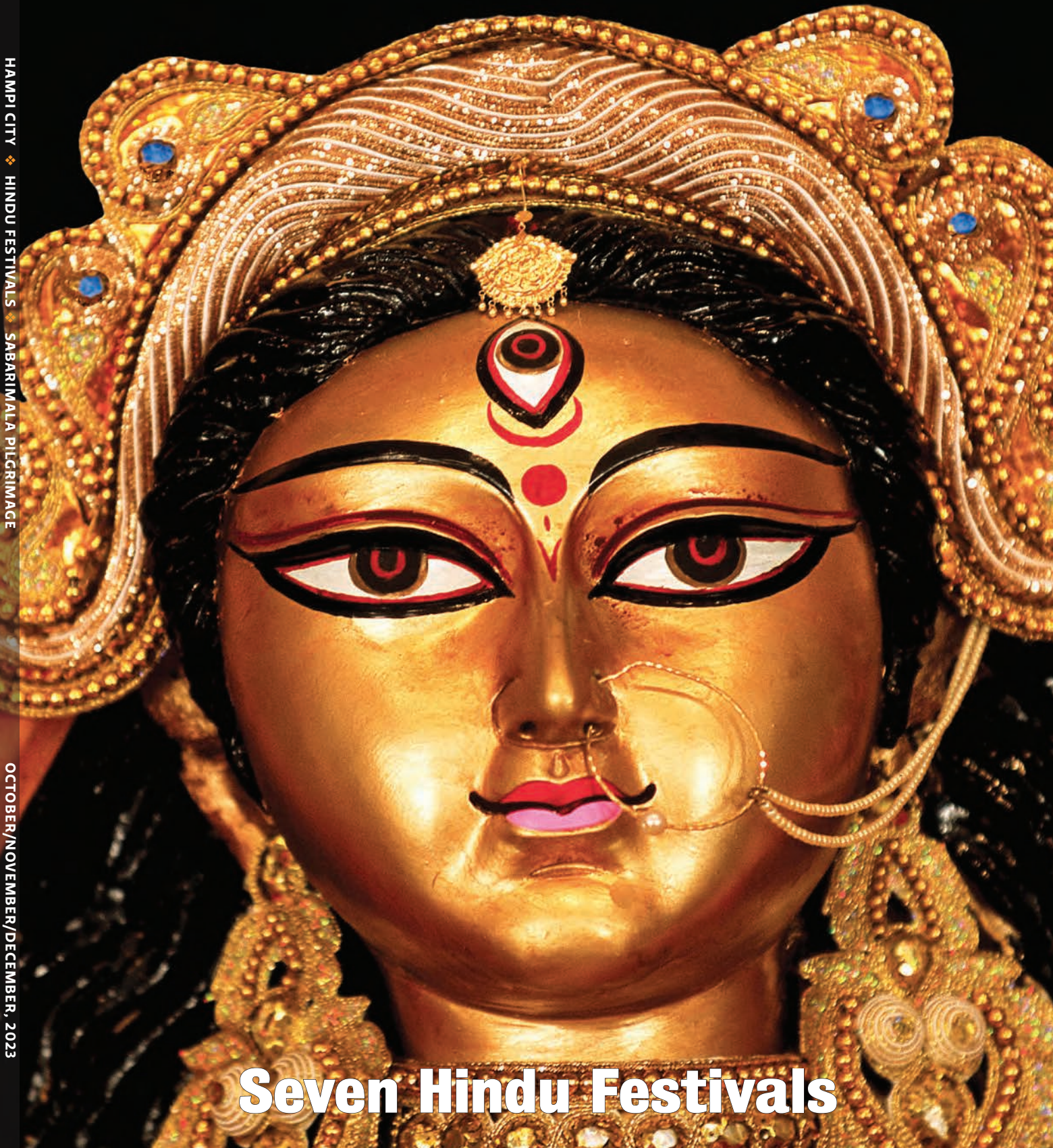


HINDUISM TODAY®

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



Seven Hindu Festivals



DEVRAJ AGARWAL

(Cover) The Goddess Durga is central to the annual Navaratri Festival, one of seven explored in detailed in this issue's Educational Insight (page 38); (above) Rama, Sita and Lakshmana dance during the Ramman Festival in a Himalayan village (page 54)

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER/DECEMBER, 2023 • The Hindu Year Śobhakṛta, 5125 • शोभकृत

Bodhinatha Veylanswami www.gurudeva.org

INTERNATIONAL

- Feature:** Follow Our Journalist to the Still Spectacular Structures of Hampi, Vijayanagara, South India **18**
- Pilgrimage:** Our Intrepid Writer Made 18 Epic and Arduous Pilgrimages to Sabarimala in Kerala **30**
- Celebration:** Visit the Vital Ramman Festival in Saloor, among India's Oldest Honoring Rama **54**
- Service:** So, How Does the Five-Star K K Eye Hospital in Pune—Following Sadhu Vaswani's Love of Compassion and Excellence—Provide Rich and Poor with Equally Advanced Care? **62**

LIFESTYLE

- Educational Insight:** A Colorful Guide to Seven of Hinduism's Most Popular Festivals **38**
- Youth:** A Texan Teen Discovers Mystic Meanings in His Family Home's Chandi Puja **60**

OPINION

- In My Opinion:** My Father's Passing Led Me to Embrace a Sensible Hindu Approach to Life's End **9**
- Publisher's Desk:** Understanding what Spiritual Unfoldment Is about and How to Achieve It **10**
- Letters** **13**
- From the Agamas:** The *Tirumantiram's* Comprehensive Explanation of Fire Worship **17**
- Science:** Religion and Science in India Have Never Clashed, Unlike in Europe **66**
- Culture:** What I Learned from Growing Up in India, then Moving to America at a Young Age **68**

DIGESTS

- Global Dharma** **6**
- Quotes & Quips** **14**

USA Contacts: Letters to the editor, subscription and editorial inquiries may be sent to HINDUISM TODAY®, 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii 96746-9304 USA, letters@hindu.org. HINDUISM TODAY® (ISSN# 0896-0801; USPS# 023082), October/November/December, 2023, Volume 45, No. 4. Subscriptions from USA and Canada 1-808-822-3012; subscriptions, copies or bulk orders from other countries 1-808-822-3012; subscribe@hindu.org. Advertising: 1-888-464-1008, ads@hindu.org. HINDUISM TODAY® is published four times a year in January, April, July and October by Himalayan Academy Publications,® a nonprofit educational institution at 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii 96746-9304 USA. Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, Founder; Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, Publisher; Paramacharya Sadasivanatha Palaniswami, Editor-in-Chief. Global subscriptions: US\$35/1 year, \$65/2 years, \$95/3 years, \$155/5 years, \$299/lifetime. **International Contacts:** In Malaysia: Datta Impexs, PT 6949 Jalan Casuarina 7, Desa Casuarina, Bandar Baru Nilai, 71800 Nilai, NSDK. Tel: 1-012-607-7310; E-mail: dattaimpexs@yahoo.com. The Russian edition is available through contacting Dinanatha Bodhiswami in Moscow: bodhiswami@gmail.com For permission to republish a HINDUISM TODAY® article, e-mail letters@hindu.org. Printed in USA. Periodicals postage paid at Kapaa, Hawaii, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to HINDUISM TODAY®, 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304.

© 2023 HIMALAYAN ACADEMY PUBLICATIONS,® 107 KAHOLALELE ROAD, KAPAA, HAWAII 96746-9304 USA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

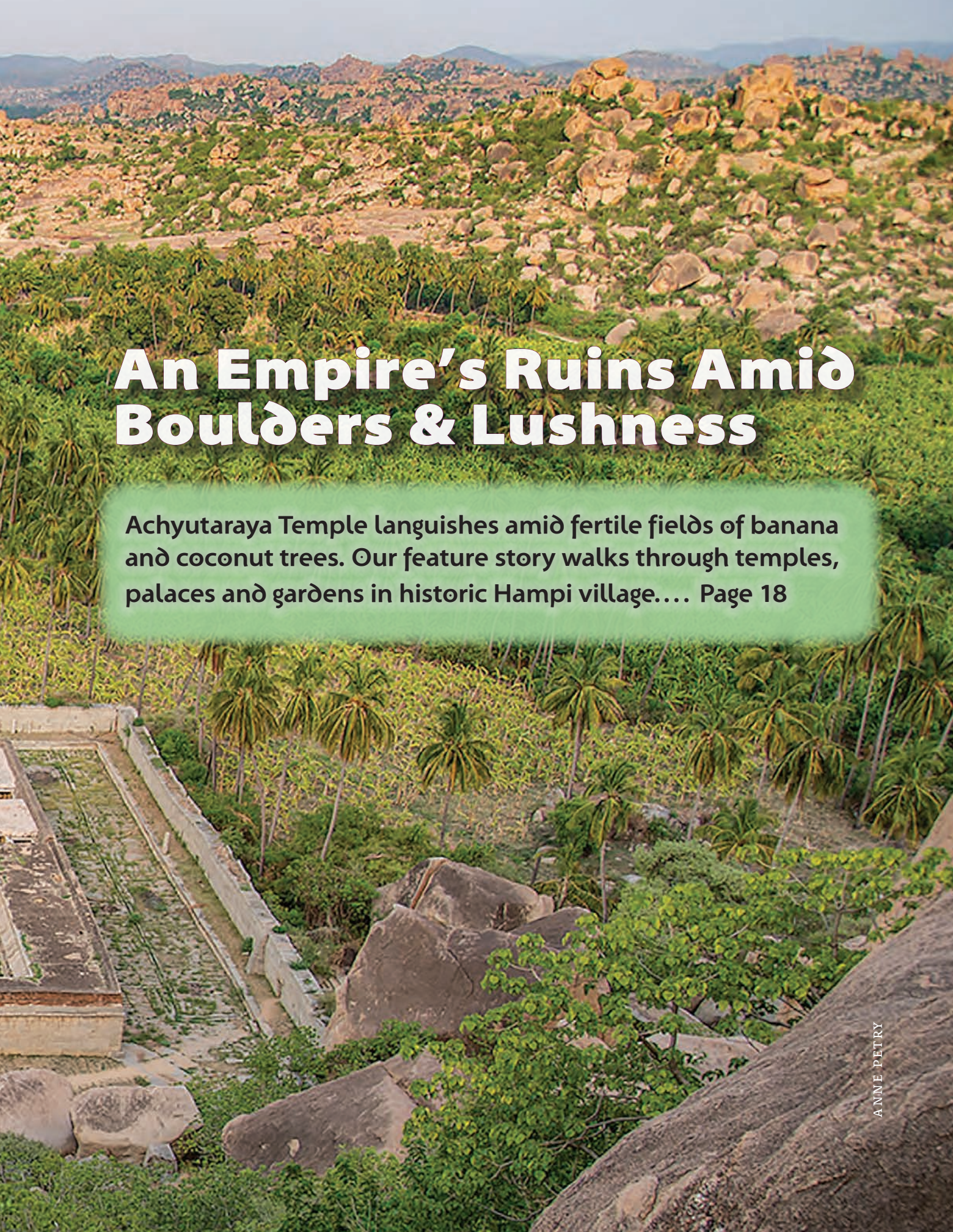


www.hinduismtoday.com



subscribe.hinduismtoday.com





An Empire's Ruins Amid Boulders & Lushness

Achyutaraya Temple languishes amid fertile fields of banana and coconut trees. Our feature story walks through temples, palaces and gardens in historic Hampi village.... Page 18

GLOBAL DHARMA

USA

Increased Evangelic Heresies

AMERICAN EVANGELICALS' grasp on Christian theology is slipping, according to *Christianity Today's* coverage of a 2022 survey by Ligonier Ministries and Lifeway Research. Twenty-six percent of evangelicals now believe the Christian Bible "is not literally true," up from 15 percent in 2020. "This view makes it easy for individuals to accept [only] biblical teaching that they resonate with," the researchers wrote. Here we discuss two of the most common unorthodox beliefs evangelicals espoused in this survey.

The first is that "Jesus isn't the only way to God." More than half, 56%, of evangelical respondents affirmed that "God accepts the worship of all religions,

including Christianity, Judaism and Islam," up from 42 percent in 2020. And while the question doesn't mention every religion, *Christianity Today* wrote, it indicates a trend toward universalism—believing there are ways to bypass Jesus in our approach to and acceptance by God. This contradicts orthodox theology found in the Bible, in which Jesus affirms that "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

The second unorthodox belief is that "Humans aren't sinful by nature." Fifty-seven percent agreed that "Everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature." In other words, humans are capable of individual sins,



Adam & Eve in the Garden of Eden: Pelagianism, which denies the doctrine of "original sin," is making a comeback—most of the evangelicals surveyed believe humans are born essentially good

but we do not have sinful natures. This response, that humans are born essentially good, leans toward a Christian heresy known as Pelagianism, *Christianity Today* explains. This denies the doctrine of "original sin," which is based on a number of biblical passages, such as

Romans 5:12. Other heretical beliefs on the increase include: The Holy Spirit is not a personal being, Jesus is a created being, and Jesus is not God.

Hindus, among others, will welcome this positive trend toward more tolerant, open-minded beliefs.

MARTINIQUE

Indian Descendants Celebrate 170th Arrival Anniversary

MAY 6, 2023, MARKED 170 years since the first 313 Indian indentured laborers were brought from South India to the Caribbean island of Martinique after slavery was abolished. They were followed by 25,000 more, mostly Hindu. About 60% remained after their five-year contracts expired. Conditions

were oppressive, so they lived discreetly and combined Hinduism with Christianity. Consequently, today they are seldom mentioned during the West Indies annual Indian Arrival Day celebrations, overshadowed by Trinidad and Guyana. No formal documentation exists beyond postcard archives from the colonial perspective.

This year it's starting to change. [Francetvinfo.fr](https://francetvinfo.fr) profiled Bruno Alimelie, a Hindu priest for 25 years at his humble temple to Goddess Mariamman. Martinique has seven Hindu temples. Says Bruno, "The Hindu priest is there to help people who need some healing. To be a priest, you have to be in harmony with the spirits, you have to have that little something that



Increasing visibility: (left) Claire-Ania presents her photobook; (above) Bruno Alimelie's temple, with a musician assistant

speaks to you in your head, in your heart and shows what has to be done." A crescent and star nailed to a nearby tree trunk are also honored. He explains, "It's called the Nagoulon, a Muslim flag. On the boat Aurélie, carrying our ancestors, there was a Muslim priest who asked the Gods to save the lives of Tamils and Muslims. If they arrived safely, they were to erect a flag in his honor. The boat arrived safely,

At our rituals, those who want to can honor the 'flag' or ask for mercy."

Islander Claire-Ania Virgile, of African and Indian lineage, has documented today's Tamil Hindu community in her new photobook, *Sacred Vision: Indian Diaspora and Rastafari in Martinique*. She dives into the heart of a mystical culture, which is largely on the fringes of Caribbean official history.



INDIA

Royal Scepter Installed in India's New Parliament Building

THE SENGOL, A HISTORICAL golden scepter from Tamil Nadu, was accorded its prior glory on May 28, 2023, when the heads of 20 Saivite Aadheenams helped install it in the Lok Sabha chamber amidst the singing of devotional *Devaram* hymns to Lord Siva. It now stands majestically in a glass and wood case near the chair of the Speaker, while for the past 75 years, following initial fame, the scepter was virtually unnoticed.

[Thecommunemag.com](https://thecommunemag.com) reports that on August 14, 1947, drawing on the ancient Chola dynasty custom of enthroning a new king, the same Sengol, newly made, was presented to Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, by the Saivite

Thiruvavaduthurai Aadheenam, symbolizing transfer of power from the British. The Nandi (bull) on top represents justice and fairness, which the new ruler vows to uphold in the name of Lord Siva. Photos of the event were widely published in Indian and international media.

In the post-colonial Nehruvian establishment's determination to secularize India, thecommunemag.com notes, the event was suppressed and the scepter forgotten. For 75 years, it languished in the Anand Bhavan Museum in Allahabad.

Upon learning of its beloved position in history, India's current central government ceremoniously restored the Sengol to its rightful prominence.



ITALY

New Temple in Bari City

THE FIRST HINDU TEMPLE IN Bari opened in January, 2023, reports quintopotere.it. It is dedicated to Lord Ganesha, who protects prosperity and removes obstacles. Bari, the capital of the Apulia region on the Adriatic Sea, is the second most important economic center of mainland Southern Italy after Naples. Mauritian immigrants, who have

lived in Bari for decades, now finally have a official place to worship and celebrate together. The first event after inauguration was to honor the 25th wedding anniversary of the priest, Indy Pauvaday, and his wife, Naveeta. The temple hall will also serve as a hatha yoga center open to all citizens, with courses held by Bari native Dario Bissanti.



Devoted: Tempio di Ganesha Bari priest Indy Pauvaday, a Mauritian immigrant, performs puja

GERMANY

First Birthday Bash in Bavaria

THE SRI LANKAN TAMIL COMMUNITY in southern Bavaria celebrated the one-year anniversary of their Sellapillaiyar Ganesha Temple on June 4, 2023, in the German town of Fürstentfeldbruck. Journalist Birgit Ratsch of br.de covered the festival and parade. She noted that though the temple is located on S-Bahn rail tracks in an industrial park, when you enter it, "you are in a different world." Ierai Dharmakulasingham, who came from Munich to

attend, noted that Ganesha plays a major role in the life of nearly every Hindu: "No matter what we start, whether it's a test, whether it's building a house, we pray first to God Ganesha and that's why He is our most important God." The colorful chariot caught the eye of passersby. "I'm totally amazed now, at first I thought I'd been transported to India," said a woman who had just wanted to pick someone up from the S-Bahn.



Enlivening: More than 10,000 Hindus live in Bavaria state, many of whom descended on Fürstentfeldbruck with colorful fervor

Historic Apology Made to Indo-Fijian Community

IN AN EMOTIONALLY CHARGED “Reconciliation and Thanks-giving” service organized in an indoor stadium by Fiji’s Methodist Church on May 16, 2023, the church’s president, Reverend Ili Vunisuwai, and Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka formally apologized to the Indo-Fijian community for the suffering and insults they have endured post independence, signaling what the islands’ leaders call “building a new era” of peace and prosperity.

As reported at eurasiareview.com, the Indian community, already traumatized from being unfairly brought here by the British as indentured laborers in the late 1800s, suffered greatly after Fiji’s independence, despite working hard and dominating business and professional fields. In 1987 and 2000, military coups—strongly supported by the Methodist Church—ousted elected governments with mostly Indian Cabinet members, including the first Indo-Fijian Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry. Indian businesses were burned down

and thousands emigrated, reducing Indo-Fijians from half the population to about 35% today.

Rabuka—who led the first coup—told a stunned audience that what he did in 1987 was wrong. “We confess our wrongdoings, we confess that we have hurt so many of our people in Fiji, particularly those of Indo-Fijian community of the time and among them sons and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters of those that were indentured as laborers from India between 1879 and 1916.” Rabuka’s wife, seated in the front row, wiped away tears as he spoke. He also acknowledged that many in the Indo-Fijian community have left since then.

Addressing those who have stayed on, he said they have every right to feel angry about what was done to them. He thanked the Indo-Fijian community leaders for helping to bring “some restoration in our relationships over the past few years.” “As you forgive, you release us and you are released. You are released from hatred and



Reconciliation: Methodist Church President, Reverend Ili Vunisuwai (left) and former Prime Minister Mahendra Chaudhry

from your anger, and we begin to feel the peace of God coming to our beings and our lives,” added Rabuka. He was immediately followed by Mahendra Chaudhry who, in an equally emotional speech, recalled the hurt and bitterness they experienced during the coup. He said, “I am deeply honored by the Prime Minister’s gesture. I also accept your apology.... Thank you very much for your magnanimity.”

Reverend Vunisuwai then stated, “The only way forward for a better and prosperous Fiji is to confess our wrongdoings,

repent from committing sin and live together in peace and harmony. On that foundation I hereby stand in the holy presence of God and also in the honorable presence of our brothers, your families and friends in Fiji and abroad to seek your forgiveness for all that had taken place in the past in our beloved country.” At the end of the service, Fiji’s leaders signed the Forward Fiji Declaration, vowing that “there will be no more coups and divisions,” and promising mutual understanding and respect to build the new Fiji.

mostly misused. The Acharya Sabha asks the government to step out of the temples and allow the communities to manage them as has been done for many centuries,” and which minority religions already have the freedom to do.

THE CALIFORNIA CIVIL RIGHTS Department voluntarily dismissed its case in April, 2023 against two Cisco Systems engineers who faced allegations of caste-based discrimination, according to a press release by the Hindu American Foundation. Filed nearly three years ago, the case made global headlines, with false claims about the Hindu religion and xenophobic depictions of people of Indian origin, eliciting widespread outrage in the Indian and Hindu American communities.

PAKISTAN’S HIGHER EDUCATION Council has banned the celebration of Holi and other Hindu holidays in all universities. *News 9 Live* reports that the move is to preserve the “Islamic character of Pakistan.” The directive was issued just after Quaid-i-Azam University students celebrated Holi on campus on June 12, 2023 and footage of the occasion went viral.

Global Dharma
news provided by

**HINDU PRESS
INTERNATIONAL**

Subscribe to a free daily
news summary about
Hinduism worldwide at
hinduismtoday.com/hpi

PHOTO: FBCNEWS.COM.FJ



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



Founder:

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

Publisher:

Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami

Editor-in-Chief:

Paramacharya Sadasivanatha Palaniswami

Publisher's Aide: Paramacharya Sivanatha Ceyonswami

Deputy Editor: Acharya Kumarnathaswami

Managing Editor: Acharya Arumuganathaswami

Production Manager: Sannyasin Saravanathaswami

Assistant Editor: Sannyasin Tillainathaswami,

Subscription and Distribution Manager:

Sannyasin Shanmuganathaswami

Advertising Manager: Sannyasin Kaivalyanathaswami

Correspondents: Choodamani Shivaram, Bengaluru;

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

Nikki Thapa, Nepal; Anne Petry, France/India,

Claire Burkert, USA/Nepal. *Copy Editor:* Chamundi

Sabanathan, Tom Salinas. *HPI Staff:* Chandra Sankara.

Consultants: Dr. S. P. Sabharatham Sivachariyar.

Photo Contributors: Thomas L. Kelly, Dinodia Picture

Agency, Dev Raj Agarwal, Dehradun. *Distribution:*

USA: New Leaf, EBSCO Subscription Services, WT

Cox, Europe: Publications Overseas, SWETS *Subscription Service:*

Malaysia: Datta Impex. India: Central

News Agency Limited, Delhi. Mauritius: CODIP.

Printer: Quad/Graphics, Midland, Michigan.

IN MY OPINION

A Dharmic Conclusion to Life

What I learned from my father's gracious end to life through *prayopavesha*, fasting to death

BY SIVARAM KRISHNAN

ALL RELIGIONS TALK ABOUT how to lead a moral life, throw light on the path to spiritual progress and help attain salvation. Dharmic religions are unique in that they also have a discourse on how to face death.

In the course of my wife’s work as a physician, she has to deal with very ill patients. Some of the most difficult conversations are with family members who desperately hold onto a fervent hope that their very elderly relatives suffering multiple, serious maladies—and with no hope of any reasonable quality of life—would somehow experience a miraculous recovery. Often, lost during this difficult time is a recognition of the wishes of the patient.

Recently I had a window into Sanatana Dharma’s unique perspective on the end-of-life. As my father, Sri K. M. Subramaniam, aged gracefully, retaining all his mental faculties and enjoying good physical health into his 90s, he often mentioned the desire for an *anayasena maranam*. Literally meaning “death without pain,” these are the first words of a shloka often attributed to Drona’s plea to Lord Siva just before Drona’s demise in the Mahabharatha war: “Death without pain; life without struggle; unshakable devotion to You; kindly grant me, Siva.”

During his lifetime, my father saw many experience sudden deaths while also seeing others live long years in acute physical discomfort or advanced mental illness. So, it was no wonder that he wanted an *anayasena maranam*. In late 2021 at the age of 93, he suffered a stroke; but after a brief hospitalization he fully recovered. However, advancing age meant that he slowly weakened over subsequent months.

On December 10, 2022, he suffered another stroke. This time it was more serious, affecting his body, speech and ability to swallow. Nevertheless, he retained his full mental alertness. When I offered to hospitalize him to administer short-term nasal



feeding, he declined, citing that he would continue to have difficulty swallowing afterward. My father gave up solid food shortly after the stroke, and consumed only liquids for the next two weeks. He finally gave up liquids other than water for the last week and limited even water intake in his last couple of days. He passed away peacefully in

his sleep just days short of his 95th birthday.

There is a term for this kind of an end: *prayopavesham*, “fast unto death.” It is a Vedic practice of ending life by one who has no responsibilities left and is suffering from a terminal condition. It is not considered suicide, which is forbidden under Sanatana Dharma as it goes against the practice of ahimsa. *Prayopavesham* has to be voluntary, publicly declared, unassisted and undertaken by one with a sound mind in a state of equanimity. *Bhagavatha Purana* records King Parikshit’s death as an early example of *prayopavesham*. In modern times, Acharya Vinoba Bhave and Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami embraced this practice.

The *Garuda Purana* (2:36.8) states: “If a person suffering from an incurable or terminal disease observes a fast and dies, he has no rebirth. He shines like a god.” In a 2015 decision, the Supreme Court of India afforded this practice legal protection.

My father had fulfilled all his duties—as a son, a husband, a father, a patriarch and a noble citizen of the community. With all his responsibilities complete, he was ready to move on. The short illness gave my family the opportunity to remain physically and emotionally close to him, say our goodbyes and get his blessings. He spent his last days listening to sacred songs and scripture. While my dad’s passing leaves an unfillable void, we are grateful that the Lord granted his desire for an *anayasena maranam*.

SIVARAM KRISHNAN is a tech executive living in the SF Bay Area. His interests include travel, reading, quizzes and gardening. He can be reached at sivaram.krishnan@gmail.com

BRIEFLY...

CANADA’S NORTHERNMOST HINDU temple opened on May 25, 2023. *Fort McMurray Today* reports that the \$8 million Sanatan Mandir Cultural Center is the culmination of 13 years of fundraising and volunteer work. Fort McMurray is in the middle of Alberta’s huge Athabasca oil sands. Many Indian families have moved there for work.

AS OF JUNE 2, 2023, BALI HAS abruptly banned tourism on all 22 of its mountains and volcanoes in response to foreigners misbehaving, and numerous accidents, including deaths. *The Bali Sun* reports that even locals are prohibited “unless

there are religious ceremonies or disaster management and special activities that are not for tourism,” said Governor Wayan Koster. The ban is a victory for conservationists, but a huge blow to tourism, impacting all the small businesses that depend on it for their income.

THE EIGHTH HINDU DHARMA

Acharya Sabha convention on April 4, 2023, in Ahmedabad, India, among other demands, requested governments to “exit temple management.” *Pipa News* quoted a press release, “Many ancient temples have been encroached upon by state governments, and the funds are

What Is Spiritual Unfoldment?

In the search for God, we discover that the entire universe is sacred, and ultimately realize that Divinity is within us

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

ON OCCASION I AM ASKED, “HOW WOULD you define Hinduism? I am a Hindu, but I don’t know much about my religion.” An effective way of answering this question, I’ve found, is a short explanation of the *purusharthas*, the goals, or wealths, of the soul.

Four in number—dharma, artha, kama and moksha—they form a cornerstone of Hindu ethics. These aspirations are found in the *sankalpa*, statement of intention, that priests chant when doing an archana for someone in a temple: “*Dharmartha, kamamoksha, chaturvidha phala purushartha, siddhyartham*.” The meaning is, “May you attain the fulfillment of life’s four goals: dharma, wealth, enjoyment and liberation.”

