

# Hinduism

All material taken from Josh McDowell & Don Stewart's Handbook of Today's Religions, Fritz Ridenour's So What's the Difference?, & the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention's *Interfaith Evangelism Belief Bulletin*

# Miscellany

- Worldwide: 825-850 million; United States and Canada: Estimated 1.2 to 1.5 million
- Hindus in the United States:
  - Traditional movements: Ramakrishna Mission & Vedanta Society (Roma Krishna Mission), Sri Aurobindo Society, Satya Sai Baba movement, & International Sivananda Yoga Society.
  - Hindu-based sects: International Society for Krishna Consciousness (Hare Krishna), TM (the Beales), Vedanta Societies, Self-Realization Fellowship, Theosophy, & Eckankar.
  - Sects that have “Americanized” Hindu concepts: Christian Science, Unity School of Christianity, & the New Age Mvmt

# Miscellany

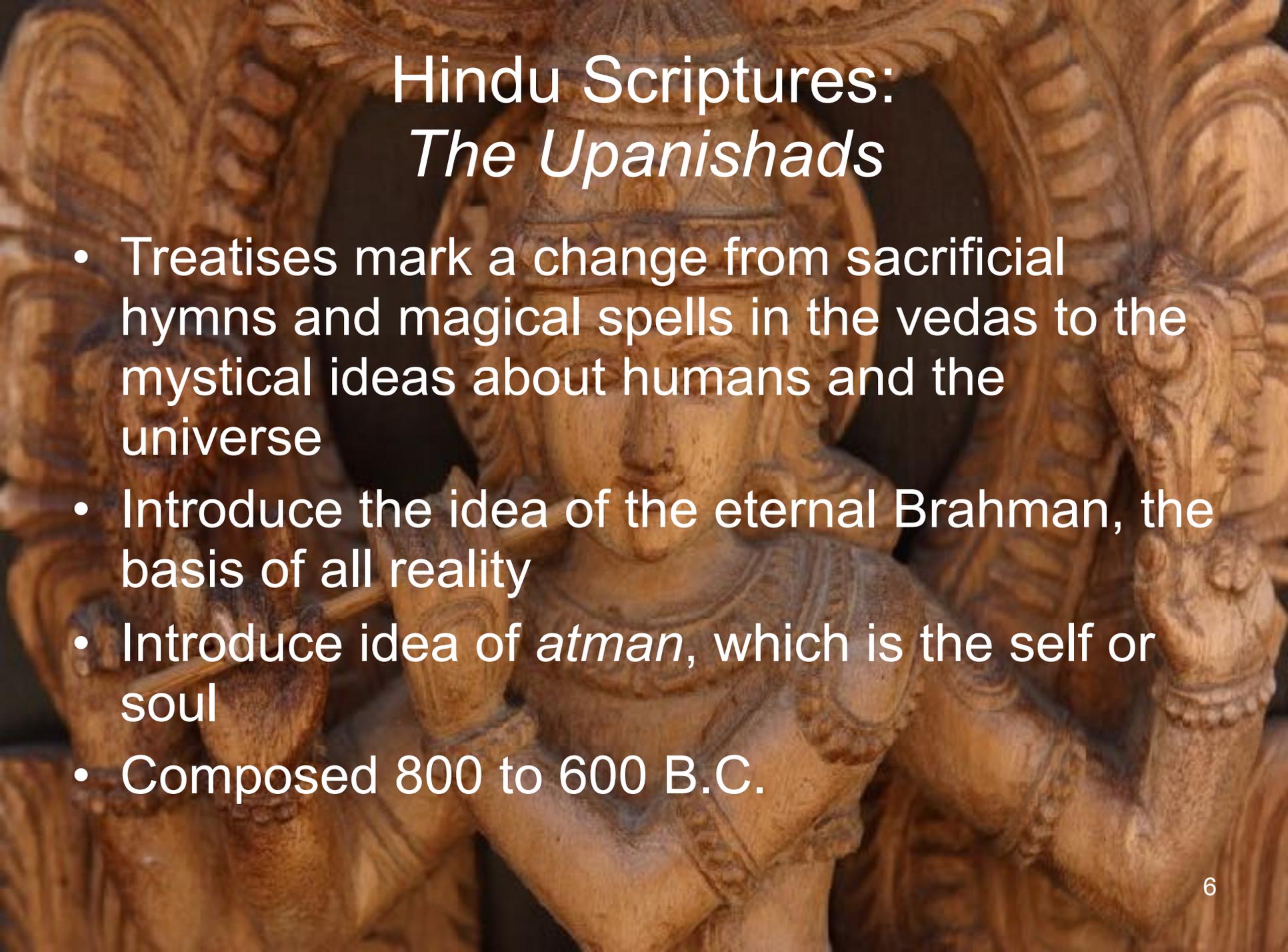
- Origin: India, about 2500 B.C. to 1500 B.C.
- Founder: No single person
- Not one religion, but a family of religions; religion of the people from the Indus Valley
- The essence of Hinduism is that there are many ways of viewing a single object, none of which gives the whole, but each of which is entirely valid in its own right.
- Tolerant of other religions, believing that “truth” is the kernel of every religion. Doctrines, rites, etc. are all signs pointing beyond them to a region of utter clarity: truth.

