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Letters

Thank You

I send my heartfelt greetings to you for publishing such a wonderful magazine. Living so far from our mother country, we have Hinduism Today to keep us related to our precious roots. I am a therapist, healer and spiritualist, as is my husband. The magazine is a treat to our heart and soul.

Kamal Sandhu
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Stop Conversion

I was very disturbed and angry after reading the article by Sri Maruthu Pandian Dharmalingam, "Friendship Evangelism," in the Oct/Nov/Dec, 2009 issue. Christians trying their very best to convert people of other religions has been a thorn in the flesh of all Hindus for hundreds of years. While Maruthu took a firm stand against their efforts, we have many others falling prey to conversion.

These Christian evangelists are paid and well trained in the art of conversion. They even manage to penetrate into families very comfortable with Hinduism. It is estimated 15 Hindus a day convert to Islam or Christianity here in Malaysia. Just imagine, 850,000 Christians actively involved in trying to convert 1.7 million Hindus, and they are gaining ground. Every Hindu should wonder why we easily fall victim to conversion. Hindus proud of their beloved religion would never convert, as Hinduism is the best religion around.

There are some things we can do to check conversions. 1) Parents should bring

their children to the temples often; 2) Parents should be able to explain the basics of Hinduism to their children; 3) Teenagers should be taught that while love may be blind, it must have the brains to understand that a trap may be set for conversion. Intermarriages should only be accepted if the Christian boy or girl agrees to embrace Hinduism; and 4) the various Hindu organizations should band together and confront the churches, demanding they stop this conversion game.

K. Thuruvan
Seremban, Malaysia

Bhutanese Refugees

Your story on the Bhutanese refugees is very well done (Jan/Feb/Mar, 2010). The article educated everyone about these Hindu refugees. Sewa International has undertaken a big challenge, and I am helping them in Houston.

Vijay K. Pallod
Houston, Texas, USA

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I was very happy to see the detailed coverage on the plight of Bhutanese Hindus in your Jan/Feb/Mar, 2010, issue. I was notified in 2007 about the plight of a few Bhutanese in Atlanta. I was then the president of the Hindu Temple of Atlanta. I contacted Sewa International, who adopted the community as part of their national campaign. The Atlanta community continues to network with several organizations, including volunteers from the CDC (Centers for Disease Control), to help the nearly 2,500 Bhutanese in Atlanta.

P. Ravi Sarma
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The excellent article by Prof. Sreenath (In My Opinion, Jan/Feb/Mar, 2010 added color to the main article of the issue on the sad plight and future hope of the Bhutanese Hindu refugees. The front cover picture speaks of the innocence of these unfortunate brethren, but with the grace of the Lord, I am of the humble view that the future will be a friendly and bright one. Unity in diversity!

Thiru Satkunendran
Toronto, Canada

Christmas or Kalpa Vriksha?

I live in the USA. My five-year-old son, Aravind, asked for a Christmas tree this year for the first time. My wife bought one despite my protest. I can understand my son's desire to get one, as my neighbors have beautifully lit up trees in the lawn. Naturally, celebrating Christmas is a popular topic in the school during this month.

But I did not want to let it go that easily. I recalled a conversation that I had with my friend about Kalpa Vriksham, the wish-fulfilling tree of Hindu lore, and the Christmas tree. This solved my problem forever. I immediately told my son to call the tree Kalpa Vriksham instead. It took a couple of tries for him to learn it, but he got it easily as he is already exposed to tongue-twisting Sanskrit words in Chinmaya Mission's children's classes. From now on we are doing "Kalpa Vriksham Celebrations" on Dec 25.

Sri Bal Gangadhar Tilak introduced a Ganesh festival in Mumbai to increase unity among Hindus, so there is a precedent. We need a solid solution to this issue. The parents need one that makes the children happy without hurting any religious sentiments. The children need it to avoid separation from friends in the school. In December, the schools are closed, the offices are closed and people are shopping. A festival atmosphere is all set for us; we just have to celebrate in our own way.

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Hinduism Today's founder, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, developed a similar solution--see page 58 of this issue for his modern festival of Pancha Ganapati

Making a Choice Against Silk

Many thanks to Hinduism Today for exposing the cruelty behind silk production (Jan/Feb/Mar, 2010). I had to get used to ridicule and harassment when I made a conscious decision not to wear silk saris or anything made out of silk many years ago. Many people around me did not understand why I did not wear silk. My decision even became a joke to some. Now I am so happy that someone took the time and effort to write about the cruelty that goes hand in hand with silk production. It is like a life saver, an external validation of what I learned from my mother, who always chose cotton over silk and talked to me from a very early age about the cruelty in silk production. All the silk worms really appreciate this article.

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Chinmaya Acharya Program

Even before I got to see my Chinmaya Mission article in the Jan/Feb/Mar, 2010, issue, people from all over North America were emailing me saying how wonderful and visually appealing the article was. Thank you for the opportunity to share the great work Chinmaya Mission is doing as well as all your hard work to make this happen.

Acharya Vivek
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Hindu Climate Declaration

This is in response to your newsletter announcing that the Hindu Declaration on Climate Change was adopted at the Parliament of the World's Religions (see page 21 of this issue). I hasten to congratulate the Hindu leaders on adopting this declaration while the world's country leaders are assembled in Copenhagen to reach a consensus on climate change issues and actions.

