



# Hinduism – an Introduction

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# Introduction to Hinduism

## **Session 1:**

- ♦ India and Hinduism: Background
- ♦ Hindu Philosophy (teachings) of non-dualism – Vedānta

## **Session 2:**

- ♦ Vedānta (continued)
  - Suffering and Liberation
  - Happiness
  - Karma
  - Reincarnation
  - Samsara (cycles of birth and death)

# Introduction to Hinduism

## Session 3:

- ◆ Vedānta (continued)
  - Dharma
  - Spiritual pursuit
  - Karma Yoga and *ahimsa* (non-violence)
  - Causation – multiplicity arising from the One
  - Maya – the veiling power
  - Qualities of a spiritual aspirant
  - Hinduism – origins and history
- ◆ The Hindu Scriptures
  - Vedas

## Session 4:

- ◆ The Hindu Scriptures (continued)
  - Concepts of time and cosmology
  - *Devas* (Gods) and *Devis* (Godesses)
    - The Hindu Trinity
  - The Epics
    - Mahabharata and Bhagavat Gita
    - Ramayana
- ◆ Stages of life
- ◆ Pursuits of life
- ◆ Sacraments – rites of passage
- ◆ Caste system
- ◆ Symbols and symbolism

# Introduction to Hinduism

## **Sessions 5, 6:**

- ◆ Hindu weddings; arranged marriages
- ◆ Pilgrimage
- ◆ Festivals
- ◆ Inspired dances forms
- ◆ Hinduism and Islam
- ◆ Hinduism and Christianity/Judaism
- ◆ Religions derived from Hinduism
- ◆ Hindu philosophy – advanced concepts
- ◆ Summary

# Introduction to Hinduism

## Session 1

# India and Hinduism - Background

- **About 85% of India's 1.4 billion population practices Hinduism**
  - The other 15% are Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Muslims, Zoroastrians (Parsees) and Jews
  - US population of Hindus is about 3.6M (0.9% of US population) (most immigrants since Immigration and Nationality Act, 1965)
- **Hindu diaspora in all parts of the World**
  - Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Burma)
  - Africa (Kenya, South Africa, Uganda, Madagascar)
  - Europe (UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain)
  - Australia, South Pacific (Fiji)
  - South America (Trinidad and Tobago)
- **Major emphasis in the Hindu culture is on acquisition of knowledge – sacred and secular**
  - Hindus as a group in the US have the highest percentage with academic degrees (~77%) of any minority group

# India and Hinduism - Background

- **Opinions of Hindus in the US (data from Pew Report “Religion in America”, 2019)**
  - 71% believe homosexuality should be accepted
  - 68% support same-sex marriage
  - 67% support abortion
  - 69% support eco-friendly regulation to protect the environment
- **Hinduism is the world’s third largest religion after Christianity and Islam**

# India and Hinduism - Background

- ▶ The name India was originally (12 century BCE?) used to refer to the geographical region around the Indus river (the Indus Valley Civilization; Mohan-je-dāro and Harappa: 3000-1500 BCE)
  - ▶ Older indigenous term is Bhārata (In India, the country is sometimes referred to as *Bhārata Mata*, or Mother India)
- ▶ The term Hindu, of Persian origin (6th century BCE; Darius I), was likewise used to refer to the dwellers in the region referred to as India
  - ▶ Hindustan – inscription from 3<sup>rd</sup> Century CE- dwelling place of the Hindus. By 13<sup>th</sup> century it was commonly used to refer to what is India today

# India and Hinduism - Background

- Hinduism was used to refer to the diverse practices of the Hindus
  - Since early times the religious practices of the Hindus were diverse and not monolithic
- Hinduism is woven into the daily workings of life of the practitioner
  - Religious rituals at home
  - Chanting of sacred *mantras*
  - Choosing auspicious times for important events
  - Etc.
- The pluralism at the core of Hinduism has prevented the emergence of a hierarchical institution similar to the Church
  - There are hundreds of thousands of Temples, each with its deity (*devata*) and its rituals
- The practice has been referred to since the early days as *Sanatana Dharma* or Eternal Way of Self Realization (similar to “salvation”)

## India and Hinduism – Background Diversity

- **Indian racial stock is diverse – Australoids, Mongoloids and Caucasians. No “standard” physical appearance.**
  - No single language
- **22 languages recognized by the Constitution; and hundreds of dialects in India**
  - English as Lingua Franca to facilitate communication
- **India is one of the most pluralistic nations in the World- a Spiritual Melting Pot!**
  - Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Muslims, Jains, Zoroastrians, Jews practice their faith freely
  - Legend has it that Christianity was brought to India by Doubting Thomas, the Apostle in 1CE
  - Legend has it that the earliest Jews arrived in India as part of the Ten Lost Tribes (8th century BCE)
  - Zoroastrians took refuge in India in the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE after the conquest of Persia by Islam
- **Other Religions derived from Hinduism: Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism**

