

Glossary : Hindu worldview traditions

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Adharma

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Adharm

DEFINITION: Going against dharma (duty).

Advaita

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Advait, advaita

DEFINITION: The philosophy of non-dualism, monist, where the soul, God and matter are considered to be one.

Ahimsa

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Ahinsa

Non-violence. The belief that we should not cause harm to any living creature. This is a guiding principle, from the Bhagavad Gita. It was used by the 20th Century Hindu reformer Mahatma Gandhi.

Artha

DEFINITION: Striving for success, earning money, and professional success through honest means to provide sufficiently for your family.

Arti

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Arti, Aarati, Aarti

DEFINITION: This is part of the puja (worship) ceremony and is an offering of light and other elements of creation to welcome, or give thanks, to the deity. Arti is the culmination and conclusion of puja in which a tray bearing (normally a lamp with five lights) is given, symbolising the five elements by circling in the auspicious clockwise

direction before each murti in turn. Simple worship at home can consist of lighting incense.

Ashrama

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Ashram

DEFINITION: A stage in the life of a Hindu person. Many Hindus say there are 4 stages in life, and that these help Hindus plan their own pathway for a good life. These 4 stages are: a student, a householder, the retired life and the renounced stage of life.

Atman

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Atma, Aatma

DEFINITION: The self; the spark of Brahman, the ultimate reality in every living creature. It is in both animals and humans. Atman is pure, eternal and unchanging.

Avatar

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: avatāra

DEFINITION: The name given to a body taken on by a God (usually Vishnu) to come to Earth. This is sometimes known as an 'incarnation' of God. Amongst the best-known avatars of the God, Vishnu, are Rama and Krishna.

Bhagavad Gita

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Gita, Bhagvad Gita, Bhagvat Gita, Bhagwat Geeta

DEFINITION: An ancient Hindu sacred text which literally means 'song of the Lord'. The central story concerns a war between different parts of the same family and takes the form of a dialogue between Arjuna and his chariot driver, who is the God Krishna.

Brahma

DEFINITION: A deity. The creator of things and the creator of the universe, people, and creatures. Part of the Trimurti.

Brahman

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Brahmanam

DEFINITION: A formless, ultimate reality. One energy or consciousness in the universe, the source of everything.

Dana

DEFINITION: Generosity and giving to others through charity.

Deity

DEFINITION: The gods and goddesses that are seen as different forms or aspects of Brahman, who is the supreme being or ultimate reality for most Hindus.

Dharma

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Dharam

DEFINITION: There is no single translation but most Hindus would refer to it as Duty. Duty is the things that people should do to carry out their role in life properly. Duties can be different for different people in their different stages of life. The word also refers to purpose, responsibility, and righteousness. By fulfilling their duty, Hindus believe they will attain Moksha.

Diya (Diya) lamp

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Diya

DEFINITION: A small clay lamp which is lit at Diwali to remember the return of Rama and Sita, and to welcome the deity Lakshmi.

Diwali

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Divali, Deepavali, Deepawali, Dewali

DEFINITION: A new year Hindu festival of lights, and a festival of good overcoming evil, light overcoming darkness, which takes place in October or November. The story of how Prince Rama defeated a demon called Ravana to rescue his wife Sita is popular at Diwali. In South India some Hindus celebrate Diwali on a different day to others.

Durga

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: MahaDevi, **Yogamaya, Ambika**

DEFINITION: A female deity who uses her power to fight evil. She is referred to as a mother and is a protector. She is pictured with a series of weapons in her multiple arms and often rides a tiger.

Dvaita

DEFINITION: Monotheistic dualism or the acknowledgement of the distinction between the soul, God and matter.

Ganesh

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Ganesha

DEFINITION: A deity who is the son of Shiva and his wife Parvati. He is one of the most worshipped deities by Hindus. He is seen as the remover of obstacles, and he brings good fortune. Ganesha is frequently depicted with a human body and an elephant's head. He is often found on a puja tray. Ganesha is usually worshipped before any ceremonial rituals to ensure a smooth ceremony. He also often found at the entrance to people's homes. His companion or vehicle is a rat.

