

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
SMALL GROUP MINISTRY
Aspects of Hinduism
Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting:

Hinduism is not just a faith. It is the union of reason and intuition that cannot be defined but is only to be experienced. Evil and error are not ultimate. There is no Hell, for that means there is a place where God is not, and there are sins which exceed his love.

~ Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975), *second President of India (1962-1967)*

Among the wealthy, compassionate men claim the richest wealth,
For material wealth is possessed by even contemptible men.
Find and follow the good path and be ruled by compassion.
For if the various ways are examined, compassion will prove the means to liberation.

~*Tirukkural 25: 241-242*

Check-in: *What is on your mind today?*

Focus Readings:

“It is one of our perennial problems, whether there is actually a God. From the Hindu point of view each soul is divine. All religions are branches of one big tree. It doesn't matter what you call Him just as long as you call. Just as cinematic images appear to be real but are only combinations of light and shade, so is the universal variety a delusion. The planetary spheres, with their countless forms of life, are naught but figures in a cosmic motion picture. One's values are profoundly changed when he is finally convinced that creation is only a vast motion picture and that not in, but beyond, lies his own ultimate reality.”

~ *George Harrison*

Hinduism is not considered to be a religion, but a way of life, because religion is deeply interwoven into the life of a Hindu the way nerves are interwoven in our bodies. It is very difficult to separate living and religion in the life of a devout Hindu. Both are inseparable. Both compliment each other. Both exist because of each other and both would lose their meaning and significance without the other. Religion is the center of living and living is the center of religion.

Religion is there in every aspect of a Hindu's life. Religion is his inseparable companion, guide and philosopher. It is there, always, however modern or advanced he may be, whether he believes in God or not, at the back of his mind, like a tuft of hair on the head of a priest, deeply rooted in his subconscious, firmly entrenched in his being, from which he cannot escape even if he chooses to follow another religion.

If we live with a divine sense of responsibility, every act that we perform in the course of our lives can lead us into the mysteries of divine life and into the highest transcendental state of light and delight.

~ *Jayaram V - The Hindu Way of Life, Living Religiously in Every Way*

Appreciation for Eastern thinking grew especially strong in America during the second half of the nineteenth century, thanks in part to an intellectual movement based in New England known as Transcendentalism. This movement was spearheaded by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry

David Thoreau, two of America's most admired essayists. The Transcendentalists believed that reality itself is spiritual and that all human beings are united with nature in expressing this spirituality. Emerson and Thoreau were both enthusiastic readers of Indian philosophy, especially the Bhagavad-Gita, which they often quoted and referred to in their essays. They adapted many Indian concepts to their own ways of thinking. Emerson, a noted Unitarian, once defined God in terms reminiscent of Brahmanism as "that unity, that Over-Soul, within which every man's particular being is contained and made one with all other."

~ Jay Stevenson, Ph.D. *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Eastern Philosophy*

Focus Questions:

1. How much do you know about Hinduism? What has been the primary source of the information that you have?
2. In any of the readings or the 'At-A-Glance' information, was there anything that surprised you?
3. It is not characteristic of Hindus to blame their problems on society or to demand that their discontents be remedied by social changes in their favor. It has been an axiom of Hinduism that the responsibility for resolving one's tensions with the world lies squarely with oneself: inner adjustment is the way to tranquility and contentment. What do you think about that?
4. One distinguishing mark of Hinduism is its intense interest in techniques of self-examination and self-control, such as yoga and meditation, which can enable individuals to attain peace of mind and harmony with the world. Hindu literature presents as ideal the person, who through mastery of impulse, preserves his emotional stability and mental balance. How does that compare with Western ideals/heroes/values? Do you have a personal yoga and/or meditation practice? If so, how does it impact your life?

Check-out/Likes & Wishes: *Did this session help you grow spiritually?*

Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice:

The three great mysteries: air to a bird, water to a fish, mankind to himself.

There is nothing noble in being superior to some other man. The true nobility is in being superior to your previous self.

