

Essential Hinduism

Gokulmuthu Narayanaswamy

Essential Hinduism

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Foreword

Swami Vivekananda wants the youth to be strong, determined and full of positive energy. He wants “muscles of iron and nerves of steel”. He wants everyone to be aware of his or her great potential as Atman and wants it to be manifested in every sphere of life.

He says, “Let every man and woman and child, without respect of caste or birth, weakness or strength, hear and learn that behind the strong and the weak, behind the high and the low, behind everyone, there is that Infinite Soul, assuring the infinite possibility and the infinite capacity of all to become great and good. Let us proclaim to every soul: उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत — Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached. Arise, awake! Awake from this hypnotism of weakness. None is really weak; the soul is infinite, omnipotent, and omniscient. Stand up, assert yourself, proclaim the God within you, do not deny Him! Too much of inactivity, too much of weakness, too much of hypnotism has been and is upon our race. O ye modern Hindus, de-hypnotise yourselves. The way to do that is found in your own sacred books. Teach yourselves, teach everyone his real nature, call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.” (CW III-193)

This message will be useful to everyone. Swami Vivekananda says, “These conceptions of the Vedanta must come out, must remain not only in the forest, not only in the cave, but they must come out to work at the

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bar and the bench, in the pulpit, and in the cottage of the poor man, with the fishermen that are catching fish, and with the students that are studying. They call to every man, woman, and child whatever be their occupation, wherever they may be. And what is there to fear! How can the fishermen and all these carry out the ideals of the Upanishads? The way has been shown. It is infinite; religion is infinite, none can go beyond it; and whatever you do sincerely is good for you. Even the least thing well done brings marvellous results; therefore, let everyone do what little he can. If the fisherman thinks that he is the Spirit, he will be a better fisherman; if the student thinks he is the Spirit, he will be a better student. If the lawyer thinks that he is the Spirit, he will be a better lawyer, and so on." (CW III-245)

This book can be used as the contents for a Workshop for youth. It will help them to gain a clear idea of Vedanta and learn to apply it in everyday life. It incorporates both theoretical and practical aspects of Vedanta and how it is implemented in Hinduism. We hope this message will spread wide and deep, and benefit the youth.

Gokulmuthu Narayanaswamy

7-Nov-2018

Deepavali Day.

Shaanti Mantra

Shaanti Mantras are loudly chanted usually at the beginning and end of any lecture, study or meditation session. Loud chanting helps us to switch the context of our mind from whatever we were doing earlier to the current activity. Chanting with our attention on the meaning puts us in the right attitude to think deeply. Here is a popular Shaanti Mantra.

ॐ सह नाववतु ।

सह नौ भुनक्तु ।

सह वीर्यं करवावहै ।

तेजस्वि नावधीतमस्तु ।

मा विद्विषावहै ।

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

Om – The Lord is the personification of all that exists

saha naavavatu – May the Lord protect us

saha nau bhunaktu – May the Lord give us the fruits of action

saha viiryam karavaavahai – May we work with energy

tejasvi naavadhiitamastu – May we be enlightened by studying

maa vidvishaavahai – May we not be hostile to each other

Om shaantih – May we be free from self-created obstacles

shaantih – May we be free from obstacles put by other people

shaantih – May we be free from obstacles put by Nature

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The word “Om” is the most popular and de facto sound representation of God in all sects of Hinduism. It is the most popular sound symbol even in other religions of Indian origin like Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. It is a combination of three sounds – “a” (as in roman), “u” (as in uber) and “m” (as in mother). “a” is the most basic sound. It starts from the innermost part of our vocal system. “u” starts from the middle part. “m” starts from the lips, which is the outermost part of the vocal system. Thus, “Om” represents all the sounds that a human being can make. This is the sound symbol of God, because God is the sum total of everything that exists.

The next four phrases mention the four pursuits of man – security/wealth, comfort/entertainment, virtue/contribution and knowledge/freedom. The fifth phrase seeks cooperation and not confrontation. Thus, through the mantra we seek the whole Universe to cooperate with us in all our virtuous pursuits. The prayer uses “we” and “us” in the plural form. Thus, you do not seek these for only yourself. You seek it as a group or you seek it for everyone whom you represent. You seek for the whole of humanity or all living beings.

The last phrase identifies, acknowledges and seeks freedom from three areas from which we can have obstacles to our virtuous pursuits. The first is from ourselves in the form of laziness, carelessness, arrogance, forgetfulness, etc. The second is from other living beings in the form of competition and misunderstanding. The third is from Nature in the form of unforeseen natural circumstances, accidents, natural calamities, etc. For example, suppose you want to go from one place to another place in a car. If I get delayed because your fuel tank got empty, it is a self-created obstacle because of carelessness. If you get delayed because of heavy

Bhagavad Gita

traffic, it is created by other human beings because of competition. If you get delayed because you had to replace a flat tire with a spare one, it is because of unforeseen natural circumstances. We need to overcome self-created obstacles by correcting ourselves. We need to overcome obstacles created by others by cooperation, coordination, social service, charity and better communication with others. We need to overcome obstacles created by Nature by being prepared for them and having the right attitude.

Bhagavad Gita

(An edited version of this article was published in the November 2018 issue of Vedanta Kesari, the monthly magazine published from Ramakrishna Math, Chennai.)

Bhagavad Gita provides a philosophy and a way of life based on the philosophy. It summarizes the wisdom of the Vedas. Here are four essential verses from the Bhagavad Gita, that covers the basic topics. The verse 10.20 tells the nature of God, living beings and the world, and their relationship. The verse 6.5 tells the nature of the individual. The verses 12.13 and 12.14 give four practical principles to live by, based on the theory mentioned in the verses 10.20 and 6.5. It will be beneficial to memorize these four verses, know the word-by-word meaning, detailed explanation and chant them every day while remembering their meaning.

