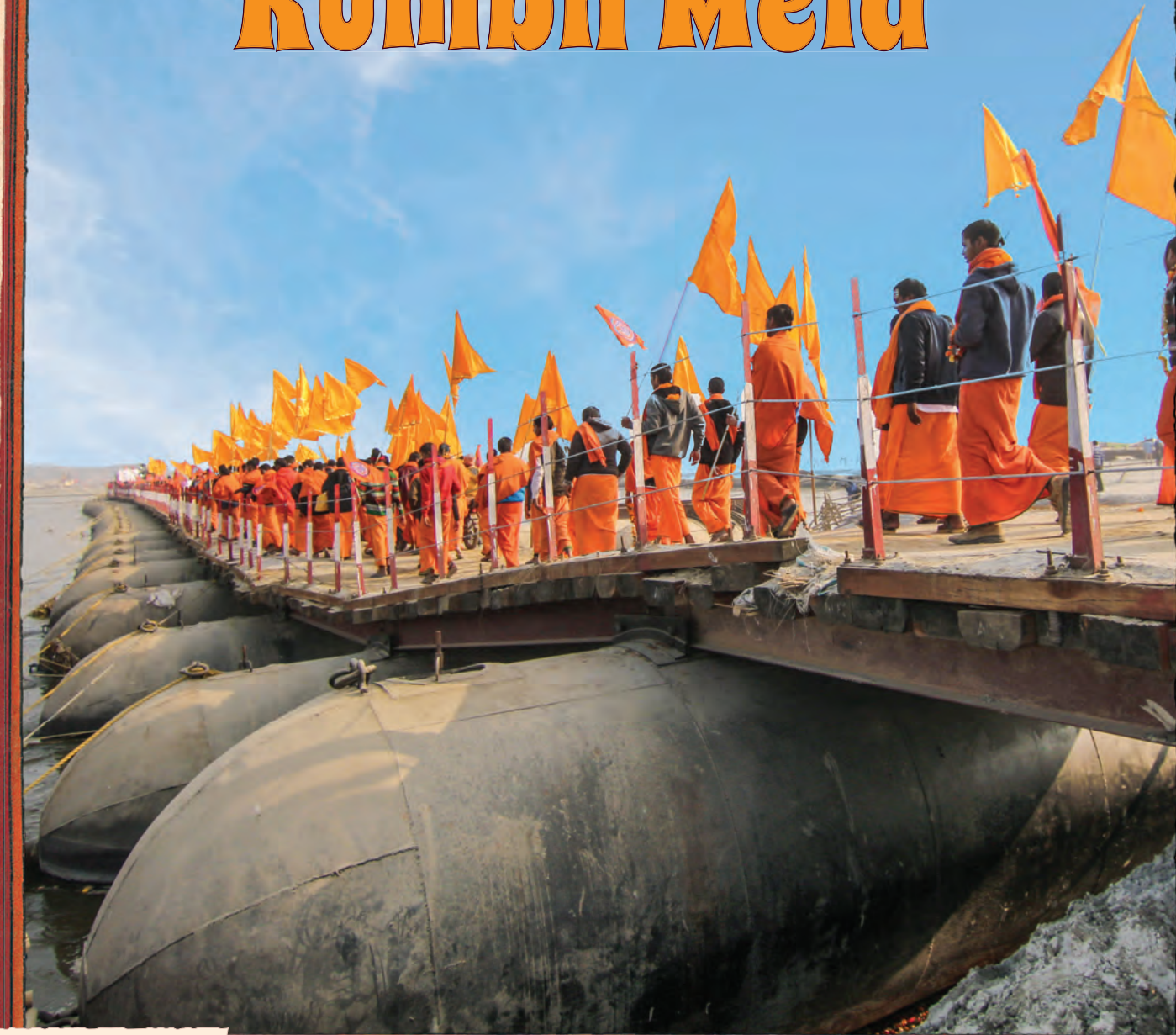


HINDUISM TODAY

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



240 Million Attend the Kumbh Mela



(Cover) Carrying festive flags, devotees march in procession across the Ganges River on a pontoon bridge at the Kumbh festival; (above) a richly decorated devotional dancer weaves worship with art during one of Kerala's Theyyam performances (page 52).

JULY/AUGUST/SEPTEMBER, 2019 • THE HINDU YEAR VIKARI, 5121

Bodhinatha Veylanawami

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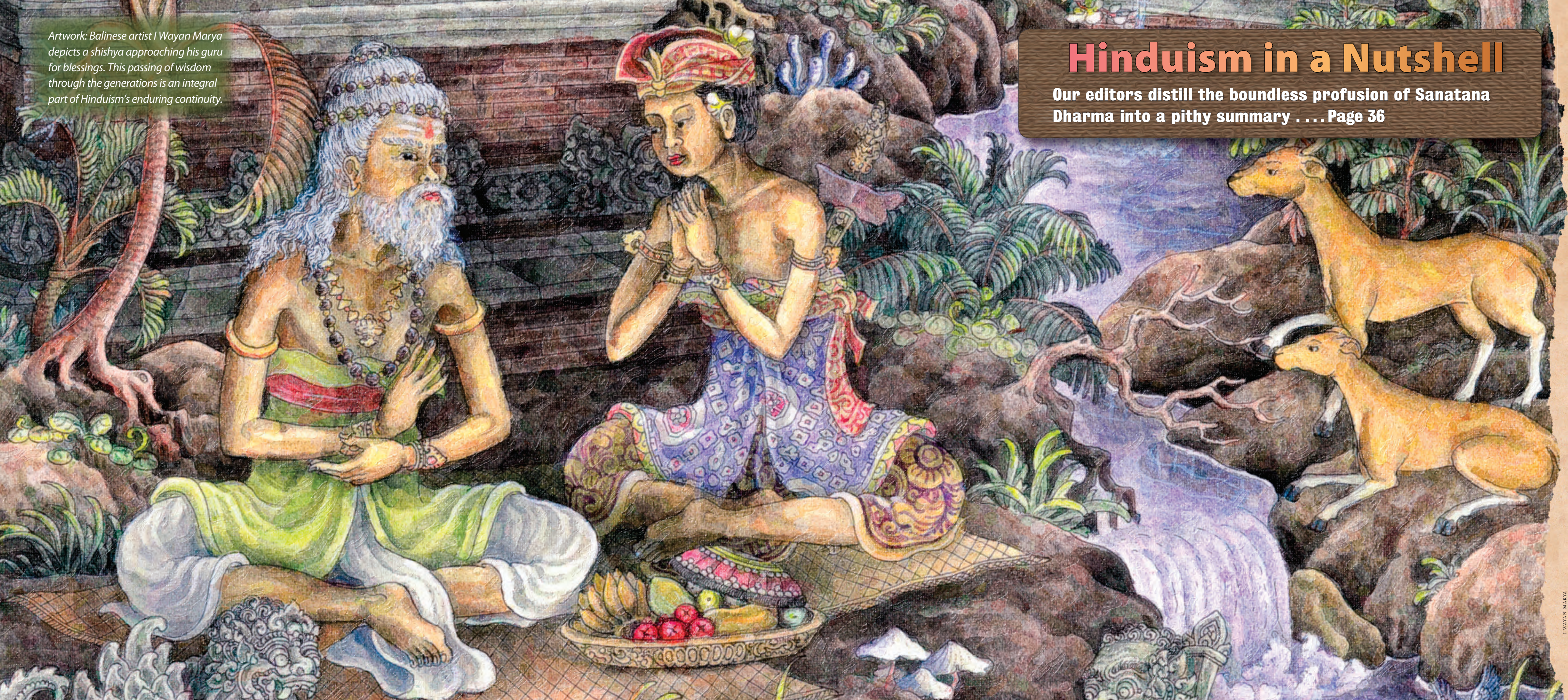
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Artwork: Balinese artist I Wayan Marya depicts a shishya approaching his guru for blessings. This passing of wisdom through the generations is an integral part of Hinduism's enduring continuity.

Hinduism in a Nutshell

Our editors distill the boundless profusion of Sanatana Dharma into a pithy summary . . . Page 36



GLOBAL DHARMA

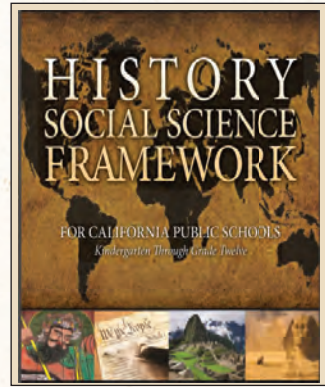
U S A

Court Rules Against Hindus In California Education Suit

IN A SETBACK FOR HINDUS SEEKING fair representation of Hinduism in school textbooks, a US District judge ruled in favor of the California State Board of Education in February and against the California Parents for Equalization of Educational Materials (Capeem) and three Hindu parents suing on behalf of their children. The ruling was not unexpected, as it is quite difficult to prove, as was required, that the state's History Social-Science Framework had encouraged "excessive entanglement

with religion" and was therefore against the US Constitution's "Establishment Clause." "A reasonable observer would not view the standards and framework as primarily denigrating Hinduism," US District Judge Charles Breyer wrote in his 33-page ruling. Capeem and the parents sued the State Board board in 2017, saying it adopted recommendations from an anti-Hindu group of history teachers called the South Asia Faculty Group when it drafted new education guidelines in July 2016.

Judge Breyer rejected their claims on three points. He wrote that use of email excerpts from the concerned scholars—some quite interesting for their candid comments on the process—was hearsay. According to a report on courthousenews.com, "The judge found allegations that the state overemphasized negative aspects of the caste system and singled out Hinduism as 'a contributor to patriarchy' unfounded." He also ruled on what had been one of the most striking student testimonies during the Framework adoption process, that of a 6th grader whose class was divided into "castes" and the higher instructed to treat the lower unfairly. He said it did not



World History: the nearly 1,000 page document lays out course curriculums from kindergarten to high school

violate the Establishment Clause because "it does not involve the role playing of a devotional act, like taking communion."

U S A

Replacing Punishment with Self-Reflection

TWO SCHOOLS IN BALTIMORE, Maryland, are receiving attention for embracing what will hopefully be a growing trend in US public schools. Both the Robert W. Coleman Elementary School and Patterson High School have chosen to implement yoga and meditation as alternatives to the long-standing practices of detention and student suspension, as those outdated practices have been found to be rather ineffective in terms of cultivating positive changes in student behavior. Both schools have been working with the Holistic Life Foundation, which has been

Breathe in, breathe out: a student at Robert W. Coleman Elementary enjoys a time of self-reflection in the school's Mindful Moment Room

functioning for over a decade to "help children develop their inner lives through yoga, mindfulness and self-care." With their help, Robert W. Coleman Elementary has implemented yoga sessions to begin and end each day, as well as a Mindful Moment Room where students can opt to go for self-reflection or be sent when being disruptive. Once



there, students are assigned an individual trainer to lead them through a meditative regimen. Mindful Moment Program at Patterson High School is currently raising funds for full implementation, which includes the same programs for their

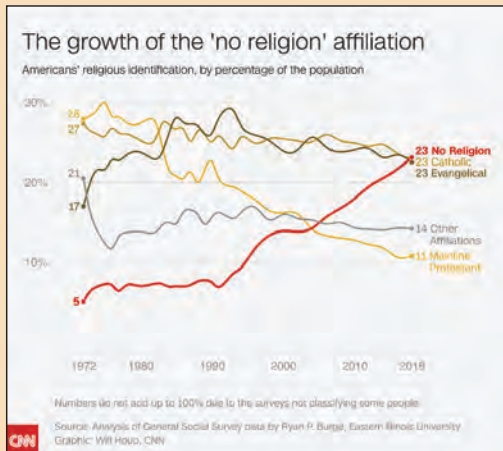
high-school students, as well as a three-week training period to teach the entire student body a routine to center themselves, which is to be performed each day school-wide. Both schools have seen improvement in student behavior and learning.

U S A

Those with No Religion on the Increase

According to the 2018 General Social Survey released by the University of Chicago, there are now as many Americans who claim to be of no religion (23.1%) as there are evangelical Christians (22.5%) or Catholics (23.0%). The statistical dead heat represents a long-standing trend in the US away from organized religion. Those so trending range from atheists and agnostics to the "spiritual but not religious" (SBNR) and those who decline to be affiliated with any organized religion. We found the report's details equally

interesting. For example, those who never attend a religious service went from 10% in 1970 to 30% last year. From 1990, those who "know God exists and have no doubts" dropped from 73% to 53%. The belief in life after death has remained almost steady at 70 to 74% for the last 50 years. The number who believe the Bible is the "word of God" fell from 38% to 29%, and those who (unkindly) consider it a "book of fables" rose from 13% in 1985 to 21% today. The massive survey is considered the most authoritative evaluation of current beliefs and trends in US society.



A U S T R A L I A

Catholic School Bars Hindu Girl for Nose Piercing

SANYA SINGHAL, 15, WAS SENT home from Aranmore Catholic College in early 2019 when she refused to remove the diamond nose stud she received during a recent coming-of-age ceremony. The school ignored a letter from her mother explaining the jewelry's religious significance in her tradition and pointing out the Christian students can wear a crucifix around their neck and

Muslim girls a headscarf. The students all wear uniforms, with earrings allowed for girls. Sanya, 15, had attended Aranmore, in Perth, Australia, since third grade. Despite being privately run, Catholic schools in Australia receive substantial federal and state government funding, which makes the question of religious tolerance all the more relevant. In 2017, a Sikh boy was refused

admission by a Christian college in Melbourne for wearing a turban. A government tribunal eventually ruled in his favor. In March, after six weeks off, Sanya was told by officials that she could return to school without removing the nose ring. In April, the Hindu Council of Australia issued a list of "Hindu sacraments worn on the body," specifying which can be removed (e.g., bangles and rings), which cannot (mangalsutra indicating marriage) and which depend upon the particular tradition (earrings and nose studs).



Standing her ground: Sanya Singhal, with her mother's support, refused the demands of her Catholic school to remove her nose stud

J A P A N

Swastika Debate Continues

WITH 2019 RUGBY WORLD Cup and 2020 Olympics being held next year in Tokyo, a particular use of the swastika common in Buddhism has attracted attention in Japan. There the *manji*, as they call the good luck symbol, is used on tourist maps to indicate the location of a Buddhist temple. In 2016, the official Geospatial Information Authority of Japan (responsible for mapping the country) posed a fairly radical

idea: replacing the swastika with a three-story pagoda on all foreign-language maps to avoid upsetting uninformed Western tourists who only associate the symbol with Nazis. According to a report on theoutline.com, many in Japan took to social media to express their dismay with the as yet unimplemented proposal. T.K. Nakagaki, a Buddhist priest and interfaith leader in New York, suggested the government work



Ancient symbol: The swastika, both left and right handed, was used in Indus Valley and many other civilizations around the world

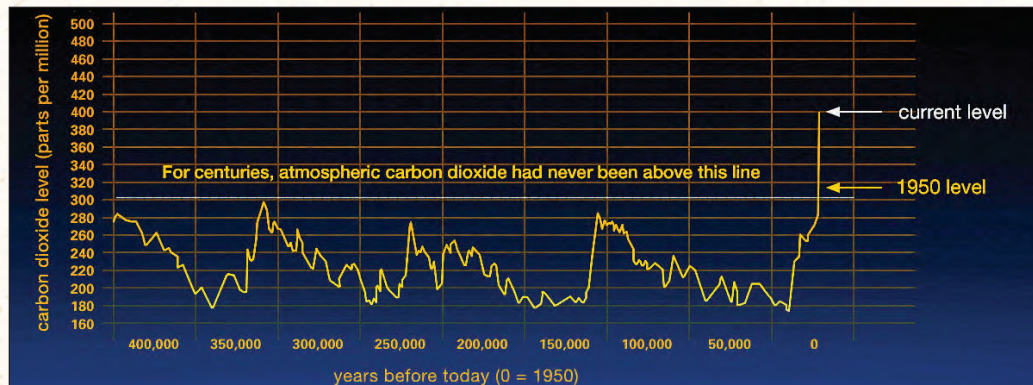
to educate the tourists rather than erase Buddhist tradition. "It's not right for the West to

appropriate the symbol, defile it, and then claim that the East can't use it," Nakagaki stated.

Industrial Meat and Dairy Enterprises Are Worse for the Climate than Power Generation

IT HAS LONG BEEN AN ARGUMENT of vegans and vegetarians that the farming of animals is a major factor in the production of greenhouse gases. But the extent of that impact remained largely unquantified. In April, 2019, this point came to the forefront when *Forbes* magazine published a report quoting Steven Chu, stating that industrial agriculture of meat and dairy, with the associated land usage, generates more greenhouse gas emissions than power generation. Chu is a Nobel Prize winner, the former US Energy Secretary, and the president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

His findings came after conducting an examination of the world's most carbon-polluting



industries in an attempt to better gauge their comparative environmental impact. He started with a close look at meat and dairy. As he stated, "If cattle and dairy cows were a country, they would have more greenhouse

gas emissions than the entire EU twenty-eight."

Another important point by Chu that *Forbes* cited is that humans and the animals they eat account for 96 percent of the carbon mass of mammals in the world, while all the Earth's wildlife accounts for just 4 percent.

In 2009 the Worldwatch Institute attributed 51 percent of the world's carbon emissions to livestock. This number puts into perspective the huge environmental impact of animal

agriculture.

Offering potential partial solutions, Chu points to the trend towards lab-grown meats, which could provide food for humans in a more environmentally friendly way than industrial meat and dairy. He also mentions symbiotic fertilization, by which plants are able to work with microbes in the soil to access needed nitrogen. This would reduce the need for fertilizers if it could be used with major animal fodder crops like corn.

Facing facts: (Left) American dairy cows eat grain at milking stanchions; (top) NASA's graphical explanation of climate change, detailing the rise in the planet's CO₂, which is occurring roughly ten times faster than the average rate of ice-age-recovery warming.



BRIEFLY...

A RECENT PEW RESEARCH STUDY

looked at the level of four-year college education among religious groups in the United States. The research concluded that, based on this marker, Hindus are the most educated religious group, with 77 percent of Hindus having college degrees. Coming in second were Unitarians with 67 percent, followed by Jews, Anglican church adherents, Episcopal church members, atheists and agnostics, Muslims and, finally, Catholics at 26

percent. The study looked at the percentage of higher education within religious groups regardless of their size. Hindus still represent one of the smallest religious demographics in the US.

IN EARLY FEBRUARY, THE ANCIENT

Sri Govindaraja Swamy temple in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, experienced the theft of three diamond-studded golden crowns. According to an article in *India Today*, the crowns, which adorn the temple's processional Deities,

weigh 13 kg and are worth hundreds of thousands of dollars.

ON APRIL 20, THOUSANDS OF INDIANS living in the United Arab Emirates and around the world rejoiced as the foundation stone-laying ceremony was held for the first traditional stone mandir in the UAE. This large temple complex in Abu Dhabi is a project of the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha. The event included a Vedic ceremony performed by BAPS leader Mahant Swami Maharaj. During the assembly, Pujya Brahnavihari Swami, a senior BAPS sadhu who is overseeing the construction, stated

that this mandir will be "a spiritual oasis for global harmony in the middle of the desert." See: www.mandir.ae

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

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



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IN MY OPINION

Improving the Kumbh

One of the event's senior police officers shares his thoughts and feelings on the duty of a lifetime

BY PURNENDU SINGH

There were times during this Kumbh I went without sleep for two days at a stretch because of my duties overseeing VIP visits. But when I saw that despite the huge rush the pilgrims were able to comfortably and smoothly take their bath and felt blissful, I got a very special kind of satisfaction which cannot be easily explained in words. Seeing that, feeling the bliss and peace on the faces of the pilgrims, is the biggest achievement of my posting here. It was such an energy booster for me.

As a devout Hindu myself, I felt that for the common pilgrim who travels hundreds and, in some cases, thousands of kilometers to participate we are still not able to offer the kind of facilities we should in terms of accommodation and transport. We do have to work within certain limitations. For example, beyond a certain level, we cannot allow vehicles into the Kumbh area, so pilgrims have to walk long distances or find alternative arrangements to carry their luggage.

Those that are associated with a saint, ashram or guru are accommodated by them, but those places can take 50 or 100 people at most. The common man finds it difficult to find accommodations. The government made arrangements for 50,000 people at just Rs. 200 (US\$2.88), but those who come in groups of 50 loaded in a tractor and trailer, or in the back of a truck, cannot afford even this, needing to save their money for travel and food.

Many such pilgrims can be seen sleeping in the open in cold and rainy weather. I personally feel guilty that we could not make arrangements for such devoted people. There are hundreds of thousands of such pilgrims. I think providing free accommodation for at least one night would be a great service to those who travel hundreds of kilometers from the interior villages to have a holy bath in Ganga and participate in the Kumbh Mela. I also think in future Kumbh Melas that the resourceful saints who spent hundreds of



thousands of dollars on their own tented mini cities can come out and help these pilgrims by offering subsidized accommodations.

I saw a very large number of youth visiting this Kumbh in a spirit of adventure, but, honestly speaking, I am not sure the level of devotion they have towards

Hindu dharma. In the past, the youth heard about the Kumbh through their relatives and friends who had visited; this time they heard about it through social media and it became a sort of craze. In particular, they were taken with how the "Paint My City" campaign had transformed the city of Prayagraj with countless murals on every street. The way we projected our ancient culture and stories from Hindu mythology on the pillars and walls had a very positive impact on the youth.

This was the first time we granted licenses for adventure sports, including water scooters, high speed boats, paragliding and helicopter tours—all kept at a reasonable distance from the Kumbh grounds. Naturally, these sports proved popular with the urban youth.

There was a special screening for all police deployed during the Kumbh: they should be below 50 and with a record of good character. We also filtered out those who drink alcohol, all in an effort to have the best people for the event.

All the policemen on duty had been given written instructions that not even a stick was to be used here to control the crowds. They have to perform their duties only with the help of their whistle. They were advised to be extremely courteous while dealing with the pilgrims. Both police and armed forces personnel held hands in namaskar when requesting them to follow the rules.

PURNENDU SINGH was the Additional Superintendent of Police for the Kumbh Mela with the responsibility of protocol in the Sangam area. He was previously in charge of two Magh Melas at Prayagraj.

A Mystical View of Sanatana Dharma

As an emanation of God, each soul has the eternal truths of Hinduism encoded within itself, available through meditation

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

HINDUISM IS OFTEN REFERRED TO BY THE Sanskrit term *Sanatana Dharma*. *Sanatana* means eternal and *dharma* in this context means religion. Thus, Hinduism is the "Eternal Religion." Calling a religion eternal naturally leads to the reflection, "What is it that is eternal in the universe?" The answer, of course, is just one entity—God. I propose that Hinduism's eternal essence is possible only if it abides in the intelligence of God. How then does this spiritual knowledge pass from God to man, whose inmost being is also immortal?

One analogy is to be found in biology where we encounter a common type of cell reproduction called budding where a daughter cell essentially grows out of and then separates from the mother cell. The DNA of each spawned cell is identical to that of the original cell. This, for example, is how yeast cells reproduce. We can picture God as the original cell and each soul as a cell produced by God. Just as the DNA of a yeast cell is passed on to a newly cloned cell, so is the divine intelligence of God, which includes the knowledge we call Hinduism, passed on to each soul.

This logically leads to a second question, "Why then are not all people aware of the truths of Hinduism that reside within them?" The answer is that this subtle knowing is hidden deep in the soul and takes great effort and maturity to find. We can think of this spiritual search as the ultimate treasure hunt. Divine truths are hidden within us, just waiting to be discovered.

Renaissance thinker and writer Ram Swarup gave an excellent description of this search: "Hinduism resides in all seeking hearts and whenever man's seeking for Gods becomes spiritual, Hinduism, or the tradition of Sanatana Dharma, automatically comes in. In what way and how long could man's innermost truth be kept away from him?"

To elaborate further on this idea, just as a trained scientist can develop deep understandings of the not-always-obvious laws that govern the universe, the matured soul is able to fathom the hidden laws that govern spiritual unfoldment. As sages have decreed, God's divine intelligence is available if you go to the depths of your soul. But it is a challenge to get there and even harder to stay there.

Here is an analogy I like to use to illustrate finding the truths of Hinduism. Imagine a pond of water with gold nuggets at the bottom. If the surface of the pond has ripples due to a wind or the pond itself is cloudy due to the presence of mud, the gold nuggets at the bottom of the pond cannot be seen from above. They are there, hidden from view. The ripples on the surface represent the agitated intellect; the cloudy water is a cluttered subconscious mind; and the gold nuggets at the bottom are the precious truths. To find these



truths we need to have a quiet intellect and a pure or clear subconscious. To achieve this takes serious spiritual striving, ideally under the guidance of a guru.

An excellent third question would be "Is there an original scripture of the Eternal Religion?" We can say that the original scripture is the wisdom imprinted in each individual soul. Over the millennia, great rishis, swamis and pundits have tapped into this inner knowledge and drawn forth portions of it which comprise Hinduism's holy texts. However, Sanatana Dharma's most potent scripture is the unwritten wisdom that

resides within each of us. Paramaguru Yogaswami often spoke of the superiority of one's inner scripture to any outer writing. He said, "Instead of spending time in book-reading, it is better to spend it in studying yourself. Study is also a kind of yoga."

"The book is within you. Turn over the leaves and study.... Truth is not encompassed by books and learning. You must know yourself by yourself. There is nothing else to be known.... It must come from within. Don't rely on book knowledge. Trust the Self alone."

That last quote, "It must come from within," adds a new dimension to the means of understanding the divine intelligence that God has placed within the soul. It is the faculty of intuition, by which we gain understanding through superconscious insight rather than intellectual analysis. Yogaswami referred to such insights as "inner orders." Here is an explanation from the book *The Guru Chronicles* of how he used inner orders.

"Yogaswami worked intuitively, responding to those who came according to 'inner orders.' In explaining this process, he once said, 'I do nothing. I can do nothing. Everything you see, that is done by what comes from within.' Another time he said, 'When you come here, what will happen was settled long ago. We go through it; you bring it, but it all happened long ago. Sit and be a witness.' Swami explained the process: 'When you are pure, you live like water on a lotus leaf. Do what is necessary, what comes to you to do, then go on to the next order you receive, and then to the next that comes.'"

"He advised, 'Boldly act when you receive orders from within. You need not wait until all details are in order. If you wait for everything



The Silent Guru: *Dakshinamurti sits beneath a banyan tree. Four sages approach Him, seeking the truth of Truth. They are the first among humans to be granted the ultimate knowledge.*

"Having never read a book from cover to cover in my life and, having been trained from very early years, sixteen or seventeen, to have the experience first and then somehow or other it would be verified by scripture later on, this was my path. I was told that to know what was coming up in the experiential pattern of spiritual unfoldment could be to put into the subconscious mind the experience and memories of it, which would not be the experience at all. This, I was taught, would build a spiritual pride that would detour one from the path to Self Realization. Very carefully I observed this, fully understanding the wisdom of the advice."

A fourth question logically arises, "Who is the original teacher of the Eternal Religion?" In his *Yoga Sutras*, Rishi Patanjali answers this question in chapter one, verse twenty-six. "Ishvara was also the guru of those who lived earlier by virtue of His temporal continuity." The term *Ishvara* refers to God as personal Lord. The great commentator Vyasa elaborates on this verse: "The former teachers of knowledge and of piety are limited by time, but He to whom time as a limiting factor is not applicable was the teacher of the former teachers. As He was present with His full powers in the beginning of the present cycle of creation, so was He at the beginning of the past creations."

In other words, the original teacher of Hinduism is God Himself, and subsequent teachers were his students. A common depiction of God as the primeval guru is Dakshinamurti, which literally means "south-facing form." It is the image of Lord Siva sitting under a banyan tree, silently conveying the ultimate truths to four rishis sitting attentively at His feet. God's silence in this transmission of spiritual knowing is important, for He is not endowing the sages with His knowledge, but provoking them to discover the knowing that is always and already within themselves. As Ramakrishna said, "You go into yourself a fool, but through the practices of yoga you come out a wise man."

