

**World Religions, Cults, and Aberrant Beliefs**  
**Lesson 4 – Hinduism, Buddhism, and New Age**  
**Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School**  
[www.valleybible.net](http://www.valleybible.net)

**Hinduism**

Hinduism began about 2000 BC in its earliest form making it the world's oldest organized religion (Elsewhere in the world: God called Abram out of Haran to journey to Canaan in approximately 2091; Isaac was born 2066; and Jacob was born in 2006). Hinduism has no founder and is a diverse religion ranging from polytheistic to monotheism. In Hinduism, the forces of nature and human heroes are personified as gods and goddesses and worshiped with prayers and offerings. Hindus believe that the world is an illusion. They believe in reincarnation (an endless cycle of continuous suffering and rebirth) and karma (all is determined by an impersonal law of cause and effect of good and bad deeds). A person's goal is to free the soul from the endless cycle of rebirth and to be absorbed into the ultimate principle (the Hindu idea of god), called Brahman. The accumulation of negative karma leads to reincarnation.

According to Hindus, god (Brahman) is the one impersonal, ultimate, but unknowable, spiritual reality. Among many Hindus, Brahman, is personalized as Brahma (creator, with four heads symbolizing creative energy), Vishnu (preserver, the god of stability and control), and Shiva (destroyer, god of endings). Each of these personalizations has come to earth in various incarnations (or avatars) to aid human beings. Hindus do not have one set of scriptures. Most Hindus daily worship an image of their chosen deity, with chants (mantras), flowers, and incense. Worship is primarily individualistic rather than congregational.

Nine Beliefs of Hinduism (from [www.himalayanacademy.com/basics/nineb/](http://www.himalayanacademy.com/basics/nineb/)): ... Hindus believe many diverse things, but there are a few bedrock concepts on which most Hindus concur. The following nine beliefs, though not exhaustive, offer a simple summary of Hindu spirituality.

1. Hindus believe in a one, all-pervasive Supreme Being who is both immanent and transcendent, both Creator and Unmanifest Reality.
2. Hindus believe in the divinity of the four Vedas, the world's most ancient scripture, and venerate the Agamas as equally revealed. These primordial hymns are God's word and the bedrock of Sanatana Dharma, the eternal religion.
3. Hindus believe that the universe undergoes endless cycles of creation, preservation and dissolution.
4. Hindus believe in karma, the law of cause and effect by which each individual creates his own destiny by his thoughts, words and deeds.
5. Hindus believe that the soul reincarnates, evolving through many births until all karmas have been resolved, and moksha, liberation from the cycle of rebirth, is attained. Not a single soul will be deprived of this destiny.
6. Hindus believe that divine beings exist in unseen worlds and that temple worship, rituals, sacraments and personal devotionals create a communion with these devas and Gods.
7. Hindus believe that an enlightened master, or satguru, is essential to know the Transcendent Absolute, as are personal discipline, good conduct, purification, pilgrimage, self-inquiry, meditation and surrender in God.
8. Hindus believe that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered, and therefore practice ahimsa, noninjury, in thought, word and deed.
9. Hindus believe that no religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others, but that all genuine paths are facets of God's Light, deserving tolerance and understanding.

Hinduism can be divided into:

1. Popular Hinduism – characterized by the worship of gods, through offerings, rituals, and prayers.
2. Philosophical Hinduism – a complex belief system developed by studying ancient texts, meditating, and practicing yoga.

Within Hinduism there are three major paths to salvation.

1. Salvation by correct works – ceremonies, sacrifices, pilgrimages, and other good deeds.
2. Salvation by knowledge – by listening to the sages and scriptures and practicing meditation.
3. Salvation by devotion – this is most popular path and is devotion to one of the Hindu gods.

	<b>Hinduism</b>	<b>Biblical Christianity</b>
Authority	A host of sacred writings.	The Bible is only source of authority.
God	Impersonal ultimate reality; or "The absolute" major triad: Brahma, Shiva, Vishnu.	Plurality within unity; (three Persons in one nature); personal
Jesus	For some Hindus, Jesus was an Avatar or incarnation of god – one among many Avatars; a great spiritual teacher, a guru whose teachings can be valuable today.	Both God and man; Died on the cross and rose from the dead to pay the penalty for our sins.
Man	The present existence is an illusion. Man's divine eternal soul is part of god. People are unaware of their oneness with god. Physical body has little worth. The human condition is the endless cycle of reincarnation.	Sinful by nature and therefore separated from their Creator.
Salvation	Goal of life is to gain release (liberation) from the cycle of reincarnation and to pass beyond illusion to become one with the divine (ultimate reality) by following the proper yoga (path or discipline).	By grace through faith.

