

Student Textbook (Section A)

Year 7, Term 3: 'The Creation'

Learning Intentions:

In this Unit, we aim to:

1. Understand the triguna (three modes of material nature) and how to apply them in our lives.
2. Use the triguna to evaluate moral issues, especially as linked to the environment.
3. Understand the Trimurti and make sense of the 'many deities', with focus on Vishnu and related forms such as Lord Krishna, who is understood to be supreme divine (God) in Chaitanya Vaishnavism.
4. Explore, with reflection on our personal experience, the idea of 'God in three places'.
5. Examine and evaluate the reasons people have for believing or not believing in God (both as a person and a non-personal being).
6. Understand the Hindu-Vaishnava ideas on creation, as linked to both Sankhya philosophy and the Bhagavata Purana.
7. Explore our own sense of awe & wonder related to creation, and how we can better care for the environment, especially by understanding the presence of the divine.

Structure of the Unit

There are six weeks, each focussing on:

1. The Triguna
2. The Trimurti and forms of Vishnu
3. 'God in three places' and in nature.
4. Reasons for believing in God (as personal and/or non-personal)
5. Vaishnava narratives of creation
6. Caring for the environment

Unit 7.3 (Year 3, Spring Term 1)

Week 1: The Triguna (3 Qualities of Matter)

1: The Three Functions of Matter

Most Hindu thought makes a distinction between spirit (*brahman*) and matter (*prakriti*). Spirit refers to the soul (and also God) which are eternal and unchanging. Matter refers to inert objects, as well as the mind and body of living beings.

Sastra Says

'The soul exists forever in the present, having no birth or death. The soul is the oldest, without beginning or end, and is not killed when the body is killed' Bhagavad-Gita Chapter 2, verse 20

Exercise 1

What kind of changes does matter undergo over time? Can you think of a material object that never changes?

Matter, unlike spirit, undergoes constant change. This means that all material objects have a beginning and an end. They are created and destroyed.

Material objects also stay for some time, as shown below:

Creation	Staying	Destruction
<i>Start</i>	<i>Middle</i>	<i>End</i>

Diagram 1 (above)

Challenge 1

You might copy the table above into your exercise books. Then, write the words below in the correct column. An example is given (in blue). The teacher may also give you a list of words.

Death, birth, finish, annihilation, beginning, make, look after, maintain, genesis, dismantle, build, preserve, support, construct, sustain, obliterate

So, material objects are created, stay for some time and are finally destroyed. They are temporary. So matter does has three functions or 'ways of working'. They are sometimes called 'modes'.

Raja-guna creates; sattva-guna maintains; tamo-guna destroys. They are often listed in another order (1) sattva-guna (the highest), (2) rajo-guna and (3) tamo-guna (the lowest).

Word Watch

sattva guna	or	sattva
rajo-guna	or	rajas
tamo-guna	or	tamas

guna means 'rope' or 'quality' or 'mode'
raja means 'king'

The three gunas have English names. 'Sattva' may be called 'goodness', or 'serenity'. It is linked to light and purity and its colour is yellow. Rajas may be called 'passion', and is linked to desire and ambition. Its colour is fiery red. Tamas is often called 'Ignorance', and may be linked to darkness. Its colour is dark blue.



Coloured powders sold during Holi festivities.

Do You Know?

The idea of the triguna comes from Sankhya philosophy
'Sankhya' literally means 'to count'. It is based on analysis, dividing matter into different 'elements'.

Sankhya is one of the *sad-darshana* (six schools of Indian philosophy).

The Bhagavad-Gita explains how all material things, including human conduct, can be explained in terms of the three qualities

That's it! This lesson; like all material things, must finish! However, we may test ourselves wit this 'quick quiz'.

Quick Quiz

Sankhya is:

- (a) An expression of joy by Admiral Nelson
- (b) One of the six Hindu darshanas
- (c) A way of dividing matter into different elephants

The word guna means:

- (a) a foolish person
- (b) a member of a gang
- (c) 'quality' (in Sanskrit).

Say which of these in connected to rajo-guna:

- (a) assassinating a king
- (b) being an inventor
- (c) looking after sick people

2. Understanding the Triguna

The three gunas are all useful. Even destruction is helpful. We usually knock down (or blow up!) an old building so we can construct a new one.

However, according to Hindu thought, when we look at morality and lifestyle choices, it is better if humans are influenced by sattva. People who like sattva are kind, knowledgeable and content. They look after themselves and others.

A person influenced by rajas, is likely to be very busy – in fact, very, very, very busy! They can be very creative! But they can also be ambitious and selfish. They might get very tired because they work too hard; or they might be too greedy.

Rajas means 'royal' so it is connected with ambition, luxury and building empires.

A person under *tamas* may be lazy. We all need rest, but some people are just too lazy! They may always feel disappointed (being sad is fine, but not all the time). Also, people who like to drink alcohol too much. Violent people also, since – remember – violence involves destruction.



War results in much destruction

You will notice, then, that the *gunas* influence our (a) character (b) conduct and (c) knowledge

Sastra Says

From *sattva*, real knowledge (wisdom) develops; from *rajas*, greed develops; and from *tamas* come ignorance, foolishness, and illusion.

Bhagavad-Gita Chapter 14, verse 17

Challenge 2

Do some research in the Bhagavad-gita to find more verses on the *triguna*.

Challenge 3

Find out how the *gunas* are connected to the idea of reincarnation. For example, who gets a better birth next lifetime? Who takes a lower birth? And how do we get another human birth in the next life?

Helpful Hint: Bhagavad-gita 14.14-16 is a good place to look!

It is important to also know that sometimes we are influenced by two *gunas*. For example, a person who gets angry may be influenced by both *rajas* and *tamas*. Drinking alcohol is connected to *tamas*, but if adults regulate and discipline their drinking, there is some *sattva* (which is about harmony, discipline and regulation).

Exercise 2

Make a table with three columns, headed *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. Please place the following words in the correct column. You may wish to use Worksheet 7.3.1b as given by the teacher.

Arrogance, compassion, absence of Love, old food, harsh speech, washing hands after eating, watching TV all day, mindfulness, gossip, dirty room, compete to get the best results, eat too much or too little, help others, procrastination, constant complaining, truthfulness, bullying, achievement, anxiety, hard work, knowing right from wrong, empathy, long-lasting friendships, strong attachments, anger, unlimited desires, sleep, knowledge, confusion, happiness

You can see some of the answers in “Table on the *Gunas*”.

3. Using the Triguna: Understanding Ourselves and Others

Human beings are not all the same. We are affected by different *gunas*. According to the Bhagavad-Gita, we can change our behaviour. For example if we eat food in *sattva*, we take on the same qualities (we become more peaceful); if we eat food that has too much sugar, we become hyper-active; and if a person drinks alcohol, he or she may fall asleep or sometimes get violent.