श्रीभगवानुवाच ।

अहमात्मा गुडाकेश सर्वभूताशयस्थितः ।
अहमादिश्च मध्यं च भूतानामन्त एव च ॥ १०-२० ॥
उद्धरेदात्मनात्मानं नात्मानमवसादयेत् ।
आत्मैव ह्यात्मनो बन्धुरात्मैव रिपुरात्मनः ॥ ६-५ ॥
अद्वेषता सर्वभूतानां मैत्रः करुण एव च ।
निर्ममो निरहङ्कारः समदुःखसुखः क्षमी ॥ १२-१३ ॥
सन्तुष्टः सततं योगी यतात्मा दृढनिश्चयः ।
मय्यर्पितमनोबुद्धिर्यो मद्भक्तः स मे प्रियः ॥ १२-१४ ॥

śrībhagavānuvāca ।

ahamātmā guḍākeśa sarvabhūtāśayasthitaḥ ।
ahamādiśca madhyaṃ ca bhūtānāmanta eva ca ॥ 10-20 ॥
uddharedātmanātmānaṃ nātmānamavasādayet ।
ātmaiva hyātmano bandhurātmaiva ripurātmanaḥ ॥ 6-5 ॥
adveṣṭā sarvabhūtānāṃ maitraḥ karuṇa eva ca ।
nirmamo nirahaṅkāraḥ samaduḥkhasukhaḥ kṣamī ॥ 12-13 ॥
santuṣṭaḥ satataṃ yogī yatātmā dṛḍhaniścayaḥ ।
mayyarpitamanobuddhiryo madbhaktaḥ sa me priyaḥ ॥ 12-14 ॥

श्रीभगवानुवाच śrībhagavānuvāca – God said:

Bhagavad Gita

Bhagavad Gita is God's message to you. Here is what God says to you.

God is the Consciousness residing in the heart of all beings

अहम् aham – I (God)

आत्मा ātmā – (am/is the) Consciousness

गुडाका-ईश guḍākā-īśa – Arjuna

सर्व-भूत sarva-bhūta – (of) all beings

आशय āśaya – in the heart

स्थितः sthitaḥ – residing

God is the Consciousness (Life) principle in all living beings. It is because of the Consciousness that living beings are self-aware. It is because of this awareness that living beings experience the world and express in the world. Just as one Sun illumines the various objects in the world, the One Consciousness shines through all the self-conscious living beings in the Universe. Thus, all Conscious living beings are manifestations of God only.

God is the Cause of everything

अहम् aham – I (God)

आदिः च ādiḥ ca – (am/is) the beginning

मध्यम् च madhyam ca – the middle

भूतानाम् bhūtānām – of all beings

अन्तः एव च antaḥ eva ca – and end

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God is the material (sat), instrumental (cit) and final (ananda) cause of the world. Just as various ornaments are made of gold, everything that exists is made of God only. Just as ornaments arise out of gold, exist in gold and dissolve into gold, all things arise, exist and dissolve in God only. Also, God is the intelligent principle because of which everything arises, exists and dissolves. So, everything belongs to God only. God is also the ultimate purpose of the whole of existence. Thus, the whole Universe is a manifestation of God only. There is nothing that exists other than God. Knowing this leads to fulfilment of human life.

You are the maker of your destiny

उद्धरेत् uddharet – raise up

आत्मना ātmanā – by your will

आत्मानम् ātmānam – the mind;

न na – don't

आत्मानम् ātmānam – the mind

अवसादयेत् avasādayet – lower down

You are the one who decides your actions – mental, verbal and physical. You are fully responsible for your actions. Right actions will result in peace and progress. Wrong actions will cause future regrets. The quality of your life depends on the quality of your mind. Raise up your mind by your actions. Don't lower down the quality of your mind.

The mind and senses are your instruments

आत्मा ātmā – mind

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एव हि eva hi – itself is

आत्मनः बन्धुः ātmanaḥ bandhuḥ – one's friend

आत्मा ātmā – mind

एव eva – itself is

रिपुः आत्मनः ripuḥ ātmanaḥ – one's enemy

You are different from your mind, senses and body. They are all your instruments. Just like any instrument, if they are under your control, they are your friends, and they will help you to achieve your goals. If they are not under your control, they are your enemies, and they will lead you astray.

Seek the welfare of all living beings

अद्वेष्टा adveṣṭā – non-hater

सर्व-भूतानां sarva-bhūtānāṃ – (of) all living beings

मैत्रः maitraḥ – friend

करुणः एव च karuṇaḥ eva ca – compassionate person

There will be three types of living beings with whom you will interact. Have the right attitude towards each of them. Do not hate those who consider you as a competitor or enemy. Defend yourself, but do not have any hatred. Wish good for them. Be friendly with the successful, without any feeling of jealousy. Be compassionate towards the suffering and try to help them as much as you can. In short, genuinely wish the welfare of all living beings. This can be easily done by seeing God as the ultimate inner recipient of the service done to every living being.

Face all situations with equanimity

निर्ममः nirmamaḥ – free from possessiveness

निरहङ्कारः nirahaṅkāraḥ – free from self-centeredness

सम-दुःख-सुखः sama-duḥkha-sukhaḥ – treating pleasure and pain equally

क्षमी kṣamī – forbearing person

Do not be possessive of anything. Everything belongs to God. Do not be self-centered. The world is a fair place. Do your duties. You need not be anxious about the results. You will get what you deserve. Be ready to face the dualities of life like pleasure and pain, success and failure, fame and censure, gain and loss, etc. Bear all situations in life with patience, without complaining. This can be easily done by doing all actions as offerings to God and accepting all results as gifts from God.

Lead a self-controlled life

सन्तुष्टः santuṣṭaḥ – content

सततम् satatam – always

योगी yogī – calm

यत-आत्मा yata-ātmā – self-controlled

दृढ-निश्चयः dṛḍha-niścayaḥ – determined

Be contented with the fair rewards of your work, without feeling greedy or jealous. Be calm always without any regrets of the past or anxiety about the future. Be the master of your mind and the senses. You should be the one who decides when to sleep, when to wake up, when to

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eat, what to eat, how much to eat, how much entertainment to indulge in, etc. Lead a moderated and regulated life. Be self-disciplined in all activities in your life. This can be easily done by having a daily routine that involves spiritual activities like reading, prayer, singing, etc. at fixed times. Reading the lives of saints and great people will show us how to lead our own lives.

Offer everything to God

मयि mayi – To Me (God)

अर्पित arpitā – offered

मनः manah – experiencing faculty

बुद्धिः buddhiḥ – expressing faculty

यः yaḥ – who

मत्-भक्तः – is devoted to Me (God)

सः saḥ – he

मे प्रियः me priyaḥ – is dear to Me (God).

As everything in the Universe is God only, there is none other than God. Knowing this inseparable relationship with God, always remember God. Whatever you do, offer it as a gift to God. Whatever you experience, accept it as a gift from God. Such a person is dear to God. This does not mean God is partial. The knowledge and grace of God is available to everyone like the light of the Sun. The wise person uses the grace by following the instructions given here by God.

