

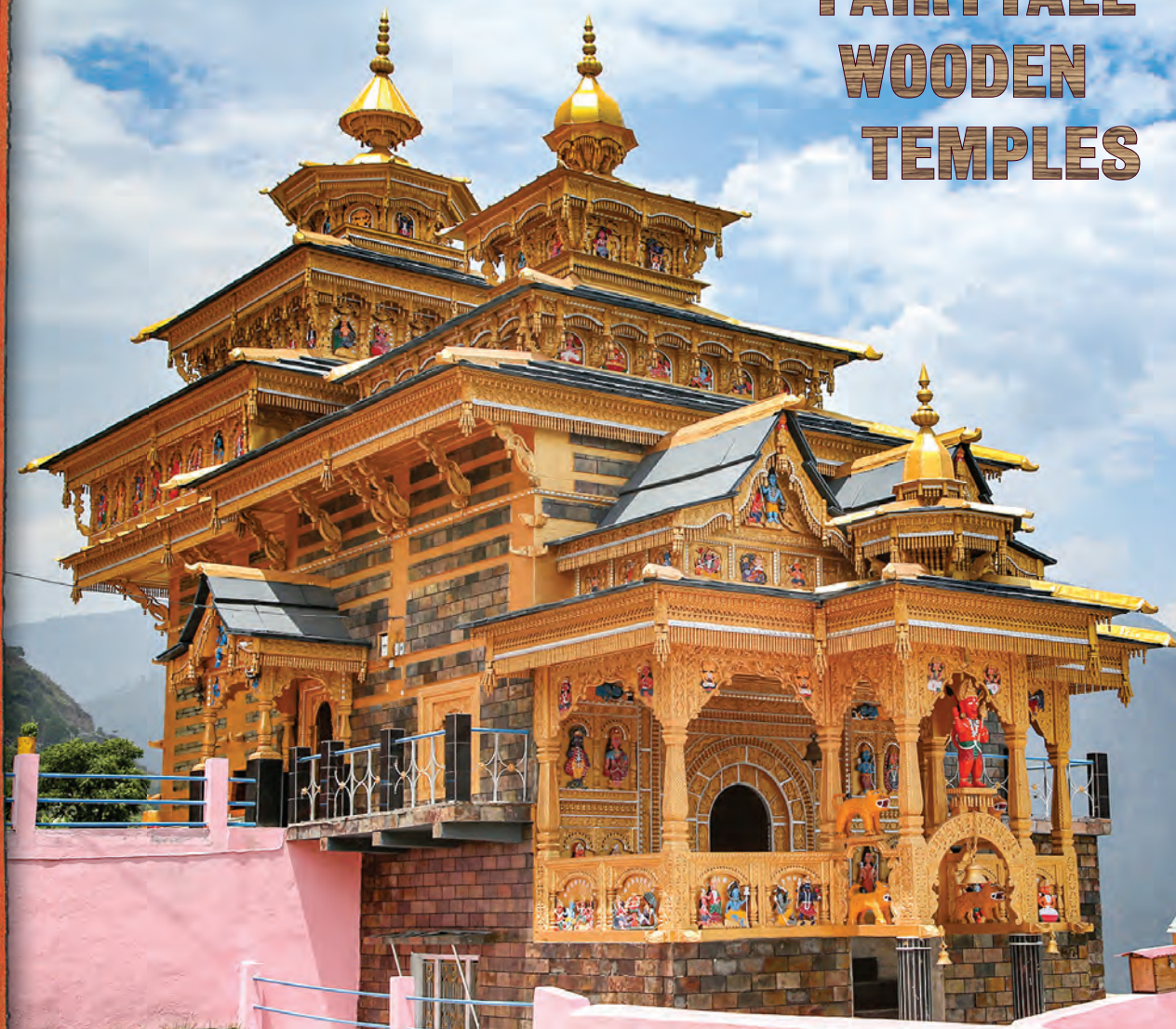
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HINDUISM TODAY

Affirming Sanatana Dharma and Recording the Modern History of a Billion-Strong Global Religion in Renaissance



HIMALAYA'S FAIRYTALE WOODEN TEMPLES



SHUTTERSTOCK



(Cover) Sherkudiya Maharaj temple in Raygi village, between the Tons and Yamuna rivers in the Himalayas is a stunning example of the complex woodwork used in temples of this area; (above) girl lights oil lamps as part of her family's celebration of the Diwali festival

APRIL/MAY/JUNE, 2022 • The Hindu Year Śubhakṛta, 5124 • शुभकृत

Bodhinatha Veylanswami

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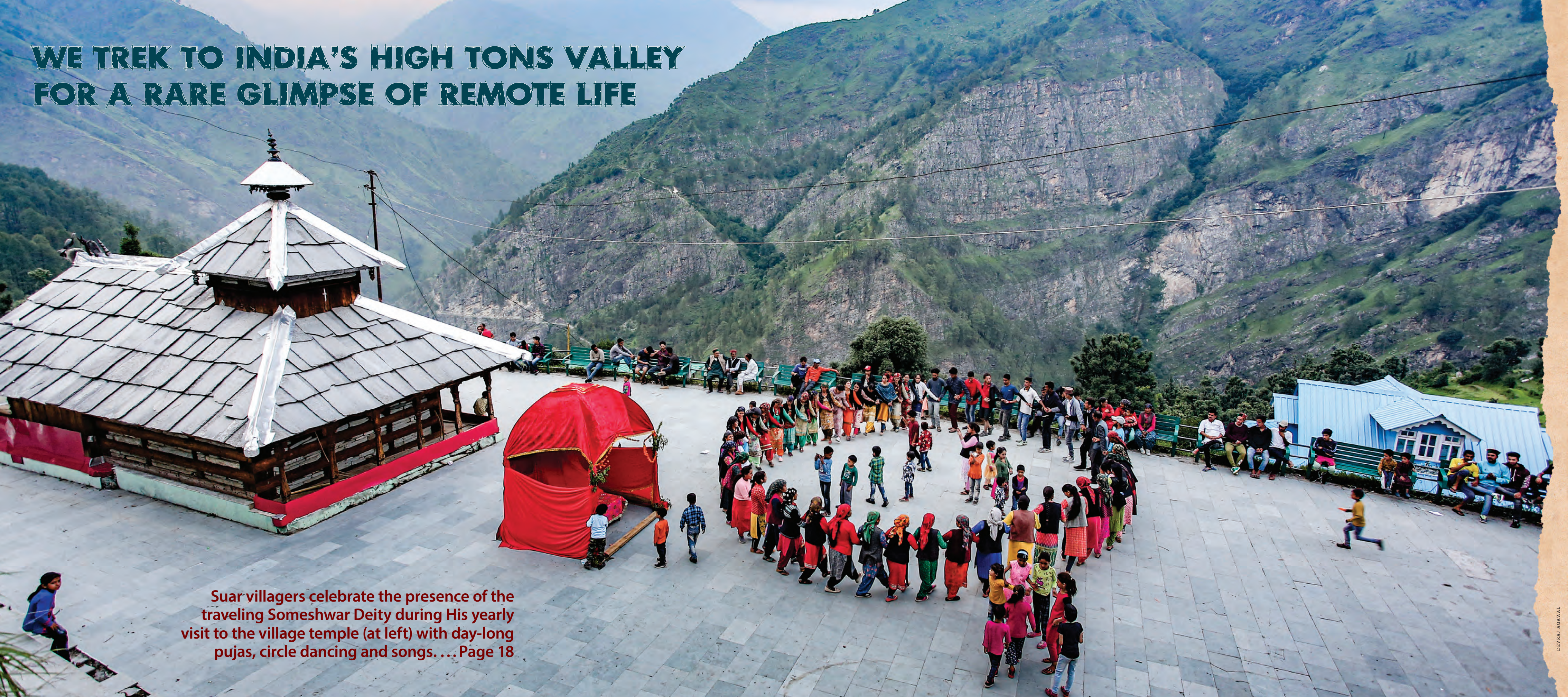
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WE TREK TO INDIA'S HIGH TONS VALLEY FOR A RARE GLIMPSE OF REMOTE LIFE



Suar villagers celebrate the presence of the traveling Someshwar Deity during His yearly visit to the village temple (at left) with day-long pujas, circle dancing and songs.... Page 18

GLOBAL DHARMA

INDONESIA

Java's Prambanan Temple Is Rededicated after 1,163 Years

HINDUS ACROSS INDONESIA turned up in large numbers for a special abhisheka ceremony performed at Prambanan Temple November 12, 2021, according to a report in [opindia.com](#). The ritual, preceded by two days of preparatory rites, was held to clean and purify the temple site for the first time in 1,163 years.

"Prambanan," explains archaeologist Manggar Sarl Ayuati, "is one of the largest Hindu temple complexes in Asia, with an enclosed area 390 meters on a side. It was built in 856 by King Rakai Pikatan of the Sanjaya dynasty, which ruled the Mataram Kingdom, and was expanded by later kings. It is dedicated to Siva."

"After we discovered an inscription from the temple's inauguration day—November 12,

856ce—stating what ritual was conducted, we decided to perform the same ritual now," said Made Astra Tanaya, a member of the abhisheka committee.

Prambanan has three concentric courtyards. The innermost contains 16 temples, including the 156-foot-high main temple to Siva and 108-foot temples to Vishnu and Brahma. The second courtyard originally contained 240 small temples. Only 129 have been restored to any degree; the rest are just piles of rocks. No structures remain in the third courtyard. The complex also contains four Buddhist temples.

Prambanan was abandoned in the 10th century, likely when the Mataram kingdom moved due to a volcanic eruption which heavily damaged the temple and surrounding area.



Prambanan: Ceremonies began with ancestor worship including holy water from eleven wellsprings; the innermost courtyard

USA

Nascent Hindu Chaplaincy

WHEN VINEET CHANDER accepted his job as the Hindu chaplain at Princeton University in 2008, students were baffled. "It was incomprehensible to them," said Chander in a report for *Religion News Service*. "I'd have people look at me like, what do you do? This is a full-time job?" Their puzzlement was understandable: Chander, a former prosecutor, was not just the only full-time Hindu chaplain at any place of higher learning at the time; he was the first Hindu in the US ever to fill the role. That was partly due to the small numbers of Hindu students.

Another factor is the title *chaplain* itself. While Hinduism recognizes the idea of spiritual caregiving, chaplaincy traditionally has been associated with Christian ministers and is not

readily translated into a Hindu framework. "Hindus don't often understand what chaplaincy is, and non-Hindus aren't familiar with Hinduism," said Asha

Shipman, director of Hindu life at Yale University.

Universities hire chaplains through outside institutions such as mosques, synagogues and church councils. "Hindus don't have such a resource." In 2020 she and colleagues founded

the North American Hindu Chaplains Association to change that. NAHCA will provide Hindus the theological training currently missing at US seminaries and universities, and develop a process for chaplains who want to become board certified.

Similarly, the Chinmaya International Foundation has two new online courses for training chaplains to serve across settings from hospitals to the military. For queries about these courses, email spiritualcare@chinfo.org. According to Chander, in the US there are now at least five full-time Hindu chaplains in higher education, a dozen or so part-time Hindu chaplains and a much larger number of volunteers and affiliates.

First chaplain: Vineet Chander with students on a learning trip to India; (inset) Chinmaya Mission's program



Mahakaleshwar: Temple officials brief the media on beautifying and expansion work; a mythological scene is depicted behind them

INDIA

Ujjain Temple Campus Swells

A US\$80 MILLION UPGRADE TO THE ANCIENT MAHAKALESHWAR TEMPLE is more than 70% complete, [freepressjournal.in](#) reports. Lord Siva is worshiped here as "Great Time." Land acquisition will increase the temple's area from six acres to 405 and allow for expansion of the main road to 230 feet wide. Security facilities will be greatly improved, and include a watch tower to safeguard the complex. Other additions include a Rudrasagar laser show, electric rickshaws, accessibility ramps, a museum, parking, shoe and food stalls as well as dedicated media facilities. The entire temple, one of twelve Jyotirlinga temples of India, is to be powered by solar panels. New temple facilities will include a shrine with the 108 Tandava dance poses of Siva. After completion, the premises will accommodate 100,000 devotees at a time.

VIDEO

How Netaji's Army Fought for India's Independence in WWII

WHEN INDIAN INDEPENDENCE leader Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose fled for safety to Malaysia during World War II, his presence galvanized second- and third-generation Indian immigrants. "At the Altar of India's Freedom—INA Veterans of Malaysia" is a 30-minute documentary capturing the stories of valor and sacrifice, plus the saga of the Malaysian Indians who, as teenagers, fought for India's freedom with Japanese assistance from the distant lands of Southeast Asia. Many of them had never even seen India.

Created by journalist Choodie Shivaram of Bengaluru and produced by the High Commission of India in Malaysia, the film

became available on YouTube after its debut screening in 2018 at Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.

INA (Indian National Army formed by Netaji) veterans recall the impact that he had on their lives. Shivaram recounted to the *Deccan Herald*, "A woman I spoke to was married only for six months. She and her husband joined the INA and told themselves that they would meet each other if they are alive or it's goodbye." The INA's young women formed the Rani of Jhansi Regiment, which was the first all-woman combat regiment in the world.

Even today, these INA veterans who are nonagenarians continue to live by the lofty ideals of

ARTS

Floor Art Protects the Home

DIWALI IS INCOMPLETE WITHOUT BEAUTIFUL AND CREATIVE rangoli designs, US-based artist Jugnu Verma recently told *The New York Times*. These decorations are usually drawn on the floor at the entry to one's home, often using chalk and colorful powders. They ward off negative spirits and welcome devas. It is also a creative grounding ritual for hundreds of millions of women who create them daily. Ms. Verma says the focus involved "helps develop meditative power." It's OK if her designs are eaten by insects, trampled over by visitors, whisked away by wind or washed away by rain. That impermanence is part of the form's beauty. Once only passed down from mom to daughter, now one can learn rangoli, and the similar Tamil kolam, online. Nowadays, fewer people perform this as a daily practice; and some are using paints so the design can last a few months to a year.



Sharing bounty: Ms. Verma uses edibles such as rice flour, turmeric and lentils, so passing creatures may feast on her creation

Netaji. When the regiments on their way to Delhi had to return home after Japan surrendered, Netaji wrote to them, "Do not be depressed at our temporary failure. Be of good cheer and keep up

your spirits. Above all, never for a moment falter in your faith in India's destiny. There is no power on Earth that can keep India enslaved. India shall be free and before long."



Unusual use for a Hindu shrine: Soldiers in caves at the base of the Batu Caves Murugan Temple complex near Kuala Lumpur

This Christian Doesn't Feel Persecuted in His Motherland

SAVIO RODRIGUES IS A CHRISTIAN in India who doesn't agree with generalizations made in a recent *New York Times* article, "Arrests, Beatings and Secret Prayers: Inside the Persecution of India's Christians." In an opinion piece at firstpost.com, he shares that he faced vicious attacks online after questioning the veracity of a statement made by an archbishop from Delhi, who opined that "Christians are in danger in India." Here are excerpts from Savio's letter:

"The reason I disagree with some of the messages of the Catholic Church leaders is because while they think they are highlighting a growing concern for the Christians, which they should, the matter of a few cases of Christian persecution cannot be generalized to be the plight of all Christians in India. "Sadly, through their statements, Church leaders target the Narendra Modi-led BJP government that is portrayed as a Hindu majority political party. But in all

fairness, Prime Minister Modi and BJP are not the problem; it is the conversion effort that is the real trigger to the disharmony between Christians and Hindus in India. Religious freedom is every citizen's constitutional right. You are free to live your faith in India as long as you respect the faith of other citizens. Proselytizing the Christian faith while demonizing Hindus and Hindu faith is against the very Constitution that gives you the freedom to profess your Christian faith in India.

"The recent attacks by mobs that see themselves as the torch-bearers of Hindu beliefs must be condemned and authorities must act against such acts of religious intimidation and brutish behavior. Similarly, authorities must also act against those Christian missionaries who commit acts of religious intimidation and coercion to convert Hindus to Christianity.

"Mocking and deriding Hindu beliefs is the fulcrum around the



Gospel for Asia's "Jesus Wells:" *the program's true motive is revealed in their promotional material: "The Lord's love, demonstrated so clearly through the Jesus Well, makes such an impression on the people's hearts that many choose to follow him."*

missionary activities of some of the Christian organizations. They are exploiting the lacunas present due to some social anomalies in Indian society. They see it as a doorway to undertake their religious conversion agenda.

"Christian conversions and prayer healing services have mushroomed across the country. Some pastors openly insult Hindu religious beliefs. Mohan Lazarus, in a 2018 preaching service, called Hindu temples

'Satan's strongholds.'

"It is wrong to term the conflict in India arising out of the growing concern over conversions and demonization of Hindu beliefs by the Christian missionaries as persecution of Christians. This sort of generalization further creates a divide between the two religious communities. Hindus, just as Christians, have every constitutional right to protect their religion under the laws of the land."

and lesson plans for the classroom and home activities; 2) a three-year calendar of Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist and Jain holidays, along with brief explanations of each and links to additional reading materials.

INDIA'S PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA Modi inaugurated a key part of Varanasi's Kashi Vishwanath Corridor in December, 2021. Constructed in less than three years at a cost of US\$44.7 million, the corridor connects the various ghats (stepped bathing areas along the riverbank) to the historic Kashi Vishwanath Temple. It aims to provide easy access for pilgrims to take a bath in Ganga and then offer their prayers to Lord Siva.

THE AYODHYA RAM TEMPLE FOUNDATION was completed in September 2021. It is a whopping 50 feet thick, 400 feet long and

300 feet wide, covering nearly three acres. The technically sophisticated foundation, made of roller-compacted concrete comprised of fly ash, gravel and cement in successive layers of one foot each, will be able to support the immense weight of the temple without settling. Officials say the temple's sanctum sanctorum will be opened to pilgrims by December 2023—quite an ambitious goal.

Global Dharma
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HINDUISM TODAY was founded on January 5, 1979, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927–2001). It is a nonprofit educational activity of Himalayan Academy, with the following purposes: 1. To foster Hindu solidarity as a unity in diversity among all sects and lineages; 2. To inform and inspire Hindus worldwide and people interested in Hinduism; 3. To dispel myths, illusions and misinformation about Hinduism; 4. To protect, preserve and promote the sacred *Vedas* and the Hindu religion; 5. To nurture and monitor the ongoing spiritual Hindu renaissance; 6. To publish resources for Hindu leaders and educators who promote Sanatana Dharma. Join this *seva* by sending letters, clippings, photographs, reports on events and by encouraging others.



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Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

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Editor-in-Chief:

Paramacharya Sadasiwanatha Palaniswami

Publisher's Aide: Paramacharya Sivanatha Ceyonswami

Deputy Editor: Acharya Kumarnathaswami

Managing Editor: Acharya Arumuganathaswami

Production Manager: Sannyasin Brahmanathaswami

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Advertising Manager: Sannyasin Kaivalyanathaswami

Assistant Editors: Sannyasin Tillainathaswami,

Sannyasin Saravanathaswami

Correspondents: Choodamani Shivaram, Bengaluru;

Lavina Melwani, New York; Dev Raj Agarwal, Dehradun;

Paras Ramoutar, Trinidad. *Copy Editor:* Chamundi

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IN MY OPINION

The World Is One Family

An excerpt from a recent address to the Parliament of World Religions

BY DR. KARAN SINGH

I TURNED 90 IN MARCH, 2020. Over the past 70 years I have personally witnessed the dramatic changes that have taken place on the planet. Science and technology have indeed made extraordinary progress. It is a cruel irony that despite this phenomenal progress our own planet is now itself in danger due to human greed and exploitation. We may well be in for a major climate change calamity by the end of the next decade. It is, therefore, fitting that the interfaith movement is working closely with the environmental movement.

However, we must remember that the primary purpose of the interfaith movement is to bring about a better understanding between different religious communities. We find that there are still many regions in the world which are plagued by inter-religious conflicts, and there are organizations active around the world, determined to create chaos. To counter these forces, it is essential for the interfaith movement to have a clear philosophical underpinning. It is in this context that I place before this audience a set of five sutras based on the Vedantic philosophy, which give us a map for addressing the problems humanity faces.

The first sutra, *Ishavasyamidam sarvam yatkinchya jagatyam jagat*, says that this entire cosmos, from the stately waltz of the galaxies to the frenetic rock and roll of subatomic particles, is inhabited by the same Divine Power. This represents the philosophic correlate of the Unified Field Theory, with which scientists are seeking to explain all the multiple phenomena in the cosmos. Almost all religions believe in an overarching Divinity pervading the universe, which in the Hindu tradition is known as Brahman.

The second sutra is *Ishwara sarvabhutanam hriddeshe tishtati*, which reveals that the pervasive Divine Power also resides in each one of us, known in Hinduism as the *Atman*. This is ultimately the golden thread that links the entire human race into what my third sutra, *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*,



"The world is a family," expresses. It is only in our lifetimes that science and technology have given us instant communications, the Internet, television and a vast array of technological instruments which have unified the world as never before.

However, these instruments have often been used for aggression, terrorism and interreligious conflicts. We must realize Planet Earth is a single living entity, and that calamities such as the Covid pandemic and climate change can never be controlled unless all countries work together.

The fourth sutra, *Ekam Sadvipraha Bahudha Vadanti*, meaning "the Truth is One, the wise call it by many names," is the very foundation of the interfaith movement. The Hindu acceptance of multiple paths to the Divine is, I would submit, a prerequisite for any meaningful interfaith dialogue. We can be totally committed to our particular religion, but unless we accept the fact that different religions offer differing paths to the Divine, we will never attain a peaceful global society. Thus, we must adopt an inclusive, not exclusive, approach.

The final sutra, *Bahujana sukhaya, bahu-jana hitaya cha*, speaks of the welfare of the many, the happiness of the many. This means that apart from working for our own salvation, all of us in the interfaith movement must commit ourselves to help the less fortunate members of society to attain a decent standard of living.

Friends, if together we accept the five sutras that I have placed before you, we will begin to fulfill our responsibility as members of the interfaith movement and to move towards a peaceful and caring global society.

KARAN SINGH, 91, is the son of the last Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, and a Hindu scholar, politician and diplomat who has served as a minister in India's Central government, a member of the Rajya Sabha (India's upper house of parliament), and ambassador to the United States.

BRIEFLY...

INDIA'S UTTARAKHAND STATE government scrapped a plan, in November 2021, to bring the management of 51 temples, including the four of the Char Dham pilgrimage, under government board control. The priest community has welcomed the reversal, hailing the decision to restore "Hindu tradition and rituals." Gangotri-based priest Rajnikant Semwal said, "From day one, we have been asking why, if the state government has no control over the management of churches or mosques, it is pushing hard to take over temples."

DURING THE CONVOCATION CEREMONY of Skanda Guru Vidhyalayam priest training school,

in Thirupparankundram, Tamil Nadu, in October, 2021, Dr. Sabharathnam Sivachariar was conferred the title of Sakalakama Pandit—"Expert in all Agamas." The award was presented on that occasion by the head pontiff of Dharmapura Aadheenam and includes a cash award of US\$1,350. The presentation was made in the presence of the school principal, Raja Bhattar, Karumuthu Kannan of Meenakshi Sundareshwarar temple and many priests and students.

THE HINDU AMERICAN FOUNDATION offers two new resources at hinduamerican.org: 1) a revamped Diwali toolkit which has more information about why the festival is celebrated,

Tolerance: A Hindu Viewpoint

In a world mired in stubborn opinion, bigotry and callousness, it is important to reflect on ideals that can be an antidote

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

WORLD POPULATIONS ARE EXPERIENCING ever-increasing diversity in their interpersonal and international interactions. This is due to freer immigration and refugee movements, global travel and, perhaps most significantly, increased Internet exposure to other religions, cultures, belief structures and ethnicities.

Some people are comfortable with this burgeoning diversity and can be described as tolerant individuals. Their response to those who are different is to accept and trust, befriend and help. Others are viscerally uncomfortable and can be described as intolerant. Their response to those who are different is to reject and distrust, hate and even inflict injury. Intolerance is the root cause of a significant amount of the violence in the world today.

Intolerance manifests in degrees. Let's review common terms used to describe this narrow-minded outlook, in the order of the harshest to the mildest forms. (Definitions are from www.dictionary.com.)

HATRED: intense dislike or extreme aversion or hostility.

BIGOTRY: stubborn and complete intolerance of any creed, belief or opinion that differs from one's own.

INTOLERANCE: 1) unwillingness or refusal to tolerate or respect opinions or beliefs contrary to one's own; 2) unwillingness or refusal to tolerate or respect persons of a different social group, especially members of a minority.

PREJUDICE: unreasonable feelings, opinions or attitudes, especially of a hostile nature, regarding an ethnic, racial, social or religious group.

BIAS: a particular tendency, trend, inclination, feeling or opinion, especially one that is preconceived or unreasoned.

THE GOAL IS TOLERANCE: a fair, objective and permissive attitude toward those whose opinions, beliefs, practices, racial or ethnic origins, etc., differ from one's own; freedom from bigotry.

In Hinduism, tolerance is honored as a great virtue, supported by three fundamental beliefs. The first belief is on the nature of God. Hinduism has a wide diversity of traditions, but followers of the different traditions respect one another and worship side by side in many temples. Through India's long history there arose four principal Hindu denominations: Saivism, Shaktism, Vaishnavism and Smartism. To Saivites the Supreme is Siva. Shaktas refer to the Supreme as Shakti, to Vaishnavas He is Vishnu and Smartas call the



Supreme Being Brahman. The name is different, the tradition is different, but it is the same Supreme Being that is being worshiped by all Hindus. An ancient verse from the *Rig Veda* (1.164.46) is often quoted in this regard: *Ekam sat viprah bahuda vadanti*. "Truth is one, sages express it variously."

The second belief is a natural extension of the first: There is no exclusive path, no one way for all, because the God we worship is the same Supreme Being in whom peoples of all faiths find solace and peace. My guru observed, "Since the inner intent of all religions is to bind man back to God, Hindus honor the fact that 'Truth is one, paths are many.'" *Ekam sat anekah panthah*.

Our popular Educational Insight "Fourteen Questions People Ask about Hinduism" explains, "In India, where Hindus are the overwhelming majority, the rights of minority religions have always been honored. Hindus have welcomed, embraced and lived peacefully among other religions for centuries. During those same centuries, Hinduism itself evolved into hundreds of strains, and thus Hindus are fully at home with many different traditions and viewpoints within their own faith. Hence, they are naturally tolerant of other religions, respecting the fact that each has unique beliefs, practices, goals and paths of attainment, and not objecting when the doctrines of one conflict with those of another. Hindus readily accept the idea that it is not necessary, desirable or even possible for everyone to hold the same beliefs. And certainly such differences should never be cause for tension, criticism, intolerance or violence."

Some Hindus citing the above verse, "Truth is one, paths are many," take it to mean that all religions are the same. In reality, all religions are not the same, nor is that notion indicated by this verse. It simply says that all religions revere the one truth; all believe in the One Supreme Being. Their paths are distinct; their beliefs and practices are different. Instead of saying, "All religions are the same," it is better to state that "all religions are good."

"Fourteen Questions" continues, "Hindus do not proselytize, meaning they do not try to convert members of other faiths to their own. Proselytizing is based upon the belief that one's religion is the only true religion and everyone else should join it. Hindus hold the view that all faiths are beneficial. A devout Hindu is supportive of all efforts that lead to a pure and virtuous life and would consider it unthinkable to dissuade a sincere devotee from his chosen faith. They know that good citizens and stable societies are created from groups of religious people in all nations. While encouraging others to follow their chosen path with dedication, Hindus hold Sanatana Dharma to be the fullest expression of religion, and do accept sincere souls who

seek entrance into Hinduism."

My guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, gave this strong statement on not seeking to convert: "Every instinct in Hinduism rebels against the doctrine which is oppressive or narrow-minded. Every instinct in Hinduism rejoices in tolerance and in acknowledgement of the many paths, even those that seem to contradict its own. When you believe that God is everywhere, in all there is, wherever it is, it becomes impossible to hate or injure or seek to aggressively convert others."

