

Sixth Edition



Scriptures of the WORLD'S RELIGIONS

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James Fieser | John Powers

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the World's
Religions*

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SIXTH EDITION

edited by

James Fieser

University of Tennessee at Martin

John Powers

Deakin University



SCRIPTURES OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS, SIXTH EDITION

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About the Authors

JOHN POWERS is Professor of Asian Studies in the College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University, and a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Humanities. He specializes in Buddhist philosophy and history, particularly of India and Tibet. He has published seventeen books and more than ninety articles, including *A Bull of a Man: Images of Masculinity, Sex, and the Body in Indian Buddhism* (Harvard, 2009) and *The Buddha Party: How China Works to Define and Control Tibetan Buddhism* (Oxford, 2016).

JAMES FIESER is a Research Professor in the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation, Deakin University. He received his B.A. from Berea College, and his M.A. and Ph.D. in philosophy from Purdue University. He is author, co-author or editor of ten textbooks, including *Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong* (8/e 2016), *Business Ethics* (2/e 2016), *Philosophy: A Historical Survey with Essential Readings* (9/e 2014), *Scriptures of the World's Religions* (6/e 2016), *A Historical Introduction to Philosophy* (2003), and *Moral Philosophy through the Ages* (2001). He has edited and annotated the ten-volume *Early Responses to Hume* (2/e 2005) and the five-volume *Scottish Common Sense Philosophy* (2000). He is the founder and general editor of the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* web site (www.iep.utm.edu).

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Preface

Religion is one of the most complex phenomena of world civilization, and several avenues are open for understanding the major faith traditions. We could attempt to have firsthand encounters with those religions by talking with their believers, visiting their sacred sites, and attending classes for converts. Alternatively, we could attempt a more arm's length approach by reading surveys of the various religions, some written by believers defending their faith, others by critics, and even more by academic historians or anthropologists. Yet another avenue is to examine the collected sacred texts revered by these religions themselves.

This book takes the last approach. There are special benefits to exploring the world's religions through selections from their scriptures. In most cases the sacred texts are the oldest written documents in the tradition, and we gain a sense of immediate connection with these religions by studying the same documents that followers have been reading for millennia. The texts are also foundational to a religion's most important doctrines, rituals, and social and ethical positions. In this way, they explain the authoritative basis of traditions that might otherwise seem incomprehensible or even groundless. Finally, the texts have become the most sacred symbols of these traditions, which conveys the sense that we are on holy ground each time we read from them.

Since very few scriptures were originally written in the English language, these are selections of *translated* scriptures and to that end we have tried to find the most recent and readable translations. Some scriptures are still available only in older translation, and we have modernized these in view of recent scholarship. Unique to this anthology are several scriptures in Asian languages newly translated by John Powers.

An exhaustive collection of world scriptures would be over a thousand volumes in length; the challenge was selecting the right ones to fit into an anthology of this limited size. The first difficult choice was to confine the texts to those of religions that are

practiced today. This excludes dead traditions that are mainly of academic interest, such as ancient Greek, Mesopotamian, and Egyptian religions. Second, we gave preference to texts that discuss the lives and teachings of religious founders and present central doctrines. These are not only of greater intrinsic interest, but including them ensures that the essential differences between religions emerge. Third, we tried to select scriptures that are accessible to lay practitioners, and not just theologians or scholars. Finally, we placed emphasis on religions that have a wide sphere of influence; specifically Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. We cover less influential religions more briefly; specifically Jainism, Shinto, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, and the Baha'i Faith.

In spite of the above boundaries of inclusion, the notion of *scripture* that we use here is sufficiently broad to include three strata of religious texts. The first stratum involves texts that the religions themselves consider most sacred. The term *protocanonical* typically denotes this level, and it includes works such as the Buddhist *Pali Canon*, the Muslim *Qur'an*, and the Jewish *Tanakh*. The second stratum involves more peripheral sacred texts, often termed *deuterocanonical*. This includes collections of oral law, such as the Jewish *Talmud* and the Muslim *Hadith*, as well as texts on the lives of religious founders, such as the Sikh *Janam-sakhi*. The third stratum involves sectarian texts that at some time in the history of that religion were considered scripture by members of that sect. Examples are the Jewish *Zohar* and the Christian *Book of Mormon*.

