

# The World of Animism – A Biblical Worldview Perspective

*The belief in spirits and their effect on our world appears in just about every culture. Christianity should replace this anti-Christian worldview, but instead many Christians just incorporate it into their own belief system. Dr. Pat Zukeran contrasts these two belief systems.*



*This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*

## Worldview of Animism

From Genesis to the present, the biblical worldview has clashed with the worldview of animism. Animism (or folk religion) is a religion that sees a spirit or spiritual force behind every event, and many objects of the physical world carry some spiritual significance.

In most parts of the world, animism blends in with formal religions. Among followers of the major religions lie many animistic beliefs and practices. Animistic beliefs actually dominate the world. Most Taiwanese believe in the Chinese folk religions. Most Hindus and Muslims in Central and Southeast Asia, and most Buddhists in China and Japan combine their religion with various animistic beliefs and practices. In many parts of the world, Christianity has not displaced the local folk religion but coexists beside it in an uneasy tension.

The animistic worldview contains both the observed or physical world and the unseen or spirit world. There is no sharp distinction between the two realities; what happens in one affects the other. The seen or physical world consists of what we can see, feel, and experience. It includes forces of nature

and physical beings. In the seen world the earth plays a prominent role because it is viewed as a living entity and is often worshiped as Mother Earth. Nature is believed to be alive. Hills, caves, mountains, and lakes are often revered as sacred places. Animals may be embodiments of spirits. Many are worshiped as sacred, such as the cow and monkey in India.

Plants can also contain spirits and some are worshiped. Forests are seen as places where the spirits dwell. Trees like oaks, cedars, and ash are worshiped in Europe. In many parts of the world, there exist numerous subhuman beings that are supposed to live in lakes, forests, and caves. For example, in Europe they include mythical beings like trolls, gnomes, and fairies.

The unseen world of animism begins with the understanding of "mana," or the life force that permeates the entire universe. This power is impersonal and not worshiped. This sacred power concentrates more heavily in the deities, sacred people, places, or objects. This mana rules over all creation and is not controlled by the gods or man.

Also part of the unseen world is the Supreme God. Following him are a host of lesser gods who dwell in particular regions. Following the gods are the spirits, who often dwell in nature and are confined to a specific area. Then there are the spirits of the ancestors who continue to play a role with the living.

There also exist unseen forces that include supernatural powers like fate, cosmic moral order, the evil eye, magic, and witchcraft. There are also impersonal energy forces in objects that give the objects power. These objects are believed to give a person power to do good or evil.

In the Bible, God transforms the animistic views of Israel into a biblical view. He teaches them that the other gods are not gods at all (Isaiah 43:10). He condemns the use of magic,

witchcraft, and divination. He shows that suffering is not the result of the spirits or the gods but His sovereign act of bringing people back to Himself.

## **Themes in Animism**

Do you ever wonder why some Christians worship their ancestors? It derives from the first of several themes within the ancient religion of animism. The first of the themes is a community-centered life. The ancestors, the living, and the unborn are the center of existence. The clan life is the most important entity because an individual has meaning only in the context of a community.

The second theme is the role of the spirit world. Humans live in a world surrounded by supernatural beings and forces, most of which are hostile to humans. The worlds of the seen and the unseen are interconnected. For this reason, people spend their time seeking to appease the gods, the spirits, and the ancestors with offerings or bribes. Extreme care is taken to maintain the harmony between the two worlds. Since all created things are connected, a simple act like eating a fruit from the wrong tree may bring disaster.

Third is the focus on the present. The primary concern is with the here and now. People seek to deal with success and failure, power and knowledge needed to control life.

Fourth is the focus on power. People view themselves as constantly struggling against spirits, other humans, and supernatural forces. Everything that happens can be explained by powers at war. The goal is to attain power to control the forces around them.

Fifth is pragmatism. Animists are not interested in academic understanding of spiritual and scientific truth but in securing good, meaningful life and protection from evil. The test of a folk religion is, "does it work?" To achieve their

goals, most people will turn to several methods that may be contradictory in hopes that one will work. I was once speaking to a Chinese woman who was suffering from lung cancer. Although she attended church and prayed to the Lord for healing, she also visited the Chinese Buddhist temple seeking prayers for healing from the priests. For those in animistic cultures, in times of need people will beseech aid from various religions or gods to find a method that works.

Sixth is transformation and transportation. Things may not be what they appear to be. Spirits can take the form of animals or plants. Shamans in a trance believe they can travel to distant places and bring harm to an enemy. They also believe they can travel to the spirit world, find information, or retrieve lost souls.

Seventh, animism takes a holistic view of life. The obsession with invoking good luck and avoiding bad luck involves every aspect of life—from what you eat, to where you place furniture (such the current feng shui fad), to how you sleep. In Al Hambra, Los Angeles where there is a large population of Chinese, houses with the number “4” in the address do not sell. The number four, pronounced “shee” in Chinese, is the first letter in the word for death, so the number is considered very unlucky.[\[1\]](#)

Eighth is particularism. People are tied to their land. Each community has its own set of gods and spirits. The gods gave the people their land, and that is where the ancestors reside. In battles, victories and defeats are attributed to the power of the territorial gods.

Finally, fear plays a major role. In a world full of spirits, omens, and spells, life is rarely secure. Many see the world as a hostile and dangerous place filled with spirits and forces antagonistic to people. Seemingly mundane activities such as moving the wrong rock can bring potential disaster. People turn to their ancestors, gods and spirits for

protection.

The focus of the Christian life, in contrast, is the relationship believers have with God. God's relationship with mankind is based on grace and love. Since God is gracious, He does not need to be constantly appeased by believers. His laws are clearly revealed to us in the Bible. When we disobey, we may suffer the consequences of our sin or experience His discipline, which is always motivated by His love and intended to bring us to a right relationship with Him. In times of difficulty, we do not fear His wrath but He invites us to draw even closer to Him. 1 John 4:16-18 says, "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment because in this world we are like Him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear . . . ." Although believers encounter tragedy and suffering, we do not live in fear but in faith, trusting in the character of God.