A third key Hindu belief that nurtures tolerance is that we are all divine beings, created by God. As I pointed out in my April 2016 editorial, "Growing Up without Prejudice," "Hindus do not accept the concept that some individuals are evil and others are good. The *Upnishads* tell us that each soul is emanated from God, as a spark from a fire, then begins a spiritual journey which eventually leads back to God. All human beings are on this journey, whether they realize it or not. So, when a Hindu sees a person whom others call bad or evil, he thinks to himself, 'This is a young soul, acting in terrible ways, but one day, in the course of many lives, he will realize his errors and adhere to dharma.' The Hindu practice of greeting one another with *namaste*, honoring God within the other person, is a way this philosophical truth is practiced on a daily basis. The *Mandukya Upanishad* states: *Ayam atma Brahma*, 'The soul is God.'"

The idea that we are all divine beings is taken one step further in the adage *Vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, "The whole world is a family." This statement is part of a verse from the *Maha Upanishad*. The full verse reads: *yam nijah paro veti ganana laghuchetasam, udaracharitanam tu vasudhaiva kutumbakam*. " 'One is a relative, the other a stranger,' say the small-minded. 'The entire world is a family,' live the magnanimous." It is notable that this verse is engraved in the entrance hall of the parliament of India and often quoted in speeches.

In a 2003 editorial, "Teaching Peacefulness to Children," I pointed out that "Everyone is family oriented. Most of what we do is for the

Anger and intolerance are the enemies of correct understanding.
Mahatma Gandhi

The responsibility of tolerance lies with those who have the wider vision.
George Eliot

In the practice of tolerance, one's enemy is the best teacher.
Dalai Lama

I've learned silence from the talkative, toleration from the intolerant, and kindness from the unkind.
Kahlil Gibran



The world is a one family: (above) Voices from four paths speak of the precious ideal of acceptance

purpose of benefiting the members of our family. We want them to be happy, successful and religiously fulfilled. And when family is defined to be the whole world, it is clear that we wish everyone in the world to be happy, successful and religiously fulfilled." The popular Hindu prayer that captures this sentiment is *Sarve janah sukhino bhavantu*, "May all people be happy."

One last thought: a subtle form of bias is to think in terms of stereotypes. This is problematic in that stereotypes stand in the way of seeing the distinct qualities in each individual. Common stereotypes are that the Chinese are good businessmen or Germans are efficient. And recently, at least in the US, we find a new stereotype—Asian Indians are all really smart. Of course, not all Chinese are good at business, not all Germans are efficient and not all Asian Indians are really smart. Perceiving others without resorting to stereotypes honors each individual's unique qualities.

Tolerance is part of the Hindu DNA, so it is essential that all Hindus—especially younger Hindus—clearly understand its importance and share such acceptance with others. In speaking at the Global Forum for Human Survival, Development and Environment in Moscow in 1990, Gurudeva stressed the need to teach tolerance to younger generations: "We need, in the century ahead, to teach all children tolerance, openness to different ways of life, different beliefs, different customs of dress and language. We need to stop teaching them to fear those who are different than themselves, stop teaching them hatred for peoples of other colors and other religions, stop teaching them to see the world as a field of conflict and instead instill in them an informed appreciation and a joyous reverence for the grand diversity we find around us."



LETTERS

Thank You!

We are missing the words to express how happy we are to receive your wonderful magazine in Kosovo c/o the Red Cross address in Switzerland as a courtesy of Kauai's Hindu Monastery. In these difficult times, HINDUISM TODAY is a breath of fresh air, and our gratitude is without limitation! For our very small Hindu community, every new issue of the magazine gives us so much opportunity to learn and enhance our sadhana and spiritual unfoldment. Pranams and Om!

RLP GROUP
MUNCHENSTEIN, SWITZERLAND

Reaching Out

I've been enjoying the magazine. Texas prison is about as far removed from the "Good Life" as I'd care enough to find myself. But the pictures and articles about people, places and things near and dear to my heart keep me warm inside. I would love to collaborate with anyone interested in setting up a Hindu pen-pal program. Some Christian churches do it and I think we Hindus could help "visit" with prisoners, too. I think people are largely uniformed or misinformed about the legally convicted. I would be happy to help transform doubts or fears into confidence for the spiritual renaissance these souls are destined for. When I came to prison, I encountered meditation. I studied and practiced devotedly. I had a genuine spiritual experience when praying to Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. I enjoy darshana with the Deities as They see fit, in Their Time, on Their Terms.

MATHEW SEAN
TEXAS, USA

Kudos

"Unusual Temples & Shrines of India" (Oct. 2021) is a great article that starts, reads and ends like a thrilling story. The content, its organization and the accompanying images are presented clearly and precisely. Thank you very much, Anuradha, for this awesome article.

JAYANTHI VITTAL
JIAN1596@GMAIL.COM

A Correction

Hari OM. Sir, I have been reading HINDUISM TODAY almost from the time of its inception, enjoying your diligently well-written articles on Hindu dharma, philosophy, spirituality and festivals celebrated all over the world. Naturally, the article in page 17, "From the Upanishads" (Jan. 2022) attracted me. Though it is well quoted from the 7th chapter of *Chandogya Upanishad*, the teaching is not by Uddalaka Aruni to his son Shvetaketu.



Why Do Hindus Wear a Dot on their Forehead?

The dot worn between the eyes or in the middle of the forehead is a sign that one is a Hindu. It is called the bindi in the Hindi language, bindu in Sanskrit and pottu in Tamil. The dot has a mystical meaning. It represents the third eye of spiritual sight, which sees things the physical eyes cannot see. Hindus seek to awaken their inner sight through yoga. The forehead dot is a reminder to use and cultivate this spiritual vision to perceive and better understand life's inner workings—to see things not just physically, but with the "mind's eye" as well. The bindi is made of red powder (called sindur, traditionally made from powdered turmeric and fresh lime juice), sandalpaste or cosmetics.

The conversation is actually Sanat Kumara teaching his younger brother Narada Muni. The discourse between Uddalaka Muni and Shvetaketu is in the sixth chapter, where the "Tatvamasi" mahavakya was taught. That is a small correction. Salutations.

DR. RAGHU GRANDHIGE,
PRESIDENT CHINMAYA MISSION, ATLANTA, GA
GVRAGHUMD@YAHOO.COM

Debating the Meaning of Yoga

I need to disagree with Pradeep Srivastava's letter to the editor in the October/November/December 2021 issue in which he countered my assertion that "the meaning of yoga in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* has nothing to do with joining." While I agree that "union" is one of the definitions of *yoga*, it is not the one that Patanjali uses in his text.

There are numerous definitions for the word *yoga* in the unabridged *Apte Dictionary*, one of which is 1) "joining" and another is 2) "application or concentration of the thoughts, abstract contemplation, meditation,

In addition to the simple dot, there are many types of forehead marks, known as *tilaka* in Sanskrit. Each mark represents a particular sect or denomination of our vast religion. We have four major sects: Saivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism and Smartism. Vaishnava Hindus, for example, wear a v-shaped *tilaka* made of white clay. Elaborate *tilakas* are worn by Hindus mainly at religious events, though many wear the simple bindi, indicating they are Hindu, even in the general public. By these marks we know what a person believes, and therefore know how to begin conversations.

From "14 Questions People Ask about Hinduism" *Hinduism Today* (Jan/2022)

(esp.) self-concentration, abstract meditation, and mental abstraction practiced as a system (as taught by Patanjali and called the Yoga Philosophy)." So, even the dictionary says that the definition of *yoga* used by Patanjali is meditation, not union.

In his second sutra Patanjali states, "*Yogash chitta vritti nirodhah*," which means "Yoga is the stilling of the fluctuations of the chitta/mind-stuff." When your mind is stilled, you are meditating; you aren't joining anything. This is also emphasized by Vyaasa in his commentary on the first sutra when he states "yoga is samadhi." This is unequivocal. Again, not union.

The word *yoga* does come from the Sanskrit root word *yuj*. But there is more to it. From page 147 and 148 of Swami Veda Bharati's translation and commentary: "The word [*yoga*] can be derived from *yuj* in several forms as follows: 1) *yuj* of the fourth conjugation (*yujyate*), meaning 'samadhi'; 2) *yujir* of the sixth conjugation (*yunakti*), meaning 'samadhi'; 3) *yuj* of the tenth conjugation

(*yojayati*), meaning "to join" or "to restrain," or "to keep under control, as in yoking."

The English word *yoke* is acknowledged by the Oxford English Dictionary to be cognate to *yuj*, and so is the word *join*. *Yoke* is derived from the third *yuj* in the above list. *Join* is from the second, but its meaning is from the third. According to Vyaasa, "the word *yoga* in Patanjali is derived not from the *yuj* of yoking or joining, but from the verbs meaning *samadhi*."

KURT MATTHYS
WEST CHESTER, OHIO, USA
KURT_MATTHYS@YAHOO.COM

Bringing Biogtry to Light

I would like to praise Dr. Julie Rajan's intelligent and compassionate rebuttal, (Jan/Feb/Mar 2022) to Pat Robertson's and his son Gordon's hateful and demonic attacks against Hindus. I was raised a Christian myself, but I find an intimate compatibility at the level of my soul and my own consciousness to the Hindu Gods, Brahman priests, Hindu monks and nuns, and the HINDUISM TODAY magazine. I believe Dr. Rajan is correct: verbal atrocities against Hinduism and other religions should not be tolerated in America, where we have freedom of religion and many of us welcome Hindus by rolling out the red carpet for their auspicious entry to the US. Yes,

we should report Pat and Gordon Robinson's hateful attitudes to the Justice Department Hate Crimes Division, and to the Anti-Defamation League. As Dr. Julie Rajan points out, Ms. Nancy Israel of the American Jewish Committee once noted that "Robertson is slowly being forced to back off with his hate by pressure from the "public spotlight." Dr. Rajan concludes if we don't ethically respond to ignorant and hateful words, "we will one day face more than Mr. Robertson's hateful words."

WILL M. DAVIS
WILLDAVIS108@GMAIL.COM

14 Questions People Ask

Dear team members at HINDUISM TODAY: Kudos to all of you for bringing out such a sterling issue filled to the brim with articles and features that are relevant and crucial for Sanatana Dharma to remain current and vital in the 21st century and beyond. It is particularly noteworthy that many of them are written by the younger generation, who will carry the torch forward. My wife and I run a dance school in Malaysia called Kshetra Academy, teaching Bharatanatyam for the last 30 years. My wife, who does all the teaching, is incessantly bombarded with questions about Hinduism. As teachers, it is our duty to answer these questions correctly

and convincingly. In this connection, "Fourteen Questions People Ask About Hinduism" (Jan. 2021) is a fantastic write up. Could you kindly send us a pdf of the article so we can distribute it to our students? [Link: bit.ly/basics14questions] Most are in the secondary school and pre-university student age group.

RAM GOPAL SIVADAS
RAMGOPALSIVADAS@GMAIL.COM

Excellent 14 Q&As! I like the introduction about how to answer these questions with a smile. I run the Hindu Speakers Bureau (HinduSpeakers.org), and this will be an excellent resource for us. If you are interested in going and talking to local schools about Hinduism, join us. Thank you, HINDUISM TODAY.

DR. DILIP AMIN
HINDUSPEAKERS.ORG
HINDUSPEAKERS@GMAIL.COM

Letters with writer's name, address and daytime phone number should be sent to:

Letters, Hinduism Today
107 Kaholalele Road
Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304 USA
or visit: www.hinduismtoday.com/letters

Letters may be edited for space and clarity and may appear in electronic versions of HINDUISM TODAY.

How Hinduism Today's Premier Quality Is Invaluable Today

One reason Hinduism Today deserves your support: its journalistic integrity

by Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami,
publisher of Hinduism Today.

MOSTLY DUE TO FREE SOCIAL MEDIA and ad-driven news sources, the world has access to a wealth of information on virtually all subjects today, including extensive coverage of current events. This is very good. But at the same time, the accuracy of today's journalism is often questioned. Much is seen to be biased and laced with a spirit of intolerance and belligerence. Along with useful information comes a slew of misinformation, disinformation and misrepresentation. Good journalism that one can trust has become as elusive as it is greatly needed.

HINDUISM TODAY has strived for this excellence ever since its launch, and it has often been praised for achieving it. One reader told us, "What I like about your magazine is that it's clean, it has no hidden agendas."

We do believe that 1) HINDUISM TODAY has provided irreproachable coverage of Hinduism, Hinduism and related topics these past 42 years, 2) that in our current times and cli-



mate, HINDUISM TODAY may be especially appreciated for its journalistic integrity, and that 3) it deserves and needs to be supported for that very reason.

Every Hindu order serves society, be it by establishing and managing priest-training gurukulams, hospitals, eye clinics, orphanages, schools or feeding centers. At Kauai's Hindu Monastery, the principal public service consists in producing and distributing HINDUISM TODAY international magazine, with the ultimate purpose of uplifting and informing Hindus and like-minded souls

everywhere. The integrity of our journalism is essential to our mission.

Here are a few of our basic policies:

- ❖ to be always objective, fair, balanced, positive and uplifting
- ❖ to put forward religious leaders of all Hindu sects positively, highlighting their successes in uplifting Sanatana Dharma
- ❖ to present the glories of this great and ancient faith
- ❖ to put forward tradition itself, showing its value even in modern times
- ❖ to remain strictly nonpolitical
- ❖ to give a voice to cultural, artistic and spiritual leaders as well as to the common woman, man and youth and, especially:
- ❖ to promote Hindu solidarity among all denominations and lineages

Help fortify HINDUISM TODAY's finances so that the magazine continues to be Hinduism's strong, clear voice.

Donate at: bit.ly/help-HT.

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+1-888-464-1008 • support@hindu.org

QUOTES & QUIPS

“Correcting oneself is correcting the whole world.”

Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950)

It is always good to endure injuries done to you, but to forget them is even better. *Tirukural* 152

First let us become gods and then help others to become gods. “Be and make.” Let this be our motto. **Swami Vivekananda** (1863–1902)

When an inner situation is not made conscious, it appears outside as fate. **Carl Jung** (1875–1961), *Swiss psychiatrist who founded analytical psychology*

Hinduism gave itself no name, because it set itself no sectarian limits; it claimed no universal adhesion, asserted no sole infallible dogma, set up no single narrow path or gate of salvation; it was less a creed

or cult than a continuously enlarging tradition of the Godward endeavor of the human spirit. An immense, many-sided and many-staged provision for a spiritual self-building and self-finding, it had some right to speak of itself by the only name it knew, the eternal religion, Sanatana Dharma. **Sri Aurobindo** (1872–1950)

Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it. **Rumi** (1207–1273), *Sufi mystic and poet*

Draw on God for the solution of all your problems. **Paramahansa Yogananda** (1893–1952)

Everything is perfect, with much room for

improvement. **Shunryu Suzuki-roshi** (1905–1971), *Japanese Soto Zen master*

There are three things that are real: God, human folly and laughter. The first two are beyond our comprehension, so we must do what we can with the third. *The Ramayana*

The Darkness which is the basis of light is the real Light. **Jillellamudi Amma** (1923–1985), *South Indian spiritual teacher*

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. **Albert Einstein** (1879–1955)

As long as you imagine yourself to be something tangible and solid, a thing among

things, you seem short-lived and vulnerable, and of course you will feel anxious to survive. But when you know yourself to be beyond space and time, you will be afraid no longer. **Nisargadatta Maharaj** (1897–1981), *a guru of the Inchagiri Sampradaya*

Important things are not things. **Swami Tejomayananda**, *former head of Chinmaya Mission*

Empty yourself of everything. Let the mind rest at peace. The ten thousand things rise and fall while the Self watches their return. They grow and flourish and then return to the source. Returning to the source is stillness, which is the way of nature. **Lao Tzu** (ca 600 bce), *author of Tao Te Ching*

Only one thing to learn in life: You must think of yourself the way God thinks of you—as another God. **Sri Chinmoy** (1931–2017)

Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great. **Mark Twain** (1835–1910), *American author*

The greatest service one can do for people is to help them experience God. **Swami Omkarananda** (1930–2000), *founder of Omkarananda Ashram, Rishikesh*

God can be discovered only by God. **Siva Yogaswami** (1872–1964), *renowned Sri Lankan mystic*

Like treasure hidden in the ground, like flavor in the fruit, like gold in the rock, and oil in the seed, the Absolute is hidden in the heart. **Akka Mahadevi**, *twelfth-century Vira Saiva saint*

Dignity does not consist in possessing honors, but in deserving them. **Aristotle** (384–322bce), *Greek philosopher*

Patience ferries you across to the distant goal. **Shirdi Sai Baba** (1838–1918), *Indian guru and saint*

No matter where one is on the path, spiritual advancement comes from

YOU SAVE PEOPLE FROM THEMSELVES? MAN, THAT'S A TOUGH GIG...



learning from one's mistakes in life. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, *publisher of HINDUISM TODAY*

We neither fear death nor look forward to it, but revere it as a most exalted experience. Life, death and the afterlife are all part of our path to perfect oneness with God. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), *founder of HINDUISM TODAY*

DID YOU KNOW?

Somnath Temple's Levitating Murti

CONSIDERED TO BE THE FOREMOST OF the twelve Jyothirlingam shrines to Lord Siva, Somnath Temple in Veraval, Gujarat, has been a place of worship and pilgrimage since ancient times. In an earlier form, this temple is said to have been tended by 1,000–2,000 priests and to have had over 100,000 pilgrims on auspicious occasions, with even more visiting for major festivals. The temple was also known far and wide to house a miraculous floating murti at its center. Over uncounted years the temple amassed unimaginable wealth as an offering to God. As such, it became a marked prize for those seeking to conquer.

Drawing from firsthand accounts during Mahmud of Ghazni's ruthless invasion in 1025 ce, several Persian historians scribed tidbits of this mark on history. Following a lengthy and bloody battle and more than fifty thousand deaths, Mahmud and his men reached the temple's sanctum. Those with him described glimpses of the temple's majesty. It had a high roof,

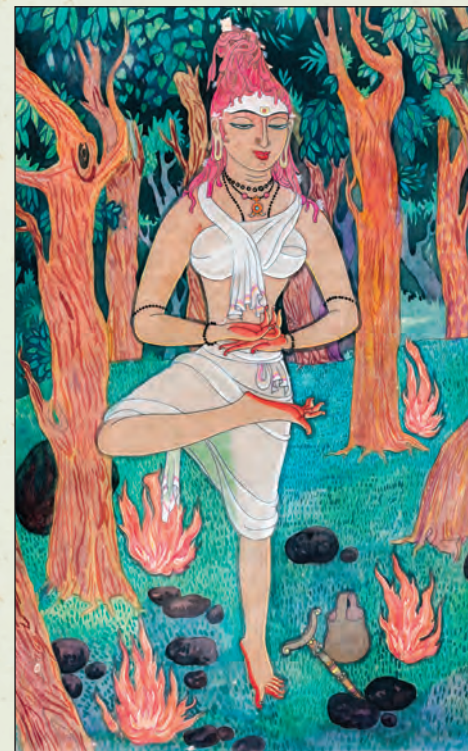
supported by 56 pillars with ornate carvings everywhere. From the ceiling hung a bell suspended on a massive chain made from thousands of pounds of gold. Hanging above the central murti was the only source of light—a great lamp which fully illumined the temple's corridors by its reflections off the gem-encrusted walls.

This account of their reaching the temple's floating murti comes from the Persian geographer Kazvini: “When the king asked his companions what they had to say about the marvel of the idol, and of its staying in the air without prop or support, several maintained that it was upheld by some hidden structure. The king directed a person to go and feel all around and above and below it with a spear, which he did, but met with no obstacle. One of the attendants postulated that the canopy was made of lode-stone, and the idol of iron, and that the ingenious builder had skillfully contrived that the magnet should not exercise a greater force on any one side. Some inclined toward



this explanation, others differed from it. Permission was obtained from the Sultan to remove some stones from the top of the canopy. When two stones were removed from the summit, the idol swerved on one side; when more were taken away, it inclined still further, until at last it rested on the ground.” They would go on to destroy both the murti and the awe-inspiring temple that housed it.

Today, in its current reconstructed form, Somnath still thrives as a center for pilgrims worldwide. Despite repeatedly losing its wealth to invading forces, it endures as an epicenter of Hindu devotion and divinity.



BASICS

The Four Stages on the Path

THE PATH OF ENLIGHTENMENT IS DIVIDED naturally into four stages: charya, virtue and selfless service; kriya, worshipful sadhanas; yoga, meditation under a guru's guidance; and jnana, the wisdom state of the realized soul. Charya, kriya, yoga and jnana are the sequence of the soul's evolutionary process, much like the natural development of a butterfly from egg to caterpillar, from caterpillar to pupa, and then the final metamorphosis to butterfly. These are four padas, or stages, through which each human soul must pass in many births to attain its final goal. Before entering these spiritual stages,

Progressive stages: A yogini performs tapas in the forest. Though resting contentedly with her realizations in the jnana pada, she has not given up the practices of the progressive padas that led her there.

the soul is immersed in the lower nature, the way of the ego, a self-centered path, bound in fear and lust, hurtful rage, jealousy, confusion, selfishness, consciencelessness and malice. Then it awakens into charya, unselfish religious service, or karma yoga. Once matured in charya, it enters kriya, devotion or bhakti yoga, and finally blossoms into kundalini yoga. Jnana is the state of enlightened wisdom reached toward the path's end as a result of Self Realization. The four padas are not alternative ways, but progressive, cumulative phases of a one path, San Marga. The *Tirumantiram* says, “Being the Life of life is jnana worship. Beholding the Light of life is yoga worship. Giving life by invocation is external worship. Adoration that displaces anger is charya worship.”

Drawn from the teachings of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami



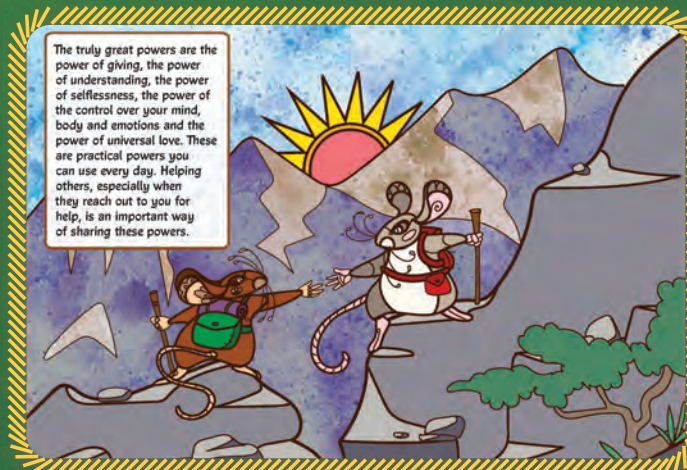
Just Released: A Magical Book For Children About Yoga and the Mind

Lion Sage is a child's version of the metaphysical masterpiece *Merging with Siva*. It teaches children how to face life's challenges, but most importantly informs them of their true identity.

Young ones are taught they are not the body which suffers now and then. They are not the emotions that well up in good times and not so good times. They are not the thinking mind. They are light and love; they are an immortal soul on a path of self-discovery. Knowing this one truth can alter a young life forever. As you take your children through these pages, you are providing a deep comprehension of life and values that few people have. You are teaching them to live in the now and not dwell on the past or worry about the future. You are giving them time-honored tools to create a happier, less stressful childhood.

I'm All Right, Right Now

Chapter 16, in which Lion Sage teaches our mouse how to be peaceful and unafraid no matter what challenges life may bring



Free PDF, Epub or Mobi Version Available at:
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FROM THE UPANISHADS

Dwelling in the Heart of All

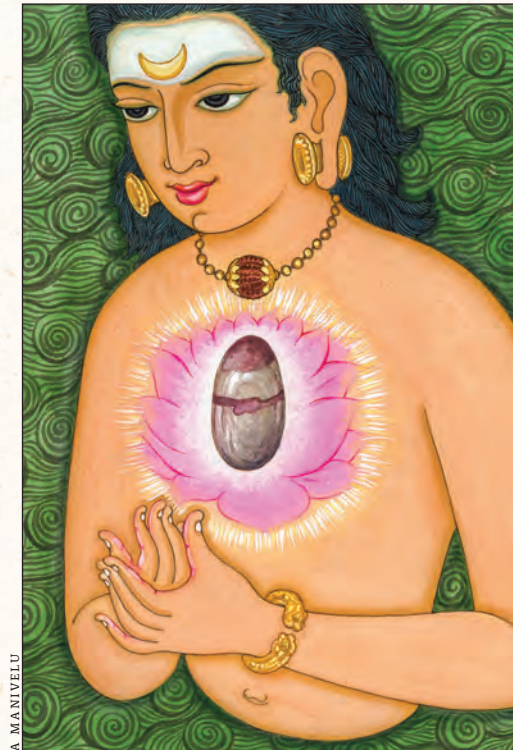
An ancient exposition illumining
our identification with infinity

The following is a translation of the Shvetashvatara Upanishad's chapter three, from The Principal Upanishads by S. Radhakrishnan. This Upanishad belongs to the Shukla Yajurveda. The verses have been edited for clarity.

1. The one who spreads the net, who rules all the worlds with his ruling powers, who remains one, while existence arises and continues, those who know of That become immortal.
2. Truly Rudra is one—there is no place for a second—who rules all these worlds with His ruling powers. He stands opposite creatures. He, the protector, after creating all worlds, withdraws them at the end of time.
3. That one God, who has eyes, faces, arms and feet on every side, creates heaven and earth, forging them together by his arms and wings.
4. He who is the source and origin of the Gods, the ruler of all, Rudra—the great seer—who of old gave birth to the golden germ (Hiranyagarbha), may He endow us with clear understanding.
5. Rudra, your body which is auspicious, unterrifying, showing no evil—with that most benign body, O dweller in the mountains, look upon us and manifest yourself before us.
6. O Dweller among the mountains, make auspicious the arrow which you hold in your hand to throw. O Protector of the mountain, injure not man or beast.
7. Higher than this is Brahman, the Supreme, the great hidden in all creatures according to their bodies, the one who envelopes the universe, knowing Him, one becomes immortal.
8. I know the Supreme Purusha (cosmic identity) of sunlike luster, beyond the darkness. Only by knowing Him does one pass over death. There is no other such path.
9. Who is higher, who is smaller, who greater than the One who stands like a tree established in heaven? By

Him, the Purusha, is this whole universe filled.

10. That which is beyond this world is without suffering. Those who know that become immortal, but others go only to sorrow.
11. He who is in the faces, heads and necks of all, who dwells in the cave of the heart of all beings, who is all-pervading, He is the Lord and therefore the omnipresent Siva.
12. That Purusha indeed is the Great Lord, the impeller of the Highest Being. He is of the purest attainment, He is the Ruler, the Imperishable Light.
13. The Purusha is the inner Self, ever dwelling in the heart of all. He is the Lord of the knowledge framed by the heart and the mind. They who know that become immortal.
14. The Purusha has a thousand heads, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet. He surrounds the Earth on all sides and stands ten-fingers' breadth beyond.



15. The Purusha is truly this whole world, whatever has been and whatever will be. He is also the Lord of immortality, and whatever grows up by food.
16. On every side it has a hand and a foot, on every side an eye, a head and a face. It has an ear everywhere. It stands encompassing all in the world.
17. Reflecting the qualities of all the senses and yet devoid of all the senses, it is the Lord and ruler, it is the great refuge of all.
18. The Purusha is the Lord of the embodied soul residing in the city of nine gates (the body), performing actions in the outside world. It is the controller of the whole world—of the stationary and the moving.
19. Without foot or hand, yet swift and grasping, He sees without eyes, He hears without ears. He knows whatever is to be known. Of Him there is none who knows. They call Him the Primeval, the Supreme Purusha.

20. Subtler than the subtle, greater than the great is the Self that is set in the cave of the heart. One beholds Him as being actionless and becomes freed from sorrow, when through the grace of the Creator they see the Lord and His majesty.
21. I know this undecaying, ancient, primeval Self of all, present in everything on account of infinity, of whom they declare there is stoppage of birth. The expounders of Brahman proclaim Him to be eternal.

SARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN (1888–1975) was an Indian philosopher and statesman, India's first vice president (1952–1962) and second president (1962–1967)

The Wondrous Wood Temples Of Tons Valley

This recently built temple for Deity Chalda Mahasu in Bishoi sits on a high area above the adjoining Tons and Yamuna valleys in a relatively prosperous region

Trek the highlands to the sacred masterpieces along the Tons River as it flows down from the Himalayas to join the Yamuna River

BY DEV RAJ AGARWAL, DEHRA DUN

THE TONS RIVER IN THE WESTERNMOST PART OF UTTARAKHAND is the largest Himalayan tributary of the Yamuna. From its highest villages down to its confluence with Yamuna near Dehra Dun, the valley is known for some of the most beautiful carved wood temples of the Himalayan region. Following a strong local tradition, these sacred edifices are decorated with intricately carved motifs depicting scenes from the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, and their gable roofs are beautifully covered with stone slates. New temples continue to advance the tradition, including Bishoi (at left) which is on the site of an old temple.

