

Hinduism

A Religion Profile from International Students, Inc.

Hinduism: An Overview

Number of Adherents

It is estimated that there are over 850 million Hindus worldwide, accounting for more than 13 percent of the earth's population (Barret). There are more than one million Hindus in North America. Globally, Hindus outnumber protestant Christians (Christudas, p. 18).

Hinduism Among the Nations

The vast majority of Hindus live in India, where they account for 81.3 percent of the population (2000 est.). Hindus also comprise a significant portion of the population in seven other countries: Bangladesh (16 percent), Bhutan (25 percent), Fiji (38 percent), Mauritius (52 percent), Nepal (86.2 percent), Sri Lanka (15 percent), Suriname (27.4 percent), and Trinidad (23.8 percent) (*CIA World Factbook*). Nepal is the only nation where Hinduism is the state religion.

Introducing Hinduism

The origins of Hinduism can be traced back to around 1500 B.C. in what is now India. It began as a polytheistic and ritualistic religion. The rituals were at first simple enough that they could be performed by the head of the household. As the centuries passed though, the rituals became increasingly complex. As a result, it became necessary to create a priestly class and to train those individuals to perform the rituals correctly. During this time, the *Vedas* were written to give the priests instructions as to how to perform the rituals.

As a result of the emphasis on the rituals, the priests became the sole means by which the people could approach and appease the gods. Because of their position as mediators with the gods, the priests gained an increasing amount of power and control over the lives of the people. Finally, around 600 B.C., the people revolted. The form of Hinduism that emerged

after the revolt emphasized the importance of internal meditation as opposed to external practice.

Between 800 and 300 B.C. the *Upanishads* were written. The *Upanishads*, also called *Vedanta* ("the end or conclusion of the *Vedas*"), are the Hindu equivalent of the New Testament. The *Upanishads* exposed the idea that behind the many gods stands one Reality, which is called Brahman. Brahman is an impersonal, monistic ("all is one") force. The highest force of Brahman is called *nirguna*, which means "without attributes."

Even after the *Upanishads* were written, the Hindu concept of God continued to develop, and it developed in the direction of seeing God as personal. *Nirguna* Brahman became *saguna* Brahman, which is Brahman "with attributes." This personified Brahman is called Ishvara.

According to Hindu tradition, Ishvara became known as humanity through the *Trimurti* (literally, "three manifestations") of Brahman. Those manifestations include Brahma (the Creator), Vishnu (the Preserver), and Siva (the Destroyer). Each of the three deities has at least one *devi*, or divine spouse.

Ishvara became personified even further through the ten mythical incarnations of Vishnu, called *avatars*. The forms of these incarnations include that of animals (e.g., a fish, a tortoise, and boar) and of persons (e.g., Rama, Krishna, and Buddha). Epics such as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, which includes the *Bagavad-Gita*, tell the stories of these myths. Beyond the principal deities of the *Trimurti*, it is estimated that there are 330 million other gods in Hinduism.

Besides the religion's various concepts of God, Hinduism can also be divided along the lines of whether the physical universe is considered to be real or illusory (*maya*). The non-dualists (*advaiti*) see Brahman alone as being real and the world as illusory. The qualified non-dualists

(*vishishtadvaita*) affirm the reality of both Brahman and the universe in that the universe is extended from the Being of Brahman. And the dualists (*dvaita*) see Brahman and the universe as being two distinct realities.

In the course of its history, Hinduism has spawned three other religious movements that have since become world religions: Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism.

Although Hinduism is tremendously diverse, most Hindus hold to the beliefs listed below.

The Beliefs of Hinduism

The Impersonal Nature of Brahman

Hindus see ultimate Reality, Brahman, as being an impersonal oneness that is beyond all distinctions, including personal and moral distinctions. Since Hindus also consider Brahman to be an impersonal force of existence, most see the universe as being continuous with and extended from Being of Brahman.

The Brahman/Atman Unity

Most adherents of Hinduism believe that they are, in their true selves (*atman*), extended from and one with Brahman. Just as the air inside an open jar is identical to the air surrounding that jar, so our essence is identical to that of Brahman. This is expressed through the phrase *Tat tvam asi*, “That thou art.”

The Law of Karma

Humanity’s primary problem, according to Hinduism, is that

we are ignorant of our divine nature. We have forgotten that we are extended from Brahman and have mistakenly attached ourselves to the desires of our separate selves, or egos, and thereby to the consequences of the resultant actions.

