

HINDUISM TODAY

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



Sri Madhva: Making A Difference



S. RAJAM



THOMAS KELLY

COVER: With Lord Vishnu, his divine beloved, offering blessings, Saint Madhvacharya teaches the reality of dualism from his monastic seat of authority in Udupi; (above) a young pilgrim honors Ramana Maharishi in the Tiruvannamalai meditation cave

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Ancient Path, Modern Youth

Young Hindus
share their India
pilgrimage stories
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Elephant blessing: *Deivayanai, Tiruchendur Temple's 8-year-old elephant, blesses 6-year-old Chidambaram Sendan with a tap on the head*

Welcome

TO HINDUISM TODAY'S DIGITAL EDITION!

I am pleased to welcome you to the free digital edition of Hinduism Today magazine. It is the fulfillment of a vision held by my Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of Hinduism Today, to bring the magazine's profound Hindu teachings to the widest possible audience. The text of each issue has long been available on the Web, right back to 1979, but without the photographs and art. Now you have here the entire contents of the printed edition, with all photos and art. Plus, it is interactive—every link is live; click and you go to a web page. You can participate in the magazine in a number of ways, accessed through buttons on the right. And you can help support this free edition in two ways: make an online contribution (even a small one); patronize our specialized advertisers. Explore the resources here, enjoy our latest edition and e-mail us if you are inspired.

Bodhinatha Veylanawami

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Part of an on-going initiative of the World Council of Religious Leaders, Israeli rabbis host a second Hindu-Jewish summit

ISRAEL

Hindus and Jews Are Talking

RECIPROCATING THE FIRST HINDU-JEWISH SUMMIT HELD in Delhi in February, 2007, Israel hosted the second summit in Jerusalem, February 17-20, 2008. A model for the kind of inter-religious dialog needed in this world, it was a fruitful meeting of two ancient, non-proselytizing religions who shared their beliefs, traditions, and ideals, finding much common ground. Of the nine resolutions signed by the summit, the one of particular significance for Jewish-Hindu community relations states: "The *swastika* is an ancient and greatly auspicious symbol of the Hindu tradition...A distorted version of this sacred symbol was misappropriated by the Third Reich in Germany...The participants recognize that this symbol is and has been sacred to Hindus for millennia, long before its misappropriation."

SRI LANKA

Seniors' Home A Model for All Hindus

THE SIVA POOMI ELDERLY Home was built and is run by the Siva Poomi Trust, founded by Aru Tirumurugan, one of Sri Lanka's prominent Hindu leaders.

One of several programs run by the trust, the seniors' home is a noteworthy model for other Hindu communities. Whether split apart from their families by war, as in Sri Lanka, or by the constantly moving lifestyle of young professionals following new job offers in foreign countries, Hindu elders are increasingly being isolated and discarded. Jaffna's Siva Poomi

Elderly Home is a creative solution. Life in an elderly nursing home would normally be the last thing that Hindus families would want for their parents. But here residents live together in a spiritual environment, are

cared for and maintain their traditional culture and lifestyle. Twice a month, the facility hosts a cultural event with drama, music and dance. What began as a simple presentation performed by the local



Daily exercise at the elderly home keeps residents healthy and alert

DIASPORA

F I J I

Strength thru Joy: Holi in Fiji

THE RENOWNED SPRING Festival of Colors, Holi, was observed in Fiji by thousands of devotees on March 22, 2008. An ancient agricultural harvest festival, it evolved to become one of several Hindu annual commemorations of the triumph of good over evil. Holi is particularly popular among North-Indian Vaishnavites, who celebrate Lord Vishnu's defeat of demon-king Hiranyakshyapu.

Shalendra Prasad writes from Fiji: "The colorful festival bridges the social gap and renews sweet relationships. On this day, people hug and wish each other 'Happy Holi.' Devotees join in small groups known as *mandalis* and move around their area singing devotional songs and playing with colors."

Holi is much more than celebrating the harvest or the triumph of the Gods over demons. The boisterous and uninhibited splashing of colors crosses class and caste boundaries, melding Hindu society in a spirit of love, joy and devotion.



Children of Carreras Road in Nadi, Fiji, splash colors on each other while elders sing devotional songs

B H A R A T

Avalanche of Christian "Aid" Falls on India

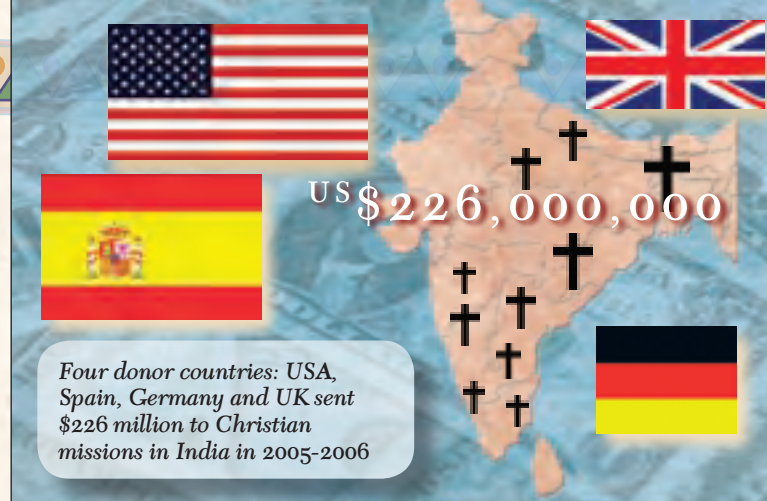
EACH YEAR THE INDIAN government's Ministry of Home Affairs issues the report "Receipt of Foreign Contributions by Voluntary Associations." With just 58% of the 32,000 registered associations reporting for 2005-2006, the total contributions were US\$2 billion. Nine of the top fifteen donor agencies are Christian, six are secular and none is Hindu.

The amounts reported by these nine organizations and their countries of origin are: **Gospel Fellowship Trust, India (USA)**, \$60 million; **Gospel for Asia (USA)**, \$36 million; **Fundación Vicent Ferrer (Alicante,**

Spain), \$27 million; **Christian Aid (UK)**, \$21 million; **Miseror Mozartstrasse (Germany)**, \$20 million; **Fundación Vicente Ferrer (Madrid, Spain)**, \$20 million; **Kindemothilfe (Germany)**, \$14 million; **Manos Unidas (Spain)** \$13 million; **Missio Germany (Germany)**, \$13 million. That totals \$226 million in aid from Christian organizations.

Secular organizations sent a total of \$110 million, as follows: **Plan International (UK)** \$29 million; **Oxfam (UK)**, \$20 million; **NOVIB, (Netherlands)**, \$19 million; **Department for International Development (UK)**, \$16 million; **Save the Children Fund (UK)**, \$14 million; and **Population Service International (USA)**, \$13 million.

One example of how the Christians use their funds comes from the The Gospel for Asia mission statement for India: "Plant another 300 Baptist



churches, start 10 Christian schools and establish 3 Bible colleges within the next 10 years." They claim to have already planted 156 Grace Baptist churches and converted 20,000 people. Germany's Kindemothilfe, founded in 1992, "encourages monthly sponsorship of a needy child. The sponsorship of 60 marks a month is transferred to the native churches and Christian organizations of

third world countries."

Many of the sponsored activities by Christian organizations are secular in nature, with relief work, rural development and child welfare topping the list of activities. Hindus, of course, support similar work on a large scale also, but not necessarily with foreign contributions. Still, the amount of money sent in by organizations with conversion goals is unnerving.



A visitor at Singapore's National Library during its recent KaalaChakra exhibition views a replica of a Tamil inscription (13th century AD), found in Wat Pra Mahathat, Thailand

S I N G A P O R E

KaalaChakra Revelations

FROM NOVEMBER, 2007, TO May, 2008, the Singapore Library put on the Kaala Chakra exhibit, which focused on the cross-cultural interactions between India and South-east Asia from prehistoric times. Galleries of Southeast Asian artifacts and replicas showed Indian Hindu and

Buddhist scripts as far back as the 1st and 2nd centuries ce. Also featured was the history of the Hindu kingdoms of Indonesia, Malaysia and Cambodia. Stone inscriptions showed evidence of Tamil settlements in Indonesia, Thailand and China dating as far back as the 9th century. One young man visiting from India said, "I used to wonder why Tamil is such a common language here in Singapore. Only after I visited this exhibition did I realize it goes back to the BCE ages!"

N O T S O S A C R E D

Beware Fake Rudrakshas

WITH THE SPREAD OF Saivite Hinduism around the world, the sacred rudraksha seed, mystic talisman of God Siva's divine compassion and grace, has become a hot commodity. Their value varies, based on form and number of "faces," and they have become a cash crop for skilled forgers. Take a betel nut and carve it with 20 lines and you have a 21-faced rudraksha. Grind off the sides of two seeds, glue them together and you have a "Gauri-Sankar" (Siva-Shakti) bead. For other species' seeds with similar textures just dye brown and attach a gold clasp.

Some fakes are astonishing in their skilled execution. Our HINDUISM TODAY staff had

.....
A four-inch tall fake rudraksha sold by a Nepalese couple at Batu Caves, Malaysia, for US\$100. Rudraksha pieces were skillfully glued onto the surface of a small coconut filled with dry red earth.

fun cutting open the four-inch "rudraksha" below. To our utter amazement it was made from a small coconut. Fakes are everywhere. Buyer beware. For info: www.rudraksha-ratna.com





Viswamitra appears on the scene after surviving an attack by Ravana in the first segment of "Ramayan Reloaded"

U S A

Virgin Comics: Wrong Turn

IN THE JULY 2006 ISSUE OF HINDUISM TODAY, we announced the release of a series of comic books based on Indian themes under the inspiration of Deepak Chopra in collaboration with Virgin Comics. It seemed

like a good idea at the time, though we hadn't seen any of the comics. Their web site states the intent: "The creation of original stories and character properties that tap into the vast library of mythology and re-invent the rich indigenous narratives of Asia in a unique, compelling and entertaining way." To date, Deepak Chopra has been successful in presenting Hindu metaphysics in an articulate, clear-minded and uplifting way—albeit distanced from its religious roots.

So one might have hoped for something better than what has come out of this venture. The four comics we reviewed, *Ramayan Reloaded*, *Shiva*, *Ganesha* and *Karttikeya*,

are loosely based on scriptural stories; but presented as they are in action comic style, they convey little to nothing of the spiritual insight of their sources.

These are your typical comics aimed at teenage boys, complete with muscled heros, sensuous heroines, ugly villains, and lots of violence inflicted by implausible weapons and vehicles. Most *Virgin Comics* are at least well drawn (see www.virgincomics.com); but these, especially the Ganesha and Karttikeya books, are amateurish, with a testosterone driven plot line and dialogue to match.

BRIEFLY...

AFTER A 50-YEAR HIATUS ON digs in the area, archaeologists will be excavating two Harappan sites near Noida and Meerut (Pakistan) to determine when exactly the "eastern limit" of the Indus Valley civilization flourished. Local residents have been finding artifacts believed to date between 1500 bce and 700 bce.

IN A MOVE TO CALM ONE ISSUE raised in Malaysia by the Indian community, the government has recently announced it will again allow or renew

the visas of Hindu temple priests, musicians and sculptors currently in Malaysia—visas previously easily extended and then suddenly denied.

CELEBRATION OF TAMIL NEW Year on April 13 in government-run temples was banned by Tamil Nadu's DMK ruling party this year. Pongal was chosen as the official "new" New Year. The ban was ignored by several large temples, and Hindus in Tamil Nadu celebrated the occasion despite the govern-



Prince Angad, leader of the Vanara asuras out to stop Lord Rama on his way to Lanka, sporting video underworld weapons

ment's fiat. Festoons were seen everywhere and feasts were held at almost every home.

TIRUPATI'S VENKATESWARA Employees' Training Academy, launched a seven-day training program on "Hindu system of worship" in April, exclusively for the fishermen community. The 45 selected trainees will become temple pujaris in their respective hamlets and maintain a temple on their own.

NEPAL'S APRIL ELECTION RESULTS surprised the world as the Maoist party took 220 seats of the 601-seat assembly. The Nepali Congress party won 110 seats and the Unified

Marxist-Leninist's took third place with 103 seats. If, as expected, the Maoists dominate in a coalition government, the first items on their agenda are abolition of the monarchy and ending Nepal's status as the world's only "Hindu state."

THE TAMIL NADU GOVERNMENT announced that yoga would be made a compulsory subject in all schools in the state from the next academic year. Education Minister Thangam Thennarasu announced that they have trained 110,000 teachers in private and government schools in the state, with the help of 300 yoga instructors.



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

Inter-religious Marriage

What our youth should know about the potential stumbling blocks of multi-faith marriages

BY DR. DILIP AMIN

AS THE FORMER PRESIDENT of a religious school, I only regret one point of collective inaction: though we had taught our kids about our religion, we failed to teach them the practical aspects of interacting with young people from other faiths. In the Western world, it is quite common that young adults date those from other faiths during their college years. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that at least one-third of our young generation of Hindus marry outside of their faith.

Religious differences can bring unexpected complexities to married life. While I feel interfaith relationships should develop based on a mutual respect for religious diversity, sometimes major differences in fundamental beliefs pose difficulties in finding a common ground. Hindus carry the attitude that all religions are good, that all bring their faithful closer to God, and thus deserve respect. But this tolerant attitude is not universal. Many Christian, Jewish and Muslim families believe in the Abrahamic monotheistic dogma. Their holy books reject what they misconstrue as a Hindu belief in polytheism. Specifically, Hindus believe that although the Ultimate Reality, Nirguna Brahman, is singular, nameless and formless, its qualities can be worshiped in many forms, Saguna Brahman. This poses a serious issue when it comes to puja, which is considered idol worship, a practice forbidden in the Abrahamic religions. Their Ten Commandments decree: "I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other Gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the Earth beneath, or that is in the water under the Earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for, I the Lord your God, am a jealous God."

Islam forbids marriage with a nonbeliever in Allah. Thus, a non-Muslim potential spouse is expected to convert to Islam by taking the Shahada oath, the declaration that there is no God but Allah and Muham-



mad is His apostle. In some Christian sects, there is also often intense pressure from family members and the clergy for the non-Christian spouse to convert by the sacrament of baptism before the church wedding. An uninformed Hindu will oftentimes discover the expectation of religious conversion after years of being in a romantic relationship.

Religious conversion may be a matter of just a brief ceremony, but do not underestimate this ritual as a trivial matter. It will not just satisfy the sentiments of the parents-in-law, but you will find that it is a binding commitment guarded by every member of your new community. As per the Shahada oath, you will be forbidden to display a statue of any God in your own home. Offering prayers or supplications to anyone, living or dead, is an unpardonable sin. Furthermore, attempting to later reclaim yourself as a Hindu, even after divorce, can be punishable by death or life imprisonment by some Middle Eastern countries' laws (such legislation is also pending approval in Pakistan). Therefore, you should be prepared to accept conversion to a new religion as a serious and potentially irreversible process.

Most conflicts in inter-religious marriages will surface after you have children. Faithful people from all traditions usually consider it vital that their children follow their religion. So, which will it be?

Before entering into a relationship, one should have an open dialog, discussing expectations and recognizing the far-reaching consequences. Though dealing with this issue early on will obviously be important for the well being of the couple, it is also a significant issue for their children, not to mention the couple's extended families, who take pride in preserving their religious and cultural traditions that have been passed down for generations.

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Who Is the Greatest God?

Rivalries abound in the world, even among Hindus, who occasionally vie for the supremacy of their Deity: Vishnu or Siva

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

HAVE YOU EVER HEARD A DISCUSSION between two or more Hindus as to who is greater, Vishnu or Siva? As is the case with many philosophical issues in Hinduism, there is, of course, more than one point of view.

Historically, the rivalry of sects has occasionally become violent. In 1760 two great throngs vying for supremacy clashed on the final day of bathing at the Kumbha Mela in the holy city of Haridwar. Violence ensued and Saiva and Vaishnava *naga babas* turned the festival into a killing ground. In all, 18,000 monks died that day.

In modern times, the rivalries are more verbal than physical, but they are real and not infrequent. In fact, they arise more lately, because Saivas and Vaishnavas are mixing freely. A Hindu family's friends and neighbors are just as likely to be from another sect—unlike in olden days when sectarian communities were more isolated and homogenous. Plus, these days one can find Vishnu and Siva side by side in the same temple, something unheard of even 50 years ago. Such temple arrangements themselves confuse worshipers, provoking them to wonder, "Who is the greatest among the Gods?"

Our first answer is based on the Vaishnava scripture *Srimad Bhagavatam* (also called *Bhagavata Purana*), in which Lord Vishnu/Krishna is the Supreme, all-embracing God of all Gods. The *Bhagavatam* enjoins devotees of Lord Krishna to not disrespect Lord Siva, but to worship Him as the greatest of the devotees of Lord Krishna. In other words, a Krishna bhakta also prays to Lord Siva, but asks Siva to assist him in attaining devotion to and the favor of Supreme Lord Krishna. The *Bhagavatam* also contains a story about Siva seated in meditation, eyes closed, chanting on japa beads. It is stated that He is meditating on Lord Vishnu's transcendental form and chanting Vishnu's holy names. In the *Bhagavatam*, Siva is subservient to Lord Vishnu, though He is above the category of an ordinary living being, or jiva. In this position Siva is sometimes referred to as a demigod. In this answer, which represents a Vaishnava point of view, Vishnu is proclaimed to be greater than Siva.

A second answer is found in a story from the Saiva scripture *Siva Purana*. Brahma and Vishnu were engaged in an argument about who was greater. The dispute grew so intense that the world was threatened. The devas requested Lord Siva to intervene. Siva appeared before them in the form of a fiery column of light, called Jyotirlinga, of which they could perceive neither the beginning nor the end. A contest was devised by the two: the one who first found either end of the Jyotirlinga would prevail as the greater. Vishnu mounted his boar (*varaha*) and tunneled downward through the nether worlds; Brahma, mounting his



swan (*hamsa*), ascended through the upper worlds. Failing to find the bottom, and totally exhausted, Vishnu returned to the surface. Brahma, failing to find the summit, resorted to a dishonest ruse. Encountering a *ketaki* flower falling through space, Brahma cajoled it to falsely testify that He had reached the pillar's summit. Upon returning to the surface, he was boasting of his achievement when suddenly Lord Siva appeared in the middle of the Jyotirlinga and unequivocally declared Himself to be beyond their ken and thus the greatest. Brahma

was castigated by Lord Siva for his deceit. Thus Brahma is not worshiped in any temple in India, except in Pushkar, a few miles from Ajmer, in Rajasthan. In this answer, which represents a Saiva point of view, Siva is manifestly greater than Vishnu.

Sometimes the rivalry between the Vaishnavite's staunch adoration of Lord Vishnu and the Saivite's steadfast adoration of Lord Siva goes to extremes. This is illustrated in a classic story that took place at the Shankaranarayana Temple in the Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu, where the main *murti* is one half Siva (Shankara) and the other half Vishnu (Narayana). One day an overly zealous Saivite entered the temple to worship the Lord. Before offering incense, he plugged the nostril of Vishnu with cotton to prevent Him from enjoying the fragrance. Seeing that happen, a bigoted Vaishnavite made his offering, plugging Siva's nostril so only Vishnu would enjoy the offering. The story demonstrates the foolish nature of fanatical sectarianism.

How is it that one *Purana* extols Vishnu as the Supreme and another elevates Siva? Swami Sivananda, founder of the Divine Life Society, explained, "*Vishnu Purana* glorifies Vishnu and in some places gives a lower position to Siva. *Siva Purana* glorifies Siva and gives a lower status to Vishnu. This is only to instill and intensify devotion for the respective Deity in the hearts of the devotees. In reality, no Deity is superior to another. You must understand the heart of the writer." Swami's commentary continues, providing a third answer to our question. "Accordingly, the scriptures hold that Vishnu and Siva are ultimately the same. Smarta theologians have cited many references to support this point. For example, they interpret verses both

ART BY S. RAJAM, INDIA



in the *Sri Rudram*, the most sacred mantra in Saivism, and the *Vishnu Sahasranama*, one of the most sacred prayers in Vaishnavism, to show this unity... Sri Sankara also has said in very clear terms that Siva and Vishnu are the one, all-pervading Soul." In this answer, which represents a Smarta point of view, Vishnu and Siva are equal; and more precisely, they are identical.

This same teaching is found in the *Shikshapatri*, a Vaishnava text written by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. "The *Vedas* proclaim Narayan and Shiv as one and as Brahmaswarup—God's true nature—and, therefore, they should be known accordingly." Bhagwan Swaminarayan enjoins his devotees: "In the month of

Harihara: The traditional statue with Vishnu (Hari) on the right holding the conch and Siva (Hara) on the left bearing the trisula portrays the view that they are a one Deity or, to some, different aspects of the Supreme God.

Shravan they shall worship or engage the services of pious Brahmin devotees to worship Shiv with Bilva-patras and the like."

Sometimes the story of the worship of Sankaranarayana by the bigoted Vaishnavite and overly zealous Saivite is marshalled as proof that sectarianism is inherently narrow-minded and all Hindus would be better off being nonsectarian. However, there is another approach to sectarianism, which is the ground for our fourth answer to the question "Who is greater, Vishnu or Siva?" We can call this the tolerant, sectarian approach. The *Tamil Lexicon*, published by the University of Madras, contains these terse but excellent definitions: "*Saivism*: The religion which regards Siva as the Supreme Being and is exclusively devoted to His worship, of sixteen sects. *Vaishnavam*: The religion which holds Vishnu to be the Supreme Being."

A tolerant sectarian Hindu accepts both of these points and does not conclude that one is true and the other false. They are simply two different names and two different concepts of the Supreme Being. The idea that there can be multiple valid viewpoints about the Supreme is certainly a core Hindu concept. It is captured in the *Rig Veda* (1.164.46): *Ekam Sat viprah bahudha vadanti*, "Truth is One, sages describe it variously."

Renowned philosopher Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, president of India from 1962-1967, offers a definition of Hinduism that stresses the same point. "The Hindu recognizes one Supreme Spirit, though different names are given to it." The conclusion of this tolerant sectarian viewpoint is the same as the Smarta's—"Vishnu and Siva are equal." The basis for this conclusion, though, is different. Here the reason they are equal is that each is the Supreme Being to a different Hindu denomination.

Clearly there is a need for a tolerant, rather than a fanatical or bigoted, sectarianism in today's Hindu world. One of the reasons is that many temple societies outside of India have shrines or adjacent temples to both Siva and Vishnu, with priests of both traditions working closely together, and devotees of both denominations attending.

We had the privilege of attending the 2004 *kumbhabhishekam* of the Siva temple at the invitation of the Hindu Temple Society of Greater Atlanta. Siva's sanctum was built adjacent to a temple for Venkateshwara, Lord Vishnu, which had been constructed years earlier. During our visit, we were greatly impressed that Vaishnava priests were helping in the Saiva ceremonies and vice versa. The smooth working together of these two priesthoods, and of Siva's and Venkateswara's devotees, was uplifting and encouraging. It shows how well these traditions can cooperate and blend their energies without giving up their distinct beliefs and customs. I have observed this inter-denominational harmony elsewhere, including the Hindu temple in Memphis, Tennessee, which, in addition to Vaishnava and Saiva priests, also engages priests of the Smarta tradition.

In this area, my guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, gave some helpful advice to his followers, who are, of course, Saivites: "Siva's devotees, with hearts as big as the sky, love and accept Smarta, Sakta and Vaishnava Hindus as brothers and sisters, even if not accepted by them, and keep harmony by not discussing differences."

The next time you are involved in a discussion about who is superior, Vishnu or Siva, feel better prepared, as you now have four different points of view to which you can confidently refer. And who knows, you may be inspired to develop a fifth point of view—such is the nature of Hinduism!

LETTERS

A Western Hindu Checking In

I LOVE THE ATTITUDE THAT YOUR MAGAZINE has that Hinduism spans the world and is not only Indian. When I came upon the article "Confessions of a Western Hindu" (Oct/Nov/Dec, 2005), I found familiarity there. I believe that I am a Hindu, but I am not ethnically Indian, and I am often afraid to tell people that I'm Hindu. I'm afraid that I will not be accepted by Indians and that people will think I'm just trying to follow a fad.

My parents were among the white Americans who learned about Indian philosophy in the 1960s. They joined a group that practiced Hindu philosophy through a filter of British tradition. Now, as a young adult, I do not know how to label myself. I examined my beliefs and found that the Hindu aspects of my upbringing are those that speak to me most deeply. I have since taken up many aspects of Indian culture: learning *bharatanatyam* dance, Hindi language, going to temples, setting up a home shrine, cooking Indian food and often wearing saris and salwar suits. My mother prefers to call herself a Vedantist, but I find that no one in the Western world knows what that is. When one says one is a Hindu, at least whoever is inquiring has heard of it. Yet I still find myself reluctant to wear a bindi or state that I am Hindu. It seems confrontational to do so. At the same time, I desperately want to declare my allegiance, tired of being assumed to be Christian. I feel quite alone, and sometimes I start to wonder if it is true that because I was not born Indian I cannot be Hindu. Your magazine has calmed my mind in many ways. I greatly appreciate your attitude that a white American can still be a Hindu.

CAROLYN MOIR
IRVINE, CALIFORNIA, USA

History Lesson in Use

IN JANUARY I PRESENTED HINDUISM TODAY's YouTube videos on the textbook controversy (www.youtube.com/hinduismtodayvideos) at our local temple during a general body meeting when the attendance was high. I also had a ninth-grader give testimony to the congregation on how he dealt with this issue in his class and what were the main issues he felt were misrepresented in his history book. It went very well, sparking a lot of discussion. I also showed what other communities in the USA have done and what we can do locally. Now it's up to the temple board to come up with a petition to present to local school boards. Thank you for your inspiration and guidance to bring awareness in our local community.

PADMAJA PATEL
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New Perspectives

THE ARTICLE ON THE "FOUR WAYS WE View the World" (Apr/May/Jun, 2008) was profound. Realizing that there are four ways has helped me to alleviate the deep confusion I have felt trying to understand the world and life as a Hindu. Being indoctrinated through an education system that views the world from a scientific perspective, *simnif*, I have learned to accept the *mulif* perspective.

ASHA B. DASS
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The Fine Art of Meditation

I AM MAKING A PRESENTATION ON THE *Agamas* at a conference in Chidambaram in May organized by The Art of Living Foundation. I have been reading a lot in preparation, and it seemed like divine timing that the Insight in the recent edition of HINDUISM TODAY ("The Fine Art of Meditation," Apr/May/Jun, 2008) focused so near my topic, the Yoga Pada of the *Agamas*. I can't believe the simplicity with which the very same content has been presented by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. What is said in the *Agamas* has been condensed and simplified for easy, everyday use. I am in awe!

SIVASRI T.S. SHANMUKHA SIVACHARYAR
CHENNAI, TAMIL NADU, INDIA

HINDUISM TODAY IS AS COLORFUL, ATTRACTIVE and enlightening as always. The article "The Fine Art of Meditation" (Apr/May/Jun, 2008) is very informative and educational. Many spiritual teachers are practicing and teaching meditation in different ways. It is important to have regular practice for an hour or two each day to get transformation in life. Being on this path and meditating regularly is beneficial toward managing day-to-day problems and living in peace.

PROF. B. C. HARINATH
SEVAGRAM, MAHARASHTRA, INDIA
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Opening Doors

YOUR MAGAZINE HAS BEEN A VERY POSITIVE influence on my life. I have been interested in Hinduism for years and when I started reading your magazine it opened up so many new doorways for me. I love your articles. Thank you so much.

DANA STEARN
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Idol Worship

IN A RECENT LETTER TO THE NEW INDIAN *Express*, March 9, 2008, Swami Dayananda wrote of a new rapprochement between Hindu and Jewish religious leaders. "The his-

toric meet," wrote Swami Dayananda, "emphasized and illustrated the importance of honest dialogue between any two religious traditions to resolve seemingly irresolvable differences." At issue was the question of the Hindu worship of Gods and idols which, for centuries, Jewish theologians have found irreconcilable with their own traditions that prohibit idolatry. To begin, perhaps Swami Dayananda is not aware of the negative baggage the word *idolatrous* carries. What astonishes me more than anything is how burdened Hindus still are with these loaded labels (*pagans* is another), bearing extremely derogatory connotations, foisted on them by invaders and colonizers down the centuries. One would have trusted that with independence (1948) these misconceptions would have been lifted and Hindus would be allowed to hold their heads high regarding key issues of their belief system. Articles such as this one, written by a leading exponent of the faith, make us realize that there is ever present the need to be accepted—and this by faiths that have never reached the heights and depths of Hinduism.

PATRIZIA NORELLI-BACHELET
KODAIKANAL, TAMIL NADU, INDIA

THE ISSUE OF HINDUS BEING IDOL worshipers has been going on ever since the Islamists and Christian missionaries came to India with their evil program. The theological and the intellectual response was given to them a long time ago. But the charge made by the opponents of Hinduism is not on the basis of theology or intellectualism. It is a political question, and thus has to be responded to at the same level. The political answer is: "Yes, Hindus are idol worshipers. But what have we done wrong? Some of us may worship statues made of stone, but we do not throw stones at others. We do not go about saying that our idol has told us to convert the whole world to Hinduism. We do not go about saying that those who do not worship an idol are unbelievers and have to be either converted or killed."

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or e-mailed to: letters@hindu.org

Letters may be edited for space and clarity and may appear in electronic versions of HINDUISM TODAY.
✉ INDICATES LETTERS RECEIVED VIA E-MAIL

INTERVIEW

Meat-Eating's Wider Effects

A nonvegetarian diet has a devastating impact on our planet's well being

SWAMI DAYANANDA SARASWATI

THE HIMALAYAN GLACIERS HAVE BEEN THE perennial source of water for rivers such as the Ganga, Yamuna, Brahmaputra and Sindhu. Now the disturbing news is that the glaciers are receding due to global warming. This problem is real, and in India it will cause irredeemable damage if it is not addressed. One will find it difficult to believe the contention of some ecologists that the Ganga and other rivers of Himalayan origin will cease to flow in six to forty years.

As a human being, I have a custodial relationship to Mother Earth. Global warming testifies to how indifferent and careless we have been in discharging our caretaking responsibilities. A report from the United Nations in 2006 revealed the surprising fact that "raising animals for food generates more greenhouse gases than all the cars and trucks in the world combined." Tens of billions of animals farmed for food release gases such as methane, nitrous oxide and carbon dioxide through their massive amounts of manure. Animals such as cows and sheep, being ruminant, emit huge amounts of methane due to flatulence and burping. "The released methane," the report says, "has 23 times the global warming potential of carbon dioxide." It is very alarming to note that the livestock industry alone is responsible for 37 percent of human-induced methane emissions. To make room for these animals to graze, virgin forests are cleared. The livestock industry also needs vast stretches of land to raise mono crops to feed the animals. The



Promotion of vegetarianism does not require any legislation from the state. It does require a change of heart on the part of meat eaters everywhere. I cannot appeal to the tigers and wolves. They are programmed to be what they are. Being endowed with free will, only a human being can make a difference by exercising his or her choice responsibly.

