



Indian Religions and the Caste System

The Caste System

- Remember the early religious ideas of the Aryan people were specified in their **Vedas**...



- These Vedas laid out the early forms of **Hinduism** and the **Caste System**.

The Caste System

- Although the Aryans did not build large imperial states, they did construct well defined social order.



- In some ways their social hierarchy actually maintained social order despite not having large scale societies.

The Caste System

- The Aryan social structure, known today as the **Caste System** rested on hereditary distinctions between individuals and groups.



- The **caste system** divides people according to their occupations and roles in society.

The Caste System

- **Caste** identities developed gradually as the Aryans established settlements throughout India.



- Initially these distinctions may have been developed from differences in ancestry, complexion or even religious ideals.

The Caste System

- By 1000 B.C.E. the Aryans had recognized four main **Varnas**.



- **Varna** - The classification of the Indian society by **four castes... imagined and created** by the Brahmins (priest) and their sacred texts...since the priest created this structure where do you think they were located socially in the caste system????

The Caste System



○ **Brahmins** (braw-mins): **Priests**

○ **Kshatriyas** (shay-tree-yah): **Government Employees**

○ **Vaishyas** (Vay-sh-yuh): **Land Owners**

○ **Sudras** (Sud-ruh): **Peasants and poor**

○ **Untouchables**: **Outcaste**



The Caste System



- **The Untouchables** are members of the lowest caste and live a life of poverty, segregation, and are outsiders in their own home land.

The Caste System

- As this Vedic society became more complex and generated better specialized occupations a complex hierarchy of sub-caste emerged known as **Jati**.



- **Jati** – A inherited caste largely determined by occupation.

The Caste System

- Today there are several thousand **Jati** classifications, which arrange individuals' roles in society in specific detail.



- These caste and sub-caste deeply influenced the lives of individual Indians throughout their entire lives.

The Caste System

- Elaborate rules dictate specific behaviors of each castes and sub-caste.



- Members of a certain Jati eat with one another, intermarried and basically spend their lives interacting with each other...never venturing outside their specific social classification.

The Caste System

- In order to move up on the Caste system during the Aryan age members of a Jati improved their condition collectively.



- This of course was incredibly difficult, requiring members to move to different areas and even take on different work.

The Caste System

- Individuals have often identified more closely with their Jati than with their cities or states in which they live.



- To this day the Caste System plays a large role in maintain social order and discipline in India.

Religions of India



- During the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E. new religions and philosophies emerged from the enslaving caste system and the **Brahmins**, Priest under the Caste System.

Religions of India

- Jains, Buddhist and Hindus turned to intense spirituality as an alternative to the mechanical rituals of Brahmins.



- Also remember that many Indians suffered from the Caste System and needed a spiritual release from that nightmare.

Religions of India



○ Enter Hinduism

Religions of India



- Hinduism generated new ideas and attracted widespread popular interest from people who were living within the caste system.

Religions of India



- Originally the religion drew inspiration from the Vedas and the original Aryan priest...
- Hinduism** departed from the older traditions to meet the needs of ordinary people.



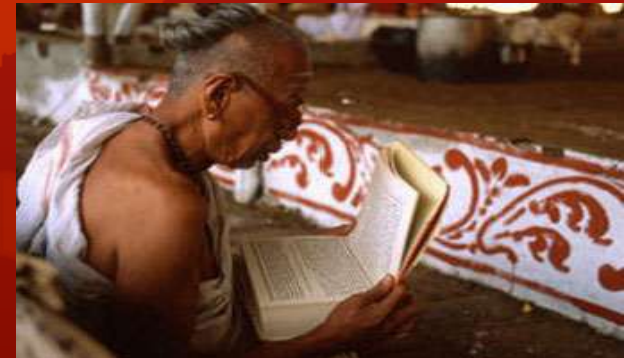
Religions of India



- Hinduism is centered around the Caste system... presenting salvation to those participated actively and met their caste responsibilities.

Religions of India

- Hinduism taught that individuals should meet their personal responsibilities and most do not strive for material reward or recognition.



- Rather they should perform their duties faithfully, with no thought to negative consequences...which is why the caste system worked so well with the religion.

Religions of India

- Hindu ethics recognized four principal aims of human life.



- 1. **Dharma** – obedience to religious and moral laws.

Religions of India

- 2. Artha



- The pursuit of economic well being and honest prosperity.

Religions of India

o 3. Kama



o The enjoyment of social, psychological and physical pleasure.

Religions of India

4. **Moksha** - The salvation of the soul



- According to Hindu moral precepts, a proper balance of Dharma, Artha and Kama would help individuals attain Moksha (Nirvana)

Religions of India



- Hinduism gradually displaced Buddhism as the most popular religion in India and remains the third largest religion today. (Holi, the Festival of Colors celebrates the victory of good over evil and Gajain Hindu festival...hot coals and piercings all to win the favor of Shiva)

Religions of India

- Hinduism almost can be seen today as coexisting with the Caste System...a system that really enslaves the poverty stricken in India.



