

Hinduism



# Hinduism

- **Hinduism is an umbrella term for the religious tradition that gave the world karma, reincarnation and yoga.**
- **Hinduism has a long history with many different beliefs and practices that find their roots in India.**

# Hinduism

- Hinduism is the least dogmatic and the most diverse of all world religions.
- Shared Scripture: Vedas
- Shared symbol: Om
- Sacred center:

Varanasi in North India



# Hinduism

- **Hindus worship many gods through many different paths, disciplines, and philosophies.**
- **Some Hindus say there is only one god who manifests itself in all the other gods, others say there are many gods with one supreme god over them. Others believe that all the gods are equal and others believe that there are no god(s) at all, but that the gods are just a product of our imagination.**

# Hinduism

- **Although Hindus differ on a lot of things they have a strong consensus regarding the human problem and its solution.**
- **The human problem is wandering which takes places in a vicious cycle of life, death and rebirth.**
- **We are born to die only to be born to die again and again endlessly.**
- **This happens through reincarnation.**

# Hinduism

- **Hindus see reincarnation as a problem rather than as an opportunity.**
- **This world is a vale of tears and frustration.**
- **Even heaven is subject to flux and frustration.**
- **The Hindu goal is to escape this cycle through spiritual liberation.**

# Hinduism

- **How does one obtain spiritual liberation?**
- **Three different yogas (disciplines) have been developed over its history.**



# Yoga (discipline)

- **Discipline of action (initially ritual action, particularly to fire sacrifice).**





# Yoga (discipline)

- **Discipline of wisdom. Developed by wandering sages and written down in the philosophical scriptures *Upanishads*.**



# Yoga (discipline)

- **Discipline of devotion to the god of your choosing – “all you need is love”.**



# The Faces of Hinduism

**Modern day Hinduism**

**Devotional Hinduism - Bhakti yoga**  
Developed around the time of Christ

**Philosophical Hinduism - Jnana yoga**  
Developed around 500 BC

**Action Hinduism - karma yoga (Vedic)**  
Developed around 800 BC

**Indus Valley Civilization (2500-1500 BC)**

# Indus Valley Civilization (2500-1500 BC)

- The cultural background out of which Hinduism came.
- Little is known about this civilization other than that it was urban, technologically advanced, and literate.



## Action Hinduism - karma yoga (Vedic)

- **Scripture: The books of the Vedas.**
  - Veda is the Sanskrit term for knowledge.
- **Hindus divide their scripture into two categories.**
- **Sruti – that which is heard and authored by divinity.**
- **Smrti – that which is remembered and authored by human beings.**

## Action Hinduism - karma yoga (Vedic)

- **The Vedas fall into the category of Sruti (that which is heard and authored by divinity).**
- **Its message was revealed to human beings through seers/prophets and compiled by the sage Vyasa.**
- **Narrowly the Vedas refer to four books:**
  - Rig Veda
  - Sama Veda
  - Yajur Veda
  - Arharva Veda

## Action Hinduism - karma yoga (Vedic)

- **Broadly the Vedas refer to these four plus three others:**
  - The Upanishads (Secret Doctrines).
  - The Brahmanas (Priestly Books)
  - The Aranyakas (Forest Books).
- **The first four Vedas are basically manuals of instruction to the priests in the proper *action* in performance, rituals and mantras.**
- **The last three are more philosophical.**

## Action Hinduism - karma yoga (Vedic)

- Of the seven scriptures the oldest is the *Rig Veda* which is a collection of 1028 hymns composed over the centuries and dating back to 1200 BC.
- The newest is the *Upanishads* which was probably composed between 600-300 BC but not written down until the 17<sup>th</sup> century AD.



# **Hindu Scriptures/Vedas**

- **Deals with the problem of disorder.**
- **Demons of chaos are pitched in battle with the gods so that the family, community and cosmos are forever collapsing and in disarray.**
- **The aim is to create and sustain a social and cosmic order.**

# Cast system

According to *Rig Veda's* (oldest Veda) "*Hymn of the Primeval Man*" the world first appeared at the beginning of time when a Primeval Man was offered to the gods as a sacrifice.

