

HINDUISM TODAY

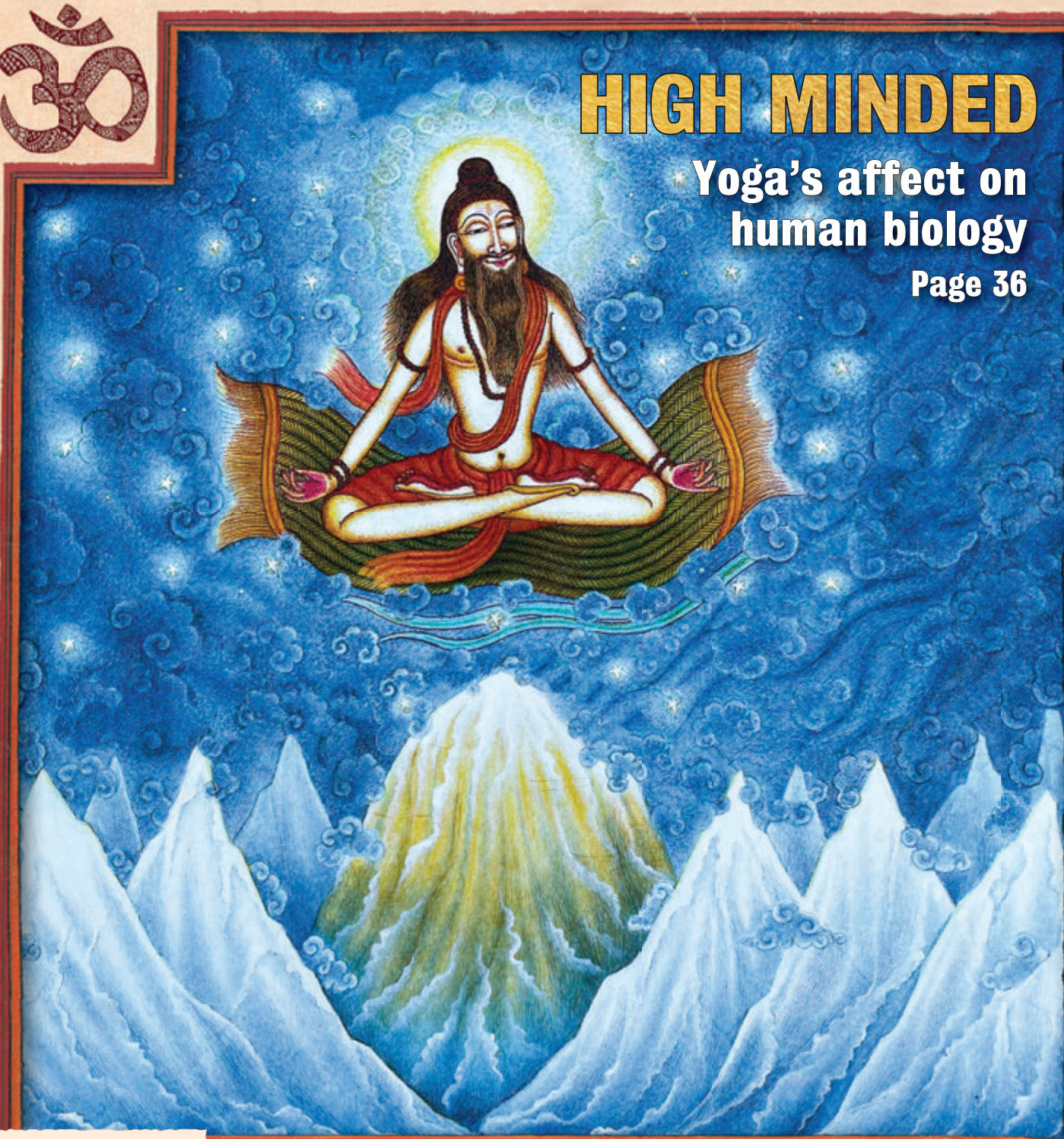
Affirming Sanatana Dharma and Recording the Modern History of a Billion-Strong Global Religion in Renaissance



HIGH MINDED

Yoga's affect on
human biology

Page 36



NODDING HEADS GAMES



(Cover) The cover painting shows a yogi on a magic carpet high above Mount Kailas, artwork by Kerala muralist Suresh Muttukulam; (above) a screenshot from *Raji: An Ancient Epic*, the all-the-rage video game inspired by Hindu history, art and architecture

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Bodhinatha Veylanswami

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INTERNATIONAL

- Feature:** India's Odd & Unusual Temples Revealed 18
- Reporting:** Examining How Hinduism Is Commonly Portrayed in Today's Media 26
- Pivotal Roles:** Hindu Counselling Is Growing 29
- Saint & Sages:** Reflecting on the Historic Life and Teachings of Paramahansa Yogananda 32
- Support:** The Tactical Role of a Hindu Club on Campus and How You Can Create One 66

LIFESTYLE

- Insight:** Diving into the *Yoga Sutras* to Discover Interconnections of Yoga, Mind & Body 36
- Environment:** Societal Ripples to be Celebrated, Thanks to Our Religious Reverence for Water 50
- Festivals:** One Teen's Valiant Effort to Make Diwali an Official Holiday for Her School 56
- Art & Media:** Let the Games Begin—the Adroit Digital Creation of *Raji* 58

- Religious Life:** The Importance of Satsang 64
- Dress:** Youth Learn to Celebrate Our Traditions through What They Wear at School 67

OPINION

- In My Opinion:** Defining Our Religion Through Our Personal Practice, Not Our Social Media Posts 9
- Publisher's Desk:** Climbing the Ladder of Consciousness 10
- Letters** 13
- From the Upanishads:** The *Svetasvatara Upanishad* Speaks of Underlying Perfection 17

DIGESTS

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

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Stepping into India's Unusual Temples

With a religion that sees the sacred everywhere and in all forms, Hindus can enjoy Bharat's proliferation of unique places of worship. Page 18...

Honoring women of divinity: a priest attends to the day's worship at a Chausath Yogini temple in the town of Hirapur. This is one of many such temples built in reverence to the 64 yoginis who are said to be manifestations of Shakti Herself.

GLOBAL DHARMA

INDONESIA

Grand Murugan Temple Coming to West Jakarta

ON FEBRUARY 14, 2020, Anies Baswedan, governor of Jakarta, attended the laying of the first stone for a temple on land donated by the government in Kalideres, West Jakarta. Other government officials and the ambassador from India were also present. According to a report from the tanda-baco.co.in website, the local Tamil community has been working toward building a temple for Lord Murugan for the past 60 years. "Today, it is realized," said A. S. Kobalen, general chairperson of the DPP Gema Sadhama, the founding organization.

Anies Baswedan said at the event: "We have a responsibility to bring about social justice in the form of equalizing opportunities, one of which is

the construction of houses of worship and the celebration of religious holidays in Jakarta."

The temple grounds are an acre in extent. The temple itself will include a large prayer hall, a multipurpose hall with a 1,000-person capacity, a museum of Indo-Indian origins and heritage in Indonesia as well as lawns and gardens.

More information is available at the temple website, sana-thanadharma-alayam.com. An impressive digital walk-through video is on Youtube: bit.ly/JakartaTemple. Donations are being earnestly sought for the work.

.....
Murugan's new home: *The new Tamil temple will sit just off a main highway on land donated by the government*



INDIA

Nearly All Indians Feel Free To Practice their Religion

INDIA'S MASSIVE POPULATION IS diverse as well as devout, according to a Pew Research Center report released in June, 2021. Not only do most of the world's Hindus, Jains and Sikhs live in India, but it also is home to one of the world's largest Muslim populations, and to millions of Christians and Buddhists. This new report, based on a face-to-face survey of 29,999 Indian adults fielded between late 2019 and early 2020—before the Covid pandemic—takes a closer look at religious identity, nationalism and tolerance in Indian society.

Indians value religious tolerance, though they also live religiously segregated lives. Across the country, most people (84%)

say that to be "truly Indian" it is very important to respect all religions. Indians also are united in the view that respecting other religions is a very important part of what it means to be a member of their own religious

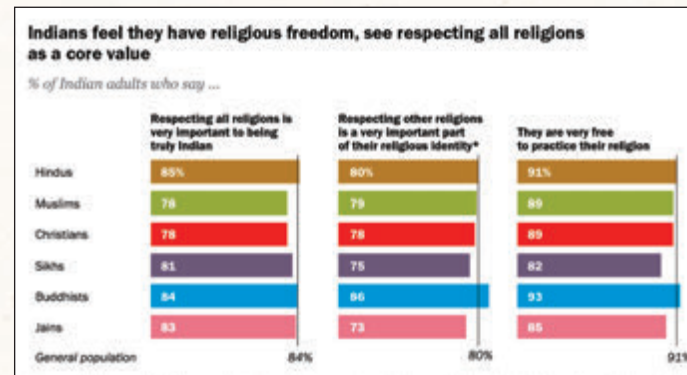
community (80%). People in all six major religious groups overwhelmingly say they are very free to practice their faith, and most say that people of other faiths also are very free to practice their own religion.

Nearly all Indians say they believe in God (97%), and most say religion is very important in their lives. Roughly 80% of people in most religious groups say

they are absolutely certain that God exists. The main exception is Buddhists, as belief in God is not central to Buddhist teachings. In comparison, according to a 2017 Gallup poll, 87% of Americans believe in God and 64% are convinced that God exists.

India's religious groups share several religious practices and beliefs. After living side by side for generations, India's minority faiths often engage in practices or hold beliefs that are more closely associated with Hindu traditions than with their own. For example, Muslims in India are just as likely as Hindus to say they believe in karma (77% each), as do 54% of India's Christians.

.....
Religious freedom: *Indians uniformly said are respect other religions and were free to practice their own*



INDIA

BBC's Marvelous Video on Eating with Your Hands

FOOD ANTHROPOLOGIST DR. KURUSH DALAL INTRODUCES THIS informative video (bit.ly/eatingwithhands) by pointing out, "Essentially, everybody, everywhere in India has always used their hands when it comes to eating, even today. Eating with a knife and fork was only brought to us by the upper-class British." The video then shows the many creative ways in which hands are used to eat across India. Dr. Dalal concludes: "Food doesn't taste better when you eat with your fingers, but there is a tactile feedback. You eat with your eyes first, then you eat with your nose, then you actually bring into play your ears and your sense of touch and it's only finally at the end of it that your mouth and your taste buds actually come into play."



Class in session: *The study of yoga will soon extend beyond Nepal's yoga studios (shown above) to the public schools*

NEPAL

Yoga Becomes Required Class

WHEN SCHOOL RESUMES IN NEPAL—COVID ALLOWING AND ASSUMING they can find enough teachers—hatha yoga will join math, science and language as a required course, according to the *Himalayan Times*. Hundreds of thousands of students in Nepal's schools will come under the program—first announced last year—which will include the history of yoga and principles of ayurveda. Giriraj Mani Pokhrel, the country's minister of education, said, "Yoga is our ancient science. We want students to learn it, and we think this is the right time." Previously yoga was available in some schools as an elective class. The ministry's Council for Technical Education and Vocational training also announced the development of a three-year vocational diploma course in yoga, ayurveda and naturopathy.



Getting handy with food: *chapatis and dal being deftly enjoyed by a row of elegantly dressed women at a festival feeding*

VEGETARIANISM

Famed New York Restaurant To Adopt Plant-Based Menu

CHEF DANIEL HUMM SPENT A lot of lockdown time pondering the future of food and, more specifically, the future of his famed Eleven Madison Park restaurant which boasts three Michelin stars and four from the *New York Times*. According to a May, 2021 article in the *Times*, he promised himself "he was not going to return to importing caviar and braising celery root in pigs' bladders."

To be fair, New York City has featured a number of top-notch vegan and vegetarian restaurants for many years. But this transformation of what some rank the best restaurant in the world is something different and may indicate a major shift

in food consumption habits—at least among rich New Yorkers. The restaurant's set multicourse menu will remain at \$335 per person, with reservations difficult to obtain.

The *Times* writes: "Mr. Humm said the decision is the result of a years-long re-evaluation about where his career was headed, which reached its breaking point during the pandemic. 'It became very clear to me that our idea of what luxury is had to change,' Mr. Humm said. 'We couldn't go back to doing what we did before.' While the restaurant's ingredient costs will go down, labor costs will go up as Mr. Humm and his chefs work to make vegan food live up to

Eleven Madison Park's reputation. 'It's a labor-intensive and time-consuming process,' he said."

Other top restaurants and

chefs are also considering or making such a shift, with one vegan restaurant in France being the first to earn a coveted Michelin Guide star.



Leaving meat behind: *Chef Daniel Humm in the famed Eleven Madison Park restaurant's dining room*



INDIA

Yadadri Temple Upgrade Nears Completion

WITH A STATE-FUNDED BUDGET OF A QUARTER BILLION US dollars at his disposal, the chief minister of Telangana, K. Chandrashekar Rao, is soon to see the successful completion of the expanded Yadadri Temple. The original temple, 70 km northeast of Hyderabad, was built in 1246 by Bommanna Dandanayaka of the Hoysala Empire. It incorporated a small temple cave 12 feet high and 30 feet long containing five forms of Lord Vishnu as Narasimha, half man, half lion. The new temple is 45 acres in area and sits on a three-square-mile artificial plateau built around the original hillock containing the cave. The original temple remains untouched below the new central 48-foot gopuram, which is to be plated with 1,543 pounds of gold.

Five hundred sculptors from Telangana and adjacent states participated in the work over a period of six years, beginning in March, 2015. The temple architects worked in consultation with Tridandi Chinna Srimannarayana Ramanuja Jeeyar Swami, a popular local Vaishnava swami. They followed the *Pancharatra Agama* in the design and construction, according to chief sculptor Anandachari Velu. The temple is intended to last over 1,000 years, said G. Kishan Rao, CEO of the project.

Extensive development is underway nearby, downhill from the temple, including hundreds of cottages for visitors and 7,000 parking spaces. This entire new city will include a reservoir, marriage halls, food courts, bus stand and a 25-acre farm to grow flowers for the daily worship.

The 1,000-year temple: (top) Aerial view of the nearly done temple; architect's overview of the project with timeline



BRIEFLY...

THE YOGA SCHOOLS OF RISHIKESH

have been dramatically impacted by the Covid pandemic, with many forced to close temporarily. The town of 100,000 has more than 200 yoga schools in and nearby, all of which shut down in March, 2020. They were later allowed to reopen. With no international tourists allowed into India, however they have lost their main source of income, according to a report in the *Wall Street Journal*.

THE MASSIVE KANWAR YATRA

was canceled in mid-July by the Kanwar Sanghs organizers at the request of the Uttar Pradesh government. In a normal year, more than 20 million devotees pilgrimage

to various places along the Ganga, especially Haridwar, to collect Ganga water which is taken back to their home villages for the worship of Lord Siva. The Amarnath Cave yatra has been similarly canceled.

THE KARNATAKA GOVERNMENT

has ordered that funds from the state's Hindu Religious Institutions and Charitable Endowments Department will no longer be used to fund non-Hindu institutions. The ruling came after Hindu groups objected to the distribution of money collected at Hindu temples to imams of mosques as compensation for loss of income during the Covid pandemic.

THE GOVERNMENT OF

Puducherry (formerly Pondicherry) launched an "Integrated Temple Management System" for the territory's 243 temples and monasteries that are under their control. The web address for the sleek site is hri.py.gov.in. It provides information on the puja schedule, festivals and online services for each institution.

SEWA INTERNATIONAL

reported that as of the end of May, 2021, it had provided US\$15 million worth of goods and services for Covid relief in India. This included 9,600 oxygen concentrators, 40,000 oximeters, 177 ventilators, 15 oxygen generator plants and more. Sewa worked in partnership with 185 organizations and 14,000 volunteers. They have established 106 Covid care centers and 258 isolation centers across the nation.

A SUPERLATIVE EDITION OF THE

Bhagavad Gita in eleven volumes with 21 commentaries—many previously unpublished, from the 8th century Adi Shankara to 19th century authors—was released by authors Dr. Karan Singh and Kamal K. Mishra at Prime Minister Modi's residence in Delhi, on March 9, 2021. The text showcases an wondrous variety of original calligraphy in Sanskrit and Hindi.

Global Dharma news provided by

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PHOTOS: YADRARI TEMPLE DEVELOPMENT



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



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IN MY OPINION

Let Us Be Hindus, Again

Let's define our religion by the personal experiences we cull from our spiritual pursuits

BY AMAR SHAH

In december 1951, in pune, india, a young sannyasin by the name of Chinmayananda publicly declared an audacious observation: Hinduism, as practiced in recent centuries, had fallen severely. "No doubt," he said, "in India, Hinduism has come to mean nothing more than a bundle of sacred superstitions, or a certain way of dressing, cooking, eating, talking, and so on." He exhorted his audience to study, understand and then live the values advocated by our ancient and sacred religion as consistently as possible. "Let us be Hindus!" he encouraged.

Driven by curiosity and the information age, Hindu knowledge spread across the world, increasing accessibility to its profound forms of self-development. Today, our social media apps are filled with *Bhagavad Gita* soundbites, shareable quotes and Hindu activist posts. We sift through our newsfeeds at a breakneck pace, and continue to "like," "share" and "subscribe" with a few taps of a finger. However, behind the keyboards and forums, tucked away in the furthest parts of the home, I've seen many altars remaining untouched, gathering dust. How many of us actually practice what we post? Now 70 years later, Chinmayananda's call to action of "Let us be Hindus" must be sounded once again.

I posit that being Hindu has two fundamental requirements. First, a reverence of *Vedas* as a legitimate source of knowledge, and second, an active adherence to the Vedic goal of self-improvement and liberation via daily *sadhana* (spiritual practice). With these in mind, I dare ask the reader a question: "Do you actually practice Hinduism?" Without personal practice, this shared knowledge—however global—becomes nothing more than dry philosophy to stagnate in the archives of our minds alongside YouTube cat clips, sports highlights and celebrity memes. In this sense, we run a danger of redefining being "Hindu" as simply a sharing of religious content, celebrating one-off, photo-op holidays, and online activism. What is the use if knowledge is not applied



in the pursuit of self-development and the Divine? What is the use, if we are Hindu in name only?

May we become practicing Hindus! The sadhanas available to us are manifold and multifaceted to suit our innumerable personalities: *puja* (physical and mental worship), *japa* (repetition of mantras),

dhyana (meditation) and *svadhyaya* (self-study) are a few that come to mind. As my guru has so nicely put it—the array of Hindu sadhana "is like a buffet!" Just as South Indians will naturally gravitate toward fresh idli, and Northerners will eye the paneer-laden gravies, we all have natural compatibility with different sadhanas. With such a variety available, we must pick up at least one practice, sharpen ourselves, and speak from the depths of self-experience. Without sadhana, our online advocacy, philosophical debates and content sharing will remain relatively ineffective or even detrimental.

Let me be clear, however, that such current efforts to be Hindu are not entirely without merit. Indeed, the *bhava* (feeling/intention) powering our young people is quite righteous and well-spirited! These efforts indicate needs for cultural and spiritual wellness, a sense of community, and an ability to be Hindu without fear of prejudice or persecution. Beginning with our colleges and universities, we must establish arenas of *satsang* (spiritual discourse) wherein sadhana can be practiced and experiences can be shared, all with careful guidance by formally trained teachers. My position at Northwestern University is a manifestation of students rallying to study scripture and practice sadhana. In the future, I plan to share insights about how we are fostering such a community as I step in as the university's first Hindu Chaplain.

AMAR SHAH, a Chicago native, is a corporate speaker with monastic training in Vedanta. He is the inaugural Hindu Chaplain at Northwestern University. See amarshah.com, or Instagram [@therealamarshah](https://www.instagram.com/therealamarshah)



Climbing the Ladder of Consciousness

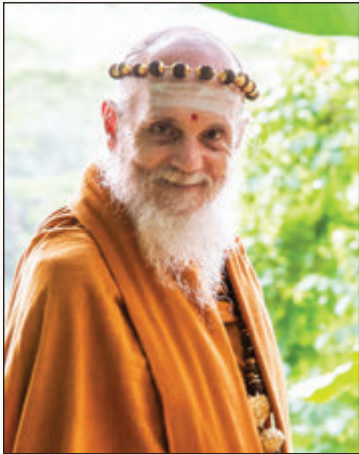
Hinduism has developed the most elaborate, detailed map of the evolution of awareness, which can guide us toward liberation

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

THE CORE PURPOSE OF ALL THE MAJOR RELIGIONS is to provide guidance to human beings so that in pursuing their natural ambitions to achieve wealth and love they do so in a manner that adheres to the principles of virtue. In some religions, this focus on virtuous and dutiful living is the sum total of its religious practice. However, in Hinduism there is an important fourth pursuit: liberation. Together these four, called *dharma* (virtue), *artha* (wealth), *kama* (love) and *moksha* (liberation), are referred to as the *purusharthas*, which means “goals of the soul.” Also called *chaturvarga*, “four-fold good,” they form a cornerstone of Hindu ethics. Although dharma, artha and kama are valid and important ends in themselves, their greatest value is in providing the environment and experiences which help the embodied soul mature over many lives until it attains moksha. In other words, moksha is a higher level goal than dharma, artha and kama. My guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, expressed this idea in saying: “To know yourself is why you are on Earth. You were born to realize the Self. You are not here to make money, to clothe yourself or to entertain yourself. These are incidentals.”

The fourth pursuit, moksha, is liberation from rebirth on Earth, release from transmigration, samsara, the round of births and deaths. Until moksha is achieved, a soul continues to be reborn on Earth. Gurudeva described the achievement in this way: “Liberation [moksha] comes when dharma has been well-performed, all our karmas are resolved and God has been fully realized.” Another way of stating “God has been fully realized” is for an individual to permanently reside in the highest states of divine consciousness. To fully understand what this means, we can look at what the various states of human consciousness are.

Imagine human consciousness as a ladder with fourteen rungs. The lower rungs represent the lower states of consciousness, and the higher rungs represent the higher states of consciousness. An excellent understanding of these states is found in the Hindu system of chakras. Our Himalayan Academy lexicon states that *chakra*, meaning “wheel” in Sanskrit, metaphysically refers to the nerve plexuses or centers of force and consciousness located within the inner bodies of man. In the physical body each corresponds to specific nerve plexuses, ganglia and glands. The seven principal chakras can be seen psychically as colorful, multi-petaled wheels or lotuses. They are situated along the spinal cord from the base to the cranial chamber. Additionally, seven chakras, barely visible, exist below the spine. They are seats of instinctive consciousness, the origin of anger, jealousy, hatred, envy, guilt, sorrow, etc. They constitute the lower or hellish world,



called Narakaloka or Patala. Thus there are 14 major chakras in all. Their Sanskrit names and location in the human body are shown in the chart, with each numbered as a rung on the ladder of consciousness. Above and within the crown chakra at the top of the head, there are seven subtle chakras, making 21 in all, as indicated in our artwork. Each chakra is a state of consciousness that is more advanced than the previous one. In the lower seven chakras this manifests in that the grosser state of consciousness is dropped off when awareness moves up a chakra, for example in moving from the sixth rung to the seventh we drop off raging anger. In the higher seven chakras this manifests in acquiring a new superconscious ability, for example moving from direct cognition to divine love we acquire the consciousness of seeing and loving the divine in all beings. The Hindu perspective is that over

the course of many lives a human soul gradually climbs this ladder of consciousness. All souls start out in a lower, selfish state and ultimately end up in an illuminated state filled with divine light and love. This is a process that goes on automatically from life to life, a process as natural as evolving from childhood to maturity.

My guru often said that everyone has a guru. Until one reaches the higher rungs on the ladder, that guru is the world. Gurudeva playfully named this guru Shri Shri Shri Vishvaguru Maha-Maharaji and gave this description: “He does live up to his name in all ways, for vishva means ‘everything and everyone in the world,’ and guru, of course, means ‘teacher.’ Maharaj is ‘great ruler.’ Vishvaguruji, as I call him, seemingly teaches so patiently, yet accepts no excuses and remains unforgivingly exacting in his lessons. . . . Gradually, eventually, and it may take many lifetimes, everyone comes to see that he is leading them to an understanding that every freedom has its price, every action its reaction, that the path to perfection is up and up and up.”

In this upward climb in consciousness, at some point when an individual is starting to reside for short periods on the eleventh rung of the ladder of consciousness—in the heart chakra of direct cognition—the ascent becomes a conscious one. That individual consciously realizes that life is all about deepening their spirituality. At this stage, it is natural to seek out a guru for training in the yogas, which are Hinduism’s disciplines for facilitating this ascent of consciousness. There are four widely known approaches. Karma yoga is the path of action. Bhakti yoga is the path of devotion and love of God. Raja yoga is the path of meditation. Jnana yoga is the path of spiritual knowing. Exactly which ones are pursued and in what way varies from guru to guru. However, the overview is the same. The more you practice and perfect them, the sooner you are able to climb to the next rung on the ladder of consciousness.

Another important aspect of how practice relates to progress is



A. MANIVEL

found in Rishi Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*, verse 1.14, in which he decrees that practice must be done with devotion and consistency for long periods of time. In other words, making spiritual progress happens slowly. In fact, it occurs over a span of multiple lives.

In his song “The Yoga Path,” my guru’s guru, Yogaswami of Jaffna, Sri Lanka, refers to the final seven stages of this upward climb. “The six steps first you must traverse; then will come the silver step. If you surmount that, too, my treasure, who will be your equal?” The six steps Swami refers to are the six chakras from muladhara to ajna, and the silver step is the final rung before liberation: reaching the seventh chakra, sahasrara.

Today millions of seekers consider themselves “spiritual but not religious,” SBNR. Such individuals are interested in experiencing higher consciousness but choose to do so outside the context of religion. One reason for this is that the spiritual knowledge and practice within some religions is not well known. The Hindu insight of climbing the ladder of consciousness is a popular concept of spirituality that resonates well with many SBNRs.

In his talk “Hinduism, the Greatest Religion in the World,” my guru observed. “No other faith boasts such a deep and enduring comprehension of the mysteries of existence, or possesses so vast a metaphysical system. 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.” We can all help spread the word that Hinduism embodies a profound, practical and sophisticated tradition of spirituality in which unfoldment can be calibrated with the ladder of chakras paradigm.

When it comes to climbing the ladder of consciousness and experiencing higher states of consciousness, modern teachers generally focus on stimulating your higher chakras, perhaps in as short a period as a weekend seminar. Gurudeva’s teachings differ from this approach. Instead, we focus first on closing off the seven lower chakras—the seats of fear, anger, malice, etc. He explains: “Spiritual unfoldment is not a process of awakening the higher chakras, but of closing the chakras below the muladhara. Once this happens, the aspirant’s consciousness slowly expands into the higher chakras, which are always there. The only thing that keeps the lower chakras closed is regular sadhana, japa, worship and working within oneself. This is demonstrated by the fact that even great yogis and rishis who have awakened into the higher chakras continue to do more and more sadhana. They are constantly working to keep the forces flowing through the higher centers so that the lower ones do not claim their awareness.”

Through sadhana, worship and working within oneself, we strengthen our refined, magnanimous soul qualities and harness our coarse, instinctive nature. As Gurudeva observed, “The fact is, the higher we go, the lower we can fall. The platform of character must be built within our lifestyle to maintain the total contentment needed to persevere on the path.”

LADDER RUNG	NAME	LOCATION/ PLEXUS	ATTRIBUTE
14	sahasrāra	crown of head/ pituitary	illumination
13	ājñā	third eye/ cavernous	divine sight
12	viśuddha	throat/ pharyngeal	divine love
11	anāhata	heart/ cardiac	direct cognition
10	maṇipūra	diaphragm/ solar	willpower
9	svādhiṣṭhāna	lower abdomen/ hypogastric	reason
8	mūlādhāra	base of spine/ sacral, pelvic	memory, time, space
7	atala	hips	fear, lust
6	vitāla	thighs	raging anger
5	sutāla	knees	retaliatory jealousy
4	talātāla	calves	prolonged confusion
3	rasātāla	ankles	pure selfishness
2	mahātāla	feet	absence of conscience
1	pātāla	soles of feet	malice, murder



LETTERS

Raising Good Hindus

Sadar Pranam! I am Shri Vyaghra Yogi of the Vidya Yoga Ashram in Brazil. I want to congratulate all of you once again for the wonderful work being done by HINDUISM TODAY magazine. I want to transmit my puja to dear Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami and all the other brothers. I revere the beloved Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. Here in Brazil, we have persistently spread and propagated Hinduism with a lot of love. I want to thank you for on the article "Raising Children As Good Hindus" (April/May/June 2021). It is very good. I would like to ask permission to republish that article and other important texts for our members here. Please receive our big and affectionate hug with Shiva's blessings.

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On the Meaning of Yoga

I read with interest Kurt Matthys' letter, "Two Clarifications on Yoga" (July/August/September, 2021). However, I disagree with him when he states, "the meaning of yoga in Patanjali's work has nothing to do with joining." I have read several authoritative articles and books on Patanjali Yoga that state that the word *yoga* is derived from the Sanskrit root *yuj*, which means to connect, join or balance. *Yoga* is usually defined as union: union between the limited self and the Divine Self. Yes, the aim of yoga is not really to unite us with anything, for we are already united. It is to help us realize our identity with the Divine Self, to make us know and tune into our intrinsic nature. So, even though this identity is always there, one doesn't realize it because of spiritual ignorance. Yoga provides us a means to remove that ignorance. I do agree with Matthys that Divine Self (atman or soul or pure consciousness) is different from the limited, individual self, identified as body and mind; and that yoga helps us to discriminate between the limited self and the Divine Self and enables us to realize our Divine Self, which is our True Self.

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Trinity and Trimurti

In his piece on John Adams (July/August/September, 2021), Rutvij Holay writes that John Adams (1735–1826), the second US president "states that the Christian concept of the Trinity—the commonly held idea that one God is split into the Father, Son and Holy

Spirit—comes from the Hindu Trimurti of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshvara. This idea, along with the general idea of "not one, but not multiple," addressed by Shankaracharya, has been in Vedic thought for longer than Christianity has existed. Furthermore, seeing how the idea of the Trinity runs directly contradictory to Abrahamic monotheism, it makes sense that there may be a foreign origin to this conception."

I'm afraid none of this is correct. First, the Hindu Trimurti is very different from the Christian Trinity, if for no other reason than that Hindus do not worship Brahma but rather only the other two members. Second, Brahma is said to die and reincarnate every so often and so is not similar to the members of the Christian Trinity. Even the most "heretical" of Christians never held that a member of the Trinity could die, let alone reincarnate only to be replaced by another jiva (soul), as is the case with Brahma.