## **Gods in Animism**

It may surprise you that most animistic religions teach that there exists one Supreme Being. He is often described as omniscient, eternal, beneficent, omnipotent and righteous. He is the creator, the moral lawgiver, punishes those who do evil, and blesses those who do good.

However, this being has distanced himself from man and cannot be known personally. Legends abound that he was once near but was angered with man and removed himself. He left men to their own devices and used lesser gods and spirits to do His will and serve as His ambassadors.

Therefore, most of the worship goes to the lesser gods and spirits who are in direct contact with humans. Anthropologist Wilhelm Schmidt studied numerous cultures and concluded that man's first religion was monotheism, which then corrupted into

polytheism.{2} This would concur with Paul's timeline of man's rejection of God that he lays out in Romans 1.

An example comes from the folk religion of China. Long before Confucianism, Taoism, or Buddhism, the Chinese worshiped Shang Ti, the Lord of heaven. He alone was worshiped until the Zhou dynasty, which began in 1000 B.C. From then on, only the emperor was allowed to pay homage to Shang Ti, and the knowledge of Shang Ti among the common people was lost. The worship-starved Chinese eventually embraced the religions of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism that provided spiritual knowledge and worship.{3} Numerous stories like these abound throughout the world. In Korea, the supreme God is called Hananim. The Gedeo people of Ethiopia call Him Magano. Missionaries use this belief of a high God to point people to the God of the Bible.

Following the Supreme God is a host of lesser gods. These beings mediate between man and the Supreme Being, but must first be paid homage. Gods possess specific powers and are localized to a geographical area. The gods inhabit places such as rivers, mountains, forests, oceans, etc. Some gods exercise power over human affairs (business, marriage, death, etc.) other gods exercise powers over nature (storms, rain, etc.) Among the Hawaiians, Lono is the god of the oceans and controls the clouds and storms. Pele, the fire goddess, dwells in the volcanoes. Many still honor these gods in Hawaii today.

The biblical worldview teaches that a personal, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent God governs the universe (Colossians 1:16-17). He alone rules creation and there are no other gods besides him (Isaiah 43:10). The God of the Bible is not distant from man, but mankind has distanced ourselves from God. God remains involved in the affairs of this world, constantly pursuing men and women to receive His gift of grace and forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

# Spirits and Ancestors

Do you ever wonder if there are spirits in forests or other dark places? Can the dead communicate with the living? Animism holds to a belief that numerous spirits exercise their power over places where they dwell, such as mountains, streams, and rivers. Spirits have never inhabited human bodies, and since they can be either good or evil they must constantly be appeased. For example, the South Sea islanders ask forgiveness of the trees they cut down for canoes so that the spirits of the trees will not harm them.[{4}](#)

There also exist legendary half-divine beings. Some are humans who became gods. Some gods are thought to have become human. For example, the pharaoh of Egypt and the emperor of Japan were believed to be descendants of the sun god. Many teach these beings had supernatural birth and did not die, but vanished into the sky. Many are believed to have taught humans valuable skills like making fire, canoes, houses, planting fruits, etc.

Important in animism is the remembrance of the ancestors. Animism teaches that people possess immortal souls. At death the soul is free to wander near the grave, travel the earth, or enter the world of the spirits. The spirits of the ancestors participate in the daily lives of family members. Neglecting to honor them has severe consequences. Souls of the departed who did not live fulfilled lives or died tragic deaths become ghosts. Ghosts search for bodies to inhabit and often bring harm.

At death, one enters the realm of the ancestors who maintain a relationship with the family. Ancestors remain deeply interested in the family they began. They care for, protect, and punish those who seek to do harm.

Ancestors are revered for several reasons. First, as the founders of the family, they remain interested in the care of

the family. Second, they have answered the question of what follows death, so they can help the living through dreams, necromancers, and visions. Third, some have accomplished great achievements, which must be celebrated. Fourth, animists believe they protect the family. Fifth, they function as mediators between God and the family.

One's happiness in the afterlife depends on the care given by one's descendants. Anyone banished from a family or tribe in essence becomes extinct with no one to remember or care for them.

As Christians, we agree with the animists that there is an immaterial soul that exists beyond the grave. We also place the family as a high priority. One of the Ten Commandments is for children to honor their father and mother. However, no departed souls remain on earth. According to Hebrews 9:27 upon death, one is immediately in heaven or hell. Secondly, the dead do not have contact with the living. In Luke 16, the rich man who was suffering in hell sought a way to communicate with his living family to warn them of their fate. However, he was not able to communicate in any way nor could the living communicate with him. Christians celebrate and honor the memory of our loved ones, but we do not worship them nor seek to appease their spirits. We wait with joy and anticipation in knowing we will be united again in the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## **Basic Practices in Animism**

In animism there are numerous taboos or prohibitions. Prohibitions are made to preserve the harmony between the spiritual world and physical world. Places or people where the life force is concentrated are protected. Myriads of taboos exist and violation of them can result in cursing of a community and must be atoned for by sacrifices.

Second, there are sacred places. Sacred places of worship



exist to commune with the spiritual world. These are places where sacred power is concentrated. In Haiti there is a sacred tree where a pact with the devil was signed over 200 years ago by the animistic witch doctors. These witch doctors were most displeased when Christian pastors recently prayed over the tree and successfully commanded the spirits to leave it.

Third, there are sacred things. A whole host of objects possess power and are potentially dangerous. Stones are often believed to possess sacred power. This is one reason you can easily find crystal jewelry and other semi-precious stones for sale in catalogs and stores. Certain plants and insects are believed to be sacred and taboo. Carved images are believed to possess the spirit of divinities.

Fourth, there are sacred actions. Worship includes sacrifices of animals or plants to the deities. The priests or shamans perform the sacred rites. Omens play an essential role; this is the origin of saying "God bless you" after someone sneezes, to protect the spirits from jumping into the suddenly vulnerable person. Signs in the heavens and certain reptiles or animals encountered in a day (such as a black cat crossing one's path portending bad luck) may predict one's future.

Fifth, there are sacred words. There are many oaths, curses, and blessings. The spells of both white and black witchcraft are sacred words. Words are charged with sacred power if uttered by a priest. Such words possess the sacred power, mana.

