

Hindu Religion

[Talk on Hinduism organized by "Inter-Faith Learning Sessions" Oshawa]

Hinduism is one of worlds oldest living religions practiced by well over 800 million people, mostly living in India but scattered all over the world. However Nepal is the only country where Hinduism is the official state religion. The word Hindu comes from the Persian language and means the people or religion of the people living beyond the Sindhu (Indus) River 'S' being pronounced as 'H' hence 'Hindu'. This land used to be called *Aryavarta* or the land of the *Aryas* (Aryans) in the ancient times. The Hindus call their religion, *Sanatan Dharma* or *Manav Dharma*. '*Sanatan*' means based on truth; '*Dharma*' in *Sanskrit* originates from the Indo-European root '*Dhree*' which implies that which holds together. It means more than religion, it also means law, usage, practice, custom, duty, prescribed course of conduct, morality, ethics, an essential quality, characteristic property; Hence Hinduism is called a way of life. '*Manav*' means 'Human'; in this respect Hinduism is the True Religion of Human Being, covering the Physical, Mental and Spiritual aspects of human life. Thus the Religion is verily a persons entire way of life.

The subject, Hindu Religion, I am going to talk about today is vast and my knowledge is limited. Time is also limited and I'll try my best to give you some idea on the topic. To start with I'll quote from the opening speech by Swami Vivekananda at the World's Parliament of Religions, Chicago on 11th September, 1893.

".... I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal tolerance, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth. I am proud to tell you that we have gathered in our bosom the purest remnant of the Israelites, who came to Southern India and took refuge with us in the very year in which their holy temple was shattered to pieces by Roman tyranny. I am proud to belong to the religion which has sheltered and is still fostering the remnant of the grand Zoroastrian nation. I will quote to you, brethren, a few lines from a hymn which I remember to have repeated from my earliest boyhood, which is every day repeated by millions of human beings: "*As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.*"

".... a declaration to the world of the wonderful doctrine preached in the Gita: '*Whosoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to me.*'

".... The Hindus have received their religion through revelation, the Vedas. They hold that the Vedas are without beginning and without end. It may sound ludicrous to this audience, how a book can be without beginning or end. But, by the Vedas no books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times. Just as the law of gravitation existed before its discovery, and would exist if all humanity forgot it, so is it with the laws that govern the spiritual world. The moral, ethical and spiritual relations between soul and soul and between individual spirits and the Father of all spirits, were there before their discovery, and would remain even if we forgot them.

“.....The Vedas teach us that creation is without beginning or end. Science is said to have proved that the sum total of cosmic energy is always the same. Then if there was a time when nothing existed, where was all this manifested energy? Some say it was in a potential form in God. In that case God is sometimes potential and sometimes kinetic, which would make Him mutable. Everything mutable is a compound, and everything compound must undergo that change which is called destruction. So God would die, which is absurd. Therefore there never was a time when there was no creation.

“....If I may be allowed to use a simile, creation and creator are two lines, without beginning and without end, running parallel to each other. God is the ever active providence, by whose power systems after systems are being evolved out of chaos, made to run for a time and again destroyed. This is what the Brahmin boy repeats every day: ‘The sun and the moon, the Lord created like the suns and moons of previous cycles.’ And this agrees with modern science.”

Hindu Religion, is based on several philosophical concepts. The most important of which is the concept of Supreme Being i.e. ‘*Brahman*.’ We cannot apprehend the idea of *Brahman*, who is beyond our mental capacity and we can only describe what He, She or It is ‘**NOT**’. *Brahman* may be realised by the process of elimination.

Three basic qualities are attributed to *Brahman*, which are:

SAT - Truth that exists beyond time and space.

CHIT - Pure consciousness and

ANANDA - Bliss or Perfect Joy.

Brahman is unlimited, beyond time and space, kindness or cruelty, creation or destruction, inherently passive and fills the whole Universe. On the other hand, It is smaller than the smallest; ie. Fills the entire space between the positive and negative Infinity. Hence the concept of : “*Purnamadah Purnamidam Purnat Purnamudachchate, Purnasya Purnamadaya Purnameba- vashishyate.*”

[This -(the manifested universe) is infinite, That -(the un-manifested universe) is infinite and both add up to the infinite; when one is taken away from the other, what remains is also infinite.]