The readings within each religion are categorized according to the inherent structure of the scriptural canons themselves, following either their original dates of composition or their historically structured narratives. We prefer this historical approach to alternative arrangements that categorize texts by topic because the former is more harmonious with the way each religion understands its own canon. It also enables readers to gain a sense of the historical development of ideas and practices, which is often lost in topical arrangements.

The most visible changes to this new edition are the inclusion of the following new selections:

Judaism

- New selection from Talmud on why God is jealous of idols
- New selection of stories about Baal Shem Tov
- New selection by Moses Mendelssohn on revealed law
- New selection by Solomon Schechter on Jewish dogmas

Christianity

- New selection from the Gospel of Judas
- New selection by Thomas Campbell on the Restoration Movement

Islam:

- New selection from the Koran on the birth of Jesus
- New selection from the Hadith on the essence of Islam
- New selection of stores about Rabi'a

Indigenous Religions

- New selection from Melanesian mythology
- New selection from Polynesian mythology
- New selection from Micronesian mythology

Other minor changes have been made throughout.

We thank friends and colleagues who have generously offered advice on this book. Alphabetically, they are Stephen Benin, Ronald C. Bluming, Christopher Buck, Stevan L. Davies, Richard Detweiler, James Findlay, Timothy Fobbs, Richard Elliot Friedman, Edwin Hostetter, Jennifer Jesse, Charles Johnson, Norman Lillegard, William Magee, Rochelle Millen, Robert J. Miller, Moojan Momen, Henry Munson, Randall Nadeau, Joseph H. Peterson, Richard Pilgrim, David Prejsnar, Habib Riazati, Kenneth Rose, Betty Rosian, Aziz Sachedina, Chaim E. Schertz, Robert Stockman, Mark Towfiq, and Mark Tyson.

PRONUNCIATION OF TERMS IN INDIAN LANGUAGES

The scriptures of India's religions are written in a variety of languages and dialects. Sanskrit was the *lingua franca* of intellectuals and religious authors in ancient India, much like Latin in medieval Europe. Most important Hindu scriptures were written in Sanskrit, and Jain and Buddhist texts are written in Sanskrit or related languages such as Pāli, the language of the Theravāda canon. Virtually all secondary literature by scholars uses diacritical spellings, and these often vary considerably from phonetic ones; in many cases, letters are pronounced similarly to Roman letters, but many letters marked by diacritics are not.

i. Vowels and Diphthongs Used in This Book:

<i>Letter</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>
a	uh, as in fun
ā	ah, as in charm
i	ih, as in pin
ī	ee, as in seek
u	oo, as in sue
ū	ooh, as in school
e	ey, as in prey
o	oh, as in phone

ai	aye, as in time
au	ow, as in cow
ṛ	er, as in fur

Long vowels should take approximately twice as long to speak as short vowels; thus ā is slightly lengthened and emphasized when pronounced. In addition, emphasis is often different from what English speakers expect, so maṇḍala, for example, is pronounced MUHN duh luh, and not mahn DAH la, as English speakers unfamiliar with Sanskrit often pronounce it.

ii. Consonants

Sanskrit and Pāli have several types of consonants, which are divided into five classes: guttural, palatal, lingual, dental, and labial. These classes are based on where in the mouth the sound is made. Gutturals are made in the throat, palatals are made by touching the tongue to the palate, linguals are retroflex sounds made by curling the tongue inside the mouth and touching the bottom of the tip to the palate, dentals are made by touching the tongue to the teeth, and labials are made with the lips. The gutturals are ka, kha, ga, gha, and ṅa. The palatals are ca, cha, ja, jha, and ña. The linguals are ṭa, ṭha, ḍa, ḍha, and ṇa. The labials are pa, pha, ba, bha, and ma. Some other letters should be mentioned: (1) the “sibilants” śa and ṣa, both of which are pronounced “sh,” as in usher or shine; (2) *anusvāra* ṁ, which is pronounced either as m, as in saṁsāra, or as ng, as in saṁgha; and (3) *visarga* ḥ, which is silent. Cā is pronounced cha, as in chair (so Yogācāra is pronounced “Yogahchahra”). The palatal ña is pronounced nya; other letters are pronounced like their English equivalents.