Exercise 3

Find out from the Bhagavad-gita 17.8-10, about the different types of food preferred by people under different *gunas*.

You might think about yourself, and your own likes and dislikes!

Exercise 4

Read the story called Three Men Enter the Forest and answer the question: “Which *guna* does each man represent? How do you know? The teacher may give you the story with the questions.

We can use the gunas to understand ourselves and others. For example, if our room is always spotlessly clean, we are influenced by sattva. If it is always dirty, we are under the sway of tamas. And if it starts clean, and gets dirty, followed by a frantic cleaning session, we may be a person controlled by passion!

Exercise 5

As instructed by your teacher, please complete the questionnaire (see Worksheet 7.3.1c(a), called 'Self-Inventory Questionnaire on the Triguna')

We can also use the triguna to explore nature and how we humans treat the environment.

You may have heard about the idea of 'sustainability' (which is closely connected to sattva guna and the idea of 'looking after'.)

Word Watch

sustainability – something which can last a long time; preserving and looking after the environment .

Perhaps you have heard about pollution of the air and rivers. Pollution is connect to dirt and dirtiness; it also is destructive because it kills fish, birds and other wildlife. The polar bears are in trouble because there are less icebergs.

Sometime pollution is blamed on human greed, because we want to enjoy the world and all the gadgets we buy in the shops. Animals don't usually make moral choices, but humans have responsibility to act properly.



Human industry often spoils the environment.

Challenge 3:

Read again the text above and try to explain the connection between the environment and the three gunas. Can the gunas help us choose a better lifestyle?

Thank you! We have almost finished. Please keep going, as we know you like sattva.

Quick Quiz

As instructed by your teacher, please write down or speak about your own strengths connected to the three gunas. In which areas of life are you most influenced by sattva?

Week 2: Hindu and Vaishnava Deities

1: The Trimurti

We have already discussed that rajo-guna (or rajas) is linked to creation; tamo-guno to destruction; and sattva guna to maintaining or preserving (i.e. making something last longer). All material objects, such as a building is built, looked after (usually by the owner) and then destroyed. Sometimes a building falls down accidentally!



A building collapsed in Wrexham last Monday.

Now, some people have the job of building houses or sometimes blowing them up (lucky people!).

So, some jobs are connected to creating; others to destroying; and even others to maintaining.



Designing new clothes is a creative job

Exercise 6

Which of the following jobs are connected to creation, maintenance or destruction: brick-layer, demolition expert, doctor, highway repairs, scrap-merchant, gardener, song-writer?

Challenge 3:

If you finish Exercise 6 early, then write down three more jobs, one each linked to creation, destruction and preservation ('looking after').

Some students think themselves to be God. We have news for you! You are not – sorry. And you can't get the job!

Now some religions call God 'the creator'. This may be true, of course. But in Hinduism, God has three roles as far as this world is concerned. Yes, you have already guessed it! He is the creator, the maintainer and the destroyer. The Bhagavad Gita explains that Krishna, the Supreme divine (God) carries out these functions through some of his different agents, the Trimurti.

And here they are . . .



The Trimurti

You already know that two heads are better than one (meaning 'it's better when we work together, in pairs') Well, Brahma has four heads! You can see him on the left in the picture above.

On the right is Lord Shiva, carrying a trident and with the River Ganga (Ganges) entering his hair. He also carries a water pot and some prayer beads. He is in charge of all destruction (of the entire universe as well).

In the middle, with four arms, is Lord Vishnu. He is the preserver and protector.

Chaitanya Vaishnavism explains that Krishna (or Vishnu, who comes from Krishna) is God and the other deities are demigods. Just as in a Government there is a prime minister and his government, so Krishna has empowered living beings, demigods, who are in charge of the universal affairs. Lord Shiva, however is the exception to this, (being in a unique category) but we'll get to that later.

Challenge 4:

Look in the Bhagavad-gita 4.8 to find out the three things that Lord Vishnu does when he comes to earth.

Now, each of the Trimurti has a partner, a goddess. This is when it gets complicated, but it isn't so difficult.



On the left is Lakshmi, wife of Vishnu. She is the goddess of wealth and fortune

On the right is Sarasvati, wife of Lord Brahma. She is the goddess of learning and the arts

In the middle is the wife of Lord Shiva, who has many names (and different forms). She is called Shakti, Parvati, Durga and Kali- or simply Devi ('goddesses') or Mataji ('Respected Mother').

Did You Know?

There are three main groups or 'denominations' in Hinduism;

1. Vaishnavas, who worship Vishnu
2. Shaivas, who worship Shiva
3. Shaktas worship Shakti (or/and the other goddesses, Lakshmi and Sarasvati).

With Vaishnavism being the main branch in the U.K.

Note: Tradition says, that due to a curse, Lord Brahma is only worshipped in one place in India

2. Other Demigods

Hinduism explains there 33 million demigods in total. Some more are shown below:

Do You Know?

The following are some other popular demigods:

Ganesh
Skanda
Hanuman
Indra
Surya

Most of the many Hindu deities are linked somehow to the Trimurti and their wives.

For example, Skanda (Murgan) is one of the two sons of Shiva and Paravati (Shakti). Surya, the Sun, is often linked to Vishnu, and hence he is called 'Surya-Narayana' (Narayana is another name of Vishnu). Hanuman is the son of Lord Shiva. Rama is an avatar of Vishnu.

Other Demigods, play a part in running the universe. They include Indra, god of rain, Agni, god of fire, and Varuna, god of the wind.

Exercise 4:

Do some research and show how the following deities are linked to the Trimurti

Surya, Hanuman, Ganesh, Skanda (Murgan),

Although there are many Hindu deities, we can make more sense of them if we see how they are related to each other!

3. Forms of Vishnu and Krishna

All the main deities have different forms. For example, Shakti appears, or is shown, as Parvati, Durga and Kali. Shiva is depicted in a form known as Nataraja, 'the king of dance'.

Perhaps most famous forms of a deity are called the Dasavatara, the Ten Incarnations. They are connected to Vishnu.

Word Watch

Avatara means 'one who descends' or 'one who descends to earth'. Sometimes it is translated as 'incarnation', though this is not accurate because God does not take a temporary material body like we do (incarnation means 'to take a material body'), as in the word 'reincarnation'.

The Dasavatara are called 'the ten incarnations of Vishnu'. However, Chaitanya Vaishnavas understand that Vishnu comes from Krishna, who is the original divine being, or God. For them, Balarama is the eight avatar, not Krishna.



Krishna (left) with his brother, Balarama (right)

Just like an actor puts an outfit on when taking on a certain role, the original divine, Krishna, takes on the form of Vishnu when maintaining the universe. Then when it is time for him to appear on earth, he resumes his form as Krishna.

Vishnu is the maintainer. He comes down to protect and preserve. He does this in three ways.

Sastra Says

To deliver the pious and to annihilate the wicked, as well as to re-establish the principles of religion, I Myself appear, millennium after millennium.

