



HINDUISM





1. INTRODUCTION TO HINDUISM

“Hinduism is an over-the-top religion of big ideas, bright colors, soulful mantras, spicy foods, complex rituals and wild stories.”

Stephen Prothero, God is not One

1. INTRODUCTION TO HINDUISM

- No founder
- No authorities
- No confession of faith or creed
- No one scripture
- Wildly varied beliefs and practices
- “Hinduism” is a 18th/19th century label

1. INTRODUCTION TO HINDUISM

“Everything you can say about Hinduism is both true and false somewhere in India.”

Dr. Timothy Tennent

1. INTRODUCTION TO HINDUISM



- The *Sanatana Dharma*: the “eternal religion”
- Earliest forms may date to 1500 BC

Scriptures

Vedic scriptures

- **The Vedas (4)**

Rg Veda (1028 hymns)

Sama veda (chants)

Yajur Veda (sacrifice)

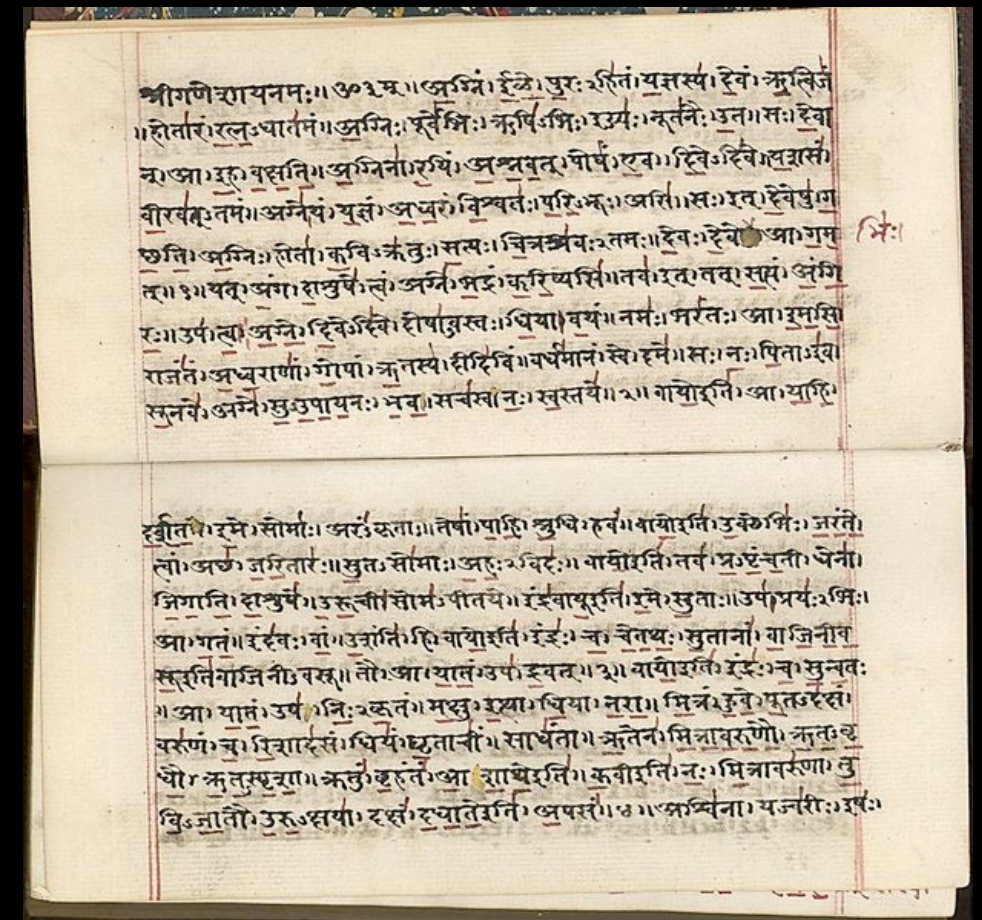
Atharva veda (incantations)

- **Brahmanas (commentary)**

- **Aranyakas (forest treatises)**

- **Upanishads (18)**

Vedanta-- “the end (conclusion) of the vedas”



