



THE QUB Hindu Faith Booklet

For Medical Students





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Introduction

Congratulations on starting your incredible journey in medical school! Becoming a medical professional is a journey that demands unwavering commitment, dedication, and a deep desire to serve humanity. For Hindu medical students, this path is uniquely intertwined with the spiritual wisdom and ethical teachings that have guided generations. Medicine, much like the teachings of Hinduism, is about balance—healing the body, nurturing the mind, and uplifting the spirit.

We understand that starting university can be overwhelming and you might face some challenges with regards to your faith.

This booklet has been created by QUB medical students to help support you as you navigate your journey through the five years of your medical education. Here, you will find reflections from current medical students, practical advice, and cultural resources designed to help you balance the demands of your studies while staying connected to the rich traditions of Hinduism. Whether it's maintaining inner peace amidst the pressures of medical training or exploring how Hindu values align with the principles of patient care, this booklet seeks to provide guidance and encouragement at every step of your journey.

While this booklet was created with Hindu medical students in mind, its insights can be valuable for all medical students, regardless of faith or background. Many of the principles shared such as mindfulness, compassion, and holistic care are universal values that align with the core principles of medicine. The challenges of medical school are not bound by religious identity, and the support, reflection, and wisdom found here can be a helpful resource for anyone navigating the stresses of training, seeking balance, or aspiring to become a compassionate, and empathetic healthcare provider. It can also be useful for understanding the culture of your fellow Hindu medical students.

As you progress through your medical journey, we hope this booklet becomes a source of support and guidance as you experience the challenges and triumphs of medical education while remaining rooted in your cultural identity. We wish you strength, wisdom, and success as you embark on your journey in medical school and for the rest of your career!

What is Hinduism?

Hinduism is also known by its original term, 'Sanatana Dharma', which literally translates to the eternal, unchanging occupation of the soul in relation to the Supreme Being. It entails upholding certain duties and responsibilities to attain the goal of eternal peace and happiness. In essence, it is a way of life.

Sanatana Dharma is guided by the Vedas, Puranas, and Upanishads, timeless scriptures that highlight the relevant dos and don'ts that develop the body, mind and soul and thus, help lead a tranquil and harmonious co-existence. They describe various practices and procedures that we must follow to pay our respects to the Creator and the Facilitators of the worlds, and the Elements of existence personified in gratitude for the lives we have received as well as in the hopes of attaining love and knowledge.

These scriptures also recount stories of personalities to provide positive and negative examples that teach us how best to lead our lives. In modern civilisation, these stories are often dubbed 'Indian mythology'. 'Myth' suggests that these stories are fictitious when in fact, these are historical accounts, and therefore, rooted in reality. Lord Rama's reign, recorded in the Ramayana, continues to be popular in India due to the principles he embodied and the rules he enforced in his kingdom that led to widespread peace and prosperity. His story teaches us the characteristics that we must develop to lead a successful, pious life.¹

Another beautiful aspect of these scriptures is the fact that they go hand-in-hand with science. Each tradition and practice recommended in these scriptures has a scientific meaning behind it. For example, the temples have a rectangular base that tapers towards the top, and this is scientifically proven to allow the flow of electromagnetic waves downwards, thereby creating a positive atmosphere conducive to spirituality, and this comes from the practice of Vastu-Shastra, or the science of directions which is outlined in the scriptures.²

Even the festivals celebrated in Sanatana Dharma have scientific foundations. Sankranti is a festival, one of the highlights of which involves feeding sweet balls made from sesame seeds and jaggery to loved ones. These ingredients generate heat in the body which is especially favourable in the winter months like January which is when this festival is celebrated.

Therefore, Sanatana Dharma is a holistic way of leading life that provides eternal, everlasting peace and happiness.



Celebrating Festivals

Sanatana Dharma celebrates several festivals which are deeply rooted into the very fabric of the faith. Such festivals hold great significance to the lives of millions of practicing Hindus; and festivals such as Deepavali or “Diwali” are national holidays in several South Asian countries including Nepal, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Reverence is held to the utmost degree with respect to these festivals, and their respective *compulsory dharmic* and *cultural* dynamics are studied in detail from an academic point of view in many a religious curriculum. Here, in this short section of the booklet, we will outline the significance of each festival discussed and emphasise the importance of each festival to the life of a Hindu medical student.

It is important to note at this point that in Hinduism, there are many festivals. The sheer number of such festivals clearly demonstrates the vast and deeply varied nature of this faith, as well as signifying the width of variation in celebration: something that occurs between geographical regions within South Asia specifically. Below are some of the “key” festivals, but please note that many other festivals do exist and are celebrated with equal levels of religious pride.