**This sacrifice set society in order.**

**Its mouth became the priestly cast (Brahmin).**

**Its arms became the warriors.**

**Its thighs became the merchants.**

**Its feet became the servants.**

# Hindu Scriptures/Vedas

- **This order cannot be accomplished by humans alone so the priests work alongside the gods through ritual (right action) – especially through fire sacrifice.**
- **Fire sacrifice/ritual is the central preoccupation of the Vedas.**
- **Priests feed the gods with animals, milk, grain, and other plants in exchange for order (sons, cows, bountiful harvests, and victory in war).**

# Fire Sacrifice

- **Echoes of this are seen today in the fires that continue to burn in Hindu temples.**



# Fire Sacrifice

- It is also seen in rituals where devotees wave a lighted lamp before a divine image.



# Fire Sacrifice

- It is seen in marriage ceremonies where vows are taken before a sacred fire.



# Fire Sacrifice

- It is seen in the practice of cremation where the impure corpse is offered to the gods for purification.



# The gods of the Vedas

- In the polytheistic world of the Vedas gods are associated with the earth, sun, sky, water, wind, storms and other forces of nature.
- There is no single high god in Vedic religion, but the most important gods are Agni and Indra.



# Agni

- The God of fire.
- Also associated with sacrifice, the sun, the sacred cow, and the inner fire in the belly.
- Because fire rituals are viewed as transmissions between heaven and earth, Agni is a messenger god.



# Indra

- **God of war and weather – especially bad weather.**
- **After Agni, Indra is the most important in the Vedic pantheon.**



## Philosophical Hinduism - Jnana yoga

- **Some of the gods from “Action Hinduism” (Vedic religion) carry over, but many new gods emerge.**
- **Ritual takes a backseat to philosophy.**
- **Mystics replace priests as the religious exemplars.**
- **Preoccupation with the afterlife.**
- **Shifts from social and cosmic disorder to the nature and destiny of the human “soul”.**

## Philosophical Hinduism - Jnana yoga

- **We find many of Hinduism's "homeless sages" preoccupied with philosophy.**
- **They wrestled with the great questions of life and death, creation and destruction.**
  - **How did I come to be born? What happens when I die? What is my relation to Ultimate Reality?**

## Philosophical Hinduism - Jnana yoga

- The *Upanishads* were compiled in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC and introduced concepts like karma and reincarnation into Hinduism.
- They also introduced meditative and yogic techniques designed to awaken people willing to withdraw from the world into lives of celibacy and other forms of asceticism.
- They are often referred to as “renouncers”.

## Philosophical Hinduism - Jnana yoga

- **Hinduism recognized duty, power, and sensual pleasure as legitimate aims of life, but these “renouncers” turned their backs on wealth, power and sex.**
- **“Renouncers” are to die socially as well.**
  - **On their spiritual quest their marriages are legally terminated, they no longer answer to their birth names, and they abandon their possessions.**

## Philosophical Hinduism - Jnana yoga

- **“Renouncers” also withdrew from the world of fire and sacrifice.**
- **While Vedic priests trafficked in action these new exemplars focused on wisdom.**
- **While Vedic religion was a tradition of priests performing fire sacrifices in order to keep chaos at bay, “renouncers” cultivated knowledge in order to liberate themselves from the cycle of birth, life and death (reincarnation).**

## Philosophical Hinduism - Jnana yoga

- **“Renouncers” focused on the ritual’s inner meaning rather than on its outer performance.**
- **They referred to themselves as holy men, strivers, silent ones, wanderers, beggars.**
- **They were homeless and celibate and begged for food. Some took vows of silence.**
- **The problem was no longer chaos but ignorance, therefore the answer wasn’t finding order, but finding wisdom.**



