

HINDU DHARMA - SANATANA DHARMA

INTRODUCTION

Hinduism is recognised as one of the most ancient of the major living religious traditions of the world.

Hinduism is different from most others because it was not started by any single individual or event and its origin cannot be traced to a particular period of human history.

Hinduism is not based on one single book or a set of doctrines, on the contrary, it allows a great deal of freedom of thought, faith and worship.

The term sanatana is often used to highlight the quality of being ancient, eternal and universal.

The term Dharma denotes the Hindu philosophy to uphold, sustain or support.

It is for this reason, it is often said that Hinduism is more a way of life or a value system rather than just a religion. Therefore, Unity of Hinduism is not external and geographical but it is deep, subtle and spiritual.

The Word HINDU

The word Hindu has its origin in Sanskrit literature. In the Rig Veda, India was referred to as the country of Sapta Sindhu i.e. the country of seven great rivers. In Vedic Sanskrit, according to ancient dictionaries, 'sa' was pronounced as 'ha'. Thus Sapta Sindhu was pronounced as Hapta Hindhu. This is how the word Hindu came into being. The Greeks, who invaded India under Alexander the Great dropped the 'H' completely and used the name Indoos or Indus which later led to the formation of the word India!

SINDHU ⇒ HINDHU ⇒ HINDU
SINDHU ⇒ INDHU ⇒ INDU ⇒ INDIA

HINDUS Around the World

There are over 800 million Hindus spread in over 160 countries around the world. Hinduism which has evolved over thousands of years in India has spread only as a result of the migration of Hindus from India to other countries.

Large-scale migration of Hindus from India started in the early 19th century when they were sent as indentured labourers to work in various British colonies around the world. e.g. East Africa, South Africa, Burma, Malaysia, Singapore, Fiji, Mauritius, Jamaica and Guyana. In East Africa, most of the early Indians worked on building railways and the later arrivals helped the British develop trade and commerce. After independence of the African colonies, many of the Hindus who held British passports and were British Subjects thus migrated to Britain. Whilst in the Caribbean islands, the Indians worked mainly on sugar plantations. In spite of cultural differences and physical hardships, they managed to keep the Hindu traditions alive.

The majority of Hindus in the industrialised countries arrived after the second World War. By sincere and dedicated work, Hindus in these countries have established themselves and made a notable contribution to the economic, cultural and religious life of their adopted nations. They are regarded as a disciplined, friendly and successful community.

HINDU FAMILY LIFE

In Hinduism great importance is placed on family life. The family is considered as the building block of society and the entire nation. Starting and maintaining a family is considered a religious duty. The second of the four stages of life is the family life stage- Grihatha Ashram. During this stage, it is ones obligation to maintain ones family as the householder.

A family life is where one shares ones joys and sorrows, successes and failures, ups and downs with ones parents, brothers, sisters and other relations. Hindu families even today benefit from this tradition even when some family members live in different parts of the world. Such links help to maintain cultural identity in countries where Hindus are a minority. The loving and peaceful qualities are developed in the individuals often as a result of the caring atmosphere in such a home.

WORLD HINDU POPULATION		
Africa & Middle East	Europe	Asia & Australia
Kenya 65,000	Austria 5,000	Afghanistan (was over 120,000 in 1989) 12,000
Malawi 4,000	Belgium 5,000	Australia 60,000
Mauritius 700,000	Denmark 5,000	Bali & Indonesia 600,000
Middle East 60,000	Eastern Europe 5,000	Bangladesh (was over 20 million in 1947) 10,000,000
Nigeria 20,000	France 30,000	Bharat 900,000,000
Others 20,000	Germany 36,000	Bhutan 65,000
South Africa 800,000	Italy 1,000	Burma 7,000,000
Tanzania 65,000	Netherland 160,000	Fiji (over 700,000 before Col Robuka took power) 400,000
Uganda 20,000	Norway 1,000	Hong Kong 90,000
Zambia 20,000	Portugal 10,000	Japan 5,000
Zimbabwe 5,000	Spain 12,000	Kashmir (was over 600,000 in 1989) 50,000
TOTAL 1,779,000	Sweden 1,000	Malaysia 1,170,000
	Switzerland 5,000	Nepal 20,000,000
	UK 1,200,000	New Zealand 50,000
	TOTAL 1,476,000	Pakistan (was over 7,000,000 in 1947) 1,100,000
		Singapore 150,000
America	<i>One in every sixth person in the world is a Hindu.</i>	Sri Lanka 2,000,000
Canada 380,000		Thailand 10,000
Caribbean 700,000		Vietnam 5,000
Mexico 500		TOTAL 942,767,000
Surinam 160,000		
USA 800,000		
TOTAL 2,040,500		

