

SQ21™ Hinduism* Glossary

* “Hinduism” is an umbrella term which refers to a number of spiritual traditions that have originated and historically existed primarily in India. Unlike many other world religions, Hinduism was founded not at a single time and place by a single person, but at many times, in many places, and by many different individuals and communities of people. While the many “Hinduisms” share important themes, the forms, practices, and beliefs of these traditions also vary widely. Some Hindu traditions hold that the essential practice of religion lies in adherence to specific rituals, while for others the essence of religion is selfless service to society, for others it is meditation or the direct realization of one’s innermost Self, and for others it is loving devotion and surrender to God. Each of these strains has a different view of the Higher Power, whether personal or impersonal, and within each strain there are sub-traditions that hold further differentiated doctrines. For example, among devotional Hindus some believe that there is only one God, others that there are many gods led by one supreme God, and others that there are many gods, equal in stature, to be worshipped depending on the situation. “Hinduism” has never been a singular movement or institution. Because of this variety it is difficult to adequately represent the complexity of Hinduism as a whole. However, while admitting this difficulty, Deep Change hopes this glossary does at least some justice to the many rich and vibrant spiritual expressions usually considered Hindu.

Belief System: A worldview that explains the origin of the universe, how to live a good life, and the meaning of life. Everyone participates in a belief system, whether it is a traditional religion, a secular worldview, or something else. Once made conscious, we can choose to adopt a belief system that fosters the growth of our spiritual intelligence.

Blessings: Meaningful coincidences or synchronicities that are unexpected and helpful, gifts of ishvara-kripa, divine grace, or the fruition of good karma. Good things happen, teachers appear, etc. when the timing is right for us and when we are open to receiving these gifts.

Boundaries: Limits, guidelines (as in setting a limit on someone else’s behavior toward you). We teach other people what is “not okay” with us by setting limits on how they treat us. One of the key jobs of the Ego is to create and preserve boundaries that keep us healthy. Insufficient Ego development can lead to an inability to set proper boundaries with others. In this case basic, healthy Ego development is needed before any “surrendering of the Ego-self” to the Divine or to Brahman is advisable.

Centered: Grounded, stable; able to feel pain and joy deeply but not be fundamentally bothered or knocked off balance; equanimous. Seeing and acting from the Higher Self and/or Higher Power. In sports, an athlete or dancer learns to operate “from their center” so that they are not easily knocked about and do not lose their balance. To “feel centered” is to have this sensation emotionally and spiritually.

Conflicting: Two things that seem on the surface to disagree, but are both true; paradox. For example, “My actions have definite and very important consequences for myself and others, now and into the future” and “My actions are an infinitely small piece of history and insignificant.” You can lean too far toward either truth and become unbalanced. The wisest, most complex thinkers can hold both things as equally true simultaneously.

Effortless Dance: When the dance and the dancer are one; when who we are is what we do. This is the state in which the Ego and Higher Self are working in complete harmony with each other and our behavior is directly inspired by the Higher Power. The universal “dance” of creation is dancing itself through the dancer in a direct way requiring no effort. Although we can temporarily Peak Experience this state, it can also be more continuous or permanent. Synonyms: flow, being in the zone, inspiration, when we feel like we’re truly alive; karma-less action, acting without attachment to the fruits of action, God’s creative lila (“play”).

Ego or Ego self: Jiva; the sense of being a separate, individual person and “doer”, the process of making meaning in the world, and the part of us which is self-concerned. The Ego is an integral part of the human being because it helps us to fulfill our basic human physical and emotional needs, but it is only a small part of the totality of who we are. When we live primarily from the Ego we often feel and act with selfishness, fear, or anger. Spiritual development includes realizing that we are more than the Ego and replacing harmful Egoic patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior with healthier Egoic patterns that work with the Higher Self. Synonyms: personal self, personality self, separate self, small self.

The Golden Rule: In the Mahabharata, this rule is stated: “Endowed with self-restraint, and possessed of righteous behaviour, one should look upon all creatures as one’s own self”* – the Golden Rule appears in some form in all major religious traditions and in many philosophies.

*Mahabharata 12.292, P.C. Roy edition as cited in Dhavamony, Mariasusai S.J. Hindu Spirituality. Rome: Editrice Pontificia Universita’ Gregoriana, 1999. pg. 191.

Higher Power: The creative power behind the manifest world or the ultimate foundation or nature of reality. Different people think about the Higher Power differently: as a thing, agency, principle, value, noble purpose, or simply as what is, and relate to it in different ways. Hindus, too, have many different views of the Higher Power: as the beloved God or Goddess, the fundamental unity underlying all apparently distinct phenomena, karma, or as an impersonal divine Power in the universe which can be utilized and directed. Possible synonyms: Brahman, Shiva, Vishnu, Shakti, Devi, Brahma, Varuna, Krishna,

Rama, Vithoba, karma, Rita, dharma, God, life itself, being, grand scheme orienting principle, love, the universe; and from other religions: Allah, YHWH, the Tao, Jesus Christ, Emptiness.

