

HINDUISM TODAY

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



Our Seven Chakras



PIETER WELTEVREDE

SHUTTERSTOCK



(Cover) Artwork by Pieter Weltevrede depicts the body's seven major chakras, the first five connecting to earth, water, fire, air and akasha; (above) this rock climber's focus, willpower and inner strength demonstrate the connection of sports and spirituality (page 56)

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Bodhinatha Veylanawami

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Whither the Future of Sacred Sandalwood?

Can the scented tree of scripture, driven to the edge of extinction, be reestablished in dedicated plantations?... Page 18



Bengaluru's Cauvery Emporium's vast inventory of sandalwood items—of which this is just one section—ranges from keychains and small elephants to prayer beads, garlands and incense to large carvings of the Gods

GLOBAL DHARMA

SURINAME

Divali with Love

KARAN GOKOEL, SURINAME
THIS PAST OCTOBER, 2017, THE country of Suriname celebrated Divali—the biggest religious festival among the country's Hindus. The most important aspect of Suriname's festival is the lighting of the Mega Diya

week, usually five days before Divali itself. During the festival, citizens believe it is very important to clean your home and purify your mind. Thus, alcohol is avoided, and many non-veg Hindus temporarily become vegetarian. But eating sweets and other treats is an intrinsic part of the joyous event. The idea behind Divali is to welcome the light in your life. Independence Square is flanked by the Presidential Palace, the Court of Justice, the National Assembly, the Congress Hall and the state flags. Divali day is a national holiday; government offices and shops are closed. People bring ghee all through the week to keep the mega diya burning. Nearby there is religious singing and dancing, float parades and burning torches, as people



Mega Diya: Paramaribo, Suriname's capitol, has the country's largest lamp, known as "Suriname diya." Diplomats and other dignitaries often take part in lighting the national diya. (left) Another view of the massive diya lamp in the middle of townsquare.

from many parts of the country come together. The "flying" Hanuman is a big attraction, as the heroic God is landed from in the square by means of a crane or cable car. Ironically, the great lamp, or *kappa*, was originally a vessel used to cook food for slaves. Many kappas are found in museums as colonial heritage. The Independence Square kappa,

which weighs hundreds of kilograms, has been transformed into a beautiful lamp, whose large flame is protected from rain by a tent. Divali is essentially a one-day celebration, but preparations often start weeks in advance: decorating and cleaning the house and surroundings, buying diyas and preparing treats.

HISTORY

Egypt's "Hindu Palace"

THERE ARE NO HINDU TEMPLES in Egypt and any existing Hindu population likely evacuated the country during the 2011 Egyptian Arab Spring protests. Yet due to the Eastern inspiration of a 19th-century billionaire, a Belgian Baron named Edouard Empain, the country holds a grand edifice known as the Baron Empain Palace or Le Palais Hindou, literally the Hindu Palace. Built between 1907 and 1911, the palace is one of history's finest and earliest examples of reinforced-concrete construction. It is said that the entire structure, or possibly one tower, could be rotated 360°. There is no doubt, however, that the three-story staircase inside is an architectural wonder. Modeled after the Hindu temple Angkor Wat in Cambodia and temples of Orissa style in

India, it presides over lush gardens in the upper-class suburb of Heliopolis—once a separate city, but now merged with Cairo as a district of that city. The inside was a lavish home occupied by Edouard and his family and the scene of many elite dinners with local aristocrats. His wife and daughter died in the home from mysterious circumstances. The family lived there until they sold it at auction to Saudi investors in 1957. The new owners hoped to resell it at a profit, but left it to become more and more dilapidated, plus it was frequently vandalized. Finally, the Egyptian government decided to acquire the palace in March, 2005, on the eve of the centenary of Heliopolis. It has been partially restored and glows at night under high-tech lighting.



The Hindu Palace: The structure was designed by the French architect Alexandre Marcel (who also created the cinema La Pagode in Paris) and built following the then-revolutionary process of reinforced concrete. Of Khmer inspiration, it is impressive for its rich ornamentation, with images of snakes, Buddhas and Hindu Shivas, Krishnas and other Deities. The garden is a botanical paradise of marvels, now restored, that the baron gathered during his travels.

CAMBODIA

Shadows of Promise

SHIVALI BHAMMER, NYC
THE INDEPENDENT PAPER IN the United Kingdom reported this past November, 2017, on two ambitious sisters reviving the many art forms of Cambodia. Popularly known only for the Khmer Rouge regime (1975-1979) or Angkor Wat, Cambodia has a rich cultural heritage which was forcibly and dramatically swept away by communist and classless ideals which led to the death of two million people, including intellectuals, artists and monks. The artistic forms that did survive were forced underground and are now resurfacing through the younger generations, who seek to explore the depths of their heritage and culture.

One of Cambodia's sacred forms of art is vast-scale shadow puppetry, *sbek thom*, depicting

stories from the *Ramayana*. The puppets, carved in exceptional detail, can be as tall as seven feet. *Sbek thom* dates back to pre-Angkor Wat times. Cambodian theaters receive no support from the government or NGO funding. But individual Cambodians, such as the two sisters behind the three-day Bonn Phum Festival, are ensuring that places like Sovanna Phum, a small independent arts theater, secure their place in the hearts of the people and have the support they need to thrive. Through a series of Kickstarter campaigns and other funding strategies, they have managed to keep the doors open. Not only the ancient art of puppetry is in the spotlight. LePetitJournal.com, in January, 2018, gave an outstanding review of *Memories in Motion*, a show



Culture revival: The unique shadow display of the *Ramayana*

performed by the Royal Ballet of Cambodia, choreographed by Princess Norodom Buppha Devi. The three-part performance included tales from the *Ramayana*. The resurgence of Cambodian arts, dance, music and puppetry is reflective of an awakened society. Cambodian art presents

the tales of a spiritual and religious past, grounding them in the present. Concepts of dharma were often expressed through theater so that the audience could understand the infinite through the creative. Now, Cambodians, again through art, are giving their audiences a chance to recall the infinite.

HINDU SANGAM

The Princess Becomes a Hindu

ON JULY 17TH, 2017, THE Princess of Java, Indonesia, Kanjeng Raden Ayu Mahindrani Kooswidyanthi Paramasi, officially converted to Hinduism in a ceremony known as Sudhi Wadani. The ritual, whose name means "initiation into Hinduism," was held at the Pura Luhur Catur Kanda Pat Sari Temple. "Returning to the path of dharma is something I've

wanted to do for a long time," said the Princess, "I am very grateful. Today is a good day because my own heart and my brother supported the move to Hinduism." The princess said she has always felt peaceful when praying in a temple and her entire family supported her decision to embrace the path of dharma as a Hindu.



Sudhi Wadani: Javanese flute music, purification ceremony and chanting of mantras complete the initiation ceremony

GERMANY

Madel Approves Temple Site

IN JANUARY, 2018, A GERMAN milk cow named Madel gave her approval to a proposed site for a temple at the edge of Bremen, Germany. The local Hindu community had borrowed the cow to determine whether the land, a leased parcel, would be appropriate for a temple. "If she stays there, it's a good place to build a house or a temple," community leader

Pathmakaran Pathmanathan told German news agency *Deutsche Welle*. "There are lots of people here, and yet the cow feels happy nonetheless." Madel's relaxed manner was deemed a favorable sign to proceed with construction. According to Pathmanathan, the temple will serve the needs of the 300 Hindu families who live in the German port city.



Moment of decision: On the future temple parcel in the Blockdiek neighborhood of east Bremen, a local priest decorates and offers flowers to Madel the cow

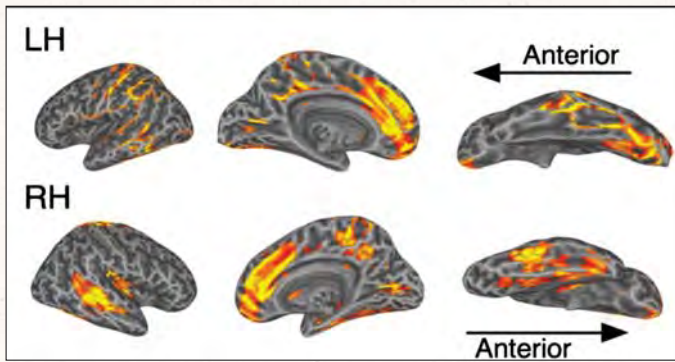
Memorization Leads to More Grey Matter; May Help Alzheimers

A 2015 STUDY OF 21 SANSKRIT pandits revealed extensive morphological differences in their brains, raising interesting questions about the potential of intensive, specialized expertise training to substantially drive plasticity in healthy adult brains.

The studies were carried out by scientists from the Center for Mind/Brain Sciences, University of Trento, Italy, and the National Brain Research Center, Manesar, India. James Hartzell—a post-doctoral researcher at the Basque Center on Cognition, Brain and Language in Spain—who helped conduct the studies, reported his findings in the January, 2018, issue of *Scientific American*:

"Through the India-Trento Partnership for Advanced Research, we recruited professional Vedic pandits from several government-sponsored schools in the Delhi region; then we used structural magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) at India's National Brain Research Center to scan the brains of pandits and controls matched for age, gender, handedness, eye-dominance and multilingualism.

"What we discovered from the structural MRI scanning was remarkable. Numerous regions in the brains of the pandits were dramatically larger than those of controls, with over 10 percent more grey matter across both cerebral hemispheres, and substantial increases in cortical thickness. Although the exact



cellular underpinnings of gray matter and cortical thickness measures are still under investigation, increases in these metrics consistently correlate with enhanced cognitive function."

Our brains have two centers called hippocampi, on the left and right of the brain, which share memory functions. Without these centers, humans could not record any new information. Hartzell explains, "The pandits' right hippocampus—a region of the brain that plays a vital role in both short and long-term memory—had more gray matter than

controls. Pandits also showed substantially thickening of right temporal cortex regions that are associated with speech prosody and voice identity."

Hartzell ends with new questions generated by these findings. "Our study was a first foray into imaging the brains of professionally trained Sanskrit pandits in India. Although this initial research—focused on intergroup comparison of brain structure—could not directly address the Sanskrit effect question, we found something specific about intensive verbal memory

Enhanced ability: (upper) Surface projection of areas where pandits showed greater gray matter density/volume than controls, as indicated by a whole-brain Voxel Based Morphometry analysis; (lower) pandits train for years to memorize and recite Sanskrit texts ranging from 40,000 to 100,000 words.

training.

"Does the pandits' substantial increase in the gray matter of critical verbal memory organs mean they are less prone to devastating memory pathologies such as Alzheimers? We don't know yet, though anecdotal reports from India's ayurvedic doctors suggest this may be the case. If so, this raises the possibility that verbal memory 'exercising' or training might help elderly people at risk of mild cognitive impairment retard or, even more radically, prevent its onset."

According to their research, today in India around 150,000 students engage in Sanskrit studies at approximately 5,000 government and private institutions. Topics (and texts memorized) include Sanskrit literature, grammar, law, history, philosophy, astronomy, yoga, logic, *Vedas*, subsidiary Vedic disciplines, and Vedic commentary. In addition, 50,000 students memorize portions of Sanskrit medical texts during their training in India's 246 registered ayurvedic medical colleges.

BRIEFLY...

RESTORATION IS UNDER WAY FOR THE ANCIENT ANJANI Kund ghat in Vrindavan, India. The project, begun in October, 2017, is spearheaded by the Braj Foundation, a nonprofit established in 2005 to restore and vitalize the environmental and cultural heritage of Delhi, Jaipur and Agra, most parts of which have lain in various stages of neglect for centuries despite their historical and cultural significance.

So far the foundation has restored nearly 50 such water bodies. See: www.brajfoundation.org

DURING THAI PUSAM IN JANUARY, OVER 1.2 MILLION Hindus and international tourists are expected to flock to the Arulmigu Balathandayuthapani Temple (known as the Waterfall temple) in Jalandhar, Punjab, India. This is the 232nd year of Thai Pusam celebrations in the nation. An elaborate new entry arch will be consecrated at the picturesque hilltop site, which is the second focal point of the Thai Pusam, after the Batu Caves in Gombak, Selangor.

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PHOTOS TOP TO BOTTOM: CENTER FOR MIND/BRAIN SCIENCES; VEDIC.ME



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

Journey of a Western Hindu

How Hinduism differs from the many other paths I have walked

BY KESHAV FULBROOK

AT AGE THIRTEEN I decided to leave Christianity, the religion of my birth, driven forth by a knowing that the relationship between man, God and the world was very different from what I had been taught. After reading the works of mystics, I finally concluded that Divinity is manifest as the Universe itself and that Divinity is also the context in which the Universe exists. God and man are one.

In my search for Truth I explored Western Neo-Paganism, Buddhism and eventually identified as SBNR or "spiritual but not religious." However, in all my searching I found a common thread. Each of these movements' most eye-opening, paradigm-shifting works ultimately credited a Hindu sacred text or guru.

I didn't understand Hinduism, though. Nothing from school, my peers or the media had ever presented an accurate and full picture. I had also developed the misconception that you must share an ethnic identity to be Hindu. Thankfully, I later learned this to be completely false.

When I was 19, I met a man named Anupam who was starting a local *Bhagavad Gita* study group. Throughout my attendance, I became amazed by the Gita's insights and also by Anupam himself. He constantly strived to practice these ideals in his day-to-day life. While he was a man with many degrees and a high paying job, he lived a modest, spiritual life. His every moment was a sadhana. I continued helping with these classes for some time after Anupam had moved away, before I also left and intensified my own personal scriptural studies of the *Upanishads*.

It was in 2013 that my life as an ardent Hindu became solidified. It was an incredibly difficult year, with health issues, a car accident and related financial problems. During this time of immense challenge, I found intense new depths in my meditations. I feel I began to experientially perceive



some of the truths that were once only intellectual ideas. This fostered a firm dedication to the Sanatana Dharma. I began to study the Master Course under the auspices of Kauai Aadheenam, as well as take courses from Arsha Vidya Gurukulam. It is now my mission to share the gifts that Hinduism has given me.

Back when I considered myself SBNR, I thought anything religious to be too restrictive. I felt religion to be an outdated list of do's and do-not's laid down by someone long gone. I thought dedication to one religion would limit growth. But with a structured religious life and through meditation, you can actually begin to experience what Hinduism's sacred scriptures speak of in a depth and detail found in no other path on Earth. Hindu dharma is a process, a science and a particular high vision of life. It is in no way limiting of one's freedom to explore and inquire, and in fact it urges you to do so! It is a complex, living system of practices designed to help a person grow into their fullest potential.

Many in the West have only taken individual disciplines from Hinduism: hatha yoga, meditation, ayurveda and so on. I have found that, while these disciplines can be effective on their own, they are exponentially more so when included together, working in union to help a person on the path. Our religion has such diversity that one is free to choose whatever avenue of spiritual unfoldment suits him or her, often with guidance of a guru and a community of peers. It is freedom with responsibility. The Hindu is free and strives to use this freedom to uplift self and others, to serve the community, and to come to the realization of Divinity within oneself and within every living thing. Aum Namah Sivaya.

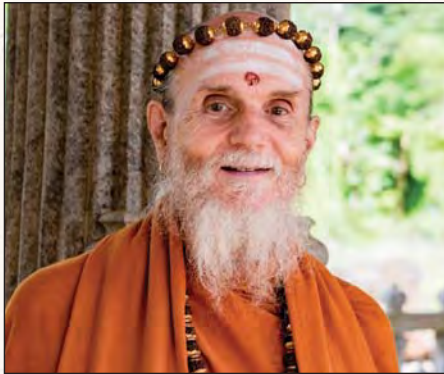
KESHAV FULBROOK, 25, is a student at the University of Montana. He is active in the Hindu community and seeks to raise awareness of Hinduism and Hindu issues. Email: fulbrookb22@gmail.com

Managing Chronic Stress

Almost everyone these days is challenged by the growing intensity of life. Here are some tools to maintain balance.

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

ON A REGULAR BASIS I MEET Hindus who, like most of the world, are emotionally distraught and mentally agitated due to the constant stress of their daily activities. This seems to be especially common when both husband and wife are pursuing demanding careers under employers who expect them to perform at exceptional levels for long hours. It is not uncommon to learn that they are also raising two or more children. The daily demands of work and family are more than can realistically fit into a twenty-four hour day. In some instances, after many years of constantly having too much to do on a daily basis, serious stress results.



will jump as you cough. An easy way to learn diaphragmatic breathing is to lie on the floor and place a book on your tummy. When you inhale while relaxed, the diaphragm will extend itself downward in the abdomen, causing the book to rise. When you exhale, the diaphragm completely relaxes and the book returns to its starting position. In this way tension is released and stress is reduced. Gurudeva commented on this: "You will experience that when the nerve currents are quieted through diaphragmatic

breathing, it is impossible to be frustrated, and it is possible to absorb within yourself, into the great halls of inner learning, into the great vacuum within you, all of your problems, troubles and fears, without having to psychoanalyze them."

Once you grasp the basics of diaphragmatic breathing, you can practice it while sitting upright, even in a chair, or when walking. Whenever you need to relax, such as before (and during!) an important meeting or exam, just take one minute to breathe deeply from the diaphragm.

A second practice for reducing chronic stress, the yoga break, also involves breathing. Lie on your back on the floor or any flat, firm surface. With arms at your sides, take a deep breath and command your body and mind to relax, to let go of all thoughts and tensions. Visualize yourself floating on a cloud, above all the troubles and turmoils of daily life. With eyes closed, inhale, breathing from the diaphragm while visualizing a powerful light flooding into your solar plexus that fills your body and mind with energy. Exhaling, feel this light energy moving out from the solar plexus into every part of your body, and visualize it expelling all of your thoughts and tensions. Repeat this for five minutes and you will feel less stressful, for as the body relaxes, so does the mind. Gurudeva wrote: "Freedom from worldly tensions is only achieved to the degree in which people are able to control the forces of their own mind. In this control they are able to lean upon the power of their own inner security, found in the eternity of the moment. In that moment, your inner strength is found. So, take your yoga break whenever you feel even a little tired physically, a little nervous, a little distraught. That is the time, not when you have time."

A third practice for managing stress is taking time each morning for a short spiritual/religious practice. Gurudeva called this a daily vigil and gave this comment on it: "Devout Hindus perform daily vigil, called sandhya upasana, usually before dawn. This sacred period of puja, japa, chanting, singing, hatha yoga, meditation and



scriptural study is the foundation of personal life." Holding a daily vigil in the morning helps center us and deepen a sense of religiousness for facing the coming day.

I outlined a simple format for a daily vigil in my January/February/March 2014 Publisher's Desk entitled "A 10-Minute Spiritual Workout." It describes an abbreviated daily regimen designed for those who find that today's busy life allows little or no time for introspection. It is now available with various chants and practices as a free mobile app designed by the monks and entitled "Spiritual Workout."

A fourth practice is that of hatha yoga, a yogic system of bodily postures, asanas, done in specific sequences and with coordinated breathing. Postures range from simple to difficult. The simple ones are sufficient to practice for reducing chronic stress. Gurudeva gave this description of the benefits of hatha yoga: "The purpose of hatha yoga today again is the same—to keep the physical body, emotional body, astral body and mental body harmonious, healthy and happy so that awareness can soar within to the heights of divine realization. Each asana carefully executed, with regulated breathing, the visualization of color and the hearing of the inner sound, slowly unties the knotted vasanas within the subconscious mind and releases awareness from there to mountaintop consciousness. Hatha yoga opens up the consciousness, because when the height of the energy, the zenith, is reached in each posture and we change to the next posture, a small or large adjustment occurs within the physical and astral nerve system." See the article on hatha yoga in the March, 2001, issue of HINDUISM TODAY for details on the system of 24 postures taught by Gurudeva.

My guru also spoke of a totally different approach, suggesting that we change our relationship with stress, turn its inevitability

Daily assault: Like the executive above, millions are facing the special challenges of modern life, whether in the boardroom, the school room or the family living room

to our advantage. He counseled, "People are confused about stress these days. There is a solution, and that is a change in consciousness, changing the way we are programmed.... This means accepting stress as a 'yes-yes,' not a 'no-no.' In the old days, yoga wasn't just an Indian anti-stress pill. It made the mind and nerve system more intense, not less so. Stress is a natural reaction to intensity. Stress is our teacher, helping us to withstand intensity. Look into the bathroom mirror and mentally say to yourself, 'Stress is making me strong.' It really does. Try to believe it. Begin to enjoy stress and the strength that it is giving you. Where would our world leaders, our religious leaders and parliamentarians, be if they did not accept and transcend stress? ... Accomplished businessmen, fantastic athletes, high-strung artists and fine musicians are asking for more. They want it. They thrive on it. They know it is making them perform at a higher level than normal. They know that weaker souls can't take it, and that gives them a special place in the universe, at the top."

Gurudeva gives us our fifth practice: "But you have to handle stress. How do you handle it? Like anything else. You go to God on the inside; you go to God in the temple and finally you get rid of your stress, from the inside out, and you are a better person because of it, because you have had to expand your nerve system. You have had to stretch your nerve system. You have had to use brain cells that you never used before, to stretch out your mind, awaken new capacities. It is not easy."



LETTERS

Jan/Feb/Mar 2018 Issue

Thank you for this beautiful issue of HINDUISM TODAY, with its startling and stunning cover page bringing consciousness to the frontiers of "Samadhi in Deep Space." Sheela Venkatakrishnans article left me in deep thought, after reading of the experience of Swami and Yogi from Kauai Aadheenam at a Siva temple in Chennai. I could not stop thinking about it all day long, and it was bringing back some memories.

RAJESHWARI PARASIVAM
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Multiple Article Review

In regards to L. Valentino's article in the Jul/Aug/Sep, 2017 issue, yes, we notice there is a great interest in many non-Hindu communities to know about Hindu religious practices.

During the last eight years, more than 40 groups came to the Hindu Mandir of Lake County, Grayslake, Illinois. Classes were given for the groups, explaining the basics and visiting the shrines, where we mentioned the specialty of each. The groups were happy, and some even donated.

I was amazed to read the Jan/Feb/March, 2018, story on the Narmada River—the pictures are impressive. I lived in Maharashtra, India, for 32 years but never noticed the importance of offerings to the Narmada. Now, due to age and health, I will never have this opportunity, which I regret. However, I learned about the greatness of this river and will tell others about it.

The first two pages (40–41) of "My Mirabai Expedition" by Mariellen Ward, in the Oct/Nov/Dec, 2017 issue, are full of nothing but complaints about her travel in India! The English translation of the Hindi poem (p. 42) sounds crude. In Hindi the same poem carries different, positive feelings.

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Sikkim's Special Feature

My hearty congratulations to you and your team for the knowledgeable, informative and flowing article on Hinduism in Sikkim, Oct/Nov/Dec, 2017.

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Regal River

Regarding the Jan/Feb/Mar, 2018, review of Hari Mahidhar's photo-biography, *Benevolent Narmada*. This coffee-table pictorial book on the holy river Narmada is indeed

a very impressive effort in self-publishing. The photographs are heartwarming, and the accompanying text by Vithal Nadkarni enlightening. In London, this book found a place in the Westminster Palace through a member of the House of Lords. I am sure that anyone, especially expatriates hailing from the central and western states of India, will be proud to see this inspiring book placed in their drawing room.

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From Outer Space to Inner

I thoroughly enjoyed Ellen Mahoney's article, "Edgar Mitchell's Samadhi in Deep Space" (HINDUISM TODAY, Jan/Feb/Mar, 2018). Several thoughts crossed my mind.

First, it is commendable that what Mr. Mitchell experienced, as a result of his space travel in terms of global consciousness, our sages in India experienced thousands of years ago simply through intuition that transcends, but does not contradict logic and rationality. Those sages must have been divinely inspired. Secondly, consciousness transcends mind. Therefore, mind is incapable of studying consciousness, just as the source of the voice coming from a radio cannot be traced by tinkering with the radio. Thirdly, I was saddened to learn that Mr. Mitchell ended up getting a divorce because of his interests in spirituality. Maybe he did not realize at the time that if he had truly gone from "outer space to inner space," he would have cognized that there is only one space, just as the space inside an earthen pot is same as the space outside the pot. Once the wall separating the two is broken, the limited inner space merges with the limitless outer space.

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Job Well Done

This magazine is very informative and has lots of wonderful articles about all kinds of Hindu matters—everything from religious practices, to beliefs, social etiquette and more.

BRANDY MCNEILL
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One Family

My heartfelt namaskarams to HINDUISM TODAY. By going through the pages of your magazine, I felt, "This is Hinduism." Even though the editors are Saivite Hindus, how beautifully and accurately the various aspects and sects of Hinduism are being represented. I think of HINDUISM TODAY as mother, and

Saivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism and Smartism as her children.

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Sharing is Caring

HINDUISM TODAY is the best magazine online—and off—on Hindu dharma on the planet! I have been handing my copies of the magazine to friends and family all the time since I love it so much. Bravo for a work only few can attempt.

SUCHETA MAHESHWARI
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American Hindus

I often visit the website of HINDUISM TODAY and am amazed by reading the wonderfully presented Hindu topics. The most fascinating part of HINDUISM TODAY is that the editors are not Indian Hindus, but American. They accepted Hinduism after enquiring and getting full knowledge of it, thus they are very special. There is hue and cry among the Hindus even in India, thus your experience and knowledge can educate them.

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Reform Funeral Protocols?

A large percentage of Hindus use cremation for taking care of the dead. A relatively small fraction of Hindus also use burials. But for Hindus today, cremation on the same day of the death is simply not feasible because of medico-legal requirements of hospitals, autopsy, death certificates, funeral home requirements, etc. Typically it takes two to three days to organize cremation in North America after one leaves their body. If long weekends intervene, cremation takes place after four to five days. This is the reality.

A further complication with Hindu cremation is that we need a pandit/purohit to perform rituals for several days after cremation. Traditionally, on the day after the cremation the ashes were sprinkled into a river, ocean or lake. And afterwards there were daily rituals for the departed for the next ten days, at the end of which the departed jiva was ritually merged with the already departed ancestors. All these are called *antyeshti* karmas, not to be confused with pujas.

On the 13th day there is a formal puja invoking the blessings of Nature to help people to come to terms with the final exit of the departed so they can get on with their lives. This puja goes by various names in different

parts of India.

The 13-day death rites and celebrations, which were okay during our rural/pastoral life, are simply not sustainable today, even in India, not to speak of the Diaspora. There are several practical reasons today. For starters, the members of the extended family are scattered globally. Further, people have only two weeks of paid vacation, and they have busy work routines. Children need to go to schools and colleges. And people running small shops cannot afford to be away for long durations.

Today, relatives and sometimes even siblings rarely participate in all the key events, such as the cremation itself, immersion of the ashes and the 10th- and 13th-day events. This is not possible in contemporary lifestyle.

The saddest part of the current system is that sometimes the husband and wife do the 9th-, 10th- and 13th-day rites all by themselves, or with very few people to give emotional support. A great opportunity is thus lost for the extended family members

and friends to commiserate among themselves in such a somber and evocative occasion. Remember, with the flow of time, after the death of parents, the siblings slowly drift apart naturally. Even though the death rites for observant Hindus are already modified to varying degrees to suit local conditions, the 13-day protocol is still the norm. And for people who die after a long life, siblings and cousins, sons and daughters, nephews and nieces, grand-kids and also close friends assemble for the 13th-day pujas to joyfully reminisce the life of the departed.

Given our changed lifestyle today, it is time that we discuss this honestly in the open and come up with a set of shortened and reformed death rites that will be the standard for all Hindus who cremate the mortal remains of the departed jiva. Those who want to and can do the traditional 13-day event can do it that way. However, for those who have other constraints, as listed earlier, we can arrive at death rites that can be completed, say, within five days after the cremation, while still retaining the key elements of the

13-day events. The five-day process is more manageable.

Shortened death rites will greatly help people to gather for all of the events, participate in the observances and celebrate the life of the departed. We, the Hindu faithful, need to make an acceptable compromise on the core steps involved in death rites. We need to meld these rites into our contemporary lifestyle and fit them into three, four or five days after the day of cremation. Are we ready to discuss this in the open?

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The Courage to Say Who You Are

The world needs Hinduism—and you to keep it strong

HINDUISM TODAY DARES TO USE THE dreaded H-word," chuckles Dr. Krishan Chawla, professor of Materials Science and Engineering at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. "I am pained to hear some of our leaders say 'No, I am not a Hindu,' or 'yoga is not Hindu,' or to hide behind the word Vedic," he explained to our staff. "I find it distasteful to dissimulate who you are. And selling wares without acknowledging the source is simply plagiarism, a form of theft."

