

SACRED COWS,  
KRISHNA, AND  
THE BAHAI'  
FAITH

Decoding Hinduism

aum



- Om is called the “seed mantra”
- Primordial sound
- Hinduism’s earliest sacred texts, the Vedas
- ritual of “waving of the lamp” -- *arati*

# Sacred cows





## kamadhenu

The “wish-fulfilling cow”

“The cows have come and have brought us good fortune. In our stalls, contented, may they stay! May they bring forth calves for us, many-colored, giving milk for Indra each day. You make, O cows, the thin man sleek; to the unlovely you bring beauty. Rejoice our homestead with pleasant lowing. In our assemblies we laud your vigour.”

Govinda

# Why learn about Hinduism?

- One of the oldest and numerically the third largest religion in the world, with about a billion adherents
- India has the largest Bahá'í community (approx. 2 million)
- Krishna considered a Manifestation of God
- 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls Krishna “the cause of the illumination of the world of humanity,” and confirms that he was “sent by God” (*Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 337)

# General features of Hinduism

- Term “Hinduism” coined by British colonials in the 19<sup>th</sup> C
- River Sindh (Indus)
- Sanatana Dharma
- Multiple traditions; over 3,500 years old
- No single founder or founding date
- “orthopraxy” vs “orthodoxy”
- Highly decentralized
- “No one truth can contradict another truth. Light is good in whatsoever lamp it is burning!” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, PT 137)
- sacred geography, shared storehouse of myths, ethical counsel, spiritual concepts, pantheon of deities; and unique social structure

# Nature of God

1. Brahman--abstract, impersonal principle; attributeless; genderless; one unchanging reality behind the changing visible world

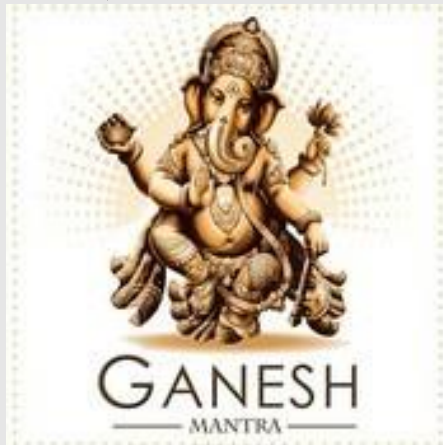
- Upanishads (c. 8th - 3rd Cent. BCE); source of non-dualist Vedantic philosophy
- “that which is One the sages speak of in various ways” (RigVeda 1.164.46)
- Brahman—not an object of worship, but of intuitive knowledge and meditation
- “not this, not that” (*neti-neti*)
- “His form is not in the field of vision: no one sees him with mortal eyes. He is seen by a pure heart and by a mind and thoughts that are pure. Those who know him attain immortality.” (Katha Upanishad 6.9)
- “Being - Consciousness - Joy” (*sat-cit-ananda*)

# Theistic view of God

God is both the Supreme Being, responsible for the creation, preservation and dissolution of the universe, and is personal and in active relationship with His creation

Worshipped:

- (a) without form or attributes; no physical iconography
- (b) with iconographic form(s); e.g., Vishnu, Krishna, Rama, Shiva, Murugan, the Devi (or goddess: Sri, Parvati, Durga, etc); Hanuman, Ganesh; many divine or semi-divine beings honored



