

Descriptions of Hindu Beliefs



Brahman: *Brahman* is the name for Hinduism's one Supreme God or Spirit. Brahman creates, maintains, destroys, and re-creates the universe in a never-ending cycle. Everything in the world, including each human soul, or *atman*, is a part of Brahman. Just like a single drop of water in a great ocean, the *atman* is both separate from and one with Brahman (God). A Hindu's spiritual goal is to unite his or her soul with Brahman.



Multiple Gods: Hindus worship many Gods and Goddesses, but they believe the Gods are all aspects of the one Supreme God, Brahman. Hindus believe that the multiple Gods represent the countless different qualities and powers of Brahman. Some Hindu Gods have humanlike personalities, and others represent such things as success, good luck, and war. Each Hindu person or family may be especially devoted to a particular God or Goddess. Three of the most important Gods are Vishnu, Shiva, and Brahma (not to be confused with Brahman).



Dharma: *Dharma* means "to hold or support." Part of dharma relates to sacred (holy) duty or moral responsibility. It is the system of rules and values Hindus follow in their everyday life. Another way to think of dharma is as "the right thing to do" in any situation. Hindus believe in a universal dharma that includes values all Hindus accept and practice, such as nonviolence. However, Hindus also believe they have an individual dharma that they should follow. People's dharmas are determined by different things, such as personality, age, sex, and inherited social class, or *varna*. Hinduism teaches that when people follow their dharma, they contribute to the harmony and balance of society and the universe.



Karma: Hindus believe that *karma* is the total of good and bad actions a human soul, or *atman*, carries with it from life to life. They believe that when people die, the soul leaves the body and is reborn into another body. Hinduism teaches that people's good and bad actions in one life influence their destiny in future lives. In Hinduism, karma determines whether a soul is reborn as a human or an animal, into a rich family or a poor one, and some of the things a person will experience in each lifetime. For example, Hindus believe that a person who steals in this life may be robbed in a future life, or that someone who harms animals may be reborn as an animal.



Samsara: In Hinduism, *samsara* is the continuous cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. The process of rebirth is sometimes referred to as reincarnation. The goal of a Hindu's life is to be released from *samsara* and united with the Supreme God, Brahman. Hindus call this release *moksha* and it is achieved after a person's soul has lived through many lifetimes. Hindus achieve *moksha* by following the path of dharma, balancing their karma (both good and bad actions), worshipping the Gods faithfully, and having a direct and personal experience of God by following certain spiritual practices.

Basic Hindu Beliefs

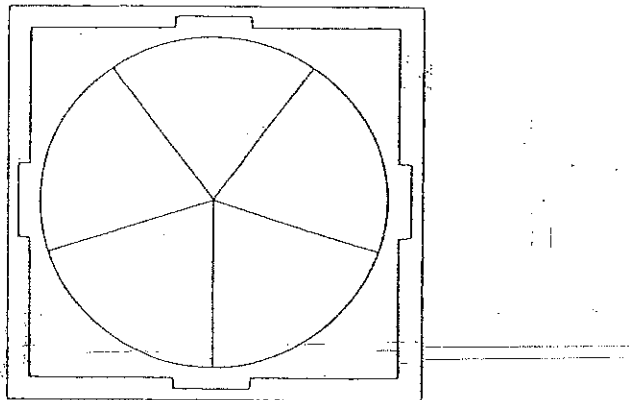
| Hindu belief | Key points about the belief | Symbol for the belief |
|---------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Brahman | | |
| Multiple Gods | | |
| Dharma | | |
| Karma | | |
| Samsara | | |

Brainstorming Ideas for a Mandala of Hindu Beliefs

Directions: Brainstorm ideas for your mandala by answering the questions below.

1. What are some ways in which the basic beliefs of Hinduism are related to each other?

2. How can you arrange your symbols in the space below to show the relationships among the Hindu beliefs?



3. Write a four- or five-sentence explanation of how your mandala reveals the relationships among the beliefs.

A Mandala of Hindu Beliefs

Directions: In the space below, use your ideas from Student Handout 2.1C to create a mandala of basic Hindu beliefs. Below your mandala, write a four- or five-sentence explanation of how the placement of your symbols reveals the relationships among the beliefs.