SWAMI DAYANANDA, 78, a *sannyasin* of the *Adi Shankara* and *Veda Vyasa* tradition, founder of *Arsha Vidya* centers in India, USA, Canada and Australia, has taught worldwide for over 40 years.

Responding to Hinduism's Direst Needs

One gift has immense impact for generations

YES, I'M ENCOURAGED BY THE VITALITY of our faith today," Dr B. M. Lathi explained to our staff. "But when I see the array of powerful forces working hard to undo Hinduism, and the mass of misinformation circulating, I worry. If we want our grandchildren to resist the onslaught, we've got to react! We need intellectual clarity as never before. It is not enough to build temples. We need to understand their function and value, then inspire our children with that knowledge—not just a youth here and there, but a majority of each generation. That is what it will take. It's a big job and, as I see it, time is short."

To do his part, Dr. Lathi, a retired professor of electrical engineering liv-

ing in California, generously supports HINDUISM TODAY. "We must make sure this pure voice of dharma is heard as widely as possible. I know of no other publication like it. It proudly declares itself to be Hindu and ceaselessly works to rectify misconceptions and abuse frankly and courageously. And especially, it is doing pioneering work to present our faith in a way that is intellectually satisfying and spiritually inspiring. Here is our chance; let's make the most of it!"

Dr. Lathi established a charitable remainder trust which, when it matures in 13 years, will grant \$300,000 to the Hinduism Today Production Fund, a part of Hindu Heritage Endowment. Earnings from this gift will enable the



"The world needs Hinduism as exemplar. Here is a faith evolved out of meditation, not conflict." *Dr. and Mrs. Lathi with children and grandchildren.*

editors to produce an ever more potent magazine. Happily, Dr. and Mrs. Lathi also benefit from their gift in a number of ways. Find out more about Dr. Lathi's charitable remainder trust here: hheonline.org/reports/2007/jan-feb-mar/ and ask for our Production Fund e-newsletter at hhe@hindu.org.

QUOTES & QUIPS

There is no remedy for love but to love more.

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), American transcendentalist writer and mystic

I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and acceptance. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth. I am proud to tell you that we have gathered in our bosom the purest remnant of the Israelites who came to Southern India in the very year in which their holy temple was destroyed by Romans. I am proud to belong to the religion which has sheltered and is still fostering the last of the grand Zoroastrian nation. I, my friends, am a Hindu.

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), disciple of Sri Ramakrishna

Other religions have all been founded by individuals, but Hinduism is not based on the teachings of any one single per-

son. Before any prophet was born, the Sanatana Dharma was there. **Swami Rama Thirtha** (1873-1906)

India has come to preserve spiritual traditions which many ancient cultures and countries have lost. Today Hinduism represents not only India but the ancient wisdom of humanity. In Hinduism many ancient countries can still rediscover their religious past, their old Gods and their old spiritual traditions. **Ram Swarup** (1920-1998), Indian writer and scholar

Rise above the cycle of unhappiness, desire, acquisition, excitement and unhappiness again. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, publisher of HINDUISM TODAY

If there are errors in other religions, that

is none of our business. God, to whom the world belongs, takes care of that. **Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa** (1836-1886)

A drop melting into the sea, this everyone can see. But the sea absorbed in a drop—this only a rare one can follow! **Saint Kabir** (1440-1518)

If you can't be a good example, then you'll just have to be a horrible warning. *Anonymous*

You seek peace? To attain peace, one must be willing to pass through the contrary to peace. Such is the teaching of the sages. **Swami Brahmananda** (1863-1922), disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and first president of the Ramakrishna mission

I have come to the conclusion that long before all other heavenly books, God had revealed to the Hindus through the rishis of yore His four books of knowledge, the *Rig Veda*, the *Yajur Veda*, the *Sama Veda* and the *Atharva Veda*. **Prince Muhammad Dara Shikoh** (1627-1658), a Sufi Muslim, later executed by his brother Aurangzeb

Separateness is an illusion. No part can ever exist. It is impossible for a part to depart from the Whole. *An anonymous sannyasin*

Good people do not need laws to tell them to act responsibly, while bad people will find a way around the laws. **Plato**, (427-347 BCE) Greek philosopher and mystic

God is within you. He has no eyes, no ears, but we place Him outside and worship. God has become father, mother and guru. God has become this mango tree also. God has become

Frank and Ernest

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you and He has become I. **Satguru Yogaswami** (1872-1964), Sri Lanka's most revered contemporary mystic

By practicing tolerance of those who insult us, we will feel honor and insult as the same. Just as we feel good when someone praises us, we should feel just as good when we are insulted. Stability in honor or insult is the ability to still have love for our aggressor. **Sri Pramukh Swami Maharaj**, Spiritual Guru of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha

Talent does what it can; genius does what it must. **Edward George Bulwer-Lytton** (1803-1873), English writer

Nothing is impossible for pure love. **Mahatma Gandhi** (1869-1948)

Perfection is achieved, not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing left to take away. **Antoine de Saint Exupéry** (1900-1944), French writer and aviator

Check your passport regularly. If you look like your passport photo, you definitely need that trip. *Anonymous*

There is no greater mystery than that we keep seeking reality though, in fact, we are reality. We think that there is something hiding reality and that this must be

destroyed before reality is gained. How ridiculous! A day will dawn when you will laugh at all your past efforts. That which will be on the day you laugh is also here and now. **Sri Ramana Maharishi** (1879-1950), South Indian mystic

In the end, the Great Mystery is known as one, as two, as neither one nor two. Most people try to experience God through other people. Disciples see a guru as God. Wives see their husband as God. Devotees see the Deity in the temple as God. But all the time, behind the eyes of their seeing, is God. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927-2001), founder of HINDUISM TODAY

DID YOU KNOW?

Going Bananas

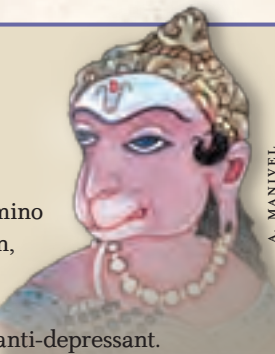
NO COUNTRY ON EARTH PRODUCES more bananas than India—17 million tons a year, or five pounds for each person on Earth. And that might be just the right thing to do. This special fruit, dear to Lord Ganesha and a part of Indian culture since times immemorial, is also a health treasure.

Bananas are a favorite offering to the Gods during Hindu worship. Lord Hanuman is said to be inordinately fond of them. The plant's leaves are used during sacred ceremonies under holy kumbhas and offerings, and no South Indian meal can be traditional unless it is served on a banana leaf.

Bananas are extremely high in vitamins and beneficial enzymes, including

the essential amino acid tryptophan, a precursor to serotonin—the body's natural anti-depressant. Bananas are also high in iron, helping fight anemia; they provide the B6 vitamins a healthy vegetarian diet needs; and their high levels of potassium replenish the body's resources depleted by stress. Athletes swear by them.

The remarkable banana tree offers us other gifts as well. Its flower, the "banana heart," is eaten raw with dips or cooked in soups and curries, and the tender trunk core is used in the Burmese dish *mohinga*. Even paper can be produced from this generous plant.



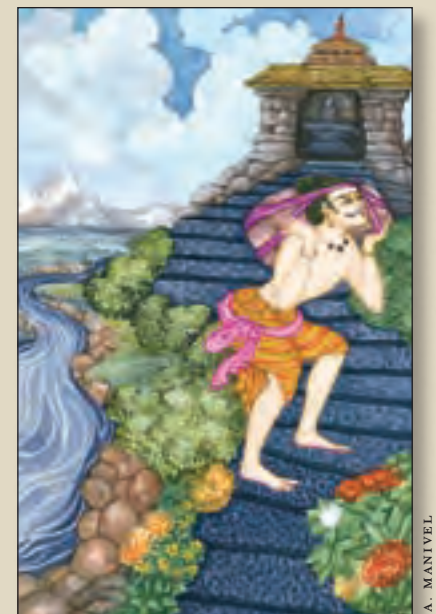
A. MANIVEL

BASICS OF HINDUISM

Sacred Pilgrimages

PILGRIMAGE, TIRTHAYATRA, IS one of the five duties of every Hindu, along with dharma, worship, *samskaras* and observing religious festivals. A pilgrimage is an exercise in willpower, humility and faith, when the devotee travels to often difficult locations, leaving his problems at the feet of the Deity and forgetting everything but God. Most Hindus go on pilgrimage from time to time. They journey to one of India's seven holy rivers, or to a few divinely blessed, liberation-giving cities, or maybe to faraway temples legendary in their power and boons. Many are the places where grace manifests on Earth.

A pilgrimage is an intimate experience, a direct connection between the seeker and the sacred. A devout Hindu goes on pilgrimage to see holy men and women, to worship at holy shrines, to have darshan of Deities abiding in ancient sanctums. Ultimately, a pilgrim journeys to see God, to have a life-changing, bliss-engendering, karma-eradicating contact with the Divine. It may happen through a special vision, a particularly deep meditation or the altered consciousness following some grand puja. When the devotee sees God, God also looks at him—and rays of divine light change his karma forever.



A. MANIVEL

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

A 16-page sixth-grade social studies lesson from the editors of Hinduism Today

Hinduism Today's 16-page Hindu history lesson 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, Ph.D Director, Center for Asian Studies, California State University

This lesson corrects many of the errors in the current chapters on Hinduism, presents the religion in a sympathetic light and describes the religion in the way Hindus understand and practice it. The lesson is a commendable attempt that is acceptable to nearly all in our religion.

C.K. Hiranya Gowda, M.D., Former President, Hindu Temple of Nashville, TN, USA

While no document 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



Note to Students, Parents and Teachers

This Educational Insight is HINDUISM TODAY magazine's response to the controversy in California over the way Hinduism is taught in public-school history books. It is a 16-page lesson on Hindu history, beliefs and practices for sixth graders written from the Hindu point of view. It is historically sound and acceptable in content and tone to the various denominations of the Hindu community.

The problem with every existing textbook for this grade level is that Hinduism is presented negatively, incompletely and inaccurately. This lesson is patterned after a typical chapter on the Jewish faith in these same books. It deliberately does not follow the specific California standards for

presenting the Hindu religion because we believe them to be deeply flawed and contrary to the State's own general rule that teaching material must: 1) be historically accurate, 2) "instill in each child a sense of pride in his or her heritage" and 3) avoid "adverse reflection" on a religion. It is our intent that this lesson will serve as a model for US textbooks, providing an authentic depiction of the eminent history and traditions of the faith while giving 10-year-old Hindu students justifiable pride in their religion.

In most states teachers are allowed to supplement the textbooks with additional material. This lesson may be offered as a more accurate basis for the classroom study of the origins and development of Hinduism in ancient India.

This is the most comprehensive summary of Hinduism's multi-faceted tradition that I have seen to date. I wholeheartedly and unequivocally recommend its use in all official textbooks for students.

Swami Chidanand Saraswati, Founder & Chairman, India Heritage Research Foundation, Rishikesh

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 these sections as review material for my college students.

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

FROM THE VEDAS

The Clear White Light

In the *Mandala Brahmana Upanishad*, the Sun's soul talks about light

MANDALA BRAHMANA, THE 28TH OF THE 108 *Upanishads*, is attached to the Sukla Yajur Veda. In it a sage reaches the sphere of the Sun and learns about the light that exists within man, the core of the seeker himself.

The great *muni* Yajnavalkya went to Aditya-loka, the Sun's world and from the Purusha of the Sun he learned thus.

The body has five stains: passion, anger, unrest, fear and sleep. The removal of these can be effected respectively by abstaining from *sankalpa* (intention) and by practicing forgiveness, moderate food, carefulness and the spiritual sight of *tattvas*. In order to cross the ocean of samsara, where sleep and fear are the serpents, injury is the waves, desire for sensations is the whirlpool and family is the mire, one should adhere to the subtle path and look for the mystical Taraka.

Taraka is Brahman when nested in the middle of the two eyebrows, having the nature of the spiritual effulgence of *satchitananda*. *Sushumna*, the channel leading to it, has the radiance of the Sun. In this channel's center, the kundalini shines like millions of lightning bolts and yet is subtle as the thread in the lotus stalk. Tamas is destroyed there. Through seeing it, all sins are destroyed.

When the two ears are closed by the tips of the forefingers, a *phutkara* (booming) sound is heard. When the mind is fixed on it, a blue light is seen between the eyes and also in the heart. When one looks at the external space, moving the eyes and sees streaks of light at the corners of his eyes, then his vision can be made steady. When one sees *jyotis* (spiritual light) above his head, 12 digits in length, then he attains the state of nectar and sees the variegated colors of the morning as if the sun, the moon and the fire had joined together in the akasha. Then the yogi comes to have the nature of those lights. Through practice, he becomes one with akasha, devoid of all gunas and peculiarities.

At first, akasha, with its shining stars, becomes to him Para-akasha and he becomes one with Para-akasha. Then he becomes one with Maha-akasha, resplendent as a deluge of fire. Then he merges into Tattva-akasha, lighted with the highest conceivable brightness. Then he becomes one with Surya-akasha, brightened by millions of suns. By practising thus, he becomes one with that.

This is the great science which is concealed in all the tantras.

When this is known, one does not stay in samsara.

Then Yajnavalkya asked the Purusha in the sphere of the Sun: "O Lord, *antaralakshya* (inner sight) has been described many times, but it has never been understood by me. Pray describe it to me."

The Purusha of the Sun replied: "It is the source of the five elements. In its midst, the tattvas are manifested. It is very hidden. It can be known only by one who has got into the boat of *jnana*. Above the inner sight is the sphere of the sun; in its midst is the light of the nectary moon. It has the brightness of *shukla* (white light), like a ray of lightning. Its *lakshya* (aim) is the tip of the nose. When this is practiced, a deep darkness is seen at the root of the palate. By prac-



The Inner Source: *The Rishis who wrote the Vedas reached into their own inner skies to fathom the secrets of creation. Mahadevas taught them the path to finding their own subtle light, merging with its effulgence and realizing the Self God.*

tising thus, a *jyoti* (light) of the form of an endless sphere emerges. This is Brahman as *satchitananda*. When the mind is absorbed in bliss thus naturally produced, then the *kechari mudra* takes place. "The following are the signs: first light is seen like a faraway star; then a dazzling diamond; then the sphere of full moon; then the sphere of the brightness of nine gems; then the sphere of the mid-day sun; all these are seen in order.

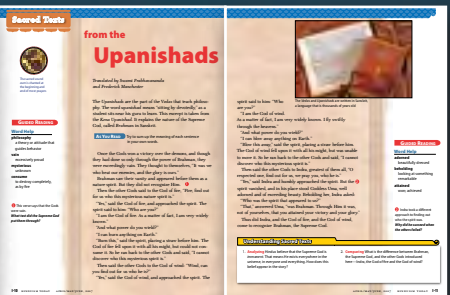
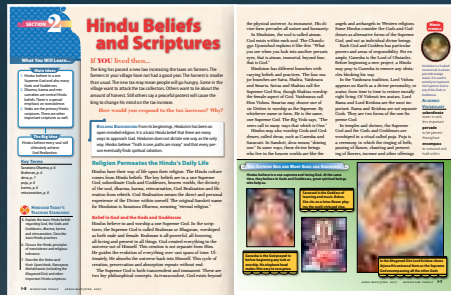
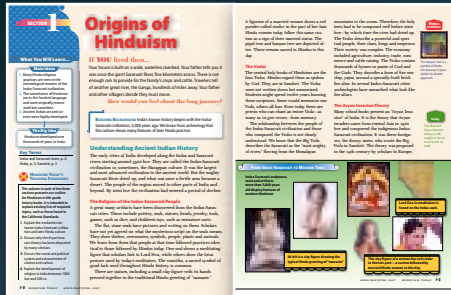
"As there is no rising or setting of the eternal sun of Chit (awareness), in the heart of a man who knows thus, he has no karma to perform. Rising above day and night through the annihilation of sound and time he becomes one with Brahman. Not being troubled by any thoughts, he is the *jnani*.

"When the *triputi* (knower, knowing and knowledge) are thus dispelled, he becomes the *jyoti* without *bhava* (existence) or *abhava* (nonexistence), full and motionless, like the ocean without the tides or like the lamp without the wind. All that is not other than the Self into which the whole universe is absorbed, as the universe is a delusion of the mind and is therefore not different from it.

He who knows Brahman and thus enjoys this bliss, which is eternal and has dawned on him, that man becomes one with Brahman."

K. NARAYANASVAMI AIYAR published this translation of Mandala-brahmana Upanishad (slightly edited here) in 1914 along with the Adyar Library as part of his book, Thirty Minor Upanishads. The translation had previously appeared in the monthly journal, The Theosophist. He collaborated on the work with Sundara Sastri.

The *Vedas* are the divinely revealed and most revered scriptures, *shruti*, of Hinduism, likened to the *Torah* (1200 BCE), *Bible New Testament* (100 CE), *Koran* (630 CE) or *Zend Avesta* (600 BCE). Four in number, *Rig, Yajur, Sama* and *Atharva*, the *Vedas* include over 100,000 verses. Oldest portions may date back as far as 6500 BCE.



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Crossing the Ocean

FEATURE STORY

*How breaking
an ancient taboo
plunged a pontiff
into controversy and
jeopardized his turn
of sovereignty at
the famed Krishna
Temple in Udupi*



Sections of the Hindu Dharma Shastras, or law books, ban taking a voyage by sea or visiting the lands beyond India. The ancient lawmakers reasoned that travelers could not maintain their daily ritual worship while traveling, and would be polluted by the influence of foreign religion and culture upon arrival at their destination. Today the Hindu diaspora has created significant Hindu communities in nearly every country of the world—communities eager for the ministry of their religious leaders and priests. Over the last two hundred years, each Hindu lineage which observed the travel restrictions—and not all of them did historically—has faced the question of keeping or changing a tradition dating back more than two thousand years. In our decentralized religion, the adaptation to a changed world has come about piecemeal—one denomination, teaching lineage or even single temple at a time. In the following story, we recount the difficulties faced within the Madhvacharya denomination when one of their most prominent swamis “crossed the ocean” to minister to followers in Europe and America.

BY VRINDAVANAM S. GOPALAKRISHNAN
KARNATAKA, INDIA

THE EXPRESS TRAIN CARRYING US chugged into the Udupi station in the January dawn as the golden rays of the sun pierced through the thin fog enveloping the area. This old town in the southern Indian state of Karnataka is famed as the birthplace of Sri Madhvacharya, founder of the *dvaita vedanta* philosophy some seven centuries ago. Though his personal Deity was Hanuman, he established a temple for Lord Krishna in an ancient *matha* on the banks of a large pond, next to two

ancient Siva temples—Chandramaulesvara and Ananteshvara. So famous is his temple now that when the name Udupi is heard, the people of South India immediately pray, “Udupi Sri Krishna” in reverence.

I was here for Paryayam, the biannual religious function to hand over the responsibilities of managing the Krishna temple and performing the daily pujas. These responsibilities rotate among the heads of the Ashta Mathas (literally, “eight monasteries”) which were founded by Madhvacharya in the 12th century. This year commences the third term of Sri Swami Sugunendra Tirtha, head of Puthige Matha (www.puthigeshree.org/), as he takes over from Sri Swami Vidhyasagara Tirtha of Krishnapura Matha.

Coinciding as it does with the festival of Makara Sankranti, Paryayam is normally celebrated with great pomp and attended by tens of thousands. But this year’s festival was overshadowed by bitter controversy. The orthodox Madhvacharya community had been embroiled in dissension since 2005, when Sri Sugunendra Tirtha traveled to the Middle East, Europe, Japan and America—thus committing the sin of *samudrayana*, “crossing the ocean.” After much highly public debate and legal action, a compromise had finally been reached: Sri Sugunendra Tirtha would take over the responsibility for the worship, but would personally perform only six of the required sixteen daily pujas—those six which do not require touching the Deity. For the time being, the

heads of the Shirur and Kaniyur Mathas would conduct the other ten daily pujas, known as Mahapujas.

Although an agreement had been reached, the controversy left its mark: this year’s Paryayam festival was completely boycotted by the heads of the other seven mathas. Sri Sugunendra Tirtha’s supporters, however, were determined to make the best of the situation. As I entered Car Street on the morning of January 17, I found hundreds of young men engaged in decorating the street for the procession—which passes in front of all three temples, the shops, the monastery buildings and even the side lanes—with hundreds of kilos of flowers. Devotees poured in from faraway villages, and by midnight

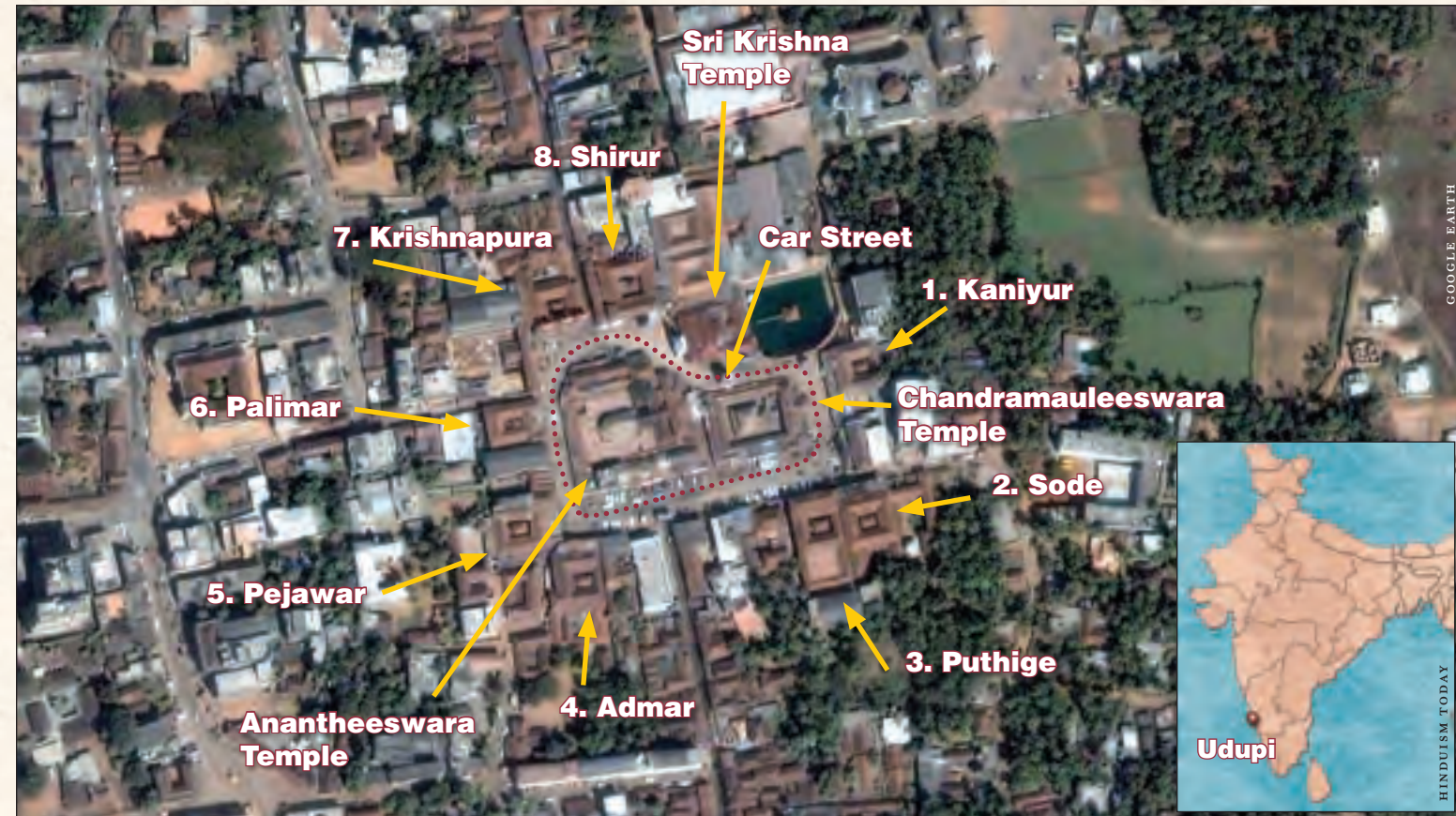
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Grand procession: (below) Sri Reghumanya Tirtha (at right) applies sandal paste to the forearm of Sri Sugunendra Tirtha, the incoming Paryaya Swami of Krishna Temple; (bottom of page) The chariot of Lord Krishna is pulled along Car Street



ALL PHOTOS: MADHU RAJ



Udupi’s Monasteries & Temples



of January 17-18, an estimated 80,000 were present to witness the Paryayam in the early hours of the 18th. It was a drop in attendance from previous years, but still a massive crowd.

Parayam normally begins with a huge procession carrying the head monks of the eight *mathas* in palanquins from a point four kilometers away. This year, all the palanquins were empty save that of Sri Sugunendra Tirtha. Subhadra, the Sri Krishna temple’s beloved elephant led the parade, majestically caparisoned, moving joyously as if dancing to the tune of the instruments. Traditional music accompanied by different types of percussion instruments filled the air along the narrow road leading to Car Street. Huge tableaux depicting the life of Lord Krishna and Madhvacharya were carried in illuminated vehicles through the narrow lanes. Then followed the palanquin carrying the Paryayam Swami, Sri Sugunendra Tirtha.

The procession arrived at Puthige Matha, of which Sri Sugunendra Tirtha is the head. A heavy police presence and the use of a metal detector at the door attested to the apprehension felt by town officials, but nothing untoward occurred. Following tradition, a white cloth was unrolled from

Puthige Matha monastery all the way to the Sri Krishna temple, where the ceremony to place Sri Sugunendra Tirtha upon the Sarvanja Peetha was to begin. Literally, “seat of universal spiritual knowledge,” the Sarvanja Peetha was first occupied by Madhvacharya himself. Whoever occupies the seat administers the affairs of the temple and conducts the sixteen daily pujas. But this year there was nothing normal about the transfer of responsibility.

Under normal circumstances, Sri Sugunendra Tirtha would have been led in procession from Puthige Matha to the Krishna temple by the heads of other seven *mathas*. Since they boycotted the event, he was forced to enlist the help of Sri Reghumanya Tirtha Swami, head of Bheemanagatta Matha, an *upamatha*, or subsidiary monastery. Arriving at the Krishna temple, they had darshan of Lord Krishna through the *kanakanakindi*, a golden window (see photo page 24), through which one can see into the inner sanctum. Sri Sugunendra then proceeded across Car Street to the Ananteshvara and Chandramaulesvara temples to pay obeisance to Lord Siva.

At this point, the outgoing monk, Sri Vidhyasagara Tirtha of Krishnapura Matha, would ordinarily have brought Sri Sugunen-

Udupi from space: Google Earth treats us to this satellite photo of central Udupi town showing its three main temples surrounded by the eight monasteries founded by the 12th century saint Madhvacharya. At issue is the worship of the main Deity of the Sri Krishna Temple.

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dra Tirtha to the Sarvanja Peetham. Sri Reghumanya acted in his place, handing over the temple keys and the revered *akshaya pathra*, literally, “inexhaustible vessel.” The original *akshaya pathra* appears in the *Mahabharata* where it was a cooking pot given to Draupadi by the Sun God. It gave an unlimited amount of food each day until Draupadi herself had finished eating. Here, only a ladle of the same name is handed over to the incoming swami, but the idea is identical—to provide unlimited food to Lord Krishna’s devotees. With this ritual, the management of the temple is officially assumed by the incoming swami.

In the final rite of installation, the new Paryaya Swami applies sandal paste in blessing to the foreheads of the other seven monastery heads—a time-honored event that became one more casualty of this year’s strife.

With the ad hoc installation concluded, the remainder of the day’s celebrations pro-

A Chariot of Firewood For Two Years of Cooking

A UNIQUE FEATURE OF the Paryayam is the two-story firewood chariot, Kattige Ratha (at right). Requiring one year to build, it is a obligatory gift from the outgoing swami to the incoming one. By tradition, it will provide exactly enough wood to the temple kitchen for the entire two-year Paryaya term. Food plays an important part in the Paryaya festival, with tens of thousands of meals prepared in the Krishna temple kitchen every day. The incoming swami's *matha* is responsible for all the cooking, which is all done in ovens fired by wood. Food, cooking utensils and huge brass pots are moved from the incoming swami's monastery to the Krishna temple on January 17. At the same time, the outgoing swami shifts his cooking equipment back to his own monastery. Vegetables are brought in procession to the temple for the daily feast, *annadhanam*, served to all devotees.



Ready for cooking: This chariot-shaped firewood stack is created every two years to fuel the mass feedings

ceeded normally. Sri Sugunendra Tirtha and large numbers of devotees moved into the Rajangana Durbar, an attached convention hall, where numerous dignitaries, including politicians and social leaders, were present to receive him.

One of the important aspects of this public address is the appointment of the Diwan, or chief administrator, as well as various other posts. Most of these were given to people connected with Puthige Matha. The position of Diwan is coveted and lucrative, as it oversees the entire administration and finances of both the Putige Matha and the Sri Krishna Temple. Sri Sugunendra Tirtha appointed not one, but two Diwans, both his own brothers. This bit of nepotism is instructive with regard to the question of orthodoxy. In other conservative monastic orders of India, swamis renounce their birth families and avoid contact with them but will not hesitate to travel overseas. Here at Udupi, some swamis even employ their relatives in their monasteries, yet, ironically,

they hold to not "crossing the ocean."

It was not until the day of Paryayam that the heads of Shirur and Kaniyur Matha agreed to assist with the daily pujas, thus ameliorating the controversy. It is a normal practice for the heads of other monasteries to help with the intense ritual schedule, but this year none volunteered until the last minute.

This awkward transition in leadership for the Krishna Temple was only the latest round in a heated debate that has gone on since Sri Sugunendra Tirtha returned from Europe and America in 2005. Efforts were made to prevent him from assuming the post at all; but neither the government nor the courts would interfere, and the efforts came to naught.

It was not the first time the Ashta Mathas have been rocked by the same controversy. Sri Vishnavijaya Tirtha Swami, the designated successor to the head of Pejavar Matha, had to relinquish his post for going to the United States in 1987. He went with the

blessings of his guru, Sri Vishvesha Tirtha, but refused to undergo the purification rites requested by the Madhva establishment upon his return (see www.hinduismtoday.com/archives/1988/02/1988-02-05.shtml). Sri Vibhudesha Tirtha Swami of the Admar Matha suffered the same fate for a similar offense, and had to install his chief disciple, Sri Vishwapriya Tirtha Swamiji, as the Paryaya Swami in his stead.

Sri Sugunendra Tirtha, who is an international president of the World Council of Religions for Peace, said that he only went abroad to propagate Hindu Dharma and *dvaita* principles and not for his personal purposes. He told HINDUISM TODAY, "When good things are done, there are people to oppose it. Lord Krishna is the final judge. Mere economic globalization is not enough; it is necessary for there also to be spiritual globalization."

Crossing the ocean— an evolving issue

Controversy over *samudrayana*, "ocean voyage," is nothing new in recent Hindu history. Swami Vivekananda was, because of his international travel, denied entry to the temple where his guru Sri Ramakrishna served for 40 years (see sidebar page 25). The priests who serve the main Deity of Tirupati temple will not leave India. On the other hand, this same temple's training school has supplied priests for many temples in other countries.

