

HINDUISM TODAY®

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



The Patient Art Of Parenting



(Cover) Harmony between child and parent is key to the Positive Discipline approach to child rearing; (above) statue of Laxminarayan stolen in 1984, auctioned by Sotheby's in New York in 1989 then finally returned by the Dallas Museum of Art and reinstalled in 2021

JULY/AUGUST/SEPTEMBER, 2026 • The Hindu Year Parābhava, 5128 • पराभव

Bodhinatha Veylanawami

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Sri Lanka's Sea-Cliff Siva Temple

Tirukoneswaram Temple sits upon a 167-foot promontory at the entrance to the historic Trincomalee Harbor. Demolished by the Portuguese in the 17th century and modestly rebuilt in the 1950s, it remains one of the nation's five great Siva temples... Page 28

Caption: The cleaved cliff in the center is known locally as Ravanan Vettu, Ravana's Cut, believed to have been split by King Ravana in a paroxysm of rage and grief upon hearing of his mother's death



GLOBAL DHARMA

INDIA

Uttarakhand Introduces Temple Entry Measures

A MAJOR RELIGIOUS DECISION has been taken in Uttarakhand ahead of the Char Dham Yatra 2026. The Badrinath-Kedarnath Temple Committee has passed a resolution prohibiting the entry of non-Hindus into 47 temples under its jurisdiction, including the sacred shrines of Badrinath and Kedarnath, according to *News Nine*. The resolution was passed during the BKTC's budget meeting held on March 10 at its camp office in Dehradun. Chaired by BKTC President Hemant Dwivedi, the meeting approved a budget of US\$13 million for the financial year 2026-27. The most closely watched proposal was the ban on non-Hindus, which was unanimously passed.

BKTC President Hemant Dwivedi explained that the

demand had been raised for a long time. He stated that only those who follow Sanatana Dharma and have faith in Baba Kedarnath and Badri Vishal are welcome. Access to the sanctum sanctorum and temple premises of 47 temples is now prohibited for non-Hindus.

The decision has sparked political and social debate. Congress MLA Qazi Nizamuddin criticized the move, calling it unconstitutional and divisive. All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen leader Asaduddin Owaisi also condemned similar restrictions earlier at Har Ki Pauri ghats in Haridwar, describing them as a violation of equality and a mockery of the Constitution. On the other hand, Dr. Imam Umar Ahmed Ilyasi, Chief Imam of the All India



God Siva: At the sacred heights of the Himalayas, Kedarnath temple stands timeless, where snow, silence and devotion meet in the presence of Lord Siva

Imam Organization, supported the decision. He said that every religion has its own rules and sanctity, and outsiders should respect them. He compared the restriction to the rule in Mecca and Medina, where non-Muslims are not allowed entry. Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Singh Dhami has left the

decision to temple committees. He stated that religious sites are managed by organizations like the Tirtha Sabha, Ganga Sabha, Kedar Sabha, and BKTC, and decisions should be made in consultation with them. The government, he said, will respect the views of those who oversee these sacred places.



CAMBODIA

Ancient Siva Deity Reborn after Restoration

A MASSIVE 1,000-YEAR-OLD "Dancing Siva" Deity, which was broken into more than 10,000 fragments centuries ago, has been successfully restored in Cambodia, the culture ministry said, according to *FTN News*.

The five-meter, seven-ton sculpture was originally carved from a single block of sandstone, with 10 arms and five faces. It dates back to the 10th century, and was found at the site of an ancient capital of the Khmer Empire, Koh Ker. The temple ruins of Koh Ker in northern Cambodia were listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2023.

The Deity was officially unveiled recently at its temporary home at the Angkor Conservation Centre in Siem Reap, near the renowned Angkor Wat heritage site. The ministry said the statue represents an extraordinary artistic and technical achievement. It will eventually be returned to its original

location at Koh Ker Temple, where it can help to attract more visitors to the historic site. The statue was discovered in a severely damaged state, having been broken into more than 10,000 fragments in the 14th century, largely due to looting during the civil war, the ministry stated.

Siva, the Supreme Deity in the Saivite denomination of Hinduism, is revered as the Lord of Dance. Hinduism reached Cambodia as early as the 1st century through Indian traders and maritime explorers who journeyed across Southeast Asia. During the Khmer Empire (9th-15th centuries), Hinduism was the state religion.

Cambodian experts, in cooperation with the French School of the Far East (EFEO), spent five years restoring the elaborate artwork. Its meticulous restoration



spanned from 2020 to 2026, building on archaeological research initiated in 2012.

The project brought together highly experienced sculpture restorers and specialist art mounters to reassemble a monumental three-dimensional puzzle, considered one of the most complex undertaken in partnership with Cambodian heritage institutions.

The project required 600 person-days for conservation and

Historic: Cambodia unveils ancient Dancing Siva statue restored from 10,000 fragmented pieces

restoration, with 215 person-days devoted to structural design and fabrication. Specialized training in stone conservation was also provided to 20 professionals so they could gain essential skills for future work, thus strengthening local conservation capacity.



Colorful celebration: Holi, returning to its roots—natural colors that celebrate both tradition and the Earth

ENVIRONMENT

Holi Turns Green with Natural Dye Replacing Synthetic Ones

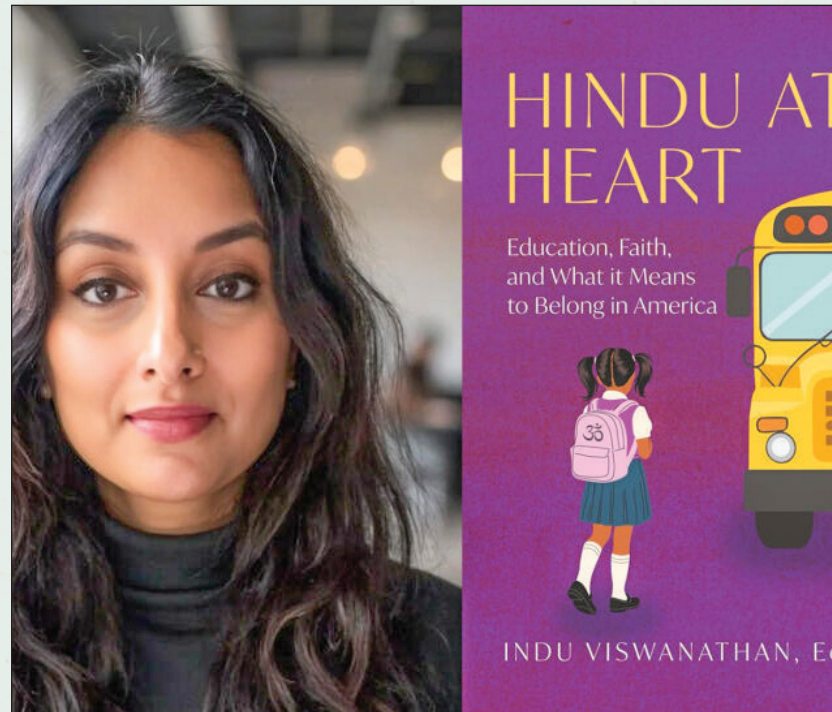
AS INDIA PREPARED FOR HOLI festival, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change turned the spotlight on nature-based colors, urging communities to celebrate without compromising health or the environment. The ministry conducted hands-on workshops across Eco Clubs nationwide, teaching students how to prepare natural Holi colors from everyday ingredients, according to an *India West* report.

In classrooms transformed into vibrant laboratories, students learned to extract green from fresh leafy vegetables, red from beetroot, yellow from turmeric and orange from palash (also called "flame of the forest") flowers. By replacing synthetic

powders with biodegradable alternatives, they learned to reduce exposure to harmful chemicals that often find their way into water bodies and soil after the festivities.

The workshops were designed not only to demonstrate how colors could be made, but also to embed environmental awareness into daily habits. The campaign gathered momentum across schools, with students emerging as advocates of eco-friendly celebrations within their communities.

Beyond classrooms, local markets also saw a shift toward eco-friendly colors, with Nagpur witnessing rising demand for organic gulal and safer alternatives.



Voice: "Hindu at Heart: Education, Faith, and What It Means to Belong in America" and author Indu Viswanathan.

USA

Hindu Voices Seek Changes in US Public Education

AN EDUCATION SCHOLAR AND MOTHER OF TWO COLLEGE students, Indu Viswanathan is no stranger to the challenges of misrepresentation in the US public school system. She was first exposed to stereotypes and tropes surrounding the Hindu faith—which she and other practitioners say have persisted—as a grade school student in the 1980s, according to *Religion News Service*.

Now, Viswanathan's recent book, *Hindu at Heart: Education, Faith, and What It Means to Belong in America*, published by Briarcliff Press, offers a new perspective on Hinduism. It questions long-standing historical interpretations shaped by Western viewpoints. Refuting claims that the religion is a pagan, irrational or un-American tradition, she draws on decades of research and firsthand engagement with families, schools and public institutions.

At a time of increasing animosity toward Indian immigrants, the book aims to open a larger, timely discussion, said Viswanathan, who lives in New York City.

"The Hindu American and Hinduism experience is the site of study, but it's speaking to larger themes right now in America—vis-à-vis education, the purpose of education, immigration and religion," she said in an interview with RNS.



UAE

BAPS Temple to Welcome Devotees Again

THE BAPS HINDU MANDIR IN Abu Dhabi reopened its doors to devotees from April 14, according to *NDTV*. The temple was temporarily closed for nearly 40 days due to regional tensions. The move comes after authorities in the UAE confirmed improved conditions, paving the way for the resumption of public access to places of worship and marking a return to normalcy in the region.

The temple announced on Instagram that devotees can offer

prayers, but they need to register in advance either through man-dir.ae/visit or by using the BAPS Mandir app. The temple's visiting hours will be from Tuesday to Sunday, between 9 am and 8 pm. It will remain closed on Mondays to allow for maintenance and spiritual reflection.

Swami Brahnaviharidas, head of BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi, shared a heartfelt message. He wrote, "With God's grace and prayers from millions, the BAPS Hindu Mandir,



Doors reopened: (above) The water surrounding the BAPS Hindu Mandir temple is symbolic of India's holy rivers; (below) HH Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan warmly received Swami Brahnaviharidas at his private palace in Abu Dhabi.

through its saints and volunteers, has served society selflessly and spiritually with courage, compassion and prayer. The Mandir is our home in a nation where everyone feels at home—safe and peaceful."

He added, "Please come with all your faith, all your hopes and all your prayers for your families, your friends, our future and the able, stable and commendable leadership of the UAE, and all the wise leaders of the world who believe in love, peace and harmony. Let us be one, for one nation, one world, one humanity."

The Ganga Aarti at the BAPS Hindu Mandir is a much-awaited evening ritual. It is held daily at 7:30 pm, with an additional session at 6:45 pm on weekends and public holidays.

The BAPS Hindu Mandir enforces a strict dress code to maintain the temple's sanctity. Visitors are required to dress modestly, covering their shoulders and knees. The dress code prohibits sleeveless tops, shorts, mini-skirts and tight-fitting or transparent clothing. Garments with political or offensive designs are also banned.



BRIEFLY...

SINGAPORE IS ALL SET TO BUILD A new Sree Guruvayoorappan Ayyappan Temple, marking a significant milestone for the country's Indian community and its multicultural landscape, according to *International Business Times*. The Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth announced in April, 2026 that the Sree Guruvayoorappan Ayyappan Temple will be constructed along Yishun Avenue 3. Construction is expected to begin by September and could take up to three years to complete. Once ready, the temple will stand as the first new temple in Singapore since the Arulmigu Velmurugan Gnanamuneeswarar Temple was built in Sengkang in 2006.

A NUMBER OF PROMINENT PLACES of worship across Dubai, including Hindu temples, churches and a Sikh gurdwara, have reopened in phases between April 10–12, 2026, restoring access for devotees following temporary closures implemented for safety and security reasons, according to *TravelsDubai*. The reopening marks a gradual return of religious activities across the city, with each institution operating under specific guidelines and controlled arrangements.

ON APRIL 18, 2026, YOGANANDA'S historic event of April 18, 1926, was replicated at Carnegie Hall at an evening titled "The Divine Art of Music." The night celebrated the "art and science"

of kirtan and recognized Yogananda's success in bringing such musical mantra meditations to the West, according to *Religion News Service*. A century ago, Paramahansa Yogananda spoke to nearly 3,000 people at Carnegie Hall, where he also led an hour-and-25-minute kirtan, creating what he described as a "divine atmosphere of joyous praise."

KEDARNATH TEMPLE REOPENED ON April 22, 2026 after six months. Preparations included decoration with nearly six tons of flowers. Devotees started arriving early, as authorities enforced strict rules inside the temple, according to *India News TV*.

PETERBOROUGH CITY COUNCIL has decided to sell the site of the Bharat Hindu Samaj Temple. The temple was established in 1986 at the city's New England

Complex, Peterborough, England. Devotees have been fundraising for years to purchase the site and have been in negotiations with the council since 2011. But the council chose a preferred buyer in an effort to reduce debt, noting that both financial and social considerations were taken into account. The council has offered its services to work with the Hindu community to find another building.

Global Dharma news provided by

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PHOTOS: BAPS SWAMINARAYAN SANSTHA; BAPS SWAMINARAYAN SANSTHA



HINDUISM TODAY was founded on January 5, 1979, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927–2001). It is a nonprofit educational activity of Himalayan Academy, with the following purposes: 1. To foster Hindu solidarity as a unity in diversity among all sects

and lineages; 2. To inform and inspire Hindus worldwide and people interested in Hinduism; 3. To dispel myths, illusions and misinformation about Hinduism; 4. To protect, preserve and promote the sacred *Vedas* and the Hindu religion; 5. To nurture and monitor the ongoing spiritual Hindu renaissance; 6. To publish resources for Hindu leaders and educators who promote Sanatana Dharma. Join this *seva* by sending letters, clippings, photographs, reports on events and by encouraging others.



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IN MY OPINION

Help the Elderly to Pilgrimage

With special arrangements, our aged parents can focus on darshan, discipline and devotion

BY KUMUDHA VENKATESAN

WHILE WE WERE VISITING the Sankat Mochan Hanuman Mandir in Kashi, a man helped my mother navigate a steep step. When I thanked him, he gestured toward my mother and mother-in-law and said, "Thank you for showing Bhagavan to elders." That moment captured the spirit of our pilgrimage: enabling aged parents to receive darshan at some of Hinduism's most sacred sites.

In July 2025, our family undertook a four-day pilgrimage to Ayodhya, Prayagraj and Kashi with my mother and mother-in-law. The intent was simple and deliberate—to make darshan possible for elders who have lived lives grounded in dharma and devotion. With careful planning and support, the journey proved not only feasible but deeply meaningful.

Our itinerary was arranged through a travel agency, which handled flights, hotels and ground transport. A knowledgeable driver-guide accompanied us from Ayodhya to Kashi, ensuring minimal walking, arranging wheelchairs where needed and guiding us through temple procedures. This support was essential to making the journey comfortable and dignified for our elders.

Ayodhya was our first stop. The newly built Ram Lalla Temple, resonant with chants of "Jai Sri Ram," left a strong impression through its scale, architecture and atmosphere. Despite long queues, wheelchair access allowed timely darshan. Photography was restricted, reinforcing the reminder that such personal experiences are meant to be carried within rather than captured externally.

From Ayodhya, we traveled to Prayagraj, to the Triveni Sangam—the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati rivers. A boat journey allowed my mother and mother-in-law to offer Ganga arati, while my husband performed *tarpan* in remembrance of ancestors. Along the route to Kashi, we encountered many Sawan pilgrims walking



barefoot with Ganga water, chanting "Har Har Mahadev," a visible expression of collective faith during Siva's sacred month.

In Kashi, my mother and mother-in-law received darshan of the Kashi Vishwanath Lingam and blessings from the priest, including sacred vibhuti. The city's narrow lanes limited wheelchair access, but we were able to visit

several important temples, each offering a quiet and grounding experience of Siva worship.

Since returning, my mother and mother-in-law have deepened their daily practices of japa, prayer and visualization. Simple adaptations—mental chanting, shorter rituals and visual remembrance—have made these practices accessible despite age-related limitations. Their focus remains steady on divine names and forms, particularly Ram Lalla and Kashi Vishwanath.

This journey demonstrated that with thoughtful planning, patience and assistance, elderly devotees can visit pilgrimage sites safely and meaningfully. Wheelchair access, organized temple systems and respectful staff made a significant difference. For families considering similar journeys, working with an experienced travel agency is strongly recommended.

Our pilgrimage reinforced a central lesson of Hindu practice: surrender combined with effort makes even demanding undertakings possible. Beyond personal fulfillment, the journey inspired relatives and friends to consider taking their own aged parents and grandparents on pilgrimage. For my mother and mother-in-law, this was among the most fulfilling pilgrimages of their lives—centered on darshan, discipline and quiet devotion, rather than physical endurance.

KUMUDHA VENKATESAN, a wife and mother based in Atlanta, Georgia, is passionate about Hinduism and spirituality. Contact: kumudha_1998@yahoo.com



PUBLISHER'S DESK

Realization in Hinduism

One cannot begin the spiritual path with God-Realization any more than he can start the study of mathematics with calculus

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

A DEVOTEE RECENTLY SUBMITTED TWO questions to our weekly online Zoom satsang. Let me share the answers I gave plus some further thoughts on these topics.

First Question

"In modern usage, self-realization is often understood as achieving one's goals or fulfilling ambitions. What term would you suggest to more clearly express the spiritual meaning of Self-Realization?"

You are correct in stating that in a modern secular context, the concept of self-realization has a different meaning than it does in Hindu thought. Today, it is often used to mean fulfilling one's personal potential or achieving success in life. A life coach might use *self-realization* to describe clients "turning aspirations into reality" through structured training. This modern usage is strongly influenced by psychology, especially the work of Abraham Maslow, who described "self-actualization" as the highest stage of personal development. Over time, the term *self-realization* has been used interchangeably with that idea in popular writing, coaching and motivational literature.

In the yogic tradition, however, Self-Realization refers to something far more profound. It does not relate to outer achievements but rather to inner spiritual truths, not just understanding a truth intellectually but actually experiencing the truth being described. For example, one's soul nature can be experienced as a bright inner light, or *atmajyoti*. Intellectually comprehending that the soul can be experienced in that way is not realization. The actual inner seeing of *atmajyoti* is what is meant by realization.

To avoid confusion with the modern secular use of the term self realization, one solution is to use a Sanskrit word rather than an English word. The word that Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami uses for spiritual realization in his writings is *darshana*. For example, *Dancing with Siva* Mandala One is entitled "Self Realization—Paramatma Darshanam." *Darshana* has the meaning of vision or sight. To render *paramatma darshanam* in English, you could say "mystical sight of the Self."

Second Question

"What does realizing God and realizing the Self mean in Hinduism?" Realization of God or the Self has different meanings in different philosophical schools of Hinduism. In purely devotional schools of Hinduism, the term *Self-Realization* is sometimes used to refer to realizing one's true nature as the soul, distinct from the body, while God-Realization refers to direct experience of the Supreme Lord. In nondual traditions, however, the deepest Self is understood

to be identical with Absolute Reality, so Self-Realization and God-Realization ultimately refer to the same attainment.

A verse from the *Chandogya Upanishad* contains the statement "Tat Tvam Asi" which is one of the four classic mahavakya that express the monistic view of Self-Realization. The verse translates as "Thou art That." It declares the non-dual identity of the individual Self (Atman, "thou" or "tvam") with Ultimate Reality (Brahman, "That" or "tat").

When the monistic perspective is presented only in this way, it can strike one as an unreachable goal, something that only monks need to be concerned about. My guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, offered a more reachable explanation. "Self-Realization is in several stages. Realizing oneself as a soul (*jiva* or *jivatma*)—rather than a mind, an intellectual and emotional type, or a worthless person—gives satisfaction, security, and this is a starting point.

"Realization of the Self as Satchidananda (Saguna Brahman) gives contentment, a release from all emotions and thoughts of the external world, and the nerve system responds to the energies flowing through the *vishuddha* and *anahata chakras*.

"Realizing the Self that transcends time, form and space, Parasiva (Nirguna Brahman), is a razor-edged experience, cutting all bonds, reversing individual awareness, such as looking out from the Self rather than looking into the Self." This last stage is the "Thou art That" of the *Upanishads*.

Gurudeva makes it clear that spiritual realization unfolds in three stages. First is realizing oneself as a soul, *jiva*. Second is experiencing the divine, all-pervasive consciousness known as Satchidananda. Third is the realization of Parasiva, the Absolute, beyond time, form and space—this is true Self-Realization. These three stages provide a helpful framework for understanding the progressive nature of spiritual attainment in the monistic schools of Hinduism.

Math Comparison

A comparison to the study of mathematics is helpful in understanding how best to approach realizing the Self. Typically the various aspects of mathematics are studied over a period of some fifteen years in a sequence from simplest to most complex. The main subjects are: 1) counting, basic arithmetic, fractions, decimals; 2) algebra, geometry,



DALIE

trigonometry; 3) calculus, statistics and probability.

In mathematics, one would not begin with calculus before mastering arithmetic and algebra. In the same way, Self-Realization unfolds progressively through three increasingly subtle levels of spiritual understanding. The first stage of Self-Realization—experiencing oneself as a soul—is like the elementary level of mathematics. Experiencing Satchidananda is comparable to the intermediate levels—algebra and geometry. The realization of Parasiva, the Absolute, beyond

the deeper experience of the all-pervasive divine consciousness, or Satchidananda. People who are experiencing Satchidananda have a universal love for all beings. Life for them is a joyous, even blissful experience, with events happening in perfect timing. They hold the perspective that everything in the world is as it should be, that it is humanity working through its self-created karma. All the while, the third stage of realization, that of the Absolute, Parasiva, is still to be experienced, for most in a future life.

Math and meditation: Siva is merging with the yogi. Surrounding them are the progressive stages of math, from arithmetic, through algebra and geometry, to trigonometry and calculus.

all qualities, is like the most advanced level of mathematics.

Who Am I?

In his published letters, Paramaguru Yogaswami presents the idea of experiencing ourselves as an individual soul, or *jiva*.

"You are not the body. You are not the mind, nor the intellect, nor the will. You are the atma. The atma is eternal. This is the conclusion at which great souls have arrived from their experience. Let this truth become well impressed on your mind. But there is one thing to which you must give attention. Never swerve from the path of dharma. Let it be your practice to regard every life as the holy presence of God. He is both within and without. I remain, 'I am He.'"

To cease identifying with the body, mind, intellect and will, it is necessary to identify with something else beyond them. That something else is the witness, called *sakshi* in Sanskrit, the changeless, self-luminous awareness that witnesses the body, mind and all states of experience.

Swami Harshananda gives this description of *sakshi* in his *A Concise Encyclopaedia of Hinduism*: "In Vedanta, the *jivatman* (individual Self) is called *sakshi* or *sakshi-chaitanya* since he is a witness to all the three states of consciousness, viz., *jagrat* (waking), *svapna* (dreaming) and *sushupti* (deep sleep)."

My guru described *sakshi* as awareness standing apart from the mind and its activities. He wrote: "That is why you strive for mastery of sadhana, mastery of concentration, your ability to hold awareness where you want it, when you want it for as long as you want it, and mastery of your ability to experience *kaif*, pure awareness aware only of itself, by taking awareness out of the entire context into just being aware....To attain and sustain *kaif* is a simple practice. You pull awareness out of the thought processes. You pull awareness out of the emotion processes. You pull awareness out of the bodily processes, and you're just completely on that pinnacle of being aware of being aware."

As this practice deepens, awareness becomes increasingly refined. Over time, the seeker moves from the initial perception of being a soul toward





LETTERS

Peanut Festival

What an interesting read—"Peanut Festival, Anyone?" I loved learning about this unique celebration (Apr/May/June 2026) which mentions Basavanna and reminded me of his teachings on simplicity and community. Speaking of which, I had a chance to connect with his philosophy during my Master's in Dharwad, Karnataka. It's amazing now to revisit his ideas with a fresh perspective!

From the article: "I stepped out of the hotel and was immediately wrapped in a warm, nutty fragrance. The air smelled of roasting peanuts! That is when I learned that "Kadale-kai Parishe" simply means "peanut fair" in Kannada. The street was filling with vendors. Some had wheeled carts, some had tarps spread on the ground, some stood behind neat pyramids of raw peanuts still in their shells. Steam curled up from large pots where peanuts boiled in salted water. Iron pans hissed with oil as vendors stirred and roasted peanuts for those who could not wait to snack."

AMIT VERMA
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Deities on Pilgrimage

The article "200 Deities Pilgrimage to Mandi for Mahasivaratri" (feature story, Oct/Nov/Dec 2024) was really heartwarming, showing our tradition and beauty.

From the article: "Birbal Sharma further explained that the Gods also communicate with one another—apparently a consequence of so many convening in the same place at once. When two palanquins meet, each with its respective God, interaction between them may be evidenced by involuntary movement of the palanquins, which become difficult for their carriers to control. The *gur* for one Deity may speak to the *gur* of another. It is a hypnotic sight—mood, sentiment, even insistence is expressed. It may seem exotic to outsiders, but for the hill people, the Divinities are living inner-plane beings able to bless you with peace and prosperity and make prophecies for the future. People find solace in Their company."

SHUBHANYA THAKUR
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Protein for Vegetarians

Wow, amazing article, Vandana. Thank you for your time to present this insightful message. It has cleared my doubt. I always thought I needed to add non-veg food in my food! ("Where to Get Protein," Apr/May/June 2026).

From the article: "Experts agree: a vegetarian diet provides all the nutrients needed for growth, energy and vitality, provided that



A palanquin of one of the visiting Deities, represented by one or more mohras (masks), usually the top one, and related Gods and Goddesses

meals are diverse and well balanced. My protein sources are wide-ranging: nuts and seeds, dairy, legumes, soy, sprouts, whole grains and fortified foods. Legumes are incredible protein sources, but they also contain carbs, and eating them daily can sometimes cause bloating, so I vary the sources. Nut butters, and dairy-based proteins like paneer, cheese and butter, are delicious but can be calorie-dense, so we keep them to once or twice a week. That said, if calories and health risks didn't matter, I would happily eat butter every single day—I absolutely love it!"

JAYSHREE
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The Power of Spiritual Practice

Hinduism is hard to find today, and even when one is fortunate enough to find it, it is not easy to sustain the practice. Without practice, it is lost to oneself and to future generations. So I set out on a quest for that which can never be lost, and in time I found the path to Truth. Now I simply practice and tread the path, and from that perspective I resonate deeply with what this boy and his parents are doing as described in the article "Performing Sandhya Vandanam, One youth's discovery of the power and challenges of daily *sadhana*," (Jan/Feb/Mar 2022). It works.

SUSHMA CHECKA
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On the River to Muktinath

Beautiful article! ("Exploring the Kali Gandaki River and Muktinath Temple," Jan/Feb/Mar

2026). Thank you for letting me travel with you on your inspiring journey to Muktinath. Your vivid descriptions and engaging anecdotes brought the region and its kind people to life. You were truly blessed to undertake this sacred pilgrimage. Mother Bhairavi herself seems to have guided you along the way, appearing in the form of a beautiful dog. Jai Sri Matre Namaha.

From the article, "Near Kagbeni is the Hindu and Buddhist pilgrimage site of Muktinath, revered in the *Muktinatha Mahatmya* of the *Varaha Purana*. The text proclaims that whoever undertakes the arduous journey to this high Himalayan shrine (elevation: 12,000 feet) and bathes in its 108 sacred waterspouts will cast off the bonds of *samsara*—the endless cycle of rebirth—and attain liberation.

"My own journey here, from June 30 to July 14, 2025, was first and foremost a pilgrimage, with research coming only secondarily. Walking its banks, speaking with local priests, and tracing the river's course to the upper reaches where the ammonites are said to originate, I sought to understand how geography, geology and devotion converge in the making of these sacred icons. Discovering the origins of the Shalagramas brought new depth to my understanding of Mustang as a sacred landscape, where rivers and rocks are not merely natural formations, but also vessels of divine presence."

SIVARUBAN SIVANESAN
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Kashi Vishvanath Renewed

Great article—"Kashi Reimagined: A Corridor Through Time" (Jan/Feb/Mar 2026). I loved the pictures. There are always two sides to every coin—progress and preservation. I visited Kashi while the renovation work was underway, and navigating the maze of narrow streets lined with shops and homes was an experience in itself. I would love to visit again to see the new corridor.

BHASKAR
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Saying Farewell at Pashupati

Thank you for the precious description, "Thirteen Days of Mourning & Release." It has helped me to better understand the mindset and traditions regarding departure and cremation. (Oct/Nov/Dec 2014.)

From the article: "Few tourists who snap pictures of the shrouded, marigold-covered bodies burning along the Bagmati River realize that unlike Western funerals that happen many days after death, the person being cremated typically passed away just a few hours earlier and the family's grief is woefully fresh. "And so it was that Komal, with her suitcase still in the car and her legs shaking, found herself approaching the yellow-wrapped body of the mother she had longed to hug.

All around was a sad blur of activity: lighting the fire, circling the pyre, chanting the prayers. Then she and her siblings retired to a bare, brick-floored room a few hundred yards from the riverbank to experience the evolving culture of mourning in the modern Hindu world."

RAJESH SACHDEVA
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The Flawless Law of Karma

This article ("Karma and Reincarnation," Sep 2019) makes the idea of karma quite clear. It is interesting to learn about Hindu philosophy and its beliefs. Body, spirit and mind must be in balance and harmony. It is true that bad actions one does return to oneself. It is very important to always believe in God.

JAYSHREE
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Young Hindus in Two Worlds

Congrats to you both, Naavalan and Kapil, for being proud Hindus and embracing our Saivite traditions, values and culture with assertiveness. Keep it up. ("Majority or Minority: How It Matters," Jan/Feb/Mar 2026).

From the article: "Our stories reflect two very different realities. In the United States,

Hindus often feel excluded, stereotyped or pressured to assimilate or convert. In Mauritius, Hinduism is part of the national fabric—respected, celebrated and protected.

"But both of us share the same desire: to preserve and practice our faith openly, without fear or judgment. We believe that countries everywhere can learn from places like Mauritius, where multiculturalism is not just tolerated, but embraced. Creating an inclusive society means recognizing all traditions, whether they are practiced by 1% of the population or 48%.

"For Hindus living as a minority, visibility, support and education can go a long way. And for those in the majority, such as in Mauritius, it's a reminder of how lucky we are to celebrate freely—and how important it is to protect that freedom for everyone."

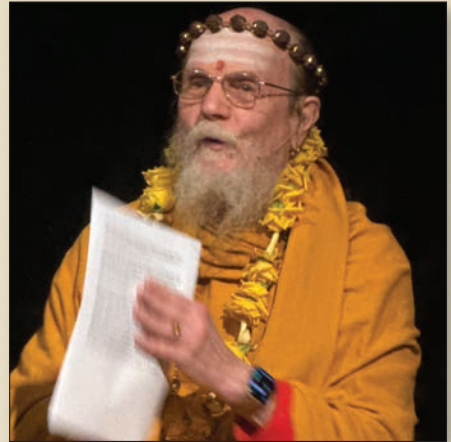
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Sharing Timeless Insights for Today's Hindu Journey



By Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami

Our April 2026 issue contains two in-depth articles providing fascinating insight on aspects of Hinduism not normally covered in publications. The first is "Exploring East India's Mighty Brahmaputra River." From its origins near Manasarovar Lake and Mount Kailas, the world's ninth largest river flows 1,900 miles through Tibet, into India, then Bangladesh, to the Bay of Bengal. Our photographer Thomas Kelly

and writer Ellen Coon journey along the river meeting people of various faiths and ethnicities along the India portion, all of whom view the abundance-giving and sometimes destructive river with great devotion.

