



Arsha Vidya Sampradaya

Sanatana Dharma or Hinduism – Key principles and practices

Position of Arsha Vidya Teachers

Hinduism – Key principles and practices

Hinduism is Sanatana Dharma

The Hindu religion is the indigenous religion of India. It is unique and different from other religions since it was not founded by any particular person in time.

Hinduism is the third-largest religion and home to the only pre-bronze ancient civilisation alive even today.

It is practiced by more than 1.3 billion people worldwide, living across 150 different countries with a majority in India

Hinduism is a vision of oneness, a complete way of life, a body of wisdom, a culture and a religion.

The key principles of Hinduism are

Key principles of Hinduism

1. Hindus have shraddha, trust in the validity of the divine *Vedas*, revealed directly by Bhagavan/God to the Rishis.

Vedas are the foundation of Sanaatana Dharma, the eternal religion which has neither a beginning nor an end.

Related scriptures to the Vedas such as Vedangas, Itihaasa (Ramayana and Mahabharata), Puraanas and Agamaas are valid and sacred.

2. Hindus recognise that ‘There is no one God or many Gods. There is only God.’ – Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati.

All forms living and non-living are forms of God or Bhagavan. God is both immanent (present in and through forms) and transcendent (untouched by the forms), both Jagat karta, Creator and Brahman, Limitless Reality.

No Hindu worships idols. Recognising the inherent divinity, Hindus may be seen to worship murtis, rivers, mountains, trees, people etc. No form is outside the purview of Bhagavan.

3. Hindus believe in karma, the law of cause and effect by which each individual contributes to his/her own destiny by thoughts, words and deeds across one’s life and lifetimes.

Karma aligned with Dharma bestows punya (invisible credits which contribute to sukha, happy experiences).

Karma not aligned with dharma bestows paapa (invisible points which contribute to dukkha, unhappy experiences)

4. Hindus see that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered and therefore practice Dharma.

Dharma is the guiding framework for all karma, be it pursuit of Artha, wealth or Kaama, pleasure.

Karma is done by the practice of the universal values of Dharma (ahimsa – non-injury, satyam-truth, aparigraha- absence of ownership, damah-discipline, shaucham-cleanliness, daya-compassion, kaushalam – competence, santosha-contentment etc)

Dharma makes all happy.

5. Devatas, divine beings exist and their presence and blessings can be invoked. Puja, Prayers, temple worship, rituals and devotion strengthens our relations with them and blessings flow in our lives.

6. Hindus recognise that Avataaras, divine reincarnations appear on earth from time to time, cyclically, to restore Dharma.

7. Hindus believe that the person reincarnates across many births. The cycle of birth and death continues across lifetimes until moksha, liberation while living(self-knowledge) is gained through self-knowledge.

8. There are diverse sampradayas in Hinduism which are different in the deity worshipped and the devotional practices. All are valid approaches.

9. Hindus believe that a spiritually awakened master, or guru is essential for learning about God as are personal discipline, good conduct, purification, pilgrimage, self-enquiry and meditation.

10. Hindus recognise that the universe undergoes endless cycles of manifestation, sustenance and dissolution.

11. Hindus believe that all religions do not lead to same goal but recognise that all forms of worship are valid and can lead one to recognise the ultimate reality.

The essential practices of Hinduism are based on the vision of Hinduism and its key principles. These are –

Essential practices of Hinduism –

1.Dharma or Virtuous living – Performing one’s own Dharma, is an important part of a Hindu’s life. How can one know one’s Svadharma?

Svadharma is a combination of Samanya Dharma (values)+Vishesha Dharma (responsibilities according to mental disposition in terms of three gunas, age and stage of life)+ Panchamahayajna (offerings to devatas, deities, pitrs, ancestors, gurus, bhutas, plants and animals and manushyah, other humans)

Hindus learn to discover and live their svadharma by practising the values of Dharma in their responsibilities across different family and social roles. No one is too big to receive and no one is too small to contribute in Ishvara srshti.

2. Puja and prayer - Hindus learn to perform daily puja, worship in the family puja corner or room. Puja and participation in yajnas, fire ritual offerings deepens the connection with Bhagavan. Additionally, Rituals, Disciplines, Chants, Bhajans, Ashtanga yoga blesses the Hindu with strength to deal with anything in life.

3. Utsavas, Festivals - Hindus look forward to Utsavas, festivals which are sacred days throughout the year.

Some of these are Makara Sankranti, Mahashivaratri, Holi, Rama-navami, Shankara Jayanti, Guru Purnima, Krishna Janmashtami, Ganesha Chaturthi, Navaratri and Deepavali.

Utsavas, festivals are celebrated through yajnas, pujas, vratams, fasting, food offerings and feasting on the vast range of culinary delights that can only be found in India. The theme of many festivals is the celebration of Dharma over Adharma. Our glorious festivals keep the value for Dharma and the prayerfulness in our hearts alive.

4. Teerthayatra, Pilgrimages – At least once a year, Hindus travel for darshana, vision of temples, sacred places and gurus, near or far. The sacred geography of Bharat has temples such as the jyotirlingas (dedicated to Shiva), divya deshams (dedicated to Vishnu), shakti-peethas (dedicated to Devi), Ganapati temples and so much more. We go to have ‘darshan’, direct vision of the deity which is a blessing. Sacred rivers and sacred mountains are also visited. The journey is as much inward as outward, deepening one’s love for Ishvara and trust in the process of life.

5.Samskaras, Sacraments marking rites of passage

Hindus observe the many sacraments, samskaaras which mark and sanctify our passage through important stages of life from birth to death. Different rituals and prayers are associated with each samskaaras and are performed by elders of the family and or a pandit. These are :

- ❖ 1. Garbhadhana – conception ceremony,
- ❖ 2. Pumsavana – Ceremony for begetting a child,
- ❖ 3. Simantonnayana – Ritual of parting the mother’s hair above the forehead (in the 6th/8th month of pregnancy for wellbeing of the mother and child),
- ❖ 4. Jatakarma – Birth ceremony (prayers for health, strength and longevity of the child),
- ❖ 5. Namakarana – Naming ceremony (around the 11th day after the birth of the child),

- ❖ 6. Nishkramana – Stepping out of the house during the 3rd or 4th month (to look at the sun and moon deities to seek blessings)
- ❖ 7. Annapraashana – First feeding ceremony (prayers to the plant kingdom and Varuna),
- ❖ 8. Chudakarana – Head shaving ceremony,
- ❖ 9. Karnavedha – Piercing of the ear lobes,
- ❖ 10. Vidyaarambha – Beginning of study in the fifth year by tracing ‘Om’ as symbol in a plate of rice,
- ❖ 11. Upanayana – Brahmopadeshm of the Gayatri mantra and sacred thread ceremony at the 8th year,
- ❖ 12. Samaavartana – Completion of education,
- ❖ 13. Vivaha – Marriage ceremony,
- ❖ 14. Vaanaprastha – Resorting to a forest like place for spiritual studies and meditation
- ❖ 15. Sannyasa – Exclusive pursuit of knowledge and hence renunciation of worldly responsibilities,
- ❖ 16. Antyesthi – Cremation of the body

This, then is a glimpse of Hinduism, Sanatana Dharma, the vision, the complete way of life and the religion by which one has a fulfilling life of purpose and connection.

As Hindus we live in harmony with the world born of the vision of the world being sacred and a manifestation of Bhagavan.

As children of Hinduism, we honor, protect, preserve and defend Dharma by living a life of Sanatana Dharma.

Dharmo rakshati rakshitah – Dharma protects the one who protects it

Om shantih shantih shantih