

HINDUISM – OR CHRISTIANITY

A young man with dark hair, wearing a grey hoodie and dark pants, is sitting on a concrete ledge. He is leaning back against a rough, textured wall and looking off to the right with a thoughtful expression. The background is a blurred urban setting with buildings and trees under bright, natural light.

Which might be
the best route
to happiness and
eternal life?



The purpose of this booklet

In this booklet, we're seeking to address two types of reader. The first wants answers to the key questions of existence, the prospect of lasting happiness in this world and the possibility of an after-life. This person is wondering whether faith can answer them and as part of that, is considering Hinduism as one of the three big world religions, the others being Christianity and Islam.

The second kind of possible reader is a long-standing Hindu but wants to address their faith afresh. Over 85% of the world isn't Hindu. Have these people got it wrong? Is there anything a Hindu can learn from other faiths – or from not having a faith at all? And does Hinduism really address the 'Why am I alive', 'What's my purpose in life' and 'Does my life matter?' questions that define who we are?

To both kinds of readers, welcome. First, let's be clear: we will here be addressing these questions from a Christian perspective. If your interest is in Islam, we've done so in a similar way in a separate booklet. If you're a Hindu or considering the claims of Hinduism against those of Christianity, then hopefully you'll find this booklet interesting and useful, even if you don't necessarily agree with everything in it.

Throughout, our intention is to explain things as factually as we can. We want to do so at the same time as expressing the greatest respect for the Hindu religion and the people who practice it. It is a great religion practiced by many wonderful people throughout the world. But is it true? And does Christianity make any more sense in comparison? That's what we're here to find out.

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- questions that define who we are

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Religion or Relationship?

Religion is an apparatus that human beings create so they can know god - under terms that feel good to them. That's why there are hundreds of religions, each of which claims to provide a platform allowing you to communicate with a deity under your own terms. Each one states that if you do this or do that as they recommend, you will please that deity and, ultimately, earn your way to some kind of pleasurable after-life.

Hinduism (like its neighbour Islam) is no different. One of its central principles is 'karma' - that an individual's actions and thoughts directly determine the status of that individual's current life as well as that individual's future lives. A follower can achieve salvation in Hinduism by detaching from the material world and accepting the overriding unity of all things with the one universal soul—Brahman.

So in short, it's all about you.

You might also have seen Christianity as being all about you. That's certainly the way many who profess to be 'Christians' practice their faith around the world; as with religion, their 'Christianity' is basically founded on what they do – going to church, giving financially, helping the poor – whatever.

But you don't have to read the Bible for very long to realise that this is not the kind of Christianity that Jesus Christ came to tell us about. As He preached it, there is absolutely *nothing* we can do to make ourselves 'good' with God – and nothing we can do to earn our salvation. It's not about what *we* can do for God but all about what God has done for *us*, sending Jesus to die for our sins so that we could be made right in God's sight.

Jesus also presented God as our heavenly Father. Jesus wanted to help his followers understand that God desires a relationship with those who believe in Him. Christianity is not just about do's and don'ts, but about the relationship between a loving father and his children.

This changes the motivation of the believer; we don't obey God or honour God because we are scared of Him or out of routine practices but because we love our heavenly Father and we want to honour Him by doing what He is asking from us.



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We need to understand that God is just, which means He has to punish sin by death but at the same time He loves humans and wants to save them. So, in His great love Jesus became the sacrifice who bore the sin of humans and satisfied God's justice by dying on the cross. Therefore, the penalty that humans had to pay for their sins, Jesus paid it on their behalf. He died because He is human and conquered death because He is God. Making His sacrifice the only right sacrifice that could give us eternal life and free us from death.

He invites us to a relationship with the heavenly Father, through Himself, by making us children of God.

In all these respects, Christianity doesn't conform to the usual definitions of a 'religion'. There are other fundamental differences too – not only with Hinduism but with every other world religion.



Pointing the way to God

World religions offer up people or created divine beings that aim in different ways to point people towards God. Let's look at Hinduism as an example.

The supreme Hindu god is Brahma, who is believed to be the ultimate force existing in all things. However, most Hindus worship additional divine beings, who take on separate forms but who are each part of Brahman's singular universal force.