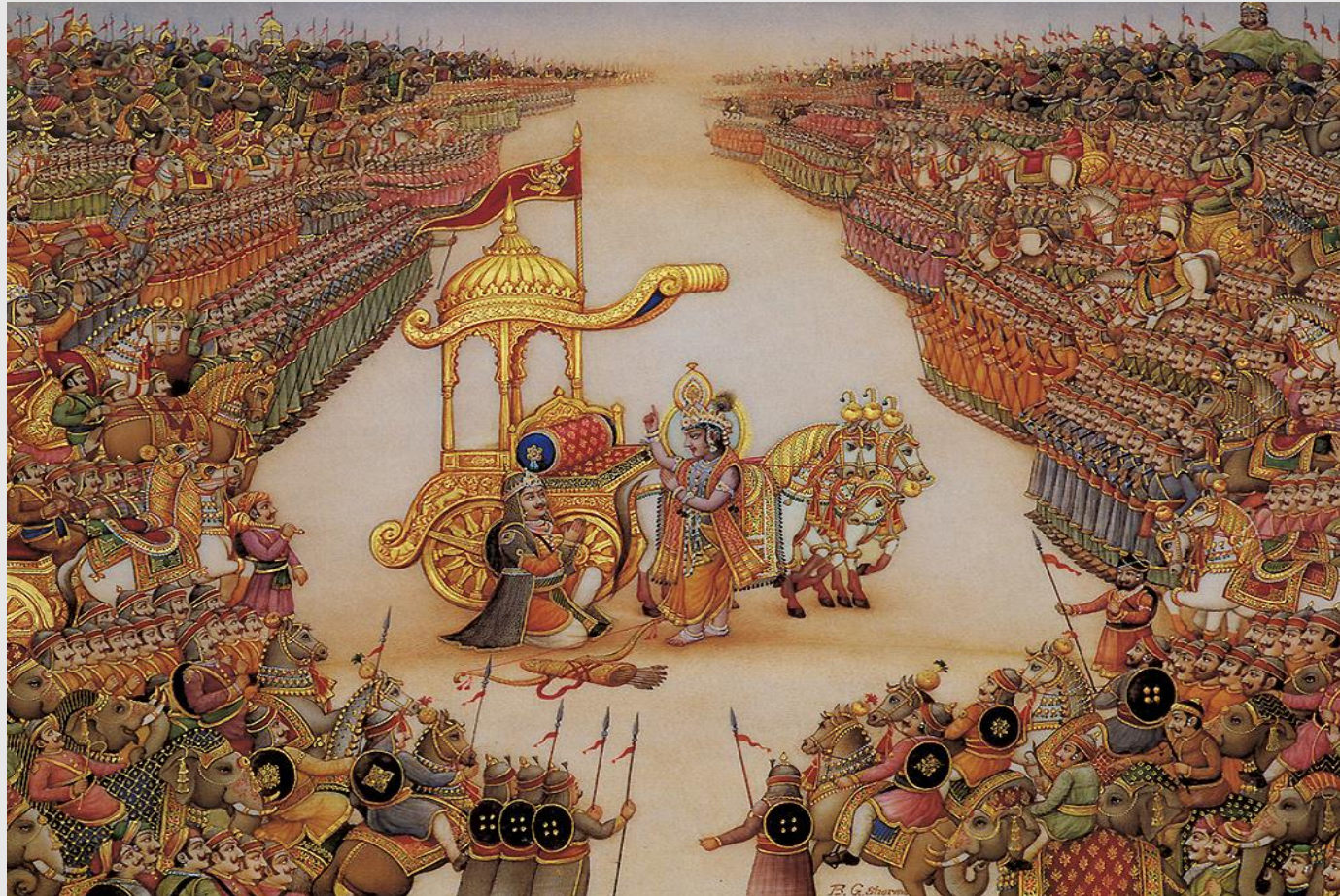
# The Trimurti (“faces” of Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva)



# Bhagavad Gita: “Song of the Lord”

- Significance: most well-known and influential religious text in the Hindu tradition
- Date: turn of the Common Era (c. 100 BCE – 100 CE)
- Authorship: ? ascribed to the sage Vyasa
- Context: dialogue between the warrior Arjuna and the prince/charioteer Krishna, found in the great Hindu epic *The Mahabharata*

# Arjuna and Krishna – on the battlefield of Kurukshetra



# Krishna, speaking as a manifestation of Vishnu:

“of utterances, I am the single syllable aum; of offerings I am the offering of silent meditation... Of trees I am the tree of life... Among creators I am the creator of love... I am the beginning, the middle and the end of all that is. Of all knowledge I am the knowledge of the Self [atma]... I am death that carries off all things, and I am the source of all things to come. ... Know thou that whatever is beautiful and good, whatever has glory and power is only a portion of my own radiance.” (Bhagavad Gita 10.25-42)

