



## Short Introductions to the World Religions - Hinduism

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1. There are about 600 million Hindus in India, Africa, Indonesia, and the West Indies. The approximate figure for Canada is 100,000.

2. Hinduism is one of the oldest organized religions in the world. Its historical records date back to more than four thousand years. It has no single founder.

3. The openness towards and acceptance of other religious beliefs and practices make Hinduism very attractive in Canada, where the diversity of cultures and religions sometimes creates a problem for the Christian majority.

4. However, the scattered Hindu communities in Canada are struggling to maintain an unbroken transmission, from teacher (guru) to student and new teacher to student, of religious traditions, which are very much linked to Indian languages and to the Sanskrit of the Vedas.

5. The Hindu sees and understands the universe in a very different way than the Christian. This understanding centres on four basic concepts:

(1) Anadi (beginning lessness).

The universe is not created out of nothing (as in Jewish and Christian teaching) but is without beginning. It exists in cycles of creation with relative beginnings. Each

cycle evolves from the seed of a previous one, grows, flowers, drops seed and dies. The next cycle has already started its seed state when the previous one dies. The present universe is in its dying stage. It is already casting off the seed that forms the basis for a new relative beginning of the next universe.

(2) Karma (moral law).

Everyone is responsible for his or her own destiny. Our thinking and action lays memory traces or seeds in our subconscious, and this in turn predisposes us to think and do the same kind of thoughts and actions again and again. The karmic seeds are stored, waiting for the right circumstances to sprout into desire or action. It is then up to the individual's free choice to either reject the bad karma or to reinforce it. Karmic impulses can be rejected and made to wither and die without leaving a seed in the subconscious. Our own free choices make the karma that will influence

our future.

Thoughts and actions that spring up without a trace to the present life can be accounted for by the third concept.

(3) Samsara (rebirth).

Karmas accompany the soul when it leaves the body in death. Many of the thoughts and desires that seem to come from nowhere stem from thoughts and actions of previous lives. The experience in this life is the consequence of all former lives, and the free choices in this life predispose us for all our future lives. Bad karma can lead to rebirth as an animal with no free choice, however, rebirth as an animal makes possible the expiation of accumulated bad karma, leading to rebirth as a human. Rebirth as a god with no free choice leads to the using-up of good merit, which eventually results in a lower position on the karmic scale, in rebirth as a human.

The fourth concept shows a way out of these endless cycles of deaths

and rebirths.

(4) Moksha  
(release).

There are three  
ways to obtain  
release:

The yoga (union) of  
knowledge removes  
the karmic  
obstructions that  
cover the true self  
by intellectual  
pursuits. The yoga  
of action aims at  
release through  
accepting and  
performing one's  
daily duties  
selflessly and  
entirely as  
dedication to God.

The yoga of  
devotion achieves  
release through  
meditation, prayers  
and chanting of the  
scriptures. It is the  
most common.  
Regardless of the  
path, the  
overcoming of the  
ego leads to the  
discovery of the true  
self (atman), which  
is one with God  
(Brahman).

6. Hindu gods are  
different aspects of  
Brahman who can  
be worshipped and  
experienced in  
whatever form  
appeals most to the  
devotee. Popular  
Hindu gods are  
Brahma, Vishnu and  
Shiva. Krishna is  
the ninth avatar  
(incarnation) of  
Vishnu. These gods  
have wives and

families.

7. Hindu literature exists in massive amount and in great variety as to form and quality. The most sacred scriptures are:

(1) The Four Vedas: Psalms, Chants, Sacred Formulas and Charms.

(2) The Brahmanas are rule books for practices of worship and ritual activity.

(3) The Upanishads (Vedantas) are aiming at higher levels of mystical purification.

(4) The Bhagavad Gita is considered to be the revelation for this time of increased karma and the declining part of the cycle of the present universe.

8. Hindu life is divided into four stages:

(1) student,  
(2) householder,  
(3) forest dweller,  
and  
(4) wandering holy man.

In the first two stages caste laws must be obeyed, duties and rituals performed. The last two allow for the withdrawal from society and caste duties to pursue the mystical path. The

Hindu caste system has to be understood in the light of these different levels of spiritual realization on the path to union with God (Nirvana, release from bondage).

9. Jesus Christ is seen in Hinduism as an avatar (incarnation) of Brahman.

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