The Dikshitar of Chidambaram, a staunchly conservative community, allow for travel, but require purification upon return.

Hinduism is not the only religion that restricts travel; Jain monks and nuns are required to walk everywhere, and barefoot at that. However, Acharya Sushil Kumar Muni, a prominent Jain monk who passed away on in 1994, traveled widely by plane in his later years. In 2005, Jain monk Acharya Rupachandgi visited the US. A news report at the time said, "Until recently, Rupachandgi would not have been allowed to travel anywhere his feet wouldn't take him. But the growing population of Jains in the United States has caused some rules to be relaxed, so that teachers from India can nurture Jain practice in this country." Hinduism is undergoing a similar adaptation. While some priests and swamis will not cross the ocean, many others will, even from otherwise conservative traditions.

The prohibition is clearly stated in several scriptures. The *Baudhayana Sutra*,

Swami's reception west and east: (top to bottom) Sri Sugunendra Tirtha Swami with President and Mrs. Bush in Los Angeles in November of 2005, during Swamiji's visit to the West; Sri Vishwapriya Tirtha, junior monk of Admar Matha, would not even enter Udupi during the Paryaya in protest; Sri Vishweswara Tirtha of Pejwar Matha, senior-most monk among all the Ashta Mathas, mediated the final compromise on the worship of Lord Krishna

one of the Hindu *Dharma Shastras*, says that "making voyages by sea" (II.1.2.2) is an offense which will cause *pataniya*, loss of caste. It offers a rather difficult penance: "They shall eat every fourth mealtime a little food, bathe at the time of the three libations (morning, noon and evening), passing the day standing and the night sitting. After the lapse of three years, they throw off their guilt."

The difference of practice on the issue among the various Hindu denominations is based on the scriptures each considers authoritative. Harsha Ramamurthy in his erudite article on the issue (kamakshi16.tripod.com/samudrayana.html), explains that, according to *Baudhayana Sutra*, the highest authority in deciding a question of dharma is *shruti*, our primary scriptures, the *Vedas* and *Agamas*. Next is the *smriti*, the secondary scriptures, which include the *Dharma Shastras*. Third is *sampradaya*, the teachings and practices of a specific lineage. He concludes, "Though there seems to be no direct ban on ocean travel in *shruti*, because of the bans in *smriti* and *sampradaya*, such travel is considered a banned activity." He said in communication with HINDUISM TODAY that the ban is observed both by the Madhva Sampradaya and Smartha Sampradaya (which includes the Shankaracharyas of Sringeri, Kanchi, etc.), as both adhere closely to the *Dharma Shastras*. He added that the ban applies to all three upper castes, and not just brahmins. It also applies to sannyasins, who—in his tradition—can only be from the brahmin caste. He pointed out that other Vaishnava Sampradayas, such as the Srivaishnavas, who follow the *Pancharatra Agama*, travel freely. He gave the example of Chinna Jeeyar (www.chinnajeeyar.org/), a follower of Visishtadvaita, who travels extensively. Similarly, the swamis of the Vaishnava Swaminarayana sect travel extensively.

Why the ban?

In the *Baudhayana Sutra*, the ban is discussed in the context of a description of the geographical limits of India which concludes that within its boundary "spiritual preeminence is found." Generally, two reasons are given by scholars for the ban. The





first is that it is impossible to maintain one's required daily religious observances on a ship, particularly thrice-daily personal worship. The second is that one will incur the

sin of *mleccha samparka*, usually politely translated as mixing with foreigners. *Mleccha*, however, is more accurately translated as "barbarian" or "savage." One should remember that triangle-shaped India is surrounded on two sides by ocean and the third by the Himalayas. Leaving ancient India to unknown lands meant either ocean travel or journey by foot through rugged terrain. It is a logical conclusion that travel outside India in those days did make religious observance difficult and took one into cultures that were not Hindu. The question is whether such concerns apply today; and if they do not, how the decision to adapt the scriptural dictate should proceed.



Speaking to HINDUISM TODAY, Sri Vishweswara Tirtha—the head of Pejavar Matha and the senior monk of the Udupi Ashta Mathas—said that violation of the scriptures cannot be accepted. "Sri Sugunendra Tirtha had crossed the ocean and, therefore, strictly following the scriptures, he could not perform the Mahapuja of the Lord Krishna by touching the Deity. We have reached a consensus that he can occupy the Sarvanja Peetha at the current Paryayam rituals, but not touch the Deity." On January 18, 2008, a convocation of 500 priests, scholars and Madhva swamis (including six of the eight Ashta Mathas), supported this opinion and concluded that the ban on travel should not be

Festive preparations: Sri Sugunendra Tirtha's Puthige Matha being decorated for the festivities by enthusiastic hordes of youth

Readying the feast: Processions of schoolchildren and devotees bring baskets of vegetables for the temple kitchen

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changed, according to Dr. Suresh Acharya, an Udupi-based scholar.

Other views on crossing the ocean

According to Acharya Narendra Bhushan, an eminent scholar on the *Vedas* and other ancient texts on Hinduism, there are no verses in the four *Vedas* prohibiting monks or priests from traveling abroad by crossing the ocean. Instead, he pointed out, there are verses emphasizing the need for building ships and travel.

He spoke with HINDUISM TODAY at his Vedic Mission office close to the Chengannur Mahadevar Temple in the Allappuzha district of Kerala. He said *Rig Veda* 1.8.9.1 clearly describes ship building. It specifically mentions that one should travel for the accomplishment of one's responsibility to preach the dharma. He pointed out that several verses describe what appear to be vehicles that travel in the sky, perhaps anticipating our modern airplanes long ago.

In my home state of Kerala, we had the unusual case of Vishnu Narayan Namboothiri, a poet and former head priest of Sri Vallabha Temple in Thiruvalla. He was dismissed from his priest job for traveling overseas. However, he received an apology and was reinstated after a few months by the *thantri* (chief priest) who realized none of their authoritative scriptures prohibits priests from traveling abroad.

HINDUISM TODAY consulted with priests in other parts of India for their view. Sri Muthu Vaduganathan, a priest associated with the Pillaiyarpati Gurukulam in Thevar District of Tamil Nadu, agreed that the tradition has been for priests and sannyasins to not move far away by crossing the ocean. But, he said, there are historical accounts

Vivekananda Was Outcasted for His Travels to America

It is a little-known fact that Swami Vivekananda was "outcasted" by the Bengali orthodoxy upon his triumphant return from the Parliament of the World Religions in Chicago. The most dramatic consequence came in 1897, when he returned to Calcutta. The following is excerpted from A Comprehensive Biography of Swami Vivekananda by Shailendranath Dhar.

IN THE EVENING OF MARCH 21, 1897, Swami Vivekananda and the Maharaja of Khetri, accompanied by a large party, paid a visit to the temple of Kali at Dakshineswar which, as is well-known to our readers, had been the scene of Sri Ramakrishna's sadhanas and where the saint had lived for forty years.

In the reception given to Swamiji at Dakshineswar, as described above, there was a discordant note which did not reach his ears but which became loud soon afterwards and produced an unpleasant controversy in the press. Babu Trailokya Nath Biswas, the proprietor of the temple, who had been informed about the impending visit earlier in the day, had actually come to the temple and was present when the visit occurred but did not personally receive Swami and his party, which included a princely personage, viz., the Maharaja of Khetri.

"In an indirect way," wrote Trailokya to *The Bangabashi* newspaper, "Swami and his followers were driven away from the temple, but not in a direct way as stated by Babu Bholanath [in the same newspaper]. I never ordered anyone to welcome Swami and the raja, nor did I myself do it. I thought that I should not have any, the least, intercourse with a man who went to a foreign country and yet calls himself a Hindu. While Swami Vivekananda and his followers were leaving my temple, Babu Bholanath Mukherjee told them that they would have no interview with me.... Your account of the re-*abhisheka* of the Deity [i.e., the evening worship was repeated to purify the temple] is perfectly true."

A member of the family of Rani Rashmani protested in a letter which was published in *The Indian Nation* on April 12, 1897, against Trailokya's claim that the temple of Kali at Dakshineswar belonged to himself. He asserted that it belonged as much to him as to any other descendant of the late



Overseas students: Swami Vivekananda and students in Maine after the 1893 Parliament

Rani Rashmani and that the recent scandal would not have taken place had it been under the management of any other member of the family.

Notwithstanding well-meant efforts to ease the situation, the story of Swamiji's alleged expulsion from the Kali temple gained ground. While *The Bangabashi* and other Bengali newspapers who opposed Swamiji kept it alive by continually writing on it, his old "friends," the Christian missionaries, had a new dart in their quiver for attacking him. Dr. Barrows who, as we know, had lately arrived in India and had turned against Swamiji [having originally supported him at the Parliament], took it as one more proof of the correctness of his theory that Swamiji was not a true Hindu and had not preached Hinduism in America.

It seems that, even for some time after he had heard about the row kicked up against him by the orthodox people, Swami Vivekananda took little notice of it. His attitude was even one of defiance of these critics, as we find it expressed in a letter dated May 30, 1897, "Our books tell us that the practice of religion is not for a sudra. If he discriminates about food, or refrains from foreign travel, it avails him nothing and it is all useless toil for him. I am a sudra and a *mleccha* (a non-Aryan, a barbarian)—why should I worry about observance of these rules? What matters it to me if I take the foods of the *mlecchas* and the untouchables of Hindu society?"

A few months later, when he came to know about the propaganda that was being carried on by Dr. Barrows and the missionaries to the effect that he had been outcasted in India, he wrote on the latter point to Mary Hale on July 9, 1897 as follows, "As if I had any caste to lose, being a sannyasin!" He added, "Not only no caste had been lost, but it has considerably shattered the opposition to sea-voyage—my going to the West. ... On the other hand, a leading Raja of the caste I belonged to before entering the order got up a banquet in my honor, at which were most of the big bugs of that caste ... It will suffice to say that the police were necessary to keep order if I ventured out into the street! That is outcasting indeed!"

In earlier chapters we have dealt with the campaign of vilification carried on against Swami Vivekananda by the Christian missionaries and by Pratap Chandra Majumdar [of the reformist Brahmo Samaj] in America and also in India. In their present campaign they reiterated their old charge that he was not a true representative of Hinduism, bolstering it with the arguments they borrowed from the charge-sheet drawn up by the Hindu orthodox opponents of the Swami in their own campaign against him. There was something funny in Christian missionaries and Brahmo reformers who did not believe in caste attempting to belittle one for non-orthodoxy in such matters as eating un-Hindu food, dining with *mlecchas*, going on sea-voyage, etc.

of Hindu saints who crossed the ocean. “I am told,” he said, “that there is a penance to be performed when a sannyasin or priest crosses the ocean. The existence of this penance shows that as per the need and their own deeper vision, a sannyasin or priest can cross the ocean to preserve and make his mother religion flourish. But this should not be done for any materialistic need.”

Dr. A.V. Ramana Dikshitulu, head priest of the Balaji Temple in Tirumala, one of India’s most respected and popular pilgrimage destinations, said, “None of our priests who serve in the main sanctum can cross the ocean. Neither I nor any member of my family have done so, despite lucrative offers from abroad. Serving the Lord here is most important to us. The Balaji Temple is governed by the *Vaikhanasa Agama*. It says that the people outside India are akin to *mlecchas*, barbarians, who do not follow any rules or code of conduct, and therefore it forbids visiting such places. These places have habits, food, relationships and other things which could make us corrupt and impure.”

“According to the *Agama*, all brahmins are supposed to worship at sunrise, midday and sunset, called *trikal gayatri sandhya*,” he explained. “This *trikal sandhya* cannot be performed on a plane or ship; it must be done on the earth.” Dr. Ramana Dikshitulu does not specifically rule out “crossing” an ocean, for he himself flies occasionally from Chennai to Kolkata, a flight which goes out over the Bay of Bengal. But as that flight is only two hours long, he does not miss his *trikal sandhya* as he would on a longer flight

or a voyage by ship, and he does not land outside India. He was unaware of any penance to offset crossing the ocean.

With regard to Udupi, he said the controversy was unfortunate. In his opinion, Sri Sugunendra Tirtha should have understood the consequences of his travel plans and either not traveled at all, or accepted the judgment of those who sought to abide by the scriptures of the Madhva Sampradaya after he did travel. The entire matter, he felt, should not have become such a public spectacle.

Dr. S.P. Sabharathnam Sivachariyar, South India’s foremost expert on the *Saiva Agamas*, said, “Rules related to the crossing of the ocean are laid down only in a few *Dharma Sastras*. Such rules are not to be found in the *Vedas*, *Puranas*, *Saiva Agamas* or *Vaishnava Agamas*. *Yati Dharma Samucchaya*, one of the most authentic texts dealing with the life system of the *yati* (mendicants and swamis), goes to the extent of saying that monks should be wandering throughout the world, even crossing the oceans. It says that to keep limited by the boundaries of one particular town or country is quite contrary to the high and noble visions of an enlightened *yati*.” Members of his priest caste, the Sivachariyars, freely travel abroad both for special functions and to serve as resident priests of temples in the West.

Conclusion

Clearly the *Dharma Shastras*’ ban on ocean travel was intended to maintain the religious strength and purity of the individual, and to prevent negative external influence from non-Hindu cultures. Other cultures had the same

concern. One can note that the very word *barbarian* (used to translate *mleccha* with a strongly negative connotation), just meant “foreigner,” in the original Greek, yet came to describe an uncultured or brutish person.

Baudhayana Sutra makes the point more than once to delineate ancient India’s boundaries and declare it a sacred land out of which one should not step. But what have we today? In the east and west of what was ancient India we have Bangladesh and Pakistan, both Muslim-majority countries hostile to Hinduism. Modern India itself is a declared secular state. Its first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, had little regard for religion and advocated sending priests out to work and turning all the temples into schools. And we have the Indian states of West Bengal, Kerala, Tripura and—from time to time—Tamil Nadu, all dominated by declared atheistic political parties.

Meanwhile, across the ocean—and leaving aside how priests got to the ancient Hindu civilizations of Southeast Asia and Indonesia—the modern diaspora has created significant Hindu populations in nearly every country of the world. The difficulties of living in the land of the *mlecchas* have indeed manifested, both for the original emigrants and their offspring. But thousands of Hindu communities worldwide have also struggled hard to maintain their religion through home worship, building temples and bringing priests and swamis to their country. It was Sri Sugunendra Tirtha’s defense that he had gone to the US to teach at the invitation of Hindus who follow Madhvacharya’s philosophy. It is also true that he knowingly broke the rules of his *sampradaya*, and then fought the logical consequences.

The swamis and priests who leave India do so to visit another community of Hindus, or are asked to come by non-Hindus sincerely interested in the Hindu wisdom. They have not gone out to consort with and be polluted by “barbarians.”

Hinduism prides itself in its ability to evolve and deal with new realities. Change is slow, as one after another of the hundreds of individual *sampradayas* faces an issue and makes a decision. Steadfast orthodox groups such as the Chidambaram Dikshitaras, various Vaishnava denominations and many orders of swamis allow travel outside India. HINDUISM TODAY has seen no compilation of how many traditions allow travel and how many do not, but it would appear that today an increasing number no longer follow the *Dharma Shastras* in this regard, focusing instead on meeting the basic religious needs Hindus living overseas.

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Dr. S.K. Suresh Acharya (left), a strong opponent of monks or priests crossing the ocean, is interviewed by GK Nair, HINDUISM TODAY correspondent



MADHU RAJ

The Kindly Elephant

Krishna’s Subhadra is a hit with kids and adults alike

SUBHADRA’S DAY BEGINS WITH A BATH FOLLOWED BY A breakfast of cornmeal and kooragu flour. At gam, after the temple puja, she receives a second meal—cooked rice seasoned with turmeric provided by the temple kitchen. A continual supply of palm leaves is available the rest of the day, plus whatever devotees offer. The 15-year-old elephant’s daily duties include leading processions once or twice, and giving blessings each evening from 4pm to 8pm. On festival days she leads the temple chariot and things get a bit more hectic. From time to time she must also greet visiting dignitaries. Unlike elephant duties in Kerala, she is not required to carry the priests on her back while circumambu-

lating the temple.

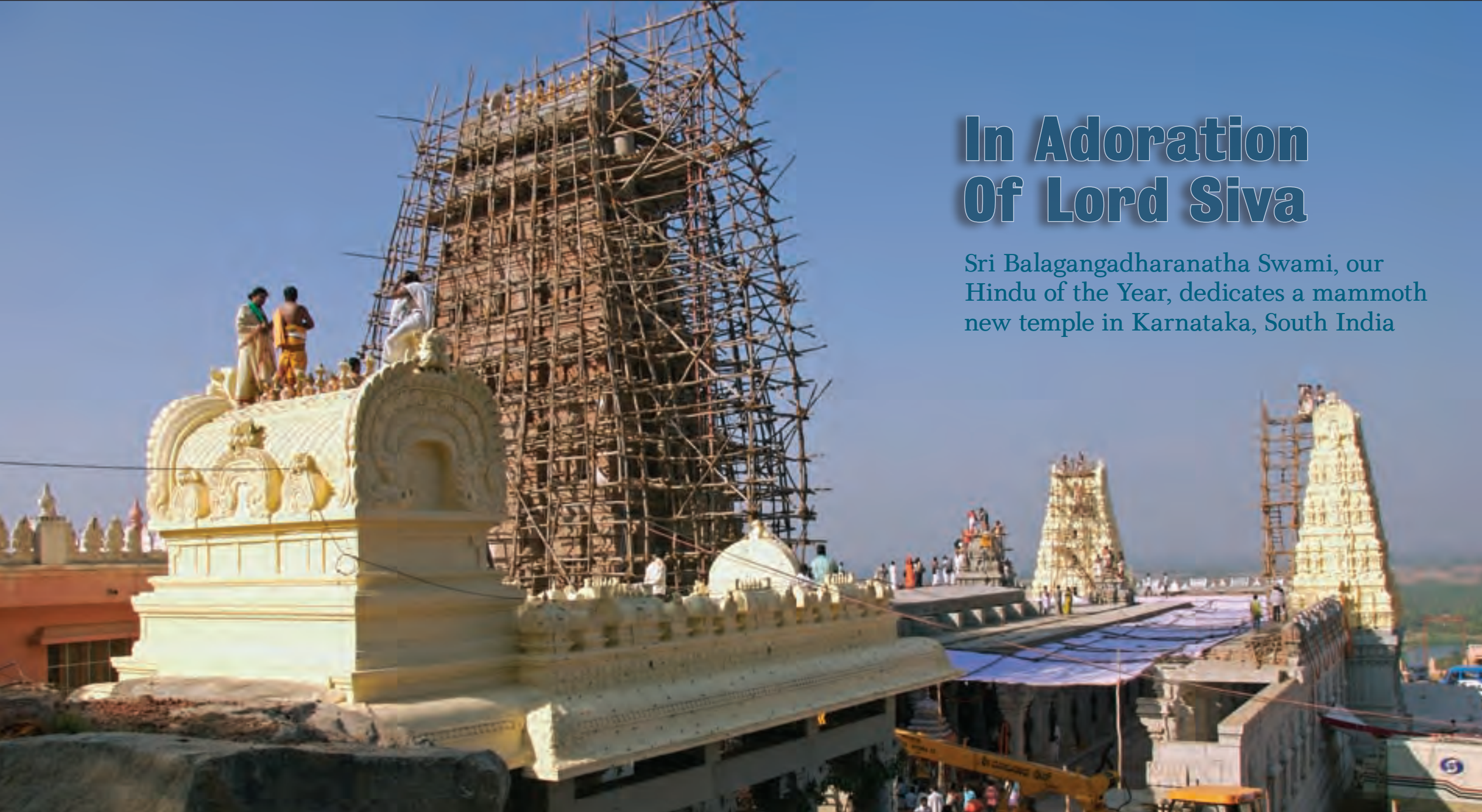
Devotees come to see Subhadra after worshipping Lord Krishna in the temple. She is trained to give a blessing when offered a small coin which she adroitly collects with the tip of her trunk and passes to Unnikrishnan, her full-time mahout. Unnikrishnan, who comes from a family of mahouts, has cared for Subhadra for seven years. “She is very obedient and follows my commands without hesitation,” he volunteers. Her good health and clean surroundings are testament to his dutiful care.

Subhadra is very considerate of small children, gently touching them on their head with her trunk, which feels like a very large and dry tongue. Although she only gives the blessing when given a coin, she happily accepts food, such as bananas—which she does not share with her mahout but eats straight away.

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Subhadra: The 15-year-old elephant blesses two children by lightly tapping them on the head with her trunk under the watchful gaze of mahout Unnikrishnan. In the background are two effigies that are carried in the Paryaya procession.



MADHU RAJ



In Adoration Of Lord Siva

Sri Balagangadharanatha Swami, our Hindu of the Year, dedicates a mammoth new temple in Karnataka, South India



PHOTOS: COURTESY BCS

BY CHOODIE SIVARAM, BENGALURU
BUILT ON THE PICTURESQUE ADICHUNCHANAGIRI hills, 110 kilometers from Bangalore, the US\$21 million Lord Kalabhairava temple is an impressive granite structure 14 years in the making, with over a hundred sculptors and thousands of laborers involved. The equal of many great temples of India, though not quite complete, it was consecrated in mid-February, 2008.

The temple was built by Sri Balagangadharanatha Swami, revered spiritual guru of Karnataka, for his favorite Deity, Kalabhairava, a form of Lord Siva. It is located at the ancient Adichunchanagiri monastery, an ancient *matha* of the Natha Sampradaya. Situated deep in the arid hills of Karna-

taka State, the monastery's many buildings cling to the massive rock outcropping that overlooks the plains below. Established 1,500 years ago, the huge edifice, with its rock caves, meandering corridors, Sanskrit college and first-rate guest facilities, has become the region's spiritual hub, and a powerful social force as well. Swamiji is the monastery's 71st pontiff.

Bhairava literally means "terrifying." As Kalabhairava, "Terrifying Lord of Time," He oversees the march of time. Adi Shankaracharya wrote that Kalabhairava indicates *kalakalam*, "death to death" and *bhuktimuktidayakam*, one who gives worldly happiness as well as liberation. This is the form of Siva as the fiery protector. He carries and is represented by the trident, an implement

often enshrined as guardian at the entrance to Siva temples. Lord Bhairava's mount is a dog. The new temple is unique in being the first major sanctuary at which Kalabhairava is enshrined as the main Deity.

The dedication ceremony

When I arrived on the evening of February 16, the day before the consecration of the temple towers and the Deity, the whole area was engulfed in festivities. Competing with the fanfare of human chatter, vehicles horns and police whistles was the loud and resonant chanting of Vedic hymns by 50 pundits. *Homas* and *yajnas* with Ganesha, Shanmukha, Siva and Parvati invoked into 1,008 *kalasas*, decorated water pots, were underway at the *yagasala*, a temporary cer-

Spectacular: Emerging out of a massive rock outcropping, the new temple sits above a buttressed retaining wall built to extend the area in front of the ancient monastery. (above right) priests pour holy water over the temple towers during the final moments of the consecration rites. (middle right) The central murti of the temple, a granite image of Kalabhairava Siva clad in gold and adorned with jewels, flowers and rudraksha malas after the final puja. (right) Balagangadharanatha Swami blesses the devotees.

emonial area erected outside the new temple. These fire rituals, called *yajna*, were to stretch through the day into the evening and late night, concurrent with other consecration rites.

That morning, the priests had all paraded from the *yagasala* to the temple, carrying their ritual implements for blessings. Then they walked back to conduct the day's chanting. The forty-by-forty foot *yagasala* held the usual complement of *homa* pits,

some round, some square, some triangular or eight-sided. At each such offering place, designed to mimic the form of the cosmos, a team of five or eight priests presided, offering their chants into the sacred fire to build the spiritual edifice that would inhabit the physical temple nearby. Nearby, forty swamis, mostly of the Natha Sampradaya, sat in silent conclave, gathered around Sri Balagangadharanatha Swami. Natha sannyasins are known for their massive earrings, and



Lord Siva, with blue face and tiger skin garb, leads the parade into the temple



Forty Hindu swamis meet to discuss dharma



Hindu of the Year

Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami presents Sri Balagangadharanatha Swami a plaque honoring him with the 2007 Hindu Renaissance Award as Hindu of the Year for his remarkable leadership in uplifting Hindus across Karnataka State and for the construction of the Bhairaveshvara Temple

these orange-robed monks were adorned with a two- to four-inch ring of bone or metal pierced through the cartilage of both ears.

Later, musicians and dancers ushered the swamis to the *homa* platform, surrounded by the surging crowd of guests, locals, villagers, streams of sadhus and attention-seeking politicians—it was chaotic! The *purnahuti*, the final ritual pouring of ghee into the sacred fire, was performed in the presence of Balagangadharanatha Swami late in the evening.

Now it is past midnight and all is quiet. I venture into the new temple, knowing that tomorrow it will be impossibly crowded. Four majestic Chola-style *gopurams*, entrance towers, beckon us. Three are 57 feet tall; the main east entrance looms 100 feet into the sky.

The grandly impressive 172 granite pillars display superb craftsmanship. Into their faces are carved the 64 forms of Bhairava, each 4.5 feet in height. Twelve hundred

skilled artisans from all over India have labored over the past 14 years to produce this traditional marvel, under the able stewardship of Muthiah Sthapati, a traditional temple architect from Tamil Nadu.

Sthapati flew in to personally guide the final days' events. On February 16, two dozen priests joined him in installing a four-foot Shakti murti in a side shrine, and in enlivening Kalabhairava's *vahana*, a graceful dog that looks down a gauntlet of eight eight-foot-tall black granite murtis that guard the entrance to the sanctum of their Lord. Nearby, workers were frantically completing the floor and preparing to install the flagpole, or *dvajasthambam*. They worked all night to complete these preparations, finishing just in time for the dawn ceremonies.

Devotees stream into the area even at this late hour. They come from all over Karnataka, neighboring Andhra, Maharashtra and

Tamil Nadu. Kalabhairava is the family Deity to millions. There's a feeling of pride and joy among the devotees as they step into this grand new temple for their Lord.

The administration has a daunting task to provide the visitors with accommodation, food and information. The celebrations, which began on February 11 and continued for 22 days, were packed with pujas, *homas* and cultural activities. Each day more than 100,000 people congregated here.

"Sahasrachandi Homa is being performed every day for one month," explains Shekarswamy, spokesperson and chief administrator of the Matha and BGS Group of Institutions. "Athirudra Mahayaga, which is rare and elaborate, is also being performed. This *yajna* needs about four hundred *ritviks* (Vedic Pundits), and they have been brought from all over India." Besides rituals, cultural and literary activities were

scheduled at a marathon pace. Hundreds of performers of classical arts presented a variety of cultural programs, including a day of poetry. A Dharma Sammelan brought together over 40 religious heads for three days to discuss key religious issues.

On February 17, Swamiji's 64th birthday, various *homas* as prescribed by the *Agamas* commenced at 5:30 am and concluded at eight with the *purnahuti* ghee offering. At 9:10 pm, the chosen auspicious moment, Mahakumbhabhisekam (ritual ablution) of the Rajagopuram, entrance tower, and Vimanagopuram, central tower, were performed (photos, page 28-29), amidst Vedic chanting, temple drums and horns, and the clamor of the thousands of devotees witnessing the historic blessing.

Focus now moved to the main shrine inside the temple. There was no restraining the crowds; the event and celebration that

belonged to them all. Only a small portion were lucky enough to make it into the temple to witness the Kumbhabhisekam of the finely chiseled 10.5 feet tall main Deity, Kalabhairava, and other accompanying Deities. Even for those inside the temple, it was not easy to see inside the sanctum. As specified in Agamic tradition, nine gems were placed under the Deity as part of the consecration rituals. After worship amidst Vedic chanting, the Deity was bathed with 108 pots of spiritually charged milk. The presence of the holy monks further heightened the spiritual atmosphere.

Back and forth the crowd moved, between the *yagasala* and the temple. It was an ancient scene—devotees vying for a glimpse of the Lord or the chance to touch the swamis' feet, even for an instant. In the midst of all this, the taciturn founder of the temple reigned with a powerful presence

that belied his quietude. A guru to millions, and having built 27 formidable institutions, he yet remains uncannily humble and unassuming. It reminded me of the saying of Yogaswami: "The hen lays one egg and cackles endlessly. The turtle lays 1,000 eggs and remains silent. Be like the turtle, not like the hen."

The day concluded with Swamiji's birthday celebrations, attended by a plethora of dignitaries: sadhus, politicians, academicians and other people of importance. The staff and pundits of the ashram showered the pontiff with bushels of flowers of all kinds.

For centuries, Adichunchanagiri Matha has maintained a small shrine for Kalabhairava. With the construction of this huge temple, Swamiji has ensured that the Deity will be central to each devotee's pilgrim's experience at this ancient monastery. 🍽️

In Swami's Own Words

Hinduism Today: What inspired you to build this temple?

Adichunchangiri is a Panchalinga Kshetra that follows the Saiva Siddhanta lineage under the Natha Sampradaya. Its existing Kalabhairava temple was a small one. I prayed to Him and started with a grand plan for the first major temple in India with Bhairava as the main Deity. The beauty, energy and vibration here is unique. This temple that will live on for centuries.

What temple renovation work are you engaged in and why?

A temple is a place of importance to people. Going to the temple, celebrating our festivals, hosting the annual temple festival, all this

leads to increased spirituality, which is essential for the well being of people. This can happen only if there is an attraction to the temple. If a temple is dilapidated, no one will go. This is the reason we are taking up renovation of temples. When we started building this temple, neighboring villagers asked us to renovate the temples in their villages. When I went to Ujjain six years back, I found that the Mahakaleshwar temple there, which was constructed in the period of Raja Vikramaditya and is one among the 12 Jyotir Lingas, was in a dilapidated condition. I sought the permission of the government and had it renovated.

What are your programs for reconversion to Hinduism?

We have throughout schools, colleges and hospitals addressed the need for education and health care among hundreds of thousands

of villagers. It is now time to focus on spirituality and to bring people into the fold of bhakti. It is just not about building or renovating temples. We have taken up the task of bringing people who have converted into other religions, especially Christianity, back into the fold of Hinduism. They have left—with or without reason—and they became outsiders to both religions. They may have been deceived by society, by their own family or their trusted ones. People may have abandoned them; maybe it was poverty. We are making them realize that leaving the religion was not the answer; finding solutions to their problems is the answer.

What is lacking in us Hindus?

We have to have pride in ourselves. We should not feel low about ourselves economically, in education or by caste. We should feel

we are equal to all. Our *Vedas* have always spoken of these values: "Aham Brahmasmi, tattvam asi." "God is in me." This is not an attitude of arrogance, but of deep understanding.

What are your thoughts about technology and youth today?

Technology has brought negative effects on our children. They don't know how to mingle with people, how to respect elders, how to relate to those around them, how to see the world. They have developed a kind of laziness and lethargy. The material world is all that they know. They are moving away from Divinity and not connecting to the superconscious, which is the ultimate. Technology also has a shelf life, what after that? The joy that spirituality brings is unknown to many.



