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<http://hoohana.aloha.net/~htoday/htoday.html>

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No, that's not a typographical error or a foreign language. It's Hinduism Today's new World Wide Web address. If you have access to a computer, you can read our Hindu Family Newspaper from any of earth's 25-million Internet nodes, for free. You would not get all the wonderful photos or art or ads, but the text is there for anyone searching the net for dharma.

I've been meditating on what this all means for Sanatana Dharma and can see a time when Hindus are all connected on the Internet. An ashram in Fiji will be able to download explanations for samskaras. A yoga society in Orissa will be able to locate graphical information about chakras for a public slide show. A pilgrim will call up a home page with all the sacred sites, temples, tirthas and ashrams his family can visit on his way back to Bharat, complete with maps, train schedules and cost of A/C rooms. I see more. A panchangam we all use together, listing the holy days and festivals. Our own Timeline is already on the Net. It stirred historians to write us many letters, and discuss the new way India's history is being understood. Even now you can get it, and search for when Ramakrishna was born, when the Vedas were composed, when South Indian Chola kings set sail for Indonesia.

I see interactive courses. A teacher in South Africa could download the lessons for her students, lessons rich in photos, maps, Vedic verses, illustrations and sounds, all the things that interest children. How about having the Encyclopedia of Hinduism online, which our dear friends Muniji and Dr. Rao are working to assemble through scholars throughout the world? How about a library of dharma graphics which anyone could log onto, find that perfect piece of art for illustrating a brochure, download it and never leave their desk?

Say your daughter just had a new child and you want a special name. What to do? Let's put all the Hindu names on the net-we have over 20,000-so anyone can search, find the meaning, learn the right pronunciation and then make a choice. Need a good time to start a business, sign an important contract or leave on a trip? Just call up the WWW home page on astrology for a computer analysis of the auspicious moment.

The World Wide Web is difficult to say fast, all those w's one after another. It comes out "wurlwyewep." The pros just call it the Web. But what is it? I have been learning a little about the Web. It took me a while to get the modem on my Blackbird Mac working right, and the monks had to install some special software for me. But soon I was out there in the Infobahn, in the slow lane. I found that the Web is the first user-friendly, interactive global information medium. Only five years old, it extends any individual's reach, from the creation of information to finding it. Soon we hope all the religionists of the Global Forum for Human Survival and Parliament of World Religions will communicate their thoughts, programs and knowledge on the Web. I remember when in Moscow and Rio at Global Forum gatherings the now US Vice President Al Gore unveiled his plan to open "an Information Highway." Congratulations, Mr. Gore. Just three years later your vision of a digital Superhighway has the equivalent of four new users every minute, and we are one of them.

From Hinduism Today's home page, by a click of a button you can bring up a file that allows you to write an instant, postage-free letter to the editor. Another click sends you into the vastness of cyberspace. It is that easy, and easy to get lost, too. Give it a try. They say the Web has changed things completely. The old Internet was OK for physicists, but it was an unfriendly, type-only, black-and-white technical world. The Web added images, color, a variety of type faces, pictures, designs and buttons that lead to the next destination. Now it's everybody's tool. Click on a button and go to a home page of Vedic verses kept in Bangalore. Click a button there about astrology and suddenly you're in San Francisco or browsing a London database on ayurveda. Click again and you are reading a page on Sanskrit studies kept in Durban. It's called hyperlinking. I learned how to make bookmarks yesterday. These are connections you have made, kept by a program in case you want to return but don't know the address. Just click and you're there again. Easy.

Another nice thing is it's so democratic. Whether you are Birla Pvt. Ltd., IBM or Mrs. Bhatt, poetess from Pune, everyone is equal on the Web.

Electronic mail is like having the post office in your house. Messages come and go through the phone lines, and can be read immediately anywhere in the world. Our institutions use the Web to connect missions we oversee in several countries. We put new information on the home page in Hawaii, and members in Mauritius, India, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka or Germany can access it instantly. Not only that, it's free. All those fax and phone bills are gone. Hindu institutions should all work hard to upgrade to the Web. These networks are all interconnected, but totally disorganized, just like Hinduism, so you will all feel at home there! Let's meet on the wurlwyewep and share our experience, vision and tools.