

Path to Dharma

தர்ம நெறி



News Letter

20

செய்தி மடல்

Fundamentals of Hinduism for beginners

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ஷேத்திர(வயல்)விநாயகர் ஆலயம்,
ஸ்ரீ முன்னேஸ்வரம், சிலாபம், இலங்கை.

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Fundamentals of Hinduism for beginners

Lesson 1. An account of the history of Hinduism through the Ages

i. An Introduction to the term Hinduism

In nomenclature the term *Hinduism* was initially introduced by the English scholars from the 17th century to denote the religious, philosophical, and cultural traditions native to India.

The Rig Veda, an ancient religious script refer the land of the Indo-Aryans as *Sapta Sindhu* (the land of the seven rivers in northwestern South Asia, one of which being the Indus).

In Persian language the Indus River is referred to as *Hindū* , first encountered in the Old Persian word *Hindu* (həndu), corresponding to Vedic Sanskrit *Sindhu*, the Indus River.

The term '*Hindu*' was referred to those who lived in the Indian subcontinent on or beyond the "Sindhu".

The Persian term (Middle Persian *Hindūk*, New Persian *Hindū*) entered India with the Delhi Sultanate and appears in South Indian and Kashmiri texts from at least 1323 CE, and increasingly so during British rule.

In Arabic language, the term *al-Hind* (the Hind) also refers to 'the land of the people of modern day India'.

ii. The history of Hinduism through the Ages

Hinduism is the oldest religion of the world. It is the belief of the varied factions of community of the area of India, and other neighboring areas. Hinduism is the third largest religion of the world with approximately 940 million people.

Hinduism is often stated to be the "oldest living major tradition". In these regions there are several other primeval cultures which were influenced by the Hindu religious faith. Hinduism is supposed to have been practiced in the Indian subcontinent, in the west Asia and Southeast Asia for over 6000 years. Hinduism is formed of diverse traditions

Western researchers of history pronounced that Hinduism originated from the cultural practices of "**Aryan invaders**" to the Indus valley in 2500 BC. Hindu intellectuals proved that Hinduism was prevailing for over 7 to 10 thousand years all over India and West Asia.

The farmers and wandering hunters of ancient India belonged to numerous groups. They followed many different faiths and diverse beliefs with their own manners of religious rituals and mode of prayers. All these miscellaneous beliefs assimilated with Hindu religion.

Lesson 2. The prehistoric state of Hinduism

There were varied forms of practices followed by many racial and ethnic groups that were in existence. The most primitive Hindu civilization that was in existence is termed "**Indus Valley Civilization**." It was in existence during the era 2500 BC or may be even earlier. The social order at that time worshipped many Deities. The members of the community followed a laid down of religious rites and prayers in vast congregations. At that period there were many similar groups of people existed in other parts of ancient India and in regions of West and Southeast Asia. The members of some the communities were called "**Dravidians**". The civilians of the Dravidian communities worshiped to images and marker stones in tiny buildings in congregations. At that period of time there were battles, incursion and occupation by several tribes of farmers and hunters. Some of the tribes are termed "**Aryans**" by the scholars. These tribes had dissimilar religious faith and practice compared to the Dravidians namely some rituals around fire,(homa) in the open air. Their main entity of prayers were **natural forces**. These two varied types of faiths namely Dravidians and Aryans amalgamated over a long period of time evolving into the Vedic and Agamic structure of Hindu religious practice.

Lesson 3 The development of Hinduism through the Ages

Historians are unable to predict the precise dates of the source of the faith of Hindu religion or the periods of the various original scripts were written.

The early Puranas refer to "**Devas**" and "**Asuras**" repeatedly combating battles. There is a possibility that these narratives are based on such historical events. In most of the Hindu mythologies Devas were considered as the good quality (Dharma) and Asuras (Adharma) were the dreadful characters. Devas and Asuras are prayed when religious rituals are performed to Fire, as mentioned in Rig Veda. Even in these mythologies (Puranas), minute data are given about the period of events or the name of the writer.

