



BIBLICAL TRAINING CENTER

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Answering World Religions – Hinduism

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1. Overview

- Hindus make up 13% of the world's population.¹ Most live in **India** (they are 82% of the population or 700 million).² There are 1 million in the US today.
- There are many Americanized versions of Hinduism. Many people in Southern **California** have worldviews shaped by Hindu-based movements like Paramahansa Yogananda's Self-Realization Fellowship, ISKCON (Hare Krishna Movement), Transcendental Meditation (Maharishi Mahesh Yogi) and the New Age Movement.
- Today's class will be more geared toward Self-Realization Fellowship's version since we will be talking about Paramahansa Yogananda next week.

2. General Beliefs

Hinduism is an ancient religion going back to 1500 BC. You will find variations.

God. Hindus believe in **pantheism**. This is the belief that God is all and all is God. Everything, including people, and all the matter of the universe, is considered divine.³

You will also hear about many **gods** (there are over 330 million!). There are different sects which worship different gods. It can be confusing:⁴

¹ *Compact Guide*, 87.

² *Ibid.*, 87.

³ Ancient Hinduism originally believed in over 330 million gods. *Compact Guide*, 88.

⁴ For a longer list of Hindu gods, see Wikipedia, s.v. "List of Hindu Deities," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Hindu_deities. There is a great chart at the bottom of Wikipedia, s.v. "Hindu Deities," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu_deities.

- **Brahman** is the one Reality behind the many gods: *Brahman*. *Brahman* is a monistic, impersonal force. In its **highest** form it is without attributes or qualities (unknowable).
- **Ishvara** is *Brahman* with attributes. **Ishvara** became known to humanity through three manifestations:
 - (1) **Brahma** - Creator
 - (2) **Vishnu** - Preserver
 - (3) **Shiva** - Destroyer
- **10 incarnations of Vishnu**. There were 10 mythical incarnations of *Vishnu* called **avatars**. Vishnu is believed to have come in forms of a fish, turtle, boar, and people like Krishna and Buddha (the *Bhagavad-Gita* contains the stories of these myths).⁵

Devotion to a god or goddess

In the West, we tend to focus on the philosophy of Hinduism. But many in traditional Hinduism are **devoted to a single god** “the way of devotion (*bhakti*).” They look to their god or goddess for release from this world. For example, the majority of Hindus today follow the god **Shiva**. Ganesha (Shiva’s son) is another popular god.

Temple Hinduism

- There are Hindu temples in just about every city of the US now.
- Each temple is dedicated to one god or goddess, with others present.
- Hindu families have shrines at home with statues or pictures of the gods.
- Followers chant the names of their gods, do mantras.
- Make offerings to the gods and goddesses fruit, flowers, water, etc.)

Creation. The universe is said to be an **illusion** (*maya*). In Self-Realization Fellowship, God (Spirit) individualized itself through “vibratory activity” to create this world much like the rays of light from a projector are individualized onto a movie screen. **But just like a movie ultimately is not real, creation is also not real.**

Man. Since everything is an illusion, man, too is an illusion. Man’s true essence is **divine**. Man’s goal is “self-actualization” or “self-realization.” People are taught to recognize that their true nature is divine and that they are actually one with God.

⁵ *Compact Guide*, 88.

- *Our soul (atman) and Brahman are the same essence.* Our essence is identical to that of Brahman.

Sin and evil. There is no **sin** in Hindu-based cults. Instead, the big problem is everything in this world is an illusion. This illusion makes people ignorant of their true nature: divinity. We are merely duped into thinking everything is real, including our pain. There is really then **no evil, no disease, no disharmony, no separateness.**

Karma and reincarnation. Illusion (*maya*) keeps people trapped in a near-endless cycle of **rebirth**. Man is travelling a path of upward evolution played out over many **lives**. Actions from previous lives affect subsequent ones. This is the **law of karma**. Karma must be worked out throughout many lifetimes. The ultimate goal is to break the cycle of rebirth.