Sixth, there are sacred persons. Witches use their powers for good and evil. They can use their powers to protect communities from enemies. They can use their power to communicate with the gods and spirits. In most societies, witchcraft and sorcery are most feared. Witches are believed to travel great distances in short periods, kill at a distance, and master demons. Witches have supernatural powers to inflict harm on others. They can cast spells on others.

They can inject foreign bodies into a victim, causing illness. Witches have the ability to communicate with dead spirits. Many societies believe they can transform themselves into animals.

Then there is the shaman or the medicine man. He can cure sicknesses. He directs sacrificial rites and escorts souls to the other world. At times he can leave his body and observe events from a distance. He is born into the family or earns the job by passing tests and rituals. There is also the sacred king. Then there are sub-humans such as trolls and water spirits. Finally there are “little people,” such as leprechauns.

Seventh, there are sacred rituals that must be performed regularly. The head of the family performs some; others require the expertise of the priests.

Eighth, there is the practice of magic and divination. The art of casting spells and communicating with the spirit world are reserved for the priests.

The Christian must be aware when his practices are influenced by animism. Often many feel that saying “amen” or wearing a cross brings protection. Others use sacred stones or believe performing a ritual will bring them fortune. A Christian has direct access to God through Christ and does not need to rely on another person of a sacred office. Also, Christians have all we need in Christ and do not need powers from the spiritual realm. Christ has given us all we need to overcome.

## **Overcoming Animism**

As our study has revealed, fear is the overriding disposition among those in animistic religions. There are several reasons for this. First, one is never really sure if a taboo has been broken and the gods, the spirits, or the ancestors have been angered. Should one of these beings become angered, they may

inflict horrific punishments. In Hawaii, there are several frightening stories about the night marchers, the spirits of ancient warriors who march along a sacred path each night. It is believed that some people have been killed because they were in the path of the night marchers.

A second reason for the prevalence of fear is that animism includes some of the most feared practices known to man. Sorcery, magic and voodoo are some of the ancient arts that strike terror in the hearts of people. It is a frightening thing to know that a priest or witch has placed a curse upon you.

Throughout the Bible and even today, believers continually encounter animistic practices and thinking. In times of crisis, many young Christians will pray to God, but also seek help from their animistic religion.

Among Christians, animistic beliefs will be displaced only when Christians transform their minds with God's word and free themselves from the life of fear in animism. Transformation takes place when Christians understand the Bible explains the true nature of the universe. First, in contrast to the many temperamental gods in animism, the Bible teaches that there is only one God. Isaiah 43:10 states, "'You are my witnesses,' declares the Lord, 'and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.'" There is no pantheon of gods—only the one true God, and all others are false gods.

Second, in the Bible God forbids the animistic practices of witchcraft, necromancy, magic, and worship of foreign spirits. Deuteronomy 18:10 commands, "Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination, sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who consults the dead." Those who practice these arts are entertaining spirits who are opposed to God and

seek the destruction of all people.

Third, Christians do not need to live in fear of hostile spirit beings and spells. Christ, who loves His people, has triumphed over all. Colossians 2:15 says that He “disarmed the powers and authorities, [making] a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”

Christ has brought into submission all authorities under His rule. Not only that, nothing enters into our life until it first filters through His loving hand. God’s hand of protection shelters His people. David wrote in the Psalms, “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God whom I trust’” (Ps. 91:1). When tragedy strikes, Christians understand that its purpose is not to punish believers, but to teach us new things about God and ourselves, refining our character to make us more like Him. Christians can be freed from a life of fear and find joy in a life of faith in Christ.

## Notes

1. Paul Hiebert, Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tienou, *Understanding Folk Religion*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book House, 1999), 157.
2. Norman Anderson. *The World’s Religion*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 38.
3. Don Richardson, *Eternity in their Hearts*. (Ventura, CA.: Regal Press, 1984), 62-70.
4. Hiebert, 55-56.

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# **“I am a Christ-Believing Hindu”**

I am a Hindu by birth. A Christ-believing Hindu (we will get to that a little later).

I was just reading your write up on [“Do Hindus believe in Jesus.”](#) And I am writing to thank you! Thank you for not calling Hinduism a religion creating by Satan as some do, for not outrightly dismissing our faith as pagan or evil. Thank you for the open mind with which you view Hinduism. And thank you for not considering Jesus a western God.

But the article talks about the Jesus of the Bible and the Jesus that the Hindu man believes in. Being a Jesus lover myself (don't get me wrong, I mean I love Jesus absolutely, unconditionally, and like crazy, talk to Jesus 24/7 and try to listen to what He tells me), I can tell you that Jesus is God according to Hinduism as He could be according to Christianity. This is because Hinduism lets you choose your

path to salvation. It lets you believe in any Ista of God or all of it. And I have chosen Jesus and His path to salvation.

And yes, my Jesus is the Jesus of the Bible. I read the Bible as often as I can. I was introduced to Jesus by the Bible and I know no other Jesus. There is nothing just nothing in the Bible that does not fit into the Hindu scheme of things. Yes, John 4:16 says Jesus only! But so does every scripture of Isha. Scriptures will tell man that following God/Jesus/Allah/Krishna is the only way of attaining God! This is because there is just One God. So there can be only one way. And that is to follow God.

It is important that people of God (I will happily claim that I belong to the group) accept that there is just one God. Different people choose different ways to reach God. But so be it. As it is stated in Romans 14:4, who are we to judge another, it is before our master, that we stand or fall. Our Master is one. He is the same to a Muslim who believes in Allah, to a Christian who believes that Jesus is the only way to heaven, to an atheist and to a Christ believing Hindu who believes that loving Jesus is the awesomest thing ever.

Good day

Bless the Lord

First of all, let me thank you for contacting Probe Ministries with your thoughts on Jesus. We must confess that your letter was thought-provoking and deserves a reasonable response. Hence, let me point out few things to shed some light on few things mentioned in your letter.

I agree with you that we have no choice when it comes to our birth. However, we all have the privilege of making a choice on what to believe and what to reject.

