

HINDUISM

The earliest evidence of Hinduism dates back to 3000 BCE in the Indus Valley, in what is now Pakistan. This ancient religion has a long and complex history that scholars continue to debate. Hinduism is a mixture of legends, ancient beliefs and customs that have evolved into the religion that its adherents practise today. It has been influenced by Buddhism, particularly with regard to its art, architecture and storytelling, and also by Islam, with which it has long been in conflict. Over time, Hinduism has developed from many different traditions into a religion without a single founder or teacher, or any one doctrine of belief. However, Hindus believe in one God, Brahman, and the gods of the Hindu faith represent different expressions of Brahman (or Brahma). He is not worshipped in the same way as are the other gods, as his work, the creation of the universe, is already complete. Hindus also believe in a cycle of life, *samsara*, whereby the soul passes through lives in succession. A soul's incarnation is always dependent on *karma*, how one lived one's previous life.

Hinduism is not simply a religion, but rather a way of life that affects how its followers live from day to day. Hindus are often classified into three groups, depending on which form of Brahma they worship: Vishnu (the preserver) and Vishnu's important incarnations Rama, Krishna and Narasimha; Shiva (the destroyer); and the Mother Goddess, Shakti, also called Parvati, Mahalakshmi, Durga or Kali.



DIWALI, the Hindu festival of lights, is the most popular of all the festivals from South Asia, and is also the occasion for celebrations by Jains and Sikhs as well as Hindus.

GANESH CHATURTHI is the day that Hindus around the world celebrate the birthday of Lord Ganesh (Ganesh Chaturthi).

HANUMAN JAYANTI marks the birth of Hanuman, the Monkey God.

HOLI is the spring festival associated with Krishna, when people throw coloured powders and water at each other. Holi celebrates creation and renewal.

KRISHNA JAYANTI (JANAMASHTAMI) marks the birth of Krishna, one of the most popular Gods in the Hindu pantheon.

MAHASHIVRATRI is a Hindu festival dedicated to Shiva, one of the deities of the Hindu Trinity.

MAKAR SANKRANT is first Hindu festival of the solar calendar year, falling on January 14.

NAVARATRI is one of the greatest Hindu festivals, symbolizing the triumph of good over evil.

RAKSHA BANDHAN is the Hindu festival that celebrates brotherhood and love.

RAMA NAVAMI celebrates the birth of Lord Rama, son of King Dasharatha of Ayodhya.

THAIPUSAM is the occasion of colourful, devotional and painful celebrations in Malaysia.

VAISAKHI is when all Hindus go to the temple to pay their respect and seek blessings, exchanging gifts and sweets between friends and family members.

VARSHA PRATIPADA is the Hindu Spring New Year.

ESSENTIAL NON-FICTION

CHOPRA, Deepak. (2004). *Fire in the Heart: A Spiritual Guide for Teens*. Simon & Schuster.
ISBN 978-0689-86216-8. Grades 10 and up.

The best-selling author, a medical doctor with an abiding interest in the mind-body connection, recalls a dialogue from his youth, when a mysterious wise man teaches him the ancient principles of Hinduism.

PATEL, Sanjay. (2006). *The Little Book of Hindu Deities: From the Goddess of Wealth to the Sacred Cow*. Plume. ISBN 0-4522-8775-8. Grades 8 and up.

In a lighthearted but delightfully informative way, the author looks at fifty Hindu deities, accompanied by his Japanese-style artwork.

HUYLER, Stephen P. (1999). *Meeting God: Elements of Hindu Devotion*. Yale University Press.
ISBN 978-0-300-08905-9. Grades 10 and up.

This comprehensive look at the powerful devotional practices of Hinduism, as witnessed by the author in his travels throughout India, includes stunning and intimate photographs of Hindu worship.

VISWANATHAN, Ed. (1992). *Am I A Hindu? The Hinduism Primer*. Halo Books.
ISBN: 978-1879904064. Grades 8 and up.

A child poses questions about his Hindu heritage to his father, who responds with elegant explanations gleaned from both Scripture and common Hindu practice. Written in the charmingly formal English of East Indian natives, it provides an insider's presentation of Hinduism.

