

BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW APOLOGETICS – (HINDUISM) - Lesson 8

Quotations Note*: Many parts of this document were copied from Chapter 10 of the book, "Faith With Reason: Why Christianity is True," which can be downloaded in PDF format at this web address: (<http://www.ntslibrary.com/apologetics-PDF-books.htm>)

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Hinduism is one of the world's oldest religions. It has existed in India for thousands of years. There is no single founder of this religion. It has no single sacred text. It has no central governing body. Hinduism is more akin to a belief system that tried to absorb the many religious ideas found throughout ancient India, and even now, tries to absorb the beliefs of all world religions, while affirming that ultimately, all roads can lead to salvation. In principle, Hinduism attempts to affirm the validity of all world-views / faith-views, and therefore, it has no great commission type of mission that encourages Hindus to evangelize. There are roughly one billion Hindus throughout the world today.

A collection of Hindu sacred writings are as follows:

The VEDAS are the primary ones: The Rig Veda, The Samaveda, Yajurveda, Atharvaveda (the belief is that the Vedas "transcend all time" and are "without beginning or end")

The Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, 18 Puranas, Ramayana, Mahabharata and Agamas are also regarded as "sacred texts" in Hinduism

- **Upanishads (or "Equivalences")** - Vyasa, according to tradition, was a sage who composed the Upanishads. These Hindu religious texts include topics of philosophy, meditation, ontological beliefs (relating to Being) and consciousness.
- **Bhagavad Gita (Celestial Song)** - a 700-verse Hindu scripture that is part of the epic Mahabharata, is religious poem that teaches that the way to the World Soul is through love of the god Vishnu. It is considered to be the "book par excellence" by many Hindus. It reflects dialogue between a prince Arjuna and Krishna, his charioteer, who is an incarnation of Lord Vishnu.
- **18 Puranas or "Antiquities"** – A large encyclopedic body of ancient Indian literature on a wide range of topics. It features legends and other traditional Indian lore. Included are a wide range of topics, including theology, philosophy, cosmogony / cosmology (the origin of the universe), astronomy, the genealogies of gods, goddesses, demi-gods, heroes, kings, sages (sacred teachers), folk tales, pilgrimages, temples, medicine, grammar, mineralogy, and love stories.

- **Ramayana** – An epic story about a legendary prince named Rama. It narrates his exile from his city of Ayodhya, his journey over many years, and his triumphant return to be crowned as celebrated king.
- **Mahabharata** – An Indian epic story about a struggle between a group of cousins in an ancient great war, including the stories of princes and the leaders following them. This epic includes devotional and philosophical materials, including a discussion of life's goals.
- **Agamas** - Agama texts describe cosmology, theory of knowledge, and meditation and practices such as yoga, mantras, deity worship, temple construction and attaining sacred desires.

Major Hindu Beliefs

- ❖ **Brahman** – the conception that ultimate, or supreme reality is one, all encompassing, unified, world soul ... It means *“utter reality, utter consciousness, and utterly beyond all possibility of frustration” ... “either personal or transpersonal, depending, on which carries the most exalted meaning for the mind in question ... it is the basic Hindu view of God”*

In Hinduism, it can be true (for any given believer) that there is no personal god whatsoever ... or, a Hindu may also be atheistic in the sense that they believe Brahman or ultimate reality consists of some sort of impersonal substance. Hindu scriptures, on the other hand, such as the Bhagavad Gita and Bhagavata Purana attribute authoritative statements to personal gods in their literature. This may be why it appears the *“average man in India is polytheistic, because he reveres all supernatural beings; and of these there is no end. To the Hindu his deities number, as he often says, 330,000,000 gods.”* According to one writer, *“Idolatry is abundantly manifest throughout Hindu India. It is directed toward all kinds of natural, human and animal representations, including trees, cows and stars, and even to images of the male and female sexual organs.”*

Many educated Hindus regard the worship of primitive pagan gods as something illiterates do. They view such primitive, pagan worship of gods such as the sun and moon as legitimate, however, because those who truly worship them are sincere in their ignorance, and Braham accepts their worship as genuine. In the next incarnation, they can be born into a more advanced religious consciousness.

Attempting to find a straightforward answer to the question of whether or not a supreme personal being exists is not possible within Hinduism. As one leading Hindu Philosopher said, *“Those who live in God do not care to define. They have a particular confidence in the universe, a profound and peaceful acceptance of life in all its sides. Their response to Ultimate Reality is not capable of a clearcut, easily intelligible formulation. The mystery of God’s being cannot be rationally determined. It remains outside the scope of logical concepts.”*

Hindu teachers constantly mix the language of personality with impersonality in their efforts to explain what Brahman means. *“As one and the same material, water, is called by different names by different peoples, one calling it water, another eau, a third aqua, and another pani, so the one Everlasting-Intelligent-Bliss is invoked by some as God, by some as Allah, by some as Jehovah, and by others as Brahman.”*

- ❖ **Monism** – the belief that everything in reality is made up of the same substance, whether that substance is matter, mind, or something else ... Monism essentially means *all is one*.

