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Other beliefs covered include:-

Bahá'í, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism

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ॐ HINDUISM

St Philip's Centre is a charity set up in 2006 rooted in the multi-faith environment of Leicester, Europe's most ethnically diverse city.

The Centre is committed to a wide programme of training, public benefit activities and community engagement. We have a superb track record of promoting positive community relations through education, religion and belief training, charitable activities, dialogue events and international exchanges.



This booklet was written by:

© Riaz Ravat, Bharti Acharya, Priest Hemang Bhatt and Darsheet Chauhan

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Front cover images: *Main image - Holi celebrations (festival of colours)*

From top down: 1. *Bathing in the Ganges* 2. *BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Leicester* 3. *Diwali celebrations in Leicester* 4. *Hindu shrine in the home*. Back cover - *Amitayus Mandala, Tibet c.14th Century*



St Philip's Centre
2a Stoughton Drive North
Leicester LE5 5UB
UK





What is Hinduism?

Hindus are people who practice the religion that we presently know by the name of **Hinduism**. Many Hindus themselves prefer to call the religion by its true name, **Sanatan Dharma** meaning eternal religion or eternal truth. "Sanatan" means eternal, without a beginning or end and forever true. "Dharma" means that which upholds. Therefore Sanatan Dharma means laws or rules that uphold and are true everywhere at every time. Often Hindus greet each other with the word Namaste which literally means I bow down to that Divine presence in you.

The term "Hindu" was derived from the river or river complex of the northwest the **Sindh**. Sindhu is a Sanskrit word meaning vast and was used by the inhabitants of the region, the Aryans, in the second millennium BCE. Later migrants and invaders, the Persians in the sixth century BCE and the Greeks from the 4th century BCE, used the name of this river in their own languages for the land and its people. Since they could not pronounce the word correctly they turned the "S" in Sindhu into a "H". The dwellers who practiced Sanatan Dharma became known as Hindus and the religion they practiced became known as Hinduism.



Hinduism is the oldest practicing religion found and presently it is the third largest world religion followed by over 900 million Hindus. The uniqueness of this religion is that it had no founder, prophet or a Guru, as the law of nature is universal and therefore believed to have always been in existence. Thus Hindus believe that Sanatan Dharma has always

existed and will forever continue to do so.

Scholars have traced the history of this religion as far back as 3500 and 1500 BCE which flourished in the Indus valley, in India but Hindus believe that its true origin began with the beginning of time.

Beliefs and Values

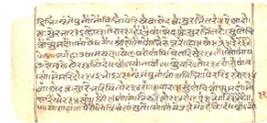
Hindus believe that Brahman (God) is present everywhere in everything. Therefore every part of creation is a part of the divine energy. Hence Hindus worship God in many different forms from plants to animals to popular deities and gods such as Lord Rama, Lord Krishna, Lord Ganesh, Mother Shakti, Mother Lakshmi.

There are male and female forms of the divine which reflects the attitude of Hinduism that everyone and everything is equal as it has an essence of the divine in it.



Holy texts

The most ancient sacred texts of the Hindu religion are written in Sanskrit and called the **Vedas**. The word Veda means knowledge. It is believed that the Vedas were orally revealed by **Brahma** (creator) to certain rishis who heard them in meditation and they passed them down in oral tradition. They were not written down for a long time and only started to be scripted when it was thought to be necessary for their preservation. Therefore it is very difficult to put a starting date on them. Hinduism has many scriptures including Ramayan, Mahabharat and Shreemad Bhagawat Gita (some spell this as Geeta) being the most popular.



The Vedas (knowledge) are a large body of texts originating in ancient India

Places of worship

Most Hindus worship daily in their own homes. A dedicated place called the shrine is allocated where the **Puja** (worship) is carried out. A shrine can be anything from a room, a small altar or simply pictures and images (**Murtis**) of gods and goddesses. As there is great flexibility in practicing Hinduism, Hindus tend to have their personal way in which they prefer to pray, worship and apply the principles in their daily lives. So it is quite common to find committed Hindus from the same family having different lifestyles as long as the end goal is the same (achieving God). Communal worship and celebrations are carried out in a dedicated building called the **Mandir** (abode of God on earth – a Hindu Temple). This could be a tiny temple to something elaborate. In temples, worship and puja are carried out by Hindu Priests.

Diet

Hindus advocate the practice of **ahimsa** (non-violence) and respect for all life because divinity is believed to permeate all beings, including plants and non-human animals. In accordance with ahimsa, many Hindus embrace vegetarianism to respect all forms of life. Vegetarianism is propagated by the Yajur Veda and it is recommended for a **satvic** (purifying) lifestyle. Having simple food can enhance the power of mind. Pure thoughts are the foundation of living a spiritual and religious life. Therefore practicing Hindus prefer to be vegetarian and often avoid food with pungent smells and spices. Food habits vary within the community and regions, for example some communities have fewer vegetarians and coastal populations rely on seafood as their staple diet. Observant Hindus who do eat meat almost always abstain from 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.





Holy days

The Hindu calendar is full of festivals. The most significant being, **Diwali**, **Navratri** and **Holi**. Most festivals mark seasonal and mythological happenings, rites of passage, family celebrations of life events and vrats (vows such as fasting). All of these have an underlying spiritual significance.

Diwali - The festival of light is a 5 day celebration to mark the end of the year and the beginning of the new one. Goddess Lakshmi - a goddess of wealth and beauty is particularly remembered and worshipped as is **Lord Rama** and his wife **Sita** who returned from a 14 year exile. To mark this, small lamps called diwas are lit and fireworks set off. Hence the name Diwali meaning a row of lights. Diwali takes place in in October/ November.

