

# What in the World is Going on?

## Introduction

Today's lesson deals with Spiritualism. Spiritualism recognizes In order to understand Spiritualism as it shows itself in the West, it will be helpful briefly discuss Eastern Spiritualism. We'll use Hinduism as an example of Eastern Spiritualism. The author of "American Veda"<sup>1</sup> argues that elements of Hinduism have been imported into western culture over the past two centuries in various ways.

## A brief look at Eastern Spiritualism

**Variety of beliefs.** Hinduism is very difficult to define because it is really an amalgamation of many eastern beliefs that the western world lumps into one category.

**Pantheism.** Literally "all is God." The divine being is not a specific, distinct deity, rather a vague or impersonal force that is in all aspects of creation. (The lines between creation and creator are blurred).

**Paganism (polytheism).** There are a number of distinct spirits or deities, sometimes millions. Occult and witchcraft would fit under this category.

**Concept of God.** Hindus claim up to 330 million gods, however a Hindu can technically be an atheist or agnostic. Most are likely pantheists (God is in all things). *Brahman* is the "over-soul," the ultimate reality that is in all things. When one breaks the cycle of life, death and reincarnation, it is believed that they become one with *Brahman*. On the basis of this belief, Hinduism says that all people are divine. You are God. The problem isn't sin, it's that you haven't been awakened to the god in you.

**Sacred texts.** Eastern religion claims a number of sacred texts (For example in Hinduism: Vedas, the Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads, and more), however, these texts don't carry the same authority as in other religions. Personal experience and meditation are just as if not more important.

**The guru.** You've heard and maybe even used the term *guru* to mean someone who is an expert in his or her field. The guru is thought to be very enlightened and able to guide disciples on the path to spiritual perfection.

**How does this worldview explain evil?** Instead of calling sin sin, it is called "temptations" or "pitfalls." What exactly is sin? Why might one be reluctant to use the word "sin?"

**Karma vs. Dharma.** You have likely heard the word "karma." How is the word used in our culture?

**Dharma:** is the action or behavior in the present life that determines the next life's karma

**Karma:** is the consequence of the previous life's dharma

**Moksha:** liberation salvation (breaking the cycle and becoming one with Brahman)

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<sup>1</sup> "American Veda: From Emerson and the Beatles to Yoga and Meditation How Indian Spirituality Changed the West" By Philip Goldberg.

“Let your conscience be your guide” is essentially the philosophy of Spiritualism and Jiminy Cricket. Is this good advice? (See Acts 24:16; 1 John 3:19,20)

## How has Eastern Spiritualism impacted the West?

After taking a brief glance at Eastern Spiritualism, what aspects of it do you think would appeal most to the average American?

Where do people in our culture look for answers on spiritual matters?

Eastern Spiritualism emphasizes, “you are GOD.” In Western Spiritualism, the emphasis is, “YOU are god.” What is the difference?

When you as a Christian state your belief that there is one God, do you think most people today (assuming they are not atheist) would agree or disagree?

The Vedas state, “*Truth is one, but sages call it by many names.*” This verse is often quoted to claim that all religions are valid. In what ways do you see this concept predominant in American culture?

The following is taken from the Vedanta Society of Southern California’s website:

*“Vedanta says that all religions contain within themselves the same essential truths, although the packaging is different. And that is good. Every human being on the planet is unique. Not one of us really practices the same religion. Every person’s mind is different and every person needs his or her own unique path to reach the top of the mountain. Some paths are narrow, some are broad. Some are winding and difficult and some are safe and dull. Eventually we’ll all get to the top of the mountain; we don’t have to worry about our neighbors getting lost along the way. They’ll do just fine. We all need different approaches to fit our different natures.”*

What are your initial reactions to the above quote?

Compare the quote to Jesus’ words in **Matthew 7:13,14** and **Proverbs 14:12**.

On the one hand, the gospel of Jesus Christ is *exclusive*—explain (see **John 14:6**).

On the other hand, the gospel is very *inclusive*—explain (see **Galatians 3:26-29**).