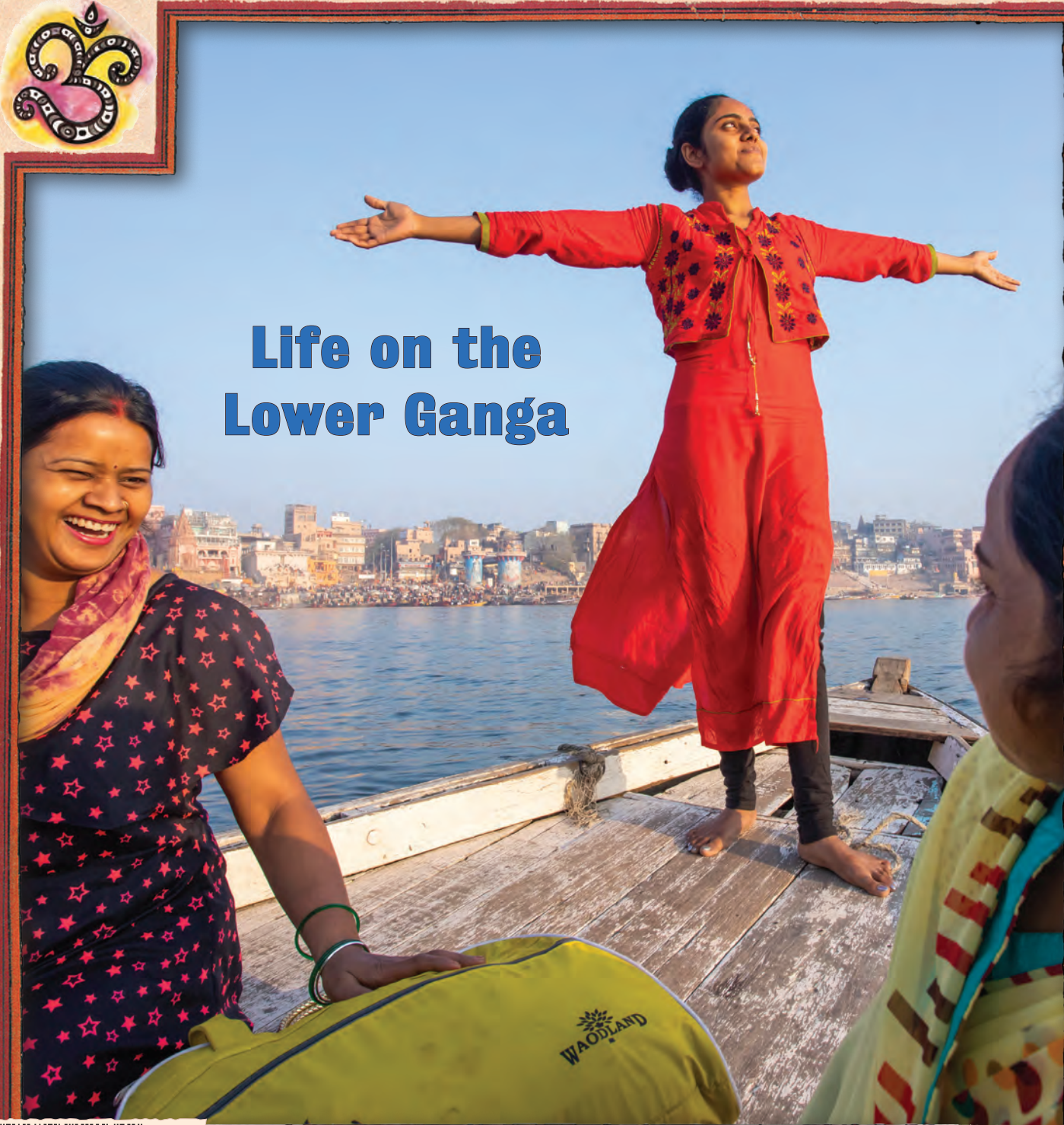


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JANUARY/FEBRUARY/MARCH, 2023

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HINDUISM TODAY

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



Life on the Lower Ganga

SHUTTERSTOCK

(Cover) A young woman greets the rising sun while standing on a boat on the Ganga near Varanasi; (Above) a clay pot of rice boils over during Thai Pongal—an American Hindu teen shares how he celebrates this ancient harvest festival ...page 65

JANUARY/FEBRUARY/MARCH, 2023 • The Hindu Year Śubhakṛta, 5124 • शुभकृत

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Tibetan thangka painting of Mahakala, Lord of Time and destroyer of the obstacles to enlightenment. Painted ca. 1500 ce using distemper on cloth.... Article on Page 50

GLOBAL DHARMA

NEW ZEALAND

First DharmaFest Receives Full Community Support

NEW ZEALAND'S FIRST EVER DharmaFest, with the theme Vibhinnatayam Ekatvam—Unity in Diversity—was launched at the Mahatma Gandhi Centre in Auckland by Hindu Youth New Zealand (HYNZ) in August, 2022. According to the HYNZ media release, the event began with the traditional welcoming of spiritual representatives from various Dharma groups followed by the lighting of the diya (lamp).

Each community recited prayers to bless the day—Swami Tadananda on behalf of Hindus,

Shri Rrahul Dosshi for Jains, Venerable Rewatha Thero for Buddhists and Shri Manjit Singh for Sikhs. The day featured cultural performances, stalls offering food, clothes, art and crafts, as well as yoga, meditation and ayurveda teachings. The event attracted about 1,000 participants.

Dharmic communities, be they spiritual, cultural or service oriented, have done tremendous work, benefiting the wider New Zealand society as well as their own members. They play a key role in promoting pluralism



Blessings to begin: Swami Tadananda and representatives of other Dharmic communities light the big brass lamp

and the respect for harmonious coexistence. DharmaFest provided an opportunity for these communities to come together and showcase their unique contributions to Aotearoa (Maori name for New Zealand).

Reflecting on the attendance of several Dharma-based temples and groups, the youth

team leading this event were grateful and humbled by the support. "DharmaFest is a turning point for the future of many of our Dharmic communities," said Murali Magesan, HYNZ president. "It paves a road for real positive engagement and opportunity to improve social cohesion within Aotearoa."

MADAGASCAR

Capital Gets its First Temple

A GRAND HINDU TEMPLE WAS inaugurated in July, 2022, in Antananarivo, the capital city of Madagascar. This very large island off Africa's southeast coast has a population of over 26 million including over 20,000 of Indian origin, mostly from Gujarat. Each of the other major cities, Mahajunga and Antsiranana, already has a small temple.

ANI News reported that Abhay Kumar, Indian Ambassador to Madagascar and Comoros, graced the occasion. Sanjeev Hematlal, president of the Hindu Samaj

(which built the temple) said the opening is a matter of great pride for the Hindu community, which is spread all over the country. The new temple will help them get together more often and strengthen community bonds.

Indian traders arrived on this island in small boats in the late 18th century, and Indians have greatly contributed to the development of trade and commerce within Madagascar itself and also with India. India is now a key partner, with about US\$400 million in bilateral trade in 2020-21.

elderly parents, and advice on last rites. Presently, such needs are addressed by Christian chaplains, who are not trained to counsel Hindus properly. In fact, some Hindus are getting converted by them to Christianity.

The Hindu Council generously provided scholarships to cover most of the US\$1,925 course fee.

Welcome video: Dean of HCI Gaurav Rastogi invites applicants to join the course



TOP TO BOTTOM: HINDU YOUTH NEW ZEALAND; GOOGLEMAPS; HINDU COMMUNITY INSTITUTE

FOOD

Is Ghee the Purest Oil of All?

FOR MILLENNIA, GHEE HAS been a venerated staple of India's diet, but it fell out of favor a few decades ago when saturated fats were largely considered to be unhealthy. An article at [bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com) says that with a recent global shift back to positivity around saturated fats, Indians are returning to this ingredient that's so integral to their cuisine.

For food author Kalyan Kar-makar, a renewed interest in ghee is emblematic of a return-to-basics movement in India, which was fast-tracked during the last couple years, when "people started being more mindful about their food," he explained. This movement is also part of an overall trend towards slow food. In keeping with the movement's philosophy, ghee can be produced locally (even at home) and has inextricable cultural ties.

"Ghee is the final and purest form of milk—the last extract,"

said food historian Pritha Sen. "It was considered the purest offering to the Gods and the medium by which prayers were carried to the heavens." Hindus pour ghee into fire at marriages, funerals and other ceremonies. Much more at: [bbc.in/3yb37fA](https://www.bbc.in/3yb37fA)

Golden: In Ayurveda, ghee is considered a virtual panacea



ART

Can You Crack this Classic Optical Illusion?

OPTICAL ILLUSIONS HAVE been around for over a thousand years. For centuries, people have struggled to conquer these classic puzzles, says an article at [komando.com](https://www.komando.com). You can find challenging optical illusions all over the internet, from TikTok to Instagram. But if you're looking for the oldest one known to mankind, head to one of the oldest civilizations, India.

Zero in on the Airavatesvara Temple in Tamil Nadu. This holy Hindu temple is full of elaborate animal carvings. One of its

900-year-old ornaments depicts two conjoined animals with what looks to be a single head. In reality, there are two heads—but most people only see one at first. Which animal do you see first? The elephant which represents Airavat, a holy elephant connected to King Indra? Or Nandi the bull, representing a devotee humbling their ego in the worship of Lord Siva? If you're having trouble seeing the separate animals, Twitter has you covered with this animation: bit.ly/india-illusion

ENVIRONMENT

Go Green in Temples & Ashrams with this Helpful Guide

THE BHUMI PROJECT AND THE Alliance of Religions and Conservation launched the Green Temple Project in 2014 to develop a network of environmentally conscious temples across India. Subsequently they created the *Green Temples Guide*: a beautifully-designed resource, first published in December 2015, on how to make your temple or ashram greener and more Hindu in its relationship with the world around it. Thirty temples were consulted in creating the guide. The first page quotes the *Atharva Veda*, "The Earth is my mother, I am the Earth's son."

It contains inspiring sections on teaching, recycling, energy, food and protecting wild animals. For each section it includes both environmental and Hindu reasons for making changes, as well as helpful lists and action points. Generally, there is a very low level of awareness among

visitors to temples and holy sites about keeping sacred sites and the broader environment clean. The vision is that all Hindu temples and ashrams act responsibly towards the natural environment, in line with their tradition and beliefs, and that they inspire pilgrims, visitors and the public to do the same.

From the guide, here is a list of ten things your temple can do to make worship, pujas and celebrations greener:

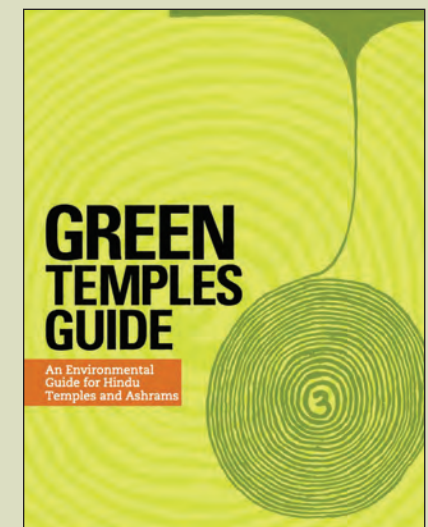
1. Create eco-themed sermons and celebrations: add statements, prayers, meditations, songs about caring for nature.
2. Center celebrations around environmental themes and on special days such as Earth Day and around the annual Hindu Environment Week in February.
3. Make sure waste is disposed of properly at all your festivals. Make this part of the early planning rather than something thought of at the end.

4. Get young people involved in the cleanup; give them eco-banners and sashes or branded T-shirts, and get them to contact local stall holders during procession to explain why they need to be eco and make sure they have rubbish bins outside their stall.

5. Make the cleaning up a celebratory and holy activity in itself. Get important people to clean up after celebrations to show that this is not something for street sweepers.

6. Be mindful of ways that noise, lights and traffic can be limited during your celebrations around environmentally sensitive areas.
7. Use environmentally friendly paints (and not lead paints) when painting statues of Deities.
8. Perform blessings over cows and threatened wildlife and wild places.
9. Source the majority of food locally to minimize fuel used for transport.
10. Plan outdoor services and spiritual outings in nature.

Download the guide here: bit.ly/green-temple-guide



AUSTRALIA

Hindu Counselors Graduate

IN AUGUST 2022, THE HINDU Council of Australia welcomed their first graduates of the nine-month "Counselor of Hindu Traditions" online course. Designed for the global Hindu diaspora by the Hindu Community Institute in California (hinduci.org/learn.html), the course trains one for community service and

the pursuit of Hindu chaplaincy credentials.

Australia's growing Hindu population increasingly needs Hindu-based chaplaincy services such as marriage counseling for young couples, spiritual care for those in prisons and hospitals, mental and spiritual support for young carers of



U S A

75 Youth Honored in Houston

ON SEPTEMBER 10, 2022, seventy-five Hindu youth living in the Houston, Texas, region were recognized and honored for their strong sense of community, fostering conversations about Indian culture, and inspiring the next generation of leaders with their contributions. This was the brainchild of Hindus of Greater Houston (HGH) past president Partha Krishnaswamy to commemorate India's "Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav"—75 years of India's Independence. After weeks of intense planning, the event came together at the

newly renovated auditorium of Sri Meenakshi Temple in Pearland. The evening, hosted by the temple, drew over 500 people and was packed to capacity.

Over 44 organizations participated, 75 awardees were selected and included those of African American, Caribbean, Nepali, Caucasian, and Indo-American origin. The event was attended by representatives from participating organizations, donors, community leaders and distinguished guests.

The evening was replete with insights, inspiration and

practical takeaways. Young speakers Somansh Agarwal and Naisargi Jaiswal of the Hindu Students Association shared pointers on ways to engage with others in promoting Indian culture and traditions, and how the youth could take these practices forward in their colleges. Deputy Consulate General of India Sandeep Choudhary encouraged the awardees to liaise with similar youth in India. A scintillating Kathak performance from the Shivangini Academy of Performing Arts and brisk Bharatanatyam Thillana by the Abhinaya School of Performing Arts rounded out the evening. Attendee Tanveer Kazi

Group photo: Elegantly dressed awardees with plaques

reflected that the evening allowed them to "witness the celebration of the youth, diversity, art and the cuisine of India's rich culture." He also appreciated the keynote speaker's message about the application of rationale and objectivity in today's era of misinformation.

Anjali Agarwal said, "I am extremely grateful to be honored as a Hindu Youth Awardee in the community. It is a blessing to see all future leaders from all Hindu temples and organizations being recognized as one."

BRIEFLY...

ON AUGUST 22, 2022, THE Madras High Court upheld the validity of the Government of Tamil Nadu's all-caste archakas policy: for any Hindu temple not created according to the *Agama* shastras, the government is allowed to hire people from any caste as priests.

THE SHREE SALASAR MANDIR Hindu Temple in Padua, Italy, has been rebuilt after a devastating fire in late 2021. Devotees gathered around a homa fire in June 2022 to celebrate the rebirth. The worshippers settled around here are from many Indian states, plus Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

CAMBODIA'S AMBASSADOR TO the US said that the August,

2022, transfer of 30 antiquities by law enforcement authorities to his country was a return of the "souls of our culture." Ambassador Keo Chhea spoke at a ceremony where a 10th century sculpture, Skanda on a Peacock, was among several works of art displayed. Some of the sandstone and bronze sculptures and artifacts were given up by their owners when US authorities told them they were stolen. Others were claimed through court actions.

AFTER BEING HAUNTED BY NIGHT-mares, a gang of thieves have returned more than a dozen murtis they stole in May 2022 from a 300-year-old Hindu temple in Chitrakoot, Uttar Pradesh, India. Included with the anonymous

return was a Hindi-language confession letter saying: "We have not been able to sleep, eat and live peacefully. We are fed up with the scary dreams and are returning your valuables."

AFTER A LOFTY MARKET DEBUT, the Beyond Meat company, which makes plant-based burgers that most closely resemble meat, is losing steam as the meat-like craze withers in the face of several weak product tests at restaurants and mediocre reviews. In August, 2022, McDonald's became the latest chain to not go through with an immediate broader launch after concluding its US test of the burger.

HEAVY RAINS AND FLOODS THAT ravaged large parts of Pakistan's Sindh province in August 2022 have also taken a heavy toll on the archaeological site of Mohenjo-daro. Many streets

and ancient sewerage drains have been badly damaged. In fact, the calamity has pushed the site—situated on the bank of the Indus River—to the "brink of extinction." Pakistan's Department of Archaeology said that Mohenjo-daro might be removed from the UN's World Heritage list if urgent attention towards its conservation and restoration is not given. Consequently, the administration has banned the entry of tourists to the place.

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IN MY OPINION

Foundations for a Good Life

How my religion shaped me since I was young, and how it brings peace of mind to others

BY ISHWAR HARIDH

FROM MY EARLY CHILDHOOD Hinduism has influenced my life and my outlook on the world. It's structured my personal beliefs and shaped attitudes. I always found flexibility in its practices, and there were often alternative paths and practices within it available to me, should I look for them. It is this variety which allows Hinduism to be practiced in a personal way. Ideally these practices are done with sincerity and conviction, adhering to the fundamental themes that Hindu traditions detail.

For me, Hinduism developed my ability to empathize and treat others with respect, due to the fundamental idea of God, the Divine, being present in everything. Not only did I learn to treat other people with respect, but this care then extended to animals, nature, books, food—everything that I was surrounded with. It was our core Hindu teachings that shaped my ability to respect and admire the world around me. This is just one example of how Hinduism, and the beliefs and attitudes that come with it, are instrumental in shaping the daily lives of those that adhere to it.

Respect for all life forms and all pursuits of knowledge are recurring themes in Hinduism. It places much emphasis on the omnipresent, transcendent spirituality that resides in all things. Thus, devout Hindus go about daily life treating everything around them with that respect, knowing that the path to a righteous or dharmic life is dependent on this trait.

As measured by the Pew Research Center in 2016, religion is shown to increase happiness, with 40% of highly religious adults describing themselves as "very happy" compared to nonreligious adults, of whom less than 30% reported such levels of happiness. As evident in this same study, religious devotion provides many with a sense of purpose in life, aiming to achieve whatever goal may be set in their respective traditions. The Pew Research Center also found that 65% of



religious adults regularly engage in acts of service through donation, compared to 40% of those that are not religious.

In Hinduism, acts of *seva* (service) are crucial to fulfilling one's religious duties, resulting in devotees' efforts to serve selflessly. These acts directly tie into one's duties as a human. Religion

additionally provides a shared sense of community due to a common set of core values and beliefs. Such groups tend to have strong social support structures. Fundamentally, having such faith allows for perseverance in daily life. During times of duress and stress, fully surrendering oneself to the perfection in all and placing faith in one's karmic balance, eases anxieties in worrying about things out of one's control. This further promotes moral and righteous acts in everyday life. Our religion helps us make sense of our purpose in life, providing comfort and helping in the journey for peace of mind.

Finally, many Hindu philosophical concepts require deep study to even begin to understand them. Concepts like *advaita*, *dvaita* and *vishishtadvaita* or the comprehension of concepts like karma and dharma are deep continual studies. Understandings gained from these inquiries can alter one's core outlook on life. Many interpretations on these subjects exist, but they are bound by an underlying set of beliefs. Sometimes this variety can seem overwhelming, but thankfully there are also some basic concepts that we can hold to in daily life. Concepts such as *bhakti* (devotion) and *seva* can be applied easily to most activities.

Hinduism is tremendously instrumental in shaping one's way of daily life, beliefs and attitudes, regardless of what stage of understanding one is in. It helps me by infusing my life with respect, service, devotion and self-discovery.

ISHWAR HARIDH, 17, is a high school senior in Georgia, US. He enjoys travel, economics, philosophy, sports and computer science.

Introducing an Amazing Person

Exploring real happiness—which does not fade with time, does not rely on novelty or material gain, does not tire of itself

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

I KNOW A SPIRITUALLY AWESOME INDIVIDUAL. He is able to quickly calm himself when upset, to transform unhappiness into happiness, to inspire those who are discouraged, and always finds time to listen to the stories and concerns of family and friends.

Would you like to be introduced to this amazing person? It's easy. Just look into a mirror. Yes, that awesome person is you. But it is not the outer you—the body, the intellect or the emotions. It is the spiritual part of you, the soul, the atman, the immortal presence you can sense by looking into your eyes.

Most religions believe that man has a soul, a divine aspect to his existence. Hinduism has always held this belief. As the *Vedas* say, "One should meditate on the atman, which consists of spirit, whose embodiment is life, whose form is light, whose essence is space, which changes its form at will, and is swift as thought" (*Shukla Yajur Veda, Shatapatha Brahmana* 10.63.2).

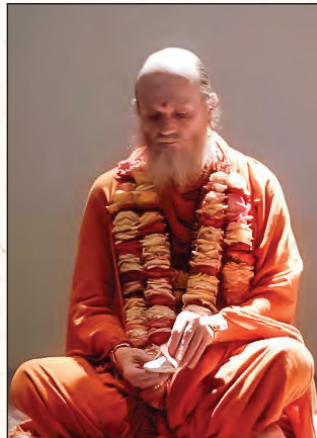
Each of us is a soul, a divine being presently inhabiting a physical body. At the deepest level, we are pure, radiant and blissful. That is our spiritual or intuitive nature. We also have an instinctive nature and an intellectual nature. Thus our nature is three-fold: instinctive, intellectual and intuitive. Let's look more deeply at each of these.

The instinctive nature embodies our lower, animal functions—self-preservation, procreation, hunger and thirst—as well as the base emotions, such as greed, hatred, anger, fear, lust and jealousy. This phase of mind functions automatically.

My guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, gave the following description of our intellectual and intuitive aspects. "The intellectual nature is a mixture of man's instinctive desires and cravings coupled with the knowledge he has gained from others and from his own intuitive discoveries. Within man's intellect, he organizes a vast amount of knowledge that begins to accumulate from a very early age. Ninety percent of this knowledge deals with the externality of the world and mind itself.

"The intuitive, or superconscious, nature is even more complex, more organized, more refined than the instinctive or intellectual phases. It is mystically known as the mind of light, for when one is in this state of mind, he may see light within his head, and sometimes throughout the entirety of his physical body, if his inner sight is developed enough. Otherwise, he just begins to feel good all over, as actinic energy permeates his nervous system. Its most refined essence is Satchidananda, all-knowing, omnipresent consciousness, the one transcendental, self-luminous, divine mind common to all souls. When intuitive flashes come, one knows the next thing to be done in a creative activity."

Hinduism does not stop at simply asking you to



believe in the existence of your soul and intuitive nature. It gives you practices to help you experience and live in your soul nature on a daily basis. In fact, we could say discovering and then regularly re-experiencing the truly spiritual being within you, the atman, is what Hinduism is all about. A wonderful byproduct of this practice is that, over time, the perspective of being your soul, your intuitive nature, becomes stronger and stronger as your identification with the outer instinctive-intellectual nature gradually diminishes.

Let's look at how experiencing the atman relates to an important goal that all people are pursuing—happiness. The

popular expectation is that happiness automatically comes upon achieving one's professional and family goals. Many adults have told me that they are surprised that even though they have, after many years, achieved career, financial and family goals they thought would make them happy, they find they are not. Swami Chinmayanandaji, founder of Chinmaya Mission, poignantly observed: "The tragedy of human history is decreasing happiness in the midst of increasing comforts."

Webster's dictionary tells us that happiness is the emotion evoked by success or by the prospect of possessing what one desires. Individuals who have given deeper thought to the subject understand that such happiness does not last. Depending on the source, this happiness fades within a few days, weeks or months at best. Then one is back in the state of feeling dissatisfied and seeking something external to provide fulfillment.

If the world cannot provide lasting happiness, where else is there to look? An abundance of verses in Hindu scripture provide the answer clearly and repeatedly: the only enduring happiness is inside of us, in our spiritual nature, in our soul.

The *Mundaka Upanishad* (3.11.1-2) presents this truth in a story. "Two birds, united always and known by the same name, closely cling to the same tree. One of them eats the tree's sweet fruit, while the other looks on without eating. While enjoying the fruit, the first bird moans, bewildered by his limitations. But when he beholds the Other, the glorious Lord worshiped by all, he becomes freed from sorrow."

Spiritual happiness has a name in Sanskrit: *sahajananda*. *Sahaja* means that which is inherent, innate or natural. *Ananda* means bliss, happiness or joy. Thus, *sahajananda* is our inherent or inmost



Seeing within: Looking into a magical mirror, a man sees himself as he really is, an immortal, perfect soul, forever content

Based on Gurudeva's teachings, there are various types of practice that lead to experiencing inner, lasting happiness. The first is meditation. A good meditator can turn within deeply enough to experience the energy, light and joy of the soul nature. Paramaguru Yogaswami described this in one of his songs: If you "practice Sivadhyaana, meditation on Siva, daily you will enjoy happiness in your inmost soul, and the thought that the well-being of others is your own will flood your heart."

A second practice involves attending puja at a Hindu temple. This is a devotional approach in which we focus on filling ourselves with the blessings emanating out from the Deity during the highpoints of the puja. Those blessings, which Gurudeva called the darshan or shakti of the Deity, can internalize our awareness to reach the same inner depth as is possible in meditation.

Success at this method requires feeling devotion for the Deity and concentrating or paying attention to the ceremony. The importance of one-pointed presence is illustrated in an analogy. Most everyone has a favorite music which uplifts them. However, if the music is playing and the person is thinking about something else, the music does not inspire. It is just background sound.

Attending puja works the same way. If we pay attention, we receive the Deity's blessings, feel uplifted and experience our inner happiness. If we are mentally engaged in something else, we miss the divine presence before us.

