



Hindu Beliefs

In order to understand Hinduism, we must learn about a few basic beliefs which form the foundation of the religion. These beliefs are rooted in both *The Vedas* and *The Upanishads*. Besides defining a belief system, these ideas also carry into Hindu law and rites of passage.



Dharma

Dharma stands for the ultimate moral balance of all things. Dharma belongs to the universe and to the individual as well. So, just as there is a divine order of the natural and cosmic realms, there is the same order within a personal life. However, each one has the responsibility to balance his or her own dharma.

A Hindu's dharma is played out in all areas of life: religious, social, and familial. If a person makes a promise, the promise must be kept at all costs. Likewise, the faithful maintain their religious rituals while attending to their family's needs.

But what if an individual goes astray? This leads to the next major Hindu belief, karma.



Karma

The word *karma* has multiple meanings in Hinduism. In one sense it means duty. Hinduism believes that everyone should do his or her duty without expecting a favorable result. Karma also means destiny or fate.



Samsara

In the Western world, *samsara* is commonly known as reincarnation. Samsara represents the cycle of life, death, and rebirth in which a person carries his or her own karma. Each life cycle presents an opportunity for balance.

Therefore, an individual may experience effects from past lives, although the circumstances may be totally different. In fact, many Hindus believe that a person's worldly status depends upon actions in a past life. Likewise, good thoughts and actions can liberate a person. Some Hindus believe that certain people meet in more than one life in order to achieve karmic balance. Thus, every relationship and situation becomes meaningful.

What happens, then, when a person becomes purified? Is reincarnation an eternal process, or is there another realm? The answer lies in moksha.



Moksha

Like heaven for the Christian, Hindus strive to reach *moksha*, or a state of changeless bliss. Moksha is achieved by living a life of religious devotion and moral integrity without any interest in worldly things. However, it may be many lifetimes within the wheel of life before moksha is achieved. The ultimate reward is release from samsara and union with God.