

From Krishna to Mohammed: A World Religions Primer



- The Human Problem = Alienation from The Divine That We Are
 - “Brahman Thou Art”

Brahman and Atman

- The Consequence of this Alienation = Remaining in the Cycle of Birth, Death, Rebirth

Samsara

- Unable to Strip Away the Temporal Self and Thus Constant Return to that Self – The Extent to which that Rebirth is Positive (Moving Away from Preoccupation with Self) or Negative (Further Enmeshed in the Temporal/Selfish Reality) =

Karma

- Good Karma = the product of thoughtful [being attuned to **Dharma**] unselfish Moral Being
- The Goal = Liberation from the Cycle of Rebirth

Moksha

- **Shruti**

Manifestation of the Divine in the World – Jesus and God Incarnate/Quran)

- ❖ Vedas and Upanishads - Sanskrit

- **Smriti**

Revealed and Composed (dependent on a Revelation)



The Upanishads – *Upanishad* means “sitting near devotedly”

Suggesting a context of disciples learning at the feet of masters who had gone beyond the Vedic sacrificial framework to **adopt ascetic practices** – by way of those practices one comes to know the fundamental realities underlying all existence – from mediated to personal responsibility

“By austerity a man achieves goodness, and through goodness he takes hold of the mind. Through the mind he reaches the self, and reaching the self he comes to rest.”

Maitreya Upanishad

- **Appear to Have Been Appended to the Vedas (around 900 BCE) as the Religion of Sacrifice Evolved into (or was competed with) a Religion of Ascetic Practice (Individual Taking Responsibility) and responded to growing Heterodoxy – Forest Dwellers/Ascetics Experimenting with Different Means to Be Liberated from Death and Rebirth (e.g., Jainism and Buddhism)**
- **Set Forth the Concepts of Reincarnation, Karma, Dharma Replacing the Central Role of Sacrifice** – Also the Growing Prominence of the Concept of Karma as Explaining the Human Situation Rather than Gods’ Actions

Smriti

❖ The Epics

- Long Poems Composed Around 500 BCE – 100 CE – Lives of Great Warriors – Best Known Are *Mahabharata* (Krishna – *Bhagavad-gita*) and *Ramayana* (Rama) – Both Avatars of Lord Vishnu