Scriptures

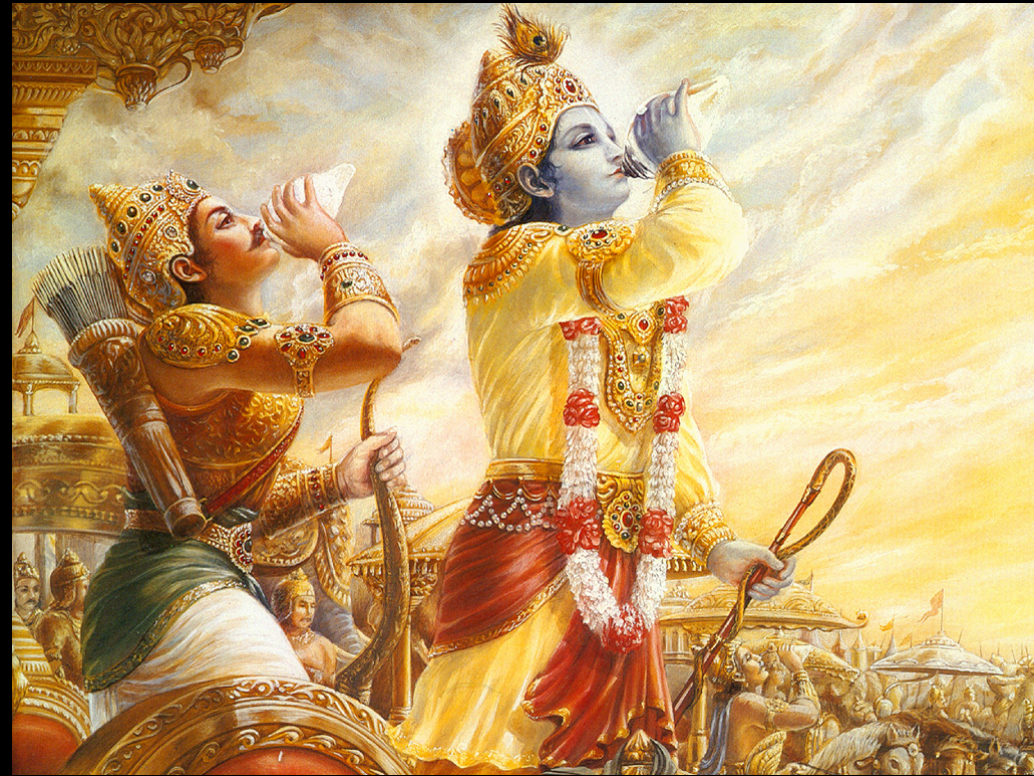
Additional scriptures

- **Shastras:** Legal & Ethical writings
- **Puranas:** (“Ancient Narrative”)
- **Sectarian Scriptures:** agamas, tantras

