Letters
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Offering the Young a Lifetime of Dharma

On behalf of his Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj of BAPS, I convey my heartfelt congratulations and appreciation for producing a wonderful cover story on the inauguration of the BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, Houston. The issue has beautiful photos describing the divinity of the mandir, its intricacies, volunteer services and festive spirit. Your write-up has captured the event in all its aspects, including a brief intro to BAPS. Kudos to the hard work put in by the Hinduism Today team for producing a wonderful issue. Pramukh Swami Maharaj was also pleased to see the issue and has conveyed a special word of appreciation and prayers for the encouraging and inspiring works you are doing in promoting Sanatana Dharma. The various articles, tidbits of relevant information and news are inspiring and gladdening. It infuses and strengthens pride in all Hindus. The glory of Hindu Dharma and its universal appeal is elegantly displayed through Hinduism Today. Thank you once again and may God bless you all to continue with your spiritual mission.

Sadhu Ishwarcharandas, Amdavad, India, info@swaminarayan.org

Thanks for Hinduism Today

We are fortunate to have Hinduism Today through an unknown benefactor and express our grateful thanks for this kind and benevolent act. As a senior citizen, age 72, serving as an honorary vice-president of an educational institution, I find this great magazine informing, educating and enlightening me on Sanatana Dharma, the eternal values of life. I am now able to talk to teachers and students about Hinduism and its eternal and perennial values, remove many misconceptions they

have about our customs and traditions and clear their doubts regarding the myriad viewpoints of life--often seemingly opposed and conflicting--encompassed and embedded in this vast ocean of knowledge. Pujya Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami is guiding us all and showing that we can work positively with other traditions and faiths while holding firmly to our own denomination and spiritual path, uplifting the world by the power of our own upliftment--the way of the positive integrated development of all mankind, of the world and nature.

Bhattu Ganesh Sharma, Bangalore, India

More Hindu Concepts in Movies

I enjoyed reading the article "Hindu Concepts in the Movies " (Jul/Aug/Sep, 2004). However, I believe the author would see many more similarities to Hindu concepts if the scope was broadened beyond reincarnation. For example, the idea of karma and the battle against maya is thoroughly demonstrated in "The Matrix " films. Beyond the theme of reincarnation, "The Matrix " films delve heavily into the topic of control of your own karmic destiny and discovering the Divine within yourself to battle the hordes of demons without. Each film goes through a cycle of confusion, discovery, rebirth, sacrifice and then death based on choice, not nature. The main character, Neo, is set upon his path via his guru(s), The Oracle and Morpheus. Through their teachings, he is able to learn that he is not flesh and blood but rather a divine creature that has complete creative control over his dream life. I feel this is just one example among many. I truly see a great trend in modern movies that creates an aura of spirituality underlying the basic plot and theme.

Adam Doty, Fort Collins, Colorado, adam.doty@private-escapes.com

Are We Treating Priests Well?

Recently while in Bali, I had the good fortune to be invited by a close Balinese friend to a ceremony at his house. I was deeply touched by the fatherly attitude of the priest and the respect, reverence and high esteem the devotees had for him. At the end of the ceremony, when the priest was given a tray full of fruits and some

money for his services, he took a token few fruits and part of the money offered and told the devotee to keep the rest for his family. He also advised the devotee not to overspend on ceremonies and to save some money for his children's future. This was a refreshing experience for me, as many Hindu priests in Malaysia depend on tips left by devotees to make ends meet, owing to the meager salaries paid to them by the temple committees. Many of the priests are very knowledgeable in Hinduism but very few of them give talks to devotees on Hinduism. They probably suffer from low self-esteem due to their poor economic status and do not feel up to the task of preaching to devotees to whom they look for tips. The temple committees should probably spend less on extensive renovations and beautification of their temples and raise the self-confidence, image and self-esteem of our priests by paying them decent salaries comparable to those paid to priests of other religions. Such a move will certainly perk up the flagging spirits of our priests and help foster a mutually close and caring bond between our priests and devotees. Perhaps it is time for some soul-searching. Have we lost some endearing values of Hinduism that the Balinese have managed to retain? Or has our brand of Hinduism always kept priests at arm's length from the devotees? If so, it is time to change with changing times by integrating them closely with society!

M. Ganeshadeva, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Rishikesh Temple Inauguration

We have received the Jan/Feb/Mar, 2005 issue of Hinduism Today with the article about our Omkarananda Kamakshi-Devi Mandir at Rishikesh. It is very beautiful! We wish to thank you and your editors for preparing such a nice report about the temple's mahakumbhabhishekam ceremony.

Swami Satchidananda, Rishikesh, India, satchidananda@omkarananda-ashram.org

Cow Dung and Nuclear Radiation

In the Oct/Nov/Dec 2004 issue the article "Cow Dung's Many Uses " explains the role of cow dung and urine in Hindu rituals and common practice in India. While I

have no qualm with any exposition on its uses, it ends with the statement that "houses coated in cow dung are insulated from and even, so they say, nuclear radiation." Statements of support can be found for many things; while they may be an indicator of a general belief, they are not scientific support or refutation. You seem to imply that since you haven't found anyone who has tested their claim that negates cow dung's use as a protection against nuclear radiation, it is true. Unless you have a fundamental qualm with how science and theory work, which you may, one does not assume truth based on a single piece of research. Instead, it is supported by overwhelming experimentation that can be replicated under standard conditions. Cow dung does not provide any protection against nuclear radiation, and adding something dubious not only detracts from the real uses, it displays a disregard for accuracy.

