

Introduction to Hinduism

Session 3

Vedānta

Dharma

- **Dharma** is an extremely complex term with no equivalent in Western languages
- It appears in the Vedic texts and, through the Classical Period, has accreted meaning depending on the context
 - *“Nothing is higher than Dharma. The weak overcomes the stronger by Dharma, as over a king. Truly that Dharma is the Truth (Satya); Therefore, when a man speaks the Truth, they say, ‘He speaks the Dharma’; and if he speaks Dharma, they say, ‘He speaks the Truth!’ For both are one - (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 1.4)*
- Among the many terms used to describe (incompletely) *dharma* in English:
 - That which is established or firm, steadfast decree, statute, law, practice, custom, duty, right, justice, virtue, morality, ethics, religion, religious merit, good works, nature, character, quality, property, essence
- Its meaning is closely tied to *Rta* from the *Vedas*, the universal principle that maintains harmony (divine law, truth, cosmic order)
 - Dharma is related to actions that would be consistent with universal harmony
- For our discussion we can use the following meaning: the path of righteousness

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Dharma

- Living in accord with ones *dharma* prepares the mind for enlightenment (*moksha*) when one will experience the Self (*Ātman*) as nothing but Brahman
 - This is Orthopraxy, which defines right actions that prepare the mind
- Some values that are important and consistent with *dharma* include (Ch 13 of Bhagavad Gita has 20 values enumerated):
 - non-violence (*ahimsa*)
 - lack of exaggerated sense of ego,
 - compassion,
 - kindness,
 - lack of clinging to desires,
 - lack of pretense,
 - accommodation to the needs of others,
 - rectitude in thought-word-deed,
 - non-attachment to sensual objects,
 - studying the scripture with a teacher (Guru),

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Dharma

- In Buddhism *dharma* refers to the teaching of the Buddha, and to cosmic law and order
- It is symbolized as a circle with 8 or 24 spokes (*dharmachakra*) – representing the cycle of birth and death or *samsara*
 - 12 forms of suffering
 - 12 ways of transcending suffering
- The Indian flag has a *dharmachakra* (of Emperor Ashoka, 268 BCE) as the central motif



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Dharma and Karma

- Dharma and Karma are related
- “Good”/skillful actions or *karma*, which facilitate progress on the spiritual path, are consistent with *dharma* (moral righteousness)
- “Bad”/unskillful actions or *karma*, which hinder spiritual progress, are inconsistent with *dharma*

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Spiritual Pursuit

- The goal of spiritual pursuit is to achieve liberation (*moksha*) from the cycle of birth and death (*samsara*) – by practicing *dharmā*
- Liberation leads to seeing the world as it is – interconnected with an underlying essence that is one, *Brahman* (*advaita*, non-dual)
- The path to liberation involves listening, reflection and meditation
- In the state of deep meditation the concepts of time, space and causality drop off and one experiences Reality or Essence (*Brahman*) in its undifferentiated form
- The deep state of meditation is called *samādhī* (state of integration or wholeness)

