

# Hinduism

## Brief #3

### Focus

The ancient Indian religion of Hinduism has hundreds of millions of followers.

**Hinduism is considered to be the world's oldest religion.** It is unique among the world's religions because no one person started or founded the religions. Hinduism grew out of and evolved from the Aryan tradition of the Vedas probably about 1700 B.C.

Hinduism is a very diverse religion with many gods and goddesses, rituals and beliefs.



### Brahman

**In Hinduism, Brahman is the life-force; the creator and destroyer of everything.** Brahman can take many forms. The three main forms, or gods, that Brahman can take are the following:

- Brahma, who is the creator
- Vishnu, who is the preserver
- Shiva, who is the destroyer



### Hindu Beliefs

Hindus believe in the principals of karma. **Karma is the result or the consequence of a person's actions.** In Hinduism, karma is a powerful force.

Hindus also believe in reincarnation. **Reincarnation is the belief that after a person dies, he or she is reborn into a new life.** The kind of life a person is reborn into is determined by his or her karma. If a person lives a good life and creates good karma, then the life he or she will be reborn into will be good. If a person lives a bad life, and creates bad karma, then the life he or she will be reborn into will be bad.



### The Caste System

Hinduism is the main religion in India. If you are a Hindu, then you are born into a caste. **A caste is a rigid social group.** The castes were written about in the Vedas. The caste into which you are born decides the kinds of job you will have and whom you are allowed to marry.

### Vocabulary

1. Hinduism
2. Brahman
3. karma
4. reincarnation
5. caste
6. untouchables

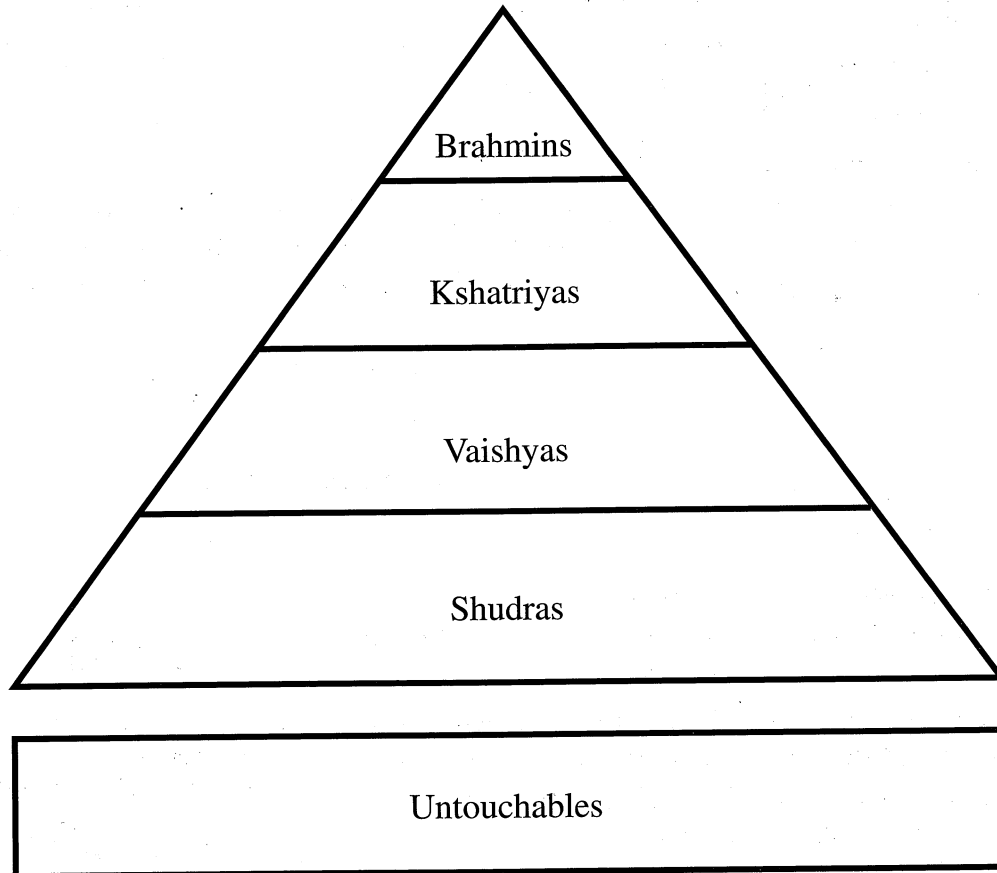
# Hinduism

## Brief #3 (cont.)



### The Caste System (cont.)

In Hinduism there are four main castes.



The Brahmin were priests, teachers, and scholars. Kshatriyas were the warrior class, or soldiers, and also the politicians. Vaishyas were merchants and farmers. Shudras were people who did manual labor or who were the servants of the people in the other castes.

**The untouchables were people considered to be so low that they were not even in a caste.** These were people who traditionally did work that was considered unclean. The Hindu belief in reincarnation and karma helped to keep the caste system entrenched for centuries. But since the 1950s, it has been illegal to persecute people due to their caste.



### Vegetarianism

Vegetarianism is a widespread practice in Hinduism. Many Hindus believe in nonviolence toward both people and animals. There is also a belief that nonvegetarian foods like meat and fish can dull the mind and interfere with the practice of meditation.