A third practice is helping other people, being of service, performing seva. This is altruism, which Webster's dictionary defines as "unselfish regard for or devotion to the welfare of others." When we get involved in the needs of others and provide for those needs through service, our awareness moves out of the area of personal concerns into an altruistic perspective which is an expression of our soul nature.

Gurudeva made an insightful statement about selfless service: "Go out into the world this week and let your light shine through your kind thoughts, but let each thought manifest itself in a physical deed of doing something for someone else.... Through service and kindness, you can unwind the subconscious mind and gain a clear understanding of all laws of life. Your soul will shine forth. You will be that peace. You will radiate that inner happiness and be truly secure, simply by practicing being kind in thought, word and deed."

The abilities described here are all within your reach by experiencing your atman on a regular basis through meditation, temple worship and selfless service. Experiencing the atman not only brings happiness to you but also brings a desire to share it with others. By claiming your spiritual nature, you naturally learn to quickly calm yourself when upset, to transform unhappiness into happiness, to inspire others when they are discouraged and to always find time to listen to the concerns of family and friends.

happiness. Sivaya Subramuniyaswami comments on this idea, "Learn to be happy by seeking happiness, not from others, but from the depths of the mind that is happiness itself."

I often stress that in Hinduism each teaching has two aspects. The first is the intellectual concept to be understood, which in this case is that lasting contentment is inside of us. The second aspect is the experience of the concept. Understanding needs to lead to experience, and experience comes through consistent practice over time.



LETTERS

Thank You from Nepal!

After six months, Rajeev and I returned to the Hanuman Ghat in Bhaktapur to distribute the HINDUISM TODAY magazine copies to the Madhav Narayan Festival participants and committee members. Their happiness knew no bounds. (See photo at right.) They have asked me to impart a special thanks for the beautiful layout and for putting their beloved festival on the map in the feature "Nepal's Grand Mela to Lord Vishnu" (Oct/Nov/Dec 2022). Dhanyabaad (thank you) from all of us! Madhav Narayan.

NIKKI THAPA, AUTHOR OF THE ARTICLE
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Through the Grand Mela article, I came to know that there is a Garura Vishnu Temple in Kathmandu at which my forefathers worshiped. As offspring, we have derailed from the old traditions for various political reasons since long centuries. I am from North Bengal, Lalmonirhat, Bangladesh. Next year I will visit this place.

SHASHI RAY (DILIP)
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The Milk Miracle

In reference to "The Milk Miracle" (Nov. 1995), I am from Fiji and witnessed the miracle of Ganesha drinking milk. I was in year 11 in an Indian school at the time. The news of the milk miracle was spreading everywhere. Schoolteachers organized an event for 1,000 students to offer milk to Ganesha's statue. We stood in a queue and took turns in pairs. One student offered milk with a spoon while the other stood and watched. My partner was Aiyaz, a Muslim boy. When it was our turn, he offered the milk and I watched. Slowly the milk disappeared from the spoon. I was



amazed and will never forget that day. Was it surface tension or a miracle? If it was surface tension, it would still be happening today.

ALVIN SINGH
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Making Mandirs Great

Your article states exactly what I need at my age—in my forties! "Making Mandirs Cool Again" (Jul/Aug/Sep 2022) is engaging and relevant to my life growing up in the US. I need our temple in Oregon to be less intimidating and more accessible for myself and my children. What I want there is community, language classes, art, dance, performance, prayer, camp, fun activities and cooking. I think it can all be there. Right now I feel like I can't participate, and there isn't a place for me to belong in this city of a million people.

SARIKA
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Needed: Stories on Tolerance

I enjoyed reading "Tolerance: A Hindu Viewpoint" Apr/May/June 2022). As a teacher, am

trying to find good religious stories demonstrating the values of tolerance in the face of prejudice and discrimination. I am using, for example, the Christian text the *Good Samaritan*. I would like to also use texts from other religions. I wonder if you might be able to suggest examples from the Hindu faith, ideally not too complex and with a clear message. Any help or advice will be much appreciated. Kind regards.

WILLIAM BRYANT
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Pressure to Convert

I can relate well to the article "My Unfortunate Conversion" (Jul/Aug/Sep 2022). My journey started age seven in colonial Kenya when my father put me in the local mission school and I learned the Bible. At home my mom was a devout Hindu who spoke no English and prayed in Sanskrit. Today, via the Matha, I made my way to the Vedas, and I was "saved" from being converted.

JAYESH PATEL
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Annual Statement of Ownership

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Swami Durganatha Shanmuga, Administrator



To Divya ji, the author of the guest editorial "My Unfortunate Conversion," thanks for sharing your journey. Reading of your experience is very valuable for anyone in the Hindu way of life, especially teens and young adults.

PRAVEEN
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A Novel Map of the Mind

"The Mind's Seven Dimensions" (Apr/May/June 2022) is a very interesting article. The framework presented is definitely helpful in elucidating the journey. Thanks!

DANESH
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One observation on the Seven Dimensions article: the word *kaif* is repeated multiple times. Its probably a placeholder. Otherwise, the article is greatly informative. Thanks for sharing!

MAHESH M.
MAHESHMEDISETTI

✓ *Editor's Note: Kaif is a central concept in the Language of meditation, called Shum, created by Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. It means "awareness aware of itself and nothing else." The term is discussed at some length in a sidebar within the article. Below are excerpts. The unusual character glyphs such as in the word im' kaif are diacritical*

marks specific to Shum.

"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 reining the outer manifestations of the second, third and fourth dimensions in order to gain a stable control over those forces...

Life's Challenges

The Publisher's Desk editorial "Life's Challenges Are Not to Be Avoided" is a powerhouse. I keep going back to it again and again. It explains the true nature and blessing of challenges and the reasons we should embrace them fully; how true yoga is creating our future with care, the true perspective and appreciation for experiences in the world. All this is discussed. A masterpiece by a master.

DEVA SEYON
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Four Denominations of Hinduism

Congratulations to the Hindu brothers who carried out the wonderful explanatory work, "Hinduism's Four Denominations" (Jul/Aug/Sep 2022). Namah Shivaya.

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or visit: www.hinduismtoday.com/letters

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

Navigating Today's Challenging Times

How you can help our magazine continue providing spiritual tools for today



Publisher of Hinduism Today:

"Now that we are under duress is a great time to grow into the individual and into the community we want to be and are destined to be."

WE ASKED OUR PUBLISHER, SATGURU Bodhinatha Veylanswami, how he sees HINDUISM TODAY's role in these agitated times.

"The world is certainly going through a difficult period, right now," he conceded. "We have lots of new opportunities to worry if we allow

it, to become anxious, even fearful. Fortunately, Hinduism is there to remind us that, if left to themselves, these emotions can run wild. But they are ours to control, and Hinduism provides the knowledge and the practices to do so and turn the negatives into positives.

"We are encouraged to see the beginning of an inspiring trend where many Hindus, and others, especially the young, prefer to take personal inner responsibility for their spiritual unfoldment, as opposed to depending solely on outer affiliation or congregational participation. These are vital, too, but there needs to be a balance; we should not neglect personal self-effort.

"This reawakening to sadhana (regular practices done to enhance one's spirituality) is promising. And our magazine is perfectly poised to help by continuing to highlight the philosophy, the vocabulary, the techniques and practices that best support individual striving.

"Pandit Vamadeva Shastri (Dr. David Frawley) praised HINDUISM TODAY in our October-November-December 2020 issue for framing ancient Sanatana Dharma in fresh metaphors

and language, making it available and appealing to contemporary minds. We have always strived to present Hinduism in a way that is usable in today's world. Hinduism is ever a religion of today, helping us face issues of today and giving us tools for today, rather than dwelling heavily on history and the past.

"I would say that HINDUISM TODAY is as relevant today as it has ever been, perhaps even more so. But it, too, has its challenges to face at this time, especially regarding fortifying its finances. Due to the pandemic, print sales are drastically down. It is fortunate that readers are turning to digital versions and overall readership is steady. But digital versions are of necessity free and cannot offset the drop in copy sales."

Help our magazine to navigate today's shifting currents, remain strong and be able to continue fulfilling its vital mission. We ask all who would support HINDUISM TODAY to direct all gifts—yearly, monthly or occasional donations—to the Hinduism Today Current Expense Fund to meet day-to-day expenses:

Donate at: bit.ly/help-HT, or contact us at: +1-888-464-1008 • support@hindu.org

QUOTES & QUIPS

“Be as simple as you can be; you will be astonished to see how uncomplicated and happy your life can become.”

Paramahansa Yogananda (1893–1952)

Break the wine glass, and fall towards the glassblower's breath. **Rumi** (1207–1273), *Sufi mystic*

Ninety-nine percent of human beings are atheists. **Yogaswami** (1872–1964)

If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion. **The Dalai Lama**

It is good to love many things, for therein lies the true strength, and whosoever loves much performs much, and can accomplish much, and what is done in love, is well done. **Vincent van Gogh** (1853–1890)

(Nachiketas asks:) “Tell me that which you see beyond right and wrong, beyond what is done or not done, beyond past and future.” (Yama says:) “That word which all the *Vedas* declare, which all the austerities proclaim, desiring which people live the life of a religious student, that word, to you, I shall tell in brief. That is Aum.” *Katha Upanishad 1.2*

Those who dance are considered insane by those who can't hear the music. **Friedrich Nietzsche** (1844–1900), *German philosopher*

Life is life, whether in a cat, or dog or man. There is no difference there between a cat or a man. The idea of difference is a human

conception for man's own advantage.

Sri Aurobindo (1869–1948), *Indian yoga philosopher*

If a person overlooks the faults of others and sees only their merits, and thus keeps his mind serene, his whole life will be happy. To be unconcerned in all things, with the mind cool, free of desires and without hate, is beautiful in a seeker. **Ramana Maharshi** (1879–1950), *South Indian mystic*

The temptation to quit will be greatest just before you are about to succeed. **Chinese proverb**

If, while washing dishes, we think only of

the cup of tea that awaits us, thus hurrying to get the dishes out of the way as if they were a nuisance, then we are not “washing the dishes to wash the dishes.” Thus we are sucked away into the future—and we are incapable of actually living one minute of life. **Thich Nhat Hanh** (1926–2022), *Buddhist monk*

He is good and wise who always speaks the truth, acts on the dictates of virtue, and tries to make others good and happy. **Dayananda Saraswati**, (1824–1883) *founder of Arya Samaj*

To measure the quality of your life, simply do nothing and see how it feels. **Naval Ravikant**, *Indian entrepreneur*

If I rest, I rust. **Swami Chinmayananda** (1916–1993), *founder of Chinmaya Mission*

Hinduism: The world's largest non-prophet organization. **Anonymous**

Realize deeply that the present moment is all you have. Make the now the primary focus of your life. **Eckhart Tolle**, *German spiritual teacher*

Clouds come floating into my life, no longer to carry rain or usher storms, but to add color to my sunset sky. **Rabindranath Tagore** (1861–1941), *Bengali poet and philosopher*

We're not trying to explain the unexplainable, just trying to help those who are sincere figure out where to go to experience it.

THANGKA ART EXHIBITION



“Definitely the first time I have understood this art form.”

ROHITS SHUKLA

Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, *publisher of HINDUISM TODAY*

A big gun that shoots the bullet of the depth of knowledge of karma, the second bullet, of the deep understanding of the perfect universal energies, and the third

bullet of the dharmic way of a balanced life, kills the anava and brings that purusha onto the charya marga, onto the path of the Gods, the hospital of the soul at that point. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), *founder of HINDUISM TODAY*

Crossword Puzzle

Across

3. strengthens us on the path
4. South Indian harvest dish
7. pilgrim of the mind
8. meditation is a fine ____
9. nonpartisan think tank
11. aggressive magnetic current
12. remain poised like a ____
14. Nepal's ancient art

Down

1. awareness aware of itself (see educational insight)
2. teacher of Truth
4. strokes of various vibration
5. metaphor for the soul's evolution
6. flour geometry
9. nature's color
10. Siva's great time
13. mother of most of India's food

Across: 3. bhakti 4. pongal 7. yogi 8. art 9. pew 11. pingala 12. hummingbird 14. Thangka Down: 1. kafi 2. satguru 4. painting 5. lotus 6. kolam 9. pigment 10. mahakala 13. Ganga

BASICS

The Yoga Pada

Yoga, “union,” is the process of uniting with God within oneself, a stage arrived at through perfecting charya and kriya. As God is now like a friend to us, yoga is known as the *sakha marga*. This system of inner discovery begins with asana—sitting quietly in yogic posture—and pranayama, breath control. Pratyahara, sense withdrawal, brings awareness into dharana, concentration, then into dhyana, meditation. Over the years, under ideal conditions, the kundalini fire of consciousness ascends to the higher chakras, burning the dross of ignorance and past karmas. Dhyana finally leads to enstasy—first to savikalpa samadhi, the contemplative experience of Satchidananda, and

ultimately to nirvikalpa samadhi, Parasiva. Truly a living satguru is needed as a steady guide to traverse this path. When yoga is practiced by one perfected in kriya, the Gods receive the yogi into their midst through his awakened, fiery kundalini. The *Vedas* enjoin the yogi, “With earnest effort hold the senses in check. Controlling the breath, regulate the vital activities. As a charioteer holds back his restive horses, so does a persevering aspirant restrain his mind.” Aum Namah Sivaya

From the teachings of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami



A. MANIVEL

REVIVAL

A Generation on the Mend

Indians who grew up after independence have not processed colonialism's trauma

BY MURALI BALAJI

IN 2004 I WAS DISPATCHED TO INDIA to cover the aftermath of the devastating tsunami, and afterward I took the opportunity to spend time with my grandfather in Chennai and listen to stories about his experiences living in the colonial era of India.

My grandfather grew up poor in Tamil Nadu. For Hindus in his village to get what was considered a good education, families pooled or borrowed their money or, in the extreme, converted to Christianity: missionaries frequently visited Hindu homes to offer a free education in exchange for conversion, and a number of my grandfather's peers converted as a way of getting out of poverty.

My grandfather's stories helped me to understand how colonial rule impacted the faith of generations of Indian Hindus and the practices they passed down to their children born and raised in the United States. For his generation and my father's, defining what it means to be Hindu, and Indian, is still very difficult.

My dad was born in 1946, a year before independence from Britain, and my mother a decade later. Growing up in liberated India, their post-World War II generation was encouraged to adopt a certain style of secularism embedded within India's new social fabric. Many were also educated in Christian schools, taught a completely different idea of religion than what they learned at home. That in turn informed how they practiced their faith when Indians began moving to the United States after 1965. The staunchness with which many Indian Hindus believed in dogmatic secularism meant that they carried a distinct shame of simply being Hindu or didn't know why they said the prayers or performed the rituals they did. Hinduism's core philosophies were largely ignored or misunderstood.

I still meet older Indian Hindus who are reluctant to identify as Hindu, even if they are regular temple-goers and follow a specific sampradaya. As one older friend told me, many in his generation were more schooled on the *Baltimore Catechism* than they were the *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and other Hindu texts. Many in my dad's generation, now retired, are only now finally taking time to understand more about a religion they were born into but didn't really know.

As a result, the trauma of colonialism has never been fully processed, and many Indian Hindu immigrants were unable or unwilling to acknowledge the ways in which their religious and spiritual

illiteracy impacted their self-conceptualization in the USA, where they were often marginalized religious minorities and frequently had to apologize for their "foreignness." Many in my parents' generation took on American (Christian) names and tried to explain Hinduism to friends in distinctly Abrahamic terms.

Upon entering college myself and being proselytized almost daily by the Campus Crusade for Christ, I realized how precarious my sense of Hinduism was. I grew upset at my parents' generation for not equipping mine with the tools we needed to cope with being religious minorities in a mostly Christian country. Some, like my dad, have become much more



Transfer of power: Lord Mountbatten, Viceroy of India, at the 1947 Indian independence ceremony

religious and curious in their later stages in life. I have friends in my age group—including some who at one point left the faith only to return later—who have also taken a more active role in understanding Hinduism and explaining it to their kids. I'm now far more empathetic to those previous generations who never had a chance to connect with their faith through shared understanding and dialogue.

Perhaps that sense of decolonizing has come too late for some, but it's still important to note that for many Indian and Indian American Hindus, the sense of identity and connection to a spiritual home is still a work in progress. Even as India continues its own journey from the vestiges of colonialism, Hinduism will continue to evolve and adapt to the changing attitudes and views of the billion people worldwide who embrace it.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Murali Balaji is a journalist and a lecturer at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania.

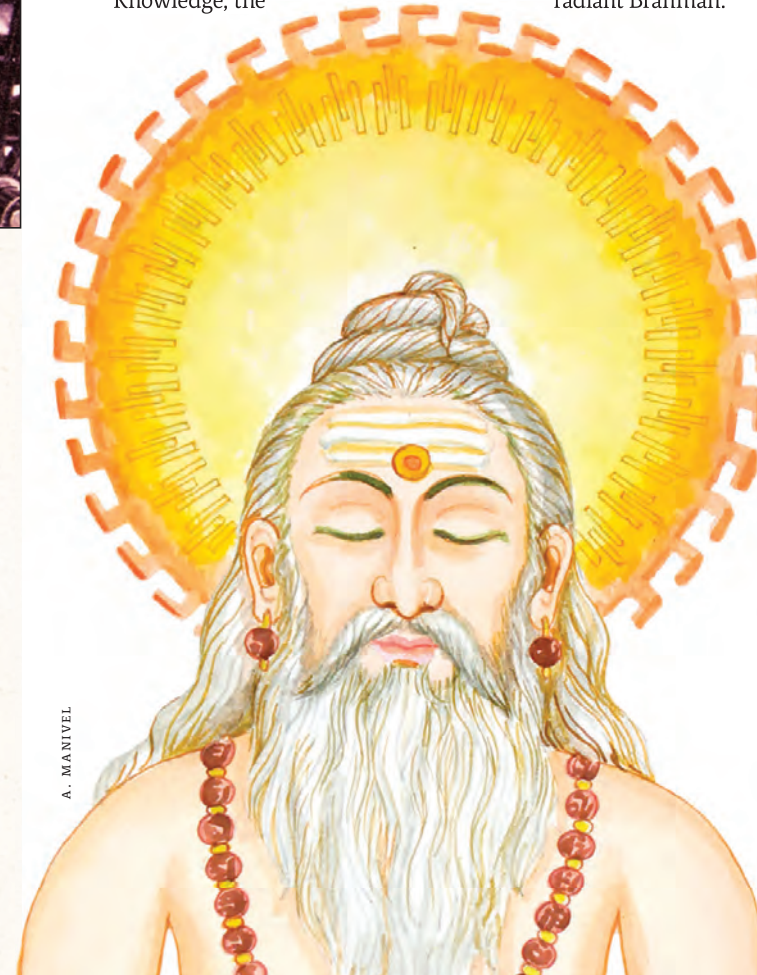
FROM THE UPANISHADS

Ancient Yoga

Invoke the Gods to know thyself through meditation

The following is from Swami Nikhilanda's translation of Shvetashvatara Upanishad. Part of the Krishna Yajurveda, this text of 113 verses in six chapters is mankind's oldest exposition of yoga. The following verses are drawn from chapter 2 and have been lightly edited for clarity.

1. May Savitri, at the commencement of yoga, join our minds and other organs to the Supreme Self so that we may attain the Knowledge of Reality. May He also support the body, the highest material entity, through the powers of the Deities who control the senses.
2. Having received the blessings of the divine Sun, and with minds joined to the Supreme Self, we exert ourselves toward meditation, by which we shall attain Brahman.
3. May the Sun bestow favor upon the senses and the mind by joining them with the Self, so that the senses may be directed toward the Blissful Brahman and may reveal, by means of Knowledge, the radiant Brahman.



4. It is the duty of those brahmins who fix their minds and senses on the Supreme Self to utter such lofty invocations to the divine Sun, omnipresent, mighty and omniscient. For He, all witnessing and nondual, is the dispenser of sacrifices.
5. O senses, and O Deities who favor them! Through salutations I unite myself with the eternal Brahman, your source. Let this prayer sung by me, who follows the right path of the Sun, go forth in all directions. May the sons of the Immortal, who occupy celestial positions, hear it!
6. Where fire is kindled by rubbing, where the air is controlled, and where Soma is greatly revealed, there the perfect mind is produced. Serve the eternal Brahman with the blessings of the Sun, the cause of the universe. Be absorbed, through samadhi, in the eternal Brahman. Thus your work will not bind you.
7. The yogi of well-regulated endeavors should control the pranas; when they are quieted, he should breathe out through the nostrils. Then let him undistractedly restrain his mind, as a charioteer restrains his horses.
8. Let yoga be practiced within a cave protected from the high wind, or a place which is level, pure and free from pebbles, gravel and fire, undisturbed by the noise of water [public wells] or of market booths, and which is delightful to the mind and not offensive to the eye.
9. When yoga is practiced, the forms which appear first and which gradually manifest Brahman are those of snowflakes, smoke, sun, wind, fire, fireflies, lightning, crystal and the moon.
10. When earth, water, fire, air and akasha arise, that is to say, when the five attributes of the elements mentioned in the books on yoga become manifest, then the yogi's body becomes purified by the fire of yoga and he is free from illness, old age and death.
11. The precursors of perfection in yoga, they say, are lightness and healthiness of the body, absence of desire, clear complexion, pleasantness of voice, sweet odor and slight excretions.
12. As gold covered by earth shines bright after it has been purified, so also the yogi, realizing the truth of Atman, becomes one with the nondual Atman, attains the goal and is free from grief.
13. And when the yogi beholds the real nature of Brahman, through the knowledge of the Self, radiant as a lamp, then, having known the unborn and immutable Lord, who is untouched by ignorance and its effects, he is freed from all fetters.
14. He indeed, the Lord, who pervades all regions, was the first to be born, and it is He who dwells in the womb [of the universe]. It is He, again, who is born [as a child], and He will be born in the future. He stands behind all persons, and His face is everywhere.

Swami Nikhilananda (1895-1973) was founder and spiritual leader of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center of New York from 1933 to his Mahasamadhi in 1973. His four-volume Upanishad translation was completed in 1959.

SPECIAL FEATURE

The Holy Ganga, from Varanasi to the Sea

Story & Photos by Dev Raj Agarwal

For the millions of devout Hindus living close to Ganga, every day is full of blessings from the sacred river. Our story takes us 1,200 miles down narrow roads from Varanasi to the Bay of Bengal, exploring the temples and ashrams that hug its banks. The abundance of Ganga is evident in the thousands of square miles of fertile land along its shores. Fifty percent of India's food supply grows in these rich alluvial soils, which are replenished each year during the monsoon rains.



DEV RAJ AGARWAL



View from Varanasi down the Ganga near sunset; (clockwise from top left) Sivalinga; pujari performs fire ceremony on a Varanasi ghat; applying a long vermilion tilak to each lady during a head-shaving ceremony in Narauli, near Patna

BY DEV RAJ AGARWAL, DEHRADUN
ON FEBRUARY 20, 2021, I COMMENCED a pilgrimage down the Ganga from Haridwar to Gangasagar, where the river enters the Bay of Bengal. I had just reached Varanasi when Covid-19 interrupted my journey. I described that first part of the pilgrimage in the July/August/September 2021 issue of HINDUISM TODAY. Now, with the easing of the pandemic, I had the green light to complete my pilgrimage.

I spent one day in Varanasi to arrange transport—and, of course, to take in the Ganga Arati on Dashashvamedh Ghat in the evening and awake early the next morning to witness the sunrise. Morning walkers, ascetics, bathers, people lost in themselves with eyes closed and hands folded, priests hurriedly arranging their seats by the river—all throng the ghat with the first ray of light. After a typical Varanasi breakfast of deep-fried kachori with dry spiced potato alu subzi and jalebi sweets, I was ready to set off from the city.

BHABUA TO GHAZIPUR

DAY I had arranged to take the route closest to the river, which meant enduring many small roads in poor condition. Such roads offer the true sensual experience of rural India in sights, sounds, smells—and bumps. Cows tied to their pegs in open courtyards, clusters of thatched roofed huts, women carrying water in earthen pitchers and that so very special smell of rural India: a mix of cow dung, burnt leaves, spices from food being prepared and wild blossoms. One such road, on Ganga's right bank, leads to the

small town Bhabua in Bihar, famous for Mundeshwari Devi Temple. Situated 60 miles from Varanasi at Ramyagiri Parvat, the temple is believed to be one of the oldest operational Hindu temples in India. Though there is no record of when it was built, an inscription found there indicates that it existed in 635 ce, at the time of King Harshvardhan's rule in India. It is said the castle of a King Mand was here once upon a time.

A small road climbs the rocky hillock to the temple. Much of the structure has been demolished over the centuries, first by natural causes such as lightning strikes and later by Muslim attacks which systematically dismantled or damaged most of it. Today Mundeshwari Temple is a protected national monument, maintained by the Archaeological Survey of India. Only the central structure, where worship takes place, has been restored to some extent. Hundreds of broken statues, intricately engraved pillars, arches and pieces of temple structure are scattered around the huge complex. It is nevertheless a spiritually powerful place, and one hopes in the future the ASI will set about a more systematic restoration.

It is believed that Mundeshwari Devi was a Deity of the aboriginal population. Today Her sanctuary is one of the most important pilgrimage centers of Bihar and adjoining states. The temple is an octagonal structure, a rare example of the Nagara style, with four doorways opening in the cardinal directions. Each wall has a large niche, flanked by two smaller niches on either side. Many are empty now, but must have originally held beautiful figures of various Deities.

The canopy of the temple is believed to

have been destroyed by lightning, long before the onslaught of Muslim invaders. There had been four additional temples in the complex, of Vishnu, Brahma, Ganesha and Siva in the four directions. The central temple, covered with a huge heap of debris from the four other temples, was spared from complete destruction; apparently the invaders had no patience or time to remove the debris and complete the demolition. The two pieces of a beautiful Lakshmi Yantra are still lying in the courtyard.

