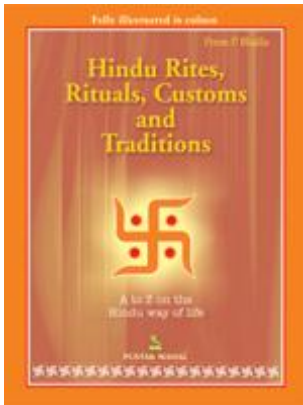




Hindu Rites, Rituals, Customs And Traditions



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Rites, rituals and customs play a major role in the life of every person, irrespective of religious affiliations.

However, this is more prominent in the case of Hindus.

Right from the time of conception and birth, up to a person's passing away and even after it, rites and rituals follow a Hindu at all times, much like a shadow.

Indeed, there is one or the other rite, ritual or custom that comes into play for Hindus 365 days of the year.

However, unlike other religions where many customs are mandatory, the Hindu way of life is comparatively flexible, with people in different regions following a variety of customs and traditions.

While a monotonous way of life could figuratively kill many people from sheer boredom, Hindu rituals and customs enliven Hindus' daily existence.

Besides, they also ensure that in the hustle and bustle of daily life in this materialistic era, people do not lose sight of spiritual goals.

This book outlines all these practices right from the sunrise to the sunset years and makes a most enlightening read for all readers, Hindus as well as non-Hindus.

About the author:

Educated in Dehra Dun and New Delhi, the author enjoys photography and travel, having travelled widely in India and abroad.

Besides running his own business, he is deeply involved with several social welfare and educational institutions.

The author has also been involved with the Rotary movement for over 40 years.

Mr Bhalla has written several self-improvement books and is particularly interested in the welfare of youngsters.

The author also gives group lectures on personality and career development.

He has also authored Teens to Twenties, The Portrait of a Complete Man, Hello! Just Married or About to Marry, 7 Mantras to Excel in Exams and 50 Moral Tales, as well as co-authored The Book of Etiquette and Manners, all published by Pustak



Mahal..

CONTENTS:

- A-1 : What is the basis of the life of a Hindu?
- A-2 : Why do Hindus consider 'Om' sacred?
- A-3 : Why do Hindus offer prayers to Sri Ganesh before a special occasion?
- A-4 : Why do Hindus say God is omnipresent?
- A-5 : What is the Hindu belief about the life cycle of the world?
- B-1 : What is the Hindu view on the many gods and goddesses they pray to?
- B-2 : What is the basis of Hindu religious thought?
- B-3 : What is the Hindu belief about the Navgrah?
- B-4 : What is the significance of the many incarnations of Gods?
- B-5 : What is the significance of making offerings to Shiva and the Shivaling?
- B-6 : What is the significance of Shalgram for Hindus?
- B-7 : Why do Hindus specially revere Hanuman?
- B-8 : Why do Hindus pursuing music and learning revere Ma Saraswati?
- B-9 : Why do Hindus working with machinery revere Vishvakarma?
- B-10 : Why do Hindus fear the influence of Shanidev in their lives?
- B-11 : How did Lord Mahavir influence Hindu thought?
- B-12 : How did Gautam Buddha influence Hindu thought?
- B-13 : What was the influence of Guru Nanak Dev and his successors on Hindu thought?
- B-14 : What is the difference between the national and Hindu calendars?
- B-15 : Why do Hindus hold Yama in fear and awe?
- C-1 : Why do Hindus hold Nature in great reverence?
- C-2 : Why do Hindus consider the Ganga holy and worthy of reverence?
- C-3 : Why do Hindus greatly revere the sun?
- C-4 : Why do Hindus hold the moon in special reverence?
- C-5 : Why do Hindus revere trees?
- C-6 : Why do Hindus consider the Peepal tree holy?
- C-7 : Why do Hindus consider Tulsi the most sacred plant?
- C-8 : Why do Hindus consider the cow sacred?
- C-9 : What is the Hindu attitude towards animals?
- D-1 : Why do Hindus consider the human form of life most valuable?
- D-2 : How are Hindus expected to make their life worthwhile?
- D-3 : What role do rites and rituals play in the Hindu way of life?
- D-4 : What attributes influence the Hindu way of life?
- D-5 : Why is the Hindu caste system often criticised?
- D-6 : Why do Hindus accord great importance to good and bad deeds?
- D-7 : What is the influence of heaven and hell on the Hindu way of life?
- D-8 : What four stages of life does every Hindu pass through?
- E-1 : Why is a Hindu marriage considered an eternal bond?
- E-2 : Why do Hindus attach special importance of partners?
- E-3 : Does comparing horoscopes help find compatible partners?
- E-4 : What is the importance of the Roka and Sagai ceremonies?
- E-5 : What ceremonies are performed at a Hindu wedding?
- E-6 : Why is a wedding procession taken to the bride's place?
- E-7 : Why is tying of the knot an important part of the Hindu wedding?
- E-8 : What ceremony fulfils the religious part of a Hindu wedding?
- E-9 : Why is Saptadi an essential part of the Hindu wedding ceremony?
- E-10 : What marital vows do the husband and wife take in a Hindu marriage?
- E-11 : What is the purpose of changing seats on getting married?
- E-12 : What is the significance of the husband applying sindoor in the wife's hair?
- E-13 : Why do married women wear a mangalsutra around the neck?
- E-14 : What is the purpose of Shiksha in a Hindu wedding?
- E-15 : What is the concluding ceremony in a Hindu wedding?
- F-1 : What are Hindu views on conception and childbirth?
- F-2 : What is the purpose of Punsavan ceremony?
- F-3 : What is the purpose of the Simantonayan ceremony?
- F-4 : Why is the Namkaran ceremony important?
- F-5 : Why do many Hindus perform the Chhochak ceremony?
- F-6 : What is the purpose of the Nishkraman ceremony?



