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In My Opinion

The Need for Balance in Faith

To keep youth interested, let us bring forward Hinduism's myriad approaches to liberation

By Varun Mehta

A friend had brought me soup, and I trembled trying to finish it. Instead of playing Holi with my friends on the university campus, I lay sick in bed. My phone rang and it was Kumar Uncle, wondering when I was going to show up to the event as one of the youth volunteers. Just as I finished my explanation, an auntie from the Sai Baba group called asking for help with their event the next day.

I had a fever. For the first time in my life, I didn't want to do any of it. I didn't want to help, I didn't want to volunteer. Maybe it was the fever talking, maybe not.

As a young adult, I have been blessed with the company of knowledgeable people. Whether it was my interest in the Gita, wanting to learn music or helping the homeless of Austin, Texas, I was able to find someone or some group to quench my thirst. For me, three of Hinduism's paths to liberation interested me and drew me to my faith. In this day and age, I see that most opportunities available for young Hindus are along the lines of serving the needs of others. Karma yoga, the path of service, has become mainstream. It is emphasized far more than the other paths to moksha, causing a bottleneck effect with the newer generation's interest in Hinduism. Why is it that in current times, we have seemingly forgotten the need for devotional and intellectual fortitude with respect to our religion?

Bhakti has been put off as less meaningful. The devotion exemplified by Sri Radha or Mirabai is obsolete for some people today. The reverence that devotional singing has, the energy of kathak, the essence of scriptural storytelling and the power of

meditation are minimally appreciated. Most of these forms of devotion are hardly focused on, much less showcased, by Hindu organizations. While art appreciation has been on the rise with the younger generations, this rise is not mirrored in organized activity. Emphasis on younger Hindus' demonstrating their religiosity through dance, music and painting--skills which require patience and attention to detail--is very important, as is developing an appreciation for talent. Our scriptures make clear references to the significance of such expressions of bhakti.

Secondly, jnana yoga highlights an intellectual means of attaining oneness with God. A high percentage of our South Asian community pursue college and graduate degrees--evidence that, professionally, this is an important goal. Yet, compelling opportunities for the pursuit of religious/spiritual knowledge are hard to find. Many religious events are organized with the primary goal of gaining or exchanging knowledge, albeit at a superficial level. If a young adult wants to take this task on alone, he has a major hurdle: language. English translations that are unbiased hardly exist on the major philosophies of Hinduism. With the array and depth of topics, there is a sense of under-qualification when young adults attempt to face the arcane treatises. Using multimedia, efforts must be made to share Hindu concepts and philosophies with younger audiences today.

Providing an outlet for young adults to engage in bhakti, jnana, and karma yoga is of utmost importance. The harmony that these three paths provide allows an individual to stay inspired and, more importantly, balanced. While I can hardly attribute my involvement in community activities to my sickness in college, I can definitely say that focusing too much on one aspect of Hindu expression--serving others--may have burned me out for a period of time. In my opinion, to re-ignite the interest of young Hindus in Hinduism, we must re-ignite the importance of our multifaceted approach to practicing Hinduism.

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