Book Reviews
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Feature Book: In Quest of God

by Swami Ramdas, pb., 166 plus xxi pages, us$10.95. Shipping: $2.50 in US and Canada;

other countries, $6.00. Blue Dove Press , P.O. Box 161611, San Diego, California 92196, USA.

There have been a number of great spiritual adventure stories coming out of India over the last century since the publication of Ramakrishna, the Great Master. Another great story occurs in the book In Quest of God, by Swami Ramdas, the first of a three-volume autobiographical account of the famous Swami. Yet, the book does not appear as an autobiography. Ramdas, in true humility, speaks of himself in the third person and writes his own story as if he were a mere observer. The book consists of short episodes and events, giving highlights of the life and travels of Ramdas.

Swami Ramdas (1884-1973) is one of the most well-known Rama devotees in modern India. He built his sadhana around simple repetition of the name of Rama, one of the great avatars of Vishnu in the Hindu tradition. Repeating the name of Ram at all times and in all places and seeing Rama in all, he found God everywhere. He achieved a childlike ecstasy, a divine innocence in which the whole of life became the lila (play) of Lord Rama. His story is also a pilgrimage through many of the holy places of Mother India and a communion with her different deities. He visits great saints and yogis and finds God in the common people of the country as well. Travel with Ramdas from Badrinath in the north to Rameshwaram in the south, from

Dakshineswar in the east to Dwarka in the west, in a great spiritual pilgrimage, both inward and outward.

The sadhana of Ramdas is vibrant in this book. Spiritual life appears full of drama, adventure, love and joy. The book is one of the best and most inspiring accounts of the path of devotion, bhakti yoga, available. In Quest of God is great reading for all spiritual aspirants, and it is good for children and young adults as well. After diving into the quest with Swamiji, one cannot help but chant "Ram! Ram! Ram!" feeling the immortal presence of Ramdas glorifying God in all forever. Included are a number of inspiring poems of Ramdas' in the appendix. The only complaint one could make about the book is that it is too short and one finishes it too quickly. But then there are more books to follow in this story. Reviewed By David Frawley (Vamadeva Shastri)

Divine Power from Adi Chunchanagiri: the Spiritual Biography of Sri Sri Sri Balagangadharanatha Swamiji, by H.H. Annaiah Gowda, pb., 126 pages, us$20.00.

Sri Adi Chunchanagiri Mahasamsthana Mutt, Vijayanagar, Bangalore 560 040, India.

Divine power, indeed! This biography, mixed with philosophy and fact, is a treat to read-every page has a message. Hinduism and Sri Adi Chunchanagiri Mutt: An Overview, introduces Swamiji and adds valuable perspective to his life-work. Then follows an inspiring account of Swamiji's birth (foretold by a sannyasin); his upbringing; his life as a swami in training under Sri Tiruchi Maha Swamigal of Kailas Ashrama and his impressive, ongoing achievements as Matadhipati of the ancient Adi Chunchanagiri Mutt, including beginning a "kumbha mela of the South" [see article in next issue]. Certainly, the extent of Swamiji's work is staggering-proof of divine power. Here's a treasured glimpse into his life and heart. Review by Prof. K. Chellappan

Dilemmas of Life and Death: Hindu Ethics in North American Context, by S. Cromwell Crawford, hb., 233 pages,us$1795. State University of New York Press, State University Plaza, Albany New York 12246, USA. Phone: 607-277-2211, fax (US): 1-800-688-2877.

Hindu ethics, or rather the supposed lack of it in Hinduism, has been a straw target at which hardly any Western or West-oriented scholar has failed to take a few shots. The present book is a welcome departure from such ritual stoning in the academe. It is more. It is a remarkably sophisticated application of Hindu ethics to issues which are currently in the forefront of moral consciousness and conscience-abortion, suicide, euthanasia and environment. The treatment of Hindu ethics in this book is sophisticated as well as mature, as attested to by the conclusion reached by the author in each case, all the more remarkable for the fact that the author is a Westerner. This is truly an outstanding book replete with insights on Hindu ethics and its nuances. Anyone introduced to Hindu ethics through this book will not go astray. Review by Prof. Arvind Sharma

Don't Think of a Monkey and Other Stories My Guru Told Me, retold by Swami Prakashananda, pb., 224 pages, us$13.95. Sarasvati Productions, 43463 Columbia Avenue, Fremont, California 04538, USA. Phone: 510-651-8369.