The temperate to subtropical climate of the Tons Valley lends itself to life in village-level communities. Perhaps due to natural hazards—such as earthquakes of 8.0 and higher that occur every century—the Gods, Goddesses and devas revered here are primarily of a fierce nature.

I saw some of these temples for the first time forty years ago. Frequent trekking trips to Har ki Dun brought me back many times. During monsoons this year, I proposed to HINDUISM TODAY that I take time to cover these temples for the magazine. Accompanied by my son, Arnav, I was able to do so in December 2021, after the monsoons and during a low point in the pandemic.

The evolution of these temples can be traced by starting at the top of the valley. The village of Jakhol, 130 miles from Dehra Dun, is located on the Supin River, which 14 miles downstream joins the Rupin to form the Tons. Nearby is the high-altitude Govind Pashu Vihar National Park, home to a variety of exquisite Himalayan flora and fauna, including the endangered snow leopard. Most of the temples in this part of the valley are dedicated to Someshwar, a form of Siva, and follow the oldest traditions of architecture.

Someshwar Temple

Jakhol is an old, fairly large hill village at an elevation of 7,200 feet. About 300 wooden houses shelter a population of 1,600, including at least 20 families of carpenters who are engaged in building homes and temples here and in surrounding villages. Jakhol's centrally placed temple to Lord Siva, the largest in this area, is a magnificent example of the Nagar style of architecture followed by most of Someshwar temples (photo next page).

Based on a rectangular platform of wooden beams and stones, the temple walls are raised with alternate rows of stone and wood. The beams and columns are securely interlocked. Beautifully carved wooden slabs depict figures and tales from the pantheon of Hindu Gods. Heads of elephants adorn the sides of thick, strong vertical wooden columns. The facade is decorated with figures of elephants and birds. The heads of two goats, symbols of fertility, are artfully carved above the main door.



Tons Valley: At right, the main rivers and towns of our report are overlaid on a Google Earth view of the northern part of Uttarakhand State. The main city in this area is Dehradun (center bottom), 207 miles north and slightly east of Delhi. At upper right we have the three main tributaries of the Tons, the Pabbar, Rupin and Supin. The Tons itself then joins the Yamuna at Kalsi. Our report begins at Jakhol, center top, one of the highest villages of the Tons watershed. We then proceed down the Tons to Saur, Deora, etc., to Tiuni and the adjacent area. From there our report follows the road which goes from the Tons Valley up through Mohana and Chakrata over to the Yamuna Valley where we visit the recently built wood temples in Bishoi, Lakshyar and Lakhwar. Shown here are only the major villages; many more small ones, each with its own temple of some sort, are not marked.



Inside the Temple

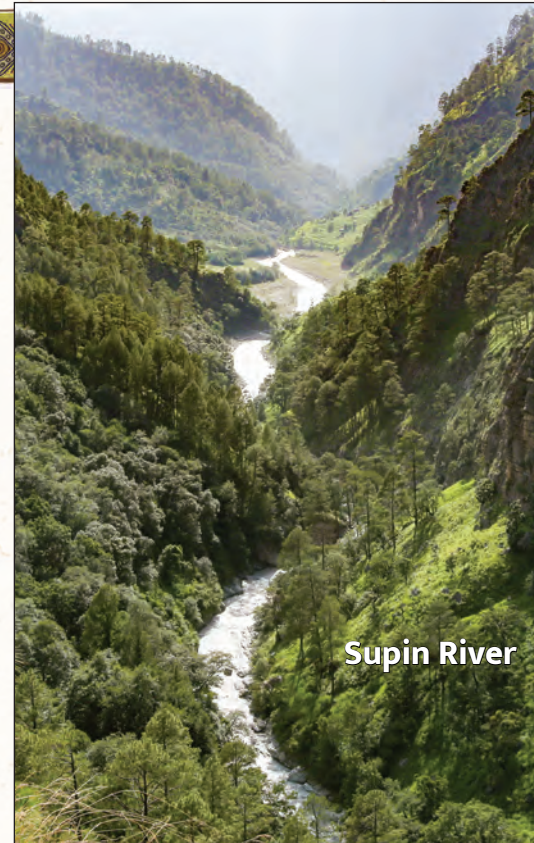
The Someshwar temples are as simple on the inside as they are ornate on the outside. The murtis are kept on a low pedestal. The doors to the chambers are very low. This is a common feature, but I could not find out the reason.

Decorating the central ridge pole are wooden peacocks, mountain pheasants and goats. Wooden bells hang from the corners of the roof. The sanctum sanctorum has a two-story roof covered with a metal canopy. As in all Himalayan temples, hundreds of wooden tassels dangle from the borders, making unique sounds as they swing in the breeze.

On either side of the main door are two high pedestals, where the temple drummers sit. Facing the temple is a huge shelter used by people for meetings. During festivals, all the young boys and girls giggle and dance here, grabbing the opportunity to meet freely.

The arrival of a motorable road two decades ago brought changes, including the replacement of the courtyard's thick slate tiles with modern ceramic tiles. The courtyard was deserted when we visited, because Samsu, as they lovingly call the Deity, is on the annual tour to 22 villages in the area, 18 of which have ornate wooden temples for Him. The Deity is presently in Saur, the next village we will visit. Because the priests travel with the Deity to each village, no temple worship is performed in any of the other villages until His return; so, all temples on this circuit except for Saur are presently closed.

We asked Dr. Sabharathanam of Chennai, a scholar of temple traditions, about this



Supin River

of temple construction and village design, it is said that many parts of the Earth are occupied by invisible forces, both benign and harsh. When a village or city or temple is to be formed or constructed, certain activities such as ploughing the land, assembling the cows to stay there, etc., should be undertaken, and the concerned priests or chief should request harsh forces to leave the place in order to be occupied by the people and the chief Deity. If such propitiatory rituals are not performed, such forces would continue to exist there. I think in this case the Deities are moving with the local priests who know the traditional process of ameliorating these harsh forces." A small temple in each village with a part-time priest would not have the power to accomplish this. People in the area told me that even though the one Deity lives away for long durations, their lives are fulfilled once He visits them.

When I visited this area 30 years ago, villagers told me the temples were dedicated to Duryodhana, the villain (in most interpretations) of the *Mahabharata*. The name *Samsu*, which they use for the Deity, originally referred to Duryodhana and honored him as a great king of this area. In recent decades, after being questioned why

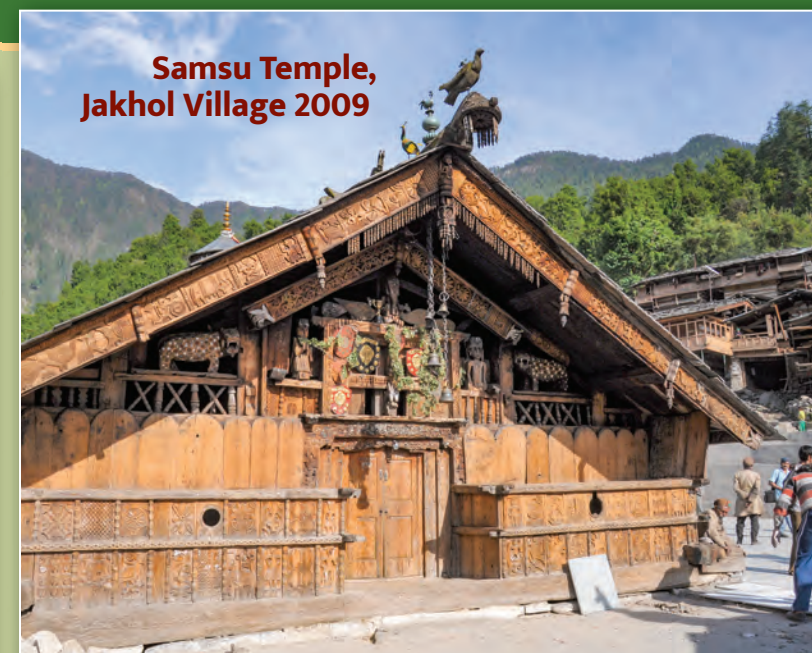
unusual pattern of moving the Deity from village to village. He had not heard of it before, but speculated, "In the *Mayamata* text

.....
Our journey begins: (above) Supin River Valley near Jakhol (below, left to right) the temple to Someshwar, a form of Lord Siva, sits on a centrally located plaza in Jakhol village; the temple has been recently painted, a new development not welcomed by everyone as it obscures the original carving and requires repainting every few years (the Hanuman carvings are a recent addition); the same temple in the author's 2009 visit to this area, showing the sculptures of birds and other animals on top, typical of this style

Jakhol Temple to Lord Siva as Someshwar



Samsu Temple
Jakhol Village, 2021



Samsu Temple,
Jakhol Village 2009

they worshiped Duryodhana, they began regarding the Deity as Someshwar, a form of Siva, which may have been the case originally.

Saur Village Hosts Someshwar

Auspiciously, the **Someshwar** Deity arrived in Saur from Jakhol the day before us. This otherwise-silent village of the upper Himalayas, sitting on a slope below a thick forest of cedar trees, is bustling with activity. This is the one time of year to receive the blessings of the Deity here. It is a time to thank Someshwar for their good health, fruitful crops and prosperity—and to pray for continued blessing. The villagers sing and dance in thanksgiving and invite relatives and friends to feasts in their homes.

We are told the Deity arrived on a silver palanquin carried by two young men followed by His six priests and a long procession of people dancing to the tune of hill songs played by a band of trumpets and drums. It is monsoon season and agricultural activities are at a minimum, so the entire village has turned out for the event. They sing praises of the Deity in the local language, a dialect of Garhwali I do not understand.

Upon arrival, the Deity is placed inside the temple, which sits on a plateau with a stunning view of the valley. In the tradition of Someshwar temples, this one faces west. Not an inch of the structure is bereft of intricate



designs carved in the wood by local artisans. Beautiful lacework, floral patterns, animals, birds and characters from *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*—all stand out prominently on the rough surface of the wood slabs, posts, beams and panels.

According to Kirpal Singh, the chief priest, "Someshwar and other Deities of Tons valley

came here from Kashmir during the time of the *Mahabharata*. They were established here after killing many demons, including Kirmir Danav, who had terrified the entire Tons valley. Someshwar not only brings peace and prosperity to His adherents, but brings rains and good crops, saves us from ailments and sufferings. No food grain is used inside the temple for prayers. We light pure ghee lamps, incense and offer many kinds of sacred leaves in prayers. We have secret mantras in our language which the priests learn from elder priests. No Vedic rituals are performed by us—we have separate family priests for those—nor do we accept any offerings for any rituals. Being

the family Deity of all living here, Someshwar is remembered with Lord Ganesha in all rituals at home."

The *mali*, a priest temporarily possessed by the Deity, is the bridge between the Deity and devotees. When the Deity is invoked to enter the mali, the priest goes into a trance, shivers, cries and then begins answering

Deity on Tour: (counter-clockwise from above) priest removes the Someshwar Deity from the temple to a temporary shrine outside for the worship and celebrations; the silver bust of the Someshwar Deity with trident in the temporary shrine; the priests dance around the shrine to the beat of the drummers; the entire village has come to watch; drummers announce the exit of the Deity from the temple; the head priest carries the ceremonial golden axe—he will soon be possessed by the Deity

questions by any person who comes to him for the solution to a problem. The services of the mali are very important for the people, for he is the God personified. His verdict is almost invariably accepted by everyone, for it is believed that whatever the mali says is the Deity's command. One person tells me of a complex land dispute between two villages that was ultimately taken to the mali and his resolution accepted by all. Another tells me consultation with the mali is so successful that only a handful of cases end up in local courts.

While we are doing interviews one early afternoon, villagers start gathering in the temple courtyard. Soon the outer chamber of the temple is packed to capacity with devotees and a priest. The drummers, settled on either side of the facade, accompany an hour-long ceremony inside the temple. After the rituals, a beautiful silver bust of the Deity is brought outside and displayed for darshan in a small tent. In addition to the silver face mask of Someshwar, we see murtis of Buddha and Parvati. A huge crowd has gathered. Important villagers sit in front of the Deity with the headmen of adjoining villages. Someshwar's six priests sing and dance to the beat of drums for thirty minutes. Soon the Deity possesses one of them. As the mali, he dances with slow, delicate steps and meaningful gestures. It is



a serious moment. Guests from surrounding villages question him about the weather, crops and the pandemic. In the past, serious fires gutted a number of houses, so many questions address this threat. On the pandemic, the mali says they will not be much impacted. After the questions are answered, other priests join the mali and dance for an hour. Later the merry-making men, women and children, wearing their home-woven woolen ceremonial clothing, dance in circles till late evening.

Over the next month and a half, the palanquin of Someshwar will visit all 18 villages in the area, moving every two or three days.

At the Confluence

Ten miles downstream of Saur is Naitwar, where the Tons River is born with the confluence of Supin and Rupin. This area has several temples of note. The one in Kotgaon, near Saur, is just as beautiful as Saur's and has an equally commanding view of the mountains.

A second important temple is that of Karna in Deora, a few miles downstream. This may be the only Karna temple in Uttarakhand, though there are others in India for this key figure in the *Mahabharata*. Karna is the son of the Sun God, Surya, and Kunti, mother of the Pandavas. Though a close friend of Duryodhana in the story (eldest son of the Kaurava clan), Karna is regarded as an upright person, so the question of why a mortal person is being worshiped has apparently not arisen here. When Karna died, his followers wept profusely, with the tears becoming the Tamas ("sorrow") River, now known as the Tons.

The Karna Temple is ornately carved and decorated, though today the wooden panels are coated with paint. Inside the sanctum sanctorum are murtis of Karna, Shalya Maharaj (his charioteer), Renuka (wife of his guru, Parusharama) and a Shivalinga.

A tantrik by the name of Lapavda is believed to have brought the statue of Karna from Champavat in eastern Uttarakhand (360 miles by modern road). Karna is said

Someshwar, the Traveling Deity



Someshwar Temple,
Saur Village





to have directed the tantrik to establish a temple to him. **Karna** is the family Deity of the people of many villages around Naitwar. As elsewhere in this region, the priest has a set of secret mantras in the local language which he recites during worship. These are orally passed down to each new generation of priests.

The architecture here is similar to that of Someshwar temples, with open pathways around the temple for circumambulation as a common feature. The temple door has a quadruple frame with a small door, all covered with brass and embossed figures of Gods. Devotees actually nail coins to the wooden doors and frames of temples as a form of offering.

Manoj Prasad Nautiyal, one of the priests from Deora's 20 families of priests, tells me, "We are simply pujaris. We do not perform any ritualistic duties outside the temple, nor do we accept donations. At home, we call upon brahmin priests to perform the rituals." Inside the temple, he says, they offer lamps and incense while reciting secret mantras for Lord Siva as Bholenath. The name of Raja Karna is recited along with Lord Ganesh. Newlyweds visit the temple for blessing, while other devotees come to seek favors from the Deity. When the wishes are fulfilled, devotees return to the temple with offerings of halwa sweets in thanks.

A third temple here is to **Pokhu**, the God of Justice. Located just above the confluence



of the Supin and Rupin Rivers, it has been renovated beyond recognition from its original form. This temple is regarded as a court

of law. Pokhu is believed to be a supernatural being sent to protect a Goddess from ferocious mountain demons. In accomplishing

.....
A school, fair and ashram: (counter-clockwise from above) The head priest in trance answers questions and makes predictions; the temple to Karna at Deora, near Naitwar; Jai Veer Singh, head priest of the Pokhu temple; detail of the painted carvings around the entry archway, this of Hanuman carrying Sanjeevi mountain to Sri Lanka; the temple of Pokhu, just above the confluence; the confluence of the Supin and Rupin rivers to form the Tons; the Someshwar temple in Kotgaon, deserted when we pass through as everyone is in Saur



Someshwar Temple,
Katgoan Village

Ornate Temples to Karna and the God of Justice, Pokhu



Karna Temple,
Deora Village



Tons River
forms at Naitwar



Pokhu Temple,
Naitwar Village



this, he becomes very proud. Realizing the error of his ways, he sinks himself upside down in the ground as an act of penance. The Goddess forgives him, and he becomes renowned for being so just that he did not even spare himself from punishment.

Pokhu remains, however, a feared being.. His murti in the temple is kept in the dark, and no one dares see it in bright light. The priest, Jai Veer Singh, performs all activities inside the temple with his back towards the altar. Jai Veer is also the mali of the temple, channeling Pokhu's insights and decisions. He tells me that animal sacrifice is practiced here, saying, "The life has to be taken to save someone's life."

Devotees come to Pokhu in the event of land disputes, family problems, fights, thefts, ailments, etc. They have more faith in the decision that comes through the mali than in any court or doctor. In almost all cases, this decision is acceptable to all concerned.

In my presence a young man is brought to the temple, carried by two men. He is unconscious and appears to be dead. He is not responding to anything. Three persons drag him to the facade of the temple, where Jai Veer, as mali, explains that the man is suffering from a spell cast by powerful forces. He tells the story of the recent death of the man's wife, then throws some rice grains on his body. The man comes to his senses in a fraction of a second. This appears to be a kind of exorcism. The man's attendants later tell me that everything the priest related was accurate.



The Temples of Doni

Twelve miles northwest of Naitwar, upstream in the valley of the Rupin River, is the village of Doni. Because modern roads reached here only a few years ago, Doni's temples are still well preserved in the old style. There are three temples of note here, all close in design to the temples of neighboring Himachal Pradesh, whose artisans are often hired to build temples in this area.

The first is Sherkudiya, a tower-shaped shrine standing in the middle of the village. It is a tall, straight structure of stone and wood, with a cantilevered wooden balcony around all sides of the top. Sherkudiya is one of the

ministers of Mahasu (see next section of this article). Like Pokhu, Sherkudiya is known as the God of judgment and wise decisions. The temple murti travels among five villages each year; it is presently in the temple at Bhitri.

Twelve nearby villages have joined together to extensively expand this temple. Artisans have been brought from Mandi in Himachal Pradesh for the task. According to Poti Singh, age 84, the original structure will not be affected by the renovation. He opposes the use of colored paints on the temples of their village—something that becomes more and more an issue the further down the Tons Valley one goes.

Two of the finest wood temples we encounter in all the valley are those of the Goddess Vithasin here in Doni. The older of these is closed for all practical purposes, though the open space around it is still used for annual festivals. The newer one is similar in design to the Sherkudiya temple, especially its tower shape, but more ornately carved. The main part sits on a high platform of stone. This floor is shorter in height but with a larger balcony. There is fantastic lacework inside.

According to priest Surajmani Gaur, Vithasin is an incarnation of Parvati. Once in five years She goes to Bharadsar Tal (a high-altitude lake) for a holy dip. The daily prayer ceremony in these temples is simple, as in other temples. "Till now we were not exposed to the outside world so much, so our temple heritage has been kept protected. The extension of the Sherkudiya Maharaj temple is a big challenge for us."

The older and essentially abandoned temple is to the north of the village. It is single storied, with beautiful corridors all around. Starting from close to the ground to the ridge, the finely cut shingles of stone slate are placed meticulously on the roof. Figures of Gods and Goddesses and unique geometric patterns embellish the corridors. One villager

estimates it to be one hundred years old, but it appears much older to me.

In the Realm of Mahasu

Eleven miles downstream from Naitwar is the junction of two roads at Mori. One goes east to the valley of the Yamuna River; the other follows the Tons River southward to its confluence with the Yamuna. This area is more populated and prosperous than further up the Tons valley, and follows different traditions. Here we find both old temples and new large ones, very ornately designed and decorated.

Mori is the gateway to the kingdom of Mahasu, the most powerful Deity of an area extending as far as adjoining Himachal Pradesh. Mahasu is the chief Deity of the Jaunsar Bawar region (which is in today's Dehra Dun District, and parts of Uttarkashi), the northernmost district of Uttarakhand. Believed to have arrived here from Kashmir, Mahasu is also worshiped widely in the adjacent state of Himachal Pradesh.

The name *Mahasu* is used collectively for four brothers: Basik, Pabasik, Bauth and Chalda. Each is regarded as an incarnation or form of Lord Siva. Each has His own temples and territories.

.....
Entering the land of Mahasu: (counter-clockwise from above) close-up of a carving at Doni's new Vithasin temple; an ornate temple to Goddess Vithasin Devi in Doni, well built but now abandoned; Doni's new Vithasin Devi temple, built in tower style; the Sherkudiya temple in Doni is being expanded—note the carved beams in the foreground; the results will be similar to this Bautha Mahasu temple in Hanol, where a large front section was recently added onto the much older back tower; Bautha Mahasu temple in Hanol

An 11th-century temple at Hanol, on the left bank of the Tons, is dedicated to the most prominent brother, Bautha Mahasu. A protected monument under the control of the Archaeological Survey of India, it is an apt example of Nagar style of architecture. The original temple, a typical structure of stone, was extended later, with three more sections in the front.

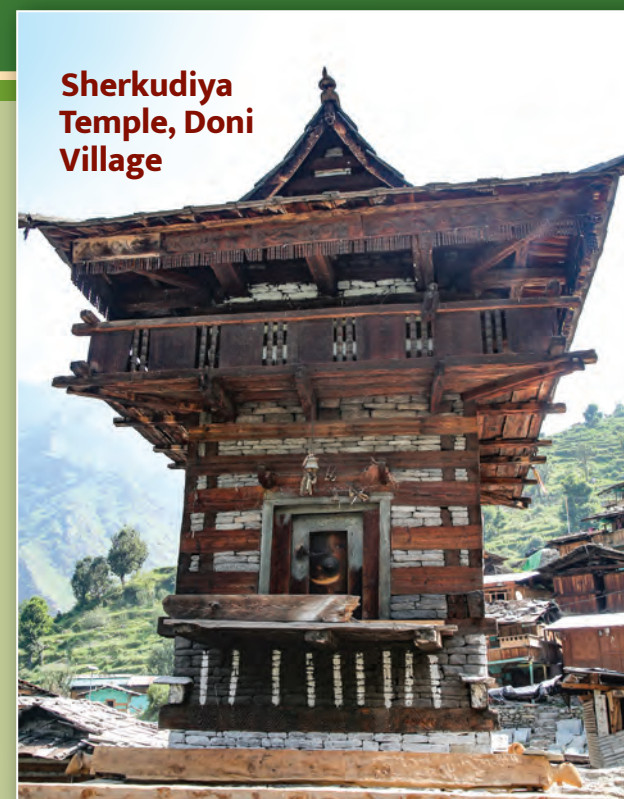
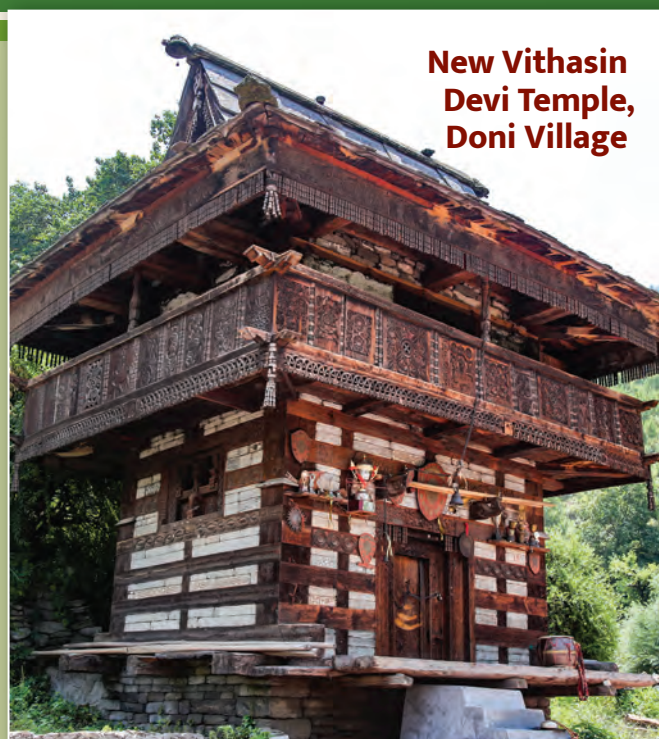
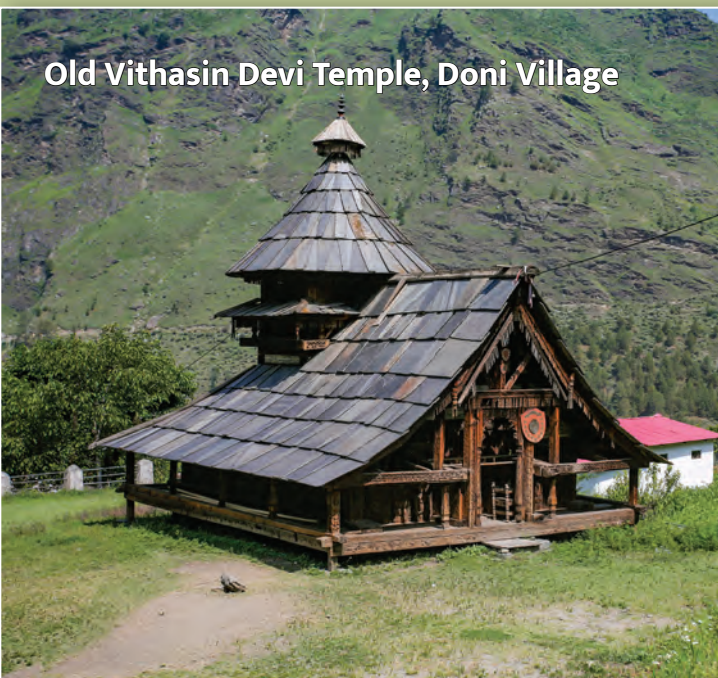
The wooden facade has been decorated with three-dimensional figures of Gods and Goddesses, while the ceiling depicts the Navagraha, the nine planets. The temple has four chambers. In the outermost, the drummers play. Women can enter the second chamber and men the third to take darshan of the Deity in the small sanctum sanctorum.

On one side of the third chamber are the murtis of the bodyguards of the four brothers: Kailu Veer for Bautha Mahasu, Kafla Veer for Basik Mahasu, Gudaru Veer for Pabasik Mahasu and Sherkudiya for Chalda Mahasu. Also in this chamber is Gudaru, the bodyguard of the Mahasus' mother, Dharmakala.

The malis of Mahasu sit on a high platform facing the temple. Hundreds of devotees come to them each day to seek solutions for their problems. Once the Deity enters a mali, he speaks out.

Just a few hundred meters upstream and across the river from Hanol stands the temple of Pabasik Mahasu in Thadiyar village. The outer chambers of this temple have been drastically renovated and repaired with concrete, but the main temple remains intact, retaining its pristine glory with a multitiered pyramid roof and intricate woodwork on side

Doni's Goddess Temples Old and New



The Tower Temples of Mahasu





panels.

A couple of miles downstream at Maindrath is the temple of Basik, the second Mahasu. This one faces north, possibly because of lack of space in the area it sits. This three-chambered building has also been renovated with concrete, but still retains some of the original woodwork.

Nine miles downstream from Hanol, the Pabbar merges with the Tons. Following the Pabbar upstream a few miles, we come to the village of Rayagi. Here we find the recently renovated and expanded multi-tiered temple of Sherkudiya Maharaj, bodyguard for Chalda Mahasu. He is the minister of all the Mahasu brothers and is regarded as a Deity in His own right. Devotees come here with problems that have not been solved by their local Deity.

Innumerable mythological figures are carved in this temple, and a tall wooden statue of Hanuman stands on the facade. Four carpenters from Himachal Pradesh worked for five years on the us\$34,000 project, according to Prama Nand Sharma, the temple

Chalda Mahasu Temple Mohana Village



priest. I ask how many wooden temples there are in the region. "Hundreds," he replies.

We find the fourth brother, Chalda, at the temple in Mohana, a hill station near Chakrata, in the cold, high region between the Tons and Yamuna river valleys. This Deity is moved from village to village in this area over a twelve-year period, staying in each for long durations. He's been here in Mohana for two years and will soon move to another village. At the end of the twelve years, He goes

to the adjoining Himachal Pradesh state for another twelve years.