On the temple's main entrance are statues of guardian Gods and Goddesses. Most of these have been ruthlessly defaced, but they are still revered and worshipped by devotees. There are massive square pillars to support the roof of the sanctum, originally much higher. In the sanctum sanctorum is a large Sivalinga with four faces of Siva. The tall murti of Mundeshwari stands to the left.

Testifying to the craftsmanship of the artisans who built the temple is a tall, cylindrical pot called Kuthia, about four feet high and two feet in diameter. Made of solid stone, the vessel is intricately decorated.

Thousands of devotees visit Mundeshwari

.....
Mundeshwari: (clockwise from right) A Google Earth view of the lower part of the Ganga basin, showing places and rivers covered in this article; lady and her mother thank the Ganga with offerings of sweets and a sari; Acharya Madhusudan Dwivedi, one of the Mundeshwari Temple's main priests, points to the broken Lakshmi Yantra; the severely damaged temple still attracts thousands of devotees a day



everyday, many of them returning to thank the Goddess and Lord Siva for fulfilling their previous prayers. It is common to offer a goat, which in the past would have been sacrificed but now is made to lie down next to the priests performing the ritual, put into some kind of trance and then released.

Local priests offer their services to the

temple on a rotational basis. They also help devotees with performing rituals both inside and out of the temple, such as head shaving and first feeding of a child, rudrabhishek, puja to bless newlyweds, and the ever-popular blessing of newly purchased cars or motorcycles.

GHAZIPUR TO BALLIA

DAY 2 The Gomti River joins the Ganga on the left bank between Varanasi and Ghazipur, 50 miles downstream. Though most widely known for its opium factory (the largest legal one in the world, established by the East India Company in 1820),

Goddess Still Present at 7th-Century Mundeshwari Temple



Ghazipur has many ghats, temples and ashrams along the river. The Manav Seva Sangh runs a large charitable eye hospital, Aarogya Ashram, established by Swami Sharananand near the banks of Ganga.

The events, places and actions of saints and sages described in the mythological stories become reality in these temples and ashrams. The faith and belief of people bring the mythology into real life. For example, there is a Vamana temple at Buxar on the right bank of the river thirty-two miles downstream from Ghazipur. Here Vishnu appeared as Vamana, the dwarf avatar who defeated the demon king Bali who had conquered many Gods. Other stories mention Lord Rama visiting the ashrams of Vishvamitra, Gautama Rishi, Narada Muni, Bhargava and Uddhalak, all of which are in this area.

The sprawling **Shri Adinath Akhara Ashram** and temple complex was established near the river in 1946 by the Nath Guru Shri Adinath Peethadhishwar Triloki Nath Maharaj, better known as Nath Baba. He passed away in Haridwar during the Kumbh Mela of 2021. Yogi Shri Nath, his successor, is the present head of the ashram, which is associated with the Nath Akara in Haridwar. According to Shri Nath, his guru was the embodiment of Lord Siva. "He was of the belief that there is no pageantry in Nath Sampradaya. Even while living a social life, one can show the way to salvation and happiness, way to salvation from 84,00,000 rebirths. Promoting

virtue in society is their main objective."

While I was there, Shri Nath told the devotees, "The divine medicinal properties of Ganga water cleanse body and mind and have the power to heal mental and physical ailments. One can attain liberation simply by remembering the name, having darshan or taking a bath in the heavenly water body called Ganga." He relates that his guru often carried Ganga water from Gaumukh—the river's origin in the Himalayas—all the way to the southern tip of India to offer to the Sivalinga at Rameshwaram.

Under the shade of giant mango trees outside the ashram, groups of men, women and merrymaking children are gathered around a display of clothes, gold jewelry and sweets. The people of Buxar have chosen the precincts of the ashram for the purpose of matrimonial alliances, a place where prospective brides and grooms meet. If they like each other, a marriage may be fixed on the spot. People believe that when a marriage is arranged at the holy place of Guru Adinath, there will be no scope for any betrayal in the partnership. Just while I was there, at least four groups of families were in meetings for this purpose. Parents and relatives come bringing all kinds of offerings and sweets. If both parties agree and the marriage is fixed, the girl and the boy put on elegant clothing. Red alta paste (a custom of married women in the Gangetic plain) is applied to the feet of both the boy and the girl. Later, the now-engaged couple go inside

to seek the blessings of Nath Baba.

Just below the ashram is the river ghat. Here I meet Umesh Paswan, who has come with his wife, mother and a few relatives to thank Goddess Ganga for blessings and fulfilling their wishes. They are offering a sari and sweets through a small ritual. Umesh says the sari will go to his mother. "It took us five years to make it to this ghat after our wishes came true. We will try to be back one more time." The nearby Ramrekha Ghat is the most popular in Buxar, especially for the mundan, or head-shaving ceremony of children.

BALLIA TO PATNA

DAY 3 **Baleshwar Temple**, the largest Siva temple of Ballia, is situated in the middle of the city. This beautiful old temple has a silver Sivalinga. It is said the town was washed away twice in history and this is the third rebuilding. The Sivalinga now established in the temple came here with flood water. The temple is known for its celebration

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Buxar and Ballia: (clockwise from right) the unusual five-faced Sivalinga at Vimleshwar Mahadeva Temple; temple of Rishi Brighu; silver Sivalinga of the Baba Baleshar Nath Temple; red alta dye is applied to the feet of a groom; Yogi Shri Nath, head of the Nath Akhara at Buxar

of Mahashivaratri and for the remarkable devotion of its inhabitants. People come here from far and wide to cure their medical problems.

Outside the temple are the seats of priests with their display of offering plates for puja, which include rice, sandalwood powder, gan-gajal, milk for the Sivalinga, bel tree leaves and the datura flower, which is especially sacred to Lord Siva. According to Pandit Vidhyashankar, these puja plates are given to devotees at no charge. "We happily accept whatever they pay us after the puja inside the sanctorum." Twenty-five priests perform the rituals in rotation.

In the corridors I find many groups of men and women reciting mantras. There are also priests who perform the recitation on behalf of a devotee, sometimes for days at a time.

In the nearby village of Devkali is the Vimleshwar Mahadev Temple, surrounded by several sacred ponds. The unusual Sivalinga in this temple, apparently made of brass, has five heads of Siva.

Traveling the 43 miles from Ballia to Chhapra is a test of endurance and strength: dust, potholes, no road signs and uncontrolled traffic of heavy trucks! Miles and miles of road has been torn out to build a new road. The only soothing element on these dusty roads is the blooming Semal trees, with those large scarlet red flowers that attract all kinds

of birds and insects. Herds of Neelgai, the "Blue Cow," are grazing freely in cultivated fields. Neelgai is the largest antelope in Asia. Herds of these often live close to cultivated areas near forests. Because *gai*, "cow," is a part of their name, they are considered as sacred as the cow and left unharmed even if they



feast on the crops—exemplifying the spirit of tolerance in Hinduism.

Our goal today is to reach the confluence of the Ghaghara with Ganga. This is Her second-largest tributary. As that country's longest river, it originates on the Tibetan Plateau and flows through Nepal to meet the left bank of Ganga near Chhapra. In its lower reaches, Ghaghara is also called the Saryu. This is the river that flows past the sacred town of Ayodhya. The area is quite flat, with

vast stretches of cultivated fields and a near total absence of trees. Each riverbed is more than a mile wide at this point, so the actual confluence is difficult to see from any vantage point.

I visit the **Baba Dharmanath Dhani Temple**, built not for a God but the saint Baba Dharmanath, a devout worshiper of Lord Siva who spent his life in meditation and service here a thousand years ago. Pandit Munna Kumar Mishra, the priest in the temple, says that seeing Baba's devotion and selfless service to Him, Lord Siva appeared in person to bless him. After such divine liberation, Baba chose to go into meditation and consciously leave his body. His samadhi, or burial place, is in the temple.

Pilgrims from far-flung regions visit Baba Dharmanath Temple with great faith. Many prefer this temple for marriages. The temple complex has a beautiful garden and a dharmasala inn where devotees spend the night. The temple donated enough land to the government to construct a school.

A few miles downstream from Chhapra, Ganga is joined on the right by the Sone River, a prominent tributary—another confluence one can't really see from any vantage point.

Continuing down the left bank, we turn a few miles inland to the small town of Ami to visit the Ambika Bhawani temple, regarded as both a Siddhapeeth and Shaktipeeth. The

Temples of the Buxar and Ballia Areas



central murti is a unique earthen statue depicting nine manifestations of Ma Durga. In a charming custom, devotees come each evening to the temple bearing a ghee lamp which they offer to the Goddess.

Next to the temple is a small pond fed by Ganga water. Worship is done here each day with various offerings to establish the presence of the Goddess in the pond. Each morning devotees come, make a wish and reach into the water to retrieve whatever they touch, be it a flower, a grain of rice, or something else. They take this home with them. When the wish is fulfilled, they return it to the pond.

No one can remain untouched by the strong, divine vibration of the place, its silence, the fragrance of incense and ghee lamps. Beaming faces and divine smiles of visiting devotees bear witness to the fact that they are blessed by the Goddess.

In the evening, we continue on to Patna, 30 miles downstream on the right bank. This is reached by the three-mile-long Digha-Sonpur bridge, one of the longest in India. It crosses at the confluence of the Gandhak River and the Ganga.

PATNA TO NARAULI

DAY The name *Patna* is derived from Patan Devi, a manifestation of Goddess Bhagavati and the chief Deity of the region. The religious life of the area revolves around Patan Devi Temple, one of the 51

Shaktipeeths of India. There are three forms of Bhagavati here: Maha Kali, Maha Lakshmi and Maha Saraswati. Their Bhairava, Vyomkesh Bhairava, a fierce form of Siva, sits nearby, as He does in all Shaktipeeth temples.

Patan Devi Temple has the tradition, also followed elsewhere in India, of having a san-nyasin as head of the temple. I met the present Mahant, Vijay Shankar Giri, who explains, "For every auspicious celebration or ritual, people of the Patna region come here to seek blessings of the Devi." Newlywed couples come with their families for Chauthari puja, the Bihar tradition in which they thank the Goddess for a successful wedding. As part of this puja, the groom's mother hands over the keys of the household to the bride, signaling her taking on major responsibility in the family. Overall, Bihar weddings are among the most elaborate in all India.

The temple complex is flooded with devotees engaged in diverse activities. Many families are sitting in close clusters, holding their little boy as the barber wields his razor for the mundan, or head-shaving ritual, which is accompanied by traditional songs. It is fascinating to watch the variations in ceremonies, songs, languages, cuisine and dress of the Ganga plains as I move from region to region.

As everywhere else along the river, sacrifice of animals in Devi temples has become simply a symbolic ritual. People come with goats, which are taken back home after being symbolically offered to the Goddess.

While in Patna, I visited the **Mahavir**

Mandir. Located in the heart of Patna city, this is one of India's holiest Hanuman temples. Here one has to stand in queue for hours to receive darshan. Governed by the Shri Mahavir Sthan Nyas Samiti trust, the temple runs many philanthropic works.

At Narauli, some twenty-eight miles downstream from Patna, childless couples throng the little **Jagdamba Temple**, also known as Karauti Wali Mayya. Here the feet of Jagdamba are worshiped, because the temple has only the feet of the Goddess—all that's left of a broken statue. It is said that on his way to destroy Nalanda University, the scourge of Hindu temples, Bakhtyar Khilji, passed by this small village and broke the beautiful statue of Jagdamba.

The temple is situated under an age-old peepal tree amid sprawling lawns. Red chunni, a small handkerchief, is tied to a thinner branch of the spreading peepal or to the metallic grille of the temple while making a wish. About 20,000 people come here every Tuesday and Saturday, special days for Devi puja.

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Blessings abound: (clockwise from right) devotees worship the lions guarding Patan Devi by applying red powder, a mother comforts her son during his ceremonial head shaving at the Patan Devi Temple; four elders take shelter from the sun under an ancient banyan tree

Worship of the Goddess and Rites of Passage for the Family



NARAULI TO FARAKKA

DAY 5 On the right bank of Ganga, 155 miles downstream from Patna, lies the city of Bhagalpur, world-renowned for its silk, saris and other handloom products. A special attraction of the river here is the Ganga dolphin, a rare freshwater variety. Vikramshila Gangetic Dolphin Sanctuary has been established to protect it.

Standing out amidst a host of temples and ghats in Bhagalpur is **Maharishi Mehi Ashram**. Maharishi Mehi Paramhansa was a great saint who lived a hundred and one years, from 1885 to 1986. Sachchidanand Verma, a volunteer in the ashram, explains that the place is a *santmat* ashram, where ideas of all great saints of all religions are preached. They stress a life of virtue and devotion.

Sachchidananda Paramhans Mahrishi Harinandan Ji Maharaj, the present head of the ashram, explains that it is a place of spirituality. "We educate visitors on traditional prayers in praise of the Gods, character building and meditation. Large crowds attend the daily satsangs which incorporate the teachings of all gurus."

Baba Vradhdheshwar Nath Temple, is renowned throughout Bihar state. Situated on the banks of Ganga, it is believed to have been established by Vashishta Muni, and is mentioned in the *Siva Purana*.

Ancient palm-leaf records of the temple are kept in the custody of the Mahant, Narayan Giri. Murtis of Bhagawati and Baba Burhanath are housed inside the sanctum sanctorum. Devotees offer silver necklaces to Bhagavati when their wishes are fulfilled.

The temple complex is very large, with murtis of Lakshmi Narain, Kalbhairav, Balram, Ganga, Annapurna, Hanuman and Kali. Pandit Pawanendra Jha of the temple said they suffered a lot from the dramatic drop in income during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Burhanath Temple has a large dharmasala for pilgrims and a big gaushala for cows. People from far-flung areas in Nepal, Bihar, Bengal and Uttar Pradesh come here to be married. Sometimes as many as fifty couples marry in a single day. The temple charges just \$1350 for the simple Vedic wedding. "The chances of quarrels and divorces are surprisingly reduced in weddings that take place in this temple," explains Pandit Jha.

The art of weaving fine silk and cotton is an age-old family tradition of Bhagalpur. Narrow alleys in the weavers' colony display sparkling colors of threads being dried or colored outside small houses. Women young and old are busy preparing rolls of thread. Over time, handlooms have been replaced by power looms. Almost every house has a power loom inside where men are busy weaving fabric.

At Kursela, near Kataria, on the left bank of Ganga about fifty miles from Bhagalpur, is Trimohini Sangam, where the Koshi river meets the Ganga. This was one of the several places where Mahatma Gandhi's ashes were immersed in 1948. A small stream by the name Kalbalia originates from the confluence. Because of its erratic nature, Koshi is called the "Sorrow of Bihar," as it inundates large areas of Bihar during monsoons, resulting in damage to property, crops and animals, causing millions of dollars in losses.

It takes hours to cover the distance of just 47 miles from Bhagalpur to Sahibganj. For most of this distance, the Ganga remains quite far north from the road. At Sahibganj is the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Harbour. Here an Inland Waterway Transport Terminal is now being developed to use Ganga for transport of heavy commodities far inland on the river.

The Fulahar River, originating in Nepal, meets the Ganga on the left bank opposite Rajmahal.

SAHIBGANJ TO KOLKATA

DAY 6 After Sahibganj, Ganga takes a sharper turn to the southeast to reach Farakka in West Bengal. The 55 miles of bad road between these towns is sparsely populated. There are hundreds of brick kilns.

Digging earth for the bricks has left the landscape denuded and unsuitable for crops. A low, multi-gated dam was constructed across the river at Farakka in 1975. Here we enter West Bengal. The Ganga to the north-east soon enters Bangladesh, where it is known as the Padma, but still crosses the border to reenter India multiple times. We follow the Hooghly River toward Kolkata. This is one of the many distributary channels of Ganga's delta region, all of which are

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Pilgrims' facilities: (below left) The earthen murti of Ma Durga at the Ambika Bhawani Temple; (below right) the large Karauti Wali Mayya Temple complex, where many marriages are conducted, has facilities for hundreds of devotees at a time



still technically the Ganga River. The Hooghly, not a big river originally, is now fed by substantial water from the dam at Farakka under an international agreement with Bangladesh.

The state of West Bengal is densely populated. Rice is the main crop in this fertile land. We pass through Plassey on our way to Kolkata. This was the site of the Battle of Plassey in 1757, in which the Nawab of Bengal and his French allies were defeated by the British East India Company. About a mile west of Plassey is a busy jetty on the Hooghly, where commuters travel across the river in a ferry, with their bicycles, motorcycles, cars and even large buses. The ferry saves miles of travel compared to crossing by the bridge.

OUR FINAL DAYS

DAY 7 Once in Kolkata, the pace of our travel eases and we take the time to enjoy the sights and sounds of this huge city. A great way to do this is by boat ride, particularly the longer rides to ghats upstream of the Howrah bridge, a famous symbol of Kolkata. It is a wonderful experience to see the giant bridge from such an odd angle, from beneath.

The ghats are not so enjoyable, as they are not very clean, but still people visit them.

The huge flower market below the Howrah bridge comes alive with the first ray of light. It is a photographer's delight with its otherworldly display of colors and its fragrances. Hundreds of flower sellers set up their stalls with all kinds of flowers in many hues and colors. There are loose flowers, garlands and bouquets. Most of the flowers are destined for temples and home shrines.

Rather than visit many temples in Kolkata, I pilgrimage to Ganga Sagar island, 70 miles from the city, where the river meets the Bay of Bengal.

Getting there is not easy. First, one takes a road 53 miles to Harwood Point, then a ferry to the Kachuberia Jetty on the north end of the island. Another 18 miles by local transport brings one to the island's southern tip—Gangasagar, one of the holiest places of the Hindu religion, where the Ganga ends its long journey to the sea. A pilgrimage here is the goal of many Hindus, and thousands arrive here daily. Yearly on Makar Sankranti, when the Sun enters Capricorn in the month of January, more than three million people come for the Gangasagar Mela.



The island of Sagar has innumerable ashrams and rest houses for pilgrims, where food and lodging can be arranged at nominal cost. If coming during the Mela, transport and accommodations must definitely be arranged in advance.

I meet Subhash Chandra who is from Jind,

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Sights of Kolkata: (clockwise from above) the Howrah Bridge opened in 1943; a more ancient bridge design serves the local farmers; Kali temple established years back by the local Chinese merchants; temple bhajan

Ma Durga's Earthen Form



Kolkata



Haryana. He was visiting Gangasagar with sixteen other people. They had traveled a thousand miles by train to reach Kolkata. Overwhelmed by his feat of making it to the distant island, Subhash feels spiritually elevated—an emotion he shared with me. He exclaimed, "I had wished to be here since long. And now the time came for it!"

They take a dip in the holy water, make offerings of arghya to the Sun and conduct other rituals with the help of a priest. In the morning they again performed puja, visit the Kapil Muni Ashram and return to Kolkata.

Conclusion

To me, the long journey down the greatest river of India is a pilgrimage in itself. Not only did it offer an opportunity to visit many sacred ghats, ashrams and temples, it convinced me that all the stories of our epics hold truth. The places mentioned in stories, hymns and mantras do exist. Characters lived exactly in the same places as mentioned in the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Puranas* and other scriptures. The descriptions in the scriptures of the Himalayas, the rivers, the land features are all geographically true.

This pilgrimage demonstrated to me the direct relation between the diversity of nature and the diversity of songs, music, cuisine, languages, dress, rituals and, most of all, the people of this great country called Bharat!



Along the Hooghly: (clockwise from above) Kapil Muni Ashram faces the sea at Gangasagar; the famed flower market under the Howrah Bridge supplies worship across the vast city of Kolkata; people and vehicles of all types enjoy the river's ferry boats

About the Author

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Where the Ganga Meets the Sea of Bengal





ENVIRONMENT

In Honor of the Mighty Indus

An annual celebration of unity for the sacred river from which the words *India* and *Hinduism* are derived

BY ANNE PETRY, FRANCE

ON THE DAY OF THE FULL MOON IN JUNE of 2022, the 26th annual Sindhu Darshan festival was held over three days in Ladakh, a Union Territory bounded by Jammu and Kashmir to the west, Pakistan occupied Gilgit-Baltistan to the north, China and Chinese-occupied territories to the east and Himachal Pradesh to the south. This large area is the highest plateau in India. It extends out from the mountains and is home to the upper Indus River valley—the only portion of this sacred river which physi-

cally resides in India today. Tall Himalayan peaks keep the rains from reaching this area, creating a high-altitude desert with sparse vegetation and craggy cliff sides. The air here is clear, fresh, slightly brisk and altogether pure. It carries the scents of the high-altitude grasses, barley fields, wild caraway and distant mountains.

During this festival, devotees from all over India and abroad gather near the banks of the Indus River. They come to celebrate this sacred waterway as a symbol of the diverse unity of the Indian population. For it is the

mighty Indus—*Sindhu* in Sanskrit—from which the words *India* and *Hindu* are derived.

The first Sindhu Darshan Festival was held in October, 1997. It was conceived by journalist Tarun Vijay, who was inspired to begin the event after traveling to see this part of the river flowing through Ladakh. As the festival gained popularity, it was inaugurated in 2000 by India's then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. On that day he quoted the *Rigveda*:

"Sindhu, its might surpasses all the streams that flow—His roar is lifted up to heaven

above the earth; he puts forth endless vigor with a flash of light; as a cow with milk is rushed to by her calves, so other rivers roar in to Sindhu. As a warrior king leads other warriors, so does Sindhu lead other rivers. Rich in good steeds is Sindhu, rich in gold, nobly fashioned and rich in ample wealth."

The Sindhu Darshan Festival is held along the riverbanks at the town of Shey, some nine miles from the area's capital city of Leh. Shey is home to only a few thousand people, but it holds a rich and largely unknown history of the 9th-century Maryul Monarchy, which would later become known as the Ladakh Kingdom. Shey was originally founded as their capital. The town is the hillside home of the historic Shey Monastery, which was built by the Maryul king Lhachen Palgyigon in the 10th century. The building was later used as a Buddhist monastery, though portions of it are in ruins today.

Gathering festivities: (far left) The festival's varied performers all join together on stage; saris are offered to the Indus; (clockwise from above) a map of the whole Ladakh territory; a view from the hilltop near the Shey monastery; a female performer in traditional garb; dancers hold Indian flags aloft as they lead a crowd along the roadway.

The Sindhu Darshan Festival takes place here because the Ladakh region is the entry point of the Indus River into India. Despite the remote location, Sindhu Darshan has managed to become an important event in the hearts and minds of people from all across the country. Over the years it has also displayed the richness of the local Ladakh customs and the natural beauty of the Himalayas to its diverse attendees.

While today, *Indus* is the most popularly used name of this river, the original Sanskrit word was *Sindhu*—hence the name of this festival which acknowledges the river's ancient past. For an unknown length of time the Sindhu has been revered and worshiped.





A performance for the Indus:

(clockwise from above) A dance troupe adorned with peacock feathers performs on the main stage; a lone sannyasin meditates on the riverbank; another set of cultural performers from the Sindh region; a rare photo of the final curves of the Indus River in India, near the Pakistan border

Some locals even say that the inspiration for the Vedas was sparked from the river's magical powers. We know that it was already tremendously important to the Indus Valley Civilization over 5,000 years ago as a source of life and nourishment. Still today it remains vital to the ecosystems of the surrounding plains, arid countrysides and temperate forests. It is essential to the Ladakhis, the local peoples who live along its banks, and it is of irreplaceable importance to the religious lives of all Hindus. All throughout India, "Sindhu" is heard, chanted in temple ceremony when ritual waters are imbued with the names and sanctity of each of India's greatest rivers. Thus, this festival is one of unity for the entire subcontinent—for India is a land united by its rivers and its reverence for the natural world that sustains its people. This cohesion is what has been drawing people from all walks of life, beliefs, castes and regions to the Sindhu Darshan Festival.

In recent years Sindhu Darshan has become a pilgrimage for many Sindhi Hindus, who in pre-partition days used to worship the Indus in their homeland of Sindh, now modern Pakistan. They join the diverse crowds here to bathe in the brisk river and to collect sacred water from it for their homes. Everyone seems to greatly enjoy these festival days as an opportunity to share time with visitors from other states and nations. The event brings together religious leaders, spiritual teachers and government officials, too.



Beginning with offerings and prayers to the river each morning, the Sindhu Darshan Festival continues with a wonderful cultural program during which different communities perform with one another. Together they display the multi-dimensional aspects of the country. Dance performances, musical shows and indigenous art and crafts offer the crowd an abundance of Indian traditions.

The Great Indus River

The word *Sindhu* is linked to Samudra (Varuna), the Hindu God of oceans, seas and confluences, and therefore this was the name given to this river, due to the great size, volume and distance it covers. Rising in the Tibetan plateau at the height of 16,000 feet (4,876m) near Lake Manasarovar, the Indus River runs a total distance of 1,980 miles (3,180km), going through Ladakh and Kashmir before entering into Pakistan and finally meeting the Arabian Sea. Being sourced in the mountains, the river is largely fed by the snow and glaciers of the Himalayas, Kara-



koram and the Hindu Kush mountain ranges. The flow of the river is greatly affected by the seasons. It diminishes vastly during wintertime when mountain waters freeze, and overflows its banks during the monsoons in July and September. Its average annual flow makes it one of the 50 largest rivers in the world. By putting so many numbers on this massive river perhaps we are trying master it, but the Indus River remains secret and even hostile as it passes through the great unin-



Caring for the land: (clockwise from above) volunteers plant thousands of trees; a large sign for the Go Green, Go Organic campaign; tree-planting volunteers gather for the mammoth task ahead



habited and wild lands at the very heart of the Himalayas.