ALL PHOTOS BY SHANA DRESSLER

A creative explosion of devotion: (Above) Dressler's photographic skills capture the intensity of Lord Ganesha in His myriad colors during a festival in Orissa; (opposite page) Lord Ganesha shines as the Deity is taken to be bathed in sacred waters during the Chaturthi festival

CULTURE

Discovering Ganesha

An American photographer's life is transformed by an unexpected encounter with Hinduism's Lord of Dharma and her first visit to India

BY LAVINIA MELWANI, NEW YORK

LORD GANESHA CAN ENTER PEOPLE'S lives in mysterious ways. For photographer Shana Dressler, it was a chance encounter on a busy New York street, when she passed a bookstore in Manhattan featuring a beautiful book with Ganesha on the cover. He was shown being immersed in the water, splashed by a small army of men. Seized by the Lord of Obstacles' magnetic charisma, Shana would spend the next five

years of her life photographing Ganesha festivals worldwide.

Dressler had taken an entry level course in Hinduism at Columbia University in 1991, while studying comparative religion and anthropology, so she had seen the Elephant-faced God before. But why was He partly immersed in the ocean? She had to find out. The photographer eventually decided to travel to India to see the Ganesha Chaturthi festival firsthand. Her serendipitous en-

counter with an intriguing book cover was to trigger many adventures.

Visiting India was a powerful experience. "More than anything else, any monument or sacred place, what keeps bringing me back to India is the people," she says. "I have been to 50 countries on five continents and nowhere else have I felt such a pervasive and palpable sense of spirituality that is not tied to a particular religion, person or place."

Her quest took her in 2003 to Mumbai,

where her Italian photojournalist friend Diane was living. There she was introduced to Sudharak Olwe, a photographer on the staff of the *Times of India*. Dressler and Diana had both come to Mumbai to attend the Ganesha Chaturthi festivities, which celebrate the birth of the God of Auspicious Beginnings. They followed Olwe around, since he had covered the festival for many years and knew exactly where to go.

"I began photographing the festival as an outsider, observing from my American lens," recalls Dressler. But as she got to know the people of Mumbai, her attitude changed. She says, "Instead of photographing Ganesha as an object, I shifted to photograph Him as everyone around me saw Him—as a Deity. This concept was radically different from my Judeo-Christian upbringing, where paintings and sculptures are just representations of God, not embodiments of God themselves."

Indeed, it was an eye-opener for Dressler, a practicing Christian who knew little about Hinduism. After attending several pujas, she understood the powerful role faith plays in Indian life and tried to photograph the festival from the perspective of a devotee as best as she could. The challenge was to materialize in the photos the spirit of the festivities. On a technical level, this included using slower shutter speeds, film sensitive to low light, and a technique she had learned as a photography student years ago called "shake and

bake."

"With this technique, you need to use a slow shutter speed along with a flash," she explains. "This creates an image where

"What greater freedom than to experience God with such a great variety of creative expression?"

—SHANA DRESSLER

some of your subject matter is in sharp focus and the ambient scene around the main object creates a blur. The blur for me was a way to give a sense of spirit being present as opposed to merely matter."

Dressler had always been interested in visual arts as a means to learn about other cultures. She is the founder of Swimming Elephant (www.swimmingelephant.com), a multimedia company that produces photography exhibitions, book projects and video

installations to celebrate the world's many cultures. These became the impetus for her new project, *Discovering Ganesha*, an artistic exhibit of video and photos which will one day become a book.

Back in New York, Dressler was on a roll with Ganesha at her side. His blessings began to manifest in tangible ways. The photos she had taken in India were sent to Kodak for a film grant, which she won. After her second visit to the Chaturthi celebrations in Mumbai, she approached renowned art galleries and was invited to

present a slideshow at the United Nations. She says, "I wanted to educate Americans about the cultural aspects of India, using Ganesha as the entry point."

Discovering Ganesha is still a work in progress, and over the years Dressler and her colleagues have joined several of the Ganesha festivities in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Orissa and Tamil Nadu, video-graphing and shooting images for the upcoming book in which they plan to have images of Ganesha from around the world.

Dressler has now photographed the Chaturthi festival for four years and has seen thousands of *murtis*: "Each year I am so struck by the simultaneous seriousness and playfulness with which the people of Mumbai and India celebrate Ganesha. The artistic license of the artists who create the Deities is truly inspirational and refreshing." Indeed, in addition to the traditional representations of Ganesha, she's seen sculptures



created out of spices, peacock feathers and even dried fruit. She has seen Ganesha sitting on the shoulder of King Kong and sharing the stage with Harry Potter.

"What's so moving is to see artistic representations of Ganesha that evoke a deep sense of devotion and love, whether they instill a sense of seriousness or evoke laughter, amusement or intrigue," she says. "In all the Deities I've seen, never once did I feel any sense of sacrilegious intent or disrespect. What greater freedom than to see and experience God with such a great variety of creative expression?"

Dressler points out that for the world's one billion Hindus, Ganesha is a powerful and majestic Deity, said to bring good fortune when one is launching new endeavors. He is also the patron of arts and the Lord of beginnings. She adds, "The iconography

and history of Ganesha go far beyond his link with good fortune. The imagery offers a spiritual map of sorts, his every feature rich with meaning."

Dressler's journey of *Discovering Ganesha* has not been free of disappointment. Plans for a major exhibit at the Rubin Museum, which was slated to open in 2009, fell through when the curator of the show left. There had been many small difficulties, such as funding the project and finding sponsors, but this was the biggest blow. But when the show was canceled, she decided not to get upset. She stayed on course, flying to Mumbai in accordance with the production timeline she had originally established.

In India, even as she worked every day on the project, Dressler had more mental space to think about the birthing pains her idea was having, and whether there was some di-

vine design behind these obstacles. "I wondered what lessons I still need to learn, what was missing in my research. I realized that in producing this entire project I hadn't really been spending time looking at the sacred texts, taking the time to learn the mantras, talking to experts, pundits and devotees to get deeper insight into what would be most meaningful to share with a Western audience." She realized that the cancellation of the museum show had been a blessing in disguise, giving her the opportunity to take the project to a much deeper level, a spiritual depth that was missing before.

Dressler's journey became deeply spiritual as she tried to understand the deeper meaning of her quest. "What does Ganesha represent for me, my journey as an artist, an individual, a non-Hindu American who grew up in another faith? Having read

through his 108 names, and then again through his 1,008 names, what I realized is that Ganesha, the Remover of Obstacles, inspired the deepest thought within me."

Dressler explains that she now understands that the obstacles—physical, mental, emotional, professional—were there for a reason. Many new people came into her life, and each brought new perspectives. She recalls the profound sense of hospitality and caring she encountered everywhere in this journey, and all the small miracles that happened along the way.

Dressler thinks this was the lesson she was meant to learn. She says, "I can trace back my interest in dedicating time and money to mentoring youth and helping those less

fortunate than myself, to the beginning of this project."

She now has developed a charitable component to *Discovering Ganesha*. From Seshu Badrinath, the book's photo editor, she learned about the travails of working class people who have lost their sight. Seshu's parents are physicians who run an eye hospital in Chennai; he explained to her that when the breadwinner has lost his eyesight, poverty often engulfs the entire family.

Along with raising funds for the book project, her goal now is to raise funds for a thousand eye operations—one for each of Ganesha's thousand names. Each eye operation costs just \$100, but is priceless in its ability to turn a family's fortunes around

completely.

Dressler plans to travel again to India to shoot videos at the 2008 Ganesh Festival. She is also trying to raise funds for a journey to Southeast Asia, Africa, Dubai and the Caribbean to photograph the worship of Ganesha in those countries.

"For me, the more I free myself from my obstacles—real or imagined—I realize that what makes me the happiest is to inspire others to look within, to be less focused on myself and to really be of service to others," says Dressler. "I had to take the journey before I realized that the power to get to where I wanted to go had been with me all along. I just didn't know it. It took the journey, the struggle, the obstacles and ultimately the help of others to figure it all out."

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The magic of tradition: Devotees carefully carry murtis of the Elephant God to be immersed in sacred waters on the auspicious Chaturthi festival, as done for generations

[HTTP://WWW.DISCOVERINGGANESH.COM/BOOK](http://www.discoveringganesh.com/book)





PHILANTHROPY

Social Change Through Education

How one Hindu-American woman set out to support a village school

EACH DAY, IN THE GENTLE LIGHT OF morning, women of Tamil Nadu, South India, use coarse, colored rice flour to create a geometric pattern of balance and beauty just outside their front doors. These temporary *yantras*, or mystical diagrams, are known as *kolam*, which means “beauty.” They are a daily tribute to the Goddess Lakshmi, and serve to bless and protect the home and all who enter or leave.

Vaidehi Ganesan Herbert, now living in Kauai, Hawaii, named her Kolam Charitable Foundation (www.kolam.info) after this ancient ritual. Vaidehi grew up watching her artistic mother create an elaborate *kolam* every day. Having the beauty of the practice etched in her heart, she began the foundation under the same name—to honor its spiritual message of welcoming and protection. The Foundation is the main support for a middle and high school in the outskirts of Tuticorin in southern Tamil Nadu, near where Vaidehi was born and raised.

The Kolam Foundation’s main objective is to create economic independence for the needy and underprivileged through grants and educational programs. For example, Kolam grants of two cows, forty goats and several sewing machines to local village women have opened new income sources to them.

Vaidehi attributes her sense of service to her upbringing: “I was always taught if you’re lucky to have, you give. I come from four generations of a family that built schools, orphanages, colleges and other service charities. It is something that comes very naturally to me, but is certainly derived from my Hindu background.”

The Foundation is partnered with the Imayam Sevalayam School, a day school providing academic, cultural and spiritual education to some 200 local students. Its founders and headmistresses are C. Ponrathi and



The unforgettable colors of home: At Imayam Sevalayam School, the students are not only allowed but encouraged to express their beautiful Hindu heritage

R. Saraswathi, retired teachers who began the school using US\$60,000 of their pension funds. In addition to teaching the students, the school is involved in community outreach to the village women, offering vocational training and counseling services. The school offers liaison services between the women and local banks, for microcredit to fund home-grown businesses.

Saraswathi looks to Swami Vivekananda for inspiration. “Swamiji’s words, ‘Service to humanity is service to God,’ left an indelible mark in my mind. He said, ‘Whatever you think, that you will be. Never say, “No.” Never say, “I cannot,” for you are infinite.’ These words of the Swamiji are a magical mantra

that made me overcome all challenges.”

Imayam School is accredited by the government and follows India’s national academic guidelines. It offers a primarily secular curriculum, but religion is emphasized as well. Classes and experiences are offered here that are not available in any other school nearby. Saraswati explains, “Students are taught *Thevaram*, *Thiruvashagam*, *Arutpa* and other devotional songs to help them understand the rich heritage of Hindu culture. They learn the reasons behind our celebrations and the significance of festivals such as Krishna Jayanti, Vinayaga Chaturthi, Navaratri, Sanda Shasti, Pongal and Ramnavami. Our students are now taking the lead

in their villages, conducting special pujas in their village temples and initiating other religious observances.” Ponrathi relates, “Physical exercises and *yogasanas* as well as *pranayama* are featured in our daily schedule. Training in Carnatic music is open to all students. Every Friday, they participate in *bhajans*. They learn devotional songs of

by the Kolam Foundation. As their parents do not have to bear the expenses of their children’s studies, they willingly and happily send them to school.”

At the close of the last school year, in Imayam’s first grade ten class, 27 out of 28 students achieved perfect scores on standardized tests. These results greatly impressed



Working where the heart is: Vaidehi, left, with her sister Indira, who works in India as a volunteer school teacher with inner city children to qualify the brightest for college

our spiritual gurus and the biographies of Hindu sages with their valuable teachings.”

If not for the free education offered by Imayam School, many of these young students would not be attending school at all; and others would have to accept scholarships from Christian mission schools in the area. “If it weren’t for us, many of them would be at these schools and be forced to convert,” warns Vaidehi.

Ponrathi explains, “No fees are taken from the students. All classes and extra-curricular activities are provided free of charge. Students are all given a noon-time nutritious vegetarian meal and provided with books, supplies and uniforms. All this is funded

educators all over Tamil Nadu, as it is rare for lower-income students to achieve such uniformly high results. These students have now moved on to other schools, as Imayam has yet to add eleventh and twelfth grade—a gap they are trying to close with their current fund-raising drive. To provide a complete secondary education, they need two more classrooms, eight more teachers and labs for physics, chemistry and biology.

Support for the school from the Kolam Foundation is more than monetary; it also includes an active volunteer program. Teachers, massage therapists, mothers and college students are among the diverse volunteers that have spent time learning and teaching

Excellence in education builds a future: Disciplined, organized and joyous, the students of the Imayam Sevalayam School see their lives and opportunities expand as they learn science, language, crafts, arts and hatha yoga in an uplifting daily routine

in this special cross-cultural environment. The volunteers are paid \$25 a day and are given housing and vegetarian meals.

“Everyone has something to offer to these students,” Vaidehi explains, “especially they need to practice conversational English.”

One such volunteer was Anna Myers, a personal trainer on Kauai. She recounts fondly, “I had the privilege of teaching English to the children in November of 2006. These kids are wonderful. I find it difficult to describe in words how my experience in Tamil Nadu has affected my life. I could see that through this school these children have the chance to escape poverty.”

Vaidehi has developed a simple fund-raising method suitable for her island life. Every first and second Saturday of the month, she invites local residents to her home. She prepares traditional South Indian vegetarian cuisine for a fabulous brunch that lasts for hours and includes sharing of recipes and cooking demonstrations. The \$30 donations for the brunch go toward Imayam School’s basic expenses.

Other organizations have also taken interest in the school. For example, Swami Sivananda’s Sevalaya recently built a dormitory to house 50 girls, and a two-room clinic that will serve the school and greater community with a part-time doctor and nurse.

One of the school’s teachers, Professor Selvaraj, came from a poor family and was sent to college by Vaidehi’s family. He summarizes the impact of this school, “Education is really an instrument of social change. Good education has emancipated many of our Tamil families from poverty, ignorance and social backwardness. They are able to lead a decent life and enjoy a good social status only due to their education.”

By Keya Keita, Hawaii

KOLAM FOUNDATION, 6213-A KAHILIOHOLO ROAD, KILAUEA, HI 96754 USA PHONE 808-828-0540 E-MAIL VI@KOLAM.INFO THE FOUNDATION OFFERS TRAVEL/CHARITY TOURS TO INDIA

EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

“Difference Is Real!”

**The Life and Teachings of
Sri Madhva, One of India’s
Greatest Spiritual Masters**

**By Jeffrey Armstrong
(Kavindra Rishi)**

In the constant presence of his Beloved, the blue-skinned Krishna, Madhvacharya sits on the guru’s seat of authority, scripture in hand, teaching the philosophy of pure dualism. Sectarian symbols, such as the conch, are drawn in white rice flour on the floor. A niche on the right enshrines Radha and Krishna, indicating Madhva’s theology, which describes the devotee’s relationship with the Divine as lover and Beloved.

The Remarkable Life of Sri Madhvacharya

Picture a man of powerful physique, a champion wrestler, who could eat hundreds of bananas in one sitting. Imagine a guru who was observed to lead his students into a river, walk them across the bottom and out the other side. Is this a modern action hero? No, it is one of the most controversial and influential Vedantic acharyas in India's modern history. Add to his qualities that he was an unparalleled Sanskrit scholar who knew the scriptures to mastery level by the age of eighteen, a powerful debater who openly and publicly challenged all views, and a mountain climber who, after fasting for 48 days, trekked to Badarik Ashram, high in the Himalayas, to meet the eternal Rishi Vedavyasa and receive his teachings. Allow me to introduce Shri Madhvacharya—also known as Vasudeva, Purnaprajna and Anandatirtha—the famous founder of the Dvaita school of Vedanta and the Brahma Vaishnava Sampradaya, of which I am a devout follower. Through his eloquent preaching and prolific dictation, this one brilliant man gave a new perspective to Vedantic scripture that influences millions of people to this day.

Vaishnava Hinduism, of which Madhva was one of the foremost exponents, holds a vision that this world and the transcendental world beyond it are populated by divine beings who can, at will, descend as avatars into our planet in what appears to be a human body. Some are manifestations of Parabrahman, from beyond all matter, whose apparent bodies are projections of their transcendent being.

They are not born and do not die, though they may appear to do so. Avatars manifest varying degrees of Divinity, from the perfect, or Purna-Avatars, like Lord Rama and Lord Krishna, to the avatars of various devas who manage our material world. Madhva announced himself as an avatar of Prana Vayu, the life force itself, come to Earth to revive and teach the real, eternal meaning of the *Vedas*.

As Lord Krishna states in the *Bhagavad Gita* (4.7), “Yada yada hi dharmasya glanir bhavati bharata.” “Whenever there is a decline of dharma within the world, I descend myself to correct the situation.” It is for this reason that in the Hindu/Vedic culture we say, “Atiti devo bhavataha,” or “The guest should be treated as a descent of the Divine.” You never really know who is coming to dinner, since avatars are always wearing a disguise so as not to disturb unknowing humans.

Details of Madhva's life are known primarily from the *Madhva-vijaya* (or *Sumadhva-vijaya*), a biography by Narayana Pandita, the son of Trivikrama Pandita, a brilliant advaita scholar who was defeated by Madhva in debate and became one of his foremost disciples. This account tells us that, in 1238, on the auspicious occasion of the Vijayadasami festival held at the Ananteshvara Temple in the city of Udupi, a mute man became possessed of the spirit of Lord Ananteshvara, climbed the temple's stone flag pole and, from atop its

As a boy, Madhva had already mastered and memorized the scriptures of Vedanta. His mother took him to a public lecture one day. When the speaker made an error interpreting a text, he boldly stood up to point out the mistake and offered the correct view, which the pundit gratefully accepted.

Defending the view that “Difference is real”

There has always prevailed in India a tolerant view regarding differences of philosophical opinion. Hindu dharma not only tolerates, but encourages a grand diversity of opinions on ultimate issues, on matters of spiritual faith and practice. And it believes neither in aggressive conversion nor imposing its spiritual world view on others. Nurtured by this environment of free expression, countless great lineages of Hindu culture have emerged throughout history as India's great thinkers have given their interpretations of Vedic wisdom according to their experience and realization.

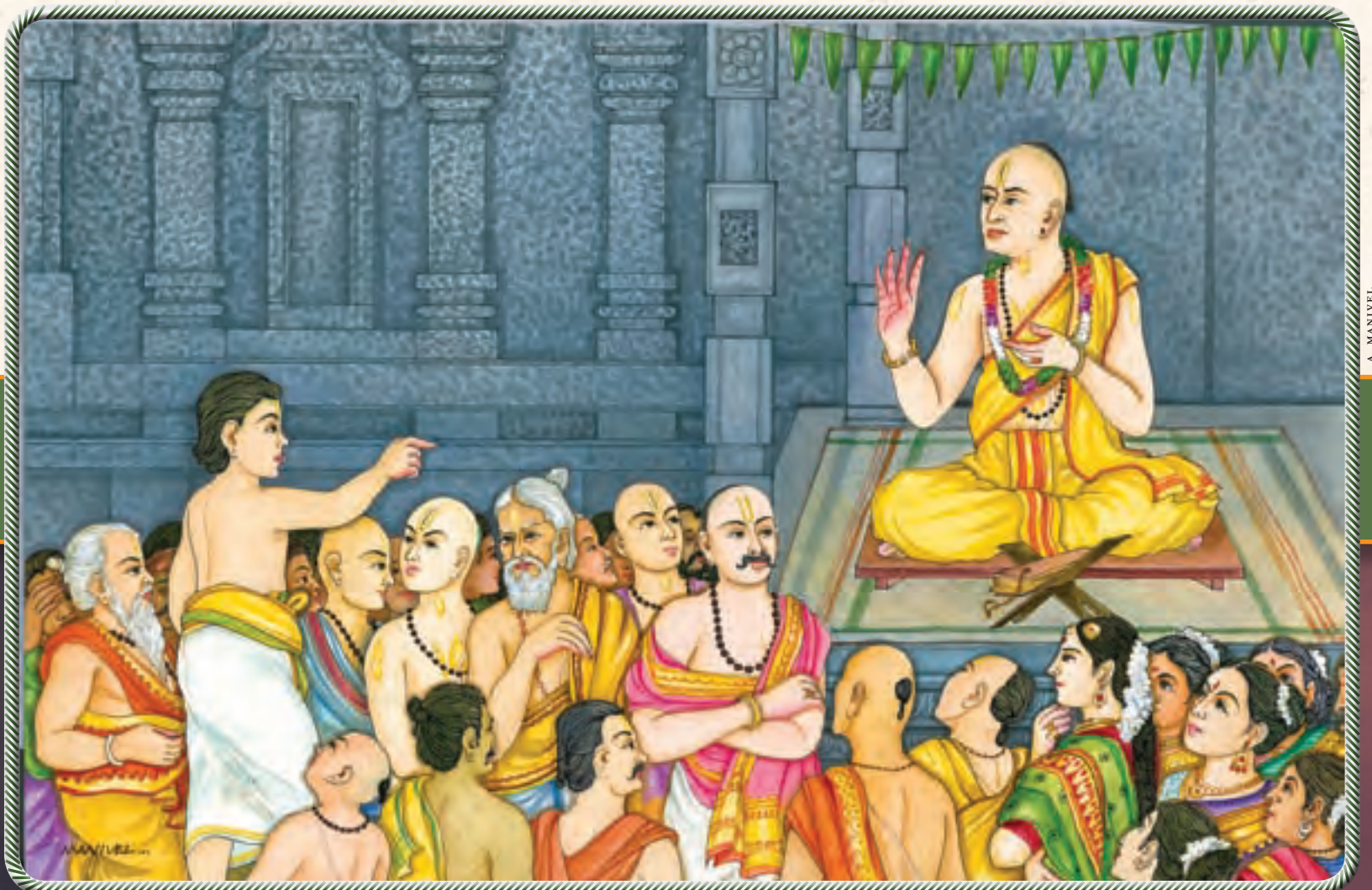
This Educational Insight takes us back to the thirteenth century in South India, where fervent public debates on the nature of truth were (as they are to this day) held between luminaries of various faiths and traditions. While religionists of Europe and the Middle East were immersed in bloody battles which they called the Holy War, great, spiritual warriors in India were locked in battles of wits and will. The goal was not land or booty, but correct knowledge of the nature of reality. If one's point of view could be proven with impeccable logic and scriptural evidence, it had to be true. At their best, these were powerful,

mystical encounters in which those present rose together to touch into higher planes of knowing and draw from the infinite well of wisdom. Such discussions were so sincere that the one who lost, if fully convinced of the other's point of view, might embrace his school of thought and become a faithful follower.

In those days, the prevailing Vedanta philosophy was the severely monistic view of Sri Adi Shankara (788–820ce), a brilliant young monk and intellectual giant who had traveled the length and breadth of India as a reviver of Hindu thought and practice. From his efforts and those of his followers emerged the highly influential and philosophically compelling system known as Advaita Vedanta, the core belief system of the Smarta Sampradaya, one of the most prominent denominations of Hinduism to this day. He built his seemingly unassailable fortress of logic not only by speaking, but by writing. His prolific commentaries on the three pillars of Vedic evidence—the ten principle *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Brahma Sutra*—became the benchmark of Vedantic thought. In a nut-

tiny platform, proclaimed to the crowd of devotees that Lord Vayu, the closest deva to Vishnu, would soon take birth to revive Hindu dharma. For twelve years, a pious brahmin couple of modest means, Narayana and Vedavati Naddantillaya, had prayed and performed severe penance at this temple, beseeching the Deity to bless them with a male child to perpetuate their family line. Eight months after the mute's declaration, Vedavati gave birth to a handsome son in their home in Pajaka, south of Udupi. They named him Vasudeva.

Vasudeva was physically and mentally precocious. Once, at the age of one, he grabbed hold of the tail of one of the family bulls who was going out to graze in the forest and followed the bull all day long. At sunset, to the great relief of his worried parents, Vasudeva returned home with the bull, hungry but otherwise happy. At the age of three, he disappeared one morning, and his increasingly frantic parents searched everywhere for him. Finally, his father found him seven miles away, at the Ananteshvara Temple in Udupi. The boy



shell: everything is illusion; only the Absolute, Brahman, is real. The goal, as defined in scripture, is to break the spell of illusion with the power of discrimination and realize the oneness of soul and God.

While Shankara's view was prominent, it was not the only way Hindus viewed life or interpreted the holy books. In the centuries that followed, many luminaries challenged his system. To do so, each wrote commentaries on the same texts he had analyzed, and avidly debated with monastic and lay scholars of the Shankara school. Each in his day

stood up and propounded his own view of what the scriptures really mean, while refuting, point-by-point, the contentions that Shankara had given forth. Because Shankara's philosophy was so articulately stated, widely known and deeply established, the great thinkers who followed him defined their school of thought by debating the assertions of Shankara.

Between the eleventh and sixteenth centuries, five such masters (see sidebar page 44) loom the largest in the halls of Indian history. All from

explained that he had walked there to have darshan of the Deity at the behest of the Lord Himself.

When he was five, his mother took him to attend a spiritual discourse by a prominent pundit. At one point, the speaker made a mistake. Vasudeva immediately stood up and corrected him, offering the proper explanation with reference to the shastra. Impressed by the child's knowledge, the pundit praised his discernment and courage.

Soon thereafter, a money lender came to their house demanding payment for a long overdue debt owed by Vasudeva's father. Curious, the boy spoke to the burly fellow and learned of his purpose. Asking him to wait a moment, Vasudeva ran to the back yard, picked

up some dry tamarind seeds, rubbed them in his palms and transformed them into gold coins, with which he paid the man even more than the amount of the debt.

At age seven Vasudeva received his *upanayana* initiation and was enrolled in Vedic studies at the gurukulam of Totanillaya. This did not impede his love of play, and he spent most of his time wrestling, swimming, trekking and lifting weights. In competition, he was fearless and invincible. One day, his teacher scolded him for neglecting his studies. Vasudeva replied, "I don't see any point in repeating what I have heard once and memorized." "Very well then" the teacher retorted, "recite all the *shlokas* I taught this morning!" Without hesitation, Vasudeva chanted the verses in resounding, sonorous

Sanskrit and then recited more from the same text that had not even been taught. That ended any further doubt in his Vedic prowess.

After nine years of formal learning, the students would each take a vow to take up a career and make a difference in the world. Their aspirations varied: priest, doctor, astrologer, merchant. Vasudeva vowed to study the scriptures to find out their true meaning, as he just could not accept the Sankaran Advaita view, so prevalent in his day, that the world is an illusion. He resolved to renounce worldly life and become a monk so that he could spend all his time combating Advaita and promoting theism, which he believed to be the essence of true religion.

Like most parents, Narayana and Vedavati were shocked by his decision and begged him to reconsider, reminding him that, as their only son, it was his duty to marry,

have children to perpetuate their family line and take care of them through their old age. Vasudeva was adamant and could not be dissuaded, but agreed to postpone his renunciation until Vedavati bore another child, which Vasudeva seemed to know would be a son. Upon the birth of his brother, the 16-year-old left home and joined the Ekadandi Order as a sannyasin at the Ananta *Matha* in Udupi. Vasudeva was initiated by Achyutaprekshacharya, who named him Purnaprajna, due to his prodigious knowledge.

Just forty days after his initiation, two famous scholars came to Udupi in search of a competitor worthy to engage in debate. They were Vadisimha of the Vyaya-Vaisheshika school and Buddhisagara, a Buddhist monk. Purnaprajna was chosen to represent the *matha*. Their easy victory turned to stunning defeat as the youth thoroughly worsted them on the first day of debate. They left Udupi that night rather than resume the contest the next day and publicly admit defeat before the extraordinary young monk. They, like so many who confronted Purnaprajna, were no match for his unassailable logic and encyclopedic knowledge of the shastras. Many an opponent was defeated and became his disciple or just quietly slipped away.

In 1256, at age 18, encouraged by his success, Madhva set out on a grand tour of South India, joined by his preceptor, Achyutaprekshacharya. On a three-year campaign passing through Anantasayana, Kanyakumari, Rameshvaram and Srirangam, Madhva preached Tattvavada, "doc-

Vedanta: One of Six Hindu Darshanans

There are six classical darshanans, or ways of seeing and investigating reality in the Hindu tradition: Sankhya, which is material science; Nyaya, logic and epistemology; Vaisheshika, physics and atomic theory; Yoga, spiritual practice and meditation; Purva Mimamsa, hermeneutics and ritual worship; and Vedanta (Uttara Mimamsa), metaphysics. Vedanta is dedicated to defining the transcendental goal of life and outlining the means to its attainment. The word *Vedanta* tells it all—the "end" (anta) or "conclusion" of the *Vedas*.

The youthful Madhva spent most of his days in athletic pursuits with schoolmates. When his teacher, Totanillaya, advised he should spend more time practicing his chanting, Madhva countered that he had memorized and perfected all the verses that had been taught. A disbelieving Totanillaya challenged the claim, and Madhva then perfectly recited the shlokas from memory. The teacher never again questioned the boy's study habits.

reality, is the only truth."

In contrast, Madhva seeks to prove from scriptural statements that the Ultimate is a personal, lovable Supreme Being who is the source of all beauty, truth, unity and diversity. Further, the *atma*, soul or self, is eternally an individual, both in the material realm and in the transcendental. The names and forms we see temporarily manifested in the realm of matter are reflections of the eternal names and forms; and the transcendental realm, the material realm, souls and the Supreme Being are all eternally different and distinctive. His emphatic declaration is "Difference is real; difference is real; difference is real." That mantra is captured in the famous portrait in which he holds up his right hand with middle and index finger extended, a simple *mudra* indicating distinction (see art on page 38).