# Hindu Scriptures: *The Vedas*

- Came from the disciples of the *rishis*, or seers
- Class of scripture called *sruti*, or “what is heard”
- Plural for “wisdom” or “knowledge”
- Hymns, prayers, & ritual texts
- Composed over 1000 years, beginning about 1400 B.C.
- Refers to the entire collection of the wisdom books, also known as *samhitas*

# Hindu Scriptures: *The Vedas*

- Subdivisions (each contains 3 parts: 1. mantras, or hymns of praise to the gods; 2. brahmanas, or guide for rituals; & 3. upanishads, doctrine)
  - *rig-veda*: hymns, originally composed in Sanskrit, praising Hindu deities
  - *yajur-veda*: mantras borrowed from the *rig-veda* pertaining to rituals by the executive priest and assistants
  - *sama-veda*: chanted mantras from the *rig-veda*
  - *athara-veda*: magical spells and incantations carried out by the priests

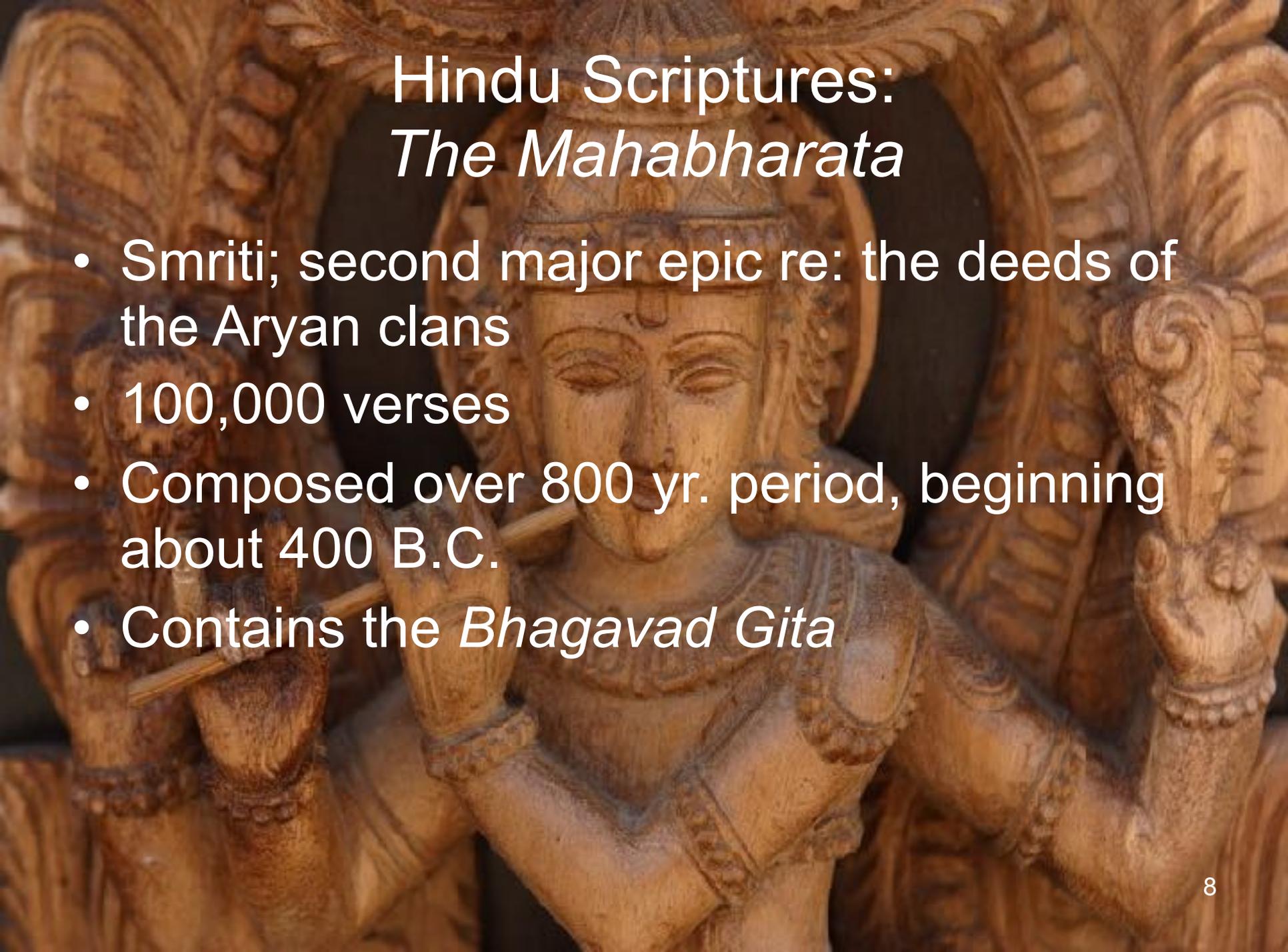


# Hindu Scriptures: *The Upanishads*

- Treatises mark a change from sacrificial hymns and magical spells in the vedas to the mystical ideas about humans and the universe
- Introduce the idea of the eternal Brahman, the basis of all reality
- Introduce idea of *atman*, which is the self or soul
- Composed 800 to 600 B.C.

# Hindu Scriptures: *Ramayana*

- Class of scripture called *smriti*, or “what is remembered”
- Major epic; authorship ascribed to sage-poet Valmiki, though others added
- 24,000 couplets based upon life of Rama, a righteous king who was supposedly an incarnation of the god Vishnu
- Rama like Gilgamesh & Odysseus



