

## **Hinduism and God's Response**

Hinduism is not just a single religion, but a "mosaic of religion".

Hinduism does not have a historical founder, nor does it have a central authority for defining or imposing its beliefs and practices. Hinduism does not insist on many dogmas. Regarding God, a Hindu can be a believer of monotheism or polytheism or pantheism or monism or even atheism.

For “official answers” regarding “what Hindus believe” (or should believe) you'd go to the Brahmin – the highest caste of people who alone are permitted to study and understand their scriptures (Vedas and Upanishads). I'll introduce you to four basic tenets that come from these scriptures and their authoritative interpreters (the Brahmin).

But deep understanding of this formal Hinduism is **not** what you find among the average Hindus. Most have no access (or very little interest, perhaps) to those teachings, so tend to follow a particular guru who will provide his perspective on the most important disciplines and practices.

For many, to be Indian **is** to be Hindu. It's just “reality”. It's not a choice or a decision to commit to something. It's the default worldview. Like here in America, to be “American” means it's important to work hard, and to believe that by working hard, you can achieve a satisfying life. This “belief” just “happens to you” through the process of acculturation. You just “pick it up”. These kinds of things are not often questioned or examined at a deep level. Same for Indians and their culture: “We're Hindus; how could we NOT be?!”

**In trying to talk with a Hindu about the Christian faith**, it's important to understand that Hindus, generally, would not see any problem in

honoring Christ as a true “avatar” or manifestation of the True God (which they would call Brahma). There is no immediate ‘problem’ or ‘contradiction’ to be overcome. You can follow Jesus’s teachings. He’ll probably lead you to God (Brahma).

Remember, the Bhagavad Gita says, “A person is a Hindu by birth.” (Their personal beliefs – whether or not there even is a God – do not qualify them or disqualify them)

**Let’s consider 4 important, core beliefs. These really ARE substantiated in their scriptures, and trickle down to the masses:**

- 1) **A connection to the one supreme “God” through any one of His millions of manifestations** (pick a family god). He is a “person” in a way, with a particular personality. But he is also “ultimate reality”, and in that sense he is more of an “experience” or a “truth” that all life can be absorbed into. He is responsible for creation and for sustaining life (or destroying it), but he has not spoken clearly about who he is.
  - a. **Bible?** There is only One God, and Jesus made it clear that He had only spoken through prophets, sent angels, revealed Himself through Jesus Christ. “There is one mediator between God and man – Jesus.” 1 Tim. 2:5.
  - b. **Bible?** We are NOT to relate to God through any images, but instead to relate to Him directly. Exodus 20:4-5 (You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. <sup>5</sup> You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods.)
  - c. **Bible?** God has revealed Himself, and declared to us the Truth about Himself. **Rom. 1:18-20** and **Col. 1:15** <sup>18</sup> But God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. <sup>19</sup> They know the truth about

God because he has made it obvious to them.<sup>20</sup> For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.

**Col. 1:15** -- Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

- 2) **A belief in Dharma** (one's duties) **and Karma** (one's actions in response to their dharma). Obviously, Karma and Dharma are involved in “connecting with the supreme ‘God’”, because Karma is the basis of one's progress or regression in relationship to Moksha (later). ***Dharma prescribes what ought to be done, and Karma is the actual good and bad that is done.***
- a. **Rituals for birth, marriage and death** must be followed in order to satisfy the expectations of Dharma.
    - ➔ Cremation at death is part of being released from ‘earthly bondage’, and progressing toward Moksha.
    - ➔ The 7 Stages (saat pheras) to insure the same spouse through 7 lifetimes.
  - b. **Practice of caste distinctions** and pursuit of ‘purity’.
  - c. **NOTE: 10 Rules of Dharma** -- **Manusmriti** written by the ancient sage Manu, prescribes 10 essential rules for the observance of dharma: Patience (dhriti), forgiveness (kshama), piety or self control (dama), honesty (asteya), sanctity (shauch), control of senses (indraiya-nigrah), reason (dhi), knowledge or learning (vidya), truthfulness (satya) and absence of anger (krodha).
  - d. **Bible?** Our behavior and duty is very, very important, but they are NOT the basis of our salvation, nor the basis for our relationship to God! **Titus 3:5** He saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. **Rom. 8:1** So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus.