## Philosophical Hinduism - Jnana yoga

- **Inside each person is an unchanging eternal soul trapped in the prison of our bodies and the illusions our bodies keep conjuring up.**
- **As long as we inhabit our bodies we are destined to suffer.**
- **Death, however, doesn't offer release because after we die we are reborn into other bodies only to repeat the cycle again – the sorrowful cycle of life, death, rebirth.**

## Philosophical Hinduism - Jnana yoga

- **In Hinduism consequence follows action without supernatural intervention. Just as the law of gravity.**
- **According to the law of karma, evil actions produce punishments and good actions produce rewards.**
- **When you die, you die with a combination of good and bad karma.**
- **Therefore, you must be reborn into another body only for the cycle to continue again.**

## Philosophical Hinduism - Jnana yoga

- **The circumstances into which you are born have nothing to do with luck - or the will of a god(s) - but are the result of the good and bad actions that took place in your prior lives.**
- ***Upanishad* – “We wander in the cycle of transmigration according to our deeds.”**
- **To end this wandering we need liberation from ignorance, karma, and rebirth which happens through our efforts and experience.**

## Philosophical Hinduism - Jnana yoga

- **Yoga in its original sense of the discipline means “to yoke” one thing to another.**
  - **the self and reality; the self and divinity; the self and immortality.**
- **You work towards this “yoking” by using your body to breath in order to transport yourself from ignorance to wisdom, illusion to reality, humanity to divinity, and rebirth to freedom.**

## Philosophical Hinduism - Jnana yoga

- **Every day, we look at ourselves and the world through the veil of illusion. To be wise is to lift the veil and to see the self and the world, not as they seem, but as they really are.**
- **When this is done we will see that we are divine.**
- **The sacred is inside each of us.**
- **The essence of the human being is the same as the essence of divinity.**

## Philosophical Hinduism - Jnana yoga

- **Hindus refer to the essence of the human being as *Atman* - typically translated as “self/soul”. They refer to the essence of divinity as *Brahman*.**
- **The individual soul is divine. The essence of each of us is uncreated, deathless, and immortal.**
- **Some Hindus believe that *Atman* (the individual soul) is part of *Brahman* (the universal soul). Others see *Atman* and *Brahman* as distinct and separate things.**

## Devotional Hinduism - Bhakti yoga

- **Around the time of Jesus, Hinduism moved in a more popular direction referred to today as “the discipline of devotion.”**
- **By doing our moral and spiritual duty we accumulate good karma so that one day we might be reborn into circumstances to a life of renunciation and release.**

## Devotional Hinduism - Bhakti yoga

- **This layer of Hinduism was expressed in the common songs, poems, dramas and dances and embodied in heartfelt worship of one's chosen deity.**
- **Instead of controlling their bodies and emotions through meditation and yoga, devotional Hindus let their bodies and emotions go.**
- **Instead of seeing the body as a prison they celebrate the body as a temple for their chosen god.**



## Devotional Hinduism - Bhakti yoga

- **Philosophical Hindus understood god(s) as something beyond human/animal attributes.**
- **Devotional Hindus described their chosen deities as male or female, four-armed or eight-armed, wild or mild.**
- **They worship their personal divinity with relish.**
- **They recite intimate poems about their overflowing love of the god of their choosing.**

## Devotional Hinduism - Bhakti yoga

- **By the grace of your chosen deity, it is possible to win release from the cycle of suffering and to gain happiness here and now.**
- **Devotees ask their chosen gods to heal their arthritis, protect their harvest, and guide their loved ones through rites of passage – birth, marriage, childhood, and death.**
- **The point of this world is not simply to get out of it, but to prosper in it.**

# Devotional Practices

- **Yoga.**
- **Pilgrimages to sacred cities, rivers, and mountains.**
- **The observance of festivals like Diwali (festival of lights) and Holi (a spring festival of reversal when people of all ages and stations in life douse one another with water and colored powder).**
- **Food offerings.**



# Devotional Practices

- In Vedic times animals were sacrificed, but today the offerings are usually vegetarian.
- If the offerings are made in a temple they are usually mediated by a priest.
- They can also be given by ordinary people at a home shrine, with oil lamps and incense lit in front of an icon.