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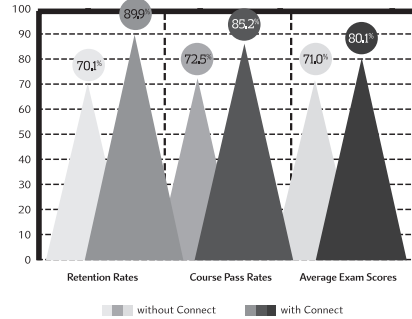
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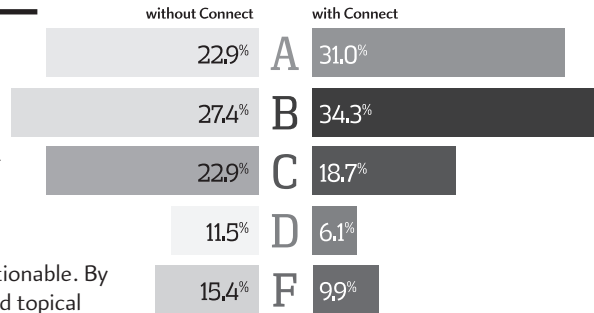
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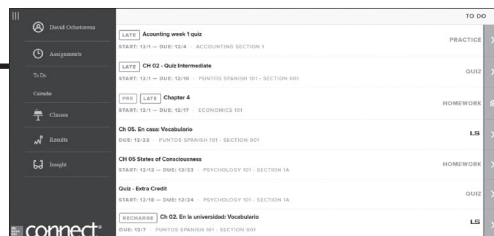
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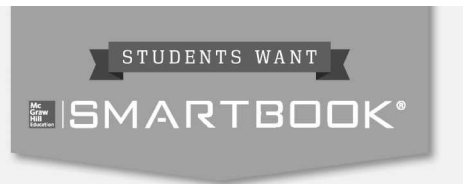
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Hinduism

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Hindus commonly refer to their religion as “universal truth” (*sanātana-dharma*), implying that it is a meta-tradition that is able to embrace the truths of all other systems of thought while transcending them through its expansive capacity to embrace truth in multiple manifestations. Hinduism is the dominant religious tradition of the Indian subcontinent, and currently more than 700 million people consider themselves Hindus.

Hinduism is, however, a difficult tradition to define. Its dominant feature is diversity, and its adherents are not required to accept any doctrine or set of doctrines, to perform any particular practices, or to accept any text or system as uniquely authoritative. Many Hindus, for example, are monotheists and believe there is only one God, despite the proliferation of gods in Hinduism. They assert that God has many manifestations and that God may appear differently to different people and different cultures.

Other Hindus are polytheists who believe that the various gods they worship are distinct entities, whereas pantheistic Hindus perceive the divine in the world around them as a principle that manifests in natural phenomena, particular places, flora and fauna, or other humans. Some Hindus consider themselves to be agnostic, contending that God is in principle unknown and unknowable. Other Hindus are atheists who do not believe in the existence of any gods; this position does not lead to their excommunication by their fellow Hindus. Even more confusing, in daily practice it is common to see one person or community sequentially manifesting combinations of these attitudes in different circumstances.

Hinduism has a plethora of doctrines and systems, but no collection of tenets constitutes a universally binding Hindu creed, nor is there any core belief that is so fundamental that it would be accepted by all Hindus. Hinduism has produced a vast collection of sacred texts, but no one text has the authority of the Christian Bible, the Jewish Torah, or the Muslim Qur’an. Perhaps the most widely revered sacred texts are the Vedas (“Wisdom Texts”), most of which were written more than 2,000 years ago. But despite their generally accepted authoritativeness, few Hindus today are even able to read them, and the brahmins (priests) whose sacred task is

2 *Hinduism*

to memorize and recite them generally are unable to explain what they mean.

In searching for a way to define the boundaries of Hinduism, the term *Hindu* may provide some help. It was originally coined by Persians who used it to refer to the people they encountered in northern India in the Indus Valley. Thus Hindu referred to the inhabitants of a geographical area, and in later centuries it was adopted by people of India who identified themselves with the dominant religious tradition of the subcontinent.