Mahashivratri

Literally named “the Great night of Shiva” is a night dedicated to Lord Shiva. By observing the rituals on this night, one can receive blessings, help purify the mind, and lead to spiritual progress. Mahashivratri is also a time for introspection and deepening one's connection with Lord Shiva, symbolizing the transcendence of darkness and ignorance toward light and knowledge. It usually occurs in **late February or early March**.



Holi – The ‘festival of colours’

Holi is celebrated to symbolize new life and love, and to welcome spring. It commemorates the legendary triumph of Prahalad over demoness Holika and also celebrates the divine love between Radha and Krishna with colours. It is celebrated as a tradition of throwing coloured powder and water. It usually occurs during the month of **March**.



Janmashtami

One of the most pompously celebrated festivals in India, Janmashtami marks the appearance of Lord Krishna on this world and falls **usually in August/September**. This is celebrated over two days – on the first day, devotees fast from food and water till midnight (which is when Lord Krishna appeared) and on the second day, they throw a feast in honour of the celebration that Nanda Maharaja, the father of lord Krishna, organised in happiness.



Ganesh Chaturthi

It is one of the biggest festivals celebrated in honor of the birth of Lord Ganesha – who is known as the remover of obstacles and patron of wisdom and prosperity. Any ritual is always started by praying to Lord Ganesha. It is usually a 10-day festival where statues of Ganesh are placed in homes and public places to worship him, offering prayers, sweets, and songs, and eventually immersing the idols in water at the festival's end. This usually occurs late **August/mid-September**.



Navratri & Dussehra

A nine-night festival dedicated to the worship of the Goddess Durga in her 9 forms, and is a celebration of the triumph of Durga over the buffalo demon Mahishasura. In Gujarat, this time is dedicated to worshipping rituals in the form of dance in Garba and Dandiya. It is a time of spiritual renewal, and devotion to the feminine divine itself through the Goddess Durga. The meaning behind this festival clearly shows the respect to that of the divine feminine, an important point to note about Hinduism. Typically falls in **September/October**, usually the nine days before Dussehra. Dussehra is celebrated to mark the victory of Lord Ram over the Demon King Ravana as told in the Ramayana.

Diwali/Deepavali

One of the most significant Hindu festivals; signifying the victory of light over darkness and good over evil. It marks the return of Lord Ram to his kingdom after defeating the Demon King Ravana. ***Celebrated in October or November.***



Since our festivals follow the path of the moon, the date that the festivals are celebrated on change every year and may fall on different days depending on where we are. This [calendar](#) is a helpful tool to keep track of the different festivals depending on the country that we are in.

Growing up, I loved celebrating festivals like *Holi* and *Diwali*, the festival of lights. My bedtime stories were filled with tales from the great epics, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. I was in awe of the great personalities in these stories- their courage, wisdom, and unwavering devotion. The lessons from these epics shaped my understanding of life. I also loved learning about the science behind certain rituals, fascinated by the influence of physics, mathematics, and astrology. As I grew older, my mind was always full of thoughts. Like any person, I had moments where my thoughts felt overwhelming, constantly jumping from one thing to the next. I searched for answers in different places. I listened to podcasts, I read popular motivational books, but nothing truly resonated with me- until I came across

Tips for Students and Doctors During Festivals

Plan Ahead for Festivals	Medical schedules can be hectic, so check your rota in advance. If working, plan a small celebration with colleagues or loved ones.
Celebrate in Small Ways	If you're on duty during a festival, bring a bit of tradition with you - wear a small tilak, light a diya at home, or share sweets with colleagues. Even a short prayer in between shifts can keep the festive spirit alive.
Find a Support System	Connect with other Hindu colleagues or student societies. Many universities and hospitals have Hindu societies (Such as INSOC and SASS in Queen's University Belfast) that organize Diwali pujas or Navratri garba nights, offering a chance to celebrate even with a busy schedule. If you're away from family during major festivals, set up video calls, cook traditional foods, or watch cultural programs online. Small efforts can keep you connected to home.
Balance Religious Fasting with Health	If you're fasting for Janmashtami or Mahashivratri while working long shifts, ensure you stay hydrated and eat energy-sustaining foods when permitted. If needed, modify your fast to suit your clinical duties - your health comes first.
Educate Others About Your Traditions	Many colleagues may not be familiar with Hindu festivals. A simple explanation about why you celebrate Diwali or why you fast on Mahashivratri can create cultural awareness and understanding in the workplace.

Festivals FAQs

 **Q1) Where can I find an online Hindu calendar that shows important festival dates and fasting days?**

A1) There are several reliable websites that provide detailed Hindu calendars, including festival dates, fasting days, and auspicious times (muhurat):

Drik Panchang: This is one of the most popular and comprehensive Hindu calendar websites. It includes daily panchang (Hindu almanac), festival dates, fasting days (vrat), and astrology-based timings (muhurat). This site allows you to select the UK as your location, providing festival dates and panchang timings according to British Standard Time.