“Monism is the Hindu view of metaphysics, which essentially is a further expression of the belief in one, all encompassing, unified, world soul.” We can see it expressed, for example, in the famous Beatles song, *“I am the Walrus.”* Monism is reflected in lines such as, *“I am he as you are he as you are me and we are all together... I am the eggman, they are the eggmen, I am the Walrus.”*

Monism leads to Hinduism’s next fundamental belief – which is **Maya**.

- ❖ **Maya** is the Hindu belief that even though reality appears to contain distinctions (tangible, intangible, mind, matter, organic, inorganic, personal, impersonal, individual, or many, or substantive, including various substances such as wood, metal, plastic, etc.) these apparent appearances of differentiation are really just maya, which means “illusion.” All of the physical cosmos, as we see it and experience it, is ultimately just an illusion.

One story is told of a Hindu yogi-teacher explaining the concept of Maya to a group of his students one particular day. And while he was conversing with them, a rampaging elephant broke through the forest and headed towards the yogi’s group. Everyone scattered, including the yogi, who quickly climbed up a tree in order to avoid getting trampled by the elephant. After the danger passed, the students asked the yogi why he scurried up the tree, since he believed with certainty that the elephant was only “an illusion.” He replied, *“Yes, the elephant was truly an illusion ... but you must remember ... what you also saw was an imaginary me, climbing up an imaginary tree, in order to escape from the imaginary elephant. It’s all an illusion.”*

In Hinduism, a large part of what Hindus view as “the salvation experience” involves an individual transcending the false conceptions of reality, in order to fully attain the realization that all of the physical cosmos and earthly world is really an illusion.

- ❖ **Hinduism’s ultimate goal (i.e., SALVATION) happens when an individual’s soul (atman)** is ultimately united with the one encompassing world-soul or *Brahman*. One’s journey to this salvation takes place over countless lifetimes ... these lifetimes involve countless reincarnations ... or rebirths, upon the wheel of life. An individual can advance their

reincarnated status in the next life by living moral lives in this life (as defined by Karmic moral laws) and progressive spiritual development. Advancement towards salvation and reincarnation status in the next life can take place by exercising disciplines such as meditation and practices of yoga. A person's status may also regress in the next life if they do not live morally in this present life.

So what exactly is a “moral life” in Hinduism? This is where the Law of Karma comes in.

- ❖ **The cosmic law of Karma** (*literally WORK*) pre-determines one's status in the present life while also determining their future birth-status in the next life ... *“The literal meaning of karma (as we encountered it in the karma yoga) is work, but as a doctrine it means, roughly, the moral law of cause and effect ... The present condition of each interior life - how happy it is, how confused or serene, how much it sees - is an exact product of what it has wanted and done in the past.”* The doctrine of karma is Hinduism's answer as to why people should be “moral” beings who take responsibility for their actions.

A part of mankind's problem is that we've lost awareness that we are one with Brahman. This results in ignorance and a consciousness that we're made of matter and conceive of ourselves as individual persons. We're punished by Karma as a result, and must endure reincarnation in various forms, beginning with lower forms of life like amoeba, and then progressing on into higher life forms. Hinduism teaches that bad karma can result in human beings being reborn as animal, vegetable, or even mineral substances.

Hindu scriptures teach that karma often brings punishment. *“Hindu folklore abounds in legends about the workings of karma. In one group of morality tales, for example, ‘a foolish man is reborn a monkey, a cunning one as a jackal, a greedy one as a crow. A tribal myth of Orissa tells of a woman burning with jealousy who is reborn as a chili plant, destined to burn all its life ... those whose conduct has been evil, will quickly attain an evil birth, the birth of a dog, or a hog, or a Kandala (outcast).’ ”*

As human beings, a person who does good earns good karma, and if they are bad they earn bad karma. Good karma merits moving on in the next life to a higher life form (or caste status). After countless incarnations, a person can potentially get rid of their bad karma. A person will remember that they're really one with the supreme being (Brahman) and the misery of physical manifestation in life will be over.

- ❖ **CASTE SYSTEM** - Reincarnation and karma WERE / ARE classically tied to the ancient **Indian caste system**. The ideas of reincarnation and karma were once strongly tied to the ancient Indian caste system's rigid lines of distinction between the various social classes.

