

## *Bridging History*

### *Generation of Belief*

Use the information below to investigate how historians try to reconstruct the beginnings of religions through textual sources and religious art.

In southern Asia, a number of religions developed to explain the cosmos. During the eighth and the seventh centuries BCE, Indo-European invasions of India resulted in tumultuous disruption and movements of people across the land. The Indo-Europeans brought with them new notions that melded with indigenous thought, leading to the creation of what we now call Hinduism. The dominant culture of the invaders was steeped in the tradition of the Vedas—a collection of ritual hymns that portrayed Indo-Europeans as heroes who triumphed over the inferior “alien” peoples they encountered. It also laid out the cosmological foundations of human society.

The sculpture of Shiva in the photograph to the right illustrates the deity whose dance creates and destroys the world. Shiva is accepted in the Vedic tradition as one part of the manifestation of the Hindu trinity, along with Brahman, the creator, and Vishnu, the preserver.

Between 800 and 500 BCE in southern Asia, Vedic teachers developed a number of speculative treatises. Called the Upanishads, these texts postulate that the universe is comprised of only one reality, personified by an all-inclusive being called Brahman.

It is written in the second Khanda of The Upanishads,

1 He (the knower of the Self ) knows that highest home of Brahman, in which all is contained and shines brightly. The wise who, without desiring happiness, worship that Person, transcend this seed. (They are not born again.)

2 He who forms desires in his mind is born again through his desires here and there. But to him whose desires are fulfilled and who is conscious of the true Self (within himself) all desires vanish, even here on earth.

3 That Self cannot be gained by the Veda, nor by understanding, nor by much learning. He whom the Self chooses, by him the Self can be gained. The Self chooses him (his body) as his own.



4 Nor is that Self to be gained by one who is destitute of strength, or without earnestness, or without right meditation. But if a wise man strives after it by those means (by strength, earnestness, and right meditation), then his Self enters the home of Brahman.

**What does the sculpture tell you about Shiva as an important deity in Hinduism?**

**What does the text tell you about the concept of Brahman?**

**How would artifacts in archaeological sites and linguistic analysis help the historian go beyond the sculpture of Shiva and the text to reconstruct the beginnings of Hinduism?**

**What other kinds of sources would help you understand better the beginnings of religions?**