Hindu Forum of Britain: Provides a UK-based calendar of major Hindu festivals and events, including celebrations organised by local temples and communities.

 **Q2) Can I use mobile apps to track Hindu festivals and calendar events?**

A2) Yes, there are mobile apps that offer Hindu calendars, festival alerts, and religious event updates, which you can access from your phone:

1. Gaudiya Calendar – You can set the zone to ‘Belfast’ and receive notifications about important events as well as their muhurtas.
2. Drik Panchang App: Available on both Android and iOS, this app provides detailed panchang information, daily auspicious timings, and festival alerts tailored to your location.
3. Hindu Calendar 2024 (Hindu Panchang): This app is widely used to track Indian festivals, fasting days, and auspicious dates. You can adjust the settings to display timings based on your location.
4. ISSO Calendar (UK-specific): Provides a detailed Hindu calendar, festival dates, and reminders for UK residents, especially catering to Swaminarayan followers.



Q3) How can I participate in online Hindu festivals or virtual pujas from Belfast? Are there any YouTube channels or social media platforms that broadcast Hindu events?

A3) Many temples and spiritual organizations offer online pujas and virtual participation in Hindu festivals. Here are some trusted platforms:

1. **[ISKON Desire Tree](#)**: Offers live streaming of festivals and religious events, including kirtans, and lectures from ISKCON temples around the world. **[ISKCON Belfast](#)** also has an Instagram page where they post about important events that they will be celebrating in their temple.
 2. **[E-Puja](#)**: Allows you to book pujas at famous temples in India and participate virtually. You can request specific rituals, and the temple will perform them on your behalf.
 3. **[Siddhivinayak Temple \(Mumbai\) Live Streaming](#)**: Provides live streaming of daily aarti and special celebrations directly from the temple.
 4. **[Art of Living](#)**: Offers live events, satsangs, and meditation sessions.
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Q4) Are there places of worship/temples in Belfast I could go to?

A4) Places of worship/temples in Belfast include:

1. **[ISKCON Belfast Krishna Temple](#)**

2A Brooklands Grange, Dunmurry, BT17 0SA

A lovely place to visit, where rituals (puja) are done every day. They are open every day but have dedicated programmes every Sunday from 15:00 to 17:00 followed by a lovely, vegetarian feast. They also celebrate a lot of important events that they continually update on their socials. They also have a Facebook and Instagram page, linked on their website.

<https://iskconbelfast.co.uk>

2. Indian Community Centre

86 Clifton Street, Belfast BT13 1AB

It is a beautiful place with a temple inside and they celebrate all festivals throughout the year. Different rituals (puja) are done and sometimes food (prasad) is served as well. They have their own Facebook page, which is linked in their website. The website also includes their opening hours and upcoming events held over there. You can go anytime it is open and have some praying/quiet time for yourself.

<https://www.iccbelfast.org>

There is also a Sikh Community Centre – Gurudwara (162 Duncairn Gardens, Belfast BT15 2GN) which is open every Sunday, 10AM to 3PM.



Q5) Is there anywhere I could go to celebrate festivals and find people who would want to do the same?

A5) There are lovely societies you can join in Queen's like SASS – South Asian Students' Society and INSOC – Indian Society.

They host amazing events each year for Diwali and Garba. You can even sign up to perform for the Diwali events. They also have loads of game nights, Bollywood nights and quiz nights, there is something on all the time.

<https://www.instagram.com/sassqub/>

https://www.instagram.com/qub_insoc/?hl=en

You can find many more societies and even start your own. There are also so many other new emerging companies you can explore that host events like Bollywood nights and Holi events, across town.

Q&As

Shared Accommodation

This section of the Hindu Medical Student Handbook addresses common concerns Hindu students may have in regards to shared accommodation.



Q1) I follow a vegetarian diet, and I'm concerned about cleanliness and cross-contamination in the kitchen.

A1) Many Hindus observe a variety of dietary practices, including vegetarianism, veganism, and specific fasting routines that may involve abstaining from meat, grains, eggs, or certain ingredients like onion and garlic. Oftentimes, Hindus may observe certain fasts or dietary restrictions on particular days of the week.

Hindu students following specific dietary restrictions may worry about cross-contamination in shared kitchens. It's important to have open discussions and communicate with your flatmates about your dietary restrictions. Consider designating specific areas in the fridge or kitchen for vegetarian food. You can also kindly request your flatmates to avoid using your pots, pans, and utensils due to your dietary restrictions. Consider labelling your pots, pans and utensils as “vegetarian” to remind everyone of your dietary needs. Most students are understanding and willing to accommodate your dietary practices once they are informed.



Q2) I'm concerned about having a quiet space to perform my daily prayers, rituals, yoga, meditation, pranayama, etc. How do I communicate my needs to my housemates so they understand the importance of this aspect of my faith?

