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Letters

A Western Hindu Checking In

I love the attitude that your magazine has that Hinduism spans the world and is not only Indian. When I came upon the article "Confessions of a Western Hindu" (Oct/Nov/Dec, 2005), I found familiarity there. I believe that I am a Hindu, but I am not ethnically Indian, and I am often afraid to tell people that I'm Hindu. I'm afraid that I will not be accepted by Indians and that people will think I'm just trying to follow a fad.

My parents were among the white Americans who learned about Indian philosophy in the 1960s. They joined a group that practiced Hindu philosophy through a filter of British tradition. Now, as a young adult, I do not know how to label myself. I examined my beliefs and found that the Hindu aspects of my upbringing are those that speak to me most deeply. I have since taken up many aspects of Indian culture: learning bharatanatyam dance, Hindi language, going to temples, setting up a home shrine, cooking Indian food and often wearing saris and salwar suits. My mother prefers to call herself a Vedantist, but I find that no one in the Western world knows what that is. When one says one is a Hindu, at least whoever is inquiring has heard of it. Yet I still find myself reluctant to wear a bindi or state that I am Hindu. It seems confrontational to do so. At the same time, I desperately want to declare my allegiance, tired of being assumed to be Christian. I feel quite alone, and sometimes I start to wonder if it is true that because I was not born Indian I cannot be Hindu. Your magazine has calmed my mind in many ways. I greatly appreciate your attitude that a white American can still be a Hindu.

Carolyn MoirIrvine
California, USA

History Lesson in Use

In January I presented hinduism to-day's YouTube videos on the textbook

controversy (www.youtube.com/hinduismtodayvideos) at our local temple during a general body meeting when the attendance was high. I also had a ninth-grader give testimony to the congregation on how he dealt with this issue in his class and what were the main issues he felt were misrepresented in his history book. It went very well, sparking a lot of discussion. I also showed what other communities in the USA have done and what we can do locally. Now its up to the temple board to come up with a petition to present to local school boards. Thank you for your inspiration and guidance to bring awareness in our local community.

Padmaja Patel
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New Perspectives

The article on the "four ways we View the World" (Apr/May/Jun, 2008) was profound. Realizing that there are four ways has helped me to alleviate the deep confusion I have felt trying to understand the world and life as a Hindu. Being indoctrinated through an education system that views the world from a scientific perspective, simnif, I have learned to accept the mulif perspective.

Asha B. DassPenang
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The Fine Art of Meditation

I am making a presentation on the Agamas at a conference in Chidambaram in May organized by The Art of Living Foundation. I have been reading a lot in preparation, and it seemed like divine timing that the Insight in the recent edition of Hinduism Today ("The Fine Art of Meditation," Apr/May/Jun, 2008) focused so near my topic, the Yoga Pada of the Agamas. I can't believe the simplicity with which the very same content has been presented by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. What is said in the Agamas has been condensed and simplified for easy, everyday use. I am in awe!

Sivasri T.S. Shanmukha Sivacharyar
Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

Hinduism today is as colorful, attractive and enlightening as always. The article "The Fine Art of Meditation" (Apr/May/Jun, 2008) is very informative and educational. Many spiritual teachers are practicing and teaching meditation in different ways. It is important to have regular practice for an hour or two each day to get transformation in life. Being on this path and meditating regularly is beneficial toward managing day-to-day problems and living in peace.

Prof. B. C. Harinath
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Opening Doors

Your magazine has been a very positive influence on my life. I have been interested in Hinduism for years and when I started reading your magazine it opened up so many new doorways for me. I love your articles. Thank you so much.

Dana Stearn
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Idol Worship

In a recent letter to the new Indian Express, March 9, 2008, Swami Dayananda wrote of a new rapprochement between Hindu and Jewish religious leaders. "The historic meet," wrote Swami Dayananda, "emphasized and illustrated the importance of honest dialogue between any two religious traditions to resolve seemingly irresolvable differences." At issue was the question of the Hindu worship of Gods and idols which, for centuries, Jewish theologians have found irreconcilable

with their own traditions that prohibit idolatry. To begin, perhaps Swami Dayananda is not aware of the negative baggage the word idolatrous carries. What astonishes me more than anything is how burdened Hindus still are with these loaded labels (pagans is another), bearing extremely derogatory connotations, foisted on them by invaders and colonizers down the centuries. One would have trusted that with independence (1948) these misconceptions would have been lifted and Hindus would be allowed to hold their heads high regarding key issues of their belief system. Articles such as this one, written by a leading exponent of the faith, make us realize that there is ever present the need to be accepted--and this by faiths that have never reached the heights and depths of Hinduism.