- There is a notion of **Karma** within Hinduism that states "a person's actions determine his destiny in his next reincarnation"

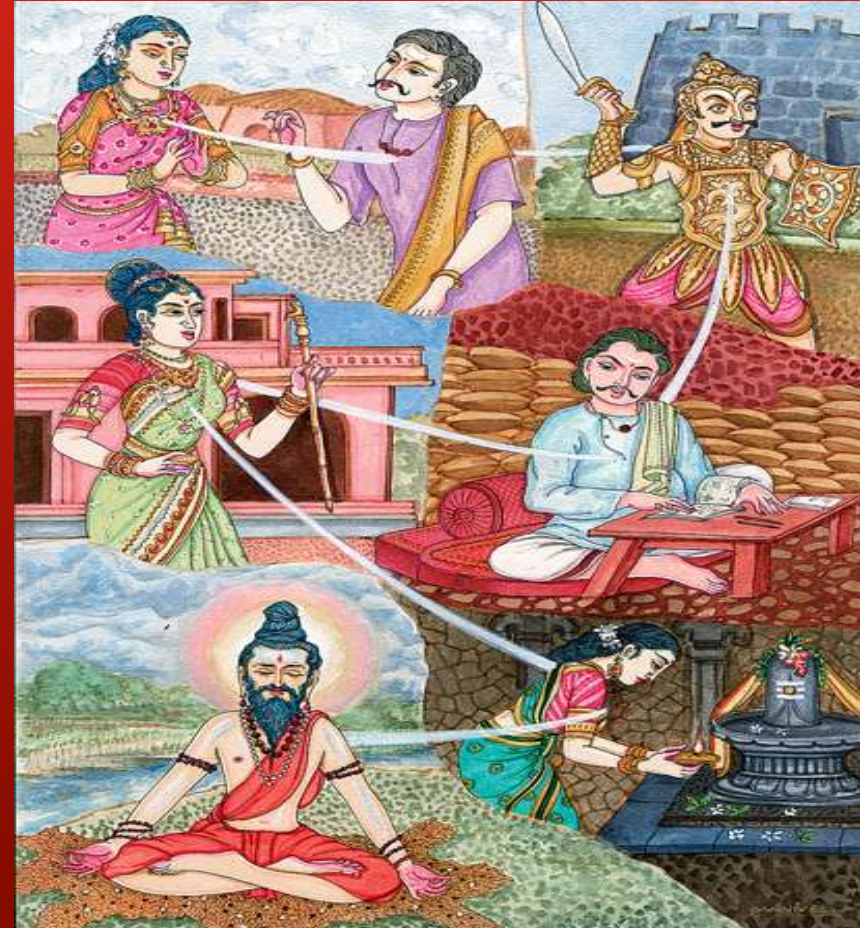
Religions of India



- **Karma** and **Reincarnation** are the most important notions that come out of Hinduism...

