

Christian Outreach and World Religions

Hinduism

The Founding of Hinduism

1. Hinduism dates back to 1500 B.C. and is one of the oldest religions still practiced today.
2. Originally it was a polyistic religion in which priests carried out special rituals (*Vedas* - written guides for rituals).
3. A revolt against this priestly class in 600 B.C. led to a new form of the faith which emphasized internal meditation as opposed to external rituals.
4. Between 800 B.C. and 300 B.C. the *Upanishads* were written. These are equivalent to the New Testament. They explain that behind the many gods stands one Reality, which is called *Brahman*. *Brahman* is an impersonal force.
5. The religion continued to evolve toward a personal view of God.
6. Humanity came to know *Brahman* through three manifestations called *Brahman* (*Creator*), *Vishnu* (*Preserver*) and *Siva* (*Destroyer*).
7. From *Vishnu* came ten mythical manifestations called *avatars*. These were in the forms of animals and persons such as Rama, Krishna, and Buddha. Beyond these deities there is an estimated 330 million other gods in Hinduism.
8. In the course of history Hinduism has spawned Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism.

The Basic Beliefs

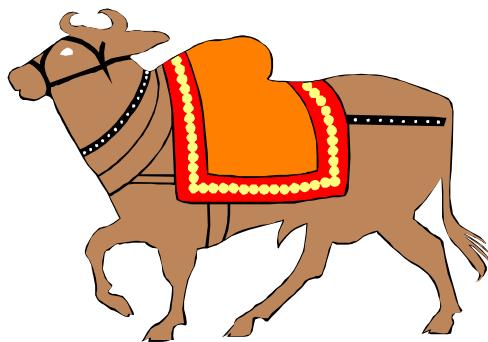
1. *Brahman* is an impersonal force of existence. The universe is an extension of the Being of *Brahman*.
2. Most adherents believe that they are extended from and one with *Brahman*. Just as the air outside the jar is identical to the air that is inside the jar, so our essence is identical to *Brahman*.
3. Humanity's primary problem is our ignorance of our divine nature. Because of this mistake we suffer the consequences of our desires and actions (law of *karma*).
4. *Samsara* refers to the ever-revolving wheel of life, death, and rebirth. 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 lifetime.
5. The solution is to be liberated (*moksha*) from this wheel. Individual self is an illusion. The oneness of *Brahman* is real. We must detach ourselves from the desires of the ego and attain enlightenment.
6. There are three ways of enlightenment: *karma marga* (action and ritual), *jnana marga* (knowledge and meditation), *bhakti marga* (devotion). Enlightenment is always based on one's own effort.

Suggestions For Evangelism

1. Offer forgiveness: The Hindu hope of escaping from this illusory realm is hopelessly remote. A good Bible passage is Matthew 11.28-30.
2. Emphasize God's personhood. An impersonal force like *Brahman* cannot be concerned about us. Sin is not a mistake but an offense. The only way an offense can be overcome is by the forgiveness offered by the one offended.
3. Remember that Hinduism is loose and lacking a consistent creed. Listen to your friend. One theme that will inevitably arise is that of works righteousness. They will use words like

“achieve, attain, overcome, and strive.” This might offer the opportunity to explain God’s grace from Ephesians 2.8-9 and Romans 3.19-24. God’s greatness is demonstrated in His grace to the undeserving.

4. Have humble spirit. With respect to our eating of meat and our attachment to materialism, Hindus see Christians as spiritually inferior. Let them see the peace of mind you have.
5. Focus on Jesus. Even Gandhi said, “I shall say to the Hindus that your lives will be incomplete unless you reverently study the teachings of Jesus” (Anand Hingorani, ed. *The Message of Jesus Christ by M. K. Gandhi*. Bombay:Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1964 - Check it out from the library if you have to!)



Objections to the Gospel

1. Hindu culture is strong. Family ties are especially strong. There is an cultural/religious pride among educated Hindus which prevents them from considering other religions.
2. There are many paths to God in the Hindu mind. But if our primary problem is a broken relationship with a personal God, the only solution is personal forgiveness from God. For this reason stress universal grace

(forgiveness is for all): the Roman centurion (Matt. 8.5-13), the tax collector (Luke 18.9-14).

3. Hindus view Jesus as another manifestation of the impersonal *Brahman*. Yet there is a great difference between the incarnations of Hinduism. Ask them to read the Gospel of John and compare.
4. Hindus have a problem with the crucifixion and their commitment to nonviolence. However Hindus will go to extreme measures to demonstrate their love for someone. A father would deprive himself of everything to send his children to school. In the same way Jesus voluntarily gave His life as a sacrifice (Romans 5.8). Also the Christian focuses on hatred not only violence. Punishment is not the same as violence.

For Further Study

1. Hinduism appears to me to be one of the most difficult religions to overcome with the Gospel. There are three areas of great difference.
2. The impersonal nature of God is the key to this faith. Understanding the doctrine of creation becomes an essential element in conversion. We are personal beings. If there is a Creator, He must also be a personal being.
3. Hindus are constrained to the law of karma (you reap what you sow). But what is the source of this constraint? Their system rejects karma in favor of enlightenment. Is karma an illusion that is forced upon them? Christians would see the law of karma as no illusion but reality.

Most of the information for these Bible studies has been drawn from *The Compact Guide to World Religions* by Dean C. Halverson, Bethany House Publishers, 1996.