

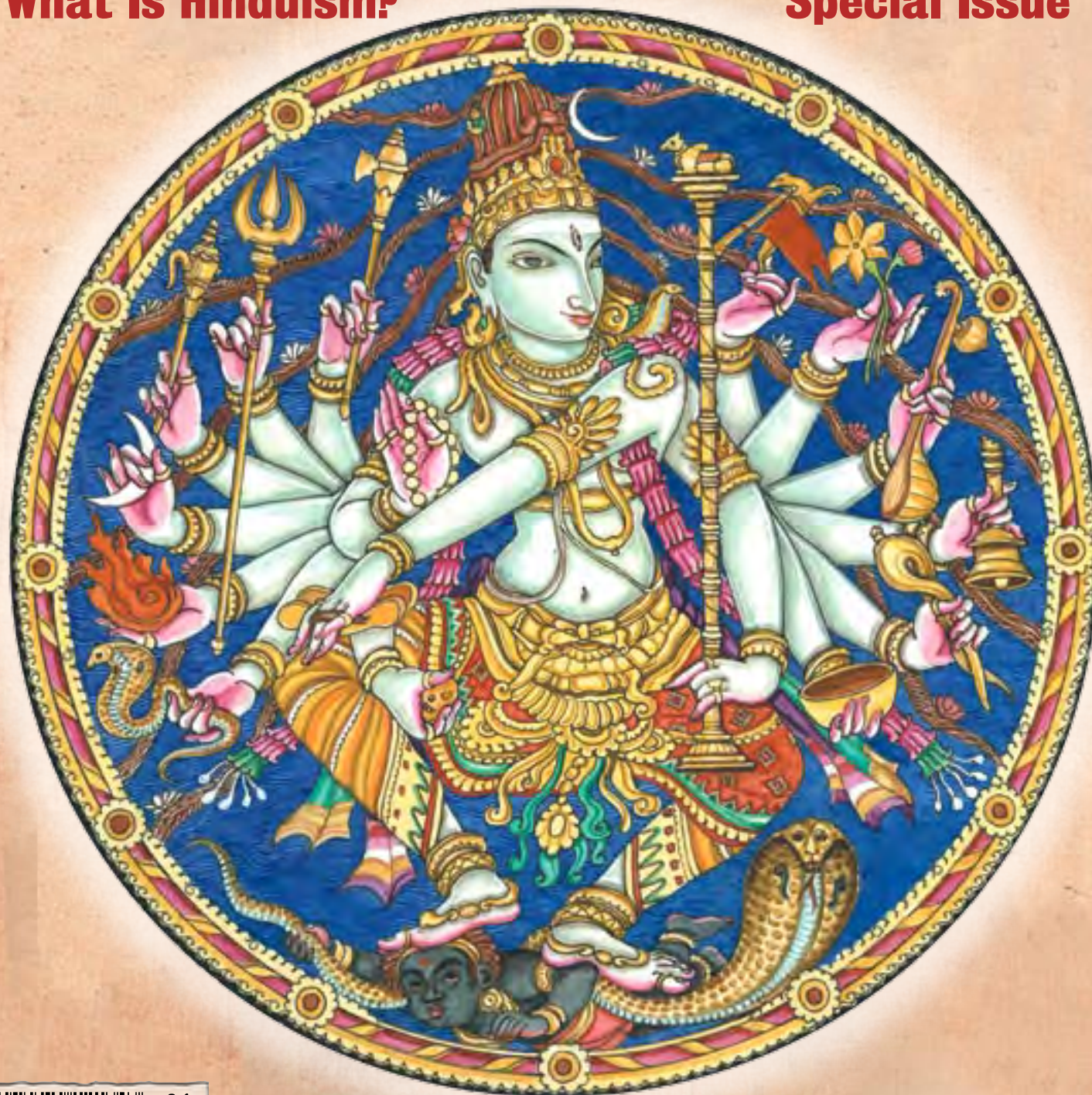
HINDUISM

January/February/March, 2007 US\$5.95

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

What Is Hinduism?

Special Issue



ART BY A. MANIVEL



DEV RAJ AGARWAL

COVER: The sixteen-armed Pradosha Siva symbolizes the complexity of the question "What is Hinduism?" (above) Millions gather at Haridwar on the river Ganges in North India for the Kumbha Mela, humanity's largest religious festival.

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WHAT IS HINDUISM?



This entire issue of Hinduism Today is devoted to answering the big question, "What Is Hinduism," as it affects education, ethics, diet, worship, yoga, death and more. Defining Hinduism is a daunting task. Some would say it can't be done. Still, a cohesive interpretation of the world's most ancient religion is necessary so that it may continue to stand strong among today's plurality of faiths. We begin here with a collection of definitions from prominent Hindus, and from India's Supreme Court.

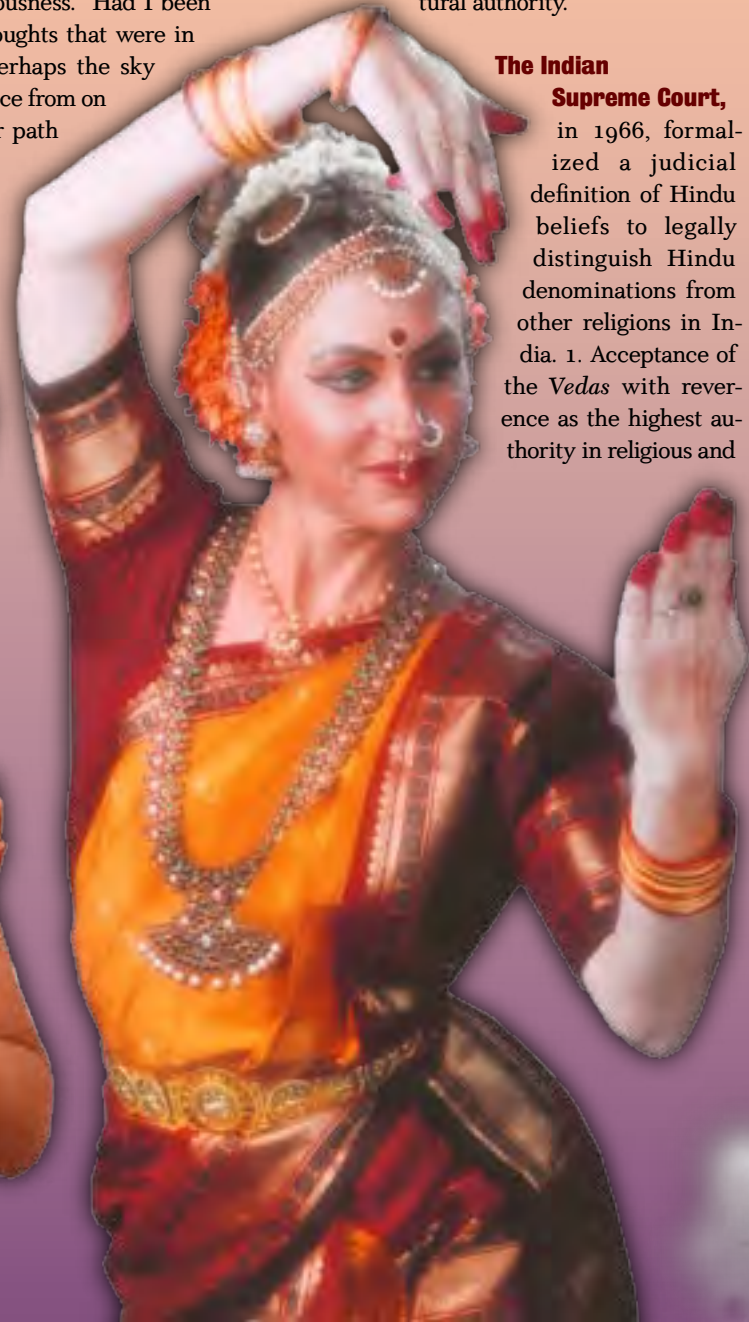


Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, renowned philosopher and president of India from 1962 to 1967, states in *The Hindu View of Life*: "The Hindu recognizes one Supreme Spirit, though different names are given to it. God is in the world, though not as the world. He does not merely intervene to create life or consciousness, but is working continuously. There is no dualism of the natural and the supernatural. Evil, error and ugliness are not ultimate. No view is so utterly erroneous, no man is so absolutely evil as to deserve complete castigation. There is no Hell, for that means there is a place where God is not, and there are sins which exceed His love. The law of karma tells us that the individual life is not a term, but a series. Heaven and Hell are higher and lower stages in one continuous movement. Every type has its own nature which should be followed. We should do our duty in that state of life to which



we happen to be called. Hinduism affirms that the theological expressions of religious experience are bound to be varied, accepts all forms of belief and guides each along his path to a common goal."

Swami Shankarananda of Australia: "In the late sixties when spirituality arose within me for the first time, I could have said (had I enough awareness), 'I'd like a path that is as spacious as the universe. A path that includes everyone and every possible belief system. A path that is as tolerant and forgiving as a mother, yet as precise and on-purpose as a brain surgeon. A path whose mode of thinking is so broad that no thought or idea is left outside of it. A path of inner transformation and self-development. A path of truth that is also a path of kindness. A path whose love is so deep and all-embracing that no sinner is excluded from its mercy. A path whose source is Universal Consciousness.' Had I been able to formulate those thoughts that were in me in an inchoate way, perhaps the sky would have parted and a voice from on high might have said, 'Your path is Hinduism.'"



Gurudeva Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of HINDUISM TODAY: Hinduism is India's indigenous religious and cultural system, followed today by nearly one billion adherents, mostly in India, but with large populations in many other countries. Also called Sanatana Dharma, "eternal religion" and Vaidika Dharma, "religion of the Vedas." Hinduism is the world's most ancient religion and encompasses a broad spectrum of philosophies ranging from pluralistic theism to absolute monism. It is a family of myriad faiths with four primary denominations: Saivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism and Smartism. These four hold such divergent beliefs that each is a complete and independent religion. Yet, they share a vast heritage of culture and belief in karma, dharma, reincarnation, all-pervasive Divinity, temple worship, sacraments, manifold Deities, the guru-shishya tradition and a reliance on the Vedas as its scriptural authority.

The Indian Supreme Court, in 1966, formalized a judicial definition of Hindu beliefs to legally distinguish Hindu denominations from other religions in India. 1. Acceptance of the Vedas with reverence as the highest authority in religious and

philosophic matters and acceptance with reverence of Vedas by Hindu thinkers and philosophers as the sole foundation of Hindu philosophy. 2. Spirit of tolerance and willingness to understand and appreciate the opponent's point of view based on the realization that truth is many-sided. 3. Acceptance of great world rhythm—vast periods of creation, maintenance and dissolution follow each other in endless succession—by all six systems of Hindu philosophy. 4. Acceptance by all systems of Hindu philosophy of the belief in rebirth and pre-existence. 5. Recognition of the fact that the means or ways to salvation are many. 6. Realization of the truth

that numbers of Gods to be worshiped may be large, yet there being Hindus who do not believe in the worshiping of idols. 7. Unlike other reli-



gions, or religious creeds, Hindu religion's not being tied down to any definite set of philosophic concepts, as such.

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

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

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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London onlookers gather to view Mother Durga gracing Camden Town Hall for nine days before Her immersion in the Thames

DIASPORA

UNITED KINGDOM

Ma Durga Gets a Proper Send-Off

NAVARATRI—THE FAMED nine-night festival honoring Goddess Durga—brings to mind piety, joy and visual vibrance. Devotees gather in blissful worshipfulness—stringing garlands and fashioning Deities of the Divine Mother from clay while priests sprinkle sanctified Ganges waters and lovingly offer arati. It is a memorable time of year for Durga devotees and a beautiful gem on the crown of Hindu festivals. For the Bengali Hindus of London, this past October presented a never-before opportunity. After 40 years of denied requests from the community, London's port authorities granted permission to the London Durga Puja

Dusserah Committee to fully immerse a series of Deities in the Thames at the conclusion of Navaratri.

This year, instead of shipping small Deities from India, giant Deities were made in the British Museum by West Bengali craftsmen, another first for the Hindu community. The images were then put on display at Camden Town Hall for nine days of worship before immersion. Cooperative Port authorities netted the non-biodegradable elements downstream. Hindus were deeply touched to be able to fully carry out the entire immersion ceremony, observing the festival in the UK as it was traditionally done by their families in Bengal for centuries.

Noteworthy are the major efforts being made by British institutions and government bodies to improve relations with Indian Hindus and the Hindu faith in the 21st century.

CANADA

Canadian Hindu Stamp

THE CANADIAN POSTAL SERVICE allows anyone to apply for an officially approved stamp, the printing of which is paid for by the applicant. Applicants are carefully scrutinized, and many

are rejected if their background check fails or objections are raised. It is to the credit of the Montreal Murugan Temple and devotee Ravi Suntharamoorthy that they got a stamp carrying a design of the temple's Kumbhabhishekam approved. The stamp has the value of one ounce of postage, currently 51 cents. Even if postage rates go up, the stamp will be accepted to cover one ounce of postage in years to come. Ravi designed the stamp and donated the cost of printing 1,000. For each \$5.00 donation to the temple, supporters get one stamp. It was a novel fund-raising and community awareness initiative and the first time in North America that a Hindu temple has appeared on a public postage stamp.



Murugan's Montreal home in the mail



Thousands of Hindus gathered for events across America

USA

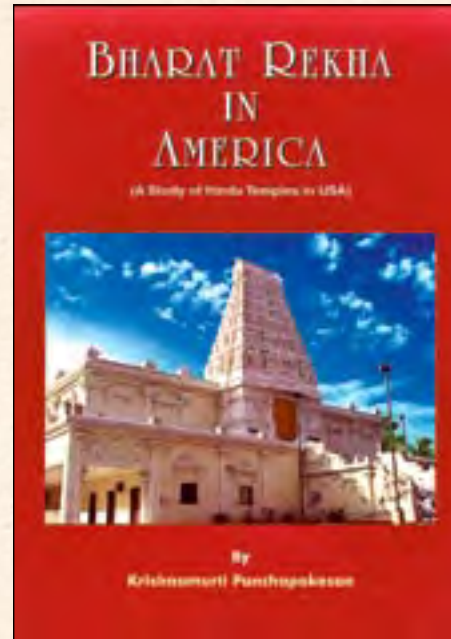
HSS Raises Hindu Awareness

FROM SEPTEMBER 9-19, 2006, MORE THAN 25,000 HINDUS AND non-Hindus associated with Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS) gathered in major US cities to celebrate and enlighten the community on Hinduism's many cultural dimensions. Yoga, music, dance, Vedic recitation and dramas from the epics were offered in Boston, Atlanta and the San Francisco Bay Area and other locations. Displays were placed in public centers. Over 4,000 children performed Ganesha puja at various venues. The future of Hinduism in the US, and religious morale of Hindu youth grew brighter as thousands of devotees joined to celebrate their heritage.

USA

Hindu Circuit Strong in US

FEW AND FAR BETWEEN ARE books that chronicle the culture and history of Hinduism outside the borders of India



Documenting Hindu temples in the United States of America

and South Asia. But Krishnamurti Panchapakasan has captured Hindu history in the making with his book *Bharat Rekha in America*. He methodically documents the establishment and status of 53 Hindu temples in 33 US states. *Bharat Rekha* offers a detailed overview of the legacy, fellowship, installed Deities, worship schedules, temple hours and contact information of major American Hindu temples. Although the piece could have benefitted from some editorial polishing, the fabulous photos, printing and binding make it a fine library addition.

Another great feature of *Bharat Rekha in America* is its detailed location and driving instructions. To take your family on a US "holy vacation," get in your camper with a copy of this book and spend a month or two on a pilgrimage. It should be noted that only major temples are covered and the US has hundreds more small mandirs and Hindu societies.

Order copies online: <http://www.BharatRekha-InAmerica.com>

TRINIDAD

Hindus Win Radio License

RADIO JAAGRITI, FM 102.7, began broadcasting on Friday, December 1, 2006, from Trinidad. Run by the Sanatana Dharma Maha Sabha (SDMS), it is the Caribbean's first and only radio station with 24-hour Hindu content, airing finally after 7 years of legal battles. SDMS first applied for a radio broadcast license in 1999. The application was subsequently left unattended by the dominant People's National Movement party which won elections in 2001. Meanwhile, the new government awarded a radio frequency to party financiers. SDMS filed a discrimination case against the State for bypassing the Hindus' application, taking the case all the way to London's Privy Council, which finally found for the plaintiffs in July, 2006. The State was ordered to grant the license and also pay for all the SDMS legal fees—a big victory for dharma. SDMS plans to add cable TV, making it a full Hindu Broadcast Network.



Diwali gets super high NY profile

USA

Stock Market Honors Diwali

ON OCTOBER 17, 2006, IN New York, NASDAQ's seven-story, corner billboard sported a giant Indian flag in celebration of Diwali, making US Hindus proud. Within hours, the image went global on the Internet, sparking interesting blog discussions over whether the wording "Indian Festival Diwali" should have been "Hindu Festival Diwali." Either way, it was Diwali's big moment in the sun.

UNITED KINGDOM

A New Home for Sri Balaji

TIVIDALE, ENGLAND, IS NOW home to one of Europe's largest Hindu temples. Built for Lord Venkateswara, with adjacent temples for Siva and Ganesha, the Shri Ventakeswara Temple of the UK opened last August with great fanfare and elaborate rituals performed by priests specially brought from India. The US\$12 million temple, funded in part by a grant from the Millennium Fund, stands on 12.5 acres of former wasteland. Trustees claim it to be the largest land area held by any temple in Europe. In 1992, the then Black Country Development Corporation made the site available for this unique



Devotees from the Birmingham area join for worship and solidarity at the Shri Venkateswara Temple of the United Kingdom

project. Over 10,000 people attended the five-day event which began on August 23, 2006, and culminated with the

sanctification of the majestic edifice built in the South Indian style. "This is the fulfillment of a long cherished dream, the

complex includes a multi-functional community hall that is available to England's 600,000-strong Hindu community.

INTERVIEW

Revaluing Religion



Montreal conference organizer offers his insights on how religion can play a positive world role

ARVIND SHARMA IS THE ORGANIZER OF THE WORLD Religions after 9/11 Congress held in Montreal from September 11 to 15, 2006. HINDUISM TODAY interviewed Dr. Sharma after the event, which was attended by 2,000 people.



Hinduism Today: What is your evaluation of the conference?

Dr. Arvind Sharma: The three main goals were partially achieved. The first was to change the negative popular perception of world religions to highlight the fact that religion is a force in human affairs like any other, with both good and evil elements. We tried to accentuate the positive dimension of religion. The second goal was accomplished with the release by Nobel Peace Laureate Shrin Ebadi of the draft document of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the World Religions (www.worldsreligionsafter911.com/pdf/UDHRWR.pdf). The third goal was to recognize that religion is here to stay. To clarify this point, most education and public policy for many decades has been based on the assumption that religion is going to gradually disappear from the public square. Or, to put it rather bluntly, religion was like a bad dream and would soon go away. But religion has shown more staying power than its secular critics expected, and now we have to deal with it, not dismiss it.

HT: What were the most appreciated presentations?

Sharma: I think the panel on “Perspectives on the Crisis in the Middle East” really gripped people. Rabbi Dow Marmur, Professor Gregory Baum, Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Karen Armstrong brought four very different points of views which were each presented with great finesse without emotionalizing the issue. Deepak Chopra’s presentation was open to the public and had a full house. The talks by Shirin Ebadi and Prof. Nasr generated great interest as a result of the historical and political depth they brought. Swa-

mi Dayananda Saraswati said the first rule on conversion is that we should respect the other person’s religion. But if you want to convert the other person, right there the respect is gone. He said everyone accepts the right of a person to convert, but whether someone has the right to come and try to make you convert is open to debate. The presentation by your publisher, Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, was also well appreciated

HT: What are your thoughts on controversy over the Pope’s comments on Islam, which occurred at the same time as the conference?

Sharma: I think the Pope’s comments, the Rushdie affair, the Danish cartoons and the less publicized controversy over Hinduism in the California school system may all be the beginnings of the negotiation of the terms on which religion is going to reenter the public square. There’s a very interesting paradox here. Secular values, such as freedom of expression, are vigorously defended whenever any such issue

crops up which involves religion. Now religions are saying, “Just as you will not accept certain statements to be made on secular grounds or have them challenged, there are some statements which we would not like to see accepted and made on religious grounds. Let us talk this over so that we can respect your position and you can respect our position.” If religion is to be a partner in public discourse then some of its sensitivities will have to be respected.

HT: What is your analysis of religious pluralism in Islamic thought?

Sharma: The Koran says that there is to be no compulsion in religion, but even more important is the statement, “If God wanted, could He not have made all of one religion? He has made you different so that you may vie with each other in piety.” In modern times, the idea that pluralism is acceptable from a Koranic and historical point of view is attractive to me. It still allows for the proclamation of the message, that you think Islam is the best and final religion. But if you also accept pluralism, then the manner in which you proclaim this is drastically affected.

act also protects sisters, widows and mothers. Unlawful dowry-demand harassment is prohibited.

MICKEY WIENSTEIN, FORMER

White House lawyer and third-generation military man, is suing the US Air Force in an effort to keep at bay the growing wave of Christian proselytizing in the military. The latest Air Force rules explicitly allow commanders to share their faith with subordinates.

INDIA’S MAJOR RIVER RECOVERY

program, the Ganga Action Plan, has led to a significant

improvement in the river’s water quality. Last year’s summer average values, recorded from March to June, for dissolved oxygen and biochemical oxygen demand showed a marked improvement compared with 1986 levels.

RENOWNED BHARATA NATYAM

guru Shri Mani passed away June 28, 2006, after a prolonged illness. He was 84. One of the main people responsible for the growth of bharatnatyam in Mumbai, he founded the Kalasadan Institute of Fine Arts in 1954.

BRIEFLY...

ARCHAEOLOGISTS IN ANDHRA

Pradesh claim that a centuries-old temple exists two kilometers offshore from Visakhapatnam coast, on the sea bed.

TIRUPATI WAS DECLARED AN

autonomous religious township in July, 2006. The Andhra government also expanded the jurisdiction of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam to the full surrounding 80,628 acres, mostly a forest reserve, where

no mosque or Christian church can be built. Only Hindus will be allowed to enter the temple, or be employed by it.

THE PROTECTION OF WOMEN FROM

Domestic Violence Act of 2005 is now in effect in India. Enforcement began October 26, 2006. Meant to protect the wife or female live-in partner from violence at the hands of the husband or male live-in partner or his relatives, the



HINDU RENAISSANCE TEAM

HINDUISM TODAY was founded January 5, 1979, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. 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 a resource for Hindu leaders and educators who promote Sanatana Dharma. Join this *seva* by sending letters, clippings, reports on events and encouraging others. to subscribe.

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IN MY OPINION

My Unexpected Inspiration

How a chance encounter kindled my faith

BY SUGANDHA JAIN

WHAT STARTED OUT as a phone conversation with a prospective client about the services we offered at our learning center in Eastern Canada ended up being a wake-up call for me. I was talking to Ally, a parent interested in having her elementary-school daughter receive individualized instruction in math. During the course of our conversation, Ally noticed my accent and asked if I was Indian—and Hindu. When I replied, “yes,” she revealed to me that her husband was also Hindu. She then asked if I might be willing to answer some of her questions about India and Hinduism. I replied that I would be happy to oblige.

Although Ally’s husband is of Indian origin, he does not know much about Hinduism, his religion of birth, because he was brought up in Tanzania and Toronto. Ally was new to Ottawa. Her friends are all white Canadians like her. She wanted to know where she could buy Indian jewelry for herself and traditional Indian clothes for her husband and two children. Although Toronto is flooded with Indian shopping arcades, Ottawa is not.

Ally loves Indian food and regularly frequented popular, local Indian restaurants to partake of *samosas* and *shahi paneer*. Lately, she had been wheedling her husband for the names of his favorite Indian dishes from childhood. By gaining access to Indian cookery sites on the Web, she had already successfully concocted spicy *cholas*. Now she wanted to know from me what local grocery stores might supply her with the fresh vegetables most commonly used in Indian cooking.

Finally, Ally’s questions veered toward the philosophy and practice of Hinduism with enquiries about its symbols and rituals. Are there any Hindu temples in Ottawa? she wanted to know. Would they find her presence in the temple acceptable? She commented that I was privileged to be born into a religion with such a rich cultural heritage and confessed to me that her



father is an atheist.

Ally had read parts of the *Bhagavad Gita* and was impressed. She was also fascinated by Hinduism’s multitude of Gods and asked if there are any classes being offered locally that might help her family gain more insight into this wonderful religion.

Listening to Ally reminded me of a fictional story I had written a long time ago about the Sun God wanting to bless

a ten-year-old boy named Rudra. Every day, the Sun God would rise, hoping to catch a glimpse of Rudra. But day after day, Rudra would still be sleeping at dawn. In this way, Rudra consistently managed to evade the Sun God. In the end, the Sun God got tired of waiting for Rudra and decided to stop trying to bless him. Now after meeting Ally, I was realizing that I was a bit like Rudra. Although my birth-religion, Hinduism, had many gifts to give me, I had failed to receive them.

Ally dreamt of taking her husband and children to India where she would happily lie on its ploughed fields of wheat and soak up its spiritual ambience. Gratitude was part of this inspiration she felt to help orient her husband to his Hindu legacy. She had only recently married him and was grateful to him for providing her children from a previous marriage with a stable home. Now she felt that she might be able to contribute to his life by helping him establish a connection with his Hindu roots.

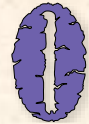
Recently, a neighbor came knocking at my door to ask for a cup of rice flour. At first, I couldn’t even remember if I had any rice flour. I had to search my pantry for it. Surprisingly, I found some and gave it to her. Ally was like that neighbor. She wanted to learn from me all about Hinduism. I was surprised I had so much to offer her. But, more, I was surprised at how much she had to offer me.

SUGANDHA JAIN is the Educational Director of Grade Expectations Learning Center in Ottawa, Canada.

What Is Hinduism?

This magazine previews our new book, which offers an inclusive, user-friendly presentation of Sanatana Dharma

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



OUR REGULAR READERS WILL ALREADY have noticed that this installment of HINDUISM TODAY is not in our standard format. It is a special issue entirely devoted to a singular topic: "What is Hinduism?" Our gatefold (pages 3, 4 and 5) introduces the subject by presenting the voices of prominent Hindu leaders offering their responses to the question. I am sure you will enjoy reading and reflecting on their varied answers which so clearly show the diversity, inclusiveness and comprehensiveness of the Sanatana Dharma. This magazine is a condensed version of our latest book, *What Is Hinduism?* We wanted to give you, as a reader of HINDUISM TODAY, a sneak preview of the book and share some of its finest chapters. And here is the story behind it's creation.



All faiths are grappling with their self-definition as we rev up to the breathtaking speed of the information age—a period more intense and kinetic than any other in the history of the world. Teachings and practices that were once accepted without question are often now rejected unless evidence and logic are marshalled to give them plausibility. To survive, customs and traditions must bear up under intellectual scrutiny, must prove themselves helpful and immediately usable.

Hinduism is no exception. Hindu education for youth is languishing, and communities around the world are struggling to compose clear, concise presentations of the dharma. It would be possible to spend an entire lifetime, indeed, many lifetimes, absorbing and practicing the teachings of just one sect or *sampradaya* of the Hindu faith. Yet, there remains a need to understand this complex conglomerate as a whole as well. There is a preeminent need, the world over, for cogent, comprehensive explanations of the various facets of Hinduism—and the shared features of its various sects—from a mountaintop perspective—to answer the sincere questions of children, coworkers, neighbors, critics and colleagues, and to provide a nonacademic presentation for those of other religions seeking insight into this ancient path.

Producing quality educational materials on Hinduism is inherently difficult precisely because it is one of the world's most paradoxical and easily misunderstood religious traditions. It can be equally confounding to the outsider and to those born in dharma's embrace. It is accurately a conglomeration, union, a family, of many different faiths and practices that share essential characteristics.

Most Hindus have an intuitive sense of but can't articulate the "whys and wherefores" of their philosophy and practices. The boldness to ask questions about such matters has only recently developed. Just confer with Hindu parents who have stumbled when confronted with the direct and innocent ques-

tions posed by their own children, questions they never voiced and therefore never learned satisfying answers to.

What Is Hinduism? seeks to be a bridge between generations of past centuries that grew up immersed in a pristine Hindu culture—with vast communal knowledge available to them—and current generations that have little or no access to such knowledge. In those olden times, living in a homogenous society with the faith's culture and traditions interwoven in every aspect of daily

life, one didn't need to ask the whys of everything. He only needed to participate, enjoy and absorb the nuances and meanings from the inside out. In today's fragmented societies, we no longer have such cocoon-like training for children, so teachings must be rearticulated and presented in ways that will make intellectually clear their purpose, relevance and value in competition with the compelling flood of media that youths and adults are subjected to day after day. Hinduism must also compete in the arena of ideas with its aggressively evangelical counterparts.

The idea of creating a book called "What Is Hinduism?" came to me from the "inner sky" one day while I was meditating on our faith's educational needs. It was as if the inner-plane masters, among them our dear Gurudeva, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, were sending the thought form that such a work would be just what is needed at this time. Approached from scratch, the book in your hands would take years to produce, especially with the amount of patience and care that you will find here in each chapter. Thus, the serendipitous beauty of the project was that the necessary thousands of hours of loving attention had already gone into researching and designing its chapters, as Educational Insight sections over the last ten years by the talented team of editors, writers and photographers of our international magazine, HINDUISM TODAY. All that was needed now, in 2007, was to choose the best features and put them together in a way that offers a highly readable, yet thorough, introduction to Hinduism. Voilà!

As a small group of renunciate Hindu monks at Kauai's Hindu Monastery in Hawaii, we have produced HINDUISM TODAY



A. MANIVEL

for more than a quarter century, tracking, monitoring and encouraging the current renaissance of the grandfather faith of the human race. One of the main reasons Gurudeva founded the magazine was to help Hindus become more aware of the activities of their Hindu brothers and sisters in other parts of the world and thus draw strength and courage from that knowledge. Another was to dispel myths and misinformation promulgated by invaders and missionaries of alien religions. A third was to present the beliefs and practices common to all Hindus, as well as the teachings and traditions of the individual sects, traditions and lineages that together form this quilt of dharma. *What Is*

Collaborative editing: Our artist shows Gurudeva, founder of HINDUISM TODAY, discussing his publications with four senior monks at Kauai's Hindu Monastery. He established a system of collaborative editing on a network of Macintosh laptop computers, which is still employed, to bring each literary creation to the ultimate level of perfection.

Hinduism? is an insider's look, honoring the beauties of culture, tradition, celebration, worship, belief and discipline.

In addition to the reams of scripture available to readers, there are many books on Hinduism by Western scholars, and by Eastern writers. But few offer much relief to the parent looking for simple answers, or the social studies teacher looking for an authentic overview of the faith. Texts by Westerners, often academic in nature, tend to paint Hinduism into the past and distort it by wrong emphasis, dwelling on peripheral, controversial issues such as caste, sati and the "Aryan Invasion." Those by Easterners generally focus on just one *sampradaya* or lineage—such as Sankaran Vedanta, Madhva Vaishnavism or Saiva Siddhanta—often presenting its philosophy and tradition as if it were the whole of Hinduism, which, of course, it is not. When each sect and lineage is presented in this way, it is no small wonder readers get confused.

Rare is the book that presents Hinduism in a comprehensive, contemporary, complementary way—as a family of faiths and philosophies—that a modern, English-speaking audience can relate to, understand and appreciate. *What Is Hinduism?* is just such a rare gem. Exploring it, readers now and then spontaneously stop and sigh, "Ahh, now I get it. I now understand this basic concept of Hinduism." It is an authoritative and inspired work, an inclusive, sophisticated, user-friendly explanation of Sanatana Dharma. Far from the arcane, sea-of-text descriptions of Hinduism, this book is rich with potent images, traditional symbols and photographs depicting each aspect of the culture and faith. If one were to simply study the photos and art and their captions, that would itself serve as a meaningful glimpse into the Hindu heart.

This book is inspired by and draws heavily from the remarkable spiritual legacy of Gurudeva, without doubt one of the most significant Hindu saints and leaders of the twentieth century. An American by birth, Gurudeva showed the world by his pure and dedicated life that Hinduism is a vibrant, relevant and living force. He renewed the pride of Hindus in their faith and gave them guidelines for following Hindu Dharma. He boldly spoke of Hinduism as the greatest religion in the world and showed millions that Hinduism is destined to teach our newly emerging global civilization that coexisting in peace, mutual respect, and with a deep sense of spiritual values, is not merely a dream, but a living reality. We know that Gurudeva is smiling approvingly at the creation of *What Is Hinduism?* We believe it will be hailed as a classic, and hopefully a best seller, so that uncounted souls may enjoy its heartfelt messages.

In this special issue of the magazine we present nine of the forty-six chapters from *What Is Hinduism?* which we hope you enjoy as a representative selection that collectively answers this enigmatic question. For a bit more about the book and how to order, see page 16.

