



*Soul Matters*

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# Crossing Paths

Walking the Path of  
Hinduism

May 2019 - Curiosity

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# Welcome

Welcome to the Crossing Paths packet for May and our exploration of Hinduism. In addition to exploring Hinduism, this packet engages our youth with May's theme of "What Does it Mean to Be a People of Curiosity?"

At first, Hinduism seems very different from Unitarian Universalism. For instance, it contains millions of Gods and Goddesses, whereas we often still struggle with and debate god language. It has ancient origins whereas we are quite young in comparison. It places colorful, body-oriented ritual at its center, whereas we tend to be most comfortable sitting still and staying in our heads.

And yet, despite the differences, there are more connections than we might expect. For example, Hindus and UU's both celebrate diversity and reject the idea that there is only one way to be religious/"faithful." Like UUs, Hindus do not prescribe a single way to worship. In fact, says Tuli Patel (a UU with Hindu heritage), Brahmin, or the Universal Spirit, is beyond the human capacity to understand, which allows Hindus the room to relate to any of the many divine manifestations, which in turn supports the idea that each person must find their own way to the divine. Just like UUs!

In addition, like our own Ralph Waldo Emerson, the great Hindu poet Rabindranath Tagore emphasized one's individual and direct connection to God. The connection between Emerson's and Tagore's thought is so deep that there are seven hymns and readings by Tagore in "Singing the Living Tradition." As [one scholar](#) writes,

"Both Emerson and Tagore sought a religion which would help establish an original and unmediated relationship with God. For both of them, the human soul and its intuition were more important than temples and scriptures. They advocated self-reliance and dependence on human hearts as guiding principles. Although Emerson and Tagore belonged to different literary periods and cultural traditions, their religious thoughts had striking similarities. They yearned for a human religion instead of a supernatural one. In this human religion, God was not in heaven, but very close to [humanity]."

So there will be a lot of things for us to learn this month. But also get ready for some fun! Playful stories, fascinating gods/goddesses and colorful rituals sit at the heart of Hinduism. This is a religion that knows how to stimulate one's imagination and senses. To honor this, we will chant, meet a monkey God and meet the animal companions who carry many of the gods and goddesses.

And that's just some of what we have planned! It's all a way of honoring Hinduism's commitment to the whole self. This is not a religion that is interested in simply shaping one's thoughts. As many have said, Hinduism is less concerned with "right belief" and more interested in waking people up to the "richness of life."

So during this month of curiosity, get your inquisitive minds ready for an exploration of more gods and rituals and ways of worshipping than you can imagine!

Thanks, as always, for letting us be your partners and walk these journeys with you in spirit!

## ***Katie, on behalf of the entire Soul Matters team***

Katie Covey

Soul Matters Director of Religious Education

[soulmattersre@gmail.com](mailto:soulmattersre@gmail.com)

**Notes on the process:** First, since Hindus do not worship on a specific day of the week, you might want to consider inviting a Hindu guest speaker or visiting an ISKCON temple (Hare Krishna) instead of visiting a traditional Hindu Temple. ISKCON (International Society of Krishna Consciousness) is a branch of Hinduism, so it is possible to get a glimpse of Krishna, music, and other similarities to Hinduism along with [noting the differences](#).

# Week 1

## Map Sunday

### *Purpose*

- Introduce youth to some of the basic beliefs and practices of Hinduism, using our Crossing Paths' binoculars/lenses

### *Preparation & Leader Notes*

#### **Remembering Humility**

As always, remember that the aim of Map Sunday is to “get a glimpse” of each religion. There is no way to capture the fullness of these rich religions in a session or two. So as a leader, you will need to help your youth remember that there is still a lot about each religion left to explore and we need to be humble about what we are learning. It might be helpful to remind your youth about our second practice of welcoming: “always be curious” - i.e. always be open and never assume you understand something fully.

#### **Leader Background Resources**

##### **Top Two**

- Stephen Prothero’s video on Hinduism: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkAwQ3HqBac>
- Hinduism 101: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGV6M4wQ8Os>

##### **Digging Deeper**

- The Hindu Belief System: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Xbpgtll-hk>
- Have a Little Faith with Zach Anner: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-NzVlwyZso>
- Decoding the Gita, India's book of answers - TEDx: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ckaEwj2A1U>

#### **Dinner and Drive Time Tips (Email to parents ahead of time):**

##### ***Before:***

- Consider watching the movie “Gandhi” together. Make some Indian foods or find an [Indian restaurant](#). We also recommend you consider watching this video with your youth: Have a Little Faith with Zach Anner: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-NzVlwyZso>

##### ***After:***

- In our centering worship we will talk about how Hinduism believes in many Gods and Goddesses, of which [Ganesh](#), the God with an elephant head, is one. He is seen as “[the remover of obstacles](#).” To honor this, we will name people in our lives that helped us get through a hard experience or overcome a hurdle. Consider sharing with your youth an obstacle you faced and someone who helped you overcome it.

##### ***For You:***

- Spend some time enriching your own understanding of Hinduism. For some background, see:
  - Stephen Prothero on Hinduism: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkAwQ3HqBac>
  - Hinduism 101: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGV6M4wQ8Os>
  - The Hindu Belief System: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Xbpgtll-hk>
  - Decoding the Gita, Roopa Pai: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ckaEwj2A1U>

## **Pre-Session To Do List:**

- Send out the Dinner and Drive Time Tip. See above.
- Create this week's graffiti board. Core question: What is Hinduism?
- Make sure you have the technology needed to play the YouTube videos that are part of this session.
- Download and create the Moksha Patam (Snakes and Ladders) Game.
- Purchase animal crackers in boxes or in bulk for the worship.
- Locate Hula Hoops, one for each pair likely to attend for the Devotion Games.
- Locate rugs or tarps for the "Islands" game, large enough to hold a group but crowding them.
- Add different color markers for Graffiti Board.

# Session

## **Getting a View of the Terrain: Hinduism**

### **Entering - Graffiti Board Writing**

As youth enter the room invite them to engage the graffiti board. Encourage symbols, words, drawings. These can be representations of Hinduism, words or feelings and experiences that youth have in relationship to Hinduism.

*This Week's Core Graffiti Board Question:  
**What is Hinduism?***

### **Gathering & Centering - Worship (10 min)**

#### ***Preparation***

Purchase animal crackers in boxes or bulk to pass around during worship.

#### ***Centering Sound***

Invite everyone to calm and center themselves. Use whatever ringing vessel you have chosen (chimes, bowl, bell). Ring the bell/bowl/chimes. Once the sound ends, pause for a moment of silence and then end by saying "Amen" or blessing words of your own.

#### ***Lighting the Chalice***

*We light this chalice in gratitude for the path we share, a path that guides us  
back to our deepest self,  
back to each other,  
And back to life's gifts and joy.*

#### ***Welcome & Lead-In to Centering***

Leader talking points, in script form:

- Welcome to Map Sunday and our exploration of this month's religion: Hinduism.
- Map Sunday is the part of the journey when we "survey" the religion and use our "binoculars/lenses" to get a glimpse of it before we make our visit and experience it directly, and more fully.
- A core part of Hinduism is its belief in [millions](#) of Gods and Goddesses, all of them different expressions of the one unknowable God, [Brahman](#).
- One of the most popular Hindu Gods is [Ganesh](#). A God with an elephant head. One of the reasons Ganesh is so popular is that he is seen as "[the remover of obstacles](#)." People pray to him when they are feeling stuck, encountering a big challenge or going through a transition. He helps people make it over their humps so to speak.
- So today our centering music is a chant that calls on Ganesh for assistance. As you listen to it, think of a challenge or obstacle you have faced in the past and someone who helped you get through that experience or overcome that hurdle. None of us persevere over our obstacles without help. Today's worship helps us remember and be thankful for that.
- Pass out boxes or bowls of animal crackers and have them search for the elephant crackers while they are thinking. Don't eat them yet. Invite them, as they search, to think of someone who has helped them overcome an obstacle.

## ***Music for Centering***

**Ganesha Sharanam Mantra** (Fade out after 3-4 minutes, since the video lasts for 9 minutes.)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFZXIP43SiA>

## ***Thematic Check-in***

Invite the group to say the name of the person who helped them through a hard time or overcome an obstacle. They can say a sentence or two about how the person helped them but let them know that this personal sharing is optional. Then they can eat the animal crackers.

After the sharing, leader expresses gratitude for everyone's sharing and for all those who help us find and hold on to home.

## ***Closing***

"In the rest of our time together and in the days ahead, **May the ropes be with you.** May we stay close to our deepest and truest selves. May we keep connected to each other. And may we remember to lean into life's joy. Blessed be. Amen"

## ***Extinguish the Chalice***

Leader note: If you use a real flame, our advice is to extinguish it now to prevent accidental tipping over or pyro play with hot wax. If you use a tea light, you may wish to extinguish it at the end of the session during the closing words.

# **Taking in the Terrain (5 min)**

## **A Glimpse of Hinduism through the Crossing Paths Binoculars**

### **Introduction**

Explain that the focus of today is to "get a glimpse" of the world of Hinduism. Stress that there is no way to capture the fullness of these rich religious traditions in a session or two. So today is about impressions and partial views and learning a bit about Hinduism before our visit. Remember our second practice of welcoming: "always be curious" - i.e. always be open and never assume you understand something fully.

## ***Sizing Up the Terrain***

You can keep this simple or get creative. The easiest and more time-efficient approach is to just share the basic facts. If you want to take it to the next level, consider getting a map for your room to capture and compare the size and location of the various religions. Use different colored push pins to represent the various religions and have each push pin represent some sizable increment, for instance 500,000 adherents.

### **When**

Founded over 1500 years BCE (Before Christian Era) in India. Stress that Hinduism is the oldest religion being practiced in the world today.

### **How Many?**

Hinduism is the fourth largest religion in the world, after Christianity, Islam and Agnosticism/Atheism, with 1 billion adherents worldwide, representing about 14% of the world population. For every 1 UU, there are 5,000 Hindus.

### **Where**

The vast majority of Hindus live in India and Nepal.