- F-7 : What is the purpose of the Annprashan ceremony?
F-8 : What is the purpose of the Mundan ceremony?
F-9 : What is the purpose of a choti?
F-10 : What is the purpose of the Karnvedh ceremony?
F-11 : What is the purpose of the Vidyarambh ceremony?
F-12 : What is the purpose of the Yagyopavit ceremony?
G-1 : Why do Hindus emphasise a good student-teacher relationship?
G-2 : What is the importance of Diksha?
G-3 : What is the importance of Dakshina to the teacher?
G-4 : How can one attain the true purpose of life?
G-5 : Why should one rise early in the morning?
G-6 : Why is the earth like the mother?
G-7 : Why is pranayam an ideal way to begin the day?
G-8 : Why is care of parents the best service?
G-9 : What is the purpose of conveying respect through Charan Sparsh?
G-10 : What is the purpose of the Samavartan ceremony?
H-1 : Why do Hindus use the swastika on auspicious occasions?
H-2 : Why should all guests be respected?
H-3 : Why do Hindus consider charity as a responsibility towards society?
H-4 : What is the purpose of fasts for Hindus?
H-5 : What benefits accrue from Maun-vrat?
H-6 : Why is the Hindu calendar full of a variety of festivals?
H-7 : Why are prayers offered to Ma Lakshmi on Diwali?
H-8 : Do pilgrimages really benefit people?
H-9 : Why do Hindus aspire to go on the Char Dham Yatra?
H-10 : Why are Kumbh Melas celebrated only at four places of pilgrimage?
H-11 : Are Hindus generally superstitious?
H-12 : Does the 'evil eye' exist?
H-13 : Do predetermined Mahurats ensure success and happiness?
I-1 : Is prayer an important element in Hindu life?
I-2 : Why should one face the east when praying?
I-3 : What is the importance of the asana we sit upon when praying?
I-4 : Why are flowers always offered during prayer?
I-5 : Why is the lotus flower most important to Hindus?
I-6 : What items do Hindus use at prayer time?
I-7 : How do Hindus conduct their prayers?
I-8 : Why do Hindus consider a conch shell auspicious?
I-9 : Why are Hindus possessive about the rosary they use for prayers?
I-10 : What is the effect of prayer on an individual?
I-11 : Why do Hindus chant a variety of mantras during prayer?
I-12 : Which mantra do Hindus consider most powerful?
I-13 : Besides the Gayatri mantra, which other mantra is very special to Hindus?
I-14 : How often do Hindus pray everyday?
I-15 : Do all Hindus follow a complex procedure of prayer?
J-1 : How important is group prayer for Hindus?
J-2 : How important is devotional prayer and singing to Hindus?
J-3 : Why do Hindus clap when singing devotional songs?
J-4 : Why do Hindus accord great importance to the name of God?
J-5 : Why do Hindus revere the Sunderkand?
J-6 : Why do many Hindus perform the Satnarayan katha periodically?
K-1 : What are the essentials in religious ceremonies conducted by Hindus?
K-2 : Why is a coconut used in all Hindu religious ceremonies?
K-3 : Why is a kalash seen at all Hindu religious ceremonies?
K-4 : What is the importance of kusha asana for sitting at a religious ceremony?
K-5 : What is the purpose of sprinkling water at the beginning of a ceremony?
K-6 : Why is lighting the lamp important at all religious ceremonies?
K-7 : What is the purpose of tying a red thread on the wrist at the beginning of a religious ceremony?
K-8 : What is the purpose of the resolve made at the beginning of a ceremony?
K-9 : Why is tilak applied on the forehead in a religious ceremony?
K-10 : What is the purpose of aachman at the beginning of a ceremony?
K-11 : Why are offerings made to the Navgrah at the beginning of all religious ceremonies?



