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PUBLISHER'S DESK

Hinduism: the Original Humanism

A critical examination of secular humanism and Hindu humanism for youth immersed in the academic atheism of college

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MODERN UNIVERSITIES ARE MOLDING the minds of our youth in ways parents might not expect. This is because reason and science dominate the learning at higher

institutions, pushing religion to the side, an understandable but limiting academic strategy. Even if a professor has strong personal religious convictions, the rules of the institution (with the notable exception of religious universities) do not allow him or her to share these beliefs, or their intellectual implications, with students. The result: the atheistic/agnostic values of secular humanism have been enshrined as the default icons of mainstream education.

Many Hindu youths leave home for college as good Hindus but, after studying the typical subjects through an anti-religious bias, come back doubting the existence of God, the Gods, the inner worlds, life after death and the mystical teachings of their parents' faith. I have heard graduates explain to their parents, as did a young man recently, "We are trained in school to follow the scientific method and to question everything. I no longer believe in God because there is no scientific proof of God's existence." Steeped in the university's atheistic ambience, these youth have essentially converted from Hinduism to secular humanism. Universities, being equal-opportunity institutions, have the same affect on unsuspecting adherents of all faiths. Jewish students return home more unbelieving, Catholics turn more liberal and Muslims become strangers to their born religion.

Gurudeva was confronted by this issue nearly three decades ago. In response, he directed his swamis to compose a summary of the beliefs of this school of thought along with three other atheistic viewpoints (materialism, existentialism and communism). He published the results in *Dancing with Siva*. He realized how important it is for students to know the belief systems of Western thought and doctrine, for they permeate and color most university subjects. I have been asked by youth and parents how we can reconcile Hinduism with secular humanism. Hence, on pages 12-13 I have prepared a Hindu counterpoint to each of the nine secular humanist beliefs.

In its search for meaning and value in life, secular humanism (or simply Humanism, the uppercase term adherents prefer) views the world through the lens of reason and science alone. Its concepts of morality have a purely rational, nonspiritual basis as well.

In 2002 the International Humanist and Ethical Union issued the Amsterdam Declaration as their official defining statement: "Humanism is a democratic and ethical life stance which affirms that human beings have the right and responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives. It stands for the building of a more

humane society through an ethic based on human and other natural values in the spirit of reason and free inquiry through human capabilities. It is not theistic, and it does not accept supernatural views of reality.â

To help Hindu students cope with the overwhelming influence of secular humanism, I suggest that Hinduism is the original and most humanistic philosophy of all. It has everything that humanism has and much more.



teens to have the experience of participating in service projects on a regular basis. Fortunately, many temples organize such service projects. If there are no Hindu projects in your area, then expand the search into the general community for activities related to improving the environment, disaster relief, or providing clothes, food and care for the needy.

What are some of the other key differences between these two forms of humanism? While secular humanism glorifies reason as king, Hinduism knows it to be but one source of knowing. What the former denounces as superstition the latter reveres as mystical experience. While secular humanism says there is no afterlife, the Hindu believes that each and every soul under-takes many lifetimes on the planet. He understands the wisdom in this cycle of birth, death and rebirth and seeks to do well enough in this life to earn entry to a high-minded family in the next. The knowledge of reincarnation eliminates the fear of death and, coupled with the law of karma, explains the diversity of human experience. In an ironic twist, the current frontiers of university science, not the old school, are deeply immersed in studies on nonlocal consciousness (read soul and reincarnation), nonmaterialism of the cosmos (the darling of quantum physics) and awareness in plants and even inert matter. So, a century from now some of this conflict may be moot.

Gurudeva spoke of how Hinduism brings forth the wonderful feelings of a belief in the cosmic processes of reincarnation coupled with knowledge of the laws of karma and the wisdom of dharma in which everyone has his rightful place and purpose in life. It brings the broadmindedness of total acceptance of all other religions as expressions of the One God's creation, the blessing of a complete devotional path revolving around powerful temples, the fulfillment of a profound mystical teaching founded on yoga and brought forth by the seers and saints and gurus, and so much more. Our religion is so strong, so rich and varied that very few can claim to understand it in its completeness. It is immense, an immense religion, so immense that we have difficulty sometimes explaining it to those who hold to a simpler doctrine.

With their understanding of the workings of the three worlds, Hindus also have the joy of pilgrimage, setting aside worldly concerns and journeying to sacred places at auspicious times for special blessings. Gurudeva explained, "Unlike the proud free thinkers who deem themselves emancipated, above the religious life, we Hindus feel that receiving the darshan from the Gods and the help that comes therein invigorates our being and inspires us to be even more diligent in our spiritual life. Unlike the rationalists who feel confident that within themselves lie all the resources to meet all needs, and that praying to Gods for help is a pathetic

4 Being Good Without a God I believe that living a good, moral life is the best means for individual and collective happiness and that morality has a rational, secular basis.

5 Protecting Human Rights I believe in expanding human rights and intellectual and moral freedom, and in secular democracy, with strict separation of church and state, as the means of eliminating discrimination and attaining equality and justice for all.

- 6 Education & Free Inquiry I believe in the development of the creative human potential through education in the arts and sciences and in the paramount importance of free inquiry in an open, pluralistic, universalist society.
- 7 Relying Solely on Reason I believe in the application and development of reason and modern science as the highest means to understanding the universe, solving human problems and enabling each individual to realize his greatest potential.

- 8 Focus on this Life;
Disbelief in an
Afterlife I believe in
striving for
fulfillment and
happiness in this
life and reject all
notions of
reincarnation and
afterlife as false
and baseless,
seeking my fullest
capacity as a
human being here
and now, serving
others and creating
a better, more just
world.
- 9 Belief in
Reincarnation I believe in Darwin's
theory of evolution
as scientific fact,
and in naturalism,
holding that the
known world is all
that exists, and that
it has no
supernatural or
spiritual creation,
control or
significance.

And a Hindu Counterpoint:

- 1 Strong Faith In God I believe in a one, all-pervasive Supreme Being who is both immanent and transcendent, both Creator and Unmanifest Reality. Great souls have testified to their personal experiences of the God, whose existence is affirmed by scriptures.

- 2 Respect for Religions I believe that the world's religions are based upon valid transcendental experiences of the Divine. I believe that no particular religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others, but that all genuine religious paths are facets of God's pure love and light, deserving tolerance and understanding.
- 3 The Sacredness of All I believe in the sacredness of life, which includes the vast cosmos in all its manifestations, and thus in the preservation of the Earth and all its species, and in the value of spiritual luminaries working with and advising secular leaders in matters of government.

- 6 Knowledge & Freedom I believe there is a profound reservoir of human karma and capability that gives rise to creativity, art, science and indeed all forms of knowing and that people will unfold these best when given unfettered freedom of thought and inquiry.
- 7 Relying on Reason & Superconsciousness I believe that a full comprehension of the universe requires the partnership of superconsciousness and religious tradition with reason and science, and that there is no inherent conflict between the two.

