

Hinduism is among the oldest of the world's faiths. It is a total way of life. It is a dharma or way of life evolved by the great sages and seers of ancient India. Its traditions extend back before recorded history. The early phase of the Vedic tradition in India is dated between 10,000 - 7,000 BCE. Yet, in spite of the fact that it first evolved more than 5,000 years ago, Hinduism (Sanatana Dharma) is also very much a living tradition. And as such, Hindus are arguably the most intensely religious people on the earth.

For thousands of years India has been a veritable laboratory of religion: everything imaginable has been tried out, and nothing ever has completely been rejected. India remains a predominantly Hindu country. Its ethos has evolved down the ages through its the ancient Hindu traditions, customs, philosophy and culture. In spite of many attacks on Hinduism by varied invaders, in spite of rumors of decay and disarray, Hinduism has outlived all announcements of its impending demise.

पूजा पूजा पूजा पूजा पूजा पूजा पूजा पूजा पूजा

Introduction

A Total Way of Life

The first fundamental principle of Hindu Dharma is that **"the Reality is one without a second."** This reality is beyond description by human mind. Hence it is indicated by a single word, "Brahman". "Infinite, eternal, changeless existence is the All; from that All, All comes forth; to that All, all returns," that is what the [Chandogya Upanishad](#) (vi.2.1) tells us.

Hinduism is the only faith to have boldly and confidently proclaimed that "Truth is one, the wise call it by various names." ([Rig Veda](#)).

Hinduism may not be called religion in the sense other religions are known. It has no founder. It is much more than a religion. It is a total way of life.

When religion becomes organized, man ceases to be free. It is not God that is worshipped but the group or the authority that claims to speak in his name. It is not faith, but just social idolatry. God is not like a father in a patriarchal society, who has His favorite children to whom He communicates. This idea seems rather archaic and crude. Hinduism believes in behavior than belief and experience over authority. In the words of [S. Radhakrishnan](#), **Prophetic religion is severe, militant, uncompromising, intolerant, while mystic religions are renouncing, and peaceful.** He further asks, "Is it an accident that Hitler and Mussolini, have been brought up in Roman Catholic societies, where it is blasphemous to criticize infallible authority?" (For information on Monotheism and its discontent and Crusades and Jihad, refer to chapters on [Glimpses VI](#) and [Conversion](#) and [God Wars: The triumph of the jealous God](#)).



Hinduism's greatest feature has been its positive ideas and those who do not belong to it are not infidels or heretics. Hinduism does not believe in bringing about a mechanical uniformity of belief and worship by a forcible elimination of all that is not in agreement with a particular creed. Hindus have never conquered, plundered or committed genocides on other peoples and they never will, primarily because the deeper values enshrined in the Sanatana Dharma are against such mindless violence and expansionism. At one level every true Hindu sees his/her self being one with the Universal Self. At a more samsaric level, a Hindu also understands more than any other religionist in

the world, the concept of a harmonious global society that should unite, prosper and live in peace. 'IOkAsamastA sukhinO bhavantu' and 'vasudhaiva kuTumbakaM' are not mere empty words spoken by Rsis a long long while ago.

Hindus were the first to discover that truth had many facets. They, therefore, never committed the error of imagining, as some people did, that they knew the ultimate truth, and that no further enquiry was required. Says Dr S. Radhakrishnan: "The Aryan did not possess the pride of the fanatic that his was the true religion." The genius of Hinduism is assimilative. Puritanism is alien to its life and thought. **It never opposed scientific enquiry. While all Semitic religions have opposed the pursuit of science at one time or another, India has always welcomed scientific enquiry. India is not afraid of knowledge.** The path of knowledge, the path of enquiry, the **Gyana Marga**, is considered to be one of the ways to salvation by the Hindus. **No other religion gives this liberty.**

Hinduism encompasses all, finds a place for all, and establishes the functional relations between diverse traditions. Those who are not Hindu in their spiritual orientation still find a place in India by the virtue of this arrangement. Hinduism has not approved proselytism as a means of increasing the number of its adherents. A Hindu does not believe that salvation is to be had only through any one particular religion. God does not refuse his truth, his love and his grace to any who, in sincerity, seek him, wherever they may be and whatever creeds they may profess. All missionary religions, like Islam and Christianity profess that they have the highest truth. **But in Hinduism, religious propoganda is discouraged and frowned upon, for Truth (God) needs no trumpeting.** Hinduism is wholly free from the strange obsession of some faiths that the acceptance of a particular religious metaphysics is necessary for salvation, and non-acceptance thereof is heinous sin meriting eternal punishment in hell.

(source: [The Hindu View of Life - By S. Radhakrishnan](#) p. 24 -35).

The distinguishing feature of Hinduism is pluralism combined with freedom of choice. Further, Hinduism recognizes no intermediary or prophet as standing between man and God. **It has none of baggage of exclusivism expressed through a prophetic medium.**

Freedom of choice – distinguishes pluralistic Hinduism from other Semitic religions. In the Hindu tradition, one is free to choose, question and reject. A Hindu faces no dire consequences even if he rejects the Vedas as false.

Secularism is a practice of extremely long standing in India – going back to the Vedic times. Brahmins in India have long been classified as Vaidika and Laukika. Vaidika Brahmins are those that are engaged in priestly duties, while Laukika Brahmins are those that are active in the secular professions like medicine, engineering, law, teaching and others. Secularism evolved in Europe as a negation of religious authority as embodied in church theocracy. It was a humanistic movement which had at its goal the removal of religious authority from the affairs of the state. The idea of a secular form of government – with priestly authority separated from the affairs of the state – is a relatively recent development in Europe. **Samuel Huntington** of the [Clash of Civilizations](#) fame needs no introduction. In his book of the same name, he writes, **"Only in Hindu civilization were religion and politics so distinctly separated."**

(source: [A Hindu View of the World - By N. S. Rajaram](#) p. 1 - 30 and [Matter of mindset - By K R Phanda](#) - dailypioneer.com - November 4 2003).

The history of religions illustrates the tragic effect of intolerant and exclusive faiths. God has no special favorites. God as a jealous one and there will be no peace in the religious world.

According to the **Bhagavad Gita**:

"I am alike to all being." "None is hateful or dear to me. But those who worship me with devotion are in me and I in them." " The Rig Veda, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita hold that all paths lead to the summit. "As men approach me so do I accept them. Men on all sides follow my path." God is leading all people of the world on to the fullness of life by diverse paths. **The Hindu seer has no contempt for other religions.** He does not believe that salvation is to be had only through any one particular religion. God does not refuse his truth, his love and his grace to any who, in sincerity, seek him, wherever they may be and whatever creeds they may profess. It is unfair to God's love and mercy to assume that he left millions of men to stagnate for thousands of years, practically without hope in the darkness of ignorance.

(source: [Recovery of Faith - By S. Radhakrishnan](#) ISBN: 81-7223-145-8 p. 143-172. [Religion and Culture - By S. Radhakrishnan](#) p. 64).

Esoteric Hinduism has also been a fertile ground for something far more than itself: out of it has grown the most sublime spiritual wisdom that the world has ever known. **India, is the motherland of the spiritual quest. Her ascetic tradition is older than history itself.** Hinduism is not just a religion. **It synonymies the five millennia of India's cultural heritage.** Hindu philosophy in comparison with which, in the words of German Scholar, Schlegel, "**even the loftiest philosophy of the Europeans**" appears "**like a feeble Promethean spark in the full flood of heavenly glory of the noonday sun faltering and feeble and ever ready to be extinguished.**"

(source: [A History of Hindu Civilization During British Rule - By Pramatha Nath Bose](#) - volume I p. x).

The Hindu mind soared to the highest flights, and grasped, some of the grandest principles ever discovered in ancient or modern times. For millennia, individuals on the sub-continent have stepped outside of the conventional norm to conduct their own personal search for the divine. Hinduism, unlike other religions, has continuously reflected the evolving needs of the times and the people. This is true today as it was in the past. In the face of growing consumerism and Western values, the spiritual streams of India still as yet, retain their fertility.



The word Hindu is a geographic rather than a religious term. Hindus call their religion **Sanatana Dharma - 'Eternal law'**.