My guru's praise of the Sanatana Dharma is the perfect conclusion to these reflections. "One great joy that the Hindu has is the appreciation for all other religions. Hinduism is theocentric, that means God-centric; whereas most other religions are prophet-centric, revolving around the personality of some living person or some person who once lived in history and interpreted religion to

to be worked out, you may miss your chance. Have faith and do the work that comes from within. Money will trail after you if you are responding to divine orders. Helpers will come. Everything will come. You have only to follow carefully that which comes from within."

My Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniya, also stressed the superiority of inner superconscious experience over outer intellectualization:

his culture in his time. Hinduism has no founder. It was never founded. It has neither a beginning nor an end. It is coexistent with man himself. That is why it is called the Sanatana Dharma, the Eternal Path. It is not one man's teaching or interpretation. It is not limited to a single facet of religion, but consists of the entire spectrum, seen in its various components as if through a prism."



LETTERS

Kumbh Mela Under Siege

An article in the *Nagaland Post* urges a Naga contingent invited to the Kumbh Mela to showcase Naga culture to use the opportunity to spread the gospel. It considers it the Christians' birthright to spread the message of Jesus and hopes that one day the Kumbh Mela will turn into a great mission center.

Several blog posts claim that as part of the evangelist project Joshua II, the First Baptist Church of Nashville, Tennessee, has adopted towns where Kumbh Melas take place. It has been actively converting the locals so that pilgrims will face extreme hardship during their next visit. Hindus would provide services and supplies for pilgrims. Now that these towns are Christianized, pilgrims won't have that support. They are making environmental groups raise their voice, too. It seems that a good section of media is also on their side, to such an extent that any group opposing their activity finds itself identified as a militant or extremist group by the Indian news media.

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The Ugly Face of Christianity

This article by Madhu P. Kiswar is a very bold attempt to bring the ugly face of Christianity before us in India. Christianity, in the name of service and education, has destroyed the Hindu community, and this has been going on for centuries. I think the time has come for majority Hindus to kick out foreign Christian missionaries from India and freeze their assets and bank accounts, because they have a plan to Christianize the whole of India. The Muslims have a similar plan, too. Both these religions are 100% against everything attached to Hinduism. They destroyed the pre-Christian and pre-Islamic tradition, heritage, culture, languages, arts, fine arts, temples and religions wherever they have dominated, which can be seen all over the world.

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Hinduism—Epitome of Religion!

Congratulations to the India Foundation's Center for Soft Power, and all others involved, for the success of the first Conference on Soft Power. On listening to some of the speeches on YouTube, I was struck by how insistently one speaker distanced himself from Hinduism, even going so far as to deny its very existence as a religion—claiming it is simply a way of life. To him and to all who hold such a view, I would like to say, "What

nonreligious 'way of life' builds great temples to its Gods and worships them with such exuberant love and devotion? Conversely, what religion does not aspire to be a way of life for its followers?" Hinduism's unmatched success in accomplishing that goal does not disqualify it as a religion—quite the reverse!

I am reminded of the story of the four blind men, the elephant, and the sighted man. I'm hearing the blind man holding the tail: "No, no, that cannot be an elephant! An elephant must be shaped like a rope, just a few feet long and no more than a few inches in diameter!" The idea that a religion must have a human founder and a starting point in history is mere propaganda, coming from those religions that do have such restrictions. Let there be no more of this nonsense. Hinduism is the very epitome of religion!

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On Steven Hawkings

In "Quotes & Quips" the late Stephen Hawking is quoted in an apparent defense of an argument for the necessary existence of God. (The rest of the famed quote continues, "Why does the universe go to all the bother of existing?")

Of course, this argument begins with a premise that everything must have a *raison d'être*, and cannot simply Be: essentially that for something to exist there must be a reason for its existence. Yet this ontological premise has been philosophically refuted by a broad range of philosophers and perspectives, from David Hume to Buddha to Carvaka's empiricism, concluding it is quite possible there is either no need for such an answer, challenging the argument's premise, or even that the question is language suspect (Wittgenstein). In Hawking's final book (*Brief Answers to Big Questions*) he overturns his own earlier thinking: "Science has a more compelling explanation than a divine creator," and "For me this means that there is no possibility of a creator...." Hawkings was a devout atheist.

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Claiming Your Omnipresence?

Bodhinatha Veylanswami's Publisher's Desk "Claiming Your Omnipresence" in the 40th Anniversary edition of HT deserves special notice and praise for its lucidity. Satguru Bodhinatha, a true king of the Raja Yoga path, offers an illuminating account of the state of omnipresence, including a handful of practical exercises for one to discover this state of

consciousness. I might add that the activities are also fun! At the core of the Yoga Sutras is the key teaching of disuniting awareness from what it is aware of, thus becoming the experienter or free traveler within the mind, as Veylanswami would say. He is encouraging modern Hindus to experience for themselves one of the central teachings of the Sanatana Dharma—the essence of the soul is pure existence, consciousness and bliss.

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Crimes Against India

I commend you for being bold enough to include the article "Why Do Christian Missionaries Dislike Modi and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh?" I have personally gone on two lecture tours in India's northeast, as organized by the RSS, and have seen and heard about the damage that such conversions have done in this area, and the resistance to them, as well as in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Your publication is one of the few that discusses this issue, which all Hindus should know about and understand from a realistic perspective. That is why I wrote my book, *Crimes Against India*, because it is time that Hindus give up their apathy and rise up to defend and protect their culture. Please continue to expand the awareness of Hindus everywhere on this issue.

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Correction

The article on dance teacher Priyamvada Sankar of Montreal (*HINDUISM TODAY*, April/May/June, 2019) was written by Nandini Ramani (the younger sister of Priyamvada Sankar), from Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. This was perhaps unclear as the byline read, "Nandini Ramani, Canada"—indicating the author and the location of the story.

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

Letters, *Hinduism Today*
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Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304 USA
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Letters may be edited for space and clarity and may appear in electronic versions of *HINDUISM TODAY*.

The Status of Sanatana Dharma Today

Vamadeva Sastri discusses *HINDUISM TODAY*'s influence on the future

Pandit Vamadeva Sastri (Dr. David Frawley), author of thirty books on *Sanatana Dharma*, is the founder/director of the American Institute for Vedic Studies in the USA. In 2015, he received India's prestigious Padma Bhushan award in recognition of his influential work. He is in touch with Hindu groups and leaders around the world and is considered a bridge between India and the West. We asked him to share his insights on India's and Hinduism's current evolution.

Q: Panditji, how are Hinduism and Mother India faring today?

The current election in India transcends ordinary politics because the result will deeply affect India, Hinduism and the world. The people will opt for one of two competing ideas: 1) that India didn't really exist before 1947, and is without a previous identity; or 2) that India is an ancient dharmic civilization, continuous to this day, and that it needs to awaken to its unique *Bharatiya* identity, its ethos, gurus, values, teachings and practices. Will the people choose for India's deeper self, or let it drift toward being just another modern place like China or the USA, the Middle East or Europe? India will, of course, remain its endlessly tolerant self, more diverse than probably any other culture or subcontinent in the world. The idea is not to exclude others, but to allow the Hindus a voice as to their destiny, one they are just beginning to claim. This will sound strange in the West, where it is assumed that India, being a Hindu country, is naturally run by Hindus. But in fact, India has been largely run by people who do not call themselves Hindus and often work against Hindu causes. For example, textbooks in India still follow the colonial narrative denigrating Hindus and Hinduism. A thriving Hindu India will be good also for the whole world, as it will share ever more generously of its wealth of values, yoga, ayurveda, mystical teachings, broad perspectives and wisdom. It will also generate rich and much-needed dialogs.

What forces are opposing Hinduism?

Because Hinduism is reviving to some extent, opposing forces are also rising. They see Hindu perspectives as a threat and rarely allow or recognize them. There's still a lot of outside interference in India, vested interests, foreign NGOs, missionaries of all ilk creating havoc. With the rise of Islam,



Pandit Vamadeva Sastri and Swami Avdheshanand at the 2019 Kumbh Mela.

new anti-Hindu concepts have entered the fray such as "Hindu nationalism." No Hindu group says, "We are Hindu nationalists." It is a fabrication from the outside whose only apparent purpose is to cast a dark pall over Hinduism and all it stands for, including efforts to give Hindus a voice in their own country. *HINDUISM TODAY* has taken on these distortions very well, including disentangling the confusion in many Hindus' minds about all religions being the same. We need more of that sort of *viveka*. Indian and Western media have been harsh. *New York Times* or BBC coverage of anything Indian, for example, is consistently negative, sometimes even grotesque. They perpetuate the 19th-century British and missionary narrative of a backward India, as if no civilization existed before the arrival of Western conquerors. The academic world is often disingenuous, too, denigrating and demonizing all things Hindu. Hindu leaders who disavow the connection to their own roots also add to the confusion. I am thankful that *HINDUISM TODAY* is taking a strong stand before these challenges in a way that is authentic, positive and protective of the higher tradition.

How is *HINDUISM TODAY* magazine making a difference?

The magazine has provided excellent models and useful ideas that have had an important impact, your coverage of the textbook issue in the USA, for example. Hindu leaders I've met do examine what you say, how you say it and how you reshape the Hindu message from what it used to be, unifying it into a one solid vision. In India there are many useful magazines and groups, addressing history,

politics, society and movements. But a voice on behalf of Hindu dharma as a whole is extremely rare. I think *HINDUISM TODAY* excels in addressing the issues in depth while highlighting Hinduism's universal aspect. It is great that *HINDUISM TODAY* is articulating that message. Another aspect of its success is showing how to use an English idiom that avoids the distortions we find elsewhere. Most importantly, the magazine has upgraded Hinduism's image at a media level, which plays an important role in the India context as well. The magazine is also influential in digital realms, making its impact truly global.

What can our readers do to help?

I wish more people would help so the message of Sanatana Dharma can have more currency and begin to affect academia and the media. It is not just Hinduism that is challenged today—so is the Earth, nature, indigenous peoples and cultures, health and peace in society. The best way to help all around is to support Hinduism. And the best way to support Hinduism is to support this magazine, one of its strongest and most effective voices. What we see about us today is an aberration. Our true humanity is found in the teachings of yogis and rishis. Yoga, Vedanta and ayurveda don't exist of themselves. They arise out of Sanatana Dharma and are sustained by it. The magazine makes that point again and again, reconnecting each particular to its source and opening doors to *vidya*, the true knowledge we need to go forward into an age of consciousness. Here are the answers the Kali Yuga could not provide. I think what *HINDUISM TODAY* teaches goes far in educating Hindus of all sampradayas as to what Hindu dharma really is, and how to talk about it so that today's citizens can understand—the children, the youth especially, because they need to understand so clearly what their Hinduness means that they can never again be thrown by the distortions that will swirl about them for a long time to come.

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QUOTES & QUIPS

“One who loves God finds the object of his love everywhere.”

Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950)

The more you know of the Hindu religion, the more you will honour and love it. The more you study it, the more it will enlighten you and satisfy your heart. **Swami Sivananda** (1887–1963)

Be ashamed of your hatred. Give up hatred and be quiet. **Shirdi Sai Baba** (1838–1915)

Work and worship are necessary to take away the veil, to lift off the bondage and illusion. **Swami Vivekananda**

My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble mind. **Albert Einstein** (1879–1955)

An empty pot makes the loudest noise. *Kenyan Proverb*

A man is born gentle and weak; at his death he is hard and stiff. All things, including the grass and trees, are soft and pliable in life; dry and brittle in death. Stiffness is thus a companion of death; flexibility a companion of life. An army that cannot yield will be defeated. A tree that cannot bend will crack in the wind. The hard and stiff will be broken; the soft and supple will prevail. **Lao Tzu** (ca 600 bce), *Chinese philosopher*

You are awareness. Awareness is another name for you. Since you are awareness, there is no need to attain or cultivate it. All that you have to do is to give up being aware of other things, that is of the not-Self. If one gives up being aware of them, then pure awareness alone remains, and that is the Self. **Ramana Maharishi**

The fish in the water is wracked by thirst:

I hear about it and burst out laughing. What you are looking for is right at home and yet you roam from forest to forest, full of gloom. **Saint Kabir** (1440–1518)

A good mother is worth a hundred teachers. *Italian Proverb*

What seems to be coming at you is really coming from you. **Rabindranath Tagore** (1861–1941), *mystic poet*

The present moment is filled with joy and happiness. If you are attentive, you will see it. **Thich Nhat Hanh**, Buddhist monk

How can you buy or sell the sky, the warmth of the land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can you buy them? Every part of the Earth

is sacred to my people, every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every clear and humming insect is holy. **Chief Seattle** (1780–1866), leader of the Suquamish and Duwamish Native American tribes

Loud speech, profusion of words, and possessing skillfulness in expounding scriptures are merely for the enjoyment of the learned. They do not lead to liberation. **Adi Shankara** (788–820)

India's traditional ideas talk about conquering the mind and reject the idea of conquering the world. **Karolina Goswami**, Polish-born Indian resident and filmmaker

We desire to bequeath two things to our children; the first one is roots, the other one is wings. *Sudanese proverb*

There are many who, without instructions from a Satguru, but smitten by vanity, read the *Vedas* and other *shastras*; but those who are possessed of a knowledge of scripture's true meaning are very rare. As a ladle does not know the taste of the liquid which it serves, and as the head carries flowers but

their fragrance is smelled by the nose, so while these people read the *shastras*, the Truth they reveal is known by good sadhakas only. *Kularnava Tantra 4*

Your guru will come to you at the proper time. **Shivabalayogi Maharaj** (1935–1994), Indian yogi and guru

Be a mountain or lean on one. *Somali proverb*

So long as passion for attaining God is not firm you shall fly hither and thither, without knowing, like a kite. **Swami Brahmanand Saraswati** (1868–1953), *Shankaracharya of the Jyotir Math*

There's no scripture that surpasses what you'll find inside yourself. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, publisher of *Hinduism Today*

In the end, the Great Mystery is known as one, as two, as neither one nor two. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), founder of *Hinduism Today*



DID YOU KNOW?

Are Hindus Forbidden to Eat Meat?

THE OVERLYING PRINCIPLE THAT DEFINES THE ANSWER TO THIS query is *ahimsa*—refraining from injuring—physically, mentally or emotionally—anyone or any living creature. Our religion does not force “do’s and don’ts.” but the Hindu who wishes to follow the path of *ahimsa*, naturally adopts a vegetarian or vegan diet. It’s a matter of conscience more than anything else. The *Yajurveda* 36.18 calls for kindness toward all creatures living on Earth. To successfully practice yoga and meditation, it is mandatory to be at least vegetarian. Consuming animal products amplifies our lower

nature, which is prone to fear, anger, jealousy, confusion and resentment. There are many great resources for vegetarian cooking. It is easy, healthy and *ahimsa* to go veg! If you need recipes, instruction or inspiration, check out these wonderful, illustrated, vegetarian recipe sites, and you might just find yourself on the way to your kitchen with some mouth-watering ideas:



- mynewroots.org
- naturallyella.com
- happyolks.com
- thefirstmess.com
- sproutedkitchen.com

.....
Love animals, eat something else: a young girl kisses a baby pig; a sweet potato Sandwich, one of the many colorful examples of the epic recipes to be found at mynewroots.org



BASICS

Understanding Timeliness

Verses from the ancient *Tirukural*, by Saint Tiruvalluvar

Verse 481: During the day, a crow can overcome the more powerful owl. Desiring to defeat his enemy, a king must pick the proper time.

482: A man may tightly bind himself to prosperity by the tether called timely action.

483: Is there any task too difficult for the man who acts at the right time and with the proper means?

484: One may aim to acquire the whole world and succeed, if actions target the right time and place.

485: Those who aim to own the world must wait, unruffled, for the fitting hour.

486: The powerful man's patient restraint is like the drawing back of the fighting ram before he strikes the stunning blow.

487: When irate, clear-minded men never show it then and there. Holding it within, they watch for an opportune moment.

488: Bow ever so humbly when meeting an enemy. His own head will hang humiliated when, in time, he meets defeat.

489: When a rare opportunity comes your way, do not hesitate to swiftly accomplish otherwise impossible tasks.

490: There are times to stay still as a stalking heron. There are times to move swiftly as a heron strikes.



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...

Now in Tamil!

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 Gurudev'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.

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www.minimela.com

himalayanacademy.com/view/path-to-siva

Hardcover, ISBN 978-1-934145-72-2, \$25.00

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FROM THE VEDAS

In Tribute to Knowledge & Lack of Desire

The bliss of one well-versed in the *Vedas* surpasses that of the higher beings

The following is an excerpt from S. Radhakrishnan's translation of the Taittiriya Upanishad 2.8.1. Here the rishis describe how knowledge of the Vedas and austerity brings bliss beyond that of beings in the higher worlds. In the course of the verse, we are introduced to multiple levels of beings in worlds beyond ours. Modern brain science confirms today that the world we perceive at any given moment is only a fraction of what our awareness is capable of experiencing as consciousness. Satguru Subramuniyaswami, founder of HINDUISM TODAY, viewed religion as a process of communication between beings in this earth plane and higher subtle realms.

This is the inquiry concerning bliss.

Let there be a youth, a good youth, well read, prompt in action, steady in mind and strong in body. Let this whole earth be full of wealth for him. That is one human bliss.

What is a hundred times the human bliss, that is one bliss of human fairies (*manu gandharvavam*)—also of a man who is well versed in the *Vedas* and who is not smitten with desire.

What is a hundred times the bliss of the human fairies, that is one bliss of divine fairies (*deva gandharvavam*)—also of a man who is well versed in the *Vedas* and who is not smitten with desire.

What is a hundred times the bliss of the divine fairies, that is one bliss of the Fathers (*pitrinam*) in their long enduring world—also of a man who is well versed in the *Vedas* and who is not smitten with desire.

What is a hundred times the bliss of the Fathers in their long enduring world, that is one bliss of the Gods (*ajanajanam devam*) who are born so by birth—also of a man who is well versed in the *Vedas* and who is not smitten with desire.

What is a hundred times the bliss of the Gods who are born so by birth, that is one bliss of the Gods (*karma devam*) by work, who go to the Gods by work—also of a man who is well versed in the *Vedas* and who is not smitten with desire.

What is a hundred times the bliss of the Gods, that is one bliss of Indra—also of a man who is well versed in the *Vedas* and who is not smitten with desire.

What is a hundred times the bliss of Indra, that is one bliss of Brhaspati—also of a man who is well versed in the *Vedas* and who is not smitten with desire.

What is a hundred times the bliss of Brhaspati, that is one bliss of Prajapati—also of a man who is well versed in the *Vedas* and who is not smitten with desire.

What is a hundred times the bliss of Prajapati, that is one bliss of Brahma—also of a man who is well versed in the Veda and who is



Inner plane beings over a bhajan satsang: devotees on the earth plane sing sacred hymns while above them five astral beings dance (people who died and are yet to reincarnate), as well as other gandhavara, and above them two mahadevas in higher realm bless.

not smitten with desire.

He who is here in the person and he who is yonder in the Sun—he is one. He who knows this, on departing from this world reaches to the self which consists of food, reaches the self which consists of life, reaches the self which consists of mind, reaches the self which consists of understanding, reaches the self which consists of bliss.

Translator's commentary: Those who attain to the status of Gods by their own work are called Karma-Devas. The bliss of delight which knowledge of Brahman occasions baffles all description. It is something completely incomprehensible. Brahman thus is blissful being and so is of the highest value. In reaching the richness of being of Brahman we reach our highest fulfilment. In describing the various degrees of happiness, the author of the Upanishad gives us an idea of the classes of human and divine beings: men, fathers, fairies, Gods by merit and Gods by birth, Prajapati and Brahma or Hirangarbh.

SARVAPELLI RADAKRISHNAN, (1888–1975) was an Indian philosopher and statesman, India's first Vice President (1952–1962) and second President (1962–1967). He held doctorates in science, philosophy and theology.

Kumbh Mela 2019

240 million join the world's largest gathering ever!



Tens of thousands of sadhus charge the river on February fourth, Mauni Amavasya, the day of the main "Royal Bath." Behind this group, millions of devotees are lined up to take their turn.

There are many ways to conceptualize 240 million people: 3.2% of the world's population or 72% of the US; 200 times the population of Paris; enough to be the fifth largest country in the world. On January 15th alone, fourteen million—some say 20 million—joined the Royal Bath at the confluence of the Ganga, Yamuna and celestial Saraswati Rivers adjacent to the host city of Prayagraj (population a mere 1.5 million). It was the

largest gathering of humans for one event in history. In attendance were India's foremost religious leaders, hundreds of thousands of sadhus and millions of Hindus, from India's great cities to her smallest villages. They were there to take a holy dip in the sacred rivers, have darshan of the saints and enjoy each other's company in grand celebration. Come with us as we describe the event and our encounters there.

BY RAJIV MALIK, FROM PRAYAGRAJ

THE 2019 KUMBH MELA WAS AN extraordinary event, far surpassing any in history. Credit for the scale and the superb organization must go to the host state government of Uttar Pradesh—itself led by a sadhu, Yogi Adityanath—and to India's central government for its strong support. One can get a sense of professionalism applied by visiting the superb Kumbh website (in Hindi and English) at kumbh.gov.in/en. This website and the smart use of social media were major factors in promoting the event, not only in India but worldwide. The festival commenced on Makar Sankranti, January 15, 2019, and concluded on the holy day of Mahasivaratri, March 4.

According to UP's finance minister, Rajesh Agarwal, the government allocated US\$588 million for the festival, compared with \$182 million for the 2013 event. The contrast is even greater when one considers the 2013 celebration was a "maha mela," one occurring every 12 years, while this year's Kumbh was the in-between, six-year event, called *ardha* (half) mela, which is usually on a smaller scale. One can only imagine what the 2025 maha Kumbh here will be like!

The Confederation of Indian Industry, a nation-wide NGO founded in 1895, estimated the festival created 600,000 jobs and generated business worth \$16.8 billion. *Fortune India* magazine called that an "astounding return" on the government's investment of a half billion dollars. The Kumbh has been a special boon for Uttar Pradesh, one of India's poorest states, with 30 percent of the people below the poverty line.

Grasping the Kumbh's Extent

The event's infrastructure development extended well beyond the official area. Highways leading into Prayagraj were improved and parking areas were created for 500,000 vehicles. Five hundred shuttle buses and thousands of auto rickshaws, running on compressed natural gas, were mobilized to ferry pilgrims to the grounds. Both the airport and railway station were upgraded. The huge



influx was controlled by police and paramilitary forces from UP and adjacent states. The festival area was immense—13 miles from north to south and half that on average east to west—17 square miles of land in all, double that of 2013. Within this area, 186 miles of roads were built, mostly of large steel plates laid on the sand, along with 22 pontoon bridges to reach the far side of the

Ganga. Vehicles were allowed inside the area on normal days but were heavily restricted during the main bathing days.

The numbers describing the facility are phenomenal: 122,000 toilets, 15,000 sanitation workers, 20,000 trash bins, 40,700 LED street lights, 2,000 electronic display signs, 2,000 volunteers just to clean the river banks, 40 fire-fighting posts, 40 police stations, 40 watch towers, 1,000 surveillance cameras and a loudspeaker announcement system that reached every corner of the area. All of this was overseen from a high-tech command and control center to manage safety and security (see sidebar on page 22). Last but not least were a dozen hugely popular selfie points where pilgrims could take photos with the Kumbh Mela logo and a grand scene behind them.

Implementing someone's brilliant idea, tea counters were set up next to the waste bins. Deposit waste in the bin and you get a free cup of tea! Such bins were everywhere and helped accomplish an unprecedented level of cleanliness. Savita Gupta, of Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, here with her son Shubham, 22, reported, "Such cleanliness was never seen in a Kumbh in the past. We heard so much about the good arrangements through the media, and it was absolutely true. The event is even

.....

An overview: (clockwise from right) Kumbh by the numbers; aerial view of Sangam, where the Ganges (top) meets the Yamuna; youngster gets a ride across one of the many pontoon bridges crossing the Ganga; presentation hall for musical performances; sadhu praying at Sangam

better organized than what we've seen on TV. With so many police, we feel quite safe and secure. They are so cooperative and polite."

Some of the 4,200 top-level accommodations here cost as much per night as a five-star Delhi hotel. We encountered pilgrims who apparently thought their expensive thin tent would have hotel-like accoutrements, such as hot water (no), secure locks (no) and a leak-proof roof (not that either). Experienced pilgrims brought their own coffee pots to have at least some hot water.

According to the organizers, there was a capacity of 20,000 beds within the grounds, but practically speaking, people slept wherever they could. This presented a difficult challenge during the cold and rainy first few weeks of the 48-day event.

The huge Ganga Pandal for cultural, spiritual and official events had a capacity of 10,000. Smaller halls spread through the grounds could hold a few thousand apiece. More than 600 cultural programs featured over 2,000 artists from all over India. These included musical performances, classical and traditional dance and more. At night the halls served as safe places to sleep.

The entire city of Prayagraj was part of the festivities. Buildings, pillars and any surface facing a street became murals to highlight the religious, historical and cultural aspects of the world-renowned fair. Highly decorated gates on specific themes graced the 25 main entrances to the grounds. Tours were set up to bring people to the important temples and places of the city.

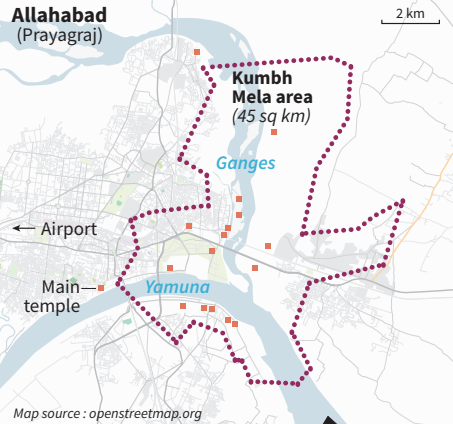
A key initiative was the Kumbh Sevamitra, a program fielding 5,000 volunteers per day, increasing to 8,000 on peak days. These

Kumbh Mela 2019

Millions of Hindus gather for ritual baths in the sacred waters of the Ganges River, during the world's biggest religious festival in India

Main bathing dates

Jan 15	Jan 21	Feb 4	Feb 10	Feb 19	Mar 4
Celebrated 4 times over a course of 12 years					
Astrologers determine the festival's exact date and duration					
Origins in Hindu scripture					
Ritual bathing in Ganges River, believed to cleanse sins and bestow blessings					



Devotees 240+ million	Police 30,000+	Drinking water 5,000 stand posts	Roads 300 km roads in the Kumbh Mela area
Tents 4,200	Cameras 1,000+	Water tankers 150	Dustbins 20,000
Beds 20,000	Watchtowers 40	Water dispensing machines 200	Sanitation workers 15,000
Toilets 122,000	Firefighting centres 40	Handpumps 100	LED lights 40,700



Photo: Indian devotees gather for the Kumbh Mela in Allahabad, Jan 14, 2019
By: Chandan Khanna

volunteers proved to be the face and backbone of the event. They offered their services in the areas of crowd and traffic control, especially near the bathing ghats. They served as tour guides for pilgrims and helped reporters at the huge government-run media center. In addition, they worked at the always-busy lost-and-found stations.

Hundreds of photographers from India and all over the world jammed the elevated

stands erected just for them. Security was tight, with commandos, local police on foot and horseback, paramilitary forces, and units of India's Rapid Action Force specially trained and deputed to deal with crowd control and potential riots or stampedes.

The Pilgrim's Experience

The two biggest attractions for pilgrims were taking a holy bath in Ganga and seeking

The Immensity of the Kumbh



the darshan of sadhus and saints who were there in the hundreds of thousands, staying at the camps of their respective *akharas*, monastic orders. Meeting and interviewing those saints was a main objective of HINDUISM TODAY's reporting for this event.

Ashwin Johar, 45, of Delhi summarized the experience for many: "Here at one place hundreds of thousands of people are chanting the name of God at one time. It seems that the whole universe is reverberating with the holy songs. This is something out of this world. The kind of arrangements made for this Kumbh are unimaginable and unprecedented."

