

## Access World Religions Hinduism Glossary

**aarti** – A Hindu ritual using wicks soaked in ghee (clarified butter) to produce light to honor a deity.

**Advaita Vedanta** – A school of Hindu philosophy that pertains to recognizing Atman or self as God – Brahman.

**Allahabad** – A city in Uttar Pradesh in northern India, significant as the site where three holy rivers, the Yamuna, the Ganges and the mystical Sarawasti come together.

**amrita** – Precious and rejuvenating nectar with medicinal properties.

**ascetic** – One who abstains from worldly pleasures for the purpose of spiritual enlightenment.

**ashram** – A community comprised of ascetics that choose to live under the guidance of a guru.

**atheism** – Belief that there is no God or set of supreme beings.

**avatar**- An incarnation or descent of a supreme deity or God to a human for a specific purpose on earth.

**Ayodhya** – Described in the Brahmanda Purana text, an ancient holy city known as the birthplace of Rama.

**Balarama** – The elder brother of Lord Krishna.

**Bhagavad Gita** – Meaning “song of God,” the sacred Sanskrit text of war depicting Lord Krishna as he counsels Prince Arjuna on the battlefields of an impending war with his own kinsmen.

**Bhakti** – Meaning “devotion,” active participation in divine worship.

**boon** – A special favor provided by a deity, given when specifically asked.

**Brahma** – Hindu God of creation.

**Brahman** – Divine, impersonal and ultimate cosmic reality.

**charioteer** – In reference to the Bhagavad Gita, the role Lord Krishna plays as counselor to Prince Arjuna while driving the chariot as they cross the battlefield.

**consort** – A companion as mate or a spouse, especially related to deities or monarchs.

**Devki** (also known as Devaki) – Mother of Krishna, sister to Kamsa.

**Dharma** – Meaning “that which holds the world,” a Hindu concept generally defined as “law” and understood as the universal path that leads adherents to God.

**Durga** – A form of Shakti, the supreme Goddess, appearing in warrior form.

**Ganesha** – Hindu God of wealth, wisdom and auspicious beginnings, also known as the “remover of obstacles”; son of Goddess Parvati.

**Ganesha Chathuri** – An 11-day festival celebrating the birthday of Lord Ganesha.

**Gangajil** – Water from the Ganges River used in rituals and believed to have sacred healing properties to remove all sin and negativity.

**Ganges River** (also known as the Ganga River) – A principal river in India considered to be holy; most Hindus consider bathing in the Ganges at least once in a lifetime as essential to being Hindu.

**ghee** – Butter that’s been processed to remove water or solid particles.

**Gokul** – City that Indra threatened to drown.

**guru** – A person with great knowledge in an area that teaches others.

**Indra** – Ancient Hindu God of War.

**Janmashtami** – Hindu festival celebrating the birthday of Lord Krishna.

**Jñâna** – Meaning “knowledge,” the intellectual realization that one’s self or “Atman” is identical with Brahman, “ultimate reality.”

**kalam** – The ritual of creating, then erasing powder drawings on the floors of temples, often practiced in Kerala.

**Kali** – Known as the Dark Mother. Fiercest form of mother goddess, Shakti, she was created from Durga’s brow and slays demons while protecting her children.

**Kamsa** – (also known as Kansa) –Tyrant king of Mathura who responds to the prophecy of his imminent death by killing the male babies born to his sister, Devki.

**karma** – Meaning “action,” the concept that actions have direct consequences on subsequent lives.

**Kerala** – A state in southwestern India known for traditional mother-goddess worship.

**kirtans** – Devotional singing of hymns.

**Krishna** – The eighth reincarnation of Lord Vishnu; born in Mathura.

**Lakshmi** – Hindu Goddess of wealth, light, wisdom, courage, and generosity; consort of Vishnu.

**Lord Dhanvantari** – Avatar of Vishu; the earliest Hindu surgeon and regarded as the originator of Ayurvedic medicine.

**Lord Rama** – The seventh avatar of Vishnu; believed to be a real-life king of ancient Ayodhya.

**Mahabharata** – Meaning “the great tale of the Bharata dynasty,” a Sanskrit epic poem fundamental to Hinduism that defines and outlines the four goals of life: dharma (duty), yoga (action), kama (pleasure) and moksha (liberation).