- 3) **Reincarnation** – (**Samsara**: rebirth) - Every living being is in the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. This is not seen as a good thing! It is viewed more as a PENALTY (the result of Karma). Very close relationship between humans and animals in this regard, as the soul can transmigrate among them. (Vikas: “I wouldn’t have killed that snake.”)
- a. **Bible?** The idea of reincarnation, and the necessary escape from it, is a lie. We have one life, and we are judged. **Heb. 9:27** Each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment...
- 4) The hope and **desire to break out of that cycle** – (**Moksha**) – be liberated from the cycle, and merge into “God”.
- a. **Bible?** The biblical view of salvation is not a loss of ourselves into a greater consciousness, but **a full development of ourselves into the fullest expression of what we were designed and born to be**: individuals who love and worship God.
- **Rewards are given out individually 1 Cor 3:13-15**<sup>13</sup> But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person’s work has any value.<sup>14</sup> If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward.<sup>15</sup> But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames.
  - **Individual names in the Book of life** Phil. 4:3 They worked along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are written in the Book of Life.
  - **Individuals having homes prepared in heaven** Jn. 14:2 In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.
  - **Individuals counted in heaven** Rev. 7:9-10<sup>9</sup> After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe

and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands. <sup>10</sup> And they were shouting with a great roar, “Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb!”

### How do we communicate Truth?

So here’s the deal: whether you’re engaging a Hindu or a Muslim or a surf-rat from Ventura, how does God engage people? What’s “God’s approach” to communication of Truth?

This is a huge topic, and one I return to often. I find a way, somehow, to bring it into nearly every chance I get to speak (sorry). God is a communicator. He is THE COMMUNICATOR PAR EXCELENCE.

He is ultimate authority. He is speaking Truth. He is not wondering about anything. He’s serious, and His message is serious. Just one passage – Rom 11:33

- <sup>33</sup> Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! <sup>34</sup> For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? <sup>35</sup> Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? <sup>36</sup> For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen.

About God’s commitment to communication: From Paul, “God doesn’t care about oxen, does He?”

- <sup>7</sup> Who at any time serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat the fruit of it? Or who tends a flock and does not use the milk of the flock? <sup>8</sup> I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? Or does not the Law also say these things? <sup>9</sup> For it is written in the Law of Moses, “YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING.” **God is not concerned about oxen, is He? <sup>10</sup> Or is He**

**speaking altogether for our sake?** Yes, for our sake it was written, because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher *to thresh* in hope of sharing *the crops*.

Be careful:

- 1) **Understand your audience:** how will they interpret your words? What does “sin” mean to them? What does it mean to say “God is holy?” Can these concepts be understood on a purely theoretical, abstract level, or does your hearer need something concrete to make sense of it?
- 2) **Build from known to unknown:** Don’t launch into “Jesus loves you”. What in the world does that mean? Who is He, and who cares if He loves me? What does it mean that “he loves me?”. And, why shouldn’t he? I’m a nice guy/gal! No! Start laying a foundation about God’s character, the creation, His position as ruler and owner of all. Then bring in man. Etc. Build slowly and carefully!
- 3) **Use language and examples that make sense at a heart level:**  
 God is like this! Oxen, Vineyards, Sowing Seed, throwing nets, lighting lamps. Jesus walked around with ordinary people, doing all the ordinary things they did. Why? Emmanuel: God with us!
  - a. Have you seen a hymnbook?
  - b. Have you read a Gospel tract?
  - c. Do you use words like justification, washing by the water of the word, etc.?
  - d. THIS IS ALL INSIDER LANGUAGE.**

## Top 10 Hindu Gods

Hindus claim that there are 330 million gods and goddesses. *Sri Ramakrishna, a prominent Hindu saint once wrote, "There can be as many Hindu Gods as there are devotees to suit the moods, feelings, emotions and social backgrounds of the devotees."*

These gods are understood to be manifestations of the one abstract Supreme Being (Brahman). The most fundamental of Hindu deities are the Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. But many other gods and goddesses top the popularity chart with Hindus across the world. Here are the 10 most popular (most worshipped/connected with)