# Hindu Scriptures: *The Mahabharata*

- Smriti; second major epic re: the deeds of the Aryan clans
- 100,000 verses
- Composed over 800 yr. period, beginning about 400 B.C.
- Contains the *Bhagavad Gita*

# *Bhagavad Gita*

- Most sacred Hindu book; added in late 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.
- Dialogue between Krishna, 8<sup>th</sup> avatar of Vishnu, and the warrior Arjuna, who is about to fight his cousins
- Story endorses *bhakti*, or devotion to a god as a means to salvation
- Arjuna devoted to Vishnu & ready to kill cousins
- No matter the caste or sex, salvation now possible through the way of devotion, not just through the ways of works or knowledge

# Hindu Scriptures: *The Puranas*

- Legends of gods, goddesses, demons, and ancestors
- Descriptions of pilgrimages & rituals to demonstrate importance of bhakti, caste, & dharma (Law of Moral order necessary for nirvana)
- Heroes displaying moral virtues

# Hindu Teachings: *Brahman*

- Ultimate reality, with changing meanings
- “He whom speech cannot express, and from whom the mind, unable to reach him, comes away baffled” (*Tittiriya Upanishad*)
- Thought of now more as a philosophic concept than as an active principle—to be meditated upon, but not adored or worshiped
- Reading from Bhagavad-Gita

# Hindu Teachings: *Moksha*

- Also known as *mukti*: term used for the liberation of the soul from the wheel of karma
- A Hindu's chief aim: freedom from *samsara* (binding life cycle) and karma, with unending cycle of births, deaths, and rebirths (redeaths)

