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SELF-UNFOLDMENT, by Swami Chinmayananda, pb, 280 pages, US$12.00, Chinmaya Publications, P.O. Box 129, Piercy, CA 95587, USA

A compilation of writings and transcribed talks by Swami Chinmayananda, Self-Unfoldment is an outstanding introduction to the vast treasury that awaits all who embark on the spiritual path. Chapters explore the mind, karma, energy, vasanas, gunas, sheaths, Vedanta, maya, self-realization, sadhana and meditation. Self-Unfoldment is an open window into the consciousness of one of the world's great spiritual teachers, Swami Chinmayananda. "If each individual learns the art of approaching life correctly, everyone can be fully happy and successful. Each one of us is essentially perfect; the possibilities hiding within us are infinitely great. We have within ourselves all the resources, abilities, energy, and power for building up supremely happy and successful lives." Self-Unfoldment has been used by Chinmaya Mission Study Groups as an educational manual for teaching the fundamental principles of Vedanta and the inner teachings of Swami Chinmayananda. Excellent for young people.

DANCING WITH SIVA, Hinduisim's Contemporary Catechism, An Illustrated Sourcebook, Timeline and Lexicon Exploring How to Know the Divine, Honor All Creation and See God Everywhere, in Everyone, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, hb, US$29.95, pb US$19.95, 1008 pages, Himalayan Academy Publications, 1819 Second Street, Concord, CA 94519, USA

There was a time not too long ago--Benjamin Franklin speaks beautifully about it in his Autobiography--when books were rare and revered as sacred, as they enshrined and preserved the secret wisdom of great souls. Dancing with Siva will rush you back through the memory banks of your soul to that bygone era, even from the moment that you grasp its big, thick binding.

Easily described as "India's Answers to Eternal Questions," Dancing with Siva has within it everything you would want to know about Hinduism and the great mysteries of life. One by one, these eternal questions of the spiritual quest are answered by Satguru Subramuniyaswami. (Catechism means questions and answers.) The text is illuminated by over 600 verses from the Vedas, Agamas and other scriptures. 165 classical Rajput paintings and 140 original graphics enhance the text with an elegance and lovely message of their own. It includes a 40-page timeline of India's history and a 190-page lexicon of terms in English, Sanskrit and Tamil. Nearly 200 scholars were consulted for proof-reading and guidance to insure precise interpretations throughout.

Here is a complete resource book for all Hindus, as the points of explanation reach past sectarian lines to the core beliefs and understandings upon which all Hindus will agree. An even-handed synopsis of comparative beliefs and practices is given of the various Hindu sects, the six schools of Saivism, the major world religions and even contemporary atheistic philosophies. So the entire splendid mosaic of human beliefs and practices is defined; each increment valued for its uniqueness and significant contribution to the whole, like the perfect functioning of a large extended family.

If you love books, if you love language, if you love the spirit of inquiry--this is where your next $20 should go.

THE VEDAS, by Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati, Sankaracharya of Kanchi, hb, 114 pages, US$17.95, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 400 007, India

Answering the current revival of interest in Vedic knowledge, The Vedas, by Sri Sankaracharya, dives into the cosmological splendor of Hinduism's most authoritative scripture. Often described as highly mystical and superconscious rather than intellectual, Vedic scripture comes alive and is appreciated best by the

average reader when explained by a great tapasvin such as the Acharya. The four Vedas, Upanishads, and the Brahma Sutra are first taken up. Then the post-Vedic studies known as the Vedangas (six limbs) and the Upaangas (four secondary limbs) are explained. Steeped in a life-time of fluency in Sanskrit, Acharya's writing is profound, incisive, lucid and free of intellectual ramification.

ANGELS, The Role of Celestial Guardians and Beings of Light, by Paola Giovetti , pb, 252 pages, US$22.95, Samuel Weiser, Inc., Box 612, York Beach, Maine, 03910, USA

In the past five years, over a dozen books and manuals have flooded the metaphysical book market on the subject of angels or devas. A few still remain in the top 10 reading lists. Paola Giovetti, an Italian writer, asks the question, "Why is this 'forgotten category' rarely discussed in Europe or given creditability, especially in this epoch of the revival of devils?" Beautiful illustrations and case histories of "angelic encounters" from all religions, with an emphasis on the western Christian tradition.

THE LIFE and TEACHINGS of SAI BABA OF SHIRDI, by Antonio Rigopoulos, pb, 466 pages, US$19.95, State University of New York Press, State University Plaza, Albany, NY 12246, USA

It is said that outside of India few have heard about Sai Baba of Shirdi (d. 1918) while within India, he is well-known and revered as one of Maharastra's most important saints. From Delhi to Madras, more than 150 temples (mandirs) have been consecrated to him. "Millions of people revere and worship him as a God, an avatara, and as a teacher of tolerance and mutual harmony between Hinduism and Islam." The debate still rages as to whether he was a Hindu or a Muslim. The Italian scholar Rigopoulos has researched extensively the details of his life and summarizes his philosophy and teachings comprehensively: The path of love, the path of knowledge, and the path of action, which are primarily Hindu in content and are referenced to Vedic scripture. Besides his universalism, Shirdi Sai Baba is best known for his miracles and gift of healing, of which many examples are detailed in the text. Many claim that this power continues even more potently beyond the tomb with individuals and at key places of pilgrimage. (See the following review of Sree Chakravarti.) Included are some rare photos of Shirdi Sai Baba, a glossary and an excellent bibliography.