A1) Start by having a respectful and open discussion with your housemates about your need for a quiet space for your daily prayers. Explain the significance of these rituals in your life and ask if they can help by being mindful of noise during specific times. If possible, designate a corner of the common area or a separate room for this purpose. Most housemates will appreciate the opportunity to understand your practices better and will likely be willing to accommodate your needs.



Q3) I'm anxious about handling social situations that involve alcohol or late-night parties which may conflict with my values. How do I set my boundaries with my housemates about alcohol use and express my preferences without creating tension?

A3) It's crucial to engage in open and honest discussion with your flatmates about your boundaries. Start by sharing your discomfort with alcohol use in the shared living space, emphasising that you respect everyone's right to their choices while seeking a compromise that suits all.

You might suggest that your flatmates avoid hosting 'pres' or 'afters' in your shared space. If that's not possible, consider requesting advance notice when they plan to host such events so that you can prepare accordingly.

Additionally, you can ask them to be mindful of noise levels, especially during the weeknights. Most student accommodations have designated quiet hours in the evenings. If you encounter any issues, don't hesitate to revisit the conversation with your housemates through a house/flat meeting.

If problems persist, you can consult your residential assistants for their help. Most student accommodations provide a number that you can ring during quiet hours to register a noise complaint.



Q4) Will I be able to light a diya or burn incense in my student accommodation?

A4) Lighting diyas and burning incense are common practices in Hinduism. However, most student accommodations have strict rules against open flames to minimise fire risks, including diyas and incense. It's advisable to read the guidelines for your accommodation or consult a staff member for clarification. As an alternative, consider lighting a diya at a nearby temple or purchasing LED diyas online. While it may not replicate the traditional experience, adhering to the rules is essential for your safety and the well-being of all.



Q5) I'm concerned that my housemates might not share my standards for cleanliness and hygiene in shared spaces. How do I approach the topic of cleaning schedules and ensure everyone is on the same page regarding expectations?

A5) Approach the topic of cleanliness by proposing a house meeting where everyone can discuss their expectations for shared living spaces. Suggest creating a cleaning schedule that outlines each person's responsibilities and the frequency of cleaning tasks. This way, everyone knows what to expect and can hold each other accountable. Emphasize the importance of hygiene in maintaining a healthy living environment, and encourage feedback from all housemates to ensure everyone feels comfortable with the agreed-upon standards.



Q6) I'm worried that I won't be able to bond with my flatmates because I don't drink or I have dietary restrictions.

A6) It's completely natural to feel worried about bonding with your flatmates, especially when your lifestyle choices differ from theirs. It's important to communicate your boundaries with your flatmates and have open discussions about flat activities. You can suggest social activities without alcohol that everyone can enjoy. For example, hosting a movie night, game night, karaoke session, potluck dinners with vegetarian dishes, and many more! Additionally, you can consider inviting your flatmates to join you in cultural celebrations such as Diwali or Holi.

Placement

This section of the Hindu Medical Student Handbook addresses common concerns Hindu students may have whilst being on placement.



Q1) What should I do if I need to fast on placement?

A1) If you need to fast while on placement, it's important to consider how it might affect you in that environment. Fasting can be done for many reasons, and whether its one day every week or a week long fast, its effects vary from person to person. Here are some tips to help you manage fasting safely.

In a medical placement, you might find it easier since there is usually less physical activity involved, such as observing clinics. However, if you're on a ward round, remember to stay hydrated, as these rounds can be long and require a lot of walking.

If you're in a surgical placement and plan to observe or assist in surgeries while fasting, make sure to inform someone on the team, like one of the surgeons or a nurse. This way, they can keep an eye on you and provide assistance if needed. Fasting can affect your energy levels more than you might expect, especially in a high-pressure environment like surgery. Many students have fainted even without fasting, so it's crucial to prioritize your safety. If you start feeling lightheaded or dizzy, don't hesitate to ask for help or step out for a moment to recover.

By taking these steps, you can ensure a safer and more manageable fasting experience during your placement!



Q2) What are the guidelines regarding wearing jewellery and religious items on placement?

A2) There are guidelines outlined by NICE and the NHS trusts regarding wearing jewellery or other religious items. These are often based on infection protocols and their main aim is patient safety. The primary requirement of these conditions is the 'bare below elbows' policy that reduces the risk of transmission of diseases.