## ***The Problem and Solution in the World (20 min)***

**The Problem: Samsara (wandering through multiple lifetimes - constant reincarnation)**

**The Solution: Moksha (liberation)**

### **Explain**

**Samsara - The perpetual cycle of repeated birth and death.**

Background to help shape your explanation:

- Stephen Prothero: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkAwQ3HqBac> (0:00-0:55)
- Samsara: <https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/essays/samsara-hinduism>

**Moksha - release from Samsara, unity with Brahman/God**

Background to help shape your explanation:

- Hinduism 101: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGV6M4wQ8Os> (7:00-7:43)
- What is Moksha?: <http://www.mokshaconsulting.com/what-is-moksha/>

### **Engage**

**Play Snakes and Ladders Game “Moksha Patamu”**

Suggested Script:

Moksha Patamu is a Hindu game created to teach children about reincarnation. It is played in the West as “Snakes and Ladders” or “Chutes and Ladders.” The game wove in lessons about the consequences of good deeds and bad deeds, with the ladders representing virtues such as generosity, faith, humility and the snakes representing vices such as lust, anger, murder and theft. Good deeds led to liberation (Moksha) and advancing in the game by climbing the ladder to higher spaces. Doing bad things led to becoming reborn into lower forms of life (Patamu) and sliding down the snake to lower spaces. The number of ladders was less than the number of snakes to stress how much easier it is to do bad things than good. One way of playing is to create small avatars of a variety of people cut from magazines and roll the dice to see what happens to them. This is a good way of playing with a larger group than 5. If the game becomes slow, you can appoint the group as deities to determine the fate of each soul and move them up or down in extra ways.

#### **Option #1 Moksha Patam**

Download game here: [https://www.hinduismtoday.com/modules/wfchannel/index.php?wfc\\_cid=35](https://www.hinduismtoday.com/modules/wfchannel/index.php?wfc_cid=35)

Other options for playing, including Daniel Harper’s downloadable homemade board game, on his blog at <https://www.danielharper.org/yauu/2014/05/moksha-patam/>

You will need to download and create this board game. The old Holidays and Holy Days had a board game included with it, if you are lucky enough to have one in your RE library. You will need to print out the game board on one or more pieces of paper (if you don't have a large format printer) and to make at least an 11 by 17 inches playing surface. You will need one die and markers for each player. Two to four players are most common.

- The aim of the game is to reach square 68, the plane of Siva. This is moksha, freedom from rebirth.
- There are various ways to set the order of play. It is common for each player to roll the die once, with the highest number going first, next highest, second, and so on. Ties at this stage are broken by another roll of the die.
- All players start with the markers off the board. As each rolls the die, they advance to the square equal to the number of the die, one to square one, two to square two and so on. On subsequent throws, they advance the number of squares of the die. Notice that the squares are numbered in what is traditionally called "ox plow" fashion: back and forth on the board, after the pattern of an ox plowing a field.

- If a player lands on a ladder, he advances to the top of the ladder and continues play from there. If he lands on a snake, he slides down the snake to the square at the tail of the snake.
- To complete the game the play has to land exactly on the 68th square. As everyone plays until they reach this square, the game doesn't really have a winner, just as in Hindu philosophy everyone ultimately achieves moksha.
- A player may land on 67. In this case, if they throw a one, they advance to 68 and are finished. If they throw a 2, 3, 4, or 5, they advance the appropriate number of squares. If they throw a six, they stay on 67 and roll again their next turn.
- A player may go beyond square 68 on their roll. If they land on 72, they slide back to 51. However, if they land on 69, 70 or 71, they must throw the die each time it is their turn until they advance to the next possible square. They have to keep throwing the die each time it is their turn until they land exactly on square 72, from which they slide back to 51 for another try. - [https://www.hinduismtoday.com/modules/wfchannel/index.php?wfc\\_cid=35](https://www.hinduismtoday.com/modules/wfchannel/index.php?wfc_cid=35)

### **Option #2 Chutes and Ladders Classic Game**

[https://www.amazon.com/Classic-Chutes-Ladders-Board-Game/dp/B00V82MG2O/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?s=toys-and-games&ie=UTF8&qid=1507128687&sr=1-2&keywords=chutes+and+ladders+classic](https://www.amazon.com/Classic-Chutes-Ladders-Board-Game/dp/B00V82MG2O/ref=sr_1_2?s=toys-and-games&ie=UTF8&qid=1507128687&sr=1-2&keywords=chutes+and+ladders+classic)

Play the classic Western version of the game and note the original meanings of the chutes and ladders from Hindu teachings. Note: there is an overly simplistic version for young children which isn't recommended for Middle Schoolers. For instance, "your tummy is full of candy so slide down the chute."

# ***Bhakti, The Path of Devotion (20 min)***

## ***A Unique Path to Liberation and a Unique Way of Relating to the Gods***

### **Explain**

Background to help shape your explanation:

- Bhakti: The Way of Devotion: <http://pluralism.org/religions/hinduism/introduction-to-hinduism/bhakti-the-way-of-devotion/>
- What is Bhakti or Devotion? <https://www.hinduwebsite.com/hinduism/concepts/bhakti.asp>
- The Hindu Way: Works, Knowledge, Devotion (the three ways/paths): <http://www.joemixie.com/college%20pdfs/Hinduism.pdf>
- Worship and Devotion in Daily Life <https://www.patheos.com/library/hinduism/ritual-worship-devotion-symbolism/worship-and-devotion-in-daily-life>

Introducing Bhakti - suggested talking points

- Bhakti (devotion) is essential to understanding Hinduism because it gets at Hinduism's distinct approach to liberation and its unique way of relating to the divine.
- Just as there are many gods in Hinduism, there are also numerous paths to enlightenment. The three core paths are Karma (the path of action or good works), Jnana (the path of wisdom or knowledge) and Bhakti (the path of devotion).
- Bhakti is the [most popular](#) of the three paths.
- Put simply, it's about being devoted to a certain god. But it's important to note that, for Hindus, it's a particular type of devotion that is about emotional connection and a two-way relationship. When talking about Bhakti, it is common of Hindus to use words like "love" and "friendship." This is very different than the western view which speaks of worshipping, fearing and obeying God. One might say Hindus are focused on *intimacy* with the gods whereas western religion tends to emphasize the *authority* of God.
- Here's how [one author](#) explains the emotional and two-way qualities of Bhakti: "One must approach and treat the god with selfless love; indeed, this is the way in which bhakti is most typically put into practice. Significantly, this love is thought to flow both ways: the devotee loves the god, and the god also loves the devotee."

### **Engage (with a story): Hanuman - The Great Example and Story of Devotion**

There is not greater example or symbol of divine devotion than the "monkey god" Hanuman. His loyalty to, friendship with and love of Rama (a major manifestation of Vishnu) is celebrated in story by all Hindus. Here are two examples of how Hanuman's devotion to Rama is talked about:

"People quote their (Hanuman & Rama's) relationship as examples of the best ever friendship that was ever there in the history of Hindu mythology. Hanuman is very popularly depicted as opening his chest containing the picture of Rama and Sita. Hanuman, therefore stands to be the greatest devotee to be ever born on the Earth." - <https://www.templepurohit.com/hanuman-stories/>

"Hanuman is worshipped for his unyielding devotion to Rama and is remembered for his selfless dedication to the God. Hanuman is considered the living embodiment of the Karma Yogi (one whose meditation and devotion are demonstrated through hard work or service)." - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/holydays/hanuman.shtml>

Hanuman is also used to talk about how devotion [unlocks our inner strength](#) and gives us access to powers we don't realize we had. As [one writer](#) puts it, "[The story of Hanuman] invites us to the place within and without that is simple and one-pointed and reverential to our lives. It unlocks our superpowers..."

After explaining the above to the youth, use the following Hanuman story to make it come alive:

## Story - Hanuman and the Mountain

Show the cartoon video. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwSK1EN\\_CyQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwSK1EN_CyQ)  
(start at 4:00 - 9:00, end) "What you do for me today is an act of pure devotion."

Or Tell the Story

"During a horrific battle in Southern India, Rama's brother, Laksman, is gravely wounded. His only chance for survival is to be treated with a very specific and rare herb that is found at the top of the Himalayas. Rama is distraught and has little hope that someone could make it to the Himalayas, find the herb and return back in time to save Laksmana. This impossible task falls upon Hanuman; son of the wind, powerful and intelligent monkey god, emblematic of devotion.

Taking a mighty leap across the ocean from the south of India to the Himalayas, Hanuman finds himself unsure of the exact location of the herb. He picks up the entire mountain range and carries it over his head while he leaps back to the battlefield. The healing herb is quickly located by experts and Laksmana is saved."

[http://www.kidsgen.com/fables\\_and\\_fairytales/indian\\_mythology\\_stories/hanuman.htm](http://www.kidsgen.com/fables_and_fairytales/indian_mythology_stories/hanuman.htm)

## Engage (with a game): Running with Divine Friendship

After telling the Hanuman story, play the following game to get at how devotion to Hindu gods is about partnership, mutuality and going on the adventure of life together.

Video of these games: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hCJMEXfLdIM>

### Pass Sita's Ring aka Hula Hoop Pass

Hold hands. Each person must pass through the hula hoop without breaking hands. Play in teams and see who finishes first. If you have a wide space, move the team forward by having the first person through the hoop break hands and run to the end of the line. Each person adds on to the end of the line once they have passed through the hoop, allowing the line to move forward.

### Rama and Lakshman Race Together v. 1 aka Pairs Race Inside the Hula Hoop

Pair off. Insert yourselves into a hula hoop. Race to a finish line together, while you are inside the Hula Hoop.

### Ram and Lakshman Race Together v. 2 aka Pairs Race on the Outside of the Hula Hoop

Pair off. Each pair must hold the hula hoop between them without using their hands or arms, at waist level. The hoop is held by sticking together and providing tension between the pair.

### Hanuman's Island (at end of video) aka Move on Rugs Across the Floor

Two rugs or tarps, each large enough to hold the entire group, but small enough to create crowding. The group must move the entire group together across the room from one island to another without touching the floor.

### **Graffiti Board - Filling in the Gaps (3 min.)**

Invite the youth to add a picture or word to the graffiti board, picking one thing that engaged them most about today's session. What did they learn about Hinduism that they think is most important to add.

Remember to use markers that are a different color than was used to fill or the board at the start of the session so you can continue to track learning over the sessions.

### **Looking Ahead - What to do ahead of time or expect (2 min.)**

Thank the youth for their participation this week. Note one thing that you particularly appreciated or enjoyed about the session you just did with them.

Remind the youth what is happening next week and make sure they know what they have to do ahead of time. Note one thing that you are particularly looking forward to.

### **Closing Words (1 min)**

"In the days ahead, **May the ropes be with you.** May we stay close to our deepest and truest selves. May we keep connected to each other. And may we remember to lean into life's joy. Blessed be. Amen"

# Week 2

## Tack Sunday

### What Does It Mean to Be a People of Wholeness... For Hindus?

#### Purpose

- Explore how Hindus think about and engage the theme of Wholeness.

