



A BIBLICAL VIEW ON

Hinduism

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Hinduism



Hinduism is the third largest world religion, with more than a billion followers worldwide. That is reason enough to know more about this religion. But it has

also become more successful in the U.S., with more than 1.7 million followers. Consider this short list of prominent people in the political arena that have come from a Hindu background: Vivek Ramaswamy, Usha Vance, Kash Patel, Pramila Jauapal, Ro Khanna, and Tulsi Gabbard.

History

Hinduism is considered the oldest religion and refers to the people living beyond the Indus River. Hinduism evolved over a 4000-year period and represents a synthesis of various religions that entered India over those thousands of years. Because of that there is no established Hindu orthodoxy. It has been described as a family of beliefs and practices. The Hindu scriptures are divided into two

classes: Sruti (what is heard) and Smriti (what is remembered). The Vedas are the earliest Hindu scriptures and signify wisdom.

The later sections of the Vedas are known as the Upanishads. These writings are considered inspired. Later Hindu writings, including the Bhagavad Gita, are of lesser authority, but widely popular.

Hinduism has no single set of rules. Instead, it is a compilation of many diverse beliefs and doctrines. Hinduism is a fusion of many philosophies and traditions. It is also syncretistic and thus incorporates many schools of thought and belief systems.

Hinduism comes in many forms, especially since there is a fundamental difference between

what could be described as popular Hinduism and philosophical Hinduism. Many of the Hindus you might meet follow a form of popular Hinduism as part of their heritage but may not necessarily believe every aspect of what could be called philosophical Hinduism. They may be involved in idol worship, nature worship, or spirit worship. They may engage in offerings or Hindu festivals.

They may live in the Western world, but still retain some of their Eastern philosophy. One former Hindu who is now a Christian evangelist to Hindus explained it this way: someone from a Hindu background might work as an engineer at Texas Instruments (or any other high-tech position) in the daytime, but at night bow down before

an elephant god at a Hindu temple. We may see this as a contradiction, but it illustrates the two different worlds in which they live.

Philosophical Hinduism

A key foundational belief is “monism.” It is the belief in an Absolute One. We may perceive distinctions, but actually, “All is One.” One popular saying in Hinduism is “Atman (the eternal true self, or soul) is Brahman.” In fact, all living things are Brahman at their innermost core. In addition, instead of ritual sacrifice, intuitive knowledge of the oneness of all things came to be endorsed as the way of contact with divine reality.

Another core belief (related to this first one) is the belief that

the material world is less than fully real. The cause of this feeling of duality is the word “maya.” Put simply, we have an inaccurate view of reality, and the cause of this illusion is ignorance.

Another core belief is the doctrine of “karma.” It is the belief that every thought and action results in certain consequences born by the actor or thinker. Hindus believe that all suffering results from one’s own past actions, in this or in a previous life.

Some Hindus believe that karma implies strict determinism or fatalism. Most Hindus, however, believe that though our present is determined by our past, nonetheless we can influence our future by conducting ourselves in a proper manner in

the present.

Related to the doctrine of karma is the doctrine of reincarnation or the transmigration of souls, called “samsara.” Since it is impossible that all of one’s karma be experienced in one lifetime, the Hindu scriptures state that after death individual souls are “reborn” in this world, in another body. A person’s rebirth is determined by the karma resulting from past actions. The ultimate goal is to tend the system of death and rebirths.

Associated with reincarnation is the caste system. According to Hindu teaching, there are four basic castes or social classes. Each has its own rules and obligations pertaining to nearly every facet of life. At the top are the Brahmins or priests. Second

in rank are the Kshatriyas or warriors and rulers. Third are the Vaisyas or merchants and farmers. Below these are the Shudras or laboring class. Outside the caste system are the Dalits, also known as the untouchables.