This is another newly renovated temple. Wooden balconies extend around the basic structure. The drummers live on the ground floor and play music each morning and evening during prayers. They receive donations from the temple, and often have outside jobs as well, tailoring in particular.

The *shringar* morning ritual typical of most temples in India, in which the Deity is bathed and dressed for the day, is not performed here. A group of people called *thani* assist the priest during the puja. They ring bells as the priest recites

his secret mantras. The priest and the thanis change in a set rotation among those qualified.

Every day the temple is thronged with devotees who come for darshan and to give thanks for blessings received. During our visit, a businessman arrives from Dehra Dun with loads of donations: after 20 years of wedded life, he had been blessed with a son. These Mahasu temples earn a lot of money and have built decent facilities for pilgrims. A few rooms provide overnight lodging, and food is provided from the temple's community kitchen.

Yamuna River Temples

As we descend from the cold heights of Chakrata toward the Yamuna, we find most

Grand temple construction: (counter-clockwise from above) The temple of Chalda Mahasu in Mohana; Pabasik Mahasu in Thadiyar village; detail of the entry archway; recently rebuilt temple of Basik Mahasu at Maindrath; the hugely expanded temple of Sherkudiya in the village of Rayagi, on the Pabbar River upstream of its confluence with the Tons



Sherkudiya Temple,
Rayagi Village

Entering a Transitional Realm to Highly Ornate, Recently Built Temples of Mahasu



Pabasik Mahasu
Temple, Thadiyar
Village



Basik Mahasu
Temple,
Maindrath
Village



temples having two main sanctums or even two separate structures, one for Chalda Mahasu and one for Bautha Mahasu.

The temple in Bishoi is a masterpiece of modern workmanship (see pages 18 and 30). Just finished in 2015, the multi-storied temple faces east, overlooking the Yamuna valley. Ten artisans worked for six and a half years to complete this structure. Built at the site of the original temple, this one has two central parts, some distance apart and made of stone and wood. One is the temple of Chalda and the other that of Bautha. Both are cleverly covered with lavish woodwork in a seamless manner. Long corridors supported by rows of wooden pillars have endless rows of wooden fringes that constantly dangle to produce a magical sound. The walls are covered with large panels carved with figures of various Gods. A row of rooms in front of the temple is equally embellished with woodwork. Altogether, over 2,500 figures and scenes from the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are depicted here. The first invitation to any wedding in

the area is always sent to the temple, as well as a portion of any new harvest.

Bishoi resident Gyan Singh Chauhan, age 86, explains that the construction cost of \$336,000 was borne by the people of the area, and part of the wood was contributed by the state forestry department and local devotees. "Architects from Uttarakashi were brought in to design the temple," he tells me, "but they were unsuited for the task compared to our own masons and carpenters."

Downstream on the Yamuna from Bishoi, the tree species are less suitable and long-lasting than the coniferous forests of the higher regions. The Mahasu temples at Lakshyar and Lakhwar have recently been rebuilt with concrete, though a lot of wood is still used in pillars, windows, panels and fringes. The design is still the same, with two temples in one, for Chalda and Bautha Mahasu. Following the tradition of Chalda, the sanctum sanctorum is on the second floor,

while the first or ground floor is used for other purposes.

Conclusion

Visiting these wooden edifices was like going back in time. The faith of people in their Gods and Goddesses has kept the art of temple construction alive. As in the rest of India, every village has its own temple.

But the art and tradition of making these wooden sanctuaries is threatened. Factors include the rapid changes in life-styles, migration of people to cities, shrinking forests, and a ban on felling trees. The adjoining Yamuna valley in the east, and Himachal Pradesh in the west, are home to thousands of unique temples with an amazing diversity of housed Deities and styles of architecture. It is time the state government took the conservation of this cultural heritage seriously. It is important that teams of experts be formed for guidance towards safety and conservation.

About the Author

Dev Raj Agarwal of Dehra Dun, India, is a photographer who loves to capture the immense diversity of the people, cultures and nature of India, especially in the Himalayas. He has worked for the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Botanical Survey of India. Email: devrajagarwal@hotmail.com



ARNAV AGARWAL

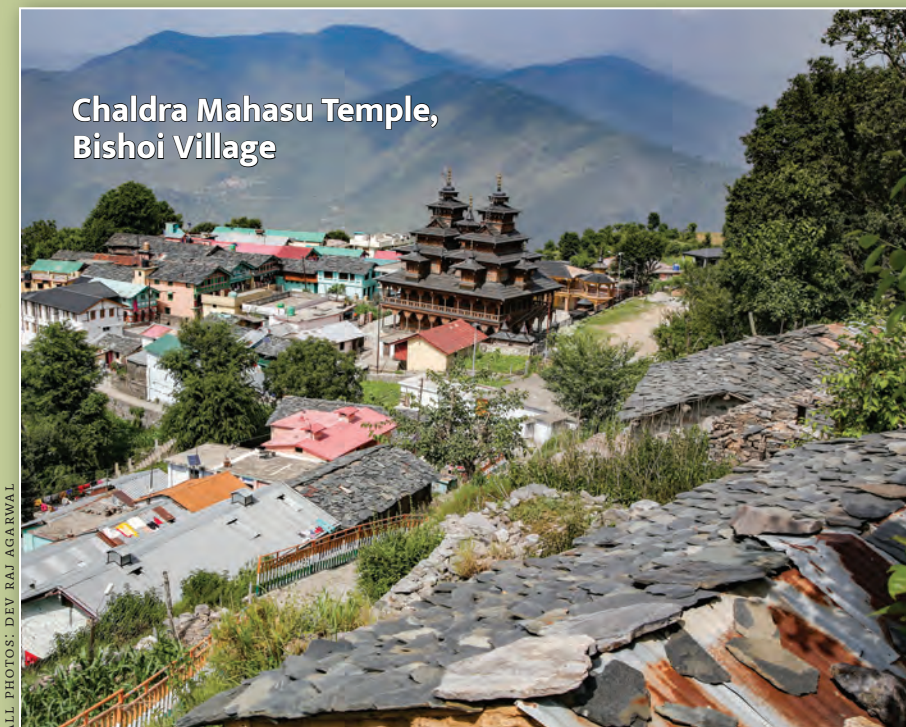


Ramasarain River Valley

Temples of Chalda & Bautha Mahasu:

(counter-clockwise from below) Wooden temple of Chalda Mahasu in Bishoi; temple carving detail; the stone-and-concrete Lakshyar temple to Chalda and Bautha Mahasu; (inset) the ornate new temple to Chalda at nearby Lakhwar; valley of Ramasarain River, a tributary of the Yamuna

The Grand Temples Along the Yamuna River



Chaldra Mahasu Temple,
Bishoi Village



Chalda and Bautha
Mahasu Temple,
Lakshyar Village



Chalda Temple,
Lakhwar Village



ALL PHOTOS: DEVRAJ AGARWAL



Continuity of tradition: (clockwise from above) The sidewalls of the Vithasin Devi Temple are covered with carvings—Ravana is depicted near the center panel; (inset) a kind of wood tassel chime common on all the temples; Arnav photographs some old spring spouts by the roadside; (inset) the style persists at the newer temples, such as this at the Pabasik Mahasu temple at Thadiyar; carved columns at the recently renovated Karna temple in Deora





SHUTTERSTOCK

BOOK REVIEW

India's Educational Heritage

A glimpse into ancient India's truly holistic systems of learning

IF YOU AREN'T ALREADY AWARE THAT THE modern university originated in India, Sahana Singh's book *Revisiting the Educational Heritage of India* will be an eye-opener. She explores this idea and more in great depth with a plethora of evidence, so elegantly composed as to be, as they say, "unputdownable."

As its title implies, this book revisits and expands on ideas from the author's previous self-described "long essay," *The Educational Heritage of India*, published in 2017. The new book is by no means a clone; it is almost five times as long as its predecessor and filled with additional explanations and over 200 citations, which you will appreciate if you have read the long essay.

The preface's preamble refutes or clarifies certain misconceptions that the first book generated. Points include "Don't blame invaders and colonizers for the ills afflicting India," "It's regressive to dwell on the past," "Do not present a glorified image of ancient India," and "Why is there no descriptive detail of the courses and disciplines studied in schools and colleges in India?" With this foundation, Singh's academic work sets out to fill a void left by modern scholars and their fixation on civilizations such as the Greek and Roman.

Singh begins by describing a land of forest

schools as early as 1000 bce, where groups of gurus would educate dedicated students on topics ranging from politics to the science of time. Unlike today's universities, there was more to lessons than material knowledge. Gurus engaged their students in character building, directing their energies to the pursuit of knowledge, and understanding the inner consciousness, with the eventual goal of Self-knowledge. Here Singh shows us a glimpse of the first holistic education, one most universities today only claim to possess.

The oldest university in India dated back to the sixth century bce. Takshashila's large university, and many others, such as Nalanda, had students studying law and medicine—even performing successful surgeries on live patients. These schools were not obscure phenomena. Students from as far as Korea came to Nalanda, where over 80 percent of applicants failed the rigorous entrance exam, an acceptance rate rivaling modern universities.

Logic and debate flourished among these centers of knowledge throughout India. As Singh writes, "This love for debate and presentation of arguments from ancient times formed the root of democracy, which has endured even today. These civilized and meticulously rule bound debates allowed faith and science to coexist. Novel astronomical

theories were challenged in debate, and no one was accused of heresy."

Perhaps even more important than the culture of students was the demanding culture of the guru, acharya or teacher. The guru, states Singh, was "central to not just India's educational system but to the entire edifice of Indian civilization." While teachers today are critical to a functional society, these gurus occupied an even greater role as an embodiment of higher knowledge, established in supreme consciousness.

One could not simply become a guru by attending a university. To be considered a guru, one must have: "detachment, virtuousness, austerity, selflessness, humility, lack of desire, and freedom from lust." These ideals make one very effective at transmitting knowledge. The inverse is true as well, as most students have observed.

The knowledge accumulated by these students and teachers did not stay in India but was dispersed throughout the world. Scholars from East and West came to learn and collect documents. So great was the repute of these schools that one man, Xuanzang, spent 17 years of his life collecting works to take back to China.

This flow included knowledge commonly considered Western in origin, such as medi-

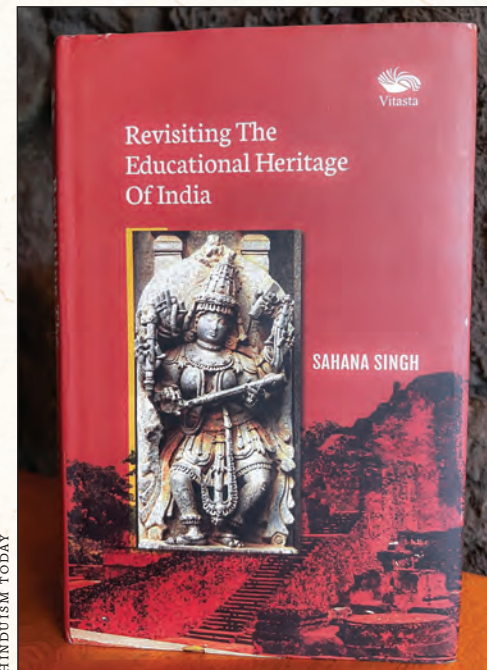
cine. Medieval European medicine found its roots in Arabic medicine, which was founded on translated Sanskrit texts.

Singh quotes a Dr. Wise, who writes, "In the relationship between the Greeks and Indians, the Greeks were the learners. In addition to medicine, great scholars, such as Pythagoras, who studied in India incorporated Vedic beliefs, such as vegetarianism and 'metempsychosis,' or reincarnation. Sadly, all good things must come to an end and an era of repeated foreign invasion destroyed temples, universities, and innumerable academic works. If that was not enough, a period of colonial rule by a civilization convinced of their innate superiority stomped out any remaining embers of its pedagogic heritage."

Singh does not want us to dwell on the past. She looks instead to the present, soberly stating that a complete resurrection of India's ancient system of learning is "both impractical and undesirable." However, she describes many potent aspects of this system that can and should be implemented to improve modern educational systems. These include a truly holistic education, one where higher powers of awareness and creativity are developed; a sacred view of Nature that permeates its foundations;

usage of ancient Indian texts for inspiration; and incorporation of ethics, along with practices such as pranayama and hatha yoga.

The book's title, unfortunately, may lead



HINDUISM TODAY

A tradition of teaching: (far left) students learning at a traditional gurukulam; (above) a copy of the book; (below) the remains of India's famed Nalanda University, which was recently restored

readers unfamiliar with Singh's earlier work to assume it is an impenetrable historical treatise, fit only for those studying in the field. Similarly, the cover art parallels standardized American textbooks which are filled with endless facts fit only to be read by the insomniac. After one reads and understands the text, however, the cover reveals its

profundity. A stone carving of the Goddess of learning, Saraswati, is juxtaposed with the remains of Nalanda University, which was destroyed by invaders. The cover art can be taken as a testament to the eternity of knowledge and truth, despite the destruction of its temporal external manifestation.

It would be unfortunate if this book were ignored because of such a small matter, as its contents would be a great boon in the hands of many, whether academics or not. Though dealing with complex topics, the book stays accessible and enjoyable to read.

We highly recommend this book to anyone unfamiliar with India's meritorious past, especially those who will, in any way, be responsible for educating the minds of tomorrow, be they lecturers, politicians or parents. The book is also an excellent resource for the reversal of the Eurocentric narrative that colonial empires were solely responsible for bringing systematic education to the world.

Beyond just the glorification of India and narrative reversal, the text alludes to a key of human potential. By methodically linking prominent creative feats of mankind such as art, science, and philosophy back to ancient India, we see the roots of these feats not as the result of an innately superior Western civilization, but of a people who valued knowledge above all else and with this spirit mastered the control of Man's mind, energies, and unlimited creative potential.

Though this supreme art has been lost for many, it is in its ascendancy today, aided by a deep understanding of the value these ancient civilizations possessed, an understanding that can be aided by a thorough reading of Singh's opus.

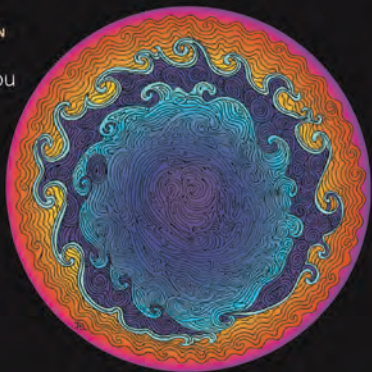


SHUTTERSTOCK

Seven Dimensions Of the Mind

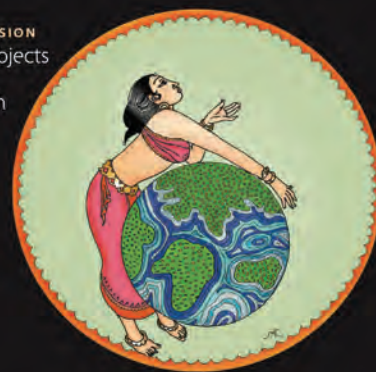
FIRST DIMENSION
The Inside of
Objects that You
Cannot See
And Touch

1



SECOND DIMENSION
All Physical Objects
That You Can
See and Touch

2



THIRD DIMENSION
The Interrelated
Magnetic Forces
That Exist
Between
People and
People and
Their Things

3



FOURTH DIMENSION
Awareness
Cognizing the
Interrelated
Forces of the
5th, 4th & 3rd
Dimensions

4



FIFTH DIMENSION
Awareness of
Forms in Their
Totality

5



SIXTH DIMENSION
The Rarified Area
Of Mind Where
Forms Are
Conceived of
Inner Sound
And Colors

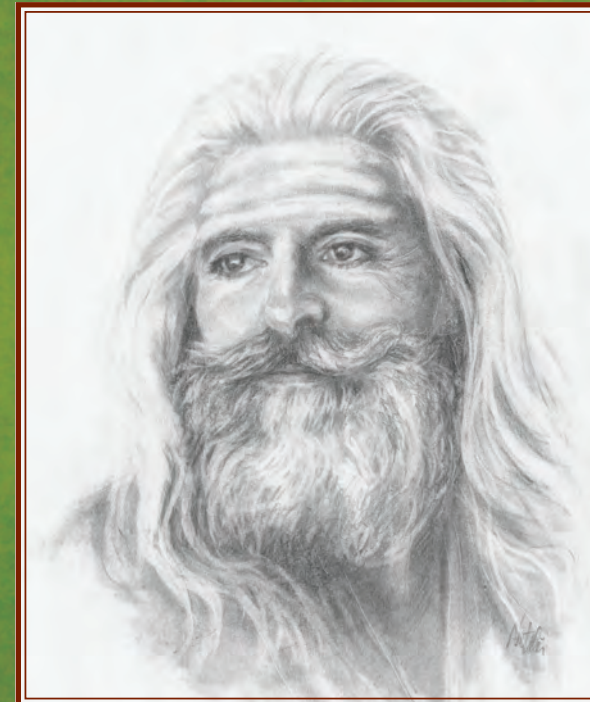
6



EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

A Mystical Map of Existence & Consciousness

MAJOR EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK BY SATGURU SIVAYA SUBRAMUNIASWAMI



The Author: This pencil portrait of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami is one of 20 created by Natalie Levin for the book excerpted in this feature. The book's seven chapter spreads are shown here, illustrated with symbolic art by S. Rajam of Mylapore, South India.

SATGURU SIVAYA SUBRAMUNIASWAMI'S FRAMEWORK of seven dimensions of the mind divides consciousness into seven categories that range from gross to extremely subtle. The first two describe physical existence—the inside and outside of things. The third dimension is mankind's normal level of consciousness, consisting of thoughts and emotions about our own and others' lives. The fourth through the seventh dimensions can be described as the inner, mystical or higher realms of consciousness. They are within everyone but require training and practice to be accessed with continuity. This unique framework is useful in providing guidance in our efforts to access inner states of consciousness. This requires knowing which dimension of the mind the inner state is in. Like following a mariner's map, once we pinpoint a superconscious experience we are able to return to it again and again, just as sailors can reach a shore on a chart. Gurudeva gives a helpful key to experiencing the states of consciousness in the fourth through seventh dimensions by relating them to the chakras. Specifically, he states that, while in meditation, to experience states of inner consciousness within the fourth dimension, look at the world from the chest area (anahata chakra); for the fifth dimension, look out from the throat area (vishuddha chakra); for the sixth dimension, look out from between the eyes (ajna chakra); for the seventh dimension, look at the inner world through the top of the head (sahasrara chakra).

Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami

Author's Introduction to the Dimensions

The dimensions are a positive and helpful way of looking at life and understanding the experiences we have on the inward path. By identifying experience as being within one dimension or another, we are able to know at all times just where we are in consciousness, and that knowledge is the control over awareness that we need to continue the upward climb. At all times we are flowing through all of the dimensions. They all exist in total completion right now within us. However, we are only conscious periodically in one or another of them as awareness magnifies itself and registers the dimension by focusing upon it, shall we say.

SEVENTH DIMENSION
Awareness
Expanded into
Endless Inner
Space

7



Prelude: Awareness and the Seven Dimensions

Awareness itself functions differently from one dimension to another. When we look at life from the fourth dimension, we see more in depth than we can from the third or the second. Remember when we studied the second dimension, we found no depth at all? Then we created the third. We put depth and life, vigor and vitality to the second dimension of things that was just sitting there. Next we became tangled in this vigor and vitality, in the relationships between people and people and people and things, and the subconscious was created. The sense of ego, of personality, evolved out of the third dimension, for it is composed strictly of odic, magnetic force. The intellect and emotions dominated us.

When we released awareness to travel freely in the mind by managing positively the second and third dimensions, we entered another perspective. We gained the overview, a mountaintop consciousness from which we could see a nine-day scope of time and look into and through all of the intricacies of the third dimension and how it is created. In a sense, we put more light into the third dimension, the dark area of the mind. [Here, the term *awareness* refers to: Individual consciousness; perception; knowing; the witness of perception, "the inner eye of the soul."]

When we are in inner darkness and confusion, that is the third dimension totally. But as we brought more light into the third dimension and saw how it was constructed, we were in the fourth dimension and could also look into the deeper dimensions. From the fifth dimension, we became aware of the intricacies and the inner workings of the fourth dimension, seeing what psychic nerves look like, seeing how psychic nerve currents draw their energy from the central source of energy. In the fifth dimension, we became aware of a bright light that filled the cranium. In a flash we intuited vast knowledge and saw the creation, preservation and destruction of objects over seemingly great spans of time simultaneously in the now. A deep love, a universal and all-embracing love, unfolded.

Compassion burst forth as we came to understand the predicament of our fellow man.

Awareness, too, changed. Instead of traveling or flowing through the mind, now it could focus and look into any area without seeming to move. Experiences came before our inner vision, and we could even bring past and future into the now. Later we evolved into the sixth dimension, where all form is reduced to sound and color. The devonic or heavenly realm of forces as represented by Gods, Deities and devas became manifest. From the sixth dimension, which corresponds to the ajna chakra or third eye, inner worlds opened and light flooded through the entire body.

The seventh dimension, or sahasrara chakra, brought us into pure consciousness or pure space void of form—awareness aware only of itself. Here awareness finally withdraws even from the magnificent visions of superconsciousness, and with no objects is able to contemplate itself as *kaif*. Finally, the snake swallows its own tail, awareness dissolves and only That remains, the Self God beyond all dimensions of the mind.

Of course, it is one thing to hear about the dimensions, to be intellectually fascinated by the vastness of this perspective, and quite another to make them an experiential part of our lives. That is what must be done next. Identify the dimensions within the context of your own personal experience. Ask yourself, "Which dimension does this kind of happening belong to? How does one dimension relate to and exist within another inside of me?" Mark off the various areas of the mind. Map them out carefully and you will identify and enjoy aspects of yourself you never knew existed before.

You will observe that man is a whole, the totality of all existence residing within him in various layers of subtle and gross vibration, evolving ever more subtle as the continuum penetrates deeper into his being, reaching ultimately the timeless, spaceless Reality of himself which he then identifies as the one Reality in all of existence.



The Seven Dimensions in a Nutshell

- First Dimension**
The inside of physical objects that you cannot see or touch.
- Second Dimension**
All physical objects that you can see and touch.
- Third Dimension**
The interrelated magnetic forces that exist between people and people and their things.
- Fourth Dimension**
Awareness cognizing the interrelated forces of the fifth, fourth and third dimensions. A natural state for those who meditate.
- Fifth Dimension**
Awareness of forms in their totality in progressive states of manifestation.
- Sixth Dimension**
The rarefied area of mind where forms are conceived of inner sound and colors.
- Seventh Dimension**
Awareness expanded into endless inner space.



First Dimension: The Inside of Objects

The first dimension is the inside of things that you cannot see or touch. The inside of a piece of fruit is the first dimension; the outside or surface of the fruit is the second dimension. The inside of the physical body, the Earth, a tree and a stone—these all lie in the first dimension. To bring the first dimension out, simply open up the fruit. The part that was previously unseen as well as untouched but which is now visible and tangible has been brought into the second dimension.

It is interesting to note that most of modern science is dedicated to unfolding knowledge of the first dimension, and that within the molecular, atomic and sub-atomic elements of matter the other seven dimensions are discovered. Thus the scientist, by looking into matter, finds the deeper dimensions to the point of reducing matter to energy and energy to sound and light. Further reducing sound and light to consciousness and anti-matter, he verges on the brink of contemplative realization similar to that discovered in deep meditation. Therefore, all dimensions of the mind exist in every cell, every atom

in the universe.

Within the first dimension of the mind, called *arehmushum*, there are energy flows. Energy in its static state. Energy spinning. Energy lifting, pushing, pulling, rising, falling, attracting, repelling, changing form, filling, emptying, appearing and disappearing. Eighteen forms of energy exist in the first dimension, interacting and causing the phenomena observed in the physical world and studied by science as gravity, momentum, inertia, magnetism, electricity and various forces. We can see these energy flows very readily in nature as we witness, without holding previous concepts, the actions and interactions within plants, within stones, within water, wind and fire.

.....

Inside a human cell: While the surface of a cell is simple (the second dimension), the inside is complex almost beyond imagination. Here the artist cuts into a cell to reveal a few of the tens of thousands of inclusions. All of the main images use Australian-aborigine dotted-art backgrounds.



See and touch: The second dimension consists of physical objects, everything we can see and touch. Here it is cleverly depicted by the artist as eyes in hands. The sidebar icon is a plant cell on a leaf.

viewed—a flower, for instance. The brief time span of a flower lets us view its budding, blossom, life and decay within a matter of days or even hours. The atoms of a flower will go to some other forms once that flower has demagnetized itself by breaking through a time cycle. A banyan tree or mountain are examples of objects with apparently more permanence, or which take years or centuries for the process of decay to become visible.

The second dimension has been and always will be created through certain aspects of time cycles and is comprised of two parts: time continuity or memory and the instinctive consciousness that works involuntarily according to habit patterns in man as well as in animals. Nature, then, is related to the instinctive mind. The memory patterns of a flower are very strong. It comes up the same year after year, century after century. It does not forget how to form itself. So, the second dimension is created by the instinctive forces of nature, the instinctive mind of animals and man in conjunction with the memory patterns of the grand mind of nature—created by man according to his needs and desires.

Man himself controls these time cycles to a certain extent, but not totally. For one thing, he holds the second dimension together in consciousness in short, medium or long time cycles, depending upon the nature of the object's construction. If he actually constructs it himself, then the amount of energy and thought put into planning and clear thinking will either lengthen or shorten the time cycle. Because his body is of the second dimension, as he enters into a particular time cycle he adds power to that cycle and objects in it and can act either as creator, preserver or destroyer and thereby lengthen or shorten a natural time cycle. A man could allow a chair to sit until it went into its natural decay, or he could enter the picture as another second-dimensional object and preserve or destroy it.

The second dimension is the exterior world which most languages describe abundantly, making it seem real to us and giving it a sense of permanency, for man's mind gives substance or recognition to things that are named or labeled. Most people acquire a possession, and instead of using that possession and disposing of it, they use it and become attached to it through like and dislike. It becomes a part of their mind. It becomes real to them. They take it seriously, and when the time comes to dispose of that possession, they are unhappy. This indicates the narrowing down of the mind which has been caused by language and attitudes which build possession and the significance of physical things out of proportion.



An Acharya's Meditation

One day, decades ago, I had a meditation that took me without notice into the first dimension. Prior to that, I had more or less dismissed it. After all, it's only one, and there are six more that are higher, and presumably more important. In this meditation, I was suddenly confronted with how vast the first dimension is. It had such depth and complexity. I realized it is far more significant to the workings of the cosmos than the second dimension, which we can see and touch. In fact, the second dimension is a mere surface, like a cell wall or the skin on our body, beneath which is the real workings of the cell. From that day, I have so appreciated what Gurudeva calls "the inside of things we cannot see and touch." The inside is far bigger and substantive than the outside. What we don't see and don't touch is infinitely larger than what we do.

Professor of biology Michael Denton, in his book *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*, explains human cell complexity [the first dimension of our own bodies] with an example: "To grasp the reality of life as it has been revealed by molecular biology, we must magnify a cell a thousand million times until it is twenty kilometers in diameter and resembles a giant airship large enough to cover a great city like London or New York. What we would then see would be an object of unparalleled complexity and adaptive design. On the surface of the cell we would see millions of openings, like portholes of a vast space ship, opening and closing to allow a continual stream of materials to flow in and out. If we were to enter one of these openings, we would find ourselves in a world of supreme technology and bewildering complexity... beyond our own creative capacities, a reality which is the very antithesis of chance, which excels in every sense anything produced by the intelligence of man."

Second Dimension: The Five Senses

The second dimension consists of things which can be both seen and touched—the surfaces of objects such as flowers, stones and water. When we observe these objects without thinking about them, without feeling like or dislike—just pure perception—then we are aware of the second dimension.

It appears flat, consisting of only two layers of form, for it is seen without evaluation or analysis which gives depth to our observations. If we close our eyes and then open them very slowly, holding the mind steady, we can sit without relating to anything we see and therefore see it objectively as it is. This flat view of the world of objects can be experienced more easily by opening just one eye than with both eyes open. There is a tendency to get involved with what we see when both eyes are open. What we perceive are things that can be identified with the five senses—things we can smell, hear, touch, taste and see. These perceptions are all two-dimensional through the senses. Through interpretation they do flow into deeper dimensions of the mind.

