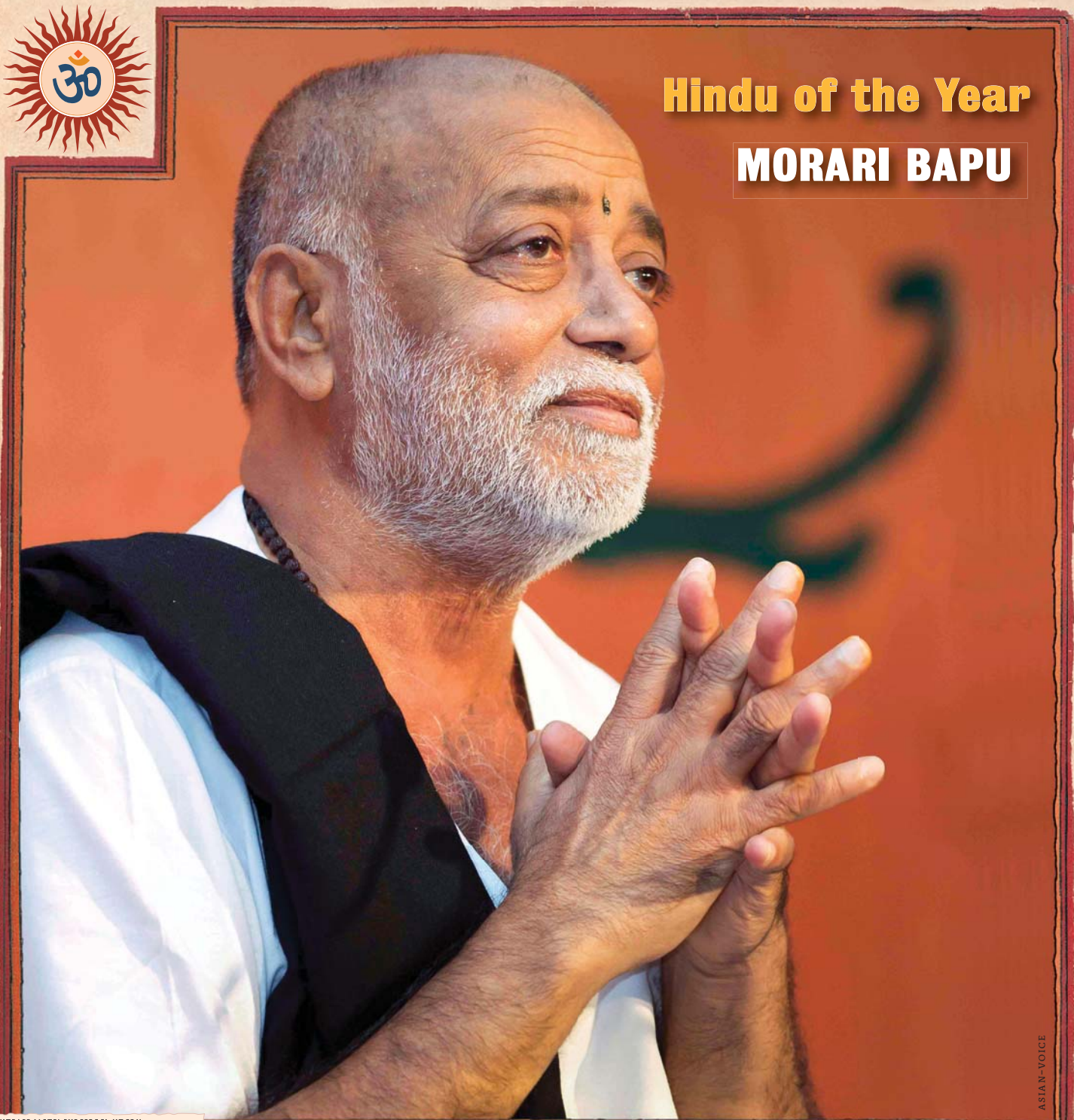


HINDUISM TODAY

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



Hindu of the Year MORARI BAPU



ASIAN-VOICE



NEWS.COM

(Cover) Renowned teacher Morari Bapu is our 2016 Hindu of the Year; (above) In a village in Chhattisgarh, India, 75-year-old Punai Bai—a follower of Ramnami Samaj—shows the backside of her hand and arm, fully tattooed with "Ram, Ram, Ram..."

JANUARY/FEBRUARY/MARCH, 2017 • THE HINDU YEAR DURMUKHI, 5117

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INTERNATIONAL

- Feature:** Follow Us to Mathura to Explore Temples, Walk in History's Footsteps and Witness the Spectacular Holi Celebrations of Barsana **18**
- Social:** Meet India's Ramnami, whose Culture of Full-Body Religious Tattoos Is Fading Fast **30**
- Education:** Can Anyone Tell Me What's Happening with the California Textbook Campaign? **32**
- Morari Bapu:** Our 2016 Hindu of the Year Has Lifted Millions of Hearts Around the World **64**

LIFESTYLE

- Insight:** Twenty-Eight Questions from *Path to Siva: An Illustrated Catechism for Youth* **36**
- Environment:** Confronting Our Unsustainable Dependence on Animals for Food **52**
- Vows:** Familial Reactions to the Taking of Sannyas **58**

- Culture:** A Teenage Girl Shares the Tale of Her Guru's Visit to London **66**
- Dancing Duo:** Sisters Shreya and Akshaya Fly to Hawaii to Dance Before Lord Nataraja **68**

OPINION

- In My Opinion:** The Importance of Explaining and Modeling Our Hindu Religion to Others **9**
- Publisher's Desk:** Our Publisher Outlines a Chakra Practice to Guide Us Toward Joy **10**
- Letters** **12**
- From the Agamas:** Exploring the Tattvas—Building Blocks of the Inner and Outer Universe **17**

DIGESTS

- Global Dharma** **6**
- Quotes & Quips** **14**
- Digital Dharma** **86**

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Brajwasis Celebrate Holi in Mathura

Young men on a courtyard balcony have been doused with colored powders as they celebrate Holi with thousands of others at the Dwarkadheesh Temple in Mathura

No one does the festival of Holi quite like the revelers at the birthplace of Lord Krishna

...Page 26

GLOBAL DHARMA

INDIA

The Zero Rupee Note: a Clever Tool in the Battle Against Bribery

VIJAY ANAND IS PRESIDENT AND co-founder of 5th Pillar, an NGO created in 2006 to fight corruption in India. Its stated mission is to go beyond the “four pillars of democracy”—legislative, executive, judiciary and electoral—to work for a bribe-free society. Its main tool is the zero-rupee note. To comply with counterfeiting laws, the note is only printed on one side. Otherwise, it looks like a standard 50-rupee note, Gandhi and all. It carries the slogan, “I promise to neither accept nor give bribe,” as well as the url for the 5th Pillar’s website.

The group’s primary target is government officials who demand bribes for services that are supposed to be free, such as obtaining a driver’s license. According to Anand, the campaign is proving effective.

Soon after the note was created, massive zero-rupee-note banners were carried to more than 1,200 schools, colleges and public gatherings. Over the

following five years, more than 500,000 people signed banners as their pledge against corruption in the country. Many students volunteered to be messengers of anti-corruption to Indian society. Altogether, 5th Pillar has put some 2.5 million notes into circulation.

Counteracting corruption: (above) Vijay Anand with the note he created in 2007; (right) School children take an anti-bribery pledge as they sign a giant note in 2007 during the 5th Pillar’s 30-day road trip across India



Science or snake oil?: A new comparative analysis provides insight into why placebo remedies are actually effective in healing

HEALTH

The Healing Power of Placebos

A 2011 STUDY CONDUCTED BY Ted Kaptchuk of Harvard, and published by The Royal Society’s journal *Philosophical Transactions*, sought to explain the known effectiveness of placebos in healing by comparing them to traditional ritual healing ceremonies. The study postulates that the administration of a placebo by a medical professional is itself a ritual, and it has an actual healing function.

Comparing Navajo healing ceremonies, among others, to routine biomedical, pharmacological and

procedural interventions, the study showed that such procedures contain significant ritual dimensions. “Healing rituals create a receptive person susceptible to the influences of authoritative, culturally sanctioned ‘powers.’ The healer provides the sufferer with imaginative, emotional, sensory, moral and aesthetic input derived from the palpable symbols and procedures of the ritual process.”

In short, placebos use the subtle power of ritual to stimulate the body to heal itself.

information is downloaded to your device, so you need not be online. The app will soon include guides to Belur temple, Mahabalipuram, Mysore Palace, Kanchipuram and other historic landmarks.

Mobile Meenakshi: A screenshot of the app on an iPhone. Ancient mandapams, towering pillars, art-filled halls, history, legend and divine lore are a tap away on your device.



TECHNOLOGY

Meenakshi Temple App

YOUR NEXT PILGRIMAGE TO Indian holy sites can be a lot easier, thanks to a new app, an audio guide called Pinakin from Chennai-based Aseuro Technologies. The initial release can guide you through the famous Meenakshi Sundareswarar Temple in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, explaining its history,

stories, dress code, temple rules, architectural marvels, hours of worship, and even parking and dining options.

Pictures and text supplement the audio as you explore. For example, you can select “rotating Lingam” and learn about an unusual painting on the ceiling of one hallway. All the

SPORTS

A Hindu-American Olympian

DENVER-BORN RAJEEV RAM won a silver medal at the Rio Olympic games. He joins a small group of Hindu-American Olympic medalists that includes artistic gymnasts Mohini Bhardwaj, who won a silver medal in 2004, and Raj Bhavsar, who won bronze in 2008. Rajeev won the medal in tennis mixed doubles, partnered with famous tennis star Venus Williams.

“Hindu Americans are used to having successful scholars, entrepreneurs and physicians, and have excelled in many professional realms with the exception of sports,” University of Florida religion professor Vasudha Narayanan noted. “This is the last frontier, some believe, a sure way of being woven into the American fabric.”

The son of Indian immigrants from Bengaluru, Rajeev credits his Hindu upbringing with giving him the self-control needed

to become a successful athlete: “Your body’s going to do what your mind tells it to do. If you can have that inner control, a sense of peace, your body’s going to follow,” he told the *Washington Post*.

Hindu hero: Rajeev Ram and Venus Williams accept their silver medals at the 2016 Games



FOOD

India Bans the Use of Animal Products in Making Silver Leaf

IN AUGUST, 2016, INDIA’S FOOD Safety and Standards Authority set new rules for silver leaf, which is often used to decorate sweets (like burfi), pan and packaged supari. An official explained a banned method: “The silver leaf is prepared by placing small, thin strips of silver between the intestines of cows and buffaloes and continuously hammering these bundles for up to eight hours a day until the desired thickness of silver is achieved.”

As reported in *Times of India*, the process was found to be

offensive and unhygienic, posing potential risk to consumers. This ruling protects the purity of vegetarians, as to date the sheets do not carry a green dot or maroon dot, India’s marking system designating veg or non-veg products. An additional concern was the presence of traces of heavy metals in silver leaf, such as nickel, lead, chromium and cadmium, which are harmful to health.

Silver sweet: Burfi made from condensed milk and sugar is often covered with silver foil



FESTIVALS

Diwali Honored on a Canadian Coin and a US Stamp

IN SEPTEMBER, 2016, THE ROYAL Canadian Mint and the US Postal Service honored the Hindu festival of Diwali—Canada with gold and silver coins, and the US with a postage stamp.

The gold Diwali coin was designed by Canadian artist Meera Sethi, inspired by the colorful Indian folk art of Rangoli, which traditionally adorns entrances and floors during Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights. The gold coin’s floral-inspired geometric pattern incorporates numerous cultural symbols, as does the silver coin, which was designed by Sarindar Dhaliwal.

Diwali is celebrated by Indo-Canadians across the country. As most reside in the Greater Toronto area and Vancouver,

these important communities are represented on the coin by each province’s official floral emblem, the trillium and the Pacific dogwood. Key spiritual symbols, such as those associated with Sikhism and Jainism, surround a ring of clay diyas, the small lamps that light up homes and hearts during Diwali. The most widely known Canadian symbol, the maple leaf, forms an inner ring around the sacred symbol Aum, the eternal sound of creation, which is positioned in the center to release spiritual energy in all directions.

For 2016 the mint produced 275 gold coins which sell for US\$2,089 at bit.ly/DiwaliGoldCoin, and 8,500 of the silver which sell for \$68.70 at bit.ly/DiwaliSilverCoin. The coins will

be produced each year.

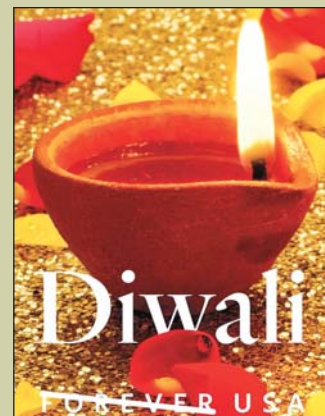
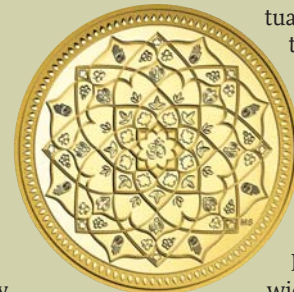
The U.S. Postal Service is commemorating Diwali with a “Forever” first-class stamp that can always be used for a one-ounce letter. The first-day-of-issue dedication ceremony was held on October 5, 2016, at the Consulate General of India in New York. The stamp is available at bit.ly/USDiwaliStamp.

The US Postal Service receives approximately 40,000 suggestions for stamp ideas annually from the public. These are reviewed by the Citizens’ Stamp Advisory Committee, who select approximately 25 topic suggestions for commemorative stamps and submit them for the Postmaster General’s approval. There has been widespread public support for a Diwali stamp for the last 12 years. With its production, there are now stamps for Hindu, Christian, Jewish and Muslim holidays.

Also known as Deepavali,

which roughly translates as “a row of lights,” Diwali celebrates the triumph of good over evil. Spanning five days each autumn, it signals the start of the New Year in many parts of India.

Signs of appreciation: (left) The Canadian Diwali gold coin; (below) the Diwali stamp, a new addition to America’s Forever Stamp series





U S A

HMEC 2016 in Atlanta

THE ELEVENTH ANNUAL HINDU Mandir Executives Conference met September 16–18, 2016, in Atlanta, Georgia. Organized by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America, it was attended by more than 200 temple presidents, trustees, priests, devotees and four swamis, including HINDUISM TODAY's editor Paramacharya Sadasivanathaswami.

The meeting's theme, "Awareness and awakening: the future role of Hindu mandirs and institutions," was addressed in nearly a hundred plenary and breakout sessions over the three days.

A common concern expressed by the younger presenters is the over-use of concepts that don't work in today's society. For example, in the plenary session discussion conducted by the Hindu Students Council (HSC)

titled "The Ticking Clock: Hindu Mandirs and the Next-Gen Challenge," the panelist emphasized that gone are the days where reciting a scriptural text or popular epic tale can sweep someone off their feet.

As today's students and youth try to forge a Hindu identity in the midst of their American life, they want sensible answers to questions, not vague responses. Their need today on college campuses, explained one HSC panelist, is to have a place to worship as well as a Hindu chaplain readily available to provide full spiritual and life-skills support, just as the Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist students have.

Older presenters shared their concern that the temples are not dispensing quality information in a manner that appeals

to youth. "Too much religion, not enough spirituality," was a repeated theme. Several expressed the worry that temple attendance would ultimately be impacted by a lack of interest among the next generation. There was a tangible sense of pessimism about the future of temple management.

The swamis present took a different approach. Swami Parameshananda of the Bharat Sevashram Sangha agreed that there isn't enough spirituality in the temples, but contended that if we are going to influence others we must first change ourselves. "If we don't live and experience the divine within us, can we expect to teach it to the next generation?" Overall, though, he assured the group that Hinduism is going to be fine.

Swami Aksharananda of Guyana gave two talks. He spoke first on the serious challenges faced

Group photo: All of the swamis and most of the attendees gather for the annual group photo

by Hindus in his country and the need for strong Hindus to come there and help uplift the community. In his second talk, he dove into the controversial topic of whether all religions teach the same truth and lead to the same goal, taking the position that they most certainly do not.

Sadasivanathaswami gave an overview of the work of the Hindu community in improving the teaching of Hinduism in California schools, followed by a presentation of the major trends in 21st-century Hinduism.

The presentations were excellent and the discussions uninhibited. Participants expressed being a bit overwhelmed by the flurry of topics and hoping for more focus next year.

and cash, including cash books—to the temple trust chairman in Sultanpur, Kullu. Two justices clarified no other action would be taken in the suspension.

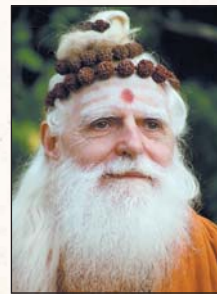
A NEW ANALYSIS FROM THE PEW research center focuses on how much money various religious groups earn. According to data collected in a 2014 study, 44% of American Jews live in a household with total income of \$100,000 or more, followed by Hindus at 36%. These two groups also had high representations in the \$50,000 to \$99,000 income bracket. Altogether, roughly 70% of members of the Jewish and Hindu faiths have household incomes of \$50,000

or above. A previous Pew study, in 2012, revealed that Hindus have higher rates of higher education, with 85% holding college degrees and 57% with some post-graduate education.

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



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IN MY OPINION

Ambassadors for Hinduism

As Hindus, our ability to articulately explain our faith to others is of utmost importance in today's world

BY PADMA KUPPA

WE LIVE IN CHALLENGING times, when ignorance about one's neighbor can lead to not just "otherizing" them, but also to fear, distrust and even violence towards those with beliefs and practices that seem alien to one's own.

When I moved to Michigan, US, nearly two decades ago, I was one of a handful of people called upon in response to requests from schools, colleges and other groups for a Hindu representative. In 2006, as a result of this increasing stream of requests, our temple formed an outreach committee with a mission to represent Hindus in interfaith and community activities. Ten years later, our committee continues to fulfill its mission, but the critical nature of its purpose is not fully grasped by our community.

Beyond responding to explicit requests for speakers, we face a larger challenge: to ensure that the Hindu community is better prepared for the ever-increasing number of non-Hindu guests. The need for outreach has multiplied, but the basic challenge for Hindus in the US remains: we are often not able to articulate our faith in a way that dispels stereotypes and reduces child bullying.

Hinduism is not a faith that holds propagation as a central practice, so informing people about Hinduism or inviting them to become Hindu is uncommon. Thus the ability to articulate the subtleties of our faith to an outsider is often absent. Many Hindu Americans are from India, where they seldom have to explain their religion to anyone. Due to a decade of incidents beginning with 9/11, it has been our Muslim and Sikh friends who have borne the larger burden of the violence targeted towards religious "others" in the US. Unlike them, we are not forced to come out of our self-segregated worship, spiritual and cultural circles to explain, educate and advocate, to dispel misconceptions and stereotypes about our faith and its practices, as Indian immigrants who



are Muslim and Sikh must.

Visitors to our community don't necessarily know all this. Often they expect the same organized outreach efforts from a Hindu temple that they would from a local mosque. While our many guests may want to learn who their Hindu neighbors are, visiting a temple without a host to help navigate the customs

and practices of this open-source faith could leave a visitor even more confused, with persisting stereotypes and even greater divisions in the community. In addition, many temples have differing practices and expectations of their membership—guidelines for attire, photography, etc., which a visitor may not know of before walking in.

When I am at the temple and encounter such drop-in visitors, I usually divert from my original intentions and engage them. I will often explain the history of the temple and the basic concepts of Hinduism, trying to offer an opportunity for a more meaningful understanding of why and how Hindus create sacred spaces, and hopefully send guests away with an awareness of the complexity of our pluralistic faith. In such an engagement, I often miss out on my opportunity to engage the Divine as per my original intention, but I can easily reconcile myself to the change in plans because Hindus believe in "athidhi devo bhava"—that the guest is God. Thus, serving a visitor in this capacity becomes my act of worship for the day. And once in a while, in answering the questions of a temple guest, I am gifted with a reflection on my own practices, allowing me to seek answers which deepen my connection to the Divine.

PADMA KUPPA is an IT professional and interfaith leader involved with WISDOM (a regional women's interfaith organization), the Michigan Roundtable for Diversity and Inclusion, and the Hindu American Foundation. padma.kuppa@gmail.com
Read the original article at patheos.com

An Alternative to "Happiness"

A simple practice which internalizes consciousness allows us to find life's deeper joys and be content in all circumstances

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

IF ASKED, "IS YOUR LIFE FOCUSED ON PURSUING happiness?" many people will readily say, "Yes." If asked, "Have you found and been able to sustain that happiness?" the same people would likely confess they have not. Hinduism directly addresses the fleeting nature of happiness. My guru, Sivaya Subramuniaswami, stated, "True happiness and freedom cannot be found in the world, for earthly joy is inextricably bound to sorrow, and worldly freedom to bondage."

The *Mundaka Upanishad* (3.11.1-2) presents this truth in a story. "Two birds, united always and known by the same name, closely cling to the same tree. One of them eats the tree's sweet fruit, while the other looks on without eating." The bird enjoying the fruit represents the jivatma, the embodied soul, and the bird simply witnessing represents Paramatma, the transcendent Self. The story continues, "While enjoying the fruit, the first bird moans, bewildered by his limitations. But when he beholds the Other, the glorious Lord worshiped by all, he becomes freed from sorrow."

In these verses, the *Vedas* indicate a way to overcome the cycle of joy and sorrow, happiness and sadness that we experience when living in our outer, instinctive/intellectual consciousness. It is overcome by becoming aware of our innate Divinity and abiding in spiritual consciousness. Paramaguru Yogaswami describes this in one of his *Natchintanai* songs: "Joy and sorrow—both are maya. The atman, never from love divided, is the very form of knowledge. Therefore, these two will not touch you. Can a mirage wash away the earth? At the gracious, holy feet of the true, all-knowing guru, to the limit of your power, let your heart grow soft and melt."

Let's imagine that we can step inside ourself, deep into our spiritual nature. Let's imagine further that this journey consists of four steps. After taking those four steps, we find ourself immersed in endless inner space, pure awareness and the transcendent source of that awareness. This is the realm of the deepest samadhis. Three steps within take us to the level of brilliant inner light and the possibility of visions of Deities and rishis. Two steps bring us to the level of divine love for all beings. One step inward takes us to a consciousness that is content, creative and intuitive.

Initially, it could be frustrating to try to take four, three or even two steps within, as we are not yet able to move to those rarefied levels. A more practical approach is to master taking the first step

within during our early morning sadhana time and strive to hold that creative consciousness throughout the day. The other steps are always there, awaiting our future mastery.



THE CHAKRAS

Our analogy of four steps within relates directly to the chakras. These are the nerve plexuses or centers of force and consciousness located along the spine within our inner bodies. There are seven primary chakras. The first three relate to the instinctive/intellectual mind, which is being experienced by the fabled bird who is enjoying the tree's fruits. The first chakra (located at the base of spine) is the muladhara, which governs memory. The second is the svadhishtana (below the navel), governing the realm of reason. The third is the manipura (solar plexus), the center of willpower. Without going within, it is natural to live our daily life in the confines of these first three chakras, rarely experiencing anything beyond them.

The fourth chakra, anahata (at the heart), the center of direct cognition, is the realm we experience by taking the first step within. It is referred to in scriptures as the lotus of the heart.

The fifth chakra, vishuddha (at the throat), the center of divine love, is the realm experienced when we take the second step within. The sixth chakra, ajna (at the third eye), the center of divine sight, is experienced when we take three steps within. The seventh, sahasrara (located at the crown of head), the center of illumination and Godliness, is experienced when we take the fourth step within.

Let's explore what we experience when we take that first step and function in the anahata chakra. Gurudeva described it as the realm of artists, inventors, creators of all kinds. Each time you design or create anything, you are bringing the beauty of the within through your nerve system into manifestation. It is a beautiful place to be, and you can be there all of the time by feeling the power in your spine. The minute you feel that radiant energy, you disconnect from instinctive/intellectual consciousness and soar into inner consciousness.

A few minutes of breath control will help you to feel the energy in the spine. One simple technique is to breathe nine counts in, hold one count, then breathe out nine counts and again hold one count. After a few minutes of this pranayama, become aware of the spine and the spiritual energy within it. Visualize a clear tube in the center of your spine being filled with yellow light coming down from the top of your head. Then inwardly see this pure life force flowing through the spine and out into the nerve system.



Centers of consciousness: In this Madhubani painting—a style practiced in Nepal and Bihar, India, that uses natural dyes and twigs—a yogi sits on a mat, his chakras aligned along the spine

to keep discussions from turning into conflicts. Domestic arguments are the most destabilizing. A major cause of such strife is the misguided view that the home is a natural place to let off steam, to vent frustrations that have built up through the day at work or school. For the sake of harmony, we must change that approach and instead consider the home a sanctuary for the entire family, never regarding it as a place where we can upset others with our emotions. Gurudeva insisted that the home "should have an even higher standard of propriety than the office, the factory or the corporate workplace." To avoid contention in the home, we can choose other ways to throw off stress: walk through a park or along a beach, visit a yoga studio or workout facility or stop to pray at a temple on the way home.

CONTENTMENT & GRATITUDE

Every day we are assaulted by a barrage of advertisements promising greater happiness if we acquire whatever they are promoting. This constant enticement presents a major challenge to sustaining a contented consciousness. Fancy new cars, faster computers, attractive clothes—all promise the ever-elusive state of mind called happiness. We can rise above this false allure by holding the perspective that we are content with what we currently have. If we acquire something more, it will not be because we think it will make us happier but because it will benefit our family in a meaningful way.

Gratitude is an important aspect of holding an inner consciousness. A key to nurturing gratitude is giving thanks for all the good things in our life. We are grateful for our family and friends, grateful for our job or school, grateful for the home we live in, grateful for the wisdom and practices of our religion.

"I'M ALL RIGHT, RIGHT NOW"

The affirmation "I'm all right, right now," a metaphysical tool that Gurudeva gives us in *Merging with Siva*, is also helpful in sustaining an

inner consciousness. It is a way to live in the eternity of the moment, where we feel perfect in the now, with no future to worry about and no past to regret. You can perform this excellent practice now and again throughout the day. Practice it by asking yourself, "Am I not all right, right now, right this instant?" And answer, "I'm all right, right now." Keep asking and answering until you feel positive, self-assured and centered in the anahata chakra.

When we look at the world as providing our happiness, life is a constant series of emotional ups and downs. When we derive our contentment from within, life is joyous, and we can share that joy with others.

CHALLENGES

Having begun our day in a consciousness of contentment, creativity and intuition, we soon encounter the many ways that security can be lost. How can we sustain the sublime state we achieved by taking one step within? The most basic requirement is following the yamas, Hinduism's ethical restraints. Adharmic actions, such as lying and hurting others, disturb the mind and emotions and draw us out into the swirl of external consciousness.

Not letting disagreements turn into arguments is also crucial. Disagreements are natural, but they should be handled in an intelligent and harmonious way. We must always be willing to compromise



LETTERS

Carriers of Culture

While reading the Oct/Nov/Dec, 2016, article and letter to the editor on saris, I remember my wife, Savita, wore saris throughout her professional careers.

We came to America in 1963. She got her PhD in 1965 and taught in colleges and universities for over 25 years. In social gatherings, meetings and conferences, she was often asked by Indian women, "Dr. Joshi, do you wear saris while teaching?" When she said yes, they wondered and exclaimed! They used to say that many of them would wear pants and shirts and have their hair cut to mix with the American ethos.

Savita continued throughout her career and while she was a candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives from South Carolina. We caught buses, trains, and airplanes hundreds of times and walked hundreds of miles; Savita was always in a sari, even when playing tennis or other sports. We are the carriers of our culture. If we do not carry that responsibility, who will?

PRABHAKAR JOSHI
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Thanks for your superb magazine. Regarding your letters to the editor on saris, I would like to add some of the swaminis themselves don't wear the sari, so how can the young girls get inspired? It seems to some youth that saris are tedious to put on, and it also seems the swaminis are quietly agreeing!

NETHRA KANAGASABAI
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All Is Brahman

I thoroughly enjoyed reading your article, Six Streams of Hindu Philosophy, Oct/Nov/Dec, 2016. It seems to me that all the six streams of Hindu philosophy pour into the ocean of Hindu wisdom, thereby enriching and enhancing its glory and magnificence. And they supplement, rather than supplant each other. They only appear to contradict each other because they perceive the Ultimate Truth (Brahman) from different reference points. Except for Vedanta, all the other five streams of Hindu philosophy seem to be viewing Brahman with the eyes of the mind, assuming that body and mind are real.

PRADEEP PRIVASTAVA
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Thank you for publishing an excellent article on Hindu philosophy by Mahamahopadhyaya Swami Bhadreshdas. Being an ardent student of Vedanta for many years, I also wanted to know about other streams of the Hindu philosophy, and this article provided just that in a very clear, concise and succinct way, packed with excellent facts, references and easy-to-understand illustrations. It also shows the greatness of Sanatana Dharma in accepting various different darshanas as perceived and cognized by the seers.

MURALI NAIDU
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Dharma Bee, Not Spelling

Aditya Tyagi advises Hindu parents (In My Opinion, Oct/Nov/Dec, 2016) to involve their children in Hindu dharma activities rather than expend energy on spelling bee

competitions. I agree with him. When raising our daughter, we made a conscious decision to do exactly that, and we are happy to have done so. Growing up, she took part in Kaon Baneya Ramayan Expert and Dharma Bee competition instead. Both were held in Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh chapters throughout the US. And, as Mr. Tyagi points out, school textbooks depict Hinduism negatively, so it is all the more important that we Hindus spend our time wisely.

ANAND BEMRA
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From the Heart

The Oct/Nov/Dec, 2016, Vrindavan article is wonderful! Well written and succinctly wide-ranging, the most pertinent aspects of the holy land as well as contemporary issues are covered with due attention, respect and love.

BRAHMACHARI VRAJVIHARI SHARAN
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India Art Festival

The article on the Delhi art festival in the Jul/Aug/Sep, 2016, issue is just amazing. It is one of the most complete articles for the event, for which I was the main organizer. I had plenty of coverage, but most was based on releases and news point of view—whereas the write-up by HINDUISM TODAY's Rajiv Malik is complete as self experienced. Thank you for the wonderful space.