These works were passed on as recitation, verbally for quite a long era of time. During later periods, various Rishis arranged these Puranas in appropriate orders. Hence these records of arrangements of the historical dates of these events are apparently indistinguishable. Recently efforts have been undertaken to sub-divide the period into some convenient chronological order with clear landmarks.

The commencement of Hindu religious period is known as the **Vedic Age**, which approximately begins from **2500 BC** or even very much earlier, and runs up to **560 BC**.

This era is subdivided into the age of Manthras, age of Brahmanas and age of Upanishads by some researchers.

Then the **age of Vedanga and Kalpa Suthra** follows the Maurian Empire from **560 BC to 200 BC**.

Then the **age of the Epics** is during the rise of Guptha Empire, from **200 BC to 300 AD**.

Following this is the **age of Puranas, Agamas and Dharsanas** from **300 AD to 650 AD**.

The **age later Puranas** is from **650 AD to 1000 AD**.

The **Bhakthi movements** begin from **1000 AD to 18th Century**.

Lesson 4: Origin of Hindu Faith

Hindu Religion is not based on any authority, single book or the words of any single prophet (guru -teacher) or. Hinduism is based on the Eternal Truth. There are thousands of scripts (books), religious spiritual literature scriptures to guide the devotees. There are numerous basic philosophies for the followers, from which he or she can select the appropriate one suitable to him or her.

Each person is permitted to learn, query, doubt, investigate reason out and finally acknowledge the teachings after their personal spiritual understanding.

The earliest known sets of scripts (books) of Hindu Religion are identified as "**Vedas**." They are of "Divine origin" [*Apaurus.e'ya*]. The vast body of Hindu scriptures, divided into Śruti ("revealed") and Smriti ("remembered"), lay the foundation of Hindu beliefs, which primarily include dharma, karma, ahimsa and reincarnation.

They are supposed to be unalterable, and considered as the utmost spiritual knowledge of the Eternal Truth. In the commencement of each era [*Kalpa*], the Supreme God, **Brahmam**, creates Himself as **Brahma**, and gives Him the knowledge of Vedas as His own breath. The Universe and the rest are created by Brahma out of the sound of Pranava Manthra "AUM" ("OM") and the knowledge of Vedas.

Lesson 5: The scripts of Hinduism (Sruthis, Smrithis, Agamas and Puranas).

The first collection of Indian philosophy that was written down was the Vedas. The word 'Veda' comes from the Sanskrit vid, meaning knowledge - the Vedas are 'sacred knowledge'. Their exact date is controversial, it is possible that the knowledge dates back 10,000 years BC, and were first written around 3,000 BC.

The primary authorities of Hinduism are known as **Vedas**. They were revealed to the Rishis,(the sages or seers), as an intuition by direct revelations from the Divine.

Sage Veda Vyasa categorized in an orderly manner the four Vedas, **Rig Veda**, **Yajur Veda**, **Sama Veda** and **Atharva Veda**. His disciples Paila, Vaisampaya, Jaimini and Sumanta educated the four Vedas to their disciples. Latter the concepts of Veda were passed down to their student generations by guru-shishya teaching - learning methodology of education.

The knowledge of four Vedas was passed down from generations to generations by memorizing and reciting the verses for thousands of years. The **Rig Veda** consists of 1028

Suukthas collected as 21 Sakhas (sections) with hymns in praise of the Divine. **Yajur Veda**, consists of 109 Sakhas, mainly consists of Hymns used in religious rituals and rites. **Saama Veda** consists of 1000 Sakhas, and it is composed of Verses from Rig Veda set to music. **Atharva Veda** consists of 50 Sakhas with 598 hymns, gives many rites and rituals to guide man in his daily activities and materialistic life, to ward off evil and destroy enemies.

The **Vedas** are composed with numerous Parts. They have the **Manthras** (Hymns) for prayers, the **Brahmanas**, the explanatory treatises for using the manthras in rituals, the **Aranyakas**, the forest books and the **Upanishads**, the portion of knowledge. The Aranyakas are the mystical interpretations of the manthras and rituals. The Vedas and the Upanishads are the foremost in authority, importance and antiquity.