# Hinduism – Background

## Western View of Hinduism

- **Discerning the essence of “Hinduism” is difficult.**
  - “Hinduism” is a Western concept
- **Indian languages lack a term similar to Religion**
- **Religion – Latin root is *religare* – to bind or yoke.**
  - In Hinduism this may be viewed as an effort to yoke the lower self with the Higher Self (Yoga has the Sanskrit root *Yuj* which means to join or bring together)
  - In Western systems it refers to piety in God
- **Uniformity and consistency do not apply to Hinduism as the name might imply in the Western interpretation**
  - Diversity and pluralism is at the core of the practice and is very much cherished.
- **Hindus ascribe themselves as devotees of deities, rather than as practitioners of a monolithic Religion**
  - So, Hinduism could be viewed as a family of religions

# Hinduism – Background

## Western View of Hinduism

- **West Religion - Church or Synagogue;**
  - Hinduism is pervasive in the practitioner's daily life; beyond the Temple
- **Uniformity of beliefs – important for Western traditions,**
  - Not so critical for Hinduism
- **Western way of knowing vs Hindu way of knowing Hinduism.**
  - Outsiders may see patterns that the Insider may not see
- **For an outsider to truly “know” Hinduism is to see, hear, touch, taste and smell it. Mere concepts will be limited in conveying the true nature of Hinduism**
- **There is no proselytization in Hinduism**

# Hinduism - Background

- **Hinduism is polytheistic but monistic / panentheistic – an important distinction**
- **Hinduism is one of the world's oldest living religious tradition**
- **Hinduism does not have a single “founder”**
- **Two important sources contributed to Hinduism: Indus Valley Civilization; and Aryans (from Central Europe to Asia)**
- **Salient quality of Hinduism – Diversity and plurality**

# Hinduism - Background

- Klaus Klostermair, a scholar in Sanskrit and Hinduism – calls India a lab of religion
- There are many viewpoints:
  - Rig Veda quote: *Ekam sat vipraha, bahuda vadanti* – Truth is one; the wise see it in different ways
- Allows different perspectives on the nature of Reality or the Ultimate Source.
- Absorbs different ideas from different traditions while keeping this diversity
- Elements from Indus Valley Civilization contributed to Hinduism

