

## Hindu Gods and Goddesses



Hinduism is the world's third largest religion (after Christianity and Islam) and has over 1 billion followers. It is also one of the oldest religions, starting in India around 1500 BC.

For Hindus, there is a single, universal god known as Brahman. This supreme god is regarded as being an entity that exists in, and brings life to all things. In other words, Hindus believe that there is a part of Brahman in every person and every other living thing. Hinduism also has thousands of gods and goddesses, known as "deities", who represent one or more of Brahman's aspects or powers.

The most significant of these many Hindu gods and goddesses are called the Holy Triad or Trimurti. The Trimurti consists of 3 gods who are responsible for the creation, preservation, and destruction of the world:

- 1) Brahma is the first (creator).
- 2) Vishnu (preserver of the universe)
- 3) Shiva (whose role is to destroy it in order to re-create it).

Hindus believe that these gods have appeared in the form of avatars - when a deity exists in human form on earth. Although Hindus believe that Brahman is everywhere but cannot be seen, Hindus pray to shrines (statues) of Brahman's many deities and they are often exceptionally colourful.



### Some famous gods and goddesses (deities) & their powers:

- Ganesha - he helps people overcome their problems by granting them strength and wisdom. He has an elephant's head.
- Lakshmi - she is the wife of Vishnu and travels on a lotus flower. She is the goddess of light and good fortune. The important festival of Diwali can be referred to as the festival of lights when Hindus light lamps to help Lakshmi find her way to their homes and grant them good fortune for the year ahead.
- Saraswati - she is the goddess of knowledge, music, arts and learning. She is also the wife of Brahma.
- Krishna - he is the god of love and compassion and is one of the most loved gods amongst Hindus. He is often depicted as blue-skinned and carrying a flute.
- Rama - he is the god of virtue and truth and is also worshipped during Diwali.

- Hanuman - he is the god of physical strength and perseverance. He has a monkey face and his shrines are some of the most visited in India.
- Parvati - she is the goddess of devotion and love. She is Shiva's wife and also created Ganesha, her son, out of earth and breathed life into him.

Most Hindus have a small shrine in their homes where they can pray regularly to a favourite god or goddess. It is called a Puja.

### **Did You Know?**

It is believed that:

Brahma has 4 heads.

Shiva has blue skin and a third eye in the centre of his forehead.

Questions:

1. Which god is the preserver of the universe?
2. When is Hinduism believed to have begun?