

HINDUISM TODAY
PASUPATINATH TEMPLE
NORTH INDIAN BHAKTI SAINTS
DHARMIC INVESTING
APRIL/MAY/JUNE, 2020

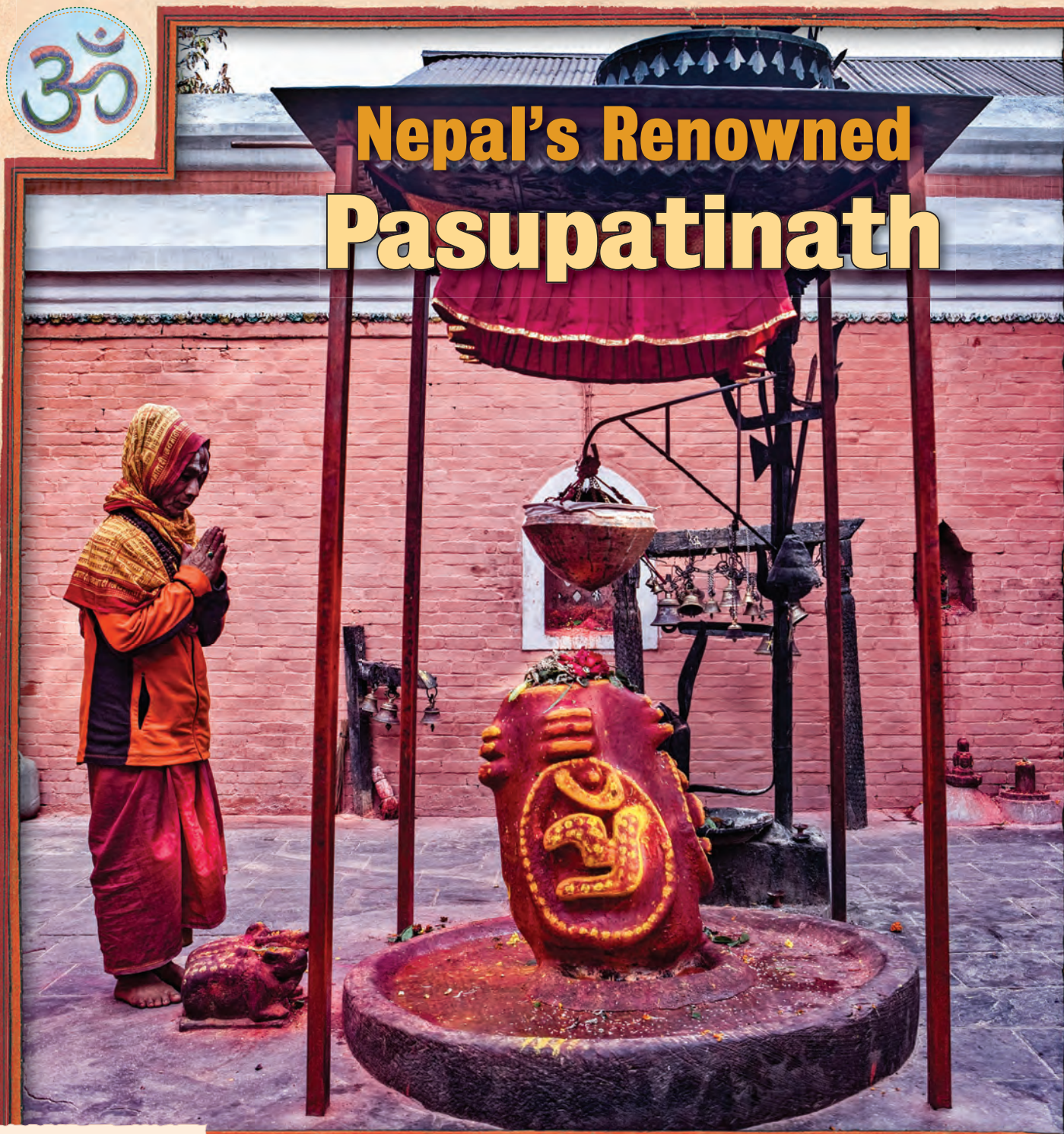
April/May/June, 2020 US\$7.95

HINDUISM TODAY

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



Nepal's Renowned Pasupatinath



THOMAS L. KELLY



KAMALAVALI NAGAPAN

(Cover) Purna Chandra Maharaj worships at the oldest Sivalingam in the Pasupatinath Temple complex, Kathmandu, Nepal; (above) Established in 1822, the Sri Mathu Mariamman Temple in Melaka, Malaysia, serves as a religious hub for the area's Chetti community

APRIL/MAY/JUNE, 2020 • THE HINDU YEAR ŚĀRVARĪ, 5122

Bodhinatha Veylanswami

www.gurudeva.org

INTERNATIONAL

Feature: Join Us on a Rare Journey to the Famed First-Century Pasupatinath Temple in Nepal **18**

Financial: Exploring the Reassuring and Surprisingly Widespread Positive Trends in Dharmic Investing **50**

Conference: THREADS Celebrates the Influence of Hindu Americans in Business, Science, Education, Health and More **58**

Community: Discover Malaysia's Chetti Clan, Still Thriving after Many Centuries **62**

LIFESTYLE

Sadhana: The Experiences of a Pilgrimage Done Alone Compared with a Journey Undertaken by the Whole Family **32**

Insight: Learn of the Lives and Teachings of North India's Bhakti Saints **34**

OPINION

In My Opinion: Ancient Answers for an Information-Rich Technological Age **9**

Publisher's Desk: "Swami, How Can I Integrate My Religious Practices into Daily Tasks?" **10**

Letters **12**

From the Upanishads: Lord Yama, God of Death, Elucidates the Profundity and Immortality of Our Inner Being **17**

Minister's Message: Swami Avdheshanand Giri Gives a Lofty Discourse Filled with Knowledge of the Greater Self **68**

DIGESTS

Global Dharma **6**

Quotes & Quips **14**

Digital Dharma **86**

USA CONTACTS: Letters to the editor, subscription and editorial inquiries may be sent to HINDUISM TODAY, 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii 96746-9304 USA, letters@hindu.org. HINDUISM TODAY (ISSN# 0896-0801; USPS# 023082), April/May/June, 2020, Volume 42, No. 2. Subscriptions from USA and Canada 1-877-255-1540; subscriptions, copies or bulk orders from other countries 1-808-822-7032, ext. 103; subscribe@hindu.org; advertising: 1-888-464-1008, ads@hindu.org. HINDUISM TODAY is published four times a year in January, April, July and October by Himalayan Academy, a non-profit educational institution at 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii 96746-9304 USA. Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, Founder; Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, Publisher; Paramacharya Sadasivanatha Palaniswami, Editor-in-Chief. Global subscriptions: US\$35/1 year, \$65/2 years, \$95/3 years, \$155/5 years, \$299/lifetime. INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS: In Malaysia: Sanathana Dharma Publications, Kovind Enterprise, No. 17, Jalan Ungu U9/29, Sunway Kayangan, 40150 Shah Alam. Tel: 016-380-2393; E-mail: silvarajos@yahoo.com. In Singapore: Sanathana Dharma Publications, Blk 210 #06-326, Pasir Ris Street 21, 510210. Tel: 9664-9001; E-mail: dsam55@gmail.com. For permission to republish a HINDUISM TODAY article, e-mail letters@hindu.org. Printed in USA. Periodicals postage paid at Kapaa, Hawaii, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to HINDUISM TODAY, 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304.

© 2020 HIMALAYAN ACADEMY, 107 KAHOLALELE ROAD, KAPAA, HAWAII 96746-9304 USA. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.



www.hinduismtoday.com

subscribe.hinduismtoday.com



Brazil BRL 14
Canada CAD 10

India INR 150
Malaysia MYR 14

Mauritius MRU 115
Singapore SGD 10

Trinidad TTD 48
UK GBP 5

PASHUPATINATH, NEPAL'S GREAT SIVA TEMPLE

PAGE 18

With the smoke of cremation fires not far from them, devotees (center) make their way to the entrance stairs of Pashupatinath Temple



GLOBAL DHARMA

HEALTH

Is Kavadi Good for You?

A RECENT STUDY PUBLISHED IN *Current Anthropology* examines the physical and psychological effects of the performance of *kavadi attam*. Kavadi, most commonly demonstrated during Lord Murugan's festival of Thai Pusam, is practiced by millions of Hindus around the world.

The name comes from *kaavu* and *tadi*, which refer to a pole to carry heavy things. Devotees carry heavy, elaborately decorated arches or altars on their shoulders, usually with milk pots attached to them. Kavadi bearers dance for hours as a form of devotion, personal sacrifice and/or penance as they pilgrimage to their temple. Often piercings through the skin or tongue are used, upon which objects are attached or hung.

The study took place in Quatre Bornes, Mauritius, and included 37 individuals from the local community. Participants were

thoroughly monitored weeks before and after the event in the areas of stress, sleep, physical activity, heart rate and more, while also taking into account other environmental factors in their lives, such as socio-economic status.

Results showed that participants experienced positive effects on psychological well-being and had no negative effects to their physiological health. Those who engaged in a higher number of body piercings showed the greatest improvements in quality of life, and people who had been experiencing health issues or were of low economic status showed higher levels of engagement. Researchers cite many reasons for the positive effects that were observed, including community bonding and the brain's euphoric, neurochemical reactions to physical and sensory stress.



For Lord Murugan: A young woman carries kavadi during the renowned Thai Pusam celebrations at Batu Caves, Malaysia

U S A

Hanuman Arrives in Delaware

IN JANUARY 2020, HINDUS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS GATHERED at the Hindu Temple of Delaware in Hockessin to greet the tallest Hanuman statue in the United States. Towering 25 feet, the 60,000-pound granite murti took over a year to carve in Telangana, India. He arrived at the temple on a flatbed truck accompanied by a motorcade of ten Department of Transportation trucks, six county patrol cars, three mounted horse patrol units and nearly 100 other vehicles. He was welcomed by crowds of devotees with beating drums, fireworks and songs.

Hanuman's formal installation at the temple is scheduled for May of this year. He joins several other prominent Hanuman statues in North America, including the 50-foot-tall Hanuman at the Richmond Hill Vishnu Mandir in Ontario, Canada, and the 21-foot-tall statue at the Hanuman Mandir of Greater Chicago in Illinois. There's also a 85-foot one in Trinidad. This Hanuman is unique in that He is entirely black granite—a hard stone with delicate tensile strength. He is a true celebration of Indian craftsmanship and carving skill.

Welcoming a God: The 30-ton black granite murti of Lord Hanuman arrives at the Hindu Temple of Delaware



PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK; HINDU TEMPLE OF DELAWARE

U S A

Bronze Lord Hanuman Stands in Hawaii

FOR THE FIRST TIME, A MASTERFULLY crafted, 13-foot-tall image of Lord Hanuman has been installed in Hawaii, USA. At 1:31pm on Friday, January 25, 2019, Lord Hanuman's feet touched down on a small hill near the sacred rudraksha forest at Kauai Aadheenam (home of HINDUISM TODAY), where it is planned that He stand firm for a thousand years. This concluded a more than ten-year long project set in motion by the late Gurudeva Sivaya Subramuniyaswami.

Decades ago Gurudeva had a powerful vision of Hanuman, and realized it was Hanuman's strength that would bring the currently-under-construction Iraivan Temple from India to

Kauai, stone by stone.

Indian artisans were commissioned to design and carve a large granite murti of the God, temple in hand; and after many years of work, the granite version of Hanuman was shipped to Kauai. However, the granite cracked some time after its arrival. At that point, Hawaii's master sculptor Holly Young was commissioned to make molds of the statue and add extra details to create a more elegant bronze version of the original. Her molds went to Page Bronze of Colorado, USA, to be cast and completed. Hanuman was given a green-jade patina added by Patrick Kipper, one of the United States' most renowned patineurs. The result was one of the most

exquisite Hanuman statues of this size and material produced in the Western Hemisphere—acknowledging the fact that He was originally designed and carved in India.

After He was set in place by crane, the harnesses were removed and He was draped with a shawl and given offerings of incense, fruits, coconuts, flowers and an arati.

.....
An island home: Monks of Kauai Aadheenam welcome Lord Hanuman to their island with a special puja following His installation



I N D I A

A Temple for Shri Ram?

ON NOVEMBER 9, 2019, AN Indian Supreme Court ruling finally resolved the deeply polarizing and destabilizing dispute over the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid. The location where the building stands today has long been considered the birthplace of Lord Ram. The mosque was constructed in the early 1500s by Emperor Babar of the Mughal Empire, after dismantling the existing temple.

Since the 1800s the mosque land has been under legal dispute. In 2010 a court judgment partitioned the disputed property between Hindu and Muslims. After another decade of appeals and court hearings, a Constitution Bench of five judges ruled that a Ram temple may be constructed at the disputed site, while the government must provide Muslims with five acres of prominent land in Ayodhya.



Stones at the ready: Carved temple pillars and slabs at the Ram Janam Bhumi workshop in Ayodhya await their potential usage

U S A

Military Severely Lacking in Hindu Chaplains

SINCE ITS INCEPTION, THE United States has employed clergy to minister to soldiers. As the nation's diversity grew over the centuries, its military has been pressed to meet the needs of service members with a variety of religious backgrounds. Chaplains provide counseling, train with soldiers and are deployed to war zones, but do not carry weapons.

In 2017 the US Defense

Department expanded its list of recognized religions from 100 to 221, which includes major faiths as well as less common belief systems such as Shamanism, Odinism (Asatru) and Druidism. This tasks the US military with finding theologically learned members of these faiths when needed. Following Pratima Dharm's retirement from service, Hinduism currently has no US chaplains in the military.

At the recent 2019 Hindu Mandir Executive Conference in New Jersey, a US army chaplain recruiter told HINDUISM TODAY of the challenge faced by the US Chaplaincy program in finding chaplains for their Hindu soldiers. He hopes that any religiously astute Hindus joining the armed forces will seriously consider becoming a chaplain, in order to respond to this growing and unfulfilled need.



To serve: With a growing diversity among soldiers, the need for Hindu chaplains has never been higher

PHOTOS: HINDUISM TODAY, RAJEEV BHATT; SHUTTERSTOCK

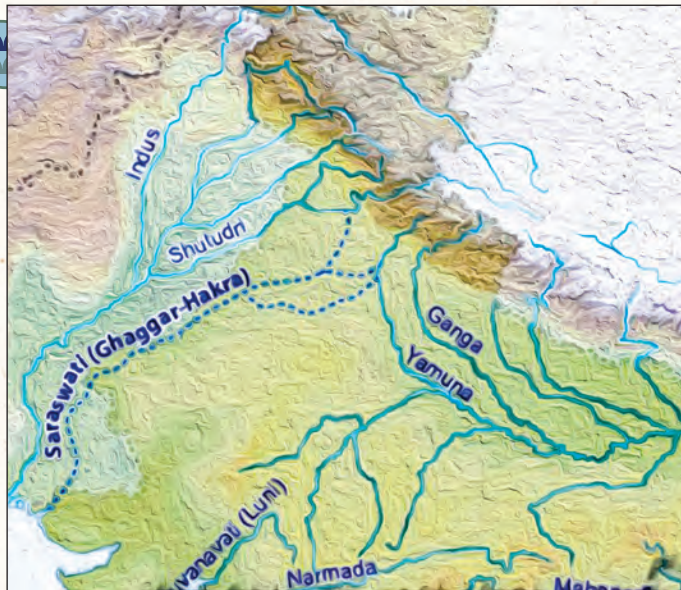
Have Scientists Found the Great Sarasvati River?

THE GHAGGAR RIVER IS A SEASONAL, monsoon-fed waterway in India and Pakistan, originating in the sub-Himalayas. According to a study published in *Scientific Reports*, researchers from the Physical Research Laboratory in Ahmedabad and the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay have analyzed multiple substrate samples taken from between 3–10 meters below the surface of the river. They found it was previously a perennial river, and that some 80,000 to 20,000 years ago it was receiving sediments from the Higher Himalayas. Between 9,000 and 4,500 years ago, it was receiving sediment from the lower Himalayas and was also connected

to incoming waters from the nearby Sutlej River. This means that during the early Harappan civilization, the river was still perennial.

According to the authors of the paper, such unambiguous evidence of the river's perennial past means that it could easily be the remains of the Sarasvati River, oft-mentioned in the *Rig Veda*. This theory has been postulated many times before, but without ample evidence of the continuous, 3-mile wide mighty water flow described in the *Rig*.

The discovery also sheds light on the long-standing mystery as to why so many Harappan settlements can be found all along the modern-day Ghaggar



Land of Seven Rivers: A map of North India and Pakistan detailing the various river systems fed by the Himalayas. The Ghaggar-Hakra is seen here, running parallel to the River Indus.

Hakra stream. Archeological evidence shows that, unlike more arid settlements in the Kachchh regions, these settlements would

not have required rainwater collection which would have been needed if the river had been seasonal as it is today.

BOOKS

Vedas and Upanishads for Kids

ROOPA PAI IS A COMPUTER Engineer from Bengaluru with a penchant for Hindu philosophy and Indian mythology. As an accomplished writer of children's books, she took on the challenge of writing *The Gita for Children*, which would go on to sell over 75,000 copies. After that success, she gave herself the daunting task of creating *The Vedas and Upanishads for Children*, a project which would require her to deeply study the

original texts and Hindu philosophy and then distill it into less than 500 pages—all expressed in language that children can easily assimilate.

The result is another wonderful book which has received lauding reviews, not just by parents, but also by adult readers who have found the book to be a fantastic, and fantastically accessible, introduction to a philosophically complex religion of immense diversity.



For young minds: Roopa with fresh copies of her new book *The Vedas and Upanishads for Children*, published by Hachette India

BRIEFLY...

IN JANUARY 2020, MORE THAN four million pilgrims from all across India and abroad took the holy dip in Gangasagar on the occasion of Makar Sankranti. The festival marks the end of the month with winter solstice, and the start of longer days. Located about 93 miles from Kolkata in the South 24 Parganas district, Sagar Island

hosts Gangasagar Mela every year during Makar Sankranti.

THE SRI LAYAN SITHI VINAYAGAR Temple in Singapore's Chinatown held a reconsecration ceremony in late December 2019. The event is conducted every 12 years to re-energize the 94-year-old temple and the Deity within. The ceremony

also marked the end of seven months of renovation and maintenance works that cost about US\$738,000. Upgrades to facilities included the addition of a wheelchair ramp, repainting of murals, and more cubicles in the restrooms. The renovations have also maximized the space where people can worship. Heavy rain did not dampen the spirit of the devotees, who woke up early to attend the ceremony on Keong Saik Road. About 15,000 people happily stood in the rain to observe the ceremony.

GLOBAL DHARMA
NEWS PROVIDED BY

HINDU PRESS INTERNATIONAL

SUBSCRIBE TO A FREE DAILY
NEWS SUMMARY ABOUT
HINDUISM WORLDWIDE AT
HINDUISMTODAY.COM/HPI



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

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



Founder:

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

Publisher:

Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami

Editor-in-Chief:

Paramacharya Sadasivanatha Palaniswami

Publisher's Aide: Paramacharya Sivanatha Ceyonswami

Deputy Editor: Acharya Kumarnathaswami

Managing Editor: Acharya Arumuganathaswami

Production Manager: Sannyasin Brahmanathaswami

Subscription and Distribution Manager:

Sannyasin Shanmuganathaswami

Advertising Manager: Sannyasin Kaivalyanathaswami

Assistant Editor: Yogi Jayanatha

Correspondents: Choodamani Shivaram, Bengaluru;

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

Paras Ramoutar, Trinidad. Copy Editor: Chamundi

Sabanathan. HPI Staff: Chandra Sankara. Consultants:

Dr. S. P. Sabharathnam Sivachariyar. Photo Contributors:

Thomas L. Kelly, Dinodia Picture Agency, Dev Raj

Agarwal, Dehradun, Arun Mishra, Mumbai. Digital

Team: Andre Garzia, Dharmalingam Siddhan.

Distribution: USA: Ingram Periodicals, New Leaf, EB-

SCO Subscription Services, Ubiquity. Europe: SWETS

Subscription Service. Malaysia: Kovind Enterprises.

Singapore: Sanathana Dharma Publications India: Cen-

tral News Agency Limited, Delhi. Mauritius: CODIP.

Printer: Quad/Graphics, Midland, Michigan.

IN MY OPINION

Ancient Philosophy, Modern Mind

Exploring the important difference between reflective wisdom and today's endless stream of information

BY SHIVALI BHAMMER

NUMEROUS articles have reported the negative effects of using your phone before bed. I envisage

many of you, right now, are reading this on your little screens whilst propped up by your pillows. We all do it. The Cleveland Clinic reported three consequences of being phone hooked: 1) it keeps your mind over stimulated; 2) the blue light disrupts your circadian rhythm; 3) any emotional triggers delay REM sleep. I find that my iPhone is the first thing I grab in the morning, but lately I have been trying to re-engineer my overworked mind to create a more peaceful existence for myself.

This goal has led to my relationship with the *Yoga Vasistha*, an influential Hindu text dated between 11th and 14th century bce. Attributed to Rishi Valmiki, it is a conversation between Sri Rama and Sage Vasistha. I recommend the translation by Swami Venkatesananda. Unlike most religious texts where God is speaking and man is listening, here Sage Vasistha is the guru and Sri Rama is the student. This text is profound in that it denies the need for a personified God and emphasizes that God exists within man as the Supreme Self. Given the book contains around 29,000 verses, I can't efficiently summarize why it has been a game changer for me; however, I will draw upon a few parts I've read recently.

"This Self is the emptiness in space. It is the motion in all things moving. Just as existence exists everywhere and time exists at all times, the Self exists in all bodies with physical and psychological faculties."

The above is taken from a larger paragraph explaining that Self is the heat in fire, the solidity in Earth, the taste in liquid, etc. Just as all these qualities exist in their corresponding substances, so, too, the Self exists as the "Lord in the body." Today many of us are so caught up promoting our personalities within this physical shell that we forget who we are and everything that we are. This



wisdom can bring us peace. The "Lord in the body" is this underlying energy—the conscious spirit—enabling everything to be.

If you are on Facebook at night reading that someone named Amit, whom you met once in Tesco in 1992, now has three kids, how useful is that information? The ideas we fill ourselves with are important because they shape

who we are. Knowledge really is power. But there is a difference between information and knowledge. The former bloats your mind without discrimination; the latter enlightens. This endless information about others is a fruitless juxtaposition which strengthens the little "I" and "me." So I find that before sleep, it is wise to zoom out with the idea that we are the Self, and that the Self is within everything. Maybe then we can relax and even feel inspired!

Another verse states: "Whatever comes, let it come; whatever goes, let it go. Let notions of diverse experiences either arise or set in the body: I am neither in them nor they in me."

So, upon establishing the idea that we are everything, we neutralize it by understanding we are nothing and thus reach an equilibrium of being—as a dancer in perfect balance. There is an incredible calm in separating yourself from the things around you, appreciating that you are beyond. This allows you to levitate just above any given situation in life, which is liberating.

Don't take my word for it—just try it. The more you read about, interpret and reflect on anything—from history, to science, philosophy or fiction—the more your universe expands. A rolling Instagram feed can't do that. I treat each day like a wave: it rises, then collapses back into itself. And as you know, the waves just keep rolling. Good night!

SHIVALI BHAMMER is a devotional singer and a kathak and ballet dancer from London, UK. See: shivali.co.uk



PUBLISHER’S DESK

Integrating Hinduism into Daily Tasks

No need to wait for personal time for spiritual practices. You can do inner yogas, resolve karma and build your character anytime.

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

A FEW YEARS AGO I SAW A PUBLIC TELEVISION program that highlighted the differences between world religions by interviewing leaders of various faiths. It became clear that for many faiths, one day of the week is a holy day, and attendance at a place of worship on that day is the primary religious obligation. We can call this the one-day-a-week, single-activity approach. A Native American Indian leader interviewed about his faith said his tribe has no word for religion, as it is just the way they live—meaning that how they perform tasks throughout the day is influenced by religious principles and practices. This full immersion in faith defines the other end of the spectrum. We can call this the seven-days-a-week, all-activities approach.



I have found that an individual can practice Hinduism following either approach or chart a path anywhere in between. This Publisher’s Desk will offer suggestions for practicing Sanatana Dharma on the seven-day, immersive approach, highlighting a few of the many possibilities for integrating Hinduism into our daily tasks.

As we know, the more we practice, the more spiritual progress we make on the path to higher consciousness, eventual realization and liberation. Clearly, one of the benefits of the immersive approach is that we can incorporate more practices into our week than would otherwise be possible. A comparison to walking will illustrate this idea. A common recommendation for maintaining health is to walk 10,000 steps a day. If this is done as a separate activity before and after work or school, we may find we just don’t have the time for it. To overcome this challenge, health professionals recommend incorporating walking into the work or school day. For example, take the stairs instead of the elevator or escalator, park a half mile from your destination and cover that distance by walking. Which spiritual practices can be incorporated into our work or school day? Let’s first see how karma yoga, bhakti yoga and raja yoga can be folded into daily tasks.

Karma Yoga

Seva, selfless service, or karma yoga is universally encouraged in Hinduism. My guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, comments on its purifying nature: “You purify yourself by being kind to others, being generous until it hurts, being benevolent, being ready to serve at all times until you are strained in serving. Put a smile on the faces of other people. Gain your happiness and your positive states of mind by making other people happy.” It is traditional to perform this activity



at a temple or an ashram. Common seva tasks are helping cook and serve food, cleaning the premises and sewing garlands. In modern life, it can be difficult to find time to fulfill seva in this way, and

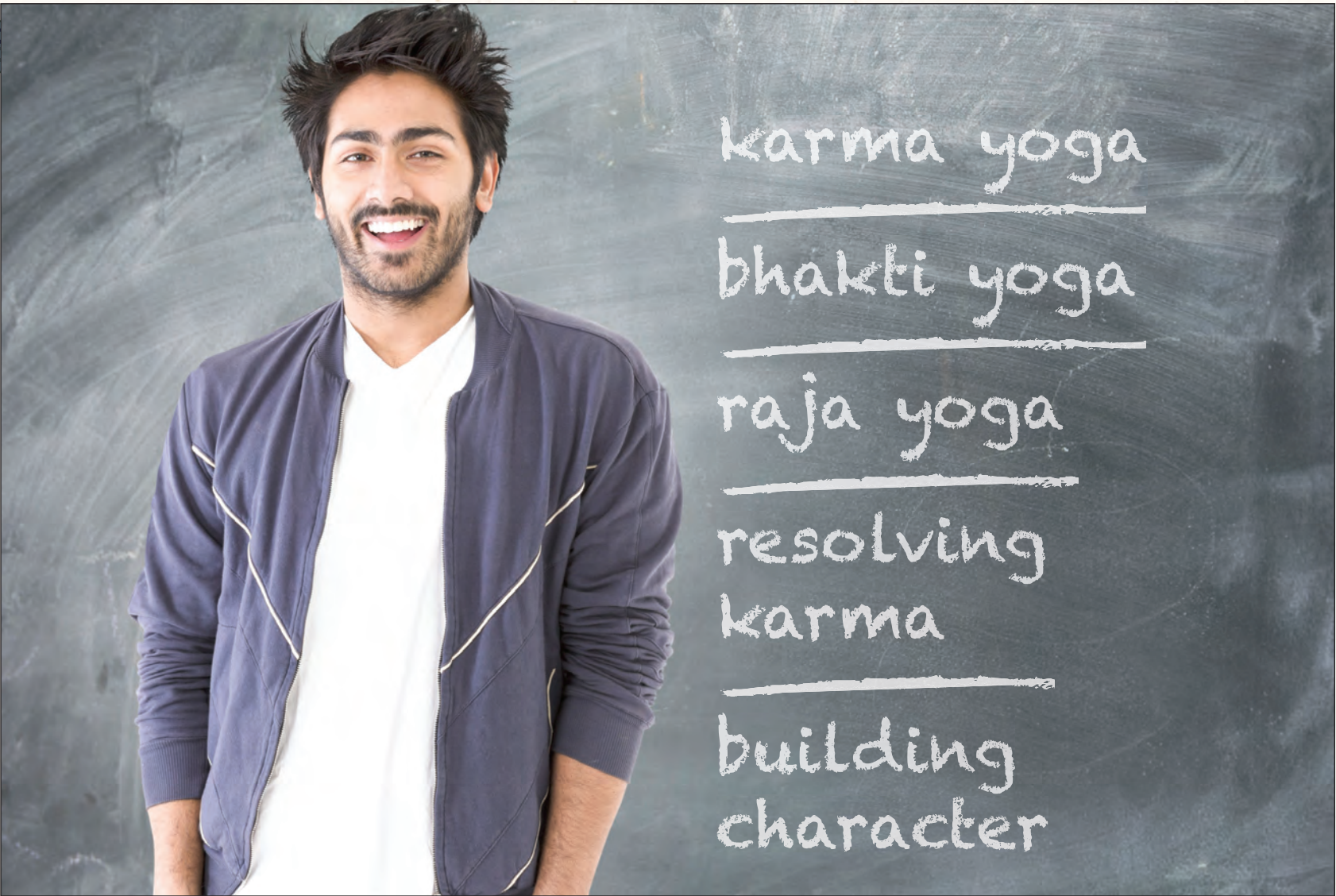
therefore in many instances minimal seva is performed. The integration approach to seva is parallel to our walking example. Rather than regarding it as a separate activity, incorporate it into daily life at your place of employment or classroom. For modern times, I define seva as doing something helpful for another person that you are not expected to do. It is a voluntary action, one that is not required of you as an employer, employee or student. For example, welcome newcomers at work or school and help orient them to their new environment. Or, when the instructor really needs extra help on certain projects, to be sure to volunteer.

Bhakti Yoga

Devotional practice is called bhakti yoga. Gurudeva gives this insightful description: “Through bhakti yoga, the yoga of devotion, the combative mind becomes erased, absorbed into the consciousness of the One Self, the Being permeating all beings.” Bhakti yoga is traditionally performed at a temple or ashram—or in our home shrine—through attending puja, devotional singing, kirtan, etc. However, bhakti yoga can also be integrated into the workplace or classroom and hence allow us to perform more of it. At work you can have a picture of a Deity on your desk. If that is not allowed, then use an abstract symbol that reminds you of the Deity. Mentally offer prayers throughout the day to the picture or symbol. In school, when beginning an important exam, mentally pray to Lord Ganesha to help you do your best. And offer a simple chant before beginning all meals.

Raja Yoga

Concentration and meditation are phases of raja yoga that can be incorporated into daily life. Gurudeva shares this insight: “Concentration is an art that once attained leads naturally into meditation, contemplation and samadhi.” Concentration and meditation are generally performed in a group at a meditation center or individually at a temple or in the home. But they, too, can be integrated into daily activities. The traditional Hindu concept of mindfulness expands the practice of concentration to include restraining the wanderings of the mind in all activities. Mindfulness is directing full attention to what is going on in the present moment without thinking about or being distracted by anything else. For example, while at work, we keep focused fully on each task, not drifting into past memories or future plans. In listening to a lecture at school, we pay careful attention to absorb the message of the speaker. This mindfulness improves the quality of our work or study, and the more mindful we are through the day, the easier it is to



quiet the mind during meditation.

Facing Karmas without Reacting

Next, let’s look at two general practices for making spiritual progress through our activities at work and school. The first is to resolve negative karmas by working through the various situations that naturally arise. One of the spiritual advantages of interacting with many people at work or school is that it gives a chance for our negative karmas to return to us. For example, when we are mistreated by others, we can refrain from retaliating and not even hold hard feelings. If we can accomplish this, we have freed ourselves from that karma—it is resolved. How can we manage such high-minded responses? The first key is to look at the experience as one you were destined to go through, and this person was simply the instrument for its delivery. Had he or she not mistreated you in this way, someone else would have done so in the future.

The second general practice is to work daily on remaining centered amidst emotionally charged situations. As my guru would say, it is easy to be peaceful in a peaceful environment. To make real progress, we must learn to find peace in situations that are not peaceful at all. This practice strengthens our emotional self-control and improves the life of those around us.

Improving Our Character

Our final integrated practice is to work constantly to improve our character, the foundation upon which all spiritual growth rests.

My to-do list: A young entrepreneur takes stock of the ways he can use his time on the job to enhance his spiritual life.

Character is defined as the sum total of mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual. Gurudeva explains its importance: “This is the foundation; without this foundation there is no spiritual growth, no fruit. Trying to realize the highest realizations before laying this foundation would be like taking a lime tree that was cut off from its roots and putting it into a bucket and expecting it to bear fruit. Of course it will not.”

On the spiritual path, the first phase of effort is to build, improve and transform our character. To facilitate this effort, we have published *A Workbook on Character Building* (bit.ly/characterbuild1). It prescribes sixty-four character qualities that we all can strive to improve. The first ten, for example, are being abstemious, accepting, affectionate, appreciative, attentive, available, calm, cautious, chaste and clean. Our activities at work or school provide excellent opportunities to strengthen such qualities, particularly those we are weak on.

Suggested Practice

Each week when you plan out the activities to be accomplished at work or school, also create a to-do list of integrated Hindu practices you will focus on for the coming seven days. This habit will remind you to take advantage of every minute of the day to accelerate your progress on the spiritual path.

