[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism)**Hinduism**

From Wikipedia

**Hinduism** is the dominant [religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion)[[note 1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism#cite_note-2) of the [Indian subcontinent](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_subcontinent), particularly of [India](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India) and [Nepal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nepal), which consists of [many diverse traditions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu_denominations). It includes numerous [traditions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu_denominations), and a wide spectrum of [laws and prescriptions](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dharma%C5%9B%C4%81stra) of "daily morality" based on [karma](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karma), [dharma](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dharma), and societal norms. Hinduism is a categorisation of distinct intellectual or philosophical points of view, rather than a rigid, common set of beliefs.[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism#cite_note-4)

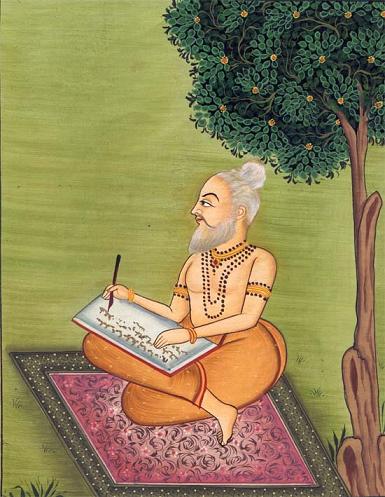
Hinduism has been called the "[oldest religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oldest_religion)" in the world,[[note 2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism" \l "cite_note-14) and many practitioners refer to Hinduism as [*Sanātana Dharma*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San%C4%81tan%C4%AB), "the eternal [law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dharma)" or the "eternal way"beyond human origins. It prescribes the "eternal" duties all Hindus have to follow, regardless of class, caste, or sect, such as honesty, purity, and self-restraint.

Western scholars regard Hinduism as a fusion or synthesisof various Indian cultures and traditions, with diverse roots and no single founder.

Since the 19th century, under the dominance of western [colonialism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colonialism) and [Indology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indology), when the term "Hinduism" came into broad use, Hinduism has re-asserted itself as a coherent and independent tradition. [Hindutva](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindutva) ideology and [Hindu politics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu_politics) emerged in the 20th century as a political force and a source for national identity in India.

Hindu practices include daily rituals such as [puja](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Puja_%28Hinduism%29) (worship) and recitations, annual festivals, and occasional pilgrimages. Select group of [ascetics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sadhu) leave the common world and engage in lifelong [ascetic practices](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%C4%81dhan%C4%81) to achieve [moksha](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moksha).

[Hindu texts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu_texts) are classified into [Śruti](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C5%9Aruti) ("revealed") and [Smriti](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smriti) ("remembered"). These texts discuss [theology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu_theology), [philosophy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu_philosophy), [mythology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu_mythology), [Vedic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vedic) [yajna](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yajna) and [agamic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C4%80gama_%28Hinduism%29) [rituals](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rituals) and [temple building](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu_temple), among other topics. Hinduism, with about one billion followers[[web 3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism" \l "cite_note-77) is the [world's third largest religion](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Major_religious_groups), after [Christianity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity) and [Islam](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam).

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Valmiki_Ramayana.jpg)

[http://bits.wikimedia.org/static-1.23wmf14/skins/common/images/magnify-clip.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Valmiki_Ramayana.jpg)

[Valmiki](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valmiki), a contemporary of [Rama](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rama), composes the [Ramayana](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramayana).

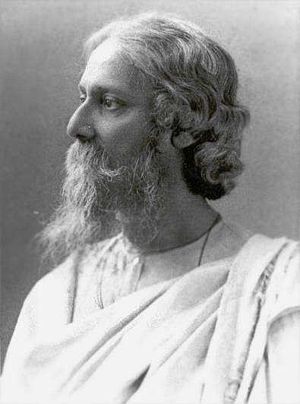
The term 'Hindu' was originally a geographical term and did not refer to a religion. The word *Hindu* was taken by European languages from the [Arabic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arabic) term *al-Hind*, and refers to the land of the people who live across the River Indus.

