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TEEN

Message to My Elders:

Please answer our questions about Hinduism

Archit Kumar

I come to you on behalf of all Hindu youth to present our dilemma. We understand that you have high expectations for us to continue the Hindu Dharma in its entirety, but you are sending us mixed messages. You declare your infinite love for the religion, but you often get stumped on the simplest question. One adult says that Hinduism is a monotheistic religion, while the other says it is polytheistic. What exactly is the correct answer? Another instance that demonstrates the lack of uniformity in our religion is this song, "Ishwar Allah Tere Naam, Sab Ko Sanmati De Bhagwaan." It was one of Mahatma Gandhi's favorite songs and means, "Some of us call you as Ishwar and some as Allah but we beg you, Lord, that you give intelligence to one and all." Ishvar and Allah are not the same. Please stop the recitation of the song. Only through proper knowledge and helpful guidance can our generation emerge as capable leaders to take the Hindu Dharma forward.

It is my distinct belief that knowledge is imparted through either literature or through adults. Teachers are meant to teach the youth. Since, unfortunately, designated teachers of Hinduism such as swamis and pundits do not have a strong presence in America, it becomes the responsibility of parents to teach the faith to their children in its entirety. However, many parents lack knowledge of the faith; and instead of admitting their lack of knowledge to their curious children, they spread misconceptions. Thus, they hurt the faith much more than simply saying, "I don't know. Look it up." Furthermore, while temples are the ideal sources of knowledge for Hindus, pundits are not fully equipped with the tools necessary to show the next generation the true roots of Hinduism. Pujas are conducted in Sanskrit, but pundits do not stop to explain the relevance of those words or the rite itself.

Given that this is a very busy world and that we all have demanding schedules, we find it appalling that the so-called leaders of Hinduism cannot join hands together to fight the onslaught of Christian missionaries working to convert the poorest and least educated Hindus, the outright attacks by Muslims in Kashmir and Bangladesh, and other such attacks on our faith. While it is appropriate to talk and discuss the problems, there is a point where discussion becomes futile. We urge you to act with strong resolve to stop the onslaughts. I do not imply that we must physically take action against those daring enough to challenge us. We simply desire a visible Hindu force that will take measures to stop the violence and blasphemy against us, spread the correct understanding of our faith and encourage others to join the cause. This point is especially valid in the US where it is common for religions to have a universal and united stand on key issues.

In an ideal world, Hinduism would have some sort of organization or international committee that is the go-to place for Hinduism. However, ours is the only faith that lacks this sort of organization. It is our plea with you to join hands in some way and create one such organization. We want to see Hinduism united. It is useless and self-defeating for five different groups or peoples to spend their time fighting the same problem in five different ways. Join together as one and fight as a community. The opposition fears the masses, not the individual.

Another important factor in the survival of Hinduism today is money. In this day and age, the world revolves around money. To be honest, we Hindus in America have plenty of it. We must invest this money in the right causes at the right time. Right now, there is a trial going on against the California history textbooks. They have published lies about Hinduism, and a group of parents (www.capeem.org) have taken a stand against these falsities. As I write, the organization fighting the lawsuit is appealing for funds needed by November, 2007. We can only hope they have raised them in time.

It will be a proud day indeed when Hindus can be proud to be called Hindus. Your monetary contribution makes this possible. Thus, it is imperative that all elders of the Hindu community make serious efforts to raise funds. But, let me emphasize that we must donate regardless of need. There are a profusion of topics waiting to be tackled, and insufficient monetary funding hinders the initiation of such efforts.

Because there are many issues affecting Hinduism today, the religion is hanging on a small thread. Many young Hindus shy away from their religion and let others, who

are extremely ignorant of the realities of the religion, influence their opinions on Hinduism. Since those youth are left with few options to find answers to their questions, some find their initial love of the religion into hatred. It is these Hindus who eventually malign the religion in a way that shapes others' views as well. And, since there is no one to fight these slanders in a united way, these lies become the truth. American Hindus should especially be aware of this fact, since the American academic community's views on Hinduism are regarded as the correct way Hinduism should be taught and interpreted. In essence, the diverse problems facing Hinduism cause a domino effect, creating a rift in the minds of young Hindus and distancing them from their true roots. As the old saying goes, united we stand, divided we fall. As of today, this plague is spreading. With many young Hindus on opposite sides, the fight to create a respectful and honest view of Hinduism will be sidetracked, with Hindus fighting amongst ourselves while those invested in the demise of Hinduism--radical Christians and Muslims--continue to slander the religion.

While it seems that we are disappointed with your leadership, this is untrue. We are dissatisfied with the results that have happened over the last few years. We bring these topics to light to educate and raise awareness to you from our point of view. Hinduism must continue. It starts with you. Leave our generation a platform to build on. Our gratitude for such a contribution would be beyond the power of words to express.