In his classic work *The Hindu View of Life*, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan gives an insightful overview of the *purusharthas*. “If life is one, then there is one master science of life which recognizes the four supreme ends: dharma, or righteousness; artha, or wealth; kama, or artistic and cultural life; and moksha, or spiritual freedom. The Hindu code of practice links up the realm of desires with the perspective of the eternal. It binds together the kingdoms of earth and heaven.”

Looking in more depth at each of the *purusharthas*—dharma refers to living a life that is virtuous, fulfilling one’s duties to family members, community and country. Kama is love, such as that experienced in a family between husband, wife and children. Artha is wealth, money and the many riches of life that are acquired by the individual or family. Moksha is spiritual attainment, liberation from the cycle of reincarnation. The meaning of the first three goals—dharma, artha and kama—and how to achieve them is self-evident. They are the natural pursuits of a mature, stable family. Not so obvious, however, is the nature of moksha and how to achieve it.

To provide clarity, I like to refer to moksha as the destination and then describe the journey toward it. A Sanskrit name for this journey is *adhyatma vikasa*, which in English can be rendered as unfoldment of the soul or higher self. I asked ChatGPT to explain the Hindu concept of *adhyatma vikasa* and the AI gave this apt answer: “*Adhyatma vikasa* refers to the development and growth of the spiritual self or the inner self. In Hinduism, it is believed that the ultimate goal of human life is to achieve spiritual liberation, or moksha, which can be attained through *adhyatma vikasa*, the process of spiritual evolution.”

The example I use to illustrate the relationship of *adhyatma vikasa* to moksha is to visualize a mountain with a winding path leading to the top. At the summit is moksha. The path represents *adhyatma vikasa*. In each life, we are born at the same spot on this path that we reached in our previous birth. The goal in each life is to move



forward, not to stand still and definitely not to slide backwards. We progress on the path through performing spiritual practices, called *sadhana*. We stand still by living a selfish life and neglecting spiritual practices. We regress by serious adharmic activities, such as living a life of theft, depravity or cruelty.

Hindus in their sixties often ask how they can achieve moksha in this lifetime. ThoWse asking have generally not done much up to this point to advance spiritually and suddenly feel an urgency to make a mad dash for moksha in their remaining years. My counsel focuses on two principles: 1) It takes far more than one lifetime to achieve moksha; 2) The

best approach is to move forward as much as you are able without fanatically struggling for the final goal in this life, which is, in most cases, unrealistic. Progress, yes. Liberation, not so easy.

Let’s look at the meaning of *adhyatma vikasa*. *Adhyatma* is derived from two Sanskrit roots: *adhi*, meaning higher and *atma*, self or soul. *Vikasa* carries the meaning of development or becoming, in the spiritual sense. Other English terms for *spiritual* are *divine* or *sacred*. Thus, we could say that *adhyatma vikasa* is a process of becoming more and more aware of the divine or sacred within us and beyond.

A few years ago I was impressed by a movie about Te Ata Fisher (1895–1995), a renowned storyteller. In the 1930s she represented Native Americans at state dinners in the presence of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. In the movie, she said that standing by a beautiful mountain lake was her cathedral. This inspiring statement about sacredness made me ponder the capacity of human consciousness to reflect, in its most profound moments, on the mystery and divine nature of existence. *Adhyatma vikasa* can be described as getting more and more in touch with that sacredness, which is the natural state of our soul or *atma*.

In *The Hindu View of Life*, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan stresses that Hinduism is a religion based on experience of the Divine, which he refers to as reality. “Religion [referring to Hinduism] is not the acceptance of academic abstractions or the celebration of ceremonies, but a kind of life or experience. It is insight into the nature of reality (*darshana*), or experience of reality (*anubhava*). This experience is not an emotional thrill, or a subjective fantasy, but is the response of the whole personality, the integrated self, to the central reality.”

My guru, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, taught four approaches to experiencing sacredness. Perhaps the easiest is to see sacredness in great religious teachers, who seem to exude spirituality.



We sense a special light in their eyes not seen in others. The spirituality emanating from the great ones is sometimes called *shakti*. Gurudeva wrote, “What is this *shakti*?” you may be wondering. It is being in the presence of Divinity. All holy men and women emanate all of these *shaktis*—and you can, too—some stronger than others. *Shakti* is divine radiation from the Third World, causal plane, through the Second World, astral plane, into the First, physical plane. The astral body is in the Second World and lives inside the physical body. It is through the astral body that *shakti* is felt.”

A second way to sense spirituality is to look deeply into the eyes of someone you know. Look deeper than the personality and the intellect and see the life energy in their eyes as the Divine within them. Verse 3.7 of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* affirms, “He who knows God as the Life of life, the Eye of the eye, the Ear of the ear, the Mind of the mind, he indeed comprehends fully the Cause of all causes.”

A third place to find sacredness is in the Hindu temple. It is a holy space, built and maintained in such a way that we can go there and experience the energy of God and Gods. During the *puja*, the priest calls forth the Deity to reside in the image and bless the devotees present. Devotees experience the Deity as an uplifting, peaceful, divine energy radiating out from the image. Gurudeva gives this description: “The reality of the Mahadevas and their *darshan* [blessings] can be experienced by the devotee through his awakened *ajna* vision, or more often as the physical sight of the image in the sanctum coupled with the inner knowing that He is there within the microcosm. This *darshan* can be felt by all devotees, becoming stronger and more defined as devotion is perfected.”

Toward journey’s end: After dharma, artha and kama have been sufficiently fulfilled over many lifetimes, one’s soul is mature in its *adhyatma vikasa*, journey of unfoldment. It is now ready to undertake the final portion of the spiritual path leading to moksha, liberation from rebirth. So it is with this yogi, who has renounced the world to focus entirely on *sadhanas* of selfless service, worship and deeper meditation. Lord Siva beckons him ever closer to the destination.

There is a fourth, more advanced, approach, which is to look directly into our inner consciousness through meditation. By consistent practice a meditator learns to locate the sacredness within him or her and over time go ever deeper into it. The initial experience may register on the external mind as peace and bliss. Later one comes into a clear white light, and later still an all-pervading consciousness. Ultimately, one encounters the transcendent source of that consciousness. As stated in the *Chandogya Upanishad* (8.3.3–4), “The Self resides within the lotus of the heart. Knowing this, consecrated to the Self, the sage enters daily that holy sanctuary. Absorbed in the Self, the sage is freed from identity with the body and lives in blissful consciousness.”

In summary, Hinduism gives us a number of approaches to experiencing the Divine. An important part of making progress on the path to moksha is encountering the transcendent on a regular basis. That practice will, over time, naturally deepen the awareness of our own inner sacredness, which is what spiritual unfoldment is all about.



LETTERS

Erratas in Inscriptions Article

In my article "Temple Inscriptions" (Apr/May/June 2023), factual errors had crept in its editing: 1) Rajaraja's Tanjore temple is made of hard granite, not sandstone. 2) Chola copper plates were inscribed in Tamil, not Nagari script. 3) The upper and lower Kollidum Anicuts built by the British in the 1830s have nothing to do with the river Kaveri (Kollidam is a tributary of the Kaveri). I shiver to think of the letters that will flow to the editor's desk. Please update me of any comments so far received. Reverentially,

SUNITHA MADHAVAN
SUNITHA.MADHAVAN44@GMAIL.COM

Keeping Rudrakshas Sacred

The rudraksha is divine for Hindus. I hope this divinity is not lost in Nepal due to Chinese entry into the market. The Nepalese need to maintain a long-term perspective with balanced approaches, so that they don't lose credibility (divinity). Giving due respect to rudrakshas will protect them always. (See "Sacred Rudrakshas" Jul/Aug/Sep 2023.)

RAMG
RSRI2406@GMAIL.COM

Stand Strong in Hinduism

In reply to Dharmesh Patadiya, author of "My Unfortunate Conversion" (Apr/May/June 2022), I had an experience in college similar to yours. I was lonely on campus. This attracted me to Unity. They are on their best behavior to attract you and make believe that they are genuinely amazing. Some of them actually are really good people in general. My advice to help other youth to be strong in such circumstances is:

- 1) Teach the basics of Hinduism yourself at home, and in school if possible. Just as Christians promote their 10 commandments, we should formulate 20 of ours and teach those.
- 2) You must be a proud Hindu to keep practicing. Anything that can rekindle your faith and keep it burning will be of help.

DIVYA JAIN
JAINDIVYA2806@GMAIL.COM

I'm intrigued by Sanatana Dharma, and really enjoyed your article, "My Unfortunate Conversion." I was raised in a strictly Christian home and attended Christian schools my entire life. I am now opening my eyes to its fear-based teachings, and would love to learn about the beautiful spiritual tradition of Hinduism. Where can I go to learn more? The Hindu temple near me does not hold weekly lessons. Thank you.

CLARISSA LEE
DLEE7@OUTLOOK.COM

Sacred Himalayas

"Beloved Mystic Mountains" (Jul/Aug/Sep 2022) was a most captivating article! India's mountains hold a special place in Hindu mythology and spirituality, and this piece beautifully explores their significance. The author's descriptive language transports the reader to these sacred peaks, evoking a sense of awe and wonder. It's fascinating to learn about the different mountains and the legends associated with them. This article serves as a reminder of Hinduism's rich tapestry of beliefs and tradition. Thank you for sharing this enlightening piece!

LAND SURVEYOR AUCKLAND
SURVEYWORKXZZ@GMAIL.COM

School Holiday on Diwali

I applaud the author of "Why Not Close School on Diwali" (Oct/Nov/Dec 2021) for raising this important issue. The closure of schools on Diwali is a step towards building a more inclusive society in which all individuals, regardless of their cultural or religious backgrounds, can thrive and feel respected. Let us embrace the spirit of Diwali and celebrate the rich tapestry of diversity that makes our world a vibrant and harmonious place.

PRAYAAGINTERNATIONALSCHOOL.COM
WEB@PISP.IN

Fourteen Questions

The images you have used in "14 Questions People Ask about Hinduism" are beautiful (Jul/Aug/Sep 2023)! And the way you answered these questions is so satisfying!

KAVITA
KBURANA2001@GMAIL.COM

Excellent! An extensive and elaborate effort made to put the eternal wisdom in simpler words! Lots of blessings and good wishes!

MRS. SHILPA DATAR
DATARSC@YAHOO.COM

Honoring Our Environment

I was mesmerized by Savita Tiwari's beautifully written article entitled "Hinduism Nature's Guardian" (Apr/May/June 2023). It captures so well Hindu Dharma's holistic connection with creation. It offers insight into how we can develop our inner environment so that we can improve our outer environment. Too many religions remain aloof from nature theologically, with catastrophic consequences for nature. The article shows Hindu Dharma's priceless contribution to protecting nature. At a time when policy makers too often think that reducing carbon emissions will by itself solve climate change, the article shows how a deeper oneness with nature offers the best solution. Thank you.

SUBRATA DEY
SUB.D108@GMAIL.COM

Mysticism and Virtual Reality

I was fascinated by the article "Virtual Reality & Temple Mysticism (Apr/May/June 2023). I'm glad to see that technology is spreading to all corners of the world, and being used by devotees of all kinds. This is an amazing time to be alive.

BRET BERNHOFT
THISBRET@GMAIL.COM

Thrice Daily Sadhana

"Performing Sandhya Vandanam" (Jan/Feb/Mar 2022) was superbly written, answering the key questions which arise in anyone who follows the discipline of sandhya. I liked the notes on the upanayana as well, and the comment, "Mother always tells me that mind is the basis of everything." This is so well put, and could be rephrased as "Thought is the basis of everything" (quoting from *Yoga-Vasistha*). The finishing lines regarding the classical religions is such a important revelation! Thanks for a sweet, beautiful article on this classic ritual!

DIVAKAR PAI
YOURSDIVU@GMAIL.COM

Ahimsa Has its Limits

I thoroughly enjoyed reading the article "Merit, Demerit and Liberation" by Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami (Jul/Aug/Sep 2023). I agree with everything he says, except when he implies that according to the teachings of Hinduism, the principle of nonviolence must be adhered to in every case without exception. Yes, ahimsa (nonviolence) is indeed an important part of the teachings of Hinduism, but even in the *Gita*, a holy scripture for Hindus, Lord Krishna does tell Arjuna, "Fight for the sake of duty, treating alike happiness and distress, loss and gain, victory and defeat. Fulfilling your responsibility in this way, you will never incur sin" (verse 2.38). It was the rigid adherence to the principle of non-violence on the part of Indians that allowed foreign invaders to invade India with impunity and rule Indians for a thousand years or so before the nation became independent on August 15, 1947.

PRADEEP SRIVASTAVA
PRADEEPSOOL@HOTMAIL.COM

✓ **Editor's Note:** You rightly point out that Satguru gives the basic definition of ahimsa, but does not go into the regrettable exceptions that common sense allows. "Ahimsa is not causing pain to any living being at any time through the actions of one's mind, speech or body." Those exceptions were included in his July 2014 Publisher's Desk column: "Is the principle of nonviolence absolute under all circumstances? My Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, answered this question by stipulating a few

'regrettable exceptions.' The first exception applies to extreme circumstances, such as when faced with imminent danger, in which case individuals may elect to injure or even kill to protect their life or that of another. Another exception applies to those who are members of a police force or armed forces. However, even those individuals should not use violence unless absolutely necessary."

Credit where Credit Is Due

In response to the point-counterpoint "Clash: Who's Stealing Yoga?" (Oct 2010), sadly, it is true that Deepak Chopra has used Vedic shastras and Hinduism to make himself and his family rich. He has not used his vast wealth to help the poor people of India. The ancient, wise people of Bharat definitely left precious jewels for humanity. Chopra and others in the West have stolen and manipulated our ancient traditions and Vedic knowledge, claiming it as their own. Chopra and others are able to do this because Hinduism does not have an organization to challenge such affronts. Sadly, quite a number of our Indian people are trying to steal from Hinduism and at the same time pulling Hinduism down to impress the West. Vedic knowledge, which is written in the Sanskrit language, belongs to India. The West claims that Sanskrit and everything to do with Vedic

knowledge belongs to them. Hinduism is and will always be part and parcel of Vedic scriptures and yoga. No one can change that, just as no one can change the source of the *Bhagavad Gita*. etc. We must make this clear to Chopra and others.

HASU PARMAR
HASUBEN@HOTMAIL.COM

More Educational Videos, Please!

I came across the video "Questions about Hinduism," published on your youtube channel: www.youtube.com/user/HinduismTodayVideos. It is very good. Please make more videos like this that include other questions that children are facing from children of other faiths in schools in the USA and other countries. Sometimes this makes Hindu children ashamed of their religion because of negative interpretations of Hinduism, which is especially strong in American academia. Example questions: "Why did Lord Rama leave Sita while she was pregnant? Is he anti-feminist?" I would suggest collecting more questions from Hindu students directly. Please provide logical, philosophical answers, which is possible because Hinduism is deeply connected with science. It is not differentiated from science and philosophy as are other faiths. I believe this kind of program will help Hindu the community as a whole.

Making Hindu Mysticism Available to the Young
Hinduism's great treasure chest is meant to be opened and its contents used

By Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami,
publisher of HINDUISM TODAY

A major trend today among religiously/spiritually inclined youth is to prefer individual practice over the group worship activities their parents favor. They are searching for something solid for their lives, something they can depend on which has clear and undeniable meaning to them personally. They are looking to experience sacredness. That upward search together with the body of knowledge sages have gathered about it through the millennia, its collected wisdom, its guidelines and teachings, is what is called mysticism. It is a spectacular element of Hinduism we regularly cover in HINDUISM TODAY, which the magazine's founder, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, described artfully in an article we published in a past issue:

"No other faith boasts such a deep and enduring comprehension of the mysteries of existence, or possesses so vast a metaphysical system. The storehouse of religious revelations in Hinduism cannot be reckoned. I



know of its equal nowhere. It contains the entire system of yoga, of meditation and contemplation and Self Realization. Nowhere else is there such insightful revelation of the inner bodies of man, the subtle pranas and the chakras, or psychic centers within the nerve system. Inner states of superconsciousness are explored and mapped fully in Hinduism, from the clear white light to the sights and sounds which flood the awak-

And I strongly believe it is one of the primary responsibilities of monasteries to dispel doubts in people's minds.

SHRINIVAS HEGDE
SMKSHRINIVASHEGDE@GMAIL.COM

✓ **Correction on Photo Credits**
Our apologies: a collection of photos were incorrectly credited in the Jul/Aug/Sept 2023 issue in the article "Sacred Rudrakshas." The following photos were taken by photographer Thomas Kelly: the two images on pages 18-19, the top image on page 21, the bottom-left image on page 24, the center-right image on page 25, all photos on page 26, the bottom-right photo on page 27, and the top left and bottom-right photos on page 29.

THE EDITORS

Letters, with writer's name, address and daytime phone number, can be mailed to:

Letters, Hinduism Today
107 Kaholalele Road
Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304 USA

or visit: www.hinduismtoday.com/letters

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

ened inner consciousness of man. In the West it is the mystically awakened soul who is drawn to Hinduism for understanding of inner states of consciousness, discovering after ardent seeking that Hinduism possesses answers which do not exist elsewhere and is capable of guiding awareness into ever-deepening mind strata."

HINDUISM TODAY continually showcases these marvels. On pages 10-11 of this current issue, for example, I suggest that aspirants keep in mind that it may take several more lives to attain moksha. But no effort is lost, I point out, as normally we pick up in a next life at the exact point where we left off last time. Such a meaningful tip can prove most encouraging to the seeker and make his pursuits more serene.

Please help HINDUISM TODAY remain financially strong and secure so it may continue to broadcast a beautiful and salutary philosophy that the young—and people of all ages—so urgently need today.

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

QUOTES & QUIPS

“We are responsible for what we are, and whatever we wish ourselves to be, we have the power to make ourselves.”

Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902)

An evil man is a saint of the future. See good in everything. Destroy the evil-finding quality. Develop the good-finding quality. Rise above good and evil. **Swami Sivananda** (1887–1963)

If the inner mind is not deluded, the outer actions will not be wrong. *Tibetan proverb*

You are awareness. Awareness is another name for you. Since you are awareness, there is no need to attain or cultivate it. **Sri Ramana Maharshi** (1879–1950)

Out of purity and silence come words of power. **Swami Chinmayananda** (1916–1992), *founder of Chinmaya Mission*

The winner has many friends; the loser has good friends. *Mongolian proverb*

Even the impossible becomes possible through devotion. **Sarada Devi** (1853–1920)

He who has created the universe is Himself present in all circumstances and conditions. **Anandamayi Ma** (1896–1982), *mystic Bengali yogini saint*

When the sea is calm, every ship has a good captain. *Swedish proverb*

A man sees in the world what he carries in his heart. **Johann Wolfgang von Goethe** (1749–1832), *German poet*

Sorrow prepares you for joy. It violently sweeps everything out of your house so that new joy can find space to enter. It shakes the yellow leaves from the bough of your heart so that fresh, green leaves can grow in their place. It pulls up the rotten roots so

that new roots hidden beneath have room to grow. Whatever sorrow shakes from your heart, far better things will take their place. **Rumi** (1207–1273), *Sufi mystic and poet*

To understand the limitation of things, desire them. **Lao Tzu** (4th century bce), *author of the Tao Te Ching*

Nothing can dim the light which shines from within. **Maya Angelou** (1928–2014), *American poet*

Beyond the senses is the mind; above the mind is its essence (intelligence); beyond the intelligence is the great self; beyond the great (self) is the unmanifest. *Katha Upanishad 2.3.7*

Wealth is really a means to work out dharma. If one uses it merely for personal

enjoyment, it is vainly spent. **Sai Baba of Shirdi** (1838–1918) *Indian spiritual master*

My brain is only a receiver; in the Universe there is a core from which we obtain knowledge, strength and inspiration. I have not penetrated into the secrets of this core, but I know that it exists. **Nikola Tesla** (1856–1943), *Serbian-American inventor*

Yoga is an internal practice. The rest is just a circus. **K. Pattabhi Jois** (1915–209), *Hatha Yoga master*

The essential nature of the self is to become one with the object deeply contemplated by it. If the sadhaka meditates continuously on a particular form, he assumes that form in due course. The nature of being one, the nature of being many and all such states are reflected in him according to his conception. All the qualities of the form meditated by him get unfolded within himself. *Raurava Agama, Vidya Pada 7.13–4*

Knowing your own darkness is the best method for dealing with the darknesses of other people. **Carl Jung** (1875–1961), *Swiss psychiatrist*

It is folly for a man to pray to the Gods for that which he has the power to obtain by himself. **Epicurus** (287–212 bce) *ancient Greek philosopher*

We are all visitors to this time, this place. We are just passing through. Our purpose here is to observe, to learn, to grow, to love... and then we return home. *Australian Aboriginal proverb*

There is no baser folly than the infatuation that looks upon the ephemeral as if it were everlasting. *Tirukural 331*

When you're meditating and you've managed to achieve a state of awareness being aware of itself, take notes on what it is that pulls you out of that state. See if it's the same thing consistently, and then work to resolve it. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, *publisher of HINDUISM TODAY*

WELL, THIS CERTAINLY INCREASES MY RESPECT FOR AMAZON'S FREE SHIPPING.



Willpower is the soul in action. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), *founder of HINDUISM TODAY*

DID YOU KNOW?

The Magic Mix for Cementing Murtis

ONE OF THE FINAL TOUCHES OF THE May, 2023, crystal Sivalingam installation at Iraivan Temple in Hawaii was the application of a thin band of *ashtabandhanam* compound around the Sivalingam and its avudaiyar base, as well as the Nandi, kodimaram, balipitham and eight directional pithams. The ingredients of *ashtabandhanam*—literally, “eight bonds”—vary among India’s regions and even according to the Deity being installed. Iraivan temple’s famed architect, Ganapati Sthapati, listed the following eight: red soil powder, select river soils, frankincense, a type of cotton, shellac, mercury sulfide, beeswax, and dried butter made from buffalo milk. At the Hawaii temple, six more ingredients were added while heating the mixture: kumkum, sandalwood, camphor, turmeric, ghee and incense.

A traditional method of preparing the compound, still followed in parts of Kerala

and elsewhere, is to pound the ingredients into a paste with 50-pound tamarind wood hammers (see youtu.be/UodWoKPeGQM?t=599). At Iraivan, the mixture was purchased premixed and just heated over a flame to soften it.

K.P. Sarma of Vaikom, Kerala, explains in a 2022 *Times of India* article that for making just the three pounds required for a small murti, they have to strike the mixture at least 100,000 times to obtain the correct consistency. “The moment we stop hitting,” he said, “it starts to harden. Its texture resembles something like melting tar. Once the last ingredient, cotton, is added, it starts to solidify. Then, it must be applied on the murti immediately and left to dry for 41 days.” Then it becomes as hard as concrete.

The cementing takes place just before the final “awakening” of the Deity. In the case of Nandi murtis, this usually occurs shortly



Image: Nandi at Iraivan Temple, cemented in place with red layer of *ashtabandhanam*

before the final carving to “open” His eyes.

The ingredients of *ashtabandhanam* have antiseptic qualities and serve the practical function of sealing the base of a murti, keeping out milk, yogurt and other offerings that might seep in and spoil.

BASICS

What Are the Hindu’s Daily Yoga Practices?

DEVOUT HINDUS PERFORM DAILY vigil, called *sandhya upasana*, usually before dawn. This sacred period of *puja*, *japa*, chanting, singing, *hatha yoga*, meditation and scriptural study is the foundation of personal life.

Each day hundreds of millions of Hindus awaken for the last fifth of the night, bathe, don fresh clothing, apply sectarian marks, called *tilaka*, and sit in a clean, quiet place for religious disciplines. Facing east or north, the devotional *puja* rites of *bhakti yoga* are performed. *Hatha yoga*, hymn singing, *japa* and chanting are often included. Then follows scriptural study and meditation, listening to the sound current and contemplating the moonlike inner light during *brahma muhurta*, the auspicious hour-and-a-half period before dawn. The duly initiated

practice advanced *yogas*—but only as directed by their guru, knowing that unless firmly harnessed, the *kundalini* can manifest uncontrollable desires. Through the day, *karma yoga*, selfless religious service, is performed at every opportunity. Besides these *yogas* of doing, Hindus practice the central *yoga* of being—living a joyful, positive, harmonious life. The *Vedas* declare, “The mind, indeed, is this fleeting world. Therefore, it should be purified with great effort. One becomes like that which is in one’s mind—this is the everlasting secret.”

Drawn from the teachings of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami



Help Your Children Grow Up Hindu



Good English resources for children, well designed and written, are woefully rare. Over the years, Himalayan Academy has developed a trove of valuable illustrated resources for educating youth. Today’s generation, who are disinclined toward religion of any kind, need well-presented, sensible explanations of our faith. While these works are written from the point of view of Saivite Hinduism, they can serve Hindu families of any tradition.

Growing Up Hindu and **Life Skills for Hindu Teens**: Companion books of engaging stories focusing on real life challenges and how to face them.

Ten Tales About Religious Life and **Ten Tales About Self Control**: Compelling stories designed to inspire virtue and spiritual practice for the preteen and early teenage years.

Lion Sage: A fun, captivating bedtime version of *Merging with Siva*, introducing 4-12 year-olds to

Hinduism’s mystical side, giving tools to inspire confidence and purpose by knowing one’s true self.

The History of Hindu India: A comprehensive chronicle of India from ancient times written for middle and high schoolers, available in book, digital, video and even song form.

Path to Siva: A highly approachable catechism summarizing Hindu belief and practice in 68 one-page lessons for teens, 20-somethings (and adults).

Saivite Hindu Religion: A four-book series aimed at children (5-12), giving the basics of Hindu thought and culture based on a course that is taught in Tamil schools in Sri Lanka.

There’s More: Additional resources include **A Character Building Workbook** by Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, **Saivite Virtue** (about brahmacharya) and the popular 16-page parental pamphlet, “Raising Children as Good Hindus.”

“Hinduism Today’s Hindu history book is both correct and authentic, and definitely better than I have seen in any school textbook. If each Hindu were to learn and remember this narrative, the Hindu community would be better off in this increasingly pluralistic society.” *Shiva G. Bajpai, Professor Emeritus, California State University Northridge*

“As a mother, I face the challenge of teaching my children—currently 9 and 11—the basic Hindu values for living according to dharma. Definitely *Ten Tales about Self-Control* and *Ten Tales about Religious Life* captured their attention and made a lasting impression on their minds.” *Sheela Visswanathan, California*

FROM THE TIRUMANTIRAM Embers of Devotion

A Rishi’s Reflections about One of History’s Oldest Forms of Worship

The following is a selection of verses from Rishi Tirumular’s Tirumantiram, translated by Dr. S. P. Sabharathnam Sivacharyar.