The "general idea of 'not one, but not multiple'" is also not a description of the Christian Trinity, since, as the name implies, there is one God in three persons: both one and multiple or one in three. This is the exact opposite of the idea of "not one but not multiple."

The Trimurti seems less like a "trinity" and more like three separate deities, one of whom is not even worshiped, brought together to form a faux-trinity by those who wish to correlate the two religions. Further, unless you belong to the Smarta sect or a sect influenced by it, no Hindu thinks all three members of the Trimurti are equal. Vaishnavas, for instance, think only Vishnu is the Supreme Being, etc. That is the opposite of the Orthodox understanding of the Trinity, where all three persons are co-equal.

The *Vedas* make no mention of such a "trimurti" nor is there any evidence that it influenced the Christian Trinity. I also fail to see how the Trinity runs "counter to Abrahamic Monotheism," since the Trinity is not three separate Gods but one God that is three ontologically distinct persons.

Suffice to say that while the overall article was good, its claims about the Christian Trinity are mistaken. I invite the author to read John 1:1 for a more concise statement on the Trinity.

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Woke Hindus

Thank you for publishing such an excellent magazine. I have been reading HINDUISM TODAY since Gurudev, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, started it in San Francisco long ago. It has excellent informative articles and beautiful artwork. I found the article "So, You Call Yourself a 'Woke' Hindu?"

by Ms. Anu Singh (January/February/March 2021) very interesting and timely. A lot of young Hindus are misinformed about their heritage because of biased reporting in the news media, middle-school and university textbooks and teachers. At the other end of the life spectrum (86 years old) compared to Ms. Singh, I have written a brief article to continue the discussion started by her. I will be most grateful if you will kindly consider printing it in a future issue of the magazine. With best wishes to all at HINDUISM TODAY.

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Let's Talk About Skin Color

I found your article "Are We Ready to Have a Real Conversation about Dark Skin?" fascinating. When I first read the headline, I thought, maybe we aren't ready! What words do we use? It's difficult for most people, I'm sure. Thankfully, the author, Anu Kumar, gave us lots of words to use and many ideas to discuss. The thing that struck me hardest is the perception of what beauty is. I was saddened to learn that young women in India believe the lie that lighter skin color determines beauty. That's just not true. All women, all people, are beautiful, and all skin tones are beautiful. With more openness about the subject, we can reassure young women of their worth. There's no logic in trying to conform with conventional images of beauty. It's better to be ourselves.

I often ask myself, wouldn't life be boring if we all looked the same? We can take a lesson from Nina Davuluri, the first Indian-American Miss America, as discussed in the article. She has been confronting the issue of skin color in her COMPLEXion Series. Check out her videos on Facebook. If more of us learn to talk about skin tone in a positive and helpful way, it will be a big step toward a better future.

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Hatha Yoga's Hinduness

Having spent the last year persistently advocating for religious rights in the face of what I observe to be covert efforts to colonize the minds and hearts of our youth with a Godless ideology that is disenfranchising the younger generation from the Sanatana Dharma, I can appreciate why Alabama voted to keep yoga classes out of schools. It was an attempt to prevent their children from being guided by, what is to them, an alien ideology. My opinion is that the idea of hatha yoga not being a Hindu religious practice is inaccurate, and

that promoting that idea will in time erode the protections of the religious freedoms we have under constitutions worldwide. In fact, yoga is integral to the Hindu religion. At this time, I observe a desire among many Hindus in my part of America to blend in and not ruffle feathers. But harmony is not attained by divesting ourselves of our religious heritage and culture for convenience or acceptance, and certainly not to assuage the challenges of ardhha-Hindus. At the end of day, if you want children to know yoga, then teach them yoga as part of our Hindu religious heritage and culture, and they will inevitably share it with their friends.

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Young Writers

I was pleasantly surprised to see four thoughtful articles by Hindu youth in the most recent issue of HINDUISM TODAY. I am excited to see how each of them grow and discover even more about the facets of Hinduism as they continue on life's journey and use the power of the pen along the way.

Shaina's recognition of the difference between believing and praying is astute. I think that we as Hindus are often using

language that isn't suited to describe what it means to be Hindu, or to practice Hinduism. At a young age she recognizes that our practice of Hinduism can look different. For example, I may not join a satsang, go to the temple, or even do puja; it's through karma yoga that I keep myself rooted in dharma.

I am so glad to know that young Santhanaa has discovered the importance of meditation, and that her Bharatanatyam practice is fueled by the stillness that only dhyana provides. I find I am most effective and rooted in dharma when am able to make time to meditate.

Sanjeevani's story about her father coming into the classroom to teach about Hinduism reminded me of when my daughter did a presentation to counter misinformation in 9th grade World Studies class. While my daughter met with some criticism from her Hindu classmates whose families may not have been able to articulate and provide a positive Hindu identity for them, I am encouraged that other young Hindus are lifting up their voices and correcting the narrative, reaching out proactively and creating a positive self identity.

It is great that Rutvij is developing an understanding of how important context is to one's connection to our Indian ethnic culture, linguistic roots and especially one's

practice of Hinduism.

As the first and only Hindu elected to the Michigan state legislature, I look forward to seeing more Hindus in America become engaged in civic issues, pursue public service and seek elected office. I always dedicated some of my time to volunteering and activism, alongside my work, family and community responsibilities. In fact, this commitment to seva and wanting to help others is why I quit my job to run for political office.

I encourage young people to be rooted in dharma, and be aware of the allies and the foes they will face. We adults should pave the way and reduce those barriers. Enabling them to share their stories and letting them know they are heard is a great way to empower them.

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

A Poet Discovers that Ganesha Is a Poet, Too

How to bring Hinduism to life in one's life, and grow closer to the Gods

On this page in our last issue, we introduced Dr. Arjunan Subramaniam, reputed as Malaysia's pre-eminent revenue lawyer. "But I would rather be known as a poet and a lover of God," he pleads. Readers know him as the author of the poems on the inside back cover in every issue.

The life of this devout poet suddenly turned topsy-turvy one day in 1992 when his wife and two sons converted to Christianity. Separation soon followed and Dr. Arjunan's life became that of a "hermit," as he puts it. "I have lived alone ever since, or rather, lived only with our Gods and devas—and poetry.

"This trying event did have a positive effect. It drove me to know my own religion better. I pored over books, went on pilgrimage to Kailas, to Shivaling mountain, Kashmir, and especially to the Prambanan Siva temple in Indonesia, which I found powerful and most transformative." (See p. 85 of this issue.)



sha Himself dictated into the satguru's inner ear, "I am the mother who cares for you....I am the now that makes you ready for the then.... I wait for your return...." I was instantly captured. From that moment, an ever finer understanding of Hinduism started unfolding within me. Then, I found HINDUISM TODAY magazine, the mother lode of life's promise, a moving temple and our point of contact with all things higher. I have not seen its equal anywhere, in English at least. Each issue is like

Dr. Arjunan Subramaniam:

"Hinduism Today is a moving temple, our point of contact with all things higher."

a mother feeding her children. "Here, have some more," she says, "there's no end to this endlessly rich tradition, just turn the page and see."

"My love of God and poetry, my finding Ganesha's poems, then HINDUISM TODAY and Hinduism's bottomless depths all merged into one effervescence that has blessed my existence. I found this journal vital for holding onto our Hindu faith, or recapturing it, or bringing it to life in our life. We need it. Youth need it.

"I like to place my poems in every issue to support the magazine materially and with all my heart as well. I encourage all who have found inspiration in it to lend their support in the way that means most to them. Do it as an offering to God. It will bring you closer to Him; then the world will be yours."

Help HINDUISM TODAY continue to be Hindu dharma's soothing voice at bit.ly/help-HT. Or contact us at: +1-888-464-1008, support@hindu.org

QUOTES & QUIPS

“If you must be mad, be it not for the things of the world. Be mad with the love of God.”

Sri Ramakrishna (1836–1886)

Religion is the secret of life. It teaches us to love, to serve, to forgive, to endure and to interact with our brothers and sisters with empathy and compassion. Advaita (non-duality) is a purely subjective experience. But in daily life it may be expressed as love and compassion. This is the great lesson taught by the great saints and sages of India, the exponents of Sanatana Dharma. **Mata Amritanandamayi**, Kerala-based hugging saint

Wealth's nature is to be unenduring. Upon acquiring it, quickly do that which is enduring. **Tirukural** 333

I swore that I would not suffer from the world's grief and the world's stupidity

and cruelty and injustice and I made my heart as hard in endurance as the nether millstone and my mind as a polished surface of steel. I no longer suffered, but enjoyment had passed away from me.” **Sri Aurobindo** (1872–1950)

We are all visitors to this time, this place. We are just passing through. Our purpose here is to observe, to learn, to grow, to love... and then we return home. **Australian Aboriginal proverb**

Actions are the louder expression of thought. The quality of thought is ordered by the nature of our inner belief and faith. **Swami Chinmayananda** (1916–1993), founder of *Chinmaya Mission*

If you see no reason for giving thanks, the fault lies in yourself. **Susquehannock proverb**

Grace is always present. You imagine it is something somewhere high in the sky, far away, and has to descend. It is really inside you, in your Heart, and the moment you effect subsidence or merger of the mind into its Source, grace rushes forth, sprouting as from a spring within you. **Ramana Maharishi** (1879–1950)

Would you like to save the world from the degradation and destruction it seems destined for? Then step away from shallow mass movements and quietly go to work on your own self-awareness. If you want to awaken all of humanity, then awaken

all of yourself. If you want to eliminate the suffering in the world, then eliminate all that is dark and negative in yourself. Truly, the greatest gift you have to give is that of your own self-transformation. **Lao Tzu** (ca 600 bce), author of *Tao Te Ching*

If people knew how hard I worked to get my mastery, it wouldn't seem so wonderful at all. **Michelangelo** (1475–1564), Italian Renaissance artist

A good teacher reveals the faults you are unable to see. **Yamamoto Tsunetomo** (1659–1719), Samurai and author of *Hagakure*

Where can we go to find God if we cannot see Him in our own hearts and in every living being. **Swami Vivekananda** (1863–1902)

One who plants trees, knowing that he will never sit in their shade, has at least started to understand the meaning of life. **Rabindranatha Tagore** (1861–1941)

By your nature you are free; you have forgotten yourself in your state of slavery. A king may fall asleep and find himself a beggar; he may dream that he is a beggar, but that can in no way interfere with his real sovereignty. **Swami Rama Tirtha** (1873–1906), teacher of *Vedanta*

Practice enjoying the moment. It is where we spend our entire lives. **I Ching**, the *Chinese Book of Changes*

One small step taken to reach a small milestone later helps you achieve the bigger goal. **Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj** (1830–1880), founder of the Maratha Kingdom

Meditation practice doesn't stand by itself; the state of consciousness we achieve in meditation needs to influence how we handle experiences as they come to us in our daily activities. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, publisher of *HINDUISM TODAY*



The belief in the existence of God everywhere, as an all-pervasive, self-effulgent energy and consciousness, creates the attitude of sublime tolerance and acceptance toward others. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927–2001), founder of *HINDUISM TODAY*

DID YOU KNOW?

The Earliest Known Ploughed Field

IN THE NORTH INDIAN STATE OF RAJASTHAN resides what is considered to be one of the ancient Indus Valley Civilization's major provincial capitals, known as Kalibangan. This archaeological site is

unique in that it includes two major fortified sections. The lower one resembles other sites from the early Harappan culture, while the upper section boasts the metropolitan grid layout and city planning associated with later Harappan sites. The whole town is distinguished by its near universal possession of religious fire altars in the

houses. These altars, for the most part, are given their own specified rooms. Unique to this site is the discovery of what appears to be the earliest known ploughed field to be excavated. The field shows that the plow was in use by the 3rd millennium bce and alludes to an unbroken continuity of farming techniques still used today.

In his book *New Light on the Indus Civilization*, former Director General for the Archaeological Survey of India, B. B. Lal, states: “Kalibangan in Rajasthan has given evidence of the earliest (c. 2800 bce) ploughed agricultural field ever revealed through an excavation.... It shows a grid pattern of furrows, placed about 30 cm apart running east-west and others spaced about 190 cm apart running north-south, a pattern remarkably similar to the one used today.”



A look into the past: (clockwise from top right) Kalibangan's cross-ploughed field; a model of the town site, showing the major sections; a view of an excavated street through the town as it stands today

BASICS

Are Hindus Idol Worshipers?

IN HINDUISM, ONE OF THE ULTIMATE attainments is when the seeker transcends the need of all form and symbol. This is the yogi's goal. In this way Hinduism is the least idol-oriented of all the religions of the world. There is no religion that is more aware of the transcendent, timeless, formless, causeless Truth. Nor is there any faith that uses more imagery to represent Truth in preparation for that realization.

The stone or metal Deity images in Hindu temples and shrines are not mere symbols of the Gods. As Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami wrote, “They are the form through which their love, power and blessings flood forth into this world. We may liken this to our ability to communicate with others through a phone. We do not talk to the phone itself; rather we use it as a means of communication with another person. Without the telephone, we could not converse across long distances; and without the sanctified icon in the temple, we cannot easily commune with the Deity.”

Divinity can also be invoked and felt in

a sacred fire, or in a tree, or in the enlightened person of a satguru. In our temples, God is invoked in the sanctum by highly trained priests. Through the practice of yoga, or meditation, we invoke God inside ourselves. The image or icon of worship is a focus for our prayers and devotions.

Another way to explain icon worship is to acknowledge that Hindus believe God is everywhere, in all things, whether stone, wood, creatures or people. So, it is not surprising that they feel comfortable worshipping the Divine in a material manifestation. The Hindu can see God in stone and water, fire, air and ether, and inside their own soul. Indeed, there are Hindu temples which have in the sanctum sanctorum no image at all; just a yantra, a symbolic or mystic diagram. However, the sight of an image enhances the devotee's worship.

Generally, this question is about the “graven images” which are denounced in various other faiths. Yet, isn't it true that all religions have their symbols of holiness? The Christian cross, the holy Kaaba



in Mecca, the Sikh Adi Granth, the Jewish Torah, the meditating Buddha, all such icons, or graven images, are held in reverence. The question is, does this make all such religionists idol worshipers? The answer is yes and no. From our perspective, idol worship is an intelligent, mystical practice.

The human mind adores the use of forms and symbols that awaken reverence, evoke sanctity and spiritual wisdom. Even a fundamentalist Christian who rejects the Catholic and Episcopal forms of idol worship, would be deeply offended if someone showed disrespect for his Bible, for he considers it sacred. His book and the Hindu's icon are surprisingly alike in this way.



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Lion Sage is a child's version of the metaphysical masterpiece *Merging with Siva*. It teaches children how to face life's challenges, but most importantly informs them of their true identity.

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Chapter 16, in which Lion Sage teaches our mouse how to be peaceful and unafraid no matter what challenges life may bring



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FROM THE UPANISHADS You Are All Things

A Vedic reflection on That which is in and through all existence

The following is a translation of the Svetasvatara Upanishad's chapter four, from The Principal Upanishads by S. Radhakrishnan. This Upanishad belongs to the Shukla Yajurveda. The following verses have been edited for clarity.

1. May we be endowed with clear understanding by That which is one, without any colors; from He who, by the manifold exercise of His power, distributes many colors in His hidden purpose; That in whom the potential Universe resides at the beginning and end of existence.
2. That indeed is fire, that is the sun, that is the wind and that is the moon. That, indeed, is the pure. That is Brahma. That is the waters. That is the Lord of Creation.
3. You are the woman. You are the man. You are the youth and the maiden too. You, as an old man, totter along with a staff. Being born in all, You face every direction.
4. You are the dark blue bird, You are the green parrot with red eyes. You are the cloud with the lightning in its womb. You are the seasons and the seas. Having no beginning, You abide through omnipresence. From You, all worlds are born.
5. The One is unborn, red, white and black. You produce manifold individual souls similar in form to You. The One that is unborn remains in delight. The individual soul may too remain in delight, having been caught in activity and then given it up, having had their enjoyment.
6. Two birds, companions who are always united, cling to the self-same tree. Of these two, one eats the sweet fruit and the other observes without eating.
7. On the same tree, a person immersed in the sorrows of the world is deluded and grieves on account of his helplessness. When he sees the Other, who does not consume the fruit of worldly activity—the Lord who is worshiped and His greatness—he becomes freed from sorrow.
8. For him who does not know that indestructible Being of the *Rig Veda*, whereon in the highest heaven all the Gods reside, of what avail is the *Rig Veda* to him? They, indeed, who know That, rest fulfilled.
9. The *Vedas*, the sacrifices, the rituals, the observances, the past, the future and what the *Vedas* declare, all this the Maker sends forth out of this; in this the other is confined by maya.
10. Know then that matter is *maya* and the wielder of maya is the Great Lord. This whole world is pervaded by beings that are parts of Him.



11. The One, who rules every single source, in whom all this dissolves at the end and comes together at the beginning of creation, who is the Lord, the bestower of blessing, the adorable God—by discerning Him one goes forever in peace.
12. He who is the source and origin of the Gods, the ruler of all, Rudra, the great seer, who, when He was born, beheld the source, the golden, cosmic egg, may He endow us with clear understanding.
13. He who is the Overlord of the Gods, in whom the worlds rest, He who is the Lord of two-footed and four-footed beings, to what God shall we offer our oblations?
14. More minute than the minute, in the midst of confusion, the creator of all, of manifold forms, the one embracer of everything, by knowing Him as the auspicious, one attains peace forever.
15. He indeed is the protector of the world in time, the Lord of all, hidden in all things, in whom the seers of Brahman and the Deities are united. By knowing Him thus, one cuts the cords of death.
16. By knowing Him, the auspicious, hidden in all beings like the film exceedingly fine that rises out of clarified butter, the one embracer of the universe, by knowing God one is released from all fetters.
17. That God, the maker of all things, the great Self, ever seated in the heart of creatures, He is framed by thought, by the heart, by the mind. They who know That become immortal.
18. When there is no darkness, then there is neither day nor night, neither being nor non-being, only the auspicious One alone. That is the imperishable, the adorable light of Savitri that the ancient wisdom was born from.
19. Not above, not across, not in the middle, can He be seen, nor can anyone grasp Him. There is no true likeness of Him, whose name is Great Glory.
20. His form is not to be seen; no one sees Him with the eye. Those who through heart and mind know Him as abiding in the heart become immortal.
21. "You are unborn"—with this thought someone in fear approaches you. O Rudra, may Your face which is gracious protect me for ever.
22. Rudra, bring no harm to child or grandchild, to life, to cattle or horses. Slay not our heroes, for we call on you always with oblations.

SARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN (1888–1975) was an Indian philosopher and statesman, India's first vice president (1952–1962) and second president (1962–1967)



KARNATAKA

On the Riverbed Of Shalmala

IN THE VILLAGE OF SONDA, ABOUT 10.5 miles from the town of Sirsi in the South Indian state of Karnataka, the Shalmala river flows quietly through lush green forests. Approaching the river, you see carved granite stones all around, but nothing prepares you for what you see at the river when the water levels are low. All over the riverbed are boulders finely carved with Sivalingas and Nandi bulls, the vahana of Siva, as well as some Nagas, or serpent sculptures. Some larger boulders have been creatively chiseled to look like a big bull. Some of the carvings are unfinished. Sometimes the Siv-

alinga is done but the Nandi has just been marked on the stone; in some cases the Linga is half finished.

Looking at the base of the boulders, you realize they are a part of the riverbed, therefore must have been carved *in situ*. As the stones stay submerged in the river for the better part of the year, the carving must have been performed in the dry summer months when they became accessible. Imagine sculptors sitting in the middle of the river with their hammers and chisels to carve out Siva and His vahana.

Legend goes that the King of Sonda, Swadi Akasappa Nayaka, was childless. Advised to create 1,008 Sivalingas to acquire offspring, he had every stone available to him carved into a Sivalinga. He was indeed blessed with children, so these can be seen as a mark of wish fulfilment. This riverbed has a sibling

in Cambodia, where thousands of Lingas are carved on the bed of Siem Reap River. Traditions have mysterious ways of traveling great distances.

HYDERABAD

Visa-Giving Chilkur Balaji

ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF HYDERABAD IS a small temple with blue walls and colorful gopurams. The shops outside give you a punch card and a pen along with the flowers and other offerings for the temple. This is puzzling unless you know the tradition here. Inside the grounds you see everyone carrying the card and pen as they do *parikrama*, or circumambulations, around the tiny temple. The card has 108 numbered boxes, to count the optimum number of parikramas. On completing each round, you bow before the Deity and punch the card, then start the next circle.

This is how devotees thank the Deity, Chilkur Balaji, for obtaining a visa—to travel to their dream destination for education, work or leisure. It seems that in the



(Clockwise from left) Sivalingas carved into the rocks of the Shalmala riverbed ever receive abhishekam as the waters flow by; a woman holds up a punch card from the Chilkur Balaji temple, used to count circumambulations around the temple as thanks for granting successful visas; acquiring visas can be a challenge for anyone, a little divine encouragement couldn't hurt; outside the entrance of the small Chilkur Balaji temple, with the chariot shed to the left

SPECIAL FEATURE

Unusual Temples & Shrines of India

BY ANURADHA GOYAL

EVERY HINDU TEMPLE IS A HOME OF ITS DEITIES, where they live just like we live in our homes, following a set routine through the day and celebrating special occasions around the year. Temples themselves are a form of Deity, designed to make us feel their presence at both the gross and subtle levels. Historically, as a public place that belongs to everyone, they have been the nerve system that keeps society together. These sacred chambers and their ecosystems have evolved along with human civilization. The variety and diversity of temple structure, a science and an art in itself, marries aesthetics and storytelling with brilliant architecture and engineering. The essence of the temple is the relationship between its enshrined Deity and the devotees who take care of that Being, worship and

share their everyday joys and sorrows with the Deity. It is here that the most intimate communion occurs between Deity and devotees. We find magnificent stone temples in the southern parts of India and glimpse them in the ruins of North India, but it is easy to miss the unusual, simple temples scattered all around the land of Bharat. Each of those sites has a unique story, showing how temple traditions can arise from specific circumstances and situations. They also tell us about the immense faith Hindus have in their Deities, to approach them like a child reaching out to parents or friends, sharing their love, needs and best-kept secrets. Come with me for a journey to some of India's unique and unusual temples. Some may surprise you and expand your concept of what a temple can be.





1980s, people wanting to go abroad, mostly for study, prayed here for quick visas, and their wishes were granted. The trend caught on, and the temple came to be known as the Visa Temple.

Fittingly, *chilkur* means small, and the temple is dedicated to Balaji. History tells how a devotee, unable to make his annual visit to the grand Tirupati Balaji Temple due to ill health, discovered a murti of Balaji here. Balaji had appeared to him in a vision to fulfill his wish, and the temple was constructed to mark the appearance. Over time, the practice developed to make eleven rounds of the temple while making a wish. When your wish comes true, you come back and do 108 parikramas. So, those who are circumambulating with punch card in hand are actually thanking the Deity for a wish fulfilled.

Unusually, this temple has no hundi (donation box). It does not accept donations. One is also advised not to close their eyes while praying, but talk to Balaji eye to eye. Possibly because wish fulfilment is the focus of this temple, a priest told me this is a temple of the young, where children bring their parents rather than the other way round.

UTTARAKHAND

Nyay Devata: God of Justice

IN THE KUMAON HILLS OF UTTARAKHAND, surrounded by tall deodar trees, is the temple of Golu Devta, the presiding Deity of this region. Entering the temple, you are surrounded by thousands of brass bells.

Small, big, huge and giant brass bells hang everywhere, most of them tied with a red cloth called chunri.

Hanging from the walls of the corridor around the sanctum are piles of judicial stamp papers and handwritten letters. The Deity here is Nyay Devta, the God of Justice. When legal battles are not solved in court and people do not get justice in the world of humans, they put their petitions before Golu Devta to sort out disputes and disagreements. Petitioners firmly believe He will deliver justice to them in His own way.

Reading a few of these letters, you understand the devotees' deep connection with the God. For example, a person with a terminally ill family member writes that the doctors have tried their best, but doctors are only human after all, requesting divine intervention from Golu Devta. Students share their dreams with him, seek help in clearing competitive exams, and request guidance in staying on the right path throughout their lives.

Golu Devta is considered as an incarnation of Gaur Bhairav (Siva), and is worshiped all over the region. Legends connect Him to the two primary dynasties that ruled this region—Chand and Katyuri. It is said that when he was born, his stepmothers replaced him with a stone in the palace and left him near the river, where he was saved and raised by a fisherman. As a child, he

took a wooden horse to the lake, where his stepmothers were bathing, and asked it to drink water. When his stepmothers laughed, he told them that if a woman can give birth to a stone, why can't a wooden horse drink water? His father heard of this, understood what had happened and made him the king. He was well known for his delivery of justice during his rule and continues to be approached for that purpose. The wooden horse became his vahana or vehicle; in the temple, he can be seen riding a white wooden horse.

As for the bells, devotees tie one when their wishes are fulfilled: all those bells represent wishes that have been fulfilled.



ANURADHA GOYAL



VARANASI

World of Miniature Sivalingas

KASHI, OR VARANASI, IS THE SPIRITUAL epicenter of India, some say of the world. It is the city of Siva; where one can find a Sivalinga or a small Siva temple in nearly every nook and corner. Hindus nearing death come to Kashi to look at death face-to-face at Manikarnika Ghat and Harishchandra Ghat.

In the ancient Jangamwadi Math, located not far from the famous Dashashwamedha Ghat, one finds a million miniature Sivalingas. This math belongs to the Vira Shaiva or Lingayat community that primarily hails from the states of Karnataka and Maharashtra, as evidenced by the sign boards in Kannada and Marathi here. This sect believes in and worships Sivalinga and nothing else. Their journey with that aniconic mark of God starts even before birth, when a small Sivalinga is tied around the belly of the expectant mother to protect the infant. Soon after birth, the same Sivalinga is placed on a string around the baby's neck.

Jangamwadi Math has rooms full of miniature Sivalingas neatly arranged in rows, usually surrounding a larger Sivalinga. Thousands surround the Sivalinga inside the main temple. These are offered by the devotees during the auspicious month of Shravana, which falls during the monsoon months and is well known across India for worship of Siva. Devotees offer Sivalingas for departed loved ones, especially those who died an un-

natural death, and as part of the usual rites for departed ancestors. Wherever you stand in the Math, you see so many Sivalingas that you are struck by the presence of Siva around you. No one tries to precisely quantify the number of Sivalingas here, they are so numerous and many more keep coming in.

CHHATTISGARH

Rudra Siva of Tala

THE 7TH- AND 8TH-CENTURY RUINS OF Tala are situated at the confluence of the Shivrath and Maniari rivers in Chhattisgarh's Bilaspur District in central eastern India. The place is widely known for the Devrani Jethani temple, which looks beautiful even in its utterly decimated condition. A

20th-century excavation here revealed a stunning piece of sculpture—a two-meter-tall murti in red sandstone of a Deity in the standing posture. Uniquely, the various body parts are carved using all possible animals and serpents. This is an excellent example of composite art, where a larger image is created using the smaller complete images of related or unrelated objects. The headgear is a coil of snakes, the nose a combination of chameleon and scorpion, the ears as peacocks, eyebrows as frogs, shoulders as crocodiles, fingers

like five-fanged snakes, breasts as humans, belly as pot, lions on knees, and many more beings in finer details.

Serpents dominate the sculpture from top to bottom. There are also many signs of the zodiac. Unfortunately, some parts of the murti have broken, and we may have lost some crucial details. It is locally called Rudra Siva, and may represent the Pashupatinath form of Siva where He is seen as the protector of pashus, ("animals" or "beings").

Rudra Siva, the signature sculpture of the state of Chhattisgarh, has been replicated in museums elsewhere. Yet, no other known sculpture is similar to this one. This uniqueness may be rooted in the place it was found. Currently it is kept locked at the site, though you can see it from outside. We do not know what the sculptor was trying to convey, nor the intention of the patron who commissioned this unusual sculpture.



ANURADHA GOYAL

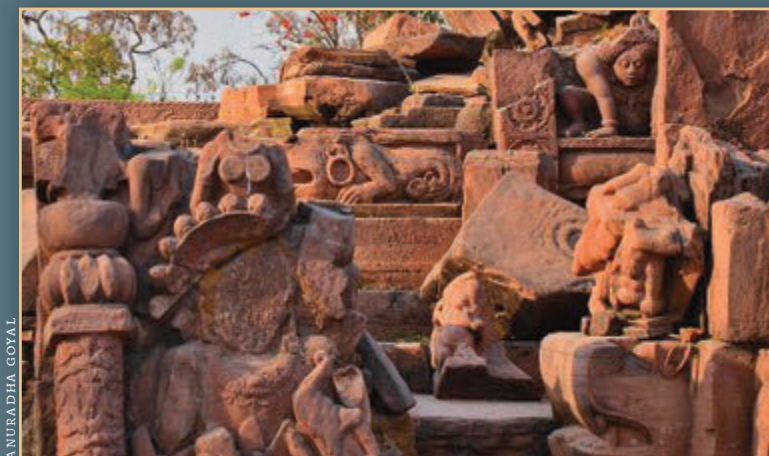


ANURADHA GOYAL



ANURADHA GOYAL

(Clockwise from right) A two-meter tall, sandstone murti at the Devrani Jethani temple complex, uniquely carved with many different animals; ruins in the Devrani Jethani temple area; handwritten letters line the walls of the Golu Devta temple's interior; the bell-embellished entryway to the temple; one of many rooms at the Jangamwadi Math filled with a thousand and eight Sivalingas



ANURADHA GOYAL



ODISHA

Chausath Yogini Temples

OTHER UNIQUE SCULPTURES ARE found in the Yogini temples, most of which are lost to us. Thankfully a few survive in central and eastern India. Close to the east coast, near the city of Bhubaneswar in Odisha, is Hirapur, a small village named after a queen. This is home to one of the smaller but relatively better-preserved Chausath Yogini temples, dating back to the 9th century ce. *Chausath* in Sanskrit and Hindi means sixty-four. These temples are dedicated to the groups of 64 Yoginis who serve Siva and Shakti. They are in fact the manifestations of Shakti Herself.