- K-12 : Is blowing a conch shell important at religious ceremonies?
K-13 : What is the purpose of Agnihotra at Hindu religious ceremonies?
K-14 : What is the purpose of a yagya and offering ahuti?
K-15 : Why is it important to chant mantras loudly?
K-16 : What is the importance of charanamrit in religious ceremonies?
K-17 : What does Panch Mahayagya mean?
K-18 : Do Hindus practise animal sacrifice?
K-19 : What is a yantra that's used by Hindus in religious ceremonies?
K-20 : Why are all Hindu religious activities entrusted to Brahmins?
L-1 : Why are temples and deities important to Hindus?
L-2 : Is it true that Hindus have innumerable gods and goddesses?
L-3 : Why do Hindus ring a bell when they enter a temple?
L-4 : Does idol worship by Hindus promote religious feeling?
L-5 : Why don't Hindus perform auspicious ceremonies during Chaturmas?
L-6 : Why do Hindu gods and goddesses use different animals as vehicles?
L-7 : Why do Hindus walk around the deity in a temple?
M-1 : What is the importance of Vanprasth in Hindu life?
M-2 : What does a Hindu achieve through sanyas?
N-1 : Why do Hindus cremate the dead?
N-2 : Why do Hindus immerse ashes of the dead in holy rivers like the Ganga?
N-3 : Is the soul really immortal?
N-4 : On what grounds do Hindus assert that the soul is reborn?
N-5 : Why do Hindus insist upon last rites being performed by the son?
N-6 : What is the importance of pind daan for the deceased?
N-7 : What is the purpose of the Shraddh ceremony?
N-8 : How does tarpan help please the deceased?

Epilogue

AN EXCERPT FROM THE BOOK IS AS FOLLOWS:

What is the basis of the life of a Hindu?

Hindu is a person who adheres to Hinduism — a religion followed by the vast majority in India. It is more about what people do than what they think. Each individual follows a way of life that provides some meaning to it. One comes across many improvisations in Hindu homes. There is no specific objection to deviation or change. The Hindu way of life is liberal in permitting space and liberty to every individual.

The Hindu way of life is principally based upon the teachings in the Vedas. The Rig-Veda, which was recorded in a form of Sanskrit over 3000 years ago, is the oldest of the four Vedas. It has 1,028 hymns to a pantheon of gods. Over the years the teachings have passed on from one generation to another through memorisation and word of mouth. Two other Vedas, the Yajur-Veda and the Sama-Veda, later supplemented the Rig-Veda. The fourth Veda, the Atharva-Veda, was added perhaps a hundred years later.

The Hindu way of life has also been profoundly influenced by the Upanishads – Sanskrit religious scriptures. They came as the final portion of a Veda, and are also termed as Vedanta (Veda-anta – end of knowledge). The word upa-ni-shad (“sit down near”) suggests a personal touch to explaining a religious truth. The earliest Upanishad dates back to about 2,800 years. Others followed chronologically. It is believed that as the first three Vedas split into a number of branches, each branch produced its own Upanishad and is named accordingly. There are about 200 of them. The emphasis is on personal realisation.

