

An Introduction to Hinduism

Introduction

The influence of Hinduism on American Culture

Vedantic Hinduism vs. Polytheistic Hinduism

Vedantic

- based on the Vedas which are the Sacred writings of the Hindus
- very philosophical

Polytheistic Hinduism

- Developed later in the history of Hinduism
- Denies a single infinite God in favor of many finite Gods
- Includes Temple Worship, Rituals and sacrifices

The World View of Vedantic Hinduism

Part 1: The Hindu view of God

- God is Absolute Reality; God is the World and all that is in it
- God is not a person
- God is above reason and logic
- God is the source of both Good & Evil

Part 2: The View of Man

- Man is part of the Absolute, but doesn't know it
- Human life is governed by fate
- The Caste System
- Reincarnation
- The Body – being trapped inside the body is not a good thing

Part 3: The View of Sin & Salvation

- Evil – an illusion
- Sin – the closest thing in Hinduism is ignorance of the Absolute (Brahman)
- Salvation is by Good Works
- Nirvana – the goal of Salvation is to escape the body and become one with the Absolute, at which point, you will no longer be an individual (in the same way a drop disappears when it falls into the ocean)

Quick Comparison with the Judaeo-Christian Worldview

1. The Scriptural View of God
2. The Scriptural View of History
3. The Scriptural View of Man
4. Salvation by Grace, not Works
5. The Origin of Pantheism & Polytheism
6. The Goodness of the Body

Glossary of Terms

Avatar

The 3 primary gods of Polytheistic Hinduism are Brahma – the creator, Vishnu – the preserver, and Shiva – the destroyer. Each of these can visit the earth in many forms, known as avatars. An avatar is not truly human. The Christian view on the incarnation is quite different, since through the Incarnation, God acquires a genuine human nature in addition to His infinite divine nature. The polytheistic deities are typically avatars of the 3 primary gods of polytheistic Hinduism.

Caste System

A Caste is a layer in Hindu Society. The 4 castes, from highest to lowest are:

- Brahmins (Priests, Teachers, Scholars)*
- Kshatriyas (Kings and Warriors)*
- Vaishyas (Traders)*
- Sudras (farmers and other workers)*

There is another group called the Untouchables,

You don't get to pick your caste – you are born into it. It is believed that birth into the castes depends on your accumulated good works. You don't get to Nirvana unless you are born as a Brahmin.

Karma

The record of all the good works (or bad works) that you have done. The way you are born in the next life (as a human, animal, etc) will depend on your Karma.

Monism

The view that all of reality is one, i.e. that there is only one Being, not many. God and the Universe, people included, are just one thing. Hinduism is monistic. The opposite of monism is metaphysical pluralism. Christianity is pluralistic (metaphysical pluralism, not religious pluralism), holding that there are many things, and that God and the Creation are different beings.

Pantheism

There is no difference between the Universe and God. They are 2 ways of understanding the same thing. God is the world, and the world is God. Pantheism is a form of metaphysical monism.

Polytheism

The view that there are many gods that influences the world. These gods are finite, and there is no single infinite god.

Reincarnation

The belief that after death, the human soul is reborn in a new body, which maybe human or animal. The new life of the soul will depend on how much good works were accumulated by the person in the previous life. Reincarnation ends only when the soul is fully enlightened and reaches Nirvana

Worldview

How one views reality. It is a set of things we believe, through which we view the world/reality. There are many worldviews. Each worldview is similar to how red colored glasses change the way the world appears to us. People with different worldviews will understand the world differently. The worldview we hold not only changes the way we see things but the way we live – our morality, our goals, our priorities, etc are also included in our worldview. It is possible for us to change our worldview.