Most classical temples are rectangular in shape, with a tall shikhara, or superstructure, over the garbhagriha, the sanctum sanctorum. In contrast, Chausath Yogini temples have no roof; they are open to the sky, freely interacting with the elements. They are circular in shape, with a small entrance. Seen from above, they resemble the yoni, female genitals, a symbol of fertility and creation. They also resemble a wheel, called yogini chakra. In the center is the place for a Sivalinga, which is surrounded by the murtis of Yoginis carved on the inner circular wall of the temple. Each Yogini is identifiable through the ayudhas, or icons, in her hands,

or the vahanas or vehicles She rides or stands on. The moods of the Yoginis vary from benevolent to fierce.

No two Yogini temples have the same set of Yoginis on their walls. At Hirapur, for example, one sees the rare murti of Vinayaki, the Shakti of Vinayaka or Ganesha. The chief Yogini in Chausath, located opposite the entrance, is Mahamaya, who stands upon a human head. Well adorned with garments and flowers, She is worshiped regularly. Other Yoginis, too, are offered flowers. In the middle is a platform with Bhairava murtis. Chandipath, the most popular yagna for Shakti worship, is performed here during Navaratri. On the outer periphery of the circular temple are nine larger murtis of Goddess Durga. In the middle of Mahamaya Pushkarni tank, close by, is a small square temple, as is typical of village tanks in Odisha.

New Delhi, India's capital, was once called Yoginipura, the city of Yoginis. Only one Yogini temple there has survived the ravages of invasions and time—the Yogmaya temple near the famous Qutub Minar, which was built after destroying 27 Hindu and Jain temples, many of which may have been Yogini temples. The parliament building in Delhi was built in a circular design resembling the Chausath Yogini temples.

GOA

Becoming Krishna

THE VILLAGE OF MARCEL, IN GOA, IS home to the Devaki Krishna temple. Immediately after Devaki gave birth to Krishna in jail in Mathura, He was taken

across the river Yamuna to Gokul village, where He grew up with Yashoda, His foster mother. Devaki and Krishna never met during His childhood. It is said that when Devaki finally saw grown-up Krishna, she yearned to hold Him in her arms as an infant—and Krishna took the form of an infant to fulfill His mother's desire. The temple celebrates that moment; its main murti has Devaki holding baby Krishna. This is the only temple dedicated to the mother-son duo.

This temple is also known for its unique mud festival, held in July during the peak monsoon season, when the ground is sloshy with mud. Males in the village, from toddlers to seniors, gather in front of the temple. The owner of a local grocery store applies coconut oil to their bodies, with elders putting cotton in their ears to denote all who have been oiled. Then all chant "Jai Vitthal, Hari Vitthal" and enter the temple. They take a bit of oil from the temple's big oil tub, dab it on their bodies, and return outside to play games in the mud—blind man's game, tug of war, kabaddi and many more, concluding it all with a war of words. These are believed to be the same games that Krishna played in his youth, which they are re-enacting for the pleasure of Devaki, the Deity of this temple, who missed this during her son's childhood.

Meanwhile, the village families are distributing sweets to everyone present. In the final act, Dahi Handi, men form a pyramid to reach a pot of curd hung high on the tree. The pot is broken and the curd falls on everyone in the pyramid. They then go to the local washermen's quarters to clean bathe. This is one of the most fun festivals you can witness. Some see it as an annual earthing exercise.

Honoring the Divine Feminine



KERALA

Calming your Nerves

IN THE CHOTTANIKARA TEMPLE IN THE city of Kochi in Kerala, Devi—as She who enlightens—lives in her Trigunatamak form, which embodies all the three qualities (*sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*) in the one murti. There is a fascinating story about how Adi Shankaracharya brought her to this area, his land of birth; but the uniqueness of this temple is its ability to cure mental disorders.

One level below the main temple here, connected by a wide staircase surrounded by a temple tank, is the Kizhukkavu Temple, where pujas are performed here for the men-

tally disturbed. The Guruthi Puja, performed on Friday evenings, is considered particularly beneficial for mental issues, but to get completely cured, the prescribed worship is for 41 days. People who have been cured return and conclude the process by putting a nail into a tree at the temple with a hammer they bring with them. Many nails adorn the thick tree trunks here.

Dozens of small wooden cradles hang from the same trees, tied by those who hope the Goddess will bestow them with children so that their homes, too, will have cradles.

A unique way to worship here is the bursting of firecrack-

ers. There is a counter where you can buy a ticket, and an official there will burst the crackers on your behalf. These sound almost like gunshots. Incidentally, gun salutes to the Goddess are given at many Goddess temples in India.



(Clockwise from top) The mud festival at the Devaki Krishna Temple in Goa; an image of Trigunatamak Devi at Kochi's Chottanikara Temple; the sacred tree at the Kizhukkavu Temple, which is known for helping to alleviate mental problems; the small Chausath Yogini temple in Hirapur; a murti of Vinayaki, situated as one of the sixty-four yogini statues that line its walls





in the small Himalayan village of Giu, in the Spiti valley of Himachal Pradesh, where the mummy of a Buddhist lama was discovered some years ago when a road was being repaired. Locals believe he was Sangha Tenzin, a monk of the Gelugpa order of Buddhism. He is sitting in a meditation, one hand in dhyana mudra with tips of forefinger and thumb touching. His nails and hair are said to still be growing, and his teeth are intact.

Radiocarbon dating tells us the mummy is roughly 550 years old, and the lama was in his early 40s when he died. No trace of any chemical has been found on his body. Some believe this monk knew a technique of natural self-mummification by gradually giving up food while entering a deep meditative state. Others propose he was buried under an avalanche while meditating in this cold desert region amidst naked snow-clad

mountains.

Though Giu can only be reached by a detour from any other route, the lama is starting to turn this remote Himalayan village into a tourist destination. A temple has been built around the mummy, which is wrapped in the yellow monastic robes and protected within a glass enclosure. It is surrounded by coins, currency and other items of worship offered by visitors.

HIMACHAL PRADESH

Mummy in Meditation

UNLIKE EGYPT, INDIA IS NOT KNOWN for its mummies. However, some saints and lamas have entered samadhi while meditating and turned themselves into mummies. One such can be seen

RAJASTHAN

Where Rats Rule

THE FAMOUS KARNI MATA TEMPLE, popularly known as the Rat Temple, is located in Deshnok village, close to Bikaner in Rajasthan. The premises swarm with thousands of rats, lovingly called Kaabas and treated as the progeny of the presiding Deity Karni Mata, who lived some 600 years ago. She is the kuladevi (family protectress) of the Charan community here and of the royal family of Bikaner. Over time she came to be revered as a Goddess, and the rats here as her children. Her temple is modest, with a small murti of her that has been covered with silver. Nearby her life, documented in a fort-like museum, honoring her as an illustrious ancestor who and saved the community through miraculous deeds. Karni Mata is also considered a form of Hinglaj Mata, whose hill shrine is now part of Pakistan.

Most of the rats here are brown. The few white ones are considered extremely auspicious, so people visiting the temple look around for them. Seeing a white rat is believed to bring loads of good luck.

Here rats get priority over everyone else. The temple is their home, and you are just a visitor. Everywhere are pots of milk and piles of yellow bundi laddus, which the rats feast in great numbers. The marble façade of the temple is carved with rows of rats, each holding a laddu in its hands. Visitors must

enter the temple barefoot, not even wearing socks. They cannot step over a rat or hurt one in any way. If by mistake you hurt one, you have to offer one made in silver at the temple. This unique temple reminds us to peacefully coexist with all kinds of living beings, as we are all the children of the same mother nature. It is believed that the total number of people in the Charan community and rats remains constant.

SIKKIM

Baba Mandir of Nathula

IN THE HIGH HIMALAYAN MOUNTAINS of Sikkim, near Nathula Pass, is the scenic Tsomgo Lake, 385 miles from Gangtok. At an elevation of over 12,000 feet, this tourist attraction stays frozen most of the year. This is a border area between India and China and has often seen military action. Near the lake is the Baba Mandir, a unique temple dedicated to Sepoy Harbhajan Singh from Punjab, soldier who served in the Indian Army in the 1960s.

While leading a mission here, he fell into an icy cold river and died. His body was lost for days, until he appeared in the dreams of his comrades and directed them to his corpse. His bunker was converted into a memorial temple. There a photograph of him in full military uniform is enshrined, and an empty chair is kept for him at meetings. It

is believed he continues to perform his duty at the border by keeping guard at night and warning Indian sentries through dreams. People bring back bottles of water from here as his blessing. This is a legend we have seen taking birth in our own generation.

VARANASI

Ode to Bharat Mata

THIS ESSAY CANNOT BE COMPLETE without mention of Bharat Mata temples, which can be seen at Varanasi, Haridwar, Ujjain and few other places. In Sanatana Dharma, the Earth has always been treated as mother. Motherland refers to the land we took birth in and belong to. Bharat Mata is a Deity that came into manifestation during the Indian Independence movement.

The first painting of Bharat Mata was created in 1905 by Abanindranath Tagore, nephew of Rabindranath Tagore. She is depicted wearing a saffron sari and, like most Goddesses, having four arms. The two upper hands hold the scriptures and a piece of white cloth; the lower hands hold a sheaf of paddy and an akshamala (string of prayer beads). Thus, She holds the essentials of human life, Shiksha-Diksha-Anna-Vastra: education, initiation, food and clothing. The original painting can now be seen at Victoria Memorial Hall Museum in Kolkata.

Within a couple of decades, a temple to Bharat Mata was built in Varanasi by Babu Siva Prasad Gupta, enshrining a to-scale 3D

topographic map of India. Carved in marble from Makrana in Rajasthan, the map depicts, water bodies, oceans, islands, plateaus, plains and over 450 mountain peaks. Poet Maithili Sharan Gupta wrote an ode to this temple, and Mahatma Gandhi inaugurated it in 1936.

Conclusion

Studying and visiting these unique temples give us a glimpse of how their legends were formed, slowly took the shape of beliefs and finally became tradition. We also learn of the devotees' faith in these temples, which is strengthened every time their wishes manifest, as evidenced in the rituals associated with thanking the Deity.

Formal temple architecture is a well-established art and science, but there are many temples that take a detour and carve their own niche. Some variations, like Golu Devta and Karni Mata, are limited to a small region, while others can be found across the country. Some deliver justice, others relieve pain, and some simply leave you wondering about their story. Some celebrate the land, while others celebrate its brave men and women. Anyone who nurtures or enlightens can be a Deity for us—be it the land, facets of nature, living beings or unseen elementals with whom we coexist. 🙏

Seeing the Sacred from the tiniest creatures to the highest peaks



SHUTTERSTOCK

(Counter-clockwise from top) The Giu village's monastic mummy; a throng of hungry rats feast on milk at the Karni Mata temple in Rajasthan; the Baba Mandir at Tsomgo Lake; the 3-D map of Mother India in the Bharat Mata temple in Varanasi; the historic painting of Bharat Mata by Abanindranath Tagore



BEP



ANURADHA GOYAL



WIKI COMMONS



CULTURE

Hinduism in the American Media

They may just be fictional shows, but the often-stereotyped depictions of Indian characters on TV have a real-life impact

BY RUTVIJ HOLAY

FOR MANY OF THE INDIAN COMMUNITY RAISED IN THE UNITED states, including myself, it is a rite of passage to see our religion depicted in TV shows and movies. For most of us, this is the first impression of how the average American seems to view our way of life. Depending on the show, we're depicted as money-grubbing store owners, nerds with no social life or devout pagans following exotic Gods and traditions. Some of us ignore these stereotypes, some act like the stereotypical characters, and some shun our culture altogether. Given the influence that these shows can have on us, it is essential that we understand them and their influence, so that we may educate ourselves accordingly. To do so, I propose to group their representation of Hindus and Hinduism into three eras: the Apu era, the Ravi era and the Mira era.

The Apu Era: 1989

The Apu era, named after Apu Nahasapeemapetilon from *The Simpsons* cartoon, is well known among those above 30, and may be the most publicized example of Indian representation on a TV show. None of the producers, writers or voice actors is Indian. Apu, with the exotic, long last name (which doesn't follow any known Hindu naming practice), is portrayed as a devout, hardworking Hindu who runs a Kwik-e-Mart convenience store. From this characterization, the stereotypes flow freely. The workaholic ("I work 22 hours a day") who just nearly missed work because he was shot, is clearly derived

from the "model minority" myth, the idea that all Hindus, and Asians in general, are naturally more hardworking than all others.

Apu is portrayed as a Hindu vegan devoted to Ganesha, and a believer in reincarnation and karma. In part, this all sets the stage to use stereotypes about Indian culture as plot devices, such as in season 7, episode 22, when Apu goes to a party. After eating some tofu hot dogs, he sees a girl with no ring on her finger, and says, "Ah! No ring, I see, so you are only arranged to be married." A few moments later, after dancing with her, to quell rumors of any pending affair, he promised that he would tell everyone she was "untouchable." Through this scene, creators of the show implied that caste, and Untouchability along with it, exists in the United States. This serves to solidify the myth of the wider caste pyramid, often used by missionaries to target certain Indian groups for conversion, and defame Hinduism in the process.

Furthermore, anyone who has firsthand experience with the Indian system of marriage understands that arranged marriages aren't an oppressive tradition where the girl is destined to be married to a certain man at birth. Rather, the girl can say no to a match, and even choose her own husband, as long as the rest of the family approves. There's an entire episode in season eight devoted to Apu's arranged marriage with a girl he hasn't seen in twenty years. He first tries to escape, but then upon meeting the girl, falls in love with her and proceeds to have eight children.



Even though the show is inconsistent in its references to Hindu customs—even the same custom, as we saw with marriage—and even though Indians understand this is a cartoon exaggeration, many of their non-Indian and non-Hindu counterparts may not. In fact, I've heard a middle-aged teacher claim to students that Hindus "have a caste system that is so bad you just have to get out." I have no doubt that, for her and many others, shows like *The Simpsons* played a role in their ignorance. People who influence millions, and who are expected to be far more educated, have also made such claims. For example, President Joe Biden joked that "You cannot go to a 7-11 or a Dunkin' Donuts unless you have a slight Indian accent," a quip that may have very well been inspired by Apu and his Kwik-e-Mart.

The Ravi Era: 2007-2015

Many people my age grew up with the TV sitcom *Jessie*, with its Indian-American character Ravi, one of several adopted children under the care of nanny Jessie. By this time, and in contrast to Apu, representation of Hindus was broadening in both the number of shows in which Hindus appeared and the age groups targeted, so other notable characters emerged as well, such as Baljeet from the *Phineas and Ferb* cartoon.

As more Indians moved into the IT sector, began to win the spelling bees (every national one from 2008 to 2019), and achieved much more in the US, a common theme emerged in their representation: Every single one of the characters in these shows was a nerd. They did very well in school, especially in math and science, and had little to no social life or athletic ability.

One of the first representations of this stereotype was Baljeet. In season two, episode 14, he signs up for a "Summer Rock" class, assuming it is about geology, before learning it is about rock and roll. This makes him so mad he spends the class doing math. In the end, as he performs a rock song, he yells out the lyrics, "Somebody give me a grade—and make it an A."

The representation of Apu was universally panned as negative, especially in Hari Kondabolu's documentary, *The Problem with*



Cartoon Hindus: (left to right) Apu tells the girl she is "only arranged to be married" as she has no ring—later he quells rumors of an affair by saying she was "untouchable;" nerd Baljeet with the "Summer Rock" episode; shouting out "Give me a grade—and make it an A"

Apu. Having all Indians as nerds in the Ravi era is, in my opinion, a two-edged sword. On the one hand, this is in many ways a positive stereotype, something that people admire about our community, and I can't imagine many who mind being called intelligent. Such stereotypes inspire our people to be better, to get better grades. From personal experience, I can certainly tell you that it helped my test scores.

On the other hand, try as they might, there are students in our community who cannot earn such grades. They may feel inferior, since all Indians are meant to be smart—at least according to these shows. I've heard fellow students say, "I'm Indian; of course I'm in all honors," or something similar. Such stereotypes, especially since they are embraced by our own community, have been known to cause mental health problems, making this an important issue.

At the same time, it may lead to resentment from other communities, who feel that we are unfairly better off. This leads to discrimination both from individuals, and through systemic programs such as racial preferences which favor non-Asians over Asians in college admissions in the United States.

In terms of religion, I found the coverage of Hinduism in this era far more confusing. In *Phineas and Ferb*, Baljeet doesn't talk about Hindu culture much—which is a problem in and of itself—but Ravi does make extensive mention of it. Perhaps the most interesting

.....
Not really karma: Luke pranks Ravi by somehow nailing his sleeping bag on a door; Ravi exacts revenge by his own prank, involving bird droppings—which he claims is only a return of Luke's earlier karma





ALL PHOTOS: DISNEY



Missing the point: (left) Holi is more than a non-traditional water-balloon fight; (right) and Diwali is more than ladoo sweets

incident would be in season one, episode three, which focuses on karma. In it, Ravi's adopted brother Luke plays a prank on him, and to get revenge, Ravi devises an elaborate plot revolving around karma. He warns Luke of "cosmic payback," in the form of karma, and sets up a series of pranks to make Luke believe that karma is real, then makes him stand outside in the rain as a sort of penance.

This idea of karma as some form of "cosmic payback" has always been a flawed understanding of karma in the American mainstream. Rather, karma is better understood as an extension of Newton's Third Law of Motion. However, rather than governing mundane actions such as throwing a ball in the air, karma also extends to moral and immoral actions.

Towards the end, Ravi's nanny Jessie learns about the plot and makes Ravi admit that he set up the pranks on his own and they were not some superstitious "cosmic payback." One wonders what would happen if a similar incident occurred with a central principal of Islam or Christianity—for example, if Jessie made some Rehman or Robert admit that Allah or Jesus wasn't real. I can imagine that, rightfully so, there would be far more backlash, and the producer of the show, Disney, would be forced to apologize.

Since this show was written seven years ago, much has happened in the US in terms of "political correctness" which has changed the way stereotypes about minority cultures, including Hinduism, are presented in the media, for better and worse. At the same time, during these seven years, in my experience, there has been a distinct rise in hostility towards Hindus and Hinduism for various reasons.

The Mira Era: 2020

It is perhaps in an attempt at political correctness that the current generation is growing up watching shows remarkable for their increased accuracy and lack of stereotypes. In the kids' cartoon show *Mira, Royal Detective*, for example, the characters have Indic names, play sitars and tablas, and celebrate Indian festivals. Compared to Apu, who listened to Middle Eastern music portrayed as "Indian" and celebrated a far more intentional mockery of Indian festivals, it is a wonder how far we have come.

Unfortunately, the show's producers have done this by sidelining Hinduism altogether. In season one, episode 19, on Diwali, there is extensive portrayal of rangoli decorations, divya lamp and other aspects of how the holiday is celebrated. Then at one point, Mira mentions that Diwali isn't Diwali without

ladoos—and her pet mongooses devouring the sweets becomes a recurring motif in the show. But there is not a single mention of Shri Ram and His triumphant return to Ayodhya or any of the other traditions associated with Diwali across India. Delicious as ladoos may be, there's no doubt that one can honor Diwali without them; yet few Hindus would do observe the festival without Shri Ram, Goddess Lakshmi, or one of the many other Deities worshiped this day.

This treatment isn't limited to Diwali. Season one, episode 25, features the spring Holi festival, but there is no mention of the downfall of the demon Holika or of Krishna and Radha. Instead, the episode features a Bollywood-style dance and a parade in which the main activity is the tossing of colors. This includes a dodgeball-like game involving water balloons, something that isn't even done in India.

Conclusion

All this reminds me of a saying in a Sanskrit textbook of mine:

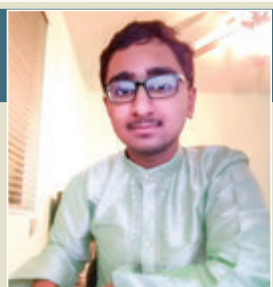
"Without the *Vedas*, *Gitas* and *Ramayana*, and without the poems of Kalidas, India is not India." When examining the representation of Hindus in the media in its entirety, then, it is important to acknowledge that older shows such as the *Simpsons* and *Jessie* attacked our *Vedas*, *Gitas* and *Ramayana* no doubt, but it should be noted that they did keep them. In that sense, it was a heavily flawed representation of our culture, but it was Indian culture nonetheless.

Mira and shows like it, to their credit, don't bash any of our religious beliefs, but that's only because they aren't there at all. They've taken away the philosophy and stories of the *Vedas*, *Gita* and *Ramayana*, and in doing so, there is a strong argument that they've taken away Indian culture itself. That they do it to appeal to Western tastes is only more hypocritical, given the emphasis that Disney and other television channels have placed on understanding other cultures.

I've talked with many community members on this issue. Some have said they prefer that producers not talk about Hindu culture at all, if the only way they can do so is by attacking it. Others have argued that showing India without Hinduism is just as insulting, if not worse. To me, the question we need to think about is: in public would we as a community prefer a culture that is attacked, or one that is nonexistent?

About the Author

Rutvij Holay, 15, of Irvine, California, an executive-committee member of Americans for Equality PAC and a budding Hindu political activist, is presently working with his local school district and a textbook company to change how Hinduism is depicted in education. He can be reached at rutvij.holay@gmail.com.



SERVICE

Where My Pursuit of Dharma Took Me

The new Hindu Community Institute has begun training religious counselors to meet the needs of Hindus in America

BY GAURAV RASTOGI, CALIFORNIA

A FEW YEARS AGO, AN UNSHAKABLE thought began to settle in my mind—"Engage more in the world, for dharma." What could it mean? Was it a call to action? It has taken me some time to figure it out. What more could I do beyond the teaching and writing I already did around yoga and dhyana? I kept looking for ideas. One day I heard a talk about a new institute that was looking for volunteers. I showed up at the first board meeting of a small group that became the Hindu Community Institute (www.hinduci.org). This is our story from that modest beginning.

Have We Done Our Duty?

Our group had first come together during the 2016-2018 debate over the portrayal of Hinduism in California middle-school textbooks. In subsequent years, we met every week to deliberate: "We have made our money, achieved our success, but have we done our duty?" The answer was clear. We all perceived a sense of loss and disconnection from our religious and cultural inheritance. Hindus have a rich and long tradition, but we ourselves had done little to bring it with us to the United States, where we had come in search of a better life. While we developed our careers, Hindu ideas continued to travel out into the West and achieve mainstream acceptance. Yoga, pranayama, reincarnation, karma, meditation, vegetarianism, cremating the dead—even putting haldi (turmeric) into your milk—these are no longer considered fringe ideas here. But what had we done to present the system of living that these ideas had come from? While good ideas have been absorbed piecemeal from Hindu tradition, the image of Hinduism in the popular mind remains limited to the cliché of caste, cow and abject poverty. Our rich philosophy and tradition are unrecognized in the West, though certain elements are pervasive everywhere, unbranded.

Our more recent immigrant families, also, have continued the tradition of education and career enhancement, making us the most successful minority group in America. But while our kids win spelling bees and robotics competitions, we have not given them the rich stories of our tradition that have been in our DNA for hundreds of generations. We have also failed to communicate to our children that our tradition extends



beyond the visits to temples and observation of festivals. The river Sarasvati, when it began to dry up in ancient times, still flowed strongly from the Himalayas for centuries, but disappeared hundreds of miles before reaching the ocean. Like that, our tradition, we felt, is going to dry up unless we do something. We carry a debt to our ancestors who have transmitted the tradition over the millennia. We owe it to them to pass it on to the future through our children and, in the process, hopefully even enhance it.

Tradition, like muscle, is a use-it-or-lose-it proposition. A few generations of under-use or outright neglect makes a tradition archaic and meaningless. It is only by putting the Hindu tradition's knowledge to use to improve our lives today that we can insure its transmission into the future.

There are, however, structural differences between the Western society we now live in and the traditional dharmic society of India. It is not obvious how to perpetuate our tradition outside the context of India. We need to be careful and methodical with our approach here. We need to understand the problems in modern society and take an unromantic look at how the Hindu tradition can help.

The Modern Diaspora Business

Hindu culture and religion have been transmitted outside India before—to Southeast Asia hundreds of years ago and to multiple countries, such as Mauritius, Fiji, South Africa and Trinidad, in the 19th century, usually through indentured servitude. Those Indian communities mostly remain Hindus; so it can be done. But modern times present different challenges, so we reached out for ideas and inspiration to other traditions, including the Jews, Buddhists and Muslims, who have dealt with America's particular issues. They were most helpful.

Central to my own position on this is that since the Hindu tradition is a lived and living tradition, we should not treat it as a museum artifact that should be "preserved." Our approach to teaching should not be looking back at India with a sense of nostalgia, but looking forward, into the future. How can we make the tradition more meaningful to the generations to come, living here in America,

many of whom will have no memories and little connection to India?

First, we must address the structural differences. Without acknowledging these differences, we will fail to find the methods that stick. Culture and dharma are both very subtle. The Western society is based on the Abrahamic traditions, which tend to congregate on the

Dharma sustains the society

Sri Krishna to Arjuna in Mahabharata (day 17, Karna Parva)

धारणाद्धर्ममित्याहुर्धर्मो धारयति प्रजाः
यः स्याद्धारणसंयुक्तः स धर्म इति निश्चयः

Dharma sustains the society. Dharma maintains the social order. Dharma ensures well being and progress of humanity. Dharma is surely that which fulfills these objectives.

GAURAV RASTOGI



weekend (Friday, Saturday or Sunday). This allows members to have a better sense of community, including pooling tithes or mandatory income shares, and the preacher can serve as the one-stop shop for connection to God, as a healer for his “flock,” as a source of insight into scripture and as a receiver of confidential information about matters of the spirit. These are religions organized on a congregational model.

The Hindu tradition, like most dharmic traditions, is different. We do not require people to come to the temple on a single day—I jokingly say, “We do not congregate, rather, we crowd.” We do not have a requirement to donate a tenth of our income. We do not excommunicate people for not following the rules. In India, we do not rely on the temple priest for sermons on the scripture or confidential advice on family issues. Our temples do not offer the spiritual care services that churches and mosques do. In so many ways, Hindu society is connected differently from the Western model. No doubt Hinduism meets the spiritual, social and emotional needs of society, perhaps better than any Abrahamic religion. But it does so in a different pattern, one not centered around a single institution, such as a church, mosque or temple, but one involving teaching lineages, ashrams, extended family and more. We cannot hope to transmit tradition in the West without fully considering these structural differences.

Dharma is the connective glue of society. It preserves and sustains society. This realization led our group to a crucial insight—modern society ails to the extent that it is not dharmic. Let me explain. Loneliness is the disease of our times. We are lonely, all of us, and this loneliness comes from the loss of connection to each other, to meaning and to our own inner selves. Can we restore that sense of connection and community? Can we recreate the Hindu society’s system of spiritual care in the West?

Using the Silicon Valley Mindset

What do you think of when you hear of Silicon Valley? Perhaps technology, innovation and unparalleled wealth. All these are true, but we think of Silicon Valley as an approach, a mindset—seeing “opportunities” instead of “problems;” having a sharp intuition about customer needs and effective solutions; being methodical, not lumbering; “staying hungry;” being able to work with minimal funds; being agile, alert and responsive to market feedback; having energy that comes from momentum; high emphasis on process and repeatability for scale; open-source in creating and sharing; using technology for leverage and building for scale; dreaming big and moving fast. These are some of the ideas that have made Silicon Valley the dominant industrial force of our

generations. The Hindu Community Institute’s core team decided to apply the same intellectual drive and honesty from our professional careers to our work for dharma.

Society as Air-Conditioning for the Emotional Self

I like to think of a well-functioning society as a kind of air-conditioning for the emotional self; to keep all of us in a comfortable range by sharing both our excess sorrow and happiness. My personal theory is that loneliness is disease-causing because these excesses of happiness and sorrow create a state of dis-ease, where we are unable to feel a sense of enjoyment. If we can restore our connections to society and dharma, we can restore that sense of ease with our own selves.

Our group ran a series of conversations to understand the life events where the emotional states can spike, and where spiritual care can provide air-conditioning. This led to our “Meeting the Needs” chart [next page], which we used to think about how tradition and connection can help in improving each of these life states. This, in turn, led to the creation of spiritual care services, such as pre-marriage counseling, memorial speaking, compassionate presence, and so on, that did not exist in the Hindu community as distinct services so far.

Counselor of Hindu Tradition

We created a graduate certificate course—“Counselor of Hindu Tradition,” abbreviated CHT—to fulfill the needs of the community. These trained CHTs effectively serve as members of one’s extended family in times of need. The CHT course runs for nine months—24 Sundays, online. We teach aspects of the Hindu tradition, the action philosophy of the *Bhagavad Gita*, compassionate presence, counseling, and dealing with medical and ethical situations around the passage of life. By “compassionate presence” is meant the simple act of

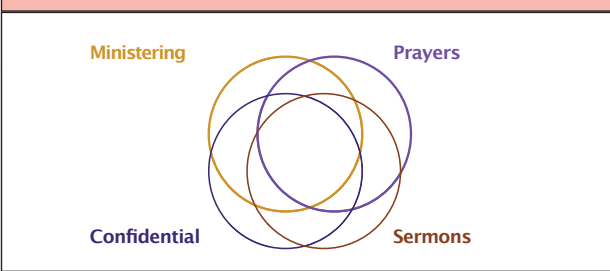
being there for a person in distress, without judgment or necessarily answers for them, but with deep sympathy and, when appropriate, spiritual insight or direction. We can share a few real-life experiences our Counselors of Hindu Tradition have reported.