At its peak on the auspicious days of the Royal Baths (Shahi Snan), tens of millions of pilgrims followed along as the various akharas of saints took their baths, starting early in the morning following a traditional order of seniority. All proceeded toward the river in a mood of meditation and as they approached the water danced with joy, shouting "Har Har Gange" and "Har Har Mahadeva" before rushing into the icy water. This is the one time ordinary devotees get a glimpse of the renunciate naga sadhus, here in huge numbers and unclothed except for garlands around their necks. For many pilgrims, darshan of these holy men and women is as great a blessing as the river bath.

Most of the pilgrims are from the rural areas, many coming straight from the bus stands with luggage on their heads. Dressed in colorful dhoti kurtas and saris, they stand



PRAMIL DWIVEDI

in contrast to the urbanites in their jeans, trousers and t-shirts. Whether urban or rural, all move silently toward the river.

After immersion in the icy water, most can be seen performing puja on the river banks, some with the help of priests. In a few places, even small homas, fire ceremonies, are performed. Many arrive and leave on the same day; but before departing the grounds, pilgrims give donations to the beggars and poor people lined up to receive them.

A special class of pilgrims are the kalpavis,

who come here to live for an entire month. One of these, Govind Ram Agarwal, is here with his wife, Santosh. "I will be wearing just one dhoti, and both of us will have food only once a day. Whatever the climatic condition, we have to have our holy bath every day. We spend our time attending Bhagwat Kathas and visiting the different camps of saints."

Another type of devotee we encountered here can't really be called pilgrims, for they live in Prayagraj itself. Arun Kumar Pandey, 65, belongs to a group of locals who come every single day, year around, to bathe at the Sangam. He pointed out that the Kumbh area was so large that the kalpavis and the elderly had trouble negotiating the long distances to reach the

confluence area.

The Transient Camps

Each of the major akharas has its own flag for

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Many facets: (above) sadhus parade through Prayagraj city streets; (below left) policeman clears the way for emergency services; (below right) women in the foreground dry their saris after bathing in the Ganga

their main Deity flying high above a temporary temple, where regularly scheduled worship is open to all devotees. The overall mood is one of a festival, with statues and pictures of Gods and Goddesses placed everywhere.

There are thousands of such camps, big and small, where pilgrims can meet and talk with the saints and participate in havan (fire worship), katha (storytelling presentations), lectures and bhajan, which take place all day and into the night. One small camp, Maibada, "home of the mothers," is for women saints of the Juna Akhara. There are also individual tents with ash-smeared sadhus sitting around their fire pits, performing

puja or tapas. If the sadhus appear occupied, pilgrims will just silently take their darshan (blessings) from a distance. One can also sit patiently and wait for an audience.

It is customary in all camps at all times of the day for the saints to offer tea and snacks to the pilgrims. The major camps provide bhandaras, or community meals, three times a day, which are a mainstay for kitchenless devotees. At many places there are arrangements for serving the sadhus separately.

The most magnificent and talked-about camp here was that of Swami Avdheshanand, head of Juna Akhara, which housed thousands of saints and devotees. Despite its

nonpermanence, the main tent of the meticulously landscaped camp looked like a huge palace, tastefully decorated and furnished. Another hall held several thousand devotees at a time for kathas, cultural programs and talks. Though far from the main Sangam area, it was a big attraction for hundreds of thousands of pilgrims. It is believed this one camp cost around two million dollars.

Pilgrims also flocked to the camp of Swami Karshney Gurusharanananda Ji Maharaj, another eminent saint of India. Here, too, was a prodigious hall where cultural programs went on continually.

Seeing the Real Mela

BY DHANANJAY JOSHI

THE KUMBH I HAD HEARD ABOUT WAS very different from the Kumbh I actually saw. The Kumbh I had heard of was supposed to be stiflingly crowded, stinking filthy, starkly down-market and swarming with fake, unwashed sadhus. It was so unspeakable that only Indian government TV channels reported it. "Civil society" was dismissive and focused only on ridiculing the name change from Allahabad to Prayagraj. Instead, what I saw at Prayagraj was the event UNESCO calls "The Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity."

It took us 78 man-hours to soak in the divinity spread over 17 square miles—just a bit more than all of New Delhi. The Kumbh is sensory overload. Rising above the cacophony of sounds and sights, I saw a throbbing, vibrant mass of consciousness living the timeless ritual just as their ancestors had for eons before them. This Kumbh was about making the humblest pilgrim connect with their self, making the humblest pilgrim proud of their shared heritage. It was about giving the forgiving pilgrim a clean and safe environment. My immersion at the Triveni Sangam was an experience that connected me to every

individual in the world. The oneness with the thousands around me was calming.

I saw the bogey of hygiene busted. Two thousand health workers took responsibility for their tasks with missionary zeal. Decentralized teams toiled round the clock in geographically dispersed teams to keep the 122,000 toilets squeaky clean. Tankers daily ferried sewage to the nearest treatment plant. Rodents and cockroaches were absent entirely. Everyone did their bit to be eco-friendly.

The flower sellers at the ghats had radically updated their flower baskets from plastic to handmade paper boats. These were laden with organically grown, locally sourced rose petals and soluble mud lamps with beeswax and a cotton wick. At the Triveni sangam,

Policing the Kumbh

THERE ARE TWO MAJOR THREATS TO AN EVENT OF THIS KIND: A terrorist attack and a stampede. In the worst-case scenario, the former causes the latter. Involved in security were police from 25 states, plus all three wings of India's armed forces—army, navy and airforce. The navy provided water rescue training and the air force supplied ambulances and fire-fighting equipment and personnel.

According to Purnendu Singh, additional superintendent of police, the protection against terrorism involved heavy deployment of both police and armed forces on all main roads leading to the Kumbh, beginning 150 kilometers out and continuing inward through five levels of security, with checkpoints and random searches. Anti-sabotage and bomb detection teams conducted daily sweeps, while 460 closed-circuit cameras monitored the Kumbh area. Stampedes were successfully averted by paying careful attention to the flow of pilgrims, with designated entry and exit routes—avoiding the two-way traffic which in the past has led to disasters.

Theft was also a major problem, though obviously a different level of concern than terrorist attacks or stampedes. According to Singh, there are entire communities known for their criminal activity at the Kumbh. One such is the Burwar tribe from Gonda. "They do not come as individuals," he said. "The complete village comes—men, women and children—with only theft in mind, no religious purpose. They are very organized and immediately have members depart the area with the stolen jewelry or cash, so it is very tough to recover anything. But overall, it is difficult to commit a crime in the area due to the heavy deployment of all kinds of forces here."



PRAMIL DWIVEDI

Mass Bathing



DR. GILAD FISKUS/FISKUS-PHOTOS.COM

this age-old biodegradable offering was bestowed on the Ganga. Clear water from the Ganga was carried home by the faithful in plastic containers.

From the anchored pontoons in the middle of the sangam, the aged, the young, the differently-abled and the enthusiastic descended onto special bathing platforms under the watchful eyes of life-guards on their bobbing life rafts. Every single pilgrim was wearing a life jacket—the local boatmen ensured it! Lips sent out silent prayers, tears streamed down faces, and some shivered in the cold waters as they energized themselves with loud prayer. Hundreds of folded hands reached out to the heavens, and one pair was mine.

In the Kumbh I had heard about, sordid tales told of swirling unwashed masses jostling against each other. They warned that women were not safe and to beware of inappropriate touches. The Kumbh that I saw was full of families—men, women, children and grandparents with headloads of their belongings, caring for each other, walking purposefully with devotion in their eyes. I roamed around at night, under the swathes of the 40,000 LED lights that dotted the riverbanks, and I felt safer here than in any city of the world. The voices of police personnel went hoarse as they patiently gave directions and repeated instructions

innumerable. These handpicked teetotalers, non-smokers and trained officers, were an example of a sensitized police force. The Kumbh I saw had 22 pontoon bridges, each unidirectional and crowd controlled to prevent a stampede.

The Kumbh I had heard about was a religious gathering of Hindus. Inside would be Hindu zealots, fake babas giving fanatic talks, persistent priests pestering for puja.



HINDUISM TODAY

In the Kumbh that I saw, small crowds gathered in the innumerable akharas to listen to soothing voices that told them how to lead a simple life. Saints passed on the age-old Indic wisdom of conquering greed, relinquishing ego and looking inward for the answers. These were distributed knowledge centers providing best practices for leading a

fulfilled life.

I saw Sikh monastic orders performing selfless service, young turbaned men working enthusiastically at the langars, hauling heavy cauldrons to feed the pilgrims. Guru Nanak Dev ji gave his blessings to all from the entrance to every Sikh akhara.

In the Kumbh I saw, there were hundreds of foreigners, many of whom were interested in the living, unbroken history of mankind.

Others were there to see a show, a spectacle so intense that nothing in the world matched it. Many young Indians were there on a selfie spree. But there were also thousands upon thousands who were there simply because they believed in the wisdom of their ancestors. To them, continuity of a civilization was far more important than trivialities. I implore you to experience for yourself "The Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" when it repeats itself in 2022 at Haridwar. If you stand in aloof judgment, you'll miss the exquisite layers of an ancient civilization's wisdom that wants to shyly reveal itself. If you immerse yourself, maybe you would understand a fraction of it.

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Interviewing Swamis and Sadhus at the Kumbh

BY RAJIV MALIK

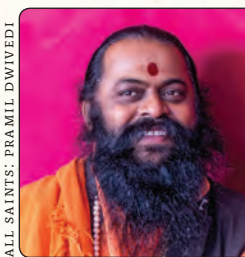
Having covered India's Kumbh festivities several times in the past (e.g., the Jul/Aug/Sep 2013 issue: bit.ly/2013Mela), our main focus this time was to interview the saints, both famed and little known. This was very much a catch-as-catch-can adventure. Some appointments were arranged months in advance, while other meetings were chance encounters. We met with great success. The interviews provide a clear demonstration of the depth of wisdom available to any Kumbh pilgrim who makes a similar effort.

Questions were prepared in advance by the editors in Hawaii, drawn mostly from suggestions solicited on our blog, *Hindu Press International*. The saints brought up additional issues, most often a perceived lack of unity among Hindu organizations, the adverse influence of Western culture, the training of future saints and sadhus, conversion to other religions and the shrinking of India's Hindu population, the collapse of the joint family system and the related issue of couples having only one child.

Throughout the interviews, one term came up repeatedly: *sanskara* in Hindi (Sanskrit *samskara*). It is one of those words (like *dharma*) that defies easy translation to English, in part because it has two meanings. The first is "impression" or "activator," and the second is "sanctification" or "preparation." The saints' use was in the first sense, formally stated in one lexicon as "The imprints left on the subconscious mind by experience (from this or previous lives), which then color all of life, one's nature, responses, states of mind, etc." The second meaning refers to the formal Hindu rites of passage, including name giving, first feeding, coming of age, marriage and funeral.

Sanskars in the first sense, the common person would likely tell you, are the good character qualities of a human being found in the *Vedas*, *Puranas*, *Bhagavad Gita* and other scriptures and passed on from generation to generation by parents, teachers, saints and gurus. The mother is the first teacher, and it is her duty, with the help of her

husband, to pass on good *sanskars* to her child. Then it is the duty of the teachers and at some point in the child's life, the family's guru. Repeatedly, the saints said the youth of today do not have good *sanskars*, and variously blamed this on the parents, society, simple greed, Western culture, the Internet and, rarely, on the youth themselves. Here are select excerpts.



ALL SAINTS: PRAMIL DWIVEDI

The first saint we encountered was **Shri Mahant Ganeshananda Saraswati** from Nashik, a revered sannyasin of the Taponidhi Shri Anand Akhara Panchayati. As with many of the saints, he congratulated the state and central government for the excellent management of the event. He appealed to Hindus to work together in a cohesive manner, and especially to better connect with the deprived sections of society, as our present inability to uplift them is making us weaker.

Youth, he said, are distracted by so many things today and influenced by Western culture, which makes them reluctant to proudly proclaim themselves Hindus. He implored them to take more interest in their religion, culture and what is happening in the country.

In response to our question, he pointed out, "To say that Hindus should build hospitals and schools and not temples is a view that is against the Hindus. Our temples are the base for our religious activities, essential for our religious lives. Hospitals, schools and colleges should be built; but at the same time, religious life has to continue side by side."

Ganeshananda is a prominent member of the Akhara Parishad, which oversees all the monastic orders. He said the Parishad keeps an eye on unqualified people presenting themselves as saints, sometimes sending a delegation to talk to them. If nothing else works, they will oust the offender from the saints' fraternity and recommend he or she be boycotted. In this way, they police themselves.

"I normally do not talk to journalists. I do not know why I have started talking to you," began **Shri Mahant Mai Uma Giri**, one of the sadhvis of Juna Akahara at Maiwad camp. She focused her remarks on the issue of marriage. "The institution of marriage is a lifetime

Sadhus and Devotees



PRAMIL DWIVEDI



PRAMIL DWIVEDI



DR GILAD FISKUS / FISKUS-PHOTOS.COM

bond between two people. Live-in relationships are not a good development, and in this Kali Yuga, men and women are also having extramarital affairs, which is very damaging to the marriage.

"The most important role of a woman is as a mother and a wife. It is the role of the parents together to raise their children with discipline and give them proper sanskars. Today our youth want to live a life without boundaries, a life of total freedom. This mentality is causing a lot of problems for society. Absolute freedom is not available to anyone when we live in a society. We have to light the lamp inside ourselves and not focus completely on our physical demands."



Shri Mahant Narendra Giri Ji Maharaj, president of the Akhara Parishad and secretary of the Niranjani Akhara, sat for a lengthy interview, which turned into a small satsang for all the devotees waiting for his blessings.

The biggest challenge facing Hindus today, he told the crowd, is a declining population in India, with the prospect to even become a minority in the distant future. India's family planning programs have only been adopted by Hindus, not by the Muslim community. He is deeply concerned with the support for terrorism found within India.

He expressed appreciation for the media's coverage of the Kumbh, especially for several months in advance, which greatly increased attendance. He sternly warned against drugs: "Drugs cannot solve the problems of the youth. They can only give a false temporary high. The true high comes when one tries to realize God. The countries that are legalizing drugs will be ruining their own forthcoming generations." He criticized the controversial assertion that Hindus should be building schools and hospitals rather than temples:

"Comparing a temple with a school, college or hospital is wrong because the school, college or hospital does not serve the purpose which is served by our temples. An upset person will go to the temple only." Like most of the other saints, he criticized the court interference with the Sabarimala temple, pointing out that other religions in India have outright rebuffed court orders aimed at their holy places.

Swami was most animated when talking about caste discrimination. "If from the very beginning we accepted our people of the lower castes, then maybe we would not face the situations we have today. We committed mistakes, too. We practiced untouchability, leading to conversions. I appeal to the youth and all Hindus that if someone asks their caste they must simply say they are proud Hindus and not disclose their jati."

Our next meeting was with **Mahamandaleshwar Karshney Gurusharananda Ji Maharaj**, one of India's most renowned saints. Like others, he is generally reluctant to talk to the press but decided to talk to us. He explained the fundamental concept of the Kumbh, one that we were in fact fulfilling with our interviews: "The idea is that devotees would come with their unresolved problems and questions. For instance, if there is a problem in the family, the family elders should solve it. If they can't solve it, then the village elders will; if they cannot, leaders of the district or state; and if they can't, the problem would come here to be considered by the rishis and munis. Out of this wisdom, the problem would be resolved."

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Scenes: (below, left to right) a boy dressed up as Lord Krishna blesses devotees; cold, wet weather prevailed during the first few weeks; family women hold tight to each other to prevent getting separated; (opposite, above) the Shankaracharya of Puri

The Pontiff of Puri Speaks Out

IT REQUIRED CONSIDERABLE ADVANCE WORK TO GET AN AUDIENCE with **Shankaracharya Swami Nischalananda** of Govardhana

Matha in Puri, Orissa. His is one of the four monastic centers founded by Adi Shankaracharya in the 8th century. He was one of the few swamis we met who criticized the state's ruling political party for trying to use the Kumbh "to increase its own clout." He was also unsparing of sadhus who have associated with political parties, stating they "lack an independent thought process of their own." He warned about the efforts since Independence to declare one group after another as a religious minority, first the Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs, and now the Lingayats and tribals—saying the end result could be that Hindus will themselves become a minority.

He was also critical of the media, observing that most journalists working for newspaper and TV channels have studied in universities such as JNU where they were influenced by communist ideology. "Such people are dominating the media and mostly spreading anarchy in the name of freedom. They are unable to present the picture of Bharat in an organized manner and only highlight the country's directionlessness."

He is troubled by India's current political parties: "The conspiracy that was hatched by the British to distance our society from dharma and spirituality is being followed and implemented by today's political parties in the name of development." Dharma and spirituality, he stated, are being presented in a distorted manner, and few have an understanding of either. In the past, he said, the temples and

monasteries were centers of education, defense, Sanskrit, dharma and moksha (liberation from rebirth). Today, he argued, these institu-

tions, including the traditional gurukul system of education, have all come under the influence of secularism. "In such a situation, there is no question of a healthy wave of dharma or spirituality. Rather they are being rubbed down, and in the name of development, only directionless economic revolution is being encouraged. This is dangerous not only for India, but for the whole world, which even today has very high expectations of India. But India is not fully utilizing its intellectual, defense, commerce or labor power. In fact, other countries in the world are benefitting from our intellectual power, but we have failed to do so."

Yet, he does see a brighter future. "In the present era of computers and mobile devices, the principles and philosophy of Sanatana Dharma are not just excellent, but the best in the whole world. The nature of the soul and its intellect is biased towards the truth. Even in today's world our Sanatana principles can be intellectually victorious, which will transform the mind that has been polluted due to the strategies of the British. The principles of Hinduism will be recognized and understood on the grounds of their practicality. The world today has no alternative to the philosophy and vision offered by Hinduism. In the name of development, America and Britain have reached a situation where they see only destruction. That is the reason they have to turn to us."



PRAMIL DWIVEDI

Meeting the Gods, Braving the Elements



DR. GULAD FISKUS/FISKUS-PHOTOS.COM



PRAMIL DWIVEDI

Getting Lost, and Getting Found Again

ON A DAILY BASIS, 200 TO 300 PEOPLE ARE LOST AT THE KUMBH; on royal bathing days, the number goes up to 40,000. But while getting permanently lost is a Bollywood plot device, the last time anyone was not reunited with their family within a few days was in 2013, according to Umesh Chandra Tewari. And even then, they were provided transport and, when needed, escorted to their home village. Mr. Tewari runs the Bharat Seva Dal lost-and-found camp, which was started by his father 73 years ago. His children help after school and will take over the camp in the future. So far, in late January when HINDUISM TODAY interviewed him, they had helped reunite 1,100 adults and 12 children with their families. They are prepared to put people up overnight and have separate tents for men and women. Twelve smaller lost-and-found centers are spread throughout the Kumbh area, and the main announcement system covers the entire grounds.

The biggest advancement has been the advent of mobile phones, which make reuniting people much easier. But mobiles have their limits. Tewari says they encounter elders who have a mobile phone but don't know how to use it. Batteries also go dead.

Elders and children may have a slip of paper in their pocket with a phone number to call if they are lost. "There are groups from rural areas that hold hands as they walk towards Sangam," Tewari explained. "Some groups hold a flag to identify themselves and for everyone to follow. Even a branch of a tree could be a symbol for villagers. We see this most on the main bathing days when the rural pilgrims come in large numbers. Years back a group would be tied together with a rope, but this doesn't happen anymore."

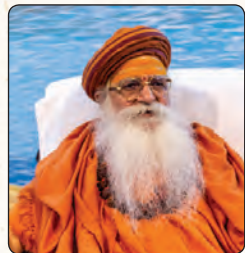
One group we encounter at the camp was searching for their

81-year-old mother. They had left her with a group of other elders while they took their bath, but she was not there upon their return. Another person, a priest from Ujjain, was trying to locate a friend he was supposed to meet.

Overall it is rewarding work, states Tiwari. "Pilgrims experience blissfulness and peace after a holy dip in Ganga. In our case, we get the same kind of blissfulness and peace when we are able to connect lost pilgrims with their family and friends."



SURESH NAGANATHAN



On family, he advised: "Our Hindu identity will be maintained if our parents or elders will teach religion to their children. In the past it was our family priest who used to handle this responsibility. The Britishers, especially Macaulay, understood they needed to end this practice in order to rule us. So our good people were hired by them and became their servants. They created universities and employed our scholars. So, our leadership slipped from the hands of the highly intelligent and competent into the hands of those less so. Then a narrative was created that those associated with Sanskrit were not true scholars."

When our intellectuals were thus taken, then the sannyasins had to come into direct touch with society, even though our householder intellectuals had been the best people to deal with society, as they were married, had wives and children and understood the problems of the people in a much better manner. They were our best leaders. Society used to take care of such intellectuals and scholars."

The question that brought the strongest response from the Mahamandaleswar was on women working outside the home. "Today women taking jobs is not for most a compulsion but a luxury born of desire. If they do not have an expensive car or handbag, they cannot live without it. They have forgotten their duties. To become an executive is not very important. To become a real mother and a real wife is very difficult. When one is going out to a job, who will look after the children? What kind of bonding will there be between mother and children? Children will not love and respect their mother, which psychologically disturbs the child. How will the children know their own identity? Children, too, are very smart. They understand if they were ignored and left when they were small. Why would they develop a bond with such a mother? So, if the trend is for the women to work, then we have to stand against this trend. Mahatma Gandhi swam against the tide, as did Shivaji Maharaj. If we cannot do so, then what is our own strength of soul or conviction?"

He related the issue to that of live-in relationships, which he finds troublesome. "Marriage is not for a physical relationship; it is for companionship. You feel that you are part of the other. When this

drama of their live-in relationship ends, then they will cry and there will be no one to listen. We have to show such people what is going to happen to them ten years from now. Even sex will not make them happy beyond a point, because sex is 95% mental and only 5% physical. If you do not have a close relationship with your companion, what kind of life will you be leading? If you start discussing expenses and try to divide the electric bill and the petrol bill, what kind of companionship will it be? Both partners in such a relationship are just serving their own selfish ends. I've seen such relationships break, with unimaginable pain and anguish. It is the joint family system which has been the core of our society and religion, everyone taking care of everyone else. If the institution of marriage is over, then the social life of the society will be over. A lady is the center of the home, and it is she only who can manage the home. Our scriptures have said, 'Where women are worshiped, devatas reside at the place.' This is our basic theory. We respect our women."



Haridwar-based **Swami Hari Prakash Ji Maharaj** of the Udasin Akhara spoke on the uniting power of the Kumbh. He said it works as a sutra for Hindus, meaning something which sews together (as seen also in the English *suture*). "We Hindus speak different languages, our dresses, eating habits and traditions are different, but still we are one. When we come here it does not matter if one be Sanatani, Shaiva or Vaishnava. There is no differentiation on the basis of caste or creed. Whatever binds in the sutra of unity is named dharma. If there is something that divides based on opinions, politics or even science, that is not dharma, for true dharma's characteristics are to unite."

He feels Hindus face two great challenges. The first is conversion, something which Hindus never did by force or inducement.

Sadhus: (below, left to right) Sadhus of the Juna Akhara assembled for evening arati worship; a sadhu serves rotis to devotees; newly naga sadhus being initiated on January 27, 2019

"Conversion to other religions," he said, "is very damaging and the government should be doing more to prevent it." The second great challenge is population control. Hindus are following family planning but Muslims in India are not, even though there are Muslim countries which have successfully implemented such programs—Indonesia, for example. He feels India will not achieve uniform development until family planning is uniformly implemented.

He is unhappy with the self-promotion of certain sadhus, especially through association with politicians. "There was a time when the saints were known for their sadhana and knowledge. If I am craving for honor and wealth, then what was the use of my becoming a sadhu? Sadhus are supposed to be natural, calm and very simple."

He spoke at length about the impact of the West on India and Hinduism, which he feels has disrupted the happy and contented life that was the basis of Hinduism's refined culture. For example, he said, "Here husband and wife have full faith in each other, but there

in the West, they have separate bank accounts and the marriage can fall apart anytime. Here marriages are permanent; there they are temporary. The outcome of live-in relationships is never good. Western influence weighs heavily on us and has damaged our culture badly."



Sadhvi Rakesh is part of Braj Academy, founded by her guru, Sripad Baba, a famous saint of Vrindavan. She feels live-in relationships are not right and will have an adverse impact on the institution of marriage. On the topic of women working, she pointed out that in the tradition of Braj, the gopis not only did household work, but also sold milk door to door. "If they could do it, why cannot our modern

women, too, carry out their household and religious responsibilities



PRABHAT KUMAR VERMA/ZUMA PRESS/NEWS.COM

Saints of the Khumb



DR. GILAD FISKUS/FISKUS-PHOTOS.COM

in a balanced manner. Many of our urban and rural women do help their husbands in their businesses and agricultural work. Out of love one does anything for the family. However, if there is accounting done for everything one does and life partners do small money calculations, then it becomes a different kind of game altogether."

With regard to the Kumbh itself, she relates, "King Harshvardhan used to bring loads and loads of jewelry, clothes and food which he distributed here. He would go back in just the clothes he was wearing. The Kumbh gives us three sutras: renunciation, love and service. The whole spirit here is of renunciation. No one comes with the desire to take anything back. In the morning, pilgrims go with rice bags and other items which they distribute to the alms seekers and needy. This desire is a very peculiar thing and feeling that belongs only to our Indian culture. This is not seen elsewhere."



Sthanapati Mahant Ghanshyam Giri is a humble and low-profile saint of Juna Akhara. "The main problem that Hindu society is facing," he observed, "is due to the divisive politics that are being played. But this kind of churning between good and bad has been happening from time immemorial. The Kumbh itself is linked to the churning of the ocean and the struggle between good and evil. It seems this

struggle will continue for all times to come. Hindus are basically united, but vested interests are dividing us."

On youth, he pointed out, it is the duty of parents, teachers and society to give good sanskars, but the youth of today are not ready to listen to anyone. "They want no one to interfere with what they are doing, whether it is right or wrong. Mobile and TV have spoiled them and polluted their minds; if these were teaching something good, why is it not reflected in their character and behavior?"



Swami Balkananda Giri, head of Anand Akhara, is from Trayambakeshwar, Nashik. He, too, is concerned about the youth: "One of the main challenges is that our new generation lacks good sanskars without which they will not be good Hindus, nor develop spiritual powers. I think the gurukul system should be revived, including for our young sannyasins. If the quality of our sannyasins is good, then more and more educated people will get connected to our dharma."

"While studying and before marriage, youth must live as brahmacharis. They must live a life of restraint; then they can develop into powerful personalities. I am shocked to know that live-in relationships exist; this is an absolutely worrisome development. What will happen if a child is born? More worrisome would be not having a child, which is against the laws of nature."

As with many other swamis, he emphasized respect for elders. "We must inculcate in our youth the sanskar to touch the feet of elders, which proves one is humble and a seeker. This has to be logically explained as a means to obtain wisdom, power and confidence. All our scriptures have said that God can be seen and experienced in our mother. This is one of the reasons we touch the feet of our elders. Once understood, this will be passed on by the youth themselves to their children."

Various venues: (below left) During the day, this hall serves for performances and kathas, and at night it provides free and decidedly basic accommodation for about 2,000 people; (right) saints from South India await Swami Avdhesananda, head of Juna Akhara, in his temporary satsang hall;



Swami Phool Dol Bihari of the Brahm Madhva Gaureshwar Sampradaya, an elderly saint we interviewed at a Kumbh in the late 1990s, is concerned with the family planning situation, with the Hindu community adhering to having just two children but the Muslim community openly declaring they would have five or more. He warned that now young Hindu couples are having just a single child and

"there will come a time when the other religion will start dominating us." Swami is optimistic about what India can offer to the world. "No other religion which talks of the welfare of all. Only Sanatana Dharma says, *Sarve bhavantu sukhina*, "May all beings be at peace." It is we who talk of harmony among all the creatures of the world. We pray for the welfare of the entire world, even of our enemy countries. What other religion has this kind of philosophy?"