1. [Ganesha](#) Easily recognizable as the elephant-deity riding a mouse, Ganesha is arguably the most popular Hindu God. The son of Shiva and Parvati, he is the lord of success and destroyer of evils and obstacles. He is also worshipped as the god of knowledge, wisdom and wealth.
2. [Shiva](#) The most powerful and fascinating deity in Hinduism, who represents death and dissolution. One of the gods of the Hindu Trinity, and known by many names - Mahadeva, Pashupati, Nataraja, Vishwanath, Bhole Nath - Shiva is perhaps the most complex of Hindu deities. Hindus recognize this by putting his shrine in the temple separate from those of other deities. He is worshipped as a phallic symbol called the 'Shiva Lingam' in most temples.
3. [Krishna](#) The great exponent of the Gita, Krishna is the ninth and the most complete avatar of Vishnu (who is a member of the Hindu Trinity). Of all avatars he is the most popular and perhaps the one closest to the heart of the masses. This blue-skinned deity has influenced Indian thought, life and culture in myriad ways - not only its religion and philosophy, but also its mysticism and literature, painting and sculpture, dance and music, and all aspects of Indian folklore.
4. [Rama](#) Rama, the perfect avatar of the Supreme Protector Vishnu, is another huge favorite among Hindus. The most popular symbol of chivalry and virtue, Rama is "the embodiment of truth, of morality, the ideal son, the ideal husband, and above all, the ideal king." He is widely believed to be an actual historical figure - a "tribal hero of ancient India" - whose exploits form the great Hindu epic of Ramayana or The Romance of Rama.
5. [Hanuman](#) Hanuman, the mighty ape that aided Lord Rama in his expedition against evil forces, described in the epic Ramayana, is another very popular idol in the Hindu pantheon. Believed to be an avatar of Lord Shiva, Hanuman is worshipped as a symbol of physical strength, perseverance and devotion. In times of trouble, it is a common faith among Hindus to chant the name of Hanuman or sing his hymn - "Hanuman Chalisa". Hanuman temples are among the most common public shrines found in India.

6. **Vishnu** The peace-loving deity of the Hindu Trinity, Vishnu is the Preserver or Sustainer of life with his steadfast principles of order, righteousness and truth. When these values are under threat, Vishnu emerges out of his transcendence to restore peace and order on earth. Vishnu's earthly incarnations have 10 major avatars. The devout followers of Vishnu are called Vaishnavas. His wife is Lakshmi.
7. **Lakshmi** Goddess Lakshmi means "Good Luck" to Hindus. She is the goddess of wealth and prosperity, both material and spiritual. She is the household goddess of most Hindu families, and a favorite of women. Lakshmi is depicted as a beautiful woman of golden complexion, with four hands, sitting or standing on a full-bloomed lotus and holding a lotus bud, which stands for beauty, purity and fertility.
8. **Durga** The Mother Goddess — known variously as Durga, Bhavani, Sherawali, Amba, Chandika, Gauri, Parvati, Vaishno Devi — represents the fiery powers of the gods. The name "Durga" means "inaccessible", and she is the personification of the active side of the divine "shakti" energy of Lord Shiva. Durga is usually portrayed as riding a lion, and carrying weapons in her many arms. She is the protector of the righteous, and destroyer of the evil.
9. **Kali** Kali, or the dark goddess, is the fearful and ferocious form of the mother goddess Durga. She is depicted as having been born from the brow of Goddess Durga during one of her battles with the evil forces. Kali is represented with perhaps the fiercest features amongst all the world's deities. Her tongue protrudes from her mouth, her eyes are red, and her face and breasts are sullied with blood. She stands with one foot on the thigh, and another on the chest of her husband, Shiva.
10. **Saraswati** Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge and learning, represents the free flow of wisdom and consciousness. She is the mother of the Vedas, and chants to her, called the 'Saraswati Vandana' often begin and end Vedic lessons. The goddess of wisdom, art and music, she is the daughter of Lord Shiva and Goddess Durga. It is believed that goddess Saraswati endows human beings with the powers of speech, wisdom and learning.