Although inherently passive, it is Active in Its manifestation in the Created Universe.

The creation, sustenance and destruction is a spontaneous, continuous natural process of manifestation of the Supreme Being called by various names such as *Parabrahma*, *Ishwara*, *Parameshwara*, *Paramatma* etc. The various souls in living beings are none but the manifestations of the same Supreme Being similar to the reflections of one moon in the sky in millions of water reservoirs. (Collection of water in cows’ foot-prints.)

SANATAN DHARMA or **MANAV DHARMA** is what characterizes a Human Being. Its basic tenets are, Code of Conduct; Interaction with human and other forms of life in physical (*kaya*), mental (*mano*) and verbal (*vakya*) behavior.

Truthfulness, Kindness, *Ahimsa* and Respect for others are the basis of this.

THE DOCTRINE OF "KARMA"

Hindus believe in birth and re-birth cycling of the Soul. The soul, in every living being (in form of life) is the same entity which is a manifestation of 'ParaBrahma' and is not destroyed when the body is destroyed. It is indestructible and passes on from one body to another in it's journey through the life-cycle. The Soul can't be cut by weapons, burnt by fire, dried by the wind or wetted by water. Just as we grow and pass through various stages like, childhood, youth, middle age, old age and meet death, like the changing of worn out clothes and putting new ones on; we enter a new body in our next birth. No '*karma*' is lost – we get rewarded for good *karma* and punished or suffer as a result of bad *karma*. Incidentally it is the body, not the soul which feels the suffering. However, we inherently equate our soul with this body which is a illusion. As we say "my body" or "my soul" the question is "who am I?" Hindu philosophers have pursued this question to a great extent and come to the conclusion "Thou art That" i.e. You are a manifestation of that Brahman."

Every action has a corresponding reaction which the soul has to go through in it's journey. **Every birth is a re-birth** with some '*Karma*' from the previous birth. One must endure the result of the last birth's residual karma in this birth and go through the entire cycle. In this respect the human birth is the highest because only humans have got the advantage of independent karma to improve it's life and uplift in the next birth. All other forms are doomed to carry on spiritually, with the same form., for that life-time. Therefore, humans are implored to utilize their opportunity to the fullest and improve spiritually in this life in preparation for the next.

Every birth is a re-birth

The cycle of Creation, Sustenance and Destruction goes on in micro and macro scale. At the end everything, created, is destroyed, while Lord Vishnu absorbs all Karma by all living beings in Himself and sleeps for one half *Kalpa*. At the end of the *Kalpa* the next creation begins and each soul takes birth with it's remaining karma from the previous birth to begin the new cycle. One *kalpa* is *Brahmaa*'s one day and one night.

There is no Sin as such in Hinduism; only **Good Karma** and **Bad Karma**. The result of any *Karma* (Action) must be enjoyed or suffered by the individual (soul) in it's journey through the cycle of birth and rebirth. In, other than human births, it has no choice but to pass that birth guided by destiny alone. It is only in the human birth that it has Consciousness to it's advantage by which one can perform independent Karma and it is possible to get out of the cycle sooner than destiny. It is akin to one floating in a river, being carried away by the current and one swimming against the current to get to the other side.

In death the soul passes on to another body. The dead body, where the *jivatma* has lived for the lifetime is a temple and must be disposed off with dignity and respect. It is composed of five fundamental elements viz., Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Space. They should be returned to Nature; hence burning the body and sprinkling of the remains to earth.

Although there is no Sin as such, in Hinduism, considering it as Bad Karma we may say there are three types of sins viz;

Physical Sin: Taking what is not given, injuring creatures without the sanction of law and violating another persons property.

Mental Sin: Longing for something that belongs to others, thinking in ones mind what is undesirable, adherence to false doctrines.

Verbal Sins: Abusing others, speaking untruth and talking idly.