Patrizia Norelli-Bachelet
Kodaikanal
Tamil Nadu, India

The issue of Hindus being idol worshipers has been going on ever since the Islamists and Christian missionaries came to India with their evil program. The theological and the intellectual response was given to them a long time ago. But the charge made by the opponents of Hinduism is not on the basis of theology or intellectualism. It is a political question, and thus has to be responded to at the same level. The political answer is: "Yes, Hindus are idol worshipers. But what have we done wrong? Some of us may worship statues made of stone, but we do not throw stones at others. We do not go about saying that our idol has told us to convert the whole world to Hinduism. We do not go about saying that those who do not worship an idol are unbelievers and have to be either converted or killed."

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Interview

Meat-Eating's Wider Effects

A nonvegetarian diet has a devastating impact on our planet's well being

Swami Dayananda Saraswati

The Himalayan glaciers have been the perennial source of water for rivers such as the Ganga, Yamuna, Brahmaputra and Sindhu. Now the disturbing news is that the glaciers are receding due to global warming. This problem is real, and in India it will cause irredeemable damage if it is not addressed. One will find it difficult to believe the contention of some ecologists that the Ganga and other rivers of Himalayan origin will cease to flow in six to forty years.

As a human being, I have a custodial relationship to Mother Earth. Global warming testifies to how indifferent and careless we have been in discharging our caretaking responsibilities. A report from the United Nations in 2006 revealed the surprising fact that "raising animals for food generates more greenhouse gases than all the cars and trucks in the world combined." Tens of billions of animals farmed for food release gases such as methane, nitrous oxide and carbon dioxide through their massive amounts of manure. Animals such as cows and sheep, being ruminant, emit huge amounts of methane due to flatulence and burping. "The released methane," the report says, "has 23 times the global warming potential of carbon dioxide." It is very alarming to note that the livestock industry alone is responsible for 37 percent of human-induced methane emissions. To make room for these animals to graze, virgin forests are cleared. The livestock industry also needs vast stretches of land to raise mono crops to feed the animals. The carbon dioxide that the trees and plants store escapes back into the air when they are destroyed.

Growing fodder for farmed animals implies heavy use of synthetic fertilizers produced from fossil fuels. While this process emits a huge amount of carbon dioxide, fertilizers themselves release nitrous oxide, a greenhouse gas that is 296 times more potent than carbon dioxide. Alarming as these facts are, I see in them a reason for hope. All that people all over the world have to do is to avoid meat eating. In the absence of demand for meat there is no more need for breeding millions of animals for daily slaughter.

The meat lobby cannot do anything if the change comes from the individuals. A single person, by simply not consuming meat, prevents 1.5 tons of carbon dioxide emissions in a year. This is more than the one ton prevented by switching from a large sedan to a small car. One needs to have an honest commitment to save Mother Earth, who has been relentlessly patient and magnanimous. There is no justification for one to continue to be a nonvegetarian, knowing these devastating consequences.

Promotion of vegetarianism does not require any legislation from the state. It does require a change of heart on the part of meat eaters everywhere. I cannot appeal to the tigers and wolves. They are programmed to be what they are. Being endowed with free will, only a human being can make a difference by exercising his or her choice responsibly.

Responding to Hinduism's Direst Needs One gift has immense impact for generations

Yes, I'm encouraged by the vitality of our faith today," Dr B. M. Lathi explained to our staff. "But when I see the array of powerful forces working hard to undo Hinduism, and the mass of misinformation circulating, I worry. If we want our grandchildren to resist the onslaught, we've got to react! We need intellectual clarity as never before. It is not enough to build temples. We need to understand their function and value, then inspire our children with that knowledge--not just a youth here and there, but a majority of each generation. That is what it will take. It's a big job and, as I see it, time is short."

To do his part, Dr. Lathi, a retired professor of electrical engineering living in California, generously supports Hinduism Today. "We must make sure this pure voice of dharma is heard as widely as possible. I know of no other publication like it. It proudly declares itself to be Hindu and ceaselessly works to rectify misconceptions and abuse frankly and courageously. And especially, it is doing pioneering work to present our faith in a way that is intellectually satisfying and spiritually inspiring. Here is our chance; let's make the most of it!"

Dr. Lathi established a charitable remainder trust which, when it matures in 13 years, will grant \$300,000 to the Hinduism Today Production Fund, a part of Hindu Heritage Endowment. Earnings from this gift will enable the editors to produce an ever more potent magazine. Happily, Dr. and Mrs. Lathi also benefit from their gift in a number of ways. Find out more about Dr. Lathi's charitable remainder trust here:

hheonline.org/reports/2007/jan-feb-mar/ and ask for our Production Fund e-newsletter at hhe@hindu.org.