



**HINDUISM**

**An Introduction**

By

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# About the Speaker

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## Name: **Ram Krisn**

- From the State of Maryland.
- Received my MBA degree from Michigan State University.
- I researched the philosophy of my own religion for this course.

## Research Approach

- The World's Religions (Idiot's Series) by Brandon Toropov and Luke Buckles, the Internet or web, personal experiences and knowledgeable friends

## Note:

- I am a beginner at today's topic of HINDUISM and no expert!! I am interested in understanding comparative religion. The presentation is a mere intellectual understanding of summary readings for this lecture.
- Please forgive me if I am wrong. The views are mine and mine only. They are subject to corrections by discussion.



# Hinduism – Getting Started

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- Will discuss the pre-historic origin and the influence of the religion in India.
- Will identify the evolution and contribution by various saints and sages over the last 4000 years and more.
- Hinduism is mainly a monotheistic or dualistic religion but permits polytheistic worship of a variety of deities
- Monism is also popular in Hindu faith with concepts of oneness.
- Many consider Hinduism to be a culture and not a religion!! India's large population of a billion people has created a variety of religious beliefs.



# Pre - History

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- **Hinduism - the SANATANA DHARMA or ETERNAL & UNIVERSAL TRUTH**
  - **At least 5000 years old**
  - **Has more than a billion followers today**
  - **Practiced in India and its emigrants / Diaspora and has followers in most countries including USA, Europe and East-Asia**
  - **Faith, belief and ideology are as diverse as India and its many languages & culture**
  - **Aryans from North Europe migrated into India (Indus Valley civilization) and started this new Hindu religion**
  
- **Scriptures and Beliefs**
  - **Original language of the scriptures was mainly pictorial, carvings or in "Sanskrit"**
  - **Earliest Scripture – Rig Veda - consists of 1008 poetic hymns**
  - **Brahmanas (vedas), Aranyakas (secret rituals)& Upanishads (spirituality) were added to the Vedas thereafter**
  - **Worship of idols and pictures of deities ( minor Gods) including exclusive human (men and woman) forms, nature,sun,planets and animal figures**
  - **Belief in philosophy of reincarnation - final goal is to seek release from cycles of life and death through DHARMIC KARMA (moral actions) in present and future life or lives**



# KEY Concepts

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- 3 B'S: Brahmin (Priest), Brahma (creator) & Brahman (Supreme)
- **Hindu Deities**
  - BIG THREE/TRIAD
    - Brahma the creator
    - Vishnu the preserver of universe
    - Shiva the destroyer
  - **Krishna and Rama** of epics or mythology (Mahabharata & Ramayana) are considered incarnations with transcendent LOVE. So are Sita and Hanuman - the Monkey God.
  - **SAMSARA & MOKSHA**: Repeat of birth & death/recycling of the eternal soul or atman and aim to merge with the infinity – Goals are to avoid rebirth thru a perfect righteous life and to merge with God.
  - **LAW OF KARMA**: “Morality’s” cause and effect is carried into current and next birth and so on until Moksha (liberation) when moral perfection is reached.
  - **THE GANGES**: This River is considered spiritual and bathing in it is a religious purification process – Cauvery and other rivers like Narmada and the Indus are equally revered
  - **TEMPLES, ARCHITECTURE, PILGRIMAGES AND HOME PUJAS, FLOWER, coconut & FRUIT OFFERINGS**: Hinduism acknowledges any and every depiction of the ABSOLUTE as both valid and limited



# Hindu Festivals and Marriage

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## **Festivals – Hindu calendar is different to Gregorian**

- **Shankranthi (Prayers to Sun God)**
- **Diwali (Festival of lights – Return of Lord Rama from exile)**
- **Pongal (Harvest Thanks)**
- **Sri Rama Navami (Lord Rama's birthday)**
- **Krishna Jayanti ( Birth of Lord Krishna)**
- **Ganesh Chaturthi (Birth of Lord Ganesh)**
- **New Year (New year in Apr 14)**
- **Navratri (Godess Shakti worship 9 days)**
- **Holi (Spring festival)**

