



## Hinduism

Hinduism is a major religious and cultural tradition of South Asia. It developed in the Indus Valley and is the oldest religion we have direct evidence for. One of the Hindu holy books is the Vedas and the symbol is the Aum or Om.

### Brahman

Hindus worship one Supreme Being called Brahman, though they know him by different names. This is because there are many different languages and cultures in India, therefore people have understood the one God in their own distinct way. The Supreme God has many divine powers. When God is formless, He is referred to by the term Brahman.

Brahman is the one thing that all things stem from. In Hinduism, every god is just a reflection of a kind of Brahman. These gods are not gods in the way that you have been taught before, they are called 'avatara' (avatar) and they represent Brahman taking a solid form to complete a specific job. This may be as a concept, or a force of nature, or an emotion.

### Varna

A hierarchy system used in Hinduism.

At the top of the hierarchy were the Brahmins who were mainly teachers and intellectuals and are believed to have come from Brahma's head. The Kshatriyas, or the warriors and rulers, supposedly from his arms. The Vaishyas, or the traders, were created from his thighs. The Shudras came from Brahma's feet and did all the menial (low skilled) jobs.

### Dharma

The duty people have. This is based on their Varna (position).

### Yoga

The word Yoga means 'to unite' or 'join together' and is used in Hinduism to describe the practices Hindus use to try and achieve Moksha (freedom from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth).

There are 3 main types of Yoga first described in the Bhagavad Gita (one of the Hindu holy books), and these are -  
**Jnana Yoga** - Yoga through intellect  
**Karma Yoga** - Yoga through kindness  
**Bhakti Yoga** - Yoga through rituals

### Puja

All forms of yoga are supported by the practice of puja. Puja simply means rituals. In its simplest form, puja usually consists of making an offering of flowers or fruit to an image of a god.

### Atman

For Hindus, the atman is the soul of a living thing. All living things have one, but the human version is the most pure and special one. Some Hindu philosophers like to use the word jivatman to describe a human soul once it is in a human body. Once in a human body, the jivatman becomes confused by human desires and emotions and is not as pure.

### Samsara

The atman travels through the various lives, moving from one being to another after death. This is known as the cycle of samsara. Samsara means 'to wander around in the world' (the cycle of birth, death and rebirth).

### Karma

Karma is kind of like a score that your soul achieves over your life. Positive actions attract positive karma, negative actions attract negative karma. You can change your karma at any time by choosing to act more positively. At the point of death, your behaviours over all previous lives decide what you are reborn as.