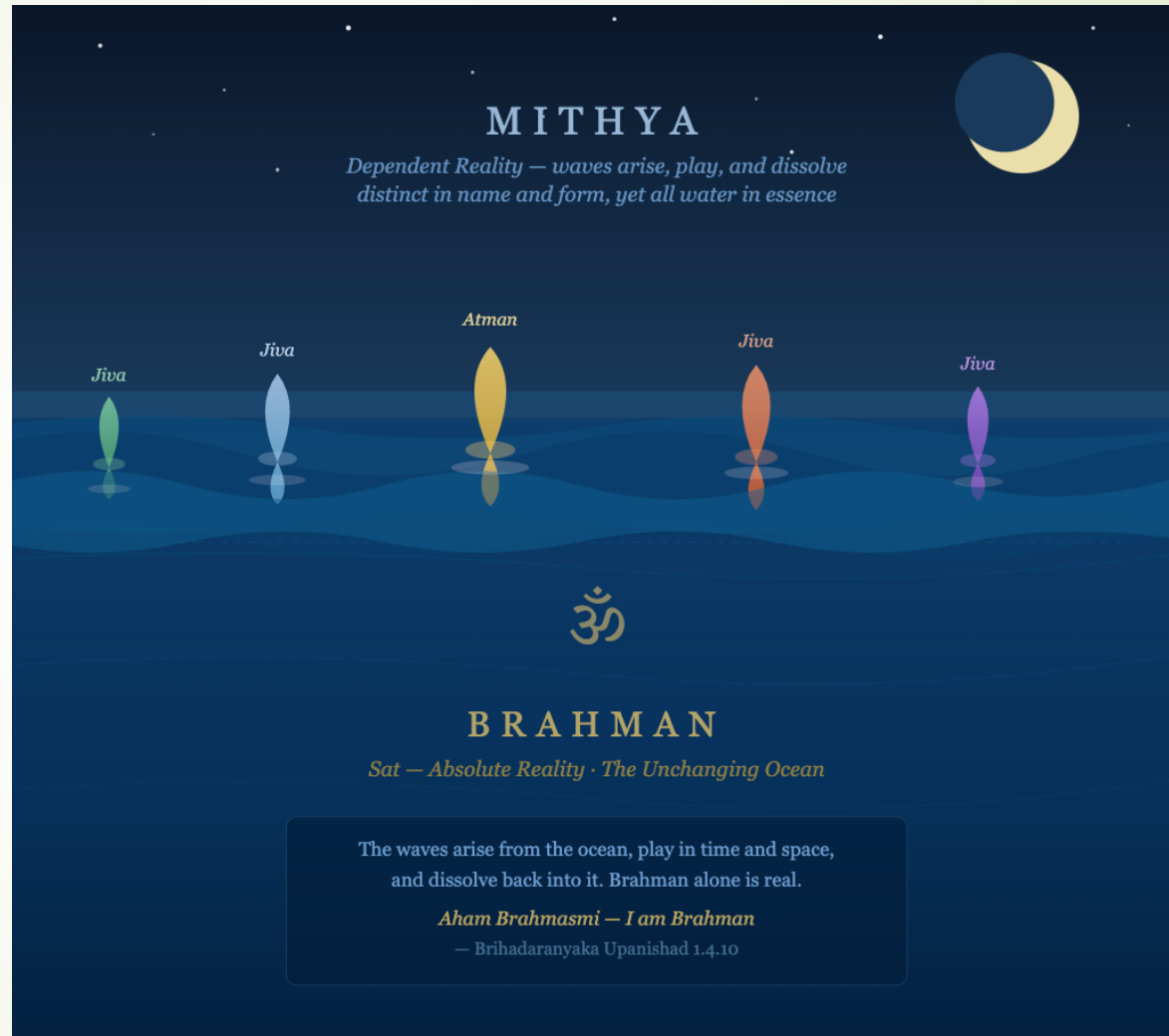
# Hindu Philosophy - Vedānta

## *Summum Bonum* – the Highest Good

- A very, very, very (!) high-level condensed summary of Hindu *Advaitā Vedānta* philosophy (details to be unfolded later in the series)
  - The substratum of all that exists is an all-pervading Infinite, Absolute reality – *Brahman*. It is the essence of all manifestation and is Impersonal in nature
  - *Brahman* is beginning-less and endless – beyond the concept of time.
  - This non-duality is the Truth (*sat*); multiplicity experienced by individuals is apparent (*mithya*)
  - At the level of the individual all beings have the same essence - *Brahman*
  - Ignorance of this Truth leads to suffering
  - Ignorance is caused by clinging to likes-and-dislikes – which creates a sense of ego and the experience of separation, multiplicity
  - One can achieve liberation from suffering (*moksha*) through righteous actions (*karma*) and through ethical living (*dharma*) and meditation (*dhyana*)
  - The goal of spiritual practice is to real-ize the experience of Oneness – seeing one's fellow-man as oneself: Compassion

Brahman is the Absolute Reality

Manifestation is the Dependent, or Apparent Reality



# Vedānta

## Compassion – a Universal Teaching

- What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow: this is the whole Torah; the rest is the explanation; go and learn – Rabbi Hillel
- Do to others what you want them to do to you. This is the meaning of the law of Moses and the teaching of the prophets – Matthew 7:12
- Seek for mankind that of which you are desirous for yourself, that you may be a believer – Hadith (Prophet Muhammad)

## Vedānta: Non-dualism

- **Vedantā** means end of the Vedas. This philosophy is based on the teachings distilled in the *Upanishads*, which are found in the last sections of the Vedas
- Majority of Hindus are followers of this philosophy
- This non-dualistic philosophy has the core teaching of oneness, *Brahman*, as the essence of all that exists (monism) – systematized by Adi Sankara (7<sup>th</sup> century, CE)
- *Brahman* is the substratum (*adhistanā*) of all that is perceived and not perceived
- Analogy of water (*Brahman*) and wave (manifestation)
  - Water is the essence of the wave. Waves have a name and form and are limited by time and space. They are analogous to individuals or to manifestation
  - Waves arise from water, are sustained as water and merge back into water (creation-sustenance-destruction). Through this cycle the water continues to be unchanged
  - Analogously, *Brahman* is the essence of manifestation as water is to wave

## Vedānta: Non-dualism

- *Brahman* is timeless, beginning-less, endless, without attributes
- Manifestation is caused by the creative potential of *Brahman*, called *Maya*
- Manifestation is part of an ongoing cycle of creation, sustenance and destruction (*samsara*)
- Based on two critical concepts related to causation:
  - *Satkaryavada* – the effect pre-exists in the cause
  - *Vivartavada* – the effect is an apparent manifestation of the cause