The mystic, in looking out at the world of objects, sees the second dimension as a coherent conglomeration of "things." Recognizing the limited mind function of things, or the boundary of second-dimensional intelligence, he does not become entangled in his relationship to them. Nevertheless, he does relate to the second dimension by using it, by observing it, by appreciating it, or by renouncing it. He places the two-dimensional world where it belongs.

Forms are always changing in the second dimension. However, the substance out of which they are made is recycled from one form to another form. According to the mystic's perspective, all forms exist in all time cycles within the mind. There is nothing created; there is nothing preserved; there is nothing destroyed. All things exist simultaneously, coming into various dimensions of manifestation from time to time.

The decay, the change of form in the second dimension through time cycles, is apparent when things of short time cycles are



Between people: The third dimension, where humans mostly live, is about people and their relationships with other people and with things. The sidebar icon is the artist's interpretation of the intertwining of energies between people, shown as two trees wrapping around one another.

simultaneously creating the next more complex strata of third-dimensional existence. That is, we analyze our impressions, weighing them against the impressions of others. We think about our own thoughts. We have feelings about our feelings, and out of these ongoing comparisons the interwoven structure of this dimension evolves. Through our ratio of comparisons, first of objects, then of our interaction with objects, through nerve system response, and finally of our self-created thoughts and feelings, the third dimension gains prominence and severely entangles awareness in a fascinating and seemingly endless cinema.

When we sit with others in a room, the third dimension claims such priority that most of the activity takes place there. Of course, the second dimension is all about us and was prepared earlier. Someone had to arrange the furniture, clean the room, or even prepare a meal. But when we gather in the room, sit down together, we immediately lose consciousness of the second dimension. Instead, we relate almost exclusively to our feelings, emotions, desires, concepts, likes and dislikes. In talking, laughing and arguing back and forth we thrust our pranic life force into the third dimension, stimulate and are stimulated by the energy that others dedicate to the discussion. As the forces mix and mingle among everyone in the room, they produce either positive, creative overtones or negative, contentious ones, according to the chemicalization of the entire group mind.

The businessman or artist has cycles as well, but they are more consciously directed. In fact, they are partially creating the forces that influence others in the world. Their control of the forces of the third dimension comes through dealing positively and dynamically with themselves and through maintaining an active, creative state which dominates rather than is dominated by the swirling energies of other people. Through discipline, knowledge and restraints, they direct the mental and feeling forces positively and smooth out the cycles of inner-dimensional life.

The mature meditator remains independent of fluctuating cycles by not identifying falsely with the inevitable changes inherent in third-dimensional existence. He works to hold awareness constantly in the fourth dimension, from which the first, second and third are viewed in affectionate detachment. The fourth dimension is home base, the area of mind he returns to after meditation, not allowing awareness to flow to the extremities of gross instincts and intellect found in the third dimension.... In man the instinctive cycles comprise a relatively minimal portion of the third dimension. Emotional and intellectual cycles are more prominent. All people have emotional cycles. They are not always cheerfully liking and they are not always sorrowfully disliking. They are not always full and they are not always hungry. A constant ebb and flow of the odic forces characterizes this dimension. It is always in flux, always changing.



Third Dimension in Depth

The third dimension is the essence of duality, the shifting of forces constantly. Within the changing world of the third dimension are two basic and intricate energy flows. The first is a flow of force between people and things. This is a one-way flow through which people relate to objects. The second is a flow between two people or more and also between people and animals. Visualize a stream of energy generated in the body by the processes of life. This energy or prana constantly flows out from the central source of energy and constitutes the aura, constitutes the physical energy that moves the body, constitutes thoughts and feelings. This prana creates a force field around the body. As soon as two people associate, these force fields interact, or the two energy streams interchange. Should these energies be of a like nature, the result is friendship. When we understand these energies as they combine, attract and repel in human relationships, we then begin to discover the constituent parts of what we call the world.

From the point of view of the second dimension looking into the third, awareness is awed by the seemingly powerful feelings, emotions and motivating forces of the third dimension. We feel victims of forces beyond our power to control. Generally, if we go into a study of the mind from this perspective of looking, in a sense, from the second dimension into the third and fourth, we analyze the surface by asking ourselves, "Why did this happen to me? Why did that happen? What did I do to deserve this?" Many, many people live their entire lifetime in a conscious-mind state, trying to analyze the subconscious, and discover very little for their efforts.

Third Dimension: Thoughts and Feelings

It is in the third dimension that most people live most of the time. This is the world of thoughts and feelings, of emotions and intellectual theory. It thrives on novelty, new ideas, new feelings, new fashions, new discoveries, new anything. The third-dimensional world is changing rapidly.

When we open our eyes and look into the exterior world, where we perceive things through sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste, the five senses are going to naturally react. They react according to the personality and habit structure of man. If he smells something he is accustomed to smelling, he likes it. If he encounters an unfamiliar smell, the animal nature will recoil and he will say, "I don't like it." He forms likes and dislikes, loves and hates which later build through repetition into joys and sorrows. The flurry caused by this attraction and repelling in the nerve system of man as he relates to people and objects is the birth of the third dimension in man.

Man creates his own personal ego through these subtle reactions

of his nerve system to the world of things and the world of other people. Once sufficient experience has been developed into habit patterns of action and reaction, he begins to dissect those things. He collects in his mind all of the good, positive, familiar impressions that he has grown accustomed to. Then he discards those impressions that have stirred his nerve system and those that are unfamiliar. Thus he enters fully into the third dimension of the mind, where most of the world as we generally know it takes place—much more so than in the first or second dimensions.

It is when we bring our subconscious and our intellectual facilities into the second dimension that we cause the third dimension to happen. We look at the world about us, up and down, right and left, and we begin to form comparisons in our analyzing things of the second dimension. Our likes and dislikes are the third dimension. The first and most simple structure of the third dimension is created in this way. Next we evaluate the likes and dislikes themselves,



Cognition: The fourth dimension is the subsuperconscious mind where we see the interrelatedness of all things, understanding the within as well as the outside. It is the world of knowing. The sidebar icon is Sri Chakra, a mystical yantra used for meditation.

the fourth dimension. Only the fourth dimension can observe the thinking process at work. That is a good, clear way to look at the fourth dimension—as simply the watcher, the witness. There are millions of different ways consciousness can and does function in the fourth dimension, but this is the best way to define and learn of it.

Understandings gained from the fourth dimension tend to make one a good teacher and philosopher. Artists are in the fourth dimension. Each time you designed or created anything, you were bringing the beauty of the within through your nerve system into manifestation. Didn't your whole nerve system feel good? That was the subsuperconscious fourth dimension of you. It finds expression in the creative intellect that wants to know for the good of the other fellow, that seeking to know.

When we say a person is open-minded, more willing to listen than to banter back his own ideas at you, he is conscious in the fourth dimension. He's a new-age person. When he says something, it's because he has something to say and generally his perspective of looking at the world is quite different from the material attitudes of people around him. He is able to see all four sides of a subject at the same time and to understand what people mean even if their viewpoint differs from his own. He is inspirational. He has and enjoys happiness. He is creative, unique, and works out of the box. He is independent, relying on himself

and the power of his spine. He is quick to help others but slow to get entangled with their third-dimensional forces. He is highly motivated, with well-defined purposes and goals. He expends his energy well, not wasting or draining the power that propels him onward and inward. He is enthused, charmed with life, charged with great desire to pursue the spiritual path.

It is not as difficult as we sometimes make it seem to be in the fourth dimension. Most people spend quite a bit of their time in the fourth-dimensional realm without even realizing it. But the discovery of the fourth dimension or any dimension is the discovery that we're already there and knowing when we are there and when we are not there. If we know that, we automatically know how to be there when we find we are not.

The transition from the third dimension into the fourth comes when our subconscious has released itself from opposing forces sufficiently to recognize that awareness travels in the mind and to identify with awareness instead of states of emotion and intellect through which it passes. We then gain a certain control over previous congested areas of the third dimension. More perception comes. We are able to see the third dimension clearly, to hold for longer periods of time our proper relations to the second, third and fourth dimensions.



Steadiness in the 4th Dimension

It's very easy to get into the fourth dimension, very easy. It's a little more challenging to hold that detached perspective when things are not going as well as we would like—but then it's easy to return when the forces smooth out. Whereas man himself creates the third dimension in daily life, the fourth dimension is the being of man and how he relates to himself within himself. Yet, it is not powerful like the fifth dimension, but serene and quiet. It is the home base for the jnani. He never moves further out in consciousness than the fourth dimension, never becomes attached or identified with thought, emotion, or even the multitudinous forms of superconsciousness. He is the watcher, and his awareness is centered, hovering like a hummingbird, governing the flow of the externalities of life while resting in the peace and enlightenment of his own being. From his established silent center, he looks at and into every aspect of the interrelated states of mind, the interrelated states of the nerve system as seen by the fourth dimension. His awareness remains basically within the fourth dimension and does not have to flow out into the third or second, because the visionary powers and faculty of inner sight already sees out through the third and second dimensions, acts, and governs those dimensions as well as the personality effectively from the fourth without ever leaving it. From this vantage point, we can view the building of emotional involvements within the third dimension, observing the workings of the emotional and intellectual units of ourselves and others. From this detachment, we gain the ability to dissolve confusions, conflicts, and the various and varied entanglements that are encountered daily.

Fourth Dimension: Mountaintop Consciousness

The fourth dimension is the natural state of mankind, the state he resides in unless external events consume awareness. This is where life should be lived every day, having that mountaintop consciousness that looks over, in and through everything and gives the facility to enjoy and participate fully in the world while knowing at all times exactly where we are in the mind. It gives the experience of a pure state of awareness flowing through the mind and is the threshold to vaster inner space and spiritual realization. It is a beautiful place to be, and you can be there all of the time by feeling the power of your spine. The minute you feel that radiant energy in the spine, you are disconnected from the third dimension and soar into the fourth.

As this transition occurs, the first glimmer of inner light within the head is seen. It is usually a pale, moon-like glow seen at the top of the head from the fourth dimension looking into the fifth. This light illumines the darkness of the third dimension. The third dimension

is the dark area of the mind, and we only see our way clearly in it through the two lights of the fourth dimension: sunlight or electric light, which man himself has invented to light up the third dimension and remove the fear of unknowing which is equal to the fear of darkness.

When we can hold ourselves in consciousness steady enough to see yesterday and tomorrow right in the same moment, we are in the fourth dimension. When we can hold ourselves steady enough to see the flow of force and vibration in the inner atmosphere between other people and ourselves, we are in the fourth dimension.

When we are emotionally tangled or upset and we see that we are emotionally upset, we're in the fourth dimension. The fourth dimension is the watcher. If totally enmeshed in the third dimension, we would be upset but would be too identified with the emotion to be able to simultaneously observe, "I am upset. I feel confused and terrible!" When we watch the mind think, we are using a faculty of



Superconsciousness: Here a seeker awakens the light of the mind, and it floods down his spine. From this dimension he sees past and future, unfolds new knowledge and creativity. The sidebar icon shows the evolution of a seed into a sprout and finally a mature plant.

obvious I could never forget it.” Ten minutes later we are struggling to maintain the continuity of the experience which, dream-like, begins to fade. Yet, as we become more and more acquainted with these strata, the memory is impressed easily on the physical brain cells, and the fifth dimension comes more into focus for us.

In the fifth dimension of the mind the total evolution of form is perceived. When we see a flower, we not only see it as it is at that moment, but simultaneously actually see the stages of its life from creation to preservation to disintegration. This is where we see “life in a blade of grass and the universe in a grain of sand.” All things are within all things. The fifth dimension is not timeless, but it has no consciousness of time or even of the third dimension.

Great inventions and music have come from the fifth dimension in a flash, followed by years of working all of the details through to the fourth and third dimensions. Awakened psychics enter the fifth dimension and are able to read patterns of the future and past through the third eye.

The fifth dimension can be related to the kalingkasim° chakra, located at the throat. People who are conscious in the fifth dimension have a deep universal love for other people. They are often humanitarians. Life for them is a joyous, even blissful, experience with events happening in perfect timing. Other people like

to be with them, for they are open, right there, present to the needs of others. The forces of their life are not so much consciously directed as directed superconsciously from the fifth dimension itself, which keeps all aspects in proportion. Of course, they also need a strong fourth-dimensional capacity to follow through on these subtle directions, and a strong third dimension to sustain the forces of superconsciousness. If they find themselves struggling with forces of the third dimension, the rules and regulations of which may not be totally familiar to them, they resolve their problems from the fifth dimension. Solutions come clearly to them, and with strong fourth-dimensional capacity they follow through and do it.

In the fifth dimension we have no sense of ego, no personal me or mine, which after all are composed of the elements of the second and third dimension. People who experience this metamorphosis from ordinary consciousness, and then discipline themselves so the intensity of fifth-dimensional being is sustained, love their fellow man with quiet compassion.

They are great humanitarians and understand the predicament and problems of others without criticism. Timing in their lives is right, and things happen for them. They’re open. They’re right there. They receive positive direction from the fifth dimension, which periodically, shall we say, adjusts their forces, keeping all other aspects in line. They find out how to do things—they’re creative.



Blissfulness in the 5th Dimension

The way to get stabilized in the fifth-dimensional consciousness is to lead a positive and virtuous inner life and a positive and virtuous outer life. This simple act brings the subtle layers of existence to the forefront of awareness. In the initial stages of meditation, the fifth dimension seems extremely tenuous, almost non-existent or out of reach. Gradually, after years of sustained sadhana, we come to relate freely within its realms. It becomes very much a part of life as we discover it during meditation, then later in the midst of ordinary activity. When this happens, dramatic changes in our life manifest due to awareness’ migration to a new channel within the spinal column.

If you visualize the simshumbisi» current as a cord of wires all together, awareness would generally flow through just one of them. In order to get into the next wire, it is not possible to jump across the hiatus in the middle. You must go to the top, to the fifth dimension, for that is the only opening. Most people are only aware of one or two currents and believe that is all that exist. Most devotees on the path have already experienced the re-channeling of awareness from the fifth dimension. They may not know what happened exactly, or even when, but something did happen, and here they are seeking within, whereas before the within was perhaps a mental concept. Re-channeling could happen during an intense sorrow or joy, by meeting a holy being or even during sleep.

Fifth Dimension: The Mind of Light

The perspective that all is well in the world, the experience that everything is as it should be, perfect right now, is of the fifth dimension. In this state we realize a great bliss, a comprehensive, all-encompassing acceptance of the universe as it is, which reveals that the whole of existence is working proportionately one with another. Everything is right, just right, and if you moved even one thing—you wouldn’t want to move one thing. You wouldn’t want to change or improve one thing, or stop something or start something, because everything is all right. Now, you would never feel that way in the third dimension or even the fourth, which would inspire philosophical discourse.

The fifth dimension is powerful. It eradicates concepts of imperfection in the flash vision of perfect harmony of all things. It is pure insight. Then insight is translated to the fourth dimension, where it can be comprehended by the outer consciousness of man. Metaphysicians call the fifth dimension the “mind of light,” for it is the superconscious area from which the clear white light is inwardly seen to fill the head. Others call it God. As man comes into the sixth dimension, that light extends throughout the physical body and can

even be seen in the feet as he walks.

When people function in the fifth dimension, they are not out of touch with daily realities. It makes them extremely alert and bright. They’re right there. They see things that have to be done and do them. Since they draw from a vast storehouse of energy and a broad evolutionary vantage point, they even do unfamiliar tasks with confidence—as though they had performed it a thousand times. They haven’t done it before, but they have. They feel they have. Nothing seems strange or awkward. Everything is familiar, and they bring grace into every department of life.

In the beginning, we discover the fifth dimension only through flashes, brief insights. People have had intuitive flashes that have altered and changed the pattern of their entire life. The still, small voice, or the inner voice, comes directly from the fifth dimension. The third eye functions from the fifth and sixth dimensions. Then one of the difficulties comes—that of translating knowledge and insight into a conceptual understanding. Very often fifth-dimensional insight is so deep, so subtle that we cannot label it and therefore cannot reconstruct it in our memory patterns. We think, “Oh, this is so clear, so



Sound and color: The deep inner world of this dimension is made of subtle sound and color, shown here as the sound-giving conch shell which holds within it brilliant colors of all shades. The sidebar icon is a steady flame, intimating the fully stilled mind that is aware of awareness and nothing else.

lives in his inner body.

Temple Deities are sixth-dimensional beings. When we visit temples, they actually do hear and see our supplications. Great beings who no longer need a physical body also reside in this dimension.

If awareness has been well schooled in concentration, it can hold itself placidly in the intensity of the sixth dimension, remaining there to view the interrelated inner forces which construct the inner bodies of man—the actinodic or astral body and the golden actinic body, which is given birth after continued experiences of Self Realization.

The sixth dimension is a guarded area of the mind, less accessible than other states. The gates to these realms are guarded by fierce and apparently demonic creatures, and entrance is only gained once it is earned. The best way to earn access into the sixth dimension is to come in from the seventh. The best way to gain audience with a king is to be a king yourself. Better not to consciously open the psychic

centers of the sixth dimension, but to understand the realm. When the time is right, experience will come of itself. It is far easier anyway to enter the equally blissful seventh dimension by entering simshumbusi energy in the spine and from there into pure consciousness—kaif». The bliss of the seventh dimension is quite different from that in the sixth.

The superconscious plane of the sixth dimension is situated at the third eye or ajna chakra. The inner mechanism of the human aura, the inner mechanism of thought forms, the inner mechanism of the astral plane and the superconscious body of light are all within this sixth dimension. The forces and rays of actinic energy, the various breakdowns of magnetic energy, the rays of the actinic force fields radiating out from the seventh dimension, and the rays of the odic magnetic force fields issuing forth from the third and fourth dimensions all come together within the sixth dimension in a tremendous intensity. The sixth dimension is therefore the heart of the generative and regenerative function of intelligence of man, whereas the fifth dimension actually governs all intelligence.

Sixth Dimension: The World of Sounds & Colors

The sixth dimension is color, sound and vibration, as well as subtle forms and beings composed of these elements. The colors of the sixth dimension are unlike colors we have ever seen on the surface of the Earth. They are brighter, yet more subtle, and they mix and mingle. In other words, colors pass into and through each other, creating exquisite varieties of color with form. The beautiful actinic body of light, that pure inner body, exists in the sixth dimension.

Awareness in the sixth dimension has an all-knowing capacity which is difficult to translate into fourth-dimensional conceptual understanding. Therefore, mystics often have deep sixth-dimensional experiences, but cannot always recall the experience later. This dimension is outside of the normal processes of thought and time, and a prolonged experience may seem to last an entire month, while its actual duration on the physical plane is only two seconds; and such vast experience cannot register within the faculty of time-space memory patterns of the fourth dimension. But from the fourth

dimension, the aspirant would intuit later certain aspects of the experience and bring them through to work with and use in his daily life. Extended practice of kaif» [awareness aware of itself] and other disciplined contemplative efforts bring more and more awareness of the deeper dimensions into daily perceptions.

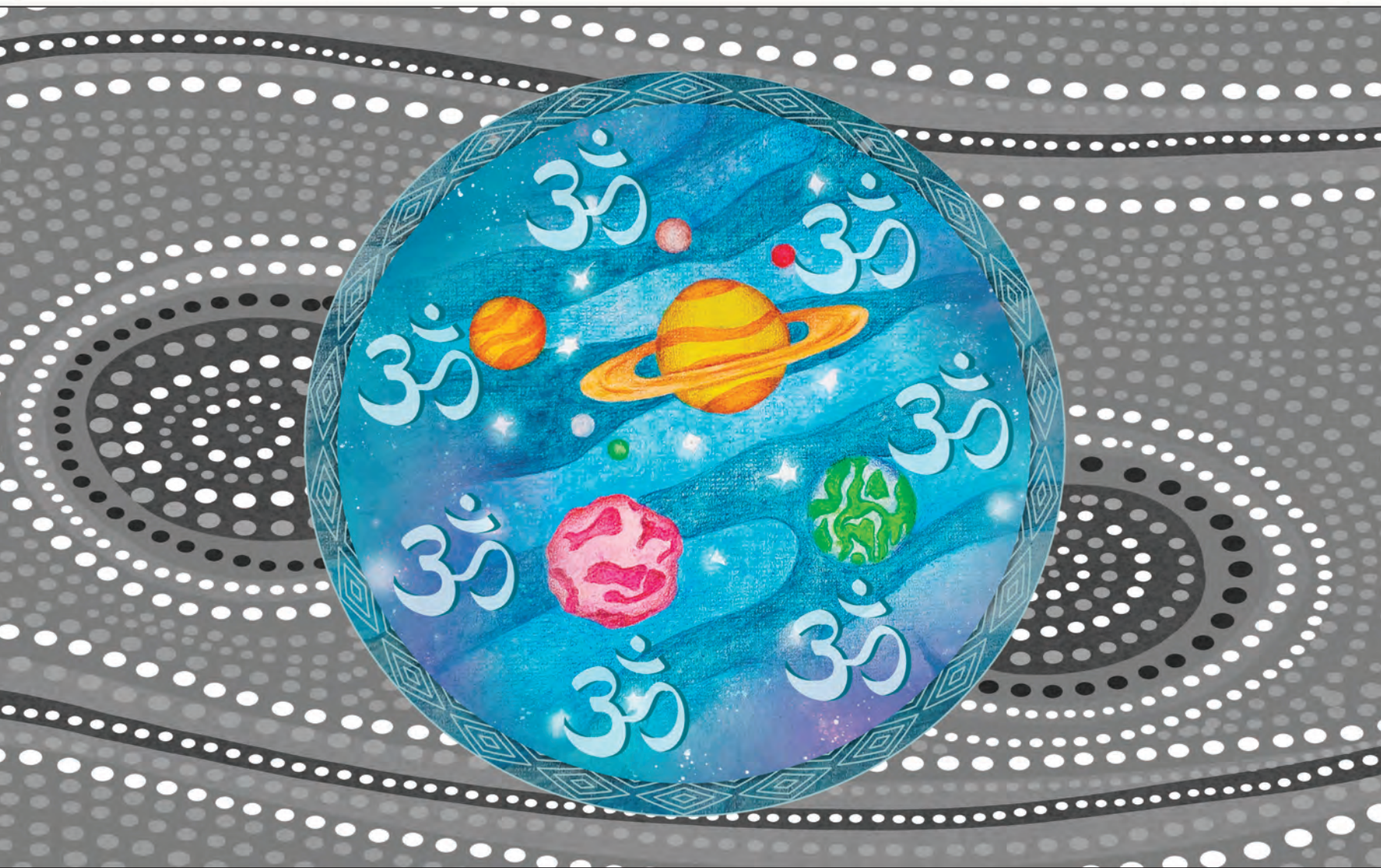
Science has recently discovered the sixth dimension. It tells us that all matter is energy in a grosser form and that even a chair can be reduced to sound and color at a sub-molecular level. And they're right. A chair on one level sounds like a symphony and looks like a light show. But in the second dimension it is just an ordinary chair. It exists simultaneously in all dimensions and looks different from each.

The great saints and sages venerated by men have lived fully and consciously in this rarified mind strata. There are people who once lived in physical bodies and in the fourth dimension and who now live totally in the sixth dimension. It is possible to live without a physical body in this dimension and to still be fully conscious. One



Kaif»: Awareness Aware of Itself

Anyone can experience kaif», awareness aware of itself, for brief interludes. It is much more difficult to sustain the intensity, however, for the very power that allows us to control the mind enough to touch into kaif» stimulates the other dimensions as well, setting a wave rippling through stillest consciousness. That wave travels through the sixth, then the fifth, fourth and third dimensions, right out into the second. And if there are areas of the mind, especially in the second and third dimensions, which are not under guidance of the will or which are unresolved, then that ripple will catalyze them and pull awareness out of kaif». That is why very few aspirants are able to just sit in the absolute simplicity of kaif»—they are externalized by the outer dimensions as the intensity of pure awareness radiates and reverberates through the nerve complex. Therefore, although kaif» is itself easy to attain, it is indeed difficult to sustain for longer periods and even more difficult to dissolve into im° kaif», Self Realization. The aspirant, noting this, then dedicates himself to refining the outer manifestations of the second, third and fourth dimensions in order to gain a stable control over those forces so that when he does return to kaif» the ripple that goes out into the mind does not cause a backlash stimulation sufficient to pull awareness out to the third dimension. And you have all experienced this. You have been absorbed in a meditation only to be drawn out into a vision or into your legs which were hurting or into some thought sequences in the mind. Therefore, the realms of Self Realization protect themselves from entrance simply by the nature of the mechanism of the dimensions. The experience of kaif» is simple; our concepts about it are the biggest barrier. We often feel that pure consciousness must be earned by a saintly life, and we generally know our life well enough to disqualify ourselves. But that is the “I’m out here and heaven is in there” concept—a false concept if ever there was one. Turn it inside out. Realize and then convince the subconscious mind that you are the whole thing right now—the within as well as the without. The saint you envision living the perfect life lives in your own consciousness. All dimensions of existence reside in you, and you will never be more or less than you are at this very moment. That makes attaining pure consciousness simple, doesn’t it? And it is simple if we discard the baggage of accumulated opinions and misunderstandings.



Infinite space: The artist indicates the expansiveness of space using a solar system metaphor, surrounded by the all-pervasive Aum. The sidebar icon is a traditional kumbha pot with mango leaves and a coconut to depict the placid auspiciousness of this dimension of the mind.

outer dimensions as niimf». The difference is in the dimensions, not in awareness. In other words, the same faculty of awareness that sees physical objects in the second dimension also perceives subtle forms in the fifth and sixth and is called pure awareness when it is able to eliminate all objects and be aware of itself. This can be observed by coming slowly out of deep meditation in the seventh dimension instead of coming out quickly as is the tendency. By consciously slowing down the externalizing process we observe pure consciousness first, followed by awareness of subtle forms of light and various consistencies of denser space which can be visually distinguished. This brings us from simply being aware immediately into processes of sight. We may also hear the inner sounds—the high pitched “ee” or the “aum.” Next, actual inner visions could be seen. As awareness moves further out into the mind, instead of focusing, it begins to travel or flow and might then come into memory patterns, then into the energy current of the nerve system and out into the physical body. At this point one would feel a blissful river of energy rushing through the body, or perhaps discomfort or even pain. Opening the eyes, awareness finally flows out into the second-dimensional world of things. It is the same awareness that functions through the dimensions, and it is closer to what you call “you” than any other form that can be identified with the mind.

Entering the seventh dimension, we enter realms of knowledge resulting from superconscious perceptions of the superconscious itself. It would be the heaven world of the Gods themselves. Their retreat place. The seventh dimension does not look back into the fifth dimension at all. It does look into the sixth and deeper into the eighth, ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth dimensions, which exist in a completely different realm—a different universe, so to speak. And all of this takes place within you, within the wonderful mind of man, your mind.

Everything learned must be forgotten to enter the seventh dimension. There are no concepts there, no feelings, no thoughts, no unfolding anyone—just pure space or pure consciousness. So, in that sublime state there is nothing to do except to let consciousness be aware of itself and finally swallow itself. Then the Self alone remains. After that total elimination of consciousness into the Nothingness of Being, pure consciousness returns, forgets itself and travels as niimf» back into the mind, flows into the fifth dimension, flows out to the fourth, looks into the third and second and becomes involved. The whole thing starts over again for you. Isn't it wonderful?



7th Dimension: Dividing Lines Merge

Between the fifth, sixth and seventh dimensions the lines we draw are understandably hypothetical. We give them boundaries and brackets in order to understand them, to define and identify these realms. The dividing lines between the first, second, third and fourth are clear and distinct. But in the deeper realms we know that they run together and merge, each existing as it does inside the other. This is intellectually intriguing, but the experience is much different. And that is what is sought, the direct personal experience.

The clear, placid, powerful seventh-dimensional space has remained the same for millions of years, untouched and untampered. Awareness travels through it viewing the various breakdowns of color, hearing the various pitches of sounds. It is the very source of the construction of all things. It is actinic energy within its quiescent state. For when actinic energy and odic energy intermingle, the mind then becomes active and awareness is thrust on the waves of mind substance and therefore views different things. Actinic or pure energy when blended together with odic, magnetic energy creates form in a similar way that the combination of air, which is invisible, with smoke creates various forms or clouds in the sky. Different patterns are made by the intermingling of smoke and air depending on the density of one and the motion of the other.