Ghats

DEFINITION: A flight of steps that lead down to a river, a lake or a pond. This term is most often used in India to refer to the steps that lead down to the sacred river Ganges. People use these for religious rituals, including cremating the dead.

Guru

DEFINITION: A spiritual teacher who gives guidance to those seeking spiritual wisdom. A person who can bring you closer to the truth or to God.

Hindu

DEFINITION: A follower of Hinduism, also referred to as Sanatan Dharma, the eternal teaching.

Hindu Dharma

DEFINITION: A term that is often preferred over the word Hinduism as a name for the tradition as a whole.

Holi

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Phagwah, Dola Jatra

DEFINITION: A spring festival lasting approximately 5 days. It is a festival of fun, where the normal rules of behaviour are temporarily relaxed, and the custom of throwing coloured powders at everyone is extremely popular. It is particularly celebrated in honour of the divine love of the Deities Radha and Krishna.

International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON)

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: ISKCON, Hare Krishna

DEFINITION: A Hindu religious community, also known as Hare Krishna movement. It is a Vaishnava tradition, rooted in the teachings of the 15c Saint Sri Chaitanya who promoted Bhakti Yoga – Loving Devotional service to Krishna teaching from Bhagavad Gita and Bhagavat Purana. The deity Krishna is particularly significant to this group who follow the philosophy of Dvaita or dualism. They can sometimes be seen chanting mantras in town centres. In the UK Bhaktivedanta Manor is a spiritual centre for members of ISKCON and visitors containing; a temple, monastery and an organic farm with a protected herd of cows.

Janmashtami

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Janmastami, Krishna Janmashtami, Gokulashtami

DEFINITION: A celebration marking the birth of Krishna, celebrated in August or September. Celebrations stretch over two days and include drama, song and dance.

Kama

DEFINITION: Finding pleasure and enjoyment in the good things that life has to offer.

Karma

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Karman

DEFINITION: This translates as 'action' or 'deed', but its wider meaning is 'cause and effect'. Karma refers to the sum of a Hindu's actions, which will determine his or her future existences. The atman (the spark of life or the ultimate reality or spirit soul) returns to the Earth in another body, according to the law of karma. A life lived in accordance with one's dharma means their future reincarnation into a body with more potential to reach Brahman/moksha. This is the belief that actions have consequences, even in the next life.

Kartikeya

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Kartik

DEFINITION: The brother of Ganesha and the son of Shiva and his wife Parvati.

Krishna

DEFINITION: A Hindu deity who is known for his love and compassion. He is an avatar of Vishnu. There are lots of stories about Krishna's childhood. He is often portrayed with blue or dark skin, wearing a peacock feather and playing the flute. The teachings of Krishna are found in the Bhagavad Gita. And His story can be found in the Bhagavat Purana. Some Vaishnavas believe Krishna is the origin of everything and the source of Brahman.

Kumbh Mela

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Kumbha Mela

DEFINITION: A Hindu festival that happens every 12 years. It takes place at the confluence of the Ganges and the Yamuna, two ancient rivers that are considered sacred by many Hindu people. Kumbh Mela is a Sanskrit term: Kumbh means pot or jar perhaps holding water, and Mela means to assemble or to unite. Large numbers of pilgrims attend, and it is said to be the largest gathering of people on earth.

Lakshmi

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Laxmi

DEFINITION: The deity of good fortune, wealth and prosperity and consort of Lord Vishnu. She is associated with the festival of Diwali.

Mahabharata

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Mahabharat

DEFINITION: A sacred text containing epic tales such as those of royal cousins, the Pandavas and the Kauravas, who are fighting over the royal throne. It also contains the Bhagavad Gita, a very popular Hindu text, in which Krishna instructs Arjuna in his crisis of conscience during battle.

Mandir

DEFINITION: A place where Hindus go to worship. Known by some as a temple. It fulfills many other roles for its community. It is the place where religious ceremonies take place, such as a marriage or a festival. It is a place where religious leaders, known as pandits or priests, can address the congregation. Although most Hindus worship in the home they still attend larger Mandirs on special festival days.