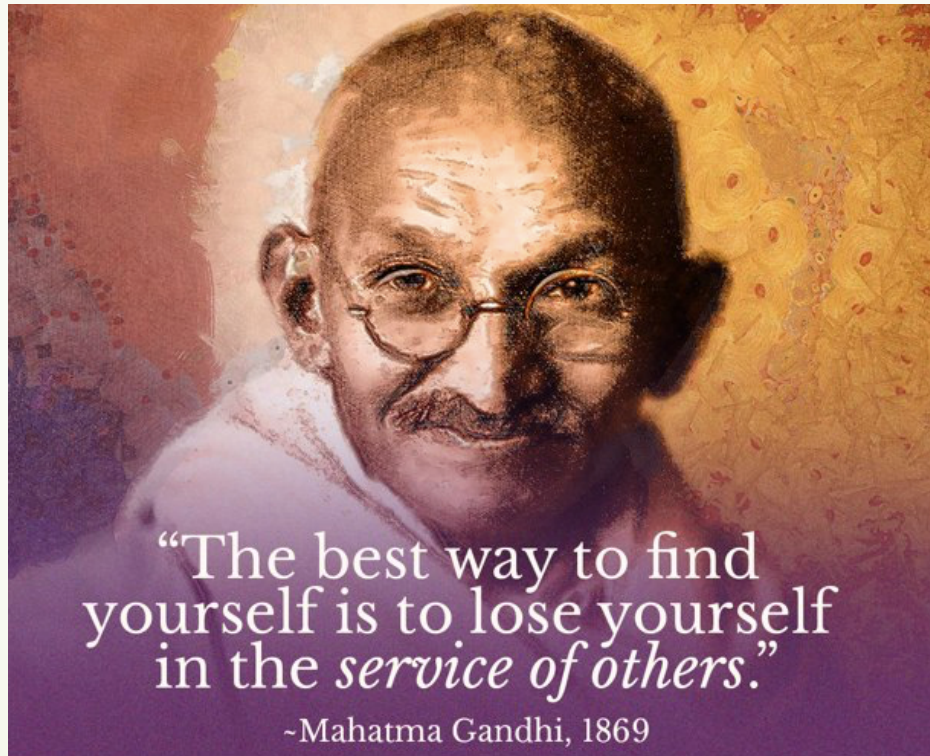
Vedānta

Spiritual Pursuit

- **Multiple paths to liberation. The three paths (*trimargā*):**
 - *Karma margā or karma yoga* (path of action with skillful intentions)
 - *Jnana margā or jnana yoga* (path of knowledge with skillful intentions)
 - *Bhakti margā or bhakti yoga* (path of devotion with skillful intentions)
- Sometimes a fourth path is included: *Raja margā or Raja yoga* (path of meditation)
- People of different temperament follow different mix of these paths
- Intentions determine the thoughts and actions and consequently the quality of the mind
 - *Sattwic* actions (harmonious, non-egoistic, non-clinging to desires) are conducive to progress in the path towards *moskhā*

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Karma Yoga and Non-violence



***Matthew. 10:39:
Whoever finds his life
will lose it, and whoever
loses his life for My
sake will find it.***

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Karma Yoga and Non-violence

We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will and we will still love you.... But be assured that we'll wear you down by our capacity to suffer, and one day we will win our freedom. We will not only win freedom for ourselves; we will appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory.

Martin Luther King, A Christmas Sermon for Peace, Dec 24, 1967

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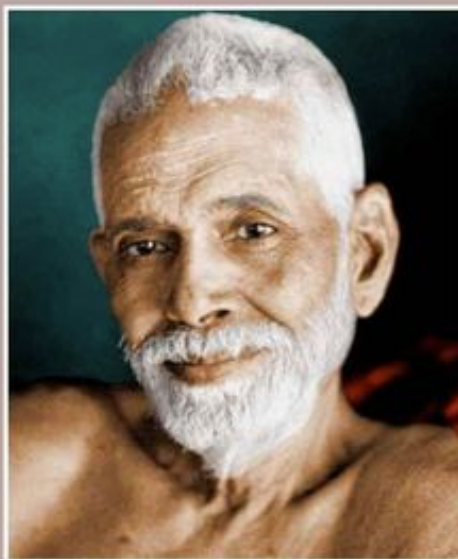
Karma Yoga and Non-violence

As long as poverty, injustice and gross inequality persist in our world, none of us can truly rest.

Nelson Mandela

Vedānta *Jnana Yoga*

Ramana Maharshi

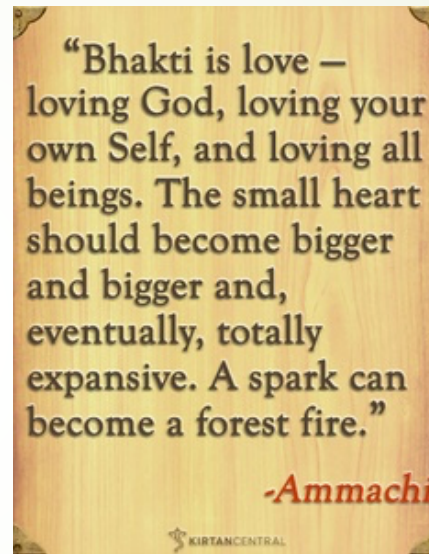


Reality is simply the loss of ego.
Destroy the ego by seeking its identity.
Because the ego is no entity it will
automatically vanish and reality
will shine forth by itself.

Ramana Maharshi

Pravin Soni

Vedānta Bhakti Yoga



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Spiritual Pursuit – Freedom / Liberation

***....Freedom's just another word for nothin' left to lose
Nothin', don't mean nothin' hon' if it ain't free.....***

Janis Joplin .. Me and Bobby McGee



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Intentions

- Intentions are determined by one's quality of mind and they lead to desire, thought and action
 - Thus mental preparation is critical as the first step in the path to liberation (example of seed planted in fertile ground that is tilled and ready for planting)
- Individual personality composed of:
 - Gross body (*sthula sharira*) – the physical aspect of the human
 - Subtle body or mind/intellect equipment and vital energy or breath (*sukshma sharira*)
 - Causal body (*kaaran sharira*) – the veiling power, *Maya*, or Ignorance, that gives rise to the sense of a differentiated “I”