Seventh Dimension: Pure Inner Space

No mind patterns are visible in the core of the seventh dimension. The seventh dimension is a silent world. Only the air exists there and not the smoke. Only pure energy, which is equivalent to pure space. What is seen here are particles of actinic force more intense than other particles of actinic force. Thus, rays of actinic force are seen in the seventh dimension as pure color or pure sound—for sound and color themselves are one and the same thing in their breakdown within this dimension.

When one is consciously in the fourth dimension, he sees a slight moonlike glow within the head—just a faint glow. When he is in fifth-dimensional consciousness, he comes into a brilliant inner light within the head—bright and clear. However, when he evolves into the sixth dimension, that light glows in every cell of the body—through the torso, the hands, legs and feet. Then, in the seventh dimension he comes into pure inner space, seeing within himself a vast space that

goes on and on and on. At that time he is not necessarily conscious of light at all, for light exists as the interaction of pure force with magnetic forces.

The seventh dimension is clear inner space—not clear white light, just clear space. It goes on and on infinitely, like an infinite inner sky. Thus space itself, even intergalactic space in the second dimension, is dark, but our atmosphere is light due to the reflecting resistance or friction it offers light energy. Similarly, one deeply immersed in the seventh dimension would be aware of being aware without an awareness of light. In a sense he would be above the vibratory rate of light, and with no thing to be aware of, awareness becomes conscious of itself.

Awareness does not change, it only seems to change as the objects of its awareness revolve. Therefore, kaif», or pure awareness, is exactly the same in the seventh dimension as awareness which travels in the



ANCIENT EASTERN TRADITIONS DATING BACK THOUSANDS of years lay much importance on fasting as an adjunct to a full-fledged life. Prominent Hindu scholars believe that the purification of the body at the cellular level happens when the stomach is empty and the systemic functions are allowed to re-synchronize themselves. Most commonly, fasting in Hinduism takes the form of a spiritual sadhana, festival observance or penance.

During the Thai Pusam festival each year in January/February, for example, members of Tamil communities in South India, Malaysia, Fiji and my home country of Mauritius often fast for ten or more days prior to the festival's final celebration on the full moon. On that day, not only those who carry the milk offerings or carry kavadi will fast, but many others as well. This is not a full fast, but one in which certain meals are skipped or certain foods are avoided. Most common is to eat just one vegetarian meal a day. For some festivals, such as Teej, women will go without food or water for 24 hours. Today the health benefits of such practices are becoming clear.

Vinayaka Vratam is a 21-day religious observance that begins on the full moon day in the month of Karttikai (November/December). Devotees attend the daily prayers at the temple and take only one meal a day. Pradosha vrata is a bimonthly observance among Saivites that falls on the 13th day of every fortnight in the lunar calendar. The most orthodox will fast on water all day and take just milk and fruits in the evening, followed by an evening vigil. It is only the following day that cooked food is taken. A devotee's commitment to such fasts depends on one's inner goals, physical condition and current activities.

As a part of nature, mankind has been practicing fasting—both voluntary and involuntary—throughout his existence, especially before the surge of civilization. By definition, fasting is the abstinence of food intake for a specified period of time. In the broader context of the general population, the three most common methods are alternate day fasting (fasting on one day and then eating the next day), 5:2 intermittent fasting (fasting two days each week), and daily time-restricted feeding (fast, for example 16 hours, then eat all your calories in an eight-hour window).

What Happens When We Fast

Scientific research has shown that each time we eat, excess glucose molecules obtained from food are converted to glycogen and stored in the liver. In an individual not exercising, the stores would usually last for 10–14 hours. Upon glycogen depletion, the body turns to our adipose (fat) tissue for energy by the release of fatty acids. The liver then converts these fatty acids to ketones, which are used as

HEALTH

The ancient and still-popular discipline of fasting is strongly supported by modern medical research

BY DR. DEVADASEN VYTHELINGUM

the major cellular fuel source to compensate for low availability of glucose. This process is termed Intermittent Metabolic Switching or IMS. Relatively speaking, the energy in glucose is released rapidly, and that in ketones more slowly—comparable to the difference in energy release between burning gasoline and wood logs. Besides ketones serving as an energy source in the absence of glucose, there are remarkably complex and coordinated adaptations in relation to ketone production in the body which maintain or even enhance our bodily performances.

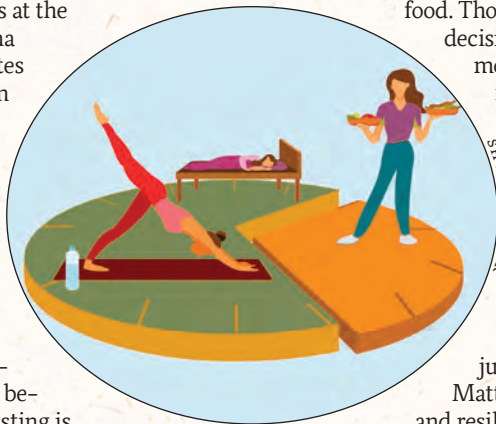
Why We're Smarter on an Empty Stomach

The rishis of yore proclaimed that food affects our level of consciousness. By controlling one's diet, the spiritual seeker gains improved clarity of mind, which can strengthen his yoga. Modern science has likewise observed that dietary energy intake impacts our brain circuits. Consider our collective situation a few millennia back, before the advent of agriculture. It is hypothesized that lack of food has been a major driving force for brain evolution. Hunger—that is being in the state of fasting—would drive people to search for food. Those with the best critical thinking and sharp decision-making skills in this fasting state were most suited to navigate their diverse environment to be successful in acquiring and then sharing food.

The key point, according to a 2018 paper by Mark Mattson (bit.ly/MattsonIMS), is that in this fasting state, with the glycogen stores depleted, the body's utilization of ketones is "accompanied by cellular and molecular adaptations of neural networks in the brain that enhance their functionality and bolster their resistance to stress, injury and disease." These repeated cycles of IMS, Mattson proposes, "may optimize brain function and resilience throughout the lifespan, with a focus on the neuronal circuits involved in cognition and mood."

Besides providing a source of body fuel, the production of ketones led by IMS has many other remarkable properties. For example, a 2009 study by Witte (bit.ly/Witte2009) demonstrated that fasting results in better memory performance among elderly people.

To reveal possible scientific explanations for these findings, exploration of the neuro-physiological effects of fasting is a prerequisite. At the molecular level, ketones are needed for the production of some crucial neurotrophic factors—essentially, growth hormones for neurons or brain cells—which, in turn, stimulate the production, consolidation and protection of new neurons and neural circuits. In addition, the fasting state enhances the gut's production of the "hunger hormone" ghrelin. This hormone is known to optimize our hippocampus—an important unit of the human brain responsible



for consolidation of information, from short-term memory to long-term memory and spatial memory. When the experimental evidence and knowledge of human physiology are combined, we can support the evolutionarily useful principle that the brain and body perform at remarkably high levels in the fasting state through long-term neuro-adaptations.

Can Fasting Reduce Major Illnesses?

If it is unnatural to thrive and evolve when consuming three energy-rich meals plus snacks every day, does that mean the nutritional dogmas we have been raised with are faulty, even harmful? Quite possibly. The collateral damage caused by these eating patterns has led to the emergence of obesity, obesity-related morbidities (such as hypertension, diabetes and ischemic heart disease), autoimmune conditions and even cancer. Interestingly, there has been an approximate 10 percent reduction in brain volumes in humans during the past 10,000 years, which correlates with the agricultural revolution and the consequent effortless ways of obtaining food. Also, overeating in children initiated by their over-nourished parents has been associated with declining cognitive functions, possibly due to a reduction in the size of the hippocampus and low levels of important brain growth factors needed for brain maturation. It may not be coincidence that the states in the US with the highest prevalence of childhood obesity have the lowest percentages of high school and college graduates.

Recent findings suggest that several types of fasting regimes can be applied to the prevention and management of diseases that impact our world today. Most obviously, fasting and low-calorie diets can result in weight loss. Since fasting improves our cells' sensitivity to the insulin hormone, some studies have shown that it can decrease the risk of diabetes. One study of 1,422 subjects with pre-existing diseases who underwent a fasting regime recorded significant reductions in weight, abdominal circumference, blood pressure and blood glucose, along with an improvement in emotional well-being. The decrease in blood pressure in fasted individuals is due to the optimization of our autonomic nervous system, which plays a critical role in regulating our blood pressure. The improved emotional health can be attributed to a decrease in the stress hormone cortisol.

The elevated level of ketones and low levels of inflammatory markers during fasting have been shown to alleviate asthma symptoms. Strong evidence has also shown that fasting can delay the onset of neurological conditions such as Parkinson's disease, stroke and

Thai Pusam, Malaysia: (above) Hundreds of thousands of devotees on the move to worship Lord Murugan. As preparation for the festival day, devotees, including those carrying the huge kavadi decorated arches, have been partaking of just one meal a day, some for over a month, a fast which ends with their worship this day. (left) proper rest, exercise and diet—the keys to good health.

Alzheimer's through the abundant benefits of fasting on our brain function.

A century of studies have shown the beneficial effect of fasting on cancer by reducing its spontaneous occurrence and suppressing its growth. Scientists believe that fasting compromises the energy metabolism in cancer cells, which can eventually render them susceptible to available interventions such as chemotherapy. There have been documented cases of fasting suppressing tumor growth and extending survival in patients with glioblastoma, an aggressive form of brain tumor. There are currently ongoing trials on fasting in patients with breast, ovarian, prostate, endometrial and colorectal cancers.

Ancient Practice as a New Way Ahead?

Our Ayurvedic texts stated, "Fasting is the greatest medicine." The ancient philosophers, as well, lauded the spiritual importance of timely fasting. Now modern science is becoming aware of the plethora of health advances possible from this simple practice. In the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, haven't we obtained a fine opportunity to rewire our way of thinking, and perhaps discard our ill-advised habit of three meals a day with snacks in between? The best news is anyone can consciously perform this age-old Hindu practice, for it costs neither money nor time but, in fact, saves both.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Devadasen Vythelingum, MD, is from Mauritius. He graduated in 2019 from the University of Pretoria, South Africa, and is now serving in the UK at Royal Sussex County Hospital. His area of interest is surgery and plant-based nutrition. He is a practicing Saivite, hatha yogi and passionate about the metaphysics of Hinduism. Email: devadasen.vythelingum@gmail.com

The Future of Hindu Matchmaking

Arranged? Assisted? Love? Marriages are coming in many forms these days, each with its own challenges and rewards

BY RUTVIJ HOLAY

AS FAR BACK AS I CAN trace my ancestry, everyone in my family, up till my own parents, has had an arranged marriage. Now, however, I am seeing my cousins having Western-style love marriages in ever-increasing numbers. This is not in my family alone—many school-age Hindus nowadays have boyfriends or girlfriends, and almost everyone has a crush of some sort.

Of course, none of this is happening without backlash from the older generation. Parents, grandparents, and even some sons and daughters fear that due to the increase in casual dating—often with no intention of forming a long-term relationship—arranged marriages, a key part of our culture, are gradually disappearing.

Arranged marriages aren't necessarily a bad custom. In a culture where the word for *divorce* is nonexistent at best and a made-up or foreign loan-word at worst, divorces are now on the rise. At the same time, however, many youth argue back that love marriages have always been a part of our culture, citing the popular love tale of Radha and Krishna as an example.

There are two questions we must answer: One, are love marriages good for society? Two, what is the future of marriage among Hindu youth? Especially outside of India, such as in the United States, it is crucial that we answer the latter question.

To find the answer, we will start with the eight types of marriages in Vedic India. These can be classified broadly into three types: arranged marriages, crimes and *gandharva vivaha*. Arranged marriages can broadly be classified as "good" (though this was never unanimously agreed upon), with the best of those being known as *Brahma vivaha*, meaning literally, "divine marriage." In a *Brahma vivaha*, which may be done by any varna, consent is needed from both families, including the boy and girl, before proceeding. More notably, it doesn't matter who finds the spouse, even if the couple does it themselves. As long as the families are actively and approvingly involved in the process, the marriage may be considered *Brahma vivaha*.

As for the other marriages, crimes include those that were completed without the consent of the couple in some way, whether by selling a girl off or even by drugging her and taking her away, as in war. These were universally condemned, and it seems that they were defined mainly for legal purposes, such as prosecution, for which



UNKNOWN

they are still used today in India.

Regarding *gandharva vivaha*, "love marriage," opinions are split. While many authors classify it as bad, some tolerate it, with others, like Vatsyayana, going as far as calling it the ideal form. In a *gandharva vivaha*, no permission is needed from anyone. A couple can get married out of love simply by exchanging some garlands and saying some vows, without performing any religious rituals. In Vedic times, while not ubiquitous, these unions were common enough to merit mention. Some, such as that of Krishna with Radha, are even popularly celebrated to this day.

The marriage of Radha and Krishna ended in tragedy. Both ultimately married other people, albeit less willingly than one would after a typical breakup. Perhaps this is why this form of marriage appears to have died out in India. Though it may have been worth a try, the instability of binding a marriage with only two people gradually became apparent.

That isn't to say that *gandharva* marriages never work out. After all, around 50% of all marriages in America, which predominantly practices

love marriages, do not end in a divorce—coin-toss odds. However, for such a match to be maintained, a variety of factors must be considered, including balancing *dharma* with *kama*, that is, duty with pleasure. This is where many fail, precisely because they do not consider the concerns of the two families, which are a focus of arranged marriages.

Though not the most common form of marriage, it seems to me that *gandharva* marriages were gradually replaced by arranged marriages, especially as Hindus became more protective and restrictive of their children when faced with first Muslim and then colonialist impacts. Now, however, much to the dismay of many (including many non-Hindus), a new type of relationship is showing up worldwide which is quickly replacing even love marriages: live-in relationships. In such a relationship, a couple will move in together, even have children, without marrying. Many believe that these are *gand-*

Matchmaking past and present: (clockwise from above) traditional painting of Radha and Krishna; a 2021 Hindu wedding held in Lahore, Pakistan; stock image of a couple pondering divorce



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harva vivahas. But even though neither requires societal permission, there is still a key difference between the two. When one marries in a *gandharva vivaha*, they must take certain vows, such as promising to stay with their partner for the rest of their life. While they can theoretically disregard these vows, there is still some societal pressure after the marriage to keep their promise. It is fairly common in India for those who have made love marriages to be forgiven by their families after some weeks and be brought back into the house as if the marriage was arranged. The intention is there to stay together for life, and thus, the couple makes an effort to set things right with their families.

In a live-in relationship, there are no such vows, or even intent. Thus, the moment things get hard, one partner can just pack up and leave, which is even worse when the couple, as many do, have kids, either from the present or a previous relationship. Without

the father—as custody is usually awarded to the mother—researchers have found that students tend to not only do worse mentally, but also lack a male role model to look up to, something which is most crucial for sons. Due to this lack of commitment, many oppose live-in relationships.

The feeling around love marriages is more mixed. Some parents still fervently support the arranged marriage system. Vaishale Dedge, married herself with three kids in the Bay Area, argues that "the system isn't as bad as it's shown to be. My parents gave me the information about my husband and let us talk for three months before I made the ultimate decision. Even better is that, because both families are involved, we can come together to cooperate and solve issues in the marriage, rather than fighting or leaving it up to the couple. That is why the marriage system works, and that is why I want to use it for my own daughter."

Others are more sympathetic towards love marriages. Most notable among them is Dilip Amin, who has guided over 1,200 youth through marriages. He explains, "I have seen three divorces—one lady got divorced twice—and all of them had arranged marriages. And by the way, I'm talking about the new generation, meaning all of them are in their 30s right now. So there is no way I will say that arranged marriage is perfect."

Even among those who at least tolerate love marriages, however, there is diversity in thought as to how far outside the community their kids can marry. In India, it is quite easy to find a Hindu spouse, given that you are literally surrounded by Hindus in most parts of the country. But within Hinduism, each community has various unique traditions which families want to preserve. This does influence the thought of some parents, such as Nambi Shankaran, who has one preteen daughter in the Bay Area. She told me, "It does not matter to me whether I find a boy or my daughter does. I just want to make sure enough research is done so that the couple can main-

Divorce in Hindu Tradition

BY DR. ARVIND SHARMA

The situation regarding divorce in our tradition is, as the Americans say, "complicated." The following points might be of help, though: Divorce as such was introduced formally through the Indian Marriage Act (1955). It was possible to have de facto "divorce" before that according to some law books (e.g. the *Parasara Samhita* or *Naradasmruti*), but it wasn't called *divorce*. The problem is that marriage in Hinduism is considered a religious sacrament, as in Roman Catholicism, and not a legal contract, as in Islam. The Hindu texts just say that the wife may find another husband if the present husband is "lost," dead, has renounced the world, is impotent or is a moral leper. Thus there was no divorce in theory—so those who say there is "no divorce in Hinduism" are almost right—but it was possible in practice according to some, but not all, sacred *smṛti* literature. Ancient India did have divorce among those groups not governed by classical *smṛti* law, sometimes described as lower castes.

The secular literature, as represented by the *Arthashastra*, provides interesting additional evidence. According to it, divorce was not possible in the first four forms of marriage (as listed in, for example, the *Manusmṛti*) but possible by mutual consent in the case of the next three. It uses the word *moksha* (which usu-



GETTY IMAGES

ally refers to spiritual liberation) for what we call divorce now!

Today Hindi uses the word *vivaha-vicheda* ("marriage dissolution") to describe it, and Marathi uses the more colorful *ghatas-phota* (literally, "pot breaking ritual").

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Dr. Sharma is Birks Professor of Comparative Religion at McGill University, Toronto



Creating the marriage bonds: (right) Elder blesses newly married couple at their wedding in Mumbai, 2017; (left) newly wed couple feed each other sweets in the ceremony of kansar bhakshan

tain their lifestyles and, most importantly, their traditions. Even among Indians, various communities, including those as close as the Iyers and Iyengars [two groups of Tamil brahmins], have their own puja observances that must all be preserved. When these traditions are not the same, either one person gives theirs up, which is a tragedy for Hinduism no matter who does, or infighting begins, and that is not a fate I want for my child.”

In the United States, however, it is not uncommon for someone to be the only one from their specific community in an area. At most, perhaps a handful of people will speak their language. Just based on numbers, it is far more likely that a Hindu could fall in love with a non-Hindu. Taking note of this, Archana Shinde, herself married to a fellow Marathi with whom she has a daughter in the San Francisco Bay Area, argues that “We can’t prevent our kids from having interstate marriages [marriages between people from two different Indian states, often meaning that they have two different mother tongues]. For one, many of our kids, even those who can speak an Indian language, prefer to express themselves in English, and so language is not that big a deal for them. Secondly, the more restricted they are, the more likely our kids are to rebel, and I would much rather my daughter marry someone who speaks a different language, which is a relatively small difference, than someone who follows an Abrahamic religion, which is a bigger one. I do not even consider Sikh, Buddhist and Jain marriages to be interfaith given that their cultures are similar. As long as there is not too big a difference, I will be happy with who my daughter marries.”

There are certainly those who are appalled at the idea of having their parents interfere in their love life. But contrary to political wisdom, many youth actually seem to agree with arranged marriages. When asked for his thoughts on marriage, a high schooler from Massachusetts explained, “For me, there is a big difference between dating and marriage. I will date anyone of any race and of any religion, but for marriage, I will certainly try to find an Indian girl in a love marriage.”

As some youth grow older, their opinions begin to change. In her view, explained Akanksha Medhi: “In a love marriage, you know your partner beforehand, and almost take them for granted, in a sense—there’s nothing new to know about your partner, since you’ve already been with them a while. In an arranged marriage, I have to actively take the time to know my partner, and so won’t take him for granted in any way. Because we’ve known each other for only a few months, he still manages to find ways to surprise me every day, and I really like that.” She is soon to get married to her partner, Abhishek Prabhudesai, found via arranged marriage.

One youth in the United States, who met his fiancée on Tinder, told me he believes “love marriage is the future. In an arranged marriage, you have to learn everything about your partner in a few months and come to a decision about whether to get married or not, especially with all the family pressure on your back. In love marriages you can take things slow, come out of college and date a girl, and if you find that she’s nice you can marry her when the time comes.”

While perspectives vary on the issue, one thing is clear: the future of marriage among Hindus is changing, especially given the influence of technology and social media, which has romanticized love marriages—and demonized arranged marriages—in the last few decades.

Various groups have tried to combine the desire of youth to find their own partners with parents’ desire to protect them and family tradition. For example Indian Matchmaker has brought the concept of matchmaking—where the family works together to find a match in the traditional style—together with allowing the couple to date each other, Western style.

While this is viewed as a novel innovation that satisfies both parents and children, in reality, it isn’t that novel—it is simply a return to the traditional, ideal Brahma vivaha. It allows families to stay within their own community, defined by their various circumstances, but also allows couples to get to know each other in their own time, and get married knowing exactly what they’re getting into.

Thus, when looking at the future of marriage among Hindus, it may be better to consider a Vedic alternative. For parents to truly secure the tradition of marriage in the Hindu diaspora, and for Hindu children to be able to lead successful romantic lives with the blessings of their family, it may be best to collectively turn to our shastras and rediscover the traditional Brahma vivaha, as many have done on their own. Perhaps, then, our future generations will be able to live a traditional, dharmic—and romantic—family life.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rutvij Holay, 15, of Irvine, California, an executive-committee member of Americans for Equality PAC and a budding Hindu political activist, is presently working with his school district and a textbook maker to change how Hinduism is depicted in education. He can be reached at rutvij.holay@gmail.com.

FESTIVALS

Diwali Days East & West

The many ways my family and friends celebrate the nearly one-week-long festival of lights in India and here in America



BY MUGDHA SHINDE, 13
CUPERTINO, CALIFORNIA

DIWALI IS GENERALLY CELEBRATED AS the victory of good over evil, of light over darkness, but there are several different stories tied to its origin. In my family’s home state of Maharashtra, it is believed that Lord Rama killed Ravana on Dussehra, 20 days before Diwali. When Rama returned to Ayodhya, people lit diyas, small clay lamps, to light his path home. The diyas symbolize Rama’s return, and thus people in Maharashtra light diyas during Diwali. In some places, including the city of Pune, big dioramas are set up depicting scenes from the *Ramayana*, and various stories are told during the nights of Diwali.

In the United States, Diwali generally falls right before Thanksgiving, a harvest festival. Though Diwali is known to be a widely celebrated festival, most businesses here don’t recognize it as a holiday, especially because they already give employees a holiday for Thanksgiving. Hence, Diwali celebrations take place on the weekends. School is still in session, so children celebrate Diwali in

the evenings, if they have time. Unfortunately, lots of homework is given around Diwali, as it comes right before Thanksgiving break.

Despite there not being an official holiday on Diwali, my family celebrates in a big way. When we lived in India, we used to travel to my dad’s village. There we would build a *killa*, or mud fort, a tradition unique to Maharashtra. In the United States as well, my brother and I make a *killa* during Diwali. It

is built as a memorial to the great Hindu king, Chatrapathi Shivaji Maharaj (see Sanjeevani Dedge’s article on her fort in the July/August/September 2021 issue). During Diwali, I also draw *rangoli* designs outside our home.

In Maharashtra, people get together on the nights before Diwali to make special foods collectively called *pharaal* in Marathi. We also make *pharaal* at home in the United States. During Diwali, calorie-packed food is eaten because our bodies require strength for the cold months ahead. The *pharaal* includes foods such as *chakli*, *chivda*, *laddu*, *karanjya* and *shankarapalyaa* (photo left). When we visit people during Diwali, we exchange *pharaal*.

In Maharashtra, Diwali lasts for six days. The first day is called *Wasubaras*, when we do a puja of cows and their calves, thanking them for all that they



Diwali at home: (top) family worship of Lakshmi is a common part of Diwali in many parts of India (bottom, clockwise from top of plate) *chivda*, aka Bombay mix, *besan laddus*, *rava laddus*, *poha chidva*, and the circular *chakli*. (inset) deep-fried wheat *shankarapalyaa*



UNKNOWN



COURTESY ARATI KAMBLE



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Home and community observances: (clockwise from left) burning jute sticks as part of Bada Badua Daka at the Jagannath Temple in Puri; Mugdha's family shrine to Goddess Lakshmi; rangoli floor design with oil lamps

play outdoor games, including some games that are related to the local tribal people, or adivasis. Children build forts in the memory of Shivaji Maharaj.

Outside of Maharashtra the traditions vary state by state. I interviewed Yagnee Makwana and her dad, Milind, who come from Gujarat.

provide. The second day is called Dhana-trayodashi. On this day, we do puja of Dhanwantari, the God of Ayurveda. The next day is called Naraka Chaturdashi. This is the day the demon Narakaasura was defeated by Goddess Durga, which also symbolizes the victory of good over evil. We get up before sunrise on this day to take a special oil bath. On the fourth day, we do Lakshmi puja of all the gold in the house. Through this, we worship Goddess Lakshmi, and thank Her for all the prosperity She has brought into our home. We also do puja of a broom, or *ker-sooni*, because the broom cleans the home, making it welcoming for Goddess Lakshmi to come inside. The fifth day is called Padwa, when the new year for businesses starts. On this day my mom performs a puja of my dad. The final day of Diwali is Bhaubeej. This day strengthens the bond between brother and sister. I perform puja of my brother on Bhaubeej, and in return, he gives me a gift in return.

To find out more about the traditions from my dad's village, I asked my friend there, Shrawani Bacchav, about what she does during Diwali. She said everybody makes pharaal at their house, and shares it with everyone else. Additionally, guests are served *puran poli*, a sweet flatbread. The children

She said that during Diwali, her family always cooks *sheero*, a sweet dish made with wheat. Here the end of Diwali is the start of the Gujarati new year for business workers and traders, who do puja of their account books.

Madhu Smitanayak is from Odisha, in east India. She told me, "In Odisha, Diwali is celebrated in the same way as the rest of India, with an exception of one ritual, called Bada Badua Daka (photo above). This unique tradition is associated with Lord Jagannath. On the day of Diwali we invoke the ancestors and forefathers of our family and pay homage to them to receive their blessings. In the morning, sailboat-shaped rangolis are drawn. The boat has seven chambers. Over the drawing of each chamber several items are kept—cotton, mustard, salt, asparagus root, turmeric and a wild creeper. Over the central chamber are the offerings meant for prasada. At dusk, all the members of the family gather together, light a bunch of jute sticks individually from the puja lamp and raise it towards the sky accompanied by chanting of the verse: 'O forefathers, come to us in this dark evening. We light your way to heaven. May you attain salvation.' Beside the rangoli, a mortar and pestle and a plough are also kept and worshipped."

Next I asked Divya Pandey how she celebrates Diwali in Bihar. There, on the night before Diwali, a diya is lit with mustard or sesame oil and offered to Yamaraja, the God of Death. Right at sunset on Lakshmi puja, worship is performed not only of Goddess Lakshmi, but of Lord Ganesha as well. Afterwards, the children make miniature houses out of mud, clay, cardboard and foam board. Small earthen pots called *chukkia* are filled with rice puffs and roasted lentils, with a sweet on top. These pots are then placed into the mini houses by the girls, symbolizing Lakshmi filling the house with prosperity. Later, the pots are given to the elders as prasada. In return, the girls receive a gift, usually money or a gold coin. Throughout Diwali, diyas are lit in every single corner of her house. In fact, Divyaji said that she even places a diya in the shower area in honor of Goddess Ganga. She also mentioned that on new moon day (*amavasya*) during Diwali, a diya is offered to Goddess Kali. The day symbolizes the victory of good over laziness and evil.

Archana Nekkar grew up in Udipi, on the west coast of Karnataka in South India. Since Diwali comes before the cold months, Archanaji's family would take an oil bath during Diwali, similar to custom in Maharashtra. First, her family would clean and do puja of a big metal vat by applying kunkum, turmeric and perfume to it. Right before the bath, they would apply oil on each other. Another main Diwali celebration in Archanaji's family is Bali puja, which happens on the same day as Padwa in Maharashtra. Bali was the king of asuras, who was killed by Lord Vishnu. Before his death he asked for a boon: that he be allowed to return to Earth once a year when everyone would remember him.



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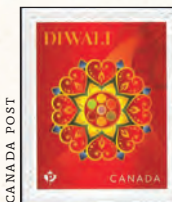
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This is why on Balipadya, Archanaji's family would do puja of Bali. The men go out to the fields, where they light a torch of cloth, wood and oil. They then perform a ceremony honoring Bali, and a diya is placed in the field overnight.