- *The law of karma.* Mankind's problem is that we're **ignorant** of our divine nature and have attached ourselves to desires of our separate selves. The consequence is that we have become subject to the law of karma.
- *Reincarnation.* Because of karma our actions follow us from lifetime to lifetime in an ever revolving "wheel of life, death and rebirth."⁶
- *Liberation.* We must realize that the idea that we are individual selves is just an illusion and acknowledge that only *Brahman* is real. We must also **detach** ourselves from our ego's desires. Once we do this, we will attain enlightenment. There are three paths for obtaining enlightenment: (1) the way of action and ritual; (2) the way of knowledge and meditation; and (3) the way of devotion.⁷

Jesus. Hindu-cults like Self-Realization Fellowship teach Jesus was an ordinary man who attained "Christ Consciousness." In other words, Jesus **became** a Christ. But he was just one of many "christs" sent to help mankind throughout history (there were many others including Krishna, Buddha and Yogananda). Jesus did not die on the cross to provide salvation for our sins, but to be an **example** for us and show us the way to self-realization.

Salvation. Self-realization (not forgiveness) is what we need. Our big problem is ignorance of our divinity. We must follow the example of Jesus and become like Christ, resurrect the Christ **within** us, and attain "Christ Consciousness" for ourselves. In Self-

⁶ *Compact Guide*, 90.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

Realization Fellowship, the “second coming” of Jesus will be when the masses finally achieve this.

Scriptures. Not all Hindu-based groups are the same, but most say that all religions teach the same core truths. All roads eventually lead to God.

3. Comparison Chart

	Hindu Groups	Christianity
God	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Polytheism (many gods) but ultimately Pantheism/Monism (all is God). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theism (one personal God). • One God exists within the world (immanent) but he is also <u>beyond</u> the world (transcendent).
Creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everything, including people, and even the matter of the universe (atoms), is considered divine. • The universe is said to be an illusion in Hinduism (<i>maya</i>). • There’s no sin and evil. Big problem is ignorance of our true nature: divinity. • We’re merely duped into thinking pain is real. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Matter really does exist (Gen. 1:1; 2:7; Rom. 1:19; Rev. 21:1,5). • Sin and sickness are privations that Jesus can heal and will remove in future (Rev. 21:4)
Bible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bible is one of <u>many</u> valid religious books. • All religions teach the same core truths. All roads eventually lead to God. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bible alone is the “Word of God.” • The Bible is our only textual authority for faith and conduct (2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Tim. 3:16). • All religions cannot teach the same truth because they have contradictory propositions.
Humanity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Man is also an illusion. • Man’s true essence is divine. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Man is not God; people cannot become God. • This is a lie of <u>Satan</u> that led to Fall (Gen. 3). It is also how Satan fell (Isa. 14:12-14)

	Hindu Groups (Cont'd)	Christianity (Cont'd)
Salvation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our big problem is ignorance. • People must recognize their true nature is divine and that they are one with God. • Illusion (<i>maya</i>) keeps people trapped in near-endless cycle of rebirth (reincarnation). • Ultimate goal is to break free from this cycle. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instead of exalting themselves to God, people need to recognize their sinful state and receive the free gift of salvation (Rom. 3:23). • All people need to be saved (1 Jn. 1:8-10; Rom. 3:10, 23; 6:23).
Christ's Nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus was an ordinary man who attained "Christ Consciousness." • He became a "Christ." • One of many gurus sent to help mankind (others were Krishna, Buddha and Yogananda). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus was unique (<i>sui generis</i>) (John 3:16). • "Christ" is Greek for Messiah. He did not discover a "Christ principle" but was fulfilling all OT prophecies about coming Messiah.
Christ's Atonement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus did not die on the cross to provide salvation for our sins, but to be an example for us and show us the way to self-realization. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While he did leave an example (1 Pet. 2:21), his primary purpose for dying on cross was to provide atonement for sin (Mk. 10:45; 1 Pet. 3:18), not show us a way to attain God-consciousness.
Christ's Return	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The "second coming" of Jesus will be when the masses finally attain "Christ Consciousness" resurrecting the Christ within. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Second Coming will be a real, visible bodily return of Christ upon the earth (Acts 1:11; Zech. 14:4; Mt. 24:27).

4. Christian Response

All **religions** cannot teach same truths. The major religions have contradictory statements about the nature of God and the way of salvation. For example, **Christianity** teaches there is **one God who has a son**, and that the only way to heaven is faith in Christ's atonement. But **Islam** teaches **God does not have a son** and one **must work** their way to heaven. There are also religions that teach **many gods** (polytheism) and there are religions that teach there is **no god** (Secular Buddhism). These propositions cannot all be true at the same time and in the same sense.