# Devotional Practices

- Offerings are usually placed in a four sided palm leaf basket which is filled with flowers, rice and a slice of banana or sugar cane.



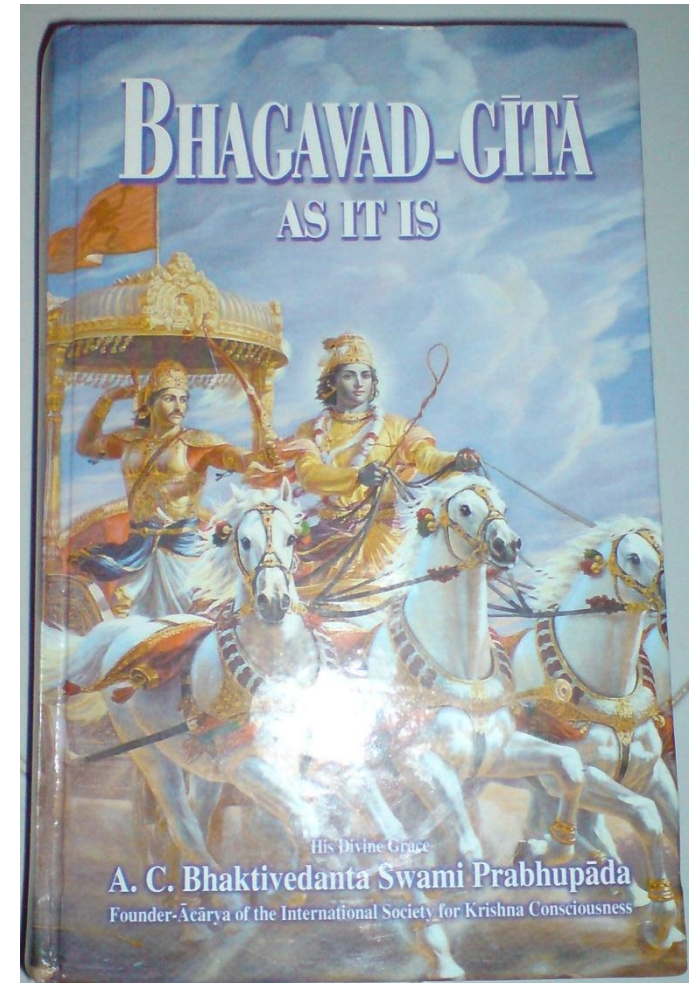
# Devotional Practices

- **These baskets are strategically placed to align with the five sacred directions (north, east, south, west, and center).**
- **An incense stick is lit across the top and the offering is splashed with holy water.**



# In the *Bhagavad Gita* Krishna says:

**“Whatever you do, or eat, or offer, or give, or mortify, make it an offering to me, and I shall undo the bonds of karma.”**



# Devotional Hinduism - Bhakti yoga

- **Devotional Hinduism is about stories.**
- **Stories and rituals are integrated.**
- **The key repositories of these stories are the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*.**
- ***Mahabharata*: 100,000 verses or 1.8 million words** (larger than the Bible, the *Iliad*, and the *Odyssey* combined).
- **Composed between 400BC to 400AD.**



## Devotional Hinduism - Bhakti yoga

- **Duty is the central theme of these stories and its stories includes heroism, holiness, betrayal, murder, adultery, and lust all played out at a time when the gods and humans walked the same earth.**
- **The most loved portion is the *Bhagavad Gita* (or *Gita* as it is popularly known).**
- **The *Gita* is a dialogue about the ethics of war.**