The **Upanishads** divulge some of the supreme truths ever revealed to human. They contain the essence of spiritual truth and philosophy of the Vedas. This directs mankind all the way through the ages in search for spiritual enlightenment. The Muktika Upanishad gives a list of the names of 108 Upanishads. Out of which 12 are exceptionally important.

It is accepted that the following ten main Upanishads namely Isa Upanishads, Kena Upanishads, Katha Upanishads, Prasna Upanishads, Mundaka Upanishads, Mandukya Upanishads, Taittiriya Upanishads, Aitareya Upanishads, Chandogya Upanishads and Brihadaranyaka Upanishads are the most authoritative and ancient. In addition to these the Kaushitaki Upanishads, Svetasvatara Upanishads, Mahanarayaniya Upanishads and Maitrayaniya Upanishads are also taken into account as they have been referred to by many early authorities. These belong to the different Vedas as shown below:

1. Rig Veda

i. Aitareya Upanishad ii. Kaushitaki Upanishad

2. Yajur Veda

Krishna Yajur Veda

- i. Katha Upanishad
- ii. Svetasvatara Upanishad
- iii. Maitrayaniya Upanishad
- iv. Mahanarayaniya Upanishad
- v. Taittiriya Upanishad

Sukla Yajur Veda

i. Isavasya Upanishad ii. Brihadaranyaka Upanishad

3. Sama Veda i. Kena Upanishad ii. Chandogya Upanishad

4. Atharva Veda i. Mundaka Upanishad ii. Mandukya Upanishad iii. Prasna Upanishad

Agamas are Divine in source and are considered authoritative texts. These are independent of Vedas, explain the worship of God in various manifest forms. In addition these lay out the rules for construction of Temples and other places of worship.

There are other texts which are explanatory treatises to guide us in proper path. **Vedangas** are explanatory limbs of the Vedic texts, rituals and astrology. They are **Siksha**, **Vyakarna**, **Chandas** and **Niruktha** which deal with the usage, pronunciation and grammar of the Vedic

language; **Jyothisha** which deals with astronomy and astrology. **Kalpa Suthras** explain various rituals, laying out the area for homa (Yagna), ethics, customs and laws for the domestic life. There are four **Upa-Vedas** on science and art of health, archery, music and politics [Ayurveda, Dhanur-veda, Gandharva-veda and Arthasasthra]. **Dharsanas** are called the *Upangaa*, texts by various authors explaining various pathways of understanding and the practice of the Vedic philosophy and teachings. The **Smrithis** or the **Sasthras** are the sacred law codes written based on the Vedic teachings. **Ithihasas** and **Puranas** carry these teachings through stories to practice the faith. When the human civilization began to settle down as groups in tiny areas, as cultivators, hunters and merchants, (ancient Neolithic age), inhabitants felt the societal requirement for appeal to a supreme being which later evolved as various forms of theology and philosophy.

The Agamas

The Agamas are theological treatises and practical manuals of divine worship. Along with Vedas these scriptures too, extolled as primary sources. The Agamas include the Tantras, Mantras and Yantras. These are treatises explaining the external worship of God, in idols, temples etc. All the Agamas composed of the following items.

1. Jnana or Knowledge
2. Yoga or Concentration
3. Kriya or Esoteric Ritual
4. Charya or Exoteric Worship

They also give elaborate details about ontology and cosmology, liberation, devotion, meditation, philosophy of temple rituals, mantras, mystic diagrams, charms and spells, temple-building, image-making, domestic observances, social rules, social obligations public festivals etc. The Agamas are divided into three sections: the Vaishnava, the Saiva, and the Sakta. The chief sects of Hinduism, are Vaishnavism, Saivism and Saktism, base their doctrines and dogmas on their respective Agamas.

Each one of these group of people developed their own systems for worship and religious practices. Nearly all groups prayed for diverse forms of natural forces. When wandering societies intermingled with each other through journeys and conflicts, several different varieties of worships coexisted.

