

The nature of God.

What you need to know:

- How God is understood (in two religious traditions or different views within one tradition).
- Is God personal or **impersonal**?
- Is God immanent or **transcendent**?
- The meaning of **monotheism** and **polytheism**.
- Can God be known? If so, how?
- The difference between **general revelation** and special revelation and examples of each.

The nature of God means what God is like or how people understand God. Even an atheist has some idea of God that they reject!

Christians understand God as a supreme being who created all things. They see God as good, loving, just, powerful and merciful, appearing to give God human characteristics (**personal**). They think God as close to people, involved in the world, acting in human history (**imminent**), yet they know this limits God. They think God is beyond human understanding, eternal, all-knowing, mysterious, more like a force (**impersonal**) and not limited by time or space, outside the world, taking no active part in human life (**transcendent**). They believe that God is One (**monotheism**) but they speak of the trinity (Father, Son and Spirit).

Although these qualities seem contradictory, Christians emphasize some more than others and many think you need to all of them to do justice to their idea of God. All theists share many of these ideas.

Hindus understand God as the **atman** (Soul), which lives in each person (personal and imminent), but also as Brahman, without form, the source of the earth, outside human experience and understanding, the energy that keeps the universe in being (impersonal and transcendent). Brahman cannot be fully known but the images or deities show many sides to Brahman's nature.

For example:

Brahma: Creator.
Vishnu: Preserver.
Shiva: Destroyer.

These three show the full personality of Brahman and make him a more personal being to the believer.

Think about the following questions:

- Personal: How can God be everywhere at the same time, care for everyone, answer prayers, if God is personal?
- Impersonal: How can people have a meaningful relationship with a 'force' or impersonal 'spirit', or a prime number (One), or the idea of infinity, or some other idea in the minds of people?
- Immanent: If God is 'in the world' does that mean that God is *part* of the world?