

Are you a **HINDU?**



You may *also* be a
HUMANIST!

HUMANISTS
believe in **GOOD.**

THE AMERICAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

provides a humanist perspective in strong support of separation of religion from government, preservation and restoration of the environment, protection of civil rights and liberties, and promotion of personal choice regarding introduction of new life, family structure, and death with dignity. Though humanists are not monolithic on every issue—this is a community that encourages tolerance and nurtures diversity—we directly challenge human rights violations and discrimination.



1821 Jefferson Place NW, Washington DC 20036
800.837.3792 | www.americanhumanist.org

HINDUISM has neither a specific moment of origin nor a specific founder. Rather, the tradition understands itself to be timeless. Indeed, its collection of sacred texts is known, as a whole, as *Sanatana Dharma*, “The Eternal Teaching.” It is a tradition that contains many different beliefs, philosophies and viewpoints. The lack of a unifying overall religious authority and the absence of a single book claiming supreme truth have contributed to its diversity.

Hinduism has been described as a set of rules for humans to lead their life. One of its main understandings is that every principle in Hinduism is centered on the growth and welfare of humankind. Another key concept is *Karma*, the Sanskrit word that means “actions” and refers to the fundamental Hindu principle that one’s moral actions have effects on one’s fortunes in this life and, as many Hindus believe, the condition of rebirth in a next life.

One can believe a wide variety of things about gods and the universe and still be considered a Hindu. According to Klaus Klostermaier, a prominent scholar of Hinduism, Hinduism has proven to be much more open than other religions to new ideas and scientific thought. Precisely because it is so diverse, large elements of Hinduism overlap and share the values of humanism.

Throughout its extensive history, there were many key figures teaching different philosophies and writing numerous holy books. For these reasons, scholars often refer to Hinduism as “a way of life” or a “family of religions” rather than a single religion.

Hinduism has over one billion adherents. It is the third largest religion after Christianity and Islam.

HUMANISM is a progressive philosophy of life that, without supernatural beliefs, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good of humanity.

“If I were asked to define the Hindu creed, I should simply say: Search after truth through non-violent means. A man may not believe in God and still call himself a Hindu. Hinduism is a relentless pursuit after truth... Hinduism is the religion of truth. Truth is God. Denial of God we have known. Denial of truth we have not known.”

—Mahatma Gandhi

“Humanism is a philosophy of reason and science in the pursuit of knowledge...humanists enjoy the open-endedness of a quest and the freedom of discovery that this entails.”

—Fred Edwords, 1986 AHA Humanist Pioneer, in “What Is Humanism?”

“Non-theistic Hinduism does not require a God to prescribe laws of morality. It does not employ rewards or punishment as methods of imposing morality. It simply asserts that the same spirit manifests as all living things, so there is a deeper level of connection and this imposes a natural moral obligation.”

—Dr. Jay Lakhani, Education Director for the Hindu Council in the United Kingdom, Theoretical Physicist

“Humanism is being good without God. It is above all an affirmation of the greatest common value we human beings have: the desire to live with dignity, to be ‘good.’ But Humanism is also a warning that we cannot afford to wait until tomorrow or until the next life to be good, because today—the short journey we get from birth to death, womb to tomb—is all we have.”

—Greg M. Epstein, Humanist Chaplain at Harvard University & MIT and author of *Good Without God: What A Billion Nonreligious People Do Believe*

But *how* can I be a **HINDU** and a **HUMANIST**?

In *Ethics for Our Time* (2011) M. V. Nadkarni (Honorary Visiting Professor at the Institute for Social Economic Change, Bangalore) wrote “...Hinduism, far from being inconsistent with humanism, shows concern both for human responsibility and human welfare, not merely in the scriptures and other literature, but also in practice.” In an essay “Hinduism: The First Culture of the World,” the author (unidentified) wrote “Hinduism is similar to humanism...it is a set of rules for humans to lead their life.... The main concept of Hinduism is to make human beings united, which means kindness, supportive affection, peace.... Every rule in Hinduism is responsible for the growth of mankind and its welfare.” What can be a clearer statement of humanism than this affirmation from the Hindu Vedic Scriptures (The Atharva Veda): “Do not be led by others, awaken your own mind, amass your own experience, and decide for yourself your own path.”

Hinduism is rooted in universality, and has an extensive evolutionary history of assimilating and adapting to competing thoughts and belief systems. Mahatma Gandhi wrote: “Religions are different roads converging to the same point. What does it matter that we take different roads, so long as we reach the same goal?” (*Hind Swaraj*, 1939). In this vein of thought, Hinduism is ever-growing and values careful reflection in the pursuit of knowledge. “Hinduism abhors stagnation. Knowledge is limitless and so also the application of truth... New experience will teach us new duties, but truth shall ever be the same. Who has ever known it in its entirety?” (*Young India*, 1926)

Throughout its history, many writings refer to Hinduism as “a way of life” rather than a single religion. Two of its central components are karma and dharma. Hindus believe that humans are responsible for their karma: their actions and the effects of their actions. Dharma or righteous living, an all-encompassing term, can mean law, duty, order, proper conduct, morality, and justice. While humanism cannot be summed up in two words, it includes two underlying concepts which relate to both responsibility and righteous living:

- “The responsibility for our lives and the kind of world in which we live is ours and ours alone.” (Humanist Manifesto III—Humanism and Its Aspirations)
- “Humanism is a lifeway aiming at the maximum possible fulfillment through the cultivation of ethical and creative living and offers an ethical and rational means of addressing the challenges of our times. Humanism can be a way of life for everyone everywhere.” (Amsterdam Declaration 2002—International Humanist and Ethical Union)

The Amsterdam Declaration ends on this note: “By utilizing free inquiry, the power of science and creative imagination for the furtherance of peace and in the service of compassion, we have confidence that we have the means to solve the problems that confront us all. *We call upon all who share this conviction to associate themselves with us in this endeavor.*”

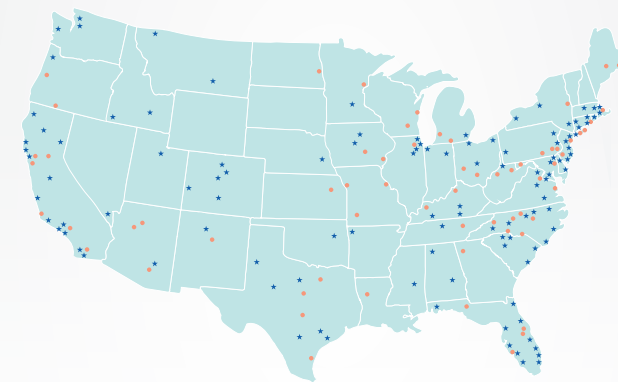
See more at www.americanhumanist.org/paths

Be a part of the *growing*
HUMANIST
MOVEMENT!

HOW TO GET INVOLVED:

Membership: New members receive a free book about humanism. All members receive voting privileges, the *Humanist* magazine, and discounts on AHA conferences, seminars, books, literature, and more!

Local Communities: Start or join a local AHA Chapter or Affiliate to connect with humanists in your area and build the humanist community.



Local AHA communities: ★ Chapter ● Affiliate

Education: Enjoy our Center for Education’s innovative online and in-person resources designed for individuals, professionals, and groups across the humanist spectrum.

Advocacy: Help us protect the separation of church and state and advocate for social justice and universal human rights.

Visit us at AMERICANHUMANIST.ORG for details.