❖ Sutras (Yoga, Vedanta, etc.) –

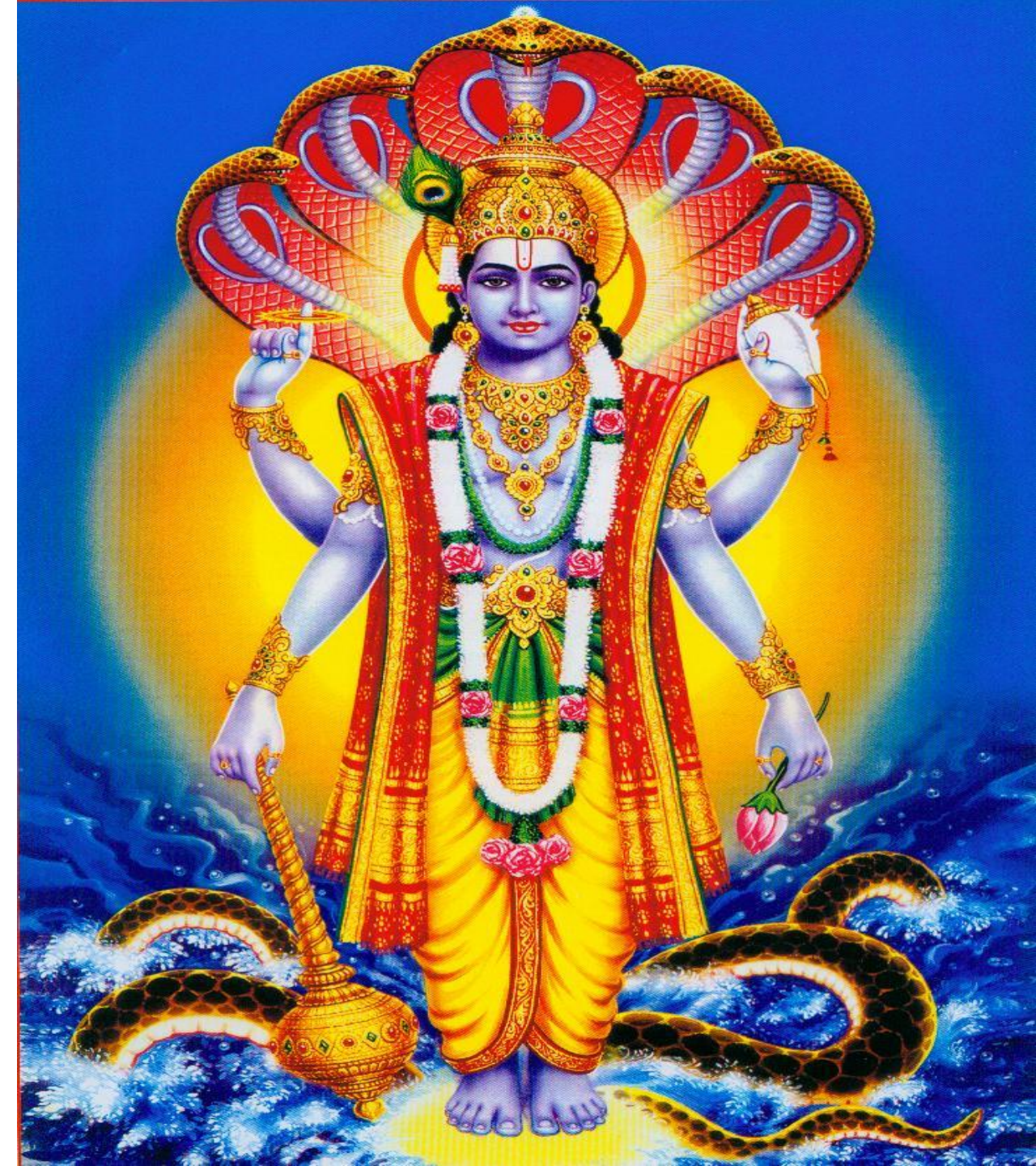
- Composed About the Same Time as Epics – Further Exploring *dharma*, *vedanta*, and *yoga*. Statements or Aphorisms “penny saved...”

Tat tvam asi “That is how you are” The eternal reality the underlies all things and is found in the self - Atman

- Includes Manusmriti – Laws of Manu – Lay out the Duties of Different Social Groups and Affirm the Sacred Status of the Vedas – Cannot Be Questioned – Became a critical Point of Diversion for Other Movements arising from Hindu Background to include Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism

❖ Puranas – 300-900 CE

- Narratives of Gods and Goddesses (Vishnu, Shiva) and The Ideal Response to Them (*bhakti* – devotion) All Puranas presume we live in Kali Yuga – The post-Vedic Age of Degeneration that Requires the Gods to Extend Their Grace in Ever-Increasing Measure and Expects in Return Unselfish Devotion – The Narratives Convey much in the way of Hindu Law, Theology and the Religious Life – Like the Gospels, Like the Hadith



Vishnu, Brahma, and Shiva – The Highest Ranking Gods

The name Vishnu is taken from the word “**Vish**,” which means to spread in all directions, and therefore he comprises the entire universe, which is ever-expanding. The word Vishnu means ‘one who pervades, one who has entered into everything.’ As a god responsible for maintenance, Vishnu requires lots of wealth; his consort, therefore, is Lakshmi – the goddess of wealth.



Shiva – The name derived from Sanskrit word that indicates liberation – a creator, reproducer, dissolver. A benevolent and fearsome God. Slayer of Demons (one who can kill the forces of darkness), patron of yoga and the arts. Carries a trident and a damanu – a drum that creates sounds that sustain the universe. The Ganges flows from his hair.



