

[Letters](#)

Category : [July/August/September 2011](#)

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Letters

Best Issue Ever

This issue of Hinduism Today is the best, most inspiring issue ever! The cover story on Bharat Sevashram Sangha--completely ignored by Western media while they doted on Mother Teresa--is a great revelation, seeing all the seva they are doing from such pure beginnings. In the back of my mind had been the doubt, "If moksha and reaching God is the goal of all life, why are so few interested in it?" In this issue, here they are! They have always been here, but just didn't get much press. The feature article on "Our Sacred Earth" will ignite Hindu spirits worldwide, as this makes the obvious-but-heretofore-unspoken connection between ancient dharma and current needs of the planet. I know from time to time I've written exulting "best issue ever;" that's because you continue to outdo the past with each succeeding gem of a magazine.

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I am very much impressed by the contents of Hinduism Today, which are selected with a view to enlighten the people who have only a limited understanding of Hinduism. By publishing well-researched articles, you are rendering valuable service to the Hindu brethren. Keep it up.

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Bharat Sevashram Sangha

We are extremely happy to receive the issue of Hinduism Today featuring an

article about us ("India: At Her Service," Apr/May/Jun 2011) on Shivaratri day when we were celebrating a three-day-long Hindu Dharma Sanskriti Sammelan, which saints and sevaks, educators and culturalists as well as 500 monks from around our organization attended. Each was given a copy of the magazine, and all praised the interest shown by you. We are very much obliged to the editors, who showed an extra interest in our activities.

Swami Biswatmananda
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Thank you for your article on Bharat Sevasram Sangha with whom our family has been connected for generations. My maternal grandfather, the late Girindra Nath Roy Chowdhury, a well known lawyer-activist of Indian independence movement, was a neighbor of Swami Pranavananda Maharaj in their native Faridpur District, now Madaripur, and they knew each other. We have grown up seeing Bharat Sevashram reaching door to door helping the destitute after floods, draughts, cyclones, tornados, in refugee camps, during riots and pogroms.

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Amma's Golden Temple

Thank you for the front cover dedication to Amma's Golden Temple (Jan/Feb/Mar 2011). I have been a devotee of Narayani Amma since 1999 and have witnessed first-hand the miracles which are occurring in South India under Amma's blessing. Although your article initially focused on the Golden Temple, I was pleased to see your description of the humanitarian and service programs. With Amma's blessing one of the most impoverished areas of southern India now has healthcare, food and education. The lives of thousands of people have been transformed. I have visited Sri Puram yearly since its consecration and I continue to marvel at the transformation of individuals as they walk the star path, listening to Vedic chants and reading messages of universal truth. I wish this experience for all human beings.

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Salvific Exclusivity

Regarding the letter by Dilip Amin in the Apr/May/Jun 2011 issue, the writer is 100 percent wrong when he says that Judaism teaches that there is only one way to salvation. On the contrary, the Talmud states, "the righteous of all nations have a share in the world to come." Not only that, Judaism teaches that most all of us will get there.

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Religion, Laws and Sexuality

In the August 2010 ruling which overturned California's Proposition 8 banning same-sex marriage, a witness asserted, "Religion is the chief obstacle for gay and lesbian political progress." Why does religion play such a central role in debates about homosexuality?

The first question that should to be addressed is "What functions do sex and sexuality play in our lives?" For many people, these have central roles that influence nearly every other aspect of their lives. For many others, they are relatively minimal. The second question is the more problematic one, at least for religious minded people: "What determines if and when sex is a good or a bad activity?"

Within the Hindu tradition, two of the key criteria for determining whether or not an activity is right or wrong are: 1) Does the activity cause anyone harm? and 2) Can the activity bring one closer to realization of the divine?

Add to this the belief that most Hindus hold the concept "live and let live." The result is a general tolerance for a wide range of lifestyles and forms of loving and

living. Of course, not all Hindus are unanimous on this point. Nevertheless, most Hindus understand that focusing on one's own lifestyle and actions is far more important and necessary for spiritual growth than worrying about what others are doing. There are far more important issues and individuals with which religious minded people should be concerned, such as those who choose to hate and perpetuate violence.

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The Mauritian Spiritual Park

When I read the article "The Mauritian Miracle" (Jul/Aug/Sep 2010) by Vel Mahalingum, I felt a sudden urge to revisit that beautiful island nation in the Indian Ocean I had been to 22 years ago. My wish was fulfilled when I was recently invited to participate with an 82-person contingent from Malaysia to promote social and cultural ties between our two countries. During our trip, I requested a newly made friend to take me to the Spiritual Park. After driving for an hour through sugarcane fields and hamlets, a large sign for the park suddenly emerged. Walking into the park, there He was, our famous Lord Ganesha gazing at us as if in anticipation of our visit. He was huge, His five faces gazing at all sides of his seven-acre domain. After washing our feet, we collected some flowers from the garden and placed them at His feet. I sat down at Lord Ganesha's feet and began chanting mantras, then went silent in meditation for several minutes. The park itself was well-maintained, with lots of pine trees, coconut and lychee fruit trees. Clusters of bamboo and flower plants adorned the park. After spending about two hours there, my friends and I left the park with enlightened hearts, the spiritual vibrations so pleasing that I said to myself that I would one day come back to visit this enchanting place. Thank you, Gurudeva, for your great contribution to the people of Mauritius.