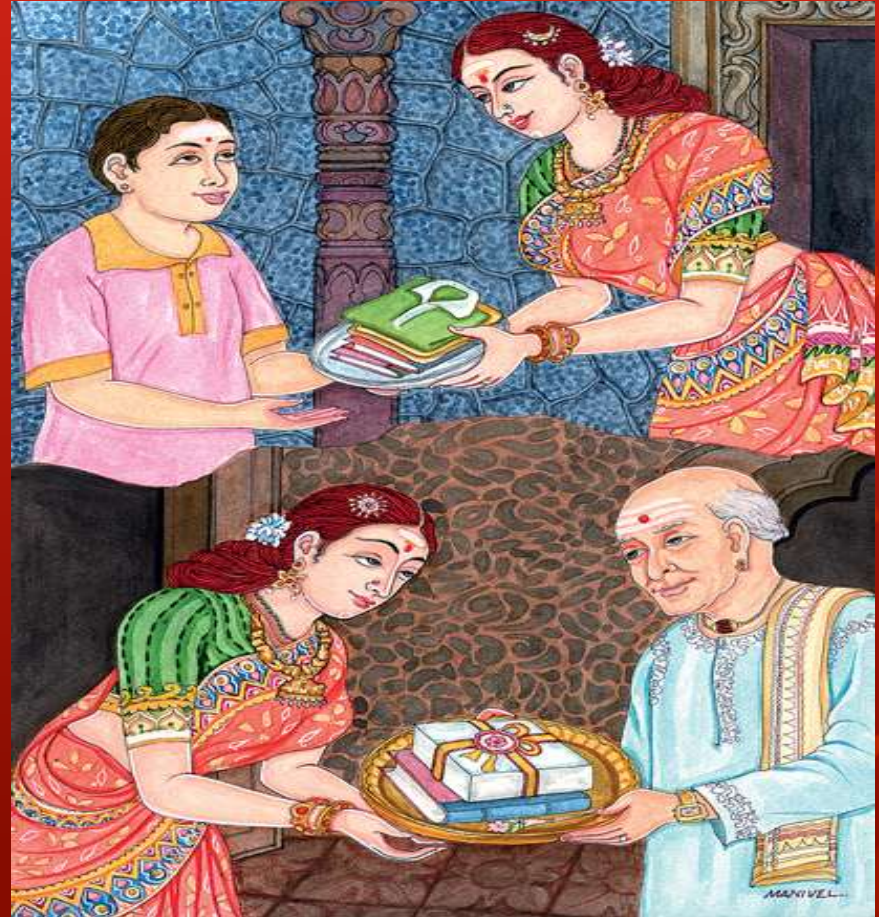
Religions of India

- **Reincarnation** describes the concept where the soul or spirit, after the death of the body, is believed to return to live in a new human body.
- This doctrine is a central tenet within the majority of Indian religious traditions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism



Religions of India

- **Karma** is a concept in **Hinduism** which explains beneficial effects are derived from past positive actions...
- ...and harmful effects from past negative actions, create a system of actions and reactions throughout a soul's reincarnated lives forming a cycle of rebirth
- Basically what comes around, goes around...



Religions of India

- Hinduism has over 330 million different deities...



- Essentially people just choose a few who are appropriate to their personal caste and situation in this life to worship

Religions of India

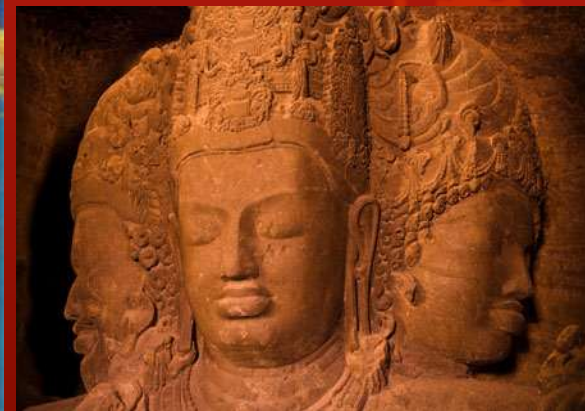


Religions of India



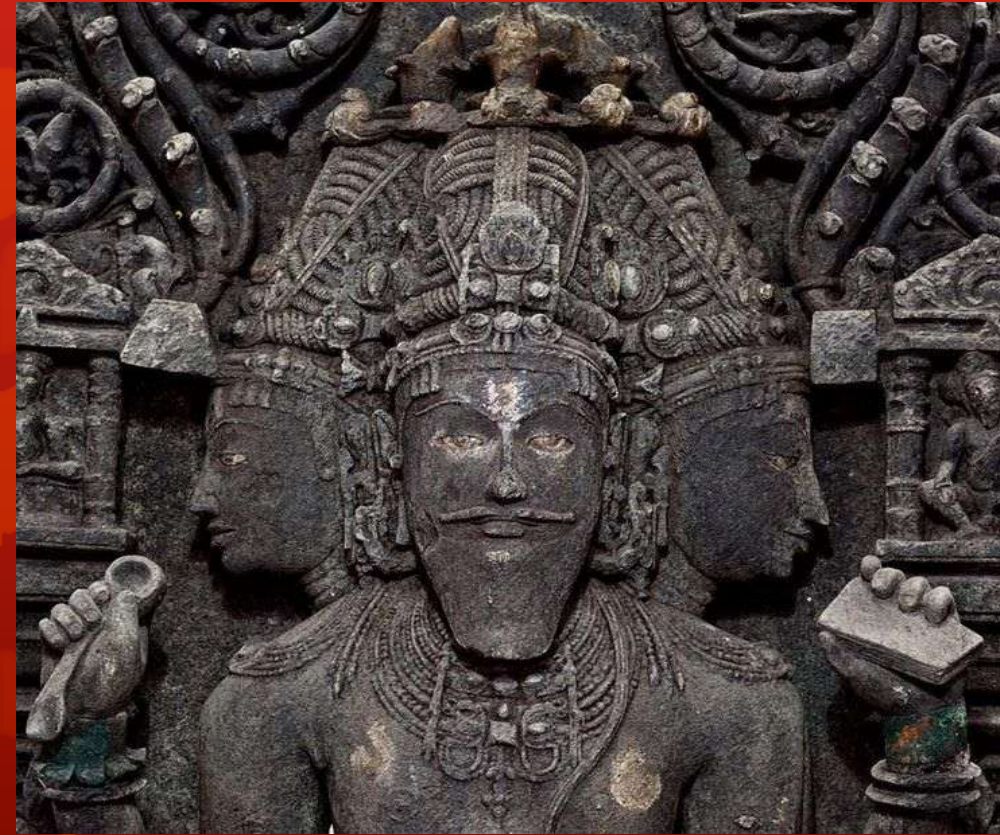
Religions of India

- The three most important gods are the **Trimurti** (Trim-urti)...who are responsible for the creation, upkeep and destruction of the world.