Preservation of the Himalayas

Because of the harsh climate here, daily life is not easy for the local population, especially during wintertime when temperatures can fall to zero degrees Fahrenheit (-18°C). Despite these difficulties, the Ladakhi love their high mountains capped with eternal snow, as much as they love their sweeping highlands. Locals know that this inspiring environment could be further developed by farming and tourism. However, the Ladakhi can see clearly that they are entirely dependent on nature. They live in a fragile environmental and economic balance, one that could easily be disrupted by pollution and global warming.

With this knowledge, and with inspiration from their sacred River Indus, this area was one of the first in all of Asia to completely ban plastic bags. Their effort against non-recyclable plastics still continues. Examples of this campaign can be seen all around. In Leh, the local administration has installed what they call "Water ATMs" which enable lo-

cals as well as tourists to refill their reusable bottles and container with mineral-fortified, filtered water at any time very inexpensively.

In another example of environmental protection, locals have chosen to undergo short-term economic deprivation, in favor of the protection of Stok Kangri. This mountain in the Stok Range has seen an excess of tourism, which has caused a noticeable degradation of its natural environment. For the last three years, it has been completely closed to trekking and climbing, and as a result its environment has begun to recover.

The initiatives come not only from local government and non-profit organizations but also from the highest religious authority in Ladakh. His Holiness Drikung Kyabgon Thinle Lhundup, a Tibetan Buddhist leader, started a large campaign of environmental awareness and launched the project called "Go Green, Go Organic," which has several important programs. In one such effort, they encourage the local population to use

organic fertilizers and avoid pesticides when farming. One of the latest efforts of the Go Green, Go Organic campaign happened this year during World Environment Day. Hundreds of volunteers joined together on this day to plant 150,000 tree saplings in the area of Changthang near the Tibetan border. It is hoped that these types of actions will help Ladakhi to preserve their natural environment, even as the modern world encroaches upon it. May they always protect the area's pristine mountains, greenery and rivers—among them the Indus River!



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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India's Unique Religious Cohesion

The Pew Research Center's most comprehensive poll of India to date, surveying 29,999 adults, holds some major surprises

DID YOU KNOW THAT MUSLIMS IN India are just as likely as Hindus to say they believe in karma, 77% each, as do 54% of India's Christians? These are two of the fascinating takeaways in a Pew Research Center report released in June, 2021. This report, based on a face-to-face survey of 29,999 Indian adults fielded between late 2019 and early 2020, takes a close look at religious identity, nationalism and tolerance. In proportion with India's religious demographics, 22,975 participants are Hindus. Let's take a look at responses to some of the most prominent topics.

Beliefs

Indians are mostly united, 80%, in the view that respecting other religions is a very important part of what it means to be a member of their own religious community. People in all six major religious groups overwhelmingly said they are free to practice their faith, and most said that people of other faiths also are free to practice their own religion. It shows that Swami Vivekananda's proclamation 130 years ago at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions still rings true: "I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal tolerance, but we accept all religions as true."

Nearly all Indians, 97%, believe in God, and roughly 80% of people in most religious groups are absolutely certain that God exists. The main exception is Buddhists, as belief in God is not central to Buddhist teachings. In comparison, according to a 2017 Gallup poll, 87% of Americans generally believe in God and 64% are fully certain of God's existence.

A majority of adults, 60%, pray daily, more than two-thirds, 71%, visit a house of worship at least monthly, and an overwhelming share, 84%, say religion is very important in their lives. Previous Pew surveys show much less importance given to religion in several other regions of the world, including Western Europe, Central and Eastern Europe, Israel, Latin America and the United States.

Practices

The high importance of religion is reflected in home-based practices. Eight-one percent of Indian adults, regardless of religion, have

an altar, shrine or religious symbol in their home for worship. A similar portion, 78%, said they have invited a religious leader to conduct rites at their home. The survey asked Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains how frequently they perform puja at home and attend a temple. Majorities of Jains, 83%, Hindus, 76%, and Buddhists, 58%, perform puja at home at least once a week. In fact, 79% of Jains perform puja daily. Across religious groups, people do puja at home more often than they visit a temple. For example, while about three-in-four Hindus do puja at home weekly, roughly half, 53%, attend a temple

each week.

Most adults, 56%, said they have made a religious pilgrimage, and this is true across most religious groups. The majority of Muslims, 62%, however, said they have not made a pilgrimage. Most Sikhs, 57%, and Jains, 61%, said they practice meditation at least once a week, as do 52% of Muslims and 47% of Hindus. Fewer Christians, 34%, and Buddhists, 35%, meditate weekly. Nearly a third of total adults meditate daily. Indians who pray daily are more than twice as likely as other Indians to meditate at least once a week, at 62% vs. 26%.

India is the motherland of hatha yoga, but most Indians do not practice it. About a third, 35%, said they have practiced hatha yoga at some point, with just 13% doing so weekly or more often. Meanwhile, 62%—including an identical share of Hindus—said they never do hatha yoga.

Roughly half of Indian adults, 48%, said they watch religious programs or serials at least weekly. Virtually all parents are raising their children in a religion; bringing up children with no religion is exceedingly rare in India. In addition, a majority of Indian parents, 74%, said their children visit a house of worship associated with their faith, and that their children, 67%, pray. However, far fewer, 43%, said their children are taught religion outside the home, suggesting that in India, children learn primarily at home.

Not only do most Hindus and Jains believe the River Ganga has the power to purify—a belief rooted in Hindu scripture—but substantial minorities of Indian Christians and Muslims believe this as well. At the same time, some beliefs that may seem mainstream for a certain group are not held by most members of that group. Although many people might consider reincarnation a core teaching in several religions native to South Asia, in no religious community does a majority express belief in reincarnation. Surprisingly, just 40% of Hindus, 23% of Jains and 18% of both Buddhists and Sikhs in India said they believe in reincarnation.

Religion and Economy

A prominent theory in the social sciences hypothesizes that as countries advance economically, their populations tend to become

less religious, often leading to wider social change. Known as "secularization theory," it particularly reflects the experience of Western European countries from the end of World War II to the present.

Despite rapid economic growth, India's population so far shows few, if any, signs of losing its religion. For instance, both the Indian census and this Pew survey find virtually no growth in the minuscule share of people who claim no religious identity. And religion remains prominent in the lives of Indians regardless of their socioeconomic or educational status. There is little difference in personal religious observance between urban and rural residents and between those who are college educated and not.

On Religious Diversity

Among Indians overall, there is no overwhelming consensus on the benefits of religious diversity. Roughly half, 53%, said India's religious diversity benefits the country, while about a quarter, 24%, see diversity as harmful, with similar figures among both Hindus and Muslims. But 24% of Indians do not take a clear position either way—they said diversity neither benefits nor harms the country, or they decline to answer.

India's diverse population is composed of religious communities who are not too familiar with each other's beliefs and practices, and who don't see much common ground among them. Yet, many Indians take a pluralistic, rather than exclusivist, attitude toward religious beliefs. The predominant opinion among Indian adults overall, as well as within most of the country's major religious groups, is that "many religions can be true," rather than that theirs is "the one true religion." Muslims have the largest share, 51%, who take the position that theirs is the one true religion. Jains are about evenly divided on this question.

Nationalism and Segregation

Indians nearly universally take great pride in their country. Fully 96% said they are very proud to be Indian. There is somewhat less consensus on whether Indian culture stands out above all others. A majority, 72%, completely agree with the statement that "Indian people are not perfect, but Indian culture is superior to others." But while an especially large share of Indians in the central region, 81%, completely agree that Indian culture is superior, only a slim majority, 59%, said this in the northeast. The survey finds that Hindus tend to see their religious identity

and Indian national identity as closely intertwined: Nearly two-thirds of Hindus, 64%, said it is very important to be Hindu to be "truly" Indian. These views are considerably more common among Hindus in the largely Hindi-speaking northern and central regions of the country.

India's religious groups see themselves as quite different from one another. They prefer personal connections (and of course marriage) with people in their own religion, and substantial minorities don't want other religions as neighbors, preferring religious segregation in communities while simultaneously believing strongly in religious tolerance. While large shares of Hindus and Muslims said all their close friends share their religion, Christians and Buddhists tend to have slightly more mixed social circles and to attach less importance to stopping interreligious marriage. While people in some countries may aspire to create a "melting pot" of different religious identities, many Indians seem to prefer a country more like a patchwork fabric, with clear lines between groups.

Religious Conversion

In recent years, lower caste people converting from Hinduism (traditionally a non-proselytizing religion) to proselytizing religions, especially Christianity, has been a contentious political issue. As of early 2021, nine states have enacted laws against proselytism, and some previous surveys have shown that half of Indians support legal bans on religious conversions. This new survey, though, finds that conversion has a minimal impact on the overall size of India's religious groups. Among Hindus, for instance, any conversion out of the group is matched by conversion into the group: 0.7% of respondents said

they were raised Hindu but now identify as something else, and roughly the same share, 0.8%, said they were not raised Hindu but now identify as Hindu. Most new followers of Hinduism are married to Hindus. Changes in India's religious landscape over time are largely a result of differences in fertility rates among religious groups, not conversion. Three-quarters of India's Hindu converts to Christianity are concentrated in the south—the region with the largest Christian population.

Festivals

Substantial minorities of Christians, 31%, and Muslims, 20%, report that they celebrate Diwali, the Indian festival of lights that is traditionally celebrated by Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists. Celebrating Diwali is especially common among Muslims in western India, where 39% said they participate in the festival, and in the south, 33%.

Not only do some followers of all India's religions participate in Diwali, which consumes most of the country once a year, a fair number of Hindus celebrate Muslim and Christian festivals, too: 7% of Indian Hindus said they celebrate the Muslim festival of Eid, and 17% celebrate Christmas. While there is some mixing of religious celebrations and traditions within India's diverse population, many Hindus do not approve of this. In fact, while 17% of Hindus said they participate in Christmas, just over half of Hindus said that doing so disqualifies a person from being Hindu. An even greater share, 63%, said a person cannot be Hindu if they celebrate the Islamic festival of Eid.

For more survey topics, and how the statistics vary considerably by India's regions, see the full report at: tinyurl.com/pewindia



Promoting Harmony: Hindus and Muslims perform Holi festival prayers together in Aligarh, Uttar Pradesh, India in March, 2022. Aligarh city is often seen as an epitome of religious unity.

EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

All About Meditation



Mystical Guidelines to the Fine Art of Exploring the Wonderful Within of Yourself

From the Teachings of
Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

The growth of the lotus flower is perhaps the best metaphor for the soul as it unfolds in consciousness. It begins in the mud, like a soul caught up in the instinctive nature; then it emerges into the water as a stem, like the soul immersed in the intellect and emotions; and ultimately it appears above the water as a bud, just as the soul awakens to its spiritual nature. For the soul, this stage of the bud beginning to open as a beautiful flower marks the onset of inner striving, seeking to know oneself and fathom the mysteries of life through the introspective process of meditation. Meditation is an art, a definite art, and well worth working for to become accomplished. It is not easy, and yet it is not difficult. It only takes persistence, working day after day to learn to control and train the outer as well as the subtle, inner forces.

SHUTTERSTOCK

Meditation is a long journey, a pilgrimage into the mind itself. Generally we become aware that there is such a thing as meditation after the material world has lost its attraction to us and previous desires no longer bind us to patterns of fear, greed, attachment and ramification. We then seek through philosophy and religion to answer the questions, "Who am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going?" We ask others. We read books. We ponder and wonder. We pray. We even doubt for a while that there is a Truth to be realized, or that we, with all our seeming imperfection, can realize it if it does exist. Oddly enough, this is the beginning of the meditator's journey on the path, for we must empty ourselves fully before the pure, superconscious energies can flow freely through us. Once this state of emptiness and genuine searching is reached, we soon recognize the futile attempt to find Truth on the outside. We vividly begin to know, from the depth of ourselves, a knowing we could not explain or justify. We simply know that Reality, or the Self God, resides within, and we must go within ourselves to realize it. Of itself, that knowing is not enough. Even great efforts to meditate and vast storehouses of spiritual knowledge are not enough. Many have tried to find the Truth this way. The Truth is deeper and is discovered by the resolute devotee who dedicates his life to the search; who lives a balanced life according to the *yamas* and *niyamas*, the Vedic spiritual laws; who willingly undergoes change; who finds and obeys a spiritual teacher, or *satguru*; and who learns precisely the disciplined art of meditation. This, then, outlines the destination of the meditator's journey and his means of travel.

One of the first steps is to convince the subconscious mind that meditation is good for us. We may want to meditate consciously, yet maintain fears or doubts about meditation. Somewhere along the way, a long series of events occurred and, upon reaction to them, awareness became externalized. We became geared to the materialistic concepts of the external world. As we begin to feel that urgency to get back within, the old patterns of thought and emotion, cause and effect, naturally repeat themselves. For a while, the contents of the subconscious may conflict with our concepts of what it is like to fully live spiritually. Our habits will be undisciplined, our willpower ineffective. Quite often the subconscious seems almost like another person, because it is always doing something unanticipated.

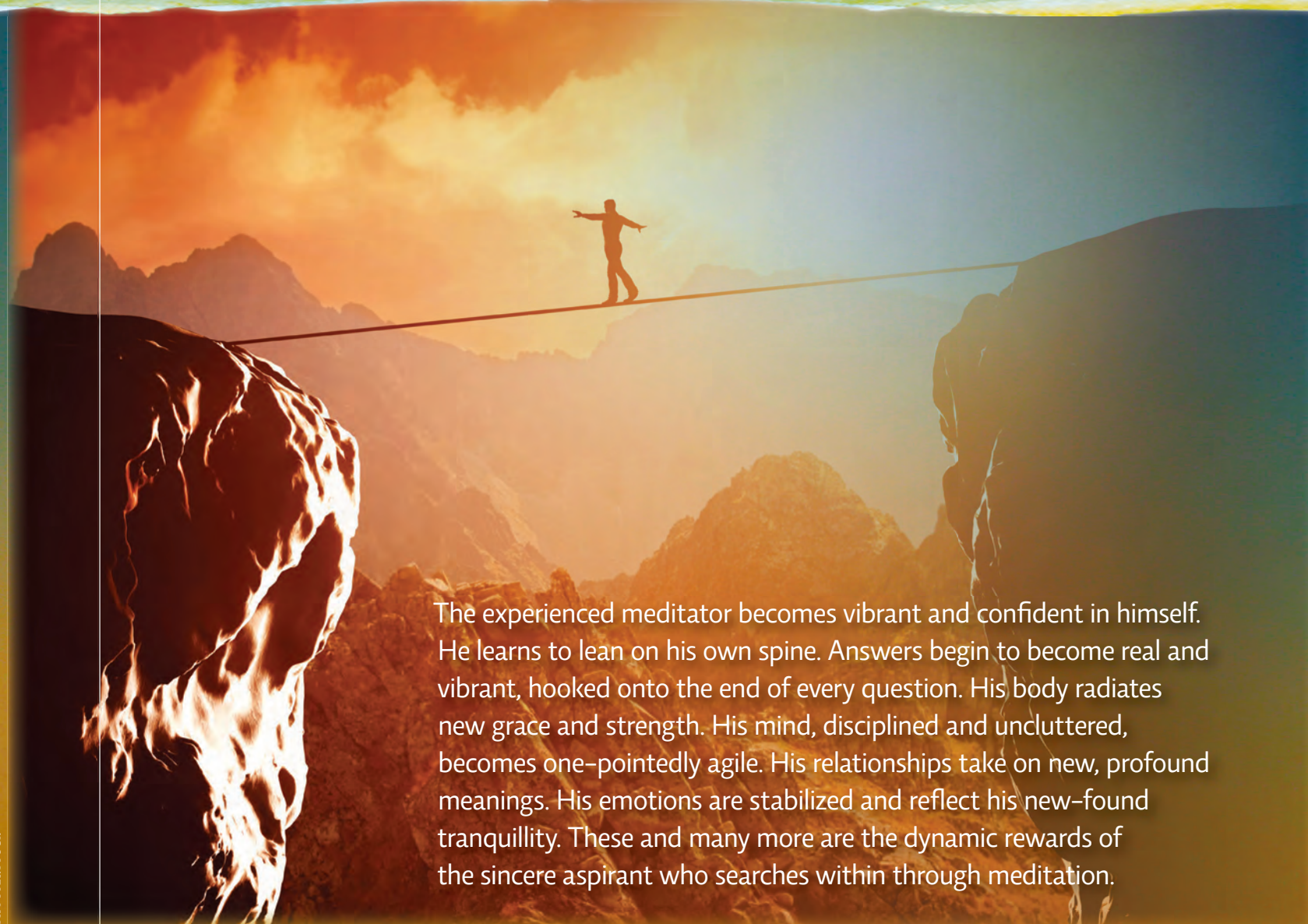
In these early stages, we must mold the areas that are different into a new lifestyle so that there will be nothing in the subconscious that opposes what is in the conscious or superconscious mind. Only when all three of these areas of consciousness act in harmony

Find a quiet retreat for the practice of yoga, sheltered from the wind, level and clean, free from rubbish, smoldering fires and ugliness, and where the sound of waters and the beauty of the place help thought and contemplation.

Krishna Yajur Veda, Shvetashvatara Upanishad 2.10 (translation by Juan Mascaro)



SHUTTERSTOCK



The experienced meditator becomes vibrant and confident in himself. He learns to lean on his own spine. Answers begin to become real and vibrant, hooked onto the end of every question. His body radiates new grace and strength. His mind, disciplined and uncluttered, becomes one-pointedly agile. His relationships take on new, profound meanings. His emotions are stabilized and reflect his new-found tranquillity. These and many more are the dynamic rewards of the sincere aspirant who searches within through meditation.

Sage Patanjali's Yoga Sutras

Excerpts from Alice A. Bailey's 1927 Free-Rendering Translation of Hinduism's Seed Scripture on Yoga

Union (or yoga) is achieved through the subjugation of the psychic (emotional) nature, and the restraint of the *chitta* (or mind). When this has been accomplished, the yogi knows himself as he is in reality. Up till now the inner man has identified himself with his forms and with their active modifications. *Sutras 1-4*

These modifications (activities) are correct knowledge, incorrect knowledge,

fancy, passivity (sleep) and memory. The control of these modifications of the internal organ, the mind, is to be brought about through tireless endeavor and through non-attachment. When the object to be gained is sufficiently valued, and the efforts towards its attainment are persistently followed without intermission, then the steadiness of the mind (restraint of the *vrittis*) is secured. *Sutras 6, 12, 13, 14*

The consciousness of an object is

attained by concentration upon its fourfold nature: the form, through examination; the quality (or *guna*), through discriminative participation; the purpose, through inspiration (or bliss); and the soul, through identification. A further stage of samadhi is achieved when, through one-pointed thought, the outer activity is quieted. In this stage, the *chitta* is responsive only to subjective impressions. The samadhi just described passes not beyond the bound of the phenomenal world; it passes not beyond the Gods, and those concerned with the concrete world. The attainment of this state (spiritual consciousness) is rapid for those whose will is intensely alive. *Sutras 17-19; 21*

The obstacles to soul cognition are bodily disability, mental inertia, wrong question-

ing, carelessness, laziness, lack of dispassion, erroneous perception, inability to achieve concentration, failure to hold the meditative attitude when achieved. Pain, despair, misplaced bodily activity and wrong direction (or control) of the life currents are the results of the obstacles in the lower psychic nature. *Sutras 30-31*

The peace of the *chitta* can be brought about through the practice of sympathy, tenderness, steadiness of purpose and dispassion in regard to pleasure or pain, or towards all forms of good or evil. The peace of the *chitta* is also brought about by the regulation of the prana or life breath. The mind can be trained to steadiness through those forms of concentration which have relation to the sense perceptions. By

meditation upon Light and upon Radiance, knowledge of the Spirit can be reached and thus peace can be achieved. The *chitta* is stabilized and rendered free from illusion as the lower nature is purified and no longer indulged. When this super-contemplative state is reached, the Yogi acquires pure spiritual realization through the balanced quiet of the *chitta*. When this state of perception is itself also restrained (or superseded), then is pure Samadhi achieved. *Sutras 34-37; 47, 51*

The eight means [or limbs] of yoga are: the commandments, or *yama*; the rules, or *niyama*; posture, or *asana*; right control of life-force, or *pranayama*; abstraction, or *pratyahara*; attention, or *dharana*; meditation, or *dhyana*; and contemplation, or samadhi.

can meditation be truly attained and sustained. For us to be afraid of the subconscious is unwise, for it then holds a dominant position in our life. The subconscious is nothing more than the accumulation of vibratory rates of experience encountered by awareness when it was externalized, a storehouse containing the past.

Remold the Subconscious Mind

The solution to subconscious confusion is to set a goal for ourselves in the external world and to have a positive plan incorporating meditation daily as a lifestyle within that goal. Through this positive initiative and daily effort in meditation, awareness is centered within. We learn how to disentangle and unexternalize awareness.

As soon as strong initiative is taken to change our nature toward refinement, a new inner process begins to take place. The forces of positive accomplishment from each of our past lives begin to manifest in this one. The high points of a past life, when something great has happened, become strung together. These merits or good deeds are vibrations in the ether substance of our memory patterns, because each one of us, right now, is a sum total of all previous experience. All of the distractions of the external area of the mind begin to fade, and positive meditation becomes easily attainable. It is not difficult to move our individual awareness quickly within when distractions occur.

Set Goals & New Patterns

This new pattern of setting goals and meeting them strengthens the will. One such goal is to perform *sadhana* every day without fail during a morning vigil period of worship, *japa*, scriptural study and meditation. Daily meditation has to become part of our lifestyle, not just a new something we do or study about. It must become a definite part of us. We have to live to meditate. This is the only way to reach the eventual goal on the path—the realization of the all-pervasive Sivam. Deep meditation takes the power of our spiritual will, which is cultivated through doing everything we do to perfection, through meeting the challenges of our goals, and through its constant expression as we seek to do more than we think we can each day. So, set your spiritual goals according to where you are on the path. Set goals for deeper, more superconscious meditation, for a change of your personality or outer nature, for better service to your fellow man, and for a totally religious lifestyle.

Goals are generally not used in spiritual life, because the inner mechanism of goal setting

is not clearly understood. Dynamic, successful people who go into business for themselves have to have a positive, aggressive plan and keep their lives in a good routine to achieve success. The most prominent among them begin and end each day at a certain time in order to sustain the pressure of the business world. We can and should approach the practice of meditation in a similar way. Like the businessman, we want to succeed in our quest, the only difference being the choice of an inner goal as opposed to the choice of an outer goal, the fulfillment of which entangles us and further externalizes awareness.

In the early stages of meditation, it's very difficult to sit without moving, because that has not been part of our lifestyle. The subconscious mind has never been programmed to contentedly sit quietly. We didn't see our families doing that. Perhaps we haven't seen anybody doing that. No example has been set. Therefore, we have to be patient with ourselves and not sit for too long in the beginning. Start by sitting for ten minutes without moving. In a few weeks, extend it to twenty minutes, then a half hour. Thus we avoid being fanatical and allow the subconscious to make its necessary adjustments.

These adjustments are physical as well as emotional and intellectual. The nerve currents rearrange themselves so that prolonged stillness and absence of external activity is comfortable. Similarly, the philosophy of the path of enlightenment fully penetrates every layer of the subconscious, adjusting previous erroneous concepts of ourselves and enabling us to consciously intuit various philosophical areas and know them to be right and true from our personal experience of superconsciousness. This, then, may take a few years.

If we plant a tree, we have to wait for it to grow and mature before we enjoy its shade. So it is in meditation. We make our plans for beginning the practices of meditation, then give ourselves enough time, several years, to fully adjust and remold the subconscious mind. Living as we do in the externalized culture of the West, we are conditioned to be in a hurry to get everything. When we try to internalize awareness too quickly through various intense and sometimes fanatical ways, we reap the reaction. Meditation goes fine for a brief span, but then externalizes again according to the programming of our family and culture.

To permanently alter these patterns, we have to work gently to develop a new lifestyle for the totality of our being—physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. This we do a little at a time. Wisdom tells us that it cannot be done all at once. We have to be patient with ourselves. If we are impatient on the path, failure is in view. We are going to fail, because instant spiritual unfoldment is a



Meditate on awareness as an individual entity flowing through all areas of the mind, as the free citizen of the world travels through each country, each city, not attaching himself anywhere. In meditation, awareness must be loosened and made free to move vibrantly and buoyantly into the inner depths where peace and bliss

remain undisturbed for centuries. We have the big city called thought. We have another big city called emotion. There's yet another big city called fear, and another one nearby called worry. But we are not those cities. We're just the traveler. When we're in San Francisco, we are not San Francisco. When we're aware of worry, we are not worry. We are just the inner traveler who has become aware of the different areas of the mind.

fairy tale concept. It is far better that we recognize that there will be difficult challenges as the subconscious looms up, with all of its conflicts and confusions, heavy and strong. When it does, we must face them calmly, through spiritual journaling, *vasana daha tantra*. If our eventual goal is clearly in mind and we have a positive step-by-step plan on how to reach that goal, then we won't get excited when something goes wrong, because we view our mental and emotional storms in their proper and temporary perspective.

Face the Barriers

Not only does the subconscious create barriers in our own minds, it also draws to us the doubts and worries of other people for us to face and resolve. There is such a vast warehouse of negative conditioning against meditation that it is almost useless to begin if we believe any of it at all. We have all heard a few of the fears: "Something terrible must have happened to you as a child if you want to go into that." "You don't love me anymore. That's why you meditate—you're withdraw-

ing." "You're just afraid of society and responsibility. It's an escape from the real world that you can't cope with." "You're going to be poor if you meditate. Everyone who meditates is broke, you know." And so it goes, on and on.

