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Religious Leaders On the Road

Traveling Pundits Advise Hindus in Trying Times

Hindus around the world are facing great challenges in changing times, especially in maintaining a religious life amid the attractions of today's rampant materialism. HINDUISM TODAY asked some of India's prominent spiritual leaders, recently passing through the USA on lecture tours, to assess and advise Hindus around the world concerning spiritual problems, challenges and aspirations. Featured in this issue are the observations of three of these pundits. Swami Pragyanand is the founder of Pragma Mission International and extolls sun worship primarily with the Gayatri mantram. Sri Jyotishacharya Ramakrishna Shasty is the founder of the Sri Shuka Foundation and is an astrologer/nadi palm leaf shastra reader following the tradition of Sage Shuka. Yogiraj Vethathiri Maharishi is the founder of the World Community Service Centre and is a yogi following the South Indian Siddha Tradition.

HINDUISM TODAY: What advice do you have for Hindus living inside and outside India?

Pragyanand: Truth is Universal. Truth is for everyone, whether they are living inside India or outside India. I would suggest to all Hindus that if they can protect their culture, their culture will protect them. Culture means, "Live and let live." Civilization means eat, drink and be merry. In other words, culture means what we are, and civilization means what we have. We have to protect the are, and then the have will be automatically taken care of. People in the West are followers of Darwin. They say that we are the son of monkey, and the eastern culture says that we are the son of God. So, there is a tug-of-war between eastern culture and western civilization. What we need now is the "Atmic" research, not the atomic research. Civilization cannot give peace, and neither can the scientific research. My advice to everyone is to practice the Universal Truths enshrined in our great Indian culture. These truths are the Yamas and Niyamas. The Yamas are: non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, celibacy and unselfishness. The Niyamas are: cleanliness, contentment, austerity, study and worship of God.

Shasty: The greatest message of Hinduism is harmony. Hinduism is a structure beyond structures. Its purpose is to help one to get enlightenment. For this, harmony is very important. This message is the same for the Hindu in India and the Hindu outside India. However, Hindus outside India must live in a multi-cultural society where greater understanding and greater support is required from spiritual institutions in order to achieve enlightenment. So the main message of Hinduism is that the whole world is one family. Let no one be unhappy on the face of the earth. May all of our actions be in this direction so that we can be better Hindus and better citizens of the world.

Vethathiri: In Hinduism there are two methods of living. They are: 1.) The bhakti marga which is faith. 2.) The jnana marga which is the enlightened state of consciousness. I am teaching the Jnana Marga through the Simplified Kundalini Yoga System which consists of four processes: meditation, introspection, sublimation and perfection.

HT: What is the most significant problem facing Hindus today, and what will be their biggest challenge in the 1990's?

Pragyanand: The biggest problem today is that we are not united. In other religions, people are regular in their prayers and religious involvement, but most Hindus are not. We have so many thousands of sects that we cannot even sit together, we cannot eat together, we cannot pray together. The Vedas say: "Sing together and go together." But now we are not following the Vedic principles in our day-to-day life. That is why we are divided. Hinduism has a very rich heritage, but one must know and follow it in day-to-day life. This is the greatest challenge that we have to meet. If we can do this, then within ten years - not with the efforts of any political or religious movement, but with the grace of God and the devotion of devotees - India will resume its lost title of the Jagatguru, the spiritual master of the world.

Shasty: The main challenge of the Hindus today is to maintain their cultural identity and use this identity to achieve enlightenment. Hinduism has the greatest potential and is the most scientific religion in the world today. That is why the Hindu should find the scientific significance for all of his Hindu practices. The greatest challenge in the 1990's will be to put across the Hindu teachings in a thoroughly non-denominational way so that even others of all cultures can respect the teachings of Hinduism in their universal and timeless significance. Only in this

way will the Hindu message address all of humanity, and the Hindu message is for all of humanity. The teachings of Hinduism are nondenominational, universal and timeless. Achieving this type of communication will be the greatest challenge of the 1990's. The 1990's will be the decade to overcome nuclear annihilation by achieving universal brotherhood. But only by understanding of the Vedic teachings can this necessary harmony between nations be achieved.

Vethathiri: Most of the religious teachers or leaders are not fully developed in the Realization of the Truth. Therefore, they are obstructing the people from getting enlightenment of consciousness through inner travel. Even though some people are deserving, they are suppressed in the Bhakti Marga. We cannot predict any challenge for the next ten years as we have not yet found the defects and planned for proper action.

HT: What is the greatest spiritual quality a man may possess?

Pragyanand: Divine Wisdom and unflinching faith in God. These may be attained through recitation of Gayatri Mantra and sun worship. Through the recitation of Gayatri Mantra our intellect is guided to the right path. But we must be regular, definite and unflinching in our practice. In fact, the power of mantras is based upon regular, definite and continuous practice. I want to conclude by saying that we are not supposed to kill our conscience, because our conscience is our best friend and is the inseparable entity of the Supreme Being in all beings.

Shasty: Hinduism and the Vedic principles teach that basically the human consciousness is perfect. It is only because of ignorance, desire and selfishness that things seem imperfect. For a Hindu it is very easy to get enlightened, because the light is already there inside himself. It is only the ignorance that keeps him from getting enlightened. So, it is only a process of cleaning the house and calling it a perfect home. Today we see that all of the spiritual schools are orienting their teachings to this fundamental truth.

Vethathiri: The greatest spiritual quality a man may possess is Realization of God-Truth-Consciousness-Self and the three virtues of morality, duty and charity. Only these spiritual qualities will make one respect the needs and ambitions of others and restrict one's activities accordingly.

HT: What has been your greatest challenge and your greatest reward in your work as a spiritual teacher?

Pragyanand: My greatest challenge has been trying to help people who have spoiled their minds and bodies with non-vegetarian diet and artificial living. We are what we eat and drink. There is a direct link between the food and thought. We have a saying: "As you eat, so you think. As you drink, so you speak." So, we have to go back to nature. By birth, human beings are vegetarian. When they eat meat they have to face so many mental, physical and emotion problems. Why do the wild animals require no medical assistance? Because they are living naturally, they are not breaking nature's laws. If we want to make our body a holy shrine or temple to God, we must make it clean. Cleanliness is next to Godliness. I firmly believe that vegetarianism is the first and basic requirement for securing global peace. Kindness and non-violence is the supreme religion.

Shasty: The greatest challenge has been to put across the teachings of Vedas and Hinduism with a scientific approach. And also presenting it to a multi-cultural group that does not have the understanding of the basic teachings of Hinduism. Hinduism is not based in belief; it is based in consciousness and knowledge. So I have been trying to present it in a scientific format that all cultures can understand, which is beyond any belief system. All of the Vedic teachings can be brought out from point zero just like the rishis did in ancient times. Even the most uninformed person in the world can be taught the Vedic principles and achieve enlightenment. My greatest reward has been watching others receive this enlightenment. This has been my greatest joy.

Vethathiri: So far I have taught thousands of people the science of living with a clear understanding of God, life, bio-magnetism and the extended activities of consciousness. So that all of the above phenomena are easily understood by all spiritual aspirants, I have brought out the Theory of Unified Force and Karma Yoga.

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