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Letters

Thank You, Hinduism Today

Thank you for the excellent service rendered to our faith. The articles "Guru Purnima: Honoring the Illumined Teachers" (Apr/May/Jun 2010), "A Little Fortright Talk Down Under" (Jul/Aug/Sep 2010) and "Letting Go of Past and Future" (Jul/Aug/Sep 2010) were thoroughly enjoyable, informative and life influencing.

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I want to thank the monks who do such beautiful work publishing Hinduism Today. As a teacher of English at the University of Montpellier, in southern France, I use Hinduism Today regularly as a text from which to study the modern American idiom, among other magazines such as Time, National Review and US News. Many students with a spiritual inclination ask me to read from Hinduism Today. Thus, at the same time they improve their English, they are learning of the marvelous depths of the Hindu religion.

Alain-Francois Revon
Montpellier, France

It was a pleasant surprise to come across your magazine on the web while searching for any regularly published magazines on Hinduism and its multi-dimensional facets. Strangely, I have not come across such a comprehensive magazine on the subject published in India, and I'm not sure whether one exists. The article "Letting Go of Past and Future" (Jul/Aug/Sep 2010) was very appropriate, and the technique of enjoying the present with a holistic view makes greater sense

after imagining oneself perched on top of a tree. I hope to see more insights on yogic techniques in the future.

Rohit Kumar
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Hinduism Today comes up with new themes in each issue about Hindus all over the world. Even the "Global Dharma" section has informative news from across the globe. For a vegetarian, knowing about the silver foil in food (Jul/Aug/Sep 2010) was an eye-opener about food contamination. Thank you for your efforts.

Sri Mallampalli
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I am from Australia and now live in Canada. My mother was born in Madras, India, and my father was born in Malaysia of Indian parents. I am currently teaching a Grade 11 World Religions class in an all-girls Catholic high school. I have been blessed to have stumbled across your website. I just watched your YouTube video related to Chapter 3 of What Is Hinduism?, "God, Soul and World." Your organization sounds so professional, filled with accurate knowledge, insight, a variety of sources and engaging visuals to reinforce the information you present about Hinduism. Thank you for your efforts in spreading the truth with accuracy, knowledge, wisdom and hard work.

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I do not find apt words to describe my feelings of joy at the content of the Jan/Feb/Mar 2010 issue, the way it was presented and, of course, the production overall. To be frank, I never thought that there could be a such a wonderful magazine from foreign soil on Hinduism and its rich heritage. My heartfelt

congratulations to the entire team for the hard work you put in and your involvement and devotion. I pray at the feet of the Almighty to bless all of you there with all necessary strength and long life to carry on this holy work further.

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Conversion in Malaysia

I refer to Mr. Thuruvaan's letter on conversion (Apr/May/Jun 2010). I was told by a reliable source that the figure is much higher. It's not only Hindus but also Muslims falling into this trap. Conversion here is done in a very peacockish manner. The preachers approach you any which way. My mother experienced this, but she told them to get lost. They talked to me about healing and read some verses from the Bible. I told them boldly, "I was born as a Hindu, live as a Hindu and will die as a Hindu. I respect every religion, but does that mean I must convert to them? No." My explanation left the preachers speechless and they just walked away. That's what every Hindu should do. Every Hindu must proud of their religion and have a solid understanding of it. Hinduism is a liberal and diverse religion, with many ways to reach God. The younger generation are confused and lost because their parents have little knowledge to pass on to them.

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I am very concerned about this, too. The Christian evangelists are coming by the van loads, descending on all the housing estates. They persistently stand at the gate and force their religious pamphlets on the Hindu residents. They have no regard or respect for Hinduism. My husband and I have been teaching Hinduism for ten years now to children 6 to 17 years of age. In our experience we have discovered that children rapidly absorb the teachings. Many things can be done to educate Hindus: volunteers should start teaching the basics of Hinduism to children in temples; temple committees should create the space for teaching and invite religious teachers to talk to devotees at least once a week on the fundamentals of Hinduism; the Malaysia Hindu Sangam should provide training for school teachers in religion (many teachers would like to do this). With almost 90% of teachers and students in Tamil schools being Hindu, I am sure school heads could provide a

session for teaching religion once a week before school starts.

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Marriages Illegitimate in India?

Refer to "Hindu-non-Hindu Marriages Not Legally Binding in India" (Hindu Press International, Dec 30, 2010, and page 6 here). Does that mean the court has made all children from inter-faith marriages illegitimate? I'm not surprised at the court's opinion. I see some xenophobia and exclusivity in it. I also see this at temples sometimes. I see it in Indian movies--Anglo-Indian movies, too (think "Bride and Prejudice"). Not that everyone who is Hindu agrees with this court opinion. I consider myself Hindu--I have for the past ten years at least--and I don't agree with it. Other than Indonesia ruling the same thing, I've never heard of any clergy or nation declaring marriages invalid if the couple aren't of the same faith. It seems like it negates the power of the clergy of all faiths in India. Is their ability to marry given power and made legitimate only if it's among members of their faith? Where does this put civil marriages?

