

## [SUMMER BOOK REVIEWS](#)

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Rajan, Deva

A Comprehensive Biography of SWAMI VIVEKANANDA, Part One & Two, by Sailendranath Dhar, hb, 1,492 pages, Rs. 325 (US\$10.00) per set, Vivekananda Kendra Prakashan, 3, Singarachari Street, Madras, 600-005, India

With high scholastic thoroughness, Shailendranath Dhar, formerly Professor of History, Holdar College, Indore, has written what most will call the definitive biography of Swami Vivekananda. The two volumes provide an in-depth accounting of his entire life, to the extent that it is known. Complete with maps of his extensive travels, abundant illustrations, a chronological table of his life, each chapter is also dutifully followed by extensive notes and references to source materials. Perhaps less known were Vivekananda's lecture tours through California, Eastern Europe, Egypt, Sri Lanka and South India, all fully narrated. Especially valuable are descriptions of his life at Belur Math as told by his brother monks. From these accounts we not only catch a glimpse into the cloistered sanctuary of monastic life - his personal training of a brahmachari, for example - but we discover also the pivotal role that Swami Vivekananda played in the development of the Ramakrishna Order in its early years.

YOUR LIFE IS YOUR MESSAGE, Finding Harmony With Yourself, Others & The Earth, by Eknath Easwaran, pb, 126 pages, US\$9.95, Nilgiri Press P.O. Box 256, Tomales, CA 94971, USA

Easwaran was very influenced by Gandhi, knew him and walked with him in India. "Once, while Mahatma Gandhi's train was pulling out of the station, a reporter ran up to him and asked for message to take back to his people. It was Gandhi's day of silence,; he didn't reply. Instead, he wrote a few words on a scrap of paper and

passed it to the reporter: "My life is my message."

Eknath Easwaran is remembered in America as the first to teach academic courses on the practice of meditation at a major University, U.C. Berkeley, beginning in 1967. Now, 25 years later, Easwaran continues to stay on the cutting edge of contemporary issues with sage advice. *Your Life Is Your Message* discusses classic disciplines and spiritual awareness for the city streets of Earth today in the 90's. The book is divided into three parts: 1) Finding Harmony With Yourself, 2) Finding Harmony With Others, 3) Finding Harmony With The Earth. Each section is a collection of very short essays that make for clear and easy reading. Of all the books in these reviews, it is from this one that my wife and I read often to ourselves and to our children. It's a daily primer for the sadhanas of self-control, selfless service and ecological nonviolence. As though Easwaran's grandmother (whom he looked to as his guru) were speaking through him, his writing is full of love, patience and understanding. "In slowing down we should attend meticulously to details, giving our best even to the smallest undertaking," from his Eight-Point Program of meditation and achieving harmony with yourself. "Each of us has the capacity to become a healing and protecting force in the family, with friends, at work, in the community, in the environment. I have become convinced that there is no instrument of change more powerful than the well-lived life."

LIVING YOGA, A Comprehensive Guide for Daily Life, Edited by Georg Feuerstein and Stephan Bodian with the staff of Yoga Journal, pb, 304 pages, US\$15.95, Tarcher/Perigee Books, Putnam Publishing, 200 Madison Ave., New York, NY, 10016 USA

Seizing the opportunity to celebrate the year of 1993 as the 100th anniversary of yoga in America, Feuerstein and Bodian looked back to discover what a beautiful job the Yoga Journal has been doing since 1975, bringing to western readers quality writing on every aspect of the subject. *Living Yoga* contains the best of Yoga Journal articles and much new writing. Organized into chapters according to the six primary branches of yoga: hatha, raja, bhakti, karma, tantra, and jnana, *Living Yoga* is abundantly illustrated and referenced to its resources. The large format (7.5" x 9") provides wide margins that feature on every page a quotation from spiritual masters and well-known authors. This imbues each page with an uplifting inspiration message that makes *Living Yoga* so much more than a mere anthology of worthy writings. The authors obviously reached for an additional dimension and achieved it.

SOME GUIDELINES TOWARDS THE GOAL SUPREME, by Swami Gokulananda, pb, 160 pages, RS 12.00, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Madras, 600 004, India

Very excellent and profound writings on the subjects of viveka (discrimination,) vairagya, (dispassion), japa-sadhana, how to control vasanas (tendencies) and how to annihilate ego or ahamakra. Written in the style that begins with a short quotation in Sanskrit from Scripture such as the Gita or the Vivekachudamani, the translation follows and then swam Gokulananda explains. The text is taken from lectures taped in 1989 at the Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi. Swami Gokulananda's guru was Swami Virajanandaj.