In the first, a woman wanted someone to speak with her ailing mother who was suffering from a terminal disease and dealing with pain. Her CHT met the mother for two sessions to offer compassionate presence, and to teach her basic pranayama techniques for

pain management. In the second example, a couple lost their oldest son, 12, in a freak accident at the beach. Our CHT met the family for several sessions to offer compassionate presence, a Hindu perspective on death, and to suggest traditional approaches for closure in such circumstances. Very recently, a man who lost his wife to the

Spiritual Care in a Congregational Society

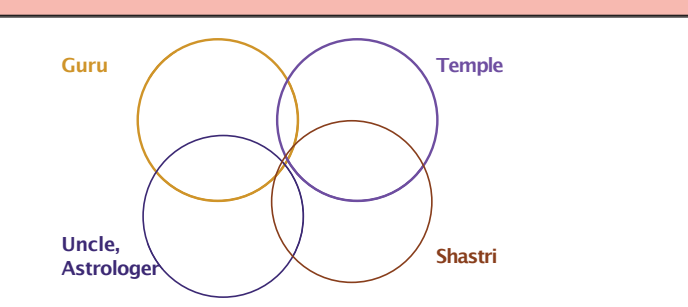
Closely Organized



Diversity: Spiritual care is typically offered by religious congregations in the Western model of society

Spiritual Care in the Hindu Society—India

Not Centrally Organized, but Community Self-Organizes

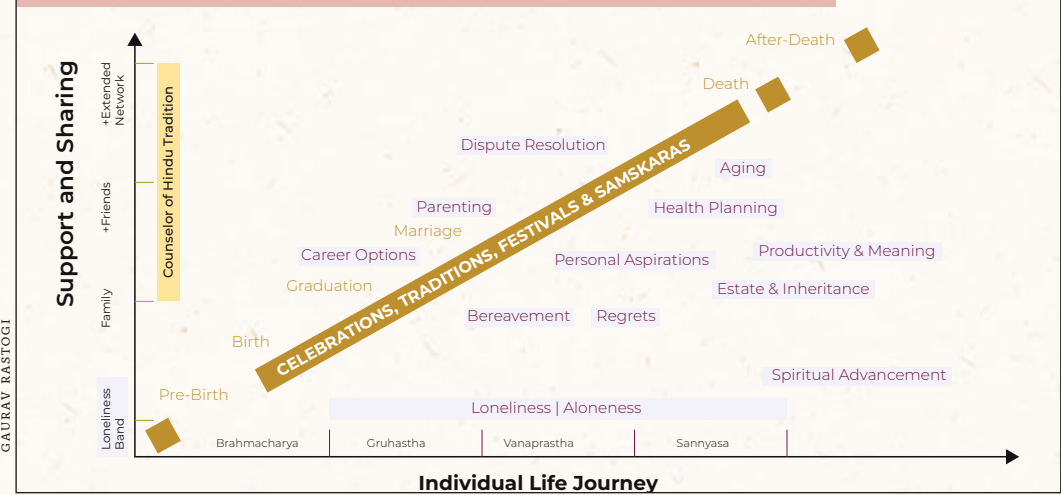


Diversity: Spiritual care is typically offered by elders, experts and community members in the Indian-Hindu model of society



Meeting the Needs of the Community

Counselor of Hindu Tradition as Extended Family



pandemic called our CHT to speak at her memorial. They offered a brief uplifting talk about grief, death in the Hindu tradition and reflections on the true purposes of life. Our last example involved a domestic violence issue. We spoke with the victim to understand the problem, and then connected her with a partner organization that deals confidentially with such issues.

The course is taught by forty faculty, including leading practitioners of their craft. For example, we learn what happens in the emergency room from Stanford’s head of emergency services. We learn Hindu last rites from a trained priest. We learn aging and geriatric care issues from leading doctors, and so on. We have built the program from the ground up, with advice from experts in education, chaplaincy and spiritual care as well as “service learning”—a combination of classroom learning with hands-on volunteer experience.

We have run three cohorts and are starting the fourth as this article is published. Our 65 graduates are all around the US and a few in India as well. These are people interested in learning how to serve, and in HCI they have found their *sangha* or community. Our CHTs can serve as volunteers in the community lifelong, or they can go on pursue the formal professional path of chaplaincy through the accredited Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. Between volunteering and professional work, we have therefore created a “continuum of spiritual care” in the community. An extended ongoing relationship with the community allows us to create an organized framework for the ongoing giving of spiritual care, instead of simply graduating individuals without a clear path of service before them.

Challenges in Building a Hindu Voluntary Organization

The pandemic forced us to reevaluate the financial and physical structure of the organization. We switched to a completely online learning model, which actually works better for students across the US. Additionally, it allow us to bring in faculty from anywhere on the planet. As the pandemic recedes, we expect to keep our classes online and meet socially in person wherever possible.

Building community trust is critical, and we have tried to gain this by better governance, leadership and communications. In the age of weaponized language, we chose to call ourselves a “Hindu” organization with pride, but we have decided to be apolitical and independent in our actions. We maintain formal procedures and carefully document our board meetings.

Another problem we face is that while Hindus in America are well off, we have not yet developed a tradition of abundantly

Place of the CHT: The Counselors of Hindu Tradition are trained to function as an extension of family and friend to help out individuals through the good and the bad, the inspiring and the challenging, the religious and the mundane, as each moves through this particular incarnation

funding community projects other than temples. We presently receive a large number of small donations by check. This will change over time, but we are being as frugal as we can while moving forward. We are currently raising money to hire our first administrative staff and for partial scholarships for

those pursuing the chaplaincy program at GTU.

One of our most effective innovations has been the linking of karma yoga, selfless service, to spiritual care. Each of us has a tremendous innate capacity to serve. How can this capacity be expressed? We created “Om dollars” to tap into our innate desire to serve. These work like regular dollars in the sense that you can earn them, count them, admire the balance and pass it on to your future generations. You just can’t spend it or convert it into treasury dollars. We use a desire we already have—earning money in dollars—and turn it into a dharmic idea by converting the question “How can I earn more money” into “How can I serve the society better in order to earn more Om dollars?” This started as a lighthearted reference, but we soon realized the power of the idea when our students asked how they could earn more! Most students now pay us in Om dollars, and our leverage is that we generate nine Om dollars for every dollar of donation. Our teachers serve pro bono and gladly return to teach every year. We started free yoga classes during the pandemic, and we now have 50 teachers that have delivered nearly 3,000 free classes online so far.

Karma Yoga for Loka Samgraha—the Welfare of the World

And so, this is how I have come to realize the full meaning of the unshakable thought that drew me in this direction; it is the desire to spread well-being in society through selfless service. For the remainder of my life, this is my mission. Building what we hope will one day be a global Hindu institution from Silicon Valley has been a great learning experience, and one I hope everyone will participate in. Our currency is authenticity—we are karma yogis ourselves, and people that are attracted to our work are drawn to us by their own desire for *loka samgraha*. We have just begun. Society needs many scores of such institutions to fully bring the richness of the Hindu tradition into the modern world, and to improve the world for everyone, not just Hindus. Let us join hands.

Gaurav Rastogi, an entrepreneur with twenty years of executive experience, holds an MBA from IIM Ahmedabad and a Mechanical Engineering degree from Delhi Technological University. He is a yoga and dhyana meditation teacher, and a board member of the Hindu Community Institute. He is married with two grown kids and lives in the San Francisco Bay Area. gauravhinduism@hinduci.org



SAINTS & SAGES

Yogananda's On-Going Impact

A century after he first arrived from India the great teacher's legacy continues to inspire the spiritually minded in America

BY NIKHIL BHAMBRI, CALIFORNIA

I WAS A PRECOCIOUS CHILD. MY FAVORITE activity with a babysitter was to ask for blank paper so I could write. Reading fluently before I entered kindergarten, I was fascinated with Hindu mythology and studied it avidly. After memorizing the names of all prominent Indian Deities, I collected their murtis, including a rare statue of Brahma, before I was eight. Alas, this fascination was not to last. Other children seldom knew what I was talking about. Seeking acceptance, I became an expert on Disney and Pokemon. Obsessed with trying to be cool like my peers on terms defined by them, I tried hard to fit in. This became a vicious cycle. The harder I tried to fit in, the more difficult and stressed I felt—so I tried even harder, setting unreasonable expectations for myself that led to increased frustration. I felt intuitively that there was more to life, but I was on

a treadmill that wouldn't stop turning. With the support of many mentors, I slowly got off the treadmill and began a long journey to reconnect with my ancient Hindu roots. It was difficult but, in retrospect, I would not have it any other way.

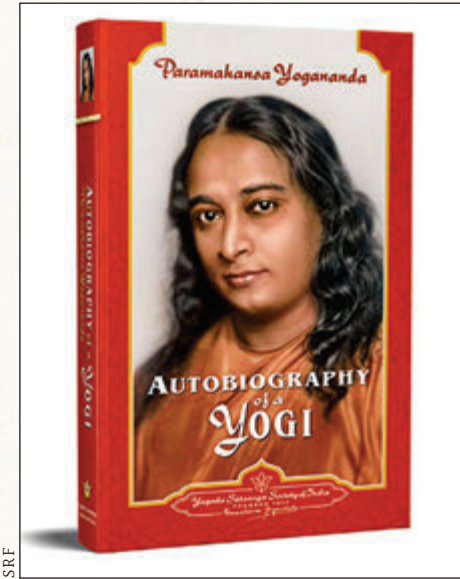
In 8th grade, my dad and I traveled to Norway and stayed at the home of Mark Kriger, a former classmate of my father. Before starting his PhD in business at Harvard, Mark had earned a master's in religion from MIT and had worked closely with Huston Smith, the legendary author of *The World's Religions*. Like Smith, Mark spent many years exploring different spiritual traditions, including Vedanta, and had visited Sri Ramana Maharshi's ashram in Annamalai.

Three years later, Mark visited us in Los Angeles. His visit coincided with my starting 11th grade, a period of heightened anxiety. Mark told me he always went to the Self Re-

alization Fellowship (SRF) Lake Shrine in Pacific Palisades whenever he was in Los Angeles. He invited me to accompany him, and I readily agreed. If Mark had a specific objective in taking me to the serene Lake Shrine, I was oblivious to it. I remained engulfed in my mind's ongoing mental chatter and gave little attention to the beautiful surroundings.

The visit to the Lake Shrine must have planted a seed, because twelve years later, as a graduate of the University of Southern California (USC), I am striving to deepen my spiritual quest. I have greater commitment to learn and am more confident in my ability to help others. The memory of my first visit to the Lake Shrine is etched in my mind, and I think back to the visit, grateful to Mark for opening my eyes to one of the most impactful gurus of global spirituality, Paramahansa Yogananda.

The Lake Shrine is one of many SRF cen-

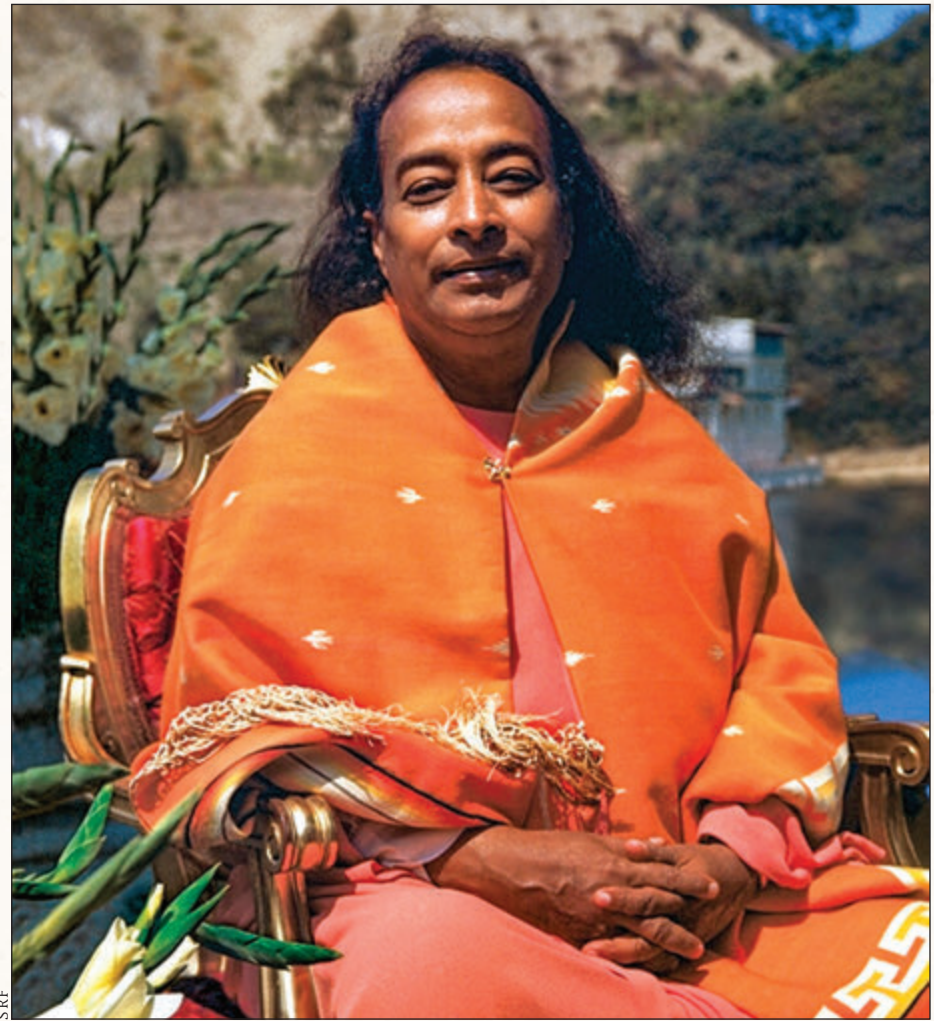


Guru in America: (far left) Yogananda at Niagara Falls; (above) Swami's well-known book *Autobiography of a Yogi*; (right) Yogananda seated at Lake Shrine in Southern California

ters in Southern California. In 1925, Yogananda established his organization's headquarters in Mount Washington, a few miles south of my Pasadena home, on a serene hill sheltered from the hustle and bustle of Los Angeles. Once I learned that Yogananda had played a pivotal role in my "backyard," my lifelong love of geography and deep interest in the Indian diaspora drove me to explore his life and the many SRF temples within a short driving distance.

Not far from the Mount Washington SRF headquarters is the Hollywood Temple on Sunset Boulevard. Built during the 1930s, it is striking in appearance with its large masjid-like onion-shaped domes. On a stretch of land alongside the Pacific Ocean in Encinitas, near San Diego, is an SRF temple gifted to Yogananda in 1937 by James Lynn, a staunch devotee and business tycoon. The grounds are dotted with greenery, koi ponds, small waterfalls, and benches for meditation. Each SRF center is an oasis of serenity.

I reached out to different people to ask about Yogananda. Prasad Kaipa, an old friend of my father's, combines great insight with a patience and humility that inevitably makes me relax in his presence. Fluent in Sanskrit, Prasad has the rare ability to intertwine ancient Hindu wisdom with modern business advice. I asked him about Yogananda's impact on his life. He began, "I used to work at Apple when Apple was a young company. My uncle in India was a very devoted follower of Kriya Yoga and asked me to bring him SRF books and videos from the US. I



had not read or watched any of them. I felt there are so many swamis in India, I do not know whom to follow. But my uncle gave me a copy of Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* and told me to read it as soon as possible. I finished the book in three days, and it put me into a totally different state of mind. On returning to the US, I went to Yosemite and meditated for three days. It brought clarity to what I wanted to do in life, and I quit working at Apple."

Struck by the transformational impact of Paramahansa Yogananda on people like Prasad and Mark, I read more about him and discovered he was the second Indian guru to visit the United States. The first, Swami Vivekananda, came to Chicago in 1890 to speak at the Parliament of World Religions. Vivekananda questioned Western stereotypes about Indians as backward, heathen snake charmers and described Hinduism as the historical mother of all religions, arguing that Hinduism's core message of embracing all religions should be universal. Following his groundbreaking speech, Vivekananda started Vedanta Society branches in several major US cities. Prasad Kaipa commented,

"Unlike Vivekananda, who founded the Vedanta Society and went back to India, Yogananda stayed in the US and continued teaching. Yogananda helped cement what Vivekananda preached about, by building the infrastructure in the US."

My turning point and recommitment to Hinduism began when I left USC and no longer had a religious social community with which to connect. Reading *Autobiography of a Yogi* helped me look inside myself. I began to understand that the essence of religion and spirituality is to find your own inner peace through meditation and to contribute to the betterment of society as a whole. I then realized my mistake in joining a religious community at USC for the expectation of a social community, a form of outward pleasure, rather than introspection and self-understanding, which are the foundations of Self-Realization.

Autobiography of a Yogi has had a strong impact on thousands around the world. In the Yogananda documentary, *Awake*, Beatle George Harrison says, "If I had not read it, I would probably not have a life. I would probably have kicked the bucket or would just be



some really horrible person. It gave meaning to life." It was the only book on Steve Jobs' iPad, and he re-read it every year. At his memorial service at Stanford University, all attendees received a copy of the book as a last gift from Jobs.

One of the highlights of my time at USC was getting to know Varun Soni, USC's Dean of Religious Life and the first Hindu to serve as the religious leader of a major university. I spoke regularly with him about my questions regarding spiritual growth.

Dean Soni explained to me that America's racism at the time of Yogananda's visit made his mission even more remarkable. "He brought Indian tradition to the West; we mostly only saw the reverse. Christian missionaries came to India; Indian missionaries did not come to the West." He added, "This was a time of Asiatic exclusion and racism. Still, this Indian man introduced all these spiritual thinkers to ancient Indian practices."

Yogananda arrived in 1920 on the ship *The City of Sparta* to attend the Seventh Unitarian Congress of Liberals in Boston. His guru, Swami Sri Yukteshwar, had long had a vision that his disciple would someday bridge the gap between Eastern spirituality and Western materialism. To fulfil his guru's expectations, Yogananda, who had never set foot overseas, traveled to the USA. Yogananda's talk in Boston, "Science of Religion," focused on the very core of what religion is all about. He famously stated, "In the world today, every person, no matter what they are doing, no matter what they are seeking, or their desire, are going for two goals: they want to avoid pain and attain bliss." Thus, "religion is that practice that brings about permanent avoidance of pain and attainment of bliss."

The period following World War I was a time of growing religious skepticism and increased materialism. The *Awake* film describes this period as the "dawn of the

atomic age, when physics could shatter your beliefs about the nature of reality." Soni recalls, "There were all these arguments that science would destroy humanity. Yogananda taught the science of spirituality as a counterbalance to the age of nuclear weapons to save humanity."

I interviewed Philip Goldberg, author of *American Veda* and *The Life of Yogananda*. He describes how Yogananda considered Los Angeles to be the Banaras of America. He "perceived something in the city's character that set it apart as a destination for explorers of the soul." Soni agrees: "The West Coast was already imagined as a place of new beginnings. Since Asians have historically come to the West Coast, people were already conscious of Eastern traditions. Yogananda found the right audience and the right time for the right message." Something clearly worked, because Yogananda attracted packed audiences wherever he spoke.

Yogananda's fundamental principle is the universality of religion. Remarkably, he introduced Hinduism to the West through the lens of Jesus. Soni says, "He understood that when he came to the USA, he would talk to many Christians, and he used Jesus to bridge the East and West and bring people together." Soni added, "Jesus is like an avatar for some Hindus, he is God coming to Earth in human form to teach us. Thus, Jesus is a bridge between Hinduism and Christianity, which Yogananda understood." In fact, his lineage continued through a Mormon woman, Dayamata, who led SRF for even longer than Yogananda himself. Kaipa told me, "Yogananda integrated with local religions much more fluidly than other spiritual gurus, without any conflicts between their religion and his teachings."

Ravi Sahay was born in a village in Bihar, India and came to the US to pursue his career as an electrical engineer. While looking

Making space for peace: the lush and serene Lake Shrine as it stands today

for a place that would provide his children a broad sense of religion, he discovered the Yogananda Temple in San Diego and immersed himself in Yogananda's teachings. Now a retiree, Sahay is an SRF volunteer and resides in a small trailer next to the SRF Hidden Valley Ashram in Escondido. Sahay reflects on how Yogananda tied Vedic teachings with the essence of all world religions: "Human beings are basically designed, wired children of God. Vedic principles say no matter what you do, you will not be happy until you find peace. There are several people who become very rich but are unhappy and commit suicide. Vedic religion says if you do not get it in this life, you will get it in the next life. That is your only path." In his book, *Science of Religion*, Yogananda explains, "Religion consists in the permanent removal of pain and realization of bliss, or God. If we understand religion in this way, then its universality becomes obvious."

The primary technique Yogananda promoted to help people in the West attain this goal was kriya yoga. Kaipa told me, "This practice helps you develop humility, inclusiveness, and openness." To address the growing emphasis on science and physics, Yogananda presented Hinduism as a science. According to Soni, "He used the language of science to talk about the spiritual practice of kriya yoga, the science of breath, energy and consciousness. You did not have to have faith and believe. You had the practices so you could test these hypotheses as a scientific practice." Sahay adds, "The more ego-driven we are, the less spiritual we are. Spirituality is about letting our ego hang loose. Spirituality is realizing that our ego is not working in our best interest or our community's. There is no other good definition."

My friend Gyan Alexander is a young man in his 30s. Gyan has practiced Yogananda's kriya yoga throughout his life, and it was his source of strength when his closest childhood friend committed suicide. Gyan says, "Practicing kriya yoga has helped me navigate the anxieties and challenges life throws at me. Sitting still and finding inner stillness has helped me separate who I am from the problems I face." He adds, "We are constantly victims of the feeling of not having enough. Meditation at its best helps you realize that you are enough. In my unpredictable career as a scriptwriter, there is something very secure about this practice that has definitely helped me logically and creatively."

Gyan's mother, Kamala, is a convert from Sikhism to SRF. She was born and raised in Yuba City, Northern California, where her family owned a farm. She was a nurse in



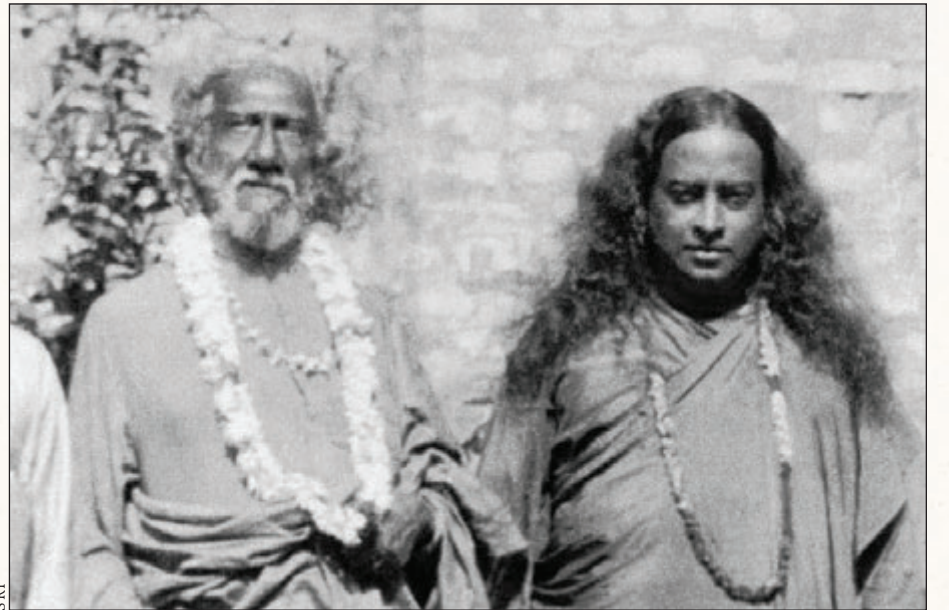
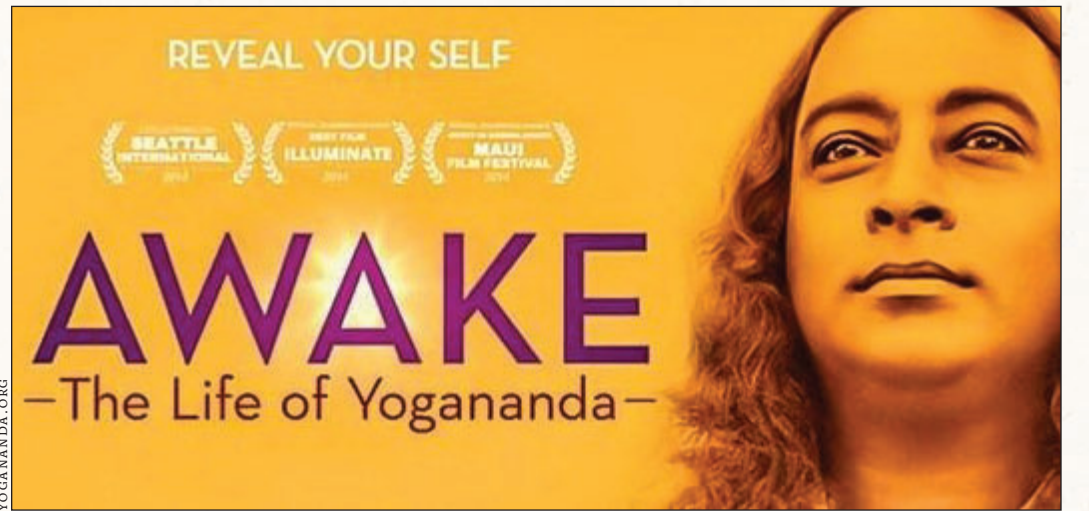
An impactful lineage: A poster image for *Awake*, a movie about Yogananda's life and teachings; (below) Yogananda with his guru, Sri Yukteshwar

Southern California when she met her future husband, Ranya Alexander, an African-American emergency-room doctor. They chose the Lake Shrine as the venue for their wedding. Ranya's SRF practice and the serenity of the Lake Shrine motivated Kamala to wholeheartedly accept SRF. Although her devout Sikh family opposed her marriage and her adoption of SRF, she remained steadfast in her commitment. She reflected, "Giving up Sikhism helped me understand my birth faith even more. It taught me the essence of what Nanakji and the other Sikh gurus did. Being brought up in the West, understanding the Guru Granth Sahib was not easy. Yogananda has volumes written with his own hand, so it satisfies the intellect. He gives you techniques of meditation that can lead to your own experience of the Divine. They are scientific techniques; that helps."

Gyan, an SRF follower since birth, recalls his experience volunteering at the Mount Washington headquarters: "You notice how the monks take care of the grounds with so much attention and quiet, contemplative joy. When they talk, it is very exact, no extra noise. They do a great job cultivating the place. Watching pilgrims arrive on the bus, you feel you are in a slice of heaven." Gyan sees SRF as a church of all religions. He says, "It has made me comfortable in navigating other houses of worship. I can find universal messages that resonate with me, whether it is people who practice other faiths, or even atheists."

In *Awake*, Varun Soni says, "Yogananda provided us a vocabulary to talk about the spirit. It gets away from dogma, doctrine and ritual. Whatever tradition you are part of, Yogananda charted a path inward that connected you with your own divinity." *The Science of Religion* further explains, "The proof of existence of God lies in ourselves and our inner experience. It is in bliss consciousness that we realize Him. There can be no other direct proof of His existence. It is in His bliss that our spiritual hopes and aspirations find fulfillment, our devotion and love find an object."

In reflecting on Yogananda's legacy, Soni said, "The one thing that is most associated with Indians in the US is yoga. Today, yoga is something 15 million Americans do. Al-



though most of them do it in the context of fitness, Yogananda brought it as a spiritual practice. Yogananda helped bring it here."

Today, twelve years since I first visited the Lake Shrine, oblivious at that time to Yogananda's teachings, I am applying to graduate programs in Clinical Social Work. I hope to use the fundamentals of Yogananda's teachings both to inspire individuals to be at peace with themselves, and to strive to make the world a better place. When I visit Lake Shrine today, its unique tranquility lingers with me. Paramahansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi* is a source of wisdom that I return to time and again.

Reflecting on Yogananda's teachings, I realize my parents never brought me up to follow only one black-and-white train of thought. They always encouraged me to find my own inner purpose and direction. Yogananda combines the best of the East and the best of the West, showing

that spiritual principles and rational scientific analysis are synergistic rather than exclusionary. Reading Yogananda's *Autobiography* has helped me find my purpose. Learning from the many people who have preceded me on this path has strengthened my commitment. In the midst of today's divisive world, there is much to heed from Yogananda's principles of oneness, and I consider myself a very grateful beneficiary of the traditions inspired by Paramahansa Yogananda.

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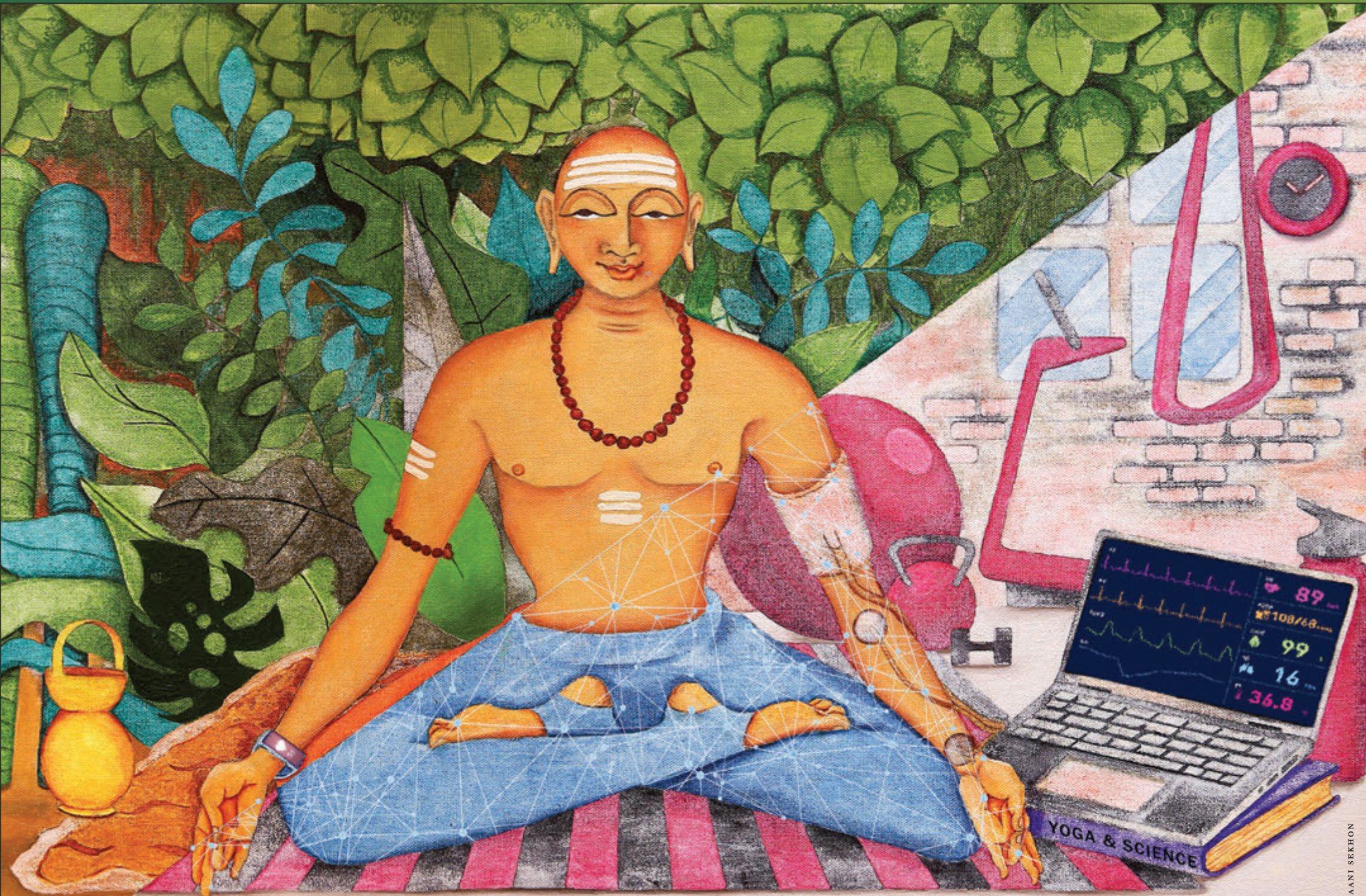
YOGA AND HUMAN BIOLOGY

EDUCATIONAL INSIGHT

A Rare Exploration of the Obstacles on the Inner Path, as Revealed in the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali



BY EDDIE STERN



THE PRACTICE OF YOGA AND THE SCIENCE OF YOGA, OR YOGA-bhaya and yogavidya, are two of the traditional ways that yoga is described. Yoga is a practice (abhyasa) and a science (vidya). While asanas and pranayama are immensely popular and currently the most visible expressions of the practice of yoga, the science of yoga has a deep and ancient history, though it has not enjoyed the same recent popularity on a public scale as postures have. There is a distinction that needs to be made between the Western definition of science and the Sanskrit word *vidya*, which means both science and knowledge. While both the Sanskrit and Western translations of *science* incorporate knowledge, understanding, investigation and quantification, the West regards science as examining observable phenomena that can be verified through measurement and data collection, while the Hindu and yogic sciences accept one's inner experience as a valid source of data collection (*pratyaksha*). The inner experience is, in fact, the primary source of knowledge, while anything that is observed, heard or inferred is secondary (*Yoga Sutra*, 1.7). As well, the inner source of knowledge may be an immeasurable, something the West does not factor into science. It's hard to measure something that, by definition, is immeasurable. I had heard from my teachers in India for many years that yoga is a process of internal revelation, the Self revealing itself in the conscious awareness of the seeker. Liberation, and even wisdom, are not something to be added to you from the outside, but revealed from the inside. So, to busy oneself collecting data and amassing information, while useful for sharpening the intellect, is not as useful for inner growth. This idea led me to focus on internal practices for the better part of two decades—that is until Western science came knocking on my door and I answered. A scientist named Dr. Marshall Hagins, having been referred to me by a student, wanted to know if I could create a yoga protocol for a study focused on treating hypertension. His hypothesis was that the practices of asanas and pranayama would have a down-regulating effect on hypertension through the actions on the vagus nerve. My interest was piqued.