Living in harmony with Mother Nature is not new to Hindus. Over centuries of time, Hindus are following a tradition of holding the five elements--air, water, earth, fire and ether--in great reverence. This ancient and glorious tradition is getting greatly diluted due to the impact of several dramatic changes taking place globally. Increasing pressures caused by rapid urbanization, energy-guzzling industries and demanding lifestyles are pushing people to face formidable environmental challenges.

There are many ways to address the issue of climate change. Reducing the electricity demand through programs like Demand-Side Management (DSM) or making more use of renewable energy is one option. The other, and more effective one, is a change in lifestyle to avoid waste and adoption of more efficient ways of using energy in homes and workplaces--what may be called "low-carbon diet" programs. This approach can help to cut carbon footprints on the world.

As an expert on energy efficiency and environmental improvement techniques, I can provide specific help to such of our members who may be interested in combating climate change.

Sundaresan Subramanian
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I am extremely glad that the global Hindu community has produced a consensual statement for the COP15. It is quite similar to the presentation of mine given a year

ago at the first Gulf of Mannar, Ram Sethu, Conference at the historic Linnean Society of London, UK. The theme was "The Gulf of Mannar as a World Heritage Site and its Spiritual and Scientific Relevance to the Earth's Changing Climate." I am congruent with the consensual statement you all have jointly come up with. Jointly you may wish to refine it to deliver the desirable impact and elicit the desirable change.

Anant Vyas
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At Press Time: S. Rajam Passes

By our Editor-in-Chief: We first met S. Rajam back in 1995 in Chennai, South India, having seen his amazing illustrations in a book, Periya Puranam. The art looked so elegant, but also so ancient and traditional. It was the only authentic South Indian art form we had ever seen. Perhaps it was done a century ago? Two? We inquired and, to our delight, found the artist was not only alive but just a few miles away. Thus began fifteen years of collaboration. S. Rajam, though in his 80s, painted for us tirelessly, producing hundreds of works that appear on the covers of all of Sivaya Subramuniaswami's books and many of our Hinduism Today covers and articles (see pages 66 and 70 of this issue). He once told us that in his youth he was talented, and full of callow ego, an ego that suffered when he could not equal the great masters of yore in his artistic achievements. The budding master thought to travel to the origins of spiritual art--Sigiriya Caves in Sri Lanka, Ajanta Caves in Maharashtra, India and more. His goal: to learn how these monastics had achieved their rare skills. His finding: it was their consciousness, not their technique that made them great. Learning this, he set out to change his consciousness, and that ultimately informed his art. As good as his art was, and it was the best, he was more widely known as a composer and musician who promoted vivadhi ragas and popularized kshetra kirthans. He also acted in three films. We honor his life and his work, and are thankful that we have, here at our editorial offices, over 600 of his original canvases, spanning the decades from the 1940s onward. S. Rajam was 91 when he passed on January 29th.

Helping Young Hindus Make their Way How to give understanding, self confidence and pride

Jayshree Rao was born in Tanzania and lived there until she was seven years old.

When her family moved to England, suddenly she was attending an English school. It was the beginning of a difficult period of her life that would last 13 years.

"At recess, someone would throw out a question or comment about our culture, and I had no idea how to respond. Whenever conversations turned to cows, caste, arranged marriages or vegetarianism, I had this awful, sinking feeling. I grew up vegetarian, but how to explain it, I had no idea. The questions were sometimes friendly, often not. Either way, I was on the spot. When the media made one of those horrid reports about something Indian, I would cringe, knowing tomorrow at school the weight of the world would once again come down on my shoulders--which weren't very strong. I learned to clam up. Some people were supportive, and I am grateful to them, but the culture gap remained, and it was painful.

"Then, when I was in my early twenties, around 1982-83, all these negatives turned into one big positive. Hinduism Today came into my life. It lifted my spirits and changed me altogether. Here was my culture in English (a rarity, back then). And here were my answers--intelligent, smartly presented--something I could show and be proud of. Questions lost their power to scare me, and became welcome opportunities instead. The prison wall around me fell, and--oh, joy!-- I was free."

Jayshree, who lives with her family in Manchester, UK, has donated generously to the Hinduism Today Production Fund, which is a part of Hindu Heritage Endowment. "I hope my humble gift will help our magazine reach all those younger Hindus who are facing the same challenges I did. I pray they will discover Hinduism Today early in their life and bypass a lot of confusion and pain. I hope they may recognize Hinduism Today as a true friend, and make it an essential part of their lives, so they can see how proud and self confident they can be when they begin to understand even just a little bit.

"I imagine a time when Hinduism Today will have offices in many places in the world where especially younger people could come to meet the staff, and absorb how confident Hinduism is, how knowledgeable Hinduism is, understand how enlightened Hinduism is. I imagine this will happen, since the Production Fund also supports Hinduism Today staff travels."

If, like Jayshree, you would like to help Hindu youth be self-confident and proud, please consider donating to the Production Fund or including it in your estate plan. Ask to receive our Production Fund e-newsletter at www.gurudeva.org/email-news. Or read more about the Production Fund and estate planning options at: www.hheonline.org/productionfund then click planned giving options. Or contact us at 808-634-5407 or [hhe @ hindu.org](mailto:hhe@hindu.org)