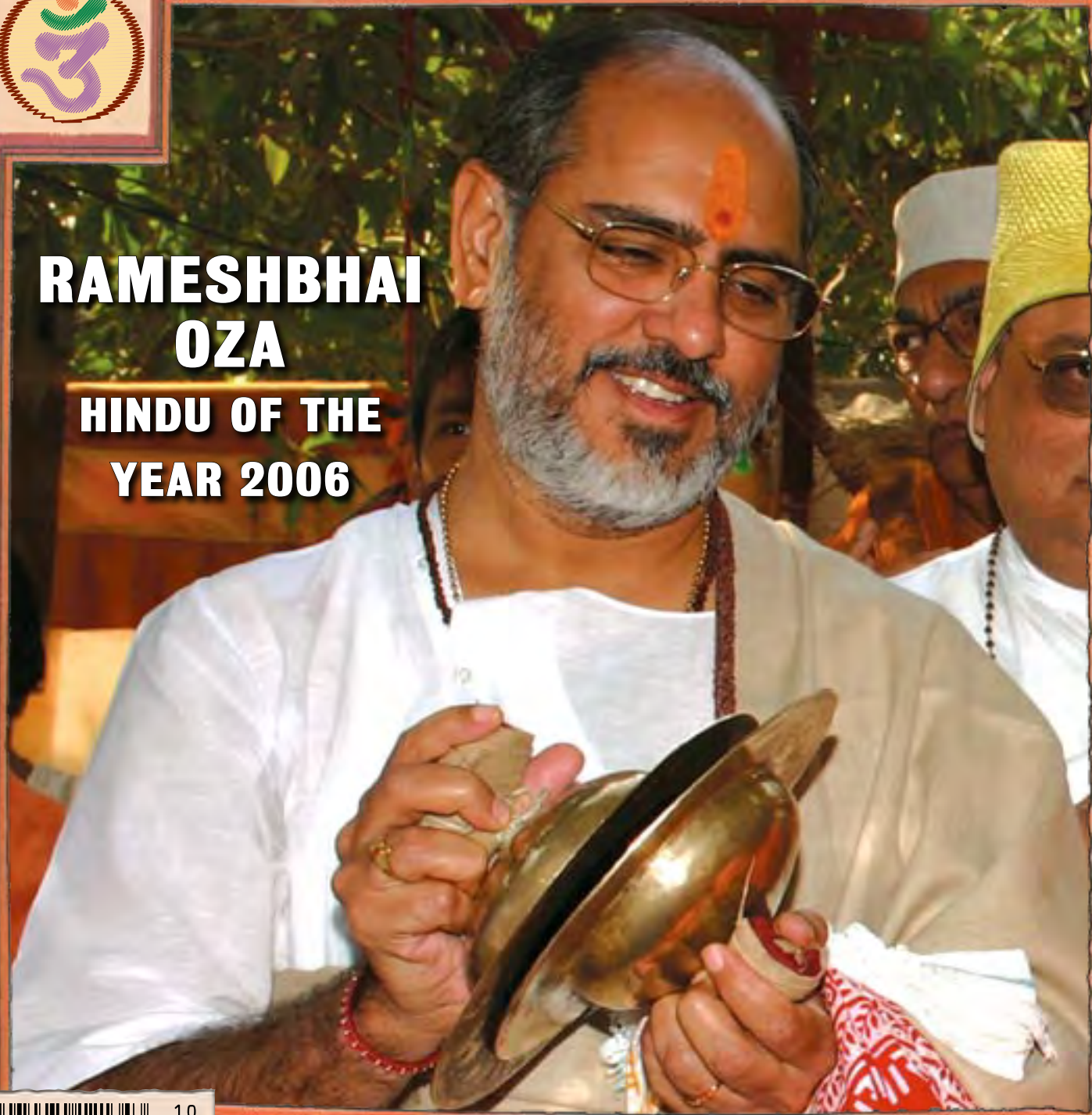


# HINDUISM TODAY

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



## RAMESHBHAI OZA HINDU OF THE YEAR 2006



SAT SAHITYA PRAKASHAN TRUST



GETTY HULTON ARCHIVES

COVER: Bhaishri Rameshbhai Oza at the dedication of the Sri Hari Mandir in Porbandar, Gujarat; (above) British troops execute Chinese soldiers during the Boxer Rebellion of 1900—our article examines the Hindu view of capital punishment

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER/DECEMBER, 2006 • HINDU YEAR 5108  
VYAYA, THE YEAR OF WEALTH

*Bodhinatha Veylanswami*  
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# “Hinduism, the Greatest Religion in the World”

When *Hinduism Today* founder Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami gave a talk in 1982 entitled “Hinduism: The Greatest Religion in the World,” he boldly proclaimed that man’s oldest religion enjoyed deserving global influence due to its passionate tolerance, its commitment to nonviolence and its profound view that all souls without exception were created by God and destined to achieve spiritual enlightenment and liberation. The 21st century Hindu renaissance adds validity to his bold message. Page 37 . . .



**Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami**

**Celebrating:** A festival scene from the movie *Mystic India*, recreating the exuberance of Lord Swaminarayan devotees, ecstatic with joy as they pull a huge chariot with two ropes



# 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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# DIASPORA

MALAYSIA

## The Challenge of Urban Expansion

**M**ALAYSIA AND INDONESIA hold a unique position in the world of Muslim nations. While elsewhere violence erupts on many sides, these countries are managing to hold a course of peace and dialog between different religious communities. But there are serious challenges. In Malaysia many of the over 17,000 Hindu temples and small shrines are located directly in the path of highway expansions and real estate development projects. A few are full Agamic temples over a century old, others are small roadside shrines, perhaps started with nothing more than a small Ganesha murti placed in a tree. Most were started be-

fore Independence and urban sprawl.

In early 2006 a number of temples were summarily demolished in spite of protests by Hindus in Kuala Lumpur with sanction from city officials in a rush to allow developers to build through certain areas. An unsuitable alternate venue for the relocated Sri Kumaravel Temple temple next to a sewage pond and high tension wires further upset Hindus. Activists raised a red flag and emotions ran high.

Amidst a climate of tension and accusations from all sides, the Malaysia Indian Congress and the Malaysia Hindu Sangam initiated discussions with the government. The President of the Malaysian Hindu Sangam, Datuk K. Vaithilingam, who is in the sensitive position of having to carry the Hindu banner and, at the same time, dialog with a Muslim administration, issued a press release



**Remnants:** Saddened Hindu with items from a small demolished temple

on July 26th: "The first meeting of the City Hall Kuala Lumpur (DBKL) Liaison Committee Regarding Places of Worship (non-Muslims) was held on Monday this week at the DBKL Jalan Raja Abdullah, chaired by Tuan Haji Mohd. Amin Nordin bin Abdul Aziz, Deputy Director General DBKL, with government officials and Hindu leaders. A formula was discussed to conduct a survey of places of worship and their status so as to find solutions to the problem of location. The meeting agreed that all parties will

study the proposals and decide in two weeks the formula. It was also agreed that all notices issued for places of worship to be demolished will be put on hold." See [www.hindusangam.org.my](http://www.hindusangam.org.my) for complete texts.

Hindu activists are still not happy, saying their leadership is not taking a strong enough stand. Fortunately, Malaysia is still holding to its high ground where media, discussion and debate continue to be the admirable, nonviolent tools for interaction between religious communities.



**Grand ceremonies for Lord Venkateshwara in Minnesota**

U S A

## Minnesota Hindus Rise Triumphant

**T**HOUGH THE DESTRUCTION of Deities in April, 2006, at the new Hindu Temple of Minnesota was a great blow to the community, devotees rallied with an amazing spirit to carry off a grand Mahakumb-

habhishekam in July, even as some new murtis were being recarved in India. It was a relief to learn it was an act of thoughtless vandalism, as confessed by two local teenagers, and not a hate crime. Today, there is only excitement and anticipation for the new temple. "This is a sea change from the time we heard about the vandalism. We were all devastated, and we have recovered beautifully," said Hindu Society member Umesh Singh.

U S A

## Mother's Day Goddesses

**O**N MAY 7, 2006, AT THE CHINMAYA MISSION TRI-STATE CENTER in Kedar, Pennsylvania, 100 families celebrated Mother's Day, Seva Day and Chinmaya Jayanthi. The children honored their mothers in a grand Mathru Puja led by the resident Acharya Swami Siddhanandaji. During the puja, the mothers closed their eyes as they remembered their mothers. A sumptuous lunch was prepared and served by the fathers, who tirelessly worked to make the occasion enjoyable and memorable. At the end of the day, the children prostrated to their parents, seeking their blessings.



**Children washed their mother's feet and performed a Devi Puja**



**Controversial award:** Trinity Cross about to change

T R I N I D A D

## National Award to Change

**I**NDO-TRINIDADIANs HAVE scored a resounding victory for religious pluralism and equality in this oil-rich Republic of Trinidad and Tobago as they celebrate the 161st Indian Arrival Day, May 30, 2006, reports Paras Ramoutar. After several years of legal battle, Justice Peter Jamadar, a Presbyterian, has ruled that Trinidad and Tobago's premier national award, "Trinity Cross," is discriminatory against Hindus and Muslims. In an 80-page judgment, Justice Jamadar said, "I concluded that the creation and continued existence of the Trinity Cross, given the historical, religious and sociological context of Trinidad and Tobago, combined with the experiences, as well as religious beliefs of Hindus and Muslims, amount to indirect adverse effects (of) discrimination against Hindus and Muslims." Subsequently, on June 2nd, Prime Minister Patrick Manning announced in Parliament that a committee had been appointed to "review all aspects of the nation's highest award, examine such other national symbols and observance which may be considered discriminatory and make appropriate recommendations to government."

ANIMAL RIGHTS

## Yet Another Elephant Dies Young in a Zoo

**G**ITA, A 42-YEAR-OLD Elephant, died on the morning of June 10, 2006, in the Los Angeles Zoo. The night before she "downed" herself, sitting on her haunches with front legs out. It is assumed muscular toxins led to vascular failure. Zoo and city officials focused blame on a night zoo-keeper (who subsequently resigned) for failure to report her condition. But animal rights activists said he was just a scapegoat. Catherine Doyle of In Defense of Animals says: "The fact that

Gita was in a downed position for more than 10 hours did lead to her death. However, we believe it was because of her painful arthritis and chronic infections of the feet that Gita could not rise once she had gone down. Lack of space for critical movement (elephants walk tens of miles a day in the wild) and the unyielding, hard surfaces that Gita stood on for decades, including concrete and hard-packed dirt, can irreparably damage elephants' feet and joints. Simply put, inadequate conditions for elephants at LA Zoo caused Gita to die prematurely. The zoo's proposed \$40 million, 3-acre expansion is grossly inadequate." Activists want elephants moved to large sanctuaries.

See [www.idausa.org](http://www.idausa.org)



**Priest Krishnamacharyulu Samudrala conducts Gita's memorial puja arranged by Malathi Ramji and Catherine Doyle**



**Prambanan:** famed 9th-century Hindu shrines damaged

I N D O N E S I A

## Shattered by Earthquake

**M**AY 27, LATE MONDAY, in less than a minute a magnitude 8.7 earthquake killed over 6,000 people in Indonesia and sent Prambanan temple's carvings crashing to the ground. Much reconstruction and restoration work begun in 1918 was destroyed. The Buddhist Borodhur temple was spared.

S R I L A N K A

## Sivapoomi—Special Needs

**A**VISITOR TO SRI LANKA IN 2005, sent this report of a small historical breakthrough in that war-torn nation. The Sivapoomi School, the first institution for special needs children in Northeastern Sri Lanka, is thriving, with over eighty students between the ages of six and eighteen, all with various forms of mental retardation. Hindu leader Mr. Aru Tirumurugan started the school in 2004 with the help of many generous donors. The tuition-free school's seven-to-one student/teacher ratio provides

much needed special attention for each student. Thirteen specially trained teachers guide Sivapoomi's curriculum, which covers various levels of mathematics, art, reading and writing skills, in a one-story building with classroom, storage and office space. Saivite theology, worship and religious study are part of the daily schedule, as well as South Indian music and dance. In the past, children with disabilities have usually dropped out of schools unable to cater to their needs, growing up to become unproductive citizens. Sivapoomi is changing the perception of these children, opening the door to mainstreaming them into society and reducing the stigma once attached to their affliction.



**Mrs. Shanmuganathan, whose daughter has Downs, is principal**





Bhikram Singh quadruples his farming income with water—up to 3,000 liters per hour

#### ECOLOGY — ENERGY

## India Wins Ashden Energy Awards

THE ASHDEN AWARDS ARE recognized globally as the world's leading green energy awards scheme—rewarding outstanding initiatives that use sustainable technologies to meet the needs of local communities and at the same time

radically improve quality of life and address the urgent challenge of climate change. India's Appropriate Technology Institute won the Food Award for its "revolutionary application of biogas technology to an urban environment, transforming food waste into clean household cooking fuel." International Development Enterprises, India, took the Enterprise Award for "commercializing a simple, sustainable technology (the treddle water pump, see photo) which helps poor farmers achieve massive improvements in yield and income." Happy pumper Bhikram Singh is a sprightly 79-year-old farmer near Lucknow, in Uttar Pradesh. He says, "Before, I made US\$6.82-\$9.00 profit per crop and I just had one crop: wheat. Renting a diesel pump was expensive. I couldn't always get one, and it washed away all the topsoil. Now I've got my treddle pump, I'm making around US\$56.81 per crop—and I get three or four crops a year. My family eats better now. I can sell the surplus at the market and buy new clothes for all the children. Next year I'm renting more land." But isn't it hard work, pedalling away for hours at a stretch? "Nooo, not for me! I like working the pump. See this knee? It used to be swollen and painful. Now, after treddling, the pain's eased and the swelling's gone right down." See: [www.ashdenawards.org](http://www.ashdenawards.org)

## BRIEFLY...

**ARCHAEOLOGISTS IN ANDHRA** Pradesh claim that a centuries-old temple exists two kilometers 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 reserved forest, where no mosque or Christian

church can be built. Only Hindus will be allowed to enter, or be employed by, the temple.

**AFTER YEARS OF LEGAL BATTLES**, the British Privy Council has ordered the Government of Trinidad and Tobago to give the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha (SDMS), led by Satnaryan Maharaj, a license to run the country's first radio facility promoting Hinduism in the Caribbean. There are over 300,000 Hindus



Participants from nine states and Canada use the language of Gods

#### U S A

## Successful Sanskrit Camp in PA

FROM MAY 26 TO 29, 2006, Sanskrit was the language of choice for 108 participants of the Samskrita Bharati Spoken Sanskrit camp held at 300-acre Vraj Bhoomi temple complex nestled in the hills of central Pennsylvania. Jyotsna Kavalur reports, "Day one started with a yoga session completely directed in Sanskrit by Samskrita Bharati founder, Sri C. Krishna Shastry. He led the camp and addressed the group twice daily in Sanskrit. The morning classes began, participants divided into levels based on prior learning and practice. My husband and septuagenarian mother were in the beginner level class, with limited inkling of what to expect. My sons went with their age-mates, partly diffident about the instruction.

"The emphasis was on learning the Sanskrit language primarily through listening and speaking, with grammar embedded therein. We quickly learned that note-taking and memorizing are not prerequisites to learning the basics. During afternoon break, my sons dropped a few Sanskrit words in their conversation. Some change, I thought! Each evening, we had an entertainment program by various participants. The skits were hilarious, and made us rock with laughter. Participants of all age groups played different games each evening. Playing tag with Sanskrit terms was just as fun and tiring as in any other language! "Throughout our stay, the opportunity to learn the language was always there. Inevitably, a congenial atmosphere emerged from four days of jam-packed learning, laughter and merriment. After returning home, we unpacked and proceeded to retire. I heard my sons call out, 'Amba, shubha raatirih.' ('Good night Mother')."

in Trinidad and Tobago.

**MICKY 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 proselytization in the military. The latest Air Force rules explicitly allow commanders to share their faith with subordinates.

**INDIA'S MAJOR RIVER ACTION** program, the Ganga Action Plan, has led to a significant improvement in the river's water quality. Last year's summer average values, re-

corded from March to June, for dissolved oxygen (DO) and biochemical oxygen demand (BOD) showed a marked improvement as against the levels noted in 1986, according to data released in July.

**RENOWNED BHARATA NATYAM** guru Shri Mani passed away, June 28, 2006, after a prolonged illness, his family said today. He was 84. One of the main people responsible for the growth of bharata natyam in Mumbai, he founded the Kalasadan Institute of Fine Arts in 1954.



## 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

# What Is It to Be Hindu?

## My ancient faith is relevant in modern times

BY CHINMAY BAJEKAL

EVERY SOCIETY HAS ITS share of problems. Hindus have always openly recognized the flaws of their society and have taken steps to correct them. Although *sati*, dowry and caste discrimination do exist, they are officially banned in India by law. There are also many Hindu organizations actively involved in eradicating these ills.

Let us now contemplate the beautiful and unique aspects of Hinduism. We Hindus need to appreciate the importance of our heritage and instill some pride in ourselves. As Swami Vivekananda once said, "When a man starts feeling ashamed of his ancestors, the end has come."

Born Hindus are heirs to the world's oldest living culture. They are also descendants of the world's oldest living civilization, which has often been referred to as "the cradle of Human civilization." The Vedas, which form the core of the Hindu scripture, comprise the oldest religious texts known to man. The language in which the Vedas have been revealed, Sanskrit, is considered the mother of all European languages.

Every Hindu has the freedom to believe or not believe in different aspects of his religion. Every Hindu has the right to question, oppose and even refrain from practicing any of the customs, rituals or methods of worship in his religion. The right of a Hindu to think freely, and even differently, is respected within his religion.

Hindus are encouraged to perceive the whole world as one family. The holy texts say, "Vasudaiva kutumbakam," meaning "the whole world is one family." Most Hindus do not create a distinction between themselves and the followers of other faiths. They do not condemn those outside their fold as non-believers. They pray not only for themselves, but for the world as well.

Hindus revere nature, deeply respecting the rivers, mountains, animals and trees. In India, one often hears the Ganges River referred to as Ma Gangay (Mother Ganga). The Himalayas, where many of India's riv-



ers originate, are also sacred to Hindus. There are many holy shrines in the Himalayan mountains.

Many sincere Hindus practice vegetarianism. One of the verses of a famous Hindu scripture declares, "How can one claim to practice true compassion when he consumes the flesh of animals to fatten his own flesh?"

Hinduism is the only religion in the world where God is also worshiped in a feminine form as the Goddess. Hinduism respects womanhood.

It is a popular Hindu belief that the two most famous wars of Hindu history, detailed in the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, were the result of dishonorable acts committed against women. Motherhood, an important aspect of womanhood, is glorified in Hinduism with the saying "Mathru Devo Bhavah," which means "Revere your mother as God." The much maligned *Manu Smriti* also glorifies women and womanhood. It says, "Where women are honored, there the Gods are pleased; but where they are not, no sacred rite yields rewards."

Never in the history of Hinduism has there been a clash between science and religion. The very sages who developed Hinduism also investigated science. Some of the most popular scientific studies in Hinduism are: ayurveda, the science of medicine; *stapathya veda*, the science of architecture; and *artha veda*, the science of sociology and economics.

At a time when the world is engulfed in fanaticism, leading to sectarian violence, disrespect of nature, leading to environmental degradation, and violation of women's rights, leading to the degradation of society, correctly understanding Hindu philosophy can bring about a positive change. This shows me that Hinduism is as relevant today in my high-tech world as it was during ancient times.

CHINMAY BAJEKAL, 24, lives in Mumbai where he works for a software company



# Lessons from a Simple Sage

## How a devotee received two potent teachings from Yogaswami of Sri Lanka: "We know nothing" and "Know thy Self"

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

SOMETIME AROUND 1955 TWO DEVOUT Hindus visited my guru's guru, an illumined master, Satguru Yogaswami of Sri Lanka. In that encounter they received a potent dose of the sage's teachings about the spiritual path. One of them recorded their experience as follows. "It was a cool and peaceful morning, except for the rattling noises owing to the gentle breeze that swayed the tall and graceful palmyra trees. We walked silently through the narrow and dusty roads. The city was still asleep. Yogaswami lived in a tiny hut that had been specially constructed for him in the garden of a home outside the city of Jaffna. The hut had a thatched roof and was on the whole characterized by the simplicity of a peasant dwelling. Yogaswami appeared exactly as I had imagined him to be. At 83 he looked very old and frail. He was of medium height, and his long grey hair fell over his shoulders. When we first saw him, he was sweeping the garden with a long broom. He slowly walked towards us and opened the gates.

"I am doing a coolie's job," he said. "Why have you come to see a coolie?" He chuckled with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes. I noticed that he spoke good English with an impeccable accent. As there is usually an esoteric meaning to all his statements, I interpreted his words to mean this: 'I am a spiritual cleanser of human beings. Why do you want to be cleansed?'

"He gently beckoned us into his hut. Yogaswami sat cross-legged on a slightly elevated neem-wood platform and we sat on the floor facing him. We had not yet spoken a single word. That morning we hardly spoke; he did all the talking.

"Yogaswami closed his eyes and remained motionless for nearly half an hour. He seemed to live in another dimension of his being during that time. One wondered whether the serenity of his facial expression was attributable to the joy of his inner meditation. Was he sleeping or resting? Was he trying to probe into our minds? My friend indicated with a nervous smile that we were really lucky to have been received by him. Yogaswami suddenly opened his eyes. Those luminous eyes brightened the darkness of the entire hut. His eyes were as mellow as they were luminous—the mellowness of compassion.

"I was beginning to feel hungry and tired, and thereupon Yogaswami asked, 'What will you have for breakfast?' At that moment I would have accepted anything that was offered but I thought of *idly* (steamed rice cakes) and bananas, which were popular food items in Jaffna. In a flash there appeared a stranger in the hut who respectfully bowed and offered us these items of food from a tray. A little later my friend wished for coffee, and before he could express his request in words the same man reappeared on the scene and served us coffee.



"After breakfast, Yogaswami asked us not to throw away the banana skins, which were for the cow. He called loudly to her and she clumsily walked right into the hut. He fed her the banana skins. She licked his hand gratefully and tried to sit on the floor. Holding out to her the last banana skin, Yogaswami ordered, 'Now leave us alone. Don't disturb us, Valli. I'm having some

visitors.' The cow nodded her head in obeisance and faithfully carried out his instructions.

"Yogaswami closed his eyes again, seeming once more to be lost in a world of his own. I was indeed curious to know what exactly he did on these occasions. I wondered whether he was meditating. There came an apropos moment to broach the subject, but before I could ask any questions he suddenly started speaking.

"Look at those trees. The trees are meditating. Meditation is silence. If you realize that you really know nothing, then you would be truly meditating. Such truthfulness is the right soil for silence. Silence is meditation.'

"He bent forward eagerly. 'You must be simple. You must be utterly naked in your consciousness. When you have reduced yourself to nothing—when your self has disappeared, when you have become nothing—then you are yourself God. The man who is nothing knows God, for God is nothing. Nothing is everything. Because I am nothing, you see, because I am a beggar, I own everything. So nothing means everything. Understand?'

"Tell us about this state of nothingness,' requested my friend with eager anticipation. 'It means that you genuinely desire nothing. It means that you can honestly say that you know nothing. It also means that you are not interested in doing anything about this state of nothingness.'

"What, I speculated, did he mean by 'know nothing?' The state of 'pure being' in contrast to 'becoming?' He responded to my thought, 'You think you know but, in fact, you are ignorant. When you see that you know nothing about yourself, then you are yourself God.'

This narrative reveals a vital theme in Yogaswami's teachings: esoteric insights about nothingness and not knowing. In life, the normal emphasis is on acquiring knowledge, or replacing a lack of knowledge on a subject with knowledge. For example, we



purchase a new computer. Knowing little about it, we read the manuals, talk to experts and end up acquiring enough information to use the computer. We have replaced a lack of knowledge with knowledge.

Yogaswami's approach, because it deals with spiritual matters, is the opposite. We start with intellectual knowledge about God and strive to rid ourselves of that knowledge. When we succeed, we end up experiencing God. Why is this? Because the intellect cannot experience God. The experience of God in His personal form and His all-pervasive consciousness lies in the superconscious or intuitive mind. And, even more cryptic, the experience of God as Absolute Reality is beyond even the superconscious mind.

Yogaswami once expressed it to a seeker in this stern phrase: "It's not in books, you fool." Acquiring clear intellectual concepts of the nature of God is good, but these concepts must be eventu-

**At the sage's hermitage:** Yogaswami sits outside his Jaffna, Sri Lanka, hut, enjoying the darshan of Siva as Ardhanareshwara. Under the palmyra trees, devotees gather to worship, sing, listen, seek his counsel and have his grace uplift their lives.

ally transcended to actually experience God.

One of the great sayings of Yogaswami's guru, Chellappaswami, emphasizes the same idea. He said, "*Naam ariyom*," which translates as, "We do not know." My own guru expressed the same idea in this aphorism: "The intellect strengthened with opinionated knowledge is the only barrier to the superconscious." He went on to explain that "a mystic generally does not talk very much, for his intuition works through reason, but does not use the processes of reason. Any intuitive breakthrough will be quite reasonable, but it does not use the processes of reason. Reason takes time. Superconsciousness acts in the now. All superconscious knowing comes in a flash, out of the nowhere. Intuition is more direct than reason, and far more accurate."

Thus, three gurus of our Kailasa Parampara have each expressed the truth that experience of God is possible only when we transcend the limited faculties of our intellect and the concepts it has about God and dive deeply into our superconscious, intuitive mind and beyond. Said another way, the experience of emptying ourselves of our intellectual concepts about God needs to precede filling ourselves with the experience of God's holy presence within us.

To guide us on the path to this experience, Yogaswami stressed the importance of meditation and formulated a key teaching, or *mahavakya*, which is: *Tannai ari*, or "Know thyself." This is a second dominant theme of his teachings. He proclaimed, "You must know the Self by the self. Concentration of mind is required for this.... You lack nothing. The only thing you lack is that you do not know who you are.... You must know yourself by yourself. There is nothing else to be known."

Markanduswami, a close devotee of Yogaswami, would later tell me, "Yogaswami didn't give us a hundred odd works to do. Only one. Realize the Self yourself, or know thy Self, or find out who you are." What, exactly, does it mean to know thy Self? Yogaswami explains beautifully in one of his published letters: "You are not the body; you are not the mind, nor the intellect, nor the will. You are the atma. The atma is eternal. This is the conclusion at which great souls have arrived from their experience. Let this truth become well impressed on your mind."

Today we are overwhelmed by information. Books, television and the Internet deluge us with vast seas of information never before available. Though information abounds, how much of it is teaching us about spirituality, that we are a divine soul? Unfortunately, only a miniscule amount. Most information in our modern world teaches us to identify with our external nature. Movies and TV teach us that we are our body and emotions, and in school we are taught that we are our intellect. For today's world, we need to amplify Yogaswami's saying to read "It's not in books, television, movies, the Internet or computer games, you fool." Yogaswami knew most people are trepidatious about meditating deeply, diving into their deepest Self, and gave assurance that inner and outer life are compatible by saying, "Leave your relations downstairs, your will, your intellect, your senses. Leave the fellows and go upstairs by yourself and find out who you are. Then you can go downstairs and be with the fellows."

We all, of course, recognize the high spiritual attainments of Hinduism's great yogis and *satgurus*. However, it is equally important to understand that their attainments are also our potential, the spiritual destiny of each soul, to be reached at some point in this or a future life. The mission of their lives is truly fulfilled if their example inspires you to devote more time and dedication to your own spiritual practices.



## LETTERS

### A Great Service

I AM NOT EXAGGERATING WHEN I SAY I AM extremely delighted at the service that your magazine renders to the Hindu community. I have always felt that the only chink in our religion's armor is the lack of a proper medium to convey the beautiful teachings of Sanatana Dharma. However, your magazine has so far managed to quench the thirst for knowledge among many Hindus.

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### Conversion in Malaysia

I AGREE VERY MUCH WITH SIVAM MANE ("Conversion in Malaysia," Letters, Jul/Aug/Sep 2006). We are aware of the increase in conversions and the Christians' relentless pursuit. I remember the same tenacity and ferocity used in the early 80s. Mr. Sivam struck the nail right on target when he wrote that there has been no properly organized teaching available for Hindus in this country. The Muslims have *agama* ("religion") schools and classes for their kids as part of their curriculum. The Christians have Sunday school or *Bible* class to look forward to. For the Hindus, we don't have a systematic curriculum or syllabus from which to teach our children. A handful of Hindu organizations have been providing teachings, but this isn't sufficient to glue together ill-informed and ill-equipped Hindus to appreciate and practice their own religion better. A well-rounded Hindu religious knowledge is very important in order for Hindus to survive in this challenging and tempting world. Hindu religion, touching on all denominations and other religious subjects, should be taught to Hindu children during the class hours usually set aside for the moral subjects designated for non-Muslim students.

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I NOTICED AN ARTICLE "HINDU FESTIVALS Are Declining" ("Briefly," Apr/May/Jun, 2006), and sadly this has happened in a district in India, home of our beloved religion. But I'm not surprised that the rationale behind why the decline has occurred is that 70 percent of the tribals of that area have converted to Christianity. But how could this happen? I live in a peaceful country with many religions, mainly Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity. We face a similar dilemma: to preserve the following and the teachings of Hinduism. The fact remains that most of us are concerned with our personal issues and are not concerned about society on the whole. A large number of Hindus convert due to numerous

reasons. Poverty is one, for some religious organizations provide three meals a day for families who convert. Abused, abandoned and orphaned children are often targeted. Lack of understanding of the religion, partly because of a lack of sermons in Hindu temples, is another. In my opinion we should: 1) donate to organizations that help very poor Hindu families; 2) assist at ashrams and welfare houses for abused, abandoned and orphaned children so that these children are brought up Hindu; 3) encourage family members and friends to attend temple pujas every week and set a good example by doing the same; 4) promote great Hindu literature such as HINDUISM TODAY and share them with those who can't afford to purchase them.

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### Yoga Comes from Hinduism

A FEW MONTHS BACK I PICKED UP YOUR magazine for the first time at a bookstore. There was an article in it about yoga ("Yoga Renamed Is Still Hindu," Jan/Feb/Mar, 2006) in which the author expressed fear that it would be long forgotten as a religious practice of the Hindus and would become thought of more as a Christian concept. Recently, I stumbled upon a discussion of yoga in which someone wanted to know that if they practiced yoga, were they going against their own religion. I told them about the article because I felt the opinion of a Hindu on the subject was important. Everyone disregarded what I had to say. They claim that yoga is not a part of a religion and in fact exists only for those who seek enlightenment. Not knowing much about yoga's history except for what I read in your magazine, I had no real argument to set forth. What I'd like to know is, is yoga based in the Hindu faith, and how do Hindus view its being used as a spiritual and physical practice by non-Hindus?

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✓ Yes, as Mr. Tiwari states in his article, *yoga did originate within Hinduism. You will find that opinions among Hindus about non-Hindus' practicing yoga vary greatly. While practicing hatha yoga (the physical postures) alone may not lead one away from a non-Hindu path, meditation and other advanced yogic practices intend to lead to attainments within Hinduism that are neither sought after nor believed in by most other faiths. It would be up to the judgment of an authority within the religion in question whether the particular practice of yoga is he-*

*retical or not. The Catholic Church has taken an official theological stance against yoga.*

### Loss of Culture

AS YOU KNOW, NEPAL HAS NOW BEEN DECLARED a secular state. We are worried that peaceful people like us in Nepal do not have a place. We feel that this country will be raped culturally like India was and is continuously. I hope your genuine cause can help free us from Western tyranny.

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### Knowledge of the Soul

IN HIS PUBLISHER'S DESK ("HOW OUR Soul Matures," Jul/Aug/Sep, 2006), Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami offers readers the most comprehensive, and yet easy to understand, description of the soul and its chakras I have ever seen or taught.

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### The Swastika Stigma

I READ ABOUT THE DISCOVERY OF A SWASTIKA fountain in Maasmechelen, Belgium, by users of Google Earth. The mayor is upset and has decided the fountain should be rebuilt in a different form. The architect is upset and claims the swastika has been used as a religious symbol by Hindus and ancient Greeks. I always thought there was a difference between the Nazi symbol and the original swastika, but I later found out that Hinduism has both clockwise and counter-clockwise swastikas. Now I am confused. Is there a difference in the shapes? I feel unfortunate for the swastika, which has a rich cultural background yet seems now to live in the shadows or be destroyed.

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✓ Refer to "The Auspicious Swastika" in our April/May/June 2005 issue.