# Baha'i views

- “No tie of direct intercourse can ever bind Him (God) to the things He hath created, nor can the most abstruse and most remote allusions of His creatures do justice to His being.” (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings, 317)
- “Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting.” (Bahá'u'lláh, Hidden Words, no.13)

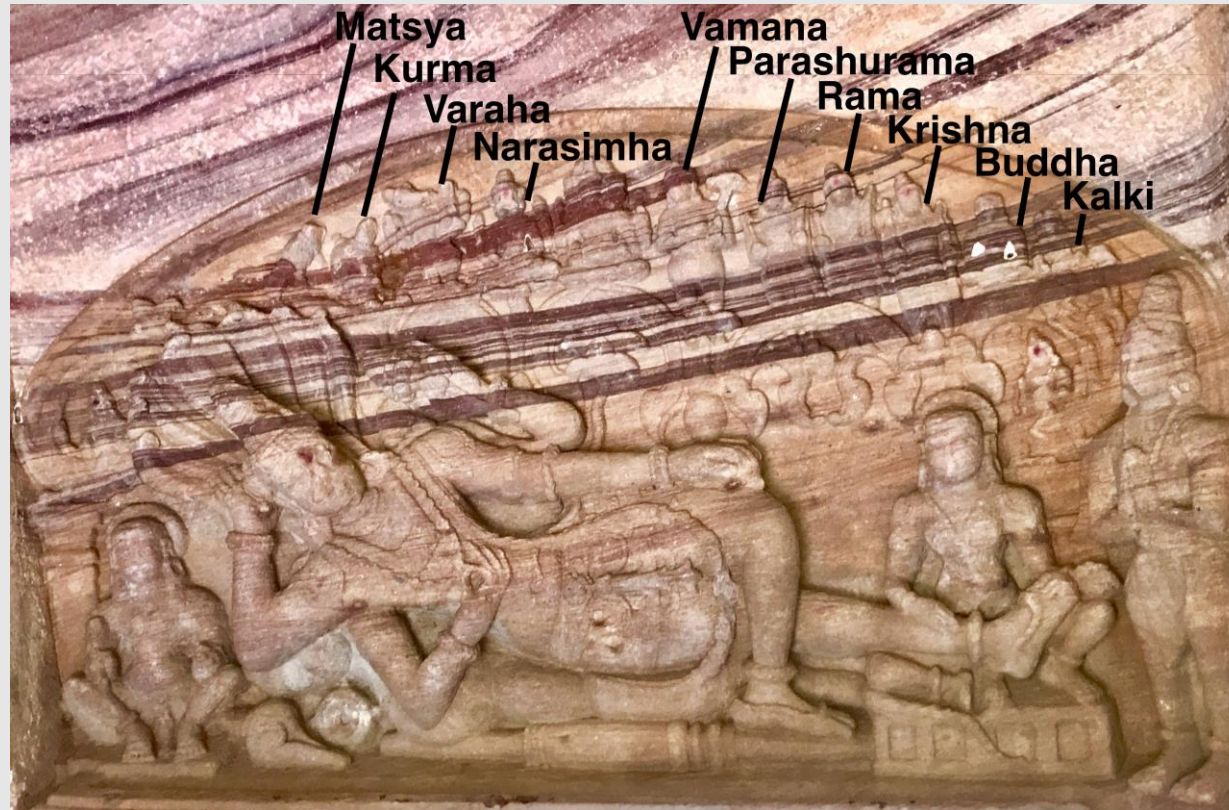
# The imperishable ‘Self’/ the soul

- “Finer than the finest, larger than the largest, is the self (atman) that lies here hidden in the heart of a living being. Without desires and free from sorrow, a man perceives by the creator’s grace the grandeur of the self” (Katha Upanishad 2.6.20). The “body and the heart are called the city of Brahman..., yet when old age overtakes it the soul remains free from evil, age, death sorrow, hunger and thirst, for it seeks only Reality.”
- Bahá’u’lláh compared the human soul to a “heavenly gem”

# Avatara and Manifestation

- “Whenever there is a decline of dharma (righteousness) and a rise of adharma (unrighteousness), O Bharata (Arjuna), then I send forth Myself. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of righteousness, I come into being from age to age.”  
(Bhagavad Gita 4.7-8)