LETTERS

Thank You from Sandipani

THANK YOU ON BEHALF OF PUJYA BHAISHRI Rameshbhai Oza for the 2006 Hindu Renaissance Award, Hindu of the Year, conferred on him by your highly esteemed publication HINDUISM TODAY. All the devotees of Pujya Bhaishri are very pleased with this honor and we take this opportunity to thank you for the acknowledgment of the impact Pujya Bhaishri has had in preserving the profundity of the Sanatana Dharma globally. We also thank you for the beautiful article on Pujya Bhaishri and the Sandipani Vidyaniketan ("A Saintly Minstrel and His Message," Oct/Nov/Dec, 2006).

TRUSTEES OF SHRI BHARATIYA SANSKRUTI
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Media Bias Against Hinduism

I HAVE WRITTEN THE ASSOCIATED PRESS (AP) in New York to protest the continuous use of the term *idol* to describe Hindu Deities in its photo captions. The same news service, however, uses the term *statue* when describing stone images of Jesus Christ. For example, in a release published worldwide on August 24, 2006, the AP photo caption read: "An artist puts finishing touches to a six-foot idol of Hindu God Ganesh made of sandalwood in Bombay, India, yesterday." In a release published on April 10, 2004, however, the AP photo caption states: "A statue of Jesus Christ is seen outside in the metropolitan cathedral in Managua, Nicaragua, on Thursday." The use of the derogatory term *idol* in reference to Hindu icons suggests that the religion is false and pagan, and is to be viewed as inferior and primitive. AP should immediately issue an apology to Hindus worldwide and desist from its use of biased descriptions of one of the oldest living religions on Earth. I am sure that Christians everywhere would take great offense if Hindus, Muslims and adherents of other faiths describe a statue of Jesus Christ as an idol. Writers should also cease using the term *myth* to describe real historical events that took place in Hindu India as far back as 6000 bce.

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What Parents Can Do

THE ARTICLE ON PARENTING BY VATSALA Sperling ("Understanding Your Child's Emotional Life," Oct/Nov/Dec, 2006) is beautiful. As a new mom, I really like to learn about parenting as much as possible, as it helps me to raise my twin babies who are nine months old. In this article, the section "What parents can do" is informative and educative to all

parents. Gurudeva's teachings, coupled with such articles, helps parents learn to be kind and firm when raising children. HINDUISM TODAY is doing an excellent job not only in spreading Hinduism worldwide but by providing uplifting articles to its readers.

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Capital Punishment

ON BEHALF OF SWAMINIJI AND THE SAD-haka team at Wise Earth School we send you our profound gratitude for the beautiful representation of Swaminiji's responses in your article "Capital Punishment: Time to Abandon It?" (Oct/Nov/Dec, 2006). This article is complete and riveting with manifold points of view from the great gurus, all of whom validate the spirit of ahimsa.

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I FOUND THE MESSAGE THAT SWAMINI Mayatitananda gives us about incorporating ahimsa into our thoughts, actions and policies regarding capital punishment both steeped in tradition and progressive at the same time. It encompasses so strongly and so compassionately how the spiritual tradition of non-harming must be implemented in our everyday lives as well as in our national and international social, economic and political policies. The article states perfectly that our stance on capital punishment must be linked to and never separate from our love and compassion of our family, community, the environment and, of course, ourselves, and that our individual and collective evolution profoundly relies on this. Let us continue to integrate and teach this message from Swaminiji and send it to our politicians and leaders worldwide.

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Trinidad's National Award

I WAS DEEPLY DISAPPOINTED IN THE LAST issue with particular regard to the brief and incomplete report on the change of Trinidad's highest national award ("National Award to Change," Diaspora, Oct/Nov/Dec, 2006). Firstly, the report was very brief and lacked any real portrayal of the struggle of the Hindu community to have this symbol removed and the Christian backlash to have it retained. Secondly, the report totally ignored the important role the nation's largest Hindu group, the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha, played in the process of the change. It was essentially the Maha Sabha that led the charge for the change of the Trinity

Cross over the years. Thirdly, the article ignored that this was an instance where the often divided Hindu and Muslim communities came together to have the Christian symbol removed with a legal battle.

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Voice of Hindus and Hinduism

I WISH TO CONGRATULATE THE EDITORIAL team of HINDUISM TODAY for filling a void and really being the voice of Hindus and Hinduism around the world. I am a college teacher and researcher in Indian history residing in India and committed to doing my part for the Sanatana Dharma. I read your mission statement outlining the reasons why HINDUISM TODAY was started and its stated objectives, and I must say I agree with each and every word of it. In fact, I have read quite a few issues and am really thrilled each time I hold a new issue in my hand. I think you should put a little more effort into distributing HINDUISM TODAY in India. I think you will agree that as long as Hindus in India are weak, divided and deluded about their real heritage, the real Hindu renaissance cannot come about. While uniting the Hindu diaspora is indeed important, you cannot ignore the Hindus in India which is still the real *pranakendra* (center of life) of Hinduism in spite of everything.

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Modernity in Hindu Temples

I AM NOT A VERY RELIGIOUS PERSON, BUT I do enjoy visiting temples. Deities bedecked in colorful flowers and the fragrant smell of incense and illumination of oil lamps puts me in a spiritual mood, and I feel fortunate to be born a Hindu. During my visit to India this summer, I had the opportunity to visit numerous temples in Bangalore. I was astonished many times to find out how the temples have embraced modernity. While some were pleasant, others were pretty disturbing to me. Years ago, I vividly remember that the *prasadam* was placed on our palm to savor. I always ate the *prasadam*, as it is considered God's grace. I ate the *prasadam* no matter how dirty my hands were, as not many temples had access to clean water. During my recent visit, I was pleasantly surprised to find out that many temples give *prasadam* to devotees in small plastic containers—a clean and efficient way. Years ago, only quaint oil lamps illuminated the area around the Deities; the vicinity around the Deity was brimming with nativity and serenity. Nowadays, artificial electric lamps illumine the Deities along with a couple of

charming oil lamps. I wonder why the temples have resorted to this artificial lighting; the realm of serenity seems to be lost. I just hope that temples welcome modern amenities only when it is absolutely necessary. Since the space around the Deities has a profound impact on the devotees, I strongly feel only natural elements should be used as much as possible.

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The Problem of Conversion

ANOTHER TRAGEDY IN INDIA: FLOODING, displacing and hurting millions of people. "Perfect," the Christian missionary vultures are saying. "Just what we want. Offer help only if they convert." I fear that Christian missionaries are going to take advantage of a sad situation. Like vultures showing up when they see the dead and dying, the Christian missionaries show up not to help, but to take advantage of a tragedy. I have heard stories of these vultures withholding help from helpless people crying out, unless they converted. During the recent tsunami tragedy, while Hindus and Buddhists went around helping everyone in need, many

Christians only helped those who converted. How sick can someone be who prays for a tragedy to occur so that they can exploit the needy?

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Hindu Prejudice

I FEAR HINDUS ARE AMONG THE MOST prejudiced people in the world. The Hindu migrants that come out of India seem to have an attitude that they are superior. They show a contempt for Indians who have intermarried with other Indians who are not of their own community, Indians who are born and brought up overseas and keep their distance from Indians who are "low caste." Instead of trying to become a cohesive group, they cast aspersions as well as only mingle within their community. They look down on high caste Hindus who have low caste daughters- or sons-in-law. They feel uncomfortable because Indians who were brought up overseas mingle better with people of other races and have children who are quite successful at school or work. Even in the temples, there is a great social divide among Hindus. They don't like the way other Hin-

dus conduct their prayers because it is not the way they do it in their community! My friends and I are looked down upon, as we have been brought up overseas and do not seem to have the "normal" attitudes that the "highly educated" high caste Hindus have.

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Correction

✓ *The interviews for the section "Saints' Voices" in "Capital Punishment: Time to Abandon It?" and the interview of Swami Nishchalananda Saraswati, Shankaracharya of Puri, that sourced his Minister's Message, "Not for Our Time" (Oct/Nov/Dec, 2006), were conducted by Rajiv Malik, New Delhi.*

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

Letters, Hinduism Today
107 Kaholalele Road
Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304 USA
or faxed to: (808) 822-4351
or 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

Gifts Give a Boost to Young Sevaks

New fund allows for free magazine distribution

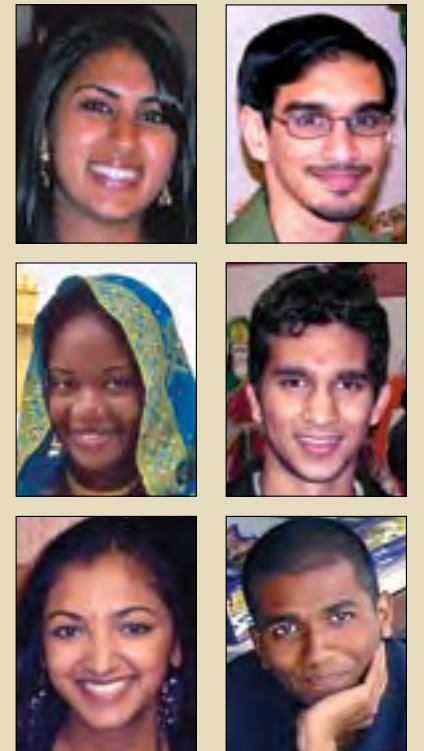
LONG HAD IT BEEN A DREAM OF HINDUISM TODAY's staff to have the means, one day, to distribute free copies to deserving souls everywhere. But it remained a far-off dream. Until there happened an act of God. A fast-food giant lied about their french fries being vegetarian. They were sued, they lost, and HINDUISM TODAY was awarded \$250,000 (October/November/December, 2003 issue) of the \$10 million settlement. Our staff placed the entire windfall into the *Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund*, which is a part of the Hindu Heritage Endowment. Suddenly, grants from this fund were sufficient to sustain 1,100 free subscriptions—indeinitely! These we gifted to members of the Hindu Student Council, an articulate, inspired and successful society of university students with over 50 chapters in the US alone.

Now, a year later, speaking with several recipients, we were overjoyed with their bright enthusiasm and sense of vision. "Our mission is to learn, then disseminate, the glories of Hinduism, especially

the spiritual teachings. Otherwise, what is the point?" (Seema) Appreciation for HINDUISM TODAY poured out. "There is nowhere else we can turn. Other sources let us down, and we don't have time to do our own research" (Sudeep). "Every article gives meaningful information, exactly what we need" (Monika). "It is always relevant, showing how our culture is important, worth keeping" (Vishaal). "It provides the help we need" (Sheena). "It is a constant discovery" (Anuradha). "I use it to teach at summer camp" (Rishi).

As the fund grows, we will be able to give HINDUISM TODAY to many more inspired souls such as these, who otherwise could not afford it. Imagine the impact. You can be a part of this noble new thrust. Please consider becoming a Benefactor of HINDUISM TODAY by making this fund a beneficiary in your estate plan of a gift of \$5,000 or more—in your living trust or charitable remainder trust. Contact us for more information and ask for a free estate-planning tool kit.

www.hheonline.org/ht/plannedgiving/hhe@hindu.org • 808-822-3012, ext. 244



"We will affect Hinduism in the USA:" (left to right from top) Sheena Sood, Rishi Bhutada, Anuradha Jones, Sudeep Roy, Monika Goel, Vishaal Gupta. Not pictured, Seema Madhavan.

QUOTES & QUIPS

If we put into practice the little we know, that is enough.
We will come to know everything in that way.

Satguru Siva Yogaswami (1872-1964), *Sri Lanka's most renowned contemporary spiritual master*

Hindu Dharma was a great reconciler. It reconciled various viewpoints, various doctrines. It knew how to look at things from various angles and viewpoints. It knew no conflict between science and religion, between rationalism and spiritualism. It was so because it was not dogmatic in reason or religion. **Ram Swarup** (1920-1998), *distinguished spokesperson of Hindu spirituality and culture in India*

Adversity and prosperity never cease to exist. The adornment of great men's minds is to remain unswervingly just under both. **Tirukural 115**

People that say "You only live once" are underachievers.

I know you are busy. At least, your mind has made you think so. Even so, can you not find some time to invite God, your Supreme Guest, to bless you—you and your

life—with His all-illuminating and all-filling presence? **Sri Chinmoy**, *renowned spiritual leader, author, poet, artist, musician and athlete*

Hinduism believes in the omnipresence of the Supreme God in every individual. There is no "fall." Man is not cut off from the divine. He requires only to bring the spontaneous activity of his mind to a state of stillness and he will experience that divine principle with him. **Joseph Campbell** (1904-1987), *American writer, professor and expert in comparative religion*

I'm a nobody, nobody is perfect, therefore I'm perfect. **Swami Anubhavananda**, *humorous author and spiritual lecturer*

Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding. **Albert Einstein** (1879-1955), *German scientist and thinker*

If you long to see God, take to spiritual practices. What is the good of merely crying, "O God! O God!"? **Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa** (1836-1886)

Forget past mistakes. Forget failures. Forget everything except what you are going to do now and do it. **William C. Durant** (1861-1947), *founder of General Motors*

For attractive lips, speak words of kindness. For lovely eyes, seek out the good in people. For a slim figure, share your food with the hungry. For beautiful hair, let a child run her fingers through it once a day. For poise, walk with the knowledge that you never walk alone. People, even more than things, have to be restored, renewed, revived, reclaimed and redeemed; never throw out anyone. Remember, if you ever need a helping hand, you will find one at the end of each of your arms. As you grow older, you will discover that you have two hands; one for helping yourself, and the other for helping others. **Audrey Hepburn** (1929-1993), *American actress and humanitarian, when asked to share her "beauty tips"*

The best thing about Pagan friends is they worship the ground you walk on.

I do not want to foresee the future. I am concerned with taking care of the present. God has given me no control over the moment following. **Mahatma Gandhi** (1869-1948)

A true artist is one who, having severed the fetters of ego and the little self with its pettiness, prejudice, pride, greed and foolish fears of other's opinions, has risen into the realm of pure consciousness, which is beyond the world of intellect. From that realm, which is the source of

Frank and Ernest



all arts, the artist can bring into expression pure form unadulterated by preconceived ideas of his or other's minds. **Hilda Charlton** (1905-1984), *England-born mystic, Murugan devotee and dancer*

Every step I take in light is mine forever. **Swami Vivekananda** (1863-1902), *modern Hindu renaissance master*

Respect, don't suspect. **Swami Tejomananda**, *spiritual head of Chinmaya Mission*

It is easy to tame the rogue elephant. It is easy to tie the mouth of a bear. It is easy to mount the back of a lion. It is easy to charm poisonous snakes. It is easy to conquer the celestial and the noncelestial realms. It is easy to trek the worlds invisible. It is easy to command the angelic heavens. It is easy to retain youth eter-

nally. It is easy to enter the body of others. It is easy to walk on water and sit in burning fire. It is easy to attain all of the siddhis (yogic powers). But to remain still is very, very difficult indeed. **Tayumanavar** (1706-1744), *Tamil saint, mystic and poet*

Silence is one of the hardest arguments to refute. **Anonymous**

The secret of health for both mind and body is not to mourn for the past, not to worry about the future, not to anticipate troubles, but to live the present moment wisely and earnestly. **Siddhartha Gautama** (ca 566-486 bce), *the Buddha*

The greatest explorer on this Earth never takes voyages as long as those of the man who descends to the depth of his heart. **Julien Green**, (1900-1998), *French-American writer*

Your mind will answer most questions if you learn to relax and wait for the answer. **William S. Burroughs** (1914-1997), *American novelist*

Mind is consciousness which has put on limitations. You are originally unlimited and perfect. Later you take on limitations and become the mind. **Ramana Maharshi**, (1879-1950), *South Indian mystic*

Remember, your own soul knows the reasons why you were born in this life. It knows what you need to accomplish in this birth. As a soul, you know what obstacles and challenges you need to face and overcome to grow stronger and conquer past karmic patterns through fulfilling your chosen dharma. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927-2001), *founder of HINDUISM TODAY*

DID YOU KNOW?

The World's Southernmost and Northernmost Hindu Temples

THE 2002-INAUGURATED "CENTRO Cultural y Templo Hindu" in Punta Arenas, Chile, recently replaced the Kurinji Kumaren temple, in Wellington, New Zealand, as the southernmost Hindu temple in the world. Located at 53°10' South of the equator, it was financed by the local Sindhi community. On the other end of the Earth, the honor of being declared the world's northernmost temple, at 61°13' North, goes to the Sri Ganesha Mandir in Anchorage, Alaska (pictured).



SHYAMADEVA DANDAPANI

BASICS OF HINDUISM

All-Pervasive Divinity

AS A FAMILY OF FAITHS, HINDUISM upholds a wide array of perspectives on the Divine, yet all worship the one, all-pervasive Supreme Being hailed in the *Upanishads*. As Absolute Reality, God is unmanifest, unchanging and transcendent, the Self God, timeless, formless and spaceless. As Pure Consciousness, God is the manifest primal substance, pure love and light flowing through all form, existing everywhere in time and space as infi-

nite intelligence and power. As Primal Soul, God is our personal Lord, source of all three worlds, our Father-Mother God who protects, nurtures and guides us. We beseech God's grace in our lives while also knowing that He/She is the essence of our soul, the life of our life. Each denomination also venerates its own pantheon of Mahadevas, or "great angels," who were created by the Supreme Lord and who serve and adore Him.



Needed In Every Home

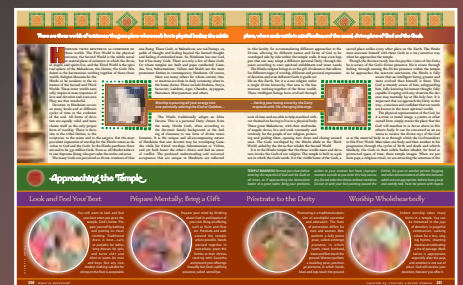
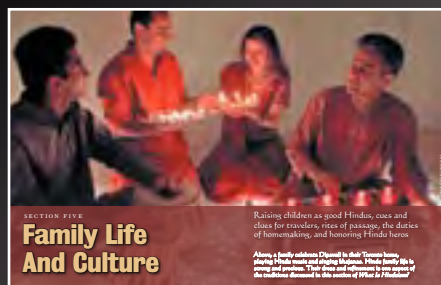
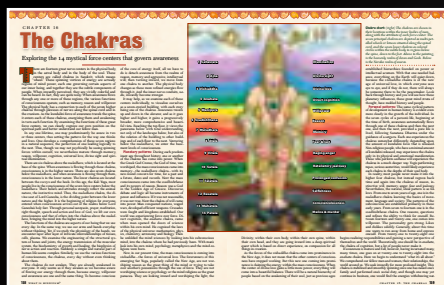


Mommy, kids at school are asking me all about our religion!

Oh, Savitri! No problem! What are their questions? We have a new book that answers them all. It's called "What Is Hinduism?"



Sample pages of the stunning 416-page, full-color book comprised of 46 educational insight sections from Hinduism Today magazine. \$39.95.



Available after March 1, 2007, at www.MiniMela.com

A Hindu Primer

A Code of Practices, Beliefs and Attitudes Common to all Hindus

LOVING HINDU PARENTS WORLDWIDE, OF VARIOUS LINEAGES, HAVE CALLED FOR A common religious code to teach their sons and daughters. They have asked, “What is the minimum I must do to dispatch my duty to my religion and my children?” In response, and to convey the basics of Hinduism for devotees and seekers of all ages, we assembled this chapter. It contains 1) an overview of Hinduism; 2) nine basic beliefs; 3) five essential precepts; 4) five corresponding observances; and five parenting guidelines. The modern Hindu child raised up with these principles and practices will be a fully functioning human being, one who is tolerant, devotional, fair, fearless, obedient, secure, happy, selfless, pure and traditional. We apologize that, in our brevity, we have inevitably blurred over subtleties in the rainbow of Hindu views.

A Bird’s-Eye View of a Family of Faiths

Hinduism is our planet’s original and oldest living religion, with no single founder. For as long as man has lived and roamed across Earth’s land and water masses, breathed its air and worshiped in awe its fire, the Sanatana Dharma has been a guide of righteous life for evolving souls. It is important to note that today Hinduism has four main denominations: Saivism, Shaktism, Vaishnavism and Smartism, each with hundreds of lineages. They represent a broad range of beliefs, sadhanas and mystic goals.

While Hindus believe many diverse and exotic things, there are several bedrock concepts on which virtually all concur. All Hindus worship one Supreme Reality, though they call it by many names, and teach that all souls will ultimately realize the truth of the *Vedas* and *Agamas*. Hindus believe that there is no eternal hell, no damnation. They concur that there is no intrinsic evil. All is good. All is God. In contrast, Western faiths postulate a living evil force, embodied in Satan, that directly opposes the will of God.

Hindus believe that the universe was created out of God and is permeated by Him—a Supreme Being who both is form and pervades form, who creates, sustains and destroys the universe only to recreate it again in unending cycles. Hindus accept all genuine spiritual paths. Each soul is free to find his own way, whether by devotion, austerity, meditation, yoga or selfless service (*seva*). Hinduism’s three pillars are temple worship, scripture and the guru-disciple tradition.

Hinduism strongly declares the validity of the three worlds of existence and the myriad Gods and devas residing within them. Festivals, pilgrimage, chanting of holy hymns and home worship are dynamic practices. Family life is strong and precious. Love, nonviolence, good conduct and the law of dharma define the Hindu path. Hinduism explains that the soul reincarnates until all karmas are resolved and God Realization is attained.

Hindus wear the sectarian marks, called *tilaka*, on their foreheads as sacred symbols, distinctive insignia of their heritage. Hinduism is a mystical religion, leading devotees to personally experience its eternal truths within themselves, finally reaching the pinnacle of consciousness where man and God are forever one. They prefer cremation of the body upon death, rather than burial, believing that the soul lives on and will inhabit a new body on Earth.

While Hindus have many sacred scriptures, all sects ascribe the highest authority to the *Vedas* and *Agamas*, though their *Agamas* differ somewhat. Hinduism’s nearly one billion adherents have tens of thousands of sacred temples and shrines, mostly in India, but now located around the world. Its spiritual core is its holy men and women—millions of sadhus, yogis, swamis, *vairagis*, saints and *satgurus* who have dedicated their lives to full-time service, devotion and God Realization, and to proclaiming the eternal truths of the Sanatana Dharma.

Four Facts of Hinduism: Karma, Reincarnation, All-Pervasive Divinity, and Dharma

1. Karma

Karma literally means “deed” or “act” and more broadly names the universal principle of cause and effect, action and reaction which governs all life. Karma is a natural law of the mind, just as gravity is a law of matter. ¶Karma is not fate, for man acts with free will, creating his own destiny. The Vedas tell us, if we sow goodness, we will reap goodness; if we sow evil, we will reap evil. Karma refers to the totality of our actions and their concomitant reactions in this and previous lives, all of which determines our future. ¶It is the interplay between our experience and how we respond to it that makes karma devastating or helpfully invigorating. The conquest of karma lies in intelligent action and dispassionate reaction. Not all karmas rebound immediately. Some accumulate and return unexpectedly in this or other births.

According as one acts, so does he become. One becomes virtuous by virtuous action, bad by bad action.

YAJUR VEDA, BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD 4.4.5



ALL ART BY S. RAJAM

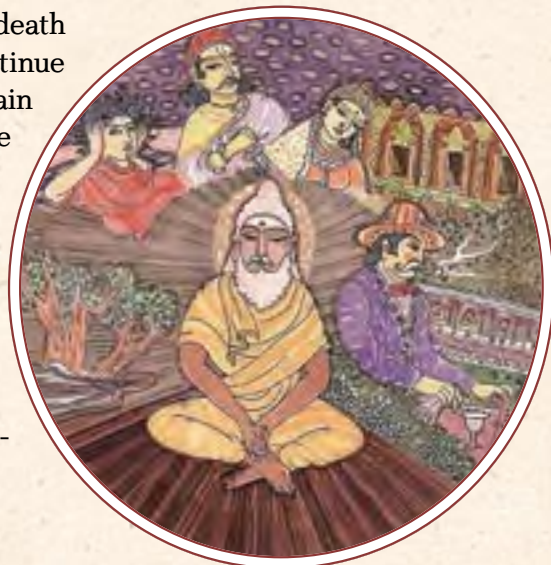
A devotee prays to a small image of Ganesha, who hovers nearby in His subtle body, blessing her life and guiding her karmas.

2. Reincarnation

Reincarnation, *punarjanma*, is the natural process of birth, death and rebirth. At death we drop off the physical body and continue evolving in the inner worlds in our subtle bodies, until we again enter into birth. ¶Through the ages, reincarnation has been the great consoling element within Hinduism, eliminating the fear of death. We are not the body in which we live but the immortal soul which inhabits many bodies in its evolutionary journey through samsara. After death, we continue to exist in unseen worlds, enjoying or suffering the harvest of earthly deeds until it comes time for yet another physical birth. The actions set in motion in previous lives form the tendencies and conditions of the next. Reincarnation ceases when karma is resolved, God is realized and moksha, liberation, is attained.

After death, the soul goes to the next world, bearing in mind the subtle impressions of its deeds, and after reaping their harvest returns again to this world of action. Thus, he who has desires continues subject to rebirth.

YAJUR VEDA, BRIHADARANYAKA UPANISHAD 4.4.6



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

3. All-pervasive Divinity

As a family of faiths, Hinduism upholds a wide array of perspectives on the Divine, yet all worship the one, all-pervasive Supreme Being hailed in the *Upanishads*. As Absolute Reality, God is unmanifest, unchanging and transcendent, the Self God, timeless, formless and spaceless. As Pure Consciousness, God is the manifest primal substance, pure love and light flowing through all form, existing everywhere in time and space as infinite intelligence and power. As Primal Soul, God is our personal Lord, source of all three worlds, our Father-Mother God who protects, nurtures and guides us. We beseech God's grace in our lives while also knowing that He/She is the essence of our soul, the life of our life. Each denomination also venerates its own pantheon of Divinities, Mahadevas, or “great angels,” who were created by the Supreme Lord and who serve and adore Him.

He is the God of forms infinite in whose glory all things are—smaller than the smallest atom, and yet the Creator of all, ever living in the mystery of His creation. In the vision of this God of love there is everlasting peace. He is the Lord of all who, hidden in the heart of things, watches over the world of time.

KRISHNA YAJUR VEDA, SHVETASHVATARA UPANISHAD 4.14-15.



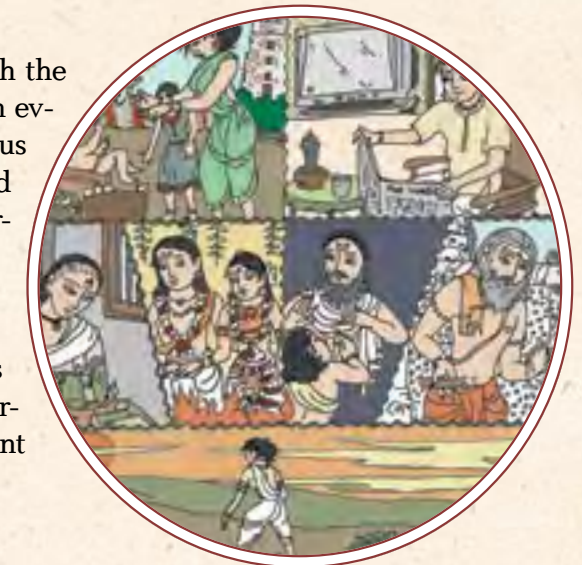
God's all-pervasive, immanent nature is portrayed here. Siva is seated against a backdrop of swirling shakti. His body is made up of the elements, galaxies, mountains, rivers, animals and manifestations of all kinds, thus depicting Him as inherent in His creation.

4. Dharma

When God created the universe, He endowed it with order, with the laws to govern creation. Dharma is God's divine law prevailing on every level of existence, from the sustaining cosmic order to religious and moral laws which bind us in harmony with that order. Related to the soul, dharma is the mode of conduct most conducive to spiritual advancement, the right and righteous path. It is piety and ethical practice, duty and obligation. When we follow dharma, we are in conformity with the Truth that inheres and instructs the universe, and we naturally abide in closeness to God. Adharma is opposition to divine law. Dharma is to the individual what its normal development is to a seed—the orderly fulfillment of an inherent nature and destiny.

Dharma yields Heaven's honor and Earth's wealth. What is there then that is more fruitful for a man? There is nothing more rewarding than dharma, nor anything more ruinous than its neglect.

TIRUKURAL 31-32



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



Children perform puja at an outdoor shrine as the Gods Ganesha and Murugan look on in approval

Nine Beliefs of Hinduism

1 Hindus believe in the divinity of the *Vedas*, the world's most ancient scripture, and venerate the *Agamas* as equally revealed. These primordial hymns are God's word and the bedrock of Sanatana Dharma, the eternal religion which has neither beginning nor end.

2 Hindus believe in a one, all-pervasive Supreme Being who is both immanent and transcendent, both Creator and Unmanifest Reality.

3 Hindus believe that the universe undergoes endless cycles of creation, preservation and dissolution.

4 Hindus believe in karma, the law of cause and effect by which each individual creates his own destiny by his thoughts, words and deeds.

5 Hindus believe that the soul reincarnates, evolving through many births until all karmas have been resolved, and moksha, spiritual knowledge and

liberation from the cycle of rebirth, is attained. Not a single soul will be eternally deprived of this destiny.

6 Hindus believe that divine beings exist in unseen worlds and that temple worship, rituals, sacraments as well as personal devotionals create a communion with these devas and Gods.

7 Hindus believe that a spiritually awakened master, or *satguru*, is essential to know the Transcendent Absolute, as are personal discipline, good conduct, purification, pilgrimage, self-inquiry and meditation.

8 Hindus believe that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered, and therefore practice ahimsa, "noninjury."

9 Hindus believe that no particular religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others, but that all genuine religious paths are facets of God's Pure Love and Light, deserving tolerance and understanding.

Five Precepts

THE MINIMAL HINDU BELIEFS. BY TEACHING THESE TO SONS AND DAUGHTERS, PARENTS WORLDWIDE PASS ON THE SANATANA DHARMA TO THEIR CHILDREN

Pancha
Shraddha

पञ्चश्रद्धाः

Sarva
Brahman

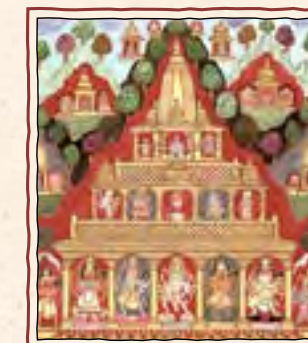
सर्व ब्रह्मन्



Mandira
मन्दिर

2. Holy Temples

The dear children are taught that God, other divine beings and highly evolved souls exist in unseen worlds. They learn to be devoted, knowing that temple worship, fire ceremonies, sacraments and devotionals open channels for loving blessings, help and guidance from these beings.



ALL ART BY A. MANIVEL

3. Cosmic Justice

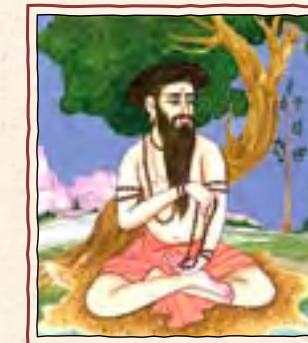
The dear children are taught of karma, the divine law of cause and effect by which every thought, word and deed justly returns to them in this or a future life. They learn to be compassionate, knowing that each experience, good or bad, is the self-created reward of prior expressions of free will.



Samsara,
Moksha
संसार मोक्ष

4. Liberation

The dear children are taught that souls experience righteousness, wealth and pleasure in many births, while maturing spiritually. They learn to be fearless, knowing that all souls, without exception, will ultimately attain Self Realization, liberation from rebirth and union with God.



5. Scripture and Preceptor

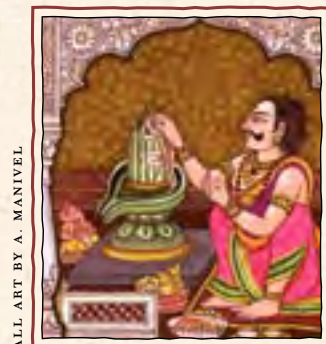
The dear children are taught that God revealed the *Vedas* and *Agamas*, which contain the eternal truths. They learn to be obedient, following the precepts of these sacred scriptures and awakened *satgurus*, whose guidance is absolutely essential for spiritual progress and enlightenment.



Veda, Guru
वोद गुरु

Five Practices

THE MINIMAL PRACTICES (ALSO KNOWN AS PANCHA NITYA KARMAS) TO NURTURE FUTURE CITIZENS WHO ARE STRONG, RESPONSIBLE, TOLERANT AND TRADITIONAL



ALL ART BY A. MANIVEL

1. Worship

The dear children are taught daily worship in the family shrine room—rituals, disciplines, chants, yogas and religious study. They learn to be secure through devotion in home and temple, wearing traditional dress, bringing forth love of the Divine and preparing the mind for serene meditation.

Utsava
उत्सव

2. Holy Days

The dear children are taught to participate in Hindu festivals and holy days in the home and temple. They learn to be happy through sweet communion with God at such auspicious celebrations. *Utsava* includes fasting and attending the temple on Monday or Friday and other holy days.