Synchronizing one's mind with speech and action is very important in Hinduism. One's speech and action must be the same; ie. One must not think, speak and act differently. This implies that a person of Hindu faith must never lie, give false evidence and be honest in every respect in his speech and behaviour.

The Vedas: are the Scriptures followed by all Hindus for guidance and influence their conduct in all aspects of life. Vedas are divided into four parts namely

1. **Rk:** (Pronounced RIK) This is the oldest of the Vedas with over 10,000 verses and is regarded as the Main Veda. It is supposed to be compiled by various sages from the revelations they had in their spiritual endeavour over many years. Initially it was memorized and passed on from person to person being written at a later date. It is said to have been compiled even before the system of writing was invented. *Rishi Vyasa* is credited with compiling and arranging the verses into three Vedas viz: Rk, Sam, and Yajus, the fourth one, *Atharva* was added later on.

Rk Veda (Pronounced Rik) consists of over 10,000 verses, praising, and praying for various things to gods, mostly attributed to forces of nature, like Fire, Wind, Water, Air, Lightning etc., Directions for laying out Sacrificial alters and areas, Rituals for many social occasions like birth, marriage, cremation etc. The science of Geometry and astronomy is included in this Veda.

2. **Sam:** (Pronounced Saam) *Veda* consists mostly of Hymns of praise, to be sung during sacrificial ceremonies etc., to gods like *Indra*, *Agni*, *Varuna* etc.,
3. **Yajur Veda** includes mostly rituals for various ceremonies apart from some Hymns repeated. Rituals for Birth, Marriage, Death etc are detailed in this Veda.
4. **Atharva Veda** is a later addition, according to scholars and includes various rituals and treatments e.g. Snake –bite, Exorcism, Getting rid of one's anger, Winning the favour of one's husband over other wife, etc.; *Ayurveda* – The Health Science, *Dhanurveda* – The Science of weapons and *Vastu- Shastra* – architecture , are included in this Veda.

After the Vedas, the Vedantas and Upanishadas were composed being the ultimate refinement of Hindu Philosophy

Next to the *Vedas* are *Puranas* which are later development. Vedas are written in ancient Sanskrit language, not understood by ordinary people whereas the *Puranas* were composed for the average person in simple language followed by the general public. *Puranas* are many in number and written on a variety of religious subjects. Vishnu Puran, Kalika Puran, Devi Puran, Padma Puran ... to name a few.

There are two great Epics: *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*.

Ramayana is the story of Ram, king of Ayodhya and Sita his wife being abducted by Ravana, the demon king of Lanka and Rama's expedition to Lanka in order to rescue her.

Mahabharata is a huge epic of about 100,000 verses the basic story being a battle between two rival groups. The Pandavas and Kouravas representing two rightful and deceitful groups respectively fight each other for the inheritance of their kingdom. Ultimately the Pandavas win with almost complete destruction of the Kouravas as a result. It symbolises the triumph of good over evil and contains an enormous volume of social, moral, cultural spiritual and economic information and guidelines. *The Bhagavad Gita*, most revered book for the Hindus is included as a part of this Great Epic.

Ramayana and Mahabharata plays very important role in the life of every Hindu. *Bhagavad Gita* (Song Divine) is the essence of Hindu Philosophy, Physical, Moral and Spiritual guidance, it contains practically all about Hinduism in a very concise form.

Five Reens (debts): A person is born with five debts viz.

1. *Daiva Reen*: Debt to the Divinity – discharged by performing prescribed acts of offering to gods, improving one's spiritual status, attending religious ceremonies etc.
2. *Rishi Reen*: Debt to the Sages and Saints who has given us guidance in the form of *Shastras* - discharged by performing rituals according to the *shastras*.
3. *Manusya Reen*: Debt to the human society.- discharged by doing Social Work.
4. *Bhuta Reen*: Debt to the five elements of which the material world around us is composed of; i.e. our environment. – We must have respect and refrain from polluting.
5. *Pitri Reen*: Debt to our ancestors. But for their care we would not have survived. So the most important of the *Reens* is the *Pitri Reen*. –discharged by raising children, educating them and making them capable of following family and social tradition.