Therefore, it is expected that healthcare professionals, including medical students, adhere to these guidelines. That being said, there are a few considerations regarding certain items as outlined below³:

1. **Rings and watches** - Unless they have a religious or cultural significance, they should be avoided and are usually not allowed in clinical areas. Most trusts allow a plain wedding band or if there is another particular significance to a ring that must be worn at all times, the clinical coordinator must be notified and proper precautions like gloves must be undertaken during procedures.
2. **Necklaces and religious items** – Those with religious connotations must be hidden underneath clothing to avoid getting in contact with patients. Most Trusts do not mind these as long as they are covered but you should check your local guidelines and to ensure this is the case.
3. **Earrings and piercings** – Large, dangling earrings and facial piercings are generally prohibited in clinical environments due to infection risk. Simple stud earrings are usually permitted by trusts.
4. **Bangles/Bracelets/Wristbands (e.g. rakhi)** – These are usually allowed if they can be pushed up the arm and appropriate clinical measures can be taken to reduce risk of cross-contamination
5. **Turbans/headscarves** – Permitted as long as they are secure (not drooping/getting loose) and clean. Ensure that you do not have to continuously adjust them as this will interfere with hand hygiene and increase infection risk.

Local guidelines and policies by hospitals and their Trusts may vary so it is important that you check what is applicable particularly for you. However, the underlying principle of ensuring patient safety by minimising the risk of contamination and controlling infection remains the basis of all these guidelines.

You can refer to the [QUB Dress Code Policy](#) and [SE Trust 'Bare Below Elbows'](#) for more details regarding dress code in medical practice.

Groceries

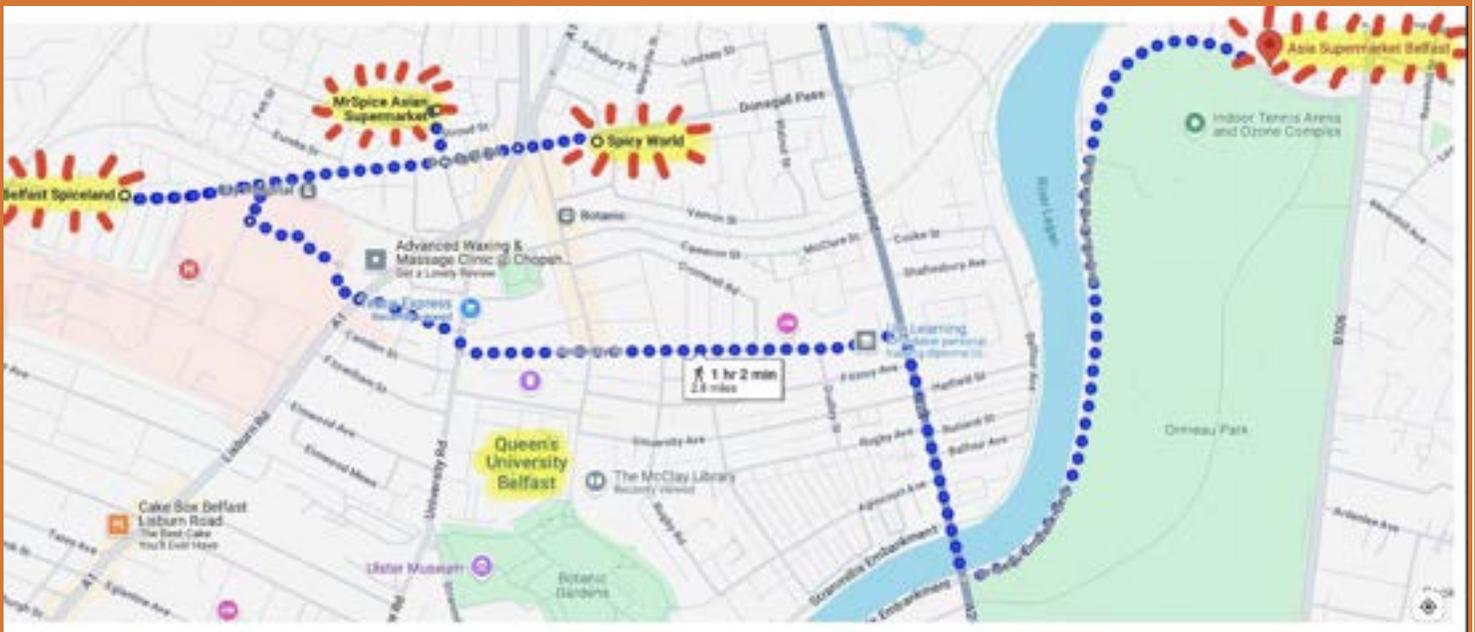
This section should help navigate students' Indian grocery shopping whilst living in Belfast.



Q1) Are there Indian grocery stores in Belfast?

A1) Yes, Belfast has several Indian and Asian grocery stores. Some of the popular Indian grocery stores in Belfast include:

1. **Asia Supermarket** (Ormeau Road): One of the largest stores for Indian, Chinese, and other Asian products
2. **MrSpice Asian Supermarket** (Sandy Row): Has Indian spices, vegetables, meats and frozen foods
3. **Spicy World** (Donegall Pass)
4. **Belfast Spiceland** (Donegall Road)



You can find Indian snacks, Indian sweets, ready-to-eat food, frozen Indian food like chapatis and parathas and spices in these stores along with other cooking essentials like rice, flour, and lentils. Many of these stores are walking distances from the city centre as well as the university.