3. Virtuous Living

The dear children are taught to live a life of duty and good conduct. They learn to be selfless by thinking of others first, being respectful of parents, elders and swamis, following divine law, especially ahimsa, mental, emotional and physical noninjury to all beings. Thus they resolve karmas.

Tirthayatra
तीर्थयात्रा

4. Pilgrimage

The dear children are taught the value of pilgrimage and are taken at least once a year for darshan of holy persons, temples and places, near or far. They learn to be detached by setting aside worldly affairs and making God, Gods and gurus life's singular focus during these journeys.

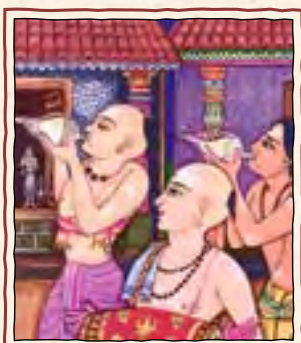


5. Rites of Passage

The dear children are taught to observe the many sacraments which mark and sanctify their passages through life. They learn to be traditional by celebrating the rites of birth, name-giving, head-shaving, first feeding, ear-piercing, first learning, coming of age, marriage and death.

Pancha
Kriya
पञ्चक्रियाः

Upasana
उपासना



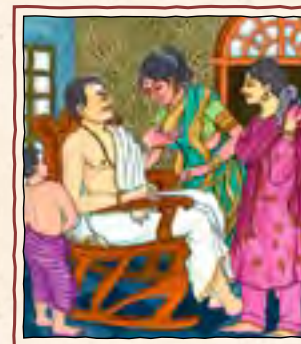
Dharma
धर्म



Samskara
संस्कार

Five Parenting Guidelines

BEHAVIORAL PRINCIPLES TO LIVE BY TO NURTURE CHILDREN AND TEACH THEM, VERBALLY AND BY EXAMPLE, TO FOLLOW THE PATH OF DHARMA



Dharma
Svagriha
धर्मस्वगृह



Dharma
Svadhyaya
धर्मस्वाध्याय



1. Good Conduct

Loving fathers and mothers, knowing they are the greatest influence in a child's life, behave the way their dear children should when adults. They never anger or argue before young ones. Father in a dhoti, mother in a sari at home, all sing to God, Gods and guru.

2. Home Worship

Loving fathers and mothers establish a separate shrine room in the home for God, Gods and guardian devas of the family. Ideally it should be large enough for all the dear children. It is a sacred place for scriptural study, a refuge from the karmic storms of life.

3. Talking about Religion

Loving fathers and mothers speak Vedic precepts while driving, eating and playing. This helps dear children understand experiences in right perspective. Parents know many worldly voices are blaring, and their dharmic voice must be stronger.

4. Continuing Self-Study

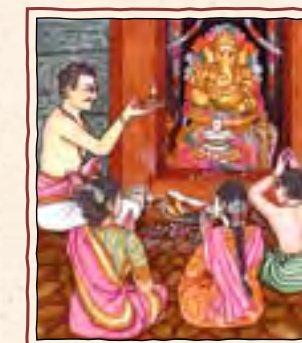
Loving fathers and mothers keep informed by studying the *Vedas*, *Agamas* and sacred literature, listening to swamis and pandits. Youth face a world they will one day own, thus parents prepare their dear children to guide their own future progeny.

5. Following a Spiritual Preceptor

Loving fathers and mothers choose a preceptor, a traditional *satguru*, and lineage to follow. They support their lineage with all their heart, energy and service. He in turn provides them clear guidance for a successful life, material and religious.

Pancha Kutumba
Sadhana
पञ्च कुटुम्ब साधन

Dharmachara
धर्मचार



Dharma
Sambhashana
धर्मसम्भाषन



Dharma Sanga
धर्मसंग

Hinduism's Code of Conduct

Twenty keys for spiritual living in contemporary times

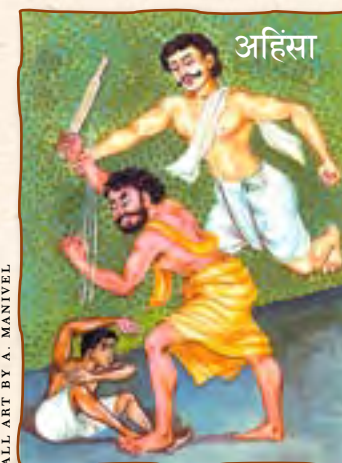
HOW OFTEN DO YOU SEE A PROFESSIONAL TEAM of people misbehave on the job? You're on a flight from San Francisco to Singapore. Do the flight attendants bicker in the aisle? Of course not. People at this level of business have control of their minds and emotions. If they didn't, they would soon be replaced. When they are on the job, at least, they follow a code of conduct spelled out in detail by the corporation. It's not unlike the moral code of any religion, outlining sound ethics for respect and harmony among humans. Those seeking to be successful in life strive to fulfill a moral code whether "on the job" or off. Does Hinduism and its scriptures on yoga have such a code? Yes: twenty ethical guidelines called *yamas* and *niyamas*, "restraints and observances." These "do's" and "don'ts" are found in the 6,000 to 8,000-year-old *Vedas*, mankind's oldest body of scripture, and in other holy texts expounding the path of yoga.

The *yamas* and *niyamas* are a common-sense code recorded in the final section of the *Vedas*, called *Upanishads*, namely the *Shandilya* and the *Varuha*. They are also found in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* by Gorakshanatha, the *Tirumantiram* of Tirumular and in the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali. The *yamas* and *niyamas* have been preserved through the centuries as the foundation, the first and second stage, of the eight-staged practice of yoga. Yet, they are fundamental

to all beings, expected aims of everyone in society, and assumed to be fully intact for anyone seeking life's highest aim in the pursuit called yoga. Sage Patanjali (ca 200 BCE), *raja yoga's* foremost propounder, told us, "These *yamas* are not limited by class, country, time (past, present or future) or situation. Hence they are called the universal great vows." Yogic scholar Swami Brahmananda Saraswati revealed the inner science of *yama* and *niyama*. They are the means, he said, to control the *vitarkas*, the cruel mental waves or thoughts, that when acted upon result in injury to others, untruthfulness, hoarding, discontent, indolence or selfishness. He stated, "For each *vitarka* you have, you can create its opposite through *yama* and *niyama*, and make your life successful."

The following paragraphs, with accompanying illustrations by A. Manivel of Chennai, elucidate the *yamas* and *niyamas*. Presented first are the ten *yamas*, the do not's, which harness the instinctive nature, with its governing impulses of fear, anger, jealousy, selfishness, greed and lust. Second are illustrated the ten *niyamas*, the do's, the religious observances that cultivate and bring forth the refined soul qualities, lifting awareness into the consciousness of the higher *chakras* of love, compassion, selflessness, intelligence and bliss. Together the *yamas* and *niyamas* provide the foundation to support our yoga practice so that attainments in higher consciousness can be sustained.

The Ten Vedic Restraints, Yama यम



Noninjury, *Ahimsa*

Yama 1

Practice noninjury, not harming others by thought, word or deed, even in your dreams. Live a kindly life, revering all beings as expressions of the One Divine energy. Let go of fear and insecurity, the sources of abuse. Knowing that harm caused to others unfailingly returns to oneself, live peacefully with God's creation. Never be a source of dread, pain or injury. Follow a vegetarian diet.



Truthfulness, *Satya*

Yama 2

Adhere to truthfulness, refraining from lying and betraying promises. Speak only that which is true, kind, helpful and necessary. Knowing that deception creates distance, don't keep secrets from family or loved ones. Be fair, accurate and frank in discussions, a stranger to deceit. Admit your failings. Do not engage in slander, gossip or backbiting. Do not bear false witness against another.



Nonstealing, *Asteya*

Yama 3

Uphold the virtue of nonstealing, neither thieving, coveting nor failing to repay debt. Control your desires and live within your means. Do not use borrowed resources for unintended purposes or keep them past due. Do not gamble or defraud others. Do not renege on promises. Do not use others' names, words, resources or rights without permission and acknowledgement.



Divine Conduct, *Brahmacharya*

Yama 4

Practice divine conduct, controlling lust by remaining celibate when single and faithful in marriage. Before marriage, use vital energies in study, and after marriage in creating family success. Don't waste the sacred force by promiscuity in thought, word or deed. Be restrained with the opposite sex. Seek holy company. Dress and speak modestly. Shun pornography, sexual humor and violence.



Patience, *Kshama*

Yama 5

Exercise patience, restraining intolerance with people and impatience with circumstances. Be agreeable. Let others behave according to their nature, without adjusting to you. Don't argue, dominate conversations or interrupt others. Don't be in a hurry. Be patient with children and the elderly. Minimize stress by keeping worries at bay. Remain poised in good times and bad.



Steadfastness, *Dhriti*

Yama 6

Foster steadfastness, overcoming nonperseverance, fear, indecision and changeableness. Achieve your goals with a prayer, purpose, plan, persistence and push. Be firm in your decisions. Avoid sloth and procrastination. Develop willpower, courage and industriousness. Overcome obstacles. Never carp or complain. Do not let opposition or fear of failure result in changing strategies.



Compassion, *Daya*

Yama 7

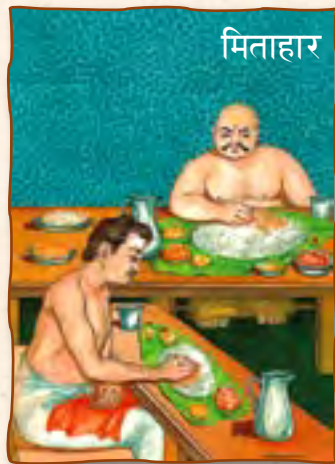
Practice compassion, conquering callous, cruel and insensitive feelings toward all beings. See God everywhere. Be kind to people, animals, plants and the Earth itself. Forgive those who apologize and show true remorse. Foster sympathy for others' needs and suffering. Honor and assist those who are weak, impoverished, aged or in pain. Oppose family abuse and other cruelties.



Honesty, *Arjava*

Yama 8

Maintain honesty, renouncing deception and wrongdoing. Act honorably even in hard times. Obey the laws of your nation and locale. Pay your taxes. Be straightforward in business. Do an honest day's work. Do not bribe or accept bribes. Do not cheat, deceive or circumvent to achieve an end. Be frank with yourself. Face and accept your faults without blaming them on others.



मिताहार

Yama 9

Be moderate in appetite, neither eating too much nor consuming meat, fish, shellfish, fowl or eggs. Enjoy fresh, wholesome vegetarian foods that vitalize the body. Avoid junk food. Drink in moderation. Eat at regular times, only when hungry, at a moderate pace, never between meals, in a disturbed atmosphere or when upset. Follow a simple diet, avoiding rich or fancy fare.

Moderate Appetite, *Mitahara*



सैच

Yama 10

Uphold the ethic of purity, avoiding impurity in mind, body and speech. Maintain a clean, healthy body. Keep a pure, uncluttered home and workplace. Act virtuously. Keep good company, never mixing with adulterers, thieves or other impure people. Keep away from pornography and violence. Never use harsh, angered or indecent language. Worship devoutly. Meditate daily.

Purity, *Saucha*



ईश्वरपूजन

Niyama 5

Cultivate devotion through daily worship and meditation. Set aside one room of your home as God's shrine. Offer fruit, flowers or food daily. Learn a simple puja and the chants. Meditate after each puja. Visit your shrine before and after leaving the house. Worship in heartfelt devotion, clearing the inner channels to God, Gods and guru so their grace flows toward you and loved ones.

Worship, *Ishvara-Pujana*



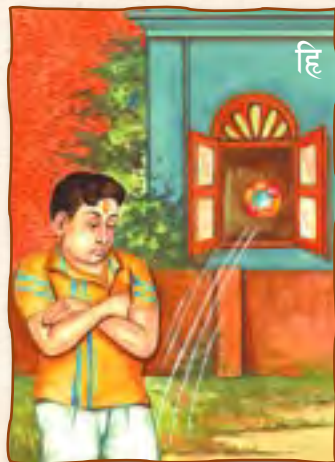
सिद्धान्तश्रवण

Niyama 6

Eagerly hear the scriptures, study the teachings and listen to the wise of your lineage. Choose a guru, follow his path and don't waste time exploring other ways. Read, study and, above all, listen to readings and dissertations by which wisdom flows from knower to seeker. Avoid secondary texts that preach violence. Revere and study the revealed scriptures, the *Vedas* and *Agamas*.

Scriptural Listening, *Siddhanta Shrivana*

The Ten Vedic Practices, Niyama नियम



हि

Niyama 1

Allow yourself the expression of remorse, being modest and showing shame for misdeeds. Recognize your errors, confess and make amends. Sincerely apologize to those hurt by your words or deeds. Resolve all contention before sleep. Seek out and correct your faults and bad habits. Welcome correction as a means to bettering yourself. Do not boast. Shun pride and pretension.

Remorse, *Hri*



सन्तोष

Niyama 2

Nurture contentment, seeking joy and serenity in life. Be happy, smile and uplift others. Live in constant gratitude for your health, your friends and your belongings. Don't complain about what you don't possess. Identify with the eternal You, rather than mind, body or emotions. Keep the mountaintop view that life is an opportunity for spiritual progress.

Contentment, *Santosha*



दान

Niyama 3

Be generous to a fault, giving liberally without thought of reward. Tithe, offering one-tenth of your gross income (*dashamamsha*), as God's money, to temples, ashrams and spiritual organizations. Approach the temple with offerings. Visit gurus with gifts in hand. Donate religious literature. Feed and give to those in need. Bestow your time and talents without seeking praise. Treat guests as God.

Giving, *Dana*

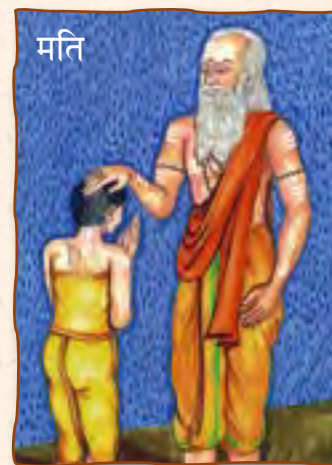


आस्तिक्य

Niyama 4

Cultivate an unshakable faith. Believe firmly in God, Gods, guru and your path to enlightenment. Trust in the words of the masters, the scriptures and traditions. Practice devotion and sadhana to inspire experiences that build advanced faith. Be loyal to your lineage, one with your *satguru*. Shun those who try to break your faith by argument and accusation.

Faith, *Astikya*



मति

Niyama 7

Develop a spiritual will and intellect with your *satguru's* guidance. Strive for knowledge of God, to awaken the light within. Discover the hidden lesson in each experience to develop a profound understanding of life and yourself. Through meditation, cultivate intuition by listening to the still, small voice within, by understanding the subtle sciences, inner worlds and mystical texts.

Cognition, *Mati*



व्रत

Niyama 8

Embrace religious vows, rules and observances and never waver in fulfilling them. Honor vows as spiritual contracts with your soul, your community, with God, Gods and guru. Take vows to harness the instinctive nature. Fast periodically. Pilgrimage yearly. Uphold your vows strictly, be they marriage, monasticism, nonaddiction, tithing, loyalty to a lineage, vegetarianism or nonsmoking.

Sacred Vows, *Vrata*

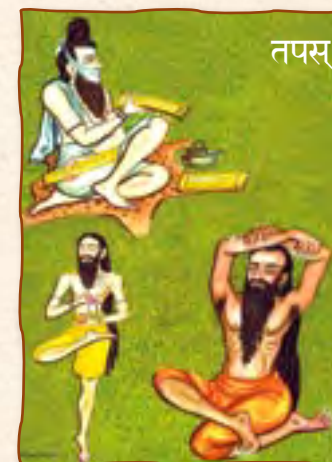


जप

Niyama 9

Chant your holy mantra daily, reciting the sacred sound, word or phrase given by your guru. Bathe first, quiet the mind and concentrate fully to let *japa* harmonize, purify and uplift you. Heed your instructions and chant the prescribed repetitions without fail. Live free of anger so that *japa* strengthens your higher nature. Let *japa* quell emotions and quiet the rivers of thought.

Recitation, *Japa*

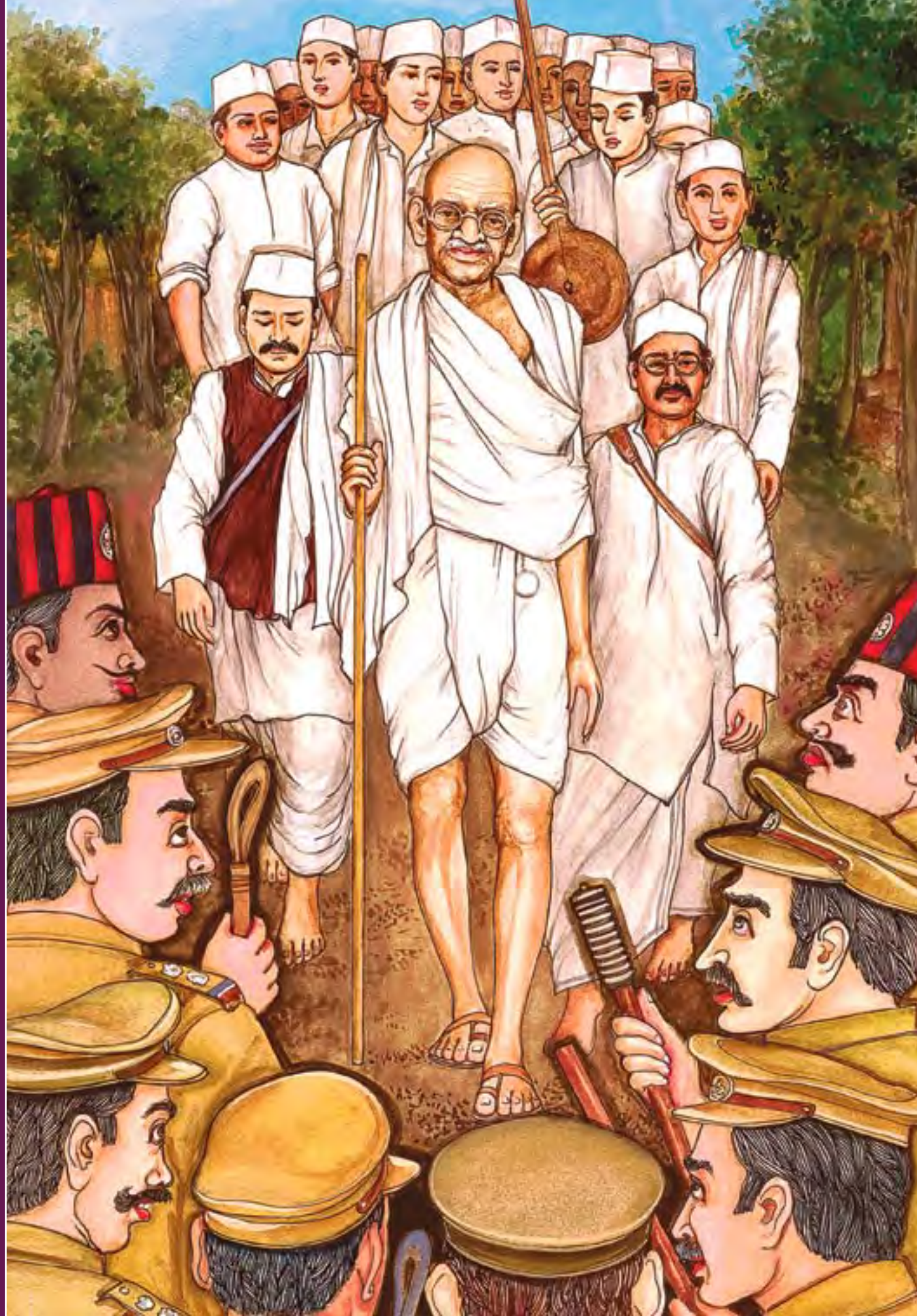


तपस्

Niyama 10

Practice austerity, serious disciplines, penance and sacrifice. Be ardent in worship, meditation and pilgrimage. Atone for misdeeds through penance (*prayashchitta*), such as 108 prostrations or fasting. Perform self-denial, giving up cherished possessions, money or time. Fulfill severe austerities at special times, under a *satguru's* guidance, to ignite the inner fires of self-transformation.

Austerity, *Tapas*



WHAT IS HINDUISM?

Ahimsa: To Do No Harm

We Can Change the Way Mankind Behaves by Practicing Nonviolence

BY SATGURU SIVAYA SUBRAMUNIASWAMI

HINDU WISDOM, WHICH INSPIRES HUMANS TO LIVE THE ideals of compassion and nonviolence, is captured in one word, ahimsa. In Sanskrit himsa is doing harm or causing injury. The “a” placed before the word negates it. Very simply, ahimsa is abstaining from causing harm or injury. It is gentleness and noninjury, whether physical, mental or emotional. It is good to know that nonviolence speaks only to the most extreme forms of forceful wrongdoing, while ahimsa goes much deeper to prohibit even the subtle abuse and the simple hurt.

Devout Hindus oppose killing for several reasons. Belief in karma and reincarnation are strong forces at work in the Hindu mind. They full well know that any thought, feeling or action sent out from themselves to another will return to them through yet another in equal or amplified intensity. What we have done to others will be done to us, if not in this life then in another. The Hindu is thoroughly convinced that violence which he commits will return to him by a cosmic process that is unerring. Two thousand years ago South India’s weaver saint Tiruvalluvar said it so simply, “All suffering recoils on the wrongdoer himself. Thus, those desiring not to suffer refrain from causing others pain” (*Tirukural* 320). A similar view can be found in the Jain *Acharanga Sutra*: “To do harm to others is to do harm to oneself. You are he whom you intend to kill. You are he whom you intend to dominate. We corrupt ourselves as soon as we intend to corrupt others. We kill ourselves as soon as we intend to kill others.”

Many today are wondering how we might move from violence to nonviolence, how mankind might transform itself from approval of killing to opposition to it. The Hindu knows that at this time on this planet those of the lower nature, unevolved people, are society’s antagonists. Being unevolved, they are of the lower nature, instinctive, self-assertive, confused, possessive and protective of their immediate environment. Others are their enemies. They are jealous, angry, fearful. Many take sport in killing for the sake of killing, thieving for the sake of theft, even if they do not need or use the spoils. This is the lower nature, and it is equally distributed among the peoples of the world, in every nation, society and neighborhood. Those of the higher nature—ten, fifteen or twenty percent of the population—live in protective environments. Their occupation is research, memory, education, which is reason; moving the world’s goods here and there, which is will. Those of yet an even higher nature delve into the mysteries of the universe, and others work for universal peace and love on Earth, as groups and individuals. The Hindu knows that those of the lower nature will slowly, eventually, over an experiential period of time, come into the higher nature, and that those of the higher nature, who have worked so hard to get there, will avoid the lower nature and not allow themselves to be caught up in it again. Hindus believe in the progress of humanity, from an old age into a new age, from darkness into a consciousness of divine light.

Nonviolence has long been central to the religious traditions of India—especially Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Religion in

India has consistently upheld the sanctity of life, whether human, animal or, in the case of the Jains, elemental. There developed early in India an unparalleled concern for harmony among different life forms, and this led to a common ethos based on noninjury and a minimal consumption of natural resources, in other words, to compassion and simplicity. If Homo sapiens is to survive his present predicament, he will have to rediscover these two primary ethical virtues.

In order to understand the pervasive practice of nonviolence in Hinduism, one must investigate the meaning of life. Why is life sacred? For India’s ancient thinkers, life is seen as the very stuff of the Divine, an emanation of the Source and part of a cosmic continuum. The nature of this continuum varies in Hindu thought. Some hold that the individual evolves up through life forms, taking more and more advanced incarnations which culminate in human life. Others believe that according to one’s karma and samskaras, the process can even be reversed, that is, one can achieve a “lower” birth. Even those Indians who do not believe in reincarnation of an individual still hold that all that exists abides in the Divine. They further hold that each life form—even water and trees—possesses consciousness and energy. Whether the belief is that the life force of animals can evolve into human status, or that the opposite can also take place, or simply that all things enjoy their own consciousness, the result is the same—a reverence for life.

Not all of Earth’s one billion Hindus are living in a perfect state of ahimsa all of the time. Sometimes conditions at hand may force a situation, a regrettable exception, where violence or killing seems to be necessary. Hindus, like other human beings, unfortunately do kill people. In self-defense or in order to protect his family or his village, the Hindu may have to hurt an intruder. Even then he would harbor no hatred in his heart. Hindus should never instigate an intrusion or instigate a death; nor seek revenge, nor plot retaliation for injuries received. They have their courts of justice, punishment for crimes and agencies for defending against the aggressor or the intruder. Before any personal use of force, so to speak, all other avenues of persuasion and intelligence would be looked into, as Hindus believe that intelligence is their best weapon. In following dharma, the only rigid rule is wisdom. My satguru, Siva Yogaswami, said, “It is a sin to kill the tiger in the jungle. But if he comes into the village, it may become your duty.” A devout Hindu would give warnings to scare the tiger or would try to capture the tiger without injury. Probably it would be the most unreligious person in the village who would come forward to kill the tiger.

Many groups on the planet today advocate killing and violence and war for a righteous cause. They do not agree with the idea that violence, himsa, is necessarily of the lower nature. But a righteous cause is only a matter of opinion, and going to war affects the lives of a great many innocent people. It’s a big karmic responsibility. Combat through war, righteous or not, is lower conscious-

ness. Religious values are left aside, to be picked up and continued when the war is over, or in the next life or the one after that. It is said that in ancient India meat would be fed to the soldiers during military campaigns, especially before combat, to bring them into lower consciousness so that they would forget their religious values. Most higher consciousness people will not fight even if their lives depend on it. They are conscientious objectors, and there have been many in every country who have been imprisoned or



killed because they would not take up arms against their brother and sister humans. This is the strictest expression of Hinduism's law of ahimsa.

One of the most famous of Hindu writings, the *Bhagavad Gita*, is often taken as divine sanction for violence. It basically says that for the kshatriya, or soldier, war is dharma. Lord Krishna orders Arjuna to fight and do his kshatriya dharma in spite of his doubts and fears that what he is about to do is wrong, despite his dread

of killing his own kinsmen. Hindus for a long time have taken this text as justification for war and conflicts of all kinds, including street riots and anarchy. But all that aside, no matter how it is interpreted, let us not be mistaken that the *Bhagavad Gita* gives permission for violence. The *Mahabharata* (of which the *Gita* is a part) itself says, "Ahimsa is the highest dharma. It is the highest purification. It is also the highest truth from which all dharma proceeds" (18.1125.25). An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is definitely not a part of true Hindu doctrine.

In every country there is the army, the navy, air force, police, the protectors of the country—the collective force of citizens that keep a country a country. This is dharma. In protection of family and nation, in armies and police forces which give security, it is indeed dharmic for kshatriyas to do their lawful duty, to use necessary force, even lethal force. But for this collective force of protectors, of peacemakers, of peacekeepers—which includes the law courts and the central administrative authorities who oversee the courts, the armies, the navies, the air force—would the priests be able to function? Would the businessmen be able to acquire and sell their goods? Would the farmers be able to plant their crops and harvest them? Could the children play fearlessly in the streets and countryside? No. The answer is obvious.

Those who take law into their own hands in the name of dharma, citing their case upon the *Mahabharata*, are none but the lawbreakers, anarchists, the arsonists, the terrorists. The *Mahabharata* gives no permission for anarchy. The *Mahabharata* gives no permission for terrorism. The *Mahabharata* gives no permission for looting and diluting the morals of society through prostitution, running drugs and the selling and buying of illegal arms. The Pandavas, the heroes of this ancient epic, were not rabble rousers. They were not inciting riots. Nor were they participating in extortion to run their war. Nor were they participating in the sale of drugs to finance their war. Nor were they participating in prostitution to win their war. Nor were they participating in enlisting women to help them fight their war. Nor were they having children learn to snare their victims.

Yes, dharma does extend to protecting one's country. But does it extend to taking a country from another, or to stealing lands? That is lawlessness, blatant lawlessness. In the modern age, to create a nation or even a business enterprise upon the death of another, upon lands confiscated, stolen, illegally acquired, usurped from another's realm, is definitely not Hindu dharma, and this is not *Mahabharata*.

In Gandhian philosophy ahimsa means nonviolent action which leads to passive resistance in order to put a point across. Basically, he taught, don't hit your opponent over the head. If he tells you to do something, stall and don't obey and don't do it and frustrate him into submission. And yet he was not a pacifist prepared to accept any harm without resistance. When a gang of tribals came in and raped the women in a village, Gandhi said there should not have been a man

left alive in the village. They should have stood up for the village and protected it with their lives.

So, to me, if an intruder breaks into your house to rape the women or steal things, you have the right, even the duty, to defend your own, but you don't have the right to torture him. Ahimsa needs to be properly understood, in moderation. To explain nonviolence, you have to explain what violence is, as opposed to protecting yourself. Is it violent to own a dog who would put his teeth to the

throat of a vicious intruder? I don't think it is. If nonviolence is to be something that the world is going to respect, we have to define it clearly and make it meaningful.

Achieving a nonviolent world would simply mean that all individuals have to somehow or other reconcile their differences enough that the stress those differences produce can no longer take over their mind, body and emotions, causing them to perform injurious acts. Again, this would begin in the home. Peaceful homes breed gentle people. Gentle people follow ahimsa.

What's the best way to teach peace to the world? The best way is to first teach families to be peaceful within their own home, to settle all arguments and contention before they sleep at night, even if they stay up for three days, so the children can see that peace can be attained and then maintained through the use of intelligence. Humans do not have horns or claws; nor do they have

sharp teeth. Their weapon is their intelligence. Children must be taught through the example of parents and by learning the undeniable facts of life, the basic tenets—that an all-pervasive force holds this universe together, that we create with this force every minute, every hour, every day, and because time is a cycle, what we create comes back to us. Therefore, because we create in a physical universe while in a physical body, we must return to a physical body, in a new life after death, to face up to our creations, good, bad or mixed. Once they learn this, they are winners. It is up to the parents to create the peacemakers of the future. It is always up to the parents. And remember, we teach children in only one way—by our own example.

Parents must teach children to appreciate those who are different, those who believe differently; teach them the openness that they need to live in a pluralistic world where others have their

Taking Care of Business, Nonviolently

Ahimsa is not just a prohibition against physical and emotional assault



Right livelihood: Beware the ill-gotten gains of ruthless business

BY SATGURU SIVAYA SUBRAMUNIASWAMI

I WAS ONCE ASKED FOR MY INSIGHTS ON APPLYING ahimsa in the business world. Ahimsa in business is taught in a reverse way on American television: *Titans*, *The West Wing*, *Dynasty*, *Falcon Crest*, *Dallas*, *Sopranos*—popular shows of our time. Their scriptwriters promoted himsa, injuriousness, in business—"Save the Falcon Crest farm at any cost, save South Fork, save the corporation." Now the national news media reports attempts to save Microsoft, save the tobacco industry, save the hand gun manufacturers. The fight is on, and real-life court battles have taken the place of TV sitcoms which have long since been off the air. In both the TV and the real-life conflicts, whatever you do to your competitor is OK because it's only business. The plots weave in and out, with one scene of mental and emotional cruelty after another. The Hindu business ethic is very clear. As the weaver Tiruvalluvar said, "Those businessmen will prosper whose business protects as their own the interests of others" (*Tirukural* 120). We should compete by having a better product and better methodologies of promoting and selling it, not by destroying our competitor's product and reputation. Character assassination is not part of ahimsa. It reaps bad benefits to the accusers. That is practiced by many today, even by Hin-

dus who are off track in their perceptions of ahimsa. Hindus worldwide must know that American television is not the way business should be practiced. As some people teach you what you should do and other people teach you what you should not do, the popular television programs mentioned above clearly teach us what we should not do. The principles of ahimsa and other ethical teachings within Hinduism show us a better way.

Many corporations today are large, in fact larger than many small countries. Their management is like the deceptive, dishonest, deceitful, arrogant, domineering autocrat, king, or like the benevolent religious monarch, all depending on whether there are people of lower consciousness or higher consciousness in charge. Cities, districts, provinces, counties, states and central governments all have many laws for ethical business practices, and none of those laws permits unfair trade, product assassination or inter-business competitive fights to the death. Each business is dharmically bound to serve the community, not take from the community like a vulture. When the stewardships of large corporations follow the law of the land and the principles of ahimsa, they put their energies into developing better products and better community service. When the leadership has a mind for corporate espionage, its energies are diverted, the products suffer and so does customer relations. The immediate profits in the short term might be gratifying, but in the long run, profits gained from wrong-doings are generally spent on wrong-doings.

Ahimsa always has the same consequences. And we know these benefits well. Himsa always has the same consequences, too. It develops enemies, creates unseemly karmas which will surely return and affect the destiny of the future of the business enterprise. The perfect timing needed for success is defeated by inner reactions to the wrong-doings. A business enterprise which bases its strategies on hurtfulness cannot in good judgment hire employees who are in higher consciousness, lest they object to these tactics. Therefore, they attract employees who are of the same caliber as themselves, and they all practice himsa among one another. Trickery, deceitfulness and deception are of the lower nature, products of the methodology of performing himsa, hurtfulness, mentally and emotionally. The profits derived from himsa policies are short-term and ill-spent. The profits derived from ahimsa policies are long-term and well spent.

unique ways, their life and culture; teach them the value of human diversity and the narrow-mindedness of a provincial outlook; give them the tools to live in a world of differences without feeling threatened, without forcing their ways or their will on others; teach them that it never helps to hurt another of our brothers or sisters.

