

## [Power of the Press](#)

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### PUBLISHING

## Power of the Press

Gurudeva began by printing his own books, then finessed the skills learned into a high-tech, multinational publishing tool to promote Hinduism

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The year was 1957. gurudeva had just turned thirty and begun his mission in the West. Knowing the innate power of the press, he bought a mimeograph machine. "Mimeograph?" you ask. For those under fifty, that's the office printing technology that preceded Xerox copiers, a stencil and spirit duplication device used between 1884 and 1960 for making copies. Gurudeva would later tell his monks of cranking out tracts and pamphlets, hands stained with the bluish-purple dyes of a messy-smelly technology. With such simple tools, he published his first book, Raja Yoga.

From the outset of his mission 52 years ago, publications were seen as a strategic tool, not merely to inform, but to transform individuals, a

way to vivify a personal and cultural revival within Hinduism. As the years passed, he embraced new technologies as soon as they emerged, moving up to small AB Dick presses when they came to market, then massive Heidelberg presses which he brought in 1970 to his Mountain Desert Monastery, high in Nevada. The monks studied printing and typesetting arts at professional schools. Experts in press, bindery and photography/prepress skills all pilgrimaged to the two-story building to offer their knowledge to the eager young apprentices in robes. Gurudeva founded Sierra Graphics, Ponderosa Press and Comstock House—a triad of institutions to design, print and distribute the books.

Books flowed like a stream in spate. Comstock House produced small, award-winning ones by the tens of thousands, notably the On the Path and Pathfinder's Library series, with titles like The Meditator, On the Brink of the Absolute and The Power of Affirmation. Teams of monks and family members traveled the US, placing the books in as many as 3,500 stores. As the popularity

of the titles increased, the sleep of the monks was inversely affected. They began printing far into the snow-bound nights to keep abreast of demand, napping on the pressroom floor when overcome by fatigue. It was a heady time, and those books touched the soul of a generation looking for spiritual insights, the flower children of the '70s.

So competent did the monastics become that they received orders, big ones, from Nevada casinos. Restaurant placemats (one order for a million!), menus, brochures, Keno tickets and Harrah's Club letterheads began to fill the cavernous brick-walled rooms in Virginia City. Most of the time, Gurudeva had the monks printing his mission-critical literature: Innersearch Travel-Study brochures, Inspired Talks, posters, newsletters, correspondence course materials— all needed for a dynamic, growing institution.

In 1985 Gurudeva, who had never sat at one, bought a state-of-the-art Macintosh computer for himself. Seeing its potential, he ordered one for each of his monks, urging them to adapt their various services to this new tool. And did they. In 1986 Gurudeva's team cobbled together the world's first publishing network. This won them the 1987 MacConnection User of the Year Award and so impressed Apple Computer (monks and Macs?) they flew a three-man film team to Hawaii for two days to record the happening.

The '80s saw a series of publications focusing on Saiva Siddhanta, including translations of the classic Tirumantiram and Tirukural texts, which Gurudeva insisted be available in modern English. That decade he published hundreds of thousands of posters and pamphlets to promote Hinduism and popularize its worship and wisdom.

It was also a time of major growth for Hinduism Today, founded in 1979. He focused his Publisher's Desk editorials on tough issues previously shrouded in silence, using his journal to guide the Hindu mind in how to dharmically approach matters like spouse abuse, suicide, adultery, pornography, mixed marriages, organ transplants and human cloning. The latter led to an invitation from President Clinton's Blue Ribbon Committee on human cloning for Gurudeva to define the Hindu view for legislators confronting the issue. Years later, the Texas Medical Association asked the magazine to write a chapter in their book on medical ethics to guide US doctors with Hindu patients. In such ways the magazine reached beyond its readership, guiding ashrams, yoga schools and hundreds of institutions. And not just in English. During the '80s, Gurudeva engineered a system of franchises, allowing teams around the world to republish in their regional languages in Malaysia, the Netherlands,

India, South Africa and elsewhere.