Bhagavad-Gita Chapter 4, verse 8

Because each age is different, and times change, he takes a different form each time he comes.

Do You Know?

The names of the Dashavatara are as follows, in the order they appeared in this age. Only Kalki is left to come, at the end of this age (in about 427,000 years!).

1. Matsya (fish)
2. Kurma (tortoise)
3. Varaha (boar)
4. Narasimha (half-man/half-lion)
5. Vamana (dwarf)
6. Parasurama (warrior with an axe)
7. Ramachandra (the monarch)
8. Krishna (the cowherd)
9. Buddha (the teacher)
10. Kalki (the destroyer)

Word Watch

Vaishnavism is a form of **monotheism**, belief in one personal and transcendent God.

It is sometimes described as '**polymorphic monotheism**', as there are many forms of the one original God.

Sastra Says

I worship Govinda, the original Lord, who manifested Himself personally as Krishna and the different avatars in the world in the forms of Rama, Narasimha, Vamana, etc., as His subjective portions.

Brahma Samhita verse 5.39

Even though Lord Vishnu is in charge of sattva, he gets angry when his devotees are hurt. When Prahlada was persecuted by his wicked father, Vishnu came as Narasimha, as half-man and half-lion!



Narasimha is the fourth of the ten avatars



Lord Chaitanya is a special avatar who came as a devotee, to teach us how to serve Krishna.

Week 3: Where do we find the Divine?

We have studied the many different Hindu deities, starting with the Trimurti and their partners (the three goddesses). We will now start to explore where God is present (according to those who experience him/her). We will also explore the idea of God according to the Vaishnava tradition (the people who worship Vishnu or a closely connected deity such as Rama or Krishna).



A poster of Lakshmi, the Goddess of Fortune. She is the wife of Vishnu.

1: God in Three Places

Some people claim to experience the presence of God; or they believe that God is present in various places.

Exercise 5:

Write down on 1 or 2 post it notes, where you think God might be present, or where you might have experienced the divine. If you don't believe in God, that's fine – please write down where other people claim that God is present.

Some people say that God is an energy that exists everywhere. Hindus call this 'brahman'. Others claim that God can be found inside (inside the heart and even inside the atom). They call this *paramatman* or *antaryami*. Even others say that God is outside (outside of ourselves and even outside of this world); they often believe God is a person, with a beautiful form and all qualities (the word is 'bhagavan').

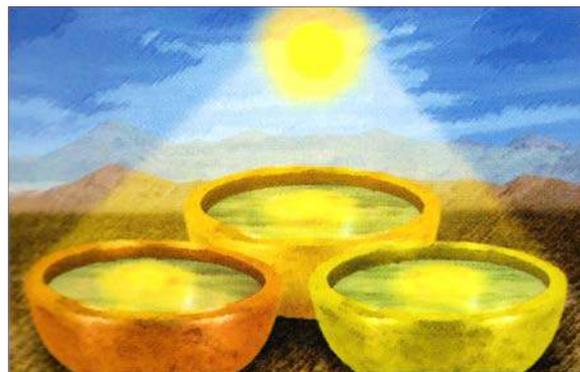
So, Vaishnavas believe that God is present in three places:

1. Everywhere
2. Inside the heart
3. Outside, in the eternal spiritual world

Can you think of an example of someone (or something) that can be in one place but also everywhere? And also present with lots of people at the same time?

One answer is: 'the Sun'.

Look at the following picture:



The analogy of the Sun (in three places)

You may wish to do another exercise.

Exercise 6:

Without reading below, work out how the picture explains God in three places, What three things do you see? (Clue: one of them is 'the reflections of the Sun in different pots of liquid'). Make some notes in your exercise book.

To see if you have the right answers, read the explanation of this analogy (in the box below).

Analogy Alert

The Sun in Three Places

From the picture above, we may notice that:

1. The sun is everywhere, as sunshine
2. The one Sun is present in the pots of liquid, as many reflections
3. The Sun planet still exists separate from the sunshine, about 93 million miles away.

In the same way:

1. God exists everywhere as brahman
2. God is reflected in the hearts of all living beings, as the paramatman or antaryami
3. God lives in his own world as bhagavan

If you wish to understand more, please read the meanings of some of these words (below)

Word Watch

Brahman means 'spirit' or 'the all-pervading absolute reality'

Antaryami means 'the Lord within the heart'

Paramatma means 'supreme self' (also referring to the Lord in the heart)

Bhagavan literally means 'one who possesses all opulence. It could also be translated as 'God', if we believe God to be a person.

Absolute means always true, whatever the circumstance. It is the opposite of relative truth, which exists in relation to something else. For example, 'It is raining' is a relative truth. Also, 'I am a son' is true relative to my father. I am not everyone's son!

This idea of God (or the Absolute Truth) being in three places (or being seen on three ways) is a teaching of the Vaishnava tradition (the people who worship Vishnu). Still, you will find many other religions have the same or similar ideas!

2: God in Nature

As God is everywhere (some believe), he is present in the word and in nature. For example, some species of life may show his/her beauty,

majesty and power. Sometimes, nature may inspire us with feelings of awe and wonder.

Exercise 7

Write down something you like in nature – something that gives you personally a powerful feeling. The try to describe that feeling or emotion.

In the Bhagavad-gita, Krishna describes the Vaishnava view – the idea that God is shown to us through nature; that the source of all beauty, strength and wisdom in not matter (prakriti) itself, but has its origins in spirit (brahman).

Exercise 8

In which species of life can we see the divine or God? For example, some think the cobra is the king of snakes. God may be present in all life, but if you had to choose just one, form the list below, what would it be?

1. Amongst the beasts (animals)?
2. Amongst the birds?
3. Amongst the fish?
4. Amongst the trees

(If you don't believe in God, you consider which species is mighty, powerful and carries great authority. Or species that arouse strong feelings!

Challenge 5

In the Bhagavad-gita, Krishna says 'I am time'.

Why so you think time is, in one sense, God. What quality does time have?

Quick Quiz

Please fill in the correct words below:

1. Of bodies of water, I am the _____
2. Of beasts I am the _____
3. Of secret things, I am _____
4. Of immovable things, I am the _____
5. Of fish, I am the _____
6. Of lights, I am the radiant _____

Word Watch

Pantheism means 'belief that God is everywhere'. However, some pantheists still believe that God also exists beyond the world as well as in it.

3: God within the Heart

There are many stories that suggest that God lives within the heart. Here is one:

Hanuman Eats Pearls

Once day, some sadhus presented Hanuman with a costly pearl necklace. On receiving it, Hanuman cracked each pearl with his sharp teeth, looked inside, and disappointedly threw it away. The intrigued saints asked him what he was doing. Hanuman retorted: 'These are no good. I do not see my Rama and Sita in any one of them. What use to me is this necklace? The saints were confused, if not a little upset!

