

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF HINDUISM

- * Hinduism started about 1500 BCE in the area of India
It's roots are in the religions of the Indus River Valley Civilization and the Aryans who lived in India after them.
 - * Third largest religion in the world
(Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, No Religion, Buddhism)
 - * They believe in one "god" type force called brahman, but celebrate brahman in the form of many gods, each with a specific function. This is because the concept of brahman is too large for mere humans to comprehend, so they put faces on individual aspects (avatars) of brahman.

Examples of gods especially important to Hindus as separate characteristics of brahman are:

 - Brahma - The Creator
 - Vishnu - The Preserver
 - Shiva - The Destroyer
 - * A Hindu believer's goal is to achieve moksha (union w/brahman). If you achieve moksha you come in touch with your atman, your pure self.
 - * Though they don't have one sacred text (like a Bible), they do have several books that hold important spiritual teachings. Examples are the Rig Vedas and the Upanishads.
 - * Hindus believe that the soul is constant and is reborn in a process called reincarnation. Karma is the actions you make that determine your fate the next time you reincarnate. Will you reincarnate to a higher social caste? Or will you reincarnate as a rock? To achieve moksha you must reincarnate to the highest social caste.
- Dharma is the religious and moral duties required of someone depending on what social caste they belong to.
- * Hindus (as well as most Eastern religions) believe in ahimsa, non- violence.
 - * There have been various leaders within Hinduism that have created their own approach to that religion and have gotten followers. Usually they focus on one particular aspect of Hinduism more than the rest. An example is Mahariva, who founded Jainism around 500 BCE. Though it is considered its own separate religion, Jainism is borne from Hinduism, and focuses on the non-violent (ahimsa) philosophy. They also rejected the ideas of the Brahmin priests as the only people who could get in touch with the gods (similar to the Protestant Reformation in Christianity.)
 - * Another off-shoot religion is the Hare Krishnas.
 - * Another off-shoot religion is Buddhism.