

The *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Brahmsutras* and the *Bhagavad Gita* form the basis of Hindu dharma and philosophy. These are jointly considered the authoritative scriptures for Hindus and are written in the ancient language of Sanskrit.

Many religious works, including literature and hymns or *bhajans* have been written over the centuries in many other commonly spoken Indian languages which include Hindustani or Hindi, Gujarathi, Tamil and Telugu.

There are 18 books called *Puranas* which contain examples and stories to illustrate the concepts found in Vedas in much simpler language. There are also two major epics - *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, the historical narrations of [Lord] Rama and [Lord] Krishna, which serve as a guide for the common man to live a moral life. The *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are also written in various Indian languages, and elements from each continue to be popular bedtime stories.

HINDU SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

Since Hinduism is a very tolerant religion, and regards all paths to truth as valid, many diverse schools of thought exist within its domain. Among these, *Advaita*, (Non-dualism), a school popularized by the 8th century AD monk *Shankara*, proclaims the absolute oneness of God, Soul and the Universe; and that the universe as we see it is transitory and therefore illusive. Other schools, *Dvaita* and *Vishishtadvaita*, do not agree with this doctrine. *Advaita* also teaches that when final liberation comes, man becomes free from the cycle of birth and death (*Jivan Mukti*). This is considered possible within the present life itself, and is compared to a little drop of rainwater joining the vast ocean.

THE KARMA THEORY

The Karma Theory states that every action performed by man will have a consequence (*Karamphala*). It is the moral foundation of the universe. Desire, discretion and action are interconnected. There are no eternal rewards/punishments as believed by other

religions, or intrinsic evil at birth. Every man is born or reborn fashioned by his own Karma. To achieve salvation, and no rebirth (*Jivan Mukti*), Hinduism advises a life of selfless-service and totally giving up expectation of the fruit of action, and by following one or more of the *Yogas* mentioned below.

REALIZATION OF DIVINITY IN MAN

The ultimate goal of life is to achieve salvation, that is, to unite the individual soul with the Supreme Being. Human life is very precious. Out of His love, God grants human birth for the sole purpose of realizing one's true nature or uniting with God.

There are four primary *Yogas* taught in Hinduism, (*Yoga* = to join or unite) to achieve this goal of self realization. Depending upon the natural tendency of the person, one selects one or more or a combination of these *Yogas*:

- *Yoga* of Action: *Karma Yoga*
- *Yoga* of Knowledge: *Jnana Yoga*
- *Yoga* of Devotion: *Bhakti Yoga*
- *Yoga* of Self Control: *Dhyana Yoga*

These *Yogas* are described in detail in the *Bhagavad Gita*.

SIGNIFICANCE OF AUM OR OM:

AUM is described in the Vedas as the primordial sacred sound of creation. Aum is recited in the beginning of all Hindu prayers and rituals. It consists of three primary notes, A, U and M, representing many three-fold entities such as: Creation, Sustenance and Dissolution

Many spiritual seekers meditate on AUM as the universal symbol or as an icon pointing to the Supreme Being of the universe.

Additional info:

- www.hinduismtoday.com;
- www.tributetohinduism.com;
- www.hinduuniverse.com
- www.swami-krishnananda.org/index.html
- www.sacred-texts.com/hin/



THE BHARATIYA TEMPLE
OF METROPOLITAN DETROIT

ESSENTIALS OF HINDUISM

(*SANATANA DHARMA*)

"Truth is one, the Wise call it by various names"
- *Rig Veda (1.164.46)*

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INTRODUCTION

Hinduism is one of the world's oldest wisdom or faith traditions. The date of origin of Hinduism is unknown; it is considered as eternal. It is difficult to define Hinduism since it is not a particular creed but a way of life. No one person created this religion; it is the sum total of thoughts developed by sages and seers over many centuries.