In the article "Afghanistan's Hindu Antiquity," Inderjeet Singh shares little-known facts about Hinduism in Afghanistan dating back over a thousand years. He opens with "Most people are only familiar with Afghanistan as an Islamic nation, so in this article I trace some of the documented history of Hindus in Afghanistan from the 7th century CE until today. It also serves as a rebuttal to those who contend that the British brought Hindus into the country for the first time in the 19th century."

The Educational Insight section presents selected songs, life story and profound philosophy of the poet saint Tayumanavar. Tayumanavar was a mystic of great interest to Dr. B. Natarajan, an economist by profession. Dr. Natarajan's short biography of the saint provides deep insights into his life, and his translation renders the saint's songs in compelling English.

A regular series in HINDUISM TODAY lets Hindu youth share their experiences and

perspectives in hopes that the articles will inspire other youth in their Hindu endeavors. Divya Srinivasan, 16, is a high school junior from the Greater Seattle area. She is passionate about journalism, linguistics, puzzles, research and connecting to her Hindu roots. In her article "Krishna's Festival Month," Divya shares details of her family's practice: "For Srivaishnava families like mine, the month of Margazhi (approximately December 15–January 15) is centered entirely around Andal and her Tiruppavai. Every morning, we gather as a family to chant the entire Tiruppavai together. During the chanting, we recite twice the specific *pasuram* that was composed on that particular date."

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QUOTES & QUIPS

Hold firmly to goodness

Saint Auvaiyar (ca 200 bce), a renowned female saint of Tamil Nadu

One becomes like that which is in one's mind—this is the everlasting secret. **Krishna Yajur Veda**, *Maitreya Upanishad* 6.24

Common men talk bagfuls of religion but do not practice even a grain of it. The wise man speaks a little, even though his whole life is religion expressed in action. **Sri Ramakrishna** (1836–1886)

Those who cannot live in harmony with the world, though they have learned many things, are still ignorant. *Tirukural* 140

The roots below the earth claim no rewards for making the branches fruitful. **Rabindranath Tagore** (1861–1941), *mystic poet*

Until we discover this Spiritual Center in ourselves, the God in us, we will be

confused, miserable, unsatisfied and disturbed, an enigma to ourselves and to others. **Swami Chinmayananda** (1916–1993), *founder of Chinmaya Mission*

Because one believes in oneself, one doesn't try to convince others. **Lao Tzu** (4th or 6th century bce), *author of Tao Te Ching*

Self-control will place one among the Gods, while lack of it will lead to deepest darkness. *Tirukural* 121

The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong. **Mahatma Gandhi** (1869–1948)

You should be far more concerned with your current trajectory than with your current results. **James Clear**, *American writer*

Everything in the universe is within you. Ask all from yourself. **Rumi** (1207–1273), *Sufi mystic and poet*

Never forget that the universe is a single living organism possessed of one substance and one soul, holding all things suspended in a single consciousness and creating all things with a single purpose that they might work together spinning, weaving and knotting whatever comes to pass. **Marcus Aurelius** (121–180 ce), *Roman emperor and philosopher*

After the game, the King and the Pawn go into the same box. *Italian proverb*

There is no death. Only a change of worlds. **Chief Seattle** (1780–1866), *leader of the Suquamish and Duwamish Native American tribes*



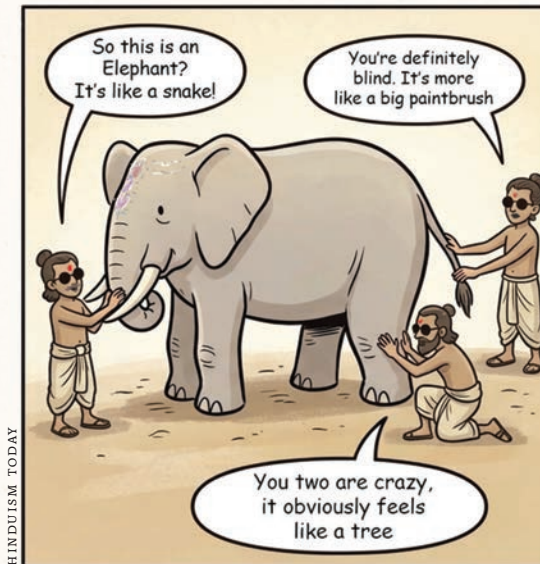
Self-inquiry directly leads to Realization by removing the obstacles which make you think that the Self is not already realized. **Ramana Maharshi** (1879–1950)

Where wisdom reigns, there is no conflict between thinking and feeling. **Carl Gustav Jung** (1875–1961)

Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid. **Albert Einstein** (1879–1955)

It is now clearly evident that there is a God, and that He is everywhere and so am I. Yet this body must remain in this hut. **Satguru Siva Yogaswami** (1872–1964), *Sri Lankan mystic*

The way to freedom is a way of silence—of silent resolve and silent service. **Sadhu Vaswani**, (1879–1966), *founder of the Sadhu Vaswani Mission*



God is not a limited individual who sits alone up in the clouds on a golden throne. God is pure consciousness that dwells within everything. Understanding this truth, learn to accept and love everyone equally. **Amritanandamayi Ma**

What is God after all? An eternal child playing an eternal game in an eternal garden. **Sri Aurobindo** (1872–1950)



Today's youth value direct experience over inherited belief. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, publisher of HINDUISM TODAY

Hindu Dharma is working for the Gods, as opposed to working and living for our own personal wants and needs. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), *founder of HINDUISM TODAY*

DID YOU KNOW?

You Can Alter Time!

TO START THIS EXPLORATION, LET'S FIRST look at gravity. Gravity is not a force. It is not objects pulling on each other across empty space. It is not even—despite the famous analogy—heavy things making dips in a cosmic trampoline that other things roll into. All of these images, while compelling, miss what relativity actually reveals: that gravity is not primarily bent space, it is mostly bent time. This is not a metaphor. Clocks closer to Earth tick measurably slower than those farther away—GPS satellites constantly correct for this drift to stay accurate.

Every object in the universe is always moving through spacetime—a four-dimensional fabric weaving together the three dimensions of space (x, y, z) with that of time. Because the speed of light remains constant to every observer—wherever and whenever they are—that unchanging constant forces space and time to trade against each other like a fixed budget between the two. If you could sit perfectly still in motionless space,

you'd travel through time at maximum speed, but if you moved through space—even walking to the next room—you'd move more slowly through time. The faster you move, the slower you age. At the speed of light, time stops. If a photon could reflect on its journey, the history of the universe would unfold in a single, eternal moment.

Mass (any amount of matter) warps this fabric, primarily along the time dimension. When you drop a ball, Earth's time curvature redirects the ball's passage through time into motion through space. The ball is not being pulled—it follows the straightest possible path through curved spacetime. What we call falling is simply what a straight line looks like when time itself is bent. This is also why light bends around the Sun: it follows the geometry, and that geometry is curved in both time and space. You can alter time in two ways: by how fast you move, and by how much mass surrounds you (but we still recommend a moderate appetite, despite your wishes to bend the fabric of the universe).

Hindu sages describe a state reached in deep meditation when, in perfect stillness,



GREG RAKOZY/UNSPLASH

they've withdrawn awareness from the senses and back into itself. Here, one does not see light but becomes light. Also known as *Savikalpa Samadhi*, it is experienced as a boundless, radiant field without edges and without time—correlating, with striking resonance, with what physics tells us light actually is: the last knowable thing at the threshold where time reaches zero. And just as light is the last knowable or calculable thing before the Singularity, the meditator who collapses awareness beyond light into *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*—the timeless, spaceless, Absolute Self—also crosses a timeless, spaceless threshold that no equation or word can describe.

PUZZLES

Word Search

Instructions: in the word cloud, find and circle the words given below. They might be horizontal, vertical, diagonal and even backwards.

V H A S A T C H I D A N A N D A B O V L N X I M J Y P U O B
R E M Z C T M H Y I D S X B D T N L N A S J C S A O P R M S
A Q K B O A R L L H I J D J L V P Y I Z H J D X I P R Y N A
R O H Z G E K A Y D A A N A N J T B R D Z A D N A N A M U M
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J A Q A J D M M Y J N U P W O R A K Q S A O L V S Y N A S A
M Q V D J W G O U T L W L D K A H F M L Q W K Y Z S D W T H
U Y S A G R D T A P A S H A S D C I I G U R U B O T H P Q D
D I V H Z Q W P Y A N A R P H H H N S D N J D O P D N G R L
Z W A E C F Z Q I F M Z E O A A I Z I D O G T M X W D R B E

AHIMSA	NIRVANA
ANANDA	OM
ATMAN	PRANA
BRAHMAN	PRANAVA
CHAKRA	PRAKRITI
DHARMA	PURUSHA
DHYANA	SAMADHI
GANESHA	SAMSARA
GURU	SANATANA
JNANA	SANGHA
KARMA	SATCHIDANANDA
KUNDALINI	SIDDHANTA
LINGA	SIDDHI
MANTRA	SUTRA
MAYA	TRISHULA
MOKSHA	UPANISHAD
MUDRA	VEDA
MURTI	YANTRA
NADA	YUGA
NANDI	TAPAS

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योगचित्तवृत्तिनिरोधः ॥ २॥

SŪTRA 1.2 29

1.2 yogaścittavṛttinirodhaḥ

yogah (yoga), nirodhaḥ (restraint), citta (of the mind), vṛtti (activities)

ॐ ॐ ॐ

Yoga is the restraint of mental activities.

Commentary

Our minds are constantly engaged in one type of activity or another, whether awake or sleeping. We are remembering events from the past, thinking about current tasks or theorizing about future events. Or we are experiencing moods and emotions. The practices of yoga enable us to silence these mental activities, which can be thought of as movements or fluctuations.

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

As you sit to meditate, awareness may wander into past memories or future happenings. It may be distracted by the senses, by a sound or by a feeling of discomfort in the body. This is natural in the early stages. Gently bring awareness back to your point of concentration. . . . Don't criticize awareness for wandering, for that is just another distraction. Distractions will disappear if you become intensely interested and involved in your meditation. In such a state, you won't even feel the physical body. . . . To become the ruler of the mind is the goal. (*Living with Śiva*, Lesson 95: "Taming Distraction")

"At last, there is a translation of Patañjali's *Yoga Sūtras* that accurately represents the devotional aspect of Suddha Saiva Siddhanta as expressed in the original text—acknowledging Ishvara, God, as a Being to be worshiped as a means to final and complete Realization and Advaitic oneness."

— CHAMUNDI SABANATHAN, HAWAII

Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras

A TRANSLATION & ŚAIVA SIDDHANTA COMMENTARY
By Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami



An illustrated English commentary on Rishi Patañjali's classic treatise, with a rare interpretation from the monistic Śaiva Siddhanta school of philosophy and insights from Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

RAURAVA AGAMA

A Yogic Departure

How adepts navigate the passage from embodiment into absorption

The following text is from chapter nine of the knowledge section of the Raurava Agama, "Departure and Absorption of the Soul." The chapter discusses how the sadhaka, or sincere devotee of Śiva, should approach death.

A perfect sadhaka is one who has known well Śiva's *astra*—the piercing divine power of direct insight—related to the science of *Sivayoga*. He should be systematically worshipping Lord Śiva, the sacred flame and guru. He should be firm and unassailed in his resolve. He should have thoroughly studied and contemplated the concepts set forth in the *Agamas*. Such a sadhaka, having seen inauspicious visions in his dreams—such as elephants, horses, chariots, unfavorable weapons and other bad omens, repeatedly—should understand that the proper time for the departure of his soul is fast approaching. 9.1

The sadhaka may be a householder or a king. Whatever be his order of life, his physical body has become resplendent with full growth and sound health. It is of the nature of the five cosmic elements: earth, water, fire, air and space. It is well refined with the disciplines of yoga and mantra. On knowing that the departure of his soul is imminent, he should perform fire-ritual, making oblations related to the five cosmic elements in the fire of consciousness created by *astra mantra*. 9.2-3

Having selected a proper place, he should purify himself well, his consciousness being sharpened by specific mantras. Having strewn sara grass and darbha grass over the selected ground and sat there, he should meditate on Rudra whose form is aligned with *astra mantra*, who is the creator and destroyer of the worlds, who is holding Brahma *astra* in his hand, and who is invincible. The sadhaka, who is well trained in meditation and well-skilled in the techniques of yoga, should contemplate the piercing form of *astra* with his yogic sight held in supreme consciousness. 9.4-5

He should assume a fitting and comfortable posture, either *svastika* or *padmasana*. He should keep the upper part of his body erect and his neck upright. He should hold his hands below in such a way as to display the specific yoga mudra known as *kurma mudra*. 9.6

Let him not press his rows of teeth together and let him keep his eyes half-closed. Having subdued the snake of deep attachment to worldly pleasures, he should restrain his five organs which are the vehicles for the senses related to the five elements. He should regulate the movement of inbreath and outbreath. Six inches above the

navel, the heart-lotus shines forth with the brightness of the rising young sun. 9.7-8

At the center of the heart-lotus, there is the solar region (*surya mandala*), and at the center of the solar region there is the lunar realm (*soma mandala*). At the center of the lunar realm, there is the fiery region (*vahni mandala*) with its innate purity. At the center of the fiery mandala, the Great Lord Śvara is present. He presents Himself there with a luster comparable to pure crystal. 9.9-10

The sadhaka should install his consciousness, perfected and illumined by such specific discipline and *astra mantra*, at the center of the heart of Śvara. There within that heart-cave, it assumes by its own force, a form of *astra* which is purified with the fire of Śiva. This *astra*-form assumed by the consciousness of the sadhaka rises to the head and then to the crest of the skull (*brahmarandhra*). Breaking open the seal there, it reaches the solar realm of Sivaloka within a fraction of a second. 9.11

Upon the head of the sadhaka who is the direct knower, a motionless, luminous light is formed. At this moment the sadhaka should draw out his soul in the form of *astra* (piercing, focused energy), contemplating Ekavira Rudra and His Śakti, and unite it with the

brahmarandhra through the process of *dharana yoga* (perfect concentration). The soul drawn out in this way departs from his body. 9.12-13

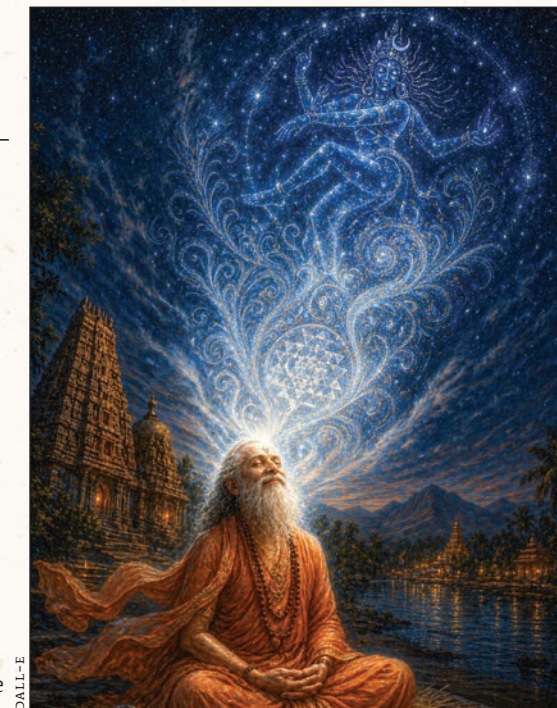
All remaining energies of the soul depart from various parts of his body—such as legs and others—and accumulate again in the plane of *brahmarandhra*. Having departed through the *brahmarandhra* gateway, the soul swiftly passes through the outer region of the *brahmanda* (vast universe) known as *lokaaloka* (region of visible and invisible worlds). Separating itself from this region, and from the dual state of *prakṛti* (material causation) and *puruṣa* (witnessing Self), this exalted and great soul assumes a resplendent subtle form and becomes one with all of existence by means of its all-pervasiveness. Finally, it enters into the Great Lord, Śiva, who is very subtle. 9.14-15

At this stage, the attending sadhaka (who is an associate of the liberated sadhaka) should keep the body from which the soul has departed upon

the stretch of darbha-grass and sara-grass designed in the form of *astra* and cover it with clothes and offer fragrant substances. He should touch the head of the body with the accompaniment of mantra "*samharaya bhutani hiranya*." 9.16

Then the attending sadhaka should offer oblations into the fire with the mantras pertaining to the Lord of Vidyas (Śiva as master of all sacred knowledge) and contemplate upon the departed soul as now being identical with the Supreme. In this way, the soul has been liberated from the bonds of the lower worlds through this discipline of *astrasamayoga*—the process of complete union. 9.17

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*. This excerpt is from his translation of the revered *Raurava Agama*.



DALL-E



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SUNIL SHARMA

SPECIAL FEATURE

The Homecoming of Nepal's Gods

Decades of looting turned living Deities into costly global commodities, but the era of quiet disappearance is giving way to one of recovery and return



A Land of Living Gods



By NIKKI THAPA, NEPAL

FOR CENTURIES, NEPAL WAS ISOLATED from the outside world by its rugged geography and policies that, until the 1950s, restricted entry of foreigners. This barrier served as protection for Nepal's sacred heritage. Stone Deities, wood and metal icons, *paubhas* (traditional paintings) and murals remained safely enshrined in their rightful abodes. As living presences, they were honored through daily worship, seasonal festivals and generational devotion.

This changed when Nepal opened its doors to the world. First-time visitors arriving in the ancient city of Kathmandu on special permits encountered a sacred landscape unlike anything they had known. Every street, courtyard and crossroads was adorned with magnificently crafted spiritual artifacts shaped over centuries by faith. Visitors were spellbound. To them, the Kathmandu Valley appeared as an enormous open-air museum. Intricately carved wooden windows and doors bore floral motifs and protective symbols. Beautiful stone, metal and terracotta Deities resided in temples, monasteries, old palaces, homes, Buddhist and Jain shrines, *stupas* and *chaityas*. Master-crafted water spouts were sanctified by ritual use. Images of inner-world guardians watched over lanes and temples, open fields and forgotten corners.

What visitors saw, wrote, recorded, was not a museum, but a living, unbroken civilization where art, ritual and daily life were inseparable. Perceval Landon, a British journalist and author—who visited in 1908 and 1924, wrote in his book *Nepal* that this land has more Gods and Goddesses than people.

In 1964, Dr. Stella Kramrisch, one of the first scholars to present Nepal's spiritual and artistic legacy, organized an exhibition of Nepali art at Asia House in New York, and documented the artifacts in a landmark catalogue. In 1966, the Department of Archaeology of His Majesty's Government of Nepal presented Nepali art in Western Europe, which further deepened international admiration. Scholarly articles and publications soon followed, bringing Nepal's sacred arts

and crafts to global attention.

This burgeoning fascination came at great cost. As interest in Nepal's art increased, the Gods of Kathmandu Valley found themselves suddenly exposed to the new and unknown danger of theft. This open museum attracted not only art lovers and religious pilgrims, but also thieves and smugglers. Statues began to disappear a few years after the country opened its borders—lost, stolen or smuggled into foreign lands.

Collectors prized the statues for their aesthetic harmony and technical mastery. Profit flowed through a layered network as Western traffickers and Nepali middlemen profited by laundering the origins of these images through false provenances. Local intermediaries, often motivated by poverty, were paid modest sums to surreptitiously pry statues from temples and communities.

Plunder of the Sacred



From the late sixties onward, Deities that had immense spiritual, psychological and emotional significance for people were whisked away, usually at night. The murtis were removed from temples, shrines, *chaityas*, *stupas*, sacred niches, fields and forests of Kathmandu Valley. Even during the day, when villagers were tending their fields,

thieves struck, snatching Deities from their homes. Art patron Sangeeta Thapa, founder of Siddharth Art Gallery in Kathmandu, says, "Sacred statues were taken across the border and then transported to other countries because systems and rules were not in place."

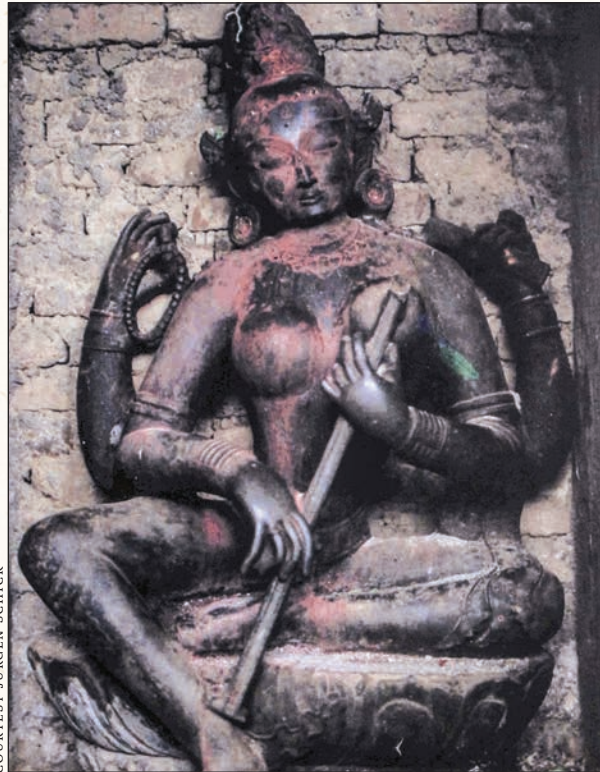
The pilfering continued in the 1970s and 80s. The stolen statues were beloved Gods before whom Nepalese offered puja and lit lamps at dawn and dusk. If the temple fell on the commute, they wouldn't pass without making a quick darshan. On every birthday and anniversary, they visited the nearby shrines of a God or Goddess in thanks for yet another year. No Nepali puja ritual starts without making offerings at a Ganesh shrine, whether at home or at temples. Every neighborhood has a small Ganesh temple at the crossroads, with its murti considered the community Deity. Losing such a holy image leaves the place bereft, where prayers are offered before beginning any task, celebration or life event, breaking the rhythms of worship and silence. What was taken was not only Nepal's heritage but the essence of our identity, faith and collective memory. Alisha Sijapati of the National Heritage Recovery Campaign (NHRC) says, "Heritage is deeply emotional; this is an aspect that is often overlooked."

Under such circumstances, the 1989 publications *Stolen Images of Nepal* by Nepali



NIKKI THAPA

Lost and found: (left) A recovered stone statue of Lakshmi Narayan is taken to Patan Museum after being transferred to Nepali custody. It was reinstalled in Patan's Patko Tole in 2021. (right) When family Deities are stolen, their crowns are left behind. Families display these during the Mataya Festival in Patan.



COURTESY JURGEN SCHICK



COURTESY JURGEN SCHICK



PAINTING BY JOY LYNN DAVIS



ANIL K. THAPA



NIKUL THAPA

Then and now: (left to right) 1) The original black-granite murti of Goddess Saraswati at a temple in Pharping village, south of Kathmandu. 2) The head was stolen in 1984. 3) Joy Lynn Davis made a painting of the Deity, rendering the head in 23-karat gold. 4) Pharping devotees installed a replica in the temple to continue the worship. 5) The stolen head was repatriated in 1999. It is currently housed in the National Museum in Kathmandu

artist and scholar Lain Singh Bangdel, and *The Gods are Leaving the Country* by German art connoisseur Jurgen Schick, carefully documented this cultural larceny. These two works hold immense significance, for they furnish authentic visual evidence to verify the provenance of looted images. But the art objects Bangdel and Schick documented are only a fraction of what has been lost in the last 50 years. Schick warned that unless urgent changes were made, Nepal, the land of Gods, risked losing all its sacred images by the turn of the millennium. It now falls to the Nepalese government to undertake the formidable task of initiating procedures to repatriate all valuable Gods and Goddesses that have been taken out of the country.

The Department of Archaeology possesses no other systematic documentation, detailed inventories, photographic records or scholarly assessments of the country's sculptural and artistic wealth.

From Shrine to Showcase

Well-organized bands of thieves have systematically plundered Nepal's art treasures, stealing under commission to the international art theft network, which then smuggled them abroad to collections and museums of rich countries in the West and Asia. No work of art was secure, no matter how famous or revered. The theft of artifacts from Kathmandu Valley and as far as Mustang and Dolpa in the northwest was also carried out by high-profile expatriates and powerful elites. On the global art black market, statues of religious Deities fetch millions of dollars. But to the Nepalese, sacred images are not valued in economic terms; they are not collectable commodities, but living Gods that are consecrated when installed.

The preferred Gods seemed to be Narayan, Surya and Uma Maheswar along with Buddha. In the ancient Newar settlement of Handigaon, villagers have lost 70% of their clan Deities. Among the stolen sacred images were wooden Bhairava figures, a metal Indra paraded during Indra Jatra festival, and stone Gods and Goddesses from Satya Narayan Temple dating back to the Lichhavi period (c. 400–750 ce). Gopal Dongol, a Handigaon resident, points to the surviving feet of a Goddess, fragments that are still worshipped during the Indra Jatra festival, standing as a stark reminder of what has been lost. A fellow resident recounts the stressful ordeal of losing his Bhairava statue. He made repeated visits to the police station in hopes of recov-

ering the family Deity, but finally gave up. Residents of Pharping, another Newar town on the southern edge of Kathmandu, echo similar experiences. They were forced to commission replicas of their stolen clan Deities to continue the age-old annual procession of those Gods.

According to an *Al Jazeera* report, roughly 80% of Nepal's valuable heritage items have been stolen from temples and shrines. After years of disappearance, they have started to reappear, especially in the Western art world. The statues stand cleaned and polished in auction houses, museums, galleries, private collections and antique shops behind clear glass and on lonely pedestals—converted from objects of worship to objects of art.

Surendra Manandhar, a cultural activist from Pharping, shares that the 17th-century gold-copper icon of Nil Barahi, which was part of a group of seven Deities featured in the annual procession during the holy festival in Pharping, was stolen in 1999 and traced to the Asian Civilization Museum (ACM) in Singapore. He added that the community has raised the matter at the Department of Archaeology, but has not seen any result yet. According to *Channel News Asia*, the ACM bought the artifact in 2007 for US\$650,000 from a defunct New York gallery.

When a religious artifact is placed in a museum, it is removed from its original context and is no longer part of daily worship, ritual cycles and communal memory. Sandip Maharjan, a 27-year-old licensed guide

and cultural enthusiast, expresses concern that his generation can identify only a limited number of Deities. When shown photographs of stolen statues, many are unable to identify them, revealing how fragmented cultural knowledge has become. He notes that several *jatras* (religious festivals) have already been discontinued following the theft of sacred images. While his generation may still know of these traditions, he fears that future generations risk being permanently disconnected from this culture.

Kanak Mani Dixit, a Nepali publisher, editor, writer, vice chair of the NHRC and founder of the magazine *Himal Southasian*, in his article "Gods in Exile," writes that sacred images taken from Kathmandu Valley and now housed in the West are not commodities but displaced Deities. Their rightful place is among the communities that worship them. Until their return, current holders stand merely as custodians, not owners.

Sanjay Adhikari, heritage activist and legal advocate, emphasizes that Nepal's sacred objects have always been part of active worship. He says, "They are not merely metal or stone objects but living embodiments of our Gods and Goddesses that we have been venerating for generations and need to continue the tradition revered by generations to come."

It's a given that thousands and thousands of sacred statues were stolen because of the indifference of various branches of government and other civic bodies. The deeper challenge of art theft lies not in blame, but

in recognizing the need for sustained collective attention and strengthened systems of care. To safeguard such a vast living heritage (whatever is left) requires a shared responsibility of government institutions, civic bodies, communities and every individual alike.

This sacred duty is stated by Article 48 in the Constitution of Nepal: "It is every citizen's fundamental duty to protect the community heritage." Encouragingly, this awareness has grown in recent years, which is what Nepal needs more than ever, because the generation that witnessed the theft is perishing. Only the millennials can connect the previous generation and the upcoming ones to hand over the heritage knowledge. Online activists and digital sleuths (like the Lost Arts of Nepal Facebook page), archeologists, and organizations like NHRC must highlight the importance of gatekeeping illicit trafficking and measures that can complement and reinforce the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act of 1956. The Act strictly prohibits the destruction, alteration, or theft of protected, ancient monuments.

Thefts that Didn't Go as Planned

Not all attempts at larceny succeeded. There are stories of collective courage that intervened to protect the sacred. One such instance is the 7th-century-ce statue of Baraha, the boar incarnation of God Vishnu. Late one night, as the sculpture was already severed at the feet and being prepared to be loaded on a car, noise from the temple alerted the fa-

ther of Surendra Bahadur Pandey, a resident of the Dhumrabarah area. He quickly roused his family and neighbors, and together they rushed to the temple and confronted the thieves. Startled by the crowd, they fled, leaving the sculpture behind. Baraha was subsequently reinstalled and firmly secured with iron support to the concrete wall. Though the main image of Baraha was saved, they lost the small figurine of Basundhara, the Earth Goddess that was seated on the left shoulder of the God. Later, the patrons of the temple commissioned a replica of the reinstated Goddess.

A similar turn of events surrounds the thousand-year-old Saraswati Goddess of Handigaon. Gopal Dongol recounts the story passed down by his father. In the early 1970s, the stolen Saraswati was placed aboard an aircraft, but the plane failed to take off. As a result, the statue was returned to the police station, where the Handigaon villagers, who had reported the theft, were summoned to claim the Goddess. Saraswati was released to the people of Handigaon. The return was marked with great celebration, but instead of returning the murti to Her isolated shrine near a river, She was consecrated at a new temple at the busy crossroads of Handigaon, ensuring constant public watch.

Another notable recovery is the 6th/7th-century four-faced Brahma statue of the Jayabageshwari Temple. Stolen 40 years ago, the image was reinstalled to its original sanctum in November 2025. In Patan Durbar Square, a



Priceless sacred artifacts: (above) A wooden tympanum, stolen from the Kumari House at Kathmandu's Durbar Square around 2000, was found at the Barakat Gallery in the UK, repatriated and formally reinstalled in 2025 with much fanfare. (right) five out of twelve gilded, copper-bronze inlaid Deities of a frieze at the Taleju Bhavani Temple in Patan were stolen and later turned up at the Bonhams Auction in Paris. They have not yet been successfully repatriated, but replicas were created in the meantime. (below) the Chaturmurti Vishnu from Maligaon, stolen in the 1980s, was later discovered buried in the bank of Dhubikhola, a tributary of the Bagmati River, and reinstalled in its original location.