HINDU RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS

Symbolism is used extensively in Hinduism so as to translate underlying principles behind many obstruct concepts (eg God). Similarly, an idol or form of God is often used so that it leads the worshipper to the ideal. The concept of use of symbol is similar as £ sign for monetary value and heart for emotion of love.

Examples:

- Aum and Swastika are symbols representing philosophical principles.
Shankha (Conch Shell) is a symbol used in rituals.
- Namaste salutation is a symbol used as part of social tradition.

AUM



It symbolises:

- a) the three functions of God viz generation, preservation and destruction.
 - b) pure consciousness or reality and pervades all states of mind.
 - c) Omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent qualities of God.
 - d) The shape of 3 in aum also represents the Trinity ñ Bramaha, Vishnu and Mahesh.
- Is the symbol of consciousness.
 - Represents the momentary silence between two successive chants.

Hindus believe, chanting of AUM, the highest Mantra, has an extraordinary effect on the human mind. It creates harmony, peace and bliss by producing vibrations that awaken dormant vital centres within the body.

SWASTIKA



It Symbolises:

a) **space**

Four Directions ñ North, South, East and West.

b) **knowledge**

Four Vedas (Hindu ancient scriptures)

Rig Veda - deals with general knowledge.

Yajur Veda - deals with knowledge of action (Karma)

Sama Veda - deals with knowledge of worship (Upasana).

Atharva Veda - deals with knowledge of Science.

Objectives of Life

Four Purusharthas viz Dharma, Artha, Karma and Moksha.

c) **Stages of Life**

Four Ashrams - Bramacharya

- Grihastha

- Vanprashtha

- Sanyasa

d) **Social classes of society**

Four Varnas: - Brahmin

- Kshatriya

- Vaishya

- Shudra

e) **Cyclic nature of time** - Four main Seasons.

TILAK (Bindi)

(This is the Red powder or sandalwood paste mark applied on the forehead)

It symbolises:

The respect to the higher centers in the brain where thoughts are generated. The forehead is the seat of memory and the spiritual eye. Applying the Tilak thus symbolises the retention of the memory of the Lord (God).

Sandalwood is used as it has cooling properties and a very pleasant aroma. This signifies that ones head should remain calm and cool and should generate pleasant thoughts. Tilak is also a reminder of vows. The most popular is the red tilak which when put on by woman symbolises her wedding vows.

Heartiest Congratulations & Best Wishes on the Mahajans

30th Anniversary

From Prabhdasbhai Thakrar & Family

HAVAN YAGNA

One of the most ancient form of Hindu prayer is known as the Havan Yagna. It is a religious ceremony in which a sacred fire is lit in a container (havan kund) and sanskrit mantras are recited. It is based on the principle of sacrificing for the sake of others. The main purposes of the rituals conducted in the Havan Yagna are:

- Lighting a fire and offering wood, ghee and herbs as a symbolic act of giving. This teaches one not to be selfish.
- Recitation of prayers in a group teaches one to live happily by sharing with others.
- It also symbolises the importance of nature and the fragrance reminds us of the protection of the environment we all have to live in. Each of the steps of the performance of Havan can be explained as follows:

1. Sipping of Water (Achman).

The importance of water in our life. Water is considered as a gift given to humanity by God. The water is sipped three times ñ first water received from the sky (rain), second for underground water (wells), and third-for surface water (lakes and rivers).

2. Prayer for Physical Health (Ang Sapparsh).

Here the mantras recognise the five senses and the parts of the body which are needed for the physical well being. Thus different parts of the body are touched with water to pray for physical health and strength.

3. Communion Prayer (Iswar Upasana).

Eight Mantras selected from the Vedas are recited ñ in remembrance of Gods powers and qualities.