- **Brahma** the creator, **Vishnu** the preserver and **Shiva** the destroyer...above all there is one main God **Brahman**. Other gods and goddess' are just aspects.

Religions of India



- **Brahma** - Brahma's job was creation of the world and all creatures... Brahma is the least worshipped god in Hinduism today with are only two temples in the whole of India devoted to him, compared with the many thousands devoted to the other two.

Religions of India

- Brahma has four heads and it is believed that from these heads came the four Veda (**The most ancient religious texts for Hindus**).

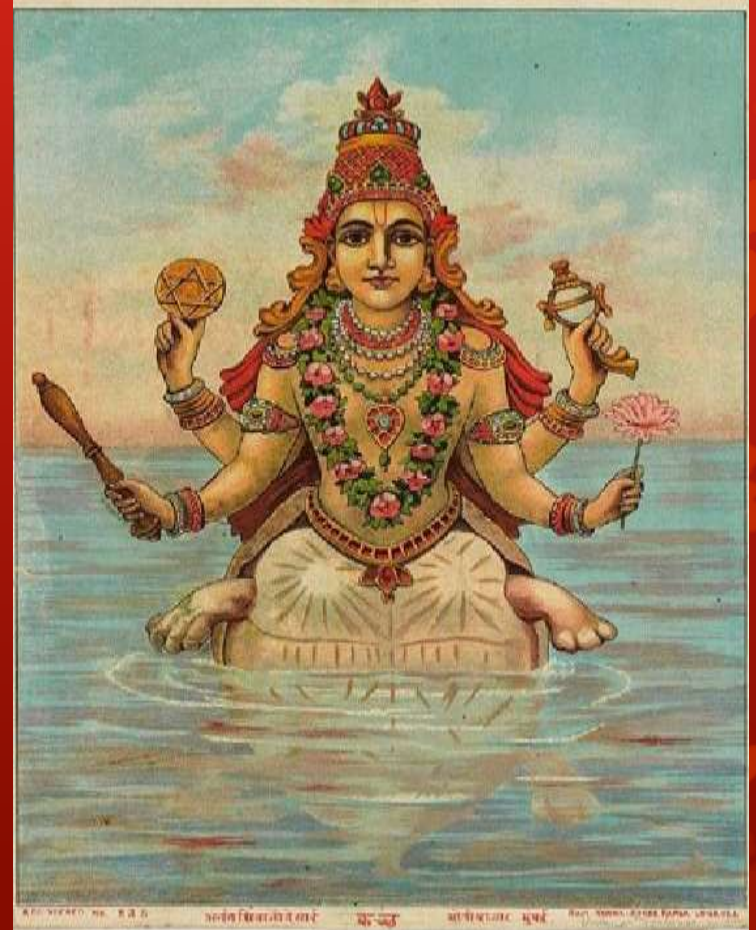


- Some also believe that the caste system came from different parts of Brahma's body...most likely his four arms

Religions of India



- **Vishnu** – His role is to return to the earth in troubled times and restore the balance of good and evil.
- So far, he has been incarnated nine times, but Hindus believe that he will be reincarnated one last time close to the end of this world.



Religions of India

- **Shiva** – His role is to destroy the universe in order to re-create it.



- Hindus believe his powers of destruction and recreation are used even now to destroy the illusions and imperfections of this world, paving the way for beneficial change.

Religions of India

- According to Hindu belief, this destruction is not arbitrary, but constructive. (**Shiva statue following a flood**)



- Shiva is therefore seen as the source of both good and evil and is regarded as the one who combines many contradictory elements.

My Favorite!!!



- **Kali** - she might be the most terrifying thing you have ever seen!
- One of the manifestations of the wife of Shiva... her role is as a goddess of death and destruction, depicted as black, red-eyed, blood-stained, and wearing a necklace of skulls.

My Favorite!!!

- She is usually depicted as a hideous, black-faced hag smeared with blood (which she spits!)...and often dancing on her husband Shiva.



- Until the 19th century the thugs of India worshiped Kali and offered their victims to her...in the late 20th century she became a symbol of feminine empowerment in some circles.

My Favorite!!!



- Her cult was loosely depicted in the film Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom...which is fantastic...shame on you if you have not seen it!

Religions of India



● Enter Buddhism...

Religions of India

- The founder of Buddhism, **Sihartha Gautama** came from a privileged royal family but gave up his position and inheritance to seek salvation.



- He was born in 563 B.C.E. in a small tribal state governed by his father in the foothills of the Himalayas.