A HEALER'S JOURNEY, by Sree Chakravarti, pb, 229 pages, US$16.95, (going to press), Rudra Press, P.O. Box 13390, Portland, Oregon, 97213, USA

"A simple Delhi housewife," yet world famous as a living legend, Sree Chakravarti tells her own story of childhood, marriage, discovering her gift of healing and an extensive account of her life of service to patients worldwide. Believing deeply that Sai Baba of Shirdi is working through her "vibrating hand" as a divine power to bring miraculous cures to thousands, she has always refused to charge for her services. Part one is her personal story and dozens of case histories. Part two contains an excellent section on self healing techniques and remedies: herbal recipes, yoga asanas, mudras (healing finger postures,) and using color and sound to heal. Sree Chakravarti plans an American tour Sept. 11 to Oct. 17. Call Sarah Fahey for details, (503) 235-0175.

THE GREAT ENCOUNTER, A Study of Indo-American Literary and Cultural Relations, by R.K. Gupta, hb, 276 pages, The Riverdale Company, Inc., 5506 Kenilworth Ave., Riverdale, Maryland, 20737, USA.

Scholarly but very readable, The Great Encounter explores the ongoing philosophical and literary dialogue between India and the U.S.. The first one third of the book does require some patience; it consists of repeated and documented statements with which most readers will readily agree: that the American Transcendentalists---Thoreau, Emerson and Whitman, all drew deeply from the well of Hindu philosophy and scripture. The author goes on chronologically to briefly discuss other lesser-known American writers. But it is not until he introduces Swami Vivekananda and Mark Twain that the reader feels he's finally hit his stride. Tagore, Coomaraswamy, Stella Kramrich, T.S. Eliot and the Beat poets along with many others influenced by Hindu thought are mentioned. Gupta points out that although many western writers and thinkers absorbed the best of Hindu thought, the American media has dealt poorly with India over the decades, trying to pass off fantasy, rumor and downright prejudice as established fact; and he decrys the extravagant use of stereotypes in depicting both the East and the West. The author is astute and the prose is graceful. One wishes, though, that more readings from the writers mentioned, both Indian and American, had been included.

MAHATMA GANDHI & HIS APOSTLES, by Ved Mehta, pb, 260 pages, Yale University Press, New Haven & London

There are at present some four hundred biographies of Gandhi. Not to add just one more to the shelf, Ved Mehta develops an intriguing search for Gandhi's thought and ideas, almost as myths, that have survived him. "It is as much about how Gandhi affected and animated others, how his ideas are now understood and applied, how he is enshrined and remembered, how he lives on, as it is about Mahatma Gandhi himself. It necessarily portrays his closest disciples and relatives... for these people, Gandhi was Christ, and they themselves are now his apostles, trying to spread his word through an indifferent world." By interviewing disciples of Gandhi in five countries, Mehta reconstructs in precise detail Gandhi's daily routine, recounts the story of his life, and presents the beliefs and practices of his "apostles." An elegant writer, Mehta never loses the overview of his literary objective, yet brings us intimately close to the unfathomable Bapu, the invincible warrior of ahimsa, cleaning his teeth with a neem twig at the village tap.

THE HINDUS OF CANADA, A Perspective on Hindu Canadians' Cultural Heritage, by Ajit Adhopia, hb, 204 pages, Ca$10.00, Inderlekh Publications, 2546 Pollard Drive, Mississauga, Ontario, L5C 3H1, Canada

Frustrated by the lack of information that 320,000 Hindus living in Canada must face about their religion, Ajit Adhopia has come forward to create this book on Hinduism. It's really more of a guide book for Canadian Hindus who are raising their families in a fast-lane western culture that threatens to take over the training and futures of their youth unless something is done about it. Chapters include the origins of Hindus, Hindus abroad, the Hindu woman, marriage, scripture, core Hindu beliefs, Hindu art and symbolism, sacred motifs, Hindu worship and rituals and the major festivals. Adhopia lays down the Hindu traditions and practices as guidelines and then follows with how Canadian Hindus are successfully handling some of these issues. The title is a bit misleading, yet the word seems to be spreading fast in Canada that this is a great book. Forty percent of the first edition was sold-out in the first month.