## **Marriage and Vows**

- **(FOUR STEPS):** The couple walk around the sacred fire. These walks represent:
  - Dharma - righteousness**
  - Artha - monetary accomplishment**
  - Kama - energy and passion in life**
  - Moksha - liberation from everything in life.**
- **(SEVEN CIRCLES)**  
The couple take seven more steps together around the fire. These walks represent:  
**1. Eat harmless diet. 2. Develop physical, mental and spiritual powers. 3. Increase wealth by righteous means. 4. Acquire knowledge, happiness and harmony by mutual love, respect and trust. 5. Be blessed with strong, virtuous and heroic children. 6. Practice self-restraint and pray for longevity. 7. Be true companions and remain life long partners.**



# Hindu Chants (Slokas)

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- Summary of the Gayatri Mantra  
The foremost mantra in Hinduism.

**"May the Almighty God, Illuminate our intellect.**

**Lead us along the righteous path, Oh God!  
Thou art the Giver of Life, Light & the Sun  
Remover of pain and sorrow, The Provider of  
happiness.**

**Oh! Creator of the Universe, May we receive  
thy supreme moral Light."**



# Hindu Chants (Slokas) - Contd

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## **BHAJA GOVINDAM (PRAY TO THE LORD)**

- – Numbers are last sections 25 – 33.  
**25: Do not waste your efforts to win the love of or to fight against friend and foe, children and relatives. See yourself in everyone and give up all feelings of duality completely.**
- **26: Give up lust, anger, infatuation, and greed. Ponder over your real nature. Fools are they who are blind to the Self. Cast into hell they suffer there endlessly.**
- **27: Regularly recite from the Gita, meditate on Vishnu in your heart, and chant His thousand glories. Take delight to be with the noble and the holy. Distribute your wealth in charity to the poor and the needy.**
- **28: He who yields to lust for pleasure leaves his body a prey to disease. Though death brings an end to everything, man does not seem to easily give up the sinful path.**
- **29: Wealth is not welfare. Truly there is no joy in it. Reflect thus at all times. A rich man fears even his own son. This is the way of wealth everywhere.**
- **30: Regulate the life, remain unaffected by external influences and discriminate between the real and the unreal. Chant the holy name of God and silence the turbulent mind.**
- **31: Through disciplined senses and controlled mind, thou shall come to experience the indwelling LORD of your heart!**
- **33: Worship God, worship God, worship God. Chanting the Lord's name/s helps cross the life's vast oceans.**





# Hindu Epics /Scriptures

RAMAYANA, MAHABHARATA, BHAGAWAD GEETA, UPANISHADS

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## RAMAYANA

- **Sri Rama stands for the 'Good' and Ravana for the 'Evil'. In the war between Sri Rama and Ravana, good prevails over evil.**
  - **Written by Valmiki and represents epic poems.**
  - **Exercises a great moral power on the life of Hindus**
  - **Stories help to learn right from wrong.**
  - **Teaches that the person who crosses the ocean of delusion or Moha, and learns to separate likes and dislikes, is a saint who finds eternal peace.**
  - **Hanuman, the monkey God is synonymous with sacrifice and service.**
  - **Sita (Rama's wife) is portrayed as the perfect woman.**
  - **Rama (a man) is the perfect role model**

## BHAGAWAD GEETA - – AN ESSENCE OF MAHABHARATA

- **Summary of all Vedas, gives practical lessons to regulate daily life and conduct**
- **Message of the Gita is of sacrifice, love, selflessness and righteous/moral duty**
- **SRIMAD BHAGVATHAM: We need to solve life's problems from within. Our own will and determination can change the problems of bad destiny. Stories help to learn right from wrong.**