Brahmarishi Shrimad Ramkrishnananda, head of Agni Akhara and based in Madhya Pradesh, observed that even under a pro-Hindu government, public schools do not offer any education related to religion. "Convent schools can teach their religion, but we cannot teach ours. That is the reason our youth are becoming atheists. It is not their fault, but due to lack of education."

He worries about the impact of Western culture on India. "We are gradually getting so influenced by it that we are forgetting our own identity and culture." He does not feel women working impacts their devotion toward God. "When a girl is educated, naturally she would like to use her talent for the welfare of society. Even if they work outside, they ensure that the household is not ignored or suffer in any way." He praised the entire Kumbh experience. "See the greatness of our dharma that when one has a holy bath in the Ganga, does anyone ask to which caste, creed or community one belongs to, or whether

one is illiterate or a scholar? Those who say Hinduism is losing its popularity must come and see the tens of millions who have gathered, and it increases with every Kumbh. Our Sanatana Dharma is like the sun. Because there are a few days of clouds, it should not be taken that the sun has become weak; as soon as the clouds disappear, the sun shines again in its full glory. The glory of Sanatana Dharma is like that. It has always been there and will remain forever."



Swami Hridayananda Giri of Juna Akhara shared: "The majority of pilgrims coming to us are seeking material things. They want to attain wealth or be blessed with a child. At the same time, there are seekers of knowledge, who want to fulfill their duties and make the best of the human life they have been blessed with. There is no need to come to us for material things. Those are readily available in the

world, though they may require hard work to obtain. Our people should come to the Kumbh as seekers of knowledge. We are happy to guide them on matters related to dharma and spirituality."



Sadhvi Vidya Giri, a Mahamandaleshwar of Mahanirvani Akhara, pointed out that women have never been confined to their homes and kitchens in India. "We had eminent scholars such as Gargi and Maitri, and warriors such as Rani Lakshmi Bai, Durga Wat and Ahilya Bai. Women played a leading role in the past; today their number has increased and they have established themselves as strong personalities in many more

areas of life, not only in India but all over the world."

Spartan Accommodations





Swami Divyananda of Chitrakoot Peeth, Vrindavan, spoke, as did many of the swamis, about the Ram temple in Ayodhya: "Not being able to build the Ram temple is one of the biggest weaknesses of Hindu society today. There is so much politics around the temple, and it is in the courts also. Ram is loved not only by Hindus; even Muslims respect Him, yet He is placed in a tented accommodation in

Ayodhya. We are also divided by caste because of vote bank politics. The saints should not be involved in politics but hold the interests of Hindu society uppermost. The day we are united, not only the Ram temple, but all our major issues will be resolved. "I am worried that the number of youth coming to our ashrams aspiring to be saints has gone down. The controversies related to many saints have put off the youth and made them more distant. Things are changing fast, and the saints should be changing fast as well to keep pace."



Sadhvi Divya Giri of Juna Akhara, head of Mankameshwar Math Mandir in Lucknow, addressed the state of women today. "On the question of the role and life of women today, my views are a little different and may or may not be liked. When women become career oriented, they become more ambitious. They want to excel in their field and at the same time they have to look after their household. If they

cannot manage the home front, they feel guilty; whereas men are free from household responsibilities and focused on their career only. As

women become career oriented, our coming generations have started to suffer. Care of the children is left to servants. The solution is not simple, but we have to ensure that women do not have to work under pressure and also can choose an area of work close to their heart.

When women are overburdened with the responsibility of career and household, they suffer from physical and mental stress-related diseases. In the race of life they are not able to take care of their health and well-being. When women take up a career, marriage happens at a later age, they are not able to conceive children in a normal manner and opt for test-tube babies. It is also not possible for busy couples to have more than one child. If this goes on, people will miss out on a joyful and fulfilling life. We need to seriously contemplate how much we can work, how long we can work, and in certain cases whether it is needed for the women to work at all."

Summarizing the Saint's Views

As a whole, those we spoke with are concerned and upset about the Hindu youth being influenced in a big way by Western thought and lifestyle. Many saints are struggling to master social media techniques and know-how to connect and convey their message with youth to follow the path of dharma and righteousness. Almost all said it is high time that parents join hands with the saints, teachers and spiritual gurus to pass on the message of our Hindu heritage and traditions in a scientific and down-to-earth manner.

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Interacting with the sadhus: (left to right) Jaya (underwater) and her sister Sanjana Singh take their holy bath in the cold water; drum troupe perform; nighttime parade through the festival grounds; the modest tent of a group of saints with the dhuni (continuous fire) at right foreground



PRAMIL DWIVEDI

CONCLUSION

Overall, the Kumbh Mela 2019 was a resounding success, and not just for the record-breaking numbers who attended. The advance planning, infrastructure created, overall cleanliness and management were unmatched by any past Kumbh. There simply were no incidents beyond the occasional medical emergency, opportunistic theft or separated family member. I and my wife Renu (attending her first Kumbh) were deeply impressed and touched by the army of saints we

encountered. Each worked with dedication and commitment, some almost round the clock. They made best use of the golden opportunity that the mammoth event provided them to give darshan and convey the message of our Vedas and Sanatana Dharma. We hope that through our interviews readers will get a sense of the wisdom available at the Kumbh by merely walking in the door of any sadhu camp, approaching with respect and posing sincere questions. 🙏

Varied Forms of Blessing



PRAMIL DWIVEDI



DR GILAD FISKUS/FISKUS-PHOTOS.COM



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Why Eggs Are Not Vegetables

An unfertilized chicken egg cannot grow into a chick, but at the biochemical level, it belongs unmistakably to the animal world

It's an issue that won't go away, and we're reminded of it every time we order a "vegetarian meal" for a plane flight and have to clarify we mean, "no eggs," because otherwise that is almost certainly what we will be served. To help settle the issue, we engaged Nikola Micic, a PhD student in biochemistry at the University Novi Sad, Serbia. His research waxes a bit technical in places, but will provide you with the solid, science-based reasons strict vegetarians don't eat eggs.



Letting science decide: chemotaxonomy is a method of biological classification made by analyzing and comparing not the external features of an organism but its chemical makeup, specifically its proteins.

ON THE FIRST LOOK, ANSWERING THIS question is easy. Chickens lay eggs, chickens are animals, so an egg must be an animal since it has an animal origin and grows into a new animal. But... what if the eggs are not fertilized? Commercially available eggs from your local grocery store in most cases originate from the large hen farms which hold chickens in cages without a chance for fertilization. Since there is no fertilization, a new animal organism will not develop from these eggs. Does this lack of animal development makes these eggs plants? In short, no.

In order to fully answer this question, it is necessary to analyze the chemical and biochemical characteristics of an egg. With this information in hand we can apply the basic principles of chemotaxonomy—a tool for classification of plants and animals based on similarities and differences in their chemical and biochemical composition. Chemotaxonomy is considered more precise than simply looking at the structure of an animal or plant—an approach we will also take in a bit.

Chemical Composition

There are four major classes of biomolecules in every organism: carbohydrates, proteins, lipids and nucleic acids. These biomolecules have a complex structure based on the specific arrangement of simple molecules, known as building blocks or monomers. Proteins are built of amino acids, while lipids and nucleic acid are made of fatty acids and nucleotides, respectively. The specific structure of these simple molecules and their share in total content, together with the unique structure of complex biomolecules, their genetic origin, function and occurrence in different organisms enables us to explain the origin and affiliation of a certain organ-

ism to a specific phylogenetic group, be it plant, animal or something in-between.

As previously mentioned, proteins are one of the major classes of biomolecules. To determine the connection between the animal nature of the egg and its proteins, we consider the genetic origin of these proteins, their occurrence in plants and animals, their structure and specific amino acid content.

Egg proteins can be classified into three groups based on their location in the egg. The first group of proteins are in the different layers of the eggshell. A typical example is the protein osteopontin (which is found not only in the eggshell, but also in hard animal tissues such as bones and teeth). In the case of eggshell, osteopontin is secreted by the chicken's uterus cells and regulates the precipitation of calcium carbonate that forms the eggshell.

Another example of chicken protein found in the eggshell is clusterin, secreted by the tubular gland cells of the chicken. There is also the protein named ovocleidin-17 (OC-17) which regulates the formation of the specific shape of calcium-carbonate crystals, plus proteins ovocleidin-116 (OC-116) and ovocalyxin-32 (OVX-32), all of which are highly specific to egg calcification process and therefore can only be found in eggshell and parts of the reproductive system in which calcification occurs.

The second group of egg proteins are those found in egg white. Main representatives

are ovotransferrin, ovoglobulin, cystatin and avidin, which are found exclusively in tissues of animal origin. The third group of egg proteins is located in the yolk. Proteins from this group, such as phosvitin and livetin, are unique to animals and cannot be found among plants. All of the above-mentioned proteins are exclusively of animal origin.

Besides the existence of specific chicken-related proteins in the eggs, the amino acid profile of these proteins can be used to determine if an egg is of an animal or plant nature. All 20 amino acids, essential and nonessential, are present in animal proteins, including those of eggs. For this reason, animal proteins are considered complete proteins. In contrast, the level of certain essential amino acids in plants is significantly lower, and plant proteins are not considered complete proteins. Thus the amino acid profile of an egg is that of an animal, not a plant.

Lipids

Lipids, also known as fats, are complex organic molecules found both in plants and animals. The difference in lipid profile between eggs and plants can also be used for answering the question of egg's nature. Regardless of their animal or plant origin, lipids play a vast number of highly important roles in the organism. On the molecular level, lipids build cellular membrane, modulate its functionality, act as signal molecules, serve as precursors for the synthesis of hormones (testosterone and estrogens) and even help to spread neural impulses in the nervous system.

Structurally speaking, lipids can be divided into different classes with specific functions. Fatty acids are the integral structural part of every one of these classes. In the case of egg lipids, dominant fatty acids can be divided into two groups. Palmitoleic acid is the dominant compound of the first group, known as fully saturated fatty acids. The second group are unsaturated fatty acids, of which oleic acid is most abundant. Although both of these fatty acids groups can also be found in plants, there are significant differences in the ratio between these groups in animals and plants. Plant lipids—usually concentrated in plant seeds in the form of oils—predominantly have unsaturated fatty acids in their structure. On the other hand, the fatty acid profile of animal lipids, to which egg lipids



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are more similar, has a significantly higher share of saturated fatty acids. In the case of egg lipids, the content of saturated fatty acids is 15 to 6 times higher than in plant oils. Also, the ratio of omega 6 to omega 3 fatty acids in eggs is in accordance with animal sources, since it is several times lower than the ratio found in plants.

When talking about lipids, cholesterol is a compound which must not be left out of the discussion. Mainly found in animal tissues, this steroid alcohol, which is an integral part of the cell membrane and precursor for the synthesis of sex hormones, is present in egg yolk in a substantially larger amount than in any plant material. The popular but wrong belief is that plants are cholesterol free. Although present only in trace amounts which rarely exceed one to two percent of total sterols, cholesterol serves as an integral part of the cell membrane of plants. As one of the key compounds found in animal cells, cholesterol's presence in eggs strongly confirms the animal nature of eggs.

Animal-Specific Vitamins

The presence of vitamins—necessary for proper development and life of every organism—can also be seen as a specific characteristic for distinguishing plants and animals on their molecular level. The specific profile of vitamins of a certain organism is a consequence of the organism's genetic basis. Lack

of specific genes and enzymes for their synthesis results in a deficit of certain vitamins, and ultimately helps determine the chemotaxonomic specificity of an organism. In the case of a plant, vitamin specificity is seen in the inability to synthesize vitamin B12 (cobalamin). This vitamin, found exclusively in animal tissue, is found in eggs, although in relatively low amounts.

In the case of vitamins K and D, different forms can be found in plants and animals. The dominant form of vitamin K in plants is phyloquinone, also known as vitamin K1. On the other hand, vitamin K in animal tissues is structurally different from its plant form and is known as vitamin K2. It is important to emphasize that vitamin K2 is not a single substance, but a group of structures in which their basic naphthoquinone ring has a variable number of isoprene residues. Vitamin K2 MK-4 sub-form, which is found only in animals is also detected in eggs.

Different forms of vitamin D are found in animals and in plants. The animal form of vitamin D, known as D3 or cholecalciferol is synthesized in the skin after photochemical UV conversion of provitamin D3. In the case of plants, vitamin D is of fungus origin and is called D2. Synthesis of vitamin D2 is also UV induced, but with ergosterol as a starting material. In some cases, vitamin D3 can be found in plants. However, the extreme difference in its role in plants and animals,

Plant or animal? (left) the eggplant is a real vegetable. (right) If an egg is unfertilized, does that make it a vegetable?

together with the smaller amount detected in plants can be used for differentiation of the egg's nature. In animals, just like in eggs, vitamin D3 is necessary for the normal development of an organism. On the contrary, vitamin D3 synthesized in plants, especially in *Solanaceae* family, has a defensive role, since it causes calcium intoxication in herbivore animals.

More About that Shell

One of the crucial structural features of an egg for our analysis is the shell itself. It is made of calcium carbonate and permeated with thousands of micro canals which enable the exchange of gasses. Such hard shell structures of inorganic origin are only found in the animal world. In the case of plants, a similar protective roll is played by the plant's hard matter formed from cellulose, hemicellulose and lignin, which are organic substances.

Conclusion

Though unfertilized eggs lack one key characteristic of every living creature—the ability to develop—their biochemical composition and structure is of strictly animal origin, unrelated to that of a vegetable.



EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

Hinduism In a Nutshell

A Simple Overview of a Complex Faith

BY THE EDITORS, DRAWN FROM THE
TEACHINGS OF SATUGURU SIVAYA SUBRAMUNIASWAMI

A recent Google search on “What is Hinduism” yielded some 223,000 answers. Many are from outsiders offering their best take; many are from antagonists taking their best shot. Too few are knowledgeable; fewer still are authentic. Rare is the answer that goes beyond parochial sectarian understandings; scarcely any encompasses the huge gamut implied in the question. For these reasons alone, the book from which this article is taken was inevitable. Written by devout Hindus and drawn from the deepest wells of spiritual experience and cultural insight, it is a definition coming from deep inside the inner sanctum and depicting in words and amazing images the living, breathing entity that is Hinduism. The founder of HINDUISM TODAY magazine, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927–2001), well understood the challenges that all religions face in today’s world, whether from outside or within. He wrote that every religion consists of the spiritual precepts,

practices and customs of a people or society, transmitted from generation to generation, that maintain the connection with higher realms of consciousness, thus connecting man to God and keeping alive the highest ideals of culture and tradition. Gurudeva, as he was affectionately known, observed that if this transmission misses even one generation, a religion can be lost for all time, left to decay in the dusty libraries of history, anthropology and archeology. He strove to protect the religion he loved so dearly. He would ask rhetorically, “Where are the once prominent religions of the Babylonians, Egyptians, Aztecs, Mayans, American Indians or Hawaiians?” Little remains of them. Not long ago it was feared by some and hoped by many that Hinduism—the religion of a billion people, one sixth of the human race, living mostly in India—would meet the same fate. That it survived a history of religious conquest and extermination that wiped out virtually every other ancient religion is exceptional.



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Ironically, this noble faith, having withstood the ravages of invasion, plunder and brutal domination by foreign invaders for over a thousand years, stumbled into the 20th century to meet the subtler forces of secularism and the temptations of materialism. Christian propaganda, fabricated by 16th-century Jesuit missionaries, empowered by the 19th-century British Raj and carried forth today by the Western and Indian media, had dealt heavy blows over the centuries to the subjugated, prideless Hindu identity. A typical Christian tactic was to demean the indigenous faith, impeaching it as rife with superstition, idolatry, antiquated values, archaic customs and umpteen false Gods. India's Communist/secular media stressed caste abuse and wretched social ills, branding as radical, communal and fundamentalist all efforts to stand strong for anything Hindu. Most recently, safeguarding the anti-Hindu mind-set, Western professors of Asian studies brandished the tarnished term *Hindutva* to suppress pleadings by Indian parents to improve the pitiful portrayal of their faith in the textbooks their children must study in American schools—a portrayal that makes them ashamed of their heritage. More than a few Hindus, succumbing to the avalanche of ridicule, gave up their faith, changed their names to Western ones and stopped calling themselves Hindu, giving more credence to the notion that this is a faith of the past, not the future. Even those who were Hindus in their hearts would demur, “No, I’m not really a Hindu. I’m nonsectarian, universal, a friend and follower of all religions. Please don’t classify me in any particular way.” In a further dilution, many swamis and other leaders promulgated the false claim that Hinduism is not a religion at all, but a universalistic amalgam

of Vedic, yogic wisdom and lifestyle that anyone of any religion can adopt and practice without conflict. Tens of thousands who love and follow Hindu Dharma avoid the H word at all costs. Rare it is to find a spiritual leader or an institution who stands courageously before the world as a Hindu, unabashed and unequivocal. Despite these erosive influences, an unexpected resurgence has burst forth across the globe in the last twenty years, driven in part by the Hindu diaspora and in part by India’s newfound pride and influence. Hinduism entered the 21st century with fervent force as recent generations discovered its treasures and its relevance to their times. Temples are coming up across the Earth by the thousands. Communities are celebrating Hindu festivals, parading their Deities in the streets of Paris, Berlin, Toronto and Sydney in grand style without worrying that people might think them odd or “pagan.” Eloquent spokesmen are now representing Hinduism’s billion followers at international peace conferences, soft-power meetings, interfaith gatherings and discussions about Hindu rights. Hindu students in high schools and universities are going back to their traditions, turning to the Gods in the temples, not because their parents say they should, but to satisfy their own inner need, to improve their daily life, to fulfill their soul’s call. Hinduism is going digital, working on its faults and bolstering its strengths. Leaders are stepping forth, and parents are striving for ways to convey to their children the best of their faith to help them do better in school and live a fruitful life. Swamis and lay missionaries are campaigning to counteract Christian conversion tactics. Hindus of all denominations are banding together to protect, preserve and

Touching Divinity: *In mystical Bali, where Hindus are intensely sensitive to the inner worlds, devas and demons are known to walk beside men and women. Nature sees, hears, feels and responds. On a remote beach in that sacred land, devotees perform Kechak, the spectacular monkey dance.*

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promote their diverse spiritual heritage.

Articulating Our Religion

A major reason why Hinduism seems difficult to understand is its diversity. Hinduism is not a monolithic tradition. There isn’t a one Hindu opinion on things. And there is no single spiritual authority to define matters for the faith. There are several different denominations, the four largest being Vaishnavism, Saivism, Shaktism and Smartism. Further, there are thousands of schools of thought, or *sampradayas*, expressed in tens of thousands of guru lineages, or *paramparas*. Each parampara is typically independent and self-contained in its authority. In a very real sense, this grand tradition can be defined and understood as ten thousand faiths gathered in harmony under a single umbrella called Hinduism, or Sanatana Dharma. The tendency to overlook this diversity is the common first step to a faulty perception of the religion. Most spiritual traditions are simpler, more unified and unambiguous. All too often, despite its antiquity, its profound systems of



S. RAJAM

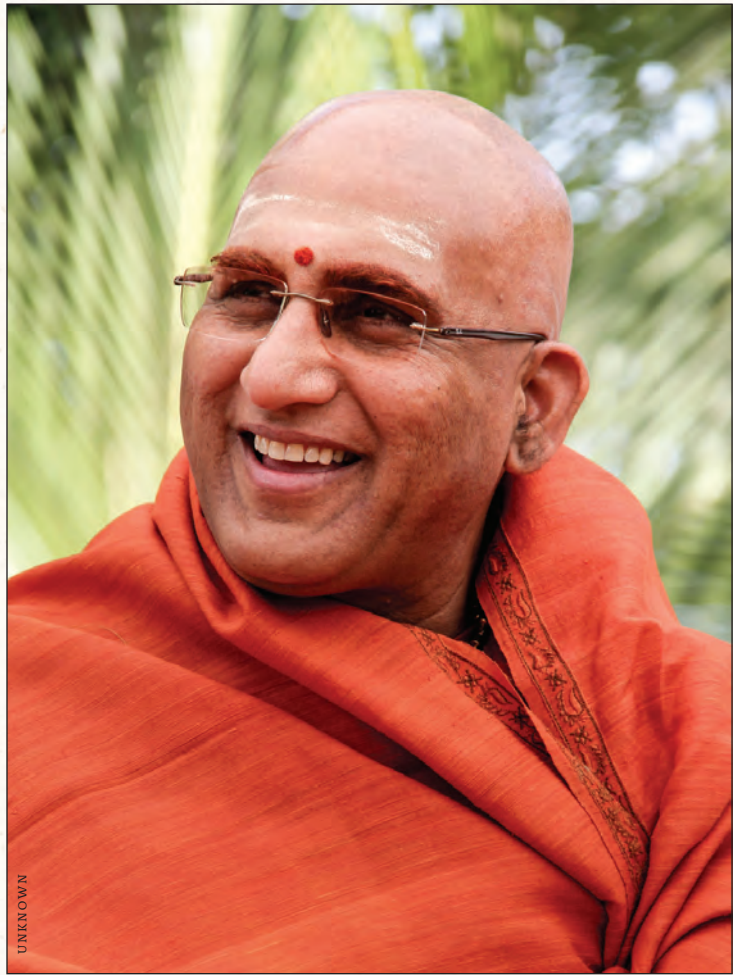
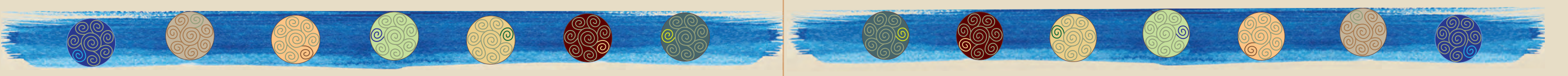
The Law of Karma Precept Number One

For Hindus and non-Hindus alike, one way to gain a simple (though admittedly simplistic) overview is to understand the four essential beliefs shared by the vast majority of Hindus: karma, reincarnation, all-pervasive Divinity and dharma. Gurudeva stated that living by these four concepts is what makes a person a Hindu.

Karma literally means “deed” or “act” and more broadly names the universal principle of cause and effect, action and reaction which governs all life. Karma is a natural law of the mind, just as gravity is a law of matter. Karma is not fate, for man acts with free will, creating his own destiny. The Vedas tell us, if we sow goodness, we will reap goodness; if we sow evil, we will reap evil. Karma refers to the totality of our actions and their concomitant reactions in this and previous lives, all of which determines our future. It is the interplay between our experiences and how we respond to them that makes karma devastating or helpfully invigorating. The conquest of karma lies in intelligent action and dispassionate reaction. Not all karmas rebound immediately. Some accumulate and return unexpectedly in this or other births. The *Vedas* explain, “According as one acts, so does he become. One becomes virtuous by virtuous action, bad by bad action” (*Yajur Veda, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.45*).

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Artwork above: A devotee prays to a small image of Ganesha, who hovers nearby in His subtle body, blessing her life and guiding her karmas.



Temple of the Goddess: (left to right) Meenakshi Sundareshwara Temple is at the center of the ancient temple city of Madurai, first mentioned in 6th-century texts. The complex, restored in the 14th century, houses 14 ornate gopurams (gateway towers), the tallest (shown in the foreground) rising 170 feet. Millions worship here each year and explore the numerous sculpted, pillared halls of extraordinary artistry. The temple is a major pilgrimage destination within the Saiva tradition, dedicated to Meenakshi Devi and Siva. Swami Avdeshanand, one of millions of holy men and women who guide and inspire the faithful.

Rejoicing in adding on to itself the contributions of every one of its millions of adherents down through the ages, it brings to the world an extraordinarily rich cultural heritage that embraces religion, society, economy, literature, art and architecture. Unsurprisingly, it is seen by its followers as not merely another religious tradition, but as a way of life and the quintessential foundation of human culture and spirituality. It is, to Hindus, the most accurate possible description of the way things are—eternal truths and natural principles inherent in the universe, that form the basis of culture and prosperity. Understanding this venerable religion enables one to fathom the source and essence of human religiosity—to marvel at the oldest example of the Eternal Path that is reflected in all faiths.

While 960 million Hindus live in India, forming 80 percent of the population, tens of millions reside across the globe. These include followers from nearly every nationality, race and ethnic group in the world. The US alone is home to three million Hindus, roughly two-thirds of Indian, Sri Lankan or other South Asian descent and one-third of other backgrounds.

Hindu Scriptures

All major religions are based upon a specific set of teachings encoded in sacred scripture. Christianity has the *Bible*, for example, and Islam has the *Koran*. Hinduism proudly embraces an incredibly rich collection of scripture; in fact the largest body of sacred texts known to man. The holiest and most revered are the *Vedas* and *Agamas*, two massive compendia of *shruti* (that which is “heard”), revealed by God to illumined sages centuries and millennia ago. It is said the *Vedas* are general and the *Agamas* specific, as the *Agamas* speak directly to the details of worship, the yogas, mantra, tantra, temple building and such. The most widely known part of the *Vedas* are the *Upanishads*, which form the more general philosophical foundations of the faith.

The array of secondary scripture, known as *smriti* (that which is “remembered”), is equally vast. The most prominent and widely celebrated *smriti* are the *Itihasas* (epic dramas and history—specifically the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*) and the *Puranas* (sacred history and mythology). The ever-popular *Bhagavad Gita* is a small portion of the *Mahabharata*. The Vedic arts and sciences, including ayurveda, astrology, music, dance, architecture, statecraft, domestic duty and law, are reflected in an assembly of texts known as *Vedangas* and *Upavedas*. Moreover, through the ages God-Realized souls, sharing their experience, have poured forth volume upon volume that reveal the wonders of yoga and offer passionate hymns of devotion and illumination. The creation of Hindu scripture continues to this day, as contemporary masters reiterate the timeless truths to guide souls on the path to Divinity.

A clear sign that a person is a Hindu is that he embraces Hindu scripture as his guide and solace through life. While the *Vedas* are

thought, the beauty of its art and architecture and the grace of its people, Hinduism remains a mystery. Twisted stereotypes abound that would relegate this richly complex, sophisticated and spiritually rewarding tradition to little more than crude caricatures of snake-charmers, cow worshipers and yogis lying on beds of nails.

While Hindus themselves do not hold these coarse stereotypes, they are often aware of just one small corner of the religion—their own village or family lineage—and oblivious to the vastness that lies outside it. Many Hindus from the North, for instance, are only aware of the Northern traditions, such as that of Adi Shankara, and remain unaware of the equally vigorous and more ancient Southern traditions, such as Saiva Siddhanta.

Unfamiliarity with the greater body of Sanatana Dharma may have been unavoidable in earlier centuries, but no longer. Anyone who is sufficiently determined can track down excellent resources on every facet of the faith. It has, after all, possibly the largest body of scriptural literature of any living religion on Earth. Mountains of scriptures exist in dozens of languages; but they are not all packaged conveniently in a single book or cohesive collection. To ferret out the full breadth of Sanatana Dharma, a seeker would need to read and analyze myriad scriptures and ancillary writings of the diverse philosophies of this pluralistic path. These days, few have the time or determination to face such a daunting task.

Fortunately, there is an easier, more natural way to approach the vastness of Hinduism. From the countless living gurus, teachers and pandits who offer clear guidance, most seekers choose a preceptor,

study his teachings, embrace the *sampradaya* he propounds and adopt the precepts and disciplines of his tradition. That is how the faith is followed in actual practice. Holy men and women, counted in the hundreds of thousands, are the ministers, the defenders of the faith and the inspirers of the faithful.

Hinduism’s Unique Value Today

There are good reasons for today’s readers, Hindu and non-Hindu alike, to study and understand the nature of Hinduism. The vast geographical and cultural expanses that separate continents, peoples and religions are becoming increasingly bridged as our world grows closer together. Revolutions in communications, the Internet, business, travel and global migration are making formerly distant peoples neighbors, sometimes reluctantly.