### Assessing the Aryan Myth

I READ WITH INTEREST RAJIV MALHOTRA'S op-ed piece ("Assessing the Aryan Myth," Apr/May/Jun, 2006). While I laud his intentions, I found his article to be uninformed and misleading. It gives the impression that there is still a serious debate about the Aryan invasion over fundamentals, when both history and science have demolished it. What we have is no longer an academic debate but a battle of polemics and propaganda that has lately degenerated into political lobbying, as witnessed in the California school controversy. There are no shortcuts.

We must take the bull by the horns and argue from facts and fundamentals. There is no reason for timidity when the facts are on our side. Appeasement will forever condemn us to be engaged in a nonexistent debate on their terms that will go on forever. Finally, I totally disagree with his stance: "We don't know." We do know a great deal. The truth needs only to be propagated, not diverted by conceding the ground to our adversaries.

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✓ Mr. Malhotra's article was really too short to include the context of his strategy, which is to cast doubt on the Aryan invasion theory rather than try now to outright disprove it. This is a political strategy, not a scientific argument, for the specific situation of school textbooks.

### Tenth World Saiva Conference

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR THE VERY informative article on the Tenth World Saiva Conference that took place in Sydney, Australia, this year. It will give adequate publicity in the Hindu community the world over.

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### About Arranged Marriage

I READ WITH INTEREST MS. VIJAYSHREE'S letter ("About Arranged Marriage," Jul/Aug/Sep, 2005). She has raised many valid points, but there are deeper issues behind all this.

The bottom line, in my view, is that a system that combines the best of arranged marriages and the marriages of the West may be the best path. Both systems have their pros and cons. Some issues that need to be kept in mind when judging the two systems—all general statements—are: Indians who commit to an arranged marriage usually have a different set of expectations from the marriage than the Western type. Westerners typically enter into marriage with certain expectations of each other, and when two people after marriage go in different directions and evolve, they also sometimes fall away from each other matrimonially. An Indian arranged couple would tend to adjust to the changed personalities better. Indians who commit to an arranged marriage usually bring a less selfish approach to married life, one of giving rather than receiving. At least, that is the ideal we are taught and many of us strive to practice. When dating, it is not always the case that one finds his or her "soulmate." Oftentimes the attraction is physical first, intellectual next, then perhaps social, and important traits such as spiritual compatibility, which are needed for the union of two souls—marriage at the deeper levels—are not even considered. Marriages of two people from relatively similar social backgrounds (arranged marriages tend to be that way) have a better chance of survival, since there are fewer potential causes of conflict. In arranged marriages, families and communities are united. That adds to the glue, and when the going gets rough later, that glue can help the couple stay to-

gether until the storm passes. Most marital storms, like all storms, do pass. A typical Western couple may walk off from the marriage more easily because of the lack of such glue and because they find fewer reasons for staying committed.

In spite of all the great benefits I have enumerated, too many times arranged marriages are fixed by the parents based more or less on selfish, superficial interests such as material prosperity, skin color and job, that have very little to do with the stability of marriage. If you have parents like that, my advice is to elope; you will do much better! But take your time, at least six months. Try to get to know each other, pray for divine guidance and try to get the blessings of your parents and elders. All the advantages of the Indian system can be built into a Western type of marriage. Conversely, just because two are married according to the Indian system, it doesn't at all imply that they have less work to do to realize a happy married life. Abuses of the system by many do not warrant abandonment of the core values inherent in both systems.

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## A Surefire Way to Reach the Young

### Introduce them to our digital edition

**D**o you remember the great riddle—*how shall we ever get the young interested in Hinduism?*

To this complex question, we propose a simple answer: introduce them to HINDUISM TODAY's digital edition! It is a hit among young ones we have spoken with, and they have convinced us that it is sure to captivate a great many more of their generation, being in their medium of choice, easily accessible, free of charge and abundant with *rich media* (videos, audio, slide shows, etc.) "We spend much more time at our computers than reading magazines," said one youth. "Give a kid a URL, and he's going to check it out, you can be sure, even if he's skeptical at first."

This clued us in: to get the youth interested in Hinduism, simply give them this URL: [www.HinduismToday.com/digital](http://www.HinduismToday.com/digital)

Or better, bring the digital edition up on your screen, call your young one over and show him or her an instance of cool stuff. He will note, at the very least, that Hinduism does speak his language, is attractive, up-to-date and relevant to his life. Do the same at temples, summer camps, classes, events and gatherings—showing the digital edition, then sharing the URL. Thus will you solve the riddle and help countless youth stay connected to their magnificent dharma.

You can also significantly bolster the youth of the near and far future through the Hinduism Today Production Fund, a part of the Hindu Heritage Endowment that will provide support for the digital edition, its rich media, and for the acquisition of new technologies as they appear. Please consider becoming a Benefactor



Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami and young resident guests at Kauai's Hindu Monastery share views and visions of the digital edition which, one of the young men said, "brings everything to life."

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## QUOTES & QUIPS

Don't put the key to your happiness  
in someone else's pocket.

**Swami Chinmayananda** (1916-1993), renowned teacher of Vedanta, founder of Chinmaya Mission

A Hindu devotee asked God, in the form of the multi-armed Lord Narayana, this question: "My dear Lord, I understand that you have innumerable inconceivable potencies. But out of all of them the energy of light seems to be the most amazing. Light pervades the spiritual world, it illuminates the material universes, and life is impossible without it." He continued, "I would like to know how you make it work." "Oh, that's easy," came the reply. "Many hands make light work."

The real change must happen within us. For only when conflict and negativity are removed from within can we play a truly constructive role in establishing peace. **Mata Amritanandamayi Ma**, India's Kerala-based hugging saint

Once upon a time a man whose ax was missing suspected his neighbor's son. The

boy walked like a thief, looked like a thief and spoke like a thief. But the man found his ax while digging in the valley, and the next time he saw his neighbor's son, the boy walked, looked and spoke like any other child. **Lao Tzu** (ca 600 BCE), author of *Tao Te Ching* and founder of Taoism

I know great earth changes have been predicted for the future, so if you're looking to avoid earthquakes, my advice is simple. When you find a fault, just don't dwell on it. **Swami Beyondananda**

**His Divine Holiness Pramukh Swami Maharaj**, leader of BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, was asked: "If you are trying to convince someone and they remain stubborn and don't accept what you say, then do you lose your temper?" He responded: "What will we achieve by losing our temper? We try to talk to them, but if they

don't listen, then we have to step down! After all, we are God's devotees and so is he!"

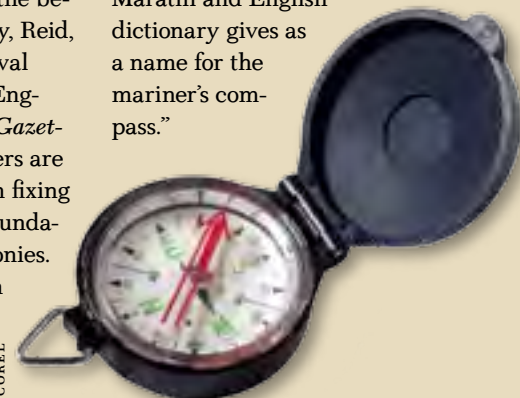
In Sanatana Dharma, there is no single life, no single judgment, or eternal punishment. There is more than one life and, of course, there is no single judgment. In fact, there is no judgment at all as such, for the idea is to help and not to judge and condemn. The inner dynamics of incarnation is not reward or punishment but self-improvement, and ultimately self-discovery and self-recovery, moksha. **Ram Swarup** (1920-1998), a foremost spokesperson of Hindu spirituality and culture in India

**Swami Vivekananda**: I am the disciple of a man who could not write his own name, and I am not worthy to undo his shoes. How often have I wished I could take my intellect and throw it into the Ganges! *Student*: But, Swami, that is the part of you I like best. **Swami Vivekananda**: That is because you are a fool, Madam, like I am.

If slaughterhouses had glass walls, everyone would be a vegetarian. **Paul McCartney**, British singer, musician and songwriter, member of The Beatles

And so, for the first time in my life perhaps, I took the lamp and, leaving the zone of everyday occupations and relationships where everything seems clear, I went down into my inmost self, to the deepest abyss whence I feel dimly that my power of action emanates. But as I moved further away from the conventional certainties by which social life is superficially illuminated, I became aware that I was losing contact with myself. At each step of the descent a new person was disclosed within me of whose name I was no longer sure, and who no longer obeyed me. And when I had to stop my explora-

compass seems placed beyond doubt by the Sanskrit word *maccha-yantra*, or 'fish-machine,' which Molesworth's Marathi and English dictionary gives as a name for the mariner's compass."



### DID YOU KNOW?

## The First Compass Was from India

AS EARLY AS 2000 YEARS AGO, according to J.L. Reid, Indian mariners used a compass and sextant to navigate the seas. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Reid, a member of the Institute of Naval Architects and Shipbuilders in England, published in the *Bombay Gazetteer*, "The early Hindu astrologers are said to have used the magnet, in fixing the North and East, in laying foundations and other religious ceremonies. The Hindu compass was an iron fish that floated in a vessel of oil and pointed to the North. The fact of this older Hindu

COREL

### Frank and Ernest

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tion because the path faded from beneath my steps, I found a bottomless abyss at my feet, and out of it comes—arising I know not from where—the current which I dare to call my life. **Pierre Teilhard de Chardin** (1881-1955), controversial Jesuit paleontologist and philosopher

Nothing can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not. The world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan "press on" has solved and will always solve the problems of the human race. **Calvin Coolidge** (1872-1933), 30th president of the United States

Who could not love a religion in which there is no such thing as a heretic, no such

belief as blasphemy and no such place as an eternal hell? **Anonymous**

Every morning I stay in bed for ten minutes to ponder my place in the universe; then I wash my face and check my karma. **Drew Barrymore**, Hollywood actress

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. **Shukla Yajur Veda, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.4.6**

Death is not extinguishing the light; it is putting out the lamp because the dawn has come. **Rabindranath Tagore** (1861-1941), Bengali poet and Brahma Samaj philosopher

Hinduism is the most dynamic religion on the planet, the most comprehensive and comprehending. The Hindu is completely filled with his religion all of the time. It is a religion of love. The common bonds uniting all Hindus into a singular spiritual body are the laws of karma and dharma, the belief in reincarnation, all-pervasive Divinity, the ageless traditions and our Gods. Our religion is a religion of closeness, one to another, because of the common bond of loving the same Gods. All Hindu people are a one family, for we cannot separate one God too far from another. Each in His heavenly realm is also of a one family, a divine hierarchy which governs and has governed the Hindu religion from time immemorial, and will govern Sanatana Dharma on into the infinite. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927-2001), founder of HINDUISM TODAY

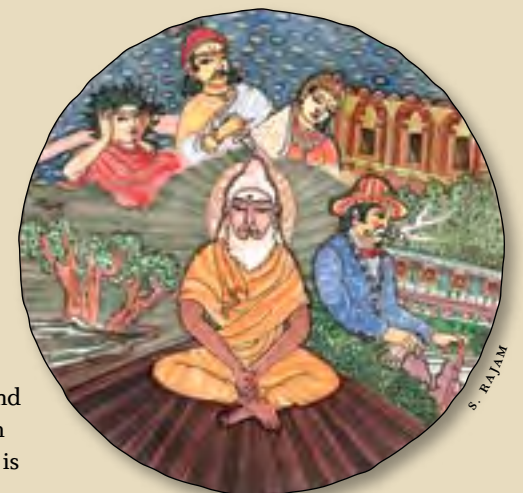
### BASICS OF HINDUISM

## The Process of 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* attained.





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FROM THE AGAMAS

## What Is the Nature of the Soul?

In the *Kirana Agama* Lord Siva explains bondage, grace and release

**K**IRANA AGAMA IS THE 27TH OF THE 28 SAIVA AGAMAS. This excerpt is from the vidyapada or knowledge section. Typically, Agamas are divided into sections dealing with philosophy, yoga, personal and temple worship and construction of temples, including design of Deity images. The Saiva Agamas are set in Sanskrit as a conversation between Lord Siva and a devotee, in this case, Garuda. Here in verses 10 to 23 of chapter one, Garuda poses a question about the nature of the soul and how it might be released from the cycle of reincarnation. The 36 tattvas, frequently referenced in these verses, are "reality essences" or categories of existence. There are five suddha or pure tattvas beginning with Siva tattva or the pure consciousness of God. Then there are seven tattvas of mixed nature including maya, time, karma, creativity, knowledge, attachment and the purusha tattva, or soul, equipped with the preceding five. The 24 impure tattvas include prakriti or primal nature, intellect, ahankara tattva, instinctive mind, the various senses, organs and the five elements.

**Garuda:** "O Lord! I am your devotee and yet I am frightened with the hazards of continuous transmigration. In order to annihilate this fear, kindly impart to me the Sivajnana, the divine knowledge, by obtaining which alone all the embodied souls are relieved from the bondage and attain the final and supreme blessedness."

Thereupon the Lord, having been implored by Garuda, shook his head, resplendent with the crescent, and spoke.

**Lord Siva:** "What is requested by you is auspicious. Now I impart to you an important and great Saiva scripture. It is capable of bestowing on the disciple *siddhis*, the greatest and perfect accomplishments. The name of this great scripture is the *Kirana Agama*. It procures for the aspirants the highest kind of the nectar of bliss. For all people, irrespective of castes, it grants liberation. It is devoid of discrepancies. Each and every word of it is full of clarity and sense. It imparts the knowledge of the soul, its three bondages, God, the grace of Sivasakti and the manner of spiritual investigation. It also explains with equal stress about worship and personal conduct. The greatness of yoga is set forth in many of its chapters."

**Garuda:** "What is the nature of the soul which is thus told? How does the soul get entangled in bondage? How is it released? Kindly impart to me in order to dissipate the doubts concerning the soul."

**Lord Siva:** "The soul is eternal. It is without form. It is with limited knowledge and action. It is without attributes. It is neither omnipotence nor omniscient. It is pervasive. It has its existence in the middle and upper regions of maya, the created worlds. It is of the nature of attaching itself to the means of enjoyments."

"To the soul associated with impurity, the bondage of *kalā tattva*, the impulse toward creativity, is brought about by me. Because of the bondage of *kalā tattva*, the power of the soul to acquire knowledge and understanding through thought, experience and the senses is partially manifested. The *kalā tattva* partially removes the obscuring impact of maya, so the soul can come under this influence of *vidya tattva*, knowledge. Then the soul is chained with *raga tattva*, desire, which induces it to feel intense attachment. Again the soul is bound by *avyakta* which is in the form of the gross worlds, and in which the three qualities of nature, *sattva* or quiescence, *rajas*, passion, and *tamas*, darkness or inertia, are latent. After the bondage of



God Siva holds the holiest of scriptures, the Vedas and Agamas

*avyakta*, the intellect, the external ego, instinctive mind and senses such as hearing, etc., bind the soul. Then the soul which is equipped in this way for empirical experience becomes restricted by its karma. Because of this restriction, the soul is confined to the fruits of its own karmas procured by it in its previous births.

"In this way the soul, which is bound by the chains of *kalā* and other *tattvas*, gets associated with the gross body. It is possessed of limited knowledge and action obscured by the innate impurities. The soul becomes deluded under the bondage of maya and its evolutes. The act of misconceiving the not-self as the self becomes its own nature. After its embodiment, the soul experiences all pleasures and pains which are the consequences of its previous good and evil deeds.

"Due to the passage of time, when equality occurs in the karmic influences of the soul, the rapid and forceful descent of grace, Saktipata, occurs. On the ground of the descent of Sakti, when the soul is initiated according to the grade of Saktipata by a guru, the soul gets over its limitedness and becomes omniscient like Siva. Thereafter it is not fettered by the bonds. It regains its own essential nature of Siva *tattva*. It does not get again plunged in transmigration. The soul whose essential nature is intelligence itself and whose bondage is due to *mala* gets released on account of the grace of the Lord who is essentially and eternally free from *mala*. Thus the nature of the soul is expounded to you. What else do you want to be imparted?"

DR. SABHARATHNAM S. PATTUSAMY (1942- ), of the Sivacharya priest lineage, is an expert in Tamil and Sanskrit specializing in *Vedas*, *Agamas* and the *Silpa Shastras* on Vastu science.

The Agamas, like the *Vedas*, are divinely revealed and revered scriptures, *sruti*, of Hinduism, likened to the *Torah* (1,200 BCE), *Bible New Testament* (100 CE), *Koran* (630 CE) or *Zend Avesta* (600 BCE). There are many Agamas and subsidiary texts for each of Hinduism's principle denominations—Saiva, Sakta and Vaishnava. Dr. Sabharathnam dates the *Agamas* at 12,000 bce.



# A Sainly Minstrel And His Message



*The man and his moment: Pujya Shri Ramesh Bhai Oza with  
his newly completed Shri Mandir in the background*



# Inspired from childhood to sing praises of God, Pujya Shri Ramesh Bhai Oza has become one of India's finest *kathakars*, head of an exemplary priest training institute and spiritual mentor to thousands

BY RAJIV MALIK, NEW DELHI

IN A WARM SUMMER EVENING in 1967, ten-year-old Ramesh Oza is sitting in a field with a few of his friends near his home in Devka, a village situated in the elitist coastal district of Saurashtra in Gujarat, India. Other children nearby are playing popular Indian games like *kabaddi*, *khokho*, cricket and soccer. Ramesh and his companions are not interested. They are busily gathering dry leaves, small wooden sticks and twigs, as Ramesh leads them in singing *bhajans*. Then they sit in a circle and ceremoniously offer the leaves and twigs, one by one, into a large bowl which represents a sacred fire. Acting as the head priest, Ramesh chants Sanskrit mantras. After each mantra, the boys repeat in unison, "*soaha*." They continue with great fervor and devotion for forty minutes. Finally, Ramesh opens a small packet of homemade candies and distributes one to each member of his team. Giddy with joy, they conclude their imaginary Vedic fire worship ceremony by singing one final devotional song.

Standing nearby, a quiet witness to this youthful *yagna* looks on with poised contentment. Mrs. Laxmi Ben Oza, is so very proud of Ramesh, her second son. She has three other boys and two girls, but Ramesh stands out. He is an especially fine young man—never involved in the usual naughtiness or pranks of childhood. Yet, perhaps even she cannot anticipate the world-famous *kathavachak* that he will grow up to be.

A *kathavachak*—also referred to as a *kathakar*—is a person who performs *katha*. A *katha* is a dramatic presentation of religious subject matter that combines lecturing, storytelling and singing. *Kathakar* literally means "one who gives *aakar* (shape) to the *katha*." *Vachak* means "to deliver." So, a *kathavachak* is someone who delivers *katha*. If a *kathakar* or *kathavachak* is an accomplished singer and a compelling speaker, endowed with natural charisma and well-versed in the subject matter he is presenting, he can become immensely popular. In modern times, *kathavachaks* have begun to employ teams of musicians to enhance their performances.

Today, Bhaishri is famous not only as a *kathakar*, he is also respected as the founder



**Award of distinction:** HINDUISM TODAY paid tribute to Bhaishri's exceptional religious contribution by recognizing him as "Hindu of the Year" for 2006



**Home:** Sandipani Vidyaniketan, Bhaishri's priest training center, is located in the town of Porbandar on the coast of Gujarat

of Sandipani Vidyaniketan, one of India's finest priest-training institutes. Certainly, this gifted man has distinguished himself as an important religious leader. We think so. This year, HINDUISM TODAY is proud to honor Bhaishri with the Hindu Renaissance Award as Hindu of the Year, 2006.

Starting in 1990, HINDUISM TODAY has honored one eminent Hindu each year who has most impacted Hinduism and spread its values, compassion and profundity across the globe. Past renaissance winners are: Swami Paramananda Bharati ('90), Swami Chidananda Saraswati, "Muniji" of Parmath Niketan ('91), Swami Chinmayananda ('92), Mata Amritanandamayi Ma ('93), Swami Satchidananda ('94), Pramukhswami Maharaj ('95), Sri Satya Sai Baba ('96), Sri Chinmoy ('97), Swami Bua ('98), Swami Chidananda Saraswati of Divine

Life Society ('99), Ma Yoga Shakti ('00), Sri T. S. Sambamurthy Sivachariar ('01), Dada Vaswani ('02), Sri Tiruchi Mahaswamigal ('03), Dr. K. Pichai Sivacharya ('04) and Sri Swami Tejomayananda ('05).

## In the beginning

It was Ramesh's uncle, Jeevaraj Bhai Oza—a highly respected *kathavachak* himself—who first noticed a spark of spiritual genius in Bhaishri. Jeevaraj considered it most auspicious that the boy was born and raised according to Vedic traditions and that he had taken an unusually strong interest in his religious studies, even from earliest childhood. It was Jeevaraj who got Ramesh enrolled in his first Sanskrit study program.

Ramesh's father was also a deeply religious man who inculcated in his son the habit of reciting the *Bhagavad Gita* daily. This one *sadhana* (religious practice) had a profound impact on Bhaishri and made the *Gita* central to his religious life.

Many elders of Devka village fondly remember his first public *katha*, which he performed with friends at the age of thirteen. He and his companions worked long and hard to organize the event. To meet expenses, they collected one rupee from each home in the community and used the money to erect a simple tent and a temporary stage. They established a management

committee, printed personalized invitations by hand and distributed them to the head of each family in the village. Bhaishri still has one of those original invitations.

By all accounts, that debut *katha* was a grand success. During those famous seven days, he presented the eighteen chapters of the *Bhagvad Gita* in two sessions per day. On the first day, primarily children attended. With each succeeding day, more adults showed up. Such was the unexpected popularity of Bhaishri's first *katha*. Everyone was astounded by the boy's oratorical skills and by his natural charm and magnetism.

## His calling flowers

Bhaishri received his initial education at Tatvajyoti, a Sanskrit school located in the small town of Rajola. Eventually, he moved to Mumbai, where he completed his primary education and attended college. He was an excellent and conscientious student—always at the top of his class.

Although Bhaishri pursued his college education with great sincerity, his heart and soul belonged to *katha*. He began college studying to be a doctor. Later, he shifted to the subject of commerce with the aim of becoming a chartered accountant. By the time he reached his final year of college, however, it was abundantly clear to him that his life was meant for something else. With each passing day of that soul-searching period, the magical *samskaras* of his childhood blossomed within him, and an overpowering dedication to *katha* slowly consumed his life.



**An ancient Vedic scene:** Bhaishri sits with priests in training at Sandipani Vidyaniketan

During those college years, Bhaishri was never far away from *kathavachana* (the study and practice of *katha*). He would often attend his uncle's daily performances at locations around Mumbai, often assisting the elder. Through this real-life exposure, Bhaishri gained considerable performing experience and confidence.

At age of eighteen, he conducted his first professional *katha* in Central Mumbai at age 18. It was like a homecoming. After that, he performed five or six times a year until his college graduation, at which point he was offered enough performance opportunities to justify making *kathavachana* his full-time vocation. From then on, there was no looking back. Bhaishri was an instant hit with a wide variety of audiences all over India. His style was simple yet elegant. His rich and melodious voice was beautiful. His wisdom was insightful and pragmatic. All the signs of greatness were there.

Bhaishri continued to mature with dignity and accomplishment. In time, his charismatic stage presence and unique style of oration distinguished him from other *kathakars*. Yet what appealed to the masses, even more than his natural flare, was the earthy wisdom of his message. He struck

at the core causes of human distress with "common sense" advice that not only proved itself out in daily life but also made listeners feel it was obvious knowledge they should have thought of themselves.

For his contribution to the field of *kathavachan*, Bhaishri has been conferred various titles, including "Bhagwat Acharya," "Bhagwat Ratna" and "Bhagwat Bhushan." Despite his achievements and fame, Bhaishri is unassuming. He revels in simplicity and is seemingly immune to the trappings of self glorification. It comes as no surprise that he is affectionately referred to—and known to millions of devotees and admirers—simply as Bhaiji or Bhaishri. *Bhaishri* literally means "respectable brother."

## Scripture

Like many *kathakars*, Bhaishri performs primarily from three literary works: *Srimad Bhagavatam*, *Ramayana* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. The *Bhagavad Gita* (one part of the epic *Mahabharata*) is world famous for its symbolic lessons about dharma, given by Lord Krishna to Arjuna on the battlefield of *Kurukshetra*. The *Ramanaya* is the story of the irreproachably virtuous Lord Rama. *Srimad Bhagavatam*, written by Sage Ved Vyasa, is a *kathakar's* favorite. It contains the essence of a number of important Hindu scriptures, as well as the life stories of the 10 incarnations of Lord Vishnu, and the famous pastimes of Lord Krishna.

In the beginning, Bhaishri focused on

**A multi-religious man:** Bhaishri, seen here worshiping the Siva Lingam, was born a Saivite brahmin, trained as a priest in the Smarta tradition and performs *katha* dedicated to Lord Vishnu





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Thousands attended the 14-day temple opening

## The Inauguration of Sri Hari Mandir

Beginning on February 1, 2006, the magnificent inauguration (Mandir Mahotsav) of the Shri Hari Mandir was held. Attended by a million devotees, it took place on the campus of Sandipani Vidyaniketan in the town Porbandar on the Western coast of Gujarat.

It all began with a two-mile parade

Shribhai leads the way

The temple Deity consecration began with the lighting of a lamp

delivering *kathas* on the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, because of its abundant dramatic possibilities. Through the years, however, he gave more and more performances and discourses on the *Ramayana*. He felt this particular epic was especially relevant for modern times when there is such a great need to emphasize the importance of the responsibility and good conduct so beautifully highlighted in the *Ramayana*'s glorification of Lord Rama's righteous life.

Bhaishri also performed *katha* on the *Bhagavad Gita*, but with more explanation than is generally given. Because the *Gita* is a dialogue occurring on a battlefield, in which Krishna urges Arujna to fight and kill the enemy, Bhaishri felt that any *katha* of it should include abundant philosophical elucidation so that its abstract symbology is understood and its violence is not interpreted too literally.

His *Srimad Bhagavatam katha* was often requested as a private performance in the home of a family who had lost a loved one. The main reasons were to invoke peace for the departed soul, relieve the distress of family and friends and prepare the younger family members to meet the challenge of living without the guiding assistance of the deceased loved one. Bhaishri's *kathas* on such occasions were filled with narration on death as perceived by the rishis. He felt this was essential, since such talk is too often avoided in home discussion.

### Spiritual Kathas

Bhaishri observed that, while the level of attendance for his presentations was always good, the attention of the family was more focused on socializing and the formalities of the event, rather than the substance and power of the *katha* itself.

As time when on, he learned that public *kathas* arranged by individuals and organizations dedicated to worthy causes, such as charities or hospital construction, tended to be more spiritual in nature, and honorable because they earned good money for good work. Bhaishri found these *kathas* more satisfying and decided to stop performing privately.

Eventually, even these fund-raising events began to disturb him. He could just not help feeling that, in performing *kathas* even for good causes, he was being too commercial. The voice of his conscience hounded him to make spirituality, not money, the central focus of his performances. Most importantly, he was concerned that the innate sanctity of the *katha* be preserved.

Bhaishri had embarked upon this life mission propelled by a conviction that *katha* was a service capable of making a person

godly. At the very least, it should inspire people to achieve coherence and meaning in lives that were otherwise mundane. Ultimately, he decided to perform *kathas* only as spiritual functions.

Bhaishri firmly believes that, simply by listening to *kathas*, one can actually resolve karma at a deep intuitive level before it surfaced into action. This is possible, he feels, because the inspired discourse of the *katha*, interspersed with its music and empowered by its devotion, has the unique capacity to evoke a deeper intuitive understanding than might be attained under ordinary circumstances.

Thousands of people whose lives were transformed by Bhaishri's *kathas* have shared their testimonies. Some even confessed they were on the verge of suicide due to dilemmas that seemed insurmountable and unbearable. The *kathas* turned their

lives around.

Yet, Bhaishri is the first to admit that the transformatory power of *katha* is limited. For instance, it would be too much to expect that such performances might suddenly make a bad man good. "Certainly, the *katha* has special power," says Bhaishri, "but that power comes more in the form of an inspiration or a motivation to adopt virtuous ways and curb the instinctive nature. *Katha* also has a unique capacity to instill a sense of discrimination within the listener—a fresh ability to differentiate between good and bad."

### Sandipani Vidyaniketan

Bhaishri is fully dedicated to the preservation of Hindu culture. During the late 1980's, he was casually invited to visit a Sanskrit school in a small village near Porbandar, a town on the coast of Gujarat famous as the birthplace of Mahatma Gandhi. Immedi-

ately, he took an interest in becoming personally involved in that school's development. Investing much of his own time, energy and money, he was instrumental not only in expanding the institution but also in making it exemplary and popular. The school's growth escalated at such a rate that its board of trustees was soon compelled to look for another location with more room. Recognizing the unique service the institution was providing, the Gujarat state government allotted 85 acres of land right in Porbandar.

At this point, Bhaishri took full responsibility for running the school and established a new governing body named the Shree Bhartiya Sanskruti Samvardhak Trust. Under his dynamic leadership, the institute became an accredited residential college.

Its campus complex was constructed with housing for 500 resident students and provisions for extensive education in Sanskrit and

## Bhaishri's Wisdom

**Pujya Shri Rameshbhai Oza's extraordinary influence as a fine kathakar, a great teacher and a living example of dharma is surpassed only by his impact as a pragmatic spiritual advisor. His growing assembly of respectful devotees revel in the seemingly endless flow of his divinely inspired "common sense." Here are some examples of his sage council.**

**How can I conquer the ego?** A person with a strong ego is always focused upon himself. He can conquer this state by becoming God-conscious. He can become God-conscious through surrender in worship. He will then be able to ask questions that will lead to

answers that will guide him forward on the spiritual path. Through surrender, the ego subsides as a consciousness of God arises.

**If I have bad thoughts, can I still do good deeds?** You are not bad, even if you have bad thoughts. You are a part of God. Your goodness is just hidden. The very fact that you have asked such a question means that you want to do good. This is of the utmost importance. Bad thoughts arise in all minds. Concentrate on the good you want to do and bad thoughts will automatically subside as the good thoughts become stronger.

**Why should I remain so committed to vegetarianism, when so many of my friends are not?** It is not logical that vegetarianism is wrong because most people eat meat. It is also not logical that

nonvegetarians are bad and vegetarians are good. Look at Mother Nature and all of her animals. You will find that animals that drink water with their lips are vegetarian while those that drink with their tongues are not. Which category do we fall into? Animals follow and act according to their intrinsic nature. Why shouldn't we? Nonvegetarian animals have short intestines and long, sharp teeth so that they can ingest and digest meat. Vegetarian animals are not built like this. They are not designed to eat meat. As a human being, you must ask yourself the question: "What is meat?" It's digested food, is it not? It is the muscle and organs of animals, made by the food they eat. When you eat meat, you are actually eating and digesting already digested food. Does this make sense? This is the cause of a number of illnesses. A disease experienced by an animal may well enter your body when you eat its flesh. Look at

Mad Cow Disease. Mother Nature made man's body for vegetarian food. Do you put petrol in a diesel car. No. This body is a temple. Temples built by man with sand and cement are considered sacred without question. What about the temple of the body, built by God? Should we not care for it at least as much as we care for the stone temples we have built?

**I lack self confidence. What can I do about this?** Man is a bundle of thoughts. What we think, we become. If you think you do not have confidence, you will not have it. Think that you are a confident person and you will become so. Stay in the company of good, confident people. Stop thinking you can't. Think that you can and you will. Talk to yourself in affirmations. Say: "Yes, with the grace of God, I can do this."





Temple Deities Krishna and Radha



Bhaishri performs the Shrimad Bhagavat Katha

From February 2 to 4 the *pran pratishtha vidhi* ceremonies were performed to “breathe life” into the temple’s Deities: Vishnu (the central image of worship), Siva, Parvati, Ganesha, Karttikeya, Radha, Krishna, Lakshmi, Rama, Sita, Lakshman, Hanuman and Durga. Bhaishri performed *kathas* throughout the two-week event.



There was standing room only at Bhaishri’s performances

For Bhaishri’s *katha* performances, an enormous tent was constructed with a capacity of 50,000. On February 4, Bhaishri and other religious leaders climbed temporary wooden scaffolding to bless the five temple spires in the *kalash dhvaja* ceremony. Round-the-clock recitation of *Bhagvat slokas* was performed by 1,111 brahmins from February 5 to 12.



The blessing of the spires

priestcraft, as well as a full secular curriculum. It was decided that the college would be called Sandipani Vidyanyketan and its teaching system would be in accordance with the ancient Vedic way.

#### Vrindavan

During my recent visit to the lush, forest setting of Sandipani Vidyanyketan, I felt as if I had been transported back to a time when great Indian saints taught their pupils deep in the grandeur of untamed nature. Yet the buildings around me were as modern as anywhere in India. The classrooms of the large, centrally located college structure are outfitted with state-of-the-art computers, a vast library, a well-equipped science laboratory and a hi-tech music recording studio.