Religions of India

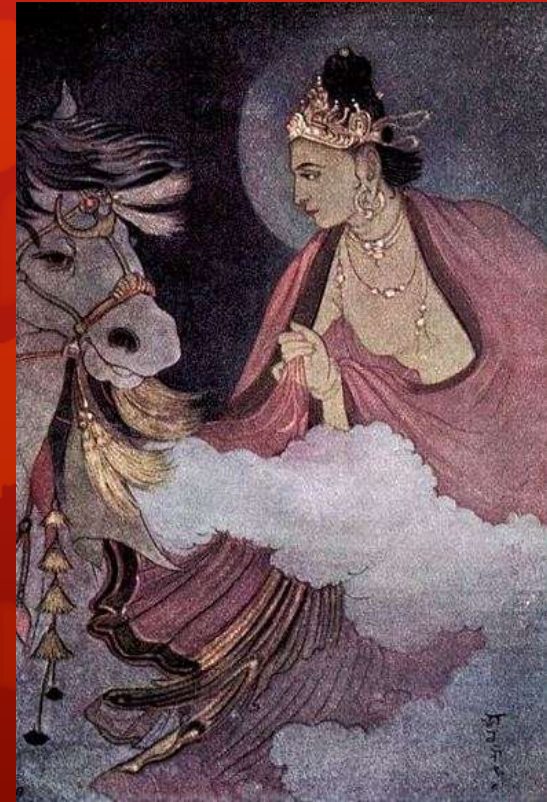
- For his first twenty nine years Siddhartha was protected from the harsh realities of life by his devoted father.



- He stayed mostly on the palace grounds, living in luxury, his every desire fulfilled.

Religions of India

- Siddhartha felt that there must have been more to life and when he finally left the palace he saw the real world for the first time.



- He was absolutely shocked to see the manner in which common people lived, the hardships that plagued their lives.

Religions of India

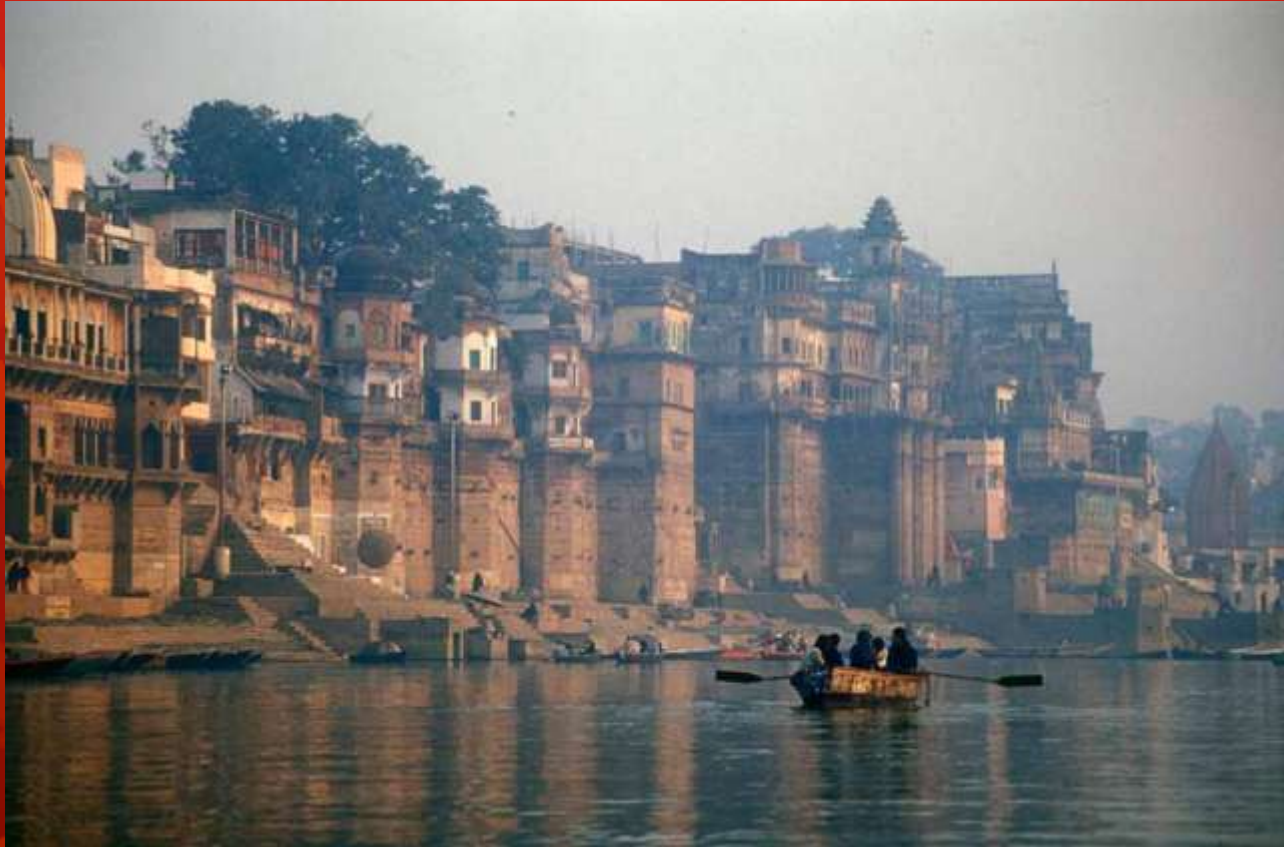
- Seeing poverty, sickness, old age and death changed his perspective on life profoundly.