ANKIT NAGPAL
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Hinduism in Kenya

I enjoy reading HINDUISM TODAY and am always anxious to read the next one. Hinduism in Kenya have a rich history, and I note that very little, if any, is mentioned about the Indians, temples and history of Hinduism in various small towns in Kenya. Having visited the monastery in Kauai, I can really say it is heaven on earth.

RAJNİKANT ACHARYA
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Thank You, Hinduism Today!

I love to read HINDUISM TODAY. Though I was born a Hindu, I completed my studies in Catholic schools. By the time I passed higher secondary school, I hardly knew anything about my religion. This magazine and the book titled *How to Become a Hindu* have helped me learn more about my religion. Now I read from the mobile app. I would like to thank all the people who work hard to bring out this magazine. This is the best magazine about Hinduism in the world. Unlike most, it's well designed and not at all boring.

JISHNU. S
INDIA

Modesty in Hinduism

With regard to Hindu clothing, you mentioned that Hindu women never expose breasts, navel or thighs. I would like to know

the reason behind this. I had a discussion with some of my friends, and I was supporting this view of yours. But I was termed judgmental by them. From that point on, I really wanted to know the reason behind this.

SAI RAVI KIRAN MALLAMPATI
SEATTLE, WA, US
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This statement on Hindu clothing appears in the Nandinatha Sutras written by Hinduism Today's founder, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. He meant that elegant Hindu clothing was to be worn in a dignified manner, and not in a manner intended to convey a more base, instinctive message.

Offensive Text

Thank you for your great website and all the hard work and activities to spread Hinduism around the world.

I found the following content on your web resource "Fourteen Questions People Ask about Hinduism" (bit.ly/14Questions), the fourth question, "Why do Hindus worship the cow?" bothersome. It reads in part, "Who is the greatest giver on planet Earth today? Who do we see on every table in every country of the world— breakfast, lunch and dinner? It is the cow. McDonald's cow-vending golden arches and their rivals have made fortunes on the humble cow. The generous cow gives milk and cream, yogurt and cheese, butter and ice cream, ghee and buttermilk. It

gives entirely of itself through sirloin, ribs, rump, porterhouse and beef stew. Its bones are the base for soup broths and glues. It gives the world leather belts, leather seats, leather coats and shoes, beef jerky, cowboy hats—you name it." I regard this as an insult to all Hindus and request you to please remove it.

BHARAT VALA
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Your point is well taken. Now that you have raised the issue, we find ourselves surprised that no one else has flagged this in the twenty years since it was first published. The intent was to point out the irony that people obtain so many products from the cow but then wonder why Hindus want to honor this gentle creature. It was never our intent to imply approval of the use of any product which requires taking the life of animals. But since this is a possible interpretation, we have deleted the material in question, leaving only "The generous cow gives milk and cream, yogurt and cheese, butter and ice cream, ghee and buttermilk."

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

Letters, Hinduism Today
107 Kaholalele Road
Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304 USA
or faxed to: (808) 822-4351
or visit: www.hinduismtoday.com/letters

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

The Best Retirement Plan of Them All

Ensuring a satisfying life by investing in wisdom and generosity

WHEN WE EXPRESSED APPRECIATION to Raghunath P. Lathi of New Mexico for his generous support of HINDUISM TODAY's Production Fund, he objected: "Please don't thank me. I have no choice. I've been fortunate all of my life, and I have to do all I can to help the less fortunate."

Raghunath came from India to the USA in 1955, earned a Master's degree, then spent his life in a variety of personal enterprises. Now 80, he still runs his current real-estate business but plans to retire next year, live a simple life and dedicate himself full time to spiritual reading, sadhana and doing what he loves most—supporting charities.

"I'm not an activist," he explains, "or a leader type. Giving is how I help. What use is money if you don't use it to uplift those who really need it? Money is a power for wisdom and generosity. If it's not used that way, then it's worthless—in the long run,



Raghunath P. Lathi in 2002, with late wife Bharati, whom he considers to have been a spiritual powerhouse and the very embodiment of selfless giving.

.....

.....

it'll be seen to be worthless. "Closest to my heart are three societies that I will always support: the Hindu American Foundation because they are compassionate and dedicated to bringing us all together,

the Ekal Vidyalaya who do so much to give India's children a chance to have a good life, and HINDUISM TODAY because they are the strong and beautiful voice of Hinduism.

"Hinduism is the salvation of a man. It is the salvation of humanity. I read an article that said that India, of all countries, has overall been the softest, most understanding and forgiving. It's in our nature. *'Lokah samastah sukhino bhavantu,'* let all the people of the world be happy. This is our constant prayer, and the heart of Hinduism.

"I have kept a copy of every issue of the magazine from the first I ever saw, around '92 or '93. I've read every one cover to cover, and I share them every chance I get. There is nothing to compare to HINDUISM TODAY. Its creators deserve our support so they can, for a long, long time to come, continue the great job they do on our behalf."

Donate to the Production Fund at http://www.hheonline.org/donate_pf
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Annual Statement of Ownership

Statement of ownership, management, and circulation (required by USPS DMM 70783) of Hinduism Today, published four times a year at 107 Kaholalele RD, Kapaa, HI 96746-9304, for October 1, 2016. General business offices of the publisher are located at 107 Kaholalele RD, Kapaa, HI 96746-9304. Name and address of publisher is Swami Bodhinatha Veylan, 107 Kaholalele RD, Kapaa, HI 96746-9304. Name and address of editor is Swami Sadasivanatha Palani, 107 Kaholalele RD, Kapaa, HI 96746-9304. Name and address of managing editor is Swami Arumugam Katir, 107 Kaholalele RD, Kapaa, HI 96746-9304. Owner is Himalayan Academy, 107 Kaholalele RD, Kapaa, HI 96746-9304. There are no known bondholders, mortgagees, or other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities. The average number of copies of each issue during the preceding 12 months is: (a) Total number of copies printed: 12,692; (b) Paid circulation: (1) Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, and counter sales: 3,618; (2) Paid or requested mail subscriptions: 6,050; (c) Total paid and/or requested circulation: 9,668; (d) Free distribution by mail: 743; (e) Free distribution outside the mail: 1,312; (f) Total free distribution: 2,055; (g) Total distribution: 11,723 (h) Copies not distributed: (1) Office use, leftovers, spoiled: 969; (2) Return from news

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Swami Durganatha Shanmuga, Administrator.



QUOTES & QUIPS

What is the use of going on pilgrimage if you do not improve yourself?

Yogaswami (1872–1964), Sri Lankan spiritual master

You are what your deep, driving desire is. As your desire is, so is your will. As your will is, so is your deed. As your deed is, so is your destiny. *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.4.5*

Missionary activity and conversion is not about freedom of religion. It is about the attempt of one religion to exterminate all others. Such an exclusive attitude cannot promote tolerance or understanding or resolve communal tensions. The missionary wants to put an end to pluralism, choice and freedom of religion. He wants one religion, his own, for everyone and will sacrifice his life to that cause. **Vamadeva Shastri**, *Vedic teacher*

Hinduism teaches that all humans are destined to transform a self-centered life to a God or Reality-centered life, in their

respective traditions. God accepts us all as we are. We are not required to present ourselves in any particular garb or caricature. True conversion, the discovery of the ultimate ground of being, takes place in the heart of one's own religious and spiritual traditions and not outside of it. **Swami Aksharananda**, *Hindu scholar and key figure in the Hindu community of Guyana*

Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves. **Carl Jung** (1875–1961), *Swiss psychiatrist and psychotherapist*

He who does not find God within himself will never find God outside himself. But he who sees Him in the temple of his Soul sees Him also in the temple of the Universe. God is seen when the mind is

tranquil. When the sea of the mind is agitated by the winds of desires, it cannot reflect God, and then God-vision is impossible. **Ramakrishna Paramahansa** (1836–1886), *Indian mystic and yogi*

Part of the Hindu religion teaches, more so than anything else, control of your mind; self-control. **Rajeev Ram**, *winner of the 2016 Olympic silver medal for tennis mixed doubles*

Apparently the people of India have no need to keep their religious sensibility to themselves. Unlike some anxious believers around the world, they have been able to avoid the paranoia that often accompanies religion. **Thomas Moore**, *best selling American author*

DID YOU KNOW?

Lighting of Lamps

IF YOU GO TO A HINDU TEMPLE OR HOME shrine, you will notice there is always some kind of oil lamp in front of the Deity or just above the altar. Why light a lamp when you can just turn on an electric light?

In a traditional analogy, each component of a lamp has meaning. The oil represents our negative tendencies and the wick our mind. Lighting the lamp brings knowledge, or light, to our mind, and our negative tendencies gradually fade as the oil is consumed.

A lamp that is kept burning constantly is called the *akhanda dipam*, literally meaning “nonstop light.” Light is the opposite of darkness; and in Hinduism light is correlated to knowledge or a force that can dispel darkness or ignorance.

Pandit S.P. Sabharathnam shares this insight from the *Saiva Agamas*, “The primal fire is in the face of the lamp; Ishvara is

present in the long stem; Brahma is present at the base. If the flames are nine in number, they represent the Navashaktis; if five, they represent the Pancha Brahmas; a single flame represents Sarasvati. Lighting sacred lamps results in the unfoldment of knowledge for adults, teens and children.”

We offer light. We are able to see with that same light and we hope to become illumined by the inner light of realization.

Contributing source: *Remembering Hindu Traditions*, published by the Colombo Young Women's Hindu Association, 2004



SHUTTERSTOCK



MEGHA VISHWANATH

Ignorance is seeing that which is impermanent, impure, sorrowful, or not self as permanent, pure, joyful and as self. *Yoga Sutras 11.5*

Laughing is good exercise; it's like jogging on the inside.

A thousand learned pandits in a hundred years can, perhaps, bring about what a true teacher can accomplish with a smile, a wink, in his devotees. **Swami Chinmayananda Saraswati** (1916–1993), *founder of Chinmaya Mission*

Gurudeva! Wherever you go, I shall follow. Wherever you stay will be my home. Whomsoever you love, I shall love also. Your lotus feet will be to me more sacred than Kashi. **Dada J.P. Vaswani**, *spiritual head of Sadhu Vaswani Mission*

If we get angry, we give up the most intelligent part of us. We lose our ability to solve things with our highest intelligence. So, there's no reason to become angry. It is counter-productive. We need to rise above such instinctive emotions. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, *publisher of HINDUISM TODAY*

Every experience that we ingest is going to produce its own reaction. In surveying our own internal balance of tamasic, rajasic and sattvic tendencies, we need to apply the power of discrimination so that everything we take into our mind and body can be easily and harmoniously digested and assimilated. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), *Founder of HINDUISM TODAY*

BASICS

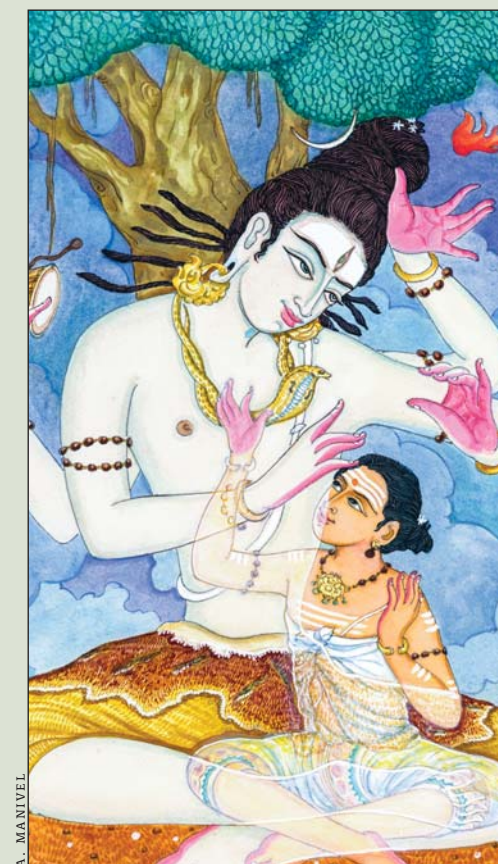
Parasiva, Life's Ultimate Goal

From Sivaya Subramuniyaswami's *Merging with Siva*

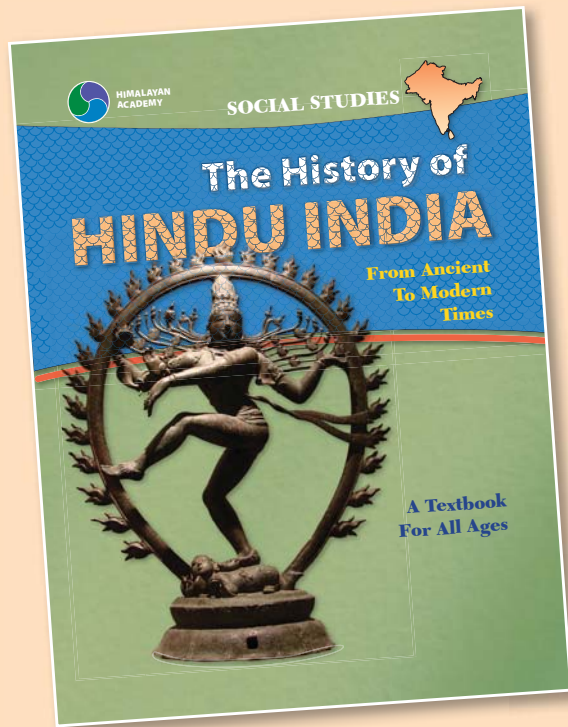
NEVER HAVE THERE BEEN SO MANY people living on the planet wondering, “What is the real goal, the final purpose, of life?” However, man is blinded by his ignorance and his concern with the externalities of the world. He is caught, enthralled, bound by karma. The ultimate realizations available are beyond his understanding and remain to him obscure, even intellectually.

Man's ultimate quest, the final evolutionary frontier, is within man himself. It is the truth spoken by Vedic rishis as the Self within man, attainable through control of the mind and purification. It is karma that keeps us from knowing of and reaching life's final goal, yet it is wrong to even call it a goal. It is what is known by the knower to have always existed. It is not a matter of becoming the Self, but of realizing that you never were not the Self. And what is that Self? It is Parasiva. It is God. It is That which is beyond the mind, beyond thought, feeling

and emotion, beyond time, form and space. That is what all men are seeking, looking for, longing for. When karma is controlled through yoga and dharma well performed, and the energies are transmuted to their ultimate state, the Vedic truth of life discovered by the rishis so long ago becomes obvious. That goal is to realize God Siva in His absolute, or transcendent, state, which when realized is your own ultimate state—timeless, formless, spaceless Truth. That Truth lies beyond the thinking mind, beyond the feeling nature, beyond action or any movement of the vrittis, the waves of the mind. Being, seeing, this Truth then gives the correct perspective, brings the external realities into perspective. They then are seen as truly unrealities, yet not discarded as such. This intimate experience must be experienced while in the physical body. One comes back and back again into flesh simply to realize Parasiva. Nothing more.



A. MANIVEL



Finally, a Fair & Accurate Presentation of Hindu History for Children

A 128-page sixth-grade social studies course from the editors of HINDUISM TODAY

HINDUISM TODAY'S Hindu history book is both correct and authentic, and definitely better than I have seen in any school textbook. If each Hindu were to learn and remember this narrative, the Hindu community would be better off in this increasingly pluralistic society.

Shiva G. Bajpai, Professor Emeritus, California State University Northridge

While no book can possibly encompass fully the breadth, complexity and plurality of Hindu practice and belief, the Hindu American Foundation finds that this work compromises little in describing the universal ideals of Hinduism that have emerged from its wondrous diversity.

Hindu American Foundation, USA

This presentation provides a needed counterbalance to textbooks on Hinduism which are sometimes inaccurate or fail to give a perspective that would be recognizable to most Hindus. Though designed for sixth-graders, I could imagine myself recommending it as review material for my college students.

Jeffery D. Long, Ph.D, Chair, Department of Religious Studies, Elizabethtown College, PA, USA



Now a Movie!

FROM THE AGAMAS

Understanding the Layers of Existence

An introduction to the 36 tattvas and how they relate to each soul

The following is a lucid translation from the Sarvajñottara Agama, Vidya Pada, chapter 5. This chapter begins a two-part series on our interaction with the tattvas and why each person should learn about them.

THE SELF THAT FUNCTIONS IN A COMPLETE IDENTITY WITH the 36 tattvas is considered to be the *tattvatma*. All the planes of existence meant for a soul's experience are within the fold of these 36 tattvas, which aid in binding and concealing the soul's knowledge.

The 36 categories, or tattvas, are very subtle. They pervade the entire range of the worlds and they are endless. These layers of existence are simultaneously created along with each birth. They are known in two different modes, namely *prakṛiti*, the source which gives rise to evolution, and *prakriya*, the categories which evolve from the source.

There is no knowledge superior to the knowledge related to prakriya; no pervasiveness greater than the pervasiveness of Lord Siva; no accomplishment superior to the accomplishment gained through Sivayoga; no happiness superior to the one born of total cessation of likes and dislikes.

O Shanmuga, at the rising of a particular tattva within one's own body, the soul acquires and sustains changes in its attitudes and actions according to the nature of that tattva.

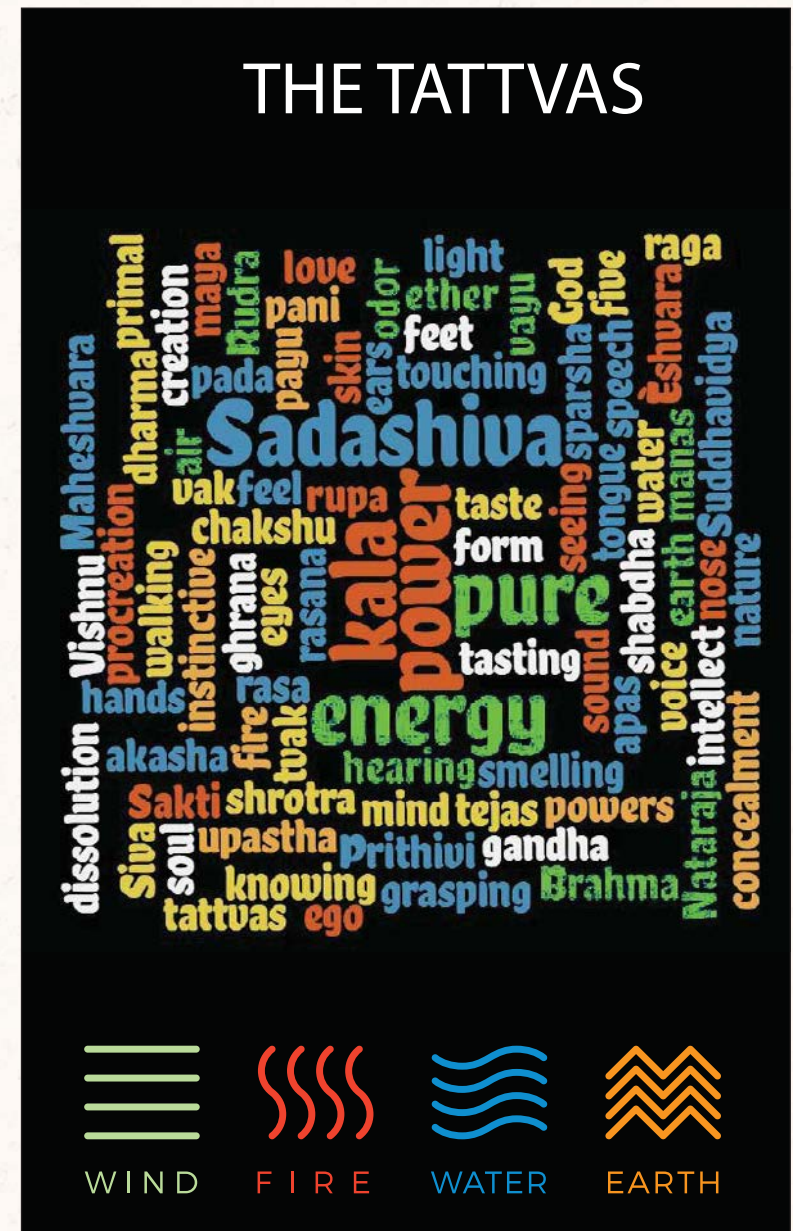
When the soul gets closely linked to a particular tattva and proceeds to do the decided work, that particular tattva arises and expands, surpassing the functions of all others. Being fully absorbed in that tattva, the embodied soul involves itself in its various actions.

In this way the soul continues to exist, being united with all the tattvas one by one in due order. Such a relationship is taking place continuously and endlessly. Since the souls are basically pervasive by nature, they are always roaming and persevering, being inseparably united with the tattvas. Because of such intimate linkage with the tattvas, the embodied soul often observes different states of mind as molded by a particular tattva.

○ Shanmuga, consequently the being acquires the notion of being the lord and controller of the tattvas. The soul is residing in total oneness with whatever substance it comes into contact and hence it is held that the soul is of the nature of all sorts of desire and thought as assumed by the mind.

The spirit which was holding the notion of being the lord of the tattvas now becomes subservient to that particular tattva with which it remains closely linked and experiences pleasure and comforts. It is to be known that the presence of the soul is in that particular tattva until the concerned action gets completed. Therefore, the initiated seeker should understand the link between the soul and the tattvas as explained here.

He should realize the importance of getting dissociated from the hold of tattvas and aim at experiencing bliss by installing himself in the transcendental Siva tattva which is untouched by the limiting principles, which is free from mutations and which is self-existent, being not propped up by any external support.



Tattvas of different degrees: Each tattva expresses itself in ways subtle to gross—from pure consciousness, the five powers of (creation, preservation, destruction, revealment, concealment) to gross magnetic energy like air, fire, water and earth

DR. S. P. SABHARATHNAM SIVACHARYAR, of the Adi Saiva priest lineage, is an expert in ancient Tamil and Sanskrit, specializing in the *Vedas*, *Agamas* and *Shilpa Shastras*. This excerpt is from his recent translation of the *Sarvajnottara Agama*.

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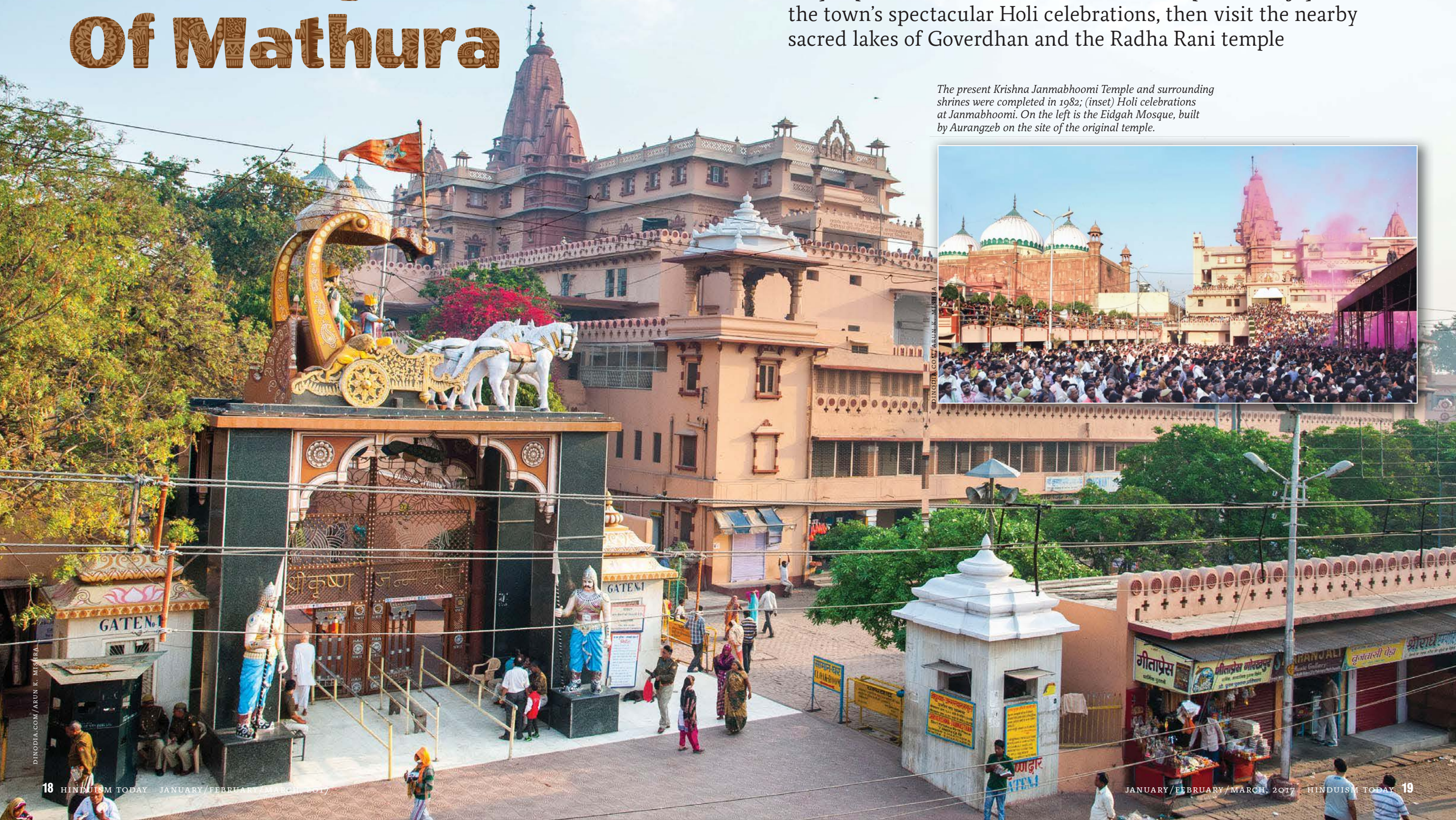
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The Holy Sites Of Mathura

Follow our journalist and photographer to Mathura, where they explore the Krishna Janmabhoomi temple and enjoy the town's spectacular Holi celebrations, then visit the nearby sacred lakes of Goverdhan and the Radha Rani temple

The present Krishna Janmabhoomi Temple and surrounding shrines were completed in 1982; (inset) Holi celebrations at Janmabhoomi. On the left is the Eidgah Mosque, built by Aurangzeb on the site of the original temple.



BY RAJIV MALIK, NEW DELHI

THE SHRI KRISHNA JANMASTHAN COMPLEX in Mathura is an extremely important place of pilgrimage, not only for all Vaishnavites and devotees of Lord Krishna but for Hindus of other traditions as well. All come to see the sacred birthplace of the Lord in one of Hinduism's seven holy cities. By some accounts, it is the most frequently visited temple in all of India.

From childhood I had heard the story of Krishna's being born in a prison cell and how His cruel maternal uncle, Kamsa, wanted to kill Him. Visiting the prison cell believed to be Lord Krishna's birthplace was one of the most thrilling experiences of my life.

Every Hindu child of my generation would have visualized this cell, so vividly described during the Bhagavat kathas and raas leelas that were performed in every village and city of India around four decades ago. At that time these performances and events were an innate part of our religious lives. They connected us to our ancient culture and religion. Now we have movies, TV shows and

.....
Krishna Janmabhoomi: (below, left to right) worshipers line up at the temple entrance; maps showing the location of Mathura; the temple is a virtual fortress, with a substantial army presence and constant high security

YouTube.

We were taught the stories of the Gods in school. During major festivals we absorbed the tales through the lifelike displays set up for Janamashtami at temples or at huge fairgrounds during festivals. Here in Mathura, standing before the well maintained, authentic-looking cell, I felt transported back to the time of Krishna's birth.

Mathura is home of the Yadavas, the tribe in which Krishna was born. Vajranabha, Krishna's grandson, is said to have established the first temple at Krishna's birthplace, janmasthan, shortly after He left His physical body. There he installed the Deity of Keshavadeva, or Keshav Deo, a form of Lord Krishna. The temple was located on Katra Mound, a large area several meters higher than the surrounding town. Even when Mathura became a stronghold of Buddhism and then Jainism, worship at the Janmasthan temple never ceased. Around 400ce, the Gupta emperor Chandragupta Vikramaditya built a big temple on the janmasthan site.

The temple was improved by the Rashtrakuta kings and others—so much so that in 1017, Mahmud of Ghazni and his army came here specifically to loot and demolish the temple. It was reported at the time that Mahmud's army carried off the gold and silver murtis of many Deities. One of the gold statues weighed 1,120 pounds (worth US\$20 million today) and was decorated with a 35

pound (8,000 carat) sapphire, most likely a blue one. To give some idea of its value, a huge blue sapphire was discovered in 2015 in Sri Lanka. It weighed 1,400 carats and was appraised at upwards of 300 million dollars.

Mahmud came only to plunder, not to rule, and left the devastated area after a few weeks. By 1150, local kings and devotees had rebuilt the temple. But it was destroyed again in the 16th century by the Sultan of Delhi, Sikandar Lodi. The temple's Deities were broken up and, according to a report from the time, "used for weights in butcher shops made on the temple site to shed the blood of the cow over the birthplace of the heathen by the decree of Sikandar."

Around 1614, Raja Vir Singh rebuilt the Janmabhoomi temple once again on Katra Mound. The huge structure, 250 feet high, could be seen from 33 miles away. Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, a French merchant traveler, recorded in 1650 that the red sandstone building as "the most magnificent he had seen; the main Deity [in the form of Keshavadeva] was of black stone and had rubies for eyes and was flanked by His two consorts of white stone, all in golden robes. It is one of the most sumptuous edifices in all of India."