It is based on the practice of **Dharma, the code of life.** Since Hinduism has no founder, anyone who practices Dharma can call himself a Hindu. **Hinduism lays emphasis on direct Experience rather than on authority.** **Indian people have been powerfully and continuously affected from ancient times by the idea of religion as direct experience of the Divine.**

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan has written: " From the beginning, India believed in the superiority of intuition or the method of direct perception of the supersensible to intellectual reasoning. **The Vedic rishis ' were the first who ever burst into the silent sea' of ultimate being and their utterances about what they saw and heard.** The Kena Upanishad says: "The eye does not go thither, nor speech nor mind.

We do not know, we do not understand how one can teach it. It is different from the known, it is also above the unknown." Hindu thinkers are not content with the postulating a being unrelated to humanity, who is merely the Beyond, so far as the empirical world is concerned. From the beginnings of Hindu history, attempts are made to bring God closer to the needs of man. Though it is impossible to describe the ultimate reality, it is quite possible to indicate by means of symbols aspects of it, though the symbolic description is not a substitute for the experience of God."

(source: [The Legacy of India - ed. G.T. Garratt](#) p.256 -286).

An important concept is the search or quest for Truth. **Hinduism is a relentless pursuit of Truth. "Truth is God."**

Knowledge, vision, wisdom, is the goal of the Upanishads. It is a new kind of thinking in which the whole man is implicated. The aim is not intellectual conformity to inherited doctrine, but one of attainment of knowledge. He can question the authority of any scripture, or even the existence of the Divine. Despite being the oldest religion, the truth realized by the seers prove that the Truth and path provided by Hinduism is beyond time. Its concern is with the absolute Truth, not with systems of belief. The absolute Truth is universal, and forever impersonal. No one has a proprietary claim to it. Hinduism is a religion that bears a great intellectual heritage with six schools of classical philosophy. Hinduism extends into every aspect of the believer's life.

Hindus have never been communal. They represent an ancient civilization not known either to draw a boundary between the faithful and the faithless, the blessed and the damned, or to engage in heresy hunting and its counterpart, persecution of other faiths. **J. Abbe Dubois**, (1765-1848) French missionary,

has said that India is:

"the only nation perhaps in the universe which has never sunk into barbarism, and which...may deserve to fix the attention of the philosopher."

(source: [Colonial Indology: Sociopolitics of the Ancient Indian Past - By Dilip K. Chakrabarti](#) p. 87).

To the Hindu, religion is an awareness of ultimate reality, not a theory about it; religion is psychology and method rather than theology and dogma. Hindus have been able to rise above their biological boundaries and roam at will in transcendental realms from which the intellect is forever barred. The spiritual and religious ethos of India is less vulnerable to scientific criticism than the Western creed because it is not connected with history.

(source: [The Soul of India - By Amaury de Riencourt](#) p.113 -15 and 399).

Narrowness of the spirit, peculiar to Semitic faiths, has been alien to India. Nazism, fascism, and communism have been expressions of the same Semitic spirit in the secular realm. Hindus, in Western terms, are pagans. Religion is a Semitic enterprise and is alien to their spirit and ways. Unlike the traditions of the Middle East, classical **Hinduism is not a religion of the book: it is a 'heard' tradition.** Its scriptures are recited, or sung not read. Though the Rig Veda is very ancient, it was not written down until almost 3,000 years later. The script was available, but the verses were considered so powerful that they were protected from possible misuse by being transmitted orally from master to disciple, father to son. Even today they are treated with the utmost respect. Sacred texts are always covered in a cloth, and if they become damaged, they are not restored, but consigned solemnly to the River Ganga.

"Hinduism has provided a complex and sophisticated philosophy of life and a religion of enormous emotional appeal. Hinduism also inspired and preserved, in Sanskrit and the major regional languages of India, the vast literature that is India's priceless literary heritage."

(source: [A History of World Societies To 1715- Mckay, Hill, & Buckler](#) vol. 1 p. 77).

Hinduism, after all, is indigenous, it has shaped Indian society and mentality for thousands of years, **it is flexible and, in the opinion of most Hindus, far superior in its philosophy to any other religion or philosophy.**

(source: [A Survey of Hinduism - By Klaus K. Klostermaier](#). State University of New York Press. 1994 p. 472).

No other living tradition can claim scriptures as numerous or as ancient as Hinduism; none of them can boast of an unbroken tradition as faithfully preserved as the Hindu traditions.

According to **Thomas Berry**, **"In quality, in quantity, in significance for man's intellectual, cultural, and spiritual life, this literature in its totality is unsurpassed among all other literary traditions of the world."**

"Hinduism is a process - for this reason, Hinduism must be studied not as a fixed body of doctrine, but as a developing tradition that has changed considerably throughout the centuries and which is still changing in a creative direction. Everything in India makes sense in the light of the changing process. Nothing makes sense without it. Hinduism is still a living, changing process and must be seen as such."

(source: [Religions of India: Hinduism, Yoga, Buddhism - Thomas Berry](#) p. 3-16).



The most sacred of Hindu texts - **The Vedas, the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas, and the Upanishads** - are all 'sruti' meaning 'what is heard' from the original Vedic Rishis, whose inspired

utterances were passed down. While sruti works are considered to be divine revelations, the 'smriti', thought still sacred, are acknowledged to have been crafted by men. They include the epics - **The Ramayana, The Mahabharata - the Dharma Sutras** (of which the most famous are the **Manusmriti**, Laws of Manu) and the **Puranas**.

Idol Worship (Symbolism)

Yes, said he, but just how many gods are there Yajnavalkya?" "Thirty three". "yes," said he, but just how many gods are there, Yajnavalkya?" "One."

- **Brhadaranyaka Upanishad** III, IX, I

The richness of Hindu iconography

Hindus have represented God in innumerable forms. Each is but a symbol that points to something beyond; and as none exhausts God's actual nature, the entire array is needed to complete the picture of God's aspects and manifestations. Nowhere else in the world do we find such a profusion of gods and goddesses, divine beings and demons, ramifications of genealogies of gods, and manifestations of the divinity in human and animal forms. **But that is only the surface of Hinduism, the colorful appearance of a tradition that has enormous depths.**



Perhaps the first thing to strike a Western observer about Hindu deities is the multiplicity of limbs they display. Nineteenth-century writers, brought up on Greek sculpture, found this grotesque and inexplicable. Yet the reason why the Hindu deities are represented in this way is simple: it is to show that they are gods, that they differ from human beings and have more and greater powers than they. A symbol such as a multi-armed image, graphically portraying God's astounding versatility and superhuman might. The use of symbolism extends to every detail of the image of a deity.

It is therefore, obtuse to confuse Hinduism's images with idolatry, and their multiplicity with polytheism. They are runaways from which the sense-laden human spirit can rise for its "flight of the alone to the Alone." Even village priest will frequently open their temple ceremonies with the following beloved invocation:

**O Lord, forgive three sins that are due to my human limitations:
Thou art everywhere, but I worship you here;
Thou art without form, but I worship you in these forms;
Thou needest no praise, yet I offer you these prayers and salutations,
Lord, forgive three sins that are due to my human limitations.**

Even if questioned about how many gods there are even an illiterate Hindu villager will answer, "**Bhagvan ek hi hai.**" - **the Lord is One.**

Only in India the mind went beyond monotheism to monism, from **dvaita to advaita** — to a god without form and attributes. One cannot go beyond that.

Behind the lush tangle of religious imagery, is a clear structure of thought. Hinduism, in its plethora of symbols and images, is endlessly complex and therefore endlessly misunderstood, but its true mission is both simple and universal: soul-enlightenment. Hinduism is **goal-oriented, not way-oriented.** In other words, its focus is the ultimate attainment, Self-realization, in God. Symbolism helps the seeker to concentrate his mind on the worship and meditation of god.



God's innumerable forms, and the acknowledgement of His Presence in everything, are an expression of the extraordinary vitality of India's collective imagination down through the ages.

Idol or image is a kind of yantra or a device for harnessing the eye and mind on God. As the **Vishnu Samhita** puts it:



"Without a form how can God be mediated upon? If (He is) without any form, where will the mind fix itself? When there is nothing for the mind to attach itself to, it will slip away from meditation or will glide into a state of slumber. Therefore the wise will meditate on some form, remembering,

however, that the form is a superimposition and not a reality."