Hanuman clarified: 'My dear saintly persons, do not be upset. Rama and Sita exist not only in their abode, called Ayodhya, but everywhere. They are also within the heart of all living creatures. To make his point, Hanuman tore open his own chest to reveal Rama and Sita seated there. To this day, devotees try to enshrine Rama and Sita in their hearts.



Hanuman tears open his heart to reveal Sita and Rama

According to Hindu thought, whatever we love lives in our minds and hearts. Therefore, if we are devoted to a particular form of God, he or she will reside there. They consider that God's presence within may be shown in other ways.

Do You Know?

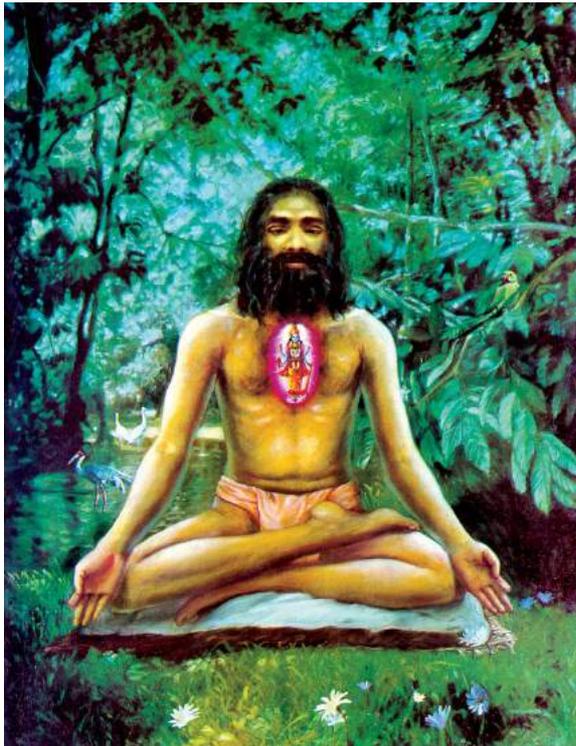
According to the Bhagavad-gita, the form of God within is shown in several ways:

1. In nature, as its beautiful features
2. In animals as instinct
3. In human beings as inspiration, intelligence, memory, conscience or extraordinary ability

Religious Practices Linked to 'God within'

Some Hindu practices aim to connect with the Lord in our hearts. The most important are prayer and meditation (including the practice of yoga). However, to be able to meditate

properly we need to be in sattva guna (do you remember the three gunas?).



A yogi mediating on God within, shown here as Lord Vishnu, the preserver.

Week 4: Belief in God

Some people believe in God. Others say they don't believe in God. Even others have not made up their minds.

Word Watch

Theist means 'one who believes in God'

Atheist means 'one who believes there is no God'

An **agnostic** hasn't made up his or her mind on this question (i.e. "Does God exist?")

This week we will ask whether or not God exists, and look at the reasons people give for being theists, atheists or agnostics.

Also this week (most likely in Lesson 2) we will try to answer the question, "What is God Like?" (or "What do people *think* God is like?"). You will notice that the two questions are different, but it's important to ask them both. We will

focus on two main ideas of the Divine: 1. God is an energy 2. God is a person.

A third question is this, "Of the many deities, whom do Hindus believe is Supreme?" (or are they all equal?).

We conclude by exploring how we deal with people whose beliefs are not the same as ours. Do we argue for our own point of view? Or do we say "everyone is right?" (Can everyone be right? Or can only one answer be correct?)

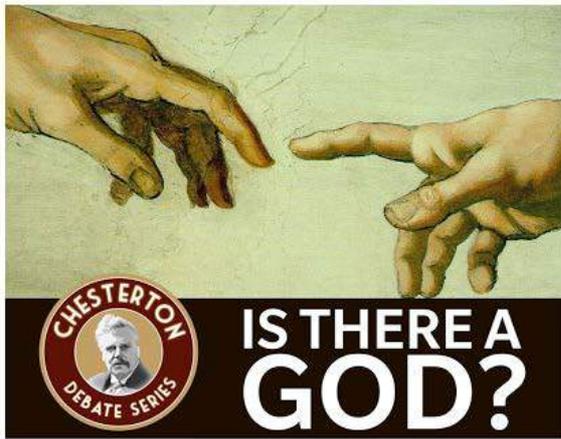
Learning Outcomes

By the end of the week we will be able to:

1. Speak about and test people's reasons for believing or not believing in God
2. Explain the two main beliefs about God, and analyse reasons people give for holding such beliefs
3. Present and test reasons why some Hindus (and other religious people) think one particular deity is supreme
4. Explain how best people deal with having different opinions (especially about God).

1: Does God exist?

People have argued on this subject for a long time. Some arguments are not very good. When arguing, some people become angry or even violent! They often don't give good reasons for their beliefs. Other people try to argue peacefully, and to give good reasons. They may have debates open to the public, as shown in poster below.



FEB 07 2014 7:00 PM

Moderator:
Stephen LeDrew
Host/ Commentator, CP24

Catholic:
Fr. Philip Cleevley, C.O.
Catholic Priest & Philosophy Professor

Atheist:
Justin Trotter
Founder, Centre for Inquiry Canada

Venue:
Isabel Bader Theatre
(Victoria University)
93 Charles Street West, Toronto

Registration:
Opens online
January 10, 2014
at ocytoronto.org

An advert for a debate on the existence of God

Exercise 9

Look at some arguments given for ‘why God exists. Do you think they are good or bad arguments? And why do you think that way?

Examine reasons given for why “God does not exist.” Do you think they are good or bad arguments? Say why.

You might ask (as we’ve studied before), What makes a reason or argument good? What tells us a reason or argument is bad?

Word Watch

The word ‘**argument**’ has two main meanings:

1. A disagreement between two or more people
2. The reasons people give for believing or doing something.

Some people claim that you must all believe what is right (which often means, “You must believe what I believe”!). However, philosophers say, “It is not so important what we believe (as long as it doesn’t hurt ourselves

or others); it’s more important that we have good reasons.” Our ‘argument’ must be good

Do You Know?

A good reason or argument is one;

- (a) That is true
- (b) That always supports our conclusion
- (c) Provides evidence

A bad reason or argument is one:

- (a) That is false (such as a lie)
- (b) Does not support our conclusion (even if it is true!)
- (c) That provides no evidence

Note: there are some standard ‘bad arguments’, which go by interesting names. For example, the ‘false dilemma’, which suggests there are only two answers. For example, some people think you either ‘use faith’ or you ‘use reason’. They ignore the fact you can use both!

We need to know about these when exploring the arguments for or against the existence of God, as discussed below:

Do You Know?

Here are some reasons people give for believing or not believing in God:

1. We see evidence of design, which means there must be a designer.
2. There must be a first cause (which has no cause).
3. I have had personal experience of God!
4. There is no evidence God exists. If there is, please show it to me!
5. There is too much suffering for there to be a loving God
6. God is beyond our experience, so we can never know if God exists. We don’t know and never will!