In 1662 the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb ordered that a mosque be built to the east of Katra Mound. In 1665 he banned the celebration of Holi and Diwali, and also banned cremations on the banks of the Yamuna. In

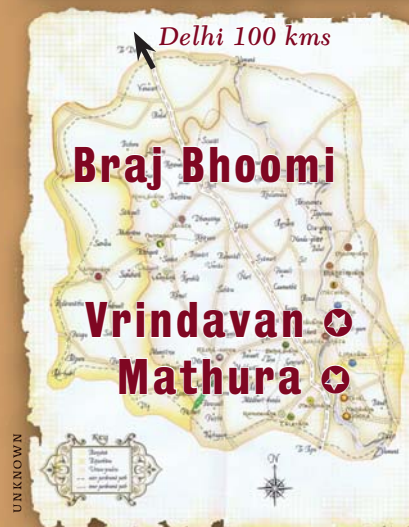
Area of Krishna's Birthplace: 1) the main Krishna Janmabhoomi Temple complex with shrines for many auxiliary Deities; 2) Eidgah Mosque; 3) temple of the prison cell where Krishna was born; 4) entry gate; 5) temple of Keshavadeva Deity; 6) greenbelt area

1670 he ordered that the temple and all ancillary shrines be completely destroyed. The Deities were broken up and used as foundation rubble under the steps of the Jahanara Mosque in Agra. The Eidgah Mosque was built upon the plinth of Raja Vir Singh's temple. The overall destruction was such that the report, *Mathura, a District Memoir*, written by local magistrate F. S. Growse in 1882 (bit.ly/Growse), stated, "Thanks to the Muhammadan intolerance, there is not a single building of any antiquity either in the city itself or its environs. ... At the present day it has no lack of stately edifices, but they are all modern."

In 1815 the 13-acre Katra Mound, including the mosque, was purchased by Raja Patnimal of Banaras. Attempts to rebuild the Janmabhoomi temple finally came to fruition in the 1950s under the patronage the Birla and Dalmia industrialist families, who were instrumental in forming the Sri Krishnabhoomi Trust. *India Today* reported in 1993 (bit.ly/Eidgah) that management of the mosque was entrusted to the existing



Janmabhoomi, Birthplace of Lord Krishna



Eidgah committee, with the understanding its right to the mosque would not be challenged thereafter. By 1982—three centuries after its last destruction—the Shri Krishna Janmasthan complex as we see it today was completed, including the restoration of the prison cell directly west of the mosque. I was told the mosque has few worshipers, local Muslims preferring to attend the Jama Masjid to the east.

After Babri Masjid in Ayodhya was demolished by Hindu militants in 1992, security was greatly enhanced here in Mathura as well as at Kasi Vishwanatha Temple and the adjacent Gyanvapi mosque in Banaras (built by the same Aurangzeb, upon the site of the original Vishwanatha temple). While thousands of mosques in India have been built upon the sites of temples, it is these three that have been specifically targeted for repossession by the RSS and VHP.

Security is extremely tight here; 15-foot-high security fences surround the Krishna Janmabhoomi complex, and an even higher barrier stands between the temple and the mosque, which share a common wall. Soldiers with loaded rifles patrol many checkpoints; visitors are thoroughly scanned before entering the complex, and all must

surrender cellphones and cameras. Photography is prohibited. Yet, despite the security and the extreme heat and humidity when we visited, the whole complex was overflowing with devotees and pilgrims queuing up to visit the sanctum sanctorum and other tem-



Nand Ji Temple, Nandgoan: marks the home of Krishna's foster father Nandji and His mother Yashoda

ples and places of religious interest within this well-maintained complex.

Throughout my trip to the Braj area, I was pained at the way the Hindu temples were damaged and destroyed, again and again, by Muslim aggressors. Here at Mathura Krishna Janmasthan one can see the mosque

that stands right alongside the temple. The temple's long and painful history of being repeatedly rebuilt only to be yet again razed to the ground, recounted by the priests and guides to the devotees and pilgrims, is deeply disturbing. The intense security only serves to augment this distress.

Due to our tight schedule, we could not visit the Shri Keshav Dev Prachin Mandir, across the street from the Janmabhoomi complex, as it had closed for the afternoon. Popular with the local devotees—in part because it is outside the high-security area—this is today a magnificent structure which was visited in its original form by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in the 15th century. It is said that after taking darshan of the Deity, he was so imbued with love for Krishna that he started dancing, singing and crying out the Lord's name, and the devotees present, mesmerized by his acts of divine love, joined him in

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Mathura sacred sites: (below, left to right) Shri Keshav Dev Temple, where Chaitanya danced in bliss; Lord Krishna, the temple's main Deity; the Rangeshwar Shivalingam; Vishram Ghat, the town's most popular place of worship along the Yamuna River

chanting "Hari Hari."

On our way to the Yamuna River we visited Shri Rangeshwar Mahadev Temple of Lord Siva, protector of Mathura city. Even on this hot afternoon it was overflowing with devotees, most of whom belonged to Mathura itself. To reach this beautiful temple, one walks along a narrow lane full of shops selling puja materials, fancy gifts and souvenirs. The temple has many paintings related to Hindu mythology and is a wonderful example of ancient Hindu architecture. Inside, a large number of devotees were performing puja and presenting offerings to Lord Siva. Meanwhile, a few priests were performing a big private puja for a Mumbai family in worship of Goddess Kali, whose statue is also prominently placed in this temple.

Mathura has 25 ghats along the Yamuna River, each one associated with a story of Lord Krishna. Many scriptures recommend pilgrimage to these ghats. Though only a short distance downstream from Vrindavan, the river flow here is stronger, the water much cleaner, and devotees bathe without reservation. We opted for a boat ride, which was cooler than walking along the stone ghats. Our priest guide advised us to sprinkle a few drops of the river water on ourselves in purification and to ask permission of the Goddess Yamuna to enter the boat. As we proceeded down the river, we encountered a steamer boat carrying a huge machine which scooped up garbage from the

surface of the river, part of the government's Yamuna cleaning project.

At this time of day, devotees had congregated at the famed Vishram Ghat. This is the centermost of the 25 ghats, with 12 to the north and 12 to the south—the traditional beginning and ending point for circumambulation of the holy city. Here devotees pay homage to their ancestors through the shraddha ceremonies, and it is here that the festival of Bhai Duj is celebrated, in which sisters apply tilak to the forehead of their brothers. This is possibly the most popular festival observed at the ghats, with brothers and sisters by the thousands coming to celebrate each year.

Behind the ghats is a row of ancient buildings of the haveli type, originally owned by wealthy kings and merchants and used to house sadhus and saints, but more recently converted to rest houses and hotels for pilgrims. The area is also home to hoards of monkeys. Our guides assured us these are not as aggressive as those of Vrindavan, but we nevertheless took no chances with our cell phones and eyeglasses.

Barsana's Radha Rani Temple

The following day we visited Barsana, about 22 miles northwest of Vrindavan, with Vishakha Dasi as our guide. The spirit of Radhe Radhe rules everywhere in the Braj; She is the embodiment of true love, with even Lord Krishna subservient and wanting

to please Her. Nowhere is this felt more than in the temple dedicated to Radha Rani in Barsana. The hilltop site was overflowing with devotees and pilgrims when we arrived. Despite the hot, humid weather, hundreds were climbing barefoot the 820-foot hill, chanting "Radhe Radhe." Many, I discovered, were youth from the neighboring state of Uttar Pradesh. Radha Rani Temple is also called the Temple of Barsana's Ladli Ji or "pampered one," i.e., Radha. This palace-like structure was built by King Veer Singh in 1675 using red and yellow stone.

Hundreds of devotees were sitting on the floor of the huge main hall, enjoying melodious bhajans sung by a professional group of musicians. The whole place was reverberating with spiritual energy amidst the loud singing of "Radhe Radhe." A group of young women started dancing to the music; my wife Renu joined them, her eyes closed in deep concentration, totally immersed in the bhakti bhav of the Goddess of supreme love. Later she shared that the few minutes she spent dancing provided her the most blissful and memorable moments of her trip to Braj.

Radha Ashtami, Her birthday festival, which occurs fifteen days after Krishna Janmashatami, is celebrated in Barsana with great fanfare. The whole area is decorated, and hundreds of thousands come from all over to participate.

Barsana is also famous for its Holi celebrations. The Holi here is known as Lathmar,

Shri Keshav Temple and its Famed Deity of Lord Krishna



Rangeshwar Temple and Vishram Ghat



"beating with the sticks," Holi. This unique form of Holi is played between the residents of Nandgaon and Barsana. During the celebrations, the womenfolk of Barsana beat the men of Nandgaon with wooden sticks while the men defend themselves from these attacks with stout shields. Lathmar Holi is also popular in Mathura and Goverdhan.

Goverdhan

A few days later we visited nearby Goverdhan, site of the Goverdhan Hill, which the child Krishna held aloft to save the town from the wrath of Indra. It is also the site of two small reservoirs, Radha Kund and the adjacent Shyam Kund, a famous leela sthali of Radha and Krishna known for its serenity and high spiritual vibration. Our guide, Vishakha Dasi, and the priest we met there, Pandit Kaushik or Anna Master, told us the reservoirs were created in penance and purification for Krishna's killing of the demon Arishthasur, who came there in the form of a bull to attack Him. Shyam Kund, the story goes, was created by a kick of Krishna's heel and filled by all the sacred rivers of India, and Radha Kund was dug by Radha and the gopis with their bangles and similarly filled. As this took place on Kartik Krishna Ahoi Ashtami, many devotees bathe in Radha Kund on this day at midnight to fulfill all their desires.

Our visit to Radha Kund was most uplifting. We came at noon, when Krishna and Radha are believed to come for their leelas

every day. Perhaps it is because of their divine presence that we were feeling extremely refreshed and blessed. We enjoyed every moment spent in the Radha Kund area, where we prayed at some of the small shrines dedicated to Goverdhan Parbat and Radha Rani. This area is full of small temples, ashrams and cottages of saints and samadhis (burial sites) of some of the six goswamis of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu who developed this area.

We visited Swami Prankrishna Das Baba's ashram, a place where they do kirtan singing and Bhagwat katha, and met his team of young musicians and singers who sang melodious and highly devotional bhajans for us. By this time, having visited Radha Kund and meeting and having darshan of some of the realized saints, I was so ecstatic that during the bhajans I myself went into a trance and started dancing and chanting "Radhe Radhe" and "Radhe Krishna."

Swamiji told me, "My message to the Hindus all over the world is that India is the best country, and in Goverdhan the best place is Radha Kund. Here Krishna and Radha melted and merged in this water. Anyone who takes a bath here will be blessed with complete love by the grace of Radha Rani. In this Kali Yuga, we must recite the name of God to be liberated; chasing material things will lead us to the world of sorrows."

Conclusion

I must say on a personal level that my time in Braj was quite a spiritual experience not only for me, but my wife Renu as well. Braj Bhoomi

is the magical land of Radha and Krishna, where today one comes into contact with the holy dust on which the divine couple trod, and where they together still engage in their raas leela, at night in Nidhi Van and Sewa Kunj of Vrindavan, and during the day at Radha Kunj in Goverdhan. Experiencing their presence is extremely easy and accessible to everyone. It is a thrilling experience to visit Krishna Janmabhoomi in Mathura, where He was born in a prison cell.

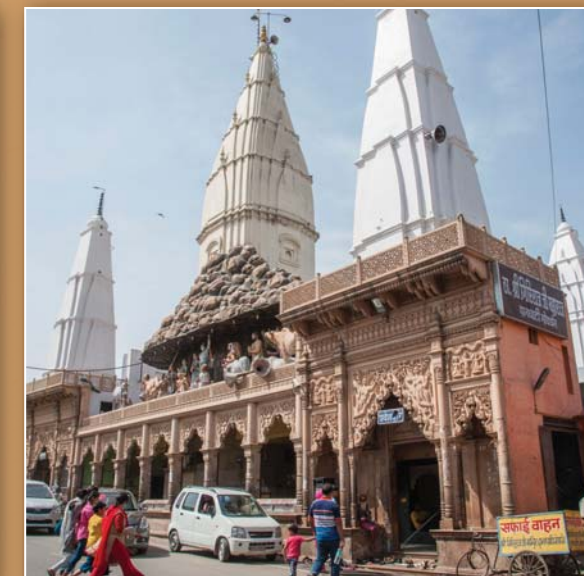
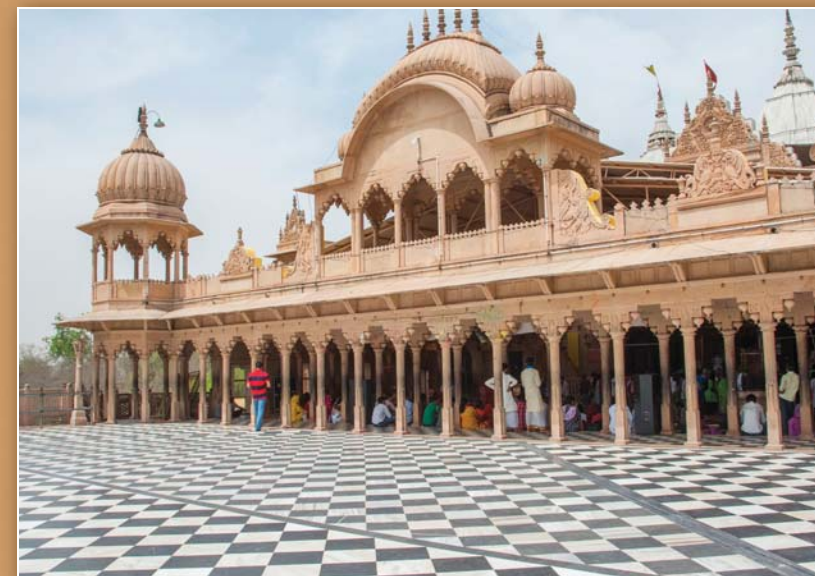
The Brajwasi people of this area are proud of their connection to Lord Krishna, who lived among them so long ago, and His consort, Radha Rani, Herself hailing from a family of Barsana. Brajwasis delight in their Hindu way of dressing—dhoti kurta for the men and sarees and gopi costumes for the women. Each greets the visitor with "Radhe, Radhe," a mantra you will also find painted on the walls as well as the faces of devotees during the Holi festival.

Even in this age of computers and the Internet, to truly experience Sanatana Dharma, one must spend some time in the sacred Braj Bhoomi, where the chanting of "Radhe Radhe" will open the inner doors to connect you to Radha and Krishna.

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Recreating Krishna's pastimes:
 (clockwise from right) devotees spontaneously dance during bhajan at the Radha Rani temple in Barsana; Ghati Temple in Goverdhan; exterior of Radha Rani temple in Barsana; feet of Radha and Krishna at the Radha Kund in Goverdhan; devotees bathe and sit along the steps of Radha Kund



... Radha Rani, Temple of the "Pampered One," and Goverdhan



HOLI

Braj Style

The festival of color and a good-natured beating: (clockwise from right) 1) During "Lathmar Holi," observed in various places, the women take turns clobbering the men (all volunteers), who protect themselves with stout shields. Here at Nandgaon it reenacts an event from Krishna's life in which he so annoyed Radha and the gopis that they chased Him away with sticks. 2) the inner courtyard of Dwarkadheesh Temple in Mathura may look like the scene of a riot, but it is just young and old alike enjoying the traditional Holi tossing of colored powders; 3) this photographer, his wife and his camera are well prepared for anything that might be thrown at them; 4) children can't believe it's OK to get so messy 5) young woman with "Shri Radhe" painted on her face; 6) a Central Reserve Police Force constable carefully maneuvers the clouds of powder being thrown by revelers in Nandgaon—from his clean uniform, it would appear he is off-limits for dousing



There's Nothing Quite Like the Hindu Celebration of Holi...



The Widow Mothers of Vrindavan

Swami Kalikrishnananda, Assistant Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Sevashram Charitable Hospital Vrindavan, provides a concise overview of the town's "widow mothers."

Due to Vrindavan's close connection with Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, many people have moved from Bengal to this place since his time. Now 40 percent of the population here traces directly or indirectly to West Bengal. These Vaishnavites initially came on pilgrimage to do their bhakti and sadhana, and eventually settled here. The belief in Bengal is that if old widows spend their last days here they will attain Vaikuntha, the abode of Lord Vishnu, just as many believe that by spending their last days in Varanasi they will be liberated. Almost all these widow mothers come from West Bengal and surrounding areas, since this practice is prevalent only in that region. They come only to Vrindavan and not to other pilgrimage centers. Widows from other religions and communities sometimes get settled in



Vrindavan in the garb of Hindus for the sake of their livelihood, but they are a small percentage.

Family members sometimes bring their elderly women or widows here on the pretext of pilgrimage and abandon them. Left with no other options, they go to the widows' homes here and seek shelter. Even sons have abandoned their mothers here. Another category is women who were married at an early age and lost their husbands. Very few really come here voluntarily with the idea of spiritual practice. Most arrive due to compelling circumstances, and that is the truth. Some take up jobs, but most subsist by begging.

By one estimate there are as many as 6,000 widows in Vrindavan. Of these, the RK Mission is providing full food rations to 1,600 of them, which is what our funds and staffing allow. We issue ration cards, and every month, from the 10th to the 17th, they can pick up their ration for the entire month. We give them rice, dal, oil, sugar, salt, milk powder, tea, soap, etc. From time to time we also provide gas stoves, boxes to keep their belongings, blankets and clothing.

If we have more funding, we will increase the number we support. There are many NGOs and ashrams doing their part to improve the widows' living conditions.

The widows take up residence in some of the ashrams or rented houses. They sing bhajans in the local temples, which in turn feed them and provide them small gifts. No doubt, either willfully or forcibly, they are leading an austere religious life while taking the name of the Lord. All-merciful Lord Krishna makes sure that these widows get their food and shelter at all times.



Caring for the city's widows: (clockwise from above) Swami Kalikrishnananda; widows and others begging near the famous Nidhi Van area of old Vrindavan; Ma Dham widow ashram, run by the Guild of Service, a Delhi-based social service organization headed by Mrs. Mohini Giri, is quite upscale compared to many other facilities for widows; an elderly resident of Ma Dham; a widow prays at the ashram's home shrine; residents living several to a room

Cared for but Not Cared About...



TRADITIONS

Tattoos Of Devotion & Defiance

A snapshot of the Ramnamis, who for decades have taken on full-body tattoos in protest of prejudice

REUTERS, ADNAN ABIDI

BEFORE INDIA BANNED CASTE-BASED discrimination, low-caste Hindus were denied entry to temples and forced to use separate wells. More than 100 years ago, those in the eastern state of Chhattisgarh began tattooing their bodies and faces with the name of the God Ram as an act of devotion and defiance. These Ramnamis, followers of the Ramnami Samaj religious movement, did this as a message to higher-caste Indians that God is everywhere, regardless of caste.

Mahettar Ram Tandon, who lives in the village of Jamgahan, is proud of the indelible message he still carries almost five decades after he had the name of Ram tattooed on his entire body. Dressed in a simple white lungi, Tandon told Reuters: "It was my new birth the day I started having the tattoos. The old me had died." Tandon is now 76, and his purple tattoos have faded over decades under the harsh sun.

Today the tattoos of Ramnamis, who num-

ber in the tens of thousands in close to a hundred villages spread across Chhattisgarh state, are usually on a smaller scale. After caste-based discrimination was banned in India in 1955, the lives of many lower-caste Indians have improved, villagers said. As young Ramnamis today often travel to other regions to study and look for work, few get full-body tattoos.

"The young generation just don't feel good about having tattoos on their whole body," said Tandon, who has always lived in his village of small mud houses surrounded by fields of grazing cattle, wheat and rice. "That doesn't mean they don't follow the faith."

In the nearby village of Gorba, Punai Bai spent more than two weeks at the age of 18 having her full body tattooed using dye made from mixing soot from a kerosene lamp with water. Now aged 75, Bai, who lives in a one-room house with her son, daughter-in-law and two grandchildren, said: "God is for everybody, not just for one community."

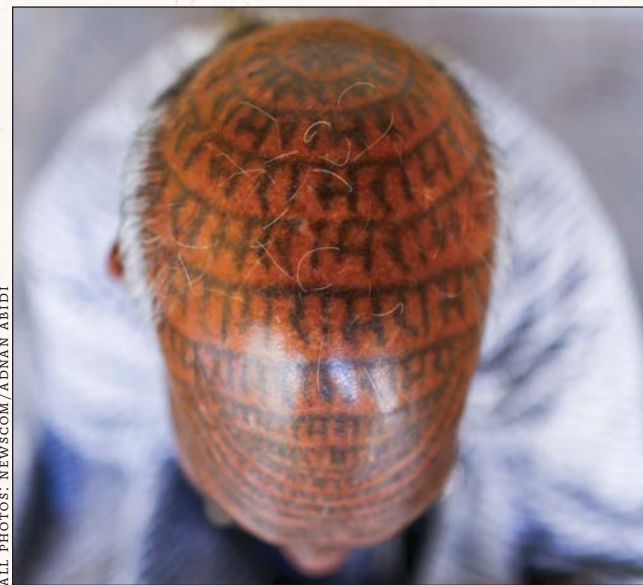
Children born into the community were

once required to be tattooed somewhere on their body (preferably on the forehead) by the age of two, but that is no longer the case. According to their religious practices, Ramnamis do not drink or smoke, must chant the name "Ram" daily, and are exhorted to treat everyone with equality and respect. Almost every Ramnami household owns a copy of the *Ramayana* epic, a book on Lord Rama's life and teachings, along with small statues of Hindu Deities. Most followers' homes in these villages have "Ram Ram" written in black on the outer and inner walls.

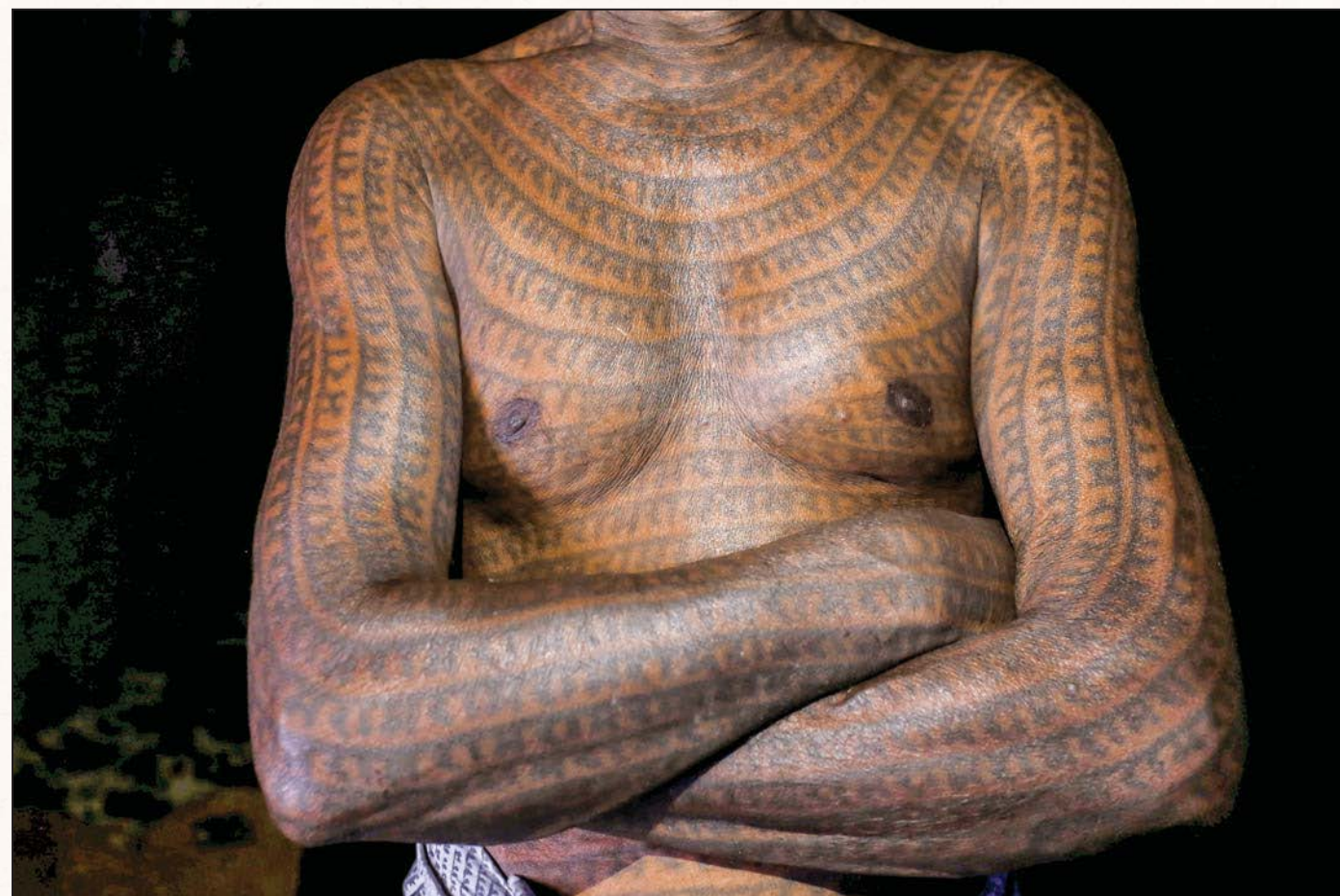
Despite the 1955 legislation, centuries-old feudal attitudes persist in many parts of the country, and low-caste people, or Dalits, still face prejudice. But Tandon is optimistic about the Ramnamis' relative change in fortunes since those years long ago when he had his body tattooed. "The world is changing, the times are changing," he told Reuters. "We have all realized that we are all the same."

For more on the Ramnamis, see the book *Rapt in the Name* by Ramdas Lamb

ALL PHOTOS: NEWS/COM/ADNAN ABIDI



We are all the same: (clockwise from left) Tiharu Ram, 70, showing a full face tattoo; Chanda Ram, 72, who has tattooed Ram on his entire face and head, poses for a picture inside his house in the village of Chapora, in the eastern state of Chhattisgarh; Punai Bai, 75, shows the frontside of her fully tattooed hand and arm; Sumitra Devi, 70, stands in the doorway showing her entire tattooed face; Mahettar Ram Tandon, 76, poses with folded arms showing a full chest and sleeve tattoos



Revising California's Curriculum

Though not perfect, the state's new K-12 "History-Social Science Framework" assures more accurate treatment of India & Hinduism

FROM THE EDITORS OF HINDUISM TODAY

AN EIGHT-YEAR PROCESS TO IMPROVE THE TEACHING OF HISTORY in California schools culminated on July 14, 2016, when the State Board of Education approved a greatly expanded History-Social Science Framework for kindergarten through 12th grade. Now just under 1,000 pages long, this document outlines the curriculum, grade by grade. Of critical interest to Hindus has been the material presented in 6th grade, covering ancient times to 300ce, and 7th grade, covering 300 to 1750—eras in which India held 25 percent of the world's population and was rivaled only by China as the most advanced region of the world. Here we explore the history and nature of the Framework, evaluate the revision process and discuss what comes next for the teaching of India and Hinduism in California's public schools.

California is the largest textbook market in the nation. The state buys \$400 million worth of books each year for its six million public school students—that's more *students* than most US states have *people*. These books must be written to specific standards, called "Frameworks," for each field—e.g., history, mathematics, science, English or health. Textbook revisions made for California often appear in the books bought by smaller states, making California singularly influential in K-12 education nationwide. Global changes made to the History-Social Science Framework, for example, which include LGBT history and much more information on the environment, will likely be included in textbooks used in other states, with the notable exception of Texas. Similarly, the new Framework's improved (but still imperfect) treatment of India and Hinduism in 6th and 7th grade will also impact other states. That is why this process in California has been so important, and why HINDUISM TODAY's staff devoted years of effort to it, consulting extensively with other Hindu organizations, scholars and individuals, providing analysis and traveling nearly a dozen times to Sacramento to attend meetings.

Why Revise the Framework?

The California Framework has two major components (see sidebar right), each with its own history of development. The oldest part, first formulated in 1986, is called the narrative; this is an essay-like description of what is to be taught. The newer component, adopted in 1998, is the Content Standards, styled as a bullet-point list easy for publishers to write to, easy for teachers to design classes around and easy to test on. This form was well adapted to the educational fad of that time. Unfortunately, knowledge isn't so neatly pigeon-holed, and while content standard lists are used in many states, educators now favor a broader, more expository description of what children should learn and how they should learn it. The expanded Framework narrative is part of this trend.

But here's the difficulty: bureaucracy. The state school system is just that, the state's. It runs according to rules set down by the California State Assembly and ratified by the governor. Logically, if one were to revise the Framework, one should start with the Content Standards, as they are the concise summary of what is to be taught.

But that would require the legislature to pass a law empowering the state's Board of Education to make such a revision—and that has not happened, though it has been proposed multiple times. Consequently, the board cannot alter the standards—not even to reduce the planetary count of the solar system from nine to eight after the demotion of Pluto. The legislature and the board itself are justifiably wary of revising the Content Standards. When Texas revised its equivalent guidelines a few years ago, the process was contentious, with creationists and other special interest groups impacting the outcome.

Instead, California's legislature passed binding resolutions requiring the Board of Education to include a number of specific topics in the curriculum, such as the history of the LGBT community, an expanded coverage of environmental responsibility, the role of Filipino soldiers in World War II, California's Latino history and a section on the Sikh religion (previously entirely absent).

Unable to change the standards, but facing mounting pressure from the various groups specified by the legislature, the Board of Education decided to do what was within their power: revise the Framework narrative while still keeping it in conformance with the existing Content Standards. This wise approach avoided the Texas free-for-all, which attracted national derision. The stipulation to adhere to the standards also proved unexpectedly beneficial to the Hindu community at a critical moment late in the process.

The Eight-Year Revision Process

Work on the Framework narrative began in 2008, and four Hindu organizations submitted testimony to what was then called the Curriculum Framework Committee (later renamed the Instructional Quality Commission). The groups were the Hindu Education Foundation, the Hindu American Foundation, HINDUISM TODAY and California Parents for Equalization of Educational Materials (CAPEEM). The revision process was suspended in 2009 by then-governor Schwarzenegger due to a state budgetary crisis. When the work resumed in 2014, we examined the draft narrative document brought forward from the earlier process. We could not find one single word in the draft that reflected any suggestion from the testimony submitted by the Hindu community in 2009. It was not a good sign.

Initial support for our effort in 2014 came mostly from the same groups that participated in 2008. But as the stakes became apparent, more groups and individuals became involved—not only from California but from other states as well. With funding from the Uberoi Foundation, HINDUISM TODAY worked closely with historian Dr. Shiva Bajpai, professor emeritus at California State University Northridge, to develop a detailed analysis of the historical development of the Framework's treatment of Hinduism compared to other religions. Another especially effective individual supporter was Tushar Pandya. An active member of the Chinmaya Mission, he arranged for us to address a number of their gatherings in Northern California, which alerted parents to the problem. Chinmaya Mission as an organization was not formally involved, but offered support



HINDUISM TODAY

and encouragement throughout.