Contemporary Hinduism is still delimited more by geography than by belief or practice: A Hindu is someone who lives on the Indian subcontinent or is descended from people of the region, who considers himself or herself a Hindu, and who is accepted as such by other Hindus. There are no distinctive doctrines whose acceptance would serve as a litmus test of orthodoxy, no ecclesiastical authority that is able to declare some to be Hindus in good standing or label others heretics, and no ceremony whose performance would serve as a definitive rite of passage into the tradition. There is no founder of the tradition, and no dominant system of theology or single moral code.

Contemporary Hinduism embraces groups whose respective faiths and practices have virtually nothing in common with one another. This is not to say, however, that Hinduism lacks distinctive doctrines, practices, or scriptures; in fact, the opposite is the case. Hinduism has developed a plethora of philosophical schools, rituals, and sacred texts, and its adherents commonly assert a belief in a shared heritage, historical continuity, and family relationships among the multiple manifestations of their tradition. The selections provided here represent only a small sampling of the vast corpus of Hindu religious literature. In addition, it should be noted that this literature represents only a tiny part of the Hindu tradition and primarily reflects the views and practices of a small intellectual elite. The vast majority of Hindus have been—and continue to be—primarily illiterate agricultural workers with little if any knowledge of the sacred scriptures. Their practices generally are derived from local cults and beliefs that may have little in common with the religion and philosophy of the authors of the scriptures. Furthermore, these texts do not form a coherent system but instead are as diverse as Hinduism itself. They were written over the course of millennia and reflect shifting paradigms and divergent political, religious, and social agendas, geographical differences, and varying ideas about how people should worship, think, live, and interact.

HISTORY OF HINDUISM AND HINDU SCRIPTURES

Hinduism can be compared to a complex symphony in which new themes are introduced as the piece develops, while old ones continue to be woven into its texture. Nothing is ever truly lost, and elements of the distant past may return to prominence at unexpected times, although often in forms that are altered in accordance with the intellectual and religious currents of a particular time and place. The scriptures of Hinduism reflect its diversity and its complex history. They include ancient hymns to anthropomorphic gods and liturgical texts detailing how priests should prepare sacrifices, mystical texts that speculate on the nature of ultimate reality, devotional literature in praise of a variety of deities, philosophical texts of great subtlety and insight, and combinations of these and related themes.

The earliest stratum of Indian sacred literature accessible today is found in the Vedas, which evolved into their present form between 1400 and 400 BCE. The earliest of these were codified around 1300 BCE by people who referred to themselves as Āryans, meaning “noble” or “wise.” They referred to other residents of northern India as “slaves” (*dāsa* or *dasyu*), but the actual relation between these groups is unclear.

The Vedas are referred to by Hindus as “revelation” (*śruti*; literally, “what is heard”), in contrast to other scriptures referred to as “tradition” (*smṛti*; literally, “what is remembered”). Both classes are regarded as canonical, but the latter is not considered to have the same level of authoritativeness as the Vedas. According to tradition, the Vedas are not the product of human composition (*apauruṣeya*) but are a part of the very fabric of reality. They were directly perceived by “seers” (*ṛṣi*), whose mystical contemplations—aided by ingestion of an intoxicating beverage called *soma*—enabled them to intuit primordial sounds reverberating throughout the universe and render them into human language as the books of the Vedas.

There are four Vedas: (1) the *Ṛg Veda*, so named because it is composed of stanzas (*ṛk*); (2) the *Sāma Veda* (composed mostly of hymns taken from the *Ṛg Veda* and set to various melodies, or *sāman*); (3) the *Yajur Veda* (composed of *yajus*, selected ritual prayers, mostly taken from the *Ṛg Veda*); and (4) the *Atharva Veda* (a collection of ritual texts named after the sage Atharvan). The Vedas contain several primary types of literature: (1) chants or hymns (*saṃhitā*), generally directed toward the gods (*deva*) of the Vedic pantheon; (2) ritual texts (*brāhmaṇa*), which detail the sacrifices performed by brahmins;

and (3) mystical texts concerned with the quest for ultimate truth (*āranyakas* and *upaniṣads*).¹

INDO-ĀRYAN RELIGION AND SOCIETY

The origins of the Indo-Āryans are a matter of considerable controversy among scholars. Early European Indologists, basing their analysis on obscure passages in Vedic texts, speculated that the Āryans were invaders from central Europe who entered the subcontinent, where they encountered indigenous inhabitants (commonly referred to as Dravidians) and conquered them with superior military technology. In recent years most of these assumptions have been debunked, and a consensus has developed that there is no real evidence to support the “Āryan invasion” theory.

