

It came with the Beatles; it's carried on by Oprah; it has found new birth in Shirley MacClaine. It has become part of our vocabulary: mantra, guru, meditation, yoga, karma, dharma, past lives. Hinduism arrived on American shores in the late 1960s, and hasn't left.

TERMS, WRITINGS, AND HOLY SITES

Pantheism

the belief that god is all and in all. Pantheists identify the universe and the world as a manifestation of god. In Hinduism some of the prominent gods are Brahman, the creator; Vishnu, the preserver; Shiva, the destroyer; they compose the Hindu 'trinity,' but there are 30 million other gods in their beliefs.

Karma

actions in this life that determine your status in the next.

Reincarnation

transmigration of the soul between varying levels of life forms as punishment or reward for karma.

Moksha

release from the cycle of rebirth dictated by the law of karma.

Caste system

each being is incarnated in a fixed social level, or caste, as a result of their karma. Brahmin are religious leaders, Kshatriyas are nobles and warriors, Vaisyas are artisans and farmers, Shudras are unskilled laborers, and the Untouchables are at the bottom of the list.

Gurus

spiritual guides who help you realize the divinity within and around you.

Swami

learned, celibate monks who follow an ascetic road to god.

Yoga

"path to god."

IMPORTANT WRITINGS

The *Vedas* (1000 BC) are the Hindu scriptures. The *Bhagavad-Gita* is an 18 chapter poem, a Hindu Bible, the most popular writing.

CENTRAL TEACHINGS

1. All things are part of God (pantheism)
2. Karma is the sum of each person's actions in this life, either good or bad
3. Souls are reincarnated into new life forms based on their karma
4. The goal is moksha, or release from the cycle of reincarnation, which results in
5. Nirvana, becoming part of the great impersonal One (their version of heaven)

VARIED PRACTICES

Hindu beliefs and practices vary widely. In fact, beliefs differ widely from one village to the next.

The vast majority of Hindus believe in god in some way or another, but there are still some who don't believe in a god at all. There are variances in religious practice as well. Some Hindus believe that they must be vegetarians, others sacrifice animals and enjoy the roasted meat.

The Hindu object of worship also varies. Some Hindus worship Shiva, others Vishnu, Krishna, Rama, or Kali. The individual Hindu may reverence one God, a few, or many, or none at all!

Hinduism teaches that no one religion leads to salvation, but all facilitate the quest for enlightenment.

IMPORTANT PEOPLE

Since the religion developed over centuries, there is no single founder or significant single leader. Mahatma Gandhi is probably the most well-known Hindu, known for non-violent resistance. The Beatles were also instrumental in popularizing Hindu thought in the Boomer generation.

1800 BC Early Hindu development begins	1000 BC Vedas written	800 BC Reincarnation introduced	600 BC Caste system developed	500 BC Development of gods Shiva, Vishnu, and Devi
60 AD Founding of Christian church by Thomas (trad.)	1540 AD Arrival of British missionaries in Hindu lands	1720 AD British empire	1947 AD Indian independence, Gandhi assassinated 1948	1960s AD Hinduism comes to U.S. through pop culture

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the appeal of Hinduism today?
2. What are the key ways that Hinduism differs from Christianity?
3. What important difference is there between pantheism and the omnipresence of God? How does pantheism affect the doctrine of sin? (cf. Psalm 139:7ff)
4. Sometimes people point to Jesus' words in Luke 17:21, "the kingdom of God is within you," as teaching the Hindu concept of pantheism. What is Jesus talking about? Consider the context and the passages below:

20 Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, 21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."

36 Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."

5. How can the concept of karma lead people to a very pessimistic, fatalistic view of life?
6. Should Christians practice yoga?
7. Consider these quotes from Hindu authorities, and then consider Romans, chapter 1. What must be our conclusion about all things Hindu?

"It is a sin to call a person a sinner," VIVEKANDANANDA. "I am the prince of demons," KRISHNA, in Bhagavad-Gita, chapter 10.

"Worship to thy tail-hair, O Cow, and to thy hooves, and to they form." RIG VEDA

ROMANS 1:22-25

22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

24 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. 25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised. Amen.

8. Consider what you've learned about Hinduism today. What would be some aspects we need to be aware of as we share Christ with a Hindu?
9. How do Hindu characteristics prove the veracity of what a former president of India, Radharishnan, said, "Hinduism is more of a culture than a creed."