We do have to answer these objections for the subconscious and thus settle all doubts within ourselves. Of course, the results of meditation will themselves convince the subconscious of the benefit of inner *sadhana* as we bring forth perceptive insights, renewed energy, a happy and balanced life and spiritual attainment. Negative conditioning breaks down as we prove to ourselves according to our own experience that it was wrong. Such conditioning is inhibiting to some and has to be corrected. To counteract it, we can ask ourselves, "Why? What is it all about? How did I attract these problems? Do I still have such doubts in my subconscious, consciously unknown?" We can further ask, "Who has done the conditioning? What was their life like? Were they happy people?" Finally, from our own positive efforts to cognize, we actually remold the subconscious, erase false concepts and become free.

The mind in its apparently endless confusion and desires leads us by novelty from one thing to the next. The reaction to this causes the miseries of the world, and the miseries of the world happen inside of people. But occasionally we have to call a halt to the whole thing and get into ourselves. That's the process of meditation. It's an art. It's a faculty we have within ourselves which, when developed, gives a balance and a sense to life. And everyone, whether they know it or not, is searching, trying to find out what life is all about.

So many people tell me, "Oh, I would like to study yoga, but I just don't have the time," "I can't get quiet enough," or "The kids make too much noise," or some excuse like that. They don't realize that you don't become quiet automatically. Becoming quiet is a systematic process. You become quiet systematically. It might take you two weeks of practice before you can sit down and feel that you've made any progress at all, or even feel like sitting down and trying to become quiet. But it's one of those things you eventually have to do. You get up and cook breakfast because you have to eat. You are hungry. And when you become hungry enough to get quiet within yourself, you will do so automatically. You will want to. And then what happens? You will sit down, and your mind will race. Say, "Mind, stop!" and see how fast you can make your mind stop and become quiet. Say, "Emotions, you are mind-controlled," and see how quiet you become.

Establish the Right Conditions

We now come to the practical aspects of meditation. In the beginning, it is best to find a suitable room that is dedicated solely to meditation. If you were a carpenter, you would get a shop for that purpose. You have a room for eating, a room for sleeping. Now you need a separate room just for the purpose of meditation. When you find it, wash the walls and ceiling, wash the windows. Prepare a small altar if you like, bringing together the elements of earth, air, fire and water. Establish a time for your meditations and meet those times strictly. There will be days when you just don't feel like meditating. Good.

Those are often the best days, the times when we make strong inner strides. The finest times to meditate are six in the morning, twelve noon, six in the evening, and twelve midnight. All four of these times could be used, or just choose one. The period of meditation should be from ten minutes to one-half hour to begin with.

By sitting up straight, with the spine erect, we transmute the energies of the physical body. Posture is important, especially as meditation deepens and lengthens. With the spine erect and the head balanced at the top of the spine, the life force is quickened and intensified as energies flood freely through the nerve system. In a position such as this, we cannot become worried, fretful, depressed or sleepy during our meditation. But if we slump the shoulders forward, we short-circuit the life energies. In a position such as this, it is easy to become depressed, to have mental arguments with oneself or another, or to experience unhappiness. So, learn to sit dynamically, relaxed and yet poised. The full-lotus position, with the right foot resting on the left thigh and the left foot above, resting on the right thigh, is the most stable posture to assume, hands resting in the lap, right hand on top, with the thumbs touching.

Control Thinking with Breathing

The first observation you may have when thus seated for meditation is that thoughts are racing through the mind substance. You may become aware of many, many thoughts. Also the breath may be irregular. Therefore, the next step is to transmute the energies from the intellectual area of the mind through proper breathing, in just the same way that proper attitude, preparation and posture transmuted the physical-instinctive energies. Through regulation of the breath, thoughts are stilled and awareness moves into an area of the mind which does not think, but conceives and intuit.

There are vast and powerful systems of breathing that can stimulate the mind, sometimes to excess. Deep meditation requires only that the breath be systematically slowed or lengthened. This happens naturally as we go within, but can be encouraged by a method of breathing called *kalibasa* in Shum, my language of meditation. During *kalibasa*, the breath is counted, nine counts as we inhale, hold one count, nine counts as we exhale, hold one count. The length of the beats, or the rhythm of the breath, will slow as the meditation is sustained, until we are counting to the beat of the heart, *hridaya spanda pranayama*. This exercise allows awareness to flow into an area of the mind that is intensely alive, peaceful, blissful and conceives the totality of a concept rather than thinking out the various parts.

Control of the breath, to be learned properly, might take months or even years. That's all right. If you were learning to play a musical instrument, it would take months or even years to perfect the basic principles of making chords and putting chords together into a melody. There is no hurry. Hurry is the age we want to bypass when we meditate. The control of the breath is exactly the same as the control of awareness, so it is good to be patient in the early stages and perfect

each element of practice.

During meditation, the breath, the heartbeat, metabolism—it all slows down, just like in sleep. You know, deep meditation and deep sleep are extremely similar. Therefore, the practice of pranayama—regulation of the breath and the pranas, the currents of the body—should really be mastered first. In the very same way, the dancer doesn't just start out dancing. He starts out exercising first. He may exercise strenuously for a year before he begins to really dance. The pianist doesn't sit down at the piano and start with a concert. He starts with the scales and with the chords. He starts by limbering his fingers, by perfecting his rhythm and posture. Meditation has to be taught like one of the fine arts. It's only the finely refined person who can really learn to meditate. Not everyone who wants to meditate can learn to meditate. Not everyone who wants to learn to dance or to play the piano can learn how to really, really do it. We need this preparation of the physical body so that the physical and emotional bodies behave themselves while you are in a deep state of meditation.

Your breath will slow down until you almost seem to stop breath-

Fourteen Secrets for Serious Meditators

BY THE EDITORS

- I Create your sacred space. Keep it clean and uplifting.
- 2 The only bad meditation is the one you skip. Use the power of habit. A strong meditation habit will carry you forward with less effort.
- 3 Decide on your meditation subject or goal and stick to it.
- 4 Meditation is hard work. The more effort you give to it, the more results you get back from it. Meditate when it's not easy. That is when the most progress takes place.
- 5 Learn to work past the obstacles of distraction.
- 6 Nurture curiosity; make your innersearch engaging.
- 7 Perfect your technique, but work equally hard to nurture the right spirit. It's the spirit/will that matters most.
- 8 Move from each meditation to a positive external activity, and from a positive project into meditation. Let the external energies impel your seeking, and let your inner discoveries inform your outer life.
- 9 Meditate in the morning before you read your email, answer phone messages or explore the Internet.
- 10 Become what you seek to experience. The quality of your meditations is a reflection of the state of your nerve system and the purity/clarity of your karmas.
- 11 Keep working on yourself between meditations.
- 12 Progress is cyclical, like a spiral. There are ups and downs, but the trajectory overall is always up. Enjoy the days when the wind is in your sails, and work on the other days extra hard.
- 13 Keep expectations realistic and achievable.
- 14 Write down your insights when they come, bringing them into words to impress the subconscious.

ing. Sometimes you do, and you're breathing with an inner breath. You have to educate yourself to that so it doesn't make you fearful and bring you out of meditation with a jerk and a gasp, which can then inhibit you. You can get fearful in meditation. So, good basics must be learned for one to become a deep meditator. You can spend hours or years working with the breath. Find a good teacher first, one who keeps it simple and gentle. You don't need to strain. Start simply by slowing the breath down. Breathe by moving the diaphragm instead of the chest. This is how children breathe, you know. So, be a child. If you learn to control the breath, you can be master of your awareness.

As we learn to breathe rhythmically and from the diaphragm, we also release tensions in the solar plexus. We learn to be spontaneous and free on the inside, and life force runs through us in an uninhibited way. We achieve and learn to maintain contentment, *santosha*. All of these things come through the simple techniques we practice while in meditation. But the practice of meditation is not the end. It is the total being of man that is the end to be sought for—the well-rounded, content, spontaneous being that is totally free.

Going Within, Four Easy Steps

After you have quieted the body, and the breath is flowing regularly, close your eyes. Close your ears and shut off the external sense perceptions. As long as you are aware of sights and sounds on the outside, you are not concentrated. It is a fallacy to think you have to find a totally silent place before you can go within. When your senses are stilled, you don't hear any sounds. You're in a state of silence. You don't hear a car that passes, you don't hear a bird that sings, because your awareness has shifted to different perceptions. It helps, but it's not necessary, to have a totally silent place. This is not always possible, so it is best not to depend on outer silence. We must discover silence within ourselves. When you are reading a book that is extremely interesting, you are not hearing noises around you. You should be at least that interested in your meditations.

Having thus quieted the outer forces, we are prepared to meditate. Just sitting is not enough. To meditate for even ten or fifteen minutes takes as much energy as one would use in running around a city block



three times. A powerful meditation fills and thrills us with an abundance of energy to be used creatively in the external world during the activities of daily life. Great effort is required to make inner strides. We must strive very, very hard and meet each inner challenge.

When we go into meditation, what do we meditate upon? What do we think about during meditation? Usually the sincere devotee will have a guru, or spiritual guide, and follow his instructions. He may have a mantra, or mystic sound, which he concentrates upon, or a particular technique or attitude he is perfecting. If you have no guru or specific instructions, then here is a raja yoga exercise that can enhance inner life, making it tangibly real and opening inner doors of the mind. Use it to begin each meditation for the rest of your life.

1. Feel the Body's Warmth: Simply sit, quiet the mind, and feel the warmth of the body. Feel the natural warmth in the feet, in the legs, in the head, in the neck, in the hands and face. Simply sit and be aware of that warmth. Feel the glow of the body. This is very easy, because the physical body is what many of us are most aware of. Take five, ten or fifteen minutes to do this. There is no hurry. Once you can feel this warmth that is created by the life force as it flows in and through the body's cells, once you can feel this all over the body at the same time, go within to the next step.

2. Become Aware of the Nerve Currents: The second step is to feel the nerve currents of the body. There are thousands of miles of nerve currents in each of us. Don't try to feel them all at once. Start with the little ones, with the feeling of the hands, thumbs touch-

ing, resting on your lap. Now feel the life force going through these nerves, energizing the body. Try to sense the even more subtle nerves that extend out and around the body about three or four feet. This may take a long time. When you have located some of these nerves, feel the energy within them. Tune into the currents of life force as they flow through these nerves. This is a subtle feeling, and most likely awareness will wander into some other area of the mind. When this happens, gently bring it back to your point of concentration, to feeling the nerves within the body and the energy within the nerves.

3. Feel the Power within the Spine: The third step takes us deeper inside, as we become dynamically aware in the spine. Feel the power within the spine, the powerhouse of energy that feeds out to the external nerves and muscles. Visualize the spine in your mind's eye. See it as a hollow tube or channel through which life energies flow. Feel it with your inner feelings. It's there, subtle and silent, yet totally intense. It is a simple feeling. We can all feel it easily. As you feel this hollow spine filled with energy, realize that you are more that energy than you are the physical body through which it flows, more that pure energy than the emotions, than the thought force. Identify yourself with this energy and begin to live your true spiritual heritage on this Earth. As you dive deeper into that energy, you will find that this great power, your sense of awareness and your willpower are all one and the same thing.

4. Become Aware of Awareness: The fourth step comes as we plunge awareness into the essence, the center of this energy in the head and spine. This requires great discipline and exacting control to bring awareness to the point of being aware of itself. This state of being totally aware that we are aware is called *kaif*. It is pure awareness, not aware of any object, feeling or thought. Go into the physical forces that flood, day and night, through the spine and body. Then go into the energy of that, deeper into the vast inner space of that, into the essence of that, into the that of that, and into the that of that. As you sit in this state, new energies will flood the body, flowing out through the nerve system, out into the exterior world. The nature becomes very refined in meditating in this way. Once you are thus centered within yourself, you are ready to pursue a meditation, a mantra or a deep philosophical question.

Tame Distraction

Throughout your inner investigations in meditation, cling to the philosophical principle that the mind doesn't move. Thoughts are stationary within the mind,

and only awareness moves. It flows from one thought to another, as the free citizen of the world travels through each country, each city, not attaching himself anywhere. When you are able, through practice, to sit for twenty minutes without moving even one finger, your superconscious mind can begin to express itself. It can even reprogram your subconscious and change past patterns of existence. That is one of the wonderful things about inner life. That's why it's inner life—it happens from the inside.

If you just sit and breathe, the inner nerve system of the body of your psyche, your soul, begins to work on the subconscious, to mold it like clay. Awareness is loosened from limited concepts and made free to move vibrantly and buoyantly into the inner depths where peace and bliss remain undisturbed for centuries. However, if you move even a finger, you externalize the entire nervous system. Like shifting

Meditation is the disciplined art of tuning in to the deepest and most subtle spiritual energies. It's not a fad. It's not a novelty. It's not something you do because your next-door neighbor does. It is sacred, the most sacred thing you can do on this planet, and it must be approached

with great depth and sincerity. At these moments, we are seeking God, Truth, and actually controlling the forces of life and consciousness as we fulfill the very evolutionary purpose of life—the realization of the Self God. Unless we approach meditation in humility and wonder, we will not reach our goal in this life.



gears from high to low, you change the intensity of awareness, and the outer nerve system then is active. Superconscious programming ceases, awareness returns to the body and the senses, and the external mind takes over. By sitting still again at this point, it is just a matter of a few minutes for the forces to quiet and awareness to soar in and in once again. Sitting quietly in this state, you will feel when the superconscious nerve system begins to work in the physical body. You may feel an entirely different flow through your muscles, your bones and your cells. Let it happen.

As you sit to meditate, awareness may wander into past memories or future happenings. It may be distracted by the senses, by a sound or by a feeling of discomfort in the body. This is natural in the early stages. Gently bring awareness back to your point of concentration. Don't criticize awareness for wandering, for that is yet another distraction. Distrac-

tions will disappear if you become intensely interested and involved in your meditation. In such a state you won't even feel the physical body. You have gone to a movie, read a book or sat working on a project on your computer that was so engrossing you only later discovered your foot had fallen asleep for a half hour because it was in an awkward position. Similarly, once we are totally conscious on the inside, we will never be distracted by the physical body or the outside.

If distractions keep coming up in meditation over a long period of time, then perhaps you are not ready to meditate. There has to be a point where distractions stop. Until then you are hooked very strongly into the instinctive or intellectual area of the mind, and the whole idea of meditation won't inspire you very much. Therefore, you need something to spur you on inwardly. In Hinduism when this occurs, the grace of the *satguru* is sought.

By going to your guru openly, you receive *darshana*, a little extra power that moves awareness permanently out of the areas of distraction. You are then able to sit in inner areas for long periods of time. Distractions become fewer and fewer, for he has wrenched you out of the instinctive and intellectual areas and changed the energy flow within your body.

Learn from Your Sleep

Get into the habit of meditating before sleep each night. If you catch yourself dropping off to sleep while sitting for meditation, know that your meditation is over. The best thing to do is to deliberately go to sleep, because the spiritual power is gone and has to be invoked or opened up again. After getting ready for bed, sit in the lotus position and have a dynamic meditation for as long

as you can. When you feel drowsy, you may deliberately put your body to sleep in this way. Mentally say to yourself, "Prana in the left leg, flow, go to sleep. Prana in the right leg, flow, go to sleep. Prana in the left arm, flow, go to sleep. Prana in the right arm, flow, go to sleep. Torso prana, flow, go to sleep. Head filled with inner light, go to sleep." The first thing you know, it's morning.

The whole dream and sleep world is very interesting. Often we go into inner planes of consciousness at night. How do you know if you have been in meditation all through the night, studying at the inner-plane school in higher states of mind? You will wake up all of a sudden with no interim period of sleepiness. You wake up invigorated. There you are, as if you came out of nowhere back into external consciousness. Otherwise, you wake up through the subconscious dream world. You feel a little off-key, and you know that you have been in the dream or astral world or the realms of intellectual aggressiveness much of the night. Striving yoga students do go into inner-plane meditation schools for short periods of time during their sleeping hours. This occurs when the mind is a well-trained mind, a keen mind, a crystal-clear mind.

Perhaps by this time you have seen the clear white light, or less intense inner light, and you have seen how crystal clear and sharp it is. Each thought, each feeling, each action has to be crystal clear and sharp to maintain and bring through a balance of your consciousness to the external world. When this happens, you have control over these states of consciousness, so much so that you are your own catalyst, and you can slide into higher states and out to external states of consciousness without being disturbed by one or the other.

When we act and react in daily affairs, we dream at night. We are living in the external or the aggressive magnetic force, called *pingala*. Thus, we dream in pictures. Should a *yogi* live in the passive force, the magnetic indrawn force, called *ida*, he feels and emotes on the astral plane. He would have a fretful, eventful night, an emotional night. He would not dream in pictures as much as he would in feeling. When one is living in the pure spiritual force, *sushumna*, the primary life force, he flows from sleep into meditation. The meditator should strive to put his body to sleep consciously and deliberately, after balancing the external and internal magnetic forces. So, whether he is lying down in his body or sitting in the lotus posture, he is in deep meditation, going to schools of learning and schools of spiritual unfoldment within his own mind. In the morning, many of my students remember inner-plane class activities which occurred during the night, not as a dream but as their own experience. So, you can meditate while you sleep, but don't sleep while you are meditating!

Clear the Subconscious

After you have practiced meditation for some time, your inner vision will become keen and clear. For a while there may be the

Be like the spaceman high above the surface of the Earth looking at the odic forces of the cities. Look then, too, at the odic forces, the magnetic forces, that motivate your life within yourself and between people and you and things. Feel the actinic force flooding out from the central source of energy itself. And then turn awareness in upon itself. Simply be aware of being aware. Sit in dynamic bliss.

The sense of bhakti yoga, a sense of devotion, is extremely important on the path. Unless we have a great bhakti, a great devotion, we can easily be shaken from the spiritual path. It's the fuel that keeps us motivated. If we prepare our room before meditation by lighting an oil lamp or candle, a stick of incense, or only setting out a few fresh flowers, it puts us in a state of readiness; and for any serious thing that we do, we must prepare.

feeling of arrival, that you have at last conquered life's cycles, that you are pure now and free at last. But soon, layer by layer, your past will begin to unfold itself to you as your subconscious mind shows you in vivid, pictorial form all the vibratory rates you have put into it in this life. Like a tape recorder, it begins to play back the patterns and vibrations of previous cause and effect.

Since some of these memories and actions may not have been complimentary, you may try to avoid looking at them. The more you avoid facing them, the more apparent they will become. You might think that everyone is seeing them, but they are not. This natural phase of spiritual unfoldment can be a pitfall, for these associations and attachments of the past seem temporarily attractive as they pass before the mind's eye. Old desires, old friends, old and comfortable habits you thought were gone now come up to tempt awareness, to pull it back into a seemingly desirable past. This event should not be taken too seriously. It is natural and necessary, but you must avoid a fear of the process, which, in order to stop the unpleasant feedback, often brings

people to stop their efforts at meditation. This is not the time to stop meditating. Nor is it the time to avoid the past. It is the time to fully review each year of your life that led you to where you are now.

As you remain inwardly poised, watching the images of life but remaining detached, they gradually fade away, leaving awareness free to dive ever deeper into superconscious realms. This sometimes intense experience brings you into renewed desire to live the kind of life that does not produce distorted images. You become religious and consciously shape up your lifestyle according to the *yamas* and *niyamas*, so that the reverberation of each action is positive in the subconscious. You have seen the uncomplimentary results of living according to the moods and emotions of the instinctive mind and the senses, and that experience has taught a great lesson. In reviewing life according to this new guideline, you may change your profession, your address, your diet and values. You will undoubtedly find new friends, for it is essential to associate with people that are of good character. Choose your friends carefully, but don't get too closely attached. People cling-

ing to people is one of the biggest deterrents to the life of meditation.

Generally as soon as someone gets on the path and starts meditating, he wants to tell everyone else how to do it even before he has learned himself. This socializing never produces inner results. Keep your meditation abilities and activities to yourself. Don't talk about inner things with anyone but your guru. When it comes others' time to turn within, they will do so naturally, just as you did. That is the law.

Live a Harmonious Life

Good interpersonal relationships help the meditator a great deal, and meditation helps keep those relations harmonious. When we get along nicely with others, meditation becomes easy. If we have problems with other people, if we argue or disagree mentally and verbally, we must work exceedingly diligently in order to regain the subtlety of meditation. Poor interpersonal relationships are one of the biggest barriers, for they antagonize awareness, causing it to flow through



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the instinctive and intellectual forces. This puts stress and strain on the nerve system and closes inner doors to superconsciousness.

If we cannot get along with our fellow man, whom we watch closely, observing the expressions on his face and the inflections of his voice, how will we ever get along with the forces of the subconscious, which we cannot see, or the refined superconscious areas of the inner mind, when we face them in meditation? Obviously, we must conquer and harmonize all our relationships—not by working to change the other person, but by working with that other person within ourself, for we are only seeing in him what is in us. He becomes a mirror. We cannot allow the unraveling of the relationship by attempted outer manipulation, discussion or analysis to become a barrier to deeper meditation. Instead, we must internalize everything that needs change, work within ourselves and leave other people out of it. This helps to smooth interpersonal relationships; and as these relationships improve, so does our ability to meditate.

Our nerve system is just like a harp. It can be played by other people. They can cause many tones to be heard in our nerve system. All styles of music can be played on a harp, but no matter what kind of music is played, the harp remains the same. People can do all sorts of things to our nervous system, and make patterns of tone and color appear. This does not hurt the nervous system. It, like the harp, remains the same. The same nervous system can be played by our superconscious or by our passions. We can experience beautiful knowledge from within, which is the outgrowth of good meditation abilities, or experience a mental argument with another person. All tones are played at different times through the same nervous system. We want our nervous system to be played from the inside out through the beautiful rhythm of superconsciousness. This is bliss. We do not want to allow other people to affect our nerve system in a negative way, only in a positive way. That is why it is imperative for those on the path to be in good company.

Enjoy Unbridled Inspiration

Concentration has to be practiced and perfected before meditation can begin. If you find that you are sitting and trying not to fall asleep for a half hour, you have only accomplished sitting and trying not to go to sleep for half an hour—and perhaps refraining from scratching your nose when it begins to itch. But that cannot be called meditation. Meditation is a transforming state of mind, really. A person once said to me, “Well, I concentrate my mind by reading a book, and when I’m reading, I don’t hear a thing.” This is not concentration, but attention, the first step to concentration. Concentration is thinking about one definite thing for a given length of time until you begin to understand what you are thinking about. What should we concentrate upon? Start with any solid object. Take your watch, for instance. Think about your watch. Think about the crystal. Think about the hands. Let your mind direct itself toward the mechanism of your watch, and then observe how your mind, after a few moments, begins to wander and play tricks on you. You may start thinking about alarm clocks or a noise in the street.

Each time your concentration period is broken by a distraction, you must start all over again. Breathe deeply and coordinate all the energies of your body so that you are not distracted by an itch or a noise. Direct your awareness once again to your watch. Before you know it, you will be thinking about a movie you saw four weeks ago and living through all the fantasies of it again without realizing that ten minutes of your time has gone by. Be careful and gentle with your awareness, however. Bring it back to the object of your concentration in a firm, relaxed manner and say to yourself, “I am the master of my thought.” Eventually, your awareness will begin to do just what you want it to.

Once you are able to direct your awareness, without wavering, upon



Attention is awareness poised like a hummingbird over a flower. It doesn’t move. The flower doesn’t move, and awareness becomes aware of the flower—poised. The entire nerve system of the physical body and the functions of breath have to be at a certain rhythm in order for awareness to remain poised like a hummingbird over a

one object, you will begin to understand what you are concentrating upon, and you will find that this state of understanding is the beginning of your meditation. You are more alive in this state than you were in the noisy condition of your mind before you began to concentrate, and you come forth from your meditation a little wiser than you were before you went in.

The next state of consciousness, which is attained when meditation has been perfected, is contemplation. In the contemplative state of awareness you will feel the essence of all life pouring and radiating through your body and through the object you have been meditating upon. When contemplation is sustained, the final step is samadhi, and that is finding or becoming your true Self, which is beyond all conditions of your mind, all phases of consciousness. Only after you have attained samadhi can you answer the question “Who am I?” from your own experience. Only then will you know that you are all-pervasive, and finally, in the deepest samadhi, that you are causeless, timeless,

flower. Since the physical body and our breath have never really been disciplined in any way, we have to begin by breathing rhythmically and diaphragmatically, so that we breathe out the same number of counts as we breathe in. After we do this over a long period of time—and you can start now—the body becomes trained, the external nerve system becomes trained, responds, and awareness is held at attention.

spaceless and that you have been able to realize this through a balance of your awakened inner and outer consciousness, a bringing together of the forces of your mind in yoga, or union.

Realize that You Are Wonderful

Now we are in a new age. Everything is changing. Everything is different. We must believe that we can change by using our powers of meditation, for we are here, on the surface of this Earth, to value and fulfill our existence. Value yourself and your fellow man. Say to yourself again and again, “I am the most wonderful person in the whole world!” Then ask yourself, “Why? Because of my unruly subconscious? Not necessarily. Because of what I know intellectually? Not so. I am the most wonderful person in the world because of the great spiritual force that flows through my spine, head and body, and the energy within that, and the That within that.”

Know full well that you can realize the very essence of this energy in this life. Feel the spine and the power within it that gives independence, enthusiasm and control. Then say to yourself, over and over, “I am a wonderful person,” until you can fully and unreservedly believe it. Lean on your own spine. Depending on the greatness within is the keynote of this new age. Get your willpower going. If you find an unruly part of your nature, reprogram it, little by little, using the *yamas* and *niyamas* as your guideline. Live a dynamic, God-like life every day. Dance with Siva, live with Siva and merge with Siva. Get into this area of the mind called meditation. Make it a fundamental part of your life, and all forms of creativity, success and greatness will find expression in your life. Everyone is on this planet for one purpose. That purpose will be known to you through your powers of meditation, through seeing and then finally realizing your Self at the very core of the universe itself.