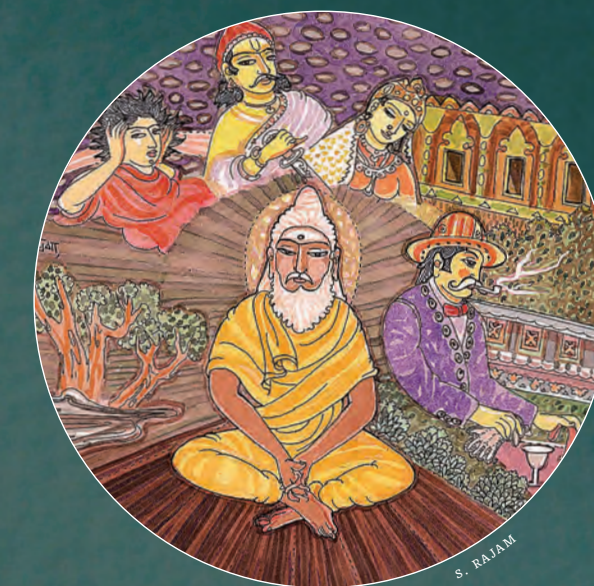
It is crucial, if we are to get along in an increasingly pluralistic world, that Earth’s peoples learn about and appreciate the religions, cultures, viewpoints and concerns of their planetary neighbors. The Sanatana Dharma, with its sublime tolerance and belief in the all-pervasiveness of Divinity, has much to contribute in this regard. No where on Earth have religions lived and thrived in such close and harmonious proximity as in India. For thousands of years India has been a home to followers of virtually every major world religion, the exemplar of tolerance toward all paths. It has offered a refuge to Jews, Zoroastrians, Sufis, Buddhists, Christians and nonbelievers. Today over one hundred million Indians are Muslim, magnanimously ac-

cepted by their majority Hindu neighbors. Such religious amity has occurred out of an abiding respect for all genuine religious pursuits. The oft-quoted axiom that conveys this attitude is *Ekam sat anekah panthah*, “Truth is one, paths are many.”

What can be learned from the Hindu land that has given birth to Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism and has been a generous protector of all other religions? India’s original faith offers a rare look at a peaceful, rational and practical path for making sense of our world, gaining personal spiritual insight and, potentially, grounding our society in a more spiritually rewarding worldview.

Hinduism boasts teachings and practices reaching back 8,000 years and more, its history dwarfing most other religions. In fact, there is no specific time in history when it began. It is said to have started with time itself. Raimon Panikkar, author of *The Vedic Experience*, emphasized the relative ages of the major religions, and the antiquity of Hinduism, by reducing them to proportionate human years. With each 100 years of history representing one year of human life, Sikhism, the youngest faith, is five years old. Islam, the only teenager, is fourteen. Christianity just turned twenty. Buddhism, Taoism, Jainism and Confucianism are twenty-five. Zoroastrianism is twenty-six. Shintoism is in its late twenties. Judaism is a mature thirty-seven. Hinduism, whose birthday remains unknown, is at least eighty years old—the white-bearded grandfather of living spirituality on this planet.

The followers of this extraordinary tradition often refer to it as Sanatana Dharma, the “Eternal Faith” or “Eternal Way of Conduct.”



accepted by all denominations, each lineage defines which other scriptures are regarded as central and authoritative for its followers. Further, each devotee freely chooses and follows one or more favorite scriptures within his tradition, be it a selection of *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Tirumanthiram* or the writings of his own guru. This free-flowing, diversified approach to scripture is unique to the Hindu faith. Scripture here, however, has a different place than in many other faiths. It guides one's practice, which leads to the goal: personal experience of the Divine. For genuine spiritual progress to take place, the wisdom of scripture must not be merely studied and preached, but lived and experienced as one's own.

The Nature of God

What is the nature of God in Hinduism is a question that defies a facile answer, for in the Hindu family of faiths each has its own perspective on the Supreme Being, and its own Deity or Deities. For this reason, Hinduism may, to an outsider, appear polytheistic—a term avidly employed as a criticism of choice, as if the idea of many Gods were primitive and false. For the Hindu the many Gods in no way impair the principle of the oneness of Reality. Further complexity and confusion have been introduced with the diaspora, that phenomenon of recent history that has, for the first time, spread Hindus throughout the globe. Outside their native soil, groups of mixed Hindu backgrounds have tended to bring the Deities of all traditions together under one roof in order to create a place of worship acceptable, and affordable, to all. This is something that does not happen in India. This all-Gods-under-one-roof phenomenon is confusing, even to many Hindus, and it tends to lend credence to the polytheistic indictment. Nevertheless, ask

any Hindu, and he will tell you that he worships the One Supreme Being, just as do Christians, Jews, Muslims and those of nearly all major faiths. The Hindu will also tell you that, indeed, there is only one Supreme God. If he is a Saivite, he calls that God Siva. If a Shakta Hindu, he will adore Devi, the Goddess, as the ultimate Divinity. If a Vaishnava Hindu, he will revere Vishnu. If he is a Smarta Hindu, he will worship as supreme one chosen from a specific pantheon of Gods. Thus, contrary to prevailing misconceptions, Hindus all worship a one Supreme Being, though by different names. This is because the diverse peoples of India, with different languages and cultures, have, through the longest existing religious history, understood the one God in their own distinct ways. Analogously, India is the only nation with fourteen official languages on its paper currency. All those names don't change the value of the note!

A crucial point that is often overlooked is that having one Supreme God does not repudiate the existence of lesser Divinities. Just as Christianity acknowledges great spiritual beings who dwell near God, such as the cherubim and seraphim, who have both human and animal features, so Hindus revere Mahadevas, or "great angels," who were created by the Supreme Lord and who serve and adore Him. Each denomination worships the Supreme God and its own pantheon of divine beings. The elephant-faced Lord Ganesha is among the most popular, and is perhaps the only Deity worshiped by Hindus of all denominations. Other Deities include Gods and Goddesses of strength, yoga, learning, art, music, wealth and culture. There are also minor Divinities, village Gods and Goddesses, who are invoked for protection, health and such mundane matters as a fruitful harvest. Though these lesser Divinities are called Gods, they are not confused with God, the Supreme.

Each denomination identifies its primary Deity as synonymous

Holiness all around: (Left) Devotees in North York, Ontario, pull the chariot of Goddess Durga around their temple on July 21, 2004; (top) a typical arati lamp held by a temple priest, or *pujari*. At the height of the *puja*, he will pass it before the Deity image in adoration, then present it to gathered devotees so they may pass their hands through the flame and draw the God's blessings to their eyes. (above) Devotees at Tirupati reverently touch the sculpted stone feet representing their Lord, their supreme source of grace.

with Brahman, the One Supreme Reality exalted in the lofty *Upanishads*. There, in the cream of Hinduism's revealed scripture, the matter is crystal clear. God is unimaginably transcendent yet ubiquitously immanent in all things. He is Creator and He is the creation. He is not a remote God who rules from above, as in Abrahamic faiths, but an intimate Lord who abides within all as the essence of everything. There is no corner of creation in which God is not present. He is farther away than the farthest star and closer than our breath. Hinduism calls God "the Life of life." If His presence were to be removed from any one thing, that thing would cease to exist.

If terms be required, we could characterize this family of faiths as both monotheistic and henotheistic. Hindus were never polytheistic in the sense of believing in many equal Gods. *Henotheism* (literally, "one God") better defines the Hindu view. It means the worship of one Supreme God without denying the existence of other Gods. Another set of philosophical terms describe God's relationship to the universe: *panentheism*, *pantheism* and *theism*. Hindus believe that God is an all-pervasive reality that animates the universe. We can see Him in the life shining out of the eyes of humans and all creatures. This view of God as existing in and giving life to all things is called

Reincarnation Precept Number Two

Reincarnation, *punarjanma*, is the natural process of birth, death and rebirth. At death we drop off the physical body and continue evolving in the inner worlds in our subtle bodies, until we again enter into birth. Through the ages, reincarnation has been the great consoling element within Hinduism, eliminating the fear of death. We are not the body in which we live but the immortal soul which inhabits many bodies in its evolutionary journey through *samsara*. After death, we continue to exist in unseen worlds, enjoying or suffering the harvest of our earthly deeds until it comes time for yet another physical birth. The actions set in motion in previous lives form the tendencies and conditions of the next. Reincarnation ceases when karma is resolved, God is realized and *moksha*, liberation, is attained; the soul then continues its evolution in more refined, non-physical worlds. The *Vedas* state, "After death, the soul goes to the next world, bearing in mind the subtle impressions of its deeds, and after reaping their harvest returns again to this world of action. Thus, he who has desires continues subject to rebirth" (*Yajur Veda, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 4.4.6).

Artwork above: In the center, we see a yogi. Behind him are depictions of how he looked and dressed in four earlier incarnations.



Yoga worldwide: (left) Thousands of hatha yoga practitioners perform asanas together in Times Square on International Yoga Day; (below) a young man in Coimbatore, South India, finds a quiet place near a river to meditate.

panentheism. It differs from the similar-sounding view, pantheism, in which God is the natural universe and nothing more, immanent but not transcendent. It also differs from traditional theism, in which God is above the world, apart and transcendent but not immanent. Panentheism is an all-encompassing concept. It says that God is both in the world and beyond it, both immanent and transcendent. That is the highest Hindu view.

Unlike purely monotheistic religions, Hinduism tends to be tolerant and welcoming of religious diversity, embracing a multiplicity of paths, not asking for conformity to just one. So, it's impossible to say all Hindus believe this or that. Some Hindus give credence only to the formless Absolute Reality as God; others accept God as personal Lord and Creator. Some venerate God as male, others as female, while still others hold that God is not limited by gender, which is an aspect of physical bodies. This freedom, we could say, makes for the richest understanding and perception of God in all of Earth's existing faiths. Hindus accept all genuine spiritual paths—from pure monism, which concludes that "God alone exists," to theistic dualism, which asks, "When shall I know His Grace?" Each soul is free to find his own way, whether by devotion, austerity, meditation, yoga or selfless service.

The Nature of Self

The driving imperative to know oneself—to answer the questions "Who am I?" "Where did I come from?" and "Where am I going?"—has been the core of all great religions and schools of philosophy throughout human history. Hindu teachings on the nature of self are as philosophically profound as they are pragmatic. We are more than our physical body, our mind, emotions and intellect, with which we so intimately identify every moment of our life, but which are temporary, imperfect and limiting. Our true self is our immortal soul, or *atma*, the eternal, perfect and unlimited inner



essence, unseen by the human eye—undetectable by any of the human senses, which are its tools for living in this physical world.

The *Vedas* teach that the Divine resides in all beings. Our true, spiritual essence is, like God, eternal, blissful, good, wise and beautiful by nature. The joining of Brahman, or God, and the *atman*, or soul, is known as yoga, a Sanskrit word that shares the same root as the English word *yoke*. We spend so much of our time pursuing beauty, knowledge and bliss in the world, not knowing that these objects of our desire are already within us as attributes of our own soul. If we turn our focus within through worship and meditation, identifying with our true spiritual self, we can discover an infinite inner treasure that easily rivals the greatest wealth of this world.

Personal spiritual development is enhanced through understanding the closely related processes of karma and reincarnation. The individual soul undergoes repeated cycles of birth, death and rebirth. This is known as the wheel of *samsara*. During each earthly manifestation, an individual's karma (literally "work" or "actions") determines his future psycho-physical state. Every ethically good act results, sooner or later, in happiness and spiritual development; whereas ethically wrong actions end in loss and sorrow. Thus, the principle of karma is an idea that celebrates freedom, since at every moment we are free to create our future states of existence through our present actions and states of consciousness. This philosophical worldview encourages followers of Hinduism to live happily, morally, consciously and humbly, following the Eternal Way.

Hinduism is a mystical religion, leading the devotee to personally experience the Truth within, finally reaching the pinnacle of consciousness where the realization is attained that man and God are one. As divine souls, we are evolving into union with God through the process of reincarnation. We are immortal souls living and growing in the great school of earthly experience in which we have lived many lives. Knowing this gives followers a great security, eliminating the fear and dread of death. The Hindu does not take death to be the end of existence, as does the atheist. Nor does he, like Western religionists, look upon life as a singular opportunity, to be followed by eternal heavenly existence for those souls who do well, and by unending hell for those who do not. Death for the Hindu is merely a moment of transition from this world to the next, simultaneously an end and a new beginning. The actions and reactions we set in motion in our last life form our tendencies in the next.

Despite the heartening glory of our true nature spoken of in scripture, most souls are unaware of their spiritual self. This ignorance or "veiling grace" is seen in Hinduism as God's purposeful limiting of awareness, which allows us to evolve. It is this narrowing of our awareness, coupled with a sense of individualized ego, that allows us to look upon the world and our part in it from a practical, human point of view. Without the world, known as *maya*, the soul could not evolve through experience. The ultimate goal of life, in the Hindu view, is called *moksha*, liberation from rebirth. This comes when earthly karma has been resolved, *dharma* has been well performed and God is fully realized. All souls are destined to achieve the highest states of enlightenment, perfect spiritual maturity and liberation, but not necessarily in this life. Hindus understand this and do not delude themselves that this life is the last. While seeking and attaining profound realizations, they know there is much to be done in fulfilling life's other three goals: *dharma*, righteousness; *artha*, wealth; and



All-Pervasive Divinity Precept Number Three

As a family of faiths, Hinduism upholds a wide array of perspectives on the Divine, yet all worship the one, all-pervasive Supreme Being hailed in the Upanishads. As Absolute Reality, God is unmanifest, unchanging and transcendent, the Self God, timeless, formless and spaceless. As Pure Consciousness, God is the manifest primal substance, pure love and light flowing through all form, existing everywhere in time and space as infinite intelligence and power. As Primal Soul, God is our personal Lord, source of all three worlds, our Father-Mother God who protects, nurtures and guides us. We beseech God's grace in our lives while also knowing that He/She is the essence of our soul, the life of our life. Each denomination also venerates its own pantheon of Divinities, *Mahadevas*, or "great angels," known as Gods, who were created by the Supreme Lord and who serve and adore Him. The *Vedas* proclaim, "He is the God of forms infinite in whose glory all things are—smaller than the smallest atom, and yet the Creator of all, ever living in the mystery of His creation. In the vision of this God of love there is everlasting peace. He is the Lord of all who, hidden in the heart of things, watches over the world of time" (*Krishna Yajur Veda, Shvetashvatara Upanishad* 4.14-15).

Artwork above: God's all-pervasive, immanent nature is portrayed here. Siva is seated against a backdrop of swirling *shakti*. His body is made up of the elements, galaxies, mountains, rivers, animals and manifestations of all kinds, thus depicting Him as inherent in His creation.



THOMAS KELLY

kama, pleasure.

In some Hindu traditions, the destiny of the soul after liberation is perceived as eternal and blissful enjoyment of God's presence in the heavenly realms, a form of salvation given by God through grace, similar to most Abrahamic faiths. In others, the soul's destiny is perfect union in God, a state of undifferentiated oneness likened to a river returning to its source, the sea, and becoming one with it—either immediately upon death, or following further evolution of the soul in the inner worlds. For still others, the ultimate state has no relationship with a Godhead, but is understood as undifferentiated oneness without form or being, a return or merger in the infinite All, somewhat akin to the Buddhist's nirvana.

Hinduism in Practice

Hinduism's three pillars are temple worship, scripture and the guru-disciple tradition, around which all spiritual disciplines revolve. These include prayer, meditation and ritual worship in the home and temple, study of scripture, recitation of mantras, pilgrimage to holy places, austerity, selfless service, generous giving, the various yogas, and following good conduct. Festivals and singing of holy hymns are dynamic activities.

Hindu temples, whether they be small village sanctuaries or towering citadels, are esteemed as God's consecrated abode. In the temple, Hindus draw close to the Divine and find a refuge from the world. God's grace, permeating everywhere, is most easily known within these holy precincts. It is in this purified milieu that the three worlds—physical, astral and causal—commune most perfectly, that devotees can establish harmony with inner-plane spiritual beings. Traditional temples are specially sanctified, possessing a ray of spiritual energy connecting them to the celestial worlds.

Temple rituals, performed by Hindu priests, take the form of puja, a ceremony in which the ringing of bells, passing of flames, presenting of offerings and intoning of chants invoke the devas and Gods, who then come to bless and help the devotees. Personal worship

during puja may be an expression of festive celebration of important events in life, of adoration and thanksgiving, penance and confession, prayerful supplication and requests, or contemplation and the deepest levels of superconsciousness. The stone or metal Deity images enshrined in the temple are not mere symbols of the Gods; they are the form through which their love, power and blessings flood forth into this world. Devout Hindus adore the image as the Deity's physical body, knowing that the God or Goddess is actually present and conscious in it during puja, aware of devotee's thoughts and feelings and even sensing the priest's gentle touch on the metal or stone.

Hindus consider it most important to live near a temple, as it is the center of spiritual life. It is here, in God's home, that the devotee nurtures his relationship with the Divine. Not wanting to stay away too long, he visits weekly and strives to attend each major festival, and to pilgrimage to a far-off temple annually for special blessings and a break from his daily concerns.

For the Hindu, the underlying emphasis of life is on making spiritual progress, while also pursuing one's family and professional duties and goals. He is conscious that life is a precious, fleeting opportunity to advance, to bring about inner transformation, and he strives to remain ever conscious of this fact. For him work is worship, and his faith relates to every department of life.

Hinduism's spiritual core is its holy men and women—millions of sadhus, yogis, swamis, *vairagis*, saints and *satgurus* who have dedicated their lives to full-time service, devotion and God Realization, and to proclaiming the eternal truths of Sanatana Dharma.

In day-to-day life, perhaps no facet of dharma is as crucial as the spiritual teacher, or *satguru*. These holy men and women are a living spiritual force for the faithful. They are the inspirers and interpreters, the personal guides who, knowing God themselves, can bring devotees into God consciousness. In all Hindu communities there are gurus who personally look after the spiritual practices and progress of devotees. Such preceptors are equally revered whether they are men or women. In few other religions are women allowed to occupy the highest seats of reverence and respect.



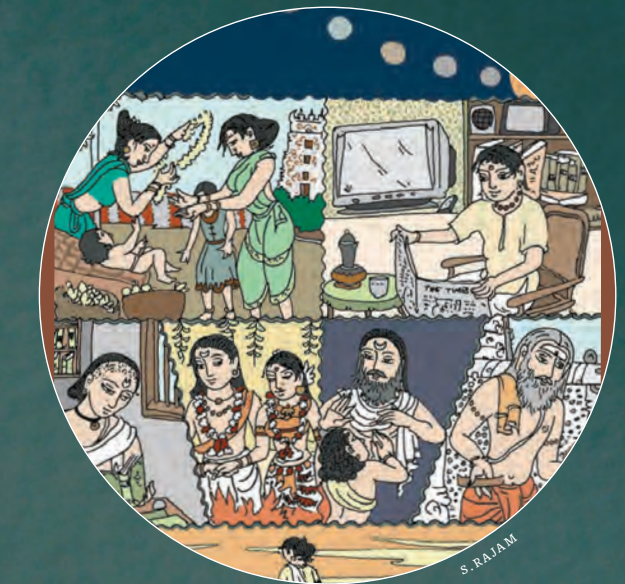
KAUAI'S HINDU MONASTERY

Joyous worship: *Hinduism is a joyous, reverent, mystical faith, as evidenced in its fabulous festivals, such as the Kumbha Mela, pictured at left, being celebrated in Haridwar in 1998 on Mahasivaratri, Siva's great night, where 25 million devotees gathered to honor and seek blessings of the Divine. (above) At Kauai's Hindu Monastery, a pilgrim pours milk over the Narmada Sivalingam in veneration of God.*

Within the Hindu way is a deeply rooted desire to lead a productive, ethical life. Among the many virtues instilled in followers are truthfulness, fidelity, contentment and avoidance of greed, lust and anger. A cornerstone of dharma is ahimsa, noninjury toward all beings. Vedic rishis who revealed dharma proclaimed ahimsa as the way to achieve harmony with our environment, peace between people and compassion within ourselves. Devout followers tend to be vegetarians and seek to protect the environment. Selfless service, *seva*, to God and humanity is widely pursued as a way of softening the ego and drawing close to the Divine. Charity, *dana*, is expressed through myriad philanthropic activities.

Hindus wear sectarian marks, called *tilaka*, on their foreheads as sacred symbols, distinctive insignia of their heritage. They prefer cremation of the body upon death, rather than burial, knowing that the soul lives on and will inhabit a new body on Earth.

Perhaps one of this faith's most refreshing characteristics is that it encourages free and open thought. Scriptures and gurus encourage followers to inquire and investigate into the nature of Truth, to explore worshipful, inner and meditative regimens to directly experience the Divine. This openness is at the root of Hinduism's famed tolerance of other cultures, religions and points of view, encapsulated in the adage, *Ekam sat viprah bahuda vadanti*, meaning "Truth is one, the wise describe it in different ways." The Hindu is free to choose his path, his way of approaching the Divine, and he can change it in the course of his lifetime. There is no heresy or apostasy in Hinduism. This, coupled with Hinduism's natural inclusiveness, gives little room



S. RAJAM

Dharma Precept Number Four

When God created the universe, He endowed it with order, with the laws to govern creation. Dharma is God's divine law prevailing on every level of existence, from the sustaining cosmic order to religious and moral laws which bind us in harmony with that order. In relation to the soul, dharma is the mode of conduct most conducive to spiritual advancement, the right and righteous path. It is piety and ethical practice, duty and obligation. When we follow dharma, we are in conformity with the Truth that inheres and instructs the universe, and we naturally abide in closeness to God. Adharma is opposition to divine law. Dharma is to the individual what its normal development is to a seed—the orderly fulfillment of an inherent nature and destiny. The *Tirukural* (verses 31–32) reminds us, "Dharma yields Heaven's honor and Earth's wealth. What is there then that is more fruitful for a man? There is nothing more rewarding than dharma, nor anything more ruinous than its neglect."

.....
Artwork above: Dharma embraces one's duties and obligations, and changes according to life's four natural stages of life: student, householder, elder advisor and religious solitary, as show in this illustration.



Five Practices

Here are the minimal practices (also known as *panchanya karmas*) to nurture future citizens who are strong, responsible, tolerant and traditional.

1. Worship, *Upasana*: The dear children are taught daily worship in the family shrine room—rituals, disciplines, chants, yogas and religious study. They learn to be secure through devotion in home and temple, wearing traditional dress, bringing forth love of the Divine and preparing the mind for serene meditation.
2. Holy Days, *Utsava*: The dear children are taught to participate in Hindu festivals and holy days in the home and temple. They learn to be happy through sweet communion with God at such auspicious celebrations. Utsava includes fasting and attending the temple on Monday or Friday and other holy days.
3. Virtuous Living, *Dharma*: The dear children are taught to live a life of duty and good conduct. They learn to be selfless by thinking of others first, being respectful of parents, elders and swamis, following divine law, especially ahimsa, mental, emotional and physical noninjury to all beings. Thus they resolve karmas.
4. Pilgrimage, *Tirthayatra*: The dear children are taught the value of pilgrimage and are taken at least once a year for darshan of holy persons, temples and places, near or far. They learn to be detached by setting aside worldly affairs and making God, Gods and gurus life's singular focus during these journeys.
5. Rites of Passage, *Samskara*: The dear children are taught to observe the many sacraments which mark and sanctify their passages through life. They learn to be traditional by celebrating the rites of birth, name-giving, head-shaving, first feeding, ear-piercing, first learning, coming of age, marriage and death.

for fanaticism, fundamentalism or closed-mindedness anywhere within the framework of Hinduism. It has been aptly called a threshold, not an enclosure.

There is a false concept, commonly found in academic texts, that Hinduism is world-negating. This depiction was foisted upon the world by 19th-century Western missionary Orientalists traveling in India for the first time and reporting back about its starkest and strangest aspects, not unlike what Western journalists tend to do today. The wild-looking, world-renouncing yogis, taking refuge in caves, denying the senses and thus the world, were of sensational interest, and their world-abandonment became, through the scholars' eyes, characteristic of the entire religion. While Sanatana Dharma proudly upholds such severe ways of life for the few, it is very much a family-oriented faith. The vast majority of followers are engaged in family life, firmly grounded in responsibilities in the world. Hinduism's essential, time-tested monastic tradition makes it no more world-negating than Christianity or Buddhism, which likewise have traditions of renunciate men and women living apart from the world in spiritual pursuits. Young Hindu adults are encouraged to marry; marriages are encouraged to yield an abundance of children; children are guided to live in virtue, fulfill duty and contribute to the community. The emphasis is not on self-fulfillment and freedom but on the welfare of the community, as expressed in the phrase, *Bahujan hitaya, bahujan sukhaya*, meaning "the welfare of the many and the happiness of the many."

Definitions from Prominent Hindus

In this magazine and in our books we have offered this dictionary-style definition of our faith: India's indigenous religious and cultural system, followed today by nearly one billion adherents, mostly in India, but with large populations in many other countries. Also called Sanatana Dharma, "eternal religion" and Vaidika Dharma,

"religion of the *Vedas*." Hinduism is the world's most ancient religion and encompasses a broad spectrum of philosophies ranging from pluralistic theism to absolute monism. It is a family of myriad faiths with four primary denominations: Saivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism and Smartism. These four hold such divergent beliefs that each is a complete and independent religion. Yet they share a vast heritage of culture and belief—karma, dharma, reincarnation, all-pervasive Divinity, temple worship, sacraments, manifold Deities, the guru-shishya tradition and a reliance on the *Vedas* as scriptural authority. Great minds have tackled the thorny challenge of defining Sanatana Dharma, and we would like to share a few of their efforts here.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, renowned philosopher and president of India from 1962 to 1967, states in *The Hindu View of Life*: "The Hindu recognizes one Supreme Spirit, though different names are given to it. God is in the world, though not as the world. He does not merely intervene to create life or consciousness, but is working continuously. There is no dualism of the natural and the supernatural. Evil, error and ugliness are not ultimate. No view is so utterly erroneous, no man is so absolutely evil as to deserve complete castigation. There is no Hell, for that means there is a place where God is not, and there are sins which exceed His love. The law of karma tells us that the individual life is not a term, but a series. Heaven and Hell are higher and lower stages in one continuous movement. Every type has its own nature which should be followed. We should do our duty in that state of life to which we happen to be called. Hinduism affirms that the theological expressions of religious experience are bound to be varied, accepts all forms of belief and guides each along his path to the common goal. These are some of the central principles of Hinduism. If Hinduism lives today, it is due to them."

Bal Ghangadhar Tilak, scholar, mathematician, philosopher and Indian nationalist, named "the father of the Indian Revolution" by Jawaharlal Nehru, summarized Hindu beliefs in his *Gitarahasya*. This oft-quoted statement, so compelling concise, is considered au-

All of life as spiritual practice: (left) Arriving guests are warmly greeted at the entryway by the home. In a well-adjusted, cohesive family, receiving visitors is a joyous event. (top) Like millions of Hindus before them, these youth are learning precise recitation of liturgy from the Agamas and Vedas. They will spend years perfecting this training, enabling them to perform ritual worship, puja, in temples around the world. In their priest school in Tirupati, India, they will memorize hundreds of mantras. (above) A devotee leafs through his holy text as he performs his morning sadhana.

thoritative by Bharat's courts of law: "Acceptance of the *Vedas* with reverence; recognition of the fact that the means or ways to salvation are diverse; and realization of the truth that the number of Gods to be worshiped is large, that indeed is the distinguishing feature of the Hindu religion."