The pantheistic view of God is not reasonable. It's not reasonable because if it were true, then we could no longer make any **distinctions** between ourselves and other things. You could never say, "I" give the ball to "you." You couldn't even say, "I" give the

ball to “me” because there would be no subject (“I”), no object (“ball”), and no indirect object (“to me.”)

The pantheistic view of God is not biblical. Pantheism is not consistent with Scripture. The Bible teaches there is only one God (Deut. 3:35,39; 6:4; 1 Chron. 17:20; Isa. 43:10,11; 44:6,8; 45:21) who is **distinct** from his creation (Isaiah 55:8-9). God is **omnipotent** (all-powerful) and **omnipresent** (everywhere at once) while his creatures are not. The Bible declares, “For I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me.” (Isaiah 46:9) The Bible says God is also **personal** (Jer. 29:11; Jn. 3:16) and **loving** (1 Jn. 4:7) while the god of pantheism is **impersonal**.

Sin and evil. Man really does have a sin problem. Man’s sin has brought evil into the world and this is the point of needing to receive Jesus as Savior. The Bible records the **Fall of mankind** in Genesis 2. Prior to the Fall everything was declared by God to be “good.” But after the Fall, the earth became cursed (Gen. 3:17). Sin and death entered the world through Adam and Eve’s sinful choice to disobey God (Rom. 5:12). The purpose for Jesus coming as Savior was to **atone for man’s sin** (Jn. 1:29; 1 Jn. 2:2; 1 Jn. 4:10; Isa. 53:4-5) and provide **reconciliation** (Col. 1:20-22) back to God through faith in **Jesus’ finished work** on the cross (Rom. 5:1; Rom. 6:23).

Karma. There is no impersonal law of karma governing the universe. But there is **one God who will hold all people accountable**. All people “will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.” (1 Pet. 4:5)

Reincarnation. People live only one lifetime—there is no reincarnation. The Bible says, “it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment...” (Heb. 9:27)

Jesus. Jesus was not an ordinary man who became the Christ. “Christ” was added to Jesus’ name because it is recognition that Jesus’ was the **promised** Messiah spoken of in the Old Testament. There is no “Christ Consciousness” that he attained that is available to all mankind.

Salvation. Mankind cannot become “god” by recognizing the divinity within. The lie that we could become gods is a lie from **Satan** which he used against Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. This led to the Fall of mankind (Gen 3). It is also how Satan fell from being a holy angel to a demon (Isa. 14:12-14). Instead of exalting themselves, people need to recognize their need of salvation and receive the free gift of salvation offered by Christ upon the cross. All people need to be saved (1 Jn. 1:8-10; Rom. 3:10, 23; 6:23).

Extra Material – Not Covered in Class

Evangelism Tips

- *Be humble.* Don't have an attitude of superiority.
- *Have a visible spiritual life.* Let them see your peace of mind because of Christ's forgiveness and the assurance you have of your destiny after death.⁸
- *Offer Jesus' forgiveness.* Most Hindus are troubled by the idea of being hopelessly locked into a cycle of rebirth based on their actions—a cycle they cannot escape. A good passage to share is Matt. 11:28-30: "'Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.'"⁹
- *Point to God's personhood.* If God is personal by nature, then he is able to be aware and empathize with our suffering (Ex. 3:7; Heb. 4:15). Ask them whether they think the impersonal Brahman can even be concerned about us.¹⁰ Furthermore, to know Brahman means to lose one's identity and cease being a separate person, and this is contrary to the drive in each of us. Aren't we most fulfilled when we are in a relationship of friendship or love? How much more fulfilled would we be in this kind of relationship with a personal, holy and loving God?¹¹
- *Act and listen.* Hinduism is actually so diverse that there is no specific doctrinal creed. It is very tolerant and allows each person to choose their own beliefs. We should not assume what our Hindu friend believes but we should ask them what they believe concerning God, man, sin and salvation.¹²
- *Focus on Jesus.* Hindus think highly of Jesus. Gandhi said, "I shall say to the Hindus that your lives will be incomplete unless you reverently study the teachings of Jesus." Encourage them to read Luke and John.¹³
- *Be aware of differing concepts.* "Born again" means reincarnation to a Hindu—something they want to escape.¹⁴

⁸ *Compact Guide*, 94.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 92, 93.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 95.