Nearly all the primitive social groups and their civilizations developed later from these groups had various forms of worship of different Gods. The different Gods, were worshiped, one for each one form of force or activity.

Lesson 6: Concept of one Supreme Reality

During the ancient period, every person of the itinerant and agricultural groups of people in different areas, who were worshipping the different forms of "Gods" was permitted to get the divine spiritual experience and true revelation of the Divine.

All of them acknowledged different variations in the manner of faith and mode of rituals performed during worships.

This resulted in accepting tolerance in variations and beliefs in many paths to One Supreme Reality.

Thus Hindus acknowledge in one supreme God who is without form and has no attributes takes the diverse outward appearance for the benefit of the people to realize Him.

Lesson 7 One God (The Supreme Reality) in many forms

Advaita philosophy of Vedas, shows that the Absolute formless God as **Nirguna Brahman**. He is evident with His veil of Maya as **Saguna Brahman**, in the numerous outward appearances which are worshipped in the temples and other places, for the common man to realize. Each one is permitted to worship to any of the appearances elucidated in the **Agamas, Itihasas and Puranas**.

All devotees are familiar with the fact that, all these diverse forms guide to the One and the only Divine Force. The worship of a range of forms by the devotees are merely to concentrate on to a form for rituals, worships or meditations.

"Ekam Sat Vipra Bahudhah Vadhanthi" -- Truth (The Supreme Reality) is One God in His true nature is far beyond understanding.

Lesson 8: The Principles of Various Systems of Hindu Philosophy

The basic principle of Hinduism is the belief in one Supreme Being who is without forms or characteristics, worshipped in any one of several of His forms of manifestations.

- i. They believe in nonviolence or **Ahimsa**.
- ii. They believe in Divine duty or **Dharma**
- iii. They believe in activities without attachment or **Karma yoga**
- iv. They believe in the needs for a devotion and surrender to God or **Bhakthi**
- v. They believe in the indestructibility of the soul, cycle of rebirth and the ultimate liberation of the Soul or **Moksha**..

The basic philosophies are given in the various Upanishads of the Vedas. The six **Dharsanas** are explanatory texts written by ancient sages for these Upanishads.

The six philosophical treatises are:

1. **Nyaya**, the philosophy of logic, maintains that the atom is the cause of the cosmic manifestation Nyaya propounded by *Rishi Gautama*.
2. **Vaisesika**, philosophy of specialised logic, maintains that the combination of atoms is the cause of the cosmic manifestation propounded by *Rishi Kanada*.
3. **Sankhya**, philosophy of analytical study, maintains that the material nature is the cause of the cosmic manifestation propounded by *Rishi Kapila*.
4. **Yoga**, philosophy of mystic perfections, maintains that universal consciousness is the cause of the cosmic manifestation propounded by *Rishi Patanjali*.
5. **Purva (karma) mimamsa**, philosophy of actions and reactions, maintains that fruitive activities are the cause of the cosmic manifestation propounded by *Rishi Jaimini*.
6. **Uttara (brahma) mimamsa [Vedantha]** propounded by *Rishi Vyasa* has two different categories: The impersonalists maintain that the impersonal Brahman effulgence is the cause of the cosmic manifestation.

Vaisheshika, Sankhya and Vedantha Dharsanas deal with theoretical aspect of the religious faith, prayers and the philosophy.

Nyaya, Yoga and Purva Mimamsa systems explain the practice of the faith with analysis, logic and pure rituals. They did not stress the importance of a concept of prayers to God.

Sri Vyasa Maharishi founded the System of **Vedantha** which is the most admired Vedic Philosophy. In addition Maharishi wrote the **Dharma Sasthras** based on the Philosophy of Vedantha.

According to the Philosophy Vedantha, Brahman develops Itself into the universe for Its own *lila*(sporting) without undergoing any change and without ceasing to be Itself.

Lesson 9: One Truth as perceived in diverse approach

Many gurus (Acharyas) provided comprehensive enlightening texts on the established philosophies and practices of different beliefs.