# Upanishads – Central Theme

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- Knowledge of the Upanishads destroys ignorance. 'Shad' means to 'destroy'.
- Knowledge of the Upanishads is to attain Self-realization and understand the power of Brahman.
- Two ideas pre-dominate the myriad Upanishads:
  - (1) Final emancipation can be attained only by knowledge of the Ultimate Reality, God or Brahman.
  - (2) Four means of salvation, viz. (discrimination), (dispassion), (the six-fold treasure; self-control, etc.) and (yearning for liberation), can attain Brahman
- Upanishads are rightly called the Vedanta, the end of the Vedas, that which is reserved for those who have freed themselves from the bonds of formal religion ; which is **UNIVERSALITY!!**
- The central theme in Hinduism is **MONOTHEISM**. It is not Monism. God is not without attributes. He is infinitely perfect, pure, just and righteous in all positive attributes. This is evident in the totality of its scriptures
- In the Hindu philosophy (Vedanta), an unthinkable, unknowable but understandable “Supreme Formless Person” is stressed. HE is extolled by a billion devotees in devotional music, praise, poetry, piety, art-work and prose



# Hindu Terminology

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- **PRIESTS & SANSKRIT:** Priests in Temples say Sanskrit prayers in praise of the lord & promote wishes
- **TILAK & BINDI:** A red dot on the forehead/hairline is an auspicious sign of marriage and guarantees the social status and sanctity of marriage. The man's tilak is decorative and is also an identifying mark. Worn by a priest, ascetic, or worshiper it shows which Hindu tradition he follows.
- **NAMASTE:** The gesture of namaste (uniting palms) is a simple act made by bringing together both palms of the hands before the heart, and lightly bowing the head. In the simplest of terms it is accepted as a humble greeting straight from the heart and acknowledged similarly.
- **SAINTS & SAGES:** Sankaracharya, Ramanuja, Madhavacharya, Nammalwar, Andal, Ramdas, Mira Bai, Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Sarada Devi, Tirugnana Samandar, Appar, Aurobindo – Gautama Buddha and Guru Govind Singh laid foundation for Buddhism & Sikhism in India. Also Jainism. Sri Sri Ravi & Swaminarayana.
- **HINDU FOOD & CULTURE**
  - Vegetarian food preferred over meats, meat not disallowed and widely eaten
  - Beef and pork are not allowed
  - Food charity done widely
  - Puja's and discourses are part of culture
  - Remove shoes before entering temples or homes and shower before religious events
  - Fasting on festival days — dance/dramas about puranas very common
  - Temple visits – priest interface at home & temple – temple architecture and art based on Gods.
- **AARATHI – PRAYERS ENDING**  
A camphor flame or oil lamp is circled in front of the God to ward off "EVIL". A prayer (puja) culminates with an AARATHI



# Hindu Beliefs

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- Predominantly monotheistic religion (very few know this) but permits polytheistic worship of a variety of deities for daily prayers
- Monism is also revered. Attain freedom from real life by shunning materialism and merging in the SUPREME BEING – the BRAHMAN or an ETERNAL ABSOLUTE POWER
- See all in SELF and SELF in all says an Upanishad – a scripture
- If E=0, PC = Infinity, Dharma in Karma or thought, duty, action, deed, words, accountability & implementation – Moksha is possible thru constant purification by righteous and moral actions
- Stages of life : Student, householder, Senior( vanaprasta) and asceticism/renunciation of worldliness by Sanyasins
- Right/Middle/Left: The practioners are orthodox, conservative or liberal. Western influence on the elite is fast growing – Intellectualism is transforming religion and reducing ritualism
- Prostration and Feet touch: Signs of extreme respect to Gods, gurus and elders
- Hindus believe in both creation and destruction as forces in human history
- Current Propagators: Sri Satya Sai Baba, Sri Sri Ravi, Smt. Amma, Sri Pramukh Swami, Sankaracharyas, Vivekananda, Sivananda, Chinmaya, Ramkrishna Parmahamsa & many others



# India: Unity in Diversity

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## **India is Diversity & Diversity is India**

- India is very diverse. Indians speak many languages. The population is divided by language, ethnicity, religion, regional multi-party politics and other schisms.
- The outbreaks of religious violence in India's state of Kashmir, Gujarat, Karnataka, Delhi and Orissa might cause some international concern about India and "diversity." This is only the latest round in a cycle of conflict between the Hindus, Christians, Sikhs and Moslems in India. None of this fits the pious image of peaceful and spiritual India. Many share the blame.
- Riots and religious "Diversity" is not just a matter of demographics. It is also a matter of "identity" and identity politics, says Thomas Sowell.
- Imperfections and ignorance are common to all societies. Extremists seem to be everywhere. Can and will God end this problem? When? Soon we hope!!