Regarding your comment on Jesus, we agree that Jesus is "not a western God." In fact, Jesus, in his incarnation, was born in the Middle East. So, when it comes to region, He was more

eastern than western. However, we must clarify that God, the Creator of the whole universe, is not limited to a region. He is not a foreigner or alien to any country or culture.

We are pleased to know that you have a loving relationship with Jesus. That is wonderful. We hope that this relationship will help you to listen to Him better and understand Him better and to follow Him better. In fact, Jesus said that "If you love me, you will obey my commands" (John 14:15).

While we respect your freedom to believe in Jesus or not to believe in Jesus, we want to point out a couple of things that Jesus taught. The first thing to keep in mind is that the information about Jesus as God is available only in the writings of the disciples of Christ. Hindu literature does not speak about Jesus. In the writings of the disciples of Jesus, it is made very clear that Jesus made some exclusive claims. For example, Jesus claimed "I am the way, the truth and the life." The definite articles in these claims make it clear that they are exclusive claims. He also claimed that "No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). The Bible is unambiguous in making exclusive claims. Exclusive claims of truth are logical. Truth by definition is exclusive—truth excludes what is false. It is from this kind of a worldview that the followers of Jesus, who loved him, believed His claim that He is the only way to the Father and therefore the only Savior of the world (Acts 4:12).

We agree with you that there is only one God. On the other hand, if there is only one God, it is reasonable for us to leave it to God to decide how many ways are there to reach Him. In fact, you might have heard of a religion known as Satanism. It will be injustice to the followers of Satan if we claim that their religion will lead to God. Don't they have a right to pick their destination? Won't it be cruel to them if we or God refuse them their right to follow someone other than God? If God has given that freedom to men, let us respect that freedom.

We agree with you that we do not have to judge others. And we do not. Jesus will be the judge during the final judgment. We just believe Jesus' claim that He is the only way to the Father, and teach that belief, as an expression of our faith in Christ and as a response to His love shown to us on the cross. In fact, if there were another way for mankind to be saved, the death of Christ was futile or meaningless. We hope that you will find meaning in the death of Christ on the cross for you and me and will show your love to Jesus by believing in His claims. For a factual belief in Jesus, read the writings about Him and His teachings recorded by His direct disciples who saw His death and witnessed His resurrection and ascension. If you really love Jesus, you will believe His claims and obey them. I am sure that you do not want to love someone who taught wrong things, right? Jesus was either right in making those claims, or he was a liar or lunatic (to die for those claims). You must make a choice!

Rajesh Sebastian

**Grace and peace of God be with one and all. Thank you for considering my mail and send such a beautiful reply.**

**Just two things. One, Lord Jesus Christ has been mentioned in the Hindu scriptures. So has Noah, Adam and Eve. Besides I see no reason why the holy Bible would not qualify as a Hindu scripture.**

**And second, Mr. Rajesh spoke about the option to choose your destination. If there can be two destinations, can't there be two paths to a destination?? Why did the holy Bible give us the laws but later God blessed us with the Grace through Lord Jesus Christ? That's two paths, right? And accepting that Jesus Christ is the path does not mean that we deny the laws.**

**Lastly, the very thought of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ going meaningless sends a chill down my spine. For He has done**



so much for me and to save me. But trust me, as long as all the sheep get home safely, my Shepherd will be glad. That's all that matters to my Savior.

May the Grace of Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all.

Happy Sabbath.

Greetings in the name of the Saviour.

You brought up some interesting topics for discussion. Let me quickly respond to a couple of them that might be beneficial to you.

You mentioned that "Lord Jesus Christ has been mentioned in the Hindu scriptures. So has Noah, Adam and Eve."

You are right. It is true that Bhavishyapurana mentions the names you have mentioned above. However, there is nothing to wonder about that. It also mentioned the names of Muhammad, Sankaracharya, Babar, Akbar, East India Company, Queen Victoria etc. Guess the date of its composition!

As mentioned to you earlier, let me repeat that the only source of reliable information for the teachings of Jesus Christ are from the writings of the disciples who gave their life for following those teachings. Almost all of them were killed for their faith in Christ by followers of various religion. St. Thomas was killed in India.

You also stated that "Besides I see no reason why the holy Bible would not qualify as a Hindu scripture."

On the other hand, will you have a problem if Hindu Scriptures are considered as Islamic or Christian or Jewish? Each religion and their texts present different and competing worldviews to people. They are mutually exclusive. While

Christianity believes in One personal God, Hinduism offers One non-personal Brahman (Nirguna Brahman) as the ultimate reality. Both views can not be right at the same time in the same sense.

Regarding your question "Can't there be two paths to a destination?" We would prefer to say that it is for God to decide how many ways are there to reach Him. We also believe that, if there were another way, the death of Christ would have been unnecessary. Moreover, what God has revealed to us in the Bible is that there is only one way to Christ. Jesus and the writers of Bible are unambiguous about it.

Regarding your comment on law and grace, let me clarify that Bible clearly teaches that the giving of the law and the sending of Christ were both actions of grace. While the law was helpful in preventing sin, it was not enough to save sinners. So, as planned in advance and promised in advance, Christ came to make the sufficient incarnation and sacrifice once and for all so that whole mankind can be forgiven through his sacrifice. Law is never presented as a path of salvation in the Bible.

As you wrote, we hope that you will find your trust in the True Shepherd and Savior. He is the way, the Truth and the Life.

Rajesh Sebastian

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# **“I Think Some of the Indian Gods Are Aliens From Ancient Visits to Earth”**

I think we're not alone in the universe because of lots of old evidence of aliens found on Earth. I'm an Indian, there are (traditionally 330 million!) gods and goddesses in Hindu culture. I'm always confused about whom to pray. In Indian culture I heard about the flying machine that our gods used at that time and also heard that our ancestors found all the planets in our solar system thousand years ago that scientists came to know with the help of modern technology. I think thousand of years ago aliens visited India, and it may be some of the Indian gods are aliens. So there is a possibility that they exist in the universe.