Having systematically done the fire rituals, the performer should contemplate the primal source of the Fire, which expands and proliferates throughout the world. In the flames of the fire blazing forth from the *havan* (fire pit), one should deeply think of their oneness with that Primal Fire. Such contemplation leads to the state of liberation. 1034

Lord Siva, who is in the form of all-encompassing Light which manifests without any causal source, takes His shrine in the heart of those who have realized the efficacy of both the external fire ritual and internal fire ritual and who have detached themselves from the dual notions of like and dislike and from worldly ties. The aspirants should make all possible efforts to detach themselves from worldly bonds; rising up through the beam of the source-light (the *sushumna* current in the spine) and having conquered the six vices, they should remain in this world dispassionately. Only such persons are considered as saints who have entered the abode of Siva. 1035

The foremost Lord is seated in the fire which is blazing forth in the well-designed and fully developed *havan*. The Siva fire has a form associated with hands, nose, face, eyes, forehead and head. The two pieces of firewood on the left and right side are the hands. The smoke is the nose. The mouth of the *havan* is the well-defined face. Small flames are the eyes. Ashes constitute the forehead. Embers constitute the head. Identify these parts and offer the oblations only in the flames which are blazing up highly, since they are the tongues. 1038

The *havan* which is constructed in the northwest, and in which the fire taken from the main *havan* is deposited, is in the form of a hexagon. Its bottom tier is the same shape as the smaller, upper part. The fire kindled in this *havan* is related to the Primal Fire which has spread throughout the seven worlds. Those who nourish this fire with various kinds of oblations and keep it alive and vibrant are considered to have done the necessary rituals for the delighted state of the world. 1040

The fire kindled in the *havan* flourishes due to various kinds of oblations. It blazes forth to yield many benefits to the world such as the timely showers of seasonal rains, abundant growth of crops, fruit trees and plants, increase of wealth and so on. The guru raises this fire and uses it for the performance of initiation, sacred installations and other such deeds. Fire, which regulates and controls the worlds, being raised in the *havan*, takes care of the world compassionately, results in the unfoldment of knowledge through instructions from the Guru, and in the abundant growth of essential things needed for the world. 1041



The Siva fire is not confined to the limited space of the *havan* and the sacrificial hall. It spreads in and through all places visible to us. It pervades everywhere. Few are competent to realize this fire’s essential nature and power with the firm conviction that it is the most essential divine source available to them. Those who realize the existence of such Siva fire within their own subtle body and perform the fire ritual internally without interruption will witness the passage of millions and millions of *yugas* (aeons). They may be considered as old in view of time; but are young forever in view of their enlightenment. 1042

A perfect yogi who has understood the nature and efficacy of his subtle body and soul and the significance of various *havans*, could design within himself the *havans* in the likeness of the nine *havans* which are constructed externally and with which all the worlds are linked. The Siva fire in the *havan* is born of Vagisvari (Goddess of words/alphabet) and Vagisvara (Siva). The great congregation of yogis and devotees have identified and recognized such a sacred fire to be the best means for the attainment of oneness with Siva. 1043

The *havan* in the form of square is for the attainment of one’s desired fruits. The *havan* in the form of triangle is for the warding off of miseries and for a peaceful life. The *havan* in the form of a bow is for success and the removal of enmity and obstructions. The *havan* in the form of circle is for protection, for a downpour of seasonal rains and strength. The *havan* of hexagonal form is for the growth of crops and removal of diseases. The *havan* in the form of eight-petaled lotus is for the blessedness of longevity. The *havan* in the form of an octagon is for the attainment of rich knowledge and wealth. The *havan* in the form of peepal leaf or yoni is for blessedness with good children and ruling power. The main *havan* in the form of circle is for the accomplishment of the desired benefits of liberation. All these nine *havans* are capable of leading devotees to the feet of the Lord. 1044

DR. S. P. SABHARATHNAM SIVACHARYAR, of the Adisaiva priest lineage, is an expert in ancient Tamil and Sanskrit, specializing in the *Vedas*, *Agamas* and *Silpa Shastras*.

Go to: kauaishindumonastery.com/youth-resources/
for a complete list of resources and guides for parents and teachers

SPECIAL FEATURE

The Hallowed Halls of Hampi

The austere, grand site of Hampi in Karnataka, India, was the prosperous capital of the Vijayanagara Empire. For over 200 years its fabulously rich princes built temples and palaces admired by Persian and European travelers. Despite being conquered, pillaged and destroyed in 1565ce, many ruins remain partially intact. In our feature story we visit temples including still-functioning Virupaksha, palace monuments and adjacent verdant river basins.

Pilgrims to Hampi in traditional dress meander through the ancient, mysterious hallways of temple ruins, stopping to imagine the milieu when the temple was alive, functioning in full glory

BY PADMA KRISHNAN
AND ANNE PETRY

INDIA IS SO RICH IN TERMS OF HISTORICAL and religious sites that it is not easy to choose which of these incredible places to visit. One day when I was traveling in South India, several people told me about Hampi, describing it with words like *great, spectacular, glorious, majestic, outstanding, amazing*. Intrigued by a place that accumulates so many superlatives, I had to go there and see for myself. Once there, I quickly realized that Hampi was all this and much more. Visiting this ancient capital is not only to take in the sights, it is also to take in the heart! So, put on your virtual hiking shoes, or if you prefer, get on your bike, and together discover this architectural jewel located in a breathtaking natural environment.

For those who travel in the south Indian state of Karnataka, Hampi is a must! Classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, it includes more than 1,600 ruins spread across more than 15 square miles. In 2012, under UNESCO'S jurisdiction, dozens of houses, small stores, restaurants and guest houses built on ancient relics located near the main alley and Virupaksha Temple were demolished, forcing about 300 squatting families to move out and find another place to live and work. The misery of some made for the happiness of others, especially those interested in archeology. If today many statues still remain enigmatic, research and excavations have uncovered one of the most fascinating sites in the country.

Myth and History of Hampi

While I could have visited Hampi on my own with a simple travel book to get the main historical information, I figured that if any place deserved a more in-depth explanation, it was this one. It didn't take me



long to find Deepak, a local affable professional guide who is passionate about the region. Let me tell you the story he shared with intensity.

As often in India, legends merge with history, and Hampi is no exception to the rule. The myth tells that the Lord of Love, Manmatha, reaching the river Pampa, disturbed Siva who was meditating on the Hemakuta Hill. Manmatha was burnt to ashes by the fire of Siva's third eye. Later Lord Siva married Pampa, the river Goddess, an avatar of Parvati,

and Manmatha was forgiven and resurrected. In ancient days, this holy site was called Pampakshetra, and locals celebrated the divine wedding annually. The Virupaksha Temple was built here and Pampakshetra became a major Saivite pilgrimage site. Over time, the Virupaksha Temple became the center of the Vijayanagara Empire, and the sacred core of the majestic Vijayanagara, now known as Hampi.

On a historical level, the Sangama brothers, founders of the Vijayanagara dynasty, chose their capital city wisely. The site is bordered by the mountains Anjaneya, Malyavanta and the Matanga Hills on three sides, with the Tungabhadra River on the fourth. The hills provided formidable defences against hostile attacks, and the river formed a natural border. The fertile Tungabhadra river basins assured food production, and the hill stones were prime resources for building a new city. They built it beautifully and called it Vijayanagara, City of Victory.

Though long forgotten and almost erased from history, Vijayanagara was, in the

.....
Stunning landscape: (clockwise from right) Anjanadri Hill is believed to be the birthplace of Lord Hanuman; a panoramic view of Stone Hills, historic ruins of Vijayanagara Empire, Tungabhadra River and cultivation in and around Hampi; Bhakti poet-saint Purandara Dasa spent his last years in this mandapa dedicated to him by King Krishnadevaraya



Hampi's Glorious Environs



15th century, the second largest city in the world after Beijing, with up to half a million inhabitants, a very large population for the time. Vijayanagara was so important that the dynasty of the builder kings was able to maintain its power over all South-ern India for over two centuries.

It took two centuries to build the city. The seven-layered fortifications, temples, palaces, markets, mandapas (pillared pavilions), gardens and waterworks demanded strong leadership and the availability of continuous talent. For generations, artists trained on the hills of Hemakuta and Matanga, where you can still find the stonework of their apprentices. Hampi's magnificent stone art was crafted with patient dedication and talent. Hampi demonstrates the skill and vast knowledge of the people who inhabited it. They were experts in architecture, hydraulics, defense, mythology, music, civics, painting, planning and building megastructures.

A Leap into the Past

My first idea was to spend two days in Hampi, but I soon realized that a place with such a rich past deserved more time to reveal itself and so I extended my stay in order to fully appreciate the ancient capital. For those who, like me, take the time to walk through the ancient temples, sit beside the appealing

carved pillars and admire the incredibly detailed sculptures, it will be like stepping into another era, imagine what life was like when this was a city of glory.

Achyutaraya Temple, for instance, is a



vast complex that looks like a lost city itself, hidden in an absolutely beautiful valley dotted with coconut trees (photo on inside front cover). Dedicated to Lord Vishnu, Achyutaraya has a processional alley 330 feet long, a first enclosure with 100 engraved columns and a second yard which is well preserved. The yellow of the stones and the green of the trees are the predominant colors, accented by the brightly colored saris of the Indian women walking here and there, passing from one monument to another, wandering between the columns. As it is not centrally located,

fewer people come here, and one can enjoy a more peaceful atmosphere.

Vitthala Temple, dating from the 16th century, was never fully completed but is one of the richest and most refined temples you can see in the whole site. A stone chariot pulled by elephants is the pinnacle of Vijayanagar art. This chariot, magnificently carved in stone, is the pride of Indians to the point that it adorns the 50 rupee bill. Vitthala has a wealth of other wonders: statues of mythical animals, musical pillars (they produce sounds when struck with the hand), mandapas and a wonderful ambulatory path. Subash, a tourist from Delhi, told me: "Some time ago I saw pictures of the Vitthala Temple in a magazine, and that's what made me want to visit Hampi. But it is even more amazing in real life. How could they

Partially intact: (clockwise from right) The epic stone chariot in the courtyard of Vitthala Temple; (inset) chariot featured on 50-rupee note; mandapa and sanctum of the Achyutaraya Temple; lone pillars missing their roof at the base of Matanga Hill; two-story stone mandapa on top of Hemakuta Hill; boulders on Hemakuta Hill dating back more than three billion years, believed to be the earliest solidified rock in India



Vitthala & Krishna Temples, Hemakuta Hill





have had such architectural techniques in that epoch?” The best time to discover Vitthala is during sunset, which gives a pinkish shade to the stones and makes the ancient edifice even more magical.

Hemakuta Hill, a vast rocky outcrop with rounded shapes, is another great spot to enjoy the twilight as well as sunrise. From here one can look over the surrounding area and observe the colors of the many stone constructions slowly changing, as if by magic, from yellow to gold. For me, sitting atop Hemakuta Hill, watching the huge fireball slowly descend and disappear behind the horizon was a visual delight and a moment of grace, like when time freezes and the only thing that matters is the present moment. It was a moment I will always remember.

It’s not easy to find your way around in Hampi. The site is so vast, it can be confusing to place the monuments on the map. But it’s worth getting lost and walking for miles to suddenly find yourself in front of one of the grand temples, the **Krishna Temple** for example. To enter here, one must pass under a huge porch topped by a gopuram. With its richly carved stone walls and colored brick structure, this building is a perfect example of Vijayanagar architecture. Krishna Temple is famous for a specific pillar with carvings of the ten avatars of Vishnu. For me, it was a joy to observe local families wandering around inside the temple. While the men chat with each other, the women keep an eye on their

children, for whom the giant statues around which they run or hide constitute the best playground ever.

Speaking of Vishnu, if there is a statue that cannot be missed, it is **Narasimha**, the largest monolith of Hampi, measuring 22 feet tall. This figure, with a lion’s head surmounted by a beautiful ornate tiara, represents Vishnu’s fourth incarnation. He sits on a seven-headed serpent named Ananta. This massive and well-preserved statue makes children smile, in front of which they love to take selfies. Narasimha was luckier than the sculpture of his wife, Lakshmi, which was unfortunately damaged by vandals.

Finally, there is the **Virupaksha Temple**. Hampi’s other temples are architectural beauties ruined centuries ago, but this one, built in the 16th century, is still functioning. From morning to night, hundreds of devotees come here daily to honor the Gods. Behind the colossal gopuram, fervent devotees observe an unchanging ritual: passing from courtyard to courtyard, they clap their hands on the granite columns, each of which emits a different sound, then they walk in front of scenes in high relief. When they finally arrive at the sacred Sivalingam, they place a coconut in front of it and receive a blessing from the priest. Inside, drums, chants, incense and oil lamps create an enchanting atmosphere that delights not only innocent visitors, but also the most experienced followers of Hinduism. Every day at 7am and

7pm, a ceremony is held in honor of Goddess Lakshmi, marking the beginning and the end of the day for all. Virupaksha, crowded and noisy, can be a bit exhausting, with people pushing and others asking for selfies, but in the end, it’s a great place to immerse yourself in an grand religious fervor. I enjoyed sitting out of sight, watching the rituals as a delightful way to learn more about Hindu practices.

The Secular Section

For the sake of simplicity, the city can be divided into two sectors: 1) the sacred sector, which has the temples, 2) and the secular sector with the royal residence, civic buildings, agricultural land, residential areas, dining halls for royal employees, elephant and horse stables, and markets. New discoveries await us in sector two.

Today, a visitor finds the royal section located in a quiet, bucolic lowland. But centuries ago, it was a bustling place of immense beauty and power. The royal section of the city had gardens, pavilions and step wells.

.....

Monumental: (clockwise from right) Virupaksha Siva Temple is the only one still functioning, with daily puja; musical pillars in the Vijaya Vitthala Temple; royal women used to gather in the secluded Lotus Mahal; Vishnu’s fourth incarnation, Narasimha, is the largest monolith



ANNE PETRY

Virupaksha Temple, Lotus Mahal, Narasimha



ANNE PETRY



ANNE PETRY



SHUTTERSTOCK

Strolling among these vestiges we can fathom how the palaces and gardens might have looked centuries ago. While discovering the royal section, I met a lovely young couple from Goa who had come to take photos for their engagement. Mala, the bride-to-be, said, “We’ve both been to Hampi before. This place is so full of history, so powerful and romantic at the same time; we really wanted to do these photos here more than anywhere else.”

The **Lotus Mahal** has survived the disaster of war and time. Known as Kamal Mahal or Chitrangi Mahal, it is located in the Zenana Enclosure, a secluded area for the royal women (harem). This remarkable monument is shaped like a lotus bud, with dome-shaped curving roofs. It is a fusion of Islamic and Dravidian architectural styles. In the short chambers at the base of the domes, one can note small holes, vestiges of a system of pipes that allowed someone to listen to the conversations from the first floor; proof that curious eavesdropping has always been part of human nature!

Not far from the the Lotus Mahal is **Elephant Stables**, another edifice that is in good condition. With six domes, each a different shape, this building housed the king’s favorite elephants, from a herd numbering up to 800.

The incredible **Queen’s Bath** with its arches, platforms, aqueducts and balconies where musicians and singers performed, is worth the detour! Thanks to the formidable irrigation system that is still partially visible today, the Queen’s Bath was filled with pure water from a nearby lake.

While the nearby **Royal Quarters** were razed long ago, their remnants give an idea of

the centrality and power of the former kings. As for the **Markets** of Hampi, they were so famous that that merchants from far away traded avidly—precious stones, horses from Persia, spices from the Malabar coast, silk and other goods.

From Oblivion to Rebirth

Hampi went from ancient origins, through a spectacular rise, to an unexpected destruction. In 1565 the Vijayanagara Empire fought a calamitous battle against an alliance of Deccan Sultans. This battle irreversibly changed the course of Indian history and the fate of Hampi. The fertile land of the Krishna and Tungabhadra river basins, the hills, forts and ports controlling lucrative sea routes were of strategic importance to both sides. This was not a battle the mighty Vijayanagara Empire should have lost, but it did. A combination of superior cavalry, fire-power and treachery led to the its defeat. Undeclared and abandoned, “the impregnable town,” the City of Victory, was methodically destroyed by the invading army. For whatever reason, the winners did not take over and govern the city; instead, they razed it to the ground, torched it and plundered the remaining wealth. A ruined Vijayanagara was left to the vagaries of time, and slowly disappeared from the world stage for over two hundred years.

In 1800 Colin Mackenzie, the first surveyor general of British India, discovered the ruins of the empire. He made extensive use of local informants to gather data, and slowly but surely, Hampi reappeared to the world, but this time as a place of archaeological marvel.

In 1986, recognizing their cultural importance to the world, UNESCO declared 68 of the 1,600 monuments as protected, and thus part of Hampi became a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

But preserving Hampi poses many challenges, as it is a living heritage and not a static monument that can be fenced off and protected. The temples and riverbanks are ancient pilgrimage sites. The Dasara festival, which includes Navaratri (nine days dedicated to Goddess Durga), is celebrated annually here, as the royals once did. So, the tradition continues unbroken. Also Hampi has 29 villages, with agricultural and commercial activities close to the monuments.

On my way from one monument to another, I stopped at a sugarcane juice stand for a refreshing drink; a little further I passed stalls selling flashy plastic toys for children; at another corner a man was selling coconuts directly from his truck. I exchanged a few words with a farmer working in his rice field near an ancient monument. All this made me wonder: how can you draw boundaries for a site that covers such a vast area? And how can the rural population around the site live and thrive among ancient ruins? Zoning the land (core, buffer and periphery) and permitting only certain activities appropriate for the zones, and construction without destroying the integrity of the environment are seen as solutions. But the fast development throws another challenge: new construction will impede or make impossible future excavations, as happened in the ancient city of Madurai.

The Indian government’s Department of Science and Technology has brought

multi-disciplinary experts for the Digital Heritage Project to create digital installations of heritage sites using the latest technology. The monuments in Hampi are studied and modeled using advanced technologies (3D scanning, modeling, virtual reality, etc.) to create virtual tours as well as to repair damaged structures. Perhaps the past glory of Hampi will be preserved in the virtual world. Replicas of the musical pillars have been created and the roofs of many temples have been restored. But technology does not always have the answer to everything, and the restoration of the Queen’s Bath has been criticized by heritage lovers concerned about the material used. However, these new technologies do allow us to dream of future discoveries that give us more detail about fascinating dynasty of the Vijayanagara kings.

Not only Historical Heritage!

Hampi is known as the largest open-air

.....
Once-thriving city: (clockwise from above) Sasivekalu Ganesha mandapa atop Hemakuta Hill, with the giant murti carved from a single boulder; a large stepped tank that was used for ritual bathing before prayers; this stable housed the king’s favorite elephants; banana, rice and other crops in the fertile river basin adjacent to Hampi’s stone ruins



museum in the world, but not only for its ancient monuments. Many visitors come to discover and appreciate its precious natural heritage, which is quite unusual and very poetic. For those who wish to immerse themselves in the rural Indian way of life, the villages here offer a picturesque setting on the banks of the Tungabhadra River, small hamlets surrounded by vast tracts of lush green farmland.

The river itself is a perfect place to get a glimpse of local life. It’s common to see Indian

families sitting on the river ghats, enjoying a gentle cooling breeze, to chat and take a break from their day of work or sightseeing. It was an occasion for me to meet Thiyagu and his family, originally from the state of Odisha. Thiyagu told me: “We love family trips and have visited many places in India, but Hampi is really something special, as there is something for everyone, those interested in history, those who like to spend time in nature, not to mention children who have space to run, play and explore. There is no doubt that it will be

Guardians, Wells, Stables, Farming



in our top three favorite destinations.”

For one who, like me, has always dreamed of being Indiana Jones, the banks of the Tungabhadra River are the perfect place! Here and there are hidden small temples as well as beautiful sculptures of Vishnu or Hanuman, totally neglected by the restoration. Maybe that is not a bad thing, because there remains an impression of authenticity in a mysterious and almost mystical atmosphere. If it is sometimes difficult to say what was the purpose of certain carved blocks, it leaves room for imagination and daydreaming, two words almost forgotten in our ultra-connected and ultra-informed world.

In addition to tourists and budding explorers, rock climbers have also found an excellent playground, with hundreds of large, roundish boulders scattered throughout the area. Animal lovers will be delighted by the amount of wildlife found in these drylands, from mammals to unique bird species. Despite increasing urbanization, the area around Hampi remains a bastion of ecological diversity. The Daroji Sloth Bear Sanctuary, located next to Hampi, offers a great opportunity to observe many species of the scrub forest, a gem of a natural habitat for mongoose, monitor lizard, leopard, sloth bear, pangolin and star tortoise. Hampi and its surroundings are recognized not only by UNESCO, but also by BirdLife International—as an “Important

Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA),” where birdwatchers can observe jungle birds, sil-verbills, shrikes, bush quail and, for the lucky ones, great horned owls and yellow-throated bulbuls.

Hampi and the surrounding region can be visited throughout the year, but the months of April, May and early June, considered the summer period, can be oppressively hot, and the animals are less visible. In June, the rainy season begins, which lasts until August and the rocky landscapes and rice fields are flush with greenery. After the monsoon, the climate becomes gradually more pleasant, for humans as well as animals, and it is a good time to observe the fauna and flora. The choice season extends from November to February. Daniel, an English traveler says: “My first visit to Hampi was eight years ago and since then I have been back several times, always at a different period of the year. Each time I have felt like I was discovering a new place because the nature changes so much depending on the weather and I have noticed that each season has something special to offer, so it is difficult for me to recommend one time more than another. I really think that Hampi deserves several trips so that one can say, “I have seen Hampi, and I know Hampi.”

Where to Put Your Suitcases?

With significant marketing and status as a

UNESCO site, Hampi is attracting many local and foreign visitors, who, perhaps tired of super touristy Goa, travel 12 hours by bus and put down their bags in the not-so-small village of Hampi. Over the years, the number of guesthouses has increased considerably, but Hampi village remains a better option than Hospet, a medium-sized, rather noisy and uninteresting town. Those who want to spice up their stay a bit and look for a country atmosphere while remaining close to the archaeological site, can stay in the Virupapur Gaddi area, which is reached by crossing a languid river. Another alternative is Anegondi, reached either by a five-mile road from Virupapur Gaddi (by auto-rickshaw, bicycle or motorcycle), or by a small ferry moored about six miles from Hampi. Located in a hilly landscape of rice fields and groves dominated here and there by the remains of temples, Gaddi is an excellent option for those wanting to enjoy nature and history. As I always travel without booking a hostel

.....
Beautiful sights: (left to right) painted spurfowl spotted in Hampi river basins; the Pampa Sarovar sacred pond, located next to the picturesque Anegondi village (which has guesthouse options) and a temple to Lord Siva and Pampa Devi; tourists glide down the Tungabhadra River

in advance, I stayed in two different places. Anegondi was undoubtedly my favorite, as it has not yet sold its soul to tourism. Moreover, I felt like I was part of the local daily life by easily meeting the villagers. If you are looking for authentic places rather than trendy ones, consider Anegondi!

Another important tip for travelers who want to cover the entirety of Hampi and get a feel of the surroundings—there are several transportation options: cycling, of course, but also scooters, rickshaws or golf buggies. For my part, I decided to walk or bicycle most of the time. I rented a scooter one day, which gave me a great feeling of freedom and allowed me to see several places in only a few hours. I also hired a rickshaw driver named Phillips, who was a great source of information and always ready to share anecdotes about the temples and the villages we passed.

Hampi is now so used to receiving tourists from all over the world that everything has been put in place to make their stay as comfortable and pleasant as possible. There is something for everyone—you just have to choose!

Conclusion

I now know Hampi is great, spectacular, glorious, majestic,

exceptional, amazing and even more. The combination of extraordinary history and breathtaking nature is so uncommon that to discover one aspect at the expense of the other would be to miss what makes Hampi Hampi. Due to the size of the site, the number of ancient monuments and the diversity of the landscape, a trip to Hampi requires time.

While many temples have already been restored, the work of archaeologists continues because many treasures are still buried. Hampi is only slowly revealing itself, still stubbornly hiding some of its mysteries. But even in ruins, any visitor can have the incredible feeling of living the past and can imagine the power that Hampi had when it was still called Vijayanagara. The discoveries that have

already been made have greatly changed the situation of Hampi, as well as of all the neighboring towns and villages. Large-scale and rapid development near the protected site, like the construction of bridges, increased vehicular traffic, the proposed reconstruction of the place, facilities for tourists and the effect of industrial pollution on the river, all raise concerns about Hampi’s future. We hope the City of Victory will win over the challenges of the twenty-first century and continue to enthrall visitors for centuries to come. As for me, rather than crossing Hampi off my list of destinations to visit, I wrote it down again and highlighted it because this first trip only piqued my curiosity and I clearly won’t wait centuries before going back!

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

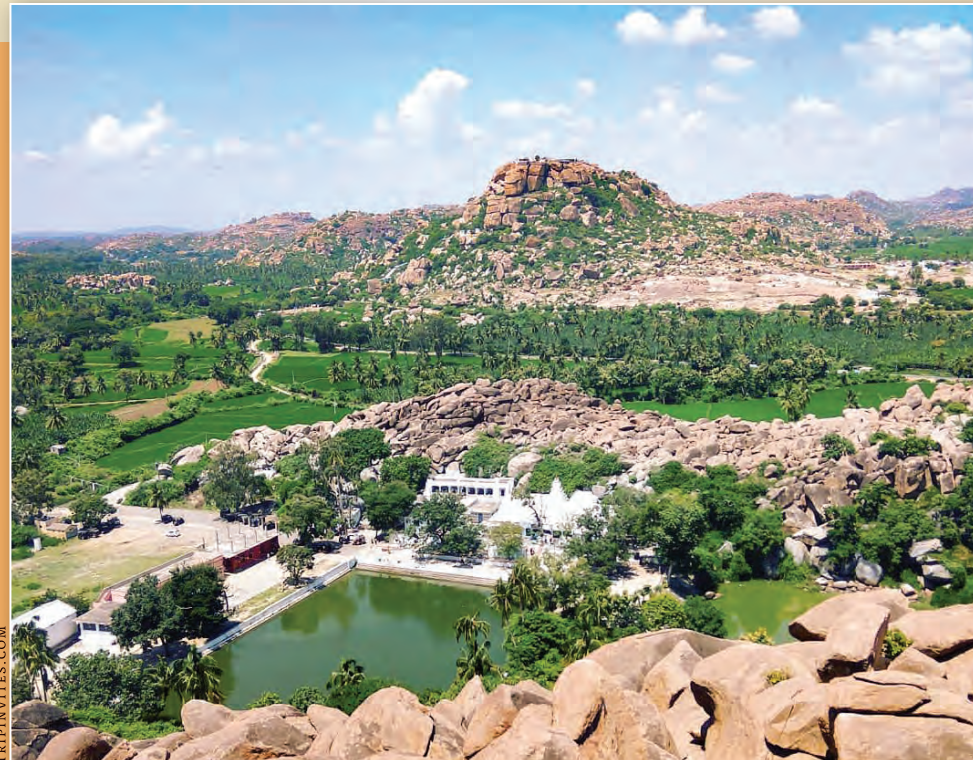


Padma Krishnan is an independent journalist living in India. A certified hatha yoga teacher, she is passionate about exploring commonalities in ancient mystical traditions.



Anne Petry is a French photographer focusing on Indigenous populations. Her nomadic life takes her all over, 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)

Cultural and Educational Institutions





WORSHIP

My Sabarimala Pilgrimage

A devotee's experience of the grueling journey to Sabarimala Temple, hiking through mountain trails to Ayyappa's revealed glory

BY MADAN GANESAN, BENGALURU

TAT TVAM ASI. YOU ARE THAT, THE FUNDAMENTAL truth about the path to moksha. Chant "Swamiye Saranam Ayyappa," and the Lord will always help you. From November through January each year, barefoot devotees of Lord Ayyappa, clad in black and blue, zealously chant this affirmation while walking to Sabarimala Sree Dharma Sastha Temple in the South Indian state of Kerala.

Lord Ayyappa was born out of Supreme God Siva and Mohini, an avatar of God Vishnu. His dharma was to protect the world from the demoness Mahishi, who Supreme God Siva granted could not be killed by anyone born of a mortal man and woman.

Contrary to customary belief, pilgrimage to any temple or holy place actually starts prior to the physical journey. Before making the trip to Sabarimala, one must observe a 41-day period of penance, living a righteous life. This penance is part of the journey, preparing devotees for the greater journey ahead.

Starting the Penance

One needs a *guruswami* to start the Ayyappa *Vrata* (vow). In this context, the term *guruswami* is one who has made the Sabarimala pilgrimage at least 18 times, mastered this vrata, and can guide a group of Ayyappa



devotees. It is always recommended to make the journey as a group.