Selections from MANIKKAVACAGAR TIRUVACAGAM, a new translation by S.M. Ponniah, Ph.D. pb, 143 pages, M\$7.50, Uma Publications, 349 Jalan Ipoh, Sentul, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Readers familiar with the translation by Pope, Balasubramaniam or Mrs. Navaratnam will delight in this fresh breath of air from the translations of St. Manikkavacagar's Tiruvacagam, by the Malaysian scholar, Dr. Ponniah. Quality bound in a brown, naugahyde cover, it feels great and is truly meant to be carried around as a pocket edition that will last for years. Selections are for "Civapuram: The Ancient Lore of Civa; Tiruppallielucci: The Awakening at Dawn; Tiruvempavai and Civa Citamparam (kantapattu). The Tiruvempavai songs make reference to the ritual bathing in the river at dawn. The maidens wake up early in the morning; gather their friends; go to the river banks; bathe in the waters; perform their pujas; sign their songs and make offering of flowers. They pray for abundant rain and for good husbands. From the Tiruvempavai, No. 12,

"O silver ankleted maidens!

We dance in delight

For the severance of the strings

Of our binding births:

We dance for Him

The immaculate One

Who does at Tillai's

Golden Hall perform the dance

Raising his flame-filled hand:

He is the Lord who does

This vast universe create

As an act of his infinite play..."

Each verse translated into English is found on the right hand page, the Tamil text on the left.

THE POETS OF THE POWERS, Freedom, Magic, and Renewal by Kamil V. Zvelebil, pb, 144 pages, US\$12.95, Integral Publishing, P.O. Box 1030 Lower Lake, CA 95457, USA

The poets of the Powers when it was first published in 1973, introduced the West to the hoary legacy of the Tamil Siddhas - "perfected ones" or "accomplished yogis". The Siddhas, who flourished nearly two thousand years ago and whose presence is still known in South India today, are remembered as illumined souls, respected and revered for their special powers (siddhis), wrought from the fire of intense yogic disciplines and austerities. Blossoming out from these inner accomplishments was an outpouring of poetry, music, medicinal knowledge, alchemy and the deep philosophies of Vedanta and Sidhanta. Tirumular's Tirumantiram is the best example. Professor Zvelebil, a known expert in Tamil linguistics, had a chance to become personally acquainted with the living Siddha tradition in the South of India in 1968. This book grew out of his discoveries. A substantial section focuses on the poets, Civavakkiyar, Pattirakiriyar, Pattinattar and Pampatti Cittar and their works. Since the language of the Siddhas often offensive, vulgar and obscene and almost all of them manifest a protest against beliefs of the ruling class, there has been a historical resistance to various schools of Siddhism on the part orthodox Hindus. Their works were uncared for, neglected, falsified and even routinely destroyed. Zvelebil stumbled across several palm (olai) leaf collections of Siddha poetry in the British Museum that appear to be the only surviving copies. No other author, it seems, has explored this venerable tradition, its beginning, history and place in the vast tapestry of Hindu culture. Kamil Zvelebil has given us a slice of it. And a beautifully profound one at that. Chapters on Siddha medicine, alchemy, yoga and the siddhis develop the context for these recondite, often suppressed, and self-guarded esoteric teachings of the Siddhas.

THE DAWN OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM, Voices from the world's Parliament of Religions, 1893, Edited by Richard Hughes Seager, Pai, 512 pages, US\$28.95, Open Court Publishing Co., 407 So. Dearborn, Chicago, IL, 60605, USA

A collection of 60 Parliament of Religions speeches given in 1893 by various delegates from the ten great religious traditions in attendance: Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Taoism, Confucianism, Shintoism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. "The ochre robes of Buddhist ascetics, the vermilion cloaks and turbans of Hindu Swamis, the silk vestments of Confucians, Taoists, and Shinto priests, the somber garb of Protestant ministers, all gathered together on the platform around a Roman Catholic cardinal, dressed in scarlet and seated in a high chair of state. The near-ecstatic crowd repeatedly burst into tumultuous applause, waving handkerchiefs and mingling tars with smiles." After the Parliament, Swami Vivekananda undertook an extensive series of lecture tours in the United States. During this time, he also established the Vedanta Society in America, a fact that places him among the Asian pioneers who brought to America the religions of the East.

HINDUISM, a Cultural Perspective, by David R. Kinsley, pb, 202 pages, \$18.00, Prentice-Hall, Inc. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 07632, USA

David Kinsley sets two aims for this work: "to present an overview of the Hindu religious tradition and to describe the essence of the Hindu vision of reality." This is an ambitious task for a western scholar, handicapped by the outsider's western scholar, handicapped by the Outsider's perspective, yet Kinsley does a remarkably good job of achieving his goal. He deals adroitly with an historical and analytical review of Hindu vision of reality, Kinsley develops a theme that flaw his otherwise excellent work. He sees "a persistent tension between dharma, or social duty, and moksha, or release from the material and social world, (as goals) often in conflict with one another." This view many will find highly questionable and even a flat-out misunderstanding of Hindu metaphysics. Most spiritual teachers will be in agreement that dharma is the orderly fulfillment of an inherent nature or destiny. Relating to the soul, it is the mode of conduct most conducive to spiritual advancement, the right path to moksha, the ladder to the top. Contemporary writers on the Vedic history of the Indus Valley will also take issue with Kinsley's time line and the "myth of the Aryan invasions." Excepting these two caveats, the work is recommended. The introduction, a beautiful view into the heart of Hinduism from the ghats of Varanasi, reveals the author's genuine sensitivities for his subject. Two chapters that bring up issues seldom explored are, "Sacred Female Imagery and Women's Religious Experience in Hinduism" and "Dissent within the Hindu Religious Tradition," (The Virashaivas and Left-Handed Tantrism).