Some of the most prominent deities representing Brahman include:

- **Brahma:** the god who created the universe and all living things
- **Vishnu:** the god who preserves the universe
- **Shiva:** the god who destroys the universe to prepare for its renewal

But in Christianity, you come across a founder, Jesus Christ, who never claimed merely to point followers *towards* God: He said He **WAS** God. That might sound a small difference; but it's seismic. Again, no other world faith founder dares or has ever dared to claim *that* because such a claim is huge: the claimant is either mad, or evil – or he speaks the truth. Those are the only three options. And if He speaks the truth, that changes everything.

Death: the key to understanding life – and the After-Life

It's a true saying that to answer the key questions of life, you have first to answer the key questions of death – then work backwards.

So what do you think happens when you die? All religions have their own view on the route to a pleasurable after-life. And these are all based on the teachings of religious founders who lived at various times back in history, people now dead, none of whom ever claimed to have risen again or in any way defeated the death they tried to teach their followers to navigate through.

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Hinduism is no different. Most Hindus follow the laws and texts of the Vedas whereby the first vedas Rig-Veda is believed to have been composed more than ten thousand years ago. Another set of texts named the Puranas (which mean 'ancient') are believed to have been written to give the fundamentals of how the Hindu Gods have organized the destiny of individuals.

They teach that if a follower of Hinduism behaves well in this life, that follower will improve his conditions in his next reincarnated life. Likewise, if the follower behaves poorly in this life, he will worsen his condition in his future reincarnation. With each reincarnation, Hindus hope to reach a way of living that embodies proper conduct and morality. The goal of Hinduism is to achieve salvation, at which point an individual's soul stops reincarnating. Once salvation is reached, the saved soul becomes part of what Hindus believe is the one absolute soul (Brahman) that binds all other souls.

Again, Christianity is rather different. Its founder alone claims to have risen from the dead, a happening corroborated by all kinds of credible historical documents. Even if you choose to discount those, it's a completely unique claim – and an important one. Are you going to trust your whole existence to a faith founded by someone who merely *claimed* to know a path they thought might lie through and beyond death? Or will you choose a faith founded by someone who claimed to have completely *defeated* it?

But there's much more. The Bible says that that the *important* death – the one that determines your eternal existence – isn't the one that happens at the end of your life when your body shuts down. What the Bible talks about instead is quite a

different kind of death, not of your body but of yourself. Dying to the life you used to control yourself; and being 'born again' into a life you try and live under the control of Christ.

Human beings generally rebel completely against that. In our minds, our life is the one thing we own absolutely. The whole idea of giving it to someone else or giving someone else complete control of it is repellent. Which is why most of humanity either chooses to believe nothing, or instead selects a religion with a set of rules that, if followed, retains for them ultimate control over their life; and an apparent 'certainty' that when they die - or are reincarnated - God will 'have' to accept them.



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Are there real consequences for the wrong things we do?

By and large, religion teaches not: that's why human beings create it. There's an old fashioned word 'atonement', which means making good for wrongdoing – trying to make things right – or at least recognise wrong. The Hindu teaching about grace sees no need for 'atonement' for wrongdoing (what the Bible calls 'sin'), but simply offers forgiveness, without any recognition of the judgment on sin required by a holy God.

In contrast, the Christian Gospel says clearly that God the Son became a man, died a sacrificial death on the cross, making real forgiveness of real sins against the real God possible to those who place complete trust in Christ. All who do so can experience true forgiveness, know God and His purpose for their lives, and have the certainty of eternal life with Him.

Suffering - and a loving God?

Whether or not you're a Hindu, it would be surprising if at some point you hadn't questioned this. It's a true saying that 'hurt people hurt people'. Which in turn across the world leads every day to almost unimaginable suffering. How can a loving God allow that? Alone among all religions, the Bible answers this by explaining that this must be so if God is to give us free will: He had to if we were to be given the chance to freely choose Him.

The alternative would have been to make us like robots – and that would have given us no choice at all about our life – and our eternal destiny. We can use that opportunity to choose either to know God; or to reject Him – and hurt those around us. But we have to be free to choose if the choice we make is to really be a choice. If God is really to be just, He cannot judge us (as one day He will when we stand before Him) if we haven't first been given the opportunity to choose to follow Him – or to reject Him.

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Creation – can we know?

If you're going to commit your life to a religion, ideally you would want that religion to know how Creation came about – and what its purpose was. The Hindu scriptures seem unsure on this point.