KING VIKRAM and the VAMPIRE, Classic Hindu Tales of Adventure, Magic, and Romance, by Captain Sir Richard F. Burton, pb, 243 pages,US$12.95, Park Street Press, One Park Street, Rochester, Vermont, 05767, USA

If you have the time to read for pure entertainment, pick up this volume. First published in 1870, and reprinted with illustrations from the 1893 edition of King Vikram and the Vampire, we have a centennial edition here that is highly

recommended to everyone. This is an old and thoroughly Hindu legend composed of 25 tales (only the best 11 are translated from the original Sanskrit,) which describe the incredible adventures of a great king named Vikram (the King Arthur of the East), whose pursuance of his promise to a Yogi brings to him the Vampire. The difficulties King Vikram and his son have in bringing the Vampire into the presence of the Yogi provides some of the most hilarious adventures you will ever read, with a scathing wit and a mastery of language that rivals or even surpasses Voltaire. From the 7th story, "Of all the learned Brahmins in the learnedest university of Gaur (Bengal) none was so celebrated as Vishnu Swami. He could write verse as well as prose in dead languages, not very correctly, but still, better than all his fellows--which constituted him a distinguished writer. He was a sea of excellent qualities, the father and mother of Brahmins, cows, and women, and the horror of loose persons, cut-throats, courtiers, and courtesans."

Delightful Hindu fairy stories, which also contain much interesting information on Indian customs and manners from ages past.

ALIEN IDENTITIES, Ancient Insights into Modern UFO Phenomena, by Richard L. Thompson, pb, 492 pages, US$19.95, Govardhan Hill Inc., 1380 Garnet Ave., #E-5, San Diego, CA 92109, USA

Formerly reviewed in Hinduism Today as a manuscript titled PARALLELS--Vedic Insights into Modern UFO Phenomena. "Alien Identities is a mind stretcher that goes as far as the evidence can allow for UFO-type phenomena in ancient India." Fascinating and so well documented by Vedic sources that that glow just beyond the clouds will never look the same.

PANCAVATI, Indian Approach to Environment, by Banwari, translated by Asha Vohra, hb, 185 pages, Shri Vinayaka Publications, B 17 Prashant Vihar, Delhi, 110085, India

Pancavati presents rare and unusual knowledge from ancient Hindu traditions and shastras regarding man's relation to nature. Banwari devotes entire chapters to values which plants, trees and forests have had in Hindu culture, that are entirely neglected in the West: Utsava, the seasonal worship of sacred trees during festivals; Upavanavinoda, an old shastra devoted to the technique of planting and growing

trees; Vrksa Ayurveda, the therapeutic care and treating of plant diseases with the perspective that, like man, trees also suffer from imbalances of vata, pitta and kapha; Pancavati, the forest grove of five sacred trees--the banyan, peepal, asoka, bela and harsda trees. The trees that should be planted for a grove devoted to Vishnu or to Siva. The trees that should always be found next to villages: neem, keekar, babool, sisama, sami and mango. An excellent chapter explains the vanaprastha ashrama, the tradition of going to the forests in semi retirement before entering the final sannyasa ashrama.

WHOLENESS OR TRANSCENDENCE?, Ancient Lessons for the Emerging Global Civilization, by Georg Feuerstein, pb, 312 pages, US$15.95, Larson Publications, 4936 State Route 414, Hardett, New York 14818, USA

The brilliant author of Encyclopedic Dictionary of Yoga (1990); and Yoga, the Technology of Ecstasy (1989), brings the world another tale of wisdom. For seekers or scholars pondering the often neglected subtleties of meditation and Self Realization, Wholeness or Transcendence? is a profoundly practical, insidiously insightful, Disarmingly concise and irresistibly readable guide to the wisdom of India's seers. Feuerstein traces in simple yet scientific language the sublime states of inner consciousness, the successive phases the meditator experiences on the way to transcendence and wholeness. He touches on the trials and pitfalls, requirements and renunciations, sidetracks and secret teachings. Had he stopped there, readers would be sated. But he goes further, unraveling the more arcane mysteries of eroticism and ecstacy, tantra and transformation, spirituality and self-discipline, embodiment and liberation, oneness and transcendence as viewed from a number of traditions. Where possible Feuerstein invites the sages to speak for themselves--Patanjali, Gorakhnath, Aurobindo, Sri Krishna, the Upanishadic rishis and more--through lucid translations from Sanskritic texts, presenting a rare and rich scriptural collection. In Part 1 of this updated, expanded version of The Essence of Yoga (1974), Feuerstein focuses on traditions that espouse transcendence as the primary goal (the classical path of Raja Yoga). Part 2 examines Self Realization as an encounter with states of "holistic" or "integral consciousness." Underlying every word is the author's intimate alliance with and love of Eastern spiritual genius. As he states in his introduction, "The insights I have gained from my studies of India's spirituality, with its extensive psychotechnology, have greatly informed my personal life and spiritual practice. In communicating them, I embody the hope that they can also be useful to others who, like me, are trying to find their bearings in our compassless postmodern civilization."