### **Witnessing Strategies for Hindus:**

Let's remember some of our general strategies:

1. Sanctify your heart. (1 Pet 3:15)
2. Pray – this is a spiritual battle for the truth. (2 Cor 10:3-5)
3. Be ready with a good understanding of the Scriptures.
4. Do not argue. Do not attack the person. (2 Tim 2:24-26)
5. Make sure you define words.
6. Do not get off on tangents. The important points are the source of authority, the nature of God, the person and work of Jesus, the nature of man, and the means of salvation.
7. Avoid Christian jargon – it has no meaning for the unchurched.

Some specifics:

1. A Hindu cannot consistently accept all of their scriptures because there are contradictory. Stress the uniqueness of the Bible as God's written revelation of Himself and His plan for individuals.
2. After settling the source of authority, move on to the nature of God. To the Hindu, God is an impersonal force. The one true God is a personal God who desires an intimate relationship with each of His creatures.
3. An important argument of the Hindu that will probably have to be addressed is the claim that all religions are the same. Stress the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as God's revelation of Himself. Stress the necessity of following Jesus to the exclusion of all other so-called deities. Keep the gospel presentation Christ-centered.

## **Buddhism**

The founder of Buddhism is Siddhartha Gautama. Gautama was born around 560 BC into the ruler/warrior class of Hinduism in Northern India near modern Nepal. His parents provided their son with a life of luxury and intentionally sheltered him from the world's suffering. In his 20s, Gautama grew dissatisfied with his life of luxury, escaped from his life of seclusion, and saw "Four Passing Sights" which made him aware of the world's suffering: 1) an old man; 2) a person suffering from disease (leprosy); 3) a dead man; and 4) an ascetic monk. Gautama rejected the more ancient theistic beliefs of Hinduism because of difficulty he had over reconciling the reality of suffering, judgment, and evil with the existence of a good and holy God.

At 29 Gautama renounced his privileged life and began a search for enlightenment through asceticism. After about six years of severe asceticism he came close to death and realized its futility. He then developed the principle of the "Middle Path" between the extremes of asceticism and indulgence. He practiced deep meditation and during one of these meditations under a fig tree in 525 BC, he supposedly reached a state of enlightenment or nirvana and became the Buddha (Enlightened One). He proclaimed his message until he died of food poisoning at age 80.

Buddhism is an impersonal religion of self-perfection, the end of which is death (extinction)—not life. The basic beliefs of Buddhism are presented in the "Four Noble Truths" and the "Eightfold Path". The Four Noble Truths are:

1. Life is full of suffering;
2. Suffering is caused by cravings or desire (the desire or thirst for pleasure or prosperity);
3. Suffering can be overcome by eliminating desire; and
4. The stopping of desires (cravings) comes by following the "Middle Path" which is accomplished by following the Eightfold Path.

The Eightfold Path is a system of therapy designed to develop habits which will release people from the cravings which cause suffering. The path is:

Wisdom	1. Right view – an understanding of the Four Noble Truths
	2. Right intention – the decision to follow and observe the Four Noble Truths
Ethical Conduct	3. Right speech
	4. Right action (deeds)
	5. Right livelihood
Mental Development	6. Right effort – to use mental energy to attain wholesome states (i.e. self-discipline, honesty, benevolence, and kindness)
	7. Right mindfulness – to observe and control the way our thoughts go
	8. Right concentration – meditation

Buddha carried over some beliefs from Hinduism, including the idea of karma and reincarnation. The goal of the Buddhist is to break out of the cycle of reincarnation by entering a permanent state of Nirvana. This final liberation is when the Buddhist becomes one with the "Impersonal". All personality and awareness is lost and the Buddhist merges into nothingness. Buddha taught that at this point one is at peace. The goal of life is to achieve this state of Nirvana where desire ceases and suffering is then eliminated.