By knowing and following these, a person can develop the maturity to understand that the individual is not separate from the

Universal. The limited individual identity is a wrong assumption. When this wrong assumption is given up, that is freedom (Moksha).

Purpose of Religion

Every human being pursues various goals in life. Though the goals are innumerable, the Vedas classify them into four categories called **purusharthas**.

1. **artha** – Security. Every living being has an instinct to preserve its own life. Many of human activities and pursuits are also merely to ensure the survival of self and one's near-and-dear ones.
2. **kaama** – Pleasure. Beyond the bare survival, every living being seeks pleasurable experiences and avoids painful experiences. This forms the next motivator in human beings also.

These two are common to animals and to human beings. A human being is no better than an animal if he stops with these two only. To qualify as a human being, he must pursue two more goals.

3. **dharma** – Virtue. Human beings alone have the concept of virtues like satya (truthfulness), ahimsa (love), brahmacharya (sense-control), asteya (fairness in possession) and aparigraha (voluntary frugality). It is man alone, who can take these virtues to their fullest bloom, where a person can be willing to sacrifice his life to uphold truth or to help a fellow human being. No animal fasts on certain days or follows the

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voluntary restraints of celibacy. These are what make human beings stand apart from animals.

4. **moksha** – Freedom. Life throws its mixture of ups and downs at every one. It is only a human being who can put up a brave smile and face life head-on. No power on earth has the capability to make a human being sad, if he has decided to be cheerful. True understanding of the nature of the individual and the world will enable the person to brave all circumstances in life without being overwhelmed by them. This freedom is always there in every human being. Manifesting this freedom is called **jivanmukti** (free when living) (Gita 2.11, 2.55, 2.56, 2.57, 2.71).

Thus, the Vedas put forth a very simple, logical, down-to-earth list of human pursuits. The first two are pursuits are common to animals and humans. The last two make man into a divine being. Thus, Hinduism caters to two basic questions which is very relevant to every human individual and society:

- Inspired by what, would a human being be truthful, kind and self-controlled, even unto great inconveniences, including death?
- Inspired by what, would a human being be undaunted in spirit even at the face of extreme ups and downs in life?

These two are the main pursuits of every religion. They are universal and undeniable.

In trying to come up with a model to cater to these two pursuits, Hinduism builds up a rational philosophical system that explains reality in a most logical and practical manner. To drive them into the hearts of the people who belong to the Hindu culture, Hinduism has organically

developed stories and legends. To help this process, Hinduism has evolved various traditions and customs that reflect the philosophy and the legends.

Principles of Hinduism

Hinduism is perhaps the least propagated among its own followers. When there is a fairly common opinion among Hindus about who their saints and leaders are, and which their scriptures are, there is very less understanding of the formal definitions and concepts that they teach. Almost every Hindu would agree more or less on many of the names of their saints and leaders - Rama, Krishna, Vyasa, Suka, Sankara, Alwars, Nayanmars, Ramanuja, Madhva, Caitanya, Vallabha, Nimbarka, Maratha and Kannada saints like Jnaneswar, Tukaram, Purandaradasa, North Indian saints like Kabir, Tulsidas, Surdas, Meerabai, modern saints and leaders like Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Ramana, Gandhi, Tilak, Tagore, Aurobindo, Bharati, etc. However, if we ask the person, "What was the leader's understanding of Hinduism?", "What did the leader teach about Hinduism?", he will not know. The kind of answers we might get are like "Hinduism cannot be defined.", "Hinduism is merely a way of life.", "There is no common concept of Hinduism.", etc. Much of these statements are unfounded. We can easily find that more than 99% of the Hindu saints and leaders in the past thousand and more years share a set of basic principles (called **Vedanta**) that are common. Almost every Hindu knows that the Vedas, Gita, Puranas, Ramayana, Mahabharata, various stotras and scriptures are the ones that define the concepts of Hinduism.

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Still, if you ask him what they say about Hinduism, he will not be able to list even a few concepts. Even though the common Hindu might not know or might not have thought about a structured presentation of concepts, there exists a structure. If the salient points of the structure are listed and told to the common Hindu, he will surely be able to relate his beliefs, practices and "way of life" to be in consonance with the list of concepts.

Some of the high level common salient concepts are listed here. References to the relevant verses from the Bhagavad Gita are given in brackets.

1. All creatures, including human beings seek happiness. If questioned under what conditions we want happiness, the answer is always, everywhere and unconditional. If unconditional happiness is possible, it should be here and now. The only reason we are not happy is because we are not availing the intrinsic happiness and fulfilment. Problems will be there in life. Even in the worst of situations, we always have the freedom to put up a brave, cheerful face and handle the problems head on. This emotional independence by which we can assert our happiness that is independent of people, objects and situations is the goal. This is called **Moksha**. (2.11, 2.55-2.57, 2.71)
2. We are not able to avail the happiness because of wrong assumption about our identity. If we know and assert our real identity, we will be happy naturally, because that is our true nature. We need to go step by step from where we are. First, we need to get out of lethargy into activity. Second, we must turn selfish activity into selfless activity. Third, we need to develop the

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- capacity to be introvert. Finally, we need to find deep within ourselves our real nature. (5.7, 6.3, 6.10, 6.27, 4.33, 4.34, 18.20)
3. Hinduism gives a philosophy, and a way of life based on the philosophy. Most of modern Hinduism is based on the Vedanta philosophy. Almost all of the saints and leaders of Hinduism in the past 5000 years agree upon some basic tenets of Vedanta. They are presented here. On this foundation, Hinduism allows people to have variations in the details and encourages diverse practices to suit different temperaments of people. Hinduism believes in the principle of **Unity in Diversity**. (4.1-4.3, 4.11, 7.21, 9.14, 9.15, 12.8-12.11)
 4. The individual, called **jiva** is the possessor of freewill. As freewill is “free” from matter, memories and emotions, the jiva is not a part or product or property of the body or mind. The jiva is an independent entity, who expresses and experiences through the body and mind. (15.7, 15.8, 15.9, 15.16, 2.12, 2.13, 2.22)
 5. The jiva is wholly responsible for all the situations faced in life. (6.5) The present situation faced by the jiva is the result of the past actions (physical, verbal and mental) of the jiva. The future situations that will be presented to the jiva will be the result of the past and present actions of the jiva. The jiva cannot escape the good and bad consequences of its actions, even by death. (6.41, 6.42, 16.18, 16.19, 16.20, 9.3, 13.22) This is called the **Law of Karma**.
 6. **Isvara** is the sum total of all that exists. (7.4, 7.5, 11.7, 11.13, 11.38) Isvara is that Supreme Being, to whom, the entire material Universe is the body, the sum total of the minds of all jivas is the