Avatars of Vishnu- Rama and Krishna



Pathways to Liberation – Exiting Samsara – Moksha

- ❖ Contemplative (philosophical) Path
 - From Brahman-Atman as One to Brahman and Self as Distinct and in Need of Grace/help
- ❖ Yogas = Active Systems of Liberation
 - ❖ Devotional (seeking help from the Avatars)

Innovations in Yoga in *Bhagavad-gita*

- *Bhagavad-gita* as Response to The Path of Ascetic Renunciation – To Not Act is to be Liberated
 - Not The Rejection of Action (contra ascetics) but The Consequence and Attitude toward Action – Act Not For Selfish Ends But Ultimately in Service to the Lord
 - Krishna Offers Two Important Innovations
 - ❖ the Idea that There Are in Fact many Ways to Liberation
 - ❖ Everyday Actions can have Spiritual Meaning:
 - Karma Yoga
 - The Way to God Through Work
 - The Human Body is Made as a Machine Made For Work – You Do Not Need To Retire to a Monastery to Find God – You can find God and Build Good Karma in the World of Everyday Affairs – No Longer Doing What I do For My Satisfaction or Reward, but as An Offering to God and For the Sake of Other ...For Example, a Young Woman newly Married does all she Does for the Sake of her Husband...cooking, cleaning, etc. A Servant for the sake of Master...Thus Letting Go of Self-Centeredness – Removing the Barrier to Being One with the Ultimate One

➤ Jnana Yoga

The Way to God Through Knowledge

- “The Infinite Sea of Being Underlies the Waves of the Finite Self”
- Distinguishing the Surface self from the Larger Self That Is out of Sight
 - Via Learning – Reading Texts, Training with Sages
 - Via Thinking – Prolonged Efforts at Reflection – The Atman Shifts from Concept to Realization
 - The Metaphor of the Chariot – Rider Sits Serene – The Charioteer Steers While the Rider Simply Views the Passing Landscape – So Body is the Chariot – The Road Are Sense Objects – The Horses the Senses – The Mind are Reins – The Decisional Faculty of the Mind is the Driver and the Rider is the Omniscient Self
 - God as Transpersonal or Impersonal

➤ Bhakti Yoga

The Way to God Through Love

- “I want to taste sugar, I do not want to Be sugar”
- God as Other and God as Profoundly Personal
- God is To be Adored and God Loves In Return
- That Love is Engendered by the Many Myths and Symbols of Hindu Gods
- “Those who meditate on Me and worship Me without any attachment to anything else, those I soon lift from the ocean of suffering.” Lord Krishna in the *Bhagavad-gita*

- Raja Yoga (Royal Yoga)– The practice of Yogin – Intense meditation that leads to the Calming of Passions, Attaining Bliss and achieving *samadhi* – deep concentration and liberation
- Siddha Yoga – Control of Self Leading to Levitation, Telepathy, Control of Pain
- Hatha Yoga – Control of self through postures

The Way to God through Psychophysical Exercises

- A Method of Willed Introversion – Driving the Self into the Deepest Part to Activate the Lost Continent of the True Self
 - Working with the Body
 - 84 postures of which 5 are important for Meditation
 - Sitting with legs crossed in such a way that each foot rests sole up on its opposing thigh
 - Hands are palms up, in the lap, one atop the other with thumbs lightly touching
 - Mastering the proper way of breathing – “The light of the lamp does not flicker in a windless place.”

The Way of Devotion – Worshipping the Icons of Avatars

- The Icons are Installed via Ritual **inside** a Temple – Infused by Brahmin with Living Breath (*prana*) and Then Inhabited by the Divine
 - The Icon then Must be Lovingly Cared For – Bathed, Fed(The Example of Ganesha), given flowers, clothing, praise
 - An Intimate Reciprocal Relationship is Established between the Devotee and the Deity Through *Darshana* – Seeing and Being Seen

