



# *Introduction to Hinduism*



# Scriptures

- Hundreds of scriptures
- oldest scriptures: the four *Vedas*
- all scriptures divided into two broad categories: *shruti* and *smriti*
- Most popular scripture: *Bhagavad Gita*



# What “ism” is Hinduism?



- Everything from Atheism to Polytheism
- Different interpretations of the same scriptures led to differences in belief
- *Sanatana Dharma*  
Eternal Philosophy



# Hinduism

- Pluralism: it's all good
- *Brahman*: the supreme essence of the universe. Many divine beings exist, leads to a form of polytheism too.
- *Maya*, illusion: reality is not always what it appears to be. God is in everything.



# Hinduism

Symbol 'Om' – first word of God



- *Atman*, the soul, is trapped in *samsara*, an endless cycle of rebirth. But *Atman* is *Brahman*.
- *Karma*: the actions of one's current life will determine the consequences of his future life.
- *Moksha*: liberation from the cycle and union with God through knowledge and devotion



# Hindu Trinity

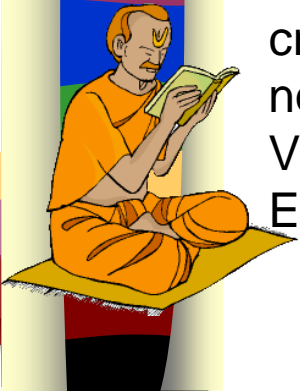
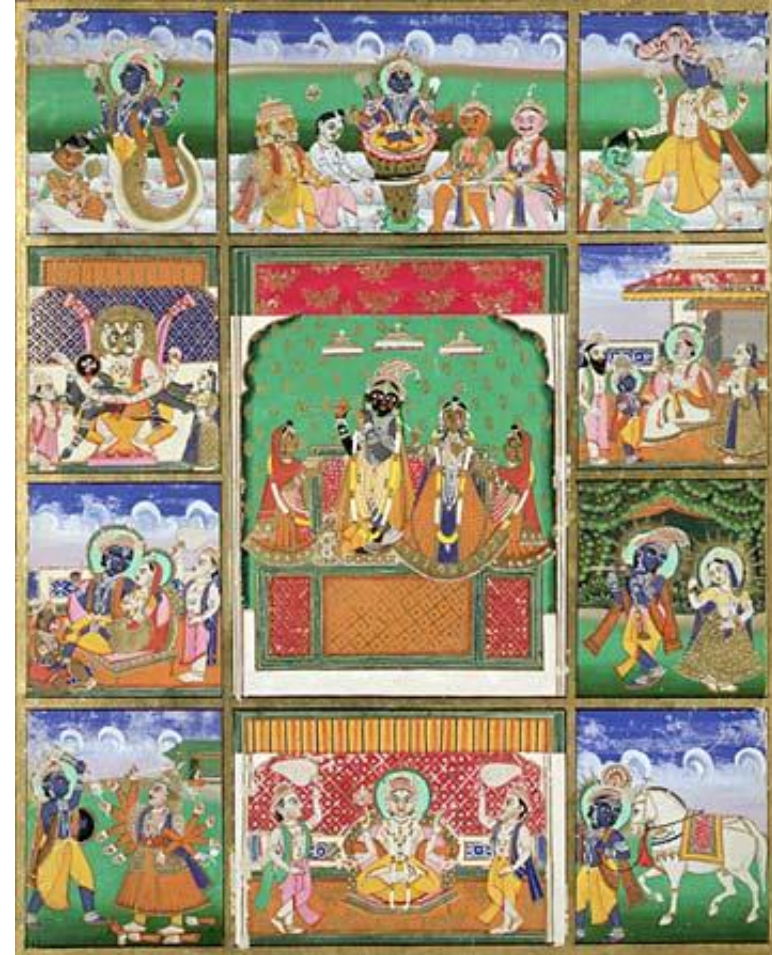


- Brahma - the Creator
- Vishnu - the Preserver
- Shiva - the Destroyer
- Three aspects/powers of the same divine being



## The Ten Incarnations of Vishnu

The Hindu god Vishnu appears on Earth in ten incarnations, called avatars, to destroy injustice and save humankind. Sacred Hindu writings called the *Puranas* describe these incarnations. Vishnu is always depicted in dark blue or black and usually with four arms, though his avatars may take other forms, such as the golden fish (top left panel) and the man lion (panel below the fish). In his tenth avatar, still to come, Vishnu will appear with a white horse (bottom right panel) to destroy the universe. This painting was created about 1890 in Jaipur in northern India and is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, England.