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mind and identifies with the whole of existence. So, Isvara is everywhere as everything. (11.5, 9.4, 13.14, 13.15, 13.16, 13.17)

7. **Devataas** are the cosmic equivalents of the various faculties of an individual. For example, the sum total of the seeing faculty of all the jivas put together forms the seeing faculty of the Isvara, and is represented by the Surya devataa. Worship with a desire for specific worldly security and prosperity is done to the corresponding devataa. This kind of worship is inferior to worshipping the Isvara. (7.22, 7.23, 9.25)
8. Isvara has created, or rather has become or appears as, the **jagat** (Universe) for the benefit of the jivas to express and experience, by which they will mature in wisdom, which is the purpose of the existence of the Universe. For this, Isvara creates, sustains and recycles the Universe. (9.17, 10.20, 13.17) The jivas continue to exist with all their past effects and impressions intact even on recycling of the Universe. (8.19)
9. Isvara knows the innermost thoughts and intentions of every jiva. (10.20, 18.63) Isvara oversees the reward of every physical, verbal and mental action of every jiva in a fair and appropriate manner. (4.11, 9.19, 7.21, 7.22) This does not make Isvara judgmental because, Isvara is not different from the whole of existence. It is Isvara, as it were, that enjoys or suffers as the jiva itself. (13.15, 13.23, 9.24) Isvara is compassionate to every jiva. In fact, the jiva is not apart from Isvara. (7.7) It is just the Law of Nature that results in the reward, under the supervision of Isvara. Isvara wants every jiva to learn from the good and bad experiences encountered in life and grow in wisdom. (4.33) Even if the jiva has done a lot of bad deeds before, making a resolution to change for

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good and trying to be good henceforth is the most valuable decision, because the current intention is more important. (9.30,31)

10. Isvara's teachings are available in the form of the **Vedas**, which was revealed to rishis in the distant past. (4.1) Isvara teaches the jivas through various saints in all places and in all ages. (4.2, 4.3, 4.34) Isvara is accessible to any sincere jiva in any place in any age. (7.21, 4.10) Occasionally, Isvara comes in the midst of the jivas in the garb of another jiva (incarnation) to help and teach the jivas. Isvara has come innumerable times in the past and will come innumerable times in the future. (4.6, 4.7, 4.8) Any teaching of anyone in any age is acceptable as authentic if it does not contradict the Vedas. (13.25, 16.23, 16.24)
11. By having a relationship with Isvara, which is based on faith, gratitude and love, the jivas can face the ups and downs of life with poise. The relationship will help them to be honest, compassionate, disciplined, unselfish, peaceful and happy even under extreme situations in life. With this equanimity and poise, the jivas will be able to learn from the various experiences, grow in wisdom and understand that they are not apart from Isvara. (12.13-12.20, 9.34, 12.6, 12.7) This relationship is called **Bhakti**.
12. To develop the relationship with Isvara, **puja** (worship) is a very effective exercise. Isvara can be worshiped as without form or through any form. It depends on the temperament of the worshiper. (12.2, 12.3, 12.4) The worship can be physical, verbal or mental. As Isvara is everywhere, knows the innermost thoughts and is compassionate, all that is needed is love and sincerity. (9.26) Isvara will know even if the jiva calls by any name. Isvara

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can be worshiped as male or female or neither or beyond. Isvara can be worshiped through any aspect of Nature, any of the devataas or any form. (11.5) Different forms of mental worship are called **upaasana** (meditation). Hinduism has developed a detailed system of preparations and procedures of meditation that is suitable to people of different temperaments. (6.10-6.28) Usage of images and other representations of Isvara helps to concentrate the mind and form a personal emotional relationship with Isvara. Stories of incarnations, saints and devotees, stories of divine personalities which incorporate various aspects of Isvara, allegories that help meditation on various qualities of Isvara and various legends help forming a personal relationship with Isvara. Any form of worship invoking an all-pervading, all-knowing, all-powerful and compassionate entity is accepted as worship of Isvara. (7.21, 7.22)

13. As Isvara is the whole of existence, anything that the jiva does is an offering to Isvara and any situation that the jiva faces in life is from Isvara only. Thus, every moment of life is an interaction with Isvara only. So, doing full justice to the current situation in which the jiva is placed by doing its duty as an offering to Isvara, is itself a form of worship of Isvara. (18.46, 9.27, 11.55) This is called **Karma Yoga**.
14. At every level – physical, physiological, emotional, intellectual, sub-conscious and pure Consciousness – the individual (jiva) is not separate from the whole (Isvara). The individuality of the jiva is only an appearance and it is only for the sake of convenience of transaction. The individuality is not real. When the jiva understands fully and deeply that it is not apart from Isvara, the

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goal is reached. Freed from the cycle of desire, action and result, the jiva merges with Isvara and attains real peace. This goal is called **moksha** – freedom. (13.31, 13.32, 6.29, 6.30, 6.31, 2.71, 2.72)

15. The Hindu way of life is harmonious living with the world, people and other living beings in it, knowing the interconnectedness of everything, considering **everything as divine**. Hinduism encourages and celebrates diversity. All daily rituals, traditional customs, festivals, stories, legends, pilgrimages and art forms of Hindus are designed to imbibe these principles. Engaging with them knowing how they are connected to the principles given here will lead to a rich cultural, emotional, intellectual and fulfilling life. This is the Hindu **Way of Life**.

With these as the common salient points, the details and practices vary from sect to sect and even person to person. Hinduism gives that freedom to the individual.

Hinduism welcomes the forming, merging and dissolution of any number of sects to cater to the different needs of people of various temperaments, provided the basic principles of honesty, love, discipline and unselfishness are upheld. Hinduism is open to various teachers, saints, mystics and cult-leaders. It acknowledges all of them of the past, present and future, as long as the basic principles are honoured by them.

Hinduism also encompasses various non-Vedanta viewpoints, which differ from the above listed points to various degrees. However, as mentioned earlier, almost all of the today's practicing Hindus would agree with the above-mentioned points.

Hindu Stories and Legends

Hindus consider a person belonging to another religion as people who worship the same Isvara in a different way. It is the people of the other religion who protest this and claim that they worship a “different” “God”. To a Hindu, there is only one Isvara, who can be worshiped in different ways. This makes the Hindu tolerant and in fact “accepting” and “respecting” of people, beliefs and practices of all religions.

