Saints
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Saints

Hindus think of the holy ones as knowers of God. Some reign almost royally over ancient lineages while others wander in simple blessedness. Here is a guide to who they are and how we should approach them.

Who Are Hinduism's Spiritual Leaders?

The saints, sages and satgurus who commune with God and Gods through devotion and meditation are Hinduism's holy men and women. We revere them and strive to follow their example and words of wisdom. Aum.

There are and have always been many holy men and women within the Sanatana Dharma. They are considered holy because of their loving surrender to God and the Gods, their dedication to our faith, their accomplishments and profound realizations. Their knowing is more important than their learning, their purity more essential than their position. It is very difficult to be so disciplined and devoted, and so we honor and love those who have attained God's grace, and worship the divine within them, not their personality or humanness. Because of Hinduism's great diversity and decentralized organization, holy ones are not universally canonized, for there is no single ecclesiastical hierarchy to do this. Still, saints, sages and satgurus are sanctified by followers within their own sampradaya. Each within his or her own sphere of devotees is the authority on religious matters, listened to and obeyed as such. The Vedas declare, "Not understanding, and yet desirous to do so, I ask the wise who know, myself not knowing: 'Who may He be, the One in the form of the Unborn, who props in their place the six universal regions?'" Aum Namah Sivaya.

What Is a Saint, a Sage and a Satguru?

Saints, devoid of ego, reflect the peace, humility and purity of a devout life. Sages, though perfectly liberated, may outwardly appear detached and ordinary. Satgurus, also fully enlightened, guide others on the path. Aum.

The saints, or sants, of Hinduism are honored as exemplars of our faith. Often living the householder dharma, they teach us how to act and how to serve the Gods. The purity of the saint's heart is evident in his or her words and deportment. There are others in our religion who are inwardly pure and awakened, but who do not outwardly display their attainment. These are known as sages and often live as secluded munis or wander as homeless mendicants, remaining aloof from the world. Satgurus are the masterful guides and mystical awakeners who bring us into the fullness of spiritual life. They are initiated swamis of recognized spiritual lineages. Sages and satgurus are the most honored among holy men, beings of the highest attainment. Both are unmarried renunciates. Sages are generally nirvanis, reposing within their realization; satgurus are upadeshis, actively guiding others to Truth. The Vedas offer this praise, "We celebrate with dedicated acts the greatness of the illustrious supermen amidst enlightened persons, who are pure, most wise, thought-inspirers, and who enjoy both kinds of our oblations-physical and spiritual." Aum Namah Sivaya.

Are There Other Terms for Holy Ones?

Many terms name Hindu masters, teachers and aspirants including: jivanmukta, rishi, muni, siddha, mahatma, guru, swami, sannyasin, tapasvin, yogi, sadhu, sadhaka, pandita, acharya, shastri, pujari, shishya and brahmachari. Aum.

A jivanmukta is a liberated soul. Rishi refers to a venerated sage or seer. A muni is an ecstatic mystic, especially one living in seclusion or vowed to silence. Siddha refers to a perfected being or one who has attained magical powers. Mahatma denotes a great soul or renowned guru. The term guru usually describes a spiritual master, but can connote a teacher of any subject. A sannyasin, or swami, is a formally ordained renunciate monk. A tapasvin is an ascetic seeking purification through rigorous disciplines. The yogi is dedicated to intense meditation for inner attainment. Sadhu is a general term for a holy man or wandering mendicant. A

sadhaka is a serious seeker of the Self, and is often a monk. The acharya, like the pandita, is a respected teacher and advisor. Shastri refers to an expert in scripture. A pujari is a temple priest. A shishya is a formal disciple. A brahmachari is a celibate student, often under simple vows. Some titles have feminine equivalents, such as sadhvi, yogini and brahmacharini. The Vedas explain, "The brahmachari moves, strengthening both the worlds. In him the devas meet in concord; he upholds earth and heaven." Aum Namah Sivaya.

What Is the Nature of Guru Protocol?

Guru protocol, as outlined in the Kularnava Tantra and Guru Gita, defines the traditional ways of relating to one's spiritual preceptor to draw forth his wisdom and blessings and fully understand his inner nature. Aum.

Guru protocol can be understood in three parts: devotional acts, codes of harmony and prohibitions. Devotional acts include serving the guru, prostrating daily and offering a gift in love, chanting his name and meditating on his inner form as the embodiment of the Divine, partaking of ucchishta-waters from his holy sandals, and his food leavings-emulating his awakened qualities, seeking initiation and striving for Self Realization as he directs. Codes of harmony include seeking his blessings, obeying his directions, keeping no secrets and honoring his lofty presence. Prohibitions include never contradicting or arguing with the guru, never criticizing him, nor listening to criticism by others, not imitating his dress or deportment, not standing or sitting above him, nor walking or driving ahead of him; not assuming authority in his presence, nor uttering words of falsehood or contempt, and not initiating conversation or asking questions unless invited. The Kularnava Tantra explains, "Be always in service of the guru, ever in his presence, giving up desire and anger, humble and devoted, lauding in spirit, upright in doing his work." Aum Namah Sivaya.

What Is the Satguru's Unique Function?

To transcend the mind and reach the ultimate goal, seekers need the guidance of a satguru, an enlightened master who has followed the path to its natural end and can lead them to the Divine within themselves. Aum Namah Sivaya.

The satguru is the devotee's spiritual guide and preceptor, friend and companion on the path. Having become religion's consummation, the satguru can see where others are and know what their next step should be. Nothing is more precious than the first soul-quickening, life-changing shaktipata from a guru. Nothing is more central to spiritual awakening than the progressive dikshas, or initiations, he bestows. A satguru is needed because the mind is so cunning and the ego is a self-perpetuating mechanism. It is he who inspires, assists, guides and impels the shishya toward the Self of himself. The satguru, perfected in his relationship with Siva, administrates the sadhana and tapas that slowly incinerate the seeds of sanchita karmas. It is his task to preside over the annihilation of the shishya's ego and subconscious dross, all the while guiding the awakened kundalini force so that safe, steady progress can be made from stage to stage. The Agamas affirm, "Individuals who become, by the grace of Siva, eager to extricate themselves from worldly fetters, obtain initiation from a competent preceptor into the path that leads to Sivasayujya." Aum Namah Sivaya.