Symbolism in Hinduism is sublime and profound. Each act of Hindu worship reflects some deep spiritual significance.

The Hindu, for his part, is nonplussed by the Western antipathy to spiritual imagery. Don't Christians, have their cross? their images of Jesus and Mary? their paintings of scenes from the Bible? And don't the Jews have their Star of David? their holy tabernacle? Guru Nanak, the first of the Sikhs gurus, said to Muslims that they bowed to the Black Stone in Mecca, which is also an image.



Where is the harm, the Hindus wonder, in images that remind one of God and that inspire devotion to Him? The value of (symbols and myths) these things lies in their power to recall our minds from the world's distractions to the thought of God and God's love. In singing God's praises, in praying to god with wholehearted devotion, in meditating on God's majesty and glory, in reading about God in the scriptures, in regarding the entire universe as God's handiwork, we move our affections steadily in God's direction.

As Lord Krishna said in the [Bhagavad Gita](#): "Those who meditate on Me and Worship Me without any attachment to anything else, those I soon lift from the ocean of death".

Foreigner have scorned the Hindu love of idols for centuries. What they have never understood is that the **Hindus are not idol worshippers**. They know as anyone - probably more so - that God can never be reduced to an image. What the devotee's gaze is fixed on in **darshan** is the eyes of the idol. Through those eyes streams the power that lives in the image through the grace of God and the invocations of the priesthood. That is why the eyes are always larger in proportion than the rest of the image, and why a red eye is daubed on the stones that are sacred to the goddess of a village. it is not the image, but the power in the image, that is worshipped by the devotee. It is a two-way process: the god sees the devotee, just as the devotee sees the god. In this meeting of eyes, the devotee and the lord become one.

Diane L. Eck, has noted: "Hinduism is an imaginative, an "image-making, religious tradition in which the sacred is seen as present in the visible world – the world we see in multiple images and deities, in sacred places, and in people. India is a visual and visionary culture, one in which the eyes have a prominent role in the apprehension of the sacred. For most ordinary Hindus, the notion of the divine as "invisible" would be foreign indeed. **God is eminently visible, although human beings have not always had the refinement of sight to see. Furthermore, the divine is visible not only in temple and shrine, but also in the whole continuum of life – in nature, in people, in birth and growth and death.** Although some Hindus, both philosophers and radical reformers, have always used the terms "nirguna" (quality less) and nirakara (form less) to speak of the One Bramh. Yet the same tradition has simultaneously affirmed that Bramh is also saguna (with qualities) and that the multitude of "names and forms" of this world are the exuberant transformations of the One Bramh.

(source: [Darsan - Seeing the Divine Image in India](#) p.10 - 12) Please refer to chapter on [Symbolism in Hinduism](#)).

Puja



Puja is the daily ritual by which devotees seek communion with the divine. Puja symbolizes a devotee's desire to offer love and devotion to the Lord, thereby surrendering his or her individuality to Him. Hinduism recognizes self-surrender as a supreme path to salvation.

The entire **puja** (worship) is a progressive identification of man and god, culminating in the meeting of eyes and the passing of the flame, the **arati**, that ends the ritual.



The flame is passed before the image of the god, and then brought to the devotees for them to pass their hands through and put them to their eyes. The god sees the face of the individual in the flame, and his power is transmitted through the flame into the person's eyes. Even a blind person goes to the temple for **darshan**. It is not the physical eye, as much as the inner eye, or the third eye that receives the darshan of the lord. The meeting happens in the intuitive, supersensible realm.

(Please visit [ONLINE DARSHAN](#) for performing Pooja and Aarti.

Hindu Concept of God



The **Rig Veda** has declared the Ultimate Reality (God) as:

"Ekam sat vipraha, bahudha vadanti" (Sanskrit)

"Truth (God) is one, the wise call it by various names"

and exhort us to "let good thoughts come to us from every where" in the **Bhagavad Gita**, Lord Krishna assures the adherents of all religions that "those who pray with devotion to another god, it is to Me that they pray."

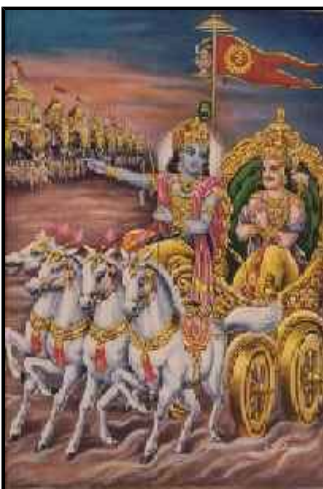
The Truth (God) was called Bramh by the sages. The root of the word Bramh is "Brih" which means to expand. According to the Hindu view, the Supreme Reality can be viewed from two aspects:

Transcendent (impersonal) and **Immanent** (personal).

In the transcendent aspect, the Supreme Reality is called **Nirguna Bramh**, that is Bramh, **without attributes**. "Bramh is He whom speech cannot express, and from whom the mind is unable to reach Him, comes away baffled" states the Taittiriya Upanishad.

Nirguna Bramh is not an object of prayer, but of meditation and knowledge. It cannot be described, and the most one can say is that It is absolute existence, absolute knowledge, and absolute bliss (**sat-chi-ananda**). It is unborn, self-existent, all-pervading, and the essence of all things and beings in the universe. It is immeasurable, unapproachable, beyond conception, beyond birth, beyond reasoning, and beyond thought". God cannot be defined in terms of any specific manifestation, nor indeed in terms of their sum total. He is beyond all possibility of definition. The Bhagavad Gita, the best-known scripture of India, states this point clearly:

"Though I manifest Myself in all things, I am identified with none of them".



In its **Immanent (personal) aspect**, the Supreme Reality, is called **Saguna Bramh**. He is the personal God, the creator, the preserver, and the controller of the universe. In Hinduism, the immanent (personal) aspect of Bramh is worshipped in both male and female forms. In the male form, he is worshipped as Ishvara, Maheshvara, Paramatma, Purusha. In the female form, as the Divine Mother, Durga, and Kali. The Vedic God has no partisan attitude of the jealous and vindictive God.

God in Hinduism is not the creator of the individual soul, (atman). The atman is divine and eternal. **Greater wisdom was never compressed into three words than by the Chandogya Upanishad which proclaimed the true Self of Man as part of the Infinite Spirit - Tat twam asi : That Thou Art".**

In the beautiful words of **Vedanta**: "Samvit or pure consciousness is one and non-dual, ever self-luminous, and does not rise or set in months and years and aeons, past or future."

Hinduism provides for the ultimate Truth but not for a final and last statement of that Truth. Hinduism provides for self-renewal. The concept of **Kalabrahma** or **Kaladharmā** is central to the Hindu way of thinking. Thus making for effective use of the built-in mechanism for change for centuries. **It accepts explicitly the inevitability of change with the passage of time.** The past is not superseded but modified according to the demands of the spirit of the times. Thus, the Vedas are followed by the Upanishads and these by the Epics and the Puranas; nothing is final. Hence, Hinduism's striking ability to adapt itself to changing circumstances and conditions.

Hinduism emphasizes Experience of Reality and Truth rather than belief.

It does not believe in concepts of proselytization, heresy hunting, Holy wars, proclamation of chosen people or a jealous God. Hinduism is an inclusive faith which provides for every form of religious experience and belief; there can be no heresy or Kufr in Hinduism.

"The Bhagavad Gita, with a clear grasp of the historical, warns us against taking away the psychological comfort of people by unsettling their faith."

According to the **Bhagavad Gita**, even those who worship other gods (anyadevatah), ancestral deities, elemental powers, if they do so with faith, then their faith is justified, for the Divine accepts every form conceived by the worshipper.

Toleration is the homage, which the finite mind pays to the inexhaustibility of the Infinite.

(source: [Eastern Religions & Western Thought - By Sir Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan](#) p.316 - 328).

Sin in Hinduism

Christianity and Judaism are religions of exile: Man was thrown out of the Garden of Eden resulting in his "fall."

Man is not born as a sinner in Hinduism. "Each soul is potentially divine." The Upanishads teach us that Reality is the essence of every created thing, and the same Reality is our real Self, so that each of us is one with the power that created and sustains the universe. In the late nineteenth century, the Dutch poet Willem Kloos (1859-1938) wrote: "*Ik ben een god in het diepst van mijn gedachten*" (I am a god in the deepest of my thoughts).