As part of Chinmaya Mission's weekly Bal Vihar classes for children, the parents are required to attend lectures during the same time period—a group they jokingly refer to as "the captive parents." No mom or dad is allowed to drop off their kids for classes, go shopping and pick them up on the way home. Instead, they are required to improve their own religious knowledge. We addressed groups of parents, and often children as well, at Bal Vihars in the San Francisco Bay Area, Bakersfield, Los Angeles and San Diego. Similar presentations were given at the annual HAF fundraising dinner and

a gathering of the Dharma Civilization Foundation (both in the Bay Area) and at the BAPS Swaminarayan temples in San Jose and Los Angeles. Altogether, thousands of parents and children got an overview of the narrative revision process and what was at stake for the

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Joining the process: December 23, 2014, photo taken outside the Department of Education building in Sacramento with Acharya Arumuganathaswami at right, Dr. Shiva Bajpai to left of sign and Tushar Pandya behind him, along with parents and children from Chinmaya Mission Bal Vihar, all of whom testified at the hearing

Where We Started: The 2005 History-Social Science Framework

The present process has been to revise the 251-page *History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools*, last issued in 2005. That edition included the mandatory 1998 Content Standards, a bullet-point list of topics to be covered, as well as an essay-style "narrative." The sixth grade Content Standards mandate study of the early civilizations of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Kush, the Hebrews, Greece, India, China and Rome. The India standards are:

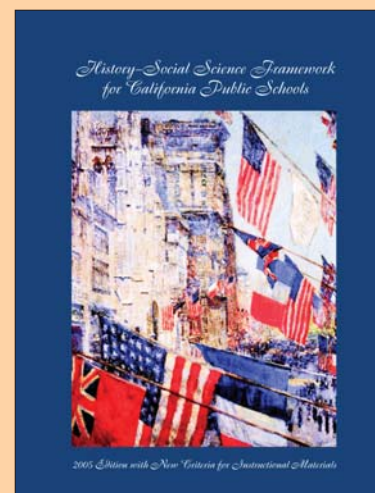
"6.5 Students analyze the geographic, political, economic, religious and social structures of the early civilizations of India:

1. Locate and describe the major river system and discuss the physical setting that supported the rise of this civilization.
2. Discuss the significance of the Aryan invasions.
3. Explain the major beliefs and practices of Brahmanism in India and how they evolved into early Hinduism.
4. Outline the social structure of the caste system.
5. Know the life and moral teachings of the Buddha and how Buddhism spread in India,

Ceylon and Central Asia.

6. Describe the growth of the Maurya empire and the political and moral achievements of the emperor Asoka.

7. Discuss important aesthetic and intellectual traditions (e.g., Sanskrit literature, including the *Bhagavad Gita*; medicine; metallurgy; and mathematics, including Hindu-Arabic numerals and the zero)."



The Content Standards were not up for discussion or adjustment, but the Framework narrative was. The 2005 edition devoted just 225 words to India, including the Harappan civilization, Aryan invasion, early Indian civilization, Buddhism, Jainism and Hinduism. The latter is mentioned in a single, 21-word sentence: "Students should also study the development of Hinduism and the role of one of its most revered texts, the *Bhagavad Gita*." The just completed revision greatly expands the coverage of Hinduism and adds a significant section in seventh grade on Indian history and Hindu religious developments of the time.

Hindu community. The warning was simple, “What you are trying to achieve through years of children’s classes can be wiped out by four weeks of public-school classes on India and Hinduism.”

At the very first talk to a Chinmaya Mission group, just days before the IQC’s December, 2014, meeting, several of the children came forward to describe their 6th-grade study of India—the inaccuracies and biases of the texts (which focused almost entirely on caste and very little on religion) and the ensuing derision and hostility of their classmates. It was immediately decided to bring some of the kids to the upcoming IQC meeting. And come they did. More than a dozen skipped school and set off to the state capital, parents in tow, to defend their heritage and religion. This set a pattern for all subsequent meetings of the IQC, and finally the Board of Education itself. By the end of the process, more than a hundred youth had testified, articulately and with conviction. They came from the Bal Vihar classes, HEF, BAPS Swaminarayan, HAF and other organizations.

The revision process is complex, but Hindus in large numbers attended each of the IQC meetings—nearly a dozen—between 2014 and 2016, and quickly learned how to work within the process. For expert guidance in evaluating the public input, the IQC relied on the California History-Social Science Project, CHSSP, at the University of California Davis. The CHSSP also wrote or revised sections on their own initiative. They were sorely underfunded, and many scholars simply donated their time to what they knew was a strategically critical revision. Clearly, the CHSSP could not possibly engage the needed depth of expertise to evaluate a framework covering the entire expanse of human history from the appearance of *Homo sapiens* 200,000 years ago. Moreover, many of the topics—such as warfare, gender identification and religion—involved highly controversial issues. In short, the task was near impossible. Nevertheless, the CHSSP and IQC gamely took on the work to the best of their ability.

In the beginning of the process they were able to accept general suggestions, such as to include India—previously barely mentioned after 300ce—in 7th-grade studies. Broad suggestions such as this were incorporated and acted upon in the “first field review,” which ended in mid-2015. After that point, input had to be more specific, giving the exact wording for edits being suggested—otherwise, input often got marked “comment,” and nothing was done. All submissions were assembled by the Department of Education staff and evaluated by the CHSSP. At each IQC meeting, the CHSSP recommendations were considered, then accepted or rejected. As well, the commissioners could make changes.

The final Framework document reflects thousands of pages of input and personal testimony from the Hindu community. With some major exceptions, it is a massive improvement to how India and Hinduism will be taught in the future. In 2014 the Framework’s 6th grade section contained just 994 words on India and Hinduism, and almost nothing in the 7th grade. The new 6th grade section—now 2,118 words—provides for a comprehensive explanation of Hindu philosophy (including “a profound acceptance of religious diversity”), practices (e.g., festivals and pilgrimages), Gods (with a capital “G,” for the first time) and the *Ramayana*. For 7th grade, there is now a

1,366-word section covering the Gupta and Chola empires, the Bhakti Movement, art, dance, music and the spread of Hinduism and Buddhism outside India. Improvements were also made to the sections on Buddhism and Jainism; and, for the first time, the origins and teachings of Sikhism were included in the curriculum.

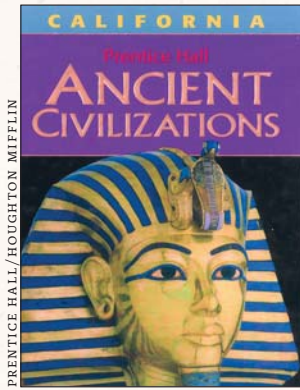
Unfortunately, however, the newly adopted narrative contains a negative and inaccurate 400-word section on caste. Social structure is supposed to be discussed in relation to each religion, but only Hinduism is singled out for condemnation. The Framework’s extensive coverage of Christianity and Islam makes absolutely no mention of the practice and theological justification of slavery by those religions—the consequences of which impact us to this day. Suggestions from the Hindu community to include a few sentences on the New Testament view of slavery were rejected out of hand. A similar edit for Islam was initially accepted, then later rejected when one commissioner opined that bringing up the subject of slavery under Islam would be “inflammatory.”

The original draft narrative described Hinduism and Islam as patriarchal, even though every other society of the time was equally or more so. When this was pointed out, the IQC acknowledged the unfairness and added entries describing patriarchy in Christianity and Judaism based on proposals made by the Hindu community. This was a major accomplishment in providing a balanced view of patriarchy across religions. Given this success, it is deeply disappointing that the treatment of Indian social structure remains so heavily biased.

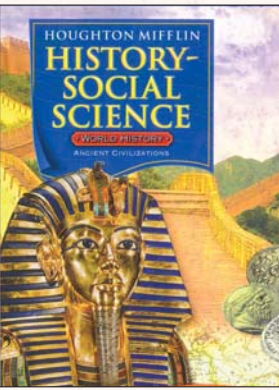
Countering Proposals to Delete India and Hinduism

In late 2015 the entire process turned contentious. A group of academics calling themselves the South Asia Faculty Group entered the fray. These were individuals from universities in California and elsewhere with varying degrees of expertise in Indian history and Hinduism. In their letter of February 24, 2016, to the IQC, they summarized their recommendations: “1) the Framework should use the term ‘religion of ancient India,’ rather than Hinduism; 2) Gods, goddesses and deities should be lower case; 3) ‘South Asia’ be used for ‘Ancient India;’ 4) the Indus Valley civilization not be associated with the people of the *Vedas*; 5) caste and untouchability not be deleted.”

The third suggestion, to replace India with South Asia, enraged the general Indian community in California and attracted attention even in far-away India. Many more individuals and groups became involved in the revision process, submitting comments and testifying in person against these new recommendations. Two IQC meetings, one in March and the second in May, 2016, were largely focused on dealing with the group’s suggestions. The Hindu American Foundation and Hindu Education Foundation, working with Professor Barbara McGraw and others, assembled an equally impressive list of academics, including Diana Eck and Graham Schweig, to oppose these recommendations. But ultimately, academic credentials played a lesser role than expected. The reason, in our opinion, was that the IQC is comprised of K-12 teachers and administrators, a group which, while happy to have the help of university-level academics, are well aware that the politicized debates of higher academia do not necessarily translate well to middle school. As one commission



PRENTICE HALL/HOUGHTON MIFFLIN



Comparing the existing textbooks: Both books shown above were adopted for use in California schools in 2005, but they differ in their treatment of India. The Prentice Hall book at left has a longer and more positive section on Hinduism; The Houghton Mifflin book at right has less, and much of that devoted to caste.



HINDUISM TODAY

member characterized it, “Academics are always arguing.”

The IQC took a common-sense approach to the five points. They kept *Hinduism* in most instances because the term is in the Content Standards. They retained the instances where *Gods*, *Goddesses* or *Deities* were already capitalized, not seeing the point in changing to lower case. They used *South Asia* in a few places, but mostly kept *India*, because that term is used in the Content Standards. They retained the material suggesting continuity between the Indus Valley civilization and the Vedic people, and kept a sentence saying there is opposition to the Aryan migration theory—both additions recommended by the Hindu community. Caste and untouchability had not been deleted from the narrative, so there was nothing to decide on that recommendation, beyond reinserting the word *Dalit*, which had been removed in an earlier round of edits.

Going Forward: Some Recommendations

The revised History-Social Science Framework will now be used to create new textbooks for California schools. These will be subject to a process similar to the 2005-2006 textbook adoption process. It will be a major challenge for the publishers to incorporate the greatly expanded narrative in new editions of their books. The India section alone went from a few hundred words to thousands, and that is just one small part of the now 1,000-page narrative.

The adoption process, like the Framework revision, is a duty of the IQC. First, they will hire what are called Content Review Experts, or CREs, individuals with PhD credentials in the subject matter. They will also appoint committees of teachers and parents to evaluate the books—both processes will be completed by the end of 2016. As in 2005-2006, the IQC will hold a series of meetings to review the books, take public comment and make adjustments as deemed necessary. In the previous adoption process, only minor revisions to individual sentences were allowed; major changes were not. The situation might be different this time, given the amount of new territory being covered. The Hindu community needs to pay close attention to this entire process, and be present to insure an accurate presentation of our faith. Once the Board of Education approves the IQC’s recommended books, the state-level process is complete.

Next, individual school districts have a choice to either adopt one of the approved texts or, if they prefer, something else that meets the requirements of the revised Framework. By our count, there are only five major textbook publishers for grades six and seven, and all

Board of Education: This photo shows only a few of the 300 people—Hindus, Sikhs, Dalits, Muslims, Jews, and others—who testified before the board during a four-hour period at the July 14, 2016 meeting. The board controls a budget of \$76 billion per year.

are expected to participate in the state-level adoption process. It is unlikely that much else will be available in print besides their texts. An innovative district, however, could create a compliant history curriculum from online resources, saving themselves millions of dollars in textbook costs.

In 2006, Hindus missed an opportunity by not paying attention to this district-level adoption process. The textbooks adopted then differed considerably from one another in their treatment of India and Hinduism. Some books, such as Pearson Prentice-Hall’s, were much more fair and favorable (and to all other religions, for that matter) than other textbooks. In general, the books that allotted more coverage to India gave a far more accurate presentation of Hinduism than those with shorter sections on India. The new texts will likely follow a similar pattern. This time around, Hindus in each community need to find out when their district will adopt books—it’s one of those public processes few people even notice—then examine all the choices and advocate for the best book.

Once the books are in place, efforts can focus on providing local schools with teacher training programs, such as HAF’s Hinduism 101 and a similar program by HEF; supplemental materials, such as HINDUISM TODAY’s *History of Hindu India* book and video series; classroom presentations by trained Hindu parents; and educational tours of local temples. A vast number of online resources could be developed, and we have recommended that a Hindu organization hire someone full time to address this need. Finally, it is up to each parent to read their children’s history books for 6th and 7th grade with them, pointing out errors and biased treatment. Those so inclined could prepare their children to challenge such inequities in class, as several courageous Bal Vihar students have done. By far the most encouraging aspect of this entire process was seeing so many youth come forward to defend their religion with intelligence and passion.

For additional information on this complex issue go to: www.bit.ly/CA-K12. A set of documents relating to the various meetings can be downloaded: bit.ly/CA-Framework-Meetings and bit.ly/CA-Framework-Development. See also www.hafsite.org/our-work/academia.

Path to Siva

A Catechism for Youth



Twenty-eight lessons excerpted from our new book based on Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswam's Master Course Trilogy, exploring how to live life, know the Divine, honor all creation and see God everywhere, in everyone

By Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami

WELCOME TO PATH TO SIVA, AN ILLUSTRATED CATECHISM for youth. We hope you enjoy these colorful lessons, all based on Dancing, Living and Merging with Siva, the Master Course Trilogy created by my Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. *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 who wants a condensed version of the Master Course. ¶ All Hindus believe in a Supreme Being. To support this idea, often a verse from the *Rig Veda* is quoted: "Ekam Sat Vipra Bahuda Vadanti," meaning, "Truth is one, sages express it variously." As I half-jokingly say, Hindus all believe in a one Supreme Being. They just don't agree on the name and nature of that Supreme Being. Fortunately, there are just four main approaches, as explained in lesson seven. "For Vaishnavites, Lord Vishnu is God. For Saivites, God is Siva. For Shaktas, Goddess Shakti is supreme. For Smartas, who are the most liberal Hindus, the choice of Deity is left to the devotee." *Path to Siva* presents the teachings of the Saivite denomination of Hinduism, in which the Supreme Being is Lord Siva. ¶ Each lesson is short—just one or two pages—but packed with information. Here you 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 difficult 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 parents with youth, and can be used as a focus for exploring Hinduism's various facets together. One lesson a week can keep the family conversation going for more than a year. ¶ This educational Insight contains twenty-eight of the book's sixty-eight lessons. To read the complete book, which was published in October, 2016, you can download the free e-pub version (or buy a hardcover version) at www.himalayanacademy.com/view/path-to-siva.



Into his eighties, Satguru Yogaswami frequently walked the paths in his sacred land of Sri Lanka to reach Nallur Temple. Lord Siva, looking on from the inner worlds, blesses this great knower of truth.

1 Who Am I and Where Did I Come from?



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

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

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

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

2 Where Am I Going? What Is My Path?



LIFE HAS A PURPOSE. WE HAVE TAKEN THIS BIRTH IN A PHYSICAL body to mature into our divine potential. This life is one more chapter in a maturing process that has been occurring over many past lives. All souls are on this same journey. The deepest part of our soul, our essence, is and has always been one with Siva, but our soul

A seeker stands in a field at day's end, arms held wide before the setting sun. His joy in that magical moment of beauty and appreciation is tiny when compared to the bliss of the inner light.

body is still maturing. We are like a tiny acorn growing into a mighty oak tree. We grow by learning to control our mind, body and emotions. The stronger we get, the more we sense our Sivaness. At first we learn from our suffering to avoid more suffering. We turn fear into fearlessness, anger into love and conflict into peace. We then learn to serve. Selfless service is the beginning of spiritual striving. Through our selfless service, we come into deep understanding and love of God. We can then see that the world we live in, the people we relate to and we ourselves are none other than Siva. Finally, we learn to meditate deeply, to quiet the mind, find peace and silence within ourselves, and watch ourselves going through all our experiences like watching an actor in a movie—knowing that our true identity is the soul, the watcher. That practice brings us to the realization of God within us. At the end of this evolutionary journey, we are fully one with God—no difference remains. We call this ancient path of spiritual striving San Marga, the "True Path." It is a path of service, worship, yoga and wisdom. Just as a train reaches its destination by following the tracks, we reach our innate perfection and freedom from rebirth by following the San Marga.

GURUDEVA: We are the undying consciousness and energy flowing through all things. Deep inside we are perfect this very moment, and we have only to discover and live up to this perfection to be whole.

3 What Is the Ultimate Goal of Life?



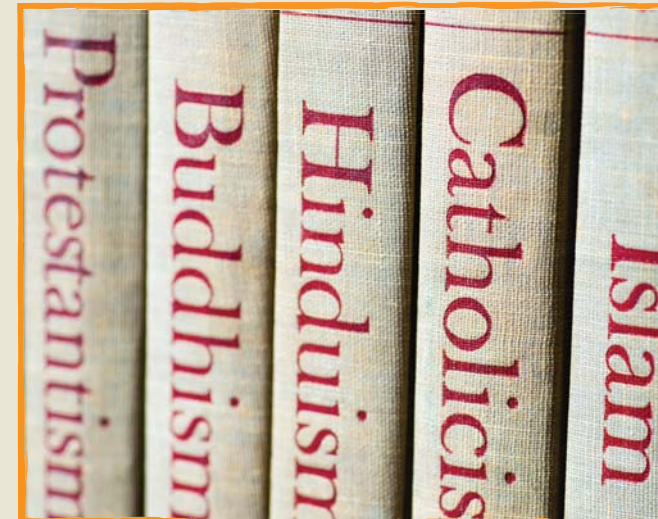
KNOWING GOD IS LIFE'S HIGHEST GOAL, REACHED BY MATURE souls following a spiritual path. Just as only the most highly disciplined climbers reach the summit of Mount Everest each year, only a few mature souls reach life's highest peak in this life. That is because souls were not created all at once. There are old souls and young souls. Older souls have matured over many lifetimes. They have enjoyed life's pleasures, suffered all the many sorrows and faced countless

A cyclist has peddled into the countryside beyond his known territory and stops to rest and get his bearings, to decide which fork to take. The Aum on his compass indicates that dharma is the way forward.

challenges. This process has made them strong, like the mountaineers, and ready for the final ascent, ready to become one with God Siva. As we mature, we become kind, generous, understanding and truthful. Anger, fear and jealousy no longer control us as they once did. We become wise and loving. Reaching this maturity moves us toward life's true purpose. Eventually we no longer need the experiences of Earth, so we do not need to be reborn. Instead, we continue to evolve and serve humanity in the heavenly worlds in our subtle body. This graduation from the cycle of reincarnation is called moksha, which means freedom, release or liberation. But before we attain moksha, we must experience the highest goal of raja yoga—the realization of the Self, God. After Self Realization, you no longer see yourself as just someone from some place. Instead, when you look inward, you see Siva. When you look at other people, you see Siva. All souls will achieve moksha, but only a few will do so in this lifetime. Hindus know this and do not think that this life is the last. While seeking to perfect themselves through service, worship and yoga, they know there is also much progress to be made in fulfilling life's other three goals: righteousness, wealth and enjoyment. Even moksha is not the end of our path. After liberation from rebirth, the soul body continues to evolve in the inner worlds until it fully merges with God. Jiva (the soul) becomes Siva, a union called *vishvagrasya*. Being on an ancient path followed by countless souls gives the serene feeling that everything is all right as it is, that everything is perfect.

GURUDEVA: Each soul discovers its Sivaness, Absolute Reality, Parasiva—the timeless, formless, spaceless Self God.

4 What Is a Religion?



An encyclopedia of religion sits on the bookshelf, with a volume dedicated to each major religion. Exploring any of them will reveal great complexity concealed beneath the simple title.

major religions, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism are Eastern. Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam are Western. There is a vast difference between Eastern and Western religions, with Eastern goals being unitive and introspective and Western goals being dualistic, extroverted. Eastern faiths tend to see God in all things, and everything as sacred. Western faiths tend not to believe that God pervades everything, and make a strong distinction between what is sacred and what is profane. While Eastern faiths hold to karma,

reincarnation and liberation, the Western postulate a single life for the soul, followed by reward or punishment.

GURUDEVA: Religion is the connection between the three worlds, and temple worship is how you can get your personal connection with the inner worlds.

What Is Hinduism?



Hundreds of thousands of Muruga bhaktars crowd around the giant gold-plated chariot as it circles the famed Nallur Temple in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. Such festivals are an essential part of Hinduism.

principle of dharma, which is divine order, righteousness and duty. Fourth, Hindus believe in reincarnation, the natural process of birth, death and rebirth. While these four convictions are essential, in Hinduism belief alone is not enough to propel us forward on the path. It is our actions and behavior that are the keys to spiritual progress. Hindus seek to experience God and their inner self through temple worship, meditation, yoga, pilgrimage and devotional singing. They enjoy a rich family life and ageless traditions of culture. They honor gurus, saints and sages. They worship many Gods, who are grand helpers to the Supreme Being. The three pillars of Sanatana Dharma are its scriptures, temples and gurus. Today Hinduism is like a great banyan tree, whose limbs represent the many variations of this ancient faith. The four main branches, or denominations, are Saivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism and Smartism. Each has a multitude of guru lineages, religious leaders, priesthoods, sacred literature, monastic communities, schools, pilgrimage centers

and tens of thousands of temples. Since Hinduism has no one central authority, these are like four independent religions sharing a vast common heritage of history, culture and belief.

GURUDEVA: Hinduism is a mystical religion, leading devotees to personally experience its eternal truths within themselves, finally reaching the pinnacle of consciousness where man and God are forever one.

HINDUISM IS THE ANCIENT RELIGION OF INDIA, PRACTICED TODAY by one billion people all over the world. With no founder and stretching back unknown thousands of years in India's earliest known civilizations, Hinduism is called Sanatana Dharma, the "eternal faith." It is based on the Vedas and other scriptures. Four beliefs are most central. First is belief in one Supreme God who created the universe, and who abides everywhere within it. He/She is all and in all. Second is belief in the law of karma, the principle of cause and effect, action and reaction. Third is belief that the cosmos is governed by the

6 What Are Hinduism's Main Denominations?



Four hands are locked in mutual support. They represent Hinduism's four main denominations. Different, but alike in many ways, they work together for dharma: Saivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism and Smartism.

they could not comprehend or describe it. What they didn't realize is that India's Sanatana Dharma, or eternal faith, is a family of religions with four principal denominations. For example, seeing so many Deities, scholars wrote incorrectly that Hindus have no Supreme God. In fact, Hindus all worship a one Supreme Being, though by different names. For Vaishnavites, Lord Vishnu is God. For Saivites, God is Siva. For Shaktas, Goddess Shakti is supreme. For Smartas, who are the most liberal Hindus, the choice of Deity is left to the devotee. These strains arose in different geographical and linguistic regions. Each has its own beliefs, scriptures, religious leaders and monastic traditions. Each has its own temples, festivals and ways of worship. Some are more focused on devotion and temple worship. Others stress yoga, mantra and scriptural study. Each has hundreds of millions of followers. All four accept the authority of the Vedas and the basic beliefs of karma, dharma and reincarnation. Much of their culture and tradition is the same. Most Hindus follow the same lineage as their parents and grandparents. As Saivites, we respect all Hindu paths and we may occasionally visit the temples of other Hindu groups. We join in their festivals and honor their religious leaders, but we hold firmly to our Saiva path.

GURUDEVA: Whatever our background, we can and we must maintain our sectarian roots and heritage, cultivate our differences and become strong within them.

HINDUISM'S PRIMARY DENOMINATIONS ARE SAIVISM, VAISHNAVISM, SHAKTISM AND SMARTISM. For two centuries Western scholars have struggled to understand India's faith. They found it so vast and varied in its beliefs, practices and ways of worship that

What Is Saivite Hinduism?



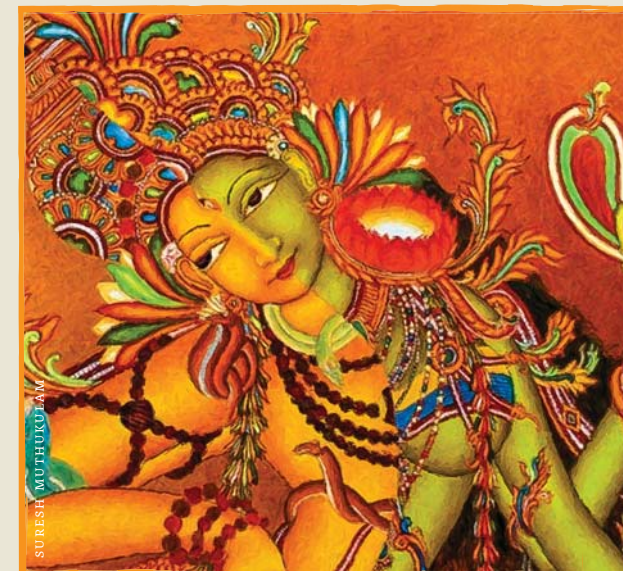
SAIIVISM IS THE WORLD'S OLDEST RELIGION. WORSHIPING GOD SIVA, the compassionate One, it stresses potent disciplines, high philosophy, the guru's centrality and the path of bhakti and raja yoga, leading to oneness with Siva within. Saivism is ancient, truly ageless, for it has no beginning. It is the precursor of the many-faceted religion now termed Hinduism. Scholars trace the roots of Siva worship back more than 8,000 years to the advanced Indus Valley civilization.

God Siva sits in the Himalayas. This form, called Sadasiva, has five faces and ten arms. These faces denote His five powers: creation, preservation, dissolution, concealment and revealing grace.

But sacred writings tell us there never was a time when Saivism did not exist. There are six schools of philosophy and tradition within Saivism: Saiva Siddhanta, Kashmir Saivism, Pashupata Saivism, Vira Saivism, Siva Advaita and Siddha Siddhanta. They differ in many ways, philosophically, historically, linguistically and geographically. Still, they share an overwhelming similarity of belief and practice. In addition to the Vedas, the Saiva Agamas are the shared scriptures of all six schools. All six identify Siva as the Supreme Lord, both immanent and transcendent, worshiped as the personal Lord and realized through meditation as the Absolute, Parasiva, beyond all form. All hold these principal Agamic doctrines: 1) the five powers of Siva (creation, preservation, destruction, concealing and revealing grace); 2) the three primary elements of existence, Pati, pashu and pasha (God, souls and bonds); 3) the three bonds, or malas (anava, karma and maya); 4) the threefold energy of Siva—iccha, kriya and jnana shakti (love, action and wisdom); 5) the thirty-six tattvas, or categories of existence; 6) the need for a satguru and initiation; 7) the power of mantra; and 8) the four padas or stages of spirituality, charya, kriya, yoga and jnana (service, devotion, union and wisdom).

GURUDEVA: Saivism is the greatest religion in the world, and we are all very fortunate and proud to be Saivites. It has the most ancient culture on the planet. It has scriptures that are utterly profound. It has sacred hymns that stir the soul. It has unparalleled disciplines of yoga and meditation. It has magnificent temples that are truly holy. It has devoted sages and holy men and women.

Who Is Siva?



This Kerala mural beautifully depicts Siva in the form of Ardhanarishvara, God who is half male and half female. Siva worshipers believe that Siva and Shakti are a one Divinity that cannot be separated.

God of love and never fear Him. He is the Self of ourself, closer than our breath. Gurudeva taught, "His nature is love, and if you worship Him with devotion you will know love and be loving toward others." Siva is the sun above us, the wind that cools the land, the five elements, the thought within our mind, the spark of light within our body, that which lives and that which is inert. Beyond knowing, beyond gender, He/She is the deathless Being who resides beyond the three worlds, yet stands in souls united.

GURUDEVA: To love God is to know God. To know God is to feel His love for you. Such a compassionate God—a being whose resplendent body may be seen in mystic vision—cares for the minutiae such as we and a universe such as ours.



PERFECTION IS THE WORD GURUDEVA USED TO DESCRIBE GOD Siva's three flawless aspects: Absolute Reality, the Divine Mind and the Primal Soul. Gurudeva described the One Being of Siva in this way to help devotees better understand the totality of His being and to tune into each perfection in worship and meditation. The three perfections also apply to each of us, as God Siva naturally creates souls in His image and likeness. The first perfection, Absolute Reality, Parashiva, is our inmost essence, the Self God. What is the Self God? Gurudeva explained, "It is That which is beyond the mind, beyond

Siva has three perfections, seen here as parts of a complete circle. The Sivalingam is His transcendence. Nataraja is His dance of creation & Parashakti is His awareness/energy flowing through all.

thought, feeling and emotion, beyond time, form and space." The second perfection, Siva's vast, Divine Mind, known as Sat-chidananda or Parashakti, is our own superconscious mind. It radiates as divine light, love, energy and knowing. When we touch into that level of our being, we become aware of the pure consciousness flowing through all things. Our sense of I-ness dissolves and we experience unlimited love and bliss. Siva's third perfection, the uncreated Primal Soul, Parameshvara, is the fullness of God, ruler of the universe, creator of our soul and all that exists. To love God is to know God. To know God is to feel His love for you. Parameshvara's resplendent body may be seen in mystic vision. It is the ultimate prototype of our own soul body, which is like the Primal Soul, but less brilliant, because it is not yet mature. The Primal Soul, God's personal aspect as Lord and Creator, is depicted in many forms: Nataraja by Saivites, Vishnu by Vaishnavites, Devi by Shaktas. To understand Siva's three perfections, think of a perfect mango. It has a skin, sweet fruit and a seed. Yet it is a one fruit. The skin is Siva's body, the fruit is His Divine Mind and the seed is His inmost essence and being.