You brought up an interesting and relevant issue worth discussing. People talk a lot about [alien beings](#) these days. The Bible also speaks about aliens. In the Biblical language, they are called angels, spirits, cherubim, etc. The Bible also speaks about their interactions with human beings at different times in the history of mankind.

All through the history, without geographical and cultural limits, mankind has been making scientific discoveries based on research methods available to us. Such scientific advantages have been made by people of different cultures and nationalities in different part of the world. India is one of them. However, to assume that they were revelations will be making a giant leap. This will undermine the foundational principles of science, which is observation and research. The Bible teaches about seeking and finding. Those who seek find solutions in spite of what their culture and nationality is. Fictions will always predict possibilities. There is no wonder when a fiction speaks about flying objects or beings. There

are other examples in history where people wrote about flying objects before man actually made airplanes.

The Bible teaches that there is only One God who deserves worship and prayer. This one God created everything else in the world. Therefore, God is not an alien to any culture of country. He is the Master and Creator of the whole universe. In fact belief in many gods will fall on its own feet when you ask a couple of questions—who created god “D,” who created god “C,” who created god “B,” and you will end up in an absolute One. That is the One we call God and who deserves your worship and prayer.

Rajesh Sebastian

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## **“You Should Come to Hinduism”**

I read your article by Rick Rood about [Hinduism](#). I think the author is lacking in the study of Hinduism. Christianity as I see is very monotonous in the sense that it has only the bible, a single book and the priest would go over and over all his life career as a priest. Whereas Hinduism is like a universe, one would not be able to complete studying the Vedas or puranas in his life time. The Dharma Sastra is very unique and reading that alone would make you understand what is Hindu religion. It does not discriminate any other faith whereas Christianity and Islam does. Hinduism is not a pagan religion as claimed by Christianity and Islam. Hinduism gives you the freedom to start from nursery and once you have reached the upper level you do not need any form of idol. That makes the religion unique from others. The author says “Hinduism lacks

any understanding that God created this world for a good purpose." What made him think so? In fact, Hinduism has a better understanding and knowledge of the purpose than Christianity or Islam.

An important factor almost universally accepted is that faith in a divine power shapes the destiny of mankind. Sanathana Dharma had famous Saints who had expounded their own specific philosophy. "Just as a man discards worn out clothes and puts on new clothes, the soul discards worn out bodies and wears new ones." (2.22) Hindus believe that the Atman is eternal it transmigrates from one living thing to another according to its karmic action.

Hinduism speaks of the existence of heavens above and hells below. The former are sun filled, inhabited by gods and innumerable divine souls. The latter are dark worlds (asurya lokas) and populated by all the dark and demonic forces. The individual souls go into these worlds according to their deeds. But they do not stay there permanently till the end of destruction. They go there basically as a consequence of their actions, either to enjoy or to suffer. In either case they learn the lesson and come back to earth to start a new earthly life all over again.

The Hindu concept of reincarnation is alien to western people. It is mostly misunderstood and misinterpreted, partly because of ignorance and partly because of some inherent mental blockage natural to the single minded pursuit of religious faith along rutted paths. It generated a lot of controversy because it directly challenges the western notion of one life, one heaven and the final day of judgment.

Today this fundamental concept of Hinduism is finding many new adherents and believers all over the world. The reasons are many. Firstly, a great mass of evidence is gathering in favour of reincarnation through the personal experiences of many who chanced to remember their past lives and were able to record

their experiences in stunning details for the posterity. Secondly, the modern theories of hypnotic regression are gaining acceptance in many parts of the world. There are now many institutions which help interested individuals to remember their past lives as a part of their spiritual awakening. Thirdly, many enlightened psychic masters like Edgar Cayce confirmed beyond doubt that reincarnation is not just a theory or imagination, but a definite reality.

If you look at the personality of an ordinary human being, you will realize that there is a lot in him, that is grosser and denser which cannot be purified and transformed in the shorter time of one life span. What is a hundred years or less than a hundred of life on a scale of millions of years of continuous evolution of life on earth? Does not it sound illogical to say that we would remain static from the evolutionary point of view, while change is the nature of life and every thing else all around us is changing and evolving constantly?

It is very obvious that God did not create the worlds and the beings in His likeness, but in exact opposite to it. If He would have created everything in His true likeness then there would have been no differentiation and no possibility of any movement. Creation would have remained static, without an aim and purpose, offering no scope for movement and change.

It is true that God is hidden in every aspect of His creation. But that which is visible and sensible is not His true self. It is His negative and false self, which tries to compete with Him and fight for its own individuality, and finally, having lost the battle, would move towards Him in total obedience.

Thus the whole drama of creation seems to start with the creation of His individual selves that hide themselves in His negative selves so that a movement away from Him and then again back to Him can be initiated and sustained. The Hindu scriptures describe this process variously with such expressions as: "the true self hides behind the false self,

God enters into Prakriti, self becomes enveloped with ignorance." There is more that one can explain but I am afraid there would be no space left to write so I would end here saying it is the open mindedness of the Hindus that the Christians and Muslims took advantage in India that these two religions are surviving there and Cliff Robertson had the cheek to say Hindus are living in darkness. There can be 1000 of him trying to convert Hindus into Christianity but millions would be converting to Hinduism in the west. People are beginning to realize the importance of yoga and the belief in incarnation and Atman in the west so soon I am afraid the churches would see empty congregation and priests and pastors would have to retire. It is not my wish but it is the Karma of the Christians who had dreamt of converting all the Hindus in this world. Come be true to yourself and discover what Hinduism has for all.

Thanks for your kind letter. Rick Rood is no longer with Probe Ministries. As you are already well aware, both Hinduism and Christianity are vast, intellectually fascinating, and ancient faiths. But insofar as they have very different views on the nature of God, the nature of man, the nature of the cosmos, what happens to a person after death, etc., it is clear that they cannot both be right (although they could both be wrong).

Such complex issues cannot be settled quickly over e-mail. We at Probe are quite convinced that Christianity is true. Our entire website, with over 1,500 written resources, is devoted to explaining why we think this. But we respect your right to disagree.