Q2) Where can I buy fresh Indian vegetables in Belfast?

A2) Fresh Indian vegetables like okra, karela (bitter gourd), and drumsticks can be found in the stores listed above. Many traditional Indian vegetables can also be found in Asian stores in Belfast.



Q3) Are there any online Indian grocery delivery services in Belfast?

A3) Some of the local stores offer delivery services:

1. Asia Supermarket offers online ordering and delivery within Belfast.
 2. Additionally, national delivery services like Red Rickshaw and Spices of India ship Indian groceries throughout the UK, including Belfast.
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Q4) Are there any stores where I can buy religious items like incense or prayer items?

A4) Yes, some of the above Indian grocery stores stock religious items. They sell items such as incense sticks, diyas, and other religious items. These can be bought through online services such as amazon as well.



Q5) What is the best time to shop for fresh produce at Indian grocery stores in Belfast?

A5) Fresh stock typically arrive at the stores mid-week, so visiting on Wednesday or Thursday often gives you the best chance of finding fresh produce.

Wellbeing

This section addresses some common questions about wellbeing and where to seek help and support.



Q1) How do I stay connected with my spirituality while managing a busy study schedule?

A1) Many Hindu students find that staying connected to their spiritual practices, whether through meditation, mantra recitations, or reading a sacred text, helps them stay grounded amidst the chaos of medical school. Consider setting aside a few minutes each day for a short prayer or a bit of yoga.

On weekends, you could visit the local [ISKCON Belfast temple](#) where they have programmes every Sunday from 15:00 to 17:00 or the [local Indian Community Centre](#). Consider spending time with other Hindu students and practicing your faith together. Even small, consistent practices can help you feel connected to your faith.



Q2) Sometimes I feel isolated as I'm far from home. How can I build a sense of community in Belfast?

A2) Feeling disconnected from home and familiar environments can be a common experience for Hindu medical students. Consider joining various cultural societies in QUB, such as the [South Asian Student Society](#), [Tamil Society](#), [Indian Society](#), and the [Bhakti Yoga Society](#). Joining these societies can provide a space to meet with other Hindu students who share similar cultural and religious values. These connections can be a great source of support during your time at university. Consider visiting the local temples and getting to know the people there.

Additionally, don't hesitate to reach out to family and friends back home through regular video calls and messages! Maintaining those relationships, even from a distance, can provide comfort and a sense of belonging.

I connect with the idea that Sanatana Dharma has an understanding that God is omnipresent. Participating in festival celebrations organised by ISKCON Belfast and ICC, by bringing communities together regardless of the demographics and promoting positive associations, has reinforced my faith. These events offer a meaningful distraction from the busy and stressful life of a medical student, promoting a sense of gratitude as I meet various people, serve the Lord together, and learn from their unique perspectives. Alongside engaging with local Hindu communities, I gain a deeper, transcendental understanding of performing duties without attachment to the results (karma yoga) through the teachings of Sri Ramayana, Mahabharata and Bhagavad Gita. This practice helps me stay balanced through both the highs and lows beyond medicine. While Sanatana Dharma offers vast knowledge, it also provides unique guidance for each phase of life. Practising any of the ninefold paths of bhakti marga (Navavidha Bhakti - nine forms of devotion) enables me to approach challenges as a student with greater clarity and patience. - **YEAR 4 MEDICAL**



Q3) I feel overwhelmed with the demands of medical school and struggle to find time for self-care. How can I manage my stress and avoid burnout?

A3) Medicine can be mentally challenging and physically exhausting at times. It's important to establish a routine that incorporates self-care alongside your studies. Prioritise activities that help you relax and recharge, such as yoga, meditation, prayer, pranayama, or recitations. These activities will help calm you and ground you in the present moment. They align with the Hindu tradition of self-awareness and mindfulness. Additionally, make sure to schedule regular breaks from studying and try to set aside time each day for your hobbies.



Q4) It's getting a little difficult to cope by myself. I want to reach out for help but don't know how.

A4) It's normal to experience ups and downs throughout university, and you are never alone. Many students feel isolated and disconnected at some point. Always remember that you aren't the only one feeling this way, and that you don't have to suffer alone. Lean on your friends, family and extended support system when you need it.

You can also speak to the Academic Pastoral Leads for your year or your [Advisor of studies](#), whose contact details are on the [medical education portal](#).

Please don't hesitate to reach out to QUB's Student Wellbeing Team at any time during the year by submitting a student contact form or visiting the drop-in service (Monday-Friday 11:00 am- 3:00pm, first floor, One Elmwood).