Common Objections

- *Cultural challenges.* Hinduism is less about creed and more about culture. Many Hindus think they must abandon their culture to accept Christianity. There is also concern about the shame they might bring upon their family. One Hindu who came to Christ talked about his struggle: “My acceptance of Jesus would make my parents lose respect and position in the community. My brothers and sisters would suffer disgrace.”¹⁵
- *“There are many paths to God.”* Instead of arguing, continually talk about a God who is personal. Since God is personal (and not a force) then sin is a matter of broken relationship because of disobedience.¹⁶
- *“Jesus is not unique.”* Encourage them to read the gospel of John for themselves and then judge. Some obvious differences: (1) there were at least ten incarnations of *Vishnu*; (2) the historicity is not essential; (3) the purpose of *Vishnu*’s incarnation was for destruction of evil-doers; (4) the avatars pointed to a way to attain enlightenment over many lifetimes of striving zealously. In contrast (1) Jesus had one incarnation in human form; (2) his historicity is essential; (3) his purpose was to seek and save the lost; (4) he himself is the way people can freely receive eternal life immediately.¹⁷
- *“The crucifixion goes against nonviolence of life.”* Explain that Christ’s death does not validate killing but it demonstrates the extent that God loves us (Rom. 5:8), how much he desires that we have life (John 3:16-17; 10:10) and that he made a way for us to have a relationship with him (John 17:3). Hindus believe in going to extremes to demonstrate love (e.g., a mother going hungry for her children or a father depriving himself of everything to send his children to school). Hindus are moved by the depiction of Jesus on the cross to validate his love for us.¹⁸

¹⁵ *Compact Guide*, 95.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

Deeper Questions and Answers

What are some beliefs of traditional Hinduism?

The Caste System

- There are four basic castes: Brahmins, Vaishyas, Shudras, Dalits. One is born into their caste based on karma. Not possible to switch castes or marry outside one's caste.

3 Ways

- Way of works: based on rituals, sacrifices, supervised strictly by priests.
- Way of knowledge: ascetic path of withdrawal, meditation, recognition of Atman-Brahman identity
- Way of devotion: devotion to a particular god or goddess.

Practices

- Each Hindu temple is dedicated to one particular god or goddess.
- Worship of the gods is called *puja* ("sacrifice").
- There are daily services, routine individual worship and special celebrations.
- Each god has a day of descent (like a birthday) where the god is carried around the city.
- Daily rituals include devotional prayer three times a day, while most only practice sunrise meditation today.
- Deities are washed, dressed, receive portion of food at meals, and prepared for sleep at bedtime.

What are the Hindu Scriptures?

- Four **Vedas** (lit. "knowledge")
 - The oldest Hindu scriptures. Hindu mythology says the Vedas were initially conceived of by the god Brahma and revealed to a group of holy men.
 - Names: (1) Rig-Veda, (2) Yajur Veda, (3) Sama Veda and (4) Atharva Veda.
- **Brahmanas** - instructions for priests.
- **Sutras** - instructions for all people.
- **Upanishads** – more philosophical.

Definitions

- **Atman.** Deep down inside our souls is Atman or the “true self” and this is Brahman.
- **Caste.** Hindus believe all people are born into their caste based on karma. Not possible to switch castes or marry outside one’s caste. Four basic castes are: Brahmins, Vaishyas, Shudras, Dalits.
- **Dharma.** The natural universal laws which must be observed to be happy and content. This Hindu word literally means “religion.”
- **Guru.** A mentor or spiritual leader.
- **Karma.** Actions in previous life determines effect of next life. Must accept suffering.
- **Mantra.** A mantra is a phrase in Sanskrit on which one meditates to invoke the powers of a deity and invite it to enter you. (*Compact Guide*, 101)
- **Maya.** Everything else that is not Brahman is not real and called maya. Maya encompasses all physical objects, our feelings and emotions.
- **OM.** *OM* is the mantra containing the primal vibrations of the universe. (*Compact Guide*, 101)
- **Swami.** A religious teacher from a monastic order.
- **Reincarnation.** Endless cycle of higher/lower lives (animals are lower, humans higher).

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