The Bible is a book of history and there is a huge wealth of evidence from archaeology and extra-biblical historical sources to commend it to us as such. What's more, it claims to be a revelation from the one true God, who created all things. This claim is either true or false. While I believe that there are good reasons for embracing the claim as true, I cannot prove this with absolute certainty. Nevertheless, we must do

our best to examine the various claims of the different religions, compare these claims with all the evidence we can find, and attempt to decide which (if any) are actually true.

But here's my point. Suppose that Hinduism is true. What follows from that for me as a Christian? If the material world is ultimately maya, and its reason for being is simply lila, and if all is one, and Atman is Brahman, then (sooner or later) I will realize this and get off the wheel of rebirth. It may take many lifetimes, but I will eventually realize that all is one, that I am Brahman. Nothing (of eternal consequence) follows from my temporary ignorance.

But now suppose Christianity is true. What follows for those who do not come to Jesus alone for salvation from the holy wrath of God against our sin? Eternal punishment away from the presence of God, the only true and ultimate Source of all that is true, beautiful and good. In light of all the evidence that Christianity is really true (here I must simply refer you to our website), and since we must make some sort of choice regarding these issues, and since absolute certainty may not ultimately be possible, it seems to me that the safest bet is on the God of the Bible. Of course, in the long run, we must each be willing to take personal responsibility for the choice that we make – and be willing to accept the consequences that follow from it.

Wishing you all the best,

Michael Gleghorn

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# **“What About Hindus’ Claim that Hinduism is the Oldest Religion?”**

**Indian Hindus claim that Hinduism is the oldest religion, but Bible teaches us that God created all this in Jewish form. If so, why do those Vedas and upanishads say they are older than the Bible?**

Your question seems to be a complex question with multiple implications and I think we need to be careful to define some of our terms. First of all, even though God did create Adam and did place a special calling, promise and blessing on Abraham and his descendents, the Bible doesn't say that "God created all this in Jewish form." When God created Adam, Judaism was not in complete form yet, even though Judaism would descend from Adam and Abraham's blood. Judaism carefully traces its roots all the way back to the creation of the universe, and the creation of man, connecting Adam to Abraham. This started out as oral tradition which was written down much, much later. So that needs to be taken into account.

Second, even among scholars of the writings of the Vedas, there is some dispute about when the actual writings of the Vedas were written. Some of them might date back to 1500 BC, but some Biblical scholars date the Exodus of the Hebrews around this time. Conservative Biblical scholars (and I) hold that Moses was the primary author of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible.) This would date the Pentateuch as being as old as some of the Vedas. But it is true that Christianity was started with Christ or, technically, after his resurrection. The New Testament was written in the first century. So, in one sense, one might claim that Hinduism is older than "CHRISTianity" because it dates back before Christ. [However, Christianity's roots are in Judaism, which, again,

traces *its* roots all the way back to the first man and woman.]

But if a Hindu apologist uses the phrase “Hinduism is older than Christianity” kind of as a “gotcha” statement, trying to make something more credible because of its age, their implications include a couple fallacies. First, Hinduism has changed and added books with their Vedas over the years, and it’s difficult to say all the Vedas are older than the Torah. Second, just because something is older doesn’t make something more true. This is the logical fallacy “*Argumentum ab Annis*” (argument because of age). Just because a religion, a thousand years ago from a primitive group, taught that child sacrifice to the gods was good, this didn’t make their belief or their practice true or good. And not just because of the argument that one religion being older makes it better. However, God’s existence, his creation, the existence of Adam, and calling of Abraham existed in reality years before Moses documented them in the Torah.

Hope you find this helpful.

Dave Sterrett

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## “How Can My Hindu Friend Justify Her Unethical Behavior?”

I had an associate for 3 years who was a devoted Hindu.... On the surface they seem nice, but over time it became apparent they allowed for violations of ethics and contracts

that I would not have expected. How is this allowed in their culture? They follow the “Laughing” form of Hinduism. The husband laughed at everything as a way to create good karma. I witnessed to them both with very limited effect. I am now planning a trip to India and these questions seem most relevant. Can you help me understand this seeming contradiction in their thought?

Note from the Web coordinator, Byron Barlowe: We asked our Indian friend Rajesh Sebastian to reply. Not only is Rajesh from the predominantly Hindu culture of India and thus highly qualified to comment, but he is also trained in worldview apologetics. Rajesh worked for Ravi Zacharias Ministries and remains a resource person for them in India. He also received his Th.M. from Dallas Theological Seminary.

1. Regarding Contradiction in Indian-Hindu culture: Your friend mentions contradiction. For a Hindu, it is not a problem to live with contradictions. According to Hindus, you talk about contradictions because you are narrow-minded (so it is your fault!). Hindus believe that god can be one and many! God is both good and evil! We see a total collapse of the Law of Non-contradiction in India. Truth is relative (Gandhi and other Indian philosophers made long argument to prove the argument). Therefore, it is possible for a Hindu to be religious and still manipulate ways to make extra income/profit. After all, what is wrong according to one god will be right according to another god. Such attitude in business help many to become more successful than others who might go by the law and make less profit.

A good example I can think of is this one: A thief goes to steal. On the way, he stops at a temple and offers prayers and makes a promise. If he is not caught, he will give a share from the loot to that god/goddess or temple. So, Indians can be very religious and very corrupt at the same time without feeling bad about being corrupt. In fact, Mr. I. K. Gujral, who was the Prime Minister of India in the 90s

for a couple of years, said that “corruption is in the blood of every Indian.” Indians believe in “both-and” logic (disagree with “either-or” logic) and can peacefully live with contradictions. This is why you will find even highly educated Hindus involved in superstitions.

Lesson to learn: When doing business with them, be careful. They do not believe in moral absolutes. “What works is right” and “end (more profit) justifies the means.” Moreover, it is possible for someone believing in karma to cheat you and live peacefully, thinking that you are suffering now because of your bad karma in the last life and that they are benefiting from it now because of their good karma in the last life! Indians are successful businessmen. A large percentage of motels in the US are already owned by Indians from a particular state where they worship a “goddess of wealth.” If money is your god, then you might do anything to get it.