GURUDEVA: The great God Siva has form and is formless. He is the immanent Pure Consciousness or pure form; He is the Personal Lord manifesting Himself as innumerable forms; and He is the impersonal, transcendent Absolute beyond all form. We know Siva in His three perfections, two of form and one formless.

S AIVISM TEACHES US THAT GOD Siva is knowable and we can experience Him right here and now. It is not just a matter of faith. Satguru Yogaswami declared, "See God in everything. You are in God. God is within you. God is in everyone. See Him there." It takes much meditation to find God Siva in all things, through all things. Gurudeva taught, "He is there as the Soul of each soul. You can open your inner eye and see Him in others, see Him in the world as the world." Perhaps the easiest place to start seeing God is in great religious teachers. We feel a spiritual aura about them that is uplifting. We see a light in their eyes that we do not see in others. The mere sound of their words encourages us to live a more spiritual life. Another way to see God is to look deeply into the eyes of another person. Look beyond the personality, go deeper than his or her intellect and see the pure life energy, which is God. This practice does not stop with people but can also include seeing the life energy in trees, birds and animals. Doing this, you discover that God is our life. God is the life in all beings. Becoming aware of this life energy in all that lives is becoming aware of God's presence. The *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* explains: "He who knows God as the Life of life, the Eye of the eye, the Ear of the ear,



Mystics and ordinary people have had visions of God, seeing Siva in their meditations, in their dreams, within the sanctum of a temple. It is the third eye, our mind's eye, that sees the non-physical reality.

the Mind of the mind, he indeed comprehends fully the Cause of all causes." A third place to look for God is in the Hindu temple. In powerful temples you can sense the Deity's presence in the enshrined murti, and even catch a glimpse of His divine form during the puja. This is done with your third eye, your inner eye of divine sight. Many people, not just saints and sages, have seen God in such mystical visions.

GURUDEVA: Smile when you feel unhappy with someone and say to yourself, "How nice to see you, Siva, in this form." Animals, beggars, princes, politicians, friends and enemies, holy men, saints and sages are all Siva to the soul that loves God. He smiles and thinks to himself, "How nice to see you, Siva, in this, another of your many forms."

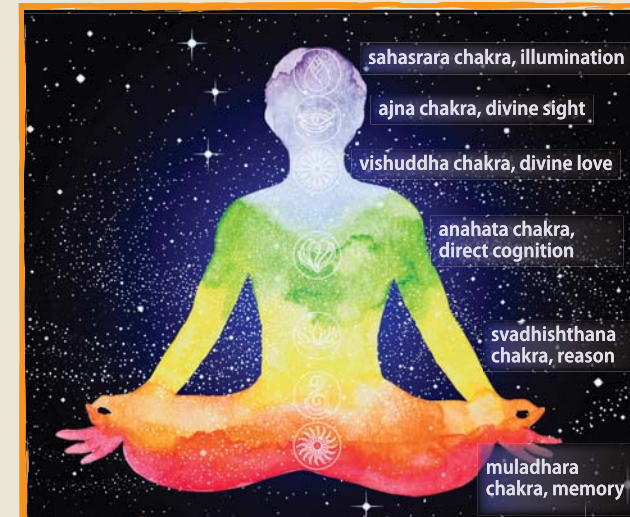


THERE ARE THREE WORLDS OF EXISTENCE. THE FIRST WORLD IS THE physical universe, the gross plane, called Bhuloka. This is the world we see with our eyes and touch with our hands. It is the material world, where we have our experiences, create karma and fulfill the desires and duties of life in a physical body. The Second World is the subtle or astral plane, the in-between realm called Antarloka. This world exists within the physical plane. As our thoughts and feelings are

Here the First World, material existence, is indicated by nature & animals. The Second World, or higher astral plane, is represented by a deva among the stars & moon. The Third World is Siva's abode.

part of that inner world, we are functioning in the astral world even while we are awake. During sleep, we leave our physical body and are aware in that inner world fully. Besides dreaming, we may also attend inner-plane classes held by our satguru. The Antarloka has many levels, spanning the spectrum of consciousness from the hellish Naraka regions, where the asuras, demonic beings, dwell, to the highest region of the Devaloka where the devas, or angels, live. When our physical body dies, we live fully in the Antarloka in our subtle body. The Third World is the causal plane, the world of light and blessedness, called Sivaloka. This highest plane is the home of God Siva and of the Gods who assist Him, such as Lord Ganesha and Lord Murugan. It is also the home of highly advanced souls who exist in their brilliant soul form. We experience the Sivaloka when we see the inner light or have a flash of intuition. We can worship God and the Gods anywhere. But the temple is the best place, because it is built as a special, sacred space where the three worlds meet as one. When we are awake, we normally don't see or sense the inner worlds. The temple enables us to feel the presence of God, Gods and devas, just as night-vision goggles allow us to see in the dark. In our form of worship, called puja, we chant, burn incense, ring bells and offer lights and flowers. This ritual brings us close to God and the great beings of our faith.

GURUDEVA: Siva's followers all believe that religion is the harmonious working together of the three worlds and that this harmony can be created through temple worship, wherein the beings of all three worlds can communicate.



We inhabit a body that was once star dust, but our soul is a body of light. The chakras are windows of consciousness. The primary chakras are along the spine. The lowest seven are in the legs and feet.

instinctive impulses, are located in the legs. The seven middle chakras are along the spine, and the highest seven, accessible only after Self Realization, are above the head. We also have an aura, radiating within and around us, whose colors change according to our thoughts and emotions. Once physical births have ceased, this soul body still continues to evolve in the heavenly worlds. We are not the physical body, mind or emotions. We are the eternal soul, atman—consisting of the radiant

soul body and its essence, Pure Consciousness and Absolute Reality.

GURUDEVA: Reverse your thinking about yourself. Feel that you come out of timelessness, causelessness, spacelessness. Visualize the pure radiant body of light, the being of the soul, the "I Am," the "Watcher."

13 Are Souls & World Essentially Good?



ALL SOULS ARE ESSENTIALLY GOOD, FOR THEIR INNER NATURE IS divine. Each soul is created by God Siva from Himself. Siva's nature is pure love. So, goodness, compassion, understanding and joy are natural qualities of the soul. Wisdom and pure knowledge are the intrinsic nature of the soul. The world, too, is God's flawless creation. All is in perfect order and balance. Since God is everywhere and in all things, there can be no place for evil. Evil is often looked upon as a force against God. But we know that all forces are God's forces, even

Our blue planet sails through space, with the moon and Saturn in the background. Astronauts returning from space describe the "overview effect:" experiences of awe, beauty, purpose & perfect design.

mean, hurtful actions. This is sometimes difficult to understand when we see the pains and problems caused by people against each other. Looking deeper, we see that what is called evil has its own purpose in life. Yes, bad things do happen. Still, the wise never blame God, for they know such things are the return of our self-created karmas, tough lessons that help us learn and mature. The nature of the world is duality. It contains each thing and its opposite: joy and sorrow, goodness and evil, love and hate. Suffering cannot be totally avoided. It is a natural part of human life that causes much spiritual growth for the soul. Knowing this, the wise accept suffering from any source, be it hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, famine, wars, disease or personal tragedies. Suffering offers us the important realization that true happiness and freedom cannot be found in the world, for earthly joy is bound to sorrow. Having learned this, devotees seek a satguru who teaches them to overcome suffering through understanding and acceptance. The world is the bountiful creation of a benevolent God, who means for us to live positively in it, facing karma and fulfilling dharma. We must not despise or fear the world. Life is meant to be lived joyously.

GURUDEVA: This is my advice: gain the perspective first that it is a wonderful world, that there is nothing wrong in the world at all. ... All men and women on the Earth are doing exactly as they should and must do.

IN THE HIGHEST SENSE, THERE is no good or bad. God did not create evil as a force distinct from good. He granted to souls the divine laws of dharma and karma along with the freedom to act as they wish in the great ocean of experience. This is God's grace allowing us to learn and evolve. There is no eternal hell, nor is there a Satan. However, there are hellish states of mind and painful births for those who think and act wrongfully. Sin is related only to the lower, instinctive-intellectual nature as a transgression of dharma. Man's true nature is not sullied by sin, and no bad deed can cause the soul to be forever lost or damned. Still, wrongful actions are real and to be avoided, for they return to us as sorrow through the law of karma. Bad deeds can be atoned for with sadhana, worship and penance. As Saivites, we do not see a sharp contrast of good and evil in the world. Instead we understand that all people have a threefold nature: instinctive, intellectual and spiritual. The instinctive nature is the outer, lower or animal nature of I, me and mine. When it dominates, people become angry, fearful, greedy, jealous and hurtful. The intellectual nature is the soul's mental aspect. When it

14 What About Evil, Hell and Sin?



This fierce monkey guards the entrance to a temple in Bali, frightening away those who should not enter. He is fearsome, but like sin and evil, he is not feared by those who are pure in heart.

rules, people can become arrogant and prone to argument and conflict. The spiritual, or superconscious, nature of the soul is the source of compassion, insight, modesty, peace and understanding. The animal instincts of young souls are strong. Their intellect, which is needed to control the instincts, is yet to be developed. When we encounter meanness and wickedness in others, we recall this threefold nature and have compassion for those in the lower, instinctive states. We know they will continue to evolve, as they learn from their self-created karma. We also know there is no intrinsic evil.

GURUDEVA: Hinduism is such a joyous religion, freed of all the mental encumbrances that are prevalent in the various Western faiths. It is freed of the notion of a vengeful God. It is freed of the notion of eternal suffering. It is freed from the notion of original sin.

15 What Is Karma?



GOD SIVA CREATES THE COSMOS AND HE RESIDES WITHIN IT. HIS many special laws or systems are at work within our complex universe. The law that causes an object to fall to the Earth we call gravity. The law that governs the reaction of thoughts, words and deeds we call karma. It is an automatic system of divine justice. By this law, what we sow, we will reap. Actions and the fruit of action are both called karma. There are three kinds of karma: the karma of all deeds

Like a boomerang, our thoughts, words and deeds always return to us, in this or a future life, according to the universal law of karma. As people say today, "What goes around, comes around."

done in our past lives; the karmas we bring into this birth to experience; and the karmas we are making by our actions now. Good, helpful thoughts, words and deeds bring good karma to us in the future. Hurtful actions bring back to us painful karma. Doing bad is like planting poison ivy. Doing good is like planting delicious mangos. Understanding the law of karma gives us the power to act wisely and create a positive future. Gurudeva said, "You are the writer of your own destiny, the master of your ship through life." He meant that karma is not fate. It can be overcome. Through understanding the effect of their actions, individuals sooner or later learn to refrain from committing misdeeds. This is what we mean by saying, "Karma is our teacher." It teaches us to refine our behavior. Even difficult karma helps us grow, by teaching us the painful results of unwise actions. No matter how well we understand karma, facing it bravely is still a challenge. Our ego gets in the way. Our emotions are stirred and we react without thinking. Such weakness can be overcome by perfecting our character according to the yamas and niyamas. The effects of karma can be softened in several ways: by accepting and not reacting, by doing penance, by performing good deeds that balance the not-so-good we have done and by seeking the grace of God and guru. Karma applies not only to individuals but to groups, communities and nations.

GURUDEVA: Siva's devotees accept all experiences, however difficult, as their self-created karma, without cringing or complaining. Theirs is the power of surrender, accepting what is as it is and dealing with it courageously.

WHEN GOD CREATES THE universe, He/She endows it with order, with the laws to govern creation. Dharma is that divine law prevailing on every level of existence, from the sustaining cosmic order to religious and moral laws that bind us in harmony with that order. It is goodness, ethical practice and duty. It is the path which leads us to liberation. Dharma is at work on four levels of our existence: universal, human, social and personal. Universal dharma rules the natural world, from subatomic quantum to galactic clusters. Social dharma governs society. Human dharma guides life's four stages. Personal dharma is your own perfect pattern in life. It is determined by your past karmas and how the other three dharmas impact you. The key to discovering and understanding your personal dharma is to worship Lord Ganesha.

He knows our past lives and can clarify our right path in life. Gurudeva wrote: "When we follow this unique pattern—guided by guru, wise elders and the knowing voice of our soul—we are content and at peace with ourselves and the world." At every step in life, your main dharma is to follow the path of good conduct. As a youth, a big part of your dharma is to be a good student and a good daughter or son. It is your parents' dharma to care for you. It is your teacher's dharma to teach you.

16 What Is Dharma?



Dharma is one of the most beautiful and complex ideas in our faith. One of its meanings is shown here, our duty to serve and help others in need, as this hiker helps a friend to the top of the mountain.

It is the dharma of the police to protect you. As an adult, you may become a parent, and it will then be your dharma to raise and support your family. Later, as an elder, your dharma will be to guide the younger generations. Yogaswami said that dharma is like the tracks of a train, and like the train we must stay on the tracks to reach our destination. Dharma is so important that the Sanskrit name of Hinduism is Sanatana Dharma, the eternal path.

GURUDEVA: Dharma is a rich word which encompasses many meanings: the path to God Siva, piety, goodness, duty, obligation and more. ... By following the ancient path of dharma, we avoid all this suffering and mental pain and bring ourselves into positive, creative and productive states of consciousness, bringing us ever closer and closer to the holy feet of God Siva.



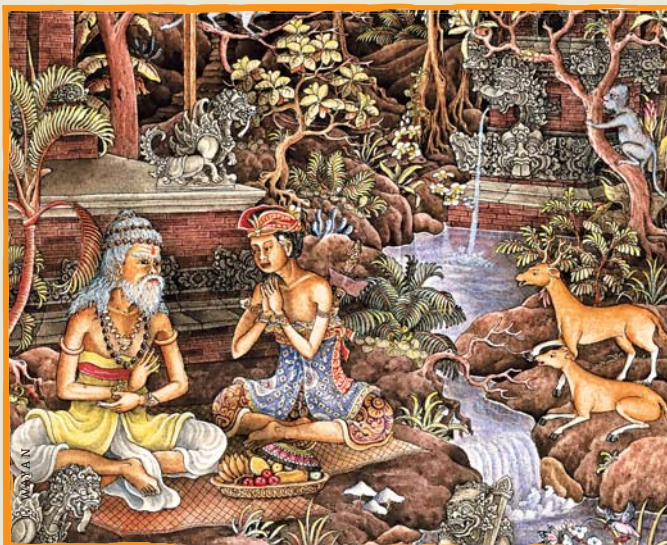
REINCARNATION IS THE CYCLE OF BIRTH, DEATH AND REBIRTH. Each soul has many lifetimes on Earth. In each life, we drop off our physical body at death, but our inner self, or soul, never dies. We just leave our physical body and go on thinking, feeling and acting in our astral body. We also do this when we sleep, but we return to our body each time we wake up. At death we don't come back into our physical body. We leave the physical plane and remain conscious in the

The soul cannot die. It moves from one body to another, a little like this butterfly, whose outer form changes from egg to caterpillar to chrysalis to adult. The same creature lives in each new form.

inner worlds. After some time, we are born again as a baby in a new physical body, with a new mother and father, a new name and a new future. This return to the physical plane in a new body is called reincarnation. Memories of our previous lifetimes fade away during childhood, though some adults can remember them. We eventually die again, because of illness, old age or an accident. Again we step out of the physical body and go on living in our astral body. This happens repeatedly. Sometimes we are born as a boy, sometimes as a girl. The way we live in this life determines what our next life will be like. Reincarnation is like a great school, and each life is a classroom. Who is learning and growing in the school of life? You, your immortal soul. You have lived many lives. Each lifetime is but one stride on the great journey of your soul. When all the needed lessons have been learned, your soul has matured, all karmas have been resolved and you have realized God, you will not need to be born again. That is called liberation or moksha, the destiny of all souls, without exception.

GURUDEVA: Through the ages, reincarnation has been the great consoling element within Hinduism, eliminating the fear of death. We are not the body in which we live but the immortal soul which inhabits many bodies in its evolutionary journey through samsara. After death, we continue to exist in unseen worlds, enjoying or suffering the harvest of earthly deeds until it comes time for yet another physical birth.

18 Why Is the Satguru So Important?



At a lush ashram in Bali a seeker after truth has approached an enlightened guru, bringing offerings of fruits and flowers. The seeker knows the importance of having a spiritual guide.

classroom teacher. A teacher is important in any area of study, because it is difficult for us to see our own weaknesses, but easy for a trained expert. Your mother and father are your first gurus. Many Hindus have a satguru, a teacher of sat, or truth. A satguru is a mature soul who has realized God and is able to lead others along the path. Siva is within each of us, shining out through our eyes. But Siva shines out from the satguru more brightly, because he or she is pure and enlightened. Thus, we worship the satguru as Siva Himself. The satguru is devoted full time to religious life, to upholding Saivism and helping his devotees. Just by living and being, he or she brings peace and blessings to the world. A satguru is always a sannyasin, one who is unmarried and has renounced all possessions, personal life, family and friends. A rare initiation from his guru empowered him with the highest spiritual knowledge and authority. This is Siva's revealing grace, anugraha shakti, in action. If your family has a satguru to guide it, you are indeed fortunate. He can wisely advise your parents and keep the family strong, harmonious and spiritually alive. Get to know him. Talk to him and ask questions. He will share his wisdom and help you draw close to God.

GURUDEVA: The satguru is the devotee's spiritual guide and preceptor, friend and companion on the path. Having become religion's consummation, the satguru can see where others are and know what their next step should be. A satguru is needed because the mind is so cunning and the ego is a self-perpetuating mechanism. It is he who inspires, assists, guides and impels the shishya toward the Self of himself.

ANYONE HOPING TO CLIMB MOUNT EVEREST WOULD BE WISE TO have a Sherpa by his side, a guide who has been where you want to go. Similarly, as we walk the spiritual path, we should not be without a satguru, an enlightened master who knows Truth and can take us there. The word *guru* means "teacher." Anyone you are studying with may be called a guru, such as a dance guru, music guru or a



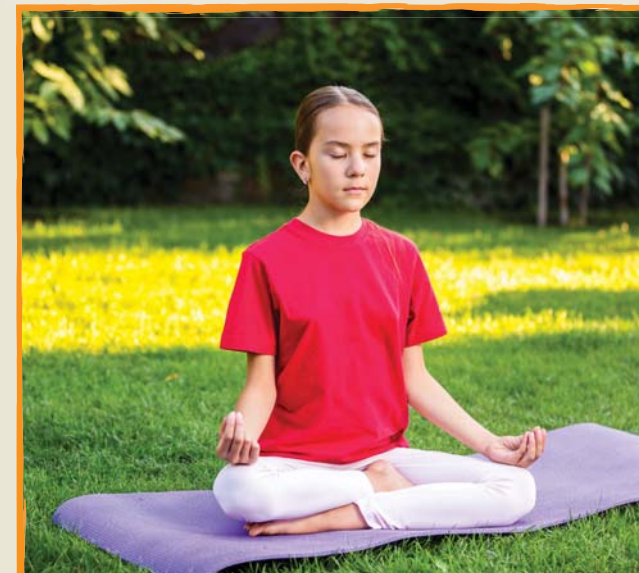
THERE ARE THREE DIMENSIONS TO OUR BEING: PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL/intellectual and spiritual. All three need attention for optimum health. Exercise strengthens our physical body. Learning and practicing self control expands and enhances our emotional/mental capacity. Through sadhana, spiritual practice, we exercise our spiritual nature by taking time to experience it. Most of the time we are so wrapped up in our outer nature that we are hardly aware of our

Hinduism provides many practices to quiet the mind & guide our life. Here young women sit for meditation, holding their japa beads beneath their shawl as they chant the mantras given by their guru.

deep, glorious inner reality. This can go on life after life, as many people only begin to think of greater realities when nearing the point of death. We give time to our spiritual nature by performing religious activities, ideally as a daily vigil or spiritual exercise. During this quiet time alone we focus on life's inner purpose, which is to make spiritual progress. Puja, japa, scriptural study, hatha yoga and meditation are all forms of sadhana. Some sadhanas are yearly, such as going on pilgrimage. Some may be assigned by the guru as a one-time practice. A popular sadhana is chanting "AUM" 108 times each day. The ten-minute spiritual workout is becoming popular in today's busy world. These times of quiet retreat from life's hustle and bustle are underrated, their benefits overlooked. Sadhana builds willpower, faith and confidence in oneself and in God, Gods and guru. It harnesses our instinctive-intellectual nature, allowing unfoldment into the superconscious realizations and innate abilities of the soul. Gurudeva noted: "Through sadhana we learn to control the energies of the body and nerve system, and we experience that through the control of the breath the mind becomes peaceful. Sadhana is practiced in the home, in the forest, by a flowing river, under a favorite tree, in the temple, in gurukulas or wherever a pure, serene atmosphere can be found." Yogaswami directed his devotees to follow the sadhana marga, the path of religious effort, all through life.

GURUDEVA: For consistent progress, sadhana should be performed regularly, without fail, at the same time each day, preferably in the early hours before dawn.

MEDITATION IS THE YOGA practice we use to quiet the mind, the body and the emotions and go deep within ourself. It is more than sitting down and thinking about things in an ordinary way. And it is not just closing the eyes and doing nothing. Meditation occurs when concentration is sustained. It is a quiet, alert, powerful state wherein new knowledge is awakened from within as you focus fully on an external object or an internal line of thought. The first goal is to sit still for a few minutes. Then sit longer, until you can remain perfectly still for ten or fifteen minutes. When you are able to sit for twenty minutes without moving even one finger, your divine mind can begin to express itself. It can even reprogram your subconscious and change bad habits. The second method is to breathe regularly, nine counts in and nine counts out, slowly. Our emotions and thinking are tied to our breathing. If we control breathing, we automatically quiet our emotions and thoughts. When our body is still and our mind and emotions are quiet, we can find peace and discover new knowledge inside ourself. We become aware of the spiritual power within us. We can use that power to understand our religion, to solve problems in our life and to



Eyes closed and seated on a yoga mat, this teenager seeks to quiet the mind through the age-old art of meditation. If successful, she will move beyond thought to discover a lasting peace of mind.

be a better person. Meditation is the study of awareness, which is therefore a study of yourself and the universe. With practice, meditation becomes a door to contemplation, where you experience the highest states of consciousness and see the clear white light of your soul. If you learn to meditate, your life will be more interesting and less stressful. You will be more alive and alert, more present and able to live in the eternal now. Your thinking will be clearer and your emotions more joyful.

GURUDEVA: Seeing the mind in its totality convinces the seeker that he is something else, he is the witness who observes the mind and cannot, therefore, be the mind itself. Then we realize that the mind in its superconsciousness is pure.



At Pathmeda cow shelter in Rajasthan, India, a boy caresses a young cow as her mother watches from behind. Just as he would never harm this calf, we should never injure other creatures, including people.

inside they are all divine beings; they are experiencing a difficult part of their evolutionary path. The second belief behind ahimsa is the law of karma. We know that any hurt we cause others will one day return to us. Being aware of this basic principle, we wholeheartedly practice ahimsa—refraining not only from causing physical harm or violence, but also from hurting others with our words and our thoughts. Such gentleness gives rise to respect, courtesy and appreciation for others. Noninjury is the product of spiritual consciousness. Hurtfulness arises from lower, instinctive consciousness—fear, anger, greed, jealousy and hate. It is based in the mentality of separateness—of good and bad, mine and yours. We never retaliate. It is wiser to accept the hurt as self-created karma and respond with understanding and forgiveness; to retaliate would only perpetuate that karma. However, ahimsa does not mean pacifism. We may defend ourself to protect our life or the life of another or turn to the police, who are authorized to use force. And we support our country's use of military force to safeguard its citizens. Ahimsa is also a powerful tool for changing and improving society and government. Gandhi proved this with his civil disobedience movement, which freed India without resorting to fights or force. Ahimsa is called the mahavrata, the great vow. Among all the yamas and niyamas, it is the most important virtue.

GURUDEVA: It is good to know that nonviolence speaks only to the most extreme forms of forceful wrongdoing, while ahimsa goes much deeper to prohibit even the subtle abuse and the simple hurt.

OUR BASIC BELIEFS AS SAIVITE HINDUS NATURALLY INSPIRE US TO practice ahimsa, or noninjury. Because we see God everywhere, we feel a deep closeness and affection for all beings. We would never want to hurt that which we love and revere. Knowing that God is in every person, every creature, every thing bestows an attitude of sublime tolerance and acceptance. We reject the idea that some people are evil and deserve to be treated badly. People do act in evil ways, but deep

PEOPLE ADOPT VEGETARIANISM for five main reasons: dharma, karma, consciousness, health and environment. First, dharma declares that we should not kill other creatures to feed ourselves. Second, those who eat meat are participating indirectly in violent acts against the animal kingdom. This creates negative karma, bringing to us suffering in the future. A third reason is the impact of eating meat on our consciousness. At the moment of death, the terror and torture of the animal is biochemically locked into the flesh. When we consume the meat, we take that animal's fear into our own body and it negatively affects our consciousness. The fourth reason is health. Eating meat has been linked to a variety of illnesses, including cancer. There is no nutritional reason humans have to eat meat. Modern research confirms that a vegetarian diet is a fundamentally healthy diet. Reason five, the huge industry that raises meat for human consumption is bad for the environment. It contributes to climate change, destruction of rain forests, loss of topsoil and the extinction of species. If the resources currently spent on raising beef, pigs and chickens were instead used to produce vegetarian food, hunger could be reduced worldwide and global warming largely allayed. Today vegetarianism is a global



Warm butter melts on a fresh roti, surrounded by spicy soup, chickpea curry, tofu and noodles and raw vegetables. Such a vegetarian meal is healthy not only for our body, but for our planet, too.

movement. There are vegetarians among all the religions as well as those who have no religion. Three percent of Americans are vegetarians, with eight percent among teens. In the UK, 15 percent of teens declare themselves vegetarians. India has the largest number of vegetarians in the world, more than 500 million, 30 percent of the population. Our saints proclaimed vegetarianism to be man's natural and noble diet. The very name of our religion in Tamil, *Saivam*, also means vegetarianism!

GURUDEVA: Vegetarianism is a natural and obvious way to live with a minimum of hurt to other beings. ... In my fifty years of ministry, it has become quite evident that vegetarian families have far fewer problems than those who are not vegetarian.



THE HINDU TRADITION UNDERSTANDS THAT MAN IS NOT SEPARATE from nature, that we are linked by spiritual, psychological and physical bonds with the elements around us. Knowing that the Divine is present everywhere and in all things, Hindus hold a deep reverence for life. We hold an awareness that the great forces of nature—the earth, the water, the fire, the air and space—as well as all the various orders of life, including plants and trees, forests and animals, are

We look on the Earth, our beautiful planet, as our mother, the source of life, our never-failing sustainer & provider. We call Her Bhumi Devi, the Earth Goddess, and protect her in all ways.

bound to each other within life's cosmic web. Our beloved Earth, so touchingly looked upon in our scriptures as Bhumi Devi, the Earth Goddess, has nurtured mankind through millions of years of growth and evolution. However, the Earth's large population, its industries, automobiles and lifestyle are causing significant damage to the environment. As one sixth of the human family, Hindus can have a tremendous impact. We should take the lead in Earth-friendly living, personal frugality, lower power consumption, alternative energy, sustainable food production and vegetarianism. All of Earth's diversity is to be cared for, from the soil, water and air to the plants and animals of every shape and kind. To achieve this, we practice restraint in the use of Earth's resources. We do not exploit its minerals, water, fuels or soil. We avoid polluting our blue planet. We work to protect the many endangered plants and animals. We do not buy or use products from exploited species, such as furs, ivory or reptile skin. We recycle paper, glass, metal and plastic and use efficient means of transportation that save on energy. We plant trees and do not waste food. In these ways we express the fundamental Hindu reverence for the Earth and all life upon it.

GURUDEVA: Hinduism offers a unified vision of man and nature in which there is reverence, not dominion or carelessness. Mother Earth, sustainer of life, is a key Vedic idea. ... All Hindus feel they are guests on the planet with responsibilities to nature, which when fulfilled balance its responsibilities to them. The physical body was gathered from nature and returns to it.



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

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

AS SAIVITE HINDUS, WE KNOW this life is precious and are thankful for it every moment of every day. Appreciating the gift of life makes us want to do the best we can, improve our character, serve others and live a spiritual life. Knowing life's purpose, we hold firmly to dharma. Like a marathon runner, we must stay on the course to finish the race. Having good, religious friends helps us stay on the path. If we mix with a worldly crowd, we may lose our way. The *Tirukural* tells us, "As water changes according to the soil through which it flows, so a man assimilates the character of his associates." Friends who are good Hindus will help you most of all. If you befriend a person who is dishonest or mean, his example will lead you into trouble. If you befriend someone who studies hard and is kind and helpful, their example will inspire and uplift you. Some people poke fun at religion or make mischief and resist authority. They do not know the real purpose of life. They waste their time and cause pain to others. Wise teachers advise us to be nice to everyone, but make close friends only with those who will help build good character and set positive patterns for the future. The *Tirukural* tells us, "Purity of mind and purity of conduct, these

GURUDEVA: Make friends with those who are on the path. Be with fine, positive people. Don't be with negative, complaining people who have no relationship to what you are doing on the inside, or who are criticizing you for what you are doing.

25 How Do We Practice Karma Yoga?



Two volunteers serve lunch to a group of sadhus and pilgrims in India. Back in the kitchen, others have spent the morning cooking. This is one form of karma yoga, selfless actions done to help others.

quietly and willingly helping others, without complaint and without expecting thanks. Such service reaps hidden blessings. In its broadest sense, karma yoga is spiritualized action. It is doing each and every task consciously, selflessly, excellently, as an offering to the Divine. Satguru Yogaswami advised devotees, "Whatever work you have to do, do it well. That in itself is yoga." Work done in this spirit is a form of worship. Doing our ordinary daily duties becomes a powerful sadhana that contributes to our spiritual progress. This yoga makes us more focused, effective and fulfilled. It eliminates the false separation of secular work from religious practice. Swami Vivekananda counseled, "When you are doing any work, do not think of anything beyond. Do it as worship, as the highest worship, and devote your whole life to it for the time being." Here are some keys to successfully turning work into worship: 1) Pray to Lord Ganesha before beginning your work. 2) Act selflessly, detached from the results. Focus on serving, helping, giving. 3) Work hard; overcome lethargy, fatigue, confusion and doubt. 4) Maintain harmony with others. 5) Enjoy the effort; don't feel rushed. 6) Make the work a worthy offering, completing it as perfectly as you can. Then stop, review what you have done and make it even better.