On the auspicious first day of Karthika month (mid-November), a guruswami or an Ayyappa Temple priest adorns each devotee with a purified and blessed mala made of rudraksha or tulsi beads. This signifies the start of the vrata. Those who cannot find a guruswami or temple priest can wear the mala with the help of their parents. After the mala is put on, one is considered to be the Lord Himself. Thereafter, men are referred to as "swami" and women as "malikaipuram." First-time swamis are referred to as "kanni" swamis. These honorary titles are a constant reminder of the underlying divinity within us all.

Rules to Be Followed

The 41-day penance, said to have been decreed by Lord Ayyappa Himself, is called a *mandala*. During this period, the swami must bathe twice a day in cold water, before



A grand journey: (far left) Pilgrims arrive at the Sabarimala Temple complex; Madan Ganesan, the author (above) the area's rolling hills in Kerala State; (right) a depiction of Lord Ayyappa at a shrine along the pilgrimage route; a group of pilgrims hike the lengthy route to the temple

sunrise and sunset, followed by performing a puja. Practicing ahimsa (nonviolence) and brahmacharya (celibacy) is also supremely important. The mandala involves vegetarianism and abstinence from alcohol and smoking, shaving or getting a haircut. One cannot wear footwear and must sleep only on the floor. It's also vital to practice *annadhanam*—giving of food—and participate in group bhajans. Such renunciation of lavish comforts teaches one to be humble and not tied to the needs of the body, mind or emotion.

How I Began My First Pilgrimage

Long ago, my mother prayed that at least one person from the family would make a pilgrimage to Sabarimala. I was the one. My first time was during my final year in college. I began by wearing a mala, starting my penance, at the Coimbatore Ayyappa temple.

It was not easy to follow the penance in the college living quarters, with so many restrictions. However, getting up at 4am, taking a bath in cold water and walking barefoot to class, none of which I had done before, gave me a feeling of freedom from my earthly limitations. I felt I was expanding. For any college student, the Sabarimala penance will surely give the focus one needs.

Irumudi Kattu and Kettunira

Now, decades later, I had just finished the 41-day penance and we were ready to begin this year's pilgrimage. Before we left home, we





SHUTTERSTOCK

prayed to Lord Karupannaswami (a guardian Deity) to safeguard our families by breaking a coconut in front of the house. Throughout the pilgrimage coconuts are broken at different places, each signifying completion of a milestone and breaking of our egos.

We performed the sacred puja called ket-tunira at the starting temple. The ritual was very powerful, as hundreds of swamis chanted together at the same time; the vibrations are so strong that one forgets all material life. The puja involved a sacred process of pouring ghee inside a dried coconut with the help of a guruswami. Ghee has a special meaning in Hinduism. Milk lasts for a day, then decays. Curd, made from milk, lasts for a week and decays, and butter out of curd lasts for a month and, again, decays. But ghee, made from butter, lasts forever. The process of

making ghee represents how the eternal soul evolves over many earthly experiences.

Guruswami assisted us with the puja and also in preparing our irumudi—a sacred bag carried on one's head. We tied shut the *irumudi* (literally "two knots"), securing the items needed for the journey, such as vibhuti, sandal powder, kumkum, etc. The *irumudi* itself is said to represent the Deity.

While performing irumudi puja, family members and friends also offered their prayers and filled my irumudi bag with rice and coins. During the latter part of my pilgrimage, I learned that this process also signifies the last rites. One's return from a pilgrimage is not guaranteed. While I was on pilgrimage, my family continued the prayer and puja at home.

Close to nature: (clockwise from upper left) A group of female pilgrims, known as malikaipuram, trek their way up a hillside; two young boys take part in their first Sabarimala pilgrimage; the irumudi knapsack of an Ayyappa devotee along the path. These cloth bundles hold offerings and items of worship; pilgrims stop for darshan at a temple along the route

Insights about Offerings

The coconut has three eyes, just like Lord Siva, and is a symbol of Him. Lord Vishnu, in His famous avatar of Lord Krishna, was a cowherd boy who loved ghee, which is a symbol of Him. The irumudi carries both coconut and ghee, signifying the unity of Siva and Vishnu as one God, the offspring of whom is Lord Ayyappa.

In another interpretation, the coconut is considered to be the body, which houses the ghee which symbolizes the eternal soul. At the temple, the coconut is burned while the ghee is offered as abhishekam to Lord Ayyappa. Thus the body is temporal, while the *jiv-atma* (soul), which is eternal and ultimately merges with the *paramatma* (universal soul).

I was anxious to join a random group for the pilgrimage. As mentioned earlier, devotees are guided by a guruswami. My group included swamis from all sorts of backgrounds: students, bank officers, clerks, police constables and more. However, everyone is equal on the pilgrimage. We learned to see God in each of us and love and respect everyone. The experience was powerful.

Swamis come back time and time again for pilgrimage to Sabarimala. Why? It is their unshakable faith in Lord Ayyappa. Each of their stories is inspiring. One swami, traveling with his five-year-old son who was mute



SHUTTERSTOCK



MADAN GANESAN



MADAN GANESAN

and deaf, had a strong faith that Ayyappa would grace the boy to speak. A guruswami explained to me how his daughters got married with the grace of Lord Ayyappa.

Each time we stopped for food or other needs, everyone chanted zealously, “Swamiye Saranam Ayyappa,” which reinvigorated us all. I could not wait to get darshan. It seemed like every 30 minutes I asked Guruswami, “Are we there yet? How much longer will it take to reach the temple?”

First Stop: Erumeli

After almost 10 hours, we reached Erumeli, about 30 miles beyond the river Pamba. Like Lord Murugan, Lord Ayyappa has six temples: Erumeli, Sori Muthaiyan, Achankovil, Aryankavu, Kulathupuzha and Sabarimala. These correspond to six chakras: *muladhara*,

svadhishtana, *manipura*, *anahata*, *vishudha* and *ajna*, respectively.

Erumeli is the site where Lord Ayyappa defeated the demoness Mahishi. At Erumeli, Lord Ayyappa graces devotees in the form of Lord Sastha. Before going for darshan, we performed a play called *Pettai-Thullal*. We applied colors and danced, losing our identities in the love of the Lord, simulating the victory scene of Lord Ayyappa’s win over demoness Mahishi. Then we bathed in the river and paid tribute to Lord Sastha.

A Traditional Path

Erumeli is the starting point for the traditional path. Swami groups who take this path, which is open only during Makara Jyothi, trek through five mountains. Swami groups who want to take a shorter route

Along the way: (clockwise from right) pilgrims walk through the forest to Sabarimala; the ghats at the Pamba River; a shrine at the Maaligaipuram Devi Temple; temple entrance at Erumeli

drive to Pamba by vehicle.

I had occasion to take the traditional path only once. To be honest, it was really hard. It took about 40 hours to trek from Erumeli to Pamba. Our guruswami never revealed the challenges involved, but just kept motivating us. Now and then, he would assure us that in another three miles we would arrive. Soon catching on to his tricks, we began focusing on Lord Ayyappa. The forest—one of India’s many tiger reserves—was very dense. Forest officers suggested we trek only in groups, since wild animals were around. The guruswami reminded us to chant “Ayyappa” to keep focused and complete the pilgrimage safely.

As we continued our journey that year, we arrived at Kaalai Katti, the location where God Siva had tied his bull, Nandi. After a brief darshan, we continued chanting “Swamiye Saranam Ayyappa” and climbed the Azhudha Hills to the holy Azhudha river. As soon as we touched the water, all the tension in our legs magically vanished. We were told to reach into the water and pick up the first stone we touched, without looking. Our guruswami told us to pray that we get a small stone, so we could carry it easily. The stones we picked represented the karma we create and carry. By taking the challenge we help resolve the karma. We carried this stone to Kalidumkundru (literally, “a place to throw the stone”), where demoness Mahishi was buried.

After another mile or so, we started to climb one of the toughest mountains, Karimalai. At certain points the mountain seems almost vertical. We crawled like babies. Luckily, we crossed this part during the night with the full moon lighting our path, not knowing what was ahead of us. Sometimes it’s helpful to face challenges only as they appear. We were thankful to enjoy annadanam—free offering of food—in appointed spots along the 25-mile stretch, providing us with much-needed energy. We halted at the Karimalai summit and the next day began climbing down. The descent was equally challenging and our legs were tired. But we just kept chanting Ayyappa’s name. After a mile or so, the welcome sounds of river water flowing down the valley reached our ears.

The Holy River Pamba

“Finally!” Guruswami said. We were nearing the holy river Pamba, a special place where baby Ayyappa was discovered by Pandhala Raja, a Pandya king who raised him. The infant was wearing a bell (*mani*) around his



neck; and hence is also called *Manikandan*. Swamis making their third pilgrimage are referred to by this name.

Pamba is the meeting point with swamis who have taken the short path from Erumeli, a two-hour journey. On a short break at Pamba, we took a holy dip in the sacred river to purify ourselves. It is believed Pamba carries blessing equal to that of the river Ganga. The beautiful view from here is like none other. We performed puja to our irumudis and chanted the Ayyappa hymn, praying to the Lord for peaceful darshan.

Security Measures and Traffic Control

Each year nearly 40 million devotees visit Sabarimala during Makara Jyothi. Kerala's Travancore Devaswom Board does an excellent job of managing traffic and ensuring pilgrim safety. In recent years, the board

has introduced an online reservation system (sabarimalaonline.org) to manage the influx. At Pamba, the each pilgrim's reservation is checked, and only those with a booking for the current time slot are allowed to continue. Others can remain at Pamba until their turn comes.

Kannimoola Ganapathi

After the security check, we began ascending the Sabari Hills. Arriving at the Kannimoola Ganapati shrine, we broke a coconut and received darshan of Lord Ganesha. The blessings given by Him are, of course, vital for a good start and the best pilgrimage overall. As we climbed the path, we encountered shrines for Lord Hanuman, Lord Rama, Naga and Goddess Devi and made humble prayers to each.

At the beginning, two paths diverge, one

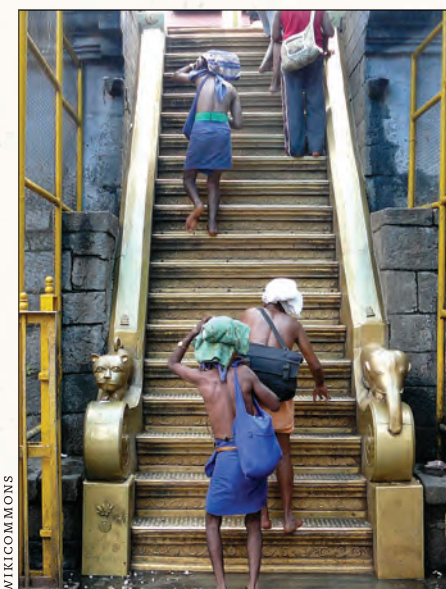
for pilgrims climbing toward the temple and another for pilgrims on the descent. The descending path is called the Subramaniya Path. It is also a utility road for tractors transporting materials, including food items, and by elephants on special puja days. We climbed Neelimala, then Appachimedu and Sarankuthi before finally reaching the *Sannidhanam* (temple complex).

Pathinettam Padi

Many of my guruswamis emphasized the holiness of the Pathinettam Padi, the 18 steps at Sabarimala Temple that lead into the sannidhanam. I was told the steps represent and contain the blessings of all the devatas from the 18 mountains around Sabarimala. They also represent the five senses, eight hindrances to spiritual life (pride, anger, etc.), the three gunas, and the twin forces of ignorance and illumination.

After ascending the wide stone stairway, we took blessings at the temple *kodimaram* (flagpole) and navigated through the ocean of devotees to finally get darshan from Lord Ayyappa inside the temple. Many happy tears were the norm. One may have so many challenges in life, but at the sight of that inner sanctum, all those troubles, all the hard hills, all the thorns and challenges are forgotten. We became newborns in front of Lord Ayyappa. The experience cannot be put into words. I felt mystically, purified and unburdened.

After this beautiful darshan, we made our tributes to the other Deities at the temple sannidhanam. Some devotees poured the ghee they had carries in their knapsacks the sannidhanam ghee tank as an offering. Many



WIKICOMMONS



SHUTTERSTOCK

This is the way: (clockwise from above) the sacred 18 steps up into the temple complex; a pilgrim salutes the gold stairs; devotees worshipping during the Makaravillaku festival; the large, sacred fire pit at Sabarimala Temple complex where the pilgrim's coconuts are burned

..... were buying supplies to take home from the prasadam counters—vibhuti, kumkum, turmeric and Ayyappa ghee.

We circumambulated the temple and prostrated, taking one last dive into the ocean of devotion. Then we slowly descended from the temple and looked for shelter nearby. The Devasom Board has many rooms available for pilgrims based on reservations. Often pilgrims find an available place near the temple. We took shelter at the Ayyappa Seva Sangam and unpacked the irumudi as we chanted and performed puja. We opened the ghee coconut, transferred the ghee (our *atma*) to a clean vessel, and gave it to the temple priest took who poured it over the Ayyappa murti during abhishekam. He then captured some of the blessed ghee from the murti, filled our vessel, and returned it to us. That is the prasadam that we had all awaited. After the abhishekam, we threw our coconut (mystically representing our body) into the fire area near the sacred 18 steps.

Malikappuram Devi

We then went to the Malikappuram Devi Temple to seek darshan. Malikappuram Devi, revered as Lord Ayyappa's mother, She grants devotees the ability to blossom in their lives. It is customary for young women to have new blouse material blessed by Malikappuram Devi to resolve any issues with finding a suitable spouse.

We then proceeded for darshan at Mani-

mandapam, the site of Ayyappa Jiva Samadhi, then saluted Nagadevatha, Navagraha, and every deva present.

A major highlight of my pilgrimage was *angapradhikshanam*, a religious vow to lie down and roll around the temple. I performed it at 1:00am, and the experience was divine. Beforehand I followed the custom of bathing in the warm waters of Bhasmakulam pond near the temple exit gate.

Programs at Sabarimala Temple

The most significant day of the annual Sabarimala pilgrimage is the festival of Makaravillakku, which culminates the pilgrimage season. A sacred fire is lit at Ponnambalamedu summit, representing the crown chakra. From Sabarimala Temple, four kilometers away, devotees witness the fire as Lord Ayyappa in His form of light. Devotees believe they attain the sahasrara chakra within themselves by witnessing this holy Makara Jyothi. On this the special day, Lord Ayyappa dons the golden jewelry that belonged to King Pandalam and offers darshan in the role of "Rajathi Raja" (king).

Sabarimala Temple is only open for pilgrimage for two months a year, from mid-November to mid-January. Makaravillaku is celebrated in mid January (usually the 14th), as the sun enters Capricorn and the Pongal or Sankranti festival is observed in many parts of India.

Providing Annadhanam

No Sabarimala pilgrimage ends without enjoying annadhanam at ABAAS (akhilabharathaayyappaasevasangam-tn.org), a 75-year-old nonprofit organization whose devotional service provides 24/7 free food and medical service at various spots from Erumeli to Sabarimala. They also provide

stretcher service for any kind of medical help across the 30-mile route. Organization member Mr. K. Aiyappan mentioned, "The volunteers' joy of selfless service together with the pure Ayyappa bhakti is the reason for providing such a noble service to all devotees at this scale."

Pure Devotion

Each of my pilgrimages has been like a small reincarnation for me, advancing my soul to its next stage of evolution. When I started my first pilgrimage, I did not think I would ever be completing it a full 18 times. Each one has provided me and those around me with new mystical and positive experiences. The Ayyappa penance is not intended to be followed only during one season of the year; it is intended to be the way one must live every day.

The significance of having a guru in one's life is really something I acquired through the Sabarimala pilgrimage. Gurus who have already traveled the spiritual path can guide the shishya in the proper direction to complete their inner journey.

All the past is burned in the large fire there, reminding me to live in the present, and to follow dharma, nonviolence, and a vegetarian diet—respecting every soul and honoring Mother Earth. The Sabarimala pilgrimage taught me how to live with the bare minimum of things in life, to be simple and healthy. More importantly, I acquired the ability to focus on one goal, Lord Ayyappa, every moment. It helped me subconsciously to focus on any other goal, which, with preparation and the grace of the Lord, can now be achieved with less effort. Along the way, I was able to inspire many to join the Sabarimala pilgrimage, and Lord Ayyappa has brought many wonders into their lives as well.



SHUTTERSTOCK



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA



Year at a Glance

APR	
MAY	
JUN	
JUL	
AUG	Guru Purnima
SEP	Ganesha Chaturthi
OCT	Navaratri
NOV	Diwali
DEC	
JAN	
FEB	Thai Pusam
MAR	Mahasivaratri
	Rama Navami



Hindu Festivals For the Media

Join HINDUISM TODAY in educating the press with accurate and uplifting information about Hinduism

Imprecise information, unflattering photos and an obsession for the bizarre are common when the media features our faith. For most Hindus, there seems little or nothing that can be done about this, except to practice detachment and soulful acceptance. That was the tone at a 2007 Hindu conference in Dallas, Texas, until suddenly the leaders collectively declared, "Enough." Determined to complain less and do more, they masterminded the **Hindu Festival Media Initiative**, a strategic project designed by HINDUISM TODAY in collaboration with the Sanatana Dharma Foundation.

There could be no better time to educate the public about Hindu religion and culture. In 2009, for example, President Obama attended the first Diwali celebration at the White House, an historic moment, complete with Sanskrit chants by a Hindu priest in full garb. Yet, not a single media report rightly explained the festival of lights; a proper description of the festival was found only in the President's brief but inspired speech.

The Pager Project: We selected fifteen major festivals as the core of the project (of which seven are in this Insight). Then, collaborating with Soumya Sitaram posters of Bengaluru, we created a series of "pagers"—ready-to-print, newspaper-sized resources. They match standard US newspapers in journalistic style and size, making them easy to use, especially for publishers with limited staff. Each pager highlights a festival in its celebratory, community and family aspects. In the "Fact and Fiction" section and elsewhere, the pagers introduce Hindu philosophical, cultural and spiritual ideas. These resources can also be sent to bloggers and digital publishers, who can repurpose them for their audience.

How the Program Works: Newspapers welcome input from faith communities if the material is of high editorial quality, with polished text and eye-catching photos—more so if it's free. Motivated Hindus are encouraged to approach their local newspapers' religion or lifestyle editors with the appropriate pager in the weeks before each festival. Editors may elect to use them as is, or draw from the graphics and words and adapt them to their own style. Television and public radio stations can also be approached; the pagers can provide a comprehensive and authentic summary for voice-overs. They are available on the web as teaching resources for families, schools, summer camps, temples, ashrams, bloggers, etc.

How You Can Participate: Talk to your local temple board, the local Hindu association and newspapers in your area. Visit hinduismtoday.com/magazine/april-may-june-2010/2010-04-introduction-to-the-festival-features/ for more information. At hinduismtoday.com/festival-pager-downloads/ you will find all the pagers in PDF format with instructions on how to best use them. No matter where you live, these festival summaries will provide your local media with informative, factual information about your faith. By preemptively explaining how Hindus experience and understand Sanatana Dharma, we bridge the "we/they" cultural gap, proactively in bringing more tolerance, acceptance and understanding into the world.

7 hindu festivals!

JOYOUS OCCASIONS THAT ARE THE HEART AND SOUL OF SANATANA DHARMA

HINDUISM IS CELEBRATORY BY NATURE. Hindus miss no opportunity to set mundane matters aside and join with family, friends, neighbors and strangers alike to feast and have fun, to renew the home and the heart and, most importantly, draw nearer to God.

Festivals are perhaps more impressive and varied in Hinduism than in any other religion. The devout Hindu knows these are times of profound mysticism, when God and the Gods touch our world, revitalize our souls, lighten karmas and bless our families.

Yet festivals do even more than this: they are essential to the perpetuation of religion, periodically reigniting the spark of zeal and devotion

in the community. They provide the spiritual public square where Hindus engage with one another, affirming shared values and enjoy-

ing life's intersections.

Before each celebration, vows are taken, scriptures are studied, pilgrimages are trodden and fasts observed in preparation—all individual acts of intimate devotion that bring the devotee closer to the Gods and keep him on the path to his inmost Self. As each festival begins, solitary adoration becomes a collective ritual, with millions of people taking their places in an ad-hoc choreography. Tradition is followed, but the result is never the same; every festival is special and unforgettable in its own way.

Thus the Hindu is reminded of his faith by the sounds, scents





Ganesha Chaturthi

Honoring the Lord of Beginnings

During Ganesha Chaturthi, a ten-day festival in August/September, elaborate puja ceremonies are held in Hindu temples around the world honoring Ganesha, the benevolent, elephant-faced Lord of Obstacles. In millions of home shrines, worship is also offered to a

clay image of Ganesha that the family makes or obtains. At the end of ten days, Hindus join in a grand parade, called *visarjana* in Sanskrit, to a river, temple tank, lake or sea-shore, where His image is ceremonially immersed, symbolizing Ganesha's merging into universal consciousness.



Who is Ganesha?

Perennially happy, playful, unperturbed and wise, this rotund Deity removes obstacles to good endeavors and obstructs negative ventures, thus guiding and protecting the lives of devotees. He is the patron of art and science, the God inhabiting all entryways, the gatekeeper who blesses all beginnings. When initiating anything—whether learning, business, weddings, travel, building and more—Hindus seek His grace for success. He is undoubtedly the most endearing, popular and widely worshiped of all the Hindu Deities. Ganesha Chaturthi (also called Vinayaka Chaturthi) falls on the fourth day in the waxing fortnight of the month of Bhadrapada in the sacred Hindu lunar calendar, which each year translates to a certain day in August–September. It is essentially a birthday celebrating Ganesha's divine appearance.

What do people do on Ganesha Chaturthi?

Devotees often fashion or purchase a Ganesha statue out of unbaked clay. Many sculpt Him out of a special mixture of turmeric, sandalwood paste, cow dung, soil from an anthill and palm sugar. The Deity image



is placed in the home shrine amongst traditional decorations. A rite of worship and prayer, called puja, is conducted daily, invoking the energies of the Deity and inviting Him to reside in the clay image. Mantras are chanted and offerings are made throughout the puja, including incense, lighted lamps, cooked food (*naivedya*), fruits, durva grass, tulasi and pomegranate leaves—and flowers, especially red ones. After ten days, a simple puja is performed before the statue is taken for a formal departure (*visarjana*). Often entire communities, from dozens to tens of thousands of devotees, gather each year for this final day of ceremony. The icons are carried on an

ornate metal tray—larger images are borne on a palanquin by several strong men—to a lake, a river or the sea. There Ganesha is consigned to the water after removing any non-degradable paraphernalia.

What foods are offered?

Sumptuous foods are specially prepared for Ganesha, keeping in mind His elephantine nature and prodigious appetite. People offer several varieties of fruits such as mangoes, bananas and sugarcane. Sweets are the elephant-headed Deity's delight, so to express their love families take great pains to make special tasty treats. Each family has its recipes.



Modaka Sweets

These rich, deep-fried, fluffy, sweet dollops are the Mangalorean equivalent of the Tamil *kollukattai*. It is the all-time favorite of Lord Ganesha, who is described as Modaka Hasta, one with the modaka in His hand.

Preparation time: 10 minutes.

Cooking time: 30 minutes

Makes 20 pieces

Cooking equipment: A wok or deep saucepan, a perforated ladle, a lined colander to drain excess oil, a mixing bowl and serving plate.

Ingredients

4 cups thin beaten rice (poha),
1 cup semolina (rava) flour, 1 cup rice flour,
1 cup slightly over-ripe bananas, mashed,
1 cup powdered jaggery (or brown sugar),
1/8 tsp salt,
oil to deep fry

Method

1. Mix all the ingredients together except the oil.
2. Add a little water and knead the mixture gently into a thick paste.
3. Heat the oil in the wok.
4. Drop tablespoonfuls of the batter into moderately hot oil and fry till rich brown. Drain and cool, then enjoy!

Tidbits About Ganesha

* Where is this festival most popular?

Nowhere is Ganesha Chaturthi observed with more creativity and enthusiasm than in Mumbai, India. The city virtually shuts down as millions of Hindus celebrate.

* Why is Ganesha worshiped first?

Lord Brahma declared that any worship conducted without seeking Ganesha's blessings would be fruitless. He is considered a loving, playful, protective Deity whose blessings would grace any endeavor. He is therefore ceremonially invoked before weddings, housewarmings, taking an important exam, starting a new business and other important events.

* What is His mystical work?

Lord Ganesha is the God Hindus pray to when changes occur in their lives as they move from old established patterns into new ones. He is always there to steady the minds of devotees and open the proper doors as they evolve and progress.

* What makes Him distinctive?

Aside from His unique and endearing elephant head, Ganesha carries an elephant goad to prod us along the right path. He holds a noose to lasso foes of dharma and to draw devotees close when they venture off the spiritual path. His mount is a mouse. His big belly is said to contain the fullness of the cosmos. In His hand is a modaka, fruit or other sweet, symbolic of enlightened attainments.

Fact & Fiction

FACT: There is not just one path to God Realization in Hinduism, but many. Tens of thousands of distinct teaching lineages prescribe varying combinations of prayer, rites and rituals, meditation, chanting and the many yogas to guide followers in their spiritual evolution.

FICTION: Many wrongly believe that Hindus worship cows. Hindus don't worship cows. They respect, honor and adore the cow. By honoring this gentle animal, who gives more than she takes, Hindus honor all creatures.



Guru Purnima

Honoring the Illumined Teachers

Hindu scriptures assert that more valuable than gold, and far more rare, is a guru, a knower of spiritual truths, also called a satguru. A guru is the devotee's best friend, a father and a mother, a trusted confidant and a demanding mentor and guide on the path to God. The guru embodies all that the spiritual seeker aspires to be; in the guru, one sees his own infinite potential. Hindus honor these rare leaders on Guru Purnima, the full moon day in June/July, the Hindu month of Ashada.

What is Guru Purnima?

Guru Purnima is the annual festival which honors spiritual teachers, preceptors and mentors who dispel the darkness of ignorance by bringing forth wisdom and illumination. *Purnima* is the Sanskrit word for full moon.

What are the customs of Guru Purnima?

On this special day all of one's thoughts are focused on the holy preceptor, tuning into his or her mind, meditating on his teachings and expressing gratitude for his or her blessings and guidance. In ashrams, monasteries, halls and home shrines, Hindus gather to venerate the guru of their lineage. The day's primary activity is a formal ritual,

called puja, in which his holy feet or a pair of his sandals are honored. At the guru's major centers, the puja is a grand event, preceded



by a festive procession. It is especially auspicious to pilgrimage to the guru's ashram or monastery on this day.

Why is the full moon of Ashada the day of the guru?

In India, this day marks the start of the four-month monsoon season. Traditionally, mendicant saints do not wander during this inclement time, but settle in temporary camps where devotees gather to partake of their wisdom. The first day of learning was dedicated to honoring the preceptor, and it is believed this custom became established as

Guru Purnima. The full moon is also known as a propitious time for attaining fulfillment, completeness and spiritual advancement, and for beginning all new endeavors.

Why are the guru's feet the focus of veneration?

According to tradition, God's presence can be most clearly and completely felt in the illumined satguru. To sit at his feet is to be close to God and our own deepest Self. All nerve currents terminate in the feet. Vital energy points relating to every organ of his physical and



inner bodies—astral, mental and soul—are there. Touch the feet and we touch the spiritual master. Venerating the feet of the guru is also an acknowledgement of our deep respect and our knowledge that by following his footsteps we will attain spiritual perfection.

Are gurus worshiped as God?