Higher Self: Atman; the eternal self or soul which is dependent on, or identical with, the Higher Power. The part of our selves that is unselfish, loving, and wise; our inner voice of wisdom and universal concern which sees that there is no absolute distinction between “me” and “others” Synonyms: true self, spirit self, essence, the light of the Divine within me, Christ consciousness, Buddha-nature.

Humility: The honest recognition of our own Strengths and Weaknesses and the willingness to stay open-minded and learn from the opinions of others. Humility is a necessary component in the development of spiritual intelligence. Asking for help when we need it, reflecting on the vastness of the universe, and recognizing that we are always growing and developing are all ways to strengthen a healthy humility.

Integrity: honesty, truthfulness, authenticity, “I walk my talk.” Aligning our words and actions to the values of our Higher Self. When our inner life is not in accord with our outer life in this way, we live in disharmony and confusion.

Intelligence: The ability to respond skillfully in real situations. A latent aptitude, such as a natural talent for music, does not become “musical intelligence” until you study and practice and develop the skill to actually play music well. Similarly we are all spiritual beings, but we are not all spiritually intelligent until we study and practice and develop our spiritual skills.

Intuition: Direct experience, insight. Knowing something and yet not necessarily knowing HOW you know it. Synonyms: hunch, gut feeling, bodily response, direct knowing, inner wisdom.

Larger Reality / Larger Perspective: Since the human perceptual process is limited, a fully inclusive perspective on what is real includes that which human eyes may not be able to see. With regards to spiritual development, adopting a larger perspective requires learning to see beyond the surface of things through intuition, spiritual insight, and grace. Our understanding of ourselves and the world expands through spiritual practices such as prayer or meditation, and with the help of our community, teachers, and experts.

Law of Consequences: Karma; the actions you take are guaranteed to have an impact on you and others, either immediately or in the future. There are many different presentations of this universal principle. For example, it has been interpreted as a completely impersonal force of the universe, like gravity, as well as an operation of a personal Higher Power who records our good and bad motivations and actions. Synonyms: karma, Rita, divine justice, rebirth in heavens or hells, moral cause and effect, living in the world of your making. (See Spiritual Principles for more information.)

Meanings: Interpretations, purposes, reasons.

Mission: Based on your Higher Self, your Mission explains how you wish to contribute to the world. Synonyms: dharma, life's work, life purpose, calling, higher purpose, vocation, reason for being, soul contract.

Mysticism: The pursuit of communion with, identity with, or conscious awareness of an ultimate reality, spiritual truth, or God through direct experience, intuition, or insight. Many branches of Hinduism contain practices and traditions which can be considered mystical. In Islam, the Sufi tradition is the mystical branch. In Judaism, one major source of mystical thought and practice is Kabbalah. Mystical states of consciousness can also be developed outside the context of traditional religions. For example, contemplation of nature or various types of secular meditation can have similar results as religious mystical practices.

Non-judgmental: Keeping an open mind and heart. Being deeply understanding while maintaining discernment and the ability to take appropriate action as needed. At the highest level of compassion and non-judgment we see that we too might share another person's thoughts, beliefs, emotions and behaviors if we were in his or her situation. This enables wise and compassionate responses.

Objective: Neutral, detached, evaluating something without preconceptions or filters.

Peak Experiences: There are many different types of peak experiences, but they are all temporary. Peak experiences feel "different" from everyday perception, often involving a moment of awe and wonder, an expanded sense of self beyond the Ego, or a feeling of timelessness. Some people report that colors are much more vivid and that everything – rocks, trees, clouds – seems "alive". There is often a sense of profound peace and joy, and a sense that "everything is okay." There is often a sense of deep compassion for and connection to all living things...a sense of being connected to, a part of, or "at one" with everything. Sometimes people may feel transported outside of their body and sense themselves as consciousness or spirit independent of physical form. After a peak experience it can be a bit depressing or feel limiting to "snap back" into ordinary experiences.

Religion: A faith tradition, a specific set of teachings, beliefs, rituals, and practices which belong to a group of people. These teachings and practices are designed to help the seeker relate appropriately with a divinity or ultimate reality. They will typically teach about how to live an ethical life; usually there is a founder and a sacred text(s). Hinduism has no founder or authoritative canon, however most Hindus consider some texts, such as the Bhagavad Gita, to be sacred and central to the tradition of Hinduism as a whole. Most of the major religions have subgroups, denominations, or sects. For example, within Hinduism, Shaivism, Vaishnavism, and Shaktism are three such sects, each with their own further sub-branches. (See the related definitions for Spirituality below, and Belief System above.)

Signals: A sign, things that change to alert me to a situation.

Significant Others: Individuals you are close to whose happiness or sadness quickly affect you such as a spouse, children, relatives, or close friends.