The term *Hinduism* was introduced into the English language in the 19th century to denote the religious, philosophical, and cultural traditions native to India.

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Shiva_statue,_Mauritius.jpg)Mangal Mahadev, 108-foot statue of Lord [Shiva](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shiva) at [Ganga Talao](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ganga_Talao), [Mauritius](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mauritius)

The study of India and its cultures and religions, and the definition of "Hinduism", has been shaped by the interests of colonialism and by Western notions of religion. Because of the wide range of traditions and ideas covered by the term, arriving at a comprehensive definition is difficult. Hinduism has been variously defined as a religion, a religious tradition, and a set of religious beliefs.

To its adherents, Hinduism is a traditional way of life. Many practitioners refer to Hinduism as *Sanātana Dharma*, "the eternal [law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dharma)" or the "eternal way" It refers to the "eternal" duties all Hindus have to follow, regardless of class, caste, or sect, such as honesty, refraining from injuring living beings, purity, goodwill, mercy, patience, forbearance, self-restraint, generosity, and asceticism. Its truths have been divinely revealed (shruti) and passed down through the ages to the present day in the most ancient of the world's scriptures, the Veda.[[15]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism#cite_note-FOOTNOTEKnott19985-17)

**Hindu modernism**[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tagore3.jpg)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Swami_Vivekananda-1893-09-signed.jpg)[Rabindranath Tagore](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rabindranath_Tagore) is Asia's first [Nobel laureate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nobel_laureate) and composer of [India's national anthem](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jana_Gana_Mana)

[Swami Vivekananda](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swami_Vivekananda) was a key figure in

introducing [Vedanta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vedanta) and [Yoga](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoga) in Europe

and USA,[[78]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism#cite_note-FOOTNOTEFeuerstein200600-109) raising interfaith awareness

and making Hinduism a world religion.

Major representatives of ["Hindu modernism"](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neo-Vedanta)[[45]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism#cite_note-FOOTNOTEFlood1996258-63) are [Vivekananda](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vivekananda), [Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sarvepalli_Radhakrishnan) and [Mahatma Gandhi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahatma_Gandhi).[[80]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism#cite_note-FOOTNOTEFlood1996256-261-111)

According to Flood, "Swami Vivekanda (1863-1902) is a figure of great importance in the development of a modern Hindu self-understanding and in formulating the West's view of Hinduism." Central to his philosophy is the idea that the divine exists in all beings, that all human beings can achieve union with this "innate divinity", and that seeing this divine as the essence of others will further love and social harmony.

Hinduism is not just a [faith](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faith_%28religion%29). It is the union of [reason](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reason) and [intuition](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intuition_%28knowledge%29#Intuition_and_spirituality) that cannot be defined, but is only to be [experienced](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_experience).

This "Global Hinduism" has a worldwide appeal, transcending national boundaries and, according to Flood, "becoming a world religion alongside Christianity, Islam and Buddhism", both for the Hindu diaspora communities and for westerners who are attracted to non-western cultures and religions. It emphasizes universal spiritual values such as social justice, peace and "the spiritual transformation of humanity."

Hinduism has been described as a tradition having a "complex, organic, multileveled and sometimes internally inconsistent nature."

Unlike other religions in the World, the Hindu religion does not claim any one Prophet, it does not worship any one God, it does not believe in any one philosophic concept, it does not follow any one act of religious rites or performances; in fact, it does not satisfy the traditional features of a religion or creed. It is a way of life and nothing more". (the Supreme Court of India)

Also, Hinduism does not have a single system of salvation but consists of various religions and forms of religiosity. Some Hindu religious traditions regard particular rituals as essential for salvation, but a variety of views on this co-exist. Some [Hindu philosophies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hindu_philosophies) postulate a [theistic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theism) [ontology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ontology) of creation, of sustenance, and of the destruction of the universe, yet [some Hindus are atheists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atheism_in_Hinduism), they view Hinduism more as philosophy than religion. Hinduism is sometimes characterised by a belief in reincarnation ([*samsara*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samsara)) determined by the law of [karma](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karma) and the idea that salvation is freedom from this cycle of repeated birth and death. Hinduism is therefore viewed as the most complex of all the living, historical world religions.

