



## The Essence of Hinduism—Glimpses into Hindu Chaplaincy

Hinduism is like a confederation of many religions with a variety of religious traditions and schools of thoughts all blended harmoniously and bound by the common bond of ‘Dharma’, its characteristic attitude towards life. From the high spiritual flights of the Vedanta Philosophy to the low ideas of idolatry with its multifarious mythology, the apparent agnosticism of the Buddhists, each and all have a place in Hinduism. All believe, **“Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within, by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy—by one or more, or all of these—and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines or dogmas or rituals or books or temples or forms are but secondary details”**.

### The Main Tenets

The common centre towards which the divergent schools of thoughts & practices converge can be found by examining the main tenets.

The Hindus have received their religion over thousands of years through revelations, the *Vedas*, the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws experienced in different times by different *Rishis*, the perfected beings, and the seers of truth (some of them were women). These laws governing moral, ethical, and spiritual relations between soul and soul and between individual spirit and God are eternal and ever fresh.

**1. Relation between God and His Creation:** The Creation and the Creator are without beginning and without end. God is ever active providence by whose power, systems after systems are being evolved, made to run for a time and again destroyed.

**2. *Jivatma*—The Individual Soul:** The Vedic answer to the eternal question “who am I” is “I am the spirit living in a body”.

**3. Theory of Karma & Transmigration:** Our everyday life’s experience testifies that people are born with different tendencies with different mental traits and physical appearances. Since tendencies are created by habit and habits are acquired through repetitions in action, the tendencies in a new-born must have come down from past lives. Apart from the body and mind, which are subject to change, there is the individual soul (*Jivatma*) that does not change. The soul, in association with these

tendencies, is passed on to a new body which is best suited to express that tendency. This is how **reincarnation** takes place following the laws of *Karma* according to which there is a cause behind every effect, i.e., the present is determined by our past actions, and the future by the present. The reason we do not remember our past lives is because our consciousness operates only on the surface of the mental ocean, and within its depths (in the sub-conscious) are stored all our experiences. If we learnt how to calm the surface waves of the mental ocean, the various depths of the ocean of memory would be revealed to us and we would get a complete reminiscence of our past lives.

**4. Maya—the Concept of Basic Ignorance:** Even though each person is in essence a spirit--eternally free, pure and perfect--somehow or other it finds itself tied down by *maya*—mistaking itself as the body & mind. This mistaken identity is *maya*.

**5. Liberation:** The Vedas teach us that the soul is divine but held in bondage to matter. One can break this bond, come out of the chain of *Maya*—the prison of ‘Cause and Effect’ and be free through the grace of God. God reveals Himself only to the pure in heart. As to His nature, God is everywhere, almighty, pure consciousness and eternal truth. He may be worshipped in the form of *Isvara* (personal God with form, the Creator of the cosmos) or *Brahman* (the formless impersonal God, the Universal Soul). The spiritual practice, therefore, may take a **dualistic** approach (that considers *Jivatma* and *Brahman* as eternally separate), or the **non-dualistic/monistic** approach (that considers *Jivatma* as essentially the same as *Brahman* or God), or **qualified dualism or qualified monism** (*Jivatma is qualitatively the same as Brahman but quantitatively infinitesimally smaller*).

## 6. The Spiritual Practices

Spiritual practices may take predominantly a path of devotion, or of detachment from the fruit of one’s action, or of discrimination between what is permanent and what is not. Love and purity of mind are essential prerequisites. Beginning with external worship using *Mantra* (a word or sound) and *Murti* (images or forms associated with the idea of holiness, purity, truth, omnipresence, and such ideas), one progresses to the next stage of mental prayer & contemplation towards the highest stage when the Lord has been realised. In this state, one’s consciousness of oneself melts away and merges into the universal consciousness. Then all multiplicity and duality merge into ultimate unity, and one sees that the Personal God (*Isvara*) and the Impersonal Absolute (*Brahman*) are one and the same—existence absolute, knowledge absolute, and bliss absolute. **Religion in Hinduism is not just believing, it is being and becoming.**

## 7. Relationship to Other Religions

The Vedas declared, “Reality is one, but the sages call It by different names”. The Bhagavad Geeta says, “In whatever manner humans approach Me, I favour them in

that very manner. In all ways humans follow My path". "Whichever form (of a deity) the devotees want to worship with faith, that very firm faith of theirs I strengthen."

Naturally, the Hindus view all religions to be valid paths leading to the feet of the Lord for the sincere spiritual aspirants. "Devotees follow these diverse paths, straight or crooked, according to their different tendencies. Yet, O Lord, thou alone art the ultimate goal of all men, as the ocean is the goal of all rivers".

### **Selected Places of Worship in Sydney**

*Ramakrishna Sarada Vedanta Society of NSW*

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15 Liverpool Road, Croydon 2132

*Vedanta Centre of Sydney*

Phone: (02) 8197 7351

vedasydney@gmail.com

144A Marsden Rd, Ermington 2115

*Hare Krishna ISKCON Temple Sydney*

Phone: (02) 9959 4558

info@iskcon.com.au

180 Falcon St, North Sydney 2060

*Sri Venkateswara Temple*

Phone: 1300 626 663

Temple Rd, Helensburgh 2508

*Mukti-Gupteshwar Mandir*

Phone: (02) 9824 7886

203 Eagleview Rd, Minto 2566

*Shree Swaminarayan Temple*

Phone: 02) 8814 8597

1-3 Tasha Place, Kings Park 2148

*Sydney Murugan Temple*

Phone: (02) 9687 1695

217 Great Western Hwy, Mays Hill 2145

**(For further info and companionship in your Journey towards Strength, Freedom, Knowledge and Peace through discourses, meditative exercises, counselling, and group activities, Contact Hindu Chaplain Dr Ashit Mohan Maitra on M 0405 657 257, E ammaitra@gmail.com)**