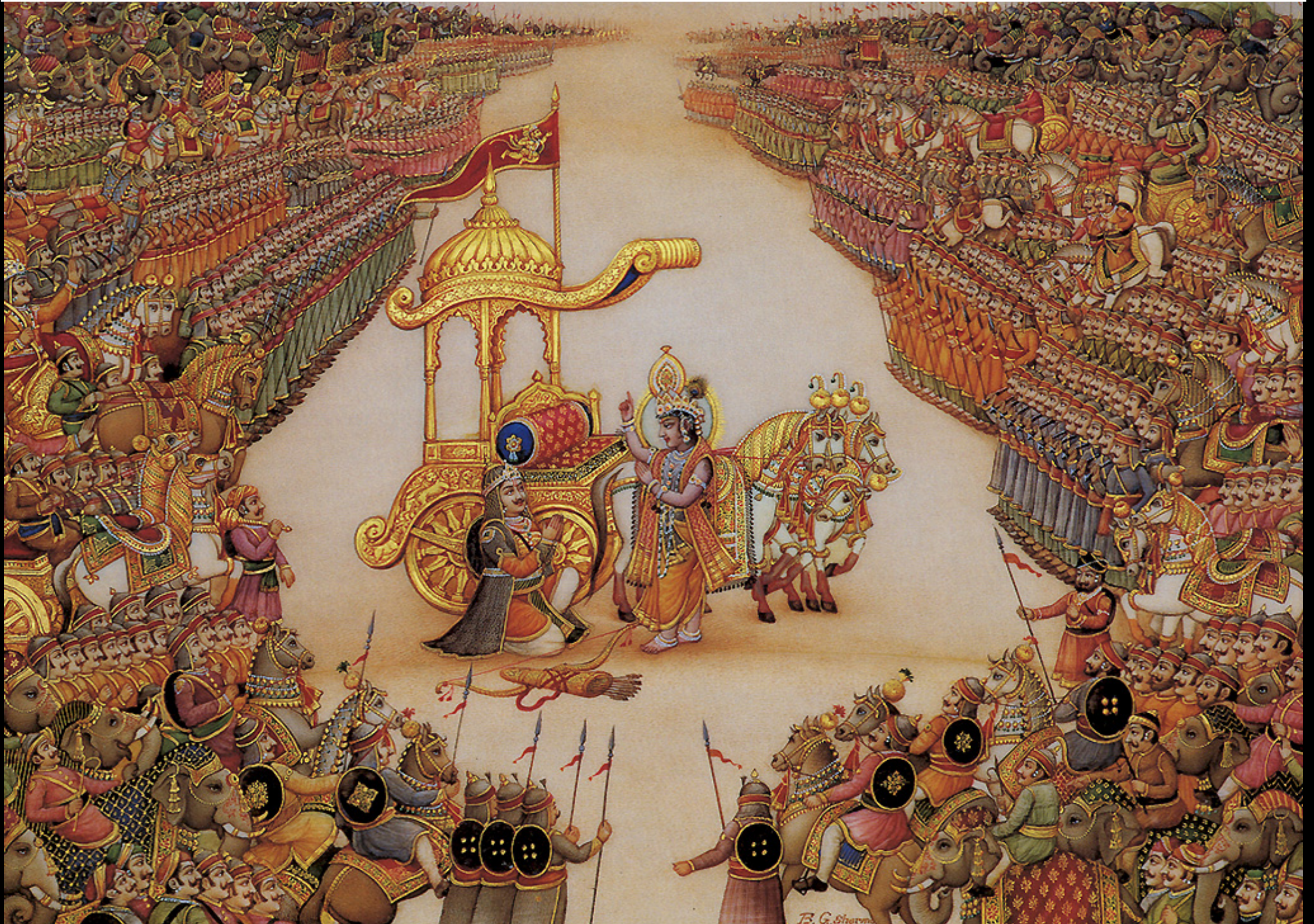
Scriptures

Epics

- Ramayana
- The Mahabharata (“Great India”)
- The Bhagavad Gita (“the Song of the Lord”)



BHAGAVAD GITA



1. INTRODUCTION TO HINDUISM

Philosophical Hinduism:

1. Jnana-marga: Path of Knowledge

Popular Hinduism:

2. Karma-marga: Path of action/works
3. Bhakti-marga: Path of Devotion

Advaita Vedanta

- “Vedanta”: focused on the Upanishads
- Advaita: non-dual, “monism”
- Shankara (c. 800 AD)
- Swami Vivekenanda
- Ramakrishna mission; Vedanta society
- Very influential, especially in the west.

2. How does Advaita Vedanta Hinduism answer the five universal questions?

A. What is ultimate reality?

Brahman !

2. The five universal questions

A. Ultimate reality: Brahman

1. Brahman is ineffable

“Nirguna”--without qualities

“not this, not this”

2. Brahman is being (sat),
consciousness(chit), bliss (ananda)

“satchidinanda”

2. The five universal questions

A. Ultimate reality: Brahman

3. Brahman is all there is.

Brahman

“We want to worship a living god. I have not seen anything but god all my life, nor have you. To see this chair is to see god.”

“Vedanta says there is nothing that is not god. It may frighten many of you, but you will understand it by degrees.”

--Vivekenanda

2. The five universal questions

A. Ultimate reality: Brahman

3. Brahman is all there is.

4. We can experience Brahman at a lower level.

2. The five universal questions

A. Ultimate reality: Brahman

“There are two forms of Brahman; the shaped and the unshaped, the mortal and the immortal, the still and the moving, the present and the beyond.”