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USA, Barely a Christian Nation

An increasing number of Americans are identifying with Eastern spiritual religious practices. Just consider the growing popularity of yoga, meditation, tai chi, qigong. According to a Pew Forum Research poll, a whopping 24 percent of American

Christians believe in reincarnation, a foundational concept in Hinduism. Even more striking is this: the same Pew Forum poll discovered 65 percent of American Christians believe that "many religions can lead to eternal life." Included in that group were 37 percent of evangelical Christians who, in the past, argued fervently that salvation is through Jesus Christ alone. Again, the idea that there are many paths to God is a foundational Hindu principle as outlined in their scripture, the Rig Veda: "Truth is one, but sages speak of it by many names."

It seems that though America is a Christian nation, it is only barely so. More and more evidence continues to present itself that Christianity is losing its grip on many Americans. Why is this? Why are traditional Christians in America embracing Eastern spiritual philosophies in ever growing numbers? The answer is not complex: they're tired of rigid theologies which separate people and suspicious of doctrines which are an affront to reasonable thought.

They are drawn to Eastern thought because practices such as yoga and meditation can give them a spiritual life without the baggage of Christian theology and doctrine. In the East, the spiritual approach is to harmonize, while in the West, Christianity has sought to categorize: the "saved" and the "unsaved." In the East, they have spiritual teachers whose role is to expand consciousness. In the West, Christianity has theologians who define and therefore confine. Christianity places the focus on differences. Hindus are comfortable with multiple viewpoints of truth, all facets of the same Ultimate Reality. Christianity has a much lower tolerance for differing viewpoints, declaring that there is but one truth, the one preached by Christians.

Given the corner which Christianity has painted itself into, it is not surprising that the number of Americans who say they are "spiritual but not religious" (meaning they don't attend Christian churches) continues to grow. A recent Newsweek poll (2009) revealed that 30 percent of Americans define themselves that way, up from 24 percent in 2005. As more Americans discover the openness of Eastern spiritual paths, it's a number which will continue to grow.

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Are Paths Many?

I read with revulsion the letter to the editor "Are Paths Many?" (Jul/Aug/Sep 2010) where a Christian attempted to berate Hindus and Hinduism Today for daring to be both pluralist and proud of being Hindu. At one point he stated that he doesn't believe that "Truth is One, paths are many" and said that this does not make him intolerant. Actually, it does indeed. The concept of religious exclusivism is indeed the central point from which all religious intolerance emanates.

Belief in the validity of other religions as spiritual pathways does not mean that they are "identical," as he put it. A phrase that I have come to use as a personal motto is "The only false religions are those that believe in the existence of false religions." While not all Christians believe that their religion is the only "true" religion and all others are "false," I cannot respect that kind of intolerance any more than I can respect racism.

The writer's attempt to cleverly disguise his intolerance should not be overlooked or tolerated. He can claim he respects Hinduism and this magazine all he wants, but it is apparent that such is not the case.

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A Steady Flow of Grace

Helping families and youth to reconnect

It all began when a member of the Krishnans' extended family discovered Hinduism Today about 20 years ago. Very gradually, one by one, sisters, uncles, husbands, nephews, grandparents, nieces, sons and daughters also began reading and appreciating the magazine, a process still going on today. "It has reconnected us with our Hindu faith," concludes Mrs. Sakuntalai Krishnan, a supervisor in Singapore's police department. Mr. Krishnan is a retired executive for Shell Oil.

In 2001, ten members of the family pilgrimaged together to Hinduism Today's home in Hawaii, there to meet the founder, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami.

"Previously, our religious life consisted of periodic elation, following some talk or event, which would soon die down. Then we'd start all over again," explained Mrs. Krishnan. "But Hinduism Today comes to us on a regular basis, bringing new knowledge with each issue, gradually making the big picture clearer. It is our constant flow of grace."

"Because we all have the same inner understandings, our family finds it easier to be of one mind. Whenever something comes up, we don't worry, knowing we'll find a good solution soon enough. We feel fortunate and each time we meet someone who's likely to appreciate the magazine, we give him or her a copy, or we'll share a quote from it."

The Krishnans have given generously to the Hinduism Today Production Fund, which is a part of Hindu Heritage Endowment. "It is our thank-you. We want the magazine to help other families as it has helped ours. We are happy to see Hinduism Today's growing presence in digital media, which captivates youth. We saw this first-hand with our son Vasaant, who has taken a keen interest in the magazine publisher's presentations on the web."

If, like the Krishnans, you would like to contribute to the upliftment of families and youth, please consider donating to the Hinduism Today Production Fund or including it 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