"This is serious, as it weakens Hinduism. And to weaken Hinduism is to deprive the whole world—a world hungry for its truths and, counting on them more and more for its salvation. To interfere in that process, really, there are no words..."

"For decades I have appreciated HINDUISM TODAY because it is upbeat and counters these negatives. It has the courage to forthrightly declare Hinduism's greatness. When my copy arrives, I drop everything and imbibe the beautiful spirit of it, its overwhelming sincerity and intelligent enthusiasm that encompasses a generous tolerance. This is soothing to me. It's a constant source of inspiration. I share my copy with my family and give subscriptions to my friends."

"About five years ago, I went to Hawaii and visited Kauai's Hindu Monastery, the home

of this premier journal. There I gained new insight and fresh appreciation for HINDUISM TODAY and its staff.

"I was most impressed by the simplicity, the elegance and the palpable spiritual atmosphere of the place. In the staff, I felt a great presence. Here they were, so powerful in their convictions, so dedicated, so globally influential and yet perfectly poised, quiet and self-effacing. There was no fanfare about them, no beating of drums. They just live their simple life and do their duty without a thought for themselves. They are the perfect karma yogis and renunciates, and their magazine is the channel of their spirit, as old as time.

"It was a great joy to be with them. I would go back often, were it not so far from my home in Alabama. Still again, thanks to their kind efforts, I can remain close digitally. They have even created a HINDUISM TODAY app, which broadcasts all their issues and their spirit, free, to hand-held devices all over the world, including India. We are all fortunate for these blessings, and it is the reason I am supportive of this great work. I urge all Hindus and like-minded souls to do the same."

Dr. Chawla has given generously to the HINDUISM TODAY Production Fund, which is a part of Hindu Heritage Endowment. If, like Dr. Chawla, you value our maga-



Dr. Chawla: "I am pleased to be a part of HINDUISM TODAY and to think my humble donations will help it reach more souls hungry for knowledge."

zine and the spirit it radiates everywhere, please donate to the HINDUISM TODAY Production Fund at: hheonline.org/donate/pf Read about the fund at: hheonline.org/productionfund

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QUOTES & QUIPS

All great ones have undergone suffering.
No one can escape what is ordained.

Siva Yogaswami (1872–1964), renowned Sri Lankan siddhar

The false belief that this hell-like house called body is me, is Naraka himself. To destroy that false belief and let the self shine as Self is Deepavali. **Ramana Maharishi**

Friends, though endowed alike with sight and hearing, may yet in quickness of mind be quite unequal. Some are like ponds that reach to mouth or shoulder, while others resemble lakes deep enough for bathing. *Rig Veda 10.71.7*

Awareness puts us in tune with the elements. This elemental connection is part of being alive. We are too often indoors, unaware of the elements. The elements are not our enemies; we ourselves are made of the elements. When we connect with them, they inspire us and make us stronger, allowing us to communicate

with the world in much subtler ways. **Sakyong Jamgon Mipham Rinpoche**, head of the Shambhala Buddhist lineage

When the highest flight of spiritual experience is reached, then both the individual soul and personal God merge in Brahman, and the three become one. Brahman alone exists. **Swami Nikhilananda** (1895–1973), accomplished writer and thinker, direct disciple of Sri Sarada Devi

Whether Hindu or Muslim or Christian, whoever tries to convert, it's wrong, not good. **Dalai Lama**, speaking at the Kumbha Mela

I do not know when I will die, and I have neither time nor reason to beg

for food. Even if I were to die from the cold, I would have little reason for regret since it would be for the Dharma. **Mila Repa**, 9th century yogi, replying to his mother and sister who were begging of him to eat and wear clothes again

If you consciously hold within yourself three quarters of your power and use only one quarter to respond to any communication coming from others, you can stop the automatic, immediate and thoughtless movement outwards, which leaves you with a feeling of emptiness, and of having been consumed by life. Let this become your way of communicating with others. **Jacob Needleman**, American philosopher, author and religious scholar

Experience has taught me that silence

DID YOU KNOW?

From North to South: India's Straight Path to God

IMAGINE YOU ARE BUILDING A temple in India thousands of years ago. Without tools of great precision and no method of zooming out to survey the land except from the highest peaks—could you build several temples from one end of the country to the other, in a straight line? Well, somehow, at least seven ancient Siva temples, from Kedarnath in the most northern part of India, down to Rameswaram in the South, fall on a near perfect geographic straight line.

Even more amazing is the fact that the five elemental Siva temples in South India fall on this line: Thiruvanaikoil (water), Thiruvannamalai (fire), Kalahasti (air), Kanchipuram (earth) and Chidambaram (akasha). Also

sitting on this line are Kaleshwaram Mukteswara Swami Temple in Telangana, famed for its two Siva Lingams on one pedestal and Kedarnath Siva temple located in the Himalayas at 12,000 feet.

The variation is from .07 to .91 degrees, they lie within “one degree” of each other. The distance measured by one degree varies with the distance from the equator, getting smaller as one goes north or south.

You'll notice Kedarnath and Thiruvannamalai are directly aligned, and Shrikalahasti, Kanchi and Chidambaram within .01 degree—at Chidambaram's latitude of 14° north, that's less than one mile! Did someone do some careful supernatural planning back then?



is part of the spiritual discipline of a votary of truth. **Mahatma Gandhi**

Our aim is not to become the world's best athlete. Our aim is to keep the body fit, to develop dynamism and to give the vital innocent joy. Our aim should not be to surpass others, but to constantly surpass our own previous achievements. **Sri Chinmoy**, (1931–2007), renowned spiritual leader, author, poet, artist, musician and athlete

You can tell whether a man is clever by his answers. You can tell whether a man is wise by his questions. **Naguib Mahfouz** (1911–2006), writer, Nobel laureate

We need not seek a cause or a motive or a purpose for that which is, in its nature, eternally self-existent and free. The sole object of the dance of Shiva is the dance itself. **Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan** (1888–1975), first Vice President of India

One big difference between Hinduism and other faiths is that it does not proclaim that it alone shows the path to liberation. Hinduism has not practiced conversion, and the reason for it is that our forefathers were well aware that all religions are nothing but different paths to realize the one and only

But eating meat is bad for your health & cruel to the animal!



SUDDENLY, AGAINST ALL PREDICTIONS, VEGANISM BECAME A WORLD-WIDE CREDO

Paramatman. **Chandrashekharendra Saraswati Swamigal** (1894–1994), 68th Jagadguru of the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam

God exists in your destiny just as much as he does in these mountains and in that lake. It is very difficult to understand this, because man is moving further and further away from Nature, and also from himself. **Hermann Hesse** (1877–1962), German-Swiss poet, novelist and painter

If you are patient in one moment of anger, you will escape a hundred days of sorrow. *Chinese saying*

For those uncomfortable with the idea of religion, I would say it is important to distinguish between religion in the sense of traditional ceremonies held in a temple, church or other religious building, and the concept of religiosity—which is one's personal devotion to the Divine, however you define that Holiness. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, publisher of HINDUISM TODAY

The superconscious mind, the mind of our soul, knows and inspires good conduct, out of which comes a refined, sustainable culture. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), founder of HINDUISM TODAY

BASICS

What Are the Primary Festivals for Siva?

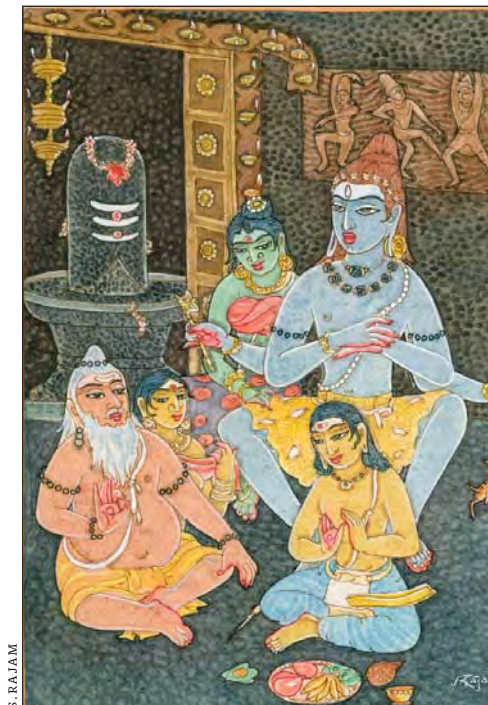
MAHASIVARATRI, SIVA'S GREAT NIGHT, venerates Parasiva. Krittika Dipam celebrates the infinite light of Parasakti. Ardra Darsanam invokes the blessings of Paramesvara—Lord Siva Nataraja in His blissful Cosmic Dance.

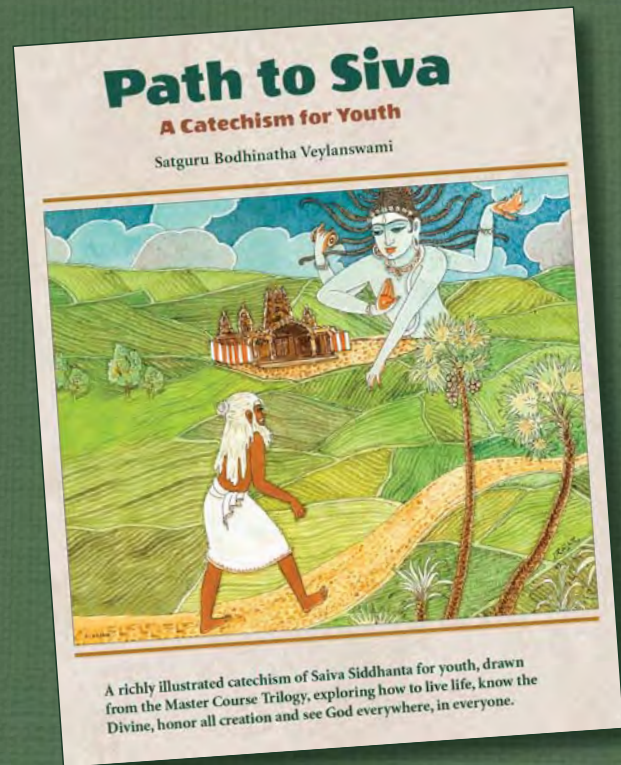
Mahasivaratri is the night before the new-moon day in February–March. We observe it both as a discipline and a festivity, keeping a strict fast and all-night vigil, meditating, intoning Siva's 1,008 names, singing His praise, chanting *Sri Rudram*, bathing the Sivalinga and being near the *vairagis* as they strive to realize Parasiva.

On Krittika Dipam, the Krittika nakshatra in November–December, we honor—with oil lamps everywhere, village bonfires and

special temple *arati*—God Siva as an infinite pillar of light. This is an important festival in Murugan temples. On Ardra Darsanam, during the Ardra nakshatra of December–January, Lord Nataraja receives elaborate abhisheka and is beseeched for yogic union, prosperity and matrimonial success. He is again lavishly invoked on the Uttaraphalguni nakshatra in June–July and on four other days each year. Special monthly days for Siva worship are the two 13th tithis, called pradosha.

The *Vedas* proclaim, “The Lord, God, all pervading and omnipresent, dwells in the heart of all beings. Full of grace, He ultimately gives liberation to all creatures by turning their faces toward Himself.” (*Svetasvatara Upanishad 3.11*)





Path to Siva

A CATECHISM FOR YOUTH

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

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



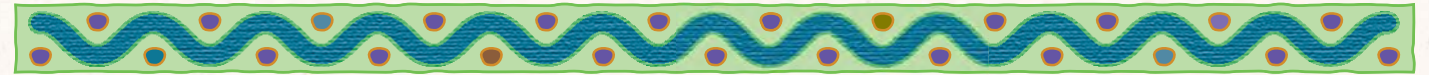
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FROM THE UPANISHADS

The Path to Immortality

Reaching the sannyasa ashrama, Yajnavalkya leaves home for the Ultimate

The following is a translation of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad—meaning “Of the Great Forest”—chapter 2, section 4, by S. Radhakrishnan. This longest and most revered Upanishad is made of the dialogue between a great sage, Yajnavalkya, and his wife Maitreyi. Yajnavalkya has just reached a critical juncture in his life where he is about to leave home in the pursuit of truth, or Self Realization. Maitreyi shares his yearning for immortality, and so the parting dialogue between them turns into a deep session of spiritual instruction—one of the meanings of the word Upanishad.

“MAITREYI,” SAID YAJNAVALKYA, “I AM ABOUT TO GO FORTH from this state. Come, let me make a final settlement between you and Katyayani.” “My lord,” said Maitreyi, “if all the world's wealth were mine, would I be immortal through those means?” “No,” replied Yajnavalkya, “Your life would be the same as that of the rich. Of immortality, however, there is no hope through wealth.” Maitreyi then asked, “Of what use then are money and material possessions to me? Please tell me, *bhagavan*, of the way that leads to immortality.”

“Ah, dear, you have always been dear to me, Maitreyi, and even more now that you have asked me about immortality. Come, sit down, I will explain to you. Reflect deeply on what I say.

“A wife loves her husband not for his own sake, dear, but because the Self lives in him. A husband loves his wife not for her own sake, dear, but because the Self lives in her. Children are loved not for their own sake, but because the Self lives in them. Wealth is loved not for its own sake, but because the Self lives in it. Brahminhood is dear not for its own sake, but because the Self lives in it. Kshatriyas are loved not for their own sake, but because the Self lives in them. The universe is loved not for its own sake, but because the Self lives in it. The Gods are loved not for their own sake, but because the Self lives in them.”

Yajnavalkya continued, “Creatures are loved not for their own sake, but because the Self lives in them. Everything is loved not for its own sake, but because the Self lives in it. This Self has to be realized. Verily, O Maitreyi, it is the Self that should be seen, heard of, reflected on and meditated upon. And, by the seeing of, by the hearing of, by the thinking of, by the understanding of the Self, all is known.

“For brahmins, kshatriyas, the universe, even God and creatures confuse those who regard them as separate from the Self. Everything confuses those who regard things as separate from the Self. Brahmins, kshatriyas, creatures, the universe, the Gods, everything: these are the Self.

“No one can understand the sounds of a drum without

understanding both drum and drummer; nor the sounds of a conch without understanding both the conch and its blower; nor the sounds of a vina without understanding both vina and musician. As clouds of smoke arise from a fire laid with damp fuel, even so from the Supreme have issued forth all the *Vedas*, history, ancient lore, sciences, *Upanishads*, verses, aphorisms, explanations and commentaries. All these are the breath of the Supreme.

“As the ocean is the uniting place of all waters, as the skin is the center of all touch, as the nostrils are the center of all smells, as the tongue is the hub of all tastes, as the eye is the core of all forms, as the ear is the meeting ground of all sounds, as the mind is the uniting place of all determinations, as the heart is the center of all forms of knowledge, as the hands are the tools of all acts, as the organ of generation is the uniting place of all kinds of enjoyment, as the excretory organ is the uniting place of all evacuations, as the feet are the center of all movements, as speech is the center of all *Vedas*.

“As a lump of salt thrown in water dissolves and cannot be taken out again, though wherever we taste the water it is salty, even so, beloved, the separate self dissolves in the sea of pure consciousness, infinite and immortal. Separateness arises from identifying the Self with the body, which is made up of the elements; when this physical identification dissolves, there can be no more separate self. This is what I want to tell you, beloved.”

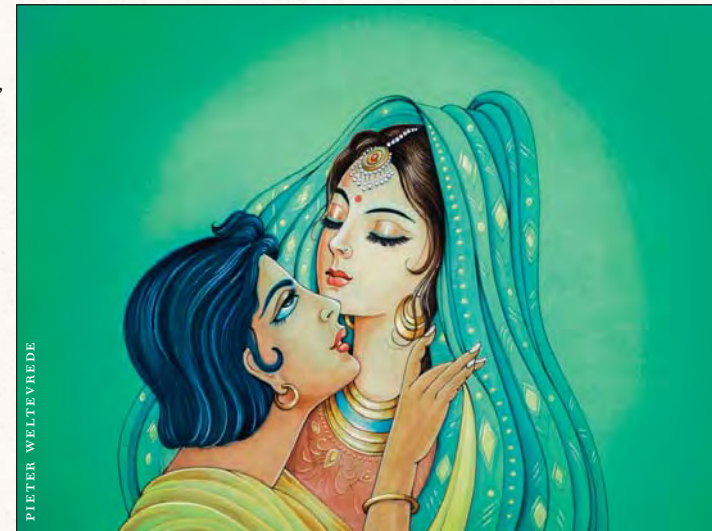
Maitreyi then said, “I am bewildered, blessed one, when you say there is then no separate self.”

“As long as there is separateness,” Yajnavalkya answered, “one sees another as separate from oneself, hears another

as separate from oneself, smells another as separate from oneself, speaks to another as separate from oneself, thinks of another as separate from oneself, knows another as separate from oneself. But when the Self is realized as the indivisible unity of life, who can be seen by whom, who can be heard by whom, who can be smelled by whom, who can be spoken to by whom, who can be thought of by whom, who can be known by whom? Maitreyi, my beloved, how can the knower ever be known?”

Holding the mountaintop perspective: *Husband and wife, Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi, embrace one last time before their schism. Yajnavalkya extends a final expression of his duty and attempts to explain the inexplicable.*

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





SUNDER RAJ

A sandalwood processing yard at the huge Quintis plantation in northwest Australia; (inset) a sandalwood carving done by Shilpa Trust in Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

PHOTO COURTESY QUINTIS

SPECIAL FEATURE

Australia: Would-Be King of Sandalwood

The scented wood, precious since Vedic times, becomes more rare and expensive year by year. Two decades ago Australian firms began planting what are now massive groves in their northwest territories, where conditions are ideal. Now economics, not nature, have bankrupted their largest plantation due to the long pay-back period. In this article we explore the art, science and financial perils of the legendary substance.

HINDUISM TODAY found itself in the unusual position of revising this article days before our press deadline: Quintis, the company we profiled in depth, unexpectedly went bankrupt after failing to meet a US\$30 million loan obligation. It wasn't a failure of forestry expertise—they are growing sandalwood trees by the square mile—but of business management and financing. While the company is now in receivership and investors stand to lose money, the plantation will likely survive. But let us first tell the rather glowing Quintis tale we collected in 2017 before discussing the details of a promising company's travails.

IT'S ONLY MID-MORNING IN KUNUNURRA in Western Australia's far north, but the air is already heavy with the promise of the heat to come. Andrew Brown knows the importance of starting the day early up here, so he's been at work for hours, walking up and down the sprawling stands of Indian sandalwood he's here to inspect—just one small section of the 5.4 million trees spread over the immense 47-square-mile Quintis company plantation. In his role as Head of Research and Development, Brown has spent ten years caretaking this precious tree, from

World's largest sandalwood plantation: (counter-clockwise from below) cross-section of a mature log; seedling ready for setting in the field; a new multi-acre planting; just one section of Quintis' 47 square miles of trees; (inset) plantation location in Kununurra

its planting to the extraction of the golden oil. Harvest of this section is only three weeks away, so to find any signs of damage now would be a hard blow. Indian sandalwood (*Santalum album*) is an endangered species, one of the rarest tree crops in the world, and takes 15 years to reach harvestable size. Its precious oil, highly prized since ancient times for its healing properties and rich fragrance, commands thousands of dollars per liter. The trees once grew throughout South and Southeast Asia, but overharvesting and unscrupulous black-market trade have taken a heavy toll. This plantation which includes hundreds of individual growers under contract and nestled in the lush, tropical Australian northwest—if it survives bankruptcy—would be the only commercial, sustainable sandalwood enterprise of its size anywhere in the world.

Ideal Site, Unmatched Expertise
Australia's Ord River Irrigation Area was developed in the 1960s and 70s, first for cotton and sugar, later for fruit and vegetable crops. Rich with water and fertile soils, the region is reminiscent of India's sandalwood plains. Drawing upon decades of research from India, the state's forestry department conducted successful plantation trials of Indian sandalwood. Quintis was formed in 1997 and began planting seedlings in this remote corner of the county almost 20 years ago.

"Album is a true tropical species. It loves hot, moist, monsoonal summers and cool, dry winters, and those are exactly the conditions we have across northern Australia," says Ken Robson, the head of forestry research.

The early years proved challenging as foresters gradually discovered the secrets to growing the hemiparasite sandalwood tree. It requires a complex ecosystem of host plants (up to four) during its growth. Working from experiments by experts in India, growers identified and incorporated into the plantings host plants suitable to local conditions. Survival rates improved in a matter of years, and the trees began to flourish.

Early on, the company set about selecting genetically superior material. "Everything is about maximizing heartwood, so you want to create straight, thick trees. This means you want to be breeding trees that have these characteristics," says Andrew Brown.

"Especially in the early years you could easily see the difference between the trees that had good genes, and those that didn't. Now we have the luxury of being able to select the better trees to create more productive and vigorous plantings, but the real results of this won't be seen for many years."

The long-term outlook is key, explains researcher Robson. "My role is to continually look for new and innovative ways to improve our plantation." A recent trial, for instance, was designed to identify host trees that use less water, in a move set to generate environmental benefits. Patience, Robson explains, is key to such research. "They'll get planted out in field trials, and we'll run those for a minimum of three years before we can actually start to see their true potential as a host," he states. "Sandalwood is important for billions of people across the world, for spiritual and cultural reasons. I've spent almost all of my working career with sandalwood, one species or another, so I'm very familiar with it,



For me—personally—it's like an old friend."

A Rich History

In ancient times sandalwood was as prized as jade or gold, and said to elevate its owner to godly status. In Ayurvedic and Chinese medicine it was prescribed for everything from curing stress to achieving enlightenment—and recent scientific research has lent some weight to these claims. Its intoxicating fragrance is as lusted after today by modern French perfumers as by ancient Indian royalty. Indian sandalwood oil is arguably one of

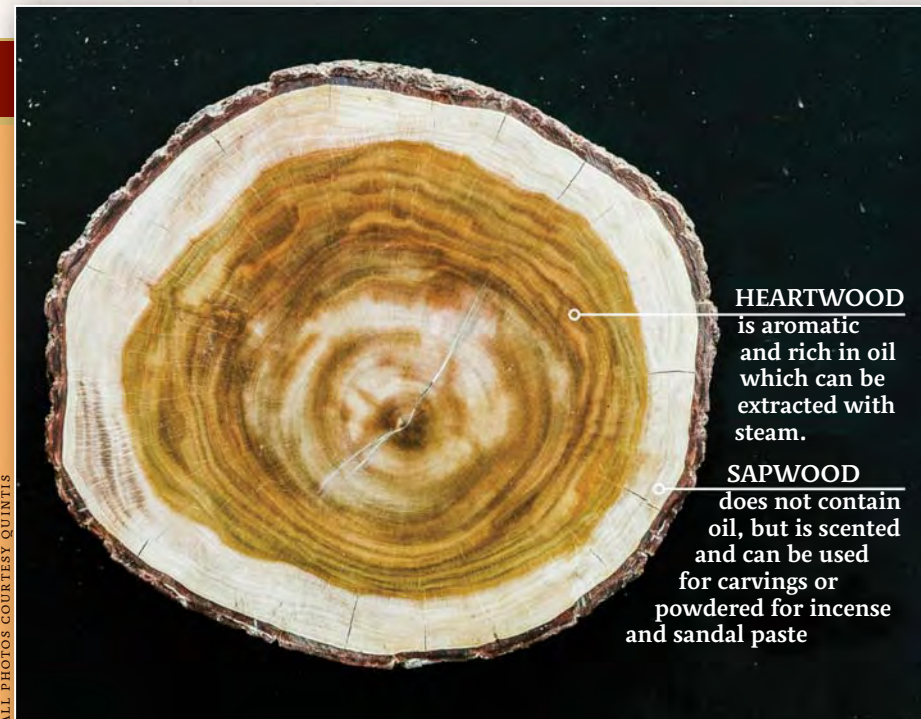
the most coveted liquids in history.

"Anyone who was anyone had to possess some and to use it," says historian James McHugh. "No king could be a king without it, and it was essential adornment both for important people and for the Gods in temples." In ancient Egypt, the oil was used in burning rituals to venerate their Gods, while Hindus use an Indian sandalwood paste made by priests to decorate the murtis of Deities. The first known statue of Buddha was made from Indian sandalwood.

"Even within India it was seen as somewhat

exotic, from far-away places, dangerous mountains in the South, or magical distant islands," says McHugh. "Many references in poems and proverbs mention the idea that the sandalwood trees are infested with snakes—and thus both beautiful and lethal."

While modern scientists have found sandalwood no more or less favored by snakes than other trees, it's still a fitting metaphor. Movies have been made of the infamous sandalwood thief Veerappan, who terrorized parts of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu during a decades-long career that included killing



HEARTWOOD
is aromatic and rich in oil which can be extracted with steam.

SAPWOOD
does not contain oil, but is scented and can be used for carvings or powdered for incense and sandal paste



Sandalwood, Aussie-Style

20 police at once with land mines, and kidnapping for ransom Rajkumar, one of India's most popular actors. As recently as 2015, 20 people died in a furious struggle between Indian police and sandalwood smugglers, as did Veerappan himself in 2004 police action.

Even Australia is not immune to sandalwood theft, though without the bloodshed. Acting in stealth, thieves attack stands of native Australian sandalwood. A 2013 report by ABC's "Bush Telegraph" news service states, "Hundreds of tons of Australian sandalwood are stolen by brazen thieves in Western Australia each year." A 2017 ABC report quotes a government spokesperson as saying, "We have anecdotal evidence that there are millions of dollars worth of illegal sandalwood and oils being sent out of Australia every year." This is not *Santalum album*, the Indian sandalwood grown by Quintas, but a close relative native to Australia, *Santalum spicatum*, which can pass for Indian sandalwood and from which good oil can be extracted.

The present situation with sandalwood in South India can be traced back to 1792, when the Sultan of Mysore made sandalwood's kingly ties official by declaring it a royal tree, meaning no individual could grow it. That law stood in India until 2002, with all sandalwood owned by the government. The sandalwood tree growing in someone's backyard was government property, and the landowner was held responsible if the tree was stolen. Unfortunately, this policy produced

unintended results: to avoid liability, landowners would cut down small sandalwood trees as soon as they were identified and before the government became aware of them. Under present law, the individual owns the tree, but it can only be cut and sold with government oversight.

As the gap between supply and insatiable global demand grew ever wider, prices



surged since 1960 and very much from the 1990s. A black trade worth millions of dollars was born. It's been estimated more than 80 percent of Indian sandalwood in the marketplace is sourced from illegally harvested wood. Often trees are axed well before their time, and the market is flooded with inferior products. According to conservationist Susan Leopold from United Plant Savers, sandalwood has been teetering on the edge of

extinction, though it is now recovering.

Harvesting, Australian Style

In their own best interests, the Quintas company carefully documents the production and harvest of their trees and the extraction of oil. This not only insures a uniform product but also assures buyers they are not contributing to the illegal trade. As well, these records assist with Quintas' research into breeding more productive trees. At present, they harvest after 15 years of growth, which is really the minimum. After 30 or 45 years the trees would contain a great deal more heartwood. But business investors can't wait that long for a return on their money, so the company must do the best they can in a shorter time span. The trees are long-lived in the wild, 500 to 800 years.

Plantation harvesting is a meticulous process. To preserve the precious heartwood, a "feller buncher" machine grasps the tree and cuts it off at the base. The attributes of each

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The process: (above left) seedlings of the relatively fast-growing tree; (right) revered products include incense, beads and oil-scented candles, chandanam paste and carvings; (below, left to right) tending the tens of thousands of seedlings for the next planting; a "buncher feller" grasps the tree and cuts it off at the base; measuring the tree's girth, a standard marker of its growth



From Nursery to Maturity to Harvest



harvested tree are recorded for quality assurance and research purposes. A separate machine cores the rich, oil-bearing heartwood from the stumps. The wood is then transported to a processing center where it is finished and treated, readied for distillation into oil, or sale as finished heartwood used for carvings, handicrafts and worship.

The Oil: Part Art, Part Science

Each ton of heartwood will produce just 32 kilograms of oil. With its powerful fragrant and medicinal properties, the oil can be used in thousands of products including cosmetics, lotions and fragrances.

Familiarity with the subtleties of scent—and the language used to describe them—is an important skill the company's team is required to possess. Andrew Brown, head of research and development, explains: "You have to be able to interpret the oil; there's an artistic component in determining if it's going to meet the specification of the client. If it doesn't, then you need to know what to blend with the oil so that it does."

Just like wine, the production of a

high-quality oil requires a deft touch; a mistake at any stage can compromise the output. "After the harvest, you can stuff things up [that's Aussie for "make a foolish error resulting in failure"] by not handling the wood appropriately," says Brown.