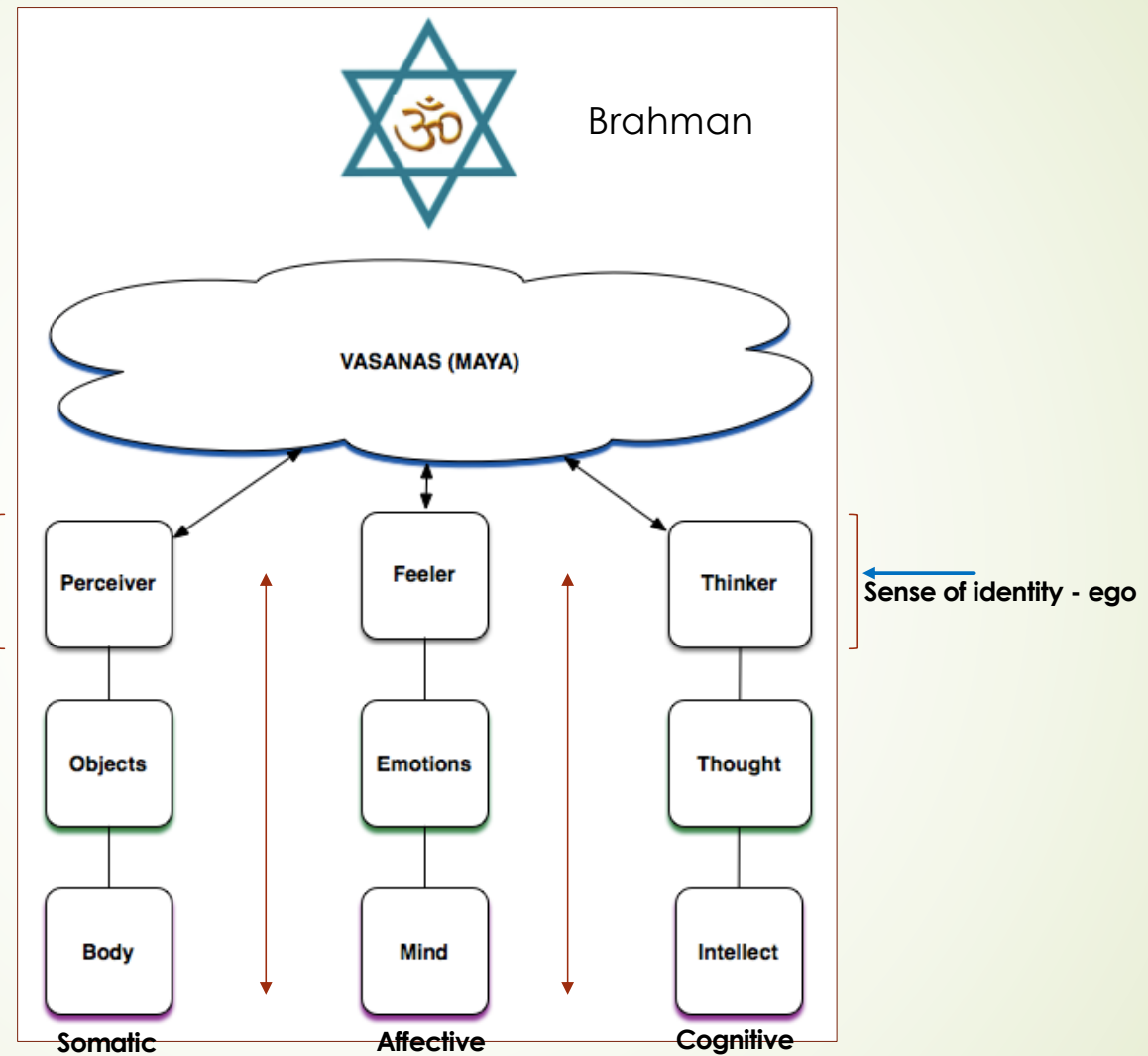
Hindu Philosophy Concepts

Causation - Multiplicity

- ***Brahman*** is the all-pervading reality and is *Sat*: without qualities, timeless, beginning less and endless, unchanging. It has no qualities (*nirguna*)
- ***Maya*** is the creative potential of *Brahman* and has the power of veiling, leading to illusion or *mithya*
- Through *Maya* the universe (manifestation - all that exists) comes into being. *Brahman* is immanent in all that exists
 - Analogy of water and wave
- The veiling power of *Maya* causes the individual to apprehend the apparent (multiplicity; *mithya* or apparent reality) as real (*sat* or absolute reality) - example of snake and rope
- This gives rise to a sense of “I-ness” or the ego (*ahankāra*), which sees itself separate from everything else. That is contrary to the reality that there is only one essence, *Brahman*, that pervades everything (e.g. wave vs ocean/water)