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:New_Delhi_Temple.jpg)

The [Swaminarayan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swaminarayan_Hinduism) [Akshardham Temple](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akshardham_%28Delhi%29) in [Delhi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Delhi), according the [Guinness World Records](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guinness_World_Record) is the *World’s Largest Comprehensive Hindu Temple*[[web 5]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism#cite_note-172)

Hinduism recognises numerous divine beings subordinate to the Supreme Being or regards them as lower manifestations of it. Notable characteristics include a belief in [reincarnation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reincarnation) and [karma](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karma) as well as a belief in personal duty, or [dharma](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dharma).

The worship place is commonly known as [Temple](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temple). Usually regarded as *Devasthana* (God's place) or *Mandir* by the followers, construction of temple and mode of [worship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Worship) is governed by several Sanskrit scriptures called [agamas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%C4%80gama_%28Hinduism%29), which deal with individual deities. There are substantial differences in [architecture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Architecture), customs, [rituals](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ritual) and traditions in temples in different parts of India.

At home, Hindus often create a shrine with icons dedicated to their chosen form(s) of God. Temples are usually dedicated to a primary deity along with associated subordinate deities though some commemorate multiple deities.

[Mantras](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mantra) are invocations, praise and prayers that through their meaning, sound, and chanting style help a devotee focus the mind on holy thoughts or express devotion to God/the deities. Many devotees perform morning ablutions at the bank of a sacred river while chanting mantras.

The vast majority of Hindus engage in religious rituals on a daily basis. Devout Hindus perform daily rituals such as worshiping at dawn after bathing (usually at a family shrine, and typically includes lighting a lamp and offering foodstuffs before the images of deities), recitation from religious scripts, singing [devotional hymns](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bhajan), [meditation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meditation), chanting mantras, reciting scriptures etc.

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Kedarnathroute.jpg)

Pilgrimage to [Kedarnath](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kedarnath)

[Pilgrimage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pilgrimage) is not mandatory in Hinduism, though many adherents undertake them.[[270]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism#cite_note-363)

**Symbolism**

Hinduism has a developed system of symbolism and iconography to represent the sacred in art, architecture, literature and worship. These symbols gain their meaning from the scriptures, mythology, or cultural traditions.

The syllable [*om*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Om) (which represents the [*Para Brahman*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Para_Brahman))

and the [swastika](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swastika#Hinduism) sign (which symbolises auspiciousness) have grown to represent Hinduism itself,

while other markings such as [*tilaka*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tilaka) identify a follower of the faith.

Hinduism associates many symbols, which include the lotus ([padma](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Padma_%28attribute%29" \o "Padma (attribute))), [*chakra*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chakra) and [*veena*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Veena_%28instrument%29), with particular deities.

Lotus

Chakra veena - instrument

**Festivals** The festivals typically celebrate events from Hindu mythology, often coinciding with seasonal changes..

The festival of lights- [Diwali](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diwali), is celebrated by Hindus all over the world. [](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Deepawali-festival.jpg)

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Vishnuvishvarupa.jpg) GODS Brahma

[http://bits.wikimedia.org/static-1.23wmf14/skins/common/images/magnify-clip.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Vishnuvishvarupa.jpg)

[Krishna](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krishna) displays his Vishvarupa (Universal Form)

[Sir William Jones](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Jones_%28philologist%29) states that Hindus "worship the [Supreme Being](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supreme_Being) under three forms — [Vishnu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vishnu), [Siva](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shiva), [Brahma](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brahma). The fundamental idea of the Hindu religion, that of metamorphoses, or transformations, is exemplified in the Avatars.