- Siddhartha was determined to understand why there was so much suffering in life and to learn how it could be overcome.

Religions of India

- In 534 B.C.E. Siddhartha left his wife (cousin), family and all the comforts of home to lead the existence of a holy man.



- He wandered throughout the Ganges River Valley searching for spiritual enlightenment and an explanation for suffering.

Religions of India

- He sought enlightenment first by means of intense meditation and later extreme simplicity, neither of which satisfied him.



- Then according to Buddhist legend Siddhartha one day decided to sit beneath a large tree in **Bodh Gaya Tree**

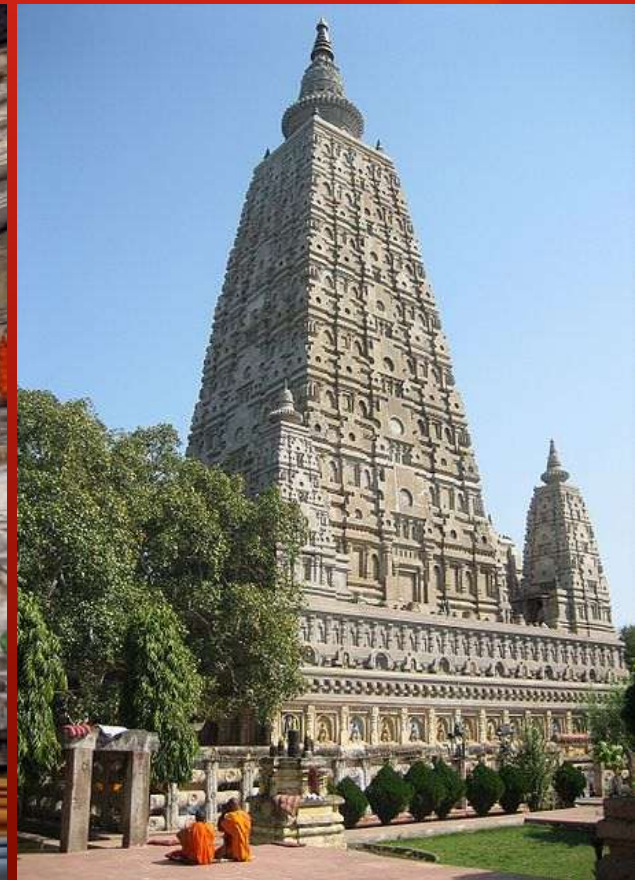
Religions of India



Religions of India



Religions of India



o The **Mahabodhi Temple "Great Awakening Temple"** was constructed around the original small temple in **Bodh Gaya**,

Religions of India



- This location has been deemed a "A world Heritage Site" due to the fact that Siddhartha Gautama obtained enlightenment here.

Religions of India



Religions of India

- Siddhartha decided that he would remain under the "bo" tree until he fully understood the problem of suffering.



- For forty nine days he sat in meditation as various demons tempted and threatened to shake his resolution.

Religions of India

- **Mara** is the main demon that tempted Gautama by trying to seduce him with the vision of beautiful women.



- In Buddhism **Mara** personifies the "death" of the spiritual life... he is a tempter, distracting humans from practicing the spiritual life by making the mundane alluring or the negative seem positive.

Religions of India

- On the forty ninth day Siddhartha prevailed and received enlightenment, he now understood the issue of suffering and the means by which humans could eliminate it from the world.



- At that point, Siddhartha became the **Buddha** "Enlightened One"

Religions of India

- The Buddha publicly announced his doctrine for the first time in 528 B.C.E. at Deer Park of Sarnath, near the Buddhist holy city of **Banaras**



- This sermon was delivered to his friends and was called the "**Turning Wheel of the Law**".

Religions of India



○ Deer Park of Sarnath, today

Religions of India



- **Banaras** - A city situated on the banks of the River Ganges and is regarded as a holy city by Buddhists and Jains

Religions of India



Religions of India

- His teachings quickly gained attention and for more than forty years Buddha led his disciples throughout much of northern India in hopes of bringing spiritual enlightenment to others.



- All they brought were their yellow robes and bowls.

Religions of India

- The core of Buddhism is known as the **Four Noble Truths**, which teaches:



- 1) **Truth of Suffering** – Life is full of suffering, full of sickness and unhappiness.

Religions of India



2) **Truth of the Cause of Suffering** - People suffer because they desire things. (**Greed**)

Religions of India



3) **Truth to the End of Suffering** - It is possible to end suffering and open the door to lasting peace.

