

Hinduism

Brahman

“Everything”
“Supreme Unifying Force of the Universe”

Brahma

The Creator



Vishnu

The Preserver



Shiva

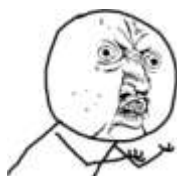
The Destroyer



Atman



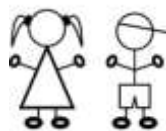
Atman



Atman



Atman



Atman



Atman



Atman



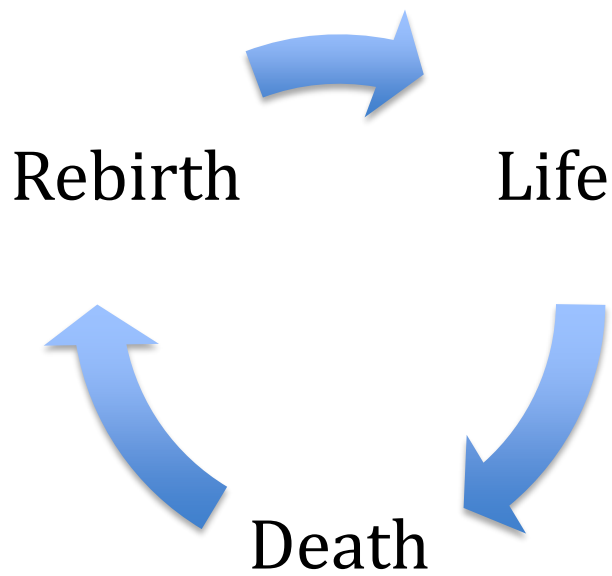
Atman



Atman



Atman



Samsara
(Cycle of Reincarnation)

Dharma
(Duty)

- One's place in society
- One's duty
- One's path

Karma
(Action & Reaction)

- What goes around comes around
- By following Dharma, one "builds up" good Karma
- Consequence
- Determines one's social position in the next life

Moksha
(Escaping Samsara)

- Attaining "Heaven"
- Escape from the cycle of life, death, rebirth, life, death, rebirth, etc.
- Becoming one with Brahman
- Ultimate Goal of Hinduism

What do Hindus Believe?



According to Hinduism, there is a great, single unifying force in the Universe known as *Brahman*. To more easily understand the concept of Brahman, Hindus have conceptualized Brahman into three main gods: *Brahma* (The Creator), *Vishnu* (The Preserver), and *Shiva* (The Destroyer). A rich and complex pantheon of thousands of gods has developed over thousands of years. These gods, however, are not separate. They simply represent the many aspects of Brahman. While many Hindus worship individual gods and goddesses, it is believed that everything in the Universe is part of Brahman: People, trees, animals, rocks, stars, planets, etc... Everything is part of Brahman.

People are, however, living under a misunderstanding (known as *Maya*, “The Great Deception”), which makes them believe that they are separate from Brahman. *Maya* causes people on Earth to believe that they are not part of Brahman, and have an individual and separate soul. This “individual soul” is referred to as *Atman*. Hindus believe, however, that they can see the truth. They believe that the Atman is actually a spark of Brahman, which lives in each individual. Through the practice of Hinduism, people who see themselves as separate from Brahman, seek to reunite with the Universe and become one with Brahman. In order to do this, the atman (individual soul) must break *samsara* (the cycle of reincarnation). If a being breaks the cycle of reincarnation and is reunited with Brahman, they are said to have achieved *Moksha*. Achieving Moksha, or breaking the cycle of life, death, and rebirth, is the ultimate goal of Hinduism. But how can this be done?

In order to eventually achieve Moksha, a being must practice two main concepts: *Dharma* and *Karma*. Simply put, Dharma refers to following one’s place in the world, one’s duty, and one’s path. By following Dharma, people can build up Karma. Karma can be understood as “consequences for one’s actions”. If a person follows his/her Dharma, he/she builds up good Karma, and will be rewarded with a better life upon reincarnation. By climbing this ladder, a person can eventually achieve Moksha, and become one with Brahman. Conversely, if a person does not follow his/her Dharma, he/she will build up bad Karma. Thus, upon reincarnation, they will be reborn into a worse position in life.

Let’s look at a simple example of how Dharma and Karma work. You were born into this life as a beggar. According to Hinduism, if you want to be a good person, first you must accept your place in society as a beggar (dharma). Even as a beggar, during this life, you have to be a good person because you are trying to build up your good karma. Therefore, when you die and reincarnate to the next life, you will be rewarded by being born into a higher rank of society due to all the good karma you have built up in the past. To summarize, by following your Dharma, you build up good Karma.

Over the centuries, Hindus have developed many methods and practices to follow dharma, build up Karma, and deepen spirituality. These methods and practices are called *Yoga*. The most popular form of yoga practiced outside of India is called *Hatha Yoga*, and focuses on uniting the mind and body. There are many different forms of yoga, however. Some focus on building knowledge, while others focus on increasing devotion. Regardless of the approach, all forms of yoga share the same goal: Striving to deepen spirituality.

Part I - Define the following Terms:

- Brahman -
- Brahma -
- Vishnu -
- Shiva -
- Atman -
- Maya -
- Samsara -
- Moksha -
- Dharma -
- Karma -
- Yoga -

Part II - Fill in the Blank

1. The cycle of reincarnation (life, death, rebirth, etc.) is known as _____.
2. One's duty in life is known as _____.
3. People mistakenly believe that they are separate from Brahman. This great deception is known as _____.
4. By following Dharma, people can build up _____, and will be rewarded with a better position in life following reincarnation.
5. The ultimate goal of Hinduism is _____, to break the cycle of reincarnation or samsara.
6. According to Hinduism, _____ is the single, unifying force of the Universe.
7. The different aspects of Brahman are depicted as different gods. The creator is called _____. The preserver is known as _____. The destroyer is named _____.
8. Due to the Great Deception, people mistakenly believe that they are separate from Brahman. This concept of the "individual soul" is known as _____.
9. Methods in Hinduism intended to deepen spirituality are called _____.

3. Describe the relationship of Maya, Atman, and Brahman.

4. What is the ultimate goal of Hinduism? How can it be achieved?

5. Scholars often argue over whether Hinduism is a Monotheistic religion or a polytheistic religion. Based on your understanding of Hinduism....

... What arguments can be made for Hinduism being called a Monotheistic religion?

... What arguments can be made for Hinduism being called a Polytheistic religion?