

[Publisher's Desk](#)

Category : [September 1993](#)

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By Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

This subject may not be as bad as it seems at first, yet it may be much, much worse. I thought that we all knew the facts about the HIV virus which gives rise to AIDS when I asked Dr. Devananda Tandavan to write in his monthly health column on page seven a simple presentation without all the big words for young readers. As most of our readers already know, Dr. Tandavan is a retired eminent member of the American Medical Association and specialist in nuclear medicine and radiation. His expertise extends into other fields--Reiki and astrology to name just two.

Why did a spiritual paper ask Dr. T. (as we lovingly call him) to write about AIDS? I postulated that everyone else is writing about it, so why shouldn't we. It was as simple as that. AIDS-related deaths have become more and more a deep concern to Hindus. Just a few months back UNICEF called Hinduism Today to ask us to participate in on-going AIDS research and education for India, of which pitifully little is presently known. We are now working with them.

Dr. T. had already done his homework on the subject, and in only a few weeks a series of four articles arrived. We read them with great surprise and alarm. He has brought forward issues seldom discussed in the media, facts which remain tightly guarded by the government and its medical departments. Facts that will no doubt shock you, as they should. Facts very few people know much about. Some say that much of the news about HIV and AIDS has been suppressed by special interest groups who are making megabucks from this human tragedy. We shall begin with

the first of Dr. T.'s four-part series in this issue.

Like you, I had been told again and again that the AIDS epidemic, I call it the plague, started in Africa. Now we find that may be a convenient deception for a terrible mistake. Dr. T.'s columns these next four months will raise some difficult questions. Was AIDS man-made? Is there a cover-up at the highest levels of the medical community? Is it only transmitted through "unsafe sex"? Is any sex safe? Can simple kissing transmit the plague to a loved one? Husband to wife, mothers to their children? Will 75% of the world's population be dead from this no-cure virus in 25 years? Is it the unthinkable solution to many of the world's problems, such as over population, global warming, the depletion of the ozone layer, pollution of all kinds, terrorism and food shortages?

Hindus do not have to justify a doomsday, as we know life is eternal and that all that happens is the great divine plan. Even AIDS! What we do have to concern ourselves with, however, is our responsibility to pass on what we know to the next generation--so there will be a next generation. We do need to know more facts so that we can respond intelligently to the questioning modern youth who will not listen to advice unless they know the reasons why. If Dr. T.'s words are right, even in part, our kids need to hear a new message about AIDS, one that no one is telling them. They need to know it is potentially more dangerous, more easily acquired, more terribly prevalent than they imagine. Knowing the facts, and confirming them for themselves, they will be able to protect themselves from potential tragedy. In fact, entire Hindu communities will do well to take heed, hear the new message that just a simple kiss on the first date may be all it takes to get AIDS. If this is true, and much else that Dr. T. discusses, then our kids need to know it.

Of course, this is not humanity's first plague, and though it has the potential to be our worst, so far it's not the biggest. Unlike AIDS, most plagues and epidemics, I was told, involve rats. The real disease is raging through large populations of rats, and people catch it from fleas that live on the rats. Such plagues can be awesome in their power to kill. Around 542-558 bce a plague in the Mediterranean area killed uncounted millions. It is recorded that one-half the city of Constantinople died, at the rate of 7,500 persons a day in that city alone.

In the 1300s there occurred the infamous "Black Plague." It began in Central Asia, was carried by rats on boats to Europe, killing one-fourth of the entire population of the Continent--about 25 million--and uncounted millions in other areas. In the

mid-1800s in China 20 million people died of this same disease. In 1917-1919 an influenza epidemic killed 13 million in India, 500,000 in the USA and millions in Africa and Europe. Total deaths were estimated at 25 million.

Those are frightening numbers, but they could be exceeded by AIDS. Some have no doubt this will happen. Please read Dr. T.'s next four health columns carefully, and discuss them with the youth. If they want more information, have them read William Campbell Douglas' book AIDS: Why it's much worse than they're telling us and how to protect yourself and your loved ones, 1993, by Second Opinion Publishing (USA) and similar books available at your local bookstores. To know more of UNICEF's AIDS prevention programs for women and teenagers, write to Health Promotion Unit, UNICEF, 3 UN Plaza, New York, New York, 10017.