

## Atman

Atman is the spirit inside us, which Hindus consider to be a part of Brahman. It is our “real self”, and our bodies are just temporary.

### **Example: The body is compared to a vehicle and the soul to the driver**

- A car cannot run without a driver. Similarly, the body will not work without the presence of the soul.
- Just as a young child may not realize that each and every car needs a driver for it to move, those without developed knowledge perceive the body but fail to see the soul within.
- The driver may identify with his car and even feel kinship with drivers of a similar model. Similarly feelings of friendship or enmity arise from identifying with the body.
- The driver develops a deep attachment to the car, so in an accident he commonly cries out "You hit me!" If the soul identifies with the body in the same way, then – preoccupied with the body's condition – he becomes caught in a web of distress and happiness.

## Karma

Hindus believe that the soul passes through a cycle of lives and its next incarnation always depends on how the previous life was lived. Karma is the cause of our particular destiny. Misfortunes in our present life are the result of acts that we have committed in the past. In the same way, our actions in our present lives will determine our fate in the lives that follow. Hindus therefore aim to live in a way that will cause each of their lives to be better than the life before.

## Moksha

Most Hindu traditions consider *moksha* the ultimate goal of life. Moksha means release from samsara. Moksha is achieved through union with God. Some Hindus believe that once one achieves Moksha, his atman becomes part of Brahman, the main God. Others believe that you are with Brahman, but still an individual.

## Maya

Maya means “that which is not”, typically defined as “illusion.” It refers to believing the temporary has having lasting value, and looking for enduring happiness in this world, as opposed to following one’s dharma.

Under *maya's* influence, the *atman*, (the soul) mistakenly identifies with the body. He accepts such thoughts as "I am white and I am a man," or "This is my house, my country, and my religion." Thus the illusioned soul identifies with the temporary body and everything connected to it, such as race, gender, family, nation, bank balance, etc. Under this sense of false identity, the soul aspires to control and enjoy things of the world. In doing so, he becomes greedy and frustrated.

Only in goodness does the soul begin to develop wisdom – to see things in the real light. Thus enlightenment means moving away from maya and towards liberation.

### **Example: Mistaking a rope for a snake**

*Maya* literally means "that which is not." In the twilight, one may easily mistake a rope for a snake. In so doing, we feel fear. Hence fear and other emotions may often be based on illusion, an incorrect perception of reality.

## Reincarnation/Samsara

*Samsara* refers to the process of passing from one body to another throughout all species of life. Hindus believe that consciousness is present in all life forms, even fish and plants.

However, though the soul is present in all species, its potential is exhibited to different degrees. In aquatics and plants it is most "covered", practically asleep, whereas in humans it is most alert. This progression of consciousness is manifest throughout six broad "classes of life, "namely (1) aquatics, (2) plants, (3) reptiles and insects, (4) birds, (5) animals and (6) humans, including the residents of heaven. Most Hindus consider *samsara* essentially painful, a cycle of four recurring problems: birth, disease, old-age, and death.

### **Example: Replacing old clothes with new**

As the body wears clothes, the soul "wears" the body.

## Dharma

Dharma is the path of righteousness and living one's life according to the codes of conduct as described by the Hindu Scriptures. In order to achieve good karma it is important to live life according to dharma, what is right. This involves doing what is right for the individual, the family, the class or caste and also for the universe itself. Dharma is like a cosmic norm and if one goes against the norm it can result in bad karma.