In this utopian setting, students reside in a place called Vrindavan, an octagonal building, replete with the most modern of

facilities. Vrindavan is a masterpiece of architecture. One of its eight wings is reserved for the school’s administrative facilities, as well as residence quarters for the *acharya* in charge of student management.

The second wing includes the dining hall, where meals are served to four hundred students at a time. The facility also provides tea and refreshments for visiting pilgrims.

The other six wings comprise living accommodations for the students. There is also a small, well-equipped, resident hospital.

It was a wonderful experience for me to experience the students’ *sandhya*, morning and evening prayers, performed upon a beautifully designed, octagonal-shaped, golden-domed podium.

#### The Rishikul

Bhaishri feels that, in modern times, Hindu society is in need of better educated temple

priests, more adequately qualified to conduct temple ritual in a traditional manner. He observes that most practicing priests do not have even minimal education in the Sanskrit language. He hopes that Sandipani Vidyanyketan will help fill this void by producing priests with some or all of the following qualities: a high level of proficiency in Sanskrit and grammar, a consummate knowledge of the *Vedas*, a selfless attitude of service and a personal commitment to the practice of prayer, *sadhana* and *tapas* in a disciplined lifestyle.

Bhaishri’s approach to the education of young priests is mystical. “Without translating knowledge into action, it becomes a burden,” he laments. “We have to make the education of our young priests action-oriented. When knowledge is translated into action, it becomes service.”

The students, or Rishikumars, of Sandi-

pani follow a well-conceived daily routine, beginning at 6am and ending at 10pm. The medium of instruction is Hindi, and the subjects taught are Sanskrit, basic temple liturgy and a deep knowledge of the *Vedas* and their *Upanishads*. In addition to a well-rounded hatha yoga and physical education program, the institute offers basic secular schooling, as well as supplementary training in classical music and art.

Graduates of the Rishikul eight-year course of study are addressed as “shastris,” while those who have completed ten years are referred to as “acharyas.” The training of shastris and acharyas is similar except that acharyas receive additional education in Vedic literature and generally develop a greater proficiency in Sanskrit.

All rishikumars are groomed to be punctual, self reliant and independent. They lead a life of strict discipline and willingly

perform the daily chores of washing their clothes, making their beds and cleaning their rooms. They also participate in the physical maintenance of the campus.

I will never forget one especially touching quality I observed about the unique lives of these students. Although they are taught to be completely self-reliant, there was never a moment when they were not being observed, usually from a respectful distance, by a quietly transparent house-master, charged with the responsibility for their well-being and development.

In addition to setting up this Rishikul, Bhaishri has established what he calls a Gurukul to impart modern secular education in the English language, as well as a full curriculum of subjects designed to prepare boys for a productive and comfortable life in the world as engineers, doctors and lawyers. As in the Rishikul, students of this

Gurukul are taught attitudes of service and humanitarianism with the aim of producing fine young men, as strong in their cultural foundation as they are in their many specialized job skills.

#### The importance of Sanskrit grammar

Bhaishri’s vision for the education of his Rishikul students is that it be based in accomplished Sanskrit with a lot of emphasis on grammar. He feels strongly that grammar is the foundation of any language and no Hindu priest can be expected to do his job well if he is not taught Sanskrit grammar correctly. Many other priest training institutions of India do not place this kind of emphasis on basic grammar. For this, Bhaishri’s approach is considered noteworthy.

When asked about the Rishikul qualifications, Bhaishri states, “Before we admit a child, we try to ascertain how much in-

#### How can we overcome the negative aspects of Western influence?

The quality of our life is dependent on the decisions that we make. The cultures of both the East and the West have their strengths and weaknesses. Through the use of discretion, we can combine the best aspects of both. Whether a person is born in India or in the West, he or she can choose to live life following the best points of both cultures.

#### How can we maintain a religious lifestyle in a society so immersed in selfish worldliness?

Life is not all bad or good. The world is full of all types of people. Live tactfully and skillfully with others as demanded by the conditions of the moment. It is not wise to expect that all experiences will be favorable, that all people will be helpful or that all of our wishes always will come true.

#### Is it wrong to strive for wealth and success in the world?

If you have the intelligence and the willingness to work hard, there is nothing wrong with being rich or enjoying what wealth brings. Wealth is *artha*, one of the four legitimate aims of life. However, wealth should be earned and used ethically. And it should be handled with a certain amount of detachment. Always bear in mind that money exists for you. You don’t exist for money. Money may be a necessary means in life, but it is not an end in itself. It has been said that, if one tenth of one’s wealth is donated, wealth becomes auspicious. It is also generally understood that, if one spends one tenth of one’s time in service, one will discover unparalleled bliss.

**What is the spiritual duty of a worldly person?** If our senses externalize our energies and drive us toward worldly activity, we may as

well perform these actions in the spirit of service to others. If such actions are carried out for the well-being of other people, they will not create negative karmas. One of the meanings of dharma is “duty.” So the dharma of a worldly person is to help others.

**I am doing poorly in school. How can I improve my grades?** Understand the importance of your studies, and you will develop a love and respect for them. Where there is love and respect, there is interest. Where there is interest, concentration is effortless. From concentration comes success. This success brings enjoyment. We are born from ananda, bliss. We live for this bliss. Bliss is to be found where there is enjoyment. Enjoyment follows love. Love comes from understanding the importance of what you are doing. Therefore, understand the importance of your studies.

#### What can parents do to stimulate their children’s interest in religion?

Start early. Set examples by doing what you want your children to do. Children copy well. When you worship, ask your children to join in. Don’t force the teachings and practices upon them. They are so innocent and open they will automatically follow you in all that you do. Make the environment of your home rich in culture and knowledge. Leave good books lying around. Do not live with the expectation that your children are going to spend as much time as you do in worship and prayer. Their priorities will be different. During their school years, their studies will be their puja (worship). At that time, it is sufficient that they simply bow before God and respect their parents. Be friends with your children and love them. The mother’s lap is the world’s best university. The mother is the child’s first and best teacher.





From left to right: Bhaishri, Devprasad Babu, Karshni Gurusharananandji Maharaj, Swami Chidanand Saraswatiji (Muniji) and Swami Hansdasji

Daily afternoon *dharma sabhas* (lectures by holy men) and *satsangs* (religious gatherings) took place from February 2 to 12, presided over by distinguished guest speakers revered throughout India as respected Hindu leaders. On February 10, Bhaishri initiated the blessing of elaborately prepared sweets that were offered during *annakut*, a time in India when farmers offer their first spring yield to the temple Deities to be later distributed as prasadam to the poor.

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Food offerings are placed before the murtis of Radha and Krishna to be blessed

terest he and his parents have in Sanskrit. This is most important, for this is not a place where parents can send their children simply because they have not done well in their studies elsewhere and education here is free. We are very strict with regard to this matter. We get as many as 450 applications every year for no more than 90 available seats. So the selection process is quite tough.”

Today, graduates of Sandipani Vidyaniketan serve as priests in India and abroad. They are also employed as teachers and *kathavachaks* all around the world.

Although nearly all of the graduates of the Rishikul are brahmins, Bhaishri is quick to assure that the school is not restricted to this caste only.

“We do not perform any sort of screening to keep non-brahmins out of our institution,” he says. “I believe that the knowledge of religious scriptures should not be confined to

brahmins alone. Still, most of our students are brahmin. Students from other castes generally do not pursue this study, simply because they cannot be sure they will have jobs after they graduate.”

The biggest difference between the training provided at Sandipani Vidyaniketan and other institutions is that service and spirituality are a first-priority motive in the former while commercial success is generally the main driving force in the latter.

#### Gods of flesh and blood

Bhaishi’s focus on spirituality is apparent everywhere in his teaching. “The *murtis* (temple Deities) in the temple are supposed to be treated like real people of flesh and blood. The whole idea behind the temple ceremony called *pran pratishtha* (installation of life into the Deities) is that these stone or metal images are being transformed

into living Gods. If the priest is not holding this feeling for the Gods that they are alive, the true power of worship is not there. Then it would not be a *darshan* (holy sight). It would be a *pradarshan* (exhibition). This *bhava* (feeling) has to be there in the priest. Out of this feeling, he will be inclined to take care of the Gods appropriately. Then gradually, the *devatva* (feeling the presence of the God) will become more apparent. All of this is helpful in developing qualified priests, as well as strong temples.”

The supreme importance of bhakti (devotion) is a central theme of Bhaishri’s message, not only to his priests but his devotees as well. “Bhakti is the mother,” he says. “*Jnana* (knowledge) and *vairagya* (detachment) are her sons. If you practice bhakti, liberation is assured. Through bhakti, attachment to the world becomes attachment to the God. When we are attached to God, we are au-

tomatically detached from the world. Then life is wonderful. Seeking *moksha* through the acquisition of knowledge alone is a tough process and a bit dry. Bhakti is filled with love and life.”

#### Social services

In addition to training priests, Sandipani Vidyaniketan provides education to the rural people of Porbandar and neighboring areas. In a program called Vaishvik Sanskruti Parivar, devotees of Bhaishri go into jungle villages and conduct classes to educate illiterate adults in the basics of reading and writing. Additionally, they encourage the children in these areas to enroll in public school, even providing them with school books and uniforms.

Vidyaniketan is deeply committed to the restoration and preservation of a healthy ecological environment. Twenty thousand

trees have been planted on these hallowed 85 acres over the past 15 years, and today the campus grounds are lush with abundant gardens and nature sanctuaries.

Twenty acres are devoted to growing wheat, vegetables, herbs and fruits, such as chikoo, pomegranate, guava and coconut. The income derived from this agriculture provides money for the growth and maintenance of the institute.

There are elaborate living facilities available for guests and pilgrims on the Sandipani Vidyaniketan campus, including a special guesthouse for holy men invited to the institute for festivals and philosophical discussion.

There is also a *gaushala* (cowshed) with a capacity to house 100 cows. In Vedic culture, the cow is symbolically perceived as the mother of mothers, and here students are taught to respect this tradition.

Bhaishri’s plans for the future include a center for naturopathy where patients may receive herbal and ayurvedic treatment.

#### A spiritual message

Bhaishri’s general spiritual message is leveled at the modern-day, cosmopolitan Hindu. “Hindus should follow the basic principles of Hinduism,” he says. “If Hindus living abroad feel that small modifications must be made due to change in time and place, then there is flexibility within Hinduism for this to occur. But our dharma is like our blood. Because our blood is very important to our bodies, we are not inclined to change it out. Even if our very life depends on it, we can only accept blood that is of our blood type. Similarly, once we have determined our dharma, we must follow it. We cannot trade it out for another way of life. If a person is not functioning properly within the frame-

#### How can parents and their children keep peace with each other during these fast changing times when a growing generation gap offers so many communication problems?

Life is like building a building. You lay one brick on top of another. Should a brick below come loose, the one above it won’t last long. If the child within a teenager dies, later life will suffer. If the best of that teenager’s past is brought into his future, his life will flourish abundantly. For instance, a person can easily learn to trust God by simply remembering how he trusted his parents when he was young. A generation gap comes into existence if a person de-links himself from his past and forgets the valuable lessons of his youth, as well as the way he felt then: innocent, simple and carefree. It is rightly said that our life ripens with old age, but this is only true if the youth within us is not allowed to die. A problem arises when life

is lived in segments. If we forget childhood in youth, and youth in adulthood, the continuity of our life is lost and we feel isolated and unhappy in our old age. If we believe in God, we believe that life is God’s gift, and we live it holistically. Ideally, a grandfather should be able to fully identify with the joy of the grandchild that he plays with. If this grandfather is indeed experiencing this youthful zest for life, his grandchildren will enjoy just being in his company. There is no generation gap in a situation like this.

**Can you please share some guidelines for raising children?** Parents should trust their children. They should not be too lax in their discipline of them, nor should they be too strict. A balance between these two extremes should always be maintained at all costs. Our scriptures say that once a son reaches the age of 16 he should

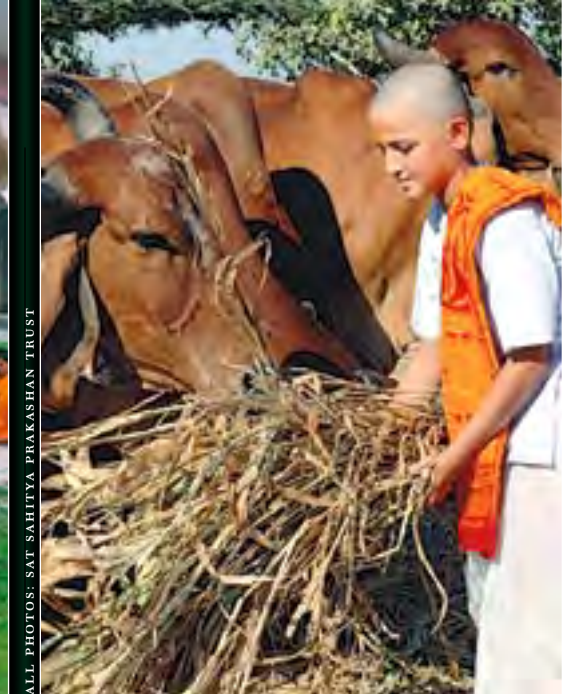
be treated as a friend. The job of preaching and teaching should be completed by this time. At this point, all matters should be discussed with him in a friendly manner, as if he were an adult.

**How do we build up character, and what are its benefits?** Character is everything. People with character make good citizens. And a society of good citizens contributes to building a great nation. Your personality is external, but your character is what you intrinsically are. Character has three aspects: action, knowledge and feeling. God is Sachitananda: existence, consciousness and bliss. The three aspects of our character relate to God in the following way. Our action relates to God’s existence. Our knowledge relates to God’s consciousness. And our devotion relates to God’s bliss. If our feelings are right, our thoughts get purified. With the purification of our

thoughts, our actions get purified. With the purification of action, thought and feeling, our character gets purified.

**Can we change our destiny with prayers and good deeds?** Rain itself is inevitable. Prayers are not intended to make rain go away. They are only meant to provide you with an umbrella for protection. This destiny you speak of is a creation of karma. All of your thoughts, words and deeds sow the seeds of your destiny. The results you reap are what you call fate. Good thoughts, words and deeds will always protect you in two ways. They will be your shield today and provide good fortune tomorrow. Yet in your future, there will be more action, creating more karma. The cycle goes on. The *bhaktar* (a devotional person) is sustained by his faith. Whatever happens, he thinks, “I am God’s. God is mine.”





ALL PHOTOS: SAT SAHITYA PRAKASHAN TRUST

### Sandipani students begin and end their day with prayer

During the fourteen days of the Shri Hari Mandir inauguration, the campus of Sandipani Vidyaniketan was furnished with all the necessary amenities to accommodate more than a million guest devotees. The students of this institution live on campus and follow a Vedic lifestyle. Their classes take place

### Caring for cows on campus

under trees in the forest, and their education includes instruction in yoga. Their rigorous priest training is complimented by a secular education which is accredited by the government.

work of this dharma, the problem is not with the dharma, it is with that person. Too often, we seek to find fault with our dharma. If Hindus fully understand their dharma, they won't find fault with it.

"It is also the duty of Hindu parents to take a lead in passing their religion on to their children. A positive religious atmosphere in the home affects children in an extremely important way."

For more information concerning Bhaishri and Sandipani Vidyaniketan please visit <http://www.sandipani.org/main.htm>.

**Special Edition:** Shri Hari Mandir is a limited edition hardcover book that costs £25.00, but is available to readers of HINDUISM TODAY at a reduced price of £15.00. Contact Mr. Bhavit Mehta at [bhavitmehtha@hotmail.com](mailto:bhavitmehtha@hotmail.com).



**If God is in everyone's heart, why are some people good and some bad?** The light of God's presence is like a light bulb that is there in each and every one of us. But that light bulb is usually covered with dirt so that, even if it is shining brightly, we cannot see it. We need to constantly keep this light bulb clean and clear. In the presence of light and the absence of ignorance, we are able to earn good karma by making right choices in following the path toward God Realization.

**What can we do when we feel consumed in depression?** Only wisdom can bring relief. Wise people bear the weight of the world honorably and with dignity, while the unwise bear it begrudgingly. Without wisdom as an aid to rising above misery, we cannot appreciate the joys of life.

When we consider existence in the light of truth, the following principles become obvious: **1.** The experience of life is the experience of duality. One minute we are happy; the next minute, we are sad. **2.** Life is subject to constant change. Nothing is permanent. This is to say that a painful situation cannot possibly last forever. **3.** No single individual can give you happiness or sorrow. We ourselves are the creators of both the joyful and painful circumstances of our life.

**What is the meaning of life?** Life is love. Where there is love, giving is natural. Hence, spontaneous service arises from love. Love is also the essence of religion. A man without religion is an animal. Life is a gift of God. Accept it wholeheartedly with gratefulness. We got this human birth by God's grace.



"Vrindavan" is an 8-winged building where the students of Sandipani Vidyaniketan live. (Below) The institute features modern guest facilities for visiting pilgrims and dignitaries.



**Why is it so difficult to concentrate on God while it is so easy to become consumed in worldliness?** The mind is like water. Like water, it flows downwards. Just as special effort must be applied to pump water upwards, so must similar effort be exerted to concentrate upon God. Just as a mechanical device like a pump is required to lift water up, so must man use a spiritual device like a mantra to lift the mind up to God. In truth, the world can offer no joy like the joy of becoming one with the Creator. Knowing this, we can easily devote ourselves to God. We can also take heart in knowing that all sins can be washed away by the repetition of God's name and by singing hymns in His praise.

**Can a person practice renunciation while remaining active in worldly affairs?** Performing one's duties without desire and with-

out a sense of ego purifies one's mind and enables one to attain that state in which all sense of doing something is lost. This state is called *naishkarmya*, which means "not doing anything." Believing that we are not the body, that we use worldly things only for the betterment of others and that we need not be rewarded for serving others helps bring about this state of *naishkarmya*. It also decreases distraction and attraction to the world. Certainly, we may live well in the world, but we should not allow the world to enter our being and take it over. A boat at sea is safe, unless it takes on water and is consumed by the sea. By developing a sense of owning and belonging, we suffer the binds of the world. In reality, we are the God we seek. From the deepest perspective, the world is that which we can never really have, for in truth, it is unattainable. Yet God is that which we can never lose.



# Fashionable Youth

India's teens devise ways express themselves with trendy clothes while keeping parents and grandparents from having a fit

BY PALAK MALIK, NEW DELHI

**W**HEN I WAS SOME 13-YEARS OLD, around 2001, Music Television ("MTV") came as a huge cultural shock to the Indian society. The music videos and programs on MTV projected the Britney Spears look—low rise pants, midriff tops and skimpy dresses revealing thigh flesh, cleavage and belly buttons. Giving in to peer pressure, I also longed to wear what was then the latest trend, but in a sensible and sophisticated version of Western clothing, rather than Britney Spears fantasies. Still, I had disagreements with my father on the issue of dressing up. He would not let me wear sleeveless shirts or even knee length skirts, for that matter. And this holds true even today, at 18. What pinched me was the fact that not only my friends, but my cousins, too, could wear such clothes.

If you are a regular reader of HINDUISM TODAY, you know my father, Rajiv Malik. He is the magazine's senior India correspondent. In the course of his reporting, he attended all four Kumbha Melas and interviewed a good number of India's religious leaders. Always a snappy dresser, he was a fashion journalist before working for HINDUISM TODAY. I found it, therefore, a bit ironic when he expressed reservations about my attempts to adopt the latest trends. He said, "Fashion is about dressing and not about undressing. It

is important to be clear about what message our clothes give, not only in general, but in particular settings, too." But at that time none of his persuasive techniques could convince me. My grandparents who live with us also had their objections. They rarely spoke their disapproval, but it was evident in their eyes. I often felt like a rebel wanting to go beyond all such cultural restrictions. I never wanted to disregard my elders, but at the same time I wanted to exercise my freedom. This was my ongoing internal conflict.

Finally, my father took me to Fabindia, one of Delhi's outstanding stores specializing in Indian clothing. Here I was exposed to a large variety of well-crafted and smartly designed short kurtas and salwar suits. I was amazed to see well-off youth thronging to this outlet with its wide variety of ready-made outfits. At first, I wore Fabindia's kurtas reluctantly, and only for special occasions. But, to my surprise, people started complimenting me for my distinctiveness. Gradually, kurtas with jeans became my all-time favorite. It is one variation on a mix of styles called "fusion" that has for many young people solved the generational differences.

"Fusion wear" in the Indian setting means stylish, contemporary treatment given to traditional attire. It is a look generated with creative usage of materials, cuts and styles that add spunk and modernity to ethnic

clothes. At the request of HINDUISM TODAY, I set out to explore this trend as it manifests among my fellow Delhites.

Mrs. Pushpa Madan is the manager of Khadi Gramodyog Showroom at Connaught Place. Like Fabindia, it is a store that features Indian clothing but with an added speciality in khadi, the hand-spun cotton cloth advocated by Mahatma Gandhi and a symbol of India's independence movement.

With regard to the fusion trend, she said, "Fashion-conscious youth pay attention to minute details such as color and design while buying clothes. Ready-made designer kurtas are popular. Some young people prefer buying khadi cloth by the meter and getting it stitched according to their taste (a still-economical option in India). Long skirts that have gained popularity these days are a modified version of *lehangas*, a long flowing skirt worn by people of our older generations." She added, "Khadi stays in fashion. It is not class specific. Instead, it is worn by all the classes of society. Not only it is an eco-friendly fabric, it also provides a unique feel that cannot be experienced in any other garment, because it is handspun. Khadi is blending itself in an Indo-Western way to face the challenges of today." She added that, along with khadi, linen is becoming more popular. This soft and durable fabric is made of flax fibers. The fabric itself

**Drawing on India's best:** Author Palak Malik (far left) with friends Sahil Sharma, 18, and Swati Raina, 20. She's wearing a kurta from Fabindia with custom-made Patiala salwar and duppata (scarf). Sahil's wearing a sherwani kurta with churidaar and dupatta. Swati, at right, is in a sari.

symbolizes style, elegance and comfort.

Following the visit to the Khadi Gramodyog Showroom, I stopped at the Hanuman temple. Just by coincidence I encountered Rajat Sharma, a popular disk jockey who goes by the name of Max Terry. His mother is a Hindu and his father a Canadian. He said, "I am into spirituality because of my mother. It is unusual being a DJ and going to a temple." On fusion wear he observed, "Bead malas are definitely popular, as are shirts with Om prints. I think fusion wear is better than Indian alone or Western alone because, by wearing it, we are modern and traditional at the same time."

I next spoke to Sacchi Choudhary, a first-year philosophy student at Delhi University's Indra Prastha College. She concurred, "Fusion wear is a positive influence on youth as we are not forgetting our own culture and at the same time we are smartly taking good things from other people's culture. I dress up in a way that is not vulgar, so my parents are supportive of my dressing style. I prefer comfort over anything else, which is why I love cotton clothes."

There was a time when khadi was considered a poor man's garment due to its texture. But times have changed and khadi tradition has been revived, so much so that rural weavers and craftsmen are enjoying a welcome boost in income. One weaver at a hand loom can produce two meters of cloth per day. It's slow, but a million weavers produce 700 million meters of khadi a year in India. Still, that is just one percent of India's total cotton textile production. Khadi means different things to different people. For the politician, it is a patriotic statement; for the elite class, it is a distinct identity; for youth, it is a bold fashion statement, not to mention being eco-friendly and comfortable. Khadi is even being picked up by designers of Europe, such as Versace, specifically for the kurta-and-jeans look.

While a few years ago designer kurtas



**Fusion fashion:** (clockwise from left) Aditi Srivastava, 18, wearing a spaghetti top with lehariya, flared skirt accessorized with big silver earrings and kada bangle with jutti footwear. Ruchika Singh, 18, in a straightened version of the lehanga skirt with white cut-sleeves and bandini dupatta with mirror work. Akansha, 19, is wearing gold-painted Kolhapuri chappals with silver toe rings.



were only available at specialized outlets such as Fabindia, now a dozen such showrooms have mushroomed in the city. Lower-cost versions are also readily available in local markets such as Karol Bagh and Janpath, bringing the latest styles to everyone.

An important aspect of fusion dressing is accessories. For these too, traditional styles are drawn upon. Silver jewelry in the form of big dangles, *kadas* (wide bangles), necklaces and anklets are popular. Wooden and jute earrings, available at any local market, are a favorite of young girls. Sacchi says, "For my personal collection of jewelry, I often visit the silver market in Chandini Chowk or Janpath. I love wearing Lucknow's Kolhapuri *chappals* (handmade leather sandals) because they are really comfortable and look very elegant when paired with toe rings or anklets. The newly launched colored Kolhapuris are becoming popular among the college set."

Devika Srivastav, a third-year journalism student at Delhi College of Arts and Commerce, finds silver jewelry to be too common and has opted for bangles or large dangles with finished *kundan* work. *Kundan* is the Rajasthani art of decorating jewelry with inlaid stones and gold.

Another vital accessory is a bead mala of rudraksha seeds, tulsi wood, crystal beads or other materials. Previously associated mainly with sadhus, these are now a must for every fashion-conscious youth. And as DJ Max Terry observed, religious symbols and motifs are common.

Fusion wear is evolving. I'm seeing that flared skirts with traditional prints, designer kurtas and *patiala* salwar with short shirts are all hot favorites today. This is a surprising change in a conservative direction from miniskirts, spaghetti and halter tops.

In conclusion, I believe Hindu youth today are desperate to discover their own culture and consequently give meaning to their lives. The move toward fusion wear, drawing upon the vast Indian traditions of clothing and jewelry, has much to do with this trend of rediscovery. It is also a process in which they are trying to tap their inner energy. Fusion wear is becoming a well-integrated part of life for Hindu youth. And conservative sections of society—parents and grandparents—are overcoming their initial discontent.

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# Encountering Hinduism on Campus

Four university teachers describe the complex dynamics they observe when Hindu students take their advanced courses in Hinduism

COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES ACROSS North America have offered courses on Hinduism and South Asian studies for decades, but for the most part few people of Indian origin have availed themselves of these classes. Over the past 10 to 15 years, however, professors of such courses have noticed that the number of enrollees of Indian heritage has increased significantly. With this shift come new classroom dynamics. Classes now comprise a diverse range of students in terms of familiarity with the course material. Perhaps more significantly, students with Hindu backgrounds are tackling a very personal area in an academic setting. One impact is for classes to reawaken Hindu students to their own religion. Another is that students may strongly challenge stereotypes, misconceptions and biased research that are taught as fact in classes, leading even their teachers to reevaluate their presentations.

"Occasionally students speak about how something contradicts their personal knowledge, experience or belief," says Vasudha Narayanan, professor of religion at the University of Florida, former president of the American Academy of Religion and founder of the Center for the Study of Hindu Traditions (CHiTra) at the University of Florida. "I say, 'Yes, but taken from a historical stand or from a linguistic stand, these are the answers the scholars give. Whether one accepts it or not is up to you, but we discuss these in classes.' We lay out these areas as problematic and keep going."

Professor Narayanan, who has taught at the University since 1982, readily acknowledges the changing demographics in her classes. She says the presence of Hindus has helped non-Hindus experience the complexity and diversity of the practice of Hinduism first hand.

"When I tell about a story or a ritual or when a Hindu student does, someone usually will interject, 'I heard a slightly different version of it,' or 'We do it a different way,' or 'We don't celebrate this ritual.' This tells the rest of the class that Hinduism is not something everyone celebrates the same way. Students from the Caribbean have a very important voice in talking about this. By getting the students involved and giving them a voice on such issues, allowing them to challenge or to question the textbooks and



College education: (above) Prof. Arvind Sharma of McGill University in Montreal, Canada; (below) Indian students are increasingly prominent on US campuses

to augment the textbooks with their own experiences, we can keep them engaged."

Part of her approach comes from her own experiences as a student. While studying at Harvard in the mid-1970s, Narayanan took a course titled "New Testament 101" taught by a Catholic priest who was also a respected scholar. She was deeply impressed by his ability to objectively discuss the *New Testament* within a historical context. "I've tried in my approaches to have that sense of academic integrity as well as sensitivity to the students' own faith and what they grew up with," she says. "Quite often it works, but sometimes it doesn't."

Arvind Sharma, Birks professor of comparative religion at McGill University in Montreal and an internationally renowned

author and scholar, says he largely utilizes the phenomenological approach, particularly in introductory courses. This means teaching religious traditions from the perspective of the insider or believer.

"Your basic goal is to make the religious tradition intelligible—to the insider and to the outsider," he explains. "Given the nature of the method and the nature of the goal, the scope for conflict between what one has learned at home, for instance, and what one is being taught is narrowed by this approach. Moreover, when there are differences, and these do arise, the discrepancy is clearly addressed. It is pointed out that this is what people believe, but this is what historians see. Because the spirit is to make the tradition intelligible, the difference does not re-

main as sharp as you might imagine."

There are certainly trying moments when Hindu students grapple with academic analysis. Sharma recalls one time while teaching Advaita Vedanta when he described something as pre-scientific. "Some of the Indian students in the class looked at me somewhat darkly," he says. "I don't think they liked the expression *pre-scientific*. I was only using an expression that is used in our textbooks. This was a very interesting experience for me. I realized that while I was treating the subject at that moment as a mere academic exercise in explaining to them what the views of Advaita Vedanta are in epistemology—the investigation of what distinguishes justified belief from opinion—the fact that I referred to these views as pre-scientific did offend them as people of faith. I then became more cautious in the words I use, because it is not my intention to convey an impression other than utmost respect for what I am teaching."

Although Helen Asquine Fazio, Ph.D., did not teach Hindu studies during her six years as a lecturer at Rutgers University in New Jersey, the classes she taught, such as Introduction to Literatures of India and World Mythology, did touch on similar subjects. She said some of her students expressed internal culture clashes with the material. "Frequently, parents who come from one culture to another very different culture become very conservative, preserving and propagating a conservative or limited version of the culture from which they came," she notes, and naturally passing their view on to their children.

"Generally, the classroom situation has been very nice," she adds. "South Asian students have taken the classes because they know they need to learn more that is objective. They are willing to learn, to hear an academic perspective or a historian's perspective. The non-South Asians in the class-

room have always been very much accepted by the South Asians."

Julie Rajan, a colleague of Fazio at Rutgers, jokes that as an undergraduate at Johns Hopkins she was one of those Indian students (she was born in Madurai) who never considered taking a class related to Hinduism or South Asia. But she did find herself drawn to Indian literature and history and pursued such studies in grad school. She and Fazio were instrumental in increasing the number of India-related offerings at Rutgers. There she has taught Modern Literatures of India, Introduction to Literatures of India and South Asian Feminism.

"To assume that all Indians have any general idea about Indian history is not the right way to look at it," Rajan says. "Even within India, everybody has a different history." She points out that Indian students include Muslims, Christians and Hindus from diverse geographic locations and backgrounds. She has never observed any conflict between those of different backgrounds. Rather, they are eager to learn and willing to admit it when topics arise with which they are completely unfamiliar.

A screening of Deepa Mehta's film *Fire*, depicting the relationship between two women, did inspire strong emotions among students in Julie's South Asian Feminism class. "We were discussing the way fire has been used as a way of testing a women's purity in South Asia (such as in *Ramayana*). The movie *Fire* took the symbol of fire and read it through a feminist lens. Fire becomes a way of bringing out the power of women in society. Some students were perturbed by the movie," she says. "I find the students in America in some ways to be a little conservative when it comes to Hinduism. Some of them were not very open to even looking at alternate suggestions of perhaps feminism in South Asia."

Narayanan took a decisive approach to

Improving their students' outlook: (left) Helen Fazio taught several classes on India during her years at Rutgers; (right) Vasudha Narayanan is professor at the University of Florida

gender issues—she wrote textbooks that include her extensive research about women. "I decided to go back and include women in every century," Narayanan says. "I used other people's research, and if it didn't exist, I did my own research. I included women philosophers who lived in the 14th century who were spouting the *Vedas*, and women men-

tioned in temple inscriptions." She points out that though this evidence exists, these women are often omitted from historical texts. "That makes my students realize how idiosyncratic our sources of knowledge are. They really get into that," she says.

As more Indian students have enrolled in her classes, Narayanan has become acutely aware of how the practice of Hinduism evolves as people move from surroundings where they are in the majority to a setting where they are in the minority. She addresses this in her course Hinduism in America, which looks at Hinduism as part of American religious history. She is writing a book on the subject. Currently, she is also deeply involved in studying Hinduism in Cambodia. "What is it that Hindus carry with them when they migrate?" she asks. "What is it that they adapt? What is it that they discard? And what is it that they highlight?"