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Two worlds: A yogi today inhabits twin spaces, a quiet forest and an urban yoga clinic filled with technology. Science is now able to quantify yoga's impact on human physiology, as intimated by the computer monitoring his heartbeat, blood pressure, pulse and brain waves.



Yoga Principles

Swami Kuvalyananda (1883–1966) was the first Indian to study yoga using Western scientific methodologies in an effort to find a meeting place of the two doctrines. Though both are of immense value as stand-alone disciplines, he felt they could help each other progress in an increasingly modern society. He knew that Western science was not necessary to prove that yoga worked—yoga had already been proven to work, as its practices had been perpetuated for several millennia in India already. But by using Western science to examine the efficacies of yoga, there could be discoveries of side benefits, and that could encourage those who might benefit from it to take up its practice, both in India and abroad. He famously said, “Persons that are equipped with an undying faith in spiritual culture and its attainment through yogic practices require no scientific interpretations of these for their progress. But those that take their stand upon reason would be satisfied with nothing short of a scientific explanation of yoga, if they are to be induced to take to it.” (*Psycho-physiology*,

Spiritual and Physical Culture, etc., with their application to Therapeutics, Kuvalayananda S., Yoga Mimamsa 1:79–80, 1924.)

One could make the case that much of what we think of as scientific thought is making a supposition and then using research, experimentation, examination and more suppositions to eventually reach repeatable and dependable conclusions. Those conclusions often lead to more discoveries that expand a particular field of focus. The framework of yogavidya follows this same trajectory, while making up a dialogue of yoga that has been occurring now for thousands of years. Much of what is referenced in yoga teachings today is from the writings of Bhagavan Patanjali, the author of the *Yoga Sutras* (400ce), an unparalleled collection of aphorisms that define the essence of yoga. In the first few sutras, Patanjali makes it abundantly clear that yoga is a practice for quieting and eliminating the extraneous activities of the mind to lead us away from states of limited self-awareness. Yoga is the process of eliminating discursive thought so the mind can

More than asanas: While the famed postures are yoga’s most common definition, the *Yoga Sutras* stress inner transformation and *sadhanas*. Here a woman methodically trains her mind in the art of concentration, *dharana*, by focusing her gaze unswervingly on a candle’s flame.

be directed towards one object of attention, and the process of thinning or removing the seed impressions from which our thoughts arise. These impressions are called *samskaras*—memories and subtle impressions in the subconscious mind. When these two processes—of focused awareness and removal of impressions—reach their pinnacle, our awareness shifts from identifying with thoughts and the myriad of subtleties of feelings, emotions, memories and shifting identities, and reverts to its original identity of ultimate awareness of the Self alone, abiding then in its original, pristine freedom. The methodology of achieving this is strategic and described as a step-by-step process. To follow that process is to engage in the endeavor of *yogabhyasa* which is based on the instructions, *anushasanam*, explained through the *yogavidya*.

Oddly, we see little of this deeper understanding in the field of yoga today. Asanas and pranayama are the most visible and popular practices in India and in the West. Nowadays when people say the word *yoga* you can almost assume that they are talking about yoga postures and equating the two. On the one hand, we could say that simply doing asanas is not really practicing yoga at all—or perhaps just partially. Sri Krishnamacharya agreed with this when he stated that the practice of yoga begins when we realize we are suffering, and take active steps to not only remove suffering, but to understand and recognize its source. Anyone can do

asanas and pranayamas, he continued, but those practices only become yoga when they are done with the express purpose to remove suffering.

Kriya Yoga

Patanjali called the things that cause us to suffer *kleshas*, or obstructions. He named five of them. The first, *avidya*, is that we do not fully know who we are. *Avidya* is often translated as ignorance. The ignorance it refers to is that, while we might know a lot about many topics, we do not fully know who we truly are. It is this incompleteness of knowing that allows four other *kleshas* to arise: a false narrative about who think we are (*asmita*); our likes and dislikes (*raga* and *dvesha*); and clinging to life (*abhinivesha*).

Several years ago I became fascinated by the question of why, if yoga was for the removal of *avidya* and other *kleshas*, did we need to do physical things like asanas and pranayama? The *kleshas* are basically mental misperceptions. How could a physical practice change something on the level of the mind? Why not work with the mind directly? Most people have experienced that the mind is very



Quotes on the Kleshas

“One of the strange but ever-present states in all beings is the desire to live forever. Even those in the presence of death every day have this illogical desire. This is what inspires the instinct for self-preservation in all of us.”

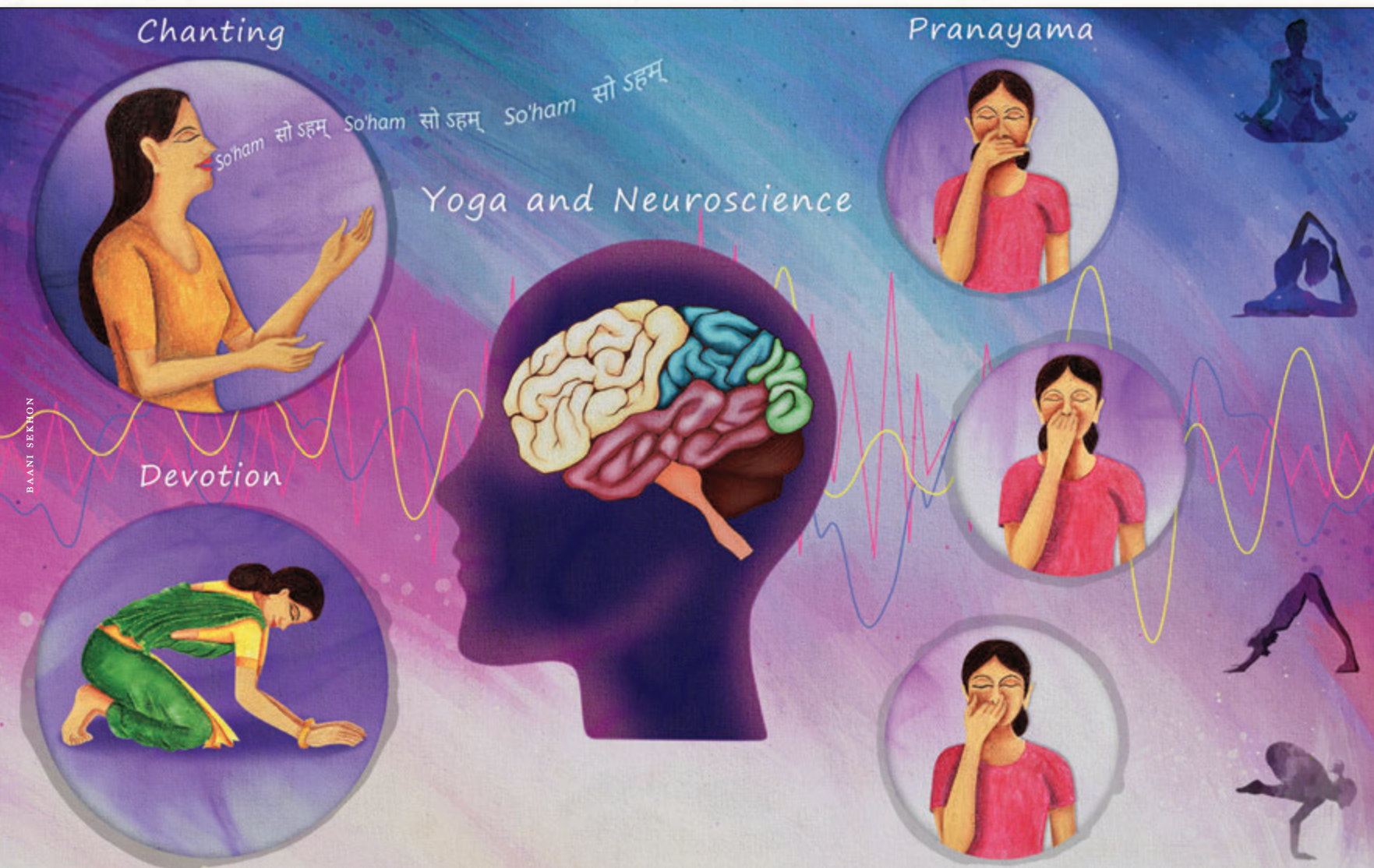
Sri TKV Desikachar,
Reflection on Yoga Sutras of Patanjali

“The means of Samadhi and the attenuation of *Klesha* is *Kriya-yoga*, i.e., calmness of the body and the senses through *Tapasya*, the predisposition to realization through *Svadhyaya*, and the tranquility of mind through *Ishvara-pranidhana*.”

Swami Hariharananda,
The Yoga Philosophy of Patanjali

“In the *Yoga Sutras*, 1:24, Patanjali says: “The Lord (*Ishvara*) is untouched by [the five] *kleshas* (troubles), karma (action), vipaka (habit), and ashaya (desire). Since the Lord is free from these eight imperfections inherent in creation, the yogi who seeks union with God must likewise first rid his consciousness of these obstacles to spiritual victory.”

Paramahansa Yogananda,
God Talks with Arjuna, The Bhagavad Gita



difficult to work with directly—meaning it's difficult to control—because when we think of our mind we think of it as being composed of thoughts, and thinking often can get out of control. We ruminate, become compulsive, imagine scenarios that may never happen; and each time we engage in these thoughts we imagine that they are real. Thinking something to be real that is not real is called a misperception, and misperception is intimately tied into the reason why we do not know, fully and truly, who we are.

In the *Yoga Sutras*, thoughts are not the mind, thoughts are activities that occur in a neutral field called *chitta*. Those activities are thoughts, emotions, sensations, information and memory. Called *vrittis*, they form the basis of our identity, but, as the often-used analogy goes, they are just ripples on the surface of the ocean, not the depths of ocean or the entirety of the ocean itself. One of the ways that the ocean expresses itself is through currents, ripples and waves; one of the ways that the field of *chitta* expresses itself is through ripples and waves that make up the form of our body and nervous system. So, to work first with our bodies, and the things that make our body go, is to calm the ripples, so we can experience the depths of the ocean, so to speak, the source of being.

In the first section of chapter two of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, we find a selection of about twelve aphorisms that discuss *kriya* yoga, the actions in yoga that thin or reduce the obstructions or afflictions of the mind (the reasons we suffer) and prepare us for the inner radiance of *samadhi*. *Kriya* means action, and the *kriyas* are the indirect actions in yoga that accomplish the above stated results. Why indirect? Because the direct action of *samadhi*, outlined in chapter one, addresses a mind that is fit for one-pointed focus already. But what about the rest of us, who are prone to semi-distracted states of mind? Those who can focus for a while, but then find our minds wandering off to different states of distraction. What can we do to move towards deeper states of yogic contemplation? We can do the *kriyas*. Patanjali defines three of these:

- ❖ **Tapas:** practices pertaining to the physical body, such as asanas, pranayama and the restrictions of the *yamas*.
- ❖ **Svadhyaya:** repetition of mantras, study of sacred texts and self-evaluation.
- ❖ **Ishvara Pranidhana:** surrender to God or any conception of the Divine.

These practices are prescribed by Patanjali to thin the *kleshas*, the

Yoga is more: Two thousand years ago Sage Patanjali anticipated neuroscience's discoveries of the effects of thought and emotion on the human brain and nerve system, at all levels. Here hatha yoga takes a back seat to japa, breathing exercises and acts of devotion.

obstacles, which are critical enough to deserve a deeper discussion.

The Five Kleshas

Avidya, as mentioned earlier, is an incomplete knowing of who we are. Vidya is knowledge, and the syllable *a* indicates, in this case, the opposite. If vidya is knowing, then avidya is a not-knowing, misperception or mis-cognition. It is not total ignorance, for indeed we know many other things, but we do not know our true nature. Avidya is the ground for all of the other *kleshas*. In fact, it could be said that there is really only one *klesha*, avidya, because contained within avidya are the other four, which do not exist independently of avidya.

Asmita is the misidentification of identity and creation of narratives that occur when we do not truly know who we are. *Asmi* means "I," and *ta* means "-ness" or "the quality of." Asmita is the limited identity of a constructed self. When we have an incomplete picture of who we are, we fill in the blanks with peripheral identities, stories and false narratives that we spend our lives enforcing, defending and concretizing. This narrative constructs itself by holding on to likes and dislikes.

Raga and dvesha are our attachments to likes and dislikes, the things that we are attracted or drawn to (raga) as well as to the things to which we are averse (dvesha). They are both attachments. We are

attached to the things that we find superior, and no less attached to the things that we find inferior or distasteful. The attachments to the things we dislike are often more troubling than the things we like. For example, if we are fans of one sports team, that can set us against every other team in the league. Attachment to one team makes us averse to twenty.

Abhinivesha is clinging to life and the fear of extinction that occurs when all we know is our story, desires and aversions. When we take them to be real, we fear that without them we will cease to exist. Hence, the clinging to life, the clinging to our constructed narratives, the clinging to raga and dvesha. On a biological level, life perpetuates itself. The impulse to procreate, for example, is nature's tight grip on its perpetuation. Since this is an impulse that is intrinsic to creation, it naturally flows in all beings, even, as Patanjali says, in the wise.

Through the practices of *kriya* yoga, all of these, we are told, will weaken their hold on us. The *kleshas* are like a covering over the light of our inner awareness. When that covering is thinned, the light of awareness shines more brightly through the covering, through the veil, and that pulls us inwards towards the radiance of



Yoga Insights

"You are always seeking pleasure, avoiding pain, always after happiness and peace. Don't you see that it is your very search for happiness that makes you feel miserable? Try the other way: indifferent to pain and pleasure, neither asking nor refusing, give all your attention to the level on which 'I am' is timelessly present. Soon you will realize that peace and happiness are in your very nature and it is only seeking them through some particular channels that disturbs. Avoid the disturbance, that is all."

Nisargadatta Maharaj on dvesha (aversion)

"There is no ignorance (avidya) outside the mind. The mind alone is avidya, the cause of the bondage of transmigration. When that is destroyed, all else is destroyed, and when it is manifested, everything else is manifested."

Vivekachoodamini by Adi Shankaracharya,
Translated by Swami Madhavananda,
Published by Advaita Ashram, Kolkatta



Meditation's obstacles: A yogi sits in meditation. One of his main goals is to overcome five barriers to higher consciousness. Left to right, he faces: *asmita* (egoity), *raga* (attraction), *avidya* (ignorance), *dvesha* (repulsion), and *abhinivesha* (fear of death).

the world as our extended, physical body. The description of prana in the yoga texts is varied in regards to detail, but cohesive in the explanation that it is prana that powers us. When prana leaves the body, our life as we know it is over.

The Brain Stem, Abhinivesha

According to Western science, the mechanism that controls these same physiological functions in our body is the nervous system. The brain stem houses what are collectively called the survival functions, the things that our body does automatically, so we don't have to think about doing them to stay alive. These automatic, or autonomic functions, include regulating respiration, heart rate, digestion, elimination, sleep, sexual reproduction and maintaining body temperature and blood pH. If we had to think about consciously doing any of those things, we wouldn't be able to survive. We couldn't eat if we had to think about breathing or beating our heart, and we certainly couldn't sleep if we had to think about sleeping—just thinking about it would keep us awake! It could be said that the entire purpose of the brain stem and our survival functions is to help us to cling to life, in a most literal sense. Thus, on one level abhinivesha, clinging to life, is the foremost job of the brain stem. While this is not explicitly stated in *Yoga Sutras*, there are an abundance of hints that speak about nervous system functions in different ways. For example, sutra 1.30 speaks of sickness, laziness, sensual preoccupation and failure to be consistent in practice as obstacles to a calm mind. Sutra 1.31 says these obstacles show themselves as shaking of the limbs, disrupted breathing (both ruled by the nervous system), and anxiety, which is also the sympathetic nervous system's response to a perceived environment. The body is the receiving-end organ of mental and emotional impulses; meaning, what happens in the mind happens in the body. Therefore, it follows that by steadying the body through practices of restraint, calmness and challenges, the upstream, subtle receiving organ of the brain and all that it processes (including our thoughts) will be influenced, steadied, as well.

While the brain processes information and is the central control mechanism for our life, it does not cause existence to happen, or cause us to be. When scientists study the brain and make statements such as "the prefrontal cortex is responsible for our executive functions," what they are saying is that decision making, language, long-term planning, compassion and other higher-level functions are processed and organized through this area of the brain. We do not know where the impulse to survive, to live, came from, but somehow, hundreds of millions of years ago, single-celled organisms had the impulse to move away from danger and move towards safety. That impulse exists within us in our brain stem, and is about 360 million years old. Other structures of our current brain makeup developed later, such as the limbic system

samadhi. But the question is, how? How will a headstand, how will a breath held in pranayama, how will the simple repetition of a mantra reduce my fear of death? How will those practices change my false narrative about my life based on my fleeting desires. How will they remove all traces of my stories so that the only story left is the story of no story at all, of pure consciousness?

Yoga and Brain Functions

I wondered if I could look to Western neuroscience for clues on how, by working directly with the nervous system, we could pave a pathway to samadhi. I had an inkling through my studies of the autonomic nervous system—and in particular of homeostasis (the body's innate ability to restore itself to balance)—that deliberate practices that restrained autonomic, physiological processes were a starting place for exploring how we could override habitual, unconscious responses to the world and move into deeper states of expanded awareness. The basic functions of the nervous system are described in very similar ways by Western scientists and yogis. The yogic conception makes use of something called *prana*, which has a multitude

of meanings depending on context. *Prana* means "that which causes things to move." It exists on a macro and micro level. On a macro level, prana creates and upholds order in the cosmos. On the micro level of the body it performs the functions that keep the body moving and in a constant symbiotic relationship with the world it lives in (such as breathing and temperature change). Prana is called by different names depending on the functions it performs, though it nevertheless remains one thing. There are five primary expressions: prana (incoming nourishment), apana (outgoing waste), samana (assimilation), vyana (distribution), and udana (outward expression).

These five processes are involved with every interaction we have, internally and with the external environment. In regards to breathing: prana is our inhalation; apana the exhalation; the exchange of gas at the level of the alveoli is samana; distribution of oxygen to every cell of the body is vyana; and speech, hiccups, coughs, sighs and yawns are udana. In regards to eating: prana is incoming food; apana is outgoing waste; samana is digestion; vyana is the distribution of nutrients; and udana describes the actions we express outwardly in the world because we are nourished. These five processes describe how the world we live in sustains us, which is another way of seeing

Beyond the Fear of Death

By the Editors

Seldom do we hear of the deeper meaning of abhinivesha, the fear of death spoken of in the *Yoga Sutras*. Most speak of it as the fear of the demise of the physical body, but more profoundly it is the yogi's core identity, his very existence, that is threatened as he approaches *nirvikalpa samadhi*.

In *Merging with Siva*, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami decreed, "Many people think of the realization of timeless, formless, spaceless Parasiva, nirvikalpa samadhi, as the most blissful of all blissful states, the opening of the heavens, the descent of the Gods, as a moment of supreme, sublime joyousness; whereas I have found it to be more like cut glass, diamond-dust darshan, a psychic surgery, not a blissful experience at all, but really a kind of near-death experience resulting in total transformation."

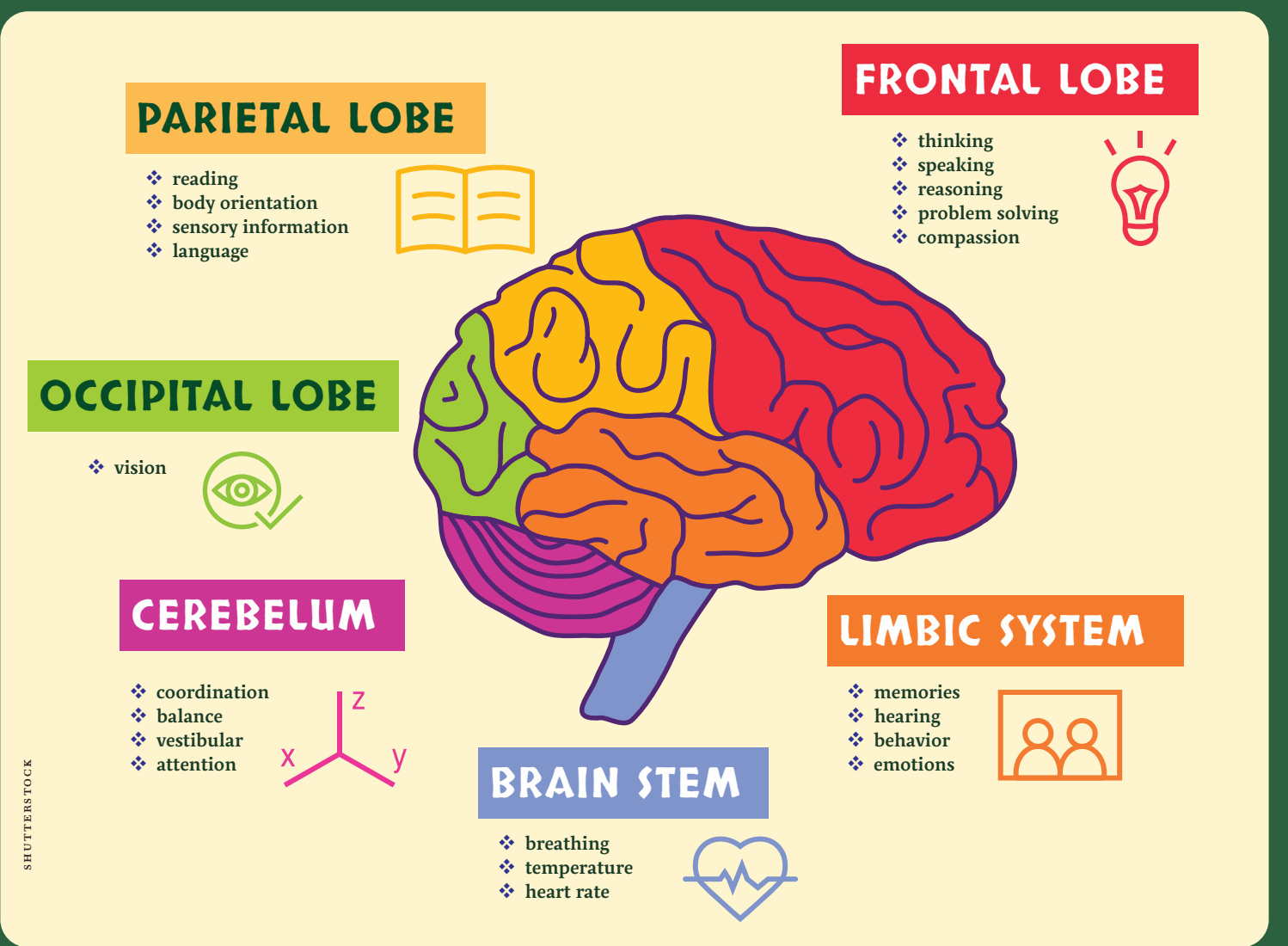
Parasiva is a death more fraught even than losing one's mind or losing one's body. It is the complete annihilation, disintegration and sundering of everything you thought of as who you are. In the proximity of the Absolute, what you are is imperiled by the presence of the Absolute nothingness that is Siva.

As the yogi proceeds in his journey to the beyond, he encounters every obstacle. He unties every knot, and in doing that he is left with nothing to hold on to, nothing to depend on, nothing to understand, nothing to support him. It is that void that he must ultimately submit to and in doing so overcome the final fear: abhinivesha. Nothing survives this journey. All of awareness is sundered. There is nothing and nobody left.

In his 1957 seminal talk, "The Self God," Sivaya Subramuniyaswami described this ultimate non-experience: "If you visualize above you nothing; below you nothing; to the right of you nothing; to the left of you nothing; in front of you nothing; in back of you nothing; and dissolve yourself into that nothingness, that would be the best way you could explain the realization of the Self. And yet that nothingness would not be the absence of something, like the nothingness inside an empty box, which would be like a void. That nothingness is the fullness of everything: the power, the sustaining power, of the existence of what appears to be everything."



A Map of the Brain's Primary Functions



and prefrontal cortex.

If the brain stem's purpose is to maintain life functions, to literally cling us to life, where could we, theoretically, see the other kleshas represented in the brain?

Limbic System, Raga and Dvesha

The limbic system is in the middle portion of the brain. It is made up of centers that process fear, emotions and memory. Raga and dvesha, our likes and dislikes, attractions and aversions, are both learned and instinctive. Through exposure to environment and the creation of habits that our parents and education expose us to, we develop habitual tendencies that draw us towards some things and away from others. For example, imagine that one day your parents bring you, as a child, to an

Brain power: The author speaks of the various regions of our brain and how they relate to the insights in the Yoga Sutras. It is an uncommon and insightful interpretation.

amusement park and buy you an ice cream. It's the best thing you've ever tasted. But while you are taking your first bite, your parents wander off and you get lost. The taste of the ice cream and the fear of being lost become linked, and somehow through that trauma, the taste of that one flavor of ice cream always reminds you of being lost in an amusement park when you were five. While some attractions and aversions are learned through experience and exposure, others we are somehow born with, and we do not know where they come from.

Interestingly, the brain's pleasure centers, the fear centers and the memory centers are all close to each other. Current scientific research on this is extremely complicated and fascinating. Neuroscientists Kent Berridge and Morten Kringelbach examined where "liking" and "disgust" are processed in the brain and published their findings in *Neuron Journal* in 2015. They discussed how the regions of the brain that are associated with reward-liking, wanting, sensory pleasures, disgust and fear in regard to external stimuli interact with higher-level brain structures such as learning, so that we can actively strategize to move towards pleasure rewards and away from things that disgust us or to which we are averse. Interestingly, this overlap in neural circuitry with the prefrontal cortex is associated with higher-level pleasures beyond sensory pleasures. The concept of "liking" is associated with the limbic system, and is described as an adaptive response to existence. Our likes and dislikes, even on this neuroscientific level, serve our existence, or our will to live. Abhinivesha is the support of raga and dvesha.

The Frontal Cortex, Asmita and Avidya

That leaves us with asmita and avidya. The cortical region of the brain is the uppermost area. It processes information relating to the executive functions: language, reasoning, strategic planning, pro-social engagement and the expression of compassion, empathy and philosophical contemplation, among other functions. It is in this region of the brain that we can ponder philosophical conundrums such as the distinctions between fate and free will, theodicy, the nature of our conscious and unconscious actions in the world, and the countless other contemplations that philosophers, yogis and seekers have dwelled on for thousands of years. The prefrontal cortex is related to conscious states of awareness, as well as directed states of awareness, while brain stem functions are largely subconscious and automatic. The ability to consciously direct our awareness, which is the basic description of what is happening when we practice yoga, is a prefrontal cortex operation.

Scientists Christopher Koch and Francis Krick have attempted to identify neural correlates of consciousness, and therefore conscious experience. They propose these correlates are located in the posterior part of the cortex, and that conscious experiences are made sense of, to some degree, in the frontal regions of the cortex, helping to turn the experiencer into the "owner" of that experience. Hence, a story is created by ownership and identity. This is asmita, or I-ness, the narrative we create when we identity the experiences we have as occurring to us. The default mode network, the area of the brain that is active in a restful, waking state, is associated with day dreaming, rumination and, according to the literature presented by Dr. Eva Svoboda, activates when we recall episodic and autobiographical information, self-reflection and semantic processes. Each of these processes is intrinsic to the constructed I-sense that is described as asmita, the first of the kleshas that arises from avidya.