Vegetarianism is a natural and obvious way to live with a minimum of hurt to other beings. Hindu scripture speaks clearly and forcefully on vegetarianism. The *Yajur Veda* dictates: "Do not injure the beings living on the Earth, in the air and in the water." The beautiful *Tirukural*, a widely-read 2,200-year-old masterpiece of ethics, speaks of conscience: "When a man realizes that meat is the butchered flesh of another creature, he will abstain from eating it" (257). The *Manu Samhita* advises: "Having well considered the origin of flesh and the cruelty of fettering and slaying corporeal beings, let one entirely abstain from eating flesh," and "When the diet is pure, the mind and heart are pure." In the yoga-infused verses of the *Tirumantiram* warning is given of how meat-eating holds the mind in gross, adharmic states: "The ignoble ones who eat flesh, death's agents bind them fast and push them quick into the fiery jaws of the lower worlds" (199).

Vegetarianism is very important. In my fifty years of ministry, it

has become quite evident that vegetarian families have far fewer problems than those who are not vegetarian. The abhorrence of killing of any kind leads quite naturally to a vegetarian diet. If you think about it, the meat-eater is participating indirectly in a violent act against the animal kingdom. His desire for meat drives another man to kill and provide that meat. The act of the butcher begins with the desire of the consumer. When his consciousness lifts and expands, he will abhor violence and not be able to even digest the meat, fish and eggs he was formerly consuming. India's greatest saints have confirmed that one cannot eat meat and live a peaceful, harmonious life. Man's appetite for meat inflicts devastating harm on the Earth itself, stripping its precious forests to make way for pastures. The opposite of causing injury to others is compassion and love for all beings. The *Tirukural* puts it nicely: "How can he practice true compassion who eats the flesh of an animal to fatten his own flesh" (251)?

If children are raised as vegetarians, every day they are exposed to noninjury as a principle of peace and compassion. Every day as they are growing up, they are remembering and being reminded to not kill. They won't even kill another creature to feed themselves. And if you won't kill another creature to feed yourself, then when you grow up you will be much less likely to injure people. 🍽️

Saints and Scriptures Speak on Ahimsa

Nonviolence, truthfulness, nonstealing, purity, sense control—this, in brief, says Manu, is the dharma of all the four castes.

Dharma Shastras 10

You do not like to suffer yourself. How can you inflict suffering on others? Every killing is a suicide. The eternal, blissful and natural state has been smothered by this life of ignorance. In this way the present life is due to the killing of the eternal, pristine Being. Is it not a case of suicide?

Ramana Maharishi

One should never do that to another which one regards as injurious to one's own self. This, in brief, is the rule of dharma. Yielding to desire and acting differently, one becomes guilty of adharma.

Mahabharata 18:113.8

To be free from violence is the duty of every man. No thought of revenge, hatred or ill will should arise in our minds. Injuring others gives rise to hatred.

Swami Sivananda

If a man inflicts sorrow on another in the morning, sorrow will come to him unbidden in the afternoon.

Tirukural 319

Refrain from killing knowingly even the trifling insects like a louse, a bug or a mosquito. Use no violence even to gain possession of a woman, wealth or kingdom. Never kill any animals even for the purpose of sacrifice. Nonviolence is the greatest of all religions.

Swami Sahajanand

Ahimsa is the highest dharma. Ahimsa is the best *tapas*. Ahimsa is the greatest gift. Ahimsa is the highest self-control. Ahimsa is the highest sacrifice. Ahimsa is the highest power. Ahimsa is the highest friend. Ahimsa is the highest truth. Ahimsa is the highest teaching.

Mahabharata 18:116.37-41

By ahimsa Patanjali meant the removal of the desire to kill. All forms of life have an equal right to the air of maya. All men may understand this truth by overcoming the passion for destruction.

Sri Yukteswar

Ahimsa is not causing pain to any living being at any time through the actions of one's mind, speech or body.

Sandilya Upanishad

Those high-souled persons who desire beauty, faultlessness of limbs, long life, understanding, mental and physical strength and memory should abstain from acts of injury.

Mahabharata 18:115.8

When one is established in non-injury, beings give up their mutual animosity in his presence.

Yoga Sutras

The Hindu sage sees the whole of life. If he does not fight, it is not because he rejects all fighting as futile, but because he has finished his fights. He has overcome all dissensions between himself and the world and is now at rest.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan



PHOTO STOCK

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Harnessing Speech

Inner contemplation and outer discipline insure ahimsa in your daily interactions

BY SWAMINI MAYATITANANDA

THE HUMAN VOICE AS A DIVINE INSTRUMENT IS A POWERFUL, foundational tool for living a life of ahimsa. It is the basis of our individuality and creative expression. However, the human voice is our most misunderstood and misused possession. We take our voice for granted—using and abusing it for the most mundane, trivial and hurtful communications—forgetting to honor it as the divine instrument of ahimsa within us.

The seers emulated the primordial sound in order to fashion the first human expression, called *sruti*, the cosmic revelation as heard by the rishis. *Sruti* is also referred to as the Word, and the

song of *Sama Veda* informs us that, "Verily, if there were no Word, there would be no knowledge neither of right or wrong, nor of truth and untruth, nor of the pleasing and unpleasing. The Word makes all this known." This original Word informed Vedic ritual speech, mantras, chants and music, which carry the cosmic rhythms and memory of the universe's entire experience. The rishis declared the spoken word, *sruti*, as their most significant contribution to humanity. Most ancient people left their imprint on history through the medium of precious materials—gold, silver, bronze, onyx and granite. While time has eroded these monuments, the Vedic tradition's rich legacy of the spoken word, recited daily by an unbroken chain of generations, still lives on.

Most of us are conscious of the foods we eat, the air we breathe, the postures we emulate and other spiritual practices we do to bring good health, yet we are unaware of the negative impressions we imbibe by way of our senses from unwholesome talk, chaotic interaction and the barrage of discordant sounds we take into our personal lives through television and other media. A mind that is bombarded with violent impressions will become desensitized and express itself in angry and insensitive ways. Eric's story is a classical illustration of exactly this challenge.

I met Eric several years ago at a meditation workshop in New York. He was seventeen years old and had been recently expelled from school for verbally abusing his teacher. Eric's mother, Marion, was a prominent yoga teacher. She confided to me that Eric had been a quiet boy and an excellent student until he fell in with a "bad crowd" in the neighborhood.

After listening to Marion, I asked to speak with Eric privately. As he slouched in the chair beside me, he refused to make eye contact. I closed my eyes and waited for him to speak. After several tense minutes, he broke the silence. "She is always screaming at me, demanding that I do the things that make her happy. But what about me? She is so caught up in her work she doesn't even know who I am. She pushes me to do all these health things. My friends think I'm a sissy—eating health food, washing the dishes, chanting..." For twenty minutes, or so, Eric blurted

out his story nonstop. All I could hear was the young man's anger about being pushed by Marion's anger and his frustration about feeling inadequate and not "fitting in" with his friends. Marion had good intentions for her son, but like many parents who underestimate their children's intelligence she had missed the most important lesson—listening to her son's needs and communicating with him. The more she forced Eric to adhere to her values, the farther away Eric ran. Suddenly, as he became a teenager, he found a voice of violence in the popular culture that had heard him and he began to retaliate

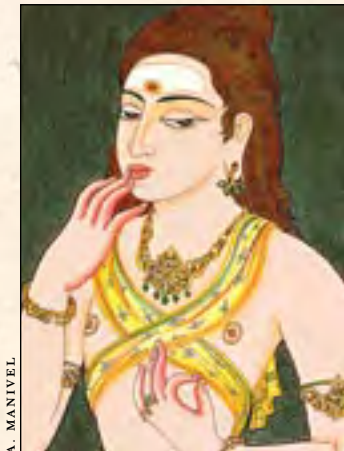
against his mother's tyranny. To compensate for the support he felt he was not getting at home, Eric had found negative reinforcement from his street buddies and seized the opportunity to express himself. He was true to his voice of anger. It was Marion who had not yet found her voice of peace. Although she had been practicing yoga for twelve years, she has still not found the true meaning behind spiritual practice—the spirit of nonviolence and nonhurting that would finally help her to communicate its wondrous essence to her son.

I have developed the Vac Tapasya, "Speech Penance," to evoke healthy, harmonious thoughts and bring forward positive, pleasant words. Spend fifteen minutes at the end of every day allowing your mind to run free. Notice whatever negative, hurtful thoughts that may come up. Write down those thoughts and the person or situations they concern, without whitewashing or censoring them. Let yourself be angry, judgmental and unkind. And above all, be honest. Repeat each negative thought aloud. For example: "Mary is so demanding. I can't bear to work with her." Then recite the attitude of one seeking true inner knowledge: "I know that every negative thought reflects my own inner condition."

Now take responsibility for your feelings from which the negative thought sprang: "I am being intolerant of Mary. It will not be pleasant for Mary if I see her with this attitude." This will help you learn to always carefully consider your words before you

speak them aloud to another person, and to avoid an angry, accusatory or aggressive tone. If you feel pressured to respond or speak in a way that you think may be hurtful to another person, use your notebook to tell this person your raw, unedited feelings in the form of a letter that you do not send. Let the letter sit for a week. Then, before you read it, make one small change. Replace the name of the person to whom it is addressed with your own name. This may help you understand that the letter has less to do with the person with whom you are angry, and is more about your hurt feelings, which stem from your negative thoughts and feelings about your own life. The *Maitri Upanishad* put it this way: "Words cannot describe the joy of the spirit whose spirit is cleansed in deep contemplation—who is one with his/her own Spirit. Only those who experience this joy knows what it is." 🍽️

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The voice of ahimsa: Thinking before speaking



What's for dinner? Young ladies at a busy market in India, where fresh vegetables, grains and legumes abound, picking out items for a scrumptious vegetarian meal

WHAT IS HINDUISM?

The Meat-Free Life

Five good reasons to be a vegetarian and 10 arguments against eating meat

THERE ARE MORE THAN A FEW HINDUS today who guiltily abandoned the vegetarian ways of their own parents and grandparents when they decided to be “secular” and “modern.” But our ancient seers had it right when they advocated living without killing animals for food. Today vegetarianism is a worldwide movement, with adherents among all religions, daily gaining converts through one or more of the five basic reasons to adhere to a meatless diet: dharma, karma, consciousness, health and environment. Each is explored in this insight section, which concludes with the famous essay, “How to win an argument with a meat-eater.”

Reason 1 Dharma

Vedic scripture proclaims that ahimsa, nonhurtfulness, is a primary religious obligation in fulfillment of dharma, divine law.

Just how widespread is this movement? In the UK, polls show more than 15 percent of teenagers are vegetarians, and six percent of the general population. In America, eight percent of teens and three percent of the general population declare themselves vegetarian. It is a movement with a broad base, for one can find advocates as diverse as philosophers Plato and Nietzsche, politicians Benjamin Franklin and Gandhi, Beatle Paul McCartney and Rastafarian singer Bob Marley, actresses Brooke Shields, Drew Barrymore, Alicia Silverstone, and actors David Duchovny, Richard Gere and Brad Pitt. It's also helped that a multitude of rigorous scientific studies have proven the health benefits of the vegetarian diet.

Vegetarianism, an Ancient Hindu Ethic

Vegetarianism was for thousands of years a principle of health and environmental ethics throughout India. Though Muslim and Christian colonization radically undermined and eroded this ideal, it remains to this day a cardinal ethic of Hindu thought and practice. A

subtle sense of guilt persists among Hindus who eat meat, and even they will abstain at special times. For India's ancient thinkers, life is seen as the very stuff of the Divine, an emanation of the Source and part of a cosmic continuum. They further hold that each life form, even water and trees, possesses consciousness and energy. Nonviolence, ahimsa, the primary basis of vegetarianism, has long been central to the religious traditions of India—especially Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Religion in India has consistently upheld the sanctity of life, whether human or animal.

The Sanskrit word for vegetarianism is *sakahara*, and one following a vegetarian diet is a *sakahari*. Hindu vegetarians commonly consume milk products, but not eggs, which are definitely a meat

product, containing cholesterol which is only present in animal flesh. The term for meat-eating is *mansahara*, and the meat-eater is called *mansahari*. *Ahara* means “to consume or eat,” *saka* means “vegetable,” and *mansa* means “meat or flesh.” The very word *mansa*, “meat,” conveys a deep appreciation of life's sacredness and an understanding of the law of karma by which the consequence of each action returns to the doer. As explained in the 2,000-year-old *Manu Dharma Shashtra*, 5:55, “The learned declare that the meaning of *mansa* (flesh) is, ‘he (sa) will eat me (mam) in the other world whose flesh I eat here.’” There developed early in India an unparalleled concern for harmony among life forms, and this led to a common ethos based on noninjury

and a minimal consumption of natural resources—in other words, to compassion and simplicity. If *Homo sapiens* is to survive his present predicament, he will have to rediscover these two primary ethical virtues.

Is Vegetarianism Integral to Noninjury?

In Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami's book, *Dancing with Siva*, this question is addressed as follows: “Hindus teach vegetarianism as a way to live with a minimum of hurt to other beings, for to consume meat, fish, fowl or eggs is to participate indirectly in acts of cruelty and violence against the animal kingdom. The abhorrence of injury and killing of any kind leads quite naturally to a vegetarian diet, *sakahara*. The meat-eater's desire for meat drives another to kill and provide that meat. The act of the butcher begins with the desire of the consumer. Meat-eating contributes to a mentality of violence, for with the chemically complex meat ingested, one absorbs the slaughtered creature's fear, pain and terror. These quali-

ties are nourished within the meat-eater, perpetuating the cycle of cruelty and confusion. When the individual's consciousness lifts and expands, he will abhor violence and not be able to even digest the meat, fish, fowl and eggs he was formerly consuming. India's greatest saints have confirmed that one cannot eat meat and live a peaceful, harmonious life. Man's appetite for meat inflicts devastating harm on Earth itself, stripping its precious forests to make way for pastures. The *Tirukural* candidly states, "How can he practice true compassion who eats the flesh of an animal to fatten his own flesh? Greater than a thousand ghee offerings consumed in sacrificial fires is not to sacrifice and consume any living creature."

Amazingly, some people define vegetarian as a diet which excludes the meat of animals but does permit fish and eggs. But what really is vegetarianism? Vegetarian foods include grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes and dairy products. Natural, fresh foods, locally grown without insecticides or chemical fertilizers are preferred. A vegetarian diet does not include meat, fish, fowl, shellfish or eggs. For good health, even certain vegetarian foods are minimized: frozen and canned foods, highly processed foods, such as white rice, white sugar and white flour; and "junk" foods and beverages—those with abundant chemical additives, such as artificial sweeteners, colorings, flavorings and preservatives.

According to Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, "In my forty years of ministry it has become quite evident that vegetarian families have far fewer problems than those who are not vegetarian. If children are raised as vegetarians, every day they are exposed to nonviolence as a principle of peace and compassion. Every day they are growing up they are remembering and being reminded to not kill. They won't even kill another creature to eat, to feed themselves.

From Market to Table: (l to r) North Indian *tali* plate; a family enjoys a vegetarian meal; selling vegetables at a local market; a traditional South Indian meal served on an eco-friendly banana leaf

And if they won't kill another creature to feed themselves, they will be much less likely to do acts of violence against people."

Vegetarian Animals

Vegetarians come in all sizes and shapes, but the elephant is the largest of all, with a sophisticated social life, loving and affectionately caring for its own. Elephants live long, vigorous lives, have a very large brain and, of course, are renowned for their excellent memory. They do not suffer any weakness for not eating meat. In fact, so many muscular and the most intelligent animals—the horse, the cow, giraffe, zebra, rhinoceros, the apes, and more—are lifelong vegetarians and friends of men. Lean animals, thin and wiry, who are feared by man and beasts alike, are all hunters and killers and eaters of flesh—tigers, sharks, hawks, wolves and the like. Similarly, no one fears a gentle vegetarian, but all have reason to fear the unpredictable meat-eater. Scriptures admonish that it is wise to fear what should be feared.

Food and Consciousness

Food is the source of the body's chemistry, and what we ingest affects our consciousness, emotions and experiential patterns. If one wants to live in higher consciousness, in peace and happiness and love for all creatures, then he cannot eat meat, fish, shellfish, fowl or eggs. By ingesting the grosser chemistries of animal foods, one

introduces into the body and mind anger, jealousy, fear, anxiety, suspicion and the terrible fear of death, all of which is locked into the flesh of butchered creatures. It is said that in ancient India meat would be fed to the soldiers during military campaigns, especially before combat, to bring them into lower consciousness so that they would forget their religious values. They performed these deeds in fulfillment of a warrior's way—with not the least restraint of conscience. The inner law is ever so simple—not eating meat, fish, fowl or eggs is essential to awaken consciousness into the seven higher chakras (the *uttara-chakras*), up to the crown. Nonkilling—and

noneating of that which is killed—is a must to pass from realms below.

Dharma

How many there are who resent the very mention of becoming a vegetarian, being instinctively repulsed by the idea, for they intuit the road ahead. They sense that once the more *sattvic* diet of pure foods are taken in place of meats (and other dead foods, packaged, processed and cellophane-wrapped) they will feel a great guilt occasioned by their transgressions of dharma, as they have so well perfected over the years their *adharmic* ways. *Adharma* means all that stands against Indian spirituality, against the path of the good and the pure and the natural, against dharma in all of its intricate dimensions. None of the other *dharma*s—*stri dharma*, the duties of women; *purusha dharma*, the duties of men; *ashrama dharma*, the responsibility of one's stage of life; *varna dharma*, one's position in society; and *svadharma*, one's own perfect pattern—even when performed properly will have the same results without fulfilling this virtue. Even *Rita dharma*, cosmic order, is upset by man's insatiable, aggressive appetites expressed through flesh-consuming.

Hindus Were the First Vegetarians

The book, *Food for the Spirit, Vegetarianism and the World Religions*, observes: "Despite popular knowledge of meat-eating's adverse effects, the nonvegetarian diet became increasingly widespread among Hindus after the two major invasions by foreign powers, first the Muslims and later the British. With them came the desire to be 'civilized,' to eat as did the saheeb. Those actually trained in Vedic knowledge, however, never adopted a meat-oriented diet, and the pious Hindu still observes vegetarian principles as a matter of religious duty.

"That vegetarianism has always been widespread in India is clear from the earliest *Vedic* texts. This was observed by the ancient trav-

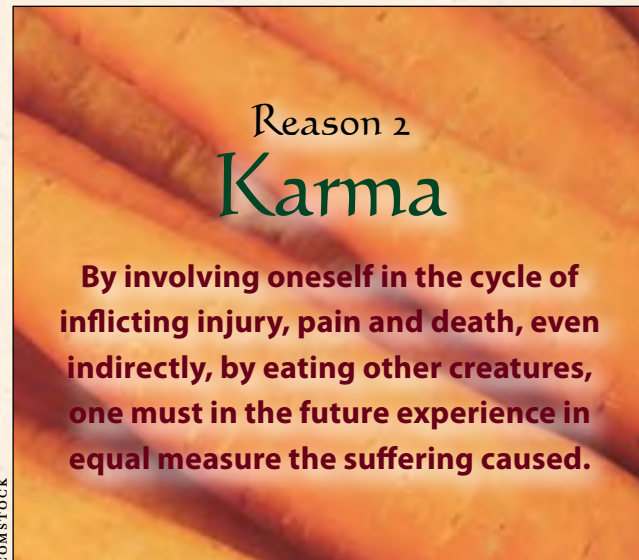
eler Megasthenes and also by Fa-hsien, a Chinese Buddhist monk who, in the fifth century, traveled to India in order to obtain authentic copies of the scriptures. These scriptures unambiguously support the meatless way of life. In the *Mahabharata*, for instance, the great warrior Bhishma explains to Yudhishtira, eldest of the Pandava princes, that the meat of animals is like the flesh of one's own son, and that the foolish person who eats meat must be considered the vilest of human beings [*Anu.* 114.11]. The eating of 'dirty' food, it warns, is not as terrible as the eating of flesh [*Shanti.* 141.88] (it must be remembered that the brahmins of ancient India exalted cleanliness to a divine principle).

"Similarly, the *Manusmriti* declares that one should 'refrain from eating all kinds of meat,' for such eating involves killing and leads to karmic bondage (*bandha*) [5.49]. Elsewhere in the Vedic literature, the last of the great Vedic kings, Maharaja Parikshit, is quoted as saying that 'only the animal-killer cannot relish the message of the Absolute Truth [*Shrimad Bhagavatam* 10.1.4].'"

Common Dietary Concerns

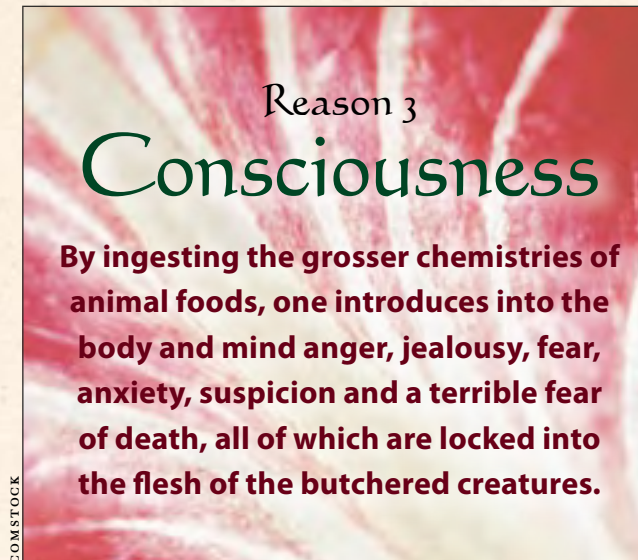
Those considering a vegetarian diet generally worry about getting enough nutrients, since the belief that meat is a necessary part of keeping strong and healthy is still extremely widespread. Recently a group of eminent doctors called the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM),

themselves members of the American Medical Association, have decided to change the US consciousness on human nutrition, particularly among the medical community. The PCRM is a nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C., consisting of doctors and laypersons working together for compassionate and effective medical practice, research and health promotion. Founded in 1985, the PCRM is supported by over 3,000 physicians and 50,000 laypersons. PCRM president (and vegetarian) Neal D. Barnard, M.D., is a popular speaker and the author of *The Power of Your Plate*. Armed with decades of nutritional research data, PCRM addresses these dietary



Reason 2 Karma

By involving oneself in the cycle of inflicting injury, pain and death, even indirectly, by eating other creatures, one must in the future experience in equal measure the suffering caused.



Reason 3 Consciousness

By ingesting the grosser chemistries of animal foods, one introduces into the body and mind anger, jealousy, fear, anxiety, suspicion and a terrible fear of death, all of which are locked into the flesh of the butchered creatures.



concerns head-on:

“The fact is, it is very easy to have a well-balanced diet with vegetarian foods. Vegetarian foods provide plenty of protein. Careful combining of foods is not necessary. Any normal variety of plant foods provides more than enough protein for the body’s needs. Although there is somewhat less protein in a vegetarian diet than a meat-eater’s diet, this is actually an advantage. Excess protein has been linked to kidney stones, osteoporosis, and possibly heart disease and some cancers. A diet focused on beans, whole grains and vegetables contains adequate amounts of protein without the ‘overdose’ most meat-eaters get.”

Other concerns are allayed by the PCRM as follows:

1. **Calcium** is easy to find in a vegetarian diet. Many dark, green leafy vegetables and beans are loaded with calcium, and some orange juices and cereals are calcium-fortified. Iron is plentiful in whole grains, beans and fruits.

2. **Vitamin B12:** There is a misconception that without eating meat one cannot obtain sufficient vitamin B12, which is an essential nutrient. This is simply not true. The PCRM advises: “Although cases of B12 deficiency are very uncommon, it is important to make sure that one has a reliable source of the vitamin. Good sources include all common multiple vitamins (including vegetarian vitamins), fortified cereals and soy milk.”

3. During **pregnancy** nutritional needs increase. The American Dietetic Association has found vegan diets adequate for fulfilling nutritional needs during pregnancy, but pregnant women and nursing mothers should supplement their diets with vitamins B12 and D.

Reason 4 Health

Vegetarians are less susceptible to all the major diseases that afflict contemporary humanity. Thus they live longer, healthier, more productive lives. They have fewer physical complaints, less frequent visits to the doctor, fewer dental problems and smaller medical bills.

4. Vegetarian **children** also have high nutritional needs, but these, too, are met with a vegetarian diet. A vegetarian menu is “life-extending.” As children, vegetarians may grow more gradually, reach puberty somewhat later, and live substantially longer than meat-eaters. Be sure to include a reliable source of vitamin B12. Besides the fortified cereals and soy milk mentioned above, vitamin B12 is widely available in multiple vitamins, brewers yeast and other potent dietary supplements.

Those interested in supporting or learning more about the work of the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine should visit: www.pcrm.org.

Converting to Vegetarianism

Making the transition from carnivore to herbivore is not as hard as you might think. According to the book, *The New Vegetarians*, by Sonia Partridge and Paul Amato, 73% of vegetarian converts stated that the transition was not difficult. It is easier for people who do some homework on the subject and have a bit of cooking skill. The time it takes for people to totally convert varies greatly. About 70% of people make the transition gradually, while 30% stop all at once. A year is the most transition time to stop

with red meat, which is almost always the first flesh to go, followed more slowly by fowl and fish.

One recommended method for the transition is to set a series of goals for yourself. Start simply with getting through one day without meat. Then, try one weekend, then one week. Make a realistic timetable for reaching them. Two to three months might be reasonable for some people while six months to a year might be better for

others. Rewards can also help. For a major accomplishment such as a week without meat, treat yourself to a nice vegetarian meal out.

One can also take a formal Hindu vow of vegetarianism, *sakahara vrata*, available on-line at www.hinduismtoday.com/in-depth_issues/veggie_vow/. The vow may be taken privately, before elders or parents or as part of a temple ceremony. It reads in part, “I accept the principle of *sakahara* as the method by which I may acknowledge my compassion, my *karuna*, for all living beings. As an act of dedication, I am resolved this day to begin (or continue) the regular practice of eating a strict vegetarian diet and not eating meat, fish, shellfish, fowl or eggs.”

The most common problem with conversion is not knowing enough about vegetarian diet. Some people who decide to be vegetarian, have no idea what to eat and end up with soggy vegetables and undercooked brown rice for breakfast, lunch and dinner. They become discouraged and rightly wonder how they will survive. But decent vegetarian food isn’t boring. A little research with books and websites will put your mind at ease. Get a vegetarian cookbook. Ask restaurant waiters which menu items are vegetarian.

Vegetarians are often asked “Don’t you miss eating meat?” For about half of beginning vegetarians the answer is yes, according to *The New Vegetarians*. They miss the texture and flavor of meat in the early weeks and months. Almost everyone though, gets over this within six months to a year and for many it becomes nauseating even to think about eating meat. Eighty-two percent of fully adapted vegetarians say there is no way they would consider eating flesh again.

Reason 5 Environment

In large measure, the escalating loss of species, destruction of ancient rain forests to create pasture lands for livestock, loss of topsoil and the consequent increase of water impurities and air pollution have all been traced to the single fact of meat in the human diet.

Conclusion

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami writes, “Modern meats are killed by chemical treatment of the animals, the hormones of fear and chemistry of death before and during slaughter, killed again by refrigerating them, killed again by grinding them, killed again by preserving them, killed again by packaging them, killed again by freezing them, killed again by storing and shipping them, and finally really killed by cooking them to death. How can such so-called food nourish a human being?”

“Why should we ever think of eating meat, fish, fowl, eggs, anything with eyes or, as some say, with two or more senses. The cock-a-doodle-doo who wakes us up in the morning is dinner on the table at night. How gruesome. How ruthless to thus forever close the eyes of an animal, or have someone else do it for them in order that they may buy the carcass, closing their eyes to the fact, which is even worse, and keeping their own eyes closed to that creature’s suffering to consume it without conscience during jovial small talk over the dinner table. How easy in turn for such a person to turn

and maim or kill a fellow human in the same way in times of stress as a natural reaction, in “justifiable righteousness.”

As the *Rig Veda* (10.87.16) proclaims: ‘One who partakes of human flesh, the flesh of a horse or of another animal, and deprives others of milk by slaughtering cows, O King, if such a fiend does not desist by other means, then you should not hesitate to cut off his head.’

Wisdom from Saints and Scriptures

Vedas, shastras and sutras alike decry the killing and eating of animals

Scriptures of all Hindu denominations speak clearly and forcefully on nonkilling and vegetarianism. The roots of noninjury, nonkilling and nonconsumption of meat are found in the Vedas, Dharma Shastras, Tirumurai, Yoga Sutras, Tirukural and dozens of other sacred texts of Hinduism. Perhaps nowhere is the principle of nonmeat-eating so fully and eloquently expressed as in the Tirukural, written in the Tamil language by a simple weaver saint over 2,000 years ago.

One who partakes of human flesh, the flesh of a horse or of another animal, and deprives others of milk by slaughtering cows, O King, if such a fiend does not desist by other means, then you should not hesitate to cut off his head.

Rig Veda Samhita 10.87.16

Protect both our species, two-legged and four-legged. Both food and water for their needs supply. May they with us increase in stature and strength. Save us from hurt all our days, O Powers!

Rig Veda Samhita 10.37.11

O vegetable, be succulent, wholesome, strengthening; and thus, body, be fully grown.

Rig Veda

Those noble souls who practice meditation and other yogic ways, who are ever careful about all beings, who protect all animals, are the ones who are actually serious about spiritual practices.

Atharva Veda Samhita 19.48.5

You must not use your God-given body for killing God’s creatures, whether they are human, animal or whatever.

Yajur Veda Samhita 12.32

The ignoble ones who eat flesh, death’s agents bind them fast and push them quick into the fiery jaws of hell (Naraka, lower consciousness).

Tirumantiram

When mindstuff is firmly based in waves of ahimsa, all living beings cease their enmity in the presence of such a person.

Yoga Sutras 2.35

Ahimsa is not causing pain to any living being at any time through the actions of one’s mind, speech or body.

Sandilya Upanishad

Having well considered the origin of flesh and the cruelty of fettering and slaying of corporeal beings, let one entirely abstain from eating flesh.

Manu Samhita

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

Mahabharata, Anu. 115.40

He who desires to augment his own flesh by eating the flesh of other creatures lives in misery in whatever species he may take his birth.

Mahabharata, Anu. 115.47

Those high-souled persons who desire beauty, faultlessness of limbs, long life, understanding, mental and physical strength

and memory should abstain from acts of injury.

Mahabharata 18.115.8

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

Tirukural Verse 251

Riches cannot be found in the hands of the thrifless. Nor can compassion be found in the hearts of those who eat meat.

Tirukural Verse 252

Goodness is never one with the minds of these two: one who wields a weapon and one who feasts on a creature’s flesh.

Tirukural Verse 253

If you ask, “What is kindness and what is unkind?” it is not killing and killing. Thus, eating flesh is never virtuous.

Tirukural Verse 254

Life is perpetuated by not eating meat. The clenched jaws of hell hold those who do.

Tirukural Verse 255

If the world did not purchase and consume meat, there would be none to slaughter and offer meat for sale.

Tirukural Verse 256

When a man realizes that meat is the butchered flesh of another creature, he must abstain from eating it.

Tirukural Verse 257

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

Tirukural Verse 259

All that lives will press palms together in prayerful adoration of those who refuse to slaughter and savor meat.

Tirukural Verse 260

My opinion is well known. I do not regard flesh food as necessary for us at any stage and under any clime in which it is possible for human beings ordinarily to live. I hold flesh-food to be unsuited to our species.”

Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948)

How to Win an Argument With a Meat-Eater

The facts you need to change opinion

WHILE IT IS CERTAINLY BEST to avoid an argument with the aggressive meat-eater, a lively discussion provides them useful information and could help save the environment, their health and solve the world's hunger problem—maybe even result in a “convert.” But be forewarned, these carnivores may regard nonmeat-eaters as a timid lot who munch “rabbit food,” and whose diet doesn't have the substance to make them strong, productive human beings. The following presentation explains the devastating effects of meat-eating both on individuals and on our planet. It is based on a poster entitled, “How to win an argument with a meat-eater,” published by Earthsave, of Felton, California, giving facts from Pulitzer Prize nominee John Robbins' book, *Diet for a New America*. HINDUISM TODAY's version details ten arguments against meat-eating and in favor of a vegetarian diet.

1. The Hunger Argument

Much of the world's massive hunger problems could be solved by the reduction or elimination of meat-eating because the needs of livestock pasture drastically cuts into the acres of land which could otherwise be used to grow food. Additionally, vast quantities of food which could feed humans is fed to livestock raised to produce meat.

This year alone, twenty million people worldwide will die of malnutrition. One child dies of malnutrition every 2.3 seconds. One hundred million people could be adequately fed using the land freed if Americans reduced their intake of meat by a mere 10%. Eighty percent of the corn and 95% of the oats grown in the US is eaten by livestock. The percentage of protein wasted by cycling grain through livestock is calculated by experts as 90%. One acre of good farmland can produce 40,000 pounds of potatoes, or 250 pounds of beef. Fifty-six percent of all US farmland is devoted to beef production, and to produce each pound of beef requires 16 pounds of edible grain and soybeans, which could be used to feed the hungry.