A Hindu does not condemn the other points of view as wrong. He only says that these are what are most logical and practical to himself. If another person has a different set of points, he does not interfere or does not try to convert or convince that person. However, if that person challenges these points, the Hindu tradition has a very systematic and comprehensive structured refutation that can stand any logical challenge. If a Hindu is not able to hold his ground it only means that the he does not know enough of Hinduism. A systematic study of scriptures like Bhagavad Gita and Upanishads is needed to understand and defend Hinduism.

Hindu Stories and Legends

Hinduism has one of the richest collection of stories, legends, anecdotes and parables in the world. These reflect the principles of Hinduism in a colourful manner, which is easy to understand and assimilate.

The Vedas have several stories of devataas, rishis, teachers and students. Sage Vyaasa collected most of the stories prevailing at that time

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in to a set of books called puraanas. They contain stories of teachers, students, kings, devataas, asuraas, saints and devotees. Several stories are also present in the two great epics – the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. These cannot be called mythology. Most of the stories would have originated based on some real event involving real persons. Because of the long passage of time and because of the Hindu tradition of extrapolation and exaggeration, they have attained the current form.

To these are added the books with the stories of various saints like the Aalwaars and Naayanmars of South India, the Bhakta Vijayam depicting the stories of various devotees of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Gujarat, etc. There are a lot of stories of devotion and valour, with innumerable local variations, which form the rich tapestry of the Hindu heritage.

Every saint or teacher uses several stories and parables to convey the religious and spiritual ideas. All these drive the principles of Hinduism into the heart of the Hindus.

Every Hindu should know the Ramayana and the Mahabharata to a reasonable depth. Also, he should know some of the important stories in the Hindu tradition. As many of them are allegories, it is important that the interpretation of the allegories is known too. Here are listed some of the important stories.

- Ramayana
- Mahabharata
- Sri Krishna
- DashaAvatara
- Ganga Avatarana
- Daksha Yagna
- Jada Bharata
- Vritrasura Vada
- Chitraketu
- Tripura Dahana

Hindu Stories and Legends

- Gajendra Moksha
- Chyavana
- Ambarisha
- Yayati
- Sakuntala
- Markandeya
- Viswamitra
- Harischandra
- Ganesha
- Kumarasambhava
- Savitri
- Satyakama
- Naciketa
- Nala Damayanti
- Lingodbhava
- Anasuya
- Basmasura
- Narada

Every Hindu should know the stories of some the saints. It is more important to know the important anecdotes in their lives than to know the biographical details. Here are listed some of the important saints, the incidents in whose lives are great lessons on Hinduism.

- Adi Sankara
- Ramanuja
- Madhva
- Purandaradasa
- Kanakadasa
- Namadeva
- Tyagaraja
- Bhadracalam Ramdas
- Samartha Ramdas
- Jnaneswar
- Meera Bai
- Tulsidas
- Kabirdas
- Surdas
- Chaitanya Mahaprabhu
- Narsi Mehta
- Chakkubai
- Thondaradipodi Alwar
- Thirumangai Alwar
- Thirunavukkarasar
- Sundarar
- Manikkavasakar
- Jnana Sambandar
- Kannappar
- Basavanna
- Ramprasad

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- Sri Ramakrishna
- Swami Vivekananda
- Sri Sarada Devi
- Ramana Maharishi
- Swami Sivananda
- Swami Chinmayananda

Apart from these, there are a lot of traditional stories that highlight various aspects of spiritual life.

The following books can help in getting to know some of the stories and anecdotes.

- Ramayana – C. Rajagopalachari
- Mahabharata – C. Rajagopalachari
- Cradle Tales of Hinduism – Sister Nivedita
- Srimad Bhagavata – Translation by Swami Tapasyananda
- The Divine World of the Alvars – Pravrajika Shuddhatmamata
- Indian Saints and Mystics – Pravrajika Shuddhatmamata
- Ancient Sages – Swami Satyamayananda
- Tales and Parables of Sri Ramakrishna
- Vedanta Through Stories – Swami Sambuddhananda

Hindu Way of Life

To be able to imbibe the principles of religion, it must be a way of life. Religion lives in the day-to-day life of its practitioners. Hinduism has inseparably integrated into the daily life, festivals, art forms and places in India.

Hindu Way of Life

Almost all the traditional forms of music, dance, drama and painting are based on the stories of Hinduism. Many of the commonly used proverbs, idioms, illustrations and verbal expressions are based on these stories. All these are reminders of the principles that they depict.

There are several places of pilgrimage in India, which are associated with the stories, legends and anecdotes of Hinduism. The walls of Hindu temples are adorned by paintings and sculptures depicting various incidents in these stories. Thus, pilgrimage and visiting temples is a popular way to remind oneself of these stories and get their message into one's life.

Hinduism has a rich array of interesting and colourful festivals. Most of the festivals are days commemorating the important events in these stories. Thus, celebrating the festivals is also a way to remember these stories and the messages that they convey.

Hinduism has a rich set of rituals for everyday life associated with key moments in the day like waking up, taking bath, eating, travelling and going to sleep. It also has traditional ceremonies to mark various important events in life like conception, birth, naming, start of solid food, start of schooling, marriage, house-warming, 60th anniversary and death. All these rituals and ceremonies reflect and remind the principles of Hinduism in different ways.

Both in the stories and in the customs, Hinduism allows a huge scope for local and personal variations. There are innumerable thriving sub-cultures with their own variations. All this diversity is celebrated as the sign of life by Hinduism.

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Here are some basic religious customs every Hindu is advised to practice.

- Greet others by the gesture Namaste, which means, “I salute the divinity in you”.
- Wear sacred marks on the forehead in the morning after bath, which indicates respect to God.
- Start the day with prayer to God, pray to God before every meal and end the day with prayer. Prayer is a gesture of gratitude to God.
- Maintain an altar at home with the pictures and/or murthys of favourite forms of God and saints.
- Spend some time every day in the morning or evening or both in prayer. During this time, offer flowers, light a lamp, light some incense and chant some prayers, hymns, slokas from sacred texts or mantras in any Indian language. After chanting, spend a few minutes of silent awareness of the presence of God in your heart.
- Read a few pages of a religious or spiritual book every day. It can be Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavata, Gita, stories of saints, etc.
- Wear traditional dress during formal prayer, visit to temples and on festival days.
- Visit a nearby temple at least once a week.
- Go on a pilgrimage to a holy place at least once a year.
- Visit a nearby temple on festival days and personally significant days like birthday, anniversary, first day of school, work, exam, etc.
- Learn some form of classical music, bhajans or chanting.
- Celebrate and support all the important festivals with both devotion and social involvement.

