



Hinduism

What is a Hindu?

A Hindu is a person who practices the teachings of the Vedas and recognises that the ways and means of union with the supreme God are diverse. Hindus realise that although many representations of God exist, God is still one.

The religion is practiced by the people from India but it does not mean that all Indians are Hindus. Neither does it mean that all Hindus are Indian. The practices of Hindus are varied. It is possible to distinguish some Hindus by the way they dress or through marks on their foreheads e.g. the Aayapans wear black clothes and have a black dot on their forehead; worshippers of Lord Shiva sometimes mark their forehead with three lines of holy ash; Lord Krishna worshippers may have a U-shaped yellow mark on their forehead and may even sometimes wear saffron robes; worshippers of Swami Narayan may mark their foreheads with a red dot.

The majority of Hindus in the United Kingdom follow the ancient traditions of going to Temples and having a shrine at home. Following traditional Hindu practices varies. At festival times, most Hindus will celebrate by visiting Temples.



What does a Hindu believe?

The main beliefs of a Hindu are

- ◆ Gods have appeared at various times through the ages when there has been a need and will continue to incarnate.
- ◆ The law of Karma means you will reap what you sow. What you are enjoying in this life is a direct result of your past deeds, either in this life or in previous ones.

◆ Reincarnation.

Hindus believe that the soul is immortal and when you die, you will be reborn until you have equalised the good and bad Karma.

- ◆ Everyone will attain union with God once the Karma has been equalised. The means of equalising the Karma is through doing good deeds, prayers and service to mankind.

- ◆ All are equal; the soul within everyone is the same. It is the journey of the soul from one form to another that defines what form we are.





Since all are equal, Hindus consider taking away of any life is wrong.

How does a Hindu worship?

The Vedas declared that the most auspicious times for prayers were during the early hours of the morning.

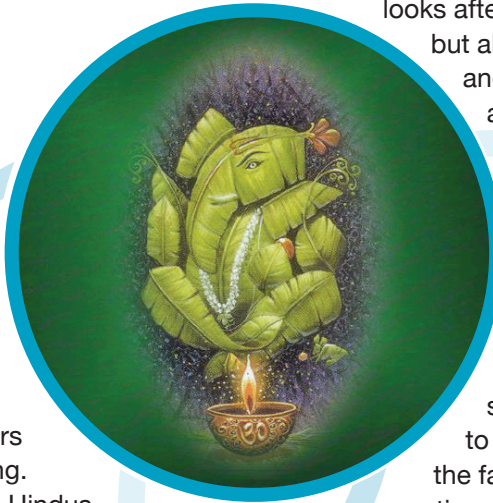
All practicing Hindus will consciously try and do their prayers during the mornings either at their home or in a Temple. As part of the prayers some meditation is also performed. As constant repetition of Gods' name also removes bad Karma, Hindus are encouraged to remember God at every moment.

Prayers consist of chants, hymns and/or reading religious texts/scriptures.

How does a Hindu live?

The Vedas offer a complete system of living and define how a person should lead their entire life. The Vedas define four stages of a person's life:

◆ Brahmacharya (Student Life). This stage is for non-distractions, self-control and preparation for life.



◆ Grihastha (Family Life). At this stage a person carries out duties to family, society and nation. The person not only looks after their spouse and children but also the parents, grandparents and other relations (this can also include the neighbours).

This is where the concept of service to mankind starts from home and extended family is defined.

◆ Vanaprastha (Retirement). This is the stage where the person starts to slow down, starts to pass responsibilities to the younger members of the family, starts to detach and to practice meditation

◆ Sanyasa (Preparation for Salvation). This is the stage where one has completely detached from worldly bondages and desires and the only attachment is towards God.

Who leads Hindus?

Priests who are trained in the Vedic practices lead services at the Temple. The priests attend a special school where they are taught the ancient sacred texts, chants and their meanings and how to conduct prayers. Traditionally the priests came from the Brahmin caste. As the Hindu religion is vast and the practices are varied, there is no single head of the worldwide Hindu community.