Because of the ego’s attachment to its desires and individualistic existence, we have become subject to the law of karma. The law of karma says that we reap what we sow. It is the moral equivalent of the natural law of cause and effect. The effects of our actions, moreover, follow us not only in the present lifetime but from lifetime to lifetime (reincarnation).

Samsara (Reincarnation)

Samsara refers to the ever-revolving wheel of life, death, and rebirth (Rice, page 10). A person’s karma determines the kind of body, whether human, animal, or insect, into which he or she will be reincarnated in the next life. We are reaping the consequences in this lifetime for deeds done in previous ones.

Moksha (Liberation)

The solution in Hinduism is to be liberated (*moksha*) from the wheel of life, death, and rebirth. Such liberation attained through realizing that only the undifferentiated oneness of Brahman is real. With that realization one must strive to detach oneself from the desires of the ego. Hinduism offers at least three paths by which to attain enlightenment, including that of *karma marga* (the way of action and ritual), *jnana marga* (the way of knowledge and meditation), and *bhakti marga* (the way of devotion).

Karma and Sin Compared and Contrasted							
<p>The Similarities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Both involve moral issues. • Both affirm the existence of cause-and-effect relationships between our actions and the results they produce in our present lives (c.f., Prov. 11:18; 22:8). 							
<p>The Differences</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Karma (Hindu Concept)</th> <th>Sin (Christian Concept)</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Karma does not affect one’s relationship with Brahman, which is beyond moral distinctions. Whether one’s karma is good or bad makes no difference to the fact that we are unconditionally extended from the oneness of Brahman.</td> <td>Sin does not affect our relationship with God in that we become alienated from Him. One of the attributes of God is absolute moral holiness, and our sin reveals an attitude of rebellion against His moral authority.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>The law of karma does not allow for the possibility of forgiveness. Its consequences are inevitable and inescapable.</td> <td>Because God is personal, and because persons can forgive, sin can be forgiven.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Karma (Hindu Concept)	Sin (Christian Concept)	Karma does not affect one’s relationship with Brahman, which is beyond moral distinctions. Whether one’s karma is good or bad makes no difference to the fact that we are unconditionally extended from the oneness of Brahman.	Sin does not affect our relationship with God in that we become alienated from Him. One of the attributes of God is absolute moral holiness, and our sin reveals an attitude of rebellion against His moral authority.	The law of karma does not allow for the possibility of forgiveness. Its consequences are inevitable and inescapable.	Because God is personal, and because persons can forgive, sin can be forgiven.
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The direction of the Hindu way to enlightenment is from man to God. It is something to be attained in that it is based on man's own effort. The direction of the biblical way of salvation, however, is from God's grace, and it is a gift to be received through faith (Eph. 2:8-9, I John 4:10).

Also, according to the *Upanishads*, the goal of enlightenment is for the individual self to lose its separate identity in the universal Self. The end result of biblical salvation, however, is to have an everlasting relationship with God. Eternal life means to be in communion with a personal God, not in a *union* with an impersonal oneness.

The Hindu Scriptures

The earliest of the Hindu scriptures are the *Vedas*. *Veda* means "knowledge," and it has the same root as the English word "wisdom" and the Greek *oida* ("to know") (Noss, page 86).

There are four *Vedas*: the *Rig Veda*, the *Sama Veda*, the *Yajur Veda*, and the *Atharva Veda*. Each *Veda*, moreover, is divided into four parts: the *Mantras* (the basic verses or hymns sung

during the rituals, also called *Samhitas*), the *Brahmanas* (explanations of the verses), the *Aranyakas* (reflections on their meaning), and the *Upanishads* (mystical interpretations of the verses). These scriptures are called *shruti*, which means "that which is heard." *Shruti* literature is the Hindu equivalent to scripture that is revealed.

Besides these primary scriptures, there are also secondary ones that are considered *smriti*, or "remembered." Included in the *smriti* scriptures are the popular *Ramayana* (Rama's way"), and *Mahabharata* ("the great story") epics. Within the *Mahabharata* epic is the most popular of all Hindu scriptures—the *Bagavad-Gita*, the main character of which is Krishna. While the *smriti* scriptures are not as authoritative as the *shruti* scriptures, they have nevertheless exerted much more influence on the culture of India.

Other *shruti* scriptures include the *Vedangas* (codes of law, such as the *Laws of Manu*), the *Puranas* (the genealogies and legends of the gods), the *Darshanas* (philosophical writings), *Sutras* (rules of ritual and social contact), and the *Tantras* (writings on attaining cultic power) (Organ, page 180).