# Avatars of Vishnu



6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> century,  
Badami

# Das-avatara (19<sup>th</sup> cen. depiction)



# Baha'i views

- “the Source of infinite grace... hath caused those luminous gems of Holiness to appear out of the human temple, and be made manifest unto all men, that they may impart unto the world the mysteries of the unchangeable Being, and tell of the subtleties of His imperishable Essence.”
- “As the body of man needeth a garment to clothe it, so the body of mankind must needs be adorned with the mantle of justice and wisdom. Its robe is the Revelation vouchsafed unto it by God. Whenever this robe hath fulfilled its purpose, the Almighty will assuredly renew it. For every age requireth a fresh measure of the light of God. Every Divine Revelation hath been sent down in a manner that befitteth the circumstances of the age in which it hath appeared.” (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings, xxxiv)

# Krishna

- before 6th century BCE, arose a religious reformer of the kshatriya (warrior or governing class) in the northwest of India named Sri Krishna, son of Vasudeva, who preached a theistic faith.
- The *Mahabharata* provides some details on a Krishna Vasudeva, head of the Vrisni clan of Mathura who fights evil kings for control of the Mathura region, and who eventually establishes himself in Dvaraka on the shores of the Arabian Sea.
- Krishna Vasudeva identified with the cow-herd god (or divinized figure) Krishna-Gopala worshipped by the nomadic Abhira clan in northwestern India
- Vedic cult of Vishnu Narayana + Krishna-Bhagavata cult
- “The whole universe is pervaded by my unmanifest form; all creatures exist in me, but I do not exist in them” (*Bhagavadgita* 9:4)



# Moksha, karma, reincarnation

- *moksha* or liberation from the cycle of rebirth
- *karma* –the law of cause and effect
- *samsara* –mundane existence or the recurrent round of birth, death and rebirth
- “As the Spirit of our mortal body wanders on in childhood, and youth and old age, the Spirit wanders on to a new body.” (BG 2.13)
- *Brhadaranyaka Upanishad* (3.2.13): “Verily, one becomes good through good deeds and evil through evil deeds”
- Bhagavad Gita—means to achieve *moksha*: paths of *jnana* (knowledge), *karma* (non-attached action), *bhakti* (devotion to God)

# Hindu dharma

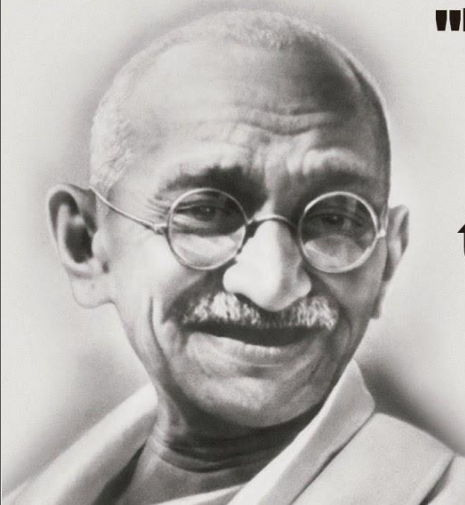
- term “dharma” literally means “what holds together” or “that which sustains.” *dharma* is the basis of all order, cosmic, ritualistic, social and moral.
- 3 principal forms of *dharma*:
- *sadharana-dharma* -- the code of ethical conduct binding on all peoples
- *varnashrama-dharma*—the specific duties appropriate to one’s class (*varna*) and stage in life (*ashrama*)
- *Sva-dharma*—the duties and path appropriate to the inherent nature of each individual (gender and personality type play a role here)

# The Bahá'í Faith in India



Baha'i Youth Committee with Martha Root 1938

- Established last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century
- Now approx. 2 million Baha'is
- core activities throughout the country
- Some 10 Baha'i-inspired schools; a Bahá'í Chair for Studies in Development at Devi Ahilya University in Indore
- 'Lotus temple', dedicated in 1986 (some 5+ million visitors per year)



**"The Bahá'í Faith  
is a solace  
to humankind."**

**Mahatma Gandhi**

*- Bombay Chronicle, May 24, 1944*

[www.bahai-india.com](http://www.bahai-india.com)