She says her studies have fueled her own sense of faith and belief. She is also constantly inspired by the energy and enthusiasm of her students. Sharma likewise says that studying Hinduism from an academic viewpoint has enhanced his own personal faith. "For me, one of the key ingredients of the Hindu view of life has been the attempt to seek out the truth," he says. "In seeking out the truth, I think it is really helpful to be challenged about the authenticity of what one comes to believe in naturally in terms of one's inherited tradition. I found the academic study of Hinduism extremely stimulating for my faith, because the way Hinduism is represented is basically along Western lines. Western scholars do not normally share in the Hindu faith assumptions—so at least they claim. For me, all of this has been very useful because it helps me to address the question of the truth of the tradition more vigorously than would have been possible otherwise."

By Lois Elfman, New York.



# Seeking Religious Harmony

A peaceful coexistence of religions requires more than tolerance

BY MADHU KISHWAR, NEW DELHI

The following text is excerpted from "When Religions claim superiority," published by Madhu Kishwar in her magazine, Manushi. For the original complete article, See <http://www.indiatogether.org/manushi/issue145/index.htm>.

**A**S AN INVITEE TO THE WORLD PARLIAMENT of Religions, held in Barcelona in 2005, I heard speaker after speaker reiterate the importance of cultivating a spirit of tolerance in individuals, and teaching people to respect diverse faiths. If people are not convinced of the intrinsic equality of all human beings, they are not likely to want to learn about their different faiths with a spirit of respect. Individual transformation plays an important role in building tolerant societies. However, some forms of hatred and prejudice cannot be banned; they can, at best, only be kept in check and under control.

It is only when societies are able to institutionalize fair and just norms for determining the rights of various groups—irrespective of power, status, class, race, caste, color, gender, language, religion or national origin—that they create the essential prerequisites necessary for imparting interfaith harmony.

Learning about other people's faith is easier if we see that faith as a part of their culture, values and collective aspirations. In pre-modern times, the task of interfaith learning and bridge-building between diverse groups occurred in different ways.

A few hearty souls undertook long journeys across major geographical boundaries to immerse themselves in the lifestyles of distant communities and form bridges of spiritual communication between those cultures and their own. Most ordinary people, however, learned about other religions simply through direct contact with followers of those religions. By participating in the festivals of friends and neighbors of other faiths, they absorbed foreign customs almost imperceptibly.

The people of the Indian sub-continent provide a good example of how, over centuries of cohabiting, different religious communities can evolve humane and dignified ways of living together. These included—in addition to joining in the celebration of each other's festi-



AMIT KUMAR

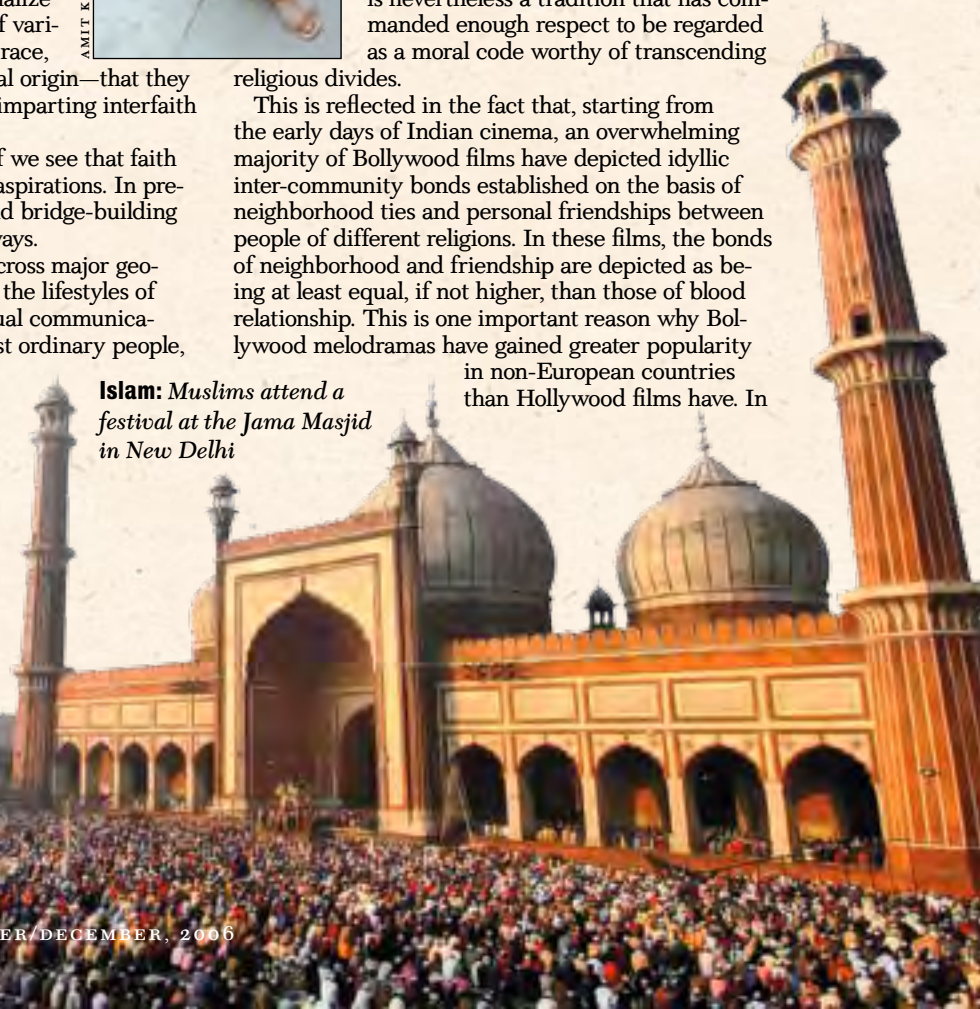
vals—having common shrines of worship and learning from saintly figures whose teachings transcended religious divides. This was all possible because, in the Indic universe, there has never been a centralized religious authority issuing dictates regarding how one should relate to people of different faiths.

## Bonding despite differences

Such cultural bonding was facilitated by a deep-rooted belief, shared by many people of different faiths and religions, that, among many other social responsibilities, *padosi dharma* (the moral responsibility towards one's neighbors or fellow villagers) is no less sacred than one's responsibility to family or caste. For example, a woman born in a particular village is expected to be treated like a daughter of that village by the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs who live in that village. Although it must be clarified that everyone certainly does not follow this principle uniformly, it is nevertheless a tradition that has commanded enough respect to be regarded as a moral code worthy of transcending religious divides.

This is reflected in the fact that, starting from the early days of Indian cinema, an overwhelming majority of Bollywood films have depicted idyllic inter-community bonds established on the basis of neighborhood ties and personal friendships between people of different religions. In these films, the bonds of neighborhood and friendship are depicted as being at least equal, if not higher, than those of blood relationship. This is one important reason why Bollywood melodramas have gained greater popularity in non-European countries than Hollywood films have. In

**Islam:** Muslims attend a festival at the Jama Masjid in New Delhi



AFP/MANAN VATSAYANA



AFP/NARINDER NANU

**Sikism:** A Sikh prays before the Golden Temple in Amritsar

such a moral universe, a sensitivity to other religious sentiments comes spontaneously. For example, it is a common practice for Hindu and Muslim neighbors to exchange food gifts during important festivals of both communities. However, Muslims take care to send only uncooked dry food to their Hindu neighbors out of respect for their unique taboos. Likewise, no Hindu family would ever offer to a Muslim friend a non-vegetarian dish not prepared with *halaal* meat. One can cite innumerable examples of such spontaneous and graceful mutual accommodation. Religious differences or caste-based taboos are rarely perceived as cause for hurt or conflict. Unfortunately, many modern secularists, who insist that inter-community harmony can be established only when everyone gives up all their religious taboos, end up creating more strife than harmony.

## When freedom causes pain

Currently, the formal study of interfaith relationships is confined primarily to a small group of academics. Every now and then, some scholar of religion will trigger interfaith hostilities because his or her writings are perceived as "hurtful" or "insulting." For example, a book on the Hindu God Ganesha, by American scholar Paul Courtright, caused a major uproar recently because the author used Freudian analysis to interpret Ganesha's elephant head and trunk in sexual terms. Those Hindus who led the campaign against this book saw it as part of a deep-rooted bias in Western academia, stemming from a tendency to trivialize or demonize Indic religions and cultures. The book is undoubtedly the product of painstaking research, and Courtright obviously knows more about the stories, myths and legends surrounding Ganesha than many practicing Hindus. What offended believers, was not his lack of knowledge but his use of a totally alien and inappropriate tool of analysis to deal with the belief system and iconography of a faith that does not lend itself to a Freudian worldview.

This is a classic example of conflicts arising not out of too little knowledge, but too much of it, combined with the unconsciously imbibed arrogance of a Western academia which assumes that its tools of analysis give it the right to understand and pass judgment on the experiences of all human beings. Instead of dealing with what was actually a criticism leveled at their intellectual approach, many Western Indologists treated the conflict as a case of "academic freedom" versus an intolerance of Hindu community leaders. Such an approach left the conflict unresolved in a bitter stalemate.



AFP/NOAH SEELAM

**Buddhism:** The Dalai Lama





**Christianity:** Venerating Christ in Calcutta

### Western vision predominates

The problem is further compounded by the fact that the study of other religions and cultures is largely a one-way process. While Western universities have any number of departments, centers and courses for studying and teaching religions and cultures of non-Western societies, as well as their own, most non-Western countries are not engaged in similar studies of Western faith systems, or even their own. Thus, for a serious scholarly study or teaching of Hinduism, Indians go to American, British or Australian universities, because there are simply no such opportunities available for this study within India.

For this reason, most noteworthy scholarship ends up being processed in Western universities that are burdened with their inevitable, in-built bias. Today most people know of the faiths of others through brief and limited exposure to superficial descriptions of them on TV, in newspapers, films and other mass media. The dominant forms of international mass media have deeply imbibed a distorted Eurocentric worldview, with its tendency to see the cultures and faiths of non-European peoples as intrinsically inferior and backward, as mainly of anthropological interest, existing only as a curious hangover from a lower stage of human evolution. Therefore, instead of leading to greater understanding, fleeting mass media images of unfamiliar practices tend to create negative stereotypes that fortify prejudices.

Those of us who are interested in interfaith harmony need to consider seriously how we might reconcile conflicting assertions. While it is true that academic freedom should be preserved, it should also be acknowledged that every cultural community should be treated with respect and integrity. For this, special tools of analysis need to be evolved that can encompass the experiences, value systems and sensitivities of a diverse group of people.

### Exclusivist claims hinder

The concept of God in Christianity (as well as that of other Abrahamic traditions) poses the biggest challenge for interfaith harmony. We cannot provide meaningful interfaith education without effectively combating the culture of intolerance derived from a belief in the inherent superiority of an exclusivist, hierarchical, jealous God, and without connecting such views to the power imbalances that came to define the economics and politics of our planet during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There are strong connections between authoritarian ways of thinking and tendencies to see God as an intolerant, jealous and tyrannical authority figure

who punishes those who do not do His bidding.

Monotheistic faiths have consistently claimed that the commandments of their Gods are somehow more superior and justified than those of other faiths. Although the followers of various Hindu sects also believe that their own faith is best, they don't usually hate or attack those of others.

Riots, massacres and genocidal attacks are almost always linked to conflicts over economic and political power. In such charged situations, religion often becomes the match that lights the tinder. This is an important reason why politicians strategically co-opt religion in their secular battles.

### The colonial dimension

The military, political and economic colonization of India resulted in aggressive onslaughts upon the country's cultures, faiths and value systems. People were told that their Gods were false and their faith systems were flawed, inferior and even evil. Not surprisingly, the flourishing of anti-colonial national factions simultaneously gave rise to religious and social reform movements, during which colonized peoples fought to defend their faiths, families and cultural values against their ruler's onslaughts.

At first, many important religious reformers in colonized countries tried to modify their faith systems so that they would be acceptable from a Western point of view. They tried to purge their religions of supposed evils, like the worship of images and idols and the belief in Gods and Goddesses. These reformers dismissed polytheism as a lower form of Hinduism meant to aid the illiterate masses and claimed that the Vedantic conception of the Divine, adopted by the colonial Hindu elite, was not all that different from the Christian belief in a one and only, all-supreme God.

The sense of humiliation and self-loathing encouraged by colonial education created whole new generations of confused people with a fragile sense of selfhood. A few astute people like Mahatma Gandhi recognized that, in most cases, the apologetic efforts of the elitist reformers only succeeded in wedging a divide between these well-meaning reformers and the sincere followers of their own faith. This did not, however, prevent them from asserting their hybrid religious/ethnic identity as a living example of modernity and progress.

Interfaith learning is like language learning. A person who is not in command of his or her own language will find it difficult to learn alien languages and certainly will not be able to understand their nuances. Similarly, those who are not deeply rooted in their own faith and belief system will find it difficult to understand and appreciate those of others.



**Hinduism:** Hindus offer arati at the sacred Ganges river

## AYURVEDA

# Combating Aging

Stave off the debilities and diseases of old age with right living routines and rejuvenation therapy

BY DR. VIRENDER SODHI

**A**YURVEDIC MEDICINE HAS DELINEATED REJUVENATION as a speciality whose main purpose is to maintain health and virility as age advances. We all age, but we don't need in the process to enter an epoch time of disease. We can age gracefully and avoid diabetes, heart diseases, hypertension, auto-immune diseases, obesity, cancer, etc.

Rejuvenation therapy, or *rasayana*, is one of the eight clinical specialties of ayurveda, which include internal medicine, surgery, ophthalmology, etc. The purpose of *rasayana* is to prevent aging, impart longevity, build immunity against diseases, improve mental faculties and add vitality and luster. The *rasayana* treatment should be customized for each person, based on age, constitution, adaptability, body tissues, microcirculation, digestion and vitality. Methods include *achar rasayana* (behavioral modification), *pancha karma vigyan* (detoxification program) and the taking of specific herbs and preparations for the body. In modern herbology these *rasayana* herbs are referred to as adaptogens for their ability to adapt according to the body's needs.

The first task is to follow a good daily routine, called *dincharya* in ayurveda. Nine suggestions for a good daily routine are: 1. Wake up early, before sunrise. The sun activates the pineal gland to send messages to the pituitary gland, which in turn messages the adrenal glands to release adrenal cortisol, which wakes us from deep sleep. 2. Drink one to three glasses of warm water in the morning. This encourages peristalsis to begin and helps bowel evacuation. 3. Oral and physical hygiene is of utmost importance. A daily shower encourages digestive health and a healthy heart in addition to general cleanliness. Brushing and flossing is important for healthy teeth and gums. 4. Get in touch with your senses by massaging your body with oil customized for your body type. To sharpen your sense of smell, put a few drops in your nose. Wash your eyes with trifala water. To make trifala water, open one capsule in one cup distilled water, boil for ten minutes, then strain through a coffee filter. You can use an eye cup available at drug stores. Care for your ears by putting a couple of drops of olive oil in each, or dip a Q-tip in olive oil and lubricate your ears. 5. Walk daily for 30-45 minutes, depending upon your schedule, and meditate regularly. 6. Eat a healthy breakfast according to your constitution, adjusted as needed to correct any imbalances. 7. Fried, processed and artificially sweetened foods should be avoided at all times. 8. Sexual activity is considered sacred in ayurveda. It is an aspect of the pursuit of *kama*, pleasure, one of the four legitimate goals of life according to Hinduism which also include wealth, dharma and liberation from rebirth. Ayurveda advises frequent sexual activity in winter, and at intervals of 3-4 days during other seasons. 9. Finish your day by calming your mind with meditation and pranayama, breathing exercises.

Use a commonsense approach to your seasonal routine, or *ritu charya*. During the summer, dress lightly, eat fruits and vegetables and drink lots of fluids to prevent dehydration. During the winter,



(*Withania somnifera*): Research on ashwagandha has shown it to be a stress adaptogen, to promote healing and to have diuretic and anti-cancer properties. I have used ashwagandha extensively in my practice for insomnia, fatigue, stress, depression, anxiety and cancer. My son uses it for body building. It can also be used as an adjuvant in chemotherapy and radiation treatment. **Amla** (*Emblica officinalis*): Amla is an excellent rejuvenator. It has powerful anti-oxidant properties and counters the toxicity of heavy metals such as nickel, cobalt, arsenic and mercury. It also provides protective properties after one has been exposed to toxic or carcinogenic chemicals. It has powerful anti-cancerous properties and, like ashwagandha, has been used in cancer therapy to cut down the side effects of chemotherapy and radiation. **Sitawari** (*Asparagus racemosus*) has tonic, adaptogenic, alternative (curative) and aphrodisiac activities. It is used to treat debility and chronic diseases like infertility, impotence, menopause, lung abscesses and chronic fevers. **Trifala** (a combination of *Terminalia chebula*, *Terminalia bellerica* and *Emblica officinalis*): Trifala is another prized adaptogen. The combined herbs are synergistic and have digestive and eliminative actions. It has anti-parasitic, anti-yeast, anti-bacterial and antihistaminic properties. It improves the flow of bile, lowers cholesterol and can be used as adjuvant in chemotherapy and radiation treatments. **Shilajeet-mumiyo** (mineral pitch) is a rich source of naturally occurring minerals. Russian athletes used it as non-steroidal body builder and a stamina enhancer. Ayurvedic medicine considers it as an aphrodisiac, a tonic for the kidneys and prostate. It helps with benign prostate enhancement and is an immune enhancer. **Pippli** (*Piper longum*): Pippli helps in digestion, enhances acid and enzyme secretions. It significantly enhances the absorption of nutrients, herbs and drugs and has shown anti-allergic, anti-asthmatic and powerful anti-parasitic actions.

Thus, by eating well, following a good daily and seasonal routine, occasionally undergoing a cleansing regime and following up with the right rejuvenative herbs, you can optimize your health as you age.

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MIKE BRYGIDER

By Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami,  
Founder of Hinduism Today

**R**eligion is man's association with the Divine, and the ultimate objective of religion is realization of Truth. Forms which symbolize Truth are only indications; they are not Truth itself, which transcends all conceptualization. The mind in its efforts to understand Truth through reasoning must always fail, for Truth transcends the very mind which seeks to embrace it. Hinduism is unique among the world's religions. I boldly proclaim it the greatest religion in the world. To begin with, it is mankind's oldest spiritual declaration, the very fountainhead of faith on the planet. Hinduism's venerable age has seasoned it to maturity. It is the only religion, to my knowledge, which is not founded in a single historic event or prophet, but which itself precedes recorded history. Hinduism has been called the "cradle of spirituality," and the "mother of all religions," partially because it has influenced virtually every major religion and partly because it can absorb all other religions, honor and embrace their scriptures, their saints, their philosophy. This is possible because Hinduism looks compassionately on all genuine spiritual effort and knows unmistakably that all souls are evolving toward union with the Divine, and all are destined, without exception, to achieve spiritual enlightenment and liberation in this or a future life. ¶ Of course, any religion in the world is a mind stratum within people, isn't it? It is a group of people who think consciously, subconsciously and subsuperconsciously alike and who are guided by their own superconsciousness and the superconsciousness of their leaders which make up the force field which we call a religion. It does not exist outside the mind. People of a certain religion have all been impressed with the same experiences. They have all accepted the same or similar beliefs and attitudes, and their mutual concurrence creates the bonds of fellowship and purpose, of doctrine and communion.

*Photo: for eleven days in 1997, one-hundred-twenty-one priests surrounded 11 fire altars in a huge worship hall at the Sringeri Sadhana Center in Pennsylvania for the grandest of all fire ceremonies. The Ati Rudra Maha Yajna, witnessed by 6,000 devotees and following liturgy set thousands of years ago, was performed for the first time on American soil, a demonstration of Hinduism's strength and geographical breadth in our modern age.*

INSIGHT

# Hinduism, the Greatest Religion in the World

A satguru's penetrating insights on the Earth's oldest living faith



The people who are Hinduism share a mind structure. They can understand, acknowledge, accept and love the peoples of all religions, encompass them within their mind as being fine religious people. The Hindu truly believes that there is a single Eternal Path, but he does not believe that any one religion is the only valid religion or the only religion that will lead the soul to salvation. Rather, the Eternal Path is seen reflected in all religions.

To put it another way, the will of God or the Gods is at work in all genuine worship and service. It is said in Hindu scripture that "Truth is one. Paths are many." The search for Truth, for God, is called the Sanatana Dharma, or the Eternal Path, because it is inherent in the soul itself, where religion begins. This path, this return to the Source, is ever existent in man, and is at work whether he is aware of the processes or not. There is not this man's search and that man's search. Where does the impetus come from? It comes from the inside of man himself. Thus, Hinduism is ever vibrant and alive, for it depends on this original source of inspiration, this first impulse of the spirit within, giving it an energy and a vibrancy that is renewable eternally in the now.

Naturally, the Hindu feels that his faith is the broadest, the most practical and effective instrument of spiritual unfoldment, but he includes in his Hindu mind all the religions of the world as expressions of the one Eternal Path and understands each proportionately in accordance with its doctrines and dogma. He knows that certain beliefs and inner attitudes are more conducive to spiritual growth than others, and that all religions are, therefore, not the same. They differ in important ways. Yet, there is no sense whatsoever in Hinduism of an "only path." A devout Hindu is supportive of all efforts that lead to a pure and virtuous life and would consider it unthinkable to dissuade a sincere devotee from his chosen faith. This is the Hindu mind, and this is what we teach, what we practice and what

*Clockwise: Prof. E. Chamuramoki, reviews precious scriptures at the Oriental Research Institute, Tirupati; the Porram Festival in Thrissur, Kerala, led by 15 gold-caparisoned elephants; a woman rings the bell as she enters the Gadhikalika temple in sacred Ujjain city, signalling her presence to the angelic hosts*



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we offer aspirants on the path.

We often send people back to their own religion, for Hindu doctrine would consider it an unseemly karma to draw someone away simply because he believed differently. To the Hindu, conduct and the inner processes of the soul's maturation are more essential than the particular religion one may be by the accidents of birth, culture or geography. The Hindu knows that he might unknowingly disturb the dharma of the individual if he pulls him away from his religious roots, and that would cause an unsavory karma for them both. He knows, too, that it is not necessary that all people believe exactly the same way or call God by the same name.

### A Religion of Experience

Still, Hinduism is also extremely sectarian, altogether adamant in its beliefs. Its doctrines of karma and reincarnation, its philosophy of nonviolence and compassion, its certainty of mystical realities and experience and its universality are held with unshakable conviction. Perhaps this is due to the fact that Hinduism is a religion more of experience than of doctrine. It prefers to say to its followers, "This is the nature of Truth, and these are the means by which that Truth may be realized. Here are the traditions which have withstood time and proved most effective. Now you may test them in your own life, prove them to yourself. And we will help as we can." Hinduism will never say, "You must do or believe thusly or be condemned." In Hinduism it is believed that none is eternally condemned. That loving acceptance and unremitting faith in the goodness of life is another reason I boldly say that Hinduism is the greatest religion in the world.

Within Hinduism, as within every religious system, are the practical means of attaining the purity, the knowledge and the serenity of life. Each Hindu is enjoined to attend a puja every day, preferably at a certain and consistent time. He must observe the laws of virtue and the codes of ethics. He must serve others, support religion within his community. He should occasionally pilgrimage to sacred shrines and temples and partake in the sacraments. If he is more advanced, an older soul, then he is expected, expects of

## The Joys of Hinduism

**T**onight we want to speak on the joys and happiness found in Hinduism, our ancient religion which brings forth the wonderful feelings of a belief in the cosmic processes of reincarnation coupled with knowledge of the laws of karma and the wisdom of dharma in which everyone has his rightful place and purpose in life. It brings the broadmindedness of total acceptance of all other religions as expressions of the One God's creation, the blessing of a complete devotional path revolving around powerful temples, the fulfillment of a profound mystical teaching founded on yoga and brought forth by the seers and saints and gurus, and so much more. Our religion is so strong, so rich and varied that very few can claim to under-

stand it in its completeness. It is immense, an immense religion, so immense that we have difficulty sometimes explaining it to those who hold to a simpler doctrine, especially if they have been subjected to erroneous concepts about our religion promulgated by invaders and missionaries of a score of alien religions. It is time that the world knew of the greatness of Hinduism, knew it as it is. Of course, we cannot explain it in an evening. My satguru, the great Siva Yogaswami of Columbuturai, would say, "The time is short and the subject is vast." But we can have a look at some of the aspects of Hinduism that bring such joys and happiness to over a billion devotees around the world. ¶Each Hindu's belief in reincarnation is so strong that it totally eliminates

the fear and dread of death. No true Hindu really fears death; nor does he look forward to it. The word death in the vocabulary of the Hindu holds a different meaning. He does not take death to be the end of existence; nor does he look upon life as a singular opportunity to be followed by eternal heavenly existence for those souls who do well, and by unending hell for those who do not. Death for the Hindu is merely transition, simultaneously an end and a new beginning. Over two thousand years ago, Saint Tiruvalluvar wrote, "Death is like falling asleep, and birth is like awakening from that sleep" (Tirukural 339). In one of the ancient languages of our religion, the physical body had a name which literally meant "that which is always drop-

ping off." ¶The Hindu's knowledge of reincarnation gives him the hope of attaining a future birth and in that birth making further prog-

ress toward the perfection that he intuitively knows is his atman, his soul. He is working in this life to gain enough good merit, enough



PHAL S. GHOSH



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himself, to undertake certain forms of *sadhana* and tapas, of discipline and asceticism.

Though it is broad and open in the freedom of the mind to inquire, Hinduism is narrowly strict in its expectations of devotees—the more awakened the soul, the higher the demands and responsibilities placed upon him. And though other systems of belief are fully acceptable mind structures within the structure of the higher mind, there is no way out of Hinduism. There is no excommunication. There is no means of severance. There's no leaving Hinduism once you have formally accepted and been accepted. Why is that? That is because Hinduism contains the whole of religion within itself. There is no "other religion" which one can adopt by leaving Hinduism, only other aspects of the one religion which is the sum of them all, the Eternal Path, the Sanatana Dharma.

I would say that, if it lacked all the qualities of open-mindedness and compassion and tolerance just mentioned, Hinduism would be the greatest religion on the basis of its profound mysticism alone. No other faith boasts such a deep and enduring comprehension of the mysteries of existence, or possesses so vast a metaphysical system. The storehouse of religious revelations in Hinduism cannot be reckoned. I know of its equal nowhere. It contains the entire system of yoga, of meditation and contemplation and Self Realization. Nowhere else is there such insightful revelation of the inner bodies of man, the subtle pranas and the chakras, or psychic centers within the nerve system. Inner states of superconsciousness are explored and mapped fully in Hinduism, from the clear white light to the sights and sounds which flood the awakened inner consciousness of man. In the West it is the mystically awakened soul who is drawn to Hinduism for understanding of inner states of consciousness, discovering after ardent seeking that Hinduism possesses answers which do not exist elsewhere and is capable of guiding awareness into ever-deepening mind strata.

*Clockwise: shaven-headed aspirants await the auspicious moment of brahmachari initiation and entry into an order of world-renouncing sadhus; pilgrims touch the sculpted stone feet of Vishnu in Tirumala Temple's Srivari Padalu shrine; a traditional Kathak dancer in outrageous, colorful costume*



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*punya*, to deserve welcome into a fine religious family as a good soul that will not upset the family but add to its love and harmony and productivity. That is one aim ever on the mind of the devout Hindu, to live well that he may live even more perfectly in a future life on this planet. That is our aim; and our other beliefs, our accumulated knowledge and the many facets of our religion, give us the strength and the wisdom to believe in such a far-reaching way, to look beyond the immediate day-to-day concerns into our ultimate objective, which is realization and liberation, moksha. ¶Nor is this belief in the cycles of earthly existence, in reincarnation, merely a belief. It is a certain knowledge for those who have had even a tiny glimpse into their origins to the point of remembering another life or just intuiting that the soul did not come

into existence just before one's birth. The Hindu believes that the soul undertakes many sojourns on the planet. We see the wisdom in



DAVID TROPE

this cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

**Karma Is Always Just:** We see reincarnation as an explanation for many of the apparent inequalities observed in life. Thus we understand the fairness even in a bad birth, say a birth as a cripple or a child who dies in infancy. To the Hindu this is not an accident, but is a natural event brought forth by the soul itself through the karma of unseemly acts and desires in a previous life. To the Hindu there is not one force in the universe at work to make all things good and an opposing force trying to destroy the soul. No. All is God's work. All karma is natural and worthy of the soul to which it comes. ¶The Hindu knows that it is the younger souls who lack understanding, who cannot live in harmony with others and who shun the higher forms of culture

and faith. Rather than inheriting eternal suffering for their acts, they earn instead another opportunity for experience, for learning, for evolving. The ideas of sin and evil are different in Hinduism from the concepts held by Abrahamic religions. If there is such a thing as sin to the Hindu, it is the breaking of the natural laws, a lapse in the patterns of karma and dharma, and that transgression brings its own punishment in the form of an additional karma created to then be worked out. Thus the Hindu does not live in fear of sin or under the notion of original sin. We do not look upon humanity as inherently sinful, but inherently perfect and striving to unfold that perfection from within. The Hindu knows that

we will have as many opportunities as needed to refine and evolve our nature—a thousand lives or more if needed. We don't have to think



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that we only have a single chance, a one life in which everything must be accomplished and all desires must be fulfilled. Therefore, we are not in a hurry. We are patient. We exhibit more patience with circumstances than do those who believe in a one life, and we are more forgiving of ourselves when we fall short. Thus it is that Hinduism offers a great joy to its followers—a blessing of fearlessness in the face of death, an assurance of the continuation of consciousness after physical death, another assurance that each soul creates its own karma and that such karma is just and right, even when it seems that some people are less fortunate than others and that

## Hinduism's Unbounded Tolerance

In apparent conflict, the scriptures written thousands of years ago explain how we should live, and saints and rishis and seers throughout the ages have told us that it is impossible to live that way. So, Hinduism has a great tolerance for those who strive and a great forgiveness for those who fail. It looks in awe at those who succeed in living a life according to its own strict ethics. In Hinduism, we have many, many saints. You don't have to die to be acknowledged a saint in our religion, you have to live. The Hindus, perhaps beyond all other people on the earth, realize the difficulties of living in a human body and look in awe at those who achieve true spirituality.

The Hindu believes in reincarnation. He believes that he is not the body in which he lives, but the soul or awareness which takes on a body for a definite purpose. He believes he is going to get a better body in a better birth, that the process does not begin and end in a single life, that the process is continuous, reaching beyond the limits that one life may impose on inner progress. Of course, his belief in karma assures him that a better birth, that progress inwardly will come only if he behaves in a certain way. He knows that if he does not behave according to the natural laws, to the Hindu ethics, that he will suffer for his transgressions in a future life, or future lives, that he may by his own actions earn the necessity of a so-called inferior birth, earn the right to start over where he left off in the birth in which he failed.

The belief in karma and reincarnation is exclusively Hindu, and yet many people in the world today, whether they call themselves religious or not, are coming to the same conclusions, not from being told to believe but in a natural way, from the inside out. This belief in more than a single life brings to the Hindu a great sense of peace. He knows that the maturity of the soul takes many lives, perhaps hundreds of lives. If he is not perfect right now, then at least he knows that he is progressing, that there will be many opportunities for learning and growing. This eliminates anxiety, gives the serene perception that everything is all right as it is. There is no sense of a time limit, of an impending end or an ultimate judgment of his



actions and attitudes. This understanding that the soul evolves gives the Hindu remarkable insight into the human condition and appreciation for all men in all stages of spiritual development.

Hinduism is so broad. Within it there is a place for the insane and a place for the saint. There is a place for the beggar and for those who support beggars. There is a place for the intelligent person and plenty of room for the fool. The beauty of Hinduism is that it does not demand of every soul perfection in this life, a necessary conclusion for those who believe in a single lifetime during which human perfection or grace must be achieved. Belief in reincarnation gives the Hindu an acceptance of every level of humanity. Some souls are simply older souls than others, but all are inherently the same, inherently immortal and of the nature of the Divine.

