

October 26, 2015

History of Belief: Hinduism.

Learning Targets

I CAN...

- identify specific Hindu terms and concepts: Brahman, atman, Vedas & Upanishads, castes, karma, reincarnation, enlightenment, and moksha;
- discuss Hindu beliefs about God and the ordering of human society;
- explain how Hindus achieve enlightenment and gain release from rebirth.

INSTRUCTIONS

Read the overview of Hinduism printed below. Focus particularly on the concepts with * beside them. On the back of the page, produce a visual representation of each of the 7 * concepts.

TERMS

Hinduism
Ganges River

Vedas, Upanishads

Monotheistic
Brahman & Atman*

Caste System*
Brahmins
Kshatriyas
Vaisyas
Sudras
Untouchables

Dharma

Ahimsa*
Karma*

Reincarnation*

Samsara*

Enlightenment

Moksha*

1. Background. **Hinduism** is one of the world's oldest religions. It developed in ancient India and is still the major faith of modern India. The **Ganges River**, which runs through much of India, remains a holy site for all Hindus. Most of what is known about early Hinduism comes from a set of ancient Indian texts called the **Vedas**. The Vedas contain the **Upanishads**, which are philosophical writings about God and creation.

2. Brahman and Atman. Hindus are **monotheistic**, which means they believe in one ultimate deity or truth. That deity – **Brahman** – exists in millions of different forms (presented as gods and goddesses). Each form represents a quality of Brahman, and each representation exists as a connection point between God and man. Hindus believe there is a piece of Brahman in all living things – the *true* self, or **atman**.

3. Hindu Caste System. Each Hindu is born into a particular **caste**, or social group. Priests and scholars (**Brahmins**) are at the top of the caste system; then warriors (**Kshatriyas**); then artisans, merchants, farmers or small landowners (**Vaisyas**); and finally peasants, commoners, and servants (**Sudras**). The **Untouchables**, a fifth group, are beneath the Sudras. Untouchables are the lowest of the low – those who sweep animal feces from the streets and dispose of diseased bodies.

4. Dharma and Karma. Each caste has certain spiritual duties (**dharma**) that must be fulfilled. If a Hindu completes the duties of his caste, keeps a strong prayer life, and practices **ahimsa** (nonviolence) then he builds up good karma. **Karma** is the good or bad energy surrounding the soul. A Hindu collects bad karma if he is violent, unkind, or ignores the duties of his caste.

4. Reincarnation. When a Hindu dies, his soul is reborn into another body. This rebirth is called **reincarnation**. Reincarnation is part of a punishing cycle known as **Samsara** – the cyclic wheel of birth, death, and rebirth. One's karma determines the caste or lifeform into which one's atman is reborn.

5. Enlightenment/Moksha. When a Hindu holy man is able to give up all his desires, then he becomes **enlightened**. He lives wisely by seeing the presence of God (Brahman) in all living things. Instead of judging others according to their looks or their popularity, the enlightened Hindu sees others as souls of God. After the enlightened Hindu dies, his atman is released from the cycle of reincarnation. It reaches **moksha** – a state of perfect peace where the soul reconnects with Brahman forever.