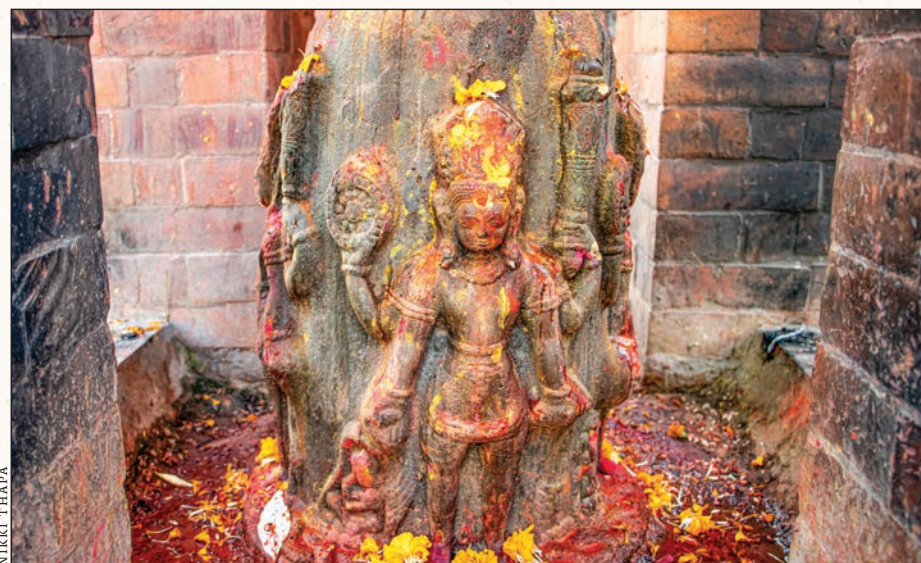
bronze Garuda water spout, the centerpiece of the Sundari Chowk, was stolen in 2010 but was retrieved by police a year later in Kathmandu before it could be trafficked abroad. As a replica had already replaced it at the site, the recovered artifact is now safely housed in the National Museum of Nepal. When the Garuda was stolen, Rohit Ranjitkar, the director of Kathmandu Valley Preservation Trust (KVPT), says his team was falsely accused of assisting in the crime since the Sundari Chowk was under renovation and no laymen were allowed in the area. He is thankful that the stolen artifact was discovered sooner rather than later.

Likewise, the 10th-century Chaturmurti Vishnu from Maligaon, stolen in the 1980s, was later discovered buried in the bank of Dhubikhola River. It was brought back and reinstalled in its rightful place. The fate was similar for the 12th/13th century, four-foot-tall stone murti of Padmapani Lokeshwar, stolen from Shankar Kirti Mahabihar in Bhagwan Bahal, Naxal, in the mid 70s. It was so heavy that thieves abandoned it in the neighboring area. After spending decades at the National Museum, local authorities restored their long-lost God to its original site on January 9, 2022.

Such cases are also documented in Lain Singh Bangdel's book, which records several stolen artifacts that never left Kathmandu

Valley and were in the custody of different police stations, now at the National Museum for safekeeping. Even so, each recovered Deity stands as a divine presence.

When thefts are uncovered, generally only the low-level perpetrators are apprehended, while upper-tier operators are untouched. Even when documents are presented to identify powerful people orchestrating smuggling networks, the wall of influence and status enables escape from accountability.

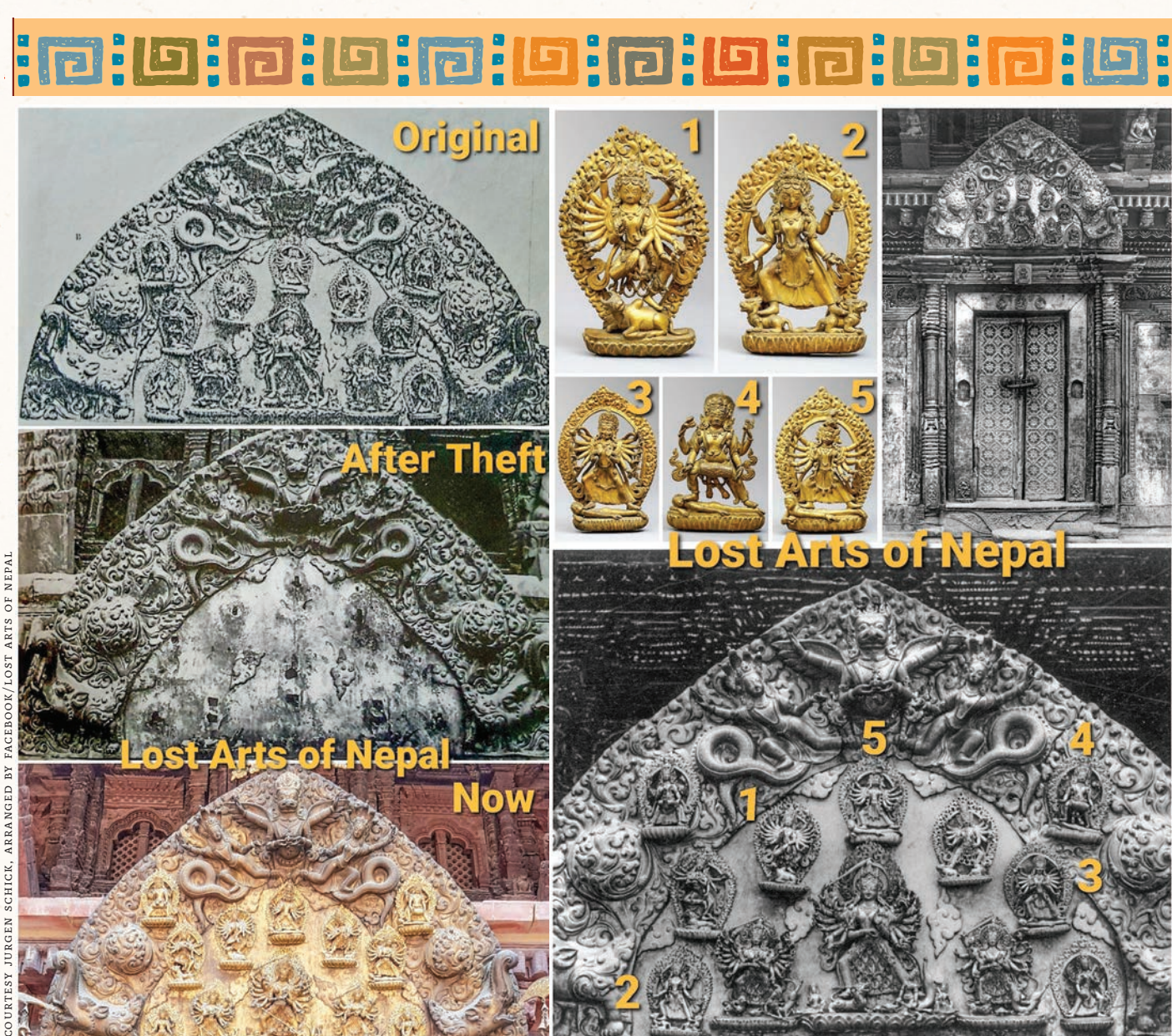


Repatriation

Although the idea of stolen Divinities ever returning to Nepal once seemed remote, formal efforts toward repatriation began in the mid 80s. Since then, 201 sacred objects have been returned from India, UK, Germany, Australia, Belgium and elsewhere. Among the earliest recoveries was a set of metal icons repatriated from a museum in Kolkata, India, which are still housed in the National Museum, as they lack a clear provenance.

In August 1999, a severed head of the Goddess Saraswati in Pharping was returned by an American collector. When Basudev Acharya, a resident of Pharping, read news about the repatriation, he went to the National Museum to greet and welcome his Goddess.

In addition to the Ancient Monuments



Preservation Act of 1956, the UNESCO 1970 Convention affirms Nepal's right to reclaim cultural property removed unlawfully. Aligned with the convention, Nepal and USA signed a bilateral Cultural Property Agreement (CPA) in Kathmandu on January 8, 2026, to curb the illicit trafficking of archaeological and ethnological objects. At the ceremony, US Ambassador Thompson noted that the agreement reflects the deep respect the US holds for Nepal's cultural heritage and strengthens cooperation between the two nations.

Advocate Sanjay Adhikari, who is also a founding member of NHRC, thinks it's a great achievement for Nepal because the agreement has significantly shifted the legal burden to the US. He explains, "Even though illegal trafficking continues, the CPA changes the dynamics. If traffickers are intercepted at US borders, the burden of proof is no longer on Nepal. It is now the responsibility of the carrier or trafficker to demonstrate that the object is not illicit. If they fail, the artifact is

seized and returned to its country of origin."

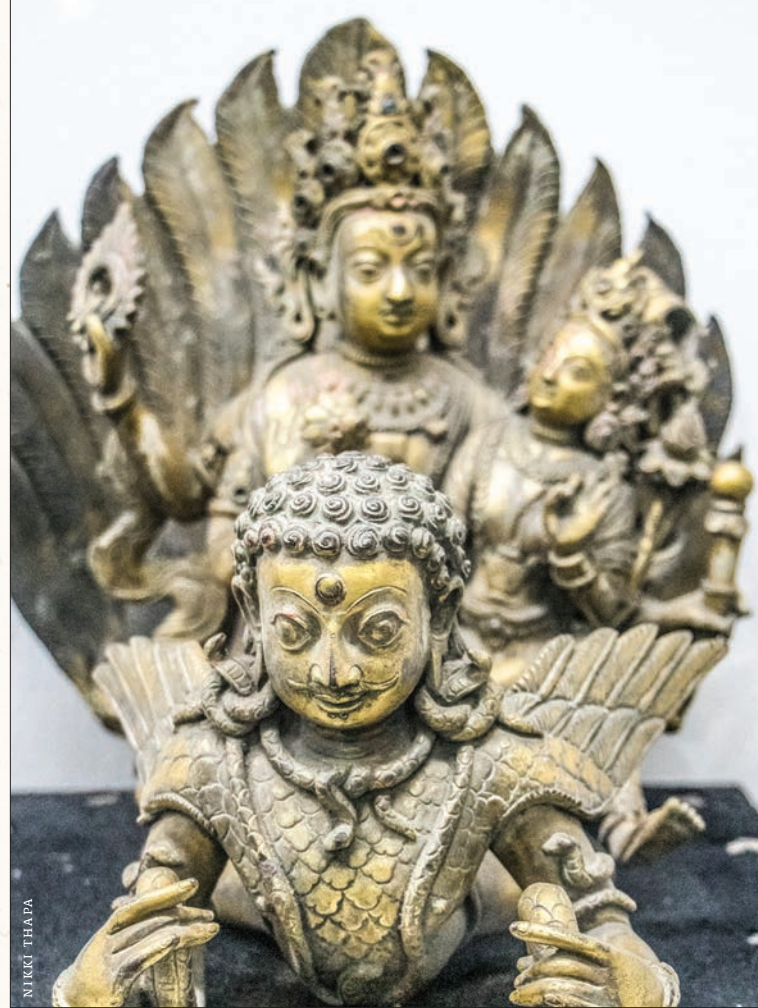
Adhikari is currently investigating 150 stolen heritages worldwide, located in museums, auction houses and also displayed in living rooms and on swimming pool decks of private collectors. He advocates for the creation of a specialized "Heritage Police" or "Task Force" to combat contraband in the future. He warns, "Unless the state builds skilled, institutional capacity, individual efforts will never be enough."

Sarita Subedi at the Department of Archaeology says the NHRC has emerged as a key partner in conducting investigative research, gathering evidence and identifying stolen objects. It is a volunteer-driven, non-profit organization dedicated exclusively to the repatriation of stolen sacred heritages and returning them to the rightful communities that continue to worship them. Adhikari says it emerged from an awakening when he read a newspaper report about a stolen 10th/11th-century Lakshmi Narayan

sculpture exhibited at the Dallas Museum of Art (DMA). He discussed the issue with conservation architect Rabindra Puri and other like-minded individuals, which led to the establishment of the NHRC. They were able to bring the Lakshmi Narayan murti home and reinstall it at the temple in Patko Tole, Patan, in 2021.

Repatriation of this particular Deity was a triumph for residents of Patan and equally for American artist and researcher Joy Lynn Davis. Davis has been visiting the theft sites, recording memories shared by locals and painting the stolen stone murtis with 23-karat gold since 2012. She first identified the Lakshmi Narayan at the Dallas Museum. Having completed a painting of this God/Goddess just a year earlier, she recognized the statue immediately. Davis had passed the Patan temple daily on her way to her studio, making its appearance at the museum shocking and deeply personal, she says.

Roshan Mishra, one of the founding mem-



bers of NHRC and Director of Taragaon Next Museum, shares that when NHRC was first established, it was an exciting and passionate phase. They believed in “naming and shaming” institutions and private collectors who display Gods and Goddesses behind glass. They thought public pressure, especially through social media, would compel those holders to return what rightfully belonged to Nepal, but today he no longer believes that. As a director of a museum himself, he understands how a museum functions and how direct, respectful, face-to-face conversation

Coming alive: (clockwise from top left) This Vishnu and Lakshmi residing on Garuda on a water spout is a replica; the original that was stolen in 2010 and later recovered; a Uma Maheshvara statue from Handigaon was stolen in 1985 and has not been found yet; a Basuki Nagaraja statue, stolen 40 years ago, was returned by Marilyn B Alsdorf Trust of America in 2022

leads to better outcomes. A good example is the strut of the Sulima Temple that he identified at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, in 2019. After returning to Nepal, he communicated with museum staff and after a sustained dialogue of two years, the strut was handed over to Nepal. This experience reinforced his belief in a courteous and collaborative approach.

Alisha Sijapati adds that on the global stage, NHRC is the first registered nonprofit organization united by the shared goal of heritage restoration. It functions as a living knowledge center where individuals are exposed to Nepali sacred art through direct engagement and learning. It organizes conferences to raise awareness on the urgency of contraband and foster dialogue. A conference held in Patan from June 16–18, 2025, by NHRC had experts and activists from Nepal and around the world discuss repatriation of stolen artifacts. The three-day conference examined case studies from Nepal, Cambodia, India, Poland, Vietnam, Lebanon, Syria and Afghanistan,

with a particular emphasis on national laws and international repatriation frameworks alongside emerging digital tools such as augmented reality, photogrammetry and data-driven provenance.

The Facebook page Lost Arts of Nepal has played an instrumental role in tracking down many stolen pieces at different museums. These include wooden statues of Nritya Devi and Chintamani Lokeshwar from a Buddhist monastery, I-Baha Bahi, at the Art Institute of Chicago, Philadelphia Museum of Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art and New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Nil Barahi God of Pharping at the Asian Civilization Museum in Singapore, and a 9th-century Buddha statue from Bungamati town at the University of Michigan Museum of Art (UMMA). They tracked the ongoing auction at Bonhams, Paris, of five gilded copper-bronze images of Nrityanath, Mahalaxmi, Chamunda, Shiva Gana (Bhairava) and Panchmukhi Hanuman (Hanu Bhairava). These were among twelve images on a 16th-cen-

An Ornament’s Clear Provenance

was part of the Goddess. So many sentiments, religious beliefs, and cultural values are attached to this necklace.”

With strong sentiments, she circulated photos and a video questioning why and how the necklace came to be in the museum. Public outcry grew, and Ms. Baniya later wrote a case study for her students’ degree course to continue the discussion. Despite her best efforts and those of activists and journalists, the Institute remains silent on the matter. HINDUISM TODAY contacted the Institute in early 2026 for their current stance on the issue. Their response via email, “We are committed to preserving and celebrating Nepal’s rich cultural heritage and are always interested in learning more about the objects in our care. We are in communication with the Government of Nepal and will continue to collaborate with them directly.” The Embassy of Nepal in Washington D.C., when asked if communication is indeed happening, replied that they do not have any updates regarding the case at this time.

THE ART INSTITUTE OF CHICAGO RETURNED A 13TH-CENTURY Chaturmukhi Sivalinga to Nepal. But the institute still prominently displays a 400-year-old necklace of Kathmandu’s Goddess Taleju Bhavani, stolen nearly five decades ago, as a centerpiece of its Art of Asia department in Gallery 141, alongside other Nepali religious antiquities.

The case for its return appears straightforward, as the necklace, studded with semi-precious stones and inlaid with Ashtamatrika (the Eight Mother Goddesses) bears an inscription identifying it as the property of King Pratap Malla, who ruled Kathmandu from 1641 to 1674. In May 2022, the Nepali Embassy in Washington D.C. sent the Institute a letter of request for repatriation for the necklace, which it has held for three decades. The Institute replied that the piece was gifted by the US-based Alsdorf Foundation and cannot be returned without definitive proof of origin.

Sweta Gyanu Baniya, an assistant professor at Virginia Tech University’s Center for Humanities, decided to visit the necklace in person with her husband after hearing about it from friends. She later reflected, “When I saw the necklace displayed as a mere object for onlookers who might not know its deep importance to a Nepali Hindu, I started to cry. I joined my hands together in prayer, mumbling to myself, ‘This necklace doesn’t belong here.’ The marks of century-long vermillion powder were still there, signifying that this piece was worshiped as a part of Taleju Bhavani and probably worn by the Goddess herself. Seeing the vermillion deeply moved me, because for the centuries until it was lost, this





ture frieze at the south door of the Taleju Bhawani Temple courtyard in Patan. Roshan Mishra has reached out to the auction house in Paris with evidence of the origin of the statues to bring them back to Nepal.

The 400-year-old necklace once worn by the Taleju Bhawani Goddess in Kathmandu, now at the Art Institute of Chicago, was also discovered by the Facebook page, later amplified by a tweet from Sweta Gyanu Baniya, an assistant professor at Virginia Tech University (see sidebar pg. 25). The page has been sharing before-and-after photos of the lost artifacts over the years. When asked how they keep track of the authenticity of their claims of theft, they replied, "Our sources and matching processes are unpredictable, without a standard format...sometimes accidental, like Gods are leading our way."

The Road Ahead



The path to repatriation is not easy. It's a lengthy process, made even more complicated when stolen items go unreported. During the 2015 earthquake, it is believed that hundreds of artifacts may have been stolen, yet many never reached the attention of police. Kathmandu Valley has a treasure trove of religious art created during a period of over 2,000 years in open areas, which have not been documented photographically, making detection and recovery especially difficult. But Sanjay Adhikari remains confident that the artifacts stolen from Nepal cannot stay concealed forever. He believes they can be traced within the next decade because trav-

elers who visited Nepal in the 1960s and 70s photographed Nepal extensively, and with the trend of sharing old photos from around the world, they will surface online.

The first and foremost challenging step is provenance research—establishing that a specific Deity originated in Nepal and was removed illegally, which requires specialized skills, archival knowledge and familiarity with community memory. Another challenge is the lack of uniform laws around the world; those regarding antiques are different in every country. Nepal has two principal pathways for recovery: diplomatic engagement through embassies and consulates, or direct negotiations with artifact holders. In many cases, collectors have voluntarily returned sacred objects once their origins were clarified. In other cases, legal actions become necessary. In the US, this process often involves criminal proceedings handled by the Manhattan District Attorney's Office. Meanwhile, France operates under civil law, where repatriation generally requires parliamentary approval. While reforms addressing colonial-era looting are underway, progress remains slow; as a result, not a single monument has been repatriated from France, despite correspondence and publicity.

According to Roshan Mishra, many objects fall into a grey area, particularly images that resemble both Nepali and Tibetan Deities. In some cases, it is difficult to determine whether they originated in Tibet or were commissioned by Tibetan patrons in Nepal and later taken across the border.

Another evidence challenge is that, despite presenting clear documents of artifacts' ori-

Sober reality: (clockwise from far left) A Deity is secured with an iron band around the waist to deter theft; wooden struts are similarly protected; a girl bows to the bodiless feet of an unknown God in Handigaon

gins, some museums and collectors continue to turn a blind eye. Besides Goddess Taleju Bhawani's necklace, several known looted artifacts have not yet been successfully repatriated. Among them are: 1) five inlaid Deities taken from a gateway, which surfaced at the Bonhams Auction; 2) a 16th-century paubha painting of the Malla era from Nepal, currently held at the Collège de France in Paris; 3) a 12th-century Vishnu with Lakshmi and Garuda, stolen from Chyasal in Patan in the late 1970s; 4) a 12th-century statue of Uma Maheswar, from Nasmanatol in Bhaktapur, stolen May 23, 1984. These sacred objects, long removed from their ritual and cultural contexts, remain in storage at the Musée National des Arts Asiatiques Guimet in France, still awaiting return.

The Department of Archaeology is the rightful state authority in Nepal to initiate repatriation work. The process begins with reports from local communities regarding missing Deities and information on where the contraband may have surfaced. Authorities monitor auction listings and museum collections to identify objects that match the reported thefts. Site inspections are conducted at the original locations, and detailed investigations are made to determine whether the objects found abroad corre-



spond to those stolen. Once the provenance is confirmed, the department submits the comprehensive report to the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation. The Ministry then forwards the cases to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which communicates with the Nepalese embassies and consulates in the concerned countries. These diplomatic missions initiate negotiations with auction houses, museums and private collectors. Foreign institutions also conduct independent verification to ensure the claims are substantiated and lawful. When the ownership is established as unlawful, most institutions cooperate, as few wish to retain illicit property. Upon approval, the Government of Nepal authorizes the embassy to receive objects on behalf of the state, and recovered artifacts are transported back to Nepal.

Funding of repatriations comes from multiple sources. The Government of Nepal often bears the cost. Museums and collectors also fund repatriation, and at times, cargo service providers transport heritage objects free of charge. In May 2024, US citizen Susan Bradford voluntarily sponsored the shipping of 24 artifacts dating back to the 13th, 17th and 18th centuries that were once part of her private collection.

Once recovered objects arrive in Nepal, the primary objective is to reinstall the sacred images within the original community, which is not always possible. Many original sites no longer exist; numerous temples fell during the 2015 earthquake. At many stone spouts, stolen statuary has been replaced with replicas. Kanak Mani Dixit stresses, "We work hard to bring back artifacts, but societies have changed in the meantime. There is no one answer, but personally, my

focus now is on a particular Uma Maheswar in room #31 at the British Museum. That Deity was from the Thapahiti stone spout next to the Rudra Varna Mahabihar in Patan."

Another issue is that communities must ensure the adequate protection of returned Deities. "These moments require humility, and NHRC understands its limits, and does not impose its decision of reinstalling the repatriated images upon communities," says Alisha Sijapati. Considering the case of the Lakshmi Narayan statue, it was returned with a severed hand, so the people of Patan already had a consecrated replica installed at the temple. Hindu shastra says that with even minor damage, a Deity is considered impure. Shastra also forbids the coexistence of two energies, but the community insisted on reinstating their returned God. Therefore the two images are worshiped side by side. A similar dilemma arose with the head of Saraswati at Pharping. The restoration was not feasible as they already had attached a replica head to the remaining torso, and Pharping is not a wealthy community.

The collection of repatriated artifacts has been increasing at the National Museum's temporary exhibition hall and also at Patan Museum, awaiting reinstallations to their original location. Sadly, hundreds may never see their reinstatement due to the loss of their homes. Nawaraj Adhikari, spokesperson of the National Museum, states that the repatriated artifacts displayed temporarily inform visitors about their origin, the efforts of recovery from abroad and their cultural significance. They will help the public to understand Nepal's historical, archaeological and religious

heritage. In addition, the museum conducts awareness programs through its website and in collaboration with related institutions to promote heritage conservation.

Conclusion

Faith moves mountains. I am with Sangeeta Thapa when she says, "What has driven the whole repatriation movement is our faith." The stolen images now held by Western and Asian collectors are the very Deities that our ancestors worshiped and venerated for generations by offering water, milk, vermilion powder, flowers, sweets and lights in devotion. We could not prevent the disappearance of our Gods and Goddesses, with whom we shared our happiness and prayed to get rid of our sorrow, but today there is a growing determination to bring them home.

For fifty years, the theft of these sacred images has deprived us of our right to faith, culture, heritage. That loss should not continue. May the global market of stolen images be destroyed, all our belongings rightfully returned to us and reinstalled in their respective sacred sites of thousands of years, so that our faith, rituals and festivities may continue far into the future.



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TEMPLES

Sri Lanka's Tirukoneswaram Kovil

Trincomalee's ancient clifftop shrine has outlasted empires, survived colonial destruction, and continues to draw pilgrims today

BY THULASI MUTTULINGAM, SRI LANKA
PERCHED ABOVE ONE OF THE WORLD'S great natural harbors, Tirukoneswaram Temple is a civilizational landmark. Here, history, politics, commerce, military ambition and spirituality converge. *Tirukoneswaram* combines *tiru*, meaning "sacred;" *kona*, meaning "peak" or "apex;" and *Iswaram*, "Lord," a name of Siva. Together: "Sacred Peak of the Lord." Emperors, conquerors, merchants, seafarers, pilgrims and poets—all have left their mark.

Lord Siva, it is said, is the God of liminal spaces. He prefers to abide in thresholds that segue from one form to another—hence why He frequents cremation grounds, cliffs, mountain peaks and river mouths. No wonder, then, that He chose Swami Rock at Trincomalee: an ancient headland of submerged mountains, rising abruptly from an

otherwise gentle coastal plain in sharp relief. He sits here atop a 167-foot-tall promontory, an elongated cliff jutting into the sea.

The visuals are striking. Even in a country known for scenic beauty from coast to coast, the clifftop shrine stands out in majestic splendor. Not because the current temple edifice is grand in scale—it is not, though it once was in medieval times—but because the landmark itself is arresting. Siva has chosen His vantage spot well.

Over the millennia, every power of consequence has sought to claim this strategic hinge in the Global South linking East and West. Even today, this geographical nexus in the Indian Ocean off Sri Lanka's eastern coast remains coveted and contested.

A 36-foot statue of Lord Siva greets you as you summit the cliff, His serene expression unbothered by all that has come before and

might yet come again. He has presided over cosmic clashes between devas and asuras, primordial tumults between good and evil, colonial conquest, native resistances, and the battles between the Allied and Axis powers in the Second World War. Today the conflicts continue more sedately, yet no less fiercely, with native Tamil and Sinhala claims over the locality, and the quiet strategic rivalry between China and India over control of the harbor. Conflicts are nothing new to Siva. Like His presence on the cliff, He rises above it all. Behind Siva rises His temple, being constructed anew. The Lord of Trincomalee has been through it all.

The Temple in Medieval Times

Tirukoneswaram is one of five famed Saiva shrines known as the Pancha Ishwarams, which fortify the Sri Lankan coastline on all



Ocean cliffs: (far left) Tirukoneswaram Kovil sits atop the 167-foot-high Swami Rock; (right) the temple's iconic Siva statue greets pilgrims as they arrive; inside, the main temple structure is ornately painted, with iconography depicting the temple's history

sides: Naguleswaram in Jaffna on the northern coast; Thiruketheeswaram in Mannar on the northwestern coast; Tirukoneswaram itself in Trincomalee on the eastern coast; Munneswaram in Puttalam on the western coast; and Thiruttondeeshwaram in Dondra on the southern coast.

Their origins are mostly lost to mythology and vague historical records. There is evidence for their being at the very least a thousand years old. Mythology associated with them traces back three thousand years or more. All five were sacked by Portuguese colonists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with historical records vanishing in the process. All five are now revived and functioning, albeit what was Thiruttondeeshwaram at the southernmost coast is now the Dondra Head temple, a Vishnu-Buddhist shrine maintained by the Sinhala community. The other four continue as Hindu temples maintained by the Tamil community. Folklore traces the origins of these temples to King Ravana's time and beyond, drawing mainly from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. King Ravana, villain of the *Ramayana*, was known as a great Siva devotee, and each of these shrines contains some legend associated with him.

The person most widely credited with transforming the Tirukoneswaram temple into a magnificent edifice renowned far and wide was a king remembered as Kulokotta Mannan, famed for his irrigation works. While there are no historical records of his life, he continues to fire imagination and veneration in the minds of devotees. Professor S. Pathmanathan, an eminent historian in Sri Lanka, surmises that Kulokottan was possibly a son of Rajendra I, the Chola king who campaigned across much of South and Southeast Asia in the eleventh century. There are temple inscriptions dating back to Rajendra I, who patronized this temple, and many of the retrieved statues from the area associated with the temple date to this period or later.

According to local tradition, Kulokottan was a prince of South India who, after his father's death, heard of the temple's greatness and sailed across to see it for himself. He became a devoted devotee and patron, going on to build it on an epic scale to mirror India's Kailasanathar Temple at Kanchipuram. Tirukoneswaram temple was already known as Dakshina Kailasa, the abode of Siva in the South. Kulokottan is credited with



establishing a network of satellite shrines along the promontory and into surrounding villages, some of which survive to this day. He also laid the socio-economic foundations of the temple complex, creating artisanal settlements, agrarian villages and irrigation systems that ensured both ritual continuity and material stability.

That pattern remains visible to this day. Rippling green paddy fields stretch across the plains, fed by an intricate system of tanks and waterways winding through them, glinting silvery blue under the tropical sunlight. Nearby, the great Kantale Reservoir spreads like an inland sea, its vast surface and radiating canals standing as enduring testimony to the scale of hydraulic planning that sustained the temple economy. A tenth of the people's revenue went toward temple

maintenance. Current villagers—hereditary servicemen of the temple he established—still tithe and continue in the same temple duties their forefathers undertook. Though many are contemporary professionals today, they return to perform their hereditary roles during temple festivals and functions, ranging from priests and administrators to ritual-specific workers such as garland makers and interior decorators. The temple, already renowned by Kulokottan's time, was patronized by Sri Lankan and Indian kings in the centuries that followed.

Civilizational Hubs

The Pancha Ishwarams did not function as Saivite shrines alone. They also served as the maritime and political infrastructure of their age. All these coastal temples were



A thriving bay: Seafarers arrive from around the world to Trincomalee's renowned bay to rest, trade and pray at the temple; King Kulokotta Mannan directs villagers in the construction of a great irrigation system which still maintains the fertility of the area.

Ocean, timing was survival. A festival could signal safe departure windows, expected return periods and seasonal trade cycles. Oral memory encoded meteorological knowledge in sacred narrative: "After the Lord's festival, the winds turn." In an age before printed charts and standardized maps, temple stories held the landscape in memory, translating cliff, tide, hazard and harvest into accessible knowledge by which sailors steered.

NANO BANANA



SHANMUGALINGAM ARJUN

embedded within maritime circuits linking South India, Southeast Asia, Arabia and the wider Mediterranean world. They functioned as port cities, administrative centers and spiritual hubs, intertwined with the kings and dynasties ruling the land in ways that extended beyond worship alone. The Tamil word for temple—*kovil*—encodes this meaning etymologically: *ko* means king or Deity, and *il* translates to house or residence. The *v* is a euphonic connector between them—giving *kovil*, simultaneously the abode of the Divine and the king's house. The ruler was traditionally viewed as a representative of God on Earth.

The temples were likewise administrative and fiscal centers—archive, court, treasury and registry, the bureaucracy of their day. Tamil merchants, Arab traders, Southeast Asian sailors, and occasionally Mediterranean intermediaries converged on Sri Lanka's ports. Major temples also functioned as economic hubs sustaining hereditary

occupations—priests, musicians, artisans, scribes, cultivators and maritime workers, whose obligations and privileges were tied to temple endowments.

Like sacred signposts, the Pancha Ishwarams dotting the coastline acted as a maritime markers. Temple towers did what flags do today—they announced presence. At Swami Rock specifically, the old temple's peak towered high above sea level, overlooking a deep natural harbor, performing the function of a lighthouse before the era of modern lighthouses. Temple flags revealed wind direction. Gold-plated gopurams reflected sunlight as well as moonlight, by which ships could find their way. Sound traveled efficiently across the water; conch blasts, bells and drums created acoustic markers detectable offshore. These elements formed a sophisticated navigational system.