LETTERS

Priests Using Cell Phones

During my recent visit to numerous temples in India, I was stunned to see priests talking and texting using cell phones in between performing divine rituals. I was greatly disturbed by the sight. Cell phones do play a pivotal role in day-to-day life, but technology should not invade the sacred realm. Priests who are the facilitators of Divinity and devotion to folks should avoid cell phones and smartphones at

Working for Pakistan Hindus

I appreciated the excellent coverage of Pakistani Hindus (HINDUISM TODAY, OCT/NOV/DEC, 2019). Their story is very important for every Hindu to know about. The Hindu American Foundation (HAF) has done some work for Pakistani Hindus as well. HAF has advocated for the rights of Pakistani Hindus through the publication of reports and policy briefs (hafsite.org/our-work/human-rights-

RXEN2_qf7tg) interviews actual Hindu refugees from Pakistan and highlights their grim but hopeful plight. India has recently passed legislation that will expedite providing many of them with citizenship, and a pathway to integration within India's pluralistic and syncretic society. HINDUISM TODAY does a great service to Hindus worldwide by connecting the diaspora, sharing stories of success and hardship, and suggesting ways for Hindus to help each other such as through HAF's projects and the Hindu Heritage Endowment.

MIHIR MEGHAN, Co-FOUNDER, HAF
FREMONT, CA, USA
MIHIR@HAFSITE.ORG

A Great Source of Inspiration

My husband and I have been reading and following *Hinduism Today* for many years. It is a great source of pride and inspiration for Hindus, as well as a valuable source of knowledge and information and we thank you.

CHANDRAKALA Y. KAMATH
PRINCETON, NJ, USA
GR8SAGE1@AOL.COM

The Real Story of Ghanashyam

The real story about Ghanashyam called as Swaminarayan is superb (HINDUISM TODAY, OCT/NOV/DEC, 2019). I attend their programs occasionally. I enjoy their bhajans and prasad. But I did not know at all how great Swaminarayan was. He was definitely a divine individual, because he walked barefooted across Bharat, Nepal, etc., at a young age and, at that age, he explained the difficult subject of philosophy to many crowds on his way. I learned a lot. Thanks to HINDUISM TODAY and its editors. I will be talking about this when I attend their programs. No wonder Swaminarayan sanstha has thousands of followers. I do not get much from their discourses because they are in Gujarathi language. I mentioned to one of the organizers to have an automatic English translator, if such is available. You have very well dealt with the subject Akshar Purshottam. Every reader will be happy to know about the tremendous intellectual work done by Shri Bhadreshdas Swami. Everyone can learn much from reading it. Thanks.

PRABHAKAR G. JOSHI
LIBERTYVILLE, IL, USA
JOSHIPPS@HOTMAIL.COM

Swaminarayan Vedanta

I want to thank you for this amazing article published by HINDUISM TODAY featuring Swaminarayan Vedanta. I am extremely amazed by the article. (HINDUISM TODAY, OCT/NOV/DEC, 2019) I am a part of the

Swaminarayan sect, also known as BAPS. This article has many amazing key points and interesting justifications about the Swaminarayan Vedanta. I am amazed by the portrait of Shri Swaminarayan Bhagwan and Shri Gunantitanand Swami on the cover. Thank you very much once again.

DHRUVIL PATEL
CHARLOTTE, NC, USA
DHRUVILP2263@GMAIL.COM

God Exists as the X Factor

I thoroughly enjoyed reading Sadguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami's article, "Mom, Dad, I'm an Atheist" (HINDUISM TODAY, JAN/FEB/MAR, 2020). It's true that many young people, especially the college-goers, take pride in announcing to their parents that they are atheists. I suspect there are basically three reasons that contribute to their atheistic mindset: peer pressure, influence of secular-minded college professors, and folks like Bill Maher, an American comedian, political commentator, and television host, who is staunchly anti-religion but is hugely popular among the young folks.

As far as I am concerned, Nature is nothing but manifestation of God. It definitely doesn't have human origin or any known origin. In

algebra, if something is unknown, we assume it to be "X," not non-existent. Likewise, since the creator of nature is unknown, we don't assume that the creator is non-existent; we just give the creator a name, like God, Allah, Bhagwan, or simply, Brahman, an "X Factor." Thus, nature is the circumstantial evidence of the presence of God, so where is any room for atheism? How can there be a clock if there is no clockmaker? Therefore, it's totally illogical to assume that God doesn't exist.

PRADEEP SRIVASTAVA,
ALBANY, CA, USA
PRADEEPSOOL@HOTMAIL.COM

Modi Ad: Religion and Politics

The Prime Minister of the largest democratic country in the world visiting Houston was a landmark event and a proud moment for all Houstonians. The Hindus of Greater Houston celebrated PM Modi's visit as an added honor in relevance to the chosen words of Swami Vivekananda's famous quote, "I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true."

Hindus of Greater Houston was started in 1989 uniting Hindus together with the goal

to bring out the core tenets of the Hindu faith and showcase it to all others. In a span of thirty years, we have grown from three temples to 32-plus temples in the Greater Houston area. The ad placed in HINDUISM TODAY magazine in the Oct/Nov/Dec 2019 issue does not reflect any political campaign, or rhetoric to be misconstrued as one. It was a momentous occasion for us to share with our Hindu community, our joy to celebrate our leader who firmly believes in Sanatan Dharma values. It is a reflection of our love and support for India, our motherland and US, our adopted country.

THARA NARASIMHAN
PRESIDENT, HINDUS OF GREATER HOUSTON, TX
TARA3102@GMAIL.COM

Letters with writer's name, address and daytime phone number should be sent to:
Letters, Hinduism Today
107 Kaholalele Road
Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304 USA
or faxed to: (808) 822-4351
or visit: www.hinduismtoday.com/letters

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



Ubiquitous: A sadhu in Nepal, with a silver crescent moon in his dreadlocks, shows how pervasive cell phone use has become. See our story on Nepal's famed temple, page 18.

least in temples. Temple authorities should restrict cell phones and other electronic gadgets inside the inner sanctum of the temples.

In India, it is good to hear that some temples have banned cell phones inside the temple, as devotees are distracted when folks talk and take selfies inside the temple. I hope all the temples in India and other countries ban the cell phones, and thereby help the devotees to focus only on God.

KUMUDHA VENKATESAN,
ATLANTA, GA, USA
KUMUDHA_1998@YAHOO.COM

issues), and statements and participation in events in the United States Congress (hafsite.org/human-rights-countries/pakistan). HAF has also spearheaded the Medical Health & Seva Initiative in conjunction with Sindhi organizations to provide grant funding for health care services, such as what you covered in Jodhpur (hafsite.org/whats-new/medical-seva-and-health-initiative-serving-pakistani-hindu-refugees). HAF's YouTube video *Victims of History: The Untold Story of Pakistani Hindu Refugees in India* (youtu.be/

Your Employer May Want to Support Hinduism Today, too!

How one family suddenly discovered their company had a *matching gift program*

"PLEASE INFORM EVERYONE YOU KNOW!" Anil and Devajoythi Kondapi urged our staff after discovering that the company Anil works for, Intel, has a *matching gifts* program. "For ten years, we had no idea the company was prepared to give an equal amount each time we donated to HINDUISM TODAY. If only we'd known! We're now doing all we can to spread the word, so others don't miss out as we did."

A matching gift program is one where a company will donate to an eligible nonprofit organization in response to gifts made by employees to that organization. Most often, the gift is matched dollar for dollar, but some companies double, triple, or even quadruple it! "We encourage your readers to check with the company they work for," urges Anil again, "see if they have such a program and take full advantage of it if they do. The practice is more widespread than one might imagine. Sixty-five per cent of Fortune 500 companies offer matching gifts, for example. At doublethedonation.com/matching-gifts/intel-corporation, you can download a list of the 20 companies best known for their matching gifts and get a lot of other useful information. Or you can

search "matching gifts" on your own company's website.

"Many companies such as ours, Intel, state that they will not match gifts made to religious organizations. At first, we were thrown. But looking deeper, we were overjoyed to find that Himalayan Academy was already registered as eligible with the company; therefore so was HINDUISM TODAY, the journal it publishes."

Himalayan Academy was founded in 1957 as an educational institution dedicated to sharing the teachings of Sanatana Dharma as a public service. Your company may already have it registered as a qualified recipient. If not, ask them to do so. You can then donate to Himalayan Academy, have your company do the same, then send a note to books@hindu.org to direct the gifts to HINDUISM TODAY, to other Academy publications or—most helpful of all—to the Hinduism Today Production Fund.

Devajoythi and Anil live in Portland, OR, USA, and have generously supported the magazine since they discovered it ten years ago. "It has reawakened in us the philosophy of our heritage. The world needs a sound



Devajoythi and Anil Kondapi: on pilgrimage at Hinduism Today's international headquarters at Kauai's Hindu Monastery in Hawaii

philosophy, today perhaps more than ever. Support our magazine and have your company join in—they, too, want to give and uplift the world. Don't deny them the opportunity." Donate at heonline.org/donate/pf • Contact us: 1-888-464-1008.

QUOTES & QUIPS

“Let us be humble.”

Shirdi Sai Baba (1838–1918), *Indian guru and saint*

If I were asked to define the Hindu creed, I should simply say: Search after truth through nonviolent means. A man may not believe in God and still call himself a Hindu. Hinduism is a relentless pursuit after truth. Hinduism is the religion of truth. Truth is God. **Mahatma Gandhi** (1883–1944)

So potent is the power acquired through disciplined self-denial that those who attain it may even delay the moment of death. *Tirukural 269*

Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind. **Albert Einstein** (1879–1955)

Be strict and intelligently critical about yourself and your own weakness and follies. But cushion your words and attitudes with Love. Love is the greatest persuasive power we know in life. **Swami Chinmayananda** (1916–1993), *founder of Chinmaya Mission*

Asceticism doesn't lie in mere words; He is an ascetic who treats everyone alike. Asceticism doesn't lie in visiting burial places; it lies not in wandering about nor in bathing at places of pilgrimage. Asceticism is to remain pure amidst impurities. **Guru Nanak** (1469–1539), *founder of Sikhism*

He who tells the truth is never wrong. *Swahili Proverb*

The rishis wrote in one sentence profundities that commentating scholars busy themselves over for generations. Endless literary controversy is for sluggish minds. What more quickly liberating thought than “God is” – nay, “God”? **Swami Sri Yukteswar Giri** (1855–1936)

Some people see the glass half full. Others see it half empty. I see a glass that's twice as big as it needs to be. **George Carlin** (1937–2008), *American stand-up comedian*

You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation. **Plato** (428–347 bce), *Greek philosopher*

The great secret of true success, of true happiness, is this: the man or woman who asks for no return, the perfectly unselfish person, is the most successful. **Swami Vivekananda** (1863–1902)

The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter. 'Tis the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning. **Mark Twain** (1835–1910), *American writer*

Let no man pull you so low as to hate him. **Martin Luther King Jr.**

Those who accomplish great things pay attention to little ones. *Malian Proverb*

All birds find shelter during a rain. But the eagle avoids rain by flying

DID YOU KNOW?

The Wonders of Indian Cork

THE SHOLA PLANT HAS BEEN IN USE FOR CRAFTING IN BENGAL FOR thousands of years. Also known as Indian cork or *Aeschynomene aspera*, the shola plant has a soft, white core in its stem which is used for carving and is considered auspicious and pure. It is used during religious and social functions, notably for making the headdresses worn at weddings in Bengal. Being soft and lightweight, it is often used for making the attire, ornaments and other decorations for statues, sometimes being used to make large carvings of immense detail and beauty. The carvings resemble ivory but are cruelty-free, natural and biodegradable. They can, for example, be used for festivals where the Deity is submerged, without worry about polluting waterways. However, like many traditional handicrafts, shola carving is decreasing, partially due to disinterest and as well as a decline of wetlands in rural areas, reducing the plant's propagation to a large extent.

Exquisite craftsmanship: A sculpture made entirely of shola pith, displayed at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya Museum in Mumbai, India



MEL MILLER

above the clouds. **Abdul Kalam**, (1931–2015) *11th President of India*

We join spokes together in a wheel, but it is the center hole that makes the wagon move. We shape clay into a pot, but it is the emptiness inside that holds whatever we want. We hammer wood for a house, but it is the inner space that makes it livable. We work with being, but non-being is what we use. **Loa Tzu** (4th or 6th century bce), *author of the Tao Te Ching*

Great calm, generous detachment, selfless love, disinterested effort: these are what make for success in life. If you can find peace in yourself and can spread comfort around you, you will be happier than an empress. **Rabindranath Tagore** (1861–1941)

We are fools whether we dance or not, so we might as well dance. *Japanese Proverb*

Here is a rule to remember in future, when anything tempts you to feel bitter: not “This is misfortune,” but “To bear this worthily

is good fortune.” **Marcus Aurelius** (121–180), *Roman emperor and Stoic philosopher*

There are three kinds of devotees. The inferior devotee says, “God is out there” and thinks God is different from His creation. The mediocre devotee says, “God is *antaryami*, the inner guide who dwells in everyone's heart;” thus the mediocre devotee sees God [only] within. But the superior devotee sees that God alone is everything, for He has become the twenty-four cosmic tattvas. That devotee finds that everything, above and below, is filled with God. **Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa** (1836–1886)

Practice, not belief, is what causes spiritual progress. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, *publisher of Hinduism Today*



DAVE COVERLY

How can it remain so unknown? Simplicity is the answer. The Self is so simple, so uncomplicated, that the ramified external mind overlooks it. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), *founder of Hinduism Today*

BASICS

The Lord of Dance

NATARAJA, “KING OF DANCE,” IS A DEPICTION of God as the Cosmic Dancer. Perhaps Hinduism's richest and most eloquent symbol, Nataraja represents the Primal Soul and the power, energy and life of all that exists. This is God's intricate state of Being in Manifestation. The dance is the dance of the entire cosmos. Nataraja is chosen to depict the Divine because, in dance, that which is created is inseparable from its creator, just as the universe and soul cannot be separated from God. Dance and dancer are one. Nataraja is also stillness and motion wrought together. The stillness speaks of the peace and poise that lies deep within us all. The intense motion, depicted by His hair flying wildly in all directions, is an intimation of the fury and ferocity, the violent vigor, which fills this universe wherein we dwell. The implication of these opposites is that God contains and allows them both, that there is divine purpose at work in our life, whether we find ourselves engaged in its beauty or its “madness.” Nataraja's Dance, or all that happens, is

composed of an ever-flowing combination of five foundational actions: 1) creation, or emanation, represented by His upper right hand and the drum, from which the Primal Sound issues forth, promulgating the rhythms and cycles of creation; 2) preservation, represented by His lower right hand in a gesture of blessing, *abhaya* mudra, saying “fear not;” 3) destruction, dissolution or absorption, represented by the fire in His upper left hand; 4) obscuring grace, the power which hides the truth, thereby permitting experience, growth and eventual fulfillment of destiny, represented by His right foot upon the prostrate figure *Apasmarapurusha*—the principle of ignorance, or ego; 5) revealing grace—which grants knowledge and severs the soul's bonds—represented by Siva's raised left foot, and by His lower left hand, held in *gajahasta* (“elephant trunk”) mudra, inviting approach. These five cosmic activities are sometimes personalized respectively as Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Maheshvara and Sadasiva—or as Sadyojata (creation), Vamadeva (preservation), Aghora (reabsorption), Tatpurusha (obscuration) and Ishana (revealing grace).

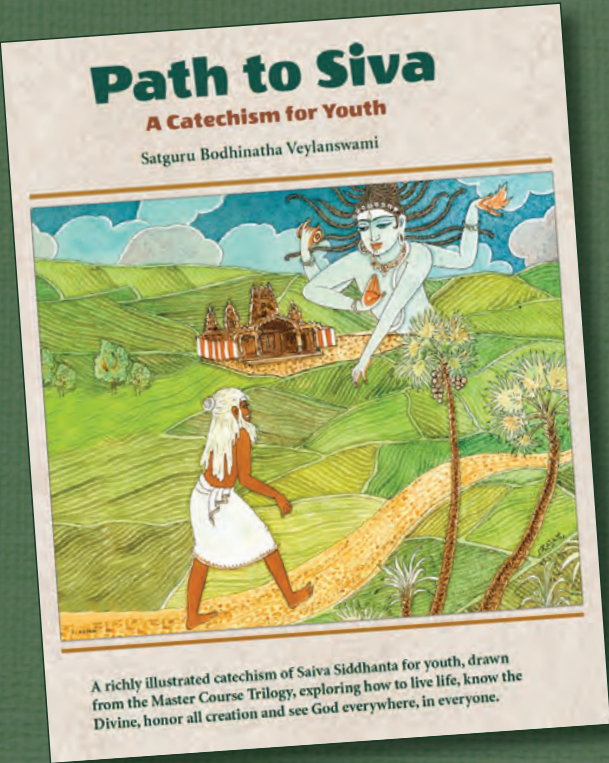
The ring of fire in which Nataraja dances is the hall of consciousness, *chitsabha*; in



WIKICOMMONS

A dancing universe: The statue of Lord Nataraja at the CERN particle accelerator in Geneva reminds physicists of the art and beauty interwoven in their work.

other words, the light-filled heart of man, the central chamber of the manifest cosmos. God dances the universe into and out of existence, veiling Ultimate Reality for most, unveiling it for devotees who draw near and recognize Ultimate Reality in the chamber of their own inner being.



Path to Siva

A CATECHISM FOR YOUTH

Sixty-eight lessons based on Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami’s Master Course Trilogy for passing our tradition on to the next generation, and the next...

Path to siva presents all of the important teachings of the Saivite religion. It is written with youth in mind, but is also ideal for anyone wanting a condensed version of Gurudeva’s 3,000-page Master Course. Each illustrated lesson is short—just one or two pages—but packed with information. Here our youth can find answers to questions about God, Lord Ganesha, Lord Murugan and the devas—how they can help us in our lives and how to contact them through temple worship and home puja. You will find clear explanations of karma, dharma and reincarnation, and how to use japa, meditation and affirmations to make your life better. You will learn the best ways to live in order to achieve your most important goals. The lessons include insights on home life, getting along with others, religious tolerance, vegetarianism and caring for the environment. They cover challenging philosophical areas, like death and dying, sin and evil. These short essays will provide a clear understanding of Hindu practices, beliefs and philosophy and give you a deep comprehension of life that few people have. The book was designed as a tool for teachers and for parents with youth, a focus text for exploring Hinduism together. Discussing one lesson a week can keep the family conversation going for more than a year.

1 Who Am I and Where Did I Come from?



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

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

GURUDEVA: When we realize that we have come from Siva, the way back to Siva is clearly defined. That is half the battle, to realize we came from Siva, live in Siva and are returning to Siva. Knowing only this much makes the path clear and impels us to return to Him, to our Source, to our Self.

24 What's the Value of Spiritual Friends?



Five friends take a selfie to share online. Friends are important and worth cultivating. They encourage our ideals and goals in life. They provide fun & keep us safe from the world's negative forces.

two depend on the purity of a man's companions." Following our religious path is made easier when we are part of a satsang group with shared values and goals. Such companionship helps keep our sadhana strong, especially during difficult times in life. As Gurudeva often said, "The group helps the individual and the individual helps the group."

GURUDEVA: Make friends with those who are on the path. Be with fine, positive people. Don't be with negative, complaining people who will help build good character and set positive patterns for the future. The *Tirukural* tells us, "Purity of mind and purity of conduct, these

Hardcover, ISBN 978-1-934145-72-2, \$25.00
Also in popular e-book formats
Available at:
www.minimela.com
himalayanacademy.com/view/path-to-siva

FROM THE UPANISHADS

Lord Yama Illustrates the Absolute

The God of Death reveals the mysteries of the one true Self in all.

The following is a translation of the Katha Upanishad from The Principal Upanishads by S. Radhakrishnan. This Upanishad is found within the Yajurveda and consists of two chapters, each divided into three sections. It consists mainly of the story of young Nachiketa and his philosophical conversations with Lord Yama, God of Death. The following verses, 4 to 18, are drawn from section three of chapter two, and have been lightly edited for clarity.

-
- 4** Lord Yama: "If one is able to perceive Him before the body falls away, one would be freed from suffering. If not, he becomes fit for another birth in the created worlds."
- 5** "As in a mirror, so It is seen in the soul; as in a dream, so It is seen in the world of the ancestors; It is seen in the world of the gandharvas as an object is seen in water; in the world of Brahma It is seen as shade and light.
- 6** "Knowing the separate nature of the senses, which spring from the subtle elements, and knowing also that their rising and setting are separate, the wise man does not grieve.
- 7** "Beyond the senses is the mind; above the mind is its essence; beyond that essence is the great Self; beyond the great Self is the unmanifest.
- 8** "Beyond the unmanifest is the One—all-pervading and without any blemish whatsoever.—Whom by knowing, a man is liberated and gains eternity.
- 9** "Not within the field of vision stands this form. No one soever sees Him with the eye. By heart, by thought, by mind apprehended, they who know Him become immortal.
- 10** "When the five senses and their knowledge, together with the mind, cease their activities, and when the intellect itself does not stir, that, they say, is the highest state.
- 11** "This, they consider to be yoga, the steady control of the senses. Then one becomes undistracted, for yoga comes and goes, due to the mind's fluctuation.
- 12** "Not by speech, not by mind, not by sight can He be apprehended. How can He be comprehended except by him who says, 'He is.'
- 13** "He should be apprehended simply as existence, but also in His real nature (non-existence). When He is apprehended as existence, His real nature becomes clear.
- 14** "When all desires that dwell within the human heart are cast away, then a mortal becomes immortal; and even here he attains to Brahman.



The mystery that follows death: Young Nachiketa questions Lord Yama about the afterlife and the Supreme Self

-
- 15** When all the knots that fetter the heart are cut asunder, then a mortal becomes immortal. Thus far is the teaching.
- 16** "A hundred and one are the pathways of the heart; one of them leads up to the crown of the head. Going upward through that, one becomes immortal. The others serve for going in a variety of other directions.
- 17** "Abiding always in the heart is the thumb-sized, inner self. Him one should draw out with firmness from the body, as the wind from a reed. Him one should know as the pure, the immortal."
- 18** Then Nachiketa, having gained this knowledge, declared by Death and the whole law of yoga, attained Brahman and became freed from passion and death. And so may any other who knows this knowledge of the Self.

SARVAPELLI RADHAKRISHNAN was an Indian philosopher and statesman, India's first Vice President (1952–1962) and second President (1962–1967).

Nepal's Revered Pashupatinath Temple

Pashupatinath, by far Nepal's most popular temple, dates back to at least the 1st century ce and has been expanded and rebuilt by various dynasties of kings ever since

Temple environs: Our photographer captured this panoramic shot from a helicopter passing by the temple area (the main airport is just a short distance to the right) showing the Bagmati river to the right and Pashupatinath Temple just left and up from the photo's center. The five spires in the center foreground are the Pancha Deval, an adjacent Siva temple complex.

A common story about the origins of Pashupatinath is that it was once a forest in which Lord Siva roamed as a deer. Later a Siva Lingam was discovered in the area and eventually a temple was built around it. The name, Pashupatinath, is sometimes translated as "Lord of Beasts." Dr. S. Sabharatanam of Chennai offers a more precise exegesis: "Pashu does not mean here cattle or beasts, but 'the one who is fettered,' ie, all embodied beings. Though the term Pati is generally translated as the Lord, the precise meaning is 'the One who protects.' Natha means 'one who leads,' and Pashupatinath, therefore, 'The ultimate Protector and the Leader' [of those who are fettered]." For our report, we enlisted the skills of reporter Bhadra Sharma and the expertise of Dr. Govinda Tandon to recount the marvelous story of this great temple.

BY BHADRA SHARMA, NEPAL

DURING THE SECOND WEEK OF DECEMBER 2019, while visiting Pashupatinath Temple for this report, I met Bishnu Prasad Koirala, 76. Dressed in the traditional Nepali *daura suruwal*, he was leading a group of 30 members of a dairy cooperative from his village of Itahari in the Sunsari District of eastern Nepal. A fervent devotee of Lord Siva with three daughters living in Kathmandu, he's a regular visitor here. "Worshipping Siva, the Supreme God, gives me an inner satisfaction and happiness. A Kathmandu visit remains incomplete without visiting this holy shrine," said



UNKNOWN

Koirala. It was at his suggestion that his village's dairy cooperative decided to visit: "When people from across the globe visit Pashupatinath Temple," he asked them, "why shouldn't we come here in this holy place and worship God Siva?"

The continuous sonorous tolling of large brass bells, singing of songs praising Lord Siva and chirping of birds makes everyone feel calm. Bands of monkeys pester devotees by snatching food from their hands. Seeing the sadhus living around the temple premises, who have abandoned personal temptations of wealth and luxury—which many others see as essential standards of modern life—one feels the simplicity possible for a human being.

Prachi Karki, just 11, had come from

Bhaktapur, just outside Kathmandu, with her family. "Tomorrow is my exam. I'm here to visit my God and pray so that I may perform better," she said.

The main attractions in addition to the temple itself are Guheshwori, Kirateshwar, 15 Shivalayas, Sati Gate, Kailash, Sleshmantak Forest, and the ashrams of Swami Prapanacharya and Yogi Naraharinath. There are Hindu shrines throughout the area, as well as Jain, Sikh and Buddhist places of worship. It is a huge religious complex with great spiritual, historic and archeological importance. All day, every day, the temple is crowded with worshipers.

"There is no such temple in my country. I found it an amazing place," Rais Mandan, a youth from Gwalior, India, said while queuing in front of the huge statue of Nandi the bull placed just outside the main temple. For Mandan and his four friends, it took three days to get here from Gwalior. They came by chartered bus with several groups of Indians from Rajasthan, Banaras, Gujarat and Gwalior. "I have found it very peaceful and fantastic," Rais said, "I prayed with Lord Siva for welfare and happiness in my life and the

.....
Teej festival: (below) On this day the temple is only open to women, who come dressed in red or blue saris to pray to Goddess Parvati for the well-being of their husbands and families (they are lined up to the left along the river ghats and up the stairs to the temple entrance)

Women Celebrate the Teej Festival at Pashupatinath



THOMAS L. K.

HISTORY

The Temple through Time

This great center of Saivism has been revered and supported by Nepal's kings for 2,000 years

BY DR. GOVINDA TANDON

Dr. Govinda Tandon did his PhD at Tribhuvan University, Nepal, on the topic "Cultural Studies of Pashupati Area." He is a well-known scholar of religion, an animal rights activist, founder of Manav Sewa Ashram to help the needy and former member-secretary of Pashupati Area Development Trust (PADT). He writes here about the religious history of the temple and its Deity.

FROM ANCIENT TIMES, PASHUPATINATH HAS BEEN REVERED as a pious land for self-awareness and liberation and as a place of worship for the devotees to join hands and show respect to the Almighty. Devotees perform sacrificial rites and ecstatic rituals, chant for peace of mind and tranquility and release their hands for service of the poor. Located in the ancient city of Deopatan, three miles northeast of Nepal's capital, Kathmandu, the temple and immediate area of Pashupati Kshetra is important not only for all Hindus but for all human beings of the world, historically and culturally. In 1979, Pashupati Kshetra was placed on the UNESCO World Heritage List along with six other places in the Kathmandu Valley, shortly after the program was founded. It has enjoyed royal support throughout Nepal's long history by the ruling dynasties—Gopal, Kirat, Lichhavi, Malla and Shah. The God of all Gods, Mahadev Shri Pashupatinath, and His temple, is a matter of great pride for Nepal and the Nepalese people.

Pashupati as a name of Siva appears in several places in the *Vedas*, most significantly in the eighth part of the famed Sri Rudram chant of the *Shukla Yajur Veda*. Historically, the Pashupata sect is one of the earliest known streams of Saivism, arising in the 2nd century bce under Lakulisa and with Somnatha (Gujarat) as one of its principal centers. Its influence remains across India and Nepal, especially in the form of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy.

The beautiful mandap style of Pashupatinath Temple is often referred to by Westerners as pagoda style. The floor area is open on all sides, with a double roof above it. In the adjoining area, known as Pashupati Kshetra, there are charming places of worship and monasteries related to multiple religions: Buddhism has Dandochaitya, Chavihar, Kutuvahal and Majjuvahal; Sikhism has Nanakmath and Nirmala Akhada. There are even old signs of the presence of Jainism. More recently, there are the ruins of a 19th-century monastery of the Josamani sect, who were active in social reform. The temple is revered by and open to all who follow the Vedic, Buddhist, Jain or Sikh traditions.

In History

The *Gopalaraj Vamsavali*, the earliest chronology found in Nepal, mentions that the temple of Pashupatinath was established by a king named



2008. Over the centuries, the ruling dynasties regarded Pashupatinath as the royal temple and saw to its maintenance and occasional renovation. In 1986, the Pashupati Area Development Trust was formed with King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah as the first chief patron. It is this trust which now administers the temple, with the Prime Minister as Chief Patron and the Minister of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation as the Chairman.

Priesthood and Worship

Unlike other Hindu temples, the priesthood of Pashupatinath is not hereditary. The five main priests are Trilinga Bhatt brahmins of the Krishna Yajur Veda tradition from Karnataka, Andhra or Maharashtra in South India. They are followers of Dakshinamnaya Sringeri Sharada Peetham, the first of the monasteries to be founded by Adi Shankara in the 7th century. They must be virtuous, born vegetarians, fully trained in Vedic recitation, initiated in Pashupata Yoga and expert in *Saiva Agama*. The priestly tradition of Pashupatinath Temple has played a major role in furthering the harmonious relationship between Nepal and India for many centuries.

In addition to these five South Indian brahmins there are Nepalese-born Bhandari helpers within the precincts of Pashupati Kshetra, as well as a large number of other local priests who collectively assist with the temple worship and functioning.

The temple's main object of worship is a five-faced Siva Lingam. Four face the cardinal directions: Tatpurusha to the east; Aghora to the south, Sadyojata to the west and Vamadeva to the north. Each face has two hands, with a rudraksha mala in the right and a kaman-dalu water vessel in the left. Ishana, the fifth face, is formless and faces upward. This is the dominant face and the first to be worshipped as the chief part of the Siva Lingam. This formless face is considered the establishment of all forms, the Lord of All Beings, the Divine Master of the Universe, the Supreme Being.



Five-Faced Lingam: This 19th century metal Lingam cover from Nepal (now in a German museum) is in the same style as the Lingam of Pashupatinath Temple

society.”

Thousands of pilgrims come to the temple by road from all areas of Nepal—Kakadbhitta, Biratnagar, Birgunj, Bhairahawa, Nepalgunj, etc. Foreign devotees come from India, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, USA, UK, South Africa, Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, France, etc. More than ten thousand are there on any given day.

Entry into Pashupatinath Temple itself is only allowed for followers of Hinduism, defined to include Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism—all of which have places of worship within the precincts. Yagya Raj Ghimire, a brahmin, stated, “Only traditional Hindus are allowed to come inside the main temple premises, not Christians, not Muslims. They can just come and visit outside the temple.” Hindus performing the death rituals are also not to enter the temple.

Trust officials are stationed at the various entry points to the main temple (adjacent areas are open to all for a fee) and can check details such as identity cards, passport, etc., as well as general appearance and dress to make a determination. Only suspicious men are so grilled. “White” people as a category are not allowed, even though some may be in fact be Hindus. With the high volume of Western tourists in Kathmandu, it would be quite a challenge for officials to sort out the few actual Hindus, given that there is no unified system to verify Hindu religious affiliation. Those Hindus so excluded understand the need to control tourists and are content to worship outside the main temple.

For a fee of \$8.75, non-Hindus can visit Deer Park, the burning ghats and various monuments constructed around the main temple. The 28 guides of the Pashupati Tour



THOMAS L KELLY



heritage, living with their wife (but not having more than one), physically healthy and having no visible scars on their body. The PADT’s priest selection committee makes their recommendations for one main priest and three assistants. Nepal’s prime minister, the trust’s patron, makes the actual appointment—a duty previously carried out by the king.

An attempt was made to end this tradition in 2008 after the country was declared a secular state and the former Maoists rebels came to power. However Nepal’s Supreme Court rejected the government’s move, and strong protests from the Hindu community—including from the Nepalese priests serving at the temple—forced the government to back down.