The two great epics the Mahabharata and the Ramayana were sources of inspiration and direction to the Hindu way of life that followed the Upanishads. Each is narrated in the form of a meaningful classic. Within each there are shorter stories, tales and discourses on subjects that pertain to life and living. The epics date back to over 2,000 years. Over the years their popularity has grown tremendously. Newer versions came about. Translated into many languages, in modern times they have been made into movies and television serials. Their popularity is unmatched as people feel there is something new to learn and be inspired by each time.

The Puranas were composed after the epics. Some of them deal in detail with subjects and characters in the epics. The Bhagavata-Purana describes the life of Krishna. The Puranas elaborate on the hymns of praise, philosophies and rituals. They use iconography as a descriptive tool and praise Shiva, Vishnu, Ganesh and many other gods and goddesses.

Along with the Puranas, the Dharmashastras and Dharmasutras (textbooks on sacred law) provide many guidelines on life and living. Of these, Manusmriti is perhaps the most important. What is significant is that the study of these is restricted to a learned few. The common man believes in the theory of karma (action) and has learnt the Hindu way of living through rituals, customs and beliefs passed on by word of mouth from one generation to another.



A ritual can be taken to mean several things. It could be a religious or solemn ceremony that involves a series of actions performed according to a set order. It could also mean a series of actions followed without variation or refer to a system of religious or other rites or observance of set forms in public worship.

Similarly, customs can also be interpreted in different ways. It could mean a traditional way of behaviour that is specific to an occasion, place or time. It could also refer to a habitual practice or a way of acting in given circumstances. The habitual activity could be transmitted from one generation to another. Customs gradually became an established way of doing things. Continued use made them a part of social usage.

A belief is a firmly held opinion or conviction. It may be a trust or confidence in something that cannot be immediately proved. It may come from personal or religious faith through use and experience.

Rituals, customs and beliefs together give direction to individuals to act in particular ways in everyday life, and also in the conduct of certain rites and ceremonies for religious services or on public occasions.

Hinduism has thrived despite a variety of reforms due to urbanisation and modernisation. The country faced foreign invasions and occupation. Changes were then necessary. Yet the rituals, customs and beliefs have survived not only in temples and religious institutions, but also in millions of homes around India. Individuals continue to follow traditional patterns. They derive strength from the confidence the rituals and customs inspire.

The inquiring mind looks for reasons to uphold traditions. Modern youth want facts to decide what they can accept or reject. An effort has been made to trace the origins of many rituals and customs and find explanations for their usage. Hinduism is the oldest of all religions. No individual or prophet has founded it. While other religions are dated in that you can go back to their origin, Hinduism emerges from the mists of time. It is a synthesis of a variety of religious experiences and offers a complete view of life. It is not rigid in thought and is tolerant of how individuals interpret it in their own life.

According to Swami Chinmayananda, "Love is the very basis of Hinduism. If you know how to love, you are a Hindu. All great people have become great because of their love for others. They gained greatness because they learnt to love."

Hinduism allows great freedom of thought to man. There is no restraint upon reasoning, thinking or the will of man. Hinduism is not theoretical. It is a practical philosophy of life. If we can call it a religion, then it is a religion of freedom. No Hindu is bound to accept any particular set of beliefs or rituals. They may have been used over hundreds of years. They may even have been misinterpreted or distorted for the personal benefit of a few. Everyone is free to reflect upon them, investigate and inquire about their utility and, finally, accept or reject them.

Your questions answered...

The Vedas date back to over 3,000 years. Are they not irrelevant in modern times?

The Vedas do not pertain to a particular time or place. They pertain to mankind. They contain knowledge pertaining to every field of science. The four Vedas and the four Upa-Vedas include the study of phonetics, the code of rituals, grammar, etymology, literature, astronomy, medicine, archery, music and architecture. They are not irrelevant in the modern context as they touch every aspect of life. What may be lacking is our effort to understand them.

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