Festivals, too, carried navigational significance. They frequently aligned with monsoon shifts and sailing seasons. In the Indian

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Colonial Destruction

In 1505, new ships—from Portugal—appeared on this ancient trade route, ostensibly for trade. Just seven years earlier, in 1498, Vasco da Gama had discovered the direct sea route from Europe to India by sailing around the southern tip of Africa, setting in motion a ripple effect that would tip the balance of power across the Indian Ocean. For years, Arab and Venetian intermediaries had controlled the spice trade from the Indian subcontinent, and by the time the spices reached



Foreign powers descend: Portuguese soldiers take control of the temple and the bay; Fort Frederick, which still exists today, was built with the stones of the temple after it was dismantled.

Europe, many were worth more than their weight in gold. The Portuguese now sought not merely access but monopoly—especially over Sri Lanka's coveted cinnamon and strategic harbors.

Over the sixteenth century, they established fortified coastal strongholds, beginning around Colombo, and progressively tightened control over maritime trade routes. They operated under a system known as *padroado*, which fused empire-building with evangelization, through the use of force and violence. They aggressively proselytized, and converted many of the coastal communities, leading to conflicts with kings inland. The king of Jaffna, facing the loss of territory and the destabilization of his kingdom through mass conversions, sent an army to Mannar which killed six hundred Catholic converts. The Portuguese attacked the kingdom, won, and annexed it. With Jaffna conquered, Portuguese authority extended more firmly across the north and east.

In 1622, their forces moved decisively against Trincomalee, and by 1624 had demolished the Tirukoneswaram temple, using many of its stones to construct a fort on the promontory—Fort Frederick, which still stands there today. Other temple architecture and murtsi were cast off the cliff.

There is no official account of loss of life during this event, either from local sources or from contemporary Portuguese records. Evidence suggests collaboration with a Vanniar chieftain from the Kottiyar district who may have converted to Catholicism. The Portuguese missionary Francis Xavier had apparently sent missives to the king of Portugal claiming the conversion of three royal personages in the subcontinent, among them a prince of Trincomalee. Since Trincomalee was not an independent kingdom but came under the purview of the Jaffna kingdom at the time, scholars estimate this was likely a local chieftain. As Xavier visited Sri Lanka in the 1540s, some eighty years prior to the temple's demolition, it is possible there was by then an extensive network of local collaborators. Historical details of these conversions and missionary missives are documented in Fernão de Queyroz's 17th-century chronicle, *The Spiritual and Temporal Conquest of Ceylon*.

As per local Hindu lore, the temple was demolished on the Tamil Hindu New Year's Day of April 14, 1624. Worshipers had been celebrating the New Year with great pomp and festivity all day at the summit of Swami

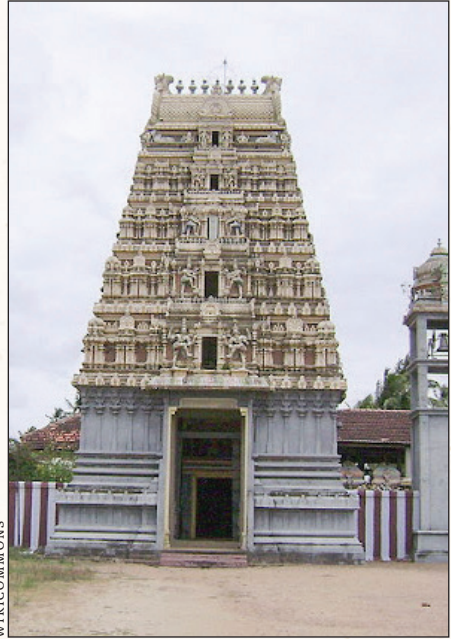


Rock. The Portuguese—some dressed as Hindu priests and pilgrims—infiltrated the festivities. Once the revelers had gone on the procession away from the main temple, the few brahmin priests remaining at the shrine were easily overpowered by a company of soldiers who sacked the holy site over the next few days. There are records of devout worshippers and temple service workers secreting away statues to Tampalakamam village fifteen miles away, where they established another temple. Those statues and that temple—Ati Koneswaram—still exist.

While archaeological excavations have never been undertaken—indeed, they are forbidden—various construction works from the 1950s onward have yielded ancient and medieval statues dating back one to two millennia. The most recent find was a statue of Nandi, Lord Siva's faithful mount and

sentinel, dating to the third century ce, unearthed in 2012 during construction work at the current Tirukoneswaram temple. Following the discovery, government injunctions were issued prohibiting the use of digging implements of any kind in the area. There is clearly a treasure trove of archaeological evidence both inland and in the surrounding sea; but due to ongoing land disputes and complex administrative hurdles, the site's full historical narrative remains waiting to be uncovered.

Local villagers surmise that their ancestors—likely forced to demolish their own shrines—hid some artifacts away while burying those not feasible to carry off. Several more were sent plunging into the sea, where they remain today, resting beneath the waters off Swami Rock and forming a magnet for divers drawn to the otherworldly



Saving shrines: *The Ati Koneswaram Temple in Tampalakamam village as it stands today. It houses some of the sacred items that were saved from the original temple; a display showing the original shrine locations on Swami Rock.*

sight of submerged temple ruins. Still to this day, fishermen will stop their boats above the submerged ruins, where they will pour water over their bow as a sunrise blessing before heading out to sea.

The temple's structural stones, columns and plinths were used in the Portuguese fort. Among those stones is an inscription, believed to date back to the temple, describing how the *parangis*—the local term for Europeans—would demolish the shrine and that no king would arise again to rebuild it. Framed as a prophecy, this has given rise to awed conjecture that the temple bore an inscription foretelling its own destruction. Scholars such as Professor Pathmanathan, however, regard it more cautiously, suggesting it may have been composed retrospectively after the events it purports to predict.

Portuguese chroniclers, and even the commander who oversaw the raid documented the temple's destruction both before and after the event, though they do not go into detail. They do record that there were considerable temple riches to strip away, and that the masonry was either toppled into the sea or repurposed in the construction of their fort.

The destruction had profound psychological consequences for the indigenous maritime communities who depended on the shrine. After the temple's fall, several shifts became visible in the records. Sailors could no longer perform traditional departure or



return rites at Trincomalee. The sea, once framed as dangerous but meaningful, became arbitrary and hostile. Authority shifted from divine sanction to colonial permission, and local merchants increasingly withdrew from long-distance trade or became subordinate intermediaries.

In the centuries that followed, Sri Lankan kings repeatedly sought alliances with other European powers in the hope of dislodging the colonizers. Each new power, supplanting the old with native strategic support, then refused to relinquish the strategic control thus gained—becoming new colonizers in turn. In 1639, the Dutch displaced the Portuguese from Trincomalee, only to be displaced by the British in 1795. Sri Lankans regained their country, their native religions and their places of worship only after 1948, when the nation gained independence following nearly five centuries of colonial rule.

Tampalakamam and Continuity
While the coastal shrine was lost, its economic and spiritual lifeblood survived not far away. Tampalakamam village, fifteen miles inland from Tirukoneswaram, is linked to the Mahaweli River basin. This is Sri Lanka's longest river and the backbone of its largest irrigation network, feeding Trincomalee through canals, reservoirs and seasonal streams. The lands around Tampalakamam were *devadana* holdings, villages whose agricultural surplus sustained temple priests, festivals, musicians and daily worship with rice, milk, ghee, flowers and cloth flowing from Tampalakamam to Swami Rock.

When the Portuguese destroyed the temple, they shattered the crown but left intact the heart that sustained it. This inland territory fell under the purview of the king of Kandy rather than the vanquished kingdom

of Jaffna. The Kandyan king stepped in as patron of the re-established Ati Koneswaram temple in the region. The name translates as "the original Koneswaram," reflecting the transfer of sanctity to this site, where devotees had fled with the artifacts and images they managed to save. The paddy and other tithes thereafter flowed to this temple, which still stands today, retaining the original statues installed there and continuing to be funded by the tithes from the region.

The lands around Ati Koneswaram temple, once held in trust for Tirukoneswaram and now for this shrine, ripple golden-green with waving sheaves of paddy in the bright sunlight to this day. This land cannot be repurposed for any other use, and according to the temple's manager, the revenue still brings in far more than is required for the shrine's maintenance, including elaborate annual festivals. The ancient royal revenue model continues to sustain and replenish the shrine and settlements established a millennium ago.

The Original Shrines
At the time of the Portuguese invasion, three temples stood upon the promontory, with satellite shrines extending into the surrounding regions. Along the upward path to the cliff top rose a sacred sequence: near the base stood a Shakti temple, revered as one of the original eighteen Shakti Pithams, drawing devotees of the Goddess from medieval times to the present day. Higher up was a temple to Vishnu and His consort, a shrine whose bronze icons have since been recovered and reinstalled. At the very apex of the cliff, fronting the shimmering blue of the Indian Ocean, stood the majestic Siva shrine, extolled in the Tamil *Tevarams* and devotional literature. All of these were



Modern Reconstruction
Hindu worship was expressly forbidden by the Portuguese (1622–1639) and discouraged by the Dutch (1639–1795), but restrictions eased under the British (1795–1948). During British rule, the only part of the medieval temple left standing on the crest was a solitary rock pillar—a surviving remnant of the original "Temple of a Thousand Pillars." Ceremoniously safeguarded to this day, this pillar became a poignant focus of devotion which the British allowed to become the center of worship once again. A formal temple structure, however, would not be constructed for as long as colonial authority remained on the island.

In the late nineteenth century, currents of Hindu revivalism spread through the subcontinent, sweeping along Trincomalee in their wake. Local Hindu leaders began pressing for the restoration of Tirukoneswaram at or near its original location. The site, however, became a major strategic nexus in the Second World War, and temple reconstruction was hardly a priority for the British Imperial mind.

On April 9, 1942, Japanese carrier-based aircraft bombed Trincomalee harbor and its surrounding installations, sinking several vessels and compelling the British Eastern Fleet to withdraw temporarily. Although the attack inflicted significant damage—including the loss of HMS Hermes off the eastern coast—British and Allied forces ultimately retained control of the harbor. As K. Saravanapavan, a Trincomalee researcher and writer, notes in his book *The Most Dangerous Moment in Ceylon*, the raid exposed the vulnerability of the island at a time when



Singapore had already fallen and Japanese naval power seemed ascendant across the region. In his wartime memoirs, Winston Churchill later described this phase of the conflict as one of the gravest and most perilous moments of the war, stating that had Ceylon been lost, "the future would have been black." With Singapore gone, the loss of Trincomalee would have dealt a catastrophic blow to Allied control of the Indian Ocean.

Just as Lord Siva's Tandava dance reminds us, periods of destruction are followed by pause, rebalancing and eventual renewal. Soon after the Second World War ended, so did British imperialism. By 1948, Sri Lanka had gained independence, and by the 1950s, a modest but functioning temple structure once again stood on Swami Rock. It continues to evolve even today, though it remains restrained in scale compared to its medieval form.

The Summit Today
At the base of Swami Rock stands Fort Frederick, the colonial stronghold built by the Portuguese which continues to assert an imposing presence. Now maintained by the Sri Lankan army and navy, the site is still regarded as a strategic defense location. Devotion and defense dovetail on the same ground, as they had since before Colonial times.

To reach the shrine today, pilgrims must first pass through the stone gateway of the fort. Then begins the climb upward through an archaeological treasure trove, marked by the traces of empires come and gone, their imprint visible both above and below ground. Medieval Tamil Saiva saints such as Sambandar once sang of the wooded beauty of this ascent, of groves thick with verdant greenery along the cliff path. While the ancient forests are long gone, clusters of trees still shade the

Ocean depths: *Today, divers can find many stones and statues from the original Tirukoneswaram Temple beneath the cliffs of Swami Rock, from where the Portuguese pushed them into the sea*

way. Moving through them, remarkably at ease among visitors, are flamboyantly iridescent peacocks and docile spotted deer. They roam with quiet entitlement, as if aware that the land was once theirs and they hold unique status as Siva's beloved spirits. They appear to expect the attention of human pilgrims; if you are unsure how to approach them, the deer with their expressive eyes will indicate the treats at the army-run snack shop nearby. Many a pilgrim stops to pay a "cute tax" to these bandits before moving on. The peacocks strutting about as though they own the place may or may not pause for your treats, but the stray dogs meekly coexisting with the deer are grateful for any attention.

The inhabitants of this sacred domain are not limited to the feathered and the fleet-footed. Others swing above, while others slither below. A grey serpent—reminiscent of the naga adorning Siva's neck—might glide across the path upward, moving with a calm entitlement that suggests it is entirely at home. As the chosen ornament of the Lord, its presence is accepted as a natural extension of the shrine's sanctity; notably, the seasoned pilgrims hardly turn a head at its passing.

Lord Siva's imposing presence looms as one approaches the summit. This is His third iteration of His likeness in modern construction. Temple authorities have repeatedly reimagined His likeness, each iteration an attempt to capture something of the luminous divinity that devotees expect, yet arriving at



RAJUMAR MANICKAM



RAJUMAR MANICKAM

Temple grounds: (clockwise from upper left) wild deer relax alongside the pathway up to the temple; the interior of the structure that houses the temple; devotees from around the world visit to attend puja at the main shrine; one of the many monkeys that live along the cliffs

a representation that satisfies both pilgrims and regulators has proven elusive. Questions of proportion, posture, expression and symbolism continue to spark debate and, at times, discord. The Lord's grace has proved difficult to capture, even for master sculptors commissioned from India. Behind the colossal seated Lord—His front hands extended in blessing, His rear hands lifting a deer and an axe—the modern temple is modest in scale, its pastel tower and bright panels standing quietly at His back.

Inside, the temple feels distinctly modern, bright and airy, in contrast to the shadowed depths of older shrines in the region. Skylights and tall windows draw in generous shafts of sunlight, which scatter across white marble floors gleaming throughout



RAJUMAR MANICKAM

the sanctum. The main shrine is dedicated, of course, to Siva in the form of the Sivalingam, with Nandi, His bull, seated in attentive gaze before Him. Along the circumambulatory passage around this sanctum, Deities and saints carved in black granite stand adorned in richly colored silk saris, pleated and draped with careful precision. Their jewel-toned folds cascade over the dark stone in riots of color: fuchsia pink, emerald green, turquoise blue, vermilion red and saffron gold, the borders shot through with glittering gold thread. Fresh garlands of marigold and jasmine rest against the fabric, their brightness set vividly against the black granite.

Higher up on the walls, rendered in fresco and bas-relief, are the legends associated with the temple, drawn from both recorded history and sacred mythology. Portuguese soldiers in Western attire are shown destroying the ancient shrine. Nearby, King Ravana appears in devotion to Lord Siva, offering one of his ten heads he has plucked to serve as a musical instrument. Also depicted is King Kulakottan, directing villagers in the construction of the irrigation tanks associated with his name, which have ensured both the temple's prosperity and the

long-term economic sustenance of the surrounding villages.

Just outside the temple, in grottos and groves overlooking the spectacular Indian Ocean, stand yet other shrines to Deities and saints. To one side of the majestic Siva towering above the complex sits the Nandi statue unearthed in 2012 during construction work at the site. Since then, even the use of simple digging implements such as pickaxes has been embargoed by the state, much to the distress of devotees who wonder what else their ancestors may have left buried from the old temple. The Nandi has been dated to the 3rd century ce and there is speculation that the earliest shrine at the site may have been established much earlier. The site was certainly known in South India by the early medieval period: standing nearby is a portly representation of the Saiva saint Sambandar, who, despite passing away at sixteen in the 7th century, had already extolled the shrine in his *Tevaram* hymns.

The priests conduct their first puja of the day at 6:30 in the morning, waving oil lamps amid Sanskrit chants and the ringing of bells. Once the *aratis* are completed within the inner sanctum, they continue to the shrines



along the cliff face. The panoramic vista is breathtaking as one steps outside. Swami Rock falls away in sheer, striated faces of weathered Cambrian stone into the ocean on three sides. On the day of our visit, the sea was a serenely luminous blue. White surf lapped gently at the base of the cliff. Wind blew in refreshing gusts across the promontory, tempering the tropical heat with salty spray. The priests managed to keep their flames alight as they performed their pujas while the breeze swept through our hair, stirred the silk garments of the Deities in their rocky alcoves, and carried the scent of camphor out over the water.

In one of these rocky recesses stand the rediscovered Vishnu and His consort, sheltered beneath a cobra hood—Chola-era statuettes retrieved and restored to their rightful place of worship. Our local guide carefully lifts the cloth adorning Vishnu to reverentially reveal the fine workmanship of His torso, sculpted by the hands of a master craftsman a millennium earlier. A little further out, poised on a lower ledge of the precipice, stands the guardian figure of King Ravana, palms pressed in devotion. At his feet rests the ancient stringed instrument he is said to have fashioned in praise of Siva, the Ravanahatha. Beside him gapes the cleaved cliff known locally as Ravanan Vettu, Ravana's Cut, believed to have been split by him in a paroxysm of rage and grief upon hearing of his mother's death. The legend extends inland to the seven springs of Kinniya, some 155 miles away, where he is said to have struck water from the earth for her final rites. The famed seven wells of varying temperature at that site remain an important pilgrimage destination to this day.

Swaying gently in the wind, straddling the shrines, are hardy canopies of trees. Tiny wooden cradles swing in their branches—tied by devotees in prayer for having children. As Sri Lanka navigates shifts in demographic trends, Siva's grace is petitioned to rock the cradle.

Significance Today

For some—particularly the government of Sri Lanka—the political, military and economic importance of Trincomalee Harbor commands the greatest attention. But for local Hindus, the spiritual and historical significance of the shrine takes precedence. The shrine continues to draw pilgrims from far and near. Hindus and Buddhists from across the country visit daily, as do devotees from abroad, especially India. The temple forms part of the *Ramayana* Trail, a series of sites in Sri Lanka associated with the epic; pilgrims believe that Lord Rama worshiped here to seek Siva's grace after killing King Ravana. Shakti devotees who believe that one of the ancient shrines on this promontory

Seeking blessings: a cliffside statue of King Ravana with the musical instrument he made for Lord Siva; wooden cradles placed in nearby trees as prayers for children; statues of Vishnu and His consort that were recovered from the original temple

was among the original Shakti Pithams also journey here from India.

Annual festivals such as Sivaratri, Navaratri and Tamil New Year are celebrated with great devotion and festivity. The most significant of these is the temple's chariot festival. Each April, Tirukoneswaram marks its great Ther Thiruvizha—a celebration that unfolds over several weeks and transforms the town into an extension of the shrine. The presiding Deities, Konesar and Mathumai Ambal, are ceremonially brought out from the sanctum and installed upon towering, flower-decked wooden chariots, which are pulled through the streets by throngs of devotees grasping thick ropes in collective prayer. Drums resound, nagaswaram pipes pierce the air, coconuts are broken, camphor flames rise, and balconies spill petals onto the passing procession. The festival culminates in sacred water rites that echo the temple's intimate relationship with the surrounding sea. During this festival, the Deity does not remain on the cliff summit. He descends into the town to meet His devotees where they are.

For centuries, they carried Him in their hearts. Now He resides once more upon His cliff, restored to His people. After dissolution, He reminds us, there is renewal.



SHANMUGALINGAM ARJUN



RAJUMAR MANICKAM



SHANMUGALINGAM ARJUN

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Thulasi Muttulingam is a Sri Lankan journalist with nearly two decades of experience in investigative writing on social issues in her country's post-war North. Being a Tamil Hindu, an ethnic minority in Sri Lanka, her work explores the intersection of religion, ethnicity, history and the socio-political landscape, with a focus on lived realities and rebuilding communities.

DINODIA



EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

PARENTING WITH LOVE

An Introduction to “Positive Discipline,” with 14 Proven Strategies for Raising Children without Blame, Shame or Pain

My Guru’s Quest for a Cruelty Free System of Raising Children

IN THE MID-1990S, MY GURUDEVA, SATGURU SIVAYA SUBRAMuniyaswami (1927–2001), founder of HINDUISM TODAY, had a startling and discouraging revelation. He learned from several youth among his international Hindu congregation that many of his family devotees were using corporal punishment to correct their children. Shocked that parents supposedly on the spiritual path would follow this common worldly pattern, he immediately set about to catalyze a change.

He devoted the July, 1998, edition of HINDUISM TODAY to disclosing the devastating, global phenomenon of corporal punishment of children. Corporal punishment in this context means slapping, spanking, pinching or hitting a child as a means of discipline at home or in school, either with the hand, a cane, a belt or a hard object. Such punishment-based discipline also includes other forms of physical distress, as well as emotional battering.

Julie Rajan, the primary author of that issue’s feature story, “Sparing the Child, Should Corporal Punishment End?” noted, “Though they don’t say much about it, young Hindu adults today feel deep resentment and anger at having been beaten as children. We struggle with feelings of low self-esteem and failure. Many of us will continue the cycle of violence by beating our own children, or our spouses, simply because we are unable to resolve those feelings. We don’t blame our parents, who genuinely loved us and sacrificed for us, for they are themselves just the previous round in this same cycle. We don’t blame our Hindu faith either, for corporal punishment of children is present in every culture. But as advocates of nonviolence, we do claim a special role in solving this problem.”

Gurudeva was eager to find a way to help Hindu families break the vicious cycle and learn to raise their children without harming them. He realized that many parents who mistreat their children would like to change their ways, but don’t know how. Dealing with misbehavior without inflicting punishment, blame and shame sounds good, but how do you do it in the face of a screaming child in the middle of a supermarket? Is there a system that can be learned and followed? Are there teachers who provide such training?

Thankfully, Gurudeva discovered the work of Dr. Jane Nelsen, founder of a successful system called Positive Discipline. Jane teaches that children should be raised with encouragement, love and respect rather than blame, shame and pain. Here, Gurudeva discovered, was a person who had made nonviolent child-rearing her life’s mission. And, she had developed a system with a proven track record. After meeting Jane at his monastery, Gurudeva established a new pattern in his

congregation: having parents not only study her books but also teach Positive Discipline classes in their local communities to other parents and teachers who struggle with the same issues.

We are deeply grateful to Dr. Nelsen for giving her wholehearted support to the use of her materials in this Educational Insight. The following pages provide a humble introduction to her thorough-

going series, which includes *Positive Discipline*, *Positive Discipline for Preschoolers*, *Positive Discipline for Teenagers* and *Positive Discipline A-Z*. She has more recently added a new and profoundly relevant book on children’s screen addiction, which will be fully presented in a future edition of HINDUISM TODAY. Visit www.positivediscipline.com for the full array of her resources. Yes, parenting is an adventure, with constant learning all along the way. Jane says that her considerable formal education is secondary to the education and experience she achieved from her successes and failures as a mother of seven children and grandmother to 20.

We hope this Insight will inspire readers to delve into a full study and adoption of Positive

Discipline to help children in your family and community to develop self-discipline, responsibility, cooperation and problem-solving skills.

Gurudeva spoke of the spiritual dimension of childrearing: “The whole world is reevaluating how we treat women, children, the aged and infirm. Ways of behaving toward our fellow human beings that were normal and acceptable one hundred years ago are no longer acceptable. We now comprehend, as never before, the tragedy of a battered wife or an abused or neglected infant. Shamefully, we do not always live up to the Hindu ideal in these areas.

“What is that ideal? It is this: Never injure others. Hindu children are always treated with great respect and awe, for one does not always know who they are. They may be incarnations of a grandmother, grandfather, aunt or uncle, dearly beloved mother, sister, brother, respected father, a yogi or rishi returned to flesh to help humankind spiritually. As parents and teachers, we must ask, ‘Who are these souls? What is their destiny to fulfill in this life? How can I help?’ Parents love their children, or at least they should, and the principles of ahimsa—nonviolence and nonhurtfulness, physically, mentally or emotionally—do apply in the parent-child relationship.”

Bodhinatha Veylanawami



By listening we give children a sense of belonging and acceptance, as this little girl found out while sharing her business plan with Gurudeva

HINDUISM TODAY

Positive Discipline

On the following pages, one of the world's foremost experts on child-rearing presents a practical and compassionate system of guiding children, complete with situational techniques and secrets that society should teach every parent. Drawn from Dr. Nelsen's books, the upper portion of these pages presents some key ideas of her system, and the lower portion presents fourteen strategies. Many of the stories in this Insight were contributed by Kavita Mardemootoo of Mauritius, a parent and avid teacher of Positive Discipline.



By Dr. Jane Nelsen

WHERE DID WE EVER GET THE CRAZY IDEA THAT CHILDREN will do better if we first make them feel worse? Please absorb that statement. It doesn't make any sense at all—yet it is the basis for punishment.

Think of the last time someone put you down, humiliated you and made you feel bad. Did you feel motivated to do better? Did you think, "This is so helpful. I can hardly wait to bring all my problems to this person. She is so encouraging?" Or, did you feel like rebelling, getting even or giving up? One of the latter is what most children do. I call this the Three R's of Punishment: 1) Rebellion, 2) Revenge, 3) Retreat, which comes in two forms: a) Low self-esteem: "I really am a

bad person and need to please others to get love." b) Sneaky: "I just won't get caught next time."

Most parents don't think about the long-term effects of punishment. They don't realize that punishment may stop bad behavior for the moment but may result in future rebellion, revenge or sneakiness. Even when a child becomes obedient, it may be because she has decided (at a subconscious level), "I'm not good enough. Maybe if I obey I will be loved." This can have disastrous results in the future when this same child decides to do whatever her peers want her to do so she will be accepted. When all their intelligence and energy is directed toward proving themselves to others, rebelling or giving up,

children do not develop the perceptions and skills needed to become fully competent and capable people.

Punishment is designed to make children pay for what they have done. Positive Discipline is designed to help children learn from what they have done in a safe and encouraging environment. We follow the Five Criteria for Effective Discipline: 1) Does it help children feel a sense of connection (belonging and significance)? 2) Is it respectful and encouraging (kind and firm at the same time)? 3) Is it effective long-term? (Punishment works in the short term, but has negative long-term results.) 4) Does it teach valuable social and life skills for good character (respect, concern for others, problem-solving and cooperation)? 5) Does it help children develop the belief that they are

capable?

It is important to emphasize that eliminating punishment does not mean children should be allowed to do whatever they want. We need to provide opportunities for them to experience responsibility in direct relationship to the privileges they enjoy. Most parents are afraid that if they stop punishing, permissiveness is the only alternative. Permissiveness doesn't meet any of the five criteria. Permissiveness teaches children to believe that love means giving in, and that the world should bow to their every wish. The Positive Discipline books offer hundreds of alternatives for discipline that are nonpunitive and not permissive—and that meet all of the Five Criteria for Effective Discipline. This Insight presents many of those alternatives.

SWAMI BRAHMAVIDYANANDA: "Hindu culture is kindness. It teaches ahimsa, noninjury, physically, mentally and emotionally. It preaches against *himsa*, hurtfulness. My experience taught me that. I grew up in a simple, humble family in India. My father followed Hindu principles strictly. He was closely associated with Mahatma Gandhi, who always taught against violence. My parents never used harsh words or corporal punishment with me or my brothers, not even when we made mistakes. Rather, they guided us by communicating verbally."

Love and Joy in Homes & Classrooms

The primary goal of Positive Discipline is to enable both adults and children to experience more joy, harmony, cooperation, shared responsibility, mutual respect and love in their life and

relationships—in other words, more connection. We often act as though we have forgotten that sharing love and joy is the whole point of living and working with children, and find ourselves acting out of fear, judgment, expectations, blame, disappointment and anger. Then we wonder why we feel so miserable. The following are some basic concepts that show us how to avoid the detours that keep us from experiencing love and joy and satisfaction in our relationships with children.

Children Are Social Beings

Children make decisions about themselves and how to behave based on how they see themselves in relationship to others and how they think others feel about them. Children are constantly making decisions and forming beliefs about themselves, about the world, and about what they need to do to survive or thrive. When they are in their "survival" mode (trying to figure out how to feel a sense of belonging and significance), adults often interpret this as misbehavior. Does misbehavior seem different to you when you think of it as "survival mode" behavior? When they are "thriving," they are developing strength in the Significant Seven Perceptions and Skills. These are:

1. Strong perceptions of personal capabilities: "I am capable."
2. Strong perceptions of significance in primary relationships: "I contribute in meaningful ways and I am genuinely needed."
3. Strong perceptions of personal power or influence over life: "I can influence what happens to me."
4. Strong intrapersonal skills: the ability to understand

RAISING CHILDREN: 14 STRATEGIES PARENTS NEED TO KNOW

1. Parents: Look for Improvement, Not Perfection

Let's face it, perfection is an unrealistic expectation, and children would rather not try at all than experience constant discouragement because they don't live up to an adult's expectation of perfection—or their own. Recognition of improvement is encouraging and inspires children to continue their efforts.

A Story from Jane Nelsen: Mrs. Goel's son Arjuna was getting into trouble at school. His teacher was punishing him by having him write fifty sentences every time he misbehaved by talking or being disruptive. Arjuna would refuse to do the sentences—so his teacher would double the number. Mrs. Goel started lecturing and scolding him. Arjuna rebelled further by acting like he didn't care, and that he hated school.

Finally, during a parent-teacher conference, Mrs. Goel asked what percentage of Arjuna's behavior was "bad." The teacher answered, "About fifteen percent." She was amazed to realize the negative reputation Arjuna was getting (and living up to) because more attention was being paid to his 15 percent misbehavior than to his 85 percent good behavior.

During another conference, with Arjuna present, they all agreed that every time he was disruptive or disrespectful in class, he



Guided by Positive Discipline, this young girl is developing healthy self-esteem, competence, significance, self-control, inner security and problem-solving skills that will be the foundation for fulfilling her dharma and facing her karma all through life

would make up for it by doing something to contribute, such as doing tasks for the teacher or tutoring another student who needed help. Arjuna's misbehavior was thus redirected into contributing behavior, and he had very few classroom problems after that.

Working for improvement, instead of

expecting perfection, this teacher began having class meetings so problems that did occur were solved by the class as a whole. He learned that it is encouraging to children and to parents when we focus our attention on the positive rather than the negative and redirect misbehavior into productive efforts.

2. Use the Three Rs for Mistakes

A great way to teach children that mistakes are wonderful opportunities to learn is to model this yourself by using the Three Rs of Recovery after you have made a mistake: 1) Recognize your mistake. 2) Reconcile. Be willing to say, "I'm sorry, I don't like the way I handled that." 3) Resolve. Focus on solutions rather than blame. It is much easier to take responsibility for a mistake when it is seen as a learning opportunity rather than something bad.

If we see mistakes as bad, we tend to feel inadequate and discouraged and may become defensive, evasive, judgmental or critical—of ourselves or others. On the other hand, when mistakes are seen as opportunities to learn, recognizing them will seem like an exciting venture. "I wonder what I will learn from this one." Self-forgiveness is an important element of the first R of Recovery.

A Story from Jane Nelsen: My signature example is the time I said to my then eight-year-old daughter, "Mary, you are a spoiled brat." Mary, who is very familiar with the Three Rs of Recovery, retorted,



"Well, don't tell me later that you are sorry." In total reaction, I said, "You don't have to worry, because I'm not." Mary ran to her bedroom and slammed the door.

