

[A Hindu Primer](#)

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WHAT IS HINDUISM?

A Hindu Primer

A code of Practices, Beliefs and Attitudes Common to all Hindu's

Loving Hindu parents worldwide, of various lineages, have called for a common religious code to teach their sons and daughters. They have asked, "What is the minimum I must do to dispatch my duty to my religion and my children?" In response, we have assembled this "Insight" with hard copy illustrations by artist A. Manivel. It contains 1) an overview of Hinduism; 2) nine basic beliefs; 3) Hinduism from A to Z; 4) five essential precepts; 5) five corresponding observances; and 6) five parenting guidelines. The modern Hindu child raised up with these principles and practices will be a fully functioning human being, one who is tolerant, devotional, fair, fearless, obedient, secure, happy, selfless, pure and traditional. As you will see, these are sophisticated sections, written for parents and teachers, to be stepped down and elucidated for specific age groups. We apologize that, in our brevity, we have inevitably blurred over subtleties in the rainbow of Hindu views.

A Bird's Eye View Of A Family Of Faiths

Hinduism is our planet's original and oldest living religion, with no single founder. For as long as man has lived and roamed across Earth's land and water masses, breathed its air and worshiped in awe its fire, the Sanatana Dharma has been a guide of righteous life for evolving souls. It is important to note that today Hinduism has four main denominations: Saivism, Shaktism, Vaishnavism and Smartism, each with hundreds of lineages. They represent a broad range of beliefs, sadhanas and mystic goals.

While Hindus believe many diverse and exotic things, there are several bedrock

concepts on which virtually all concur. All Hindus worship one Supreme Reality, though they call it by many names, and teach that all souls will ultimately realize the truth of the Vedas and Agamas. Hindus believe that there is no eternal hell, no damnation. They concur that there is no intrinsic evil. All is good. All is God. In contrast, Western faiths postulate a living evil force, embodied in Satan, that directly opposes the will of God.

Hindus believe that the universe was created out of God and is permeated by Him--a Supreme Being who both is form and pervades form, who creates, sustains and destroys the universe only to recreate it again in unending cycles. Hindus accept all genuine spiritual paths. Each soul is free to find his own way, whether by devotion, austerity, meditation, yoga or selfless service (seva). Hinduism's three pillars are temple worship, scripture and the guru-disciple tradition. Hinduism strongly declares the validity of the three worlds of existence and the myriad Gods and devas residing within them. Festivals, pilgrimage, chanting of holy hymns and home worship are dynamic practices. Family life is strong and precious. Love, nonviolence, good conduct and the law of dharma define the Hindu path. Hinduism explains that the soul reincarnates until all karmas are resolved and God Realization is attained.

Hindus wear the sectarian marks, called tilaka, on their foreheads as sacred symbols, distinctive insignia of their heritage. Hinduism is a mystical religion, leading devotees to personally experience its eternal truths within themselves, finally reaching the pinnacle of consciousness where man and God are forever one. They prefer cremation of the body upon death, rather than burial, believing that the soul lives on and will inhabit a new body on Earth.

While Hindus have many sacred scriptures, all sects ascribe the highest authority to the Vedas and Agamas, though their Agamas differ somewhat. Hinduism's nearly one billion adherents have tens of thousands of sacred temples and shrines, mostly in India, but now located around the world. Its spiritual core is its holy men and women--millions of sadhus, yogis, swamis, vairagis, saints and satgurus who have dedicated their lives to full-time service, devotion and God Realization, and to proclaiming the eternal truths of the Sanatana Dharma.

