

CULTURALLY INFORMED TRAUMA AND GRIEF RECOVERY TOOLKIT



My Suffering Does Not Define Me: Hindu Americans' Healing from Trauma and Loss

"I just pray to Krishna when I feel totally alone. Then, I know that I'm not suffering alone."

Hinduism is one of the world's oldest religions and is rooted in a spiritual and philosophical tradition known as Vedanta. At the core of Hindu scriptures is the belief that God or Brahman is without form but is observed through various forms or deities, such as Krishna, Shiva, Lakshmi, Parvati, and Ganesha. There is also a belief that the Divine exists both within each human being and as an external being that supports all life. Hindus believe that liberation from trauma, grief, and other forms of suffering can also be achieved in one's lifetime through meditation, prayer, and other spiritual practices. In Hinduism, suffering is thought to be a part of everyday life and is connected with a belief in karma or consequences of past actions in current and past lifetimes. Suffering is also seen as something that can be transformed through devotion or prayer, meditation, and selfless service to others.

Hindus believe that there is a close connection between the mind and body. Therefore, many Hindus practice meditation and Ayurveda to secure a sense of balance between the mind and body and to connect physical, emotional, and spiritual experiences. Some rituals that help with loss include gathering family and friends to conduct pujas or prayer ceremonies, finding comfort in being with close family and friends to remember the deceased loved one, and consulting with spiritual leaders or Gurus to remember the broader purpose of life, death, and rebirth. Death and loss are typically understood as guided by the will of God. Family and friends grieve their loss by remembering and honoring loved ones.

In contrast to losing a loved one through death, many Hindus are reluctant to talk about trauma such as physical, emotional, and sexual abuse with others. These topics are stigmatized and bring up a great deal of shame. Unfortunately, this stigma keeps many survivors isolated, making it difficult to get help in coping with traumatic stress. It's important to understand that Hinduism encourages people to get help in coping with suffering that is rooted in trauma. However, cultural stigma and expectations sometimes guide how they view and cope with trauma. In this way, South Asian cultural expectations become infused with Hindu practices. Yet, Hindu spirituality guides us to support those who are vulnerable and need protection.

One way in which Hindus cope with trauma and loss is through the practice of detachment from overinvolvement in relationships and circumstances over which they have little control, including traumatic events. Meditation and prayer often facilitate this process of detachment. For example, some survivors of trauma pray for protection and healing or they meditate to develop a greater sense of control and peace. They also remember that their core spiritual self is separate from external circumstances and forces including the traumatic event and the perpetrator(s). Through spirituality, a person recognizes that the self exists apart from suffering, and there is an understanding that all people are born with the right to happiness. Navigating what one can control and what is

outside of one's control is a part of acceptance in one's spiritual journey. This acceptance does not mean, however, that one is passive. Rather, a person coping with loss or trauma is active in the healing process through devotion to God (prayer), meditation, and service to others who need help, and through accepting the support of others who care and want to help. Some people may choose to seek help from a spiritual leader such as a Guru or from an Ayurvedic healer who can help with the physical and emotional stress resulting from trauma. Hindus are encouraged to take up whichever of these spiritual pathways is preferable to them in coping with loss and trauma. For more information on interpersonal trauma, violence, and abuse, see [here](#). To learn about collective trauma, see [this](#). To learn more about how to heal and thrive, go to [here](#).