

Tuesday, April 16, 2024

What's the Difference

Hinduism

- The World's oldest organized religion.
- The 3rd largest religion with approximately 1.2 billion followers worldwide
 - The vast majority of Hindus live in _____. (Approx. 966 million)
- The word "Hinduism" comes from the Indus River.
- There is no single founder. It began as a polytheistic and ritualistic religion with simple rituals.
- Over time rituals became more complex and a priestly class was formed. Vedas were written as instructions for the rituals.
 - Eventually the priests became mediators with the gods, which gave them control over peoples lives.
 - 600 BC, the people revolted and the Hinduism that resulted emphasized internal meditation more than external rituals.
- **Basic Beliefs (Most Hindus hold to the following):**
 - **Belief in Brahman** which they see as ultimate reality, an impersonal oneness that is beyond all distinctions.
 - **The unity of Brahman and Atman.** Most followers believe that their true selves (atman) are extended from and are 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 the essence of Brahman" (The Illustrated Guide to World Religions, p. 88)
 - **The law of karma.** This is the moral equivalent of the natural law of cause and effect. The effects of our actions follow us throughout the present lifetime and into the next lifetime.
 - **Reincarnation (samsara).** This is the seemingly endless cycle of life, death and rebirth. We reap in this lifetime the consequences of the deeds of previous lifetimes. A person's karma determines the kind of body he or she will receive in the next life, whether human, animal or insect.
 - **Liberation (moksha).** The goal of Hinduism is to be free of the cycle of life, death and rebirth. This liberation is attained by realizing that the concept of self is an illusion and that only the undifferentiated oneness with Brahman is real.

- **Paths to Moksha (Liberation)**

- **Dharma**, or the path of works. A person has a set of specific social and religious obligations that must be fulfilled.
- **Jnana**, the path of knowledge. This is a more difficult path and involves self-renunciation and meditation.
- **Bhakti**, the path of passionate devotion. This is the most popular way to achieve moksha. A devotee may choose any of the 330 million gods, goddesses or demi-gods in the Hindu pantheon and passionately worship that god. In practice, almost all Hindus who follow this path worship Vishnu or Shiva.

- **What about the mark on the forehead?**

- The colored dot often seen on the forehead of Hindus is called by a number of names, including bindi. It is a sign of piety and symbolizes the third eye – the one focused inward toward God.

- **What about the cows?**

- The cow is considered sacred in Hinduism. She is symbolic of abundance, the sanctity of all life, and the earth that gives much while asking nothing in return. The cow is respected as a matriarchal figure for her gentle qualities and for providing milk and related products to people who consume a mostly vegetarian diet.

- What does Hinduism teach about God?

- What does Hinduism teach about man?

- What does Hinduism teach about Jesus?

- What does Hinduism teach about salvation?

- What does Hinduism teach about life after death?

Comparing Christianity and Hinduism

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What the Bible says about God:

There is one true and living God, who exists as three distinct, co-equal, co-eternal persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Deut. 6:4; John 20:28; Acts 5:3-4; 2 Cor. 13:13; 1 Peter 1:2).

What Hinduism says about God:

God (Brahman) is the one impersonal, ultimate, and unknowable spiritual reality. Sectarian Hinduism personalizes Brahman as Brahma (creator), Vishnu (preserver), and Shiva (destroyer). Hindus claim there are 330 million gods. Belief in astrology, evil spirits and curses is common.

What the Bible says about Jesus:

He is the virgin-born Son of God, conceived by the Holy Spirit (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:18-23; Luke 1:35). He is the eternal God, the Creator, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and Holy Spirit (John 1:1-14; Col. 1:15-20; Phil. 2:5-11; Heb. 1:1-13). Jesus died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3), rose physically from the dead (Matt. 12:38-40; Rom. 1:4; 1 Cor. 15:4-8; 1 Peter 1:18-21) and is coming back physically and visibly one day (Matt. 24:29-31; John 14:3; Titus 2:13; Rev. 19:11-16).