Every householder should try to repay these Debts in his lifetime.

Five ashramas: A person's life is divided into five stages viz.

1. *Vallya*: Childhood.
2. *Brahmacharya*: Student.
3. *Grihastha*: Householder
4. *Vanaprashtha*: Retirement
5. *Sannyas*: Complete detachment.

Most important of these is the *Grihastha ashram* because this ashram supports all others including itself.

THE THEME OF HINDU RELIGION

1. The Universe is real and knowable. *Satyam*

The Universe reveals itself in human experiences of the real, the good, the beautiful and the true through the five senses of human body viz

- (i) eyes – sight - beauty,
- (ii) tongue – taste
- (iii) nose – smell
- (iv) skin – touch
- (v) ears- sound,

The ground of beings is also the ground of values. The Sanskrit word *SAT* means existing, existent, present, being, real and actual, but the word blends into the value spectrum, for *SAT* also means genuine, right, good, and virtuous

2. The Universe is orderly: *Ritam*,

- (i) Even in the early centuries of the formation of Hindu nature gods – whose number was said to be 330,000,000- there was the notion of cosmic order or the regularity of the cosmic process. This is known as *RITA*. It is manifest in the rising and setting of the sun, in the orderly appearance of the stars, in the regularity of the seasons, in the predictability of the monsoons, in the springtime and harvest, and even in the intrinsic rightness of things in nature. “The dawn follows the path of Rita, the right path; as if she knew them before. She never oversteps the regions. The sun follows the path of *rita*.” So sang an ancient seer. The gods conformed to this order of things. Miracles, i.e. violations of cosmic law, were not in their power. They were a class of beings within the sovereignty of *Rita*. A corollary of this is that there have been few serious conflicts between science and religion in India. Hindus do not recognize two orders of explanation: the natural and the divine.
- (ii) *Satyam* The created Universe is Real. There is another feature of the orderliness of the universe which ought to be mentioned. According to Hinduism, the universe had no absolute beginning and will have no absolute ending. The universe moves in great cycles (*kalpas*) each one of 4,320,000 years as measured by the human calendar. Each *kalpa* is divided into four ages (*yugas*) of diminishing length and of decreasing virtue. One thousand *kalpas* constitute a “Brahma day” and are followed by a “Brahma night” of equal length. Thus the orderly sequence continues endlessly. * see Vedic Time Table.

3. All life is a unity. The Sanskrit term for life is *jiva* . Substantially the *jiva* is the soul. Although *jiva* denotes different aspects of the soul, sometimes *jiva* means only the principle of vitality, that which distinguishes a living thing from a lifeless thing. The soul in a living thing is called *jivatma*; which is believed to be a manifestation of Brahman (*paramatma*) . The heart and essence of the Hindu faith is to be found in a constant intuition of the unity of life, and the instinctive and ineradicable conviction that the recognition of this unity is the highest good and the uttermost freedom. This means that men must practice the “Golden Rule” in their relationship with all forms of life: “Do not do to others which if done to you will cause you pain.” Thus arose the doctrine of ahimsa.

4. Each birth is a rebirth: *Sadhana* is a program for spiritual improvement, not for material gain.

5. Each birth is determined by *Karma*.

6. The human birth is misery as well as opportunity.

7. *Atmasiddhi* (self-perfection or realization of one's own self) is the spiritual goal of human life.

8. Techniques are provided for *atmasiddhi*. In addition to the primary goal of *Atmasiddhi* there are secondary goals: hedonic satisfaction, physical possessions. It is the responsibility of each person to choose a path and try to improve his or her spiritual condition.

9. Each person is free to choose his own techniques although a guru may help in providing the right direction..

10. Any path, faithfully pursued will realize the goal.

Any *marga* or path will successfully lead to the goal of *atmasiddhi*, providing it is faithfully followed. Pluralism, tolerance and unity with diversity mark the Hindu way of life from the first millennium B.C. Seer who sang: **"We all have various thoughts and plans and diverse are the ways of man."** to the 19th century saint Shree Ramakrishna, who at various periods of his life lived as a Hindu, as a Buddhist, as a Muslim and as a Christian to demonstrate his conviction that all ways are ways of salvation.