KARMA YOGA IS SELFLESS SERVICE, OR SEVA. IT OFTEN TAKES THE form of volunteer work at a temple—helping with the basic needs and events, like polishing the brass lamps, answering the phone, making garlands and preparing for pujas. This humble service helps establish good character. The effort to do good deeds can be extended into other areas as well, such as the workplace and the home,

GURUDEVA: Go out into the world this week and let your light shine through your kind thoughts, but let each thought manifest itself in a physical deed, of doing something for someone else. Lift their burdens just a little bit and, unknowingly perhaps, you may lift something that is burdening your mind. You erase and wipe clean the mirror of your own mind through helping another. We call this karma yoga

27 What Is the Purpose of Temples?



Pilgrims have reached a remote all-granite Siva temple in India. They look upon this as the home of God, and they are able to draw nearer to His divine love and light in such a holy place.

blessings through the enshrined image, or murti. Flooding your aura, this energy can erase worries, clear confusion and relieve sadness. Devotees leaving the temple feel inspired and lightened of burdens. Gurudeva explained that the stone or metal images are not mere symbols of the Gods. The image is the physical-plane form through which the God's love, power and blessings flood forth into this world. The image is like a temporary physical body the God uses during temple ceremonies. The temple, God's home, becomes a truly sacred place for us when we know that the Gods are real beings and the

purpose of going to the temple is to experience their blessings.

GURUDEVA: A Siva temple marks an agreement between God Siva and the people on the Earth as a meeting place where the three worlds can consciously commune.

26 What Is Our Form of Prayer?



GOD SIVA AND THE GODS ARE ALWAYS WITH US, CLOSER THAN breathing, nearer than hands and feet. Praying is our way of communicating with them. To offer a prayer, visualize the face of God Siva or a God, concentrate and say your prayer mentally, sending it up through the top of your head. You can pray anywhere, but the inner-world beings can best hear you in a sacred temple or your home shrine. One of the greatest prayers of all is giving thanks for all the

Following the final arati of a puja, the priest moves through the crowd of devotees holding the lamp. As he approaches, they eagerly reach out to "touch" the flames which carry the Deity's blessings.

gifts Siva has provided in our life. Most often, though, devotees pray for help. The Gods will respond. Most simply, they send a blessing to quiet your mind and clear your aura. Sometimes this is all that's needed. Suppose you pray to Lord Ganesha for help with your studies. After the blessing from the Mahadeva, the subject matter seems clear and interesting. You absorb it easily and do better on your tests. Answering some prayers may require assigning a deva to determine the best way to assist you. It is comforting to know that the Gods, their devas and your own guardian devas are ever ready to respond to your requests for help and guidance. You gain this boon by living a religious life and being consistent in your sadhana. Some temples, such as Kadavul Temple in Hawaii, accept written prayers from devotees. When burned, these are released to their astral form in the Devaloka for the devas to read and act upon. Before asking for help, we make every effort to use our own intelligence and strength. In our prayers we always remember that God and the Gods know the highest course for our life. They know better than we do the lessons and experiences we need to improve. Our prayers will be answered, and in wisdom we accept the answer—even if it is not what we had hoped for.

GURUDEVA: Those who worship in Siva temples slowly gain acceptance into the devonic realms of the Gods, and one or two of the uncountable numbers of devonic intelligences often return with the devotee to his home. ...It is these guardian devas who are the first to receive the devotee's written prayers when they are transferred to the Devaloka through the sacred fire.

THE TEMPLE IS WHERE WE WORSHIP and commune with God and the Gods. Here, devotees are uplifted and receive the inner help they need to live a positive, fulfilling life. Temples are sacred for three reasons: they are constructed in a mystical manner, they are consecrated with special, complex rites, and thereafter continuous daily worship builds a holy force field. Our grand Saiva temples are like no other place on Earth. Some are more than 1,000 years old. Strict rules from the *Agamas* are followed to create such holy spaces where holiness, God, can reside. Devas, Gods and people work together to establish the temple and assure it will be used only for worship. Over the years, the power becomes strong, forming an invisible, glass-like bubble or shield around the temple. This keeps out gross vibrations and allows the heaven worlds to be strongly present. As you approach God's home, you can feel the spiritual energy, and as you go inside you are engulfed in peace. Here the devas and Gods can easily hear your prayers. Here the ancient scriptures are chanted, the traditional rites knowingly performed. Here joyous festivals are celebrated and arduous pilgrimages concluded. At the high point of puja, as bells ring loudly and conches blow, the Deity sends rays of

HINDUISM IS CELEBRATORY by nature. Hindus miss no opportunity to set mundane matters aside and join with family, friends, neighbors and strangers alike to feast and have fun, to renew the home and the heart and, most importantly, draw nearer to God. Festivals are perhaps more impressive and varied in Hinduism than in any other religion. The devout Hindu knows these are times of profound mysticism, when God and the Gods touch our world, revitalize our souls, lighten karmas and bless our families. Yet, festivals do even more than this. They are essential to the perpetuation of religion, periodically reigniting the spark of zeal and devotion in the community. They provide the spiritual public square where Hindus engage with one another to affirm shared values and enjoy life's intersections. Before each celebration, vows are taken, scriptures are studied, pilgrimages are made and fasts observed in preparation. Such acts of intimate devotion bring the devotee closer to the Gods and keep him on the path to his inmost Self. As each festival begins, solitary worship becomes a collective ritual, with millions of people taking their places in a creative choreography. Every festival is special and unforgettable in its own way. Thus Hindus are reminded of their faith by the sounds, scents, colorful decorations and the wild

28 How Do We Celebrate Festivals?



A gleeful devotee has been showered with colored powders during the playful and joyous Holi festival. Such celebrations bring the community close and lift the spirit of all who participate.

medley of tastes laid out for the feast. Mind and emotions are saturated with Hinduism as sacred mantra prayers are intoned, the spiritual teachings are recounted by saints, and the Gods are praised in melodious bhajans. Each Indian village and each global community lends a little of its unique culture to how a festival is celebrated, creating almost endless variations. Recently, with the growing Hindu population outside of India, festivals have acquired an international dimension.

What could be more entertaining, alive, vibrant and yet pious and rich in symbolism than a Hindu festival?

GURUDEVA: Festivals are special times of communion with God and Gods, of family and community sharing and sadhana.... We strive to attend each major festival, when the shakti of the Deity is most powerful, and pilgrimage to a far-off temple annually.



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ENVIRONMENT

Assessing the Meat Industry's Impact on Earth's Climate

Aside from the deplorable treatment of farm animals, consider for a moment that giving up beef alone can have more environmental benefit than giving up your car

By MAT McDERMOTT

THE MEAT INDUSTRY HAS CAREFULLY cultivated a benevolent image of itself and worked hard to instill that image in our minds. We look out over the quintessential American family farm. A dog sleeps on the large, hospitable front porch of an old white two-story house. The warm orange first light of day rises beyond a distant treeline over a lush green landscape. Fog rises from a small pond. Facing us is a red barn with open front doors. Just visible are rows of cows, eagerly awaiting their keeper's attention. The farmer, dressed in denim

overalls, white t-shirt and rubber boots, carries a wooden stool and a milk bucket into a clean stall to milk a black-and-white Holstein, her udder bulging. She steps forward to meet him, and he takes his seat and begins milking. A dog barks in the distance, and we hear a woman's voice. The scene fades as milk fills the bucket under the farmer's deft hands.

Marketers of milk, eggs and meat want us to believe our food is produced by this kindly bucolic chain. It starts with salt-of-the-Earth people working on small farms, lovingly caring for their animals; it ends with

a happy, healthy family seated around the dinner table. No doubt there are still farmers who deeply care about the animals they raise. But statistically this image is as much a relic of America's past as paddle-wheel boats, bustle skirts and the wild West.

The reality of the livestock industry is grim. Undercover investigators and whistleblowing farm workers have made countless videos documenting the depraved treatment received by farm animals. These have spread via the internet to millions on their mobile phones. While these videos clearly show the inhumanity of the industry, they do not show

Factory farms: (opposite) In Australia, NAPco's Australian, Wainui feedlot covers thousands of acres and holds 17,500 cows; (below) turkeys packed by the thousands in confinement pens, which are breeding places for diseases possibly beyond our control; a chart of meat production resources

its impact on the environment, which equals or even exceeds the devastation caused by our use of fossil fuels for energy and engines.

The Scale of the Problem

To understand the sort of damage being caused by intensive raising of animals, we need to grasp the prodigious numbers of animals involved. USDA data shows that in 2015 9.2 billion land animals were killed in the United States alone for their meat—8.8 billion chickens, 232 million turkeys, 115 million pigs, 28 million cows, 28 million ducks and two million sheep. That's 28 animals killed for every US resident. Globally, according to statistics compiled by Compassion in World Farming, 70 billion land animals are killed for food by humans, an average of 10 per human, with two-thirds of them raised on factory farms. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) places the total weight of meat produced in 2015 at 350 million tons.

When you include sea life, the figures are even more mind boggling. Again based on FAO data, each year some 2.7 trillion animals are harvested from the world's oceans, totaling 90–100 million tons of fish—386 sea creatures per person. But for now, we will focus on land animals and leave the impact on the oceans for another article.

Who Raises What and Where?

Estimates for 2016 break down like this: Global cattle production (for meat and milk) is led by India, with China and Brazil roughly tied for second place. The United States follows, with approximately half the numbers of India. Argentina rounds out the top five. If we only consider beef production, the United States leads the world, followed by Brazil, the European Union, China and India. Global milk production is dominated by the European Union (still including England, at this writing) and India, with the United States, China and Russia occupying positions three, four and five.

Poultry production rankings are similar: the United States leads the world, followed by Brazil, China, the European Union and India (which produces less than half the amount as the EU). Global production of pigs is dominated far and away by China, with the numbers quickly falling off to place the EU in second place, followed by the US, Russia and Brazil.

Hindu Scriptures Say

How can he practice true compassion who eats the flesh of an animal to fatten his own flesh? — Tirukural 251

If the world did not purchase and consume meat, no one would slaughter and offer meat for sale. — Tirukural 256

Greater than a thousand ghee offerings consumed in sacrificial fires is to not sacrifice and consume any living creature. — Tirukural 259

The purchaser of flesh performs violence by his wealth; he who eats flesh does so by enjoying its taste; the killer does violence by actually tying and killing the animal. Thus, there are three forms of killing. He who brings flesh or sends for it, he who cuts off the limbs of an animal, and he who purchases, sells, or cooks flesh and eats it, all of these are to be considered meat-eaters. — Mahabharata Anu. 115.40

Bhishma said: "That man who wishes to increase his own flesh by the meat of another living creature is such that there is none meaner and more cruel than he. In this world there is nothing that is dearer to a creature than his life. Hence, one should show mercy to the lives of others as he does to his own life. Forsooth, O son, flesh has its origin in the vital seed. There is great sin attached to its eating, as, indeed, there is merit in abstaining from it." — Mahabharata 116.11–13



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It takes a lot of resources to raise the beef for a single quarter-pound hamburger

1.5*
pounds of grain
and forage

150

gallons of water (for feed
crops and cattle)



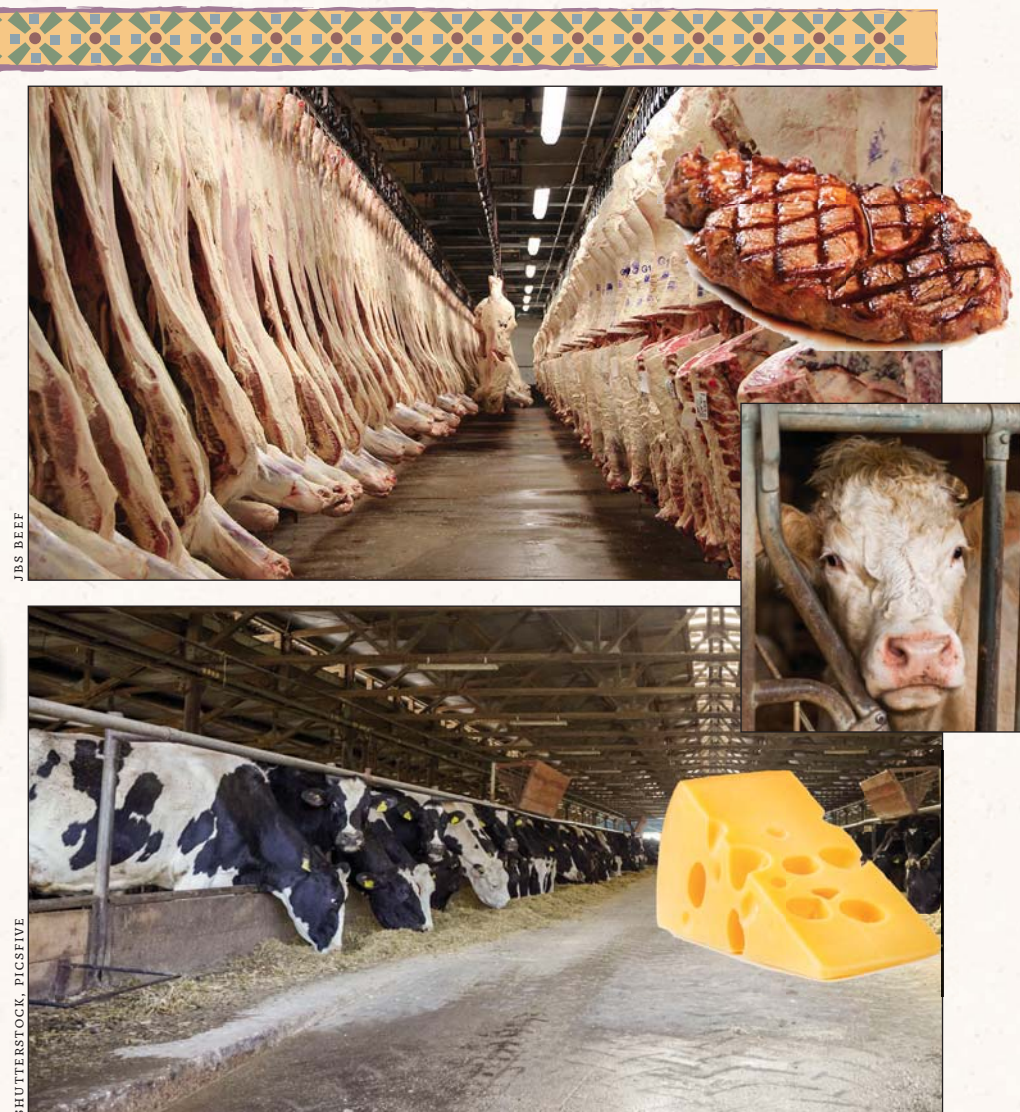
1,036
BTU's of fossil fuel energy
for feed production, transport

74.5

square feet for grazing
and growing feed crops

* Based on approx. feed conversion for finishing cattle on feedlots

STATS: NPR.ORG, USGS.GOV



Not-so-idyllic farms: (above) At enormous energy costs, all meat must be refrigerated from slaughterhouse through transport to reach the table; dairy cows pollute the environment with excrement and suffer in confinement on an unnatural diet filled with antibiotics and hormones, which then enter our bodies through the products we eat

The number of land animals killed for food is rising quickly in most places. Globally, 10 billion more animals are now killed each year than just five years ago, as reported by Compassion in World Farming. Over the past 50 years, while world population increased by 41 percent, global meat production quadrupled. By 2050, the FAO forecasts that global meat production will reach 500 million tons per year, 70 percent higher than even today.

Much of this increase is due to the growing urban middle class in Asia's emerging economies, as they mimic the West and adopt more meat-centric diets. China, for example, has largely abandoned its ancient fresh-food, plant-centered dietary traditions. Per-capita meat consumption has increased sixfold since 1980, along with rapidly rising consumption of Western-style fare—and a corresponding rise in obesity and diabetes. Since the turn of the century, obesity in China has risen 500 percent, and levels of diabetes now approach those of the US.

Western trends are less bleak. Meat consumption in Europe is more or less flat; and in the US—despite the still-staggering numbers of animals killed each year—the recent trend is towards slaughtering fewer animals. Increasing numbers of people are learning how eating less meat will benefit their own health, animal welfare and the Earth itself.

In Great Britain, analyses produced in 2014 show that more than 12 percent of adults are now vegetarian, a statistic that increases to 20 percent for people aged 16 to 24. That's significantly higher than in the US, where slightly more than three percent follow a vegetarian or vegan diet—though here, too, more young people are vegetarian, with an estimated 12 percent of millennials abstaining from meat.

These lower percentages are now typical of wealthy nations. India, where the world's greatest percentage of vegetarians live (roughly 20–30 percent, depending on the survey), is also trending toward less meat. In the past ten years, the number of vegetarians in India has increased by roughly four percent.

What's the Impact?

Raising all these animals, giving them grazing land and/or growing the crops required to feed them, requires an amazing amount of space. Nearly 80 percent of all agricultural land in the world is dedicated to livestock production in one way or another. One-third of the world's arable land, amounting to 40 percent of the world's cereal production, goes towards feed for livestock. Of non-arable land, slightly more than one quarter of the ice-free land in the world is used for grazing

livestock. A disproportionate amount of this land goes to beef production. Even though humans consume more chicken and pork than beef, global beef production occupies 11.6 million square miles of land, while a total of only 1.5 million square miles is devoted to raising chicken and pigs.

As we continue to put increasing acreage under cultivation, livestock production in particular has been decimating the world's last remaining large forests, particularly the Amazon. According to the World Bank, animal agriculture is responsible for up to 91 percent of rainforest destruction worldwide.

This destruction reduces habitat for forest-living humans and animal species; it increases carbon emissions and reduces the ability of the forest to store carbon dioxide. Moreover, the world's equatorial rainforests significantly influence global weather. They cannot be destroyed without disrupting the weather patterns essential to the production of our own food crops.

The livestock industry also creates enormous quantities of waste. The quantity of waste from a single dairy cow approximates that of 160 humans. USDA statistics show that in the US alone, seven million pounds of excrement is produced every minute by land animals raised for human consumption. A factory farm, with thousands of

cattle confined to a small area, must use a prodigious amount of water to wash away the excrement. This water becomes so polluted that it can't be sent into water treatment systems. Instead, it is often stored in large ponds—and some of this polluted water inevitably escapes the storage ponds to pollute our water supplies. Where waterways meet the ocean, this pollution contributes to toxic algae blooms.

All in all, up to one-third of all the world's fresh water is devoted to animal agriculture. In the US this figure is even higher. There, 50–60 percent of available fresh water is used to grow feed for animals that will be slaughtered for their meat.

The Production of Greenhouse Gases

Perhaps the worst form of pollution created by raising so many animals is invisible: increasing greenhouse gas emissions, in the form of carbon dioxide and methane.

Calculating the contribution of animal agriculture among all of humanity's greenhouse gas emissions is somewhat complicated. Every aspect of the production cycle causes emissions: planting, growing, fertilizing and harvesting animal feed crops; transporting the crops to feedlots; raising and transporting the animals; slaughter, its associated refrigeration, transportation and



waste disposal. Then there's the transportation of the workers involved in all aspects of the process, as well as the energy required for marketing it all.

There are many places in this production chain where the analysis could be stopped and still produce a reasonable assessment of the global warming attributable to meat eating, but there is no one standard place to do this. Estimates, therefore, are widely divergent. The most conservative assessments, coming from various reports from UN agencies, say animal agriculture causes 18 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions. That's greater than all the emissions related to transporting humans around the planet. The highest estimate comes in a 2009 analysis done by the Worldwatch Institute. According to this research, which sets the widest boundaries of any study to date, fully half of all greenhouse gas emissions can be traced back to raising animals for food.

Threatening New Diseases

A more insidious problem is the rise of antibiotic-resistant bacteria caused by modern methods of raising farm animals. The unhygienic conditions impel farmers to routinely administer antibiotics to farm animals that are not sick, either as a preventative measure or simply to promote growth. Globally, more than half of all the antibiotics produced are given to farm animals. In the US, roughly 80 percent of antibiotics that could be used to treat infections in humans are instead given to farm animals.

This overuse and misuse of antibiotics has hastened the rise of antibiotic-resistant infections. US Centers for Disease Control estimates that each year Americans incur at least two million antibiotic-resistant infections. Nearly a quarter of these are linked to food-borne pathogens. The seriousness of this situation has prompted the CDC to advise, "Antibiotics should be used in food-producing

animals only under veterinary oversight and only to manage and treat infectious diseases, not to promote growth." The threat posed by antibiotic-resistant bacteria is so severe that the United Nations has characterized it as a global crisis. Only three other health issues have ever been the focus of high-level general assembly meetings: HIV, Ebola and noncommunicable diseases. All 193 member states have signed a declaration agreeing to combat the proliferation of antibiotic resistance.

Your Actions Matter

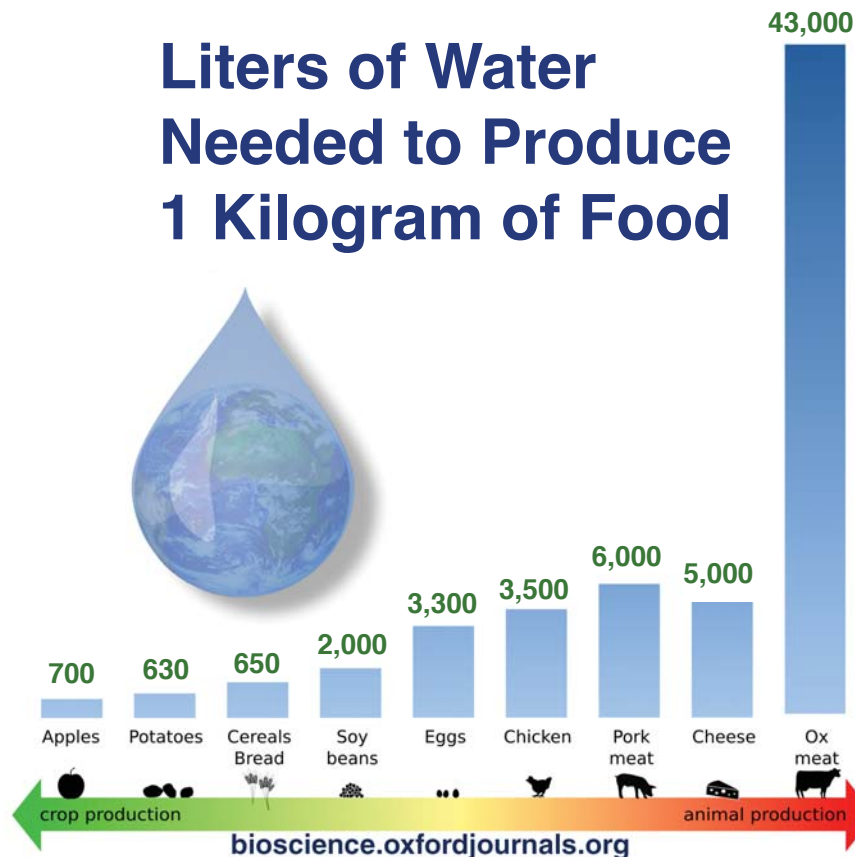
Our personal dietary choices make a real difference, in some cases quite dramatically. Using carbon emissions as a proxy for overall environmental effect, and using average estimates of US patterns, a vegetarian diet is two-thirds less harmful than the standard American diet. A vegan diet—abstaining from all animal products—has an even lower carbon footprint. Eating only fish, eschewing all land animals, has a marginally higher carbon footprint than a vegetarian diet.

Just by eliminating beef from your diet, your personal environmental impact is just slightly higher than a vegetarian diet. The impact of beef is so high, in fact, that giving up beef could be more beneficial for the planet than giving up your car.

This article has examined only the environmental impact of livestock production. Other important considerations include the inhumane treatment of animals in factory farm conditions, the health benefits of following a plant-based diet, and the benefit of viewing diet from a spiritual angle, rooted in ahimsa—striving to reduce the suffering caused by our actions. Demanding of special mention is the global hunger issue: 20 million people die of malnutrition per year, including one child every 2.3 seconds. One hundred million people could be adequately fed using the land freed if Americans reduced their intake of meat by a mere 10%. Considering all this, the benefits of a vegetarian or vegan diet are many and compelling.

Eating is a daily reminder of the biological, philosophical and spiritual interconnectedness of existence. At every meal of every day, most of us have the luxury of choosing which foods we will eat. Even if that choice has become habitual, dictated by tradition, cost or other factors, it is still a choice. In making that choice, we can either ignore the harm it may cause to other beings and our shared planet—or we can choose to lessen harm, to lessen suffering, to support planetary and personal well being and to allay global food shortages by freeing up land and water resources for crop production.

Liters of Water Needed to Produce 1 Kilogram of Food



Additional Information: the treatment of animals—www.mercyforanimals.org; where animals are raised—bit.ly/raised-where; Worldwatch report on livestock and climate change—bit.ly/www-climate; vegetarianism and your carbon footprint—bit.ly/goveget; FDA report on antibiotics in factory farming—bit.ly/badbacteria; UN report on livestock and environment—bit.ly/darklivestock; the Cowspiracy film—bit.ly/cowsecret; chicken farming pollution—bit.ly/toxic-tyson

Impact of the industry on the land: The staggering size of modern industrial agriculture received mainstream exposure in The New York Times' October, 2016, article "Super Size." Above, an aerial view of a dairy calf lot with 4,896 individual hutches at Calf Source, in Greenleaf, Wisconsin; (opposite) burning land in the Amazon; once-rich tropical rainforest becomes desolate pasture; (below) a factory farmed pig—an animal said to be smarter than a dog—stares out from the tiny pen where it lives out its entire life

Is a Positive Relationship with Farm Animals Even Possible?

Is it possible for humans to embody the highest ideals of ahimsa and still use animals in agriculture, either as draft animals or for dairy and other products that don't involve killing them? Is it possible to raise animals other than pets in ways that are mutually respectful and mutually beneficial?

Considering the massive environmental problems now caused by animal agriculture and the increasingly well-documented abuses caused to animals by industrialized farming, this is not a mere academic question or one for hard-core ecological and animal-rights advocates. Nor is it intended as a rhetorical question, with the implied answer being, "Of course not; all animal agriculture is exploitative"—a reply sometimes given by vegan activists.

Today we have living examples of communities and organizations attempting to raise animals in ways that uphold the spirit of non-violence. The Bishnoi community in India is a classic example. They maintain amazingly positive and interactive relationships with both wild and domesticated animals. In Europe and North America there are ongoing attempts by Hindu organizations to produce milk on farms that eschew the usual cruel practices, such as selling off male calves for beef, forced pregnancy schedules, and sending older animals to slaughter when they no longer produce milk in the desired quantities.

These examples show that small-scale alternatives to the current norm of animal agriculture can be functional. Perhaps we should ask, is it possible to have a respectful, mutually beneficial and non-violent relationship with farm animals at the scale needed to meet the nutritional needs of seven billion people? What would such a system look like? Could anything approaching the current milk production be sustained by such a system? Could it be compatible with



a rapidly urbanizing human population?

Collectively as a species, we are in unknown territory, and the answers to these questions are simply unknown. Moving to a plant-based diet is one obvious solution. Even mainstream medicine is finally making that recommendation, simply from the standpoint of human health. There may be hope for change in the recent investment by USA's biggest meat producer, Tyson Foods, in the vegan company Beyond Meat. But unless enough of us begin to take responsibility for our dietary choices—with a strong focus on our health and the health and welfare of animals, other humans and the planet as a whole—continued harm will remain the order of the day.



L I F E S T Y L E

“What if My Child Renounces the World?”

An exploration of parents' wishes and expectations, attitudes and reactions when a son or daughter is irresistibly drawn to renunciate life

BY CHOODIE SHIVARAM

WHEN I WITNESSED THE ANOINTMENT of Sri Bharati Thirtha Swamiji's successor to the Sringeri Peetham in January of 2015, I saw that people were euphoric because a befitting successor to the peetham had been chosen. Devotees of the math felt blessed that a sannyasin of such pristine quality had been selected to one day don the mantle of the peetham. The joy on their faces was indescribable.

Standing in their midst, I wondered, “How many here would feel this same euphoria if this were their own child? How open and accepting are we to giving our sons and daughters to the order of sannyas, irrespective of the institution they may wish to join?”

Many years ago, while I was out for dinner with a relative and his family, the conversation predictably turned to what the kids wanted to be when they grew up. Expecting a typical answer like “a doctor” or “an engineer,” this relative asked my son what he wanted to become. Thanks to the pious influence

of my parents and to our close association with HINDUISM TODAY and Sringeri Math, our children had a clear disposition towards religion and spirituality. My son nonchalantly responded that he wanted to become a sannyasin.

A minute of shocked silence ensued while my relative tried to process this response. Regaining his composure, he assumed that my son was either joking or didn't know what he was saying. Attempting to convince my son otherwise, he carefully explained the negative aspects of monasticism. My son, who had heard all of these arguments before, stuck by his convictions with an unconcerned equanimity that only a nine-year old could muster. As I had long been aware of his spiritual inclination, his response did not surprise me. I felt an acceptance towards this path and even a sense of pride in his consideration of it.

Later, my relative, still shocked and disturbed, spoke with me, stating that as a responsible parent I ought to force my child in another direction. Later in life my son

did chose to become an engineer. But I am a staunch believer in destiny. If he had been destined to be a renunciate, I feel that no force on Earth could have stopped him.

India's system of Vedic thought, Sanatana Dharma, stands among the world's most ancient spiritual cultures and is an integral part of Indian life to this day. In his book *Sannyas Darshan*, Swami Niranjanananda Saraswathi writes, “While ancient religions of the Celtic, Teutonic, Slavic races, Syria and Asia minor have disappeared, Sanatana Dharma withstood the ravages of invasions. Our spiritual heritage survived because of the sannyasins who went away to live in solitude and seclusion during these inclement times of invasions and calamities.”