'The problem of evil', which makes many people doubt God's existence or become atheists.



IF GOD IS SO POWERFUL AND HE IS SUPPOSED TO BE EVERYWHERE, HOW COME I CAN'T FIND HIM ON EITHER MYSPACE OR FACEBOOK?

Some modern reasons for atheism

Some people give reasons connected to the creation, often because they think that behind the creation there must be a creator. Others say that the universe came about without a creator, without any kind of God



Some say a complex mechanism, whether a watch or the entire cosmos, requires an intelligent maker

The panel on the previous page shows some of the main reasons for believing or not believing in God. There are many others too. We all have our own, personal reasons - though we may not always be entirely sure what they are! It may be useful to start exploring our reasons.

Exercise 10

Start to prepare for a short debate (using a worksheet, if the teacher asks you).

If you believe in God, write down your reasons (your argument).

Similarly, if you don't believe in God, please write down your reasons.

If you are an agnostic, write down your reasons.

Don't be afraid to write down what you believe; all answers are good! (But do try to give reasons!)

Challenge 5!

If you have time, write down (in your exercise books) what is meant by the following words. Use your dictionary if needed and don't worry if you don't finish all six.

1. Theism
2. Atheism
3. Agnosticism
4. Monotheism
5. Monism
6. Polytheism

2: What is God like?

We may think of God in different ways. However, it's important to note that what we believe does not change the facts about God! Bad religion does not prove that God does not exist. Good religion does not prove that God does exist!

In Hinduism, understanding God usually begins not with belief but with philosophy. It asks, "Does God exist?" Is there an absolute (eternal) reality? Or is everything always changing, as we see in this world?

Hindu understanding begins by exploring the real self (atman), which is different from the temporary, changing body made of prakriti (matter). The body is born, stays for some time and is destroyed. However, the real self is brahman (eternal spirit). Brahman is conscious and pervades everything. It is conscious (aware) and everywhere.

This suggests that Hindus may believe in a non-personal God, an all-pervading reality. And, that the various Hindu deities are different aspects of that one non-personal God.



A representation of God as the all-pervading world-soul

However, Hindus also think that God is also a person (bhagavan) existing in his own eternal world. They often believe that the personal form of God is higher than his/her all-pervading presence and authority. The government is made of people, but we can feel the presence of the government in all aspects of life (think of road signs, the police, and paying VAT when buying a new phone or new trainers).



Some Hindus, especially Vaishnavas, think that God is a person (shown here as Krishna), the source of the radiant light of brahman

More arguments

Hindu scholars often debate whether God is a person or a non-personal energy.

Here are some arguments that God must be non-personal

1. If God is a person, everyone will argue what he or she looks like (and they do!). To help us agree, God must be just an energy.
2. Matter has form. Therefore, spirit has no form, because it's JUST the opposite and we are all God.

Here are some arguments that God is a person.

1. We see people in this world; the source of this world must also be personal. Whatever is in this world must also be in God – including personality. The world cannot possess something that God does not.
2. Matter is non-personal. We only see a person when the soul (atman) is present. We do not see a person in material objects. Hence, personality comes from the soul; spirit must be personal. The Supreme Spirit must be the Supreme Person.



Lord Vishnu. Most of his followers (Vaishnavas) believe that God (Vishnu) is a person with a name, form, qualities, activities and relationships

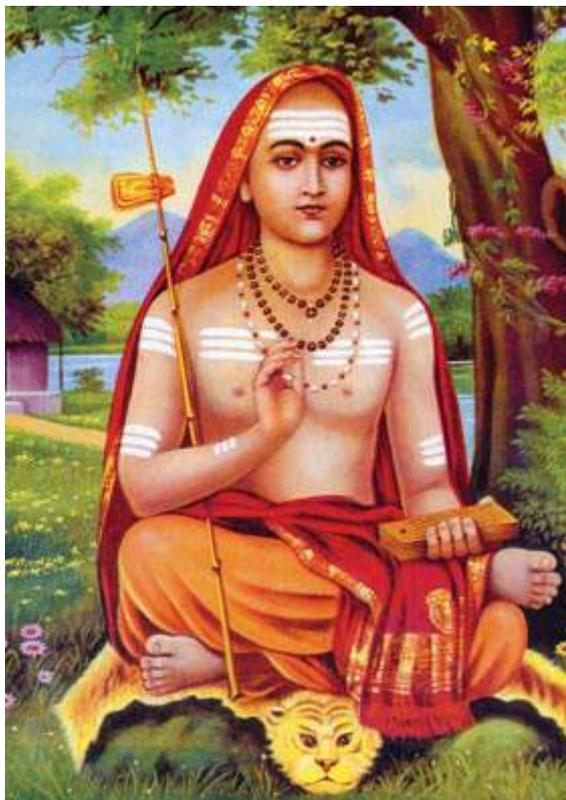
Do You Know?

Most modern Hindus follow the philosophy (or 'darshan') called Vedanta. In Vedanta there are two main beliefs about God:

Advaita (monism) – God is non-personal. The self and God are the same

Dvaita (dualism) - God is personal, and the atman is always different from God,

Many Hindus believe that God is both personal and non-personal (though they might argue over which is higher!)



The followers of Shankara (called 'Smartas') believe that God is the non-personal brahman.

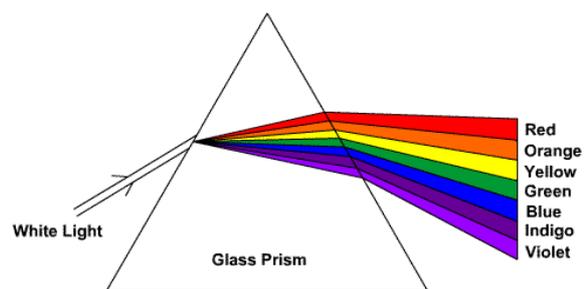
We find that similar arguments about God's nature are found also in other religions. For example some Christians believe in a personal God, others in a non-personal God. You may also notice that Christians talk of three features of God, called the 'Trinity'. However, they have different opinions as to whether 'God the Father' is a person. Many of these important

questions are asked by members of all religions. You will also find religious people who don't even believe in God, such as most Buddhists.

One God, Many Deities.

Some people claim that Hindus are polytheists (i.e. they worship many gods). However, most Hindus believe in one God and, at the same time, believe in many deities.

Personalists and impersonalists explain this in different ways, using their own analogies. Here are two analogies:



The analogy used by those believing in a non-personal God

The impersonalists believe that the various deities are equal representations of the non-personal brahman. For them, all deities are more-or-less equal and they are all God. They also believe that we are all also God.

Chaitanya Vaishnavas and other Vaishnavas, understand the supreme person to be a person. This is Krishna or Vishnu, who also incarnates as any of the avatars, like Rama.