It now appears that the Indo-Āryans may have been indigenous to the subcontinent and that they distinguished themselves from other peoples as the holders of the sacred Vedic scriptures and performers of Vedic rituals. Archaeological evidence from Dravidian cities in the Indus Valley region suggests that the inhabitants attained a high degree of social development, although their society probably was in decline by 1300 BCE. Little is known with any certainty about their civilization, but there appears to have been interaction between them and the Indo-Āryans, which may have led to cross-cultural influences.

From an early period, as indicated in their sacred texts, the Indo-Āryans and their descendants propounded the idea that human society ideally should be stratified, with each social class having clearly defined functions and duties. At the top of the hierarchy were the brahmins, or priestly class, whose sacred duty was to perform sacrifices to the gods described in the Vedas. Many of these gods were personifications of natural phenomena, such as the sun, moon, wind, and so forth. Many gods were believed to have dominion over a particular natural force or phenomenon, and the rituals of the Vedas were commonly directed either to one god or to a small group of gods who were considered to have the ability to affect a particular sphere of divine provenance.

¹ The term *Āranyaka* literally means “Forest Text” because they were attributed to sages who removed themselves from society and lived in remote areas in order to devote themselves to a solitary pursuit of truth. The term *Upaniṣad* derives from the root word *ṣad*, “to sit,” with prefixes meaning “around,” implying that they were spoken by sages to an audience of students sitting around them in a semicircle.

The role of the priests was central in this system: They were expected to remain ritually pure and to preserve the sacred texts, along with the lore of priestcraft. Their social function prevented them from engaging in manual labor, trade, agriculture, or other nonpriestly occupations that were considered polluting. In exceptional circumstances occasioned by special need, they were allowed to earn a living by other means, but ideally their lives should be devoted to study of the sacred Vedas and performance of Vedic rituals. This was crucial to the maintenance of the system of “upholding the world” (*loka-saṃgraha*), a core concern of Vedic religion.

In this system, the brahmins performed a pivotal function in offering sacrifices to the gods. The sacrifices generally were transmuted into smoke through the agency of Agni, god of fire (who is manifested in the ritual fire, as well as in other forms of combustion). Smoke converted the material of the sacrifice into a subtle essence suitable for the gods’ consumption, and the process required that the brahmins remain ritually pure because any pollution they acquired was passed on to their sacrifices. The gods would naturally be insulted if offered unclean food and would respond by denying requests the brahmins made on behalf of the sponsors of the sacrifices.

The Vedic system was based on a symbiosis of gods and humans: The gods required sacrificial offerings, and humans needed the gods to use their supernatural powers to maintain cosmic order (*ṛta*). The system assumed that humans only prosper in a stable and ordered cosmos, an idea reflected in the story of the slaying of the demon Vṛtra (“Obstructor”) by Indra, the king of the gods in the Vedas. Demons thrive in chaos, and at the beginning of time Vṛtra rules over a chaotic cosmos until Indra, after a mighty battle, slays him and thereby makes it possible for the gods to establish order.

This primordial battle reflects the crucial role played by the gods in establishing and maintaining cosmic law. The concerns of Vedic literature are primarily practical and this-worldly. They focus on particular pragmatic goals, such as bountiful crops, fertility, peace, stability, wealth, and so forth. The results of the sacrifices are believed to accrue in the present life, and although a world of the dead is mentioned, it does not play a major role in the early Vedic tradition.