Mantra

DEFINITION: Religious utterances (or recitations or prayer) are often recited repeatedly in order to form a Mantra. They are believed to be imbued with power and derived from the divine. One example is the Gayatri Mantra from the Rig-Veda (a Hindu sacred text). It celebrates the underlying unity of all creation. Another example of a mantra is used by the contemporary ISKCON movement, 'Mahamantra' (Great Mantra), which is believed to be the mantra for this age or yuga 'Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare, Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare

Moksha

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Moksa

DEFINITION: Describes the ultimate goal of most Hindus: liberation from the cycle of samsara and the constant pain of rebirth. Moksha is sometimes described as a drop of water meeting the ocean, as the atman (eternal self or spark of the divine) is finally reunited with Brahman.

Mundan

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Mundan Sanskara, Mundan Sanskar

DEFINITION: The first haircut a Hindu child receives, which symbolises the removal of impurities from previous lives, thus wishing them a healthy new life. It is also known as Mundan Sanskara (Sanskar).

Murti

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Murthi, Moorti

DEFINITION: A physical representation of a deity. This is often a statue of the deity. This is usually a form of the deity made of wood, marble, metal or other material that can be moulded.

Namaste

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Namaskar

DEFINITION: A greeting where people bow slightly and put their palms together. It means 'the spark of God in me bows to the spark of God in you', it also acknowledges God in the heart of the other person.

Navratri

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Navaratri, Navarathri

DEFINITION: The Hindu festival of nine nights. The female divine is particularly important at this time as the festival celebrates the nine forms of Durga or Mother Goddess. There are dances on each night celebrating each form. Rama's triumph over Ravana which is celebrated on the tenth night. Families celebrate the triumph of good over evil. and many celebrate Durga, the mother deity slaying of Mahishasura a demon who could not be killed by any man. A tenth night is Dusshera, where an effigy of Ravana is burned.

Om

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: A U M, Aum, ohm

DEFINITION: The primordial sound, the first sound of creation and the sound of the universe. Also used in prayers, hymns, chants and meditation. It is a sacred symbol that describes Brahman.

Pandit

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Pundit

DEFINITION: One who is knowledgeable or expert in scriptures and performs ceremonies, sometimes also known as a priest.

Prathana

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Prarthana

DEFINITION: To pray, Hindus pray when they attend the worship ceremony at the Mandir (temple) and within their homes.

Puja

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Pooja

DEFINITION: The practice of worship in the home or mandir (temple). It is carried out by many Hindus, and it shows love and devotion to the deity.

Rakhi

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Rakhri

DEFINITION: A bracelet that siblings tie on one another's wrists to show love and protection. Most often, sisters tie the rakhi onto their brother's but, in some families, sisters tie one to their sister's wrist or people tie them onto the wrist of a friend.

Raksha Bandhan

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Rakhsha Bandhan

DEFINITION: A festival or ceremony held in August, that celebrates the love and bond between sisters and brothers. This festival is when Rakhis are traditionally used.

Rama

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Ram

DEFINITION: A significant, popular deity and the hero of the Ramayana. A prince who is known for bravery, kindness and his devotion to his duties. He is believed to be an avatar of Vishnu who appears in this world to bring balance back into the universe.

Ramayana

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Ramayan

A sacred Vedic text for Hindus. It is an epic poem that tells one of the great stories of Hindu Dharma which tells the story of Rama and Sita. An important text used as example of following dharma.

A sacred text, which tells an ancient Indian epic tale. It describes the story of Rama and Sita.

Rangoli patterns

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Rangoli

DEFINITION: A pattern created using paint powder and natural material, put just outside the front door of homes and other buildings to welcome visitors. This is done at festivals such as Diwali. Decoration around the home are placed to welcome the deity into their homes.

Ravana

DEFINITION: King of the demons who once ruled all of the universe with 10 heads and 20 arms. He is also the reason Rama appears on the earth. He is the king of the island of Lanka and is a key figure in the Ramayana.

Reincarnation

DEFINITION: The belief that after death a being is reborn into a new life or acquires another material body. Another way of putting this, is that the atman (spark of life or of the ultimate reality or spirit soul) is reborn into another body.