The priests are extremely well paid: the head priest receives us\$70,000 annually and the three assistants get between \$35,000 and \$43,500 each. To put this in perspective, Nepal’s president, their highest paid government official, receives \$15,700 a year. The trust officials justify the handsome salary by pointing out that the priests have to give up their personal life and focus fully on promoting the religious and historical significance of the temple. The head priest is housed inside the main temple premises, while the other

.....
Then and now: (below, left) “Temple of Mahadeo at Pasupati,” 1853 watercolor of the west-facing side by Henry Ambrose Oldfield, a British surgeon. (below right) The temple today with prominent changes to the roof structure. Pilgrims enter past the Nandi bull at right, and exit through the gate at the left

The Great Temple



BRITISH MUSEUM



THOMAS L KELLY

Mapping the Grounds of Pashupatinath



GOOGLE EARTH

1. **Mahasnanaghar:** Originally a place for storing puja materials, now being repurposed as the Pashupati Museum.
2. **Sano Sadavarta Sattal:** A former food storage area, now the residence of the priest of Vasuki Temple.
3. **Rudragaeswor Sthana:** Temple for the Rudragaeswor Shivalinga.
4. **Badrinarasimha Guthighara:** Previously a public rest house built by Badrinarasimha Rana, now an office for the Badrinarasimha Trust.
5. **Shankaracharya Matha:** A monastery built in the name of Adi Shankaracharya.
6. **Kulananda Jha’s Sattal:** A public rest house built by Kulananda Jha, offices of the Pashupati Area Development Trust.
7. **Gopur:** A large gate and building at the western entrance to the main temple.
8. **Sri Pashupatinath Temple**
9. **Pashupatighata Sewa:** A hospice center.
10. **Pandra Shivalaya:** Fifteen small Siva temples along the river’s edge.
11. **Vajraghar Garden**
12. **Vajraghara Sattal:** A former public rest house, presently unused.
13. **Aryaghata:** The traditional sacred crematory.
14. **Bhandarighara:** A facility for Nepal’s Bhandari community.
15. **Pancha Deval:** “Five Temples” to five forms of Siva; the surrounding building is an old-folks’ home.
16. **Amarkanteswor/Sureshkanteswor Siva Temple**
17. **Laxminarayan/Ram Temple**
18. **Gaibaccha Sewasthala:** Cow shelter.
19. **Souvenir Shopping Arcade**
20. **Samrajyeswor/Samrajyeswari Temple:** Temple built by Samrajyeswari Shah.
21. **Ved Vidyashram’s Hostel**
22. **Vedvidyashram**
23. **Bankali Dev Uddhyan:** Garden named after the Bankali forest.
24. **New Souvenir Shopping Arcade**
25. **Hamsamandap:** A platform named for Hamsa.
26. **Laliteswor/Kriyaputrighar:** Place of mourning.
27. **Madhavraj Sumargi Bhawan:** Event place.
28. **Electric Crematorium**
29. **Bankali/Kripalu Garden**
30. **Kailash Hill**

priests live in the adjacent area. The present priests—all from Karnataka—are Ganesh Bhatta, the chief priest, from Udupi, with assistant priests Ramkaranta Bhatta from Mangalore, Girish Bhatta from Sirsi and Narayan Bhatta from Bhatkal. Sri Raghavendra Bhatta from Mangalore is priest of the Vasuki Temple. They are required to shave their heads and go about barefoot in the temple.

One devotee, Om Sharan, told HINDUISM TODAY, “We should thank the government of India for sending such devoted Hindu priests. They neither go out of the temple nor eat food given by outsiders.”

In part because of this tradition of Bhatt priests, Pashupatinath is a revered pilgrimage destination for Hindus across India. Whether it be India's prime minister or president, or Bollywood celebrities, none



Worshippers: (counter-clockwise from above) One of the Bhatt priests is escorted by security through the temple area; a worshiper descends a staircase from the Ram temple area lined by Siva Lingams, offering water at each; students from New Zealand visit Pashupatinath; pilgrims Ramita Chetra and Aashma Karki; interior view of the temple area; view up the Bhagmati River to the north—the main temple top is just visible at upper left, the white shrines to the right are all to Siva, with the ghats in front used for rituals to honor one's ancestors

who come to Nepal return without visiting the temple. The present PM, Narendra Modi, visited in 2014, donating a large amount of sandalwood and announcing a fund to construct a dharmasala to accommodate the increasing number of pilgrims.

The four priests perform the ritual worship every day. The temple doors are opened at 4am; all four appear at the main temple around 8am. The first assistant priest leads the worship of the south face, Aghora; the second the east, Tatpurusha; the third the north, Vamadeva. The chief priest is responsible for the worship of the western

face, Sadhyojata, and the upward face, Ishana. Worship ends with gupta puja around 2pm and resumes again at 5pm, with the temple closing after 7:00 pm.

Native Nepalese priests, called Bhandaris assist the four Bhatt priests, especially in dealing with devotees. These days there are 88 Bhandaris assigned to assist. Three of these, on a rotational basis, are allowed to go to the western face of the temple to directly assist the Bhatt priests. In addition to the Bhandaris, another 1,000 Nepalese priests are employed by the temple for the many shrines and activities of the huge area.

Apart from daily rituals, devotees can offer special worship between 9:30 and 11:15 am on most days by donating money ranging from \$10 to much more, as per their financial means. According to Prem Hari Dhugana, chief of the PADT's cultural division: “Special worship for pilgrims as per their wishes is one source of income to run the temple administration. The only difference between ritual and special worship is that the special worshiper gets easy access to the temple, milk is offered to the Sivalinga and the worship is conducted by the main priest.”

The Burning Ghats

Walking by the Bhashmeshwor Ghats along the Bhagmati River, immediately adjacent to the temple entryway, is a striking part of the experience of Pashupatinath Temple. On any given day there may be a half-dozen



Worshippers and Tourists at the Sacred Temple

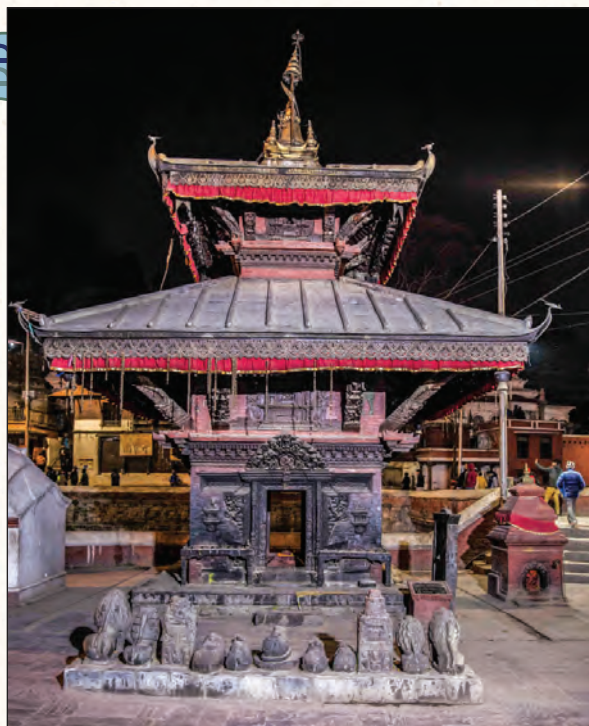


flaming cremation pyres, each attended by wailing relatives. For the temple devotees, this can be a stark reminder of the ephemeral nature of our physical existence and a motivation for more intense worship and communion with the enshrined God Siva. It is the common belief here that departed souls find peace upon being cremated here. The fires burn day and night—an average of 18 in a 24-hour period.

There are hospices adjacent to the temple—one just to the right of the entry stairs—where the dying are brought by relatives for their last rites. A traditional physician known as Ghatevaidya attends to and comforts the dying. He or the relatives will constantly recite the name of God in the dying person's ear to ease their transition from this world to the next.

The PADT trust manages the funeral rituals within the temple precincts. A few years ago they built an electric crematorium a short distance downstream from the temple entrance and Bhashmeshwor ghats. But many still want to cremate their dead in the traditional manner, with firewood at the riverside ghats.

Of the total of twelve ghats, the two at



Aryaghat are the crematoria for VIPs. "In the past, only members of the royal family and the head of the government or ministers used to get cremated with state honors at the Aryaghat," stated Saroj Ghimire, an official of the ghat Service Center. "The rest of the people cremate at Bhashmeshwor ghats." Today one of the two ghats at Aryaghat is open

for the use of the general public, with the other still reserved for VIPs. On most days, both are unused.

To cremate at Bhashmeshwor ghats, one pays a fee of \$1055; for Aryaghat, the fee is \$44. In addition, there is a \$1.76 registration charge. After getting their registration receipt, the family can obtain the required timber from the temple for free. There are 30 workers who handle the cremations. They are paid between five and ten dollars, or more by wealthy families. Villagers and some poor people will perform the cremation work entirely by themselves.

Bodies are first brought to Brahmanal, a stone bed on the river just

Shrines and devotees: (counter-clockwise from above left) the Kali temple with adjacent Vatasala and Bhairab shrines; Kirant community pilgrims and their priests do puja at Kirateshwor; main Siva Lingam in the walled compound area of Kirateshwor, possibly the oldest object of worship in the area; the main entrance to the temple showing bronze Nandi facing Siva; ecstatic dancing during the women's festival called Teej

below the temple entrance, where the huge quantity of milk offered at the temple's main Siva Lingam shrine flows into the Bagmati River. They are then carried to a platform for the cremation, which will take several hours. Once the body is consumed, the pyre is pushed into the river and washed away.

The Bagmati, unfortunately, is getting polluted, despite several measures implemented to keep it clean. This is especially a problem at low flow, in the two months prior to monsoon season. The ever-increasing number of pilgrims and generally unmanaged development of Kathmandu are blamed.

To revive the lost glory of the Bagmati River, the PADT is working on two projects in collaboration with Asian Development Bank. One would implement rainwater harvesting to augment the temple's internal water supply. Another is a pipeline to divert water from the river upstream at Sundarimal, a forested area nine miles north of Kathmandu, and reintroduce it just above the temple—bypassing all the in-between users.

Efforts to purify the river by regulating pollutants are also underway. A major government project is the Guheshwori Wastewater Treatment Plant not far upstream from the temple, which can treat eight million gallons of water a day and substantially improve the river's water quality. It is expected

to come fully online this year.

Sadhus

Nine categories of sadhus are said to frequent Pashupatinath: Natha, Udasi, Bairagi, Birmal, Aghori, Vaishnava, Kapalik, Josmani and Brahmachari. All perform their spiritual practices, sadhanas, within their respective places, popularly known as *akharas*, within the complex. Lifestyle and sadhanas of sadhus differ from one group to the next, although the ultimate goal of all is God Realization.

Our reporter met a few of these sadhus, starting with the Nathas, who are identifiable by their pierced ears with very large earrings. Here they number just ten and live up on a nearby hill, stay clean and neat and don't eat meat. "Our day starts with two assigned people playing the nagara flat drum to mark the official beginning of our sadhana and ends with the arati to Gorakhnath [their founding guru] at 5pm," explained Yogi Omnath. "Burning the dhuni fire, teaching people and worship are our main sadhanas."

There are three Aghori sadhus. Unlike the Nathas, they prefer to live close to the burning ghats, don't care if the place is dirty and eat whatever they get—usually from a bowl made of a human skull. They cover their bodies with ash from the burning ghats,

wear black clothes, often keep a dog with them and partake of marijuana and alcohol. They live a different kind of life, one which seems strange to others.

Vaishnava sadhus wake at an early hour, kindle a fire, bathe and smear ashes on their bodies, then chant Siva mantras. "We Vaishnavas just eat plain rice and lentils and take no alcohol and no meat," said Radha Baba, who was sitting cross-legged and holding a rope-made snake in his hand beside the Ram Temple. This temple is very popular with Vaishnava sadhus; in fact, they are a majority of sadhus here.

Maha Shivaratri

Many of Nepal's 50 official festivals are observed at Pashupatinath Temple or the nearby area, but Maha Shivaratri, the 13th night/14th day of Phalgun (February/March), is the most famous by far, with a reported million-plus devotees in attendance each year. Most are from Nepal, with large numbers from India and some from Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and other parts of Asia, as well as Europe and America.

Hundreds of sadhus from India and elsewhere arrive at the temple three days in advance to join the many Nepali sadhus for celebrating the festival. Their presence enhances the festival for all the devotees, as

Temple Festivities



they sit around their dhuni fires, sing Siva bhajan, dance throughout the night and offer blessings to all who approach them.

Wealthy devotees of Lord Shiva arrange for free food, fruits and water. The temple provides firewood to keep devotees and sadhus warm. There are emergency medical facilities and a strong security presence by the Nepalese army and police forces.

"If you visit the temple premises on that special day, you feel as if you are in heaven fully relaxed. Unlike wrangling seen over minor issues for petty personal interests, this temple gives you a religious vibe all the time—be it on a quiet normal day or at a festival," says Om Sharan Aghori, one of the bhandaris assisting the head priests.

Om feels no one is as lucky as the bhandaris, priests and brahmins of Pashupatinath. "We are disciples of Lord Siva. We don't feel uncomfortable in Pashupati temple even in extreme cold or heat. It's because of Lord Siva's power," he said.

As there is no large gathering area inside the temple, the hundreds of thousands of devotees circulate quickly through the temple, whose four main doors are kept open all day and all night. It is so rushed on Maha



Shivaratri that the main priests do not perform any extra ceremonies for individual devotees but only do the main worship.

Under the monarchy, the royal family never missed attending special functions at the temple on Maha Shivaratri. Today the head of state, other high-level dignitaries as well as the former royal family themselves carry on the tradition.

Many other festivals are also observed at Pashupatinath, with the most colorful being Teej, the annual festival of Hindu married women in Nepal, during which they fast and pray for the well-being of their husband and

family. On this day the temple is only open to women, who come in large numbers all dressed in red (sometimes blue) wedding saris. The three-day festival includes dancing, singing and on the last day a feast prepared by the men. It is considered the Hindu festival of womanhood.

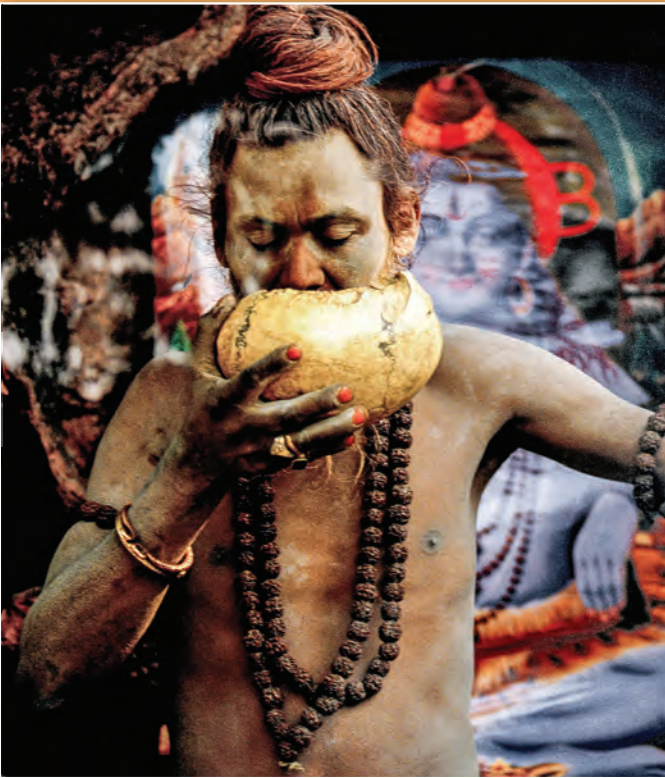
How to Visit the Temple

Pashupatinath temple is easy of access, being virtually adjacent to Tribhuvan International Airport, and just a short distance off the eight-lane Ring Road that encircles Kathmandu. There are several four to five-star hotels within four miles. Near the temple are a few three-star hotels, as well as other less expensive accommodations. There are many places

.....
A place of austerity and sadhana:
(counter-clockwise from above left) Aghori sadhu with his rudrakasha mala which includes skulls carved from human bone; Ganga Das Baba, a Vishnava sadhu, in front of the Ram temple; two sadhus; young boys who have adopted the sadhu life; an Aghori sadhu drinks from a human skull; Vaishnava sadhus gather around their fire on the eve of Maha Shivaratri



The Sadhus of Pashupatinath



to eat.

The north-facing view of the Himalayas from Pashupatinath Temple is always fascinating. With regard to weather, even in the hot summer the atmosphere in Kathmandu seems to be cooled by natural air conditioning. Likewise, the winter does not seem so cold in Kathmandu. Normal sweaters and jackets are the common attire.

Upon entering the large park-like area adjacent to the temple, one first encounters the numerous street vendors lining both sides of the road selling a leaf plate—*bel-patra*—for worship. It has marigold flowers, beads, a lamp, incense sticks and more. Open from early morning to 8pm, these stalls also sell rudraksha beads, shaligram and other religious items. Elsewhere on the temple grounds is a large bazaar with much more for sale.

As pilgrims enter the second entrance gate to the main temple, they are directed to the highly organized footwear lockers where they may check their shoes, a facility established a few years ago by the PADT to ensure pilgrims could get their shoes back safely. It's open from 4am to 8pm. From there one can enter the temple, attend worship and visit nearby shrines.

Future Plans

In 2017, the PADT announced progress on a plan for the future development of the temple. The chairman, Jeevan Bahadur Shahi, explained, "It will be a significant contribution



to the tourism of Nepal if the Pashupati area can be made a center of attraction for foreigners by developing it as a study and religious site." He added that it would be a contribution to national economy if Pashupati area is developed as an open museum.

Pradeep Dhakal, member secretary of the Trust, told HINDUISM TODAY in December 2019 that it would take another year and a half to finalize the plans. They include upgrading the existing Nepal Veda Vidhyashram, presently teaching only Sanskrit, to a more comprehensive Hindu Research Institute; establishing a Sanskar Mandal to teach about Hindu rituals from birth to death; promoting Siva bhajan and dance; and developing the area as a tourist destination for

non-Hindus.

A summary of the master plan, intended to cover the next hundred years, is available on the temple's website: pashupatinathtempletrust.com/master-plan-padt/. It addresses the needs of three component areas: the Core Area, which is mainly the Pashupati and Guheswori Temple precincts; the Consonant Area, which encircles the preceding; and the Continuum Area, which is everything else within Pashupati Kshetra. There is particular concern to deal effectively with urbanization and encroachment upon the Continuum Area. At this point the master plan is still in its first phase, gaining consensus on the overview of what to do. The second phase will be the detailed plans. Phase three is actual construction.

.....
Temple of life and of death: (counter-clockwise from upper left) a convenient hallway is all this lady needs to set up her kitchen and prepare a delicious meal; Indian pilgrims from Rajasthan shopping; (top) pilgrims deposit their shoes at the well-organized and free shoe stall; local devotees visiting the temple on Saturday, a government holiday, buy garlands and other offerings before going for worship; a mourner at the cremation of a close relative; part of the funeral ceremonies; an average of 18 cremations a day take place at the ghats immediately adjacent to the temple entrance



The Temple Bazaar and Shoe Stall



Life's End: the Cremation Ghats





SADHANA

Pilgrimage: for Reflection or for Family

A comparison between traveling to holy places alone for self-reflection and going with one's family for shared blessings

BY SUGANTH SRICHANDRAMOHAN

BEFORE WRITING THIS ARTICLE, I CONSIDERED MYSELF A new pilgrim, but after thinking it through, I realized that I am actually not so new to the pilgrimage scene. I was born in Sri Lanka and moved to Canada at age five, after spending a few years in Uganda. As a child, I visited various temples around the world, in Asia, Europe, Africa and the Americas. I even received blessings at temples in Tamil Nadu, India, when still in my mother's womb.

But these trips as a child weren't chosen by me. I just went along for the ride. I have had peaceful experiences at some temples and was even fortunate enough to go with my father to feed milk to the Ganesha murti at a temple in the Greater Toronto Area during the 1995 Milk Miracle.

Like others, as a teenager I became rather rebellious. I was bored with these temple trips and would often question all authority, customs and traditions. Eventually I refused to go to the temple at all. I rejected the religion, culture and way of life of my ancestors from Sri Lanka, thinking that I knew better. I was a Westernized, modern citizen of the new world and didn't have time for these ancient customs.

I didn't understand the purpose behind the temple or anything about Hinduism in a way that was interesting to me. I was being taught by various sources that we were worshipping idols who were not worthy of reverence. Unable to reconcile the Hinduism of what felt like the old world with the new world I found myself living in, I essentially discarded the religion I had grown up with.

As I grew out of my rebellious stage, I found that I wanted to know God, and I pursued various spiritual and religious paths. At this time, the door to Hinduism was closed in my mind. I felt I needed to explore the many paths and find the one that was mine.

Rediscovering Hinduism

I realize now how fortunate I was to have been able to visit those many temples when I was young. All these experiences helped establish and maintain a connection with my religion and the Gods in the inner realms.

After a walk in the woods one day, an image came into my head of an advanced spiritual teacher with a halo around his head, sitting in the woods teaching two boys. The light from his halo fed the light of the halo of the two young boys as they learned. The teacher was dressed as a traditional guru or sannyasin. This may have been an image from a book I read when I was a kid. I am not sure where it came from. But after this experience, I had an intense desire to relearn Hinduism.

At first I went through the dry, academic learning of Hinduism as taught in books from Oxford Press and taking courses on it as outsiders dissected the various components of Hinduism. But this wasn't what I was looking for. Something was missing. It was the



HINDUISM TODAY

A family experience: Saganth with his wife Nelushiya and daughter Shreya during their recent pilgrimage together

experience of the faith. It was the experience that existed when I was a youth in the temples—something that was hard to explain, but something I felt was there. Something I remembered.

I then found the works of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of HINDUISM TODAY, which taught me (and still teaches me) intellectually and experientially a new depth of Hinduism. One teaching was to take a religious pilgrimage to a faraway temple once a year.

Pilgrimage Alone

I decided to set out on my first religious pilgrimage on my own. That journey was to Kauai Aadheenam, where I received darshan from the satguru of the ancient Kailasa Parampara. I spoke with various

monks and went to every temple puja offered to me. I stayed at the residence of one of the devotees during my pilgrimage. Here, I read books or rested before the next puja and meditated whenever I could. The result was a burning away of long-held, congested karma. I felt lighter and freer by the end of it. I had life-changing realizations and intense inner experiences, too many to fit in this article. It was everything I had hoped a pilgrimage would be.

My third pilgrimage alone was with a 2019 travel-study program to Sri Lanka. Again I had intense experiences at powerful temples. I had the opportunity to spend time with the satguru and his monks. Though I say this pilgrimage was alone, it was actually with a large group of other religious seekers. But, I went there on my own and met them there. Without my wife and daughter there, I had nothing to do but reflect on what I experienced each day at the temple, or to deal with my own deep rooted issues internally.

I saw some deep *vasanas* (mental impressions) coming to the surface of my mind and I realized the next steps I needed to take in my spiritual efforts. Some issues that I had been dealing with since I was young and that were still unresolved showed themselves to me, including things that affected my life to that very day. I knew I needed to make changes inwardly and outwardly to overcome these *vasanas*.

Again, these pilgrimages on my own were fantastic in giving myself totally to the Gods through devotion during times of worship, and being able to immerse myself in meditation and deal with my karmas. To be able to have a set number of days in a year to do this fully on my own was fantastic, and I am so glad I had the chance to do it. But, leaving my wife and daughter home was tough at times.

Pilgrimage with Family

My second pilgrimage was with my brother, with focused intention for religious purposes. It wasn't to go hang out at the beaches in Hawaii. We were there for God. Although we had each other's company, our intentions were individual. We each had our own experiences and realizations. We both were enhanced in our day-to-day lives upon returning.

My fourth pilgrimage, completed a few weeks ago, was with my wife and daughter. This was a unique pilgrimage for me. It was my third visit to the temples of Hawaii, but the first for them. This pilgrimage was very different, because I was not able to disconnect from my role as a father or a husband. Although my second pilgrimage was with my brother, since we were both older, not living together anymore, and independent, we could disconnect from our roles for the most part.

But when I am with my daughter, I cannot detach from my role as a father. When I am with my wife, I cannot ignore my role as a husband. When my daughter wasn't behaving as I wished (in the manner of any four-year old), I was more concerned about her behavior than worshipping the Gods or engaging with full presence with the satguru or the monks. Instead of going to every puja I could, I had to ensure my wife had a good time on the trip, so we did outside activities as well.

My religious experiences were more limited while there. But I

am so glad for this experience, because the entire trip helped bring us closer. It brought unseen blessings to our family. Yes, perhaps it didn't provide the same experience as before for me personally, but it helped our family. My daughter, upon returning, was calmer. We had conversations about what we saw and did at the temple. Although sitting through the entire puja wasn't something she enjoyed, going around the temple grounds with one of the monks and feeding the cows and the horse was fun. She remembers standing in front of the large Hanuman bronze and also looking at many tropical plants.

These *samskaras* are what I wanted her to have. These *samskaras* are like those given me as a child by my parents when they took me to various temples. This was the key to the trip.

Conclusion

My recommendation for you who are young and living on your own or with your parents: go on a pilgrimage by yourself. Not with your

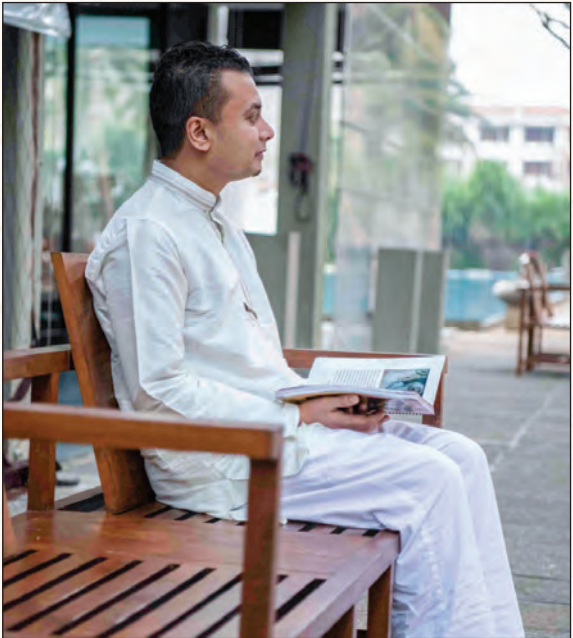
friends, unless your friends are fully dedicated to the spiritual journey. It shouldn't be part of a bigger holiday. For those of you who are parents, try your best to do both an individual and family pilgrimage, if your situation permits. There are great blessings in going on pilgrimage on your own, where you can truly disconnect from your life at home and fully immerse yourself in the inner realms. You then bring back a better version of yourself when you return home to your family. For me, the changes to my family life happened so quickly (for the better) due to my individual pilgrimages.

There is also great importance in going together as a family. For my family, this was our first pilgrimage together. It may be different for your family. If your spouse is on the same religious path, perhaps your experience would be different. But as my wife had no real desire to go on a pilgrimage in the first place, it was a hard sell on my part. She kept remarking before the flight there that she would never do a pilgrimage again, and she was only doing it for me. But by the end of the first week of the pilgrimage, she started

talking about all the things we should do the next time we come.

I found myself on the path of Hinduism again partly because of the shakti of the various temples I had visited as a child. Although I couldn't understand it, growing up in the Western world, I eventually was brought back to the ancient religion where our Gods live. If it hadn't been for all those pilgrimages and temple visits when I was young, perhaps I would have lost Hinduism forever. The *samskaras* impressed on the subconscious of the young will serve them well as they grow older, even if they get lost in the world for a while. I see this as the biggest reason for traveling with your family (especially younger kids). This is the reason for my weekly temple visits with my daughter, and from now on, for our pilgrimages to faraway lands. 🍵

SUGANTH SRICHANDRAMOHAN, 38, lives in Canada with his wife and daughter. He enjoys reading and writing about Hinduism, and you can see several of his blog posts at www.hinducorner.com. He also runs a nonprofit to help war-affected children in Sri Lanka through the Saiva Dharma Foundation. Email: nadarajah@hinducorner.com



RAJKUMAR MANIKAM

In Sri Lanka: Suganth reads in solitude during a 2019 travel-study program and pilgrimage that took him to many sacred temples across the island

Seven Bhakti Saints Of North India



From uncounted spiritual poets, we examine the life, language and works of a few

BY LAKSHMI CHANDRASHEKAR SUBRAMANIAN

BEFORE WE SPEAK OF THE GREAT BHAKTA POETS, we should acknowledge the primary language that was the tool for many of them. Hindi is the treasured national language of India, with 615 million speakers worldwide. Hindu devotees from all regional and language backgrounds engage with Hindi through popular devotional songs (bhajans), scriptures such as *Ramcharitmanas* (the famed story of Lord Rama), the poems of Kabir, religious stories (katha), and in other ways big and small. Hindi is written in Devanagari script, which it shares with Sanskrit, Marathi, Nepali, Rajasthani, Kashmiri, and dialects such as Brajbhasha and Awadhi which can both be classified linguistically as Hindi. This family of tongues is the medium of a vast body of literature, with every dialect carrying unique nuances.

Brajbhasha, meaning “language of Braj,” was one of North India’s most notable literary languages from the 16th to the early 20th century. Braj is a region in India on both sides of the Yamuna river with its center at Mathura-Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh state. Brajbhasha was also a major court language, in addition to being the poetic vehicle of many Krishna bhaktas. We refer to a time when there was fluid interweaving between the “devotional” and the “courtly.”

Sanatana Dharma (Hinduism) has given rise to a plethora of poet-saints, immortalized by tradition. Their devotional songs have lived long after their physical passing, carrying on the spirit of their soulful love and longing for God. The seven North Indian saints we are meeting in this Insight—Lal Ded, Swami Ramananda, Narasinha Mehta, Ravidas, Surdas, Dadu Dayal and Tulsidas—sang the universal language of bhakti in five Indian tongues:

Kashmiri, Hindi, Gujarati, Brajbhasha and Avadhi. Here we explore a sampling of their works, acknowledging the limits of translating these timeless works into English.

While many of these saints lived in the religious epicenter of Varanasi, they are well-known all over India. Their legacy is not limited to where they hailed from. With the prevalence of Mirabai and Kabir festivals, Amar Chitra Katha comic books, religious cartoons and Hindi serials, these saints have become global religious and cultural icons.

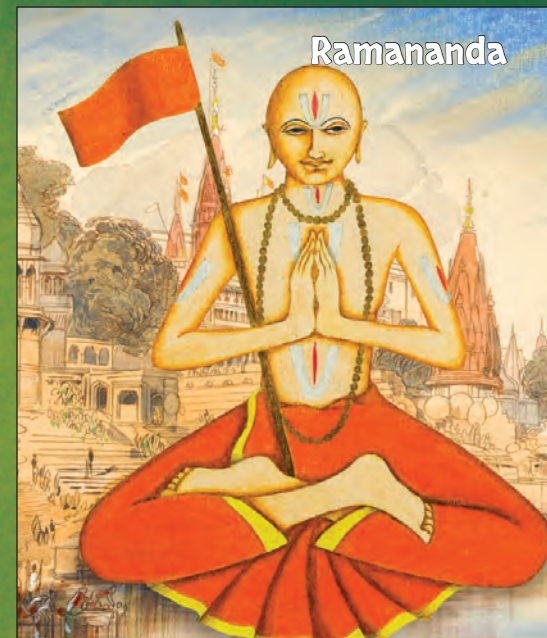
They represent a broad spectrum of bhaktas: from those who sang about the formless Truth, to those with overflowing love for the Divinities Siva, Rama and Krishna. We know little with historical authority, but much from sacred narratives that developed over the centuries. When surveyed together, these reveal consistent legends and themes. Therefore, each poet-saint’s story is cobbled together from narratives, oral and written, popular and historical, drawn from a number of sources.

A genre of poems called “pad” was the favored mode of many of these composers. The closing lines of a pad would provide the author’s oral signature, called “chaap,” an indication to the audience that the poem was about to conclude. Practically, this also creates an inner “wow” as listeners reflect on the poet’s legendary life story, bhakti, and poetic genius all at once. Here we hope to facilitate that inner wow as we dive into the lives, compositions and legends of seven key North Indian saints.

