



AFFIRMING FAITH HINDUISM WORKBOOK

Egale

 Rainbow Faith
and Freedom

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We acknowledge that our work takes place on the traditional territories of diverse Indigenous Peoples, who have stewarded these lands for millennia. These lands, now known as Canada, are home to a rich tapestry of Indigenous cultures, languages, and traditions.

We acknowledge the enduring presence and contributions of the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples to this land, and recognize their deep connection to the territories, waters, and resources.

We acknowledge the painful history of colonization, forced displacement, and cultural suppression that Indigenous Peoples have endured, and the ongoing impacts of these injustices.

We commit to honouring Indigenous rights, supporting reconciliation efforts, and fostering meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities based on mutual respect, understanding, and partnership.

May we all work together towards healing, justice, and a future where Indigenous Peoples are empowered to thrive and flourish across Turtle Island.



ABOUT

Egale Canada

Egale is Canada's national 2SLGBTQI organization working to improve the lives of 2SLGBTQI people in Canada and to enhance the global response to 2SLGBTQI issues. Egale achieves this by informing public policy, inspiring cultural change, and promoting human rights and inclusion through research, education, awareness, and legal advocacy. Our vision is a Canada, and ultimately a world, without homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and all forms of oppression so that every person can achieve their full potential, free from hatred and bias.

Rainbow Faith and Freedom

Rainbow Faith and Freedom (RFF) is a global movement to confront religious-based LGBTI Discrimination and improve the human and equality rights of LGBTI people everywhere. Decreasing and lessening the effects of religious-based LGBTI discrimination can, and will, make changing punitive laws easier and improve the lives of LBGTI people so they can be who they are, love who they want, and find safe and accepting places to practice their faith (worship).

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1. HINDUISM: OVERVIEW OF THE FAITH

Hinduism is the third-largest religion practiced globally. It has existed and evolved over a period of around 4,000 years. As a result, it is difficult to articulate one single definition of Hinduism.

Although Hinduism is often perceived as polytheistic due to the multiplicity of deities in its pantheon, this is not strictly accurate as these deities are most frequently considered manifestations of a universal principle or Brahman. Primary among these manifestations of the divine are the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Brahma is known to be the supreme God that resides in all things. Vishnu is the powerful sustainer, and Shiva is the powerful destroyer. Together, these represent the Hindu concept of samsara, the continuous cycle of birth (Brahma), life (Vishnu), and death (Shiva). Among them, none is more powerful than the other. This acceptance of multiplicity among deities may be a contributing factor to the tendency for Hindus to embrace other religions and recognize many deities as viable paths to that one supreme God. Because of this inclination to embrace diversity, Hindus also tend to see Hinduism as a way of life or as a way of being rather than as a singular religion.

There are no restrictions for anyone to enter a Hindu temple. In fact, all are welcome to attend.



1.1 Tenets

There are **four** *purusartha* (tenets) in Hinduism that originate in ancient texts. These are: *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *mosha*. These tenets do not have direct one-word translations into English, but the LearnReligions.com website summarizes them as follows:

1. **Dharma** is the ethical, duty-driven manner of living in cooperation with one's fellow human beings. It includes a comprehensive set of rules for the "right way of living."
2. **Artha** is the pursuit of material prosperity through constructive work. For Hindus, *artha* includes not only traditional work for daily sustenance but also the work of government and civic service.
3. **Kama** is the pursuit of pleasure and happiness through the exercise of desire and passion. This does not have the connotation of hedonistic pleasure, as it does in some other traditions, but is regarded as one facet of a well-rounded spiritual life.
4. **Mosha** is the pursuit of spiritual liberation and salvation. This is the area of scholarly study and meditation, along with forms of mysticism."

All individuals should strive for all four, but in practice, an individual may personally place greater value on one tenet over the others.

Hindu Diet

Diet is a very important aspect of the Hindu religion. Hindus consider certain foods to be intimately tied to mood, fitness, health, and longevity, and many will tailor their diets accordingly.

Hindus believe that all life contains a spark of the Divine. For this reason, many Hindus are vegetarian. Many Hindus who eat meat will refrain during important



celebrations or holidays. Cows are a sacred animal within the Hindu religion, and as such, consuming beef is strictly forbidden, though non-vegetarian Hindus regularly consume pork, goat, seafood, and poultry. For Hindus who follow a strict diet, certain vegetables are also considered taboo, including onion, garlic, turnip, and mushrooms. Dairy products are generally regarded as acceptable to eat, though strict vegetarian Hindus will avoid any cheeses made with rennet.

1.2 Important Texts

Hinduism does not have a singular sacred text, but several. The primary ones are the **four Vedas** (stories, hymns, verses) that were received by sages and written down. These are The Rig Veda, Samaveda, Yajurveda, and Atharaveda.

Other important texts include the Bhagavad Gita, 18 Puranas, Ramayana, and Mahabharata. Although there are others, these tend to be the most common texts familiar to non-Hindus.