Furthermore, the Buddha rejected subservience to a supreme God and denied belief in an eternal self. His concept of karma (the transcendental effect in a person's life of actions accomplished in that person's previous existences) has sometimes been misunderstood. Certainly he believed that karma determines the kind of rebirth a person experiences according to past merit. The Buddha, however, did not believe there is a self or soul that is reborn. Instead, he taught that at birth there is a rearrangement of the elements of a person's identity, which are called the "self" much as a "chariot" is a name for a certain grouping of parts that can be rearranged to be something else while still comprising the same parts.

The Buddha also defined nirvana differently from the Brahmins. Whereas in Brahmanism, nirvana or *moksha* is attained when the individual soul becomes one with the Universal Soul, the Buddha held that nirvana is actually the termination of rebirths that is, the identity of an individual is extinguished. One way to distinguish classical Hindu teaching from Buddhist teaching on this subject is to present the traditional metaphors taught in these two religions. In describing nirvana symbolically in classical Hinduism, the individual self is like the raindrop that falls into the ocean, becoming one with the Universal Soul. In describing nirvana symbolically in Buddhism, the identity of a person is like a candle flame that is blown out. CRI Statement DB-565-1, "THE BUDDHA AND WHAT HE TAUGHT" (Part One in a Four-Part Series on Buddhism in North America) by J. Isamu Yamamoto at [www.equip.org](http://www.equip.org)

Buddha was an atheist. He did not believe in God and felt that the very concept of God or gods was holding people bound to this physical world of karma and suffering. What is so interesting about all this is how idolatry, which Buddha condemned, has become such a major part of Buddhism, with its many shrines and statues of Buddha, the very one who loathed these things. "Fast Facts on False Teachings" by Ron Carlson and Ed Decker – page 25

	<b>Buddhism</b>	<b>Biblical Christianity</b>
Authority	The writings of Buddha and other Buddhist teachers.	The Bible is only source of authority.
God	Southern Buddhism: irrelevant. Northern Buddhism: Buddhahood.	Plurality within unity; (three Persons in one nature); personal
Jesus	A teacher who possessed Buddhahood (Enlightenment). One among many, not unique. Jesus was a great religious teacher whose teachings can be valuable today.	Both God and man; Died on the cross and rose from the dead to pay the penalty for our sins.
Man	One lifetime for each person, composed of skanda (parts), but many lives for the parts. Concept of anatta (no self) denies existence of a self beyond mental and physical attributes. The human condition is suffering, caused by attachment to things and the craving (desire) accompanying this attachment.	Sinful by nature and therefore separated from their Creator.
Salvation	Goal of life is nirvana (negation of suffering) to eliminate all desire, particularly by following the Eightfold Path.	By grace through faith.

### **Witnessing Strategies for Buddhists:**

Let's remember some of our general strategies:

1. Sanctify your heart. (1 Pet 3:15)
2. Pray – this is a spiritual battle for the truth. (2 Cor 10:3-5)
3. Be ready with a good understanding of the Scriptures.
4. Do not argue. Do not attack the person. (2 Tim 2:24-26)
5. Make sure you define words.
6. Do not get off on tangents. The important points are the source of authority, the nature of God, the person and work of Jesus, the nature of man, and the means of salvation.
7. Avoid Christian jargon – it has no meaning for the unchurched.

### Some Specifics:

1. You may want to avoid terms such as “new birth,” “rebirth,” “regeneration,” or “born again.” These terms are Biblical, but are also somewhat Christianese. Use alternatives such as “endless freedom from suffering, guilt, and sin,” “new power for living a holy life,” “promise of eternal good life without suffering,” or “gift of unlimited merit.”
2. Share your own testimony, especially your freedom from guilt, assurance of heaven (no more pain), and personal relationship with Christ.
3. A concept that is important to the Buddhist is suffering. Jesus overcame the cause of suffering – sin. The secret of true success, inner peace, self-control, and lasting salvation is submission to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Those who repent and trust Jesus alone are set free from the power of sin in this life and from the eternal penalty and presence of sin after death in eternity. This is a future hope, a hope that Buddhism does not offer.
4. Extend yourself in love to your Buddhist friend. A true Buddhist knows nothing about caring for other people or being cared for. Buddha taught that, “You are to be an island unto yourself” and “If someone is suffering, that is his karma.” Jesus demonstrated that people have infinite value by loving them so much that He died for them. Love your Buddhist friend.
5. Under karma, there can be no appeal, no mercy, and no escape except through unceasing effort at self-perfection. Buddhists constantly struggle to earn merit by doing good deeds, hoping to collect enough to break free from the life of suffering. Focus on God’s mercy and grace through Jesus.