# Hindu Teachings: *Moksha*

- When one achieves liberation, he enters into a state of fullness (oneness with Brahma)
- Can be achieved through 3 paths:
  - Knowledge, or *jnana*
  - Devotion, or *bhakti*
  - Ritual works, or *karma*
- One who achieves moksha before death is known as *jivanmukta*

# Hindu Teachings: *Atman*

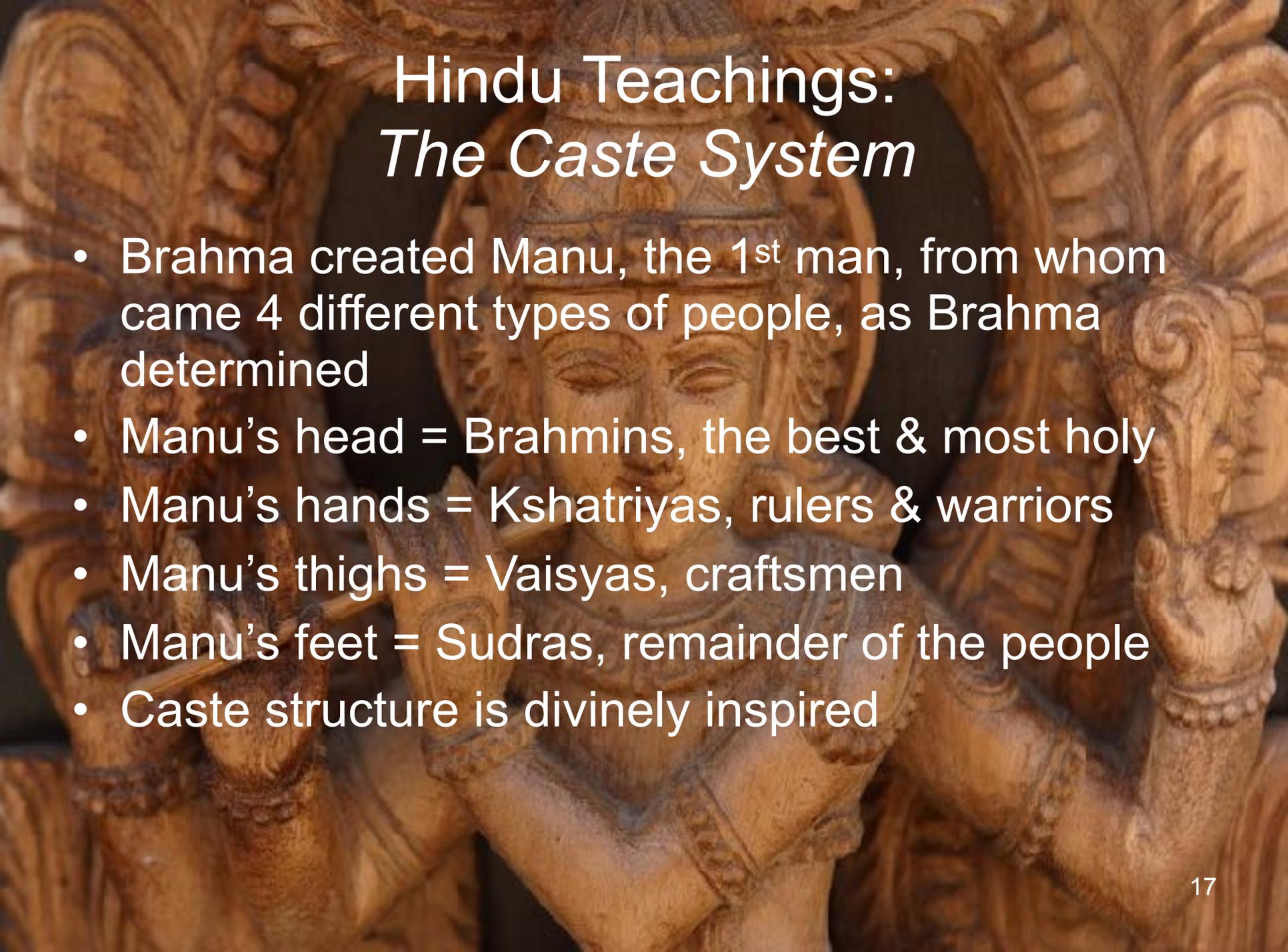
- The soul, or true self, the part of each living thing that is eternal
- “that from which speech, along with the mind, turns away—not able to comprehend” (*Taittiriya Upanishad*)
- Sometimes used synonymously with Brahman, the universal soul, seeking mystical union together

# Hindu Teachings: *Maya*

- As dreams are real in that we really have them, the world is real. Yet, the things in dreams do not exist. This is what Hindus mean when they say the world is maya
- The world, in our minds, appears as we see it. But we have no right to infer from this that reality is in itself the way it appears to us.
- In this way, it is “illusion.”

