

HANDOUT 1: HINDUISM FACT SHEET

Emerged: Indigenous faith of India.

Adherents: 900 million.

Ranking: Fourth, behind Christianity, Islam, and Atheism/Agnosticism.

Prophets: None, although there are numerous lineages of revered gurus and saints. Famous Hindu religious leaders include Mohandas Gandhi and Paramahansa Yogananda, founder of the Self-Realization Fellowship.

Texts: The Bhagavad Gita, the Vedas (including the Upanishads), Mahabharata, Ramavana, Puranas, the Tantras. Of these, the Vedas are the most important and are considered basic truths.

Clergy: Religious authority is transmitted personally through an established lineage of gurus. There is no administrative structure or person as a final authority in Hinduism.

Symbols: There are many symbols of Hinduism, as varied as the faces of God. Each god and goddess (i.e., each facet of the divine) has a symbol or symbols. Here are three important symbols:

- Aum or om: This symbol represents the primal sound of the universe. The syllable "aum" or "om" is sometimes chanted in meditation, and the symbol usually appears at the beginning of written sacred texts, prayers, and rituals.
- Lotus: This flower, which is rooted in mud but floats on water without becoming muddy, represents the many facets of God and the unfolding of Self-Realization.
- Elephant: The elephant represents the solidity and weightiness of the material world.

Terms and Fundamental Precepts:

- Brahman: God, the Ultimate Reality, formless, without gender, cannot be described. As the formless enormity of Brahman can be difficult to grasp, other gods and goddesses are offered as aspects of the divine to provide seekers with a more comprehensible path to reach Brahman.
- Nonattachment to results: The concept of retaining equanimity regardless of the results of one's actions.

- Ahimsa: Nonviolence—to do no harm. This is an ideal of Hindus and a vow of Hindu spiritual leaders.
- Nonviolent resistance: The activist expression of ahimsa. A harmful law should not be followed and should be changed, but never by hurting another person.
- Four Yogas, or Four Paths to Realization (God): Yoga of Knowledge, Yoga of Devotion, Yoga of Work, and Yoga of Spiritual Contemplation. This precept recognizes that different people will find fulfillment in different approaches to their spiritual quest.
- Karma: The concept of behavior having a cumulative effect into the future, including future lifetimes. Living well in one lifetime will have positive results on one's rebirth. Once the weight of all bad karma is removed, the karmic wheel of reincarnation ceases to turn, and the seeker is reunited with Brahman.
- Vegetarianism: Most forms of Hinduism include the practice of vegetarianism, for spiritual, ecological, and medical reasons. The primary reason is the practice of ahimsa (nonviolence), which forbids violent actions against animals.

Shared with Unitarian Universalism:

- A commitment to nonviolence and nonviolent social reform
- Recognition of differences among individuals
- Support for a wide variety of spiritual quests
- The idea that the divine can be seen in infinite forms
- Many songs and readings—for example, in *Singing the Living Tradition* (Boston: UUA Publications, 1993), Readings 419, 511, 519, 529, 540, 577, 593, 611, and 612 and Hymns 176, 178, 185, and 197 are from the Hindu tradition

HANDOUT: UPCOMING VISIT

Place: SHANTINIKETAN TEMPLE IN ROANOKE

Date: October 18, 2015

Time: 5:00-7:30 PM; includes a light meal which is provided by the temple volunteers

Address: 7221 Branico Drive, Roanoke

Website: www.roanoketemple.org

Meet at: 4:00 PM at UUC to carpool. UUC Approved Driver Policy must be followed for youth not riding with parents. Return to UUC at 8:30 PM

What to know before we visit:

- Remove shoes/sandals at the entrance.
- Dress conservatively and modestly; wear tops with sleeves and no shorts. Wear clean socks with no holes. Women might be asked to cover their heads. As a sign of respect avoid wearing leather or other products made from dead animals.
- At the temple, languages other than English may be spoken. Be respectful.

During our visit, try to observe the following:

- What can you tell about connections between the members' faith and their daily lives? For example, what classes or services are offered to the congregation? What notices and announcements are posted?
- What level of familiarity is expected of members? Does the entire congregation seem to know the order of service, the words spoken, the tunes sung? Are explanations or instructions offered during the service? Are directions written or spoken in English and/or another language?
- What are the signs that the members respect the service, its leaders, and the space in which it is held? How can you tell which spaces, objects, or moments are most sacred and least sacred for this congregation?
- What is the role of children in the service? How well-behaved are the children or youth attending the service? Do congregants practice communal parenting; in other words, do adults correct other congregants' children?