"God sleeps in the rocks," proclaims the Indian scriptures, "dreams in the plants, stirs toward wakefulness in the animals, and in mankind is awake to his own ego individuality." In the enlightened stage, finally, he awakens to the full reality of who he truly is, in His infinite Self.

As **Willem Kloos** (Johan Theodoor) (1859-1938) Dutch poet and critic, who was the driving intellectual force of the 1880 Dutch literary revival wrote: "*Ik ben een god in het diepst van mijn gedachten*" (**I am a god in the deepest of my thoughts**).

Both Protestants and Catholics expressed their indignation at this sacrilegious statement.

(source: [Psychology of Prophetism - By Koenraad Elst](#)).

The goal is to **manifest this divinity** within, by controlling nature (both) external and internal. "This can be done either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy (by one or more) and be free". The doctrine of sin as expounded by Christianity is not accepted by Hinduism. According to Hindu view, man commits sin, only because of his ignorance of his own true nature. Ignorance of Self is the root cause of all evils in the world. Self-knowledge is thus essential for eliminating evil.

Thus, says, **Lord Krishna** in the **Bhagavad-Gita**:



"Even if thou art the worst of sinners thou shalt cross the ocean of sin by the bark of wisdom". (BG 4.36)

Freedom and tolerance in Hinduism

Freedom was born in India. Doubt, the mother of freedom, was born with the **Rig Veda**, the most sacred scripture of the Hindus which has the following:

*What are words, and what are mortal thoughts!
Who is there who truly knows and who can say,
Whence this unfathomed world
And from what cause!*

Freedom of the mind created the wondrous world of the intellect — the world of Hindu rishis, philosophers, poets and dramatists.

India has had an unrivalled tradition of religious freedom and tolerance. That tradition was born of the consciousness that truth can never be the monopoly of any one sect or creed.

Infinite tolerance is the hallmark of Hinduism. The first statement of tolerance in Hinduism comes from the Rig Veda and the Bhagavad Gita:

"Let good thoughts come to us from all sides" or "The truth is one but the wise call it by many names" or Lord Krishna saying that "Whoever invokes a deity by whatever name, it is Me he invokes"

(source: [Ayodhya and After - By Koenraad Elst](#) Voice of India SKU: INBK2650 p.238).

The Rishis (sages) realized that each man had to work out his own salvation and that everyone's own spiritual experience is vital to the attainment of the ultimate state of the soul's evolution. A blind obedience to authority is the surest prescription for spiritual paralysis.

Hinduism allows absolute freedom to the rational mind of man. Hinduism never demands any undue restraint upon the freedom of human reason, the freedom of thought, feeling and will of man. Dogmatism, on the other hand, stifles mental elasticity and turns people into "psychological antiques." In Hinduism, the attitude of freedom and generosity to other faiths is bound up with the conviction that the religious life has its source and certainty in the eternal deeps of man's soul.

(source: [Eastern Religions & Western Thought - By S. Radhakrishnan](#) p. 288).

Tolerance: This basic feature of Hindu religion which separates it from revealed religions believing in the finality of their revelations as a fundamental doctrine. While **Lord Krishna** says in the **Gita**:

*Ye yathaa maam prapadyante
Taamstathaiva bhajaamyaham.*

He proclaims a doctrine which is fundamental to all Hindu thought; that is, religion is not a matter of exclusive dogma. It is a wide tolerance, a feeling that others may be equally right in the methods they follow, that is the essence of Hindu teaching.

(source: [Essential Features of Indian Culture - By K. M. Panikkar](#) Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. Mumbai.1964 p. 6).



Hinduism is a **religion of freedom**. It allows the widest freedom in matters of faith and worship. It allows absolute freedom to the human reason and heart with regard to questions such as the nature of God, soul, creation, form of worship, and goal of life. It does not force anybody to accept particular dogmas or forms of worship. **When religion becomes organized, man ceases to be free. For it is not God that is worshipped but the group or the authority that claims to speak in his name. Thus, it becomes a kind of social idolatry.** Highly individualistic, Hindus have always resisted any regimentation of thought. Religion is an experience. To think that any human being or institution has the monopoly of God's truth is to commit the sin of pride.

Exclusivism and intolerance in matters of faith are features of Semitic religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam. Contrary to these desert-born religions, **intolerance and persecution were alien to Hinduism.** [Encyclopaedia Britannica](#) defines Hinduism as: "In principle, Hinduism incorporates all forms of belief and worship without necessitating the selection or elimination of any. The Hindu is inclined to revere the divine in every manifestation, whatever it may be, and is doctrinally tolerant.... A Hindu may embrace a non-Hindu religion without ceasing to be a Hindu...he tends to believe that the highest divine powers complement each other for the well being of the world and the mankind."

(source: [The Hindu Soul in search of Its Body - Balbir Punj](#)).

According to **Sri Aurobindo**: "The inner principles of Hinduism, the most tolerant and receptive of religious systems, is not sharply exclusive like the religious spirit of Christianity or Islam. Europe where men have constantly fought, killed, burned, tortured, imprisoned, persecuted in every way imaginable, by human stupidity and cruelty for the sake of dogma....**Hinduism is in the first place a non-dogmatic inclusive religion**, and would have taken even Islam and Christianity into itself, if they had tolerated the process."

(source: [India's Rebirth - By Sir Aurobindo](#) p. 143).

The great German thinker **Paul Natorp** (1854-1924) reminds us of an Indian (Hindu) teacher who adopts silence as the best expression of the great mystery. Truth exists by its own majesty. Its language is silence. When we sense the consuming heat and the kindling light of his spirit. He creates a mood, a temper rather than a conviction or a belief.

(source: [Religion and Culture - By S. Radhakrishnan](#) ISBN: 81-222-0012-5 p. 104).

Dr. L. P. Jacks, eminent English cleric, editor of the Hubbert Journals and author of the book **Two Letters** 1934, p. 26, has referred to this feature: "The spiritual men of India, a great and watchful multitude whose spiritual status is un-attainable, are many of them catholics in a deeper sense than we of the West have yet given to the word...."

(source: [Eastern Religions & Western Thought - By S. Radhakrishnan](#) p. 342).

Hinduism allows everybody to reflect, investigate, enquire and cogitate. Hence, all sorts of religious

faiths, various forms of worship or Sadhana, diverse kinds of rituals and customs, have found their honorable place side by side within Hinduism, and are cultured and developed in harmonious relationship with one another.

Hinduism, unlike other religions, does not dogmatically assert that the final emancipation is possible only through its means and not through any other. It is only a means to an end, and all means which will ultimately lead to the end are equally approved.



Sir. S. Radhakrishnan has observed, "Hinduism recognizes that each religion is inextricably bound up with its culture and can grow organically. While it is aware that all religions have not attained to the same level of truth and goodness, it insists that they all have a right to express themselves. Religions reform themselves by interpretation and adjustment to one another. **The Hindu attitude is one of positive fellowship, not negative tolerance.**"

"As a result of this tolerant attitude, Hinduism itself has become a mosaic of almost all the types and stages of religious aspiration and endeavor. **It has adapted itself with infinite grace to every human need and it has not shrunk from the acceptance of every aspect of God conceived by man, and yet preserved its unity by interpreting the different historical forms as modes, emanations, or aspects of the Supreme.**"

(source: [Eastern Religions & Western Thought - By. Dr. S.](#)

[Radhakrishnan](#) p 313).

"India did not till recently take to the cult of the nation. We did not make our country a national goddess, with an historic destiny, a sacred mission, and a right of expansion. We did not worship Mother India (Bharatmata) as others do, 'Britannia', 'La France', 'The Fatherland'. We did not tell the people that the enemy of India is the enemy of God and if the enemy had a god, he could only be a false god. Our leaders did not proclaim to be the finest people on earth, the chosen race of the universe"

(source: [Eastern Religions and Western Thought - By Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan](#) p. 54).

In an age that celebrates tolerance and pluralism, the claim that there is the only way to God is offensive to Hindus and could be considered as "spiritual racism."