The supreme person is compared to the head of a school (with many teachers) or government (with many ministers beneath the prime-minister). Similarly Chaitanya Vaishnavas understand that Krishna has many powerful agents such as Shiva, Surya, Vayu etc. under him. They do not believe that these agents (gods and goddesses) are equal to the Supreme Lord, but rather, they are invested with certain power.

One of their supporting arguments for their belief is that God cannot become lesser than his own power. If the gods and goddesses, along

with all of us, were indeed the Supreme Lord, then we should be able to remember and act as the Supreme. If we were God, they argue, we could never be overcome by our own power.

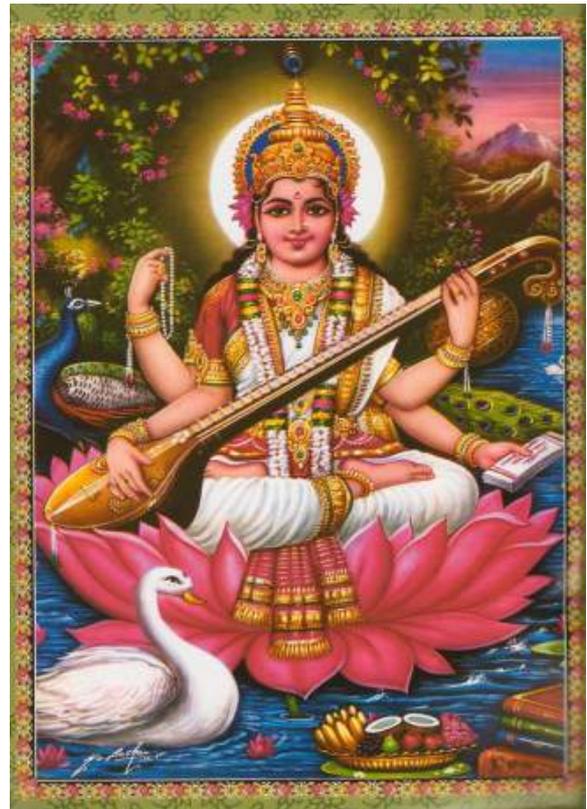
An important analogy for Vaishnavas is the sun and the sunlight. They believe that just like sunlight is the energy of the sun, we (along with the gods and goddesses) are all energy of the Supreme Lord. This makes us similar, but not equal to the Supreme Lord – and not nearly as powerful!

3: Who is Supreme?

Among many Hindus, there is sometimes debate about who is Supreme. Perhaps the biggest (friendly!) argument is between Shaivas (who worship Shiva) and the Vaishnavas (who worship Vishnu/Krishna).

Vaishnavas consider Shiva to have a very special place as a special transformation of Vishnu, like yogurt is a transformation of milk, in order to work as his agent in the maintenance and destruction of the world. You can make yogurt from milk but you can't make milk from yogurt!

As far as gods and goddesses are concerned, some consider them to be just imaginary symbols to represent God's qualities, such as strength, beauty and learning.



Sarasvati, Goddess of Learning

For example, some consider Sarasvati to be an imaginary representation of God's knowledge and learning. Others may think she is a real person.

Exercise 11

1. Read the story called 'Bhrigu's footprint'. Why do you think Vaishnavas consider Vishnu to be Supreme, according to this story?
2. Do some research to find a story that suggests that another deity (e.g. Shiva) is Supreme. If you have time, write a summary of the story you find.

Week 5: Hindu Ideas on Creation

We have so far explored various Hindu teachings on two subjects (1) matter (prakriti) and (2) God, or the absolute reality (brahman).

Now we more closely examine the relationship between the two, especially through the process of creation.

We look mainly at Vaishnava teachings, as given in the Bhagavata Purana (Srimad Bhagavatam). Do you remember the triguna? They come from Sankhya philosophy. We'll study more of this by looking at the 'material elements'.

Finally, we will also consider other creation theories, as linked to Christianity and science; here we will also think about the purposes (if any!) behind creation.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the week we will be able to:

1. Explain the Chaitanya-Vaishnava theory of creation.
2. Categorise the various elements of Sankhya philosophy, and explain their role in creation.
3. Present and compare various ideas on creation and its purposes, with reference to Vaishnava, Christian and scientific ideas.



Lord Vishnu creates an unlimited number of universes

1: Creation in the Bhagavata Purana

The following are some important aspects of creation

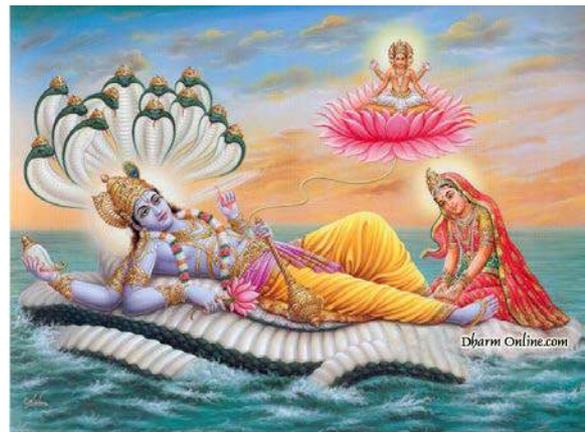
1. What existed before creation of the temporary material world? (ideas of a

param-dhama, 'spiritual world'), including the Vaikuntha planets.

2. Maha-Vishnu creating many universes (form his breathing and his perspiration).

3. Vishnu entering each universe, and lying on the Shesha serpent, while Lakshmi massages his feet.

4. Brahma born on a lotus flower, which sprouted from Vishnu's navel.



Lord Brahma is born atop a lotus flower.

5. Brahma constructs the universe, with elements, planetary systems, and the stars and planets. He also creates time.

6. Shiva is born out of Brahma's anger, when his four sons refused to get married and create all forms of life. He takes charge of destruction (and Vishnu of maintenance)

7. Brahma creates many gods and goddesses, such as Surya (sun-god), Soma (moon god) and Indra (god of rain).

8. Populating the universe, started by Daksha, one of Brahma's sons. There are 8.400.000 species divided into 6 categories.

9. Manu takes charge of human beings, whom he divides into four varnas (classes). There are also four ashrams (stages of life),

10. Brahma instructs mankind through the Vedas and further holy books, so that they can

both (1) enjoy the world properly and (2) get liberation and return to their spiritual home



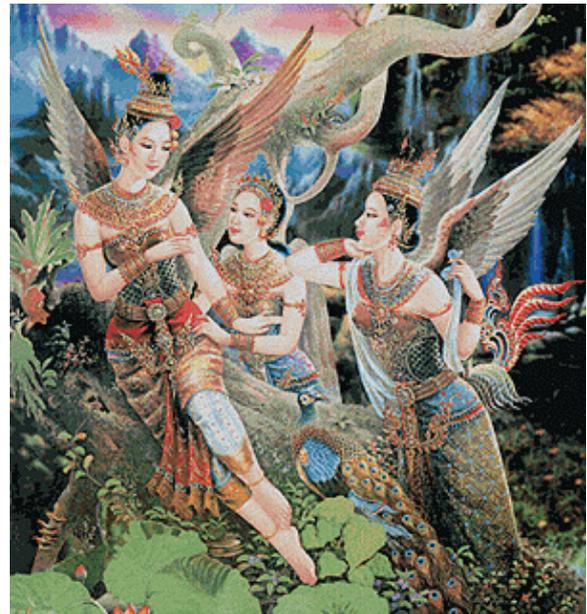
Lord Brahma is shown holding the Hindu holy texts, called the Vedas

Do You Know?