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Maya – the Veiling Power



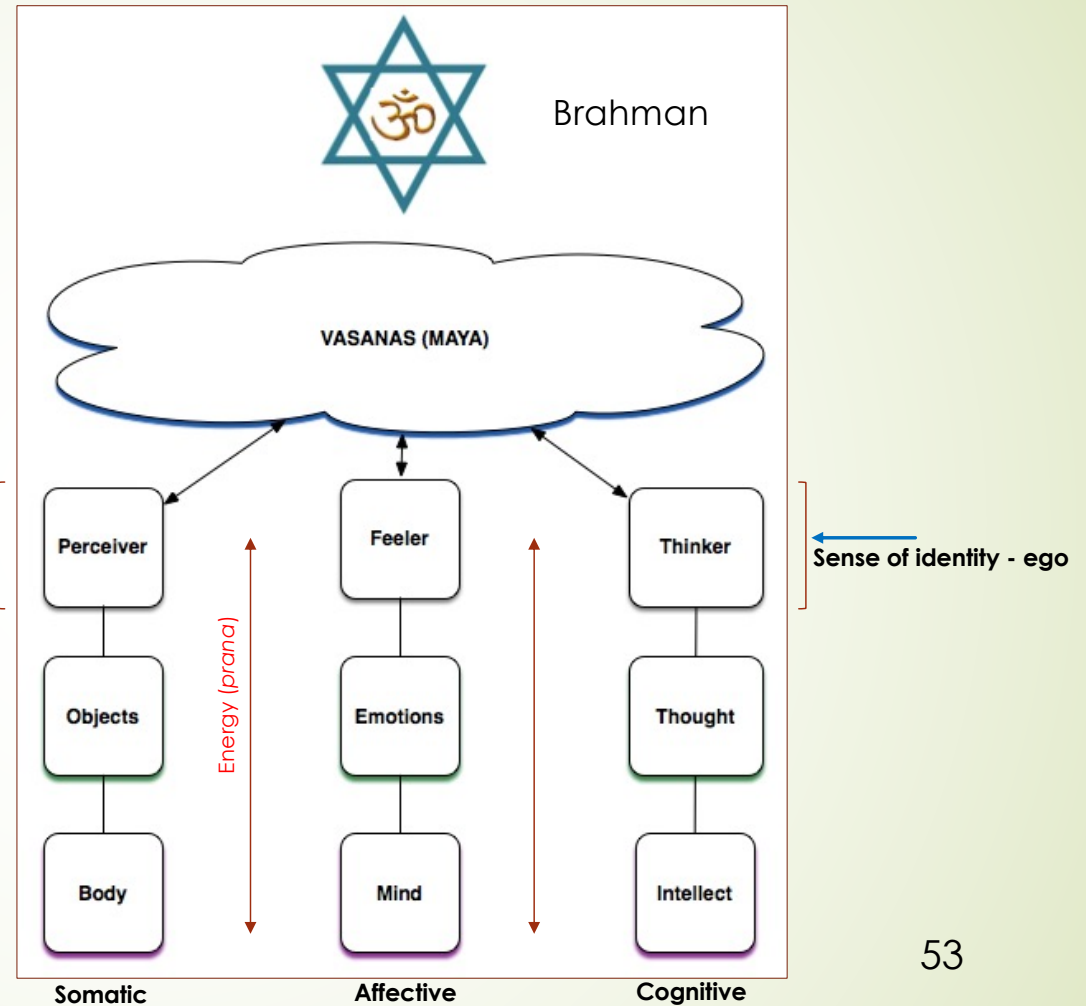
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The Five Sheaths – *pancha kosḥā*

The Five Sheaths (*pancha kosḥā*) covering apprehension of Brahman

- Matter sheath (*annamayā kosḥā*)
- Energy/breath sheath (*pranamayā kosḥā*)
- Mental sheath (*manomayā kosḥā*)
- Intellectual sheath (*vigyanamayā kosḥā*)
- Bliss sheath (*Maya; annandamayā kosḥā*)

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Spiritual Pursuit - Actions

- Meritorious actions without ego or egocentric desires (*karma yoga*) are considered conducive to spiritual progress. These include:
 - Selfless service / compassion
 - Rituals
 - Festivals
 - Pilgrimage
- Daily rituals practiced by typical observant Hindu
 - Start morning with personal deity (*Ishta Devata*) prayer (*puja*)
 - Forehead markings (*tilak*) with ash – marking commitment to burn ignorance with the fire of knowledge
 - Mantra incantation

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Qualities of Spiritual Aspirant

- The spiritual seeker is encouraged to develop four qualities of mind and practice
 1. *Vivekā* – discrimination (between the Real and apparent)
 2. *Vairagyā* – dispassion (non-clinging to desires)
 3. *Saktā smpatti* – the six-fold qualities
 - *Sama* – curbing of the mind
 - *Dama* – curbing of the senses
 - *Uparati* – regular cessation of worldly activities (to allow time for meditation)
 - *Shraddha* – faith in the teaching of Vedanta
 - *Titiksha* – endurance of the pairs of opposites (elation-dejection, etc); equanimity
 - *Samadhan* – Concentration of the mind toward the teaching of Vedanta
 4. *Mumuksatvam* – Intense desire for *mokshā*, liberation

