

## Hinduism

Hinduism is probably the oldest of the recognized living religions. It is difficult to date its origins, but to suggest that it has been more than 4000 years since its establishment would not be an over-estimation. Unlike other religions, Hinduism has no founder and no common creed or doctrine. Hinduism embraces a galaxy of gods and goddesses. Ancient scriptures such as the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Brahmanas, the Bhagavad Gita and other epics contain rich stories of these deities.

Basically Hindus believe in an ultimate great spirit, Brahman or Atma. Then comes the trimurti consisting of Brahma, the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Shib or Shiva, the destroyer and regenerator of life. After these comes the other deities. The doctrine of karma (the moral law of cause and effect) influences many a Hindu's attitude to life. Hindus see life events as being due to his karma. Karma is the working out in this present life something that happened in a past life.

Strongly believing in reincarnation, they hold that the present status and behavior have a bearing on existence in the next reincarnated life. Hinduism covers the whole of life, including health. Ayurvedic medicine, practiced for millennia, is still practiced today. A Hindu may be reticent to follow procedures that go counter ayurvedic practices that cover a regimen of regular diet, sleep, defecation, hygiene, clothing, exercise and sexual practice.

### Fundamental Features of Hinduism

- Basic World View: The universe is profoundly one, and all while it goes through surface changes and cycles, its ultimate nature as expression of the divine does not change.
- God: or Ultimate Reality Brahman, the one Mind or Life which is the one reality, expresses itself in all that is like a flame taking many shapes.
- Origin of the World / Destiny of the World: The world goes through endless cycles of creation and destruction but has no real beginning or end.
- Origin of Humans: Like the world, the individual has no known beginning but goes through countless lifetimes the nature of which is determined by karma.
- Destiny of Humans: The series of lifetimes continues and may include episodes in heavens and hells, until one transcends karma through God-realization.
- Revelation or Mediation: between the Ultimate and the Human The Vedic scriptures; the Brahman priesthood; the gods and God-realized Saints as expressions of the One; following one's guru as spiritual guide.
- What is expected of Humans: To follow dharma through rituals, behavior, and righteous deeds; if one seeks moksha (liberation), one would practice yoga, meditation, or devotion under the guidance of a guru.

From *Many Peoples, Many Faiths*, by Robert S. Ellwod Jr.