"Today, there is an unfair bias in the contest of conversions because the two largest, best-financed and most widespread faiths—the **"Jealous-God" religions of Christianity and Islam**—got that way by conquest and persecution. The monopoly that Christianity has on the Americas, Australia, and much of sub-Saharan Africa and Europe is a strength for that faith—they can keep these areas free of competition with little effort while pouring their propaganda and "charity" into targeted regions where other religions struggle to emerge and recover from the impact of European colonialism and forced conversions. Islam's dominance of the Middle East, Indonesia, and North Africa is a similar fortress."

(source: [God Wars: The triumph of the jealous Gods](#)). For more refer to chapter on [Conversion](#)).

Secularism is inherent in Hindu ethos since Hindu philosophy believed that all faiths lead to God just as all rivers lead to the Sea.

The religious hospitality of Hinduism is proverbial. Hinduism is extremely catholic and liberal. This is the fundamental feature of Hinduism. **Hinduism pays respects to all religions.** Hence, its tolerance to all. It does not revile any other religions. It accepts and honors truth, wherever it may come from and whatever garb it may put on. Eastern religions, **Hinduism, Buddhism and others influenced by them have been looking upon different religions not as rivals but as friendly partners in nourishing the spiritual life of mankind.** Their approach to religion has been essentially empirical.

The law of Karma: (laws of cause and effect)

"This vast universe is a wheel. Upon it are all creatures that are subject to birth, death and rebirth. Round and round it turns and never stops. It is the wheel of Bramh. As long as the individual self thinks it is separate from Bramh, it revolves upon the wheel in bondage to the laws of birth, death and rebirth. But when through the grace of Bramh it realizes its identity with him, it evolves upon the wheel no longer. It achieves immortality."

- **Svetasvatara Upanishad**

Karma is one of the natural laws of the mind, just as gravity is a law of matter. It simply means "cause and effect." What happens to us that is apparently unfortunate or unjust is not God punishing us. It is the result of our past actions. The Vedas, Hinduism's revealed scriptures, tells us that if we sow goodness, we will reap goodness; if we sow evil, we will reap evil. The divine law is: whatever karma we are experiencing in our life is just what we need at the moment, and nothing can happen but that we have the strength to meet it. Even harsh Karma, when faced in wisdom, can be the greatest catalyst for spiritual unfoldment.

The human predicament in the midst of the omnipresent and universal change and suffering is often expressed in Vedanta and Buddhism by the image of the wheel. **Lord Krishna** speaks of the terrible wheel of birth and death which binds the individual down to the phenomenal world of time and circumstance: "The spirit of man when in nature feels the ever-changing conditions of nature. When he binds himself to things ever-changing, a good or evil fate whirls him round through life-to-death. Even Gautam Buddha alludes to the wheel of existence, which he calls **samsara**. In Europe, during the Renaissance, the wheel was absorbed into a popular adage - God is a Circle, whose circumference is nowhere and whose center is everywhere.

(source: [T. S. Eliot Vedanta and Buddhism - By P. S. Sri](#) p. 35 -36).

According to **Nani A. Palkivala** (1920 -) India's best known constitutional lawyer, author, former Indian ambassador to the USA:

"The law of Karma postulates that in this world there are no rewards or punishments; it is simply a case of inevitable consequences. As you sow, so shall you reap. Sometimes others reap what you have sown. There is an interlinking and inter-connection all round and at every level, in time and in space. No one lives, or can possibly live, in isolation. The past is linked to the future, the world to the next, men to their fellow-men, thoughts to actions, actions to reactions, the living spirits to the departed ones. The law of karma governs all."

(source: [India's Priceless Heritage - By Nani A. Palkivala](#) 1980 p. 32-33).



To quote in the words of **Sir. S. Radhakrishnan**, philosopher, and former president of India:

"The cards in the game of life are given to us, we do not select them. They are traced to our past karma, but we can call as we please, lead what suit we will, and as we play, we gain or loose. And there is freedom."

We must also be very careful about our thoughts, because thoughts create, and thoughts also make karmas, good, bad and mixed.

What happens when we die?

According to Hinduism, the body alone dies, the soul never dies. But the path the soul takes is decided upon by the past actions or Karmas. Past actions are attached to the soul and they decide the path of the soul's travel. So if you are born with a disease or a handicap, it is the result of your past actions done in past lives. If you live a good moral pious life, then you will be born in better situation and ideal life.

According to Hinduism, the soul continues this journey with a heavy load of Karmas, (good or bad) until it

exhausts all Karmas by undergoing pain or pleasure sensations in the body. Then the individual soul, will merge with the Absolute Soul or infinite power. This merging process is known as Salvation.

God does not punish us. God created man near to perfection and has given him the free will to decide whatever he wants. There is no such thing as being cursed. Hindus believe even God is bound by the law of Karma once He takes human form. Lord Krishna was killed by a hunter. He was obeying the law of Karma, the unwritten law of the Universe.

Karma is a very just law, too, as it is equal in repayment. Karma, like gravity, treats everyone the same. Karma is a rational explanation for inequalities among human beings which cannot be given. The possibility of rebirth makes death more acceptable. In fact, the rishi of the Isa Upanishad welcomes death when it comes, in the following words: Let my breadth mix with the eternal air and let my body be burnt. And then I will recount all that happened in the past.



Individual souls, or jivas, enter the world mysteriously; by God's power we may be sure, but how or for what reason we are unable fully to explain. Like bubbles that form on the bottom of a boiling teakettle, they make their way through the water (universe) until they break free into the limitless atmosphere of illumination (liberation). They begin as the souls of the simplest forms of life, but they do not vanish with the death of their original bodies.

In the Hindu view, spirit no one depends more on the body it inhabits that body depends on the clothes it wears or the house it lives in. When we outgrow a suit or find our house too cramped, we exchange these for roomier ones that offer our bodies freer play. **Souls do the same.**

**" Worn-out garments Are shed by the body:
Worn-out bodies Are shed by the dweller. "**

(Bhagavad-Gita, II:22)

This process by which an individual **jiva** (soul) passes through a sequence of bodies is known as reincarnation or transmigration of the soul - in Sanskrit **samsara**, a word that signifies endless passage through cycles of life, death and rebirth.

Hinduism believes that God, who is all-loving and merciful, does not punish or reward anyone. He molds our destinies based upon our own thoughts and deeds. Every action of a person, in thought or deed, brings results, either good or bad, depending upon the moral quality of the action, in accordance with the adage, *As you sow, so shall you reap*. Moral consequences of all actions are conserved by Nature. **"God keeps an accurate record of all things good and bad. There is no better accountant on earth,"** says **Mahatma Gandhi**. Until we reach the end of our journey we are subject to the law of Karma which makes out that our desires and acts determines the pace of our progress. Our present state is conditioned by our past and what we do now will determine our future. Death and rebirth do not interrupt this process. For our present condition, we are ourselves responsible. We not blame God or the existing social order. **Mahabharata** says that there is no external judge who punishes us; our inner self is the judge.

*na yaman yamah ity ahuh atma vai yama ucyate
atma samyamito yena yamas tasya karoti kim?*

If a person lives a good life on earth, he or she will be born into a better life in the next incarnation. For example, a sinner who leads an immoral life will be born as a poor human or as an animal in the next incarnation. A person born again and again to reap the fruits of his or her own actions. This cycle of birth and death continues until the person attains moksha or freedom from the cycle of birth and death. In all forms of Indian thought, time is symbolized by birth and death. The world is represented by wheel of time,

of births and deaths.

Count Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949) was a Belgian writer of poetry and a wide variety of essays. He won the 1911 Nobel Prize for literature. In his book [Mountain Paths](#), in the doctrine of Karma, he finds "the only satisfactory solution of life's injustices."

Reincarnation

Reincarnation is interlinked with karma: successive lives afford the requisite scope in which the law of karma operates. It is the natural way the soul evolves from immaturity to spiritual illumination. When all the lessons are worked out and all the lessons of life are learnt, one attains enlightenment and *moksha* (liberation). This means you will exist, but will no longer be pulled back to be born in a physical body.

Reincarnation is called **Samsara** in the Vedas and means being bound to the cycle of repeated birth and death. The materially conditioned soul transmigrates through different bodies according to his desires and past activities. It is stated, that as a man sows, so shall he reap.