Vedānta
My Essence

Atman is Brahman
The Upanishads

Pravin Soni

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Introduction to Hinduism

Vedānta My Essence

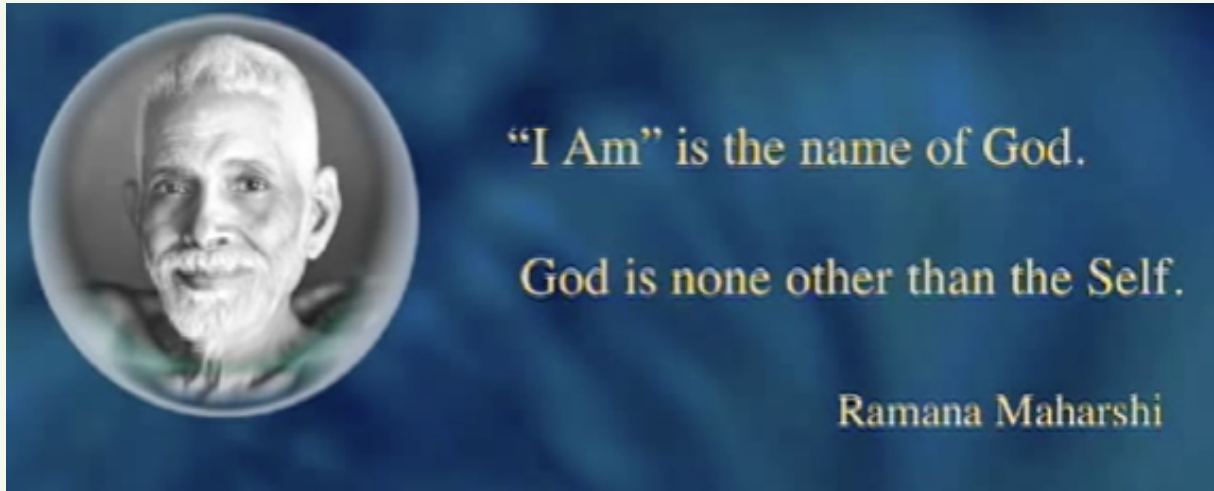


If I penetrate to the depths of
my own existence, to the
indefinable *AM* that is myself
in its deepest roots, then
through this deep center I pass
into the infinite *I AM*, which is
the very Name of the Almighty.

Thomas Merton

Vedānta

My Essence



Vedānta

My Essence – Transcending Time and Space

***To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wildflower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour***