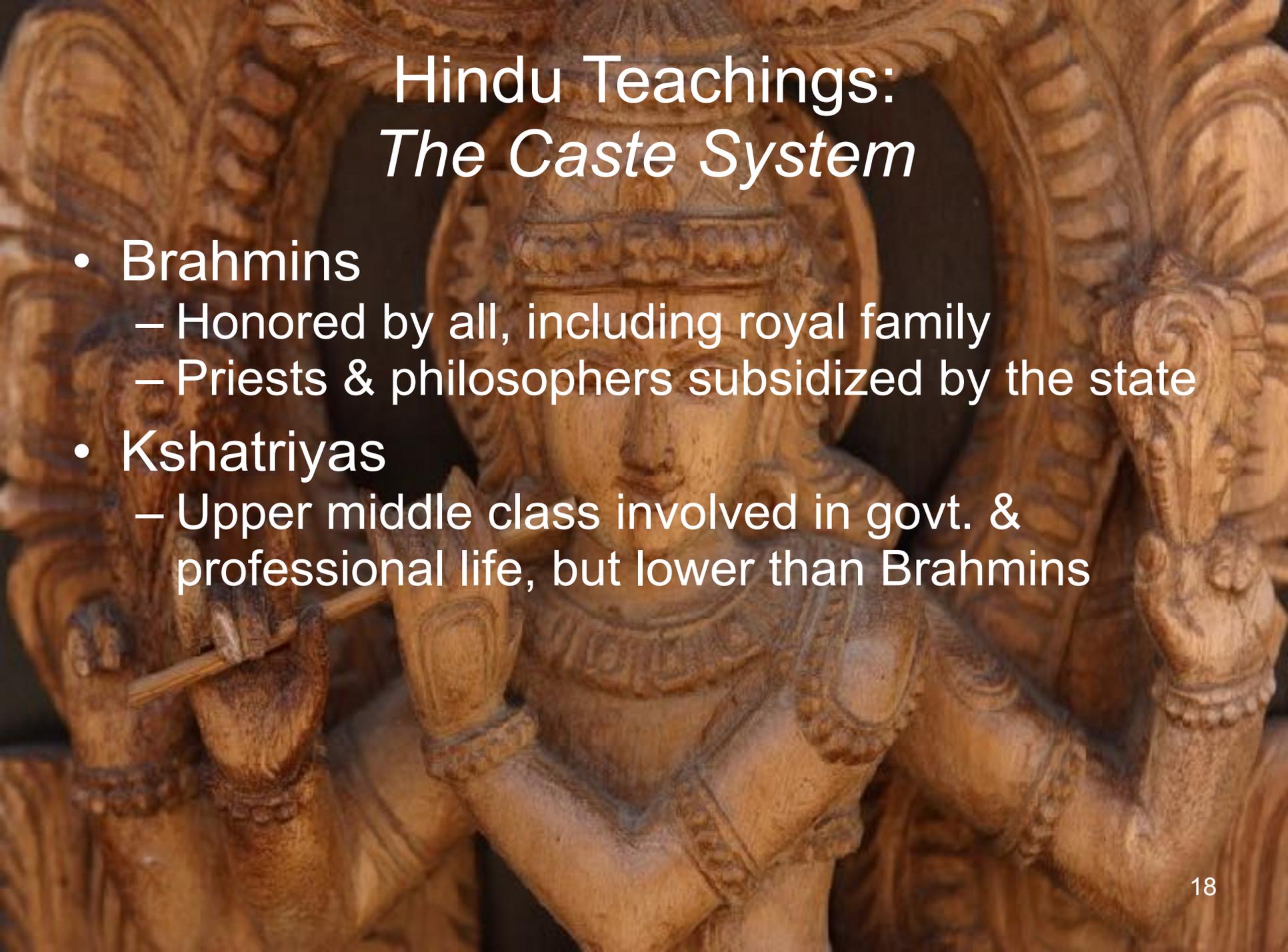
# Hindu Teachings: *Karma*

- Means “action”
- One’s present state of existence is determined by his performance in previous lifetimes.
- The law of moral consequence
  - If one performs righteous acts, he moves towards moksha
  - If one’s deeds are evil, he moves further away from moksha