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Nepal's Thangka Art

An Ancient Art Form Forging its Future

By Anne Petry

Nepali thangka paintings have vivid colors with red, orange, yellow, blue and green dominating, capturing the cosmic world of Buddhist and Hindu Gods and Goddesses plus local religious monuments and landscapes.

Divine cosmos: A Nepalese temple's walls, ceiling, pillars and doors are covered with sacred art, intended to bring the spiritual world into the material; (inset) This woman may work up to eight hours a day for months to complete an average thangka painting. It's demanding work, requiring patience, concentration and dedication. The cost of a thangka is determined by various factors: artist's reputation, size of the painting, quality of the drawings (quantity and intensity of detail), type of color used (natural pigments or acrylic), etc.



Sacred Design

PHOTOS AND TEXT BY ANNE PETRY

Thangka is the Tibetan name for the ancient Nepal art painting. This art originated from manuscript illustrations, first made on palm leaves. The earliest Nepali paintings are found in the eleventh century *Ashtasahasrika Prajnaparamita* manuscript. Later on, they were made in the form of either wall paintings or cloth paintings (also called *paubha* in Sanskrit). In ancient times, to better fulfill the great demand, Nepali artists created this type of religious painting on cloth so it could be easily rolled up and carried to remote destinations. Initially the artists creating thangkas were from the Buddhist community called Newar, one of Nepal's many ethnic groups, and Newari artists were famous all around Asia for the high quality of their craftsmanship.

If today thangkas are usually bought as pure art, they were commonly used in the past as icons to worship

in both Nepal and Tibet. In fact, these religious paintings are based on myths and illustrate Hindu and Buddhist Gods and Goddesses that occupy the central position while surrounded by smaller Deities.

Though the art of thangka has evolved through centuries, the technique, style and iconography remain quite conservative. For refined paintings, pigments like plants, minerals and soil are still used in order to achieve bright colors that will last longer. The biggest paintings are created by a whole team, each person being specialized in one particular act: drawing with pencil, adding colors or applying gilding. Creating a thangka can take weeks, sometimes months. To perform such precise work, the artists have to put themselves into a high state of concentration, a form of meditation. Let's now discover together this ancient and precious art coming from the lofty reaches of the Himalaya.



Colors and Preparation: (left) The main colors used for these specific paintings are red, green, yellow, blue and white. While the basic thangkas are painted with acrylic paints, traditional pigments are used for the most refined ones. The most demanding artists, like Urgen D. Lama (pictured below left) bring their pigments from Tibet, finding they give more vibrant colors and last longer.

Lower left: While some thangkas are painted on silk, cotton is the common material used for this art. In order to paint on cloth, special preparation is necessary. Firstly, to avoid pores on the cloth, a mixture of distemper and gum boiled with water is applied on the fabric and then left to dry. The second step is to smooth the surface by polishing it with a special stone, talc or sandpaper.

Right: To be a thangka painter requires great skills in drawing and a clear understanding of the proportions. In fact, a balanced grid of angles and intersecting lines is used to draw legs, arms, eyes, mouth and all the ritual symbols. The first part of the painting is always painting the sky as a background using color saturation.



Cosmic Divinities: Urgen D. Lama is a renowned Nepali artist, the sixth generation in his family to create thangkas. With more than 30 years' experience, he shares his knowledge with the youngsters at a school he created in Kathmandu, called "Yoga Life." Working on this masterpiece of devas and Mahadevas took him over two months.

Best friend: Ganesha is one of the best-known and most worshipped Deities in the Hindu pantheon. This God is widely revered as the remover of obstacles, bestower of good luck, intellect and wisdom, and the patron of arts & sciences. He is worshiped as the God of education, knowledge and wealth. Ganesha has an elephantine countenance with a curved trunk and big ears. The elephant head denotes wisdom and His trunk represents Aum, the primal sound of cosmic reality.

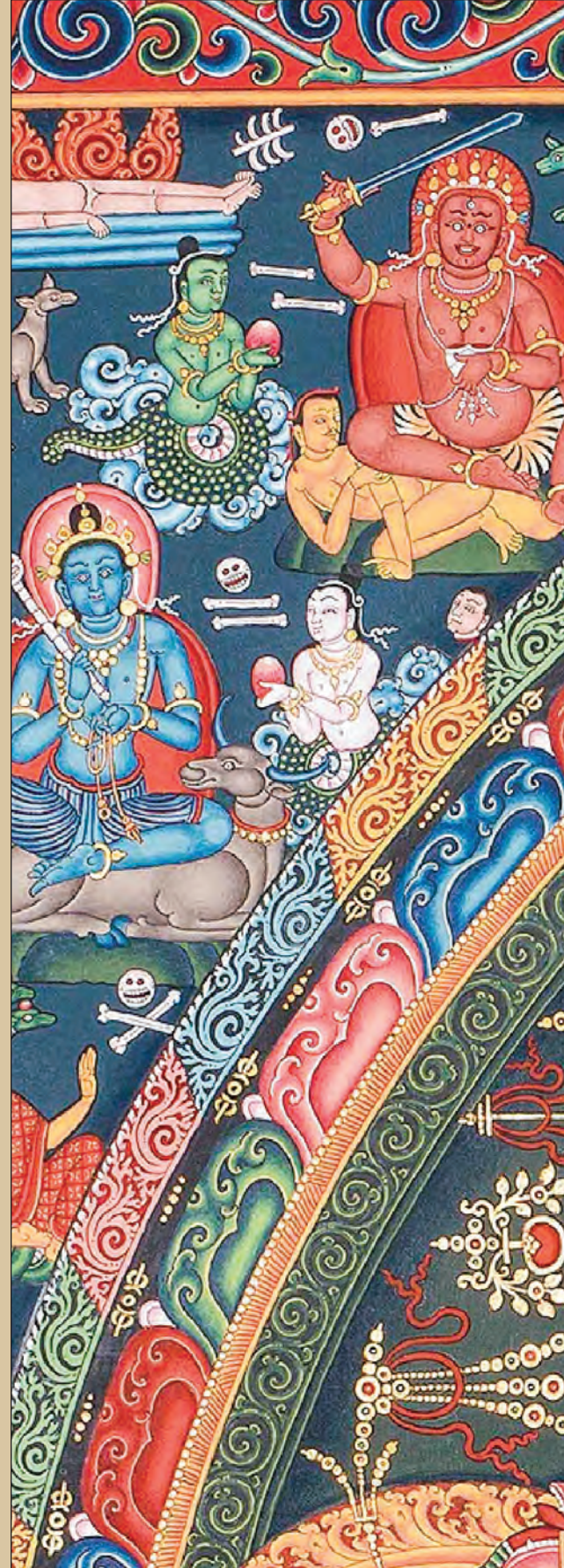


"Great Time:" Mahakala is a Deity common to Hinduism and Tantric Buddhism. In Hinduism, Mahakala is a fierce manifestation of both Siva and Vishnu, and He is prayed to for protection. In the *Bhagavata Purana* and *Linga Purana*, Mahakala is described as Lord Narasimha or the fire of destruction. In fact this God has the power to dissolve time and space into Himself and so can disintegrate the whole universe. He is also responsible for annihilating great evils and great demons. Mahakala has four arms and three eyes, He is adorned with skulls, sits on five corpses and holds in His hands a trident and a drum. He is drawn with black color. Just as all colors are dissolved into black, all names and forms are absorbed by the God Mahakala.



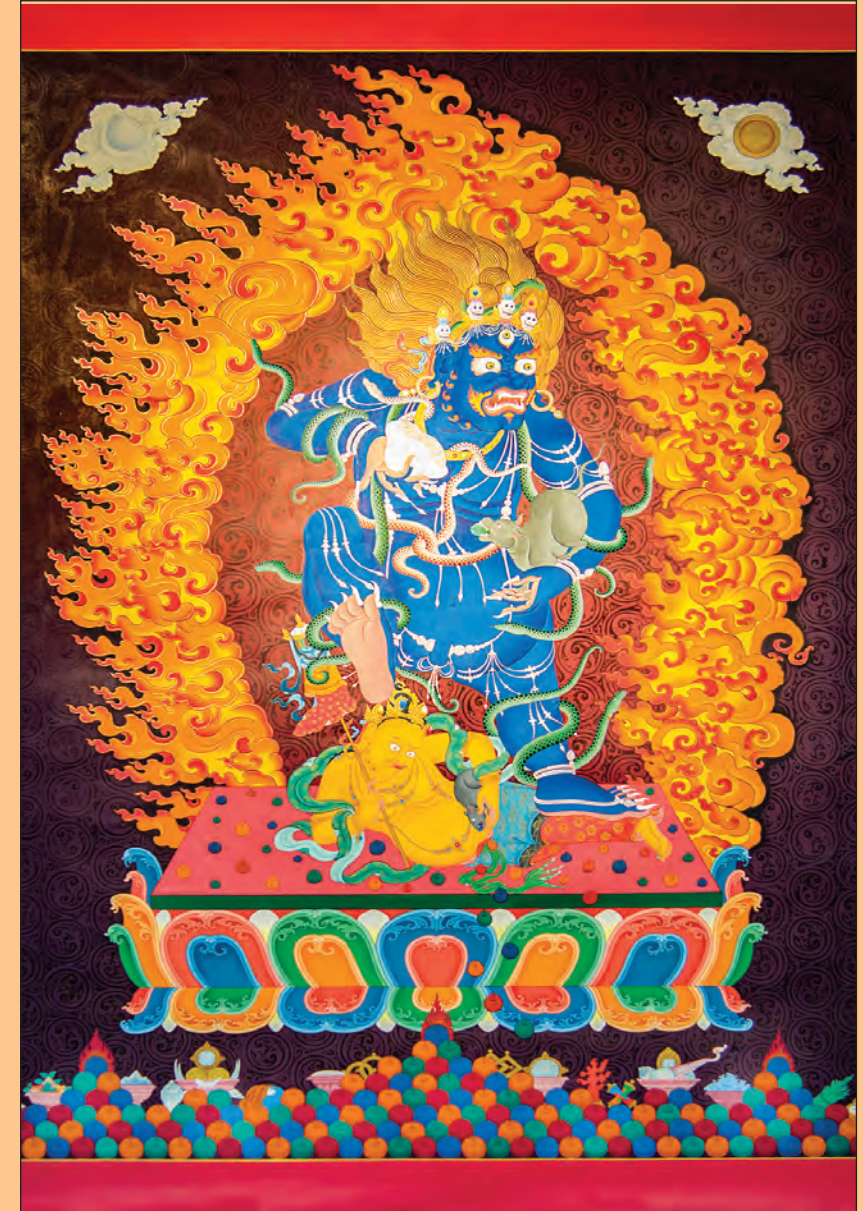


Teamwork: Painters must have precise knowledge of the measurements and proportions of each Deity as established by the Hindu and Buddhist iconography. To achieve a thangka, several artists will work on it, as shown above, each painter being specialized in one task. One will do the design outlines, another one will be in charge of the color gradient, a third one will focus on the details, one will take care of the touch-ups and the last one will do the final touch by adding gold and giving a glittering look to the painting. Such accomplished teamwork gives even more value to the painting.



Newar style: At left is a corner detail of a magical painting by master artist Mukti Singh Thapa, part of the Paramasukha Chakrasamvara Mandala, often described as the chakra of supreme bliss (*paramasukha*). This captivating piece displays Thapa's mastery of the 13th–16th century Newar design style through its rich color palette, precise lines and expert use of traditional iconography. This original thangka is painted in the traditional manner with ground mineral pigments on primed cotton canvas. Prominent minerals in this work include rich blue lapis lazuli, brilliant red cinnabar and elegant green malachite. The gold ornaments, such as the crowns and jewelry, are painted painstakingly with 24-carat gold. A painting of this large size will take several months to compose, sketch and complete.

Trishula: The trident, below, an attribute of Lord Siva, Shakti and Kali, is the most powerful divine weapon. The trident of Siva is called trishula and is considered as a magic protection that drives demons away. The three teeth of the trident are a reminder of creation, preservation and dissolution. It may also reflect the three fundamental qualities: goodness, passion and darkness, which are in all things in different proportions. The shaft symbolize the axis of the universe.



Grantor of abundance: Dzambhala, above, is the God of fortune—the God of material as well as spiritual wealth. He is sometimes equated with the Hindu Deity Kubera. There are five different wealth Dzambhalas (black, white, yellow, green, red); each has His own practice to help eliminate poverty and create financial stability. Through His powers, this God helps us minimize or decrease all misfortunes and obstacles and helps us increase all good fortune and happiness. Black Dzambhala wears a snake necklace on His body. In His right hand is a gem pot, and His left hand holds an animal. He is depicted in a standing position over a human body, which symbolizes our ego and greed.



Massive art: A large thangka scroll painting hangs on public display during the 2011 Tsechu Festival at Jakar Dzong fortress of Bumthang District in central Bhutan.



Tools of the task: First, the drawings are traced directly on the canvas with all the appropriate measurements. For this, a pencil is used. Then different types of brushes are used depending on the task that has to be done. In fact, size and texture of the brush will change depending if the painter is working on the main lines or making the final touch-ups.



Work frame: In the past, canvases were stretched on bamboo or wood frames, but nowadays it is more common and convenient to use cotton threads and iron frames that both can be re-used. Thanks to this method, the artist ensures that the required uniform tension on the canvas is maintained so that he can then paint properly.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anne Petry is a French photographer focusing on indigenous populations. Her nomadic life takes her from the Himalaya to the natives in Mexico, from the Shamans in Amazonia to the Hindu priests in India. She is passionate about people who keep alive their beliefs and traditions. Contact Instagram: [annepetryphotography](https://www.instagram.com/annepetryphotography)

A Visual Lexicon

Prasad Offerings: In both religious traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism the offerings of food or fruits are common. When this offering is made to the God while reciting prayers, it is believed the blessing of the God strewn on the prasad will go to the devotees while they share the food.



Agni: In the Hindu universe, agni, fire, is one of the most ancient and most sacred objects, being a potent vehicle to convey prayers. As such, the God Agni is considered as the mediator between men and Gods, as protector of mankind and their home, and as witness of their actions.



Kartika: This is the weapon held by Mahakala, the God of time, maya, creation, dissolution and power; it is also affiliated with Lord Siva. Kartika represents the severing of worldly bonds by the Dakinis embracing tutelary Deities such as Yama and Yamantaka.





WORSHIP

The Amazing Grass-Roots Effort to Restore South India's Neglected Temples

Volunteers are renovating dilapidated structures, training musicians, providing needed temple supplies and more

ARTICLE & SIDEBARS BY
BALAKUMAR MUTHU, TAMIL NADU

IN HINDUISM, TEMPLES ARE PLACES OF profound importance. They are not only centers of divine spiritual devotion and worship, but also the source of culture, traditions, music, dance, education, architecture, food, yoga, meditation and medicine. In the past they have served as hubs of resource reserves of water, gold, silver, gems and rice. Today, temples are found across South India, from small village shrines to magnificent complexes in major cities.

Since our early days, the ancient South Indian dynasties like Pallavas, Pandya, Cholas, Vijayanagar Nayaks and Tanjore Marathas, have built temples to express their devotion to God and as a way of proclaiming the wealth and might of the rulers. The kings

who erected these temples also donated massive financial resources and properties in the name of the temple, so they would always be financially strong and could support their wide-ranging spiritual and social activities.

But today, the majority of these greatest temples are in a pathetic condition of maintenance, with a very poor financial situation. Even the temples' priests are not paid salaries regularly, which causes the non-performance of the required daily pujas. Many lack basic amenities such as sufficient oil to keep the lamps burning. Even some of the top temples have not recently performed the kumbabhishekam ceremonies which are required every twelve years to re-energize the temple. This leads to an unfortunate hampering of the Hindu religion's spiritual life-line ecosystems.

On seeing the dire state of some temples in their community, many ordinary individuals are volunteering to take part in temple and

spiritual preservation activities such as restoration, renovation and associated activities. It is their devotional gift to God.

Service related to Deities and the renovation and reconstruction of temples is considered extremely noble—creating good karma not just for the people directly involved, but also for their entire family and future generations. In the Tamil language, this is known as *uzhavarapani*, literally “plowing service,” embodied by the 7th-century Tamil saint Appar.

Uzhavarapani is the voluntary spiritual involvement in the maintenance and cleansing of Hindu temples and worship places. It involves collaborative activities like the renovation of dilapidated structures, keeping the temple clean by sweeping, removing weeds or vines, clearing pathways to make worship accessible, cleaning sacred ponds, lamp lighting, gardening, garlanding, polishing puja vessels, providing drinking water and shelter

Continued on page 60

The Importance of Temple Restoration

BY VAMADEVA SHASTRI, USA

INDIA HAS HISTORICALLY BEEN A LAND OF MAGNIFICENT TEMPLES. They were not only important sites for religious worship but also served as centers of learning, art, community gatherings and festivals. Temples held great wealth and were the pride of the communities in which they were built.

Such temples became targets for foreign invasion or destruction. Conquering temples could be a source of wealth, social and political control. Yet when Hindus regained power, they restored conquered temples and renewed their traditions.

After the Marathas defeated the Mughals and became the dominant power in India in the eighteenth century, they began an active campaign to take back important temples, and to restore those that had been damaged or neglected. Other Hindu communities did the same.

The British had no campaign to destroy or expropriate temples, but they did not support efforts to restore them either. As a result, when India achieved Independence in 1947 many important and famous ancient temples had not been reclaimed or restored, though there was a strong sentiment to do so. There was an expectation that Independent India would continue the process that the Marathas and others had started.

Yet, though India was divided into a Hindu-majority India and a Muslim-majority Pakistan, the Nehru government, much like the British, did not allow Hindus to reclaim their sacred sites or offer government support in restoring them. Not much support was given to Jains, Sikhs or Buddhists or other dharmic traditions either.

This means that the policy of restricting Hindus from reclaiming or renovating their sacred sites continued unbroken through the Mughal, British and Nehruvian periods. Only Somnath managed to escape the Nehruvian restriction, but that was owing to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, not Jawaharlal Nehru who opposed it. Pakistan, meanwhile, was happy and proud to fund new mosques, renovate the old, and restrict or destroy existing Hindu temples.

A New India and a New View of Temples

The question arises: Can India be India without honoring its civilizational heritage, including its magnificent temples? India's Independence movement followed the inspiration of modern rishis and yogis such as Swami Vivekananda, Lokmanya Tilak, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo. The need to restore India's dharmic civilization was their motivation, the awakening of Sanatana Dharma, not just modern political independence.

Today in 2022, 75 years after Independence in 1947, a New India is arising under the Narendra Modi government, which has a profound respect for India's enduring civilization and its diverse traditions. We see a new concern for temple restoration as part of a national cultural awakening. This extends to sacred sites of all of India's dharmic and mystical traditions. It is not just a UNESCO-type approach or museum center, but as a living restoration of an ongoing cultural creativity.

Ram Janmabhoomi has been reclaimed and is being rebuilt in

splendor. Kashi Vishwanath has been extensively renovated. Now Mahakal, yet another important Jyotirlinga temple of Shiva Mahadev, like Kashi Vishwanath, is being renovated in a magnificent style. Yet, throughout India there remain many additional great temples in need of restoration which many people may not even know of. This issue of temples requires a new in-depth examination on legal and cultural levels, starting with recognizing all the many sites and complex considerations involved, which may require a variety of approaches.

Mahakal Jyotirlinga in Ujjain

Modi recently inaugurated the renovation and expansion of the Mahakal Temple in Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh, for which he gave what has been regarded as one of his most inspiring speeches: a call to a New India which honors all its spiritual traditions and sacred sites, gurus and devatas.

Mahakal [at left] is one of the 12 Jyotirlingas, or temples of light, of Shiva Mahadev, and one of the most important ancient Hindu temples. *Mahakala* means the Great Lord of Time and Eternity (Kala). Renovating Mahakal means restoring India's ancient history, cosmic view of time, civilizational continuity and connection to the Eternal.

Mahakal in Ujjain represents the prime meridian for Vedic astronomical calculations going back to ancient texts like *Surya Siddhanta*. Mahakal in Madhya Pradesh also marks the center of India in terms of geography and travel. It is very important for vastu, the Vedic science of directional influences as well. Renovating Mahakal means renewing the presence of India in terms of history and geography, restoring its vision of sacred time and sacred space, opening to the universe as a whole.

India's temples include important sites to Shiva, Vishnu, Rama, Krishna, Durga, Kali,

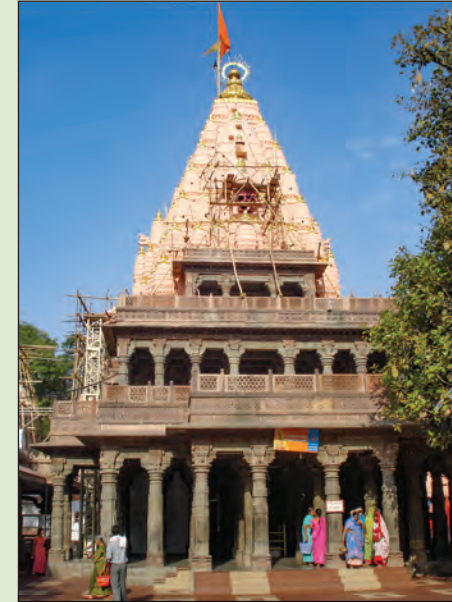
Lakshmi, Sarasvati, Ganesha, Hanuman and the many forms of Brahman. Each temple has its own jyotish and vastu, its own power of sacred time and sacred space as a gateway to the Eternal and the Infinite. The temple is not just an outer structure to be admired but an inner presence to take us to a higher consciousness.

Through restoring these extraordinary temples, one is purifying not only Bharat/India but the entire Earth, and aligning it with the Supreme Consciousness, which the planet desperately needs today to move beyond all the conflict we see developing, and learn to use our new powers of technology for the good of all. Certainly, people from the entire world will come as pilgrims to visit them.

This new labor and sadhana of restoring and renovating important temples needs to go forward with determination and confidence as part of a greater cultural unfoldment and civilizational affirmation for India as a whole. Many more temple sites throughout the country need to be examined and restored, a number of which are suffering from neglect unworthy of their historical and cultural value.

New temples also need to be built. The art and science of temple construction and design needs to be encouraged, sustained and renewed on all levels. It is wonderful to see this temple restoration increasing and its growing momentum for the future of India and the world, including many countries that have similar ancient sacred sites needing renovation. It is part of India's affirmation of its yogic and dharmic traditions in which temples and sacred sites are an integral component, if not the pillar that upholds the teachings and traditions.

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Mahakal Temple: the famed temple in Ujjain is undergoing major beautification



to devotees, grinding sandalwood, and encouraging others to do the same.

Appar (Thirunavukkarasar) was one of the most prominent of the 63 Nayanars, or Saivite saints. He popularized cleaning of temples as a form of devotion called *charya marga* in Saivite philosophy, meaning the path of service. He is always seen holding an *uzhavaram*, a kind of hoe, which he used to clean the unwanted weeds or shrubs in and around temples. Some 313 of his songs survive to this day. They form the fourth, fifth and sixth sections of the *Tirumurai* collection of Tamil devotional poetry.

Today individuals from various walks of life—college students, IT professionals, doctors, engineers, business people, government and private company employees, homemakers along with their kids and elders—have come together to follow the path Appar exemplified. Every month these volunteers form groups and visit a chosen temple to clean and renovate. Some take on long-term restoration projects of dilapidated temples. In this article we will meet several of these groups and describe their mission.

Annamalaiyar Charity Committee

Named after the famed Arunachala Siva Temple located in Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu, this temple restoration and rehabilitation group was started in 2006 by Sri V. Ramachandran and a handful of devotees. Ramachandran explains, "Until one attains the maturity to realize God within oneself, we rely on temples, such as our ancestors built, as places for us to seek God and to cultivate spiritual maturity. But today many of our grandest ancient heritage temples have been neglected, almost forgotten, without maintenance and forced into a pathetic situation. Is it not our responsibility, to our present and future generations, to protect the ancient temples and the surrounding resources like gardens, ponds and pathways? When we reclaim our temples, we also reclaim our rich spiritual knowledge, our traditions, our

heritage, and spiritual realization."

The volunteers, from ages 8 to 80, try to visit one temple each month, mostly on abandoned rural sites. When they learn of such a temple, they depute a small crew to conduct a survey, evaluating its condition and the adjacent area.

After the survey, the group visits the temple during weekends bringing the tools needed for its restoration and cleaning. The group provides its own transport; food, water, materials and lodging are provided by various charities. Sometimes neighboring people provide needed resources.

This group is particularly skilled in the removal of trees and weeds on temple towers. Birds scatter seeds into the crevices of these vimanamams which sprout and grow into large trees in short order, causing massive cracks. Angkor Wat's temples, for instance, were severely damaged by such growth.

The group once visited the very ancient **Karkadeswarar Temple** at Manavur. They were thrilled to see the temple with its huge Shivalinga. But the sanctorum had no roof at all, only sandstone walls. Unable to bear leaving the temple in that state, they approached the government for permission to restore it. Nearly all of Tamil Nadu's temples



Stone by stone: (above left) Devotees start work at the Manavur Karkadeswarar Temple; (above right) nearly finished; (inset) Sivalingam during the rededication ceremony (below) V. Ramachandran and friend

are legally under government control, and some are even under the jurisdiction of the Archaeological Society of India. For the kind of major renovation this temple required, the group needed official sanction.

Once permission was obtained, they started the restoration process. Local villagers, who had not visited the temple for a long time, joined them in the work. Renovation proceeded rapidly. After completion, daily pujas resumed and have been going on continuously since.