# ***Gita* Themes:**

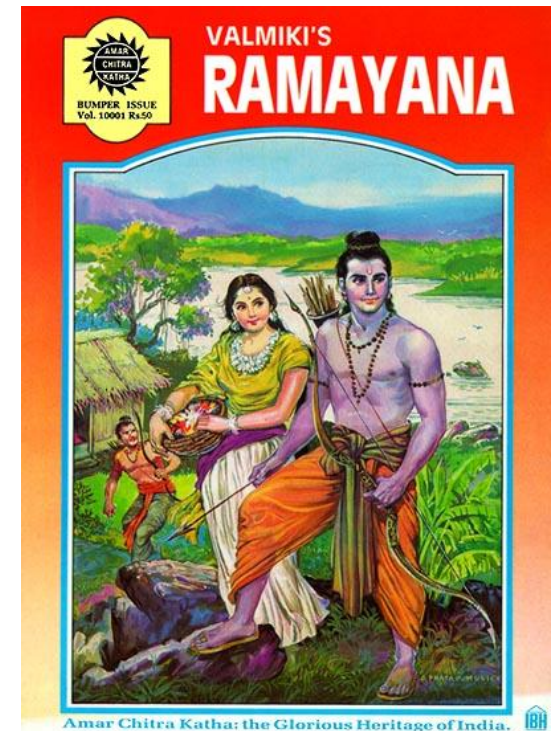
- **Do your duty without attachment to the fruit of your actions.**
- **Renounce any desire for reward.**
- **Don't fear punishment.**
- **Devote your actions and consequences to god(s).**
- **Remember that a warrior cannot actually kill anyone since we are not our perishable bodies, but are immortal souls.**

# ***Ramayana***

- **Central theme: love, longing and fidelity are the ethics of marriage.**
- **Put together between 200BC and 200AD.**
- **7 books – 24,000 verses (twice as long as the NT).**
- **It is revered by Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, and even Muslims - putting it alongside the Bible and the *Analects of Confucius* as one of the four most influential books ever written.**

# *Ramayana*

- Diwali celebrates Rama's return to rule the kingdom of Ayodhya.
- Many Hindus see this story as an allegory of the soul captured by the body only to be rescued by god (Rama).



# Some of the Major Hindu Gods



# Shakti

- **A term for the feminine energy that animates all divinities.**
- **It is also the name for the “Great Goddess” who appears in many forms often both wild and mild.**



# Shakti

- In some of these incarnations she is the consort of Shiva, in some the consort of Krishna, and in some the consort of Rama.
- She is associated with prosperity and good luck and adorns the walls of many homes and businesses.



# Shakti

- In one incarnation she is the goddess of cremation grounds and battlefields with a thirst for blood.
- The *Tantric* tradition typically worships the goddess Shakti.





# Tantric

- **The Tantric tradition uses a variety of techniques (mantras, meditative strategies, visualization techniques, and sexual rites) to seek after spiritual liberation and this-worldly power.**



# The Hindu Trinity: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva



**Brahma**

**Vishnu**

**Shiva**

# Brahma

- Creator
- The father of Manu, and from Manu all human beings are descended.
- The creation of the *Vedas* (scriptures) are credited to him.
- His wife Saraswati has taken different forms throughout history.