Shankara defines *moksha*, the soul's liberation from the cycle of rebirth, as the shedding of all distinctions, forms and personhood to merge in the timeless, seamless, formless reality of Brahman. Madhva's doctrine, which to this day forms the backbone of several Vaishnava bhakti schools, asserts that the individual *atma* and the Supreme Paramatma, as well as their friends, associates and paraphernalia, exist for

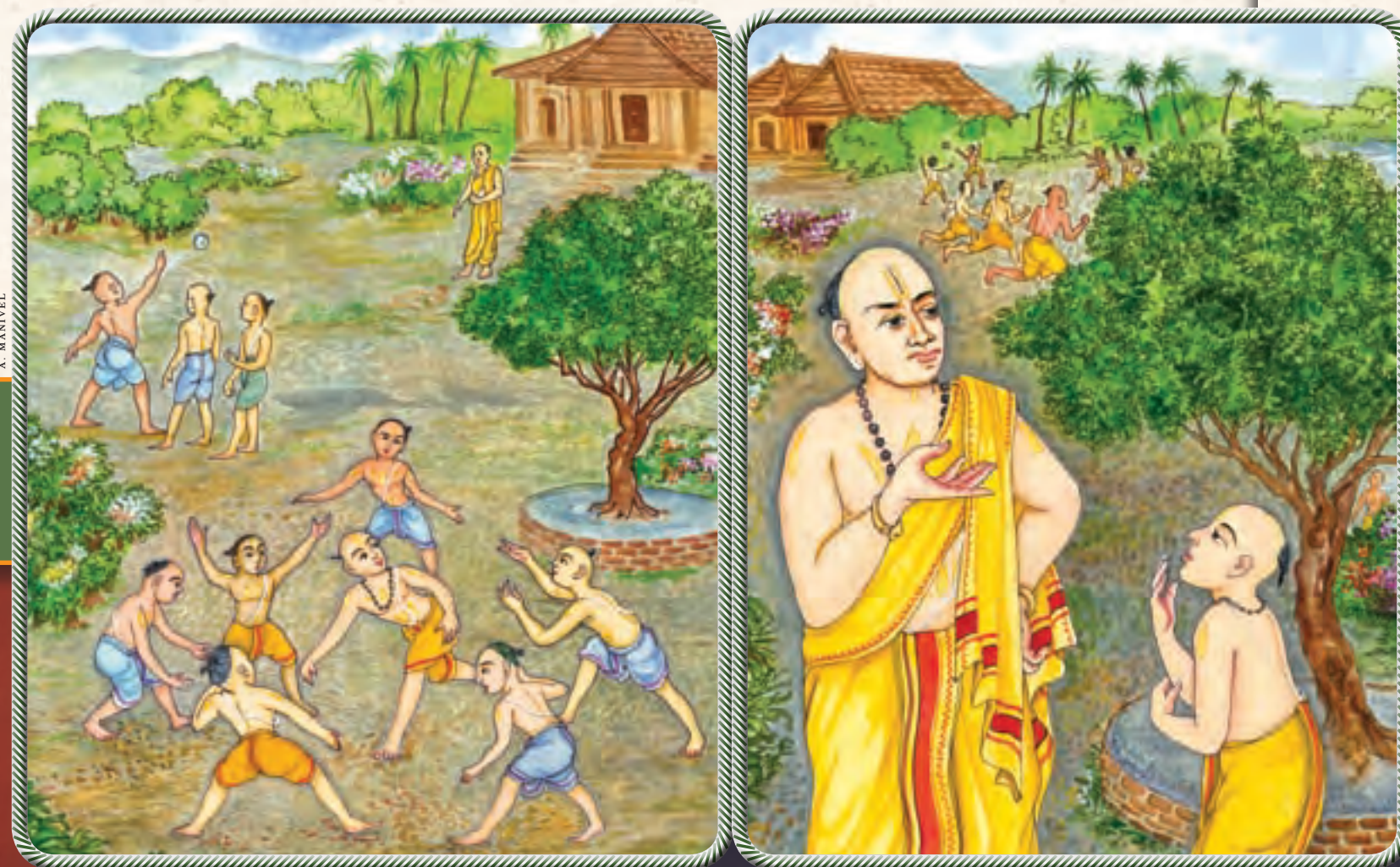
eternity in the transcendental realm. There they engage in various loving activities beyond the reach of the temporary material realm, in which birth, death, old age and disease interrupt our potential for eternal, loving service. That pure activity, called *bhakti*, or devotion, is the goal of life and ultimate message of the scriptures.

This very personal and permanent relationship with Divinity contrasts starkly with the view of Shankara—which ultimately considers the relationship between the worshiper and Bhagavan, God, as but another aspect of the grand illusion that must be transcended—and argues that liberation, being a formless state, can alone be attained by the path of *jnana*, the cultivation of knowledge of the impersonal Absolute, Brahman.

Shankara's Advaita defines the extreme left pole of Vedanta. In the middle range are the Vishishtadvaita views of Ramanuja, the Achintya-Bheda-Abheda-Tattva of Chaitanya and others. Madhva's Dvaita, called Distinctive Realism, is at the extreme right pole.

What Evidence Is Trustworthy?

Madhva defines the three valid sources of the truth: perception, inference and testimony: "Perception is the flawless contact of sense organs with their appropriate objects. Flawless reasoning is inference. Flawless



the Vaishnava tradition, two lived in South India and three in the North. Among them was Sri Madhva, born in Karnataka. From his early teens, he was disturbed by the pervasive advaitic notion that we are all caught up in some fantastic dream in which Bhagavan, his beloved Lord, is ultimately nothing more than a phantom. "It is not true," he swore one day after completing his priestly training, "and I will prove it wrong."

Madhva's lifelong debate with Shankara centers around the definitions of Self, the reality or unreality of the world and the nature of the ultimate transcendental goal. His investigation begins with the *Brahma*

Sutra, a pithy, 550-verse text that stitches together the varied scriptures of Vedanta, including the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, into a consistent whole. Its first verse reads, "Athato Brahma jijnasu," meaning, "Now, therefore, let us inquire into the nature of the transcendent reality." Does it have qualities, forms, distinctions and individuality similar in any way to those we experience in the realm of matter? Or is it pure *advaita*, a boundless, unified, homogenous existence, without individuality, distinctions and forms, as Shankara claims: "Jagat mithya brahma satya," "The world is false or illusory, and Brahman, the non-distinctive

trine of truth,” and held heated debates with advaitins as well as scholars of all schools of thought, including Buddhism and Jainism. Coming in contact with followers of the great Ramanuja, the South Indian founder of the Shri Vaishnava Sampradaya, Madhva realized he was not alone in his campaign against advaita, as they also argued against Shankara’s philosophy. This first of three great tours galvanized his resolve: “My whole life shall be dedicated to the spread of ultimate truth.”

People flocked to hear the handsome, charismatic preacher; many were won over and joined him as disciples. The *Madhva-vijaya* describes him: “Madhvacharya shone like the moon, with his gentle

smile, lotus eyes, golden complexion and words of blessing. He had the gait of a young lion, feet and hands like sprouts, nails like rubies; thighs like the trunk of an elephant, a broad chest and long muscular arms. Indeed, those who made sacred images considered him the model for their art.” After the troupe returned to Udupi, Achyutaprekshacharya conferred on his disciple the title Madhvacharya and appointed him his heir-apparent to the *pitham* of Ananta *Matha*. For the next six years, Madhva remained in Udupi, during which time he authored the first of two commentaries (*bhashya*) on the *Bhagavad Gita*, dictating it in Sanskrit to his disciple Satyatirtha, who scribed it on palm leaves.

Five Schools of Vaishnavism

Sect/Sampradaya	Founder	Philosophy	Spheres of Influence
Shri Vaishnava	Ramanuja (1017 to 1137)	Vishishtadvaita	Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka
Sanakadi Vaishnava	Nimbarka (13th century)	Dvaitadvaita	Karnataka, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu
Brahma Vaishnava	Madhva (1238–1317)	Dvaita	Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal
Rudra Vaishnava	Vallabhacharya (1479–1531)	Shuddhadvaita	Rajasthan, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh
Gaudiya Vaishnava	Chaitanya (1486–1533)	Achintya Bheda-Abheda Tattva	Bengal and Orissa

This valuable summary is drawn from *The Sri-Krsna Temple at Udupi*, by B. N. Hebbar, who notes that “all five schools are theistic and realistic reactions to the absolutistic idealism of Shankara’s Advaita Vedanta.... The first two are South Indian and follow the *aishvarya bhakti-marga* (Master-servant relationship between the Lord and His

devotee), while the latter three are North Indian and adhere to the *madhurya bhakti-marga* (Lover-beloved relationship between the Lord and His devotee). Also, while the Lakshmi-Narayana concept predominates South Indian Vaishnavism, the Radha-Krishna element pervades the three North Indian Vaishnava sects.”

Around 1278, Madhva received a large mound of yellow clay from a ship captain in appreciation for his magically preventing the ship from capsizing during a gale. Inside the mound Madhva discovered an ancient stone murti of Gopi Krishna, which he carried to his monastery. Along the way, devotees are placing flowers at his feet in adoration. Below: The decorated Gopi Krishna murti that Madhva retrieved at Malpe Beach is still worshiped today.

words conveying valid sense is testimony.” Perception is *pratyaksha*, inference is *anuman*a and testimony is *agama*. *Agama* is another name for the Vedantic library of evidence, all of which is considered divinely given information or testimony. All three sources of information—sense perception, inferential reasoning and scripture—are always accurate in varying degrees, and all three can be perfected and relied upon. This stands in contrast to Shankara’s assertion that inference and perception, like the world, are illusory, and testimony alone can lead us to the undifferentiated, impersonal conclusion regarding the nature of reality.

Madhva also berated Shankara for misusing inference, as he does in the following argument: The world is imperfect, illusory and has



form; therefore, the transcendental, which is not illusory, must not have form. Here is Madhva’s retort: “If inference is said to negate perception, when perception is not negated by another perception of equal strength, what then is the talk of the wretch, inference, who lives at the feet of perception, being the negator of that!” In other words, we cannot infer anything without the evidence of our senses. Thus, inference can be used to correct our perceptions but never to totally negate them. Yet, Shankara uses inference to not only prove the formlessness of the transcendental world but also deny the entire material realm and negate its reality, forming the crux of his philosophical stance by a

Around 1265, Madhva set out on his first tour of North India. Taking his *Gita* manuscript to present as a tribute to Vedavyasa, he set out on pilgrimage with a few close disciples to the legendary sage’s ashram in the Himalayas. Reaching Badri, he fasted, bathed in the Ganga and remained silent for 48 days, in a quest for spiritual guidance. Finally, the call came from within to go to Uttara Badri, the harsh and isolated spot high in the Himalayan peaks where the legendary Vedavyasa is said to still reside. Leaving a note for his disciples, he left alone, before dawn one morning, on the arduous journey. Satyatirtha, reading the note, followed his master into the treacherous frozen peaks. Catching up to the athletic saint, only halfway to Uttara Badri, Satyatirtha was so weak that he could neither go on nor go back the way he had come. It is said that in this moment Madhva blew a powerful and magical burst of air that sent

him flying back to safety with his brother disciples at Badri. Reaching Uttara Badri, Madhva prostrated at the feet of Vyasa and spent weeks receiving instruction from him on the true meaning of Vedanta. Though Madhva begged to stay, the sage instructed him to return to the world and continue his mission. In obedience, the monk retraced his steps back to Badri, where his disciples, though fearful that he might have perished, had held a faithful vigil. Far from worn out by the arduous trek, Madhva returned energized and jubilant. In the days following he dictated to Satyatirtha the commentary on the *Brahma Sutra* that Vedavyasa had spoken to him. Satyatirtha scribed it, then arranged for the precious work to be copied and distributed. Madhva and his monks headed south. As they were passing through Andhra Pradesh, around 1270, they got word that a huge



method he himself decries as illusory. Madhva inquires: “What or who, in fact, is the ultimate perceiver or validator of any information?” He answers that it is the soul’s intrinsic intuitive faculty, known in scripture as *sakshin*, the witness. He explains: “The cognitive senses are of two kinds: the intuitive faculty, *sakshin*, or the cognitive agent, which is identical with the self; and the ordinary cognitive senses and the mind, which are made of matter.” Each *atma* has dormant spiritual senses which, when activated, are the instruments by which conclusive truth is perceived: “The perception by the

sakshin is that which, in our experience, is not open to contradiction and which is decisive in character. Knowledge that is acquired through sensory channels and the mind, and is thus subject to discrepancies, is to be regarded as a modification of the mind-stuff. The latter is liable to correction and contradiction, while the perceptions of *sakshin* are not. What is thus established by the flawless verdict of *sakshin* must be regarded as true and valid for all time.” The saint argues that if there is no higher sense by which to verify the refutation of *sakshin*, then there is also no one to verify the conclusion

philosophical convention was being held at Rajamahendri on the Godavari River. It was convened by Sobhanabhatta, a staunch and brilliant advaitin and the prime minister of the Kakatiya dynasty of Warangal. Scholars from all over India were gathering. Madhva decided to attend. This was the first major public forum by which his new philosophy became widely known to the world of Sanskrit scholars. It was a turning point. At that convocation, Madhva won over the famous scholar Puri Swami Shastri, whom he accepted as his disciple and renamed Narahari Tirtha. Sobhanabhatta also

was converted to Tattvavada, and the two illustrious scholars joined Madhva's growing entourage on their return to Udupi, where they were greeted joyously by Achyutapreksha.

The time had now come, Madhva deemed, to bring his own guru into his philosophy, who while proud and supportive, was still an advaitin with strong reservations regarding Madhva's views. After a long series of debates, Achyutapreksha conceded defeat, accepted Madhva's Dvaita view as supreme and became his disciple as Padmanabha Tirtha. The Ananta Matha, which had been a stronghold

of Advaita for centuries, became the spiritual center of Madhva's Brahma Vaishnava Sampradaya.

A few years later, a miraculous, landmark event occurred at Malpe beach, three miles west of Udupi. One day Madhva was meditating by the seashore, as he often did. A storm arose at sea and a cargo ship traveling from Dvaraka, which Madhva could see in the distance, began to flounder in the heavy waves. Madhva waved his saffron cloth. The ship suddenly stabilized, the waves abated. Certain that they had survived by the grace of a holy monk, the captain and a few mates took a tender boat to shore. Approaching Madhva, the captain offered him anything he wanted from the merchandise in the ship. To their surprise, he said he had no need for their goods, but would take the three mounds of gopi chandan clay that lay as ballast in the ship's hull. Amazed that the monk knew of the clay, the captain himself delivered to the swami the three mounds of gopi chandan native to the Godavari River that some Vaishnavas use in paste form to make their gold-colored sectarian body marks.

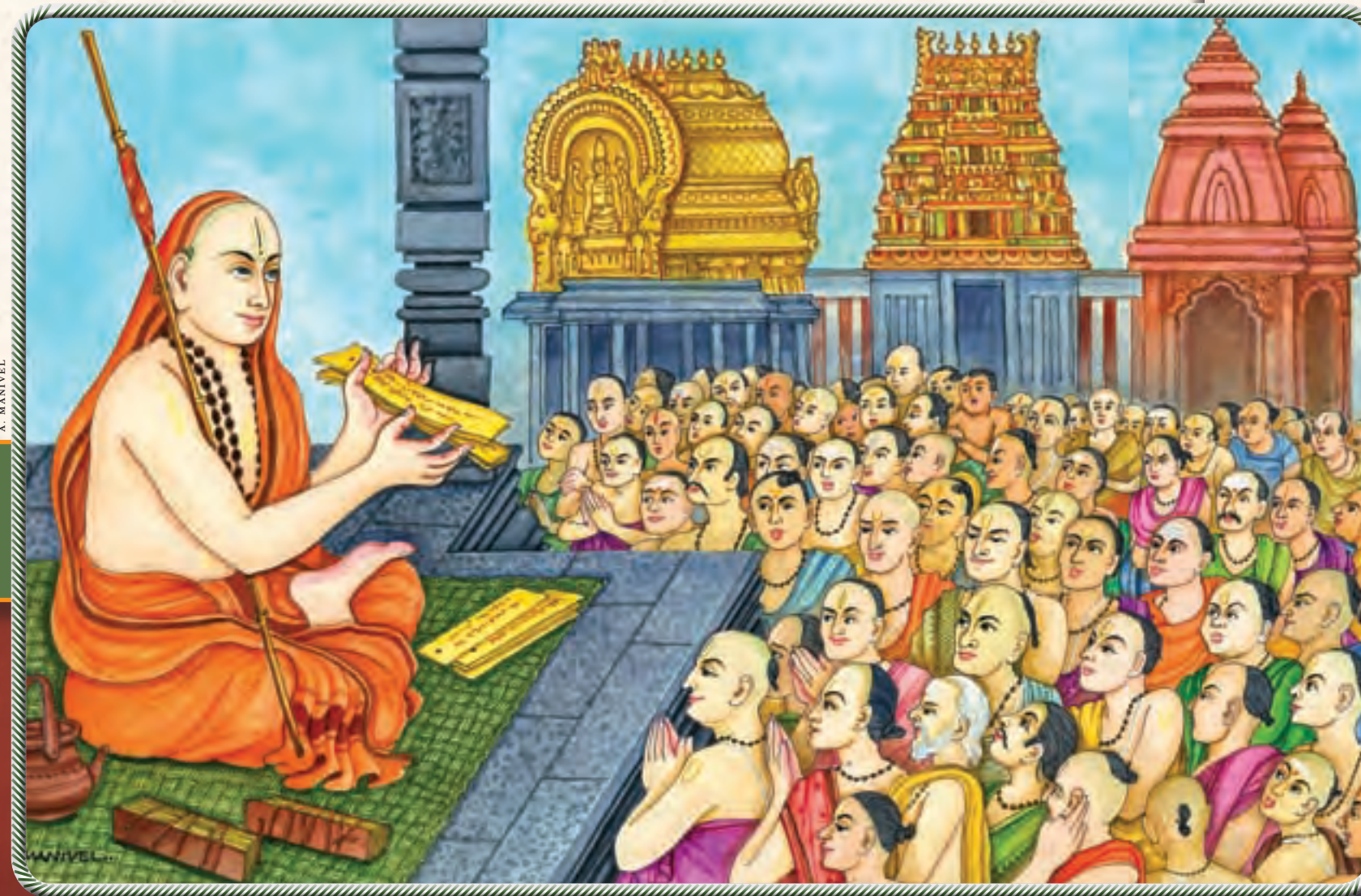
As Madhva must have intuited, when submerged in water and broken apart, each block of clay liberated an ancient stone murti of Krishna. These are said to have been lost when the original city of Dvaraka was submerged in the sea at the end of the Dvapara Yuga. The largest of the three, an icon of Janardana nearly three feet tall, he consecrated

for worship at the village of Yermal, 15 miles south of Udupi. The second, an image of Balarama 2.5 feet tall, he installed at a Subrahmanya temple in Malpe. The third murti, just twenty inches tall, is a unique statue of Balakrishna holding a shepherd's staff. This icon Madhva enshrined, in 1278, at the Ananta Matha, later renamed the Sri Krishna Matha. This small shrine at the matha is today one of India's most important Krishna pilgrimage destinations. This began the pattern Madhva would follow for the rest of his life, obtaining and consecrating images of the Lord and establishing unique sanctuaries specific to his Dvaita sampradaya. Setting up a new liturgy as well for his sampradaya, Madhva discontinued the Smarta Puja rites and replaced them with the Tantrasara worship patterns he learned from Sage Vyasa—elaborate, spectacular pujas that melt the heart of anyone attending and open the doors to the realm of God.

Leaving no aspect of religious life unexamined, Madhva also addressed social issues. In one of his most controversial battles, he spoke against the sacrifice of animals at Vedic rituals and brought an end to the practice in the Udupi region. Madhva offered a revolutionary meaning to caste, saying it should be determined by a man's behavior and nature, rather than his birth—that an illumined soul is a true brahmin, regardless of his occupation. He instigated the prohibition of liquor consumption during religious ceremonies. And, criticizing the priesthoods, he said, "Spirituality should not be confused with superstition." His opponents were equally bold. They continually denounced his reforms and went so far as to raid and pillage his large collection of rare manuscripts.

Madhva was as physically powerful as any warrior. On one oc-

On his long, philosophical campaigns throughout India, Madhva mesmerized audiences from North to South (indicated by the varied temple towers). Crowds were captivated by his charismatic presence and mastery of polemics and scripture, and many became devout followers.



that it stands contradicted. In other words, we must have an inherent faculty that can validate the truth; otherwise it can neither be validated nor rejected. The acceptance of an eternal sensibility, the individual soul—which is in its essential nature pure, conscious and infallible—is the ground on which Madhva discusses the nature of reality. He posits that the atma, or soul, is the final arbiter of the truth of anything.

Differences Are Real

While Madhva's Dvaita philosophy has been construed as dualism, it, in fact, articulates a view of multiple realities that all have particular

natures and are all real. Madhva's view is not dualistic, because he did not limit existence to two realities, pitted against one another, but rather described how the various categories of reality are eternally real. To him, the differences among things are not mere illusions to be denied outright, but rather are a gradient of different types of existence among which the eternal souls, who are distinctive individuals, are allowed to choose.

Madhva divided differences into five types, which he called Prapancha and described as the five-fold differences that lead to excellence and liberation and constitute right knowledge. The five distinctions are

between the Supreme and souls, the Supreme and matter, souls and souls, souls and matter, and matter and matter. For Madhva, difference is not at all a lower order of reality but is, in fact, the essence and true message of all the scriptures of Vedanta.

Shankara presents a radically different view in an earthy analogy: A man went to an outhouse at sunset and while there put his hand on a coiled-up rope, which he mistook for a snake. At first he was afraid the snake would bite him. When he realized that the snake was *mithya*, or false, the illusion was dispelled and he was released from his fear. Similarly, when the soul realizes the unreality of the world, it merges into the nondual and nondistinct Brahman.

To counter, Madhva presents his "transcendental realist" argument: "If this universe is to be regarded as imagined by our delusion (like the illusory snake in the rope), it would require the acceptance of a real universe that is the prototype of the imagined one. No theory of illusion can be demonstrated without at least two reals: a substratum of the illusion and a prototype of the superimposed object." Madhva's contention is that this material world is a reflection of the transcen-

dental realm. Both realms have form and are real, even though one is temporary and the other is eternal. All differences are real, though some are temporary.

When the scriptures speak of the world as illusory, dream-like or unreal, Dvaitins understand this to mean that it is a temporary manifestation of reality. When compared to realities that are eternal, it is less real in the sense of duration but no less real during the time of its manifestation. Just as in the case of the mirage of a lake seen in a desert, the perceptions of lake, desert, water, etc., are all real, but they are not where they appear to be (in the desert). Madhva argues that the reality of the world cannot be undermined, because it is our experience in the world from which all other stages of being are reached. He scolds Shankara: "If the universe is illusion, its creator must be no better than a juggler in rags who goes about giving performances in magic to eke out his livelihood."

The Nature of the Soul

The point of dispute is not whether the material world is a desirable place of residence for the soul, as Madhva and Shankara agree that liberating the soul from matter is the goal of Vedanta. Where they diverge sharply is on the nature of the soul. To Shankara, there is actually only

casion two champion wrestlers came to challenge him. Engaged in chanting the names of Lord Vishnu, Madhva paused to say he doubted they were strong enough for the contest. At this they began lifting and throwing heavy objects to demonstrate their prowess. Madhva said he would wrestle them if they could, by choking him, silence his japa. Grasping his neck, the two powerhouses tried to stop his chanting one at a time and then together, but to no avail. Exhausted, the Goliaths bowed in defeat and asked, “What, may we ask, is the source of your power?” Madhva said, “It is the names of Vishnu.” They, too, became disciples.

Madhva undertook one more tour of North India between 1280 and 1290, after initiating a number of his disciples into sannyasa. The final destination of his troupe was Badri. Among their many adventures was a famous encounter at the south bank of the Ganga. They were planning to cross by boat, but none was operating. They learned that war was brewing locally and that Balban, the Sultan of Delhi, camped on the north bank, had forbidden anyone to cross without permission. He who disobeyed would be brought to him and put to death. Hearing this, Madhva had his disciples stand in line behind him, each holding the garment of the one in front, and, walking on the river bottom, led them safely to the other side. Seeing them emerge from the river, the Sultan’s soldiers rushed forward to arrest them. Madhva is said to have commanded, “Be quiet and behave yourselves. I want to see the Sultan.” Appearing swiftly, Bal-

ban demanded to know how they dared defy his decree. Madhva answered in fluent and chaste Persian, presenting himself as an apostle of theism who took directives only from God. “I worship that Father who illumines the entire universe; and so do you. Why should I fear then either your soldiers or you? I am traveling through on my life’s mission to spread the true faith in the one Supreme Being who is the ruler of the cosmos, whom all persons should worship by their honest work and loving devotion. We are all citizens of His kingdom.” Disarmed by Madhva’s fearlessness and purity, the

Sultan paid his respects, offered gifts, which Madhva declined, and provided safe passage to the monk and his followers.

When highway robbers attacked the itinerants in a deep jungle, Madhva rolled up one of his saffron robes and threw it into their midst. By his mystic power they saw it as a bag of gold and began fighting over it while the travelers walked safely on.

It was on this tour that Madhva secured several more important sacred icons and artifacts that to this day are the focus of worship for followers, including a set of ancient icons of Sri Rama and Sita

that were retrieved from the treasury of the Kalinga court. It is known that before returning to Udupi, the saint visited Goa, where he is said to have enthralled audiences, not only with his oratory, but with his music.

Returning at last to Udupi, Madhva spent the next two decades, 1290-1310, engaged in missionary work in Tulanad, the home territory of his burgeoning new sect. It is said he visited every home in the region. It was during this time that he faced the most formidable adversary he had ever debated, Trivikrama Pandit, a champion of Shankara’s Advaita. Over fifteen days of fierce dialog between two opposite views of Vedanta, Madhva slowly but steadily gained ground. Finally, on the fifteenth day, Trivikrama admitted defeat and prostrated to Madhva in submission. Rising from the floor, the pandit had a spiritual vision in which he saw in Madhva the three incarnations of Vayudeva: Hanuman, Bhima and Madhva. He spontaneously spoke forth a *shloka* in praise of Madhva that is recited daily by Madhvas to the present time.

Perhaps Madhva’s greatest genius was that he recorded his philosophy and system of religion so eloquently and completely. He authored—not by writing, but by dictation—thirty-nine original Sanskrit works, including four works on the *Brahma Sutra*, commentaries on the ten major *Upanishads* and on the *Rig Veda Samhita*’s forty hymns; commentaries on the *Mahabharata* and *Bhagavat Purana*, and two commentaries on the *Bhagavad Gita*; five hymns in praise of the Divine and five manu-

Madhva, on his way to find Rishi Vedavyasa in the high Himalayas, realizes that Satyatirtha, his disciple, has been following him



Realizing that he young monk has grown too weak to either proceed or go back, Madhva sends a supernatural burst of air which carries Satyatirtha to the safety of their base camp at Badri

one atma, or soul, in the whole of existence, and that great soul is called Brahman. Due to inexplicable ignorance, or maya, that one soul imagines itself (and thus appears) to be many. To Madhva, souls are multiple and eternally individual, real and distinct from Brahman, while at the same time one with it in essence. To support his position, Shankara quotes from Vedanta’s “identity texts,” while Madhva cites “difference texts,” such as the following verse from the *Bhagavad Gita* 14:27, in which Krishna says: “I am the basis of that impersonal Brahman, which is immortal, imperishable and eternal, and is the constitutional position of ultimate happiness.” Madhva interprets this to mean that the soul is an eternal spark or part of the energy of the Being who is the source of the Supreme Brahman.

In assailing Shankara’s position, Madhva queries: If Brahman is the Supreme, how could there be a greater power that could put it under illusion? If Brahman has no parts, how can there be a Brahman that is both liberated and not liberated? If there is no liberated Brahman, how could liberation be possible? If the world is merely a dream, since many individuals are seen in the world, whose dream is it? How could someone teach of the non-distinctive Brahman if he did not recognize

the need to teach it, which is in itself a distinction?

Karma and the Individual Soul

From Madhva’s point of view, each soul has a spiritual body, which is its true identity. When that eternal individual enters the realm of matter, it becomes covered with many layers of dark and unconscious matter. As a result, the soul’s true nature goes dormant and is forgotten. In that bewildered state, the atma takes on material bodies, beginning with the lowest species and eventually ascending the ladder of reincarnation to human birth. Throughout these incarnations, the soul identifies

fully with its material body and mind.

When the soul reaches the human condition, its further progress is determined by its own actions, according to its free will. Material nature, or the natural mechanism of karma, responds like a mirror to this stream of choices. Through this unfolding process, souls may elevate themselves to the highest stratum of the material world or propel themselves to the lowest. Madhva points out that though he and Shankara agree that in order to achieve liberation, souls must carefully follow nature’s laws by adhering to good moral conduct, the laws of nature are real distinctions that lead the real soul to another reality and

are not false presentations, as claimed by Shankara.

In theory, once a soul is within matter, it is possible for it to behave so badly that, by the laws of karma, it could become caught up in virtually endless bondage. Some critics have likened this aspect of Madhva’s doctrine to the Christian belief in eternal damnation. But the two views are actually quite different. Christianity believes in a single lifetime, before which the soul does not exist, and it does not believe in karma as a law of nature. Further, Christianity’s damnation to hell is moral punishment meted out by a vengeful God. Madhva’s view is of an eternally divine soul

that is lost in matter but could release itself from bondage. Its sufferings within matter are temporary, not eternal, and are not the result of a punishment by a condemnatory God, but a self-imposed consequence of wrong action in relation to the rules that govern matter.

The Means to Liberation

Madhva proclaims that Vedanta’s ultimate conclusion is that the highest substance is the Supreme Brahman—Bhagavan, Vishnu, Hari—in all His eternal forms and avatars, as well as His supernal form, eternally full of all beauty and distinctions in the transcendental abode

als on sectarian practices. This literary legacy, along with the scriptures it comments on, forms the canon of his *sampradaya*, which is today one of the strictest, well organized and tightly administrated spiritual bodies in India.

Madhva's bold approach and the clarity and force of his scholarly writings are unique not only in India but in any theistic tradition anywhere in the world. If Shankara was the original "Unitarian," as the one, for instance, whose philosophy influenced the views of Emerson, Thoreau and other transcendentalists, then Madhva was

a "unique-itarian" standing as the fearless champion of the eternal existence of the individual soul. His bold assertion that the eternal truth of the *Vedas* was nearly lost and so he had to go straight to the source—to sit at the venerable feet of Vedavyasa in Uttara Badri, hear the true meaning of the *Vedas* from their original source and write that truth as his own commentary on the *Brahma Sutra*—is stunning.

After his parents passed on, Madhva initiated his brother, Vishnuchitta, and seven other disciples into the order as sannyasins. The brother became known as Sri Vishnutirtha. Through these eight,

Madhva established eight (*ashta*) *mathas* in Udupi: Palimaru, Admaru, Shirur, Kaneyur, Pejavara, Krishnapura, Puttige and Sodhe.

Madhvacharya had a profound influence on other bhakti schools in his day, the most obvious and currently visible being the Gaudiya branch of Vaishnavism. Originating from Shri Chaitanya in West Bengal, its followers are widely known through the presence of ISKCON and related groups. The Gaudiya lineage traces itself to

Madhva, though the followers of Madhva are of the opinion that the Gaudiyas have deviated significantly from many important points in Madhva's teachings. Yet, both sects accept the nine points presented in this Insight (see sidebar below) as bedrock Dvaita Vedanta and have built their teachings on Madhva's foundation.

As for his own identity, in the last verse of his brief work summarizing Dvaita, the *Vishnu Tattva Vinirnaya*, Madhva declares, "In

Madhva's Philosophy in Nine Tenets

From the Prameya Shloka, a summary of the tenets of Tattvavada written by Sri Vyasa Tirtha (1460–1539), a staunch and highly venerated Madhvite scholar and missionary

1. Hari (Vishnu) is Supreme. हरिः परतरः
2. The world is real. सत्यं जगत्
3. The differences are real. तत्त्वतः भेदः
4. The various classes of jivas are cohorts of Hari. जीवगणाः हरेः अनुचराः
5. They reach different states (lower or superior) ultimately. नीचोऽद्य भावङ्गताः
6. Mukti, liberation, is the experience of one's own nature. मुक्तिः नैज सुख अनुभूतिः
7. Mukti is achieved by pure devotion. अमलाभक्तिः च तत् साधनम्
8. The triad of perception, inference and testimony are the sources of valid knowledge. अक्षादित्रितयं प्रमाणम्
9. It is Hari alone who is praised in the *Vedas*. अखिल आम्नाय एकवेद्यो हरिः

Having returned to Udupi from the Himalayas, Madhva is dictating to Satyatirtha the Sanskrit commentary on the *Brahma Sutra* that he divinely received from Sage Vedavyasa. Satyatirtha is scribing his master's words on dried palm leaves. He will rub the leaf with lamp black to make the etching legible, then assemble the pages into a book, bound with a cord threaded through a hole in each leaf.