- Contact the Inspire 24/7 helpline 0808 800 0016
- Contact Student Wellbeing at studentwellbeing@qub.ac.uk
- Visit the Inspire Student Support Hub: Self-help and Support for Students
- Talk Campus: Mental Health Peer Support App available to QUB students

Hear from students themselves...

Being with family and near-dear ones is one of the most important associations I have with celebrating festivals or culture. Being in Belfast for the past four years, I have felt the same homely connection.

Belfast has become my second home, but of course it took me time initially to understand the beautiful blend of cultures here, and to bring in my own.

From getting lost trying to find the Asian shops through google maps to meeting incredible people, I wouldn't change a thing.

Going to the temple at the Indian Community Centre is one of the many places that makes me feel at peace and at home. Moreover, discovering that there was another ISKCON temple too, was amazing. I've made a small worship corner in my room too, which helps me feel more connected.

Even if it was going to Bollywood nights or joining the South Asian Dance Academy (SADA), I've met lovely people. As part of some societies (SASS) in the university, there would always be celebrations for Diwali during November, for which I would help and perform dances. The Holi festival has always been big; I've played Holi every year since I've been here. I would usually go to a friend's place in Belfast, who would invite me to celebrate Ganesh Chaturthi together.

I had the opportunity to even find a large Belfast group who were from the same place back home, and they celebrated festivals or programs the way I would. I discovered there were more associations/groups like that for every state of India..In a nutshell, I have found my home away from home.

Nobody had ever taught me how to manage my thoughts, but the *Bhagavad Gita* felt like a manual for the mind. It showed me how to navigate life with clarity and purpose. I learned about *Karma Yoga*, acting without attachment to results, and *Bhakti Yoga*, surrendering with faith and devotion. The more I read, the more I realised that Hinduism wasn't something I practiced. It was something I lived.

My faith is the foundation of my character. It guides my actions, keeps me disciplined, and teaches me to embrace life with mindfulness and devotion. Hinduism isn't just a belief system to me- it's a way of thinking, a way of being, and a path that constantly helps me grow.

YEAR 4 MEDICAL STUDENT

To put it succinctly, Sanatana Dharma is what shapes my life and soul. I particularly follow the principles of the International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), one of the main branches of Sanatana Dharma. It tells me who I am - a part and parcel of The Supreme Personality of Godhead. It enumerates my purpose.

*adveṣṭā sarva-bhūtānāṃ maitraḥ karuṇa eva ca
nirmamo nirahaṅkāraḥ sama-duḥkha-sukhaḥ kṣamī
santuṣṭaḥ satataṃ yogī yatātmā dṛḍha-niścayaḥ
mayy arpita-mano-buddhir yo mad-bhaktaḥ sa me priyaḥ*

One who is not envious but is a kind friend to all living entities, who does not think himself a proprietor and is free from false ego, who is equal in both happiness and distress, who is tolerant, always satisfied, self-controlled, and engaged in devotional service with determination, his mind and intelligence fixed on Me - such a devotee of Mine is very dear to Me. (Bhagavad Gita 12.13-14).

*sarvasya cāhaṃ hṛdi sanniviṣṭo mattaḥ smṛtir jñānam apohanaṃ ca
vedaiś ca sarvair aham eva vedyo vedānta-kṛd veda-vid eva cāham
I am seated in everyone's heart, and from Me come remembrance,
knowledge and forgetfulness. By all the Vedas, I am to be known.
Indeed, I am the compiler of Vedānta, and I am the knower of the
Vedas (Bhagavad Gita 15.15).*

We are encouraged to ask questions and receive answers through qualified people, ensuring that our knowledge is not tainted by additions or deletions. All this knowledge that we receive is so complete, that it explains everything without discrepancies. This affirms our faith in the Lord and is further strengthened by seeing the unconditional trust that our philosophers placed in Him.

Following this path has provided me an eternal sense of solace, happiness,

Hinduism, for me, is a deeply personal spiritual journey where science and the divine often intertwine. A transformative experience I had at the Kashi Vishwanath Temple in Varanasi made me feel the divine presence in a way I had never imagined. Standing there, I could feel subtle vibrations in the air, reminding me of the sacred sound of Om. Om is a powerful frequency that aligns the mind with the universe, creating an energy field that connects us to something much greater. The vibrations I felt in places like Kashi aren't just spiritual—they resonate with the very fabric of the cosmos. During times when I've felt far from home, my faith has been a source of strength and protection, especially through my devotion to Hanuman Ji. His strength, devotion, and fearlessness serve as a reminder of the power of unwavering faith.

Hinduism plays a large part in my cultural identity as it is the religion I was born into and has shaped numerous aspects of my life on a personal and emotional level. My understanding of the ideas of karma and dharma have helped my sense of right and wrong as well as understand my duties and responsibilities.