The goal of Hinduism is liberation, which relates to karma and reincarnation. The fundamental problem is ignorance in humans. We make distinctions when none are needed. True liberation or salvation can be accomplished in one of three ways: the way of knowledge and meditation, the way of action and ritual, and the way of devotion. The way of action gains salvation through good works, which either brings about a better rebirth in the next cycle of reincarnation or eternal communion with god. In the way of

devotion, salvation is gained by devotion to some deity (Krishna is one example).

It is worth mentioning that this devotion to a personal god can become quite complex. Some of the gods that are venerated are: Brahma (the creator), Vishnu (the preserver), and Shiva (the destroyer). In India there are many temples devoted to Shiva (or to one of his wives, such as Kali), or to Vishnu (or to one of his ten incarnations known as avatars). Some researchers estimate that Hinduism may have as many as 330 million gods and goddesses.

Christian Response

In his book on world religions, Winfried Corduan warns: “Knowing that someone is a Hindu

tells you little about that person's beliefs and practices." He reminds us that with any religion, people do not like being told what they believe. We should begin by asking questions. A person may be a Hindu but not necessarily have a Hindu worldview (just as many Christians don't have a biblical worldview). Even if a Hindu does not accept certain beliefs, it is good to have a basic framework for their general way of thinking.

A foundational principle in Hinduism is a rejection of logic. Most Hindus believe truth is relative and that absolute truth is unknowable. For them, truth is merely a matter of perspective. Put another way, they reject the principle of non-contradiction (A and non-A cannot both be true). They reject the idea of either/or

and accept the concept of both/and. This can make it difficult when you are sharing your faith with a Hindu. Nevertheless, here are a few distinctions between Hinduism and Christianity.

First, Hinduism does not have a proper understanding of God. Hindus often lack any conception of God as holy and righteous (Leviticus 19:1-2 and 1 Peter 1:14-16). And since God is holy, we are to be accountable to Him for how we conduct ourselves.

Second, Hinduism lacks any understanding that God created this world for a good purpose (Proverbs 16:4 and Colossians 1:16). It was not merely a random act by a deity. Some Hindus will talk about God creating the universe merely as a playful exercise of His power.

Third, Hinduism has an inaccurate understanding of human nature as well as the fact that we are sinful and separated from God (Isaiah 59:2 and Romans 3:23). According to Hindu teaching, human beings are divine at the core of their being. It teaches that we are “one with God.” The problem, according to Hinduism, is that we are ignorant of this fact. We are deceived by a focus on this temporal and material world. This ignorance gives rise to acts that result in bad karma and traps us in the cycle of reincarnation.

That’s not what the Bible teaches. Our alienation from God is not ignorance of our divinity. Our separation is due to our sinful rebellion against God and His purpose for our lives (Jeremiah 17:9). Paul warns, “For the wages

of sin is death” (Romans 6:23).

Finally, the Hindu view of liberation contrasts with the biblical teaching of salvation. Most Hindus believe that liberation will come from the cycle of reincarnation. This is achieved by their own efforts (whether through good works, meditation, or devotion to a deity). Hindus believe they alone are responsible for their salvation over many lifetimes.

By contrast, the Bible teaches that we cannot achieve salvation through good works (Ephesians 2:8-9) but it is the result of grace. Moreover, there is only one way to reconcile sinful humans to a holy God, and that is through Jesus Christ (John 14:6).

It is worth mentioning that

some Hindus will talk about grace, but they aren't talking about the biblical view of grace. The Hindu teaching about grace sees no need for an atonement for sin, but simply offers forgiveness without any satisfaction of the judgment on sin required by a holy God.

The biblical view of salvation is simple. God the Son became man and died a sacrificial death on the cross for our sins. He paid a debt He did not owe, because we owed a debt we could not pay. Because of His death and resurrection, we can experience true forgiveness and have a personal relationship with God. Moreover, we can know that we have eternal life (1 John 5:13).

The key verses to remember when witnessing to Hindus are

Ephesians 2:8-9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”



Additional Resources

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February 2025 • A Biblical View on Hinduism

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