Nine Beliefs of Hinduism

1. Hindus believe in the divinity of the Vedas, the world's most ancient scripture, and venerate the Agamas as equally revealed. These primordial hymns are God's word and the bedrock of Sanatana Dharma, the eternal religion which has neither beginning nor end.
2. Hindus believe in a one, all-pervasive Supreme Being who is both immanent and transcendent, both Creator and Unmanifest Reality.
3. Hindus believe that the universe undergoes endless cycles of creation, preservation and dissolution.
4. Hindus believe in karma, the law of cause and effect by which each individual creates his own destiny by his thoughts, words and deeds.
5. Hindus believe that the soul reincarnates, evolving through many births until all karmas have been resolved, and moksha, spiritual knowledge and liberation from the cycle of rebirth, is attained. Not a single soul will be eternally deprived of this destiny.
6. Hindus believe that divine beings exist in unseen worlds and that temple worship, rituals, sacraments as well as personal devotionals create a communion with these devas and Gods.
7. Hindus believe that a spiritually awakened master, or satguru, is essential to know the Transcendent Absolute, as are personal discipline, good conduct, purification, pilgrimage, self-inquiry and meditation.
8. Hindus believe that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered, and therefore practice ahimsa, "noninjury."

9. Hindus believe that no particular religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others, but that all genuine religious paths are facets of God's Pure Love and Light, deserving tolerance and understanding.

Hinduism A to Z, a fun, illustrated alphabet designed as twenty-six mini-lessons on Hindu thought and culture

A is for Aum, the three-syllabled mantra that represents the Sacred Mystery in sound and vibration.

B is for bhakti, deep devotion and love for the Divine which softens even hearts of stone.

C is for culture, the beauty of Hindu music, fine arts, drama, dance, literature and architecture.

D is for dharma, which is righteousness, cosmic order and duty, leading us on the right path.

E is for Earth, our lovely blue planet, which we treat as sacred, protecting all its wonderful creatures.

F is for family, the precious cornerstone of Hindu life, culture, service and tradition.

G is for guru, our enlightened master who, knowing Truth himself, can guide us there.

H is for hatha yoga, healthful physical science for vitality, energy balancing and meditation.

I is for India, Bharata, Mother land to one-sixth of humanity, holy land for Hindus everywhere.

J is for japa, repetitive, prayerful mantras which quiet emotion and empower the mind.

K is for karma, the law of cause and effect by which we determine our experience and destiny.

L is for lotus, the heart's inner shrine, where God dwells, ever serene, ever perfect.

M is for mauna, not talking, the inner silence known when words, thoughts and actions are stilled.

N is for nonattachment, the art of living the simple life, without too many needs or desires.

O is for open mindedness, the Hindu's tolerant freedom of thought, inquiry and belief.

P is for puja, mystic worship of the Divine in our home shrine and holy temples and places.

Q is for quest, seeking to know, "Who am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going?"

R is for reincarnation, our immortal soul's journey from birth to rebirth. We do not fear death.

S is for samskaras, sacraments sanctifying life's passages: name-giving, marriage, death and more.

T is for tilaka, forehead marks worn in honor of our unique and varied lineages.

U is for utsava, our many home and temple festivals, full of bhakti, fun, feasting and family sharing.

V is for Vedas, our oldest and holiest book, the word of God recorded in 100,000 Sanskrit verses.

W is for wealth (artha), one of life's four goals, along with love, dharma and enlightenment.

X is for xerophily, the ability of certain plants and animals to thrive in India's hot, arid plains.

Y is for yoga, union of the soul with God which brings release from worldly bondage.

Z is for zeal, the fervor with which we perform service, go on pilgrimage and greet our holy religious leaders.

Five Precepts

THE MINIMAL HINDU BELIEFS. BY TEACHING THESE TO SONS AND DAUGHTERS, PARENTS WORLDWIDE PASS ON THE SANATANA DHARMA TO THEIR CHILDREN.

1. God Is All in All

The dear children are taught of one Supreme Being, all-pervasive, transcendent, creator, preserver, destroyer, manifesting in various forms, worshiped in all religions by many names, the immortal Self in all. They learn to be tolerant, knowing the soul's Divinity and the unity of all mankind.