#### Preparation & Leader Notes

##### Dinner and Drive Time Tips (Email to parents prior to the meeting):

###### *Before:*

- Ask your youth about the “graffiti board” and what kinds of things the group has listed on it. Ask what their initial understandings of Hinduism are and what they learned through what others wrote/drew on the board. Talk to them about what you know and admire about Hinduism, and how you learned what you know.

###### *After:*

- During our session, we explored how Hinduism relates our monthly theme here at church: Wholeness. In our worship we learned about the symbol of Hinduism, OM, which some Hindus describe as “the sound of the whole universe” and say is the sound of the first echo when the universe was created. We love the idea of OM being both a symbol and a sound, which is pronounced “aaah,” “oooh,” and “mmm.” Invite your youth to teach you how to pronounce it and have some fun doing it with them and experiencing its vibrations!

###### *For You:*

- In March, Hindus celebrate Holi, the Festival of Colors. It is a playful celebration during which people throw colored powder and water on each other. Explore the holiday for yourself by watching these videos and reading these articles:
  - Meaning of Holi: <http://www.holifestival.org/significance-of-holi.html>
  - Photo & Video: <https://www.tripsavvy.com/photos-of-holi-festival-in-india-4063984> (be sure to check out the video at end for a great overview)
  - Video of Holi in Action: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1hs5FO\\_Oqk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1hs5FO_Oqk)
  - Pictures of Holi: <https://www.reuters.com/news/picture/the-colors-of-holi-idUSRTX30SJB>

##### Pre-Session To Do List:

- Send out the Dinner and Drive Time Tip. See above.
- Make sure you have the technology needed to play the YouTube videos that are part of this session.
- Print out or locate a picture of the symbol OM for worship.
- Print and cut out Hindu deities (3-4 copies of each deity) like baseball cards from the links provided in Activity #1, Picking Your God
- Index cards (16) for the “Who Am I” Game.
- Index cards (at least 8) to identify the values in the colors for Holi represented by markers.
- Locate washable markers in colors suggested in the Holi activity.
- Copies of Handout #1 Eight Practices for review.
- Copies of Handout #2 Interview Questions so group members may choose or create interview questions.
- Different colored markers than used before for the final Graffiti Board activity in this session.

## Session

# **What Does It Mean to be a People of Wholeness... for Hindus?**

### **Entering - Graffiti Board Writing**

*Same Core Question: What is Hinduism?*

As youth enter the room, direct them check out the graffiti board as a way to remind themselves of what they've been learning. Using a new color for the markers, invite them to add a new item or embellish an item they've already put up.

### **Gathering & Centering - Worship (15 min)**

#### **The Wholeness of Om**

*Preparation: Locate a [picture](#) of the Om symbol to show during worship.*

#### **Centering Sound**

Invite everyone to calm and center themselves. Use whatever ringing vessel you have chosen (chimes, bowl, bell). Ring the bell/bowl/chimes. Once the sound ends, pause for a moment of silence and then end by saying "Amen" or blessing words of your own.

#### **Lighting the Chalice**

*We light this chalice in gratitude for the path we share, a path that guides us  
back to our deepest self,  
back to each other,  
And back to life's gifts and joy.*

#### **Welcome**

##### Suggested Script/Talking Points:

- Welcome to Tack Sunday and to our continued exploration of this month's religion: Hinduism. Today we are going to explain - or "tack up" with - how Hinduism thinks about the monthly theme we are exploring here at our church: Wholeness.
- There's no better place to start than with the symbol most often used to represent Hinduism: The [Aum or Om Symbol](#). [Be sure to have a [picture](#) ready and show it at this point]
- It's important to know that OM is both a symbol and a sound, pronounced "aaah," "ooh," and "mmm" with a silent pause after. This sound is referred to as "[the sound of the whole universe](#)," with some Hindus saying it is the sound of the first echo when the universe was created.
- Beside the sound speaking to our theme of wholeness, the symbolism or lettering also speaks to wholeness by representing all of the states of human consciousness. Notice how the lettering [contains three curves, one semicircle, and a dot](#).
  - The large bottom curve symbolizes the waking state, A.
  - The middle curve signifies the dream state, U.
  - The upper curve denotes the state of deep sleep, M.
  - The dot signifies the fourth state of consciousness, Turiya - the awareness of unity with all.
  - The semi-circle at the top represents Maya, the illusion of separateness.

- There's another connection to our theme of wholeness: The vibrations made when chanting the sound of OM are said to align the body, mind and spirit, helping to create a feeling of wholeness inside the individual. When sitting in the same room, the vibration is also said to align and connect all those gathered into a single whole, and even connect and align them with the wholeness of the universe.
- So as a way of honoring and engaging all this, we're going to do an OM meditation for our worship this morning.

### Teach It:

Teach the youth how to pronounce/chant it: "aaah," "oooh," and "mmm" with a silent pause after. Have the youth practice a few times.

Tell the youth that the group will chant it together in a moment but first you want to highlight a few things for them to pay attention to as they chant together:

1. Pay attention to the feeling of vibration and how it is calming:

"OM has endured in popularity simply because of its vibration — how we feel when we chant it. "The sound itself seems to calm the nervous system," says Stephen Cope, founder of Kripalu's Institute for Extraordinary Living." - From [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kripalu/meaning-of-om\\_b\\_4177447.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kripalu/meaning-of-om_b_4177447.html)

2. Pay attention to how the sound creates connection.

As one Hindu teacher says, "When we sound OM together, we're aligning body/mind/spirit; we're aligning with one another; we're aligning with the universe."

Stress that ultimately this is a sound that validates cosmic wholeness, oneness and harmony.

Here are some videos for you to watch ahead of time so you can pronounce and chant it correctly:

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WC5\\_rC3NiXc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WC5_rC3NiXc)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yoYrLM5rGX8>

### Do It:

## OM Meditation

Invite the group into a circle and have everyone sit in a comfortable position.

Explain that you will start and then after you are chanting 2-3 times have the group join in.

Tell the group to keep chanting until you stop them, which will be after around 10 times. You will signal it is time to stop by touching the shoulder of the person next to you and them doing the same to the person next to them.

Encourage them to sink into it.

Begin.

### Reflection

Afterward, invite conversation about how it felt and how it helped them connect to one of the intended experiences: calm; alignment & wholeness of body/mind/spirit; alignment and wholeness with one another; alignment and wholeness with the world around them.

***Closing***

“In the rest of our time together and in the days ahead, May the ropes be with you. May we stay close to our deepest and truest selves. May we keep connected to each other. And may we remember to lean into life’s joy. Blessed be. Amen”

***Extinguish the Chalice***

Leader note: If you use a flame, our advice is to extinguish it now to prevent accidental tipping over or pyro play with hot wax. If you use a tea light, you may wish to extinguish it at the end of the session during the closing words.

## Session Focus #1

### “A Whole Bunch of Gods to Honor the Whole of Life” (25 min)

#### Explain

Start with some basics about the [huge number](#) of gods in Hinduism. Be sure to explain how they are all manifestations of [Brahman](#). Here are some articles to help:

- Hindu Gods: <http://factsanddetails.com/world/cat55/sub354/item1354.html>
- The 33 Million Gods of Hinduism: [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/gadadhara-pandit-dasa/the-33-million-demigods-o\\_b\\_1737207.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/gadadhara-pandit-dasa/the-33-million-demigods-o_b_1737207.html)
- Brahman: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/brahman-Hindu-concept>

After that, connect the idea of wholeness to the many gods of Hinduism. Two points are particularly important:

1. Hinduism has a whole bunch of gods because they affirm the whole of life. They celebrate the diversity of life and it is reflected in their incredibly diverse number of gods.
2. Hinduism affirms many gods because they affirm the uniqueness of individuals. Everyone is different and so their spiritual needs and paths will be different. Only a bunch of gods can meet (and honor) the needs of human beings.

These two points are expressed by [one writer](#) this way:

“Hindus find the notion of one God unnecessarily restrictive. They are “dazzled by the wondrous variety of the creation...For so multiplex a world, the more gods the better! How could one god account for so varied a creation?...To explain the multiplicity and plurality of gods, Hindus view the Brahma as a diamond with a multitude of facets, each representing a god, with some individual facets having more of a hold on individual people than others.”

#### Engage

##### Activity #1 - Find your place in the whole by picking “your god”

Go deeper into the ideas above by having the youth pick which Hindu god they resonate with most. Reiterate the idea that the Hindu goal is not to worship all the gods but to find the god or few gods that represent the qualities you want to develop or match the struggles you are facing on your unique spiritual path. In other words, the goal of Hinduism (and this activity) is to find your place in the whole by picking “your god.”

To make the activity manageable, we recommend focusing on a smaller group of the major or most popular gods. Below are some links to these smaller lists. Each link contains pictures and short descriptions of gods that you can cut out and then spread out on the floor or on a table so the youth can go through them and decide which speaks to them the most. We suggest you make 3-4 copies of each god so more than one youth can pick each god. (Think about it like trading and collecting baseball cards of your favorite players.) You can decide whether you youth get to pick only one or 2 of the gods.

After they’ve made their selections, have the youth go around and read the descriptions of the god they picked and explain why that god resonates with them.

Lists of Gods:

- <https://www.blueosa.com/10-hindu-deities-everyone-know-pilgrimage-india/>
- <https://www.ancienthistorylists.com/india-history/top-10-hindu-gods-praised-hindus-around-world/>
- <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/world-history/ancient-medieval/hinduism/v/hindu-gods-overview>
- [https://www.lotussculpture.com/bronze\\_sculpture\\_the\\_gods.html](https://www.lotussculpture.com/bronze_sculpture_the_gods.html)

## Activity #2 - Who Am I Game: A whole bunch of animals to carry the gods around!

### INTRODUCTION:

Hinduism honors the whole of life also by honoring animals and giving them a special role in the sacred order. It has them carry the gods around and serve as their partners and friends! It wants to include them too. Religion would not be complete and whole without them! Here's how one Hindu writer expresses it:

“The Hindu faith, the cradle of which is India, is a religion which dotes upon the birds and animals. In fact, the religion has bestowed the fur, feathers and fins species the status of divinity by linking their multifarious gods and goddesses to various animals. All the numerous Hindu gods and goddesses are considered the manifestations of one supreme creator, the Almighty God. The gods and goddesses in Hindu mythology travel in supersonic speed on animals and birds. Different gods have different vahanas (animal vehicles). The literal meaning of the word ‘vahana’ is ‘that which carries, that which pulls’...” <https://www.yourpetspace.info/hindu-animal-vehicles/>

So play the following game to honor Hinduism's belief that religion is not whole without honoring the animals.