The '90s were filled with state-of-the-artbooks and a move to digital publishing, including multimedia and CD design and production, audio, video and graphic. He introduced his daily Hindu news service, HPI, using the Internet to connect and inform Hindus. Gurudeva developed an editing style that was highly collaborative, based on networked Macs. Each afternoon, 365 days a year unless he was traveling, he met with a team of monks between 3:00 and 7:00 pm. The team's portable PowerMacs were connected so that the same file, say a chapter of Loving Ganesha, was displayed simultaneously on all four monitors, to be accessed and altered by any member of the team. From this digital synergy poured forth

thousands of pages, most notably The Master Course trilogy, Gurudeva's lifetime legacy on Hindu philosophy, culture and yoga.

Gurudeva was not writing in those sessions. In fact, he never wrote a book in the usual way. Rather, his thousands of recorded discourses provided the raw material of his works. Several times each week, or when traveling abroad, he would address pilgrims and seekers, speaking on dharmic subjects or answering their personal queries. He would invite his CyberCadets, visitors to his website, to send in questions by e-mail. A collection of over 600 talks can be found at:

<http://www.himalayanacademy.com/audio/>

Days later, his editing team would import the transcripts, fine-tune them and add supplemental materials as he directed. Gurudeva personally edited every word in every book, without exception. That hands-on style brought an integrity and euphony to the lifetime written record of his creative, illuminating and vivifying mind.

His books were vast, diverse and always focused on deepening everyone's understanding of Hinduism, and always in an approachable and practical idiom. In the last ten years the book effort took on a new momentum as others realized their preciousness. Spanish-speaking readers wanting to share the teachings received permission to translate the works. A team in Russia published editions, as did others in Sri Lanka (Tamil), Mumbai (Marathi),



Kuala Lumpur (Bahasya Malay) and elsewhere. Motilal Banarsidass, Munshiram Manoharlal and Abhinav, three of Delhi's foremost publishers, vied to reprint his books in India.

In his vivacious final year, Gurudeva completed the trilogy, and set a new standard even for his monks asking them to publish the three, art-rich, thousand-page books in full color and hardbound. It was unprecedented, as a few minutes in any bookstore reveals. A Malaysian printer was found for the task, and on October 27 Living with Siva was lovingly placed in Gurudeva's hands on his deathbed. He saw, in that moment, the last of his remarkable publishing efforts come to fruition. The monks recalled: "We placed the four-pound gem into his hands, and spontaneously the

whole room erupted in applause, loudly saluting Gurudeva for this masterpiece. We asked how we could go on in his absence, without his grace and wisdom. He tenderly assured his aggrieved monastics, 'It's all there in the Master Course to guide your life and answer your questions.' "

## A Heart for Art

Gurudeva understood the importance of art in communicating ideas and uplifting the human spirit, and he regarded Hindu art as itself sacred. During his travels, he

noticed that art, like so many other Hindu things, was waning, with unappreciated artists urging their sons to be engineers. In response, he sought out the finest artists and commissioned them to do major works in traditional styles, paying them well for their gifts. Artists in India, Bali and North America took on creative projects, some involving years of painstaking work on a single canvas, others requiring hundreds of large paintings illustrating Hindu motifs. Much of it has been ported to the

Web, and a digital tour can  
begin at:

<http://www.hinduart.org/mws/index.html>

Art is more than painting, and Gurudeva retained bronze and stone craftsmen to produce Saiva saints, Siva's 108 dance poses, a 32,000-pound Nandi and a 12-foot Dakshinamurthi. Artists were awed by this saint's interest in their skills. Two years

ago Gurudeva brought A. Manivelu to Malaysia and the US for two months so he could see, and therefore depict, contemporary Hindu families and practices around the globe. S. Rajam, who at 83 still paints for Himalayan Academy, was captivated when in 1995 Gurudeva purchased his lifetime collection, fifty years of ingenious effort, and brought it to America to save it from neglect. Rajam wrote, "To take my 400 paintings to his ashram in Hawaii is something that opened my heart, to know there

is a future for my paintings.  
Above all, his very majestic  
personality reminds artistes like  
me of old-time rishis and  
religion-makers."