

## 2022-2023 ENCOUNTERING DIFFERENCE

### JANUARY MONTHLY FOCUS:

## HINDUISM

Rooted in India, Hinduism is often called the oldest living religious tradition—or, perhaps, more accurately traditions in the plural. Dating back to the Vedic religion of Iron Age India, the threads of different philosophies and devotional expression have diverged and crossed and crossed again creating a tapestry of interwoven practices and beliefs. Consequently, in pursuing the release (*moksha*) of the self (*atman*) from the endless cycles of rebirth (*samsara*), there are multiple paths (*yogas*) to follow: Bhakti Yoga (the path of love and devotion); Karma Yoga (the path of right action); Rāja Yoga (the path of meditation); Jñāna Yoga (the path of wisdom). While Hindu traditions contain a multiplicity of divine beings within their sacred texts and folklore, there is also a strong sense of an underlying essence of all life, which suggests a philosophical *monism* (one source), if not *monotheism* (one god).

### Some Notes:

- Sacred Texts:
  - Oldest: *The Vedas*—ancient hymns and other religious texts composed in India about 1500 BCE to 1000 BCE. The *Rig-Veda* is the oldest of these texts, which were transmitted orally before being written down.
  - *The Upanishads*, 9<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE. They are religious and philosophical in nature, wisdom lit.
  - Dharma-texts: *The Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* – two epics from late centuries BCE and early centuries CE; mythological stories of ancient India interspersed with religious and philosophical treatises.
    - *Bhagavad Gita*, part of the larger *Mahabharata*, composed as a poem that tells the story of the god Vishnu who takes the form of Krishna. Krishna and the warrior Arjuna discuss questions about living a meaningful spiritual life in society as well as duty and social obligations.
  - *Puranas* – an oral and transcribed repository of myth, folklore, and other teachings from the early CE
  - *Agamas* – sacred texts that developed in a non-Vedic context. Considered ‘Vedic-congruent’, they implicitly refine Veda teaching.
- Important Terms:
  - Brahman – one behind the many
  - Atman – the inner most self, according to the *Upanishads* identical to Brahman
  - Samsara – reincarnation, body dies but soul is reborn in another body—an animal, human, or god
  - Karma – “action”, all actions have consequences. A soul’s karma continues after death and determines the conditions of the next life.
  - Dharma – “right behavior” or “duty”, links a person’s particular social obligation to the social caste of one’s birth.
  - Moksha – “liberation” or “release”, an escape from the endless cycles of rebirth (*samsara*) in which the self’s essence (*atman*) returns to Brahman, the unchanging essence of all existence.
- Key Divinities – the *Trimurti*, introduced in the *Rig-Veda*
  - *Braham*, the creator, birth, wife is *Sharupta*, then *Saraswati*
  - *Vishnu*, the preserver, life, wife is *Lakshmi* (goddess of love, beauty, and prosperity)
  - *Shiva*, the destroyer, death; wife is *Pavarati* (goddess of power and transformation; reincarnation of *Sati*)
- 95% of world’s Hindus live in India. However, today there are Hindus in nearly every part of world.
- The sound of “Om” is the symbol of Hinduism.
- Harvard Religion and Public Life Video: <https://rpl.hds.harvard.edu/religion-context/religions/hinduism>
- Florida State Online Textbook: <https://fscj.pressbooks.pub/worldreligions/chapter/introduction-2/>

### Words of the Tradition:

The one who loves all intensely begins perceiving in all living beings a part of himself. He becomes a lover of all, a part and parcel of the Universal Joy. He flows with the stream of happiness, and is enriched by each soul.

*Yajur Veda*

The whole mantram AUM, indivisible, interdependent, goes on reverberating in the mind. Established in this cosmic vibration, the sage goes beyond fear, decay, and death to enter into infinite peace.

*Prashna Upanishad*