Five Duties

It goes without saying that the basic principles of good living are taken care of. Here are some of them.

- Lead a legal and ethical life.
- Spend time and effort constructively.
- Take good care of family members, especially old people and children. Spend enough quality time with them.
- Help near and dear people in their needs as much as possible.
- Be sensitive to social and environmental issues. Ensure that you contribute to the well-being of the society and environment.
- Involve in some social service in the form of donation of time, effort, money or materials.

Formally, Hinduism defines five duties and ten virtues.

Five Duties

You have been consuming goods and services from various entities right from birth. This puts you in a debt. The various entities are classified into five. The five debts need to be countered by doing five duties to get back into balance. This list is from the Vedas. There is a reference to this in the Gita in 3.11 and 4.28.

1. deva yagna – Duty to environment – Take care of nature. Don't pollute. Plant trees. Conserve resources. Pray every day to God thanking for all the good things in your life. Visit temples regularly.

2. bhuta yagna – Duty to other creatures – Take care of animals. Treat them with dignity. Preserve them. Avoid harming them.

3. manushya yagna – Duty to society – Take care of people. Treat everyone with dignity. Donate to and involve in social service activities. Help people. Pay fairly for services availed from people.

4. pitru yagna – Duty to lineage – Take care of parents, grand-parents, children, grand-children, etc. Respect old people. Help them. Pray for the wellbeing of departed ancestors. Be kind to young children. Donate to and involve in orphanages and old-age homes.

5. rishi yagna – Duty to culture – Take care of teachers. Acquire, develop and disseminate knowledge. Help education of children and adults. Donate to and involve in schooling of underprivileged children. Support the study and development of science, mathematics, literature, arts, music, dance, philosophy, religion, etc. Celebrate cultural and religious festivals.

Ten Virtues

Gita gives lists of do's and don'ts in several places like 13.7 to 13.11, 16.1 to 16.3, 17.14 to 17.16. Patanjali has formulated a concise list of ten virtues in his Yoga Sutras, which as below.

1. satya – Don't tell a lie. It is not necessary to speak all the truth that you know. But when you speak and act, there should be perfect alignment between your knowledge, intention, words and action.

Ten Virtues

2. ahimsa – Don't take advantage of the weakness of others. It is not possible to live without hurting smaller life forms. You should try to be as harmless as possible. You should not wish harm to anyone. Follow non-violence in thought, word and deed. Also, positively help people.

3. brahmacharya – Don't have indecent and inappropriate attitude towards the other gender. The appropriate attitude towards everyone is to look upon people as thinking and feeling human beings, and not as physical entities. Also, this translates to chastity for householders and celibacy for all others.

4. asteya – Don't have any unfair possession.

5. aparigraha – Don't have possessions or consume things beyond what is reasonably necessary. Lead a simple life.

6. soucha – Maintain everything neat and tidy. This applies to environment, body and mind.

7. santosha – Always be cheerful and contented. Don't keep complaining about everything. Have positive attitude. Be pleasant in thought and word.

8. tapas – Maintain discipline in life. Wake up, eat, go to sleep, etc. at the right times. Have control on what you eat, read, see, hear, speak, think, etc. Practice meditation every day to better understand your mind and be able to regulate your thoughts.

9. swaadhyaya – Entertain healthy thoughts. Have a habit of reading good books, thinking deeply about them and discussing with like-minded people.

10. ishvara pranidhaana – Believe in the fairness of the world – “As you sow, so shall you reap.” Do everything as an offering (arpana) to God and face everything as a gift (prasaada) from God. Face success with humility and failure with dignity.

Meditation

Meditation is important to assimilate the concepts that you have intellectually understood. It helps you to develop a personal relationship with God.

Gita gives detailed instructions for meditation. (6.11 to 6.14) Here is a simple procedure of meditation in the form of worship of God, that you can practice.

Choose a form of God that you like. If you do not want to choose a particular form, you can use the form of the golden luminous flame of a lamp.

Choose a name of God or a mantra that you like or got from your Guru. You can use the Gaayathri Mantra if you know it. There are several popular ones like these:

- Om Namah Shivaaya
- Om Namō Naaraayanaaya
- Om Namō Bhagavate Vaasudevaaya
- Om Shri Raam Jai Raam Jai Jai Raam

Meditation

- Hare Raama Hare Raama, Raama Raama Hare Hare, Hare Krishna Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna Hare Hare

Once you have chosen, you should not change your choice often.

Reserve a small room or a cupboard to keep the items of worship. Place the pictures or images of the deities which are the favourite of the people in your family. Place them neatly and artistically.

Fix a time for worship. It can be in the morning or evening or both. You should reserve at least fifteen minutes for worship. It is better to always do your worship at the same time every day. It will be preferable to avoid other sounds from outside during this time.

You can sit on the floor or on a chair. Keep a small mat made of cloth to place on the floor or chair when you sit to worship. (6.11) Do not use this cloth for anything else. When you sit, your body, neck and head should be in a straight line. (6.13) Your whole body must be relaxed.

Follow this procedure everyday:

1. Keep a lamp lit during the worship.
2. For a few minutes, sing or chant a stotra or devotional song. Remembering the meaning when you chant will give additional benefit.
3. Gently close your eyes.
4. Pray for the welfare of everyone in the world.
5. Pray to your parents, teachers, saints and others to bless you with mental strength, moral life and peace of mind.
6. Thank God for all the good things in your life.
7. Visualize a fully bloomed lotus at the center of your chest.

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8. Visualize a part of the all-pervading God condensing into a golden yellow flame of light in the center of the lotus.
9. Visualize the formless light taking the form of your favourite form of God. The form should face the same direction as you are facing.
10. You can mentally worship God through the form by offering whatever you like to offer. You can give a ritual bath, decoration with clothes and jewels, sandal paste, flowers, incense, light, fruits, sweets, water, etc.
11. Chant the name or mantra that you have chosen 108 times. It is better to chant in the mind without any movement of the lips or tongue. If it is not possible, you can chant in as low voice as possible.
12. Sit silently for a few minutes enjoying the presence of God. You may continue to mentally chant the name or mantra.
13. Let the form turn into golden yellow light and dissolve into the Universe. The same God whom you worshipped with closed eyes is now available for you to see with open eyes as the world and its living beings.
14. Slowly open your eyes.
15. Read a few pages from any book on devotion or spiritual life. Various books which give stories of devotees of God, stories illustrating the teachings of Vedanta, incidents in the lives of saints, conversations with saints, lectures and letters of spiritual advice are all available for this. You can even read this book every day for this purpose. You can also listen to a devotional or spiritual lecture.
16. Bow down before God. Thank God for all the good things that you have got in life. Pray for the knowledge and strength to lead a virtuous and compassionate life that is useful to others and peaceful to yourself.