2. Regarding the Laughing form of Hinduism: Hinduism is like a vast sea. There are lot of practices and beliefs that might be contradictory or different from each other. For example, there is a temple in India where they have a festival every year. Devotees go there during this festival that goes for a week and utter curses and abuses to the god in that temple. These are the worst words (@#\$%^&\*) you can imagine. They do it with the belief that this is a way of bringing out all the evil thoughts and anger in them and this god can take it so that they can get cleaned from all the dirt inside them.

Similarly, there are different yoga practices. If you walk around a park in Delhi, or any other cities in India, you will find groups of people standing together and just shouting. They practice it as a form of yoga. Those who practice laughing believe that doing so will help them to control their anger and also will help them to see the positive side of life. Hinduism is all about getting things

done. Practitioners look for success even if that includes bribing gods. If gods can be bribed, why can't people cheat? Remember, you cannot be better than the gods you worship. In fact, the Bible says that you will be like the gods you worship. "Contradiction" is an alien concept to Hindus. They will mock you and say you are saying "contradiction" because you are not tolerant of other views. You say there can be only one God because you are not tolerant of the opposite belief!! The only thing Hinduism can not tolerate is exclusivism.

3. In order to communicate the gospel to Hindus, a worldview approach starting with one common Creator might be a better way to go. Starting with Jesus as "Son of God" (they believe there are many sons, why only one?) or man as sinner does not make sense to them. Tell about a Father trying to save the lost ones through the sacrifice of Christ. It is important to abolish polytheistic worldview by showing that polytheism is a self-defeating belief as it teaches that all the minor gods were created by some major gods and finally points down to One Ultimate Being. You have to start from there and then show what that ultimate one will be like and what he has spoken to mankind.

Hope this helps little bit to clear some of the great confusion surrounding Hinduism. However, do not underestimate the system. Hinduism is like the great serpent that can swallow all systems except exclusivism and that is why Hindus are now fighting exclusive viewpoints in academic circles all over the world.

See the following resources from Probe on Jesus as the only way, or exclusivism vs. pluralism:

- [Christianity and Religious Pluralism](#) by Rick Wade
- [Do All Roads Lead to God? The Christian Attitude Toward Non-Christian Religions](#) by Rick Rood
- [What's the Difference Between Moral Relativism and](#)

[Pluralism?](#) by Don Closson

- [How I Know Christianity is True](#) by Dr. Pat Zukeran. Note particularly the bibliography section, Is Jesus the Only Way?

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# **“Your Perception of Hinduism is Inaccurate”**

Rick Rood’s learned and well organized article on [Hinduism](#) is an excellent attempt at giving an idea of the basic features of the religion to non-Hindus.

I am a nominal Hindu with a great deal of Christian influence. I find a few inaccuracies when he talks of the religion under, “A Christian Response”. I appreciate that Hinduism is too vast a religion to be grasped accurately in all its aspects by any one man. However the perception that the Hindus’ concept of God’s grace could be a Christian influence and related comments are inaccurate. Most of the rituals, Pujas that the Hindus perform are to seek God’s grace and deliverance, apart from asking for material favors! Further the concept of performing “Prayaschitta” or atonement for your wrong-doing and asking for forgiveness is very much a part of Hinduism that came from ancient times. Of course, there is also the concept of the one who is wronged giving a “shaapa” (curse) to the wrong doer.

While there are a lot of differences between the two religions, the final destination individually and as a society appears to be the same.

And, by the way the Christians can relax. Though Hinduism is

**gaining popularity in the West there is no provision in Hinduism to “convert” non-Hindus! The Indian Christians are considered part of the Hindu culture and you find many Hindus like myself believing in Christ, though not in the same manner as the practicing Christians.**

Thank you very much for your message regarding the article on Hinduism, and for taking the time to read the article. It is certainly not an exhaustive description of the Hindu religion and its comparison to the Christian faith. But I tried to give a brief summary.

I noted your comments with regard to the contrasts between Christianity and Hinduism mentioned in the article. I thought I would just briefly respond to your comment on “grace,” and also on “forgiveness.”

I appreciate what you said about Hindus seeking grace through religious activities. By this I take it that you mean that Hindus believe that they can obtain the help of a deity in relieving themselves of negative karma and moving toward enlightenment. I suppose that this kind of divine help or assistance could be described as “grace” in a certain broad sense (though I think you will see some important distinctions below). I appreciate also your comment about a Hindu worshiper asking for forgiveness (which I would take to be a remission of bad karma).

I wonder if you could help me, however, in understanding the way in which you are using the word “grace.” As I understand the Hindu religion, spiritual progress always requires the effort or striving of the worshiper, whether it is through action or ritual, knowledge or meditation, or devotion to a deity. In the Christian faith, spiritual discipline and works of love and service are also very important. But these spiritual activities are never considered the means of one’s attaining salvation. They really are the fruit or result of attaining salvation. Actually, this salvation is not attained,

but obtained as a gift through faith in Jesus. I'm sure you are familiar with the statement in the New Testament by the Apostle Paul, "For by grace you are saved, through faith; and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not as the result of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). This statement puts grace and works in totally different categories. In fact, it states that salvation is a gift, not to be achieved, but to be received through faith in Jesus. I'm interested to know if you perceive the same contrast between the Hindu way of striving (working) to make spiritual progress toward enlightenment, and the Christian way of receiving the free gift of salvation through faith in Christ. One of the most beloved statements of Jesus that highlights this contrast is as follows: "Come unto me all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28)!

The reason that this free gift of salvation is tied to faith in Christ comes into clearer focus when we consider the second issue you noted in your message . . . the issue of forgiveness. In the Christian faith, when God forgives someone their sins, it means that He freely releases the person from the judgment and penalty that his sins have brought against him. This judgment or penalty for sin is defined in the Bible as "death." "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). The death referred to here is not merely physical death, but spiritual death which is eternal separation from God: "Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2). This judgment on sin is necessary, because the Bible says that God is a "holy" God: "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil, you cannot tolerate wrong" (Habakkuk 1:13). Furthermore, the Bible says that it is impossible for us to be released from God's judgment on sin by working our way out of it, or striving to overcome it: "No one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law" (Romans 3:20).