~*Hindu Proverbs*

The Hindu man drinks religiously, sleeps religiously, walks religiously, marries religiously, robs religiously.

~*Swami Vivekananda*

Hinduism At-A-Glance

Overview:

Hinduism is generally regarded as the world's oldest organized religion. " It has no founder, single teacher nor any prophets. The word "Hindu" comes from the name of the river Indus, which flows 1800 miles from Tibet through Kashmir and Pakistan to the sea. Because of the wide variety of Hindu traditions, freedom of belief and practice are notable features of Hinduism.

Hinduism is not a religion in the same sense as Christianity is; it is more like an all-encompassing way of life -- much as Native American spirituality is.

What do Hindus believe?

For many Hindus, religion is a matter of practice rather than of beliefs. It's more what you do, than what you believe. Hindus believe in a universal soul or God called Brahman. Brahman takes on many forms that some Hindus worship as gods or goddesses in their own right. Hindus believe that there is a part of Brahman in everyone and this is called the Atman.

Hindus believe in reincarnation - a belief that the soul is eternal and lives many lifetimes, in one body after another. The soul is sometimes born in a human body, sometimes in an animal body and sometimes in a plant body etc.. Hindus believe that all forms of life contain a soul, and all souls have the chance to experience life in different forms.

Samsara means going through the cycle of repeated births and deaths (reincarnation). Hindus believe that existence of this cycle is governed by Karma.

What is Karma?

Hindus believe that the soul passes through a cycle of successive lives and its next incarnation is always dependent on how the previous life was lived. (Similar to **Buddhist** beliefs) Karma is the cause of our particular destiny. Misfortunes in our present life are the result of acts that we have committed in the past. In the same way, our actions in our present lives will determine our fate in the lives that follow. Hindus therefore aim to live in a way that will cause each of their lives to be better than the life before.

What is the Hindu way of life?

For many Hindus there are four goals in human life (purusharthas).

- 1 Moksha - the release of the soul from the cycle of rebirth.
- 2 Dharma - the code for leading one's life.
- 3 Artha - the pursuit of material gain by lawful means.
- 4 Karma- through pure acts, knowledge and devotion, you can reincarnate to a higher level. The opposite achieves the contrary result.

Why are there so many Hindu Gods?

Hindus actually only believe in one God, Brahman, the eternal origin who is the cause and foundation of all existence. The gods of the Hindu faith represent different forms of Brahman.

These gods are sent to help people find the universal God (Brahman).

Most Hindus have a personal god or goddess to whom they pray regularly.

The three most important Hindu gods (forms of Brahman) are: Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva.

What is the Hindu place of Worship?

Most Hindus worship every day at home and have a shrine there. A shrine can be anything from a room, a small altar or simply pictures or statues. Family members often worship together. At the shrine, Hindus make offerings to a murti. A murti is a sacred statue of God, or a god or goddess.

The Hindu building for communal worship is called Mandir (Hindu Temple). The temples are dedicated to different gods and are the focus of religious life. Outside India, people mainly gather at the mandir at the weekend. Worshipers repeat the names of their favorite gods, goddesses, and the mantras. Water, fruit, flowers and incense are offered to the gods.

What is Hinduism's Holy book?

The most ancient sacred texts of the Hindu religion are written in Sanskrit and called the Vedas. Hinduism does not just have one sacred book but several scriptures. The Vedas scriptures guide Hindus in their daily life. They also help to preserve the religious dimensions of family and society. Hindus have developed their system of worship and beliefs from the scriptures.

Hinduism differs from Christianity and other monotheistic religions in that it does *not* have:

- a single founder,
- a specific theological system,
- a single concept of deity,
- a single holy text,
- a single system of morality,
- a central religious authority,
- the concept of a prophet.

Hinduism has grown to become the world's third largest religion, after Christianity and Islam. It claims about 950 million followers -- about 14% of the world's population. It is the dominant religion in India, Nepal, and among the Tamils in Sri Lanka.