

[Five Secrets to Make Your Movement a Succe\\$\\$](#)

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Five Secrets to Make Your Movement a Succe\$\$

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Warning! This is a tough editorial. Readers who feel squeamish about controversy or satire should turn the page now. Those who stay will find we feel sufficiently betrayed to speak about things which should be observed somewhere but which should be observed somewhere but which remain, so far, a dark secret that no one has ever whispered in public - Hindu intolerance.

From your letters it's clear that many readers share our love of Hinduism's open-mindedness toward other paths, other expressions of spirituality. Admit it. You always thought of the Sanatana Dharma as tolerant, seeing the Divine in its many guises, possessing a cosmic overview that rises above conflicting dogmas. You took pride in the Vedic affirmation that "Truth is one, paths are many." To be candid, you sometimes felt a little smug that the My-Way-is-the-Only-Way syndrome, so prevalent in other faiths, was graciously absent in yours. Or so you thought.

In the past few months it has become painfully clear to us that Hinduism can be an insular and narrow-minded as the next religion. The good news is that the great majority of Hindus don't suffer from the MWOW syndrome. The bad news is that a growing number of groups do. Witness the followers of Sri Aurobindo near Madras. The official creed for the '90s is that theirs is the only true and illumined yoga. All others yogas are mere preparations, all other seekers are doomed to a lesser attainment, all other masters are a few chakras shy of Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950). Such was not Aurobindo's style.

Elsewhere, longtime TM meditators are inching toward a similar attitude. There is a growing sense - at least in the 2500-strong community in Fairfield, Iowa - of

us-versus-them. Those inside the community are perceived as saved and those outside as lost in maya. Sound familiar? Certain leaders, a definite minority, have become "as dogmatic as any born-again Christian" and "witch-hunts" have been instituted to purge popular influences such as channeling, healing, etc. Old-timers remember more sublime days when Mahesh Maharishi was there, and they have told us they fear his six-year absence (since 1984) is leading to a hardening of the doctrine and a narrowing of tolerance for other spiritual traditions and possibilities.

Novice devotees of Krishna sometimes show they have a fair share of what the street-wise call attitude. Not only is Krishna the only Supreme God, every other deity is reduced to a demigod. Chaitanya is the chosen world savior, non-Hare Krishna karmis are lost souls, one and all.

From the above, you might judge that we don't like followers of Aurobindo, Maharishi and Krishna. Not so. We love them all, respect them, admire their genuine dedication and discipline. But we can't admire the tendency, once we have found our path, to denigrate others. True spirituality softens the heart, never hardens it. In coming closer to the Divine, we never draw farther away from our fellow man and woman. I say all this to point out the obviously pan-humanic tendency to limit God's good work and purpose to one path, and to urge Hindus to resist the urge to adopt this view. It is not necessary to degrade another's chosen way in order to prove our love and commitment to our own. It is perfectly possible, not to mention enlightened, to cherish our path and our relationship with God without diminishing the next person's. This has always been the highest Hindu way, and hopefully will continue to be so. Just as there will never be one medicine for every human ailment, so there will never be one spiritual path for every seeker. Nor should we hope for that. Bottom line: We are intolerant of intolerance.

What could be the cause of all this? Perhaps western disciples needing to let everyone know how much they love their adopted path? Or perhaps when an institution gets to be fairly large (as the above three are) there arises a need to secure the castle? Then again, it may be part of the pre-millennium fever. It's been a thousand years since we last went through this rite of passage. It is a time when new religions multiply and old ones get a bit mercurial. The last time this happened, in 990, Europe went collectively berserk, prophets proliferated and heathens converted to Christianity (just in case the world did end at midnight on the last day in the year 999 as many feared). Now it's our turn to be present at the new millennium and to participate in what one observer called "an avalanche of nuttiness." Many of our readers will no doubt be planning to take full advantage of this rare opportunity to start their own religious movement. I have studied this

carefully, taking copies notes of what works out and what washes out. So before you apply for federal tax-exempt status, before you write that first corrupter, commit these secrets to memory. I offer them with a wry smile, but also with utmost seriousness as part of our reflections on the MWOW syndrome.

Secret Number 1: Remember, Yours is the One and Only True and God-Inspired Path. This is important. If you wish to be moderately successful, it is sufficient to quietly claim yours as the path of choice and to confess that other paths may have merits too. Always use the disclaimer may, in case you later opt to upgrade to the next level.

Secret Number 2: For a movement that will bring in big bucks, the Mercedes and a spot on the Johnny Carson Show, it is necessary to add that you are the One they have all been waiting for. They will understand. Be clear that no other teacher can take them as far or as fast. Describe how in each age there is a one Avatar, Messiah, Prophet of God and Jagadguru, and they should count themselves fortunate to have found him.

Secret Number 3: For a run-away movement that will end up in the history books and fill entire stadiums with admiring devotees, you have to get down and dirty. That's right, you have to reveal that not only is your path Divinely Good, all others are Satanically Bad. Throw in that those who disobey you or leave your movement are doomed to Hell or will be born as a cockroach for 84 million lives and you will enjoy extra security.

Secret Number 4: Some form of millennialism is helpful in keeping everyone on their toes. You may promise a Golden Age, a period of great world peace and prosperity, or you may prefer to intimate that Cosmic Dissolution is near and now would be an auspicious time to get off the wheel of samsara.

Secret Number 5: Become involved in politics, healing or saving the world. It is hard to find people who can think about spiritual things day in and day out - they are a rare breed. So for multinational memberships it is necessary to provide other healthful activities people can throw themselves into and feel good about and forget why they came to you in the first place.

There is a fine, line between being fanatical and dedicated. And there are valid reasons to follow a single path, without distraction and ramification. It's also OK to have pride in one's faith and faith in one's teacher. We should; indeed we must. Done right, this will lead to an embracing of creation and of all mankind, not to animosity, contempt or scorn.

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