

Hinduism Key Concepts and Useful Terms

Learners should be able to explain and apply these terms in relation to the themes:

1. **Ahimsa** – Non-injury to living things; the doctrine of non-violence.
2. **Ashramas** – The four stages of life.
3. **Caste (Varna)** – Refers to any of the social divisions of the Hindu class system.
4. **Dharma** – The religious and moral duty in relation to a person's status in Hindu society as determined by caste.
5. **Diwali** – Hindu festival of Lights (sometimes Diwali or Deepavali); this celebrates good conquering evil and invites the goddess Lakshmi into the home.
6. **Holi** – A spring festival celebrated by Hindus, known as the 'Festival of Colours' or a celebration of fertility and love.
7. **ISKCON** – The International Society for Krishna Consciousness; a religious sect based on Vedic scriptures.
8. **Karma** – The belief that actions, and the consequences of these actions, determine whether the atman will be released from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. One could gain positive and/or negative karma.
9. **Moksha** – The release from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth; liberation; ultimate union with God.
10. **Ramayana** – One of the two great epics of India that tells the story of Rama, the seventh avatar of Vishnu.
11. **Reincarnation** – After death, the soul, which is seen as eternal, returns to be reborn into a new body.
12. **Samsara** – The constant change of the world through a process of birth, death and being reborn through reincarnation.

Other useful terms:

1. **Arti** – A form of Hindu worship/prayer in which burning lamps are waved before the statues of the gods to invoke their presence.
2. **Atman** – The individual self or soul that is believed to be non-physical and return to Brahman once moksha is achieved.
3. **Avatar** – The incarnations of a deity, sometimes in human form; most commonly used is Vishnu, the Preserver God, who was incarnated through Krishna.
4. **Bhagavad Gita** – The Hindu holy book; the "Song of the Lord".

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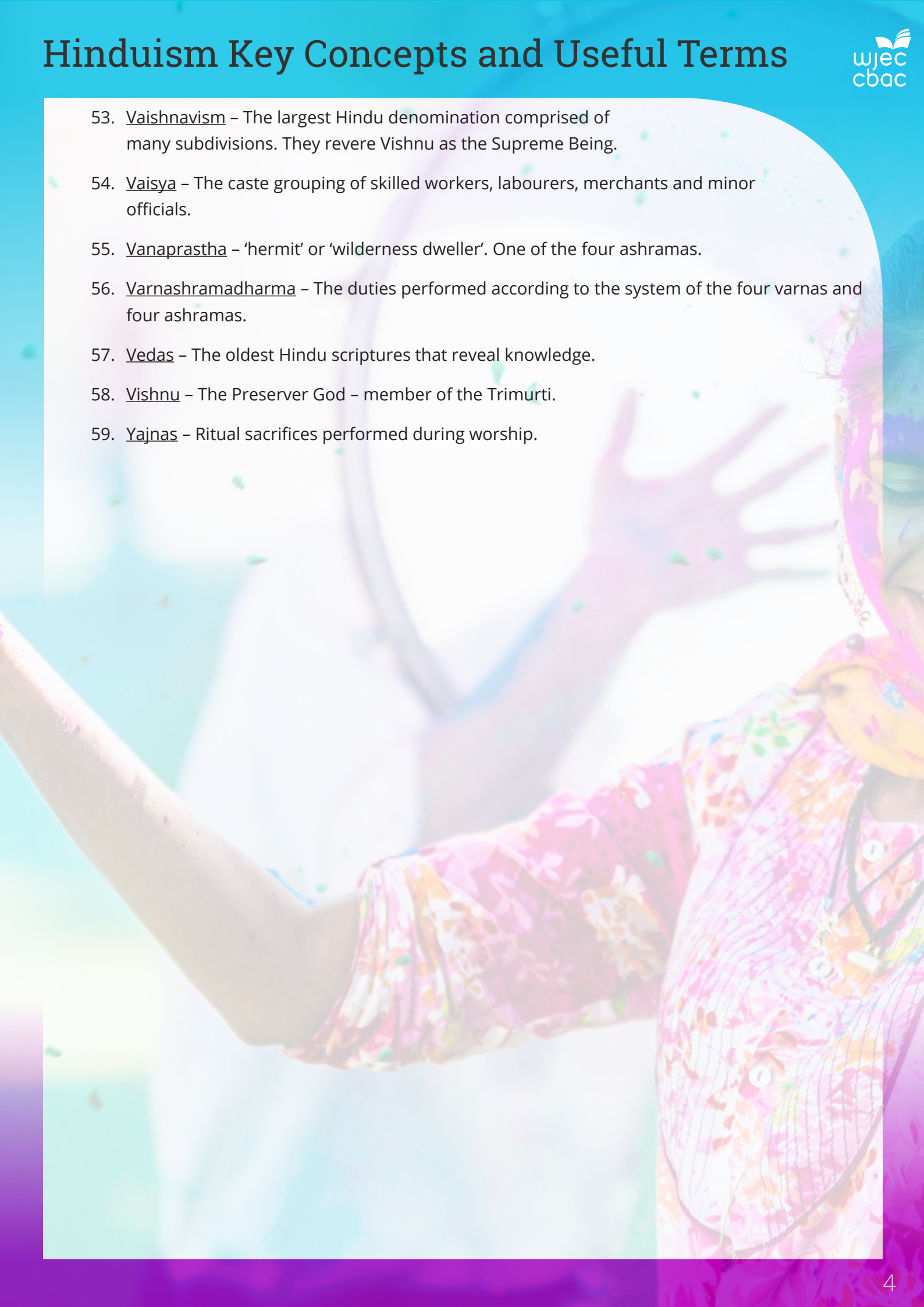
5. Bhakti – An act of love and devotion to a personal God performed as an act of worship.
6. Brahma – The Creator God – one of the members of the Trimurti.
7. Brahmacarya – ‘Celibate student’. One of the four ashramas.
8. Brahman – The supreme power in the Universe; ultimate reality; God.
9. Brahmin – The priestly caste.
10. Dalit – ‘Untouchable’. The social group associated with occupations regarded as impure.
11. Deity – A god or goddess.
12. Diya – A small lamp often used during Diwali.
13. Ganesh – The elephant-headed God; god of good beginnings; symbol of luck and remover of obstacles. He is often the first to be worshipped.
14. Gayatri Mantra – A very important verse from the Vedas, which is said each day in particular by the Brahmins (Priests).
15. Grihastha – ‘Householder’. One of the four ashramas.
16. Guru – A religious teacher and spiritual guide.
17. Hanuman – The monkey God; Hero of the Ramayana, God of strength.
18. Havan – A purifying ritual that involves the use of a sacred fire.
19. Holika – Demoness found in Vedic scriptures who was burnt to death with the help of Vishnu.
20. Ishtadev – A personally chosen God.
21. Japa – The repetition of a mantra or the names of God. This can be done aloud or in the mind.
22. Jati – Birth lineage or ‘genus’. The form of existence determined by birth.
23. Krishna – An avatar of Vishnu, which is worshipped widely.
24. Kshatriya – The caste of warriors and rulers; the noble caste.
25. Kurma Purana – A Medieval era Vaishnavism holy text.
26. Lakshmi – The goddess of wealth and fortune and wife of Vishnu – the Preserver God. Popular at the time of Diwali when diya lamps are put in windows to attract her attention.
27. Mahabharata – One of the two epic poems of India that includes the Bhagavad Gita.
28. Mahashivratri – The Great Shiva Night. Shiva, one of the most important gods in Hinduism, has the power to create and to destroy. This is a time of fasting.
29. Mantra – A sacred verse from the ancient scriptures that is repeated before and during