Deciding Between Right and Wrong

17. Apply basma or kumkum or something similar on your forehead as the sign of your prayer and surrender to God.

You can also write the name of God 108 times in a notebook reserved for this purpose. When the notebook is full, cut the pages into small pieces, make paper flowers out of them and make a garland out of those flowers and give in the nearby temple.

By keeping God as the goal in life, living a righteous life, offering all that you do as a gift to God, accepting all that you face as a gift from God and worshipping God every day, you will develop devotion to God. (9.34)

This devotion will help you to face the ups and downs of life with a calm mind. You will develop all virtuous qualities. You will get purity and peace of mind. Such a devotee is a favourite of God. (12.13 to 12.19)

Deciding Between Right and Wrong

We have two faculties which influence our decisions. In any given situation, we will have various options for action. We will have to choose one. One faculty, called manas, evaluates the various options based on likes and dislikes. Another faculty, called buddhi (intellect), evaluates the options based on right and wrong. Animals also make decisions. However, they always make decisions based on likes and dislikes. Only humans have

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the buddhi, which works through the mirror neurons in the pre-frontal cortex. Using this faculty, we are able to mentally run various simulations of what will be the consequence of the action to us and others, in the near-term and long-term. By this, we can make better decisions. This buddhi is the one that distinguishes between animals and human beings.

Katha Upanishad calls decision based on manas as preyas, and decision based on buddhi as shreyas. It says that following shreyas will lead us towards becoming better people. Following preyas will lead to downfall. A noble human being is one who ignores preyas and acts based on shreyas. (Katha Upanishad, 1.2.1,2) The person would do what is right, even if it is inconvenient or gives pain, and would avoid doing what is wrong, even if it is convenient or gives pleasure. This faculty or capacity is called will power. Exercising the will power is the only way to increase it.

What is right and what is wrong? How do we decide in confusing situations? Can we depend on our gut-feel or conscience? Is there guidance from our scriptures on this? This is a question that is asked very often.

In most of the situations in our life, what is right and what is wrong is quite unambiguous. Only in some situations, things are gray. In the situations where it is clear, if we do not do what is right and refrain from what is wrong, we will be violating our own judgement. The intellect is uncomfortable with this. The intellect starts looking for a justification for the wrong action. This results in indecisiveness in a similar future situation. Over a period of time, this becomes a habit. So, every time we violate our intellectual conviction, we are pushing more situations into gray areas, thus weakening our intellect. We are also weakening our will

Deciding Between Right and Wrong

power. So, where we know what is right and what is wrong, following our intellectual conviction is very important. Without this, mere knowing is of no use.

Now, the next question is, how to strengthen our buddhi to be able to make better decisions and how to reduce the gray areas. Here the Hindu scriptures, especially the Bhagavad Gita give a lot of guidelines.

One guideline that Gita gives is to depend on the scriptures regarding what is to be done and what is not to be done. (16.24) There are several series of verses like prerequisites for knowledge (13.7-11), divine treasures (16.1,2,3) and three types of tapas (17.14,15,16), which enumerate right action and attitude. In general, the lists include truthfulness, non-violence, self-control, absence of arrogance, forbearance, cheerfulness, cleanliness, silence, respect to elders, helping others, etc.

Another guideline that Gita gives is to depend on the words of people of good character. (13.25) The conduct of wise people can be referred to as the standard of righteousness. In fact, Gita says that it is the duty of leaders to set an example to others by their actions. (3.21,25,26) It is helpful to be familiar with the life of saints. Then, when we need to decide something, we can think, "What would the saintly person do in this situation?" Taittiriya Upanishad also mentions this in verse 1.11.4. Gita has several lists of the qualities that saintly people possess like qualities of a wise person (2.55-71), qualities of a transcendent person (14.22-25) and qualities of a devotee (12.13-20).

Gita mentions the Golden Rule: "Do to others what you would like others to do to you." Gita says, "Keeping yourself as the yardstick, seeing

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others as equal to you, consider what is pleasurable and painful to them.” (6.32) This is often a great way to discern right from wrong.

Another hint that Gita gives is this. After doing the action, would you be comfortable in the presence of God or would you avoid Him? The Lord is the giver of the fruits of all action. He is impartial. So, if you do the right thing, you will not fear His presence. You will feel protected. When Arjuna saw the Lord in the form of Time, he saw that good people were bowing to Him and bad people were trying to run away from Him. (11.36) So this is one means to decide. A variation of this is to think if you can tell, with dignity, to your mother (or anyone whom you revere) about what you did. If you can, then it is right. Otherwise, it is wrong.

The merit of an action can be evaluated from the attitude of mind (to you and to others) that it would create or enable. If the action would pull down the mind to make the person identify with the body, it is bad. If it would make the person identify with the mind, it is better. If it would make the person identify with pure Consciousness, it is best. (18.20,21,22) For example, hunger and disease pulls down the mind to the body. So, alleviating these of people is a noble activity. Giving secular education pulls towards identifying with the mind. Giving spiritual knowledge pulls towards identifying with the Self. These define the relative merits of these activities.

Another way is to seek the “greatest welfare to most number of people”. Gita says, an action that is done as a duty (for the welfare of others) without seeking personal benefit is greatest. An action done for only personal benefit is not so good. Action that brings loss to oneself and others is bad. (18.23,24,25)

A Selection of Quotations from Swami Vivekananda

Every person does any action only if it gives benefit in the short-term or in the long-term. Gita says, an action that gives benefit in the short-term but harms in the long-term is wrong. An action which appears inconvenient in the short-term but gives benefit in the long-term is right. (18.37,38) This analysis can be used in many situations to decide.

Thus, Bhagavad Gita gives several ideas to decide between right and wrong. One or more of these can be used in any situation. When we have decided, it is important that we follow what is right and refrain from what is wrong. Even after all these, we are not able to decide, we can discuss with people. If there is no opportunity for that, or we are not able to decide even after that, we can do whatever we think is the best out of the various options and pray to God to show more light next time. Following our intellectual conviction will strengthen our intellect and increase our will power.