THE UPANIṢADS AND YOGA

The focus shifts in the later Vedic period, in which texts of speculative philosophy and mysticism begin to appear. Referred to as Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads, they were written by sages

who often expressed dissatisfaction with the ritualism and this-worldly focus of the early Vedic texts. Their authors sought the ultimate power behind the sacrifices, the force that gives rise to gods, humans, and all the other phenomena of the universe. They found this by a process of inward-looking meditation that sought an unchanging essence beyond the transient phenomena of existence. The present life was no longer viewed as the beginning and end of one's existence; rather, living beings were said to be reborn in successive lives in accordance with their actions (karma). The actions of the present result in opposite and equal reactions in the future, and one's present life is a result of the karma accrued in the past. The cycle of existence (*saṃsāra*) was said by the sages of the Upaniṣads to be beginningless, but it may be ended. It is perpetuated by a basic misunderstanding of the true nature of reality (*avidyā*, or "ignorance"), but one may escape it by attaining correct understanding of truth, which is found only by people who shift their attention from external things to find the truly real.

By following the path of wisdom that correctly discriminates the real from the unreal, the truly important from the merely pleasant, and the changeless from the transitory, the sage eventually discovers that within everyone is an eternal, unchanging essence, an immortal soul referred to as the "self" (*ātman*). The Upaniṣads declare that this essence alone survives death and that it has been reborn countless times in an infinite variety of different bodies, while itself remaining unchanged by the multiple identities developed in successive lifetimes. It is characterized by three qualities: being, consciousness, and bliss (*sat cit ānanda*), meaning that it is pure, unchanging being and its nature is never altered, despite the changing external circumstances of our lives; it is pure consciousness that takes no notice of the vicissitudes of our lives; and it remains unaffected by our joys, sorrows, hopes, disappointments, pleasures, or pains and thus is in a continuous state of equanimity. Moreover, the Upaniṣadic sages identified the self with the cosmic ultimate, something supremely mysterious, hidden from ordinary perception but all-pervasive, supremely subtle, the essence of all that is. This ultimate was said to be beyond words or conceptual thought and was referred to as "Brahman," because it is the purest and most sublime principle of existence, just as in human society brahmins are the purest and holiest class.

According to this system, the perceptions of ordinary beings are profoundly distorted by ignorance, and the only way to attain correct knowledge is through a process of discipline (yoga) in which one's thoughts and body are gradually brought

under control and one's attention is turned away from sense objects and directed within.

These premises are shared with the system outlined in the *Yoga Aphorisms (Yoga-sūtra)* of Patañjali, who is credited with gathering the principal practices and premises of the yoga system. Patañjali's system, however, differs in significant ways from that of the Upaniṣads, although both use the term *yoga* to describe their respective training programs. The Upaniṣads outline a monistic system in which the sole reality is said to be Brahman, and everything else is based on mistaken perceptions.

Patañjali, in contrast, contends that both matter (*prakṛti*) and spirit (*puruṣa*) are real entities, and the goal of his system is separation (*kaivalya*) of spirit from matter; the Upaniṣads aim at a final apotheosis in which all dualities are transcended and one realizes the fundamental identity of the self and Brahman. The final goal of the Upaniṣads is expressed in the greatest of the "great statements" (*mahāvākya*) that sum up the central insights of the Upaniṣadic sages: "That is you" (*tat tvam asi*). This expresses the identity of the individual soul and Brahman. Patañjali's goal is separation that liberates one's spiritual essence from matter.

The aim of both systems is liberation (*mokṣa*) from the cycle of existence, but each conceives of this release differently. Both consider yoga to be the primary practice for attaining the final goal, and for both yoga is a program of introspective meditation that begins with physical discipline; control of random, ignorant thoughts; and development of insight into unchanging truth. But the ontological presuppositions and ultimate goals of the two systems differ in significant details.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The Upaniṣads and Patañjali's yoga system represent a shift from the primacy of sacrifices to the gods in the early Vedic period to a general acceptance of the idea that the final aim of the religious path is liberation. As release from cyclic existence came to be viewed as the supreme goal, sacrifices aimed at maintaining the order of the world and the acquisition of mundane benefits became devalued as inferior to the pursuit of knowledge of truth.