What Hinduism says about Jesus:

Jesus was a teacher of Hinduism, a guru of the past whom Christians greatly misunderstand. He was neither the unique God-man nor our Savior. In fact, many modern Hindu leaders ignore, ridicule or condemn Jesus as a false Messiah, describing Him as “a mental case ... a fanatic ... a fascist ... a salesman” (Rajneesh). He also is called a “false idol” and “a perversion of the truth” (Da Free John).

What the Bible says about salvation:

Christ’s death at Calvary completely paid our sin debt so that salvation comes by grace alone through faith in the person and work of Jesus (John 3:16, 5:24; Rom. 4:4-5; 1 Cor. 15:1-4; Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; 1 John 1:7).

What Hinduism says about salvation:

There is no clear concept of salvation in Hinduism. *Moksha* – freedom from infinite being and selfhood, and final realization of the truth – is the goal of existence. The paths to *moksha* are *dharma marga*, or the way of works; *inana marga*, or the way of knowledge; and *bhakti marga*, or the way of love and devotion. Hindus hope one day to get off the cycle of reincarnation. The illusion of personal existence will end and they will become one with the impersonal God.

What the Bible says about the Bible:

The Bible is the inerrant, infallible, inspired Word of God, and is His sole written authority for all people (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21).

What Hinduism says about the Bible:

The essence of Hinduism is not to be found in the Bible, but in writings such as the *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabhrada*, *Vedangas*, *Puranas*, *Darshanas*, *Sutras* and *Tantras*.

Comparing Christianity and Hinduism

What the Bible says about man:

God created man in His image – with a human spirit, personality and will. A person’s life begins at conception and is everlasting, but not eternal; that is, our lives have no end, but they did have a distinct beginning (Gen. 1:26-28; Ps. 139:13-16).

What Hinduism says about man:

The eternal soul (*atman*) of man is a “spark” of Brahman mysteriously trapped in the physical body. Many reincarnations are required before the soul may be liberated from the body. The physical body is an illusion (*maya*) with little permanent value. Bodies generally are cremated at death, and the eternal soul goes to an intermediate state of punishment or reward before rebirth in another body.

What the Bible says about sin:

Sin is a violation of God’s perfect and holy standards. All humans are sinners (Rom. 3:10) and are under the curse of sin – spiritual and physical death (Gen. 2:17, 3:17-19; Rom. 3:23). Only faith in Christ and His work on our behalf frees us from sin and its consequences (John 3:16, 5:24; Eph. 2:8-9).

What Hinduism says about sin:

Hindus have no concept of rebellion against a holy God since God (Brahman) is impersonal and unknowable. Ignorance of unity with Brahman, desire, and violation of *dharma* (one’s social duty) are humanity’s problems.

What the Bible says about death:

Physical and spiritual deaths come upon all people as a consequence of their sin (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 3:23; Eph. 2:1). A person becomes spiritually alive when he or she is “born again” by the Spirit of God (John 3:3-6; Eph. 2:1-5). At physical death, our souls and spirits separate from our bodies [which go into the grave to await resurrection and final judgment] and enter an everlasting state of blessedness [for those born again] or torment [for those who die in their sins] (Luke 16:19-31; 2 Cor. 5:8).

What Hinduism says about death:

Death is the freeing of the soul (*atman*) from the body. The *atman* goes to an intermediate state of reward or punishment as it awaits rebirth in another body. The cycle of death and rebirth goes on indefinitely until the *atman* reaches *moksha*, in which the illusion of personal existence ends and the soul becomes one with the impersonal God.

What the Bible says about heaven and hell:

Hell is a place of everlasting conscious existence, where the unbeliever is forever separated from God (Matt. 25:46; Luke 16:19-31; Rev. 14:9-11, 20:10). As for Heaven, all believers have God’s promise of a home in Heaven, will go there instantly upon physical death, and will return with Christ from Heaven to earth one day (Luke 16:19-31; John 14:1-3; 2 Cor. 5:8; Rev. 19:11-16).

What Hinduism says about heaven and hell:

Neither heaven nor hell exists in the biblical sense. Since reality is but an illusion, the goal of man is to achieve *moksha*, ending the cycle of reincarnation so the soul becomes one with the impersonal God. There is no eternal reward or punishment; however, an individual’s present life is determined by the law of *karma* – actions, words and thoughts in previous lifetimes.