I soon reverted back to my rational brain, realized what I had done, and went to her

Puja (left) realizes that when she told her mother a lie this morning to save herself from getting in trouble, she was actually creating more trouble than the incident itself caused. After her parents guided her through the three Rs for recovering from her falsehood, Puja is confident that she will not make that mistake again!

room to apologize. She was still angry and was not ready for an apology. She had a copy of *Positive Discipline* and was busy scribbling "phony" in the column.

I left the room. I knew I had made a huge mistake. In about five minutes Mary came to me, timidly put her arms around me and said, "I'm sorry, Mama." I said, "Honey, I'm sorry, too. In fact, when I called you a spoiled brat, I was being one. I was upset at

you for losing control of your behavior, but I had lost control of my own behavior. I am so sorry." Mary said, "That's okay, I was acting like a brat." I said, "Well, I can see what I did to provoke you to act that way." Mary said, "Well, I can see what I did."



personal emotions and to use that understanding to develop self-discipline and self-control.

5. Strong interpersonal skills: the ability to work with others and develop friendships through communicating, cooperating, negotiating, sharing, empathizing and listening.
6. Strong systemic skills: the ability to respond to the limits and consequences of everyday life with responsibility, adaptability, flexibility and integrity.
7. Strong judgmental skills: the ability to use wisdom and to evaluate situations according to appropriate values.

Four Steps for Winning Cooperation

Children feel encouraged when they think you understand their point of view. Once they feel understood, they are more willing to listen and to work on a solution to the problem. Using the following Four Steps for Winning Cooperation is a great way to create a connection before seeking to solve a behavioral problem.

1. Express understanding for the child's feelings. Be sure to check with him to see if you are right.
2. Show empathy without condoning his behavior. A nice touch here is to share times when you have felt or acted similarly.
3. Share your feelings and perceptions.
4. Invite the child to focus on a solution. Ask if he has any ideas on what to do in the future to avoid the problem. If he doesn't, offer some suggestions and seek his agreement.

An attitude of friendliness, caring and respect is essential to these steps. Your decision to create a connection will be enough to create positive feelings in you. After the first two steps, the child will be won over. He will now be ready to hear you when you use the third step (even if you may have expressed your feelings many times before

without being heard). The fourth step is likely to be effective now that you have created an atmosphere of respect.

SWAMI TEJOMAYANANDA: "In a home I once visited, the host had two sons. He told them, 'Swamiji is here. Ask him whatever you want to ask or know.' The boys replied, 'We don't have any questions.' After breakfast I went to them and asked, 'What is your hobby?' 'We like to play baseball,' was the reply. I said, 'Please teach me about baseball.' Immediately they became enthusiastic about educating me on the game. They showed me some pictures and a video. Gradually they began asking me all about religion and culture." This shows that if you take an interest in a child's interests, slowly a rapport will build.

A Misbehaving Child Is a Discouraged Child

Sometimes it is difficult for us to remember that misbehaving children are speaking to us in code—that they are trying to tell us they want to belong when their behavior inspires frustration rather than love and caring. Some experts believe we will reinforce the behavior if we respond positively to a child who is misbehaving. If, however, we understand that a misbehaving child is a discouraged child, it is obvious that the best way to remove the motivation for misbehavior is to find a positive way to help the child feel belonging and significance.

Accepting this concept intellectually is one thing, but it is quite another to put it into practice for three reasons: 1) Most adults do not feel like being positive when a child is misbehaving. 2) Most adults don't fully understand how their own misbehavior can invite misbehavior from children and therefore are reluctant to accept responsibility for their part of the show. Awareness without blame can create a huge step in resolving conflict. 3) The rare adult who is able to respond to misbehavior with positive encouragement will often be rejected by the child. This is because children (like most of us) are not



always receptive to encouragement when they need it the most. They are too emotionally upset to accept it. The solution: wait for a cooling-off period and try again with encouragement.

The child who needs love the most is often the child who acts the most unlovable. Understanding the four mistaken goals of behavior helps adults remember what children are really saying with their misbehavior: "I just want to belong." It also helps us know what to do to resolve the problem in ways that are encouraging while teaching children life skills.

Think of the misbehavior as a code and ask yourself, "What is she really trying to tell me?" The child is not consciously aware of her coded message, but will feel deeply understood when you deal with her hidden belief instead of reacting to the behavior. You will feel differently if you remember that behind the misbehavior is a child who just wants to belong and is confused or unskilled

MOMENTS THAT CONNECT, LESSONS THAT LAST

3. Spend Time with Your Children

One important way to help children feel encouraged is to spend special time being with them. Have fun! One primary opportunity for cultivating closeness: when tucking children into bed, ask them to share with you their saddest time during the day and their happiest time during the day. Then you share with them. You will be surprised what you learn.

A Story from Amala Katir: Sita didn't realize how important one Positive Discipline tool had become until one night when she tucked her two girls into bed and walked out. One daughter, Ravindra, shouted, "Mom! You forgot to ask what was the saddest thing that happened today and what was the happiest thing." Not only had their previous endless crying and getting out of bed repeatedly stopped, but asking these questions every night had opened a wonderful new world of communication and bonding.

Scheduled Time: One of the most encouraging things parents can do for their children is to spend regular, scheduled special

time with them. You may already spend lots of time with your children. However, there is a difference between "have to time," "casual time," and "scheduled time."

There are several reasons why scheduled time is so encouraging:

- 1) Children feel a sense of connection when they can count on scheduled time with you. They feel that they are important to you. This decreases their need to misbehave as a mistaken way to find belonging and significance.
- 2) Scheduled special sharing is a reminder to you about why you had children in the first place—to enjoy them.
- 3) When you are busy and your children want your attention, it is easier for them to accept that you don't have time when you say, "Honey, I can't right now, but I sure am looking forward to our special time at 4:30."

Plan the special time with your children. Up to age 6, it can be daily. From 6 to 12, it can be more occasional, even weekly. Brainstorm ahead of time a list of things you would like to do together then.



A father in Mumbai creates a rangoli design with his daughter on Dipavali. By having fun with her, he builds a relationship of trust, affection and cooperation.

4. Take Time for Training

The idea of setting aside time for training children is not as obvious as it may sound. Too often, adults expect children to accomplish tasks for which there has not been adequate training. This is more typical in homes than in schools. Parents may expect children to clean their rooms without having ever been shown how. Children go into their messy rooms and feel overwhelmed. It helps if a parent says, "Put your clean clothes in your drawers and your dirty clothes in the hamper and then I'll let you know what is next." Next they could put their toys on the shelves or in toy boxes. To make it more fun, suggest all toys with wheels first, then toys with body parts, then toys that are animals, etc. Before long, the child has internalized the idea and learns what is expected.

There is often a great communication gap. When Dad tells his daughter to clean up the garage, each may have very different ideas of what this means. Taking time for specific training can eliminate misunderstanding. Taking time for training

means being specific about your terms and expectations.

Even when you do provide training, remember that children will seldom do things as well as you would like. Improvement is a lifelong process. Remember, too, the things you want them to do may not be a high priority for them until they become adults with children of their own to guide. We all do better at things that have a high priority in our lives. Even though cleanliness and good manners may not be important for children, they still need to learn these qualities. Adults do, however, need to remember that kids are kids.

A Story from Jane: A father of eight children complained that his son slammed the door every time he left the house. He admitted he was ready to slap the boy. The group suggested that he take his son over to the door and show him how to close it carefully—run through it a couple of times, actually train him how to close a door without slamming it. He came back to class the next week amazed—"It worked!"



This girl was acting out in the family, refusing to follow even the simple rules and distancing herself from her mom and dad. They tried everything, from time-outs to yelling, but nothing worked. So they changed the approach and stopped correcting her so often. Instead they started a program of training her, with the family chores, even how to ride her new bike. It worked! She felt competent and cared for.



about how to accomplish this goal in a socially useful way. Look closely to see if your words and actions are causing the child to believe she doesn't belong or have significance.

The following chart shows the four mistaken goals and corresponding beliefs that motivate misbehavior.

A CHILD'S MISTAKEN GOAL	CORRESPONDING ERRONEOUS BELIEF
Undue Attention	"I belong only when I have your attention."
Misguided Power	"I belong only when I'm the boss, or at least when I don't let you boss me."
Revenge	"I don't belong, but at least I can hurt back."
Assumed Inadequacy	"It is impossible to belong. I give up."

Undue Attention: Everyone wants attention. There is nothing wrong with that. The problem occurs when a child wants excessive attention. In other words, she seeks belonging in annoying ways rather than useful ways. The behavior is annoying because it comes from the child's mistaken belief of the moment: "I belong only when I am the center of attention." This belief adds a sense of urgency and persistence to the behavior that others find annoying. It can be very encouraging to children seeking undue attention to redirect them to get attention in contributing ways, such as helping you with a task.

Misguided Power: Everyone wants power. Power is not a bad thing; it depends on how it is used. When children have the mistaken belief that they belong only when they are the boss, their use

of power looks like misbehavior. When they operate from the mistaken goal of misguided power, they are not using their power in useful ways and need redirection to use it in socially useful ways. A power-hungry child can be shown how to lead others instead of dominating them.

Revenge: It seems to be human nature to strike back when we feel hurt. This is why revenge cycles are so common. It is ironic that adults want children to control their behavior when adults have difficulty controlling their own behavior. Controlling your own behavior is very important to break the revenge cycle. When you are feeling hurt, you can avoid striking back. Instead, validate the child's feelings.

Assumed Inadequacy: The child who operates from the mistaken idea of assumed inadequacy (because of a mistaken belief about her capabilities) may not cause you many problems during the day, but may haunt you at night when you have time to think about how she seems to have given up. Unlike the child who says, "I can't," just to get you to pay attention, the child operating from assumed inadequacy really believes she can't. You need to take time to show her a small step. Don't do all the steps. Having too much done for her could be what gave her the impression that she is inadequate. "I'll show you how to tie one shoe, and then you



Want kids to behave? Nothing works like sharing. Even the simple task of making sandwiches together creates close ties and gives young ones a sense of importance and belonging. This prevents misbehavior caused by discouragement.

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can show me what you have learned and let me know if you need more help."

Clues for Identifying Mistaken Goals

There are two clues adults can use to help identify the goal. Clue number one is to examine your emotional reaction. Ask yourself, "Underneath my anger or frustration, am I feeling annoyed, threatened, disappointed or inadequate?" If the child's mistaken goal is **undue attention**, you will feel irritation, worry, guilt or annoyance. If it is **misguided power**, you will feel threatened, challenged, provoked or defeated. If revenge is the goal, you will feel hurt, disappointed, disbelieving or disgusted. When the goal is **assumed inadequacy**, you will feel inadequate, hopeless or helpless, asking yourself, "How can I possibly reach and inspire this child?" Practice observing your feelings and you will catch on to how this works. Many parents and teachers have reported that they keep a copy of the Positive Discipline Mistaken Goal Chart on their desk or refrigerator as a useful resource. It helps them remember the basis for most misbehavior, and to be more effective in helping their children during times of stress.

Clue number two is to observe the child's response when you use conventional methods to cope with the behavior. Here is a guide: **Undue Attention:** The child stops for a while, but soon resumes the same (or some other) behavior to get your attention.

LOVE GIVEN FREELY, CONFIDENCE GROWS NATURALLY

5. Give a Hug

In many cases adults can help children change their behavior when they stop dealing with the misbehavior and deal with the underlying cause: discouragement.

Encouragement is providing opportunities for a child to develop the perceptions, "I'm capable, I can contribute, and I can influence what happens to me or how I respond." Encouragement is teaching children the life skills and social responsibility they need to be successful in life and relationships. Such support can be as simple as giving them a hug to help them feel better and thus do better.

A Story from Jane: A young father was frustrated and perplexed about the frequent temper tantrums of his four-year-old son. Scolding or punishing only increased the tantrums. The father learned in his parenting class that a misbehaving child is a discouraged child, and that encouragement is the best way to deal with misbehavior. The idea seemed backward to him—sort of like rewarding unruliness. Still, he was intrigued with the idea that children do better when

they feel better. He decided to test the theory.

The next time his son started a tantrum, the father got down on one knee and shouted above the racket, "I need a hug." His son paused and asked through his sobs, "What?" The father shouted again, "I need a hug." His son stopped sobbing long enough to ask incredulously, "Now?!?" The father said, "Yes, now." The son seemed totally bewildered, but he stopped his temper tantrum and said somewhat begrudgingly, "Okay." Then he stiffly gave his father a hug. Soon the stiffness disappeared and they melted into each other's arms. After a few moments the father said, "Thanks, I needed that." His son said, with a small tremor on his lips, "So did I."

Remember timing. Sometimes hugs don't work because the child is too upset to give or receive a hug or any kind of encouragement. You can still try. If the child is unwilling, you can say, "I sure would like a hug whenever you are ready," and then leave the area. Parents report that when they try this, the child usually comes after them right away wanting a hug.



Jennifer was having trouble at the cabin the family rented for a summer weekend. She was afraid of the unfamiliar surroundings and could not sleep. Mom knew intuitively that such fears dissolve with a loving word and a hug, and took the time to hold Jennifer close and assure her she was safe.

6. Share Encouragement Freely

Use encouragement to help children develop a sense of belonging, security, love and acceptance. They misbehave because they don't feel this belonging. Celebrate each step in the direction of improvement (rather than focusing on mistakes). Give positive feedback at every opportunity. Communication is important. Don't assume the child knows you love and care about him or that you are pleased when he does something right. You need to express these feelings.

A Story from Kavita: Priya was working hard one night studying for her exams. Actually, she had been working hard every day and night for the last year and she was completely exhausted. It seemed as though her mind couldn't retain one more word! At the age of seventeen, she knew that her parents loved her—"Well, at least until the exam," she thought to herself. Mom and Dad wanted her to be in the top ten in her class, so she would get into the best university. They told her it was for her own good, for her future, but the pressure of it all made her

feel that she would lose everything if she didn't come out with the perfect score. If she didn't, would her parents still beam when they looked at her? Probably not. "I have to earn their love, or I will lose it," she said to herself as she reopened her English book.

Hours later, she was awakened with a soft touch. She found herself face down on her book. She must have fallen asleep. Confused, she looked up to see both her parents standing by her side. Her father gathered her into his arms as if she were five again and sat on her bed, her mother joining. She felt so safe. In gentle voices her parents reassured her that they would always be her refuge. She was trying her best, and no matter what the outcome of the exam, they would support and help her. Tears rolled down Priya's eyes and she felt more determined than ever, feeling a new strength surging through her. Even young adults need encouragement to face life's challenges.



Basanti had the habit of putting her schoolwork off until the last minute. One day her parents took her out for a milkshake, and had her look around at the people and consider their many walks of life. They explained that, through her schooling, she has the power to open many doors for her future. Since then, with the strong support of her family, she spends long hours studying—knowing that failure is okay, but not trying is unacceptable.



Misguided Power: The child continues misbehaving and may verbally defy or passively resist your request to stop. This can easily escalate to a power struggle between you and the child. **Revenge:** The child retaliates by doing something destructive or saying something hurtful. This may escalate to a revenge cycle between you and the child. **Assumed Inadequacy:** The child usually is passive, hoping you will soon give up and leave him alone. Sometimes this child will act out (such as being the class clown to cover up feelings of inadequacy in academics, sports, etc.).

These two clues help parents and teachers break the code of what children are really saying with their behavior. Even when we understand the motive, it may not be easy to respond wisely. When we encounter a child who is misbehaving, it is much easier (and normal) to react from our secondary feelings of anger and frustration than it is to stop and wonder: "What is this child trying to tell me?" In my book, we also explain a technique of asking strategic questions of the child to determine the hidden motives of her behavior. One further complexity is that a child may be motivated by more than one mistaken goal at a time!

Effective Intervention

Once you know the mistaken goal (and the belief behind it), you can choose an effective strategy to create a connection with children and help them achieve their true goal of belonging and significance. Here are some basic remedies.

WHEN THE GOAL IS UNDUE ATTENTION

1) Redirect the child into contributing behavior. 2) Do the unexpected. A big hug is often effective. 3) Set up a schedule for special time with the child on a regular basis. 4) Smile in a knowing way that

communicates you are not "going to get hooked into this," and then say, "I'm looking forward to our special time at six o'clock." 5) Set up nonverbal signals with your child in advance: a hand over your heart to signal, "I love you," or a hand cupped to your ear to signal you are ready to listen when the whining stops. 6) Give reassurance and show faith. "I love you, and I know you can handle this yourself." 7) Ignore the behavior (but not the child) by placing your hand on his shoulder in a caring manner while continuing your activity. 8) During pleasant moments, take time for training and role play other ways to behave, such as using words instead of whining. 9) Verbalize love and caring.

WHEN THE GOAL IS MISGUIDED POWER

Withdraw from the power struggle to allow for a cooling-off period; then do one of the following: 1) Admit you can't make the child do anything and ask her for help in finding a solution that works for both of you. 2) Use the four steps for winning cooperation. 3) Follow up with a one-to-one problem-solving session. 4) Redirect the child to use power constructively. 5) Get the child involved in finding solutions. 6) Decide what you will do, not what you will try to make the child do. Example: "I will pull over to the side of the road until you two stop fighting." It is important that such actions be done with kindness as well as firmness. It is especially effective to keep quiet

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It's natural for siblings to compete, and even to fight, as these brothers compete for a digital device. One way to defuse battles is to restrain your own emotions, and not put down one child in front of the other or blame either of them. Instead, send each to a favorite place for some alone time. Soon they will get the idea that fighting in this family is not appropriate.



while following through—avoid reminders, threats and lectures. 7) Set up a schedule for spending special time with the child. 8) Get children involved in creating routines and then let the routines be the boss. 9) Offer limited choices. 10) Invite the child to put the problem on the family meeting agenda. 11) Verbalize love and caring.

WHEN THE GOAL IS REVENGE

Remember that children cover up hurt feelings, which make them feel powerless, by seeking revenge, which gives them a sense of control. Effective remedies include the following: 1) Withdraw from the revenge cycle by avoiding retaliation. 2) Make a guess about what has hurt the child and show empathy. Validate the hurt feelings. 3) Use reflective listening. Get into the child's world by reflecting back what you are hearing, "You sound very hurt." Reflective listening can include curiosity questions, "Can you tell me more? Then what happened? How did that make you feel?" The goal is to avoid sharing your point of view and to understand the child's point of view. 4) Use the Three Rs of Recovery if you caused the hurt. 5) Use the four steps for winning cooperation. 6) After a cooling-off period, engage the child in one-to-one

CLEAR ROUTINES, CONFIDENT SOLUTIONS

7. Establish Routine Charts

The more children do for themselves, the more capable and encouraged they feel. One of the best ways to avoid bedtime hassles and morning hassles is to get children involved in creating routine charts. Start by having your child make a list of all the things she needs to do before going to bed. The list might include: pick up toys, snack, bath, jammies, brush teeth, choose clothes for the next morning, bedtime story and hugs. Copy (or when children are old enough let them copy) all the items onto a chart. Then hang the chart on a wall where she can reach it. Let the routine chart be the boss. Instead of telling your child what to do, ask, "What is next on your routine chart?" Often, she will tell you without your asking.

Remember, the goal is to help children feel capable and encouraged. A nice fringe benefit is that you will be able to stop nagging and will experience more peaceful bedtimes and mornings.

A Story from Kavita: Aruna, an only child, was always around grown-ups, so she thought she was all grown up, too. When it

was time to get ready for bed, she always insisted on staying up like Mom and Dad. The six-year-old would hold on to the sofa and scream until she got her way. As a result, she had difficulty waking up in the morning for school and sometimes even fell asleep at her desk. All this left her moody and irritable.

One day Mom read about routine charts and their potential to make children happier and healthier. When Aruna came home from school the next day, Mom had big white paper with color pens, glitter and cutouts all over the kitchen table. Of course, Aruna wanted to help! Before long, to her own amazement, Mom had created a fun-looking bedtime chart! She couldn't wait to start putting gold stars in the squares.

Mom told her that when the small hand



Routine charts can be simple to-do lists or elaborate calendars that include family chores, outings, grandma visits and more. They give structure that makes young ones feel competent and independent.

on the clock reached the 8, she could start following the chart. It was so much fun that she actually looked forward to getting ready for bed. By the time the newness wore off and she was no longer impressed by the chart, she had developed a strong routine and bedtime was no longer a hassle.

8. Focus on Solutions

Get children involved in finding solutions to the cause of their misbehavior or mistake that are 1) related, 2) respectful, 3) reasonable and 4) helpful (the "three Rs and an H").

Making amends is a solution that is encouraging when used in a non-punitive manner, because children experience the opportunity to learn from their mistakes and correct any resulting problems. Making amends is encouraging because children learn they can be responsible and accountable for their behavior without fear of blame, shame and pain.

It is sad that some adults think it is more important for children to feel blame, shame and pain for what they have done than to make amends and experience encouragement that will motivate them to stop misbehaving. It is important to note that children do not get away with misbehavior when they are encouraged to make amends. They learn to be accountable, while keeping their dignity and respect intact.

For example, when your daughter bops

a baseball through the garage window and together you decide that the solution is to fix the window (with materials purchased with her allowance), you have arrived at a solution that is related, respectful, reasonable and helpful. So long as you stay out of a blaming mode and see the mistake as an opportunity to learn, you have practiced problem-solving skills and respect with your child, and you have enjoyed some quality time together. When focusing on solutions, one life skill that is often needed is calling for a cooling-off period (see strategy 9).

A Story from Jane: Ravindra, the custodian in an elementary school, caught five students defacing classroom doors. He spoke to them respectfully and together they decided they would make amends by helping him repaint the doors. He was so understanding that he inspired the boys to take pride in their work and to discourage other children from vandalizing. He had successfully used three Positive Discipline tools: 1) focusing on solutions, 2) creating a connection before correction and 3) redirecting the misbehavior.



After finding a way for Anjali to participate in the daily puja, the Gowda family was amazed to witness an immediate change in her demeanor. Being the middle child, she needs a little extra responsibility to feel that she is an important member of the family.



problem solving. 7) Show you care and give encouragement. 8) Set up a schedule for special time with the child. 9) Verbalize love and caring.

WHEN THE GOAL IS ASSUMED INADEQUACY
Remember that the child is not inadequate, but will continue to act inadequate until she gives up her belief that she is. Here are some remedies. 1) Take time for training, making the steps as basic as necessary for the child to experience success. Demonstrate a small step that the child can duplicate. "I will draw half the circle, and you draw the other half." 2) Arrange for small successes. Find out anything the child can do well, and give her many opportunities to share her expertise. 3) Acknowledge any positive attempt, no matter how small. 4) Eliminate all expectations of perfection. 5) Focus on the child's assets. 6) Do not give up. 7) Spend regular, special time with the child. 8) Verbalize love and caring.

Teach and Model Mutual Respect
Mutual respect incorporates attitudes of: 1) faith in the abilities of yourself and others; 2) interest in the point of view of others as well as your own; and 3) willingness to take responsibility and ownership for your own contribution to the problem. The best way to teach these attitudes to children is by modeling them yourself.
TARA KATIR: "We cannot teach Positive Discipline without establishing rapport. Developing rapport means spending time doing things together and talking with your children at their level about things they want to talk about. Often this can be achieved by just being together silently, or simply feeling the good bond of parent and child while enjoying an activity. Rapport can easily be broken. Speaking sharply can break it. Then it needs to be repaired."

What We Do Is Never as Important as How We Do It
The feeling and attitude behind what we do will determine the "how." The feeling behind words is often most evident in our tone of voice.
One day I came home from a trip and was welcomed by a sink full of dirty dishes. I felt discouraged and angry and started scolding and criticizing, "We have agreed that everyone will put their dishes in the dishwasher. How come no one keeps their agreements when I'm not around?"
I looked for someone to blame, but everyone claimed, "I didn't do it." From a negative feeling I said, "Okay, we have to have a family meeting and decide what to do about this." Can you imagine the outcome if we had tried to have a meeting based on my feelings of blame and criticism? We would not have found the kind of effective solution that comes from an atmosphere of love and respect. My attacking attitude would have inspired defensiveness and counterattacks instead of harmony and solutions. I realized what I was doing and immediately changed directions. I could see that my negative attitude would not produce the results I wanted—to say nothing of how miserable it made me feel at the time. As soon as I changed my attitude, my feelings changed and I had immediate inspiration about how to get positive results. I said, "Let's go out for pizza. Later we will have a family meeting to look for solutions instead of blame."
Based on those feelings, we had a successful meeting. We laughingly agreed that it must have been a phantom who left the dishes in the sink. When we stopped looking for blame and concentrated on solutions, Mark and Mary proposed that we all be assigned two days a week to take care of the phantom's dirty dishes. As you might guess, fewer dishes were left in the sink after this friendly discussion.
BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI: Kids can learn from parents that it is through taking a humble attitude, rather than a dominant



position, that conflicts are resolved smoothly and easily. Mastery of resolving differences keeps our young one's lives sublime and their subconscious minds free of the disturbances caused by memories of unresolved disagreements.

Give Children the Benefit of the Doubt
Every child wants to succeed. Every child wants to have good relationships with others. Every child wants to feel a sense of connection, belonging and significance. When we remember this, we will give misbehaving children the benefit of the doubt. Instead of assuming they want to be difficult, we will assume they want positive results and are simply confused about how to achieve them. They don't have the knowledge, the skills or the maturity to find belonging and significance in useful ways. It is our job to help them develop what they need. To be effective, our approach must be based on an attitude of, "I know you want to succeed. How can I help?"
DR. KRISHNA D. BHAT: "Parents should know the needs, aspirations, strengths and limitations of every child. Paramahansa Niranjanananda calls it the SWAN theory: Strengths, Weaknesses, Aspirations and Needs. Children should be properly molded by parents. They are highly suggestible, like malleable metal. They are very imitative and will copy our behavior,"

.....

The values of Positive Discipline only work when a strong rapport has been created. There is no better way to build that foundation of closeness and trust than to be with your children. Knowing this, the Patels have taken their children to the park for the day, to picnic and be with the grandparents, but mostly just to have fun.

WHEN EMOTIONS SETTLE, LEARNING BEGINS

9. Cool-Off Before Solving a Problem

▶ In coping with tough situations, proper timing will improve your effectiveness tenfold. It does not work to deal with a problem at the time of conflict. Emotions get in the way. Thus, it is important to understand and to teach children that, in most cases, a cooling-off period is necessary before seeking a solution. Since it is difficult to focus on solutions when we are upset and responding from our irrational brain, where the options are fight or flight, it is helpful to wait until we have calmed down and can access our rational brains. I call this positive time-out.
How do you teach children about cooling-off periods? By example and repetition. You (or the children) can go to a separate room and do something to make yourself feel better, and then work on the problem with mutual respect. "I think we are both too upset to discuss this now, but I would like to get together with you when we have had time to cool off." Another approach might be, "What would help you the most right now—to take some positive time-out, or to put this problem on the meeting agenda so we can get

some help from the whole family later?"
Have your children help you design a pleasant area (with cushions, books, music, stuffed animals) where they can go to calm down when they are upset. Remember that children do better when they feel better.
A Story from Kavita: "I can't believe what just happened!" Roshan's father stammered. "I can't even think straight, I'm so mad! You need to go upstairs. I need to calm down." Roshan, age 6, ran to his favorite time-out spot and hurled his body on the cushions. His father, fraught with anger, went into his study and shut the door, struggling to regain his composure. Both gradually felt better as, in their own worlds, they were able to calm their breaths and maybe punch a couple of cushions. After 15 minutes, young Roshan was quietly playing with his favorite toy car. Downstairs, his father had turned his attention to today's newspaper and was reading an article. When he saw the time, he walked up the stairs, tussled Roshan's hair and sat on the floor next to him, eye level. Now the time was right for solving the problem.



Stacey has been overcome with emotion from an incident at school. Mom knows this is not the time to sort out the problems that caused the upset, and arranges for her daughter to cool off in their agreed-upon quiet place.

10. Connection before Correction

Making a connection means creating a feeling of closeness and trust before using any of the many respectful and encouraging corrective methods suggested in the Positive Discipline books. Whenever possible, correction includes involving children in focusing on solutions instead of punishing them for mistakes. Effective connections are made when both child and adult feel belonging and significance—even though it is the adult who takes the first steps. Some of these steps to connection are: 1) Listen. Really listen. Stop doing whatever you are doing and give your child your full attention. 2) Validate your child's feelings. Don't we all feel connected when we feel understood? 3) Share your feelings when appropriate. Remember that children will listen to you AFTER they feel listened to. Children feel special when you respectfully share something about yourself. (Respectfully means no stories about "walking miles in the snow.")
It is important to understand that correction in the Positive Discipline way is

different from conventional correction. Positive Discipline correction respectfully involves children—whenever possible, doing things with them.
A Story from Kavita: Davishan, age 16, was a natural athlete. His parents enjoyed his enthusiasm and encouraged him to channel his energies into sports. The only problem was the level of competition. Davishan was starting to lose the enjoyment of striving by channeling all of his thoughts toward winning. He became distraught for days on end if he did not win.
Calling for a quiet time one afternoon, the father looked his son straight in the eyes with such love and respect that Davishan turned away. After some time, he asked the boy questions about competing and listened to every word the boy had to say. Davishan was afraid his father would stop him from competing. So, he was taken completely by surprise when he asked what Davishan thought they should do to improve his frame of mind when he lost a game. Davishan offered that he could work more on excelling



Kevin's mom has a correction to make, but is wise enough to first give him full love and attention, and to listen to her son's side before explaining why it's important not to speak with strangers. She earns his attention and is able to get her message across meaningfully.

and helping his teammates than on winning. Dad liked that, and added that they could work through it together. Only if that did not resolve the behavior problems would they need to consider alternatives.

which is one of the greatest risks of using corporal punishment.”

Freely Express Unconditional Love

Children need to know they are more important to us than anything they do. They need to know they are more important than their grades. They need to know they are more important than the material possessions in our lives. Jiva's mom made some mistakes before she remembered this vital point. When Jiva broke one of her prize antique vases, she was so heartbroken over it that she sat down and cried. Jiva felt awful about what he had done, but finally asked, "Mother, would you feel that bad if something happened to me?"

Children often don't know how important and loved they are. Sometimes parents and teachers focus so much on misbehavior that they lose sight of the child—and the child loses sight of himself. One mother asked her three-year-old, "Do you know I really love you?" The reply was, "Yes, I know you love me when I am good." A teenager replied to the same question, "I know you love me if I get good grades."

We often nag at our children to do better. We want them to be better because we love them and think they will be happier if they do what we think is good for them. They usually do not hear that we want them to do better for their sake. What they interpret is, "I can never do anything well enough. I can't live up to your expectations. You want me to be better for you, not for me."

Remember that children do better when they feel better. Nothing feels better than unconditional love. Most parents are not aware that they are being unloving when they use punishment. In fact, most parents use punishment in the name of love!

KAVITA: "When talking to children, it can help to get on the same eye level with the child. I found that this simple practice changed my communication with my young son. The hardest part is trying not

to break into a smile when I ask him to look into my eyes and he looks left and right trying to avoid my gaze. Once he makes eye contact, I have his full attention. Looking into your child's eyes brings the two of you closer and tunes you into how he or she is feeling in that moment."