### PREPARATION:

Using the list below, write each Animal Vehicle (vahana) and their god or goddess on index cards - 16 cards for the 16 pairs.

### PLAYING THE GAME (“20 Questions”):

Ask for one volunteer at a time to be the “guesser.” Without looking, grab a card and tape it to the forehead or back of the guesser. The guesser then tries to guess which animal is on their back or forehead by asking 20 questions. The group can answer only with “yes” or “no.” If the guesser can't come up with 20 questions on their own, invite the group to help them. Remember 20 questions are hard to come up with on your own sometimes! Once the animal vahana is guessed, read the description of the god or goddess found in Handout #3.

**Surya – Horses**  
**Agni – Ram (Sheep)**  
**Brahma- Swan**  
**Durga – Lion**  
**Ganesha–Mouse**  
**Indra–Elephant**  
**Kartikeya –Peacock**  
**Lakshmi–Owl**  
**Saraswati–Swan**  
**Shani–Crow/Raven/Vulture**  
**Shashthi - Cat**  
**Shitala—Donkey**  
**Shiva–Bull**  
**Vishnu–Eagle**  
**Yama–Buffalo**  
**Ayyappa–Tiger**

## Session Focus #2

### **Holi & the Work of Giving Your Whole Self Over to Goodness (15 min)**

#### **Explain**

##### **Leader Resources (background so you can introduce the activity)**

- Meaning of Holi: <http://www.holifestival.org/significance-of-holi.html>
- Video overview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1IUwDfYvvjo>
- Pictures and further explanation: <https://www.tripsavvy.com/photos-of-holi-festival-in-india-4063984>  
(check out video at end for a great overview)
- Video of Holi in Action: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1hs5FO\\_Oqk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1hs5FO_Oqk)
- Pictures of Holi: <https://www.reuters.com/news/picture/the-colors-of-holi-idUSRTX30SJB>

Leader Note: If you have time, you can also introduce Holi more generally using this page of pictures and the video at the end: <https://www.tripsavvy.com/photos-of-holi-festival-in-india-4063984>

##### **Suggested Talking Points:**

After using the above recommended resources to share the basics of Holi, use the below suggested talking points to help make the connection between Holi and this month's theme of wholeness.

- Holi is not just about reassuring people that good will triumph over evil.
- It's also a reminder that one has to give themselves over fully *and wholly* to the good for it to triumph. Think of the story of [Holika and Prahlad](#). Prahlad's devotion saved him.
- So in a sense, when people splash the colors on themselves, they are giving their whole selves over to goodness. They are immersing themselves in the values that these colors represent.
- So what values do you want to give your whole self to?
- Let's not just think about this. Let's do it with the following activity...

##### **Engage: "Putting on the Colors of Goodness that Overcomes Evil"**

- Purchase and bring in washable markers of all the below list of colors.
- Set a card in front of each set of colors that names the value it represents. (see the list below)
- Invite the youth to decorate one of their hands in the colors and values of their choice, asking them to think about the value they want to hold on to the most in their lives, the value they want to give their whole self to.
- While the youth are painting their hands, consider playing some of this music in the background or on a screen:
  - Coldplay - Hymn For The Weekend (Official Video)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=111&v=YkjpeuMNEk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=111&v=YkjpeuMNEk)
  - Holi Bollywood Party Songs:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iWBgo5yn-48>

### List of Colors and Their Meaning:

- Red - Love Purity and fierceness and energy of love
- Pink - Friendliness
- Green - Happiness, vitality and positive energy
- Blue - Bravery and strength
- Yellow - Knowledge and wisdom
- Pink - Charisma and charm
- Orange - Faithfulness and belief
- Purple - Kindness and compassion

### **Sharing**

Invite the youth to share their decorated hands, which colors they picked and why.

### **Graffiti Board - Filling in the Gaps (3 min)**

Invite the youth to add a picture or word to the graffiti board, picking one thing that engaged them most about today's session. What did they learn that they think is most important to add?

Remember to use markers that are a different color than was used to fill or the board at the start of the session so you can continue to track learning over the sessions.

### **Looking Ahead - What to do ahead of time or expect (5 min)**

Thank the youth for their participation this week. Note one thing that you particularly appreciated or enjoyed about the session you just did with them.

Remind the youth that next week is THE VISIT! Share a bit about where you are going, go over logistics and stress any rules that will need observed-e.g., let them know about clothing expectations.

#### **Tacking up our Eight Practices of Welcome**

Hand out the list of the Eight Practices of Welcome, Handout #1. Remind the youth that we are using them

during our visit next week and will be reviewing how well we do. So ask them to please make time to think

about them during the week. Which one do you particularly need to remember and work on for yourself.

#### **Choosing an Interview Question (either now, or before you leave for your visit on Summit Sunday)**

If you are able to include a conversation with a leader as part of your visit, we suggest that you bring questions for the youth to ask. We have included the Interview Questions at the end of this packet as part of the preparation for the visit, labeled Handout #2. We suggest that you ask the youth which question they would like to ask. Be flexible to allow youth to ask their own questions, paraphrase the question from the Handout in their own words, or ask it straight out.

*(Remember that we also recommend sending the list of questions ahead of time to the faith leaders you are going to interview. This will allow them to prepare. You might also want to let them know that the youth will be taking turns asking their favorite questions from the list or ones they have generated themselves.)*

### **Closing Words (1 min.)**

"In the days ahead, **May the ropes be with you.** May we stay close to our deepest and truest selves. May we keep connected to each other. And may we remember to lean into life's joy. Blessed be. Amen"

# Week 2

## Tack Sunday

### What Does It Mean to Be a People of Curiosity... For the Hindus?

#### Purpose

- Explore how Hindus think about and engage the theme of Curiosity.

#### Preparation & Leader Notes

##### Dinner and Drive Time Tips (Email to parents prior to the meeting):

###### *Before:*

- Ask your youth about the “graffiti board” and what kinds of things the group has listed on it. Ask what their initial understandings of Hinduism are and what they learned through what others wrote/drew on the board. Talk to them about what you know and admire about Hinduism, and how you learned what you know.

###### *After:*

- During our session, we explored how Hinduism relates our monthly theme here at church: Curiosity. In our worship we learned about the symbol of Hinduism, [OM](#) and we talked about how it is a symbol and a [sound](#), which is pronounced “aaah,” “oooh,” and “mmm.” Invite your youth to teach you how to pronounce ti and ask them to explain to you how the second sound “oooh” is connected to the idea of curiosity.

###### *For You:*

- We also talked about how Hinduism is a lot like Unitarian Universalism when it comes to religious freedom. You might say that it asks its members to be “Finders” not “Followers.” In other words, instead of telling its members, “Follow the one right way!” it says, “Get curious about all the options out there and find the way that fits you best!” One of the things it asks people to get curious about is its millions of gods. We asked the youth to get curious about them and pick which ones resonate with them the most. Use the below links to do the same:
  - <http://factsanddetails.com/world/cat55/sub354/item1354.html>
  - <https://www.blueosa.com/10-hindu-deities-everyone-know-pilgrimage-india/>
  - <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/world-history/ancient-medieval/hinduism/v/hindu-gods-overview>

##### Pre-Session To Do List:

- Send out the Dinner and Drive Time Tip. See above.
- Make sure you have the technology needed to play the YouTube videos that are part of this session.
- Print out or locate a picture of the symbol OM for worship.
- Print and cut out Hindu deities (3-4 copies of each deity) like baseball cards from the links provided in Activity #1, Picking Your God
- Index cards (16) for the “Who Am I” Game.
- Set up a simple helpful activity such as sorting markers or cleaning toys for the Karma path in the Three Corners Game
- Index cards (at least 8) to identify the values in the colors for Holi represented by markers.
- Locate washable markers in colors suggested in the Holi activity.
- Copies of Handout #1 Eight Practices for review.
- Copies of Handout #2 Interview Questions so group members may choose or create interview questions.
- Different colored markers than used before for the final Graffiti Board activity in this session.

## Session

# **What Does It Mean to be a People of Curiosity... for Hindus?**

### **Entering - Graffiti Board Writing**

*Same Core Question: What is Hinduism?*

As youth enter the room, direct them check out the graffiti board as a way to remind themselves of what they've been learning. Using a new color for the markers, invite them to add a new item or embellish an item they've already put up.

### **Gathering & Centering - Worship (15 min)**

#### **Using OM to Open to and Get Curious About the Vastness of The World**

##### **Preparation**

Locate a [picture](#) of the Om symbol to show during worship.

##### **Centering Sound**

Invite everyone to calm and center themselves. Use whatever ringing vessel you have chosen (chimes, bowl, bell). Ring the bell/bowl/chimes. Once the sound ends, pause for a moment of silence and then end by saying "Amen" or blessing words of your own.

##### **Lighting the Chalice**

*We light this chalice in gratitude for the path we share, a path that guides us  
back to our deepest self,  
back to each other,  
And back to life's gifts and joy.*

##### **Welcome**

##### Suggested Script/Talking Points:

- Welcome to Tack Sunday and to our continued exploration of this month's religion: Hinduism. Today we are going to explain - or "tack up" with - how Hinduism thinks about the monthly theme we are exploring here at our church: Curiosity.
- There's no better place to start than with the symbol most often used to represent Hinduism: The [Aum or Om Symbol](#). [*Be sure to have a picture ready, such as found [here](#) and show it at this point*]
- It's important to know that OM is both a symbol and a sound, pronounced "aaah," "ooh," and "mmm" with a silent pause after. This sound is referred to as "[the sound of the whole universe](#)," with some Hindus saying it is the sound of the first echo when the universe was created.
- So where does curiosity come in? Well let's look more closely at the three sounds.
- First comes "aaah." This is about opening up. It's the sound some of us make when staring out at an open sky or a beautiful view. It's a response to taking in "the wide view" and recognizing how big and beautiful, vast and amazing our world is.
- Next comes "ooh." Think of it as the sound you make when you've just discovered or learned something, the sound of interested surprise. It's a sound and experience connected to wanting to know more. It's a "question mark" sound, you might say.

