

HINDUISM

BASIC BELIEF Hindus worship one Supreme Reality, called by many names. Hinduism accepts all genuine spiritual paths; each soul is free to find his own way, whether by devotion, meditation, or selfless service. Hindus believe that all life is sacred and practice ahimsa (nonviolence). They believe in karma, the law by which each individual creates his own destiny. Hindus believe that no particular religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others, all deserve tolerance and understanding. **Symbol** OM represents supreme God and its origin is from Vedas.



BACKGROUND Historically, Hinduism is considered one of the world's oldest religions; it has no single human founder. Rather, it consists of a vast variety of beliefs and practices. Hinduism hardly fits most Western definitions of religion, rather, it suggests commitment to or respect for an ideal way of life, known as Dharma. This would conform to the 4 philosophical values as defined by the sages: **psycho-physical values,**

economic values, moral values and spiritual values. The Hindu scriptures consists of several books, among them four Vedas, the Upanishads and the Brahma Sutra. World Hindu population 850 million, mostly in India and scattered all over the world.

CUSTOMS AND PEOPLE Most Hindus on LI wear contemporary clothes, however, many will change into their traditional clothes when at home or among friends. Exception are priests, who wear white or saffron colored robes and keep their hair long. Most Hindus are strict vegetarians but there are some who eat meat, fish, goat meat and chicken but they do not eat beef and pork. Hindus do not consume alcohol. They adhere to Vedic

and Sanatana-dharma rules incumbent on all moral beings; honesty courage, service, faith, self-control, purity and nonviolence. Famous Hindus include Mahatma Gandhi-statesman and Jawaharlal Nehru - Prime Minister. Social action on LI is expressed through feeding the hungry and homeless and in community issues.

STRUCTURE The spiritual leader of each community is the Guru whose primary task is that of teacher. The priest of the congregation also teaches, but in addition also performs ceremonies, interprets scriptures and informally resolves family problems. Both Guru and priest must go through a rigorous training period which includes apprenticeship and monastic life, before being considered fit to hold official spiritual positions. They

are then chosen by the congregation's Board of Directors, a group elected by the congregation. Many of the branches have no higher or central religious authority. Funds for congregational needs are raised from donations and fund raising events.

MAJOR HOLY DAYS Deepavali (Festival of lights) is the Hindu New Year. It is celebrated for 5 days in October or November. Homes are decorated with lit earthenware lamps. It is celebrated with worship, family gatherings and the distribution of sweets and gifts to children. The Dussehra Festival, one day in October, celebrates the victory of Good over Evil. It is based on the oldest epic of India, the defeat of Ravana, an

arrogant, warrior, by Rama. Day is celebrated with burning Ravana in effigy. Other major holy days are Holi, Ram Navami, Ganesh Chaturthi, Hanuman Jayanti and Gokul Ashthami. All are celebrated with big gatherings.

WORSHIP Mandir, Ashram, Gurukul and Arya Samaj are some of the names used for the Hindu house of worship. the prayer room is covered with carpets, there are no seats or benches. Interiors range from austere to lavish. Some have altars, many have statues of some of the 1000 Hindu Gods and pictures of Gurus. Services are held daily, conducted by priest and his assistant. They are held at specific times or at the

request of worshippers and may last up to one hour. They include chanting of Sanskrit verses from the Vedas and may also include offerings of fruit, flowers and sweets. Visitors are welcome to the temple. Shoes should be removed before entering the temple.

SAYINGS OF THE FAITH

Truth alone wins or truth prevails. This mantra is from an Upanishad of the Atharva Veda. It has been written below the national emblem of India.

Let your mother be God. Let your father be God. Let your teacher be God. Let your guest be God. The Taittiriya Upanishad (According to the Hindu scriptures, God loves, nourishes and cares for you through your parents. He provide knowledge to you through your teachers. He sends blessings to you through your elders and guests).