2. The Environmental Argument

Many of the world's massive environ-

mental problems could be solved by the reduction or elimination of meat-eating, including global warming, loss of topsoil, loss of rain forests and species extinction. Trees, and especially the old-growth forests, are essential to the survival of the planet. Their destruction is a major cause of global warming and top soil loss. Meat-eating is the number one driving force for the destruction of these forests. Two-hundred and sixty million acres of US forestland have been cleared for crop land to produce the meat-centered diet. Fifty-five square feet of tropical rain forest is consumed to produce every quarter-pound of rain forest beef. An alarming 75% of all US topsoil has been lost to date. Eighty-five percent of this loss is directly related to livestock raising. Another devastating result of deforestation is the loss of plant and animal species. Each year 1,000 species disappear due to destruction of tropical rain forests for cattle grazing and other uses—driven by US demand. The rate is growing yearly.

3. The Cancer Argument

Those who eat flesh are far more likely to contract cancer than those following a vegetarian diet. The risk of contracting breast cancer is 3.8 times greater for women who eat meat daily compared to less than once a week; 2.8 times greater for women who eat eggs daily compared to once a week; and 3.25 greater for women who eat processed butter and cheese two to four times a week as compared to once a week. The risk of fatal ovarian cancer is three times greater for women who eat eggs three or more times a week as compared with less than once a week. The risk of fatal prostate cancer is 3.6 times greater for men who consume meat, eggs, processed cheese and milk daily as compared with sparingly or not at all.

4. The Cholesterol Argument

The average cholesterol consumption of a meat-centered diet is 210 milligrams per day. The chance of dying from heart disease if you are male and your blood cholesterol intake is 210 milligrams a day is greater than 50%.

It is strange but true that US physicians are as a rule ill-educated in the single most

important factor of health, namely diet and nutrition. As of 1987, of the 125 medical schools in the US, only 30 required their students to take a course in nutrition. The average nutrition training received by the average US physician during four years in school is only 2.5 hours. Thus doctors in the US are ill-equipped to advise their patients in minimizing foods, such as meat, that contain excessive amounts of cholesterol and are known causes of heart attack. Heart attack is the most common cause of death in the US, killing one person every 45 seconds. The male meat-eater's risk of



Carnivores: Humans, it is noted, do not have fangs or claws, like this powerful meat-eating tigress

death from heart attack is 50%. The risk to men who eat no meat is 15%. Reducing one's consumption of meat, processed dairy products and eggs by 10% reduces the risk of heart attack by 10%. Completely eliminating these products from one's diet reduces the risk of heart attack by 90%.

5. The Natural Resources Argument

The world's natural resources are being rapidly depleted as a result of meat-eating. Raising livestock for their meat is a very inefficient way of generating food. Pound

for pound, far more resources must be expended to produce meat than to produce grains, fruits and vegetables. For example, more than half of all water used for all purposes in the US is consumed in livestock production. The amount of water used in production of the average cow is sufficient to float a destroyer (a large naval ship). While 25 gallons of water are needed to produce a pound of wheat, 5,000 gallons are needed to produce a pound of California beef. That same 5,000 gallons of water can produce 200 pounds of wheat.

Thirty-three percent of all raw materi-

attempts to control this disease by feeding the animals huge quantities of antibiotics. Of all antibiotics used in the US, 55% are fed to livestock. But this is only partially effective because the bacteria that cause disease are rapidly becoming immune to the antibiotics. The percentage of staphylococci infections resistant to penicillin, for example, has grown from 13% in 1960 to 91% in 1988. These antibiotics and/or the bacteria they are intended to destroy reside in the meat that goes to market. The response of the European Economic Community to the routine feeding of antibiotics to US livestock was to ban the importation of US meat.

In February, 2001, Cornell University reported, “Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), also known as mad cow disease, has now been officially identified in a dozen European countries including the UK, France, Italy, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Portugal, Switzerland, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. As a result, beef sales have fallen by as much as 50% in parts of Europe.” It was the common practice of feeding cows ground-up sheep brains and parts infected with the related disease of scrapie which is believed to have started the mad cow epidemic.

7. The Pesticide Argument

Unknown to most meat-eaters, US-produced meat contains dangerously high quantities of deadly pesticides. The common belief is that the US Department of Agriculture protects consumers' health through regular and thorough meat inspection. In reality, fewer than one out of every 250,000 slaughtered animals is tested for toxic chemical residues. That these chemicals are indeed ingested by the meat-eater is proven by the following facts:

a. Ninety-nine percent of the milk of US meat-eating mothers, contains significant levels of DDT. In stark contrast, only 8% of US vegetarian mother's milk contains significant levels of DDT. This shows that the primary source of DDT is the meat ingested by the mothers.

b. The breast milk of meat-eating mothers has 35 times more chlorinated hydrocarbon pesticides than the milk of nonmeat-eating mothers.

c. The average breast-fed American infant contains nine times the permissible

level of the pesticide Dieldrin.

8. The Ethical Argument

Many of those who have adopted a vegetarian diet have done so because of the ethical argument, either from reading about or personally experiencing what goes on daily at any one of the thousands of slaughterhouses in the US and other countries, where animals suffer the cruel process of forced confinement, manipulation and violent death. Their pain and terror is beyond calculation. Most slaughterhouse workers are not on the job for long and have the highest turnover rate of all occupations. It also has the highest rate of on-the-job injury.

In the US alone, 1.14 million animals are killed for meat every hour. The average per capita consumption of meat in the US, Canada and Australia is 200 pounds per year! The average American consumes in a 72-year lifetime approximately eleven cattle, three lambs and sheep, 23 pigs, 45 turkeys, 1,100 chickens and 862 pounds of fish!

10. The Physiological Argument

The final and most compelling argument against meat-eating is that humans are physiologically not suited for a carnivorous diet. The book *Food for the Spirit, Vegetarianism in the World Religions*, summarizes this point of view as follows. “Many nutritionists, biologists and physiologists offer convincing evidence that humans are in fact not meant to eat flesh....” The book gives seven facts in support of this view:

1. Physiologically, people are more akin to plant-eaters, foragers and grazers, such as monkeys, elephants and cows, than to carnivora such as dogs, tigers and leopards.

2. For example, carnivora do not sweat through their skin; body heat is controlled by rapid breathing and extrusion of the tongue. Vegetarian animals, on the other hand, have sweat pores for heat control and the elimination of impurities.

3. Carnivora have long teeth and claws for holding and killing prey; vegetarian animals have short teeth and no claws.

4. The saliva of carnivora contains no ptyalin and cannot predigest starches; that of vegetarian animals contains ptyalin for the predigestion of starches.

5. Flesh-eating animals secrete large quantities of hydrochloric acid to help dissolve bones; vegetarian animals secrete little hydrochloric acid.

6. The jaws of carnivora only open in an up and down motion; those of vegetarian animals also move sideways for additional kinds of chewing.

7. Carnivora must lap liquids (like a cat); vegetarian animals take liquids in by suction through the teeth.

The Home Shrine

How and Why to Establish a Holy Room for Worship and Meditation

WHAT IS THE CENTER OF YOUR HOME? THE KITCHEN, the workshop, the living room, the den? The ancients designated a crucial part of the home as a sacred sanctuary, a fortress of purity to which dwellers could retreat before dawn each day, to commune with their higher nature and with God and the Gods. This center of spiritual force is called *devatarchanam*, the “place for honoring Divinity.” Sacred architecture places it in the northeast corner, the realm of Isana, where its potency naturally flourishes. Scriptures speak but little of this tradition, perhaps because its necessity is taken for granted. Nevertheless, the custom has lived on, and every prominent devout Hindu home has a holy shrine room, often opulent, sometimes austere, the domiciles’ most auspicious quadrant, reserved for religious pursuits, and like a miniature temple, radiating blessings constantly through the abode and out to the community.

Love and joy come to Hindu families who worship God in their home through the traditional ceremony known as *puja*, meaning adoration or worship. Through such rites and the divine energies invoked, each family makes the house a sanctuary, a refuge from the concerns and worries of the world. The center of that sanctuary, the site of *puja*, is the shrine, mystically tied to the temple to which they pilgrimage weekly. *Puja* is performed daily—usually in the early morning, but also in the afternoon or evening—generally by the head of the house. All members of the family attend. Rites can be as simple as lighting a lamp and offering a flower at the Lord’s holy feet, or they can be most elaborate and detailed, with myriad Sanskrit chants and offerings. The essential and indispensable part of

any *puja* is devotion. Without love and reverence in the heart, outer performance is of little value. But with true devotion even simple gestures become sacred ritual.

As in a temple, the images or icons of God and Gods are the focus of the shrine room. These are called *murti* in Sanskrit, worshiped and cared for as the physical body of the the Divine. Hindus do not worship these “idols” per se. They worship God and the Gods who by their infinite powers spiritually hover over and indwell the image. *Murtis* of the Gods are sanctified forms through which their love, power and blessings flood forth to bless the family. The God’s vibration and presence can be felt in the image, and the Divinity can use the images as a temporary physical-plane body or channel. Hindus believe and expect that the God is actually present and conscious in the *murti* during *puja*, aware of thoughts and feelings and even sensing the worshiper’s gentle touch on the metal or stone. The great Adi Shankaracharya, while espousing a strict monism, wrote, “Although Parabrahman is all pervading, to attain Him one should accept that He is ‘more’ present in one particular place, just as we see Vishnu in the Shaligrama, a small round stone.” The Vaishnava saint Ramanuja similarly stated, “Although the Lord is all pervading, using His omnipotent powers He appears before devotees to accept their devotion through an image.”

The Science of Ritual: *Puja* is a ceremony in which the ringing of bells, passing of flames, presenting of offerings and chanting of mantras invoke the *devas* and Gods, who then come to bless and help the devotees. *Puja* is holy communion, full of wonder and tender affections. Thus the home shrine is a place of tremendous

importance, made more and more sacred by the cumulative power of prayer. Daily *puja* is the axis of religious life, and the *puja* room is the heart of the home. Chanting the Vedas is the magic enlivener. In the words of Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati, “The *Veda* mantras being the root cause of creation, the mere chanting of *Veda* mantras would, by their vibrations, make the *Devas* appear in person.”

The home shrine is also the locus for private and group meditation, prayer, mantra recitation and devotional singing. Its sanctity is protected by never using it for other purposes. This space is meticulously cared for, kept immaculate and elaborately decorated to look like a small temple. It should be well-lit and free from drafts and household disturbances. The altar is generally close to the floor, since most

of the *puja* is performed while seated. But when there are small children in the home it is often higher, as to be out of their reach. Pictured in the large illustrations are “typical” altars (slightly larger than life) of the four major Hindu denominations: Saivism, Vaishnavism, Saktism and Smartism. In truth, Hinduism consists of ten thousand lineages and more, each with its unique traditions, and as many variations in home altars as well. Yet, there are many similarities.

At a Ganesha shrine, for example, an icon, or *murti*, of the elephant-headed God is placed at the center of the altar. A metal or stone image is considered best, but if not available there are two traditional alternatives: 1) a framed picture, preferably with a sheet of copper on the back, or 2) A *kumbha*, which is a symbol of Ganesha

Do Hindus Worship Idols?

FROM THE MOMENT THE VEDIC rites are completed and a statue or painting of the image manifests all His glory and grace, He accepts various devotions. He listens to prayers and woes. He is at once a confidante and giver of blessings. Thus, an image cannot be said to be merely a beautiful statue or doll, nor an excellent painting. The image is God.

Said Swami Vivekananda, “It has become a trite saying that idolatry is bad, and everyone swallows it at the present time without questioning. I once thought so, and to pay the penalty of that, I had to learn my lessons sitting at the feet of a man who realized everything from idols. I allude to Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Yet, idolatry is condemned. Why? Some hundreds of years ago, some man of Jewish blood happened to condemn it. He happened to condemn everybody else’s idols except his own. If God is represented in any beautiful form or any symbolic form,

said the Jew, it is awfully bad; it is sin. But if He is represented in the form of a chest with two angels sitting on either side, it is the holiest of holies. If God comes in the form of a dove, it is holy. But if He comes in the form of a cow, it is heathen superstition, condemn it...”

Over the centuries, in their condescending haste and missionary fervor to convert the rest of the world to the “One and only correct faith, and to commit the souls of the otherwise damned to God,” various religions have condemned image worship with fanatic zeal. This has led to a shallow refutation of image worship and a misinterpretation of the Hindu image worshiped. To complicate the issue, image worship is also frowned on by some pro-



So lifelike: Icon of Santoshi Ma, Orissa

fessing Hindus.

The question of image worship will be debated for years to come. Here it suffices to say that with the ancient Hindus image worship was not left to be treated as an ignorant and useless practice fit only for the ignorant and spiritually immature; even the greatest visited mandirs and worshiped images, and these thinkers did not do so blindly or unconsciously. A human necessity was recognized, the nature

of the necessity was understood, its psychology systematically analyzed, the various phases of image worship, mental and material, were defined. The modern Hindu follows in footsteps of his forebearers. Through the image, the eye is taught to see God, and not to seek God. The first lesson received at the sanctum is to be applied everywhere: see God in everything!

By SADHU SHANTIPRIYADAS,
BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha

A Saivite shrine: Husband offers arati (flame), wife rings the bell and son blows a conch before their altar to Siva Nataraja, Ardhanarishvara, Sivalinga, Ganesha and Muruga.



A Shakta shrine: In a large joint-family home, womenfolk clean and decorate the shrine room and prepare offerings to Kali Ma, the fierce image of the Goddess. Flower garlands are hung to create the feeling of a small temple.



made by placing a coconut on a brass pot of water with five mango leaves inserted between the coconut and the pot. The coconut is husked but the tuft of fibers at the top is not removed. Most shrines also honor a picture of the guru of the family lineage, either on the altar or adorning the walls.

Bathing the God's image is often a central part of puja. For this, special arrangements are established at the altar to catch the sacred water or milk as it pours off the icon. Most simply, the *murti* may be placed in a deep tray to catch the water. After the bath, the tray is removed and the *murti* dried off, then dressed and decorated. More elaborately, a drain is set up so the water flows into a pot at the side

of the altar. If devotees are in attendance, this blessed water is later served by the pujari (the person performing the ritual) who places a small spoonful in each devotee's right palm.

Holy Accoutrements: Puja implements for the shrine are kept on large metal trays. On these are arranged *ghee* lamps, bells, cups, spoons and pots to hold the various sacraments. Available from Indian shops, these are dedicated articles, never used for purposes other than puja. Their care, cleaning and polishing is considered a sacred duty. Usual items include: 1) water cups and a small spoon for offering water; 2) a brass vessel of unbroken, uncooked rice (usually mixed with turmeric powder), also for offering; 3) tray or basket of freshly

picked flowers (without stems) or loose flower petals; 4) a standing oil lamp, *dipastambha*, that remains lit throughout the puja; ideally kept lit all day; 5) a *dipa* (or lamp with cotton string wick) for waving light before the Deity; 6) a small metal bell, *ghanta*; 7) an incense burner and a few sticks of incense, *agarbhatti*; 8) sacraments of one's tradition, such as holy ash, *vibhuti*; sandalwood paste, *chandana*; and red powder, *kumkuma* (these are kept in polished brass or silver containers); 9) *naivedya*, an offering for the Deity of fresh fruit and-or a covered dish of freshly cooked food, such as rice (never tasted during preparation); 10) a camphor (*karpura*) burner for passing flame before the God at the height of puja; 11) brass or

silver pots for bathing the *murti*; 12) colorful clothing for dressing the *murti*; 13) flower garlands; 14) additional oil lamps to illumine and decorate the room; 15) a CD or tape player.

Purity: Before entering the shrine room, all attending the ceremony bathe and dress in fresh, clean clothes. It is a common practice to not partake of food at least an hour or more before puja. The best time for puja is before dawn. Each worshiper brings an offering of flowers or fruit (prepared before the bath). Traditionally, women during their monthly period refrain from attending puja, entering the home shrine or temple or approaching swamis or other holy men. Also during this time women do not help in puja preparation, such as picking flowers or making *prasada* for the Deity. Use of the home shrine is also restricted during periods of retreat that follow the birth or death of a family member.

Worshipful Icons: As seen in the main illustrations, the images enshrined on home altars vary according to lineage and denomination. All icons, however, are either anthropomorphic, meaning human in appearance; theriomorphic, having animal characteristics (for example, Lord Hanuman, the monkey God); or aniconic, meaning without representational likeness, such as the element fire, or the smooth Shaligrama stone, worshiped as Lord Vishnu. Other objects of enshrinement include divine emblems or artifacts, including weapons, such as Durga's sword; animal mounts, like Siva's bull; a full pot of water, indicating the presence of the Devi; the sun disk, representing Surya; the holy footprints or sandals of a God or saint; the standing oil lamp; the fire pit, mystic diagrams called *yantra*; water from holy rivers; and sacred plants, such as the tulsi tree. All these are honored as embodiments of the God or Goddess. The *Vedas* enjoin: "The Gods, led by the spirit, honor faith in their worship. Faith is composed of the heart's intention. Light comes through faith. Through faith men come to prayer, faith in the morning, faith at noon and at the setting of the sun. O Faith, give us faith!"

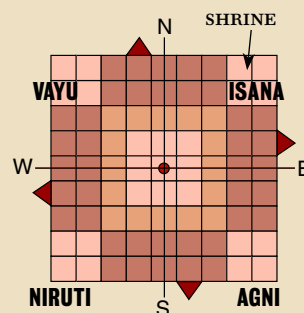
Harmonious Home Design According to Vastu

IN INDIAN ARCHITECTURE, THE DWELLING is itself a shrine. A home is called *manushyalaya*, literally, "human temple." It is not merely a shelter for human beings in which to rest and eat. The concept behind house design is the same as for temple design, so sacred and spiritual are the two spaces. The "open courtyard" system of house design was the national pattern in India before Western models were introduced. The order introduced into the "built space" accounts for the creation of spiritual ambience required for the indweller to enjoy spiritual well-being and material welfare and prosperity.

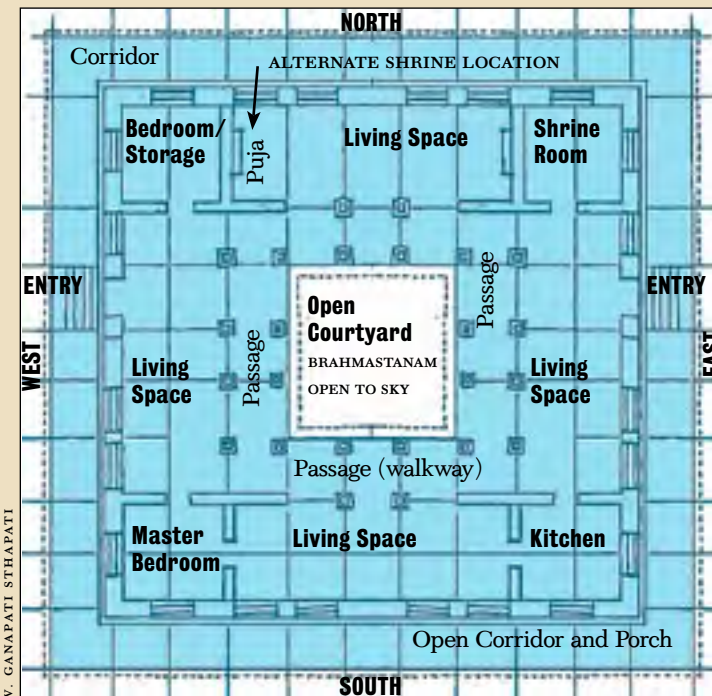
At right is a typical layout of a square building, with a grid of 9x9=81 squares, meant for family persons (for yogis, scientists and artists, a grid of 8x8=64 is prescribed). The space oc-

cupied by the central 3x3=9 squares is called Brahmathanam, meaning the "nuclear energy field." It should be kept unbuilt and open to the sky so as to have contact with the outer space (*akasha*). This central courtyard is likened to the lungs of the human body. It is not for living purposes. Religious and cultural events can be held here—such as yajna (fire ritual), music and dance performances and marriage.

The row of squares surrounding the Brahmathanam is the walkway. The corner spaces, occupying 2x2=4 squares, are rooms with specific purposes. The northeast quarter is called Isana, the southeast Agni, the southwest Niruthi and northwest Vayu. These are said to possess the qualities of four respective devatas or Gods—Isa, Agni, Niruthi and Vayu. Accordingly—with due respect to



House grid: With sloping roof and open courtyard



V. GANAPATI STHAPATI

The "built space:" The ideal position of each aspect of the home is enhanced by that place's inherent nature. This knowledge is given in the Vastu Shastras, a study of the dynamics of time and space, by Mayan, the architect and town planner of ancient India. About 60% of Indian homes still follow this paradisiacal design.

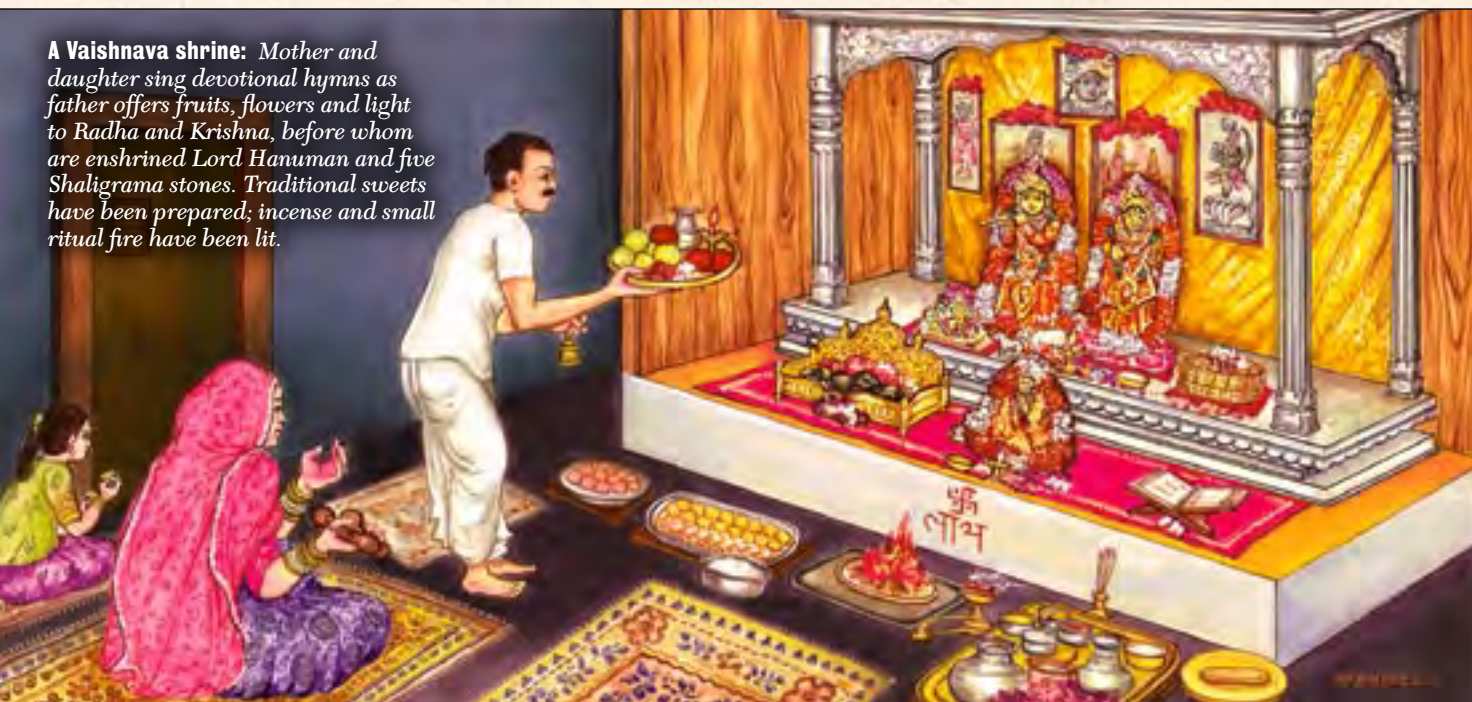
ecological friendliness with the subtle forces of the spirit—those spaces (quarters) are assigned as follows: northeast for the home shrine, southeast for the kitchen, southwest for master bedroom and northwest for the storage of grains. The spaces lying between the corner zones, measuring 2x5=10 squares, are those of the north, east, south and west. They are meant for multi purposes.

For home worship, *griha* puja, the Deity icon should be smaller in size than in a temple. The agreeable and generally recommended height of the standing image without pedestal is one's own fist (*mushti*) size, measured with the thumb raised.

By V. GANAPATI STHAPATI,
Master Architect, Chennai



A Vaishnava shrine: Mother and daughter sing devotional hymns as father offers fruits, flowers and light to Radha and Krishna, before whom are enshrined Lord Hanuman and five Shaligrama stones. Traditional sweets have been prepared; incense and small ritual fire have been lit.

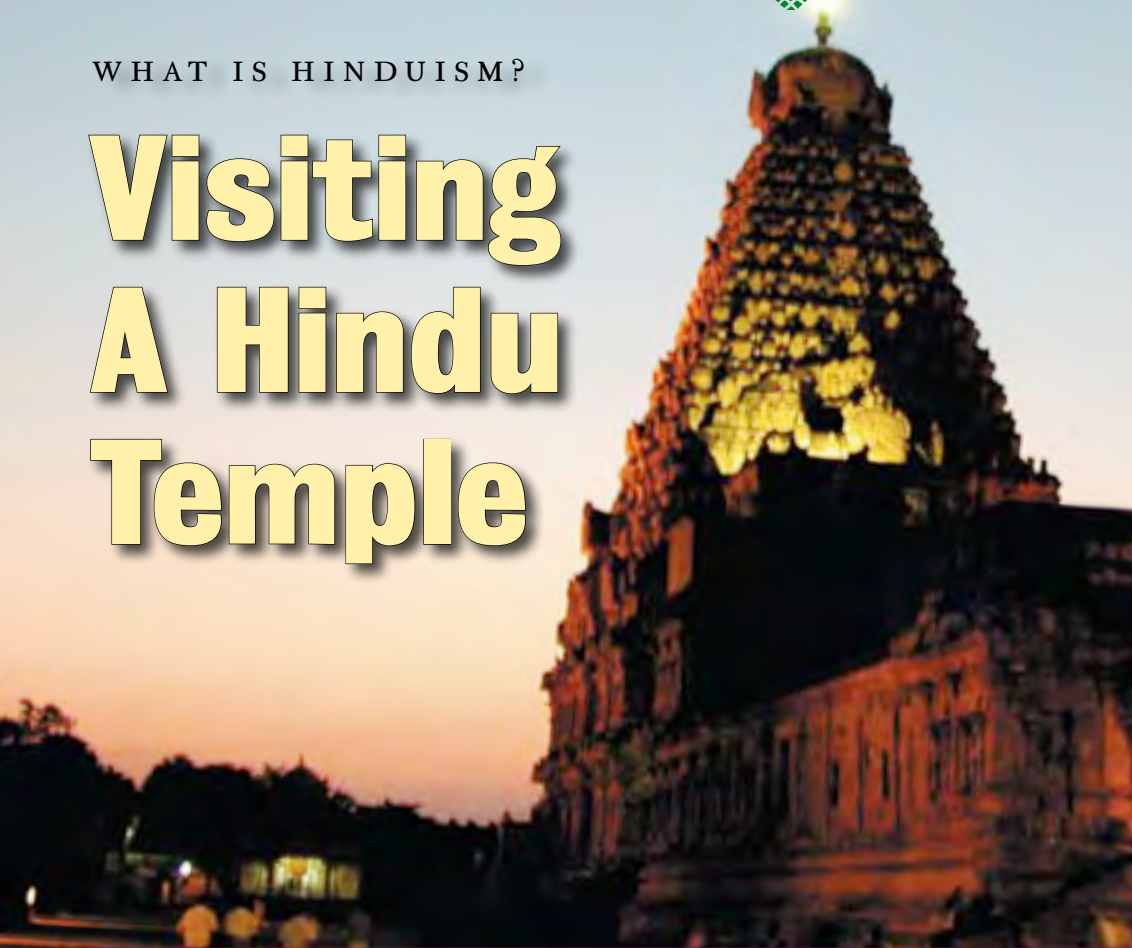


A Smarta shrine: A brahmin chants the Vedas as his father meditates after morning puja. Pictures honor all the major Deities of the Hindu pantheon. Ritual ablution has just been performed to five small Shaligrama stones (see inset) safely encased in an ornate chest; Sivalinga (center), Devi (clockwise from top), Vishnu, Sun and Ganesha.



WHAT IS HINDUISM?

Visiting A Hindu Temple



A guide to the inner and outer workings of Hindu places of worship

The Hindu temple is a sacred space where man and God commune. It is the home of God and the Gods. Within these sacred abodes, priests conduct puja rites—presenting flowers, water, incense, lights, food and other choice offerings—to honor God and the Gods and invoke their presence and blessings. In this Insight, we explore the experience of attending a temple, drawing from Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami's wisdom on the mysticism of Hindu worship. While basic customs described here are common to temples of all traditions, we focus mainly on the style of puja done in the temples of South India.

God and the Gods are real beings; they are not mere symbols or figments of imagination. If you could view the temple from the inner worlds, you would see a brilliant ray coming from the Third World right into the temple on the physical plane. This ray allows communication similar to a live video conference. The priest opens the connection by performing puja worship. When the puja is performed with loving devotion, the ray becomes strong and inner doors open from God's world to ours; the angelic helpers, called devas, hover around and through the temple, and blessings pour out to the devotees. A Hindu temple's devonic rays have the power to transform the course of karma, open inner doors to new opportunities, assuage long-held hurts and provide inner visions equaling the fullness of devotion.

Devotion in Hinduism is known as bhakti. It is an entire realm of knowledge and practice unto itself, ranging from the child-like wonder of the unknown and the mysterious to the deep reverence which comes with understanding of the esoteric interworkings of the three worlds.

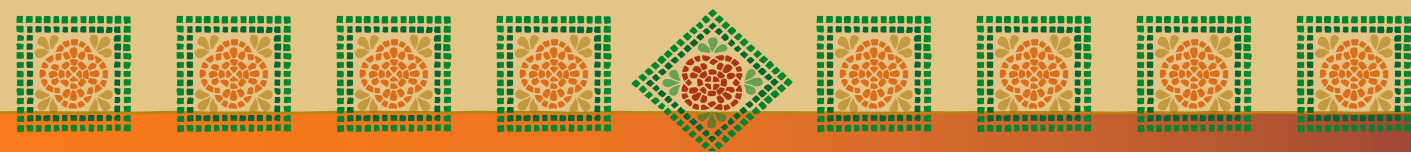
In the mural below, we depict the myriad goings-on in a large temple courtyard. Here is a key to the numbered activities.

1. A family worships at the temple entrance. Vendors sell garlands, incense, rosewater, coconuts and other traditional offering items.
2. A woman approaches with an offering tray.
3. A merchant at a stall watches after devotee's footwear for a small fee.
4. A husband and wife prostrate at the flag pole.
5. A father and son receive blessings from the elephant, who lightly touches their forehead with his trunk.
6. A devotee breaks a coconut near the Ganesha shrine while praying for a new job.
7. A man bathes and worships at the temple tank as an act of purification.
8. Led by musicians, the festival Deity is pulled around the temple in a special chariot.
9. A youth meditates in a quiet corner.
10. A child, held by his father, is having his ears pierced by a trained priest.
11. A family sings devotional hymns in praise of God and the Gods.
12. At the main shrine, a pujari offers the lighted oil lamp before the Sivalinga at the height of puja.
13. Hovering over the temple in the inner worlds, Lord Siva gives forth blessings.
14. A woman circumambulates the Siva shrine.
15. A girl joyfully rings the big temple bell.
16. Two boys listen as their teacher chants the *Vedas*.
17. A man gives coins to a group of sadhus.
18. After enjoying the morning at the temple, a family partakes of picnic lunch.
19. At the Murugan shrine, a woman beseeches the Deity for help with a difficult problem.





There are three worlds of existence: the gross plane where souls live in physical bodies; the subtle



plane, where souls reside in astral bodies; and the causal, divine plane of God and the Gods.

HINDUISM VIEWS EXISTENCE AS COMPOSED OF three worlds. The First World is the physical universe, the Second World is the subtle astral or mental plane of existence in which the devas, or angels, and spirits live, and the Third World is the spiritual sphere of the Mahadevas, the Deities, the Gods. Hinduism is the harmonious working together of these three worlds. Religion blossoms for the Hindu as he awakens to the existence of the Second and Third Worlds. These inner worlds naturally inspire in man responses of love and devotion and even awe. They are that wonderful.

Devotion in Hinduism occurs on many levels and at different cycles of time in the evolution of the soul. All forms of devotion are equally valid, and none claims itself as the only proper form of worship. There is devotion to the tribal Deities, to the scriptures, to the saints and to the *satguru*. But the most prevalent expression of worship for the Hindu comes as devotion to God and the Gods. In the Hindu pantheon there are said to be 330 million Gods. Even so, all Hindus believe in one Supreme Being who pervades the entire universe.