Blending is another delicate process, one taken into consideration from the very beginning. Sandalwood harvested from the base of the tree has different characteristics from that grown near the top. "You also get inter-tree variation, but that's not such a problem," says Brown. "After the wood is processed, we test the chips to get the oil information, then mix them in order to create a standard product."

The oil is extracted in a four-day process in which steam is passed through the wood chips, causing the oil to rise to the top where it is collected. "Steam distillation is one of the least invasive methods of extracting oils from plant material," explains Brown. "It is a physical process, not chemical, so the nature of the product doesn't change. You need to distill the essence that you want, without also producing molecules that you don't want. The art is in creating an oil that smells the way it should."

Meditation and Medicine

"There's nothing quite like *Santalum album* in terms of its effects on the mind and the skin," states aromatherapist Robert Tisserand, who wrote *The Art of Aromatherapy*.

"We know it has a calming, sedative affect, with sedative constituents finding their way into the bloodstream in tiny amounts."

Other studies show Indian sandalwood oil can induce a feeling of well-being, triggering the feel-good neurochemicals dopamine and serotonin. It also inhibits delta opioid receptors in the brain, which are linked to major depressive disorder. "This suggests the possibility of an anti-depressant, mood-uplifting effect—much like the desired effects of meditation," says Tisserand.

Practitioners of reiki, a Japanese form of healing developed in 1922 by the Japanese Buddhist Mikao Usui, use sandalwood oil to help clients tap into a higher plane of consciousness. Says one, "It works on this energetic field—almost as if the oil is dissolving and going onto a new level. It smooths out the chakras if they're out of balance."

The pharmaceutical-grade standardized oil is producing important developments in health care as modern physicians discover the wonders of sandalwood. In 2010, dermatologist Dr. John C. Browning of San Antonio, Texas, was approached by the biopharmaceutical company Santalis (a subsidiary of Quintis) to develop prescription skin-care medication from this high-grade oil. In Dr. Browning's practice he had treated people of all ages suffering from eczema. Frustrated with the current steroid-based treatments, he was eager to find something better. After reviewing the data on sandalwood oil's

anti-inflammatory, anti-bacterial and antiviral properties, he concluded that "it would be a great treatment modality for atopic dermatitis."

Browning conducted an eight-week clinical trial with 32 children suffering from mild, moderate or severe eczema. He had them soak in a sandalwood oil cleanser bubble bath and apply a sandalwood-oil based moisturizer to the affected areas. At the end, they reported a 68 percent reduction in severity—a result comparable to steroid creams, with fewer risks.

"We don't know the full mechanism of action, but we do know that it demonstrates anti-inflammatory benefits, so it seems to inhibit the inflammation and the itching," reports Dr. Browning. Data also suggest the oil can inhibit pro-inflammatory pathways like the enzyme PDE4, thought to play a role in eczema and other inflammatory skin conditions, and has antiseptic properties that prevent and treat secondary infections. "People with eczema often have staph or strep on their skin, and it helps to remove that—without requiring the use of oral antibiotics," he says. "A lot of patients are looking for a natural-based product—they're really drawn to using an organic extract as opposed to a chemical manufactured in a laboratory." Currently, Quintis' oil is part of five clinical trials, including a larger phase 2 clinical trial for eczema and other skin conditions.

What Led to Bankruptcy?

As recently as February 2017, *Bloomberg Business News* painted a rosy future for Quintis in its article, "This Sandalwood Plantation Is About to Make Its Owners a Lot of Money." They wrote: "The trees are maturing just as prices soar amid a production shortfall from the biggest producer in India and rising demand from China. A kilogram of Indian sandalwood oil now sells for about \$3,000, and prices are rising by at least 20 to 25 percent a year, according to the South India Sandalwood Products Dealers & Exporters Association. Global demand for sandalwood is set to gain five-fold by 2025. The company plans to increase output 30-fold to 10,000 tons of timber a year."

Bloomberg's report quotes Frank Wilson, the largest shareholder and managing director of Quintis speaking optimistically about the future. But just a month later, Wilson quit the company to join a competitor looking to take over Quintis—an attempt that ultimately failed. The same week Wilson left Quintis, Glaucus Research Group, an American short-seller (investors who bet a company's stock is going to fall) published a savage report on Quintis likening it to a Ponzi scheme. They said the company had borrowed large sums of money over the years and continued to borrow to repay earlier investors, as income from the trees was nearly nil.

Quintis stock plummeted and trading was halted on May 12. Also in May, Quintis'

board was forced to reveal that the dermatology company Galderma, a subsidiary of Nestlé and expected to be a major customer, had not bought any oil from them since 2015. Similarly, a Chinese buyer, Shanghai Richer Link, had not ordered any wood for 2017.

On January, 7 2018, shareholders called a meeting to express lack of confidence in the present board of directors. The company's financial obligations looked impossible to meet. On January 20th, according to the *Australian Financial Review*, Quintis declared bankruptcy, and "The company-appointed administrators and shareholders stand to see nothing in return." On January 22, the Australian Securities and Investments Commission announced an investigation.

Out of all of this, however, did come voices of hope for the future, one from Teague Czulowski of the Sandalwood Growers Co-op. He estimates the plantation will ultimately yield returns of \$100,000/acre. A market report cited by AFR predicted the Chinese market alone for *Santalum album* will grow 18 to 34 percent per year and reach 7,400 metric tons by 2025. Local Kununurra farmer Robert Boshamer is quoted in a January 7th Reuters report as saying, "Sandalwood has a bright future in the region no matter what."

In the following article we explore the industry in India and how experts are working to develop plantations while avoiding the economic misfortunes faced in Australia

Making the Best Use Out of Every Part





India's Sandalwood Scene

As Australia's vast plantations falter, can India moderate its overzealous regulations and contain black market corruption to make a comeback?

BY RAJIV MALIK, DELHI

SANDALWOOD HAS BEEN AN INTEGRAL part of India's and Hinduism's religious and cultural moorings from times immemorial. Each newborn child is welcomed by applying a sandalwood tilak on the forehead. Sandalwood paste is presented as a sacrament for every Hindu ritual, and the final funeral pyre has at least some sandalwood pieces or powder placed on it. Scripture extols its qualities.

Sandalwood is—or was—most common in the south of India, in what is now Karnataka State, an area known in ancient times as Gandhara Gudi, the mountain or temple of sandalwood. This one state alone contains more than half of India's sandalwood growing regions. The adjoining states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala also are traditional areas of sandalwood supply; but Karnataka, specifically Bengaluru, is today the center of the sandalwood trade. And it is in Bengaluru that HINDUISM TODAY sought out Dr. H. S.

Anantha Padmanabha, the acknowledged world expert in sandalwood. Now retired, Dr. Padmanabha devoted his entire professional life, starting in 1954, to research on sandalwood.

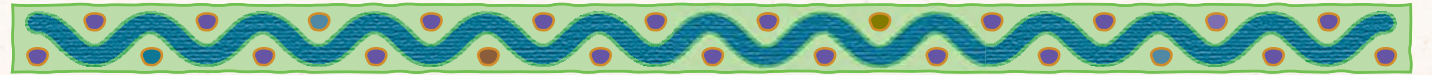
His living room, where I interviewed him over two days, is a virtual sandalwood museum, displaying wood samples, oils and various other products. He has traveled to over one hundred countries promoting and helping sandalwood projects by sharing his wealth of knowledge through participation in seminars and symposiums. Two of our Kauai staff met him at a 2012 conference in Hawaii. He has published several books on the topic and over 150 scientific papers. He makes himself available to anyone who wants help with growing sandalwood, with a special focus on creating viable sandalwood plantations in India.

Karnataka, he bluntly told us, was once number one in sandalwood cultivation but now lags behind Tamil Nadu and Kerala. He

told us of the main factors involved. There is a high level of corruption in the forestry department; the government's policies are lopsided and directionless; and sandalwood mafia and poachers have looted, plundered and smuggled Karnataka's sandalwood reserves.

Dr. Padmanabha related that at a recent auction held at Shivamogga, central Kerala, sandalwood was sold by the ton for about \$196/kilogram, including taxes running over 30%. This, he said, is the prevailing rate, and it can only continue going up. The Australians, whose labor rates are much higher than India's—and who harvest their trees at just 15 years of age, are selling sandalwood

(Clockwise from above) Sandalwood Ganesha on display at Cauvery Emporium, Bengaluru; Namdhari Seeds plantation; seedlings ready to plant; seeds from the trees—they're edible and a favorite with birds; Dr. Anantha Padmanabha, world's foremost expert on sandalwood



ALL PHOTOS: SUNDER RAJ

for \$283/kilo, and the oil for \$4,718/kilo. India's trees yield a higher-quality oil, since they are not harvested until age 30. In spite of the quality difference, India's sandalwood oil sells for just \$2,830/kilo. At the retail level, one can buy pure sandalwood billets at Cauvery Emporium in Bengaluru for \$422/kilo.

There is also fake sandalwood, created by sprinkling synthetic sandalwood oil on wood that looks like sandalwood. Padmanabha can tell if the wood is real, and even estimate the oil content, by chewing on a piece—but that requires an educated tongue. The non-expert is best off buying at reputed sellers, such as Karnataka Soaps and Detergents Limited. There has been research in both Australia and Kolkata to artificially duplicate genuine sandalwood oil. This has met with some success, but the such oil would cost ten times as much as natural oil.

Sandalwood oil has long been used in Ayurveda to treat skin conditions, and other pharmaceutical applications are being explored in India. Currently, major uses of the oil in India include soaps, mouth fresheners (*gukta* or *pan*) in very small quantities, and chyawanprash, an Ayurvedic preparation of amla fruit and many other ingredients. One of Dr. Padmanabha's projects is an advisor to a 250-acre sandalwood plantation for Dabur India, a major producer of chyawanprash.

Padmanabha told us sandalwood trees have been state property since the time of Tipu Sultan in the 17th century. Only recently has this been changed in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. In these states, trees

can now be the property of the land owner. But still, each tree has to be registered and can only be cut and sold at auction by the forestry department. None of these restrictions exist for the rest of India. Recently the Central Government in Delhi has ordered the states to change their laws again so that any tree grown as an agricultural product (as opposed to wild trees) is not only the property of the owner, but may be sold by him as agricultural produce. Those laws have yet to come into force.



There are sixteen species of sandalwood worldwide, according to Padmanabha. The Indian variety, *Santalum album*, is the most productive and has the best quality wood and oil. Highly adaptable, the species grows in many areas of Southeast Asia and other places, including Africa. Some claim it is indigenous to Indonesia, but Padmanabha believes that its home is India, due to the long historical record.

The trees require a host plant throughout their life, but can adapt to many different

hosts—some 400 have been identified. The tree absorbs nutrients from its host very selectively, taking in only those it needs and rejecting what might be harmful. Dr. Padmanabha's research has identified about 30 short- and long-term host plants most suitable for conditions in India. Several of these have commercial value themselves, including the drumstick tree (moringa), amla, betel nut, chikoo, ginger, turmeric and pomegranate. Plantations can also be intercropped with onions, garlic and potatoes, making use of the space between trees for cash crops. As sandalwood must grow at least 15 years before harvest, such secondary crops can pay the farmer's yearly bills. Sandalwood trees also benefit from the attention paid while the farmer is caring for the other crops in the plantation. Padmanabha said the Australians, faced with high labor costs, did not consider it profitable to plant cash crops between their trees, which then forced them to finance the entire project for at least 15 years. In India, such intercropping can be done profitably, a major advantage avoiding a cash drain to the farmer.

India's official production is 250 tons a year, explained Padmanabha, but eight times that much passes through the black market at a price of about \$160/kilo, with illicit oil selling for \$283/liter. This is genuine sandalwood, he points out, but the black market has no overhead and pays no taxes. The dealers pay the tree cutters just \$15/kilo. Smugglers

actually have more control over the sandalwood trade than the government. Because of smuggling, India's legitimate commercial sandalwood trade has nearly vanished.

"Once I was interviewed by a media channel on sandalwood, and immediately thereafter the same channel interviewed a famous sandalwood smuggler by phone," recounts Padmanabha. "He offered to deliver any quantity of sandalwood to any place. If such people can talk openly with a TV channel, why cannot the government catch them? All this is happening because they are working hand in glove with the forestry department people. I have witnessed this myself."

Two issues must be solved, he says: the corruption in the forestry department and the theft of trees by the sandalwood mafia. The first is a government issue; the second, he believes, can be prevented through technology, such as microchipping the trees, and by proper investment in security by the farmers once the trees are mature enough to be vulnerable to theft. A 15-year-old tree is worth one lakh rupees (\$1,600). By spending just a small percentage on security, the farmer can realize the full value of his efforts.

India's Top Sandalwood Company

Enlisting Dr. Padmanabha's help with this report brought the boon of his high-level

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Wood and Soap: (upper left) raw billets selling for \$422/kilo are Cauvery Emporium's most popular sandalwood item; (directly below) KSDL's popular sandalwood soaps—the one at right, with its fancy packaging, is aimed at the current generation

contacts within every near-by business dealing in sandalwood. He instantly arranged for us to meet Hari Kumar Jha, managing director of Karnataka Soaps and Detergents Limited, the largest company in the world dealing in sandalwood products. We also secured appointments with three leading plantation owners, all of whom freely shared their experiences and opinions with us.

KSDL, founded in 1916 under the Maharaja of Mysore, maintains a forty-acre campus in the heart of Bengaluru. To enter this place is to enter another world. The scent of pure sandalwood is overwhelming, energizing—intoxicating even. It pervades the modest office where we met with Jha and is even more potent in the building where their famous Mysore sandal soaps are manufactured and packaged. Each bar contains two percent sandalwood oil. Everything in the factory, save the final packaging is completely automated. Yearly the company produces 13,000 metric tons of soap worth US\$71 million.

Their soap is popular with the older generations, Jha stated, but the youth prefer the more heavily advertised and cheaper multinational soap brands. He hopes they will eventually switch as they come to realize sandalwood's benefits for their skin health.

Jha told us the company now deals in sandalwood oil in "very reduced quantities than we used to." Previously they could count on a certain allotment of the wood production, but now they must compete with others at the government auctions. Supply was not an issue until 1964, when the Karnataka Forest Act came into effect with its many restrictions. Only in 2003, with the threat that sandalwood might actually go extinct, did the

government take action.

Government restraints on the industry still exist. As an example, KSDL is the only company in India licensed and permitted to extract sandalwood oil. These constraints are a legacy of India's "license raj," the attempt instituted under Nehru to control the economy by requiring companies to have a government license before manufacturing and selling just about any product—with the government even setting the selling price. Reform of the license system was undertaken in earnest in 1991.

The government appears to have realized that such laws have been a major obstacle for the industry. Jha is encouraged by recent signs that the rules and regulations still throttling the industry in Karnataka will be relaxed. In anticipation, KSDL has entered into agreements with thousands of one- and two-acre farmers to help them grow sandalwood, providing seedlings and supplying advice on growing methods.

Meeting the Cultivators

We were able to visit three sizeable sandalwood plantations, each within a 200-km radius around Bengaluru. None were anywhere near the scale of the Australian plantations. The first, in Tumkur district, is run by Namdhari Seeds, one of the largest vegetable seed companies in India. It is owned by members of the Namdhari religious sect, a branch of Sikhism. They started their plantation under Dr. Padmanabha's guidance in 2002 and now have 7,000 trees growing on 40 acres of land.

Some of the trees are now harvestable. They would be much more valuable in another decade; but the manager, Ramesh,

Sandalwood in the Perfume Industry

SANDALWOOD HAS BEEN ENJOYED FOR ITS AROMATIC QUALITIES for over four thousand years. Due to its unique fragrance, sandalwood remains prevalent in perfumery to this day. Sandalwood is especially prized for its distinctively soft, warm, smooth and creamy scent. It has two unique properties: it can blend easily with any natural essential oil, even those with a much stronger fragrance such as jasmine, lavender and peppermint; and it has a high boiling point of some 300°C, which means it is very long-lasting in perfume. Synthetic sandalwood oils are usually alcohol based. Even if they initially smell similar, they rapidly evaporate and disappear. They also do not mix well with other essential oils.

Sandalwood oil is considered in the perfume industry as a neutral oil, suitable for perfumes for men or women. It is used in Indian perfumes, attar, where its presence is easily recognizable. Western manufacturers use it as a featured scent, or with stealth to create a more subtle interaction of complementary scents. Quintis company refuses to reveal any of the perfume manufacturers who purchase their sandalwood oil.



Prized scent: (left) Indian attar made with sandalwood oil (\$11 for 1/2 ounce); (right) sandalwood cologne (\$44/3 ounces) by America's oldest perfume maker, Caswell Massey, founded in 1752



Those Marvelous Sandalwood Soaps!



PHOTOS: SUNDER RAJ



explains that due to fears of theft, they are harvesting now rather than wait for the sandalwood mafia to steal the trees in the dead of night. He says this is the biggest problem cultivators face, and the government must enact and enforce far more stern laws against smugglers. If that were done, he could confidently plant more acreage. He also recommends that the license permit system be liberalized. It is presently so cumbersome it discourages people from getting into the business. They must have impeccable proof of land ownership and must register every single tree with the government.

On another day we visited the farms of cousins Chinalu in Chamraj Nagar District and Nanje Gowda in Mandya Taluk. Chinalu's farm has 50 acres in sandalwood with 10,000 trees, and Gowda has 7,000 trees on 25 acres. Gowda carefully selects income-producing host trees and otherwise makes good use of the open land between trees for cash crops. The initial host is red gram, or pigeon pea, followed by gliricidia or stick plant. This nitrogen-fixing plant is used as cattle

fodder when young and fence posts when more mature. A third host is *Wrightia tinctoria*, a type of oleander that produces an indigo-like dye. Its fine, white wood is used for carving, and it also has a number of uses in Ayurvedic medicine. Other cash crops used as hosts at different stages of growth include black pepper vine, silver oak and drumstick trees. All were implemented under the advice of Padmanabha and are still being evaluated by the farmers.

As their trees are less than ten years old, Chinalu and Gowda do not yet face the problem of theft, but they share exactly the same concerns as Ramesh of Namdhari Seeds.

Carvers and Sellers

Carvers in this area obtain wood legally only from the Karnataka Handicraft Board. At each government auction, ten percent of the wood—usually the larger pieces—is sold for carving at a subsidized rate. The artisans are mainly in Mysore and Shivamogga areas. Originally they were mostly of the Gudikar jati, but others have entered the craft and now Gudikars are perhaps 30 percent of the total.

Finished carvings must be sold back to the Board. Padmanabha says the carvers get only a small part of the profit, with most going to the Board. The situation is the same in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, but other states allow the free purchase and sale of sandalwood as long as it is grown in their state. Depending on the piece, 30 to 70 percent of the value of a

carving is in the cost of the wood.

Padmanabha estimates only 20 percent of the carvings in Karnataka come from legal sources; the remaining 80 percent do not and are sold through shops opened by the carvers themselves. The difficulty in getting a legal supply has caused many artisans to switch to stone carving, especially in Shivamogga.

Two of the top names in carving in Bengaluru are Vajinath G. Ganeshpur and his son Vishwanath V. Ganeshpur. They manage an NGO, Karakushala Kaigarika Sahakar Sangh Ltd, which employs 400 carvers, and maintain the KKSS showroom in central Bengaluru. Before coming to Karnataka, I had visited the top emporiums selling sandalwood sculptures in Delhi, but none came anywhere near the quality and price of what this company offers.

The most expensive piece we found in Delhi was 40 lakh rupees (US\$63,000). Here a spectacular six-foot-tall sculpture of Radha and Krishna's ras leela in Braj (photo page 32) which is solid sandalwood and took four artisans two years to complete, goes for one crore rupees (\$157,000)! The economic reality of sandalwood figures very much in this pricing. With the wood accruing in value twenty to thirty percent a year, the company can patiently wait for an art lover willing to shell out a high price for such unique pieces of art.

KKSS's Vajinath is frustrated by the red tape surrounding sandalwood. He must keep track of every ounce of wood bought from the auction, and he is subject to government



SUNDER RAI

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The various uses: (counter-clockwise from below) Sandalwood sepulcher of the late King Bhumibol of Thailand, in which he was cremated; Gandhi's funeral pyre was made with 1,200 pounds of sandalwood and 320 pounds of ghee—today a token billet is commonly used; parrot carved inside a cage; incense; carver Sumitra at work

The Sacred, Sensuous, Beautiful and Worshipful World of Sandalwood



SHUTTERSTOCK



UNKNOWN



SHUTTERSTOCK



SUNDER RAI

audits. He said he has often wanted to quit the business, but has not done so because he feels responsible for the 400 artisans and wood carvers working for their NGO. He is concerned for the future, however. Few of the carvers' children are taking up the trade, finding better jobs elsewhere. "At one point of time," stated Vajinath, "there were 1,500 high-level fine art carvers in this industry. Now the number has shrunk to less than around 150." He estimates KKSS has trained six to seven thousand artisans over the years.

Son Vishwanath told us that besides dealing in high-value items, they also make small carvings of Hindu Gods, key rings, incense and many other products which cost just a few hundred rupees or less. The business is lucrative, as there is no waste. Every bit is utilized in products such as incense sticks, which are in good and regular demand.

KKSS supplies Cauvery Emporium with high-value carvings and incense alike. The state-run shop, considered the premier source for sandalwood in all of India, carries a huge range of products. Its manager, Mainak Mandal, takes special interest in selling expensive sandalwood Deities and shrines to rich customers building new homes.

Until around 2000, KKSS supplied hundreds of carvings a month to Japan, Taiwan and China. But as the wood became dramatically more costly, this business dropped off.

Equal in scale to KKSS is the Shilpa Trust, with 400 carvers, run by M. Bhupathy. He and his brother, M. Ramamurthy, who runs Wood Mantra, are sixth-generation award-winning carvers. Both are happy their sons



have joined them in the business. They are of the Viswakarma community, which also includes temple carvers and architects. They shared the same complaints about government policy and poaching, and also said the government emporiums are not properly promoting the woodcarving art, but just looking after their business interests. Both brothers run training schools for young artisans, but, like KKSS, do not find many youth interested in the profession, even though they pay students' expenses as well as a stipend for the entire three years of training.

Whither India's Sandalwood?

"We see the future of sandalwood as bright,"

stated Padmanabha. "Once it was listed as an endangered species, and it is still listed as 'under threat.' I want this removed and sandalwood to be freely available in the world. Here in India, if farmers grow sandalwood along with cash crops, they will stop committing suicide due to financial problems. I am happy to share all the knowledge I have with any farmer, big or small."

Sandalwood, it could be said, has been too treasured for its own good. Modern transportation has allowed its easy shipment from places of plenty to the rest of the world, fueling a demand which drove the tree to near extinction. Growing abundantly in sparsely inhabited forests, it was easy pickings for those beyond the law. Today, organized, secured plantations provide a viable path forward for one of nature's most fragrant creations. India's government must take strong measures to vigorously protect the trees against theft and corruption and to eliminate the vestiges of the license raj inhibiting production. Then the sandalwood which has served the Hindu community well for thousands of years will do so for the next thousand.

Past, present and future: (clockwise from above); KKSS's Vishwanath V. Ganeshpur with the \$157,000 carving of Radha and Krishna; Hawaiians pack a mountain pit the size of a ship's cargo hold with sandalwood before hauling it down to the docks; Mark Hanson works to preserve Hawaii's native sandalwood species; leaves and buds of the sandalwood tree; C.V. Ramesh, manager of Namdhari Seeds

Hawaii's Piteous Sandalwood Tale

It took just 40 years to exhaust the originally abundant native species

KAUAI, ISLAND HOME OF HINDUISM TODAY MAGAZINE, WAS once, briefly, a major source of sandalwood. The Hawaiian island chain is home to six of the world's 18+ species. The Hawaiians knew the tree as *iliah* and used it for scenting kapa cloth and as a medicine. Hawaiian species, such as *Santalum paniculatum*, are not as large or straight as their Indian cousin, and the wood is less desirable. Until the early 18th century, the remote islanders were unaware of its great value in the global market, especially in China.

However, when King Kamehameha I learned of its high demand—caused then, as now, by low supply from India—he ordered the entire able-bodied population to harvest the trees, everyone from chiefs to common people. Workers would uproot the trees to get at the oil-rich stumps, saw up the logs and transport them on their backs, down the mountains through challenging terrain. Pits were dug to the same dimensions as a cargo ship's hull (see right) to measure a shipload. Wood was stacked in the pit until full. Then the logs were transported to the beaches. The conditions were unpleasant for these workers, who were already plagued by diseases brought by the Europeans. Even

worse, the king's greed for sandalwood resulted in reduced agricultural production of food, and famine ensued. Kamehameha finally placed a *kapu* (ban) on the harvest of iliahi in order to bring island life back into balance.

In 1819 he died and his son Liholiho took the throne as Kamehameha II. Shortly thereafter, he abolished the kapu system, sending the iliahi harvest back into overdrive. By 1821 the kingdom of Hawaii was \$300,000 in debt for foreign goods, ships and liquor. The abuse of credit was fueled on both sides. The Hawaiian chiefs indulged in lavish commodities, while foreign traders, eager for the sandalwood, pushed the credit system on the islanders. As the iliahi got harder to find, workers resorted to burning forests to locate the trees by their powerful smell. The older trees survived the fires—only to be cut down—but the younger saplings were eradicated in the process.

By the time Kamehameha II passed away in 1824, the next heir to the throne inherited a debt of \$500,000 owed to American traders—a fortune in those days. In 1827 the new king enacted Hawaii's first written law, the sandalwood tax, to pay this debt. This tax required every man to deliver 70 pounds of sandalwood, or pay four Spanish dollars, to the district governor each year. Women of age 13 and older were required to weave a 12 foot by 6 foot mat, or to pay one Spanish dollar. By 1830, the forests were exhausted, and Hawaii's sandalwood trade ended.

Today one can find a tree on the Hawaiian Islands only with great difficulty. A few commercial-scale efforts are being made, but the primary interest is in simply preserving the native varieties. In fact, planting of anything other than indigenous species—especially India's *Santalum album*—is discouraged, as unwanted hybrids would result.

Everywhere sandalwood is found, its history has been filled with a reverence for the tree's qualities and insatiable greed for the profits it can bring. Hawaii, the Aloha State, has been no exception.



Champions of the Tree Working to Ensure Its Bright Future





EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

Our Grand Chakra Journey

Exploring the centers of consciousness

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY PIETER WELTEVREDE,
BASED ON THE TEACHINGS OF HIS GURU, HARISH JOHARI



PIETER WELTEVREDE



The knowledge of the chakras is a spiritual science from the world of sadhus and sannyasins, the monks of Sanatana Dharma. It is a road map that can bring us to cosmic consciousness, which is without name and form. But before we reach that state, we need name and form to understand the different energies that are influencing our lives.

The Deities within the chakras help us to understand and use these energies for the benefit of others and our own spiritual growth. An old saying is: he who connects to the material world will get suffering; he who connects to the spiritual world will get blessings. We experience this suffering or blessing in the people we meet. We attract to ourselves those we need to encounter. In the end, the study of chakras is all about eternal happiness, which we are all looking for—not an ecstatic or emotional happiness, but a balanced, harmonious, neutral happiness. It is possible to experience this state all the time.

In the first three chakras, we experience our animal nature, which roams about in the forest of desires. In daily life our desires can be so dominating that we become engulfed in problems and lose ourselves in our psychodrama. It is crucial on yoga's path to get control over our mind. According to the science of chakras, we take mind, intellect, ego and the Self to our next life, leaving the body behind. With the mind and its intellectual powers, our ego creates its own mental world. Getting this mind under control is the subject of Sage Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. When we closely study the images of the various Deities connected to the chakras, we see there is a spiritual journey to the Divine inside us. The images work like an alphabet. Once we learn the ABCs, we start making out words that form sentences. A beautiful story becomes visible that gives space to all kinds of spiritual experiences and interpretations or philosophies.

When we look at these Deity images, we first see that some are male and some are female. These polarities are embodied in our primary spiritual nerves, or nadis, ida and pingala, which end above our nostrils. Most of the time, one nostril is more active than the other. If the left nostril is active, the left side of our brain is cooled and the right side, ida, becomes dominant. If the right nostril is active, the left side, pingala, becomes dominant. This polarity is reflected in the split-brain discovery of Western science in the 1950s. Disconnecting the two halves of the human brain, researchers discovered that the two hemispheres are different. The left side, considered masculine in nature, is responsible for abstract, analytical thinking using symbols and patterns. The right side, regarded as feminine, is connected to emotions and concrete action, or just doing. When flowing in this current, we feel one with everybody and everything around us. Intuitively yoga has long known of and worked with this polarity.