Lord Krishna said to **Arjuna**, " **Both you and I have passed through many births. You know them not; I know them all.**"



Nonetheless, one is not condemned to stay in this cycle of repeated birth and death forever. There is a way out. In the human form one can attain the knowledge of spiritual realization and attain release from Samsara. This is why every religious process in the world encourages people not to hanker for sensual enjoyments which bind them to this world but to look forwards what is spiritual and gives eternal freedom from Samsara. In fact, the only religion, which does not acknowledge this science of reincarnation is modern day Christianity.

A partial list includes the Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Pythagoras, and Plato, Italy's philosopher and poet of the Renaissance Giordano Bruno (who was later burned at the stake by the Inquisition because of his beliefs), as well as the great French philosopher Voltaire.

Plotinus, Origen, St. Augustine, Cicero, Marcus Aurelius, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, William James, Henri Bergson, Goethe, Hugo, Sand, Blake, Wordsworth, Whitman, Shelley, Kipling, Tennyson, Browning, Alcott, Emerson, Thoreau, Poe, Whitman, Wagner, da Vinci, Benjamin Franklin, Luther Burbank, Edison, Henry Ford, Edgar Cayce and General Patton all believed in reincarnation. Poets, in their moments of inspiration and intuitive insights, have written about rebirth. There are passages in Shelley, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Browning, Rossetti, Longfellow and Whitman, which evince the poet's interest in reincarnation. In a poem to [Evelyn Hope](#), a girl whose life was snuffed out at the age of sixteen, poet **Robert Browning** (1812-1889) sang of lives to be:

"I claim you still, for my own love's sake!
Delayed it may be for more lives yet,
Through worlds I shall traverse, not a few;
Much is to learn and much to forget
Ere the time be come for taking you."

John Masefield (1878-1967) poet laureate has been explicit in his poem [A Creed](#):

"I hold when a person dies
His soul returns again to earth;
Arrayed in some new flesh-disguise,
Another mother gives him birth.
With sturdier limbs and brighter brain
The old soul takes the road again.

(source: [India's Priceless Heritage - By Nani A. Palkhivala](#) 1980 p. 32-34).

William Wordsworth, the poet, was bold enough to believe in a life beyond death. He succeeded in keeping pessimism at bay by drawing inspiration from the belief that the soul had its beginning elsewhere and lived

endlessly.

Some of America's founding fathers, such as Benjamin Franklin, as well as former Presidents John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, also believed in reincarnation. **Benjamin Franklin** stated that "I believe I shall, in some shape or other, always exist; and, with all the inconveniences human life is liable to, I shall not object to a new edition of mine, hoping, however, that the errata of the last may be corrected." Napoleon made mention of his accepting reincarnation as did the German poet Wolfgang von Goethe. In Russia, Count Leo Tolstoy, believed in reincarnation as did such early American philosophers and poets as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau, and Charles Dickens, who mention their beliefs in many of their writings.

We can also include U.S. auto magnate Henry Ford, U.S. General George S. Patton, Nobel Laureates Herman Hesse and Isaac Bashevis Singer, Psychologist Carl Jung, British biologist Thomas Huxley, American Psychoanalyst Erik Erikson and Mahatma Gandhi.

Dr. S Radhakrishnan has written: "**The development of the soul is a continuous progress, though it is broken into stages by the baptism of death.**"

(source: [The Story of Oriental Philosophy - By L. Adams Beck](#) p. 46).



Moksha (Freedom or Salvation)

Moksha means freedom from the cycle of birth and death. The ultimate goal of Hindu religious life is to attain freedom from the cycle of birth and death, or union with God. This union is achieved through true knowledge (jnana), devotion (bhakti), or right work (karma). Purity, self-control, truthfulness, non-violence, and compassion toward all forms of life are the necessary prerequisites for any spiritual path in Hinduism. There is no concept of Savior. You have to free yourself by your own effort. No savior can help you achieve God realization without your personal effort.

Four Stages of Life

All cycles in the world we perceive are characterized by the number four, which is the number of the Earth. Like all things terrestrial, man's life thus divides into four periods - the four stages of life. All life has a springtime, summer, autumn, and winter, as also its morning, noon, evening, and night. These four periods of life are called "the four stages of action": the four ashramas.

1. The First Stage of Life : The quest for knowledge (Brahmacharya) - the student
2. The Second Stage of Life: Family Life (Grihastha) - dedicated to domestic affairs.
3. The Third Stage of Life: Retreat into the Forest - (Vana-Prastha) - to devote to study and reflection.
4. The Fourth Stage of Life: Renunciation (Sanyasa) - Renunciation all attachments, the spiritual and physical preparation for death.

Guy Sorman, author and visiting scholar at Hoover Institution at Stanford and the leader of new liberalism in France, has commented on these wise division of life: "Here is a philosophy far removed from the grotesque refusal to grow old in the West, where wisdom has been replaced by cosmetic surgery and psychiatric help."

(source: [The Genius of India - By Guy Sorman](#) ('Le Genie de l'Inde') Macmillan India Ltd. 2001. ISBN 0333 93600 0 p.122).

Six Schools of Philosophy (Darshana)

Indian philosophical thought, in contrast to the Western tradition, has remained more stable and more clearly continuous. In spite of its metaphysical nature and religious overtones, Indian philosophy is essentially practical, aiming at realizing spiritually what is known intellectually. Knowledge without vision is meaningless. Hence, **Indians call their philosophy darshan, vision. Philosophy and religion in India are intertwined, because religion for the Hindu is experience or an attitude of mind, a transformation of one's being, a consciousness of the ultimate reality, not a theory about God. Whatever view of god the Hindu many adopt, he believes that the divine is in man.**

Philosophy, as religion, is seen in India as a means to an end, not as an end in itself. Hence, there is no room for dogma or intolerance in Indian tradition because the roads to truth are more than one. The infinite reality cannot be comprehended by the finite human mind.

(source: [India and World Civilization](#) By D. P. Singhal Pan Macmillan Limited. 1993. p. 23 - 25).

The Hindu religious system can be divided into two major systems. The Orthodox system (called astika in Sanskrit) accepts the authority of the Vedas.

1. **Sankhya** - founder Sage Kapila
2. **Yoga** - Sage Patanjali
3. **Mimamsa** - Sage Vyasa / Sage Jaimini
4. **Vedanta** - Shankaracharya, Ramanuja/Chaitanya/ Madhava/Vallabha
5. **Nyaya** - Sage Gautama (not Buddha)
6. **Vaisheshika** - Sage Kanda

The Heterodox (Nastika) system rejects the authority of the Vedas. This system includes Carvaka (materialism), Jainism, and Buddhism. The Carvaka system denies existence of the individual self (atman) apart from the body and rejects the notion of moksha (salvation) for the atman. This system never gained popularity among the Hindus.

Concept of Time

Professor Arthur Holmes (1895-1965) geologist, professor at the University of Durham. He writes regarding the age of the earth in his great book, [The Age of Earth](#) (1913) as follows:

"Long before it became a scientific aspiration to estimate the age of the earth, many elaborate systems of the world chronology had been devised by the sages of antiquity. The most remarkable of these occult time-scales is that of the ancient Hindus, whose astonishing concept of the Earth's duration has been traced back to Manusmriti, a sacred book."

(source: [Hinduism and Scientific Quest](#) - By T. R. R. Iyengar p. 20-21).

As in modern physics, Hindu cosmology envisaged the universe as having a cyclical nature. The end of each kalpa brought about by Shiva's dance is also the beginning of the next. Rebirth follows destruction.

Huston Smith (?) a philosopher, most eloquent writer, world-famous religion scholar who practices Hatha Yoga, writes:

"While the West was still thinking, perhaps, of 6,000 years old universe – India was already envisioning ages and eons and galaxies as numerous as the sands of the Ganges. The Universe so vast that modern astronomy slips into its folds without a ripple."

(source: [The Mystic's Journey - India and the Infinite: The Soul of a People](#) – By Huston Smith).



The transcendence of time is the aim of every Indian spiritual tradition. Time is often presented as an eternal wheel that binds the soul to a mortal existence of ignorance and suffering. "Release" from time's fateful wheel is termed **Moksha**, and an advanced ascetic may be called **Kala-attita** ('he who has transcended time').

Hindus believe that the universe is without a beginning (**anadi**= beginning-less)



or an end (**ananta** = end-less). Rather the universe is projected in cycles.

