



# Society for Conservation Biology

## RELIGION AND CONSERVATION BIOLOGY

### Working Group

<http://www.conbio.org/workinggroups/Religion/>

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## Hinduism and Conservation Fact Sheet

### Religion and background

Hinduism, the largest religion of India, is one of the world's oldest living religions. It is also the third largest religion in the world, with about one billion followers. Concepts of deity in Hinduism are complex and widely varied, ranging from pantheism to polytheism, monotheism, and atheism. Although Hinduism is sometimes categorized into denominations, there are no central authorities, and religious doctrines are not rigidly defined. Key Hindu beliefs include reincarnation, karma (action and reaction), dharma (religious living or duty), and moksha (liberation from reincarnation and suffering).

### Religion in relation to environment

Because Hindus believe the soul can be reincarnated into any form of life, all life is considered sacred and deserving of compassion and respect. Mountains, lakes, forests, sun, air, water, and other natural features are often revered, as well. Stories in Hindu scripture often treat animals as divine, and Hindu scriptures, particularly the Atharva-Veda, are highly respectful of nature. Because of their belief in the sanctity of all life, many Hindus are vegetarians.

Hinduism emphasizes simple living and a focus on the spiritual nature of things, rather than consuming and seeking after material possessions.

*"Hindu religion wants its followers to live a simple life. It does not allow people to go on increasing their material wants. People are meant to learn to enjoy spiritual happiness, so that to derive a sense of satisfaction and fulfilment, they need not run after material pleasures and disturb nature's checks and balances. ... Do not use anything belonging to nature, such as oil, coal, or forest, at a greater rate than you can replenish it. For example, do not destroy birds, fish, earthworms, and even bacteria which play vital ecological roles; once they are annihilated you cannot recreate them. Thus only can you avoid becoming bankrupt, and the life cycle can continue for a long, long time." - Swami Vibudhesha Teertha, Acharya of Madhvacharya Vaishnavas, Udipi, Central Advisory Committee Member of the Visva Hindu Parishad*

*"God's creation is sacred. Humanity does not have the right to destroy what it cannot create. Humans have to realize the interconnectedness of living entities and emphasize the idea of moral responsibility to oneself, one's society, and the world as a whole. ... Hindus revere the Earth as mother. She feeds, shelters, and clothes us. Without her we cannot survive. If we as children do not take care of her we diminish her ability to take care of us." - Dr. Sheshagiri Rao, Chief Editor of The Encyclopaedia of Hinduism*

*"Do not cut trees, because they remove pollution." -Rig Veda, 6:48:17*

*"Do not disturb the sky and do not pollute the atmosphere." -Yajur Veda,5:43*

### Examples of religious leaders in conservation

- Rajan Zed, President of the Universal Society of Hinduism, has praised other religious leaders for their work in conservation and has called for all religious leaders to openly bless environmental causes.
- Friends of Vrindavan focuses on

### Examples of conservation projects aided by religion

- In 2008, Ganga Raksha Manch, a group religious leaders and Hindu organizations, launched a "Save the Ganga" river campaign. They aim to reduce river pollution and obtain national heritage status for the river. As part of the project, they also plan to clean up the Yamuna river.



environmental care and regeneration based on the values of Hinduism.  
<http://www.fov.org.uk/>

- The Art of Living, an organization that encourages traditional Hindu practices, has adopted several initiatives protecting and nurturing the environment. See “A Green Revolution” at <http://www.artofliving.org/intl/>
- <http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=261>
- A Balinese environmentalist worked with local Hindu leaders to ban sea turtle meat from their ceremonies.  
<http://www.arcworld.org/news.asp?pageID=142>
- Since 2002, Tirumala, one of the holiest temples of Hinduism, has employed solar cooking technology in its community kitchen, cutting down on diesel fuel. The emission reduction credits are sold to a Swiss green-technology investor.  
<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1820844,00.html>
- Hindu groups have cooperated with the Orissa government and the Alliance of Religions and Conservation to develop a management plan for the state’s sacred forests.  
<http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=172>

For more information, see Alliance of Religions and Conservation ([www.arcworld.org](http://www.arcworld.org)) and the Forum on Religion and Ecology (<http://fore.research.yale.edu/main.html>)