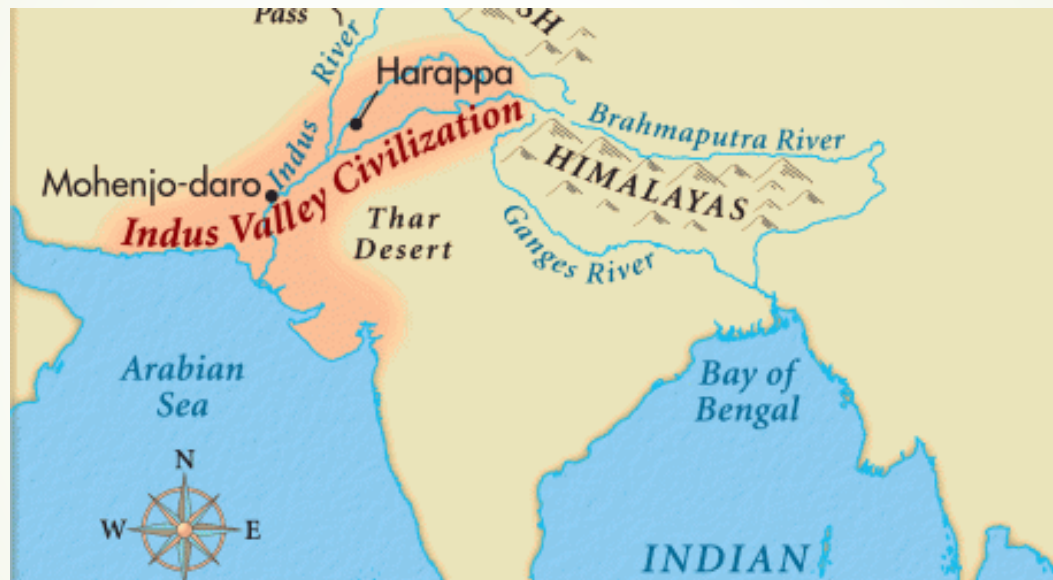
Auguries of Innocence, William Blake

Hinduism – Origin and History

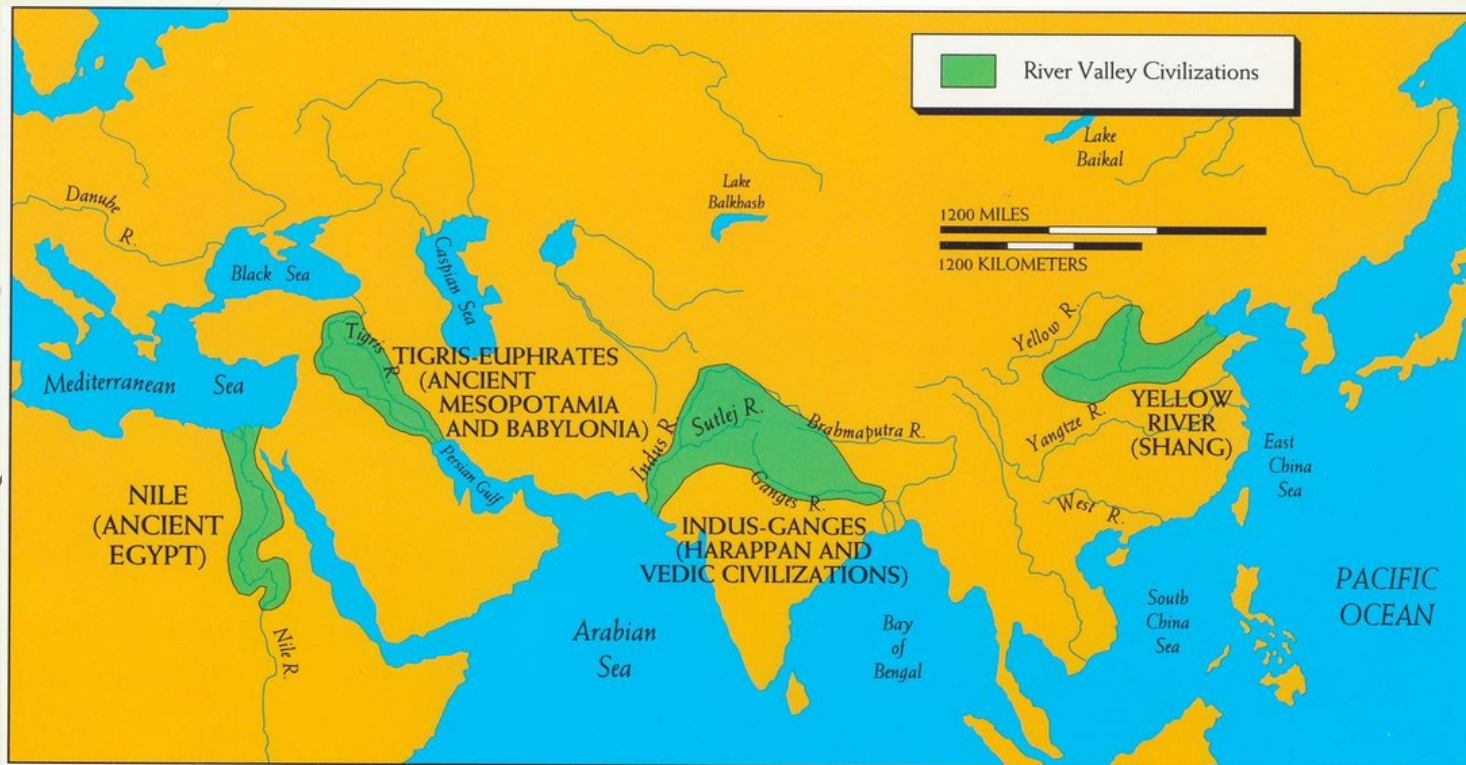
Chronology

- **Pre-Vedic religions (pre-history and Indus Valley Civilization; (~3000 -1500 BCE);**
- **Vedic period (c. 1500-500 BCE);**
- **"Second Urbanization" (c. 500-200 BCE);**
- **Classical Hinduism (c. 200 BCE-1100 CE);**
 - **Pre-classical Hinduism (c. 200 BCE-300 CE);**
 - **"Golden Age" (Gupta Empire) (c. 320-650 CE);**
 - **Late-Classical Hinduism - Puranic Hinduism (c. 650-1100 CE);**
- **Islam and Sects of Hinduism (c. 1200-1700 CE);**
- **Modern Hinduism (from c. 1800).**

Indus Valley Civilization 3000 – 1500 BCE



Indus Valley Civilization 3000 – 1500 BCE



Indus Valley Civilization

3000 – 1500 BCE



Indus Valley Civilization

Details and Implications

- **Indus Valley Civilization – excavation in 1850, in current Pakistan – was as great as ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, and as great a culture**
- **Archeological evidence (3000-1500 BCE) points to social and political unity. May have spanned 1MM SQ Km**
- **Mohenjedaro and Harappa cities – each with population of circa 30-40k.**
 - **Few weapons discovered – indicates peaceful existence.**
 - **Indoor bathrooms and plumbing. Emphasis on cleanliness. Large central baths with public access. Suggests cleanliness in personal hygiene and also in ritual purity**
- **Central purpose of baths – remove “dirt” of everyday living. Today, Ganges serves a similar purpose.**
 - **Ritual purity – both physical and psychological (mental)**

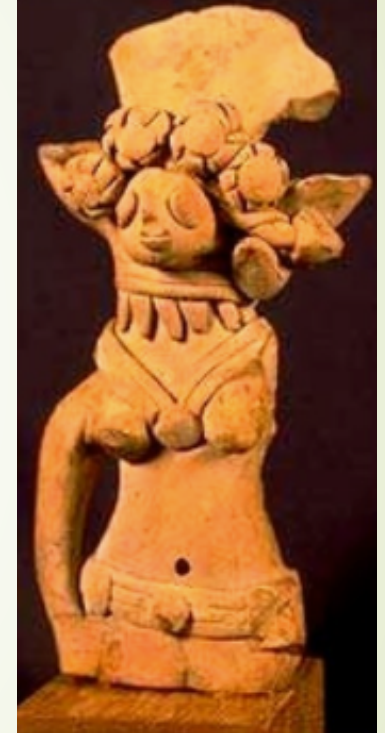
Indus Valley Civilization

Details and Implications

- **Ritual purity: All societies maintain structure of order – What is Right and Wrong is in written or unwritten form.**
 - Taboos implemented to prevent chaos where there is risk of violating order
 - Opposite of cleanliness is dirt – purity vs pollution
 - “Clean” (allowed) and “dirty” (proscribed) : people, activity, food
- **Other artifacts found in Indus Valley: clay seals with religious significance; maybe used to mark property.**
 - Similar seals found in Mesopotamia
- **Images on seals – fertility rituals, male animals – suggests interest in reproductive activity**