“Renunciation,” he writes, “is severance of the individual from all bonds of the phenomenal world; family, social, political, caste, creed, religion. It is a virtual rebirth, and once entered upon this path, there is no going back. Thus the sannyas parampara was conceived to be the direct path to moksha (liberation

Sannyasins: (left to right) a painting by artist S. Rajam depicting a sannyasin giving blessings and advice to a young couple; Bharat Sevashram Sangh swamis and monks in training pose before a statue of their founder, Acharya Pranavananda Maharaj (1896–1941)

.....

from the cycle of rebirth).” Swami notes that the sannyas tradition is said to have started with the Kumaras, the four sons of Brahma, whose renunciation was absolute.

Vairagya, detachment, the foundation of renunciation, must be an integral part of a sannyasin's personality. His fundamental duty is to exercise control over the mind, discarding all worldly affairs in thought, word and deed, and liberate himself from worldly bondage. The *Kathopanishad* compares the path of sannyas to “a sharp edge of a razor, difficult to cross and hard to tread.” Sannyas is regarded as a path of utmost purity and sanctity, hence people revere sannyasins as the personification of these qualities.

inform us, “Who indeed overcomes maya? He who gives up all attachment, who serves the great ones and who is freed from the sense of ‘I and mine.’ He who lives in solitude, cuts through the bondages of this world, goes beyond the three gunas and depends upon the Lord even for his living. He who gives up the fruits of his actions, renounces all selfish activity and passes beyond the

pairs of opposites. He who renounces even the rites and ceremonies prescribed by the scriptures and attains unfaltering love for God—such a man, indeed, crosses this maya and helps others to cross it.”

Sri Kuppa Siva Subramanya Avadhani, principal of the TTD Veda Vigyan Peetham in Tirumala, explains, “The sacred thread for brahmana; the arms and armory for kshatriya; money and business for vaishya; and protection of cows (and other cattle) for shudra are respective identities, but these classifications are creations of the mind. Transcending all these and realizing the natural unborn, uncreated state of the Self is sannyas.” He concludes, “When a person has walked a long way in the scorching sun with a heavy bag on his back and offloads it when he finds some shade; that sublime feeling of relief and calmness he experiences is what sannyasa gives when we renounce everything worldly.”

Traditions vary, of course, and some are less formal than others. The *Sannyas Upanishad* lists four types of sannyas: vairagya sannyas, jnana sannyas, jnana-vairagya sannyas and karma sannyas. According to the *Bhagavad Gita*, sannyas, or renunciation, is a matter of attitude and thinking, freedom from desires; and this is possible through detachment and equanimity of mind. Adapting to changing times and sociopolitical transitions, a number of maths and ashrams have emerged paving the way for a new order of sannyas. While the basic tenets of detach-

ment and nonviolence remained unchanged, their approaches and processes manifest differently to suit the masses. The Ramakrishna Order, the Brahma Kumaris and Sivananda Ashram, to name a few, approach sannyas and monkhood without orthodoxy. Service to society is given primacy. Some religious institutions adhere to strict traditional orthodoxy, some are devoted to service, and there is a new wave of sannyasins who profess detachment even as they engage with the corporate world. Sharada, a devotee of Ramana Maharshi, says, “Sannyaso Nirmalam Jnaanam’ is the philosophy of Ramana Maharshi; it is not necessary to shave one's head and live in isolation. One has to be in a state of renunciation abiding in knowledge.”

The Call of Sannyas

From the distant past to the current day, there have been innumerable examples of renunciates for whom the call of sannyas has been irresistible.

It is said that if the samskaras (impressions of the mind) towards renunciation are strong enough, the pull cannot be resisted. Life's course for the soul is predestined and planned, and sometimes that course is sannyas. Sri Bharathi Thirtha Swami, pontiff of Sringeri Math, said in his speech during the anointment of his successor, “I did not seek his horoscope to see if he has *sannyas yoga* (an astrological configuration which indicates sannyas is likely). It was Divine



SHUTTERSTOCK

ordination that directed my decision.”

Gautama Saraswathi, a sannyasin I met in the Himalayas, spoke with me at length about the lives of monks who live in the mountains. Many of these ascetics left affluent families, successful careers and their former lives, simply surrendering to that divine call to embrace renunciation. They live in harmony with nature and are on the move all the time. “It is preordained and scripted by destiny; theirs is a direct connect with the Supreme,” he said.

Swami Harshananda, president of Ramakrishna Math in Bengaluru, recalls, “When I wanted to take sannyas and join the

Ramakrishna Order, I came into contact with Swami Tyagishanandji, who was the president of the math. He was a great scholar and disciple of Brahmanandji, who was a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. He always discouraged me from taking sannyas. One day I was fed up and asked him, ‘If tomorrow I come and join the ashram against your advice, will you feel happy or sorry?’ He laughed and replied that he would feel happy. I asked him why then was he discouraging me. He immediately said, ‘You young people are always sanguine by nature and look at the brighter side of things. I am deliberately keeping you exposed to the darker and difficult side of

A divine life: Two sannyasins at a temple in Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu; a conference of Natha Sampradaya swamis hosted by Balagangadharanatha Swamiji

monastic life. Then you will make a mature decision after weighing the pros and cons.’ I have been in this organization for 63 years now. I feel lucky that the Ramakrishna Order has chosen me for this life and given me shelter.”

Shastras enjoin a person taking sannyas to sever all familial ties. The traditional initiation into sannyas includes performing the *shraddha* (funeral rites) of the aspiring sannyasin. This signals the culmination of material life; his vows of renunciation signify a rebirth. This also indicates the highest level of detachment, not just from one’s family, but from one’s own identity. To the family, especially the mother, this custom is often emotionally difficult. Many traditional institutions follow this custom to this day; other institutions and orders of sannyas have evolved their own customs which allow for interaction with the monk’s birth family.

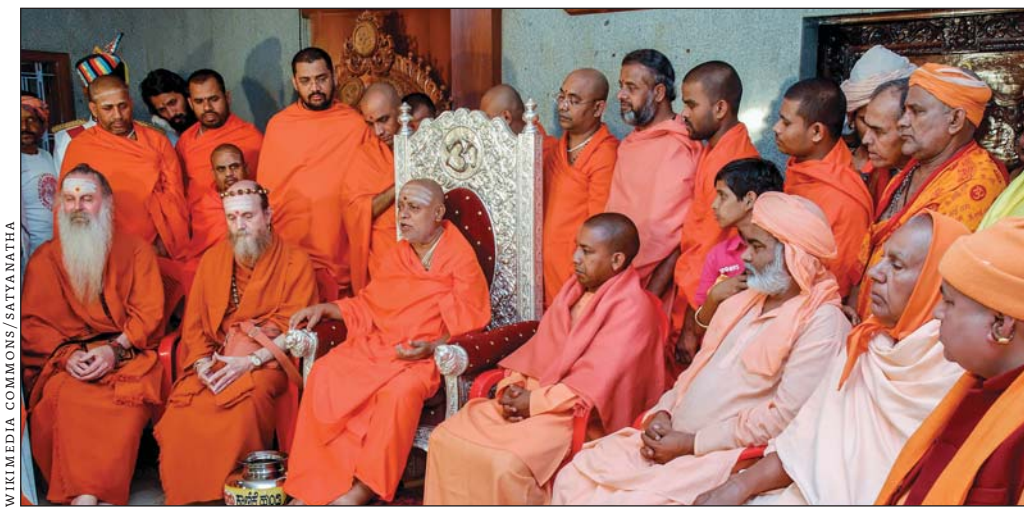
The importance of receiving consent from the family for taking sannyas is emphasized with the example of Adi Shankara. He did not leave home to take sannyas until his mother,

Aryamba, granted him permission.

Swami Harshananda explains, “Generally we tell young people who come seeking sannyas to convince their parents and get their blessings. Don’t come with their curses. But ultimately, if detachment is very strong in the person, we tell the parents to make a decision of whether or not to accept the choice. Many of us have come in opposition of our parents; but all this settles down in time. When our parents see that we are leading a quality life and ultimately monasticism is doing good for us, they will accept it and realize that they are giving to society. Those who join a monastic order should show by their personal life and behavior that they are an asset to the organization and are doing service to society.”

Parental Attitudes of Loss

Parental obstruction has been a significant impediment to many young men and women taking to sannyas. From the time of Shankaracharya’s mother, Aryamba, to present times, parents, especially mothers, have resisted. While the renunciate by his own will sacrifices his material life, the family,



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sometimes unwillingly, sacrifices their offspring. I have interacted with a few people who preferred anonymity, and hence their names have been changed.

Why is it considered a loss for the family when the child gives up the world? Indeed, this can be a difficult sacrifice, particularly for the parents. Vatsala, a wife and mother from Bengaluru, was shocked when, after finishing his education, her only son announced that he would be taking sannyas. Being an average middle-class family, Vatsala

and her husband had looked forward to relaxing into a stress-free life when he became employed and got married. Like many others, they hoped to live through old age with their son as their security when they needed him.

Vatsala explains, “My son excelled in academics, both in his engineering and MBA. He was even offered a very good job. His decision broke our hearts, because we didn’t know where to go; we had invested all our savings on his education. Our support system had crumbled. We were hoping he would be

What Is Sannyas?

Many people today are unaware of the depths and importance of the sannyasin’s life, or even the purpose of renunciation. This excerpt from the vows of the Kailasa Parampara’s Saiva Siddhanta Yoga Order gives a suitable introduction:

“*Sannyas* may be simply defined as Hindu monasticism, and a sannyasin is one who has renounced the world in search of God Realization and has been formally initiated by a guru who is himself a sannyasin. In Sanskrit the word *sannyas* literally means ‘to throw down’ or ‘to abandon.’ Thus, sannyas is the giving up or abandonment of the world, and the sannyasin is one who has so renounced.

“True sannyas is not a denial of life but life’s highest fulfillment. It is unmitigated selflessness. It is the relinquishment of the transient and illusory in favor

of a permanent Reality, the eschewing of a worldly life that one may, by gradual stages of purification, draw inward toward Absolute Truth. It is a break with the mundane and a binding unto the Divine. It is the repudiation of the dharma, including the obligations and duties, of the householder and the acceptance of the even more demanding dharma of the renunciate. The seasoned sannyasin is truly the liberated one, the spiritual exemplar, the disciplined yogi and ultimately the knower of Truth, freed to commune with the Divine and bound to uplift humanity through the sharing of his wisdom, his peace, his devotion and his illumination, however great or small.

“The sannyasin is the guardian of his religion, immersed in it constantly, freed from worldliness, freed from distraction, able



RAMAKRISHNA MISSION; DIVINE LIFE SOCIETY



History makers: (above) two famed renunciates, Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), founder of Ramakrishna Mission; and Swami Sivananda (1887–1963), founder of Divine Life Society

to offer his work and his worship in unbroken continuity and one-pointed effectiveness. He undertakes certain disciplines, including the purification of body, mind and emotions. He restrains and controls the mind through his sadhana, tapas and meditative regimen. He unfolds

from within himself a profound love of God and the Gods. His practice of upasana or worship is predominantly internal, seeking God within.

“Renunciation for the sannyasin is the relinquishment of world, desire and ego. It is detachment founded in knowledge



CHINMAYA MISSION

of the magnetic nature of body, mind and emotion, a knowledge which inclines the soul toward non-involvement with external forms and, in time, summons forth realization of Absolute Reality.

“Renunciation is repudiation of individual personality and ownership. It is poverty as opposed to affluence, simplicity as opposed to ramification in life. It is self-containment, freedom from worldliness and its concomitant

distractions and obligations. In its deeper sense, renunciation is a surrendering of limited identity, ego-sense or individuality known in Sanskrit as *ahamkara*, that the soul may soar to the very depths of Being. It is the beginning of the end of *samsara*, the wheel of rebirths, the death of the old ushering in a spiritual renaissance which will ultimately mature into illumination and *moksha*.

“Renunciation is not a running

away from the world, provoked by fear or failure therein. Rather it is an irrepressible drawing into sacred realms of consciousness and being, far more subtle and demanding of discipline than anything the world may offer—a state of being that follows fulfillment in the world as the next natural evolution of consciousness. Renunciation is not an opportunity to shun responsibility or to do as one pleases, but carries with it chal-

Initiation: Swami Tejomayananda, head of Chinmaya Mission (third from left), welcomes new sannyasins into the order

enges and accountability of an even more formidable, albeit inner, nature. It is not a disgust for this world, but a love of deeper worlds so great that the material universe and its gifts are, by comparison, mean and meager.

“Renunciation is the abjuration of the *grihastha* dharma and the acceptance of the *sannyasa* dharma, a dharma which will create or resolve karmas according to how it is discharged. Though it disallows personal possessions and upholds the ideals of simplicity known as poverty, renunciation is not a condition of destitution, deprivation or disregard for one’s well-being. Nor is it a resignation from life or an abandoning of humanity, but a fulfilling of mankind’s highest need and a joyous surrender to That which is the substratum of life.”



BAPS SWAMINARAYAN

Holy orders: (top to bottom) Swamishri HH Pramukh Swami Maharaj (1921–2016) with 591 sadhus of BAPS Swami Narayan Samstha at Smruti Mandir, Akshardham Temple, New Delhi; Swami Avdheshanand Giri initiates Sadhavi Aanand Magi Giri Maharaj of Trinidad and Tobago into sannyas in July of 2016

there to take care of us in our old age. Now we are left to fend for ourselves.” The couple did their best to dissuade their son, but his resolve was unshakable. Now they have accepted the dictate of destiny and are resigned to the fact that he is happy doing what he chose for his life.

In the mountains I spoke with Chandra Giri, a wandering monk in his late twenties. He is a management graduate from a premier institution and an only son. After university, he had taken the reins of a successful international business owned by his father. “Out of nowhere I developed a strong urge, a calling for the mountains and the guru there beckoning me. I gave up everything, came to the Himalayas and met my guru. I’m blissfully nestled in this world of renunciation. Many times my parents have reached out to me and asked me to return, but even the thought of return unfurls a strong sense of aversion in me.”

As a young woman, Lakshmi was completely disinclined to marriage and wanted to take sannyas. Her parents rejected the idea vehemently and got her married, but the marriage quickly ended in disaster. Not letting her follow her calling, they forced her into a second and later a third marriage. Each failed. Finally, Lakshmi headed to the Himalayas to pursue the renunciate life. I met her a few years back in Haridwar during the 2014 Kumbha Mela; there was a bright aura around her. She was at peace with herself, and her radiant face proved to me that she was living in Divinity.

Father of a Pontiff

Sri Kuppa Siva Subramanya Avadhani was father to the boy who would become the successor to the pontiff of Sringeri Sri Vidhushekara Bharathi. He explains, “When we think that a boy from our family has been chosen to succeed as the 37th Jagadguru of Sringeri Sharada Peetham, it gives us goose bumps. For the entire family this is the fruition of virtue and spiritual discipline earned over a billion past births. It is indeed the culmination of blessings from God, guru



PARAS RAMOUTAR

and ancestors. This will lead us in the right path even through future births. The feeling of blessedness is beyond description. By detaching from the family, our son has done a great sacrifice for the sake of dharma, and by letting the dear child go into the order of sannyas, the family is doing a great sacrifice; both for establishing and strengthening dharma. Hence this is a sacrifice that will lead us towards Self Realization.”

Society Needs Sannyasins

The definition of a good sannyasin is a matter of varied perception. We live in a consumerist environment; and India, the seat of Sanatana Dharma, is transitioning fast under Western influence. Mrs. Vijaya Subbaraju, a renowned scholar and poet, writes, “To find someone in this age who is not a slave to the fascination of mobile phones, gadgets or sports—which are primary distractions today—is almost impossible. We would expect a renunciate to be one with pristine purity, distanced from the material world. Is today’s environment conducive for such a person?”

While some religious and monastic institutions are completely orthodox and renounce modern habits and gadgets, most institutions and renunciates are adapting to changing times—communication being of prime importance. But sannyasins succumbing to modern lifestyles and affluence, engaging in transactions and business have been viewed with distrust.

There is a thin line between necessity and fascination. Sri Jayendra Puri Swami, pontiff of Shri Kailash Ashrama Mahasamsthana, illustrates this with the story of a king who intensely revered a sannyasin, whom he considered his guru. He provided the sannyasin with a palatial residence and all the material comforts, with a sense of treating him on par with himself. Someone asked the sannyasin in what sense could he be called a renunciate if he lived in material comforts equal to the king. The sannyasin replied, “The difference between the

king and me is, I can walk out, free from all these comforts at my will and never repent. The king cannot.” Swami explains, “This sense of detachment and liberation is the hallmark of a sannyasin.”

In an interview ten years ago, Sri Bharathi Tirtha Swami of Sringeri Peetham told me change is inevitable. “We have to adapt and change with the times; we cannot say we will not travel by car and insist on a bullock cart like our predecessors. What cannot change is the dharma we practice, the austerities that bind us. There is no compromise on that.”

Some traditional institutions prohibit parents and families from interacting or meeting the sannyasins of their order. The 109-year-old seer of Siddaganga Math did not visit his hometown for over 25 years, citing detachment. Sringeri Math places no such restriction, but the families meet the swamis just as other devotees do, and the response is correspondingly detached. Some institutions, such as Suttur Math, are quite liberal in this respect, allowing such families to become part of the institution and maintain their ties with the sannyasins.

The Role of Parents

According to the Shastras, if the son or daughter takes to monastic life, seven generations of his forefathers, both maternal and paternal, will be blessed. In the Hindu religion, monasticism is considered the highest life. In spiritually evolved families, a member taking sannyas is celebrated with reverence. They train themselves to accept his detachment, and this in itself is a form of renunciation. For example, from the very day of his anointment as the successor, Sri Vidhusheka-

ra Bharati’s pre-monastic family stopped referring to him by his pre-monastic name and addressed him as Sannidhanam. No longer considered his family, they instantly adopted the traditional, disciplined protocol, meeting him as ordinary devotees do.

Sharada, whose parents were devout followers of Ramana Maharshi, has chosen the life of renunciation. From childhood she grew up in an environment of piety and devotion, and this laid out a fertile platform for her to find bliss in renunciation.

“Some amount of spiritual training will fuel the quest for sannyas. A conducive atmosphere has to be created,” she opines. Besides service to Ramana Ashram and propagating Maharshi’s doctrines, Sharada is actively engaged in conducting classes for young children, bringing light to the values of life and our spiritual heritage. “Children are very receptive; they accept things with faith. They must be allowed to question, as enquiry is an important part of evolving. However, I find many parents are scared and tend to take their children away from engagement in spiritual discourse. I have been accused of influencing people towards renunciation,” she said with a smile.

On this subject Sri Swami Harshananda stated, “It is a tragedy of Hindu society that so many admire and praise the monastic ideals intently, but when it comes to the question of their own children taking to this path, there is terrible opposition. This psychology has to change. In Christianity if the child wants to dedicate his life to the church and to the service of Christ, they often feel proud of it. One of our priest friends in Mysore informed me that nine out of ten children of his parents had taken to service of the Church.”

For thousands of years, our heritage has produced great ascetics who have done tremendous work for Sanatana Dharma. They can uplift the entire society. A number of sannyasins I interviewed said that parents should take a broader view and allow their children to take up sannyas if they so desire. If a child is so inclined, it would be prudent for parents to counsel him on the nature of that dharma. He should be allowed to interact and receive counsel and guidance from great renunciates on the nuances of renunciation. The child should be allowed to ponder this carefully before deciding.

Sri Avadhani advises, “Parents should first

imbibe the culture themselves. It is quite rare to find children who want to become sannyasins. Even rarer are parents who want to make their children sannyasins. But, what is actually needed is that parents be keen on guiding their children to follow Vedic dharma. Becoming a sannyasin is a consequence of following such a life.”

Role of Temples & Maths

Two important forces guiding Hindu society today are the maths and temples; these are crucial centers for leading and rejuvenating Hindu society. The health and untarnished image of our monastic institutions ensure that the image of sannyas is held in reverence. The quality of the monastic institutions depends on the quality of the sannyasins and their activities, not upon buildings, wealth or prestige. Swami Vivekananda emphasized *jnana* (knowledge gained from realization) and *tapas* (spiritual disciplines and penance) as the fundamental factors expected in every sannyasin in every institution of sannyas.

Unfortunately, the reputation of sannyasins and monastic institutions has suffered in modern times. A few institutions and the monks heading them have been accused of immoral and criminal activities, reflecting badly on the entire order of renunciates. Twelve centuries ago, in his *Bhagavadgita*, Adi Shankaracharya cautioned against fakes who appear in the garb of sannyasins. His warning is echoed in the words and writings of many true renunciates today.

I interacted with numerous sadhus and naga sannyasins during the Kumbha Mela. While media coverage of the Kumbha Mela showcased some sannyasins who owned international empires, flashed their wealth and used the occasion to advertise their strengths and following, a large number of true renunciates were quietly and inconspicuously tucked away, engulfed in their sadhana and uplifting devotees. Distanced from the material world, from name, fame and wealth, reaching the Divine was their only goal. These true sannyasins exemplify and reiterate what sannyas is, despite the ills that have cast a shadow on this supreme path.

It is the silent sadhana of millions of true ascetics, unknown and unseen to the material world, that has sustained and bolstered the values of the life of sannyas. When India went through the turmoil of so many terrible invasions, our dharma was preserved and protected by these unseen sannyasins, who retreated into the interiors of the forests. The pristine purity of this order remains eternal, its supremacy unchallenged and unfazed, irrespective of any aberrations that have occurred in an evolving society. Knowing this, parents may rejoice when their beloved children elect to follow such a noble and elevating path.

Morari Bapu, Our Hindu of the Year, 2016

Shri Morari Bapu is honored for decades of Ram Katha that has inspired devotion and adherence to dharma for countless Hindus the world over

BY LAKSHMI C. SUBRAMANIAN

SHRI MORARI BAPU, A RENOWNED EX-pounder of *Ramcharitmanas*, has been reciting Ram Katha for over fifty years. His nine-day discourses of Hindu devotional storytelling spread messages of universal peace, truth, love and compassion. For taking Ram Katha across the globe, keeping India's rich oral tradition alive, and for his humanitarian contributions, he has been chosen to receive the 2016 Hindu of the Year award.

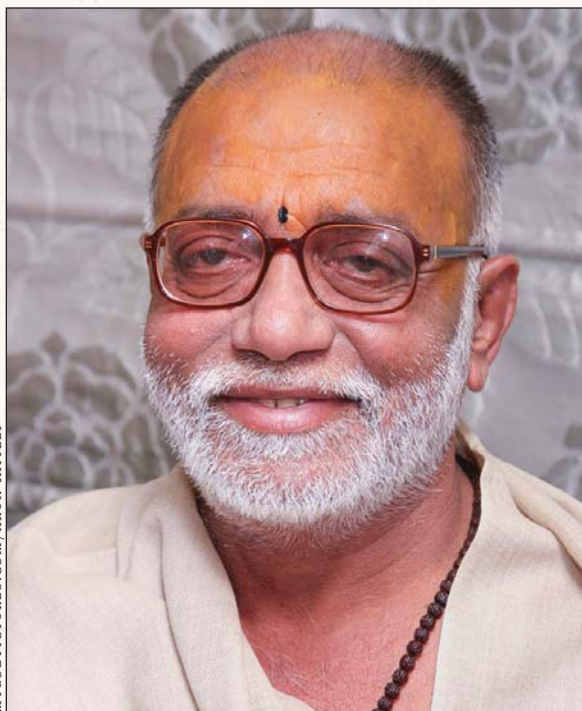
Early Years

Temple priest Prabhudas Bapu and his wife, Savitri Ma Hariyani, gave birth to Moraridas in 1946 in Tal-gajarda village, Gujarat. Born into the Vaishnav Bava Sadhu Nimbarka lineage, the boy spent much of his childhood with his grandfather and guru, Tribhovandas Dada, and grandmother, Amrit Ma, who brought him into the katha way of life. Each day, Dadaji would teach his grandson five verses with meaning which the youth memorized while walking to and from school, often singing to the trees along the way. By age twelve, the boy had memorized all 4,712 four-line verses of *Ramcharitmanas*; by fourteen, he started reciting Ram Katha. After secondary school, Bapu taught at the J. Parekh High School for ten years. During that time, he listened to prominent speakers and met many spiritual leaders. Reminiscing on those times, he says, "I would take leave without pay to deliver kathas in rural areas."

An Enthralling Kathakar

A *katha* refers to the Indian tradition of narrating an oral text by a trained *kathakar* or storyteller. Morari Bapu's nine-day kathas are based on the *Ramcharitmanas*, a devotional retelling of the Sanskrit *Ramayana* in a dialect of Hindi known as Avadhi. Ever since the 16th century, when it was composed by poet-saint Tulsidas, the *Ramcharitmanas* ("Spiritual Lake of Ram's Acts") has been hugely popular throughout North India. In seven chapters of mostly four-line stanzas, the *Manas* tells Lord Rama's life

story in poetry. This vernacular retelling made the *Ramayana* epic accessible to those who do not speak Sanskrit. Morari Bapu has taken the baton forward by elucidating the meaning in both Hindi and Gujarati. "*Ramcharitmanas* is not merely a book; it is the very heart of the sages of this country," Bapu has stated. He also performs kathas on *Gopi Geet*, an ode to Lord Krishna by the gopis of



Vrindavan who seek to merge with Him.

His first katha in Talgajarda Ram Mandir, at age fourteen, was attended by three people. As of today he has performed over 750 nine-day kathas in Indonesia, South Africa, United Kingdom, United States, Brazil, Australia and Japan. Of special note were his 2011 katha at the foothills of Mount Kailas in Tibet, his 2012 Ram Katha in Jerusalem, Israel, and his invitation to Iran as a state guest, also in 2012.

Explaining the relevance of Hindu scriptures in modern-day life, Morari Bapu calls out to humanity for love and mutual respect. He does not consider himself anyone's guru; rather, he is a conduit to inspire devotion through the narration of Rama's story, attracting people from all walks of life.

Bringing Communities Together

Morari Bapu's charitable activities are many. He has organized marriage ceremonies for Hindu and Muslim girls who were unable to pay for their wedding, provided free education to students and free healthcare to thousands. He has contributed financially and arranged for volunteers to assist in disaster-stricken areas such as the 2001 Gujarat earthquake, the 2011 nuclear leak in Fukushima and the Bihar floods. He provided 100 million rupees (US\$150,000) for relief work after the 2013 Uttarakhand floods, and 10 million rupees (US\$15,000) to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund for the 2014 Jammu and Kashmir flood victims. Spreading messages of communal harmony through Ram Katha, he was among the first Hindu leaders to lead a peace march through the riot-torn areas of Ahmedabad during the 2002 Gujarat riots.

An avid supporter of the arts, Morari Bapu has organized several literary and cultural programs in his hometown. These include the annual three-day Asmita Parva with scholars of the Gujarati language; Sanskrit Satra, which brings Sanskrit specialists together; and the Regional *Ramayanas* conference that discusses the many linguistic versions of the *Ramayana*. As a social reformer, he believes women should be permitted to perform last rites and priestly duties, and

organizes events such as "Voice of Women," which commemorates the life and works of female poet-saints of India. He gives away yearly awards to artists and scholars, honoring those who work to preserve folklore, traditional dance and forms of Indian art.

Morari Bapu's vision goes beyond the Hindu faith with the belief, "Supreme love is the supreme religion." In Jerusalem he told the story of Jesus and his lesson of love. In Hiroshima he spoke of compassion. In January 2009 he organized "Harmony through Dialogue," an interreligious conference inaugurated by the Dalai Lama that brought together leaders of many of the great world religions—Jain, Hindu, Sikh, Christian and Muslim—to seek peace between communities. That same

Joyful, soulful, mind on God: (far left) Morari Bapu, the benevolent emissary of dharma; (this page) immersed in devotion while singing and explicating the *Ramcharitmanas*, Morari Bapu becomes a virtual embodiment of Lord Hanuman, behind him, in his devotion to the Supreme in the form of Lord Ram.

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year he hosted Sadbhavana Parva, a conference in which 300 Christian, Muslim and Hindu delegates discussed ways to foster harmony among their faith traditions.

In the Eyes of Devotees

Devotees' praise of his work can help us understand Morari Bapu's impact. Sunil Patel, software engineer, Atlanta, says, "When I lived in London, in 1994-1995, my commute to work each way took two and half hours. My mum suggested that I listen to Morari Bapu katha, which till today I am so thankful for. The narration of katha by Morari Bapu was extremely powerful. To explain the meaning of the slokas, Bapu set the stage with the scenes so vivid, decorated with words, that I felt as if I were part of the *Ramayana*. The multitude of examples and jokes, mixed with emotions to drive the point, were powerful enough to be ingrained in my heart. My commute felt like five minutes. This led me to turn towards God. I know this must have been a divine plan, because only after listening to the katha, I found a beautiful home very close to work."

Abhishek Mehrotra, entrepreneur, India: "Param Pujya Shri Morari Bapu ji stands out as a true propagator of the *bhakti marga* (path of devotion). His discourses have more far-reaching effects than one can imagine. They have impacted and kept millions of young adults on the righteous path of dharma."

Prachi Pandey, Delhi University student: "Through reading and listening to *Manas*, I have learned to be considerate and tolerant of others while standing up for the right causes. Morari Bapu doesn't just recite *Manas* and preach blind faith in God. He makes it clear that we can choose our beliefs. He asks us to read and listen to *Manas* katha to improve

ourselves as human beings."

Dr. Lalit Lalit, Editor, National Book Trust, Delhi: "Morari Bapu is a missionary who reduces the stress of people caught in this never-ending race without direction or aim. The message I get is that good conduct makes us peaceful and blissful. He points out that we spend more time with electronic gadgets than with our own family members and that our lives will become more prosperous and fulfilling if we abandon these gadgets even for a few hours every day."

Tejal Pandya, teacher, Rajkot, India: "Shri Morari Bapu's katha often comes up with solutions. Whenever I hear him, he makes me feel that whatever so-called problems I am facing are universal and it is not just me. So that 'why me?' question has been erased out of my life. Secondly, there is no problem which does not have a solution; only a paradigm shift is required."

Ghee from Bapu's Teaching

Quotes from Morari Bapu's performances:

Worship is not separate from life. Life itself is worship. In everything there is worship; in everything there is satsang, prayer.

It is very easy to run away from everything, yet difficult to wake up; don't run from your life, from your duties, from those around you; awake to them!

