Introduction to Hinduism

“There is only one God, but endless are his aspects and endless are his names”
The vast majority of Hindus live in India and Nepal.
Goal of Hinduism

Moksha: “release or liberation

United forever with the divine

Infinite bliss and awareness
Reincarnation

- Samsara is the wheel of rebirth which means the soul is reborn from one life form to another.
- People may be reincarnated at a higher or lower level of existence depending on their karma from their present life.
- People may be reborn as plants or animals or they may be elevated to a higher caste as a human.
- Death is not final for Hindus as they expect to be reborn many times.
Karma & Dharma

- Karma: “action” or “deeds”
- Every action produces a Justified effect based on its moral worthiness.
- Karma determines all the particular circumstances and Situations of one’s life.
- Dharma: ethical duty based on the divine order of reality. The word is the closest equivalent to “religion.”
Four Stages of Life

Stage One: Student stage

Stage Two: Householder

Stage Three: Forest-dweller -- after the birth of first grandchild

Stage Four: Sannyasin - wondering ascetic
Sacred Texts

Rig Veda:   Hinduism’s oldest text- nearly 4000 years.

Bhagavad Gita:   Hinduism’s most popular sacred text
Brahman: essence of reality

- He is not ultimate reality because he can be visualized.
- Brahma’s life span = each day is 1000 times the whole of human history.
- The world will end with the appearance of Vishnu is about 4000 years from now.
THE TWO MOST POPULAR GODS

SHIVA

VISHNU
Avatars of Vishnu

Krishna

Rama
Goddesses

Lakshmi

Saraswati
Kali

- wife of Shiva
- black in color & wearing a necklace of skulls.
- She is a bloodthirsty goddess.
- A violent destroyer of her enemies
- affectionate and caring for her devotees.
Festivals and Holy Days

- No set day of the week is holy—each day has its possibilities.
- Religious festivals may be solar or lunar—lunar is preferred.
- In order to keep festivals consistent, an additional lunar month is added to the calendar about every three years.
- Some numbered days of the month are more important than others. There are 125 special days in the Hindu year.
Festival: Divali

Divali: “Row of lights

- Takes place in Oct. or Nov.
- It is a series of five festivals
  - Lights are floated on small rafts
  - If the candle remains lit, good luck will follow.
The Ganges River

Falling from Its source of Vishnu’s feet onto Shiva’s head and out from his hair, the water of the Ganges is sacred enough to purify all sins.
Banaras - Hindu’s Holy City

- Pilgrims come from all over to bathe in the Ganges.

- Countless Hindus come to Banaras to die.

- It has 1500 temples, most of them devoted to Shiva.

- It is a gathering place for the religiously learned and their disciples.
Sacred Cow of India

QuickTime™ and a Photo - JPEG decompressor are needed to see this picture.
Caste System

Four major castes

- Brahmin: priests
- Kshatriya: warriors and administrators
- Vaistrya: farmers, merchants, teachers, artisans
- Sudras: servants, laborers
Gandhi: the Father of India

For Gandhi, social concern was deeply rooted in his conviction of the Sacredness of life.

Gandhi believed that human beings should strive to live as simply as possible since overindulgence often meant that others may have to do without their basic needs.

Gandhi was assassinated by a Hindu fanatic on January 30, 1948 as India was gaining its independence.
One Ocean, Many Names