1.3 Important Symbols



Figure 1:
Hindu Swastika

The **swastika**. Many get nervous when they see the swastika due to misuse and appropriation of the symbol by Nazis. The Nazi swastika is positioned in diagonal form, whereas in Hinduism, it is positioned parallel to the horizon. Contrary to its negative connotation due to Nazi appropriation, the Swastika in Sanskrit means “good fortune” or “being happy.” You will often see the swastika in the doorways of temples and homes, as well as on altars and shrines in the home.

When pujas (ceremonies, rituals) are done, a swastika is also drawn using turmeric or holy ash.



Figure 2:
Aum symbol

The **Aum symbol** (“om”) is comprised of three sounds a, u and m which, when combined, produces an auspicious sound. Many Hindus will wear an aum symbol on a chain or keep it as a small statue or ornament on their desks, car dashboards, altar, etc. It is seen as something that brings calm as well as blessings.

1.4 Important Holidays and Celebrations

There are many holidays and days of significance observed throughout the year in Hindu tradition. To what degree a person actively observes holidays will vary widely depending on their family’s traditions, broader cultural/regional traditions, and/or which individual deities the person or their family follows.

The following are some of the main celebrations that many Hindus celebrate today, listed in the order they occur within the calendar.



Note:

The Hindu calendar is lunisolar, so the date on which a celebration falls in the Gregorian calendar can vary by up to 4 weeks from year to year.



Winter Months

- **Makar Sankranti/Pongal** marks the sun's entrance to *Makara* (Capricorn) and celebrates Surya (the Sun God). This festival is made unique by its celebrations, which range from kite-flying to bonfires to riverbank rituals. January 14 or 15 each year.
- **Maha Shivaratri** is "the great night of Shiva." This vigil commemorates Shiva's power as the destroyer. People refrain from sleeping and instead pray. Many also fast and perform chants in Lord Shiva's honour. Late February to early March.
- **Holi** is a festival of colour and the herald of spring in India. The celebration includes the burning of an effigy to signify the triumph of good over evil, a night-long party around a bonfire, and the raucous smearing of coloured powders on each other. Early to mid-March.



Spring Months

- **Rama Navami** commemorates the birth of Lord Rama. The epic poem *Ramayana* has vast religious significance in Hinduism. In it, its protagonist, Lord Rama, uses his divine prowess and benevolence to slay immoral beings, conquer the realm, and establish order. Observances of his symbolic birthday include charity, recitals, and prayers. Late March to early April.
- **Ugadi** is the Hindu New Year. Characteristic components of the celebration include decorating homes with mango leaves, preparing elaborate floral designs on floors, and the consumption of *bevu bella* – a blend of bitter neem (*bevu*) and sweet jaggery (*bella*) to symbolize acceptance that life must include both bitterness and happiness in equal parts. Late March to early April.





Late Summer Months

- **Krishna Janmashtami** celebrates the birth of Lord Krishna, a prominent Hindu deity. Celebrations include general merriment and a competition wherein players form human pyramids to reach and break a suspended pot of yogurt. Once broken, the spilled contents are offered as *prasada* (ritual offering). Mid-August to early September.
- **Ganesh Chaturthi** commemorates the birth of Lord Ganesh. It is one of the most popular Hindu festivals, in part due to its playful and eccentric traditions. Observances of this day include offering of prayers and immersing a clay idol of the beloved elephant-faced deity in water. Late August to mid-September.
- **Onam** is the official state festival of Kerala. Like many other Hindu festivals, it celebrates the triumph of hope over despair. It is celebrated with festivities that include boat races and tug of war. Late August to mid-September.



Fall Months

- **Navratri/Dussehra** is an invigorating nine-day long festival that centers on the Goddess Durga Puja. The final day of Navratri is known as Dussehra. The festival as a whole serves as the precursor to the coming Diwali. It is a time to honour the deities and ask for blessings and goodwill. Late September to mid-October.
- **Diwali** is the festival of lights. It is the most popular festival on the Indian subcontinent and is celebrated around the world. At its core, it is a celebration of light (goodness) overcoming darkness (evil). In the evening, glimmering *diyas* (lamps) adorn every nook and cranny, along with fireworks and a traditional banquet. Late October to early November.



1.5 Sources and Suggested Resources

A Guide to the Fundamental Tenets of Hinduism (Learnreligions.com)

<https://www.learnreligions.com/the-main-tenets-of-hinduism-1770377>

Hinduism (Wikipedia.org) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism>

Hinduism (History.com) <https://www.history.com/topics/religion/hinduism>

Hindu Festivals You Should Know About (TheCultureTrip.com)

<https://theculturetrip.com/asia/india/articles/10-hindu-festivals-you-should-know-about/>

What is Hinduism (Study.com)

<https://study.com/learn/lesson/hinduism-major-beliefs-origin-history.html>

What is Hinduism, a religion of a way of life? (The Times of India)

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/readersblog/rationalthoughts/what-is-hinduism-a-religion-or-a-way-of-life-40809/>

Why Hindus Don't Eat Meat (Dr. Jai Marahaj)

<https://lakshminarayanlenasia.com/articles/WhyHindusNoMeat.pdf>



2. HINDUISM: HISTORY AND STRUCTURE IN CANADA

As of 2021, there are about 828,000 Hindus in Canada. It is the third-largest religious group in the country.