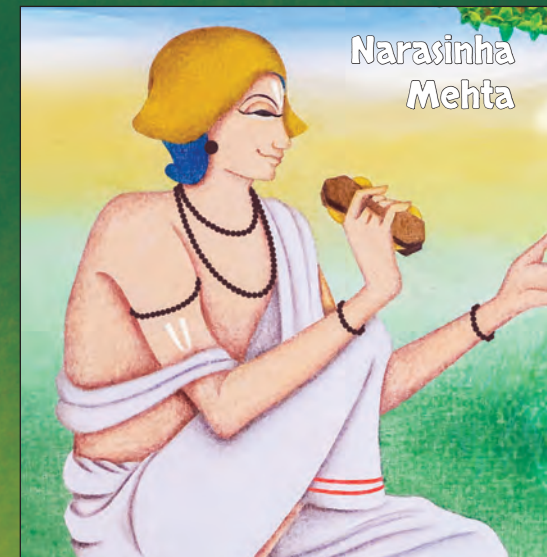
Lal Ded



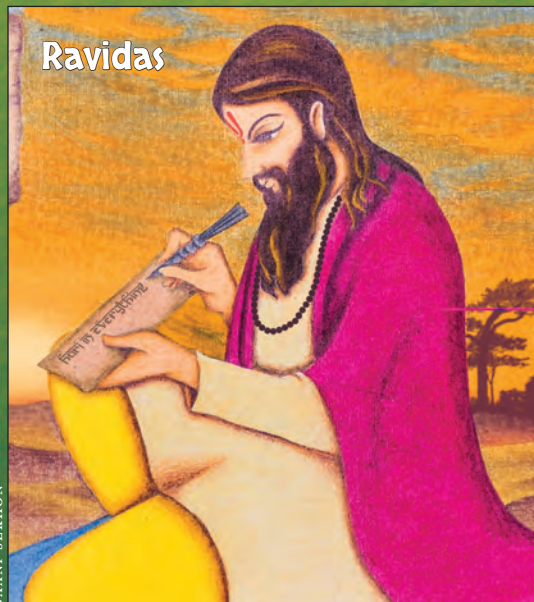
Ramananda



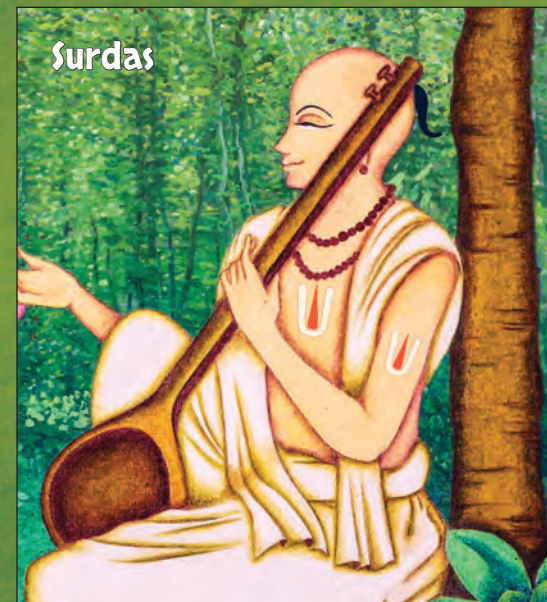
Narasinha Mehta



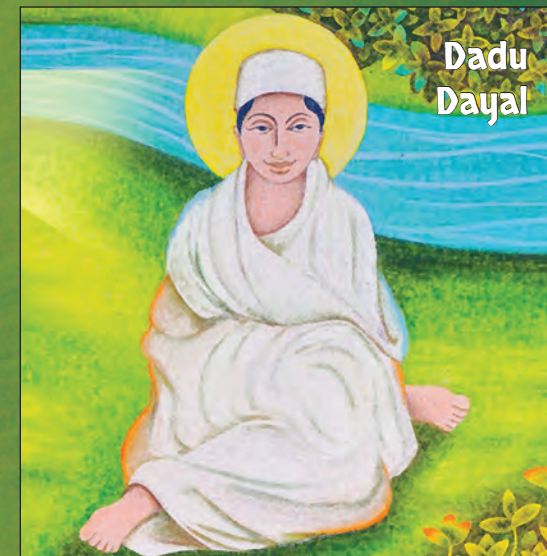
Ravidas



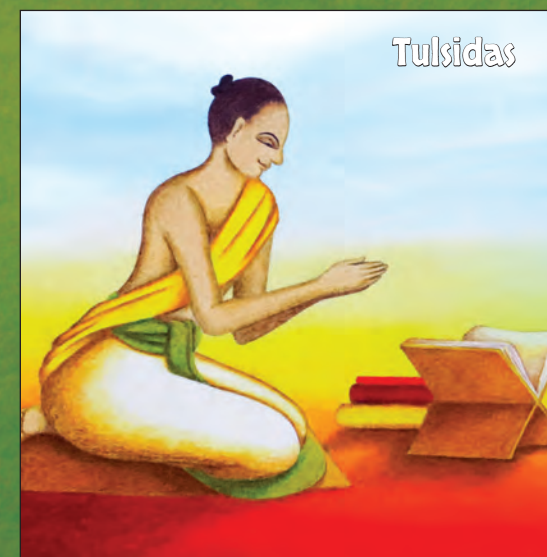
Surdas



Dadu Dayal



Tulsidas



Swami Sivananda queries, “Who is a saint? He who lives in God, or the Eternal, who is free from egoism, likes and dislikes, selfishness, vanity, mine-ness, lust, greed and anger, who is endowed with equal vision, balanced mind, mercy, tolerance, righteousness and cosmic love, and who has divine knowledge, is a saint.” While tradition idolizes numerous saints who lived and breathed bhakti, India has given birth to innumerable more unsung God-intoxicated heroes. It is not surprising that this ancient nation is often referred to as Punyabhumi (“land of merit”), the blessed land where saints could be living anywhere, even in the most unexpected places. The author wishes to honor those saintly souls who have paved the way for a life of spirituality for generations to come.



Lal Ded: Kashmir, c.1320–1392

Reminiscent of Akka Mahadevi in 12th-century Karnataka, Lal Ded is a bhakta from Kashmir who dedicated her life to pursue union with Siva. Belonging to the 14th century, a time of political and religious flux, when Kashmir was under various rulers, poet-saint Lal Ded, or Grandmother Lal, known formally as Lalleshwari or affectionately as Lalla (“darling” in Kashmiri), is very much a part of modern Kashmiri psyche due to her mystic poems (vakh) and their universal appeal.

Oral traditions say Lalla was born in Pandrethan, southeast of Srinagar, in the spiritual atmosphere of a traditional Kashmiri Pandit household. Her poems suggest she was educated in Hindu scriptures and yoga philosophy early in life in her father’s home. This is sometimes cited as evidence that girls received advanced education in those times. She was married at a young age and moved to the town of Pampore. It was an untenable marriage, rife with difficulties, and she turned to spiritual life for solace. A popular anecdote goes thus: one day when Lalla returned home late from fetching water at the river (where she worshiped Siva as Natha Keshava Bhairava in a temple on the opposite bank), her mother-in-law accused her of infidelity. Believing this falsehood, her husband grew angry and struck out at her, breaking the pot of water she was carrying on her head. Miraculously, the water remained in the shape of the pot! She then tossed the water into the yard, where it grew into a pond known today as Lalla Trag.

Around the age of 26, Lalla took sannyasa, renouncing the world in search of God Realization. Tradition says she became a disciple of Kashmiri Saiva saint Siddha Srikantha, also called Sed Bayu, a direct descendent in the guru-shishya lineage of Vasugupta, the founder of modern Saivism in Kashmir, a nondualist tradition with scholarly and

yogic streams. Lalla lived as a yogini, composing devotional verses on Siva, singing about mystical experiences, ecstatic love for God, seeing Siva in everything, and her nondualistic relationship with God. Kashmiri legends say she shed her clothes and wandered with hair loose, ridiculed by some and worshiped by others. At the end of her life, like Mirabai in the Vaishnavite stream, Lal Ded attained Siva-consciousness and merged into the Divine.

Lal Vakh

Lalla’s succinct, declarative, and at times cryptic, sacred utterances are called *Lal Vakh*. Over 250 verses have been attributed to her; around 128 are considered indisputably hers. *Vakh*, singular and plural, is cognate with the Sanskrit *vach* (speech) and *vakya* (sentence). Each vakh is usually a stanza of four lines and conveys an independent idea. As one of the earliest compositions in vernacular Kashmiri language, passed down orally through the generations and transcribed many centuries later, Lalla’s verses play a central role in the making of modern Kashmiri language and literature. Today, every Kashmiri native or student of the language would be familiar with her wise utterances, as the language is imbued with them.

Lalla’s proverbs are not easily categorized. They are rooted in Trika Saivite philosophy with Sanskrit phrases, while alluding to ideas from Tantra and Yogachara Buddhism. Lal Ded seems to have been acquainted with Sufism as well. The same vakh can elucidate Hindu philosophy and yogic terminology for one translator, while another envisions her mystic poem through a Sufi lens. Her *Lal Vakh* have inspired Hindus and Sufis alike, translated differently based on context. Her verses express deep religious yearning, reverence to guru,

Siva within, Siva without: *In a distant Kashmir meadow the wandering poetess, carrying a simple knapsack, halts at a lotus pond to offer flowers to a Shivalingam, and receives His blessings of light and love*

importance of intense meditation and yogic practices, rejection of orthodoxy and organized religion, and the soul’s burning desire to experience God. They also carry a plethora of images such as moons, lakes, nectar and waterfalls, which sometimes express the celebratory mood of having merged with the Divine within. Among many mystic subjects, she wrote of the power of mantra, as in this verse: “O Lalli! With right knowledge, open your ears and hear how the trees sway to *Om Namasivaya*, how the wind says *Om Namasivaya*, how water flows with the sound *Namasivaya*. The entire universe is singing the name of Siva. O Lalli! Pay a little attention” (*The Yoga of Discipline*, by Gurumayi Chidvilasananda). In another poem she writes, “I, Lalla, entered the gate of the mind’s garden and saw Siva united

with Sakti. I was immersed in the lake of undying bliss. Here, in this lifetime, I’ve been unchained from the wheel of birth and death. What can the world do to me?” (Yong Kian/Wikimedia Commons).

Ambassador of Communal Harmony

Inspiring peace, devotionism and communal harmony in the Kashmir Valley, Lal Ded’s works represent a confluence of Saivism and Sufism. Her poetry inspired many Sufis of Kashmir over the centuries, and her association with Sufi saint Nund Rishi is especially noteworthy. He formed the Rishi order of saints, who are considered heirs of Lal Ded by some. In a region where Hinduism and Islam have deeply influenced one another, saints like Lal Ded inspire a vision of pluralistic coexistence in how dear she is to both communities. She was revered as Lalleshwari by Kashmiri Hindus and Lalla Arifa by the Muslims.

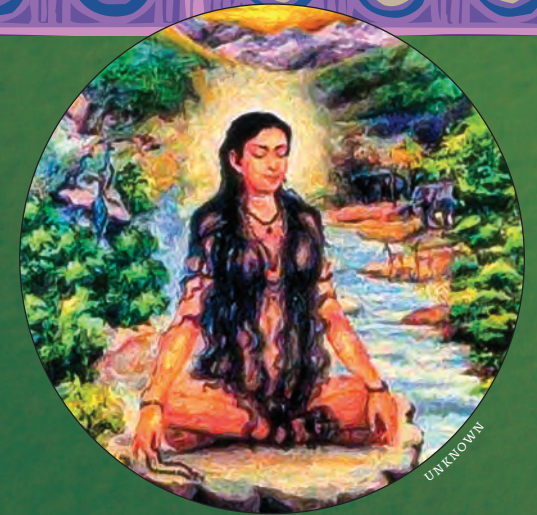
Lal Ded’s aphoristic sayings are still recited in Kashmir today, making a deep impact on the religion and culture of locals from all walks of life. They have also been adopted by contemporary global movers and shakers in scholarly publications, music, and theater productions. For example, the solo play in English, Hindi and Kashmiri entitled “Lal Ded” has been performed by actress Mita Vashisht all over India and abroad since 2004.

Testimony from Poet and Author Ranjit Hoskote

“To the outer world, Lal Ded is arguably Kashmir’s best-known spiritual and literary figure; within Kashmir, she has been venerated both by Hindus and Muslims for nearly seven centuries. For most of that period, she has successfully eluded the proprietorial claims of religious monopolists.”

LEARN MORE

- ✱ **Read** the book *I, Lalla: The Poems of Lal Ded*, translated by Ranjit Hoskote
- ✱ **Listen** to *Lal Vakh* sung on YouTube



Lal Ded’s Vakh

TRANSLATED BY RANJIT HOSKOTE, FROM HIS BOOK *I, LALLA*

Kusha grass, flowers, sesame seed, lamp, water:
it’s just another list for someone who’s listened,
really listened, to his teacher. Every day he sinks deeper
into Shambhu, frees himself from the trap
of action and reaction. He will not suffer birth again.

Who trusts his Master’s word
and controls the mind-horse
with the reins of wisdom,
he shall not die, he shall not be killed.

The Lord has spread the subtle net of Himself across the world.
See how He gets under your skin, inside your bones?
If you can’t see Him while you’re alive,
don’t expect a special vision once you’re dead.

Wrapped up in Yourself, You hid from me.
All day I looked for You
and when I found You hiding inside me,
I ran wild, playing now me, now You.

What the books taught me, I’ve practiced.
What they didn’t teach me, I’ve taught myself.
I’ve gone into the forest and wrestled with the lion.
I didn’t get this far by teaching one thing and doing another.

Some, who have closed their eyes, are wide awake.
Some, who look out at the world, are fast asleep.
Some who bathe in sacred pools remain dirty.
Some are at home in the world but keep their hands clean.



Swami Ramananda: Varanasi, c.1400–1470

“**R**am, Ram!” Swami Ramananda is often hailed as the guru of a galaxy of saints—including Kabir, Ravidas, Sena, Pipa and Dhana. He played a crucial role in the cultivation of poet-saints and the propagation of bhakti in late 14th- or early 15th-century North India. As with countless Indian saints, little is known with certainty about his life, but devotees and historians have put together key details. According to Bhagwan Prasad Rupkala, an early 20th-century Ramanandi monk, the saint was born in ancient Prayag as Ramadatta. In his youth, he became a disciple of Raghavananda, who gave him the Ram mantra and initiated him as Ramananda. According to legend, as a youth Ramananda went on pilgrimage to South India and returned as a follower of Sri Vaishnavism in the line of the renowned philosopher-theologian Ramanujacharya, though he disagreed with that tradition’s strict ritualistic guidelines and caste exclusivity. Some Ramanandis, such as Rupkala, disassociate their founder from the South Indian Vaishnavas. Another influence in Ramananda’s teachings is that of the Nathpanthi ascetics.

After his travels, Ramananda settled in Varanasi, on the banks of River Ganga, to preach in local dialects his liberal ideas of egalitarianism, selfless devotion, and making bhakti truly accessible to all people.

A famous story details Swami Ramananda inadvertently initiating weaver-saint Kabir on the banks of the Ganga in Varanasi. While walking up the ghat steps one morning, he tripped over Kabir who lay prone on the step, waiting for Ramananda. As he stumbled, Ramananda exclaimed the name of the Lord, “Ram!” Kabir took that as his sought-after initiation. From then on, Kabir, like his guru, sang the glories of the Lord. In another version, Kabir goes to meet Ramananda and requests initiation. The guru initially sends him away;

but later, once convinced of Kabir’s sincerity and wisdom, he initiates the persistent seeker. Scholars over past decades have questioned the historicity of this relationship due to the conflicting dates attributed to the two poets, but Ramanandis and Kabir Panthis retell the story often, valuing it as an important puzzle piece in their enigmatic biographies. Stories narrate that another poet-saint, Ravidas, a leatherworker of Varanasi, also received his spiritual mantra from Ramananda, while other versions say that Ravidas’s guru may have been Kabir. In any case, several of the well-known North Indian bhakti saints are considered spiritual descendants of Swami Ramananda.

The Ramananda Tradition Today

A pioneering force of bhakti in North India, Saint Ramananda is also the inspiration behind the Ramananda Sampradaya, an ascetic Hindu order. Its sadhus (saint-practitioners), often called Ramanandis or Vairagis, adhere to vows, discipline and austerities. They are considered the largest monastic order in North India, the parent of numerous subgroups. Ramanandis who choose to get initiated in additional vows of austerity become Tyagis (renunciates), and Mahatyagis, undertaking even more stringent vows. Disciplines include restrictions in food, clothing and lifestyle choices. With bhakti as the core of all Ramanandi practice, two ways of interacting with the Divine emerged: one that savored “saguna” (God with form) worship towards Lord Rama and His consort Goddess Sita, and the other “nirguna” (formless Divine), deeming Rama as the ineffable supreme Reality. Poet-saint Tulsidas extolled the saguna philosophy with his *Shri Ramcharitmanas*, a devotional text at the heart of the Ramananda tradition, while Kabir was a leading voice of devotion to the formless

In Varanasi: With the holy city and Ganges River behind him, Swami Ramananda presses his hands together in worship of Rama and Sita, whom he takes to be the universe entire.

divine with his dohas and bhajans (couplets and songs). Today, Ramanandis live throughout western and northern India, predominantly in the states of Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, the Ganges basin, the Himalayan foothills and Nepal.

Testimony from Dr. Ramdas Lamb

“Swami Ramananda opened up Ram bhakti to the masses like no one else. During my time as a vairagi in India, it was always so refreshing to be in satsang with those for whom devotion was both the means and the goal, the process as well as the product. Swami Ramananda played a pivotal role in the individualization and personalization of the bhakti tradition. One of the sayings commonly heard within his order with respect to who is qualified to follow the path is *Jati pati puchha na koi. Jo Hari ko bhajan, so Hari ka hoi*. He taught anyone who had an interest in learning the path of devotion,

including females and males, Hindus and non-Hindus, those of any caste, rich and poor, educated and uneducated. Living at a time when Sanskrit was considered by many as *the* religious language, he encouraged his followers to sing, write and teach in vernacular languages that listeners could understand and relate to. Undoubtedly, his best-known direct disciple was Kabir, and by far the best known of the members of his lineage is Tulsidas. For both, love of God transcends all limitations (*jati pati*).

“In the contemporary world, far too many seek to emphasize our differences with each other, whether it be caste, class, ethnicity, ideology, physical appearance or ability. However, those differences are so temporary and thus so meaningless. For Ramananda, and ideally for all his followers, Ram and Sita together are the essence and the manifestation of all reality. Thus, seeing and serving that Universal Divinity in all should be the ultimate goal for all of us. Tulsidas presents this idea and approach to life in the two verses from his *manas* (presented in the sidebar at right).”

Did You Know?

Guru and God are both highly regarded in Hinduism. Ramananda’s fame spread due to his illustrious disciples, especially poet-saint Kabir. A popular couplet of Kabir, translated by Linda Hess, goes thus:

Guru and God are before me. Whose feet should I touch?
I offer myself to the guru who showed me God.

LEARN MORE

- ✱ **Discover** Ramanandi practices in “Monastic Vows and the Ramananda Sampradaya” by Dr. Ramdas Lamb, scholar and former Ramanandi Sadhu, in the book *Dealing with Deities: The Ritual Vow in South Asia*
- ✱ **Read** Vasudha Paramasivan’s PhD dissertation, “Between Text and Sect: Early Nineteenth Century Shifts in the Theology of Ram”
- ✱ **Listen to** Musical renditions of Ramananda’s “Ek Onkar” on YouTube



Swami Ramananda’s Shabad in the Adi Granth

TRANSLATED BY SANT SINGH KHALSA

One Universal Creator God. By the Grace of the True Guru.

Where should I go? My home is filled with bliss.
My consciousness does not go out wandering.
My mind has become crippled.

One day, a desire welled up in my mind.
I ground up sandalwood, along with several fragrant oils.
I went to God’s place, and worshiped Him there.
That God showed me the Guru, within my own mind.

Wherever I go, I find water and stones.
You are totally pervading and permeating in all.
I have searched through all the *Vedas* and the *Puranas*.
I would go there, only if the Lord were not here.

I am a sacrifice to You, O my True Guru.
You have cut through all my confusion and doubt.
Ramanand’s Lord and Master is the All-pervading Lord God.
The Word of the Guru’s Shabad eradicates
the karma of millions of past actions.

Verses from Tulsidas’s Manas

TRANSLATED BY DR. RAMDAS LAMB

Knowing the universe is filled with Sita and Ram,
I join my hands bowing to them in pranam.

[Lord Ram exclaims:]

Hanuman, he is my devotee who is pure in the thought
Of seeing me, his Lord, in all that moves and does not.



BAANI SEKHON

Narasinha Mehta: Gujarat, c.1414—1481

Can you name the poet-saint whose hymns were a moral compass for visionaries such as Mahatma Gandhi? That is none other than 15th-century Narasinha Mehta of Gujarat, also known as Narsi Bhagat. Honored as Adi Kavi (“first poet”) of the Gujarati language, Narasinha is both a renowned literary figure and a beloved Vaishnava saint whose devotional songs about Krishna are widely sung in Gujarat, Rajasthan and beyond.

Narasinha was born into a Saivite Nagar Brahmin family who worshiped Lord Siva. Legends say he lost his parents at a young age. He later married and had two children. He lived with his brother and his wife in the city of Junagadh. Narratives portray his becoming a Vaishnava thus: Narasinha was so engrossed in singing bhakti songs that he did not earn enough, which his sister-in-law taunted him about. In indignation and search for peace, Narasinha Mehta took refuge in a forest, where he meditated in an abandoned Siva temple for seven days and nights without food or water. This prompted Siva to appear and offer him a boon. Narasinha was so overwhelmed he couldn’t think of what to ask for. On impulse, he asked for what was rare to the Lord Himself. Siva transported him to Lord Krishna’s world of Raas Leela. Seeing Krishna and the Gopis’ devotion transformed Narasinha, and he was filled with Vaishnava bhakti—all through the grace of Siva.

Narasinha Mehta unites Saivite and Vaishnavite communities with his affiliation to both traditions. He also bridges the nirguna and saguna communities. His poems, written in a genre called *pad*, show that he was well-versed in the Vaishnava cannon, and was influenced by Vedantic philosophy and classical Sanskrit *kavya* literature. Passed down orally, his songs extol nirguna bhakti (devotion to the formless

Divine), Sri Krishna Leela (Krishna’s divine play), reverence to Siva, and moral teachings. Many of these are sung as early morning hymns (*prabhatiya* in Gujarati) in temples and at night-long bhajan gatherings in Gujarat. Some poems share glimpses of his life, including miracles and his encounters with the Divine.

Narasinha Mehta and Gandhi

As seen in the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Narasinha Mehta is one of the saints whom Gandhi glorified in his writings, along with Tulsidas, Surdas, Mirabai and Kabir. Narasinha and Gandhi both hailed from Gujarat and believed in an egalitarian society. Like Gandhi, Narasinha interacted with people from all castes. This angered and alienated his own community, but did not stop him from living the ideals he preached. Gandhi was born in a Vaishnava family, and there came a point in his life when Narasinha’s bhajan “Vaishnava Jana” struck a deep chord. In fact, it was in the context of this song that Gandhi defined himself as a Vaishnava. Gandhi said even his Christian and Muslim friends loved the song, as it espouses ethical guidelines that transcend religious affiliations.

Professor Neelima Shukla-Bhatt discusses this in her 2014 book: “The references to Narasinha in Gandhi’s writing indicate that the saint-poet’s songs formed an integral part of Gandhi’s inner world and that the saint’s sacred biography, with its marked stress on voluntary poverty and empathy for the downtrodden, offered him a model to emulate as well as to invoke in public life. Gandhi also found in these songs and narratives valuable resources to support his social and political ideology. He adopted the term *Harijan* (children of God) from a Narasinha song to refer to the Dalits, the “untouchables” of

Universal Divinity: *Narasinha was transported by Siva to Krishna’s spiritual plane. Seeing the gopis and their pure devotion, from that day he sang of Krishna and of all-encompassing love of God*

Hindu society, and recurrently alluded to the saint in public debates about untouchability in Gujarat.”

Universal Moral Anthem

Narasinha Mehta’s iconic song on moral values begins with *Vaishnavajana to tene re kahie* (Call only that one a true Vaishnava), and encourages peace and noble thought, word and action (see sidebar, right). Set to raga Mishra Khamaj by Pandit Narayan Khare, the song outlines the virtues of a truly spiritual person, worthy of emulation (termed Vaishnava in the bhajan). As Gandhi’s favorite, it became a part of his ashram’s book of bhajans despite having no political or patriotic undertones. It was sung in daily prayer meetings and important public events such as the 1930 Salt March. As a core part of the Gandhian Movement, it appealed not only to Gujarati speakers but united all Indians, and humankind at large. It is taught to children at Gandhi Camps even today. The song is reminiscent of Kanchi Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati’s “Maitreem Bhajata,” a benediction in Sanskrit encouraging world peace and harmony composed for the United Nations. Similarly, Narasinha’s “Vaishnava Jana” functions as a universal moral anthem that warms the heart of anyone who cherishes compassion, empathy, truthfulness and devotion.

Every top musician in India, whether vocalist or instrumentalist, has performed this song. Some of the most soulful renditions include those of M.S. Subbulakshmi and Lata Mangeshkar. The Narasinha tradition gained momentum with Mahatma Gandhi’s inspired use of his songs and life story, and continues to evolve as younger generations give his eternal poems their own innovative layers of meaning.

Did You Know?

Narasinha Mehta No Choro, in Junagadh, Gujarat, is the place where the poet-saint and his followers gathered for spiritual discourses and bhajans. Narasinha is believed to have had his first darshan of Lord Krishna in this sacred spot.

Rupayatan, a school of Gujarati art and literature in Junagadh, together with an artists’ association called Gujarat Kala Pratishthan, has undertaken a creative project to document Narasinha’s inspiring poetry in visual art.

LEARN MORE

- ✳ **Read** the book *Narasinha Mehta of Gujarat: A Legacy of Bhakti in Songs and Stories* by Neelima Shukla-Bhatt
- ✳ **Enjoy** many renditions of “Vaishnava Jana” on YouTube
- ✳ **Watch** Hindi devotional biopic “Narsi Bhagat” (1940) by Vijay Bhatt



BLOG.SAGARWORLD.COM

Narasinha Mehta’s Pads

TRANSLATED BY NEELIMA SHUKLA-BHATT

Call only that one a true Vaishnava
who understands others’ pain,
who helps them in their suffering,
but has no arrogance in his heart.

The one who respects everyone in the world
and speaks ill of none,
who is unwavering in speech, action and thought,
blessed, blessed is his mother!

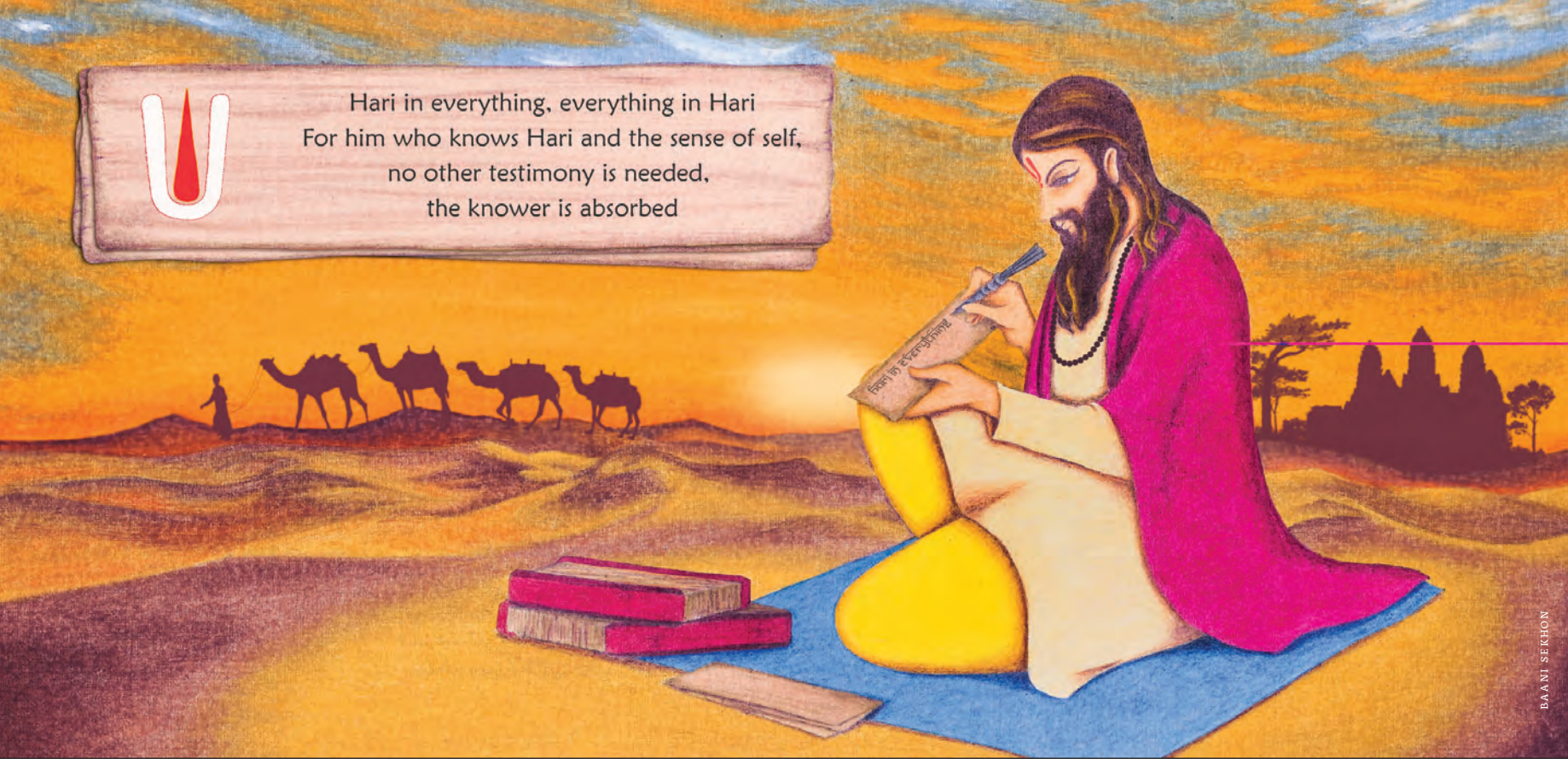
The one who sees everyone as equal, and has given up desires,
who views another’s wife as mother,
whose tongue does not lie,
who does not touch another’s wealth,
who is not bound by illusory attachments,
whose detachment is firm,
and whose heart is immersed in Ram’s name,
all places of pilgrimage are within his body.

The one who is without greed or deceit,
who has subdued anger and lust,
on seeing that one, says Narasaiyo:
seventy-one generations are saved.

Meditate on him.
Contemplate on him.
The Lord is in the eyes;
the singular focus of search within.
He will be seen in your body, will touch you with love—
the unique, unmatched, unheld form.
With your heart filled with joy and karmas destroyed,
the earth will appear like the woods of Vraj.
Krishna will sport in the lovely bowers;
the young woman and her friends will watch him with joy.



Hari in everything, everything in Hari
For him who knows Hari and the sense of self,
no other testimony is needed,
the knower is absorbed



BAAHI SEKHON

Ravidas: Varanasi, c.1450–1520

Let's transport ourselves to Varanasi, one of India's religious epicenters (also known as Benares and Kashi), on the banks of River Ganga in Uttar Pradesh. Here, in the 15th or 16th century in the southern village of Sri Govardhanpur, lived a devoted leather worker (*chamar*) called Ravidas. He composed powerful, soulful devotional hymns in Hindi, earning a noteworthy place in the family of North Indian bhakti poets. Ravidas mentions poet-saints Namdev, Trilochan and Kabir in his compositions, indicating deep solidarity with them.

One of the distinguishing features of the devotional works often highlighted from this period was their voice-giving to the lower classes. Ravidas, sometimes known as Raidas, often sang of his status as a shoemaker, demonstrating that such livelihoods are in no way a barrier to reaching God. In fact, his trade offered a unique vantage point for him to transcend social distinctions through bhakti. He exclaims in one of his couplets, "O, well-born of Benares, I too am born well known: my labor is with leather. But my heart can boast the Lord" (translated by John Stratton Hawley and Mark Juergensmeyer).

Like poet-saint Kabir, also from Varanasi and famous for his nirguna bhakti, Ravidas often sang about devotion to the formless Divine and is thought by many to be a disciple of Saint Ramananda. *Nirguna* literally means without qualities, making nirguna bhakti seem like an oxymoron. How can one feel love towards something without qualities or personality traits? Herein lies the genius of Ravidas. Unlike Mirabai or Surdas, who gained spiritual fulfillment by loving and surrendering to God in a specific form, Ravidas ardently communicated his love for Divinity without form. Ravidas uses *Ram* as a synonym for God or Truth, and as a goal that one should meditate on and strive towards.

Ravidas as Mirabai's Guru

In the late 17th century, Anantadas dedicated an entire section of his hagiographies to Sant Ravidas, called the *Raidas Parchai*. Here we read of several miraculous incidents demonstrating the purity of Ravidas's devotion. Moreover, we find stories about Ravidas's meeting with the Rajput queen Jhali of Chittor, who is presumably Mirabai, the iconic poet-saint from Rajasthan (as per *Ravidas Ramayana*). Anantadas describes Queen Jhali's search for a guru and how she went to Ravidas in Varanasi for spiritual guidance. He writes that the queen bowed down and touched her forehead to his feet. Subsequently she received initiation from him. There is mention of Brahmins objecting vehemently to the initiation, but they did not prevent it. Queen Jhali then returned to her royal palace, after donating money to Ravidas's temple, which the saint used to feed the poor. There is also mention of Queen Jhali's sending a letter to Ravidas, requesting him to visit Chittor. After gaining permission from "his big brother" Kabir, Ravidas leaves for the city. This episode in Anantadas's hagiography is a prime reason for the popular belief that Ravidas was Mirabai's guru.

Ravidas in the Dadu Panth

Several of Ravidas's poems are embedded in the scriptures of the Dadu Panth, a sect headquartered in Rajasthan. Dadu's followers revere Ravidas as one of the four great bhaktas, following his teachings alongside those of their guru, Dadu Dayal. Legend has it that Ravidas met Nanak, the founder and first guru of the Sikh tradition, at the Guru Bagh (Gurus' Garden) in Varanasi. Philosophically, Ravidas, Dadu Dayal and Guru Nanak share a spiritual affinity to poet-saint

Odes to Omnipresence: *Ravidas gave God the name of Ram, but then undid the limits of that personification in his poems. Here in the desert he scribes his verses, which speak of sahaja, the unity of the One and the many.*

Kabir (c. 1398–1448) and his teachings. All three considered themselves to be in Kabir's lineage. The poems of all four of these saints carry common themes, such as challenging caste distinctions and the authority of organized religion. Inspired by the ascetic teachings of the Nath Yogis, each spurned external forms of worship and encouraged turning inward to seek God and wholeheartedly loving God. Over time, Ravidas's charismatic hymns gained so much momentum that they were included in various Hindu and Sikh scriptures. Indeed, much of his poetry was adopted into the Sikh scriptural anthology *Adi Granth*.

In Recent Times

In 2001, the Indian government issued stamps in Ravidas's honor to celebrate his birth anniversary. Considered by many as their guru, the saint continues to draw thousands of followers from Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh, who visit the Sant Ravidas Janam Asthan Mandir to offer prayers on his birth anniversary each year. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Ram Nath Kovind paid a visit there in February 2019.