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 2:3.1

2. The five universal questions

A. Ultimate reality: Brahman

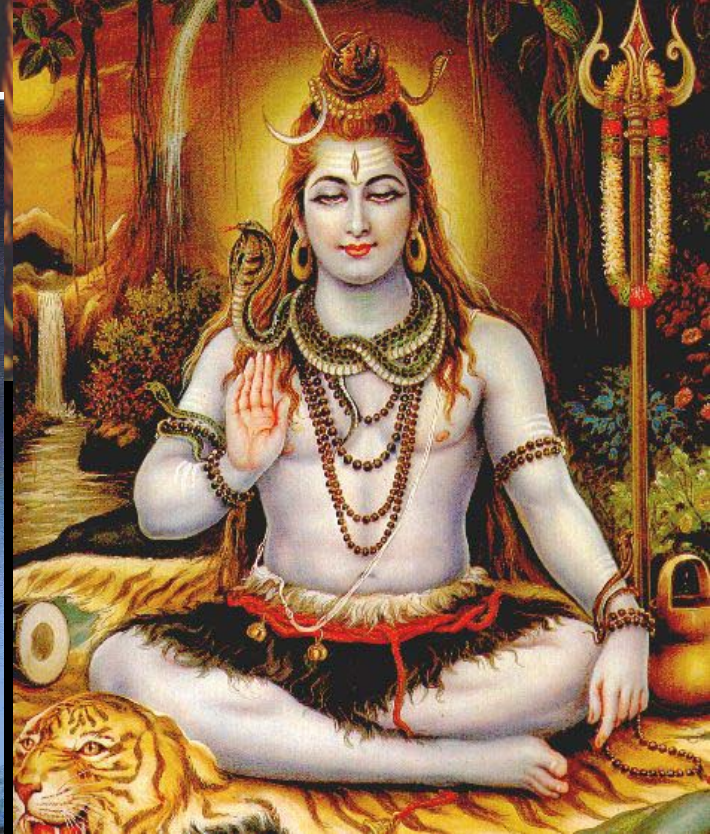
4. We can experience Brahman at a **lower level**:

Saguna Brahman:

Brahman **with** qualities

Ishvara—personal, supreme Lord

5. The gods and goddesses are relatable **manifestations** of Brahman.



2. The five universal questions

A. Ultimate reality: Brahman

“Who is Ishvara?”

Answer: “The Eternal, the pure, the ever free, the almighty, the all-knowing, the all-merciful, the teacher of all teachers.

And above all,

he is the Lord whose nature is inexpressible Love.”

2. The five universal questions

A. Ultimate reality: Brahman

“These certainly are the definitions of a Personal God. Are there then two Gods--the ‘not this, not this’, the satchidananda, the existence-knowledge-bliss of the philosopher, and this God of Love of the devotee?

2. The five universal questions

A. Ultimate reality: Brahman

“No, it is the same Satchidananda who is also the God of Love--impersonal and personal in one. It has always to be understood that the Personal God worshipped by the devotee is not separate or different from Brahman. All is Brahman, the one without second.”

2. The five universal questions

A. Ultimate reality: Brahman

However, Brahman, as Unity or Absolute, is too much of an abstraction to be loved and worshipped. So the devotee chooses the relative aspect of Brahman, that is Ishvara, the Supreme Lord.”

Vivekananda, Karma-Yoga and Bhakti-Yoga

2. The five universal questions

A. Ultimate reality: Brahman

“God is the way the ignorant person sees Brahman to be. If one knows the metaphysical truth, knows the oneness of all beings, he does not need the concept of God.”

Shankara

2. The five universal questions

B. Human beings

1. In each human being is the **atman**, the eternal, perfect, indestructible, soul.

2. The five universal questions

B. Human beings

2. The soul (Atman) goes through countless rebirths, in human or animal form. This is called “**transmigration**”.

The cycle of birth, death, and rebirth is called **samsara**.

2. The five universal questions

B. Human beings

“Just as the embodied self enters childhood, youth, and old age, so does it enter another body. . . As a man discards worn-out clothes to put on new and different ones, so the embodied self discards its worn-out bodies to take on other new ones.”

The Bhagavad Gita



2. The five universal questions

B. Human beings

3. The purpose of a human is to advance spiritually, realize the true nature of the atman, and eventually can be released from the cycle of samsara.

2. The five universal questions

C. The Human Problem

1. The human problem is that we are **trapped** on the wheel of samsara.
2. We are trapped because we are **ignorant** of our true nature.