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worship; usually written in Sanskrit.

30. Murti – An image or statue of a God/Goddess; one or more of these are often the focal point of puja.
31. Namaste – A greeting, usually said with hands clasped in front of the body; literally “I bow to God as you”.
32. Om – A sacred syllable; said to be the first word ever lettered and the first sound heard; the most sacred mantra (sometimes Aum).
33. Papa – Actions that lead to negative results and spiritually degrade a person.
34. Prahlada – One of the heroes of the story associated with Holi, through chanting Vishnu's name, he was saved from imminent death.
35. Prashad – Food offered to the gods and shared with the congregation.
36. Puja – Prayer/worship of the gods; offerings. Offerings are given to the murti.
37. Punya – Actions that bear positive results and spiritually elevate a person.
38. Radha – Krishna's consort who is regarded, by Vasinavites, as the original goddess.
39. Rama – The seventh avatar of Lord Vishnu and the hero of the Ramayana.
40. Rig Veda – The oldest of the Hindu scriptures, literally “royal knowledge”.
41. Samskara – Ceremonies that are rites of passage to mark key transition periods in life. E.g. naming ceremony, marriage or death rites.
42. Samnyasa – ‘Renunciator’. One of the four ashramas.
43. Sanskrit – Language of the ancient scriptures.
44. Saraswati – The goddess of music, art and learning and wife of the god Brahma.
45. Satsang – A gathering for devotional singing/worship.
46. Shaivism – Literally translated as ‘Shiva's Path’ and refers to groups of Hindus who revere Shiva as the Supreme Being.
47. Shiva – The most ancient Hindu deity, the Destroyer God – a member of the Trimurti.
48. Shudra – The caste grouping of unskilled workers or servants.
49. Sita – Wife of Rama and found in the story of the Ramayana which is told at the time of Diwali.
50. Swami – A Hindu ascetic or religious teacher.
51. Trimurti – The three major aspects of the Brahman, the supreme power; Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver and Shiva the Destroyer.
52. Upanishads – The Hindu scriptures; final section of the Vedic scriptures.

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- 53. Vaishnavism – The largest Hindu denomination comprised of many subdivisions. They revere Vishnu as the Supreme Being.
 - 54. Vaisya – The caste grouping of skilled workers, labourers, merchants and minor officials.
 - 55. Vanaprastha – ‘hermit’ or ‘wilderness dweller’. One of the four ashramas.
 - 56. Varnashramadharma – The duties performed according to the system of the four varnas and four ashramas.
 - 57. Vedas – The oldest Hindu scriptures that reveal knowledge.
 - 58. Vishnu – The Preserver God – member of the Trimurti.
 - 59. Yajnas – Ritual sacrifices performed during worship.