Historically, Hinduism was seen as a threat to the British who settled in Canada. So, newly arrived Hindus generally practiced Hinduism privately and with fear. Often, people would gather at each other's homes for prayer and *bhajans* (devotional songs) to practice their faith.

One of the first Hindu temples established in Canada was in Aulds Cove, Nova Scotia, in 1971. A year later, in 1972, British Columbia registered a temple in Burnaby. Since then, many Hindus from India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Fiji, Bangladesh, Nepal, and other countries began building temples in the cities where they settled. Today, there are approximately 443 Hindu temples across Canada, mostly located within larger cities.

2.1 Governance

As a whole, Hinduism does not have a formal governing body within Canada or globally. Most temples operate independently through the leadership of a board of directors/trustees.

Temples affiliated with the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), colloquially known as the Hare Krishna movement, function slightly differently from many other temples. ISKCON temples have a more formal governance structure that follows the directions provided by Srila Prabhupada.



Each ISKCON temple has a president who executes standardized directives that help ensure that no matter where a person goes in the world, there is no change in how the temple they visit functions.

2.2 Sources and Suggested Resources

List of Hindu Temples in Canada (Wikipedia.org)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Hindu_temples_in_Canada

Hinduism in Canada (Wikipedia.org)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism_in_Canada

2021 Census of Population – Profile Table (Statcan.gc.ca)

<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page>



3. HINDUISM: HISTORIC AND CURRENT STANCES ON 2SLGBTQI IDENTITIES

There are no specific mentions of homosexuality being wrong or right within the religion itself. In fact, Hinduism is full of stories of fluidity of gender, gender expression, and sexual orientation. Examples are not just found in the Kama Sutra, but in many stories in the vedas (stories, hymns, verses) and sastras (scriptures).

This said, popular social and religious understandings of gender and sexual diversity among Hindus drastically changed as a result of British colonization. Colonial laws prescribed harsh punishments for anyone who challenged British norms of gender and sexuality. Homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia became endemic cultural norms and practices, and religion was often the tool used to enforce it.

While colonial rule does account for a significant portion of the discrimination, as with all religious and faith groups, there is no one cause or correlation of hate. For example, although Hindu teachings do speak to appropriate conduct for those who specifically belong to the upper caste, there are no outright mentions of homosexuality that would suggest that it is to be condoned or forbidden. Meanwhile, the teachings are indifferent to how individuals of lower castes conduct themselves.

With the rise in education, awareness, and activism, the Hindu community is progressively re-embracing its 2SLGBTQI members. It is not uncommon for family and friends to now support same-sex marriages, and some Hindu priests, recognizing the importance of love and commitment, are now willing



and happy to officiate these unions. India, Pakistan, and Nepal now formally acknowledge diverse genders and sexualities, including the rights and freedoms of hijra, a “third gender” community traditionally recognized and revered within Hindu society.

However, while these developments are promising, the journey towards complete acceptance and inclusion remains ongoing. Many gay and trans Hindus still face societal pressures, including being coerced into heterosexual marriages, facing punitive actions for their identities, or even being disowned. Some may confide in their immediate family but remain cautious about revealing their truth to extended relatives or the wider community. The decision to come out at the workplace remains a significant challenge for many.

3.1 Sources and Suggested Resources

19 LGBT Hindu Gods (Advocate.com) <https://www.advocate.com/religion/2016/9/06/19-lgbt-hindu-gods?pg=1#article-content>

Homosexuality Is Not a Sin in Hinduism (youthkiawaaz.com) <https://www.youthkiawaaz.com/2022/10/homosexuality-hinduism-and-the-concept-of-sin/>

Stances of Faiths on LGBT Issues: Hinduism (HRC.org) <https://www.hrc.org/resources/stances-of-faiths-on-lgbt-issues-hinduism>

The Third Gender and Hijras (Harvard Divinity School) <https://rpl.hds.harvard.edu/religion-context/case-studies/gender/third-gender-and-hijras>

Views About Homosexuality Among Hindus (PewResearch.org) <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/hindu/views-about-homosexuality/>



4. HINDUISM: DOS AND DON'TS



Do



Do check in with your staff on their dietary restrictions.

While many Hindus are vegetarian, not all are. There are many Hindus who are vegetarian only on certain days.



Do assess organizational policies for cultural awareness.

For many people, including Hindus, the definition of family is broader than the nuclear family. Therefore, policies around things like bereavement leave or family care leave may need to be flexible.



Do foster cross-cultural understanding.

Use appreciative inquiry to ask about someone's practices or traditions and believe what they tell you about them.



Don't

Don't conflate traditionality with cisheterosexuality.

For example, a mangalsutra (marriage necklace) is often worn by Hindu women and tied by the husband during the wedding ceremony. This tradition is sometimes also used in non-heterosexual marriages.

Don't misapply Western concepts of family.

Never interrogate or assume the staff person is overstating or exaggerating their family relationships. For many Hindus, "immediate family" extends beyond just parents/children and siblings.

Don't exoticize or infantilize a Hindu person for what they wear, say, or do.