Instead of resistance and confrontation, try to have an understanding with your heart/mind.

Don't think about what you don't have; leave what you may have in the future; just enjoy what you do have at this present moment.

Living without expectation from anyone is *punya* (merit). Living with devotion to and with thoughts of the scriptures and of God is *punya*. Being happy and content is *punya*.

A flower blooms in quietude; man's inner self also blossoms in solitude. Each one of us should find our own space and solitude.

www.moraribapu.org



NIRAJ THAKAR

CULTURE

Dear Diary, My Guru Came to London

Growing up as a Hindu in the cosmopolitan capital, a young woman shares a heartwarming tale of cultural discovery

BY GAJANANI GANESHU, LONDON

IT IS WITH JOY AND LOVE THAT I HUMBLY report on the wonderful visit of my guru to London, his first official tour of our city in over ten years. I am told that his predecessor held me as a baby and, while peering deep into my eyes, remarked, "What big eyes she has!" From this point onwards I am sure a deep inner connection was made, and it is truly through his blessings that I find myself fifteen years later reflecting on the journey.

London is rich with Tamil Saivite culture, which permeates my life. I have grown up immersed in these eternal truths, while adjusting to life in the West. Sprouting from the abundance of Tamils in London, temple culture has flourished, with some 23 Saivite temples in the city alone. Barely do I have to travel half an hour before arriving at my local temple, the London Sivan Kovil, which feels like Jaffna in London.

Though we have no lack of temples, it has been challenging for me, as a youth growing up in the West, to understand my religion

completely and apply it to life outside my immediate family. For example, when at school, how does one explain their home life, filled with sadhana, prayers and temple visits? My family are my world—they have inspired me to stay deeply connected, and we live together, three generations as one. To some in the West, this may be an alien concept, and to speak of spiritual matters may be considered controversial or at best not relevant. This is why my guru's visit was so important to me, an opportunity to be in the presence of a realized soul where I can simply "just be." My guru knows my heart without my having to say a word. This was a wonderful opportunity to reaffirm the eternal question, "Who am I?"

Excited and expectant, we traveled to the airport to meet our spiritual preceptor, bringing flower garlands and flowers aplenty. Welcoming him to the UK was an opportunity not to be missed! Then, immersed in a bubble of love, we set out from the airport with him on a joyful journey which started with my own home, the first of

many glorious satsangs and temple visits. Our home has been the venue for London's monthly satsangs for about two years now, but this time it was different. The monthly pada pujas are usually quite vibrant, as we feel our guru's presence during the invocation through chants, but this time he was actually there in his physical form. It was a scintillating experience, though preparation was a little nerve wracking!

My grandfather performed the puja, and our home felt alive with energy. It was out of this world! A particular highlight was hearing words on Saivism, my sect of Hinduism, straight from the mouth of one with immense wisdom. Somehow even though I had heard the words before, they seemed to permeate deeply when heard so sweetly and directly from my guru.

We visited six of London's most established Saiva temples. At each one we attended elaborate pujas and enjoyed wonderful musical performances, with melodic flute, violin, mridangam and thavil recitals.

Our first public event, the welcoming

Greeting the guru: (left) Pitchai Gurukkal welcomes Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami at the London Sri Murugan Temple. (this page, top to bottom) The Santhirapala family prepare for the visit to their home; Satguru's upadesha inside the London Sivan Kovil; traditional welcome at the London Sivan Temple; author Gajanani Ganeshu.



PHOTOS BY MARAGATHAM PASUPATHI

ceremony at London Sri Murugan Temple, left me speechless. As soon as Satguru placed his feet in the temple, it resonated with Sivacharyas chanting our Guru Mantra. It was such a powerful and uplifting experience that I had to take a step back to find my balance. Our next stop was Enfield Nagapoosani Amman Temple, which was celebrating its annual festival (thiruvilha). We felt the beauty and loving motherly grace deeply. This was equally felt when we went to Sri Rajarajeswari Amman Temple in Stoneleigh. Here for the first time I saw three pujas performed at once—that was awe inspiring!

At Shree Ghanapathy Temple I attended a workshop on Saivism, presented by my guru. This was an immense boon, as I learned about Saivism in English alongside seventy or so other participants. Some were youth like me, while others were young at heart, which shows religion connects with an essence deeper than our physical form.

During my guru's previous official visit to London, when I was just five years old, I sang to him at Highgate Hill Murugan Temple. Looking back, I wonder where I found the courage. He gifted me with lemon rice as prasadam, and since then lemon rice has been a favorite of mine. Ten years on, I stood with him again in Highgate Hill Murugan Temple, reflecting on how much had changed yet stayed the same. A guru is a friend for life and my constant.

The last public event was at my local



temple, London Sivan Kovil, which has a traditional oduvar, a singer of sacred songs. He captivated our hearts with his rendering of the Tirumurai hymns in praise of Siva. I felt I had been transported to Jaffna!

Jaffna is the place of my origin, and visiting there on pilgrimage feels in many ways akin to going home. My lineage of gurus passes through Jaffna; and one in particular, Siva Yogaswami, appeared to be leading us around London. It was wonderful to hear stories of Yogaswami from elders, true affirmations of how a guru can change one's life forever through selfless guru bhakti. His presence was most clearly felt in our visit to Shanti Nilayam, a hall dedicated to him. We were delighted to locate Yogaswami's paduka, his sandals. This was such a boon! I felt I was witnessing a historical puja as my guru performed puja to his guru's guru! It truly felt as though Paramaguru Siva Yogaswami was standing right next to me.

Another memorable moment was strolling with Satguru through the grounds of

Kew Royal Botanical Gardens. I especially enjoyed the Palm House, filled with tropical and exotic plants from around the world. It led me to contemplate on the simplicity of nature, so beautiful at the same time, much like the soul which abides within. I felt I was being transformed from inside out, coming closer and closer to my guru. Our teachings emphasize a positive self concept, and being in the presence of my guru, even when no words were spoken, brought out the most refined essence that lay in me.

It was a great blessing to be present for my guru's entire visit, and I feel I have undergone an inner transformation. I cannot quite describe it, but something has changed. The visit is, without a doubt, a highlight of my humble fifteen years. Just one simple sweet glance from his eyes says more than one could ever write.

The Author: Gajanani Ganeshu, 15, is a schoolgirl of Jaffna Tamil descent born in Germany and now living in London with her family

Dancing for Lords Ganesha and Siva

Two sisters from Arizona fly to Hawaii for a single purpose: to offer their loving talents to the temple Deities

BY SHREYA & AKSHAYA VENKATESH

MY NAME IS SHREYA AND I AM 16 YEARS OLD. SINCE I WAS five, I have been learning the art of Bharatanatyam, a form of Indian classical dance. Depicting the divine poses present in the Lasya by Goddess Parvati and in the Tandava by Lord Nataraja Himself, Bharatanatyam conveys devotional praise and beautiful stories to any audience. What is most amazing about Bharatanatyam, and what sets it apart from many other dance forms, is that it can explain complex ideas and stories to inform people about Indian culture and social issues. Perhaps most fulfilling for the dancer, Bharatanatyam can incite awe, joy and devotion from the audience through sharp, precise movements and artful expressions.

Although these facts are important, they do not come close to expressing the reason for my love of the art form. Bharatanatyam is one of the few forms of dance in which the dancer can actually convey emotion through facial expressions and movements, also known as *abhinaya*. While it may be strenuous at times, it gives me so much joy to explain Indian mythological stories through dance to an American audience and watch them appreciate different cultures and values. Being given the opportunity to dance at Kauai's Hindu Monastery was a blessing, and I was happy to hear that the attendees could embrace their devotion for Lord Nataraja through my dancing.

To me, dance is freedom and comfort. Being able to create something beautiful using only my own movements is something amazing that only dance can provide. I enjoy putting effort into making my style of dance excite an audience and getting them interested in the stories I tell. To put it simply, dance is the language I know best. If I could speak the words, they would be powerful, but those words would never capture the depth and meaning that dance can.



I AM AKSHAYA, SHREYA'S 11-YEAR-OLD SISTER. I STARTED TAKING Bharatanatyam classes when I was six. Dancing at the Siva temple in Hawaii was an amazing experience. I really felt I was able to show my devotion to God through my dance. I wanted to dance to a song that talks about the lord of good fortune, Ganesha. We worship Lord Ganesha before beginning any new task and seek His blessings to remove any obstacles along the way.

I always love to perform. While dancing, I forgot about the huge crowd of people; I felt like God was the only one watching me. It is incredible how much dedication and time is being devoted by the holy monks at the monastery for the Hindu Deities. Being able to dance in front of God and the monks was a huge honor on the auspicious day of Guru Purnima.

Dance is precious to my sister and me, and we were so happy to be surrounded in the mandapam by 108 bronze tandavas (dance poses) of Lord Nataraja carved in bronze, 54 on each side. This experience was the highlight of our visit to Hawaii!



Accomplished sisters: Shreya (right) and her sister Akshaya pose with Lord Ganesha outside of the Kadavul Hindu Temple in Hawaii

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Shreya Venkatesh is a high school senior at BASIS Scottsdale in Arizona. She recently received an Outstanding Achievement Award in environmental stewardship from President Obama. Akshaya attends seventh grade at BASIS Scottsdale in Arizona. She loves music, fashion and theater performance. Akshaya was a global finalist in the 2016 International Schools Essay Competition on the topic, "Are Sustainable Cities Possible?"

Hindu Heritage Endowment

The Power of Bequests: Making a Difference with the Stroke of a Pen

The Iraivan Temple Endowment, fund #2, received almost \$2 million from the estate of the late Dr. Devananda Tandavan. "A gift like that is one of the reasons bequests have been the fastest growing source of charitable revenue in the United States over the past 40 years," said Phil Murphy, HHE's former planned giving specialist.

He added that those of lesser means than Dr. Tandavan can use the same charitable tool to make a commitment to a larger gift than they thought possible and in a way that does not affect their current finances.

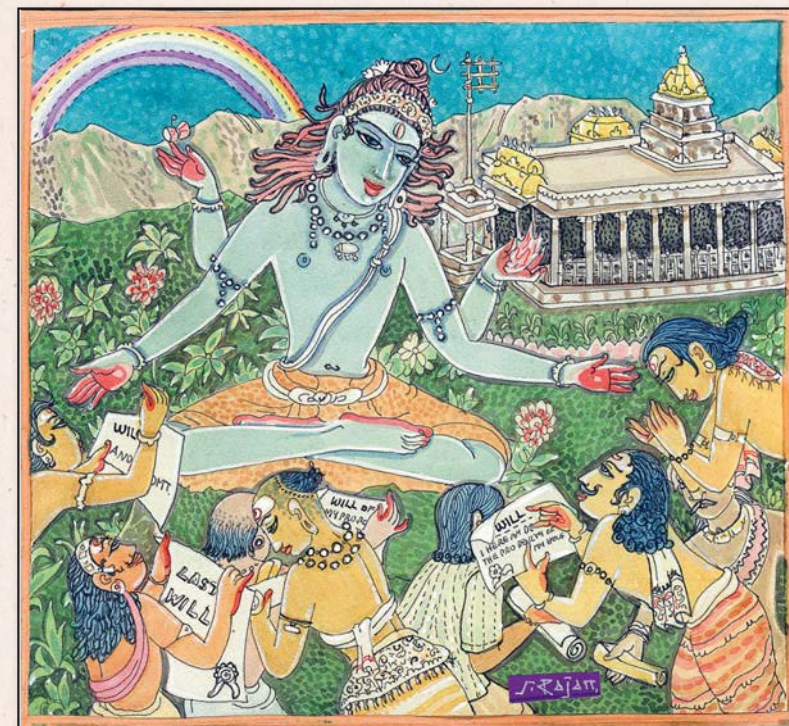
"Bequests are powerful tools that make a big difference to good causes," Murphy points out. "Yet they keep the donor in complete control of his or her resources during life. That's why they're the most popular way of making an estate gift to charity." Giving USA reports that said bequests accounted for \$31.76 billion in gifts to U.S. charities in 2015 alone.

"Most of those gifts didn't come close to Dr. Tandavan's \$2 million," he notes; "\$5,000 and \$10,000 bequests are far more common than the whopper bequests that make headlines. But they can be the largest single gift that an individual ever makes. Also, they're completely revocable. If someone's circumstances change, they're free to change their bequest."

Given the flexibility of bequests, why do less than ten percent of US decedents leave a bequest to charity? "The main barrier is psychological," Murphy asserts. "Most adults die without a written estate plan. We tend to put off writing our wills because we don't want to face our mortality. But without something official in writing, charities you care about get nothing."

Those who do leave bequests to good causes see it as a way of giving their children a final message. "One donor with three children and six grandchildren told me that her charitable bequest was part of her children's inheritance," Murphy recalls. "It's my final reminder to them to care about others," she told me. Charitable bequests, though perhaps a small part of your total estate, tell people what you stood for during life. That's part of their power."

For suggested bequest language or to learn more about setting up your own estate and life income plan to provide immediate tax and income benefits to you and your family, while also providing a future gift to the temple, contact Shanmuganathaswami at 808-822-3012 ext. 6 or visit www.hheonline.org. For an estate planning toolkit visit www.hheonline.org/tool-kit.shtml



Devotees beseech the blessings of Lord Siva to help draft bequests to benefit their families and their favorite charity, in this case the Iraivan Temple Endowment in Hawaii

JULY TO SEPTEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment	299.00	Hindu Press International Endowment Fund	
Homer Lewis Gibson Estate	US\$32,315.38	Hiranya Gowda	63.00
Anonymous	117.46		
Janava Dharmadeva	1,248.00	Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund	
Roshan Harilela	375.00	Mano Navaratnarajah	225.00
Gunasekaran Kandasamy	148.00	Gassa Patten	1,350.00
Gayatri Rajan	75.00	Total	1,575.00
Puvaneswary Roberts	300.00		
Chamundi Sabanathan	100.00	Spiritual Park of Mauritius Endowment	
Aran Sambandar	108.00	Anil Kumar	36.00
Keith Wallach	54.00		
Other Donations	30,000.00	Positive Discipline Endowment	
Total	64,840.84	Vinaya Alahan	22.00
Iraivan Temple Endowment		Tirumular Sannidhi Preservation Fund	
Anonymous	15.84	Shyamadeva Dandapani	33.00
Frank Burkhardt	30.00	Srinivas R. Madaboosi	300.00
Gunasegaran Chitravelloo	11.54	Total	333.00
Kiran Davane	17.67		
Dinesh Kumar Jayaram	7.08	Kauai Aadheenam Religious Art and Artifacts Fund	
A. Paranthaman	28.30	Rajadeva Alahan	51.00
Jayaram Rajaletchumi	11.54		
Krishanth Rajasooriyar	10.00	Murugan Temple of North America Pillaiyar Shrine Fund	
Indrani Shanmugasundram	11.54	Sayanthan & Anupama Sivanathan	5.00
Yuvanes Waran	20.00	Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00
Other Donations	30,000.00	Sayanthan & Anupama Sivanathan	10.00
Total	30,163.51	Total	165.00
Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund		Thank You Bodhinatha Fund	
Thirujnanam Arnassalon	22.54	Anonymous	14,622.80
Anuradha Badhwar	138.45	Vel Alahan	108.00
Mekaladeva Batumallah	53.00	Anil Ananda Badhwar	11.00
Gunavadee Caremben	20.02	Radhakrishnamurthy Bhandaru	101.00
Somasundaram Caremben	20.02	Gunasegaran Chitravelloo	113.00
Sukanta Caremben	20.02	Peter Christian	50.00
Shailesh Girish	9.74	Amarnath & Latha Devarmanai	324.00
Kamila Jagambrum	81.25	Janava Dharmadeva	108.00
Juhivaasana Koothan	8.46	Debashis Ghosh	300.00
Anil Kumar	81.00	K. Jananayagam	1,254.90
Suguna Kutty-Skanda	116.90	Gunasekaran Kandasamy	537.74
Ashwini Maureemootoo	16.90	Michael Kempinski	1,080.00
Saroja Maureemootoo	11.34	Silvarajoo Muniandy	101.00
Anonymous	26.90	Mano Navaratnarajah	150.00
Jogendra Moorooogen	5.64	Aran Sambandar	162.00
Vidyadevi Moorooogen	5.64	Aran Sendan	108.00
Toshadevi Nataraj	60.00	Hridaya Sivalingam	5.00
Kalpana & Rajesh Oberoi	151.00	Tejasinha Sivalingam	20.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	49.98	Ramesh Sivanathan	24.52
Chinmayie Rajasankara	7.18	Anba Dayananden Valayten	10.98
Thangaratnam Sanmugam	201.00	Vayudeva Varadan	171.00
Adiyan Omkara Sendan	2.50	Sahunthala Vinothachandran	1,008.00
Chidambaram Sendan	2.50	Michael Wasylkiw	648.00
Hemavalli Sivalingam	4.37	Total	21,018.94
Total	1,116.35		
		Udayan Care Endowment Fund	
Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund		Rajendra Giri	110.00
Vishal Agarwal	499.00		
Parkash & Sarota Ahluwalia	299.00	Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment	
Jim & Nancy Barnhart	299.00	Shyamal Chandra Debnath	150.00
Hemaksheshaa Naatha Batumallah	53.00		
Shawn Binda	299.00	Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund	
Uma Boshier	299.00	Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00
Bhadresh & Kusum Desai	299.00		
Tarakini Gunasegaran	6.00	Manitha Neyam Trust Fund	
Sanjay Jeganathan	299.00	Bala Sivaceyon	20.00
Viswanathar Kailasapillai	299.00	Devaladevi Sivaceyon	30.00
M.A.V Trust	299.00	Nutanaya Sivaceyon	30.00
Matthew McDermott	240.00	Total	80.00
Bhaveshan Moorghen	8.46		
Shanda Kumaran Moorghen	8.46	Manjung Hindu Sabha Orphanage Fund	
Udeyadeva Moorghen	8.46	Anonymous	100.00
A.L. Muthiah	299.00		
Bijamati Pareatumbree	60.00	Pazhassi Balamandiram Orphanage Fund	
Varsha Patel	299.00	Mohit Dhingra	375.00
Ramchand Persaud	299.00	Rajendra Giri	110.00
Prashanth Seetharam	299.00	Total	485.00
Manoj Sharma	299.00		
Amy Sherrer	299.00	Karnataka Temple Development Fund	
Sai Singh	120.00	Shankerbhai & Chandrakantaben Patel	501.51
Devaladevi Sivaceyon	203.06		
Javanya Skanda	155.86		
Lakshmi Chandrashekar Subramanian			

JULY TO SEPTEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Swami Vipulananta Children's Home Endowment		Hindu American Foundation Endowment	
Canaganayagam Kugendra	60.00	Toshadevi Nataraj	30.00
		Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment	
Hindu Literature Fund		Anonymous	74.52
John & Abha Wiersba	153.00	Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	1.39
		Ananda Manickam	51.00
Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund		Natraj Narayanswami	55.00
Hiranya Gowda	153.00	Toshadevi Nataraj	30.00
Rajagopal Krishnan	40.00	Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan	150.00
Total	193.00	K. Vasanthakumari	50.00
		Arunasalam Vathavooran	75.00
Himalayan Academy Book Distribution Fund		Total	486.91
Shyamadeva Dandapani	33.00	Jaffna Kannathidddy Kali Kovil Endowment	
		Ravi Madapati	200.00
Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment		Krishanth Rajasooriyar	10.00
Kerry-Fleur Schleifer	40.00	Total	210.00
Anonymous	1,108.46	Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund	
Marlene Carter	162.00	Ishani Chowdhury	75.00
Sasikumar Darmalingam	8.00	Anil Kumar	27.00
Aloka Pagrut	51.00	Total	102.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01		
Purany Ponniah	75.00	Digital Dharma Endowment	
Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan	150.00	Anonymous	236.54
Lucy Soutter	40.00	Gunasekaran Kandasamy	74.00
Total	1,684.47	Chamundi Sabanathan	108.00
		Total	418.54
Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund		Insurance Premiums	
Vayudeva Varadan	54.00	Mrunal Patel	3,003.00
India Hindu Temple Cleaning Fund		Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment	
Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	2.80	Other Donations	600.00
Hiranya Gowda	99.00		
Manogaran Mardemootoo	14.08		
Kulagan Moonesawmy	16.90		
Toshadevi Nataraj	60.00		
Total	192.78		
		Total Contributions	\$155,763.78
Anantha Ladies Home Endowment		Funds at Market Value, Sep 30, 2016	
Praneel Chandra Gosai	200.00		
Sayanthan & Anupama Sivanathan	30.00	Total Endowment Funds	\$14,054,198.12
Total	230.00		
		Grand Total	\$14,054,198.12

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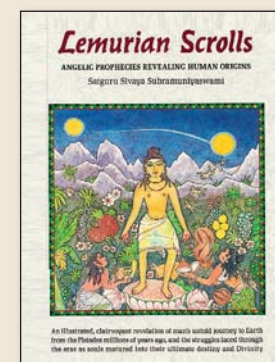
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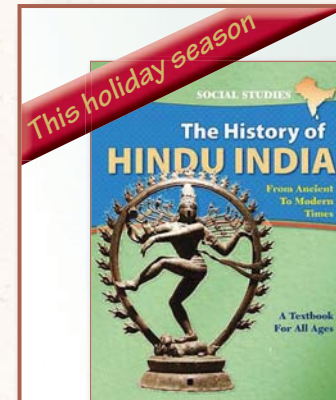
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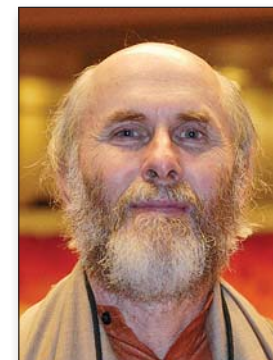


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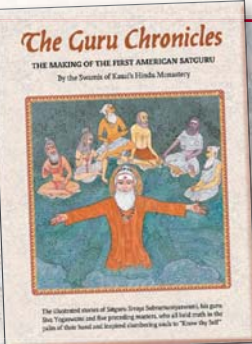
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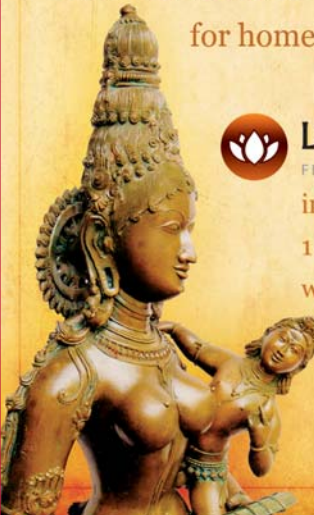
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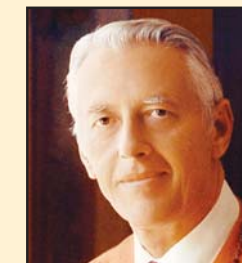
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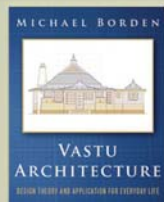
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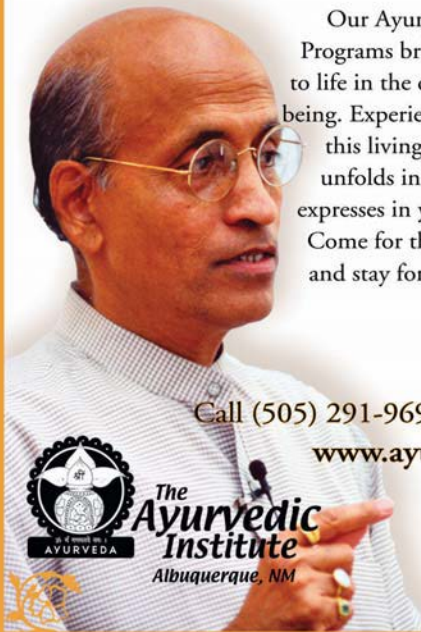
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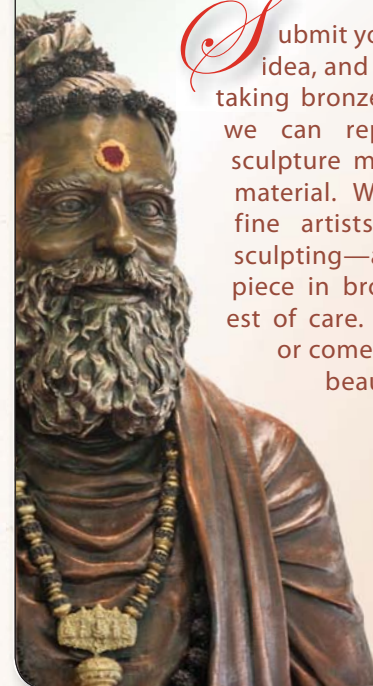
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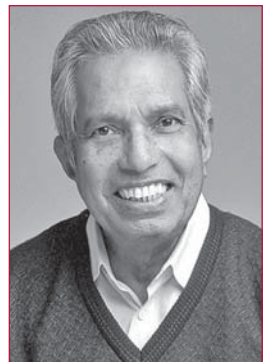
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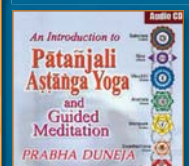
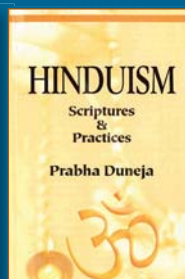
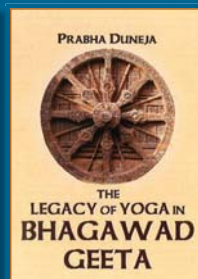
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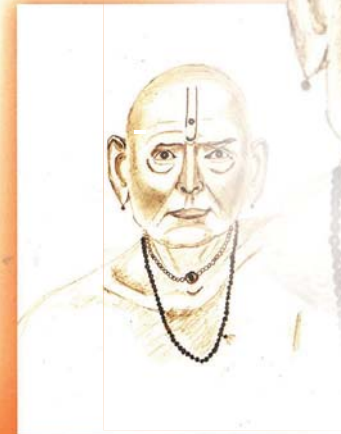
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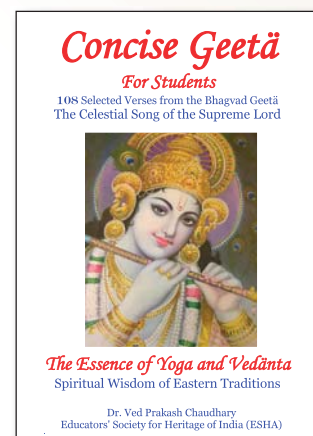


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DIGITAL DHARMA

FILM

Awake: The Life of Yogananda

FOR THOSE CLOSE TO PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA and his teachings, it was no surprise that a movie was finally made about his remarkable life. The 2014 biographical documentary *Awake: The Life of Yogananda* attempts to summarize the famous yogi's sojourn on Earth in 90 minutes of fascinating visuals, interviews with celebrities and close disciples. There is also rare footage of him interacting with his guru, Sri Yukteswar, upon his return to India in 1935 after 15 years of teaching in the West.

Paramahansa Yogananda was initiated into sannyas in 1915 after youthful years filled with spiritual visions, intense meditation, seclusion and of searching for his guru. For those unfamiliar, he authored the 1949 spiritual classic *Autobiography of a Yogi*, a dramatic account of his own life. Published three years before his great departure, the autobiography introduced millions of

Western seekers to meditation and kriya yoga, and it still continues to inspire. Yogananda also founded Self Realization Fellowship (SRF), an international nonprofit spiritual organization based out of Los Angeles.

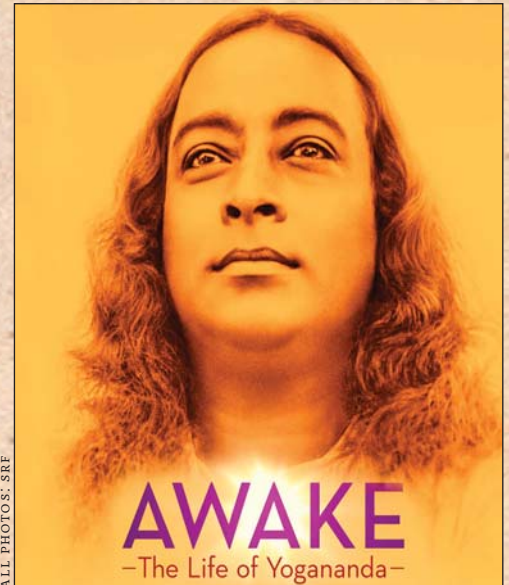
Awake: The Life of Yogananda is a nonlinear account of the guru's life and teachings. The movie focuses on his "science of religion" explanation of meditation within mystical Hinduism. The narrator speaks as Yogananda as if in an autobiographical story, but we also hear Yogananda's own sharp voice during the film. His voice brings energy, and gives us an idea of what it was like to be with him in those exciting spiritual times.

The film portrays Yogananda's visions of his mother's death and the first meeting with his guru, Sri Yukteswar, set in a contemporaneous historical theme of Indian and US history. A reenactment of the seeker's ten years spent with his guru in Serampore,

India, places emphasis on the teachings he received, which Yogananda would treasure and teach throughout his life.

Directors Paola di Florio and Lisa Leeman created a dynamic visual presentation, giving old, static, archived footage a magical, modern feel. To appeal to a wide audience, as Yogananda himself did, they reveal how neuroscience and physics apply to meditation and wellbeing. Harvard trained physicist

www.hinduismtoday.com



ALL PHOTOS: SRF

A glance at a yogi: (clockwise from above) The film's cover photo; Yogananda standing in front of an advertisement for one of his lectures, which attracted crowds by the thousands to over-filled lecture halls; Yogananda with God-intoxicated yogini Anandamayi Ma and her husband, who was under a lifetime vow of silence.

..... Anita Goel and neuroscientist Andrew Newberg explain how science supports Yogananda's method of meditation, which is one of his greatest contributions to the world.

The movie also covers the early years of SRF, including legal struggles and the air of controversy surrounding the exotic swami from India.

While the film feels rushed, one can't help but get lost in this miraculous tale, so far overdue in the telling. For those of us only familiar with Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*—don't expect to see it in this film. *Awake* comes from quite another perspective in portraying his life than the classic autobiography so many seekers hold dear to their hearts.