A Selection of Quotations from Swami Vivekananda

(This selection is a part of an article that was published in the Oct-Dec 2015 issue (number 17.2) of “Dialogue”, the quarterly magazine of [Astha Bharati](#), Delhi, an organization to promote National Unity and Integrity.)

Strength

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We are responsible for what we are, and whatever we wish ourselves to be, we have the power to make ourselves. If what we are now has been the result of our own past actions, it certainly follows that whatever we wish to be in future can be produced by our present actions; so we have to know how to act. (CW I 31)

Men in general lay all the blame of life on their fellowmen, or, failing that, on God, or they conjure up a ghost, and say it is fate. Where is fate, and who is fate? We reap what we sow. We are the makers of our own fate. None else has the blame, none has the praise. The wind is blowing; and those vessels whose sails are unfurled catch it, and go forward on their way, but those which have their sails furled do not catch the wind. Is the fault of the wind? (CW II 224)

Say, 'This misery that I am suffering is of my own doing, and that very thing proves that it will have to be undone by me alone.' That which I created, I can demolish; that which is created by someone else, I shall never be able to destroy. Therefore, stand up, be bold, be strong. Take the whole responsibility on your own shoulders, and know that you are the creator of your own destiny. All the strength and succor you want is within yourselves. (CW II 225)

Whatever you think that you will be. If you think yourself weak, weak you will be; if you think yourself strong, you will be. (CW III 130)

Anything that brings spiritual, mental, or physical weakness, touch it not with the toes of your feet. Religion is the manifestation of the natural strength that is in man. A spring of infinite power is coiled up and is inside this little body, and that spring is spreading itself. ... This is the history of man, of religion, civilisation, or progress. CW VIII 185

A Selection of Quotations from Swami Vivekananda

Work

Even the least work done for others awakens the power within; even thinking the least good of others gradually instils into the heart the strength of a lion. I love you all ever so much, but I wish you all to die working for others — I should rather be glad to see you do that! ... Get up, and put your shoulders to the wheel — how long is this life for? As you have come into this world, leave some mark behind. Otherwise, where is the difference between you and the trees and stones? (CW V 382-383)

Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life — think of it, dream of it, live on that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body, be full of that idea alone. This is the way to success. (CW I 177)

Isn't it man that makes money? Where did you ever hear of money making man? If you can make your thoughts and words perfectly at one, if you can, I say, make yourself one in speech and action, money will pour in at your feet of itself, like water. (CW VI 455)

Three things are necessary to make ever man great, every nation great.

- (1) Conviction of the powers of goodness.
- (2) Absence of jealousy and suspicion.
- (3) Helping all who are trying to be and do good.

(CW VII 29)

Serve People

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The watchword of all well-being, of all moral good is not “I” but “thou”. Who cares whether there is a heaven or a hell, who cares if there is a soul or not, who cares if there is an unchangeable or not? Here is the world, and it is full of misery. Go out into it as Buddha did, and struggle to lessen it or die in the attempt. Forget yourselves; this is the first lesson to be learnt, whether you are a theist or an atheist, whether you are an agnostic or a Vedantist, a Christian or a Mohammedan. (CW II 353)

You cannot help anyone, you can only serve: serve the children of the Lord, serve the Lord Himself, if you have the privilege. If the Lord grants that you can help any one of His children, blessed you are; do not think too much of yourselves. Blessed you are that that privilege was given to you when others had it not. Do it only as a worship. (CW III 246)

After so much austerity, I have understood this as the real truth — God is present in every Jiva; there is no other God besides that. ‘Who serves Jiva, serves God indeed’. (CW VII 247)

This is the gist of all worship — to be pure and to do good to others. He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased, really worships Shiva; and if he sees Shiva only in the image, his worship is but preliminary. He who has served and helped one poor man seeing Shiva in him, without thinking of his caste, or creed, or race, or anything, with him Shiva is more pleased than with the man who sees Him only in temples. (CW III 141-142)

In one word, the ideal of Vedanta is to know man as he really is, and this is its message, that if you cannot worship your brother man, the manifested God, how can you worship a God who is unmanifested? (CW II 325-326)

Serve India

This national ship of ours, ye children of the Immortals, my countrymen, has been plying for ages, carrying civilisation and enriching the whole world with its inestimable treasures. For scores of shining centuries this national ship of ours has been ferrying across the ocean of life, and has taken millions of souls to the other shore, beyond all misery. But today it may have sprung a leak and got damaged, through your own fault or whatever cause it matters not. What would you, who have placed yourselves in it, do now? Would you go about cursing it and quarrelling among yourselves! Would you not all unite together and put your best efforts to stop the holes? Let us all gladly give our hearts' blood to do this; and if we fail in the attempt, let us all sink and die together, with blessings and not curses on our lips. (CW III 461)

I too believe that India will awake again if anyone could love with all his heart the people of the country — bereft of the grace of affluence, of blasted fortune, their discretion totally lost, downtrodden, ever-starved, quarrelsome, and envious. Then only will India awake, when hundreds of large-hearted men and women, giving up all desires of enjoying the luxuries of life, will long and exert themselves to their utmost for the well-being of the millions of their countrymen who are gradually sinking lower and lower in the vortex of destitution and ignorance. I have experienced even in my insignificant life that good motives, sincerity, and infinite love can conquer the world. (CW V 126-127)

India will be raised, not with the power of the flesh, but with the power of the spirit; not with the flag of destruction, but with the flag of peace and love ... One vision I see clear as life before me: that the ancient Mother has awakened once more, sitting on Her throne rejuvenated,

more glorious than ever. Proclaim Her to all the world with the voice of peace and benediction. (CW IV 352-353)

My hope and faith rest in men like you. Understand my words in their true spirit, and apply yourselves to work in their light. ... I have given you advice enough; now put at least something in practice. Let the world see that your reading of the scriptures and listening to me has been a success. (CW VII 175)

Go Forward

Is Hinduism a “way of life”? Yes, it is. However, the “way of life” is founded upon and is a tool to imbibe a set of well-structured principles, which are agreed upon by almost all Hindu teachers, saints, mystics and leaders.

- Read this book again and again till you understand all the concepts presented here.
- Chant the Shaanti Mantra and Gita verses given in this book every day.
- Follow the values described.
- Do meditation everyday based on the instructions given in this book.
- Read the books mentioned in this book.

Please feel free to contact us if you need guidance to start a Hinduism/Vedanta study group for children, youth or adults in your neighbourhood, temple or organization. Visit us at <http://www.practicalphilosophy.in>