The origins of the universe are explained in different ways in the Hindu scriptures. In one place, it says that a lotus flower grew from Lord Vishnu's navel with Brahma sitting on it. Brahma separated the flower into three parts - the heavens, the Earth and the sky. Then out of loneliness, Brahma split himself into two to create a male and a female and from this male and female, all beings were created. Another story makes reference to life coming from the cracking of an enormous egg,



which is the life from which the universe is born. Then again there's the Hymn of Creation from the Rig Veda, which concludes that nobody knows how the universe came into being - and even questions whether Brahman knows.

What about the Bible? Well it states that 'in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth' (Gen 1v1); and that its purpose was to display His glory (Isaiah 43v7, Isaiah 60v20 & Romans 11v36).

Let's fast-forward to the times we live in now. Do the scriptures in Hinduism and Christianity correspond with what we see around us in the modern day? In Hindu mythology, we're told that the earth is supported by four elephants standing on the back of a turtle. The Hindu deity Vishnu was reincarnated as the turtle Kachhapa that carried the weight of the world on its back.

In contrast, what does the Bible say? Quite a lot. In Job 26v7, it says that the earth 'hangs on nothing'; in Psalms (written 3000 years ago) in 19:4, it talks about the sun moving round the heavens (the ancients thought the sun was either still or went round the earth). In Isaiah (written 2700 years ago) in 40:22 it says that the earth is round: lest we forget, we live only two centuries after people laughed at anyone who thought it wasn't flat.

All of these things were written in the Bible hundreds or thousands of years before scientists discovered them. And since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in Qumran in 1947, we know that the Bible text we have today is almost exactly the same as those original ancient scriptures. In which case how did those who wrote those original scriptures know to write these things if God was not inspiring them? If you dismiss the Bible, then this is a question you have to answer.



“The earth hangs
on nothing”

Job 26v7

More than one way to God?

If you've read this far, you might well have changed your perception of Christianity and religion. And that's great, but it won't actually change anything about your life if nothing you believe really changes.

There can't logically be more than one way to God: there *is* only one right answer to a sum. All the other answers are wrong, even if some of them are closer to being the correct answer than others. Jesus Christ was very clear about this: 'No one comes to the Father except by me'. He loves Hindus; He loves all people. And He gives them the life they've been given the opportunity of living so that they have the opportunity to put His claims to the test.

What it all means in the end

Of all faith founders, only Jesus Christ claimed to BE God: only He claimed to rise from the dead: and only He said what deep down we all know. That no religious action, no religious practice, no religious gift is enough to make us right with the God in control of all Creation: there IS nothing we can do in ourselves. It is all about what He has done for us. And whether we choose to accept it.

Hindu Testimony

"I was born into an orthodox or puranic hindu family where children are initiated into priesthood by reading the holy texts in sanskrit and performing rituals for prayers. Given my caste, I grew up believing that some human beings are born more privileged than others and that what originates from India and from the Ganges river are the purest form of godliness. This fostered some discriminatory perceptions about others, whilst I was growing up in a cosmopolitan country.

Since childhood I always felt uncomfortable with the fact that performance and accuracy in the rituals were required to approach God and to obtain his favour. If something bad was happening in someone's life, it was surely because something was lacking in the prayers. There is also a Hindu concept where the gods may be unsatisfied and that the stars are not working right, which requires another set of rituals and prayers to adjust.

The notion of sin and God being holy and righteous had never really hit me and I had always conceived the idea that what I did aside from practicing the rituals would not interfere with my eligibility before the gods: I was redeeming myself through my own works. I often asked myself what kind of persons were the Hindu gods, did they have feelings or a personality or how did they consider human

beings because in Hinduism there is no such thing as Love, Forgiveness through Grace and adoption as a child of God.

As a young adult I decided I was an atheist because my prayers were not working for my cause and my life was a wreck. I rejected the idea of giving in order to receive an answer or a favour from the gods. This also allowed me to sin without thinking about the consequences.

At the age of twenty, as I was at my lowest psychologically and emotionally, my understanding and experience of God changed. I personally encountered Jesus Christ and realised that yes, everyone can have a personal relationship with Him, be forgiven and redeemed. I was disarmed by so much love that was emanating from His person, and I felt forgiven, brought back to life and light. He is so close to me and at the same time, He is the person of God.'

Meenakshee, Mauritius



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Christianity alone teaches that salvation to heaven is by grace: it's not about what you do: it's about what God has done for you.
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