Ravidas inspires India's youth to this day. For example, the Saint Shiromani Ravidas Youth Club in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, organizes activities to promote the philosophy of the poet-saint, as well as that of Dr. Ambedkar, and assists needy youth financially and otherwise, something the impoverished poet might have done himself.

Did You Know?

Numerous temples, religious organizations and educational institutions worldwide draw inspiration from the life and works of Ravidas. Many community leaders in North India adopt his philosophy of helping others in their service to their community.

The *Amar Chitra Katha* comic book series was launched in the 1960s with the goal of teaching Indian children about their rich cultural heritage. The series featured legendary stories of famous North Indian saints, including Ravidas, Surdas, Tulsidas, Kabir and Mirabai. These richly illustrated booklets were often a child's first introduction to the saints, whose poetry they might learn as part of their school curriculum. The comics are still widely available, on Amazon and elsewhere.

LEARN MORE

- ✳ **Visit** Sant Ravidas Janam Asthan Mandir in Seer Goverdhanpur, Varanasi, India
- ✳ **Listen** to Ravidas's famous bhajan "Prabhuji Tum Chandan Hum Pani" on YouTube



Ravidas's Poems from the *Adi Granth*

TRANSLATED BY JOHN STRATTON HAWLEY
& MARK JUERGENSMEYER

A family that has a true follower of the Lord
Is neither high caste nor low caste, lordly or poor.
The world will know it by its fragrance.
Priests or merchants, laborers or warriors, halfbreeds,
outcasts, and those who tend cremation fires—
their hearts are all the same.
He who becomes pure through love of the Lord
exalts himself and his family as well.
Thanks be to his village, thanks to his home,
thanks to that pure family, each and every one,
For he's drunk with the essence of the liquid of life
and he pours away all the poisons.
No one equals someone so pure and devoted—
not priests, not heroes, not parasoled kings.
As the lotus leaf floats above the water, Ravidas says,
so he flowers above the world of his birth.

The day it comes, it goes;
whatever you do, nothing stays firm.
The group goes, and I go;
the going is long, and death is overhead.
What! Are you sleeping? Wake up, fool,
wake to the world you took to be true.
The one who gave you life daily feeds you, clothes you;
inside every body, he runs the store.
So keep to your prayers, abandon "me" and "mine,"
now's the time to nurture the name that's in the heart.
Life has slipped away. No one's left on the road,
and in each direction, the evening dark has come.
Madman, says Ravidas, here's the cause of it all—
it's only a house of tricks. Ignore the world.



BAANI SEKHON

Surdas: Braj, c.1478–1584

“What poet, hearing the poems Sur has made, will not nod his head in pleasure?” asks 17th-century saint Nabhadass in *Shribhaktamal*, one of the oldest Indian vernacular hagiographies. This is bhakti scholar John Stratton Hawley’s translation of the opening line on Surdas, expressing appreciation for the saint’s poetic brilliance that is shared by countless devotees worldwide.

Surdas is a mainstay in the family of North Indian bhakti saints. Primarily a saguna poet, he composed in Brajbhasha for and about a personal God with personality traits (saguna: *sa* “with,” *guna* “attributes”). To Surdas, Divinity came in the form of Shri Krishna, the eighth avatar of Vishnu. Surdas also wrote about Lord Rama and Sita, and often addressed Hari; but he is most celebrated for his songs on Krishna *leela* (“divine play”).

Surdas is remembered as a blind poet-saint in the Braj region south of Delhi, where Lord Krishna spent his childhood. There are many explanations for Sur’s loss of sight, ranging from blindness from birth, to metaphorical blindness, to his request to Krishna to remove his vision after a magnificent darshan of the Lord. Devotees consider his blindness an advantage, as worldly distractions would not affect his spiritual vision. The songster was renowned in his own times in the 16th century. Stories include his being invited to compose for Mughal emperor Akbar, who greatly admired his poetry. Nabhadass, who composed his influential *Shribhaktamal* in the early 1600s, devoted several lines praising Surdas’s matchless lyrical dexterity in conveying the depths of devotion. Since then, Surdas has remained renowned among Vaishnava poets, revered by worshipers and scholars alike.

Surdas is the most well known of the *ashtachaap*, “eight seals,” or eight great disciples, of the Vallabha Sampradaya, also known as

Pushtimarga. Founded by Vaishnava philosopher-theologian Vallabhacharya (c. 1475–1530), this devotional community engages in pure nondualism (Shuddha Advaita) through Krishna-centric worship. One of Vallabhacharya’s grandsons, Gokulnath, compiled the *Chaurasi Vaishnavan ki Varta* (Accounts of Eighty-Four Vaishnavas) in the 17th century. The work features Surdas as a principal teacher in the tradition and contains an account of his life, with Vallabhacharya as his spiritual mentor.

Sur’s Ocean of Poems

The massive poetic corpus *Sursagar* (“Sur’s Ocean”) recounts numerous episodes from the tenth canto of the Sanskrit *Bhagavata Purana* in literary Brajbhasha dialect. According to the Vallabha Sampradaya, Surdas composed 125,000 poems, some of which are in the *Sursagar*, with others having been lost over time. Historians date the earliest manuscript of Sur’s poems at 1582, with 239 poems, from Fatehpur in present-day Rajasthan. By 1640, Sur’s collection of poems was termed *Sursagar* and contained 795 poems. That number steadily increased in later manuscripts, with a 19th-century *Sursagar* containing nearly ten thousand. Academicians conclude that poets over the centuries adopted Surdas’s voice and wrote poems in his name, even including his signature (*chaap*). Some poems in the *Sursagar* are about him; others simply embody his inspiring devotion. Surdas’s authorial identity extends thus beyond his lifetime, and the *Sursagar* now refers to the collective poems of the evolving Sur genre. As devotees, we can ask ourselves: If a poem can evoke bhakti in our hearts and minds, how much does history’s academic stamp of approval on the poet’s identity really matter?

Prolific poet: Holding his lute in the forest, Surdas offers his musical creations to the flute-playing Krishna

Themes Surdas Loved

Surdas’s poems are lyrically par excellence, replete with visual detail describing darling Krishna’s divine deeds, virtues and form, often as elaborated in the *Bhagavata Purana*, using such terms as “dark one” and “Nanda’s delight” for Krishna. These are not mere creative descriptions but translations of affectionate addresses traditionally associated with the Lord.

Typical of bhakti poetry, Surdas’s poems emphasize personal experience and emotional engagement in relational terms, such as maternal affection (*vatsalya bhava*) for baby Krishna, or lovers’ honeyed emotions (*madhurya bhava*). The language frequently demonstrates *viraha vedana*, the longing and agony of separation from the divine beloved Hari. Surdas assumes the persona of a devotee, male or female, and at times even that of Lord Krishna. The gopis (cowherding women) whose ultimate goal is spiritual union with

Krishna, epitomize *viraha*.

Surdas is also famous for *bhramargit*, “songs to the bee,” a type of *viraha* poem that the gopis of Braj sing to Krishna’s messenger Udho. While Udho consoles and philosophically reasons that Krishna exists within them as Supreme Being of the nirguna persuasion, the gopis respond by lauding the greatness of devotion to Lord Krishna with personality traits. Not surprisingly, a major theme in Surdas’s poetry is humble supplication, *vinaya* poetry that demonstrates a devotee’s laments and complaints of having been deserted or ignored by their Lord. The Sur genre continues to evolve today as artists and devotees recreate and relive his poems in temples, homes and concert halls worldwide.

Did You Know?

Like his female counterpart Mirabai, Surdas is a truly pan-Indian poet-saint. Though he is from the Braj region, his soulful compositions to Krishna and inspiring life story are famous in every Indian state. Vaishnava communities (those who regard Maha Vishnu and His avatars as Supreme) globally adore his bhakti-laden poetry.

Krishna leela, or divine play, as described in the Hindu scripture *Srimad Bhagavatam*, is full of colorful stories, from childhood antics to adolescent pranks. Surdas’s poems vividly capture every incident with emotional sensitivity and poetic flair. Another famed bhakta who composed poetry on Krishna with similar expertise is the 18th century Tamil composer-saint Oothukadu Venkata Kavi.

LEARN MORE

- ✱ **Read** John Stratton Hawley’s book *Surdas: Poet, Singer, Saint*
- ✱ **Listen** to singer Anup Jalota’s “Main Nahin Makhani Khayo” bhajan on YouTube
- ✱ **Enjoy** *Sursagar* paintings online and in museums around the world



Surdas’s Poems

TRANSLATED BY JOHN STRATTON HAWLEY

A Bhramargit from 1582 in Fatehpur

Having seen Hari’s face, our eyes are opened wide.
Forgetting to blink, our pupils are naked
like those who are clad with the sky.
They’ve shaved their Brahmin braids—their in-laws’ teachings,
burned up the sacred thread of decorum,
And left their veils—their homes—to mumble exposed
through the forests, day and night, down the roads
In simple concentration—their ascetic’s death;
beauty makes them vow their eyes will never waver,
And anyone who tries to hinder them—husbands,
cousins, fathers—fails.
So Udho, though your words touch our hearts
and we understand them all, says Sur,
What are we to do? Our eyes are fixed.
They refuse to be moved by what we say.

Ever since your name has entered Hari’s ear
It’s been “Radha, O Radha,” an infinite mantra,
a formula chanted to a secret string of beads.
Nightly he sits by the Jumna, in a grove
far from his friends and his happiness and home.
He yearns for you. He has turned into a yogi:
constantly wakeful, whatever the hour.
Sometimes he spreads himself a bed of tender leaves;
sometimes he recites your treasurehouse of fables;
Sometimes he pledges silence; he closes his eyes
and meditates on every pleasure of your frame—
His eyes the invocation, his heart the oblation,
his mutterings the food to feed
the priests who tend the fire.
So has Syam’s whole body wasted away.
Says Sur, let him see you. Fulfill his desire.



Guru's darshan: *Dressed in ascetic garb and sitting in bliss near the master's hermitage, Dadu Dayal receives a blessing from his guru that propels his transcendent devotions.*

Palkan. Here the religious sect offers free accommodation to pilgrims, along with lunch and dinner prasad.

The Dadu Dwara in Naraina, the main center of worship for Dadu Panthis, is a sacred place of asceticism, as well as an education center and hub of religious discourse. Naraina is home to many of Dadu's followers.

The Dadu Panth

The sect Dadu founded remains a vibrant spiritual community to this day. It consists of male and female monastics, as well as householder devotees. They abstain from alcohol and are vegetarian, in line with the ascetic character of the tradition. The Dadu Panth is headquartered in Rajasthan, where it first originated, and its scriptural texts serve as a major resource for early manuscripts of poems by Dadu and other

north Indian saints, such as Ravidas. By traditional accounts, Dadu had 100 disciples who attained samadhi. He instructed 52 disciples to build ashrams, known as *thambas*, of which the five most sacred are in the cities of Naraina, Bhairana, Sambhar, Amer, and Karadala (Kalyanpura). These are places of pilgrimage for devotees from Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and other parts of the country. The lineage is continued through a succession of acharyas who carry on Dadu Dayal's vision as spiritual heads. All of them worship their Compassionate Brother with utmost love.

Testimony from Rajesh Anand, Singapore

Only with devotion to God and guru we can transcend the maya and reach the divine realm where there is no birth, death, disease, old age, etc. That is a state of complete bliss. This can only be achieved in human form. *Bhagavad Gita* and other scriptures state this unequivocally. Poet saint Dadu Dayal says the same in his poetry: "Human form, which is rare, is not [easily] obtained again and again; this human birth is a priceless gift granted by the grace of God."

Did You Know?

Dadu Dayal had such great respect for Kabir that Dadu's followers preserved Kabir's poetry in their collections. Thus we find that the Dadu Panth scriptures are a wonderful resource, capturing the 15th-century poet-saint's writings.

LEARN MORE

- ✱ **Spend** a day at the Mandir Shri Dadu Dwara in Jaipur, Rajasthan
- ✱ **Listen** to Dadu Dayal bhajans on YouTube
- ✱ **Read** books and essays about Dadu Dayal by Winand M. Callewaert



Dadu Dayal's Padas

TRANSLATED BY W.G. ORR

The Creator has many and diverse names:
Choose the name that comes to mind;
thus do all the saints practice remembrance.
The Lord who endowed us with soul
and body—worship Him in your heart;
Worship Him by that name
which best suits the moment.

Where Rama is, there I am not; where I am, there Rama is not.
This mansion is of delicate construction; there is no place for two.
While self remains, so long will there be a second;
When this selfhood is blotted out, then there is no other.
When I am not, there is but One; when I obtrude, then two.
When the veil of "I" is taken away, then does the One become as It was.

Ah me! Oft do I feel such pangs of separation from
my Beloved that I am likely to die unless I see Him.
Maiden, hearken to the tale of my agony;
I am restless without my Beloved.
In my yearning desire for the Beloved I break into song
day and night; I pour out my woes like the nightingale.
Ah me! Who will bring me to my Beloved?
Who will show me His path and console my heart?
Dadu says: O Lord, let me see Thy face,
even for a moment, and be blessed.

Dadu Dayal: Rajasthan, c.1544–1603

A spiritual lighthouse claimed as their own by two Indian states, Dadu Dayal was a gifted poet who was born in Ahmedabad, Gujarat and spent his spiritual life in Rajasthan. Affectionately known as "compassionate (*dayal*) brother (*dadu*)," he attracted both Hindus and Muslims with his nonsectarian teachings.

Some say Dadu was a foster son of a wealthy businessman in Ahmedabad named Lodhram, who found the baby floating on the Sabarmati River in 1545. In his childhood, Dadu was blessed by an elderly sage named Vriddhananda, or Baba Budha, whom Dadu's followers revere as God Himself. Having received divine instruction from Baba, Dadu commenced worshipping the peerless Absolute Brahman.

Considered a disciple in the lineage of saints Ramananda and Kabir, Dadu was a cotton carder (*dhuniya* or *pinjari*) by occupation, who married and had four children. After some years, he left family life and became a religious wanderer, finally settling down in Rajasthan. There he garnered a large following, which marked the formation of a sect called the Dadu Panth. Some accounts suggest he once met the Mughal emperor Akbar in the famed city of Fatehpur Sikri.

Nirguna Poetry

The Dadu sect reveres the Divine as the formless (nirgun), untainted Existence-Consciousness-Bliss (Sat-Chit-Ananda). Historically, the nirguna sant tradition flourished in several parts of North India, particularly Punjab. This strain of bhakti advocates devotion to the ineffable Absolute, without shape or form. Like the renowned 15th-century poet-saint Kabir, Dadu Dayal was known for his influential nirguna compositions. His "Dadu Anubhav Vani" is a compilation of

5,000 verses (*padas*) on such topics as truth, virtue and faith, documented by his disciple Rajjab. Composed in the Brajbhasha dialect, they exalt spontaneous bliss (*sahaja*). The themes of Dadu's poetry echo those in Kabir's poems, as well as motifs used by earlier Saha-jiya Buddhists and Natha yogis. In one *doha*, called "Kaya Mahai Rati Dina," Dadu sang: "The breath is the single-stringed musical instrument that continually emerges and subsides within one's body. Dadu says, 'When I found the supreme guru, he made me become one with the primordial sound of God within.'"

Equality of all was a pillar of Dadu's teachings. He preached that devotion to God should transcend religious or sectarian affiliation, and that devotees should become non-sectarian, or *nipakh*. He promoted japa (repeating names of God) as a tool for turning inward to find God, and stressed the centrality of guru, a source of divine authority who can lead the aspirant to God. Dadu's followers venerate other sants alongside their guru, including Kabir, Namdev, Ravidas and Haridas, all of whose poems feature prominently in the Dadu Panth scripture *Panchavani*.

Shedding His Mortal Coil

Dadu spent the last phase of his ascetic life in Naraina, near Jaipur in Rajasthan, where he attained *mahasamadhi* in 1603 at age 59. Subsequently, his body was taken in a palanquin from Naraina to Bhairana, where popular legend says Tila, a disciple, saw him standing at the entrance of a hilltop cave where he declared, "Satya Ram," and disappeared into the cave. Dadu Panthis say that on the palanquin, in place of his body, only flowers remained, which they then offered into the final cremation fires. Today, the site of the vision is called Shri Dadu



BAANI SEKHON

Tulsidas: Varanasi, c.1543–1623

In the *Hanuman Chalisa*, poet-saint Tulsidas seeks the grace of Lord Rama, Sita, Lakshmana and Hanuman, fervently requesting them to forever reside in his heart. This hugely popular 40-verse ode is today memorized and chanted by devotees worldwide. Hanuman is known to help not only human beings in need, but is so loyal and powerful that his service extends to even the Gods! Tulsidas describes this and more in his composition, at the heart of which is beloved Hanuman's virtues, valor and surrender to Rama. Like Hanuman, poet-saint Tulsidas devoted his life to Shri Rama bhakti; in his case, by creating and reveling in literary masterpieces on Lord Rama and Hanuman.

A proponent of Rama Nama (repeating the Lord Rama's name) and one of India's most renowned Hindi devotional poets, Goswami Tulsidas was a Sanskrit scholar, bhakta and saint who lived in 16th-century Varanasi during the Mughal rule of Akbar and Jahangir. Tulsidas composed many devotional hymns, including *Sankat Mochan* (glorifying Hanuman as "Remover of Sorrows") and *Vinaya Patrika* ("Letter of Humble Petition" to Rama). His most celebrated work is *Shri Ramcharitmanas*, the *Ramayana* epic recomposed in the eastern Hindi dialect, Avadhi. Stories about Tulsidas record his interactions with his bhakti kin, poet-saints Surdas and Mirabai.

Transformation from Grihasta to Bhakta

An anecdote from Priyadas's early 18th-century hagiography *Bhakti-rasabodhini* revolves around Tulsidas's transformation from a grihasta (householder) to bhakta (devotee). Rambola and Ratnavali are names popularly attributed to Tulsidas and his wife. Rambola utterly adored Ratnavali. Once, upon returning from a trip and realizing

that she had gone to her parents' home (a common custom for young brides), he rushed to be with her. Amar Chitra Katha comics portray him using a corpse as a raft to cross a river, and mistaking a snake for a rope while climbing up to her window. Once he and his wife were face to face, she was so stunned by his intense dedication to her that Ratnavali reminds him of the impermanence of earthly love. She explains that while the body is a temporary reality of bones covered with skin, the love of Rama lives on forever. Shocked to the core upon hearing such wisdom from his wife, Rambola sets out on the path to Truth. He leaves his young family and dedicates his life to God. Years later, having lived the life of a bhakta, constantly craving a vision of Lord Rama, he composes the *Ramcharitmanas* as Saint Tulsidas.

The Masterpiece: *Shri Ramcharitmanas*

One of India's greatest treasures, the *Ramayana* was composed by Sage Valmiki in Sanskrit around the 5th to 4th century bce, as estimated by historians. It is a magnificent epic narrating the life of the divine king Rama, which over time has been many an artist's creative playground. It manifests in diverse textual versions, oral recreations, classical and folk singing, temple rituals and recitations, theatrical shows, and *pravachanas* (discourses) in which one learns the philosophical nuances of Rama's dharmic example. In all of these, retelling, enacting and reflecting are common factors. Add to this a trove of visual art, architecture, sculpture and popular media portrayals it has inspired. There are *Ramayanas* in numerous South and South-east Asian languages, as scholar A.K. Ramanujan points out: Balinese, Bengali, Cambodian, Chinese, Gujarati, Javanese, Kannada, Kashmiri, Laotian, Malay, Marathi, Oriya, Prakrit, Sinhalese, Tamil, Telugu, Thai,

Hanuman bhakti: Tulsidas offers his Hanuman Chalisa poem to Lord Hanuman, seen flying with the Dronagiri mountain, which contains the life-saving herb, Sanjivani, that saved Lakshmana's life. In the background is the Sankat Mochan Hanuman ("reliever of troubles") Temple, which Tulsidas founded in Varanasi.

Tibetan—as well as Jain and Buddhist tellings. In Sanskrit alone, there are more than 25 versions in various genres. With one central storyline, we enjoy a multitude of discourses based on each poet's vision, audience and context.

Tulsidas brought this epic of Rama into the Hindi language. One cannot reflect on the life of Tulsidas without dipping into his awe-inspiring Manas (Spiritual Lake). *Shri Ramcharitmanas* (roughly translating to "The Spiritual Lake of Rama's Acts") is a Hindi version of the *Ramayana* about Lord Rama's life and great deeds from the bhakti perspective of Tulsidas, composed in the latter half

of the 16th century. Scholars suggest it was influenced by Kambar's 12th-century Tamil *Ramayana*, called *Ramavataram*.

A fascinating feature in Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas* is the deep reverence that Siva (the presiding Deity of Varanasi) and Rama have for one another. While Siva extols the greatness of Lord Rama, Rama is a worshiper of Siva. In other poetic works, Tulsidas praises Rama and Siva in every other line, as he equates Siva's greatest mantra, *Namasivaya*, to Rama's name. Saint Tulsidas thus served as a bridge between two major Hindu streams.

Through his epic poem, Tulsidas made Lord Rama's story accessible in Avadhi. In those days it was not customary to render such works in a local dialect. Despite being challenged by many at the time, Tulsidas thus expanded the reach of the epic boundlessly. This can be likened to making devotional works available in numerous transliterations and translations in the 21st century, enabling seekers worldwide to reflect on India's spiritual wisdom regardless of language.

Did You Know?

During the Dussehra festival, the "Ramlila of Ramnagar" (Varanasi) is performed every evening for 31 days, during the course of which the entire *Ramcharitmanas* is recited. Each scene is elaborately enacted in a different part of the city. The Ramlila is a spiritual and visual treat for attendees as they follow and witness the story of Rama.

LEARN MORE

- ✱ **Visit** the Tulsi Ghat neighborhood, as well as Sankat Mochan Hanuman Temple and Tulsi Manas Mandir in Varanasi
- ✱ **Read** Philip Lutgendorf's book *The Life of a Text: Performing the Ramcaritmanas of Tulsidas*
- ✱ **Listen** to renditions of the *Hanuman Chalisa* on YouTube



UNKNOWN

Poems from the *Vinaya Patrika*

TRANSLATED BY JOHN STRATTON HAWLEY
AND MARK JUERGENSMEYER

The name of King Ram: think of it with love.
It is provisions for those who journey empty-handed,
and a friend for those who travel alone,
It is blessedness for the unblessed,
good character for those with none,
A patron to purchase goods from the poor,
and a benefactor to the abandoned.
It is a good family for those without one,
they say—and the scriptures agree—
It is, to the crippled, hands and feet,
and to the blind it is sight.
It is parents to those who are destitute,
solid ground to the ungrounded,
A bridge that spans the sea of existence
and the cause of the essence of joy.
Ram's name has no equal—
Rescuer of the fallen:
The thought of it makes fertile earth
from Tulsi's barren soil.

To those who look to Hanuman
The fulfillment of promises is certain,
like a diamond-cut line in stone.

He makes the impossible possible, the possible impossible—
no one else receives such praise.
Those who think on Him, that joyful treasure,
are freed from adversities and cares.

He is favored by the Gods—Parvati, Siva,
Lakshman, Ram and Sita—
And Tulsi; the gracious gaze from that monkey
is a mine of good fortune, a mother lode.



FINANCE

Does Anyone Make Money Investing Dharmically?

Our financial pundit addresses the challenges and opportunities of supporting good in the marketplace and surveys growing trends toward ethical capital

BY EASAN KATIR, CALIFORNIA

AUM, AUM, AUM!" YES, WE DO OUR JAPA each morning, but here we are chanting the investment-industry acronym AUM, which stands for Assets Under Management. Ask an investment manager what his AUM is and he will give you a number, not a mantra. Let's think about AUM for Hindus. To develop personal integrity, we want to integrate our life, to align our daily activities with our ideals. Yes? Shouldn't we do the same with our investments? More and more investors are saying yes, and are choosing to invest so that their capital promotes goodness in the world.

In the investment world, this trend was first called SRI, socially responsible investing; and some mutual funds are devoted to

this idea. SRI is a broad term which includes company ethics, environmental issues and human rights.

History of Ethical Investing

In American colonial times, some religious groups proscribed their endowments from investing in the slave trade (more about investments in the slave trade later in this article). The Quakers refused to invest in the slave trade or alcohol. In 1851, when the American Temperance Society was at its height, there were 8,000 chapters comprised of people who pledged to abstain from distilled alcohol. Civic, business and religious leaders who were members in Hartford, Connecticut, formed the American Temperance Life Insurance Company, which only

wrote policies for teetotalers. The company prospered. It insured Abraham Lincoln's life in 1865. Along the way, the name changed to Phoenix Life and was eventually listed on the NY stock exchange, and I invested. In 2016, Nassau Reinsurance Group offered to buy our shares for a healthy premium, and we sold to them.

In 1921, Pioneer Funds were the first mutual funds to avoid tobacco, gambling and alcohol investments. In the 1960s, they expanded their prohibitions to accommodate the civil rights, environment and anti-war movements. In the 1970s, the concept of socially responsible investment (SRI) expanded to prohibit investment in companies doing business in apartheid South Africa. By 1995, there were almost 60 SRI funds, with total

assets of \$640 billion.

The nomenclature evolved, too. The term used by institutional investors is now ESG, which stands for "environment, social, governance." In 2006, this was made formal by the United Nations when it announced the Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI). One can join this organization for a substantial annual fee and debate their six aspirational and voluntary principles.

More specific are the SRI Standards, which provide a detailed template for companies to report their adherence to ESG principles. Not every company that touts itself as ESG compliant really is so, and a low quality of data is being reported even by ESG-focused companies. Consistent standards and reporting methods don't exist, so it is difficult for investors to compare these funds accurately.

There was a recent tempest in the ESG world. Last summer, mutual-fund behemoth Vanguard confessed that two of their ESG funds had 31 investments in oil, weapons and other non-ESG compliant companies. One analyst dubbed it "greenwashing." They have since sold those investments and promised not to allow that again. On the other hand, Blackrock Funds have invested billions with meat processors and companies that burn Brazilian forests.

Extraordinary visionaries have espoused ESG goals. Even in early interviews with Steve Jobs, he articulated his vision to not just create a company that sells products, but



Do Millennials Invest Differently?

The millennial mindset is geared for quality over quantity. They will spend extra for brands they share a message with, and they'll tend to take a lower paycheck in return for a more desirable lifestyle. Similarly with investing, they are more inclined to take an equity interest (buy a stock) in a company they perceive as

making the world a better place, even if they know they may be sacrificing some returns. Fortunately for them (and everyone else), there is evidence to suggest that investing in ethical companies may in itself be a powerful investment thesis, simply because it avoids the risks inherent in owning the bad actors.

David Koch. Halbert Hargrove

one that will revolutionize the world. And he did that with computers. Was it luck? Apparently not, because he revolutionized three more industries: music, animation and cell phones. I recall sharing a vegetarian lunch with Jobs at London's Savoy Hotel. He showed a 12-minute clip of his new movie, Toy Story, to promote his 1995 Pixar IPO. As HINDUISM TODAY reported, Jobs had once pilgrimaged to India, meditated, was a vegetarian and promoted dharmic ideals. Oh, and by the way, he kept Apple debt-free during his reign.

How big is ESG today? Swami Venkataraman, Senior Vice President in charge of developing ESG analytical tools for the famous Wall Street bond rating service, Moody's, told me that "over \$12 trillion in the US was invested according to some form of sustainable or ethical or socially responsible strategy, commonly called ESG or Environmental, Social and Governance."

Of course, even if a company is ESG-compliant, it may not be a profitable business model. As fiduciaries, investment stewards are legally responsible to exercise care, loyalty and responsibility to clients, while exerting

best efforts toward portfolio growth. So ESG is only the first screen in the decision process. There is progress, though. In 2015, the UN ratified 17 sustainable development goals and 169 targets. As is often the case, Wikipedia explains them best: [bit.ly/WikipediaSRI](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainable_development_goals).

Do Good

Avoiding evil is a passive form of ESG. Some investors actively invest to gain board seats to steer companies to more responsible business practices. These activists may invest in companies with poor ESG records, since their goal is to make change. I interviewed a retired CalPERS fund manager, Diloshini Seneviratne. She told me "ESG is a huge mandate for CalPERS," and they have a 21-point ESG risk factor checklist to rank their outside managers. CalPERS is the largest pension fund in the US, with \$336 billion in AUM. They have committees which screen to avoid socially reprehensible companies. Though they don't sit on company boards, CalPERS is a leader in activist investing to ensure that managers implement ESG principles. They created the Sustainable Investment Research Library

(SIRI), a searchable database of 1,200 academic papers on ESG topics.

Petroleum-Based Energy

Is oil ESG-compliant? Even the Rockefeller Foundation has divested from petro-based energy companies, a major milestone since their ancestor, John D. Rockefeller, made his fortune in oil. But ESG investing is relative. Few know that the discovery of oil, gas and coal saved the world's forests during the industrial revolution. After the steam engine was invented, factories needed fuel to heat the boilers, so they cut down forests. Destruction of England's forests was well underway when oil, gas and coal were discovered and subsequently used to run the engines of the industrial revolution. The world's forests were saved by coal and oil.

We use these natural energy products every day of our lives, produced by mother nature over hundreds of millions of years from plants, sunlight and gravity. Oil is literally ancient solar energy. From energy products we get asphalt for our roads, as well as efficient sources of power, electricity, transportation and aviation. Nothing else has ever come close in energy efficiency.

Plant-Based Foods

The world's forests are in danger again today, not because of energy, but because of carnivores. To feed human addiction for beef, forests are clearcut for cattle pastures. Brazilian farmers simply burn the forests on their land to create more grazing for beef.

That trend may be ebbing, though. According to Jennifer Bartashus and Diana Rosero-Pena, analysts, "Imitation meat-makers like Beyond Meat and Impossible Foods Inc. are engineering veggie burgers that are more acceptable to the masses. It's also about the masses changing their tastes and trying to eat less meat. Indeed, there are signs of a shortage of elite veggie burgers to satisfy consumers at the moment. Consumer trends, including health and wellness, animal protection and environmental concerns, continue to gain traction, aiding sales growth prospects for plant-based meat substitutes. Millennials are driving this trend, and their growing disposable incomes allow them to spend in support of their beliefs."

Who Cares?

We can ask, "What about religious values? Are Hindus the only ones concerned?" No. MSCI



publishes the Catholic Values Index, which excludes companies involved in abortion, contraceptives, stem cells, pornography, alcohol, tobacco, gambling, firearms, nuclear power and GMO.

MSCI also publishes an Islamic index, which eschews vintners, distillers, breweries, bars, pubs, tobacco, pork, pornography, pawn shops, mortgages, stock exchanges, credit cards, insurance, military equipment, gambling, lotteries, radio, broadcasting, hotels, cruise lines, restaurants, movies, television, cable and satellite. However, Sharia law provides an interesting workaround, which incidentally increases charitable contributions. If a company derives part of their income from these haraam activities, they may still be invested in if they "purify their dividends" by donating the proportion earned by these activities to charity.

Another Voice

As a millennial investor and fiduciary to thousands of retirees, I find it difficult to appease both the financial and moral responsibilities of my position.

Hinduism teaches us that dharma, or duty, is significant and must be fulfilled regardless of circumstances. Dharma guides us to fulfill our duty, and the duty of an investor is to create returns for those who have trusted us with their finances. Regarding the two

commonly condemned sectors, defense and energy, the intent of the industry is not to harm others, but to aid people in their daily lives (power, electricity) and help them defend against enemies (guns). Therefore, while I agree that ESG mandates should provide boundaries to invest, our ultimate responsibility is to return a profit to our constituents.

Arun Nallasivan
Investment Analyst

Another Islamic index, published by the Bombay Stock Exchange, is the TASI Shariah 50 Index, overseen by the Taqwa Advisory and Shariah Investment Solution (TASIS). And the S&P has created the BSE 500 Shariah suite of indices, one each for the US, Europe and Pan Asia. The US Sharia index is up 25% as of this writing, badly lagging the broader markets.

Issues for Hindus

Current ESG principles—even these religious indexes—do not screen for companies who participate in cow slaughter, such as McDonalds, so they are not exactly what we want as Hindus. And when one searches the CalPERS SIRI database of ESG papers, there are zero results for "vegetarian," "animal" or "cruelty," though one finds hundreds opining on board diversity. As Hindus, we need to go beyond ESG.

What are the unique ideals of the Hindu investor? Moody's Senior Vice President, Venkataraman, summed it up last August when he told me, "The Hindu idea of ahimsa provides a unique ESG-compliant framework. Hindu philosophy sees the Divine as being immanent in all of nature, including inanimate nature. Thus, treating animals and the Earth with respect and regard is deeply resonant with Hindu philosophy. Those ideas can be extended to avoid investments in industries that pollute the Earth or treat animals violently or treat workers badly. An agnostic investor may adopt ESG principles, but a Hindu investor has a powerful faith-based rationale for doing so."

The ideal of dharmic investing is to uphold a respectful religious culture which honors all souls and Bhumi Mata herself. At the dawn of this millennium, climate change is a looming concern.