- And here's the thing: Doesn't curiosity ("ohhh") almost always follow an encounter with vastness ("ahhh"). When we are open to the complexity and wonder of the world, we naturally want to learn more and ask question about it. We want to explore. We can't help but be curious.
- And what follows a curious exploration of the vast world? Well, contentment. Thus the final of the three OM sounds: "mmmm."
- The cool thing about this is that it helps to highlight how Hinduism is a religion of openness and curiosity. Not all religions are this way. Too often they are about controlling how people see the world rather than encouraging people to be curious about it. As we've learned, Hinduism wants people to see the world as a vast, diverse place with divinity waiting to surprise you wherever you turn (With millions of gods spread around there are endless opportunities for surprise and curiosity!)
- In addition to affirming curiosity, OM also highlights how connection, unity and wholeness are central to Hinduism.
- The vibrations made when chanting the sound of OM are said to align the body, mind and spirit, helping to create a feeling of wholeness inside the individual. When sitting in the same room, the vibration is also said to align and connect all those gathered into a single whole, and even connect and align them with the wholeness of the universe.
- So with all this as background, now let's stop explaining and start experiencing, by doing an OM meditation for our worship this morning.

### Teach It:

Teach the youth how to pronounce/chant it: "aaah," "oooh," and "mmm" with a silent pause after. Have the youth practice a few times.

Tell the youth that the group will chant it together in a moment but first you want to highlight a few things for them to pay attention to as they chant together:

1. Pay attention to the feeling of vibration and how it is calming:

"OM has endured in popularity simply because of its vibration — how we feel when we chant it. "The sound itself seems to calm the nervous system," says Stephen Cope, founder of Kripalu's Institute for Extraordinary Living." - From [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kripalu/meaning-of-om\\_b\\_4177447.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kripalu/meaning-of-om_b_4177447.html)

2. Pay attention to how the sound creates connection.

As one Hindu teacher says, "When we sound OM together, we're aligning body/mind/spirit; we're aligning with one another; we're aligning with the universe." Make a reference to our three UU ropes of connection.

Stress that ultimately this is a sound that validates cosmic wholeness, oneness and harmony.

Here are some videos for you to watch ahead of time so you can pronounce and chant it correctly:

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WCS\\_rC3NiXc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WCS_rC3NiXc)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yoYrLM5rGX8>

**Do It:**

## **OM Meditation**

Invite the group into a circle and have everyone sit in a comfortable position.

Explain that you will start and then after you chant 2-3 times have the group join in.

Tell the group to keep chanting until you stop them, which will be after around 10 times. You will signal it is time to stop by touching the shoulder of the person next to you and them doing the same to the person next to them.

Encourage them to sink into it.

Begin.

Afterward, invite conversation about how it felt and how it helped them connect to one of the intended experiences: calm; alignment & wholeness of body/mind/spirit; alignment and wholeness with one another; alignment and wholeness with the world around them.

### ***Thematic Check-in***

Invite the group to share, in a sentence, their answer to the reflection question: What gives you strength when you are facing tough times? A song or a book. A person or a quote?

### ***Closing***

"In the rest of our time together and in the days ahead, **May the ropes be with you.** May we stay close to our deepest and truest selves. May we keep connected to each other. And may we remember to lean into life's joy. Blessed be. Amen"

### ***Extinguish the Chalice***

Leader note: If you use a flame, our advice is to extinguish it now to prevent accidental tipping over or pyro play with hot wax. If you use a tea light, you may wish to extinguish it at the end of the session during the closing words.

## **Session Focus**

### **Hinduism's Invitation to Get Curious (25 min)**

#### **Explain**

Here are some talking points to bring Hinduism into conversation with our monthly theme of curiosity...

- So as we noted in our worship, we're exploring today how Hinduism relates to our monthly theme of curiosity.
- In a way, curiosity is what Hinduism is all about because instead of telling its members exactly what to believe, it encourages them to explore which parts of the religion they resonate with the most.
- You might say that it asks its members to be "Finders" not "Followers." In other words, instead of telling its members, "Follow the one right way!" it says, "Get curious about all the options out there and find the way that fits you best!"
- You see this most clearly in two big ways:
- First, it gives people millions of gods to choose from. Instead of telling people there is only one true god and only one right way to think of god, Hinduism says "There are millions of gods out there. Your job is to get curious about them all and get into relationship with the ones you need most right now in your life."
- Second, it gives people three very different paths to enlightenment to choose from. Remember Map Sunday when we talked about Bhakti (the path of devotion) as only one of the three paths to enlightenment. The other two paths are Karma (the path of action or good works) and Jnana (the path of wisdom or knowledge). Hinduism says all three of these ways are great. Only you can know which path works best for you. Some people are passionate about learning about and thinking about religion (the path of Jnana). Others are passionate about moral action and social justice work (the path of Karma). Still others are passionate about spiritual practice and devotional types of religion (the path of Bhakti.) Your job, says Hinduism, is to get curious about all three and discover which one works the best for you.
- So, to explore this more and to have some fun, let's spend some time ourselves getting curious about the many Hindu gods and the many Hindu paths and then pick which ones seem to fit each of us the best!

#### **Engage**

##### **Activity #1 - Get Curious about the Gods!**

#### Introduction

Start with some basics about the [huge number](#) of gods in Hinduism. Be sure to explain how they are all manifestations of [Brahman](#). Here are some articles to help:

- Hindu Gods: <http://factsanddetails.com/world/cat55/sub354/item1354.html>
- The 33 Million Gods of Hinduism: [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/gadadhara-pandit-dasa/the-33-million-demigods-ob\\_1737207.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/gadadhara-pandit-dasa/the-33-million-demigods-ob_1737207.html)
- Brahman: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/brahman-Hindu-concept>

After that, connect the idea of the many gods of Hinduism. Two points are particularly important:

- Hinduism has a whole bunch of gods because they affirm the whole of life. They celebrate the diversity of life and it is reflected in their incredibly diverse number of gods.
- Hinduism affirms many gods because they affirm the uniqueness of individuals. Everyone is different and so their spiritual needs and paths will be different. Only a bunch of gods can meet (and honor) the needs of human beings.

These two points are expressed by [one writer](#) this way:

“Hindus find the notion of one God unnecessarily restrictive. They are “dazzled by the wondrous variety of the creation...For so multiplex a world, the more gods the better! How could one god account for so varied a creation?...To explain the multiplicity and plurality of gods, Hindus view the Brahma as a diamond with a multitude of facets, each representing a god, with some individual facets having more of a hold on individual people than others.”

### Pick Your Favorites

Go deeper into the ideas above by having the youth pick which Hindu god they resonate with most. Reiterate the idea that the Hindu goal is not to worship all the gods but to find the god or few gods that represent the qualities you want to develop or match the struggles you are facing on your unique spiritual path. In other words, the goal of Hinduism (and this activity) is to find your place in the whole by picking “your god.”

To make the activity manageable, we recommend focusing on a smaller group of the major or most popular gods. Below are some links to these smaller lists. Each link contains pictures and short descriptions of gods that you can cut out and then spread out on the floor or on a table so the youth can go through them and decide which speaks to them the most. We suggest you make 3-4 copies of each god so more than one youth can pick each god. (Think about it like trading and collecting baseball cards of your favorite players.) You can decide whether you youth get to pick only one or 2 of the gods.

After they’ve made their selections, have the youth go around and read the descriptions of the god they picked and explain why that god resonates with them.

Lists of Gods:

- <https://www.blueosa.com/10-hindu-deities-everyone-know-pilgrimage-india/>
- <https://www.ancienthistorylists.com/india-history/top-10-hindu-gods-praised-hindus-around-world/>
- <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/world-history/ancient-medieval/hinduism/v/hindu-gods-overview>
- [https://www.lotussculpture.com/bronze\\_sculpture\\_the\\_gods.html](https://www.lotussculpture.com/bronze_sculpture_the_gods.html)

## Activity #2 - Get Curious about the Gods by Getting Curious about Their Sacred Animal Friends!

Another fun way to explore and get curious about the Hindu gods is to learn about the animals connected to each. Hinduism gives them a special role in the sacred order. It has them carry the gods around and serve as their partners and friends! Here's how one Hindu writer expresses it:

“The Hindu faith, the cradle of which is India, is a religion which dotes upon the birds and animals. In fact, the religion has bestowed the fur, feathers and fins species the status of divinity by linking their multifarious gods and goddesses to various animals. All the numerous Hindu gods and goddesses are considered the manifestations of one supreme creator, the Almighty God. The gods and goddesses in Hindu mythology travel in supersonic speed on animals and birds. Different gods have different vahanas (animal vehicles). The literal meaning of the word ‘vahana’ is ‘that which carries, that which pulls’...” <https://www.yourpetspace.info/hindu-animal-vehicles/>

So here's another game to continue your curious exploration of the gods:

### PREPARATION:

Using the list below, write each Animal Vehicle (vahana) and their god or goddess on index cards - 16 cards for the 16 pairs.

### PLAYING THE GAME (“[20 Questions](#)”):

Ask for one volunteer at a time to be the “guesser.” Without looking, grab a card and tape it to the forehead or back of the guesser. The guesser then tries to guess which animal is on their back or forehead by asking 20 questions. The group can answer only with “yes” or “no.” If the guesser can't come up with 20 questions on their own, invite the group to help them. Remember 20 questions are hard to come up with on your own sometimes! Once the animal vahana is guessed, read the description of the god or goddess found in Handout #3.

**Surya – Horses**  
**Agni – Ram (Sheep)**  
**Brahma- Swan**  
**Durga – Lion**  
**Ganesha–Mouse**  
**Indra–Elephant**  
**Kartikeya --Peacock**  
**Lakshmi–Owl**  
**Saraswati–Swan**  
**Shani–Crow/Raven/Vulture**  
**Shashthi - Cat**  
**Shitala—Donkey**  
**Shiva–Bull**  
**Vishnu–Eagle**  
**Yama–Buffalo**  
**Ayyappa–Tiger**

### Activity #3 - Get Curious About the Three Paths to Enlightenment! (10 min)

As mentioned above, Hinduism does not try to get everyone to follow the same religious path. It lifts up three very different paths to enlightenment to choose from:

- Bhakti, the path of devotion
- Karma, the path of action or good works, and
- Jnana, the path of wisdom or knowledge.

Use the following game to help the youth remember and think about these three paths, with them also getting curious about which one represents how they like “walking around in the world.”

#### Three Corners, with a spiritual twist

Begin by introducing the youth to the three corners [game](#) as it is usually played. Invite them to do three rounds using the following choices:

- topic: ice cream - first round: vanilla, chocolate, strawberry
- topic: ice cream - second round: mint chocolate chip, cookies and cream, cherry Garcia
- topic: cars - Prius, corvette, Chevy truck

Now try it with the three paths of Hinduism.