In every chakra we see a male Deity who represents the ab-

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Chakras are the playground of elements: earth, water, fire, air and space/akasha—depicted behind the yogi in ascending order. The multi-petalled psychic wheels and their seed sounds are shown in position along the spine, with the ida (orange thread) and pingala (blue) nadis winding upward.

stract concepts connected to that chakra, and a female Deity who shows us how to work with these concepts. In each chakra we must learn to make these hemispheres work together. When thinking and doing are focused on the same subject, we may be able to convince the lower animal brain—with its primitive instincts and desires—to behave. If we want both hemispheres to be active, we have to do something. Motor-action is needed. Then sushumna (the central nadi) becomes dominant. It can bring us to the highest and purest state of happiness. Activities become more subtle when we come into the higher chakras. The most subtle action is the meditation of a yogi. He is doing nothing, which is very difficult to do! How difficult? It can take lifetimes to achieve.

Through history two tools have had a therapeutic effect on society and individuals: religion and the world of arts and crafts. Especially when combined, they can bring us into the highest chakras. These two supply a lot of our cultural education, which comes from family, friends and society. It is remarkable that in Sanatana Dharma there is no fundamentalism or extremism or terrorism. All are included and get space to live their subjective story, whether they believe in God or not. Religion is an important tool to elevate our consciousness. And as we awaken more fully, the face of religion begins changing. From just going to the temple, church or mosque, we evolve into living the religion, and then to becoming the religion. That means finding the eternal happiness inside us. The real purpose of religion is to make us happy by experiencing the Divine.

That brings us to one more important issue. In the philosophy of the chakras there is only subjective reality. There is no objective reality. We are each in our own body/mind trap. We may all read the same scientific book, but we will each experience and understand it differently. Sadhana, too, is subjective. It is personal. We do it for our own self; and in a sense it is selfish, though by improving ourselves, we also uplift others. As we go into sadhana, we start realizing that we create our own psychodrama of problems and suffering.

Eventually we come to know every angle and corner of the chakras, good and bad. Tradition tells us that in each lifetime we ideally progress through the seven chakras, assuming we have learned about the chakras, are sufficiently evolved and live an extraordinary life of dharma and sadhana. The period spent in each is seven years for men and six for women. Our journey starts in the first chakra, where individual consciousness (ego) has the form of a snake. In the fourth chakra, it becomes the Goddess Kundalini Shakti. In the seventh, She unites with Her source, our immortal self, or Siva. This is our own subjective journey, and it is not a easy one. We need many lives to accomplish this. Reincarnation is part of the philosophy of the chakras. Because life on Earth can become so complex, we need the guidance of a loving and caring guru who can show us how to live our daily life as an art and how to realize the Divine or eternal happiness inside us. For most of us, our first guru is our mother. And that is where the first chakra, the muladhara, starts.



With proper use of the seed sounds, or bija-mantras, divine energies can be evoked. The central bija (root mantra) of this chakra is lam. It removes the insecurities associated with the element earth. The bija-mantras of the four lotus petals are vam, sam, sham and saim. They are connected to the mental modifications. Here one behaves like an ant or a honeybee, whose life and death depend on smell.

1 | Muladhara

"This chakra encompasses the planes of genesis, illusion, anger, greed, delusion, avarice and sensuality. The energy in the first chakra is influenced by the earth element, and the earth element is connected with the desire for security in the form of job and shelter. A person who is dominated by the Muladhara Chakra is obsessed by the desire to find security."

Harish Johari

All quotes by Johari are from his book
Chakras: Energy Centers of Transformation,
published by Inner Traditions/Bear & Company.

The muladhara chakra dominates when we are a child, age 0-6 for girls and 0-7 for boys. For a good journey through the chakras we need to be well grounded. The element of muladhara is earth, which is the foundation on which everything takes place. Earth provides all that we need. It is represented by the square, with its four directions, and by the elephant. The animal nature is like an elephant, heavy, strong and wise. The elephant is also known for its sharp organs of sense (the five jnanendriyas) and action (the five karmendriyas). It is with these powers that we perceive the world and work in it. In this chakra and stage of life, we receive and develop the tools to enter and enjoy God's creation.

The spiritual beginning of our journey through the chakras is beautifully symbolized by the first Deity we meet, Lord Ganesha, who is honored at the start of any undertaking. If we can see a divine being in this figure with an elephant head and a pot belly, we might be able to see this divine presence everywhere. Our analytical and critical left brain might have problems here. But if we can surrender to the protecting power of Ganesha, faith in our path can emerge. We trust that He will remove the obstacles. The divine in the form of Ganesha is easy to access. He is happy with whatever worship we offer. If we can but fold our hands, and even bend our head downward, the rest will happen by itself.

With His blessings, we can enter the physical world created by Brahma, who rules this chakra. He created the world of the five elements—earth, water, fire, air and akasha—with overwhelming beauty. As a child in the muladhara chakra, we do not yet experience much mind, ego or intellect. We are simply busy learning and surviving, with a focus on food and shelter.

Brahma's nature is sattvic. That means He is at peace, content in Himself. There is not only beauty in His creation, but also goodness and truth. He carries no weapons and is nonviolent. In one hand He holds the Vedas as a manual for living in His creation. His peaceful nature can be understood when we look at indigenous peoples who reside in the jungle. They only have to take care of food and shelter, while living in harmony with nature by worshiping the spirits in their surroundings. They only take what they need. Our challenge is to find that same balance and discover creation's peaceful nature in a complex, cosmopolitan world.

The doorkeeper of this chakra is Goddess Dakini, "the Beholder." Harish Johari wrote that "Dakini carries the light of divine knowledge, which she imparts to yogis." She shows us how to deal with the ocean of primitive desires connected to our senses. We tend to lose ourselves in the overwhelming, outer allure of nature. Dakini can show us that the real beauty is inside, which expresses itself as happiness. To experience this, we have to live a disciplined life. The five yamas (restraints) listed by Patanjali are good guidelines: nonviolence, truth, honesty, sexual continence and forbearance. These describe the character of our inner self. This is how we all are deep inside. If we can master these virtues, we can enjoy our jungle.

These disciplines help us understand that everything we need is available, but not all that we desire. We have to trust in providence. Then we can live in harmony with nature, and Dakini will show Herself as a Goddess of wealth. If we disobey the laws of nature, She can become the fierce Kali or Tripura Bhairavi, and we will face hard times.

In this chakra there are many addictions. Our food habits are first to be harnessed. Junk food is a weak spot here. We take more than we need. That brings us into a lazy and lethargic mood. At this stage we are usually not aware of the importance of healthy food. Fasting can be helpful; there are many ways, even just abstaining from certain foods.



If we are able, like a baby, to find security in food and shelter, we may enjoy the mental modifications attributed to the four petals of this chakra: the state of great joy, the state of natural pleasures, delight in the control of passions, and the blissfulness of concentration. To have loving and caring parents as first gurus helps us have good experiences here. Then the rest of the journey can be felt as a blessing.

Although spiritual practice in the first chakra is difficult, all the spiritual energies are present in their basic, primitive forms. The downward pointing triangle in the center of this chakra represents Shakti, which we perceive as nature with her seemingly uncontrollable desires. The Lingam is the symbol for Siva, or our immortal Self. He is present right at the beginning, but does not yet have a face. The snake, kundalini shakti, is the energy of our individual consciousness

The artist depicts the growth and training of a child, who learns from loving parents. The mother teaches healthful habits of behavior, learning, eating and sleeping. The father helps the boy control his rough and aggressive lower nature by teaching sports, such as wrestling. When strong patterns are set, the child controls his instinctive nature like the mahout controls the powerful elephant.

(ego), which longs to become one with our immortal Self. Out of its mouth come the spiritual nerves: ida, pingala and sushumna. If we are grounded in our disciplines, the journey upward can begin.



The primary bija-mantra here is *vaṁ*. It affects the fluids in our body. Together with the bija-mantras of the six lotus petals (*baṁ, bhaṁ, maṁ, yaṁ, raṁ and laṁ*), it purifies the mental modifications of this chakra. Here one behaves like butterflies and fish, who live and die for taste.

2 | Svadhishthana

“Svadhishthana chakra encompasses the astral plane, the space between heaven and earth, as well as the planes of entertainment, fantasy, nullity, jealousy, mercy and joy. The energy in the svadhishthana chakra is influenced by the water element....As this chakra is connected with the procreation of life, it is also related with family and the responsibilities of a family. The genitals being its work organ, it is connected with sexuality and fantasies.”

Harish Johari

After our basic needs are secured, we are ready to look around and meet other souls, especially of the opposite sex. The svadhishthana chakra is dominant between age 6 and 12 for girls and 7 to 14 for boys. Its element is water, which can move in all directions and makes life possible. Its connection with the moon brings us into the world of emotional fluctuations. With emotions as spices, our life becomes more flavorful.

The animal nature here is like a crocodile, which is always ready for hunting and loves floating, sunbathing and fantasizing. In this chakra we are confronted with unlimited fantasies. Such fantasies, especially sexual, consume more energy than any other human activity. This chakra creates six mental modifications, bringing us into the world of psychological complications, represented by this chakra's six lotus petals—affection, suspicion, disdain, delusion, destructiveness and pitilessness. Here we create our own world with the help of our mental and intellectual faculties. This is the world we think and talk about most of the time. It can become so overwhelming that we can lose grip. We need guidelines as we navigate this chakra.

Lord Vishnu appears here, on hand to preserve the creation of Brahma and to maintain harmony and balance. He represents life. He pervades everything. From the smallest to the biggest, life is everywhere. Although science researches life, it is still not able to trace its source in the outside world. As Lord of Maya, Vishnu creates a world in which it is very difficult to find Him. To make it easier, He brings us religion. The goal of every religion is to live in harmony with nature and all the creatures in it. Science can't say much about religion, but one thing it does confirm is the therapeutic value of faith in easing the impact of suffering, hardship and death.

All religions have two things in common: a theology or philosophy and a moral code. Theology tells us where we come from and where we are going. It deals with karma and with dharma (being one with nature's laws). In Sanatana Dharma, Hinduism, the moral code is the yamas and niyamas. The five yamas (restraints) help us behave according to the character of our immortal Self, which is defined by the niyamas: purity, contentment, austerity, self-study and respect for worship of God. Our individual spiritual energy is like a locomotive, and our immensely active fantasy world needs a track. That track is religion. But beware, in this chakra spirituality can lose itself in superstitions, omens and dreams. The main job of religion here is to quiet the seemingly uncontrollable tides of this water-dominated chakra.

Rakini, another aspect of kundalini shakti, opens the door to this chakra. Her two heads indicate the duality between “I” and the “other.” The energy of the second-chakra person is spent on attaining a balance between the external world and the world within. The “other” has entered the game, and that can bring mental pollution. Purification is one of the tools Rakini offers. The simplest tool is humming. We often use it unconsciously, such as when confronted with a puzzling situation. It resets the brain. Life itself offers purification through facing hardships, meeting remarkable people, visiting temples, reading scriptures, etc.

During the years dominated by this chakra, good stories are an important way to convey spiritual wisdom and playfully introduce complex philosophical and moral issues. It is important to listen to stories that make sense. Knowledge is not yet internalized. That begins



In this chakra youths discover the “other.” This opens the world of desires and fantasies, represented by the crocodile. The creativity of the arts help him or her to attain a balance between the world outside and inside. In this chakra the desire for physical love is born.

to happen in the fourth chakra. Without religious stories and teachings, life makes little sense. The only thing that remains is making money, which we spend mostly on things and unending entertainment, including social media.

Rakini gives another tool to express our fantasies and keep this mental world under control. Since times unknown, arts and crafts in all their forms have been used to live a harmonious, balanced life, as both hemispheres of the brain, focused on one subject, learn to work together. The right brain is playfully exploring the world by doing. The left brain learns from this as it analyzes the art process to discover symbols and patterns. Playfully we investigate different techniques. It is our first lesson in concentration.

There are unlimited possibilities in the world of entertainment. The arts and crafts

make us play, and we become playful. Here we can find a talent to develop for the rest of our life. An art or craft can become a spiritual tool when combined with religion. Our passage through this chakra finds solace in stories of romantic and epic heroes like Rama and Krishna, where sacrifice for divine love is more important than sensory satisfaction.

All old cultures had an art and craft world that penetrated the whole society. Everybody was connected in this common dream world (maya) through common spiritual stories, in which Gods and demigods and subtle concepts were introduced. This was and still is the oldest and best therapy. Such stories are intertwined with religious festivals, which inspire people to think about these realities and make creative decorations. In doing so, we feel one as a community, an experience that elevates us all.



“*Chakra* is a Sanskrit word that means a wheel, a disc, or any arrangement in circular form or organization. The ancient sources depict each of the seven major chakras as a lotus blossom, a circular form surrounded by petals.....Although the roots of the knowledge about chakras are of ancient origin, this knowledge is still functionally practical today.”

“Our body exists at two levels. The gross, material level is composed of the seven *dhatus*—flesh, bone, clay, blood, fat, marrow, fluids—and the five elements—earth, water, fire, air and akasha (the void or space). The subtle level is composed of the vital life force (*prana*), mind (*manas*), intellect (*buddhi*), ego (*ahamkara*), and the feeling self (*chitta*). Prana is the means by which the subtle and the gross in the human organism are connected. It activates all of the systems in the body, including the nervous system, and helps them work together as they should. Prana is distributed throughout the body by nadis, channels of energy. The nadi transport system belongs to the subtle body, and the chakras are connected to the main nadi of this system, the sushumna, which operates within the vertebral (spinal) column. Chakras thus do not belong to the material body and cannot be described fully from a materialistic standpoint.”

Harish Johari



The primary bija-mantra here is ram. It increases the digestive fire, longevity and physical strength, all represented by the ram. The bijas of this chakra's ten petals are dam, dham, nam, tam, tham, dam, dham, nam, pam and pham. Repetition of these helps pacify the mental modifications. Here one behaves like a cobra or a moth, for whom sight is all-important.

3 | Manipura

"This chakra encompasses the planes of karma, charity, atonement for one's errors, good company, bad company, selfless service, sorrow, dharma and the celestial plane. It is the seat of the fire element, which manifests as angry looks, fiery temperament and dashing personality. It is also the gravitational center of the body. The behavior of a third-chakra person is motivated by desires for identification, recognition, power and better living conditions."

Harish Johari

In the manipura chakra we enter the world of big games, as we get involved in politics, organizations and other social and economic structures. Name and fame are our primary ambitions during the time this chakra is dominant—age 12–18 for females and 14–21 for males.

The symbol for this chakra is the downward pointing triangle, which represents the energy of fire, which can be purifying, but also destructive. The tendency here is downward, toward exploiting the first two chakras and blocking the energies from flowing upward. Here we find the first knot (Brahma granthi), which ties us to the material and physical world.

Fire is related to the Sun, which is this chakra's ruling planet. This chakra gives us the intellectual ability to organize, structure and manage. It is at this level of consciousness that society is formed. The need for food and shelter are met, and the aspirations of the second chakra are made practical. Personally, we are able to stabilize our life.

At the same time, our self-created psychodrama becomes more complex and we become more attached. The price we may pay is seen in the mental modifications of this chakra's ten petals: spiritual ignorance, thirst, jealousy, treachery, shame, fear, disgust, delusion, foolishness and sadness.

The animal nature of this chakra is the ram. While sheep are among the most gentle mammals, the ram, with his famous head-down attack, is a symbol of power and aggression. He is the vehicle of Agni, the God of Fire. In this chakra we feel very special. The ego takes its mature shape here. In the first chakra it was behaving as subordinate, and in the second it was subdued by the other sex. In the manipura, the ego—if left unbridled—is strongly self-centered, ready to selfishly sacrifice everything and everybody, including family and friends. Using this energy, together with like-minded people, we organize ourselves and experience the power to control. While this power can be destructive, without it a society cannot develop. We need this force to organize and structure.

To control this self-centered ego, we face in the third chakra a fierce and mighty Deity: Braddha Rudra, the Weeping One. When we get too attached to our world of name and fame, only the indomitable power of Rudra can stop us. Rudra does not give blessings like the other Deities that rule the chakras. He intervenes forcefully to show us the reality behind worldly life. As Vishnu brings life, Rudra confronts us with death, which can end the kingdom of ego. But death is no end! It is only change. And the ego does not like change.

However, our karmas cannot stay self-centered. This is a misinterpretation of reality. Even when we don't know about the Truth, the Truth remains the Truth and never changes. So, it is better to understand this Truth. And a long journey upward can commence. Meditation on Rudra helps.

A compassionate, three-headed female Deity, Lakini, shows us the beauty of this chakra. After the physical and mental (astral) planes, the plane of thoughts (celestial) is encountered. Instead of exploiting the world, we see that we can use our new-found power to focus the energy of the first two chakras for the benefit of all. We have the power to create heaven on Earth. Here religions take form, which can make living in harmony with nature more practical. Lakini shows that by organizing a society we can raise the spiritual level of the masses. Saints and saint-like persons like to work within this chakra



For the young man, awakening of the sensual ego becomes the main problem, as expressed in the fiery nature of the ram. He feels special and wants to be as powerful as a king who owns the city of jewels and entertains himself lavishly. Through selfless service, the king can achieve balance.

to inspire humanity.

To have clear and open thoughts we need intense spiritual practice. Then the fire of tapasya can become a great purifier. We need to calm our mind, control our thoughts. And we have to start somewhere. If the body is not free, the mind cannot be free. If the body is quiet, the mind also has a chance to become quiet.

Here asana becomes important, as explained by Rishi Patanjali. We have to find an asana or posture in which we can sit for a long time. For this, discipline is needed. Martial arts and other sports are helpful. With more control over our bodies, the triangle that is fire can start moving up to the higher chakras.

Charity and selfless service are two other important tools to transform our egos into spiritual beings that serve society. When we are focused on the cosmic good, we follow dharma, or truth, and the highest dharma is doing good for others. Only then can we start feeling one with all.

By rightly using the energy of this chakra, we can be inspiring, shining and compassionate personalities who think only of the interests of others. Here we find the saviors of the world, who make the manipura chakra (literally, the City of Gems) shine radiantly. At this stage, the fourth chakra, where Siva reigns as the eternal benefactor, is within reach.



"Chakras are active at all times, whether we are conscious of them or not. Energy influenced by the elements—earth, water, fire, air, and akasha—moves through the chakras, producing different psychic states. These elements (tattvas) are constantly moving with the breath inside the body and influencing one's temperament. (These changes are understood by neurobiologists as chemical changes produced by the endocrine glands, ductless glands whose secretions mix into the body's blood stream directly and instantaneously.) With training, it is possible to observe oneself and see energy moving through these various psychic centers."

Harish Johari

"The word *chakra* also indicates movement. Chakras introduce movement because they transform psychophysical energy into spiritual energy. ¶ Psychophysical energy is electrochemical in nature, and it works with the help of prana. Prana is the energy that creates life, matter and mind. The word *prana* means 'vital life force.' Although our organism draws prana in through our nostrils as we breathe, dynamic prana energy is not based on the physio-chemical system of the body; it operates super-physically, through a 'wireless' system rather than through the nervous system."

Harish Johari



The main bija-mantra of anahata is *yaṁ*, which vibrates the spiritual heart. The bijas of the twelve petals are *kaṁ*, *khaṁ*, *gaṁ*, *ghaṁ*, *ṇaṁ*, *chaṁ*, *chhaṁ*, *jaṁ*, *jhaṁ*, *ñaṁ*, *ṭaṁ* and *thaṁ*. Here one behaves like a deer or an elephant, for whom touch is all-important. The desire to find security dominates.

4 | Anahata

"The Heart Chakra is revered as a center of devotion and transformation in many spiritual traditions. It shines like a jewel in the center of the spine, with three chakras above and three chakras below. It is mentioned in tantric, Puranic and Vedic scriptures under several different names. Sufis and mystics of other traditions instruct their disciples to visualize a clear light in the heart when beginning the practice of raising the Kundalini force and entering higher states of consciousness. It is here that anahata nada—the unstruck cosmic sound—is produced."

Harish Johari

In this chakra we start experiencing a state of balance between the male and female energies, as symbolized by the hexagram, which is the merger of two triangles. Doing and thinking are focused on achieving this balance. Here we have our first experience with the Divine, which is *anahata*, or "unstruck," "unhurt" or "unbeaten." We feel happy. This chakra is dominant for females between 18 and 24 and males age 21 to 28. For mothers the anahata opens automatically. The animal nature here is well depicted by the black antelope. It runs around restlessly but always in joy, searching for the source of the smell of the musk that resides in its own navel.

By joining ashrams, monasteries or organizations that serve the cosmic good, we experience the happy state of balance and oneness with all. Meditating with a group helps us reach the level of the group. In ajna chakra we meditate alone to reach higher levels. In the anahatha chakra we experience something we like, but more study is needed. We are restless to find the source of happiness, in search for it everywhere with full enjoyment in our heart.

In the first three chakras, ego is connected to the material world, to security, outer beauty and the world of name and fame. Here, in the fourth chakra, ego opens for a greater cause, and instead of being self-centered it feels one with all. Saints and saint-like people love to abide here. Here we can achieve balance between idealism and materialism, high thinking and creative action.

As with the antelope, we find that this joy is inside us. In the center of anahata we will find an additional chakra, *ananda kanda*, our spiritual heart. In all conditions, waking and dreaming, our immortal Self is always there, always on duty to serve all. Occasionally we may experience this presence and take selfless action.

Gradually our understanding of our immortal Self gets more defined. As Sadasiva, it appears in the Bana Lingam as the eternal benefactor who has compassion for every creature. From Him we receive the power of language, with which we express our understanding of the causal world. From here comes the inspiration to write. He is the guru inside us who works as our conscience, the inspiring inner voice that accompanies us every step of our life. Warned when we make mistakes, we begin understanding our true character and internalizing the moral code (*yamas* and *niyamas*). This brings us into the everlasting happiness behind everything.

Perpetual bliss is the nature of the main Deity of this chakra: Ishana Rudra Siva, the ultimate yogi and source of good. There is balance and harmony inside and outside us. We enjoy pure relationships. We receive, in this chakra, our first spiritual instructions from our guru, ashram or organization. While practicing them we achieve balance and experience happiness. The Shakti that opens the door for us is Kakini.

The lotus petals of this chakra represent 12 mental modifications: hope, anxiety, endeavor, possessiveness, arrogance, incompetence, discrimination, egoism, lustfulness, fraudulence, indecision and repentance. The psychodrama is still going on; but with the help of Kakini we start seeing these modifications as imperfections created by our own attachments.

We yearn to get more grip on this mind. Pranayama and kumbhaka (holding the breath) are helpful to calm the mind. When there is no breath, there is no mind. When the breath is slow, the mind is slow. When we only concentrate on the breath, we can experience a little time without thoughts. When we make that a sadhana, or spiritual practice, we can prolong our concentration and experience meditation.

Then instead of holding a wrong identification with the world of maya, Kakini can show us the divine play (*leela*) in this seemingly cha-



otic illusion (*maya*) that is created by Vishnu. Also He is hiding in our spiritual heart in the form of Narayan, or the human incarnation. To find Him our life has to become worship while performing our duties in family and society. Then it becomes *leela*, the divine play.

Religion now becomes internalized. Following a spiritual path seems needed to discover the depth of the divine game. Surrendering to a guru who has followed that path is helpful to have confidence in the path and to remove the ignorance that makes *maya* look so real. To accomplish this we need *bhakti* or spiritual devotion, the essence of this chakra. To experience this devotion Kakini brings us devotional and spiritual forms of arts and crafts and their enjoyment. The worldly arts of the second chakra are transformed to devotional and inspired art of the fourth.

The last Goddess, Kundalini Shakti, represents this devotion or *bhakti*. Now She sits in a upward-pointing triangle. In the first chakra She was a dangerous snake. Here She becomes a Goddess. She represents the devotional side of our ego, which longs for union with Her Lord, or our immortal Self. It is like Radha with Her divine love

The spiritual heart of the adolescent opens, which is expressed by the deer. He becomes firm in his *asana*. The eyes indicate his awareness of the divine in all existence. Following a spiritual path makes life fulfilling and worthwhile. For a mother this chakra opens automatically.

for Krishna. We are no longer a victim of desires connected to the material world when we are able to surrender our ego. Then we are able to experience divine love (*prema*) everywhere, in everything and for everybody.

To continue our path, Kundalini Shakti gives us important tools. As Goddess of speech and sound, representing anahata nada or cosmic sound, She provides us with the 50 *matrikas* and all the mantras. In group settings we learn to play with them. Bhajans can help us experience a peaceful and happy world without thoughts. No more value judgments, but instead an open mind. We are ready to enter the fifth chakra to learn more about these sounds.



The primary bija-mantra here is *ham*. It makes the voice sweet and melodious. The petal seed sounds are *ām*, *īm*, *īm*, *ūm*, *ūm*, *ṛm*, *ṛm*, *ṛm*, *lṛm*, *lṛm*, *em*, *aiṁ*, *om*, *auṁ*, *anusvāra* itself and *aḥ*. Here we can, like a peacock, become overly proud of our knowledge—or be captured by sound, as a deer in India is enticed into a trap by flute music.

5 | Vishuddha

“The Vishuddha is the chakra of spiritual rebirth. It encompasses the five planes: physical, astral, celestial, balance, and human. It also includes jnana, awareness that bestows bliss; prana, the vital life force throughout the body that brings balance of all the elements; apana, the air that cleanses the body and is charged with negative ions; and vyana, the air that regulates the blood flow. The human plane (jana loka) becomes vital, enriched with mantras, musical sounds, and the sixteen harmonious qualities (vrittis).”

Harish Johari

We enter now the world of akasha, space or void, the purest element, in which the other four elements appear. Akasha arises from nada, pure cosmic sound, symbolized by the crescent moon. Represented by the circle, akasha has many forms—from the space between atoms to the void in a vessel, and from the subtle space created by mantra-repetition to the supreme cosmic void, where there is nothing but space. At this level we come in contact with pure knowledge, which we need to untie the Vishnu-granthi, the knot that binds us to the diversity inside the unity. In this chakra we discover the unity in the diversity. Vishuddha dominates between the age of 24 and 30 for women and 28 and 35 for men.

In the anahata chakra we discovered the beauty, goodness and truth outside us. Now, in the fifth chakra, we come to know that the Divine is inside us, that we are divine; as outside, so inside. When no longer distracted by outside noise, we hear our own inner sounds: heartbeat, breathing, fluids and gasses. The awakened will hear music, mantras and the powerful *nada-nadi shakti*, which sounds like a thousand vinas playing in the distance, or a swarm of honey bees nearby.

