

Hindu Religion and Philosophy

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A Very Shallow Introduction to Hinduism

- Hinduism is generally considered to be the oldest major world religion still actively practiced today.
- It originated from the ancient Vedic culture in the Indus Valley, dating back as far as 2000 BCE.
- There are over 1 billion followers today, most of whom live in India.
- Hinduism is a very tolerant religion, allowing for multiple interpretations and paths to truth. No one can claim one transcendent Truth, because there are many truths.
- The central texts of Hinduism are contained in the Vedas

Core Concepts

- Dharma is the central concept of the Hindu religion, though a difficult one to define. [Monier Monier-Williams](#) gives its *primary* definition as:
that which is established or firm, steadfast decree, statute, ordinance, law; usage, practice, customary observance or prescribed conduct, duty; right, justice (often as a synonym of punishment); virtue, morality, religion, religious merit, good works,
 - To a certain extent, it is better left undefined because the word has its own powerful meanings, best translated as “correctness”, “duty”, “Path of Righteousness”, and “faith”.
 - Specifically, these are critical concepts
 - Religious expression is a search within the self. External figures can be guides or teachers, but answers are individualized, as are paths
 - All existence is part of the Dharma, from rocks to humans
 - Living in accordance with one’s Dharma means living in accordance with one’s role.
- Reincarnation. The Hindu faith emphasizes the idea that our souls endure while we are constantly being reborn.
“The idea that the soul reincarnates is intricately linked to karma, whose first explication was also seen in the Hindu books of the Upanishads. The idea is that individual souls, **jiva-atmas** pass from one plane of existence carry with them **samskaras** (impressions) from former states of being. These karmic agglomerations on the soul are taken to the next life and result in a causally-determined state of being. In Hinduism, liberation from **samsara**, the cycle of death and rebirth, is considered the ultimate goal of earthly existence. This is known as **Moksha**, **mahasamadhi** (or nirvana) in Hinduism.” –(Wikipedia)
- Karma. As part of the order of dharma, **karma** functions as a cosmic sense of “cause and effect”, essentially regulating a system of balance in the universe. Ill deeds in one life will be repaid in another, good deeds will be rewarded. Karma is not an instrument of a god, or a single God, but is rather the physical and spiritual 'physics' of being. It eliminates the Fate, Destiny, and Kismet of Western cultures, arguing that the karma is part of the order of the universe.

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- Moksha. Liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth. In higher Hindu philosophy, it is seen as a transcendence of phenomenal being, of any sense of consciousness of time, space and causation (karma).
- Ahimsa. The Hindu religious concept that advocates non-violence

Bhagavad Gita “Song of the Lord”

- The Bhagavad Gita is the most important text to Hindus. Almost all Hindu people regard it as the central philosophical work of their religion.
- It is a part of Mahabhrata, the long epic poem of the Hindu faith.
- Critical Ideas
 - Suppression of the Ego is paramount. If we eliminate focus on our singular self, we gain the path to Enlightenment and moksha.
 - By decreasing our reliance on the senses, reducing extremes of sorrow and joy, and doing one’s duty, a person can subjugate his mortality and attachment for the material world and see the infinite.
 - Emphasizes the importance of reincarnation, and the shallowness of concern for physical bodies.
 - Truth is found in **Atman**, the universal oversoul that binds us all. It is incorrect to conceive of the soul in Hindu religion as a singular element of one individual. It is part of a connected whole, and the individual’s soul aspires to be reunited-