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In My Opinion

The Immigrant Blues

What I learned from US Independence Day

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Saivism is an orthodox religion, conservative in its ways and yet pliant and understanding. It is simultaneously the most demanding spiritual path and the most forgiving. Saivites have persisted through many ages through successfully adapting work, service and skills according to the times while internalizing worship and holding firmly to the eternal values." How true! I think that these values, described in Dancing with Siva, are those that make a Hindu a successful part of any community that he chooses to become a part of.

Like millions of other families all over the United States on the Fourth of July, our family stood on the sidewalk. Each one of us had the American flag in our hand that hot summer morning. We were waving to the floats in excitement just like everyone. Then a group of war veterans marched past during the parade. Suddenly, I felt my heart sinking. From that moment, however much I tried, I could not feel like a part of the crowd any more. I could not relate to the rest of the crowd, least of all the veterans passing by!

As we drove back home, something was bothering me. I thought, "We should not participate in celebrations such as

this. What would the people around us have thought as we cheered and lauded the veterans? What do we, the Asian immigrants, know about the hardships that the people of America went through during WWI and WWII?"

From that day on I looked at everything differently. I became very conscious of who I am (an Asian Indian). I used to think that I had overcome my sense of "feeling like an immigrant" a long time ago. To my utter disappointment I discovered that it was not so. I became totally conscious of my external surroundings. I even came to the conclusion that we will never fit in this society and that the place we belong to is India. I thought, "What a big mistake my husband and I have made in deciding to move to the United States."

A few weeks went by and I continued to feel miserable! My phone rang. It was a friend. They had just arrived from India, and she was learning to drive--something that almost all immigrants go through. She was calling me for advice. Of course, I was more than happy to offer some "words of wisdom." Just as I hung up the phone, my own words echoed, "The only way to overcome the fear of driving is to drive! You cannot learn to drive by staying home. You have to get behind the wheel. Get on that road and try again and again until you feel comfortable. The key is to make yourself feel that the road is 'friendly towards you.' The only way to do that is to get on that road as many times as possible. Once you are comfortable with two lanes, move to roads with four lanes. Then in no time you would be driving all over the US!" As I recalled my own words, I knew that my worries were over! I felt exhilarated! I knew that I had found my answer!

True, my children can never relate to the World War veterans of America! But getting involved and showing everyone that we care is the key to becoming a part of the community, our community. We do not feel alien any more. Our friends in the community know that we care, and they

know that we participate because we care.

To be or not to be a part of your community is up to you. If you want to be accepted, though, you need to make the initial effort. Serve your community. By serving your community, you get noticed. The community will embrace you with delight!

Volunteer and participate in community activities as much as you can. It is great to give to your community. You will be amazed to find, as I did, how far participating in the external world outside of your home helps you live a more peaceful inner life!

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