# CULTURAL ASPECTS OF RELIGION

- **LIFE'S GOALS:** Human goals are: Righteousness, prosperity, pleasure, success, and final spirituality to attain Moksha (liberation).
- **LIFE STAGES:** Student, householder, Senior (vanaprasta) and asceticism/renunciation of worldliness by Sanyasins – Supreme can be experienced in multiple ways hence the many Gods or polytheism and the types of yogas (methods or exercises).
- **CONCEPTS:** Non-materialism, faith in personal gods to reach out to the transcendent SUPREME, detachment, non-expectation or selflessness, high morals, righteousness in duty and actions, respect for ancestors, gender equality, prayers & pilgrimages, praise of the lord or Bhajans or hymns
- **RIGHT/MIDDLE/LEFT:** Hinduism practitioners are orthodox, conservative or liberal. Western influence on the elite is fast growing – Intellectualism is transforming religion and reducing ritualism. Interpretations and practices vary very widely without conflict.
- **PROSTATION AND FEET TOUCH:** Signs of extreme respect to Gods and elders
- **Current and Recent Saints:** Sri Satya Sai Baba, Sri Sri Ravi, Smt. Anandamayi Amma, Sri Swaminarayan, Sankaracharyas, Vivekananda, Sivananda, Chinmaya & many others?
- **RAJDHANI TEMPLE:** In Centerville, Va Pictures follow – Siva Vishnu temple in Lanham, MD
- **SUPREME GOD :** Power behind –Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer. Please note that God is a power or force and not an identifiable being! The ultimate belief is in such Power and not a being.
- **YOGA TYPES (SPIRITUAL METHODS)**
- Gnana ----- Wisdom, knowledge of God thru meditation & study
- Bhakti ----- Total devotion and passion
- Karma ----- selfless service/duty/morals/Actions
- Raja ----- combo 3
- Hatha ----- Body control (The goal of this classical martial style yoga is to bring self-transcendence, or enlightenment, through physical, mental and spiritual health. – based on intricate body poses.)
- **MEDITATION**
- To awaken the super-consciousness that transcends the five normal senses
- Morning is the best time for meditation. The hustle of the day hasn't really started, and it's a good time to just sit quiet and meditate.
- Meditation is silencing the mind or brain. It is energizing and fulfilling. Silence is the eloquent expression of the inexpressible or the super-conscious.
- The mental quietness in us is a source of vast hidden energy and power. When we meditate we actually enter into the deeper part of our inner conscience like 6th sense or super-consciousness.
- It is like going to the bottom of the turbulent sea where it is calm and tranquil. Then, fear, worry and mental turbulence disappear.
- Breathe slowly and evenly. Imagine you are breathing out all undesirable thoughts. Breath is pure energy. You feel energized and experience the unusual.
- **CASTE SYSTEM**
- A cultural and real downside of original Hinduism is and was the caste system.
- **Classifications:** Brahmin or Priests, Kshatriya or warriors, Vaisyas or business men, Sudras or menial workers, pariahs / Dalits, sewage handlers – Inequities addressed by law and political reform – Democracy & politics is reversing the inequities – slow but steady. Dravidians are distinct South Indians



# Cultural Aspects Continued (1)

- **DOWRY-GATE** – **SATI-GATE** and **GIRL-ABORTION-GATE IS MADE ILLEGAL** – The divide between Haves & Have-nots:
- **CORRUPTION GATE**: Extreme corruption in politics and government is a disease, nationwide! Does law alone solve these problems? Role of religion!!
- **ASTROLOGY**: Hindus have great faith in astrology – All important decisions are made in consultation with astrologers. The subject is very advanced **and unique**.
- Vedic astrology is the traditional system of astrology of India that is at least 4000 years old. It has recently gained popularity in the West. It influences decisions about career, finances, investments, relationship, health, spiritual growth, etc. It is based on the zodiac and the positions of the planets.
- **ASTRONOMY** is also a very advanced subject. The ancient knowledge of the cosmos is legendary. Horoscope reading at birth is extremely common in decision making of marriage, career, health, business and other life events.
  