Hinduism and Christianity Contrasted	
Hinduism	Christianity
God	
Impersonal.	Personal.
Humanity	
Continuous in the sense of being extended from the being of God.	Discontinuous in the sense of being separate from the Being of God; continuous in the sense of being made in God's image.
Humanity's Problem	
Ignorance	Moral rebellion.
The Solution	
Liberation from illusion and ignorance.	Forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with the personal holy God.
The Means	
Detachment from desire and awareness of unity with the divine through self effort.	Repentance from sin and trusting in the completed and substitutionary work of Jesus Christ.
The Outcome	
Merge into the Oneness; the individual disappears.	Eternal fellowship with God; the person is fulfilled in a loving relationship with God.

Approaching Hindus

Suggestions for Evangelism

Offer Jesus' Forgiveness

Bakht Singh, a convert from Islam and an Indian evangelist, once said, "I have never failed to get a hearing if I talk to them about forgiveness of sins and peace and rest in your heart" (Hesselgrave, p. 169). Forgiveness is a real need for Hindus, because it is not available in their system, which is based on the law of karma. This fact, moreover, troubles many Hindus. They are aware that the actions that bind them to this illusory realm keep accumulating, and the prospect of escape is hopelessly remote.

One passage that you might use is Matthew 11:28-30, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." The kind of people that Jesus had in mind when He spoke those words were those who felt burdened by the effort that it took to attain salvation.

What does Jesus offer in place of feeling weary and burdened? Rest. How does Jesus say we can find rest? By coming to Him, which means believing in Him (c.f., John 6:35). Why could Jesus say that His yoke is easy and His burden is light (v. 30)? The yoke of trusting in Jesus is easy because He has accomplished the work of salvation on our behalf. The load is light because Jesus has taken the burden of our sin upon His own shoulders. As His disciples, we follow One who is not a taskmaster but who is "gentle and humble in heart" (v. 29).

Keep God's Personhood in Mind

When discussing your beliefs and those of your Hindu friend, keep God's personhood in mind at all times. This has several benefits. First, it will help you find ways to illustrate the Christian perspective on spiritual issues by using familiar images of interpersonal relationships. Through such images you can illustrate the *meaning* of sin (sin is the rejection of God's moral authority), the *consequences* of sin (interpersonal alienation), the *resolution* of sin (confession and forgiveness), and the *hope* of eternal life (everlasting fellowship with a personal and loving God). These examples of illustrating sin through interpersonal relationships were taken from the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15).

Obviously, then, this parable can be useful in illustrating the Christian understanding of sin and forgiveness.

One drawback of that parable, however, is the killing of the fattened calf to celebrate the son's return. Such an image is

offensive to Hindus, who consider the cow to be sacred. Be careful to point out that the main theme is not the killing of the calf, but the alienation and then reconciliation of the son to the father and the joy of the father, who represents God, at the return of his son.

Second, the fact that God is personal will help you find ways to provoke your friend's thinking. For example, if God is personal by nature, then He is able to be aware of and empathize with our suffering (Exod. 3:7; Heb. 4:15). Is their god as concerned for them?

Another example of using the fact that God is personal has to do with the destiny of the individual after death. What it means to "know" the impersonal Brahman of Hinduism is to lose your identity as a distinct and separate person. There is something within each of us, though, that makes us want to cling with all our might to our existence as personal beings. Is such a drive nothing more than the ignorance of our separatistic egos? Are not people most fulfilled when they are in a relationship of friendship or love? How much more fulfilled would we be if we were to be in fellowship with a personal, holy, and loving God? Such a fulfilling relationship is exactly what the God of the Bible offers for eternity (see John 17:3; 14:2-3; Rev. 21:3).

Ask and Listen

Hinduism is a vastly diverse religion with some unifying beliefs but no specific creed. As such, it is a very tolerant religion, allowing each person to choose his or her own set of beliefs. Don't assume, then, that you know what your Hindu friend believes. Ask questions about his or her beliefs concerning God, man, sin, and salvation, and listen carefully to the answers.

Listen closely to the words that your Hindu friend uses to describe the way to enlightenment. He or she might very well use words such as "achieve," "attain," "overcome," and "strive." Such language reveals how enlightenment, the Hindu equivalent of salvation, is based on human effort, not on God's grace. You might discuss with your friend such passages as Romans 3:19-24 and Ephesians 2:8-9, which speak of the futility of attempting to earn one's salvation and of how salvation is a gift from God to be received by faith.

