Hinduism

Hinduism is considered to be at least 4,000 years old and has about 800 million followers around the world. The unique situation with Hinduism is that it has no specific founder. Hinduism can be said to be quite diverse in its practices—and might be considered an eclectic system or compilation of religions. It has been considered monotheistic, polytheistic and pantheistic. It also is absent of a unified system of beliefs and can be experienced as abstract and metaphysical. Early on some of the nature deities in Hinduism included the sun, moon, Mother Earth, fire, water, river, air, mountains and plants. For sure, it professes honoring moral ideals such as non-violence, truthfulness, friendship, compassion, self-control, purity and generosity. Hinduism can also be defined as a way of life derived from the teachings of ancient sages and scripture The name Hindu means “Indian” and this faith focuses on achieving freedom from the observed world; on appreciating the diverse ways one can experience the divine.

Hinduism was given birth to about 1,500 years before the time of Jesus. In what is known as Pakistan today, a region named Indus was inhabited by a people that eventually became known as the Indus Valley Civilization. Between 1500 and 1200 B.C.E. the Rig Veda, considered the earliest holy scriptures of Hinduism, was written. In it the idea of heaven and hell was articulated with the understanding that the virtuous would ascend to heaven. At a later time though, Hindus professed that a human spirit, as it pursues perfection, returns several times in differing forms after each death of the physical body. This is referred to in Hinduism as reincarnation. The circle of life referred to reincarnation and it placed importance on one’s individual spiritual development—to earn release from the cycle of birth and death. Interestingly, the Hindu faith asserts that the forces of good and evil contend for man’s soul. The Laws of Manu are the Hindu Ten Commandments which guide social behavior—including customs for marriage and family life, duties of women, norms for daily living how to lead a life of goodness and virtue; which Hindus refer to as Dharma or the right path to virtue. Dharma represents the moral laws of Hinduism—prescribing the do’s and don’ts for living right.

Hinduism early on emphasized the worship of natural entities such as rivers, mountains and animals. These forces were endowed with spiritual powers and the Ganges River held the most sacred power. The Hindu Bible, referred to as Vedas identifies the worship of one Supreme Being, Brahman—the source of all life in the universe. Brahman is unseen—and represents an unknowable, supreme G-d; an abstract concept which is difficult for us to comprehend. The other major deities in Hinduism are Vishnu and Shiva. Vishnu saves and protects man. Shiva is the creator of life; the source of fertility, health and who protects man from his enemies. Man’s soul is termed Atman and it seeks to achieve its highest level after death by suffering and experiencing s number of births and rebirths until the soul reaches moral perfection and is prepared to be with Brahman in heaven. For Hindus the greatest goal in life is for our soul to be released from the daily tribulations and pain of life—which is termed Moksa. Moksa represents the absolute goal of Hindus; the return of the soul after death to Brahman. The concept of Karma refers to the record one accumulates on earth; either good or bad and unlike Christianity, there is no merciful G-d in Hinduism to repent to for our sins. Thus, karma represents the total record of one’s life, including life from earlier reincarnations. The goal is for man to earn more good than bad karma. In one is rewarded with good karma then their soul will likely avoid the cycle of birth and rebirth—and rise to an elevated plane where cycles aren’t present. On the flip side, bad karma send the soul to endless cycles of reincarnation and possibly being reincarnated as a lower animal or lowly insect.