Rishi

DEFINITION: A sage, enlightened philosopher or wise person. Much of their time is spent meditating. Vedic texts speak of Rishi's who also have special powers acquired due to their devout meditation and practices.

Sacred thread

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Yajnopavita

DEFINITION: A ceremony that takes place when a Hindu is ready to take responsibility for their religious life. It is one of the 16 samskaras, the rites of passage of life. This ceremony is undertaken by many Hindu boys and some Hindu girls.

Sadhu

DEFINITION: A Hindu person who, often later in life, has chosen to lead a life away from other people, focusing on meditation to enhance their spiritual life. Sadhu- male, Sadhvi-female

Sadhvi

DEFINITION: A Hindu person who, often later in life, has chosen to lead a life away from other people, focusing on meditation to enhance their spiritual life. Sadhu- male, Sadhvi-female

Samsara

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Sansara

DEFINITION: Describes the cycle of birth, death and rebirth (reincarnation). The life one is born into depends on how the previous life has been lived, or how far the individual kept or performed his or her dharma. There is no personal judgement of the individual.

Samskara

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Sanskar

DEFINITION: The rites of passage that take place during the life of a Hindu person between birth and death. There are 16 in total, including a baby naming ceremony, and the sacred thread ceremony.

Sanatan Dharma

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Sanatana Dharma

DEFINITION: Eternal law or eternal religion. A phrase used by some Hindus to describe their beliefs. It is used as a name for the tradition as a whole.

Saraswati

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Sarasvati

DEFINITION: A deity who is the consort of Brahma. She is often depicted with her vehicle, the swan, and a musical instrument. She represents knowledge, arts, music and learning.

Sewa

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Seva

DEFINITION: Selfless service. In other words, giving to others without expecting anything in return.

Shakti

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Sakti

DEFINITION: She represents the feminine side of the divine. Powerful and protective she is also known as Devi or Mata.

Shiva

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Siva

DEFINITION: A deity. The destroyer of things so new things can begin, keeping the universe in balance. Part of the Trimurti. Known for his steadfastness, detachment, and controller of his senses. Some worship Shiva as the supreme deity.

Shrine

DEFINITION: A place set aside for worship for a Hindu, either in the home or the mandir. It often houses murtis of deities, offerings, candles and incense.

Shruti

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Sruti

DEFINITION: One of two kinds of Hindu sacred text. Shruti means 'that which is heard'. These texts are believed to have been revealed to holy men and women, directly from the divine. They include the four Vedas and the Upanishads.

Sita

DEFINITION: The wife of Rama. She is also a princess and is known for her loyalty and devotion and beauty

Smriti

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Smrti

DEFINITION: One of two kinds of Hindu sacred text. Smriti means 'that which is remembered'. These texts are based on human recollections of messages from the divine. They are considered less important by some scholars than the shruti texts. They include some of the best loved books, such as the Mahabharata, the Bhagavad Gita, the Ramayana and the Puranas.

Temple

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Mandir

DEFINITION: An alternative name for the place Hindus go to worship. It is also known as a mandir. It fulfils many other roles for its community. It is the place where religious ceremonies take place, such as a marriage or a festival. It is a place where religious leaders, known as pandits or priests, can address the congregation. Most Hindus also worship in their home.

Tilak mark

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Tilaka

DEFINITION: Marks made on the forehead. Can denote a worshipper of Vishnu or Shiva and the various schools within the Hindu Dharma.

Trimurti

DEFINITION: The word means three-image. Most Hindus believe in these three significant forms of Brahman, the ultimate reality. Brahma, the creator of things who created the universe, people and creatures. Vishnu, the sustainer or protector of all

living things and Shiva, the destroyer of things so new things can begin, keeping the universe in balance.

Upanishads

ALTERNATIVE SPELLINGS: Upanisads

DEFINITION: Sacred texts which contain the teachings of those who not only debated intellectual ideas about the divine but spent time in meditative and ascetic practices. They contain information on, the soul, karma, reincarnation, Brahman and moksha.

Vedas

DEFINITION: Most ancient sacred texts that are said to have been 'heard directly' by rishis. Veda literally means knowledge.

Vishnu

DEFINITION: A deity. The sustainer or protector of all living things. Part of the Trimurti.