The many Gods are perceived as divine creations of that

one Being. These Gods, or Mahadevas, are real beings, capable of thought and feeling beyond the limited thought and feeling of embodied man. So, Hinduism has one God, but it has many Gods. There are only a few of these Gods for whom temples are built and pujas conducted. Ganesha, Siva, Subramaniam, Vishnu and Shakti are the most prominent Deities in contemporary Hinduism. Of course, there are many others for whom certain rites or mantras are done in daily ceremony, often in the home shrine. These include Brahma, Surya, Sarasvati, Lakshmi, Agni, Chandra, Ayyappan, Hanuman, Mariyamman and others.



Worship is pouring all your energy into one-pointedly adoring the God or Goddess...

The Hindu traditionally adopts an Ishta Devata. This is a personal Deity chosen from the many Hindu Gods, often according to the devotee's family background or the feeling of closeness to one form of divine manifestation. It is the unique and all-encompassing nature of Hinduism that one devotee may be worshiping Ganesha while his friend worships Subramaniam or Vishnu, and yet both honor the other's choice and feel no sense of conflict. The profound understanding and universal acceptance that are unique in Hinduism are reflected

in this faculty for accommodating different approaches to the Divine, allowing for different names and forms of God to be worshiped side by side within the temple walls. It may even happen that one may adopt a different personal Deity through the years according to one's spiritual unfoldment and inner needs.

The Hindu religion brings to us the gift of tolerance that allows for different stages of worship, different and personal expressions of devotion and even different Gods to guide our life on this Earth. Yet, it is a one religion under a single divine hierarchy that sees to the harmonious working together of the three worlds. These intelligent beings have evolved through

...feeling your loving sincerity, the Deity responds with life-changing blessings.

eons of time and are able to help mankind without themselves having to live in a physical body. These great Mahadevas, with their multitudes of angelic devas, live and work constantly and tirelessly for the people of our religion, protecting and guiding them, opening new doors and closing unused ones. The Gods worshiped by the Hindu abide in the Third World, aided by the devas that inhabit the Second World.

It is in the Hindu temple that the three worlds meet and devotees invoke the Gods of our religion. The temple is built as a palace in which the Gods reside. It is the visible home of the Gods, a

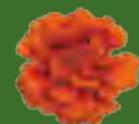
sacred place unlike every other place on the Earth. The Hindu must associate himself with these Gods in a very sensitive way when he approaches the temple.

Though the devotee rarely has the psychic vision of the Deity, he is aware of the God's divine presence. He is aware through feeling, through sensing the divine presence within the temple.

As he approaches the sanctum sanctorum, the Hindu is fully aware that an intelligent being, greater and more evolved than himself, is there. This God is intently aware of him, safeguarding him, fully knowing his inmost thought, fully capable of coping with any situation the devotee may mentally lay at His holy feet. It is important that we approach the Deity in this way—conscious and confident that our needs are known in the inner spiritual worlds.

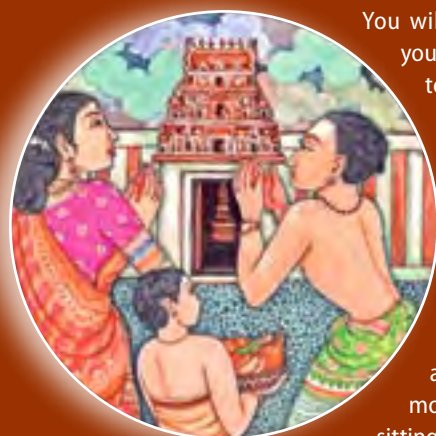
The physical representation of the God, be it a stone or metal image, a yantra or other sacred form, simply marks the place that the God will manifest in or hover above in His etheric body. It can be conceived as an antenna to receive the divine rays of the God

or as the material body in or through which the God manifests in this First World. Man takes one body and then another in his progression through the cycles of birth and death and rebirth. Similarly, the Gods in their subtle bodies inhabit, for brief or protracted spans of time, these temple images. When we perform puja, a religious ritual, we are attracting the attention of the



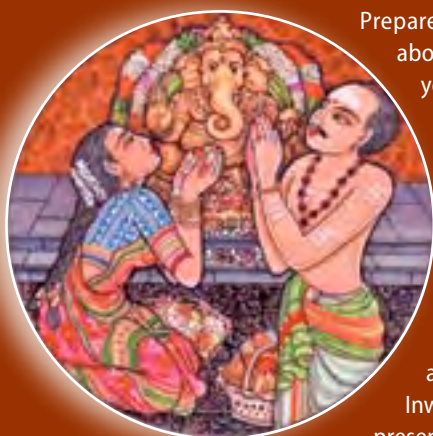
Approaching the Temple

Look and Feel Your Best



You will want to look and feel your best when you go to the temple, God's home. Prepare yourself by bathing and putting on clean clothing. Traditional dress is best—saris or *punjabis* for ladies, long dresses for girls, and *kurta* shirt and *dhoti* or pants for men and boys. But any nice, modest clothing suitable for sitting on the floor is acceptable.

Prepare Mentally; Bring a Gift



Prepare your mind by thinking about God in anticipation of your visit. Bring an offering, such as fruits and flowers. Prostrate and walk around the temple where possible. Hands pressed together in namaskara, greet the Deities at their shrines, starting with Ganesha, and present your offerings. Inwardly feel God's uplifting presence, called *sannidhya*.

Prostrate to the Deity



Prostrating is a traditional expression of worshipful surrender and adoration. The form of prostration differs for men and women. Men perform a fully prone pose, called *ashtanga pranama*, in which hands, chest, forehead, knees and feet touch the ground. Women perform a kneeling pose, *panchanga pranama*, in which hands, head and legs touch the ground.

Worship Wholeheartedly



Ardent worship takes many forms in a temple. You can be immersed in the joys of devotion, in prayerful communion, seeking solace for a loss, singing hymns, chanting mantras or celebrating a rite of passage. Meditation is appropriate, especially after the puja, and emotion is not out of place. God will receive your devotion, however you offer it.

TEMPLE MANNERS: Remove your shoes before entering. Be respectful of God and the Gods at all times, as if approaching the benevolent leader of a great realm. Bring your problems,

wishes or your sorrows but leave improper manners outside as you enter this holy sanctuary. Do not enter the shrines without invitation. Do not sit with your feet pointing toward the

Deities, the guru or another person. Hugging and other demonstrations of affection between adults are not appropriate. Refrain from gossip and worldly talk. Treat the priests with respect.

Religion is the harmonious working together of the three worlds. This harmony can be

devas and Mahadevas in the inner worlds. That is the purpose of a puja; it is a form of communication. To enhance this communication, we establish an altar in the temple and in the home. This becomes charged or magnetized through our devotional thoughts and feelings, which radiate out and affect the surrounding environment.

Chanting and satsanga and ceremonial rituals all contribute to this sanctifying process, creating an atmosphere to which the Gods are drawn and in which they can manifest. By the word *manifest*, I mean they actually come and dwell there and can stay for periods of time, providing the vibration is kept pure and undisturbed. The altar takes on a certain power. In our religion there are altars in temples all over the world inhabited by the devas and the great Gods. When you enter these holy places, you can sense their sanctity. You can feel the presence of these divine beings, and this radiation from them is known as darshan. The reality of the Mahadevas and their darshan can be experienced by the devotee through his awakened *ajna* vision, or more often as the physical sight of the image in the sanctum coupled with the inner knowing that He is there within the microcosm. This darshan can be felt by all devotees, becoming stronger and more defined

as devotion is perfected. Through this darshan, messages can be channeled along the vibratory emanations that radiate out from the Mahadevas, as well as from their representatives, the Second World devas who carry out their work for them in shrines and altars.

To understand darshan, consider the everyday and yet subtle communication of language. You are hearing the tones of my voice through the sensitive organ, your ear. Meaning comes into your mind, for you have been trained to translate these vibrations into meaning through the knowing of the language that I am speaking. Darshan is a vibration, too.



You can go into the temple with problems and lay them at the feet of the Deity,

It is first experienced in the simple physical glimpse of the form of the Deity in the sanctum. Later, that physical sight gives way to a clairvoyant vision or to a refined cognition received through the sensitive ganglia within your nerve system, the chakras. Through these receptors, a subtle message is received, often not consciously. Perhaps not immediately, but the message that the darshan carries, direct from the Mahadeva—direct from Lord Ganesha, direct from Lord Murugan,

created through temple worship, wherein the beings of all three worlds can communicate.

direct from Lord Siva Himself—manifests in your life. This is the way the Gods converse. It is a communication more real than the communication of language that you experience each day. It is not necessary to understand the communication immediately. The devotee may go away from the temple outwardly feeling that there was no particular message, or not knowing in his intellectual mind exactly what the darshan meant. Even the words you are now reading may not be fully cognized for days, weeks or even months. The depth of meaning will unfold itself on reflection.

Visiting a Hindu temple, receiving darshan from the majestic Gods of our religion, can al-

...and later leave feeling uplifted, hardly remembering what was bothering you.

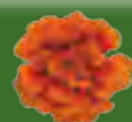
together change the life of a worshiper. It alters the flow of the pranas, or life currents, within his body. It draws his awareness into the deeper chakras. It adjusts his beliefs and the attitudes that are the natural consequence of those beliefs. But the change is slow. He lives with the experience for months and months after his visit to the temple. He comes to know and love the Deity. The Deity comes to know and love him, helping and guiding his entire evolutionary pattern. Darshan coming from the great temples of our Gods can change the patterns



of karma dating back many past lives, clearing and clarifying conditions that were created hundreds of years ago and are but seeds now, waiting to manifest in the future. Through the grace of the Gods, those seeds can be removed if the manifestation in the future would not enhance the evolution of the soul.

Devotees ask, "Why do we circumambulate the temple?" When we come to the temple out of the world, off the street, we are often shrouded by negative vibrations, which can actually be seen in our aura. Our nerve system may be upset, especially now, in the technological age, when we often suffer from stress and strain, the insecurity of so many changes and the rapid pace of life. In order to prepare ourselves to enter the sanctum sanctorum of the temple, the great *mandapam* inside, we walk clockwise around the temple very slowly. In this way we prepare our mind. We consciously drop off worldliness, letting the sufferings go, letting all disturbances leave our mind the best we can, and trying to reach deep inside of ourselves where peace exists eternally. We become as celestial as we can during the time we are walking around the temple, so that we can communicate with the celestial beings within the temple.

In a Hindu temple there is often a multiplicity of simultaneous proceedings and ceremonies. In one corner, an extended family,



Attending the Puja Ceremony

Conducted by a trained priest called a pujari, a Hindu worship service or puja, literally "adoration," is similar to a grand reception for a king. Pujas can last from ten minutes to several hours, but all follow one basic pattern. First, the pujari purifies himself, the sacred implements and the place of worship. He chants in Sanskrit the time, place and nature of this particular puja. Through hand gestures (mudras) and

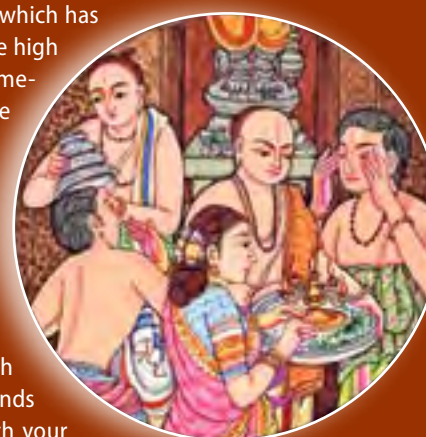


cious substances to the Deity, including water, uncooked rice with turmeric powder, holy ash, sandalwood paste and kumkum. Sometimes water, sesame oil, turmeric water, saffron, milk, yogurt, ghee, honey, lime juice, *vibhuti*, sandalwood paste, *panchamritam* (mixture of five fruits), coconut water and rose-water are poured over the Deity in a ritual bath called *abhishekam*. Devotees are

seated during most of the puja, in some traditions, men on the right and women on the left. After *abhishekam*, the Deity is dressed in new clothes and beautifully decorated with

flowers. At this point, devotees may sing devotional songs. After decorating the Deity, the pujari offers incense, oil lamps and food. He offers flowers while chanting 108 names of the God. At the high point of the puja, a large, sacred lamp is waved before the Deity and the temple bells are rung loudly as God sends His power through the holy image of Himself. When the lamp is lowered, everyone prostrates to the Divine. The lamp is then carried out to bless the worshipers, who often leave a donation on the tray (or later in the temple offering box). Finally, depending on the tradition, sacraments such as holy ash, holy water, sandalwood paste, kumkum, fruit, sweets and flowers are passed out to bless all present. These include a portion of the offerings—flowers, cooked food and more—brought by devotees. Devotees may then sit in meditation, basking in the blessings invoked by the puja.

The sacramental lamp which has just been offered at the high point of the puja is sometimes passed among the devotees. The devas can see and bless you through this flame as it lights up your face. Sometimes you, too, can glimpse into their world. When the priest comes to you with the lamp, hold your hands a few inches apart with your palms down. Reach out and pass



both hands devoutly over the flame. Then bring your hands back, turn your palms toward your face and touch your eyes with your fingertips to receive the Deity's blessings. At Lord Vishnu's shrine, the priest may bring out the silver or gold crown of the Deity and lightly touch it to the head of each devotee as a personal blessing.

Partaking of the Sacred Flame

Receiving Holy Ash & Water

A sacrament offered in many temples is holy ash, *vibhuti*, by burning dried cow dung cakes with ghee, flowers, yogurt and other ingredients. It symbolizes the purity we attain by burning the bonds of ego, karma and maya to reveal the soul's natural goodness. The priest will put a pinch of ash into your right palm. (Accept all offerings with your right hand.) Transfer the *vibhuti* into your left palm, then apply it to your forehead using your right hand, generally three broad stripes for men, one short stroke for ladies. Next, a small spoonful of holy water, or *tirtham*, is placed into your cupped right hand, which you then sip, afterwards touching the right palm to the crown of your head.

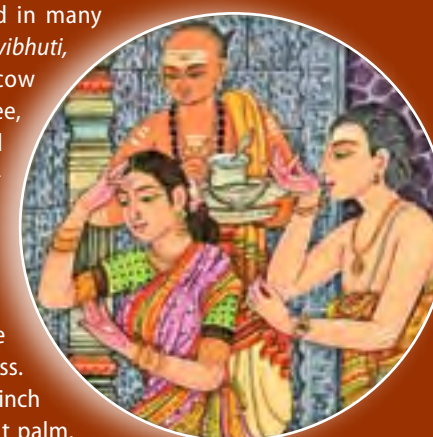




PHOTO BY
THOMAS
KELLY

Pray first to Ganesha. When in the temple, take every opportunity to serve in simple ways, sweeping the floor, polishing the brass, making flower garlands.

or clan, with its hundreds of tightly knit members, may be joyously celebrating a wedding. At another shrine a lady might be crying in front of the Deity, saddened by some misfortune and in need of solace. Elsewhere in the crowded precincts a baby is being blessed, and several groups of temple musicians are filling the chamber with the shrill sounds of the *nagasvaram* and drum. After the puja reaches its zenith, brahmin priests move in and out of the sanctum, passing camphor and sacred ash and holy water to hundreds of worshipers crowding eagerly to get a glimpse of the Deity. All of this is happening at once, unplanned and yet totally organized. It is a wonderful experience, and such a diverse array of devotional ceremonies and such an intensity of worship can only be seen in a Hindu temple. There is no place on Earth quite like a Hindu temple.

Esoterically, the Gods in the temple, who live in the microcosm, can work extraordinarily fast with everyone. There is so much going on that everyone has the sense of being alone. The weeping woman is allowed her moment of mourning. No one feels that she is upsetting the nearby wedding. No one even notices her. The temple is so active, so filled with people, that each one is left to worship as he needs that day—to cry or to laugh or to sing or to sit in silent contemplation in a far-off corner.

Like the Hindu religion itself, the Hindu temple is able to absorb and encompass everyone. It never says you must worship in this way, or you must be silent because there is a ceremony in progress. It accepts all, rejects none. It encourages all to come to God and does not legislate a single form of devotion.

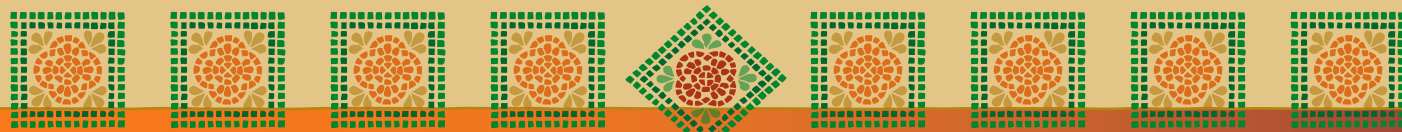
Hindus always want to live near a temple so they can frequent it regularly. When we go to the temple, we leave with our mind filled with the *shakti* of the Deity. We are filled and thrilled with the *shakti* of the temple in every nerve current of our body. When we return to our home, we light an oil lamp, and that brings the power of the temple into the home. This



It is from worship in the temple that the culture arises—refined living, selfless giving,

simple act brings the devas in the Second World right into your home, where they can bless the rest of the family who perhaps did not go to the temple. Each Hindu temple throughout the world has its own rules on how to proceed and what to do within it. In some temples, in fact most temples in South India, all the men are required to take off their shirts and enter bare-chested. However, if you are in a business suit in the South Indian temple in New York, that's all right. You are not required to take off your shirt. Every temple has its own rules, so you have to observe what everybody else is doing the first time you go.

In the beginning stages of worship, a Hindu soul may have to



During the puja, focus on the acts of worship, rather than letting your mind wander. Learn the inner meaning of what the priest is doing and follow along.

wrestle with disbelief in the Gods. He may wonder whether they really exist, especially if his own intuition is obscured by assimilation of Western, existentialist beliefs and attitudes. Yet, he senses their existence, and this sensing brings him back to the temple. He is looking for proof, immersed in the process of coming to know the Gods for himself. He is heartened and assured by hundreds of saints and rishis who have fathomed and found close and enduring relationships with the Gods, and who then extolled their greatness in pages of scripture and chronicle.

The devotee stands before the sanctum and telepathically tells the Gods a problem, and

harmony, integrity, music, art, drama, dance and other aspects of spiritual conduct.

with hopeful faith leaves and waits. Days or weeks later, after he had forgotten about his prayer, he suddenly realizes the problem has disappeared. He attempts to trace the source of its solution and finds that a simple, favorable play of circumstance and events brought it about. Had the Gods answered his prayer, or would it have happened anyway? He brings another prayer to the Gods, and again in time an answer appears in the natural course of his life. It appears to him that the Gods are hearing and responding to his needs. Trust and love have taken root. He goes on, year after year, bringing the Gods into his secular affairs, while

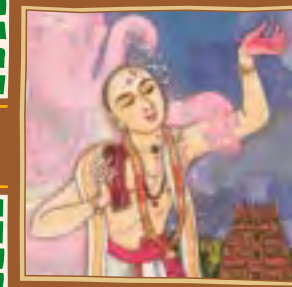
just as carefully the Gods are bringing him into their celestial spheres, enlivening his soul with energy, joy and intelligence.

The Hindu looks to the Gods for very practical assistance. He devoutly believes that the Gods from their dwelling in the Third World are capable of consciously working with the forces of evolution in the universe and they could then certainly manage a few simpler problems. He devoutly believes

that the Gods are given to care for man on the planet and see him through his tenure on Earth, and that their decisions are vast in their implications. Their overview spans time itself, and yet their detailed focus upon the complicated fabric of human affairs is just as awesome.

The Gods of Hinduism create, preserve and protect mankind. It is through their sanction that all things continue, and through their will that they cease. It is through their grace that all good things happen, and all things that happen are for the good. Now, you may wonder why one would put himself under this divine

authority so willingly, thus losing his semblance of freedom. But does one not willingly put himself in total harmony with those whom he loves? Of course he does. And loving these great souls comes so naturally. Their timeless wisdom, their vast intelligence, their thoroughly benign natures, their ceaseless concern for the problems and well-being of devotees, and their power and sheer godly brilliance—all these inspire our love.



Accepting Other Sacraments

Chandanam, or sandalwood paste, is a traditional precious substance, valued for its wonderful scent. A small dab is placed in your hand by the priest, which you transfer to your left palm with a wiping motion. Dip your right-hand ring finger into the paste and apply it with a small circular motion between the eyebrows. Kumkum, a red powder, is next. The priest will either place a small pinch in your right hand or invite you to take some from the container which he holds for you. Apply the kumkum on top of the sandalwood, creating a dot, *bindi*, which represents the third eye of spiritual seeing.



The bhakti of uncompromising surrender, *prapatti*, to the God during a temple puja awakens the amrita. The amrita is the sweet essence from the *sahasrara* chakra. It is the binding yoke to the Divine. Sit down in the lotus posture after the puja and internalize all the feeling that you had for the God during the worship. Draw into yourself the *pranas* you feel around your

body. Then draw those energies up the spine into the head. This is done with the mind and with the breath. Devotees who want to awaken the higher chakras and sustain that awakening on the safe path will throw themselves into becoming uncompromising bhaktars.



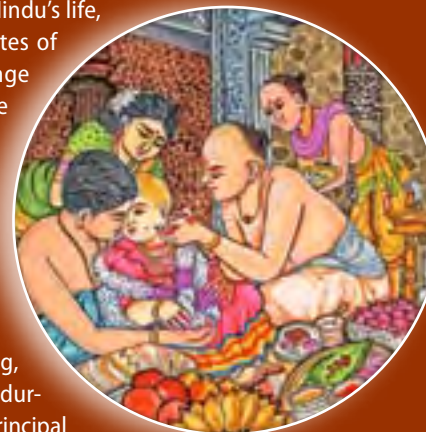
Invoking Special Blessings

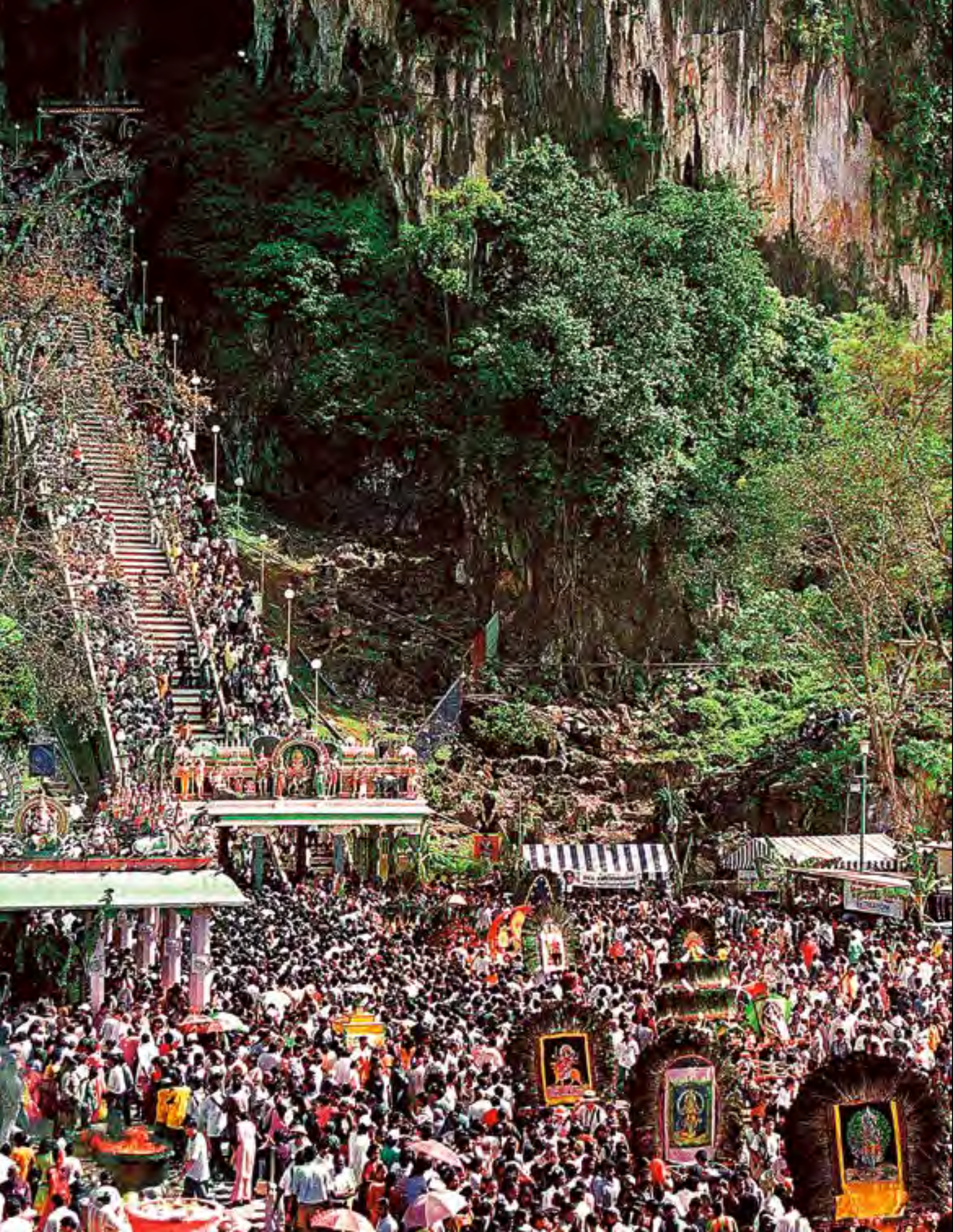
An *archana* is a short puja for an individual, usually done after the main puja. It is a way of asking God for something specific, such as success in school or business, or to express thanks for good fortune. Inform the priest that you want an *archana*. You should bring fruit and flowers, as well as the *archana* fee, on an offering tray, which can also have a coconut, incense, kumkum, camphor and sandalwood paste. As you stand before the shrine, the priest will ask your name, *gotra* (family lineage), and *nakshatra* (birthstar). During the *archana*, pray for your special needs. Afterwards the priest will return part of your blessed offerings to take home.



Celebrating Rites of Passage

A central part of every Hindu's life, *samskaras* are sacred rites of passage. You can arrange for a *samskara* with the temple priest. There is a charge for these rites, which usually include a puja and *homa*, or fire ceremony. The priest will set an auspicious time, explain how to prepare and what to bring, as well as what you do during the ceremony. The principal *samskaras* held in temples, homes or halls are: name-giving (11 to 41 days old for a child, or anytime for an adult entering Hinduism); first solid food (6 months old); ear-piercing (1, 3 or 5 years old); head shaving (1 to 4 years old); first learning (4 years old); initiation into Vedic study (9 to 15 years old); marriage and funeral.





WHAT IS HINDUISM?

Holy Festivals

Insights into the Annual Celebrations Hindus Enjoy the World Over

WHEN IT COMES TO HINDU FESTIVALS, NEPAL EXCELLS. THEY CELEBRATE 19 PER YEAR ON their official calendar, three of them exclusively for women. India, by contrast, sets aside just two Hindu days a year on its national calendar—Navaratri and Diwali. But whatever official calendars say, Hindus miss no opportunity to set mundane matters aside and join with friends, neighbors and strangers alike in invocation of the One Supreme God and the many Gods, in honor of the guru or in celebration of the passing of the seasons. These are times when all three worlds—of men, of devas and of Gods—come close and commune with each other. While anthropologists generally assign mere social significance in our cycles of festivals, the devout Hindu knows these are times of profound mystical connection to the inner worlds, times when God and the Gods touch our world, revitalize our very souls, lighten our karmas and bless our families. In this chapter we present the nine most popular Hindu festivals.

In celebration: (left) one million Hindus gather at Batu Caves, Malaysia, to celebrate Thai Pusam in honor of Lord Murugan; (below) family and neighbors in North India join in kirtan, ecstatic religious singing, for Janmashtami, the birthday of Lord Krishna



LEFT, SHAMSHAHIN SHAMSUDIN

DINODIA/SHAMA M. KETKAR

The nine festivals described here are celebrated India-wide—or rather, worldwide, wherever Hindus live. There are also many regional festivals, some of which are locally celebrated on an even grander scale than some of these nine.

Ram Navami

Lord Rama, the seventh incarnation of Vishnu, was born on *navami*, the ninth lunar day, or *tithi*, of the bright half of Meena, or Pisces (Chaitra—the lunar month of March/April). Devotees observe this day with non-stop recitation of the *Ramayana*, the story of Rama's life. In the evening, crowds attend Ramalila, dramatic performances recounting Rama's deeds. Every home will resound with devotional singing. This festival is especially popular in Uttar Pradesh, where Rama's ancient kingdom of Ayodhya was situated. Sometimes Ramalila and other devotional observances are done during the nine days before or after *navami*. People will keep fasts or eat only fruit or a special *prasadam* prepared for the day. If celebrated for nine

Of brothers and Gods: (below) women toss colored powders in the air at each other in celebration of Holi; (right top) A sister ties the *rakhi* around her brother's wrist; (right below) a huge crowd escorts Lord Ganesha to the ocean in Mumbai on Ganesha Chaturthi



DINODIA/R.P. VALIA



(LEFT) DESHAKALYAN CHOWDHURY (RIGHT) DINODIA/LAL BAUG



days, it is common to remain awake the whole ninth night, engaged in devotional practices. Devotees also contribute generously to temples and other charitable organizations on Ram Navami. Lord Rama is honored not only as an incarnation of God, but also as an ideal man who exemplified the virtues of reverence, obedience and duty.

Raksha Bandhan

On the full moon of Karkata, or Cancer (Shravana—July/August), sisters tie a *rakhi* around the wrist of their brothers, who in return give a present of clothing, cash or jewelry and become obligated for the safety of the sister. The *rakhi* can also be given to anyone chosen as an “adopted brother,” even outside the Hindu community. It signifies that she is praying for his welfare and that he is determined to give protection to her. Originally the *rakhi* was a handspun cotton thread dyed yellow with turmeric, but now many colors and materials are used. Three knots are made in the thread to signify protection in thought, word and deed. This day is also celebrated as Narali Purnima, “coconut full moon,” when coconuts are offered to Varuna, God of the Sea, by throwing them into the ocean. It is also called Avani Avittam, the ceremony of changing of the sacred thread among the brahmins. This tradition dates back to Vedic times when the year's studies were commenced on this day.

Ganesha Chaturthi

The fourth lunar day of the bright half of Simha, or Leo (Bhadra—August/September), is celebrated around the world as the birthday of Ganesha, the elephant-headed God of Wisdom and Lord of Obstacles. As with other festivals, the homes and temples are elaborately decorated for the day. The special activity is the making of clay images of Ganesha, reverently formed and decorated. Some are huge works of art created by craftsmen, others are tiny icons painted and decorated by children. At the end of the day, or seven or ten days later, these images are ceremoniously immersed in the ocean or a nearby stream or lake, signifying the creation of Ganesha from the Earth and His return and dissolution in the ocean of universal consciousness. So intense has been His presence at this time that even grown men weep at His auspicious departure. His worship on this day removes obstacles and ensures smooth progress in all ventures through the year. As Ganesha is common to all Hindu sects, this festival is serving both inside and outside of India as a day to celebrate Hindu solidarity and unity.

Diwali

The festival of lights, Diwali or Dipavali in Sanskrit, takes place on the fourteenth lunar day of the dark half of Tula, or Libra (Karttika—October/November), with related festivities on adjacent days. It is the most widely celebrated Hindu festival in the world, and possibly related to the European Celtic festival of Samhain, observed at the same time of the year with huge bonfires set on hilltops. This is the day that Rama returned to Ayodhya after spending 14 years in exile, though many other reasons for the day are cited. It is a celebration of renewal as the New Year commences in the Vikram calendar. Everyone takes a special bath in the early morning and puts on new clothes. Houses are cleaned, painted and decorated. Goddess Lakshmi is invoked for prosperity, and Her presence is felt in every home. Businesses close out their books for the past year and open new ones, even conducting a mock first business deal of the year. In the evening, every house, store, temple and wall is decorated with thousands of small lamps, while fireworks are set off overhead and firecrackers by the hundreds of thousands below. Family bonds are renewed, especially between brothers and sisters, and forgiveness is requested from friends for any misunderstandings during the previous year. Of all festivals, Diwali holds a special place, and is the premier international one, holding official holiday status in nine countries—India, Nepal, Fiji, Mauritius, Guyana, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Singapore, with attempts being made to add more countries where Hindus live.

Holi

Bonfires and the splashing of friends and strangers alike with brightly colored waters, powders and paints mark this most high-spirited of Hindu festivals. It is celebrated on the full moon day of Kumbha, or Aquarius (Phalguna—February/March), and in many places for the several days preceding. Giant bonfires are built by neighborhood boys, where effigies of various demons are consumed. Friends are visited and presents of sweets exchanged. This is essentially a celebration of spring, at which different events are commemorated. This is the day the infant Krishna killed the demoness Putana; the day that Lord Vishnu's devotee Pralada, son of the demon Hiran-yakasipu, survived a fire intended to kill him, and the day that Siva burnt Kama, the God of Love, to ashes. Holi is very popular among devotees of Krishna at Mathura, Krishna's birthplace. Also known as Hutasani, "fire consuming," Holi signifies the triumph of good over evil, the beginning of the new agricultural season and the renewal of relationships.