2. The five universal questions

C. The Human Problem

3. We are ignorant because of a veil of illusion called **maya**.

2. The five universal questions

C. The Human Problem

Maya: a false way
of seeing the world



2. The five universal questions

C. The Human Problem

Maya: a false way
of seeing the world



2. The five universal questions

C. The Human Problem



2. The five universal questions

C. The Human Problem

“Vedanta teaches that the essence of all beings and all things is Spirit, infinite and eternal, unchanging and indivisible. It emphasizes that a person's true nature is this divine Spirit [atman], identical with the inmost being and reality of the universe [brahman].”

2. The five universal questions

C. The Human Problem

4. The problem of maya is compounded by **karma**, the natural, moral law of cause and effect.

2. The five universal questions

C. The Human Problem

5. Accumulation of karma causes rebirth into the “appropriate” form.

2. The five universal questions

C. The Human Problem

“Those who are of good conduct here--the prospect is that they will come to a pleasant birth, either the birth of a priest, or the birth of a warrior, or the birth of a merchant.



2. The five universal questions

C. The Human Problem

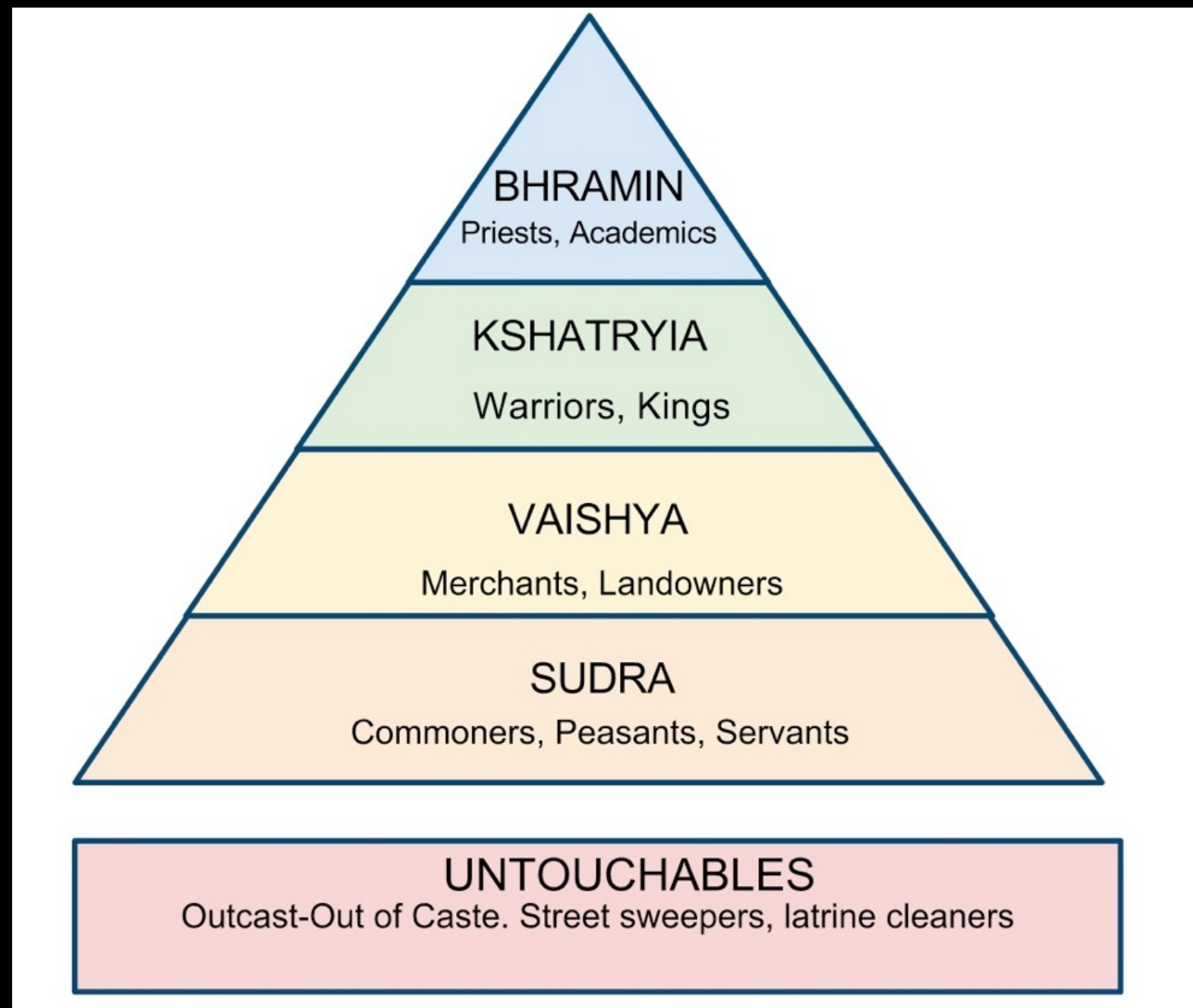
“But those who are of evil conduct here--the prospect is they will come to an evil birth, either the birth of a dog, or the birth of a swine, or the birth of an outcaste.”