### Hindu Views of the Divine

In Hinduism it is believed that the Gods are living, thinking, dynamic beings who live in a different world, in an inner world in the microcosm within this world in which there exists a greater macrocosm than this visible macrocosm. For the Hindu, surrender to the Divine Will that created and pervades and guides the universe is essential. The Hindu believes that these beings guide our experiences on Earth, actually consciously guide the evolutionary processes. Therefore, he worships these beings as greater beings than himself, and he maintains a subjective attitude toward them, wondering if he is attuned with these grand forces of the universe, if his personal will is in phase with what these great beings would have him do. This gives birth to a great culture, a great attitude, a great tolerance and kindness one to another. It gives rise to humility in the approach to life—not a weak or false humility, but a

*Clockwise: devotees in North York, Ontario, pull the chariot of Goddess Durga around their temple on July 21, 2004; a sadhu sits in a circle of embers for three hours, part of a 12-year, daily penance, using fire in summer, standing in cold water in winter and in the rain during the rainy season; the elegant face of a Deity icon of Lord Siva Nataraja at Kauai's Hindu Monastery, site of the editorial offices of Hinduism Today*



BASIL SAGE

fate has unfairly given all the advantages to a few. All these things are bestowed on Hindus simply because they understand the doctrine of reincarnation. ¶Hinduism is a hopeful and comforting religion. Hope for a future life makes this life worthwhile, joyous, contented and happy, because the Hindu can live and deal with current problems, knowing that they are transitory problems, that they will not last forever; nor will they affect us forever. They are problems; we cannot deny that. But they are problems to be worked out with a positive attitude and a high energy and a helping hand from our Gods.

**The World As Our Teacher:** The Hindu also wants to improve conditions in the world, in the physical world. We do not look upon all that

happens to us as unreal. That is a misconception. It is real. Life is real. It is through life that we progress. Life is the means provided by the Primordial God for finding Reality. True,



HIMALAYAN ACADEMY

it is maya. But it is maya in the form of mind, in the form of form. Maya, or form, or mind, is created for a purpose, to help man evolve, not to bind him in illusion. The Hindu understands this. We want to help humanity, and simultaneously we know that we may well return in another physical body. So we are working not only for ourselves, but for our loved ones, not only now, but in the future as well. We are improving the world for future generations in which we will play a part. ¶Through our knowledge of reincarnation, we have a great love and understanding for every human being, for they have been our mothers, our fathers, our sons and daughters, our grandparents and companions in many past lives, or perhaps will be in a future incarnation. This expanded knowledge of the interrelatedness of humanity brings

with it a deepened appreciation, helping us to understand why it is that some people seem so close to us though we hardly know them and others are strangers or even enemies after years of close association. To the Hindu, everyone younger is his brother or sister. Everyone older is his mother or father, and he maintains a deep respect for others. We have this knowledge by having lived through many hundreds of lives on this planet and having been associated with many thousands of people. We know that in our current pattern in this life we often attract those to us whom we have been with in past lives. So we have a great joy and happiness in meeting them again and a deep knowledge of our relationships, our psychic relationships, with them in past lives. ¶The Hindu believes in the law of karma, the ability to earn one's rewards

as well as punishments. All this we can do ourselves with the help of our Gods and our personal relationship with our Ishta Devata, the individual God that we have chosen, or rather



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that God who has chosen to love, guide and protect us through an incarnation. ¶In Hinduism there is no priest standing between the devotee and God. The priest is a servant of the God, just as is every other devotee. Even the satguru, the spiritual teacher, does not stand between the disciple and God, but seeks instead to strengthen the devotee's direct experiential relationship with the Divine. The Hindu thus finds a great joy in his relationship with God and the Gods. It is his relationship, and he alone is able to perpetuate it. No one can do this work for him or on his behalf. There is a great happiness there between the devotee and the God resident in the Hindu temple, which is the communication point with the God, as is the sacred home shrine.

strong and mature sense of the grand presence and purpose of life before which the head naturally bows.

There are said to be millions of Gods in the Hindu pantheon, though only a few major Deities are actually worshiped in the temples. That God may be worshiped as the Divine Father or a Sainted Mother or the King of kings is one of the blessings of Hinduism. It offers to each a personal and significant contact, and each Hindu will choose that aspect of the Deity which most appeals to his inner needs and sensibilities. That can be confusing to some, but not to the Hindu. Within his religion is monism and dualism, monotheism and polytheism, and a rich array of other theological views.

God in Hinduism is accepted as both transcendent and immanent, both beyond the mind and the very substratum of the mind. The ideal of the Hindu is to think of God always, every moment, and to be ever conscious of God's presence. This does not mean the transcendent God, the Absolute Lord. That is for the yogi to ponder in his contemplative discipline. That is for the well-perfected Hindu who has worshiped faithfully in the temples, studied deeply the scriptures and found his *satguru*.

For most Hindus, God means the Gods, one of the many personal devas and Mahadevas which prevail in our religion. This means a personal great soul which may never have known physical birth, a being which pervades the planet, pervades form with His mind and Being, and which guides evolution. Such a God is capable of offering protection and direction to the followers of Hinduism. The Hindu is supposed to think of God every minute of every day, to see God everywhere. Of course, most of us don't think of God even one minute a day. That's the reason that each Hindu is obliged to conduct or attend at least one religious service, one puja or ceremony, every day in his temple or home shrine. This turns his mind inward to God and the Gods.

Hinduism, Sanatana Dharma, is an Eastern religion, and the Eastern religions are very different from those of the West. For one thing, they are more introspective. Hinduism gave birth to Buddhism, for Buddha was born and died a good Hindu. And it gave birth to other religions of the East, to Taoism, to Jainism, to Sikhism and others.



### Three Pillars: Temples, Philosophy, Preceptors

There are three distinct aspects of Hinduism: the temples, the philosophy and the satguru. It is very fortunate that in the last two decades Hindu temples have nearly circumferenced the world. There are temples in Europe, in North America, in South America, Australia, in Africa and throughout Southeast Asia. The Hindu temple and stone images in it work as a channel for the Deity, for the Gods, who hover over the stone image and, in their subtle etheric forms, change people's lives through changing the nerve currents within them through their darshana. People come to a sanctified temple and go away, and in that process they are slowly changed from the inside out. They have changed because their very life force has changed, their mind has been changed and their emotions have undergone a subtle transformation. The temples of Hinduism are magnificent in their immensity and in their ability to canalize the three worlds, the First World of physical, outer existence and the inner Second and Third Worlds.

Hindu temples are not centered around a priest or minister, though there may be a holy man associated with a temple whose advice is cautiously and quietly sought. There is no sermon, no mediator, no director to guide the worship of pilgrims. The temple is the home of the Deities, and each devotee goes according to his own timing and for his own particular needs. Some may go to weep and seek consolation in times of sorrow, while simultaneously others will be there to rejoice in their good fortune and to sing God's name in thanksgiving. Naturally, the sacraments of name-giving and marriage and so forth are closely associated with the temple. One has only to attend a Hindu temple during festival days to capture the great energy and vitality of this ancient religion.

In its second section, philosophy, Hinduism has influenced the

*Clockwise: in Jejuri, as the palanquin carrying the images of Khandoba and Malshabai circumvent the temple, an exuberant crowd showers turmeric powder, coloring everyone in the yellow kinship of devotion. Modern, well-to-do Hindus on pilgrimage in Tirupati; women at the marketplace in Nepal*



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deep religious thinkers of all cultures through known history. There is not a single philosophy which can be labeled "Hinduism." Rather, it is a network of many philosophies, some seeming to impertinently contradict the validity of others, yet on deeper reflection are seen as integral aspects of a single, radiant mind flow. In the area of philosophy must be included the enormous array of scripture, hymns, mantras, devotional bhajana and philosophical texts which are certainly unequaled in the world.

In the natural order of things, temple worship precedes philosophy. It all starts with the temple, with this sacred house of the Deities, this sanctified site where the three worlds communicate, where the inner and outer mesh and merge. It is there that devotees change. They become more like the perfect beings that live in the temple, become the voice of the Deity, writing down what is taught them from the inside, and their writings, if they are faithful to the superconscious message of the God, become scripture and make up the philosophies of Hinduism. The philosophies then stand alone as the voice of the religion. They are taught in the universities, discussed among scholars, meditated upon by yogis and devout seekers. It is possible to be a good Hindu by only learning the philosophy and never going to the temple, or by simply going to the temple and never hearing of the deeper philosophies.

Hinduism has still another section within it, and that is the guru—the teacher, the illuminator, the spiritual preceptor. The guru is the remover of darkness. He is one who knows the philosophy, who knows the inner workings of the temple, and who in himself is the philosopher and the temple. The guru is he who can enliven the spirit within people. Like the temple and the philosophy, he stands alone, apart from the institutions of learning, apart from sites of pilgrimage. He is himself the source of knowledge, and he is himself the pilgrim's destination.

Should all the temples be destroyed, they would spring up again from the seeds of philosophy, or from the presence of a realized man. And if all the scriptures and philosophical treatises were burned, they would be written again from the same source. So Hinduism cannot be destroyed. It can never be destroyed. It exists as the spirit of religion within each being. Its three aspects, the temple, the philosophy and the satguru, individually proficient, taken together make Hinduism the most vital and abundant religion in the world.

**The Joy of Pilgrimage:** In our religious life, one of the most fulfilling aspects is pilgrimage. We have a joy in looking forward to a spiritual journey, and we experience a contentment while on our pilgrimage and later bask in the glowing aftermath of the pujas. It is like going to see a great friend, a devotee's most loved friend—the Ishta Devata. We travel to the far-off temple where this great friend is eminently present. At that particular temple, this personal God performs a certain function, offers a specific type of blessing to pilgrims who make the pilgrimage to that home. In this way, different temples become famous for answering certain types of prayers, such as requests for financial help, or prayers for the right mate in mar-

riage, prayers to be entrusted with the raising of high-souled children, or help in matters of yoga, or help in inspiring bhakti and love. ¶The Hindu does not have the feeling of having to

take a vacation to "get away from it all." We don't lead a life of mental confusions, religious contradictions and the frustrations that result from modern hurried living. We lead a moderate life, a religious life. In living a moderate life, we then look at our pilgrimage as a special moment, a cherished time of setting ordinary concerns aside and giving full stage to our religious longings. It is a time to take problems and prayers to our personal God. ¶Unlike the proud "free thinkers" who deem themselves emancipated, above the religious life, we Hindus feel that receiving the darshana from the Gods and the help that comes therein invigorates our being and inspires us to be even more diligent in our spiritual life. Unlike the rationalists who feel

confident that within themselves lie all the resources to meet all needs, and that praying to Gods for help is a pathetic exercise in futility, the Hindu wisely submits to the Divine and thus avoids the abyss of disbelief. ¶All in life that one would want to "get away from" the Hindu takes with him on a pilgrimage to the temple, to the feet of his personal God, to the inner-plane being or Mahadeva, who needs no physical body with which to communicate with people—to the God who has a nerve system so sensitive and well developed that as it hovers over the stone image, which looks similar to how the Deity would look on the inner planes, this being of light can communicate with the pilgrims who visit the temple. This being of light, this Mahadeva, can and does absorb all of the dross the devotees have to offer, and

gives back blessings which bring happiness and release to them. Thus, the pilgrimage is not travel in the ordinary sense of travel, but

rather going to see a personal friend, one who is nearest and dearest, but does not live in a physical body. ¶The Hindu has another great joy—the certainty of liberation. Even in difficult times, we are solaced in the knowledge of our religion which tells us that no soul that ever existed or ever will exist in future extrapolations of time and space will ever fail to attain liberation. The Hindu knows that all souls will one day merge into God; and he knows that God, who created all souls, slowly guides our maturing into His likeness, brings us back to Himself, which is not separate from ourselves. The Hindu, through striving and personal development in this life on this planet, knows that liberation into God is the final goal. This knowing and this belief release us from any ego, from any superiority by which one person



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## Hinduism's Fathomless Diversity

Hinduism has a grand diversity among its many sects. That diversity is itself a strength, showing how broad and encompassing Hinduism is. It does not seek to have all devotees believe exactly alike. In fact, it has no central authority, no single organized institution which could ever proclaim or enforce such sameness. There is an immense inner unity, but the real strength and wisdom of Hinduism is its diversity, its variety. There are so many sects within Hinduism that you could spend a lifetime studying them and never begin to assess them all. More is there than any single human being could assimilate in a single lifetime. Hinduism, therefore, has the magnetism to draw us back into its immensity life after life. Each sect may be said to be a full religion in its own right, with all the increments of faith, with no necessary part missing. Therefore, each sect works for the individuals within it completely, and each tolerates all the other sects. It does not totally divorce itself from the other sects, denying their beliefs, but simply separates to stress or expound a limited area of the vast philosophy, apart from all others, to be understood by the limited faculties of man.

These various sects and divisions within Hinduism all spring from a one source. Most Hindus believe in the transcendental God as well as the personal Lord or God, and yet there is within the boundaries of the faith room for the non-believer, for the atheist or for the agnostic who is assessing and developing his beliefs. This brings another unique asset to our religion—the absence of heresy. There is no such thing as a heretic in Hinduism, for there is no single right perspective or belief. Doctrine and *sadhana* are not considered absolutes, but the means to an absolute end, and they can be tailored to individual needs and natures. My *satguru* would say that different prescriptions are required for different ailments.

*Clockwise: devotees observe evening fire offerings to the Ganga River at the Kumbha Mela in Haridwar, 1998; the Sri Kandaswamy Temple in Kuala Lumpur; a boy, representing Lord Ganesha, is ceremoniously bathed during the Holy Waters Festival at Toronto's Varasiththi Vinaayagar Temple*



considers himself or herself as especially meriting God's grace while others are lost. For the Hindu, there is an assurance that all souls will eventually enjoy liberation, and that includes ourselves and all of our friends and family. We need never fear otherwise.

**The Joy of Mysticism:** Then there is the joy of the mysticism of Hinduism. It is the world's most magical religion, offering worlds within worlds of esoteric discovery and perception. The inner worlds are what Hindu mystics tell of in the greatest richness and freedom of expression that exists on the planet. Mysticism in Hinduism is more out-front than in all the other religions of the world. As a result, it is enjoyed by more of the people in our religion. Mysticism is discussed more broadly and not limited to a few great



souls or a handful of pandits. The mysticism of Hinduism is for all the people; yet, too, in its esoteric aspect it is protected at its core and kept sacred by being kept secret. How

grand is the Hindu mystical tradition, with its *sadhanas* and *yogas*, with its wealth of understanding of the etheric bodies, of the nadis and the *chakras*, of the aura and the *pranas*, of the various states of consciousness and levels of existence, and so much more. No other religion on the Earth can ever begin to equal Hinduism's mystical teachings; all that wealth is the rightful inheritance of each Hindu. ¶The Hindu enjoys all the facets of life as transmuted into a religious expression in art. The Hindu's art is a religious art—drawing, painting and sculpture of the Gods, the *devas*, and the saints of our religion. The music is devotional and depicts the tones of the higher *chakras*, echoes the voices of the Gods; and the dance emulates the movements of the Gods. We are

never far away from sights, sounds and symbols of our religion. A mountaintop represents Lord Siva; a hill represents Lord Murugan, Kartikeya; and sugar cane fields represent Lord Ganesha. Everything that one sees on the planet represents something religious. Art is not merely for egotistical and existential self-expression, but for spiritual expression, done consciously in service to the Divine. That is why one seldom sees or even knows the name of the artist of the great Hindu artistic creations. The artist is not creating in order to become famous or rich. He is surrendering his talents, serving his Gods and his religion through his art, and his art takes on a certain sacredness. ¶One great joy that the Hindu has is the appreciation for all other religions. Hinduism is theocentric, that means God-centric, whereas most other religions are prophet-centric, revolving around the personality of some living person

or some person who once lived in history and interpreted religion to his culture in his time. Hinduism has no founder. It was never found-



In Hinduism there is no person or spiritual authority who stands between man and God. In fact, Hinduism teaches just the opposite. The priests in the temples are the servants of the Deity, the helper, the keeper of the Gods' house. He prepares and purifies the atmosphere of the temple, but he does not intervene between the devotee and his God—whichever of the many Gods within our religion that he may be worshiping. Without a mediator, responsibility is placed fully upon the individual. There is no one to intercede on his behalf. He is responsible for his actions, for his thoughts, for his emotions, for his relationship with his God. He must work out his beliefs from the inside, without undue dependence upon external influences. Of course, there is much help, as much as may be needed, from those who have previously gone through what he is now going through. It is not enough that he adopts an authorized dogma. He must study and bring the teachings to life from within himself.

Within the philosophy, each philosopher proclaims that God can be found within man if man practices the proper precepts of yoga and delves within himself through his *kundalini* force. The guru himself teaches the awakening of that force and how God can be realized in His transcendental as well as His personal aspect within the sphere of one's own personal experience in this very lifetime if he but pursues the path and is obedient.

Hinduism is unique because God and man, mind and God, instinctive mind, intellectual mind and superconscious mind, can merge as one, according to the evolution of the individual. Each one, according to his own self-created karma, has his own fulfillment. Those in the first stages of evolution, whose interests and experiences are basically instinctive, who possess little intellect or mental prowess, are guided by their emotions and impulses, are generally fearful. They have a personal experience of the Deity in the temple, but it is generally a fearful experience. They are afraid of God. Alongside of them during a *puja* is a great *rishi* who has had many hundreds of lives on this planet. He has his own personal experience of God, but it is an experience of love, of oneness and of union. There they are, side by side. Each experience of God is as real to one as to the other. There is no one in-between, no arbitrator of the experience to compel the one to see God exactly as the other one does.



## Within Hinduism Is a Place for Everyone

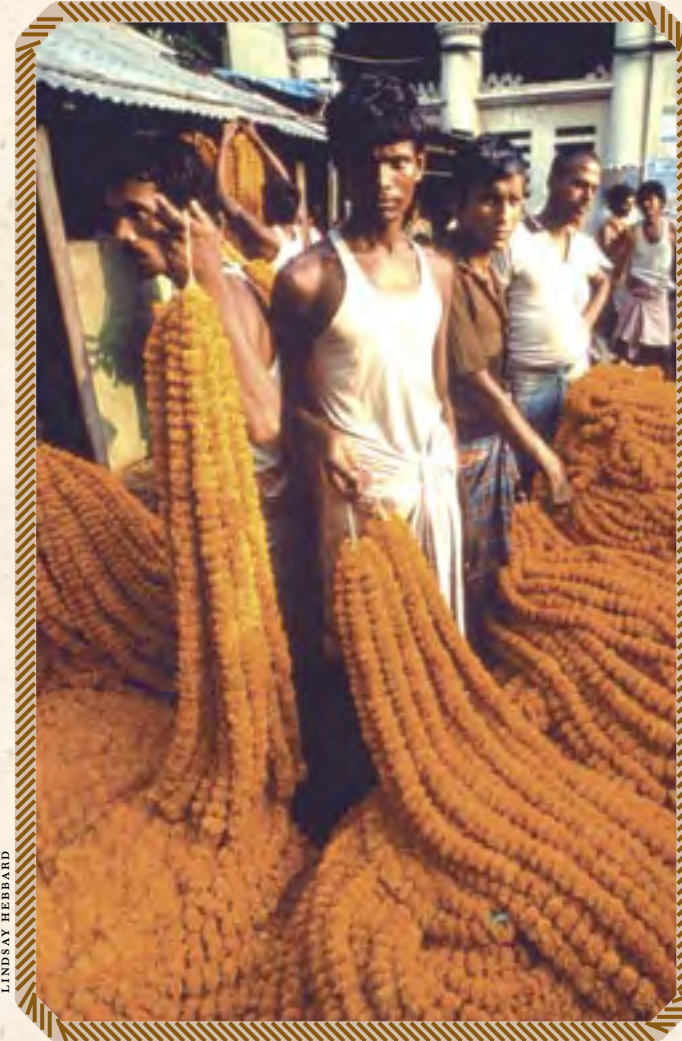
Hinduism is as broad as humanity is, as diverse as people are diverse. It is for the rich and the poor, for the mystic and the materialist. It is for the sage and the fool. None is excluded. In a Hindu temple you can find every variety of humanity. The man of accumulated wealth is there, supporting the institutions that have grown up around the temple, seeking to spend his abundance wisely and for its best purpose so that good merit may be earned for his next life. The pauper is there, begging in hopes that perhaps he will eat tomorrow and the God will inspire some devotee to give him a coin or two. So, a Hindu temple is a reflection of life, set in the midst of the life of the community. It is not making an effort to be better than the life of the village, only to serve that life and direct it to its next stage of evolution. The same Hindu mind which can consume within it all the religions of the world can and does consume within it all of the peoples of the world who are drawn to the temple by the shakti, the power, of the temple. Such is the great, embracing compassion of our religion.

The greatness of Hinduism cannot be compared with other religions. There is no basis for comparison. Hinduism, the Eternal way or Sanatana Dharma, has no beginning, therefore will certainly have no end. It was never created, and therefore it cannot be destroyed. It is a God-centric religion. The center of it is God. All of the other religions are prophet-centric. The center of those religions is a great saint or sage, a prophet, a messenger or messiah, some God-Realized person who has lived on Earth and died. Perhaps he was born to create that particular sect, that particular religion,

*Clockwise: Holy men at the Allahabad Kumbha Mela in 2001 parade to the bathing ghats, carrying elaborate dandas, symbols of spiritual authority; flower vendors in Kolkata ready at dawn with garlands of marigolds, prepared as offerings to the Gods. During Raksha Bandhan a girl ties a bracelet, on her brother's wrist, betokening her love and prayers for his welfare, and his commitment to protect her. Pilgrims arrive at Tirupati Temple, Andhra Pradesh, wearing yellow as a sign of austerity and sacrifice.*



PRADIP GUPTA/DIKODIA



LINDSAY HEBBARD

needed by the people of a certain part of the world at a certain time in history. The Hindus acknowledge this and recognize all of the world's religious leaders as great prophets, as great souls, as great incarnations, perhaps, of the Gods, or as great beings who have through their realization and inward practices incarnated themselves into, or transformed themselves into, eminent religious leaders and attracted devotees to them to give forth the precepts of life all over again and thus guide a tribe or a nation or a race into a better way of life.

The Hindu mind can encompass this, appreciate it, for it is firmly settled in a God-centric religion. The center of Hinduism is the Absolute, the timeless, formless, spaceless God who manifests as Pure Consciousness and as the most perfect form conceivable, the Primal Soul. He radiates out from that form as a myriad of Gods and Goddesses who inhabit the temples and bless the people, inspire the scriptures, inspire the spiritual leaders and uplift humanity in general. It is a one God in many forms. We recently heard a sannyasini at the Ganesha Temple in New York describe this in a most wonderful and profound way, "Siva is the fire. Shakti is the heat of that fire. Ganesha is the red color of that fire. Murugan is the light of that fire."

There are nearly a billion Hindus in the world today. That's roughly four times the population of the entire United States. Every sixth person on the planet is a Hindu. Hinduism attends to the needs of each one. It is the only religion that has such breadth and depth. Hinduism contains the Deities and the sanctified temples, the esoteric knowledge of inner states of consciousness, yoga and the disciplines of meditation. It possesses a gentle compassion and a genuine tolerance and appreciation for other religions. It remains undogmatic and open to inquiry. It believes in a just world in which every soul is guided by karma to the ultimate goal of Self Realization, leading to moksha, freedom from rebirth. It rests content in the knowledge of the divine origin of the soul, its passage through one life and another until maturity has been reached. It offers guidance to all who take refuge in it, from the nonbeliever to the most evolved maharishi. It cherishes the largest storehouse of scripture and philosophy on the earth, and the oldest. It is endowed with a tradition of saints and sages, of realized men and women, unrivaled on the earth. It is the sum of these, and more, which makes me boldly declare that Hinduism is the greatest religion in the world.

penetrate with spiritual power, bringing harmony and culture, balancing out the dharma of the planet. ¶Hinduism is such a great religion. All practicing Hindus are very proud of their religion. Unfortunately, these days too many born into the religion are not all that proud to be Hindus, but this is slowly changing. Hindus are now welcoming into their religion others who are, of their own volition, adopting or converting into the Sanatana Dharma. They are proud enough of their faith to want others to share its wisdom, its mysticism, its scriptures, its broadmindedness, its magnificent temples and its final conclusions for all mankind. To all Hindus, who today are found in every country on the Earth, I say: Courage! Courage! Courage! Have the courage to know beyond a doubt that Hinduism is the greatest

religion in the world. We must be proud of this. **Hinduism Cannot Be Destroyed:** It is false to think that one has to be born a Hindu in order to be a Hindu. That is a concept postu-



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lated by certain caste-based Hindu lineages and reinforced by the Christians in their effort to hinder the growth of our religion, to deprive it of new life, to hold it down while they in turn try to convert Hindus en masse to their religion. Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), a Hindu monk and missionary who wrote extensively on the Hindu Dharma, when confronted by this same issue in the West would explain how Hindus who have been converted by force should not be denied an opportunity of returning to their ancestral religion. As for the case of those not born into Hinduism who might be interested to join it, he simply said, "Why, born aliens have been converted in the past by crowds, and the process is still going on." Dr. S. Radhakrishnan (1888–1975), the distinguished Hindu philosopher who became

the second president of India, confirms this view in writing, "In a sense, Hinduism may be regarded as the first example in the world of a missionary religion. Only its missionary spirit is different from that associated with the proselytizing creeds. It did not regard as its mission to convert humanity to one opinion. For what counts is conduct and not belief. The ancient practice of *vratyastoma*, described fully in the *Tandya Brahmana*, shows that not only individuals but whole tribes were absorbed into Hinduism." ¶During the era of India's domination by alien religions, when Hinduism was scheduled to be destroyed, the attack was to be carried out in three ways. The first strategy was to convince the women to abandon their age-old *stri* dharma—of maintaining the home, its purity and ways of worship—thus draw-

ing them away from the household in order to receive a so-called "higher education" or to teach in alien religious schools, thus denying future generations the mother's religious coun-



HINDUISM TODAY

sel and grounding in the dharma. The second strategy was to overtly break down the various castes of temple priests by enticing them to accept other, often higher paying, occupations, thus leaving the temples unattended. ¶The third strategy was to convince Hindus that they had inherited a crude and outdated religion. This last attack was accomplished mainly through ridicule, by ridiculing every aspect of the religion that could possibly be ridiculed. For example, those who slandered Hinduism claimed it has no sacraments. Why, Hinduism has more sacraments, more sacred rites and ceremonies for its members, than perhaps any other religion in the world. These sacraments include the *namakarana samskara*, name-



# Where Hindus Live

While India is home to 94 percent of the world's nearly one billion Hindus, nearly 57 million are scattered widely across the globe. This map shows larger communities, with smaller ones listed to the right, and world populations below.

## WORLD POPULATION 2002

|                    |                     |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| Hindus .....       | 1 billion           |
| Catholics .....    | 1.4 billion         |
| Muslims .....      | 1.3 billion         |
| Nonbelievers ..... | 900 million         |
| Protestants .....  | 600 million         |
| Confucian .....    | 400 million         |
| Buddhists .....    | 360 million         |
| Tribals .....      | 100 million         |
| Taoists .....      | 50 million          |
| Shintoists .....   | 30 million          |
| Jews .....         | 18 million          |
| Sikhs .....        | 16 million          |
| Jains .....        | 6 million           |
| Zoroastrians ..... | 125,000             |
| Other Faiths ..... | 77 million          |
| <b>Total .....</b> | <b>6.25 billion</b> |



|                    |       |                   |       |
|--------------------|-------|-------------------|-------|
| Algeria .....      | 600   | Jordan .....      | 1,000 |
| Barbados .....     | 100   | Lebanon .....     | 100   |
| Brunei .....       | 500   | Liberia .....     | 500   |
| Cameroon .....     | 60    | Laos .....        | 600   |
| C. African Rep. .. | 20    | Libya .....       | 500   |
| Czech Republic ..  |       | Mexico .....      | 50    |
| and Slovakia ....  | 150   | Morocco .....     | 60    |
| Chad .....         | 20    | Mozambique ..     | 600   |
| Chile .....        | 20    | Panama .....      | 600   |
| China .....        | 170   | Poland .....      | 100   |
| Congo .....        | 100   | Qatar .....       | 500   |
| Colombia ...       | 60    | Senegal .....     | 100   |
| Cuba .....         | 100   | Seychelles .....  | 600   |
| Ecuador ...        | 600   | Sierra Leone ..   | 500   |
| Finland .....      | 100   | South Korea ..... | 60    |
| Gabon .....        | 100   | Sudan .....       | 500   |
| Ghana .....        | 600   | Syria .....       | 100   |
| Guinea .....       | 50    | Tunisia .....     | 100   |
| Hungary .....      | 50    | Turkey .....      | 100   |
| Iceland .....      | 7     | Upper Volta ..... | 100   |
| Ireland .....      | 20    | Yemen, North..    | 100   |
| Israel .....       | 200   | Zaire (Congo) ..  | 500   |
| Ivory Coast ...    | 1,000 |                   |       |
| Zambia .....       | 600   |                   |       |

giving sacrament; *annaprashana*, first feeding; *karnavedha*, ear-piercing; *vidyarambha*, commencement of learning; *vivaha*, marriage; and many others. ¶Though India was politically dominated for generations by adherents of alien faiths, and though every attempt was made to discourage, weaken and crush the native religion, the carefully calculated, systematic assault failed to destroy Hinduism. Hinduism cannot be destroyed. It is the venerable eternal religion, the Sanatana Dharma. But it was an effective campaign that has left in its wake deep *samskaric* patterns, deep subconscious impressions, which still persist in the minds of the Indian people. It is going to be difficult to completely eradicate these impressions, but with the help of all the millions of Hindus throughout the world, in adhering to and extolling the benefits and joys of Hinduism and the gifts which it

holds for mankind, this is possible and feasible, within the range of accomplishment, perhaps within this very generation.

**Bringing in Ardent Seekers:** Hindus should freely welcome sincere devotees into

their religion, not those who already have a firm religion and are content, but those who are seeking, who believe, as millions in the West already believe, in the laws of karma and reincarnation and the existence of the ever-present God that permeates this planet and the universe. Hindus should freely embrace those who believe in the Gods and all we have been speaking about earlier, for whom other religious avenues have proved empty and fruitless. There are certain matured souls for whom the Sanatana Dharma can be the only true religion, who have no other religion and who will seek and seek until they come upon its profound truths, perhaps in an old scrip-

Left: Hindu school girls in Bangalore, India; right, boys attending Rameshbhai Oza's Hindu school at Sandipani Vidyaniketana near Porbandar, Gujarat

ture, or in a temple sanctum during puja or in the eyes of an awakened siddha yogi. These souls we must help. We must teach them of our religion and allow them to fully accept or reject it, to accept it because they know it, or to reject it because they know it and are not ready to meet Maha Ganapati and humbly sit at the feet of this most profound Lord. ¶There are many lost souls on the planet today who die in the physical world—lose their physical body—wander on the astral plane a short time and are caught up immediately in another womb. They have no knowledge of other states of existence or of the workings of reincarnation. They have no time for the bliss of these in-between, astral states. They have no time for assessing their last life and preparing for the next, which they could then enter with new knowledge, no time for inner attunement

with the Gods in the inner worlds between death and birth. Instead, they are caught in a constant cycle of flesh, making flesh and living in flesh, with the soul being immersed in ignorance and the darkness of the conscious-

ness of flesh. Hinduism eradicates this cycle by offering knowledge of the states between life and death and then life again. It creates deep impressions within the mind of these individuals, which then bring them out of this syndrome so that they can enjoy months, years, in fact, of education and knowledge in the inner planes of consciousness between births, so that they can come back into a physical body a more awakened soul than when they left their last physical sheath at death. ¶We must not be reluctant to welcome these sincere Hindu souls and to assist them in finding the answers they seek and do not find elsewhere. It is our dharma to help them. Hinduism has always welcomed adoptives and converts. Bring in new people to the religion. Teach them. Help them. Counsel them. Proceed with confidence. Have courage, courage, courage.





# PARENTING

## Understanding Your Child's Emotional Life

The nine traditional emotions depicted in Hindu dance and music are evident in children right from infancy

A mother and daughter together experience *shanta*, the emotion of tranquility or calmness as they watch the sun set over the ocean

BY VATSALA SPERLING, VERMONT, USA

INDIAN TRADITION RECOGNIZES NINE rasas as representing our most important and basic emotions: love, joy, wonder, courage, calmness, anger, sadness, fear and disgust. These emotions are universal to mankind. Five are desirable, while four are unpleasant and usually undesirable. Poets and artists have used the rasa system to express these inherent emotions in works of art. The poet-saint Thyagaraja has composed numerous classical Carnatic songs with one or another of the rasas providing the song's theme. Artists who learn classical Indian dances, like *bharata natyam*, *kuchhipudi* and so forth, spend decades under the expert eye of a guru, mastering the mudras (facial expressions, eye-movements, hand gestures and body language) that depict the various rasas. While adults must study for years to learn an accurate expression of the rasas, a child knows instinctively how to express the rasas in a natural, perfect and pure way.