### New Age

The New Age Movement (NAM) is a blend of many ancient and modern religions and philosophies. It can be described as a Westernized form of Eastern religions’ beliefs combined with occultic practices. The root of New Age thought can be found in the account of the fall where Satan questions God's word, authority, and benevolent rule (v1); disputes that death results from disobedience (v4); and claims that through the acquisition of secret wisdom man can be enlightened and can be "like God" (v5). Some see the statements by Satan in Gen 3 as showing the New Age tenants: "You will be like God" (pantheism), "You will not surely die" (reincarnation), "Your eyes will be opened" (change of consciousness), and "Did God really say" (moral relativism).

<sup>1</sup>Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden?'" <sup>2</sup>The woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; <sup>3</sup>but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it or touch it, or you will die.'" <sup>4</sup>The serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die!" <sup>5</sup>"For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."  
Gen 3:1-5

Since the NAM is so diverse it is difficult to detail every belief, but below are some of its main tenants.

1. Monism – “all is one” Everything and everyone is interrelated and interdependent. Ultimately there is no real difference between humans, animals, rocks, or even God. Any differences between these entities are merely apparent, not real.
2. Pantheism – "all is god" All of creation partakes of the divine essence. All of life has a spark of divinity within.
3. Godhood – "we are gods" Each person is ignorant of their divinity. The goal is to discover our own divinity.

4. Discover our divinity by experiencing a change in consciousness – The human race suffers from a collective form of metaphysical amnesia. We have forgotten that our true identity is divine and thus must undergo a change of consciousness to achieve our true human potential.
5. Reincarnation – In its classic form, the cycles of birth, death, and reincarnation are necessary to work off our bad "karma" and to reach perfection. The doctrine of karma says that one's present condition is determined by one's actions in a past life. The Western version of reincarnation held by many New Agers places much less emphasis on bad karma and postulates an upward spiral towards perfection through reincarnation.
6. Moral relativism – New Agers think in terms of gray, rather than black or white and will often believe that two conflicting statements can both be true. They will therefore teach that "all religions are true" and "there are many paths to God."

Douglas R. Groothuis, author of *Unmasking the New Age* and *Confronting the New Age*, identifies six distinctives of New Age thinking: (1) all is one; (2) all is God; (3) humanity is God; (4) a change in consciousness; (5) all religions are one; and (6) cosmic evolutionary optimism. Norman Geisler details 14 primary "doctrines" of New Age religions: (1) an impersonal god (force); (2) an eternal universe; (3) an illusory nature of matter; (4) a cyclical nature of life; (5) the necessity of reincarnations; (6) the evolution of man into Godhood; (7) continuing revelations from beings beyond the world; (8) the identity of man with God; (9) the need for meditation (or other consciousness-changing techniques); (10) occult practices (astrology, mediums, etc.); (11) vegetarianism and holistic health; (12) pacifism (or anti-war activities); (13) one world (global) order; and (14) syncretism (unity of all religions).  
[www.rapidnet.com/~jbeard/bdm/Cults/newage.htm](http://www.rapidnet.com/~jbeard/bdm/Cults/newage.htm)