In an apparent reaction to this trend, orthodox elements began to stress the importance of performing one's social duties (dharma). Texts like the *Traditions of Manu (Manu-smṛti)* and the *Song of God (Bhagavad-gītā)* emphasized the importance of selfless, devout adherence to the duties of one's social class (*varṇa*): the brahmins, the warriors and rulers

(*kṣatriya*), the merchants and tradespeople (*vaiśya*), and the servants (*śūdra*). Both texts asserted that if people ignore their sacred duty the world will fall into chaos, society will crumble, and essential social functions will not be performed. The *Traditions of Manu* delineate a system in which people eventually should renounce the world and pursue final liberation, but only after first fulfilling the duties assigned to their social class. In its system of “duties of social classes and stages of life” (*varṇāśrama-dharma*), specific duties for each class are outlined that should be performed diligently in order to maintain the world. The system assumes that only in an ordered universe will some people have the leisure and resources to pursue liberation.

The ideal life begins with the student stage, in which a man finds a spiritual preceptor (*guru*) who teaches him the lore appropriate to his class. The three highest classes (*brahmins*, *kṣatriyas*, and *vaiśyas*) are said to be “twice-born” (*dvija*) because they undergo a ceremony (the *upanayana*) that initiates them into adulthood and is considered a “second birth.” Only these three classes are permitted to study the Vedas or to participate in Vedic rituals (but officiating in Vedic ceremonies is the special duty of brahmins). After a period of study (which varies in length and content among the four classes), a man should marry, produce male heirs to continue the lineage and perform sacrifices for him and his ancestors after his death, and support the brahmins whose rituals maintain the whole cosmos.

According to Manu, after a man has successfully performed his duty and when he sees his grandson born (assuring that the lineage will continue) and gray hairs on his head, he may withdraw from society (often with his wife) and begin to sever the ties that he cultivated during his life in the world. As a “forest dweller” (*vana-prastha*), he should be celibate and detached from worldly enjoyments, cultivate meditation on ultimate truth, and pursue liberation. When he knows that his attachment to mundane things has ceased, he may take the final step of becoming a “world renouncer” (*saṃnyāsin*), completely devoted to the ultimate goal, wandering from place to place and subsisting on alms, intent on final liberation from cyclic existence.

In this system, everything has its time and place. Although liberation is recognized as the ultimate goal of the religious life, it should not be pursued in a way that might destabilize society. When the demands of dharma have been met, one may seek one’s own ends, but Manu declares that renouncing the world too soon would lead to a degeneration of the whole society, and the resulting chaos would make the attainment of liberation difficult, if not impossible, for anyone.

THE PATH OF DEVOTION

Another important path to liberation lies in the “yoga of devotion” (*bhakti-yoga*), in which one finds salvation through completely identifying oneself with God. The yoga of devotion requires that one focus one’s attention so completely on God that all thoughts of ego are transcended in a pure experience of union.

There are a variety of ways of conceiving devotion: Sometimes it takes the form of a love affair in which the devotee experiences an ecstatic union surpassing any human love; for others, devotion is characterized by selfless service to an omnipotent master. Often, Hindu devotionalism exhibits elements of both, along with a feeling of an intensely personal relationship between a human being and God.

The selections presented here are arranged in roughly chronological order and are taken from a wide range of Hindu scriptures. Of necessity many important scriptures have been omitted from this survey. Those that have been included were chosen because they exemplify central themes of contemporary and traditional Hindu religious thought.

HOLIDAYS

Festival of Lights (Divālī or Dīpāvalī) Celebrated in the second half of the lunar month of Aśvina, which generally occurs in October/November. It celebrates the homecoming of Rāma and Sitā to Ayodhya after their years in exile as recounted in the *Adventures of Rāma (Rāmāyaṇa)*. Lights adorn houses, temples, and streets; gifts are exchanged; and food and jewels are offered to Lakṣmī, the goddess of fortune. The holiday is also associated with the slaying of a demon by Kṛṣṇa.

Festival of Colors (Holī) Celebrates the immolation of Holikā, a demoness who possessed a magical shawl that made her immune to fire. Her father, the demon Hiranyakaśipu, ordered that his son Prahlāda be burned alive because of his devotion to the god Viṣṇu, but Holikā’s shawl flew to him and protected him, while she was burned by the fire. On the first day of the festival, huge bonfires are lit all over India, and on the second day people throw colored powders on each other. Holī generally falls in late February or early March.

(Continued)