Watch a small child carefully and you will be able to see displays of all nine of the basic emotions: 1) A baby smiles and gazes adoringly at his mother, showing the emotion of

*shrngaar*, charm or love. Overcome with love for the infant, she picks him up, cuddles him and showers him with kisses. This is what the baby wanted, a physical confirmation of mother's presence and love. He knows exactly how to display his needs by way of facial expressions when he is barely three months old. 2) A loud noise startles and awakens the baby and he cries out in fear, *bhayanak*. This cry is distinct from all other cries. 3) Try spooning a cooked and mashed vegetable into an infant's mouth. As he sniffs, tastes, spits out and makes a horrible face he is expressing *bibhatsa*, disgust, with the new taste, very different from that of milk, his staple diet so far. 4) A ladybug lands on his table, walks across, flutters her wings and takes off. The child is wide-eyed with *adbhut*, wonder or fascination, and has watched every move made by the ladybug. 5) A child has learned to climb a ladder and gets a better view. He is feeling very accomplished and *veer*, brave, a hero of his own world. 6) Laughing when tickled is a child's expression of *haasya*, joyous humor and laughter. Watch him play with a pet. 7) In a hurry, the mother stubs her toe and cries out in pain. A child as young as two, will

reach out, wipe mom's tears and touch the injury in an expression of *karuna*, compassion, empathy or mercy. 8) Children fighting may display *raudra*, anger. 9) A well-fed and relaxed baby that is asleep does look angelic. He is *shanta*, tranquility or calmness, personified.

Besides these, a child can display with equal ease and mastery a few more inherent emotions, such as greed, selflessness, obstinacy, curiosity, clinginess, generosity, dependency, violence, arrogance and rudeness.

### Understanding these childhood emotions

In our alarmingly individualistic modern societies, the transmission of a collective child-rearing wisdom is either totally lost or seriously damaged. The barrage of advertising and information that bombards us through the media persuades many young parents to accept propaganda wholesale instead of following the intuitive wisdom of their own hearts. For example, consider this piece of propaganda from the baby formula manufacturers, "Breast milk is polluted with pesticides, give the baby formula." This ad slogan has stripped millions of children of their birthright—mother's milk. "Let the

child cry himself to sleep. If you run to the child every time he whimpers, he will learn to control you, will never sleep through the night and will never be independent." This propaganda has successfully deprived millions of children of their mother's soothing touch and presence. It has taught them to ignore their natural needs for love, warmth and responsiveness. Children whose parents follow this advice grow up deprived of the trust that their cries for help will be heard by those who care for them. They do learn to cry themselves to sleep, no doubt, but who can deny with any authority that they also learn (in their nursery full of stuffed animals) that it is okay to ignore others who call for help and kindness. Perhaps these children find themselves incapable of extending any deep, lasting or genuine emotional warmth when they grow up. "Spare the rod and spoil the child." This saying has caused many children to be beaten black and blue. All of these misguided approaches to child rearing befall children in modern societies when all that they are doing is being children—expressing, without censorship, the rasas that are inherent in them. Any society that expects children to have the self-control of adults has no tolerance for, or understanding of, the natural state of children.

When a child is raised on the basis of propaganda, rather than on the principals of a child-centered cultural wisdom gathered over the ages, he or she learns from a very early age to suppress, divert, subjugate, hide, be ashamed of and feel guilty about the expression of fundamental emotional states. While parents continue to believe that they are doing the best for their children, they never stop to wonder about the long-term outcome of the emotional suppression they have been encouraged to visit upon kids at such an early, impressionable age.

In fact, such early stomping out of a child's emotions is damaging. When a society thwarts its children's natural expression of inherent emotions, without first providing a healthy venue for the complete expression and blossoming of their growing minds, it creates problems for itself. The fact that these problems are specific to modern societies cannot be disputed.

### How older cultures respond

The older, child-centered cultures take a different approach to the display of rasas by the powerful beings called children. The parenting techniques followed in many so-called primitive cultures foster attachment, and create such a closeness and bond between mother and child that the mother develops a total acceptance and understanding of her child and his mind. When an entire extended family lives in a one-room longhouse in the rain forest of South America, the adults reach a high level of tolerance



**Our innate emotional toolbox:** The first four of the nine rasas or emotions in Hindu psychology are: 1) Shringaar, charm and love; 2) bhayanak, fear; 3) bibhatsa, disgust; 4) adbhut, wonder and fascination.

to childhood display of rasas. They do not expect the child to conform to the expectations of the adults the moment he opens his eyes to this world. Discipline and assimilation into the community will come later, by way of the numerous rites of passage.

In a similar fashion, the child-centered and ancient culture of India takes a very tolerant view of the childhood display of rasas. In India they let the children be children. They understand that childhood does not last forever. Soon enough the child will grow up and learn the ways of the world. There is no need to rush the process, to cause premature aging and untimely maturation.

When children have strong emotions, the adults do not feel the need to resort to violent beatings or verbal abuse to suppress the expression those feelings. Such a response would only inflict rejection and social humiliation on children for their natural displays. Adults in these older cultures understand that just as a lion hunts a deer, the child, in all his innocence, is simply following his inborn instincts. He is not acting to please or displease. These adults understand

that just as nature expresses herself through her elements, children express themselves through their displays of rasas. The display is not the child. It is just a state of mind and therefore is inherently changeable.

Though the expression of rasas is a life-long process, it does not go on and on in the same hyperkinetic fashion as is seen in childhood. If a child is allowed to be a child and at an appropriate time is exposed to other possible ways of channeling and expressing the rasas, his emotional health does not suffer from suppression. He can be emotionally expressive and free and at the same time learn how to bring his rasas to the surface in a socially acceptable way.

### A practical approach

I was raised in India in a modest home with five siblings, each more expert than the other in his or her ability to drive Mother up the wall. How did my mother deal with it? As I recall, the weapons in her arsenal were love . . . love . . . love, endless patience, endless tolerance and a lasting belief that "this too shall pass."



I also recall Swamiji Chinmayananda talking to a group of young mothers after a Sunday Balavihar. He said, "For the first seven years, treat the child as if he is God; for the next seven years treat him as you would treat a servant; for the next seven years treat him as if he were a slave; and for the next seven years and beyond, treat him as if he were your friend."

He went on to explain why. "A child in his first seven years is in the realm of innocence. He lives in the here and now. He is ruled by his inborn instincts and impulses and is mainly governed by his bio-physiology. He has no awareness of the duality of the adult world. He has no malice. His love is pure. His hatred and anger are pure; so, too, are his fears, compassion and violence. In his purity and innocence he is God-like, akin to the elements of nature. At this stage, there is no need for bringing about changes in a child's expressions of emotions by inducing fear, beating, berating, humiliating or forcing the child. Let him weather the storm. Let him live through his emotional upheaval and outburst.

"In the next seven years, the child's milk teeth are falling. He has been through a few childhood illnesses and is aware of pain. He is beginning to read and write. Now the child, just like a servant, is ready to obey authority. He is eager to learn what

will please his parents, teachers and friends. He is beginning to figure out what brings him praise and goodwill. Treat this child with the utmost dignity. Into his receptive ears, pour all the good moral stories from cultures around the world. Don't just read like a machine. Read and discuss the stories with your child. Encourage the child to think, imagine and question. Set a positive example and be a good role model for your child to emulate. Appeal to the child's inherent sense of justice, fairness, love, compassion, kindness and reciprocity. No child has ever been born without these beautiful qualities," said Swamiji, his bright and lively eyes blazing with conviction.

"For the next seven years, treat him like a slave, in the sense that he should now learn that life has serious responsibilities and obligations. To do this you do not have to become a cruel slave driver. Teach him about money, social codes and ethics, about the value of work and education. Teach him to respect physical labor. Encourage him to accomplish challenging tasks that will give him strength and confidence in himself. Teach him about consequences, the ripple effect and repercussions. And once your child has reached twenty-one years of age, stop treating him like a child. If you have treated him right from the first day, he will know to take charge and be a man. From now on he will

be your friend for rest of your life, and you will be his friend."

It need not be told that life begets life, tolerance breeds tolerance, love generates love, hatred brings more hatred, violence leads to more violence. The natural display of rasas during childhood gives parents and children an opportunity to make a fresh and correct start. A child raised in an environment imbued with love, acceptance and tolerance learns to accept these values as natural and can find in himself a reserve of these very same qualities, from which he can give to others freely when needed. A child raised on anger, hatred and violent discipline learns that his basic, inborn, inherent signals, the instincts that lead him to display the full range of rasas, are all wrong. This negative feedback toward his most natural, instinctive behavior causes him, in turn, to lose trust in himself and in others. The final outcome is a suspicious, doubtful, cold, emotionally dead and ruined adult who has chronically low self-esteem.

#### What parents can do

When the display of negative rasas by children gets out of hand, there are certain positive things that parents can do:

- Take a few deep breaths.
- Commit to loving the child without conditions.

**Emoting, continued:** The remaining rasas are: 5) veer, heroism and bravery; 6) haasya, humor, laughter and joy; 7) karuna, compassion, empathy and mercy; 8) roudra, anger; and 9) shanta, tranquility and calmness. These nine primary emotions, also called sthayibhavas, are brilliantly portrayed in bharata natyam and other forms of India dance. In a performance, the dancer seeks to portray not only the obvious manifestation of the emotion, but also its cause, effect and related subordinate emotions. According to the dance tradition, these emotions are derived from the Atharva Veda, fourth of the Vedas.



**Love:** When the rasa of shringaar, beauty, charm and love, is at play, the persons involved are overcome with lofty feelings of love as is this mother reaching out to caress her happy child.

- Be firm, yet remain flexible to the child's needs of the moment.
- See the child for what he is—just a small child in need of support.
- Impose no grown-up values and expectations on the child.
- See the display of rasa for what it is—a little storm in a tiny tea cup, which will calm down eventually.
- At the peak of the display of negative rasas, do not force the child to change his ways or engage with him in a forceful manner. A calm voice and a firm but peaceful demeanor is a stronger weapon than force.
- Do not, do not, do not suppress, neglect, ignore, put down, discourage, demean or humiliate the child when he is displaying any sign of a positive rasa. While excessive praise is detrimental, so are neglect and discouragement.

- At no point are violent physical punishments, frightening time-outs, deprivation or verbal abuse called for. These negative devices affect children for the rest of their lives.
- Focus on cultivating tolerance and patience in yourself. Treat the child as you would expect him to treat you when you grow old, powerless, dependent and needy. Talk to your child about the expression of positive rasas when the time is right. In the meantime, just show him by the example of your own behavior how the expression of positive rasas brings joy to the family.

- Set a family time—free from technology—to create an ideal environment for cultivating your child and teaching him about the display of positive rasas.

Soon enough you will be able to speak to the child about the universal laws of righteous behavior. Every being has the desire to be treated with love, courtesy, kindness, loyalty, generosity, consideration and warmth. While being taught to extend this treatment to one and all, the child will also need to be told about discretion. For example, loyalty is a good quality but the child must learn to choose his company wisely. If he befriends a drug pusher and becomes loyal to him, his loyalty to this friendship will quickly take him right down the drain and into the septic tank. This is where discretion comes in.

When all is said and done, nobody can deny that these are challenging times for parents. Rootlessness, alienation, marginalization and anonymity—these are some of the prices parents pay when they move around the world in search of the perfect situation. Young parents are often cut off

ALL ART BY VATSALA SPERLING



from their original cultures and societies. Techno-commercial values constantly push parents and children to test one another. In pursuit of their individual ambitions and needs, parents and children often live in separate worlds, albeit in the same household. And when children enter school, the child who has not been given time to be a child, who has not been accepted with tolerance, often ends up in the school nurse's office being tested for and diagnosed with illnesses such as bipolar disorder, ADHD or oppositional defiant disorder.

Harried teachers, under pressure to maintain order in their classrooms and to have their students meet minimum academic standards, expect all of the children to behave like obedient, quiet, perfect, little ladies and gentlemen. Children are not allowed to be children. They are not allowed to deviate from the norm or to freely express all of their rasas. Sometimes as early as the age of three or four, children are labeled with psychiatric diagnoses and begin to be treated with powerful drugs such as lithium or Depakote (mood stabilizers), Risperdal, Seroquel or Zyprexa (atypical antipsychotics), Prozac (an antidepressant) or Ritalin (a drug for ADHD). Each of these drugs comes with a frightening list of side effects. If prescribed without any physical markers, but solely on the basis of behavior—or rather the display of rasas—what good (or harm) is being done to the child, the parents and society?

In the face of this, it becomes all the more imperative that parents consider other, more holistic approaches to child rearing. If, as is sometimes the case, the child's display of rasas becomes detrimental to his own or his family's well-being, there are scores of other, non-pharmaceutical options available for

modifying mood and behavior. His parents might explore changing his diet, limiting his intake of sugar, preservatives and additives. Calming and healing herbs might help. Perhaps homeopathy could shift his energetic balance or counseling for the entire family could diffuse the situation. Training a child in martial arts, classical music or classical dance could help. All of these disciplines have been known to stabilize and channel excessive or disruptive energy in more positive directions. A regular TV-free time when family members sit together, work together and converse with one another is also known to provide lasting positive change for children.

As children grow up and display rasas, parents need to continue to grow up as well—not just in the physical manifestations of age, the wrinkles and gray hair, but in wisdom. This is what a study of the display of rasas in childhood is all about: a call for parents to monitor the growth of their wisdom. When parents learn to take charge of their own growth in terms of tolerance and empathy and resolve to let children be children first, allowing them an age-appropriate display of rasas, they have an opportunity to become truly close to their children and know them in their totality. As children mature, good parents take the initiative for gently channeling their rasas at the appropriate time and place. When parents take this positive approach to child-rearing, the options of violent discipline and drug-based treatments become obsolete. While we continue to ponder who is raising whom, learning to flow with the rasas will bring about lasting peace and joy in many households.

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## ANALYSIS

# Capital Punishment: Time to Abandon It?

Execution is inherently inhumane, unfairly applied and ineffective in deterring crime

BY MAHUA DAS

ACCORDING TO AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL'S BRIEFING FOR the European Union and India Summit on September 7, 2005, 120 countries have abolished the death penalty in law or practice. Some of the countries that have repealed it for all crimes are Australia, Canada, South Africa, Venezuela, New Zealand, Mauritius and the 25 countries of the European Union. India is among 76 countries that retain the death penalty. Amnesty International's annual report on official judicial execution states that in 2004 there were 3,797 executions in 25 countries. The People's Republic of China was the most prolific executioner of the world, carrying out more than 3,400 executions. This was followed by Iran (159), Vietnam (64), USA (59) and Saudi Arabia (35).

Methods of execution in the modern era include hanging, stoning, beheading, shooting, electrocution and, more recently, lethal injection. Many countries retain hanging as the standard mode, notably India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Japan, Singapore and Egypt. Some nations use firing squads, either exclusively or for certain classes of crime or criminal. For instance, in Egypt and India military personnel are shot, while civilians are hanged. Six coun-

tries stone condemned criminals to death. Beheading is used in Congo, the United Arab Emirates and in Saudi Arabia, where 35 men and one woman were publicly beheaded in 2004. Five countries use lethal injection. It is the most popular mode in the United States, accounting for 58 of 59 executions in 2004.

The death penalty can be found in human society as far back as history can reveal. It is present in India's ancient scriptural epics, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, as well as in the laws of ancient Egypt. The earliest written version is the 18th century BCE code of King Hammurabi of Babylon. Numerous crimes in these ancient codes called for death. In the 7th century BCE, the Draconian Code of Athens made *every* crime punishable

by death—hence the term *draconian*, meaning extremely harsh. Every ancient religion endorsed capital punishment, with at least the exception of Jainism and Buddhism, though rulers of both religions were known to have executed criminals.

Today there is a vigorous international debate over the death penalty. On one side are the "abolitionists," who want to eliminate it; on the other are the "retentionists," who want to keep it. Abolitionists, of which I am one, focus on the issues of morality, effectiveness and fairness in application. Retentionists assert that deterrence and retribution justify the continued use of capital punishment across the world. In my opinion, their position is fraught with the dangers of undermining the cherished values and principles of a civilized society. It would be worthwhile to delve deeper and assess the ground realities, beginning with the most common rationale for the death penalty, that it deters others from committing crime.

**Evaluating the deterrence rationale:** There is a lack of convincing evidence to indicate that the death penalty deters crime more

is not to cut his life short, thereby stopping his progress, but to improve him. This is an act of a very high wisdom, which clearly states that capital punishment has to vanish. The convict may go to his next life full of anger and revenge. In lifelong imprisonment are the chances for a true improvement and betterment, which adds much to our great and timeless culture.

**Swami Pragyanand, Sai Pragya Dham, Delhi:** Hindu Avatars, such as Lord Rama or Lord Krishna, come to Earth to destroy evil forces. Saints, on the other hand, are supposed to be models of compassion. The saint never kills anybody. Instead, he tries to reform them. Sage Valmiki, for example, was a robber who was reformed. Reforming a person is quite a difficult job, whereas killing somebody is a relatively easy job. So the Gods come to the Earth to destroy the evil persons. And the saints take birth to reform the people. Therefore, in the Sana-tana Dharma, the tradition accepts capital



**Tombstone, Arizona:** This reconstructed gallows is part of the Tombstone Courthouse State Historic Park. The 1882 courthouse tried some of the most notorious criminal cases in Arizona's "wild west" days. Two US states (Delaware and Washington) and 58 countries retain hanging. The cause of death is not usually asphyxiation, but compromise of the blood flow or spinal column.

effectively than other punishments. A study conducted for the United Nations concludes, "It is not prudent to accept the hypothesis that capital punishment deters murder to a marginally greater extent than does the threat and application of the supposedly lesser punishment of life imprisonment." Statistics show that countries without the death penalty have a lower murder rate than those with it. For example, the murder rates in Germany, Britain, Italy, France, Netherlands and Sweden are less than two per 100,000 people per year, whereas the rate in the US is 6.3. In Canada, the murder rate has fallen 23 percent since the death penalty was abolished in 1976. The Canadian statistic supports the contention that abolishing the death penalty can lower the homicide rate rather than increase it.

The US experience is instructive. In 1972, the Supreme Court banned the death penalty. Five years later, the court reinstated it, with certain conditions. Many states thereupon reintroduced the death penalty on the rationale that it deters violent crime. However, there is no conclusive statistical evidence that states with the death penalty have lower rates of homicide than those without it. One US-based nonprofit organization, the Death Penalty Information Centre ([www.deathpenaltyinfo.org](http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org)) claims that states without the death penalty have lower murder rates than states where executions take place. But this statistic, even if true, would not take into account the unique demographics of various states, such as a lower poverty rate, which could account for the lower murder rate.

Why would the death penalty not decrease the murder rate? W.T. McGrath wrote in his 1956 book *Should Canada Abolish the Gallows and the Lash?*: "Murderers might be classified arbitrarily into three groups—the insane killer, the person who strikes in a moment of blind fury, and the deliberate killer who murders for gain. Which of these three will be deterred by the possible conse-

# SAINT'S VOICES

Hinduism's holy men hold varying opinions on criminal execution

**Swami Vishvesh-warananda, President, Omkar-ananda Ashrams, Rishikesh:** To my belief, in no way do we have a right to take the life of a convict, whatsoever the situation may be. It is more appropriate to keep such a crime-



maker permanently behind the bars, but in a strict and consistent way. One important reason not to take the life of a convict is that in rare cases the judgment may be wrong. Such errors have truly happened. We have, with great care, to do our best, but we have to understand clearly, that the final and perfect judgment or punishment is in God and God alone. We are not here to take life, but we are here to improve the life and make the life better. Hinduism teaches us that we have to try to reach the Truth. Even the most imperfect man has to come to this path eventually. So, our duty

is not to cut his life short, thereby stopping his progress, but to improve him. This is an act of a very high wisdom, which clearly states that capital punishment has to vanish. The convict may go to his next life full of anger and revenge. In lifelong imprisonment are the chances for a true improvement and betterment, which adds much to our great and timeless culture.

**Swami Pragyanand, Sai Pragya Dham, Delhi:** Hindu Avatars, such as Lord Rama or Lord Krishna, come to Earth to destroy evil forces. Saints, on the other hand, are supposed to be models of compassion. The saint never kills anybody. Instead, he tries to reform them. Sage Valmiki, for example, was a robber who was reformed. Reforming a person is quite a difficult job, whereas killing somebody is a relatively easy job. So the Gods come to the Earth to destroy the evil persons. And the saints take birth to reform the people. Therefore, in the Sana-tana Dharma, the tradition accepts capital



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punishment. But the tradition of saints does not accept capital punishment. The saint would always seek to reform a person by ridding him of his evil tendencies.

In the present time and age capital punishment is not relevant. Today people commit offenses out of frustration and revenge. When someone has committed murder, we need to probe into the circumstances that led him to do so. According to the *Bhagavad Gita*, no action is by itself sinful or meritorious. It is the motive in the heart of the doer which leads him to take a particular action that is the determining factor.

I have personally seen someone being hanged to death, and therefore I can tell you that it is very cruel punishment. Let me clarify I could see this hanging because

the jail superintendent was a friend of mine and I had expressed to him my desire of witnessing a case of hanging. This man who was hanged before me in the jail was a dacoit, an armed robber, and his mother came to meet him. He was asked by the jail authorities about his final wish. Someone suggested to him that he should meet his mother, but he refused to meet her when she came there. The dacoit said that she could not have been his true mother, as if she had been a true and good mother she would have prevented him from going ahead from childhood on the path of stealing things. It is because she did not prevent him from thieving that he finally landed up becoming a dacoit.

It is true that the rich get away from capital punishment due to their influence and power, and the economically poor man cannot escape it. I am sorry to point out that today there is a lot of corruption, even amongst members of the judiciary. Because the poor man cannot bribe the corrupt, he

cannot escape the punishment.

We have to change the viewpoint of the person. If we are successful, the person will change. Reformation, not capital punishment, is the way out. Our scriptures have always laid a lot of emphasis on non-violence. Somebody who has turned to violence due to his personal circumstances in life can be transformed, made a nonviolent and reformed human being.

**Swami Parmatmananda Saraswati, a senior disciple of Swami Dayananda Saraswati based in Rajkot, Gujarat:** Capital

punishment is allowed under Hindu tradition. Lord Rama is the embodiment of dharma, yet he killed King Bali, who had stolen his own brother's wife. I do not know



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quences of his crime? Obviously not the insane killer who is living in a world of his own. Surely not the impulsive killer who is in the grip of a passion he cannot control. Surely not the deliberate killer, who has based his decision to kill on considerations of profit and loss; life in prison would make it an unprofitable transaction indeed. He does not expect to be caught.” Logic reasons that rational people will be deterred from murder because of the existence of the death penalty, but since most murders are unplanned, a logical analysis is not feasible.

China is the world’s record executioner, imposing the death penalty for 68 crimes, including murder, rape, drug trafficking, pimping, habitual theft, re-selling of VAT receipts (a form of tax evasion), stealing or dealing in national treasures or cultural relics, publishing pornography, selling counterfeit money and economic offences such as graft, speculation and profiteering. Even killing a panda, the national animal, is a capital offense.

China considers information regarding the death penalty a state secret, and a realistic estimate of the judicial carnage is not divulged by the communist regime. Amnesty International ([www.amnestyusa.org/abolish/](http://www.amnestyusa.org/abolish/)) is the only organization that systematically monitors and records executions and death sentences in China. Its annual death-penalty log revealed that China sentenced at least 3,152 people to death and executed more than 1,876 during 1997. These figures represent a drop from 1996, at the peak of the “Strike Hard” anti-crime campaign, but are comparable to figures for the previous three years. Amnesty International stated, “1996 was an exceptionally high year for executions, and 1997 just marks a return to the level before then.” It concluded that the sharp increase in the number of executions in 1996 did not in any way deter crime rates.

In spite of the profusion of executions, the crime rate in China has shown an increase in recent years. Violent crimes, such as murder and robbery and crimes associated with gangs abroad, such as trafficking in narcotics, smuggling of gold and relics, and counterfeiting of currency and credit cards, have multiplied. In 1997, the Special Rapporteur for the United Nations on extra-judicial, summary and arbitrary executions stated, “The death penalty is not an appropriate tool to fight the growing crime rate in China.”

what great saints and gurus have said about capital punishment in the past. It is true that times have changed. Technological advancement has made life more comfortable, and we have more means of communication. But the nature of crime has remained the same. Sometimes I feel that the crimes today are even more heinous than in the past. Hence capital punishment, if sanctioned by the scriptures, should continue.

**Acharya Mahamandaleshwar Swami Jagdish Muni Ji Maharaj, Head of Sant Mandal Ashram, Vaishno Yati Akhara, Haridwar:**

The scriptures speak both for and against the system of capital punishment. The scriptures give the ruler or the government the power to use capital punishment. However, the saints and mahatmas do not believe in capital punishment. They believe in reforming people. There are a large number of instances in which saints have reformed criminals, in some cases so much so that the reformed people themselves became saints. Rishi Valmiki is one such

example. He was a dacoit who used to kill people for money. But the saints reformed him, and he himself became a saint. The rishis whom Valmiki attacked as a dacoit could have killed him or gotten him killed through the help of others, but they chose to reform him. In the Sikh tradition, Guru Nanak came across a criminal named Sajjan, a rogue who would offer shelter and food to pilgrims and travelers and, while they slept, kill them and take all their belongings. He had plans to do the same with Guru Nanak. But Guru Nanak Dev Ji’s interaction with him influenced Sajjan so much that he left his criminal activities and became his disciple. All these instances show that the saints have reformed people who might have received capital punishment. But so far as the ruler is concerned, he goes by the constitution of the country and can use capital punishment to govern his nation. There is no doubt that it is a cruel way to punish somebody. But when someone is himself cruel and has been given adequate chance to reform

himself and still is not willing to mend his ways, in such circumstances giving capital punishment is justified.

**Acharya Mahamandaleshwar Swami Samvidananda Saraswati Ji Maharaj, Head of Kailash Ashram, Nashik:**

The system of capital punishment has been there since the ancient times. Now a debate is going on as to how relevant it is in the present times. I believe capital punishment should no longer be given.

Hinduism is full of compassion and forgiveness. Leave aside human beings, we are supposed to be kind even to insects and animals. We are not supposed to kill a small insect. Therefore, taking the life of a human being is a very big issue for us. Our Hindu dharma is very clear that



THOMAS KELLY



**California:** The lethal injection gurney at San Quentin prison in California sits in the former gas chamber. Stanley Tookie Williams, founder of the Crips gang, was executed here December 13, 2005, for the murder of four people. Between 1937 and 1995, 196 prisoners were put to death in the gas chamber. Since 1995, eleven have been killed by lethal injection. During the same period, twelve condemned inmates committed suicide

and about 30 died of natural causes. Today about 650 await execution on “Death Row,” with about 30 inmates added each year. The appeal process commonly takes 16 years after sentencing to death. Several death-row prisoners have developed their own fan clubs through web sites. California is planning to rebuild Death Row at a cost of \$223 million.

use of violence against anyone is not allowed. Any other type of punishment may be given, but we should not take anyone’s life. Our scriptures and Vedas do not favor capital punishment. They advocate the principle of nonviolence.

In the Mahabharata battle the person who had killed the children of Draupadi was captured and taken to Draupadi. She was asked whether he should be killed. Draupadi asked that he be set free, saying, “If he is killed, his mother will also have to go through the same trauma and grief that I am going through because of his killing of my children. As a mother, I would not like his mother to go through this level of grief.” The killer was given other punishment, but was not killed.

**Mahamandaleshwar Mahanirvani Akhara, Swami Vishweshwaranand Giri Ji Maharaj, Head of Sannyas Ashram, Mumbai and Sannyas Ashram Spiritual Centre, New Jersey:** Our scriptures do have provision for giving capital punishment. The idea behind it is

Rather than deterring crime, there is evidence that capital punishment actually increases the murder rate. The most dramatic is from a study done by Bowers and Pierce in New York State, examining the period between 1907 and 1963, when the state carried out more executions than any other state. It was revealed that there were, on average, two additional homicides above the normal rate in the month after an execution. They surmised that this periodic rise in homicides might be due to a “brutalizing” effect of executions, similar to the effect of other violent events, like publicized suicides, mass murders and assassinations. One researcher concluded there to be a penchant of persons with criminal tendencies to commit a crime with the intent of getting executed. Playwright George Bernard Shaw observed, “Murder and capital punishment are not opposites that cancel one another, but similars that breed their kind.” In a poll conducted by the *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology*, more than 80 percent of professional criminologists interviewed were of the opinion that capital punishment does not lower murder rates.

**The abolitionist view:** In addition to contending that the death penalty does not, in fact, reduce the crime rate, those opposed to it cite several other ethical and practical issues. There is, for example, the fallibility of the judicial system. Death penalty trials are prone to errors, and the possibility of sending an innocent man to the gallows is always lurking in the background. Forensic DNA evidence was a boon to prosecutors in trying and convicting criminals. But at the same time, DNA evidence has in the last 30 years proven 107 people innocent of the crime for which they were sent to death row in the US. Several of the India-based saints interviewed for this article [see sidebar below] complained that the justice system in India is highly corrupt, and one can bribe one’s way out of even murder charges.

Then there are the astounding costs of death penalty cases, at least as prosecuted in Western countries. According to a study of North Carolina State, a murder case costs US\$2.16 million more with a death penalty than with a sentence of life imprisonment. This includes all the expenses from trial through appeals and execution compared to incarceration for 40 years. It is estimated that

some terrorist or criminal, society will not forgive him, because he poses a threat to the peace. Without strict laws against criminality, no nation or society can feel safe and secure. But a punishment like capital punishment should only be given to such a person who has really done something heinous in nature.

Capital punishment is indeed a cruel way of punishing anybody. There are no two opinions on this. We have also to keep in mind that when a criminal kills somebody his mental state is different than when he is given capital punishment by the concerned authorities. When capital punishment is given to somebody, we feel it is cruel, and we feel sympathy and compassion towards him. But at the same time, we need to ask this very criminal why he was not sympathetic and compassionate to the person whom he killed or tortured.

that the people who are criminals and are indulging in acts of cruelty will continue if not given capital punishment. The Mahabharata has a verse which means: “The person who engages in putting up a fire, who gives poison to others, who kills others with the help of a weapon, one who abducts a person or money, one who tries to occupy the land of another, one who abducts a lady not belonging to him, all these people are to be labeled as *atattayi* [extremists]. Such people should definitely be punished suitably and, if need be, with capital punishment.” In addition, in *Manu Smriti* (8.128) it is written that if someone betrays the king after winning over his faith or betrays the common people of the nation after winning over their faith, such a person also should be given capital punishment.

If you see this whole issue of capital punishment from the viewpoint of a saint, the saints will tell you that those who have committed something wrong should be forgiven. If somebody harms a saint physically, they will forgive that person. But so far as

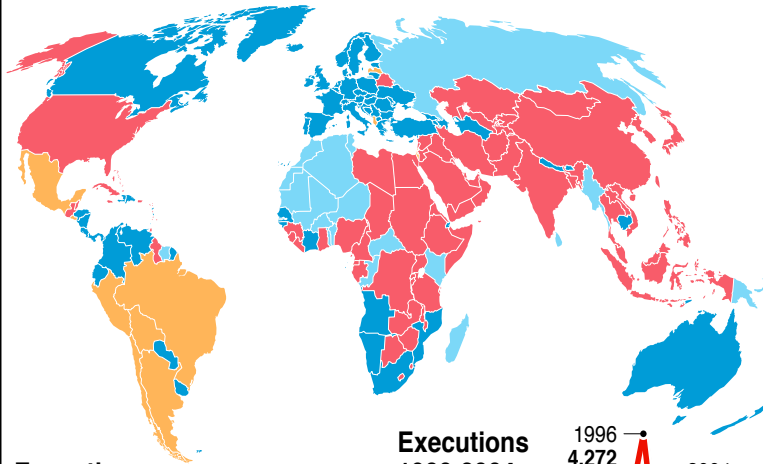


## WORLD EXECUTIONS

The death penalty ended more lives in 2004 than at nearly any time in the last 25 years, according to Amnesty International

### Abolition and retention of death penalty

Death penalty abolished for all crimes  
Death penalty used only for exceptional crimes  
Death penalty retained but not carried out  
Death penalty retained

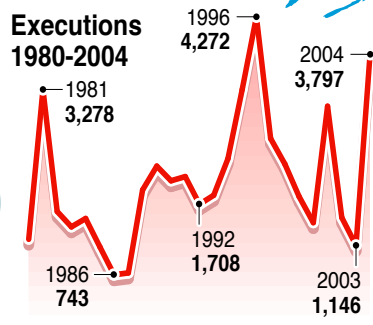


### Executions in 2004

China 3,400  
Iran 159  
Vietnam 64  
United States 59  
Others 115

Total 3,797

### Executions 1980-2004



Source: Amnesty International

REUTERS

the death penalty costs the US justice system an extra one billion dollars a year.