Hinduism also gives me a sense of community, especially during festivals and events. This provides me further exposure to the religion itself as well as the opportunity to interact with people with diverse backgrounds. Festivals such as Diwali are an excellent example of this, in which there is a sense of celebration and delight.

Practices such as meditation and yoga also play a role in my mental and physical wellbeing.

The Hindu concepts of ahimsa (non-violence) and seva (selfless service) are, in my opinion, important ideas which influence my daily life as I try to live by them. I also believe that these concepts are very important in today's modern world and the challenges that accompany it.

Hinduism has a profound impact on my life, especially when it comes to community and culture. Growing up in a close-knit community in Belfast, I've learned the significance of coming together, whether in times of joy, offering support, and celebrating our shared cultural traditions.

Culturally, Hinduism has shaped how I view family and tradition. The emphasis on rituals, festivals, and celebrations plays a key role in helping me maintain a strong sense of cultural identity.

Participating in family traditions for festivals, like Diwali or Ugadi, helps me stay connected to my roots. These practices remind me of the importance of gratitude, reflection, and balance, which help me navigate both the challenges of medical school and life in general.

Hinduism has taught me the importance of maintaining balance, compassion, and connection, helping me stay true to my values as I navigate the challenges of both my studies and life.

Hinduism, to me, is not just a religion but a way of life. I may not have read the Vedas in depth or delved into extensive research, but I strive to live by its core principles. At the heart of my practice is the understanding of karma—the belief that every action has a consequence. As a doctor, this resonates deeply with me. The idea of "do no harm" is a constant reminder to approach my work with compassion and integrity, knowing that the smallest action can have a ripple effect on the world around me.

Hinduism also teaches that every individual has their own dharma (loosely translated to your calling or purpose) and by embracing it, we contribute to the greater good of society. Since starting my journey in Medicine, I've come to feel a deeper connection to my faith, as I have realized that being a doctor is my calling. Fulfilling this purpose has helped me understand that I'm walking the path I was meant to follow. In this way, my medical practice is not just a career, but a spiritual journey, one that aligns with my values

Hinduism is a faith and a way of life into which I was born. For centuries, my family has followed the religion, and I see it perhaps as an intangible string of connection between my ancestors and me. I do not tend to take everything literally, nor do I consider myself a strict follower of every set rule. Rather, I see it as just one part of the multifaceted and ever-expanding nature of "the self" as a concept that pertains to me. A key, though admittedly paraphrased, quote I shall raise here is "*I would rather have you live your life by that which I do not believe, than to have you live it blindly*" which derives from the infamous movie "Life of Pi". In essence, I have always been instructed and advised to never live my life blindly, and as such, blind faith in *any religion*, including Hinduism, is something I *adamantly* strive to avoid.

I am not one to state the power nor the effect this faith has had on me or my studies in something so final and permanent in nature as a blog post for a guide, so rather than doing the aforementioned, I shall now discuss religion as a concept, and what I believe to be the epitome of logical thought: rational thinking.

In short, everyone has a unique connection to this faith. Here, I have outlined the basic principles of mine, based on rational thinking and learning through an *allegorical* lens.

The sheer nature of religion is that it is an ever personal, an ever-changing, intrinsic, expanding dimension of the self, and a *relentless* pursuit for many to achieve a sense of *guidance* through the tumultuous events of life.

I leave you with one thought: Descartes once spoke the line "*Cognito, ergo sum*" meaning "*I think, therefore I am*".

Conclusion

This QUB Hindu Faith Booklet aims to help Hindu medical students balance their studies and personal lives by offering practical advice on managing religious practices, cultural needs and academic responsibilities to achieve complete success. It also aims to increase awareness of Hinduism among non-Hindu students and staff.

We have discussed several important aspects of practising Hinduism, such as the sattvic diet, fasting and celebrating festivals. These can be challenging to manage during medical school, especially in the clinical years. However, by planning and clearly communicating your needs with housemates, faculty, and peers, you can foster mutual respect and successfully integrate these practices into your daily life.

We also encourage you to explore the vibrant Hindu community in Belfast, where you can build meaningful connections, participate in cultural events, and engage in religious activities. You can visit the local temples, student societies, or online platforms to connect with your spirituality and find a sense of belonging.

We want to highlight the importance of self-care again. As a medical student, you'll face a demanding schedule, so it's essential to manage stress by prioritising your mental and physical well-being. Remember, you are not alone. There is a supportive Hindu community at Queen's University, and reaching out to them for guidance or companionship can make your journey easier.

Ultimately, this handbook serves as a resource to help you embrace your identity as a Hindu medical student while making the most of your time in Belfast. Stay true to your values, seek support when necessary, and remember that Bhagavan will guide you through every challenge.

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