Sankara explained the theory of **Advaita**. According to this speculation, the Brahman is absolute and formless. He appears as the **Saguna Brahman** in a variety of forms for the sanctimonious worship of devotees. The **Supreme Brahman** and all His creations are one and the same. All have taken different forms owing to the veil of **Maya** and due to our ignorance or avidhya.

Ramanuja explained the theory of **Visishtadvaita**. According to this thought Brahman is Narayana, a personal God with attributes. It is not homogenous, has elements of plurality and manifests in a diversified world.

Madhva explained the theory of **Dvaita**. According to this hypothesis it is strictly dualistic. The individual souls do not attain equality with God. According to this suggestion God is separate from His creations, who are real and dependent on God.

Meykandar explained the theory of **Saiva Siddhanta** another philosophy that is slightly different from the above

Lesson 10 The observance of Hinduism as in Vedas and Agamas

The Philosophical knowledge and teaching of Hinduism has continued to exist in the history of mankind for several thousands of years and still considered admired generally due to the application of the theoretical concepts in the daily practical life of common man and specially due to the sound principles on which its practice is based. The **Dharma Sasthras** and **Smritis** teach us of normal conduct in performing our work.

The Hindu way of life.

The spiritual destination of a Hindu is to unite with the Almighty God. This process is known as moksha. A Hindu believes that till moksha is attained, one will be repeatedly reincarnated in order that the person may work towards self-realization of the truth.

Purusharthas

Four aims in human life (purusharthas);

Purusha is the human being and artha is the objective. Hence Purusharthas means the objectives of man.

1. Dharma (righteousness), the code for leading one's life.
2. Artha (material wealth), the pursuit of material gain by lawful means
3. Kama (desire) determines the reincarnation of an individual according to one's deeds in the previous births.

4. Moksha (salvation) the release of the soul (Atman) from the cycle of rebirth.

Every individual in a society is expected to achieve these four objectives and seek fulfillment in his life before departing from here. The concept of Purusharthas clearly establishes the fact that Hinduism does not advocate a life of self negation and hardship, but a life of balance, achievement and fulfillment.

Dharma

The word Dharma means that which upholds this entire creation. It is a Divine law that is inherent and invisible, but responsible for all existence. Dharma exists in all planes, in all aspects and at all levels of creation. As far as human life is considered dharma consists of all that an individual undertakes in harmony with divine expectations and his own inner spiritual aspirations, actions that would ensure order and harmony with in him and in the environment in which he lives.

Dharma is the appropriate rules and regulations of one's duty, which literally means "**that which holds**" the universe and its beings. They are classified as **Samanya Dharma** or the general and universal rules and **Visesha Dharma** or specific personal rules for each individual. They give peace, joy, strength and tranquillity.

Since this world is deluded, a human being may not know what is right and what is wrong or what dharma is and what adharma is. Hence he should rely upon the scriptures and adhere to the injunctions contained there in. Dharma for a human being is to develop divine virtues and perform actions that are in harmony with the divine laws. Dharma is the first aim because it is at the root of everything and upholds everything. Any action performed without observing dharma is bound to bring misery and suffering and delay ones salvation.

Earlier dharmashastras (law books) provided guidance to people in their daily lives and helped them to adhere to dharma. These law books were written for a particular time frame work and hence are no more relevant to the modern world. The best way to know what dharma is and what is adharma, is to follow the religious scriptures such as the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads or any other Vedic scriptures

Artha

The word Artha means wealth. Hinduism recognizes the importance of material wealth for the overall happiness and well being of an individual. A house holder requires wealth, to perform many duties to uphold dharma and ensure the welfare and progress of his family and society. Hinduism correctly places material wealth as the second most important objective in human life.

Hinduism advocates austerity, simplicity and detachment, but does not glorify poverty. Hinduism also emphasizes the need to observe dharma while amassing the wealth. Hinduism believes that both spiritualism and materialism are important for the salvation of human beings. In earlier days Artha shastras (scriptures on wealth) provided necessary guidance to people on the finer aspects of managing their wealth. Kautilya's Artha shastra, which is probably a compilation of many independent works, gives us a glimpse of how money matters were handled in ancient days.

