

Hinduism is one of the world's major religions and holds the distinction of being the most ancient of the world's religions. It is the most tolerant and peace-loving religion. It is known as **Sanatan Dharma** (Eternal Religion). Its origin is traced to the most ancient civilisation of the Indian sub-continent-the Indus civilisation. There are over a billion Hindus today. Most are in India, but Hindus live all over the world. Sizeable Hindu populations live in Nepal, Mauritius, Fiji, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Guyana, Indonesia, Australia, America, Canada, England, New Zealand and some other countries. Australian census 2000 indicates that more than 100,000 Hindu families live in Australia? Hindu religion is rapidly growing in the country.

### What is Hinduism?

Is it a religion or a way of life? The truth is - it is both a religion and a way of life, a philosophy on life. Hinduism asks each one of us to search for the Divine within us. We are all divine and each one of us has the capacity to realise that divinity within us; therefore each one of us is a Hindu by birth. It is through ignorance, we do not know our divinity and commit crimes. Once we realise the truth behind our existence we become pure, ever peaceful, ever radiant with joy, happiness and bliss - **Sat Chit Ananda** (Truth, Consciousness and Bliss) - that is our true nature..

Under the umbrella of Hinduism, today one finds numerous religious denominations promoting and practicing the Hindu philosophies throughout the world. India gave to the world the original, oldest and most profound philosophy of life. The brilliant scholars, called the **Rishis** explored the truth behind our existence and gave several philosophies and theories to define the Truth. The ultimate truth aims to reach **Moksha** when one goes beyond the cycle of birth and death. At the same time they created a set of rules for "good living" on this earth. That the Supreme Reality is One and can be worshiped in any form is a concept unique to Hinduism. Hinduism gives form and shape to these "works" of Infinite with the Hindu Trinity - Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva - "Brahma", the creator, "Vishnu" the sustainer and "Shiva" the destroyer or the annihilator of the Universe.

At different periods of time, many genuine **Rishis, Saints** and **Sages** born in India have cleansed, reformed and revitalised Hinduism and made it relevant to their times. The Saints and sages were called Rishis because they had realised the truth with their purified minds through **Tapas** - an intense, dedicated search through meditation and penance. A Sage or a Saint in the context of Hinduism, is one who has realised his true self or in other words has experienced the existence of God. The revealed divine truths are contained in the books called the Vedas. They are the primary Scriptures of **Sanatan Dharma**. The **Vedas** shaped the ancient Indian society and governed ethics and morality. The Vedas can be identified in terms of their origin into "Shruti" (what is heard or revealed) and "Smriti" (what is worth remembering). A Sage named Krishna Dvaipayana (Ved Vyas) recorded and documented them as Yajur Veda, which was the original Veda. Due to its voluminous

content, it was classified into four categories: [Yajur Veda](#), [Rig Veda](#), [Sama Veda](#) and [Atharva Veda](#).

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