- **YOGA** :
- The practice of yoga, Sets the atman (soul) free and aims union with the Ultimate. Carl G. Jung the eminent Swiss psychologist, described yoga as 'one of the greatest things the human mind has ever created.' "Yoga is the cessation of agitation of the consciousness."
- The practice of yoga may lead to the union of the human with the divine - all within the Self. The aim of yoga is the transformation of humans from natural to spiritual.
- The silencing of mind is the prerequisite to reflect objective reality without subjective thoughts. Yoga does not create this reality, which is above the mind. It prepares the mind to comprehend it. "There is no Yoga without Hinduism and no Hinduism without Yoga."
- **RITUALS: THREAD CEREMONY** for boys, birth of child, 1st birthday, 60th birthday, 80th birthday, Coming of age (girls), Birthday visit to temple, funeral rites, and baby shower.
- **FUNERAL RITUALS** The body is decorated with sandalwood, flowers and garlands. Scriptures are read from the Vedas or Bhagavad Gita. The chief mourner, usually the eldest son or male, will light cremation pyre and circle the body, praying for the well-being of the departing soul. Cremation is predominant - Some burials also coexist in culture. 13 day mourning and prayers – The soul reincarnates based on the merits during life as human or non-human – Only the best dharmic souls merge with God.
- **ANCESTER WORSHIP**: Ancestors are worshipped thru prayers and offerings on death anniversary days per Hindu calendar – Priest presides at home or temple



# CULTURAL ASPECTS OF RELIGION

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- **SUPREME GOD** : Power behind –Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer. Please note that God is a power or force and not an identifiable being! The ultimate belief is in such Power and not a being.
- **LIFE'S GOALS**: Human goals are: Righteousness, prosperity, pleasure, success, and final spirituality to attain Moksha (liberation).
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- **RIGHT/MIDDLE/LEFT**: Hinduism practitioners are orthodox, conservative or liberal and in-between these. Western influence on the elite is fast growing – Intellectualism is transforming religion and reducing ritualism
- **Hatha YOGA** The goal of this classical martial style yoga is to bring self-transcendence, or enlightenment, through physical, mental and spiritual health. – based on intricate body poses.
- **MEDITATION** To awaken the super-consciousness that transcends the five normal senses. Meditation is silencing the mind or brain. It is energizing and fulfilling
- **CASTE SYSTEM** A cultural and real downside of original Hinduism is and was the caste system. Inequities addressed by law and political reform – Democracy & politics is reversing the inequities





## CULTURAL ASPECTS OF RELIGION Continued (1)

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- **ASTROLOGY**: Hindus have great faith in astrology – All important decisions are made in consultation with astrologers. The subject is very advanced and unique
- **Vedic astrology** is the traditional system of astrology of India - at least 4000 years old. It influences decisions about career, finances, investments, relationship, health, spiritual growth, etc. It is based on the zodiac and the positions of the planets.
- **ASTRONOMY** is also a very advanced subject. Horoscope reading at birth is extremely common in decision making of marriage, career, health, business and other life events
- **RITUALS:THREAD CEREMONY** for boys, birth of child, 1st birthday, 60th birthday, 80th birthday, coming of age (girls), birthday visit to temple, funeral rites, and baby shower.
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- **ANCESTER WORSHIP**: Ancestors are worshipped thru prayers and offerings on death anniversary days per Hindu calendar



# ARYA SAMAJ & VEDA(A variation)

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- The prime object of the Arya Samaj is to do good to the world, that is, to promote physical, spiritual and social good of everyone
- The Vedas are the scriptures of all true knowledge. It is the paramount duty of all Aryas to read them, teach them, recite them and to hear them being read.
- God is the efficient cause of all true knowledge and all that is known through knowledge.
- God is existent, intelligent and blissful. He is formless, omniscient, just, merciful, unborn, endless, unchangeable, beginning-less, unequalled, the support of all, the master of all, omnipresent, immanent, un-aging, immortal, fearless, eternal and holy, and the maker of all. He alone is worthy of being worshiped.
- One should always be ready to accept truth and to renounce untruth.
- All acts should be performed in accordance with Dharma that is, after deliberating what is right and wrong..
- Our conduct towards all should be guided by love, righteousness and justice.
- We should dispel Avidya (ignorance) and promote Vidya (knowledge).
- No one should be content with promoting his/her good only; on the contrary, one should look for his/her good in promoting the good of all.
- One should regard oneself under restriction to follow the rules of society calculated to promote the well being of all, while in following the rules of individual welfare all should be free.



