This is not the first world, nor is it the first universe. There have been and will be many more worlds and universes then there are drops of water in the holy river Ganges. The universes are made by the Trimurti of Lord Brahma the Creator, maintained by Lord Vishnu the Preserver and destroyed by Lord Shiva. Since the universes must be destroyed before they can be re-created, The Lord Shiva is called the Destroyer and Re-Creator. These three gods are all forms of Supreme One and part of the Supreme One. The Supreme One is behind and beyond all.

“***There was neither non-existence nor existence. There was neither the realm of space nor the sky which is beyond. There was neither death neither immortality. There was no distinguishing sign of day or night. That One breathed by its own inputs. Other than that, there was nothing beyond.”***

After each old universe is destroyed nothing is left but a vast ocean. Floating on this ocean, resting on the great snake Ananta, is Lord Vishnu. Some say that a Lotus flower springs from his naval and from this comes Lord Brahma. And it is from Lord Brahma that all creation comes.

***Darkness was hidden by darkness in the beginning. With no distinguishing sign, all this was water. The life force was covered with emptiness. That One a rose with the power of heat.”***

How does Lord Brahma create? Some tell of how he grows lonely and splits himself in two to create male and female. Then it becomes one again and human beings are created. In the same way he creates all the other living things, from the great animals to the tiniest insects. Others say that everything comes from different parts of the Lord Brahma’s body. All the different animals and all the people come from his mouth, arms, thighs and feet. Everything comes from one – Lord Brahma, like all those before and all those to come will be destroyed by Lord Shiva.

How long is the life of a universe? Its length is beyond imagination, one day to Lord Brahma is no longer than four thousand million of the years that we know. Every night when Lord Brahma sleeps the world is destroyed. Every morning when he wakes, it is created again. When the Lord Brahma of this universe has lived a lifetime of such days the universe is completely destroyed by Lord Shiva.

***Desire upon That One in the beginning. That was the first seed of mind poets, seeking in their hearts wisdom, found the bond of existence in nonexistence. Their cord was extended across. Was there be low? Was there above?”***

Everything disappears into the Supreme One. For an unimaginable period of time chaos and water alone exist. Then once again Lord Vishnu appears, floating on the fast ocean from Lord Vishnu comes forth Lord Brahma on the new universe and the cycle continues forever.

This belief in reincarnation, in the cycle of life, strangely influences the lifestyle of many Hindus. It can best be explained by the terms ‘dharma’ and ‘karma.’ Dharma may be translated as ‘duty’ and for Hindus, part of that duty is to respect and care for all living things. The belief that after death we are reborn in another body, not necessarily human, leads to a great respect for all life and results in many cases of vegetarianism. Karma is the result or product of what we do. If we do our duty, then we create good karma, since the next life we may have is directly related to the actions of our present life. To the Hindu, everything is part of Supreme One, and thus every living thing is equally important to the great cycle of life.

“***Who really knows? Who here proclaim it? Whence was it produced? The gods came afterwards who then knows when it’s it has a reason. Perhaps formed itself or perhaps it did not. The One who looks down upon it in highest heaven, only he knows, or perhaps he does not know?”***

A Hindu creation story

Hindus believe that there is One Supreme Spirit of the universe. This Spirit is God. Hindus also believe that God can be seen in many different ways, so for Hindus God can take on the shape of different gods and goddesses. There are several creation stories in Hinduism. Here is one of the creation stories from Hindu mythology.

Before this time began, there was no heaven, no earth and no space between. A vast dark ocean washed up on the shores of nothingness and let the edges of the light. A giant cobra floated on the waters. Asleep with its endless coils lay the Lord Vishnu. He was watched over by the mighty serpent.

Everything was so peaceful and silent that Vishnu slept undisturbed by dreams or motion. From the depths a humming sound began to tremble, Om. It grew and spread, filling the emptiness and throbbing with energy.

Ooooommmm.

The night had ended, Vishnu awoke. As the dawn began to break, from Vishnu’s naval grew a magnificent lotus flower. In the middle of the blossom set Vishnu’s servant, Brahma. He awaited the Lord’s command. Vishnu spoke to his servant: “it is time to begin.” Brahma bowed. Vishnu commanded: “Create the world.” A wind swept up the waters. Vishnu and the serpent vanished.

Brahma remained in the lotus flower, floating and tossing on the sea. He lifted up his arms and calmed the wind and the ocean. Then Brahma split the lotus flower into three. He stretched one part into the heavens. He made another part into the earth. With the third part of the flower he created the skies.

The earth was bare. Brahma set to work. He created grass, flowers, trees and plants of all kinds. To these he gave feeling. Next, he created the animals and the insects to live on the land. Made many birds to fly in the air and many fish to swim in the sea. To all these creatures, gave the senses of touch and smell. He gave them power to see and hear and move.

The world was soon bristling with life and the air was filled with the sounds of Brahma’s creation.

From Brahma’s body, the four main divisions of people (known as *varna*, literally ‘colours’) were created: from his mouth come the priests (the Brahmans), from his arms the warriors and rulers (the Kshatriyas), from his thighs the people who live by agriculture or trade (the Vaishyas) and from his feet a serf class (the Shudras).

These distinctions have survived to our own day and are usually thought of as the caste system, though they are only a tiny part of it. The essential element in the caste system is the division of society into a great many mutually exclusive groups - *jati* in Hindi. The *jati* into which a person is born defines his or her social status through life, as well as providing the group within which that person must marry.

Each *jati* has its place within a well-established hierarchy. Work of an unclean kind (leather-tanning, sweeping, garbage removal) will ensure a very low status. Even today Brahmans consider themselves polluted if coming into contact with Hindus of a low caste - an attitude which has led the lowest groups of all to be classed as 'Untouchables'.

On a personal level the rigidity of the system is softened by the Hindu belief in reincarnation. One of the main rewards of a virtuous or holy life is to be reborn into a higher caste.