In Rajasthan, Diwali celebrations last five days, according to Jyothi Agrawal. On the first day, called Dhanteras, people purchase valuable items. The second day is called Rukchodas, when a bath is taken early in the morning. The third day is Lakshmi puja. On this day, Jyothi performs puja of a picture of Goddess Lakshmi. She places a betel leaf on the picture and behind the leaf she hides a coin with a picture of Lakshmi on it. This leaf stays on the picture for 11 days, after which it is said that the Gods wake up. On the day of Lakshmi puja, Jyothi also lights 32 diyas—16 oil diyas and 16 ghee diyas. The fourth day of Diwali in Rajasthan is called Annakut. This day is all about food. People prepare as much food at home as possible, and in temples 56 different dishes are cooked. Finally, the last day is called Bhai dooj, which is another name for Bhaubeej.

As we have seen, several traditions are common over nearly all of India. In most places, people start cleaning their houses a few days before Diwali, because it is believed that having a clean house during Diwali invites good energies into the home. As it is a public holiday, people living away from their families—for example in the city—have time to travel back home and celebrate. Clothes, electronics, appliances, etc., are on sale during Diwali, similar to Black Friday or Christmas in the United States. All around, houses are decorated with colorful rangoli designs and lanterns.

Celebrating Diwali in the US is definitely different. In India, people visit friends and family almost daily, while in the US, that's not possible because of work and school. Instead, there are weekend get-togethers



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Celebration's ways: (clockwise from top) sister feeds brother; fireworks over Diwali night; the hand and relatives. These are common Diwali traditions, brought with them. My celebrations are filled with games, bhajans, storytelling and various different foods. The people who gather tend to be from all over India, so the activities are a mix of all these traditions, stories and food.

More and more, Diwali is becoming recognized in the US as a major Hindu festival. It is observed at the White House, with special postage stamps, through local government resolutions and, in a few cases, by the actual closing of schools for the main day. In my area, non-Hindu neighbors know it is a celebration of the victory of good over evil called the "festival of lights." While they understand it is about lighting lamps, they generally don't know the reason to do so, being unfamiliar with any of the stories linked to Diwali, such as from the *Ramayana*, or how Goddess Durga defeated Narakasura on Naraka Chaturdashi. In addition, most people in the United States don't know that Diwali is actually a five-day festival, let alone what the names of those days are. But, on the bright side, as more Hindus migrate to the United States, their

When my brother and I were in school, we had presentations about Diwali at my school, and such school presentations are becoming common anywhere there are local Hindus in attendance. If these efforts continue, soon everyone will know the vast religious traditions and stories of Diwali.

Illustrated pamphlets of all major Hindu festivals can be downloaded here to share with associates and inform neighbors: www.hinduismtoday.com/festival-pager-downloads/.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mugdha Shinde, 13, is an 8th-grade student at Cupertino Middle School in Cupertino, California. She plays the trombone in her school's band and enjoys cooking and baking. mugdha.shinde29@gmail.com



YAGNEE MAKWANA



GEN Z

My Trip into Young Hindu-American Minds

An informal survey revealed much about what my fellow Hindu kids are experiencing as they mature as one among many minorities in a diverse land

BY SANJEEVANI DEDGE, 13, CALIFORNIA

HOW DO HINDU CHILDREN PRACTICE their faith in America? What support do they get? What challenges do they face? How do they go about dealing with them? These are some of the questions that have always intrigued me as a growing Hindu American myself.

Wondering how to find the answers, I realized I could do a study along the lines of the surveys of the youth of India, Nepal and Mauritius that have appeared in recent issues of HINDUISM TODAY. There's a big difference between those surveys and mine, however: age. While their definition of "youth" began in the 20s and cut off somewhere around 35, mine was 10 to 18, the American definition.

I created a questionnaire in discussion with friends and family and drawing on my own understanding of topics that relate to Hindu Americans. I set up the survey in Google Forms and made sure it was simple to fill out and not too long. The survey included multi-

choice questions on topics such as language, traditions, food, yoga and praying habits. It also asked questions which required written answers, such as "Has anybody made a rude comments about Hinduism to you; if so, how did you react?" Or "To you, what is the best thing about Hinduism?"

The survey received responses from Maryland, California, New Jersey, Texas, Illinois and Arizona. Thirty-nine respondents provided a fascinating journey into the young Hindu American mind. Let's walk through it!

Influence of Language: Twenty-eight of the respondents speak their mother tongue at home, including Telugu, Kannada, Tamil, Punjabi, Marathi, Pahadi, Gujarati, Malayalam, Tulu, Saurashtra, Hindi and Urdu. Since all also speak English, this means that 28 of 39 are bilingual. Brain science studies have showed that a multilingual brain develops more densely, enhancing problem solving, cognitive and diverse thinking skills. How amazing is that?

Practicing Yoga: Twenty-eight practice yoga at home, more than I had expected. Of those, all said they do it for physical benefits, and about half said they practice it for mental and spiritual benefit as well.

Food Habits: All of the participants' families cook Indian food at home at least once a day, and 30 of them more than once a day. It is encouraging that the respondents eat Indian food so often, because Indian food has been well established for centuries and is very healthy and balanced.

Religious Influence: There were multiple influences in each child's growth as a Hindu, starting with the parents of 37 respondents. It goes without saying that leading by example is best, right from attending puja to wearing a bindi and Indian clothes.

It was more unexpected to find that 30 of those surveyed said their grandparents had a direct influence on them. Most grandparents visit the US only once in a few years and then



PHOTOS COURTESY SANJEEVANI DEDGE

only for a few months; and we kids visit the grandparents in India also only once in a few years, and also only a few months. Yet, they still have such a strong impact on us.

PRO-TIP: Parents, try to bring grandparents to the US more often!

Twenty-six said they were influenced by Hindu religious movies. This was more than various cultural classes which stood at 22, or books such as the *Amar Chitra Katha* series which were at 21. This data point needs a closer look. The influence of Indian media is impressive, given the fact that the kids mainly watch mainstream American movies.

PRO-TIP: I personally see a huge opportunity for media movies or animations created specifically to serve Hindu American children and contribute to their development.

Five of those surveyed said they were influenced towards Hinduism by doing pilgrimage with their parents.

PRO-TIP: Hey kids! When you are in India insist that your parents visit places of pilgrimage such as Varanasi and Mathura. Even local pilgrimages when visiting your ancestral home can be great learning opportunities.

Only five said they learned about Hinduism on their own. That shows hand-holding is very important.

Wearing Indian Clothes: All of the respondents have worn Indian clothes. Six said they wear Indian clothes at least once a week and nine said they wear them at least once a month. Most said they only wear Indian clothes in conjunction with festivals. When

they wear Indian clothes outside of Indian places, such as at school, most got positive or neutral responses. For example, Aanchal Kale wrote, "I get comments like, 'Wow, what a beautiful dress, where did you get it?'"

Knowledge of Hindu Literature: The diversity of responses to this question not only provided a peek into the books kids enjoy, but also added to my own reading list.

The *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were the best known, with nearly all of the kids familiar with both. The works of modern saints such as Swami Vivekananda were inspiring to 24 of the participants. Twenty-five knew of the *Pancha Tantra* stories and the *Vedas*. Books on historical figures such as Shivaji Maharaj are a source of inspiration for 16. Lesser-known literature included the *Natyashastras* on dance and theater, the *Puranas*, the songs of saints such as Kabir, and Tamil literature such as *Tirumurai*.

Religiousness Compared to Parents: Twenty-three respondents feel they are as religious as their parents, while 16 said they are not as religious. No one said they are more religious than their parents, which I didn't find surprising.

Home Shrines: While all respondents say they have a home shrine of some kind, only 24 pray daily at home. Seven pray at least once a week, and five at least once a month. These responses were similar to those about how often they visited the temple. Seven go once a week, 9 once a month, 21 only for festivals, and 6 rarely.

Cultural Activities: As someone passion-



SNEHALATA

Carrying on tradition in the US: (far left) Yagnee Makwana, one the 39 Hindu American kids from six states who responded to the survey; Diwali celebrations at home; summer camp song praising India's holiness; (insets) Meenakshi Iyer, Neelakshi Iyer

ate about karate and bharata natyam, and trying to balance time myself, I have been interested in knowing what cultural activities appeal to kids my age. The responses were diverse.

Classical singing, including Carnatic and Hindustani, was the most popular activity, attended by 17 out of the 39 respondents. Second was language classes of Hindi, Sanskrit, Kannada or Tamil, attended by nine. Seven practice classical dances such as bharata natyam and kathak. Five attend cultural weekly programs such as balagokulam, dharma classes or *Bhagavad Gita* chanting. Three play instruments, such as the bansuri flute. One respondent is not attending any cultural classes.

Interestingly, only one person goes to yoga class. It likely means that many kids are learning yoga from their parents or in other ways, since in a previous question we learned that 28 are practicing it.

Rudeness Due to Faith: With the question of experiencing rudeness due to being Hindu, 12 respondents confirmed that they have indeed faced it. The intensity varied from blunt insults ("bindis look like blood") to misinformed attacks on the religion right in the classroom: "My 5th-grade history teacher spent a long time berating Hindu practices, without giving any context. As I was in 5th grade, I ended up getting very angry and mad at him, but he simply wouldn't listen and sent me to the principal's office."

Neelakshi Iyer reported this attempt at conversion: "Mom once invited our Christian neighbors for Navaratri and our neigh-



bor told her that these Gods aren't God, only Jesus is." Meenakshi Iyer got one along similar lines: "Someone told me Hindus don't believe in evolution and our Gods aren't real Gods. At first, I tried to explain the concept to her but she didn't listen, so I ignored her and walked away from the conversation."

Hindu Activities at School: The response I got to this question surprised me: 23 respondents have conducted some sort of Hindu activities at school. Of those, nine said they gave a Diwali presentation and an equal number did a yoga demonstration, usually Surya Namaskar. For example, Spoorti recounted, "In elementary school, my family and I conducted a Diwali art project, and also taught my classmates about Diwali. We have taught the Surya Namaskar in my sister's class, and the teacher really liked it."

How to Be a Better Hindu: Responses to this question fell into two approaches: 1) follow traditions and practices and 2) learn about Hinduism, including educating others. One respondent felt they should focus more during the monthly full-moon havana, while another said they should pray daily and go to the temple more.

One seeks to "be educated about my culture and able to clear up misconceptions that people have." And another: "I think I should educate myself on the past—Hindu philosophy, mythology, and other ideas and things that derived from Hinduism."

Although most of the responses fit under those two categories, some respondents had rather different thoughts: "I don't think there's such a thing as a 'good Hindu.' Everyone practices in a way that is right for them."

Applying Dharma in Daily Life: When it came to practice, most responses emphasized either being respectful to all or participating in puja and prayer.

By far at the top was being respectful and responsible towards others. This included not only elders and humans but also animals and plants. The feeling came out from 16 respondents in many beautiful ways. Typical responses were, "accepting everyone for who they are, and by respecting life around me," "don't take life of an innocent animal," "protect nature and Mother Earth" and "I do not take the life of an animal just so I can fill my stomach."

Several responses related directly to karma. One said, "I try to help my parents and my brother out when I can, to get positive karma. I don't cheat in school, to prevent negative karma." Another answered, "Follow dharma as daughter, sister, student."

Acceptance of human beings irrespective of differences is a direct way the kids apply Hinduism's teachings. As one put it, "Respect



MILIND MAKWANA

others, respect everyone, even those with differences." And another, "by accepting everyone for who they are, and by respecting life around me."

Respecting elders has been an ancient tradition, and several called it out as way to apply dharma in daily life, for example, "Ask elders for blessings" and "treat elders with respect; touch their feet."

Puja or prayer was important to 16. One said, "I do pujas with my family, especially during major festivals." Another said, "I seek Ganesha's blessings every time we buy or start something new."

The Best Thing about Dharma: The spirit of this question was for respondents to express the one thing they like the most about their faith. To me, it was among the most revealing questions. Thirteen respondents talked about Hinduism's flexibility. One, Yagnee Makwana, wrote, "I think one of the best things about Hinduism is that it is open. There is no rule that you have to be Hindu to follow certain things in Hinduism, or to do things that are in Hindu culture. Hinduism is accepting of all religions, races, genders, sexualities and more." Sowmya Venkatesh stated, "Hinduism is the epitome of cultural refinement and wisdom."

Conclusion

While this survey serves as a baseline to peek into the young Hindu-American mind, there are opportunities to reach a wider group in future studies. The group in this first study all had a shrine at home, which means

Festival preparations: *garba dance practice just prior to Diwali celebrations*

we were reaching fairly religious families. In the future, I'd like to collect random samples such as asking Hindus I see in front of grocery stores.

I would love to get insights on their media habits that help them shape them as Hindus. Yes, over half said they were influenced by movies, but I'd like to know more—the language, period and themes of the movies. I also want to try to conduct this survey in India to compare the results, and see how living in a different country can affect one's upbringing as a Hindu child.

The responses to my survey were vibrant and true to the principle of "Unity in Diversity" that is common in India. The survey responses reflected diverse viewpoints, yet, at the same time, there were common patterns. I got introduced to so much with this small survey—about kids' practices, families, inspirations. The opportunities that this survey discovered can bind us further together, as young Hindu minds are fascinating!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sanjeevani Dedge was born in Santa Clara, California, and now lives in San Jose. Now an 8th-grade student at Dartmouth Middle School, she enjoys dance, swimming and reading.

sanjeevanisdedge@gmail.com

AYURVEDA

Diabetes: Part Two

Eat and exercise your way to health, or pay the price of neglect

BY DR. VIRENDER SODHI

PREVENTION IS DECIDEDLY THE BEST medicine when it comes to the dreaded disease of diabetes. The four-pillar approach of Ayurveda is largely preventative medicine by balancing physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. You can achieve this by consuming a healthy diet, living a healthy lifestyle, having a healthy mental attitude and taking healthy supplements. Nutrition is the cornerstone for good health. As the old computer adage goes, "Garbage in, garbage out." There are several thousand research studies available observing cultures that do not have heart disease, diabetes, cancer or auto-immune disease. People with longevity in the Hansa Valley in the Himalayas and in the Andes don't have doctors or hospitals available for several hundred miles and are claimed to live past 100 without any diseases. Why? Because they follow the simple laws of nature, eat what they grow, do hard manual labor and enjoy a stress-free life.

My dietary program for vegetarians is based on a valued tradition of Ayurvedic medicine and scientific evidence (those who eat meat can find useful advice on the Internet). Daily consume five to seven servings of vegetables, focusing on the more green, leafy and cruciferous variety. Try to consume vegetables with a low glycemic index. Oil should be included in foods up to four times a day, of which two to three servings should be good oil such as olive, flax seed, canola or macadamia. At least one serving of nuts and seeds should also be consumed. Do not purchase roasted nuts and seeds, because they become rancid very quickly, usually 8-10 hours after roasting. The best way to consume both is to soak raw, unsalted nuts or seeds overnight in water and then use them as a snack. Nuts and seeds have the power to germinate, so when we soak them in water, it activates the life force in them and the enzymes become readily available, which in turn helps digestion. Saturated fats are essential. However, keep saturated fats like dairy limited to only one serving in a day. Consume three to five servings of whole grains.

Throughout the world, we are constantly using bleached and husk free grains, which is our biggest mistake. All the essential vitamins, mineral and fibers are present in the husk. As we remove it to make it more appealing and have a longer shelf life, we are also stripping grains of nutrition. Fiber is of utmost importance, as it helps in decreased intestinal transit time, slows down gastric emptying, which in turn reduces sugar absorption, increases satisfaction (the satiety reflex), increases pancreatic secretions, increases stool weight, helps intestinal flora, produces short-chain fatty acids, decreases serum lipids and increases bile production. Consumption of the right amount of fiber can result in decreased incidence of irritable bowel syndrome and other gastrointestinal track diseases, gall stones, heart diseases, obesity, diabetes mellitus and cancer, as well as lowering your cholesterol. Consume four to five servings of legumes. Legumes,

especially kala channa (black chickpeas, available from any Indian store), help in sugar metabolism.

Quality proteins are tofu, low-fat cottage cheese, Indian paneer and nut butters. Two to three servings of fruits should be taken. Do not just stick to bananas, apples and oranges. Be creative! There are hundreds of different varieties of fruits available. One general rule to follow is to not eat similar kinds of food every single day. Change your menus regularly. Not only does this provide a variety, but it also enables the body to avoid food sensitivities or allergies. Do not eat late dinners. Finish your dinner by 7:15 pm, and make it a light meal.

Foods to absolutely avoid are: refined, sugar-loaded cereals, candies and baked goods; refined white flour products such as pasta, cakes, muffins and pretzels; processed foods full of sugar and fat or salt, such as theater popcorn; margarine and shortening, butter and ghee (ghee is OK up to one teaspoon per day); heavily sweetened or artificially sweetened soft drinks or juices (always prefer whole fruits or vegetables or smoothies); and fried food like french fries, potato chips, corn chips or doughnuts.

Set up a stress reduction program. My patients complain, "I don't have time." I advise them, "Time will never find you. You have to find the time for your health. Write down the time when you're going to exercise, in bold letters anywhere you will see it.

Walk fast, 30-45 minutes every day, at least five times a week; do yoga 20-30 minutes per day; do light weights, to tone up your muscles, 20-30 minutes for two to three times per week. If you need to lose weight, walk more. If you work at a desk all day, get up every hour and take a brisk short walk. Park your car far away so that you can walk; take the stairs instead of the elevator. Make every attempt to get some exercise! At our clinic, every staff member takes a fifteen minute walk during lunchtime. Set up 15-20 minutes of quiet time for meditation in the morning and evening."

Vitamin and mineral supplements definitely help in the prevention of diabetes. I recommend a good multiple B-complex, one which has vitamin A, B1, B2, B3, B5, B6, B12, C, D, E, biotin (at least 2,000 mcg), folic acid, choline and inositol. As well, take a good mineral compound with absorbable calcium (1000 mg), chromium (200-400 mcg), copper (1-2 mg), iodine (50-150 mcg), magnesium (500 mg-1000 mg), manganese (10-15 mg), molybdenum (10-15mg), selenium (100-200 mcg), vanadium (50-100 mcg) and zinc (15-30 mg).

Herbs, spices and ayurvedic preparations are also helpful. I recommend: ashwagandha, 500 mg standardized extract twice a day; trifal, 500 mg standardized extract three times per day; and shilajeet-mumiyo, 250 mg two times per day. Flavor your cooking with ginger, garlic, onion, cinnamon, cumin, fenugreek, basil, thyme and turmeric. Cinnamon, fenugreek and basil have been studied extensively on diabetic patients for lowering blood sugar levels. Because herbs lose most of their healing properties during the cooking process, I recommend adding these spices to the food after cooking.

Most of us have to earn our health by doing hard work, balancing our nutrition, exercising, stress reduction with yoga, meditation or Thai chi and maintaining a balanced frame of mind.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Virender Sodhi holds an M.D. (Ayurveda) from India and a N.D. from Bastyr College of Naturopathic Medicine, USA. E-mail: drv@sodhi@ayurvedicscience.com. Web: www.ayurvedicscience.com.



SADHANA

Performing Sandhya Vandanam

One youth's discovery of the power and challenges of daily sadhana

BY GUNAP SRIGANESH, AGE 13, TEXAS
ONE WET MORNING THIS SPRING, ON the day of my sixth-grade Texas state exam, my dad and I woke up early to get ready to leave. This past fall we'd moved but had not yet changed my school, which was now an hour's drive away. Just before we left, I woke my mom up so that I could offer my dad and her *namaskaram* (prostration) to receive their blessings. Mom asked if I had done my *sandhya vandanam*, to which I responded, "Yes, Amma." For more than a year, it has been instilled in me that no matter what, sandhya has to be observed. So there I was.

Sandhya vandanam is a Hindu ritual performed three times a day. The *sandhyas* are those times (*kala*) in a day when our *prana* (vital energies) are balanced in the external nature. There are four sandhyas: 1) morning, *pratah kala sandhya*; 2) noon, *madhyanah kala sandhya*; 3) evening, *sayana kala sandhya*; and 4) midnight, *kali sandhya*. These are auspicious times to connect with the Divine and increase one's awareness. Therefore, the ancient rishis blessed us with this practice to bring us closer to Ishwara (God).

The Ritual of Sandhya Vandanam

Sandhya vandanam is performed in the first three sandhyas of a day, accompanied with kriyas (actions) while chanting mantras. The

key steps in this daily ritual, as practiced by the followers of the *Taittiriya Krishna Yajurveda* tradition, are:

1. *Sankalpam* is where one commits to the universe their intent to perform sandhya vandanam.
2. *Marjanam* is a purification act where the seeker asks for forgiveness for sins committed unintentionally. For any sins committed with intention, the law of karma will take care of those.
3. *Tarpanam* is an offering of jala (water) to the various devas and grahas, seeking their protection.
4. *Gayatri Japa Sankalpam* is where the seeker promises to the Universe that he will now perform the Gayatri Japa.
5. *Pranayama* are breathing exercises to balance the prana vayu, air.
6. *Gayatri Japa* is the repeated chanting of the Savitur Gayatri mantra. The number of times the mantra is repeated depends on the family's tradition. In my family, we chant 108 times in the morning (about 15 minutes), 64 times in the afternoon, and 32 times in the evening.
7. *Samashti Abhivadanam* is seeking the blessings of the various Devas, such as Surya, Yama, Varuna, Bhoomi Devi, Digdevatas (guardian Deities of all directions), and others.
8. *Samarpanam* is the final step, where one seeks forgiveness for any mistakes during the

ritual, and offers it all, including *ahamkara* (ego), to Ishwara (God).

Initiation: Upanayanam Samskar

For one to get initiated into sandhya vandanam, they have to go through a rite of passage called *upanayanam samskar*. Upanayanam marks the beginning of the study of the *Vedas*, and *brahmacharya* (life of a celibate student). In ancient times, after upanayanam, the guru would take the child to his gurukulam (ashrama) to teach the *Vedas* and other holy scriptures over the course of many years. In turn, the child gave up material comforts of the family home, and vanity (such as hair) to live an austere life in their guru's ashrama.

During the upanayanam ceremony, a child is given a *yagnopavita* (sacred thread, also known as *janeu* or *pulnool*), and the most auspicious Gayatri mantra by his father or grandfather. The ceremony typically lasts two days and has many elements that hint toward the ancient practice of leaving the family home to join the guru in his ashrama. For example, one of the steps in the ceremony involves partaking of what was supposed to be a last meal with your mother before leaving her. While traditional gurukulams are not a thriving institution where I live, this step still made me think about what it would have been like in the earlier times for



A thread of knowledge: (far left) Our author during the *sankalpam* portion of his practice: *nyasa* for establishing the Deity; balancing the energies with *pranayama*; focusing on feeling oneness with the universe; (above) two boys meditate, both initiated in *sandhya vandanam*; (below) some of the items used during the practice

a boy like me to leave his family behind in the pursuit of learning.

Another step from the ceremony that left its mark on me was that of the *bhikshatan* ritual. The way our culture was set up, we never expected brahmins to earn their living. They were expected to pursue the Divine with full attention and were expected to benefit the larger society with knowledge and wisdom attained through their pursuits. So a guru, his ashrama, and all his disciples were sustained through *anna* (grains, literally) given in *bhiksha* (donation) by the rest of the society. A newly initiated brahmachari was expected to get the first *bhiksha* of *anna* from his mother and elderly ladies in his family. Thus, I, too, had to hold out a container and seek alms from my mother with a call "bhagavati bhiksham dehi." She was only too happy to bless me with *anna*, but it was humbling nonetheless.

A person initiated through upanayanam ceremony is considered a *dwija*—literally, one who is twice born. The first birth is from the mother's womb; the second refers to the new and, hopefully, more aware life with the initiation into the study of *Veda Shashtra* (scriptures). This self transformation is brought upon not just by the lifestyle changes needed to support the study of the *Veda*, but also by a disciplined spiritual practice of sandhya vandanam.



The Gayatri Mantra

The most important part in the sandhya vandanam ritual is Gayatri japa, which is mental recitation of the *Savitur* (Divine Sun) *Gayatri* given in the *Rig Veda*. Here is a transliteration:

*Aum tat savitur varenyam.
Bhargo devasya dhimahi,
dhiyo yo nah prachodayat*

This mantra was given to us by Brahmarshi Vishwamitra. Here, Gayatri is the *chhanda* (meter) of the mantra, signifying that it has twenty-four syllables divided into three parts with eight syllables each. There are mantras in this Gayatri *chhanda* for other Gods as well, though the term *Gayatri Mantra* is commonly used to refer to Savitur

Gayatri. Nowadays, the mantra is preceded by "Bhur Bhuvah Suvah," but I am told that an uninitiate should never use *bijakshara* with the mantra, and an initiate should never reveal the *bijakshara* to anyone. So I've not given the *bijakshara* with the mantra here.

Over the ages, many gurus and yogis have commented on the meaning of this mantra; although, as per my mom, one has to meditate on a mantra for a considerable length of time to fully internalize it. Still, here is the literal translation of this mantra as given to me by my mother:

"That Supreme Bliss, the Radiant One who guides the intellect of the devas, may such (Savitur) inspire our intelligence."

Mental recitation of this mantra shall guide an individual's intellect as one goes through their daily life. Mother always tells me that mind is the basis of everything. That we elevate ourselves to higher levels of consciousness or descend into lower realms based on how our intellect guides us. No wonder this mantra is the first part of the *Veda* that is taught to an initiate. Once the intellect is set on the right track, other things take care of themselves in due course of time.

Personal Transformation

Apart from the spiritual practices of sandhya vandanam, and the study and recitation of *Vedic* hymns, as a brahmachari, one is supposed to follow other lifestyle habits such as not sleeping when the sun is up, not eating food partaken of by others, etc. My personal daily routine changed, as I now strive to



GUNAP SRIGANESH

wake up at sunrise to perform my morning sandhya vandanam. Similarly, I keep reminders to do madhyanam at noon. I initially had difficulty remembering when in the middle of my schoolwork. I also avoid taking naps during the daytime. When we are on family vacations, I am unable to carry my accouterments. So, I sit on a flat seat, usually a table in the hotel room, and just do the most important part of the sandhya vandanam, which is Gayatri japa.

I admit that doing school from home in the times of Covid has helped me practice sandhya vandanam three times a day with regularity. However, I have been asked by my parents to commit to practicing the ritual at least twice a day, during morning and evening kala, even if I'm away from home during the noon time in the years to come.

The discipline involved in performing sandhya vandanam thrice a day brings its own benefits and challenges. For instance, when I am in the middle of something boring or difficult, taking a break to do sandhya vandanam recharges me. On the other hand, it is sometimes annoying when I have to interrupt something fun to observe the ritual. All things said, it does bring a lot of discipline in my life.

Not a lot of people around me practice sandhya vandanam. I have two friends who got initiated with upanayanam around the same time as I. But neither of them perform sandhya vandanam, and one of them also doesn't wear his yagnyopavita. Similarly, most men or children my age in my family do not perform daily sandhya vandanam. Of all the people I know, my father is the only person who does it with discipline each day.

Due to our differing daily routines, my father and I don't do our morning and noon practices together. However, we have a family tradition in place where my father, my younger brother and I observe our evening practice together each day. My younger brother is not yet initiated, but Dad still

makes him sit down with us to have him practice *asana* (sitting still). I enjoy this time together because my father explains the meanings of each mantra and their Sanskrit roots, but also particularly because he tells us stories from the *Puranas* and *Itihasas* (the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*). In this way he is teaching us life lessons that he urges my brother and me to always remember. I will always cherish this aspect of sandhya vandanam. I hope to pass on this knowledge to future generations.

Why Practice Sandhya Vandanam?

As I observe the world around me and see that not many are following this age-old spiritual tradition, naturally I questioned my parents as to why they insist that I should continue this practice. I was hoping that my father, being someone who has done it consistently, would be able to help me understand how it has helped him personally.

In his own words: "Certainly, the least that any sadhana does is instill discipline. I was initiated into sandhya at the age of seven. That was the one thing my mother made sure that I do no matter what—vacation or school or what have you. I believe that the discipline it cultivated in me at a young age, of doing something on a daily basis without allowing the mind to make excuses, has helped me in other areas of my life.