Spirituality: The human need to be in connection with something larger than our Ego self, something sacred and timeless. Spirituality contributes to a fulfilling life and manifests in two ways: 1. a “vertical” desire to be in relationship with the Higher Power, and 2. a “horizontal” desire to be of service to other people, creatures, or the planet.

Spiritual Principles / Spiritual Laws / Universal Truths: Spiritual guidelines, rules, teachings or ideas that explain the right way to live, how human beings can achieve happiness and inner peace, how our inner life shapes our experiences, or how things work in the world. Examples: “As you give to others – so you will receive” or “What you believe is what you will create.” Spiritual Principles are different from the laws of physics in that we cannot – at this time – easily measure them in typical scientific ways. Yet we can experiment with them in our own lives and see if they appear to work as taught. For example: Do moral behaviors create better relationships and more inner peace? Deep Change teaches that there are basically two levels of these: 1. simpler ones like the Golden Rule or various ethical teachings which explain what to DO in the world. 2. more complex ones that explain how to BE in the world, such as “live in the ever-present moment of Now,” or “what I focus on expands.” Synonyms: dharma, sage advice, life lessons.

Spiritual Principles - Basic: Deep Change defines a “basic” spiritual principle as one that is outer-world focused. Two examples are the Golden Rule and the Law of Consequences. The Golden Rule occurs in some variation in every major faith tradition and most philosophies: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Outer-world focused spiritual principles discuss the consequences of our actions and whether they are ethical or not. The Law of Consequences says that in some way the universe “keeps track” of our intentions and actions and that we will see consequences from these choices eventually – in heaven or hell, in the type of rebirth we receive, or in achieving liberation. Basic Spiritual Principles are usually taught before Complex Principles because they are more concrete and thus easier to understand.

Spiritual Principles - Complex: Deep Change defines “complex” spiritual principles as those that are inner-world focused. For example, in a significant way our thoughts help create our reality. The value of Complex Principles is generally more difficult to demonstrate than of Basic Principles, so it is important that we validate these principles for our selves, experimenting in our own experience. Do affirmations, visualizations, focusing on the Higher Power, positive thinking, or positive intentions work? Most spiritual teachers would say “yes” – but not always in a simple way. The foundation of Complex Spiritual Principles is the effort to understand the inner world and the “rules” that govern the connection between the inner world and outer world.

Spiritual Topics: Discussions of spirituality. For example: explanations or descriptions of the origin, meaning, or purpose of life and the universe, or of how to be a virtuous human being.

Strengths: The things we have a natural talent for or have learned to do well. This might include an area of comfort, confidence, expertise, or mastery, including in the skills of spiritual intelligence. Part of the spiritual exploration is discovering our particular natural gifts and talents and developing them. Knowing your strengths may help you discover your Mission.

Suffering: Mental or emotional distress. Suffering is created by our resistance to what is. We resist unchangeable facts (like our age) or we resist what is happening around us or to us. Suffering is somewhat avoidable, while pain, which is biological or neurological, may not be. Some challenges in life are inevitable. We can meet these challenges more effectively by not getting lost in upset (optional suffering). When we do experience pain or suffering we can turn it to good by developing compassion for our self and others.

Transcendent Timelessness: The experience of stepping out of our normal perceptions of time and change and into the perception of eternity, or that which never changes. Paradoxically, this may also feel like being totally present in the now. Transcendent Timelessness may be one aspect of a Peak Experience, or it may be more stable. Repeated familiarization with this perception can dramatically alter our sense of ourselves and our relationship to life.

Values: Things, qualities, or principles that are important to me and influence the decisions and actions I take. Examples: family, health, work, success, honesty, trustworthiness, humility, piety, loyalty, generosity, devotion.

Weaknesses: The things I don't do very well, haven't learned how to do yet, or have no natural talent for. We all have skills that are underdeveloped, but we also have the ability to cultivate these skills and improve.

Worldview: This literally means "the way I see the world." Any worldview is made up of what we believe is "right" or "wrong", how we think things "should be," and what we think is true and false. People may agree with all, some, or none of someone else's worldview. Worldviews are shared by communities of people and based partly on geography, religion, age, culture, national citizenship, level of education, life experiences, and biological realities such as how our brains work. Our Worldview profoundly affects our perception of reality. We filter all the data we receive through our senses and through our Worldview so that we can make sense of it. Our filters inherently "leave stuff out" (especially what we don't understand or don't want to see), so each worldview excludes some information. Worldviews also "add stuff" by interpreting and making meaning out of what is being observed. Thus, by leaving out and adding in each of us can reach amazingly different interpretations of the same events. Worldviews, once made conscious, can be adjusted to be as accurate as

possible. Synonyms: philosophy of life, belief system, personal filters, lens through which I see the world, my window on the world.

If you have any suggested improvements to this SQ21 Hinduism Glossary please email cindy@deepchange.com