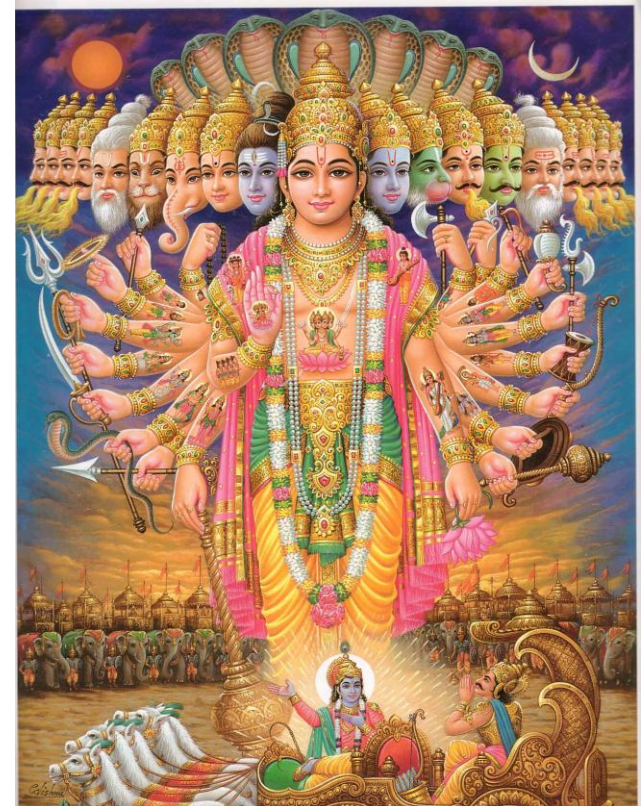
# Brahma

- He is also known as the “Lord of Speech and Sound.”
- He is not to be confused with the Supreme Cosmic Spirit of Hindu philosophy known as Brahman, which is genderless.



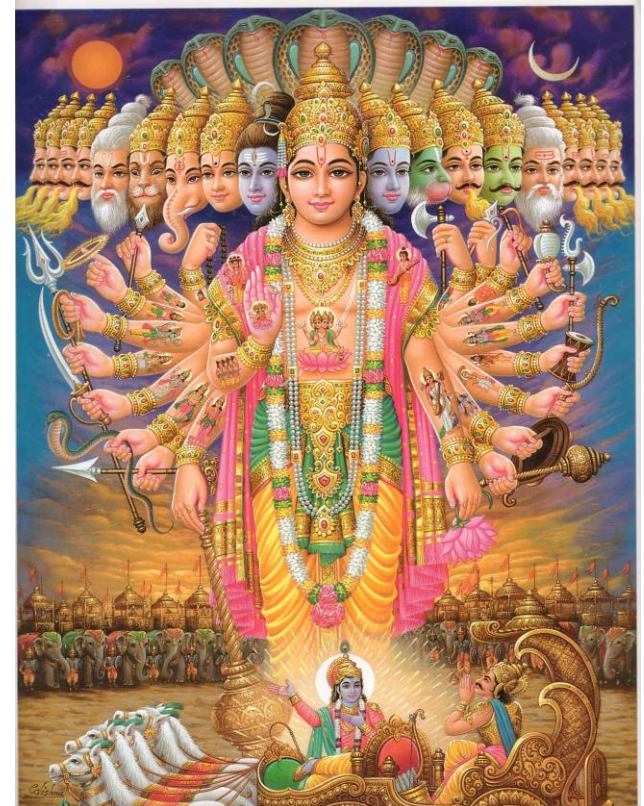
# Vishnu

- **Sustainer**
- **Vishnu best known for his ten avatars (incarnations):**
- **Fish, turtle, boar, half lion/half man, and dwarf.**
- **And his human embodiments: Parashurama, Rama, Krishna, Balarama, and Kalki (the incarnation still to come).**



# Vishnu

- As Krishna, Vishnu is the hero of the *Mahabharata*.
- As Rama he is the hero of the *Ramayana*.



# Holy Cow



**The cow is considered sacred because it was Krishna's favorite animal. It is also considered the source of food and a symbol of life, therefore it must be revered and never killed. It is also a non violent animal.**

# Shiva

- **Destroyer**
- **Associated with divinity's weaker side.**
- **Shiva's third eye can turn anything and anyone into dust.**
- **Both loving and wrathful.**





# Shiva

- Male and female.
- Erotic and ascetic.
- It is said that anyone who dies in the city of Shiva (Varanasi) achieves liberation at the moment of death.