Religions of India



4) **Truth of the Middle Path** - By changing your thinking and behavior you can find happiness

Religions of India

○ The **Four Noble Truths** can be obtained if a person was to follow the **Eight Fold Path**, which is a set of guidelines for individuals to live by.

○ Together these constitute the Buddhist doctrine or the **Dharma** shared by all Buddhist sects.

The Eightfold Path

- 1 Right View**
Right view simply means to see and to understand things as they really are, not as you 'wish' them to be.
- 2 Right Intention**
Right intention can be described best as commitment to ethical behavior for the good of the whole.
- 3 Right Speech**
Buddha explains right speech as follows: 1. to abstain from false speech; not to tell deliberate lies and not to speak deceitfully; 2. to abstain from slanderous speech and not to speak maliciously against others; 3. to abstain from harsh words that offend or hurt others; and 4. to abstain from the idle chatter that lacks purpose or depth.
- 4 Right Action**
1. To abstain from harming sentient beings, especially to abstain from taking life (including suicide) and doing harm intentionally or unconsciously, including eating the flesh of other beings; 2. to abstain from taking what is not given, which includes stealing, fraud, deceitfulness, and dishonesty; and 3. to abstain from sexual misconduct.
- 5 Right Livelihood**
Buddha teaches four specific activities that harm other beings and that one should avoid for this reason: 1. dealing in weapons; 2. dealing in living beings (including slave trade and prostitution as well as raising animals for slaughter); 3. working in meat production and butchery; and 4. selling intoxicants and poisons, such as alcohol and drugs.
- 6 Right Effort**
1. to prevent the arising of unwholesome states; 2. to abandon unwholesome states that have already arisen; 3. to arouse wholesome states that have not yet arisen; and 4. to maintain and perfect wholesome states already arisen.
- 7 Right Mindfulness**
1. contemplation of the body; 2. contemplation of feeling (repulsive, attractive, or neutral); 3. contemplation of the state of mind; and 4. contemplation of the phenomena.
- 8 Right Concentration**
Right concentration is the practice of meditation.

Religions of India

- **Budai** is a Chinese folkloric deity...his name means "**Cloth Sack**," and comes from the bag that he is conventionally depicted as carrying.



- He is usually shown smiling or laughing, hence his nickname in Chinese, the **Laughing Buddha**

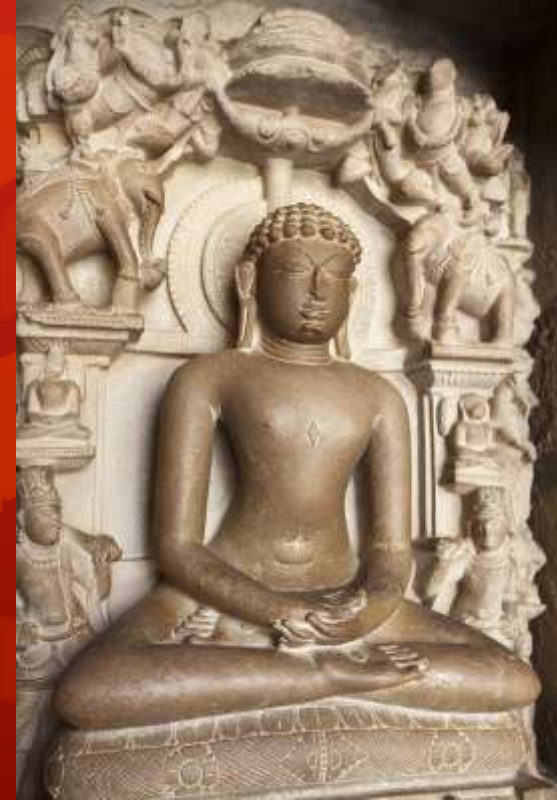
Religions of India



● Enter Jainism...

Religions of India

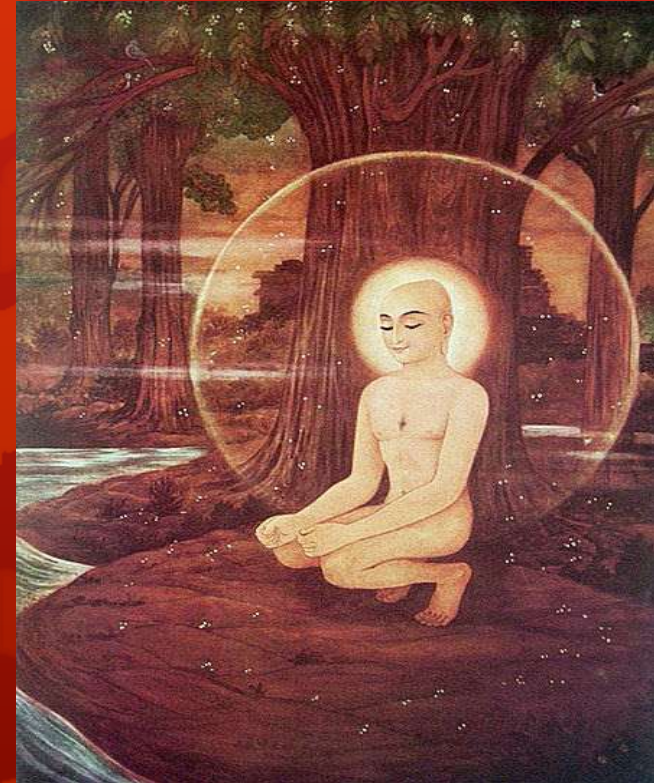
- Among the most influential of these new religions was **Jainism**.