Kama

The word Kama gives the meaning, desire and in particular sense, sexual desire. The Bhagavad gita informs us that desire is an aspect of delusion and one has to be wary of its various movements and manifestations. The best way to deal with desires is to develop detachment and perform desireless actions without seeking the fruit of ones actions and making an offering of all the actions to God. By this our actions would not bind us to the cycle of births and deaths. Hinduism permits sexual freedom so long as it is not in conflict with dharma. Hindu scriptures emphasize that the purpose of sex is procreation and perpetuation of family and society, while the purpose of dharma is to ensure order in the institution of family and society.

Just as the dharmashastras were written for the sake of dharma, and artha shastras for artha, kama shastras were composed in ancient days for providing guidance in matters of sex. We have lost many of them because of the extreme secrecy and social disapproval associated with the subject.

Artha and **Kama** are the materialistic aspiration and passion, that too govern our events. If not one seeks the material benefits and pleasures within the scope of Dharma, it will cause pain with greed and lust.

Moksha

The word Moksha means absence of moha or delusion. Delusion is caused by the actions of the triple gunas. When a person overcomes these gunas, he attains liberation. The gunas can be overcome by detachment, self control, surrender to god and offering ones actions to God. If dharma is at the center of human life, beyond moksha there is no human life, but only a life divine.

In short Moksha is the relief from pain and suffering and ultimate liberation that is the main reason for all our actions.

The individual soul (Atman) unites with Brahman the universal soul. There are different ways to moksha.

1. Gathering spiritual experiences knowledge through yoga and meditation.
2. Real devotion to god
3. Serving selflessly for the good of society.

The Hindu can choose one or all four of the following paths to achieve Moksha;

1. The path of knowledge - Jnana-Yoga
Spiritual knowledge -leading to the knowledge of the relationship between the soul (atman) and God (Brahman)
2. The path of meditation - Dhyana-yoga
The aim is to reach the real self within you and become one with Brahman
3. The Path of Devotion - Bhakti-yoga
worshipping a particular god in full faith during the life in actions, words and deeds.
4. The path of good works - Karma-yoga

Performing all the duties correctly without the expectation of any sort of reward throughout your life. Every person has his Swabhava (natural being) fitting him for his Swadharma (natural function). We cannot change either our natural being or our natural function because nature cannot be forced into a change by our whims and fancies.

Lesson 11: Applications of the knowledge of Hindu philosophy in life

The philosophy and ethics of practice of the rituals are given in the respective scripts of Hinduism by the sages. The rituals are considered as one of the easy paths for the eternal bliss.

The **four Yogas** of Hinduism show the path to spiritual discipline of the behavior of mankind.

Karma Yoga is the correct path of performing day to day duties without greed or desire and the actions carried out without looking for the remunerations of benefit or loss.

Raja Yoga is the discipline of the control of our mind and body. It trains us the breathing, meditation, concentration and physical exercise and a state of equanimity of the mind as a natural reaction to all actions.

Bhakthi Yoga is the spiritual discipline of supreme devotion and love of God. It trains to surrender to God at any time. Bhakthi Yoga coaches the devotee to see and feel God in all living beings and in all activities.

Jnana Yoga is the path of obtaining Spiritual knowledge through activities, study, meditation and devotion.

Vedas describe three personality characters namely, Sathvika, Rajasika and Tamasika.

The **Sathvika Gunas** are characteristics in devotees who belief in the faith of Dharma.

The **Rajasika Gunas** are characteristics in devotees who enjoyed some amount of worldly enjoyments directed by desire and ego, which are Artha and Kama.

The **Thamasika Gunas** are characteristics in devotees who have less knowledge of the appropriate Dharma. They are ambitious solely by Artha and Kama which are enthusiasm, greediness and desire.

The Yoga path of spiritual discipline promotes the ways to follow the most superior Sathva Guna and at the same time shows the techniques to suppress the detrimental Artha and Kama without the proper Dharma.