For Madhva, the scriptures, the guru and the Lord in person, within the heart or as an avatar, are the various ways in which Bhagavan, the Absolute Truth, reveals Himself. In all these revelations the soul can only invite the appearance of the truth. Sincere individual effort in material acts is necessary, but ultimately the Supreme Person, Vishnu, reveals Himself when and to whom He chooses. But what is it that induces the Lord to reveal Himself, and what is the destination of the soul to whom He has been revealed?

Release Is the Attainment of Bhagavan

Madhva holds that nurturing the soul's relationship with Bhagavan is the correct aim of yoga practice or the cultivation of knowledge. It is not seeking knowledge of the impersonal Brahman or trying to negate and relinquish one's material identity that brings liberation, as Shankara would claim, but rather regaining the ability to see the transcendental form of Bhagavan face to face and then to render loving service to Him. Knowledge is not an end in itself; it is a means to awakening devotion.

In Madhva's view, the real soul remains an individual after liberation

and, in its spiritual body, resides in Vishnu's eternal abode, where it is no longer subject to birth, death, old age or disease. Madhva quotes from the *Brahma Vaivarta Purana*, "Those who have attained final release assume, of their own accord, luminous bodies, and through them they enjoy only pure pleasures.... They are rid of all miseries, as well as all undesirable merit, together with demerit, and they are freed from all defects and consist only of intelligence, bliss, etc."

This is radically different from the Advaitic view of liberation, to which such descriptions of the afterlife must simply be considered maya or illusion. Madhva argues that the scriptures abound in depictions of such spiritual places, which are real and eternal. Describing that transcendental world of bliss, he writes, "The liberated souls, having found their eyes and ears, loving one another, become hierarchically different in various qualities such as intelligence. Some among them play in the huge ocean of milk. Some play near and in the gardens. They bathe and behold themselves in deep, fine lakes fit to bathe in. They behold the Supreme Lord Himself."

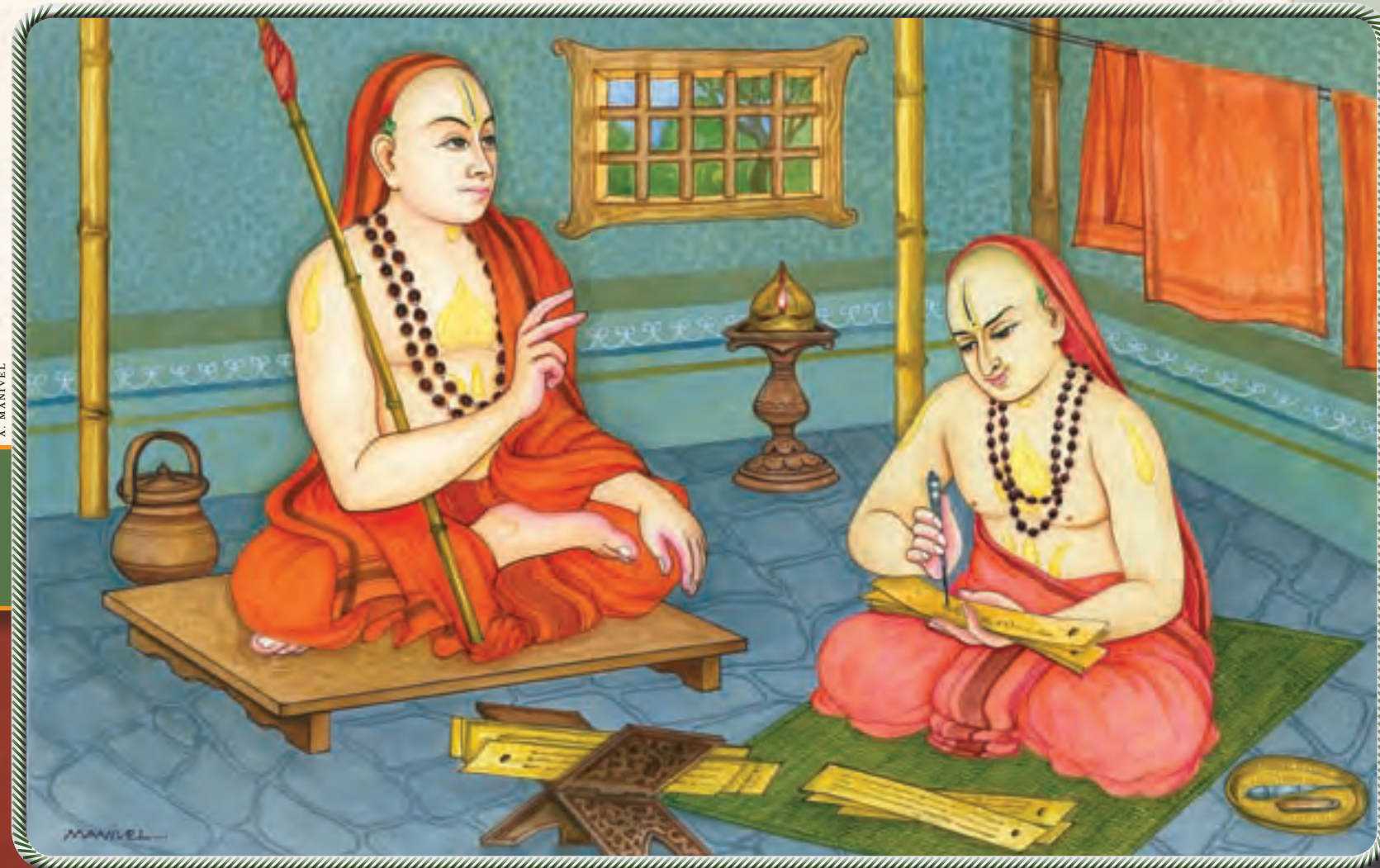
Genuine Worship

Madhva points out that while Shankara did institute among his followers a system of worshiping six Deities (Ganesha, Surya, Shakti, Siva,

and destination. The definition of Bhagavan, the Supreme Person, is *bhaga*, "wealth" (the six-fold opulence of riches, strength, knowledge, fame, beauty and renunciation), and *van* which means "who possesses." That being is also designated as Krishna, the Being who is by eternal nature the most attractive. Because the soul remains a distinct individual, now and in the transcendental state in the future, karma yoga and especially bhakti yoga are the surest means by which the soul achieves liberation and continues to act in the liberated state. Bhagavan is the highest substance, Madhva says, and moksha is reestablishing one's lost relationship with Him.

The Advaitic view, which was so troubling to Madhva, leads the soul

away from the world—for it is seen as false and illusory—and propels us toward an impersonal and indistinctive, transcendental Brahman, with which we merge in the final stage of moksha (liberation). At that moment, even our individuality is viewed as an illusion to be shed. We become the drop of water reuniting with the ocean, never again to be deluded by maya or our troublesome individuality. Due to Advaita's prejudice against all distinctions, including individuality, its preferred process of evolution is jnana yoga or the cultivation of discrimination and knowledge of Brahman. This inevitably leads to less emphasis on karma, or action, and especially bhakti, or spiritual emotion combined with service.



my first birth I was Hanuman, born to help Lord Rama rescue Sita from the asura Ravana. In my next birth I was Bhima, the strength of the Pandavas, born to defeat *adharma* in the form of the evil-minded Duryodhana. And in this birth I am born to restore the real purport of the *Vedas* as serving only the highest truth, Lord Hari.”

One of the two most popular images of Madhva shows him as the muscular and indefatigable hero, scion of Vayu, the life force itself, in His triple form of Hanuman, Bhima and Madhva. The other shows him seated, resolute and focused, with two fingers on his right hand raised while chanting the slogan of Dvaita Vedanta, “Difference is real.”

Madhva left his body at the age of 79 in the year 1317. By one account, this occurred while he was lecturing to hundreds of dis-

ciples at the Ananteshvara Temple on the *Aitareya Upanishad*, his personal favorite. He recited a prayer based on the invocation to that terse scripture as his final instruction: “Om, may my mind and speech always be fixed upon the Supreme Being Who is the greatest of all. May that Being reveal Himself to me now and for evermore. May my mind and speech help me to understand the Vedic truths and may that truth always be present within me. Do not be idle. Day and night, remain dedicated to this endeavor. Always think this Truth and speak it to those who will listen. Lord Vishnu will protect those who do this and bring wisdom and peace to the world.” It is said that as he gave this final call for his followers to go forth and preach,

Inside the Krishna Matha, Madhva’s central monastery in Udupi, the guru gives a discourse on his philosophy, which he calls Tattvavada, “doctrine of truth.” His right hand displays the classic mudra by which he indicates, “Difference is real; difference is real; difference is real,” which is the essence of his doctrine.

Kumara and Vishnu), the devotee is, in fact, told to use the image of the Deity only as a means to concentrate the mind on Brahman. The aim is to go beyond the form and merge with Brahman. The form is thus, in the worshiper’s heart of hearts, taken as an illusory tool only—a means to an end, namely the unmanifest, formless Brahman. This, to Madhva, is not true worship. For worship to be true, he declares, the forms of the worshiped and the worshiper must be accepted as real and eternal and linked in a favorable relationship. He delineates three grades of image worship. In the first, the Deity is regarded as illusory and only a means to an impersonal, formless end. In the second, worship is performed in order to receive temporary personal benefits. In the third and only recommended type, the Deity is adored in full faith, as the Supreme Being, Bhagavan Vishnu. On this point he quotes the *Brihat Tantra*: “Just as Shri (the Goddess of Fortune), though eternally liberated and absolutely accomplished, eternally contemplates Vishnu, so shall the devotees of Vishnu do the same.”

To Madhva, it is as subversive for the soul to claim that there is no Bhagavan, but only an impersonal-energy Brahman, as it would be for an ordinary citizen to claim to be the king. It is on this crucial point that the doctrine of bhakti rests. If the soul will not recognize that Bhagavan is a Person, or that He can come to Earth as an avatar if He wishes, or make Himself known in the scriptures or within one’s heart, and, most importantly, that He is Bhagavan, the possessor of all opulence, then how, Madhva asks, can one render genuine service to Him? And without rendering service, how could one ever become liberated from ignorance and bondage? The world is, in fact, a jail full of rebellious souls who refuse to recognize the greatness of the Supreme Being. The Advaitin’s idea of becoming Brahman at the point of liberation is, to Madhva, the ultimate act of envy and hostility toward Vishnu.

Madhva quotes from the *Mathara Shruti*, “Devotion alone leads one to the Supreme; devotion alone shows Him; in the power of devotion is the Person. Devotion only is the best of means.” He writes, “The voice of the clouds, the music of the spheres, the fury of the winds, the roar of the ocean waves, the names of the Devas and the sages are all names

of the Supreme, giving voice to His eternal glory and majesty.”

Madhva deeply valued diligent scholarship and study of scripture. In this regard he quotes the *Brahma Taraka*: “Only on the proper study and understanding of all the *Vedas*, supplemented by a study of the *Itihasas* (*Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*), *Puranas* and the doctrines of logical principles guiding their interpretation (Mimamsas), is the knowing of Vishnu possible, and not otherwise.”

Final Distinctions

Madhva’s view culminates in the belief that our individuality never had a beginning and never ends. Differences or distinctions are not only real and eternal, but vital in that they convey to us the unique nature of all that exists. In spite of the fact that we are not and can never be supremely powerful, knowing and beautiful, we are so intrinsically unique and individual, that through our desire and actions we can inspire the Supreme Being to engage us in an intimate, loving relationship. Hindu holy texts abound in ideal paradigms: the friendship of Arjuna or Draupadi, the service of Hanuman, the parental love of Yashoda and Dasarath, the conjugal love of Sita, Rukmini or the all-consuming devotion of Radha and the Gopis, the unswerving devotion of countless beings sung of throughout the scriptures. All these give credence to Madhva’s thesis—that devotion, love and service are a path of eternal and joyous existence.

Conclusion

That, in brief, is the Vedantic thesis of the irrepressible Madhvacharya, one of the great saints of Indian history. Monumental doc-

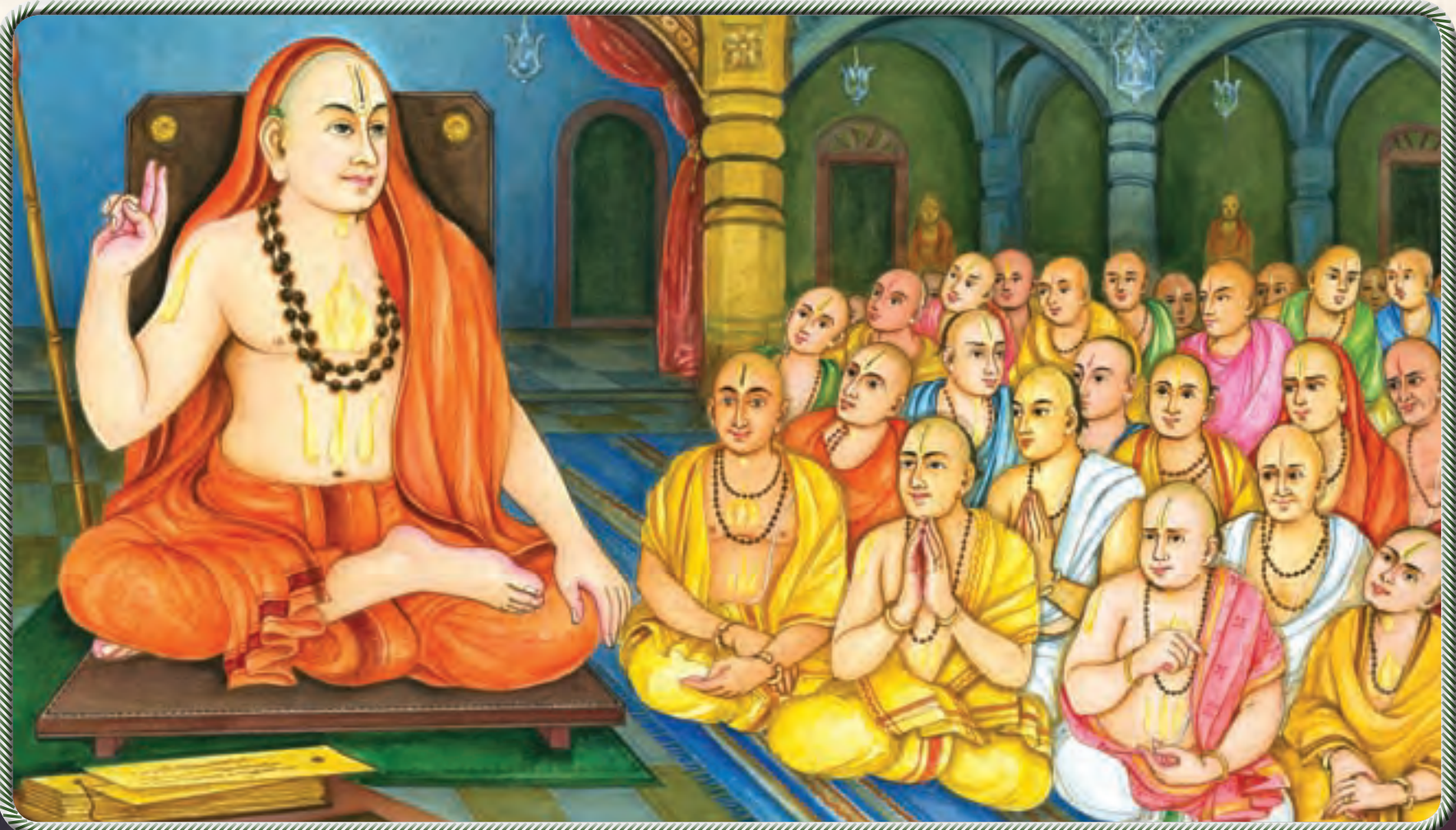
trines have been created by many other saints: Tirumular, Ramanuja, Chaitanya, Vallabhacharya, Nimbarka, Vasugupta, Basavanna, Meykandar, Aghorasiva, Gorakshanatha, Srikantha, Swaminarayan and others. Their insights and debates are all gifts to humanity’s search for truth and spiritual liberation.

The day of his departure is celebrated as Madhvanavami.

Sriman Madhvacharya was the embodiment of resolution, individ-

quality and eternal truth, serving the wishes of Bhagavan Sri Vishnu to establish the eternal truths of the Hindu dharma, even with his final breath. He is one of Hinduism’s greatest heroes. The followers of Madhva continue his tradition with steadfast fervor.

A primary reference for this brief summary of Madhva’s life was the book by B.N. Hebbar, *The Sri-Krsna Temple at Udupi, The Historical and Spiritual Center of the Madhva Sect of Hinduism*, published in 2005 by Nataraj Books.



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The magnificence of our Hindu dharma is that such great thinkers have delineated these philosophical points so keenly, creating a map of consciousness that followers may employ to discover for themselves what is real, unreal and relatively real. In our Hindu dharma, each seeker is free to decide which of these or other views he accepts, which inspires his heart and lights his path. What a marvelous diversity and arena for exploration Hindu dharma provides!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Jeffrey Armstrong is the Media and Communications Director for both the Vedic Friends Association (VFA) and the Hindu Collective Initiative for North America (HCI-NA), and founder of VASA, the Vedic Academy of Sciences & Arts. In this role he speaks at corporations, yoga ashrams and centers, temples, ayurvedic and astrological conferences, and teaches a wide variety of seminars based on the Vedic knowledge. His website is www.JeffreyArmstrong.com.

"The Indians Are Coming!"

America's 14 Vedanta Societies face an immigration-induced identity crisis

EVER SINCE THE FIRST center was founded by Swami Vivekananda in 1894 in New York, the country's Vedanta Societies have catered to a white American public with a deep interest in spirituality but a varying sense of the Hindu foundation of the teachings they love. Beginning in the 1960s, many Hindu immigrants from India to the US have gravitated toward the centers. They brought with them rituals, culture and culinary influences in what has been described as "Indianization"—to the joy of some Western members and the dismay of others.

The *American Vedantist* magazine, an independent publication not connected to the Vedanta Societies or the Ramakrishna Mission, tackled the issue head-on in their 2007 summer and fall issues. They asked readers to respond to the questions being raised at centers across the US: "Are Western Vedantists Hindu? Is Vedanta a universal philosophy independent of any particular religion, or is it a sophisticated form of Hinduism? Have the Societies become Hindu temples and cultural centers for a mostly Indian immigrant population? Does it matter?" Below are excerpts from the ten responses they published. Five favor the Indian influence, four are against and one is neutral.

William Page is an English teacher living in Thailand who has been connected with the Vedanta Society of Massachusetts since 1960, shares. "I have found Indian devotees to be charming, generous and hospitable people who are a delight to know. Not long ago I went down to visit the Ramakrishna Ashram in Penang, Malaysia, where the hospitality I received from the Indian devotees was so overwhelming it almost reduced me to tears. There is a proverb from the *Taittiriya Upanishad* (I: II, 2), *Atithi devo bhava*—The guest is to be treated as God."

"So if Indian devotees are coming to the American Vedanta centers, that's wonderful. Give them a warm welcome and make them feel at home. Many of us will never have a chance to go to India and visit the holy places of our movement. Now India is



Beginnings: The Vedanta Society of San Francisco was built in 1907, during the dawn of the movement in America. Its architect merged Indian motifs with a Russian-inspired dome and the city's typical Victorian bay windows.

coming to us!

"Sustained contact with Indian devotees and their culture will enrich us. It will broaden our hearts, our minds, our knowledge, and our waistlines. By making friends with Indian devotees, we'll be able to learn more about Sri Ramakrishna, his culture, and the people he associated with. We'll learn about schools of philosophy we never knew existed, and whole bodies of scripture, too. Some of us may develop an interest in Indian art, music, dance, literature, or languages. Best of all, we'll meet some really nice people. And the food will be fantastic."

"Vedanta is, after all, an Indian philosophy. There's no question of 'Indianizing' it, because it's already Indian. Maybe what's actually happening is 're-Indianization,' because for many years some American Vedanta centers looked and operated very much like Protestant churches. Let's not forget what

Swami Vivekananda thundered so many years ago: 'I shall flood your Yankee land with ritualistic swamis!'"

An Anonymous Devotee voiced a different view: "As immigrant Indians came to America, after immigration laws were liberalized in 1966, they naturally gravitated to Vedanta Centers. There were then few places to remind them of home and to meet fellow countrymen. Today, forty years later, all or most of the Vedanta Centers in America have a large attendance of Indians. The Americans will find activities that they cannot relate to, pujas to many Gods and Goddesses, some of which they've never heard of. I envision that fewer and fewer Westerners will attend, till at last, the only ones will be a few American women in saris and dots on their foreheads."

"There is nothing wrong with having centers that focus on the needs of the Indian immigrants. But what is the primary reason for the Vedanta Centers in the US? Can the needs of Hindus and Americans be met at the same time in the Vedanta setting? The two populations have different problems. The Indian swamis are sometimes not aware that Americans have a different background, so they end up speaking as if everyone in the audience has the same issues as Indians."

Beatrice Bruteau of Atlanta, Georgia, an author and an editor of the *American Vedantist*, writes, "Although Vivekananda is from India and was formed by Indian culture, he did not insist on Americans' adopting Indian cultural forms in order to realize the Formless. I think that we may safely answer the often-asked question, 'Are American Vedantists Hindus?' by responding 'Not necessarily' or even 'No.' That would depend on the individual, but would not characterize the nature of the Vedanta Societies. The sannyasin was supposed to keep moving and not take part in any particular cultural behaviors."

"In understanding Vivekananda's presentation of Vedanta, we need to say that American Vedanta is not intended to be another religion among the many religious institutions that we have in this country. It

is not supposed to fulfill the social roles of the proper religious institutions. Religion was not Vivekananda's idea. We are not expected to adopt Indian dress or language or customs or religion."

John Schlenck, a musician, is secretary of the Vedanta Society of New York and Coordinating Editor of the *American Vedantist*. He offers: "Some would say that Vedanta in America was Hindu from the start, and why pretend otherwise. Vivekananda's universal spirituality was merely a liberal presentation of Hinduism."

"Others would suggest that there were practical considerations, such as a need for specific spiritual practices for the growth of spiritual life. Those Vedanta devotees who were either dissatisfied with the religions they were brought up in or who had no religious upbringing needed some specific forms of contemplative practice. Rather than arbitrarily inventing new forms, was it not more sensible to draw on the rich and varied store of Hindu practices, proven effective over the centuries?"

Steven F. Walker, a literature professor and an editor of the *American Vedantist* who has been associated with the Vedanta Societies of Boston and New York for forty years, points out, "As soon as Vivekananda arrived on these shores and faced an American audience that knew little about Vedanta, he tried to express its deepest insights in a language that could bridge the cultural gap immediately. This effort to adapt Vedantic thought to the American mind resulted in a thoroughly new and modern Vedanta, a reformed Vedanta of tremendous vitality. Without his American experience, Vivekananda's writings would have been very different, there is no doubt about it."

"Thus, in many ways, we Americans have a right to claim him as 'our' Swamiji. But this 'Americanization' of Vedanta, so crucial in establishing the originality as well as the persuasiveness of Vivekananda's teaching, also involved an introduction in depth to the best of traditional Indian culture: Sanskrit chanting, commentary on canonic Vedantic texts, spellbinding stories from Indian mythology and an irreverent view of Western cultural arrogance from an Indian proud of the roots of his own culture."

"From that point onwards, the presence of Indian swamis continuing Vivekananda's work in America involved a kind of acculturation on both sides, for the swamis and for their students: the swamis becoming more American; the students becoming more Indian."

Sister Gayatriprana, a monastic of the Vedanta Society of South California, states her opinion in unambiguous terms: "Vedanta is my belief system and what I am trying to live in practice. Does it make me a Hindu? In my own mind, the answer is no. I

think of myself as a Vedantist, in the sense in which Swami Vivekananda used the word. The word does not imply any specific forms of religious observance. Swami Vivekananda himself felt that Vedanta is of universal significance, because it is a map, as it were, of the whole range of spiritual possibilities, covering the dualist through non-dualist positions, including all levels of consciousness which humanity has as yet manifested, and open to all possible forms of depth inquiry, including contemporary science."

"Then, what is the place of Hinduism? Swami Vivekananda himself defined Hindus as 'Indian Vedantists.' The people of the Indian subcontinent developed forms totally appropriate for their spiritual progress, ranging from shamanism to the most refined and abstruse philosophy."

William A. Conrad, a bio-physicist, is the president of Vedanta West Communications, the company that publishes the *American Vedantist*. He writes, "Shall our centers go full throttle on the path to 'Indianization'? Given my experience with Vedanta, I think that would be ill-advised."

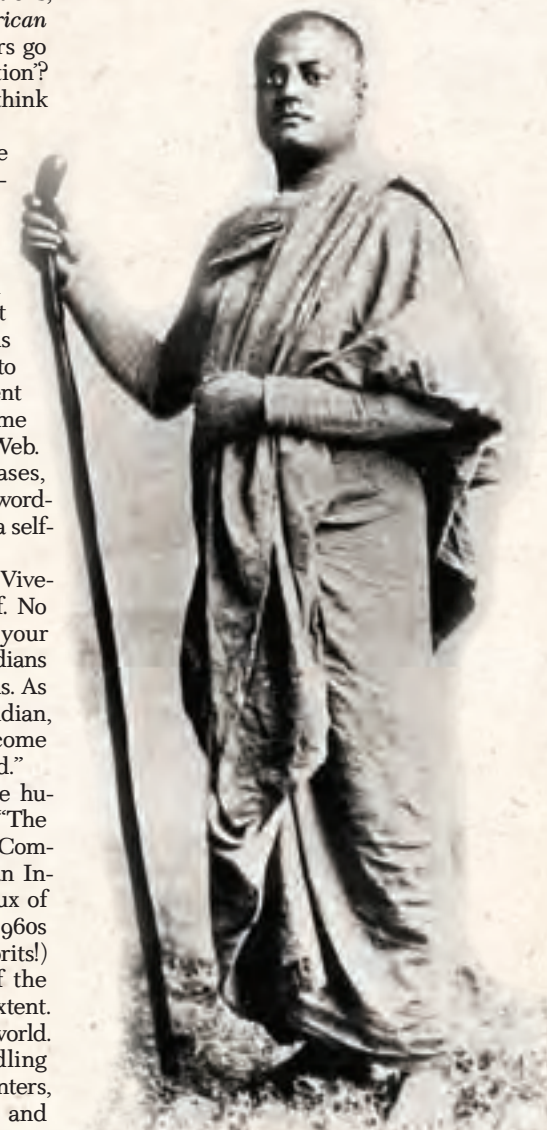
"For about 45 years I have had a place at the back of our chapel in the Vedanta Society of New York. I have talked with many newcomers, asking people how they had heard of us. Being an experimental physicist, I would record the answers. More than 50% percent of Western newcomers had heard of us from other Westerners who had been to one of our centers. However, in recent years most of the people who have come to us have found us by searching the Web. As the number of Westerners decreases, the number who can be informed by word-of-mouth in this way also decreases in a self-reinforcing loop."

"For me, the greatest thing Swami Vivekananda said was: 'Think for yourself. No blind belief can save you, work out your own salvation.' I have observed that Indians customarily do not challenge the swamis. As our centers become predominantly Indian, questioning types like myself will become rare indeed. This has already happened."

Anil Gupta, a reader, takes the issue humorously. In an opinion piece entitled "The Indians Are Coming! The Indians Are Coming!," he explains his perspective as an Indian immigrant. "I agree that the influx of Indian immigrants starting in the late 1960s (my family and I are among these culprits!) might have changed the character of the American Vedanta Centers to some extent. But I do not think it's the end of the world. Setting aside the problem of dwindling American presence at the Vedanta Centers, we need to discard our tunnel vision and look at the bigger picture. If we take into account the contributions these immigrants have made to the USA, I am sure all will

agree that the overall outcome of this influx has been positive, and that, too, in the Vedantic context. Was not that Vivekananda's vision?"

In a letter to the editors, **P. Shneidre** also offers a lighter view. "One good friend goes to not one but two Vedanta groups, serving the devotees those well-known Indian treats—donuts! This is a far cry from Vedanta Societies becoming curry klatches; it is in fact part of the exchange of values that Vivekananda sought. Who can forget that Swami Vivekananda met Sri Ramakrishna only after his English teacher, a Scotsman, suggested it? Many Americans and Indians are becoming ready for Vedanta at the same time. And how could anything be more universal?"



True to Vivekananda: How Hindu did the Hindu monk intend his organization to be?



MEDICINE

Need We Drug America's Children?

Skeptics question the existence of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and the pattern of giving powerful psychotropic drugs to young children

A first-year medical student offers his personal observations and investigations into the controversial issue of ADHD.

By TRISHUL SIDDHARTHAN, FLORIDA

I FIRST ENCOUNTERED ATTENTION DEFICIT Hyperactivity Disorder in the fourth grade in one of my classmates. Due to his impulsiveness, he made simple mistakes that led to difficulty in school and caused disciplinary problems. He would not follow classroom rules. Frequently, he often blurted out answers without raising his hand. I remember the ashamed look on his face when he was chastised in front of the class. Though his attention span was limited, he was a bright student with a passion for science and a dream of working for NASA. Concerned about his hyperactivity, his parents took the 10-year-old to a doctor who diagnosed him with ADHD and prescribed a drug called Ritalin (the chemical methylphenidate). I can still remember the white pill in his hand. The drug dramatically changed his behavior. A once playful and curious boy became docile and unsettlingly focused.

I now feel that my friend's disinterest and difficulty with class work stemmed from

not being fully engaged and challenged by the school system. Unfortunately, Ritalin did not cure his problems. Although his parents were very active in school affairs and showed a strong interest in their son, I recently found out he has become heavily involved with drugs over the years and now faces problems with the law.

From fourth grade on, I had frequent opportunities to observe the disorder in other students, the many prescription medicines used to combat it, and the abuse these powerful drugs invited. In high school I saw classmates share pills. In college I witnessed a strong underground market for methylphenidate, sold as Ritalin, Methylin, Concerta and other brand names.

Diagnosing ADHD

ADHD, once known as just Attention Deficit Disorder or ADD, is characterized by persistent inattention and/or hyperactivity. Its symptoms include forgetfulness, lack of impulse control and distractibility. It has been a controversial diagnosis for adolescents. Arguments for and against it are vehement, and obtaining unbiased information is difficult. Many critics argue that the definition of the disease is too broad, and that the

symptoms can be a result of other problems.

Currently the mechanism of diagnosis for ADHD follows a list of 22 symptoms (www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/ADHD/symptom.htm) of inattentiveness and hyperactivity such as: "difficulty sustaining attention in tasks or play activities," "fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in seat," "easily distracted," "blurts out answers," "talks excessively" and "loses things." If the majority of these conditions are met, a child may be diagnosed with ADHD. It is this subjective diagnosis which raises questions as to the reality of the psychological condition.