Indian caste system consisted of 4 main groups (and one lowest of the low group):

India's caste system classified Hindus into four varnas (or classes), based largely upon occupation:

- **Brahmin** - the highest caste, considered to be an incarnation of knowledge – this was the class of priests and teachers.
- **Kshatriyas** – these were the political rulers, aristocracy and also the warriors.
- **Vaishyas** - merchants (business people), the traders and also the farmers.
- **Sudras or Shudras** - These were the laborers – considered to be the lowest of the four main classes.
- **Dalits** - the lowest group – known as the “untouchables” – an entirely separate sub-caste, perceived to be the impure, the vile. Dalits were considered so vile that members of other casts were forbidden to even share the same water, the same street, or interact with Dalits on any personal level.

The Caste system was paramount in ancient India, as it determined a person’s social status, career, language, diet, clothing and options for choosing a spouse. It also provided the means by which those of upper castes would often oppress those in lower castes and keep them subordinate.

Strict adherence to caste rules was believed to bring a reward of rebirth into a higher caste in the future life. *"Caste rules preventing a Hindu from eating, marrying, and all intimate dealings with persons who belong to the other main casts, were even to the other sub castes of his own main caste, though it should be said that the 20th-century has witnessed a progressive breakdown of caste in India."* Indians once looked upon re-incarnation as the primary vehicle for social advancement.

Critique of Hinduism

Religious worldviews are comprised of systematic truth-claims.

Although Hinduism teaches religious pluralism (i.e., claims that all roads lead to heaven) on the one hand ... it simultaneously tries to make distinctive Hindu truth claims. It makes distinctive truth-claims regarding doctrines such as Brahman, Monism, May and Karma. Mahatma Gandhi wrote in his *Autobiography* that, *“truth is the sovereign principle, and the Bhagavad-Gita is the book par excellence for the knowledge of Truth.”*

Truth-claims associated with particular worldviews are either true or they are not. This makes it all the more important that such beliefs be truth-tested.

As one Christian apologist once said, *“A true defense of any claim must also deal with the evidences that challenge or contradict it. In other words, truth is not only a matter of offense, in that it makes certain assertions. It is also a matter of defense, in that it must be able to make a cogent and sensible response to the counterpoints that are raised.”*

BRAHMAN

A description of “Brahman” presents a logical challenge all by itself. Contending that all of reality is “oneness” first requires a person to ignore the fact that reality appears to contain distinctions. Christian apologist Francis Schaeffer once commented that Hinduism doesn’t teach Pantheism (all is god) as much as it teaches *Pan-everything-ism* (that everything is said to be a part of god). But for “God” to be God then God must be Supreme, or else God is not God. If everything is a part of God then nothing is God, for there is nothing distinct from us that can be referenced.

Though Hinduism teaches the idea of an impersonal *Brahman* as true reality it also attempts to accommodate every pagan notion of deity as well. Hindu scripture often leads many Hindus into primitive paganism. But worshiping a plurality of deities introduces its own problems from a rational standpoint. *“The word gods itself is problematic. The very word God implies and requires sovereignty. This is why the word gods implies a contradiction: because the so-called gods imply by that title sovereignty, which they do not possess; they can only be seen as partially gods, i.e., one god controlled sea voyages; another, sexual matters; still another, warfare and so on. Polytheism has many partially ruling spirits, but no God.”*

How can a Hindu philosopher logically *know* (logically justify) that God’s being falls outside the scope of logical concepts? Would not his use of logic in this statement imply that logic itself must be an expression of ultimate reality? If so, then how is it that logic cannot somehow correspond with human descriptions about God? What the Hindu is admitting, of course, is that Hinduism’s concept of God falls completely outside of logic.

This is the heart of this negative internal critique of Hinduism as a worldview. Hindu descriptions of God always end up as irrational, contradictory or unintelligible abstract formulations. By trying to accommodate every possible definition of God, Hinduism strips real meaning from any of them.

MONISM

If “all is one” or “all reality is ultimately oneness” is true then one might legitimately ask if there is a *difference* between Hinduism and other religions? Is the Hindu declaring a unique (i.e. different) faith while theoretically positing everything in fact is one (i.e. the same)?

If monism (all is one) is true, then one could easily conclude that pantheism (all is god) is also true. But if pantheism is true then human beings, in themselves, may consider themselves to be “gods,” and every individual “a god.”

It is not surprising that this is exactly what one finds in many writings of those influenced by Hindu thought. *“This is the heart of philosophical Hinduism – self-deification. One of India’s*

premier philosophers stated as forthrightly as one could, ' Man is God in a temporary state of self-forgetfulness.'” Monistic doctrine ultimately leads some Hindus to think that human beings are god. The desire to be like God, with the power to decide right from wrong, is exactly what the Bible says led Adam and Eve to their downfall.

MAYA

If everything in this world is maya, or illusion, then apparent distinctions between both physical and mental states are illusory. But that would call into question not only one's perceptions about any religious knowledge, but every other aspect of human experience as well. For example ... are chairs real? ... is your mother real? ... is love real?