A devotee following the proper Dharma concepts and the accepted Karma experiences a sense of peace and equanimity of mind and everlasting happiness. The Guna and effects of Karma of a person, determines the rebirth and ultimate liberation of that individual.

The **Vedas** illustrate the details of rituals and Manthras for practice of Hinduism.

The **Agamas** give the details of worship of the Supreme Reality. There are several manners of practice of the Hindu faith. The popular ones are the Advaita, Visishta-adhvaitha and Dvaita systems.

The **Nirguna Brahman** is without forms or attributes and is Impersonal. It is hard to visualize and comprehend for ordinary people due to their ignorance and limitations. Therefore, to make this Universal Spirit easily understandable,

The **Saguna Brahman**, is God with many forms and attributes who is known as the One Great God (Ishwara). Thus the average man or woman is able to offer their prayers to the Divine in any one of the several forms

Lesson 12 The Itihasas and Puranas

The **Itihasas** narrates the stories of absorbing interest and importance, by which most of the fundamentals of Hinduism are indelibly impressed. The laws of Smritis and the principles of the Vedas are stressed deeply in the minds of the common people, through the noble characters

and courageous deeds of the distinguished heroes. The actual concepts of Hinduism are set into the minds of the mass from these sublime stories.

Ithihasas, (meaning "*It happened thus*") are chronological observations of early era explaining such incarnations of Vishnu as Sri Rama in Ramayana and Sri Krishna in Mahabharatha.

The Puranas cover the intermediate period between the Vedic and the Classical epochs. Cast in the form of parables and narratives, became the scripture of the common. Apart from their religious and often sectarian significance, they furnish a picture of social, political and cultural life and comprise an astonishingly varied repertory of folklore and information regarding diverse topics including philosophy, ethics, legal institutions, popular festivals, and several arts. They deal even with subjects like grammar, prosody, rhetoric, archery and care of horses and elephants.

The Puranas belong to the class of Suhrit-Samhitas and they have five characteristics (Pancha Lakshana):

1. History
2. Cosmology
3. Secondary creation
4. Genealogy of kings
5. Manvantharas

The two great Hindu Epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, are the main mythology. According to recent evidences it is proved that both are accounts of real events, not merely mythological. *Itihasas*, literally means 'that which happened'. The epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are interwoven in Hindu philosophy and serve as parables and sources of devotion for Hindus into the present day.

Lesson 13 Manifestations of the Supreme and forms of worship

Though different people worship different forms of the one and the same god, it will be clear that all rituals in many forms are for the same Brahman. "Like the rain water from the sky falls and flows to the same ocean, let all my prayers in every direction reach the same almighty." These are some of the popular words studied and recited by every devotee to explain "**One God in many forms**".

Bhakti is an uncomplicated form of worship in the path of worship observance of Hindu faith. This form of worship is believed as the total surrender to the Divine superior which is the ultimate objective of life.

The initial phase of devotional mode of worship is called the "**Apara Bhakti**". In this manner of worship the devotee prays for some worldly request as a personalized worship.

After that the devotee is totally keen in his devotion and love to his personal God, (Ishta-Devata). The devotee sees the Divine (Him) all over and completely surrenders to Him with divine love. At the final stage the devotee does not request anything in return as a favor.

The highest stage of devotional mode of worship is called the "**Para Bhakthi**". Here the devotee may see God as his father, as his mother, as a personal friend, as a master etc. The devotee perceives God in every thing and every thing in God.

Lesson 14 Spiritual Discipline

Karma Yoga, is the performance all actions with devotion as an offering to God and not own benefit without expecting any favorable or unfavorable results from such action.

Carrying out an action with an aspiration for return of any yield is imperfect as it will be the cause of pain.

The Smritis of Hinduism set up the common conduct, ethics and customs for the devotees. each one is specified certain obligations in accordance to their age, personality, qualification, aspiration, past actions and certain instinctive qualities.

Hinduism stipulates a number of rituals for different circumstances. Every one needs to perform certain Karmas and rituals as part of their daily duty. Funeral rituals and annual rites are conducted for the departed souls. Many other rituals are conducted depending on the needs.