"But there is more. The ritual makes me realize the benevolence of all the beings—Devas, grahas, gotra rishis, pitris (ancestors)—who play a role in letting my life flourish in this plane. It gives me an opportunity to thank them properly each day. Also, the ritual offers a reminder that all my actions have implications in terms of karma, whether I recognize them as such or not. Over the years, this has made me more aware of my actions throughout the rest of the day. To add to these, I get to meditate. That

A thread of knowledge: Gunap (center) with his mother, little brother and father

is an icing on the cake for me personally."

My mom tells me that she promised herself to initiate me, her oldest, into sandhya vandanam even before I was born. I was eager to know the reason behind her conviction. So, I asked Amma. She asked me in return: "Say, you wanted to learn a sadhana of the Greek God Zeus, where would you go, Gunap?" I did not have an answer. A quick Google search led me to understand that there are not many people walking Earth right now who worship the Gods of the ancient Greek faith.

"Exactly," she said, and then continued further, "All classical religions—Egyptian, Greek, Native American, Mesoamerican religions, Roman, you name it—are all dead. Today if you wish to learn about them, you will need to visit a museum and see a few exhibits about the lives they lived and the beliefs they held, and call it a lesson. The only surviving classical culture is Sanatana Dharma (eternal path). This long, continuous thread of civilization we call Sanatana Dharma will break the day we stop practicing it."

So, there it is. Clarity and conviction of my parents is enough to take me further down this path. While I await the longer-term gain of higher awareness, I am content to practice *tri kala* (thrice daily) sandhya vandanam to keep this spiritual tradition alive for one more generation.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gunap Sriganesh is a middle schooler living in North Texas. When he is not at school, Gunap enjoys playing tennis, cooking, and building things around the house. He thanks his mom for helping with this article. gunap.sriganesh@gmail.com

SOCIETY

Surviving College as a Hindu

How peer discussions strengthened and made me a calm defender of my faith

BY MARUT YELAGALAWADI

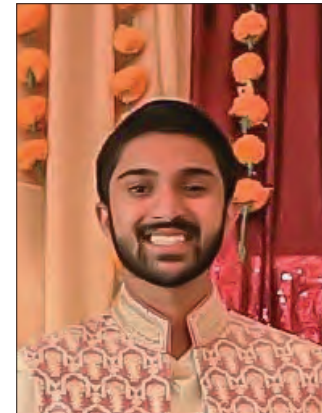
BY THE BEGINNING OF THE FALL, 2022, semester, approximately 20 million high school graduates will be taking classes at US institutes of higher learning. A small but significant portion of these freshmen university students will identify as Hindus. However, since the turn of the 20th century, many of these state and private universities abandoned religious aspects of education and became more secularized, continuing the trend of secularization throughout American society and the Western world at large. As these young men and women begin their academic journey, it is clear that some will face a dilemma: maintaining their identity and being outcasts, or denouncing their identities to fit in.

I am one of these students who has faced such a dilemma, between fitting in with the university social environment and being a practicing Hindu, and I have found that such a dilemma need not be faced. If anything, practicing my Hindu heritage and its core tenets—such as the belief in pursuing knowledge—has helped me become a far more studious and hardworking individual in my college years. It has helped me maintain my philosophical beliefs while befriending students of different religious backgrounds. With American society being secular and friendly to people of all religious backgrounds (and even to those with no religious backgrounds), I have connected with American Hindus and engaged in interfaith dialogue.

Yet, the issue of being a practicing Hindu on US campuses remains. I recall a philosophy class discussion on the concept of God and religion that examined the relationship between an individual and his or her God. Many students shared ideas in the framework of Judeo-Christian theologies, with some bringing up Islamic and Buddhist tenets. Fascinated with the discussion and excited to share my analysis, I explained some of the basic tenets of Hinduism, from Sanatana Dharma to moksha. To my dismay, the responses were not quite reciprocal, and most of my analysis was discarded.

It could have been my enthusiasm was off-putting, or that the online Zoom setting depressed the reciprocation of my enthusiasm. Perhaps it was the subject matter I broached. While I gave my peers the benefit of the doubt, the event made me think of similar discussions and made me realize that Hinduism may not be understood or appreciated as much as it ought to be.

Outside of class, I have often spoken with many friends about Hinduism and related concepts. Two common trends stand out to me. The first is that many non-Hindu college students do not seem to know anything about Hinduism, or are accustomed to accept what they learn through social media. For instance, in one discussion during a project on the relationship between religion and politics in a political theory class, a peer asked if Hinduism "has anything to do with yoga and meditation." Later, he asked if simply



sitting down cross-legged and chanting "Om" three times makes someone a Hindu. During a discussion in philosophy class, the lecturer pointed out the "polytheistic elements in Hinduism" that separate it from the monotheistic, Semitic religions. Rather than becoming disturbed, I simply chalked up these instances to misinformation or half-truths that lead to ignorance toward Hinduism. I have always found it enjoyable to discuss my faith and heritage with those who wish to understand it. If anything, these fruitful discussions have taught me more about my own faith, as complex and unique as it is.

The second trend is about irrational, unfounded bigotry as much as it is about misunderstanding—and this goes beyond one's college years. As the secularization of institutions ramps up in the Western world in the 21st century, it seems that some anti-theistic individuals use university platforms to stoke fear and hate against those of religious backgrounds, which has in recent years included American Hindus. Despite Hinduism's being a worldwide faith shared by people of different ethnicities and nationalities, it is often conflated with the Republic of India and the current geopolitical situation in the Indian subcontinent. The terms *Hindutva* and *Hindu nationalism* are being thrown around in American universities, despite their having nothing to do with religions or politics in America. I distinctly recall one person characterizing Hindus as Nazis because of our use of the swastika—a symbol meant for peace that was and

is unjustly used by truly deplorable white supremacist organizations.

It has become increasingly exhausting explaining to some non-Hindu peers that simply because I am a Hindu does not mean I have ties with India or the geopolitical situation in the Indian subcontinent, especially as it refers to complicated issues such as the Kashmir conflict. Explaining to these individuals that I am an American Hindu, born and brought up in the United States, falls on deaf ears. Unfortunately, it has become difficult for me to even try to change their view. But alas, it is something I will continue to do.

As when facing all forms of bigotry, it is important to continuously defend your heritage, but without engaging in altercation, to speak softly but be strong about your convictions. While I have not changed the minds of those who are against me based on my heritage, my words have been heard. Engaging in sincere discussion about Hindu heritage, I believe, helps ensure that fewer people become Hinduphobic and more people better understand what it means to be Hindu.

Anti-Hindu sentiment is not foreign to American universities or the United States at large, nor is it foreign anywhere else. Wherever there is ignorance, a culture of fear evolves into a culture of hate. It is up to us American Hindus to not engage in more conflict, but to engage in valuable dialogue with those who do not understand Sanatana Dharma. It is important to shed light where there is darkness, and participate in meaningful discussions so that such ignorance is removed.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marut Yelagalawadi is an American Hindu residing in the San Francisco Bay Area. While involved in various Hindu cultural organizations, he is currently completing his undergraduate degree in Political Science. E-mail: marutyelagalawadi@gmail.com.

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Hindu Heritage Endowment

The Often-Neglected Advantages of Life Insurance Gifts

By AKHILA SATISH

*"The benevolent expect no return for their dutiful giving.
How can the world ever repay the rain cloud?"*

Tirukkural, verse 211

How can the world ever repay the rain cloud? Financial planning for the future is a valuable skill set, providing substantial benefits to you, your loved ones and communities you care about. However, at a certain age you may look back on your financial planning with a new lens. After years of carefully maintaining a life insurance policy, for example, you may realize that the original purpose of the policy no longer applies—your children have completed their education and are self-sufficient, or the financial support you sought is no longer needed. Whatever the reasons may be, there is an opportunity to transform the hard work of those years into a heroic gift to a charitable organization.



Life insurance to a charity is an easy-to-set-up planned gift option

Setting up a charity as the beneficiary of your life insurance policy is a relatively straightforward and hugely impactful way to give. There are two main ways to accomplish this goal.

First, you could fill out a beneficiary designation form on a policy you own. In this form, you would name the charity as a beneficiary of all or a portion of your life insurance policy. This allows you the flexibility to name the charity as a contingent beneficiary, one that will only receive the balance of your policy if the primary beneficiary does not survive you. You may also choose to create a separate trust in which loved ones have financial support for a specific term of years or for life, after which the trust terminates and its assets pass to the charity. Regardless of how the benefit is structured, you maintain ownership of the policy and have the ability to change the arrangement if circumstances change.

Second, you could name the charity as the owner and beneficiary of an existing policy. This allows you to potentially qualify for a federal income tax charitable deduction. If you continue to make payments on the policy, each payment is tax deductible as a charitable gift. If you choose to not continue making payments on the policy, the charity could access the surrender value of the policy immediately for cash needs. This path may be of particular interest to younger donors, who could take out a new policy with a charity in mind. The routine of monthly policy payments may be easier to manage than the mental effort required to remember to consistently send in donation checks. Moreover, the long term value of the policy for the charity will be substantially greater than the collective value of smaller ad-hoc donations.

As in much of life, planning and thinking strategically about the future are integral to successfully contributing to charitable organizations you support. Take the time to thoughtfully evaluate your circumstances and financial planning to see if a meaningful gift of life insurance is the right fit for your charitable goals. As you plan, reach out to charitable giving experts, look for legal, financial and tax advisors, and discuss your plans with loved ones.

OCTOBER TO DECEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment			Hindu Heritage Endowment Administrative Fund		
Subhash Kumar Choudhary	US\$50.00		Rogini Shummooogum	225.00	
Shyamadeva Dandapani	12.00		Kauai Aadheenam Religious Art and Artifacts Fund		
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	2.40		Hasan Saeed	10.00	
Roshan Harilela	375.00		Murugan Temple of North America Pillaiyar Shrine Fund		
Kulagan Moonesawmy	4.44		Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00	
Gowri Nadason	84.37		Thank You Bodhinatha Fund		
Mani & Surya Nallasivan	1,000.00		Thulasidas	333.35	
Gayatri Rajan	75.00		Dinanatha Borzunov	108.00	
Chamundi Sabanathan	105.00		Lutcheemee Curpen	301.00	
Hitesvara Saravan	84.00		Shubha Gangal	500.00	
Nandi Devi Sivanathan	24.11		Debashis Ghosh	400.00	
David Wiekrykas Estate	7,000.00		Haran Kandasadas	108.00	
Anonymous	1,115.91		Murugesu Kandasamy	47.11	
Total	9,932.23		Vel Mahalingum	67.26	
Iraivan Temple Endowment			Tatsiana Mezhenmaya	80.00	
Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund	500.00		Kulagan Moonesawmy	67.26	
Benevity	3,000.00		Dayavati Murugan	100.00	
Frank Burkhardt	30.00		Hitesvar Skandanatha Murugesu	5.94	
Subhash Kumar Choudhary	151.00		Puvana Murugesu	23.42	
Indupuru Kota Reddy	1,000.00		Rishitaa Murugesu	5.94	
Kalyan Kuppuswamy	251.00		Sadhunathan Nadesan	750.00	
Sadhunathan Nadesan	378.00		Mano Navaratnarajah	200.00	
Thillai Raj & Santhi Natarajan	500.00		Nikolay Ogloblin	108.00	
Sharad & Smita Parikh	5,001.00		Cassan Pancham	2,000.00	
Sri R. Ram	500.00		Nuckiren Pyeneeandee	33.68	
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	50.00		Sumathi Raja	450.00	
Hargunvir Singh	101.00		Aran Sambandar	144.00	
Jai & Sumitra Srinivasan	150.00		Hitesvara Saravan	108.00	
Radhakrishna Tummala	501.00		Aran Sendan	108.00	
Manish & Archana Verma	101.00		Egambrum Sinsamy	22.42	
Anonymous	218.40		Logavalli Sinsamy	22.42	
Total	12,432.40		Devaladevi Sivaceyon	11.83	
Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund			Ganga Sivanathan	108.00	
Fidelity Charitable	50.00		Nandi Devi Sivanathan	71.75	
Shashi Bagle	101.00		Ramesh Sivanathan	11.97	
Surendra Mahanti	25.00		Anba Dayananden Valayten	8.75	
Logadhasan Murugesu	71.80		Vayudeva Varadan	129.00	
Subramaniam Pennathur	66.64		John Wahlen	36.69	
Anonymous	33.00		Anonymous	3,776.01	
Total	347.44		Total	10,247.80	
Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund			Udayan Care Endowment Fund		
Kalpathy R Anantharaman	300.00		Benevity	158.00	
Nagendra & Jyothi Arakali	299.00		Krishan Chawla	333.33	
Anandkumar Ayyachamy	249.00		Alok Kadakia	25.00	
Ashok Azhagiri	249.00		Mona Khurana	51.00	
Lehar Blair	249.00		Thamby Kumaran	54.00	
Poornima Chebrolu	299.00		Anonymous	108.36	
Aswani Datt	249.00		Total	729.69	
Prameela Dukkupati	301.00		Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment		
SD Franchi	249.00		Shyamal Chandra Debnath	150.00	
Chetan Gadhavi	299.00		Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund		
Prashanth Gowda	249.00		Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00	
Uma Iyer	249.00		Manitha Neyam Trust Fund		
Chidambaram Jambulingam	299.00		Bala Sivaceyon	34.64	
Phanindra Kalanadhabhatla	249.00		Nutanaya Sivaceyon	10.00	
Nikhil Kale	249.00		Total	44.64	
Jayanthi Kandiah	249.00		Mahajana College Fund		
Sundari Katir	498.00		Anonymous	1,117.00	
Joel Knepp	299.00		Kerala Temple Trust		
Juhivaasana Koothan	6.73		Rick Harter	108.00	
Rajasekhar Kuppa	249.00		Jerry Shuper	540.00	
Bhuvana Prasad Mandalapu	249.00		Total	648.00	
Sridhar Manthena	249.00		Taos Hanuman Fund		
Ashwini Maureemootoo	22.40		Anonymous	108.36	
Jean Francois Mayer	249.00		Manjung Hindu Sabha Orphanage Fund		
Bhaveshan Moorghen	6.73		Thulasidas	333.33	
Shanda Kumaran Moorghen	4.49		Phui Chan	80.00	
Udeyadeva Moorghen	6.73		Subhash Kumar Choudhary	100.00	
Rohin And Savita Mukherjee	249.00		Ignatius Hastomo	25.00	
Ramyar Nagarajan	249.00		Muthukumar Jayapalan	2,000.00	
Manoj Nair	249.00		Emily Xin Rui Lim	10.00	
Jayeshwar Nigam	249.00		Pritesh Patel	198.40	
H.G. Parsa	249.00		Nutanaya Sivaceyon	50.00	
Murali Pasupulati	299.00		Rajiv Verma	150.00	
Hemant Patel	299.00		Total	2,956.73	
Sarennya Pathmanandavel	299.00		Pazhassi Balamandiram Orphanage Fund		
Giomathy Perithiruvadi	299.00		Subhash Kumar Choudhary	50.00	
Prakashchandra M. Rao	249.00		Thamby Kumaran	108.00	
Kaditam V. Reddy	249.00		Steven Lee	30.00	
Mayur Sangani	249.00		Total	188.00	
Arunachala Satgunasingam	299.00		Kauai Aadheenam Matavasi Medical Fund		
Tharackandathil Shanavas	249.00		Shyamadeva Dandapani	24.00	
Ajay Singh	299.00		Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	4.87	
Venkat Srinivasan	299.00		Kulagan Moonesawmy	9.03	
Papasani & Subbalakshmi Subbaiah	299.00		Gowri Nadason	85.18	
Shalini Teagarden	249.00		Ram Ramamoorthy	15.00	
Anonymous	237.40		Aran Sambandar	96.00	
Total	11,246.48		Nandi Devi Sivanathan	23.93	
Kadavul Nataraja Ardra Abhishekam Endowment			Vayudeva Varadan	18.00	
Vel Mahalingum	133.30		Total	276.01	
Kauai Aadheenam Feed the Monks Fund			Nadesan Family Lord Muruga Shum Fund		
Mohana Ahambaram	100.00		Sadhunathan Nadesan	501.00	
Anandkumar Ayyachamy	50.00		Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar Gurukulam		
Shyamadeva Dandapani	108.00		Muthukumar Jayapalan	2,000.00	
Anil & Prema Gogate	1,000.00		Thamby Kumaran	108.00	
Suresh & Meena Joshi	101.00		Aran Sendan	108.00	
Shanti V. Kalathia	251.00		Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	150.00	
Murugesu Kandasamy	23.45		Anonymous	216.00	
Mihir Meghani	10,606.35		Total	2,582.00	
Mani & Surya Nallasivan	1,000.00		Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment		
Amisha Patel	25.00		Rao & Maheshwari Chinnam	251.00	
Gayatri Rajan	75.00		Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund		
Ashley Raman	11.00		Aran Sendan	108.00	
Sonal Sahay	108.00		Anonymous	375.00	
Padmini Samuthiran	162.00		Total	483.00	
J. S. M. & Radha Sarma	150.00		Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment		
Rajeshkumar Shah	251.00		Thulasidas	333.33	
Salone Shahi	324.00		Thamby Kumaran	108.00	
Hargunvir Singh	108.00		Mano Navaratnarajah	100.00	
Tarangadeva Sinhapatra	21.00		Aran Sendan	108.00	
Devaladevi Sivaceyon	58.27		Anonymous	60.00	
Nandi Devi Sivanathan	71.61		Total	709.33	
Carolyn Stewart	40.00		Hinduism Today Production Fund		
Kunjal Thaker	7.50		Krishan Chawla	3,389.98	
Ravi Thaker	18.00		Subhash Kumar Choudhary	400.00	
Sastry & Naina Varanasi	251.00		Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	9.31	
Subatra Dewi Veeriah	15.00		Hiranya Gowda	83.00	
Saravan Veylan	324.00		Ian Johnson	60.00	
Anonymous	2,303.36		Rajagopal Krishnan	20.00	
Total	17,563.54		Raj & Deepa Maturi	1,000.00	
Concord Shiva Murugan Temple (CSMT) Endowment Fund			Arun J. Mehta	418.37	
Gayatri Gadepalli	13.43		Kulagan Moonesawmy	11.43	
Kuppe & Sarala Srinivas	101.00		Bill Muster Foundation	400.00	
Anonymous	908.36		Mani & Surya Nallasivan	1,000.00	
Total	1,022.79		Subramaniam Pennathur	66.68	
Himalayan Acres Endowment			Nuckiren Pyeneeandee	33.68	
Alka Patel	21,000.00		Gayatri Rajan	75.00	
Vythieswara Subramanian	101.00		Aran Sambandar	96.00	
Total	21,101.00		Nandi Devi Sivanathan	24.11	
Total Contributions			Nancy Walder	150.00	
Funds at Market Value, Dec. 31, 2021	\$173,822.33		David Wiekrykas Estate	7,000.00	
Grand Total			Anonymous	73.00	
	\$21,936,444.94		Total	14,310.56	

OCTOBER TO DECEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Swami Vipulananta Children's Home Endowment		Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund		Kulagan Moonesawmy	13.47
Thulasidas	333.33	Pathmini Saravanapavan	100.00	Subramanian & Sudha Sharma	108.00
Canaganayagam Kugendra	60.00	Vayudeva Varadan	18.00	John & Abha Wiersba	601.00
Thamby Kumaran	54.00	Total	118.00	Anonymous	3,096.99
Total	447.33	India Hindu Temple Cleaning Fund		Total	4,253.16
Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund		Hiranya Gowda	66.00	Kauai Aadheenam Feed the Monks Fund	
Hiranya Gowda	102.00	Anonymous	60.00	Mohana Ahambaram	100.00
Rajagopal Krishnan	40.00	Total	126.00	Anandkumar Ayyachamy	50.00
David Wiekrykas Estate	7,000.00	Anantha Ladies Home Endowment		Shyamadeva Dandapani	108.00
Anonymous	1,008.00	Rick Harter	108.00	Anil & Prema Gogate	1,000.00
Total	8,150.00	Hindu American Foundation Endowment		Suresh & Meena Joshi	101.00
Himalayan Academy Publications Endowment		Gouri Shanker	50.00	Shanti V. Kalathia	251.00
Shyamadeva Dandapani	36.00	Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment		Murugesu Kandasamy	23.45
Vel Mahalingum	8.92	Arun Aarooren	75.00	Mihir Meghani	10,606.35
Nrusimhayya Manda	30.00	Srinath Asuri	51.00	Mani & Surya Nallasivan	1,000.00
Haran Kandasadas	75.00	Partha Ayalasomayajula	350.00	Amisha Patel	25.00
Kannan Venguswamy	51.00	Anil Ananda Badhwar	30.00	Gayatri Rajan	75.00
Anonymous	54.00	Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	7.27	Ashley Raman	11.00
Total	254.92	Paras Kishnani	251.00	Sonal Sahay	108.00
Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund		Rajagopal Krishnan	153.00	Padmini Samuthiran	162.00
Hargunvir Singh	101.00	Luke Labella	300.00	J. S. M. & Radha Sarma	150.00
Anonymous	33.00	Srinivas R. Madaboosi	500.00	Rajeshkumar Shah	251.00
Total	134.00	Natraj Narayanswami	59.00	Salone Shahi	324.00
Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment		Diwakar Rao	51.00	Hargunvir Singh	108.00
Thulasidas	333.33	Padmini Samuthiran	162.00	Tarangadeva Sinhapatra	21.00
Muthukumar Jayapalan	5,000.00	Bala Sivaceyon	34.64	Devaladevi Sivaceyon	58.27
Thamby Kumaran	216.00	Devaladevi Sivaceyon	11.41	Nandi Devi Sivanathan	71.61
Steven Lee	30.00	Sivaruban & Carolyn Sivanesan	200.00	Carolyn Stewart	40.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	66.68	Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00	Kunjal Thaker	7.50
Aran Sendan	108.00	Aishwarya Vashishtha	30.00	Ravi Thaker	18.00
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	200.00	Arunasalam Vathavooran	75.00	Sastry & Naina Varanasi	251.00
Salone Shahi	108.00	Krishna Vijn	31.00	Subatra Dewi Veeriah	15.00
Dharmalingam Siddhan	25.00	Anonymous	193.77	Saravan Veylan	324.00
Sivaruban & Carolyn Sivanesan	200.00	Total	2,595.09	Anonymous	2,303.36
Anonymous	1,496.91	Jaffna Kannathiddy Kali Kovil Endowment		Total	17,563.54
Total	7,783.92	Anonymous	216.72	Concord Shiva Murugan Temple (CSMT) Endowment Fund	
Siva Poomi School Trust		Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund		Gayatri Gadepalli	13.43
Pritesh Patel	198.40	Chandra Sekhar Chilappa	251.00	Kuppe & Sarala Srinivas	101.00
Anonymous	30.00	Murugamoorthi Thirukkivil Endowment		Anonymous	908.36
Total	228.40	N. Balasubramanian	10,000.00	Total	1,022.79
Bharatiya Ekta Mandir of Arizona Endowment		Digital Dharma Endowment		Himalayan Acres Endowment	
Schwab Charitable Fund	200.00	Subhash Kumar Choudhary	50.00	Alka Patel	21,000.00
Anonymous	113.86	Chellappa Deva	51.00	Vythieswara Subramanian	101.00
Total	313.86	Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	7.27	Total	21,101.00
India Hindu Tribals Endowment		Amravadee Kownden	64.43	Total Contributions	
Kamalesh & Krishna Gangopadhyay	20,000.00	Rajagopal Krishnan	153.00	Funds at Market Value, Dec. 31, 2021	\$173,822.33

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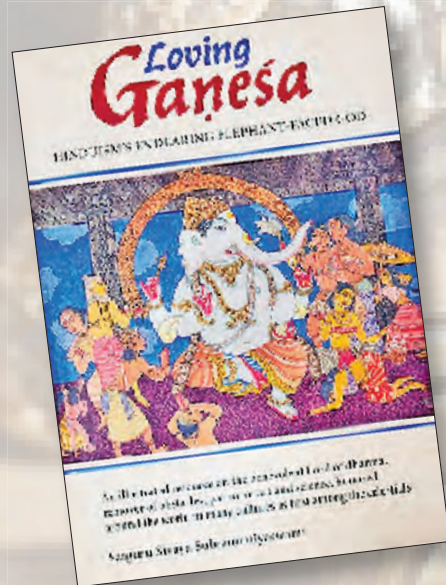
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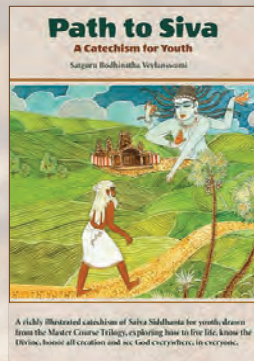
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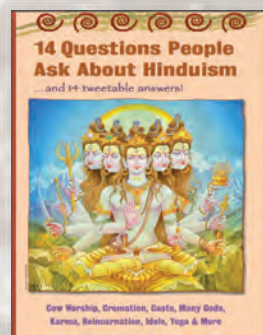
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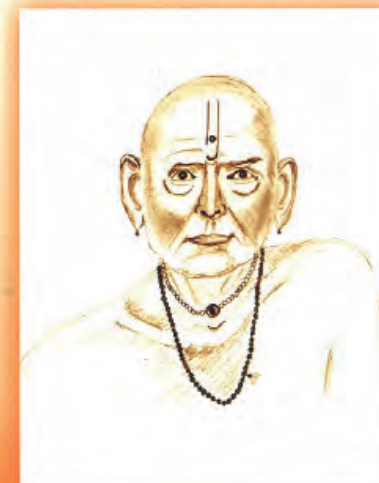
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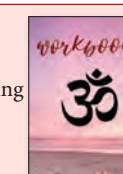
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SCAN ME

*In a land far away,
Among flowers,
Birds and trees,
Rises holy Prambanan.*

*The sanctum sanctorum's
Four sides converge
With mathematical precision
Upon a single point
Thirty feet above me.*

*In that pure space,
She abides
From ancient times,
Infinity in the finite.*

*There,
No mantra is heard,
No puja resounds,
No arati is seen.*

I sit in silence.

*The brilliant Central Sun
Knows no mantra,
No puja
No arati.*

She is the God of silence.

*In silence,
I imbibe
Her Compassion.*

*My Mother,
My Mother
Durga.*

*Infinity in the Finite, by Dr. Arjunan Subramaniam,
Desa Parkcity, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 23rd-24th November 2019*

DIGITAL DHARMA

FRENCH-LANGUAGE WEBSITES

Francophones Rejoice in Saivite Website!

www.hinduismtoday.com

A BEAUTIFULLY DESIGNED FRENCH-LANGUAGE website, hindouisme.org, has been developed by a group of Montreal devotees of HINDUISM TODAY's founder, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. "We wanted to make those sublime Hindu teachings available to Francophones in Canada and all over the French-speaking world," says Nandi Sivam, who has been managing the site.

It is a work in progress that already provides a broad range of resources on Hinduism. These include books, such as the complete *Path to Siva* (a basic introduction to Saivite philosophy), along with excerpts from esoteric writings. There are translations of "14 Questions People Ask About Hinduism" and selected editorials by HINDUISM TODAY publisher, Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami. Of special note is an entire translation of *Lemurian Scrolls*, a channeled writing on ancient Lemuria recounting the story and destiny of humanity.

The spirit of the site is captured in the "Who we are" section at the bottom of each page: "We are devotees of Siva much taken with the magnificence of Hinduism, its thought, its spirituality, its wisdom, its savoir-vivre, its effective practices and deep knowledge. We seek to capture this marvel in its purest essence and all its beauty and offer it thus to French speakers around the world."

Gananatha Subrahmanyam, one of the main translators, adds, "We strive to transfer all the clarity, relevance, and especially the spirit, the vision and the intent of the guru into the French language. It seems to be working. We have more and more visitors."

Reunion-based Rajeshwari Parasivam is managing a companion Facebook page (hindouisme-groupe d'études) which has grown to 2,200 members in just a few months. "I am amazed how eager so many are to understand and begin practicing. 'Your site gives me the urge to become spiritual,' said one member. While they survey our pages, readers seem free of pressures, free to be themselves and to answer only to their own inner voice."

Other Hindu-oriented French websites of interest are centre-vedantique.fr (Ramakrishna Mission), federationvediquedefrance.fr (Ram Chandra Mission) and etw-france.org (Ammaji).

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