Yamas and Niyamas

We can propose a solution: we can screen investments with the yamas and niyamas, the ancient ethics written of in over 50 scriptures beginning with the *Rig Veda* and comprising the first two steps of Patanjali's eight-step yogic path to God Realization. For the best American English essays on these Hindu ethics, read *Yoga's Forgotten Foundation*, by Satguru Bodhinatha Veyanswami. The yamas and niyamas provide good guidelines for dharmic investing, just as Tiruvalluvar tells us about the right time to invest: "A man may tightly bind

CHOICES: They Do Exist



You choose: (clockwise from facing page) Beyond Burger is just one of several non-meat alternatives to beef that are capturing the market's attention; the oceans of the world await our solutions; and can be pristine again; while new studies indicate tree

coverage worldwide may actually be increasing due to climate changes, deforestation remains a threat. Between 2010 and 2015, the world's forests decreased by 8 million acres a year.

himself to prosperity by the tether called timely action" (Kural 48).

The very first and foundational yama is ahimsa, not harming others in thought, word or action. As a first screen for investment, that would steer us away from gun manufacturers, like Smith & Wesson, and companies like McDonald's (MCD), Hormel (HRL) and Tyson (TSN), or lesser-known Pilgrim's Pride (PPG) and Seaboard (SEB), each responsible for killing millions of animals. MCD is one of the Dow 30, so when one invests in the Dow index fund, one participates in *papam*.

Arjava, honesty, is another dharmic investing screen. There is just as much hype in the dharmic investing space as any other, so we need a screen for honesty, as well as *asteya*, non-stealing. We can invest in honesty, enforced by surveillance equipment, in promoting ethical energy and in producing high-quality communication tools such as Apple computer.

The third yama, *asteya*, includes avoidance of debt. Avoiding debt-ridden companies is also good investment advice, since highly leveraged companies are more vulnerable in economic downturns. This is an extreme position, since debt is so prevalent in the world;

but my guru advised avoiding most debt.

Debt results from discontentment with what we have, mixed with perhaps a dash of adharmic impulses if the borrower knows he will have a tough time repaying, or—from the perspective of the lender, the bond buyer—knows the borrower will. This means investing in bonds may be considered adharmic, as it is debt. Debt has caused great suffering in



the world, from the suicides of failing farmers to the impoverishment of nations. Want to know who is debt-free? Here are a few: Facebook, Intuitive Surgical, Skyworks Solutions, T. Rowe Price Group, Lancaster Colony Corp, Universal Display Corp and PS Business Parks.

Won't debt-free companies under-perform because all enterprises need leverage? Well,

there is OLED, up 155% year-to-date, while debt-laden S&P500 is up only 20%. Just a high-tech anomaly? Then how about Five Below, up 24% in September of last year. iRobot and Columbia Sportswear are two others. Are these stock recommendations? No. One should carefully analyze one's personal situation, and at most add these in small doses to a diversified portfolio.

Another guideline for dharmic investing is *dhriti*—being steadfast in following prudent rules. Tiruvalluvar can teach us the rules, but it is our dhriti which holds us to them. Everyone has their story of an investment made on a whim, or because of social pressure, or an outright scam. Dhriti honors the rules of due diligence and prudence, for it would be adharmic to suffer a catastrophic loss.

Santosh, contentment, protects us from taking undue risks. If we envy another's greater wealth, we may risk too much because of this cloud of envy. According to a recent survey, wealthy families are content; they generally don't divorce, don't change jobs frequently and don't change houses, and often drive older cars. They are content with their lot in life, not chasing shiny objects or going



deeply in debt to keep up with the neighbors. One may argue they're content because they have money—but was it santosha that allowed sufficient stability to create wealth?

Hri, remorse and reflection, comes into play when we do make a foolish investment. *Mata*, cognition, shines when it all comes together in perceptive insight. And how about the *niyama Isvarapujana* (worship)? Well, on a recent Sunday my wife worshiped Ganesha at a temple and asked for an increase in family wealth. On Monday we received an out-of-the-blue email from a \$100 million investor looking for investment counsel. Coincidence? Readers can exercise *mata*, and decide.

Dharmic investing is more than just where to invest, it is also what one does with the profits. Therefore tithing, *dana*, is an important component—realizing that everything belongs to God, and actualizing Tiruvalluvar's dictum that the purpose of wealth is to support swamis, temples, one's family, the poor and oneself. The above observations constitute refinements of dharmic investing, based on 20-plus years of experience.

Wealth-Building Strategies

So, how can we integrate dharma into our wealth-building strategies? Should we trust the S&P 500 index funds to keep our ideals intact? No, this index includes 12 meat processors and 12 weapons dealers, not to mention many polluting oil companies. A better

choice for our passive index investing is the Invesco QQQ Trust (QQQ), representing the Nasdaq 100 index. This comprises companies with a much lighter karmic footprint, mostly high tech, as well as the maker of Naked Fruit Juice and Quaker Oats, since PepsiCo joined the Nasdaq 100 last July. Much of the high-tech world meets our ahimsa guidelines and also increases world *vidya*, knowledge in the palm of our hand, and *sambandham*, the ability to commune with billions, inching toward our Hindu ideal of Vasudhaiva kutumbakam, "The world is a one family."

At first glance, another possible choice for passive index investing might be iShares MSCI KLD 400 Social Fund (DSI), which bills itself as ESG compliant. However, this fund contains twelve oil companies and McDonaldd, so QQQ is preferable for Hindus.

As one's wealth increases in index funds, small, prudent positions of minority interests in public companies are also appropriate.

The yamas and niyamas provide a most organized screening tool. One might miss a big profit in an adharmic enterprise. But that's ok, isn't it? When Beyond Meat rises from \$25 to \$200 in a single month, most dharmic investors can feel content.

Are Stock Investments Too Risky?

Having reached \$200, Beyond Meat next dropped to \$150. If that type of abrupt equity

change upsets your meditations, what to do? One can also invest in bonds. There is the iShares Global Green Bond Fund (BGRN), up 11 percent last year.

The Nuveen California Municipal Value Fund (NCA), which pays a 35% dividend, is diversified in multiple sectors including housing affordability, transportation, healthcare, education, utilities and water. One remarkable project that this fund supports is Measure DD, for the preservation and restoration of estuaries and lakes in the Bay Area. A huge estuary that benefits from this bond fund encompasses San Francisco Bay and the delta of the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers. This is the largest estuary in western North America. With growing demand for water and utilities in the Bay Area, as well as increased activity and pollution, investing in conservation efforts to protect our most precious resource is vital. There are about \$160 billion in green bonds that finance environmental causes.

Did you know one can invest in land which grows strawberries, blueberries, almonds and pistachios? Yes, publicly traded and paying a 4% dividend, Gladstone Land (LAND) owns 103 farms growing nuts, fruit and vegetables.

Invest in gold? One would think gold investing is, well, golden. But others have aptly named it "blood gold," since it is often produced in near-slavery conditions. Is that something we want to participate in?

A Millennial's Entrepreneurial View

When I think about building companies dharmically, I think about what technology already exists and how to best leverage what's already there to decrease friction for the end user. For example, look at Honey Science Corporation, which was just acquired by Paypal for \$4 billion, or even Grammarly, which has raised over \$200 million in venture capital. At their core, both are extensions to the

Chrome browser that automatically provide value and convenience to the user. They do not require the user to change their browsing behavior; there is no new portal that the user must login to, no new training for the user and no new technology or hardware that the user needs to deploy. It's value first, with the least friction possible, that works with the applications that the user already has and understands.

It's not about building new portals or deploying heavy software/hardware for the sake of it. It's about putting the users first, with easier-to-use software, which can attract even more users, and thus affording lower prices. This approach is efficient, less wasteful and coexists with others, building humbly on the shoulders of giants as opposed to replacing existing work and investments.



Vik Singh is the CEO and co-founder of a new software venture. He was the CEO and co-founder of Infer, a company providing a predictive platform for helping businesses win more customers.

Moving Away from the Harmful



Doing well while doing good: (clockwise from opposite page) Cow slaughter or bovine nurturing? Coal mining or pristine mountains? Vaping or healthy youth? Military tanks or humanitarian relief?

The rise of ethical investing

Aligning investment outcomes with client values

ae **australianethical**

November 2018

Screen carefully. One choice is the Perth Mint Fund (AAAU), up 21.67% last year, the only sovereign-backed ETF, with shares redeemable in gold coins.

One exchange-traded fund Hindus could consider is Vegan Climate Fund (VEGN), a newly launched fund comprised of vegan-oriented companies. I spoke with CEO Claire Smith, who said, "Our aim is to help vegans and animal activists take the pain out of their portfolios."

There's the ideal and then there's the deal. There are huge caveats for all investing, and dharmic investing is no exception. For every investment consideration, there is the story, the idea, the concept, which can be fabulous. For example, 95% of Beyond Meat buyers are meat-eaters! Then there is the deal—the pricing, the profit sharing, the insider options granted, which can give one pause. For example, Beyond Meat became overpriced at \$235 and was at \$75.60 on December 31. So while investing with a dharmic conscience, we don't want to foolishly throw money at every idea, no matter how good, unless we have analyzed the deal. We want to buy low, sell high, plant the seed, reap the harvest, code the app, sell a billion copies. Investing is about making a profit at the end of the day. Anything else is either philanthropy, which has its big place in the world, or foolishness, which we want to leave to those who overpaid for Lyft and Uber.

So, conclusions: Most research papers

conclude with "more study is needed," but in our case, conclusions are clear. We want to put our money prana into good dharmic companies, just the way we want good food prana, and good interpersonal prana. There is plenty to invest in while upholding our dharma in this new era of Hindu renaissance.

Is ESG-compliant investing profitable? Does one need to sacrifice profits to own a dharmic portfolio? History has shown

IPO, we bought Beyond Meat shares, which increased in value immediately. The scales have tipped, and the world is catching on: Dharmic investing can be very profitable. As we go to press, many chains, including KFC, Burger King and McDonalds, are starting to test-market vegan options. Or consider Enphase Energy, a Fremont, California-based solar company, up a mere 484% last year.

By Pawan Deshpande

A few months ago, I found out that our family office has invested in a fund which had in turn invested in a company with a subsidiary in Argentina that was a beef processing facility with a capacity of 9,600 cows per month. After this came to my attention, we sent notification to the fund manager that we will be redeeming our investment by year-end

given that this violates our ESG policy.

I am happy to report that this morning the fund manager said that they instead will divest from this company, and not make any similar investments going forward, not only for our family office but for their entire portfolio across all their clients! Go-raksha through investing!

that SRI/ESG investing keeps up with other investments. In 2019 one IPO showed that big money has arrived. There is a new niche sector: meat lookalikes that are vegan. Americans eat 50 billion burgers a year; Americans average three per week. Some companies are private, such as Impossible Burgers, but in some we can invest. Shortly after the May 3rd

Exchange-Traded Funds

Funds as well as individual companies are traded on exchanges. Today Exchange-Traded Funds (ETF) have become more popular than the old-fashioned mutual fund, since they have generally lower fees and the ability to invest and divest during the day when exchanges are open. The old mutual funds could

only be bought or sold once a day at a set price after the exchanges closed. There are now 96 socially responsible ETFs, with total assets under management (AUM) of \$20 billion. The iShares Global Green Bond ETF (BGRN) was up 8% in 2019. The Invesco Solar ETF (TAN) is up a spectacular 62%, and is, in fact, the best performing ETF of the year! So the answer to the question "Can Hindu investing keep up with the market?" is a resounding yes; done well, it can surpass the market.

Types of Social Screens

There are many more options for social screens currently available than there were in the early nineties. There are currently four basic approaches, two of which were already mentioned. The original approach is called "Socially Responsible Investing," abbreviated as SRI. Some prefer to call it "Socially Responsive Investing." It excludes companies that are involved in activities such as nuclear power, tobacco, alcohol, gambling, military weapons, civilian firearms, GMOs and adult entertainment.

A second, more recent approach, which has become significantly more popular in the last few years, is called "Environmental, Social, Governance" (ESG). The ESG approach chooses companies that have positive environmental,

social and governance characteristics. *Environmental* generally refers to a combination of factors including energy efficiency, environmental impact, and the sustainability efforts of companies. *Social* covers things like human rights, labor and consumer protections, and public health values. *Governance* considers the responsiveness of a company to stakeholder (employees, shareholders and customers) concerns, proper oversight of a company and its executives by its board, and the checks and balances in place to protect the stakeholders.

The third approach is called "Sustainable Investing," focused on creating and supporting a sustainable global community. This means investing in companies and industries that use as few resources as possible or improve the efficiency of those resources, so as to preserve precious natural resources for future generations and the health of the planet. Sustainable investing also means trying to invest in ways that will help current generations pass on an equal or better quality of life to future generations, creating a sustainable future for everyone. Along these lines, Morgan Stanley

A Dharma Index

We could devise a Dharma Index, consisting of the following companies. Do I recommend buying all these at the market open tomorrow? Of course not. This is the Dharma screen. Next, apply the screens of prudent investors intent upon profit.

AAPL	AAP	BYND	ALGN	ANSS
TRIP	TTWO	AAON	BPT	CONE
CSGP	DORM	ENPH	EPRT	EQM
ERII	GNTX	GOOGL	LULU	MAG
MMI	PSB	ROST	RYN	TREX
VRS	WERN	IOVA	LOB	OC
ZM				

has created the "Institute for Sustainable Investing," describing their mission as: "For us at Morgan Stanley, it is abundantly clear that the solutions to global challenges can only achieve the required scale if they can attract a critical mass of private capital. To this end, we've established the Morgan Stanley

Are You Investing in Involuntary Servitude?

Socially Responsible Investing (SRI) has been important to religious people as far back as one cares to look. As early as the mid-1700s, the Quakers refrained from investing in the slave trade and alcohol consumption.

When we think of slavery in America, generally we think of historic times far from today's life. When we look beyond the labels to see circumstances as they are, we realize that slavery/indentured servitude has become a billion-dollar industry. In fact, it is authorized in the 13th amendment of the US Constitution: 13th Amendment, Section 1. *Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.*

This language allows the use of forced labor as a form of punishment after conviction of a crime. With an incarcerated population of over 6 million people (2 million more than the population of Los Angeles!) combined with a need for cheap labor, the prison system has successfully provided a



Conflict of interest?

Businesses hire inmates, like these women at Arizona State Women's Prison, to staff their call centers and package their products. It provides work, but it also offers an incentive to keep them locked up.

in private prisons, such as GEO Group (GEO) or CoreCivic (CXW).

Publicly-traded prisons should be avoided. Less obvious are the products manufactured

using prison labor. Identifying and avoiding these is more challenging, as many companies use prison labor for products ranging from cell phone parts and airplane components to department store clothing. For example, Microsoft has used prisoners to package hardware, Starbucks uses it to package their coffee sold in stores, and BP hires prison inmates to clean up their oil spills. AT&T pays inmates \$2 a day to man their call centers. The list goes on: www.ranker.com/list/companies-in-the-united-states-that-use-prison-labor/genevieve-carlton.

bountiful supply at minimal cost. In many cases, through the privatization of prison corporations, an increased prisoner population brings an increase in government subsidization and funding. These subsidies seldom result in improving heinous conditions or reducing overpopulation (California prisons have reported 400% occupancy in recent years). Private prison companies continue to operate. This money-making gives incentive to keep people behind bars, since releasing them is letting cheap help run away. To lighten our karmic footprint, let's avoid investing in the modern-day slavery

Which Factors are Most Important to ESG Investors?



Poll: (left) A ten-minute online survey was conducted with 1,056 American adult investors with at least \$250,000 in investable assets. True North Market Insights conducted the poll between March 16 and 19, 2018. The statistical margin of error is +/- 2.6%. Graphic courtesy Ameritrade.

In January 2020, Blackrock's Chairman and CEO Larry Fink explains the company's new emphasis. He states that regarding sustainability, "the most significant of these factors today relates to climate change, not only in terms of the physical risk associated with rising global temperatures, but also transition risk—namely, how the global transition to a low-carbon economy could affect a company's long-term profitability."

In terms of specific changes in Blackrock's investment products, he states that "We intend to make sustainable funds the standard building blocks in these solutions wherever possible." This would be the equivalent of a car maker moving from having just one electric vehicle to offering an electric version of each of its many models.

Conclusion

Modern society is characterized by an excess of opportunity. We have more information, more products, and more options than ever before. As a result, curating, filtering and refining are more important skills than ever before. Those who edit best will find the signal in the noise. One can make the case that investing with ESG compliant companies can enhance returns because those companies are less likely to incur large fines, are more likely to retain talented staff and do not risk reputation issues. One of the arguments in favor of ESG based investing is that these are the companies of the future, those that will survive tough times ahead and still be in business in 50 years.

Blackrock Sees the light

The year 2020 started with an unexpected boost to ESG investing. Blackrock, the world's largest money manager, announced that it is overhauling its investing strategy to make sustainability the new standard for investing. As the headline on its website now boldly states: "Making sustainability our standard." In letters to CEOs and clients

About the Author

The Financial Industry Regulatory Authority, of which I'm a member, wisely insists I mention that nothing in this article should be construed as standalone investment advice or guaranty, and any ideas described should comprise part of a diversified portfolio, and that you, dear reader, should exercise due diligence, assess your risk tolerance, avoid gambling, and consult with your chosen advisors.



For over 30 years I have invested according to dharmic principles. Ahimsa is the cornerstone of my life and belief, so that means I avoid companies whose principal business is killing or weapons manufacturing. I manage wealth for families, individuals and retirement plans. I may own minority interests in companies described in this article.

For more, write to easan.katir@gmail.com

Celebrating the Hindu American Saga

The THREADS conference in Boston was a first-time exploration of the influence of Hindu Americans from business, science, health and more

By NIMMI RAJ, CALIFORNIA

AT A TIME WHEN THE PUBLIC SPACE IS fraught with discussions on immigrants and the nature of their contributions to the national fabric, the Hindu-American community gathered to take stock on where they had arrived since the reformation of the US immigration system and the Asian exclusion laws in 1965.

"THREADS 2019: The Hindu American Saga," November 1-3, 2019, organized by the World Hindu Council of America, sought to look past Hindus' label as the most affluent and highly educated group in the US—to understand the factors in that success and where we are headed. Rather than highlight politically oriented speakers from India, this conference, focusing on its purpose, showed a community coming into its own. Political conversations—in the corridors and over tea breaks—centered on the GOP and the Democratic Party, rather than Indian politics.

Speakers included big hitters like Dr. Rudy Tanzi, Dr. Stuart Rothenberg, Prof. Menas Kafatos, Rajiv Malhotra, Dr. Mukesh Aghi and Dr. Subhash Kak. Others spoke of immense financial success or passionately espoused various causes. Unanimously, they stressed the hard work, enterprise, honesty, determination and integrity which had led to their success. Many credited their accomplishments to their heritage.

For the first generation, success usually meant achieving stability and financial security in a new land. For succeeding generations, it has meant confidently branching out—choosing careers in politics, working with refugees, getting into advocacy, finding local volunteer opportunities, dispelling common American misconceptions, and integrating more fully into the mainstream.

Non-Hindus as well as Hindus had been invited to participate and speak openly; but only a few from other faiths participated. Perhaps some were put off by the WHC's affiliation with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. But this conference contained nothing to claim preeminence, offend or provoke, so future participation is likely to only grow. For a full understanding of the Hindu American community, the gap needs to be closed.

The narrative was meant especially for the younger generation who are carrying the community forward. There were

young musicians, panelists and a fast-paced 75-minute session in which a dozen speakers made their presentations—but not many youth in the audience itself. And while organizers carefully included women panelists, there was no session on women's issues.

Overall, the nine different panels of "Threads 2019" did a fine job of creating a record of the community as being more than just a group of doctors and engineers.

Following are vignettes of the panels. Some of this material was said at the event, and some later to HINDUISM TODAY.



ALL PHOTOS: THREADS/KV PHOTOGRAPHY

1. Arts & Literature

Here it was all about storytelling. Panelists were Rachna Bodas, Hindustani vocalist; Malathi Iyengar, dancer and choreographer; Philip Goldberg, author; Dr. Aishu Venkataraman, Carnatic violinist; and Aditi Banerjee, author.

Moderator Shekhar Shastri, a dramatist, pointed out that the public at large gets connected to its roots through artistes. This is particularly true of Indian classical art, which gives voice to an ancient, continuing heri-

tage. Panelists recognized that the burden of communication was theirs. Iyengar said she keeps her audience in mind while preserving the classicism of the Bharatanatyam idiom. Bodas demonstrated how with simple musical notes and without lyrics the audience could be told a story that is universally understood. Venkatraman spoke of striving to capture the mood of young cancer patients through her music, making it relevant for them. Goldberg said when writing non-fiction he thinks explicitly of his effect on readers.

Banerjee offered, "We haven't done a good enough job of understanding the importance of storytelling and understanding the influence it has on minds." She pointed to Chinese TV shows with high production values which give people pride in their ancient heritage. India has yet to voice an understanding of the shastras in stimulating ways.

2. Public Service & Advocacy

Panelists were Jamie Eldridge, MA State Senator; Niraj Antani, OH State Rep.; Padma Kuppa, MI State Rep.; Vindhya Adapa, Assistant General Counsel, HIAS; and Jay Kansara, advocacy expert.

How does one who looks and sounds different find a voice in the public space—and retain one's identity while so doing? For both women on the panel, the humble *dupatta* (scarf) provided an answer and a cultural symbol.

Adapa, who holds a law degree from the University of Pennsylvania, never used to wear bright colors to her legal offices. And when Kuppa was elected to the state legislature, she dressed for work as an American—unlike her days in advocacy as a "public Hindu." Then came the lure of the scarf. Deciding appearances should not make a difference, one day Adapa wore a bright orange scarf to work. Kuppa wore a red and green *bandhini* around her neck to an official tri-city meeting. Both fondly remember the compliments they received.

Adapa spoke of using opportunities to educate. By creating familiarity, we release Indian culture from the box of "the exotic." Kuppa, who introduced a resolution in the Michigan legislature to recognize the religious and cultural significance of Diwali,



Discussions: (Clockwise from opposite page) Young Vindhya Adapa works with refugees and actively brings her heritage to bear; Megha Desai is passionate about making a difference in the lives of women and travels to villages to understand the cultural mores that would bring home the message of menstrual health; Padma Kuppa proudly takes oath of office in Michigan clad in a sari; Rudy Tanzi on the



forefront of discovering causes and cures for Alzheimer's explains his SHIELD model to reduce its risks as Anand Venkataraman looks on; (panel, listed from left) Nishith Acharya said the first generation immigrants gave back by sponsoring and taking care of other immigrants; Megha Desai; Alpa Ladani serves the nation in uniform, and Aashika Patel who made the case for giving toward the building of temples.

agrees: "Understanding comes with awareness." Eldridge indicated Hindu Americans could learn from the Jewish community: "Communicate, educate."

As a politician, Kuppa says she has not felt the need to hide her identity. Everyone is aware she hangs her "Christmas" lights early, for Diwali. In India, she points out, those of all faiths participate in Diwali, just like in America everyone celebrates Christmas. By focusing on the joy, she says, "nobody feels it's being forced. That creates division."

3. Innovation

Heritage lessons were explored by panelists Jit Saxena, founder of Netezza; Dr. Ravi Kanjolia, CTO, EMD Performance Materials; Deepak Taneja, CEO, Zilla Security; and Ram Sudireddy, cofounder of Bento.

Entrepreneurship, said Taneja, is about acting on an idea—focusing thought on a single issue, persisting, and building a company around it. In so doing, the individual confronts their strengths and weaknesses. Saxena advised that the entrepreneurial journey

"is internally driven—look inside."

Serial entrepreneur Sudireddy added that Hindu scriptures have answers that empower the entrepreneur. "With faith, there is no fear."

Sage Vishwamitra demonstrates grit: wanting to be like Rishi Vashishta, he took on every hurdle. Lord Rama demonstrates the importance of mentorship, going to Sage Vashishta for guidance. Lord Rama chose to make friendships and build alliances rather than overcome his enemies—a good strategy for operating in the marketplace. Sita was an advisor, and Kaikeyi went to war; gender equality in the office is the message here.

On the battlefield, Lord Krishna told a fear-frozen Arjuna: you cannot control the result, I do. So, said Sudireddy, after every effort has been made, enjoy the journey. And when the profits come in, the inspiration is Lord Rama: after winning Lanka, he handed over the kingdom to the right person instead of crushing it or finding a ruler from Ayodhya. Companies should not be top heavy, therefore, but recognize house talent.

Sudireddy, a believer in "human engineer-

ing," says Hindu culture gives more respect to the human aspect and learning, over sheer wealth. "Saraswati takes precedence over Lakshmi; guru is more important than the king. They have no money, but respect and power are theirs." He spoke of selling his company, Applied Micro Circuits Corporation. The investors favored an offer which would have enriched them by about \$10 million each, but would have meant laying off staff and meddling with the product. Unwilling to betray employees who had labored with him to build the company, he convinced his investors to settle for less. He sold it to another buyer who not only retained the staff but hired more people—and the market capital of the company rose from \$800 million to \$25 billion at its peak.

4. Holistic Living

Panelists were Dr. Stuart Rothenberg, Maharishi University of Management; Sri Dinesh Kashikar, Yogacharya, Art of Living; Dr. Sailesh Rao, founder, Climate Healers; Dr. Angelina Mehta, Naturopath, Verve Holis-

tic Health; Hilary Garivaltis, National Ayurvedic Medical Association.

This panel's theme was healing and harmony, within and without. "World peace begins with individual peace," said Kashikar. Rothenberg suggested that understanding the Vedic ideal of "Ayam Atma Brahma" is to understand harmony; and ayurveda is about living as one with nature.

In Mehta's view, good health could begin by letting our intuition tell us what the body needs. The body, said Rothenberg, has a tremendous capacity to heal itself. Keys include knowing our constitution (vata, kapha, pitta), focusing on gut health and going vegetarian.

Dr. Rao explained why veganism is good for us personally and compellingly described its benefits to the world.

5. Education

Panelists were Prof. Anil Saigal, Tufts University; Prof. Mahesh Sharma, founder of the Center for Teaching/Learning of Mathematics; Prof. Prasad Jayanti, Dartmouth College; Dr. Parul Kumar, Prof., Suffolk University and teacher, Lexington High School; and Parth Parihar, PhD student, Princeton University.

While focused on the sciences, all panelists agreed that education should inspire young minds and instill joy. Jayanti said students are inspired when a teacher exposes the inherent beauty of a subject. Sharma said a good education between the ages of four and eight is critical for future learning. She cited the Greek system, American experiential instruction, British rigor and the Finnish love of learning.

She likes the holistic Indian gurukul for



Exemplars: (clockwise from above) Sailesh Rao, an optimist who believes a vegan world is coming, says the journey is "about coming home to your true self;" Mahesh Sharma said the Upanishads taught by raising questions, instigating thinking, leading to understanding; Aditi Banerjee and Phil Goldberg, both writers, share thoughts; Parul Kumar says information for its own sake is of no use, understanding and analysis are keys for development; Anand Venkatraman says the ancients were always open ended in their exploration and free of dogma; Ram Suddireddy offered that entrepreneurial values are found in the texts

the teaching immersion, small class sizes and student-teacher interaction. "The focus was not just on academics. Students imbibed respect for knowledge and were exposed to art, music, sport and the shastras."

She is a big advocate for girls in STEM. "There is so much fuss about girls and science. Memorizing times tables is not as important as being able to apply the fundamentals of multiplication and division. Understanding

and analysis is key." She stated that so-called "Socratic" question-and-answer thinking started in India.

6. Science & Vedanta

Focusing on the mind-brain conundrum were Dr. VR. Anand, neurologist, South Carolina; Dr. Rudy Tanzi, Professor of Neurology, Harvard Medical School; Prof. Menas Kafatos, Computational Physics, Chapman University; and Dr. Vinod Deshmukh, Emeritus Associate Professor of Neurology, University of Florida.

Deshmukh said biophysics and bioneurology are embedded systems, like nesting dolls. Tanzi succinctly said: Awareness is existence. Consciousness is an output of Awareness; it is Awareness with attention. Kafatos said we perceive the world not from the outside in, but in fact, the reverse. Indian philosophy, of course, has known this for thousands of years.

Anand, a young neurologist trained in India and the US, is attempting to bridge modern science with introspective traditions. "A large portion of Hindu thought is a rational explanation of ourselves." He believes most scientists are open to ideas, but

that Hindu philosophy is not explained in a way that scientists can understand. Even the *Upanishads* are not "classically" sequential like Plato or Aristotle. "They are more snapshots of what the rishis discovered, an intuitive vision, more in the realm of the personal. This becomes hard to readily transfer to scientists." He sees neuroscience in tantra, and points to the tantric texts which speak of cognitive processes like *chetana*, *buddhi* and

smriti. "Tantra was part of the rishis' toolbox for realization, and practiced by almost all."

The traditions are there, he says, and Indian researchers need to build the bridges. The world is interested in the connection. Now is the time to redefine and lay out clearly what Hinduism is about.

7. Philanthropy & Service

Focusing on the desire for change were Alpa Ladani, armed forces; Nishith Acharya, advisor on innovation, entrepreneurship and commercialization; Megha Desai, President, Desai Foundation; and Aashika Patel, CCS Fundraising. All panelists indicated that giving of time has even vaster import than money. Ladani said, "It's easy to give money and have someone else do the work," but "there is a lot of satisfaction in investing your time." Acharya, subscribing to Mahatma Gandhi's ideal, said commitment is important, "You can't just do service on Saturday afternoon; you must go deep to understand the issue you are trying to solve."

The *Gita* says the worst kind of charity is that given with condescension or forced on the recipient. Desai, US-raised, says this happens when the givers do not listen to the people on the ground. Working on menstrual health issues with village women in Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra, she strives to understand the religious and cultural components of making change.

Desai mentions in her TED Talk that cultivating dignity in the woman is vital if change is to be long lasting. She tells of a 28-year-old who came to a sewing class, having never before stepped out of her marital home and having no friends. Making friends in the class, she finally realized it was neither normal nor okay to get beaten by the mother-in-law.

8. Values that Impact

Dr. Amar Sawhney, CEO, Instylla Inc.; Dr. Rahul Singhvi, operating partner, Flagship Pioneering; Dr. Rajiv Gupta, Harvard Medical School; Dr. Ganesh Kaundinya, founder, Momena Pharmaceuticals; Dr. Maha Radhakrishnan, Senior VP, Sanofi; Nisha Subramanian, partner, McKinsey. Expecting a dry, left-brain hour, listeners wound up laughing and holding their hands over their hearts, thanks to deft moderating by Udit Batra, CEO, Merck KGaA, Life Sciences, who drew out warm, personal accounts from the speakers.

Singhvi said he was in a pell-mell rat race wanting to make it big and make money, but with success came the realization "no one cares how smart you are." Instead it is about "how much you care about others."

Gupta told of growing up in the interior of

Rajasthan and entering school at fifth grade without even knowing the alphabet. What he did know was to recite from the scriptures his mom regularly read to him. He went on to get an engineering degree from BITS and a PhD in the US, teach at USC and then, with kids and wife in tow, get an MD from Cornell. Today, he is a neuro and cardiac radiologist at Harvard Medical School. The lesson he derived from chasing his professional dreams: family support is everything.

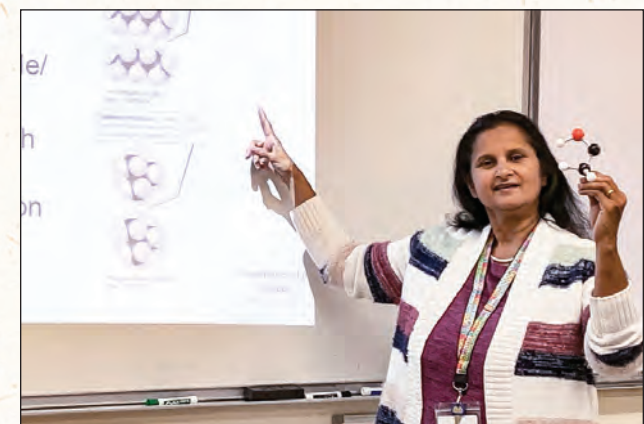
Sawhney said he follows the central Sikh tenets—*naam japo*, *kirat karo*, *vand chakko*—and surrounds himself with good people, whom he calls his *sadh sangat*, spiritual fellowship. Coupled with non-attachment to the fruits of one's actions, this produces good results. Batra seconded the importance of community: "As long as you do something that is good for the collective rather than for yourself, it is sustainable."

Radhakrishnan emphasized finding solutions and making gene therapy accessible to all. Subramanian envisages a day when getting gene therapy would be like going to hospital for surgery. Kaundinya wants to bring affordable, cutting-edge treatment to all. Sawhney demanded to know why the focus is on rare diseases that affect a miniscule segment of the population rather than widespread ones which impact public health.

9. Commerce

Panelists were Arun Kumar Sharma, financial services; Yogi Sarin, sustainable technology; Sumit Ganguli, information technology; Pradeep S. Mehta, development economy; Saumya Sharma, attorney. The aim was to study the India-US trade relationship and the urgency for India to both learn and unlearn from the US. Arun Sharma said the state of a nation is determined by the willingness and ability of a people to think and work in the collective interest. Example: even though the current administration has pulled out of the climate accords, people in the US are not throwing trash on the street or cutting down trees. Why is social discipline not applied in India, where peace, inclusiveness and respect for nature are fundamental? He wants India to study the success factors that draw worldwide migration to the US.