Guru Purnima

In ashrams around the world, the spiritual preceptor is honored on this full moon day of July with garlands, gifts and donations to show love and gratitude for his wisdom through the year. Devotees renew their commitment to following his teachings and guidance for the coming year. The traditional worship is *pada puja*, ceremonial bathing of the guru's feet (or, in his absence, his sandals) with water, milk, honey, sandalwood paste and offering gifts of precious items including 108 gold coins. This day is also known as Vyasa Puja, in honor of Sage Vyasa, codifier of the *Vedas* and author of the *Mahabharata* and *Puranas*. He is honored in temples with offerings of limes and rice, the latter being taken home by devotees and mixed with their own store of rice. This is also a day for reading religious books while remembering the auspicious form of the *satguru* through whom God grants the grace of enlightenment to seekers.

Krishna Janmashtami

Lord Krishna, eighth incarnation of Vishnu, was born on the eighth lunar day (*ashtami*) of the dark half of Karkata, or Cancer (Sravana—July/August). Devotees fast the preceding day until midnight, the time that Krishna was born to Vasudeva and Devika in the Mathura kingdom's prison 5,000 years ago. At midnight, amidst grand ceremony the temple priest places the image of the newborn Krishna in a swinging crib. Among the traditional observances, pots of sweets, curd and butter are hung near homes, on trees and street poles in recollection of Krishna's love for these things. Teenage boys dressed as cowherds form human pyramids to reach and break the pots. The following day is again one of festivity, including puja, storytelling and the Ras Leela, a folk theater depicting major events of Krishna's life. "Dark as a rain cloud," reads one account of His birth, "He made the prison glow with the splendor of His crown, His jewelry and His yellow silk robes. He was the Lord God incarnate."

Navaratri

The festival of "Nine Nights," Navaratri, honoring the Goddess, begins on the first lunar day of the bright half of Kanya, or Virgo (Asvina—September/October). Three days are devoted each to Durga (Goddess of valor), Lakshmi (Goddess of wealth) and Saraswati (Goddess of knowledge). In eastern India the festival is known as Durga Puja. There, images of the Goddess are created, worshiped

God, Gods and guru: (above) priest offers holy ash to the guru's sacred sandals on Guru Purnima; (below) North Indian devotees crowd about a Sivalinga to offer milk and garlands during Mahasivaratri; (far right) a pyramid of daring youth attempt to knock a pot strung high above the street in this competition held in imitation of the child Lord Krishna's stealing butter



HINDUISM TODAY



AFP/T. C. MALHOTRA



for ten days, then immersed in the sea. In southern India, houses are decorated with displays of dolls, toys and images of the Gods. In western India, the traditional *garbha* dance is performed nightly. On the fifth day (Lalita Panchami), all books of a household are gathered, sacred lamps lit reverently by their side and the blessings of Saraswati invoked. Artisans give their tools a "day of rest," worship and seek blessings for them. Day ten, variously known as Vijaya Dasami, Dasara and Dussehra, marks the commencement of learning. In many localities huge effigies of Ravana are burnt to celebrate Rama's conquest of the demon.

Mahasivaratri

On "Siva's Great Night," Mahasivaratri, the fourteenth day of the dark half of Kumbha, or Aquarius (Phalguna—February/March), devotees fast all day in preparation to worship Lord Siva from evening until early dawn—bathing the sacred Siva Linga with water, milk, honey and saffron water, then offering bilva leaves while chanting *Sri Rudram*, the pre-eminent Vedic hymn to Siva, or reciting His 1,008 names are the highpoints of the all-night vigil. Only when the last puja is finished in early morning do devotees break their fast by eating the sacred *prasadam* offered earlier to the Lord. The following day is one of feasting and gaiety, especially at grand fairs held in many parts of India. On Siva's night we contemplate Siva as the Unmanifest Reality. We dive deep in yogic meditation on His endless/beginningless Radiance.

Setting Festival Dates

Most festivals are held on astrologically auspicious times for a particular deity in the same zodiac sign of the Sun each year. Ram Navami, for example, takes place in the sign of Meena or Pisces, which corresponds to the north Indian month of Chaitra or the Tamil month of Panguni. Each festival day is designated on a particular lunar day, or *tithi*, during a particular sign. There are 30 *tithis* from new moon to new moon. The month's "bright half" (*shukla paksha*) starts from the new moon (*amavasya*) to the full moon (*purnima*) and the "dark half" (*krishna paksha*) from the full moon to the new moon. Because the cycle of the Moon around the Earth (about 29.5 days) and the Sun through one zodiac sign (about 30.4 days) do not match, the month may begin on varying *tithis*. *Tithis* also vary in length from 20 to 26 hours, because of the Moon's orbit in relation to the sun. When a *tithi* occurs twice in one month, the second is chosen for the festival. Because a *tithi* is not the same as a 24-hour day and the calculations depend on location, one must consult a Hindu calendar (*panchanga*) computed for a particular place to determine a festival date. One cannot simply go by the dates for India. Some festivals are calculated using the *nakshatra* system. There are many regional variations in calendars and hence even dissent on festival calculations.

DINODIA

The Chakras

Exploring the 14 mystical force centers that govern awareness

There are fourteen great nerve centers in the physical body, in the astral body and in the body of the soul. These centers are called chakras in Sanskrit, which means “wheel.” These spinning vortices of energy are actually regions of mind power, each one governing certain aspects of our inner being, and together they are the subtle components of people. When inwardly perceived, they are vividly colorful and can be heard. In fact, they are quite noisy. When awareness flows through any one or more of these regions, the various functions of consciousness operate, such as memory, reason and willpower. The physical body has a connection to each of the seven higher chakras through plexuses of nerves along the spinal cord and in the cranium. As the kundalini force of awareness travels the spine, it enters each of these chakras, energizing them and awakening in turn each function. By examining the functions of these great force centers, we can clearly cognize our own position on the spiritual path and better understand our fellow man.

In any one lifetime, one may predominantly be aware in two or three centers, thus setting the pattern for the way one thinks and lives. One develops a comprehension of these seven regions in a natural sequence, the perfection of one leading logically to the next. Thus, though we may not psychically be seeing spinning forces within ourself, we nevertheless mature through memory, reason, willpower, cognition, universal love, divine sight and spiritual illumination.

There are six chakras above the *muladhara*, which is located at the base of the spine. When awareness is flowing through these chakras, consciousness is in the higher nature. There are also seven chakras below the *muladhara*, and when awareness is flowing through them, consciousness is in the lower nature. The lower chakras are located between the coccyx and the heels. In this age, the Kali Yuga, most people live in the consciousness of the seven force centers below the *muladhara*. Their beliefs and attitudes strongly reflect the animal nature, the instinctive mind. Thus, the *muladhara* chakra, the divine seat of Lord Ganesha, is the dividing point between the lower nature and the higher. It is the beginning of religion for everyone, entered when consciousness arrives out of the realms below Lord Ganesha's holy feet. Through personal sadhana, prayer, meditation, right thought, speech and action and love of God, we lift our own consciousness and that of others into the chakras above the *muladhara*, bringing the mind into the higher nature.

The functions of the chakras are aspects of our being that we use every day. In the same way, we use our arms and hands everyday without thinking. Yet, if we study the physiology of the hands, we encounter layer after layer of intricate interrelationships of tissues, cells, plasma. We examine the engineering of the structural system of bones and joints, the energy transmission of the muscular system, the biochemistry of growth and healing, the biophysics of nerve action and reaction. Suddenly a simple and natural part of human life seems complex. Similarly, we use the various functions of consciousness, the chakras, every day without even thinking about them.

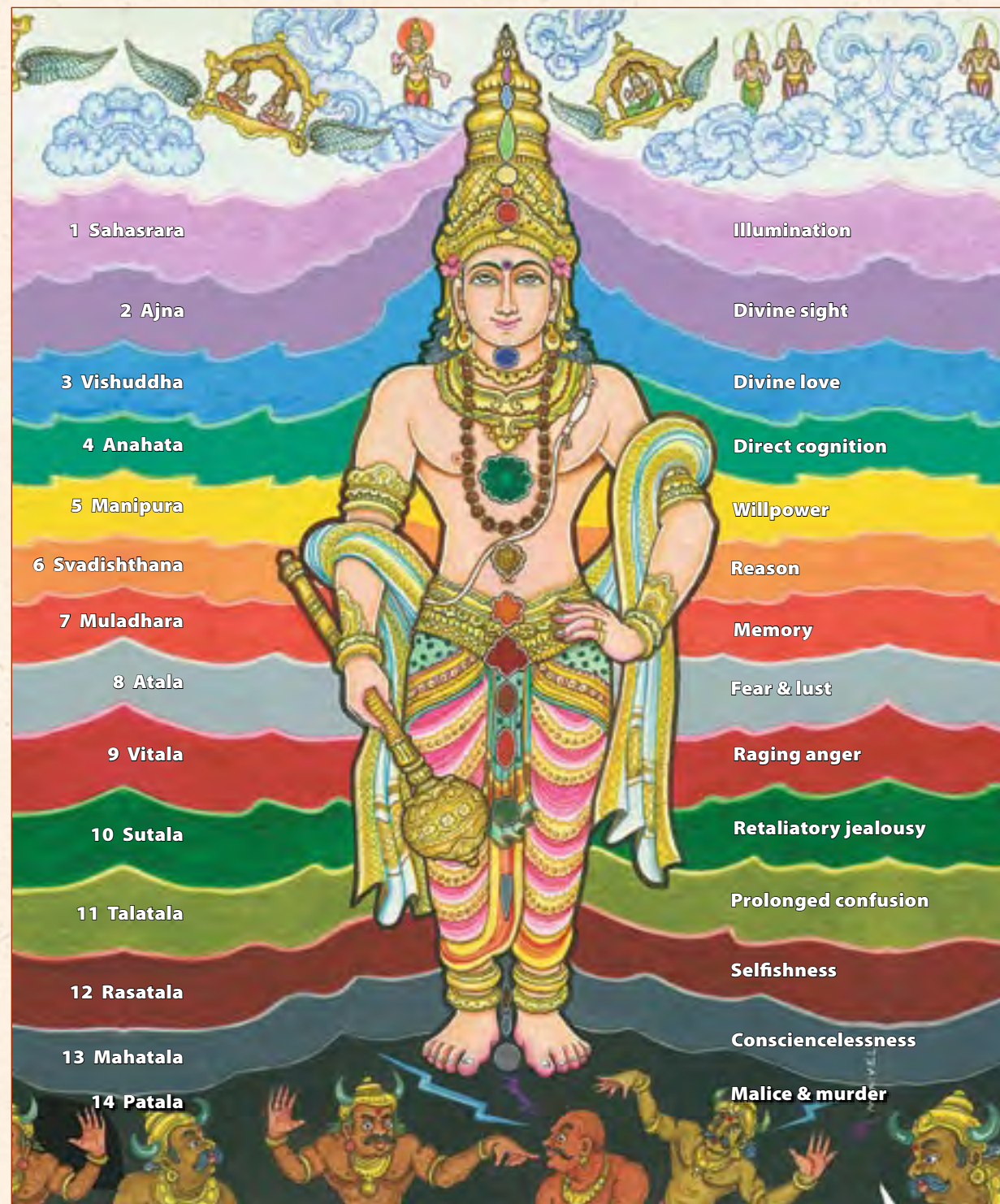
The chakras do not awaken. They are already awakened in everyone. It only seems as if they awaken as we become aware of flowing our energy through them, because energy, willpower and awareness are one and the same thing. To become conscious

of the core of energy itself, all we have to do is detach awareness from the realms of reason, memory and aggressive, intellectual will; then turning inward, we move from one chakra to another. The physical body changes as these more refined energies flow through it. And the inner nerve conduits, *nadis*, inwardly become stronger.

It may help, as we examine each of these centers individually, to visualize ourselves as a seven-storied building, with each story being one of the chakras. Awareness travels up and down in the elevator, and as it goes higher and higher, it gains a progressively broader, more comprehensive and beautiful vista. Reaching the top floor, it views the panorama below with total understanding, not only of the landscape below, but also of the relation of the building to other buildings and of each floor to the next. Venturing below the *muladhara*, we enter the basement levels of consciousness.

Planetary patterns: During each predominant age throughout history, one or another of the chakras has come into power. When the Greek God Cronus, the God of time, was worshiped, the mass consciousness came into memory—the *muladhara* chakra—with its new-found concern for time, for a past and a future, dates and records. Next the mass consciousness came into the *svadhishtana* and its powers of reason. Reason was a God in the Golden Age of Greece. Discourse, debate and logic all became instruments of power and influence. If it was not reasonable, it was not true. Next the chakra of will came into power. Man conquered nations, waged wars, developed efficient weapons. Crusades were fought and kingdoms established. Our world was experiencing force over force. Direct cognition, the *anahata* chakra, came when man opened the doors of science within his own mind. He cognized the laws of the physical universe: mathematics, physics, chemistry, astronomy and biology. Then he unfolded the mind sciences by looking into his subconscious mind, into the chakras where he had previously been. With man's look into his own mind, psychology, metaphysics and the mind-religions were born.

Now, in our present time, the mass consciousness is coming into *vishuddha*—the forces of universal love. The forerunners of this emerging Sat Yuga, popularly called the New Age, are not worshipping reason as the great thing of the mind or trying to take over another's possessions through the use of force. They are not worshipping science or psychology or the mind religions as the great panacea. They are looking inward and worshipping the light, the



Chakra chart: (right) The chakras are shown in their locations within the inner bodies of man, along with the attribute of each force center. The seven principal chakras are depicted as multi-petalled wheels or lotuses situated along the spinal cord, and the seven lower chakras as colored circles within the subtle body in regions below the spine, down to the feet. Above in the painting, is the heavenly realm of devas and Gods. Below is the Naraka realm of asuras.

established hierarchies founded on power or intellectual acumen. With that one needed balance, everything on the Earth will quiet down, because the *vishuddha* chakra is of the new age of universal love, in which everyone sees eye to eye, and if they do not, there will always be someone there to be the peacemaker. Look back through history and you will see how these planetary influences, these great mind strata of thought, have molded history and people.

Personal patterns: The same cyclical pattern of development in human history is evident even more clearly in the growth of the individual. In the seven cycles of a person's life, beginning at the time of birth, awareness automatically flows through one of these chakras and then the next one, and then the next, provided a pure life is lived, following Sanatana Dharma under the guidance of a *satguru*. Each one experiences the chakras somewhat differently, depending upon the amount of kundalini force that is released. Non-religious people, who have a minimal amount of kundalini released, may experience the chakra only in its physical and emotional manifestation. Those who perform sadhana will experience the chakras in a much deeper way. Yogis performing *tapas*, serious austerities, would likely experience each chakra in the depths of their soul body.

In reality, most people never make it into the higher four chakras, but instead regress back time and again into the chakras of reason, instinctive will, memory, anger, fear and jealousy. Nevertheless, the natural, ideal pattern is as follows. From one to seven years of age, one is in the *muladhara* chakra learning the basics of movement, language and society. The patterns of the subconscious are established primarily in these early years. From seven to fourteen one is in the *svadhishtana* chakra. One reasons, questions and refines the ability to think for oneself. Between fourteen and twenty-one, one comes into willpower. The personality gets strong. Likes and dislikes solidify. Generally, about this time one wants to run away from home and express oneself. From twenty-one to twenty-eight one

begins realizing responsibilities and gaining a new perspective of themselves and the world. Theoretically, one should be in *anahata*, the chakra of cognition, but a lot of people never make it.

If awareness is mature and full, however, having incarnated many, many times, one goes on at twenty-one to twenty-eight into the *anahata* chakra. Here we begin to understand “what it's all about.” We comprehend our fellow men and women, their relationships, the world around us. We seek inwardly for more profound insight. This chakra is stabilized and smoothly spinning once one has raised one's family and performed one's social duty, and though one may yet continue in business, one would find the energies withdrawing nat-

ART BY A. MANIVEL

urally into the chest. It is most often the renunciate, the *mathavasi*, the sannyasin, who from twenty-eight to thirty-five or before, depending on the strictness of his *satguru*, comes into the *vishuddha* chakra, into inner light experiences, assuming a spiritual responsibility for himself and for others. This awakening soul appreciates people, loves them. His heart and mind broadly encompass all of humanity. He is less interested in what people do and more in what they are. It is here that, having withdrawn from the world, the world begins to renounce him. Then, from thirty-five to forty-two or before, he perfects his sadhanas and lives in the *ajna* chakra, experiencing the body of the soul, that body of light, awareness traveling within naturally at that time, withdrawing from mundane matters of the conscious mind. From forty-two through forty-nine he is getting established in the *sahasrara* chakra in a very natural way, having met all of the responsibilities through life.

Esoterically, there are seven more chakras above and within the *sahasrara*. Agamic Hindu tradition cites them as seven divisions of *Paranada*, inner sound. They are, from highest to lowest: *Unmana*, *Samana*, *Anasrita*, *Anatha*, *Ananta*, *Vyomanga* and *Viapini*. These chakras are a conglomerate of *nadis* that slowly develop as a result of consistent and repetitive Self-Realization experiences.

The Seven Chakras of Higher Consciousness

Here we present a brief overview of each of the seven principal chakras, followed by the seven chakras below the *muladhara*.

Muladhara: The memory center, *muladhara*, located at the base of the spine, creates a consciousness of time through the powers of memory. Whenever we go back in our memory patterns, we are using the forces of the *muladhara*. It has four petals or aspects, one of which governs memories of past lives. The other three contain the compiled memory patterns and interrelated karmas of this life. This chakra is associated also with human qualities of individuality, egoism, physicality (including sexuality), materialism and dominance. A person lives predominantly in this chakra during the first seven years of life, acquiring language skills, relationships and cultural ways.

Svadishtana: Once the ability to remember has been established, the natural consequence is reason, and from reason evolves

Castles of consciousness: (counterclockwise from above) The *muladhara*, *svadishtana*, *manipura*, *anahata*, *vishuddha*, *ajna* and *sahasrara* chakras, showing their presiding deity and seed syllable

the intellect. Reason is the manipulation of memorized information. We categorize it, edit it, rearrange it and store the results. People in this six-petaled chakra research, explore and wonder, “Why? Why? Why?” They propose theories and formulate rational explanations. They often form a rigid intellectual mind based upon opinionated knowledge and accumulated memory, reinforced by habit patterns of the instinctive mind. It is in this chakra that the majority of people live, think, worry and travel on the astral plane. We open naturally into this chakra between ages 8 and 14. This center controls the *muladhara*, as does each progressively higher chakra control those that lie below it.

Manipura: The third chakra is represented in the central nervous system by the solar plexus, where all nerves merge to form the “second brain.” Of its ten petals, five face up and five down. Correspondingly, depending on how the energy is flowing, the forces of willpower from this chakra add power either to worldly consciousness through the first two centers or to spiritual consciousness through the fourth and fifth centers. When awareness is confined to the realms of memory, reason and aggressive willpower, men and women are instinctive in nature. They are quick to react and retaliate, quick to have their feelings hurt and quick to pursue the conquest of others while fearing their own defeat. In these states of mind, the ego rises to its greatest prominence, and emotional experiences are extremely intense. Young adults from 14 to 21 discover willpower, willfulness and individuality as this chakra unfolds.

Anahata: The center of perception and insight is often referred to as “the lotus of the heart.” Its 12 “petals” imply that cognition can be expressed in twelve distinct ways or through as many masks or personae. People abiding here are generally well-balanced, content and self-contained. Even when in day-to-day life they become involved in the seemingly fractured parts, they are able to look through it all and understand. They have a deep understanding of human nature, which brings effortless tolerance and an innate ability to help others, to resolve conflicts and confusions. Between ages 21 and 28, perceptions deepen and understanding matures for those who enter this chakra. Many people regress back into reason and memory. But, if awareness is mature, having incarnated many times, and well-trained all through youth, the soul proceeds smoothly into *anahata* consciousness.

Vishuddha: Universal or divine love is the faculty expressed by the *vishuddha* chakra. Whenever people feel filled with inexpressible love for and kinship with all mankind, all creatures large and

small, they are vibrating within the sixteen-petaled *vishuddha*. When deeply immersed in this state, there is no consciousness of being a person with emotions, no consciousness of thoughts. One is just being the light or being fully aware of oneself as radiant force flowing through all form. One may sometimes see light throughout the entirety of the body. The exceptional soul who resides fully in this center, usually between the ages of 28 and 35, is able for the first time to withdraw awareness totally into the spine, into *sushumna*, the central spiritual current. Ultimately, he realizes that the inner being is the reality of himself.

Ajna: The sixth force center is called *ajna*. It is the “third eye,” the center of divine sight and direct cognition. Of its two “petals” or facets, one is the ability to look into the lower worlds or states of mind and the other is the perception of the higher worlds, or spiritual states, of consciousness. It, therefore, is the connecting link, allowing the awakened soul to relate the highest consciousness to the lowest in a unified vision. We open naturally into this chakra between ages 35 and 42.

Sahasrara: The seventh center at the top of the head is called the crown chakra. According to the ancient mystics, it governs 1,008 aspects or attributes of the soul body. These personae are transparent, a crystal-clear white light, ever present, shining through the circumference of the golden soul body. Here the soul dissolves even blissful visions of light and is immersed in pure space, pure awareness, pure being. Within the *sahasrara* is the *Brahmarandhra*, or “door of God,” an aperture in the *sushumna nadi* through which the kundalini exits the body, catapulting the mind beyond and into *nirvikalpa* samadhi, and the truly pure spirit escapes the body at death. We open naturally into the crown chakra between ages 42 and 49.

Often when people get older, if they have not learned to sustain consciousness in the higher chakras, they start to drop in consciousness, returning to reason and trying to understand why all the things that happened to them in their lifetime happened as they did. They get stuck in the *muladhara* and spend years just remembering the past, reliving old experiences, good and bad alike. But more mature souls rightly fulfill life’s two final stages: senior advisor and religious solitaire. They utilize their golden years to manifest higher-chakra faculties of love, light, inner vision and God Realization through service, *sadhana*, pilgrimage, worship and meditation.

The Seven Lower Chakras

Atala: The first lower chakra, located in the hips, governs the state of mind called fear, which is truly a bottomless abyss. Someone in this consciousness fears death, fears life, even fears God and other people. This center is also the home of lust and promiscuity.

Vitala: Here anger predominates, and burning resentment. Anger comes from despair, confusion, frustration or lack of understanding. People in the consciousness of this chakra, centered in the thighs, are always wrathful, mad at the world, even angry at God.

Sutala: This chakra, found in the knees, governs jealousy, wanting what one can’t have. Jealousy is a feeling of inadequacy, inferiority and helplessness. People in *sutala* consciousness covet everything, often deny the existence of God and are contentiously combative.

Talatala: Prolonged confusion dominates here, giving rise to instinctive willfulness: to get rather than give, to push others around and pursue materialistic advancement over all else. Greed and deceit prevail in this dog-eat-dog state of mind, centered in the calves.

Rasatala: This chakra of the ankles is the true home of the animal nature. Unmitigated selfishness prevails, of seeing to the well-being of “number one” first. The suffering of others is of no concern. Jealousy, anger and fear are intense, even high, states of consciousness.

Mahatala: This is the realm of consciencelessness, or inner blindness to the effect of one’s actions, of negativity and deep depression. Those living in this chakra of the feet steal freely, taking what they justify as theirs anyway, feeling that the world “owes them a living.”

Patala: Here, in the soles of the feet, is the abode of destructiveness, revenge, murder for the sake of murder, torture and hatred expressed through harming the properties, minds, emotions and bodies of others. Hatred and scorn abide here. Malice reigns supreme. Reason seldom reaches this state of mind.

This is the story of our evolution through the mind—from the gross to the refined, from darkness into light, from a consciousness of death to immortality. We follow a natural pattern that is built right in the nerve system itself: memory; reason; will; direct cognition; inner light perceptions of the soul which give a universal love of all mankind; psychic perceptions through divine sight; and the heavenly refinement of being in the thousand-petaled lotus.

Recommended Resources: *Tools for Tantra and Chakras: Energy Centers of Transformation*, by Harish Johari, Inner Traditions International, Ltd., Rochester, Vermont 05767 USA; *Theories of the Chakras: Bridge to Higher Consciousness*, by Hiroshi Motoyama, and *The Chakras*, by C.W. Leadbeater, Theosophical Publishing House, 306 West Geneva Road, Wheaton, Illinois 60187 USA; *The Chakra Handbook*, by Shaila Sharamon and Bodo J. Baginski, Lotus Light, PO Box 2, Wilmet, Wisconsin 53129 USA



Death and Dying

The Hindu view of the grand departure and its sacred rites of passage

LEAD ME FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT, FROM DEATH to immortality.” This famed Vedic prayer proclaims the human urge to survive, to conquer death and to know the joys of illuminated consciousness. People often pilgrimage to an isolated place in expectation of a vision, be it a jungle of fauna and foliage or cement and glass. Every person is on a vision quest. But for all souls, at the time of the great departure, *mahaprasthanā*, a vision comes as a tunnel of light at the end of which are beings of divine nature.

Many, having had a near-death experience, have sworn their testimony of such transforming encounters. An American woman who “died” during childbirth, but was brought back to life by quick medical action, recounted: “It was an incredible energy—a light you wouldn’t believe. I almost floated in it. It was feeding my consciousness feelings of unconditional love, complete safety and complete, total perfection. And then, and then, a piece of knowledge came in—it was that I was immortal, indestructible. I cannot be hurt, cannot be lost, and that the world is perfect.” Hundreds of people report similar experiences, affirming what Hinduism has always taught—that death is a blissful, light-filled transition from one state to another, as simple and natural as changing clothes, far from the morbid, even hellish alternatives some dread. A Vedic funeral hymn intones: “Where eternal luster glows, the realm in which the light divine is set, place me, Purifier, in that deathless, imperishable world. Make me immortal in that realm where movement is accordant to wish, in the third region, the third heaven of heavens, where the worlds are resplendent” (*Rig Veda, Aitareya Branyaka* 6-11).

Most often, before our own death, we encounter its reality in the passing of friends or family. Our thoughts during the rites, termed *antyeshti* samskara in Sanskrit, turn to God. We witness the end of another’s life and ask, “What am I going to do with the remaining years of my own life?” All that is said during these times reminds us that life on earth is temporary. All our possessions, power, ego and learning will end. Seeing this truth we turn the mind toward God, toward life’s ultimate goal, moksha, liberation, and toward the path of dharma that will take us there. We do this not in trepidation, but in assurance, faith and gratitude for the opportunity to progress spiritually in this physical incarnation.

Death is defined differently according to what people believe themselves to be. If they are only the body and brain (as with humanists or atheists), then death is the end of sensory experience, of self. If we live once, death ends our only sojourn on Earth and is naturally dreaded. If we are born again and again, it loses its dread in light of the soul’s pilgrimage to eternity. No matter how ill, how infirm our condition, there is a serene and consoling center of our being to which we can adjourn, the Source within. It is more us than our body, more us than our mind and emotion. It will not die. It does not hurt or fear. As physical debility and death draw near, we seek this center, whether we call it Paramatma, God, Self or Divine Consciousness. In the *Krishna Yajur Veda, Katha Upanishad*, Yama, Lord of Death, explains: “Death is a mere illusion

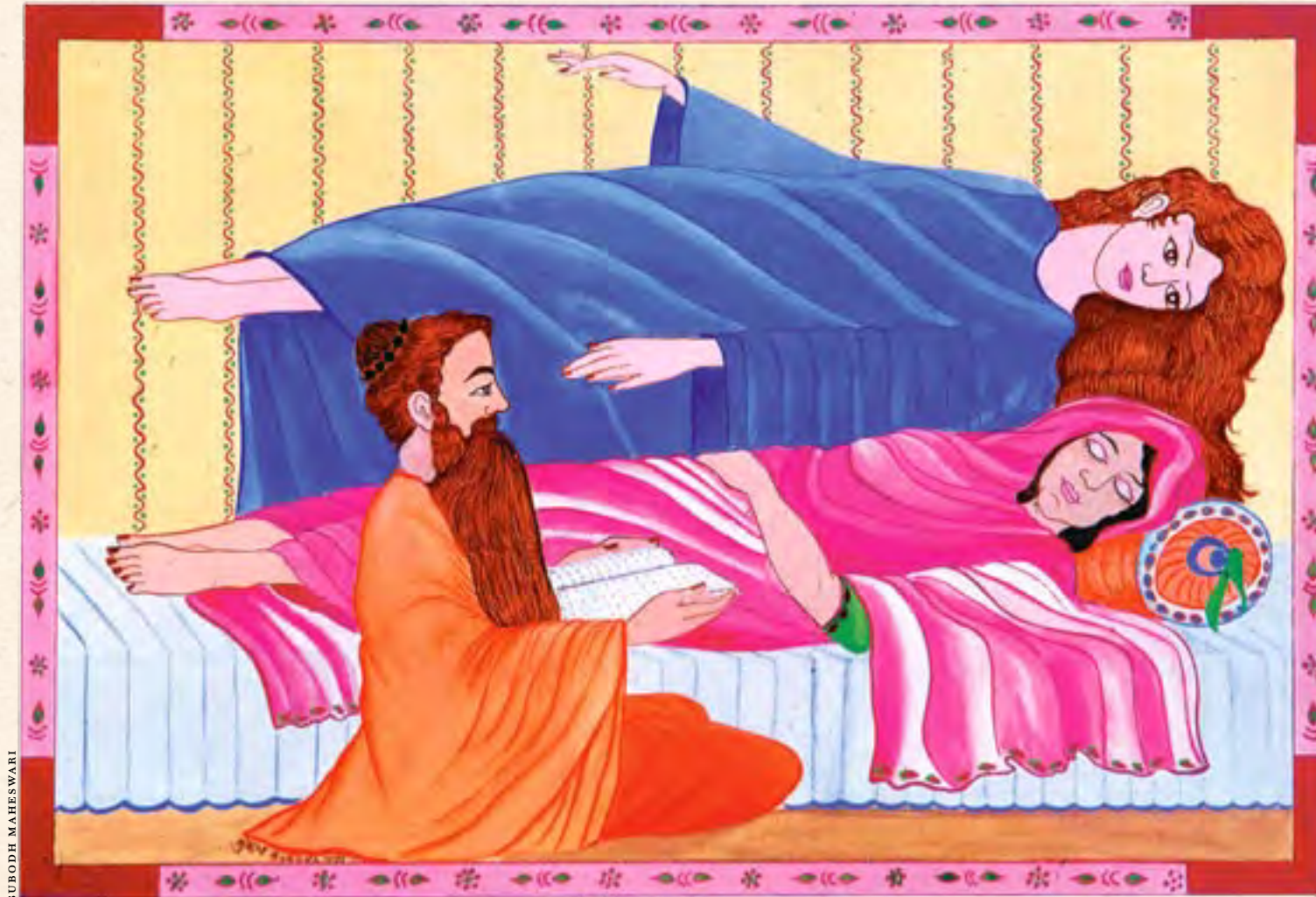
which appears to those who cannot grasp Absolute Reality. The soul is immortal, self-existent, self-luminous and never dies.”

It is the soul’s subtle body, *linga sharira*, that stores the “thought-energy” experiential impressions of life, called samskaras. When the body dies, this nonphysical sheath continues as a constellation of subtle elements—dispositions, memories, desires, etc. It is within this subtle body that the soul, if needed, reincarnates, as described in the *Shukla Yajur Veda, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* (4.4.5-6): “A man acts according to the desires to which he clings. After death he goes to the next world bearing in his mind the subtle impressions of his deeds; and after reaping there the harvest of his deeds, he returns again to this world of action. Thus, he who has desires continues subject to rebirth.” Death, according to

Hinduism, is not the contradiction of life. Death and birth are two sides of life’s cosmic cycle. The culmination of that cycle is liberation. As the venerable Satguru Yogaswami of Sri Lanka taught: “By getting rid of desire, man can put an end to birth altogether.”

Resolving the Karmas: Many who have had a near-death experience speak of having come back to complete unfinished obligations to children, parents or friends. It is a great blessing to know of one’s impending transition. A Hindu approaching death works diligently to finish all his “business” of this lifetime, the allotted portion of his total karma carried into this birth to face and resolve. If death

The grand departure: A soul detaches from the body (dressed in red) the time of death in its subtle body (draped in blue). A swami, keeping vigil, reads from Hindu scripture.



SUBODH MAHESWARI

comes while loose ends remain (misunderstandings unresolved, misdeeds unatoned for or obligations unfulfilled), another lifetime may be required to expire that karma. Thus, an aging or ailing Hindu will be seen going around to friends and enemies, giving love, help and blessings, working to resolve conflicts and differences, offering apologies and fulfilling all known obligations. Ideally, he executes his own will, distributing his properties and duties to heirs, charities and endowments, not leaving such tasks to others.

That done, he turns to God, reads scriptures, attends temple and amplifies meditation and devotion. He may pilgrimage to sacred spots or retire to a secluded place to practice *japa* and yoga sadhanas. The family takes care not to disturb these efforts, nor his retirement from social obligation or interaction, realizing he

has entered life’s final stage, that of the renunciate, or sannyasin.