The Example of Ganesha

➤ The Divine (Shiva and Vishnu) Can Take Many Forms (avatars) – Incarnations



MATSYA



KURMA



VARAHA



NARASIMHA



VAMAN



PARASHURAM



RAMA



BALARAM



BUDDHA



KALKI

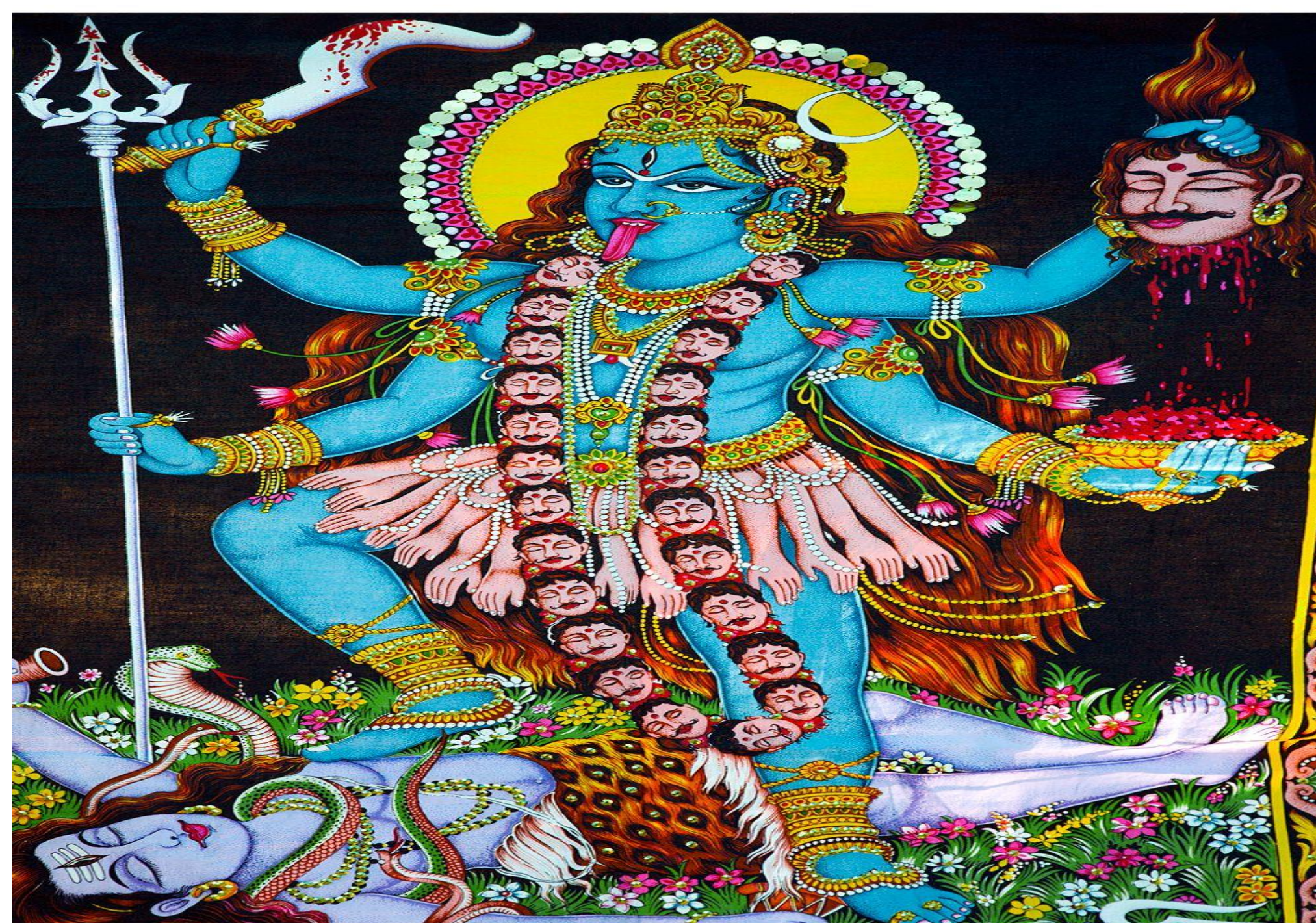




- The Goddesses – Devi – Female form of Deva = God
 - Devi or Mahadevi – The Great Goddess
 - Devi-mahatmya Narrative
- Mahisha – Buffalo Demon Defeats the World and Plans To Assault Heaven
 - The Gods in their Fury Give ‘Birth’ to Devi – A beautiful Woman That Rides a Tiger, Equipped with Weapons and Drinking Wine
 - She Slays the Demon
 - Warlike – Aggressive – Not Married – Not Bound/Submissive to Husband or to Male Demons
 - Beautiful, Amorous, a Lover of Wine
 - Devi Laxmi is the goddess of wealth, Devi Durga is the goddess of power
- The Goddesses Durga and Kali (emanations of Devi) Destroy Demons – Kali Springs forth from Durga’s Brow
 - Kali Destroys Evil to Protect The Innocent – Also Identified as Divine Mother, Mother of the Universe – Killer of Raktabja
 - The Innate Power of these Goddesses is referred to as *shakti* and thus those whose Devotion is Centered on Female gods are known as *Shaktas* (as opposed, for example, to those whose devotion is directed to Vishnu are known as *Vaishnavites*)
- The Inclusion of These Powerful Female deities in the Hindu Pantheon Brings Balance – Male/Female – The Cosmos like the human species is seen as created and sustained by the same combination of gender energies – each is incomplete and even dangerous without the balancing effect of the other. Thus most Hindu deities are married – e.g., Vishnu to Lakshmi, Krishna to Radha, Rama to Sita...



Devi



Kali and
Killing of
Raktabja

Gods and Goddesses by way of their grace and power may also appear:

- In Nature (in rocks, trees....) and Marked by Cloth Streamers or food offerings (placating a *Bhut*/ghost or blessing a *mata*/local goddess)
- Can Appear in Humans – Earning the Title Mahatmas (Great Ones) like Ghandi or evidence of Possession
- The Responses Can Take Many Forms as Well
 - Darshana – Home Shrines and Icons – *puja* - Festivals and Fair
 - Kumbh Mela – Pilgrimage to a sacred river – bathe, darshana of the spiritual gathering, receive blessings