4. Benedictory Prayer (Swasti Vachan).

Various branches of science, which can be of benefit to mankind, are mentioned in these mantras. The mantras also mention the twenty-one things which make up this world: the five physical elements ñ (fire, air, earth, water and space) which have qualities of light (heat), sound, smell, taste and touch, which are sensed by the five sensory organs ñ eyes, ears, nose, mouth and skin which contains the soul.

5. Prayer for Peace (Shanti Prakarna).

In these mantras, the prayer is for the forces of nature to be peaceful eg. Elements in air to be kind, elements in plant not to be harmful and animals and man to live in harmony. God is also requested to grant one with the quality of fearlessness and bravery so that one can fight bad influences and stay on the side of good.

6. Lighting the fire (Agnya Dhan).

In this mantra, the role of nature is acknowledged for giving things to sustain life. The fire is lit with prayer to remind us that we cannot live without consuming things offered by nature.

7. Placing the firewood (Samidha Dhan).

It Signifies that work has to be done to achieve ones objectives.

- 8. Offering of Ghee (Ghrit Ahuti).**
This signifies that just as fuel (Ghee) is needed to keep the fire burning, so God is needed to keep us alive and healthy.
- 9. Sprinkling of Water (Jal Sinchan).**
Water is sprinkled around the sacred fire and prayers are made for obtaining strength tolerance and intelligence.
- 10. Special Prayers.**
In these, the offerings are made as Gifts from God without which we cannot live viz, air (oxygen), sun, water and fire (energy/food).
Worshippers are reminded not to misuse the resources of nature.
- 11. Offerings without selfishness (Ajyahuti).**
The mantra chanted here is Id na mum (It is not for me).
The participants in the yagna pray for protection from anger, gaining of knowledge and happiness and less misery for everyone.
- 12. Final Offering (Poornahuti).**
The vedas say that God is infinite and perfect. The yagna is concluded with the prayer for everything to be perfect.

YOGA EXPLAINED

The word Yoga means to unite, to connect or to establish a relationship with God, the Supreme Being. Yoga is communication with God, in which one consciously directs ones thoughts towards God. Yoga is not just physical exercising of the body but also controlling ones thoughts so as to bring mental peace and calmness.

The difference between Meditation and Yoga is that Meditation is the thought process ñ the process of turning within and tuning ñ whilst Yoga is the result ñ the connecting, union or link with God, the Supreme Being. The four main types of Yoga can be explained briefly as follows:

a) Raj Yoga (Yoga through self Control)

The word Raj means King and it also means Secrets. By practising Raj Yoga one becomes king over ones own physical senses and the mind. It is also by way of opening up all secrets of the spirituality. Raj Yoga works on the soul. It is not just a technique for control of stress and relaxation but it is a tool which enables one to create new attitudes and responses to life through clear spiritual understanding of oneself. The eight constituents of Raj Yoga as laid down by Hindu Sage Patanjali are:

1. Yama

Self control over moral and disciplinary matters: truthfulness, non-violence, non-stealing, celibacy and non-covetousness.

2. Niyama

Self control over physical disciplines: purification, contentment, austerity, study and devotion.

3. Asanas

Self control over physical health: Keeping the body strong and healthy by yoga postures or physical exercises. There are over eighty balanced postures!

4. Pranayama

Special control on the breathing as there is a close link between the mental state and breathing and life forces.

5. Pratyahara

By the ability to withdraw the senses from the objects to which they are attached.

6. Dharana

Self control over mind. By withdrawing the mind from external objects and achieving total concentration on an idea or a centre.

7. Dhayana

Self control over meditation.

By achieving a degree of concentration (Dhyana) such that one forgets the surroundings and physical pleasures or pains. The meditative techniques are varied but by and large entail choosing a quiet, clean place, adopting a comfortable, cross-legged sitting position, with eyes closed, mentally releasing body tension and then meditating on the deity or symbol or even contemplating the ocean or sunrise or such beauty of mother nature.



8. Samadhi

Complete self control.

By achieving complete fixation of the mind without interruption. Samadhi is the final step when the person experiences oneness with the Supreme God. It confers absolute bliss and happiness and an end to all sorrows. This is Yoga.!

Work through each stage and through gradual control over your body and mind, you will achieve bliss!