# Vedānta

Kena Upanishad,1 (4-8); Nature of *Brahman*

**That which speech cannot express but through which speech is expressed,**

**Know that as the *Brahman* and not what is here worshipped**

**That which thought cannot conceive but through which thought is thought**

**Know that as the *Brahman* and not what is here worshipped**

**That which sight cannot see but through which sight sees**

**Know that as the *Brahman* and not what is here worshipped**

**That which hearing cannot hear but through which hearing is heard**

**Know that as the *Brahman* and not what is here worshipped**

**That which breath cannot breathe but through which breathing is breathed**

**Know that as the *Brahman* and not what is here worshipped**

# Vedānta

## Concepts of Reality

- **There are three aspects of reality**
  - **Sat** – that which is true and real. This Absolute reality is independent of everything and is the essence of all there is
  - **Asat** - that which is untrue and unreal
  - **Mithyā** – that which is apparent. The apparent nature is dependent on an underlying reality that is immutable - *sat*
- **Example of gold ornament**
  - Ornament has a name and form and is dependent on the gold for its existence – apparent reality
  - The gold is the substratum of the ornament – the “Absolute” reality; it is the essence on which the ornament is dependent for its existence, but its existence is independent of the ornament

# Vedānta

## Concepts of Reality

- The multiplicity experienced by us is *mithya*, apparent
  - It exists but is not absolute; it is dependent on the Absolute that is One, non-dual
- Perception of *Mithya* arises from our sense of separate self – ego (*ahamkara*), which results from ignorance or delusion (*avidya*)
- Through the acquisition of knowledge of the nature of the Absolute (*sat*) and through practice (*Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga or Gnyana Yoga*) and meditation one reaches a state of equanimity conducive to the experience of non-duality, Oneness

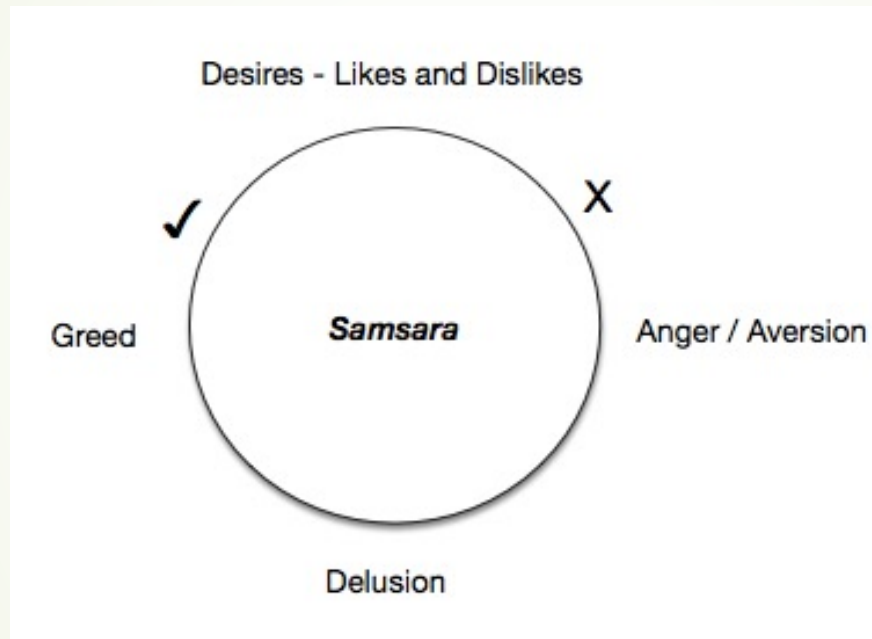
# Vedānta

## Suffering and Liberation

- All beings seek happiness through reduction of suffering
- Suffering is caused by clinging to *ragā* (likes) and *dveshā* (dislikes)
- Likes and dislikes (Pairs of Opposites; Duality) lead the individual to delusion of the nature of Reality (i.e. the Oneness of everything, the substratum, *Brahman*)
  - *Kamā* – desire to have what one likes and reject what one dislikes
  - *Krodhā* – anger resulting from unfulfilled desire
  - *Lobhā* – greed resulting from fulfilled desire
  - *Mohā* – delusion resulting from anger and greed. Delusion is ignorance of the Nature of Reality/ The Absolute (*Brahman*)
  - Delusion leads to an agitated mind which cannot comprehend the nature of Reality, *sat*
- Sin: Any action motivated by ignorance (*avidya*) of the Nature of the Absolute

# Vedānta

## Samsara in Daily Life – Clinging to Likes and Dislikes



- \* Delusion is non-comprehension of the nature of Reality / Brahman
- \* It leads to more desires and the cycle of *Samsara* is propagated