# **The three main branches of devotional Hinduism**

- **Vaishnavism – worship of Vishnu.**
  - **Shaivism – worship of Shiva.**
  - **Shaktism – worship of the Great Goddess (Shakti).**
- 
- **Brahma (the creator) is now a marginal deity – invoked far more often than worshiped.**

# Ganesh

- The most popular god in Hinduism.
- The god of health and wealth.
- Today stock traders chant his name 108 times each morning before the opening of the Bombay Stock Exchange in Mumbai.



# Ganesh

- Leader of the celestial army.
- Holds an ax to destroy obstacles.



# Ganesh

- Holds a plate of sweets signifying that people should engage in the bliss of spiritual liberation.



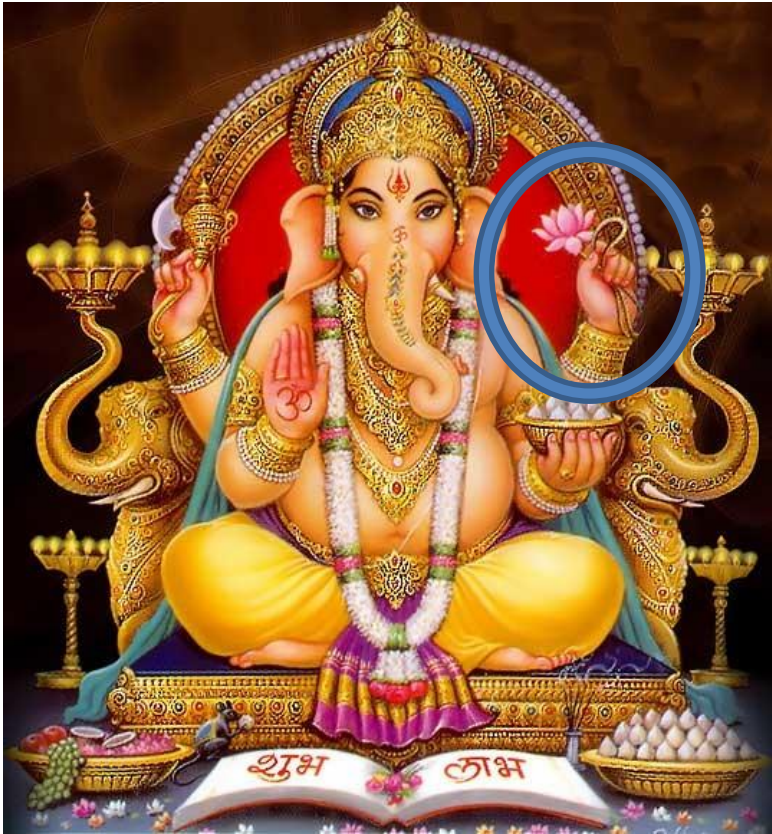
# Ganesh

- Holds one hand in blessing - removal of fear.



# Ganesh

- **Holds the lotus flower** (has roots in mud, but shines on the surface of the water). **This signifies that the devotee should be in the world, but not attached to it.**



# Ganesh

- Holds a rope to rescue devotees from troubles.





# Ganesh

- Has only one tusk which was broken off when his pen ran out of ink; thus, he dictated to a sage to write down the Hindu scriptures *Mahabharata*.



## Modern day Hinduism

- **Preference for stories over dogma as these revel in mystery and paradox and have an aversion to fixed boundaries and settled borders.**
- **Hinduism deifies human beings, but as the epics demonstrate, it also humanizes the gods.**
- **Human beings need the gods and the gods need human beings.**

## Modern day Hinduism

- **The heart and soul of Western Hinduism resides in the temples dedicated to Vishnu, Shiva, the Great Goddess Shakti, and Ganesh (god of health and wealth) that now punctuate the skylines of almost all European and American cities.**

## Modern day Hinduism

- **In today's Hindu temples the ancient belief and practice of India continues to push up through the various layers we call Hinduism.**
- **Devotees continue to call on the gods of their choosing to bring them happiness in this life and release in the world beyond.**