# Hindu Teachings: *The Caste System*

- Brahma created Manu, the 1<sup>st</sup> man, from whom came 4 different types of people, as Brahma determined
- Manu's head = Brahmins, the best & most holy
- Manu's hands = Kshatriyas, rulers & warriors
- Manu's thighs = Vaisyas, craftsmen
- Manu's feet = Sudras, remainder of the people
- Caste structure is divinely inspired



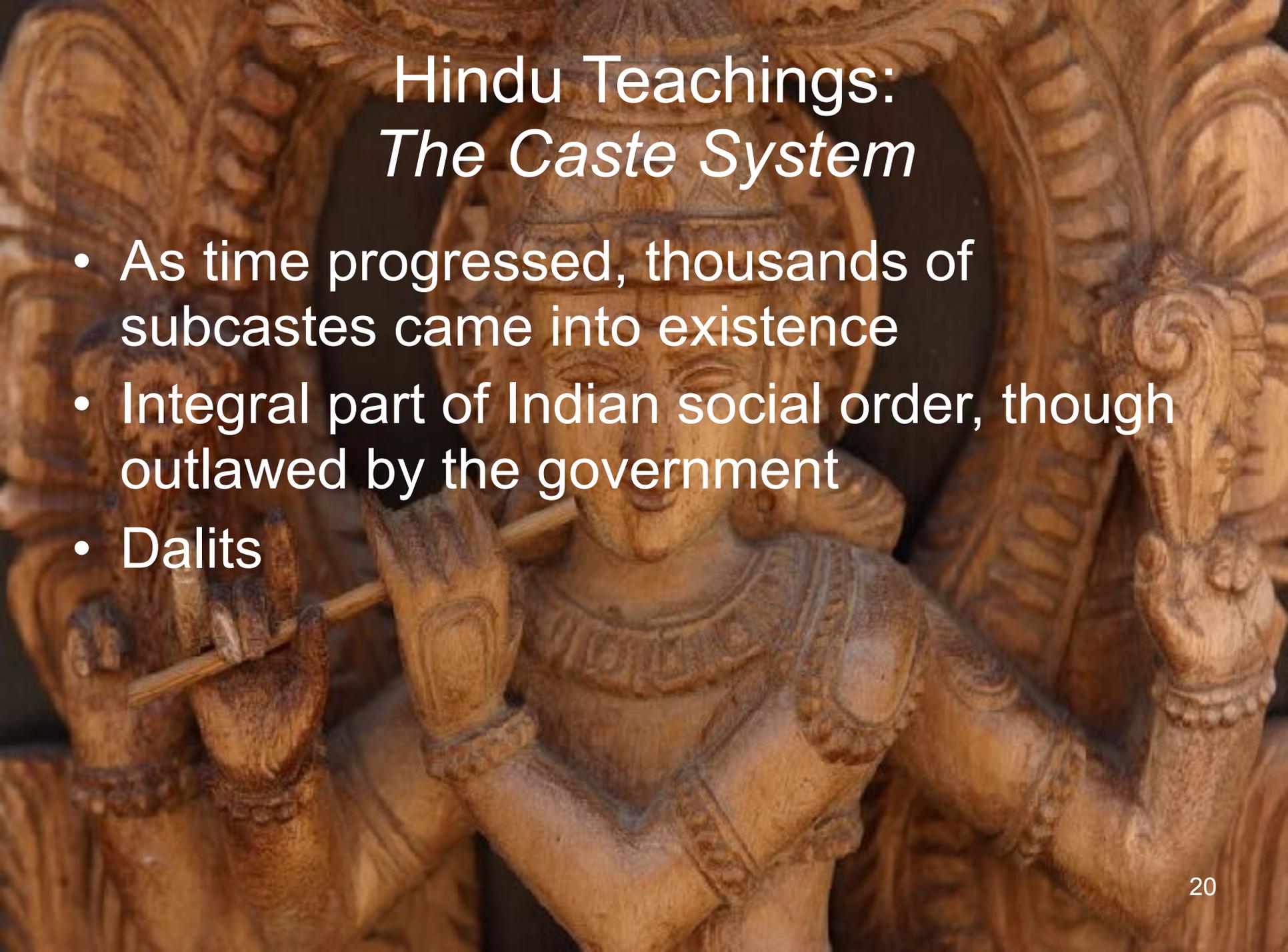
# Hindu Teachings: *The Caste System*

- Brahmins
  - Honored by all, including royal family
  - Priests & philosophers subsidized by the state
- Kshatriyas
  - Upper middle class involved in govt. & professional life, but lower than Brahmins



# Hindu Teachings: *The Caste System*

- Vaisyas
  - Merchants & farmers
- Sudras
  - Lowest caste
  - Serve the upper castes as laborers & servants
  - Excluded from many of the religious rituals & vedas



# Hindu Teachings: *The Caste System*

- As time progressed, thousands of subcastes came into existence
- Integral part of Indian social order, though outlawed by the government
- Dalits

# Hindu Teachings: *Salvation*

- Achieved in one of 3 ways:
- The Way of Works (karma marga):
  - salvation through religious duty
  - Carrying out prescribed ceremonies, rituals
  - Adds favorable karma to his merit
  - If done religiously, it is possible to be reborn as a Brahmin on his way toward moksha
  - Emotionally detached, mechanical
  - Do things unselfishly, not for gain