Sri K. Navaratnam, esteemed Sri Lankan religious scholar, enumerated a more extensive set of basic beliefs in his book, *Studies in Hinduism*, reflecting the Southern Saiva Agamic tradition. 1) A belief in the existence of God. 2) A belief in the existence of a soul separate from the body. 3) A belief in the existence of the finitizing principle known as *avidya* or *mala*. 4) A belief in the principle of matter—*prakriti* or *maya*. 5) A belief in the theory of karma and reincarnation. 6) A belief in the indispensable guidance of a guru to guide the spiritual aspirant towards God Realization. 7) A belief in moksha, or liberation, as the goal of human existence. 8) A belief in the indispensable necessity of temple worship in religious life. 9) A belief in graded forms of religious practices, both internal and external, until one realizes God. 10) A belief in ahimsa [nonviolence] as the greatest dharma or virtue. 11) A belief in mental and physical purity as indispensable factors for spiritual progress.

Mahatma Mohandas K. Gandhi: "I call myself a Sanatani



MIKE BREYER



THOMAS KELLY

Hindu because I believe in the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Puranas* and all that goes by the name of Hindu scriptures, and therefore in avatars and rebirth. In a concrete manner he is a Hindu who believes in God, immortality of the soul, transmigration, the law of karma and moksha, and who tries to practice truth and ahimsa in daily life, and therefore practices cow protection in its widest sense and understands and tries to act according to the law of *varnashrama*.”

Sri Pramukh Swami Maharaj of the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Sanstha (Swaminarayan Faith) propounds: 1) Parabrahman, one, supreme, all-powerful God: He is the Creator, has a divine form, is immanent, transcendent and the giver of moksha. 2) *Avataravada*, manifestation of God on Earth: God Himself incarnates on Earth in various forms to revive dharma and grant liberation. 3) *Karmavada*, law of action: the soul reaps fruits, good or bad, according to its past and present actions, which are experienced either in this life or future lives. 4) *Punarjanma*, reincarnation: the mortal soul is continuously born and reborn in one of the 8,400,000 species until it attains liberation. 5) *Moksha*, ultimate liberation: the goal of human life. It is the liberation of the soul from the cycle of births and deaths to remain eternally in the service of God. 6) *Guru-shishya sambandha*, master-disciple relationship: guidance and grace of a spiritually perfect master, revered as the embodiment of God, is essential for an aspirant seeking liberation. 7) *Dharma*, that which sustains the universe: an all-encompassing term representing divine law, law of being, path of righteousness, religion, duty, responsibility, virtue, justice, goodness and truth. 8) *Vedapramana*, scriptural authority of the *Vedas*: all Hindu faiths are based on the teachings of the *Vedas*. 9) *Murti-puja*, sacred image worship: consecrated images represent the presence of God which is worshiped. The sacred image is a medium to help devotees offer their devotion to God.

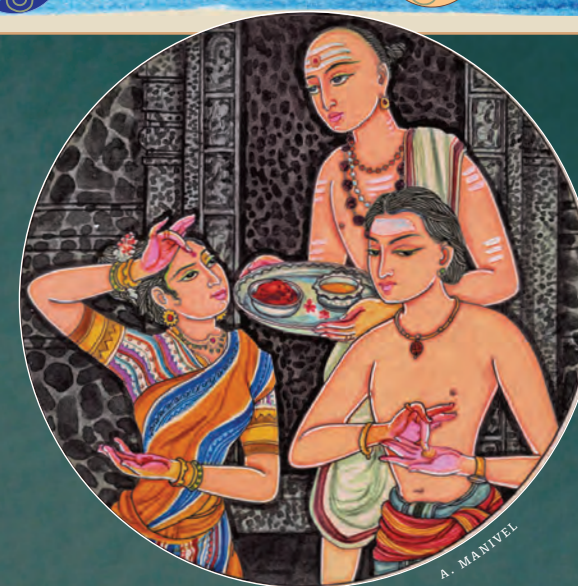
Sri Swami Vivekananda, speaking in America, proclaimed: “All Vedantists believe in God. Vedantists also believe the *Vedas* to be the revealed word of God—an expression of the knowledge of God—and as God is eternal, so are the *Vedas* eternal. Another common ground of belief is that of creation in cycles, that the whole of creation appears and disappears. They postulate the existence of a material, which they call *akasha*, which is something like the ether of the scientists, and a power which they call *prana*.”

Sri Jayendra Saraswati, 69th Shankaracharya of the Kamakoti Peetham, Kanchipuram, defined in his writings the basic features of Hinduism as follows. 1) The concept of idol worship and the worship of God in His *nirguna* as well as *saguna* form. 2) The wearing of sacred marks on the forehead. 3) Belief in the theory of past and future births in accordance with the theory of karma. 4) Cremation of ordinary men and burial of great men.

Powerful priesthoods: Traditional priests, 121 in all, pose at Sringeri Sadhana Center in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, in 1997, during a break in the biggest Vedic worship ceremony performed on American soil; (below) a father and daughter arrive at a temple in Sri Lanka.

The Vishva Hindu Parishad declared its definition in a Memorandum of Association, Rules and Regulations in 1966: “Hindu means a person believing in, following or respecting the eternal values of life, ethical and spiritual, which have sprung up in Bharatkhand [India] and includes any person calling himself a Hindu.”

The Indian Supreme Court, in 1966, formalized a judicial definition of Hindu beliefs to legally distinguish Hindu denominations from other religions in India. This list was affirmed by the Court as recently as 1995 in judging cases regarding religious identity. “1) Acceptance of the *Vedas* with reverence as the highest authority in religious and philosophic matters and acceptance with reverence of *Vedas* by Hindu thinkers and philosophers as the sole foundation of Hindu philosophy. 2) Spirit of tolerance and willingness to understand and appreciate the opponent’s point of view based on the realization that truth is many-sided. 3) Acceptance of great world rhythm—vast periods of creation, maintenance and dissolution follow each other in endless succession—by all six systems of Hindu philosophy. 4) Acceptance by all systems of Hindu philosophy of the belief in rebirth and pre-existence. 5) Recognition of the fact that the means or ways to salvation are many. 6) Realization of the truth that numbers of Gods to be worshiped may be large, yet there being Hindus who do not believe in the worshiping of idols. 7) Unlike other religions, or religious creeds, Hindu religion’s not being tied down to any definite set of philosophic concepts, as such.”



A. MANIVEL

Nine Beliefs of Hinduism

- 1 Hindus believe in the divinity of the *Vedas*, the world’s most ancient scripture, and venerate the *Agamas* as equally revealed. These primordial hymns are God’s word and the bedrock of Sanatana Dharma, the eternal religion which has neither beginning nor end.
- 2 Hindus believe in a one, all-pervasive Supreme Being who is both immanent and transcendent, both Creator and Unmanifest Reality.
- 3 Hindus believe that the universe undergoes endless cycles of creation, preservation and dissolution.
- 4 Hindus believe in karma, the law of cause and effect by which each individual creates his own destiny by his thoughts, words and deeds.
- 5 Hindus believe that the soul reincarnates, evolving through many births until all karmas have been resolved, and moksha, spiritual knowledge and liberation from the cycle of rebirth, is attained. Not a single soul will be eternally deprived of this destiny.
- 6 Hindus believe that divine beings exist in unseen worlds and that temple worship, rituals, sacraments as well as personal devotionals create a communion with these devas and Gods.
- 7 Hindus believe that a spiritually awakened master, or satguru, is essential to know the Transcendent Absolute, as are personal discipline, good conduct, purification, pilgrimage, self-inquiry and meditation.
- 8 Hindus believe that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered, and therefore practice ahimsa, “noninjury.”
- 9 Hindus believe that no particular religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others, but that all genuine religious paths are facets of God’s Pure Love and Light, deserving tolerance and understanding.



DANCE AS WORSHIP

Experiencing Theyyam

Kerala is home to an ancient dance form featuring deliriously elaborate costume design and choreography—all offered to God as a form of worship

BY NAINA LEPES

ATHEYYAM PERFORMANCE EXUDES THE primordial sense of eternity ongoing. This dance-drama form of art and worship, loosely stylized in open nature, supports the open heart. The newly emerging historical stories brought from far and wide seem to merge and thrive with the telling and the listening, amidst the backdrop of breezes, chirps and swaying palms surrounding a tiny outdoor shrine with a lived-in house in the background. The performer is acknowledged as man-God combined, and the audience serves as natural participant, interacting as an intrinsic part of the whole through time and space. The audience even participates in viewing the dancers' preparation of make-up and props, setting the tone for an extremely intimate and mutual experience.

Though some of the stories enacted may seem mundane, the natural setting, actors-dancers, makeup, drumming, music, chanting, props, masks and the holy ambience combine to create a fresh experience that can never be constricted by boxes, forms or words. This otherworldly magical vastness is the real beauty of my experience of Theyyam.

The overriding impact of Theyyam is presence, awareness, being. All else—the intricate make-up, body painting, grass skirts, headpieces finely tied with string, tall carved poles carried on the back, sparkling fire and smoky embers, action and inaction—all these are mere peripherals.

Whether it's a trickster lord-death chasing children or a person-legend caked with body painting standing on a small wooden table holding up his insignia, eternal awareness is the only thing. This moves the heart and creates atmosphere, giving a sense of permanence to all the changes in life.

At first I thought I was attending a dance, so I wanted some dancing. But presence and stillness are far more lasting than movement. For this throws us back on our self: our ordinary person self, our self that is God.

In the beginning, when all the strings and headpieces and poles have been tied,

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Living stories: (Left) The tedious make-up and costumes take hours for each performance; (right) An unidentified Theyyam artist performs at Kadannappalli Muchilot Bhagavati Temple on January 5, 2015, in Kannur, India. Massive head pieces are a feature of the art.

the ritual costumes have been donned, the drums have sounded and the ancient Malayalam chanting has been intoned, now the hero is handed a mirror. He looks. And what does he see? He sees himself. He sees God. The character he is portraying is God. God is inside the character. God is inside his self, reflected back. Always present within the ritual, the movements, the stillness, the body. Always present as God.

Suddenly the ordinary person he once was becomes omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent. He knows exactly what is. And knows precisely what is needed for whom. So, at the end of the performance, when one approaches him for the blessing, he transmits what is given by God—not just the historical character he is portraying, but what is given by God. Is this "shamanism?" Forget the labels.

one before the land mass split.

For the next Theyyam I choose the theme—Vishnu Murthy. As he prances round the holy coconut grove to the sound of the drum, a speck of this all pervasiveness becomes known inside. Here no external circus. No kids chasing and cameras clicking that block the view. Sheer presence only.

Then an old man with big white lips walks to the beat of the drum. Slowly. Are the lips Neanderthal lips? This is Siva, the ancient one. Does he always accompany Vishnu without our knowledge? Of course! Prior to the human folly called Vaishnavite and Shaivite, these simple Dravidian artists understood the futility of division.

What we separate into holy and unholy—nonsense! The simplest boy within the proper lineage can embody Vishnu, who



Although from the very beginning I attune with the indomitable presence, nonetheless I am turned off by the external noise and jumping, cameras clicking, people standing, blocking our view, and kids chasing. This is too busy, too much! The trickster senses my lack of acceptance. He stops running to offer me a banana, and just as I am about to accept with folded palms and bowed head, he snatches it away! This swift trickiness initiates reflection—accept all as equal: the ordinary, the extraordinary. All equal. And I leave with a feeling of ancientness—Africa? Hawaii? South Seas? Totem pole culture? All

some think was once an ordinary human being himself and attained Godhood after the accusatory errors of a feudal lord became known; now portrayed by an ordinary person who realizes his Godhood within the sacredness of ritual.

The same is true with stories of the Goddess. Muchilottu Bhagavathi was once a Brahmin girl wrongly accused of improper conduct. She leaves her ancestral home and seeks refuge in a small shrine. After forty-one days, Siva appears, declaring her innocence. After the girl merges into a blaze of fire, auspicious signs reveal that she is a

Goddess. Truth triumphs, the God-nature is revealed. What is so strikingly paradoxical about these stories is that even the one who commits the heinous sin of killing his Brahmin teacher can be recognized as God.

Where are the delineations? They are here only to foster the strength of the ritual itself. Conventional distinctions are considered worthless in a world where everything is equal. Then why the strict caste distinctions? Paradox seemingly abounds.

What feeds the Gods here? The naturalness of the land and its people—the nectar of naturalness! Every coconut grove in each plot of land has a tiny corner for a temple. And as the Gods live, they are believed in and their presence felt.

The land is pristine and the people generally kind. Many have not yet been bitten by the bug of touristic greed: natural, giving, happy. Two different rickshaw drivers refuse to accept money from me on a short trip to and from the Theyyam. “I want to help you,” they both say. The owner of a guest house down the beach refuses to accept money for lunch. “We have no restaurant. Lunch for guests only,” he says.

Squawk of baby hawk. A mother flies back and forth with straw to expand the nest. A tiny bright green bird almost camouflaged

behind green cashew leaves, leaves its perch as a heavy fan branch thumps to the ground in the distance.

Waves swish back and forth while orb of sun shines through slits of palm. Green coconut clumps still up in spite of the many picked last week. Each morning I am awakened by haunting chants from temple and mosque within the backdrop of lilting ocean. Music from the ocean of life is always here in the background—if we can but listen.

Some people born here now live in Dubai, leaving all manner of native dwelling place behind, awaiting school vacation for the family reunion. So no overpopulation—yet.

Individual fishermen make their own industry with tire tube as boat. Their soft net collects fresh mussels and crabs. And coconut trees perpetuate the economy. Outside the veranda, an expert climber winds rope round his two feet, making them one. Effortlessly he slithers up the tree with sword in side pocket. From this distance, the curved sword resembles the tail of Hanuman. Another man on the ground is cutting off the outside brown shell from the older ones. White coconut meat inside is dried in the sun for six days, then pressed for oil.

The same climber appears day after day, tapping a spot high up for toddy. The local women participate, gathering up left-over dried coconuts from a deep pit dug ages ago. From this do they make coir for mattresses? Stray palm fronds are used to make fires. No waste here.

There’s a private beach cove next door,

absolutely pristine till the sand smugglers come and leave a hole with some litter around. But even now the rest is beautiful and the hole can be overlooked—until the next batch of smugglers arrive. A few days later, the ocean has leveled out the sand and swept away all remnants of pollution.

I notice that the resort being built next door has been stealing sand daily for building. What to do? If I called the police, they won’t understand my English. Though the ocean might spew forth some sand every now and then, even beach sand is limited. The theft might one day backfire on the robbers, when their prospective guests have no beach on which to sunbathe.

Nearby volcanic rocks are alive, bestowing the feeling of sacred cathedral on those who venture near enough. The beach on the other side is interminable, beach after beach after beach. I walk only as far as the rocks, about five kilometers. On the way is a high cliff where you can sit under a palm, viewing sand and water stretching forever.

This is the only place I’ve ever been where there are no restaurants. Everyone eats at the homestay. Hindu and Muslim live side by side, friends intertwined within the Theyyam culture.

Some Theyyams you can walk to through jungle paths near backwaters as the ancestors did. Others must be approached by rickshaw. The drivers know which stories are being performed where. Timing can be anywhere from 4:30AM to 1:00PM or later, or continuously, with varying stories in

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Village storytelling: (right) Two protagonists battle bare-footed in the sand with swords as drummers drive the beat of their dance.

Getting into character, from head to foot



between.
Lest one get lost in ancient sacredness, let it be known that in a culture where one kills a guru and yet becomes God, there is no dark side to be suppressed as in the West. Here it just is.

The caretaker of the house where I am staying returns home inebriated at 11PM and starts screaming just as I'm dozing off to sleep. The next morning I ask him to be quiet when it's late. He pretends to not understand, and says he was talking on the phone. I ask the landlady to explain to him, and he makes up a story about me which I won't repeat.

It is said that sixty years ago, only brahmins were allowed to attend the Theyyam, and the other castes had their own Gods. I suspect that certain themes are needed only for brahmins: themes that evoke humility by ridiculing pride or rigidity or sense of superiority. Standards for brahmins are different than standards for other castes, as each group behavior is different, if samskara conditioning prevails. Obligatory duties or emotional expression vary among people with different kinds of mind, lifestyle and training. One level of psyche might need to develop a standard of right and wrong; whereas another might need to learn to let go of all standards and just be. These differing psyches should not be exposed to the same kind of training. Now the Theyyam is more mixed than sixty years ago. But still, tradition dictates that only certain groups are allowed to



perform certain themes.

Global economics forces the entrance of Siva to homogenize existence, beating down old cultures unto the ash of destruction. Siva always accompanies Vishnu.

Therefore, do not let your heart cling to this glorious ancient Dravidian culture that might soon be destroyed by airports and concrete high-rise buildings. How else can the greedy psyche eventually help the vibrations of planet and cosmos but by destroying the status quo? With the destruction of culture

comes suffering, with suffering comes seeking, with seeking comes an individual connection with the totality—minus all forms of group intermediary, be they strict or permissive. India I love because of her diversity. The “melting pot” mentality of the US is dull and lifeless! And the whole world is heading for just that! Unless another dimension, an eternal “new-now” consciousness pulls us out!

The area here in northern Kerala is now filled with palm trees all pervasive. Simple people go out into the sea with tire and net

to fish for mussels and crabs. Nourishment is available and free. The clear waters swooshing back and forth comprise the background music of life. To me, this place can be called paradise!

Just seven kilometers away in the city, the land is filled with dull concrete apartment houses and occasional smells of rotten fish. Kerala's fourth International Airport opened in December of 2018. Will these simple glorious homestays that allow ancient culture to shine also become

concrete jungle devoid of palms? And what will happen to the minds of the people?

Global greed, travel agents, taxes for the government and bribes come when they pack all the tourists into concrete-slab hotels pumped up by air conditioners that consume electricity from polluting landslide-causing dams in the north, which upset the ecological balance in the region. The more global jets, the more dollars, the more Euros, the more rupees!

For now, enjoy. And be grateful you are experiencing a culture that is worthy of being called “culture,” as opposed to “society”—a culture that contains the seeds for engendering enhanced consciousness in those who are able to receive.

One morning early, I walk to a small home nearby that serves appam for breakfast. On the way, behind the sprawling cement houses under construction, I see a small cottage with traditional roof, almost hidden by palms. On returning home, a thin woman with black headscarf on the roadside near the gate is gathering palm fronds. From the distance our eyes meet. She is wearing large round earrings. Her dress is unusual, her appearance otherworldly. While staring, I point to my earlobes, acknowledging her earrings in admiration. And we two smile.



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Author: Naina Lepes, a longtime lover of Vedanta and Indian culture, moved to India from New York where she worked as a Jungian-trained psychotherapist. She is the author of *From Maya to Oneness* and other books. More recently she has been writing poems and travel stories. Visit her website at www.thegitaspace.com

There are over 400 forms of Theyyam

Divine dance: (left to right) Skilled preparations precede each performance, including applying colorful, elaborate make-up; (right) it is typical for performers to dance in and among the audience. (above) Percussionists performing in the small village of Kannur.



“Theyyam is an 800-year-old celebration of divinity and devotion in the northern Malabar region of Kerala, a mélange of dance, drama, music and mime. The musical dance performance is ritualistically held at some 1,200 temples throughout Malabar. Each participant represents a heroic character with divine power. It is believed that the mortal bodies of performers become one with immortal spirits and mythical figures to perform ritual dances and cast a trance over onlookers. The performance ends with distribution of turmeric powder as a token of blessing to the devotees. In return, they sprinkle rice grains over the performers.”

By Sourav Agarwal



MALAYSIA

Inspiring a New Generation

Divine Life Society Malaysia offers young Hindus an infusion of fun and philosophy, empowering them with their religion for the rest of their lives

BY RATNAVATHY SIVALINGAM, MALAYSIA

WHEN I WAS ASKED TO WRITE AN ARTICLE for HINDUISM TODAY about the Hindu youth camp organized by the Divine Life Society (DLS), Malaysia, memories of my own experience at this very camp 20 years ago flooded my mind. I remember it being intense, fun and mind-awakening.

"How has it evolved over the years?" I wonder. "Are some of the same swamis still there? How is the current generation of Malaysians teenagers responding towards the camps?" Many such questions come to me as I approach Batu Caves, the famous abode of Lord Subramanya in northern Kuala Lumpur. This craggy limestone hill houses a series of hollowed caves and caverns. A beautiful 140-foot-tall statue of Lord Murugan stands beside the 272 multi-colored stair steps leading up to the temple.

I visit on a cool but sunny weekday. As I turn off the main road into the compound of Sivananda Ashram—as this DLS center is known—I notice how picturesque it is, located at the foot of Batu Caves. Waves of bird songs fill the morning air, joined by the voices of teenagers chanting mantras in the nearby prayer hall. The peaceful atmosphere is alive with a sort of tingly excitement. I smile to

myself. "The first day of camp has begun," I thought, as I step away from the car, to be welcomed by resident Swami Brahmajnanananda, the organizer of the youth camp.

The Divine Life Society

Founded in 1936 by His Holiness Gurudev Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj, the DLS motto is "Serve, Love, Meditate and Realize." They primarily aim to preserve and advocate ancient traditions and cultural practices, as well as disseminating worldwide the spiritual knowledge found in yoga and Vedanta studies. Emphasizing the global revival of spiritual living, they welcome anyone who is devoted to the ideals of truth, nonviolence and purity, regardless of their religious background. They produce books, pamphlets and magazines and hold spiritual gatherings, discourses and conferences, while also maintaining training centers for spiritual practices.

Inspired by Swami Sivananda, the late Swami Pranavanandaji inaugurated this first center of the DLS Malaysia branch in 1953. Here, activities such as weekly prayer meetings, satsangs, lectures and festivals could take place. Since then it has grown and thrived, sprouting twenty sub-branches which continue to disseminate the teach-

ings of Swami Sivananda nationwide. The DLS Malaysia branch is currently headed by Swami Swayamjayanandaji Maharaj. It has five trustees, eight swamis and swaminis and two brahmacharis; some reside at the DLS Batu Caves branch, while others help to manage other centers.

The society's many activities and services include teaching religion, Tamil language, Carnatic singing, *Thirumurai*, the *Thirukural*, bhajans, hatha yoga and mantras, and classes by the monks. They run the Computer Educational School for some 814 students, the Tadika Sivananda preschool, a medical clinic, the Swami Pranavananda Trust Fund, a library, and two homes for underprivileged children. They have programs providing food for those in need, hold many charity dinners and publish a quarterly publication, the *Divine Messenger*, which contains articles on various aspects of Hindu philosophy. The society also holds regular religious, motivational and educational camps for youth.

Overview of the Youth Camp

The youth camp held at Sivananda Ashram had been conducted for many years prior to the inception of the DLS Youth Section in 1996. The primary aim of the youth camp is to expound the topics of ethics, morals,

Learning can be fun: (far left) Participants trying to capture Facilitator, Durgambigai, during a game of "kabadi" traditionally played by Tamilians; (right) Swami Mumukshuananda using visuals to elaborate on his talk; students clapping hands during bhajans

religion and spirituality, revolving around Swami Sivananda's Vedanta teachings. In the initial years, the youth camps prioritized lessons on the theoretical philosophies of Vedanta and the *Bhagavad Gita*. Classes were generally conducted in lecture format, with some time allocated at the end of the session for questions and answers. Speakers were mostly disciplined, strict monks whom the youth both respected and feared. The ambience of the camps was rather serious, and youth mostly attended because their parents wanted them to.

The camp evolved over the years as the monks organizing the camps worked closely with the youth and empathized with their natures, preferences and life issues. The camps were reorganized to be more fun and interactive. Topics were carefully screened to sustain interest and increase engagement. Speakers became friendlier, more approachable and open to discussion, encouraging questions and interaction. Mailvannan, a returning participant, appreciates this: "Usually when swamis give talks, it is slow and boring. But the swamis here give them in a very fun and interesting way." Youth no longer attend because they were told to by parents, but keep coming back because they can't get enough of the experience.

The Four Means and Six Virtues

The theme of the camp this year is *Sadhana Chatustaya*, the four means of practice that lead to the path of Self-realization as taught in Vedanta. These include the six virtues, *Shatka Sampatti*, which must be cultivated to realize the inner self. All this builds a sound foundation for the practices of listening to the teachings (*sravana*), reflecting on those teaching (*manana*) and deep, contemplative meditation on those principles (*nidhidhyasana*). The fourfold qualifications (*Sadhana Chatustaya*) are:

- 1) *Viveka* or discrimination, the ability to seek and distinguish between the real and unreal, the permanent and impermanent, and the Self and not Self.
- 2) *Vairagya* or detachment from the enjoyment of the fruits of one's action, gradually decreasing one's attachment to worldly objects and desires and aversions in the inner mind. It does not mean one needs to abandon worldly responsibilities and duties to society.
- 3) *Shatka Sampatti* includes: i) *Samah*, mastery of the mind to cultivate tranquility and



contentment; ii) *Damah*, training and control of the internal and external senses to use them in a positive and useful manner; iii) *Uparati*, withdrawal from sensory experience; iv) *Titiksha*, forgiveness and forbearance of obstacles on the spiritual path. This frees one from the onslaught of sensory stimuli and pressure from other individuals; v) *Sradha*, persistent faith in spiritual practice and the words of one's guru; vi) *Samadhana*, the ability to focus and harmonize and balance the mind in its thoughts and emotions, bringing it to single-pointedness.

4) *Mumukshutvam*, intense yearning for liberation and self-enlightenment.

Daily Happenings

The DLS youth camp lasts for six days and is intended for teenagers aged 13 to 16. The camp encompasses a variety of activities that keep most teenagers interested and engaged. Facilitators—dedicated young men and women volunteers from the DLS youth wing—help manage the participants and ensure the smooth flow of the camp.

A typical day's activities start at 6:30am with prayers and mantra chanting led by Swami Brahmajnanananda at the main

prayer hall. Prior to attending the prayers, all participants shower and don fresh, clean clothing. Hygiene and punctuality are paramount, and latecomers to prayers and classes are gently reprimanded. They seem to appreciate the sense of discipline. Nilesh shares: "In previous camps, we could be late to the prayer hall. However, this time, I was reprimanded for being late; I had to do *toppu kaaranam* (holding the ears with arms crossed while squatting, commonly done before Ganesha) for 50 times as I entered the prayer hall. I like this strictness because it trains me to be more disciplined and punctual."

The yoga session after prayers is tough for participants who are used to getting up and going straight to breakfast. Here they are asked to first do early-morning exercise and asanas. A 30-minute vegetarian breakfast is then served. The *bhojana*, or food blessing mantra, is chanted before meals to seek blessings from Mother Annapurna for the food that is about to be consumed. A second mantra is chanted shortly thereafter to express gratitude to Mother Annapurna. Meals are prepared with no onion or garlic, and little salt. One participant mentions, "Initially it was difficult for me to eat my meals with



less salt. When I asked Brahmaji (the organizer) about it, he told me we should not let our senses control our mind, and we should eat what is offered to us. What he said made a lot of sense to me, and eventually I got used to the less pronounced flavors.”

Breakfast is followed by two sessions of talks by the DLS swamis, lasting about two and a half hours. This year, these sessions mainly cover the elements of Sadhana Chastaya and some teachings from Swami Sivananda. Talks are filled with humor, visuals and day-to-day examples. Clearly, the monks have thought deep and hard on their delivery in order to keep participants engaged and interested.

Questions from the group are highly encouraged, and no question is ridiculed or deemed wrong. Participants are very focused and ask some intelligent questions that are of great help to everyone. Though every speaker does a terrific job, Swami Mumukshuanandaji and Swami Brahmajnanananda are clear favorites. I hear participants and facilitators alike mention looking forward to Swami Mumukshuanandaji's talk, and indeed his session was enthralling. Swamiji includes a lot of humor and has a way with words and a demeanor that teenagers can relate to easily. He explains, “It is important for us to understand, relate to and reach out to teenagers. We must remember that we have also been teenagers ourselves, so we know exactly what they go through at this stage. When I was camp organizer, I observed that some of the participants hardly understood the sessions that

were being delivered and were often caught off guard by the speakers. I used to surreptitiously hand them notes to help them better understand the session.”

The swamis' talks are followed by facilitator-led sessions where participants can seek advice on spiritual practice as well as issues they face in their lives. Many—especially first-time participants—hesitate to approach a swami with their questions, but find it easy to speak to the facilitators, who are closer to them in age. Facilitators are free to use their sessions as they choose. Some conduct quizzes and games, and others hold character building workshops.