This delightful collection of 108 stories were heard directly from Baba Muktananda-a master storyteller and guru of the author-over the many years they were together. Such stories and parables have always been an important part of the teachings of great masters. This collection, some of which have been told for thousands of years, conveys spiritual truths and also exposes the follies and antics of humanity-in a humorous way-to help show how to live in the world happily, without too much trouble. It's a book you'll want to pick up again and again.

Stories of the Flood, by Uma Krishnaswami, illustrated by Birgitta Saflund hb, 41 pages, us$15.95. Roberts Rinehart Publishers, P.O. Box 666, Niwot, Colorado 80544, USA. Phone: 303-652-1921, fax: 3923.

Colorful mental and visual images fill this easy-to-read children's book. It's a collection of nine ancient stories of a great flood-akin to Noah's Ark-traditionally told by some rarely encountered cultures, including the Maori of New Zealand; ancient Hawaiian; Greece; Sumeria; the Alabama nation of North America and The Story of Matsya from the Hindu tradition. An enjoyable book which will enrich any child's perception of the oneness of humanity.

Sayings of Paramahansa Yogananda, by Self-Realization Fellowship, pb, 135

pages, 8 photos, us$4.00. Self-Realization Fellowship, 3880 San Rafael Avenue, Los Angeles, California 90065, USA. Phone: 213-225-2471, fax: 213-225-5088.

Now available for the first time in paperback, this informal collection of Yogananda's sayings, anecdotes and spiritual counsel was originally published by SRF in 1952, shortly after his passing. The stories recorded here by some of his closest disciples give the reader an opportunity to share in their personal conversations and experiences with this beloved world teacher. Turn to it daily for "emergency inspiration" and for a warmly personal glimpse into the heart and mind of a master.

Vraja Mandala: The Holy Land of Sri Krishna, by Helmut Kappel, hb., 132 pages, 108 full-color plates, us$39.50. The Soma Publishers, Hauptstrasse 10, 3021 Pressbaum, Austria/Europe, Phone and fax: 043-2233-2132.

Every Hindu is familiar with Sri Krishna's life and teachings, but not many have the chance to visit the holy land of Vraja, also known as Goloka, Vrindavandham, etc. The author, an initiated Vaishnava and expert photographer, presents an exquisite picturebook, offering the rare chance to visually enter this divine realm. Lavish photographs capture the richly spiritual atmosphere and aesthetic qualities. Concise text provides the essential historical and philosophical lore. The reader will be transported into this sphere, regarded by Vaishanavas as the earthly manifestation of the highest spiritual plane. An outstanding picturebook destined to become a classic.

Happiness, by Sri Chinmoy, pb.,132 pages, us$9.95. Order from: Heart Music and Books, 85-65 151 Street, Jamaica, New York 11432, USA. Ph: 718-523-3527; fax:3471.

In this anthology, Bengali philosopher and meditation teacher Sri Chinmoy offers both inspirational encouragement and practical advice on the quest for happiness. He affirms that, ultimately, it comes from one's inner life. Aphorisms, poems and brief, categorized prose excerpts provide an engaging format which entices the reader to flip to any page for immediately accessible wisdom. Simple, clear, direct and compelling, this volume quietly conveys the light of a giant spirit fully attuned to the needs of the present world.

Awaken Children! Dialogues with Sri Sri Mata Amritanandamayi, by Swami Amritasvarupananda, pb, 260 pages. Mata Amritanandamayi Mission Trust,

Amritapuri, Kerala, India.

Written by a devotee of Mataji, this volume is part of a series providing insights into day-to-day life at the ashram by documenting a number of days with Mataji, including detailed paraphrased and transcribed excerpts of conversations with her. The text is enlivened by numerous stories, some instructional, others light-hearted and ingenious. Some are familiar, like the story of Prahlada's devotion and of Rama entering exile with a smiling face. There are some real gems in this book. My favorite is, "Karma is like a boomerang which you fail to catch most of the time, so it hits you." A glossary and footnotes are helpful additions. Review by Uma Krishnaswami

Tantric Yoga and the Wisdom Goddesses: Spiritual Secrets of Ayurveda, by David Frawley, pb, 256 pages, us$16.95. Passage Press, 8188 South Highland Drive #D5,

Sandy, Utah 84093 USA. Phone: 801-842-1440.