Navratri is a 9 night festival to praise the power of **Shakti** – goddess Durga who is thought to have slayed the demon Mahisasur in a long battle that lasted 9 days and nights. Garbas and Raas – dances played in a circle with claps and sticks are performed for 9 nights to remember the strength & courage of the goddess. Takes place around September/October. It is also to mark the significant strength of women in our society.

Holi – The festival of colours. This is to mark the beginning of spring and also to remember the true devotion of a young child who believed **Vishnu** (form of God) to be the supreme being. His father had tried to kill him for this but all in vain. His sister Holika had also assisted but was burnt in the fire and this festival is to mark the victory of good over evil. The first crop of the harvest is picked and offered into a large bonfire. Colours are thrown on each other to mark the beginning of Spring and life.



For many Hindus religion is a matter of practice rather than beliefs. Hindus believe **Brahman** to be the ultimate God; the uncreated, unchanging cosmic energy behind the whole of existence. Brahman is the source from which everything proceeds and the ultimate goal is to re-unite with this force/energy. Brahman is expressed throughout the universe in infinite ways. There is one God but many manifestations and qualities. Therefore different forms of gods and goddesses exist. Each with their own special qualities and functions in life. Hindus believe that there is a part of Brahman in everyone and its called the Atman (soul).



Hindus believe in **Reincarnation** – a belief that the soul is eternal and continues to pass through the cycle of birth and death – **Samsara** to live many lives in different bodies. These lives are dependant on their actions – **Karma**. It is their individual karma that determines their future successive lives. Hindus therefore aim to live in a way that will cause each of their lives to be better than the life before.



The spiritual goal of a Hindu is to become one with Brahman – and this is called **Moksha**. Until moksha is achieved a Hindu believes they will repeatedly reincarnate so that they can progress towards this aim of self realisation of the truth (the truth being that only Brahman exists and nothing else).

Different pathways to achieve Moksha

There are four main pathways which a Hindu can take to achieve Moksha:

i The pathway of knowledge - Jnana Yoga

Spiritual knowledge - leading to a knowledge of the relationship between the soul (atman) and God (Brahman).

ii The pathway of devotion - Bhakti Yoga

Choosing a particular form of god or goddess that is worshipped through love and devotion in all parts of ones life and extending this love to all that is around you.

iii The pathway of action - Karma Yoga

This involves doing actions through thoughts, words and deeds and carrying out one's duties throughout their life.

iv The pathway of meditation - Dhyana Yoga or Raj Yoga

The idea is to concentrate through discipline of mind, body and spirit to reach the real self within and become one with god.



Who are Hindus

The majority of the Hindu population resides in India but there are Hindu populations all around the world.

Hinduism as a religion originated in "Bhaarat", nowadays referred to as India. People who follow the tenets of the faith are Hindu. The Hindu scriptures do not refer to the term Hindu and instead refer to mankind, the universe etc. Hinduism is a growing religion and is not limited to people from Indian origin. People from all countries embrace the religion.

The religion is based on how an individual sees their relationship with God. Hindus can appear to be very different. To one another. Some common things a Hindu may have:

A tilak/tikka (marking on the forehead between the eye brows) – This is to awaken the third eye (spiritual). It's usually red powder (kumkum) sandalwood (chandan) or holy ash (bhasma).

A yagyopaveet – a sacred thread of three strands marking one's initiation into the formal study of the scriptures. The three strands represent the three duties an individual has to Devtas (God), Rishis (ancient Seers) and Pitru (ancestors)

A mangal sutra – a marriage necklace of black beads usually with either gold or silver worn by Hindu married women.

There are many sub sects within Hinduism. Some of the popular ones are:

Swaminarayan: Swaminarayan is regarded as an incarnation of God by his followers. The main philosophical, social and practical teachings are contained in the **Vachanamrut**, a collection of dialogues recorded by five followers from his spoken words. It contains views on **dharma** (moral conduct), **jnana** (understanding of the nature of the self), **vairagya** (detachment from material pleasure), and **bhakti** (pure, selfless devotion to God)

Hare Krishna (International Society for Krishna Consciousness ISKCON): A missionary movement which is popular in the west, devoted to the pure love of Krishna.

Shirdi Sai Baba: A very popular Saint from the 19th Century who preached Shraddha (faith) and saburi (patience). The following has many devotees across the world and does many charitable services.

Hindus believe in four stages of life

Bhramacharya ashram – celibacy phase – spend time learning (usually 8-25years)

Grihastaa ashram – householder stage (25-50years) - support family and wider society

Vaanprastha ashram – retiring and passing duties onto the next generation

Sannyasa ashram – can be taken at any point. One renounces the world and all ties and unites with God. A Sanyasi treats the whole world as their family and traditionally wear saffron coloured cloths to symbolise a burning of all ties.



Rites of passage

There are 16 samskars - rites of passage that guide an individual toward a sense of duty and obligation during various stages of life. Some of the most significant samskars are **Namkarana** (naming) **Upanayana** (thread) **Vivaah** (marriage) and **Antim/Anthyesthri** (cremation) that are still practiced by all Hindus.



Rites of passage (left to right) Namkarana (naming) Upanayana (thread) Vivaah (marriage) and Antim/Anthyesthri

The ten commitments practiced by Hindus

1. **Ahimsa** (non violence) - respect to all life. So Hindus prefer to be vegetarians as they believe every living being has the same right to live as you do.
2. **Satya** - speak the truth
3. **Asterya** - do not steal
4. **Brahmacharya** - do not over indulge in sexual relationships
5. **Aparigraha** - do not be greedy
6. **Saucha** - cleanliness, keep yourself clean internally & externally
7. **Santosh** - be content with what you have
8. **Tapa** - self discipline
9. **Swadhyay** - self study and development
10. **Ishwar Paridhan** - surrender to God