Then comes a two-hour break for lunch are relaxation. Resting during this time is encouraged. Swami Brahmajnanananda explains, “Here these children arise early in the morning on a daily basis. Some may not be accustomed to this. They attend talks for a long time that are sometimes heavy in philosophical content. This might be mentally tiring, so it is crucial that they get good rest and a mental break, allowing the lessons to sink in and be absorbed, and so they can feel rejuvenated for the afternoon sessions.”

I see that the youth look forward to the afternoon workshop sessions, which are conducted by experts in their respective fields. Incorporating lots of visuals and some humor, these interactive workshops focus on helping teens deal with issues they face in life. Topics during my visit include “Finding the champion within you,” “Consequences of drug use,” “Managing the anger within you” and

Among peers: (left) Facilitator Durgambigai telling jokes to her team members during a tea break; (right) Facilitator and past participant, Revati, alleviates Elanggeswaari's fears about participation in the talent show; (below right) a view from the front of Sivananda Ashram

“Compassion.” The presenters relate real-life examples and invite participants to share personal testimony. I am very surprised that so many participants came forward to open up and share their challenges (controlling anger for example), with some testimonials being very personal.

I find the session on drugs to be an absolute eye-opener. The speaker is well versed in this area, having worked as a drug enforcement officer for numerous years. He explains the types of drugs, and stresses the perilous effects of drugs on one's life, encouraging participants to keep away from them. Participants are notably engaged during the session.

During the karma yoga session, participants work in teams to clean and maintain different areas of the ashram. They enjoy this session, too. I hear positive feedback from several about the work, that it helps them bond with each other while inspiring them to be self-motivated to keep things clean.

From 5:30 to 7:00pm we gather for a recreation session with physical activities and games, which everyone looks forward to this period. Participants then shower and dress for an hour of prayers, which include the singing of *Thirumurai* and bhajans, followed by dinner.

At the day's final and very popular session, participants are encouraged to ask questions, share testimonials, give feedback on the camp, and showcase their talents. Some sing or tell jokes, while others perform short plays. Many students forego their rest time to work together on planning and practicing their plays. This is the pattern for the first four days.

The last two days take on a free and easy style. A quiz session helps participants recall what was taught during the talks. Students are urged to experience gratitude for all that they have in their lives.

On the sixth and final day, the students go on a short yatra (foot pilgrimage). “The yatra is the most famous part of the camp,” says Linkeswar. “We go to the nearby temple, sing bhajans and clap our hands. The vibration is so strong that it can bring out devotion in students who do not usually prioritize prayer.”

After the yatra, participants and facilitators offer final feedback, showing me this was truly an enlightening experience for one and all. The campfire session that night, with games and street-style food prepared for the participants, is a huge hit. 🍷



ALEXANDRA RADU

FEEDBACK

Testimony About the DLS Camp

Teens talk about their experiences, and facilitators share why they became involved

BY RATNAVATHY SIVALINGAM

IN SPEAKING WITH THE PARTICIPANTS at the Divine Life Society Youth Camp at Batu Caves, Malaysia, I was impressed by the unquestionable devotion and sense of accountability towards Hinduism and to learning more about its practices: “This is our religion. If we don't learn it, then who will?” Participants and facilitators alike express how the camp has helped build their character in terms of discipline, punctuality, collaborative nature and the confidence to speak in public.

Facilitators speak passionately about giving back to Hindu society. All attended the camp themselves as teenagers, to great benefit, and feel the need to dedicate their services to ensure that the current participants enjoy similar benefits.

Participants' parents are also very supportive about sending their children to this camp. They feel that the camps strengthen their family bonds and help their children become more knowledgeable in spiritual practices.

Vignes Tamilanban, 28, Facilitator

Vignes comes from Kedah, Malaysia and currently works as a pastry chef in the hotel industry. He has been active in the DLS from a young age. His father, a long-term, ardent devotee of Swami Sivananda, earned the



DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY MALAYSIA

“Guru Seva Ratna,” a title bestowed upon a select few devotees who have dedicated a lifetime of service to Gurudev. Vignes considers himself privileged to be born into such a family. Of Swami Sivananda he says, “He is God-like, and has given me a lot of knowledge on Hinduism.”

In his teens, as a member of the Sungai Kangan DLS branch in Kedah, he attended camp for about five years during school holidays. Upon completing his studies, he became involved at the DLS headquarters at Batu Caves and became a camp facilitator.

The camp is held during the winter holidays, one of the busiest times of year for a

pastry chef. Working day and night, he rushes off to camp, despite a lack of rest and sleep, to serve as facilitator. “My bond with the ashram drives me to do so. The ashram is like a second home to me. Spending time here helps me connect to spirituality. When I was young, someone else sacrificed their time and energy to organize these camps for us. It was hugely beneficial for me, and it's time I paid it forward. These opportunities for seva don't come often. The camps are only held once or twice a year.”

Vignes believes the camp plays a huge role in helping participants

become more spiritual, rather than only being religious. He feels that though most Malaysian youth do worship in temples, they basically think of Hinduism in terms of culture, celebration and tradition. By attending satsangs, reading books and connecting with swamis and satgurus, they can come to understand the depth of Hinduism. This is something that the teenagers are exposed to at camp.

Vignes stated that the impact of the camp is not immediate, but it sets something in motion. He says even the opportunity to step into the ashram is a blessing for a good life, and “The mark of a successful camp is the



ability to clearly convey the message to even five out of the 28 who attend it."

Durgambigai, 21, Facilitator

Durgambigai was born and raised in Kuala Lumpur and has been involved with the DLS since childhood. Her father was an ardent devotee of Swami Sivananda, and she often accompanied him to prayer meetings and bhajan sessions at the ashram. She started attending camp at the age of 12. "At that time I was a very shy person. The first time I had to speak in front of a crowd, I almost cried. Swami Mumukshuji gently encouraged me, and I told myself I could do it. I gradually became more confident and started leading bhajan and devaram sessions. Eventually, I led a workshop session on self-confidence." She has been a facilitator for four years.

Durgambigai serves at the youth camp in order to give back what she has gained during her time as a participant—and because she loves being a facilitator. "I enjoy answering questions from students, and this helps me expand my knowledge as well."

Durgambigai feels that the youth in Malaysia are extremely unknowledgeable about Hinduism and its practices. She holds the parents responsible. "Many parents do not seem to care and are not interested in their children's religious upbringing. This could be because parents themselves do not know about religious practices." She believes the camp is a good avenue for such an education, and thinks the talks could be made even more interactive and fun. But she admits, "We can only show the youth the way. Whether they follow is up to them."

Linkeswar, 16, Returning Participant

Linkeswar is excited about being interviewed for HINDUISM TODAY. His family are long-time subscribers, and he is glad the world will read about the DLS youth camp.

Linkeswar is from Kuala Lumpur and was born and brought up in a religious environment. His family performs daily rituals such as their morning prayers, *surya* (sun) mantra and *bhojana* mantra. He says performing rituals together as a family creates a strong bond and helps them function better as a unit. "It creates a positive vibration at home and makes it a comfortable place to live in."

Linkeswar's father and cousins attended DLS camp as youngsters, and he started at the age of 12. Understanding Hinduism is important to him, and he says the teachings at camp have helped him learn about his life purpose, karma, dharma and moksha, liberation from the cycle of birth and death, which he learned can only be attained by adhering to certain religious practices. He says it is crucial that every Hindu know their religion well and take responsibility for spreading it. "It is really important to know, or else I will be ignorant. I'd like to help my religion grow because it inspires and motivates me."

Linkeswar speaks knowledgeably about Sadhana Chatustaya. He plans to gradually put the teachings into practice when he gets home, prioritizing the areas he needs to strengthen most: "The prayers and mantras, and controlling my mind. Mastering my mind will help me focus better on my studies. The camp reminds me of inner areas I have to work on."

Hindus in Asia are in a sad state, he says.

"All teenagers must attend these camps to learn the spiritual practices of Hinduism and help our people improve."

Laveeniah, 15, Returning Participant

Laveeniah lives in Rawang, Malaysia, and is actively involved in the Rawang DLS branch, where she got the invitation to attend this camp. This is her fourth time at camp, and she loves it. Her cousin, sister and brother are attending with her. Laveeniah said she learned the proper way of performing spiritual practices at previous camps, and currently embraces 10 minutes of worship at home every Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, with the chanting of *japa*, mantras and singing bhajans. She says her prayers have helped her perform well in her exams.

Laveeniah says the camp has been her source of knowledge on Hinduism and its spiritual practices, which have been really beneficial to her. "Swami Brahmajnanananda has taught me a lot about Hinduism. For example, we should rise and pray each morning, and always shower before prayers. We should also chant mantras and do *japa*."

Apart from learning about Hinduism and making new friends, she says "This camp allows me to become well versed in Hinduism. I can then teach those who are unfamiliar with the religion. Next year is my last year as a participant, and I believe I will be very well versed by then. This camp has been very beneficial, rather than me idling my time away at home."

She does feel there should be more teaching about God and Gods. "Given a chance, I will definitely come back again."

Beginning a tradition: (far left) Swami Saravanabhavananda conducting a morning yoga session; (right) Participants involved in a team-building exercise; youth perform karma yoga by cleaning the washrooms

Nilesh Shanmugam, 16, Returning Participant

Nilesh, from Penang, Malaysia, was introduced to the camp by his uncle, Swami Brahmajnanananda. This is his second time at the camp. "I didn't know much about my religion when I came here, but now I know the importance of adhering to a vegetarian diet and the reason for the numerous Gods, and I can chant some mantras, for example the *bhojana* and gratitude mantra for food, which I have incorporated into my daily spiritual practice. My mantra pronunciation has improved, too. I now pray three times a day, unless I am out of the house. Praying and chanting mantras have helped me become more focused on my studies."

Nilesh is the only Hindu boy at his school, and his schoolmates often ask about Hindu practices. This camp has not only given him new Hindu friends, it has empowered him to answer the questions of non-Hindus. Further, he says it has tremendously helped him develop and refine his behavior and character. "When I was here at 13, I realized that I had a lot of disciplinary problems. By the time I returned home, I was a lot more disciplined. I put to practice my knowledge from the camp. I have seen positive changes in myself." He says the camp surprised him. "I thought it was going to be a waste and we wouldn't learn much about our religion. But I've learned a lot. The camp is also very balanced. There were lots of games; I had a lot of fun. Many of my friends do not know much about religion. I think this camp is a great place to start."

Girija, 13, New Participant

Girija lives in the USA and is visiting relations in Malaysia. Her mother is Malaysian and her father is American. She decided to attend the camp to learn more about Hinduism, which she considers to be her culture. She also felt that attending the camp would affect her positively.

"This camp is better than any camp I've attended in the US," she says. "Those were pretty disorganized. I thought this camp would be in the jungle, with barely any facilities and few teachers, and it would be old-fashioned and unfun. But it is very neat and clean. The facilities are good, with lots of bathrooms and toilets—you don't have to wait in line. The teachers are nice. Some of them use comedy to help the students relax and listen, while others are serious. But all of



them teach really well so you can remember. More than any of my other learning experiences, these teachers want to make sure you understand what you're learning. They took our phones away on the first day, and I hardly noticed it. I think it's actually a really good thing to do."

Girija wants to learn more about Hinduism, as her knowledge is limited. Her mother is quite busy, and her father doesn't know much about Hindu beliefs and practices, though he wants to know more. When she gets home, she will teach her father what she has learned. At home she tries to pray every morning, and she chants mantras before meals. "When I pray before I eat, the food tastes better."

Girija feels that such camps are extremely important for younger people to learn about Hinduism, so they can carry on and practice the Hindu tradition even when the elders have passed away. In addition, camps like these instill positive values in attendees and keep them away from alcohol and drugs. She says the talk on drug use was excellent because of how the speaker elaborated on the consequences. "At camps in the US where they've talked about drugs, they only spoke about the effects on the drug user. Here, they

also explained how drug use would affect other people in your life."

She hopes future camps will incorporate more basic topics. "This camp is for people who know Hinduism. I don't, really. I'd like to know more about the Gods and their functions. My school's social studies program does not teach anything about comparative religion, and we have no prayer hall. Social studies tells us where a religion came from but doesn't really tell you about the religion. I think this experience will make me become more spiritual, stable and enlightened. I would like to attend again and again."

Mailvannan, 14, New Participant

Mailvannan comes from Ipoh, Malaysia, and actively participates in the DLS branch there. This is his first time at the camp. He hadn't wanted to attend, as his experiences at other camps had been boring. But his mother convinced him to attend. Mailvannan describes himself as a religious person. "I'm the one who prays at home. I sing at least three devarams and chant mantras nine times because my *Ishta Devata* is Lord Siva. Every time there's a special puja for Swami Sivananda, Swamiji invites me to the DLS center

and I sing bhajans and chant Swami Sivana-nda mantras.”

He says chanting mantras has helped him control and focus his mind and feelings and shape his character. “I used to be arrogant and often spoke rudely to my mother. Now I have better self-control and am less arrogant, because I know this body is impermanent.”

On the first day, he wished he hadn’t come: “There were no activities except chanting mantras, singing bhajans and listening to speeches.” But after that, the DLS camp caught him by surprise: “I realized this was going to be very unique and interesting. There were lots of fun activities.”

Mailvannan’s attitudes changed tremendously at camp. “Doing karma yoga, which involved cleaning up areas of the ashram, made me realize the importance of keeping things clean for positive energy to flow in. At home, it is usually my mother who does this. From now on, I will clean up my room by myself.” He knows it will take time to put into practice everything he learned at camp. He intends to prioritize improving his behavior, such as respecting his parents and being nicer to his younger brother.

These camps are filling a vital need in Malaysia, Mailvannan affirms. “Most Malaysian youth are not interested in spirituality because their parents are too busy making money in this modern-day living. They place no importance on spiritual life, so the youth are left in the dark with no proper guidance. These days especially, youth need to know more about religion, as it is easy for them to stray away. By learning about spirituality, they become more connected to God and less likely to stray.”

Mailvannan wants to attend camp again next year: the facilitators were friendly, the games were exciting and the talks by swamis were funny and interesting. “In fact, I plan to become a facilitator in coming years.”

Sri Swami Swayamjayananda

Swami Swayamjayananda has been president of DLS Malaysia for the past five years. Initially he volunteered his medical services at the Sivananda Clinic on weekends. Reading Swami Sivananda’s books fanned his interest in monastic life, and in 2011 he quit his career and entered the sannyasa order.

Swamiji believes Hinduism is ingrained in all Hindu homes in Malaysia in one form or another. “If you look at any Hindu home, there is always an altar, be it in a small corner of the home. This is the tradition. I feel that Hindus look to God when in need. If you don’t go to God in times of distress, who else can you go to? This basic need ensures the eternal existence of Hinduism. It will never be washed out. The most important message I would like to carry across is that every Hindu must perform some form of spiritual practice.”



Swamiji also strongly feels it is the parents’ responsibility to introduce children to the spiritual path. “We have to be directly involved in our spiritual growth. Until the parents do something about this, the children will never follow.”

Swamiji emphasizes the importance of inculcating human values and developing the character of children, in tandem with religious practice. “This is something that needs to be incorporated from early childhood. For example, even if a family employs a maid, the children need to be taught to respect the maid.” He maintains that performing prayers is one of the only ways children can be guided along the correct path, as parents have restricted time with their children due to the urban lifestyle most families lead these days. “All too often, parents are at work 10 to 12 hours of their day. Personal prayers will certainly help children become better people.”

Swamiji strongly urges vegetarianism in spiritual practice and opposes animal sacrifice. “Vegetarianism leads to a *sattvik* (pure,

peaceful) mind. According to the *Upanishads*, the most nutritious part of the food goes to the mind, as the mind needs it to function. Meat consumption is human desire, and this can be curbed by the control of the mind.” He speaks of the importance of having a guru. “Whichever guru that is most acceptable to your individuality, you should have. Most of us do not know where to start in our spiritual lives. I think this is a major concern, especially for youth. The *Vedas* and *Agamas* are very complex texts, which can only be understood if you study them deeply. Gurus are able to give people the *Vedas* in a special simplified form.

Swamiji stresses the importance of parental attitudes towards the camps: “Parents should not send their children to the camps with the thought of simply getting time off for themselves. They should explain to their children the reasons for being sent here and the positive things they will learn.”

He says many parents fear that the child might end up becoming a monk if they spend

Lasting impressions: (clockwise from left) Vikramithan, Manush and others immersed in the bhajan session; a team prepare for their talent show performance; students share a humorous moment during a session with camp facilitators

time at the monastery. “You should never look at it like that. Destiny is something which you and I cannot change. We do not push anybody here towards becoming a monk.” Swamiji strongly affirms that becoming religious can help you excel in either path, householder or sannyas path, and that many people do not understand these two paths in Hinduism.

Swamiji stresses the importance of all youth respecting and honoring the Hindu tradition. Youth need to be able to differentiate between religious rites, spiritual teachings, traditions and customs. Teaching these to children makes a great difference.

In the future, Swamiji says, the DLS aims “to coordinate and continue the work started by our founders, and possibly, even raise the standards and increase the number of spiritual camps at DLS.”

Swami Brahmajnanananda

Swami Brahmajnanananda has been in the DLS since 1992. He was initiated into the sannyasa order in 2014 at DLS Rishikesh on a Mahasivaratri day. Trained in Vedantic and Sanskrit studies, he currently teaches Sanskrit and Vedanta in DLS sub-branches around Malaysia. Swamiji also gives public talks when requested and organizes the annual youth camp and adults’ basic Vedanta camp twice a year.

Swamiji was asked about Malaysian youths’ views and the priorities they place on Hindu beliefs and practices. “That is a difficult question to answer. Malaysian youngsters have

different ideologies about religion. Some do practice, yes, but a majority feel that this isn’t the age for them to be religious. They’d rather spend their teenage years focusing on secular education; they regard religion as something meant for adults or older people.”

However, Swamiji knows some Malaysian youth who perform Hindu religious practices faithfully. These are youth who come from strongly religious families. But another group of youth are involved in practices of a lower nature, such as animal sacrifice in temples. He attributes this to a lack of real knowledge about religion. “Parents lament that there was no one to teach them. However, there are many organizations who are willing to conduct religious classes.”

Swamiji emphasizes the importance of developing religious knowledge. “Without that, we can’t have good character. Good character comes under dharma. Without the right dharma, we can’t be good human beings. The duty of DLS, as a spiritual organization, is to give children religious knowledge, however possible.”

Swamiji has seen participants benefit tremendously from the youth camps, and he hopes they return to help at the ashram. Many attendees are now doing really well and have become professionals. Some are also conducting religious classes.

Swamiji explains the innovations he has introduced in the camp, such as life-skills and behavior-management workshops: “We can’t just teach them, for example, that they need to pray every day, the mantras and the mudras. We also need to teach them about principles they can apply in their daily life. Many people view religion as a separate aspect of life, failing to understand that religion is all-encompassing. It includes ourselves, God and the world. We need to realize this fact.”

Conclusion

The DLS Malaysia youth camp provides tremendous opportunities for Hindu teens to understand and connect with their religion, and most importantly, give them pride in their spiritual origins. The organizers, DLS monks themselves, work tirelessly and go to great lengths to provide a memorable experience to all participants. Attending the camp also enables teenagers to meet other Hindu youths of similar upbringings. This is something every participant looked forward to in the camp. We thank the Divine Life Society Malaysia for this amazing seva in continuously educating teenagers in Malaysia about the Hindu religion.



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Do Hindus Have a Milk Problem?

On behalf of cows everywhere, an activist offers ways we can improve the care of these gentle creatures, and be models for their protection

BY PANSHULA GANESHAN

MANY THOUSANDS OF HINDUS EVERY DAY WILL STOP BY A grocery store and buy commercial milk for offering to a Deity—a type of sacrifice and cultural remembrance with deep ties to Vedic Indian culture.

I, too, happily participated in this venerable practice until my eyes were opened to the reality of commercial dairy farming. That was at least fifteen years ago. The Internet made finding this information easy. When I approached a temple board member with my concern about the ethics involved in offering the Deity commercial milk, I was basically ignored. The board member happened to be an environmental engineer. He actually had a different concern: that there was so much milk going down the drain in the temple sanctums that it might create an environmental hazard. There was an obvious disconnect. The priority should be on the cow. I did discover, however, a new initiative for offering organic milk soon after.

Then I witnessed a debacle where eggnog was accidentally poured over the Sivalingam in the temple. The priest didn't realize it until the ritual abhishekam was finished, at which time he started to clean up and saw the empty eggnog carton. He became furious and scolded the attending devotees. Everyone felt embarrassed and, I assume, somewhat ashamed. Eggs are regarded as impure and harmful, thus they are not to be offered. The auspiciousness of the moment was palpably diminished. Again, there was a disconnect. No one could see the milk itself was *himsa*—harmful.



SHUTTERSTOCK

But how could it not be? Just a few basic facts about commercial dairy farming will suffice, and this is without a tinge of fanaticism, hysteria or overstatement. Dairy cows are commodities, not only for their milk, but also for their meat. In fact, many vegans equate milk with meat because once the milk producing capacity of cows diminishes (typically a quarter of their natural lifespan), they are sold for slaughter. Cows only produce milk after pregnancy, and so they are kept near constantly gravid through artificial insemination. New-born calves are immediately removed from their mothers so a bond is not formed. Bull calves are sold as veal or allowed to grow bigger, only later to be sold as hamburger meat. Though practices vary, it is common to inject cows with antibiotics and growth hormones to increase milk production, and they are frequently confined in concrete stalls for insufferably long hours.

Mahatma Gandhi once wrote that “the cow is a poem of pity.” He was right. There are far worse things that happen to cows that I have spared the reader. You can do your own research. To say the least, commercial dairy cows do not lead natural lives, even if they are allowed to graze for part of the day.

I haven't even invoked the considerable pollution and other negative environmental impacts of commercial dairy farming—not owing to the gentle cow herself, but because of the massive scale of the industry.

Let there be no mistake, commercial milk is fraught, particularly if you're a Hindu living outside of India, and even more so if the milk is being offered for worship. It is the cow that is being sacrificed, and perhaps we—the worshipful devotees—along with it, owing to our ignorance. We should remember that the Divinity we seek to worship in the temple is also in the cow.

What are the alternatives? How about ahimsa milk? Though few in number at this point, there are slaughter-free dairy farms in India, UK and the US. More are bound to pop up. The idea behind ahimsa milk is humane care of the cow throughout its life. According to ahimsamilk.org—the website for a British NGO slaughter-free dairy—no bull, cow or calf is slaughtered. Calves are allowed to stay with their mothers and suckle. There is no artificial insemination. They are milked by hand and graze freely on organic pasture, even after their productive years are over. These are commonalities among all the ahimsa milk operations I've discovered. Ahimsa ghee is also available on Amazon.

There are obvious limitations to the scalability of such benign operations; and to be financially sustainable, the cost of the



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milk is high. But for the sake of ahimsa, these issues come with the territory. If milk is seen as an absolute necessity for worship and/or personal consumption, extra attention should be paid to the process of production and care of the cow. This is dharma.

A reduction in the amount of milk offered is another responsible step. Buying grass-fed organic milk helps, although still complicit with the worst harms of the commercial industry.

But why not get creative? What we sacrifice can be turned into a true sadhana. We can grow our own flowers with a deep sense of love and offer them instead of milk from exploited cows. We can offer organic juices, fruits and sacred plants which are grown with respect to the environment. Feeling more ambitious? Create a GoFundMe campaign to start or sponsor your community's own ahimsa dairy, or support the ones already created. The possibilities are truly inspiring.

My Guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, in restating the dharma for Hindus of the twenty-first century, did not neglect to instruct his devotees to avoid products of exploited species. He said so in the spirit of ahimsa. Though he did not specify it himself, the modern dairy cow is the epitome of exploited species.

Mahatma Gandhi famously reflected, “Cow protection to me is one of the most wonderful phenomena in human evolution. It takes the human being beyond this species. The cow to me means the entire sub-human world. Man through the cow is enjoined to realize his identity with all that lives.” This quote highlights that even contemplating the problematic nature of commercial dairy could be spiritualizing.

Vamadeva Shastri stated emphatically that “a true yogi should be among those in the forefront working for protection of animals and protection of the Earth” (*Yoga & Ayurveda*, 176). As we confront the

India honors the gentle cow: During the Go Puja at the Golden Temple in Vellore, devotees walk around a cow which has been decorated with flowers, sandalwood paste and kumkum. In India, it is illegal to slaughter a cow, and even today most cows forage freely.

work to be done, we should take the messages of these great souls to heart.

The offering of milk for worship is still a potentially meaningful cultural and ritualistic action, so I am not suggesting it be stopped altogether. Rather, let us take extra measures to ensure our sacrificial actions are based in compassion and nonviolence. At least take positive steps to reduce the harm. Devotees and temple management committees should give careful consideration to this ethical dilemma. Leadership is sorely needed. Everyone can contribute to this positive and compassionate cause.

Those wanting to explore this issue further can follow these links to ahimsa-based dairy products and producers:

Ahimsaproducts.com
ahimsamilk.org
VedicA2ghee.com
Gitanagari.org

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Let's Talk about Christian Persecution

Missionaries charge Hindus with persecution; the reality is the opposite

BY MARIA WIRTH

LIES ARE OFTEN DISGUISED AS SURVEYS. OPEN Doors, a Christian organization with a global reach, recently issued its yearly ranking of the persecution by nations of Christians worldwide. People reading this list will now "know" that the level of persecution of Christians is extremely high in India, higher than in Syria or Nigeria. The British Foreign Secretary, Jeremy Hunt, endorsed the list with a statement in January, 2019: "People of all faiths and none should have the freedom to believe what they choose, but that is clearly not the case across too much of the world."

But there is no other country where members of other religions are as safe as in India! Jews gratefully acknowledge that India is the one country where they were never persecuted. Syrian Christians, under their leader Thomas of Cana, were given refuge in the 4th century. Parsis came in the 10th century to escape the Muslim invaders in Persia. And in 1959, some 100,000 Tibetan Buddhists fled over high Himalayan mountains and found shelter in India. Yet now the British Foreign Secretary has endorsed the ranking of India in the "extreme level," at number 10 among 50 countries.

Of course, nobody should be persecuted for their faith. Yet why is there persecution? Who *would* persecute others for their faith? Only those whose ideology considers other faiths unacceptable. Three main ideologies—communism, Christianity and Islam—are known for not only persecuting, but killing dissenting voices in the millions. Communism wants to stamp out religion, as it considers it as a disease. Radical Islam wants to obliterate all other faiths except itself, and evangelical Christianity has the same goal. Open Door's list clearly propagates falsehood in the name of this agenda.

Most of the countries which top Open Door's World Watch 2019 list may indeed deserve their rank of persecuting Christians. Communist North Korea ranks number one. Of the next 16, all are Muslim-majority countries, with one exception: Hindu-majority India, which ranks number ten.

Why is India ranked as a country where Christians are persecuted? Is there an agenda to obfuscate and muddle the issue? Hinduism does not condemn other faiths as wrong and does not persecute others. It has the most liberal world view possible. Everyone can seek their own connection to the source of their being.

But was there not a young American missionary killed by tribals in the Andaman Islands recently? Is this not persecution? Yes, he was killed. The Sentinelese tribe is cut off from civilization and hostile, and nobody is allowed to go to their island. Yet he went nevertheless, feeling called to bring the Gospel to them, as if they were in need of it. He was warned of the danger, but apparently felt possible martyrdom was worth the risk.

This cannot possibly be called persecution of Christians. It was a defense against an unwanted intruder by tribals who earlier had bad experiences under the British colonial rule. These villagers have every right to protest against their Gods being called devils and be-



ing pestered to leave their ancient tradition. He crossed decent human behavior by not respecting others' views—views that are not harmful to anyone. Unfortunately, Christian missionaries are notorious for crossing decent human behavior and for putting out misleading reports about what actually happened.