Time immemorial is measured in cycles called Kalpas. A Kalpa is a day and night for Brahma, the Lord of Creation. After each Kalpa, there is another Kalpa. Each Kalpa is composed of 1,000 Maha Yugas.

A Kalpa is thus equal to 4.32 billion human years. Kirtha Yuga or Satya yuga (golden or truth age) is 1,728,000 years; Treta yuga is 1,296,000 years; Dvapara yuga is 864,000 years; and Kali Yuga is 432,000 years.

One Maha Yuga is 4,32 million years.

Krita or Satya	golden age	1,728,000 years
Treta	silver age	1,296,000 years
Dvapara	copper age	864,000 years
Kali	iron age	432,000 years

A Brahma, or Lord of Creation, lives for one hundred Brahma years (each of made up of 360 Brahma days). After that he dies. So a Brahma lives for 36,000 Kalpas, or 36,000 x 2,000 x 4,30,000 human years – i.e., a Brahma lives for 311.4 trillion human years. After the death of each Brahma, there is a **Mahapralaya or Cosmic deluge**, when all the universe is destroyed. Then a new Brahma appears and creation starts all over again.

(source: [Am I a Hindu - by Ed Viswanathan](#) p. 292 - 293). For more on Yugas, refer to [One Cosmic Day of Creator Brahma](#)

Time in Hindu literature is conceived as a **wheel turning through vast cycles of creation and destruction (pralaya), known as kalpa.**

In the words of a scholar of spiritual and cultural development and writer, **Joseph Campbell:**

"The Hindus with their grandiose Kalpas and their ideas of the divine power which is beyond all human category (male or female). Not so alien to the imagery of modern science that it could not have been put to acceptable use."

Alan Watts, a professor, graduate school dean and research fellow of Harvard University, drew heavily on the insights of Vedanta. Watts became well known in the 1960s as a pioneer in bringing Eastern philosophy to the West. He wrote:

"To the philosophers of India, however, Relativity is no new discovery, just as the concept of light years is no matter for astonishment to people used to thinking of time in millions of kalpas, (A kalpa is about 4,320,000 years). The fact that the wise men of India have not been concerned with technological applications of this knowledge arises from the circumstance that technology is but one of innumerable ways of applying it."

(source: [Spiritual Practices of India - By Frederic Spiegelberg](#) Introduction by **Alan Watts** p. 8-9).

According to **Carl Sagan**, (1934-1996) astro-physicist, in his book [Cosmos](#) says:



"The Hindu religion is the only one of the world's great faiths dedicated to the idea that the Cosmos itself undergoes an immense, indeed an infinite, number of deaths and rebirths. It is the only religion in which the time scales correspond, to those of modern scientific cosmology.

According to **Guy Sorman**, visiting scholar at Hoover Institution at Stanford and the leader of new liberalism in France:

" Temporal notions in Europe were overturned by an India rooted in eternity. The Bible had been the yardstick for measuring time, but the infinitely

_____ vast time cycles of India suggested that the world was much older than anything the Bible spoke of. **It seem as if the Indian mind was better prepared for the chronological mutations of Darwinian evolution and astrophysics."**

(source: [The Genius of India - By Guy Sorman \('Le Genie de l'Inde'\)](#) Macmillan India Ltd. 2001. ISBN 0333 93600 0 p. 195).

Swami Kriyananada (J. Donald Walters) World renowned as a singer, composer, and lecturer, founder of the Ananda Village is perhaps the most successful intentional community in the world writes:

"Hindu cosmography, for example born in hoary antiquity, strikes one in certain ways as surprisingly modern. India has never limited its conception of time to a few crowded millennia. Thousands of years ago India's sages computed the earth's age at a little over two billion years, our present era being what is called the seventh Manuvantra. This is a staggering claim. Consider how much scientific evidence has been needed in the West before men could even imagine so enormous a time scale."

(source: [Crises in Modern Thought: The Crises of Reason - By Swami Kriyananda \(J. Donald Walters\)](#) vol. 1 p - 94)

Princeton University's **Paul Steinhardt** and Cambridge University's **Neil Turok**, have recently developed The Cyclical Model.

They have just fired their latest volley at that belief, saying there could be a timeless cycle of expansion and contraction. **It's an idea as old as Hinduism, updated for the 21st century.** The theorists acknowledge that their cyclic concept draws upon religious and scientific ideas going back for millennia — echoing the "oscillating universe" model that was in vogue in the 1930s, **as well as the Hindu belief that the universe has no beginning or end, but follows a cosmic cycle of creation and dissolution.**

(source: [Questioning the Big Bang - msnbcnews.com](#)).

According to **Alain Danielou**: "The Hindu lives in eternity. He is profoundly aware of the relativity of space and time and of the illusory nature of the apparent world."

(source: [Virtue, Success, Pleasure, & Liberation : The Four Aims of Life in the Tradition of Ancient India - By Alain Danielou](#) p. 9).

The Hindus, according to **Sir Monier-Williams**, were Spinozists more than 2,000 years before the advent of Spinoza, and Darwinians many centuries before Darwin and Evolutionists many centuries before the doctrine of Evolution was accepted by scientists of the present age.

The French historian **Louis Jacolliot** says, "Here to mock are conceit, our apprehensions, and our despair, we may read what **Manu** said, perhaps 10,000 years before the birth of Christ about Evolution:

'The first germ of life was developed by water and heat.' (Book I, sloka 8,9)

'Water ascends towards the sky in vapors; from the sun it descends in rain, from the rains are born the plants, and from the plants, animals.' (Book III, sloka 76).

(source: [Philosophy of Hinduism - By T C Galav](#) p 17).



Sir John Woodroffe, (1865-1936) the well known scholar, Advocate-General of Bengal and sometime Legal Member of the Government of India. He served with competence for eighteen years and in 1915 officiated as Chief Justice. He has said:

"Ages before Lamarck and Darwin it was held in India that man has passed through 84 lakhs (8,400,000) of birth as plants, animals, as an "inferior species of man" and then as the ancestor of the developed type existing to-day. **The theory was not, like modern doctrine of evolution, based wholly on observation and a scientific enquiry**



into fact but was a rather (as some other matters) an act of brilliant intuition in which observation may also have had some part."

(source: [Is India Civilized - Essays on Indian Culture - By Sir John Woodroffe](#) p. 22).

Count Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949) was a Belgian writer of poetry and a wide variety of essays. He won the 1911 Nobel Prize for literature. In his book [Mountain Paths](#), he says:

"he falls back upon the earliest and greatest of Revelations, those of the Sacred Books of India with a Cosmogony which no European conception has ever surpassed."

(source: [Mountain Paths - By Maurice Maeterlinck](#)).

The [Laya Yoga Samhita](#) stated that just as the beams of sunlight entering a room reveal the presence of innumerable motes, so infinite space is filled with countless brahmandas (solar systems). The atomic structure of matter was discussed in the ancient Vaisesika treatises. And in the Yoga Vashista it was stated, in a passage very similar to the foregoing: "There are vast worlds all placed way within the hollows of each atom, multifarious as the motes in a sunbeam."

(source: [Crises in Modern Thought: The Crises of Reason - By Swami Kriyananda \(J. Donald Walters\)](#) vol. 1 p - 95).

Thus, in Hinduism, **science and religion are not opposed fundamentally**, as they often seem to be in the West, but are seen as parts of the same great search for truth and enlightenment that inspired the sages of Hinduism. Fundamental to Hindu concept of time and space is the notion that the external world is a product of the creative play of **Maya** (illusion).

Om

Matter is said to be created from sound and Om is the most sacred of all sounds, the syllable that preceded the universe and from which the gods were made. It is the "root" syllable (mula mantra), the cosmic vibration that holds together the atoms of the world and heavens. Since Om precedes all things, it is used as an invocation to prayer or sacred singing.



Omkar is the most sacred word for the Hindus. For them, it is synonymous with the Supreme Godhead, the Impersonal as well as the Personal God. It is the all-comprehensive Symbol and Name of God. It is also deemed as the *Maha Mantra* , the best aid and means for man to realize God.

Philo (50 BC) an Alexandrian philosopher, who knew of the Indian Gymnosophists set forth the theory of Logos which passed into Christianity in the Gospel of St. John and is verily the Indian conception of **Vak** (word) which is personified in the Vedas as a Divine Power.

