

Meet Hindus

Have you met someone who says they are a Hindu? The nearly 1 billion Hindus strive for perfectly good lives to achieve a kind of other worldly spiritual existence, an escape from our physical existence. In Hinduism, following a personal guru (leader/teacher) helps a person to be freed from darkness and the evils of life. Many Hindus are looking for true peace, so all life decisions (food, friends, clothes, body) are weighed for their spiritual impact. Key ways to pursue a higher spiritual life include personal purity, external cleansing, mystic disembodiment and specific devotion to a chosen god or goddess.

Most Hindu spiritual and ritual practices emphasize the importance of cultivating ritual cleanliness and mental and spiritual purity. Prayer, worship, meditation, righteous conduct, yoga or austerity are purification practices. Hindu practices aim to purify the person, his or her environment, the world, family, ancestors—getting rid of all that is impure in and around a person. In this way, he or she can become free from bad karma, transgressions, bondage and suffering that are the result of being impure.

Brahman is the supreme being expressed in many gods and goddesses, each of which have unique virtues and vices. Jesus and Mary are acceptable to some modern Hindus as part of the pan-Indian pantheon. There are three major Hindu paths (Shaivism, Vaishnavism and Shaktism) based on three different primary gods.

Many Hindus value hierarchies based on race and caste, believing that certain types of people are naturally purer and more holy. Some also are highly superstitious, skilled at animistic efforts to interact with the spirit world, and they put heavy stock in dreams and divination.

For many Hindus, spirituality is connected to social and class standing. Personal agency and positive life direction are extremely important, as is maintaining social respect. Most Hindus are born into their religious system and often both family threats and spiritual fear hold them to it.

Core values: knowledge, education, karma, respect for spiritual authority, support for spiritual values that are recognized by all authoritative religious traditions.

According to Hindus

Some Hindus will see Christianity as the West's colonizing missionary religion. For many, Jesus could be a good example of a guru who leads to one of many spiritual paths to transcendence. Parts of the Bible

contain meaningful teachings, but other parts are too violent and manifest the evil things of the world. They don't see how Christians can be on the path to light while soaking in darkness. They might add Jesus to their collection of gods.

To Hindus, Christians do not take seriously enough the need for good deeds and a pure life, so they view Christian devotion to Jesus (as a guru or a god) as weak. Some Hindus see Christians as lower-caste people who have sold their long, rich identity heritage for money or handouts. That's because the gospel first came to lower caste Hindus and rarely crossed the boundaries of caste in India. Lower caste Hindus often worked menial jobs in Christian hospitals or schools.

Connecting With Hindus²

So how do you connect with Hindus? Respect their long tradition of spirituality and agree, if necessary, about the colonizing, divisive nature of Christianity's history. Work to isolate conversations about Jesus rather than engaging in religious discussions, and focus on your shared need for peace (with God, spiritual, personal, etc.). Jesus has the power to overcome all evil in the world. He has made clear the way to eternal life. When your Hindu friends are open, you can share how your life is being transformed through Christ by God's Spirit. Pray for God's shielding as you interact with them on these eternal matters.

When talking to Hindus, don't see yourself as a converter but as someone who has found the true Light and wants to share it. Find ways to share how Jesus identifies himself: "Did you know that Jesus calls Himself the Light of the World?" Refer often to Jesus' Way. "Jesus' way has important teachings about peace, too!" or "Jesus' Way gave me hope for spiritual life when I was desperate." You might read with them or share how Jesus the Holy Son of God healed ritually impure people with a simple touch. He could not be made impure by contact with unclean people. Instead, He made them clean and acceptable to God. Explain to them that our whole being is unclean, especially our hearts and minds, and Christ has come to make people righteous and pure from the inside out. He has done this through his life, death and resurrection.

Remember not to make assumptions about your new friends. Try to understand their personal and spiritual stories.

Engage Hindus With Questions Like...

How do you know when you find a path/guru/teaching worth following?

What's your deepest hope/fear in life right now?

Who is the most perfect/best person you've personally known? What are/were they like?

² <https://www.imb.org/2018/10/19/im-a-hindu-and-this-is-what-i-believe/> last accessed 2/20/2020

How does a person transform themselves? May I share how following Jesus changes me? How Jesus purified an unclean woman with just a touch?

May I share why Jesus is different and better than any guru in history?