To be fair, Hindus do not teach that everything in life should be treated as if it is illusion. Hindus do deal with the real world on real terms. Many professing Hindus are among the brightest and most intelligent people anywhere. Hindus, however, should be asked, “How does one deal with the realness of this world when Hinduism teaches this world isn't real? How can one aspire to escape from the illusion of this present reality while simultaneously encountering and reacting to the realness of this world?

Hindus realistically deal with this world because they MUST do so, or else, like everyone else, they would perish. This is a real world and there are real world consequences to not dealing with the world in its realness. The issue here is whether or not Hindus can account for the realness of this world based upon the teachings of Hinduism.

If everything in this cosmos is illusion, then are “good” and “evil” thoughts or actions illusory? But if so, then how would individuals be judged for being either good or evil? More on this below...

KARMA

The full Hindu view of “*Karma combined with Re-incarnation combined with historical ties to the ancient Indian Caste System*” is typically more than the mind of an average western person typically wants to wrestle with, which is why non-easterners usually only borrow selective elements from the concept of Karma in order to incorporate into their worldview. Westerners often adopt the notion that Karma is simply some type of impersonal moral law that somehow governs human actions or dispenses unpleasant judgements when people don't act the way they “should,” whatever that means. We often hear this expressed today, for example, when someone says something like, “*Karma is giving so-and-so what they deserve.*”

Orthodox Hinduism's doctrine of karma essentially implies an impersonal judge over the universe. Since karma itself is seen judging human actions. This leads one to wonder how

karma, with its ability to distinguish “right” from “wrong” behavior in a universe where all is “one” came into being in the first place? And how can there be moral law without a personal moral being as lawgiver?

The belief in karma brings with it more than just a notion that man lives within a moral universe. If karma is real then individuals inevitably face a predetermined fate in this present life that cannot be altered. Human conditions are already bound and determined by choices made in a previous life. With this kind of determinism though, the conditions of the previous life would be representative of the life lived before that one, and so on, into the past. If this is true then isn't it legitimate to ask just how much actual freedom or personal responsibility one currently exercises regarding the choices or state of their present life?

And what about future lives? If Karma has determined our fate (along with most or all of the associated choices made in order to bring it about) then how can better choices be made in this life that will positively affect one's next reincarnated life? Does not Karma operating in this life have a pre-determining effect upon the next live ... and then the next one ... and so on?

KARMA AND CASTE CONNECTED

What exactly is the relationship was between the presupposed law of karma and the ancient rules of caste? If the formerly imposed rules of caste determined how karma would judge people, then this would mean finite mankind had the power to create the supposedly higher cosmic laws that judged him. But if the ancient rules of caste were derived from the higher law of karma then Hinduism is now disregarding the rules that karma continues to apply when judging man. Its standard is now unattainable since the cast system has officially been eradicated.

How can Karma continue to judge Indians today who no longer operate according to the ancient caste system? And how does Karma judge human beings who have never been a part of any caste system? Since that ancient Caste class structure has now been officially banned in India, the rules once supposed to be the standard by which Indian human actions were measured have been removed. What moral standard is now applied by the workings of karma to determine either blessings or curses?

What is good? What is evil? What is right behavior and what isn't? Hindus will end up answering questions such as these in many different ways. But how can one escape the wheel of life and reincarnation without being able to answer fundamental ethical questions like these?

KARMA VERSUS BRAHMAN

Perhaps the greatest internal moral contradiction within Hinduism is that its doctrine of Brahman implies that all circumstances, including those resulting from direct human actions, are ultimately an expression of the same ultimate reality. While karma recognizes “good” behavior such as altruism and unselfishness, the concept of Brahman itself reduces all human actions to moral equivalence, since it teaches that everything is an expression of the one-ness that is ultimate reality.

Philosophically speaking, Hinduism actually blurs any distinction between good and evil because the idea of Brahman equates good and evil. How so? If all is one, then “god” is both good and evil, as good and evil are ultimately one.

Hindu philosophers may counter by saying that only an individual’s ultimate unity with Brahman could permit them to transcend all ethical distinctions. But the notion of good and evil ultimately reflecting a one-ness as conceptualized in teachings about Brahman are not foreign to Hinduism. Here is a quote from another Hindu philosopher ... *“Such a one, verily, the thought does not torment: ‘Why have I not done the good?’ ‘Why have I done the evil?’ He who knows this, saves himself from both these thoughts. For truly, from both of these he saves himself - he who knows this. This is the Upanishad mystic doctrine.”*

If good and evil are ultimately one, however, then there can be no “good” behavior or “bad” behavior ... and no “good” karma or “bad” karma ... and no moral application for salvation.