According to medieval Hinduism, Lord [Vishnu](#) spilled drops of [Amrita](#) (the drink of immortality) at four places, while transporting it in a [kumbha](#) (pot). These four places are identified as the present-day sites of the Kumbh Mela.

- ISKCON – International Society for Krishna Consciousness – All actions are opportunities for divine service and a path way to an eternal relationship with Krishna – The Importance of spreading the name of Krishna to every town and village
- Madurai – Temple City







- Challenging the Caste System and In Particular the Dalits or Untouchables
 - The Ambedkar Solution
 - No Equality in Hinduism – No Place for Individual Progress or Judgment – “Why do you remain in that religion that insults you at every step.” – Conversion to Buddhism – Acknowledge Suffering and offer a path to change
- Despite Legislation (and Efforts by Ghandi among others – called them *Harijans* – “Children of God”) They Remain Largely landless rural agricultural workers that have little protection from violence, rape, and even mass murder
 - Efforts to Give Shape to a ‘Dalit Consciousness’ – Similar to Socialist Calls for Workers To Rise Against Bourgeois – Embrace a Secular Humanist Consciousness – Reject otherworld focus and hierarchical norms
- The Solution for Some Continues to be Conversion to Include Conversion to Sikhism (sikhna – To Learn)
 - Arose in 15th Century – In the Punjab region of India – Based on the Writings of Guru Nanak – Arose in the Context of Mughal Empire – Influenced by both Bhakti Yoga and Sufism in the context of Mughal India – Mughal Empire(Muslim Empire) Ruled much of SE Asia – 16th – 19th Century – patron of the arts to include the Taj Mahal – Guru Nanak had a Enlightening Experience in Which He Was Shown the Oneness of All Reality

“There is one supreme being, the eternal reality, the creator, without fear and devoid of enmity, immortal, never incarnated, self-existent, known by grace through the true Guru.”

9th Largest Religion in the World



Hinduism and the Cow

- The Devotion Shown to this Animal is at Once a Marker of Identity and A Religious Conviction About the Cow as Source of Nurture – Like a Goddess she is the Great Mother and Provider
 - Also the Favorite Animal of Krishna – Symbol of Abundance