1. Appoint three corners of the room as each one of the three paths.
2. First, all go to each corner and experience each path together.
3. Then standing in the middle, have each youth pick the one which calls to them the most and then go to their separate corners.
4. Once there, each one shares why that particular path called to them.

- **Bhakti, the path of devotion:**

On this path you will bow to each other in the Namaste position. Continue for 1 minute. of hands together, pressing in front of the heart, to show your devotion to each other.

“Use Namaste to feel close to God when you pray. Many Hindus perform Namaste during prayer in order to look into their inner spirit. Prayer is individual, so do whatever feels natural to you.”

<https://www.wikihow.com/Do-Namaste>

- **Karma, the path of action or good works:**

On this path you will perform a helpful action. (sorting markers, giving a hug, cleaning toys). Offer a simple helpful service for others for 1 minute.

- **Jnana, the path of wisdom or knowledge:**

On this path you will try out yoga positions such as [downward dog](#), [child’s pose](#), and/or [corpse pose](#). Explain to the youth that some knowledge is found by going inward and discovering inner truth. For instance, when Hindus meditate they say they discover the knowledge that they are connected to the universe around them, and interdependent not isolated. As [one person](#) explains “The mystical experience of the individual soul with the world soul is facilitated by the practice of Yoga meditation.”

## Optional Activity

Take some time and get to know a couple of Hindu families who have “gotten curious” and picked their own favorites gods. Here are two great videos to watch with the youth:

- Hindu Morning Ritual - Sakila's Puja: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARaNRTJPnpg>
- Hindu Shrine (with Middle School kids): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iyw5EJRKEXU>

## Graffiti Board - Filling in the Gaps (3 min)

Invite the youth to add a picture or word to the graffiti board, picking one thing that engaged them most about today's session. What did they learn that they think is most important to add?

Remember to use markers that are a different color than was used to fill or the board at the start of the session so you can continue to track learning over the sessions.

## Looking Ahead - What to do ahead of time or expect (5 min)

Thank the youth for their participation this week. Note one thing that you particularly appreciated or enjoyed about the session you just did with them.

Remind the youth that next week is THE VISIT! Share a bit about where you are going, go over logistics and stress any rules that will need observed-e.g., let them know about clothing expectations.

### Tacking up our Eight Practices of Welcome

Hand out the list of the Eight Practices of Welcome, Handout #1. Remind the youth that we are using them during our visit next week and will be reviewing how well we do. So ask them to please make time to think about them during the week. Which one do you particularly need to remember and work on for yourself.

### Choosing an Interview Question (either now, or before you leave for your visit on Summit Sunday)

If you are able to include a conversation with a leader as part of your visit, we suggest that you bring questions for the youth to ask. We have included the Interview Questions at the end of this packet as part of the preparation for the visit, labeled Handout #2. We suggest that you ask the youth which question they would like to ask. Be flexible to allow youth to ask their own questions, paraphrase the question from the Handout in their own words, or ask it straight out.

*(Remember that we also recommend sending the list of questions ahead of time to the faith leaders you are going to interview. This will allow them to prepare. You might also want to let them know that the youth will be taking turns asking their favorite questions from the list or ones they have generated themselves.)*

## Closing Words (1 min.)

“In the days ahead, **May the ropes be with you.** May we stay close to our deepest and truest selves. May we keep connected to each other. And may we remember to lean into life's joy. Blessed be. Amen”

# Week 3

## Summit Day

(The Visit)

### Purpose

- Get a direct experience of Hinduism with a visit.
- Engage and use our Eight Practices of Welcoming.

### Preparation & Leader Notes

#### Dinner and Drive Time Tips (Email to parents prior to the meeting):

##### *Before:*

- Talk to your youth about the 8 practices of welcoming and how they might use them in their visit.
- Remind youth to bring an offering. We recommend an amount of \$\_\_\_\_\_.
- Remind your youth about dress requirements. [Leader note: tailor this bullet to the visit]

##### *After:*

- Ask your youth to share their favorite part of the visit.
- Reflect with them on your own experiences with and understanding of Hinduism. Share your assumptions and stereotypes and ask your youth how their experience relates to those assumptions and your past experiences.

##### *For You:*

- While your youth are traveling to visit and learn from Hindu leaders, make some time to meet some Hindus yourself and hear them talk about their religion:
  - Former UN Under-Secretary-General Shashi Tharoor: <https://vimeo.com/272512802>
  - Have a Little Faith: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v-NzVlwyZso>

#### Pre-Visit To Do List:

- Arrange for and prepare the drivers. Make sure the drivers:
  - Have the address of the destination and a phone number to call if there are problems.
  - Have a list of who is in their car and their emergency contact numbers.
  - Are familiar with and comply with congregational safety guidelines, such as a license and proof of insurance on record.
- Send the Interview Questions to the faith leader, optional.
- Make sure to collect signed permission slips from group members, with all relevant contact information and emergency numbers. Make a copy to leave at the church, and a copy to bring on the trip.
- Let parents know the approximate time of return and post it on the door of your meeting room.
- Prepare to post a “We Will Return Soon” note in case someone comes late, such as “Sorry we missed you. The Crossing Paths group is visiting \_\_\_\_\_. We will return at \_\_\_\_\_.
- Bring offering money for each group member or remind them to bring some
- Consider purchasing or bringing a gift for your host. Perhaps an interfaith poster or calendar.
- Make sure you have collected and clarified all the rules & expectations for your visit. You will share this information before you leave your church on Summit Sunday. Rules and expectations include:
  - the name of the faith community you are visiting. (e.g., First Congregational Church of...)
  - the religion’s name for their house of worship. (e.g., temple, church, mosque...)

- what the religious leader is called and how they should be addressed (e.g., “They are call a minister and they should be addressed as Rev. Jones or Pastor Jones.”)other behaviors that should be observed (e.g., expect dress, silence in certain spaces, when one can and when one shouldn’t participate in a ritual, etc.)
- When and if it is appropriate to take pictures with phones. (Remember that we want to have some select moments when photos are gathered so they can be used in the end of year scrapbook or video)

## ***Session - Visit***

### **Before You Go**

Before you leave, gather as a group at your home church and do the following:

#### **Choosing an Interview Question (before you leave for your visit on Summit Sunday if not done earlier)**

If you are able to include a conversation with a leader as part of your visit, we suggest that you bring questions for the youth to ask. We have included the Interview Questions at the end of this packet as part of the preparation for the visit, labeled Handout #2. We suggest that you ask the youth which question they would like to ask. Be flexible to allow youth to ask their own questions, paraphrase the question from the Handout in their own words, or ask it straight out.

#### **Remembering to be a Good Guest:**

Leader reviews basic information and guidelines about how to be respectful during the visit:

1. Share the name of the faith community you are visiting. (e.g., First Congregational Church of...)
2. Share the religion’s name for their house of worship. (e.g., temple, church, mosque...)
3. Tell them what the religious is called and how they should be addressed (e.g., “They are call a minister and they should be addressed as Rev. Jones or Pastor Jones.”)
4. Review other behaviors that should be observed (e.g., silence in certain spaces, when one can and when one shouldn’t participate in a ritual, etc.)
5. Make sure everyone’s dress is appropriate and honors the expectations of the tradition you are visiting. If someone has forgotten, address the situation according to the understandings you’ve made ahead of time.
6. Share when and if it is appropriate to take pictures with phones. (Remember that we want to have some strategic moments when photos are gathered so they can be used in the end of year scrapbook or video)
7. Share expectations about texting and use of smartphones.
8. Remind them that they are guests and will be representing Unitarian Universalism to your hosts
9. Go over the travel plans and rules:
  - Assign participants to a car and make sure they know to return in the same car.
  - Be respectful of their drivers and cars.
  - Give emergency contact numbers to drivers.

**Packing Up Our Eight Practices:** Gather in your church foyer or parking lot before you go. Move together in a circle and share a blessing based on the Eight Practices of Welcoming. We recommend that you print out this blessing so the youth have the Eight Practices physically available. Here's one version of a blessing you could do. Do it as a group by each person taking turns reading one line:

*Leader: Let us take a breath and pause before we go.  
[PAUSE IN SILENCE]*

*With our feet firmly grounded here at our church home, we are grateful.  
Here we find community and comfort.  
Here we also encounter the call to go out, explore and become more.*

*On our journey today, let us take our practices and values with us  
so we can notice and receive all the gifts offered to us.  
May we remember to...*

*Be fully present  
Be curious  
Be open to being changed  
Be comfortable with discomfort  
Be an appreciative listener  
Be light-hearted  
Be gentle when mistakes are made  
And, be ourselves*

*With all these commitments tucked tightly in our hearts and heads,  
Amen, Let's go!*

## The Visit

**Don't forget about collecting pictures for our future scrapbook/memory wall/video project.** At the very least get a picture of the youth in front of the house of worship.

*Have the youth text or email you 1-2 of their favorite pictures that they took. Save for the spring scrapbook/memory wall/video project.*

## After the Visit (just before everyone heads home)

### Looking Ahead - What to do ahead of time or expect (1 min.)

Thank the youth for their participation. Praise something about how the youth handled themselves. Note one thing that you particularly appreciated or enjoyed about the visit.

Remind the youth that next week is Lake Sunday. Lift up anything they need to do or think about ahead of time.

### Closing Words

"In the days ahead, **May the ropes be with you.** May we stay close to our deepest and truest selves. May we keep connected to each other. And may we remember to lean into life's joy. Blessed be. Amen"

# **Week 4**

## **Lake Sunday**

*(Reflecting on Our Visit)*

### **Purpose**

- Reflect on the visit.
- Review our use of the Eight Practices of Welcoming

### **Preparation & Leader Notes**

#### **Dinner and Drive Time Tips (Email to parents prior to the meeting):**

##### ***Before:***

- *Talk with your youth about what they plan to write on the Thank You Card that will be sent to faith community they visited last week. This will help them prepare, give them a chance to reflect more on the visit and better enable them to write something meaning.*

##### ***After:***

- *Ask your youth to share which of the 8 Practices of Welcoming were hardest for them personally.*
- *Ask them to share something about the graffiti board. They have been adding new thoughts to it each week. Ask them how the board has changed? What's interesting about how it has changed and grown? How does it show that the group's understanding of Hinduism has evolved?*

##### ***For You:***

- *Talk with your spouse/partner or a friend about how your own view of Hinduism has evolved over the month as a result of your conversations with your youth.*

#### **Pre-Session To Do List:**

- Get a thank-you card for everyone to sign.
- Choose the Hanuman Keepsake you will give as a gift.
- (optional) Invite a guest with a Hindu background or experience, perhaps identified in the Parent Orientation, or from a request to the congregation at large. Share Handout #2 with them and let them know the youth will be asking them the questions listed, optional.
- (optional) Make plans to attend the adult service or part of the service as a way of exploring the monthly theme of Wholeness.
- (optional) Locate supplies for the Ring on a String Game.