PAST LIVES PRESENT KARMA WORK BOOK and PAST LIFE REGRESSION GUIDEBOOK, How Our Past Lives Influence Us Now, by Bettye B. Binder, pb, 160 and 120 pages, US\$13 and \$10, Reincarnation Books/tapes, P.O. Box 7781, Culver City, CA 90233, USA

Over the last 13 years, Bettye Binder has done over 3,000 past life regressions and taught reincarnation principles to more than 13,000 people in classes and workshops. Past Lives Present Karma Workbook is filled with exercises and training to help identify karmic patterns brought into this lifetime from past lives. "As we study present karmic patterns and examine the past lives from which they came, we open the way to understanding the soul's reasons for incarnating as this personality in this life time. I so doing, we experience the significance of our life's lessons. This creates a new and more positive direction for our future." Past Life Regression guidebook includes past life case studies, exercises in separating memory from imagination and how to do a past life regression, step by step. Bettye began this unique career after verifying one of her own past lives as a

Comanche Indian in 1746, through library research. Her writing avoids a fascination with the occult and remains focused on helping people confront their present life karma positively for the deep lessons inherent within them.

THE BHAGAVADGITA, A Modern English Translation, Revised Edition by Ramanand Prasad, Ph.D., pb, \$5.95, going to press, Ramayan Sabha, 511 Lowell Place, Fremont, CA, 94536, USA

Formerly reviewed by HINDUISM TODAY in July 1990, the first edition has been revised and enlarged by 50% with a view to underline the unit between major teachings of the great religions of the world. In this second edition, parallel verses from major Hindu scriptures such as the Vedas, the Puranas, Mahabharata, several sutras, the Ramayana, etc., as well as the Bible and Koran have been added. An ambitious work that will be appreciated by all who study the Gita.

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF J. KRISHNAMURTI, prepared by the Krishnamurti Foundation of America, 17 volumes, 5,500 pages, pb, \$14.95/vol., Kendal/Hunt Publishing Co., P.O. Box 536, Dubuque, IW, 52004, USA

The Collected Works contain Krishnamurti's previously published talks, discussions, answers to specific questions, and writings for the years 1933 through 1967. They are an authentic record of his teachings, taken from transcripts, shorthand reports and tape recordings. The 17 volumes are distinguished by individual titles, and dates of talks. At the back of each volume are listed the specific questions that were asked of him before his talks. A monumental accomplishment by the foundation staff, editors and proof readers who worked for over a year to prepare the manuscripts for publication. Published talks were verified against original transcripts, tape recordings, and often Krishnamurti's own handwriting where he edited what he had said. This is a must for all institutional libraries and Krishnamurti students.

KEYS TO HIGHER CONSCIOUSNESS, by Graham V. Ledgerwood, hb, 512 pages, US\$24.95, Everest Publishing Co., 445 East 17th Street, Suite I, Coast Mesa, CA, 92627, USA

Ledgerwood was trained by Swami Kriyananda at Ananda Ashram and later received initiations and advanced training from gurus in India. Keys to Higher Consciousness is written for the western novice who may or may not be looking for a teacher or traditional religious path. While it carries advice on these subjects, most of the text is written from the perspective of secular humanism, "you can do it all yourself." The chapter on Hinduism which is intended to describe the religion by way of an interview, is appallingly incomplete and incorrect.

Additional titles received but not reviewed: LYRICS OF BHARATHIAR, Heroic Hindu Poet and Patriot, translated by S.M. Ponniah, PhD. pb, 112 pages, M\$6.00, Uma Publications, 349 Jalan Ipoh, Sentul, Kuala, Malaysia

IMPACT OF Swami VIVEKANANDA ON SOCIETY AND INDIVIDUALS, published by Vivekananda Kendra Prakashan, Madras 600 005, India

MORE THAN ME, Confessions, Perceptions, and Inspirations of a Modern-Day Mystic, by Isana Mada Grace Dhyana, Dhyana Press, P.O. Box 470700, San Francisco, CA, 94147, USA

THE SECRET TEACHINGS OF THE VEDAS, The Eastern Answers to the Mysteries of Life, Volume One, by Stephen Knapp, The World Relief Network, P.O. Box 15082, Detroit, Michigan 48215, USA.

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