Have a Humble Spirit

Don't approach a Hindu with a spirit of superiority. In many respects, such as the eating of meat and our attachment to materialism, Hindus see Christians as spiritually inferior. Live your life as an open book. Let them see the peace of

mind you have being assured of your forgiveness in Jesus Christ and of your destiny after death.

Focus on Jesus

Present your Hindu friend with a New Testament and ask him or her to discover who Jesus is for himself or herself. Let your friend know that even Gandhi said, “I shall say to the Hindus that your lives will be incomplete unless you reverently study the teachings of Jesus” (Hingorani, p. 23). Encourage your friend to read either Luke or John.

Be Aware of Differing Definitions

Be aware of terminology or concepts that could be misunderstood by followers of Hinduism. For example, Hindus would understand being “born again” as referring to reincarnation, which is something from which they want to be liberated. In Christian terminology, however, being “born again” is to be made new or regenerated by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

Hindrances and Objections

Cultural Barriers

There are several cultural factors that might prevent Hindus from considering Christianity. The first stems from the fact that Hinduism is intertwined with the culture of India, the home of most Hindus. Radhakrishnan, a renowned Indian scholar and statesman, once said, “Hinduism is more a culture than a creed” (Beaver, p. 170). Thus, many Hindus think they must reject their culture before they can accept Christianity. Second, there is a cultural/religious pride among educated Hindus that prevents them from considering other religions. The third reason arises from the association that Christianity has had, at least in the Indian’s mind, with “materialistic” civilization and imperialistic exploitation (Hingorani, p. 32).

Fourth, the Indian family is very close. The actions of one member of the family affect the rest of the family. Mahendra Singhal, a Hindu who came to Christ, wrote, “My dilemma [with respect to his conversion] had another dimension. My acceptance of Jesus Christ would make my parents lose respect and position in the community. My brothers and sisters would suffer disgrace. Even though I was working away from home in a different environment, I was not really free to make my own decisions (Singhal, p. 3).

Each of these issues is difficult to deal with. Still, with God, they are not insurmountable. We must always keep the focus on Jesus Christ and His salvation, and separate that message as much as possible from Western culture. After all, Christianity has its roots in Asia, not in the West.

Also, as Christians, we must affirm with Gandhi that

“conversion must not mean denationalization” (Hingorani, p.15). While Christianity certainly speaks to the polytheistic aspects of the Indian culture, it does not require, for instance, that a believer eat meat. Indians can be Christians, moreover, and still be proud of their national heritage.

The price for accepting Christ might indeed be high, but Jesus has promised that those who pay such a price “will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life” (Matt. 19:29).

“There Are Many Paths to God”

Probably the most common Hindu objection to Christianity is the belief that there are many ways to God. Each person can choose whichever way is best suited for him or her. The Hindu sees ultimate Reality, Brahman, as being an undifferentiated oneness. If that view of God is accurate, then it would indeed be true that there are many ways to God, because God is contained within each person. This idea was reflected in *Hinduism Today* when it printed a chart of the major world religions entitled, “Truth Is One, Paths Are Many.”

In response, you must continually set before your Hindu friend the image of God being personal. If God is by nature personal, then the issues of how to know God are different from those of knowing an impersonal, undifferentiated force. With a personal God, the issues are similar to those of relating to a friend or parent. To be more specific, there are issues of morality, obedience, and trust. Also, if God is personal, then sin is not a matter of ignorance but of moral rejection and the breaking of a relationship.

If our primary problem is that we have broken our relationship with the Person of God, then it is understandable why there is only one way to God. You can illustrate this for your Hindu friend by asking him or her: How many ways are there to restore a relationship that you are responsible for having broken? The answer, of course, is that there’s only one way: through confessing your guilt and requesting forgiveness.

