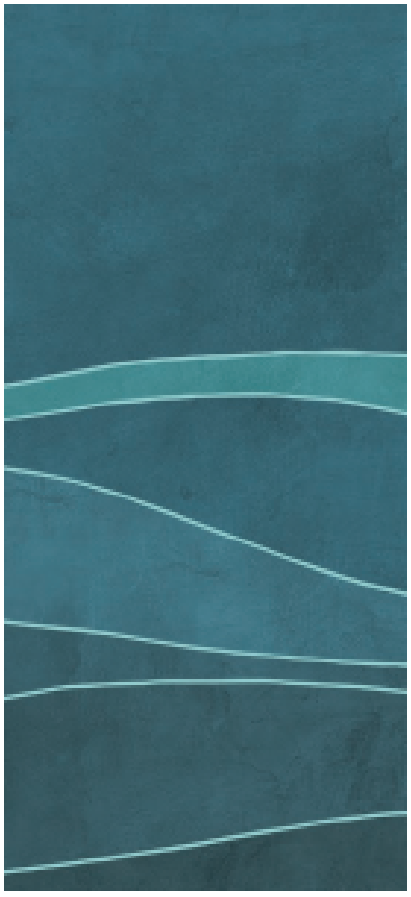
# Dharma

Hinduism is a religion which has fused many different traditions and practices. There is no one way to be a Hindu, nevertheless, there are certain fundamental principles that all Hindus share:



- Truth is eternal: Hindus feel that they must pursue knowledge and understanding of the truth.
- Reincarnation: Hindus feel that all forms of life have a soul (atma). They think that the soul cannot be destroyed. Instead, Hindus believe in reincarnation, which means that the soul exists in the body until the living thing dies. It then enters a new living thing.
- Karma: Good and bad actions carried out during someone's life, affects which living thing the soul will be born into next. For example, Hindus think it is possible for a human soul to be reborn as a cat.
- Moksha: Moksha means liberation of the soul from the cycle of death and rebirth. It occurs when the soul reunites with the god Brahma. For a Hindu, this is the end goal.

In Hinduism, 'dharma' means duty, religion, virtue and morality; it is a central part of a Hindu's daily life. Hindus believe that there are right and wrong ways to behave so they must behave correctly, follow the moral law and take their duties seriously. According to dharma, it is best to do the right thing at all times. For example, a pupil's dharma is to is to work hard at school; the parents' dharma is to raise and support their family; and the dharma of the police is to protect others. At different stages of a Hindu's life, their dharma will change, however, it is everyone's dharma to be kind, honest, religious and to be a good person in society. Hindus believe that following their dharma allows them to feel happy and live a rewarding life. Not acting in accordance with your dharma is believed to be wrong and called 'adharma'.

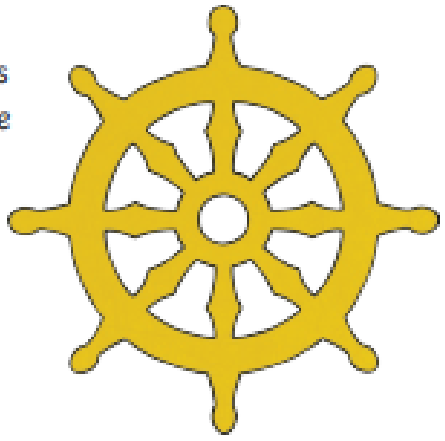
Karma refers to the law that every action has a reaction in the near or distant future. Therefore, actions in accordance with dharma will have good reactions. If a Hindu follows the dharma, they can expect to be reincarnated into a higher form in the next life or good luck will come their way.

**Did you know?**

Hinduism is often referred to as Sanātana Dharma, a Sanskrit phrase meaning 'the eternal law'.

There are two main categories of the Hindu scriptures known as Shruti and Smriti. Smriti is composed of traditional texts, including the Dharma Shastras (legal and ethical texts), the Puranas and the folk legends known as the Mahabharata and Ramayana.

The word dharma also means the ancient teachings of the Buddha in relation to Buddhism. Many of the Buddha's teachings come from Hinduism.



# Questions

1. How does the text describe Hinduism?

2. True or False – Hindus believe that the soul can be destroyed.

3. To not act in accordance with your dharma is called what?

4. What do Hindus believe happens to a soul when a living thing dies?

5. In your own words, explain karma.

6. Why might a Hindu's dharma change?

7. In the text, it lists the dharma of a student, parents and a police officer. Can you think of another example to add to this?

8. What do Hindus believe can happen if they don't act in accordance with their dharma?

9. Which facts show that Hinduism and Buddhism are linked?

**Extension task – Write about your own beliefs.**

# Answers

1. How does the text describe Hinduism?
   **The text describes Hinduism as a religion which has fused many different traditions and practices.**

2. Find two pieces of evidence to show why Hindus believe a soul cannot be destroyed.
   **Hindus believe that the soul cannot be destroyed due to the cycle of birth and rebirth because when a living thing dies its soul enters a living thing. For example, Hindus think it is possible for a human soul to be reborn as a cat.**

3. Not to act in accordance with your dharma is called what?
   **To not act in accordance with your dharma is called 'adharma'.**

4. What do Hindus believe happens to a soul when a living thing dies?
   **Hindus believe that the soul exists in the body until the living thing dies. It then enters a new living thing.**

5. In your own words, explain karma.
   **Various answers which must touch on the following ideas: Karma, good and bad actions carried out during someone's life, affects which living thing the soul will be born into next. For example, Hindus think it is possible for a human soul to be reborn as a cat. Karma refers to the law that every action has a reaction in the near or distant future.**

6. Why might a Hindu's dharma change during their life?
   **A Hindu's dharma will change during their life because as a child, their dharma will be to work hard at school, however, when he or she grows up, they may raise children. In this instance, their dharma would be to raise and support their children.**

7. In the text, it lists the dharma of a student, parents and a police officer. Can you think of another example to add to this list?
   **Various answers**

8. What do Hindus believe can happen if they do not act in accordance with their dharma?
   **Hindus believe that if they don't act in accordance with their dharma, they won't feel happy or live a rewarding life. Furthermore, they can't expect to be reincarnated into a higher form in the next life or have good luck.**

9. Which facts show that Hinduism and Buddhism are linked?
   **The fact that many of the Buddha's teachings come from Hinduism shows that the two religions are linked.**