

# The Nature of Religious Narratives

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## WHAT'S COVERED

This is a tutorial on the nature of religious narrative stories. You've probably heard lots of good stories in your life. Religions are full of all sorts of narratives, myths, and histories that contain beliefs that guide people's actions along a religious pathway. These narratives provide information about religious culture and tradition that is available to believers and non-believers. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. [Secular vs. Religious Narratives](#)
2. [Jewish and Christian Narratives](#)
3. [Hindu Creation Narrative](#)

## 1. Secular vs. Religious Narratives

Many narratives are not religious. Instead, they contain stories, perhaps actual histories, of the lives of cultures and societies. These **secular** narratives are not intended to portray a religious tradition in any direct way as the religious narratives generally do. Certainly, religious themes might be present within the secular narrative, but this is not the purpose or the approach of secular narratives.



### THINK ABOUT IT

[What is a secular narrative?](#)



You might think of the traditional historical narrative that recounts the events of different cultures' struggles for and fights for independence, such as the American Revolutionary War.

Both secular and religious narratives often have universal themes that don't necessarily know any boundaries. In spite of the unique elements that are specific to each religion, there's often no distinction between themes. These themes apply to many different traditions and cultures.

The common religious themes have to do with subjects such as where humanity came from and what role God plays in the unfolding of the universe and human civilizations. Perhaps the most universal theme of all is the

belief that there is some very special relationship between humanity and the sacred realm of the divine and transcendent.



#### TERM TO KNOW

##### Secular

Worldly, not spiritual.

## 2. Jewish and Christian Narratives

In the Jewish and Christian tradition, there is a fairly well-known creation story in the book of Genesis, the book where Adam and Eve appear in the Garden of Eden.

In Judaism, the book of Genesis ends with the people of Israel who had descended into slavery in Egypt, and there they await the arrival of Moses, who would lead them back to their promised land, Canaan. This is their land of origin. The second book of the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament is the book of Exodus. This book narrates the story of Moses leading the Israelites out of captivity and through the desert back to Canaan. The Ten Commandments are received by Moses, and the foundation of Jewish law is further established. The subsequent stories portray the establishment of civilization and the mandates of God.

## 3. Hindu Creation Narrative

In certain branches of Hinduism, there is the creation story that links divine Vishnu, the incomprehensible transcendent being, with creation. His sport, folly, and love entailed manifesting itself in the form of various avatars, such as Lord Krishna, and dispersing himself throughout the universe. He is all pervasive and all encompassing. Creation represents his divine will and expansion.



#### SUMMARY

This lesson started out by distinguishing between **secular vs. religious narratives**. The difference has to do with the approach and the intention of the story. Religious narratives contain themes that are related to the creation of the world, human beings, the establishment of civilization, and the role that God might play in that. Secular narratives have more to do with things that are non-religious and related to subjects such as politics. One of the most well-known creation stories in the West is the **Jewish and Christian narrative** of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis, the creation of the world, the creation of man and woman. This led to the casting out of Man from the Garden of Eden. In Judaism, this lesson mentioned Moses leading the Israelites back home, out from captivity in Egypt. You looked at a **Hindu creation narrative** of the universe and the creation of the divine expansion of will, of Vishnu, into different aspects of the universe. Many of the themes in religious narratives are universal across all traditions, namely this belief that there is some special relationship between the created world and the un-created creator or the divine. The purpose of religious narrative is to express and maintain that kind

of connection with the transcendent through storytelling.

All of these stories maintain a link with the past, maintain a link with tradition and sacred principles. The divine commandments that are part of these narratives have become a part of civilization and a part of secular law in many cases.

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## TERMS TO KNOW

### **Secular**

Worldly, not spiritual.