A few Hindu denominations worship their gurus as the embodiment of God, and may even revere him as an avatar. But most Hindus see their guru as a great illumined soul in whom God's presence is most powerfully apparent.

Tidbits About the Guru

✳ **What is the guru's role?** It is the guru's task to lead aspirants to God. He sets souls on the spiritual path, corrects those who stray, softens karmas, inspires lifelong practice and, through initiations, awakens the seeker's superconscious knowing. He helps us become aware of our shortcomings and strengths and gives us tools to overcome weaknesses and refine ourselves. The guru, knowledgeable in Hinduism's scriptures, its sacred, practical and philosophical treatises, has the ability to help us unlock their esoteric meaning and gain insight as we study. He guides us in our meditations, helping us navigate the mind and ultimately transcend it.

✳ **What is darshan?** Darshan, literally "sight," is the mystical meeting of guru and devotee. Hindus travel great distances to experience darshan and receive the blessings of a illumined soul established in his enlightenment. Hindus believe that the spiritual power, called shakti, coming from a great soul accelerates their spiritual evolution, changes patterns in their life by

purifying their subconscious mind, renewing their spirit and commitment to religious life.

✳ **Are all gurus renunciate monks?** Hindu spiritual teachers may be either unmarried renunciates or householders. Many Hindu institutions are led by luminaries who follow the householder path. Most gurus, however, are celibate monks—swamis, sadhus or acharyas—who have renounced worldly life and received initiation into a monastic order.

✳ **Are gurus centrally organized?** Hinduism is actually a multitude of faiths and lineages loosely bound together by common beliefs and practices. There is no central organization. Each guru within his or her own sphere of devotees is the authority on religious matters, his or her wisdom sought and words obeyed. Some are heads of institutions with large followings, while others are reclusive sadhus who rarely appear in public.



Traditional Offerings

When visiting a guru, just as when going to a temple, devotees bring an offering, such as flowers, fruits (a lime is traditional) and, for renunciate gurus, a piece of unstitched cloth. These items are presented in a basket or on a metal tray. A monetary gift, called *dakshina*, wrapped in a betel leaf, is often included. In ancient days, gurus were given gold by the king and cows by the wealthy to sustain their schools and allow them to freely share wisdom.

Fact & Fiction

FACT: Hindus consider the mother to be a child's first guru. She and the father are responsible for their offspring's upbringing, welfare and education. Upon coming of age, youth may turn to a satguru to begin their spiritual training.

FICTION: Some incorrectly criticize Hinduism as a world-negating faith that overemphasizes asceticism and austerity. In fact, while its large contingent of celibate monks pursue the path of renunciation, yoga and deep meditation, the vast majority of Hindus are householders dynamically engaged in family life, career and community service. Tradition affirms the pursuit of four goals: righteousness, wealth, pleasure (including sensual) and liberation.



Mahasivaratri

Siva's Great Night

Mahasivaratri is the most important festival dedicated to God Siva. This holy day is observed by millions of Hindus all over the world. It is one of Hinduism's most esoteric holy days, when yoga practices, mantras and meditation take the devotee closer to God's essence within the core of himself. Hindus typically fast, maintain silence and stay up all night to perform spiritual practices, such as worshiping, chanting and singing. In some regions, devotees visit as many Siva temples as they can on this night.

Who is Siva?

For hundreds of millions of Hindus Siva is the Supreme Being, the absolute One God who both transcends creation and pervades it—thus existing as our own innermost essence. Siva is the powerful Deity whose energetic dance creates, sustains and dissolves the universe in endless cycles. He is the master yogi delving into unfathomable mysteries, the supreme ascetic, the prime mystic, the Light behind all light, the Life within all life. Siva is often called Mahadeva, "Great Being of Light," for He created other, lesser Gods such as Ganesha and Karttikeya. Although Siva is usually depicted as male, in reality God and the Gods are beyond gender and form, as depicted by His half-male, half-female form, Ardhanarishvara. Parvati, regarded as Siva's consort in village Hinduism,



HINDUISM TODAY

is mystically understood as His manifest energy, inseparable from Him. The ancient *Tirumantiram* scripture says of Siva, "Himself creates. Himself preserves. Himself destroys. Himself conceals. Himself all of this He does and then grants liberation—Himself the all-pervading Lord."

What happens on Mahasivaratri?

Many Hindus perform an all-night vigil, plunging the soul into its own essence, led by Siva, the supreme yogi, who is both the guide and the goal of the search. Staying awake through the night is a sacrifice and a break from life's normal routine, a time out of time to be with God within, to reach for the realization of our true, immortal Self. Siva is known as Abhisheka Priya, "He who loves sacred ablutions," and thus many temples and home shrines have water always dripping on the Sivalinga. On this special night, Sivalingas are bathed with special substances, sometimes several times. Mahasivaratri occurs on the night before the new moon in February/March.

What is the Sivalinga?

Linga means "mark, token or sign." A Sivalinga, representing Siva, is found in virtually all of His temples. The Sivalinga is the simplest and most ancient symbol



WWW.DINODIA.COM

of the Divine. It is especially evocative of Parasiva, God beyond all forms and qualities, the unmanifested Absolute. Sivalingas are commonly made of stone, but may also be of metal, precious gems, crystal, wood, earth or even transitory materials like sand or ice. Ardent devotees make special Sivalingas to worship during Mahasivaratri.

Is there a special mantra for Siva?

Namah Sivaya is among the foremost Vedic mantras. It means "adoration to Siva" and is called the Panchakshara, or "five-letters." The five elements, too, are embodied in this ancient formula for invocation. Na is earth, Ma is water, Si is fire, Va is air, and Ya is ether, or space.

Tidbits About Mahasivaratri

✳ **What is holy ash?** Holy ash is a sacrament that is dear to devotees of Siva. Taken from sacred fires, it purifies and blesses those who wear it. This fine, white powder is worn on the forehead as a reminder of the temporary nature of the physical body and the urgency to strive for spiritual attainment and closeness to God.

✳ **What is the special offering to Siva?** Hindus believe that offering bilva leaves (*Aegle marmelos*) on Mahasivaratri is most auspicious. Legend tells of a hunter who was chased by a tiger. Scrambling up a thorny tree, he plucked and dropped its leaves to stay alert. The tree was a bilva. The leaves happened to fall on a Sivalinga, and it was the night of Sivaratri. That all-night worship of God, though inadvertent, earned the hunter liberation from rebirth.

Siva accepts devotees irrespective of their faults and foibles, forgiving man's cognizant and innocent mistakes.

✳ **What is the Kumbha Mela?** The Kumbha Mela is a grand festival held every few years in rotation at four places where several sacred rivers converge: Haridwar, Prayag, Nasik and Ujjain. The largest melas, at Haridwar and Prayag, fall in January to April and often include Mahasivaratri. Devotees come from near and far to immerse themselves in the holy waters, with prayers for purification and spiritual liberation on their lips. In 2001, the Kumbha Mela at Prayag, held on the river bank, was attended by more than 60 million people. It was the biggest human gathering held on Earth, seven times the population of New York City.



DREAMSTIME

Fasting & Silence

Virtually every Hindu festival comes with a sumptuous list of foods to feast on, but during Mahasivaratri most Hindus fast. A spiritual practice found in almost all of the world's religions, fasting calms the physical, mental and emotional energies, helping the devotee draw nearer to the ineffable Self within. While the strictest fast on nothing but water; others permit themselves fruits, milk or rice. Many observe silence on this night, thinking of nothing but God. Silence, known in Sanskrit as *mauna*, quiets the demands of the mind and body, bringing forth spiritual clarity.

In Hinduism, God is not separate from His creation. A virtuous life and certain techniques, such as yoga and ascetic practices, enables us to remove the veil that makes us think of ourselves as separate from Him.

Fact & Fiction

FACT: Hindus undergo numerous traditional rites of passage at critical junctures throughout life. These ceremonies invoke divine blessings for the individual and help bind him with his community as he advances on the path of virtue. Name-giving, first feeding, commencement of learning, coming of age, marriage and cremation are primary examples.

FICTION: It is commonly believed that rituals are mandatory. In fact, there are no absolute requirements within Hinduism. Each devotee is free to practice his faith according to his family tradition and personal preferences.



Navaratri

Dedicating 9 Nights to the Goddess

Millions of Hindu women consider Navaratri the year's central festival, the one they most deeply connect to. These nine days dedicated to Shakti, the Goddess, provide an opportunity to seek blessings and commune with their own divinity. It is a time for sacred gatherings, austerities, selfless acts and intimate prayers. But Navaratri is not just for the ladies; everyone turns out for the joyous worship, festivities, plays, feasting and dance—all venerating God as the loving Mother Spirit that gives life to everything.



What do Hindus do for Navaratri?

Navaratri starts on the new moon of September/October. On the first day, it is customary to plant seeds in a clay pot which will sprout over the next nine days. In some communities, women prepare a specially decorated *kalasha*, a vessel symbolizing the fertile womb, representing the Goddess. Especially in cities in Tamil Nadu, families create elaborate shelf displays, called *kolu*, of handmade clay dolls. Adding new dolls each year and handing the collection down to the next generation results in some grand displays.

How is Navaratri observed in homes?

Each night, the Goddess "holds court," and special food offerings are presented as prayers eulogizing Her powers are chanted. Guests are invited to showcase their artistic skills, and all enjoy sweets and other treats. Women dress up and visit female friends and relatives, taking a tray of offerings which includes the betel leaf and nut that bear the gravity of a formal contract of friendship and loyalty. Other items on the tray—beauty accessories, fresh turmeric root and coconut—symbolize goodwill and fertility. They fast, pray morning and evening, and give food and cooking pots to the poor. Some families formally honor a prepubescent girl each day, giving her new clothes, treating her to a sumptuous lunch, and pampering her, affirming her femininity and affinity with the Goddess.

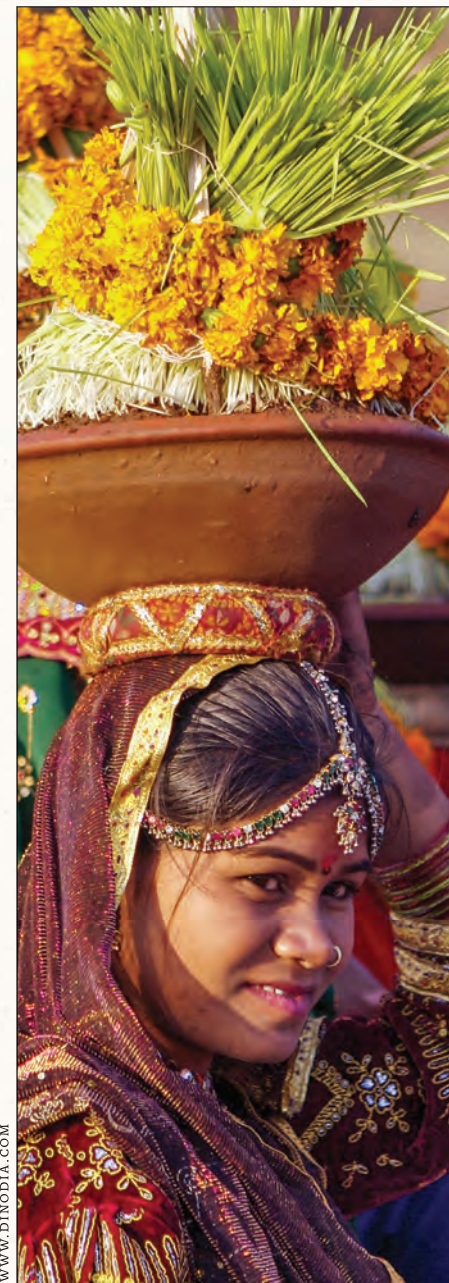
How are Shakti's forms worshiped?

In South India the first three days are dedicated to Goddess Durga, the fierce Mother who decimates negative forces. For the next three days, Lakshmi, the Goddess of prosperity, is revered. The last three days are dedicated to Sarasvati, the Goddess of learning and wisdom. In this way, Hindus honor women as the protectors of the family, extol their powers of fertility and endurance, venerate them as the source of good fortune and revere them as repositories of culture and learning. In North India one of the nine aspects of Durga is venerated each day. These nine days are celebrated by communities in East India as Durga

Puja, treating the Goddess as the Daughter who has come to Her maternal home for an annual visit.

What is the final day?

Vijaya Dashami, "triumphant tenth day," celebrates Durga's legendary victory over Mahishasura, a powerful being fraught with ignorance and selfishness. On the same day, many celebrate Rama's victory over the evil Ravana. The celebration is a reminder to persist in the challenges we face in life. Local traditions vary widely, and this day is known by other names, including Dussehra, Dasara and Dashain.



Tidbits About Navaratri

✳ **What special events occur on Maha Navami, the ninth day?** Books, musical instruments, equipment and tools are placed before Goddess Sarasvati for blessings, seeking Her gifts of talent, ability and inspiration. This rite, called Ayudha (weapon or tool) Puja, began when the kings of ancient India had their weapons blessed. Today any tool of one's trade may be consecrated: craftsmen's tools, books, offices, vehicles, computers, even iPhones! Devotees reflect on their skills, strengths, goals and needs. A key rite of passage for children ages three to five is performed on this day. Called *vidyarambha*, "beginning of learning," it marks the start of a child's formal education.

✳ **Are there group festivities?** In the evenings, devotees gather to dance in halls and public squares. The Garba, Gujarat's popular folk dance, is a vigorous dance performed in circles while twirling, jumping, flailing the arms, clapping rhythmically and stepping in sync. In the Dandiya-Ras, sticks are part of the choreography. Dancing is a community expression of joy and togetherness.



SOUFYA SITARAMAN

Sundal

This is a high-protein, low-oil dish made from steamed or boiled whole chickpeas.

Preparation time: Approx. 1 hour

Serves: 6

Equipment: A pressure cooker, a ladle, a wok or saucepan and a dish

Ingredients

1 cup chickpeas, ½ tsp turmeric powder, 3 tbsp to ½ cup grated coconut, 1 tsp black mustard seeds, broken dried red chillies (to taste), ½ tsp asafoetida powder, sliced green chillies (optional), curry leaves, salt

Method

1. Beforehand, soak the chickpeas for 12 hours. Cook with the turmeric powder and salt in a pressure cooker (1:2 ratio of beans to water) until soft but firm, not mushy. Drain and set aside.
2. Heat ghee; add the mustard seeds and let them pop.
3. Add the curry leaves, chillies and asafoetida; roast the mixture slightly.
4. Add the cooked chickpeas. Stir gently over a low flame, taking care not to mash them.
5. Add grated coconut and salt to taste. Mix well.
6. Enjoy!

Hinduism: Fact & Fiction

FACT: Hindus place high value on self improvement through education and learning of all kinds. In bygone days women and men were educated from age seven: students lived as part of their teacher's family. Hindus revere women as the guardians of culture, family, religion, learning and prosperity. Modern Hindu society has the highest number of female spiritual leaders in the world.

FICTION: Many wrongly believe that Hindu women are prohibited from learning, performing rites, ritual and prayer. Hindu women are not oppressed or considered unequal to men, but honored and respected. Hinduism is the only major religion to honor God's feminine power!



Diwali

Celebrating the Triumph of Goodness

If you rolled a bit of Christmas, New Year's Eve and the Fourth of July all into one, then catered the affair with mountains of sweets and savory snacks, you would have a taste of what it means to celebrate Diwali, India's best-known festival. It is a day of Hindu solidarity, when

all Hindus gather in love and trust. It is observed by lighting rows of oil lamps and exchanging greeting cards, clothing and other gifts. Family bonds are strengthened and forgiveness sought. For many, Diwali marks the beginning of the new year. Joyous festivities and parties abound.

What occurs on Diwali?

Diwali (or Deepavali, "row of lights") is celebrated by Hindus worldwide to commemorate the triumph of good over evil, knowledge over ignorance, hope over despair. Oil-wick lamps are lit in every household, along with colorful strings of electric lights, causing the home, village and community to sparkle with dancing flames. The festival falls on the day before the new moon in the month of Ashwin (October/November). Communities spare nothing in celebration. Lavish spreads of sweets and treats reflect unfettered partying. Diwali lehyam—a potent concoction made with ginger, pepper, ghee and more—is provided to help gourmands digest the sumptuous feast. Families reach out to each other with gifts of sweets, dried fruit and crunchy, salty treats. Everyone wears colorful new clothing and many even



new jewelry. Girls and women decorate their hands with henna designs.

What does lamp-lighting signify?

In Hindu culture, light is a powerful metaphor for knowledge and consciousness. It is a reminder of the preciousness of education, self-inquiry and improvement, which bring harmony to the individual, the community and between communities. By honoring light, we affirm the fact that from knowing arises respect for and acceptance of others. Lighting lamps reminds Hindus to keep on the right path, to dispel darkness from their hearts and minds, and to embrace knowledge and goodness.

What legends are associated with Diwali?

In the sacred text *Ramayana*, Diwali marks the return of Rama to his kingdom after defeating Ravana, the demon



king who ruled Sri Lanka and kidnapped Rama's pious wife, Sita. It also celebrates Krishna's victory over Narakasura, the demon of ignorance. Rama and Krishna are earthly incarnations, or avatars, of Vishnu.

Does ritual bathing play a part?

Diwali marks the conquest of negative forces. To wipe away all traces of life's struggle, the negative and draining energies of strife, Hindus invoke the waters of India's holiest rivers—Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Sarasvati, Narmada, Indus and Kaveri—into water

collected in urns in preparation for an ablution after an oil massage. The special bath cleanses the physical and auric energies of the individual. Fragrant powders of dried lentils, roots, aromatic seeds, leaves and flowers are used to remove the oil. Families then don fine new clothes, beautiful patterns are drawn on the ground, and lamps are lit until entire streets glow. The annual White House observance of Diwali in Washington, D.C., is illumined by the gentle glow of a standing oil lamp lit by the president.

Tidbits About Diwali

* **What else is done for Diwali?** *Melas*, or fairs, are held in all Indian towns and villages. In the countryside, the *mela* includes a festive marketplace where farmers bring their produce to sell and clothing vendors have a heyday.

* **What are the giant effigies that are burned by big crowds?** Huge effigies of Ravana, with ten heads, are built of straw and filled with firecrackers. They are burned as a joyous, symbolic cleansing from evil, and lights are lit in every home, just as residents of Ayodhya did to welcome home their victorious king, Rama.

* **What about giving during Diwali?** Gifts are freely exchanged, and special prayers are offered to Lakshmi for a prosperous year. Such ritual worship for abundance is also directed

to Kubera, a celestial being who bestows riches to mortals. Some believe that, to preserve family wealth, money should not be borrowed, loaned or given away on Diwali or the day after.



Indian Carrot Sweet

Carrot Halwa

Preparation time: 20 minutes

Cooking time: 60 minutes

Serves: 6-8

Equipment: A small wok or round-bottomed pan, a ladle and a serving dish.

Ingredients

4 cups/1 kg grated carrots, 1 cup sugar, 2½ cups milk, 1½ ladles ghee, a few cashews and raisins, 2 cardamom pods

Method

1. Wash, peel and grate the carrots.
2. Fry the cashews, raisins and cardamom in ghee and set aside.
3. Heat a ladle of ghee in the pan. Add the grated carrots and sauté.
4. Add enough milk to soak the carrots and cook on low heat, stirring occasionally, until carrots are soft. Add the remaining milk, a ladle at a time, and cook until the milk thickens, then stir in the sugar.
5. Cook over low heat until everything blends together into a firm mass that separates from the sides of the pan.
6. Garnish with the fried cashews, cardamom and raisins. Top with a little ghee and pistachio slivers for extra flavor.

Hinduism: Fact & Fiction

FACT: Believing that the Divine resides in all things, Hindus practice non-injury and hold a deep respect, bordering on reverence, for all living beings. This embracing attitude is reflected in India's history of welcoming refugees from all cultures and faiths. By following dharma, Hindus eschew violence and terror. Secure in their faith, they interact harmoniously with their neighbors, regardless of religious affiliation.

FICTION: Many people wrongly believe that Hindus, being proud of their religion, may disdain other cultures. In fact, Hindus fully accept the spiritual efficacy of other paths and never proselytize.



Rama Navami

Birthday of Rama, the Ideal Man

An incarnation of God, an ideal man, dutiful son and just king: these are just a few ways to describe Lord Rama, an exemplar of honor, reverence, self-control and duty. He fought battles, became king, married a Goddess, traveled far and befriended

exotic beings who were steadfast in their loyalty and courage. Rama Navami is the celebration of His birthday, when Hindus honor and remember Him with devotional singing, dramatic performance and non-stop recitation of His remarkable life story, the *Ramayana*.

When is Rama's birth celebrated?

Rama was born on *navami*, the ninth day of the waxing moon, in the Indian month of Chaitra (late March or early April). Sometimes the festival is observed for nine days before or after *navami*.

How do Hindus observe Rama Navami?

Devotees fast or eat only fruit or special food offerings prepared for the day. They participate in non-stop reading of the 24,000-verse epic *Ramayana*, at home or in a temple. Images or statues of baby Rama are placed in cradles and rocked by devotees. Homes resound with singing. In the evening, crowds attend *Ramlila*, in which storytellers and dance-drama troupes depict the *Ramayana*. It is common to remain awake the whole night, engaged in devotional

practices. Devotees contribute generously to temples and charitable organizations. They make buttermilk and a lime drink called *panaka*, serving them to the public without charge. Some temples make *khoa*, a sweet made from thickened milk. This festival is especially popular in Uttar Pradesh, where Rama's kingdom of Ayodhya is located.

Is the festival observed at temples?

Many temples hold grand celebrations on this day, especially those with shrines for Lord Rama, His wife Sita, His brother Lakshmana and His loyal friend Hanuman. *Panaka* and garlands of the sacred *tulsi* plant are offered as families pray for "Rama-Rajya," a time when dharma will once again be upheld in the world. In South India, the day is celebrated as the marriage anniversary of Rama and Sita. A ceremonial wedding is held at temples with great fanfare.



Why is Rama so popular?

Rama is one of the ten avatars or incarnations of Lord Vishnu. He is revered as the perfect husband and ruler, who held duty to king and country above all else. He held strong to his ideals in the face of tremendous trials, including exile from His kingdom and separation from His beloved wife, Sita, herself an embodiment of virtue and truth. He is honored and glorified for His unshakable adherence to dharma, righteousness. The story of Rama is deeply influential and popular in the societies of the Indian subcontinent and across Southeast Asia.

What is the story of Rama?

A tale of love and separation, the *Ramayana*

has moved the hearts of millions of Hindus over the ages. To honor a promise made by his father, King Dasaratha, prince Rama abandons His claim to the throne and spends 14 years in exile. Wife Sita and brother Lakshmana join him in exile, a time of perils and tribulations. Sita is abducted by Ravana, the monarch of Lanka. After a long and arduous search, Rama discovers Sita's whereabouts, with the help of Hanuman. A colossal war ensues against Ravana's armies. In a duel of majestic proportions, powerful and magical beings wield mighty weaponry in formidable battles. Rama slays Ravana and liberates Sita. Having completed His exile, Rama returns to be crowned king, loved by one and all.

Tidbits About Rama

* **Who wrote the epic?** Some 25 centuries ago, a sage ordered a thief to sit under a tree and chant "ma-ra" until he returned. Years passed, and an ant-hill covered the man, who had lost himself to the chant. The sage returned and broke the anthill, naming the thief Valmiki, meaning "from an anthill." Inspired by his expanded awareness, Valmiki

immortalized Rama by composing the *Ramayana*, a work unmatched in poetic excellence and longevity. *Shri Ramcharitmanas* by Tulsidas in Hindi and the *Kamba Ramayanam* by the poet Kambar in Tamil stand alongside Valmiki's epic in Sanskrit.

* **Who was Sita?** Sita was a powerful, gifted, beautiful woman, utterly devoted to her husband. Found in the fields as a babe by King Janaka, Sita was raised as a princess. She walked alongside Rama in exile. When abducted by Ravana, she was unshakable in her faith that her husband would rescue her. She walked through fire to prove her purity. To prevent further slander, Rama sent her away to the forest. She patiently bore separation from her husband a second time and bore twins named Lav and Kush. When they were reunited with their father, she commanded Mother Earth to swallow her. The Earth split open and Sita disappeared.



Panaka

Sweet Indian Limeade

Ingredients

½ cup of jaggery or brown sugar, 4 cups water, juice of one lime, 1½ tsp of grated fresh ginger, 1 tsp ghee or oil, a pinch of cardamom powder

Method

Mix ingredients and serve cold.

Spicy Buttermilk

Ingredients

2 cups buttermilk or yogurt, 2 cups water, 3 curry leaves, chopped coriander leaves (cilantro), 1 finely chopped green chilli, 1½ tsp ginger powder, 1 tsp mustard seeds, 1 pinch asafoetida, salt to taste

Method

Heat oil in saucepan and add mustard seeds; allow it to splutter, then add curry leaves, ginger, green chilies and asafoetida, stirring vigorously. Mix with remaining ingredients and beat until smooth.

Hinduism: Fact & Fiction

FACT: Hinduism has more than one sacred scripture, with several books considered revered or holy. While all Hindus revere the sanctity of the primordial *Vedas*, distinct sects recognize scripture that is most aligned with their theological beliefs, but not universal to all Hindus. Examples are the *Agamas*, *Ramayana*, *Puranas* and *Mahabharata*.

FICTION: Some deride Hinduism as primitive because certain of its Deities have animal features. Actually, most religions share this characteristic. The Greek God Pan and the Egyptian Deities Anubis and Horus are examples. In Christianity and Judaism, the biblical prophet Ezekiel describes the angels known as *cherubim* as having the faces of a lion, an ox, an eagle and a man, with the feet of a calf and four wings.



Thai Pusam

Honoring the God of Yoga

By many names we know Him. He is Murugan, the beautiful one. He is Dandapani, the God of yoga who guides us on the path to Self Realization. He is Kumara, the God of child-like love, holding steady the higher realms of creation. He is Karttikeya, the God

of war, who arrives to end all conflicts with piercing wisdom and swift action. During January/February, the Tamil month of Thai, millions gather to worship and honor Him with fervor. He has a growing number of temples in North America and around the world.



How is Thai Pusam celebrated?

Devotees prepare themselves through prayer and fasting. On the day of the festival, many shave their heads, an act of sacrifice that symbolizes humility and the surrender of vanity. They undertake a pilgrimage to a place where Thai Pusam is being celebrated, usually a temple, while performing acts of devotion and penance. The most notable practices are the carrying of *kavadis* ("burdens"). Thai Pusam is observed in the Tamil month of Thai, between January 15 and February 15, when the Pushya star cluster, called Pusam in Tamil, rises with the full moon.

What is kavadi?

Kavadi is an offering carried by a devotee during a grand parade and offered to Murugan at the destination. The most common, *pal kudam*, is a pot filled with milk carried on one's head. Less common but more impressive are the bamboo structures formed like a peacock or chariot, ornamented with

symbols evocative of Murugan. Some of these heavy structures many feet tall and covered in peacock feathers. For weeks before the festival, *kavadi* carriers observe celibacy, take only fresh, light foods, while striving to think continuously of the Deity. Just before the sacred walk, they take a vow and pray for boons, often pledging some form of sacrifice or change in behavior. During the ordeal, many experience states of euphoria or trance.

What is the purpose of kavadi?

Austerity strengthens willpower, clears the mind of regrets, resolves problems and brings closeness to God. Devotees believe that God will make any burden seem weightless as long as their faith is firm. *Kavadi* is the highest form of offering, a gift to God of personal effort and sacrifice.

What is Thai Pusam's special significance?

This festival celebrates the moment in sacred legends when Lord Murugan, as the commander-in-chief of the divine army, defeated, using various spiritual powers, a mighty demon named Taraka who was wreaking havoc in all the worlds.