**MahaKala** – Maha meaning “great” and kala meaning “time.” A name for Lord Shiva while in the phase of destruction; indicates his timeless nature.

**mantra** – Sounds or phrases chanted to create a sound for the purpose of praising a deity.

**Mathura** – An ancient and holy city in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh known as the birthplace of Krishna.

**moksha** – Achieving spiritual liberation, or the final stage of spiritual evolution allowing Hindus to escape the cycle of birth.

**monism** – Belief in the concept that all separate realities are ultimately one; the universe is God and the universe is divine.

**monotheism** – Belief in a single God.

**Mount Kailash** (also known as Mount Kailasha) – Located in the Himalaya Mountains in Tibet, it is the traditional home of Shiva and considered a sacred location for five religions.

**mudra** – Symbolic gestures done mostly with the hands and fingers, but also through seated postures in ceremonies, dance and art.

**Narakasura** – Son of Vishu, a long-reigning demon-king who was killed by Satyabhama.

**panchamrit** – Meaning “nectar of the Gods,” a five-ingredient mixture consisting of milk, curd, honey, ghee and tulsi leaves used in Hindu offerings.

**panentheism** – Principle that the universe is a manifestation of God; God enlivens all natural forces so that God is outside the universe and the universe is within God.

**pantheism** – Principle that God and the universe are one; God is the universe the universe is God.

**Parvati** – Most gentle form of Hindu mother goddess, Shakti. Divine consort or spouse of Shiva, mother of Lord Ganesha and Kartikeya.

**pilgrims** – Those who make a pilgrimage or journey to perform a sacred ritual.

**plaster of Paris** – A paste often used to construct statues of deities for the purpose of devotion.

**polytheism** – Belief in many gods.

**prasad** – Any offering (usually edible) given to a God, deity or avatar that is in turn consumed by the devotee.

**Prince Arjuna** – Leader of the Pandavas family who asks Lord Krishna to be his “divine charioteer” in his family’s war against their relations, the Kauravas Brothers.

**Puja** – Ritual worship consisting of prayers and offerings.

**Puranas** – Eighteen post-Vedic texts that offer a history of the universe, cosmology, deities and legendary figures.

**purification** – Ceremonial cleansing to remove sin or impure energy.

**Ravana** – Commonly known as a devil, he kidnaps Sita, the consort of Rama. Also believed to be a scholar well-versed in the ancient Vedas and Upanishad texts, as well as a devotee of Shiva.

**reincarnation** – A belief that when a person dies, the soul remains and is re-born into a different form.

**Rig Veda** – Believed to be the world’s oldest scripture providing the foundation of Hinduism spiritual and philosophical belief.

**Rohini** – Mother of Balarama and consort to Vasudev.

**Sadhu** – Those who have renounced society in their ultimate desire to achieve through meditation and contemplation, moksha, the fourth and final goal of Hindu life.

**Sanatana Dharma** – For some, a preferred name for the religious, historical and cultural tradition generally referred to as Hinduism.

**Sanskrit** – The ancient literary language of classic Hindu scriptures.

**Saraswati** – The Saraswati is considered by many to be both a real river originally described in the Rig Veda that flowed over 2,000 years ago as well as a mythological river associated with the Saraswati, the Goddess of knowledge, music, and art.

**Satyabhama** – Wife of Krishna; killed Narakasura.

**Shiva** (also known as Siva) – Hindu God of destruction and re-creation Lives on Mount. Kailash. Divine consort or spouse of Goddess Parvati.

**Sita** – Avatar of Lakshmi, the consort or wife of Rama and a principal character in the ancient Sanskrit text, The Ramayana.

**Trimurti** – The three principle Gods of Hinduism: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, when linked together.

**tulsi leaves** – From the holy basil plant, an important part of Hindu religious tradition and ritual.

**Upanishads** – A written philosophy of spiritual discipline and meditation, intended only for serious seekers but available to priests and non-priests.

**Vishnu** – Hindu God of preservation who protects, supports and sustains the universe.

**Yamaraja** (also known as Yama) – Twin brother of Yami, Lord of Death, associated with Day 5 of Diwali.

**Yami** – Twin sister of Yamaraja, the first woman, Goddess of the Yamuna River, associated with Day 5 of Diwali.

**yoga** – Meaning “discipline,” knowledge of self derived through meditation.