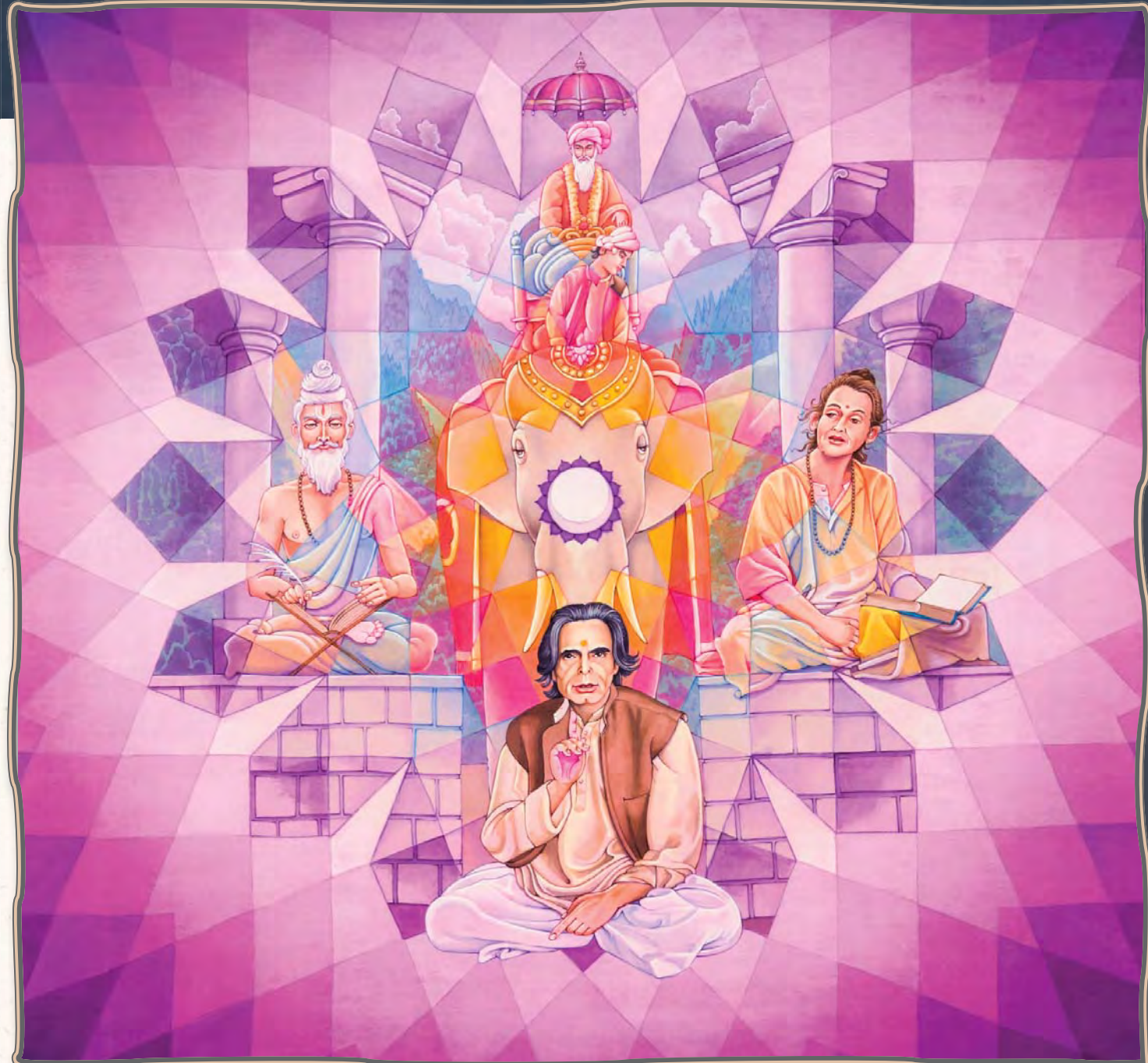
The seers of the ancient world distinguished the basic sounds to create the matrikas, the 50 letters of the Sanskrit alphabet. One matrika is connected to each of the 50 lotus petals in the first six chakras. Working with these sounds is one of the best ways to balance the chakras. Start with the first chakra and move upward, one chakra at a time, ending in Aum at the ajna. This meditation makes one feel grounded and prepared for meditation on the third eye. Here we become aware that all knowledge is inside us.

The animal nature of the elephant, which prevails in this chakra, also points to knowledge. After this chakra, there are no more animal desires. The power of the elephant, the symbol of knowledge here, is needed to deal with the world of the senses. From the elephant we can learn to be patient, to have self-confidence, to remember what we have learned and to enjoy our oneness with nature. With this wisdom we can survive in the material world. But to go higher we need a teacher. The Deity of this chakra is Panchavaktra Siva. In this five-faced Lord we find the guru, who helps us realize our true nature. Our spiritual darkness ends in this chakra, which is the source of all great religious teachings. At this stage Siva reveals His grace and shows us that we were never separated from Him.

This is the chakra of spiritual teachers. Even they still have challenges, attachment to the desire to communicate with others, attachment to this still-worldly position. And there is even the danger to misuse their knowledge or stop practicing the teachings themselves. In the austere attire of Siva we can glean the most important axiom for this chakra: simple living and high thinking. With no distractions from the world of luxury, we are more able to make unattached refectations.

Shakini, who closely resembles Sarasvati, is the doorkeeper to the vishuddha chakra. She represents the knowledge behind education and the fine arts, two important tools in this chakra, not only school education, but also cultural education, learning to be a good father or mother, brother or sister, friend and neighbor. The highest art is the art of living.

Fine arts and crafts are part of and support cultural education. To master them we need to improve our concentration. In the arts and crafts we learn in a playful way to withdraw from the senses. While creating, we forget everything and are focused on one subject. At that moment there is no ego, and art can become inspired. Then we can play with dreams in a way that words cannot. Or we use poetry. Most religious texts are written in poetic style or dream-like stories with profound hidden messages.



Shakini introduces us to the world of silence that no words can describe, and reveals the importance of non-verbal messages, like body language and facial expressions.

Knowledge is not yet fully realized in this chakra. We have become aware of its existence, but we are still in the world of desires and the karmas that they create. When we discover knowledge, ignorance appears also. It is not in nature, but it is in us, in our mind or our thoughts. A lot of education is needed, and Shakini is there to give it.

In the fifth chakra we become aware that to control the senses, we have to control our mind. Patanjali calls this pratyahara, withdrawal of the senses. We all know how difficult this is. Seeking control, we practice withdrawal of the senses in meditation. We also practice it in the fine arts and the karma yoga of daily life. When we are deeply engaged with music, painting, sculpting, animation, gardening, cooking, planning and organizing, there is nothing else. Whenever we are absorbed in something, withdrawal of the senses is happening. We learn

Thirsting for true knowledge, the seeker enters the world of the teachers. Scriptures are studied at this stage, the sacred texts that contain all past knowledge, represented by the elephant. Here spiritual poetry and philosophy are composed. In this artwork, Pieter has painted three figures from his own life: Harish Johari, his guru, in the center; Narmada Puri, a German sadhu and teacher, on the right; and on the left Santoshpuri, a legendary master.

that deep concentration with complete absorption is within our grasp.

We can work even more directly on controlling the mind by using breath suspension (kumbhaka). Here the ultimate aim is to withdraw the mind in the Self. Another practice to keep focused on the Self is japa, or mantra-repetition. After many years of deep study, we are ready for some real practice in the ajna chakra.



The main bija-mantra here is Aum, the primal cosmic sound. It brings nondual consciousness. The bijas of the two lotus petals of ajna are kṣang and haṁ. They activate the shaktis in our consciousness of feeling, knowing and doing. Here one behaves like a swan (hamsa) which can separate milk (truth) from water (maya).

6 | Ajna

“This chakra encompasses the solar (Yamuna), lunar (Ganga), earthly (Prithvi), and liquid (Jala) planes, and the planes of conscience (Viveka), neutrality (Sarasvati), austerity (Tapas), violence (Himsa), and spiritual devotion (Bhakti). The solar and lunar nerve energies intertwine up through all chakras and join into one at the sixth chakra. The plane of neutrality appears as a balance between solar and lunar energy within the body. The components of duality become equalized, leaving a state of pure music and neutrality. This brings the sense of oneness and of unity with the cosmic laws that appear in the plane of austerity.”

Harish Johari

In the ajna chakra we reach a place where the male and female energies within us are becoming one. The ida and pingala spiritual nerves end here [though some teach they continue into the crown chakra], and sushumna—the path to cosmic consciousness—opens. The distractions of the lower chakras lose their power. Only by hard work (tapas) do we experience this level of mind. And for that we have to be able to be alone without feeling lonely. Just as the yogi withdraws inside his cave, we must find the cave inside ourself. Once we have discovered it, we can find shelter and peace no matter where we are, and melt into our immortal Self, the ever-present witness to our personal psychodrama.

Life is now like watching a movie while experiencing the ineffable Divine. We have arrived at a place of inner neutrality, devoid of value judgments. The primal sound of the universe, Aum, is our constant companion. This chakra is dominant between age 30 to 36 for women and 35 to 42 for men.

The Deity here is Ardhanarishwara. In this form the Almighty shows us that Siva and Shakti are one. They cannot exist without each other. They are like our split brain. We have a male side that is electric and gives shocks. And we have a female side that is magnetic and attracts.

The male side is dominant in the first chakra (surviving), in the third (organizing), and fifth (intellectualizing). In the second chakra (outer beauty), and the fourth (inner beauty), the female side is more active. With the presence of Hakini, the Shakti of ajna, we see an emphasis on the female again. Siva is the Sun and Shakti is the Moon. Her moon-influenced energy, our feminine side, allows for meditation to be possible, for She has no thoughts, no value judgments, no time consciousness.

Hakini has six heads. The attributes of the first four are especially developed here: undivided attention, perfect concentration, thought control and enlightenment. These powers are needed to untie the final knot: Rudra Granthi. First we had to untie the knot that binds us to the world of names and forms, maya. Then we had to untie the knot of attachment to the fruits of our actions, karma. Now it is time to unravel the knot of anava, I-consciousness, or ego: the illusion that we are separate.

These four qualities are also needed for another gift from the feminine side: arts and crafts and their enjoyment. Inspired by Hakini, these efforts become spiritual. Now we can work enjoyably for long periods without disturbance or discomfort, in a state without ego, and we can even experience enlightenment. We reside in blissful, neutral happiness when thinking and doing are focused on one spiritual subject. This is not yet unitive meditation, in which the distinction between meditator and the object of meditation does not exist.

Before we can really meditate, we have to work hard on our concentration. Commonly when we talk about meditation, we actually mean concentration. Concentration can be honed while engaged in the arts and crafts, or by focusing on a mantra, yantra, Deity, flame or even a point. Meditation on a particular aspect of the Divine can help us improve our concentration.

Once we are one-pointed, intuitive solutions will appear. It is not yet unobstructed meditation and superconscious concentration (samprajnata samadhi), which are the fifth and sixth heads of Hakini. Thoughts are still there. But we have experienced that thinking and doing can be focused on one subject, and that can develop into meditation, where thinking and doing reach their most subtle form. When we see a yogi doing something, he is actually doing nothing. When we see him doing nothing, he is working very hard.



In the fourth chakra we became aware of our conscience. With the help of the guru of the fifth chakra, we can now meet the guru within. We may have freed ourselves from political and social games, but we cannot—and would not want to—escape our inner voice, our guide to enlightenment.

In the ajna chakra, all that humanity has learned through experience is present in the form of the collective unconscious. This akashic library opens now for us.

A most useful tool at this stage is japa. We may have played with it before. But now it has to become serious. Counting the repetitions is needed to establish japa as an potent sadhana. After years of practice, japa may become more mature and automatic, with counting no longer required. Japa frees us from worries and other distractions, opening us to the innate, peaceful silence within. Siva as Itara Lingam symbolizes this state in which lower-chakra desires are subdued because the subtle mind (sukshma manas) is under control and the masculine-feminine energies are in balance.

Working hard in this chakra, we begin to see new perspectives for

Here the mature seeker becomes a yogi, no longer bound by time. All duality stops here. He has discovered the Divine in himself after long meditations and arduous sadhanas. He has become true (sat). From this chakra, sacred scriptures are written. In the forefront sits Avadh Behari Das Kathiababa, a dear friend of the artist. At the right is the renowned Bengali saint Anandamayi Ma (1896-1982). The person on the left wishes to remain unknown.

our life on Mother Earth. We understand that all the suffering we experienced in the lower chakras was needed to bring us to where we are now. We don't blame others anymore. Without valuations, we open ourselves for the divine game we are playing on this Earth. And we become curious about what more we can experience here. To fulfill our dharma, we still have to perform actions (karma), but we don't want to create new negative karma. We do our duty to the best of our ability, in full contentment, while maintaining our disciplines, our tapasya.



The primary bija-mantra of sahasrara is visarga, a short, abrupt "h" sound indicated in Sanskrit by two dots, one above the other. In the thousand lotus petals one finds all pure sounds. This is the chakra of pure illumination.

7 | Sahasrara

"When the Kundalini is raised up to the Sahasrara Chakra, the illusion of 'individual self' is dissolved. One is one's own real Self. According to the scriptures, Sahasrara is the seat of the self-luminous soul or chitta, the essence of being. In the person who has attained Sahasrara, chitta is like a screen upon which the reflection of the cosmic Self, the divine, is seen. In the presence of the cosmic Self, it is possible for anyone to feel the divine and, indeed, to realize the divinity within oneself."

Harish Johari

As we enter the seventh chakra, we encounter two minor chakras located within the sahasrara. The first is soma chakra, or "moon center," of female energy, revered as the source of all desires. Having opened ourselves to the moon-influenced feminine energy in the sixth chakra, we now reach the realm of Kamadhe-nu, the wish-fulfilling cow. At this level of consciousness, whatever the adept wishes for comes true. Because ego is dissolved, his wishes concern the good of all. Only real yogis can gain and make use of this power.

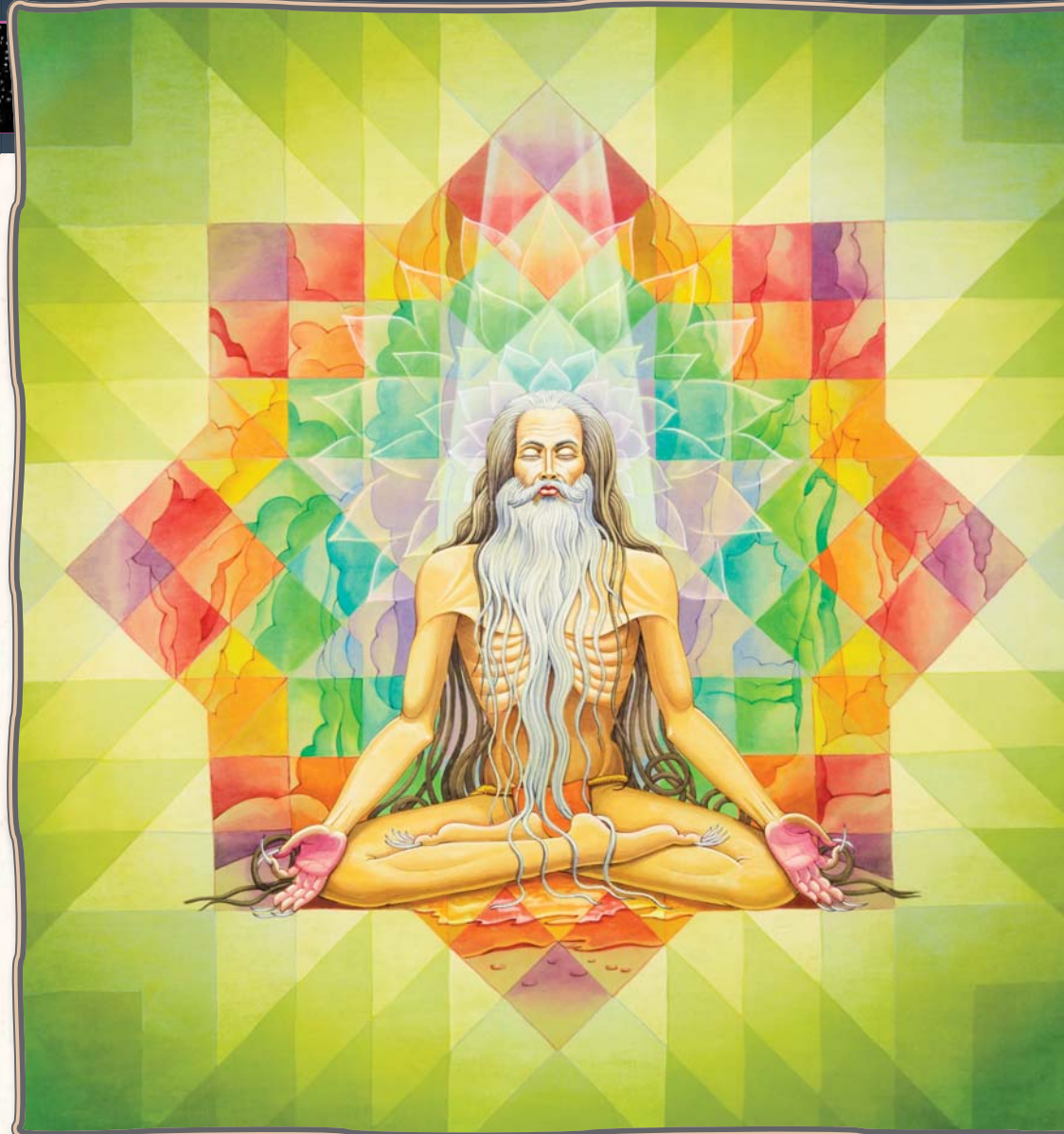
Kameshwara is the other minor chakra within sahasrara. Here Shakti as Kameshwari, the Goddess of desire, unites with Siva as Kameshwara, the Lord of the desire principle. The one who desires is now one with the One who fulfills desire. Here, in the ultimate non-experience, individual consciousness dissolves in the immortal Self. This is called Self Realization.

The higher we ascend, the more subtle the inner realms become, and words can fail us here. To reach the crown chakra requires laboring hard to bring our individual consciousness back to its source. In this chakra we can experience this source. Here we can enjoy uninterrupted meditation, where mind, ego and intellect are dissolved. Classically, this is known as turiya, the transcendent "fourth" state. It is like a deep sleep, but we are neither conscious nor unconscious. Here the adept is free from all attachments. The mind is finally still. The period of life at which people would ideally unfold into this chakra is between the age of 36 to 42 for women, and 42 to 49 for men.

Up to the sixth chakra, we are naturally limited to meditation with form (saguna). The left hemisphere of our brain produces the concept and the right gives the percept. Through this process we learn about the different aspects of consciousness. In the seventh chakra, meditation without form (nirguna) becomes possible, focusing on Truth, which has no form, no shape and never changes.

In the first seven steps of Patanjali's eight-fold (ashtanga) yoga, success depends primarily on the effort and diligence of the seeker. In the last step, samadhi, fulfillment depends on the grace of God, Gods and guru. Such grace comes when least expected. The rare few, having evolved in the inner arts for lifetimes, are granted the experience of Self Realization. Yet this is the destiny of all souls, without exception. As individual consciousness and the supreme consciousness become one, we enter the rarefied world of Siva, who shows us the reality behind creation. Now we can truly say, "Sivoham, I am Siva, the immortal self, the witnessing consciousness."

Even after Self Realization, we are still not out of the game. We still need action (karma) to fulfill our dharma. Although ego was subdued in the sixth chakra, even here it can still persist and become big and powerful, even making the yogi a danger to society. With his focus no longer upward, only downward remains, and soon he must start all over again, but with the advantage that he knows the destination to be reached. The wise aspirant keeps the ego in check, guarding his humility as a sacred treasure, knowing that there remains much work to be done. He must become one with cosmic consciousness, with the living concept that penetrates everything, from the smallest sub-atomic particle to the largest star. Coming out of samadhi, a mature and accomplished yogi strives



Entering the sahasrara chakra, the adept yogi becomes his real Self, which is the Self in all. He has concluded the spiritual journey and transmuted his humanness into pure divinity, which we can feel in his presence, a divinity that, while yet to be known, is also inside us all.

to abide in a state of effortless oneness, *sahaja samadhi*, seeing everything as forms or sparks of the Divine.

There is still one more step we have to take after Self-Realization. We have to become one with cosmic consciousness, with the living concept that penetrates everywhere, from the smallest atomic particle to the largest star. In the tradition of my guru, Harish Johari, that concept is represented by Vishnu, the Lord of Maya and Master of the game (Leela). When we become Siva, we have to ask ourselves what is Siva doing. He is constantly in meditation and His favorite mantra is Ram. He loves to watch the

game of Vishnu and even joins as Hanuman. His motto is: don't think, just enjoy! Now we can realize this. Siva and Vishnu, like life and death, cannot do without each other. This is best expressed in the form of Harihara, half Vishnu and half Siva. They worship each other. As immortal selves (Siva), we now worship the life that is present everywhere (Vishnu); and in life's highest achievement, we surrender to our immortal self.

Living on Earth, the best way of becoming one with Vishnu is by serving Him. For that we must simply do our duty. Siva as Hanuman is the supreme example.

Pieter Weltevrede met his guru, Harish Johari, in 1977 in the Netherlands, where the master was teaching about chakras, tantra, numerology, ayurveda and more. Pieter, a student of social science at the university, was especially attracted



to the knowledge of chakras. To understand, one has to do some form of art, according to Johari, who himself was a multi-media artist. Painting soon became the most important subject. His quest to develop that

gift led him to India in 1988, where his guru had him meet the distinguished art teacher Sri Chandra Bal. While Pieter explored the holy land, Dada Harish introduced him to the sadhus and sannyasins of India, who taught him about the chakras in daily life. Harish Johari left his body in 1999. Together with Victor and Kooch Daniels, Pieter contributed to the book *Awakening the Chakras* (published by Inner Traditions). Many of his paintings can be seen at sanatansociety.com and sagarworld.com.

Conclusion

The yogi's spiritual journey through the chakras culminates here. But that does not mean it ends, because he is still in the game of life. To continue evolving he needs more experiences, as do we. With the knowledge of the chakras we can better understand our experiences. We realize that ultimate peace and happiness are subjective, mental states. We live in a body and we have a mind. Getting this mind under control is the objective. We begin our journey by trusting in providence in the first chakra. In the second we find a good skill. In the third we organize our life. In the fourth we realize balance. To continue, we gain a guru in the fifth. In the sixth we practice and find the guru within. In the seventh, we reach the ultimate awakening, Self Realization, in which there is only cosmic consciousness."

INDIA—Ancient Nation Reawakens!

Sanjeev Sanyal's fast-paced book, *The Land of Seven Rivers*, is a provocative portal to Bharat's history from the time of Pangaea to the 21st century

Sanjeev Sanyal challenges the modern claim that India was never a nation but was born in 1947 as a cobbled-together group of princely states. Some criticize Sanyal's work for lacking depth. But he doesn't claim to address all controversies regarding the ancient past of the Indian sub-continent, cover every angle or even include more than a small percentage of his research. He targets the YouTube generation with a fast-paced, story-telling documentary style. In just 300 pages he takes us from the age of Pangaea to the spectacular new city of Gurgaon, with a diverse selection of fascinating subplots that all point to a common theme: India's nationhood is 8,000 years old, has re-awakened and is moving dynamically into the 21st century. The following text is drawn entirely from his book, mostly from the first half.

THIS BOOK IS ABOUT THE HISTORY OF India's geography. Although I do not have any formal training as either a historian or as a geographer, my profession as an economist, my love of old maps and wildlife, my studies of urban habitats and my many travels through India and Southeast Asia began to slowly fit together into a mosaic. It was no easy journey. I read through ancient religious texts, the writings of medieval travelers and scores of academic papers on seemingly unrelated and arcane topics. The topic became an obsession. It drove me to take two and half years off from my career to travel around India. Many of the texts make sense only if one has actually visited the places to which they refer.

As we make our way through the second decade of the twenty-first century, India is undergoing an extraordinary transformation. After centuries of relative decline, the Indian economy is reasserting itself. The result is an urban construction boom that defies imagination. As urbanization and modernization churn the population, communities are being torn apart, and with them we are losing old customs, traditions and oral histories. Many reminders of the country's history are being paved over by new highways and buildings. In a time of rapid change, it is important to remember that India is an ancient land.

Almost all written Indian history to date

is concerned with sequences of political events. This book focuses on a somewhat different set of questions: Is there any truth in ancient legends about the Great Flood? Why do Indians call their country Bharat? What do the epics tell us about how Indians perceived the geography of their country in the Iron Age? How did the Europeans map India? And more. One cannot understand the flow of Indian history without appreciat-



Magical Gupta metallurgy: Originally established in Madhya Pradesh in 402 ce by Chandra Gupta II in honor of Vishnu, the famed iron pillar was moved to Qutab Minar, Delhi, by Sultan Iltutmish. Mysteriously, it has remained free of corrosion for over sixteen centuries.

ing the drying up of the Saraswati river, the monsoon winds that carried merchant fleets across the Indian Ocean, the Deccan Traps that made Shivaji's guerilla tactics possible.

The very idea of India, its physical geogra-

phy and its civilization, has evolved over the centuries. Yet, despite all these changes, it is astonishing how India's civilizational traits have survived over millennia. The ox-carts of the Harappan civilization can still be seen in many parts of rural India, essentially unchanged but for the rubber tyres. The Gayatri Mantra, a hymn composed over four millennia ago, is chanted daily by millions of Hindus. This is not just about longevity but about a civilizational ability to take along an incredible mix of ideas, cultures and lifestyles that, despite their apparent differences, are still a part of the overall patchwork.

One of the persistent misconceptions about India is an idea often repeated by colonial-era officialdom for obvious political ends. As Sir John Strachey put it in the late nineteenth century, "The first and most essential thing to learn about India is that there is not, and never was an India." Half a century later, Winston Churchill would echo the same point when he said that "India is a geographical term. It is no more a united nation than the equator." A corollary to this point of view was the argument that since Indians were never conscious of their nationhood, they did not care for their history (or their freedom).

As we shall see, this is totally incorrect. There is more than enough evidence to show that Indians have long been conscious of their history and civilization. Indeed, from very ancient times, Indians have gone out of their way to record their times as well as to create linkages to those who came before them. This sense of civilizational continuity is so strong that foreign rulers, including the British, have repeatedly acknowledged Indian civilization even as they have tried to give themselves legitimacy. But to understand India, we must go back to the very beginning.

Ancient Tectonics and Genetics

After breaking apart from the ancient supercontinent of Pangaea, the Indian subcontinent moved north 55-60 million years ago until it collided with the Eurasian plate. The process is not over—the Indian plate is still pushing into Asia, making the Himalayas and the subcontinent tectonically very active. Wedged into Asia along the Himalayas, the stage was set for the formation of the young-

Ancient cities, ancient roads: (overlays upper left) major cities of the Indus Valley Civilization Mature Harappan Phase (2600-1900 bce), white dots are modern cities; (upper right) India's flag with ancient symbol of the Chakravartin, Universal Monarch; (red line) National Highways 1 and 2 still run along the ancient Uttara Path (Northern Highway), from Kolkata to Peshawar, eastern end of the Khyber Pass, now in Pakistan; the Dakshin Path, (in blue) described in the Ramayana, runs from Ayodhya to Gujarat, then south to Rameshwaram and over to Sri Lanka; (black) NH7 is the modern direct highway south

est of India's geological features—the Gangetic plains. They started out as a marshy depression running between the Himalayas and an older mountain range called the Vindhyas. Silt brought down by the rivers began to create a fertile alluvial plain. We know that the Ganga repeatedly changed its course and shifted southward over time.

After the mysterious global extinction event that occurred around 72,000 bce, African Bushmen were the only hominids to survive. With Europe still uninhabitable, locked in ice, a small number, perhaps a single band, crossed over from Africa into the southern Arabian peninsula. They spread out along the Makran coast into the Indian subcontinent. Amazingly, all non-Africans are descendants of this tiny group of wanderers. There are plenty of remains of these early humans in Stone Age sites scattered across India. Bhimbetka in central India is one of the most extensive sites in the world. The hilly terrain is littered with hundreds of caves and rock shelters that appear to have been inhabited almost continuously for over 30,000 years.

Bhimbetka's cave paintings provide intriguing glimpses of the ancient origins of Indian civilization. As the BBC's Michael Wood puts it, "Looking at the dancing Deity at Bhimbetka with his bangles and trident, one can't help but recall the image of the dancing Shiva." The story is still unfolding, but we know for sure that India supported a fairly large human population by the end of the Neolithic age (circa 4500 bce). Who were these people? How are they related to



present-day Indians?

Until the early twentieth century, it was believed that India was inhabited by aboriginal stone-age tribes until around 1500 bce, when Indo-Europeans called "Aryans" invaded the subcontinent from Central Asia with horses and iron weapons. This theory, however, had to be drastically revised when remains of the sophisticated Harappan civilization were discovered. They proved that Indian civilization clearly predated 1500 bce. Twenty-first-century genetic studies of India's population are still evolving, but a 2006 study concludes that India's population mix has been broadly stable for a very long time and that there has been no major injection

of Central Asian genes for over 10,000 years. After thousands of years of mixing, Indians are most closely related to each other, and it is pointless splitting hairs over who is more Aryan and who is more Dravidian. The story of Manu, the Indian Noah, sums up the genetic findings surprisingly well. He was said to have been the king of the Dravidians prior to the flood but is repeatedly mentioned in the Vedic tradition as an ancestor!

The Story of the Harappans

The hot topic of reconciling the Indus Valley civilization with Vedic tradition often deteriorates into a political debate. The discovery of the Harappan civilization, which was a



contemporary of the Sumerians, the Minoans and the ancient Egyptians, revealed no massive structures like the pyramids. Yet, the Harappan sites are remarkable for their attention to urban design and active municipal management. A large city like Mohenjo-daro (now in Pakistan) may have had a population of around 40–50,000 people. Furthermore, we see meticulous town-planning in every detail—standardized bricks, street grids, covered sewerage systems, advanced toilets and extensive water management systems and so on. Over the last century, thousands of sites have been found and several new sites are being discovered every year. It appears that the subcontinent was very populous. The core of the Harappan civilization extended over a large area, from Gujarat in the south, across Sindh and Rajasthan and extending into Punjab and Haryana, as far east as Uttar Pradesh and as far west as Sutkagen-dor on the Makran coast of Baluchistan, not far from Iran. The geographical spread, the number of sites and implied population of the Harappan civilization dwarfs that of contemporary Egypt, China or Mesopotamia.