Chandogya Upanishad



2. The five universal questions

Varna: social Classification or
“**caste**” System



2. The five universal questions

D. Values/morals

1. There is no intrinsic evil; ultimately good and evil are maya, illusion, because ultimate reality (brahman) is non-dual and undifferentiated.

2. The five universal questions

D. Values/morals

2. But until one is free of maya, Hindu ethics are driven by a practical concern, that of dealing with karma.

2. The five universal questions

D. Values/morals

3. Appropriate actions, or **dharma**, are closely related to one's station in life--your caste, your gender, your stage of life.

2. The five universal questions

E. Human Destiny

1. After death, transmigration into new forms, hundreds or thousands of times.
2. When maya and karma are gone at last, my soul is “self-realized” and merges with Brahman. There is no more rebirth. This is called **moksha**.

2. The five universal questions

E. My Destiny



self-realization =
moksha

2. The five universal questions

E. My Destiny

“Those who attain the supreme goal of life, realizing the self and passing beyond all sorrow, shine bright as a mirror which has been cleansed of dust...



2. The five universal questions

E. My Destiny

In the supreme climax of samadhi they realize the presence of the lord within their heart. Freed from impurities, they pass forever beyond birth and death.”



Shvetashvatara Upanishad

2. The five universal questions

E. My Destiny

1. Transmigration into new forms.
2. When illusion and karma are gone at last, the soul is “self-realized” and merges with Brahman. There is no more rebirth. This is called **moksha**.
3. Individuality disappears in Brahman.

2. The five universal questions

E. My Destiny

“As the rivers flowing east and west merge in the sea and become with it, so do all creatures lose their separateness when they merge at last into pure being.

Chandogya Upanishad



3. How does Hinduism see other religions?

A. Tolerance and plurality

“I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true.”

Swami Vivekananda

3. How does Hinduism see other religions?

A. Tolerance and plurality

“God has made different religions to suit different aspirations, times and countries. all doctrines are only so many paths; but a path is by no means God himself. Indeed we can reach god if we follow any of the paths with whole-hearted devotion.”

Ramakrishna

3. How does Hinduism see other religions?

B. Exclusivity and superiority

“In the family of religions, Hinduism is the wise old **all-knowing mother**. Its most sacred books, the vedas, claim, ‘truth is one, but sages call it by different names.’”

3. How does Hinduism see other religions?

B. Exclusivity and superiority

“If only Islam, and all the rest of the monotheistic ‘book’ religions, had learned that lesson, all the horror of history’s religious wars could have been avoided. . . .” which other religion has its God say, as Krishna does in the Bhagavad Gita, ‘all paths lead to me’?”

Robin Zaehner, Catholic convert to Hinduism, All Souls College, Oxford

3. How does Hinduism see other religions?

B. Exclusivity and superiority

“Vedanta affirms that all religions lead to the same Truth. . .all religions lead to the same goal.”

3. How does Hinduism see other religions?

B. Exclusivity and superiority

“Vedanta affirms that all religions lead to the same Truth. . .all religions lead to the same goal.”

4. Hinduism and Christianity Compared

1. According to the Bible, God, the ultimate reality, the Real God, is personal, and is knowable.
2. While God is everywhere present, he is distinct from his creation. Human beings are not God.
3. According to the Bible, human beings are given one life on this earth.

4. Hinduism and Christianity Compared

4. Karma closes the door on grace, mercy and forgiveness. The Gospel is a message of grace, mercy and forgiveness.

5. There are no class distinctions in the Christian faith.

6. Moksha (liberation) in Hinduism is not final, personal or communal. Salvation in the Christian faith is final, personal, and communal.