How, then, does Jesus come into play here? By giving his life



as a sacrifice for sin, taking on himself the judgment we deserve and paying the penalty that we owe to God: "For even the Son of Man (Jesus) came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom (payment) for many" (Mark 10:45). This is why God is free to offer his forgiving grace to anyone who acknowledges his sin and need for forgiveness, and receives this gift by trusting in Jesus and what he has done for us: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23). The "eternal life" referred to here includes God's forgiving grace, but also so much more . . . a life in fellowship with God both now and forever. But apart from what Jesus has done for us, this "eternal life" could never be made available to us.

By the way, here is one additional contrast worth noting between Hinduism and Christianity. As I understand the Hindu religion, the goal of spiritual progress is ultimate union with God, a melting of all distinctions between self and ultimate reality. The essence of salvation or eternal life in the Christian scriptures is not union with ultimate reality, but communion with God . . . person to Person!

Thank you, \_\_\_\_\_, for taking time to interact with me on some very important issues. I commend you for taking seriously the spiritual journey we all are on in life. May I also commend to you a word from your own M. K. Gandhi: "I shall say to the Hindus that your lives will be incomplete unless you reverently study the teachings of Jesus."

Respectfully,

Rick Rood

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# **“Is There a Christian Alternative to Yoga?”**

I have a question in response to your postings regarding [Yoga and Christianity](#). This posting addresses the incompatibility of Yoga with Christian beliefs. I agree with the content of the article and have many other resources that express similar views.

However, I am trying to find a Christian alternative for flexibility, stretching, and exercise that give similar health benefits. I am aware of the concern with some of the Yoga postures and want to stay away from anything that could be potentially harmful. I can find many resources to warn of the potential concerns of Yoga practice even for exercise, but I cannot find much in the way of positive alternatives.

Can you point me to some good sources for Christian stretching and exercise alternatives to yoga? This would be very beneficial for myself and for me to pass along to others.

Thanks for your question—it's a very good one! I wish I could give you a very clear and direct answer to your question, but unfortunately I cannot. Nevertheless, although I do not have a great deal of personal experience with stretching and exercise alternatives to Yoga, I do believe that there are probably some very worthwhile alternatives available.

[Note from the webmistress: Check out [PraiseMoves](#), an orthodox Christian stretching program from a former yoga instructor who knows what she's doing. I am very impressed by [her explanation of why yoga and Christianity are not compatible](#).]

A couple possibilities which you may want to consider are gymnastics and ballet. I know that those who are involved in these practices have to be very flexible, and of course both are extremely good forms of exercise. You can probably find

some helpful books and/or videos on the web or at your local bookstore. You might even want to see what options are available in your area to get supervised training (e.g. a gymnastics or ballet class, etc.). In addition, you can probably find some helpful books which simply deal with the subject of stretching. Of course, some of these books may incorporate some stretches which are also used in yoga. But my personal opinion is that this would probably not be harmful. I tend to think there is a pretty big difference between incorporating some yoga stretches into a more comprehensive stretching program (on the one hand) and actually practicing the discipline of yoga (on the other).

I wish I could be of more help. But if you begin with gymnastics and ballet (and general books on stretching) I think you can probably find something that will accomplish all you like without the potential dangers from yoga practice. Even if you're not interested in gymnastics or ballet, books on these subjects could maybe point you in the right direction. You might also consider calling a local gymnastics coach, or ballet instructor, and asking their advice.

I wish you all the best!

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn  
Probe Ministries

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## **“What Resources Can Help Me**

# Witness to Hindus?"

Please could you send me details about how to share my Christian faith with Hindu friends and any literature that I could use with them. At present I am running a large parent toddler group here in the UK [United Kingdom] and many Indian Hindus are coming and I need some good literature and advice on how to share Jesus with them. If you can help me please reply.

Thanks for your letter. One of the most useful resources I've found for this purpose is [The Compact Guide to World Religions](#). This book not only includes chapters on the history and doctrine of various religions (including Hinduism), but it also includes helpful suggestions on how to share the gospel with such people.

Helpful articles on the Probe site include "[Hinduism](#)" and "[Do All Roads Lead to God?](#)"

Of course, by far the most important thing you can do is pray for these people, show them the love of Christ, and offer them peace and rest in their hearts through the forgiveness of sins by faith in Christ Jesus.

Hope these resources are helpful to you. Blessings to you in your ministry!

Michael Gleghorn

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# “How Does Christians’ Singing Hallelujah Differ From Hindu Chanting?”

In discussing chanting with a Hindu, I stumbled when he pointed out that we Christians also repeat God’s name when we sing “Hallelujah, hallelujah....” So are we repeating vainly? Of course not. If we are praising God, he claimed, so are they.

How can I make my point against chanting but still justify our glorification of God singing “Hallelujah”? Also he pointed out that they are praising God like we also praise God in Psalms.

It seems to me that a few points can be made to distinguish what Christians are doing from what Hare Krishnas and other Hindus are doing.

1. “Hallelujah” comes from two Hebrew words meaning “Praise the Lord” (i.e. *Hallelu Yah*). When we say Hallelujah, we are praising the Lord. This seems different from simply repeating the name of a particular god over and over. We are praising the Lord, not simply repeating His Name.

2. Although this may not be true for all of those engaged in repetitive chanting of the name of a god, nevertheless, for many of these people such chanting is intended to focus the mind and help induce an altered state of consciousness in which one “realizes” that “All is One,” “All is God,” “I Am God,” etc. This, of course, is not what Christians are trying to achieve when they praise the Lord. Thus, the intentions of Christians in praising the Lord are very different from the intentions of some Hindus in repeating the name of a god.

3. Hindus and Christians typically have very different conceptions of “God.” Even if we both refer to the Supreme Being as “God,” we mean something very different by this term.

Hindus are typically pantheists or polytheists; Christians are monotheists. Thus, we have very different ideas or definitions about what (or who) "God" is.

These three differences, at least in my opinion, make it very difficult to equate what Christians are doing when we praise the Lord with what Hindus are doing when they engage in the repetitive chanting of a god's name.

The Lord bless and keep you!

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn  
Probe Ministries