Though the constitution of each nation guarantees equality before the law, several studies reveal that discrimination and procedural unfairness in death-penalty cases are epidemic. Ethnic and religious minorities, the unprivileged, disempowered poor and less-educated are more likely to be convicted and sentenced to death. Studies in the US reveal that 95% of death-row inmates are classified poor, and a disproportionate number are from minority groups. For example, in Texas, of 400 people currently on death row, 31% are white, 41% black, 27% Hispanic and one percent "other." The state's population is 50% white, 12% black and 34% Hispanic.

Abolitionists hold that the death penalty is a violation of human rights and an outrage to the intrinsic worth and sacredness of human life. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights directs, "No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment"—though neither the Declaration nor the subsequent binding covenants based upon it actually forbid the death penalty in every circumstance (e.g., treason in time of war). Not only is the death penalty a human rights violation, but the biased manner in which it is applied is a clear violation of the dignity of persons. It is time we strive to transcend the gruesome history of capital punishment and face the daunting challenge of providing basic human rights to all, irrespective of social or economic status and class distinctions. The European Union

strongly considers the death penalty a "denial of human dignity" and is of the opinion "that the abolition of the death penalty contributes to the progressive development of human rights." The basic human rights philosophy is universal, based on human values and a spiritual essence that is common to all religions. Hinduism emphasizes that "All humanity is one family" and urges us to treat every member of the family with due respect and dignity. The theory of uncompromising human dignity echoes in the splendid expression of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, "Each soul is potentially divine."

**Conclusion:** Crime changes its contours with the passage of time, and the evolution of the culture from which it emerges. As society progresses rapidly, the concept of criminality and punishment also undergoes a change. The arbitrariness of a particular punishment is further highlighted when measured in terms of evolving standards of human decency. We should not allow the burden of our past to weigh us down. We must make an earnest attempt to recognize that we need to infuse fresh laws, ideals and beliefs to replace an obsolete mode of punishment which is not worthy of a humane society. The Hindu lawgiver Manu said that laws would change with the maturity of the human race (See *Manu Dharmashastras* 1.85 on the changing duties of man through the yugas).

Before we decide to unflinchingly extinguish the flame of another human life, it would further the cause of mankind if we strive to ignite the sleeping embers of our minds and humanize the penal system by remembering that "every saint has a past and every sinner a future." Imprisonment for life without the possibility of parole is a befitting alternative to capital punishment. Italian criminologist Cesare Beccaria's essay "Crimes and Punishments," published in 1764, still holds contemporary relevance. He believed that while the death penalty is successful in shocking people momentarily, it does not leave a lasting impact on people's mind. "The death of a criminal is a terrible but momentary spectacle and therefore a less efficacious method of deterring others than the continued example of a man deprived of his liberty."

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan has aptly enunciated his view of the future of capital punishment around the world. "The forfeiture of life is too absolute, too irreversible, for one human being to inflict it on another, even when backed by legal process. And I believe that future generations, throughout the world, will come to agree." Mahatma Gandhi was firmly against the death penalty: "I cannot in all conscience agree to anyone being sent to the gallows. God alone can take life because He alone gives it." And let us end with the words of the *Rig Veda* 10.137.1: "Ye enlightened men, uplift once more the fallen and forlorn, lowly and forlorn; ye illustrious men, raise him who has sinned and degraded himself, restore him to life again."



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## HISTORY

# How the World's Religions View Capital Punishment

All major religions advocate reform, repentance and forgiveness, yet most endorse execution

IN ALL THE MAJOR RELIGIONS OF THE world, mercy, compassion and forgiveness form the crux of the religious teachings. However, the injunction that those who take the life of others must pay with their own lives is equally dominant.

**Hinduism:** The divinity in every human being is beautifully enunciated in the *Brahmasukta* of *Atharvaveda*:

"Indeed these killers are Brahma (God); these servants (or slaves) are Brahma; these cheats and rogues are also manifestation of one and the same Brahma itself." That said, ancient Indian lawgivers considered *danda* (punishment) as essential for the maintenance of dharma. The king was called Dandaharita, wielder of the scepter of punishment. The *Mahabharata* refers to four kinds of punishments: gentle admonition (*dhigdanda*), severe reproof (*vagdanda*), imposition of fine (*arthadanda*) and lastly capital punishment (*mrityudanda*). Capital offenses in India included murder, arson, manslaughter, poisoning, sale of human flesh, theft, adultery, forgery, treason and destruction of a temple.

In ancient India, the use of the death penalty is referred to by Kautilya, Manu, Yajnavalkya and Kamandaka. Manu stated that if the king does not "inflict punishment on those worthy to be punished, the stronger would roast the weaker like fish on a spit." In another verse he says, "The king who pardons the perpetrator of violence quickly perishes and incurs hatred." The South Indian *Tirukural*, written by Tiruvalluvar circa 200 BCE, states in verse 550, "A ruler's punishing cruel criminals by execution is like a gardener's removing weeds from his garden." The same scripture offers in verse 541 advice as valid today as it was 12 centuries ago: "Investigate well, show favor to none, maintain impartiality, consult the law, then give

judgment—that is the way of justice."

**Jainism:** Ahimsa is central to Jain philosophy, which does not allow for the killing of even small creatures. However, according to Jain legal expert Lekh Raj Mehta,



"Jain rulers, in fact, dealt with instances of crime as was done by any other ruler, including by capital punishment, though it was rare." These rulers also maintained armies, he said, which necessarily fought and even eliminated opponents. The issue of statecraft is not dealt with much in Jain scriptures, according to Mehta. The overriding Jain principles are nonviolence, search for truth, forgiveness and reform.

**Buddhism:** Buddhist philosophy clearly advocates the rehabilitation of criminals. There is the famous story of Buddha himself reforming—to the astonishment of the local king—the feared murderer and highway robber Angulimala. The *Dhammapada*

says, "Hatred does not cease by hatred, hatred ceases by love; this is the eternal law." At issue, however, is the actual practice of Buddhist rulers. One of the earliest, Emperor Ashoka, circa 200 BCE, said, "The state should not punish with vengeance." Nevertheless, that he did resort to execution is documented in his rock edicts. The 4th century Chinese monk Fa-Hsien wrote that he met a king of India who "governed without capital punishment." While most Japanese Buddhist rulers employed capital punishment, there were notable exceptions, including Emperor Shomu in the 8th century. One might be surprised to learn that Buddhist Tibet had the death penalty until 1920, when it was eliminated by the 13th Dalai Lama, Thubten Gyatso. In modern times, four countries have Buddhism as their state religion: Bhutan, Cambodia, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Of these, Cambodia eliminated the death penalty in 1993, and Bhutan eliminated it in 2004. Thailand has more than 1,000 prisoners awaiting execution. Sri Lanka reactivated the death penalty in 2004 after a 27-year moratorium.

**Judaism and Christianity:** The *Old Testament* prescribes death by stoning for a number of offences, including blasphemy, idolatry, homosexuality, being a false prophet, adultery, not observing the Sabbath and disobeying parents. *Deuteronomy* 21:18-21 states, "If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not harken unto them: Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out.... And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear." Christians have varying views of the death penalty—liberal Christian groups and the modern Roman Catholic Church oppose it; conservative groups support it. Judaism is similarly divided, with Reform Jews and others vigorously opposed to the death penalty. The State of Israel can impose the death sentence for treason and war crimes.

**Islam:** In Asian and Middle Eastern countries, violent and nonviolent crimes are punishable by death under Islamic and Sharia laws: murder, drug trafficking, armed robbery, apostasy, adultery, blasphemy, sorcery, prostitution, conjugation between partners not married to each other, converting to Christianity or Judaism, plotting to overthrow the Islamic regime and conspiring against the government.

With Mahua Das



## MINISTER'S MESSAGE

# Not for Our Time

Our faulty and corruptible justice system controverts the scriptural intent of capital punishment

BY SWAMI NISHCHALANANDA SARASWATI

**E**XECUTING A CRIMINAL IS APPROVED BY OUR SCRIPTURES. But, in giving capital punishment there should be no flaw in the system of delivering justice—that is, no jealousy, enmity, attachment or lethargy influencing the judgment. If these standards are met, then capital punishment can be given by an authorized judge. But today, the justice system that prevails in the world—and especially in India—is not that healthy. Our Indian system has corrupt police officials and land-record maintenance officials, witnesses who lie, attorneys who misrepresent the facts and judicial officers and judges who can be influenced both by greed and fear. There are no clear guidelines from the Supreme Court on when the death penalty may be imposed, leading to many different local interpretations. Because of these factors, the delivery of a timely, just verdict is quite difficult. It is quite possible that an innocent person gets punished while the real culprit escapes through his money and muscle power. So while capital punishment is allowed by the Hindu scriptures where the justice delivery system is fair, that is not the present situation in India.

Our traditional judicial system works on the basis that the body is not the soul. So does our traditional system of education, medicine and worship—all are based on the body and soul as two different things. This is the spiritual point of view. If we don't accept this view, then how is it possible to define justice and injustice, goodness and badness, repentance and punishment? All these materialistic people, such as the communists, believe that the body and the soul are one and the same. In their school of thinking they do not have another world beyond this one or the system of reincarnation. Such people insult basic ethical values again and again. Their system of punishment is not spiritual.

In the past, if someone committed a murder, he would consult the priests and then undergo the recommended penance, however harsh. All those who have faith in the Sanatana Dharma would do this. But the justice system today is not based on scriptures but on materialism. Until there is a total transformation in the educational system, electoral process and the general governance in the country, the system of punishment and delivery of justice will be full of faults.

Just have a close look at the situation prevailing today in India. Today someone can murder another person, but when it comes to delivery of justice, because of the inadequacy of our judicial system, the murderer cannot be punished under the law. You tell me whether you will call it justice or injustice? One person kills the other person who is innocent. Now this person who has murdered the other fellow has meted capital punishment to an innocent. Though the innocent person had not done anything to attract the kind of punishment given to him, this murderer has succeeded in killing him. But now this murderer cannot be booked easily under the law and given due punishment. How do we term it, justice or injustice?

So just see that there is freedom in murdering, but there are limitations in punishing the person for this crime of murdering.



AMIT KUMAR

Now these Naxalites (armed communist rebels), what they are doing? They enter Indian villages at night and kill the innocent people who are sleeping. The village may have a population of three thousand people, but they come and shoot ten persons while these innocent people are fast asleep. The Maoists and Naxalites come and terrorize the innocent people. Neither the army nor the police are able to check these rampant killings, which encourages these elements to carry on and do this again and again.

Our education policy should dissuade people from committing crimes. There should be a reform process, a system of repentance, whereby the heart of the criminals could be changed in a healthy manner. If such circumstances prevail, then a ban on the capital punishment is justified.

Is capital punishment cruel? Cruelty is a very strange word. When we have faith in the other world, we can term cruelty as compassion. And sometimes when we do not have faith in the other world we may call compassion as cruelty. For example, a doctor operates on a patient. Outwardly, he is ripping apart the portion of the body that needs to be operated on. But behind the operation he has the welfare of the patient in his mind. Similarly, behind giving capital punishment the whole philosophy is that the present body of the person has become so *tamasic* (inert, dark) that by living in this body his thoughts cannot change. And when this person will get the fruits of his wrongdoings, it will lead to purification of his inner soul. So in the imparting of justice there is always the feeling of compassion and not cruelty. The Indian Penal Code has faith in reincarnation and *parlok* (existence of worlds beyond this physical plane). Justice and cruelty do not go hand in hand. Justice means that the person needs this essential dose of sufferings for the purification of his *chitta* or consciousness. If someone is given a punishment here, in this world, then from a scriptural point of view his purification is done. Such a person will not get punished after his death. The person who does not repent for his wrongdoing and does not get the due punishment for his crime from the king or the ruler, he will then enter a "hellish body" after his death, and this special body type has the capacity to receive a lot of punishment in the next world. Seen from a philosophic point of view, the sufferings you undergo in the Naraka Loka, hell, lead to reduction of your negative karma and purification of your consciousness.

In the ancient times people used to apologize and admit their mistake after committing a crime. Then they used to offer themselves for repentance and also punishment. Recently the railway minister resigned after several terrible accidents took place. He did not cause them, but he was so sensitive he felt responsible. But he is an exception. Today most people commit offences and then try to hide them. Our education system has to create an atmosphere such that people do not have criminal tendencies. We need a media which does not promote vulgarity. Until all this happens, how can we imagine the justice system to improve? How can you expect the crime graph to go down?

SRIMAD JAGADGURU SHANKARACHARYA ANANTSHREE NISHCHALANANDA SARASWATI Ji MAHARAJ is the *Shankaracharya* of Govardhan Peetham, Puri, Orissa, one of the four theological centers established by Adi Shankara in the 7th century ce.

## MINISTER'S MESSAGE

# We Need to Stop

Killing, even lawfully by the state, is an act of violence that runs counter to Hindu dharma

BY SWAMINI MAYATITANANDA

**T**O KILL FOR ANY REASON WHATSOEVER IS HIMSA—violence against nature and hurtfulness to the self. At every level of human existence, Hindu dharma—which means cosmic laws and life values in addition to life's purpose—forbids the act of slaughter and killing. Slaughtering and killing are never the answer to those who disregard societal laws and commit even the most heinous of crimes. By Hindu definition, a criminal is one who is not yet awakened to his heart—the center of consciousness. A person who forgets his human nature is certain to commit egregious acts against himself, family, community and society at large. The answer is to condemn all violent and adharmic actions, but to not condemn the human spirit of the person that commits the crime. Although wrong actions that fly against the cosmic order cannot be condoned, we do not serve societal good by administering vengeful punishment to the convicted person. Harm begets harm, hurt brings more hurt. When we kill, we kill a tangible part of the living resonant memory field within ourselves—the heart of compassion. In the *Bhagavad Gita* 18.61, Krishna informs Arjuna that Isvara, the Lord, resides in the heart of every being, giving mobility to everyone through His power of maya. Isvara protects the entire universe—and all its beings, including the wrongdoers.

No person or agency in any tradition has the right to kill. Each person has a right to live. When a person commits a crime—however heinous it might be and however ignorant he may be of his true nature—Isvara still remains entrenched within his heart. By Cosmic Law and until such time as he is awakened to his nature of divinity, he continues to accrue *papa* (negative) karma for his crimes. In the third chapter of *Sri Rudram* in the *Yajur Veda*, the Lord is described as one who also "protects" criminals, wrongdoers and *jighamsads*, murderers. The meaning here must be clearly understood. The Lord does not condone wrongdoing. Rather, through His unlimited power to level karma by inflicting the pain of *papa* to those who earn it, He may transform the criminal mind to its spiritual recognition. To support Isvara's intention for humanity, we must be pro-active in the preservation of life.

Each one of us has inherited a set of karmas (including our genetic precursors) that can uphold, suppress, excel or diminish our life's purpose, or push us in the direction of garnering *punya* (positive) karma, or in the unfortunate way of *papa* karma. These characteristics impact our physical, mental and psychic dispositions—the way we think, feel, experience and respond to life shapes the way in which we assimilate life. The degree to which we grow into healing past karmas depends on how committed we are to developing our inner awareness and helping others to do so.

To fully live our karma in dharma, we are called to safeguard the collective human psyche. As I see it, the collective crimes, illness and grief of the modern world are due to the loss of our memory of, and connection with, each other as a family of humanity. At present, the collective karma of the human psyche is experiencing a profound sense of fragility and loss as a direct response



to the quantum violence that surrounds us. This psychic fragility in both the individual and society may be the most significant malaise of our time. It leads to the breakdown of dharma in relation to our family, global community and nature. To kill those who are found guilty of heinous crimes can only add to this collective psychic fragility in a culture already inundated with violence, abuse and despair.

To support and realize this transformation in society, we urgently need to revamp and restructure our entire educational structure within prisons and detention camps so that prisoners can be educated physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually to reform their behavior. Witness the massive degree of violence, hurtfulness and crimes, wretched and inhumane activities that occur within the walls of the present prison systems. To inundate this already myopic methodology of crime and punishment with capital punishment is simply insane. No form of vengeful punishment works.

Because the foundation on which Hinduism is based is dharma, it is not in the Hindu way of life to seek revenge—to

"take an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth." Ultimately, this fear-motivated way of thinking leaves the entire world in a blind and hopeless quagmire. For those of us who rush to enforce capital punishment for the legally condemned, let us pause for a moment and explore our definition of what we may consider a "criminal mind"? Are these only the people who hurt or kill other humans? What of the greater energies of dire despair, hurtfulness, poverty and egregious crimes committed every moment of every day which most people condone and in which an even greater number participate. For example, the billions of poverty-stricken people in our so-called world of privilege and power, or the slaughtering of millions of animals every day, or the crimes committed by science through its hurtful exploitation of the maternal energy in its endless killings of the mice, monkeys, fruit flies and so on.

The greatest good we can do as individuals who are awakened to our divine nature is to educate the wrongdoer, establish a culture of kindness that strives to forge the necessary pathways to educate, inform and transform the mind of the egregious and the aggrieved. The common factor that all criminals share is the same as that of the poor and the underprivileged—a lack of nurturing, educational support, unconditional love and spiritual culture. Only self-knowledge of our own divinity can free any one of us from ignorance of our true nature. Human beings give themselves permission to do terrible things until we discover who we really are: *Aham brahmansi*—"I am that immortal Consciousness!"

The highest personal sacrifice we can make is to embrace the oneness of spirit imbued in the Self and nonseparation from the humanity of each other. When we set ourselves apart from wrongdoers by condemning them to death, we take away their Isvara-given right to live. In so doing, we deprive ourselves of the magnificent inner growth of awareness in helping a person who has transgressed their goodness to transform their lives into spiritual understanding.

SWAMINI MAYATITANANDA is the spiritual head of Wise Earth School, the first school for Ayurveda in USA. She is also the founder of the Mother Om Mission (MOM), a charitable, holistic health organization in Guyana, South America. E-mail: [health@wiseearth.org](mailto:health@wiseearth.org).





Pandharpur pilgrims' music leaders play, sing and dance continuously for Lord Krishna

## FESTIVALS

# Joyous Festival of Bhakti, A Pilgrimage of Songsters

Pandharpur's annual yatra of penance and bhajan transports devotees to a heaven world

BY ANANTA KRISHNAN, CHENNAI, INDIA  
**L**ORD VITHAL (KRISHNA) AND HIS CON-  
 sort Rukmani Devi stand with arms  
 akimbo at the temple, as if waiting  
 for this party day in Pandharpur in  
 southern Maharashtra. Hordes of pil-  
 grims pour in from far and wide on the July  
*ashada ekadasi* day to sing and dance with  
 verve. My longtime love of *abhang*, pulsating  
 bhajans to Lord Vithal, endearingly called  
 "Vithoba," made me undertake a trip this  
 year. Abhangs are four-line poems written  
 by two Maharashtra saints, the 13th century  
 Dyaneshwar and 17th century Tukaram. My  
 bus from Solapur had to crawl its way into  
 Pandharpur through the surge of pilgrims  
 who have made this round trip from their  
 home to Vithal temple and back. It was a  
 sea of humanity, and the air over the town  
 was engulfed by non-stop chants of "Vithala-  
 Vithala" and "Gyanba-Tukaram," serenad-  
 ing Vithal and the saints who poured their  
 hearts out for the dwarf Lord of this village.  
 Shri Tukaram Ganapathy Maharaj, a  
 well-known master of *pravachanam* (relig-  
 ious preaching, often with stories and mus-  
 ic), invited me to join his camp of 50 peo-

ple who had traveled along with him from  
 Tamil Nadu. On arrival I went to check out  
 the partying town at close range. The night  
 was fast setting in, but there was no sign of  
 anyone retiring. What a party for the spirit!  
 Bhajan singing emanated from every corner  
 and every single tent, creating an ethereal  
 ambiance. The clash of differing music in  
 close proximity disturbed no one, as the  
 mind, body and spirit were all focused on a  
 higher plane. Singers were belting out songs  
 accompanied by tambura, harmonium,  
 tabla, pakhawaj drum and cymbals. Some  
 vocalists were flanked by about a hundred  
 cymbal players, who danced in fluid har-  
 mony with his verses. Regardless of age, the  
 humble musicians touch each other's feet  
 and seek blessings in the firm belief that a  
 musically gifted person must be a higher,  
 blessed soul. "Having trained as a classical  
 Hindustani musician, people ask me why I  
 sing more of *abhangs*, and I tell them I must  
 be fortunate and blessed to be singing the  
 name of God all the time" says Sanjay Nad-  
 karni, a noted musician from Mumbai, who  
 was on his second visit to Pandharpur.  
 The pilgrimage starts a week in advance

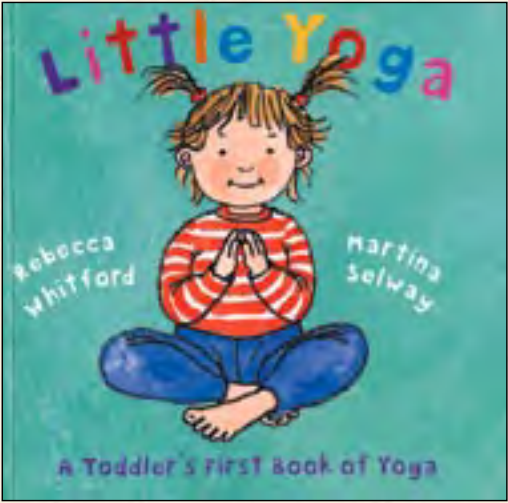
and culminates on the *ekadasi* day. Every  
 day the odes to Vithal continue well into the  
 wee hours. Men and women sitting on the  
 ground with folded legs join in the chanting  
 with their countenance full of bliss, bereft of  
 all worldly worries. Musicians move around  
 neighboring camps to offer variety for the  
 pilgrims. Established musicians, such as Sa-  
 tarkar Maharaj, give large public shows. His  
 diehard fans throng to catch a glimpse of  
 him once a year during this festival.  
 The *warakaris* (pilgrims) carry floral  
 decorated *palkhis* (palanquins) with the  
*paduka* (sandals) of the saints on the 21-  
 day walk-a-thon from their villages. These  
 are worshipped along the way by those who  
 cannot make the journey. Each *wari* (pil-  
 grim group) will have a lead singer. A truck  
 follows with their belongings. Bystanders  
 offer food and drinks along the way. The  
*warakaris* are predominantly simple farm-  
 ers, men dressed in all white—cotton shirt,  
 pajama and a Nehru cap. They undertake  
 this 21-day journey after sowing their fields  
 so that it is time for weeding by the time  
 they return home. "This is the land of Shiva-  
 ji, the king who defended Hinduism against  
 the invading Islam, and that spirit still stays  
 alive amongst us Maharashtrians" quipped  
 a frail man in his eighties.  
 The story of Pandharpur is that once a  
 man named Pundalika lived here. One day  
 Lord Krishna came to his house to bless  
 him for his exemplary service to his parents.  
 Pundalika threw a brick for the Lord to  
 stand on as he was busy serving his parents.  
 The Lord waited and then granted him  
 boons. Pundalika asked the Lord to stay  
 permanently. This place was thus named  
 Pundalikapuram and later, Pandharpur. To  
 this day the Lord is standing on a brick in a  
 waiting posture at the temple here.  
 There was a long, serpentine queue in  
 the multi-terraced building adjoining the  
 temple. People were waiting 24 hours for  
 darshan of the Lord. People streamed into  
 Chandrabhaga River that runs by the temple,  
 as Saint Tukaram deemed this river as the  
 mother of all rivers, and a source of certain  
 salvation for those who bathe in her waters.  
 "Some of us don't just sing and dance  
 once a year, have fun and go back to our  
 earthly existence. We visit Pandharpur ev-  
 ery month and keep the flame alive in our  
 hearts through this sacred music" says Sa-  
 mant, a dapper man from Pune, a town 250  
 kms away.  
 To transcend this material and earthly  
 living and climb onto a higher plane is a  
 constant battle for seekers everywhere, but  
 these self-effacing, uncomplicated farmers  
 who gather at Pandharpur seemed to ac-  
 complish that transition with utmost ease  
 through their strong faith, simply plung-  
 ing themselves into that divine subliminal  
 bliss.

## BOOKS

# Baby Poses

Asanas for infants

BY TARA KATIR, KAPAA, HAWAII  
**R**ANGING FROM A CHILD'S YOGA  
 book to a series of essays inves-  
 tigating the scholarly and often  
 emotional debate surrounding  
 the Aryan migration hypotheses, our  
 books this issue could hardly be more  
 diverse. *Little Yoga, A Toddler's First  
 Book of Yoga* by Rebecca Whitford  
 and Martina Selway is the sweet-  
 est place to begin our journey. *Little  
 Yoga* is literally and figuratively a little book  
 for little children and their mommies and  
 daddies. In whimsical and colorful art de-  
 picting smiling tots in simple yoga poses,  
 Whitford and Selway have delightfully cap-  
 tured the spirit of very young children. Pos-  
 ing and moving like butterflies, frogs, cats,  
 dogs and birds while breathing like lions,  
 young children are sure to find this book fun  
 to share with their parents. Special sections



for parents and caregivers have color photos  
 of toddlers in each pose, a simple explana-  
 tion of the poses and practical tips for mak-  
 ing yoga simple and playful while teaching  
 your child. Whether it's for read-aloud or  
 practice together, this little yoga book is a  
 charmer.

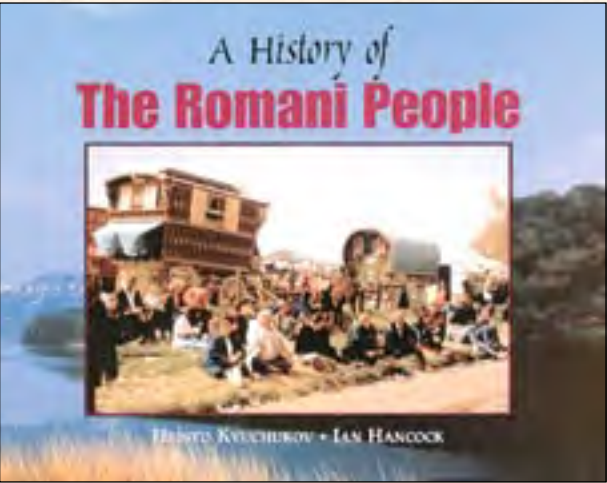
LITTLE YOGA, A TODDLER'S FIRST BOOK OF YOGA, BY  
 REBECCA WHITFORD AND MARTINA SELWAY, HENRY HOLT  
 AND COMPANY, 115 WEST 18TH STREET, NEW YORK, NEW  
 YORK 10011. US\$9.95; 23 PAGES, [WWW.HENRYHOLT.COM](http://WWW.HENRYHOLT.COM).

# Romani History

**D**RIVEN FROM INDIA 1,000 years ago  
 by Muslim armies, later to be en-  
 slaved in Europe, persecuted and de-  
 rogatorily dubbed "Gypsies," the Ro-  
 mani people continue a unique culture with  
 Hindu roots. Young people can explore this  
 little-known past in *History of the Romani  
 People*. The authors, Hristo Kyochukov, a

Romani scholar at the University of Veliko,  
 Bulgaria, and Ian Hancock, the director of  
 The Romani Archives and Documentation  
 Center, University of Texas in Austin, bring  
 authenticity, grace and dignity to this lovely  
 book. While small, it is filled with beauti-  
 ful photographs, contemporary and archival,  
 showing Romanies at work, play and inti-  
 mate family gatherings. Beginning with the  
 Romanies' historical origins in India, sub-  
 sequent defeat by invading Muslim armies  
 and forced relocation westward, the authors  
 trace the beginnings of the Romani nomad-  
 ic migrations. Ending with life today, they  
 note Romanies still face discrimination af-  
 ter centuries of persecution. Sadly, the European Court of  
 Human Rights continues the discrimination by a recent  
 ruling that allows the nearly automatic placement of Ro-  
 mani children in schools for the mentally handicapped.  
 Romani language is related to Hindi. This is an appropriate  
 book for parents and teach-  
 ers to inspire respect and  
 understanding for a people  
 long maligned and misun-  
 derstood.

A HISTORY OF THE ROMANI PEOPLE  
 BY HRISTO KYOCHUKOV AND IAN  
 HANCOCK, BOYDS MILLS PRESS, 815  
 CHURCH ST., HONESDALE, PENNSYLVANIA  
 18431. US\$19.95; 32 PAGES, [WWW.BOYDSMILLSPRESS.COM](http://WWW.BOYDSMILLSPRESS.COM).



# Debunking the Aryan Theory

**O**UR CONCLUDING BOOK TAKES A MOST  
 scholarly look at the debate surround-  
 ing the Indo-Aryan discussion. *The  
 Indo-Aryan Controversy, Evidence  
 and Inference in Indian History*, edited by  
 Edwin F. Bryant and Laurie L. Patton, pres-  
 ents 13 essays by various scholars represent-  
 ing different points of view in the debate  
 over the early history of India and surround-  
 ing the supposed "Aryan Invasion." The es-  
 says address the issue within the context of  
 three major areas: archaeological research  
 in the relationships between the Indus Val-  
 ley and the Aryan settlements; a linguistic  
 look at the parent languages; the philologi-  
 cal study and interpretation of Vedic texts in  
 their historical context, an interpretation of  
 astrological data and possible geographical  
 influences. Ending with an historical assess-  
 ment of current arguments and their vari-  
 ous ideological roots,  
 editor Bryant suggests  
 the theories remain  
 influenced by politics  
 from the past as well  
 as present. He points  
 out there are many  
 ways to interpret the  
 evidence, which is  
 hardly definitive in  
 supporting theories  
 of an Aryan invasion  
 or migration. Most im-  
 portant is his analysis of the historical, social  
 and political aspects of the debate. He says,  
 for example, "I have expressed concern at  
 what I have termed a type of Indological  
 McCarthyism creeping into areas of West-  
 ern, as well as certain Indian, academic  
 circles, whereby anyone reconsidering the  
 status quo of Indo-Aryan origins is instantly  
 and a priori dubbed a nationalist, commu-  
 nal or, even worse, a Nazi." He calls for a  
 civil tone in the entire discussion: "There  
 is all-too-often a mocking and condescend-  
 ing tone adopted by disputants of this issue,  
 and a tendency of simply highlighting and  
 ridiculing the most outlandish aspects of an  
 opponent's arguments while ignoring any co-  
 herent points that might counter one's own  
 position." Be advised the essays are of un-  
 even interest and quality and that the book  
 as a whole is definitely a hard read. It is,  
 however, useful information for anyone con-  
 cerned with these unsettled historical issues.

THE INDO-ARYAN CONTROVERSY, EVIDENCE AND INFER-  
 ENCE IN INDIAN HISTORY, EDITED BY EDWIN F. BRYANT AND  
 LAURIE L. PATTON, ROUTLEDGE, 270 MADISON AVE., NEW  
 YORK, NEW YORK 10016. US\$43.95; 522 PAGES.





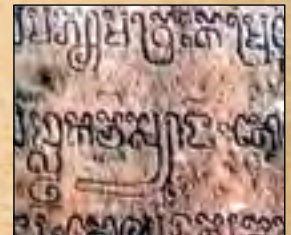
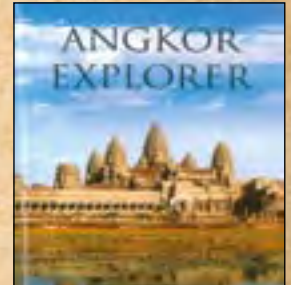
# DIGITAL DHARMA

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LOST HINDU CIVILIZATIONS

## Angkor Media — The Incredible Hindu World of Cambodia

CAMBODIA'S 9TH-13TH CENTURY Khmer Hindu civilization was one of the most advanced in the world. The mind reels in awe before the temple complexes of Siem Reap, the center of Khmer rule, religion and home of the world's largest temple—Angkor Wat. For those unable to travel to foreign lands, Cambodian history need not remain a misty dream. Among the many books and videos lies a little-known jewel produced by Angkor Media in 2003. It is a DVD with great music, narration and deeply researched content on the Siva temple complex of Banteay Srei. Produced by a sympathetic Hindu team in Delhi, it "breathes" with authentic devotion, unlike most offerings on South Asia produced from a condescending Western academic anthropologist's view. Banteay Srei, though smaller than Angkor Wat, is considered the jewel of Cambodia's temples for its exquisite art, sculptures and inscriptions. While Lord Siva was the Ishta Devata of the day and the Sivalinga was central, temple art and culture were a rich integration of *Vedas*, *Siva Puranas*, *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* and classical yoga texts and practice. Angkor Media's *Banteay Srei* DVD is special in going beyond just an archeological survey. It is a window on a Hindu institution that was more than a temple. Banteay Srei was a center of education, humanitarian service, monastic penance and the spiritual anchor of political dynasties.



To order: [www.sfrd.org](http://www.sfrd.org)

HINDUISM TODAY's publisher is inviting readers to join him in January, 2008, for a pilgrimage to Siem Reap, Malaysia and South India.