Ramachandran happily shares, "The local villagers earlier had been quarreling with others in the nearby villages. But after the temple's restoration process, they began to visit the Deity of the newly reinstated temple regularly and attend the auspicious pradosha observances on the 13th day of each fortnight of the moon. Peace returned to the villages as Vedic recitation started happening at the temple." Seeing Lord Siva's blessing, the villagers set up their own group to restore and maintain local temples. Ramachandran and his group were delighted to see such results from their work, which were beyond their expectations. Ramachandran humbly states, "Everything is by the divine grace of Arunachala, Lord Siva."

Many other temples have been brought back to life by this group. The **Keezh Kolathur Siva Temple**, for example, was completely dilapidated and surrounded by thorn bushes. No one had visited to worship there for more than a hundred years. After months of renovation, kumbhabhishekam was done and the daily pujas were resumed. They have similarly undertaken the renovation of the 9th-century **Nawaspettai Temple** on the banks of the river Cheyyar.



Other notable reclaimed temples include Pagasalai Shri Aadi Kesava Perumal, Poundarigapuram Somanathaswamy, Mangudi Sri Sivalokanadhar, Sri Vaakpureeswarar, Vellai, Koogaiyur Karyampureeshwarar, Brahma Nandeeshwarar in Thirumettrali, Nagakudi Sri Agastheeswarar and Shri Kasi Viswanathar in Thiru Magaral.

For temples not in need of major repairs, the team cleans the various puja items, Deity clothes, walls, floors and pillars using eco-friendly products such as vinegar and lemons. They plant flowers and trees for the temple's use and restore temple tanks (reservoirs) which have become filled with algae and garbage. When kept clean, these tanks can store rainwater for the dry season.

Ramachandran suggests, "Instead of building new temples, we should repair and preserve our marvelous ancient historic temples."

Behind Every Temple

When the *Agamas* were written, the kings managed the temples; today in India it is most often the local state government. Such is the case in Tamil Nadu: over 40,000 temples, including most major ones, are under government control through the Tamil Nadu Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department. This interference with Hindu temples by a supposedly secular government—which has made no corresponding attempt to control the religious institutions of Christianity and Islam—is a thorny issue

Rescuing a temple tank: (clockwise from above) The newly restored water tank at Pavala Vanna Perumal Temple; devotees at work; the original condition

within the Hindu community. There have been egregious examples of corruption in the temple finances and usurpation of endowment lands, leaving the temples in poor financial condition. These are the key reasons for the poor maintenance, especially for the smaller temples.

Dr. Duraiswamy's study (see January/February/March, 2022 issue of *HINDUISM TODAY*) compares how governments manage Hindu temples today, and how kings did it

Promoting Traditional Musical Instruments

THE KAILAYA VATHIYAM ARE THE 30 OR more musical instruments played by the attendants of Siva at Mount Kailash. It is widely believed that a performance of them today at a dilapidated temple means its renovation and reconsecration will soon take place.

The instruments include the *udal* (drum), *kombu* (long curved horn), *thirisanam*, *kokkarai* (conch), *ekkalam* (single horn), *thiruchinnam* (double horn), *thavandai* (small two-headed drum played with a single stick), *kodu kotti* (two drums, like the modern tabla), *nagara* (drum with a

metal bottom), *yazh* (early veena or harp), *uyirthumpu* and the *kurumbaran thumpu* (double drum set).

Vijay Arasan, local manager for a Japanese company, and his friends from various walks of life—but none professional musicians—have formed a group to play these instruments for free at various processions, festivals and events at Siva temples. Vijay explains, "Playing these instruments replenishes our bodies and minds, gives us the energy to get enthused about our own work and makes us appreciate Lord Siva's magnificence."



Raising spirits: Vijay's group, with *udal* drums in the foreground and an *ekkalam* horn being played in the background



centuries back, suggesting some solutions to the current situation.

The concept of giving to temples is one of the key elements of Hindu tradition. This donation ensures that our temples are protected and preserved through regular infrastructure maintenance, renovations, reconstructions and periodic rededications.

Ananda Prateeka, a digital marketing strategist, and his wife, Suguna, of Arizona have long had a deep love for Indian temples and Hindu religion. Together, they founded Behind Every Temple (behindeverytemple.org), an NGO working towards keeping alive the timeless teachings and values of the Vedic tradition through raising funds and services that promote Sanatana Dharma and preserve the ancient temples.

Ananda started his spiritual journey pilgrimaging to countless sacred temples all over India over the past ten years. During one pilgrimage in Tamil Nadu, they witnessed the various threats many ancient temples currently face. On a visit to the famous Chola-period Kala Bhairava Temple they met Kannan, who had just spearheaded the renovation of the temple. Based in Kumbakonam, Kannan has dedicated his life to rebuilding ancient temples in Tamil Nadu—renovating over 50 in the last twenty years. This meeting inspired Ananda and Suguna to take action. They conceived Behind Every Temple and asked Kannan to join their board of directors. He is now a vital part of their activities and services.

Ananda explains, "Behind Every Temple was founded after witnessing the sad plight of so many ancient temples in India." He

realized the best way to assist is by using their organization to help create awareness and raise funds within the US to support temple restorations.

Their current renovation project is the **Nellithope Perumal**, a 1,500-year-old Lord Vishnu temple located in Kumbakonam, Tamil Nadu. This temple is associated with Sri Ranganathamuni (823–951 ce), who collected and compiled the *Nalayira Divya Prabandham*, a set of verses composed by the twelve Alvars, Tamil poet-saints who were



devotees of Lord Vishnu. He is said to be the predecessor of the famed Vaishnava saint Sri Ramanuja (1017–1137), who was influential in the formation of the Bhakti movement. Ranganathamuni spent his last days in this area. It is said Vishnu as Sri Ranganatha gave darshan to him here before he attained moksha, liberation.

For centuries, this notable Vishnu temple was in total ruin. Ananda said, "When we saw the state of such a temple, which has great historical and spiritual significance,

International effort: (clockwise from upper left) Nellithope Perumal Temple; Keezh Kolathur Shiva temple rededication; Sapthareeswarar temple work; Kannan of Behind Every Temple; Ananda and Suguna Prateeka, Behind Every Temple founders

being totally neglected, we felt highly disheartened. Temples like this represent an integral part of dharma and the upliftment of society as a whole. We are dedicated to doing everything in our power to help save and protect the temple and ensure this ancient spiritual science of India is not lost to future generations." They embarked on a global campaign to raise money for the restoration.

They are following the guidelines of the *Agamas* in the restoration process and keeping to the traditional architectural style of the Nayakar kingdom. They are using locally available and environmentally friendly materials, such as limestone and jaggery as a binding agent. The work is proceeding rapidly. Once complete, the rededication will be done and the daily pujas resumed after many years.

What One Man Can Do
Thiruthalaiyur Saptarishishwarar Temple is located on the banks of the Aiyaru River in Thiruthalaiyur, Trichy District. The name means "Highest God of the Seven Sages," as all the Saptarishis are said to have worshiped here. Dedicated to Lord Siva and the Mother Goddess, Kungumavalli, it is at least 1,500 years old. Historically, this temple is known to be one place where Ravana, king of Lanka in the *Ramayana* epic, did extreme



penance to please Lord Siva. Until just a few years ago, this glorious old temple was in a pathetic condition physically and financially.

Saptarishishwarar is the family Deity of D. Chandrasekhar, founder and president of Madras Dyslexia Association. In 2006, he embarked upon an ambitious rescue plan. The work started in 2016 after 10 years of planning and permission gathering, and was completed with the re-dedication in 2020. It would be difficult to overstate the difficulties he faced and overcame. His first obstacle was obtaining permission to do anything all, which he obtained from the Archaeological Survey of India and the Tamil Nadu State Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department. Then he successfully engaged

A massive project: (clockwise from upper left) Saptarishishwarar Temple under renovation; silpis work on a gopura; D. Chandrasekhar

the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, to provide the needed technical guidance to salvage the structure without disturbing its antiquity. He next raised enough money through his network of friends and associates to proceed with the work in 2016.

Chandrasekhar explains that Saptarishishwarar Temple is a mix of architecture from various periods. Each round of new construction was added on to the older structures. Eventually, settling of the ground

Keeping the Lamps Lit

EVEN IN THIS DAY OF UNIVERSAL ELECTRICITY, nearly every Hindu temple maintains oil lamps 24 hours a day. It is believed their light penetrates the inner worlds, allowing the Gods and devas to remain anchored to the temple's location in this world.

Ramakrishnan, a telecom consultant and Siva devotee, has visited some 240 Siva temples, including many of the ~275 Paadal Petra Thalangal, the holy places that the Saiva Nayanar Saints revered in their spiritual songs (6th–9th century ce). He came to know that nearly all lacked sufficient financial support to keep a consistent supply of lamp oil.

Five years ago, he and a small group of

like-minded devotees started donating 15 liters of oil each to a few temples on a monthly basis. For Siva temples they donate sesame oil, for Vishnu temples ghee. It is a good example of how even small contributions can make a big difference. The team buys oil tins, goes to the temple and hands them directly to the temple priest. For remote places they have established a network of oil vendors nearby from which the priests can collect the oil. One tin will generally last a temple two to three months.

According to Ramakrishna, "The main reason why our temples survive is because of the worship of our forefathers and our belief in God today."



Constant supply: Ramakrishna (second from left) and his group have delivered oil to several temples a month for the past five years



Final touches: (left) A painter completes the last details on a side shrine gopuram of Sathareeswarar temple; ready for the rededication ceremony

as well as minor earthquakes adversely impacted most of the temple's pillars, beams and ceiling slabs.

In the past, leakage in the roof was addressed by adding new courses of large stones atop the previous layers, greatly increasing the dead weight of the ceiling. The lime mortar in various areas disintegrated completely, resulting in constant leakage and incessant dampness.

Chandrasekhar holds the temple as more important than his own life. He was determined to restore it to its ancient glory without altering its original character. His efforts

were successful, and the grand Maha Kumbabishekam was held on March 12, 2020.

Commenting on the overall situation, he points out: "In Tamil Nadu, there are more than 34,000 temples, but there is only one person to manage everything in the temple, from puja to caretaking to security. The typical annual income is less than US\$122.00. In 12,000 temples, puja rituals are not taking place. As the presence of glorious temples is living proof of the spiritual awareness, dedication, faith and scientific knowledge of our ancestors, it's heartbreaking to see how many of them are on the verge of collapsing due to apathy and neglect."

Keeping Sacred Songs Part of Our Worship

ODHUVARS ARE THE TEMPLE SINGERS offering the songs of the *Thevaram* and *Thiruvagam* in praise of Lord Siva. Such musical offerings are made during the part of the daily puja when the Deity is being dressed and the sanctum curtains are closed. In ancient periods, there were at least two to three odhuvvars available at each Siva temple, but now their numbers have dwindled drastically because of the impoverished state of the temples.

Recently, S. Jayakumar, a trained classical musician from Kalakshetra Foundation,

founded Prastara (prastara.in) to support odhuvvars across Tamil Nadu. Their mission is to preserve the tradition and spread the singing of sacred Thevaram hymns as musical offerings during Lord Siva's worship in and around every festival and during the daily rituals. During the pandemic, they paid the monthly salary to many odhuvvars, who had no revenue, as the temples were closed.

He explains, "In the last few centuries, the patronage for odhuvvars has been minimal. Thankfully, the tradition has remained alive, but it needs more support."



Conclusion

Preserving our places of worship is to preserve our Sanatana Dharma, its culture and traditions, as a service to our Deities. Instead of depending on government authorities, everyone should get involved in doing voluntary services and activities related to our marvelous, ancient local temples, thereby preserving them for future generations.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Balakumar Muthu is the editor and photographer of CasualWalker.com. He is a software consultant, explorer of traditional religious and cultural places, hatha yoga practitioner, lifelong student and follower of Sanatana Dharma.



In praise of Siva: A community group singing Thevaram hymns with a priest during a festival procession

FESTIVALS

"Pongalo Pongal!"

How my family celebrates Thai Pongal

BY KRATHU SANKARANARAYANAN

AS THE WELL-KNOWN HOLIDAYS of Christmas and New Year's Day end, the festival of Thai Pongal just begins for my family. Young dancers and musicians learn new steps and songs, cooks gather ingredients for the signature dish, and women paint kolam designs at entrances.

Thai Pongal is a multi-day harvest festival observed by the Tamil people. It is celebrated to commemorate the hard work in the field and the collection of the harvest. We make a unique dish called pongal which speaks to the occasion. It has two varieties: sweet (chakarai pongal) and savory (venn pongal). Because Pongal is a celebration of the harvest in South India, it is prepared using the two most common products, rice and lentils, mixed mainly with milk, butter and jaggery. The Pongal festival is celebrated by many people, and the holiday stretches from India and Sri Lanka all the way to places like the USA, Malaysia, Mauritius and the UK. Wherever Tamils migrate, this festival has always traveled with them. It marks the beginning of the month Thai on the Tamil lunisolar calendar. It typically falls on January 14. This festival is also held to honor the Sun and, as such, is dedicated to the God Surya. My family observes three important days for this occasion.

The first day of celebrations is Bhogi Pongal, for us a time of preparation. We wake up very early in the morning to prepare the house. My brother and I start by cleaning our rooms, keeping an eye out for items we don't use anymore—old toys, clothes, and furniture. After that, my family and I move on to other areas of the house, and then we gather all the unused items and sort them. Items that can be still used by other people, like old toys and clothes, go to thrift stores such as Goodwill. Things that cannot be used anymore are discarded. Traditionally in India, people will burn these things to welcome in positive energy. However, since we are in America, we cannot do that, and we instead donate and discard them. It's almost like the Tamil version of spring cleaning.

Next is to decorate the house. We live in tropical Houston, so we grow many Indian plants in our backyard. I pick flowers, mango and banana leaves, and turmeric. I then string the mango leaves onto a thread, creating a garland. This

garland is hung in the doorway of the prayer room. Next, my mom and I make a kolam outside. Kolam is an integral part of the festival. It is a pattern made from rice flour that is drawn on the entrances and prayer areas of houses. We draw kolam because it is said to bring prosperity into the household and feeds the insects outside. Once we finish up, we are done with the festivities of Bhogi Pongal.

The next day of the festival is Surya Pongal. It's the main day of the three-day festival and coincides with Makara Sankranti, when the Sun enters the zodiac sign of Makara or Capricorn. This day is mainly to honor the Sun God, Surya. Without Surya Bhagavan's energy, agriculture wouldn't even be possible, which is why we honor Him this day. We make the pongal dish today, starting with cleaning and preparing the cooking area. The pongal must be cooked in a place that is in full view of the Sun; because of this, we cook it outside. We sweep the area, then set up bricks in a square formation and place the pots on top of it. My family decorates the pot by tying a turmeric plant around the top. We then light a fire under the pots and begin to cook the dish. The word *pongalo* means to "overflow" in the Tamil language. Once the dish begins to overflow out of the pot, we all say, "Pongalo Pongal!" It symbolizes the wishes for greater fortunes in the years ahead. Once the pongal is done cooking, it is offered to the Gods and Goddesses as prasadam. After all of this, we can finally enjoy this amazing dish.

The third and last day is Maatu Pongal, cele-



Happy Pongal: (top to bottom) Chakarai Pongal (pictured) and Venn Pongal are cooked outdoors on a wood fire; Krathu harvests turmeric; creating a kolam design

brated by honoring cows. Cattle are a big help in planting, growing and harvesting crops, so we honor them. In India, cows are bathed, horns painted, bells tied around their necks, and garlanded. A traditional game called Jalilikattu is also played in which an angry cow is released and players have to tame it. Since we live in the US, we cannot celebrate it like that and instead visit the temple and pray there. Our temple holds an annual Pongal cultural event with artistic performances such as Bharatanatyam, folk dance, singing and kolam competition. Some years we even volunteer at cow sanctuaries.

Another thing we celebrate on the third day is Kanum Pongal. Kanum means "viewing" or "seeing" in Tamil. The significance of this day is that the women of the house pray for the prosperity and good health of their brothers. Villagers cut and consume sugarcane at social gatherings. Relatives and friends visit and greet each other, while younger people will visit their seniors for blessings. This marks the end of all the Pongal festivities. It's a magical time when I truly appreciate my heritage.

Krathu Sankaranarayanan is an 8th grader from Houston, Texas. He loves volunteering in his local community and enjoys writing, swimming, coding and science.



SANJEEVANI DEDGE

CULTURE

Juxtaposing Our Two Homelands

Two teenage Indian-American friends who spent this summer in India reflect on how Hinduism lives and breathes in each country



BY MUGDHA SHINDE AND
SANJEEVANI DEDGE, CALIFORNIA

THIS SUMMER, THROUGH JUNE AND July, each of our families had a separate fun trip to India to visit with relatives and friends. We stayed in the cities of Pune and Nashik in Maharashtra, and Bengaluru among others. Though on two completely separate continents, separated by several oceans, we noticed a lot of similarities—and some differences—in the presence of Hinduism in the US and India. We examined and compared the temples, festivals and customs in both countries.

Mugdha on Temple Experiences

When I visited India, there was a temple around every corner. Even the home shrines were much more elaborate than those in the US. Sometimes, an entire room was dedicated for worship in the home.

Temples in India varied greatly in size. While some were simple structures with four walls and a roof, others were grand buildings, with elaborate carvings. Sometimes they even had large properties, allowing for huge open areas. A common feature

in all the temples I saw was that they could easily be recognized due to the saffron flag waving above them.

In the US, I have noticed most temples are in generic warehouse-style buildings that cannot be recognized as a temple at first sight. This could be due to the high costs of building grand temples in the US, or simply due to the convenience of renting a pre-built building. Another observation about temples in the US is that they have murtis of multiple Deities. For example, the Sunnyvale, California, Hindu Temple has murtis of Ganesha, Lord Rama, Saraswati, Lakshmi and even Dhanvantari, the God of Ayurveda. This might be due to the fact that there aren't as many temples in the US, so all Deities are worshiped in one temple. Another reason could be that people from all over India visit temples in the US, so all the Gods that people across India worship must be there.

On the other hand, most temples in India are dedicated to one Deity. If there are multiple Deities worshiped in a temple, there is one that is the "main" Deity. For example, a temple dedicated to Lord Rama might also have murtis of Sita, Lakshman and Hanuman.

The final difference I noticed was that in India, the temples are more of a place to socialize, with some people even visiting them daily. In contrast, not as many people go to the temple every day in the US. Rather, visiting the temple is more of a "special event" that usually takes place during festivals.

Sanjeevani on Festival Celebrations

I stayed in India for two months and that was more than enough time for me to be around for a few festivals. In India, I noticed that the festivals are celebrated as a whole community, very unlike how they are celebrated in the US.

Here, Hindu festivals are celebrated by families alone, or sometimes by groups of families who come together and celebrate. But in India, everyone celebrates! Schools will give holiday breaks or they will change the school rules for the festival. For instance, during Naga Panchami (a festival where snakes are worshiped with milk, sweets and flowers) my cousin's private school allowed the students to put on mehendi, something that they cannot do normally in the year. And when I went to the mall, there were

clothing items on discount for Naga Panchami; you can see the reflections of the festival everywhere you go!

In India, celebrating the festival feels much more real, and authentic. For example, during Vat Pournima (a festival where married women worship a banyan tree) in the US, my mom usually just takes a normal tree and considers it as a banyan for the puja, since there aren't that many banyan trees in the US. When I visited my cousins in Connecticut, they lived in a really, really crowded city without any big trees around, so they printed a picture, put it up on the wall, and used that. But in India, everyone went to these big banyan trees that are in the area, and to me, it felt really good seeing the puja being done to a real banyan tree. What's more is that there were so many other ladies who had also come there, doing the puja alongside my mom. And the festival felt more "real" once I could see that so many other people were celebrating it with us.

Mugdha on Guest Protocols

In India and the US, I noticed the customs related to being a guest and hosting guests are very different. For starters, people in the US almost always call ahead before they visit anyone's house. However, in India, the visits were less planned out. In fact, several times during our trip my family would be in an area and just visit everybody that lived close by that day. There was no planning ahead of time who we were visiting and when; we just called around ten minutes before to check that they were at home. At one point we visited my grandfather's house without calling at all, as the phone reception was bad there.

Because visits in the US are almost always planned a few days in advance, there is usually a reason for them. Most of the time,

Shrines and Guests: (clockwise from opposite page) Sanjeevani was surprised to find this tiny temple in the middle of a really busy marketplace; Mugdha touches her elder's feet in respect; Mugdha is offered refreshments at a home visit.

people don't just drop by to say hello, as is the case in India. Even if the reason is that the two people haven't seen each other in a long time, it is still planned. The conversations during visits are more structured in the US as well, as these discussions generally relate to specific reasons for the visit. However in India, conversation can be about anything, from the weather to the most recent political activity.

An additional thing I noticed in India was that guests were always offered water when they arrived. In the US, as well, my family follows this tradition, but not all people do. In Hindu scriptures and shlokas, it is said "atithi devo bhava," which means that your guest is like God. Thus, you should treat them with respect and hospitality. When we meet someone elderly, my brother and I—and sometimes my parents—bend down to touch their feet and receive their blessings. This is another example of treating your guests, especially older guests, with respect in India.

Mugdha & Sanjeevani on Media

It is very clear that the amount of religious exposure a child gets will reflect on how religious they are when they grow up. And no matter how much parents enforce learning about their religion at home, the exposure children get outside, for example at school, or through media, will affect them. In the US, most of the popular celebrities and music artists are Caucasian, some Black or Hispanic. Not only celebrities, but most TV shows and beauty standards are based on European standards. This may not seem like it has a lot to do with religion, but I have seen that many Indian teens tie their culture with their religion—they try to push them away. Many Indians I know have tried to hide their religion and not talk about their culture to fit into these standards.

And the media isn't the

only place that children get negative impressions about their religion; it can also be at school. In many US schools, Hinduism is taught in a bad light compared to other religions. It is ridiculed, and students are given a lot of misinformation. This makes teens further think that they need to push their religion away. My own friends joke about this sometimes, about how they sometimes feel embarrassed to show up to the Hindu club at school.

This is completely different in India. There you don't feel like the odd one out, because culture and religion are part of the mainstream life, and culture gets emphasized not only through media, but also through food, festivals and day-to-day practices. The need to fit in isn't really there, because everyone else is just like you.

There is, however, a lot of Western culture seeping into India. Some schools, especially English-medium schools, give more holidays for Christmas than for Diwali. You can find many young people in India, including a few of my friends, obsessed with Western trends and entertainment. K-pop has become quite popular, as have songs by Western artists. Several Indians of the young generation now listen to artists such as Taylor Swift, Ed Sheeran and Ava Max, not listening nearly enough to Indian artists from their own country. When I visited India this summer, I was really surprised that my cousins knew a lot more about K-pop and Western music artists than I did. This is yet another example of India being Westernized.



MUGDHA SHINDE



MUGDHA SHINDE



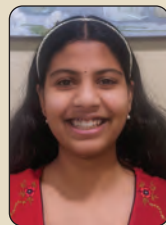
Religion and culture: (above) Mugdha marveled at this dignified Nandi vahana in an Indian temple dedicated to Siva as the primary Deity; (below) She notes how Western video media now fills households in India along with local programming



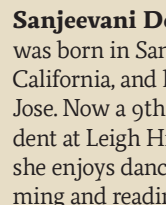
Our Joint Conclusion

Slowly these two countries are coming together, intermixing the cultures and traditions. While this is a good thing in that the US is being exposed to Hindu culture, it is not so good that some of India's culture is getting pushed aside by Western pop trends, especially among the youngest generation. However, we are somewhat optimistic. In both countries, efforts are being made to preserve, renovate and build Hindu temples. Our festivals are being recognized in the US. And even though certain customs—such as visits to friends and relatives—are different in the US, the meaning and intentions behind them are the same. For us, it is important to slowly unite our traditional Hindu culture with the best of Western ideals in a way that makes for a stronger future.

AUTHORS



Mugdha Shinde, 14, is a 9th-grade student in the San Francisco Bay Area. She plays the trombone in her school's band and enjoys cooking and baking. mugdha.shinde29@gmail.com.



Sanjeevani Dedge, 14, was born in Santa Clara, California, and lives in San Jose. Now a 9th-grade student at Leigh High School, she enjoys dance, swimming and reading. sanjeevanisdedge@gmail.com



Hindu Heritage Endowment

End-of-Year Planning Checklist

Don't Forget These Important Actions

With this year's challenges and accomplishments still fresh in your mind, now is a good time to review your estate and financial plans. To help you in this process, we have constructed the following checklist of actions for you to go over as the end of the year rolls closer.

- **Review your current will and trusts.** These may need to be updated because of major changes in your life, such as births, deaths, marriages or a move to a different state.

- **Review the beneficiary designations** for your life insurance and retirement plans to make sure your beneficiary isn't someone who is now deceased or a former spouse.

- **Make sure your durable power of attorney for health care and living will are current.** These medical documents should be updated and on file with family members and health care providers. Discuss decisions regarding anatomical gifts with your family.

- **Take inventory and make a written record of the contents of any safe-deposit box.** Give a copy to a trusted family member and note any items you are holding for someone else that don't belong to you.

- **Name designated heirs** to receive bank account proceeds at your death.

- **Be sure you are comfortable with the guardian named in your will** for those under your care, such as minor children or a loved one who is disabled.

- **Make donations in honor of loved ones** as meaningful holiday gifts. They can even result in tax benefits. Visit www.hheonline.org or contact us to learn more.

If you are interested in supporting Hindu Heritage Endowment with a tax-wise gift this year or through your estate, please contact us. We can help you find the right gift for you.

Don't have an estate plan? Get started by visiting www.hheonline.org and clicking on "Gift Planning."