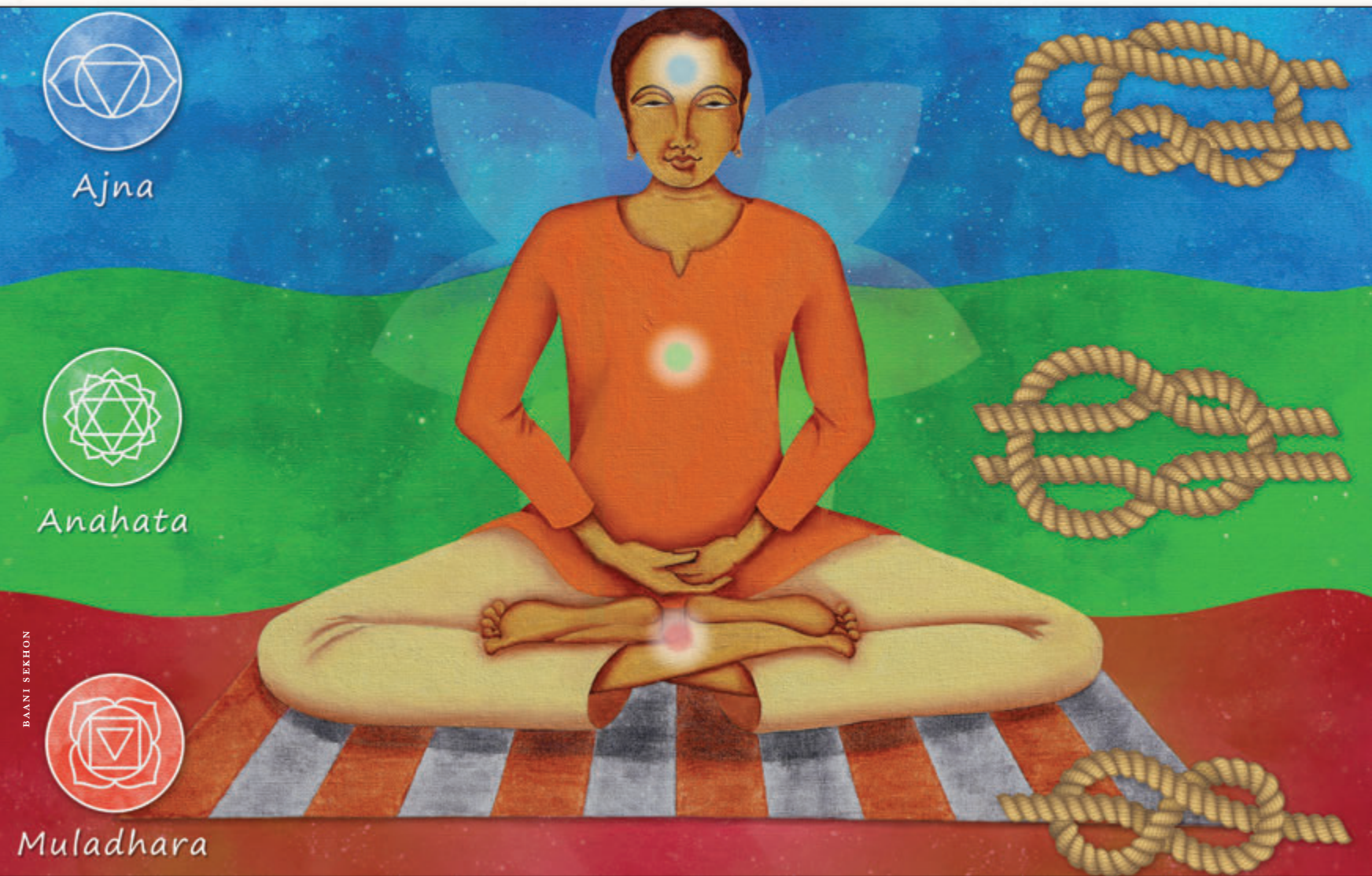
And so what of avidya, the incomplete knowing of who we are? According to Patanjali, it is through the conscious directing of focused awareness and non-engagement with arising memories and thought patterns that we can begin to unravel our misperceptions. We use the power of self-awareness to experience that we are aware. Then that awareness of awareness is a movement inward to places that neuroscience cannot yet describe, but that the yogis have, and in detail. In regards to the brain, this process of consciously directing our awareness towards quiet occurs in the prefrontal cortex.



72,000 Nadis

By Eddie Stern

While the yogic examination of the nervous system is quite complex, for the sake of this article I will briefly describe the system of nadis, or tubes, that are divided into three categories: *shiras*, *dhamini* and *prana nadis*. The shiras are the blood vessels, veins, arteries and capillaries. Dhamini are the nuclei, dendrites and axons that make up the nerves of the central and peripheral nervous system. The prana nadis are the subtle channels that act as channels for prana, our vital force. Shiras and dhamini are in the annamaya kosha, the physical/food body. The prana nadis are contained in the pranamaya kosha, the energy or breath body. The number of nadis are cataloged in different ways depending on the source. The *Chandogya Upanishad* speaks of 101 nadis emerging from the heart, and each of those branching off into 72,000 nadis. Most hatha yoga texts speak of only 72,000 nadis. The *Yoga Yajnavalkya* places the origination point of all nadis at the *kandasthana*, four finger widths below the navel. Our life force is bound at this point, and the Self, or jiva, is tied to prana as we are tied to our lives. Ten of the nadis are considered to be important for a practitioner to have working knowledge of. Three are of primary importance: the ida, pingala and sushumna.



Bringing It All Together

Let's come back to kriya yoga to pull this all together. The components of kriya yoga, as mentioned earlier, are tapas, svadhyaya and Ishvara pranidhana.

Tapas

Swami Hariharananda Aranya, in his commentary on Vyaasa's bhashya on the *Yoga Sutras*, states that tapas is physical, svadhyaya is verbal and Ishvara pranidhana is mental. The practices of tapas include asanas and pranayama, which affect physiological functions. Asanas are done not just to make the body strong and flexible, but to exert a deliberate pressure on internal organs and nerves that send messages directly to the brain, particularly the brain stem. For example, the gut-brain axis is the communication network of the microbes of the gut communicating through the vagus nerve (the primary nerve complex of the parasympathetic nervous system) back to the brain to tell the brain the condition of the gut. Many of the twisting asanas, and postures such as mayurasana are providing a deep stimulation to the abdominal viscera which are messaging directly to the brain.

The heart, lungs, liver, pancreas, stomach, diaphragm and intestines are all receiving messages from the brain, and also sending messages to the brain, through the vagus nerve. When we massage, stimulate and change pressure to these organs, when we encourage blood circulation and oxygenation to these organs, that message of life and vitality is sent to the brain. This keeps our operating system in balance, healthy and filled with vitality.

The health of the communication systems from the body to the brain stem supports homeostasis, the body's ability to constantly restore balance in relationship to the changing environment that we live in. Thus, the physical practices associated with tapas are directly affecting brain stem functions. The yogis who can stop their heartbeat, stop their breathing, control their sleep, withstand either freezing or extremely hot temperatures, go without food for extremely long periods or digest anything they ingest, are controlling brain stem functions. This is tapas.

Svadhyaya

Svadhyaya is self-evaluation and the repetition of mantras. One of the key aspects of svadhyaya is *bhavana*, the devotional mood or emotion

Body esoterics: Nadis are the channels through which life energies flow. Of the ten major ones, three are most important: Ida (relates to Brahma knot at muladhara chakra), Pingala (relates to Vishnu knot at the anahata chakra) and Sushmana (relates to Siva knot at the ajna chakra). When these nadis are blocked by knots, called granthis, prana's flow is hindered. The cause of the knots are past samskaras and karmas. One of our jobs in yoga sadhana is to untie these knots that bind us to changing form rather than allowing us to rise through the chakras into unchanging consciousness.

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associated with spiritual practices. The experience of mood and emotion is tightly linked to the limbic system. Swami Hariharananda has stated that without developing bhavana, the deeper levels of meditation cannot occur. Through the practice of svadhyaya, we address the area of the brain that processes and cements the narrative we have created about ourselves based on fear and emotions. The likes, dislikes, attractions and aversions of raga and dvesha are cemented here as repeated, habitual responses to the constructed world we live in.

Ishvara Pranidhana

While the brain stem primarily performs operations for the sake of keeping us alive, the limbic system processes information that keeps the sense of identity alive, but an identity based not on Self-referral but the object referral of the constructed self. Fear, memory and emotions are all processed in the limbic system. They are responses to actions, experiences, impressions and the desires to either move toward or move away from one of those experiences.

The repetition of mantras and self-evaluation breaks the cyclical narrative we often have rolling through our heads, and replaces that narrative with the syllables of transcendent thought (mantras) and the ability to observe how and when our likes and dislikes rear their heads. We can train ourselves to slow down our physiological processes with tapas, and we can train the fiery reactivity of the limbic system through using cooling, devotional feelings to calm the turbulence of the emotional centers. When things are going too fast, they are harder to catch. So, the first step is to slow down. We then create conditions for the deeper practices of compassion, empathy and contemplation, all of which occur in the cortical region of the brain.

Ishvara pranidhana, which is surrender to the Lord, or the perfect alignment of our awareness with the Seer within, could potentially be correlative for the information processing at the cortical level of the brain, as it requires the conscious directing of our awareness. Surrender is a purposeful not-knowing of what the future will bring, and a trust that whatever does happen is for the best. Ishvara pranidhana bypasses philosophical thought, to some degree, through surrender and devotion, and maximizes the two practices into a one-pointed flow of mental modifications; so we could surmise that bhavana is also associated with the prefrontal cortex.

If tapas is an undoing of solely identifying on a physical level, and

Nadis & Granthis

By Eddie Stern

When prana flows in ida, pingala and all of the other nadis other than sushumna, we are in our normal day-to-day duality consciousness, subjected to the ever-changing states of mind and emotions that we identify with: happiness, sadness, kindness, anger, generosity, greed, sympathetic joy, jealousy and the entire range of the up's and down's of life. In this state, the nadis are not free-flowing open tubes that are transmitting prana effortlessly and unimpeded, so they continue to bind us to changing states of consciousness and give rise to disease and imbalances of the physiological systems. These blockages, called granthis (knots), hinder the flow of prana and prevent it from flowing into sushumna nadi. The knots are caused by past samskaras and karmas that bind us to our name, form, identity, and drive our propensity to act in habitual patterns. The untying of the granthis is largely the purpose of asanas, pranayama and meditation, as we have granthis on the level of the body, nervous system, pranic and mental planes.

The most important of the granthis are the Brahma, Vishnu and Siva granthis. The Brahma granthi, located at the muladhara chakra, is our attachment to survival issues: money, sexual reproduction, job, family, home and safety. Vishnu granthi comprises our emotional knots: the need for love, acknowledgement, image, respect, identifying ourselves by our partner, friends or our group identities. The Siva granthi is our bondage to spiritual achievements, spiritual superiority, scholarly arrogance, and inflated sense of "I" in regards to mistaken identity as an authority.

Asanas and pranayama help to untie the knots of the Brahma granthi. Mantras and ritual help to untie the knots of the Vishnu granthi. Service, humility and meditation on God as dwelling equally in all beings help to untie the knots of the Siva granthi. Most sources place the Brahma, Vishnu and Siva granthis, in order, at the base of the spine, the heart and between the eyebrows. Other sources place them at the three fused bones of the coccyx and say that by loosening those bones, through mulabandha and other practices, the three knots can be untied.



svadhyaya is an undoing of our constructed narrative identity, then Ishvara pranidhana is the inward movement of awareness towards the Seer within. It is the utter relaxation into the arms of the Lord, to rest on the bed of Anantadeva, the serpent bed who represents the infinite folding in and out of time. As this final process is intentional, the area of the brain where intentional thought is processed lies in the prefrontal cortex. The higher-level behaviors discussed in the yoga texts—such as compassion, generosity, kindness, friendship, forgiveness and discipline—all occur in the prefrontal cortex.

It has been shown in studies on monks and yogis in deep meditation that there is a harmonious flow of brain-wave activity—whole-brain signaling—that occurs at deep stages of meditation.

The observable patterns of brain-wave activity simply reflect the electrical activity of information flows in the brain, blood flow and oxygen absorption, and these activities are driven by thought—so that something imperceptible causes a perceptible activity—whether those meditative thoughts are non-specific awareness, focused attention, compassion-based practice or repetition of a mantra. Certain types of thoughts will direct blood flow to targeted areas of the

brain; this is what brain imaging is measuring. However, the deepest levels of meditation show a coherence of brain-wave patterns, a fully integrated coherence that transcends our normal, fractured waking and dreaming states. Yoga is a process of mastering and intentionally constructing new patterns of awareness within our body-mind complex. The ultimate goal is *kaivalya*, which the absence of all patterns; freedom is to be free of all patterns, no matter how pure or elevated a pattern may seem. We can use the ingredients nature has given us in order to be free from all patterns.

My Question Answered

It turns out, in answer to my earlier question, that the body can indeed be the starting place for freedom, and asanas are the easiest way to begin. We just have to be careful that we do not stop or get stuck on asanas, because then identification with the body will become stronger, and with it, all of the issues of *asmita*, egoity, as well. When we engage practices beyond asanas, we have more tools to consciously reflect on our own personal patterns, troublesome as well as

Strength builds strength: The artist depicts the closed-loop feedback system described by the author. Beginning with *shraddha* (faith; here worship of Lord Ganesha), the devotee's *virya* (vitality) is enhanced, causing *smriti* (memory) to improve. This in turn brings constant remembrance of the path, leading to *samadhi* (deep states of consciousness), which awakens *prajna* (spiritual insight), which in turn strengthens faith, and the circle continues.

positive, on our journey towards liberation.

Science can help, simply because it is another tool for measuring whether or not the techniques are doing what we hope they will. It can be encouraging to see that we have the power to slow our heart rate, decrease high blood pressure, slow down brain wave patterns to deep sleep states even while awake, maintain constant body temperature in extremely cold weather or control anger and food habits. The encouragement we feel inside of ourselves from experiencing these things leads us to have a faith based on conviction, called *shraddha*, that fills us with vitality, or *virya*. This vitality and energy increases our memory, *smrti*, so that we constantly recall that, yes, we should always remember to practice, because we are on the right path. This constant remembrance leads to deep levels of mental absorption, called *samadhi*, and from these deep levels of absorption comes insight, or intuition, into the deepest recesses of our being. This is the sequence as described by Bhagavan Patanjali: *shraddha virya smriti samadhi prajna purvaka itaresham* (1.20). The *prajna* that arises from within strengthens our *shraddha* again, and so the entire mechanism works as a closed-loop feedback system. Patanjali's yoga describes the deliberate steps we can take to work towards this attainment, and modern science and the understandings of brain functions can help us to understand on a very practical level what occurs physiologically when we engage in the various yoga sadhanas. The kleshas do indeed have physiological correlates, because the mind and body are a continuum of patterns. When we free one, we free the other.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eddie Stern is a yoga instructor and author from New York City. His latest book is *One Simple Thing, A New Look at the Science of Yoga and How it Can Change Your Life*, and his newest app is "Yoga365, micro-practices for an aware life." His daily, live yoga classes can be found on www.eddiestern.com



Verses from the Yoga Sutras

समाधिभावनाथः क्लेशतनूकरणार्थश्च

"This yoga (kriya yoga) has the purpose of bringing about samadhi and attenuating the kleshas." sutra 2.2

अनित्याशुचिदुखानात्मसु नित्यशुचिसुखात्मख्यातिरविद्या

"Ignorance (avidya) is the seeing of that which is eternal, pure, joyful and the soul in that which is ephemeral, impure, sorrowful and not the soul." sutra 2.5

क्लेशमूलः कर्माशयो दृष्टादृष्टजन्मवेदनीयः

"The kleshas are the root source of the stored karma, and this may be experienced in the present visible birth or in an unseen future birth." sutra 2.12

स्वाध्यायाद् इष्टदेवतासंप्रयोगः
समाधिसिद्धिरीश्वरप्रणिधानात्

"Through self-study (svadhyaya), a connection is established with one's chosen Deity. Through devotion to Ishvara, samadhi is attained." sutras 2.44-45



TRADITION

India's Profound Kinship with Water

Water holds a special place in every Hindu's life. The rivers are sacred, the temple tanks bestow blessings, and worshipful offerings are made daily.

BY ANURADHA GOYAL, DELHI

GIVING WATER TO THE THIRSTY earns you instant *punya* or merit—so declared our grandmothers. Travel across India and you see this as a living tradition, where clay pots filled with water are kept on the road for anyone who may be thirsty. With time, clay pots have made way for water coolers, but the idea remains the same. In Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh you still see women sitting on the road in the hot sun to offer water to thirsty passersby. Not just fellow humans; we keep water even for birds and animals.

Water is one of the Pancha Tattva, the five prime elements of which everything is made, four others being Earth, Air, Fire, and Sky. Of these, water is the key nurturer, without which most life, including human life, cannot survive. No wonder, when man decided to settle, he chose to settle near the rivers flowing from hills to the oceans. These lands were fertile, ensuring constant food supply;

but more importantly, there was ample water for all kinds of needs. Later, when men did settle away from rivers, they established huge lakes that allowed them to collect water and saturate the earth beneath. Cities like Bhopal, Hyderabad and Bengaluru are a good example of cities full of lakes.

In India, anyone who nurtures you is a Devata, a Deity worthy of worship. So, every source of water is revered and prayed to—be it oceans, rivers, ponds, wells and lakes, or man-made stepwells and temple tanks. Worship of water goes back to Vedic times at least. The *Rig Veda's* "Nadi Stuti Sukta" hymn praises the primary rivers that nurtured the land of Bharata, including Ganga, Yamuna, Shutudri (now Sutlej), Sarasvati, Asikni (Chenab), Parushni (Ravi), Vitasta (Jhelum), and several rivers that are lost to us. Most major rivers have their own stutis, or songs, praising them, which are duly sung while worshipping them.

Unfortunately, the water-rich culture that

treated water with so much reverence is losing its water at a rapid speed. The rivers are getting polluted with unchecked toxic industrial waste being dumped into them. The region of Cherrapunji and Mawsynram in the hill state of Meghalaya is one of the wettest places on earth, receiving an average of 467 inches of rainfall yearly. Come summer months, even these areas suffer water shortage. Underground water tables are lessening across the country, and are dangerously low in urban areas. Big cities like Bengaluru are predicted to go dry soon. P. Sainath—the founder/editor of PARI (People's Archive of Rural India) cites per-capita availability of water falling from 5,177 cubic meters in 1951 to 3,300 in 2011. He attributes this to the channelizing of water from small landowning farmers to industries and urban areas.

Dependence on piped water, which consumers have no idea where it comes from, has broken the relationship between humans and sources of water. People whose



PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK

ancestors started their day by worshipping the water bodies near and far, by invoking all the holy rivers with mantras like "*gange cha yamune chaiv godavari sarasvati narmade sindhu kaveri jalesmin sannidhim kuru*" as they poured water on their bodies to bathe, now treat it as a commodity like any they buy. Ironically, a people who for eons believed that offering local water to the thirsty carried great merit now sell pilgrims water from the polluting plastic bottles, water that is sucked from the earth and transported long distances. It is time India realizes its sacred relationship with water, revives and re-establishes it, values it, cherishes it, and lives with abundant water, just like our ancestors did.

Abhay Mishra—author and Riverine Culture Scholar at IGNCA, New Delhi, endorses this view that introduction of tap water disconnected us from our sources of water, which used to be collectively managed by society. He recalls their vital role in the family and social rituals and emphasizes that we have forgotten to offer gratitude to sources of water. He talks about the efforts of Saurabh Singh, who is reviving wells for potable water in Ghazipur. It is helping them deal with the grave threat of arsenic in ground water, an issue that has its roots in digging too many tube wells in the fields.

He gives an example of Halma, a community effort for common issues, organized by Shivganga organization in the tribal region of Jhabua in central India. Thousands of villagers work one day a week to create 30,000 trenches on the Hathipawa hill to collect rainwater that was otherwise being lost. Each trench is two meters long, one meter wide and half meter deep. Groups of such trenches store and channelize water while improving the biodiversity of the region. All this is achieved through community effort

Liquid life: (Clockwise from far left) Rishikesh, August 3, 2016, chanting priests offer oil lamps to the Ganga each night; Rani Ki Vav is a stepwell (and UNESCO World Heritage site) located in Patan, Gujarat; pilgrims bathe and make offerings at the tank of Matangeswara Temple in Khajuraho

with minimal cost. There are similar initiatives happening in other parts of the country. Hopefully, these water body revival activities will scale up across India and bring back the much-required balance between water management and consumption. These efforts inspire us to look back in time at the great water heritage of India.

Water, Water Everywhere

India is a "Jal Pradhan," the water-abundant land. It is not only blessed with a 4,670-mile coastline that touches the three oceans, but its whole landscape is adorned with a vast network of rivers originating from hills and mountains and running towards the sea. They are like the nerve system of the country, transporting water, the nectar of life, to all parts of the land. Thousands of mini streams, bejeweled with waterfalls, flow through myriad terrains to join these rivers. India is famously called





SAIKAP



HARI MAHIDHAR



DANIEL J. RAO

Life-giving blessings: (counterclockwise from top left) A temple water tank at Hampi, the center of the Hindu Vijayanagara Empire; Jabalpur tourists ride a cable car to enjoy an aerial view of Dhuandhar waterfall on the Narmada River; Kerala fishermen pull in a large net of sardines at Kannur; devotees are bathed with water at Rameshwaram temple; monsoon time in Chennai is an annual event

the land of seven rivers, rivers that are invoked before every major ritual. However, every region has so many rivers and river valley settlements that it would not be inappropriate to call it the land of hundreds of rivers.

Each tributary has famous cities and pilgrimage sites on its banks. Ganga has Haridwar, where it enters the plains at the foothills of the Himalayas, and then Kashi, where it flows northwards for a while looking back at its origin. Cauvery originates from the Kodagu hills in South India and flows eastward towards the Bay of Bengal, nurturing the states of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Each river has its own stories in the *Puranas*. King Bhagirath brought Ganga down from the heavens via the hair of Siva. Tapti is the daughter of the sun. The Godavari is called Gautami due to her association with Rishi Gautam. Cauvery came down in the *kamandalu*, or metal pot, of Rishi Agastya. The Brahmaputra comes from a pond that arose at the place where Brahma's son was placed, making it a rare male river. According to the *Puranas*, most rivers are Goddesses who live on Earth in their *dravya*, or liquid, form. In fact, the most beautiful women in the *Indraloka* originate from water and are hence called *apsaras*—*ap* being water.

India's reverence for water extends from rivers to every drop of rain bestowed upon its land. In peak summer months, people keep looking at the skies, waiting for clouds to show up and assure them that rains are around the corner. Why not? After all, rains keep the wheels of the agrarian economy moving. Nothing brings more happiness than the abundant rains for four months known as Chaturmas. This is the time when travels are abandoned, fields are left on their own and people stay at home. Even the wandering saints choose one place to stay for these four months. In *Ramayana*, Sri Ram and his brother Lakshman camped on the outskirts of Kishkindha during Chaturmas before moving to Lanka. The Sanskrit word for monsoons is *Varsha*. That is the word also used for a *year*, giving rain the preeminence it deserves. Monsoon is one of the six seasons in India. It usually starts in early June from the southern coast and



moves upward, lasting till September. Both cold and hot deserts in Ladakh and Rajasthan get hardly any rain, while coastal regions get about 120 inches, and the wettest parts get as much as 550 inches. Folk songs like "Kajri," sung during monsoons, are full of emotions that rains invoke. Kalidasa evocatively describes monsoon as a season of longing in his poem "Ritusamhara."

Anupam Mishra, a pioneer in rain-water harvesting and water conservation, is credited with reviving many traditional water conservation techniques. In his copyright-free book *Ponds Are Still Relevant*, he takes us through the ecosystem of water bodies in different parts of India. He talks about how people chose the right spot and time to build the pond and how they maintained it over years, involving each segment of the society that benefited from it. Every rooftop was connected to a water collection mechanism leading to individual



DANIEL J. RAO

wells in desert cities, including Jaisalmer, even though it has a wealth of 52 scenic ponds.

Stepwells

Extraordinary stepwells are sprinkled across the country, more so in the dry western states like Rajasthan and Gujarat. They are man-made oases that not only stored water but served as social places to gather. They are built like inverted temples dedicated to

Vishnu, who likes to sleep in the waters of Ksheersagar.

Rani Ki Vav ("Queen's Well") was built in the 11th century by Queen Udaymati of Solanki dynasty in the town of Patan in Gujarat state. It descends seven levels below the ground, with stone walls and platforms all around, adorned with ornate carvings, leading to a pool 31 feet square and 75 feet deep. You wonder what inspired the queen to build such an architectural wonder, thought to be a memorial for her departed husband. My answer is *punya*: the greatest merit that you accumulate is by ensuring water for your people.

At Abhaneri near Jaipur, the sheer symmetry of Chand Baori makes it one of the most photogenic stepwells. Its more than 3,500 rhythmic geometric steps going sideways ensure that you can reach the water level at all times.

At Shringverpur near Prayagraj, there is an ancient elaborate arrangement of connected tanks to collect the floodwaters of Ganga

Rameshwaram Temple's Karma-Conquering Wells

The 22 wells of this ancient South Indian temple wash away pilgrims' karmas and bestow blessings. The labyrinthine complex is large even by Indian temple standards, with thousands of feet of high-ceilinged granite-pillared corridors. Having pilgrimaged here, you ready yourself by wading out to immerse three times in the Bay of Bengal. You turn and walk 700 feet to the temple tower, entering a fantasy world of stone chambers, slippery floors and steel handrails. At the first well, groups are organized into little tribes that will spend the next 90 minutes together. As instructed by your guru, you hold in your mind the far-too-many wrongdoings of this life—sometimes called sins, but that's a charged word, too Abrahamic. Your caravansary of misdeeds marches past—the wrongs, the hurts, the transgressions, the vices and victims of your ignorance—all there, carried all this distance. At each well one among them will surge forward, be acknowledged and—as the sacred waters of Sivaness pour over you—washed away and released forever. How it must feel, you wonder, to be free of all that.

The pilgrims are ready, and you are urgently signaled to follow a thin man who scurries ahead holding a dented tin bucket tied to a long, yellow rope. The guide rushes through several dark halls as you and your tribe of 15 try to keep up, confused by the hundreds of other pilgrims following dozens of other bucketeers, all crisscrossing, scurrying barefoot along the wet stone floors, worn smooth by millions of previous pilgrims' feet. Suddenly the guide stops at the second well and climbs atop the wall with such deftness that you forget how precarious his perch really is. He tosses

the bucket into the water some 20 feet below, and with lightning moves born of years of practice, brings the brimming pail up, splashing the cool water with kinetic urgency on the crown of your head. Others step forward for their turn, and you take that moment to purposefully watch one gnarly misdeed disappear.

Off the tribe goes, through a dim tunnel, out into an open, sunny courtyard, then back into the dark corridors, left and right until the third well is reached. You realize you've become disoriented in both time and space. That might be a cause for concern, but not here, not now. It is a blissful state, the feeling of being everywhere and everywhen at once.

The wells continue in no logical order, some close, others far. Some are round and others square. One turns out to be the giant temple tank, 100 feet wide and filled with water lilies. You feel the lightness of the soul as felonies, misdemeanors and unkindnesses fall away.

Each well has a story, you are told. The first, Mahalakshmi Tirtham, bestows riches. The second, third and fourth lifted a curse from a rishi. At Ganga Tirtham, the 13th well, Rama was absolved of the sin of killing Ravana. You reach the final well, the twenty-second. Called Kodi Tirtham, it is said to confer blessings equal to bathing in the holy Ganga ten million times. There is no bucket here, just a tiny copper cup holding a few scant ounces. How ironic. The greatest blessings from the smallest demitasse!

You feel strangely different, purer, right with yourself and the world. "How long can this last?" you wonder.



THOMAS KELLY



SHUTTERSTOCK

during the rainy season and direct excess water back into the river. The tanks not only collected water but also cleaned it through sedimentation process. We find extensive water management systems in archaeological sites like Dholavira, that belong to the Sindhu Saraswati River Valley civilization, dating back to at least the 8th century bce. Water channels can be seen all around the 2,000-year-old excavated Buddhist caves called Kanheri Caves in the heart of Mumbai. Interconnected water tanks at regular intervals leverage the natural gradient of the rock, capturing water from the roofs of the caves. The water collected in four months lasted for the whole year for the monks.

In the eastern state of Odisha, when you drive through the rural landscape, you know you are close to a village when you see a series of large ponds, invariably with a small temple in the middle or on the banks. In the northeastern states, most ponds are full of lotus flowers that cover the water with their broad leaves, minimizing loss by evaporation.

Each temple in ancient India had at least one temple tank, if not more. *Skanda Purana*, in its "Ayodhya Mahatmay," describes a map of Ayodhya defined by a series of interconnected ponds, despite the city being located on the banks of a *sarayu*, perennial river. In the South, the ancient temple town of Kanchipuram is full of tanks inside and outside the temples. In the heart of the city

is Sarv Teertham Kulam, a huge tank surrounded by small temples on three sides. One can only imagine it as a place where the locals and pilgrims mingled and exchanged stories in olden times.

A ray of hope: the revival of temple tanks in Tamil Nadu have yielded immediate impact on the level of groundwater, showing that if the inlets and outlets of these tanks are maintained, they automatically channelize rainwater back into the earth that would otherwise be dissipated.



ARUN SAMBHU MISHRA

The best example of water preservation is seen at Mandu, an ancient city located on the top of a tabletop hill with no supply of water except the annual rain. Narmada, the closest river, is more than 40 miles away. The city was among the most densely populated in the world in its time but, it seems, was never short of water. Walk around and you see a series of lakes to collect water. Inside its royal quarters, the buildings are arranged around deep wells to collect every drop of water. You also see luxurious rooftop swimming pools! So much so that its palace is called Jahah Mahal, as it looks like a ship sailing on the water with two huge lakes surrounding it on either side. The whole city is designed around water collection and conservation.

Where Rivers Meet

All the pilgrimages in India involve taking a dip in the holy waters of the place being visited. Can the pilgrimage to Kashi ever be complete without a dip in the Ganga? Famous Panchkroshi Yatra, around the larger mandala of Kashi, begins and ends with a boat ride on the Ganga from Manikarnika Ghat. The highest tribute to the Narmada, the oldest river in India, is Narmada Parikrama, where pilgrims walk the full length of the river and then returning on the opposite bank, taking a holy bath in its water every morning. They walk more than 1,600 miles for months and sometimes years together, stopping for the



INDIAN EXPRESS

Hydrophiles: (clockwise from far left) Stone walkways provide access to abundant reserves of water in the ancient city of Mandu, Madhya Pradesh; tens of millions of pilgrims gather on India's riverbanks in Haridwar, seeking blessings; a devotee bathes a sacred Sivalinga with water

night at the temples and ashrams and eating whatever they are offered.