There is no sign that Harappan cities were laid waste by invaders. Around 2200bce we

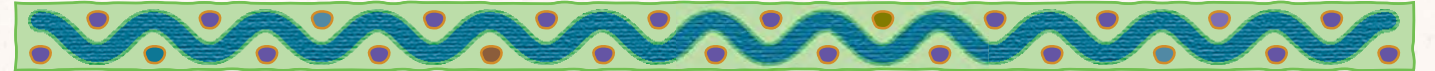
find that the monsoons had become distinctly weaker and there were prolonged droughts that also affected Egypt and Turkey. However, the Harappans were hit by an even bigger problem—the drying up of the river system on which their civilization was based. Their cities began to disintegrate and they began to migrate, slowly drifting east and south. B.B. Lal puts forward a formidable body of evidence that the Harappan legacy is not just visible in later Indian civilization but is present in everyday life to this day. Take for example, the *namaste*—the common Indian way to show respect to both people and to the Gods. There are several clay figurines from Harappan sites that show a person with palms held together in *namaste*. There are even terra-cotta dolls of women with red vermillion on their foreheads. Is this the origin of the “sindur” used by married Hindu women? In short, the Harappans did not just disappear; they live on amongst us. They merged with the wider population and seeded what we now know as the Indian civilization.

It would not be unreasonable to say the *Rig Veda* was compiled no later than 2000bce, and the geography of the book is very clear.

From fertile river valleys to desert: (above) the stupa mound and great bath of the abandoned city of Mohenjo-daro, now located in the Thar desert near the lower reaches of the Indus River in Pakistan; (left) the lush valley of the Indus, higher in the Himalayan foothills

To the east, the book talks of the Ganga river and, to the west, of the Kabul river. It also shows awareness of the Himalayan mountains in the north and the seas to the south (i.e. the Arabian Sea). This is a very well defined geographical area and, interestingly, roughly coincides with the Harappan world. Most interesting of all, the *Rig Veda* speaks repeatedly of a great river called the Saraswati. The Saraswati is called the mother of all rivers and “great among the great, the most impetuous of rivers,” the “inspirer of hymns.” The problem is that there is no living river in modern India that fits the description. But the controversies over the details of shifting river beds do not change the big picture. In the end it is very difficult to escape the conclusion that the Rig Vedic people and the Harappans were one and the same riparian civilization. My own sense is that the Harappans were a multi-ethnic society, rather like India today. The Rig Vedic people could well have been part of this bubbling mix.

Even after 8,000 years, the lost river Saraswati was not forgotten. We find its memory echoed in legends, folk tales and place names. At the core of the Rig Vedic landscape was an area called Sapta-Sindhu, Land of the Seven Rivers, a region some feel is constrained to include Haryana, all of Punjab (including Pakistani Punjab) and even parts of adjoining provinces. This is a very large area. But the *Vedas* clearly mention a wider landscape watered by “thrice-seven” rivers. While one does not have to take it literally as referring to twenty-one rivers, it is obvious to me that



India's urban future: projects still under construction in Gurgaon (above) include Unitech's Infospace, a 28-acre, 3.7 million sq. ft. business complex; (right) architect's drawing of the upscale 20-acre Vipul Aarohan residential complex: 37 floors, 383 units, each priced at 3.62 crore rupees (US\$570,000)

the Sapta-Sindhu is a sub-set of the wider Vedic landscape. What was so special about these seven rivers? In my view their importance derives from it being the home of the Bharatas, a tribe that would give Indians the name by which they call themselves.

The Bharatas

Although the *Rig Veda* is concerned mostly with religion, the hymns do mention one event that is almost certainly historical. It was the Bharata king Sudasa's victory, at great odds, in the “Battle of the Ten Kings” that occurred on the banks of the Ravi river in Punjab. But the real genius of the Bharatas was not their military strategy. It may lie in the fact that the *Vedas* do not confine themselves to the ideas of the victors but deliberately include those of sages from other tribes, including some of the defeated tribes. Thus, the hymns of the sage Vishwamitra, the great rival of Vashishtha, are given an important place in the compilation. In doing so, the Bharatas created a template of civilizational assimilation and accommodation rather than imposition.

The Bharatas live on today in the name by which Indians have called their country since ancient times: “Bharat Varsha” or the “Land of the Bharatas.” In time it would come to denote the whole subcontinent. Later texts such as the *Puranas* would define it as “The country that lies north of the seas and south of the snowy mountains is called Bharatam, there dwell the descendants of Bharata.” It



remains the official name of India even today.

Sudasa's achievements may also have triggered an imperial dream that would remain embedded in the Indian consciousness. After his victories, he performed the Ashvamedha or horse sacrifice and was declared a Chakravartin or Universal Monarch. The word *chakravarti* itself means “wheels that can go anywhere,” implying a monarch whose chariot can roll in any direction. The spokes of the wheel symbolize the various cardinal directions. Over the centuries, the symbolism of the wheel would be applied to both the temporal and the spiritual. We see the symbol used in imperial Mauryan symbols, Buddhist art and in the modern Indian nation's flag.

The Geography of the Epics

The Gangetic plain was the birthplace of the next cycle of urbanization. From 1300 to 400 bce the area was made up of a network of small kingdoms and republics. Many of them were centered around towns. We come across place names that are still in use, and remarkable socio-cultural continuities. Modern

Indian children are still brought up on this era's legends from the great epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* composed in this period. For the first time, we see an awareness of the whole subcontinent as a geographical and civilizational unit. It is also a time that we witness the growing cultural importance of the Asiatic lion, an animal that would come to occupy a central role in Indian symbolism. They tell us a lot about how the geographical conception of India evolved in the Iron Age.

In this book I am not concerned with the historical authenticity of the events described in the epics. My interest is in the expansion of geographical knowledge that we can discern from them. The two epics have very different cardinal orientations from that of the Sapta-Sindhu conception of the landscape. The geography of the *Ramayana* is oriented along a North-South axis while the *Mahabharata* is generally oriented on an East-West axis. These are aligned with two major trade routes. The Dakshina Path (or Southern Road) made its way from the Gangetic plains through Central India to the



Symbols of imperial power: (top) one of only 420 protected Asiatic lions remaining in the Gujarat's Gir Forest National Park; (below) Ashokan Pillar, Vaishali, Bihar

and was later pushed back by Chanaka and his protege Chandragupta Maurya. Their conquests would redefine the political geography of the world.

Third in the Mauryan succession, Ashoka is the first Indian monarch who left artifacts of his reign. Best known are a series of edicts engraved on rocks and stone pillars scattered across the empire. These pillars and inscriptions have been found across the subcontinent, from Afghanistan in the north to Karnataka in the south, Gujarat in the west to Bengal in the east. They give us a sense of the scale and extent of the Mauryan empire. Around 40-50 feet high, the stone columns are impressive structures often capped by a lion (or lions), an animal that was associated with the Mauryas since Chandragupta's time. In some of the pillars, the lions are accompanied with the "chakra" or wheel, which in my view represents the "Chakravartin" or Universal Monarch. They were expressions of imperial power, the Mauryan way of marking territory.

Later rulers understood the symbolic meaning of the Mauryan columns and were always keen to appropriate them. This is why the emperors of the Gupta and Mughal dynasties went out of their way to put their own inscriptions next to those of Ashoka. Therefore, it should not be surprising that when India became independent, Mauryan lions and the chakra became the country's national symbols. The founding fathers of the Indian Republic intuitively understood that the lions and the wheel stood for the power of the State.

What About the South?

One of the richest sources from this era is the Tamil Sangam literature. Sadly, much of the scholarship around Sangam literature is focused on trying to use the corpus to discern the roots of pristine Dravidian culture, unsullied by "Aryan" influences from the north. This is ridiculous at many levels. The society described in the poems is full of trade and exchange with the rest of India as well as foreign lands. It is a world that is busily absorbing all kinds of influences and clearly reveling in it. Looking for signs of a pristine past misses the point about the people who composed the anthologies. Secondly, the composers of the Sangam poems clearly show strong religious and cultural links with the rest of the country. This includes knowledge of Buddhist, Brahminical and Jain traditions that are of "northern" origin. Even when "local"

who argue that the epic pre-dates geographical knowledge about South India and that the place names were retrofitted in later times to flow with the story. Take for instance Kishkindha, the kingdom of the monkeys. I visited such a site across the river from the medieval ruins of Vijayanagar at Hampi. The terrain consists of strange rock-outcrops, caves with Neolithic paintings, and bands of monkeys scampering over the boulders.

It is such an evocative landscape that it is likely that Valmiki either visited it or had heard detailed descriptions of it from merchants plying the Dakshina Path or Southern Road. It takes us from the top to the bottom of India and across the "bridge" (possibly just a strip of land still above water then) to the northern tip of Sri Lanka.

Moreover, we can tell a lot about how Iron Age Indians perceived the geographical extent of their civilization from the way Ravana is depicted. He is the villain of the *Ramayana* but is not presented as a *mleccha* (barbarian). He is very much an insider: a learned Brahmin and a worshiper of Shiva. Whatever his failings, Ravana and his southern kingdom are categorically within the Indian civilizational milieu. The exchange of goods and ideas along the Southern Road, therefore, had linked the north and the south of India long before political unification under the Mauryans in the third century bc. The name *Mahabharata* is itself interesting, as it can be read to mean "Greater India."

The Imperial Dream

In the third and fourth centuries bce, simultaneously across the ancient world we see a new political ideology and ambition. Within a couple of generations, the idea of empire inspired a series of remarkable leaders around the world. Beginning in the sixth century bc with Cyrus the Great of Persia, then in China, 330 bc, King Hui of Qin and around the same time, Alexander the Greek from Macedonia. He tried to take India, made little headway



From 350 bc to the 21st century: (left) The Ashoka pillar capital (top portion), once atop a pillar in Sarnath and now in a museum there; (above) India's national emblem atop Vidhana Soudha, located in Bengaluru, the seat of the state legislature of Karnataka

gods like Murugan (Kartik) are mentioned, they are depicted not as separate but as obviously part of the overall cultural milieu.

By the late Iron Age the people in southern India were not just aware of the rest of Indian civilization but were comfortably a part of it. Goods and ideas were flowing along the coast as well as the Dakshina Path. For some odd reason, Indian historians see cultural influences flowing only from the North to the rest of the country. The reality was of back-and-forth exchange. We see this in how the "northern" Sanskrit language evolved over the centuries by absorbing words from other languages. Contrary to popular perception, Sanskrit was never a "pure" language, and its success was largely due to its ability from the earliest times to absorb ideas and words from Tamil, Munda and even Greek. Instead of using it to split hairs over regional differences, I would say that Sangam literature is far more remarkable for the extraordinary continuities it shows that remain alive today.

Today India is witnessing what all developed countries have experienced at some stage of their evolution. Development is ultimately about shifting people from subsistence farming to other activities; urbanization is merely the spatial manifestation of this process. My guesstimate is that urban India will have to absorb some 300-350 million people over the next three decades. This will be one of the biggest human events of the twenty-first century. [End of Excerpts]

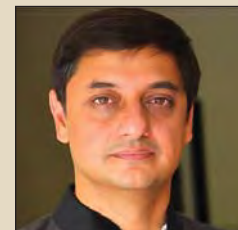
Colonial Era to Modern Times

Having established the integrity of India as a civilization entity and taken us through to the story of the last great Hindu empire of the Guptas, *Land of Seven Rivers* continues with the story of Muslim conquerors who carried on their own imperial dream as would-be emperors of the whole subcontinent. We get details of the incredible destruction during their rule, with a focus on the churn of cities, palaces and fortifications. We learn about trade, seafaring and interactions of peoples from Europe to Arabia to China, and the reports of foreign visitors about India's amazing opulence.

Sanyal then describes the advent of the European powers, most significantly the brutal Portuguese and greedy British. Chapter Six, *The Mapping of India*, is a mesmerizing story of the top-secret nature of geographical knowledge and how the quest to conquer India was a key factor driving the science of cartography. Chapter Seven, *Trigonometry and Steam*, describes the incredible fortitude

and perseverance of the British men who took six decades to make precision surveys of India by hauling huge theodolites across unknown and dangerous terrain, mapping the subcontinent all the way to Tibet. It goes on to tell the story of the railroads, followed by the first major revolt of 1857 and on to Independence. Chapter 8, *The Contours of Modern India*, takes us through the tragedy of Partition, the absorption of princely states and the defeat of "the last colonial" when India ejected the Portuguese from Goa.

From an age of urban India 8,000 years ago, Sanyal closes by taking us to modern India's urbanization, detailing the transformation of villages into slums and into the gleaming towers of Gurgaon. We recommend this book to every Hindu family and to anyone who thought they "hated history" in school but would like to understand India. It reads more like a novel than a documentary. You will come out with a renewed, informed vision of Hinduism's roots in Bharat Mata, Mother India.



Sanjeev Sanyal is an Indian economist, environmentalist and urban theorist. Currently he is the Principal Economic Adviser in the Ministry of Finance, Government of India. A bestselling writer, he is also the author of three other books. See his Wikipedia article for details, get his books on Amazon, and don't miss his videos on YouTube.

see: sanjeevsanyal.com

Uniting Sports & Spirituality

At its core, the pursuit of personal perfection through athletics is a time-tested method of reaching our innermost divinity

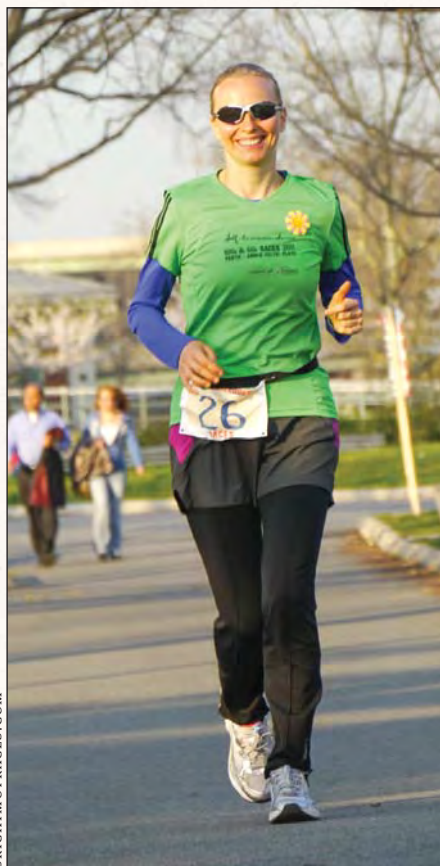
BY KUSUMITA P. PEDERSEN, NEW YORK CITY

SRI CHINMOY SAYS, "OUR PHILOSOPHY is the acceptance of life for the transformation of life." For him the word "life" refers to the whole of manifest existence, and the transformation he envisions is integral. It aims ultimately for "perfect perfection," or the perfection of all aspects of the human person and of the world. Since what is not accepted cannot be transformed, this sea change calls for acceptance of physical existence in its totality: the material universe, all living beings, other people and our own selves. Acceptance must extend to all parts of our being: the body no less than the mind, the life-energy and the emotions.

With some exceptions, such as the martial arts of East Asia, we do not usually think of sports in connection with the spiritual life. Some spiritual figures of ancient India were warriors and heroes, but we often associate spiritual practice with monastic life, and the term *ascetic* with a world-renouncing monk or yogi who devotes most of his or her time to meditation and study in seclusion. Many monastics, however, past and present, have maintained fitness through manual labor and walking long distances. The "marathon monks" of Mount Hiei, Japan, run great distances as a spiritual discipline, but this is a rare case.

The term *ascetic* is derived from the Greek *askesis*, which meant exercises and training, as for an athlete who competes for a prize. The goals of such training include physical strength, stamina, agility and skill. Today it is widely recognized that children and young people need sports training, not only for general health and fitness but also to build discipline and concentration, cultivate virtues such as fairness and courage, increase self-confidence and teach teamwork. Sri Chinmoy incorporated all of these dimensions of sports into the daily practice of his philosophy—an *askesis* for the acceptance and integral transformation of life.

On a practical level, our physical health is an important support for spiritual practice, since illness and weakness can impede meditation or even prevent it. Thus acceptance of the body includes the care, diet and activity needed to keep the body as healthy as possible. Research has shown that besides being



Happy running: Jayasalini Abramovskikh, from Moscow, has participated for years in the Flushing Meadow Self Transcendence races. In this 2011 photo she is again running the 10-day race. "Only being happy can you run well," she says.

necessary for physical health, exercise reduces the probability of certain illnesses, can mitigate the effects of aging and may help prevent or overcome depression. It fosters dynamism, enthusiasm and inspiration.

Transformation seeks to go beyond acceptance and basic wellness to effect positive change of the entire being: the physical, life-energy, emotions and the mind, all of which participate in sports in their respective ways. In the process of transformation they support and nourish each other and also receive and assimilate the qualities of the heart and soul: love, peace, joy, light and power.

Self Transcendence

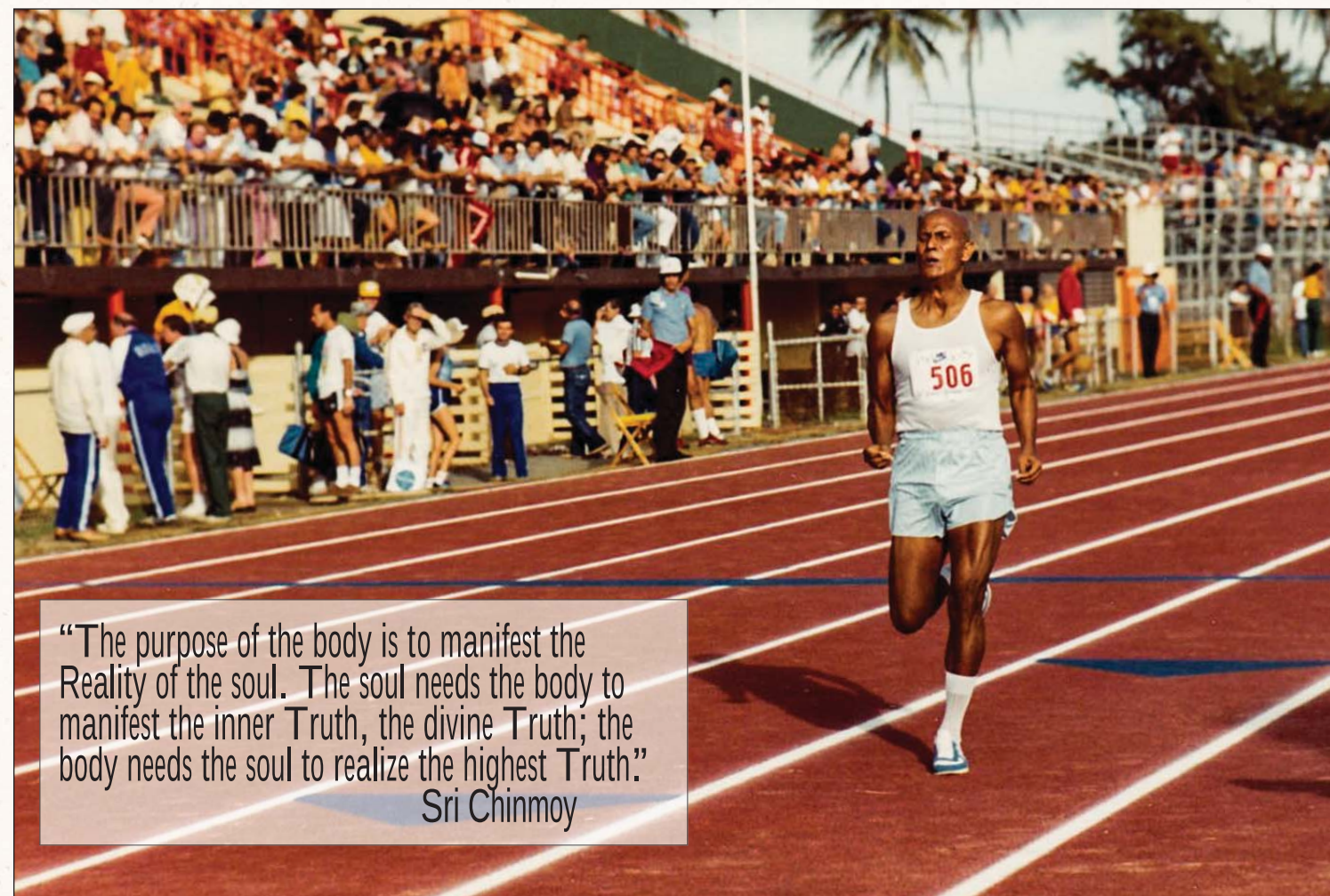
Sports is by no means just an individual practice. Often it is a group activity that can bring people together in powerful and meaningful ways. It offers a unique opportunity for self-transcendence, in which a person seeks to surpass his or her own limits and previous achievements.

Sri Chinmoy invariably distinguishes self-transcendence in this sense, which is at the core of spiritual life, from competition with others. He explains the spiritual purpose of competitive sports: "Our aim is not to become the world's best athlete. Our aim is to keep the body fit, to develop dynamism and to give our vital being innocent joy. Our aim should not be to surpass others, but to constantly surpass our own previous achievements. We cannot properly evaluate our own capacity unless we have some standard of comparison. Therefore, we compete not for the sake of defeating others but in order to bring forward our own capacity. Our best capacity comes forward only when there are other people around us. They inspire us to bring forward our utmost capacity, and we inspire them to bring forward their utmost capacity. That is why we have competitive sports."

Self-transcendence is a central principle of Sri Chinmoy's philosophy. It is an expression of aspiration, the longing for a higher, fuller and better life, which he often speaks of as an inner hunger, a "cry" or a mounting flame. He asks, "What gives life its value—if not its inner cry for self-transcendence?" Aspiration, whether conscious or unconscious, is the force that drives human progress and creativity and also impels cosmic evolution. At the highest level, self-transcendence is essential to God's own Being, which constantly goes beyond Itself, and the evolving manifested creation expresses the nature of its ever-transcending Source. Our own inner cry is awakened in us by the Supreme: "Self-transcendence / Is beckoned by / The ever-transcending Beyond."

Living in Sports

How did a mystic from India come to embrace sports and make it essential to his understanding and practice of the spiritual life? Sri Chinmoy was born in 1931, the youngest of seven children in a prosperous and cul-



"The purpose of the body is to manifest the Reality of the soul. The soul needs the body to manifest the inner Truth, the divine Truth; the body needs the soul to realize the highest Truth."
Sri Chinmoy

tured Hindu family in Chittagong, East Bengal. As a boy in his native village of Shakpura, he was lively and adventurous. He ran, played soccer and loved to climb trees. When Chinmoy was still an infant, his oldest brother became a disciple of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, Mirra Alfassa, at their ashram in Pondicherry, South India. In July, 1944, after the deaths a year apart of both parents, the six other brothers and sisters all traveled to Pondicherry and became permanent residents of the spiritual community. Within a year, the ashram began to develop an elaborate sports program under the guidance of the Mother, with Pranab Kumar Bhattacharya as the director. The purpose of this initiative was the perfection of the body as part of the Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The Mother herself was a dedicated sportswoman. In her youth she had cycled throughout France, and she played tennis for much of her life. The newly arrived Chinmoy, then thirteen, was among Pranab's first students.

Over the next ten years, as resources allowed, the ashram found sports venues and acquired equipment. The program ex-

panded to include all the events of track and field as well as soccer, volleyball, table tennis and swimming; students also learned marching in formation. Girls as well as boys participated.

While deeply immersed in contemplative practices and studies, Chinmoy became an outstanding athlete during his twenty years at the ashram. He excelled in track and field, especially sprinting. He won first prize in the decathlon competition in 1958 and 1959, and the prize for "fastest runner" every year from 1948 to 1960. He retired from competition in 1962 but continued sports for general fitness and inspiration, still enjoying soccer and table tennis and also coaching.

After arriving in the United States in 1964, Chinmoy maintained his regular regimen and took up new sports, notably distance running, tennis, cycling and weightlifting. He met and honored many distinguished athletes, including Muhammad Ali and his childhood hero, Jesse Owens. He formed especially close and lasting friendships with Olympic great Carl Lewis, five-time Mr. Universe Bill Pearl and the "father of long distance running," Ted Corbitt, a founder of the

Spirituality in sports: Sri Chinmoy competes in the 400 meter event at the World Masters Games, Puerto Rico, 1983

New York City Marathon. For the rest of his life he remained keenly interested in sports of all kinds, following the Olympics (which he attended in 1976, 1984 and 1988), tennis matches and other events.

Chinmoy delighted in sharing his enthusiasm and love of sports with his students. Through the years he developed an array of activities and programs ensuring the centrality of sports in the growing international community of Sri Chinmoy Centres devoted to meditation and service. The first annual Sports Day of the Centers was held on June 7, 1970, with track and field events. In 1977, 1978 and 1979, Sri Chinmoy joined his students in the Pepsi-sponsored 24-hour bicycle marathon in Central Park, New York, himself cycling 175, 230, and 160 miles in those three years. The Sri Chinmoy Cycling Team of about 200 men and women won a number of prizes.

Not every spiritual seeker will become a prize-winning athlete, of course. But in the



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Cycling Underwater...

great variety of sports and physical activities each person can find one or more things he or she can enjoy doing regularly to maintain health and fitness, overcome lethargy and cultivate cheerfulness and enthusiasm. Today Sri Chinmoy's students throughout the world are involved in a wide range of sports, including running, track and field, tennis, rowing, sailing, cycling, mountain climbing, weightlifting and swimming, including long distances such as the English Channel. Hatha yoga, while not a "sport" strictly speaking, is a serious interest for many.

In 1982 Sri Chinmoy initiated the Impossibility Challenger, an annual festival in which participants try to break a world record in any non-Olympic event. According to the event's website, "The records can be athletic, funny, creative or even a bit silly, as long as they are challenging and require some serious training or preparation." Ashrita Furman, a disciple of Sri Chinmoy since 1970, has set more than 600 Guinness Records and currently holds more than 191—including the record for holding the most Guinness world records. Sri Chinmoy inspired Furman to participate in a 24-hour bicycle race in New York City's Central Park in 1978. With only two weeks' training, Furman tied for third place, cycling 405 miles (652 km). He later described the experience,

"It was one of the most profound moments of my life. As I climbed off my bicycle, I realized that it wasn't my body that had cycled for 24 hours, but my inner spirit. By using meditation I was able to connect with an inexhaustible energy which we all have but rarely use. At that moment I decided to attempt breaking Guinness records to inspire others to connect

"By no means should we neglect the body. The body is the temple. The soul is the Deity therein. Have we not learnt from Vedanta that it is in the physical that spiritual disciplines have to be practiced?" Sri Chinmoy

with their own indomitable inner strength." His spiritual name, *Ashrita*, means "protected by God" in Sanskrit.

Weightlifting

Sri Chinmoy's own dedication to self-transcendence took him in his middle age into a surprisingly different area of sports. He took up weightlifting in 1985 at age fifty-three, when a knee injury made it difficult for him to continue playing tennis. In his

Record setting: Ashrita Furman sets Guinness record for longest distance to bicycle underwater (1.8 miles) in a pool in Coimbra, Portugal in September 2011

youth as a track and field athlete he had no liking for weightlifting, but now he answered an inner call to enter a new and unfamiliar field. Weightlifting soon became the arena for dramatic feats of self-transcendence and manifestation of the spiritual in the physical. He began training with dumbbells, and by the end of 1985 was able to lift 155 pounds, his own body weight. Training rigorously over the next two years with an apparatus that suspended the weights overhead, he lifted heavier and heavier weights, eventually succeeding in lifting thousands of pounds. His weightlifting was comprehensively recorded on film, analyzed by weightlifting experts and witnessed by large audiences on many occasions. He never described what he was able to do as miraculous or the result of superior physique, but

attributed it to "God's unconditional Grace." Its purpose was to inspire others to transcend themselves.

Bill Pearl, who supported and encouraged him in every way through the years, suggested to him that if he lifted human beings, animals and familiar objects rather than metal plates, it would capture the popular imagination—and indeed it did. To do these lifts, Sri Chinmoy used not only his overhead apparatus but the standing calf raise by which he could raise on a platform not only groups of people but elephants, cars, even airplanes. These lifts highlighted not only the self-transcendence of lifting heavy weights, but also the symbolic meaning of lifting itself, as honoring the liftee and connecting intimately with the person, living being or object lifted.