Where is Thai Pusam celebrated?

This festival is widely celebrated among Tamil communities in South India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Fiji, South Africa, Singapore, Mauritius, the Caribbean and North America. In South India, thousands walk barefoot for days to Palani Hills carrying colorful *kavadis*. The largest celebrations take place in Malaysia, where it is a public holiday. The temple at Batu Caves, near Kuala Lumpur, attracts a million devotees on that day.

Tidbits About Thai Pusam

* What other acts of penance are observed?

After fasting and following other spiritual preparations, carriers of *kavadi* may ask a priest to pierce their bodies with small spears, replicas of Lord Murugan's

Vel. Other famous acts of penance include walking on hot coals and wearing nail shoes. It is considered a miracle of faith that fire walkers suffer no burns, and piercings do not bleed or leave scars.



* Why are these austerities performed?

Fasting, head-shaving and *kavadi* are acts of devotion and penance to atone for misdeeds, earn spiritual merit and subdue the ego. Such austerities soften and relieve the burdens of karma, guilt, regret and troublesome memories. Through sacred rites and intense prayers, the Deity's soothing blessings are received into the nerve system of the devotee. Penance, sincerely performed with the help of the angelic worlds, heals mental-emotional wounds and grants release from suffering.



God Loves a Parade

Many Hindu festivals feature a grand parade in which the Deity is taken through the streets. The procession attracts huge crowds, energizing devotees and bringing God's blessings out to the city from the confines of the temple. It is not the temple's main Deity image that is paraded, but a smaller statue or symbol. An ornate chariot built of wood and silver is pulled with huge ropes by throngs of devotees. The procession in Kuala Lumpur begins in the heart of the city and proceeds 15 kilometers—a slow, 8-hour journey—to Batu Caves. There the Deity is carried up the flight of 272 steps to the Murugan shrine inside the cave.

Hinduism: Fact & Fiction

FACT: Devotees who receive piercings and undergo other self-inflicting austerities during Thai Pusam do not bleed, suffer infections or experience prolonged pain after the events. Fasting, herbal salves, celibacy and a trance-like, exalted state mitigate the suffering commonly experienced when such practices are carried out unsupervised. Those who express devotion in such extreme ways are accorded reverential respect by the community.

FICTION: Many people believe that karma means "fate," a preordained destiny over which one has no control. This is untrue. Karma is the process of action and reaction on all levels—physical, mental and spiritual. We each have the power to remold our future by the way we live now. If we sow goodness, we will reap goodness; if we sow evil, we will reap evil.



FESTIVALS

Himalayan Village Celebrates Ramayana

Perhaps the most ancient portrayal of the epic is celebrated yearly by the villages of Saloor-Dungra, high in the Himalayan foothills above Haridwar

BY DEV RAJ AGARWAL, DEHRA DUN, INDIA
THE ANNUAL FESTIVAL OF BHUMIYAL Devta, a powerful local Deity some say is a form of Siva, has been celebrated from time immemorial for one fortnight, starting April 13th or 14th, in the adjacent villages of Saloor-Dungra, Uttarakhand. Popularly known as Ramman, it combines the spring procession of Bhumiyaal Devta with rituals, pujas, unique mask dances, singing and group dances, simple episodes from *Ramayana* and performances of *swang* ("imitation" or "disguise"), a tradition of the region's folk theater. The *Ramayana* performances are unique in that local boys silently portray the various characters, dancing slowly to the beat of drums, with no dialogue. In the background, jagar singers narrate the dances in the local dialect. *Jagar*, from Sanskrit *jaga* meaning "to wake," is a unique tradition to the Uttarakhand area. As the name implies, its objective is to get the Deities' attention and ask for blessings or boons. The name *Ramman* is derived from the epic, but the tradition of mask dances is much older. It is believed that the *Ramayana*

episodes were incorporated after the arrival of Adi Shankaracharya to the Himalayas. Although his direct influence would be difficult to substantiate, he stayed four years in nearby Badrinath in the late eighth century and would have narrated the stories of Ram, Krishna and the Gods to the local people. According to American scholar Paula Richman, author of *Many Ramayanas*, the Ramman in this remote corner of the Himalayas is India's oldest documented Ramleela tradition. In 2009, authenticating its antiquity and originality, UNESCO inscribed Ramman on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The festival is now sponsored by the Indira Gandhi National Center for Performing Arts. Other villages in the area have similar celebrations, but none as elaborate as Ramman in Saloor-Dungra. Dr. D. R. Purohit, a retired professor of English literature from Garhwal University and an authority on Himalayan folk drama, and Dr. Kushal Singh Bhandari, a teacher by profession, have been laboriously striving to revive this dying art of folk theater, mask

dances and jagar singing. In particular they are seeking to document the jagar songs, as most of the jagar artists have passed away, and many an unwritten song is now gone with them forever. **Understanding the Festival** The entire festival revolves around Bhumiyaal Devta, the Supreme Deity of the region. He is the guardian of the land, of people, crops and animals, of good health and prosperity. "All other Deities—Rama, Arjuna, Krishna—surrender their powers to Bhumiyaal," says Dr. Purohit. "Nothing moves without the involvement of Bhumiyaal in villages of this little-known part of the western Himalayas." The start of the month of Vaisakhi, April 13 (or rarely the 14th, as happened this year), is the first day of the annual procession of Bhumiyaal, the day when He visits His temple after a year-long stay in one of the village homes. Theater, drama, mask dances, singing and group dances all begin on the day of Vaisakhi. Bhumiyaal remains at the temple until the 27th, one fortnight, until this concluding day of Ramman after which the entire festi-



val is named. Then He is taken to another village's home until the following April. This tradition is common in the area, according to Dr. Purohit, with more than 500 such Deities in Uttarakhand. For the Negis family the past year of hosting the Deity has been full of austerities and strong discipline for the men of the household. Each morning one of them arose very

early to perform the daily puja, lighting the ghee lamp, offering incense and food to the Deity. Today, Vaisakhi, is the day to say goodbye. Drummers and trumpeters have arrived in their courtyard. The loud music calls the entire village to join the procession escorting Bhumiyaal to the temple, and people of all ages start pouring in. Three among the crowd are special. Called

Bhumiyaal's celebration: (clockwise from top left) Villagers gather in the temple's courtyard to watch young men dance with the Bhumiyaal pole; (inset) location of Saloor on map of India; initial blessing of the pole in the temple courtyard on the 14th; (inset) the silver pot which represents the Deity; dancer takes his turn with the heavy pole; examples from the temple's mask collection





ALL PHOTOS: DEVRAJ AGARWAL



pashwas, they are men who in the course of the event become possessed by the Deity, answering and speaking prophecies at different times. One is connected to Bhumiyaal, one to Nandadevi (Bhumiyaal's sister) and one to Bhagawati, all local Deities.

Now, as the final pujas are performed in the house, preparing the Deity for His journey, the three *pashwas* go into trance. They shiver and tremble as their faces turn red with eyes open wide. Without a blink, looking into the void, they dance with the music, while devotees anticipate with folded hands to hear what they will say. One can feel the power of the Deity in the charged atmosphere.

In the home, Bhumiyaal is worshiped in the form of a small silver kalasa or pot, along with large bundles of hair and silk cloth. When brought out for the festival, the kalasa is affixed to the top of a tall pole, with the hair and fabric attached to the sides. This is paraded to the temple with cries of "Jai Bhumiyaal Devta" and offerings of barley sprouts. Each morning and evening at the temple, a young man will bring the pole out and dance with it. This continues until the thirteenth day of Vaisakhi.

The Bhumiyaal temple in Saloor remains the center of activities for two fortnights, from April 13th to the portrayals from the Ramayana on the 27th. The temple priests are in full-time attendance. Each day there is a race



All join in: (clockwise from left) A *pashwa* in trance during the ceremony—the two knives he holds, which also represent the Deity, are kept in the temple year round; women dance in a circle during a break in the formal events; young ladies sporting nose rings;

among the young boys to bathe, dress in yellow dhoti and dance with the Deity, accompanied by local drummers and horn players.

Late in the evening, village families gather in the temple courtyard to enjoy the beautiful *jagar* songs and watch the dances and small plays, many of which employ the temple's masks portraying Gods and sages such as Surya, Durga and Narada. Made of birch wood, the oversized masks, most too big to fit on the face, are tied on with scarves and



strings. "We call our masks *pattar*, and worship them as representative of the Gods. They are charged with divine energy," explains Bhandari.

In one dance, the creation of the Earth is narrated. In another, sage Narada is implored to go to the different planes of existence and request the Gods and Goddesses to bless the village. There is a dance for Radha, consort of Krishna, and another for the Pandavas.

Some of the dances are for light-hearted entertainment. Almost every evening there is a dance involving Mawar and Mawaini, a shepherd couple who face many dangers as they pass through dense forests on their long journey to Saloor-Dungra. In one of these, a drummer asks the Mawars about their well-being, the journey and their herd. Amused by the lifestyle of this distant land, the Mawar respond by teasing the audience on their

dress, language and food. Other dances involve a trader couple, Baniya and Baniyayin, portraying their trials as their families travel on foot with servants and caravans of goods.

The Day of Ramman

Finally the main day arrives. The temple of Bhumiyaal wears a festive look, and the sounds of trumpet and drum make it difficult to hear anything else! Young boys wait their turn to take charge of the Deity and dance around the courtyard. The women especially are dressed in their best clothes and jewelry. Activities begin around 1:15pm and end at 6pm, cut short this year by heavy rain and wind.

The dances and accompanying *jagar* songs for the tales of Rama are organized around 18 *talas*—drum patterns of classical Indian music that date back to the *Vedas*. The sing-

Ramman day: (clockwise from above) the soldiers of Saloor-Dungra (in white) vanquish the invading Gurkhas; the *jagar* singers; trumpeters

ers, who have come from the distant villages of Bhalgaon and Subhain, are unfortunately nearly the last of their kind. During the first seven *talas*, the story of Lord Rama is told. The eighth is dedicated to Parvati, the ninth to Sita's *svayamvara*, the ceremony in which she chooses Rama as her husband. On the tenth *tala*, Lord Rama, Sita and Lakshmana dance together.

Other dances are interspersed, each with its own *tala*. In one, the herders Mawar and Mawarin appear again, dancing slowly to the beat as they dramatize being attacked by a tiger in the forest. Suddenly there is a change in





ALL PHOTOS: DEVRAJ AGARWAL

the drumming, signaling that the Deity Bhumiya has come again. A young man steps out onto the plaza with the Deity's pole. He struggles to maintain his balance as his quick steps follow the beating of the drums, turning and twisting the long shaft in his hands in quick succession. Its divine energy makes it difficult for him to control.

Following the herders, the trader couple Baniya and Baniyain reappear, joined by a group of dancers in strange costumes. They make fun of the audience, picking out one after another to lightheartedly imitate and mock. Some of the dancers portray thieves, who try to divert the attention of the rich trader, and the audience, in order to rob him!

Next is the Maal dance, depicting the repelling of Gorkha invaders at a place known as Rapwal Gwaad around 1815. It is a intense presentation as two fighters in red and two in white enter the arena from opposite sides, armed with guns, kukri swords and shields. Stepping to the beat of the drums, they move forward and backward from each other brandishing their weapons, to the enjoyment of the cheering crowd.

On the sixteenth tala, Rama kills the golden deer and departs, fatefully entrusting the security of Sita to his

brother Lakshmana. On the seventeenth, Rama dances while holding the mask of the head of the slain deer. In his absence, Sita has been abducted by Ravana. The dance continues with Hanuman flying to Lanka to find Sita, and in the process burning large parts of the island. All this takes place in haste because of the unexpected rainstorm.

The accession of Rama to the throne takes place on the eighteenth tala. Brahmin priests bless Rama, Sita and Lakshmana by putting tilak on their foreheads and offering wor-

Honoring Gods and men: (above) Rama, Sita and Lakshmana; (below) the herdsman who is attacked by a forest tiger

ship with lamps. The dancers signal the final end by repeating eighteen times with the audience a plea to the Gods for peace and prosperity in the villages. The ancient plea is "Raunlya Paunlya Hey Bharati Bhai." It literally means, "O Brothers Raunlya and Paunlya of Bharat!" It was explained to me that by addressing Raunlya and Paunlya, two oxen, all the Deities are addressed. The chanting is followed by a long list of favors sought, spoken out by those present.

With the approach of dusk, the silver kalasa pot, the vessel of Bhumiya, is removed from the pole and brought inside the temple. In the courtyard a new dance begins, the story of Narasimha, the half-man, half-lion incarnation of Vishnu who saved the devotee Prahlada. It is quite hypnotic. Even the ongoing heavy rains and chilly winds do not dampen the dancers' spirits, held in trance by the cosmic energy of the extraordinarily large and heavy mask of Narasimha.

At the end of the dance, the silver kalasa, the hair and silk fabrics



of Bhumiya are once again brought to the courtyard and reattached to the pole. One of the pashwas appears in front of Bhumiya, quickly goes into trance and behaves like the Deity Himself. He bathes himself by emptying vessels of water on his head, thrusts the dagger blades of the Deity into his belly, hitting them hard with a stone, and then makes prophecies about the wellbeing of the people and the village at large.

At the end, the Deity's kalasa, cloth and hair are packed in bamboo baskets and taken in procession to His new home for the coming year. "All celebrations in our villages take place because of Bhumiya, our Supreme Deity, the protector of our land and cattle," states Bhagat Singh Rawat of Dungri. "Ramman is an ancestral, cultural, religious and social program which binds people together in a close society since time immemorial."

Conclusion

Dr. Purohit has been one of the key figures behind the preservation of the festival in Saloor-Dungri. In his view, "We have a great future for our folk arts if we document them properly." He explains such traditions come in three parts: ritual, history and narrative. If one part is lost, there is no future for the tradition. We must emphasize the maintenance of *parampara*, teaching lineages, and the learning of the *Vedas*, *Puranas* and shastras—and this should happen without consideration for caste. "It can only be done by constructing more universities, gurukuls and colleges. We must create more avenues for students of Sanskrit and the



Festival scenes: (clockwise from top left) Narasimha, fourth incarnation of Vishnu, rescues Prahlada (in pouring rain); devotees crowd every part of the temple; the three Salood pashwas (at right) giving prophecies and blessings

shastras to pursue a career upon completion of their studies. It is equally important to conserve the dying art forms such as the Ramman masks and document the songs, such as the jagars, and the various stories. I

don't think we need publicity, documentation is more important."

Ramman has been provided an international platform ever since it received the recognition of UNESCO. More and more people, including Westerners, are curious to see for themselves the extraordinary masks and the unique way the Ramleela is performed here. Saloor and Dungri are still small villages, with no hotels or home-stays yet. To visit Saloor, one has to travel by road about 150 miles from Rishikesh to Joshimath, where there are hotels. Saloor is situated in a side valley, about five miles from Joshimath.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dev Raj Agarwal of Dehradun, India, is a photographer who loves to capture Bharat's immense diversity of people, cultures and nature, especially in the Himalayas. He is retired from the Ministry of Environment and Forests, Botanical Survey of India. Email: devrajagarwal@hotmail.com



Celebrating Chandi Homa at Home

Despite its length and complexity, the fire worship of the Goddess carries great significance for me personally

BY KRATHU SANKARANARAYANAN, TEXAS

A FEW WEEKS AGO, ON MAY 19, MY FAMILY performed Chandi homa, which is believed to be the ultimate form of worship to Devi. The fire ceremony is complex and elaborate, and when done properly with the recitation of the 700 verses of *Devi Mahatmyam* for Goddess Chandika, it has the capacity to remove any hurdles in one's life and bestow one with prosperity and spiritual upliftment. I am not an expert on it by any means, but I want to share my experiences and reflections as a devotee.

The Goddess in My Family's Tradition

Devi worship has an important place on both sides of my family. On my mom's side, Nachiyar Amman has been worshiped as the family Deity for generations. On my dad's side, my great-great-grandfather built an Amman temple in Simizhi, Tamil Nadu. Because of this deep generational connection, we wanted to perform this elaborate homa at our house.

I am sure we all know the story where the Gods were fighting a demon called Mahishasura, who had been granted a boon that he could only be defeated by a woman. The Gods, therefore, caused three creative forces, Shaktis (or Devi), to unite and destroy him: Goddesses Maha Kali, Maha Lakshmi and Maha Saraswati. As this mighty unification of the three Goddesses, Chandika is referred to as Mahadevi, Vanquisher of Mahishasura. She is the subject of the *Devi Mahatmyam*, a part of the *Markandeya Purana*, and referred to by numerous other names, such as Chamundi, Katyayini and Mahishasuramardhini. Her vahana, or vehicle, is a lion, and she is visualized wearing a red sari.

Performing the Chandi homa requires highly trained priests who are expert in their craft and have years of experience. We were fortunate to have such priests in Houston who are devotees of Devi and have been performing large and complex rituals to Her.

The Ceremony as it Unfolded

The groundwork for the homa was fascinating—the priests start by building a brick enclosure called a homa kunda to house the sacred fire and in which to invoke Devi. A unique aspect of Her worship is that a circular fire altar is required, as opposed to a typi-



cal square.

We officially start by seeking permission from the Goddess for the worship, followed by the *sankalpam*—an oath to complete the homa and request for blessings—and a Ganapati puja. Ganapati is the remover of obstacles. We first seek His blessings, as without His grace, nothing can be done.

Next we perform a ceremony to purify and bless the *kalasam*, a brass pot filled with water and various other items. We invoke God Varuna in the *kalasam* and then recite the purifying *Pavamana Suktam*, found in the *Yajur Veda*. The water is then sprinkled around us.

There are three main *kalasams*, one for Maha Kali, one for Maha Lakshmi and one for Maha Saraswati. These are each connected to

the homa kunda via a thin thread, which energizes them as we perform the fire worship. This thread takes the energies of the mantras and offerings and transmits them to the *kalasams*.

Next we formally invite the God of Fire, Agni, to enter the sacred flames in the homa kunda, a rite called *Agni pratishthapanam*. This is done because before the Agni pratishthapanam, the homa kunda houses just a simple fire, not Agni. We use dried coconuts, camphor and darba grass to invoke Him. In every homa, Agni Deva plays a critical role, as He is the vehicle of our offerings and prayers. Agni Deva has two heads and four horns and typically faces east. Since we are sitting at the western side of the homa kunda, we are also facing east, so we are look-



ALL PHOTOS: COURTESY KRATHU SANKARANARAYANAN

ing at Agni's back. We request Agni Deva to face us. We do this with the Sanskrit mantra meaning "Be faced toward me." Then, we all begin the chanting of *Devi Mahatmyam*, which takes about three hours. During this homa, various *dravya* offerings such as sweet pongal, rice, flowers and turmeric are offered into the homa kunda. At the end of each sloka we say, "Svaha," which means "salutations" or "hail" and is the name of one of Agni's wives. Upon hearing "Svaha" Agni Deva opens his mouth and takes the offering to Devi.

As I listen to the chanting and explanations, I am thrilled to learn that many of the mantras and stories that I have heard and learned earlier come from the *Devi Mahatmyam*. Two famous slokas—"To that Devi, who dwells in all living creatures and is Shakti incarnate in all beings, I bow" and "O, personification of auspiciousness, o consort of Shiva, accomplisher of all, I bow to you"—both come from this wonderful collection of verses.

Before we start reciting each chapter, the priest takes time and explains its essence. Sitting through a long homa as a teenager can be difficult, but because of the storytelling aspect added by the priests, it almost felt like I was in an *Amar Chitra Katha* comic book myself, seeing all of this unfold before me. For many, a homa may seem like a recitation of a bunch of verses, but what is at its core is storytelling and invoking divine vibrations and energy. When you're able to visualize the story and understand the spirit of it, the experience is at a whole different level, and you begin to appreciate it more.

Devi Mahatmyam, which means the "Greatness of Devi," has 13 chapters, each dedicated to a different form of Devi as She defeats the demons. The first chapter is dedicated to Maha Kali and describes the demons Madhu and Kaitabha the dual energies of

tamas and *rajas*, darkness and undirected energy. These two demons attempt to conquer the creative, sattvic force, also known as Brahma. Maha Kali destroys them with Her mightiness and protects the world from their demonical force.

After each chapter is chanted, a small offering of flowers and turmeric root is placed into the sacred fire to conclude the worship of that Devi. Chapters two, three and four narrate the battle between Devi and the demon Mahishasura. It begins with the Gods coming together in the mountains where they combined their shakti energies to form Chandika Devi. The newborn Goddess then leads a battle riding Her Lion and defeated Mahishasura.

Chapters five through thirteen, dedicated to Maha Saraswati, recount how She slays many demons, Dhumralochana, Chanda and Munda in particular. She then proceeds to battle and defeat Raktabhija, the demon who multiplies when a single drop of his blood touches the ground. In a sense Raktabhija reminds us how the mind multiplies negative thoughts, a process that should be curtailed by meditating on Devi. Finally, she battles Nishumba and Shumba and emerges victorious.

After reciting the entire *Devi Mahatmyam*, we performed an offering to Bhairava, a guardian form of Siva. A pumpkin was cut, and offered in different areas of the large homa kunda. Then the final offering, *purnahuti*, of coconut, flowers and fabric are offered into the sacred fire to end the homa.

I was very grateful that we had the fortune of being able to perform the Chandi homa at home. It was not an easy task and required lots of time commitment, materials and skilled priests to perform it.

The worship: (clockwise from left) mother Ayshwaray and father Krishnan about to make the final offering, *purnahuti*; with brother Sathvik, invoking Agni; Bhairavi, a labradoodle, joins the family and friends to take the final arati.

What It Means to Me

All in all, performing Chandi homa was an eye-opening experience. I've always been emotionally connected with Devi, and She has been my Ishta Devam, or favorite Goddess, ever since I was a kid. Worshiping Her always leaves me fulfilled emotionally and feeling that She is looking after me with Her motherly love. I find a lot of comfort with Her. When we performed Chandi homa, I could completely feel Her presence.

In the past I have attended many different homas but none where I was able to connect to and appreciate as much as I can with Chandi homa. Because I was familiar with the stories from *Devi Mahatmyam* and understood some of the mantras, the whole experience was enriched. Seeing the sacred fire dance in the homa kunda and chanting along with the priests elevated me spiritually and allowed me to see new perspectives of things that I did not see before.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Krathu Sankaranarayanan is a 9th grader at Dulles High School in Houston, Texas. He enjoys STEM, debating, volunteering and learning about his Tamil heritage and Hinduism.





HEALTH

How One Hospital Pursues Dada Vaswani's Goal of Sight for All

K K Eye Institute developed a financial model to provide large numbers of people—regardless of personal income level—with the best eye care available

BY LAVINA MELWANI, NEW YORK

DURING MY RECENT VISIT TO THE bustling city of Pune in Maharashtra, I received a real-life lesson in how the contours of an entire community can be remade to include everyone—the haves and the have-nots—and where caring and compassion can become a part of the ecosystem. Wealth does not come into the equation.

Our eyesight is a God-given gift which we often take for granted when we have it; when we lose it, the world is plunged into darkness and chaos. So many types of blindness and near-blindness are curable with the cutting-edge technology and vast medical

knowledge in our world today. Yet, for the forgotten millions mired in poverty and ignorance, living in scattered villages with no or inadequate eye care, loss of sight can become a chilling fact of life.

Take the case of the village child who has developed hard cataracts in both eyes—he does not know what is happening as darkness sets in—the world recedes until he can no longer see the colors of the kites or the faces of the children flying them. Then there are the older villagers who can no longer see enough to do their daily tasks or tend to their grandchildren. In their ignorance, they attribute it to karma or old age, but the cause

may be as simple and treatable as glaucoma or adult cataracts.

What would be their chances of seeing the best eye surgeons or getting operated on with the cutting-edge equipment in a state-of-the-art facility? They, who are illiterate, have zero bank balances, not even the money to buy shoes, let alone a bus ticket to the big city?

Dada J.P. Vaswani's Solution

What would have been an unrealistic and impossible dream is now a reality for thousands of villagers, thanks to the Kirpalani and Kundnani Eye Institute, commonly called K K Eye Institute, operated by the Sadhu Vaswani

Mission. This impressive award-winning hospital, named after its original donors, is set in the exclusive area of Koregaon Park. It is one of India's top eye hospitals, where the wealthy flock for the best eye care from top-notch surgeons. Its financial success enables it to offer totally free treatment to the thousands of villagers in the surrounding areas who have neither the bank balance nor the power to gain access. The truly remarkable thing is that they are availed the same doctors, the same equipment and the same treatment as the paying clients.

K K Eye Institute is the creation of Dada J. P. Vaswani (1918–2018), who always believed that the noblest charity is *netra daan*—giving sight to the sightless. It has received a Special Appreciation award from the All India Ophthalmology Society, a national body of 26,000 ophthalmologists, for its high standard of eye care services to the population of Pune.

As Renu Wadhwa, the CEO, explains, it is a nonprofit organization but has both a paying and non-paying section. The paying patients are from Pune city; the non-paying section is predominantly run through the Sight for the Sightless Initiative, with a patient base from the adjacent rural area.

Wadhwa explains the unique model:

"Our operative volumes are approximately 45 surgeries a day, 1,200 a month, that is split between a six-percent premium segment paying US\$183 and above per surgery, a 44-percent segment paying \$80 per surgery and the balance being served at no charge."



Delivering the best care: (clockwise from far left) Institute headquarters in Pune; a flyer for a eye camp; patient evaluation; cataract surgery; after surgery, with a picture of Sadhu Vaswani; CEO Renu Wadhwa

In this way the forgotten middle class are treated at a lower price and the poor pay nothing—all for the same state-of-the-art services.

The hospital has eight full-time ophthalmologists. Each, along with general ophthalmology, practices an additional sub-specialty such as glaucoma, cornea, pediatrics, medical retina, cataract or refractive surgery. There are also three visiting specialists for retinal surgeries and one visiting surgeon for oculoplasty (plastic surgery involving the eye area, either to repair injuries or for cosmetic purposes).

Reaching Rural Areas

The Institute's Sight for the Sightless Initiative specifically helps rural populations, treating visual disorders related to squint, cataract, retina, pterygium (aka "surfer's eye," caused by UV rays) and the cornea. One related program, called "Bright Eyes," pro-



He states, "If I was not blind, I could have seen my kite."



is organizing free eye checkup camps for people suffering from visual problems



Then day after tomorrow, after the doctor's checkup, you will be dropped back to your village



When your eye patch will be removed, whom would you like to see first?



ALL PHOTOS: COURTESY K K EYE INSTITUTE



Village outreach: (left) A series of screen grabs from the promotional video, "I Have a Coloured Dream," focusing on a young boy with advanced cataracts who regained his sight; (clockwise from above) the Institute lobby; celebrating four successful surgeries; introductory meeting for arriving villagers

vides glasses at reduced cost.

Indeed, if the poor cannot go to the hospital, the hospital comes to them. First a van with a loudspeaker system travels to remote, scattered villages, distributing flyers and announcing an eye camp. Scores of villagers, old, young and middle-aged, turn up to have their eyesight checked. Over the years, 140,000 people spread across hundreds of villages have been checked for poor vision, shortlisted for surgery and brought to the Institute by bus.

As Wadhwa explained: "They are given a detailed round of ophthalmic and medical investigations to be cleared for eye surgeries which include glaucoma, blocked tear duct, retina issues, congenital cataract and adult cataracts, which are most common."

The patients are operated on with top-of-the-line equipment by expert surgeons, counseled and taught how to take care of their eyes after the surgery, with dispensed eye drops and medicines to be used post-surgery. Then they are bused back to their villages, their eyesight restored. They do not have to give anything for this care.

The children's part of the project, called Dekhna Hai Mujhe (I Wish to See!), has taken within its fold over 108,900 children from underprivileged backgrounds.