# Concept of God



- *Nirguna Brahman* - God without attributes
- *Saguna Brahman* - God with attributes
- *Saguna Brahman* can be worshipped in any shape or form, human or otherwise





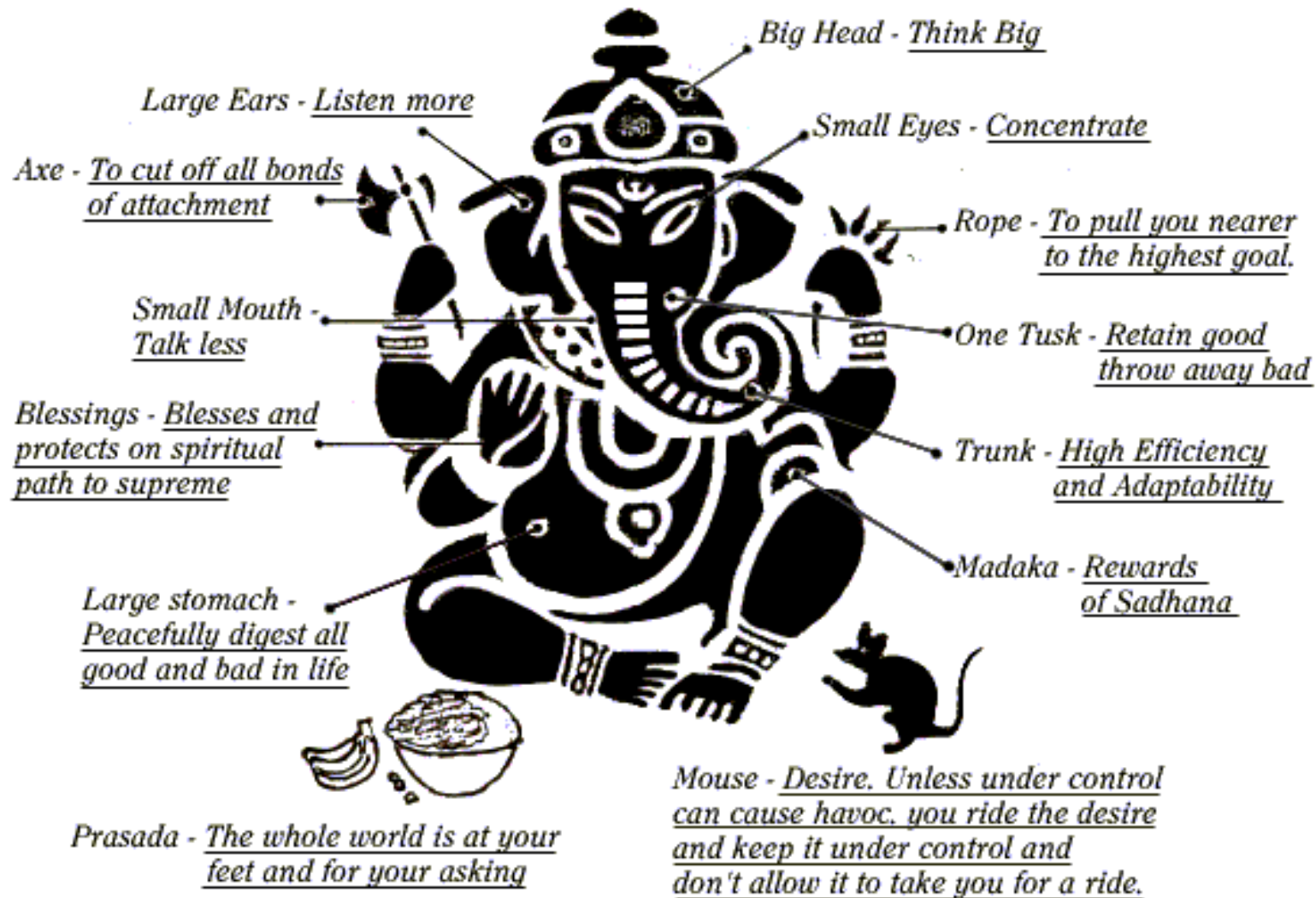
# Basic Beliefs



- Karma - the law of cause and effect; “you reap what you sow”
- Reincarnation - eternal soul traverses through different bodies till it finds liberation



# Symbolism in Hinduism



# Holy Cow!



- Hindus have always had great respect for Mother Nature and its creatures
- Cow is especially significant because it symbolizes gentleness



## Ahimsa

*Ahimsa* is the Hindu doctrine of nonviolence or noninjury to other living beings. As a result of this doctrine, many Hindus are vegetarians, and cows and other animals often wander freely and unharmed in the streets of Indian towns and villages, as in this market in Jaisalmer in the state of Rājasthān.





# Four Paths to *Moksha*



- *Karma Yoga* - Path of righteous action
- *Bhakti Yoga* - Path of selfless devotion
- *Jnana Yoga* - Path of rational inquiry
- *Raja Yoga* - Path of renunciation