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Krishna_holding_flute.jpg)

[Krishna](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krishna), the eighth [incarnation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Incarnation) ([avatar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avatar)) of Vishnu or [Svayam bhagavan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Svayam_bhagavan), worshipped across a number of traditions

**Karma and samsara**

*Karma* translates literally as action, work, or deed, and can be described as the "moral law of cause and effect".[[309]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism#cite_note-411) According to the [Upanishads](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upanishads) an individual, known as the *jiva-atma*, develops [*sanskaras*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sanskara) (impressions) from actions, whether physical or mental. The *linga sharira*, a body more subtle than the physical one but less subtle than the soul, retains impressions, carrying them over into the next life, establishing a unique trajectory for the individual Thus, the concept of a universal, neutral, and never-failing karma intrinsically relates to [reincarnation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reincarnation) as well as to one's personality, characteristics, and family. Karma binds together the notions of [free will](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Free_will) and [destiny](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Destiny).

This cycle of *action, reaction, birth, death and rebirth* is a continuum called [*samsara*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samsara). The notion of reincarnation and karma is a strong premise in Hindu thought.

*Samsara* provides ephemeral pleasures, which lead people to desire rebirth so as to enjoy the pleasures of a perishable body. However, escaping the world of *samsara* through *moksha* is believed to ensure lasting happiness and peace. It is thought that after several reincarnations, an *atman* eventually seeks unity with the cosmic spirit (Brahman/Paramatman).

The ultimate goal of life, referred to as *moksha*, [*nirvana*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nirvana) or [*samadhi*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sam%C4%81dhi), is understood in several different ways: as the realization of one's union with God; as the realization of one's eternal relationship with God; realization of the unity of all existence; perfect unselfishness and knowledge of the Self; as the attainment of perfect mental peace; and as detachment from worldly desires. Such realization liberates one from *samsara* and ends the cycle of rebirth. Due to belief in the indestructibility of the soul, death is deemed insignificant with respect to the cosmic self.

**Dharma (righteousness, ethics)**

The [Brihadaranyaka Upanishad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brihadaranyaka_Upanishad) views dharma as the universal principle of law, order, harmony, all in all truth, that sprang first from [Brahman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brahman). It acts as the regulatory moral principle of the Universe. It is *sat* (truth), a major tenet of Hinduism.

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Shiva_Bangalore_.jpg)

[http://bits.wikimedia.org/static-1.23wmf14/skins/common/images/magnify-clip.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Shiva_Bangalore_.jpg)

A statue of [Shiva](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shiva) in yogic meditation.

In whatever way a Hindu defines the goal of life, there are several methods (yogas) that sages have taught for reaching that goal. [Jñāna Yoga](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J%C3%B1%C4%81na_Yoga) (the path of wisdom)[[328]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism" \l "cite_note-bhaskaressentgeneral-432)

An individual may prefer one or some yogas over others, according to his or her inclination and understanding.

**Ahimsa, vegetarianism and other food customs**

Hindus advocate the practice of *ahiṃsā* (non-violence) and respect for all life because divinity is believed to permeate all beings, including plants and non-human animals.

Many Hindus embrace [vegetarianism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vegetarianism) to respect higher forms of life.. Observant Hindus who do eat meat almost always abstain from [beef](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beef). The cow in Hindu society is traditionally identified as a caretaker and a maternal figure, and Hindu society honours the cow as a symbol of unselfish giving. Cow-slaughter is legally banned in almost all states of India.

"Hinduism is attracting Western adherents through the affiliated practice of yoga. Yoga centers in the West—which generally advocate vegetarianism—attract young, well-educated Westerners who are drawn by yoga's benefits for the physical and emotional health; there they are introduced to the Hindu philosophical system taught by most yoga teachers, known as Vedanta." [Yoga](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoga) is a Hindu discipline which trains the consciousness for tranquility, health and spiritual insight. This is done through a system of postures and exercises to practise control of the body and mind.