In 1988, to express this spiritual meaning, Sri Chinmoy inaugurated the Lifting Up the World With a Oneness-Heart Award, in which he lifted the honoree overhead on a specially designed platform. For their service to humanity, over 8,000 persons in different fields received this award, including many world figures such as Nelson Mandela, Muhammad Ali and Ravi Shankar, as well as ordinary citizens serving their local communities. Of his commitment to honor all areas of human endeavor, Sri Chinmoy says, "We need all branches

of the life-tree to be perfect and complete."

Ultra-Distance Running

In the 1970s distance running became an integral part of the life of Sri Chinmoy and his students, as a means of conveying these spiritual lessons deeply and at times dramatically. Ultra-distance races are the signature events of the Sri Chinmoy Marathon Team, and many national and world records have been set during these races. The Self-Transcendence Races notably include the annual 6- and 10-day races and the 3,100-mile race, all in New York. In 1985 Sri Chinmoy requested the team to hold a 1,000-mile race, the first of its kind in the Western Hemisphere. In 1987 he asked that the distance be increased to 1,300; in 1996 it became 2,700, then in 1997,

3,100 miles.

The 3,100-mile race, held each summer in Jamaica, Queens, a few blocks from where Sri Chinmoy lived, is the longest certified footrace in the world, known as the "Mount Everest" of ultra running. A field of usually around ten to fifteen men and women run an 883-meter loop—over 5,600 laps in all, each one carefully counted—around Thomas Edison High School. To complete the distance in the 52 days allowed, they must average at least 59.6 miles a day, although many do much longer daily distances. Runners must be at the start each day at 6 a.m.; the course closes at midnight. To qualify for this race, a runner must have proven his or her fitness and capacity by doing well in shorter long-distance races and be accepted by the race

directors.

Organizing the 3,100-mile race is complex. Runners at all times receive food, drink, massage and medical treatment as needed. They are supported and encouraged by a stream of visitors and by far-flung friends and well-wishers who follow their progress and keep in touch.

At this writing the men's world record for the 3,100-mile race, set in 2015 by Asprihanal Aalto of Finland at age 46, is 40 days and 9:06:21; the women's record, set in 2017 by Kaneenika Jarakova of Slovakia at age 47, is 48 days and 14:24:10. This race is an extraordinary example of self-transcendence, showing what a human being can do if she or he challenges the mind's preconceptions and draws on untapped sources of strength. Sri Chinmoy

Let's Marathon!

THE SRI CHINMOY MARATHON TEAM, FOUNDED in 1977, is headquartered in New York and has branches now in over thirty countries. Its first running race was held October 2, 1977, in Greenwich, Connecticut. In the same year over 60 Marathon Team members participated in the New York City Marathon, increasing to almost 400 two years later. Sri Chinmoy ran his first marathon in March, 1979. As he would be the first to say, he was built to be a sprinter and not for distance, but during his lifetime he completed twenty marathons with a best time of 3:55:07 and also two ultra-marathons of 47 miles. He invariably did himself all of those things he commended to his students.

The Marathon Team soon began organizing races of different distances for the public. By 1980 the team was sponsoring marathons, half-marathons, five-mile races, a weekly two-mile race and even a 24-hour event in Greenwich, Connecticut. At Sri Chinmoy's request, the course for every race is fast and flat, water is available at every mile and there is careful monitoring. A 70-mile race and triathlons were soon added.

"Conservatively, it is estimated that the Team has hosted nearly 2,000 running events in New York since 1977—including 124 multi-day races since 1985," writes co-director Sahishnu Sczesiul. Celebrating its 40th year in 2017, the SCMT organizes some 500 sporting events every year, including running races, marathons and ultra-marathons, long-distance swimming, triathlons and cycling.

Sri Chinmoy has offered many insights on running as a fruitful spiritual practice. "Long distance running reminds us of our inner life. It makes us feel that we are running along Eternity's Road. At the same time, long distance runners receive many good things from Above: patience, consecration and a self-disciplined and self-dedicated life." (He frequently uses running as a metaphor in his poetry.) In addition, long-distance runners receive the blessings of Mother Earth by being out of doors, breathing fresh air and appreciating the beauty of nature. Another important experience is the oneness that is achieved when running as a group. Running serves as a vivid



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Divine running: A 1979 half-marathon in Flushing Meadow park, New York, with over 500 people

example of how sports can be part of the practice of spirituality. It brings together the outer and inner dimensions of life to support and feed one another.

"Many people have discovered that running is a most effective way to bring about happiness," Sri Chinmoy says. "Running demands not only the fitness of the body but the fitness of the vital, mind and heart as well."

Running also provides an opportunity to use one's breath to invoke "divine energy." Sri Chinmoy comments, "Spiritual energy is the source of physical, vital and mental energy." Distance running enables us to transcend ourselves, to establish oneness with others, to receive inspiration and dynamism, and to experience in a concrete and personal way an integral transformation in which the inner and outer realities unite.



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Torch holders: (top) Carl Lewis and Sri Chinmoy. Lewis is holding the Peace Run Torch, a symbol of a global torch relay that seeks to promote harmony among people from all backgrounds

teaches, "Any extraordinary activity we perform on earth in the outer world—whether it is a long-distance run or a short-distance run or jumping or throwing—shows that in the inner world that capacity does exist. It is

only that we have to use it. The capacity that we appreciate, admire and adore on earth can be seen, felt and acquired in the inner world in infinitely greater measure."

The inspiration that we give to the outer

world by exercising our extraordinary capacity comes from the ever-mounting aspiration of the inner world. Our achievements add to the receptivity of the outer world, to make the outer world eventually ready to accept the inner capacities of love, peace and bliss in infinite measure.

Sri Chinmoy states, "Individual self-transcendence / Collectively inspires / Humanity at large." Thus the self-transcendence manifested in this highly exceptional achievement has an effect on the progress of the world as a whole. Such remarkable feats of self-transcendence can and should inspire each of us to go beyond our previous achievements and mentally defined limitations to surpass what we have attempted before. This applies in any field of endeavor, including our daily lives, where we can strive to do more and raise our standards each day in all our ordinary activities, whatever they may be.

Runners who have completed the 3,100 miles say it is necessary to disregard the mind. The runner must not dwell on the number of

Running for Peace

BRINGING TOGETHER THE MANY TRANSFORMING QUALITIES OF distance running with the over-arching goal of world peace to which he dedicated his life, Sri Chinmoy founded the Sri Chinmoy Oneness-Home Peace Run torch relay in 1987. This is an ongoing international activity, organizing a large-scale global program in alternate years, with many smaller programs held frequently throughout the world on a continuous basis.

In its thirty years' existence the Peace Run has reached over 150 countries and many millions of people, the majority of them children and youth. Its mission is to bring to as many people as possible a simple and universal message: that peace begins in the heart of each one of us. In the Peace Run, the torch relay does not encircle the globe in one unbroken route; rather the Peace Run is made up of a great many individual running events, some very long. The U.S. Peace Run passes through 38 states, encircling most of the contiguous U.S. It also touches into Canada and Mexico. The European Peace Run visits 49 countries, traversing 16,000 miles in eight months. The Peace Run Russia offers seven routes of various lengths in different parts of the vast land. Countless others are small, such as a neighborhood run at a school, yet these, too, embody in full measure the oneness-spirit of the Peace Run.

Added to the spiritual value of running itself is the archetypal symbol of the flaming torch. The element of fire has sacred significance in many traditions, and Sri Chinmoy often refers to aspiration as a flame within us. The torch relay is a well-known part of the modern Olympics, and the flaming torch is a symbol of peace that is

understood everywhere. It is hard to overstate the impression made on people of all cultures and ages by the peace torch. This is evident along the running route or at any Peace Run function. People feel a special joy or thrill as they hold the torch or even see it. The torch is not only symbolic, but can even be thought of as sacramental—as carrying a real spiritual presence.

Sri Chinmoy says, "When you are carrying the peace torch, do not feel that it is a material object....You have to feel that inside the peace torch there is a flame, and that flame is your own flame. You yourself have created the flame. What for? To illumine yourself first, and then the people you are seeing within your orbit. Your own orbit can be made large, larger, largest. Today it may be very small, but tomorrow it can be much larger, and the day after tomorrow it can be an infinite expanse."

The runner holding the torch should identify the torch with his or her own inner aspiration for peace, and then expand this aspiration more and more widely into the world. We have seen that runners of the 3,100-mile race also use this language of expansion. The expansion of peace is facilitated by the runners' outer journey from one location to another, one country to another, but it also travels inwardly as a spirit of peace that spreads in the consciousness of an ever-increasing number of people.

While many dignitaries and influential people, including heads of state, eminent spiritual leaders and celebrities, have participated in the Peace Run, Sri Chinmoy placed special emphasis on involving children. Therefore, the Peace Run makes a point of visiting schools.

days or total distance, but stay in the moment, one lap at a time and one day at a time, even while strictly maintaining a daily schedule in which every minute is valuable. Runners sleep little, though they need to drink a great deal and eat about 10,000 calories a day.

Suprabha Beckjord of the U.S., a 13-time finisher in 1997–2009 and for those years the only woman in the race, explains, "If you focus on just what you really love, which is the running, the movement and the enthusiasm of getting out every day and accomplishing,

that gives you everything you need, really, a kind of supply of sweetness and joy that really propels you."

A runner has to remain cheerful and in the heart, to draw on inner, spiritual forces as much as outer physical energy. Yuri Trostenyuk of Ukraine, a four-time finisher, says, "You cannot rely on your physical strength. The source of our infinite power is within us. We only need to reveal it, to feel and use it." Four-time finisher Grahak Cunningham of Australia recounts, "I hit the wall many

times—and went on. I was convinced I had taken my body to the limits of its endurance, but then I went deeper, into the core of my being where strength, power, poise and silence all exist. If we can tap into this inner source, nothing can stop us moving forward."

United: On August 23, 2017, Peace runners from all around the globe came together in front of the United Nations, in New York, to celebrate



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In local communities the team of uniformed runners bearing the peace torch is received with excitement and warm hospitality. The peace torch as symbol and sacrament makes an immediate contact with the heart, bypassing the mind and its prejudices and skepticism.

Children spontaneously understand the meditation they do by placing their hand over their hearts and feeling peace within themselves, and people of all ages have an opportunity to express their hope and longing for peace. Those holding the torch are asked to feel and identify with the hopes and dreams of peace of all those who have held the torch before them.

The runners on their journey encounter people from all walks of life, who when they see the torch often approach to ask about the Peace Run and to affirm its purpose. Runners experience the distinctive consciousness of each place as they run through beautiful landscapes communing with nature, or bustling towns and cities. Each runner must feel inside their hearts that the people encountered in every new place are brothers and sisters. Runners must not feel that

they are coming from outside to instruct or give something. Rather the aspiration for peace that one has grown within oneself through prayer and meditation can, when it is shared, call forth the same aspiration in others.

Sri Chinmoy says, "The main contribution of this Peace Run is to bring together all the God-lovers—that is to say, all the lovers of God's creation. And those who are inwardly getting the message to become God-lovers and to serve God's creation will be amply helped by this run....As this Peace Run covers the length and breadth of the world, we shall see how Heaven and earth can go together, carrying the same message of the Creator's infinite Joy, which is inside His eternal Peace."

This transformation of the world will not happen all at once, but over time will develop like a seed that germinates, becomes a plant and eventually grows into a giant tree. It will not be the achievement of one person but of countless people who share their aspiration with each other and the world at large through their heart's oneness.



Runners often speak of the Grace that is needed to arrive at the goal.

Each runner must have an expert knowledge of his or her own body and how it responds to different conditions during the weeks of running. Runners receive counsel from other runners, helpers and health care providers, all of whom advise them on all aspects of health, food, drink, gear, running style and strategy. They report that after a difficult transition in the first two or three weeks, the body adapts to long daily distances and the middle period of the race can become a flow, remarkable as this seems. But the runner must be ready to continue with determination when inner weather can range from a crisis of low physical energy and mood to an opposite state of overflowing strength and joy, described by Stutisheel Lebedev of Ukraine, who has completed the race nine times.

He said, "I felt a great inner peace, as if I were at the bottom of the ocean or deep, deep in my heart. On the other hand, I experienced a very powerful energy flowing through my body, often causing goose bumps on my skin. This state has been described as a super receptivity to everything coming from above and super efficiency on the physical plane."

Each runner discovers the depths of his or her own character and spirit by facing extremely demanding and sustained challenges, and learns the constant and subtle interaction of the inner and the outer parts of the being, especially how thoughts and feelings can affect the physical. They also develop an intimate ongoing connection with the running course itself, the very ground their feet touch, each physical object or living being they see on the course, and the surrounding neighborhood. Jayasalini Abramovskikh of Russia, a one-time finisher, refers to the "progress to which every runner aspired—first of all, changing oneself as a person." She adds, "When one overcomes all the difficulties, one's attitude to life alters. All emotions, feelings, experiences become unbelievably keen, sincere and profound. There comes a clear feeling of what is important and really needed in life, and what is a mere trifle." Each in their own way, the runners engage in prayer and meditation to carry them through the miles day after day.

Runners always declare after they finish that they could not have done the race alone, and offer their intense gratitude to the other runners and to each person who helped in any way or offered encouragement. Anyone

who has participated in the whole undertaking of the 3,100-mile race by performing any needed task or offering any kind of support can attest to the deep sense of community that is established and experienced during those seven and a half weeks. This is often compared to a family; Suprabha says, "There's so much love." People come to New York from other parts of the world not only to run the race themselves but to assist in many practical ways, including direct help to the runners, cooking and providing food, supplies, dealing with logistics and more.

Nirbhasa Magee of Ireland, finishing for the second time on August 6, 2017, compared the race to a wheel with the runners at the center and larger and larger circles "further out" comprising the helpers, the supporters and even the whole world. He said, "You really feel such a connection that somehow we're all in it together and we're just one little part of the whole force that animates the thirty-one hundred and keeps it running." He also spoke of the heart's self-giving: "Countless millions of acts of self-giving...it's just that outpouring of self-giving."

Jayasalini asks, "What if the runners' prayers about peace, friendship and the oneness of people from different countries and



Going the distance: (opposite page left to right) Ashprihanal Aalto of Finland took the world record for 3,100 miles to a new level in 2015, averaging nearly 76.8 miles per day to complete the course in just 40 days + 9:06:21. (above left to right), from 1997 to 2009, Washington D.C.'s Suprabha Beckjord was the only woman to complete the 3,100-mile race in Queens. In 2015, Vasu Nicolai Duzhy set a new Russian record in the 3,100-mile race: 44 days + 06:10:42; after thirteen attempts in thirteen years.

continents would be heard by the Creator, by the One who can fulfill these prayers? Or what if this little paradise present at the course, where all the participants wish each other only good, share smiles, the heart's oneness, love and support, would start to distribute itself to the world around and help this planet to become a bit better, kinder and more perfect?"

Conclusion

Including sports in spiritual practice offers great and open-ended opportunities for self-knowledge, progressive awakening, living in the heart and the creation of a better world. In a spirituality of integral transformation, acceptance of the world means acceptance of all physical existence including the whole natural world, the physical existence of others, and of our own bodies. Such an acceptance calls for care and respect. We must do what is needed to keep our own bodies well and fit, taking responsibility for ourselves with awareness and discipline, and must also care for the well-being of others with beneficence, kindness and concern.



other parts of the human person interact and influence each other. This is a profound illumination about what is meant by "integral" and offers deep insight into how transformation can take place.

Last but not least, the practice of sports understood as a part of spirituality brings people together in community, whether in highly organized ways or spontaneously sharing joy and achievement. Here the respect and care that we must show to ourselves are also given to others, and the inspiration of self-transcendence is expanded into the wider world. Runners achieve oneness with nature, with the running course itself, with each other, with their helpers and supporters, and with the world at large. Sports, we may surely say, can be a way of increasing love between people. This is true for athletic events and also for the Peace Run, which is dedicated to this very oneness rather than to athletic competition.

Sports opens many paths of transformation and offers fulfillment and benefit on many levels. Can it help bring about enlightenment and a world of peace? Without doubt it can make an important contribution to these ends, as Sri Chinmoy has clearly demonstrated.

Dr. Kusumita Pedersen is Professor Emerita of Religious Studies, St. Francis College. She lives in Jamaica, New York, and has been a student of Sri Chinmoy since 1971.



MAURITIUS

Welcoming the Mother Goddess

Our reporter in Mauritius travels to the sacred lake Ganga Talao for a festive inauguration of the world's largest statue of Maa Durga

BY SAVITA TIWARI, MAURITIUS

ASWIN NAVARATRI IS ALWAYS A SPECIAL, celebratory time on the small island of Mauritius, but this year it was something much more. A river of pride flooded the hearts and minds of our island's more than six hundred thousand Hindus, and it was also an important moment for Hindus worldwide. September 30 marked the completion of the world's tallest Durga statue, towering at a height of 108 feet

at Ganga Talao, our most sacred lake in the hilly south of Mauritius. For two days, Maa Durga was the honored guest at this new annual island event, Durgotsav, during which the grand statue was consecrated.

Organized on a national level, it took place on September 30 and October 1. The ceremony started on Navami, the 9th day of Navaratri, and completed on the auspicious day of Vijayadashmi.

I started my journey to the inaugural fes-

tival early in the morning on its first day. This was the same Ganga Talao I have visited hundreds of times, and it was the same route I've always taken. But somehow the feeling was completely different from what I had ever felt while traveling up to this 1,800 foot hilltop.

When I made my way around the last curve of the road and turned towards the lake, the sight was divine. I suddenly understood why the energy was so different.

An island-wide celebration: (clockwise from opposite page) Maa Durga in all Her glory, towering 108 feet tall above the holy grounds; Ganga Talao lake and surrounding shrines and temples during Durgotsav 2017, celebrating the Mother Goddess and the completion of Her new statue. Maa Durga stands to the left and slightly forward of Lord Siva as one travels up the entry road.

For the first time, standing alongside the 108-foot-tall Mangal Mahadev (Siva) was the completed and equally majestic Maa Durga. There they both were to welcome devotees to their abode, the lake we Mauritians revere as Mount Kailash.

Until now, Mahasivaratri has been the only time of year that Mauritians don't feel burdened by traffic, as scores of pilgrims make their way to the lake. Now we have Navaratri as another occasion where people can put aside their daily problems and simply celebrate. Everyone was enjoying the distant sight of Siva and Shakti together as we approached. From nearly half a mile I was able to smell the fragrances of incense sticks and burning homas and hear the divine sounds of Sanskrit mantras and people singing bhajans to the Goddess.

Pilgrims had to park further away than usual, as tents, pilgrims and Maa Durga Herself were occupying the usual spaces. As I was leaving the parking lot, a man approached me with a broad smile and a hearty "Jai Mata Di!" He was passing out red ribbons embossed with those words to tie around our foreheads. Everyone accepted the ribbons with gratitude, and replying "Jai Mata Di," they helped one another tie them on. The man then continued on to greet other arriving guests.

It was all a very new feeling. In Mauritius no one had ever greeted each other with those words of praise to the Mother Goddess. Today it was coming so naturally to everyone, like we had all been saying it for years. People were enthused to greet each other with joy. Today my thoughts focused on a question: "What is the meaning of the world's tallest Maa Durga statue?" Upon arriving at Her feet, that meaning became instantly clear.

During Mahasivaratri, Ganga Talao is dominated with the color white, honoring Siva. But today, as I walked up the main road towards Maa Durga. I saw nothing but red everywhere. All the women were wearing red sarees and everyone had red ribbons around their foreheads. The flowers in every offering tray were red; and, somehow, I too had unconsciously worn red today. Red is the color of Durga, Goddess of love, energy and all manifest existence.

As I reached the feet of Durga, all I could



feel was blessedness. She welcomed me with a motherly smile and an assurance of protection, Her many powers represented by the weapons in her eight hands. I felt so much love in that moment. I could have stared up at this beautiful statue for hours, but after a long time of looking straight up, a gradual neck pain reminded me to continue on. I offered my prayers and made my way to a

group of pandits who had arrived from India for the ceremony. I inquired about the meaning of the rites.

One punditji explained: "As the statue is made up of inert material, it must be infused with life energy that is of divine origin. The term for 'life force' in Sanskrit is *prana*, and by the *prana pratishtha* (installation) ceremony, the murti is infused with the

subtle form of the Deity, becoming a channel for the Deity in the physical world. Thus the ceremony marks the recognition of this statue to represent a particle of the Divine whole to be held in one's inner mind while worshipping this outer form."

I wanted to inquire further into this mystical explanation, but the pandits needed to be on the platform to start the puja. I thanked them and headed off into the crowd to talk with pilgrims. I came upon a young girl praying, her eyes closed, deep in reverent thought. When she opened her eyes and came back into this world, I approached to ask what she felt was the meaning of having the world's tallest Maa Durga statue here in Mauritius.

Her name was Radhika, a 15-year-old schoolgirl. She responded, "It is something that makes me feel really proud. As a small island, we don't have so many big monuments and such things to take pride in. But here in this moment we are inaugurating something you will find nowhere else in the world. We are in the news everywhere. While there are many countries with lots of Hindus, it is Mauritius that has accomplished this. We are such a small island, but as the smallest Hindu-majority country, we can do such great things." Throughout our conversation I became a bit overwhelmed with the knowledge she possessed about her religion. I asked her how she knew so much, and she told me that she had thoroughly studied Hinduism online because she wanted to be sure about everything relating to her dharma.

Radhika told me of her Facebook group of young people who had made a page about Hinduism in Mauritius.

Every day they post new information about Hinduism and their beliefs and practices so that young people can better know what their religion really means. My mind turned again to Durga. I felt She was inspiring young Hindus to understand themselves and their heritage.

I soon happened upon a young videographer named Ian Jadoo who was busy tinkering with his electronic gadgets. He told me, "My drone has flown over Mangal Mahadev so many times, but capturing both divine masculine and feminine in one shot is a real

challenge." I waited for him to get his shot, piloting his drone just above the two statues. After half an hour of juggling between his drone controller and his computer screen, he got the perfect take. His face gleamed with satisfaction as powerful as the sun's glare off his computer screen. Everyone around us was taking selfies with Maa Durga. They also tried to capture both Maa Durga and Mangal Mahadev in a single frame, but it is very difficult to do.

After receiving darshan beneath Maa

none left to offer. I had a feeling that Maa Durga would never want this to happen. So to please Her I am serving Mahadev."

This was just one of the many examples of selfless giving and gratefulness that I saw throughout my day. I knew Maa Durga would really be pleased with this. Jagdeesh's friend Videsh soon chimed in, "I feel like Mangal Mahadev's smile is a bit bigger today. He is smiling more than usual." When I said that sounds a bit odd, he countered, "Yes, it may sound funny. Since it is our thoughts that reflect the content of our heart, it may be me that is feeling happier and smiling wider. Perhaps it is the presence of Mother of the Universes that is behind my happiness and that of everyone here."

It may not seem scientific that the presence of these statues could imbue everyone with happiness, and yet here we all were feeling just that. I realized that I felt markedly more content and happy than usual. Everyone around me seemed jovial, satisfied and simple. Here at the feet of our Gods we all had effortless peace.

After visiting each of the many lakeside temples, we went to one of the large serving tents for some tasty prasada. There was a huge line with hundreds of people before me, but it only took ten minutes to be served, as more than 100 volunteers were preparing and dishing up food for the countless devotees.

For such a simple meal, it had a mouth-watering effect on me, and my stomach growled. I quickly sat down with my food and put a big bite in my mouth. My stomach responded with an even louder growl, embarrassing me in front of a nearby tourist who had just finished his food. Smiling, he observed, "Normal food always seems to be just nourishment for the body, but

when you eat at places like this, where everyone is cooking, serving and eating out of devotion, you truly understand the meaning of 'food for the soul.'" I smiled back at him and continued my meal. My hunger kept me from contemplating his words. He soon left with a smile and a "bon appetit." By the time I finished my plate, thinking about what he meant, I regretted that I hadn't furthered the conversation. Since it would be impossible to find him again in the ocean of devotees, I simply cherished his thought and left the tent.



SHUTTERSTOCK

Durga, I went forward to pay tribute to Mangal Mahadev, the monumental statue of Siva across the main road. He was installed at Ganga Talao in 2007. When I reached the feet of Mahadev, a man named Jagdeesh was welcoming all new arrivals, handing each pilgrim a bunch of flowers from a giant flower bag. I asked why he was distributing flowers here. He told me that because everyone was coming to Ganga Talao, excited to see Maa Durga, they were offering all their flowers to the feet of Mother. "Only when they come here do they realize they have

A wonderful welcome: (far left) The Maa Durga statue while under construction, funded entirely by community donations; (right) pandits from India and Mauritius are ready to welcome the Goddess through puja; presentations and musical performances at Durga's feet begin the day's event; devotees from all over the island pilgrimage to see Maa Durga for the first time

People continued arriving all day long from all over the island for their first sight of Maa Durga, offering flowers and coconuts to Her feet and taking blessings. The day passed quickly, with countless greetings of "Jai Mata Di." I found myself with many others sitting in front of the puja pandal where the pandits from India and Mauritius were performing the consecration ceremony. In between their chants and actions they were explaining the rituals so everyone would understand what was happening. As evening set in, everyone was served free tea and snacks in all the food tents.

I sipped my tea, thankful for the caffeine it provided. Being a bit tired, I decided to sit for a while before going to find out what events were coming up next. Everyone was waiting eagerly for the evening performances. I made my way to a faraway bench. An elderly man, around 70, was sitting on the next bench, unaware of my presence. He was smiling and watching the to and fro of the crowd between Mangal Mahadev and Maa Durga. I enjoyed the sight of this seasoned old man smiling all by himself, but eager to know his thoughts, I coughed to get his attention. He turned toward me with a grin, and I quickly asked, "Chacha (uncle), why are you smiling?" He smiled wider and, glancing up at both Deities, observed, "Ganga Talao is complete now."

As evening came, the last rays of the sun were lowering behind Maa Durga. Everyone was mesmerized with the sight, as golden rays appeared to gleam from the Mother Herself. Her powers, represented by the eight implements She holds came into stark relief: Bow, mace, sword, trisula, conch, lotus flower, chakra and blessing mudra. When the sun finally set, the lights and music arose. It was magical. Mauritians had never seen such a night before in their life. This was the first large-scale, public evening of devotional music renderings ever held in Mauritius. It comprised devotional chanting of bhajans and kirtans, choreographed dances and theatrical presentations by artists in many languages—Bhojpuri, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu and Marathi.

Some of the best performing artists of the nation were present for the evening. A member of one performing group told everyone, "We've always performed for the public,



ALL: SAVITA TIWARI





Festivities into the night: (left, top to bottom) The sun begins to set during the celebration; many different performances take place throughout the evening and into the night; scene from the Shiva-Kalika Tandav performed by the group Zeness Lapeyrouse; (right) after climbing the steps up to Maa Durga, a woman offers flowers and touches the feet of the Goddess



but this is the first time in our life we are performing for God, for the Mother of the Universe. Because of this, we've practiced extra hard these last few days. Every one of us is excited for this performance. We will give our best today!" When they finished, the cheers from devotees and the happiness on the performers' faces proved that it was indeed a most satisfying show.

One after another, artists carried the event through the whole night. Some sang or performed alone, others in groups. One act was Shiva-Kalika Tandav (the dance of Siva and Shakti) by the Zeness Lapeyrouse group. When the elaborately dressed performers reached the stage everyone suddenly got goose bumps, including me. The power of Kali's dance to the reverberating drums was absolutely enthralling. It wasn't until sometime around 4am that this spiritual music night came to completion with a grand arati. Everyone was extremely tired, but I could still see smiles and happiness in every face.

"I hope we will be celebrating this every year," said one lady. She was around 90 years of age. I asked her if she had stayed awake all night and she replied: "Yes, this has been a long-standing dream of my life. I always wanted to go to Vaishno Devi in India, where everyone greets each other with 'Jai Mata Di' and you are immersed in devotion of the Mother for at least a whole day. But when I was younger, we were not rich enough, and when we had enough money to travel we didn't have the time, and now here I am and I don't have energy!" She laughed, "So it is a blessing that I am getting a feel of Maa Vaishno Devi here in Mauritius in my ending days. I would have never missed this." I began to notice tears of joy in her eyes. I felt so happy for her. Saying goodbye to her with a "Jai Mata Di!" I at last ended my night for some deeply enjoyed rest.