ESSENCE OF HINDUISM

Sanatana Dharma, more commonly known as Hinduism, is in essence an eternal order, a set of rules for the governance and smooth functioning of the universe. It is the inherent nature of things, like the sun giving out light. *Sanatana* means that which is eternal and not subject to change. Dharma means fundamental truths or spiritual laws which exist at all times, in all places and in all conditions. Dharma is which holds and sustains (“*when one follows Dharma, it protects*”). According to *Sanatana Dharma* there are three spiritual truths which all human beings have to deal with:

God (*Brahman*)

Individual Soul (*Atman*)

Creation (*Jagat*)

God (*Brahman*) is defined as the entity that pervades everywhere, present in every atom of this universe i.e., He is the existence or the “Is-ness” of things. He provides support to everything which exists in Nature but does not need support from anyone or anything. God is neither male nor female. However, Hindus believe that God manifests Himself in personal forms too. Therefore God is worshipped both in the male form (as *Ganesha*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva*) or the female form (*Durga*, *Lakshmi* and *Sarasvati*). Hindus believe that whenever there is a decline in righteousness, God manifests himself on earth as a mortal being (e.g., Rama and Krishna). [The Lord] Krishna declares in *Bhagavad Gita*: “Whenever there is a decline of *Dharma* (righteousness) and rise in *Adharma* (unrighteousness), I embody Myself from time to

time, O *Arjuna*; for the protection of the good, destruction of the wicked and to re-establish Dharma.”

The Individual Soul (*Atma*) is like a ray of consciousness of the Supreme Being. Just as an image in a mirror has no existence without the original, the *Atman* has no existence without God. *Atman* has the same attributes as the Supreme. *Atman* is the “God” residing in every creature. Its true nature is not realized due to a false relationship with the ever changing body and the world.

Creation (*Jagat*) is infinite. Hindus believe that this universe we live in has always existed and will always continue to exist. Unlike God, who is not subject to modification, Nature (*Prakriti*) is in a state of eternal and constant change. God is the cause for the existence of *Prakriti* just as He is the source for the *Atma*'s existence. Due to power of God alone, *Prakriti* is undergoing a never-ending cycle of creation, sustenance and dissolution. Creation, when properly understood, should be thought of as a projection of God Himself and not just His creation.

Thus, there is one all pervading, all knowing God. *Brahmasutras* reject the possibility that God is distinct from nature. If God were distinct from nature, then God would be limited; a God who is not infinite is no God at all. It follows that, humans, animals and every living being and non-living beings are part of God. Living creatures such as humans, animals and birds have a indestructible, distinct beingness, known as *Atman*, that is eternal, unchanging and is basically indistinguishable from the Supreme Being. The many gods worshipped by Hindus are the higher forms of life and are essentially representations of the Supreme Being known in Vedanta as *Brahman*. Prayers to any of these gods will be directed to *Brahman*. Therefore man has the freedom to imagine God in any form or as formless if she or he chooses.

SCRIPTURES:

For Hindus, all secular and spiritual knowledge is contained in the Vedas. The root of the word “Veda” is “*Vid*” which is to know, therefore all knowledge is in the *Vedas*. The date that the Vedas were written has never been conclusively fixed. According to Hindus, the *Vedas* are eternal. The Vedas do not owe their authority to anyone, as they are considered an authority unto themselves. Since the Vedas are eternal, Hindus believe that they were never created, but rather that they have existed throughout time. Just as Creation is infinite and eternal, without a beginning or an end, so is the knowledge of God, without a beginning and without an end.

Hindus believe that *Rishis* – the seers – received this knowledge from God, just as an antenna receives radio signals from the original source. To facilitate an easy assimilation of this knowledge, a seer called Ved Vyas compiled the content of the Vedas into four major books: *Rig*, *Yajur*, *Sama* and *Atharva*. Each Veda consists of four parts: *Sambitas*, consisting of beautiful poems that glorify God; *Brahmanas* that enumerate procedures for carrying out rituals; *Aranyakas* (Forest Books), developed primarily for the forest dweller who devotes his time in pursuit of the Supreme Identity; and the *Upanishads*. The *Upanishads*, or Vedanta (the definite end of or climax of knowledge in Vedas), is considered to contain the essence of the Vedas. *Upanishadic* thoughts have influenced Western philosophers significantly in both ancient and modern times.

There are more than 250 *Upanishads*. An integrated synopsis of the *Upanishads* is provided in the *Brahmasutras*. Another much revered text which contains the main thoughts of the *Upanishads* is the *Bhagavad Gita*. Also referred to as simply the Gita, and translated as “Song of God” or “The Divine Message,” it contains what was delivered to Arjuna (a human who was considered fit to receive this spiritual knowledge) by [Lord] Krishna, who is God personified.