## Hindu Holy Men

Some Hindu men devote their entire lives to the quest for *moksha* (liberation from the chain of lives). These holy men, known as *sadhus*, renounce worldly concerns, live on alms, and spend their lives wandering to avoid attachment to people or places. Here, sadhus share an offering of rice at a temple in Pushkar, a city in the northwestern Indian state of Rājasthān.



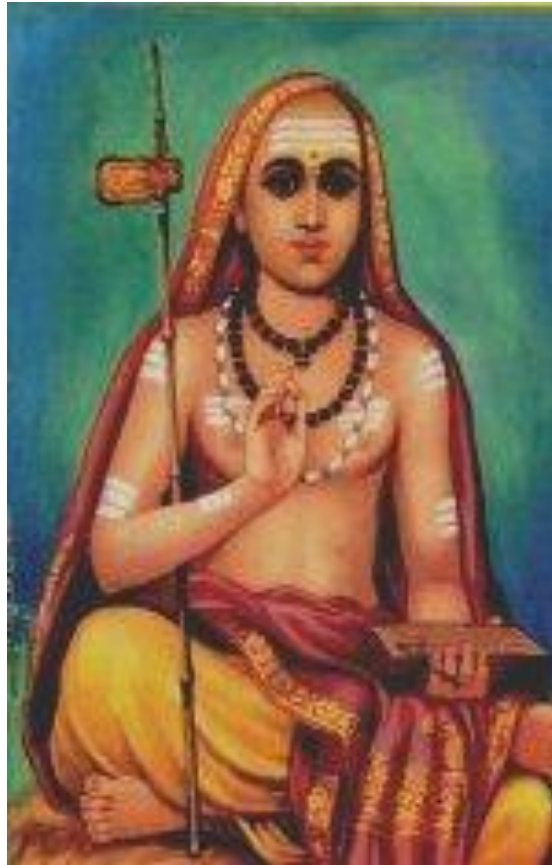
# History of Hinduism

- Originated between 4000 and 2000 BC
- No single founder
- Vedas: the oldest scriptures of Hinduism
- Veda means “to know”
- Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva Veda
- Upanishads explain the philosophical ideas in story and dialogue form





# Sankara



- Advaita philosophy
- 7<sup>th</sup> century AD
- traveled all over India having public debates with other philosophers
- true happiness can be attained by removing *avidya*(ignorance) and *maya* (self deception)



# Ramanuja

- 10<sup>th</sup> Century AD
- Vishistadvaita
- wanted everybody irrespective of social standing to enjoy the eternal bliss of Lord Narayana
- Bhakti - complete surrender to the Lord