Tantra is one of the most misunderstood aspects of Hinduism and yogic spirituality. This volume goes far to counter this, explaining the deeper, meditational and devotional side of tantric yoga. It introduces the Ten Wisdom goddesses (Dasa Mahavidya), one of the most important esoteric tantric teachings. It also explains how to use Ayurveda along with tantra, discussing the energies of the mind and subtle body, including Kundalini and the chakras and practical methods of how to develop them. Notably, the book is based upon the work of Ganapati Muni, the chief disciple of Ramana Maharshi, and serves to introduce his work. Anyone who thinks they know what tantra is, or who wants to find out, should have this book.

Is the Veda Divine Revelation?: Indus Valley and the Veda, by M. Sundar Raj. 1989, pp. 208. $15. Affiliated East-West Press, G-1/16, Ansari Road, New Delhi 110

002, India.

This book joins issue both with the orthodox Hindu and modern Western approaches to the Veda. The former regards the Vedas as revelation without a revealer. The latter scholarship regards it as the product of an Indo-European immigration into or invasion of India, which overran the Indus valley culture. The author calls both these positions into question by maintaining that "a perfect concordance can be establishedâ¦" The central claim of the book-that the so-called Harappan and Vedic cultures are related-is finding an increasingly receptive audience among scholars. This book is a timely and welcome contribution. Review by Prof. Arvind Sharma

The Essentials of Hinduism: A Comprehensive Overview of the World's Oldest Religion, by Swami Bhaskarananda, pb, 233 pages, us$12.95. Viveka Press, 2716 Broadway Avenue East, Seattle, Washington 98102, USA. Phone: 206-323-1228, fax: 206-329-1791.

This book fills a great need of Hindus worldwide for a thorough and lucid explanation of their religion. It is an outcome of the author's intimate and profound knowledge of the Hindu religion, philosophy and cultural traditions, as well as his deep understanding of the intellectual inquiries of the western trained mind. In twenty-two chapters he has answered virtually all the questions which come to the mind of those wanting to know about this ancient and complex religion. Essentials is perfect for Hindus who need to know more about their own religion and for second generation Indian immigrants growing up in the West. Illustrated, with glossary, index and appendices.

Sree Narayana Guru: Saint, Philosopher, Humanist, by Dr. K. Sreenivasan. 1989, 208 pages. $15. Eureka, 6167 Potrero Drive, Newark, California 94560, USA.

Sree Narayana Guru [1856-1928] was perhaps the greatest social and religious reformer in the history of Kerala after Sri Sankaracharya. Born into an environment riven by casteism, he spearheaded the struggle that led to the Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936, which threw open all Travancore temples to all Hindus. A Saivite Advaitin, he preached the radical concept of "One caste, one religion, one God for mankind." His message to the oppressed was simple: gain dignity and

self-respect through your own efforts-education, industry and self-improvement. His words are of great import to the dispossessed-that they are human beings with dignity and that they can earn respect. Dr. Sreenivasan's excellent biography brings the mystical and social aspects of the Guru's work (little known outside Kerala) to an English-speaking audience. Many profound and mystical poems of Sree Narayana Guru are included. Here's a sample, "Thou verily art Brahman, not senses, not mind, neither intellect, consciousness nor body. Outside of thine own Self, this world manifested is naught. Self-hood alone does shine thus, mirage-like in variegated display." Sri Narayana Guru, Brahma Vidya Panchakam. Review by Rajeev Sreenivasan

Skipping Stones Published by Arun TokÃ©, bimonthly children's magazine 35 pgs. B/W. Subscriptions: US: $18. Institutions: $25. Worldwide: $30 (airmail). Post Office Box 3939, Eugene, Oregon, 97403 USA. Phone: (503) 342-4956.

This enlightened, multicultural children's magazine is dedicated to thinking children. Published by a Hindu ex-engineer turned ecologist/"childologist," every issue resounds with soulful voices of youth from Kyoto to Kashmir talking about everything imaginable-religion, ecology, culture and discrimination. A "Guide for parents and teachers" makes this a superb resource for schools. A photo/art filled smorgasbord, including an international pen-pal column. Born out of conscience with each issue crafted so beautifully, every Hindu parent should take advantage of it. [Look for Skipping Stones in next month's children's books article.]