See: [www.himalayanacademy.com/innersearch/](http://www.himalayanacademy.com/innersearch/)

**Left to right, top to bottom:** images from the DVD; Outer entry to Banteay Srei, inner temple complex, amazing ornamentation, classic statue of Lord Siva and consort Uma, Angkor Media's excellent historical map of Cambodia, inscriptions in Khmer-Sanskrit, detailing philosophy, temple history and precise rules of conduct and temple management, Indra on three elephants over doorway

Click to view an eighteen-minute excerpt from the Banteay Srei DVD. Order from [www.sfrd.org](http://www.sfrd.org)



# Hindu Heritage Endowment

## SIVA POOMI SCHOOL TRUST FUND

The December, 2005, release of the comedy movie “The Ringer” demonstrated how young people with intellectual disabilities can compete at a high level in the Special Olympics. The athletes displayed extraordinary talents in many ways. It was his awareness of the hidden skills of children with learning disabilities that motivated Mr. Aru Thirumurugan, vice president of Skandawarodaya College, to do something for such youth on Sri Lanka’s Jaffna peninsula. While appealing to people running various childrens’ homes, he kept hearing how difficult it would be to establish a school for intellectually challenged children. ¶Undeterred, Mr. Thirumurugan was encouraged when he visited a school for 600 students with special needs while he was in Singapore giving a religious speech. He was inspired to see the school’s large building, five buses and full-time doctor. Fueled with the confidence that a similar school in Jaffna was possible, he shared his vision with interested people and began collecting funds for the project. Later, a piece of land in Kondavil was given for the school, and the foundation stone was placed in August, 2003. The school was completed as the main project of a trust established under the name Siva Poomi. Today over fifty children with learning disabilities attend the school. Recently, modern equipment designed to give remedial vocational training to the children was donated. The Siva Poomi directors, including Mr. Aru Thirumurugan, president of the trust, drew up plans for a new building to house this equipment. ¶During a visit to Jaffna, Dr. Shun K. Sunder came to know about the school and took a personal interest in the vocational training center. Dr. Sunder, a long-time supporter of various HHE endowments, took advantage of HHE’s ability to give US tax-deductible contributions to foreign charities to send the money needed to complete the center. He also opened an endowment for the school, HHE fund #64, to provide permanent, ongoing support.



Dr. Sunder of California

## YOGASWAMI HINDU BOYS’ HOME FUND

The tragedy of the December, 2004, tsunami on the eastern coast of Sri Lanka may have faded in the minds of many people, but the plight of those affected is still ever present. Batticaloa was one of the most heavily damaged areas, and many children lost their parents to the waves, including two of the boys in the photo. The three boys on the left are the first residents of the Yogaswami Nalvar



Boys’ home residents and staff

Ilam, and more boys are expected to arrive. Inspired by Nilufer Clubwala’s creation of the Yogaswami Hindu Girls’ Home Fund, Dharmalingam Siddhan initiated the Yogaswami Hindu Boys’ Home Fund with HHE, fund #65. Both of the homes will begin receiving annual grants from HHE to help pay for the childrens’ food, clothing, education, medical and other expenses. Recently, new bathroom facilities were constructed for the girls’ home, and several milk cows were purchased to provide the girls with better nutrition and a group project, all funded by HHE patrons.



Fund creator Dharmalingam



Special needs children of Siva Poomi School are taught dance & drama

## APRIL TO JUNE ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment</b><br>Darmaguan Satgunasingam 50.00<br>Niraj Thaker 35.20<br>Other Donations 42,787.74<br>Total 42,872.94                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <b>Hindu Businessmen's Association Trust</b><br>Manogaran Mardemootoo 32.33<br>Vishwanaden Mooroooven 25.87<br>Easvan Param 294.45<br>Janaka Param 23.00<br>Vedapragassen Peruman 6.47<br>Total 382.12                                                                      | <b>Tirumular Sannidhi Preservation Fund</b><br>Maruthu Pandian Dharmalingam 13.50<br>Total 13.50                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | <b>Karnataka Temple Development Fund</b><br>Hiranya & Saraswathi Gowda 624.33<br>Naveen & Suma Srinivas 36.00<br>Total 657.33                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Iraivan Temple Endowment</b><br>Anonymous 375.00<br>Maruthu Pandian Dharmalingam 13.75<br>Shiven M. Gandhi 50.00<br>Praneel Chandra Gosai 100.00<br>Victoria Johnson 21.00<br>S.V. Ravi Rahavendran 904.00<br>Gangadhar Shaktiprema 27.50<br>Susilia Silvam 100.00<br>Jnana Sivananda 150.00<br>Niraj Thaker 35.20<br>Thanavinthan Siva Thirumalai 80.00<br>Other Donations 28,143.55<br>Total 30,000.00                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <b>Boys School for Iraivan Priesthood</b><br>Maruthu Pandian Dharmalingam 27.25<br>Praneel Chandra Gosai 100.00<br>Jayshree S. Rao 5.00<br>Bala Sivaceyon 31.69<br>Total 163.94                                                                                             | <b>Alaveddy Pasupatheeswarar Temple Fund</b><br>Anonymous 50.00<br>Total 50.00                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <b>Sri Ganesha Hindu Temple of Utah Endowment Fund</b><br>Sukesh Parasher 50.00<br>Total 50.00                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund</b><br>Hemakeshaa Naatha Batumallah 10.00<br>Gunavadee Caremben 2.43<br>Somasundaram Caremben 2.43<br>Sukanta Caremben 2.43<br>Ravichandran Ceyon 41.00<br>Umayal Devasegavam Family 73.02<br>Maruthu Pandian Dharmalingam 130.75<br>Suguneswary Gunasegaran 56.60<br>Victoria Johnson 7.00<br>Kotisvara Jothiswarar 5.00<br>Amooda Koothan 3.24<br>Saravan Koothan 3.24<br>Sakuntalai Krishnan 162.70<br>Muniamah 30.00<br>Kirtideva Peruman 6.46<br>Niroshnee Peruman 9.70<br>Jiva Shanmuga 100.00<br>Devaladevi Sivaceyon 7.92<br>Nutanaya Sivaceyon 7.92<br>Patudeva Sivaceyon 7.92<br>Hemavalli Sivalingam 3.31<br>Kantha Ruben Sivalingam 3.31<br>Rohini Sivalingam 3.31<br>Shivaani Sivananda 8.05<br>Potriyan Sivanathan 8.14<br>Girish Skanda 39.00<br>Javanya Skanda 6.13<br>Subasene Skanda 14.00<br>Total 755.01 | <b>Kauai Aadheenam Mathavasi Medical Fund</b><br>Carmel V. Hawn 891.00<br>Gowri Nadason 125.58<br>Niraj Thaker 21.00<br>Frank Van Waardenburg 75.00<br>Vayudeva Varadan 72.00<br>Other Donations 6,300.00<br>Total 7,484.58                                                 | <b>Hindu Heritage Endowment Administrative Fund</b><br>Anonymous 375.00<br>Total 375.00                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <b>Swami Vipulananta Children's Home Endowment</b><br>Anonymous 50.00<br>Total 50.00                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment</b><br>Jayshree S. Rao 5.00<br>Niraj Thaker 21.00<br>Total 26.00                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment</b><br>Anonymous 50.00<br>Manoharan Navaratnarajah 75.00<br>Total 125.00                                                                                                                                                          | <b>Kauai Aadheenam Religious Art and Artifacts Fund</b><br>Rajadeva Alahan 153.00<br>Niraj Thaker 21.00<br>Total 174.00                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <b>Hindu Literature Fund</b><br>Nigel Subramaniam Siva 700.00<br>Total 700.00                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Sri Subramuniya Kottam Fund</b><br>Anonymous 50.00<br>Total 50.00                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <b>Hinduism Today Production Fund</b><br>Cyril Assent 10.00<br>V R Ramakrishnarao 101.00<br>Urmil Shukla 1,001.00<br>Total 1,112.00                                                                                                                                         | <b>Murugan Temple Pillaiyar Shrine Fund</b><br>Pathmini Saravanapavan 25.00<br>Total 25.00                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <b>Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund</b><br>Hiranya & Saraswathi Gowda 51.00<br>Total 51.00                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund</b><br>Sujeet Akula 80.00<br>Ved Chaudhary 80.00<br>Maruthu Pandian Dharmalingam 128.00<br>Ravindra Doorgiat 64.61<br>Doris G. Jorden 100.00<br>Isanah Kameni 13.30<br>Amravadee Kownden 129.36<br>Sevanti Kumaran 51.00<br>Dasan Mahadevan 1,001.00<br>Adi Sankara Perumal 76.80<br>Anjeeni Devi Perumal 19.20<br>Surendar Purohit 101.00<br>Jacob Russell 240.00<br>Sothinathan Sabesan 160.00<br>Nalayini Shanmugarajah 240.00<br>Urmil Shukla 800.00<br>Prasad Sunkavalli 800.00<br>K. Suriyakumar 1,600.00<br>Meghasyamaraao Theertham 53.75<br>Total 5,738.02                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <b>Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment</b><br>Anonymous 50.00<br>Manoharan Navaratnarajah 75.00<br>Total 125.00                                                                                                                                                          | <b>Thank You Bodhinatha Fund</b><br>Anonymous 776.00<br>Marlene Carter 600.00<br>Amarnath & Latha Devarmalai 324.00<br>Francesco Gimelli 50.00<br>Toshadeva Guhan 108.00<br>Mahalakshmi Gunasegaran 755.00<br>Manoharan Navaratnarajah 150.00<br>Shanta Devi Periasamy 345.00<br>Jayshree S. Rao 5.00<br>Alex Ruberto 30.00<br>Niraj Thaker 35.20<br>Vayudeva Varadan 72.00<br>Total 3,250.20 | <b>Himalayan Academy Book Distribution Fund</b><br>Surendar Purohit 151.00<br>Niraj Thaker 35.20<br>Total 186.20                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund</b><br>Auslin Mangal Lawrence 340.00<br>Manoharan Navaratnarajah 75.00<br>Gassa Patten 802.00<br>Total 1,217.00                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <b>Spiritual Park of Mauritius Endowment</b><br>Maruthu Pandian Dharmalingam 13.50<br>Total 13.50                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>Mathavasi Travel Fund</b><br>Niraj Thaker 21.00<br>Total 21.00                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <b>Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund</b><br>Victoria Johnson 7.00<br>Total 7.00                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Positive Discipline Endowment</b><br>Roger Brown 40.00<br>Total 40.00                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <b>Saivite Hindu Scriptural Fund for the Visually Impaired</b><br>Maruthu Pandian Dharmalingam 13.50<br>Alex Ruberto 30.00<br>Total 43.50                                                                                                                                   | <b>Manitha Neyam Trust Fund</b><br>Richard Ksieniewicz 15.00<br>Bala Sivaceyon 31.69<br>Total 46.69                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment</b><br>Anonymous 1,041.00<br>Lila Shakti Devi 30.00<br>Maruthu Pandian Dharmalingam 54.50<br>Dora Kovacs 504.00<br>Wigneswaran Maharatnam 86.73<br>Jayshree S. Rao 5.00<br>Jutikadevi Sivaraja 602.00<br>Silas H. Zirkle 375.00<br>Total 2,698.23 |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>Kerala Temple Trust</b><br>Kishore G. & Subha Pathial 1,200.00<br>Total 1,200.00                                                                                                                                                                                         | <b>Yogaswami Hindu Boys' Home Fund</b><br>Dharmalingam Siddhan 400.00<br>Total 400.00                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | <b>Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment</b><br>Anonymous 1,041.00<br>Lila Shakti Devi 30.00<br>Maruthu Pandian Dharmalingam 54.50<br>Dora Kovacs 504.00<br>Wigneswaran Maharatnam 86.73<br>Jayshree S. Rao 5.00<br>Jutikadevi Sivaraja 602.00<br>Silas H. Zirkle 375.00<br>Total 2,698.23 |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>Kapaleeshwara Temple Orphanage</b><br>Prasad Krishnan 7.50<br>Richard Ksieniewicz 30.00<br>Auslin Mangal Lawrence 50.00<br>Jayanthi Vasudevan Naiker 300.00<br>Natraj Narayanswami 40.00<br>Ganesan & Rajalakshmi Ramalingam 75.00<br>Niraj Thaker 21.00<br>Total 523.50 | <b>Pooled Income Fund Trust</b><br>Satya Palani 100.00<br>Total 100.00                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>Yogaswami Hindu Boys' Home Fund</b><br>Dharmalingam Siddhan 400.00<br>Total 400.00                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>Pazhassi Balamandiram Orphanage Fund</b><br>Ganesan & Rajalakshmi Ramalingam 75.00<br>Niraj Thaker 21.00<br>Total 96.00                                                                                                                                                  | <b>Total Contributions</b> \$101,803.98                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <b>Total Contributions</b> \$101,803.98                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | <b>Funds at Market Value, June 30, 2006</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <b>Funds at Market Value, June 30, 2006</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Total Endowment Funds \$7,024,026.95<br>Total Pooled Income Funds \$203,436.28                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <b>Grand Total</b> US\$7,227,463.26                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

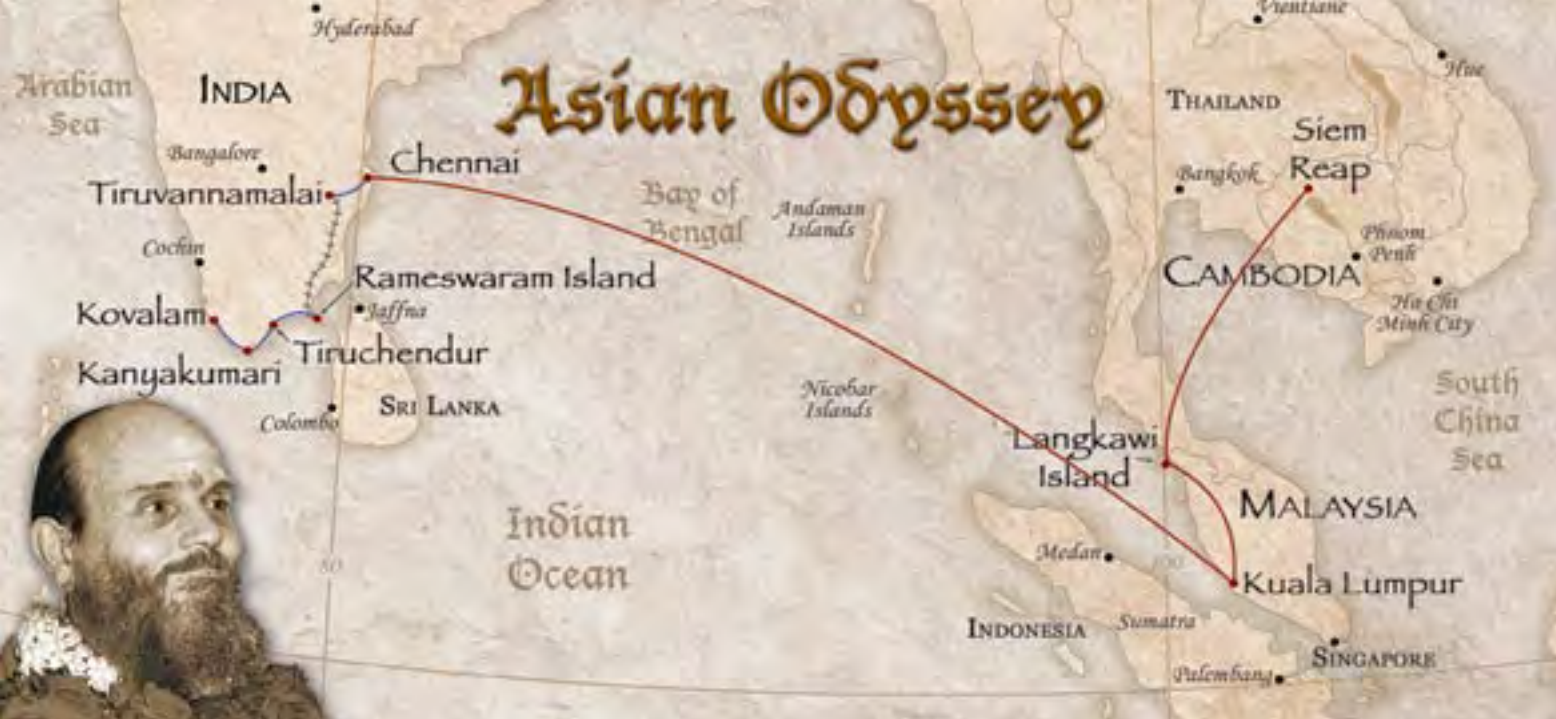
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**PROFESSIONAL ADVISORS:** Halbert, Hargrove/Russell, Investment Counsel; Alvin G. Buchignani, Esq., Legal Counsel; and Sonoda & Isara, LLP, CPA. HHE is a member of the Council on Foundations, an association of more than 2,000 foundations which interprets relevant law and management and investment principles.

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## Once upon a time you took a journey...

### DO YOU REMEMBER?

A journey weaved into existence from the very fabric of your most exotic dreams that saw you nestled between rice paddies in Siem Reap, exploring the world's largest temple, Angkor Wat, and other millennia-old temple ruins of the Khmer empire.

Do you remember? You discovered life in four undisturbed days in a village-style resort perched on the shores of a gorgeous tropical island just off the border of Malaysia and Thailand, an island steeped in mystery, legend and once a hideaway for pirates, where we sat in the presence of Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami as he unfolded the mysteries of meditation and inner life to us.

Do you remember, when you joined a million-strong devotionally-drenched lovers of Lord Muruga in a Thaipusam celebra-

tion parallel to none at the famed Batu Caves of Malaysia with its 140-foot tall golden Muruga statue before flying off to southern India where you were whisked away to the sacred town of Tiruvannamalai. Then there was our train ride, a cultural experience in itself of sights and smells, chaiwallahs and impossibly crowded stations through this land of extremes that knows no halfway to the sleepy fishing village island of Rameswaram where we bathed in 22 sacred wells at Lord Siva's 1,000-pillared citadel.

And who can forget Tiruchendur, the heart-melting seaside temple, or Kanyakumari, India's southern most tip where three oceans meet or our journey northwest to Kerala, where life is gentle and relaxed, as we settled down for gem-like moments of reflection and study amidst intricate waterways, lush surroundings and beautiful beaches.

Now do you remember your Asian Odyssey? It was in January 2008.

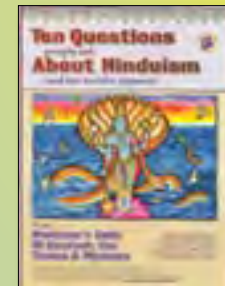
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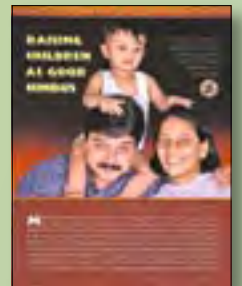
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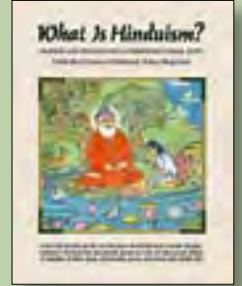
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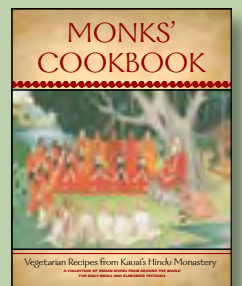
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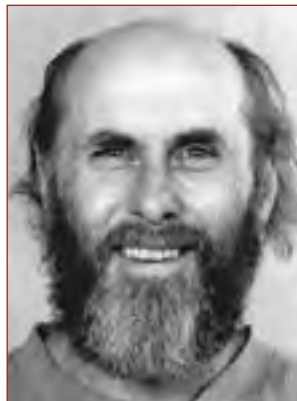
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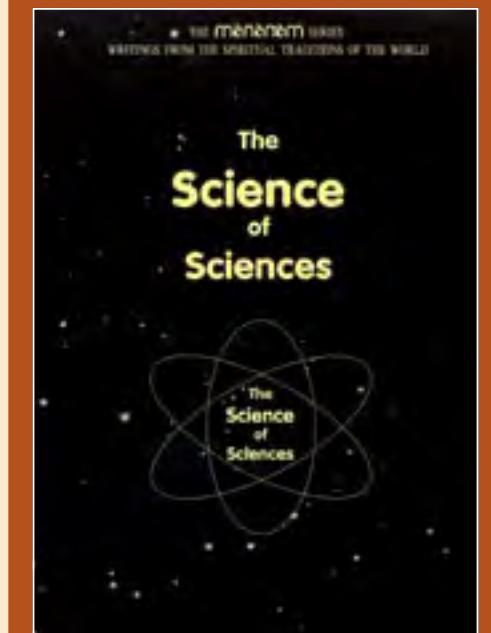
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| 02:30 Sant Geet-Devotional songs                                       | 02:30 Sant Geet-Devotional songs              | 02:30 Sant Geet-Devotional songs              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 02:40 Bhair Chamanji Singh Kirtan Darbar                               | 02:40 Bhair Chamanji Singh Kirtan Darbar      | 02:40 Bhair Chamanji Singh Kirtan Darbar      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 03:00 Discourses - Anandmurti Gurumaa                                  | 03:00 Discourses - Anandmurti Gurumaa         | 03:00 Discourses - Anandmurti Gurumaa         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 03:30 Discourses - Hari Chaitanyapuri                                  | 03:30 Discourses - Hari Chaitanyapuri         | 03:30 Discourses - Hari Chaitanyapuri         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 04:00 Yoga (Swami Ramdev)                                              | 04:00 Yoga (Swami Ramdev)                     | 04:00 Yoga (Swami Ramdev)                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 06:30 Discourses - Pujya Dr. Nandani Anand                             | 06:30 Discourses - Pujya Dr. Nandani Anand    | 06:30 Discourses - Pujya Dr. Nandani Anand    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 07:00 Discourses - Chaitanya Mission                                   | 07:00 Discourses - Chaitanya Mission          | 07:00 Discourses - Chaitanya Mission          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 07:30 Vipassana (Siddharama Das)                                       | 07:30 Vipassana (Siddharama Das)              | 07:30 Vipassana (Siddharama Das)              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 07:50 Mudra Vigyan                                                     | 07:50 Mudra Vigyan                            | 07:50 Mudra Vigyan                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 08:00 Discourses - Shree Kumar Swami                                   | 08:00 Discourses - Shree Kumar Swami          | 08:00 Discourses - Shree Kumar Swami          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 08:30 Jai Vani - Jyotsna Devi Mahara                                   | 08:30 Jai Vani - Jyotsna Devi Mahara          | 08:30 Jai Vani - Jyotsna Devi Mahara          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 08:50 Satsang Samachar                                                 | 08:50 Satsang Samachar                        | 08:50 Satsang Samachar                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 09:00 Aastha Special Programmes                                        | 09:00 Aastha Special Programmes               | 09:00 Aastha Special Programmes               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 09:20 Discourses - Chaitanya                                           | 09:20 Discourses - Chaitanya                  | 09:20 Discourses - Chaitanya                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 09:40 Shree 24-7                                                       | 09:40 Shree 24-7                              | 09:40 Shree 24-7                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 10:00 Sant Asaram Vani (Discourses)                                    | 10:00 Sant Asaram Vani (Discourses)           | 10:00 Sant Asaram Vani (Discourses)           | <b>Saturn</b> On Sky Digital platform of BSkyB at channel no. 808.<br><b>Plug in to your roots in India !</b>                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 11:00 Discourses - Kirtibhai                                           | 11:00 Discourses - Kirtibhai                  | 11:00 Discourses - Kirtibhai                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 12:00 Jaiwa - USA                                                      | 12:00 Jaiwa - USA                             | 12:00 Jaiwa - USA                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 12:30 Rishabh Sahib - Gurubani                                         | 12:30 Rishabh Sahib - Gurubani                | 12:30 Rishabh Sahib - Gurubani                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 14:00 Ramayana                                                         | 14:00 Ramayana                                | 14:00 Ramayana                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 14:30 Sant Geet (Sants Devotional Songs)                               | 14:30 Sant Geet (Sants Devotional Songs)      | 14:30 Sant Geet (Sants Devotional Songs)      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 15:00 Discourses - (Swami Anandharananda)                              | 15:00 Discourses - (Swami Anandharananda)     | 15:00 Discourses - (Swami Anandharananda)     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 15:30 Talk on Bhagavad Gita (Jaya Row)                                 | 15:30 Talk on Bhagavad Gita (Jaya Row)        | 15:30 Talk on Bhagavad Gita (Jaya Row)        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 15:50 Satsang Samachar                                                 | 15:50 Satsang Samachar                        | 15:50 Satsang Samachar                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 16:00 Meditation (Swami Sukhabodhananda)                               | 16:00 Meditation (Swami Sukhabodhananda)      | 16:00 Meditation (Swami Sukhabodhananda)      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 16:20 Mangal Matri                                                     | 16:20 Mangal Matri                            | 16:20 Mangal Matri                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 16:30 Shree Shyam Vandana by Nandini                                   | 16:30 Shree Shyam Vandana by Nandini          | 16:30 Shree Shyam Vandana by Nandini          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 17:00 Sai Baba Dhroop Aarti - Shirdi                                   | 17:00 Sai Baba Dhroop Aarti - Shirdi          | 17:00 Sai Baba Dhroop Aarti - Shirdi          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 17:30 Discourses - (Anandmurti Gurumaa)                                | 17:30 Discourses - (Anandmurti Gurumaa)       | 17:30 Discourses - (Anandmurti Gurumaa)       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 18:00 Yoga (Swami Ramdev)                                              | 18:00 Yoga (Swami Ramdev)                     | 18:00 Yoga (Swami Ramdev)                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 19:00 Gyan Ganga (Narayan Seva Sansthan)                               | 19:00 Gyan Ganga (Narayan Seva Sansthan)      | 19:00 Gyan Ganga (Narayan Seva Sansthan)      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 19:20 Hazur Muz Terlochan Dandani Dasji                                | 19:20 Hazur Muz Terlochan Dandani Dasji       | 19:20 Hazur Muz Terlochan Dandani Dasji       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 19:40 Hare Krishna 2005 - Wonder of the World                          | 19:40 Hare Krishna 2005 - Wonder of the World | 19:40 Hare Krishna 2005 - Wonder of the World |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 20:00 Discourses - (Anandmurti Gurumaa)                                | 20:00 Discourses - (Anandmurti Gurumaa)       | 20:00 Discourses - (Anandmurti Gurumaa)       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 21:00 Ramayana - Murali Bapu                                           | 21:00 Ramayana - Murali Bapu                  | 21:00 Ramayana - Murali Bapu                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| 22:00 Discourses - Ramesh Chandra                                      | 22:00 Discourses - Ramesh Chandra             | 22:00 Discourses - Ramesh Chandra             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |

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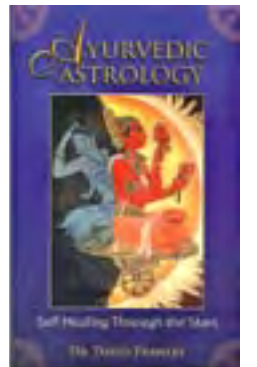
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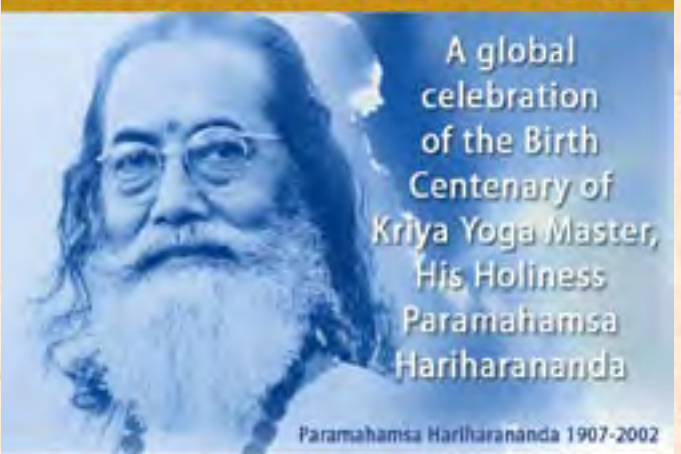
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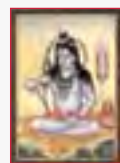
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But my heart is of the Moon.  
My mind finds answers incomplete;  
Even contradicting and some  
Beyond my comprehension.  
But my heart feels The One Being.

My Lord of Light,  
Teach me not the might of  
Thy power of purposelessness;  
The depth of Thy Desire of desirelessness.  
Teach me not time and timelessness;  
Space and spacelessness.  
Teach me not "consciousness."  
For no words, no analogy can describe  
Or illustrate to me "consciousness" fully.  
Teach me Truths, in simple terms,  
For my state of evolution, that earn me  
Three meals a day, a roof above my head,  
A healthy body and tickets to travel.  
Then, I am ready to take flight to lofty heights.  
I am Thy embryo caught in matter  
In despair to understand life and living in matter.  
Speak to me what I should do on a daily basis.  
Speak to me, Thy child, in simple terms; I await.

It is not for Me to tell you: Do this or Do that.  
You are on Earth. Be your own God.  
Make an effort and find  
Your three meals a day, and more.  
Listen to your inner voice. I am your inner voice.  
I am your Spirit. Be silent to receive.

Walk daily; and in your walking is the WAY.  
Drink lots of water; then drink  
At the fountain of my Love.

And give a dollar to the hand that stretches to you.  
It is your link to Me.  
Plan your day; a rose blossoms in inherent detail.  
Then, expect the unexpected.  
And accept the unacceptable...  
Be prudent in expenditure;  
A dollar not spent is a dollar earned.  
Save for the tomorrow of old age.  
In a world of matter, self must take care of the body.  
Focus on your work with all your heart.  
I AM your work.  
Worry Not; but be concerned:  
There are asuras in your midst.  
Light cannot be unless challenged by darkness.  
Each week, keep walking the 272 steps.  
In each step is your destination.  
Each breath is your liberation.

There is no moment of time you are lost to Me.  
Pilgrimage; energise yourself at the Holy Centres.  
Be with illumined souls; absorb their vibration.  
Be patient; a fruit ripens in its own time,  
Not a moment earlier.  
Grace your office and home with flowers;  
Beauty attracts beauty.  
Face your challenges with courage.  
Traveling in space, time and matter,  
There is a past, present and future.  
Draw from your experiences past and  
Bring them to the present, to the Now and  
Shape your future.  
Be you your own God.  
Do not get into arguments on ME with anyone.  
Let it be. Laugh.  
Laugh at your mistakes, misjudgments.  
I AM in your laughter.  
Bear the pain; the road to Heaven is through hell.  
Abandon not your children  
For they are your Hope of tomorrow.

Sit before Me, breathe in and out  
At your pace and ease.  
Feel the warmth of My Energy  
Pulsating in your body.  
Feel the lightness,  
Bodilessness, the freedom.  
Then immerse in MY SEA of SILENCE.  
Burn your Karmas in the fire of your meditation.

Dissolve your burdens in the Ocean of my Love.  
Draw my Light into your vessel  
And dispel your darkness of Ignorance.  
And finally let Me reveal to you  
A fact which is beyond your comprehension  
At this point of your evolutionary cycle.  
In the stillness of your being,  
See the ONENESS: see Me in all you meet.  
Reflect, contemplate and ponder over this.

My Lord of Light,  
Thou has thrown Thy thunderbolt at me.  
Thou has struck me with Thy Light of Lightning.  
I see the ONENESS, the wholeness,  
The common destiny of Man and living things  
In Thy Creation.  
I can see Thy Life Force in all things.  
But I cannot see Thy Love in all I meet.  
And I am bewildered in wonderment at the  
Full import and implications of Thy revelation  
That I am God, part of the Godhead.  
I bow to Thy Glory, Power, Majesty and Mystery.

You ask questions, the answers to which will not  
Increase your spirituality or give you, as you put it,  
Three meals a day.  
But know this for the present:  
To appreciate Light, you must know darkness.  
To know Love, you must know cruelty.  
Both darkness and light emanate from Me.  
I have sent you a message before.  
In the Law of Karma is the seed of success.  
I know no failure—and there are more mysteries.  
I shall always remain a Mystery to Man.

My Lord of Light, I shall await the Day  
Of awakening of God in me.  
But what is this feeling that arises in me,  
This stirring of my spirit,  
This warmth in my Body?  
Thou has ignited a pillar of fire  
In the altar of my heart, a column of flames  
Bursting into a dance. Dancing.  
Dance, my Lord of Light.  
Dance on the graveyard of my desires;  
In the Ashes of my ambitions.  
Dance Thy Will, at Will. Dance....

by Dr Arjunan Subramaniam,  
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
1st to 5th April 2006