Sarin wants India to make better public policy decisions. He said alternate energy sources would revitalize India's economy and people, and advocates diverting investments



to agriculture. He said that in the last 15 years, the US produced 50 million tons of bio-fuels, enough to meet India's energy demands for two years—yet India has imported Middle East oil rather than US ethanol. He called for India to urgently acquire American technology and look at the US Midwest where farming is big. Saumya Sharma ponders the shifts in investments and business practices between the two nations: Indians are investing in the US now and not just the other way, and US models are not the only kind for young businesses. Her suggestion for ease of business in India: learn the language.



ALL PHOTOS: THREADS/KV PHOTOGRAPHY



K. SHANMUGAM RAJA FAMILY

MALAYSIA

Melaka Chettis, Past and Future

In a fast-paced, multi-cultural world, one of the oldest Hindu communities of Southeast Asia struggles to keep their unique heritage alive

BY KAMALAVALI NAGAPPAN, MALAYSIA

THE MELAKA CHETTIS ARE DESCENDANTS of the true adventure seekers of long ago who traveled by ship from the Coromandel Coast of Tamil Nadu to ports throughout Southeast Asia. Historical records of their trading go back as far as 600ce. The Chettis distinguish themselves from the modern-day Chettiar caste of bankers and financiers. They were sea traders. One group of them settled along the Strait of Melaka between Java and Malaysia, one of the most important shipping lanes in the world. Though among the wealthiest people of Melaka during the 1400-1500s, the Chettis turned to agriculture after the Dutch invaders restricted their trade. Kamachee Pillay, 84, says her father was a farming plantation supervisor. She reminisces how her husband used to sell cow's milk and would rent out their bullock carts for transporting people and goods as well as for temple functions, pongal and weddings.

Today the community of Chettis number less than 2,000 (see en.wikipedia.org/wiki/

Chitty). Most are in Melaka state, with relatives throughout Malaysia, Singapore and as far away as Australia and New York. Surrounded by a diverse ethnic landscape, the Chettis have adopted many Malay and Chinese traditions; but despite deep acculturation in matters of food, dress, language and even burial customs, they were never assimilated. They remain staunch Saivite Hindus to this day.

Melaka resident Kannan Pillay, 55, relates, "My father always used to say, 'You were born a Hindu. You must die as one.' I will always remember this advice and have passed the same advice to my son. This community will always preserve its culture."

The secret to the Melaka Chettis' undying bond with their Hindu faith can be found in the power that comes to them from their ancestors and a small network of temples. The virtue of filial piety is a primary pillar of the community's culture. The Hindu precepts *mata*, *pita*, *guru*, *deivam* (mother, father, guru, God) are central to their life.

Burial of the Dead

Unlike most Hindus, the Chettis bury their dead. The origin of this custom is unclear. According to Sundaram Palani Padiachee, committee member of the Sri Poyyathar Vinayaga Moorthy Temple and head of the committee's cultural preservation and promotion group, "When our forefathers came down from Tamil Nadu, they brought the pre-Vedic practices, which included burial of our loved ones." Others believe that because the early Chetti sailors and traders, all men, married local women, this assimilation led to the practice of burying the dead.

The villagers say that centuries ago they had a burial ground just beside the Jalan Gajah Berang, Melaka Chetti Kampung (village) in Melaka. It was a highland. Thus an annual observance honoring the ancestors is called Naik Bukit, "Climbing the Hill" (*naik*, ascent; *bukit*, elevated location)

Sundaram explained, "The graves had to be relocated because of development. The land was not ours, because in the earlier centuries there was no landmark to say this is

Inviting the ancestors: (left) K. Shanmugam Raja arranges two coconuts for the *Parchu Nasi Lemak* at his home; (right, top) sambrani incense burner to wave heavenward to invoke the ancestors; (right, bottom) a plate of sweets and desserts made from fruit as an offering during June/July *parchu buah-buahan* worship

your land. Only when the Dutch came in did they subdivide and give you the land. So in 1970, the developers approached us and told us they were giving us an opportunity to remove the graves. At that time, we already had our own ten-acre burial ground in the hills of Jelutong about eight miles from Melaka, so we transferred the graves there." Among

the fifteen graves transferred was an ancient Chetti clan grave with the guru buried seated, believed to be from around the 16th century.

Naik Bukit—Climbing the Hill

The Naik Bukit observance, akin to Chinese Qing Ming and Catholics' All Souls' Day, draws the dispersed Melaka Chettis from all over the world back home to Melaka to participate in this ceremony. Through the ancestral rites, their prayers and food offerings invoke the ancestors at the graveyard, and then they invite the ancestors into their homes. The joyous and pious feasting of ancestors feeds their faith from deep within through a thread going back to ancient times.

Every January, whole families set out for the hills of Jelutong to observe Naik Bukit. Every

member participates if possible, regardless of difficulty. In 2020, Kamachee came with her family even though she tired very easily, as she was diabetic and had problems walking. She was brought by her daughter, Rani, 53, and her husband Panniruky Perumal, 53, who had come up from Johore Bahru very early in the morning.

On their way to the graveyard, Rani and her family stopped at the Indian shop to pack their favorite foods. "As far as I remember, from the time of my grandfather we used to do this. They, too, bought the idly and dosai or roti canai from the shops, as our forefathers loved these foods. Coming for this function is also a means of inviting our ancestors to our house for our *parchu nasi lemak* ancestral prayers, when we offer rice cooked with

The Annual Feast for Ancestors at Home

ON THE MORNING WHEN THE SUN moves into the constellation of Capricorn (January 15, 2020), Hindus celebrated Thai Pongal in the South, Makar Sankranti in the North. On *bhogi* day (the day before Pongal), Chetti families observed *parchu nasi lemak* (worship with coconut rice) at home. *Nasi* is rice and *lemah* is the coconut milk in which it is steamed. The family had already visited the graveyard during the preceding days.

Nirmala relates, "Cooking is done at home, and a strict discipline is maintained. No talking is permitted while food preparation is being done. This silence is observed in reverence to our ancestors. Also, no tasting of food is allowed before offerings are made. Hence, food preparation is done by experienced womenfolk in the family. At dusk, the food and drinks are carefully arranged on banana leaves near the entrance to the home. Again, silence is observed."

"Unlike the typical Indian ancestral prayers where food is offered in front of a photo of the deceased, here the food is placed on the floor in the hall near the home's entrance. One, three, five or more banana leaves—always an odd number—are placed on the floor as offering. On each leaf is placed a mound of coconut rice, surrounded by salads, fried chicken, prawns, fish and a variety of vegetables. For those who are poor or working people who do not have the luxury of time, a single leaf offering will suffice. Two coconuts are a must. A *kuthuvilakku* (oil lamp) is placed at one side and two huge red candles at the other.

"At 6:30 to 7pm, the *kuthuvilakku* and candles are lit, together with incense and



K. SHANMUGAM RAJA FAMILY

KAMALAVALI NAGAPPAN

member in turn, according to age, invites the ancestors.

"In my home, after the youngest has given respect and invited the ancestors to partake of the offering, we sit down together to sing bhajans and Thevaram. After the bhajan, we observe a few minutes of silence and reflection. Water is then sprinkled on the offerings by the eldest male in the family followed by everyone else. Coconut water is given as a final offering for the evening by opening a pair of coconuts near the candles and *kuthuvilakkus*. After the prayer, everyone sits on the floor and shares the food from the banana leaves, which has been blessed by our ancestors. Guests are also welcomed to share the food and blessings."

Kannan's neighbor Sithambaram Kanagalingam Pillay, 55, added, "These prayers have been going on since my forefathers' time. Since we eat the food after offering it, we usually prepare the leaves according to the number of people in the house, but that depends on the family." Rani said that when she used to stay in Jalan Gajah Berang, neighbors would visit to pay respect to the ancestors during this time.

Another ceremony honoring the ancestors is called *parchu buah-buahan* ("buah-buahan" means fruits). This is usually celebrated anywhere from mid-June to mid-July, during the fruiting season. This ceremony, which features sweet fruit desserts, is less rigid; residents can conduct the ancestral prayers any day during this period. There is also no necessity to go to the cemetery; the Naik Bukit function is done only once a year, in the days before *bhogi* day.



Naik Bukit and Temples: (top) the Panniruky and Pillay family at their relatives' graves, having "Climbed the Hill;" (left) Rani unpacks the breakfast for her deceased grandfather; (above) pre-prepared aromatic flower mix; (opposite page) the Sri Muthu Mariamman Temple; (below, right) Sri Poyyatha Vinayaga Moorthy Temple

coconut milk accompanied with a variety of fried stuff, vegetables and curry."

On the evening before Naik Bukit, Rani had prepared the *bunga rampeh*—a potpourri of perfumed flowers—by cutting the screw pine leaves. In the morning, she took apart the rose petals, orchids and chrysanthemums, button shaped flowers, the red jungle geranium, bread flower, cape flower and cananga flower. Getting all this together is considered a real feat! But any perfumed flower is good. Then next she added whole jasmine with the shredded screw pine leaves. Lastly, she sprinkled the flowers with a touch of perfume.

On reaching the burial ground, the family cleaned the area and decorated the graves. Rani strewed the bunga rampeh over all to give the air an aromatic smell, then unpacked the foods and drinks for the offering and lit the incense, and all waited for the ancestors to partake of the meal.

A Unique Culture Evolves

Kamachee sat quietly as her daughter Rani unpacked and arranged the breakfast offerings at the foot of her grandfather's grave. She has seen the times change. Her father was an estate plantation supervisor. Upon marriage, she moved to the Chetti village in the town of Melaka, where she learned the secrets of baking sweet desserts from her sister-in-law. She became quite successful selling these for weddings and dinners.

Because of its trading ports, Malaysia is one of the oldest cultural melting pots in the world. As well as the many Chetti family clans, there were many Chinese whose relatives had married the Melaka Chetti descendants and whose ancestors were also buried at the Jelutong site.

Rani, who works as a teacher and supervisor at a child care center in Johor Bahru, used to live in a village surrounded by Chinese. The Chettis there picked up Chinese easily. They spoke Malay at home and could speak

only a smattering of Tamil. "We loved to go to the cinema when there was a Tamil movie playing. We also took up Tamil lessons later on to learn some basic words," she said. "We pray to the Hindu Gods, but we also adopted the Chinese kitchen God. So, alongside Deepavali, we also celebrate the dumpling festival and the mooncake festival."

Nirmala Devi, the honorary secretary of the Sri Poyyatha Vinayaga Moorthy Temple committee and Melaka Chetti community, said, "Ours is an assimilation of centuries of local culture and Hindu practices. Similarly, our food reflects the same cultural assimilation. We are different from the Chettis. The only similarity we have is our Hindu faith and the related celebrations. Other than that, our language, attire, food and traditions are different."

The Chetti Temples

There are a total of nine temples that belong to the Melaka Chetti community. Eight



of these are within walking distance of the Chetti village. Three main temples guard the village: Sri Kailasanathar Temple (1887), Sri Muthu Mariamman Temple (1823) and Sri Angalamman Parameswari Temple (1887). The five open-air or *gramanggal* (village) temples are Sri Amman Temple, Dharma-rama Temple, Sri Ayyanar Temple, Sri Leng-gadari Amman temple and Sri Kathai Amman Temple. All these are the property of the Sri Poyyatha Vinayaga Moorthy Temple (SPVMT) of the Melaka Chetti Community.

The SPVMT was built in 1781. "The land where SPVMT is located was granted by the Dutch colonial government. The temple was believed to be under the trusteeship of the late Tevansyan Chitty, who was a leader in the Chetti community," said Sundaram. The temple is dedicated to Lord Vinayaka, the Elephant-faced Deity. It is the oldest Hindu temple in Malaysia. After 239 years of worship, it is believed to be one of the oldest functioning Hindu temples in maritime Southeast Asia.

With development works going on near Jalan Gajah Berang, the community was concerned their village would also be engulfed. Sundaram and his brother Shunmugam Padiachee Palani were instrumental in getting the Melaka state government to categorize the Melaka Chetti Village as a cultural village. The temple itself is endorsed as a Malaysian heritage temple by Warisan Negara (Department of National Heritage in Malaysia).

Nirmala said properties are held in trust by Chetti trustees through a court order of 1962. "Our trustees are responsible for the assets,

temples and shrines and the well-being of the Melaka Chetti community." This includes the 10-acre graveyard.

Progress in the Second Millennium

HINDUISM TODAY reported on the Chettis thirty years ago (bit.ly/melakachetti). How are the Melaka Chettis progressing in 2020? Nirmala shared, "Through social media we are reaching out to those living outside the kampong to help them stay connected to their heritage. We help them learn about the annual Naik Bukit, the graveyard cleaning ceremony to honor, invoke and pray for our ancestors, and the meaning of our parchu ancestral celebrations held in the home. This is also when the older members in the family point out the headstones of departed family members. For example, I can identify headstones and graves of five generations of elders before me."

Education of the young children ensures that they keep their traditions intact. But there are challenges. Rani's grand nephew, 10-year-old Akesh Pillay, is enrolled in the Pay Fong Chinese school. "He understands Tamil but can't speak it. His mother is from Sabah (East Malaysia), but he does follow Indian tradition. We hope this younger generation will shoulder the responsibility of moving our community into the next millennium."

Nirmala added, "The youth actively participate in our annual prayers at the





Sri Muthu Mariamman Thiruvila. This is a highlight for the community; members from all over the country as well as Singapore make an effort to return for this festival, which is typically held in the month of April-May. The celebration is a form of appreciation as well as fulfilling of vows by devotees towards Sri Muthu Mariamman, who is known as the Goddess of rain and the curer of diseases, such as chicken pox. Many other communities, like the Chinese, frequent the temple. The management is also drawing youth into its fold to expose them to the Melaka Chetti cultural and religious practices and traditional beliefs, culture, etc. The youth learn how to tie a *talapa* (head gear)."

On February 1, Kannan Pillay's daughter Lochini, 18, will undergo the *sadengu* ceremony (coming of age). The family was excitedly preparing for the event and inviting relatives and friends for the function. Lochini has just finished her Form Five exams and hopes to become a nurse. She would like to continue the Melaka Chettis' food, culture and dressing style into the future. The *sadengu* process will be the same as in India, but after the customary flower bath ceremony, Lochini will don Malay dress rather than a sari. Only at dinner will she wear her sari.

Rani's husband, Panniruky, is head of security in a multi-national firm and an executive committee member of the Peranakan Indian Association Singapore. He explained, "There are many Indians of mixed heritage now, so we must be inclusive and not exclusive. That is why we added the word *peranakan*

(indigenous, locally born Indian). The message to the Melaka Chettis is that you are unique, not only culturally but also in terms of your food and festivals." The association hopes to double its ties with the Melaka Chettis. Panniruky says, "By showcasing our heritage, dance activities and food, documenting the Melaka Chetti way of life and getting the youth involved, we hope that these will keep the community afloat well into the next millennium."

Mohan Shree Pillay, 23, son of Kannan Pillay, is a graphic art student at Management and Science University. He said he used to be enthralled watching the drama of Krishna fight Asuran Samharan when he was young. Unfortunately, because the younger generation has moved out, there are not enough participants and it is no longer being performed. But he says, "However far I go or wherever I am, I will continue to uphold the culture that I have learned from early childhood. It's an undying bond, as my mother was a Hindu. We read all the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* as well, and sing Thevaram at home and in the temple."

P. Udaiya Shakti, 24 years old, and his cousin Reuben Pillay, 28, came from their home in Singapore to join Shakti's parents, Rani and Panniruky, and drive them to Melaka. Shakti is also active as a member in the Peranakan Indian Association. He is a mass communication and public relations graduate and is currently teaching. "When I look at the graves of my great grandfather and my grandfather, I feel sad that I never met them, as I was born



six years after my grandfather passed away. I am happy that my grandmother Kamachee is still around. She regales me with tales of both her husband and her father, so I feel that I almost know them.

"I look forward to the ancestral prayers function as it is an opportunity to meet up with all my relatives. My uncles and parents will inevitably talk about the ancestors when we stand in front of their graves. When I was young, one of my deceased uncles used to bring me with him to take the cows out to graze and to cut the grass for their feed. He also brought all the children for a ride on his bullock cart during the temple functions. I used to be so excited when I saw a cow, as it is a rare sight in Singapore.

"As I am a Melaka Chetti, the Naik Bukit function is important to me. It is my



A colorful community: (clockwise from left) an outdoor Sri Ayyanar temple; Rani and her mother Kamachee; Nirmala (in blue) with her family; young Chetti girls prepare for a dance; Sushila and Phillips Roy from Singapore, in traditional dress; budding young artist Mohan Nirmala; three girls after their coming of age bath; Udaiya Shakti from Singapore.



responsibility to uphold our tradition, even if it requires me to travel far. Visiting the grave and then coming back the same day to prepare for the parchu nasi lemak ancestral prayers at home the next day is a rush, but it is important that we do it. At home we do the prayers for my paternal side ancestors. It is a very fulfilling experience. Celebrating this event, we ensure that our future generations will be educated in our tradition and understand the importance of it in our lives."

Steadfast amidst the Diaspora

During the 18th and 19th centuries, the Brit-

ish found that some Melaka Chettis spoke good English. These were given prominent positions in Kuala Lumpur, and some moved to Singapore. Many others have migrated elsewhere within Melaka state or to other states in Malaysia. This exodus has left just 30 Chetti families in Gajah Berang in Melaka city now. It is believed that Singapore has about 5,000 Peranakan Indians. Whenever possible, they to travel to Melaka to participate in the Naik Bukit function.

Nirmala elucidates the unique Chetti experience: "Our culture is an assimilation of centuries of local culture and Hindu practices.



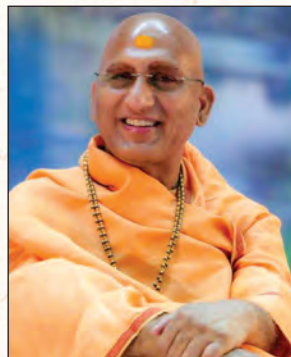
Our food reflects the same cultural assimilation. Tamil is not our mother tongue. We converse with each other in Malay creole. However, we do have some members of our community who are able to speak and read in Tamil. Our long history as a community underscores our resilience. We are proud of our legacy and culture. With more members of our society coming together to strengthen our roots and the way we operate, I am optimistic about the future, the next chapter of our journey. We shall move forward into a new era without losing sight of our heritage and our religious faith."

On the Importance of Spirituality

Understanding the self and understanding our social and spiritual obligations are the keys to success both in the temporal and eternal worlds

BY SWAMI AVDHESHANAND GIRI MAHARAJ

A CACTUS PLANT WILTS IN THE RIVER, BUT A LOTUS grows profusely in the same river because the former is rooted in the sand and the latter is connected with water. It shows that for proper development and perfect living, every living creature needs to be firmly attached to its core or roots. The same logic applies with human existence and development, where spirituality is the root of the human soul, and in the absence of spirituality a person dies virtually, though physically he remains alive. Such a body without the soul is nothing but a mass of confusions and problems that can open a Pandora's box for all humanity. An unspiritual person neither lives in peace nor does he let others live peacefully. Hatred, terrorism, cruelty, injustice, oppression, corruption and other forms of evil are born from nowhere but an unguided, imperfect and unspiritual mind.



The transition of life from a dark womb to the fullness of the glittering world is subject to variations from one phase to another. During this evolution, the heart continuously tries to adapt to the changing environment; but, irrespective of physical and social variations, the soul wants to push itself towards its roots—spirituality. When the heart and soul move in the same direction, the individual gets success in finding and embracing God; but when they oppose each other, it is one's knowledge that decides one's fate. Again, if knowledge is true and virtuous, then it will strengthen the soul and help it to embrace spirituality, but if the knowledge is impure and vicious, then it will incite the heart to defy and suppress the soul with whims, fancies and unjustified desires.

Material gain is not absolute and enduring; spiritual gain is perfect and eternal. It is lack of vision and knowledge which deprives the majority of realizing the actual worth and importance of spirituality. The fast-paced environment and cutthroat competition in every walk of life have diverted the present generation from the virtuous goals of life—i.e., perfection.

To attain perfection, one has to follow the six indispensable steps: selfless service, self-assessment, companionship of righteous people, patience through self-discipline, tenacity in beholding spirituality and self-development. When one understands these six steps in a true sense and abides by them firmly, his consciousness awakes, his conscience gets cleared and his thoughts enlightened. Such people do every bit to please God and refrain from every action that tarnishes their spirituality and displeases God. They live in harmony with every living and nonliving creature, and they accept nature as much as nature accepts them. For such a person, conflict with any element of nature is impossible, including fellow beings.

Ishwar is the Supreme Creator, and humans are His most beautiful offerings to the universe, with their distinct physical, intellectual and spiritual abilities. He has revealed in the Vedas, our holy scriptures, that the final goal of life is moksha (salvation); and to attain moksha, one has to perform dharma (righteousness), artha (honest earning

and its honest use) and kama (fulfillment of noble desires). Dharma, artha and kama are difficult or almost impossible to implement in life without realizing one is a divine being. If one has failed to realize this, he can never ever understand what is his/her dharma, what is the legitimate way to earn and consume resources (artha) and what are the noble ways to fulfill his/her desires (kama).

Modern life is fully equipped with a hectic style, and people find it challenging to incorporate these spiritual practices, virtues and principles into their lives. To implement the spiritual principles and practices in modern life, one ought to invest his time and energy in deep meditative contemplation and reflection, which will surely bring the commendable positive transformation of behavior, thinking and life. To further grow, he can endeavor to achieve spiritual perfection and self-discovery that would ultimately lead him to the path of moksha or salvation in true terms.

Sadhana Chatusttaya is the fourfold means for the achievement of spiritual liberation and moksha prescribed in the Vedantic philosophy. To embark on the journey of truth, one must commit to this set of spiritual practices, comprised of *viveka* (discriminative knowledge), *vairagya* (non-attachment), *shamaadi shatka sampati* (six-fold virtues: tranquility, restraint of the senses, forbearance, protection against covetousness, boundless faith and equipoise), and *mumukshutva* (desire for liberation). Without following these four practices, no spiritual progress can be made. Therefore, the spiritual aspirant should not only know these practices but master each of them to find the purpose of his life and attain his goals.

Understanding the self and understanding our social and spiritual obligations is the key to success both in the temporal and eternal worlds. Once we come to know our divine self, nothing else remains to be misunderstood. When a person discovers himself/herself in the true sense, he/she reaches the uppermost level of wisdom and starts living the life which guides him/her to moksha. The discovery of our divine self is the solution to all the contemporary problems of the present world. Be they social conflicts, degrading family values, corruption, pollution or even terrorism, the root of all problems is the failure to explore our divine self, which can be achieved only through being spiritual and helping others on the path of spirituality.

SWAMI AVDHESHANAND GIRI MAHARAJ, *Acharya Mahamandaleshwar of the Juna Akhara, received the 2008 Hindu Renaissance Award from Hinduism Today (bit.ly/avdeshanand). A guru to thousands and an inspiration to millions, Swami Avdeshanand has initiated more than a hundred thousand sannyasins, transformed lives with his social initiatives and led Hinduism's largest monastic order into the 21st century.*

Hindu Heritage Endowment

See Your Generosity in Action through an IRA Charitable Rollover Gift

If you are 70½ years old or older and live in the USA, you can take advantage of a simple way to benefit Hindu Heritage Endowment and receive tax benefits in return. You can give up to \$100,000 from your individual retirement account (IRA) directly to a qualified charity such as HHE without having to pay income taxes on the money.

This law no longer has an expiration date, so you are free to make annual gifts to HHE this year and well into the future.

WHY CONSIDER THIS FORM OF GIVING?

- Your gift will be put to use today, allowing you to see the difference your donation is making.
- You pay no income taxes on the gift. The transfer generates neither taxable income nor a tax deduction, so you benefit even if you do not itemize your deductions.
- If you have not yet taken your required minimum distribution for the year, your IRA charitable rollover gift can satisfy all or part of that requirement.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q. I have already named Hindu Heritage Endowment as the beneficiary of my IRA. What are the benefits if I make a gift now instead of after my lifetime?

A. By making a gift this year of up to \$100,000 from your IRA, you can see your philanthropic dollars at work. You are jump-starting the legacy you would like to leave and giving yourself the joy of watching your philanthropy take shape. Moreover, you can fulfill any outstanding pledge you may have made by transferring that amount from your IRA as long as it is \$100,000 or less for the year.

Q. I'm turning age 70½ in a few months. Can I make this gift now?

A. No, you cannot. The legislation requires you to reach age 70½ by the date you make the gift.

Q. I have several retirement accounts—some are pensions and some are IRAs. Does it matter which retirement account I use?

A. Yes. Direct rollovers to a qualified charity can be made only from an IRA. Under certain circumstances, however, you may be able to roll assets from a pension, profit sharing, a 401(k) or a 403(b) plan into an IRA and then make the transfer from the IRA directly to Hindu Heritage Endowment. To determine if a rollover to an IRA is available for your plan, speak with your plan administrator.

Q. Can my gift be used as my required minimum distribution under the law?

A. Yes, absolutely. If you have not yet taken your required minimum distribution, the IRA charitable rollover gift can satisfy all or part of that requirement. Contact your IRA custodian to complete the gift.

Q. Do I need to give my entire IRA to be eligible for the tax benefits?

A. No. You can give any amount under this provision, as long as it is \$100,000 or less per year. If your IRA is valued at more than \$100,000, you can transfer a portion of it to fund a charitable gift.

Q. I have two charities I want to support. Can I give \$100,000 from my IRA to each?

A. No. Under the law, you can give a maximum of \$100,000. For example, you can give each organization \$50,000 this year or any other combination that totals \$100,000 or less. Any amount above \$100,000 in one year must be reported as taxable income.

Q. My spouse and I would like to give more than \$100,000. How can we do that?

A. If you have a spouse (as defined by the IRS) who is 70½ or older and has an IRA, he or she can also give up to \$100,000 from his or her IRA.

It is wise to consult with your tax professionals if you are contemplating a charitable gift under the extended law. Start your estate plan by downloading the pdf file at www.hheonline.org/tool-kit.shtml.

OCTOBER TO DECEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment			
Irina Davydova	19.00		
Anonymous	444.74		
Roshan Harilela	375.00		
Gayatri Rajan	75.00		
Chamundi Sabanathan	78.75		
Hitesvara Saravan	63.00		
Jai Sivakumara	600.00		
Nancy Walder	108.00		
Keith Wallach	83.00		
Other Donations	30,000.00		
Total	31,846.49		
Iraivan Temple Endowment			
Doraisami & Mohanasundari	21.00		
Frank Burkhardt	30.00		
Bharat & Sunita Choudhary	100.00		
Subhash Kumar Choudhary	100.00		
Demo & Genevieve Di Martile	108.00		
Amey Surendra Gangal	43.00		
Anonymous	249.18		
Vanesh Naidu	27.00		
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	50.00		
Atul Thakkar	500.00		
Other Donations	131,413.00		
Total	132,641.18		
Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund			
Mary Washington College	20.00		
Doraisami & Mohanasundari	25.00		
Valli Ananda	170.00		
Alan Bailey	60.00		
Ram & Kaipana Batni	30.00		
Sivakumaran Kurunathan	154.54		
Saroja Maureemootoo	10.65		
Jogendra Moorooogen	5.32		
Vidyadevi Moorooogen	5.32		
Sunil & Shobha Nair	100.00		
Subramaniam Pennathur	33.32		
Anonymous	5.00		
Manishankar Sagum	21.31		
Pathmini Saravanapavan	300.00		
Lavanyadeva Sivananda	73.42		
Saguna Skanda	117.47		
Shailes Skanda	29.37		
Sornavanita Sutherland	30.00		
Maran Thodaya	122.37		
Total	1,313.09		
Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund			
Valli Ananda	170.00		
Chandrasegaran Arnasalon	79.96		
Thirujnanam Arnassalon	21.31		
Hemaksheshaa Naatha Batumallah	23.00		
Mekaladeva Batumallah	23.00		
Gunavadee Caremben	5.33		
Somasoundarum Caremben	5.33		
Sukanta Caremben	5.33		
Kirit Desai	299.00		
Ravi Ghanta	299.00		
Dhan Goel	299.00		
Krishna Goolcharan	299.00		
Jose Rugue R. Junior	299.00		
Mala Kalyan	299.00		
Juhivaasana Koothan	5.32		
B Lankipalli	299.00		
Ashwini Maureemootoo	22.63		
Saroja Maureemootoo	5.33		
Anonymous	22.63		
Deepak Mehrotra	299.00		
Bhaveshan Moorghen	18.65		
Shanda Kumaran Moorghen	18.65		
Udeyadeva Moorghen	18.65		
Giri Mundluru	299.00		
J.D. Muzumdar	299.00		
Arunachalam Natesan	299.00		
Shiv Navada	299.00		
Amit & Mohini Paliwal	299.00		
Jay Patel	299.00		
Hari Raghavacharlu	299.00		
Sita Ramadugu	299.00		
Jayant & Shashi Sathe	299.00		
Nadaraja Shan	299.00		
Sai Singh	40.00		
Javanya Skanda	176.21		
Abi Subramanian	299.00		
Raam Subramanian	299.00		
Total	6,641.33		
Gurudeva's Trilogy Distribution Fund			
Vel Mahalingum	15.99		
Kadavul Nataraja Ardra Abhishekam Endowment			
Anonymous	635.18		
Umasankaran Mohambourame	112.23		
Gowri Nadason	84.90		
Parimala Selvaraj	93.00		
Jai Sivakumara	108.00		
Vayudeva Varadan	18.00		
Total	1,051.31		
Kauai Aadheenam Matavasi Medical Fund			
Shyamadeva Dandapani	36.00		
Kulagan Moonesawmy	15.98		
Gowri Nadason	84.90		
Pritesh Patel	33.00		
Ram Ramamoorthy	75.00		
Aran Sambandar	48.00		
Anonymous	324.72		
Vayudeva Varadan	18.00		
Matthew Wiczork	10.00		
Other Donations	4,800.00		
Total	5,445.60		
Nadesan Family Lord Muruga Shum Fund			
Sadhunathan Nadesan	501.00		
Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar Gurukulam			
Anonymous	324.00		
Rick Harter	108.00		
Aran Sendan	108.00		
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	150.00		
Total	690.00		
Sri Subramuniya Ashram Scholarship Fund			
Subhash Kumar Choudhary	50.00		
Anonymous	324.00		
Total	374.00		
Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund			
Anonymous	375.00		
Pritesh Patel	33.00		
Aran Sendan	108.00		
Total	516.00		
Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment			
Mano Navaratnarajah	75.00		
Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	26.63		
Krishanth Rajasooriyar	40.00		
Aran Sendan	108.00		
Total	249.63		
Hinduism Today Production Fund			
Anupama Bhatt	101.00		
Anonymous	294.00		
Krishan Chawla	4,050.00		
Subhash Kumar Choudhary	400.00		
Prabhakar C Ghosh	60.00		
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	3.99		
Rajendra Giri	51.00		
Ian Johnson	60.00		
Rajagopal Krishnan	40.00		
Raj & Deepa Maturi	1,000.00		
Murli Melwani	2,500.00		
Kulagan Moonesawmy	15.98		
Nori Muster	300.00		
Subramaniam Pennathur	33.34		
Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	26.63		
Gayatri Rajan	75.00		
Chamundi Sabanathan	664.00		
Aran Sambandar	48.00		
Nancy Walder	108.00		
Total	9,830.94		
Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund			
Benevity	445.00		
Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund	100.00		
Shashi B. Acharya	1,001.00		
Subhash Kumar Choudhary	50.00		
John Donovan	108.00		
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	3.99		
Rajendra Giri	151.00		
Roshan Harilela	375.00		
Chamundi Sabanathan	78.75		
Hitesvara Saravan	12.00		
Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00		
Anonymous	104.18		
Total	2,458.92		
Suntheram Family Trust Fund			
Sri Ranganathan	1,000.00		
Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund			
Anonymous	10.00		
Mano Navaratnarajah	225.00		
Total	235.00		
Positive Discipline Endowment			
Fidelity Brokerage Services LLC	100.00		
Schwab Charitable Fund	1,500.00		
YourCause	136.50		
Vinaya Alahan	66.00		
Total	1,802.50		
Alaveddy Pasupatheeswarar Temple Fund			
Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund	500.00		
Rick Harter	108.00		
Total	608.00		
Murugan Temple of North America Pillaiyar Shrine Fund			
Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00		
Sayanthan & Anupama Sivanathan	15.00		
Total	165.00		
Thank You Bodhinatha Fund			
Doraisami & Mohanasundari	25.00		
Shyamadeva Dandapani	108.00		
Amarnath & Latha Devarmanai	324.00		
Sivaram Eswaran	25.00		
Debashis Ghosh	300.00		
Toshadeva Guhan	108.00		
Timur Izmaylov	10.00		
Anonymous	1740.20		
Murugesu Kandasamy	11.82		
Malaysia Mission	47.38		
Kulagan Moonesawmy	53.30		
Mano Navaratnarajah	150.00		
Ambhigai Paghan	30.00		
Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	26.63		
Sumathi Raja	450.00		
Pritha Ranganathan	51.00		
Chamundi Sabanathan	108.00		
Aran Sambandar	72.00		
Easan Saravan	60.00		
Sivakumar Saravan	1,000.00		
Aran Sendan	108.00		
Parul Singh	100.00		
Hridaya Sivalingam	5.00		
Anba Dayananden Valayten	10.38		
Vayudeva Varadan	42.00		
Sahunthala Vinothachandran	406.00		
John Wahlecn	11.00		
Michael Wasylkiw	648.00		
Total	6,030.71		
Udayan Care Endowment Fund			
Rajendra Giri	151.00		
Anonymous	54.18		
Total	205.18		
Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment			
Subhash Kumar Choudhary	50.00		
Shyamal Chandra Debnath	50.00		
Total	100.00		
Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund			
Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00		
Manitha Neyam Trust Fund			
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	100.00		
Nutanaya Sivaceyon	10.00		
Total	110.00		
Mahajana College Fund			
Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund	500.00		
Schwab Charitable Fund	100.00		

OCTOBER TO DECEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Total	600.00	Bharatiya Ekta Mandir of Arizona Endowment		Jaffna Kannathiddy Kali Kovil Endowment	
Taos Hanuman Fund		Schwab Charitable Fund	500.00	Anonymous	108.36
Anonymous	108.36	India Hindu Tribals Endowment		Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund	
Manjung Hindu Sabha Orphanage Fund		Rajendra Giri	151.00	Pritesh Patel	66.00
Subhash Kumar Choudhary	50.00	Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund		Murugamoorthi Thirukkivil Endowment	
Swami Vipulananta Children's Home Endowment		Vayudeva Varadan	36.00	N. Balasubramanian	5,000.00
Canaganayagam Kugendra	60.00	India Hindu Temple Cleaning Fund		Panchangam Endowment Fund	
Hindu Literature Fund		Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	4.71	Venkatakrishnan Balaji	10.00
John & Abha Wiersba	153.00	Kulagan Moonesawmy	7.99	Digital Dharma Endowment	
Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund		Pritesh Patel	33.00	Anonymous	1399.10
Rajagopal Krishnan	20.00	Krishanth Rajasooriyar	40.00	Chellappa Deva	51.00
Himalayan Academy Book Distribution Fund		Total	85.70	Rajendra Giri	51.00
Shyamadeva Dandapani	36.00	Anantha Ladies Home Endowment		Sadhunathan Nadesan	501.00
Anonymous	51.00	Yallini Manokaran	50.00	Aran Sendan	51.00
Nrusimhayya Manda	30.00	Pritesh Patel	33.00	Jai Sivakumara	108.00
Pritesh Patel	33.00	Aran Sendan	108.00	Shama Vinayaga	369.20
Subramanian & Sudha Sharma	101.00	Anonymous	50.00	Total	2,530.30
Total	251.00	Jai Sivakumara	100.00	Kauai Aadheenam Feed the Monks Fund	
Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund		Sayanthan & Anupama Sivanathan	30.00	Jason Mendes	25.00
Anonymous	33.00	Total	371.00	Thulasidas Nadarajah	100.00
Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment		Hindu American Foundation Endowment		Gayatri Rajan	75.00
Anonymous	1239.20	Naga Bhushan & Leela Mandava	101.00	Padmini Samuthiran	108.00
N. Balasubramanian	5,000.00	Govinda & Indira Srikantiah	1,001.00	Anonymous	216.36
Subramaniam Pennathur	33.34	Total	1,102.00	Total	524.36
Aran Sendan	108.00	Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment		Insurance Premiums	
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	150.00	Partha Ayalasomayajula	350.00	Mrunal Patel	3,003.00
Dharmalingam Siddhan	25.00	Anonymous	186.39	Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment	
Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan	150.00	Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	4.64	Other Donations	600.00
Kevina Soobramanien	53.29	Srinivas R. Madaboosi	150.00		
Poobarlene Soobramanien	26.60	Gaurav Malhotra	101.00	Total Contributions	\$228,022.41
Total	6,785.43	Saroja Devi Manickam	20.00	Funds at Market Value, Dec 31, 2019	
Maha Ganapati Temple of Arizona Endowment		Natraj Narayanswami	37.00	Total Endowment Funds	\$18,183,764.65
Chellappa Deva	28.00	Pritesh Patel	33.00		
Anonymous	108.00	Krishanth Rajasooriyar	40.00	Grand Total	\$18,183,764.65
Total	136.00	Padmini Samuthiran	108.00		
		Jerry Shuper	501.00		
		Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan	150.00		
		Arunasalam Vathavooran	75.00		
		Total	1,756.03		

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

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

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



HINDU HERITAGE ENDOWMENT

KAUAI'S HINDU MONASTERY

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

808-822-3012 ext 6 • hhe@hindu.org

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





Help make Hindu History and be a messenger of peace

Participate in a grand, **grand** project as a donor or volunteer

The superlative,
216-foot high
Statue of Equality
in the likeness of Sri
Ramanujacharya Swamy
has been completed &
installed in Hyderabad.

