What Is Hinduism? 1

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Hinduism: An Overview
Hinduism, also known as the Sanatana Dharma, or "Eternal Way," is our planet's original and oldest living religion, with over one billion adherents. Today it has four main denominations: Saivism, Shaktism, Vaishnavism and Smartism, each with hundreds of lineages. They represent a broad range of beliefs, practices and mystic goals, but virtually all concur on certain bedrock concepts.

All Hindus worship one Supreme Reality, though they call it by many names. There is no eternal hell, no damnation, in Hinduism, and no intrinsic evil--no satanic force that opposes the will of God. Hindus believe that the cosmos 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. Each soul is free to find his own way, whether by devotion, austerity, meditation, yoga or selfless service.

Hinduism's three pillars are temple worship, scripture and the guru-disciple tradition. Hinduism strongly declares the validity of the three worlds of existence--physical, astral and spiritual--and the myriad Gods and devas residing within the inner worlds. 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.

Hindus are generously tolerant of other faiths. Hinduism explains that the soul reincarnates until all karmas are resolved and God Realization is attained. All souls, without exception, will attain this highest spiritual summit, though it may take many lives. This 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.

Hindus 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 we have many sacred scriptures, all sects ascribe the highest authority to theVedasandAgamas. Hinduism has tens of thousands of holy temples and shrines, mostly in India, but now located around the world. Its spiritual core is its holy men and women who have dedicated their lives to full-time service, devotion and God Realization, and to proclaiming the eternal truths of the Sanatana Dharma.

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