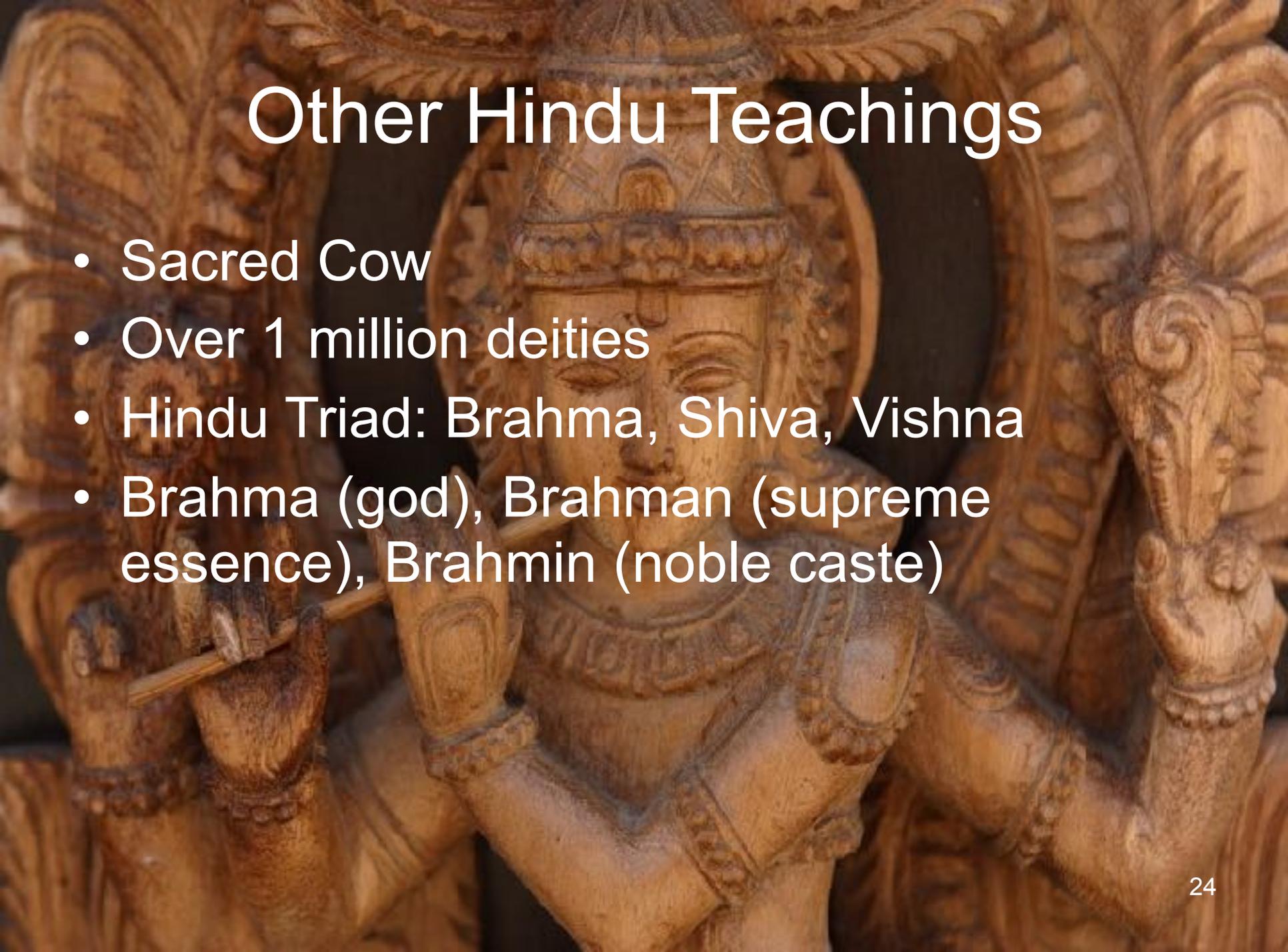
# Hindu Teachings: *Salvation*

- The Way of Knowledge (jnana marga):
  - suffering caused by human ignorance
  - Our error: we see ourselves as separate, real entities, whereas Brahman is the only real entity. Thus, we are a part of Brahman.
  - Selfhood is an illusion; need to understand this
  - Not merely intellectual, but experiential, reaching a state of consciousness where karma is ineffective
  - Need for much self-discipline & meditation
  - Only appeals to the intellectual few willing to go through the prescribed steps

# Hindu Teachings: *Salvation*

- The Way of Devotion (bakti marga):
  - Devotion to a deity, which may be reflected in acts of worship, both public & private
  - Based upon love for the deity, the bhakti will also be carried out in human relationships
  - Bhakti can lead to ultimate salvation
  - Exemplified in Bhagavad Gita
  - Commitment & action needed (two types of yoga: bhakti [devotion] & raja [meditation])

# Other Hindu Teachings



- Sacred Cow
- Over 1 million deities
- Hindu Triad: Brahma, Shiva, Vishna
- Brahma (god), Brahman (supreme essence), Brahmin (noble caste)

# Hinduism & Christianity

- Philosophical concept of Brahman vs. Personhood of the Triune God
- Man as manifestation of Brahman w/o self or self-worth vs. imago Dei
- Acts of wrongdoing as a result of ignorance vs. rebellious nature and actions against a Holy God
- Works-based salvation from endless cycle of birth, death, & rebirth vs. salvation from eternal punishment of & eternal separation from God by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone

# Hinduism & Christianity

- Material world as extension of Brahman vs. entity eternally different in nature from God
- Pantheon & pantheism vs. exclusivity & uniqueness of Jesus Christ
  - Swami Prabhavananda's quote re: Jesus
  - Mohandas Gandhi's quote re: Jesus & sin

# Evangelism

- Pray and trust the Holy Spirit to use the gospel message to reach the hearts and minds of your Hindu friends.
- Share your personal faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Keep your testimony short.
- Stress the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as God's revelation of Himself.
- Stress the necessity of following Jesus to the exclusion of all other deities. Jesus will not allow Himself to be a part of a pantheon.

# Evangelism

- Keep the gospel presentation Christ-centered.
- Share the assurance of salvation that God's grace gives you and about your hope in the resurrection.
- Make sure you communicate that your assurance is derived from God's grace and not from your good works or your ability to be spiritual (1 John 5:13).
- Give a copy of the New Testament. If a Hindu desires to study the Bible, begin with the Gospel of John. Point out passages that explain salvation.