Finally, it should be noted that many systems of Yoga are found in Hinduism and they may differ in their approach but the ultimate aim for each is the same!

b) Karma Yoga (Yoga through action)

This Yoga is based on worship of a God through action! Following the path of karma (action) one can attain perfection by performing all actions as a divine offering and with a spirit of detachment and devotion. When actions are performed selflessly, out of love for the Supreme Being, one is not caught in the bondage of actions.

c) Jnana Yoga (Yoga through knowledge and understanding)

Jnana means knowledge. This form of yoga is based on worship of an impersonal God. The seeker on the path of Jnana Yoga seeks God through self-realisation. To attain divine wisdom one must have complete faith in God. When one achieves complete self mastery and self-control and has intense faith and devotion, their true knowledge dawns within and one attains liberation and freedom from all bondage!

d) Bhakti Yoga (Yoga through love and devotion)

Bhakti Yoga is based on the worship of a personal God. The chanting and singing of adoration, love and praise for the God enables one to develop humility within oneself. The devotee who surrenders completely to God attains peace and tranquility of mind

THE JOURNEY OF LIFE

What is the purpose of life? And how should life be lived? These are questions which have perplexed thinkers of all generation.

The Hindu view which has evolved over thousands of years presents an outlook on life which synthesizes both spiritualism and materialism. This view is practical because it is based on an understanding of the desires of human nature and accepting that the physical body is only transient.

Thus the Hindu approach for the life's Journey is to have its destination (objectives) specified, through its various stages and have its direction.

These are the Four Objectives of Life: (Purusharthas)

1. Duties (Dharma)

Performance of one's duties by means of a disciplined life with virtues such as honesty, truth, love and justice. (unselfish approach). Eg. A Doctor who efficiently attends to a patient, irrespective of who the patient is, then does his Dharma.

2. Material Prosperity (Artha)

This is the means of obtaining the necessities of life by fair and honest means. Hinduism recognises the human need to earn money to live and gain material goods. But this is whilst remembering that gaining wealth is not the only objective, other duties must also be carried out.

3. Enjoyment (Kama)

Kama deals with the natural desire of man to obtain and enjoy worldly happiness (this is done through the five senses). Hinduism teaches that there is a time and a place for enjoyment and one's action should be self-controlled. Guidance is given as to what desires are appropriate and to be fulfilled at what stage in life.

4. Salvation (Moksha)

This is the final and ultimate objective of life! - to gain freedom from worldly suffering.

Humans have to face disease, old age and death. Birth follows death and death follows rebirth and this cycle goes on. The ultimate aim is to be free from this continuous cycle of birth and death. This is Moksha and Hindus believe that it can be achieved only by following the path of Dharma and by leading a disciplined and virtuous life.

WHAT ARE THE FOUR STAGES OF LIFE (ASHRAMAS) ?

Hinduism defines the four basic stages through which a life passes and each stage can be lived as planned! The four stages are:

1. The Student Stage - (Brahmacharya)

The first stage of life is the principal stage of learning. At this stage a celibate student is known as Bramachari. The priority is to be educated and learn about duties (Dharma) which have to be performed in life. At this stage, the foundation of life is laid through emphasis on self-discipline ñ physical and mental discipline.

2. The Family Life Stage - (Grihastha)

This stage begins after completing formal education, reaching maturity and upon getting married. As a householder, one has to carry out ones duties towards the family, the society and the world. The objectives of kama (enjoyment) and Artha (material prosperity) are to be achieved during this stage. This stage is expected to be most demanding as it requires understanding of ones duties towards everyone around them including providing for the childrens needs. This stage is based on the feeling of mutual love and sharing and it depends on respect for family life.

3. The Retirement Stage (Vanaprastha)

This stage is arrived at when the children have grown up and most of the family and financial responsibilities are over ñ thus retirement! Naturally, at this stage one has to slow down the pace ñ as signs of tiredness and aging set in, one should start to detach from worldly life and practice meditation ñ bringing calmness and serenity in life!

4. The Final Stage ñ (Preparation for Salvation - Sanyasa)

Hindu scriptures advise that in this final stage of life, one should have no bonds of relationships and attachments. The mind should be free of all desires and there should be no more yearning for wealth, children and fame! Such a desire free mind, full of spiritual knowledge is the perfect state of mind for the last stage of life

Mara Jalaram Bapa Sauni Raksha Karo.
Rudeya Ma Avine Tame Vaso.
From Sureshbhai Vithalani & Family