Help Children Develop a Sense of Capability

All the concepts taught in Positive Discipline help children develop their sense of capability. Children will not acquire a sense of competence and responsibility if adults keep doing for them what they can and should do for themselves.

Put Positive Discipline to Work in Your Life

If you like the concepts presented in this brief introduction, I strongly urge you to read my *Positive Discipline* book, and then read it again. I guarantee that you will get at least ten times more from it in the second reading. You will see things you totally missed the first time. Once you understand the principles, your common sense and intuition will enable you to apply them in your own life. I know from personal experience, and from reports from hundreds of parents and teachers, that these concepts really work when used correctly.

Adults have a leadership responsibility to help children develop characteristics that will enable them to live happy, productive lives. It is our job to provide them with a good foundation that they can build upon. Teaching them self-discipline, responsibility, cooperation and problem-solving skills helps them establish an excellent foundation. When children exhibit these characteristics and skills, they feel a greater sense of belonging and significance, which gives rise to positive behavior.

Here is an inspiring testimony that Marianne McGinnis sent me

CURIOUS MINDS, CONFIDENT OUTCOMES

II. Ask Curiosity Questions

Too often adults tell children what happened, what caused it to happen, how the child should feel about it, what the child should learn from it, and what the child should do about it. It is much more respectful and encouraging when we ask what happened, what the child thinks caused it, how the child feels about it, what the child has learned, what ideas the child has to solve the problem, or how the child can use what she has learned in the future. This is the true meaning of *education*, which comes from the Latin word *educare*, which means "to draw forth." Too often, adults try to "stuff in," instead of draw forth, and then wonder why children don't learn.

One way to get the child engaged is to ask questions that arouse their curiosity. A few typical curiosity questions are:

- What were you trying to accomplish?
- How do you feel about what happened?
- What did you learn from this?
- How can you use what you learned in the future?
- What ideas do you have for solutions now?

A Story from Jane: One of my favorite examples is the time my daughter shared with me her intention to get drunk at a party. I gulped and said, "Tell me more. Why are you thinking of doing that?" She said, "Lots of kids do it and it looks like they are having fun." I stifled my temptation to lecture and asked, "What do your friends say about you now, knowing you don't drink?" She thought about this and said, "They are always telling me how much they admire me and how proud they are of me." I continued, "What will they think after you get drunk?" I could see her think before she offered, "I'll bet they'll be disappointed." I followed with, "How do you think you'll feel about yourself?" I could tell this question made her think a little deeper. She paused a little longer before saying, "I will probably feel like a loser." This was soon followed by, "You know, Mom, I don't need to get drunk. Thank you for taking the time to help me with this."



Asking the right questions about a sensitive issue can bring mother and daughter closer together. It is good to remember that a child's relationship with the parents can profoundly affect his or her decision-making patterns.

12. Prepare Kids for Success

If you plan to bring your child to the store, a movie, or on any outing, be sure to have a conversation beforehand about the needful behavior of the day. If children know beforehand, it gives you more freedom later to explain consequences and respect. Otherwise, they can simply and truthfully tell you they didn't know any better. Respecting our children creates respect in all aspects. For example, let them know that they can choose only one treat at the store and if they ask for a second treat, the first treat will be put back on the shelf. This limits argument in public places, which often creates frustration in the parent, leading to incidents that are embarrassing and hurtful to all involved.

Story: Every Sunday the Ramdoo family goes to the temple for Ganesha puja. Mr. and Mrs. Ramdoo always take a little time to tell Siven (age 7) and Purna (age 5) that the temple is a special place, and to remind them of the expected behaviors inside the temple walls. During their family meeting, they let the children write out a list of things that are OK to do and things that are not OK. Then they have

the children write down a list of things they could do during the puja that would help them to sit quietly. One Sunday, Purna decided to bring her favorite doll to hold, and Siven brought his favorite toy car. He learned in advance that he could not push the car on the floor but he *could* hold it in his lap and play with the tires. Because it was Chaturthi, Siven and Purna also decided to each make five drawings for Ganesha as a gift to Him on His special day.

The family agreed on certain hand signals (not threatening looks) to let the children know without words if their actions were appropriate or not. There were signals of encouragement that made their faces light up! And there was a gesture that warned them that if unacceptable behavior persisted there would be consequences. That was also agreed upon at the family meeting.

INTRODUCTION & STORY BY KAVITA MARDEMOOTOO

The Teen Years

When children reach their teens, they naturally go through a major individuation process. They are exploring who they are, separate from their parents. This often translates into rebellion as they test parental values.

Peer pressure is extremely important to teenagers. Younger children are influenced by peer pressure, but adult approval is even more important to them. To teenagers, peer approval trumps adult approval.

Many parents and teenagers have drawn battle lines, which are intensified when parents are intent on controlling their teenagers. We are saddened by this, because we know it is absolutely impossible to control teenagers; it is too late. The more you try to control them, the more defiant and/or devious they get.

The best way to win the cooperation of teenagers is through mutual respect and equality in problem solving. Family meetings and class meetings teach social responsibility and get them involved in the decision-making process.

When treated with kindness, firmness, dignity, respect and lots of joint problem-solving, teenagers usually fall back on parental values in their twenties—and they will have learned more of the important life skills they need when they are no longer under the authority of adults.



Success is important, but it must be achieved in the right way. Forcing kids to achieve important goals is counter to Positive Discipline. Parents do better when they enlist their children's inspiration and do not foist their own goals on them. When children achieve on their own, success feels genuine, satisfying and freely earned.



after attending my two-day workshop “Teaching Parenting the Positive Discipline Way.” “Your philosophy on living and parenting gives me more hope than anything else I have ever come across. I am truly inspired, and am already incorporating many of the tools—family meetings, remembering that mistakes are opportunities to learn, asking ‘what’ and ‘how’ curiosity questions, looking for solutions instead of blame, sharing encouraging messages (‘I have faith in you’ is my favorite) and always getting the message of love across. Not only are my boys responding with more love and helpful behavior, I can see how encouraged and inspired they are! I’m not shutting them down anymore.” I called Marianne and asked her to share her success stories for a podcast. To hear her story, go to www.PositiveDiscipline.com, search “Marianne,” second result.

If you find that Positive Discipline isn’t working for you, check to see if something is missing or out of balance. For example, problem-solving may not be effective if adults or children do not understand that mistakes are opportunities to learn. Family or class meetings may not be effective until people have learned mutual respect and social responsibility. Too much kindness without firmness may become permissiveness, and too much firmness without kindness may become excessive strictness.

Sometimes we have to stop dealing with the misbehavior and heal the relationship first. Often the healing involves encouragement that removes the motivation for misbehavior without dealing directly with the misbehavior. Encouragement may not seem to work until adults understand the belief behind the child’s behavior by recognizing the mistaken goals.

There is never just one way to solve a behavior challenge. In parent and teacher study groups, participants can brainstorm several possible suggestions based on the principles in the books. The parent or

teacher seeking help can then choose the most acceptable suggestion. You can also send questions to my blog, where I post my answers and advice on a vast array of issues. On-line classes in Positive Discipline are available, and my team offers telephone consultation as well.

Positive Discipline is not about perfection. It is helpful to have patience with ourselves and with our children as we work to change old habits. As our understanding of the underlying principles deepens, practical application becomes easier. Patience, humor and forgiveness enhance our learning process. Remember to see mistakes as opportunities to learn when you fall back into old habits. We have found that no matter how many times we react and forget to use the principles of Positive Discipline, we can always go back to the principles and clean up the messes we made while reacting. It is true, over and over again, that mistakes are wonderful opportunities to learn. Have compassion for yourself when you make mistakes—and learn from them. I have been learning from mistakes for over 40 years since I first wrote *Positive Discipline*. I love these principles because they are wonderful guidelines to help me get back on track every time I get lost.

I have presented many new concepts and skills here that will take practice for you to successfully apply to the special circumstances of your family. It can be confusing and discouraging to expect too much of yourself. Apply one method at a time and move ahead slowly, remembering to see mistakes as opportunities to learn. Many parents and teachers have found that even though their children don’t become perfect, they enjoy them much more after applying these concepts and attitudes. That is my wish for you.

Dr. Jane Nelsen

The Challenge of Screen Addiction

In her newest book *Help! My Child Is Addicted to Screens—Yikes, So Am I!*, Jane Nelsen and Kelly Bartlett argue that the answer to children’s digital overuse is neither harsh control nor helpless permissiveness, but a balanced middle path of wisdom, kindness and firmness. Screens are now woven into daily life, they note, so the goal is not total rejection of technology but learning how to use it wisely while protecting healthy child development and family relationships.

Their central message is that digital habits are best changed through connection before correction. Children are more likely to accept limits on screen use when they feel close to their parents through conversation, shared meals, one-on-one time, hugs, listening and regular family interaction. Even screen use itself can become a point of connection when parents sit with children, understand what they enjoy and engage without judgment.

The book stresses that parents must examine their own device habits, because



Wise use of digital devices has become a primary adjustment in families. Too often young ones, including young adults, spend more time in the virtual universe than in the real world developing important skills and relationships.

children learn more from example than from lectures. Families are encouraged to create routines, screen-free zones, device-free meals and bedtime boundaries, along with a thoughtful family media plan. The authors warn that excessive screen use can crowd out the slow-growing skills children most need: empathy, self-discipline, problem-solving, communication and real-world social confidence.

For Jane Nelsen, the deeper issue is not screens alone, but a child’s sense of belonging. When children feel truly seen, valued and connected within the family, their need to seek fulfillment through screens naturally diminishes. From this foundation of security and significance, they are better able to develop self-restraint, make thoughtful choices and cultivate a healthier, more balanced relationship with the digital world.

GUIDED CHOICES, STRONGER FAMILIES

13. Try Limiting the Choices

One of the easiest and yet most powerful tools of Positive Discipline is “Limited Choices.” You can actually guide your children through their younger years by letting them make choices for themselves, so that they build character and individuality, while still retaining parental control of the situation.

Try putting two children in a candy store and asking them to choose just one treat! They are overwhelmed by the options. Each watches to see who got the best or bigger treat, and it ends up being a competition, instead of a simple candy treat.

Now try it with “Limited Choices.” Tell the children that each may choose two pieces each of two types of candy, one piece for themselves and the other for the sibling. You have let them choose their own, but you have reduced the choices from 50 to two, and you have avoided the competition—all in one sentence. They each end up with four pieces of the same candies.

This strategy can work for just about everything: “Would you like to ring the bell

or decorate with the flowers for this morning’s puja?” “Would you prefer a glass of water or a glass of juice?” Avoid asking, “What would you like to wear?” “What would you like to drink?” Such questions invite conflict because the child may say something that you do not agree with.

Story: Before each family dinner or outing, Anuradha chose the appropriate outfit for her son and daughter. She would set out the clothes on the children’s bed and inevitably face a storm of protest. One of them almost always ended up crying. One day Anuradha was choosing her own outfit for an important dinner. She asked her husband what he liked. He surprised her by picking out two outfits, then saying that she should make the final decision. She quickly picked her favorite and saw how easy he had made it for her. She realized in that moment that she was frustrating her children by not



Savanna’s mom has learned an important lesson—that giving her daughter limited choices allows them both to benefit. Mom gets to set the limits that protect her daughter and Savanna gets to feel part of the decision.

respecting them enough to let them have a say in their choice of clothes. Soon after, while preparing to go to their cousin’s house, she laid out three good choices for each child and left the room. No arguing, no tears!

TEXT BY KAVITA MARDEMROOTOO

14. Hold Weekly Family Meetings

Having weekly family meetings is an important key to creating a loving, respectful atmosphere in the home while helping children develop self-discipline, responsibility, cooperation and problem-solving skills.

One of the activities is solving problems with cooperation and mutual respect. Solutions must be agreed upon by consensus. A majority vote in a family meeting would accentuate a family division. Convey an attitude of faith in your family that you can work together to find unanimous solutions that are related, respectful, reasonable and helpful.

Planning weekly family fun activities and other events is an important part of family meetings. Family members are more willing to cooperate when they have participated equally in planning events they will all enjoy. Also discuss chores at a family meeting so that children can help solve the problems of getting them done. They are more cooperative when they can voice their feelings and be part of the planning and choosing.

Choose a chairperson. Children love to be

the chairperson and can do a very good job after they reach the age of four or five. This job should rotate. The chairperson calls the meeting to order, starts the group sharing of compliments, begins the problem-solving sessions, and sends the “talking stick” around the circle, which gives everyone a turn to voice an opinion or make a suggestion.

The job of secretary should also rotate among members of the family who are able to write. The secretary keeps notes of problems discussed and decisions made. Family meetings should include a review of the next week’s activities. This is especially important as the children grow older and become involved in many activities, such as babysitting, sports, dates, lessons and so on. Coordinating the calendar for car use and mutual convenience can be essential. Family meetings should not end without planning a family fun activity during the coming week.

End the meeting by doing something together as a family. You might want to play a game together, eat popcorn or take turns making and serving desserts. Do not watch TV unless there

is a program that the whole family looks forward to. If you do watch a program, be sure to end by turning off the TV and having a family discussion about what values (or lack thereof) were portrayed, and how this might apply in your lives.

A Story from Kavita: The Peruman family had four children, ages 2, 4, 10 and 12. Family meetings were often interrupted by two-year-old Vijay, who would scream at the top of his lungs and throw toys at the table. The other siblings rolled their eyes as Mother spent most of the meeting coping with him. Finally, Father asked what to do about Vijay. “Put him in his room!” “Let him cry!” came the responses. Mr. Peruman asked them to calm down and think about why Vijay was acting up. Little Anjali (age four) surprised them by saying, “He just wants to be like us.” At that, the others sprang from their chairs, hugged their little brother, put cushions on a kitchen chair and placed him at the table. Enjoying his beaming smile, they gave him a pen and paper and told him to choose the next person to share while he took notes (scribbles). As the official co-chairperson at family meetings, Vijay fit in perfectly.



INTERVIEW

Sivam Yoga Is Her Calling

With Amma Thiyaneswar

BY ERICA BASSANI

IN THE SPRING OF 2024—WHILE IN TIRUVANNAMALAI, INDIA, CONDUCTING interviews with teachers and leaders for the Women Awakening Project—one night I went to sit and meditate at the feet of Mouna Swami, an Indian man who took a vow of silence around thirty years ago. In a large warehouse, sitting on a simple wooden bed, he spends the whole day in contemplation, his long dreadlocks touching the floor, a swarm of silent people coming and going. To my surprise, on that day a big celebration was happening. As I was finding my way through the crowd, I saw Mouna Swami standing next to an Indian woman. When he bowed to her, and then put a garland around her neck, I got excited. Immediately someone close to me confirmed, “That Amma is Mouna Swami’s guru.” I was so happy to have found a female guru! I couldn’t wait to meet her, so after the event I went directly to her ashram. In the following month, I went several times to interview her. She speaks Tamil, so her assistant translated into English. Her sweet gaze and smile were just melting me as I tried to find out more about her ashram’s practice of Sivam Yoga.

Amma, what is the Sivam Yoga tradition and its duration? Sivam Yoga lineage starts from Lord Siva. Siva preached it to Parvati, Parvati to Nandi, Nandi to Tirumular and Tirumular to other gurus who were following Sivam Yoga. It has not been written, but it is passed on from guru to guru only through oral communication. The time period is not predictable. It starts from Siva, when He preached it and from that time onwards it is continuing for the betterment of human beings.

Can you please share with us what is Siva in your experience? Is it supreme consciousness? Sivam is Yegam, which means “the unique one.” It’s formless and nameless, but we call it Siva. The place of Yegam is beyond the universe. It is the supreme power, the greatest power. We can’t see it with our physical eyes, because it is far beyond. In this world, we can see the formless one in the forms.

How did your spiritual journey begin? I was born in 1962 in Tirunelveli, a small village in the Tamil Nadu region. My father worked at a railway station, and my mother was managing the kids. Due to the proximity of our house to the train tracks, I wasn’t allowed to play outside and spent most of my time indoors. At that time, there were no televisions or newspapers, and I had limited knowledge of the world beyond my immediate surroundings. I was familiar only with my parents and Siva, the Divine. When my family acquired their first radio, a rare privilege, I was permitted to listen solely to devotional songs.



COURTESY THIYANESHWAR AMMA ASHRAM

In the absence of external distractions, I found myself deeply absorbed in thoughts about God. At the age of six, I attended a temple festival with my grandfather. Witnessing a man in trance during the festival, I got profoundly curious and asked my grandfather why I couldn’t also dance like that man. He explained to me that the Goddess of the temple was entering the man’s body. So, I expressed my desire to dance like him and see God, and my grandfather replied, “When and if God allows, I’ll show you.” This is how it all began.

How is it for a woman here in India to be a guru in this tradition, and what was the situation of women as you were growing up? In all the time periods, women gurus are there, but they do face opposition. My mother had a high education level; she could read and write and that was considered to be more than enough. There were many restrictions for women as I was growing up. Giving women more freedom was felt as a threat that could break cultural norms. Women couldn’t smile. Just as the tobacco leaf that loses its fragrance if it opens, likewise, a woman that smiled in public would lose her qualities. Women couldn’t stand at the door of the house. It was customary at five in the afternoon to light a lamp in the house. Once the lamp was lit, she could no longer go out. If she had to, she could only do so accompanied by members of the family. These were the limits in which a woman was living back then.

How did your family respond to your becoming a guru at an early age? For everything, God is the only reason. I received guru diksha from my grandfather, so he already knew about my whole life journey in this world, and my family was made aware of it. He knew I would



COURTESY THIYANESHWAR AMMA ASHRAM



COURTESY THIYANESHWAR AMMA ASHRAM

get married and have children. After three years of marriage, my husband got Siva diksha, and he became a sannyasin and renounced the lay life. So, from that moment onwards my spiritual path became clearer. But for sure, a woman can have a family and be perfectly fulfilled spiritually, and you can become a guru even if you are living the marital life. You can realize Siva by renouncing the world or by staying and living an ordinary life in it.

How did you juggle motherly responsibilities on one side and your profound relationship with Siva on the other? It’s like riding two horses at the same time. If I learned it, it means it is possible for everybody, but practice is needed. Think of a person



Sadhana and seva: (clockwise from opposite page) Amma Thiyaneswar at her ashram; the ashram’s Dyaneshwar Sivalingam; Amma personally distributes basic necessities to sadhus in Tiruvannamalai town

who can walk on a rope with a weight on his head. It’s a great capacity of balance that doesn’t develop overnight. Likewise, people that are leading an ordinary life should worship God whenever they have time, as well as while doing their duties, their work. Take a woman in a village who is walking a goat with a rope in one hand, her son in the other hand and a pot full of water on her head. And, she is also talking with the friend who’s walking along with her. How is it possible for her to do all of these things at the same time? You see these things when you walk around in the villages. It’s practice. Similarly, we have to think about God all the time.

Tiruvannamalai is known for the sacred mount Arunachala and for the ashram of Ramana Maharshi. The silence in this place is very tangible, incredibly powerful and beyond external noises. What is your relationship with silence? Peace, silence, is the common base of all spiritual practice and has to be found within. If you find that peace, you can meditate also in the marketplace. When you are in front of the ocean you can hear the sound of the waves, sometimes it is very loud. And this is the daily life we live. But you know that if only you immerse in the ocean, you can find a silence that is always there. And that is the spiritual practice.

Since time immemorial people have been searching for the creator of this world. Even if the creator exists in all the creatures, their search is still continuing. Where peace exists, there is God. Wherever there is love, wherever there is dharma, God is there. But to abide in that, discipline and morality are necessary. The searching is not enough. It has to become a way of living. Then only, the realization can happen. We don’t need to search for God here and there, but have absolute faith in His existence, so we can walk a path to reach Him. And one day the consciousness will let It shine through. If we have love and mercy, and if grace allows, we will realize It.

What about the many manifestations of that infinite one? How do we reconcile in our hearts the existence of that Supreme Reality and the smaller manifestations of it available to our eyes and senses? Many years ago, during a satsang, someone asked me: “You worship Arunachala (Annamalaiyar), and you keep a Sivalingam at your home, calling it Dyaneshwar. If

everything is one, why are you worshiping the great Annamalaiyar as well as the small Dyaneshwar?” I really didn’t know what to say. The universe suggested to me: simply say that if Annamalaiyar is a laddu (a typical south Indian sweet ball), then Dyaneshwar is a *bhundi* (a piece of laddu). Everybody was happy with that answer.

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The Author: Erica Bassani is a copywriter, author and spiritual seeker since her early twenties. She’s combined her highest passion with her deepest love by founding the Women Awakening Project (www.womenawakeningproject.com), a space to gather interviews with female masters of all spiritual traditions.



PHOTOS COURTESY KHYATI DESAI-SELTZER



rites of passage

My Daughters' Upanayana

How our family celebrated the ancient tradition of girls receiving the sacred thread, witnessed by the sacred fire, family and friends

BY KHYATI DESAI-SELTZER

BELIEVE INDIA IS EXPERIENCING A TIME of coming home, decolonizing, awakening and returning to our roots and ancient traditions. Our family has been fully on board, trying to do our part to decolonize our thinking and traditions, or, at the very least, to question our beliefs. What is true and what did we borrow over time? What is not ours to hold on to? What was influenced by invasions, colonialism or patriarchy? So, we were thrilled when our daughters, Sunaina, now age 10 and Sahani, age 5, approached us with interest in having an *upanayanam*, the investiture of the sacred thread that has over time become available only for brahmin boys. The girls stood steadfast in their interest for over a year, so we investigated it.

Their interest made me recall an article in *HINDUISM TODAY* of girls in South India receiving their sacred threads, referred to as a *janoi* in the Gujarati community. Participat-

ing in the ceremony is a mark of a commitment to learning spiritual knowledge. In my research, I learned that Gayatri Parivar, Arya Samaj and Art of Living perform these ceremonies in India and America. I was nervous to pose this idea to my traditional family, but my parents and other relatives were mostly on board. My daughters would be the first girls in our entire family of many generations to receive their sacred thread.

We waited for our girls to be old enough to understand this rite of passage. We had a deep desire to have the ceremony in India and decided to have it with Gayatri Parivar, who had performed our baby shower ceremony and other important rites of passage in our life. For us, it was important to do it while the grandparents remained in good health and could witness the ceremony and give their blessings.

In December 2024, we traveled to India and started planning for the ceremony

that would take place at a beautiful mandir in rural Gujarat, about an hour outside of my hometown of Vadodara. Coming from a brahmin family, it was incredibly important to have this rite of passage in the most respectful and honorable way. For my older daughter, we purchased a book on the Gayatri mantra while both my daughters practiced reciting it daily and understanding the profound meaning.

My father, Girish Desai, who had received his sacred thread along with his seven brothers, found Gayatri Shakti Peeth in Kayovarahan to be a suitable location. His enthusiasm, though, which was a sense of pride for our daughters, led to many invitations going out to our very large network of family and friends, resulting in more than 100 attending. For us, having a small and meaningful ceremony was more important than a fancy affair, though this important rite of passage can be celebrated with fanfare.



Thread Ceremony: (clockwise from left) Performing Gayatri havan; Sunaina and Sahani following the purification ceremony; preparing the baton and books for the symbolic departure to study with a guru; the newly bestowed sacred thread; Girish Desai's family photo in front of Gayatri Shakti Peeth



Some relatives had reservations about attending, believing that this ceremony was meant for boys only—a belief that is historically inaccurate. In Vedic times, texts such as the *Ashvalayana Grihya Sutra* and *Yama Smriti* confirm that girls could undergo the upanayana rite and engage in Vedic learning, especially before marriage. It was over time that this changed, perhaps with influences from colonialism and patriarchy. How can Hindu youth displaying devotion to Gayatri Ma and committing to singing the most powerful mantra be a bad thing? In fact, both priestesses who performed our daughters' upanayanam had received their sacred threads as well.

Doubts aside, our family members arrived in support with enthusiasm. My daughters sat through the three-hour ceremony without complaint, even though it was hot, there were many country flies and lots of smoke from the yagna in their eyes. We beamed with pride when they each received their *janoi*. It was a deeply profound and spiritual moment, and I could feel our ancestors around us.

My uncles expressed joy over the opportunity to participate in their first upanayanam

for girls. Family members, friends and special guests came from all over Gujarat to witness, to shower the girls with blessings and gifts and to express their pride in how they conducted themselves. We were so proud of them.

It filled our hearts to see the enthusiasm of the family, as well as their dedication throughout the ceremony to help make it as smooth as possible. A heartwarming moment was the symbolic departure from home to study with a guru after the ceremony, wooden staff and sacred books in hand, only to be caught and brought back by the relatives anxious to prevent the sadness of the mother being separated from her child. This is a part of the ancient rite and observed today in various parts of India.

Our older daughter had been enthusiastically preparing for it for months by engaging in stretching and sprinting exercises. We watched her, giddy with joy, try to outrun her older uncles and aunts. They, just as joyfully, would not give up—despite the aches and pains that come with age—and eventually caught her and brought her back to us.

The memories of this occasion have never

left us. Moments of absorbing the beauty of rural India, the grandeur of the temple, small glances of approving kindness from the priestesses, the arrival of family from all over Gujarat, family members anticipating our needs and bringing water to our daughters or a step stool for my husband's back pain, uncles and aunts running after our daughters, the entire family enjoying a delicious lunch and the famous local *shrikand* (a sweet yogurt dish), and visiting the other temples in the area after the ceremony were all remembered with gratitude.

We share this to encourage other families whose daughters express interest in receiving their sacred thread not to let societal norms or familial expectations discourage you from supporting a life of devotion to Gayatri Mata. The ceremony was not only for our daughters but also for us to celebrate our rich Vedic heritage every day. These three reputable organizations do great work in performing beautiful *vidhis* (rituals). What better way to validate and defend your daughters' faith and devotion in an ever more demanding and challenging world? The time is long overdue for us to come home.

The Author: Khyati Desai-Seltzer, born in India and raised in America, lives in Portugal with her husband and two daughters. She is passionate about dharma, Sanskriti, history and heritage and ensuring the next generation is inspired to learn and carry forward these traditions. She works in community development and postpartum care, sharing traditional baby massage and belly binding practices.



A R T

The Glittering Gold Heritage of Thanjavur's Famed Art Lives on

Generation after generation of artists have preserved this rare artform

BY PADMA KRISHNAN, INDIA
PHOTOS BY ANNE PETRY, INDIA

THANJAVUR IS A CITY IN SOUTH INDIA with a rich cultural heritage. This fertile land, fed by the river Kaveri, flourished under the rule of the Tamil Cholas, Nayaks and the Marathas prior to British colonial rule. It has birthed many art and craft forms and boasts four government-recognized handcrafted products: Thanjavur painting, dancing dolls, brass plates and the Saraswati vina. Among these, Thanjavur painting, known locally as *palagai padam* ("wooden plank picture"), is the most popular.

We spoke with award-winning painters Vijayalakshmi Prabhakaran and Marimuthu Uthrapathi to learn of the fascinating history of this glittering art form and their journeys as artists. Both painters have received prestigious awards from the state of Tamil Nadu.

In the tradition of Thanjavur painting, images of Deities are drawn on canvas mounted on wooden boards. Gold foil, precious and

semi-precious stones and crystals are applied along the lines to create depth. The resulting image is a type of bas-relief work.

The vivid colors, gold sheen and jeweled stones combine to create a striking beauty and deep religious sensibility. Gold is traditionally associated with Goddess Lakshmi and Lord Kubera, and golden Deities are auspicious for personal worship.

Such gilded works originally adorned royal palaces and temples. Under the patronage of Vijayanagara rulers, the art form thrived. After that dynasty's demise, artists moved from the Vijayanagara region to Thanjavur, Mysore and Madurai in search of affluent patrons for their expensive art form. Many settled in Thanjavur, continuing their art under Nayaka and Maratha patronage, with rulers Raghunatha Nayaka (1600–1634) and Serfoji Maharaj (1777–1832), respectively, among its most ardent supporters. Serfoji Maharaj's contribution in particular was immortalized

by the artists, who sometimes gave him a place in their Ram Darbar paintings of Lord Ram and his family. Serfoji was depicted as a tiny figure with traditional royal headgear, distinct from the celestial beings present at Ram's royal court (see three figures at bottom of above art).

Origin

The roots of Thanjavur painting can be traced to earlier temple murals. The walls of the Vijayanagara-era Virupaksha Temple in Hampi and the Chola-era Brihadeeswara Temple in Thanjavur showcase wall paintings similar to later Thanjavur paintings. Continuing from walls to the canvas, the art form has shown great resilience, surviving and thriving through many changes in the Indian subcontinent to the present day.

Thanjavur artisans have ingeniously adapted their craft by drawing inspiration from various cultures. They use elements



COURTESY VIJAYALAKSHMI



ANNE PETRY

of style and techniques from an array of regional craft forms, resulting in an art form unique to Thanjavur. This tradition, characterized by gold embossing, has earned Geographical indication status from the government of India.

Walking through Vijayalakshmi Prabhakaran's studio is a journey through a centuries-old art form. From paintings that look like thousand-year-old murals in terms of colors and forms to the color-saturated calendar art and more contemporary portraits and personalized imagery of Deities, her work reflects how the artistic community continues to adapt to changing times.

A confluence of cultures is evident in these current Thanjavur paintings. We see the influence of folk art in the rotund central figures and the way animals are depicted in the backgrounds. In the Chola and Vijayanagara periods, mainly Deities were gilded; gilding portraits of real people came with Islamic and Maratha rulers.

A similar style, also with historical roots in the Vijayanagara Empire, is Mysore painting. Mysore paintings are low-relief works, while Thanjavur paintings are high relief works with embedded precious stones. The paste used in each is also different. Another distinctive feature of Thanjavur paintings is the use of thin strips of gold foil glued on the lines of the preliminary sketch. Rarely, silver is used.

Contemporary Artists

Today, artists freely express their individuality through diverse color palettes and backgrounds. We noted the charcoal-gray head of a Devi in a gallery, a departure from the traditionally used colors—red, green, blue and yellow. Artists Marimuthu and

Divine art: (from far left) Artist Vijayalakshmi presents a completed artwork of Lord Rama and His royal court; Vijayalakshmi and a fellow artist present a finished painting of Lord Vishnu as Venkateswara, the presiding Deity of Venkateswara Temple in Tirupati; an artist at work in the studio; another artisan builds up raised contours that will later hold gold foil and precious stones—this relief work, known as gesso or makku, gives Thanjavur paintings their distinctive three-dimensional quality; a portrait of Goddess Samayapuram Mariamman

Vijayalakshmi say they accommodate patrons' choices of colors and backgrounds unless they fall well outside traditional norms.

"Thanjavur means chubby figures," laughs artist Vijayalakshmi, showing us around her galleries in the busy streets of Pondicherry, where cherubic Bala Krishna, the infant form of Krishna, looks straight at the viewer from various angles. Rotund bodies and vivid colors are the hallmarks of Thanjavur paintings and are still widely followed. Earlier, natural dyes were used, but most commercial artists have switched to chemical colors; creating organic dyes is a time-consuming process and commercially not viable.