Also, share with your Hindu friend the *inclusiveness* of Jesus Christ toward others. Christ beckons “*all* who are weary and heavy laden” (Matt. 11:28, emphasis added) to come to Him. He commends the faith of the Roman centurion (Matt. 8:5-13), the kindness of the Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37), and the repentance of the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14) and the sinful woman (Luke 7:36-50). The inclusive Christ associates with the social outcast (Luke 19:1-10) and the sinner (Luke 15:1-7). The Gospels portray Jesus as the provider for the physically hungry (Matt. 14:13-21) and the spiritually hungry (John 6:35); the healer of the leper, the lame, the blind, the deaf, and the mute; the seeker of the lost (Matt. 18:10-14; Luke 19:10); the lover of the children (Matt. 19:14); “a light for revelation to the Gentiles” (Luke 2:32; John 8:12); the

Vishnu and Jesus: Differences Between Their Incarnations

Vishnu	Jesus
At least ten incarnations (some claim more) in both animal and human form.	One incarnation in human form.
While the stories of the avatars, or incarnations, of Vishnu might have a core of truth, history is not essential to them. They are mythical in nature. If it were shown that there were no historical basis to the stories, it would have no effect on their meaning and influence. A Hindu tradition even asserts that when the avatars walked, they left no footprints.	History is very important to the veracity of Jesus' claims and to the salvation that He accomplished on our behalf (1 Cor. 15:14, 17; 1 John 1:1-3). If Christ did not actually live, die, and rise from the dead in history, then Christianity is built on a lie and the Gospel is without foundation.
The purpose of Vishnu's incarnations was "for destruction of evildoers" (<i>Bhagavad-Gita</i> 4:8; Edgerton, p.23).	The purpose of Jesus' incarnation was to "seek and save what was lost" (Luke 19:10). "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:17; also see John 10:10).
The avatars pointed to a way by which we can attain enlightenment over a period of many lifetimes: "But striving zealously, with sins cleansed, the disciplined man, perfected through many rebirths, then (finally) goes to the highest goal" (<i>Bhagavad-Gita</i> 6:45; Edgerton, p.37, emphasis added).	Jesus points to Himself as the way by which to receive eternal life immediately (John 6:29, 40; 10:9-10; 14:16; 11:25-26).
Vishnu incarnates periodically as an avatar when the need arises, and then the avatar dies and is reabsorbed back into Brahman. Hinduism makes no claims concerning the bodily resurrection of the avatars.	Jesus' incarnation was a unique event. His sacrifice was "once for all" (Heb. 9:26-28); He died and rose from the dead; and His individual identity is manifested before, as well as after, the incarnation.

physician of the spiritually sick through whom one passes to receive eternal life (John 10:9).

The Gospel of Jesus Christ, moreover, is intended for the whole world. As John wrote concerning the end, "I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, *from every nation, tribe, people, and language*, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb" (Rev.7:9, emphasis added). This all-embracing Christ will naturally appeal to the Hindu (Sudhakar, p. 3).

“Jesus Christ Is Not Unique”

The Hindu sees the gods and *avatars* (incarnations) as manifestations of the impersonal Brahman. They view Jesus as one of those *avatars*. Your Hindu friend might be willing to incorporate Jesus into his or her pantheon, but yet unwilling to accept Jesus as the exclusive incarnation of God.

Gandhi represented typical Hindu thinking when he said, "I...do not take as literally true the text that Jesus is the only begotten son of God. God cannot be the exclusive Father and I cannot ascribe exclusive divinity to Jesus. He is as divine as

Krishna or Rama or Mohammed or Zoroaster (Hingorani, p. 53).

But was the incarnation of Jesus really the same as Vishnu's incarnations, which included Krishna and Rama? No, for there were distinct differences.

If the objection of Jesus' uniqueness comes up, encourage your Hindu friend to read through the Gospel of John and judge the issue for himself or herself. One former Hindu wrote, "At the urging of my classmate...I began to read the New Testament to learn more about Jesus. He totally captivated me. Here was someone who struck me as different from anyone else who ever lived" (Sairsingh, pp. 5-6).

“I Must Pay for My Own Karmic Debt”

Hindus are deeply influenced in their thinking by the law of karma. Their tendency, then, is to believe that actions have consequences both now and in subsequent lives, and that each person bears the consequences of his or her own actions alone. Typically, therefore, Hindus have difficulty understanding the concept of Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice. How could

Jesus suffer in our place and pay for our debt, while we receive forgiveness and salvation as a free gift?

In one sense the law of karma is true in that one who sins will personally reap the consequences of that sin, such as shame, the loss of a friend's trust, ill health, a jail sentence, or a failed marriage. Even Paul wrote, "A man reaps what he sows" (Gal. 6:7).

But, again, one must put this issue in the context of God being personal. If God is personal, then our sin is ultimately an affront to the moral authority of a holy God. While the bad news is that such sin results in our alienation from God, the good news is that, with a personal God, forgiveness is possible, just as it is possible for any person to forgive another for a wrong.