How You Benefit From Your Generosity

When you donate to Hindu Heritage Endowment this year, depending on the gift arrangements you choose, you can:

- Reduce your income taxes.
- Increase your spendable income.
- Eliminate capital gains tax.
- Attain no-cost, worry-free asset management.

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Prepare for 2023 by reviewing your estate planning documents and goals

JULY TO SEPTEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment	
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	US\$7.02
Roshan Harilela	375.00
Gunasekaran Kandasamy	47.00
Kulagan Moonesawmy	13.23
Gowri Nadason	118.09
Chamundi Sabanathan	78.75
Hitesvara Saravan	63.00
Pathmini Saravanapavan	100.00
Satya Sagar Sharma	250.00
Usha Kiran Shastri	500.00
Anonymous	406.92
Total	1,959.01

Iraivan Temple Endowment	
Frank Burkhardt	20.00
Raj Kumar Rathakrishnan	101.00
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	51.00
Anonymous	300.40
Total	472.40

Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund	
Michael Doyle	108.00
Melodie Essig	1.08
Malvi Gandhi	75.00
Roudhranee Jugurnauth	97.63
Sumathi Kuppusamy	251.00
Rose Marcon	251.00
Tejwantee Meetoo	23.56
Jogendra Moorooogen	2.14
Vidyadevi Moorooogen	2.14
Logadhasan Murugesu	11.23
Vinod Nair	21.76
Subramaniam Pennathur	49.98
Puvaneswary Roberts	200.00
Manishankar Sagum	8.57
Kavidah Sockanathan	171.66
Annamuthu Sutherland	160.00
Anonymous	44.00
Total	1,478.75

Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund	
Deepa Aditya	249.00
Thirujnanam Arnassalon	8.57
Khelan Bhatt	249.00
Chitra Arunachalam Chidambara	
Ramalingam	249.00
Faith Collier	249.00
Michael Doyle	108.00
Prakash Ganapathi Deva	249.00
Naveen & Anita Goswami	500.00
Vineet Gupta	249.00
Kanwal And Shashi Kher	249.00
Juhivaasana Koothan	8.57
Mahesh Krishnamurthy	249.00
Sumathi Kuppusamy	293.00
Rose Marcon	139.24
Ashwini Maureemootoo	17.89
Bhaveshan Moorghen	6.51
Udeyadeva Moorghen	6.51
Srinivasa Nallamotu	299.00
Naveen C. Pasupuleti	299.00
Vedhanth Premkumar	299.00
Arjun Ram	249.00
Maunak Rana	249.00
Vijendra Vekriya	249.00
Ramakrishna Yimadabattum	299.00
Anonymous	69.00
Total	5,092.29

Kadavul Nataraja Ardra Abhishekam Endowment	
Valliammah Kandasamy	11.08
Umasankaran Mohambourame	113.76
Gowri Nadason	118.09
Puvaneswary Roberts	200.00
Parimala Selvaraj	62.00
Kitri Waterman	108.00
Anonymous	176.00
Total	788.93

Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar Gurukulam	
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	151.00
Anonymous	344.00
Total	495.00

Sri Subramuniya Ashram Scholarship Fund	
Anonymous	6,000.00

Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund	
Hitesvara Saravan	108.00
Anonymous	2,375.00
Total	2,483.00

Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment	
Mano Navaratnarajah	50.00

Hinduism Today Production Fund	
Fidelity Charitable	250.00
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	7.02
Ian Johnson	60.00
Rajagopal Krishnan	60.00
Kulagan Moonesawmy	13.00
Easvan Param	21.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01
Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	21.72
Chamundi Sabanathan	686.00
Anonymous	6,042.00
Total	7,210.75

Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund	
Benevity	235.00
Charities Aid Foundation America	48.51
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	7.02
Tamnash J. Gupta	648.00
Roshan Harilela	375.00
Gunasekaran Kandasamy	47.00
Swaminathan Murugesan	14.00
Chamundi Sabanathan	78.75
Hitesvara Saravan	36.00
Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00
Jeeva Velusaami	28.00
Matthew Wiczork	10.00
Anonymous	3,185.00
Total	4,742.28

Hindu Education Endowment	
Fidelity Charitable	100.00
Arjun & Revathi Pennathur	75.00
Total	175.00

Alaveddy Pasupatheeswarar Temple Fund	
Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	21.72

Hindu Heritage Endowment Administrative Fund	
Anonymous	3,000.00

Murugan Temple of North America Pillaiyar Shrine Fund	
Pathmini Saravanapavan	600.00

Thank You Bodhinatha Fund	
Sumathi Raja Chanda	150.00
Yongliang Chen	300.00
Gunasegaran Chitravelloo	82.41
Peter Christian	50.00
Peshanidevi Dandapani	108.00
Chellappa Deva	25.00
Elena Dmitrichenko	54.00
Debashis Ghosh	300.00
Roudhranee Jugurnauth	21.27
Gunasekaran Kandasamy	137.00
Murugesu Kandasamy	32.81
Gregg Lien	1,008.00
Gaurav Malhotra	50.00
Tatsiana Mezhenmaya	70.00
Kulagan Mxoonesawmy	85.07
Seedha Lutchmee Moonesawmy	21.27
Souria Koomaren Moorghen	38.28
Silvarajoo Muniandy	101.00
Hitesh & Rishitaa Murugesu	11.08
Rishitaa Murugesu	21.73
Toshadevi Nataraj	50.00
Mano Navaratnarajah	100.00
Cassan Pancham	1,500.00
Janaka Param	558.00
Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	21.72
Sumathi Raja	300.00
Puvaneswary Roberts	600.00
Hitesvara Saravan	501.00
Egamburam Sinsamy	106.34
Logavalli Sinsamy	106.34
Tejasinha Sivalingam	12.00
Nandi Sivam	108.00
Nandi Devi Sivanathan	66.62
Adi Srikantha	108.00
Anba Dayananden Valayten	8.45
John Wahlen	36.69
Anonymous	6,668.98
Total	13,519.06

Udayan Care Endowment Fund	
Varun & Priyanka Oswal	301.00
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	51.00
Total	352.00

Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment	
Ishani Chowdhury	101.00
Shyamal Chandra Debnath	150.00
Total	251.00

Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund	
Pathmini Saravanapavan	600.00

Manitha Neyam Trust Fund	
Anil Ananda Badhwar	30.00
Nutanaya Sivaceyon	20.78
Total	50.78

Mahajana College Fund	
Charities Aid Foundation America	145.53
In Re Petrobras Securities	12.63
Anonymous	264.00
Total	422.16

Manjung Hindu Sabha Orphanage Fund	
Phui Chan	50.00
Emily Xin Rui Lim	45.00
Gayathri Sinnmayanandan	100.00

JULY TO SEPTEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Nutanaya Sivaceyon	20.78
Rajiv Verma	150.00
Anonymous	51.00
Total	416.78

Pazhassi Balamandiram Orphanage Fund	
Steven Lee	30.00
Dasarathi Minjur	11.00
Total	41.00

Himalayan Academy Publications Endowment	
Arun & Sangeetha Chandrakantan	301.00
Vel Mahalingum	4.43
Nrusimhayya Manda	30.00
Mano Navaratnarajah	150.00
Ravichandran Shanmuganathan	21.27
Anonymous	54.00
Total	560.70

Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund	
Valliammah Kandasamy	21.73
Anonymous	33.00
Total	54.73

Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment	
Palash Chakraborty	11.00
Yovani Curpen	25.00
Steven Lee	30.00
Varun & Priyanka Oswal	301.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01
Puvaneswary Roberts	500.00
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	151.00
Sivaruban & Carolyn Sivanesan	200.00
Poobarlene Soobramanien	21.60
Anonymous	988.92
Total	2,278.53

Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund	
Pathmini Saravanapavan	600.00

India Hindu Temple Cleaning Fund	
Anonymous	30.00

Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment	
Arun Aarooren	75.00
Anil Ananda Badhwar	30.00
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	7.02
Usharani Iswaran Magana	100.00
Rajagopal Krishnan	102.00
Luke Labella	300.00
Srinivas R. Madaboosi	375.00
Natraj Narayanswami	37.00
Rani Natarajan	108.00
Padmini Samuthiran	162.00
Sivaruban & Carolyn Sivanesan	200.00
Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00
Aishwarya Vashishtha	30.00
Arunasalam Vathavooran	75.00
Kitri Waterman	108.00
Anonymous	114.25
Total	1,853.27

Jaffna Kannathiddy Kali Kovil Endowment	
Anonymous	108.36

Bharathi Yoga Dhama Fund	
Johnson Chanthabouasy	20.00

Panchangam Endowment Fund	
Benevity	100.00
Audrey Fowler	15.00
Devaladevi Sivaceyon	10.88
Total	125.88

Digital Dharma Endowment	
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	7.02
Gunasekaran Kandasamy	22.00
Rajagopal Krishnan	102.00
Kulagan Moonesawmy	13.00
Chamundi Sabanathan	686.00

Anonymous	3,282.49
Total	4,112.51

Kauai Aadheenam Feed the Monks Fund	
Malaygiri Aparnath	500.00
Anandkumar Ayyachamy	75.00
James Feketa	200.00
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	7.02
Ajita Gupta	20.00
Murugesu Kandasamy	32.81
Velika Lawrence	9.99
Kulagan Moonesawmy	7.02
Sadhunathan Nadesan	300.00
Robert M. Petersen	50.00
Sahil Puranik	30.00
Gayatri Rajan	1,001.00
Puvaneswary Roberts	500.00
Padmini Samuthiran	162.00
Devaladevi Sivaceyon	43.49
Nandi Devi Sivanathan	66.62
Sugan Subramanian	100.00
Ravi Thaker	12.00
Ravi & Kunjal Thaker	7.50
Jeeva Velusaami	21.00
Saravan Veylan	324.00
Anonymous	8,236.00
Total	11,705.45

Himalayan Acres Endowment	
Anonymous	287.15

Total Contributions	\$71,958.49
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Funds at Market Value, Sept. 30, 2022

Grand Total	\$18,662,530.35
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The Self is timeless, causeless and formless.

**Therefore, being That, it has no relation whatsoever
to time, space and form.**

**Form is in a constant state
of creation, preservation and destruction within space,
thus creating consciousness called time,
and has no relationship
to timelessness, causelessness or formlessness.**

**The individual soul, when mature, can make the leap
from the consciousness of space-time-causation
into the timeless, causeless, formless Self.**

**This is the ultimate maturing
of the soul on this planet.**

— Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

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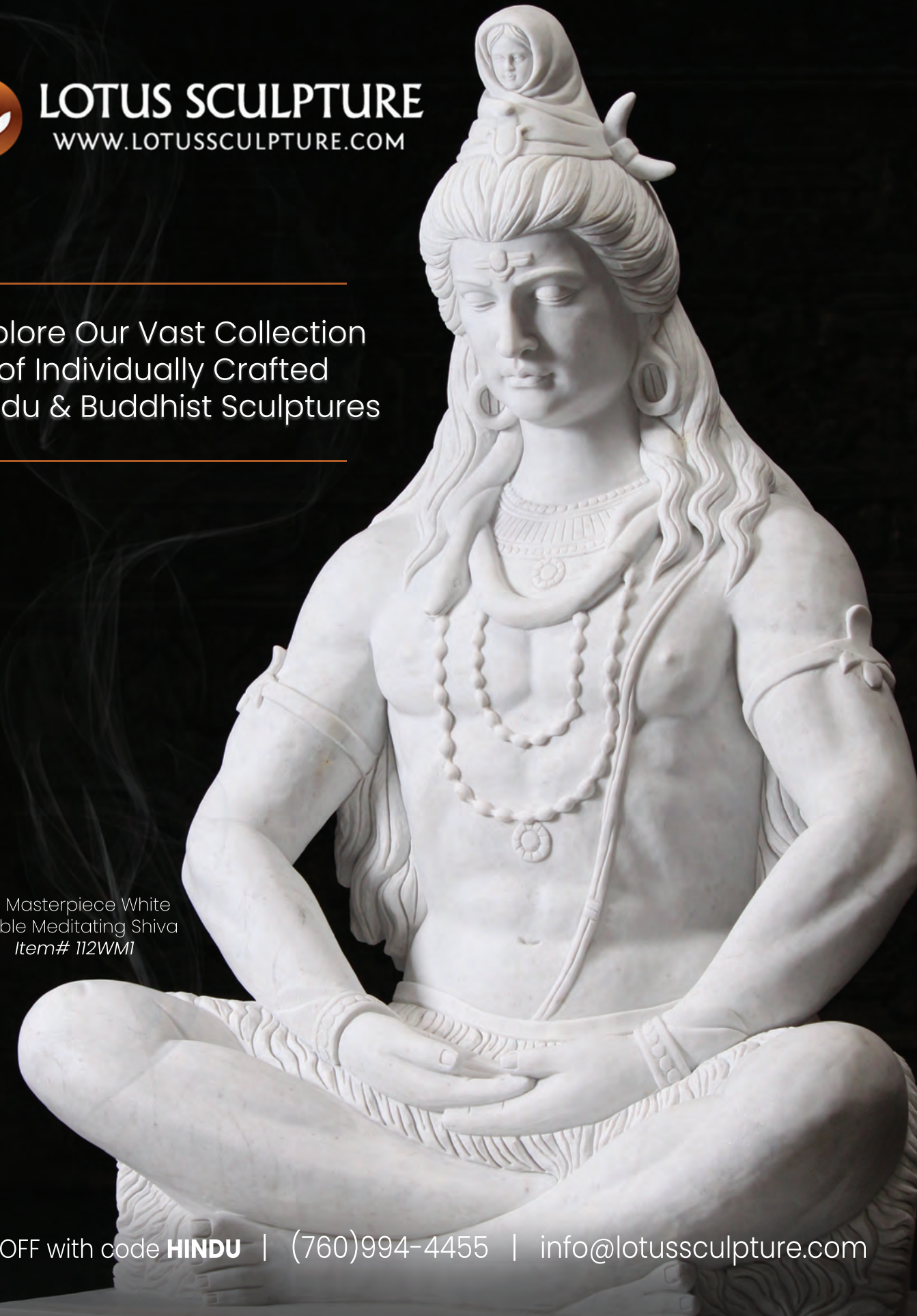
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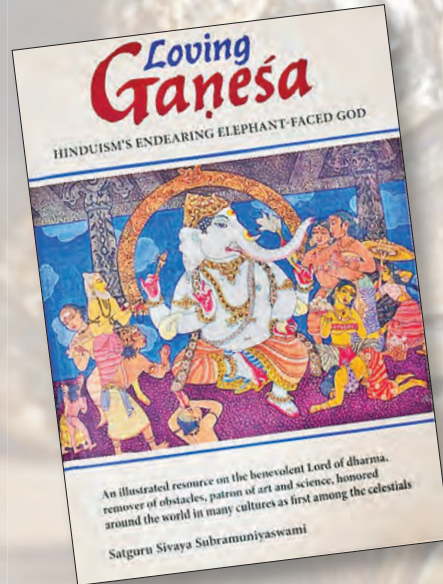
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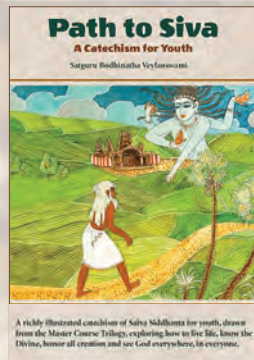
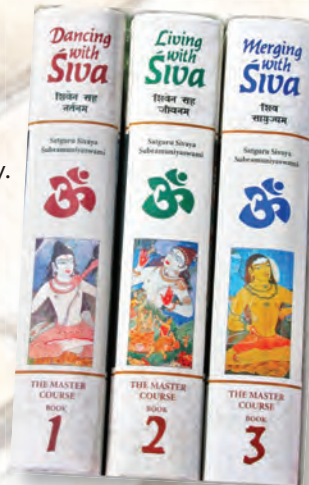
Newly released 3rd edition of *Loving Ganesha*

by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami is now available with more exquisite illustrations and now in full color. In the clearest, most captivating terms, the satguru introduces you to this great God, shows the many ways to develop a rapport with Him so as to illumine and uplift your life. Learn about this endearing God who, of all the Gods, is closest to us. Learn how to contact Him, pray to Him and celebrate His presence in your home.

Hinduism's most essential

teachings as presented and illumined by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. The three volumes may be acquired together or separately. They elucidate Hinduism's:

- tenets and philosophy, vol. 1
- lifestyle, culture, ethics, vol. 2
- metaphysics and mysticism, vol. 3



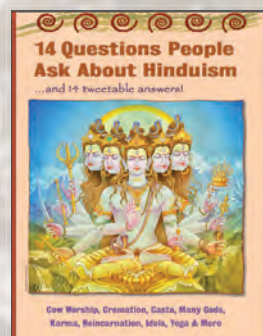
Path to Siva • Composed by Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami to present Hinduism's teachings in a way youth could more immediately appreciate. It contains all of Gurudeva's teachings rearranged, compacted, trimmed, and turned it into a delightful, beautifully illustrated 96-page handbook of liberating knowledge and wisdom. (Adults are also fond of this book.)



36-bead rudraksha mala grown and assembled by devotees of Kauai's Hindu Monastery and blessed by the swamis.



5 rudraksha beads grown at Kauai's Hindu Monastery and blessed by the swamis.



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Vedic Wisdom - Online

Mission

The Hindu University of America provides education in knowledge systems based in Hindu thought involving critical inquiry, ethics, and self-reflection. Committed to fostering the culture and traditions of Hindu Dharma in an atmosphere of academic excellence and freedom, it prepares students for service, leadership, and global engagement.

Vision

Promoting dialogue across disciplines, cultures and civilizations, while enabling self-discovery, conscious evolution and harmony, the Hindu University of America will set the standard for the study of Hindu Dharma.

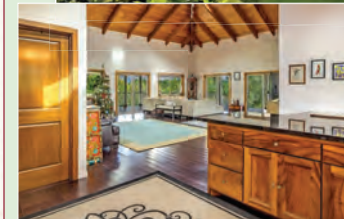


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Hindu University of America is an institution of higher learning, teaching, reflection and research based in the knowledge systems rooted in and emerging from Hindu thought, where you will find a welcoming, global community of learners led by passionate faculty.



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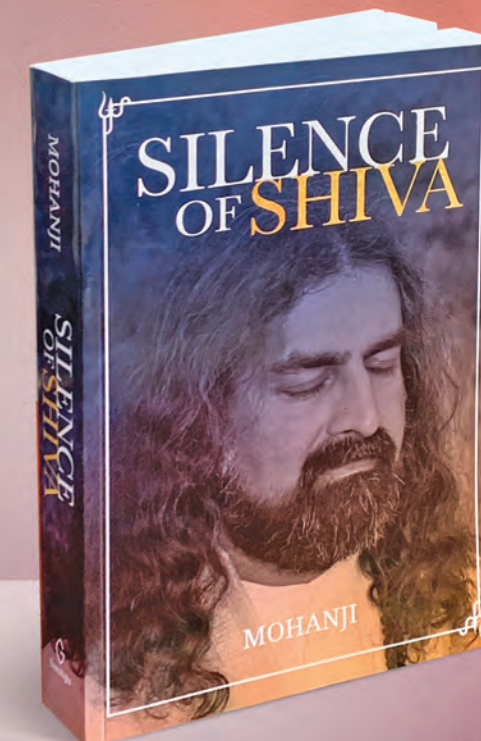
We are currently planning projects in Nepal, Pakistan and Nigeria.

American Hindu World Service (AHWS) 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to educating the American public and the world about Hindu perspectives on global health and international development. It is now working on HIV/AIDS, nutrition awareness, women's empowerment and sustainable agriculture. It is active with other religious communities on interfaith issues, and serves without discrimination as to ethnicity, gender, nationality, or creed. More at www.ahwsngo.org

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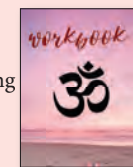
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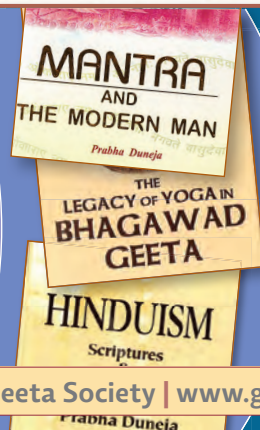
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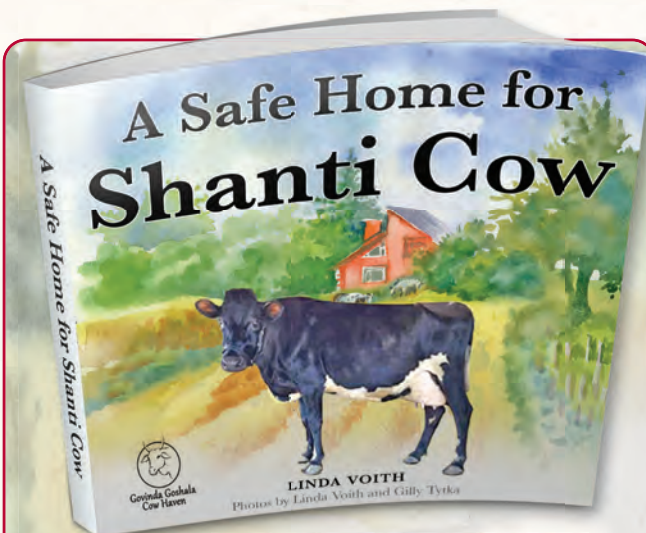
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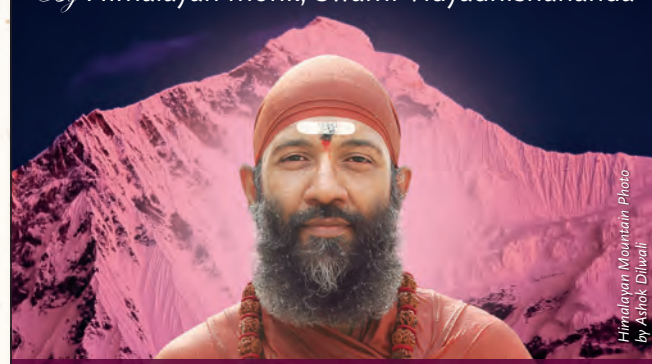
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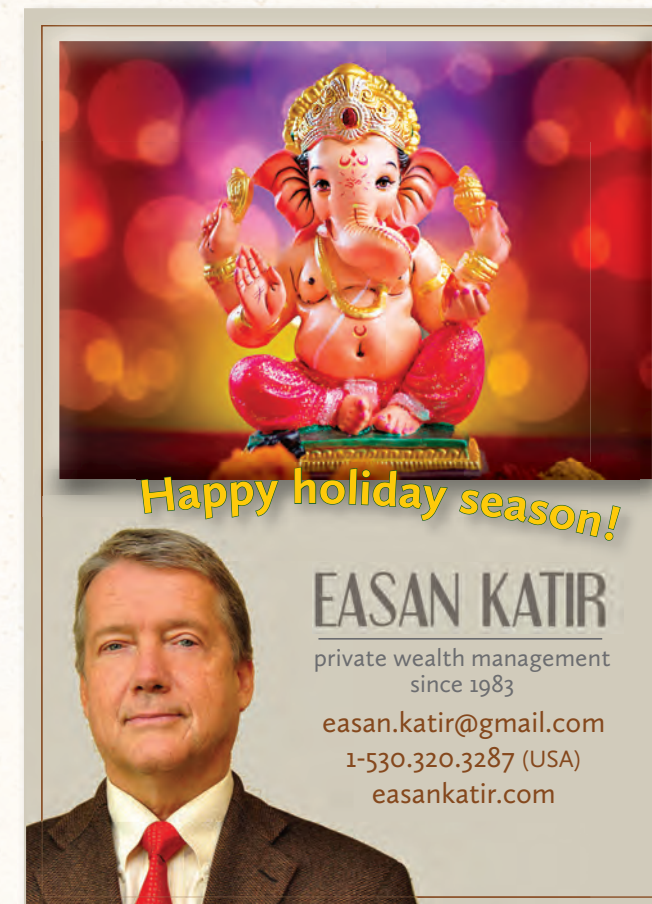


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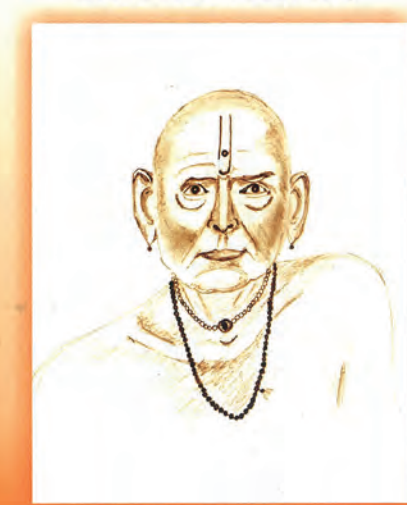
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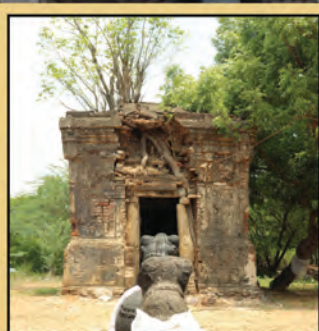
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Today,
A thousand-year span
Ended.

Today,
A thousand-year span
Began.

My past
Never had
A beginning,
My future
Will never end.

And I, I dwell
In between.

I carry on, I persist,
I shape a destiny
In one eternal,
Timeless
Moment.

Thus spoke
My Shivaling
To me,
Today.

The Shivaling,
by Dr. Arjunan Subramaniam
Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia • 17-18 February, 2020



Master thangka artist Romio Shreshta depicts various realms of existence encompassed by Mahakala, a fanged demon symbolizing time and the inevitable death it brings to all composite things. At the top, enlightened beings can be seen who have escaped the confines of time and space by following spiritual masters who have come before them. See page 50 for the article on Nepal's thangka art form.