

## Hinduism: Religion in India

### I. Gods

Hindus believe in one Supreme Being called “Brahman” whose presence is everywhere and in all things. Because “Brahman” is too complex for humans to understand, Hindus worship gods that give a more concrete form to Brahman. These gods are considered “manifestations” of Brahman

1. Brahma – the creator
2. Vishnu – the preserver
3. Shiva – the destroyer



Brahma

Vishnu

Shiva

### II. Sacred Objects

The cow is considered sacred. Therefore, Hindus do not eat beef. Hindus believe that the Ganges River is sacred and has the power to wash away evil and sin.

### III. Reincarnation

The goal of life is to achieve union with Brahman. Achieving union with Brahman is said to occur as people free themselves from the selfish desires to separate them from the universal spirit. Most people cannot achieve this union in one lifetime. “Reincarnation” is a belief in the rebirth of the soul in another body after death. The concept of reincarnation allows people to continue their journey toward union with Brahman. People get closer to this union by being born into higher and higher levels of existence. The cycle of reincarnation continues until a person achieves “moksha”, which is the highest state of internal life.

### IV. Karma and Dharma

Karma refers to a person’s behavior in life and determines the form of his next life. Dharma refers to one’s duties and obligations in life. Religious duties included praying, respecting the Brahmins, and making pilgrimages (religious trips) to the sacred Ganges River. By living in a right way, a person will be reborn at a higher level. Evil deeds cause people to be reborn into a lower level. Righteous living consists of avoiding untruth and envy, seeking knowledge, granting charity, practicing non-violence, and observing caste rules. Dharma must be preformed to build up good Karma and reach a higher level in the next life.

### V. Sacred Texts

Over several thousand years, Hindu teachings were developed and recorded in a number of sacred texts. These include the “Vedas”, collections of prayers and sacred verses, and the “Upanishads”, philosophical dialogues about Hindu beliefs.

### Questions to Answer

1. What are the manifestations of Brahman?
2. What do Hindus consider to be sacred?
3. Why is “reincarnation” significant?
4. What is the difference between karma and dharma?