Indus Valley Civilization

3000 – 1500 BCE



Pravin Soni

Indus Valley Civilization

Details and Implications

- ▶ **Terra cotta figurines of women.** Perhaps mother god ritual – reproductive power of women was revered and celebrated
 - ▶ This may have contributed to goddess worship in Hinduism
- ▶ ***Lingam* (mark or symbol) and *yoni* (womb) – matter and energy – combining to create the universe**
 - ▶ This may have been a contributing factor to the Hindu myth of creation
- ▶ **Some figurines seeming to be in meditative posture – early evidence of meditation**
 - ▶ Modern image of Shiva – in meditative posture
- ▶ **Multiple heads of sculptures - indicating omniscience**
 - ▶ Modern images of some Hindu gods have this aspect

Indus Valley Civilization

Details and Implications

- **Dominant theory: Indus Valley Civilization ended in circa 1750BCE – maybe caused by Aryan (Arya – the noble one) conquest from the Northwest**
- **But recent scholarship indicates civilization may have been in decline before invaders came. Aryans and Indus dwellers may have coexisted**
- **Aryans from Central Asia also migrated to Iran,Iraq, Ireland, Europe**
 - **Pastoral nomads, used horses and chariots; skilled in bronze use. Brought different gods, rituals, language.**
- **Aryan language – evolved into Sanskrit –the official language of Hindu tradition**
- **Sanskrit closely related to European languages – Indo-European languages.**
 - **e.g. Cognates of deva: divinity /deus**

Indus Valley Civilization Aryan Invasion



Indus Valley Civilization

Sanskrit

Detached vowels
अ आ इ ई उ ऊ ए ऐ ओ औ ऋ ॠ

Vowel marks
ा ि िी ु ू ॄ ॅ ॆ े ै ॉ ॊ ो ौ ् ॎ ॏ ॐ

Numbers
० १ २ ३ ४ ५ ६ ७ ८ ९

Letters
क ख ग घ ङ च छ ज झ ञ
ट ठ ड ढ ण त थ द ध न
प फ ब भ म य र ल ळ
व श ष स ह श्रृ ष्टृ व्र ज ॐ
भ ण च झ रु ह क्ष त्त ज ङ ङ
ॠ ॡ ॢ ॣ । ॥ ० १ २ ३ ४ ५ ६ ७ ८ ९
० १ २ ३ ४ ५ ६ ७ ८ ९
० १ २ ३ ४ ५ ६ ७ ८ ९

Half letters
ॠ ॡ ॢ ॣ । ॥ ० १ २ ३ ४ ५ ६ ७ ८ ९
० १ २ ३ ४ ५ ६ ७ ८ ९
० १ २ ३ ४ ५ ६ ७ ८ ९

ॠ ॡ ॢ ॣ । ॥ ० १ २ ३ ४ ५ ६ ७ ८ ९
० १ २ ३ ४ ५ ६ ७ ८ ९
० १ २ ३ ४ ५ ६ ७ ८ ९

Sanskrit writing

India and Hinduism

Vedas

- **Veda** means “wisdom” from the root *vid*, “to see”, like in video (a cognate)
- Aryans brought Vedas to India – starting with oral tradition
- The original texts did not contain a systemic theology – unlike modern texts on Hinduism
- Four Vedas, parts of which emphasize religious practices
 - *Rig Veda* (earliest) – 1000 hymns to gods and goddesses (3000-1200 BCE);
 - *Sama Veda* (melodies);
 - *Atharvana Veda* (spells and incantation for healing rituals)
 - *Yajur Veda* (Instructions for sacrifice)

India and Hinduism

Vedas

- **Vedas are the sacred texts at the foundation of Hinduism**
 - Collection of writings – from the Aryans
- **Vedas existed for a long time as oral tradition.**
 - Aryan emphasis on oral language which was considered very powerful and only priests could recite the Vedas
 - Written form was considered a desecration
- **Vedas recently made accessible to public - in the 18th century**
 - Prior to that it was the purview of the priests (*brahmins*)
- **Vedas contain hundreds of hymns, incantations and ritual practice details.**

India and Hinduism

Vedas

VEDIC SCRIPTURES (SHASTRAS)

SRUTI prasthanas

RIGVEDA	SAMHITAS - mantras BRAHMANAS - commentaries ARANYAKAS - treatises UPANISHADS - knowledge	karma kanda upasana kanda jnana kanda
YAJURVEDA	SAMHITAS - mantras BRAHMANAS - commentaries ARANYAKAS - treatises UPANISHADS - knowledge	karma kanda upasana kanda jnana kanda
SAMAVEDA	SAMHITAS - mantras BRAHMANAS - commentaries ARANYAKAS - treatises UPANISHADS - knowledge	karma kanda upasana kanda jnana kanda
ATHARVAVEDA	SAMHITAS - mantras BRAHMANAS - commentaries ARANYAKAS - treatises UPANISHADS - knowledge	karma kanda upasana kanda jnana kanda

*VEDANGA "Limbs of Veda"

1. Shiksha - phonetics
2. Chanda - poetic meter
3. Nirukta - etymology
4. Vyakarana - grammar
5. Jyotish - astrology
6. Kalpasutras - rituals, dharma sastra, grihya sastra

*UPAVEDA "Applied knowledge"