# Hinduism – Practitioners

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- **HINDUISM IN USA:** Krishna consciousness, Amritananda Mayi, Sai Baba, Vivekananda, Sri Sri Ravi, Swami Narayan, Chinmaya Mission
  - Temples in every city – Rajdhani in VA & Sri Shiva Vishnu in Lanham, MD
- **NEW AGE SPIRITUALISTS:** They accept reincarnation, karma, yoga, meditation, chanting and vegetarianism for spiritual needs. This spirit and that of the western civilization when merged can be a good balance to humanity
- **Brahmo Samaj** - Hindu religious movement in **India**. It was founded in 1828 by **Raja Ram Mohan Roy**
  - The raising of a new class of educated Indians that resulted from the occupation by the **British Empire** promoted new thinking
  - It rejected the **Vedas**, the caste system, **polytheism** and the belief in **karma** and **avatars**.
  - Its prime belief is that there is only one God.
  - It rejects idol worship and the caste system



# Monism

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- **Belief that everything in the universe is made from one basic substance or principle**
- **Monism is found in the the Rigveda, which speaks of the One that 'breathed without breath'. In short, Advaita declares - All and **EVERYTHING**, known and unknown are Brahman**
- **The Monistic Hindus believe that sensual knowledge is untrustworthy. Reason alone is reliable. The conclusion is that change, plurality, and origination do not really exist**
- **The monist view of creation was that universe and its components are a manifestation of God and not a creation of God**



# More "isms"...

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- **Mysticism** considers the end of philosophy as the direct union of the human soul with the Divinity through contemplation and love
- **Theism**, in its most inclusive usage, is the belief in at least one deity
- **Atheism** infers disbelief in God or gods
- **Pantheists** are 'monists'. They believe that there is only one Being.
- **Panentheism** : God exists and coexists in every part of universe and nature forever in time
- **HENOTHEISM**: The worship of a particular god, as by a family or tribe, without disbelieving in the existence of others.
- **DEISM**  
A movement or system of thought advocating natural religion, emphasizing morality. Creator or God does not manage the laws of the universe or nature.
- Pandeism or Pan-Deism is a term used to describe religious beliefs. It mixes pantheism and deism
- **Hinduism is flexible with these varieties of interpretations in its vast theology and the population of a billion plus people and growing**



# What I learned from my research and life experiences

## Are my thoughts subjective?

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- If negative expectation is zero, peace of mind and contentment are maximum
- If ego is zero, peace of mind is max and suffering is minimal
- If negative emotion is zero, peace of mind will be maximum
- If detachment/discretion/non-attachment is max, peace of mind will be maximum
- If greed and selfishness is absent, peace of mind is max
- If morality & righteousness is max, peace of mind is max
- If equanimity or equipoise to pain & pleasure is max, peace of mind is max
- If materialism is high, peace of mind is less
- Sharing is caring and caring is sharing
- Spirituality leads to Godliness –teaches **RIGHTEOUSNESS**
- Control what you can and decontrol what you cannot
- Understand Reality versus non-reality in life
- God is real, powerful and all-knowing; say the saints and sages of Hinduism
- The world has good, bad, ugly humans – Learn to deal with them righteously
- Simple living & high thinking
- Goodliness is Godliness!
- Good mind & conscience management will mean sure happiness
- Say yes to LOVE & no to HATE
- God is absolute or infinite in attributes but unknowable
- Greed and lust will end in Disaster
- Per Hinduism, if Self Soul merges with God's Soul, Moksha or liberation from re-birth is attained