Subjects in high demand are celestial weddings, Ram and Shiva darbars, Tirupati Balaji, Krishna and Murugan. These are commissioned for temples and personal worship. Portraits of families and political figures are also in vogue.

The process of creating a Thanjavur painting is both time-consuming and labor-intensive. Each stage requires ample sunlight for the glue to dry. Artist Marimuthu says it takes a year

to train apprentices. Each one has a specific task, from washing the coarse cotton cloth, staining it yellow, mounting it, polishing the board, tracing or drawing, mounting stones and glass pieces and applying paste



ANNE PETRY



over specific parts of the drawing to build up the bas-relief effect. Apprentices cut the fragile gold foil and paste the strips along the drawn lines, clean them and color the image.

Drawing the face is reserved for the master. Marimuthu and Vijayalakshmi emphasize its importance. They say the expressions that captivate the viewer are concentrated in the eyes, lips and the curve of the cheek. In one of their paintings, the round eyes of the cherubic Krishna follow us from any angle. That takes years of practice!

In addition to making new paintings, these artists are called upon from time to time to restore old ones. It's a task that takes time and patience. Vijayalakshmi recalls slowly restoring a 120-year-old painting that now adorns a temple wall.

In 2011, she completed a 24-hour Thanjavur painting marathon recognized by the *Indian Book of Records* and has also created large-scale artworks using seeds of various colors and shapes. These achievements were dedicated to events promoting religious harmony and world peace.

Similarly, Marimuthu and his team worked around the clock to complete the Ashtalakshmi project, eight large, intricate images of Goddess Lakshmi. Normally, it would take between a week and six months to complete a painting.

Until recently, Thanjavur artists did not sign their work, deeming it inappropriate, but now they add their contact details to the backs of frames.



Craft: (Clockwise from above) Marimuthu demonstrates the timeless art of Thanjavur painting; after placement, the gold foil is carefully cut to reveal the various jewels beneath; a rotund Krishna typical of Thanjavur depictions; Goddess Annapurni, Deity of nourishment and abundance; an artist at work on what appears to be a painting of Goddess Lakshmi seated on a lotus flower

Future of the Art

The once-flourishing community of hereditary Thanjavur artists holds on precariously today. Though some continue the centuries-old tradition, financial stability in other professions lures the next generation away. Conversely, those driven by passion like Marimuthu and Vijayalakshmi have dedicated decades to honing their skills through professional training and working under seasoned teachers.

Today, they nurture new artists and are creating a new pool of talent. Both are hopeful of their children continuing their craft. They cite the significant costs involved in learning and practicing this art form as reasons for the high turnover in this field. However, resourceful artisans have found ways to make Thanjavur painting commercially viable by adapting their methods and materials to appeal to modern collectors. Jackfruit wood has been replaced by plywood, traditional tamarind seed paste by readily available glue. Gesso paste is now crafted with a mix of chalk powder, zinc oxide, gum arabic and even the popular Fevicol-brand white glue.



Both artists are concerned about imitations, where cheaper materials such as synthetic gold are used instead of real gold foil. These are hard to detect and do not last long. The artists appreciate the GI recognition, which raises awareness and helps combat imitations.

The demand for Thanjavur paintings has been growing steadily among both domestic and international art collectors. Like many small businesses in India, Thanjavur artists are also foraying into the digital world.



They use social media channels to drive sales through online platforms. Marimuthu's Instagram page and YouTube channel help him stand out in the cluttered market. Vijayalakshmi is setting up her website and plans to create her online store soon.

The spirit of innovation that created this unique art form continues today. Some artists are crafting 3d effects using thick plaster of Paris, creating paintings resembling low-relief sculptures. This living art constantly reinvents itself, yet manages to retain its heritage. Social-media DIY videos teaching Thanjavur art indicate it is flourishing and has garnered a wide audience.

The Tamil Nadu state government's Handicrafts Development Corporation takes these handicrafts to a global market under the brand name Poompuhar. Its impressive showrooms and production centers make the products accessible. For more information, visit nall.ai/poompuhar.com. Poompuhar offers training in various craft forms and helps artists with marketing and support services. It honors artisans annually—Marimuthu won the coveted award in 2017.

Many artists applaud various initiatives by the government, especially the Artisans' Card. The card, signifying that they are a genuine handicraft artisan, enables them to showcase and sell their work



all over India through an organized series of exhibitions in cities. It helps them to network, find talent, apply for grants and collaborate with other recognized artisans.

We asked the artists what the future holds for Thanjavur paintings. Vijayalakshmi, said she is very confident it will thrive and encourages others to enter the field. She says the fulfillment that comes after completing a painting cannot be described; it is a reward far beyond what it might fetch in the marketplace. Many of her paintings are not for sale. These are ones she cannot part with, as they gave her immense joy during their creation.

Echoing a similar positive outlook, Marimuthu says the heightened awareness of Thanjavur painting through media exposure in recent years has created a steady demand, and he feels the craft will last for the next fifty years, at least. His Murugan Art Gallery offers a thirty-year guarantee for its creations.

Machines encroaching on their field are a whispering concern in the painting community. But for now, both of our artists are confident that Thanjavur painting has a bright future for generations to come.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Padma Krishnan is an independent journalist. She writes about travel, art, culture and books at substack.com/@inkarnate



TECHNOLOGY

Escaping the Digital Chakravyuha

Easy to enter, hard to flee—the risks of today’s screen-based childhood and the erosion of real-world play

BY RAJEEV CHAUDHRY

EVERY GENERATION WORRIES ABOUT ITS CHILDREN. OURS MAY BE the first that feels something essential is being lost. A few years ago, *anxiety* was a word we associated with adults navigating the burdens of life. Today, anxiety sits quietly in classrooms, scrolls through social media feeds and stares back from the eyes of children who have everything—except ease.

In his era-defining work, *The Anxious Generation*, social psychologist Jonathan Haidt identifies a “Great Rewiring” of childhood that occurred between 2010 and 2015. It was the moment we moved from a “play-based” childhood to a “phone-based” one.

Since 2010, he writes, rates of depression, anxiety and self-harm among adolescents have surged—rising by over 167% among girls and 91% among boys. In the US and UK, emergency-room visits for self-harm rose by a staggering 188% among teenage girls. He presents a deeply unsettling observation: that the sharp rise in anxiety, depression and emotional fragility among young people is not incidental—it coincides with the transformation of childhood itself.

A generation that was made physically safer has, paradoxically, become psychologically more vulnerable. We have reduced their risks outdoors, but handed them an unfiltered, unending digital universe indoors. We have ushered them into a space they know how to enter, but not how to exit.

In the Indian epic *Mahabharata*, there is the story of Abhimanyu—a young warrior who knew how to break into the deadly seven-ring battle formation known as the *Chakravyuha*, but not how to escape it. Surrounded, disoriented and overwhelmed, he fought bravely to the end. It is a story in which we have long admired Abhimanyu’s courage. Perhaps it is time we also read it as a warning. Today’s child enters the digital world much like Abhimanyu entered the Chakravyuha, with skill and confidence. Entry is effortless, requiring just a swipe, a click or a scroll. But what lies inside is not a playground, but a complex, ever-shifting maze of attention, comparison, validation and subtle psychological pulls. We have taught them how to log in, but not how to log out.

Inside this digital Chakravyuha, time dissolves quietly. Attention fragments. Self-worth begins to mirror external reactions. The battlefield is not visible, but its effects are deeply felt. Unlike Abhimanyu, there is no single enemy. There are many—distraction, comparison, loneliness, performance and the constant, silent pressure to be seen.

Long before algorithms and interfaces, Indian wisdom had already mapped the inner terrain of the human being with remarkable clarity. In the *Kathopanishad*, life is described through a powerful chariot metaphor: the chariot is the physical body; the rider the individual self, *atman*; the horses the five senses; the reins the mind, *manas*; and the charioteer, the discriminating intellect, *buddhi*. When the

charioteer is alert and holds the reins firmly, the chariot moves with precision and purpose. When the horses run unchecked, the journey turns chaotic. This ancient insight feels uncannily relevant today.

The digital world is designed to stimulate the senses—bright visuals, constant notifications, endless novelty. The horses are not merely active; they are overstimulated. The reins—the mind—struggle to maintain control. And the charioteer—the intellect—is often too underdeveloped to guide the journey. When the reins loosen, even the finest chariot loses direction.

What we see today is not a crisis of intelligence. Children are sharper, quicker and more informed than ever before. What we are witnessing is a crisis of inner balance. Attention is scattered. Patience is thinning. Our systems of education have focused on sharpening the mind, but not on steadying it. We have trained children to process information, but not to regulate experience. The result is a generation that can navigate complexity outside, but often feels overwhelmed within.

We have built powerful chariots drawn by strong horses, but not invested enough in the one who must hold the reins. This is the charioteer dilemma of our times.

There is, however, an important truth we must not forget. Children are not fragile by design. They are far more capable than we imagine. And if they have entered the Chakravyuha, it is also within our collective wisdom to help them find a way out. But to do that, we must first understand what we have taken away from them—something far more fundamental than freedom. We have taken away the sacredness of play. And without play, childhood loses its center. If the digital world has become a maze, then the loss we must first acknowledge is not technological—it is human. We have not merely introduced children to screens. We have gradually taken them away from play.

In Indian thought, play is not trivial. It is sacred. The idea of *leela*—divine play—suggests that life itself, at its purest, is an expression of joy, curiosity and spontaneous engagement. Childhood is perhaps the closest we come to experiencing this truth. Think of the stories of Krishna—not as distant mythology, but as reflections of a philosophy. His childhood is not remembered for discipline or achievement, but for mischief, exploration, music, friendship and effortless connection with the world around Him.

Play, in that sense, is not an activity. It is a state of being. It is where children negotiate rules, test limits, resolve conflicts, imagine worlds and discover themselves—without instruction manuals and without constant supervision. Play is where the child meets the self—uninterrupted.



COURTESY RAJEEV CHAUDHRY



DALL-E

Modern childhood has quietly replaced *leela* with structure. Free afternoons have become scheduled engagements. Open-ended play has become guided activity. Imagination has given way to consumption. Even leisure is now curated. And in this transition, something subtle but profound has been lost—the ability to engage with the world without external prompts. When play disappears, so does a child’s natural laboratory for growth.

One of the most important insights from Jonathan Haidt is that children are not fragile beings who must be shielded from every difficulty. They are, in fact, antifragile. They grow stronger through manageable challenges, through friction, through experience. A scraped knee, a disagreement, a failure—these are how children learn balance, negotiation and perspective. When these experiences are removed, growth does not accelerate—it weakens. There is a quiet but dangerous imbalance in modern upbringing.

Children are overprotected in the physical world and underprotected in the digital world. They are not allowed to climb a tree, but are allowed to navigate an unfiltered universe of comparison, judgment and psychological pressure. They are shielded from small, real risks, but exposed to large, invisible ones.

Indian wisdom has always valued growth through engagement, not insulation. The idea of *tapasya*, disciplined effort, reflects a deeper understanding: strength is not built through comfort; it is built through experience. The goal is not to make childhood harder. The goal is to make children stronger.

If children have entered the digital Chakravyuha, the responsibility of guiding them out does not lie with them alone. It lies with us—as parents, educators and as a society. For parents, the most powerful intervention is not control—it is personal presence. Introduce technology gradually, not as default. Encourage outdoor play, unstructured time and independence. Trust them with small responsibilities. Children do not need perfect oversight. They need emotional availability.

In schools, education must go beyond conveying information. It must cultivate attention, patience, curiosity and character. There should be spaces for art, music, storytelling, debate and nature. Children should experience learning as exploration, not just evaluation through constant testing. Education must shape the compass, not just sharpen the mind. A well-directed mind can navigate complexity. A restless mind gets lost in it.

As a society, we must examine what we celebrate. If success is de-

The circular trap: Just as the complex Chakravyuha battle formation trapped Abhimanyu in its circles of moving troops, so too can today’s endless morass of online entertainment and social engagement engulf a child’s mental and emotional life

finer only by achievement, visibility and speed, children will chase those markers—often at the cost of balance. Let us also value kindness, resilience, integrity and humility. Let us begin by developing a healthier relationship with technology ourselves. Children do not follow advice; they follow how we actually behave.

The answer is not to reject the digital world. It is to reclaim mastery over it. Technology is a tool. Like all tools, its impact depends on how it is used—and who is in control. When the charioteer is strong, the horses can run fast without losing direction. When the mind is steady, the senses can engage without being overwhelmed. This is not a battle against modernity. It is a return to balance. Tools must remain in our hands, not take hold of our minds.

Every age faces its own test. Some are visible. Some are silent. Ours did not arrive with noise or warning. It arrived in the quiet erosion of attention, the gradual shrinking of play and the subtle rise of anxiety in the youngest among us. This is our battlefield. We must become the charioteers of our children’s need. We must guide without controlling, protect without suffocating and prepare without rushing.

The goal is not solely to help children succeed in the world. It is to help them remain whole within it. So, let us give them back their afternoons. Let us return to them the dignity of boredom, the joy of discovery and the freedom to fail and try again. Let us allow them to grow—not just perform. And when they step into the complex formations of the modern world, let them do so not as Abhimanyu—brave but unprepared—but as aware, balanced individuals who know not only how to enter, but how to navigate the world and return intact. Let us guide them through the Chakravyuha. And in doing so, let us help them rediscover something far more powerful than success—innate innocence, strength and joy.

The Author: Lt Gen Rajeev Chaudhry (Retd) is a seeker and writer who reflects on modern life through the prism of Indian spiritual wisdom and mindful compassion.



HISTORY

The Writer Who Listened to Silence

How this English author's best-selling books introduced millions across the globe to the depth of India's spiritual wisdom

BY PRADEEP SRIVASTAVA, CALIFORNIA

I'M A "JUST THE FACTS, MA'AM" KIND OF reader—someone who routinely skips advertisements in newspapers and magazines. But in what felt like a moment of divine intervention, I found myself unable to turn away from a full-page ad by Larson Publications in the July/August/September 2025 issue of HINDUISM TODAY. It opened with a striking quote from Ramana Maharshi: "Paul Brunton is one of my 'eyes.' My Shakti [spiritual power] is working through him. Follow him closely."

As a follower of Advaita Vedanta—as taught by Maharshi and other sages—I took this statement seriously and decided to explore Brunton's work in depth. Brunton's philosophy rests on the idea that reality is fundamentally mental. He developed a system he called "Mentalism," which holds that space, time and matter—including the body—are

appearances within consciousness. He urged seekers to look beyond yogic techniques and mystical experiences, favoring instead a rational inquiry into the nature of perception and selfhood. The goal: direct realization of what he termed the "Overself," a higher, universal consciousness.

What impressed me was Brunton's confidence in communicating profound truths without dogma. Though he rarely quoted scriptures, his writing evoked the same stillness I'd found in the *Upanishads* and the *mahavakyas* (great sayings), such as *tat tvam asi*, "you are that."

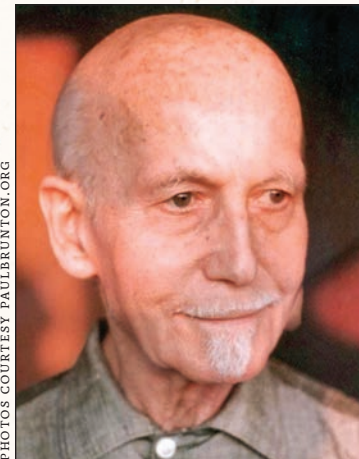
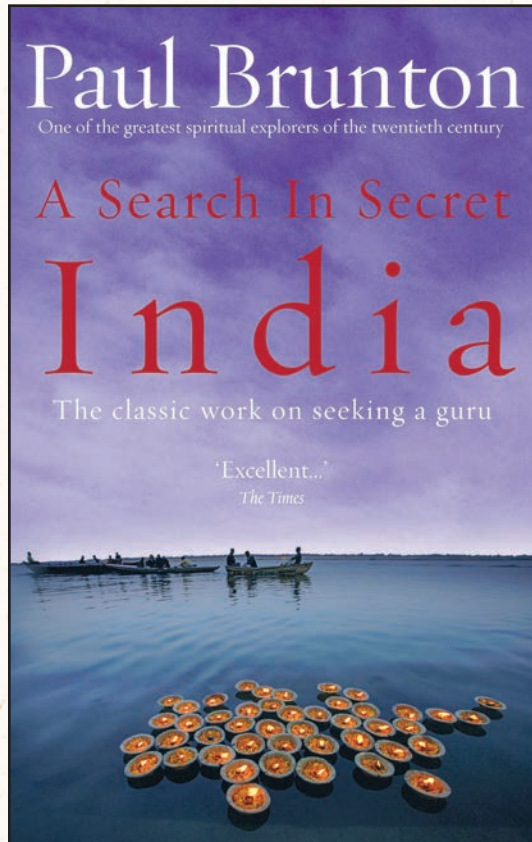
Deeply advaitic at heart, Brunton reframed ancient wisdom in Western philosophical terms—building a bridge between inner experience and modern understanding.

Paul Brunton was born Raphael Hurst in 1898 in London at a time when the West was beginning to awaken to the philosophies of

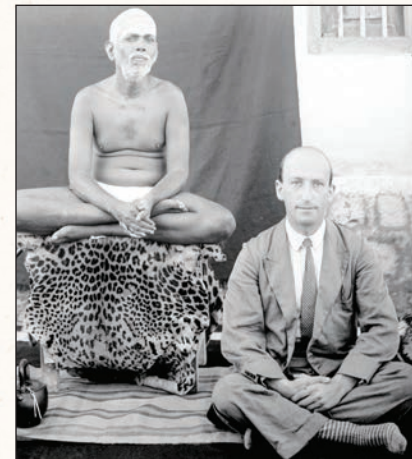
the East. As a young man, he lived the life of a journalist and editor, immersed in the intellectual and literary currents of his time. But beneath this professional persona stirred a deeper longing—a thirst for inner peace and truth that Western culture seemed ill-equipped to quench.

Brunton's personal crisis of meaning mirrored that of an entire generation recovering from the trauma of World War I. Disillusioned with materialism and the dogmatism of organized religion, he, like many others, turned toward the East for answers. But unlike others, he didn't stop at the exotic or the superficial. He wanted the real thing.

In the early 1930s, Brunton undertook a journey through India and Egypt, meeting mystics, yogis, fakirs and monks. But the defining moment of his spiritual quest came when he visited the ashram of Ramana Maharshi at the foot of the sacred Arunachala



PHOTOS COURTESY PAULBRUNTON.ORG



hill in South India.

There, he encountered not just a man, but a presence—one who answered his questions without uttering words. Brunton later described this meeting as a pivotal event in his life. In Maharshi's silent gaze, he experienced a kind of inner disarmament—a melting of the egoic self into something timeless. This was not religious conversion, but spiritual recognition.

He chronicled these encounters in his ground-breaking book *A Search in Secret India* (1934), which became an international success and was translated into two dozen languages. More importantly, the book introduced Ramana Maharshi and Indian non-dual philosophy to the Western world, creating a spiritual bridge that continues to stand.

Unlike Orientalists who analyzed India from the outside, Brunton allowed himself to be changed by what he encountered. He approached Indian spirituality not as a cultural artifact but as a living truth. His sincerity, independence and discernment enabled him to honor the tradition without becoming its blind follower.

He saw through charlatans, questioned rituals and remained grounded in reason—yet he never let cynicism obscure the spiritual grandeur he discovered in India. His life is proof that the eternal truths of Advaita Vedanta do not belong to geography; they belong to consciousness.

Among Paul Brunton's most original and intellectually powerful contributions is his doctrine of Mentalism. Mentalism bridges the empirical skepticism of modern thought with the mystical depth of Advaita Vedanta.

According to Mentalism, what we perceive as the external world is not a self-existing, material reality but a projection within consciousness. The world appears solid and objective, but its true essence lies in mind. Just as dreams appear vividly real during sleep but dissolve upon waking, so too does the waking world emerge within and dissolve into the awareness that beholds it.

Brunton is careful to differentiate this view from solipsism. He does not claim, as solipsism does, that the world is a projection of the individual mind. Rather, he posits that the universe arises within a universal consciousness—a shared mind or substratum within which all forms appear and disappear. In this framework, the physical world is not denied but recontextualized as an idea in consciousness.

This position echoes Shankara's *vivarta vada*—the idea of illusory superimposition. According to Advaita Vedanta, *nama-rupa* (name and form) are transient appearances upon the unchanging ground of Brahman. Brunton translates this insight into accessible, secular language: "We do not see the world as it is; we see it as the mind presents it to us."

Mentalism serves a dual function. Intellectually, it invites seekers to question the assumption that the world is solid, external and

At a sage's feet: (left to right) Paul Brunton with Ramana Maharshi, likely in the 1930s; cover of *A Search in Secret India*; Paul Brunton in his later years; his typewriter; also with Ramana Maharshi, ; (below) cover of the Romanian edition of *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga*

absolute. Spiritually, it nudges them inward toward the recognition that consciousness is primary.

Brunton's approach draws from both Eastern scriptures and Western idealists like Bishop Berkeley, Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer. He synthesizes these perspectives to challenge materialism not through dogma, but through inquiry.

Paul Brunton with Ramana Maharshi likely in the 1930s; cover of *A Search in Secret India*; Paul Brunton with Ramana Maharshi likely in the 1930s; cover of *A Search in Secret India*; Paul Brunton with Ramana Maharshi likely in the 1930s; cover of *A Search in Secret India*; In daily life, Mentalism encourages humility. Our perceptions are not infallible. Our world views are constructs. And in this humility, a door opens to something deeper—not beyond the world, but at its silent center.

If Mentalism is the intellectual scaffold of Brunton's philosophy, then the Overself is its sacred heart. The Overself, as Brunton defines it, is the eternal, pure awareness that underlies and transcends the thinking mind. It is not an abstraction, not a psychological state and certainly not the ego. It is what remains when all that is transient and personal is peeled away.

The Overself is his Western term for Atman, which in Advaita is not different from Brahman. Brunton's radical yet profoundly Vedantic claim is that this Overself is not distant or divine in a mythological sense—it is the core of who we are.

He writes, "The Overself is not an object to be grasped, not even by thought. It is the





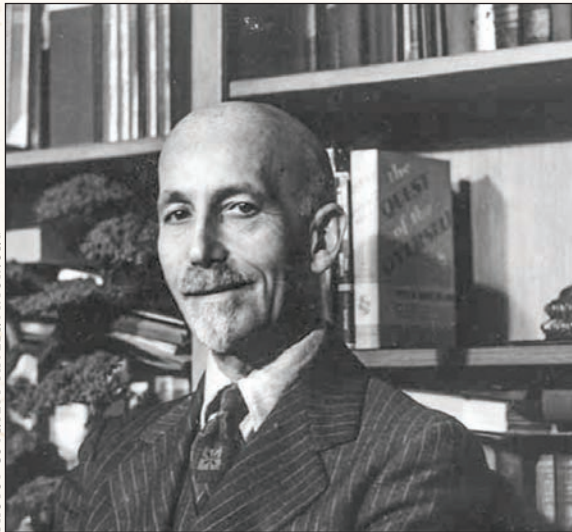
unchanging witness of all changes.” This mirrors the teachings of the *Upanishads*, where the Self is described as “the seer of seeing, the hearer of hearing.”

Brunton emphasized that realization of the Overself is not the result of intellectual acrobatics or emotional highs. It comes through a quieting of the mind and a radical sincerity of purpose. His rejection of both materialism and mysticism reflects his belief that true spirituality must be experiential and verifiable—not based on blind faith, nor on fleeting visions. This echoes the spirit of Ramana Maharshi’s path of *atma-vichara* or Self-inquiry. Both masters insisted that the ultimate Truth must be realized inwardly, in silence, through direct knowing.

To Brunton, the Overself is not something to be created or attained. It is already present, veiled only by the mind’s restlessness. His writings repeatedly stress that the Overself is not “mine” or “yours,” but the same in all. This makes his message universal and egalitarian—a spiritual democracy of being. In a world fractured by identities and ideologies, Brunton’s Overself points us to that which is always already whole.

Brunton’s book *The Hidden Teaching Beyond Yoga* was a bold title for its time—and even now. Why “beyond yoga?” Was he dismissing the ancient science of inner transformation? On the contrary, Brunton had great respect for yogic disciplines, especially those that developed concentration, breath control and moral clarity. However, he saw that many spiritual aspirants—both Eastern and Western—stopped short at yoga’s preliminary stages. They became enamored with techniques, visions, energies and sometimes even psychic powers, mistaking these for enlightenment.

In Brunton’s view, yoga is a means, not an end. The real teaching lies beyond postures and experiences. It lies in the questioning mind, in the silent stillness where the ego dies and the Self shines.



At a sage’s feet: (above) Paul Brunton in England; (below) five of Brunton’s published books

His spiritual path had three phases: philosophy, mysticism and realization. First, one must think clearly and deeply. Then, one must feel deeply and surrender the ego. Finally, one must let go of both thought and feeling to abide in pure awareness. This mirrors the classical Advaitic progression from *shravanam* (hearing), to *mananam* (reflecting), to *nididhyasanam* (meditative absorption).

Brunton’s originality lay in offering this path in a structure intelligible to modern readers, especially those steeped in rationalism. His emphasis on self-observation—careful examination of thoughts, motives and attachments—is a practice rarely emphasized in mainstream yoga but crucial for transcending the ego. By seeing the ego in action, one dis-identifies from it and uncovers the quiet, unconditioned witness—the Overself.

Paul Brunton’s influence is more widespread than many realize. His books have sold in the millions and his early writings played a major role in the spiritual awakening of the West. In introducing Ramana Maharshi to global audiences, he forever changed the landscape of comparative spirituality.

His *Notebooks*—published after his passing in 1981—span over 7,000 pages, reflecting decades of meticulous inner and outer inquiry. They are not just musings but maps—guiding readers through metaphysics, meditation, ethics and realization.

The Paul Brunton Philosophic Foundation (www.paulbrunton.org) continues his mission, curating his teachings and making them accessible to modern readers worldwide in multiple languages. What makes Brunton especially relevant today is his refusal to create a spiritual cult, align with any dogma or claim to be a guru. In a world overwhelmed by superficial spirituality and commodified enlightenment, his voice is refreshingly sober, humble and precise. He addressed educated readers who may have dismissed religion but still longed for meaning. To them, he offered a path of Self-inquiry without

dogma, of silence without escapism and of truth without pretense.

For Hindus, Brunton’s writings are a mirror. They show how the essence of Advaita Vedanta—once confined to the Sanskrit commentaries of Shankara or the verses of the *Upanishads*—can now speak across cultures without losing its soul. He did not dilute Vedanta; he distilled it. He did not bypass tradition; he rendered it transparent.

Paul Brunton did not come to replace India’s sages or reinterpret Hinduism for a foreign audience. He came as a listener, a recorder and ultimately a transformer—not of the truths he found, but of the language in which they could be shared. He rarely used religious language. Yet, his work has initiated thousands into inner stillness, into the silence where *Aham Brahmasmi* becomes more than a phrase—it becomes their truth.

The Overself, he reminded us, is not attained. It is realized. And in realizing it, we transcend not just ego and suffering—but the illusion of separation that divides East from West, Hindu from non-Hindu, seeker from sought.



BOOK REVIEW

Hinduism and America

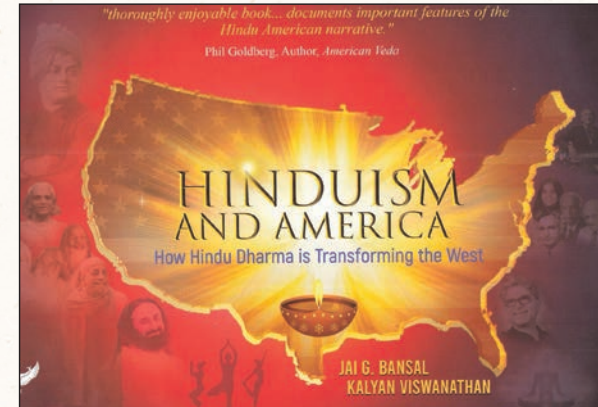
How Hindu Dharma Has Impacted America Over the Last Two Centuries

HINDUISM AND AMERICA IS A coffee-table book which presents the nearly 250-year-long journey from the arrival of early Sanskrit translations to the 20th-century influence of swamis, yogis and spiritual teachers who brought Vedanta, yoga and other Hindu teachings to American soil. It concludes with the current transformative impact by present-day resident Hindu citizens on the social and cultural outlook in the United States. The introduction observes: “Nearly two-thirds of Americans, even while professing to be Christian, Jewish or just spiritual, now believe that there are many equally valid paths to spiritual truth—a quintessential Hindu idea. A third of them believe in life after death, reincarnation and the law of karma. The advent of thousands of yoga studios, meditation centers, ayurvedic health centers, vegetarian/vegan restaurants and the rising popularity of meatless products attest to a massive social movement that has its roots firmly planted in Hindu thought.”

Jointly authored by Dr. Jai G. Bansal and Kalyan Viswanathan, the book chronicles the bold and courageous dissemination of key Hindu concepts by visiting swamis, yogis and gurus, as well as the trials and tribulations of immigrants who slowly incorporated these Hindu ideas in a rather unintentional natural manner while they integrated themselves into society in pursuit of the American Dream. In the authors’ words, “This transformative change in American attitudes did not happen overnight. It is the result of an organic movement that spans a period of almost 250 years. It is a movement without any master plan or directive force and can be divided into three partially overlapping phases.” The book narrates the key contributions of early pioneers who led this spiritual transformation, along with the real-life achievements of Hindu Americans who have continued it, and the core values and beliefs behind it.

In the foreword, Phil Goldberg, author of the award-winning book *American Veda*, notes, “Hinduism—along with the other Dharmic traditions birthed in India—is not just an interesting new theology or a collection of doctrines to be denounced or tolerated or appreciated. It represents a fundamentally different way of understanding and expressing the universal spiritual impulse that drives human beings to worship the divine and to turn inward in search of wholeness and unity. For that reason, Hindu citizens are contributing day by day to the transformation of America’s spiritual landscape.” He continues, “Core elements of Hindu dharma have become commonplace fixtures in America. A more yogic perspective has become prevalent—one that prioritizes inner spiritual experience and recognizes the individuality of the quest for divine illumination.”

The book is organized into three broad parts, each illustrated with biographical sketches, historical anecdotes and reflections on how



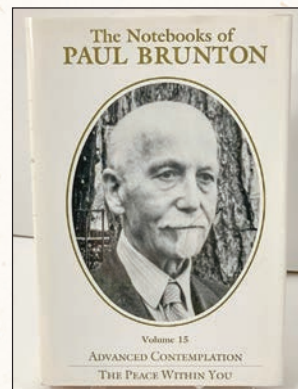
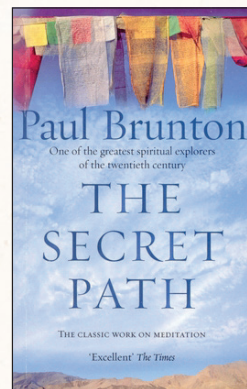
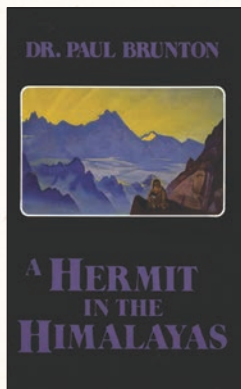
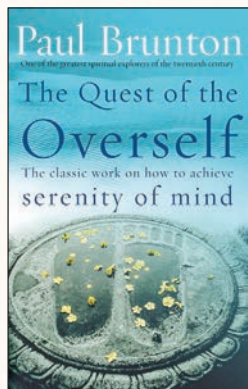
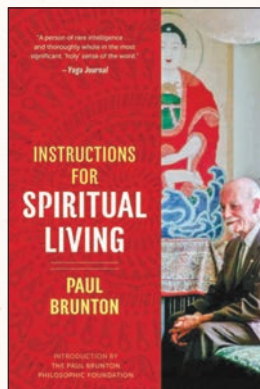
core Hindu practices—specifically yoga, meditation and spirituality—from Hindu spiritual leaders. It describes the ways in which American society was transformed by the adaptation and integration of Hindu ideas into American daily life in the 125 years since Swami Vivekananda’s arrival in Chicago for the Parliament of the World’s Religions.

