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Hindu Commandments

For years in this and other publications we have written praises about the generous open-mindedness to be found in Hindu faith. Not that it suddenly seems a misplaced pride, but today we plan to change the entire course of history. That's right, 10,000 years or so of non-dogmatic, free inquiry ends with this editorial, probably never to be the same. I can hear you thinking, "What? Is history so easy to remold?" You be the judge.

It all began a few months back when a long-time island friend and journalist. Bill Solner, introduced us to another publication, Free Inquiry. You see, Bill is a thinker, a cognitive maverick, a churlish gadfly pestering the insouciant gelding of society - in other words, a trouble-maker. His problem is clinically simple: He likes to think for himself.

This trivial character flaw has had disproportionate impact on Bill's life. Among other things, it drove him to denounce Western religiosity, to move to an island in the middle of nowhere and to embrace Secular Humanism (capitalized for reasons soon to be revealed). Secularism allowed Bill, even encouraged him, to think freely, to make judgements based on his experience and not someone else's, to be querulous and skeptical to his heart's content. Readers will instantly recognize these as freedoms most Hindus take for granted and advantage of. So it was that Bill brought us a copy of the Secular Humanist magazine. Free Inquiry. It looked interesting. We subscribed, mostly because the issue he handed us had a long article on reincarnation (of which more in a future issue for those who renew their subscriptions).

As one issue and then another of Free Inquiry arrived, it soon became clear that

Secular Humanism was not really the intellectual vanguard it had first seemed. There were some wonderful articles, to be sure, especially the no-holds-barred investigation of Christian faith healers and their wily ways. These secular humanists had the sweet audacity to draft electronics experts to monitor healing meetings around the US. They discovered that "healers" were using high-tech means to dupe ailing audiences (including concealed receivers in the minister's ear by which he "mysteriously" received medical histories and symptoms of people he never met). Their published reports on these findings are an example of what is right about their role as watchdog over religious humbug.

But there is something wrong, too. They're against everything. They hate the Catholics and merely don't like the Protestants. God knows what they will say about the Hindus if they ever write of Eastern pagans. But the most startling discovery, which brings us back to our main point, is that these freethinkers have issued a creed for Secular Humanism. That's right, a set of 21 beliefs is printed in every issue under the canonical title "The Affirmations of Humanism: A Statement of Principles and Values." It's a nice list, really - more enlightened than most. But isn't a heretic's creed an oxymoron, a doctrine for the undoctinaire? Even freethinkers, doubting Thomases, confirmed agnostics and born-again skeptics seem inclined these days to take refuge in dogma. The editors are getting everyone to endorse it, sign it, agree that it is authentic, orthodox in all ways. Not only that, another group has formed a non-prophet, nonprofit Church of Secular Humanism. It's now officially a religion in America.

Well, all this made us think. Maybe Hindus need more spiritual ballast. Maybe we silently long for a few good old-fashioned Commandments with a capital C. Maybe the free-spirited Eastern path is a bit too nebulous, too unconstrained, too libertarian. After all, Free Inquiry has more subscribers than we do, and if their readers want more orthodoxy, Hindus may also. Thus it was that we came to prepare the first and only Commandments of Hinduism, twenty of them since Hinduism is roughly twice as complex as Christianity. As you no doubt have intuited by now, it's part serious, part humorous and partly a celebration of the exquisitely liberating freedoms our religion has granted to all seeking Truth.

TEN HINDU COMMANDMENTS

1. Thou shalt not limit Divinity by thy concepts, nor divide It from Creation, nor forget Its presence, but remain a Witness.

2. Thou shalt not deny thy brother his chosen path, but radiate tolerance and follow thine own Light quietly.

3. Thou shalt not act against Dharma, but seek its subtle wisdom and obey thy Conscience in all matters.

4. Thou shalt avoid violence and abstain from the abyss of doubt, fear, lust, greed, anger, hatred, arrogance and sloth.

5. Thou shalt find a true Guru, following him faithfully.

6. Thou shalt not neglect thy purpose on this Earth - to learn, to serve, to seek, to mature inwardly, to realize thySelf and thus know God.

7. Thou shalt honor all illumined saints and sages, and seek solace and guidance in our temples and sacred scriptures.

8. Thou shalt take joy in life, cheerfully enduring the trials and challenges of repeated births with the certain knowledge that you - and indeed all souls - will ultimately reach the Truth.

9. Thou shalt blame no other entity - neither God nor man nor fate - for thy circumstances, but know it is thine own thoughts, words and deeds which determine thy destiny.

10. Thou shalt see God everywhere, in all things and all peoples.

TEN LIGHT-HEARTED COMMANDMENTS

11. Thou shalt not send thy children to a non-Hindu educational institution - neither Christian, nor Islamic, nor Protestant nor Humanist - even if its engineering school be highly lauded in the land.

12. Thou shalt not stand on thy brothers shoulders that his stature may be diminished and thine own augmented.

13. Thou shalt not be penurious in sharing thy wealth, but, considering it a no-interest loan from God, generously support thy local Hindu institutions, striving mightily to keep thy beneficence from being too broadly known or acclaimed.

14. Thou shalt not disdain thy forefathers' name or religion, thinking thy pocket may thereby find increase or thy neighbor's animosity find decrease.

15. Thou shalt not hide thy Faith under a big rock, pretending that it is less colorful, contradictory or perplexing than it really is.

16. Thou shalt not conceal thine own ignorance about religion and other Mysterious Matters, but humbly seek knowledge from others and then freely bestow it upon thy children as thine own.

17. Thou shalt not soil thy hands with issues of caste nor ransom thy son for outrageous dowry demands, nor hire thy wife out to other men, even if she holds a higher degree than thine.

18. Thou shalt not carry luggage on a train or plane in excess of ten thousand pounds, nor saddle Indian history with all thy social, financial and intellectual baggage.

19. Thou shalt not forget thy sense of humor, even when all other senses have

been dulled and dimmed by the benign foolishness that fills this world.

20. Thou shalt pay no heed to anyone who begins a sentence, a book, a paragraph, an admonition or a parenthetical phrase with the three words "Thou Shalt Not."

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