The tactic can encompass even outright fake news. For example, alarmed friends sent me this message they received in November, 2018, and asked if there was any truth to it:

"SAD NEWS: Pray for the Church in India. Last night 20 churches were burnt down. And tonight more than 200 churches in the Olisabang province are meant to be destroyed. They want to kill 200 missionaries in the next 24 hours. All Christians hide in villages... Send this message to all Christians whom you know the world over. Pray to God that He has mercy for our brothers and sisters in India. Please pray for the 22 Christian missionary families who have been condemned to be executed. When you receive this message, pass it on urgently to other people! With love. Joyce Meyer"

A Google search shows this message has circulated since 2010 and is a hoax. Even the province doesn't exist. Would a persecuted religious group dare to spread such blatant, outrageous lies? Would it dare to have a detailed plan like the Joshua Project does to convert the maximum number of Hindus? Who is actually persecuting whom? Yet instead of condemning the devious agenda of the missionaries, the world accuses India of persecuting Christians.

Why? The West knows they cannot bully Islamic countries. But Western-oriented Indians willingly and falsely accuse Hindus of persecuting Christians. In this way, Hindus and India get a bad image and meanwhile generate media sympathy plus monetary support.

The mainstream media has tremendous power to shape opinions. Churches have tremendous financial and political clout. Both cooperate to portray India and Hindus as intolerant of other religions—contrary to facts. Incidentally, Pakistan (number five on the list) benefits from the global lack of global good will toward India.

No European or American country is listed among the 50 top countries where Christians are persecuted. But was there not a shooting in a church in the USA? Were Christian refugees in Europe not attacked by Muslim migrants? Are those French, German and English citizens, who were randomly stabbed or blown up in terror attacks, not targeted for their faith—for not being Muslim? Does this not count as persecution?

In a tweet, I suggested to the British foreign secretary a slight change in his comment. Instead of "Nobody should be persecuted FOR his faith," I suggested, "Nobody should be persecuted BY a faith." Will he understand?

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Hindu Heritage Endowment

How a Marital Bypass Trust May Save Thousands in Taxes

Dhaval and Radha's attorney warned them to protect their \$5 million estate with a marital bypass trust. "What's a marital bypass trust?" Radha asked during their first visit to his office.

"It's the same as a credit shelter trust or an A-B Trust." "Yes, but what is it and what does it do?"

"Look at Dhaval," the attorney said, gesturing toward her husband. "Imagine him carrying a sack marked '\$2 million' over his shoulder. Dhaval dies. Not only he passes from this life, but so does that \$2 million, unless you have a marital bypass trust."

"But I thought on the death of the first spouse the surviving spouse got everything," Dhaval said. "That's true," the attorney answered. "And if the surviving spouse is a US citizen, he or she gets everything free of federal estate tax. But that \$2 million is not \$2 million in cash or property; it's a \$2 million exclusion from estate tax."

"But why do we need estate tax protection if everything passes to the surviving spouse tax-free?" Radha asked, wondering now why all this was so complicated.

"Because the day of reckoning has only been postponed, not eliminated," the attorney explained.

"On the death of the second spouse, the estate becomes vulnerable to estate tax. Without a marital bypass trust, you will have lost one-half of the estate tax protection you have as a married couple."

"So what should we do?" Dhaval asked. He had begun to tally in his mind the tax on \$2 million of their estate that could be transferred tax-free.

"Here's what I propose," the attorney offered, looking up from his yellow legal pad where he had roughed out the \$800,000-plus tax savings a marital bypass trust would provide. "I'll write your estate plan so that the surviving spouse may either take the entire estate directly or choose to place part of the estate into a marital bypass trust. The choice will be yours, and you can make it depending on the size of your estate at that time and the current laws."

"Since I have coronary artery disease, the bypass trust will be well named," Dhaval quipped. "Yes," the attorney mumbled with a weak smile.

"Puns aside, the bypass trust will eventually pass to your children, but in the meantime the trust assets are invested exclusively for the surviving spouse who receives all the income and can invade principal if his or her health, education or welfare is at stake."

Leaning toward the couple for emphasis, he added: "The fact that the surviving spouse does not directly own what's in the marital bypass trust preserves the decedent's \$2 million exclusion from estate tax, or whatever that exclusion is at time of death."

"But what if the trust grows beyond exclusion amount?" Dhaval asked. "It doesn't matter. The full amount in the trust, whatever it ends up being, is completely protected."

Leaving the office, Dhaval and Radha felt slightly woozy. Why, they wondered, did so much of their children's inheritance depend on such obscure points of law? Still, it was helpful to have such sophisticated options.



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Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment	Ellen Grace O-Brian	299.00	Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment		
Anonymous	Aryaman Pothulu	299.00	Mano Navaratnarajah	75.00	
Roshan Harilela	Gagan Prakash	299.00	Nuckiren Pyeneeandee	43.33	
Gunasekaran Kandasamy	Ajay Pulijala	299.00	Krishanth Rajasooriyar	80.00	
Mira Das & R. Mahalingam	Chandar Ramrakha	299.00	Total	198.33	
Gayatri Rajan	Niranjan Sandesara	299.00			
Chamundi Sabanathan	Valli Sanmugalingam	299.00	Hinduism Today Production Fund		
Hitesvara Saravan	Manickam Shanmugam	299.00	Ron & Jennifer Burke	100.00	
Jai Sivakumara	Sai Singh	120.00	Vinoda Caremben	5.88	
Riorita Tkatchenko	Sanjay Singh	299.00	Murugan Temple Devotees	500.00	
Keith Wallach	Jai Sivakumara	499.00	Amrit & Chandra Prabha Duneja	110.00	
Other Donations	Lakshana Chetana Sivananda	299.00	Prabhakar C Ghosh	90.00	
Total	Kedarnathan Subramanian	190.00	Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	4.33	
	Total	8,477.99	Rajendra Giri	108.00	
			Ian Johnson	20.00	
Iraivan Temple Endowment	Gurudeva's Trilogy Distribution Fund		Anonymous	1421.00	
Frank Burkhardt	Vel Mahalingum	11.44	Rajagopal Krishnan	20.00	
Amey Surendra Gangal	Manogaran Mardemootoo	29.41	Kulagan Moonesawmy	11.44	
Anonymous	Total	40.85	Tara & Arvind Patel	51.00	
Other Donations			Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01	
Total			Sakuntalai Periasamy	69.87	
	Kailasa Peedam Gift Fund		Nuckiren Pyeneeandee	43.33	
	Vel Mahalingum	5.88	Gayatri Rajan	100.00	
			Chamundi Sabanathan	901.00	
Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund	Hindu of the Year Fund		Aran Sambandar	108.00	
Thirujnanam Arnassalon	Rajendra Giri	151.00	P. Ravi Sarma	1,001.00	
Sanyasi Ganta			Total	4,714.86	
Anil Kumar					
Saroja Devi Manickam	Kadavul Nataraja Ardra Abhishekam Endowment		Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund		
Ashwini Maureemootoo	Anonymous	54.00	Benevity	674.00	
Saroja Maureemootoo	Gowri Nadason	129.48	Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	4.33	
Jogendra Moorooogen	Sakuntalai Periasamy	34.93	Roshan Harilela	375.00	
Vidyadevi Moorooogen	Shamala Raman	34.93	Gunasekaran Kandasamy	143.92	
Subramaniam Pennathur	Kanesanathan &		Chamundi Sabanathan	78.75	
Manishankar Sagum	Kanta Devi Sabapathipillai	75.00	Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00	
Muthukumar Shanmugam	Parimala Selvaraj	93.00	Total	1,306.00	
Jai Sivakumara	Total	421.34			
Total			Hindu Education Endowment		
	Kauai Aadheenam Matavasi Medical Fund		Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund	100.00	
Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund	Shyamadeva Dandapani	36.00	Anonymous	300.00	
Yulia Machalaba	Mira Das & R. Mahalingam	250.00	Total	400.00	
Anonymous	Kulagan Moonesawmy	14.38			
Pratul & Meena Ajmera	Gowri Nadason	129.49	Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund		
Anil Amuluru	Ram Ramamoorthy	225.00	Mano Navaratnarajah	225.00	
Chandrasegaran Arnasalon	Aran Sambandar	108.00			
Thirujnanam Arnassalon	Vayudeva Varadan	54.00	Spiritual Park of Mauritius Endowment		
Hemakheshaa Naatha Batumallah	Other Donations	4,800.00	Anil Kumar	27.00	
Mekaladeva Batumallah	Total	5,616.87			
Gunavadee Caremben			Positive Discipline Endowment		
Somasoundarum Caremben	Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar Gurukulam		Vinaya Alahan	66.00	
Sukanta Caremben	Anonymous	324.00			
Shiva Chandrasekaran			Tirumular Sannidhi Preservation Fund		
Eric Elbers			Shyamadeva Dandapani	12.00	
Tarakini Gunasegaran	Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment		Srinivas R. Madaboosi	100.00	
Himanshu Jani	Rajendra Giri	151.00	Total	112.00	
Vigneswaran Kandiah					
Shoba Khajuri	Sri Subramuniya Ashram Scholarship Fund		Hindu Heritage Endowment Administrative Fund		
Juhivaasana Koothan	Rajendra Giri	151.00	Sheth Family Trust - Schwab Charitable Fund	251.00	
Anil Kumar	Anonymous	324.00			
Achyut Kute	Total	475.00			
Gregg Lien	Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund				
Shren Moodley	Anil Ananda Badhwar	20.00	Murugan Temple of North America Pillaiyar Shrine Fund		
Bhaveshan Moorghen	Anonymous	125.00	Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00	
Shanda Kumaran Moorghen	Total	145.00	Sayanthan & Anupama Sivanathan	15.00	
Udeyadeva Moorghen			Total	165.00	
Krishna Murthy					
Shanmugam Muthukumar					
Chandraiya & Savitri Narayan					

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Thank You Bodhinatha Fund		Himalayan Academy Book Distribution Fund		Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment	
Anil Ananda Badhwar	21.04	Shyamadeva Dandapani	36.00	Anonymous	24.15
Amarnath & Latha Devarmanai	324.00	Nrusimhayya Manda	30.00	Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	4.33
Brintha Devi	5.55	Total	66.00	Srinivas R. Madaboosi	150.00
Timur Izmaylov	10.00			Natraj Narayanswami	44.00
Anonymous	7,684.75	Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund		Krishanth Rajasooriyar	80.00
Gunasekaran Kandasamy	252.10	Sanyasi Ganta	501.00	Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan	150.00
Mano Navaratnarajah	150.00	Anonymous	33.00	Arunasalam Vathavooran	75.00
Nuckiren Pyeneeandee	43.33	Total	534.00	Total	527.48
Kishore & Suhasini Racherla	153.00				
Sumathi Raja	450.00	Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment		Jaffna Kannathiddy Kali Kovil Endowment	
Tristan Ramirez	33.00	Anonymous	1,312.71	Nigel Subramaniam Siva	500.00
Aran Sambandar	162.00	Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01		
Hridaya Sivalingam	20.00	Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan	150.00	Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund	
Vignesh Sukumaran	216.00	Poobarlene Soobramanien	86.64	Anil Kumar	27.00
Anba Dayananden Valayten	11.26	Total	1,599.36		
Vayudeva Varadan	63.00			Digital Dharma Endowment	
Michael Wasylkiw	648.00	Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund		Anonymous	499.15
Total	10,247.03	Vayudeva Varadan	54.00	Rajendra Giri	108.00
				Chamundi Sabanathan	901.00
Udayan Care Endowment Fund		India Hindu Temple Cleaning Fund		Sornavanita Sutherland	205.47
Tamnash J. Gupta	108.00	Shyamadeva Dandapani	12.00	Total	1,713.62
		Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	4.33		
Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund		Srinivas R. Madaboosi	100.00	Insurance Premiums	
Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00	Manogaran Mardemootoo	29.41	Mrunal Patel	3,003.00
		Kulagan Moonesawmy	11.60		
Swami Vipulananta Children's Home Endowment		Krishanth Rajasooriyar	80.00	Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment	
Canaganayagam Kugendra	60.00	Total	237.34	Other Donations	600.00
		Anantha Ladies Home Endowment			
Hindu Literature Fund		Arany Shanmugalingam	101.00		
Bhupendra & Subha Mistry	201.00	Sayanthan & Anupama Sivanathan	30.00	Total Contributions	\$185,027.08
John & Abha Wiersba	153.00	Total	131.00		
Total	354.00			Funds at Market Value, Mar 31, 2019	
Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund				Total Endowment Funds	\$16,558,906.83
Rajagopal Krishnan	40.00				
				Grand Total	\$16,558,906.83

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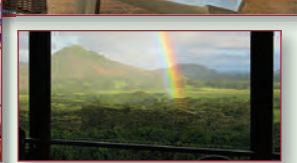
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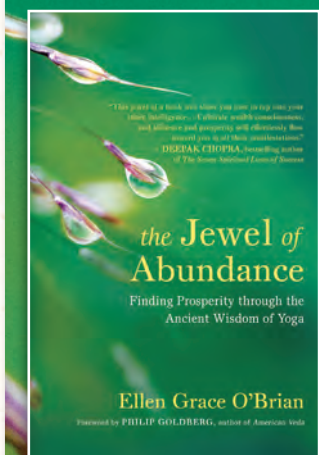
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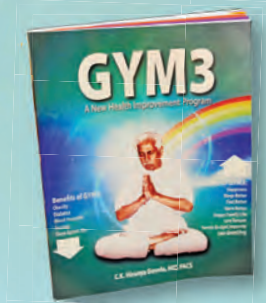
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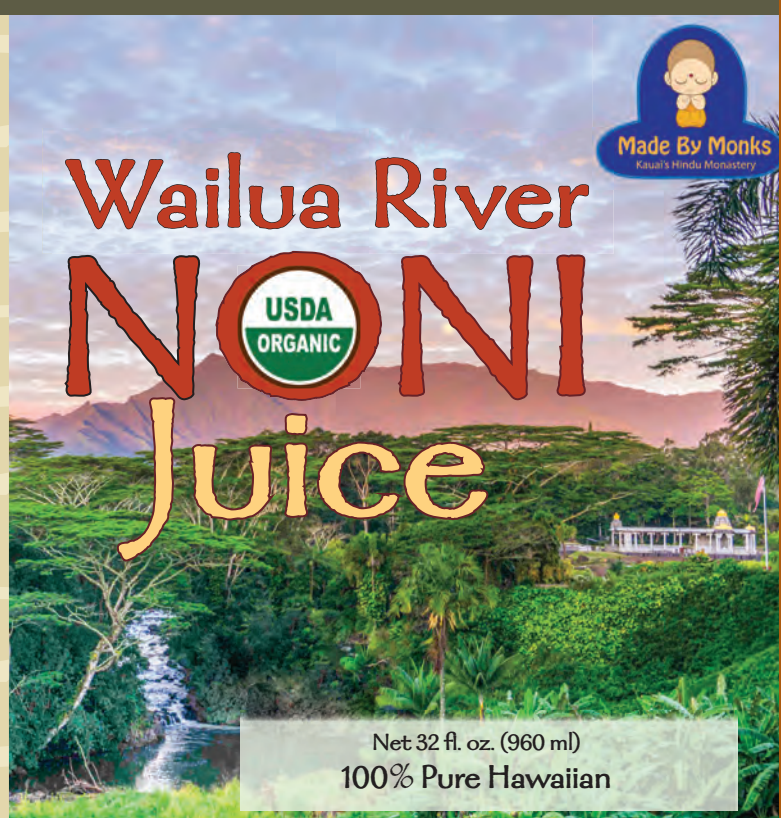
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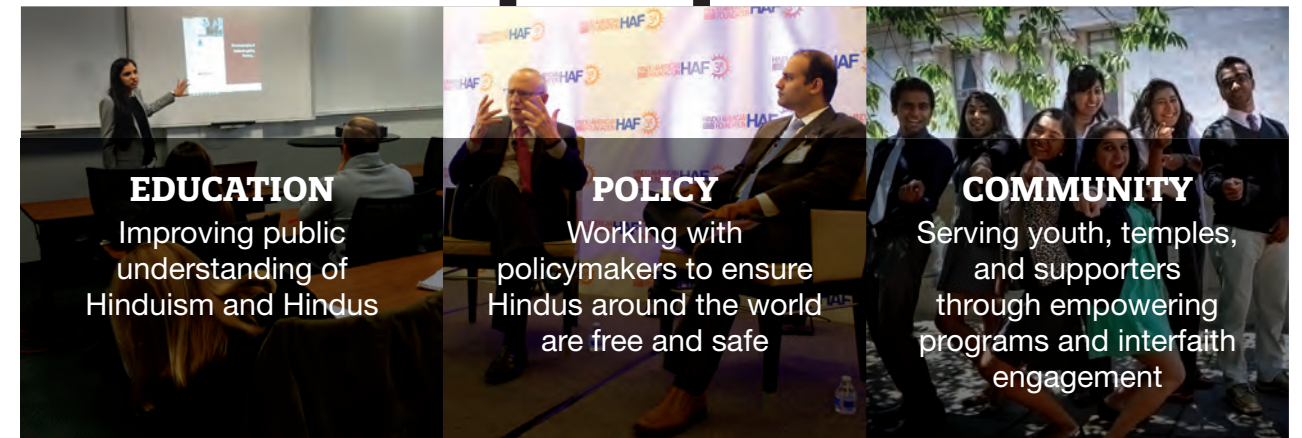
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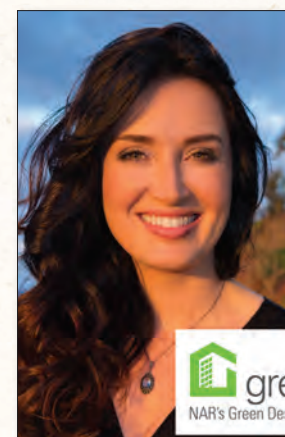


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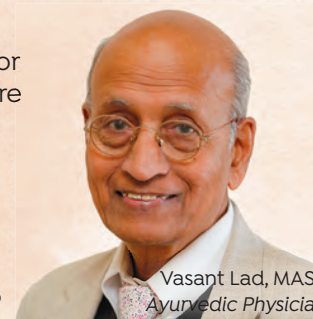
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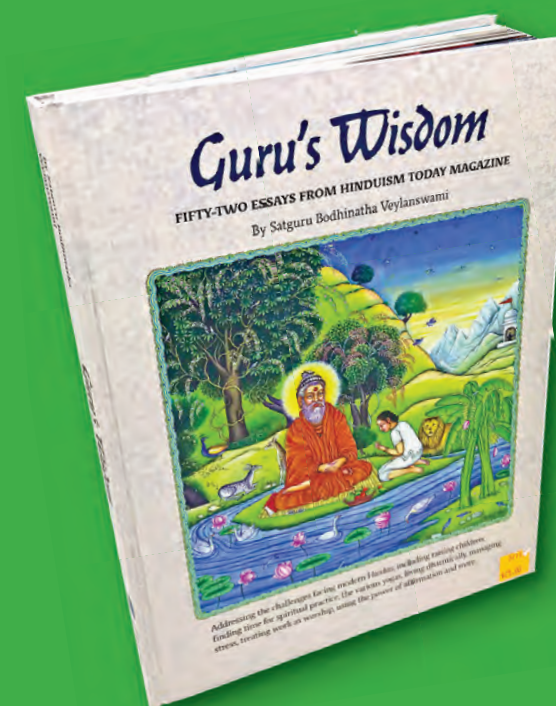
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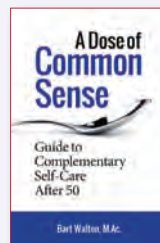
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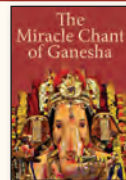
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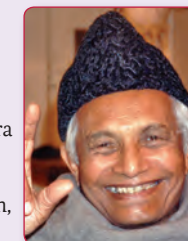
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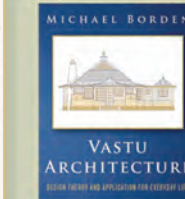
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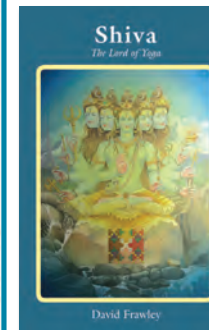
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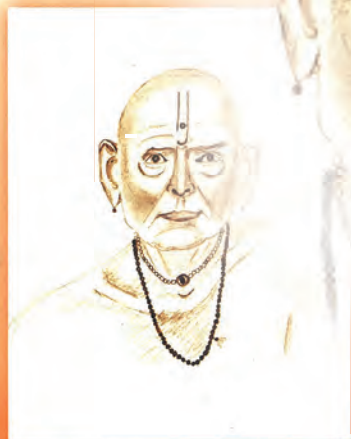
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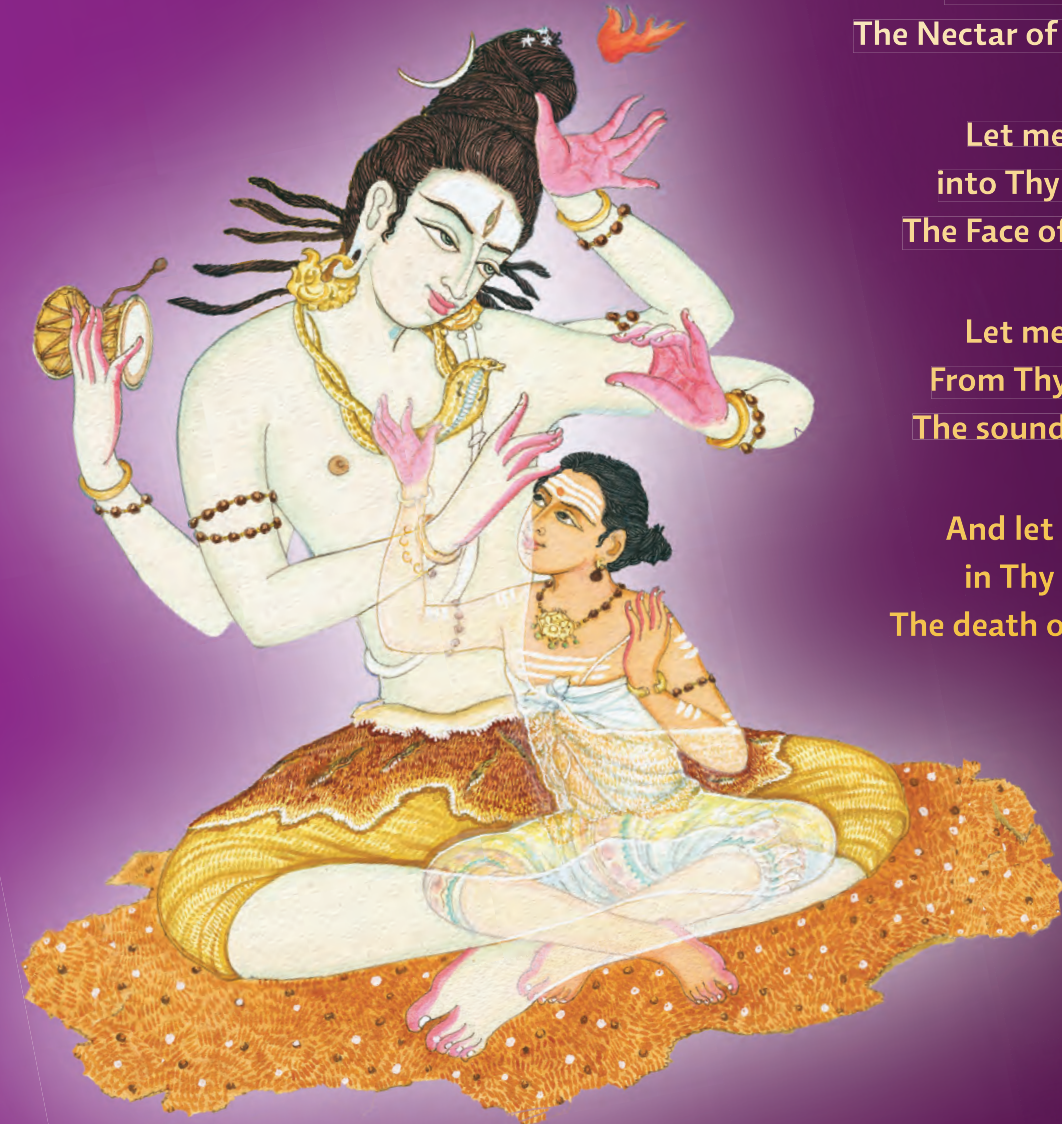
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*M*y Lord of Light,
Let me drink
From Thy glass
The Nectar of immortality.

Let me look
into Thy mirror,
The Face of eternity.

Let me hear
From Thy silence
The sound of Aum.

And let me die
in Thy Arms
The death of illusions.



Let me Die, by Dr. Arjunan Subramaniam, 24th February 2006, Desa Parkcity, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
Image drawn from a painting by Manivelu of India • Courtesy of Himalayan Academy

DIGITAL DHARMA

DIGITAL EDUCATION

A New Frontier: Learning Sanskrit Online through Apps and Video

IN THE LAST TEN YEARS YET ANOTHER DIGITAL revolution has been heating up: remote learning of Sanskrit. We reviewed many sites and apps and came up with some general recommendations.

Online Mentoring and Courses

This trend in remote education is still your best: to have a personal teacher connect with you online or, alternatively, follow a web course. Ashok holds free webinar sessions which you can see here: bit.ly/ashok-sanskrit. Search for "Sanskrit teacher online" for more.

For self-paced study, Vyoma Labs is at the technological forefront. Sign in for a free beginner's course at bit.ly/begin-vyoma. Regarding YouTube video options: almost all lack structure, even channels citing a "curriculum/syllabus" suffer from the passive nature of video. There is no way to ensure engagement or progress of viewers.

Mobile Apps

Looking at Google Play and Apple Store, we checked out a few apps. It was a wild ride through apps that in most cases present one facet, such as how to pronounce or write the alphabet. When courses or games are presented, the user interface is often lacking, the ads are insufferable, text is too small, log-ins fail and there is no means to upgrade or contact the developer. No doubt there are good paid apps. But be sure to read the reviews, especially complaints that "the app doesn't work" or "I should get my money back!" Avoid apps that have no rating, no reviews and haven't had an upgrade in a year.

Sensible user experience: top of the class in the free app category are Vyoma Labs' "Learn Sanskrit." Vyoma Labs has since expanded to web apps (see above) but their old mobile apps still work. They are graded: one for learning the alphabet (left top) through stages such as "Learn Sanskrit Pronouns" (left middle) and more advanced levels; the "CHIMKY Trace Sanskrit Alphabet" (left bottom) is also well done. It teaches the way to write Devanagari by letting you trace the letters with a "game" interface—for big fingers on a smart phone you will want a stylus; "Swarakshar," \$0.99 (right, top), is a good app, one of the few with big letters and voice-over dedicated to pronouncing the alphabet; and for \$1.99 you can get the excellent "English-Sanskrit-Dictionary from Dnyadeep Infotechnologies (right)

www.hinduismtoday.com

Almost all learning apps are more effective on a tablet. We found only a few that work well on a smart phone, and those specialize on narrow skills. You may need a modest budget, perhaps a folder on your home screen to put together the various tools, along with preparedness for some that don't deliver what you expected. HINDUISM TODAY is planning more on this trend. So keep us posted on your finds and recommendations!



Nature	Social	
	English	संस्कृत
Animals		
Birds	Agitation	विकार (अ. न.)
Insects	Agitation	संघे
Aquatic life	Agitation	संचलन (अ. न.)
Plants	Agitation	संक्षोभ (अ. पु.)
Plant Rela...	Assembly	सभा (आ. स्त्री.)
Flowers	Backward Claa	शुद्ध (अ. पु.)
Fruits	Barbarian	हूण (अ. पु.)
Vegetables	Barbarian	म्लेंच्छ (अ. पु.)
Animal Re...	Birthday of god	जयन्ती (ई. स्त्री.)
Human b...	Brahmana	ब्राह्मण (अ. पु.)
Feelings	Brahmin	विप्र (अ. पु.)
Behaviour	Brahmin	द्विज (अ. पु.)