OM TAT SAT

OM - The chief basic Thought-Form.

The seed-of-the-immensity (*brahma-bija*) or Thought-Form-of-the-knowledge-of the Immensity (*brahma-vidya-mantra*)

Sound: *AUM*

Meaning: "I bow", or "I agree", or "I accept" in the primeval language. This mantra is also called "that which leads to the other shore" (*tara or tarini*). It is considered the source of all mantras.

'A' represents *Brahma*, the revolving tendency (*rajas*), the red color, the form of the universe, the state of wakefulness, the power of action.

'U' represents *Vishnu*, the tendency toward concentration (*sattva*), the white color, the Cosmic Intellect (the Embryo of Splendor, *Hiranyagarbha*), the state of dream, the power of thought, the un-manifest world.

'A' and 'U' together mean 'truth', 'immortality'.

M represents *Siva*, the tendency toward disintegration (*tamas*) the black color, the Cosmic Consciousness, the All-knowing (*sarva-jna*), the state of deep sleep, the power of consciousness. This half letter (M) is the basis of all things, but that is not within the reach of mind and words.

'AUM' is said to represent also the One Being pervading space, time, and forms.

Purpose: Leads to realization, to liberation from bondage, to the attainment of Supreme Reality.

From the basic syllable *AUM* (*OM*) spring forth all the elemental sounds, the "seed utterances"(*bija-mantra*) which are the root of all aspects of manifestation, the keys to all language, the powerful sound-elements from which the magical power of the mantras is derived.

" 'AUM'. This syllable is the whole world. It is the past, the present, the future. Everything is just the word *AUM*. And whatever else there is that transcends threefold time, that, too, is just the word *AUM*." (*Mandukya Upanishad* 1.1)

Vedic Time Scale

Four Yugas = One Maha Yuga. (Divya Yuga) = 4,320,000 Solar years

	Four Yugas and their Twilights	Time in Daiva years	Time in Earth Solar years	Total time in Solar years
First Yuga Satya (Krita) Yuga	Satya or Krita Yuga Twilight (Sandhya)	400	400X360=144,000	1,728,000
	Satya Yuga	4,000	4,000X360=1,440,000	
	Satya-Treta Yuga Twilight (Sandhyamsa)	400	400X360=144,000	
Second Yuga Treta Yuga	Treta Yuga Twilight (Sandhya)	300	300X360=108,000	1,296,000
	Treta Yuga	3,000	3,000X360=1,080,000	
	Treta-Dwapar Yuga Twilight (Sandhyamsha)	300	300X360=108,000	
Third Yuga Dwapar Yuga	Dwapar Yuga Twilight (Sandhya)	200	200X360=72,000	864,000
	Dwapar Yuga	2000	2,000X360=720,000	
	Dwapar-Kali Yuga Twilight (Sandhyamsa)	200	200X360=72,000	
Fourth Yuga Kali Yuga	Kali Yuga Twilight (Sandhya)	100	100X360=36,000	432,000
	Kali Yuga	1,000	1,000X360=360,000	
	Kali-Satya Yuga Twilight (Sandhyamsa)	100	100X360=36,000	
One Mahayuga Total of Four	Satya+Treta+Dwapar+Kali	12,000	12,000X360 = 4,320,000	4,320,000

1,000 Mahayuga = Half Kalpa = Brahma's (Creating Authority) one day. His night is another Half-Kalpa.

Brahma's one day and one night = One Kalpa = 8,640,000 = 8.640 Billion Years.

One Daiva year = 360 Earth years; For Devas' One Day = six months of Earth Time and One Night = six months.

12 months in one year, 30 days in a month and 360 days in a year; hence 360 Earth year = one Daiva year.

Devas Domain is North Polar Region, hence six months = one day and one night.

A *Kalpa* also consists of 14 *Manus*.

Presently we are under the seventh *Manu* (*Vaivaswat*) of the *Shwet-Varaha* (White Boar) *Kalpa*