The next day was more of an official program with speeches by local politicians. Anil Becchoo, a former Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Public Infrastructure and present president of Man-



SAVITA TIWARI

gal Mahadev Shakti Swaroopa Association (the association that made the 108-foot Maa Durga a reality), emphasized that this was an important moment for every Hindu of Mauritius. He informed the crowd that the association had applied to the Guinness Book of World Records for creating the world's tallest Maa Durga statue. As this project was 100 percent funded by donations, the general public were again and again recognized as chief guests of the occasion.

When I later talked to Mr. Becchoo to get his words for HINDUISM TODAY, he was more than eager to share. He said he was a regular reader of the magazine and felt it an honor and privilege to have his words published. He shared a story which he had never mentioned in a public speech. He told me, "Back in 1967, when I was just 14 years old, we used to go Ganga Talao on foot. There was a big antenna of the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation near the lake. That antenna can be seen from far off places, and it acted kind of like a beacon, motivating people heading towards Ganga Talao. We used to give strength to ourselves, saying, 'We just have to reach that antenna.' On one such journey a thought suddenly cropped up in my mind: 'How amazing would it be for pilgrims if, instead of this antenna, we were to take our strength from a grand statue of Lord Siva!' After 34 years, I came into office in 2001 and proposed this project to the government. It was passed with pleasure, and in 2007 Mangal Mahadev was inaugurated. At the time of the inauguration, once again, an inspired thought came into my mind. It was that Siva is incomplete without Shakti. And just like that, ten years later, in 2011, we were able to launch this project of a 108-foot-tall

Maa Durga. We wanted the height of Maa Durga's statue to be the same as of Mangal Mahadev. After so many difficulties, today in 2017, with the blessing of Maa Durga, we are able to welcome the Mother of the Universe to our small island." I later learned that in his early career Mr. Bachoo had been a teacher of Hinduism. His experience came through strongly while I spoke with him, and I didn't even realize how much time had passed during our conversation. It was soon time for me to head home.

On my way out I met Acharya Puranchandra from LaLaura village. I asked him how he views Mother Durga's presence in Mauritius. He said, "In the Indian state of Bihar, Kali is the guiding force of every Hindu family. When Indians came to Mauritius as indentured labors from Bihar, they established Kali at the entrance of every village. Still today we can find thousands of these small temples on every turn of the road. They have placed seven stones symbolizing the seven forms of Maa Kali. On both annual occasions of Navaratri, every temple in Mauritius organizes nine days of Durga katha (dance), where people from the surrounding area participate. Until now Mauritius didn't have a place where all Hindus could come together and pray to Kali. So you can understand what this means for Mauritius. It is going to be a national festival like Mahasivaratri in the coming years."

Acharya also added an interesting play on words saying, "When we remove 'm' from 'mother,' it becomes 'other.' The 'm' stands for maa, mommy, mama or whatever you prefer. 'Except for the mother, everyone else is other.'"

As I returned home, only two things were with me. First, the infinitely radiant smile of

Mother Durga in my heart, and second, the natural beauty outside my car. Mauritius is a natural place. Everyone calls it "a place of sun and sea." I see this as a place where Mother Nature is the driving force. One sees green and blue colors everywhere. Maa Durga is a representation of this Nature.

Mauritius already had Purusha—the masculine element—found in the form of Mangal Mahadev. Now we also have Prakriti—that is, the feminine element—in the form of Maa Durga. This statue hasn't only completed Mangal Mahadev and Ganga Talao, it has also completed Mauritius in many ways. I came with honest devotion, and I'm leaving this place feeling blessed by our Divine Mother. Jai Mata Di!



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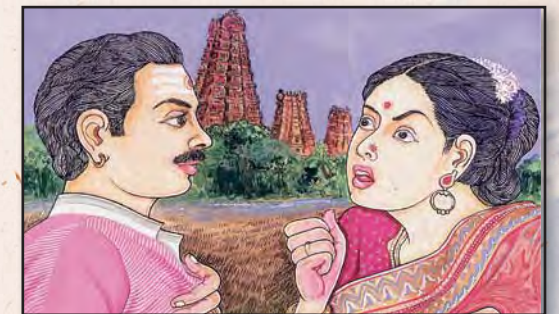
Hindu Heritage Endowment

TALE OF TWO SIBLINGS SHOWS CHOICE OF TRUSTEE IS CRUCIAL

Two brothers, never very close, were surprised when their 85-year-old mother called and asked them to meet with her. She would not tell them why. "My friends at the senior center keep telling me I'm crazy not to have a living trust," she told them when they met at her aging Victorian on the edge of town. "I want you boys to help me." Amol, a hotel manager in his late fifties, lived near San Francisco with his wife. They had two adult children in the area. His much younger brother, Partha, a software engineer, lived alone in San Jose, in Silicon Valley. Amol, to Partha's relief, found a local estate planning attorney. In three weeks the trust was ready for their mother's signature. The two brothers were named successor co-trustees with equal powers.

All went well for three years. Then Amol, who visited his mother often, found her one weekend afternoon unable to continue a conversation. The diagnosis at the local emergency room was transient ischemic attack, a temporary lack of blood to the brain.

After they arrived at emergency, his mother was fully alert and clamoring to go home. But they spent the next five hours waiting for tests and the doctor's report. The doctor could find nothing specific, but insisted on overnight observation. The mother, discharged the next day, left fuming at being kept from her home when she had felt "perfectly fine." When Amol told Partha of the incident that afternoon, Partha asked pointedly why he hadn't been called right away. "You've kept your distance for the last twenty years, and now you want me to be your personal eye-witness news team?" Amol shot back. So it went for four more years as their mother continued to suffer fainting spells and diminished capacity. Partha regularly second-guessed his brother's decisions. Amol grew resentful of the time his mother required of him as the nearby son. Then one of Amol's children began taking what Partha thought was an unseemly interest in the value of his grandmother's estate. The damage to already tenuous family relationships was substantial. So far, the brothers have avoided taking each other to court, but just barely.



Use care when selecting a trustee for a living trust. Otherwise, contention among family members may arise.

Amol and Partha's story, though fictional, is a composite of true stories. Despite situations like these, estate planning attorneys continue to promote living trusts because they work so well in most cases, allowing families to handle major assets without court intervention and bypassing probate. But many living-trust boosters have tempered their enthusiasm by emphasizing the need for great care when selecting a successor trustee.

Having the love of a parent is not the sole qualification. Trustees need to have the competence to manage assets, the discipline not to consider property in a trust as theirs, the ability to cooperate with others, and the self-control to exercise fairness, honesty, respect, courtesy and good faith at times of great stress. No matter how well written your living trust is, the choice of your successor trustee remains crucial to its fulfillment.

Hindu Heritage Endowment wants you to succeed in your estate planning efforts so as to care for your family and remember good causes like the Iraivan Temple Endowment. For more information contact Shanmuganathaswami at 808-822-3012, ext. 6, or hhe@hindu.org.



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OCTOBER TO DECEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment	Total	385.41	Total	1,282.67
Anonymous	US\$69.15			
Roshan Harilela	375.00			
Srinivas R. Madaboosi	150.00			
Gayatri Rajan	100.00			
Chamundi Sabanathan	78.75			
Hitesvara Saravan	63.00			
Jai Sivakumara	432.00			
Other Donations	30,000.00			
Total	31,267.90			
Iraivan Temple Endowment				
Ram & Kalpana Batni	25.00			
Frank Burkhardt	30.00			
Shaila Campbell	50.00			
Subhash Kumar Choudhary	200.00			
Amey Surendra Gangal	33.00			
Sivani Lloyd	108.00			
Vijay S. Singh	251.00			
Anonymous	33.00			
Other Donations	30,000.00			
Total	30,730.00			
Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund				
Thirujnanam Arnassalon	17.56			
Anonymous	468.28			
Juhivaasana Koothan	8.78			
Anil Kumar	27.00			
R. & K. Mahadevan	100.00			
Ashwini Maureemootoo	11.76			
Jogendra Moorooogen	4.39			
Vidyadevi Moorooogen	4.39			
Shanmugam Muthukumar	29.65			
Thiaga Nadaraja	100.00			
Mano Navaratnarajah	600.00			
Subramaniam Pennathur	49.98			
Rajeshkumar Shah	500.00			
Charles Steele	10.00			
Kannen Valaydon	108.70			
Total	2,040.49			
Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund				
Vikram Baghel	299.00			
Gunavadee Carenben	2.90			
Somasundaram Carenben	2.90			
Sukanta Carenben	2.90			
Girish B Desai	299.00			
Sunaina Desai Seltzer	299.00			
Sri Jandhyala	299.00			
Harshil Joshi	299.00			
Sanjay Khare	299.00			
Bhaveshan Moorghen	8.78			
Shanda Kumaran Moorghen	8.78			
Udeyadeva Moorghen	8.78			
Nalini & R.J. Patel	299.00			
Praful C. Patel	598.00			
Ajay Sai Pumish	299.00			
Vijaya & T.R. Raman	399.00			
Sumeet Saxena	299.00			
Sai Singh	120.00			
Hemavalli Sivalingam	96.15			
Raina & Arjun Sohur	299.00			
Parth Thaker	299.00			
Total	4,537.19			
Gurudeva's Trilogy Distribution Fund				
Vel Mahalingum	17.56			
Manogaran Mardemootoo	43.70			
Total	61.26			
Kadavul Nataraja Ardra Abhishekam Endowment				
Julia M. Hall	54.00			
Gowri Nadason	127.41			
Parimala Selvaraj	93.00			
Anonymous	101.00			
Bala Sivaceyon	10.00			
Kauai Aadheenam Matavasi Medical Fund				
Shyamadeva Dandapani	33.00			
Devajyothi Kondapi	324.00			
Kulagan Moonesawmy	17.56			
Gowri Nadason	127.41			
Rajeswary Ramamoorthy	225.00			
Aran Sambandar	108.00			
Jai Sivakumara	200.00			
Vayudeva Varadan	36.00			
Other Donations	4,800.00			
Total	5,870.97			
Nadesan Family Lord Muruga Shum Fund				
Ramana Jandhyala	100.00			
Sadhunathan Nadesan	501.00			
Total	601.00			
Iyarappan Temple Trust				
Krishanth Rajasooriyar	45.00			
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	25.00			
Total	70.00			
Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar Gurukulam				
Anonymous	324.00			
Aran Sendan	108.00			
Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	51.00			
Total	483.00			
Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment				
Narasingrao Pampati	500.00			
Sri Subramuniya Ashram Scholarship Fund				
Subhash Kumar Choudhary	100.00			
Anonymous	324.00			
Total	424.00			
Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund				
Andrew Schoenbaum	10.00			
Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment				
Mano Navaratnarajah	75.00			
Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee	44.13			
Aran Sendan	108.00			
Total	227.13			
Hinduism Today Production Fund				
Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund	10,000.00			
Anonymous	2,051.00			
Ron & Jennifer Burke	150.00			
Krishan Chawla	3,603.60			
Subhash Kumar Choudhary	400.00			
Thom Drinkwater	50.00			
Prabhakar C Ghosh	90.00			
Hiranya Gowda	31.00			
Raj & Deepa Maturi	1,000.00			
Kulagan Moonesawmy	5.84			
Muster	100.00			
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01			
Arcot Radhakrishnan	200.00			
Gayatri Rajan	75.00			
Aran Sambandar	108.00			
P.S. & Ratna Thakur	50.00			
Total	17,964.45			
Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund				
Benevity	487.00			
Subhash Kumar Choudhary	50.00			
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurburn	2.92			
Roshan Harilela	375.00			
Ramana Jandhyala	108.00			
Chamundi Sabanathan	78.75			
Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00			
Himanshu Vyas	151.00			
Hindu Education Endowment				
Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund	100.00			
Rajendra Giri	121.00			
Pandit & Gemma Lathi	2,501.00			
Total	2,722.00			
Hindu Press International Endowment Fund				
Hiranya Gowda	21.00			
Surendra & Patsy Rajpal	250.00			
Total	271.00			
Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund				
Mano Navaratnarajah	225.00			
Gassa Patten	900.00			
Total	1,125.00			
Spiritual Park of Mauritius Endowment				
Peter Christian	100.00			
Anil Kumar	27.00			
Total	127.00			
Positive Discipline Endowment				
Vinaya Alahan	58.00			
Tirumular Sannidhi Preservation Fund				
Shyamadeva Dandapani	33.00			
Srinivas R. Madaboosi	300.00			
Total	333.00			
Kauai Aadheenam Religious Art and Artifacts Fund				
Rajadeva Alahan	102.00			
Murugan Temple of North America Pillaiyar Shrine Fund				
Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00			
Thank You Bodhinatha Fund				
Indian Heritage Center Of W. Texas	501.00			
Anonymous	21,530.05			
Shyamadeva Dandapani	108.00			
Amarnath & Latha Devarmanai	324.00			
Debashis Ghosh	300.00			
Lorraine Jackson	25.00			
Mano Navaratnarajah	150.00			
Kishore & Suhasini Racherla	102.00			
Sumathi Raja	450.00			
Jiva Rajasankara	200.00			
Chamundi Sabanathan	1,008.00			
Aran Sambandar	198.00			
Hitesvara Saravan	51.00			
Aran Sendan	108.00			
Som Sharma	250.00			
Rogini Shummoogum	82.65			
Ramesh Sivanathan	23.63			
Adi Srikantha	108.00			
Anba Dayananden Valayten	11.41			
Vayudeva Varadan	642.00			
Michael Wasylkiw	648.00			
Total	27,820.74			
Udayan Care Endowment Fund				
Ramana Jandhyala	100.00			
Anonymous	27.09			
Total	127.09			
Saivite Hindu Scriptural Fund for the Visually Impaired				
Rajendra Giri	121.00			
Pathmini Saravanapavan	50.00			
Total	171.00			
Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment				
Subhash Kumar Choudhary	50.00			
Shyamal Chandra Debnath	200.00			

OCTOBER TO DECEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Total	250.00	Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment	Srinivas R. Madaboosi	150.00
Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund		Anonymous	Natraj Narayanswami	33.00
Ramana Jandhyala	200.00	N. Balasubramanian	Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan	100.00
Pathmini Saravanapavan	100.00	Marlene Carter	Arunasalam Vathavooran	75.00
Total	300.00	Julia M. Hall	Total	1,763.10
		Subramaniam Pennathur		
Manitha Neyam Trust Fund		Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar	Jaffna Kannathiddy Kali Kovil Endowment	
Bala Sivaceyon	10.00	Dharmalingam Siddhan	Anonymous	27.09
Nutanaya Sivaceyon	30.00	Kumaraswamy Sivakumaran		
Kumaraswamy Sivakumaran	250.00	Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan	Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund	
Ananda Sivanesan	238.10	Total	Kripa Chandrakantan	1,001.00
Total	528.10		Anil Kumar	27.00
		Maha Ganapati Temple of Arizona Endowment	Total	1,028.00
Taos Hanuman Fund		Chowdary & Radhikadevi Koripella	Murugamoorthi Thirukkovil Endowment	
Anonymous	27.09		N. Balasubramanian	10,000.00
Manjung Hindu Sabha Orphanage Fund		India Hindu Tribals Endowment	Panchangam Endowment Fund	
Subhash Kumar Choudhary	50.00	Ramana Jandhyala	Anonymous	11.00
Ramana Jandhyala	100.00		Suganth Srichandramohan	311.12
Total	150.00	Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund	Total	322.12
Pazhassi Balamandiram Orphanage Fund		Vayudeva Varadan	Digital Dharma Endowment	
Subhash Kumar Choudhary	50.00		Pankaj J. & Ranjana Patel	500.00
Hindu Literature Fund		India Hindu Temple Cleaning Fund	Chamundi Sabanathan	100.00
John & Abha Wiersba	153.00	Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurburn	Aran Sendan	108.00
		Hiranya Gowda	Anonymous	177.51
Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund		Kulagan Moonesawmy	Total	885.51
Hiranya Gowda	51.00	Muthu & Nandini Senthilkumar		
Rajagopal Krishnan	60.00	Total	Insurance Premiums	
Total	111.00		Mrunal Patel	3,003.00
Himalayan Academy Book Distribution Fund		Anantha Ladies Home Endowment	Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment	
Shyamadeva Dandapani	33.00	N. Balasubramanian	Other Donations	600.00
Nrusimhayya Manda	30.00			
Total	63.00	Hindu American Foundation Endowment	Total Contributions	\$163,508.95
		Subhash Kumar Choudhary		
Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund		Rajendra Giri	Funds at Market Value, Dec 31, 2017	
Sivakumar Saravan	1,500.00	J. S. M. & Radha Sarma	Total Endowment Funds	\$16,284,915.68
Anonymous	33.00	Total		
Total	1,533.00			
		Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment		
		Partha Ayalasomayajula		
		Anonymous		
		Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurburn		

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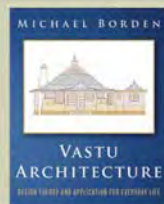
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May 25-28 (Fri-Mon)	Memorial Day Weekend Family Vedanta Course Swami Veditatmananda	Aug 22-29 (Wed-Wed)	One-Week Vedanta Course Swamini Svatomvidyananda
Jul 1-4 (Sun-Wed)	Independence Day Vedanta Course Swami Veditatmananda	Aug 23-26 (Thu-Sun)	Purna Vidya Teacher's Training
Jul 7-14 (Sat-Sat)	Bhasyam Classes Swami Veditatmananda Brhadaranyaka-bhasyam 2.1.1 onward	Aug 31-Sep 3 (Fri-Mon)	Patrons' Complimentary Course II Swami Tattvavidananda and Swami Pratyagbodhananda
Jul 7-14 (Sat-Sat)	Young Adults Course 17-21 yr., unaccompanied by parents	Sep 8-15 (Sat-Sat)	One-Week Vedanta Course I for Adults Swami Tattvavidananda and Swami Pratyagbodhananda
Jul 15-21 (Sun-Sat)	Children's Course I , 9-16 yr. unaccompanied by parents	Sep 16-22 (Sun-Sat)	One-Week Vedanta Course II for Adults Swami Tattvavidananda and Swami Pratyagbodhananda
Jul 15-21 (Sun-Sat)	Family Vedanta Course I Swami Veditatmananda	Sep 23 (Sun)	Third Anniversary of Puja Swamiji's Mahasamadhi
Jul 22-28 (Sun-Sat)	Children's Course II , 9-12 yr., unaccompanied by parents	Sep 26-Nov 20 (Wed-Tue)	Fall 8-Week Vedanta Course for Adults Swami Tattvavidananda
Jul 22-28 (Sun-Sat)	Family Vedanta Course II Swami Veditatmananda Swami Pratyagbodhananda	Nov 22-25 (Thu-Sun)	Thanksgiving Family Vedanta Course Swami Tattvavidananda
Jul 29-Aug 4 (Sun-Sat)	Family Vedanta Course III Swami Veditatmananda Swami Pratyagbodhananda	Dec 23-31 (Sun-Mon)	Year-End Vedanta Course Swami Pratyagbodhananda Swamini Svatomvidyananda
Aug 5-10 (Sun-Fri)	One-Week Vedanta Course Swami Tadatmananda		

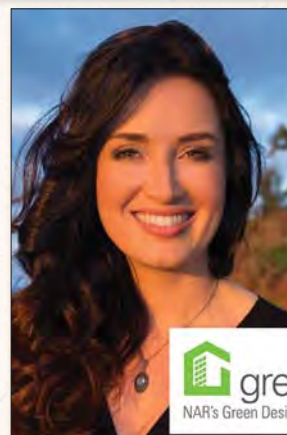
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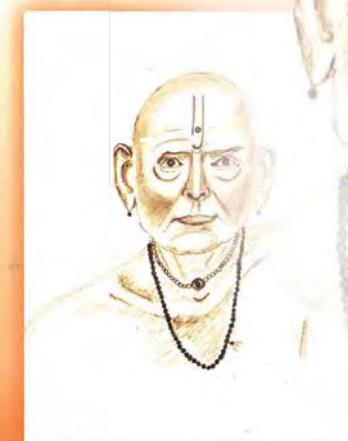


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3–5, Ojai & Ventura, CA
7–8, Santa Barbara, CA
12–15, San Francisco, CA
18–19, Vancouver, BC
20–22, Seattle, WA
26–29, Dallas, TX

MAY

4–6, Austin, TX
11–13, Houston, TX
19–20, Atlanta, GA
25–31, Forsyth, GA

JUNE

1–3, Forsyth, GA
8–10, Washington, DC
12–13, Philadelphia, PA
15–17, Princeton, NJ
21–24, New York, NY
26–27, Woodstock, NY
29–30, Cleveland, OH

JULY

1, Cleveland, OH
6–8, Chicago, IL
13–15, Toronto, ON

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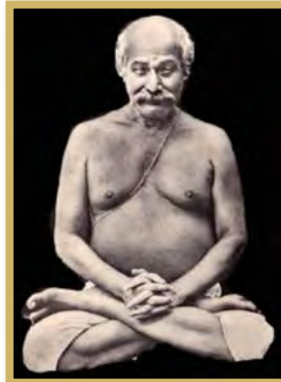
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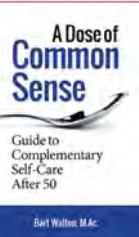
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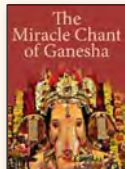
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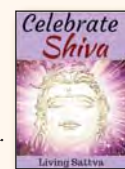
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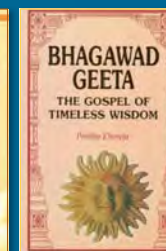
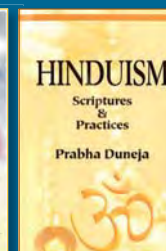
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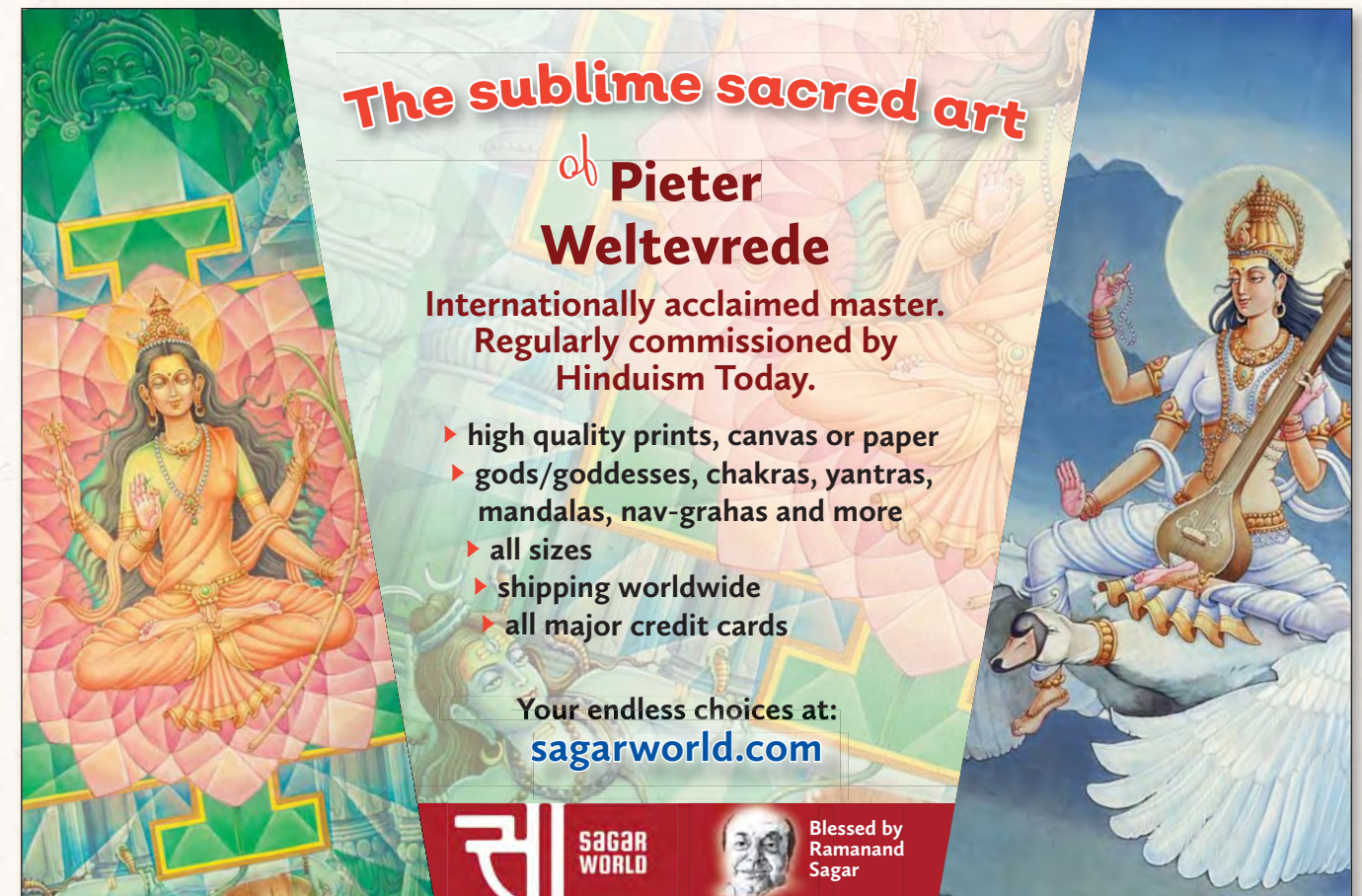
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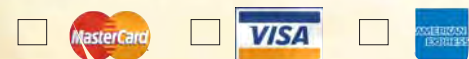


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Hashtagging Temple Restoration

HINDUS IN INDIA ARE TAKING TEMPLE RESTORATION into their own hands, or hashtags it seems. The hashtags [#ReclaimTemples](#) and [#SundayforDharma](#) spotlight community activists who are reclaiming their abandoned neighborhood temples.

"An initiative launched through tweets, hashtags and social media posts has now snowballed into a movement in Karnataka that aims to undo the damage done to these temples that were not only religious centers but also melting pots of culture, art and education," writes Harsha Bhat of *Swaraj Magazine*. His editorial, published in December, 2017, highlights the use of [#ReclaimTemples](#) and talks with members of the movement.

Harsha continues, "Spearheaded by activist Girish Bharadwaja, the movement aims to bring together people to not just deplore the deteriorating state of these relics or talk about their horrific past, but to get peoples' hands dirty and 'reclaim temples' that have endured this distressing treatment over the past decades and, in some cases, centuries."

Bharadwaja explains how the movement got started: "Having seen hundreds of posts about ruined and uncared-for temples, I wondered if I could use the 15,000-odd followers on Twitter to do something about it. This is why I took to social media and appealed to locals around these temples.... The first one we chose was in Kashiपुरa in Hassan, to join hands to reclaim our temples."

According to *Swaraj*, Bharadwaja began

the small movement through his trust, Bharata Punarutthana, and now has hundreds of volunteers supporting the efforts physically, legally and financially. Because it all revolves around hashtags and social media, the age group is under 40, thus spreading Hindu culture to the next generation on a whole new level.

"Bharadwaja's post on social media," reports *Swaraj*, "asking people to look for and report any temple ruins led a youngster from Kalaburgi, Sachin Halkeri, to start searching for such sites, probing virtually, scanning history books and pursuing similar activities. Kalaburgi is home to many temples that were destroyed during the reign of the Delhi sultanate. And Halkeri, who spends his birthday every year doing something for society, started the temple cleanup activities at Kalaburgi this year. The Sunday of 26 November was thus spent by a group of youngsters cleaning the Chinchansu Maheshwara Devalaya in Kalaburgi, and the transformation was immense."

"This is a temple that has 12 Jyotirlingas in one place, half of which have been destroyed, sadly. Having cleaned the temple, we are now looking at what it will take for those to be reinstalled and rituals restarted," said Halkeri.

Swaraj captured the voice of medical student Sanjay K. M. of S. Nijalingappa Medical College in Bagalkot, who saw posts about the cleanup efforts under the hashtag [#SundayforDharma](#). "We were around 15 of us who gathered all that was required for the cleaning process and headed to the temple. It was sad to see food, paper and the like thrown around and the temple premises being treated like a dustbin," said Sanjay, who along with his friends are glad that the response to their effort not only received appreciation but also encouraged fellow students, doctors and professors in their college to join them in their future efforts.

"What was just a thought," writes Harsha of *Swaraj*, "turned into hashtags [#ReclaimTemples](#) and [#SundayforDharma](#), which has now taken the form of a massive movement

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with people from all over the country and abroad supporting their efforts."

The Bharata Punarutthana and the KBSV Bharat Trust, which has been doing similar work in Kerala, have dedicated phone numbers that people can call and send images or information regarding temples that need attention. To reach the trusts on Twitter see [@punarutthana](#) and [@kbsvbharat](#); for KBSV phone, call 91 9747923251.