- Jainism doctrines first appeared in the seventh century B.C.E. and became popular when the great teacher **Mahavira (Great Hero)** turned to Jainism.

Religions of India

- **Mahavira** was born to a prominent family and according to semi-legendary accounts left home at the age of thirty to seek salvation.



परस्परोपग्रहो जीवानाम्



- He lead a frugal life for twelve years, wondering the Ganges River Valley, after which he gained **enlightenment**.

Religions of India

- **Enlightenment** - Education that results in understanding and the spread of knowledge.



- Mahavira abandoned all of his worldly goods, even his clothes and taught a doctrine of detachment from the world.

Religions of India

- For the next thirty years until his death in 468 B.C.E. he developed his thought and taught it to a group of disciples who formed an order to perpetuate and spread his message.



- They referred to Mahavira as **Jina** "Conquer" and borrowing from his title referred to themselves as **Jains**.

Religions of India



- Jains believed that everything in the universe, humans, animals, plants, air, water, and even inanimate physical objects possessed a soul.

Religions of India

- As long as they remained trapped in terrestrial bodies, these souls experienced both physical and psychological suffering.



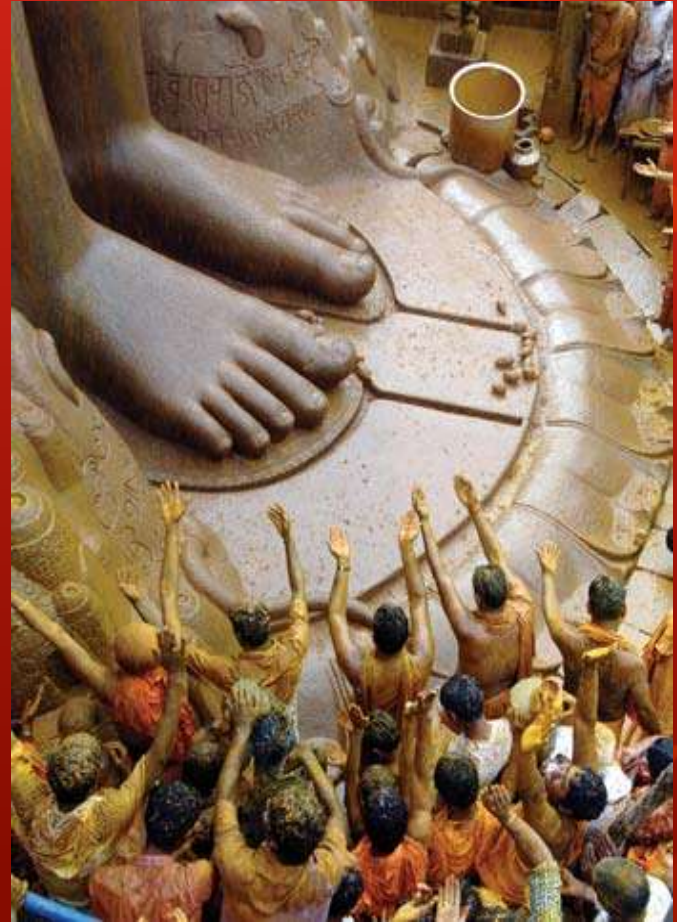
- Only by purification from selfish behavior could souls gain release from their imprisonment and attain a state of bliss.
(**Paryushana ...Coming together festival**)

Religions of India



- They also believe in reincarnation and eventual spiritual salvation... one factor in the search for salvation reverence for all life and the avoidance of injury to all living things.
- Due to this belief the Jains are all vegetarians and some monks even cover their mouth with a piece of cloth actually to avoid the risk of accidentally swallowing an insect.

Religions of India



- Jains believe that it is possible to escape this cycle and achieve **Moksha**, or bliss, by following three central ideas, known as the three jewels.
 - **Right belief** – Belief in Jainism
 - **Right knowledge** – Knowledge of learning about Jainism
 - **Right conduct** – Appropriate behavior by following Jainism

Religions of India



- **Jainism** - 3.7 million, almost all in India
- **Buddhism** - 600 million worldwide
- **Hinduism** - 1.2 billion, most in India...about 2 million in the U.S.