(source: [The Soul of India - By Satyavrata R Patel](#) p.12).

Vak

There is a verse in the **Vedas** as follows :

Prajapati vai idam agra asit
Tasya vak dvitiya asit
Vag vai paramam Brahma

"In the beginning was Prajapati (Bramh), with whom was the Vak or Word, and the Word was verily the Supreme Bramh."

Vak is thus a Sakti or Power of the Bramh which is one with the Possessor of Power (Saktiman). This Sakti which was in Him is at the creation with Him, and evolves into the form of the Universe whilst still remaining what It is - the Supreme Sakti.

In the “beginning” there was Brahm and with It was Vak. In the Veda ([Satapatha Brahmana VI 1—1-8](#)) it is said, “this Being (Purusa) Prajapati willed ‘May I be many’, ‘May I be propagated. In the [Kathaka](#) it is said ([XII-5 and XXVII-1](#)) “Prajapati only was then this (Prajapatir vai idam asit. Vak was a second to Him (Tasya vag dvitiya asit).

(source: [The Garland of Letters - By Sir John Woodroffe](#) p. 4 - 11 and The Pranava Om - The source of Creation - An extract from the book [Art Of God Symbolism - By Swami Chinmayanand](#) and [Omkaar - The Source of Creation](#)).



Conclusion:

Hinduism is not a "one size fits all" religion. Hinduism is a religion that is doctrinally less clear cut than say Christianity, politically less determined than Islam. It offers something for everyone, including the atheist. It has delighted its followers, with its richness, its antiquity and its depth. Hinduism, is a philosophy that appeals to reason, love, tolerance, harmony, unity and truth. It motivates us to live life to the fullest, to achieve and realize our goals, keeping in mind that all things are connected in this universe and respecting them thereof. Religion in India is the cultivation of the interior life. It is the attainment of spiritual freedom. In the West, religion is a social phenomenon, a matter of the ecclesia, of the community. The Western mind sees the divine as largely external to man but to the Hindu it is about improving his being, or inner self. Hinduism traditionally does not recognize the borderlines within which religion in the West has been confined for some centuries - politics, social structures, hygiene, science - everything is assimilated and considered part of the divine reality.

Hinduism is alive and vigorous and has withstood attacks from within and without. It seems to be possessed of unlimited powers of renewal. Its historic vitality, the abounding energy which it reveals, would alone be evidence of its spiritual genius.



*"O Goddess Earth, the consort of Visnu,
you whose garments are the oceans and
whose ornaments are the hills and mountain ranges;
please forgive me as I walk on you this day."*

This shows the utmost respect for the earth....and with such humility. (For more refer to chapter on [Nature Worship](#)).

No other religion can truly claim to be a universal religion, except Hindu religion not in terms of its propagation but because of its broadness, toleration and absorbing abilities.

Hinduism is both monotheistic and polytheistic believing in one God as well as some demigods and is based on scriptures and evolving proven spiritual and mystical experiences of many individual souls. Hindus believe in God and demigods, past and present prophets, saints and sages and their supernatural power belonging to this world and outside this world for their spiritual and material prosperity unlike other religions which believe in God sitting in heaven alone and ruling the world spiritually and materially. It is natural for the Hindu worshipper to address God with a fondness that amounts sometimes to familiarity.

And why not? God is our very own. The Bengali song says:

"I will follow him (Krishna) to Mathura, where he now dwells. And if I find him, though I know his consciousness is as infinite as the ocean, I will bind him with my sari and drag him home with

me!".

What Western hymnist would dare to express himself to god in terms of such intimacy?



and yet, again: Why not? If we really love God, is it not natural to hold him close? The Hindu imagines God smiling from the hearts of trees, from the flowers, from the rocks, from the hearts of clouds. To worship God for the Hindus, means love. It means childlike trust. Indian devotional songs often express such sentiments, as " *I will make Thee prisoner of my heart's love*".

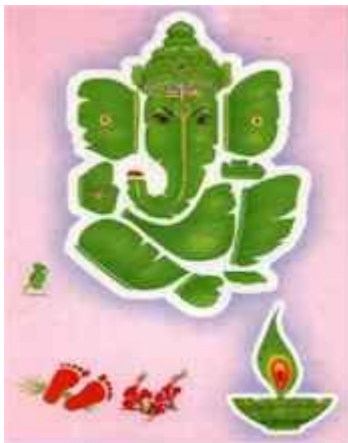
For this reason Hinduism is still strong and surviving and can not decline even against the aggressive conversions carried out most often in disguise in the name of love for the people, social services and education by other foreign religions for the last 2000 years.

For Hinduism is the most ancient expression of Sanatan Dharma, the eternal and universal religion. The true message of Hinduism, is inward, not outward. It is a message of soul-upliftment, of inner purification, and of deepening awareness and love. Behind all the symbolism, Hinduism teaches communion with God.

A need for commitment from all Hindus Worldwide:

In the words of [Prof. Bhagwan S.Gidwani](#), in his book "[The Return of the Aryans](#)", (ISBN 0-14-024053-5)

" We have inherited an ancient culture. It has faced many waves of invasions, among others, from the Greek, Persian, Pathan, Mongol, French, Dutch and the English. Often with savagery they attempted to suppress our culture; yet the flame of hope burnt brightly against the dark background of foreign rule. Our religion endured, though our land has shrunk to less than half its size compared to the past.



What often saved us in the past was the awareness of our age-old religion and culture and the need to hold fast to it, while weaving and refining it for the future generations to come. What might indeed doom us in the future is the ignorance of our traditions, with no roots to cling to.

Culture is tradition and tradition is memory.

The ancients knew that and that is why Bharat, who led the Sindhu clan, introduced the Memory songs in 5095, to keep alive the knowledge of the past, lest we run the risk of building our future without foundation of the past.

In the era of vanishing worth and fading memory, it is imperative to rekindle the dying embers of life and light in our society. We need to teach the new generation of Hindus about Sanatan Dharma and be proud of it. He who fails to guard his house - be it the scholar, priest or the nation itself - must learn to tolerate an intruder. "

Hindus Unite!

[Francois Gautier](#) (1950 -) Paris-born, he has lived in India for 30 years, is a political analyst for Le Figaro, one of France's largest circulation newspaper. He has recently observed:

"In all humility I propose that a Supreme Spiritual Council, composed of at least seven of the most popular Hindu leaders of India, be constituted. It should be a non-political body, and each group would keep its independence but nevertheless. It could meet two three times a year and issue edicts, which would be binding

on 850 millions Hindus in India and one billion over the world. Then and then only can this wonderful spirituality which is Hinduism, this eternal knowledge behind the outer forms, the wisdom to understand this mad earth and its sufferings, be preserved for the future of India, and for the future of humanity. I bow down to all the great gurus who have graced over the ages, this wonderful and sacred land which is India and beseech them to hear my prayer:

Hindus leaders, unite, if you want eternal Dharma to survive."

(source: [In defence of Hindu gurus - By Francois Gautier - rediff.com](#)).

Jai Hind!

(For more refer to [Hinduism - By Arvind Sharma - Encyclopedia Article in Encarta](#)).

[Top of Page](#)



Did You Know?

Shakti is the Divine power found in everything?



Shakti is the divine feminine power found in everything. One of the things most misconstrued about India and Hinduism is that it's a male-dominated society and religion. It is not. It is a culture whose only words for strength and power are feminine -- "shakti" means "power" and "strength." All male power comes from the feminine. And Shakti is the fundamental strength of the feminine that infuses all life and is viewed as a goddess. And one of the forms of that goddess is Kali.

Kali is the personification of the most dynamic aspect of feminine strength: We often see her in the horrific form that she assumes to destroy evil and to rescue the universe from destruction. In this photograph, Kali is destroying evil shown in the guise of beauty. Beauty is often beguiling. Kali is often depicted in a form as conqueror, which to many might appear horrific. But to her devotees, she is considered beautiful, maternal and kind.

Contributed by Stephen Huyler, art historian, cultural anthropologist, curator at the Smithsonian's Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, in his book [Meeting God: Elements of Hindu Devotion](#)'

[Top of Page](#)





[home](#)

[introduction to hinduism](#)

[contents](#)

Copyright © 2001 - All Rights Reserved.

[Guest Book](#)

Updated - September 7, 2005