If God is an impersonal force, though, then moral law becomes more like the laws of nature. As such, it is inevitable that we will suffer the consequences of our actions, whether good or bad. Also, forgiveness would not be possible, just as it is not possible for nature to offer forgiveness when we break its laws.

Carrying the image of a personal God further, forgiveness has its price. When we forgive the one who has wronged us, we bear on ourselves the hurt and the consequences caused by the other's action.

That is precisely what Jesus accomplished on the cross. Being God, He was sinless and represented the One who had been sinned against. Being man, He was qualified to bear on our behalf the consequences of our sin, which was death.

"The Crucifixion Goes Against Nonviolence to All Life"

Some Hindus have difficulty understanding the significance of Christ's crucifixion because of their conviction that one must act with nonviolence toward all life, which is the Hindu doctrine of *ahimsa*. It needs to be explained to them, though, that the crucifixion of Christ was the graphic consequence of "the wages of sin" (Rom. 6:23) and the direct result of Christ having taken our sins upon Himself.

The following word picture might help them understand the meaning of the cross. Have them imagine a loved one—say it's a daughter—becoming involved with drugs. At first the daughter experiments with marijuana. She does it for the enjoyment of the experience, and she's able control it. But within a few weeks she gets involved with heavier drugs such as cocaine. The highs and lows become more intense, and she develops a craving for the drugs. They begin to control her; she become addicted. Her parents see what the drugs are doing to their daughter: her grades have plummeted; she hangs out with the wrong crowd; she gets in trouble with the law; she has become distant in her relationship with them.

Then, one tragic day, they find their daughter dead as the result of a drug overdose.

Now ask: As the parent of this daughter, what would your attitude be toward the drugs? Would you be upset only with the death of your daughter and have no conviction concerning the effects of the drugs? Or, would you be motivated to warn others about the dangers of doing drugs?

Explain that God feels even more strongly than they do about the death of a person. It grieves him; he abhors death. But that is precisely why He hates sin—because sin, like drugs, destroys people. And that is why He was motivated to give His only Son as a sacrifice for our sins. Christ's death does not uphold killing; instead, it demonstrates the extent to which God loved us (Rom. 5:8). It shows how much He desires for us to have life (John 3:16-17; 10:10) and to make a way for us to have a relationship with Him (John 17:3).

Dr. Mahendra Singhal, a former Hindu, said, "Hindus believe in going to the extremes to demonstrate their love for someone. A mother, for example, would go hungry to feed her children. A father would deprive himself of everything so that his children could go to school. The image of Jesus Christ that made the strongest appeal to me was the limit to which He was willing to go to show His love toward me, and I did not even know Him at the time. I have discovered in my witnessing to Hindus that they are generally moved by the depiction of Jesus on the cross to validate His love toward us."

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Glossary of Common Hindu Terms

Ahimsa: The doctrine of nonviolence to all life, which is the basis for Hindus being vegetarian.

Asanas: The physical postures or ways of sitting in order to do yoga.

Avatar: The incarnation of a deity.

Bhakti: A form of yoga where a person loses one's self through selfless devotion to a personal concept of God, usually either Krishna or Rama.

Brahmin: The priestly caste of Hinduism, which is to be differentiated from Brahman—Hinduism's word for ultimate reality.

Dharma: The Hindu word for religion. It is the way a Hindu should live, especially with respect to performing the duties of one's caste. To live according to dharma is to live in harmony with the universe.

Karma: The law of cause and effect active in the moral realm.

Mantra: "Thought form." A single or multi-syllabic phrase (usually in Sanskrit) on which one meditates. Each mantra is identified with a particular deity to the extent that the correctly pronounced mantra embodies that deity. The point of repeating the mantra is to invoke the powers of that deity and to invite it to enter you (Rice, 247).

Maya: The doctrine that the invisible world is an illusion that clouds the reality of absolute oneness. Maya may also be considered to be the divine play of the gods.

Nirvana: Refers to the individual self merging into the impersonal and undifferentiated oneness of the Ultimate Self. Nirvana is the goal of enlightenment.

OM: The mantra that contains all the primal vibrations of the universe. It is considered to be the queen of the mantras (Rice, p. 279).

Puja: The term for the worship of deities at an altar.

Samadhi: Absorption into the ultimate oneness. Also used in the sense of dying with respect.

Yoga: A physical and mental discipline that is practiced for the purpose of spiritual liberation or empowerment.

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