The diagnosis of ADHD is relatively new. Only in 1994 was the condition fully described in the *DSM-IV*, the reference book for psychological disorders. The prescribing of methylphenidate has been an economic boon to the pharmaceutical industry, with 40% of pediatric psychiatry references pertaining to ADHD occurring within two years of the revised definition. In 2005, Adderall, an amphetamine drug prescribed for ADHD, accounted for half of Shire Pharmaceutical's US\$1.3 billion in sales.

Hyperactivity and attention deficit are hallmarks of normal adolescence. At some point in my 16 years of formal education, I

Hyperactivity: *About three percent of American school children, a majority of them boys, are prescribed drugs to combat what might for many just be normal behavior, or treatable by less drastic means*

have found myself exhibiting the majority of these criteria. I can remember squirming in my seat throughout school; I still do so in medical school. Dan P. Hallahan and James M. Kauffman, in their book *Exceptional Learners: Introduction to Special Education*, have argued that the increase in diagnosis of ADHD is due to overly general diagnostic criteria which allow any child with persistent unwanted behaviors to be classified as having ADHD. Some experts claim nine percent of all children have ADHD. Misdiagnosis of ADHD has been an issue among health professionals, as ADHD symptoms are easily confused with a variety of other problems, including poor vision, inadequate caregiving or even simple lack of sleep. As with most medical conditions, there are both genetic and environmental factors. Increased sugar intake and caffeine in students' diets is one suspect. Many of the effects of caffeine on the central nervous system parallel those of ADHD, including decreased attention and hyperactivity.

Most experts would not agree that ADHD is the result of bad parenting. But parents with busy schedules can easily miss the early signs of difficulty in school or disciplinary problems. It is crucial to promptly correct these earlier difficulties and especially to reinforce the child's self-esteem, which invariably suffers in a child who has ADHD.

Treatment by drugs

The cause of greatest alarm for ADHD lies not in the diagnosis but in the treatment. Both methylphenidate and the amphetamines in Adderall are listed by the US Drug Enforcement Agency as Schedule II substances, meaning they have a high potential for abuse and induced effects. That list includes cocaine, opium, oxycodone and a host of other powerful and addictive drugs. Over the past decade, the pharmaceutical market has seen a dramatic increase in drugs marketed to treat ADHD. Testifying before the House Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Youth and Families in May, 2000, then DEA Deputy Director Terrance Woodworth stated that methylphenidate prescriptions increased 846%—from 1,768 kilograms in 1990 to 14,957 in 2000. Amphetamine prescriptions increased 2160%—from 417 kilograms to 9,007—during the same pe-



Detection and treatment: *Ritalin is a powerful drug. It has serious side effects and is as addictive as cocaine.*

riod. The majority of these drugs were prescribed for childhood ADHD. The US accounts for approximately 90 percent of total world manufacture and consumption of methylphenidate. In high schools and colleges across America, methylphenidate is regarded as a quick aid for studying and last-minute cramming. For a few dollars, or even for free, many diagnosed students happily share a pill with a schoolmate. Along with a stimulant drink, it can keep a student alert all night before an exam. I have witnessed this as an increasingly common practice. An Indiana University study of 44,000 high school students found that about seven percent of those surveyed admitted to Ritalin abuse at least once. Of those students, 2.5 percent took it monthly or more often.

Potential for abuse

Even among Asians, who have the lowest rates of substance abuse, taking methylphenidate and its many derivatives are a popular way to get a competitive edge in school. Educators and ethicists are now debating whether these drugs may give unfair advantage to some students in the academic field, just as performance-enhancing drugs do for athletes. These are smart students

seeking entrance into medical or other professional schools. Their family upbringing is similar to mine; yet to them, taking an illegal drug to help study is somehow acceptable compared to taking one just to get high.

After taking methylphenidate, students become intensely concentrated on the work in front of them, oblivious to their surroundings. Frequently, I have had to address a drugged classmate multiple times to get his attention, then watch him mechanically go back to studying. The next day, after the extended-release tablets had worn off, he would sleep for hours all through the day. With the abuse of methylphenidate comes weight loss and sleep disorders.

Until recently, the effects of this drug were thought to be short term; but now there is evidence of long-term impact. In July 2001, the Connecticut legislature unanimously passed a measure prohibiting school officials from recommending psychiatric drugs of any kind.

The broader problems

Proponents of ADHD point to the positive results of medicating diagnosed individuals. Many students do perform better in school as a result. I have encountered students whose lives were dramatically improved by proper diagnosis and treatment. At the same time, a once obscure dis-

order has become a trend in mainstream America, with many parents—increasingly too busy to raise their kids—medicating them for what the rest of the world regards as normal behavior. In my time in secondary school I witnessed many parents attempt to explain away their child's poor performance with a diagnosis of ADHD—often encouraged by a teacher, counselor or school official. I am constantly reminded of the dependency some of these students developed. Due to its wide availability and its labeling as a "study" drug, methylphenidate remains one of the most popular and easily obtained controlled substances in America.

The bottom line is that the issues associated with ADHD underscore a larger problem in our society: the tendency to seek quick fixes for complex problems. Difficulties in child rearing cannot be solved with a pill. The United States' poor showing in education indices—from reading to mathematics—cannot be blamed on ADHD, given that the US accounts for 90 percent of the world's methylphenidate consumption. Parents, educators and legislators must look beyond this short-term remedy and begin addressing the broader problems that are really to blame.

Thoreau

A Sage in Early America

Stillness of a peaceful mind: (above) Walden pond, the idyllic glen where the writer meditated; (opposite) Thoreau in 1856, 39

BIOGRAPHY

The 19th-century writer drank deeply from the *Vedas*, lived in communion with nature and advocated a life of mystical simplicity

THE UNLIKELY HERMIT STOLE A SPOT in the woods, built a cabin, stilled his mind and burrowed into nature. By day, whippoorwill melodies drifted through the tranquil glen. At dusk, bullfrogs bellowed deafening nocturnes. Slowly a higher presence embraced the solitary advances of the kindly Lincolnesque form, yielding a flurry of pristine secrets. By the time he died at 44, with two million words quilled in broad journals, Henry David Thoreau had softly cracked nature's subtlest codes and thundered forth his pri-

mal civil command—obey conscience first, society second. Half a century later, curled up in a dank South African jail cell, a persecuted Mahatma Gandhi nursed himself on *Walden*—Thoreau's nature odyssey—and sealed the fate of India's independence studying a copy of Thoreau's *Duty of Civil Disobedience*, the germ spark of his *satyagraha* (tenacity in truth) campaign.

Around the globe, the soulful ruminations of the son of a New England pencil-maker spread. Thoreau knew well that his works were a mere echo of a true, unfathomable

divine order, and recognized that Hindu scripture hugged this perception as dearly as he. He assiduously probed Hindu writings borrowed from Harvard's library. The contours of his driftwood bookshelves were lined with Upanishads and other Indian treasures which he read again and again: "In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the *Bhagavad Gita*, since whose composition years of the Gods have elapsed, and in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial.

Thoreau was born in 1818 in a chipmunk of a town: Concord, Massachusetts. Though Christian by count, this homely Atlantic seaboard region spawned an unusual tribe of Orientalized minds that America later proudly identified as Transcendentalists. This loose metaphysical brotherhood of brilliant, highly educated writers—including Ralph Waldo Emerson and later compatriot Walt Whitman—were versed in Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist and Confucian thought. Like a band of divine blacksmiths sent from inner worlds, they pounded on society's repressive puritanical mind-set, working to refashion it back to some semblance of America's embryonic vision: individual freedom, abhorrence of enslavement and reverence for a mystical, undoctrinaire approach to God. The anvil ring of their message echoes today through every high school and college in America. India fondly adopted the Transcendentalists as kindred souls, especially Thoreau. Every English-medium-educated Indian boy or girl studied his classic weapon of nonviolence, *Duty of Civil Disobedience*. *Walden's* meditative message has such a strong Indian appeal, it has been translated into Tamil, Gujarati, Telugu, Malayalam, Hindi, Kannada and Bengali.

Thoreau was junior to Emerson by 14 years, but the two were very close. It was on Emerson's land that Thoreau built his immortalized Walden Pond cabin. But Emerson scolded Thoreau for lacking ambition, coaxing him to shoulder more of the literary burden of their clandestine mission to reform America's stiff mentality. He railed one day at the incontrovertible introvert: "Instead of being the head of American Engineers, you are captain of a huckleberry party."

Thoreau ignored the lifelong spur and maintained an icy dispassion to all self-conscious, master-minded literary strategies to recompass America's future. Lack of fame also failed to concern him. "I have now a library of 900 books, over 700 of which I wrote myself," he once said jesting about a heap of his unsold books.

He and Emerson were invited to join Brook Farm, the commune and heady vortex of the Transcendentalist movement. Both declined. The idea disgusted Thoreau: "I would rather keep bachelors' hall in hell than go to board in heaven! I love to be alone. I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude. A man thinking or working is always alone."

When Thoreau graduated from Harvard, he took

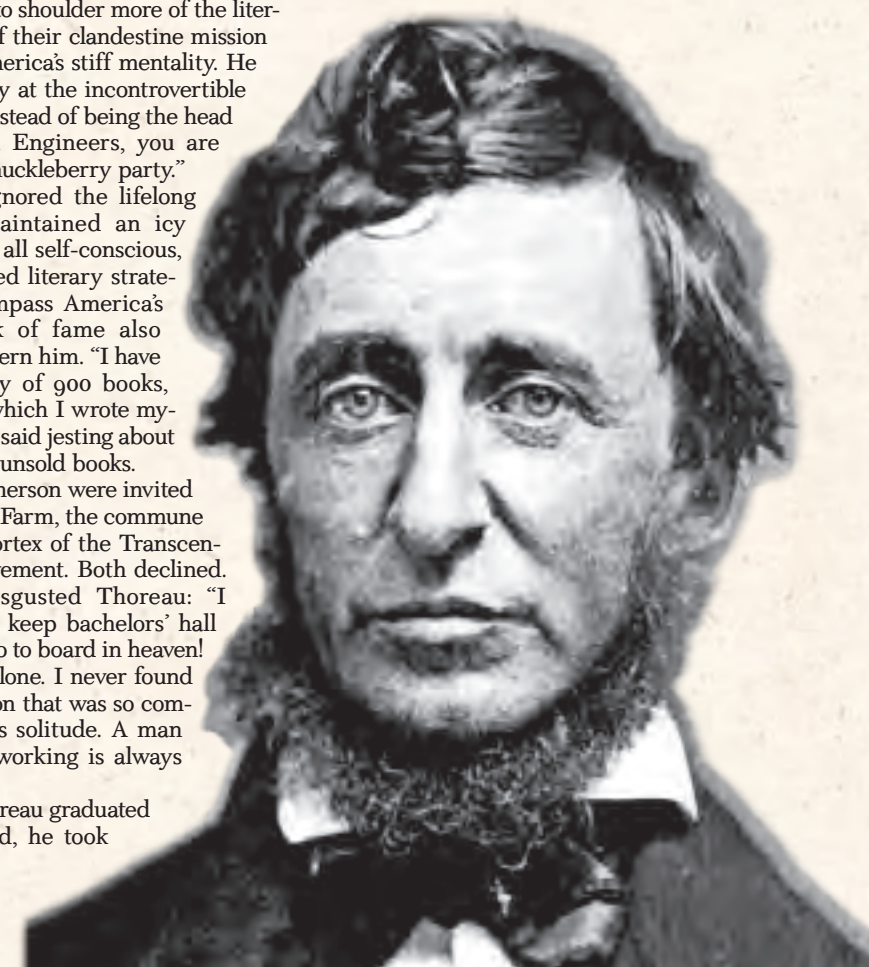
up the occupation of his three brothers and sisters—teaching. That job lasted barely a semester. Asked to flog one of his students, he refused, left and started his own school, Concord Academy. At Harvard he had seen everything he hated about schooling in his day—intellectually dehydrated professors, mind-dulling recitation and a police-state behavioral demerit system. His school was the opposite—coeducational, free tuition for the poor, no flogging and discipline maintained by an honor code. Discussion was encouraged, and classroom walls often evaporated as field trips took the students to dig for Native American relics, visit craft shops and plunge deep into the woods where Thoreau taught his specialty—nature. But his brother's illness forced him to close the school after two years.

Thoreau's shyness and intense inner life would certainly not make him a popular figure or a leader of any sort. His grey, owl eyes gazed more inward than out. "He is as ugly as sin, long-nosed, queer-mouthed, and somewhat rustic, though with courteous manners," American author and Concordian Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote of his bearded dinner guest of August 31, 1842. Hawthorne's wife Sophia was kinder: "He is gentle, simple, ruddy, and meek, as all geniuses should be. How his great blue eyes fairly outshine and put into a shade that nose I once thought must make him un-

Even our Shakespeare seems sometimes youthfully green."

Uninterested in the separate-from-man-and-nature God of the Occidentals, he allied his deepest sympathies with the "gods of the Orient." He once shared: "The Hindu *Laws of Manu* comes to me with such a volume of sound as if it had swept unobstructed to me over the plains of Hindustan, and when my eye rests on yonder birches, or the sun in the water, or the shadows of the trees, it seems to signify the laws of them all. They are the laws of you and me, a fragrance wafted down from those old times and no more to be refuted than the wind."

He identified with the austere lifestyles of the rishis: "One may discover the root of the Hindu religion in one's own private history, when, in the silent intervals of the day or the night, he does sometimes inflict on himself like austerities with a stern satisfaction."



comely forever!” Yet the photo on the previous page was commissioned by a reader who, entranced with the first edition of *Walden*, sent a photographer to register the remarkable man behind the words.

Regular townsfolk acknowledged him less and tagged him an “idle fellow”—a rank insult in those proud pioneering days. Getting himself published was irregular at best. Needing steady income, he worked for his father making pencils and ink compounds and finally settled on working three days a week as a surveyor. The other four he walked, climbed mountains, canoed, idled with true dedication and kept his journal. “I lived like the Puri Indians, of whom it is said that for yesterday, today and tomorrow they have only one word—pointing backward for yesterday, forward for tomorrow and overhead for the passing day. This was sheer idleness to my fellow townsmen, no doubt; but if the birds and flowers had tried me by their standard, I should not have been found wanting.”

He considered his cabinside pond “at least as sacred as the Ganges” and one morning visualized: “Now I go for water, and while

All a man needs: (below) Thoreau lived his *Walden Pond* years in a small cabin similar to this replica until a fire freed him from even these comforts; (above) a commemorative US stamp of the writer, issued in 1967

there I meet the servant of the Brahmin priest of Brahma, Vishnu and Indra, who still sits in his temple on the Ganges reading the *Vedas*.” Thoreau’s reverence for ancient wisdom and the sacredness of creation often stretched out to the Gods themselves. Thoreau had his own personal form of prayer: “This journal, I must not live for it, but in it for the Gods. They are my correspondents, to whom daily I send off this sheet postpaid. I am a clerk in their counting room and at evening transfer the accounts from day-book to ledger. It is as a leaf which hangs over my head in the path. I bend the twig and write my prayers on it; then letting it go, the bough springs up and shows the scrawl to heaven.” Enraptured by the power of contemplation, he wrote with the mellowed voice of a Vedic forest sage: “Sometimes,

ing taken my accustomed bath, I sat in my sunny doorway from sunrise till noon, rapt in a reverie amidst the pines and hickories and sumachs, in such undisturbed solitude and stillness, while the birds sang around or flitted noiseless through the house, until by the sun falling in at my west window, I was reminded of the lapse of time. I grew in those seasons like corn in the night, and they were far better than any work of the hands would have been. I realized what the Orientals mean by contemplation and forsaking of work.”

Thoreau’s treasured jewels

The post office notified Mr. Thoreau that some large wooden crates had arrived for him. The lean and bearded wordsmith marched down Concord’s muddy main street and claimed the unexpected items. The year, 1855. As he pried off the lids, his opalescent blue eyes dilated. Inside glittered “jewels,” 44 volumes of Hindu scriptures—*Rig Veda*, *Mundaka Upanishad*, *Nala Damyanta*, *Vishnu Purana*, *Shankya Karika*, *Aphorism of the Mimamsa*, *Aphorisms of the Nyaya*, *Bhagavad Gita* and more. Bliss. This was more exciting than getting a favorable review of *Walden* in a Boston paper, or listening to a summer squall thunder through a muggy afternoon or receiving a letter from his only close female friend, Lydia Emerson, Ralph Waldo’s handsome wife. Immediately, like a priest installing a Deity, he created a special shelf out of driftwood for his Hindu treasures. Now Vedic wisdom, like heady *soma* juice, was on tap in Thoreau’s private writing den. He began to imbibe from each, but within a few days announced, “Of them all, the *Rig Veda* is the most savory I have yet tasted.”

It was during his student days at Harvard, in dusty library aisles, that Thoreau first discovered the *Upanishads*. They were sunlight to the footloose literary giant. They resonated with the advaitic mind strata that he personally accessed through his own woodsy, contemplative lifestyle. His Asian leanings mushroomed over the years. Eventually, the self-styled forest sage wrote in his Journal that his beloved fish and frog pond Walden sometimes seemed like the sacred Ganges.

He further imagined his \$28.47 self-built waterside cabin a typical rishi’s hermitage and himself a dhoti-clad brahmin. Though literate in four languages and versed in the scriptures of many religions, he assessed, “It happens that I am better acquainted with those of the Hindus, Chinese and Persians than of the Hebrews” and soberly suggested a new Bible, filled two-thirds with Buddhist and Hindu verse. Thoreau fondly quoted Hindu writings in his works and harped on the need of “establishing himself in the consciousness of the Atman, always.”

Unmarried, abstinent, Thoreau identified easily with the Indian yogi. Villagers said he could sit motionless for eight hours just watching duck eggs hatch. “He knew how to sit immovable, a part of the rock he rested on, until the bird, the reptile, the fish which had retired from him, should come back and resume its habits, nay, moved by curiosity, should

come to him and watch,” Emerson shared. “Free in this world as the birds in the air,” Thoreau wrote, “disengaged from every kind of chain—those who practice the yoga gather in Brahma the certain fruit of their works. I would [gladly] practice yoga faithfully. The yogi absorbed in concentration contributes in this degree to creation. Divine forms traverse him without tearing him. To some extent and at rare intervals, even I am a yogi. If I am not a modern Hindu, we are near neighbors.” His mystical senses were clearly awakened by his solitary sojourn. “I find myself in perfect connection with nature, and the perception, or remembrance even, of any natural phenomena is attended with a gentle pleasurable excitement... Each man’s necessary path, though as obscure and apparently uneventful as that of a beetle in the grass, is the way to the deepest joys he is susceptible of; though he converses only with moles and fungi and disgraces his relatives, it is no matter if he knows what is steel to his flint... Pursue, keep up with, circle ’round and ’round your life as a dog does his master’s chaise. Do what you love. Know your own bone; gnaw at it, bury it, unearth it, and gnaw it still. Do not be too moral. Be not simply good. Be good for something.”

Thoreau abjured alcohol, coffee and meat. “I believe that every man earnest to preserve his higher or poetic faculties in the best condition has been particularly inclined to abstain from animal food.” However he exempts the sage who has “true faith in the Omnipresent Supreme Being and may eat all that exists.” He prized a pruned lifestyle. “Our life is frittered away by detail. Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three and keep your accounts on your thumbnail.” His test of yogic detachment (*vairagya*) came one parched fall afternoon. A spark from his campfire ignited dry grass and then engulfed the nearby woods. Thoreau ran to alert Concord. There was nothing anyone could do. Thoreau gravely pondered his next move—wallow in guilt or watch. He quickly raced up a near hilltop and spent the afternoon watching nature magnificently consume in ruby, crimson and green flames the woods he loved probably more than anyone. He wrote later the day was one of his fullest.

Gandhi’s political inspiration

One day in London, in the frustrating pursuit of a vegetarian meal, Thoreau’s biographer, Henry Salt, met with Mohan-

das K. Gandhi and asked: “How influenced were you by Thoreau?” Gandhi smiled like he had been asked how influential his mother had been. Greatly influenced, he said right off, adding that he knew passages from *Civil Disobedience* like his own pulse. He shared that he especially admired the

“Direct your eye inward, and you’ll find a thousand regions of your mind yet undiscovered. Be a Columbus to whole new worlds within you, opening channels not of trade, but of thought.”

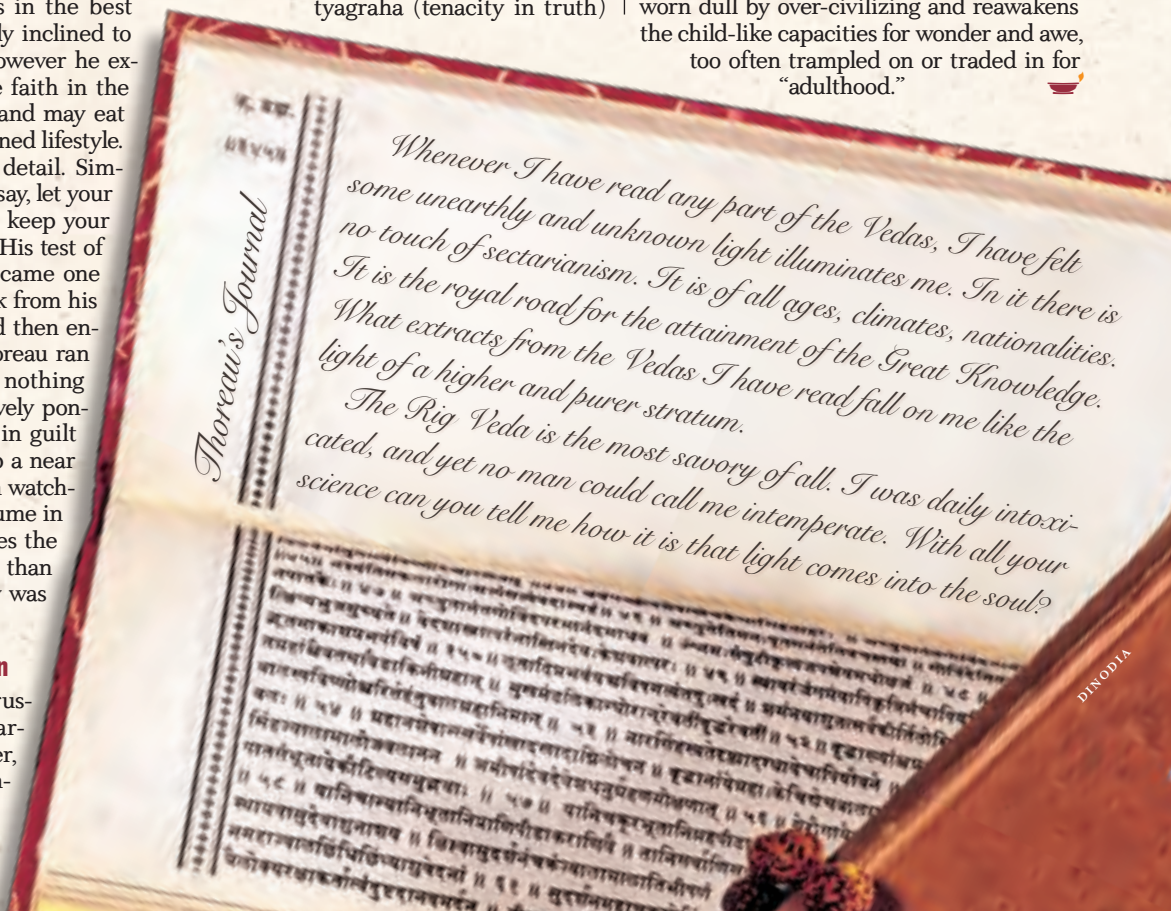
—HENRY DAVID THOREAU

sage’s austere lifestyle and obstinate dedication to freedom—personal, civil and spiritual. He added that all his study always left him “feeling the need of knowing more of Thoreau.” It was a worn-out copy of *Civil Disobedience* that Gandhi repeatedly took with him to jail during his turbulent years in South Africa fighting for Indian rights. “Like his salt-making and his hand-spinning, civil disobedience was [one of the key] symbols Gandhi shared,” notes author Sujit Mukherjee. Gandhi later told an American journalist that he named his movement Satyagraha (tenacity in truth)

after reading *Civil Disobedience*. Gandhi’s Indian commune near Durban, the Phoenix Settlement, was inspired by *Walden Pond*, as well as by the works of Tolstoy. “Noble villages of men,” Thoreau had advised. Gandhi took the Thoreauvian ideals of frugal self-sufficiency, vegetarianism and the sacred value of manual, not mechanized, labor and planted them in South Africa, and later back in India.

Today, the solitary fellow “who frequently tramped eight or ten miles to keep an appointment with a beech or yellow birch” is read throughout India as one of America’s greatest authors. This is certainly true: Thoreau’s writing is unparalleled in vision and craft, each sentence chiseled with a sculptor’s feel. But the older, Independence-generation Indians value Thoreau as he would have preferred—for his Vivekananda-

like, Kshatriya disdain for servitude. Hindu treasure Thoreau’s fondness for Hindu writings and admire how he made them part of his inner quest. Even deeper and broader, he remains to all a universal teacher of the joy of stillness and oneness with nature. For everyone who has at some time felt they were sadly party to the mass of humanity “leading lives of quiet desperation” (as Thoreau surmised), the soulful musings of the woodsy yogi always sparkle. Like clear water from a magical mountain spring, his infectious joy revitalizes nerves worn dull by over-civilizing and reawakens the child-like capacities for wonder and awe, too often trampled on or traded in for “adulthood.”





Initiation day: Kartikeya Katir (far left) receives samaya diksha from Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami at Tiruvannamalai Temple

Seeking Their Spiritual Roots

Hear from youth who spent three weeks on pilgrimage to Cambodia, Malaysia and India as they strived to connect with Hinduism's depths

THE ASIAN ODYSSEY WAS THE 2008 EDITION of Himalayan Academy's biannual pilgrimage program during which Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami led 97 devotees from 15 countries through the Hindu temples of Cambodia, Malaysia and India from January 15 to February 4. Worship, meditation and personal reflection filled each day as the pilgrims sought to strengthen their connection to the Divine. They visited Angkor Wat, the world's largest Hindu temple, participated in Thai Pusam at Batu Caves in Kuala Lumpur and pilgrimaged in South India to Tiruvannamalai and the famed Arunachala Hill, Rameshwaram Siva temple, Tiruchendur Murugan temple and Kanya Kumari at India's southern tip.

Among the group were thirteen youth, age 11 to 33. Most were Hindus, some born of Indian parents (though only one actually in India), others of Western converts to Hinduism. Here they recount their expectations, experiences and observations during their spiritual journey.



Young searcher: 11-year-old Ruby of Thailand was on her first visit to India

Niraj, 30, England

Niraj Thaker (nirajthaker@hotmail.com) is an information technology specialist working in the London's financial sector. He came on the pilgrimage to become closer to his guru and make spiritual progress.

Why should young people consider the religious path? Hinduism is such a deep, mystical religion. There is clarification and knowledge available from wise people—gurus, saints and devotees. They can help you transform your life and understand your inner self. For me, Hinduism is my way on earth. I have had profound experiences on this path.

What's been the pilgrimage high point for you? Batu Caves was one. I had hurt my leg badly in Cambodia. It was extremely painful to walk. I had to conjure up courage and willpower to climb up to the cave. We started from the Divine Life Society where we



THOMAS KELLY

prepared the milk pots to take as offerings. As soon as the chanting started, I was energized and ready to go. I could not feel any pain. All I could feel was just love—love for Lord Muruga. There were 272 steps but it felt like two seconds. Once in the cave, I put all my energy into the milk pot, all of my prayers and apologies. After that, I felt completely cleansed. The other high point was Tiruvannamalai temple in India. The ancient temples *are* God—they represent Siva Himself. As soon as you enter the temple, you know it is alive and welcoming you, nourishing you. Everything was alive, the temple itself, the pillars, the floor, even the guardian deva statues on the side seemed alive.

Aubrey, 20, Canada

Aubrey Burke (aburke@uvic.ca) is about to enter his third year of college at the University of Victoria in British Columbia. He is in the process of making major decisions about his education and future career.

What were your high points? I very much enjoyed the little Skanda Ashram of Ramana Maharishi on Arunachala Hill in Tiruvannamalai. I was quite amazed with the feeling of love. I felt like I could have stayed there a long time. The other place that I really enjoyed was Vivekananda Memorial at Kanya Kumari. The rock where he meditated had a strong energy. I was there only momentarily, but would have liked to sit there for hours, if not days.

How did you find the camaraderie among the youth here? I met Niraj before on Facebook through the Subramuniya group. That was kind of cool. It's good to have people around the same age going through the same sort of things you are, such as, "What career am I going after?" The group strengthens your quest. I know I'll be friends with them for the rest of my life, and that's very special.

What's your impression of India? I think it is important that everyone that is interested in yoga or Hinduism come once in their lifetime to India. It is different. There is a temple around every corner, a shrine everywhere you go. It is a magical place. I've wanted to come to India since I was in eighth grade. There is so much flourishing spirituality here.

What are you doing after the pilgrimage? I will be going on the eight-temple Ganesha pilgrimage in Maharashtra, and then the six Murugan temple pilgrimage and the five Siva elemental temples in South India. Then I'll head north. I may even go to Mount Kailash. I'll be in India for four more months.

Kartikeya, 18, California

Kartikeya Katir graduated in June from Da Vinci High School, Davis. He had been working for several years to qualify for initiation from Bodhinatha during the pilgrimage (see the video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=8dY3UvRQiyk). One of his

Ocean blessing: (left to right) Shren Moodley, Bijamathi Peratumbee and Tatiana Martushev take a dip in the ocean at Rameshwaram prior to bathing at the ancient temple's 22 wells

goals on the pilgrimage was to decide where to go to college.

What is the value of spirituality? It is a guide to help me make choices throughout my life. It's easier to deal with situations when you have an idea of what the right thing to do is. The understanding of karma has the biggest impact on my daily actions. I see myself thinking, "Well what kind of karma might this create?"

What's been your high point? My *samaya diksha* (initiation) into Saivism's most sacred mantra, "Aum Namasivaya," at Tiruvannamalai. At one point, Bodhinatha placed his hands on my head and blessed me. It was the clearest that my mind had ever been. It was amazing. The wells at Rameshwaram were also unexpectedly intense. It was about releasing sins encountered throughout your life. Every time that I would go to a well, I would have all of these emotions and memories come up. I could physically feel them getting caught up by my throat. As soon as that water hit me, they just completely evaporated into nothing. I couldn't even remember what I was upset about.

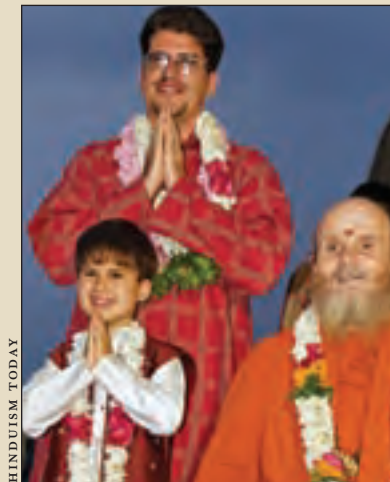
What did you decide about college? My parents and I had very conflicting ideas about



Panshula and Shailesh at Tiruvannamalai



Shivani and Kailas



Nathan & Chidambaram



Niraj



Misha

where I was going to go to school. They wanted me to stay at home. I wanted to go out somewhere else. As I've thought about the different aspects of being at home and away from home, I came to agree with my parents. It is the best decision.