New Agers employ a mixed bag of an almost infinite number of occult practices; far too many to identify and fully explore in this chapter. There are, however, words and phrases that may serve as warning signs that a particular belief, practice, or group is involved with the New Age movement and incompatible with the Christian faith. These include: Monism, Pantheism, Reincarnation, Karma, Evolution, Personal Transformation, Unlimited Human Potential, Reality Creating, Energy Alignment, Energy Healing, Energy Focusing, Attunement, At-one-ment, Enlightenment, Inner Power, Goddess Within, Mother Earth, Sensory Deprivation, Intuitive Abilities, Near-Death Experiences, Chakras, Gurus, Tarot, Kabbalah, Pyramids, Crystal Power, Auras, Colour Balancing, Psychic Centring, UFOs, Extraterrestrials, Brotherhood of Light, Higher Consciousness, Cosmic Consciousness, The Christ, Ascended Masters, Spirit Guides, Meditation, Yoga, Guided Imagery, Visualisation, Astral Projection, Silver Cord, Inner Light, Out-of-Body Experiences, Mystics, Metaphysical, Holistic Healing, Therapeutic Touch, Biofeedback, Transpersonal Psychology, Hypnotherapy, Paranormal, Parapsychology, Higher Self, Personal Transformation, Values Clarification. *THE KINGDOM OF THE CULTS {REVISED}* by Walter Martin (1997), Hank Hanegraaff, Editor, 2000 bible study centre DIGITAL LIBRARY, Page 458.

One of the tenants of NAM is evolutionary optimism.

The major goal of the New Age Movement is to bring peace to the world upon entering the Age of Aquarius. This will be accomplished primarily through the leadership of "the Christ" (also known as "Lord Maitreya"), who will supposedly come to teach us to live at peace with each other. Some of the other stated goals of the movement are to establish a World Food Authority, World Water Authority, World Economic Order, and an entirely New World Order. It should be noted here that one of the requirements for a person to enter the New Age is that he or she will have to take what is known as a "Luciferic Initiation," a kind of pledge of allegiance to the Christ of the New Age and to the New World Order. The primary goals of the movement then, are to prepare the world to receive the Christ and to enter the Age of Aquarius, thus establishing the New World Order. [www.rapidnet.com/~jbeard/bdm/Cults/newage.htm](http://www.rapidnet.com/~jbeard/bdm/Cults/newage.htm)

The "Age of Aquarius": Astrologers believe that evolution goes through cycles corresponding to the signs of the zodiac, each lasting from 2,000 to 2,400 years. NAM advocates say we are now moving from the cycle associated with Pisces into the one associated with Aquarius. The Aquarian Age will supposedly be characterized by a heightened degree of spiritual or cosmic consciousness.

	<b>New Age</b>	<b>Biblical Christianity</b>
Authority	There is no objective source of authority. Sacred writings and devotional material from many traditions have spiritual value.	The Bible is only source of authority.
God	God (ultimate reality) is an impersonal power, often spoken of as energy, consciousness, mind, or truth. God is everything; everything is god.	Plurality within unity; (three Persons in one nature); personal
Jesus	Jesus was one of many appearances of god throughout the ages, one of many people who were fully aware of their true divinity. Christ is separate from Jesus, the way-shower. Christ is the perfect god idea - the awareness of divinity within each person.	Both God and man; died on the cross for our sins; rose from the dead for our justification
Man	Humanity is not distinct from god. Human beings are essentially divine; god is within each person. Everyone has the "Christ spirit", everyone is potentially good. The human problem is illusion, ignorance, or lack of perception. People are unaware of their true identity as divine, as one with god. They need to be "enlightened" to find ultimate spiritual knowledge and liberation from the cycle of reincarnation.	Sinful by nature and therefore separated from their Creator.
Salvation	People overcome lack of perception by using techniques to change (transform) their consciousness. They can attain enlightenment when they step outside ordinary modes of perception into altered states of consciousness that dispel illusory boundaries of individual existence. Souls are evolving toward union with god and will eventually find spiritual knowledge and liberation from the cycle of rebirth.	By grace through faith.

**Witnessing Strategies for New Agers:**

Let's remember some of our general strategies:

1. Sanctify your heart. (1 Pet 3:15)
2. Pray – this is a spiritual battle for the truth. (2 Cor 10:3-5)
3. Be ready with a good understanding of the Scriptures.
4. Do not argue. Do not attack the person. (2 Tim 2:24-26)
5. Make sure you define words.
6. Do not get off on tangents. The important points are the source of authority, the nature of God, the person and work of Jesus, the nature of man, and the means of salvation.
7. Avoid Christian jargon – it has no meaning for the unchurched.

**Some Specifics:**

1. The specifics above for Hinduism and Buddhism.
2. Lovingly share with New Agers some of the implications of their belief system. For example, many New Agers do not realize that one implication of pantheism is that God is impersonal. Also, one of the implications of their belief in karma and reincarnation is that there are no innocent sufferers.