There are really interesting points about Hindu creation! You might compare these with other ideas to see if they are the same or different.

1. There are many universes not just one!
2. Once the universes (the whole material cosmos) is destroyed, it is recreated. This goes on endlessly!
3. God is not just the creator, but also the maintainer and the destroyer.
4. There is life on many other planets (though they also exist in different dimensions!)
5. The material world is described as only 'one quarter' of all existence. The other three quarters is made of eternal, spiritual words, which are never created nor destroyed.

The Hindu holy books speak of life on many other planets. Some life forms are heavenly, others are really terrifying!



A picture of the Kinnaras, who are believed to live in the higher planets



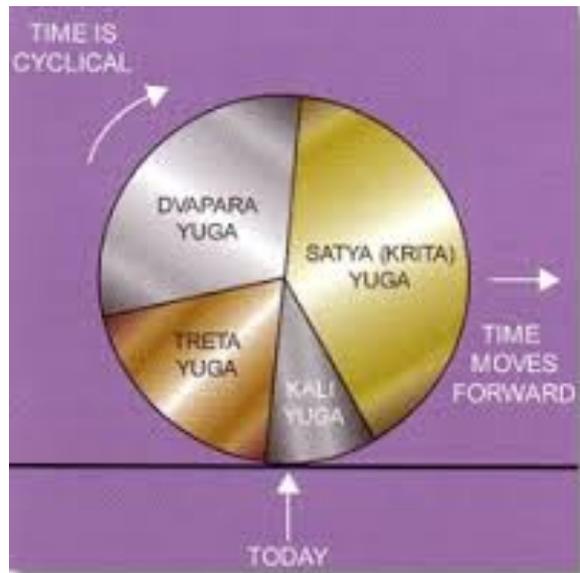
Rama and his brother, Lakshman, fight a Rakshasa, a man-eating resident of the lower worlds

As you can see from the above picture, this universe is an interesting place! Here the eternal soul passes through many different species of life, which are divided into six categories:

1. Aquatics
2. Plants
3. Insects and reptiles
4. Birds
5. Animals
6. Humans

In order to help the soul gain liberation (moksha), Brahma created four different ages.

Each has a specific religious practice. They are called the golden, silver, copper and iron ages. They are shown below with their Sanskrit names



Exercise 12

Do some research into the four ages, and find out:

1. How long each one lasts
2. The recommended practice for each age

We now live in the Iron Age (called Kali yuga). It is the most materialistic age. *Sattva guna* is not doing very well, and *raja-guna* and *tamo-guna* predominate. For this reason, human beings are greedy and destructive. This has had a detrimental effect on the creation and on our environment.



In this age, we must deal with pollution of the air, as well as contamination of our water, and the earth in which we grow our food

2: The Elements of Creation

Sankhya philosophy mentions eight different elements. Three of them are subtle (they are so fine we cannot perceive them with our five senses), the other five correspond to our senses.

It may seem that this is primitive (since science has identified 92 main elements). However, if we think philosophically, it is logical – everything we perceive (or know) must be perceived i.e. experienced). Therefore there are five senses, five elements and five sense organs.

The table below shows them:

1	2	3	4	5
ether	air	fire	water	earth
sound	touch	sight	taste	smell
ear	skin	eye	tongue	nose

According to Sankhya, the elements are produced in a specific order.

The first of the five gross elements is ether (space). From space comes air (which fills up the space). We can detect air not with our eyes, tongue or nose, but through the sense of touch. From air comes fire, which we perceive with the eyes. From fire, is born water, which allows us to taste. And finally, from water comes earth, and the corresponding sense of smell.



The air controls the water, as shown by the wind creating huge ocean waves. In the same way, our mind is able to control matter.

3: A Purpose to Creation?

There are many different creation stories some are religious and others are non-religious (as taught by modern science).

Scientific Theories

Scientific theories deal with 2 main areas of creation, namely:

1. The formation of the universe itself
2. The creation of the various species of life

The most common theories trying to explain these are

1. The Big-Bang theory
2. Darwin's theory of evolution



An artist's impression of the Big-bang

However, there are challenges to both these theories, and hard-to-answer questions, such as, "What happened before the Big-bang? And 'Where did the 'will for survival' come from".

Hindu scripture questions whether life can arise from matter, and suggests that life or spirit is the cause of matter, and not vice-verse.

With scientific theories, it's hard to determine any common purpose to life (i.e. a purpose we all share). Some philosophers say that we have to decide on our own purpose.

Christian Beliefs about Creation

We learn from the chapter called Genesis in the Bible that the world was dark, empty and formless. God's Spirit moved over the waters preparing to perform God's creative Word. And then God began to speak into existence his creation. The day by day account follows:

- **Day 1** - God created light and separated it from darkness, to make "day" and "night."
- **Day 2** - God created an expanse to separate the waters and called it "sky."
- **Day 3** - God created the dry ground and gathered the waters, calling the dry ground "land," and the waters "seas". God also created vegetation (plants and trees).
- **Day 4** - God created the sun, moon and stars to give light to the earth and to separate the day from the night and to mark the days, seasons and years.
- **Day 5** - God created fish and birds, to fill the waters and the sky with life.
- **Day 6** - God created the animals to fill the earth and then man and woman (Adam and Eve), made in his own image. He gave them the earth and every creature to rule over and care for.
- **Day 7** - God had finished his task of creation and so he rested, blessing this seventh day and making it holy.



Michelangelo's famous painting depicts God creating the first man, Adam

The Fall of Man

Darwin's theory suggests that man is evolving, and always improving. However, a Jewish story (also a Christian one) suggests that humans once lived in an elevated state, in a paradise called Eden. Mankind then fell down into a lower, degraded state of existence.

The story tells of how Adam and Eve were sinless and innocent, without selfishness. However, Eve was tempted by a serpent to eat an apple from the 'tree of knowledge'. This was the first 'sin'. Since then, all humans are born sinful because they inherited this original sin. This is like inheriting money, though inheriting sin is not quite as enjoyable!



A painting of Eve eating the 'forbidden fruit'

According to most Christian thought, humans need a saviour to free them from sin (which starts with disobedience to God). This saviour is thought to be Lord Jesus Christ.

