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YOUTH COMMENTARY

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How I've learned to handle myself as a Hindu girl in America

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As I board the bus to school I can hear the students making fun of me, "See that girl? What a weirdo!" I hear the comments, and what do I say? What can I do? Use bad language and beat them up? I figure that they only make fun of me because they have nothing better to do than make fun of an innocent person. They are ignorant, basically. In the Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 16, verse 17, it says, "The ignorant are self-conceited, stubborn, filled with pride and disregard ordinance." This is how they are. Why should I stoop to their level of ignorance? I ignore it. Because only the ignorant speak ignorance to the ignorant. An educated person would never speak ill of a person who has said an untrue statement, because the better educated person knows better.

At school, I walk to my locker to get my materials for class, and a few guys holding Bibles approach me, "Are you happy?" They ask, "Yes, of course," I reply, "I am very happy." "Is Jesus making you happy? Have you accepted Jesus?" "What do you mean?" "If Jesus isn't making you happy, then you aren't really

happy, you just think you're happy." "No, I'm sure I'm happy." "If you don't accept Jesus in your heart, then you will be condemned to hell." I respond, "I am happy." "God bless." They then turn around and leave. I don't make a scene; just be calm and truthful. Christianity is a way to God, not the way. Hinduism is a way. Islam is a way. Buddhism is a way. Whichever religion you choose should make you happy. Christianity might make you happy, but it might not make me happy. Hinduism makes me happy. I don't try to explain this because it will obviously fall on deaf ears.

I meet some of my friends. Friends are a big part of school, and to most people to be friends with someone you have to dress a certain way, look a certain way, even talk a certain way. A true friend would openly accept anyone and everyone despite the way they are. It's like the ocean. The ocean accepts both dirty and clean water. The ocean wouldn't refuse anything. For a long time, I had struggled with friends. I felt very hurt, alone, unwanted, and it was a point in my life of great depression. I opened my personal Gita and my eyes fell on Chapter 18, verse 65, "Fix your mind on Me, think of Me and you will come to Me. This is my promise to you, for you are my dearest friend." I know Krishna was talking to Arjuna, and they were the best of friends. Arjuna is the example of a human being. What is the need for human friends when I can be friends with the Lord? What is more, who are we to judge? God never judges us on our physical attributes or the way we talk and walk. God never rejects us. We reject God.

Society pressures us into doing things and thinking it will make us happy. But why should we worship what is temporary? Everything is temporary, even this body, so why are we

obsessing over it?

My friends get themselves in trouble a lot. Their desires are wrong. Then, they come to me. What do I advise? I can't tell them what they did was wrong, and I can't tell them what they did was correct. I listen to them and then tell them, "Ask God for forgiveness. What you did must never be done again. Do good actions and expect no reward."

When I meet people who seem unhappy, maybe because of a problem at home or with friends, I tell them that they should help someone, and that will help them. How? Well, maybe the other person has an even worse problem, and so your problem will seem minute, or maybe you will become so busy trying to help the other person that your own problems aren't such a big deal.

I can't go through half of my lunchtime without someone asking me about being a vegetarian. Most vegetarian people my age say, "Eating meat is against my religion," because they can't think of a better reason. But I tell the person that I believe that every living being has a right to live. Every being, animal, plant, whatever, has God in it, and I should respect it. God resides equally in all beings.

People are always curious about Hinduism. They ask me questions about it, and eventually someone will take what I say the wrong way and a rumor goes around that I worship a "six-armed demon freak," which is totally untrue. I can't yell at them and tell them what is said is untrue, but simply tell them

it's untrue and leave. No big deal.

Unreligious people don't believe in God. I should know, they tell me so every day. They probably don't because they are too lazy to find God. So they say there is none, and they are too ignorant to look for logic and truth. The Gita describes what this person would say in chapter 16, verses 13, 14 and 15. "This has been gained by me, this desire I will fulfill, this is mine, this wealth will be mine in the future. I have slain this enemy, and I will slay others. I am Lord, I enjoy. I'm successful, powerful and happy. I am rich and well born. Who is equal to me?" Notice all the "I" sentences, which show they don't know who they really, truthfully are. So they think they are this physical and mental make-up, when in reality they are more than that.

I'm a normal human being, and just like any other normal human being, I get stressed by the time the school day is over. I sometimes just want to give up trying with everything and I think, "I can't do it. I can't do it, don't do it!" Of course, it's a negative thought. To get rid of that negative thought just do what you have to do, and the thoughts go away. We could take it the Deepak Chopra way, who said that when a negative thought comes to mind, just say, "Next!" And the thought moves on.

I would like to conclude with this thought: "Do what is righteous, and the righteous will declare you brave, for the unrighteous will scorn torment and never rest until you stoop to their level. When they spit on you and call you a fool, never raise a hand, for if you do, you have blessed them. Do not

Speak to them, for it will be a blessing for them to hear your voice. Just stand tall. Look them straight in the eyes. Just leave without looking back. Then, and only then, will God proclaim that you are truly righteous."