2. Holy Temples

The dear children are taught that God, other divine beings and highly evolved souls exist in unseen worlds. They learn to be devoted, knowing that temple worship, fire ceremonies, sacraments and devotionals open channels for loving blessings, help and guidance from these beings.

3. Cosmic Justice

The dear children are taught of karma, the divine law of cause and effect by which every thought, word and deed justly returns to them in this or a future life. They learn to be compassionate, knowing that each experience, good or bad, is the self-created reward of prior expressions of free will.

4. Liberation

The dear children are taught that souls experience righteousness, wealth and pleasure in many births, while maturing spiritually. They learn to be fearless, knowing that all souls, without exception, will ultimately attain Self Realization, liberation from rebirth and union with God.

5. Scripture and Preceptor

The dear children are taught that God revealed the Vedas and Agamas, which contain the eternal truths. They learn to be obedient, following the precepts of

these sacred scriptures and awakened satgurus, whose guidance is absolutely essential for spiritual progress and enlightenment.

Five Practices

THE MINIMAL PRACTICES (ALSO KNOWN AS PANCHA NITYA KARMAS) TO NURTURE FUTURE CITIZENS WHO ARE STRONG, RESPONSIBLE, TOLERANT AND TRADITIONAL

1. Worship

The dear children are taught daily worship in the family shrine room--rituals, disciplines, chants, yogas and religious study. They learn to be secure through devotion in home and temple, wearing traditional dress, bringing forth love of the Divine and preparing the mind for serene meditation.

2. Holy Days

The dear children are taught to participate in Hindu festivals and holy days in the home and temple. They learn to be happy through sweet communion with God at such auspicious celebrations. Utsava includes fasting and attending the temple on Monday or Friday and other holy days.

3. Virtuous Living

The dear children are taught to live a life of duty and good conduct. They learn to be selfless by thinking of others first, being respectful of parents, elders and swamis, following divine law, especially ahimsa, mental, emotional and physical noninjury to all beings. Thus they resolve karmas.

4. Pilgrimage

The dear children are taught the value of pilgrimage and are taken at least once a

year for darshan of holy persons, temples and places, near or far. They learn to be detached by setting aside worldly affairs and making God, Gods and gurus life's singular focus during these journeys.

5. Rites of Passage

The dear children are taught to observe the many sacraments which mark and sanctify their passages through life. They learn to be traditional by celebrating the rites of birth, name-giving, head-shaving, first feeding, ear-piercing, first learning, coming of age, marriage and death.

Five Parenting Guidelines

BEHAVIORAL PRINCIPLES TO LIVE BY TO NURTURE CHILDREN AND TEACH THEM,
VERBALLY AND BY EXAMPLE, TO FOLLOW THE PATH OF DHARMA

1. Good Conduct

Loving fathers and mothers, knowing they are the greatest influence in a child's life, behave the way their dear children should when adults. They never anger or argue before young ones. Father in a dhoti, mother in a sari at home, all sing to God, Gods and guru.

2. Home Worship

Loving fathers and mothers establish a separate shrine room in the home for God, Gods and guardian devas of the family. Ideally it should be large enough for all the dear children. It is a sacred place for scriptural study, a refuge from the karmic storms of life.

3. Talking about Religion

Loving fathers and mothers speak Vedic precepts while driving, eating and playing. This helps dear children understand experiences in right perspective. Parents know many worldly voices are blaring, and their dharmic voice must be stronger.

4. Continuing Self-Study

Loving fathers and mothers keep informed by studying the Vedas, Agamas and sacred literature, listening to swamis and pandits. Youth face a world they will one day own, thus parents prepare their dear children to guide their own future progeny.

5. Following a Spiritual Preceptor

Loving fathers and mothers choose a preceptor, a traditional satguru, and lineage to follow. They support their lineage with all their heart, energy and service. He in turn provides them clear guidance for a successful life, material and religious.