Bijamati, 13, Mauritius

Bijamati Pareatumbbee lives on the island of Mauritius. Her family are long-time devotees of Bodhinatha and his predecessor, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, known as Gurudeva. She traveled with her mother.

What has been the high point for you? I was not that religious before I came on the pilgrimage. I wasn't concentrating on my spiritual life. Now I am. I have become a lot more religious. The best things I have done so far in this trip are the 16-kilometer walk around Arunchala Hill in Thiruvannamalai and the 22 baths in Rameshvaram. I felt the well bathing washed away the bad things we have done, our bad karma.

What is your impression of India? I like it here. The temples are extremely big. You can get lost in them. You can also sit for many hours if you want to.

Shivani, 25, California

Shivani Rajan (laufah@hotmail.com) of Canyon, California, recently earned a BA in Fine Arts and will next be studying herbal healing from a Native American Indian perspective. Her father, Deva, and brother, Kailas, were also on the pilgrimage.

What is your personal objective here? I am

coming to a crossroad in my life. I am either going to go into medicine or teaching. I am also spiritually at a crossroads in trying to decide how much my life is going to be about being a Hindu and how much is more about just being Shivani Rajan, and what the difference is.

Why is a spiritual approach to life important to you? I want to live expressing my soul, and there is no other way to do that. I think life is pretty pointless if it does not have a spiritual drive or goal. Without a spiritual life, nothing is ever satisfactory. The waves are too high in the ocean of the world. You are not able to control things and just get flipped around. If you are very spiritual, you have more control over how you respond. Also, I think you have to have a huge amount of trust in the world and the universe. Ganesha is my best friend. Seriously, I feel constantly protected and cared for. I meditate and do puja daily and also sing, which I find very gratifying. I spend some time in nature every day.

What are your observations as a born Hindu raised in the West? I think it is really important for children to be given a lot of respect and the opportunity to be together—without adults around—so that they can really explore what it is being a Hindu in America or in the West. There were times when I felt that Indian culture as I was taught to live it carried more than just Hinduism, so it felt excessive because we are American Hindus. To me, Hinduism is, in the end, whatever you want it to be. There is a lot of freedom in it. Once I let go of the past experiences as a kid, I could accept a lot of the concepts that I was brought up with and embrace them.

What was the high point for you? On an internal level, the meditations towards the end of the pilgrimage were especially rich and deep. Externally, the mind-blowing vibrations from the puja at Tiruchendur Muruga Temple resonate within me still, and will never be forgotten.

Did you accomplish your goals? In the last few months I've come to feel more myself than I have felt since I was 8 years old. I feel strong, sure of my path and well endowed with tools to help me manage life's challenges. I have direction and courage, and I feel educated in the way a good captain needs to be.

What have you realized about the pilgrimage since coming back? That I can retain what I learned during it through practicing meditation and daily *sadhana*. I feel sure of my inner strength and voice in a way that I think could only have resulted from spending so much time in all of the temples we visited in the company of a great many old souls. Pilgrimage seemed to scrape off the barnacles collected through the day-to-day grind of being out in the world, worrying about money, my future, health, politics, the planet, etc. It has a wonderful, "spiritually exfoliating" affect that I've gained much from.

Nathan, 31, California

Nathan Sendan (nsendan@gmail.com) was born in a family of Gurudeva's devotees. He now lives in California with his wife and two children. His six-year-old son, Chidambaram, accompanied him on the pilgrimage.

How did the trip impact your son? I think it will definitely have made an impression on

him, but I won't know what it is until we get back home. We'll have to see what he talks about. He's filtering it now all through a six-year-old perspective. He was able to pay attention at the temples, and I think it was good for him to be exposed to all of that. I have to do more daily religious practice myself for it to have a lasting spiritual impression on him.

Did you accomplish your main purpose? Time will tell. My main purpose on the trip was to get a disconnect from my day-to-day life back in California. If this actually creates some space in my life to do something other than think about work, then it will have been successful.

Shailesh, 30, California

Shailesh Trivedi was born and raised in the United States to a Tamil mother and Gujarati father. The family runs a flower farm in San Diego.

What was your purpose in going on the pilgrimage? India is like a spiritual playground. On pilgrimage, I knew that I could really allow myself to become absorbed in worship and *sadhana*, more so than at home. The energy of the temples is strong, as well as the power one feels seeing all the other pilgrims worshipping alongside. For me, a pilgrimage is a sort of life calibration, a strong reminder of what I believe in and who I am.

How did you free yourself to go? I have been wanting to go on a pilgrimage for many years, but January and February, the cool time in India, was also the busiest time of the year for the flower farm. Then in October of 2007, a massive wildfire swept

through our area and destroyed our farm. I suddenly found myself having basically no flowers to sell for the upcoming season. The fire turned out to be a blessing in disguise, as it allowed me to take a break from farming and everyday life, and dive into a spiritual journey without any distractions.

What did you get out of the trip? It was everything I thought it would be and more. The temple experiences and *sadhanas* performed were rare and strong, just as I always dreamed. The guru, swamis and fellow pilgrims were great inspiration and showed me so many different perspectives on how to see God, how to be happy and how to just be. After the group pilgrimage ended, I went alone to the six Murugan temples. I found myself very focused and energized in my *sadhana*.

Shren, 30, South Africa

Shren Moodley works in marketing for Unilever Hindustan, South Africa. Toward the beginning of the trip, while still in Malaysia, he said, "I can't wait to get to India. I can't wait to get to the temples."

How did religion become important to you? There was a stage in my life where I was a bit lost and confused. I was born a Hindu. My mom and dad taught me the culture and how to pray. But my faith wasn't as strong as it is now. A few years ago I was lost in my life and curious to find out my roots. I went on the Internet and came across the books of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (founder of HINDUISM TODAY). I have been reading them since 2003. No human being could have ever written these. The books answered all the questions I had as a child,

such as, Why is there hell? or Why would God create violence? I don't have those questions any more. Every question has found an answer through this philosophy.

What's your advice to other young people? As I was growing up in South Africa, we learned that temples and literature are important. But we didn't learn how important the guru is. When a guru puts it into words that you understand, you get a series of small realizations that make you feel at peace.

What has been the high point of the pilgrimage for you? Tiruvannamalai temple. During the abhishekam worship, I was right in front of the main sanctum just before they dressed the Deity. The shakti, the power, was absolutely awesome. I came on the trip because I thought I was going a little bit off the path. It has gotten me focused back. It has gotten Siva to the forefront of my mind.

Misha, 27, South Africa

Misha Visram is an administrative assistant working for Unilever Hindustan. She and Shren are engaged to be married.

Why are you on the pilgrimage? I want to grow spiritually and learn to meditate. A few years ago, I started going to the temple every week. I also started questioning everything that I have been doing, to understand things better. One of things that really got me excited about coming was Shren's passion when he speaks about all of this. I want to be like that. I want to know all of that.

What's the value of religion to youth? With the youth of today, religion is forgotten. We do not speak our mother tongue. We have

become very Westernized. We have forgotten who we are and where we came from. Religion is the only thing that can give you those answers. You can only tell a person so much. It is for them to realize it.

What's been your high point? I felt really uplifted and good at having accomplished the Batu Caves experience. At Tiruchendur Murugan temple, we attended a five-hour homa and puja that was just out of this world. I never experienced so many priests and so many swamis at a ceremony. I can't really explain it, the energy.

Panshula, 30, Chicago

Panshula Ganeshan, of Chicago, Illinois, works in the grocery business and also teaches English. He adopted the Hindu religion in 1999.

Why should youth take up spirituality? When we're living a good religious life, we have a steady center that we can identify with. Then we can face the challenges of our karma coming back to us in a smoother manner. Our emotions are much calmer and life is much more peaceful. Living a good religious life has manifested a continuous peace that does not waver.

What was the high point of the trip for you? Bathing at the 22 wells of Rameswaram temple to cleanse ourselves of past transgressions. At each well I had a transgression in mind; the water was symbolic of purification. I really felt those transgressions were forgiven, and at the end of the whole experience I was purified.

How do you compare the temples in India with those in Chicago? To be perfectly honest, I found that the temples at home were just as powerful and meaningful as the old temples in India. I realized what Saint Tirumular meant when he said, "Chidambaram is everywhere. Divine Dance is everywhere. Siva Shakti is everywhere."

Have you become a better Hindu? I saw in India that Hinduism is a total, complete way of life. And that's impressive. I feel like I live the complete Hindu life in the West, but in a Western context. When in India, you are a Hindu living in a Hindu context. So being in India impresses the mind that there is this whole Hindu context that is not there in the West. You can only see that by being in India.

How would compare the temples in Cambodia and India? It was so interesting to go to Siem Reap where all the temples, though younger

than those we saw in India, were dilapidated, broken down, leveled. The worship had stopped. The culture had dispersed, disintegrated, moved away. And then to go to India and you see older temples still going, the worship still there, the priests still doing the pujas. That was a beautiful thing to realize the continuity of Hinduism in India; there's nothing like it in the world.

Do you have any advice for future pilgrims? I would say, don't come to India thinking things are going to be easy and lavish. For a foreigner, it is a shock. It's difficult. It's not comfortable. But I think experiencing that awakened my sense of gratitude for all the conveniences I have in my life.

Kailas, 23, California

Kailas Rajan, Shivani's brother, has worked at different times in the construction, food and medical industries. He is a talented carnatic singer and drummer.

What prompted you to come on the Innersearch? I was born and raised as Hindu. At 14, I went off to military school and went my own way for a while. Now I want to come back and kind of reestablish my views and get more of a concrete foundation of what my beliefs

actually are. I came on this trip to decide to continue being a non-practicing Hindu or to start to pursue it more actively.

What is it that catalyzed you to seek a spiritual angle to life? For me, it was when I turned 17 or 18. I started becoming really frustrated with myself as a person. I was just unhappy in general. I had a lot of anger. For a long time I actually couldn't decide why that was. As I got older, I realized that my frustration stemmed from the lack of an active spiritual life, from a solid understanding of what my beliefs are.

How would you encourage young people toward personal experience of their religion? I think the experience is ultimately there most of the time. You just have to open yourself up to it.

Tatiana, 32, New York City

Tatiana Martushev (tmartushev@hotmail.com) is a licensed therapist who works with chronically ill people.

Why have you come on the pilgrimage? My objective is to heal myself and to understand healing at a deeper level so I can provide that to my clients. I also want to create more clarity, balance and joy in my life.

How did spirituality become important to you? I think I was born spiritual. My family were strict Russian Orthodox. But as a child I would tell my mother about reincarnation and how I struggled with coming back. That was not a concept acceptable to my family, so every since then I kept it to myself. I think I reincarnated for a specific purpose. I learned to meditate on my own when I was nine. Now I am looking for a more structured purpose for this spirituality.

What were the high points? At Thai Pusam I had this moment where I felt very embraced and very taken care of. I felt this sensation that I had my family in the Mother and Father of the universe, and in the Gods. I had this moment of perfect clarity where something came into my mind and said, "You will never be alone again." It was a profound moment, something that I will always carry with me.

Ruby, 11, Thailand/USA

Ruby Rattana Inthawong traveled with her father, Janava Dharamadeva (jana.vadharmadeva@yahoo.com) of New Mexico, and her mother, Daraneerat Inthawong of Thailand, where Ruby was born. Her father is a long-time devotee of Gurudeva and officially became a Hindu during this pilgrim-

age. It was his intention to expose his daughter to Hindu religion.

What did you expect from the trip? I hoped the pilgrimage would make me a better person. And I wanted everyone to be happy in the journey. I also wanted to see some monkeys in India!

What did you like most about the journey? I liked Angkor Wat and Batu Caves. It was kind of scary seeing people carrying the kavadis. I now have a better understanding of Hinduism. I want to come back to India when I am older.

After the pilgrimage, HINDUISM TODAY asked Janava how it impacted Ruby. He writes, "Before the pilgrimage, Ruby would sometimes lose her awareness in a sad and crying section of the mind, even for an hour. Now, when this happens, she can come out of that area almost immediately. She told me that she recently learned to 'focus on the tiny Ruby in her heart and then come out to a happy place.'" (This concept of controlling one's awareness was taught on the pilgrimage.) Daraneerat, her mother, says Ruby learns things faster, is better organized and has an increased interest in *tambon*, which is a Thai word for spiritual practices intended to gain merit.



Thai Pusam: Aubrey Burke carries pal kavadi, an offering of milk in a pot, up the 278 steps to Lord Murugan's Batu Cave temple in Malaysia during the festival to honor Lord Murugan receiving the Vel from Goddess Parvati



Culmination: (right to left) Niraj, Shivani, Tatiana, Bijamati and Shailesh after a profound ceremony at Tiruvannamalai temple.

HISTORY

Marvelous Historical Atlas of South Asia Is Now Online

THE HISTORICAL ATLAS OF SOUTH ASIA may go down in history as one of the great academic achievements of the 20th century. Sadly, the 15-pound, \$250 tome has gone out of print. But, happily, it is now available for free online at the University of Chicago's Digital South Asian Library at <http://dsal.uchicago.edu/reference/schwartzberg/>.

An effort started in 1964, the Atlas was based on the foundation of the Ames Library of South Asia, a collection that began in 1917 when Charles Lesley Ames and his bride went to India. When he gifted his treasury of text to the University of Minnesota in 1961, it comprised 80,000 items, including more than 25,000 volumes and 700 maps. In 1966 Professor Joseph E. Schwartzberg took the post of editor and was joined by part-time contributors Eleanor Zelliot and cartographer Raj B. Mathur. Historian Shiva G. Bajpai joined full time in 1967. Many others contributed over time to the 1978 first edition. By the time the second edition was published in 1992, a staggering 190 man-years of work had been invested in the masterpiece.

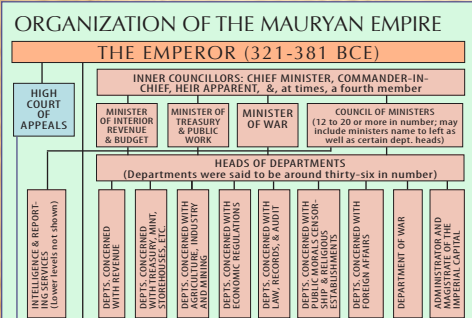
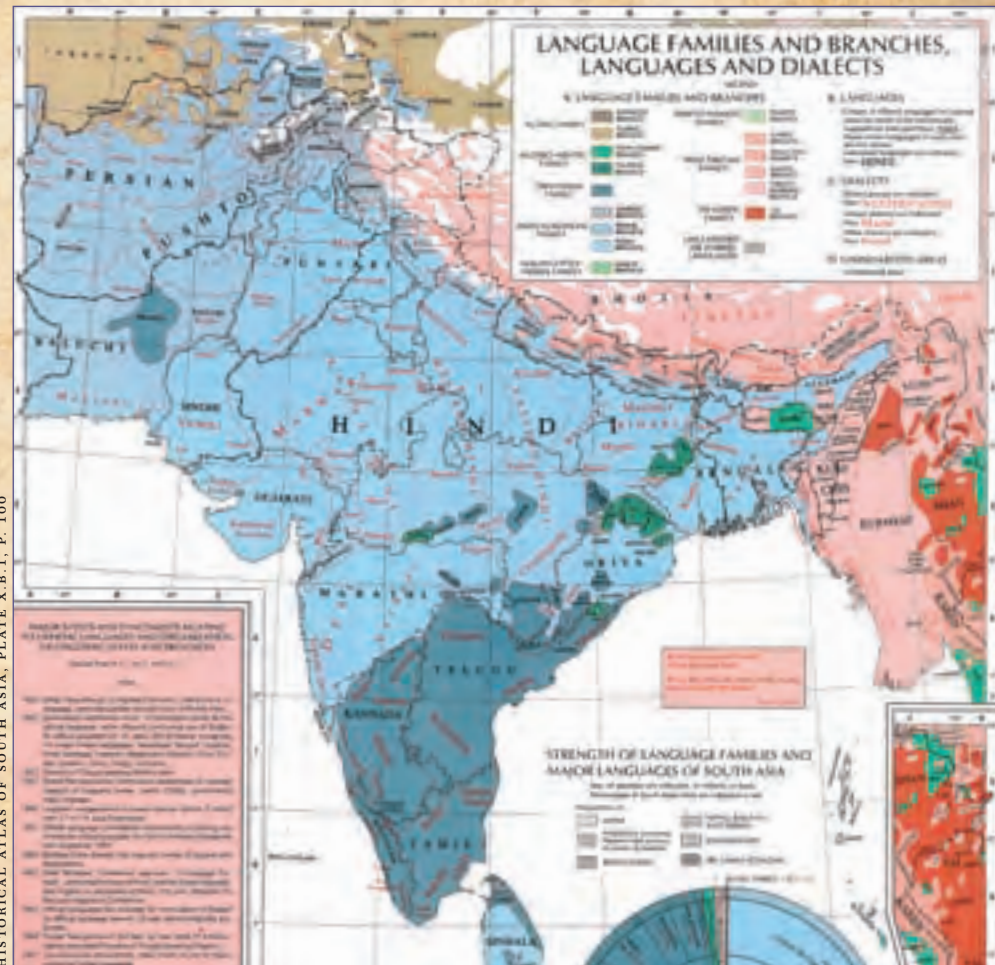
The first 159 pages of the book contain

Right: a language distribution map; below: a chart from the overview of the complex Mauryan Empire administration of 321 bce, evidencing the sophistication of ancient Indian civilization

fascinating maps detailing the physical geography, social and cultural landscapes from prehistory to the Vedic period, through independence and up to 1961. You can see exactly where Neolithic and Harappan tools were found, follow the movements of kingdoms, cultures, religions and saints across the ages, chart the spread of Indian culture all the way to Vietnam and follow India's modern-day political di-

visions and urbanization.

Pages 151 to 375 provide a fascinating historical text. Journey back to the 4th century and learn about the rise of the Hindu Gupta dynasty on the Gangetic plain, then come forward to just before Independence and learn about details of India's first elections. Far more than a book of maps, as the name implies, this atlas is an awesome and accessible encyclopedia of Indian history.



Hindu Heritage Endowment

NEW FUND SUPPORTS TEMPLES IN MALAYSIA

A successful professional in Kuala Lumpur has created a fund at the Hindu Heritage Endowment (HHE) to purchase the ground under Malaysia’s eight- to ten-thousand Hindu temples. The donor, starting with a \$10,000 pilot project, says some \$50 million is needed. “I really hope the seriousness of the situation is realized; the future of Hinduism in Malaysia is at stake.”.

A country of 25 million, of which 1.6 million are Hindu, Malaysia brought in Hindu immigrants as laborers to develop rubber plantations under British rule in the 1920s through the 1950s, the donor explained. “They built small temples on agricultural estates. When the British left in 1957, many of these estates were handed over to the local government. Hindu temples were suddenly on government land.”

For forty years, he said, the government continued to allow people to worship as before, but over the past ten years the sale of government land to private businesses has changed that. “The companies that bought the land objected to the temples. They wanted them torn down to make room for development.” He is convinced that buying the land where the temples stand is the only way to stop the destruction.

But he feels it is more than just the temples that are on uncertain ground. He is worried that Hinduism in Malaysia lacks a foundation of structure and discipline. “There are specific rules as to how temples should be operated and how pujas should be done,” he asserted. “Most of the temples are not following these rules, because there is no one organization responsible for the running of the temples.”

This visionary created the Malaysia Hindu Renaissance Fund (#19) at HHE to link the purchase of temple lands to the reform of temple practice. “I pray and hope that this fund will both purchase temple land and help establish proper management procedures at the temples it funds. As the fund grows, more temple lands can be acquired, more temples reformed and Hindu religious schools started throughout Malaysia to raise the quality of teaching and practice.”



Malaysian Hindu children playing religious games

His family history seems to suit his large plans. He grew up in a small town 200 kilometers from Kuala Lumpur. “My father passed away when I was three. I was one of eleven children under the leadership of my mother. She had only papa’s pension, and a small plot of land where we grew vegetables. The children worked and their money went back to mom. She was the central government and there were no opposition parties. At times she wanted to commit suicide, but her Hindu faith carried her through. All eleven of us went to school. Mother

believed knowledge was indispensable. Before buying a car or a house, she said, get educated.”

He has also included a bequest for the newly created fund in his estate plan. “I really appreciate what the Hindu Heritage Endowment is doing. I also believe that the teachings of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (founder of Hinduism Today) will take root and flourish in Malaysia. I have read his writings for twenty-five years. His teachings changed my life. He’s the reason I have been successful and have money to give. It was not just what he taught, but the way he lived.” To donate to this fund, visit www.hheonline.org.



HINDU HERITAGE ENDOWMENT

KAUAI’S HINDU MONASTERY, 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304 USA
808-822-3012 ext 244 • fax: 808-822-3152 • hhe@hindu.org • www.hheonline.org

JANUARY TO MARCH ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment	
Tina Desai	US\$200.00
Anonymous	100.00
Nathan William Mudrick	108.00
Darmaguhan & Shivali	
Satgunasingam	75.00
Niraj Thaker	25.50
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	512.39

Iraivan Temple Endowment

Hotranatha Ajaya	25.00
Roger & Rosemary Brown	120.00
Tina Desai	50.00
Raj & Patricia Iyer	501.00
Victoria Lynne Johnson	54.00
Latha Kannan	153.00
Bhani Karthigesu	400.00
Anonymous	1,503.00
Jnana Sivananda	100.00
Devananda Tandavan Estate	21,132.15
Niraj Thaker	25.50
Gunavinthan Siva Thirumalai	240.00
Anonymous	31.50
Raja Vishnu	59.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Elena Woodward	36.00
Other Donations	69,959.72
Total	94,393.76

Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund

Gunavadee Caremben	8.70
Somasundaram Caremben	8.70
Sukanta Caremben	8.70
Jnanideva Cevvel	250.00
Sharath Chigurupati	369.00
Tarakini Gunasegaran	3.13
Victoria Lynne Johnson	18.00
Amooda Koothan	70.48
Saravan Koothan	7.58
Vivhek Bhani Muthu	35.72
Mrunal & Padmaja Patel	1,008.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	49.98
Kirtideva Peruman	11.25
Niroshnee Peruman	16.89
Girish Samugam	14.29
Akileiswaran Samuthiran	28.98
Jayasutha Samuthiran	46.50
Devaladevi Sivaceyon	9.19
Nutanaya Sivaceyon	18.38
Patudeva Sivaceyon	9.19
Hemavalli Sivalingam	3.72
Kantaruban Sivalingam	3.72
Rohini Sivalingam	37.17
Nitya Sivam	50.00
Potriyan Sivanathan	9.10
Javanya Skanda	5.93
Malathi Utukuri	350.00
Samynaden Veerapen	30.55
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	2,486.74

Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund

Yatrika Ajaya	52.96
Thushyanthan Amirthalingam	800.00
Jeri Arin	252.00
Jnanideva Cevvel	50.00
Maruthu Pandian Darmalingam	374.06
Panshula Ganeshan	57.40
Rosa Jaramillo Osuna	421.14
Sakuntalai Krishnan	188.69
T. Iswarah Kumar	213.00
Sevanti Kumaran	51.00
Auslin Mangal Lawrence	270.00
Bhaskar & Phani Peesapati	240.00
Kirit Shah	240.00
Sujata Singh	240.00
Girish Skanda	80.00
Subasene Skanda	12.00
Samynaden Veerapen	111.44
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	3,657.58

Hindu Businessmen’s Association Trust

Paramaseeven Canagasaby	22.46
Vel Mahalingum	22.70
Manogaran Mardemootoo	38.24
Vishwanaden Mooroooven	23.66
Easvan Param	469.96
Total	577.02

Boys School for Iraivan Priesthood

David Bohn	25.00
Bala Sivaceyon	18.38

K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	47.27

Kauai Aadheenam Mathavasi Medical Fund

Maruthu Pandian Darmalingam	46.76
Gowri Nadason	218.80
Vayudeva Varadan	54.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Other Donations	6,300.00
Total	6,623.45

Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar Gurukulam

Trond Liland	25.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	28.89

Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund

Craig Bagdasar	100.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	103.89

Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment

Craig Bagdasar	100.00
Thulasidas Nadarajah	75.00
Manoharan Navaratnarajah	75.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	253.89

Malaysia Hindu Renaissance Fund

Anonymous	5,190.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	5,193.89

Hinduism Today Production Fund

Vijay Pallod	1,000.00
Devdatta & Swati Mhaiskar	50.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01
Savithri Sundaresan	50.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	1,153.90

Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund

Ramakumar & Sailaja Kosuru	100.00
Brahmanand & Panna Nagarsenker	167.00
Kumar Ranganathan	100.00
Alex Ruberto	50.00
Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00
Savithri Sundaresan	100.00
Raja Vishnu	59.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	609.89

Hindu Education Endowment

Naran D. Patel & Mani N. Patel	
Family	100.00
Savithri Sundaresan	50.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	153.89

Suntheram Family Trust Fund

Ramachandran Suntheram	1,500.00
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Hindu Press International Endowment Fund

Ram Iyer & Usha Chandra	100.00
Hiranya Gowda	63.00
Baleswary Selvarajah	5.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	171.89

Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund

Manoharan Navaratnarajah	75.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Elena Woodward	36.00
Total	114.89

Swami Agnivesh Endowment Fund

Prasad Krishnan	4.50
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	8.39

Saiva Agamas Trust

Vidyavathi Ande	50.00
Natraj Narayanswami	100.20
Ganga Sivanathan	426.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	580.09

Alaveddy Pasupatheeswarar Temple Fund

Craig Bagdasar	100.00
Prasad Krishnan	4.50
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	108.39

Kauai Aadheenam Religious Art and Artifacts Fund	
Rajadeva Alahan	153.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	156.89

Thank You Bodhinatha Fund

Hotranatha Ajaya	33.00
Asha Chaku	500.00
Amarnath & Latha Devarmanai	324.00
Panshula Ganeshan	57.40
John Kinglsey	10.00
Souria Kumaren Moorghen	211.66
Manoharan Navaratnarajah	150.00
Mrunal & Padmaja Patel	303.00
Shanta Devi Periasamy	445.00
Anonymous	210.50
Jayshree S. Rao	1,500.00
Alex Ruberto	30.00
Vayudeva Varadan	68.00
Raja Vishnu	59.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Other Donations	1,779.24
Total	5,684.69

Mathavasi Travel Fund

Kailash Sivam Dhaksinamurthi	501.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	504.89

Udayan Care Endowment Fund

Brahmanand & Panna Nagarsenker	167.00
Natraj Narayanswami	100.20
Savithri Sundaresan	100.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	371.09

Saivite Hindu Scriptural Fund for the Visually Impaired

Alex Ruberto	30.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	33.89

Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment

Rao L. Atluri	116.00
Shyamal Chandra Debnath	50.00
Raghavan Srinivasan	1,000.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	1,169.89

Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund

Chitrnanjan Saravanapavan	100.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.88
Total	103.88

Manitha Neyam Trust Fund

Bala Sivaceyon	36.77
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.88
Total	40.65

Taos Hanuman Fund

K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.88
Elena Woodward	36.00
Total	39.88

Kapaleeshwara Temple Orphanage

Prasad Krishnan	4.50
Kumar Ranganathan	100.00
Savithri Sundaresan	100.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.88
Total	208.38

Pazhassi Balamandiram Orphanage Fund

Charles Hayse	300.00
Prasad Krishnan	4.50
Natraj Narayanswami	100.20
Savithri Sundaresan	100.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	508.59

Karnataka Temple Development Fund

Hiranya Gowda	303.00
Hemanth Kumar	36.00
Krishan K. Paul	7.50
Savithri Sundaresan	50.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	400.39

Sri Ganesha Hindu Temple of Utah Endowment Fund

Sri Ganesha Temple Devotees	2,500.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	2,503.89

Swami Vipulananta Children’s Home Endowment	
Craig Bagdasar	100.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	103.89

Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund

Tina Desai	50.00
Hiranya Gowda	153.00
Devdatta & Swati Mhaiskar	50.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	256.89

Himalayan Academy Book Distribution Fund

Anonymous	25.00
Raja Vishnu	59.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	87.89

Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund

Victoria Lynne Johnson	18.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	21.89

Yogaswami Hindu Girls’ Home of Sittandy Endowment

Jeri Arin	300.00
Marlene Carter	54.00
Maruthu Pandian Darmalingam	46.76
Tina Desai	1,200.00
Panshula Ganeshan	57.40
Brahmanand & Panna Nagarsenker	167.00
Natraj Narayanswami	100.20
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01
Kumar Ranganathan	300.00
Ganga Sivanathan	300.00
Devi Tandavan	201.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Silas H. Zirkle	375.00
Total	3,155.26

Siva Poomi School Trust

Shun K. Sunder	1,500.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	1,503.89

Yogaswami Hindu Boys’ Home Fund

Siva & Dharshi Balasingham	75.00
K. Nadana Chandran	969.10
Maruthu Pandian Darmalingam	46.76
Panshula Ganeshan	57.40
Natraj Narayanswami	100.20
Kanthasamy Selvakumar	100.00
Dharmalingam Siddhan	150.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	1,503.35

India Hindu Tribals Endowment

Kamalesh & Krishna	
Gangopadhyay	3,654.08
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	3,657.97

Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund

Pathmini Saravanapavan	100.00
Vayudeva Varadan	54.00
K.D. & A.D. Williams	3.89
Total	157.89

Rani Jothiswarar Memorial Fund

Rani Jothiswarar Estate	20.00
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Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment

Other Donations	600.00
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K.D. & A.D. Williams gave an additional \$3.89 to each of 24 other funds 93.36

Total Contributions	\$141,172.22
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Funds at Market Value, Dec. 31, 2007

Total Endowment Funds	\$9,343,310.62
Total Pooled Income Funds	\$225,709.27

Grand Total \$9,569,019.89

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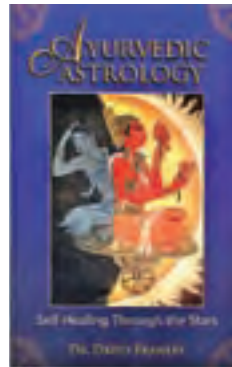
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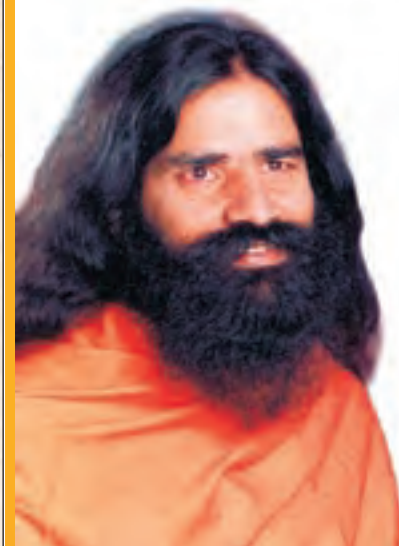


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