As a co-founder of Children's Hope India, a NY-based nonprofit organization which supports Sight for the Sightless Initiatives, I visited a Marathi medium public school



where the children had benefited from the eye camps. I met with children who had been identified with eye issues and they smiled shyly, proud of their new spectacles. The teachers emphasized how these eye exams detect problems and ensure the children do not suffer from more serious eye ailments.

Exploring the Institute

I then visited the K K Eye Institute, 38,000 square feet across seven floors, which has over 200,000 eye surgeries and consultations with over 776,000 patients to its credit.

The hospital is cutting-edge, not only in its techniques and equipment but also in beliefs and temperament: It was founded on Dada's beliefs of caring and compassion. Right in the lobby you sense the spiritual heartbeat of the institution. Images of different faiths and of Sadhu and Dada Vaswani circle the lobby's perimeter, creating a soothing sanctuary. Here you can light an oil lamp as you pray to the Almighty to dispel the darkness.

I then got to meet the dynamic young CEO, Renu Wadhwa, who is so passionate about the hospital that she practically lives and breathes all aspects of the institution. In her round-the-clock work schedule she had fit me in to share a quick vegetarian lunch in her office. This was the same food being served to all their patients that day; the healthy menu included dal, spinach, rice and flat bread, okra and yogurt.

I was curious about the success of this award-winning hospital and the unique model that it follows. So I asked her what made K K Eye Institute's Sight for the Sightless Initiative different from other leading charitable hospitals. She quoted several factors, the main criteria being that only senior surgeons perform all surgeries, be they paid or unpaid clients: "All surgeons are fully qualified in ophthalmology and have performed a minimum 500 surgeries. There are reviews of their past surgeries before they operate on patients."

A comprehensive panel of pre-operative

tests, such as blood, are done for every patient, whether they are free or paying patients, and the same sophisticated equipment is used for all diagnostics, procedures and surgeries. For every patient there are audits to ensure that quality care and support services have been provided.

Wadhwa explained that the communications are adapted to villagers' understanding and needs, providing pictorial instructions and creating a simple rural tenor to the surroundings which makes them feel at home and comfortable. They are even given demonstrations on how to open a bottle of eye drops.

Later I toured the various bustling clinics, with their busy teams of doctors, nurses and patients. I visited the private rooms as well as the public wards which were clean and airy with patients from the village relaxed on their beds. Hot home-style cooked meals are served for breakfast, lunch and dinner. At tea-time there is a welcome cup of chai and biscuits. As I was in their ward at tea-time, I was invited to serve them. There were toothless smiles and appreciative namastes as patients accepted the biscuits. Many had just undergone surgery and had their eyes bandaged. Tomorrow they would be back in their villages, their eyesight and independence restored.

The Hospital Business

Every room I visited in my tour seemed to have an aura of joy about it. Every doctor I met, every staff member had a smile, a sense of mission. The most illuminating conversation I had with Wadhwa was about how Dada Vaswani conceptualized the hospital.

The spiritual master created a business blueprint for building and running a successful hospital resting on five points: 1) the first and foremost is patient satisfaction, accomplished with respect and reverence; 2) The second is employee enthusiasm, so that the employees work as a united team cheerfully doing their duty; 3) The third is the ability to generate profits and manage; 4) The fourth is a growing market, the progress and popularity of the hospital; 5) and the fifth is continuous improvement, which includes maintaining state-of-the-art equipment. Dada asked the team to focus above all on the first point: to take care of each patient with respect and

reverence.

That respect and reverence is possible because of the devotional aura that exists at the K K Eye Institute. "Satsang infuses a spiritual energy within and around an individual," Wadhwa explained. "Our satsang at K K Eye Institute, held every month, is an attempt to align the team to a higher consciousness. Kirtans rendered in sweet simplicity create a charged vibration; a spiritual message from our beloved Dada Vaswani reiterates tips for righteous living. The satsang is nondenominational in its approach. Tuning in to a divine dimension we believe will help us be more aware and assertive in the choice between the 'right' and the 'wrong.' This ultimately helps us in providing better patient care."

Indeed, at the eye institute, that respect and reverence exists for even inanimate objects: every Dussehra (Vijayadashami, the day after the end of Navaratri) the staff and medical team perform a special puja to express gratitude and reverence towards their machinery and equipment, symbolizing the presence of the Divine in the inanimate principle.

For any impoverished man, woman or child suffering from waning sight in Pune, there is hope. The road leads straight to the K K Eye Institute, where they are met with a welcoming hot meal, caring and compassion—and the gift of sight.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lavina Melwani is a New York-based journalist who has written on the arts, spirituality and life for several international publications. She reports on the Indian diaspora for The Week and is a co-founder of Children's Hope India. She blogs at www.laviniwithlavina.com. You can follow her @lassi_with_lavina

Hinduism's Enduring Respect for Science

The clash of religious belief and science in medieval Europe simply did not occur in India, where a “scientific outlook” has long prevailed

BY MICHAEL CAVALLI

IN THE WEST, THE IDEA THAT SCIENCE AND RELIGION stand at opposite ends of a spectrum has long been widespread. Most people have taken as given the notion that worldly pursuits are, by their very nature, preclusive of the achievement of spiritual goals, that intellect and logic are antithetical to intuition and faith, and that there are basically only two kinds of people: the religious, or spiritual, who live by belief alone, and the rational, who accept only what is perceived by the senses and what experience and experimentation prove.

In the years leading up to the Enlightenment, Christianity and science arrived at an uneasy compromise after centuries of strife in Europe. Scientific authority was gaining recognition, but that of the Church had not completely waned. The tension eventually separated Church and State, leaving science and religion each to its own sphere of interest. The result was a cultural dichotomy in which two completely different approaches were encouraged, one for answering religious questions and another for scientific ones.

In religious matters, people were taught to read the Bible and believe everything in it without question. Skepticism, criticism and sometimes even personal interpretation were deprecated by most of the clergy, as they had been for centuries. However, in scientific matters, a new popular outlook appeared: people were taught to believe only in things that could be substantiated by empirical evidence. A strange situation came about in the West: one was either a rationalist or a believer, rarely holding a position in between.

That dichotomy largely exists to this day. In India, though, it has never existed—not to any great extent at least. In India, where *religion* has always been an integral part of everyday life, that word means something very different than it does in the West. Western societies are segmented in a way that intentionally keeps religion separate from almost everything else, but India is the opposite. Though the country has become more secular over the past few generations, most parts of Indian society revolve around Hinduism as they have for millennia.

Long before the fall of Rome and the rise of Western civilization proper, India was scientifically advanced. Both the Harappan and Vedic civilizations were very sophisticated for their times, and to this day India has never failed to progress scientifically, even if such progress was slow at times. While Christianity, the dominant religion in the West, has always been detached from science—despite various attempts by the Church to appropriate it—religion and science in India were integrated from the beginning. It is only with modern India's increased Westernization (or secularization, really) that the beginnings of a rift between them can be observed.

Since at least the Vedic period, scientific advances in India were made almost entirely by deeply religious individuals, for the subcontinent's brightest minds were neither rationalists nor believers



exclusively, but rather a combination of both. As such, religion became an integral part of all Indian society, and scientific advancement—including a scientific outlook on all things—became an integral part of the religion commonly known today as Hinduism.

Hindu achievements in science went unappreciated in the West for too long. Besides creating chess in its original form as well as a sophisticated number system, the Hindus made numerous scientific discoveries that can rightly be called major today. Those discoveries include, but are certainly not limited to, the relativity of time and space, heat as a source of molecular change and the existence

of atoms. The Sanskrit word *anus* means atom in the Greek sense of “uncut” or “indivisible” and also signifies a unit of time based on how long an atom takes to traverse its own unit of space.

Hindu medical science was advanced as well. Classical treatises prove that India was home to some of the brightest physicians and psychologists of the ancient world. They took mental health as seriously as physical health, paying close attention to the way diet and stress affect the body. They recorded ailments, documented symptoms and employed preventives, treatments and cures. India's fourfold concept of disease, diagnosis, cure and treatment may have influenced medicine in Greece and China; it can certainly be seen in Western medicine today.

It is no surprise that yoga, which may be considered a science in the truest sense, is part of Hinduism. Yoga applies a scientific methodology to spiritual matters and does so without misunderstanding science or spirituality in themselves. Logic and intuition each have a special place in human life. Spirituality cannot be forced into a mechanical mold; Hinduism understands this. Its scientific methodology simply refers to the different ways (such as yoga) Hindus can rigorously test the validity of their religion's spiritual or metaphysical claims.

While Hinduism can be rigid in some ways, it is generally nondogmatic, which is to say that it does not require its adherents to accept specific dogmas in order to be called Hindus. Nor does it demand blind faith from its adherents—though they can believe blindly if they choose. Hindus are always free to take a more scientific approach if they prefer, which includes analyzing, hypothesizing, experimenting and ultimately realizing for themselves whether a given religious claim is valid. By encouraging intellectual freedom in this way, Hinduism parallels the kind of thinking that fuels honest science in the West. What makes such thinking so valuable in a Hindu, however, is that it is applied to all areas of life, especially where one usually finds it applied the least: spirituality.

Hinduism's scientific outlook is an expression of its nondogmatic nature. If Hinduism were dogmatic, the intellectual freedom necessary for scientific advancement would have been suppressed in India, as it was in Europe when political power carried the spirit of



WIKIMEDIA

dogmatism from the churches into every important sphere of European culture, ultimately stifling scientific progress and ushering in the Dark Ages. Instead, scientific achievements in India were made as part of the progress of Hinduism itself.

While scientific thinking may be a detriment to other religions—especially those which are more dogmatic—to Hinduism, it is a handmaiden. Let us, therefore, recognize all that makes Hinduism great, and celebrate its scientific outlook.

The earliest surgeon: Sushruta (circa 500 bce) wrote the *Sushruta Samhita*, a foundational text on Ayurveda. It included instructions for complex surgical operations, including plastic surgery, not equaled in Europe until the 18th century.

Michael Cavalli is a writer/editor specializing in e-commerce copy writing, web content writing, and copy editing. A long-time student of Hinduism, he lives in the United States.

The Goddess Spoke to Him

“I owe everything to Goddess Namagiri Thayar of Namakkal who leaves these formulae on my tongue in my dreams. An equation for me has no meaning unless it expresses a thought of God,” wrote Srinivasa Ramanujan.

A recent article by Roshni Chakrabarty in *India Today* states, “Srinivasa Iyengar Ramanujan, born on December 22, 1887, as the son of a sari shop clerk, the man who gave us mathematical equations that are solving cosmic problems even now, was certainly much, much ahead of his time. A self-taught mathematician, it is astonishing how much the man achieved, turning into one of the most significant groundbreakers in history, much like Newton and Einstein.”

That such a person was not only profoundly religious but actually credited his discoveries to divine communication is a powerful demonstration of the compatibility of science and the Hindu faith. His unusual and unfortunately short life was recounted in the 2015 film *The Man Who Knew Infinity*. An early math prodigy, he ultimately ended up at Cambridge University working in partnership with the leading

mathematicians of his day.

He developed 3,600 theorems, stating them as conclusions but without the usual long detailed proofs. Cadres of mathematicians have since worked on these theorems, and only a handful remain unproven. How he was able to arrive at these theorems by



INDIA POSTAL SERVICE

intuition remains one of science's unsolved mysteries. In the last days of his life, at age 32, he produced thirty pages of “mock theta functions,” a deeply esoteric corner of math now called “mock modular form”—a concept

that defies explanation in layman's terms.

Ken Ono, professor of mathematics at Emory College and an expert on Ramanujan wrote, “The formulas that Ramanujan put in these last notebooks could not have resulted from pure computations, because the methods to do such computations were worked out only in the late 1970s and 1980s, many years after his death. He must have had deep insights. It's puzzling how he came to these findings.”

According to T.V. Venkateswaran, in a 2017 article in *FirstPost*, “Surprisingly, in 2010 scientists found a profound and precise relationship between Ramanujan's cryptic mock theta functions and the hottest item in theoretical physics—string theory and black holes.”

Prof. Ono wrote, “The conjuncture called ‘umbral moonshine conjuncture,’ derived from the work of Ramanujan, is crucial to understand a fundamental question that physicists have been asking so far: what is the universe made of? The very same mathematics would illuminate the behavior of black holes.”

It is worth pondering that the Hindu religion did not oppose Ramanujan's efforts in any way, and that he himself credited openly divine inspiration for his discoveries, which miraculously proved to be far ahead of their time.

BY SHREYAL SHARMA, NEW JERSEY

Why do my Indian-American friends and I have different experiences? While being born and raised in the US is one reason, there are many other factors that contribute to our differing experiences. Through conversations with them, I learned that no one wants to be seen as “the other.” My friends would refrain from wearing mehndi to school and shorten their names to make it easier for their white friends to address them. Even their parents, in an effort to assimilate into their new country, allowed their children to distance themselves from their culture. This saddens me, and I am grateful for having lived in India for a decade, which gave me the opportunity to understand and appreciate my rich heritage. Although I faced similar challenges as my friends who have lived in America most of their lives, I was fortunate enough to understand that my foreignness was not something to



I deeply value Dussehra as a ten-day-long celebration filled with joy and festivities. My apartment complex in India has always celebrated Dussehra in a grand manner, with beautifully decorated giant murtis of Gods for puja and delicious food counters. Even the lengthy pujas were enjoyable. At precisely 8PM, arati would commence, and everyone in the complex would gather for the waving of lighted lamps before the images of Gods or persons to be honored. As I write this, I realize that I may never experience this celebration again, but I am content knowing that festivals are celebrated differently in other countries, and that I have grown to appreciate and enjoy them as well.

Shreyal Sharma, 18, is entering her sophomore year at New Jersey Institute of Technology where she is a computer science major. She enjoys reading, writing for the school newspaper and volunteering at a local animal shelter.



Who Am I and Where Did I Come from?



ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF THE DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY

SEEDERS ASC: "WHO AM I AND WHERE DID I COME FROM?" THEY inwardly know they are more than just another person with a particular name who was born in a certain place. They sense that they are more than their body mind and emotions. They want to understand. Did I exist before I was born? Will I exist after death? The answer given in Saivite Hinduism is that we are each a divine soul on a wondrous journey. We are an immortal body of light that has lived many lives, had many bodies and personalities. Gurudev explained, "When the soul has had enough experience, it naturally seeks to be liberated,

A young woman reflects on one of life's most profound questions. The answer may take her an entire lifetime to find, but that answer is the most important discovery she or any of us will ever make.

to unravel the bonds. That begins the most wonderful process in the world as the seeker steps for the first time onto the spiritual path. Of course, the whole time, through all those births and lives and deaths, the soul was undergoing a spiritual evolution, but unconsciously. Now it seeks to know God consciously." Our soul was created by God Siva out of Himself. Like sparks flying from a fire. Like the sparks and the fire, we are both the same and different from Siva, our source. We live within His boundless creation, this unthinkably vast cosmos which is filled with His divine presence. Siva is the life energy in the birds, in the fish and in the animals. His being flows through all we see and experience. Our Vedic rishis have assured us that "God is the life of our life. We are all beautiful children of God Siva. Deep within, we are one with Him this very moment. We came from God, live in God and are evolving into complete unity with God. Siva created each of us in a perfect state, but we have to discover that perfection within us to be whole. By seeing the life energy in all creatures and in all people, we are seeing God Siva in action. By drawing close to God, we draw nearer to our eternal soul. Siva is all and within all."

GURUDEVA: When we realize that we have come from Siva, the way back to Siva is clearly defined. That is half the battle, to realize we came from Siva, live in Siva and are returning to Siva. The other half is to make the path clear, to remove the obstacles and impels us to return to Him, to our Source, to our Self.



Now in Tamil!

Available in English or Tamil at:

www.minimela.com

himalayanacademy.com/view/path-to-siva

SRI GAYATRI

The Inner Secrets Revealed

3 volumes with 2 chant CDs



Amma Sri Karunamayi explains the sacred Gayatri mantra, syllable by syllable, in this uplifting collection.

"Gayatri Devi is One who is self-luminous. She not only illumines all the organs and chakras in the bodies of humans and all living beings, She also gives light to all the worlds in the entire universe."



Check out these and other inspiring books and CDs at our website.

Planning for the first 100 years



EASAN KATIR

private wealth management
since 1983

easan.katir@gmail.com

1-530.320.3287 (USA)

easankatir.com

EVERY YOGA. EVERY DAY?

VISIT YOGA.DAY



Do you practice yoga every day? What if we told you that you probably already do? From your morning wake up routine, your daily work schedule, family time in the evening, through bedtime. Don't believe us?

VISIT YOGA.DAY

It's our dedicated, online resource that takes you along with Maya and her son through her every day with yoga.

START YOUR JOURNEY WITH EVERY YOGA, EVERY DAY. TODAY!



Hindu American Foundation

Promoting dignity, mutual respect, and pluralism.
hinduamerican.org

Hindu Heritage Endowment

You Can Help Feed the Monks

By Akhila Satish

In the early days of Gurudeva's monastic order, to supplement their meager food budget the monks would regularly visit local restaurants and ask the chefs for the produce they would normally discard. Since moving to Kauai, the abundance of land has made growing fruits and vegetables easy and sustainable and eliminated the need to beg restaurants for expired produce.



Monks gather each day for a shared lunch in the courtyard. There are several ways to support Kauai's Hindu monks.

Because of those earlier experiences, Gurudeva asked the monastics to work towards self-sufficiency, and in 1994 he created the Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment, KAME. The goal he set for the endowment was five million dollars. This would cover all the monthly budgets of the monks. Of course, Gurudeva realized the goal would need to be updated periodically because of inflation and to reflect certain needs of the monks not included in the original budgets.

Hurricanes have devastated the island of Kauai over the past decades and if they return will destroy most, if not all, of the fruit trees and vegetable gardens. To prepare for such natural but destructive events, including winter storms, Gurudeva asked the monastics to keep a three-month supply of staple foods, such as rice and various kinds of legumes. These are consumed over time and replaced with fresh supplies on a regular basis.

Kauai's Hindu Monastery is located in one of the world's most breathtaking places: the Garden Island of Kauai. The natural beauty of the island enriches the spirit of tranquility and peace that radiates out from the monastery. This incredible location, however, does create some unexpected costs. Primary among them is the high price of grocery store goods. The cost of food and groceries is at least 30 percent higher on Kauai than in New York City, which is already significantly higher than most of US states. Some prices are 70 percent higher than the national average.

Conscious of these prices, the monks demonstrate self sufficiency by growing most of the vegetables they eat in two gardens: old-style dirt and sophisticated, environmentally friendly hydroponic green houses. The greenhouses protect the produce from fruit flies and other pests. Orchards provide a wide variety of organic tropical fruits. As a result, the monks enjoy a daily diet of fresh fruit and vegetables at a fraction of the cost of the produce available in stores. Grains and staples, such as rice, flour and dals, that must be imported from the mainland are purchased in fifty pound sacks to minimize costs.

The monks at Kauai Hindu Monastery do everything within their power to offset the costs of groceries on the island of Kauai. If you would like to directly help their efforts and support the monastery, you can do so by donating to the "Feed the Monks" fund at donate.himalayanacademy.com/donate.php. Or donate to the Feed the Monks Endowment at www.hheonline.org/feedthemonks. The endowment allows the monastery to use your funds as an investment and draw on the grant income over time. This way your donations will feed monks in the far future.

Feed the Monks donations are also used for special foods to celebrate festivals, auspicious events and accomplishments, and to sponsor occasional catered meals.

APRIL TO JUNE ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment		Kadavul Nataraja Ardra Abhishekam Endowment			
Ambika Alagere	US\$2.13			Leo Demers	200.00
Isani Alahan	10,008.00	Umasankaran Mohambourame	111.01	Chellappa Deva	25.00
Kedarnath Challakere	251.00	Gowri Nadason	116.07	Michael Doyle	324.00
Roshan Harilela	375.00	Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	42.69	Shubha Gangal	2,100.00
Kulagan Moonesawmy	12.81	Parimala Selvaraj	93.00	Debashis Ghosh	100.00
Gowri Nadason	116.07	Piragash Swargaloganathan	108.00	Rosa Jaramilla Osuna	108.00
Chamundi Sabanathan	78.75	Anonymous	184.50	Murugesu Kandasamy	32.25
Hitesvara Saravan	63.00	Total	655.27	Anil Kondapi Kumar	51.00
Tejasinha Sivalingam	12.00			Luke Labella	452.00
Michael Zimmermann	5.00	Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar Gurukulam		Gregg Lien	2,001.00
Anonymous	203.66	Muthukumar Jeyapalan	3,000.00	Eric Mackow	50.00
Total	11,127.42	Anonymous	138.00	Dasan Mahadevan	108.00
		Total	3,138.00	Vel Mahalingum	2.77
Iraivan Temple Endowment				Gaurav Malhotra	256.00
Mathura Alladi	108.00	Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund		Saurav Malhotra	256.00
Eshwar & Aarati Bandlamudi	303.00	Muthukumar Jeyapalan	5,000.00	Ashwini Maureemootoo	5.33
Frank Burkhardt	30.00			Souria Koomaren Moorghen	320.06
Rajagopal Krishnan	324.00	Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment		Hitesh & Rishitaa Murugesu	21.72
Sadhunathan Nadesan	300.00	Mano Navaratnarajah	75.00	Mano Navaratnarajah	150.00
Mallik & Manju Reddy	3,600.00			Cassan Pancham	1,500.00
Rajinder Sharma	504.00	Malaysia Hindu Renaissance Fund		Jake Porter	10.00
Anonymous	539.98	Anonymous	1,175.52	Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	42.69
Total	5,708.98			Chamundi Sabanathan	108.00
Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund		Hinduism Today Production Fund		Chandra Sankara	101.00
Mardaye Caremben	21.28	Ambika Alagere	2.13	Hitesvara Saravan	216.00
Shanmuga Devam	251.00	Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	6.40	Nandi Devi Sivanathan	43.72
Malvi Gandhi	75.00	Ian Johnson	40.00	Shanthi Suresh	108.00
Roudhranee Jugurnauth	31.95	Rajagopal Krishnan	20.00	Anba Dayananden Valayten	5.55
Luke Labella	300.00	Murli Melwani	500.00	John Wahlen	36.69
Karthikeyan & Uma Lakshmanan	20.00	Kulagan Moonesawmy	10.67	Anonymous	2,913.33
Tejwantee Meetoo	21.34	Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01	Total	12,505.11
Logadhasan Murugesu	32.50	Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	42.69	Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment	
Subramaniam Pennathur	49.98	Chamundi Sabanathan	487.00	Shyamal Chandra Debnath	150.00
Bhanugopan Ramudu	251.00	Anonymous	63.00		
Chidambaram Sendan	68.13	Total	1,221.90	Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund	
Nandi Deva Sundaram	100.00	Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund		Pathmini Saravanapavan	300.00
Devadasen Vythelingum	251.00	Benevity	202.00		
Anonymous	272.00	Tamnash J. Gupta	432.00	Manitha Neyam Trust Fund	
Total	1,745.18	Roshan Harilela	375.00	Nutanaya Sivaceyon	10.41
Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund		Steven Lee	10.00		
Rajendra Bassit	249.00	Chamundi Sabanathan	78.75	Manjung Hindu Sabha Orphanage Fund	
Mekaladeva Batumallah	40.00	Hitesvara Saravan	36.00	Gayathri Sinnmayanandan	50.00
Jagdish Bhavsar	249.00	Jeeva Velusaami	42.00	Rajiv Verma	150.00
Bill Brown	37.15	Matthew Wieczork	20.00	Anonymous	100.00
Niranjan Bukkapatna	249.00	Michael Zimmermann	5.00	Total	300.00
Shanmuga Devam	499.00	Anonymous	84.00		
Srinivas Gantasala	249.00	Total	1,284.75	Pazhassi Balamandiram Orphanage Fund	
Carvel Harward	249.00	Hindu Education Endowment		Steven Lee	20.00
Roudhranee Jugurnauth	32.14	Fidelity Charitable	100.00	Anonymous	100.00
Sabyasachi Kar	249.00	Arjun & Revathi Pennathur	75.00	Total	120.00
Juhivaasana Koothan	8.52	Ravi & Vaishnavi Ramakrishnan	101.00		
Aran Ram Krishnarajah	249.00	Total	276.00	Swami Vipulananta Children's Home Endowment	
Chakrapani Kunda	249.00	Alaveddy Pasupatheeswarar Temple Fund		Muthukumar Jeyapalan	3,000.00
Shilpa And Vishal Lodha	249.00	Chandni Patel	30.00		
Rajinee Marcon	102.19	Anonymous	10.00	Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund	
Bhaveshan Moorghen	6.39	Total	40.00	Rajagopal Krishnan	40.00
Satinder & Adarsh Passi	249.00	Murugan Temple of North America Pillaiyar Shrine Fund			
Arjun Patel	249.00	Pathmini Saravanapavan	300.00	Himalayan Academy Publications Endowment	
Darshan B. Patel	249.00			Vel Mahalingum	8.53
Priya Patel	249.00	Thank You Bodhinatha Fund		Mano Navaratnarajah	225.00
Bhanugopan Ramudu	219.00	Sumathi Raja Chanda	450.00	Anonymous	54.00
Seydi Shaheen	299.00	Yongliang Chen	50.00	Total	287.53
Sudha Vinadharan	270.94	Peshanidevi Dandapani	108.00		
Shamini Wijay	299.00	Sachi Dastidar	249.00		
Total	5,050.33				

APRIL TO JUNE ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund		Total	147.00	Ambika Alagere	6.40
Valliammah Kandasamy	32.24			Anandkumar Ayyachamy	75.00
Anonymous	33.00	Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment		Murali Balaji	251.00
Total	65.24	Arun Aarooren	75.00	Barathi Balasegaran	12.00
		Anil Ananda Badhwar	30.00	Yongliang Chen	150.00
Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment		Kiran Datar	108.00	Rishi Chopra	10.00
Steven Lee	30.00	Shubha Gangal	101.00	Rakesh Dixit	451.00
Chandni Patel	40.00	Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	6.40	Ajita Gupta	30.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01	Srinivas R. Madaboosi	250.00	Sundaramahesan Jeyakumar	100.00
Tejasinha Sivalingam	12.00	Natraj Narayanswami	30.00	Murugesu Kandasamy	32.24
Sivaruban & Carolyn Sivanesan	150.00	Chandni Patel	20.00	C. & J. Kumaranayakam	100.00
Poobarlene Soobramanien	21.41	Padmini Samuthiran	162.00	Sumathi Kuppusamy	108.00
Anonymous	1,434.30	Gouri Shanker	101.00	Velika Lawrence	9.99
Total	1,737.72	Nandi Devi Sivanathan	32.94	Kulagan Moonesawmy	6.40
		Sivaruban & Carolyn Sivanesan	150.00	Hitesh & Rishitaa Murugesu	21.19
Siva Poomi School Trust		Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00	Mohanavilashiny Murugesu	10.52
Ashwini Bennett	50.00	Arunasalam Vathavooran	75.00	Sadhunathan Nadesan	300.00
Muthukumar Jeyapalan	9,000.00	Krishna Vijh	51.00	Vanesh Naidu	90.00
Tharani Rockwood	101.00	Anonymous	495.22	Rajesh & Anu Nanda	100.00
Nanthakumar Velayutham	10.00	Total	1,717.56	V.A. & Radhu Ravi	51.00
Total	9,161.00			Padmini Samuthiran	162.00
		Jaffna Kannathiddy Kali Kovil Endowment		Tarangadeva Sinhaputra	63.00
Maha Ganapati Temple of Arizona Endowment		Anonymous	325.08	Jeyakumari Sivakumar	101.00
Chellappa Deva	25.00			Nandi Devi Sivanathan	33.03
Anonymous	116.00	Murugamoorthi Thirukkovil Endowment		Ramesh Sivanathan	17.58
Total	141.00	Raj Padman Padmalingam	42,732.89	Manoj Sureshkumar	100.00
				Ravi Thaker	23.00
Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund		Panchangam Endowment Fund		Atul Thakkar	1,000.00
Pathmini Saravanapavan	300.00	Balaji Mudradi	5.00	Jeeva Velusaami	21.00
Ravi Thaker	2.50	Anonymous	100.00	Saravan Veylan	324.00
Total	302.50	Total	105.00	Anonymous	824.36
		Digital Dharma Endowment		Total	4,683.71
Rani Jothiswarar Memorial Fund		Kulagan Moonesawmy	4.27		
Charities Aid Foundation America	48.51	Chamundi Sabanathan	487.00	Total Contributions	\$115,727.57
Charities Aid Foundation	97.03	Ashok Sridhar	251.00	Funds at Market Value, June 30, 2023	
Total	145.54	Anonymous	209.66		
		Total	951.93	Grand Total	\$20,802,356.53
India Hindu Temple Cleaning Fund		Kauai Aadheenam Feed the Monks Fund			
Sivaramakrish Muthukrishnan	102.00	Fidelity Charitable	100.00		
Anonymous	45.00				

MISSION STATEMENT: Hindu Heritage Endowment is a publicly supported, charitable organization recognized as tax exempt by the IRS on April 22, 1994. Employer ID 99-0308924. Founded by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, its philanthropic mission is to provide secure, professionally managed financial support for institutions and religious leaders of all lineages of Sanatana Dharma.