1. Arthaveda - science of governing (Artha shastra)
2. Dhanurveda - war science
3. Gandharvaveda - music
4. Ayurveda - medicine
5. Vastu sastra
6. Kama sutra
7. Vimana sastra

SMRITI prasthanas

DARSHAN SHASTRAS "Knowledge Treatise"	1. Purva mimamsa 2. Nyaya 3. Vaisheshika 4. Sankhya-yoga 5. Yoga 6. Utara mimamsa (Brahma sutra)
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PURANAS

"Myths"

1. Vishnu
2. **Bhagavata-Srimad bhagavatam**
3. Narada
4. Garuda
5. Padma
6. Varaha
7. Brahmanda
8. Brahmavaivarta
9. Markandeya
10. Bhavishya
11. Vamana
12. Brahma
13. Matsya
14. Kurma
15. Linga
16. Shiva / Vayu
17. Skanda
18. Agni

Satva guna

Rajas guna

Tama guna

AGAMAS

Mantras, Tantras and Yantras

ITIHASAS

"Epics"

Ramayana
Mahabharata → **Bhagavad gita**

NYAYA prasthanas

Vedanta sutra

India and Hinduism

Vedic Scriptures (*Shastras*)

- Vedic scriptures: *Shruti*, *smriti* and *Brahma Sutra* (*Nyaya*)
 1. ***Shruti*** – that which is heard – Vedas (*Upanishads*). Rig, Sama, Atharvana, Yajur
 2. *Smriti* – *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* (*Bhagavad Gita*)
 3. *Nyaya* / *Brahma Sutra* – Summary and systematization of philosophical and spiritual ideas
- Vedas (*shruti*) divided into four sections:
 - Mantras (benedictions),
 - aranyaka (description of rituals, sacrifices, ceremonies)
 - brahmanas (commentaries on rituals, ceremonies, sacrifices), and
 - Upanishad (description of philosophy, spiritual knowledge and meditation).
- Upanishads form the basis of the non-dualistic (*advaita*) Vedanta philosophy. There are 108 Upanishads of which 13 are the most important ones

India and Hinduism

Vedic Scriptures

- **Smriti**: that which is remembered
 - Hindu epics – Mahabharata and Ramayana. These contain mythological stories. Also called the *Itihasa*
 - Mahabharata contains the Bhagavad Gita (The song of the Lord) which condenses the teachings of the *Upanishads* that are part of the Vedas

India and Hinduism

Vedas

- Vedas are said to contain Wisdom that is timeless.
- Vedas are the most authoritative scripture. Hinduism is Vedic Dharma.
 - Not a narrative, like the Bible; more like a liturgy manual
- Words of Vedas believed to be revealed to ancient seers (*rishis*)
- But most Hindus have not read the Vedas
- For daily life the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, *Bhagavad Gita* and *Puranas* (myths, legends, lores) are more important.
 - These texts are derived from the Vedas



Vedic Fire Ritual

India and Hinduism

Vedas

- World divided into three levels – *triloka*
 - Earth, atmosphere, heavens (*svarga*)
- World governed by a Principle of Harmony (*Rta; dharma*)
 - Morality and ceremony – right (right and wrong) and rite (ritual ceremony) derived from *Rta*
- Vedic practice emphasized rituals that produced benefits for the participants

India and Hinduism

Vedas: the Four Aphorisms (*mahavakyas*)

- ***Pragnānam Brahman – the Self is Brahman***
- ***Tat twam asi – That Thou Art***
- ***Ayam Atman Brahman – This Self is Brahman***
- ***Aham Brahman Asmi – I am Brahman***

India and Hinduism

Vedas

- **Creation myth: Hymn of creation (Rig Veda)**
 - *“Neither non-existence nor existence, neither space nor skies; neither death nor immortality, nor day or night; The One breathes windless by its own impulse.. Lacking pairs of opposites” – non-dual*
 - That One breathes by its own power of heat or *tapas* (creative energy)
 - Through *Maya* the One became many
- Who really knows – whence was creation produced?
- Maybe Creation formed itself spontaneously, maybe not (indicating that the origin of the Universe is a mystery)
- Gods came after creation.
 - God – *deva* – shiny and exalted; divine being, but not omniscient or omnipotent.
 - Created after the world’s creation, they are subject to *Rta* (Principle of Harmony)

India and Hinduism

Creation Myths

➤ Samkhya school

- Manifestation arises from union of *Purusha* (unchanging and un-caused aspect; essence, “consciousness” or “spirit”) and *Prakriti* (changing aspect; “matter”).
- *Prakriti* has three qualities – *sattwa* (subtle), *Rajas* (active), *Tamas* (ignorant).
- When these qualities are out of equilibrium the Universe is created through union with *Purusha*
- “Om” ॐ the primordial mantra is believed to have created the universe (akin to Logos of Genesis; *creatio ex nihilo*)
- Note that Descartes’ radical dualism also proposes *res cogitans* (mental substance; consciousness) and *res extensa* (matter)
 - But God is accepted as the creator (transcendent), unlike in Hinduism where Brahman is considered the essence and the matter – the non-dual One; immanent and transcendent