## Session

### **Entering - Graffiti Board Writing**

Using the same graffiti board from past weeks, invite those entering to add words, pictures or impressions that represent what stuck out for them about last week's visit.

### **Gathering & Centering - Worship (10 min)**

#### ***Preparation***

Choose a Thank You Card to send to the Hindu leader(s) that everyone can sign. Gather pens and markers.

#### ***Centering Sound***

Invite everyone to calm and center themselves. Use whatever ringing vessel you have chosen (chimes, bowl, bell). Ring the bell/bowl/chimes. Once the sound ends, pause for a moment of silence and then end by saying "Amen" or blessing words of your own.

#### ***Lighting the Chalice***

*"We light this chalice in gratitude for the path we share, a path that guides us back to our deepest self, back to each other, and back to life's gifts and joy."*

#### ***Welcome***

Suggested welcome script: "Welcome everyone to Lake Sunday! Lake Sunday is about "coming back from our journey - back down the mountain - and reflecting on our trip" I'm so excited for us to talk about our visit and notice all the gifts the visit gave us.

As a way of getting ready for this discussion about learnings and gifts, our centering song this morning comes from the Indian-American pop singer, [Raja Kumari](#). In this song, Raja honors the gift of her Hindu heritage and the way it helped her believe in herself. As you listen to her song of gratitude, think about the parts of last week's visit you are most thankful for. In addition, sign the Thank You card and include any special note or reflection you would like to share with the Hindu leader(s) who were such generous teachers to us this past week.

#### ***Music For Centering***

Believe in You -Raja Kumari

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lsqzOwlk3k0>

#### ***Closing Words***

*"In the rest of our time together and in the days ahead, **May the ropes be with us.** May we stay close to our inner and truest selves. May we keep connected to each other. May we remember to lean into life's joy. - Blessed be. Amen"*

#### ***Extinguish the Chalice***

Leader note: If you have an open flame, we suggest extinguishing it at this point to prevent accidents and pyro-play. Otherwise, consider extinguishing it during the Closing at the end of the session.

## Reflecting on the Visit (20 min)

### *Initial Reactions*

- 1. What surprised you?** What was completely new? What didn't you expect?
- 2. What was the most interesting part?** What was "cool"? When were you having the most fun?
- 3. What didn't you fully understand?** What confused you? What do you want to learn more about (Leader note: Answer the questions/confusions if you can. Or see if the group can help. If time, look up the answer on a computer/phone. If no time for that, encourage the youth to look it up with their parents or promise to look it up for them)

### *Personal Application*

**How did the visit and our sessions make you think about your own life differently?** How do you wish your life was more like the Hindus you met and learned about?

Lead the group in discussion about their personal takeaways. Invite them to think about how the visit and the past few weeks of learning gave them a challenge for their own life. Give them some example questions to help them reflect:

- Remember in Tack Sunday when we did the OM chant and how the vibration of the chant connected you to each other, life and yourself? Did it make you want to find a meditation practice that will regularly give that sense of calm and connection?
- We talked about how Hindus believe that gods take many different forms. Did this understanding of many gods and many manifestations of divinity change your own understanding of God/The Divine in any way?
- Did our visit to the Hindu community make you think about religion differently? Did it make you wish our UU church community would do some things differently?

Leader Note: Consider sharing your own personal takeaways first to model and help them think about this. How did the visit and learning invite you to think differently or want to make a change or add something more to your life?

## **Activity**

### ***Holding on to Inner Strength: Keep Hanuman in Your Pocket***

**(15 min)**

#### **Leader Background - the Keepsake**

Ahead of time, locate a keepsake to give to each group member to remember the message of Hanuman, the Monkey God. There are several options for a gift.

1. Create a small Hanuman portrait using Handout #4 below and invite them to color it.
2. Give a monkey figurine from the game, [Barrel of Monkeys](#) (10 monkeys per game)
3. Give a [toy monkey figurine](#).

Don't give the keepsake until after the video clip. This will help focus the attention of the group

#### **Leader's Talking Points**

- In Map Sunday, we reflected on the importance of devotion in Hinduism and learned about Hanuman, the Monkey God. Hanuman is an example or symbol of divine devotion. His loyalty to, friendship with and love of Rama (a major manifestation of Vishnu) is celebrated in story by all Hindus.
- Hanuman is also used to talk about how devotion [unlocks our inner strength](#) and gives us access to powers we don't realize we had. As [one writer](#) puts it, "[The story of Hanuman] invites us to the place within and without that is simple and one-pointed and reverential to our lives. It unlocks our superpowers..."
- Hopefully, our exploration of Hinduism and particularly, Hanuman, will inspire you to unlock your own superpowers and inner strength. To support you in this, we will make a keepsake of Hanuman to keep in your pocket.
- But before we do, let's check out something cool. Did you know that Former President Obama himself carried around a small statue of Hanuman in his pocket?

Show the video clip of Obama from 44:00 - 47:25 -

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?time\\_continue=2863&v=Tjl8ka3F6QU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2863&v=Tjl8ka3F6QU)

With this in mind, we are going to give you a Hanuman keepsake to keep in your pocket to remind you that you have strength inside you.

#### **Give the Keepsakes**

Pass out the keepsakes you have chosen for the group. Invite them to keep them in their pocket, purse, locker, dresser or backpack. When they touch Hanuman or see him, they will be reminded that they have inner strength inside of them.

If you are using the Barrel of Monkeys game, invite the group to play it.

If you are using the Hanuman outlines to color, invite the group to cut them out and color them. If you have a laminating machine, that would be an ideal way to keep them.

## Engaging the Graffiti Board - Stepping back and seeing how far we've come! (10 min)

- Gather around the graffiti board or take it down and bring it into the circle.
- Pause to see if there are any last things to add.
- *Ask them to share something about the graffiti board. They have been adding new thoughts to it each week. Ask them how the board has changed? What's interesting about how it has changed and grown? How does it show that the group's understanding of Hinduism has evolved?*
  1. **What strikes you as you look at all the colors?** Were there some weeks where we seemed to learn more than others? Are there more words than pictures? What does that mean?
  2. **Is there anything on the board that needs to be corrected?** Any "understanding" that was incomplete or misunderstood?
  3. **What 2-3 things seem to best describe the essence of Hinduism for you?** If you had to explain Hinduism to someone else, which 2-3 items on the board would you talk about?
- Take some selfies! Individual and as a group. Remember to remind the youth that we will be using these pictures in the spring to create a scrapbook, memory wall or video to document our journey this year.

## Eight Practices Review (10 min)

Remind the youth that Crossing Paths is not just about visiting and learning about other religions. It's also about learning skills and practices to better engage new people and new ideas throughout our entire life. So explain that you are reviewing how well the group used the 8 Practices not just to "grade ourselves" but also to push ourselves to develop them as "life practices." The 8 Practices are included below, in Handout #1.

There are a number of ways to review the practices:

1. **As a group:** Have the group evaluate itself as a whole by going through the list one by one and asking the group to share when they did each practice well and when they could have done it a bit better.
2. **As individuals:** Ask each person to pick one practice they feel they did well and one practice they wish they had done better and want to work on. Take turns having each youth share their answers.

## Looking Ahead - What to do ahead of time or expect

Thank the youth for their participation this week. Note one thing that you particularly appreciated or enjoyed about the session you just did with them.

Remind the youth what is happening next week and make sure they know what they have to do ahead of time. Note one thing that you are particularly looking forward to.

## Closing Words

"In the days ahead, **May the ropes be with you.** May we stay close to our deepest and truest selves. May we keep connected to each other. And may we remember to lean into life's joy. Blessed be. Amen"

*Extinguish the chalice if you haven't done so earlier. Invite any participants to sign the thank-you card if they haven't done so.*

## ***Add Ons for Groups with More Time***

### **Option #1 - Interview**

If you have time, consider inviting a congregant with a background in Hinduism tradition to visit and talk with the youth. You can do this after or before you reflect on your visit - both have advantages and disadvantages. Use Handout #2 "Interview Questions."

### **Option #2 - Attend the Adult Service on Curiosity**

"Visiting" your own worship service can enrich the experience tremendously. If you usually meet during the service, consider changing and expanding your schedule for Lake Sunday, attending the service first then staying after to do the Lake Sunday session. You can go even deeper with this by asking your minister or ministers to come talk with the youth after the service about what they appreciate about Hinduism and how they see us being similar and different when it comes to belief and their understanding of what it means to be a people of curiosity.

### **Option #3 Hanuman and Rama's Death - A lesson about devotion and being willing to let go**

#### **The Story**

Hanuman was devoted to the god Rama. They were lifelong friends. When it came time for Rama to die, Hanuman guarded his door and refused to let death enter. Rama had to trick Hanuman by throwing his ring away and asking Hanuman to search for it. While Hanuman searched, death took Rama.

"One day, Rama was informed that it was time for him to die. He understood that those who take birth have to experience death. "Let Yama, come to me. It is time for me to return to my heavenly abode," he said. But Yama, the god of death, dared not enter as he was afraid of Hanuman who guarded the gates of Rama's palace.

To allow Yama's entry, it was necessary to distract Hanuman. So Rama dropped his ring into a crack in the palace floor and requested Hanuman to fetch it. Hanuman reduced himself to the size of a beetle and entered the crack only to discover that it was no crack but the entrance to a tunnel that led to Nag Lok, the land of serpents. Hanuman met Vasuki, the king of serpents there and informed him of his mission.

Vasuki took Hanuman to the center of Nag Lok where stood a mountain of rings! "There you will surely find Rama's ring," said Vasuki. Hanuman wondered how he would do that as it was like finding a needle in a haystack. But to his delight, the first ring that he picked up was Rama's ring. To his astonishment, even the second ring he picked up was Rama's ring. In fact all the rings that made up the mountain were identical. "What is the meaning of this?" he wondered.

Vasuki smiled and said, "This world we live in goes through cycles of life and death. Each life cycle of the world is called a kalpa. Each kalpa has four quarters. In the second quarter, Rama [is born.] Then one day his ring falls into the subterranean realm of serpents through a tunnel. A monkey follows it and Rama on earth dies. So it has been for hundreds of thousands of kalpas. All these rings testify to that fact. The mountain keeps growing as more rings fall. There is enough space for the rings of future Ramas."