PROFESSIONAL ADVISORS: Halbert, Hargrove, Investment Counsel; Lynn M. Gaumer, J.D., Stelter Co. and Sonoda & Isara LLP, certified public accountants. HHE is a member of the Partnership for Philanthropic Planning, the source for education, research and advocacy for professionals who have a role in designing and implementing donors' philanthropic plans.

I WANT TO PARTICIPATE: Where should I Send My Donation? You can send your gift to an existing fund, create a new endowment or request information through the address below. Donations may be made online at www.hheonline.org to join our family of benefactors who are Strengthening Hinduism Worldwide. Thank you.



HINDU HERITAGE ENDOWMENT

KAUAI'S HINDU MONASTERY

107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304 USA

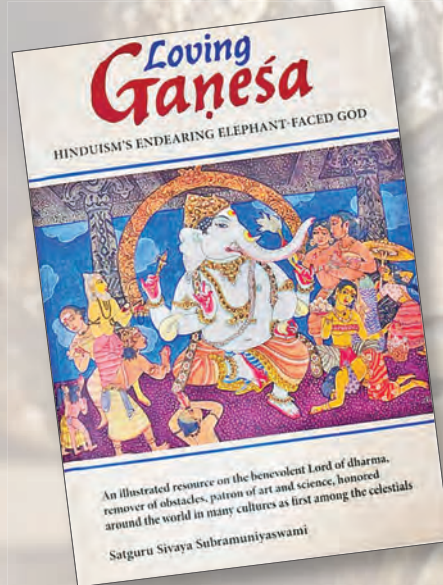
808-822-3012 • hhe@hindu.org

www.hheonline.org • www.facebook.com/hhecares



MiniMela

Kauai Hindu Monastery's
Spiritual treasure box



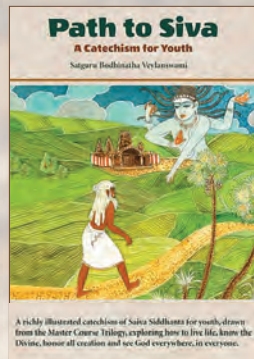
Newly released 3rd edition of *Loving Ganesha*

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.)

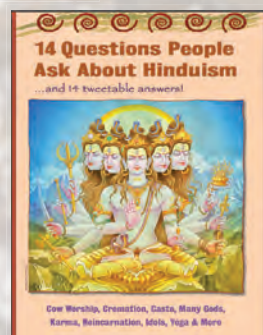


36-bead rudraksha mala grown and assembled by devotees of Kauai's Hindu Monastery and blessed by the swamis.



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

14 great answers to those 14 tough questions people ask you and your children (Why many Gods? Do Hindus worship cows?... etc.)—a 9-page booklet created by Hinduism Today's editors.



And much more at:

minimela.com

SACRED STATUES & ART FROM INDIA & TIBET



This magnificent 6-foot tall sandstone Surya and other fine, hand-carved statues are available in the USA now, ready to be shipped anywhere.

713-668-2948
concept@wt.net
www.hindugods.net



SACRED DIALOGUE ARTIST



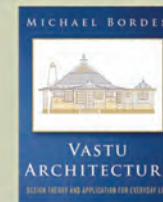
Your guide to Self Empowerment



Book a session by email
Xylawaum@gmail.com
Studio Trust



VASTUVED INTERNATIONAL



Building design in the ancient tradition of Vastu Shastra
Residential and Commercial Properties
Comprehensive Vastu Design Theory and Application for Everyday Life

<http://www.vastu-design.com/vastu-architecture-book.php>
www.vastu-design.com 1-641-472-2157



THAT INDIAN PLACE

Kauai, an exceptionally beautiful island with an incredible Indian Restaurant

www.thatindianplace.com

808-320-3512

2360 Kiahuna Plantation Dr, Koloa HI 96756



सा विद्या या विमुक्तये

KNOWLEDGE IS THAT WHICH LIBERATES

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.



www.hua.edu

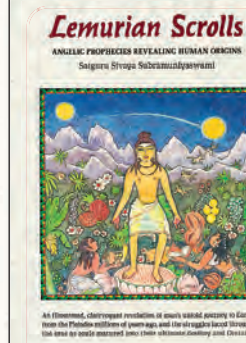
Hindu University of America is an institution of higher learning, teaching, reflection and research based in the knowledge systems rooted in and emerging from Hindu thought, where you will find a welcoming, global community of learners led by passionate faculty.

HAWAII HEAVEN

Magnificent private bluff estate on Kauai's north shore

- Bali-style 5-bedroom main house and agricultural structures
- Enjoy your own private retreat
- Zen-style residential spaces
- Elegant studio w/European hardwood floor
- Medicinal tea farm, mature fruit trees

Yelena Okhman Realtor®(S) • Remax Kauai
808-635-6552 • yelenastars@gmail.com



Gain a great understanding about where human-kind is headed at this point in time, the reason we originally came to this plane of existence, why we have gone

through all that we have gone through, where it will all lead and what is the purpose of it all.

Lemurian Scrolls consists of akashic messages that were revealed mystically to the founder of Hinduism Today magazine, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (Gurudeva) in 1973. After decades of being kept private, Gurudeva decided, one day, to release them to the world. If you know Gurudeva's other teachings, you know that you can expect sound, clear information that will mean a great deal to you.

400 illustrated pages • hardback • color • US\$35

www.minimela.com/lemurian

VEDIC YAGYA CENTER

(Traditional Vedic Yagya Remedies Performed by Expert Vedic Pandits)
FOR MORE INFO : (+1) 512 633 7999 | www.vydic.com

Sadhana Yatra & Yagya

Special Individual Yagyas at the sacred abode of Lord Shiva - Mother divine - Lord Ganesha & Lord Subrahmanya (Murugan)

Pundit Samavedula at Vedic Yagya Center is organizing first time a special yagya remedies at the holy abode of Lord Shiva & Goddess Shakti to offer the utmost highest remedial yagyas to remedy many issues in our mundane lives.

These remedial yagyas can help participants to live with the highest level of comfort & bring success, happiness and peace into their lives.

Level A - Shiva Shakti Parivara Yagyas (Over 30 Yagyas together) Benefits: Health & healing - Prosperity & protection - Wealth & well-being - Success in personal & professional life Order Now - \$1801 (Early Bird Price - \$1501)	Level B - All Shiva Jyotirlinga Maha Yagyas Benefits: Good health & rejuvenating/healing energy - Balancing all Graha Doshas - Help with legal issues in personal & professional life Order Now - \$999 (Early Bird Price - \$899)
Level C - All Shakti Peetha Maha Yagyas Benefits: Health & healing - Prosperity & protection - Wealth & well-being - Success in personal & professional life Order Now - \$999 (Early Bird Price - \$899)	Level D - All Ganesha Kshetra Maha Yagyas Benefits: Neutralizing obstacles in personal and professional life - Helping with anxiety and Depression in one's life. Order Now - \$455 (Early Bird Price - \$355)
Level E - All Subrahmanya Kshetra Maha Yagyas Benefits: Creating a stronger energy for healthy fertility - Neutralizing Naga, Sarpa Doshas in natal chart - Finding a suitable spouse or companion in one's life. Order Now - \$455 (Early Bird Price - \$355)	Shiva & Shakti Yagyas Only Benefits: Eliminate the effects of past sins and distractions, enabling a focus on divine creations. Order Now

For your personal and professional astrological and vedic remedy consultation with Pundit Samavedula, please contact : vyc@vydicfoundation.org | +1 (512) 633 7999 / +1 (888) 835 7788



Vegan Vitamins & Supplements

No animal products or derivatives of any kind

High quality
Wide selection
Affordable prices



...and many more!



DEVA vitamins are 100% vegan, vegetarian and certified by the Vegan Society, the non-profit organization that actually invented the word "vegan."

Available for purchase at:

WHOLE FOODS & other
Natural Health Food Stores.

(888) 988-DEVA

www.devanutrition.com
info@devanutrition.com



Life Insurance and Estate Planning

Rely on a professional for Retirement and Estate Planning

For information, contact one of the most highly trained financial advisors:

Niraj P. Baxi, msi, clu, chfc
Tel: 800-686-8436
niraj@baxifinancial.com
www.baxifinancial.com

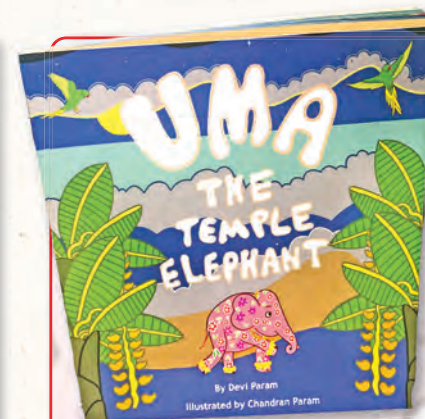


Kauai
Investment Properties
Homes Condos Land

Claire SUNITA Keaton
Real Estate Broker
RE Licence: RB 23898
808-639-9090
clairekeaton@yahoo.com
kauaihomesearcher.com
Brokerage Licence: RB 23899



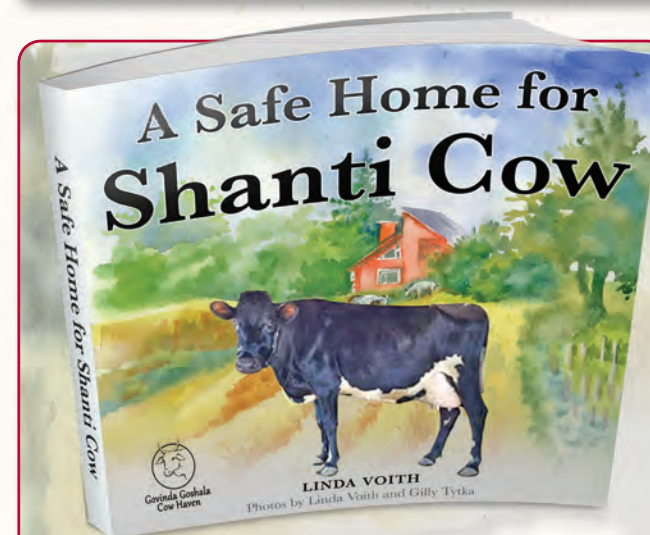
Kauai
Home Searcher LLC
Real Estate Sales and Property Management



A sweet, inspiring story

Uma may be a baby elephant, but she is determined to define her own future. In a small village where young elephants often do not get to choose the life they desire, Uma knows in her heart that she has a special destiny. With her sheer will and clear desire, will the dream come true?

By Devi Param • 48 pages
Illustrated by Chandran Param
Order from Amazon.com



Touching the hearts of little ones

The true story of a rescued cow & her calves, and other children's books that teach compassion and kindness. All are downloadable, **FREE**.

www.govindagoshala.org

Print versions are available on Amazon, world-wide

CLASSIFIEDS

Classified ads are us\$55 for 20 words, \$1 for each additional word. "Box ads" are \$80 and \$150 • 10% to 35% discount for repeat ads • 888-464-1008, 808-634-5407 fax: 888-217-3108 • ads@hindu.org
www.hinduismtoday.com

Devotional Supplies

For All Your Spiritual Needs

Shop at the home of **Hinduism Today** for all your devotional and spiritual supplies. Books, including the complete works of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, incense, rare rudrakshas, malas of all types, elegant statues, children's books and much more.

www.minimela.com

Free Products & Services

Home-Study Course in the Vedanta.

Contact Parashakti Vidya Gurukul,
PO Box 250, Spring Valley, NY 10977
parashaktividya@aol.com

Professional Products & Services

Indoor/outdoor painting—No. California
Residential, commercial, interior & exterior. Color consulting. Licensed, bonded & insured. Vama's Painting Co., 925-279-1051.

Freight Forwarder

Ship >45 kg or more
Anywhere from US
Fx: 1-800-396-6659
Sales2@air7seas.us
www.air7seas.com



Fine Quality Neem Products

Specializing in fresh neem leaf, neem sticks, living neem trees and other Ayurvedic herbs. Our complete line of neem products contains more neem than any other U.S. manufacturer, all at fresh-from-the-farm prices.

www.neemtreefarms.com
877-500-6336

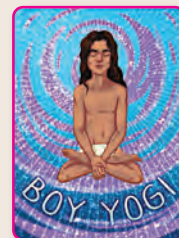


Publications

Creation of a Great Yogi

The inspiring true story of a teen who courageously meditated non stop for 12 years and became the great Shri Shiva-balayogi Maharaj. View on Amazon. Free in the USA:

germaine108@yahoo.com



Dreaming Peace: The History of Positive Thinking and What It Means in the Post-Truth Era, by Nori Muster
norimuster.com/books/

Babaji's Kriya Yoga Publications

Books, correspondence course, seminars, ashrams, audios, videos, pilgrimages.
babajiskriyayoga.net
1-888-252-9642



Sri Aurobindo books. Ayurveda. vReiki. Vedic astrology. Alternative health. Plus over 14,000 health & wellness products. Wholesale-retail-mail order. Free catalogs. Lotus Press, HT Box 1008, Silver Lake, WI 53170 USA • www.lotuspress.com

Sri Chinmoy Books

Sri Chinmoy's soulful offerings in the form of books, music and art have been the source of inspiration and wisdom for seekers for over 50 years.

+1-734-994-7114
srchinmoy.org
srchinmoybooks.com



Divine Life Society Publications

Choose from over 100 free e-books and 300+ printed books on Hindu philosophy, yoga, meditation and more by Swami Sivananda and his disciples.

www.dlsebooks.org • www.dlsbooks.org

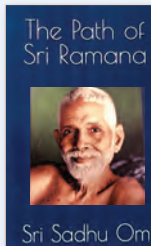


Discover Your True, Divine Nature:
Read *Yogatma - the Spirit of Yoga*. Explore Yoga beyond asana and pranayama • www.yogaatma.in

The Teachings of Sri Ramana

The best comprehensive and introductory book on the teachings of the great sage by Sri Sadhu Om, one of his direct disciples. Available at Amazon marketplaces worldwide.

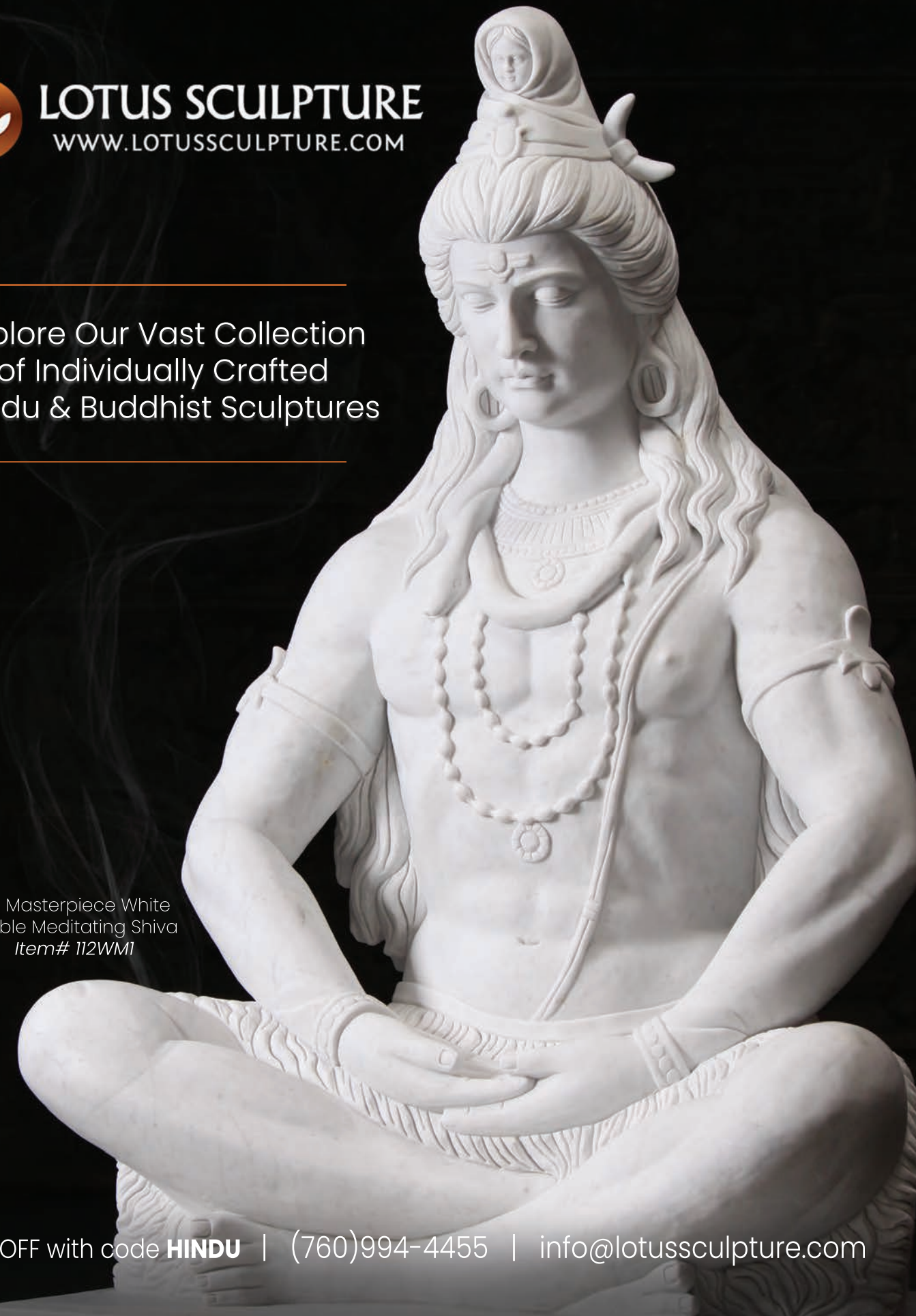
ramanahou.org
vimeo.com/ramanahou



LOTUS SCULPTURE
WWW.LOTUSSCULPTURE.COM

Explore Our Vast Collection
of Individually Crafted
Hindu & Buddhist Sculptures

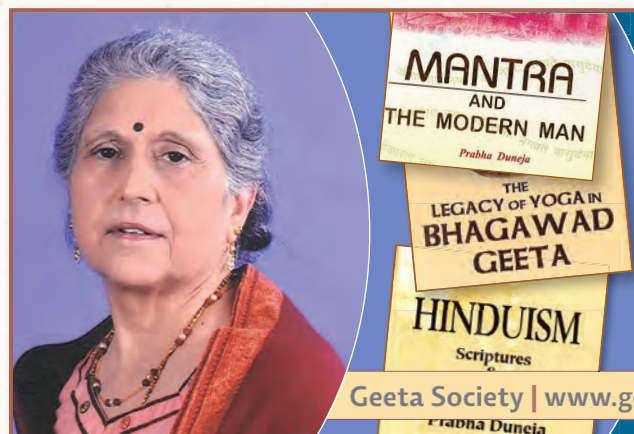
54" Masterpiece White
Marble Meditating Shiva
Item# 112WMI



Resources to enhance life

Prabha Duneja was recognized for her deep devotion and lauded for her ability to capture Hinduism's spirit, philosophy and mysticism. Her works are used in universities, and her spiritual insights continue to inspire many, some of whom testify that she has transformed their lives. Search YouTube/Prabha Duneja

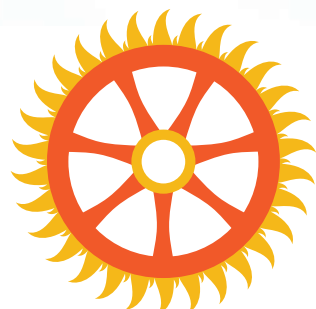
Geeta Society | www.geetasociety.org | 209-609-4791 | drmakker@gmail.com



10% OFF with code **HINDU** | (760)994-4455 | info@lotussculpture.com

Hinduism Today Publisher, Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, will attend the Congress and receive an award

WHC 2023 Bangkok



Jayasya Aayatanam Dharmah
Dharma, the Abode of Victory

World Hindu Congress 2023

24 - 26 November, 2023
Bangkok, Thailand

Seven Thematic Parallel Conferences



Economy



HINDU EDUCATION BOARD

Education



HINDU MEDIA FORUM

Media



Political



HINDU WOMEN FORUM

Women



HINDU STUDENTS & YOUTH NETWORK

Youth



HOTA FORUM

Organisational



@WHCongress



@WorldHinduCongress

www.worldhinducongress.org

whc2023@worldhinducongress.org

+66 81 890 6227



SCAN to REGISTER

Ad sponsored by Hindus of Greater Houston

Yoga Tantra SriVidya Sacred dance Kirtan Samskrit Samskara Puja

MATHA GITANANDA ASHRAM



a traditional Hindu ashram in Italy

+39 019 584692 |
monasteroindu@gmail.com | www.gitanandashram.it



Hindu Global Charity

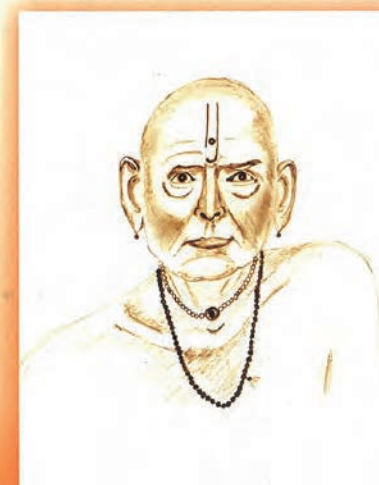


We are currently planning projects in Nepal, Pakistan and Nigeria.

American Hindu World Service (AHWS) is a 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

AHWS • PO Box 1483, Laurel, MD 20725-1483, USA
626-475-7149 • ahwsngo@gmail.com

ETERNAL FRIEND ŚHRĪ SWĀMĪ SAMARTH MAHĀRĀJ OF AKKALKOT



By
MUKUND M. HANUMANTE, Ph.D

Find the Divine within

Eternal Friend offers the keys to the Divine that ever resides within—is always there, ready to guide and help you attain that peace and contentment which is your true nature.

"Eternal Friend is a doorway to auspiciousness and infinite peace."—Shri Sathya Sai Baba

"Eternal Friend helps people manifest their deepest soul potentials."—Dr. David Frawley:

By M. Hanumante, PhD • 142 p.
hardcover • color

mukund@juno.com
<https://akkalkotswamisamarth-usa.org>

HELP SAVE INDIA'S ANCIENT TEMPLES & TRADITIONS



Temple Renovation



Oil Donation
to Poor Temples



Annadanam

Practicing Hindus Preserving Our Past

India's ancient temples are dying. In Tamil Nadu alone, more than 12,000 temples do not have any poojas happening or even a single lamp being lit. Thousands of temples across the state are lying in ruins waiting to be renovated. Behind Every Temple is a 501c3 Non-Profit organization dedicated to ensuring these sacred sites are protected and renovated for future generations. In addition to temple renovation, we also provide free oil to ancient temples in poor condition and regularly perform annadanam (feeding) for intellectually disabled people. We are entirely volunteer-run, so 100% of your tax-deductible donation goes directly to these projects.

For Hindus, dana (giving) is an integral part of one's dharma, so we invite everyone to help participate in these noble projects and help keep India's temples and traditions alive



To learn more please visit us at
www.behindeverytemple.org



SCAN ME

*A*mong the mists of yesterdays,
I lifted anchor
And ventured upon Samsara.

By 1992, there arose
Troubled waters
Without end.

By 1998,
My heart was aflame
Longing for His Presence.
Flame upon flame, 'til
I cried out for help!

Within days,
The man appeared,
Who would take me on
My journey to Kailash.

In Kathmandu, I purchased
A bronze statue
Of Lord Nataraja,
That I might adore him
At Lake Mansarovar
And at Darshan,
At the foot of
Mighty Kailash.

Two hundred kilometers
Into Tibet,
A camp was set.
The cold was bitter
And my temples were burning.
I heard a voice give advice, and
I survived the night.

In the morning
Mansarovar was serene
And rippled gently in the breeze.

And Lo!
On my left, there it was!
In the distance, clad in snow,
The Dome of my delight!

My heart soared.

My Journey to Kailash
by Dr. Arjunan Subramaniam
Desa Parkcity, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 1st to 13th May, 2020
Photo Shutterstock: Mount Kailash

Then the harshest test:
Scaling the Drolma La Pass.
18,900 feet, little oxygen, I faltered,
The lady guide
Held my arm.
Past midnight,
I threw up my hands and shouted,
And the mountains echoed,
"Muruga! Muruga! Muruga!"

At dawn, exhausted,
I not knowing Tibetan,
She not knowing English,
I pointed to my legs.
She found me a place
To sit.

At that very moment,
A whirlwind arose
And I heard the music
Of Lord Nataraja's Tandava.

In two and a half days of
Unrelenting altitude, cold and wind,
I had traversed fifty-two kilometers
To complete the traditional
Drolma La Pass trek
And the great Pradakshina.

The wilderness
Was my silence;
My breath, my mantra;
The bronze statue,
My Companion.

The Unfathomed Blessing of Disappearing Into Divinity



The artist captures the attainment of kaivalya, ultimate liberation. Dharma Megha Samadhi arises when you have lost even the desire for enlightenment. It comes not by effort, but reveals itself when all effort has subsided. It is a divine gift from Siva. Grace-giving clouds, called Dharma Megha, fill the cosmos, symbol of Siva's love surrounding the yogi. Patanjali speaks of this as "a cloud of virtue raining goodness," shown in the artwork as various blessings from the devas—flowers, bilva leaves, light, music and water. Above, Siva is the fierce Bhairava with His vahana, a dog. Siva's ten strands of hair flail across the sky. In His hands Bhairava holds a trisula and a sword with which He just severed the yogi's bonds. Siva's arms are held apart, welcoming the yogi. At the top of the image is the blazing Central Sun representing Savikalpa Samadhi, and at the center is the Great Nothingness, Sunya, Parasiva beyond the beyond. At left, the yogi is seen to merge into this timeless, formless, causeless Self, propelled by the power of the Siva temples near him, northern and southern, which are the powerhouses of Siva's shakti.

Canada CAD 10
India INR 225
Malaysia MYR 14
Mauritius MRU 115
Singapore SGD 10
UK GBP 5



SURSH MUTHUKULAM