Vivek G. Sahani, New Brunswick, New Jersey, sahani@rutgers.edu

Ending Religious Denigration

The article "The Beginning of the End of Christianity in Australia?" (HPI, December 23, 2004) is on a very sensitive and interesting subject: what the religious say about other faiths. I praise the Australian law and the judge's power of discrimination. It is time, here in America also, for those who feel strongly about their own chosen religion to completely abandon vilifying others' chosen paths. Whether they are referred to as infidels, heathens, outcastes or other disparaging terms, the effect is the same--divisiveness and discouragement. Even those who profess agnosticism and atheism are often people with very fine value systems that are a benefit to their society and whose voices and opinions should be honored when offered in the spirit of uplifting or even correcting their society. It is time to see the beauty, sacredness and utility of all approaches that attempt to uplift and help each individual while helping the society as a whole. Chauvinism is a concept whose time is long, long past. It is time for constructive, rather than destructive, speech about the world's religious and ethical practitioners.

Martin Wolff, New Milford, New Jersey, vedantin@aol.com

Beware of Welfare Homes

Being an avid reader of Hinduism Today since its inception in 1979, I am very pleased to state that I am now a better Hindu. Many, many years ago, when information was scarce and there was hardly any religious education on Hinduism, I used to feel very frustrated. But today, with knowledge derived from reading Hinduism Today, I stand tall with my head high. I love reading the "Letters " column where views of readers all over the world are expressed. My humble request is that Hinduism Today allocate more space for letters, which will mean that more letters are published.

Your article "Solidarity in Diversity " (Jan/Feb/Mar, 2005) states that conversion is effectively contained in Malaysia through solidarity with the help of the Malaysia Hindu Sangam. There are numerous welfare homes and orphanages run by Christian bodies. The majority of children in these homes are Hindu. The poor, innocent Hindu children are taught to despise Hindu Gods. They are told that Hindu Gods are demons and that some of them are holding weapons. They are further told that Hindus are stupid to pray to images of stone and metal or to pictures of Gods. Parents are oblivious to this threat, as they are happy that the burden of raising their children is in the safe hands that promise to turn their children into successful youth. The little children are not allowed to pray to Hindu Gods; instead they attend Christian religious indoctrination. I know that what I report is true because I have spoken to these children myself. So, conversion in Malaysia is raging on under the disguise of orphanages. The Malaysia Hindu Sangam should take note of this serious situation and take necessary action to protect our great religion from shadowy Christian organizations that are actually instruments of conversion.

K. Thuruvan, Seremban, Malaysia

Growing Up Mixed Up

Jennifer Verwey's experiences of growing up in an ethnically and religiously mixed familiy ("Growing Up Mixed Up, " Jan/Feb/Mar, 2005) may be more endemic to Western liberalism and an absence of cultural diversity in her childhood neighborhood than a weakness in religious diversity training. I've personally witnessed as many people wounded by sectarianism and parochialism as distressed by pan-religious insecurities. My wife grew up Buddhist in a home where her mother was Hindu and father was Buddhist. All the children were strongly discouraged from learning, practicing or appreciating their one-half Hindu origins--they were, in effect, "raised in the religious life and culture of only one of the parents, " as Ms. Verwey

recommends. The result of this myopia? None of them became strong Buddhists, and except for my wife, none embraced or learned of the richness of their mother's tradition. They only knew half of their heritage and mourned for the missed opportunity to experience the second of their two ethnic and religious worlds. I'm happy to see my nephews growing up feeling comfortable and knowledgeable whether in a mosque, temple or church. They don't feel confused or unbelonging, but comfortably shift between religions as easily as changing from Tamil to English to Sinhala to Arabic, depending on which family member they are addressing. And one won't find any religious intolerance in them.

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The Best Gift I Could Give Him

Recently Dr. Nigel Subramaniam Siva, a Principal Engineer at Sparta, Inc., Maryland, USA, offered his son, Henry Ragavan Siva, a lifetime subscription to Hinduism Today. We asked him why he was doing it. "It's the best gift I could give him!" he said. "Modern life tends to blur and distance us from our heritage. Hinduism Today reconnects us. And it's a refuge from the turbulence of karma and life in this world. I reread old issues, especially the editorials; they always have wisdom to give. They are powerful, there is prana in them, parampara power in them. And I just want my son to share in that heritage. It helps to see life in a different way, in a way that makes a positive difference rather than sitting around and worrying. It brings out issues that nobody talks about but touch everyone, such as anger and child abuse. I share them around, and it soothes and comforts every time. I also chose to give him this as a way of helping Hinduism Today and doing good for the world."

We encourage all our readers to make such a gift to a young person who will receive Hinduism Today wherever in the world he or she may live for a lifetime. It is a fine financial investment. But it is an even more potent investment in the beneficiary's education, well-being and happiness. Hinduism Today has published continuously for 26 years now, and the various Hindu Heritage Endowment funds in its name guarantee its existence far into the future. The lifetime subscription donation of US$1,001 is placed into the Hinduism Today Lifetime Fund of Hindu Heritage Endowment. Grants support the costs of each subscription and further strengthen Hinduism Today in other ways. A donation for a lifetime subscription

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