

[OUR TURN!](#)

Category : [May 1991](#)

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"Ghosh, I'd love to teach Hindu youth classes, but I'm too busy," drags on the typical excuse of an otherwise hard-working, temple-building flock of first-generation Indian parents. But suddenly their chance is gone. Their kids are now young adults and savvy enough to realize they'd better sort out karma from dharma and yuga from yoga on their own or they'll soon be sending their kids to the local library to learn Hinduism. And that's definitely not "cool."

So a new breed of youth are mining the ancient truths by midnight oil and tooling them into teenage dialects for their peers. Example: Northwestern University student Balu Natarajan, head of Chicago's Ram Sita temple youth group and founder of Om, a Hindu student association on six US campuses.

On March 3rd, this onetime US spelling bee champ spelled out Hindu pride to a crowd of hungry youth at the Hindu Temple of San Antonio, Texas. They flew Balu from Chicago for a two-day visit, gambling that youth listen best to youth. They were right. Balu recalls, "I was a little apprehensive," but nevertheless daringly opened his talk with loud music from British rock group Sting - "Be yourself, no matter what they say." Even the old guard nodded as Balu beelined further into the teens' minds, telling them that being Hindu and American were not mutually exclusive. His informal moments with them were the richest.

He shared a story about reciting the Gayatri mantra daily for 40 days - a daily ritual he has often neglected - and how, just as a priest had predicted, he received a boon on the final day. A teenage girl confided with him: "We've had many swamis come, but you were our best speaker because you were less philosophical and more practical."

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