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Development in Vrindavan

Today, India is undergoing a tremendous development revolution. The middle class is booming, and many sectors of the population, especially in the cities, are basking in a newfound wealth. This is fuelling a spirit of conspicuous consumption and the conviction that consumerism is the only way to economic development. This means more cars, bigger highways and febrile drivers all looking for somewhere to go. Tourism is regarded as a new magic formula for combating poverty. And Vrindavan, Radha and Krishna's playground, is a Disney World just waiting to be built!

Environmentalists first saw this coming decades ago, but calls for sane

planning--that would have preserved green spaces, the Yamuna flood plains and the ancient ashrams--were ignored. In 2009 came a shock: UP Chief Minister Sushri Mayawati proclaimed her "dream project" to develop Vrindavan; she ordered the Parikrama Marg widened and "beautified." Cash began flowing; ancient trees were chopped down by the hundreds. The crowning desecration was the construction of a bypass over the sacred Yamuna, directly in front of the picturesque Keshi Ghat. The monstrous structure would turn the holy path into a ring road for funneling vehicle traffic in and out of Vrindavan. Tourists could now take drive-through darshan at the major temples and be back in Delhi by night. Bathers in the Yamuna would take darshan of concrete pillars and traffic.

Lovers of Vrindavan despaired: was Vrindavan to be turned into an urban jungle like Delhi or Mumbai? Was it destined to become a museum of petrified religiosity for tourists to gawk at? Fortunately, construction of the bypass was stopped by the Archeological Survey of India; but the spirit of uncontrolled development continues unabated.

The vocation of Vrindavan continues to be under attack. It is time India thinks carefully how to develop its holy places in a sustainable way. They are meant to be reserves for the spiritually minded. They need protection from the destructive steamroller of crude materialism. Time is short. The voices of India's holy men and women, indeed of all Hindus of vision, must make themselves heard before it is too late.

Jagadananda Das

Rishikesh, Uttarakhand, India

Salvific Exclusivity

Three Abrahamic faiths, Christianity, Islam and Judaism, carry the exclusivist monotheistic belief that there is only one way to the heaven and that it is theirs. Here, a proud Hindu, Pooja, and honest McKenna had open discussion based on what they have learned from their families and religious institutions ("Debating the Merits of Our Two Religions," Oct/Nov/Dec 2010). Unfortunately, youths in college do not openly express their personal feelings from the fear of being labeled as intolerant.

My research shows that 38% of Hindus, Sikhs and Jains (Dharmics) marry to Abrahamics in America. Many times an exclusivist Abrahamic cannot tolerate a Dharmic in married life, and they expect religious conversion before marriage or ask for the promise to raise their children in his or her faith only. After years of being in a romantic relationship, reluctantly accepting the religious conversion may be the only way left for a Dharmic to avert marital grid-lock. All young adults in relationships with Abrahamics should proactively find out whether their intended spouse is truly tolerant.

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Corrections

Julia Roberts's name was misspelled "Julie" in "Global Dharma: I Am a Hindu" (Jan/Feb/Mar, 2011).

In "Thai Pusam: Honoring the God of Yoga" (Apr/May/Jun 2010), we incorrectly stated that, at Batu Caves, the utsava murti is carried to the Murugan shrine inside the cave. It is placed in a separate hall in the caves, remaining there for three days of special pujas before returning to the Sri Mahamariamman Temple.

Dispensing Scriptures' Gold

How to help light find its way to peoples' hearts

I had the good fortune to grow up surrounded by holy books and by people who loved them," Mr. Asan Tejwani recalls of his early life in Sindh. His fondness for scripture has remained with him and given him a passion for gyan daan, the giving of holy books and sharing of words of wisdom.

Asan moved to the USA in 1964, worked in structural engineering, then in financial services, and is retired today. When he is not traveling (which he does a great deal of), he participates in charitable activities, maintains an e-mail list to whom he sends daily inspired messages and--as ever--gives away lots and lots of books.

"I have given thousands of them to libraries and individuals," he explains, "including hundreds of books by Gurudeva (founder of Hinduism Today), and thousands of Hinduism Today's history lessons. It is my constant and blessed sacrifice. You never know when a holy word will find its way to someone's heart."

In Hinduism Today Asan has found a fellow dispenser of teachings. "The magazine has picked up the spirit of Swami Vivekananda, articulating the Hindu renaissance in a way that welcomes, includes and uplifts everyone, showing the divine essence of us all. It is inclusivist, not exclusivist. This is gold."

Mr. Tejwani has given generously to the Hinduism Today Production Fund, which is a part of Hindu Heritage Endowment. Recently, he has also made it a beneficiary in his estate plan. "I want to do all I can to help the magazine reach as many people as possible. It is our generation's duty to fortify this fund so the magazine stays strong for 1,000 years, no matter what the world goes through. Each of us can give one dollar a day and be a give-365. Let's do it!"

If, like Mr. Tejwani, you are enthusiastic to help Hinduism Today dispense the gold it contains, please consider donating to the Hinduism Today Production Fund or including in your estate plan. Read about the fund at www.hheonline.org/productionfund.

Subscribe to the Production Fund e-newsletter at: www.gurudeva.org/email-news

Ask for our Planned Giving Toolkit by contacting one of our monastic staff at 1-808-634-5407 or hhe@hindu.org.