Letters
Category : December 1998
Published by Anonymous on Dec. 02, 1998

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Pranams to Balinese Hindus

Your excellent issue on Balinese Hinduism [Oct. '98] evoked wonderful memories of my visits to Bali and Java on official missions as a senior United Nations official. I explored and marveled at the extant beauty and resilience of Hinduism: the magnificent Vishnu, Siva and Brahma Temples at Prambanan, the vibrant and picturesque Besakih with Mount Agong as backdrop, the beautiful seaside temples of Tanah Lot and Uluwatu, as well as the many candis devoted to Lord Siva. Even more interesting is the cleanliness, beauty and discipline of Balinese Hindu temples and Balinese Hindus' recognition of the one Brahman, even as they celebrate the many Deities as His many expressions. Also remarkable is the pride and joy that Indonesian Muslims have in their Hindu and Buddhist heritage, evidenced in their Sanskrit names, symbols of Ganesha, Sarasvati and Garuda for their state enterprises and the ubiquitous reminders of Ramayana and Mahabharata everywhere, all the while being very secure in their Islamic identity. What a contrast to the situation in South Asia! Congratulations on your fine work. Many thanks.

Dr. Mukunda Rao
Buckhannon, West Virginia, USA

Puzzled by Meat-Eating Hindus

I was moved to tears after reading your heart rending story of the crying bison [Diaspora, Oct '98]. Although the story is

about a bison in a Hong Kong slaughterhouse, it raises an obvious question that cries for an answer, "How can man, who is touted to be a 'rational animal' justify killing animals only to satisfy the cravings of his palate?" It is even more puzzling how a person who claims to be a Hindu, can justify eating meat when Hinduism teaches in no uncertain terms that ahimsa (nonviolence) is the highest dharma (religion)--ahimsa parma dharmah.

Pradeep K. Srivastava
Detroit, Michigan, USA

Be Not Intimidated. Bindi On!

Karen Beth Campion [letters to the Editor, Sept. '98] correctly pointed out that unfortunately there is a great ignorance in USA concerning Hinduism. I agree and feel that the reason for this is the Hindus themselves. More than a century after Vivekananda's thunderous awakening of the world to the message of Hinduism in this very land, a billion-strong religion is still in anonymity. The average Hindu does not proclaim his/her own identity in this vast community. Instead, every aspect of religious liberty is meekly submitted to the dominant Western culture. How many Hindu women who live in this country live as they did in India, wearing a sari and/or a bindi? Why should a person's very physical appearance be changed to please a stranger? Why this timidity? In a country as free as America! When an individual is too timid to practice his/her own religion in this free country, is it surprising that the average American is ignorant about that religion?

Dr. Murthy V. S. Andavolu,
Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

Chakras: Chapels Within

The above article appearing in your July, l998 issue was very interesting, informative and stimulating, with colorful images for those who do not know about chakras. Om Shanti! Om Shanti!! Om Shanti!!!

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Trust in the Rishis. Use Ghee.

I enjoyed Bri. Maya Tiwari's column on the health benefits of ghee. Like many Indians educated in and influenced by Western science, I had eliminated ghee from my diet, believing that all animal fat would raise cholesterol levels in the body. I doubt that any serious research has been done to prove this misinformation about ghee. Sadly, many Indian families have replaced ghee with Dalda, hydrogenated vegetable oil, which has now been shown to cause heart disease. Today I would rather trust the wisdom of the rishis of India, and ayurveda, the time-tested science of healing propounded by Charaka and Sushruta. Tiwari presents this holistic knowledge most beautifully.

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Composer Fears the Worst

I'm a composer writing from India. Though you have been in existence since 1979, only last week I came to know of your magazine. That itself shows how poorly Hindus the world over are connected! After returning from UK, I'm worried about the missionary zeal of Christians converting Hindus. Though many

like you are working hard, here and abroad, it is a losing battle. In 50 years, I will be surprised if India is more than 25% Hindu! This is mainly due to caste divisions. Unless we cast off our castes and unite as one large Hindu family, we will get wiped out. The brahmins (high caste) and the chandalas (outcastes) must get together and share knowledge, in this case information. It can bridge the gap a lot if implemented properly. Adaptation is also needed to take our religion forward into the next century--namely, group singing, meditation, chants, stories and other community-based activities in temples regularly. The Christians are strong due to this one act: singing hymns together on Sundays, regardless of whether one is rich or poor. Many temples overlook this and are still autocratic towards devotees. Also, money for poor people to stop these conversions will be of great help. We must genuinely unite and work for a common cause, namely a better life for all. Only then will religion have meaning. To this end I'm willing to help in any way I can.

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Please Count Us as Hindus

I note that you list The Divine Life Society as "Quasi-Hindu" [Oct. '98, Religion, Who Then Are the Hindus.] If you read Swami Sivananda's essay on Hinduism at: http://www.rsl.ukans.edu/~pkanagar/divine/religions/religions.htm, you will see that we are Hindus and in the true spirit of Hinduism also embrace all religions. Swamiji doesn't shy away from using the H word. He has also written a 288-page book titled All About Hinduism. I am certain that people who are shy to call themselves Hindu will proudly proclaim themselves as Hindu after reading this book. Besides, during the 1993 World

Parliament of Religion, Sri Swami Sivanandaji's beloved disciple, Sri Swami Chidanandaji, represented Hinduism.

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* Our criteria for the article were simple: organizations either forthrightly call themselves Hindu, or overtly reject any Hindu identity or assiduously do neither. In the case of the Divine Life Society, its official 1936 Aims and Objects (published on Kanagaratnam's web site) does not mention the word Hindu. While Swami's essay describes several other organizations as Hindu, he does not identify DLS as among them, nor in the course of the essay even identify himself as a Hindu. We would be delighted to add Divine Life Society to the list of Hindu organizations but would need an official statement to do so.

Letters, with writer's name, address and daytime phone number, should be sent to:
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