

[Hindu Values](#)

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Hindu Values

Many of our readers have expressed the hope that Hinduism Today would provide regular columns to address the many questions that their non-Hindu friends, and their children, ask about their religion. This column, "Hindu Values," comes in response to those requests. We will begin by defining what Hinduism is, and what its central beliefs are, exploring some of the most central beliefs, such as karma and reincarnation, in depth in subsequent columns. This column will also cover Hindu practices, such as pilgrimage, worship, sadhana and tapas, marriage, renunciation and sacraments. Last but not least, it will explore the Hindu view of various crucial societal challenges, such as divorce, suicide, drug abuse, alcoholism and abortion. As always, we welcome your Questions, suggestions and advice, and will strive to incorporate them in future Hindu Values columns.

WHAT IS HINDUISM?

FOUNDED: Hinduism, the world's oldest religion, has no beginning-it predates recorded history.

FOUNDER: Hinduism has no human founder.

MAJOR SCRIPTURES: The Vedas, the Upanishads, the Agamas, etc.

ADHERENTS: Over 650,000,000, mostly in India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Malaysia, Indonesia, Mauritius, Africa, Europe and North America.

SECTS: There are three main denominations: Saivism, Saktism and Vaisnavism-and liberal, non-sectarian forms, most importantly the Smarta Sampradaya.

SYNOPSIS: Hinduism is a vast and profound religion. It worships one Supreme Reality (called by many names) and teaches that all souls ultimately realize Truth. There is no eternal hell, no damnation. It accepts all genuine spiritual paths-from pure monism ("God alone exists") to theistic dualism ("When shall I know His Grace?"). Each soul is free to find his own way, whether by devotion, austerity, meditation (yoga) or selfless service. Stress is placed on temple worship, scripture and the Guru/disciple tradition. Festivals, pilgrimage, chanting of holy hymns and home worship are dynamic practices. Love, non-violence, good conduct and the law of dharma define the Hindu path. Hinduism explains that the soul reincarnates until all karmas are resolved and God Realization is attained. The magnificent holy temples, the peaceful piety of the Hindu home, the subtle metaphysics and the science of yoga all play their part. Hinduism is a mystical religion, leading the devotee to personally experience the Truth within, finally reaching the pinnacle of consciousness where man & God we one.

WHAT DO HINDUS BELIEVE?

There are many beliefs and practices common to most, if not all, Hindu sects. The following 12 are some of the central ones.

1. Hindus believe in a one, all-pervasive Supreme Being.
2. Hindus believe that all souls are evolving toward union with God and will ultimately find Moksha, spiritual knowledge and liberation from the cycle of rebirth. Not a single soul will be eternally deprived of this attainment.
3. Hindus believe in karma-the law of cause and effect by which each individual molds its own future through thoughts, words and deeds.

4. Hindus believe in reincarnation, that the soul has not merely one birth on the earth but many through which it matures and evolves until all karmas are resolved.

5. Hindus believe in the guidance offered by enlightened masters and mystics, and that the awakened Sat Guru can lead the soul to God-Realization, revealing its true and divine nature.

6. Hindus believe that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered, and therefore practice ahimsa, non-violence.

7. Hindus believe in the ancient Vedas and Agamas as the highest scriptural authority.

8. Hindus believe that "Truth is one, paths are many." Thus, no particular religion teaches the only way to salvation, but all genuine religious expressions are facets of God's Pure Light, deserving tolerance and understanding.

9. Hindus believe that divine beings exist in unseen worlds and that temple worship, rituals and sacraments create a harmony or communication with the Gods and devas.

10. Hindus believe in wearing sacred marks, called tilaks, on the forehead. Each sect has its own distinctive insignia.

11. Hindus believe in cremation of the body upon death.

12. Hindus believe in the importance of personal purification, devotional practices, sadhana, meditation & self-inquiry as expressed in their distinctive Sampradaya (living tradition).