Hanuman realized that his entry into Nag Lok and his encounter with the mountain of rings was no accident. It was Rama's way of telling him that he could not stop death from coming. Rama would die. The world would die. But like all things, Rama would be reborn each time the world is reborn."

- Story source : <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/Timeless-story-of-Sri-Rama/articleshow/7945143.cms>

### **Suggested Script and Game for After the Story**

This story illustrates the importance of devotion in Hinduism. Being devoted to a cause or a person can help us persist and overcome many obstacles. But sometimes devotion prevents us from accepting hard truths or moving on. So knowing when to let go is key. Just as Hanuman had to let go and accept the death of Rama, sometimes we need to let go of what we really care about in order to move forward. To get at this idea, let's play a game!

It's called Ring on a String. The ring is a symbol of devotion and the game requires us to let our devotions go.

### **Explain the Game**

Use this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Puhd-Bt-g5s>

### **More Background:**

The Ring on a String Game is a traditional game that's played in many countries. Sometimes it's called Hunt the Ring.

### **Lyrics Sung During the Game:**

*Can you guess who has the ring  
As we pass it on the string?  
Pass it left, pass it right,  
Always keep it out of sight.*

### **Here's how you play...**

1. Slip a ring on a long string and tie both ends. To determine the length of the string, you need to use about 24" of string per player.
2. Everyone should form a circle and hold the string with both hands – so there will be one long circle of string that's held by everyone in the circle. One person should go in the center of the circle.
3. The people holding the string should pass the ring along the string from hand to hand while hiding the ring. Everyone in the circle should always be pretending to pass the ring, even when they don't have it.
4. The one in the middle has to guess who has the ring. As soon as they guess correctly, they switch places with that person.

***Handout #1***  
***The Eight Practices of Welcoming Difference***

1. Be fully present
2. Be curious
3. Be open to being changed
4. Be comfortable with discomfort
5. Be an appreciative listener
6. Be light-hearted
7. Be gentle (allow and heal mistakes)
8. Be yourself

## ***Handout #2***

### ***Interview Questions***

1. How has Hinduism influenced your understanding of “the divine”? What do you wish non-Hindus would most understand when it comes to the Hindu approach to divinity/gods & goddesses?
2. Who is your favorite Hindu god?
3. What is your favorite service, ritual or holiday of the Hindu year?
4. What is your favorite Hindu story or morality tale?
5. We learned about Hanuman, The Monkey King. Did the stories of Hanuman play a big role in your life when you were younger? Do they now?
6. What does the Om symbolize for you? Do you use the Om chant in your personal spiritual practice?
7. What is your most regular spiritual practice? How has Hinduism influenced your personal spiritual practices?
8. How did your journey as a Hindu begin? For instance, Christians mark the official beginning of their journey with baptism or confirmation. What ritual welcomed you into your faith?
9. What sound or taste do you most associate with Hinduism?
10. Our church’s monthly spiritual theme is “A people of curiosity.” What does “being a person of curiosity” mean to you? How has Hinduism influenced that?
11. Is there a particular Hindu belief or perspective that you think is especially relevant to our culture and political climate right now?
12. What is unique about the Hindu approach to social justice?
13. What are the major misconceptions out there about the Hindu tradition? What do you wish others better understood?

## **Handout #3**

### **Gods' "Cheat Sheet" for Who Am I? Game**

(Adapted from <https://www.yourpetspace.info/hindu-animal-vehicles/>)

#### **Surya – Horses**

The sun god, Surya, mounts on a golden chariot, pulled by seven white horses. Seven is a sacred number in Hindu mythology. The seven horses are representative of the seven major sins and how the Sun God triumphs over them. They also symbolize the seven chakras (spiritual vortexes in the human body).

#### **Agni – Ram (Sheep)**

Agni, or the fire god, rides upon a ram. Sacrifices are offered to Agni and to many other gods through him. Interestingly, the ram is a sacrificial animal, which has been linked to the Hindu fire god, to whom sacrifices are offered.

#### **Brahma- Swan**

Brahma, the god of creation, travels all over outer space on a swan, chanting the sacred Hindu scripture the Vedas. The elegant swan is symbolic of intelligence. As per Hindu tradition, it's a bird which can figuratively sift the pure from the impure, like it sieves milk from water. Sometimes, Brahma is shown riding seven swans.

#### **Durga – Lion**

Durga, the mother of the universe and the warrior goddess, pierces a spear into the buffalo demon's heart, while riding a lion. The lion has been nicknamed the King of the Jungle. In Hinduism it's also considered the supreme of all animals. The goddess riding a lion may also symbolize that she has tamed the instincts of greed, lust and gluttony to rise to a spiritual height.

#### **Ganesha–Mouse**

Ganesha, the huge elephant headed god, who is worshipped for wealth and prosperity, mounts on a mouse. This rodent was actually a god named Kroncha in his previous life. He had accidentally stepped on the toes of Saint Vamadeva, who was also worshipped as a god. Stepping on a spiritual being, is considered blasphemous in Hinduism. Kroncha desperately begged apology. Vamadeva's wrath simmered down. Undoing a curse is mythically impossible, but he toned it down by saying that he would become Ganesha's vehicle. Some feel that the mouse is representative of the egoistic mind, as it can metaphorically gnaw on the virtues of man. Ganesha, by mounting the mouse, thereby symbolically conquers impure desires, spiritual darkness and pride.

#### **Indra–Elephant**

Indra, the god of rain and thunderstorms, rides a white elephant called Airavata. This winged elephant was hatched from a cosmic egg. Of the 16 elephants that were born from this egg, Airavata was by far the strongest. This mythical creature sucks water with her trunk and sprinkles it on earth thereby creating rain. The white elephants of today are said to be Airavata's descendants. Airavata besides being Indra's vahana is believed to, along with his siblings, hold up the eastern hemisphere of the globe.

#### **Kartikeya –Peacock**

Kartikeya, the god of war is seen in pictures as perched on a magnificent peacock. As the old wives' tale goes the peacock is contented with its magnificent plumes but is deeply embarrassed by its unattractive legs. While it joyfully dances under a cloudy sky, when it glances at its legs, it is moved to tears.

#### **Lakshmi–Owl**

Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune, wealth and prosperity mounts the wise old white owl. Besides wisdom, the bird also symbolizes patience and intelligence. Its white plumes denote spiritual purity. It is also bestowed with the mythical powers of fortune telling. Simultaneously, this owl also serves the practical purposes of a barn owl. In the state of Bengal in India, the annual festival dedicated to the worship of Goddess Lakshmi, is celebrated in late autumn. This is when the farmers have just reaped a rich harvest and have stocked their granaries with food grains. The owl cleanses the granaries of all pests, thereby protecting the grain.

**Saraswati–Swan**

Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge, wisdom, learning, music and arts is seen with a swan. As she is after all Brahma's consort, it's not surprising that she has chosen the same bird as the vahana.

**Shani–Crow/Raven/Vulture**

Hindus pray to Lord Shani to ward off influences of evil forces. Just like mischievous magpies have ill repute in the occidental part of the globe because of their thieving tendencies; in India crows too are linked with stealing. By mounting the crow, Shani is said to suppress pilfering habits in people. He is also the god who metes out punishment to those who have abided by evil ways.

**Shashthi - Cat**

Goddess Shashthi, the goddess of fertility, is worshipped by the childless who wish to conceive. As the old tale goes, the daughter-in-law of a farmer, consumed great quantities of fish and milk from the kitchen on the sly. When confronted, she falsely put the blame on a black cat. The innocent animal was beaten repeatedly. The feline complained to Shashthi and decided to teach the liar woman a lesson. The Cat stole six of her newborn baby boys. Her seventh child was a daughter and when the cat tried to take her away, she injured it and the mother followed her to discover that all of her children were with mother Shashthi. The Goddess insisted that she apologize to the cat. The woman touched the cat's paws as a sign of devotion and promised never to put false blame on anyone.

**Shitala—Donkey**

Shitala is prayed to with the hope that she'll ward off chicken pox, measles and sores. She is believed to ride the streets of villages on a donkey with a broom, sweeping paths free of germs.

**Shiva–Bull**

Shiva, the destroyer, rides a bull named Nandi. The bull being a strong animal symbolizes virility. Nandi is Shiva's ardent devotee. He is said to have lived with the god in the heavenly snowy abode of Kailash.

**Vishnu–Eagle**

Vishnu, the Preserver/Protector mounts an eagle-like creature called Garuda. To save his mother, Garuda flew to the heavens and slayed two snakes to fetch a pot of nectar. Since that day, Garuda developed acrimony with snakes and started feeding on them. The eagle, as we all know, preys on snakes too. Garuda is seen as clutching two snakes and with serpents garlanded around him.

**Yama–Buffalo**

Yama, the lord of death, rides a black buffalo. This celestial beast is said to be strong enough to ferry two armored gods. Yama is also the god of righteousness; his tough water buffalo is said to be symbolic of upholding justice. Yama, perched on the buffalo roams around the world, searching for souls which are about to exit the earthly abode.

**Ayyappa–Tiger**

The tiger, which is the national animal of India, is the vehicle of god Ayyappa. The baby Ayyappa was forsaken on the river banks and was found by a childless king. Later, the queen had a biological child. She faked an illness which would only be cured by tiger's milk. She summoned Ayyappa to fetch the milk. The wicked woman secretly hoped that the tiger would kill him. He returned victoriously on a female tiger along with her cubs, carrying a pot full of milk. The royal couple realized that he was god. The queen pleaded for forgiveness.

# Handout #4

## Hanuman Keepsake



## Some Resources to Remember:

### Soulful Home Family Guides

Invite your parents to explore the themes at home with their entire family by subscribing to our monthly parent guides, **Soulful Home**.

Here's the link to the Soulful Home page on our website: <https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com/soulful-home.html>.

Here's [a link](#) to a PDF flyer you can share with families.

### Inspiration Facebook Page

To keep you inspired as a group leader, check out our Soul Matters Facebook inspiration page:

<https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/>

Consider also sharing it with your youth and their families!

### Soul Matters Spotify Music Playlists

Discover musical inspiration on each of our monthly themes through our playlists:

<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com/spotify-lists.html>

A great source of inspiration and connection for you, the youth and their families!

## ***Crossing Paths Authors:***

***Katie Covey, DRE of Soul Matters Sharing Circle***

***Rev. Scott Tayler, Team Lead and Founder of Soul Matters Sharing Circle***



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