The last part, titled “Perspectives of Contemporary Hindu Americans,” spotlights legally immigrated Hindus in America, who in the last five decades have integrated into professional, cultural and civic life and made meaningful contributions to America’s multicultural landscape in subtle and overt ways while simultaneously preserving their traditions to pass them on to the next generation. They have not only carved out an important place for themselves in the socioeconomic sphere but also significantly impacted the cultural landscape of American society.

Consistent with the subtitle of this book, “How Hindu Dharma is Transforming the West,” facts are presented that project a very positive side of the exposure of Hinduism in America. This could mislead readers into thinking that Hinduism is being accepted by the majority or that its presence in America is the panacea for intercultural and inter-religious harmony. A case in point to the contrary is the controversy in the State of California over the misrepresentation of Hinduism in middle-school textbooks, which created a rather negative outlook in the minds of young students. The recent incidents of vandalism against Hindu temples and the currently ongoing criticism, such as in Texas, of Hindu statues and temples that were all legally built, display the other side of the coin that is just as factual as what the book portrays. Hence, some readers looking for a more balanced academic analysis may find the narrative a bit skewed.

Overall, this book gives a generally comprehensive and graphically rich account of how Hinduism has interfaced with American society over the past two and a half centuries. Its narrative blends historical research with personal stories, making the book a useful read.

Hinduism and America—How Hindu Dharma Is Transforming the West by Jai G. Bansal and Kalyan Viswanathan, 202 pages.





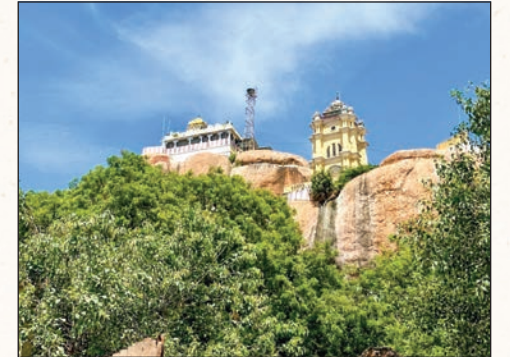
PILGRIMAGE

My South India Temple Tour

Grace and effort—the two wings of the soul—finally made it possible



The great temples of Tamil Nadu: (clockwise from far left) Thanjavur's Brihadeeswara Temple to Lord Siva; Srirangam Temple to Lord Vishnu; inner hallway of Madurai Meenakshi Temple; the Tiruchendur Murugan Temple was amazingly spared any impact from the 2004 tsunami; Rockfort Ganesha Temple in Tiruchirappalli; entry to Tirupparankundram Murugan Temple, which is carved into the granite of the hill behind; Chidambaram Temple entrance



BY DR. CHOUDARY VOLETI

HUMAN LIFE, I HAVE ALWAYS BELIEVED, is like a bird with two wings—one of Divine Grace and the other of human effort. Only when both move in harmony can we truly soar. My recent pilgrimage through the sacred temples of South India became a living testimony to this eternal truth.

Though born in India, I have spent most of my life since the late 1960s in the United States. Many times I returned home, yet the cherished wish to undertake a temple pilgrimage in the South lay unfulfilled for decades. Only in 2023, by what I now recognize as Divine Will, did the journey manifest.

At first, it appeared to be my planning—calls to friends, travel arrangements, meticulous itineraries. Yet, at every step, unseen hands guided me. When my humble car proved inadequate, a devotee offered his new vehicle. When I sought a reliable driver, one appeared through a friend's call. As the *Bhagavad Gita* reminds us: "When the devotee is ready, the Divine provides every means to advance his journey." Indeed, the pilgrimage unfolded as a dance between sincere human effort and the benevolent play of Grace.

The Dance of Consciousness

Our journey began in Chennai, reaching Chidambaram by mid-morning. Here, Lord Siva is worshiped as Nataraja, the Cosmic Dancer whose rhythm is the pulse of the universe. The sanctum houses the Akasha Linga, symbol of the infinite and formless.

Standing in the inner courtyard as a sudden tropical shower drenched me, I felt the rain as a benediction—as though my mind, too, were being washed clean. The Chidambaram Rahasyam whispered its subtle truth: the Divine resides not only in sacred form but in the vast inner space of the heart. *Sivam bhutva sivam yajet*—to worship Siva, one must become Siva. In Chidambaram, I realized that a true pilgrimage is a journey from place to presence.

The Infinite Compassion of Vishnu

At Srirangam, abode of Lord Ranganatha, serenity dwells amidst grandeur. The seven concentric enclosures embrace the devotee as gently as the Lord's own reclining form. Entering the sanctum to the chorus of "*Ranganatha Swami ki jai*!", I felt a peace beyond description. His smile seemed to convey, "Rest,

child—all is in Divine Order." The *Vishnu Purana* came alive: "He who dwells in all beings as their Self—to Him I bow again and again." Srirangam teaches the essence of bhakti yoga—surrender with trust.

The Majesty of Siva's Power

At Thanjavur's Brihadeeswara Temple, faith takes architectural form. The towering vimana crowned by 80 tons of granite blocks evokes awe at what devotion can accomplish. As the setting sun bathed the temple in gold, I stood before the massive Lingam in quiet reverence. Here, Siva teaches not fear, but fearlessness born of devotion.

The Grace of the Divine Mother

Madurai, ancient and vibrant, is home to Meenakshi Amman, embodiment of Shakti. The temple is a symphony of devotion in stone. When the priest placed upon me a garland that had adorned the Goddess, I felt Her presence—compassionate, radiant and infinitely near. *Ya Devi sarva-bhuteshu shakti-rupena samsthita*. "The Mother resides in all beings as power itself."

Murugan's Sacred Abode

Near Madurai rises Tirupparankundram, among the most ancient and revered shrines of Lord Murugan. A 150-foot, seven-tiered rajagopuram marks the entrance, beyond which the temple merges into the very body of the hill. Much of it is carved directly into granite, with halls at varied levels, echoing early 6th–8th-century rock-cut architecture.

The cool, dim corridors contrast beautifully with vibrant sculptures of Deities and celestial guardians, expressing a harmonious blend of Saiva, Vaishnava and Tamil traditions. Spiritually, this is the sacred site of Murugan's divine marriage to Devasena after defeating Surapadman—the triumph of dharma. Pilgrims feel here a unique energy: protective, transformative and profoundly intimate.

Where Rama's Faith Meets Siva's Grace

Crossing the Pamban Bridge into Rameswaram felt like entering a realm sanctified

by timeless devotion. At Ramanathaswamy Temple, endless pillared corridors invite contemplation. Bathing in the 22 sacred wells symbolized an inner purification—a washing away of doubt. Nearby, the famed "floating stones" of Rama's Bridge quietly affirm that faith can lighten even stone.

The Soul's Further Ascent

At Tiruchendur, Murugan stands steadfast against the sea, untouched even by the 2004 tsunami—a testament, many believe, to Divine Will. Suchindram's Thanumalayan

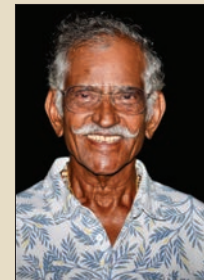
Temple celebrates the unity of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva, while its musical pillars seem to hum creation's song. At Padmanabhaswamy Temple in Trivandrum, the Lord resting on Adishesha revealed serenity itself. Viewing His feet, navel and face through three doorways felt like passing through stages of spiritual evolution: surrender, devotion and realization.

Reflections—the Journey Within

As the pilgrimage concluded, I discovered that every temple is also a mirror: at Chidambaram, God dances in stillness; at Srirangam, surrender becomes strength; at Madurai, love is worship; at Rameswaram, purification opens wisdom; at Trivandrum, peace crowns devotion. The journey reaffirmed a timeless truth of Sanatana Dharma: grace descends when effort is pure; effort blossoms when grace is felt. Ultimately, every heart is a temple—awaiting the awakening of the Divine within. Aum Namah Shivaya. 🙏

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Choudary Voleti, after practicing cardiac surgery for over 30 years in California, took early retirement and was pulled into the orbit of Sri Sathya Sai Baba. For 16 years he volunteered as chairman of cardiac sciences at Sai Baba's hospitals in India. He now lives in Princeville, Kauai, having been absorbed into Lord Siva's orbit.





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CUISINE AND HEALTH

Cardamom, Nutmeg & Cloves

These three sweet spices, with multiple benefits beyond their flavor, have long been valued in India and across Asia

By LAKSHMI SRIDHARAN, SAN JOSE

SPICES WERE PRIZED IN EUROPE FOR many centuries, not only for their culinary uses but also for medicinal properties and fragrance. At one time, a pound of cloves could cost half a month's wages for a laborer, while a single nutmeg in the 15th century sold for a week's worth. Small wonder, then, that the spice trade drove the Europeans to open sea routes to India and eventually Indonesia. That trade dramatically changed world history and ultimately contributed to British rule in India. In this article we'll explore three key spices: cardamom, cloves and nutmeg.

Cardamom

Cardamom, *Elettaria cardamomum*, a member of the ginger family Zingiberaceae, is indigenous to India. Turmeric and ginger, also widely used spices, belong to the same family. Cardamom is native to the moist evergreen forests of South India, growing wild between 2,500 and 5,000 feet in the Western Ghats mountain range, which runs along India's western coast from Maharashtra to Kerala.

Green cardamom, often called true cardamom, is native to these mountains and is chiefly cultivated in Kerala, Karnataka and

Tamil Nadu, with smaller production in parts of northeastern India, such as Sikkim and Assam. Black cardamom (*Amomum subulatum*), also known as greater or Nepal cardamom, originates in the eastern Himalayas. It is cultivated primarily in eastern Nepal, Sikkim, the Darjeeling district of West Bengal and Bhutan, as well as parts of northeastern India.

In addition to volatile oils and fiber, cardamom contains trace minerals including calcium, phosphorus, sodium, potassium and iron, as well as vitamin B1 (thiamine), vitamin B2 (riboflavin), vitamin C (ascorbic acid), niacin and small amounts of vitamin A.

Cardamom is widely used as a culinary spice, especially in desserts, rice pilaf and biryani in Indian cuisine. North Indian cuisine uses cardamom in a variety of dishes, including sauces. The seeds are aromatic, with a characteristic warm, slightly pungent taste. It is used for flavoring curries, cakes, bread, liqueurs and for other culinary purposes. In Arab countries, cardamom is added to coffee and tea. In medicine, it is used as an aromatic, stimulant, carminative and flavoring agent.

Cardamom has long been valued in traditional medicine. Studies suggest it may help support healthy digestion and blood sugar

regulation. It contains compounds with anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties that help neutralize harmful free radicals. Traditional medicine has also used cardamom to support heart and respiratory health and to promote oral hygiene. Some laboratory studies indicate that cardamom's natural compounds may have anticancer potential.

Cloves

Clove (*Syzygium aromaticum*), family Myrtaceae, is an ancient spice. It is indigenous to the Moluccas, or the "Spice Islands," part of what is now Indonesia. The British East India Company first cultivated cloves in India around 1800 ce in its spice garden at Courtallam in Tamil Nadu. The clove-growing regions in India today the Nilgiri, Tirunelveli and Kanyakumari districts of Tamil Nadu; the Calicut, Kottayam, Quilon and Trivandrum districts of Kerala; and the South Kanara district of Karnataka. The major producers of this spice today are Indonesia, Madagascar, Tanzania (especially Zanzibar) and the Comoros.

Clove, the dried unopened flower buds of the evergreen tree, is known for its flavor and medicinal value. In all Indian homes, clove is used as a culinary spice, as its flavor blends well with both sweet and savory



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Three great spices: (left to right) cardamom pods for sale in a sack (Philippines); nutmeg seed with its red mace covering; cloves in flower (Indonesia)

dishes. It is used for flavoring pickles, curries, ketchup and sauces. It is highly valued in medicine as a carminative and aromatic stimulant. In addition to volatile oils, clove contains fiber and trace amounts of minerals such as calcium, phosphorus, iron and potassium, as well as vitamin B complex (including niacin), vitamin C and vitamin A.

Because of its stimulating properties, it is used as one of the ingredients for betel chewing. In Java, clove is used in the preparation of a popular type of cigarette known as *kretek*.

Clove oil is used in perfumery, pharmaceuticals and the flavoring industry. The chief constituent of the oil, eugenol, is widely used in perfumes. The food processing industry uses clove in both whole and ground forms in a variety of preparations. Clove oleoresin is also increasingly used in food processing.

Nutmeg

Nutmeg, *Myristica fragrans*, is a tropical evergreen tree of the family Myristicaceae. The tree produces a fruit from which two spices are derived: nutmeg, from the seed, and mace, from the surrounding red aril. The tree is native to the Moluccas of Indonesia. In India, Kerala (often called the spice garden of the country) leads in nutmeg production. Other tropical regions cultivating nutmeg include Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra.

Nutmeg contains small amounts of carbohydrates, protein and dietary fiber, along with vitamins A, C and E and minerals such as potassium, magnesium, calcium and iron. Nutmeg also contains phytonutrients such as beta-cryptoxanthin and beta-carotene.

Nutmeg essential oil is used in the cosmet-

ic industry, in natural flavoring extracts and in perfumes. It acts as a natural preservative due to its antibacterial and antioxidant properties. As a preservative, it inhibits microbial growth, oxidation and rancidity.

The seeds of the nutmeg fruit are used in culinary, medicinal and cosmetic applications. Nutmeg is widely used as a flavoring agent in baked products, confectionery, meats, puddings, vegetables and beverages. It is used in curry powders, teas and soft drinks. In the Middle East and India, it is commonly used in sweet dishes, while in European cooking it is used in both sweet and savory dishes, flavoring custards, cakes, potatoes, meats, eggs, spinach, soups and sauces.

Nutmeg has been used in traditional medical systems across many cultures, including in Arabia, India, China and among Jewish communities. It has been used to regulate vomiting and bowel movements and to treat conditions such as tuberculosis, colds and fevers, as well as respiratory disorders.

Nutmeg is also reported to have anthelmintic properties and has been used in treating skin conditions such as eczema and scabies. It has further been used to address inflammatory disorders, joint and muscle pain and liver ailments. Nutmeg oil has been applied traditionally for kidney stones, kidney infections, diarrhea, rheumatism and cholera, and in the treatment of nervous disorders and dizziness. Medicinal use should, of course, be approached with caution and due research.

Cardamom, nutmeg and cloves are widely available in grocery stores and are easy to incorporate into cooking.



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Pineapple Kesari

Preparation time: 40 minutes.
Serves: 6

Ingredients

- 1/2 cup ghee of good quality
- 1/2 cup peanut oil
- 1/2 cup dried raisins
- 1/2 cup cashews
- 1 tsp saffron
- 1 cup pineapple pieces
- 1 cup semolina
- 2 tsp cardamom powder
- 3/4 cup sugar
- a pinch salt

Method

Peeling the pineapple can be a bit difficult. Use a knife and slice off the thick rind and remove the "eyes." Cut the flesh into small cubes. Soak the saffron in two tbsp hot water until it releases a nice reddish-orange color.

Use a heavy-bottomed saucepan over medium heat. Mix the ghee and oil, pour into the pan and heat gently. Set aside half of this mixture in a separate bowl. Fry the cashews and raisins on low heat for one to two minutes, until the raisins swell and the cashews turn golden brown. Add the semolina and stir-fry for three to four minutes until it becomes aromatic and lightly golden.

Stir in the saffron, pineapple, sugar and salt. Add 2 cups of boiling water, stirring constantly to avoid lumps. Add the reserved ghee mixture and stir well. Add the cardamom powder and mix. Cover and simmer on low heat for five minutes. Turn off the heat, stir and let rest for ten minutes before serving. Share and enjoy.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lakshmi Sridharan is an American scientist of South Indian origin who lives in San Jose, California, with her husband Tim. As a freelance writer, she enjoys sharing with others her knowledge in plant science, culinary science, her experience in gardening and cooking as well as Indian culture and traditions.



Court of the Goddess

Exploring the rich traditions of a beloved South Indian home celebration during Navaratri

BY VIDYA MOHAN, SEATTLE

THE FESTIVAL OF NAVARATRI, OR DUSSEHRA, is celebrated grandly every year during the Sharad or autumnal season. These ten days and their nine nights are a ritual of art, food and the Divine. Those originating from the Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh begin preparations several weeks in advance. Handcrafted dolls made of clay, papier-mâché and wood are brought out of attics to be set for display. Called *bomma*, *bombe* or *golu* in different languages, they are neatly arranged on stepped tiers, and friends and acquaintances are invited to view them. They depict a wide variety of scenes from history and scripture. Backgrounds are painted, staged with colorful decor and carefully lit to evoke a celestial atmosphere. There are also nostalgic, lively scenes of everyday people—farmers, teachers, householders, merchants and priests—with children at play adding warmth and humor.

Alongside a *kumbha*—a pot filled with water or grains, spices and coins—the golas are arranged for formal worship on the day of Mahalaya Amavasya, the new moon. For the ten days that follow, they are honored and pampered as esteemed guests with ritualized food offerings called prasadam, flowers and fragrant incense.

While the exact origins of this festival are unclear, it likely took shape during the 14th century. Golu dolls were originally crafted in clay by artisans in and around Kanchipuram and neighboring districts. They later came to include papier-mâché, wooden and marble cousins from other states in India.

The clay-making process incorporated the elements of air, fire, water, earth and space, with the final product honoring the *pancha bhutha tattva* that forms the basis of all living things. It serves as a reminder that we arise from these gross elements and to them our ephemeral bodies will eventually return.

While traditionalists might fume at the papier-mâché and resin-molded models that are becoming a common sight, they may be reassured by the growing popularity of this

festival. The Navaratri Golu has transcended geographical boundaries with the rise in middle-class economics. Households in the US, Australia and the UK celebrate this tradition proudly.

The original artisans took inspiration for their creations from the murtis inside the temples and on the gopurams. Later, paintings from celebrated artists like Raja Ravi Varma influenced the designs. Over time, the complexity of the physical models and their stories grew into a joyful mix of time-honored traditions and subtle relevance to cur-



A place for everyone: the family's 2025 presentation

rent affairs.

The golas are arranged in odd-numbered steps. The lowest steps are usually occupied by animals. These are followed by humans, whose discerning intelligence distinguishes them from animals. On the step above, you will find enlightened gurus who shared a path to attain Brahman, along with well-known social workers, artists and freedom fighters who lived their lives with more earthly purposes.

The subsequent steps are occupied by avatars, manifestations in which Divinities take anthropomorphic form and descend to overcome evil. Their stories are meant to reaffirm the Deities' continued support and protection in our lives.

The top step is occupied by the main Deities: Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati or Siva, Vishnu and Brahma. The space above represents the all-pervading Brahman, the formless, attributeless, supreme consciousness into which even these Deities dissolve. This arrangement reminds us to better ourselves and live each life with purpose, so we may eventually break the karmic cycle and merge with Divinity. When you sit down and stare up at the display in silence every year, you become aware of how much further you have to evolve.

Central to this display are a pair of wooden dolls called Pattada Gombe or Marapachi Bommai. Representing a primordial pair, they signify royalty, fidelity, fertility, balance and unity. They are often the first to be set on the steps and are said to "oversee" the arrangements that follow. Originally, this couple was handcrafted by artisans near Tirupati in India, from red sandalwood, silk-cotton wood or other local woods. Dressed according to local traditions or in bright finery, they are gifted to the bride as part of her trousseau. If they age well with proper care, they can command a fortune in art resales.

Honoring Adi-Shakti, the primordial creative energy of the universe, Navaratri is also a season for the arts. If you paint, dance, sing, cook or craft well, you are invited to display your talent before the court of dolls. You can also offer your colorful kolams or rangolis, lip-smacking recipes and singing to the Goddesses every evening. Dressing up in fine make-up and silks is encouraged, as even this is considered one of the 64 arts or Chatushashti Kalas in the Indian tradition.

Nowadays when I visit people's homes and partake of their elaborate catering, judicious holiday lighting, dramatically themed displays or private musical performances, I can't help but drift into nostalgia. I recall humble visits to homes in my neighborhood, where I would sing (off-key) and receive a simple dish of spiced lentils and beans.

On the last night of Navaratri, one doll is "put to sleep" before the arrangement is brought down and packed away the next day with considerable care. Some people even store their dolls in temperature-controlled environments!

Navaratri is not just about preserving a tradition, but also offers a break from the roughness of routine and the busyness of modern living. It encourages us to reflect on ourselves and relearn our real purpose as we retell stories from our tradition to our children. This precious season of Navaratri passes on more than just material things.

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Estate Planning Back to Basics: Remembering Why We Help Others



Like many people, you're probably inundated with requests to support a variety of organizations, from your neighbor's school fundraiser to campaigns at organizations like Hindu Heritage Endowment. It might be time to reflect on what really inspires you to give back. Renew your giving spirit with these quick ideas.

Step 1: Determine your values.
Ask yourself: What principles guide my life?

Step 2: Concentrate your efforts.
From your list of values, determine a few organizations or causes of greatest importance to you.

Step 3: Make a personal plan.
Decide how much time and money you can devote to the organizations closest to your heart. Even a few hours or a few dollars can make a meaningful impact.

Step 4: Do your research.
Be as prudent when offering your volunteer time and money as you would with any other investment. Make a site visit, review the organization's financial statements, attend a board meeting—do whatever it takes for you to feel comfortable with the charities in which you plan to invest.

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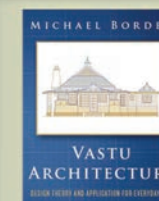
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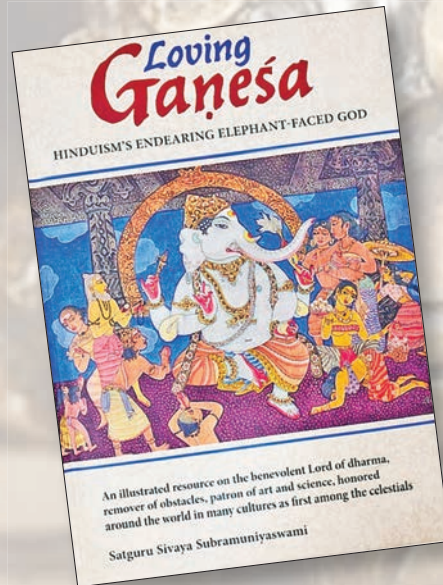


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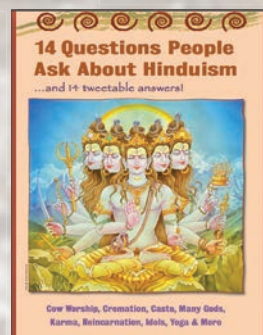
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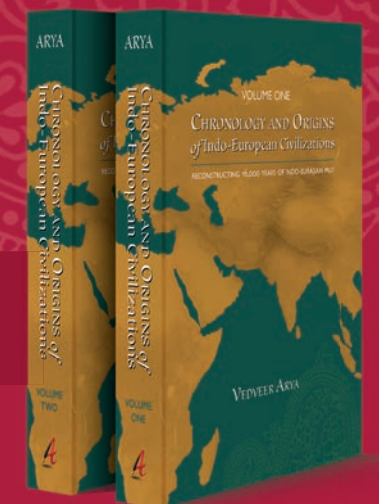
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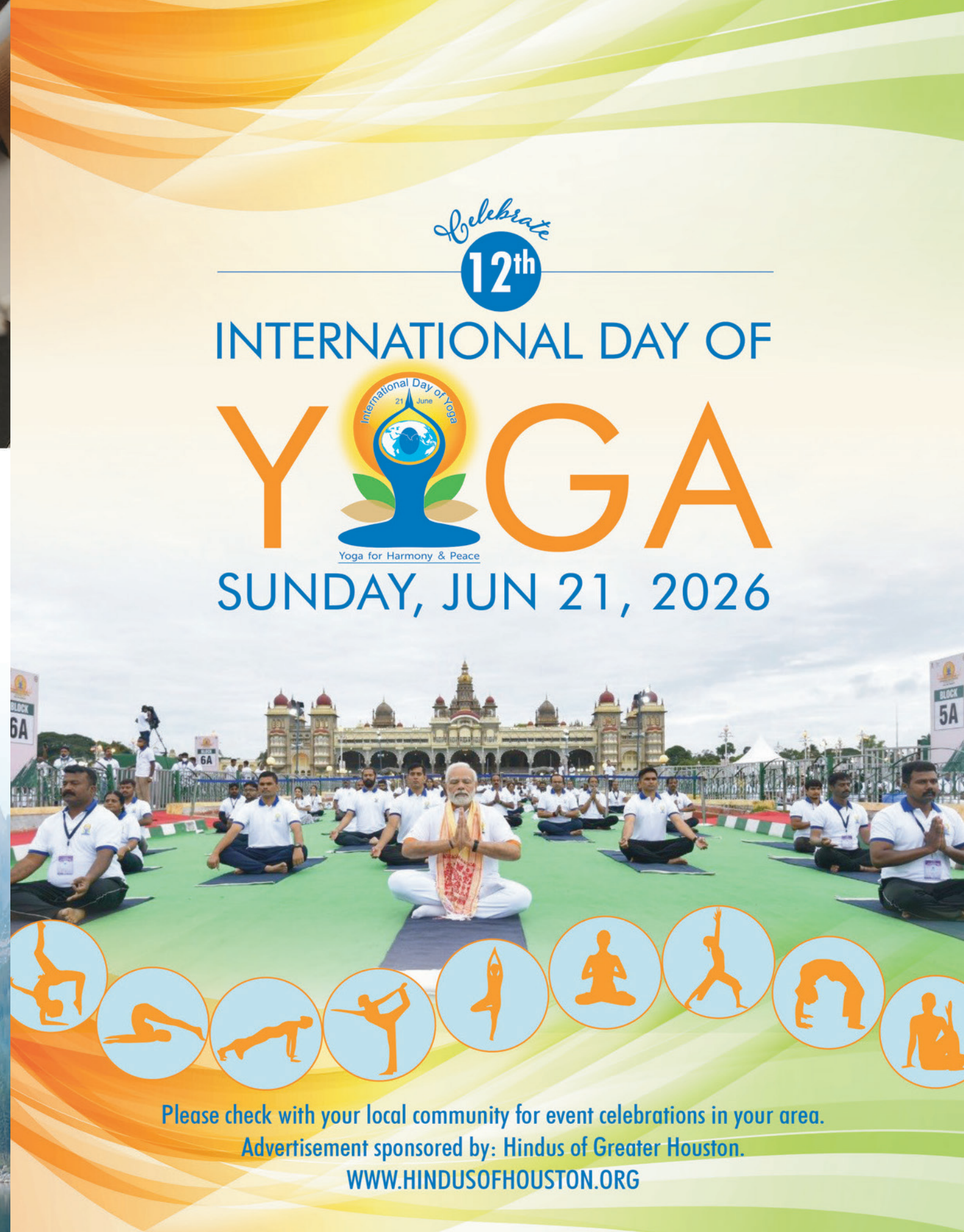
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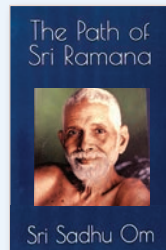


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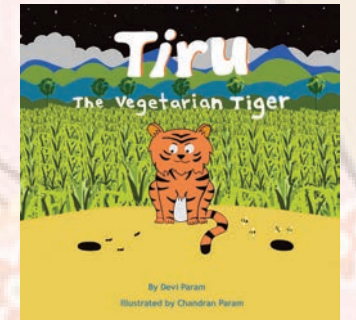


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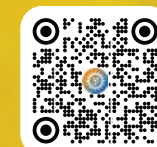


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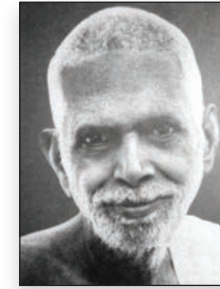
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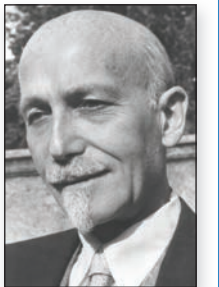
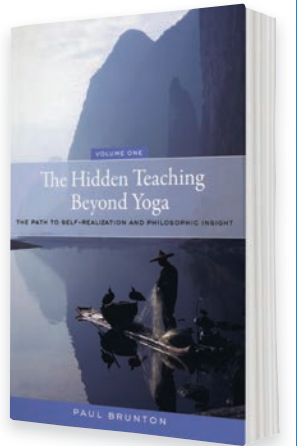
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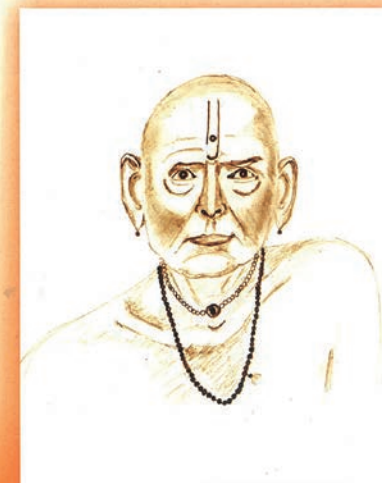
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SCAN ME



A first breath, a cry,
And I am delivered
Into the world of matter.

The Prince of Wales
Is sunk by the Rising Sun.
Babe in arms, mother runs
To the safety of rubber trees.

And as the Sun sets,
The Dragon rises.
For twelve years,
Fears and tears
Are close companions.

II
Thus ever shy
Of life and of living,
Of death and of dying,
It did, one day, occur to me
That I was far,
Far from Home.

The Spirit stirred,
Longing for Home.
From the depths of time
Did rise a misty memory
Of Home.

There appeared
A sunset that had no Sun,
A light without a glare,
A river born of no storm,
And life without a body.

III
Burning desires consuming,
Challenges overwhelming,
Bewildered still,
Bearing the unbearable,
I am drawn to
One Face,
One Vibration,
One Radiance,
The brilliant
Six-Pointed Star which,
Though far from Home
Yet I be,
Shows me
The Way.

Far, Far from Home,
by Dr. Arjunan Subramaniam.
Desa Parkcity, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
1st October, 2020-2nd January, 2021

Digital Dharma



Kumbh Mela 2025: Behind the Scenes

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Roads & Tents & Water Systems



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created."

"Between 150,000 and 200,000 tents or tem-
porary structures were installed for pilgrims."

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