That brings me to the grandest celebration of water on Earth, the Kumbh Mela, which happens every 12 years at four different venues. The heart of the massive festival is bathing in sacred rivers—the confluence of rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati at Prayag; River Ganga at Haridwar; the Kshipra River at Ujjain, and the River Godavari at Nashik. Millions of people travel from across the nation during precise planetary conjunctions just to take a dip in the water. You can do a million things at the Kumbh, but it is essentially a visit to the holy river, to pray to it and to take a dip in it.

Throughout each year there are considered most auspicious to bathe in India's holy rivers. The full moon night of Karthik, in January, 15 days after the Diwali festival, is celebrated in many ways, but the most important is bathing in a holy river close to you. There also are special snans, or bathing schedules, for

intense events like solar eclipses, when pilgrims visit holy sites like Kurukshetra for a ritual bath.

It is interesting to note the purpose said to be served by that each of India's cardinal dhams. Devatas meditate at the Badrikashram located in the Himalayas in the north. They eat at Anna Kshetra of Puri in the East. They sleep in Dwarka on the western coast. And they bathe at Rameswaram in the South.

There is a water wonder of 22 stone wells inside the premises of Rameswaram temple, where, following ancient tradition, pilgrims take bath after they have bathed the Sivalinga with the Ganga River water they bring from Kashi. They say taking bath in these perennial wells absolves all your sins. Each well has a name and story of kings and sages who took bath in these wells and the type of sin the well is known to affect. For example, at Kodi Teertham, Sri Krishna got rid of the sin of killing Kamsa, and after a dip at Chakra Tirtha the Sun received its golden glow.

In the spirit of giving water to those who need it, India remains a net exporter of water. No, it does not sell its water per se, but its major exports are agricultural products that need a lot of water to grow. Among the primary

crops exported are rice, cotton and sugarcane, which are all water-thirsty crops. Add to this the massive meat exports. Essentially India is taking upon itself the water burden of countries it is exporting to. Can it or should it do this while it faces water shortages itself?

It is promising that the Indian Government set up Jal Shakti Ministry in 2019, an agency that looks at water as the key resource and is expected to work on river rejuvenation, including the cleaning of Ganga and on providing safe clean drinking water for everyone. Hopefully, this will bring the focus required to make India water-rich again, along with bringing back the culture that treats water as sacred in everyday life as much as it does in its rituals.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Anuradha Goyal is one of India's leading travel bloggers. Her key focus at www.IndiTales.com is ancient Indian civilization and temple architecture along with old techniques such as water management with step wells.

Why Not Close School on Diwali?

Young Pennsylvania Hindus making our biggest holiday official

By SANTHANAA HARIHARAPUTRAN, 16
IRVINE, CALIFORNIA

“WANT PEOPLE TO THINK, WHAT IF IT WAS me? What if I had to go to school or work on my holiday? How would I feel?” said Paree Pasi of Pennsylvania in her May 2021 interview with WFMZ-TV’s 69 News, sharing her thoughts on school holidays in regards to her religion. This concern, and inspired by the success of her cousin in a nearby district [see sidebar], powered the actions of Central Bucks West High School student Paree Pasi into starting a campaign to recognize Diwali as a school holiday. If she succeeded, all schools in her district would close for the day, with no classes being held. Hindu students would be allowed to celebrate in traditional fashion, and the others would learn about one of the world’s major holidays.

Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights, is an official state holiday in 12 countries, including Fiji, Guyana, India, Malaysia, Mauritius, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Suriname and Trinidad, with a combined population of 1.7 billion people, or 22% of the world’s population. It is the fourth most popular holiday in the world after New Years Day (January 1), Christmas and Eid al-Fitr.

Pasi personally treasures Diwali and its traditions, especially the family get-together for a grand feast. She points out that the Indian holiday is similar to the American traditions of Christmas and Thanksgiving—both also being marked by feasting.

Yet, the closing of schools on Diwali itself is not Pasi main concern. The campaign is more about her belief that “A school calendar should reflect the changing demographic of a community.” She also said she felt underrepresented, unappreciated and unheard.

A district school board in Pennsylvania is allowed to designate five local holidays a year, beyond the state or federally mandated ones. Central Bucks District chooses to close for Good Friday, Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah. If a particular holiday is not official, “Students of any faith in Central Bucks can take an excused leave of absence for religious reasons,” Pasi stated.

She has the support of students and staff, with the local teachers’ union issuing an official statement in support. Opposition, she says, has come mostly



69 WFMZ

from the conservative Christian community. Her campaign is strengthened by the adoption of Diwali as an official holiday by not only her cousin’s district, Council Rock, but also the Pennsbury district, both nearby.

Pennsylvania state as a whole, according to the Pew Research Center, is 73% Christian and 21% with no religion. One percent identify as Jewish, Hindu or Muslim, and slightly fewer as Buddhist. With these statistics, some could argue that the school calendar in Pennsylvania already reflects its religious population, due to the high percentage of Christians present. However, Pasi reasons that “it’s not about numbers, but about creating an inclusive community.”



INQUIRER.COM/MICHAEL BRYANT

Her interview with WFMZ-TV attracted quite a few comments, some in support, some critical. One said, “When I was in school, I lived in a town that had just a couple of students who practiced Judaism. There was no problem with them taking off to celebrate Jewish holidays. It didn’t mean that five hundred Christian kids could get off. Suppose we make Diwali a school holiday, then a Muslim child comes along and wants all Muslim holy days to be declared school holidays. Everyone of every religious persuasion gets their holy days declared school holidays. What will that do to the educational system?”

In the case of Central Bucks, the district already has set two Jewish holidays, despite the relatively low number of Jewish students, so that precedent is in Paree’s favor.

In Irvine, California, in the school district of myself, the author, we have the option to take off school for a holiday of our religion, but that isn’t necessarily a very good option. One Hindu I spoke with at my high school puts academics over holidays and would not take a day off if it meant missing important classes or tests. “Why would you take off before the most important math test of the entire semester?” she challenged another Hindu student. The confused and slightly offended classmate replied, “I took the day off to



PAREE PASI

Diwali: (clockwise from left) Paree Pasi’s May, 2021, interview with a local station in Pennsylvania attracted national attention; with her family on Diwali evening; Central Bucks West High School

spend time with my family for Diwali.”

After this encounter with her religiously active classmate and after hearing of Pasi’s efforts in Pennsylvania, the student’ perspective of only focusing on academics changed somewhat and she wondered why Irvine school district, which is much more diverse than Central Bucks, doesn’t consider making Diwali a school holiday.

Similarly, Pasi encountered one Hindu student at her school who thought that giving a day off was unnecessary, and education about Diwali might be better. But mostly the Hindu students supported her efforts.

Asked how she explains the importance of Diwali, Pasi told HINDUISM TODAY, “Diwali is the biggest Hindu holiday, with around 1.2 billion people celebrating worldwide. It is a 5-day event recognizing the victory of good over evil, light over darkness and, in parts of India, the new Hindu year. Diwali, ‘festival of lights,’ was derived from the Sanskrit and Tamil term Dipavali meaning a row of lights. When Rama, Sita and Lakshman were coming back to their hometown, Ayodhya, after 14 years of exile and the defeat of Ravana, the villagers lit a path with diyas, traditional clay lamps, to celebrate Rama’s victory and to show him his way back home, since Diwali falls on a moonless night.”

She goes on to describe the extensive preparations, including the rangoli designs made on the sidewalks and outside the front door, the cleaning and renovation of the home, and the creation of a temporary shrine, all to encourage the Goddess Lakshmi to enter and bless the family. On Diwali day itself the family visits the temple and sets off fireworks in the evening. “My favorite tradition,”

catching each other up on our lives makes irreplaceable memories.”

Pasi has yet to achieve her goal and continues the effort. Her efforts have gotten over 1,500 votes in favor of adding Diwali to the school calendar, and many are hoping that this initiative will continue to spread to other districts as well. After all, a Google search says that “almost 3.1 million people in America celebrate Diwali,” so why is such a widely-celebrated holiday not on the American school calendar?

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Born in Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu, and now residing in Orange County, California, Santhanaa Hariharaputran is a Bharatanatyam dancer and devout Hindu. In her spare time, she aspires to be a polylinguist and violinist and to pursue her passion for medicine. Contact her at: santhanaamhari@gmail.com.

Success in Council Rock District

In Pennsylvania, Paree had a playbook to follow in her campaign to have Diwali declared an all-school holiday at Central Bucks High School: her cousin Vir Sahu’s successful 2018 campaign with the same goal at the Council Rock School District, just 12 miles southeast of Central Bucks.

According to a report in the *The Indianite*, the official school newspaper of Council Rock North High School, Sahu first approached the Council Rock school board at their December, 2017, meeting. “He argued that recognition of major Hindu holidays such as Diwali in the school calendar would be a step in building a more inclusive school community,” according to the report. By the board’s January meeting, he had gathered 450 signatures from students and community members on a Change.org petition. He, his father and two other students testified in favor of the holiday at the meeting. They were successful. The proposal was formally added to the February meeting agenda, and the board unanimously voted to make Diwali a full day off. The decision sparked considerable local coverage.

Sahu told *The Indianite*, “I learned that students have the ability to make a difference when they see something in their community that needs to be changed. We have stronger voices than we may seem to perceive, and it is important to make yourself heard, especially regarding topics that are close to your heart.”

2018-2019 SCHOOL YEAR CALENDAR

NOVEMBER '18							Diwali!
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	
				1	2	3	Election Day, No Students; Professional Development Holiday – All Schools Closed; Offices Open
4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
11	12	13	14	15	16	17	19* Early Dismissal K-8; PM K attends; ES PM Conferences; HS PM & Evening Conferences; HS Evening Inservice
18	19	20	21	22	23	27	20* Early Dismissal K-8; AM K attends; ES PM & Evening Conferences; MS PM Conferences
25	26	27	28	29	30		21 No School for Students; Professional Development HS only; AM Conferences K-8
Teacher Days: 19 Student Days: 17							22-23 Thanksgiving Break; All Schools/Offices Closed



VIDEO GAMES

Raji: An Ancient Epic Takes the Gaming World by Storm

The video game immerses us in Hindu art and architecture as we guide Raji to rescue her kidnapped brother from a demon



Video games are a bigger industry than movies—\$180 billion in 2020, compared to \$100 billion for films. Driving their popularity is a rapidly advancing technology that creates a directed, immersive and realistic experience. Raji, with stunning visual imagery, transports you to ancient Rajasthan. We invited our Young Writer and avid gamer, Aditya Muthaiah, to introduce the epic, and our contributing artist and art expert, Baani Sekhon, to explore the game's incorporation of traditional forms of Indian art.

BY ADITYA MUTHAIAH, OREGON, USA
GOOGLE'S AUDIENCE RATING SUMMARY of *Raji: An Ancient Epic*, is 4.9, just a tenth point off a perfect five—and that's based on nearly 3,000 reviews. Raji was nominated for the Best Debut Game at the Game Awards 2020, arguably the most important award in game history, and won the Grand Prix, Winners Circle and Best Narration awards at the Taipei Game Awards 2021. More nominations and awards followed at major gamer functions such as Pegasus 2021. This is remarkable for an "indie" production by a small

team, as opposed to games produced by large, well-funded studios.
Raji: an Ancient Epic is based on a young girl named Raji, a circus performer, and her brother Golu, who is a storyteller. The demon Mahabalasura's henchmen kidnap Golu on the day of Raksha Bandhan, when sisters traditionally tie a rakhi around the wrists of their brothers. Raji then sets out to rescue her brother. The invasion of the human realm by Mahabalasura has enraged Durga, Vishnu and Siva, who then assist Raji. As the story develops, Raji learns that her fight with the demons has a greater purpose: to save hu-



ALL ART: NODDING HEAD GAMES

Entering Raji's magical world: (left to right) Game screenshot of Goddess Durga blessing Raji with a powerful tri-shul or trident; Raji battles a demon in "The Fortress of Jaidhar" using the Sharang bow gifted her by Lord Vishnu

manity, a task entrusted to her by the Gods, in a major battle between good and evil.
The game is a single-player [see sidebar for this and other gaming terms], action-packed game with many hints to Indian mythology and architecture and shadow puppet cutscenes. Goddess Durga and Lord Vishnu

often converse in the background. There's a lot of Indian music throughout, mainly flute and tabla. This game is great because it shows us a lot about ancient India.
The experience begins with a 2-D shadow-puppet cutscene, after which we come to the playable game side of things and first see Durga and Vishnu debating if Raji can take on Mahabalasura. Vishnu, unsure of Raji's abilities, asks Durga, "Are you very sure about Raji's intelligence and power, Ma Durga?" Ma Durga knows that Raji will be able to save her brother.
As the player, we can choose three abilities. We witness ancient Indian architecture

as Raji starts her path and combative encounters demons along the way. The game continues with more fights, and finally Raji battles Mahabalasura in the boss fight. Raji uses her acrobat skills from the circus during the fight and avoids a few attacks from Mahabalasura, although Mahabalasura's attacks are too strong. In the end, if the player is good and has chosen the right abilities, they will be able to either take down Mahabalasura or will have to try again.
This game deserves all the hype because of the fun and original game-play mechanics such as the combat and visuals. The reviews are high as well, because it is a game you can

Game Terms

The first video game was developed in 1940, putting us in the gaming's ninth decade, so it's no surprise this world has its own terminology. There is a fundamental difference between **single-player games** such as *Raji*, running on your own console or computer, and **online multiplayer games**. The latter

communicate with a server and connect player from around the world. They can be played on a dedicated **game console** (such as Nintendo's Switch, the Xbox by Microsoft or Sony's PlayStation 5), or on a PC or smart phone.
The most basic terms refer to the hardware, such as **KBM**, ("keyboard and mouse") when using an ordinary computer and not a dedicated console. **WASD** means using the W, A, S and D

keys under the left hand on a Qwerty keyboard, often to control the movement of your character. **Keybinds** are dedicated keys or key combinations used to control play. A **framedrop** refers to a lag visual frame rate—caused by lack of computing power or network issues.
A **cutscene** is when the game will stop gameplay and show a short pre-rendered story scene. Its function is to develop the

narrative by providing additional information, setting a mood, rewarding a player or foreshadowing future events.
The **Boss Fight** refers to the game's most challenging enemy battles, such as the final boss encounter (in *Raji* being Mahabalasura) or any subsequent powerful, unique enemies, often being bigger and badder than any faced before.



enjoy when you just need a break to relax, with or without company. The game is not so easy that you will get bored, but it is not super difficult. So you will have a challenge, but in the end, you will feel proud of finishing and want to try again, just because of the enjoyability.

More on the game-play mechanics side of things: one of my favorite mechanics is how the weapons and the powers will upgrade when you find different areas on the map and when you speak to the Gods. You start off with a spear, a bow, a sword, shield and a chakram that you use countless times when fighting the demons.

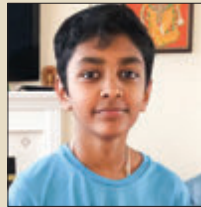
I did find some issues *Raji*. I think it would be more enjoyable to play online and as mul-

tiplayer, for example, using the arrow keys and WASD for multiplayer on a PC. On the Switch, you could make it so that each controller on the Switch is one player—but only one to four players should play at a time, or the game would get chaotic. Another issue

was I could not find the in-game menu on how to change my keybinds. This is important, because the default controls are not optimal for the Nintendo Switch or KBM on the PC.

The game crashed and kicked me out with frequent frame drops, but that might just be the software I have. Besides the problem with the controls and

the suggestion for future change with multiplayer, the game is perfect with no major issues. Also, they may have fixed some or all the issues when they recently added the game to Xbox and Playstation, so we will see what the results look like on the console. 🙌



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Aditya Muthaiah, 12, is going into 7th grade in fall 2021 at Meadow Park Middle School in Beaverton, Oregon. His interests are gaming, Indian classical music, and playing the piano.



NODDING HEADS GAMES

A Close Look at Raji's Exquisite Art

BY BAANI SEKHON, CHANDIGARH, INDIA
PUNE-BASED NODDING HEADS GAMES, a small indie Indian studio founded by Shruti Ghosh, Avichal Singh and Ian Maude, has put India on the international game-development map, living up to the top industry standards with their ambitious debut game *Raji: An Ancient Epic*.

The game is an inventive blend of culturally rich environment and detailed visuals that capture the Hindu mythology quite perfectly. Indian folk art is skillfully exhibited, with shadow puppetry for cutscenes along with

Pahari art style for all the graphic elements. The shadow puppetry sincerely adheres to its indigenous originality with detailed 2-D figures along with the puppeteer sticks.

Raji, the protagonist of the game and the embodiment of Goddess Durga Herself, slays an array of villains with fluid and agile moves owing to her acrobatic skills as a street performer. The skillful jumps and somersaults over obstacles are spine-tingling. It's a pure delight to experience how she effortlessly runs up walls and spins around poles, striking devastating attacks and dodg-

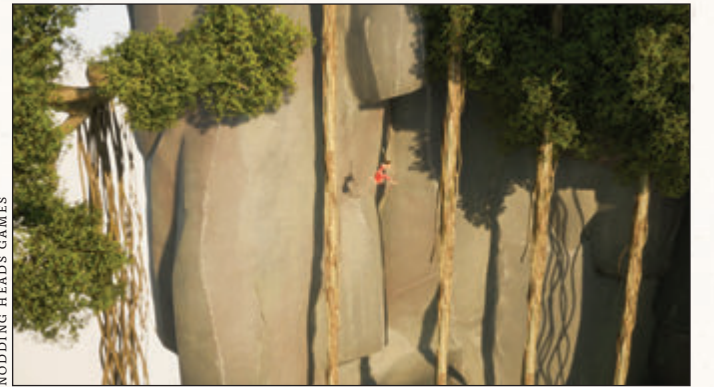
ing villains.

The flavor of the game is set by the mesmerizing background score which is composed with the classical Indian musical instruments that follows the momentum of the game, as well as the fervor and the emotions that Raji's actions evoke.

At every level, she is blessed by the Gods with divine weapons from Hindu mythology, including the trishula (trident), chakra (discus) and gada (mace). Each time Raji is blessed with a godly weapon, the gamer gets an option to select different elemental pow-



NODDING HEADS GAMES



NODDING HEADS GAMES

To rescue her brother: (clockwise from left) This image of Raji at the magical pond is a concept art or visual representation for one of the many scenes in the game; Lord Vishnu blesses Raji with Sharanga, a mighty radiant bow; Raji's acrobatic circus skills come in handy while scaling difficult terrain like these cliffs; a pavilion at Gadsisar Lake in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, built in the 12th century and rebuilt in the 14th; a central piece of concept art, inspired by the traditional architecture of Rajasthani forts; Vishnu narrates "The Legend of Shakti" while Raji admires this wall mural



NODDING HEADS GAMES



NODDING HEADS GAMES



NODDING HEADS GAMES

ers, including fire, lightning, ice, earth and rage. This facet is called "Favor of Gods."

For the player, Raji's world is zoomed out to a bird's-eye view, letting them immerse in the vast scenic locations in all their glory. The elevated view makes the player experience the visuals from perspective of the Gods, who are ever present to support Raji. Adding to this ambience is the sophisticated camera work that pans, zooms and tilts across the action and exhibits the locations in sleek, cinematic fashion.

As Raji heads towards the culminating fight with Mahabalasura, on each level the player comes across recognizable settings inspired from historic sites, including the Amer Fort, Jaisalmer Fort, Udaipur City Palace, Jaipur City Palace, Lake Pichola and the Ajanta Caves murals.

Raji must cross three large levels before finally confronting Mahabalasura. Each level

is dedicated to a particular God. The "Fortress of Jaidhar" centers around Goddess Durga. "Hiranya Nagari" is the heavenly city of Lord Vishnu, while the "Land of Mystics" characterizes Lord Siva.

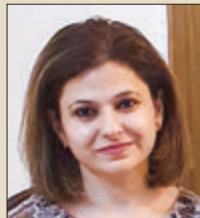
The Fortress of Jaidhar, with warm colors dominant, is beautifully designed with towering statues lit with fire lamps, sun-filtered stained-glass windows, elegant royal chambers and aesthetically embellished doorways. Hiranya Nagari has cool tones. It is calm, graceful and paradisiacal. The main theme of this city is the lotus, which beautifully complements the glittering water components and the blue-tinted backdrop. Lastly, the Land of Mystics is set in the foothills of the Himalayas. The atmosphere is sombre and muted, represented

by overgrown foliage, vines and rocks.

In each level, Vishnu narrates various Hindu mythological stories, which are shown painted on the walls as murals. The players get to learn about the birth of Goddess Durga and about Shakti, the primordial cosmic energy. The avatars of Lord Vishnu, legend of Garuda, nine avatars of Goddess Durga and other such stories from mystical lore are explained. Enriching the voice acting is the classical Indian music. The sound design follows the momentum of the game, as well as the fervor and the emotions that Raji's actions evoke. The game is an informative gateway into the colorful world of Hindu mythology and beautifully represents Indian culture.

This entertaining and adventurous tale about sibling love leaves the audience asking for more. The ending, as I encountered it, seems a bit abrupt, though, and a sequel bringing Raji's journey to a logical conclusion would be welcome. 🙏

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Baani Sekhon is a postgraduate in fine arts, armed with an extensive experience in the creative industry. She works independently as an art director, curator, writer, designer, illustrator and fine artist. Her forte in writing is art-related subjects, be it about contemporary art scenarios or historical subjects.



NODDING HEADS GAMES

Imaging Raji's magical world: (clockwise from top left) Concept art of the Nataraj Temple, which Raji comes to in level three; (inset) battle scene; the famed Jaisalmer Fort, the second oldest in Rajasthan. It was built in 1156 by the Rajput ruler Jaisal and stood at the crossroad of important trading routes, including a branch of the ancient Silk Road. (above) Concept art inspired by Jaipur, the Pink City, built in 1727, Rajasthan's largest city and capital today; looking down in a game scene with Raji in the middle of one of the mandala puzzles (this one shows her father and brother earlier in life); the Maze portion of the game, inspired by Rajasthan's famed step wells; one such well near the Amer Fort in Jaipur; shadow-puppet cutscene in which Durga reveals that Mahabalasura captured the children for a greater evil purpose.



NODDING HEADS GAMES



SHUTTERSTOCK/ PHILIPYB STUDIO



NODDING HEADS GAMES



SPIRITUAL LIFE

How Satsang Made Me a Strong Hindu

Finally, I had a place to ask questions and get lucid and authoritative answers on theology, practices and issues that puzzled me from childhood

BY KUMUDHA VENKATESAN

WHEN LORD RAMA SENT HIS PREGNANT wife Sita to the forest, I was filled with sorrow and started to hate Lord Rama! My curious young mind was hurt seeing Sita in dense forest. I disliked Lord Krishna when I read that He had 16,000 wives. I felt weird when my grandma performed elaborate puja and fasted on Mondays. Vedic chanting and elaborate worship rituals in the nearby temple annoyed me. My loving father—an engineer—would tell me about the glories of the *Bhagavad Gita* and Lord Krishna, but even he did not know the profound reasons behind ancient stories and rituals!



Growing up in Bengaluru, I occasionally prayed at home and accompanied my parents to temples on festivals, just to please them. In my school—a Christian Catholic school—we started our daily studies after reciting the popular prayer, “Our Father.” I used to envy my Christian and Muslim friends, as they had their Bible and Koran to guide them. What about Hindus? I was confused by Hinduism’s many ancient scriptures and Deities. Questions flooded my mind. Which holy book do we consider as sacred? Why do we have so many Deities? I had blind faith in God, but was overwhelmed with everything from the countless Deities to the temple rituals to animal sacrifice to mantra recitation. In short, my mind was consumed with numerous questions without logical and convincing answers, leaving me bewildered and sometimes disgusted with my religion.

As an adult, my marriage ceremony was a nightmare, brimming with rituals. I just smiled throughout to please my parents, future husband, in-laws and relatives! When I moved to the United States after my marriage, my husband and I would go to temples on festival days. When we discussed God, religions, philosophies or traditions, he often told me that he was influenced by *Tirukural*. When I saw the fire worship or bathing of the Deities in the suburban Detroit Hindu temples, I wondered why so many intelligent folks were interested in watching time-consuming rituals. I only saw a huge loss of manpower in these elaborate rituals! I even became annoyed when I heard any new Hindu temple was being built in the United States. At home, I mechanically performed simple puja in the mornings. Even as an adult, I was beleaguered with countless questions regarding my religion.

Everything changed when I gave birth to my son. When he was nearly a year old, my mother-in-law joined us in Detroit. We started going to temples almost every week, and slowly I was introduced to *satsang*—literally, “spiritual gatherings.” Swami Tejomayananda explains them thusly: “Satsang is association with goodness, nobility, truth and reality. Watching and listening to video and audio cassettes of great people is also satsang.” At first, I was shocked to see hundreds of folks attentively listening to enlightening talks on the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharatha*, *Tirukural*, *Bhagavad Gita* and *Puranas* in the temple.

During this phase, I also started reading *HINDUISM TODAY* magazine, which dispelled many myths and illusions regarding Hinduism. The satsang was captivating, and I enjoyed the way enlightened souls, swamis and gurus explained the profound scriptures and connected their ancient wisdom to modern living. Fortunately, going to satsang helped me understand everything from the rituals and chanting mantras to the importance of numerous Deities and the power of prayer.

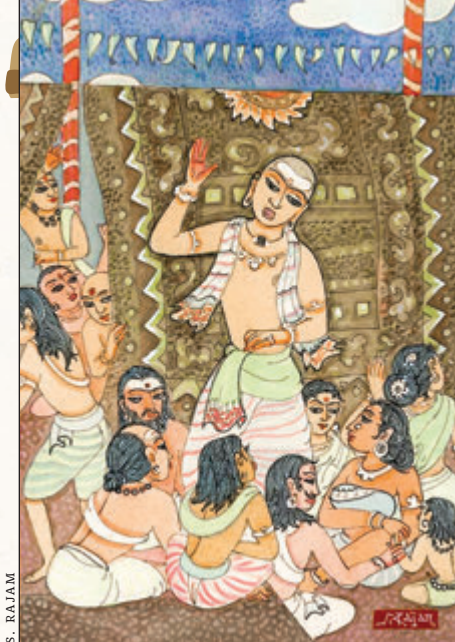
As I finally found convincing and logical answers for all my questions, I felt like a kid in a candy store. Satsang not only gave me answers to why Lord Rama sent Sita to the forest, and why Lord

Krishna had many wives, but it immensely helped me to “connect the dots” in my life. Satsang showed me there is something very precious and eternal beyond the material world. Attending satsang gave me immense happiness and ignited good vibes in me. The late Dr. Bannanje Govindacharya’s words have deeply influenced me: “According to *Agni Purana*, all human beings should grow the flowers of ahimsa, love for all creatures, self-control, compassion, spiritual knowledge, meditation and dharma in their heart, and should perform puja with these flowers. These flowers are very dear to God.” Every moment, I try my best to use these beautiful flowers in my thoughts and actions.

Today, I understand my eternal religion. I enjoy my spiritual journey now, because of the spiritual knowledge that has come from satsang. Tulasidas in *Ramacharitamanas* says, “Without satsang, we do not get *viveka*, the wisdom to discriminate and understand what is right and what is wrong.” Each morning as I tackle my daily duties and challenges, the words of Swami Vivekananda flash through my mind: “The world is a great gymnasium where we come to make ourselves strong.” When problems greet me, I try to remember the profound concept of karma and my final goal of moksha, liberation from rebirth. Magically, I get immense strength and comfort, and can resolve my problem. I have noticed that my instances of anger, ego, impatience or jealousy have been greatly reduced after many satsangs. For years, I used to feel so jealous that I was not good at painting or singing. Now, I’m happy seeing successful and talented people, and I’m compassionate and kind to everyone.

I wondered why I didn’t get an opportunity to attend satsang when I was young. But I smile when the concept of karma comes to mind. I realize that everything in the universe is the divine play of God. I have understood that each person is bestowed with unique talents and virtues depending on their nature, previous births and karma. I wholeheartedly agree with Swami Vivekananda’s teaching, “Spiritual knowledge is the only thing that can destroy our miseries forever. Any other knowledge satisfies wants only for a time.”

Eternal concepts such as karma, the soul, acceptance and tolerance are explained wonderfully in our scriptures. Today, Self-Realized



S. RAJAM



M.A. CENTER



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saints and gurus lucidly explain these concepts in temple gatherings, on CDs and YouTube. According to the *Vedas*, *sravanam* (hearing), *mananam* (reflection and contemplation), and *nididhyasanam* (meditation) on truth is the way to achieve true knowledge. Satsang is an amazing opportunity to hear and reflect on eternal truth. From this study of all the philosophies of Hinduism, I’m understanding how to increase my bhakti, love of God.

Attending satsang regularly encourages me to follow a sattvic lifestyle, performing my duties with dedication, talking only when necessary, doing nama japa, meditating, minimizing oily and junk food, singing devotional songs and reflecting on scriptures. Sometimes, when I’m constantly thinking about an important issue, I forget about God for many days. Then, after listening to empowering videos such as “Power of Nama Japa” (youtu.be/wwMfkVcWK9Q) by Swami Mangalanathananda of the Ramakrishna Mission, I feel so good. Bhakti is again ignited in me. As I start to chant the name of God, I can feel that my mind is purified and I’m in a state of joy. Sarada Devi said, “Mantra purifies the body. Man becomes purified by repeating God’s name. So repeat His name always.” Past sins can be counteracted by japa and meditation. Now, I understand why many Hindus name their kids Ganesh, Murugan and Krishna!

I have realized that the purpose of everything from rituals to prayers and religious customs to philosophies is to reach the omnipresent God. Swami Vivekananda’s words resonate in my mind, “I’m proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world tolerance

Satsang through the centuries: (clockwise from top left) discourse in ancient times; Mata Amritanandamayi in New York, 2005; a young Swami Chinmayananda holding an informal satsang in India in the 1950s; Swami Vivekananda in Maine, USA, 1894

and universal acceptance.” I have realized that God is beyond rituals, race and religion. I understand why Hinduism is known as Sanatana Dharma. Satsang rejuvenates my mind and reduces my worldly desires. I feel composed and calm, even during these uncertain times. I still have a long way to attain liberation, but I’m thrilled to have satsang, saints and gurus to motivate and inspire me to follow the path of dharma and perform my duties to the best of my ability. I’m eternally grateful for satsang. I feel blessed to listen to Swami Vivekananda, Swami Chinmayananda, Bannanje Govindacharya, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and others, for helping me understand the path to “True Knowledge” which is permanent. I wholeheartedly agree when Swami Tejomayananda says, “Satsang is the greatest blessing. Do not wait for any greater grace from the Lord.”