# Madhva



Shree Madhvacharya

- Dwaitha philosophy
- 12<sup>th</sup> Century AD
- the world is not an illusion.
- solitary study of the scriptures, performing one's duty without self-interest, practical acts of devotion



# Vivekananda

- First Hindu leader to visit America
- Famous address at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago on September 11, 1893
- Spent three years preaching the Vedanta philosophy in America and England
- Founded the Ramakrishna Mission



# Contemporary Hindu Leaders in America



- David Frawley
- Satguru Sivaya Subramuniaswami
- Mahesh Yogi
- Satchidananda
- Mata Amritanandamayi



# Temple Worship



- Temples provide an atmosphere conducive for spiritual progress
- Centers of social and cultural activities
- Provide a place for collective worship and prayers



# Festivals

- Hinduism is a celebratory religion
- The motive: Festivals keep us close to Gods, invigorate our household and renew our personal life.
- Festivals signify victory of good over evil.
- Every month of Hindu calendar has atleast one significant festival. Each festival has regional significance also.
- Celebration of diversity.

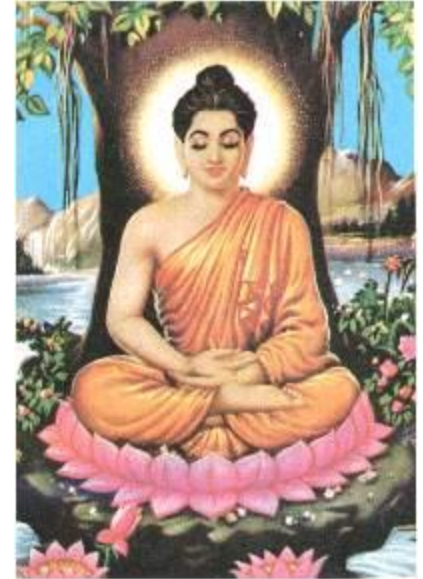


## Sri Ramanavami



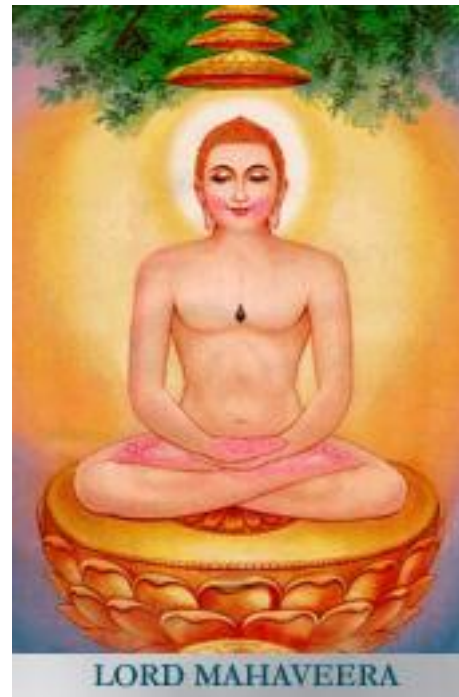
Birthday of Lord Rama, the prince of Ayodhya, and his coronation as a king.

## Buddha Jayanti



Birthday of Buddha, the founder of Buddhism

## Mahavir Jayanti



Birthday of Mahavira, the founder of Jainism





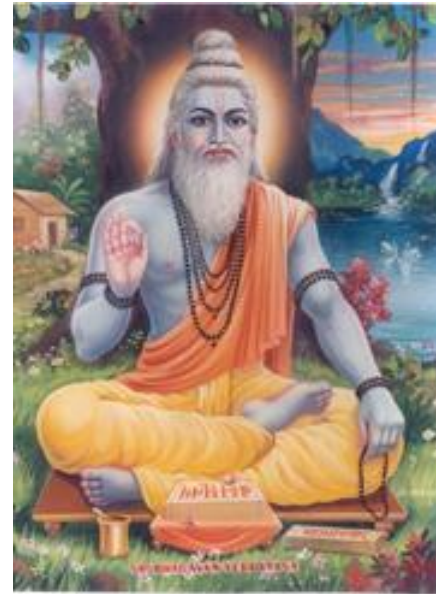
# May/June

## Guru Purnima



Lord Muruga

- Worshipped mostly in South India



- Guru: One's teacher. The day commemorates the birthday of Veda Vyasa.
- Time to remember and felicitate one's teachers.