Making the Transition Consciously: Knowing that a conscious death is the ideal, the Hindu avoids excessive drugs or mind-numbing medical measures. He cultivates detachment as death approaches, knowing that loss is not suffered when something is given up voluntarily, only when it is taken from us by force. He is grateful for life, but not angry with or fearful of death. Dying is not unlike falling asleep. We have all experienced death many times in past lives. The astral body separates from the physical body, just as in sleep. The difference is that the silver cord connecting the two breaks at the moment of transition, signaling the point of no return.

Scriptures speak of leaving the body through one chakra or another, departing in a level of consciousness of a particular chakra, which then determines where in the inner worlds a person will find himself after death. Those who depart full of hatred and resentment go to the world of those who also died in lower consciousness. Those with love in their heart enter a world where abide others with similar attainment. Therefore, during transition a person must strive to be in the highest possible state of consciousness, concentrating on the top of the head and holding to lofty thoughts as he succumbs. A woman in California narrated: “Shortly before my husband died, he held my hands and asked me to recite the *Lalitha Sahasranama* and to say the mantra we were initiated into. He repeated after me in a loud voice when suddenly his face began to shine with a luster, and he became overjoyed and beaming. He started almost shouting in joy that he was seeing the temple and the Deities—Siva, Ganesha and Murugan—smiling at him. In this glowing way he passed away shortly thereafter while I recited the mantra in his ear.”

Those who die suddenly, through accident or murder, have no time to prepare. Traditionally, full death rites are not performed after such deaths, because rebirth is expected almost immediately. For the same reason, rites are not accorded children who die young, before adolescence. In India, bodies of accidental-death victims and children are buried in a common grave or put in a river. Since neither is possible in Westernized countries, cremation is accepted.

Funeral and Memorial Rites: Hindus traditionally cremate their dead, for swifter, more complete release of the soul. Burial, which preserves the bond, is generally forbidden. Death’s anniversary is called Liberation Day. For saints, it is celebrated rather than the day of birth. To some extent, the funeral rites serve to notify the departed soul that he has, in fact, died. It is possible for a disoriented soul, not understanding that he is on the other side, to linger close to the physical plane. He can still see this material world, and even observe his own funeral. Some of the ritual chants address the deceased, urging him to relinquish attachments and continue the journey. The rites are also for the living, allowing the family to say a respectable and dignified “farewell,” to express grief, loss and the mosaic of emotions they naturally encounter. The deepest significance of the funeral rites lies in their yoking the inner and outer worlds, Bhuloka and Devaloka, and their recognition that a family consists not just of its living generations, but its ancestors as well. Often a group of souls will sequentially incarnate into the same extended family, so that, for example, a grandson may be the returned soul of the father. In this way collective karma and dharma are worked through. Those in the inner worlds help relatives living in the outer world. When their turn comes in the outer world, they strive to attain spiritual progress that is only possible in physical incarnation. Ceremonial uniting of the deceased with his forefathers and yearly honoring of ancestors keep open the inner communication which makes the family prosperous and preserves its longevity.

The *Vedas* proclaim, “When a person comes to weakness, be it through old age or disease, he frees himself from these limbs just as a mango, a fig or a berry releases itself from its stalk” (*Shukla Yajur Veda, Brihadharanyaka Upanishad* 4.3.36).

Rites of Transition

HINDU DEATH RITUALS in all traditions follow a fairly uniform pattern drawn from the *Vedas*, with variations according to sect, region, caste and family tradition. Most rites are fulfilled by the family, all of whom participate, including the children, who need not be shielded from the death. Certain rites are traditionally performed by a priest but may also be performed by the family if no priest is available. Here is a simple outline of rites that can be performed by Hindus in any locality. Variations are noted and suggestions made for Hindus in Western countries.

1. As Death Approaches

Traditionally, a Hindu dies at home. Nowadays the dying are increasingly kept in hospitals, even when recovery is clearly not possible. Knowing the merits of dying at home among loved ones, Hindus bring the ill home. When death is imminent, kindred are notified. The person is placed in his room or in the entryway of the house, with the head facing east. A lamp is lit near his head and he

is urged to concentrate on his mantra. Kindred keep vigil until the great departure, singing hymns, praying and reading scripture. If he cannot come home, this happens at the hospital, regardless of institutional objections.

2. The Moment of Death

If the dying person is unconscious at departure, a family member chants the mantra softly in the right ear. If none is known, "Aum Namō Nārāyaṇa" or "Aum Nama Sivaya" is intoned. (This is also done for sudden-death victims, such as on a battlefield or in a car accident.) Holy ash or sandal paste is applied to the forehead, Vedic verses are chanted, and a few drops of milk, Ganga or other holy water are trickled into the mouth. After death, the body is laid in the home's entryway, with the head facing south, on a cot or the ground—reflecting a return to the lap of Mother Earth. The lamp is kept lit near the head and incense burned. A cloth is tied under the chin and over the top of the head. The thumbs are tied together, as are the big toes. In

a hospital, the family has the death certificate signed immediately and transports the body home. Under no circumstances should the body be embalmed or organs removed for use by others. Religious pictures are turned to the wall, and in some traditions mirrors are covered. Relatives are beckoned to bid farewell and sing sacred songs at the side of the body.

3. The Homa Fire Ritual

If available, a special funeral priest is called. In a shelter built by the family, a fire ritual (*homa*) is performed to bless nine brass *kumbhas* (water pots) and one clay pot. Lacking the shelter, an appropriate fire is made in the home. The "chief mourner" leads the rites. He is the eldest son in the case of the father's death and the youngest son in the case of the mother's. In some traditions, the eldest son serves for both, or the wife, son-in-law or nearest male relative.

4. Preparing the Body

The chief mourner now performs *arati*, passing an oil lamp over the remains, then offering flowers. The male (or female, depending on the gender of the deceased) relatives carry the body to the back porch, remove the clothes and drape it with a white cloth. (If there is no porch, the body can be sponge bathed and prepared where it is.) Each applies sesame oil to the head, and the body is

bathed with water from the nine *kumbhas*, dressed, placed in a coffin (or on a palanquin) and carried to the *homa* shelter. The young children, holding small lighted sticks, encircle the body, singing hymns. The women then walk around the body and offer puffed rice into the mouth to nourish the deceased for the journey ahead. A widow will place her *tali* (wedding pendant) around her husband's neck, signifying her enduring tie to him. The coffin is then closed. If unable to bring the body home, the family arranges to clean and dress it at the mortuary rather than leave these duties to strangers. The ritual *homa* fire can be made at home or kindled at the crematorium.

5. Cremation

Only men go to the cremation site, led by the chief mourner. Two pots are carried: the clay *kumbha* and another containing burning embers from the *homa*. The body is carried three times counterclockwise around the pyre, then placed upon it. All circumambulating, and some *arati*, in the rites is counterclockwise. If a coffin is used, the cover is now removed. The men offer puffed rice as the women did earlier, cover the body with wood and offer incense and ghee. With the clay pot on his left shoulder, the chief mourner circles the pyre while holding a fire brand behind his back. At

each turn around the pyre, a relative knocks a hole in the pot with a knife, letting water out, signifying life's leaving its vessel. At the end of three turns, the chief mourner drops the pot. Then, without turning to face the body, he lights the pyre and leaves the cremation grounds. The others follow. At a gas-fueled crematorium, sacred wood and ghee are placed inside the coffin with the body. Where permitted, the body is carried around the chamber, and a small fire is lit in the coffin before it is consigned to the flames. The cremation switch then is engaged by the chief mourner.

6. Return Home; Ritual Impurity

Returning home, all bathe and share in cleaning the house. A lamp and water pot are set where the body lay in state. The water is changed daily, and pictures remain turned to the wall. The shrine room is closed, with white cloth draping all icons. During these days of ritual impurity, family and close relatives do not visit others' homes, though neighbors and relatives bring daily meals to relieve the burdens during mourning. Neither do they attend festivals and temples, visit swamis, nor take part in marriage arrangements. Some observe this period up to one year. For the death of friends, teachers or students, observances are optional. While mourning is never suppressed or denied,

scriptures admonish against excessive lamentation and encourage joyous release. The departed soul is acutely conscious of emotional forces directed at him. Prolonged grieving can hold him in earthly consciousness, inhibiting full transition to the heaven worlds. In Hindu Bali, it is shameful to cry for the dead.

7. Bone-Gathering Ceremony

About 12 hours after cremation, family men return to collect the remains. Water is sprinkled on the ash; the remains are collected on a large tray. At crematoriums the family can arrange to personally gather the remains: ashes and small pieces of white bone called "flowers." In crematoriums these are ground to dust, and arrangements must be made to preserve them. Ashes are carried or sent to India for deposition in the Ganges or placed them in an auspicious river or the ocean, along with garlands and flowers.

8. First Memorial

On the 3rd, 5th, 7th or 9th day, relatives gather for a meal of the deceased's favorite foods. A portion is offered before his

photo and later ceremonially left at an abandoned place, along with some lit camphor. Customs for this period are varied. Some offer *pinda* (rice balls) daily for nine days. Others combine all these offerings with the following *sapindikarana* rituals for a few days or one day of ceremonies.

9. The 31st-Day Memorial

On the 31st day, a memorial service is held. In some traditions it is a repetition of the funeral rites. At home, all thoroughly clean the house. A priest purifies the home, and performs the *sapindikarana*, making one large *pinda* (representing the deceased) and three small, representing the

father, grandfather and great grandfather. The large ball is cut in three pieces and joined with the small *pindas* to ritually unite the soul with the ancestors in the next world. The *pindas* are fed to the crows, to a cow or thrown in a river for

the fish. Some perform this rite on the 11th day after cremation. Others perform it twice: on the 31st day or (11th, 15th, etc.) and after one year. Once the first *sapindikarana* is completed, the ritual impurity ends. Monthly repetition is also common for one year.

10. One-Year Memorial

At the yearly anniversary of the death (according to the moon calendar), a priest conducts the *shraddha* rites in the home, offering *pinda* to the ancestors. This ceremony is done yearly as long as the sons of the deceased are alive (or for a specified period). It is now common in India to observe *shraddha* for ancestors just prior to the yearly Navaratri festival. This time is also appropriate for cases where the day of death is unknown.

Hindu funeral rites can be simple or exceedingly complex. These ten steps, devotedly completed according to the customs, means, and ability of the family, will properly conclude one earthly sojourn of any Hindu soul.



Yama: Lord of Death

Recommended Resources: *Caring for Your own Dead*, Lisa Carlson, Upper Access Publishers, PO Box 457, Hinesburg, Vermont 05461. *Dialogue with Death*, Eknath Easwaran, Nilgiri Press, Box 477, Petaluma, California 94953. *Funeral and Other Sacraments After Death*, Jnana Prabodhini, 510 Sadashiv Petha, Pune 411 030, India. *Grihya Sutras*, Sacred Books of the East Series, Motilal Banarsidass, Bungalow Road, Jawaharnagar, New Delhi 7, India. *Hindu Samskaras*, Dr. Raj Bali Pandey, Motilal Banarsidass. *Life After Life*, Raymond A. Moody, Bantam Books, 1540 Broadway, New York, New York 10036. *Meditation and the Art of Dying*, Pandit Usharbudh Arya, Himalayan Institute, Honesdale, Pennsylvania 18431. *The Transition Called Death*, Charles Hampton, Theosophical Publishing House, 306 West Geneva Rd, Wheaton, Illinois 60187. *Dilemmas of Life and Death*, S. Cromwell Crowley, SUNY Press, Albany, New York 12246.

Kasi, the holiest place to die: A man awaits his great departure; at the moment of death Ganga water is trickled into the mouth at the Mukti Bhavan free hospice; cremation grounds; women in mourning.



PHOTOS BY RAJESH BEDI



SOCIETY

Youth Challenge the Dowry System

A NEW GENERATION OF YOUNG INDIANS want to stand up against the dowry system, but find it hard to tackle that social menace. Satya Naresh, Director of NKG Info Services, has taken the cause to the Internet with his "idontwantdowry" matrimonial site, which he launched in April, 2006. Satya comments: "On average there are three to four dowry deaths in a day in our country. I set up the web site to fight the problem. Of course, I also run the web-site to make money, but I never move away from my ideals."

For a nominal fee of Rs.500 (US\$11.00), potential brides and grooms can register and host their profile on the site for six months with the expectation that no dowry demands will be made to the girl or her family. The site took off immediately with over 2,000 registrations. "We wanted to start a website that benefits society," Naresh offers. To reach the less affluent, non-

net savvy populace, for a mere US\$2.25, the web site accepts contact details for insertion in its classified section.

Though mainly catering to women who cannot or who refuse to bring dowry to a match, the web site saw more prospective grooms registering than brides in the days following the launch. Prospective groom, 23-year old software professional Abhinay

C., says, "From childhood I hated the idea of being 'bought' by the girl's family for a sum of money. I will continue to be part of this site to keep open my options for meeting an independent girl."

In light of the positive response, Satya says he wants to launch another site aimed at fighting the caste system. See: www.idontwantdowry.com



WWW.IDONTWANTDOWRY.COM



WWW.PALANITEMPLES.COM

TEMPLES

Lord Murugan's Hilltop Abode

THE BELOVED GOD OF TAMIL SAIVITES, Lord Murugan, has many centers of great spiritual power in South India and Sri

Lanka. Preeminent among them is Palani Hills, a temple dedicated to Murugan as Dandapani, the renunciate, flocked to by those doing austerities, seeking purification and spiritual advancement. The Lord now has a new web site dedicated to the lore and services related to this ancient, otherworldly, holy hill temple. With real depth, www.palanitemples.com brings us the his-

tory, the stories of the siddhas, meanings of symbols and more. Alongside the religious content is plenty of practical information for pilgrims on lodgings, other shrines in the environs and maps. For a touch of the sacred in your life, you can also sponsor an *archana*. Your name is chanted by the priests of Palani and temple *prasadam* mailed to you from India.

Hindu Heritage Endowment

CHARITABLE TRUST IS A WIN-WIN FOR PROFESSOR & WIFE

Dr. Bhagawandas P. Lathi, who retired a few years ago from a 39-year career as a professor of electrical engineering, is convinced that “Almost anyone in the Indian community can benefit from using a charitable remainder trust.”

Charitable remainder trusts allow donors to sell stock, real estate and other assets tax-free, and to benefit good causes at the same time. Dr. Lathi and his wife Rajani, who live in Carmichael, a suburb of Sacramento, California, are co-trustees of their own charitable remainder trust which they established in 2001. They used the trust to sell the publishing rights to two of Dr. Lathi’s books to Oxford University Press. “It was a win-win situation for everyone,” he said.

Clearly two of the biggest winners were HINDUISM TODAY and the India Development Relief Fund, which will receive equal shares of whatever remains in the trust after 20 years from the foundation date (that’s 2021.) But the Lathis won as well. The use of the trust allowed them to bypass all tax on the \$600,000 sale price for the publishing rights, to receive an immediate income-tax deduction, and to become the income beneficiaries of the charitable trust for 20 years. The income from the trust supplements their retirement plan.

“HINDUISM TODAY has done a good job of defending the Hindu religion from outside attacks, as well as explaining it,” Dr. Lathi said, describing why he chose the magazine to benefit from their trust. “We deeply value the Hindu tradition of letting people worship in their own ways for reaching the ultimate reality, eschewing proselytization and hegemony,” he emphasized. “That’s a message that HINDUISM TODAY underscores.” He bristles at the use of the word *tolerance* in inter-religious discussion, declaring, “Tolerance implies you’re putting up with an inferior position.”

Of the two books with which the Lathis funded their trust, *Linear Systems and Signals* offers a 940-page development for undergraduates of signals as well as systems to process signals. This important area encompasses applications in such diverse fields as speech and image processing, satellite and space communication, biomedical systems, and aerospace, automotive and industrial applications. The Internet, cell phones, satellites and other electronic devices use signal processing routinely to transmit everything from text messages between teenagers to images from Jupiter.

Dr. Lathi, who is Professor Emeritus of Electrical Engineering at California State University, Sacramento, considered using a charitable remainder trust after attending a seminar on the subject and consulting with his attorney. “I suggest that people look at the charitable remainder trust very carefully,” he urged. “It is a valuable philanthropic and estate-planning tool that has worked well for us.”

The Hindu Heritage Endowment is pleased to enroll Dr. Bhagawandas P. and Rajani Lathi as members of its Legacy Sangha, which honors those who have included HHE in their estate plan. For information on bequests, charitable trusts and other estate-planning tools, contact Swami Shanmuganatha at 808-822-3012 extension 244 or hhe@hindu.org.



Dr. Bhagawandas P. Lathi and wife, Rajani, co-trustees of trust benefitting Hinduism Today

JULY TO SEPTEMBER ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS			
Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment	Darmaguhan Satgunasingam	US\$75.00	
	Ajay & Lata Shah	5,000.00	
	Other Donations	29,427.01	
	Total	34,502.01	
Iraivan Temple Endowment	Anonymous	200.00	
	Roger Brown	120.00	
	Sarojini Elangovan	101.00	
	Sivamayam Gunaratnam	145.00	
	Victoria Lynne Johnson	30.00	
	Diksha Katir	42.00	
	Ushadevi Katir	42.00	
	Nathan Mudrick	108.00	
	Pathmini Murugesan	10.00	
	S.V. Ravi Rahavendran	1,002.00	
	Sheela Rahavendran	151.00	
	Payal Sehgal	20.00	
Hindu of the Year Fund	Jayshree S. Rao	10.33	
Boys School for Iraivan Priesthood	Maruthu Pandian Darmalingam	13.50	
	Bala Sivaceyon	43.08	
	Total	56.58	
Kauai Aadheenam Matavasi Medical Fund	Maruthu Pandian Darmalingam	13.50	
	Sarasvathi Iswarapatham	40.71	
	Arul Karttikeya	350.00	
	Pathmini Murugesan	10.00	
	Gowri Nadason	82.52	
	Vayudeva Varadan	72.00	
	Other Donations	6,300.00	
	Total	6,868.73	
Iyarappan Temple Trust	Nathan Mudrick	108.00	
Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar Gurukulam	Muthukumar Jayabalan	30.00	
	Muthu Kumar	40.00	
	Total	70.00	
Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment	Manoharan Navaratnarajah	75.00	
Malaysia Hindu Renaissance Fund	Devdatta & Swati Mhaiskar	12.63	
Hinduism Today Production Fund	A. Melwani	1,000.00	
	Murli Melwani	1,000.00	
	Devdatta & Swati Mhaiskar	12.62	
	Total	2,012.62	
Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund	Adi Alahan	14.00	
	Anil Anand Badhwar	72.40	
	Michael Mrakovic	14.29	
	Natraj Narayanswami	45.00	
	Sai Pavuluri	18.75	
	Jayshree S. Rao	10.34	
	Alex Ruberto	75.00	
	Payal Sehgal	20.00	
	Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00	
	Raja Vishnu	22.00	
	Total	321.78	
Hindu Education Endowment	Natraj Narayanswami	20.00	
Hindu Press International Endowment Fund	Hiranya & Saraswathi Gowda	21.00	
	Baleswary Selvarajah	5.00	
	Total	26.00	
Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund	Eric Jautee	50.00	
	Devdatta & Swati Mhaiskar	12.62	
	Manoharan Navaratnarajah	75.00	
	Gassa Patten	1,640.00	
	Total	1,772.62	
Manitha Neyam Trust Fund	Richard Ksieniewicz	35.00	
	Bala Sivaceyon	43.08	
	Total	78.08	
Spiritual Park of Mauritius Endowment	Devdatta & Swati Mhaiskar	12.63	
Positive Discipline Endowment	Vinaya Alahan	4,000.00	
	Devdatta & Swati Mhaiskar	12.63	
	Total	4,012.63	
Kauai Aadheenam Religious Art and Artifacts Fund	Rajadeva Alahan	153.00	
Murugan Temple Pillaiayar Shrine Fund	Pathmini Saravanapavan	50.00	
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	Lila Shakti Devi	101.00	
	Toshadeva Guhan	108.00	
	Shama Kumaran	51.00	
Mathavasi Travel Fund	Rakesh Sood	125.00	
Saivite Hindu Sriptural Fund for the Visually Impaired	Natraj Narayanswami	25.00	
	Alex Ruberto	45.00	
	Total	70.00	
Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment	Shyamal Chandra Debnath	200.00	
Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund	Pathmini Saravanapavan	50.00	
Tiptur Shiva Temple & Youth Hostel Fund	Payal Sehgal	20.00	
Kerala Temple Trust	Sai Pavuluri	18.75	
Kapaleeshwara Temple Orphanage	Kumar Bhagavatula	50.00	
	Prasad Krishnan	7.50	
	Richard Ksieniewicz	35.00	
	Auslin Mangal Lawrence	150.00	
	Devdatta & Swati Mhaiskar	12.62	
	Michael Mrakovic	14.28	
	Jayanthi Vasudevan Naiker	300.00	
	Natraj Narayanswami	20.00	
	Total	589.40	
Manjung Hindu Sabha Orphanage Fund	Muthukumar Jayabalan	110.00	
	Muthu Kumar	40.00	
	Michael Mrakovic	14.28	
Total			164.28
Pazhassi Balamandiram Orphanage Fund			
Michael Mrakovic			14.28
Natraj Narayanswami			20.00
Total			34.28
Karnataka Temple Development Fund			
Ishani Chowdhury			31.00
Sai Pavuluri			18.75
Total			49.75
Sri Ganesha Hindu Temple of Utah Endowment Fund			
Sukesh Parasher			50.00
Sai Pavuluri			18.75
Total			68.75
Swami Vipulananta Children's Home Endowment			
Michael Mrakovic			14.29
Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund			
Jayshree S. Rao			10.33
Himalayan Academy Book Distribution Fund			
Devdatta & Swati Mhaiskar			12.62
Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund			
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Victoria Lynne Johnson			10.00
Vijay N. Samant			100.00
Sivakumar Saravan			500.00
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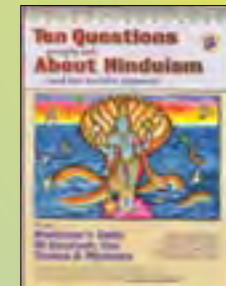
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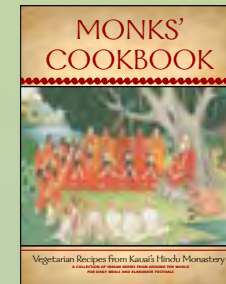
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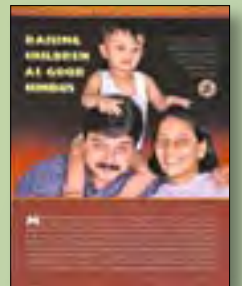
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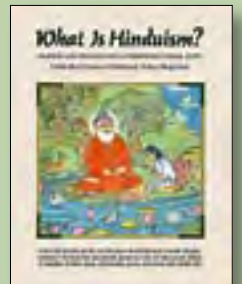
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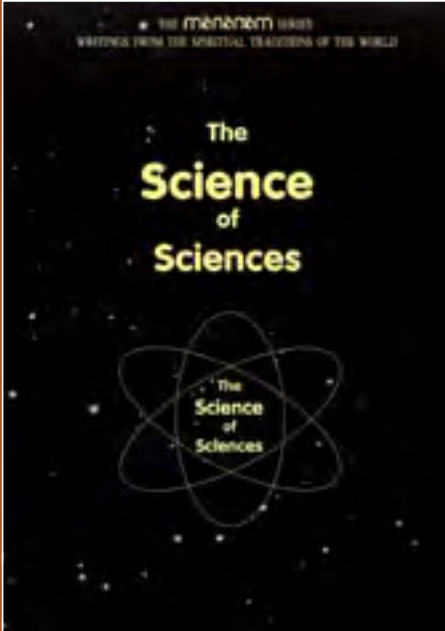
In this book, the timeless spiritual wisdom is referred to as the Science of Sciences, because from it, all other sciences emanate. Modern science searches for the truth through the material world, hoping to give us more comfort and happiness. The Science of Sciences searches for the *ultimate* truth—the knowledge that leads to total peace and happiness. This is the highest wisdom, for it deals with the best in us, the divine within. The essays by renowned scientists, saints, and sages demonstrate how the findings of modern science are beginning to meet with the wisdom of the ages. They show that science is limited when it searches in the material world, but when it probes deeply enough, beyond matter, it ultimately leads to the Science of Sciences—the vision of the inherent Oneness at the heart of all life.

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01:00	Asha Di Ji Vair Sahib-Gurubari	20:20	Haz Matra Tarlochan Darshan Dasji
03:00	Aastha Special Programmes	20:40	Discourses - Satguru Jaggi Vasudev
03:20	Sant Geet (Saints Devotional Songs)	21:00	Guided Fortune
03:40	Bhai Chamanji Singh Kirtan Darbar	21:30	Discourses - Gyananandaji
04:00	Discourses - (Anandmurti Gurumaa)	21:50	Crystal Show
04:30	Discourses - Hari Chaitanyapuri	22:00	Ramakatha - Morari Bapu
05:00	Yoga (Swami Ramdev)	22:30	Discourses - Rameshshah Dibi
07:30	Discourses - Pujya Dr. Hiruben Amin		
08:00	Discourses - Chintmaya Mission	00:00	Mangal Mahti / Sai Shaj Aarti
08:30	Vipassana (Satyanarayan Goenka)	00:40	Discourses - Swami Adgadenandji
09:00	Mudra Vigyan	01:00	Asha Di Ji Vair Sahib-Gurubari
09:30	Discourses - Brahmajhi Kumar Swami	03:00	Aastha Special Programmes
09:50	Satsang Samachar	03:20	Sant Geet (Saints Devotional Songs)
10:00	Aastha Special Programmes	03:40	Bhai Chamanji Singh Kirtan Darbar
10:20	Discourses - Chaitanyapuri	04:00	Discourses - (Anandmurti Gurumaa)
10:40	Shop 24-7	04:30	Discourses - Hari Chaitanyapuri
11:00	Discourses - Sant Asaram Vani	05:00	Yoga (Swami Ramdev)
12:00	Discourses - Kirtihaji	07:30	Discourses - Pujya Dr. Hiruben Amin
13:00	Discourses - Swami Anubhavananda	08:00	Discourses - Chintmaya Mission
13:30	Rahim Sahib - Gunabari	08:30	Vipassana (Satyanarayan Goenka)
15:00	Aastha Special Programmes	09:00	Mudra Vigyan
16:30	Sant Geet (Saints Devotional Songs)	09:30	Discourses - Dr. Kumar Swami
17:00	Didi Maa: Ramabharajji	09:50	Satsang Samachar
18:00	Talks on Bhagvad Gita (Jaya Row)	10:00	Aastha Special Programmes
18:30	Satsang Samachar	10:20	Discourses - Chaitanyapuri
19:00	Meditation (Swami Sukhabodhananda)	10:40	Shop 24-7
19:30	Mangal Mahti	11:00	Discourses - Sant Asaram Vani
19:50	Discourses - Pujya Deepakbhai Desai	12:00	Discourses - Kirtihaji
20:00	Sai Baba Dhoo Aarti - Shirdi	13:00	Discourses - Swami Anubhavananda
20:30	Discourses - Rameshshah Dibi	13:30	Rahim Sahib - Gunabari
21:00	Yoga (Swami Ramdev)		
21:30	Gyan Ganga (Narayan Seva Samsthan)	15:00	Aastha Special Programmes
22:00	Haz Matra Tarlochan Darshan Dasji	15:30	Sant Geet (Saints Devotional Songs)
22:30	Servic Ahar - Cookery Show	16:00	Talks on Bhagvad Gita (Jaya Row)
23:00	Discourses - (Anandmurti Gurumaa)	16:30	Satsang Samachar
23:30	Ramakatha - Morari Bapu	17:00	Meditation (Swami Sukhabodhananda)
24:00	Discourses - Rameshshah Dibi	17:30	Mangal Mahti
		17:50	Discourses - Pujya Deepakbhai Desai
		18:00	Sai Baba Dhoo Aarti - Shirdi
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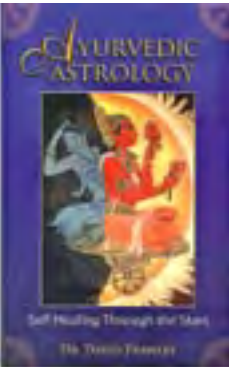
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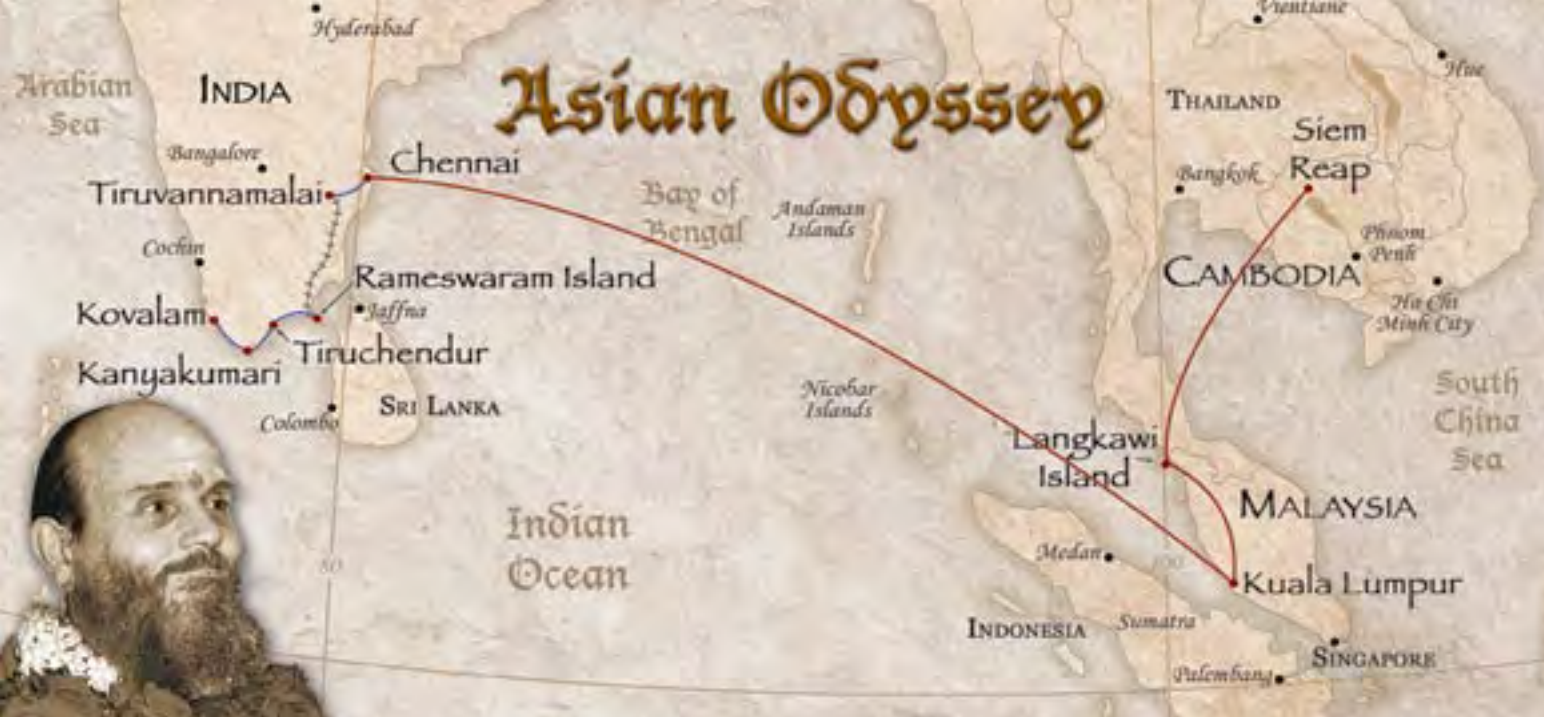
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The Way in Is the Way Out

I have no legions to lead in battle;
Except defending clients in Court
With all my mettle.

No Pompey to challenge me,
The Rubicon, to cross—
Except my SELF that impels me
To burn my dross.

And cross the River of Arrogance,
Born out of my ego.

Cross the River of Ignorance,
Born out of my darkness.
Turbulent are my Rivers;
In turmoil my heart.

What boats shall I build?
What Way to chart?
How shall I anchor

What my heart aspires?
Or will I drown

In the waters of my desires?

It is you

With your choice

Who wrote your own story.

Let not your drama now become your worry.

You do not know what is yet to come

'Round the bend,

What arrows of fate your Self shall send.

Sorrow and suffering are the lot of Man.

But grieve not, bear the pain and strive,

For the Creator has a plan.

Whither my legions?

Where my trusted generals?

Where is my passion?

What has become of her?

What drama is this,

Life, death, life ... ?

Your legions are buried

In your memories past;

Your generals from your company cast.

Your passion sits on the table next;

A different dialogue in her text.

You are a soul traveling in matter dense

With your body as your fence.

Many more lives you will travel;

Many wonders you shall marvel,

Of birth and death

And the mysteries of your breath.

Build the boat of Silence and
Anchor in MY consciousness

By creating a hollowness, an emptiness,
Time and timelessness, space and spacelessness,
To see ME within...

By Dr. Arjunan Subramaniam, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 6th April - 25th April 2006