Now a vast complex remains to be completed, including duplicates of the original 108 divya desams (Centers of Spirituality, or small temples each housing one of the forms, or powers, of Lord Vishnu.) You can support this world-transforming project for peace and equality by donating or volunteering, or both. There are spectacular videos and photos and a wealth of information about the project at statueofequality.org. Learn of the great souls and philosophy that inspired it at jetusa.org. charyrenu@gmail.com • +1-832-489-0964



Your **Hawaiian** **Pilgrimage Destination**

Visit the spectacular gold-domed, all-white-granite *Iraivan Temple* being constructed at Kauai's Hindu Monastery—from stones quarried and hand-carved in India. Bring the children. Read more, see photos, videos and/or donate at: himalayanacademy.com/iraivan.org
808-822-3012, x237 • iraivan@hindu.org

AMMA SRI KARUNAMAYI 2020 NORTH AMERICAN TOUR



MEDITATION RETREATS

Meditate for individual and universal peace, and tap the inner wellspring of compassion, love and creativity.



INDIVIDUAL BLESSINGS

Receive guidance, request blessings or simply bask in the healing vibrations of Amma's motherly love.

SARASWATI DIKSHA

To inspire and energize students ages 4–24, Amma offers initiation into the Saraswati mantra, which enables students to advance to the highest knowledge.

SACRED FIRE CEREMONIES

Experience the healing power of the Vedic homa, an ancient ceremony that spreads the vibrations of peace and purity through the sacred element of fire.

ATI RUDRAM

Receive an abundance of blessings for healing, peace and prosperity through the power of Vedic fire ceremonies (homa). This unique opportunity to participate comes from Grace and Blessings of the Divine herself. For more information visit www.srimcenter.org/atrudram

All programs are free to attend (with the exception of meditation retreats). REGISTER TODAY!
*Dates are subject to change - Visit www.karunamayi.org/world-tour/north-america for information.

2020 TOUR SCHEDULE

MARCH

12–22, San Francisco, CA
26–31, Los Angeles, CA

APRIL

2–5, Los Angeles, CA
6–7, Ojai, CA
10–12, Phoenix, AZ
16–19, Sedona, AZ
24–26, Seattle, WA
30, Dallas, TX

MAY

1–17, Dallas, TX
22–24, Houston, TX
29–31, Austin, TX

JUNE

3–7, Houston, TX
10–14, Forsyth, GA
19–22, Washington, DC
25–28, New York, NY
30, Woodstock, NY

JULY

1, Woodstock, NY
3–5, New Jersey
10–12, New York, NY
23–26, Cleveland, OH
30–31, Toronto, ON, Canada

AUGUST

1–2, Toronto, ON, Canada
6–9, Chicago, IL
14–16, Maui, HI

ATI RUDRAM

June 10–14, Forsyth, GA
www.srimcenter.org/atrudram

GURU PURNIMA RETREAT

July 3–5, New York/New Jersey

GURU PURNIMA CELEBRATION

July 5, New York/New Jersey

HOMA at Your Request



WHAT IS HOMA?

Homa is a most ancient and sacred ceremony in the Vedic tradition of Sanatana Dharma. It is a fire ceremony in which the presence of the Divine is invoked through the power of mantra and profound spiritual intention. Special offerings like grains, clarified butter (ghee), milk, incense and seeds are cast into the fire while Sanskrit mantras are chanted. The combined energy of the fire, offerings, and mantras generates powerful spiritual vibrations that bless and purify everyone present, in person or by proxy, spreading peace and healing through the world. Homa is a fire element ritual which purifies and consumes old habits and blockages, reducing karma while paving the way for new creation. A properly conducted Homa draws the blessings of the Divine. The smoke that rises from a Homa contains powerful healing energy, and as it rises to the heavens purifies the atmosphere, both physically and subtly, encouraging a peaceful environment and gentle weather. The energetic vibrations that are invoked during a traditional Vedic fire ceremony represent the powerful presence of the Divine on Earth.

Guru Raksha Homa

This Homa is specifically carried out to invoke the blessings and protection available through Brahmarishi Mohanji and is available to all those who seek spiritual help. Invoking the energy of a spiritual master like Mohanji by using fire as an element is a very sacred, unique and divine experience. Guru Raksha Homa not only helps the individual but also helps to cleanse the entire family lineage. Guru Raksha Homa is available at US\$ 299. For more information on how to order your Homa visit <http://bit.ly/2QoEojY>



Vedic Fine Art

We customize what you like



A beautiful painting has the power to calm the mind and lead us to *Ananda*. It is more so if that painting is a form of divine being or an aspect of Vedic culture and lifestyle, or a story from our *Puranas* or *Ithihasas*.

Through several well known artists, we bring these blissful creations to you all art lovers. Please contact us to customize what you want.

www.vedicfineart.com

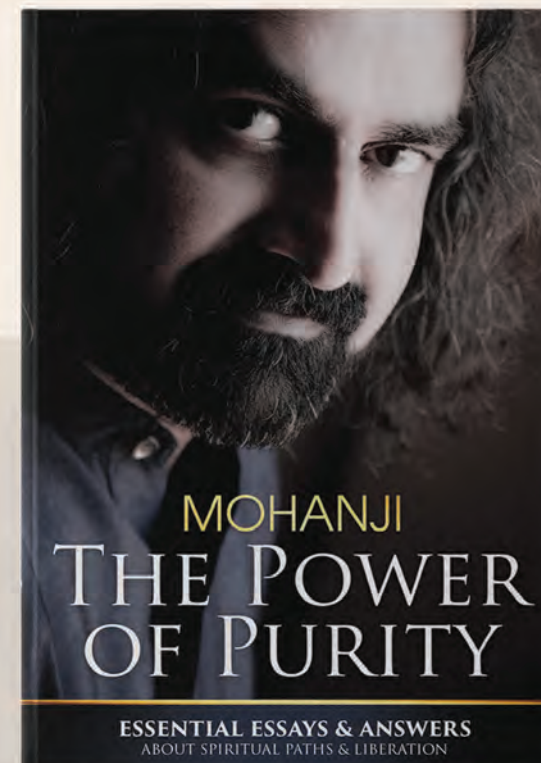


+440 821 8502



Gurudeva's legacy unfolds in Sri Lanka

The great Yogaswami of Jaffna initiated Gurudeva Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (founder of Hinduism Today) in 1949. Gurudeva then established a mission in Alaveddy, Sri Lanka, that thrived as a spiritual, religious and cultural center until the advent of war. Today, the mission has come to life again, and inspired events are in the offing. Follow the exciting developments in this ongoing advertisement and, for the most current information, visit Subramuniya.org



In *THE POWER OF PURITY* Mohanji, in his authentic and unassuming way moves the minds and hearts of people of all confessions and backgrounds to lead them back to their own souls. The book is available online in Kindle edition or as hard copy from Mohanji Foundation Canada by writing to canada@mohanji.org.



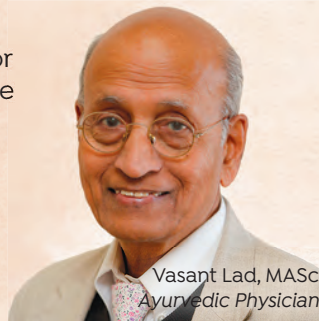
Mohanji is a globally respected spiritual leader and philanthropist whose core teaching is liberation from all bindings, concepts and habits of life. He emphasises purity, faith and unconditional love, as well as selfless service and non-violence towards fellow beings across all species. He is the founder of the Mohanji Foundation, which has been spreading his core teaching of liberation from all bindings so we may live a harmonious, fulfilling life. The Foundation is now active in more than 22 countries across the world. He also founded the ACT Foundation that drives initiatives in education, infrastructure, healthcare, animal welfare and social/financial empowerment across Europe, Americas, Asia Pacific and Africa. He is an active traveller and prolific author, writer and speaker. He has written several books and frequently publishes articles in popular spiritual and secular literature (newspapers, magazine, etc).



Have you always wanted to know more about Ayurveda?

- ◆ With a couple of hours, you can watch our free video library.
- ◆ With a weekend, come to our amazing seminars and webinars.
- ◆ With a week, enroll in a **summer intensive**.
- ◆ **Study with us in India:** Panchakarma Therapist Training and Gurukula Program
- ◆ Train to become an **Ayurvedic professional** with **Vasant Lad, BAM&S, MASc**. Our **Ayurvedic Studies Certificate** programs are nine months each.

Visit Ayurveda.com for videos, recipes, & more about Ayurveda.
Call (505)291-9698



Vasant Lad, MASc
Ayurvedic Physician

HAWAII HEAVEN



Beautiful 3-bed, 2-bath, fully furnished, turnkey **VACATION RENTAL**



- cedar home, screened in lanai
- large new lpe wood deck allows for indoor and outdoor living
- build another house or guest cottage on the adjacent property and create a family compound
- located just before double bridges

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

SACRED STATUES & ART FROM INDIA & TIBET



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

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

Zaposh India

We specialize in orders from monasteries & temples



THE FINEST COLLECTION OF ANTIQUES & ART FROM INDIA, TIBET AND NEPAL

We offer group tours to visit temples in INDIA



Life Insurance and Estate Planning

Rely on a professional for Retirement and Estate Planning

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

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



LOTUS SCULPTURE

THE LARGEST SELECTION OF HINDU & BUDDHIST STATUARY IN THE WORLD!

Explore our Vast Collection of Hand Crafted, One of a Kind Hindu Murtis

www.lotussculpture.com | (760)-994-4455 | info@lotussculpture.com | Statues ship directly from California

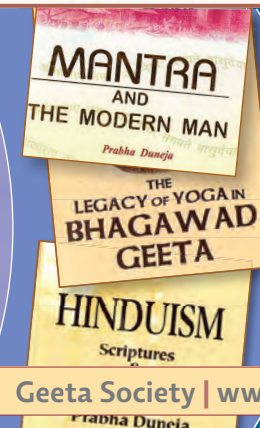
Kauai Investment Properties Homes • Condos • Land



Claire **Sunita** Keaton
RS-73854

808-652-9543
clairekeaton@yahoo.com
kauaihomeseacher.com

Kauai *Landmark* Realty
4-356 Kuhio Hwy., Kapaa HI 96746



Resources to enhance life

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

Geeta Society | www.geetasociety.org | 925-484-5411 | duneja@aol.com

Celebrating our
34th anniversary!

ARSHA VIDYA GURUKULAM

Saylorsburg, PA, Pocono Mountains
Spring, Summer, Fall & Winter 2020 Vedanta programs conducted by:
Swami Vidadatmananda, Swami Tattvavidananda & Swami Pratyagbodhananda

Mar 6-Apr 2 (Fri-Thu) **Four-Week Vedanta Course for Beginners** Swami Muktatmananda

Apr 10-12 (Fri-Sun) **Easter Week-End Family Vedanta Course** Swami Pratyagbodhananda
Br. Suryanarayanan

May 25-28 (Fri-Mon) **Memorial Day Weekend Family Vedanta Course**
Swami Vidadatmananda
Swamini Paraprajnananda

Jun 5-7 (Fri-Sun) **Weekend Vedanta Course**
Swamini Paraprajnananda

Jul 2-5 (Thu-Sun) **Independence Day Vedanta Course** Swami Vidadatmananda
Swamini Paraprajnananda

Jul 6-18 (Mon-Sat) **Two-Week Bhasyam Classes for Adults** • Swami Vidadatmananda

Jul 19-25 (Sun-Sat) **Family Vedanta Course I**
Swami Vidadatmananda
Swami Pratyagbodhananda

Jul 19-25 (Sun-Sat) **Children's Course** w/o parents
(9-16 yr.) • commuters welcome

Jul 26-Aug 1 (Sun-Sat) **Family Vedanta Course II**
Swami Vidadatmananda
Swami Muktatmananda

Jul 26-Aug 1 (Sun-Sat) **Children's Course II** w/o parents
(9-16 yr.) • commuters welcome

Aug 2-8 (Sun-Sat) **Family Vedanta Course III**
Swami Vidadatmananda
Swami Muktatmananda

Aug 9 (Sun) **Gurukulam's 34th Anniversary**
Kshama, forgiveness

Aug 13-16 (Thu-Sun) **Patrons' Complimentary Course I**
Swami Vidadatmananda
Swami Pratyagbodhananda

Aug 15 (Sat) **Swami Dayananda's Jayanti Day**

Aug 26-Sep 2 (Wed-Wed) **Yoga and Sound** • Ramanand Patel,
Pandit Mukhesh Desai, Suddhatma
Chaitanya

Sep 4-7 (Fri-Mon) **Patrons' Complimentary Course II**
Swami Pratyagbodhananda
Swamini Svamavidyananda

Sep 9-15 (Wed-Tue) **One-Week Vedanta Course for adults** • Swami Pratyagbodhananda
Swami Tattvavidananda

Sep 18-Nov 21 (Fri-Sat) **Fall 9-Week Vedanta Course**
Swami Tattvavidananda

Sep 23 (Mon) **5th Anniversary of Pujya Swamiji's Mahasamadhi**

Nov 26-29 (Thu-Sun) **Thanksgiving Family Vedanta Course** Swami Tattvavidananda

Dec 24-31 (Thu-Thu) **Year-End Family Vedanta Course**
Swami Pratyagbodhananda
Swami Muktatmananda

Jan 1, 2021 (Fri) **New Year's Day**
Maharudrabhisekam

Invest dharmawise

We prudently manage wealth,
screening for investments
which affirm dharmic life.



EASAN KATIR

private wealth management
since 1983

easan.katir@gmail.com

1-530-231-5646 (USA)

easankatir.com



Hindu Global Charity

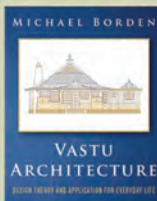


We are currently planning projects
in Nepal, Pakistan and Nigeria.

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

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

VASTUVED INTERNATIONAL



Building design in the ancient
tradition of Vastu Shastra

Residential and Commercial Properties

Comprehensive Vastu Design Theory
and Application for Everyday Life

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



Moksha McClure R(S)

Diligent Buyer Representation.
Extreme Marketing for Sellers.

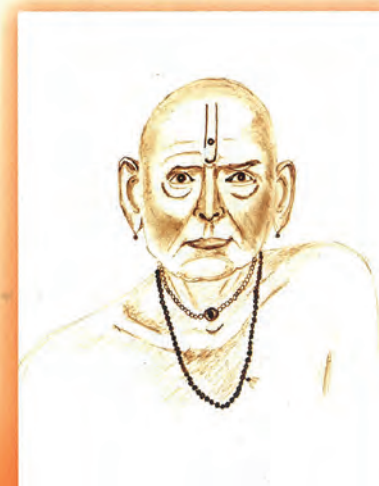
(808) 652-7387
M@OasisHawaii.com
RS #73174

For Buyers: OasisHawaii.com
For Sellers: MokshaMcClure.com

Oceanfront | Sotheby's
INTERNATIONAL REALTY

Each office is independently
owned and operated

ETERNAL FRIEND ŚHRĪ SWĀMĪ SAMARTH MAHĀRĀJ OF AKKALKOT



By
MUKUND M. HANUMANTE, Ph.D

Find the Divine within

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

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

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

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

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

CLASSIFIEDS

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

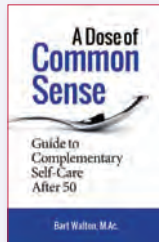
Appeal

Help Hinduism toward a brilliant future by helping HINDUISM TODAY flourish. Support the Hinduism Today Production Fund which is a part of Hindu Heritage Endowment. The fund was established to empower current and future editors to produce an ever more potent journal in both print and digital realms, able to reach ever more souls. Be a part of the global Hindu renaissance, donate at www.hheon-line.org/donate_pf Subscribe to our Production Fund newsletter at: gurudeva.org/email-news Contact: 888-464-1008 • productionfund@hindu.org

Ayurveda/Health

Take Charge of Your Health

An excellent guide-book for self-care after 50. Simple home strategies for health and well-being by respected practitioner and consultant to staff of Hinduism Today, Bart Walton, M.Ac. • Amazon.com
Japanesehealingarts.com



Devotional Supplies

Top Quality Rudraksha beads and malas
Jai Hanuman Ltd. • gdg4044@yahoo.com
641-919-2448 • www.rudraksha.com

Free Products & Services

Shri Shivabalayogi Maharaj Meditation
Blessings. Peace, Bliss and Self-Realization are Guaranteed through Meditation. Receive Shivabalayogi's photo, holy ash and meditation instructions. Free. Sanjay Singh, 8300 Halston St. # 7, Louisville, KY 40222 USA.
thesksmail@yahoo.com
www.meditate-shivabala.org

Professional Products & Services

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

Freight Forwarder

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



Fine Quality Neem Products

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



www.neemtreefarms.com
877-500-6336

Publications

Divine Life Society Publications

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



www.dlsebooks.org
org • www.dlsbooks.org

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

Wisdom Wave Publications

Shrikrishna Kashyap was a beloved holy sage and Ayurvedic healer. Wisdom Wave offers Mantra CDs/downloads, plus books of his teachings on health, Vedic scriptures and philosophy.



www.wisdomwave.org

Sri Chinmoy Books

Wisdom of ancient India made clear and simple.
Free catalog: 1-734-994-7114
SriChinmoyBooks.com
SriChinmoy.org



Dreaming Peace, by Nori Muster. "Every right action, word and thought has a good effect." • dreamingpeace.net

Babaji's Kriya Yoga Publications

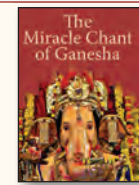
Books, correspondence course, seminars, ashrams, audios, videos, pilgrimages.
babajiskriyayoga.net
1-888-252-9642



Lemurian Scrolls. Celestial messages given in 1973 to Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of Hinduism Today, that help us understand the times we live in and what it all means • www.minimela.com

Rely on Ganesha

Miracle Chant of Ganesha is a guidebook/workbook for chanting His mantra to successfully manage your life • livingsattva.com



Year-Round Recipes

Modern, traditional Pongal recipes for all occasions. Sweet, salty, various grains. Available on Amazon
livingsattva.com



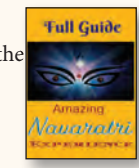
Gowree Ganesh

Small children learn Sanskrit and invoke Ganesha with this illustrated kirtan book. Available on Amazon.
livingsattva.com



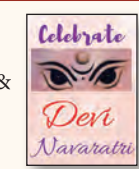
Guide to Navaratri

Learn how to connect with the Divine Mother and tap into divine knowledge. Available on Amazon
livingsattva.com



Devi Navaratri

Learn to honor the Divine Mother at this sacred time & achieve oneness with her. Available on Amazon
livingsattva.com



Recover & maintain your health by yourself, at home

During a lifetime of medical practice, Dr. Gowda MD observed that the ailments that burden people can almost always be improved or remedied easily by applying simple, basic principles and practices. He now

with simple, easy practices that have proved effective for thousands of years

shares his knowledge and experiences in highly illustrated GYM3. The title is an anagram referring to the three traditional practices: exercise, yoga and meditation.

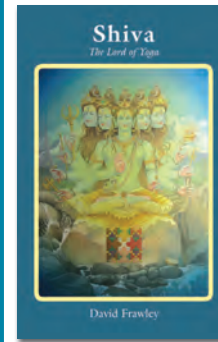
106 pages • \$13.30, including shipping less for quantities • contact us:
2025 Priest Road, Nashville, TN 37215 USA
615-665-1565 • ckhgs@gmail.com

Lotus Press • Lotus Press • Lotus Press • Lotus Press • Lotus Press

Shiva

The Lord of Yoga

David Frawley (Pandit Vamadeva Shastri)



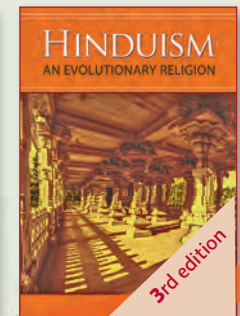
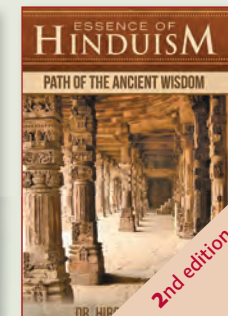
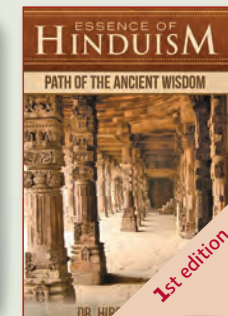
ISBN: 978-0-9406-7629-9
\$19.95 • 296 Pages

Lord Shiva is the personification of all the main practices of Yoga, as the origin and ruling power over asana, prana, mantra, inner seeing and meditation. He is the ultimate Yoga guru reflecting the highest Self-awareness. Yet this centrality of Shiva in Yoga is rarely understood and utilized. The current book unfolds the presence, light, energy and consciousness of the Supreme Shiva to take us beyond all death and duality.

Dr. David Frawley (Pandit Vamadeva Shastri), is one of the most respected modern teachers of the deeper secrets of Yoga and the Vedas, an author of more than forty books in twenty languages worldwide. He has received the prestigious Padma Bhushan award from the government of India for his outstanding work in the Vedic field.

Lotus Press, Inc., a majority woman-owned, family business,
P O Box 325, Twin Lakes, WI 53181 USA • Office Phone: 262 889 8561
Office Fax: 262 889 2461 • Toll Free Order Line: 800 824 6396
Email: lotuspress@lotuspress.com • Website: www.LotusPress.com
Pandit Vamadeva Shastri • www.vedanet.com

Lotus Press • Lotus Press • Lotus Press • Lotus Press • Lotus Press



The marvels of Hinduism in a nutshell

Read, study or teach any of the three editions of Dr. Hiro Badlani's seminal book for a basic understanding and appreciation of Hinduism. With a pleasant style and a knack for storytelling, the author brilliantly covers the essentials in some fifty clear and compact chapters.

Choose the edition/s that best meets your need. The **first edition** is the most complete, the **second** is the most compact, and the **third** focuses on Hinduism's

ability to evolve and adapt through the millennia while preserving its deepest Vedic essence. For twenty years, Dr. Badlani has passionately dedicated himself to bringing these writings forth. They are the result of much research, introspection and consultation with scholars, spiritual masters and pandits.

Visit www.hinduismpath.com. Find the author on YouTube, and Facebook. Books are available on Amazon.com • hgbadlani@aol.com



Vegan Vitamins & Supplements

No animal products or derivatives of any kind

High quality
Wide selection
Affordable prices



...and many more!

Available for purchase at:

WHOLE FOODS & other
Natural Health Food Stores.



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

(888) 988-DEVA

www.devanutrition.com
info@devanutrition.com

American Institute of Vedic Studies

Expand your horizons in Vedic Knowledge and Hindu Dharma. Practical teachings of Pandit Vamadeva Shastri (David Frawley), D.Litt, Padma Bhushan. Authentic Vedic knowledge in a clear and modern idiom. Courses, publications, programs and retreats—with students from all over the world.



Recent books:

- Shiva: The Lord of Yoga
- Vedic Yoga: The Path of the Rishi
- Art and Science of Vedic Counseling
- What is Hinduism: A Guide for the Global Mind

Institute Courses:

- Ayurvedic Healing Course
- Yoga, Ayurveda, Mantra & Meditation Course
- Ayurvedic Astrology Course
- Integral Vedic Counseling Course

American Institute of Vedic Studies
PO Box 8357, Santa Fe, NM 87504-8357 USA
vedicinstitute@gmail.com • www.vedanet.com

Yogini Shambhavi Devi

Yogini Shambhavi Devi is a mystic yogini, spiritual guide and educator rooted in the ancient traditions of Bhakti Yoga, Shakti Sadhana, Vedic Astrology, Mantra Yoga and Ayurveda.



Shambhavi is co-director of the American Institute of Vedic Studies. She is a direct disciple of Sadguru Sivananda Murty, who has empowered her as a spiritual teacher.

- Yoga Shakti retreats in India, Europe, Canada and USA.
- One-year experiential Yoga Shakti training programs
- Spiritual Guidance and Mantra Initiation with Yogini Shambhavi Devi
- Vedic astrology consultations with Yogini Shambhavi Devi

shambhavi.yogini@gmail.com
www.vedanet.com

Yoga Tantra SriVidya Sacred dance Kirtan Samskrit Samskara Puja

MATHA GITANANDA ASHRAM



a traditional Hindu ashram in Italy

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

Second revised edition, quality paperback
224 pages 16 pages of photos
\$8.00 plus \$3.00 postage



Revised Second Edition 2018

**PARAMAHANSA
YOGANANDA**
As I Knew Him
Experiences and Reflections of a Disciple
ROY EUGENE DAVIS

706-782-4723 weekdays 8 a.m. – 3 p.m.
or e-mail info@csa-davis.org
online at www.csa-davis.org

Center for Spiritual Awareness Post Office Box 7
Lakemont, Georgia 30552



Ayurveda

The science of vital power from the balance of nature

The most effective herbal remedies available in the US.

- Sourced from a family lineage in the ancient tradition.
- Constantly evolving in application to meet the health needs of the day.
- Through the optimal combination of potent herbs the efficacy has been ensured.



"Of all nectars, Ayurveda is Supreme"

800-455-0770 . www.trihealthayurveda.com

ARE THERE ANY
MATERIALS
TO TEACH ABOUT
DIWALI
IN MY CLASSROOM?

IS THERE A SIMPLE
RESOURCE
AVAILABLE THAT CAN
TEACH ME ABOUT
HINDUISM
AND ITS
CONCEPTS?

IS THERE AN
**UPCOMING
EVENT**
WHERE I CAN
CONNECT
WITH OTHER
HINDU
AMERICANS?

I SEE OTHERS
DISPLAYING THEIR
RELIGIOUS
SYMBOLS
BUT I'VE BEEN FORCED
TO TAKE DOWN MY
SWASTIKA.
**CAN SOMEONE
HELP ME?**

THE ANSWER TO ALL OF
THESE QUESTIONS IS

YES!

Hindu American Foundation

Your partner in educating the public.

Your partner in bringing the
community together.

Your partner in upholding
your civil rights.



Promoting dignity, mutual respect, and
pluralism.

www.hafsite.org



*A*t Batu Caves,
In a crowd of a million faces,
I see only Thy Face.

Of a million mantras,
Only one for me—
"Muruga, Muruga, Muruga..."

Of all Thy Sayings,
I live by one:
"Why Fear when I am here."

Among many poems,
One touches my heart—
The Bhagavad Gita:
"Of the Generals, I am Skanda."

Among all Thy Forms,
Only one touches my spirit,
My Lord Muruga.

Among All Thy Forms, by Dr. Arjunan Subramaniam, 17 July 2018, Desa Parkcity, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

DIGITAL DHARMA

SMART PHONE EDU

A Savvy Minnesota Team Educates Temple Visitors through QR Codes



ALL PHOTOS: HSMN

THE HINDU SOCIETY OF MINNESOTA (HSMN), formed in 1978 in Minneapolis, evolved from simple satsangs in the early 1970s. By 1998 it was clear that a large facility was needed, and they acquired an 80-acre plot in the cornfields of Maple Grove, 20 miles northwest of the city. In 2003 the groundbreaking ceremony was performed for a 43,000-square-foot mandir. Western construction technology was used to withstand the harsh Minnesota climate, but the interior was built to Hindu standards. Quoting from their website, "The enormity of the structure, colossal internal height, mesmerizing windows and skylights, and artistic shrines...overwhelm everyone." (see: www.hindumandirmn.org).

Inside the building are twenty-one "mini-temples." To address the challenge visitors face understanding the complexity of this layout, an education committee developed the QR Project. It was unveiled during the kumbh-abhishekam event on September 5, 2019.

The team worked with a group of temple members to write web pages for each Deity. Then, QR codes were developed along with a color scheme and size that matched the aesthetics of the temple. The shilpis employed at the

temple created stone carvings for each frame. The codes were printed on a thick, long-lasting non-paper material. All the frames are the same shape, size, and color—so the QR codes can be removed or updated whenever necessary. These frames were mounted on the right side of each mini-temple.



www.hinduismtoday.com

Tying technology to Deities: (left) Bhakti Modi (School Coordinator), Pooja Bastodkar (HSMN 2020 President), Kaushtubh Alegaonkar (Education Chair). (below, left to right) a shrine to Hanuman; (below) QR codes like this are on the right outside wall of every shrine; two QR codes: one for Ganesha, and one for all the 21 Deities

There are several audiences: first generation Hindus can learn about Deities from other regions in India; second and third generation American Hindus can learn the big-picture symbolism behind our history and practices; tourists and all members, volunteers, and temple staff can gain a better understanding of what HSMN offers, instantly on their smart phone. Open your QR Reader and try it below!

HSMN has developed an implementation guide for other temples or facilities interested in replicating this innovation at their location. For more information, contact Bhakti Modi at: hatsadministrator@hsmn.org.