# July/August

Raksha Bandhan



Symbolizes the love between brother and sister.

Krishnashtami



Birthday of Lord Krishna,  
favorite lovable God of many :)



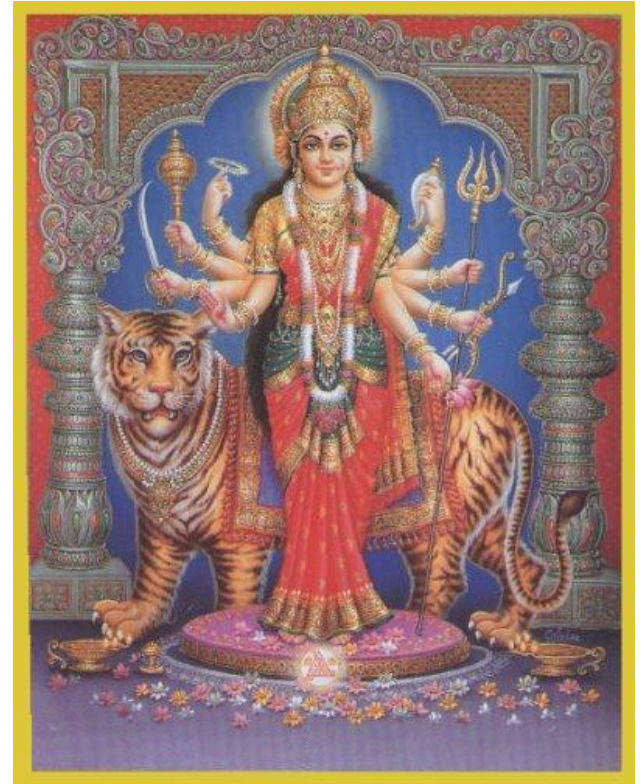
# August/September

## Ganesh Chaturthi



Birthday of the elephant God,  
Ganesha

## Durga Pooja/Navaratri



A nine day celebration signifying  
the victory of Mother Durga  
over the evil demon King  
Mahishasura.



# February/March

Mahashivaratri



Birthday of Lord Shiva

Holi



Holi, the festival of colors commemorating the victory of Lord Krishna over the demon *Holika*



## Hindu Sacrament

On an auspicious date, around the age of one, a Hindu child receives his or her first haircut. To mark this rite of passage, the child's head is shaved, a priest recites special prayers and rings a temple bell, and the family makes offerings of food and other items to the household divinities.



## Hindus Praying at a Shrine

The circular, open-air temple where these Hindus worship is in Orissa, a state in eastern India. Along with prayers, they offer food and flowers to the temple deities. The niches in the temple wall contain statues of 64 female figures known as yoginis. Worship of these female deities remains popular among villagers in Orissa.



## Hindu Family Praying at Home

Many Hindus worship a deity that they have personally chosen. Individuals or families may set up a shrine with images of the deity and offer food to the deity before partaking of it themselves. Prayers and chanting are part of these daily household devotions known as pūjā.



## ***Shiva as Nataraja (Lord of the Dance)***

This bronze sculpture, entitled *Shiva as Nataraja (Lord of the Dance)* (about ad 1000), is one of a number of sculptures of the Hindu god Shiva made during India's Chola dynasty (10th century to 13th century). The sculpture shows Shiva dancing within a circle of fire. One of the god's hands holds a flame, while the other beats on a drum. His foot rests on the demon of ignorance.





## Hare Krishnas

The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) is a modern Hindu *bhakti* (devotion) sect inspired by the teachings of 16th-century Indian mystic Chaitanya. ISKCON was founded in New York City in 1965 by Indian religious teacher A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. Here, members of the sect, known as Hare Krishnas, chant in their traditional robes.