Christian scholars have disagreed on the precise meaning of the story of Adam and Eve. Some say it is literal – it really did happen. Others say it is symbolic, an allegory. For them, the serpent may stand for Satan, or for envy of God. The apple may represent knowledge (perhaps of a life separate from God).

Whatever the idea, most Christians believe there is a purpose to creation. It is God's purpose, which is to reunite all souls with Him in heaven, and for them to be happy forever.

Word Watch

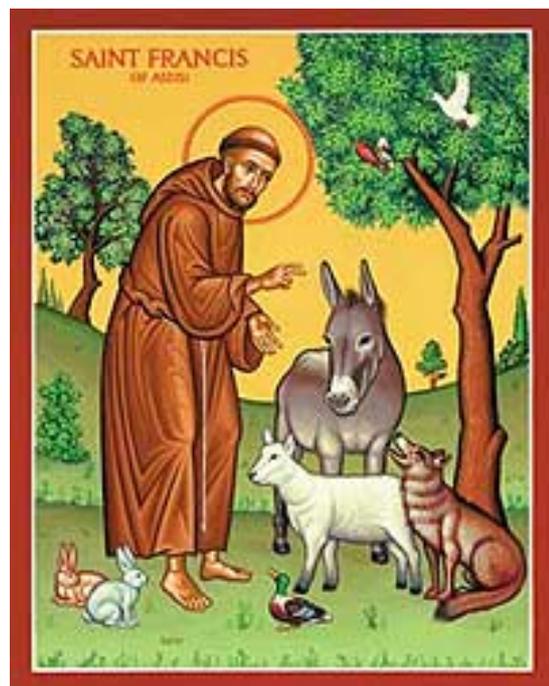
Metaphor: something we know or is concrete which helps us understand something new or abstract. For example, "God is my fortress."

Allegory: a story which is not literally true, but symbolic (with a hidden or suggested meaning),



The Eden Project in Cornwall is named after the paradise mentioned in the Bible

Most Christians don't believe that animals have souls – only humans do. However, some Christians have shown great interest in God's creation and in the welfare of all living creatures. They include the patron saint of animals, St. Francis, who lived in Italy in a place called Assisi.



St. Francis showed great kindness to animals

Week 6: Hinduism and the Environment

This week, we start to consider how what we have learned over the last five lessons is relevant today. We will focus on perhaps the biggest human challenge, namely the environment.

The project for this week will also help us summarise all we have learned, and to personally apply it in our lives.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the week we will be able to:

1. List common environmental problems
2. Identify Hindu teachings relevant to the environment
3. List environmental projects run according to Hindu principles.
4. Evaluating whether Hinduism can help solve environmental problems.

1: What are our Environmental Problems?

Environmental problems go back many centuries and may be as old as the first human settlements. However, it was only during the 20th Century that they were widely recognised. Now, practically everyone knows about them! And they may be getting worse, due to industrial and technological advancement and what is called 'consumerism' – the habit of acquiring more and more belongings.



Smog in London, December 1952, may have killed 4,000 people. Smog is a mixture of smoke and fog. The term smog was first used in 1911 in New York.

Do You Know?

The following list gives you an idea of how big our environmental problems are.

1. Pollution
2. Global warming
3. Overpopulation
4. Natural resource depletion
5. Waste disposal
6. Climate change
7. Loss of biodiversity
8. Deforestation
9. Ocean system collapse
10. Ozone layer depletion
11. Acid rain
12. Lack of drinking water
13. Urban sprawl
14. Health problems
15. Genetic engineering
16. Need for clean, renewable energy.

Many of these ills are linked together. For example, global warming is causing the polar ice-shelves to melt and then the oceans to rise, causing danger to polar bears and other wildlife.



A polar bear clinging to a melting iceberg has become a modern emblem of environmental concern

So, it's very complex! It's hard to establish a single cause. However, many of the problems seem to stem from modern lifestyles and mass-consumerism. This is one reason we have to get rid of so much waste, including computers, televisions and mobile phones; some of them contain poisonous

materials. It may be that the problems lie mainly in human character and traits such as greed, exploitation and ignoring the consequences of our actions.

2: Hindu theology and the Environment

What do Hindu and other religious teachings, say about the environment? Hinduism is at least 5,000 years old, so it grew mainly in rural and countryside settings. Even Lord Krishna lived, when he was young, in a simple village with cows. He taught about the importance of a simple life, but also being very thoughtful.



Lord Krishna lifts the famous hill called Govardhana

Below are some Hindu teachings that may help us understand (1) why there are environmental problems (2) how we can solve them

Do You Know?

The following are some Hindu teachings connected to nature and the environment.

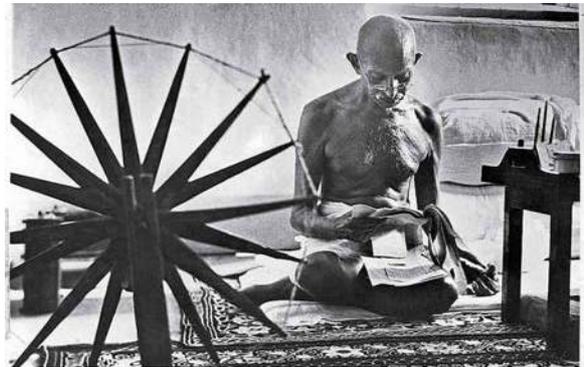
1. **The triguna** (especially as linked to the modern ideal of 'sustainability')
2. **God's role in creation** (the Trimurti and other deities)
3. **The divine present in nature** (as through the worship of sacred hills, rivers, animals and plants)
4. **The need to think carefully** (guided by God within the heart)
5. **Ahimsa, nonviolence towards all creatures** (and cow-protection)
6. **The law of Karma** (and the idea of global karma)
7. **Finding happiness within** (e.g through yoga) instead of always looking outside

Exercise 13

In groups, discuss how the Hindu teachings (shown above) can be used to help us look after the environment better.

3. Hindu Environmental Projects

Many Hindu people try to apply their philosophy and religion to help save planet Earth. Even many years ago, in the first half of the 20th Century, Mahatma Gandhi advocated a simple life, free of modern technology. He was very inspired by reading the Bhagavad-gita.



Gandhi at his own spinning wheel. He objected to British exploitation and the vast cotton mills in Manchester.

Today, a few Hindus follow his example, and teach that we need to live a life free from greed and mass-production.

Hindu Environmental Projects

Modern Hindu projects include the following:

- Protecting sacred forests
- Saving the sacred rivers, such as the Yamuna
- Cow Protection (as at Bhaktivedanta Manor)
- Ahimsa Milk (see below)



Ahimsa milk is an important British environmental project run by devotees of Lord Krishna

Sastra Says

Those whose minds are engaged within, who are always busy working for the welfare of all living beings ... achieve liberation in the Supreme.

Bhagavad-Gita Chapter 5, verse 25