KUMUDHA VENKATESAN, based in Atlanta, Georgia, is a wife and mother to a preteen son. She is passionate about environment, healthy lifestyle, spirituality and loves to read and contemplate Hinduism. Contact: kumudha_1998@yahoo.com

Starting a Hindu Club on Campus

It's not necessary for devout Hindus to tolerate the secularized activities of "South Asian" college organizations—here's my solution

BY ANU SINGH, TEXAS

LAPTOP? CHECK. BEDDING? CHECK. NOTEBOOKS? Check. It's that time of the year again: back to college. Freshman and senior alike, everyone is preparing their lists and starting university, although it may look different for those of us who are studying remotely this fall. Nevertheless, sooner or later we all will return to campus physically. But amid all this packing and preparing are we forgetting something? Did we forget to take our Hindu identity with us?

Exploring your religious identity on campus typically begins in student organizations or clubs. You would be hard-pressed to find a university in the US that doesn't have a student club for Christians, Muslims or Jews. Unfortunately, if you're looking for a Hindu club at your university, you may not be lucky enough to find one and, if you do, it may be ineffective and unpopular. Students of most other faiths have strong student and faculty support for their clubs. However, many universities don't even have a club for Hindus and those that do are not adequately supported by the students, academic departments or the greater community. So if you, like me, wanted to join a Hindu club as a freshman but realized that your campus doesn't have one—tough luck.

But don't worry, chances are your campus will have a vibrant, popular "South Asian" organization. As a freshman, I went to my university South Asian group's Diwali celebration. At first, the idea seemed OK. Sure, it wasn't a "Hindu" organization, but at least I could celebrate my first Diwali away from home with other students. I even thought maybe my college didn't really need a Hindu organization after all. As I walked to the event, my naive eagerness for fellowship and celebration slowly died down. Loud Bollywood music bombarded my ears. With dismay, I stared at the marshmallow skewered on a stick that a club officer handed me in greeting. Confused at this alien experience of my first Diwali away from home, I stammered an excuse saying that I didn't want one because I was vegetarian. "Oh, you're vegetarian? No problem, here, try roasting this Oreo instead." I wish I could say that I had the courage to tell him that the real reason I didn't want a marshmallow was that I didn't appreciate this secularization of Diwali. Instead, under the influence of the pressure to conform, I ate an offered ladoo, halfheartedly swirled a firecracker in the air, and headed back to my room to FaceTime my parents and join their Diwali puja.

What's wrong with that, you ask? Marshmallows and Bollywood music certainly aren't something to get this worked up about, right? These college kids are just trying to celebrate Diwali in a fun way, fusing American and Indian traditions!

Wrong. Stripping Diwali of its spiritual significance and changing it in this way was insulting to me as a practicing Hindu, especially since this was the only choice for students to celebrate Diwali on campus. Furthermore, no other religion represented in the South



Asian group had its festivals celebrated and then denuded in this manner. The truth is, these organizations gain prominence on campuses by celebrating popular Hindu events such as Diwali, Garba and Holi, divesting them of all religious ties, and ultimately preventing Hindu student organizations from thriving. Why are Hindus the only major religious group who are unlikely to have an organization representing them on campus? Why are Hindu Americans the ones who have their festivals taken, secularized and made a joke of? It's not just your festival they're taking—they're stripping your very identity, bit by bit.

As a university student, what can you do about this? I suggest you tackle this problem by starting small. This semester, if you find that your university

offers both types of clubs, join and support the unabashedly Hindu organization. And if your university doesn't have a Hindu organization, consider starting one.

If you choose to found a Hindu organization, it is important to gain concrete support from a faculty sponsor. Most universities have Hindu professors, and it is not necessary to have a faculty from the religious department to sponsor your club. You can network with local Hindu organizations to find potential faculty sponsors. Then investigate your school's registration procedure for clubs—which usually involves training sessions, finding club officers and creating a constitution. If creating a club from scratch seems daunting, then consider starting a local chapter of an existing national club such as Hindu YUVA or Hindu Students Council.

After you have registered your club, begin publicizing your events campus-wide and create social media accounts. If your school has other Indian organizations or interfaith clubs, you can collaborate with them for events to gain a broader audience. Celebrating popular festivals like Diwali or Holi, along with holding dedicated discussions on Hindu topics is a good combination to amass more members while retaining authenticity.

Starting a Hindu club may be difficult, but it can be done. Even though we may feel alone and outnumbered, it takes only one person to initiate change on your campus, and that person is you. Whether or not you choose to bring your Ganesha murti to your dorm room, or talk about your religious life with friends, know that this option is open to you and there are others like you on campuses across America. It only takes networking with like-minded students, choosing the right student organizations to support, and overcoming hesitation to embrace your Hindu identity. While we prepare and start the new school year, let's also choose to start this semester by being proud Hindu Americans.

ANU SINGH, 22, is recent graduate from Rice University now pursuing medicine. She is involved in Hindu YUVA and is a contributor to the website *The American Hindu*. Email: isha.singh5034@gmail.com.

Dressing Ethnically

Encouraging traditional outfits is one way schools help students express their identity

BY MUGDHA SHINDE, CALIFORNIA

THE FIRST TIME I WORE AN INDIAN dress to school was in fourth grade. We were doing a biography project and were required to dress up as the person we had chosen. In my case, that was the famous Indian classical singer, Asha Bhosle, a sister to the even more famous singer, Lata Mangeshkar. I wore a "half sari" because Asha is from Maharashtra, as is my family, and this sari is a traditional dress there. It was a great experience. Everyone was dressed up, so I did not stand out much in the class.

Most people had chosen to do biographies about people from the United States. I was one of the few who chose someone from outside North America. I received questions both inside and outside the class and got to tell people who Asha Bhosle was, and about all the great songs she has sung. None of the questions were negative, and everyone was happy that I had chosen to wear something unique. I had worried that the sari would be too restricting, but I could do all school activities in it, including physical education class. Overall, I really liked wearing the outfit.

In fifth grade, I was inspired to wear a Punjabi dress to school on Vijayadashami. It wasn't a class assignment, but my choice. I told people about the festival, and how it celebrates the defeat of Ravana by Rama. Kids and teachers all wished me "Happy Vijayadashami" and complimented my outfit. The experience was more fun than the 4th-grade one because I was the only one dressed up. I also dressed up for Holi and Diwali. Most people knew about Diwali, and so when they saw me and other students in Indian dresses, they wished us "Happy Diwali." On a few days, I dressed up just for fun.

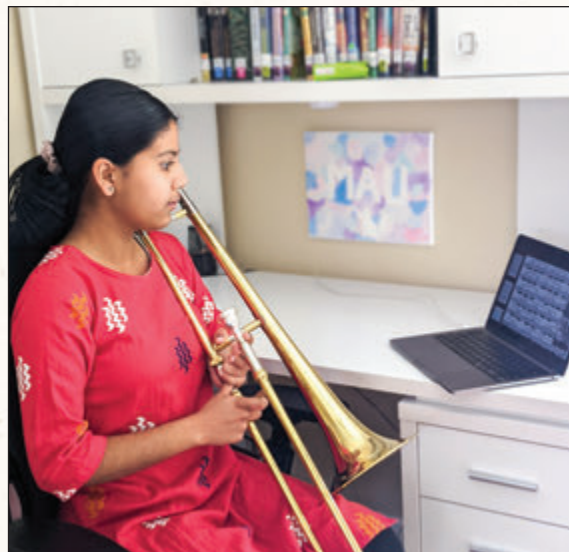
The next year, I entered middle school where they hold an annual cultural day where students can choose to dress up in their traditional clothes, or dance or sing. It's optional, and participation is not mandatory. In sixth grade, this event was held in the evening, so that parents could attend. There were students from the Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Mexican, Korean and Jewish cultures.

I asked one of the Korean students, Claire Lee, why she wanted to partici-

pate. She said, "I chose to because I knew that K-pop was getting more popular in countries like America, but people hadn't seen much of the traditional side of Korean performances. At first, I was skeptical about performing because I didn't think anyone would enjoy watching our traditional dancing. But I wanted people to know more about Korean culture. Surprisingly (to me at least), barely anyone asked questions. At the end, I felt good about representing my country with dancing, even if not everyone enjoyed it."

Around a third of the students participated in this cultural day, including a few Indians. Due to the event being in the evening, many students couldn't make it because of conflicting classes or activities. Unfortunately, I had volleyball tryouts before the event, and could not go home and change into a traditional dress. I came in normal clothes, and tried to support the students who were dressed up. The only stage presentation for India was a Bollywood dance. To me, Bollywood is only one part of the vast culture of India, and is not a good representation of India by itself.

The last time I got to wear an Indian dress to school before the pandemic started was for a Spirit Day in sixth grade. At my school, students can choose to show their school spirit by participating in lunchtime activities on Fridays. On this particular Spirit Day, the theme was to dress up as a character. Most kids dressed up as movie characters, but I



Our heritage: (above) fourth-grader Mugdha in a half sari as Asha Bhosle with her then first-grade brother, Aaditya; (below) remote band practice was no reason to stop dressing up for school

dressed up as a proud Indian person. Some of my friends complimented me on my outfit. I was pleased to see that other Indian students have started representing their cultures, including at our school's talent show, where there were two Indian/Nepalese dancers.

It was a fun experience every time I wore an Indian dress to school, and that might have something to do with my living in Silicon Valley, a very diverse area. Dressing up differently here is not as unusual as in a less diverse place, such as Iowa. It might be hard to introduce Hindu culture to a less diverse community. However, it is worth the stares and questions if dressing up in traditional clothes means that word is spread about Hinduism.

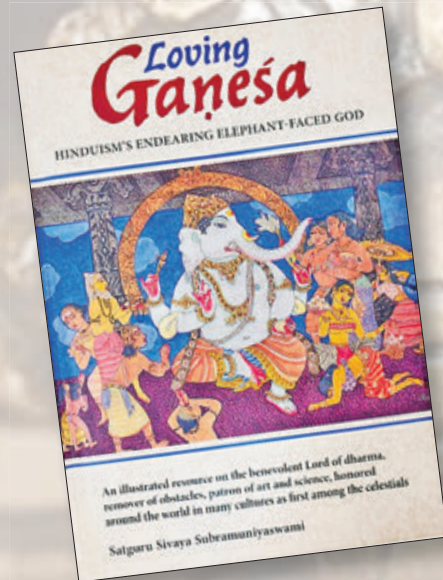
In the future, I hope that more people will be encouraged to go to school, stores and public events dressed up in traditional clothes. People such as Claire Lee have started doing this, and her experience has inspired me to participate in our school's talent show this fall, hopefully when life gets back to normal. 🍛

Mugdha Shinde, 13, is an eighth-grade student at Cupertino Middle School in Cupertino, California. She plays the trombone in her school's advanced band, and enjoys cooking



MiniMela

Kauai Hindu Monastery's
Spiritual treasure box



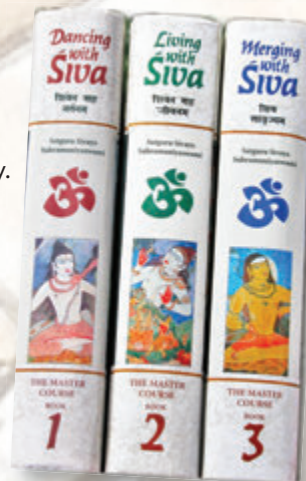
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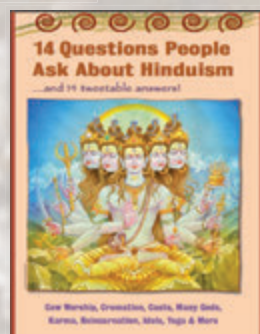


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Hindu Heritage Endowment

The Value of Endowments During Times of Crisis

Kauai's Hindu Monastery is the largest beneficiary organization of Hindu Heritage Endowment. The monastery was closed to visitors for the most of 2020. The sign on its front gate and banner on its website now states, "The Monastery's Front Grounds Are Open from 9am to noon. Our Temple Itself Is Open with Limited Capacity, by Reservation, for 9am Puja or Later Morning Visits. Email puja@hindu.org for a Reservation." In fact, the whole island of Kauai was virtually closed to visitors in 2020. Closure of the monastery has kept the monks healthy and productive during 2020 but, as visitors are a significant source of donations and other income, this closure has caused the monastery's income to drop. Also, as the personal income of some regular donors has been reduced by COVID-19, the donations they are able to make is correspondingly lower.

Literature in the nonprofit world indicates that in 2020 because of COVID-19 many nonprofits have been forced to scale back on staffing and support programs, and some even had to close their doors. As one publication states, "Organizations with an endowment have been fortunate to be able to utilize those funds for additional support during the crisis."

Fortunately, Kauai's Hindu Monastery has a number of endowments at Hindu Heritage Endowment. Two of them, Iraivan Temple Endowment and Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment, are by far the largest and provide significant support to the monastery and its activities. The combined principal of these two endowments is approximately \$12 million, which is currently providing a grant from Hindu Heritage Endowment of about \$19,000 a month—an amount that covers a significant portion of the monastery's basic operating expenses. Because of these two endowments, the monastery has not had to cut back on its activities or lay off any of its grounds workers.

Kauai's Hindu Monastery looks forward to the day, a few decades from now, when grants from its endowments at Hindu Heritage Endowment will be large enough to cover all of its basic operating expenses and provide total financial security in any future pandemic, hurricane or other event that temporarily disrupts the monastery's normal flow of income.

What is an Endowment? This animated video explains the three types of endowments in 101 seconds: www.hheonline.org/what-is-endowment.shtml.

Hindu Heritage Endowment strengthens communities by supporting orphanages, temples, monasteries, schools, ashrams and homes for the elderly, youth hostels, cows, distribution of free Hindu literature and audio scripture for the blind.

For information on establishing a fund at Hindu Heritage Endowment, contact Shanmuganathaswami at 808-822-3012, ext. 6, or e-mail hhe@hindu.org.



A view of Kauai's Hindu Monastery's granite archway entrance gate

APRIL TO JUNE ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment	Anonymous	893.6		
Roshan Harilela	Total	1,286.01		
Mira Das & R. Mahalingam			Spiritual Park of Mauritius Endowment	
Gayatri Rajan			Kiran Keerodhur	100.00
Chamundi Sabanathan				
Hitesvara Saravan			Positive Discipline Endowment	
Anonymous			Vinaya Alahan	22.00
Total				
Iraivan Temple Endowment			Alaveddy Pasupatheeswarar Temple Fund	
Frank Burkhardt			Nuckiren Pyeneeandee	35.79
Gayathri Dhanasegaran			Gayathri Sinmayanandan	30.00
Ram Kumar			Total	65.79
Ravi & Vaishnavi Ramakrishnan				
Terrill Silke			Hindu Heritage Endowment	
Anonymous			Administrative Fund	
Total			Subramaniam Karuppan	100.00
Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund			Kauai Aadheenam Religious Art and Artifacts Fund	
Sai Dhulipalla			Rajadeva Alahan	267.60
Umasankaran Mohambourame				
Yogadhasan Murugesu			Murugan Temple of North America	
Subramaniam Pennathur			Pillaiyar Shrine Fund	
Pathmini Saravanapavan			Pathmini Saravanapavan	100.00
Tejasinha Sivalingam			Sayanthan & Anupama Sivanathan	5.00
Annamuthu Sutherland			Total	105.00
Anonymous				
Total			Thank You Bodhinatha Fund	
Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund			Thulasidas	250.00
Keyur Desai			Lutcheemee Curpen	324.00
A. H.			Debashis Ghosh	200.00
Sankari K			Murugesu Kandasamy	23.64
Juhivaasana Koothan			Ian McLeod	10.00
Usha & Sastry Kunda			Hitesh & Rishitaa Murugesu	35.76
Sivakumaran Kurunathan			Toshadevi Nataraj	100.00
Ashwini Maureemootoo			Mano Navaratnarajah	150.00
Aaron Mitchell			Cassan Pancham	1,500.00
Bhaveshan Moorghen			Nuckiren Pyeneeandee	35.79
Shanda Kumaran Moorghen			Sumathi Raja	450.00
Udeyadeva Moorghen			Aran Sambandar	108.00
Mark Muesse			Tejasinha Sivalingam	21.00
Varsha & Dilip Naik			Nandi Devi Sivanathan	124.06
Sreejith Nair			Anba Dayananden Valayten	6.20
Ekanatha Pai			Vayudeva Varadan	63.00
Hemang Pandya			John Wahlen	24.46
Narendra Patel			Michael Wasylkiw	648.00
Rajendra Patel			Anonymous	2,736.51
Yogesh Patel			Total	6,810.42
Meera Rai			Udayan Care Endowment Fund	
Sridhar Raju			Benevity	142.50
Rai Ramlal			Tamara Iakiri	1,250.00
Anjali Rao			Total	1,392.50
Anuja Sabnis			Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment	
Siva Jothiswari Selvanathan			Shyamal Chandra Debnath	150.00
Sandeep Sharma				
Patudeva Sivaceyon			Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund	
Vivek Subramanian			Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00
Joshua Sulesky				
Mini Vasudevan			Manitha Neyam Trust Fund	
Ashit Vijapura			Gayathri Sinmayanandan	100.00
Anonymous			Bala Sivaceyon	34.98
Total			Total	134.98
Gurudeva's Trilogy Distribution Fund			Kerala Temple Trust	
Vel Mahalingum			Kizhake Ramachandran	200.00
Anba Dayananden Valayten				
Anonymous			Manjung Hindu Sabha Orphanage Fund	
Total			Ignatius Hastomo	10.00
Kadavul Nataraja Ardra Abhishekam Endowment			Emily Xin Rui Lim	35.00
Umasankaran Mohambourame			Shamili Lingam	25.00
Gowri Nadason			Anonymous	105.00
Parimala Selvaraj			Total	175.00
Salone Shahi			Pazhassi Balamandiram Orphanage Fund	
Bala Sivaceyon			Tamara Iakiri	1,250.00

APRIL TO JUNE ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

Swami Vipulananta Children's Home Endowment		India Hindu Tribals Endowment		Jaffna Kannathiddy Kali Kovil Endowment	
Canaganayagam Kugendra	180.00	John Wahlen	12.00	Venkateswara R. Sola	21.99
		Anonymous	3032.4	Anonymous	3.00
		Total	3,044.40	Total	24.99
Hinduism Today Complimentary Subscription Fund		Murugan Temple of North America Puja Fund		Panchangam Endowment Fund	
Rajagopal Krishnan	40.00	Pathmini Saravanapavan	150.00	Venkatakrishnan Balaji	10.00
		Vayudeva Varadan	54.00	Diana L. Harger	25.00
		Total	204.00	Total	35.00
Himalayan Academy Book Distribution Fund		India Hindu Temple Cleaning Fund		Digital Dharma Endowment	
Shyamadeva Dandapani	36.00	Gayathri Sinmayanandan	50.00	Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund	501.00
Nrusimhayya Manda	30.00	Anonymous	60.00	Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	7.70
Anonymous	3,051.00	Total	110.00	Rajagopal Krishnan	102.00
Total	3,117.00			Kulagan Moonesawmy	14.25
Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund		Anantha Ladies Home Endowment		Chamundi Sabanathan	559.00
Radhamani Dayanidhi	50.00	Gayathri Sinmayanandan	30.00	Anonymous	428.51
Anonymous	33.00	Sayanthan & Anupama Sivanathan	10.00	Total	1,612.46
Total	83.00	Total	40.00		
Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment		Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment		Kauai Aadheenam Feed the Monks Fund	
Aravindraj Chandrasekaran	8.38	Arun Aarooren	50.00	Ishani Chowdhury	78.00
Yovani Curpen	25.00	Krishna Akundi	500.00	Meena Joshi	202.00
Sonia Mitrevski	50.00	Anil Ananda Badhwar	30.00	Rohini & Vijay Mashettiwar	101.00
Subramaniam Pennathur	50.01	Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn	7.70	Covida Mootoosamy	50.00
Efrain Raul Eduardo Roman-Abarca	62.00	Rajagopal Krishnan	102.00	Gayatri Rajan	75.00
Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan	100.00	Srinivas R. Madaboosi	100.00	Padmini Samuthiran	162.00
Anonymous	1,290.03	Hem & Sonia Maharaj	60.00	Pathmini Saravanapavan	200.00
Total	1,585.42	Natraj Narayanswami	37.00	Sivanesan Sinniah	150.00
		Yogeswaran & Anitha		Nandi Devi Sivanathan	124.06
Siva Poomi School Trust		Pararajasingam	1,000.00	Carolyn Stewart	120.00
Gayathri Sinmayanandan	60.00	Padmini Samuthiran	162.00	Balasingam Thevakumar	500.00
Amarneethi & Ranjan Vamadevan	100.00	Srikanth Sankaran	51.00	Subatra Dewi Veeriah	15.00
Total	160.00	Gayathri Sinmayanandan	20.00	Saravan Veylan	324.00
		Devaladevi Sivaceyon	11.57	Anonymous	3,964.00
Maha Ganapati Temple of Arizona Endowment		Nandi Devi Sivanathan	50.00	Total	6,065.06
Anonymous	1,008.00	Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan	100.00		
		Rodney & Ilene Standen	30.00	Insurance Premium	
Bharatiya Ekta Mandir of Arizona Endowment		Aishwarya Vashishtha	30.00	Mrunal Patel	3,003.00
Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund	50.00	Arunasalam Vathavooran	75.00		
Jessica Buckner	251.00	Anonymous	137.25	Total Contributions	\$73,781.07
Anonymous	1,159.00	Total	2,553.52		
Total	1,460.00			Funds at Market Value, June 30, 2021	
				Grand Total	\$21,343,030.26

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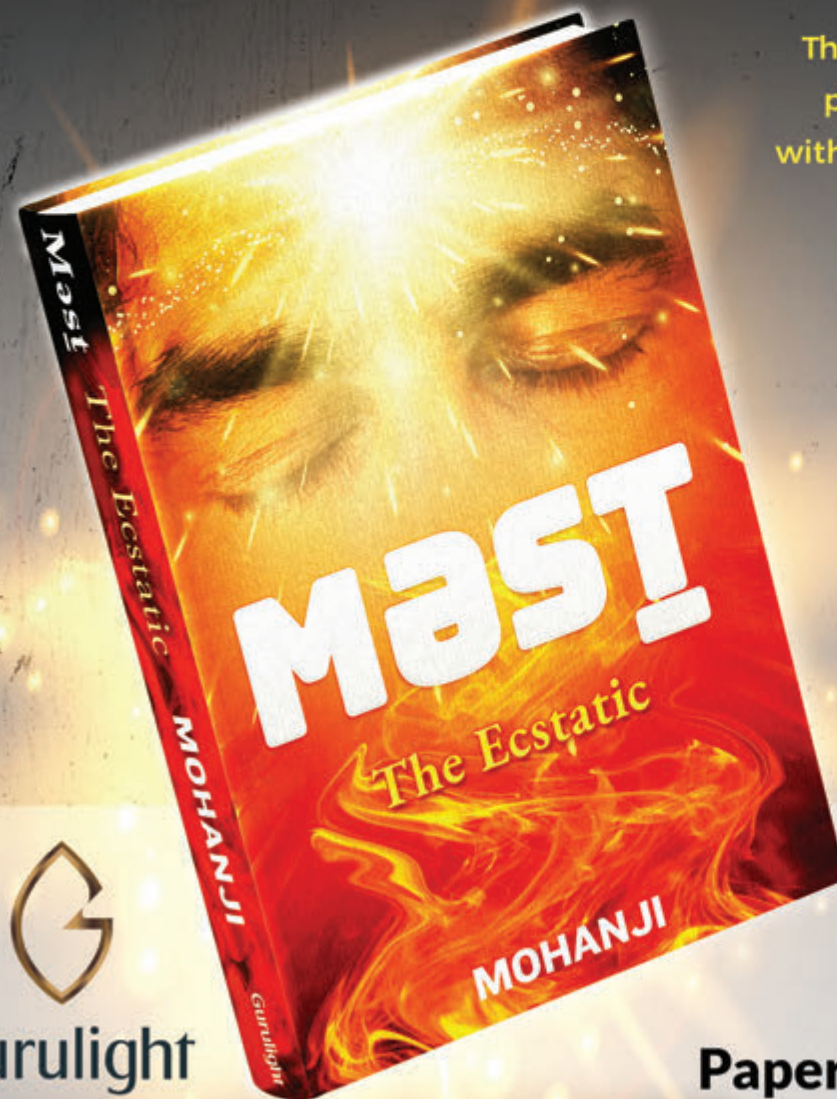
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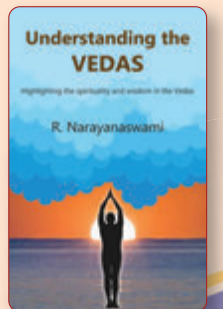
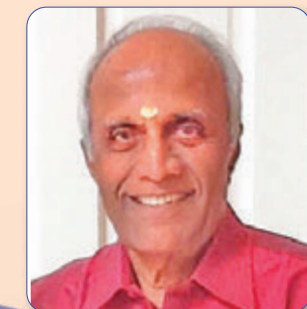
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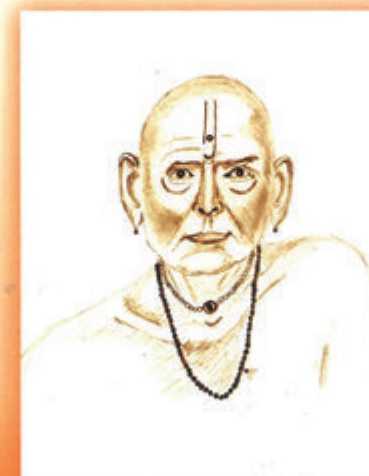
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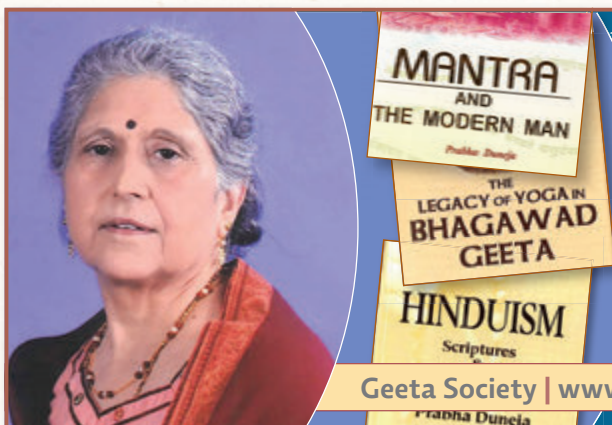
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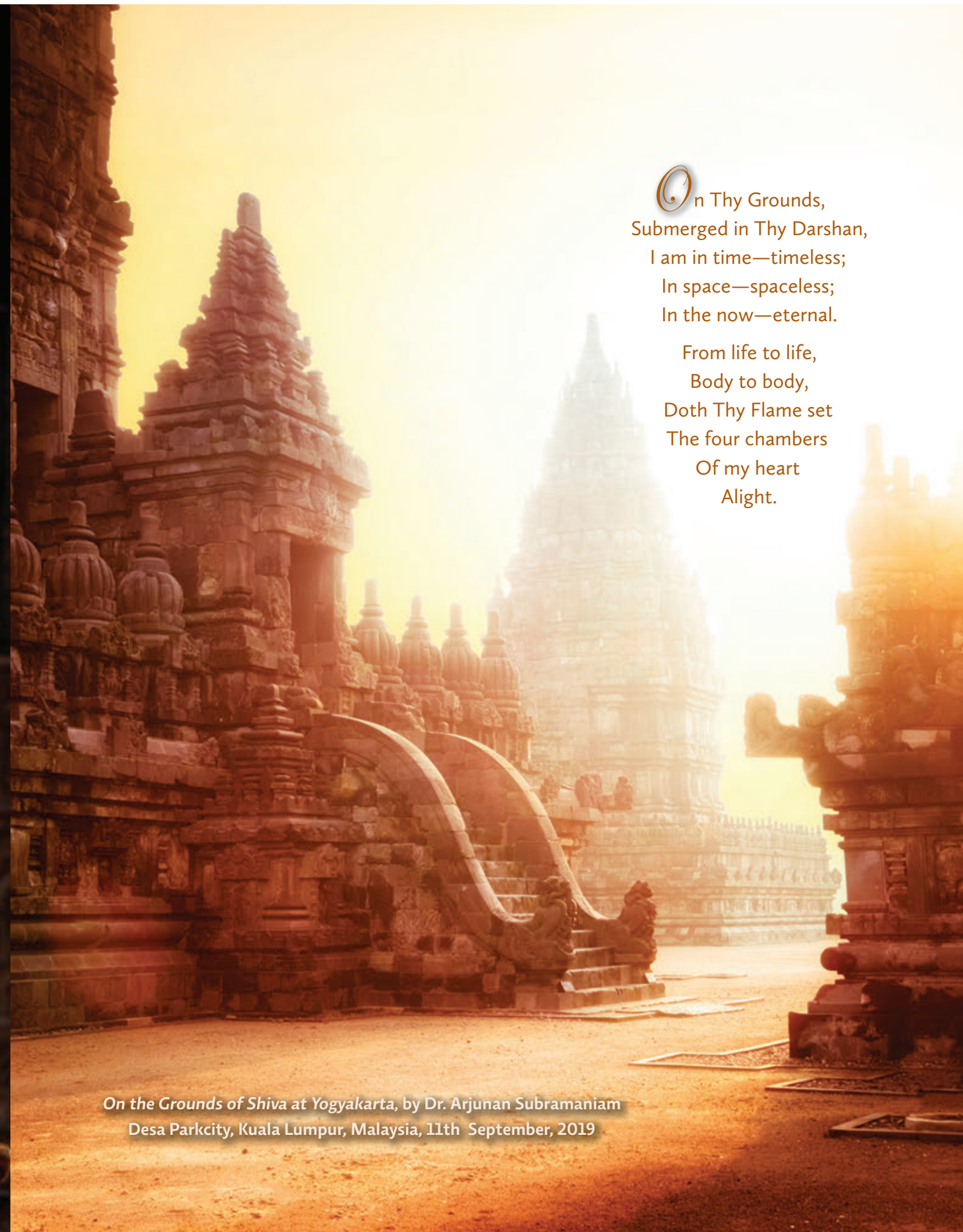
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Submerged in Thy Darshan,
I am in time—timeless;
In space—spaceless;
In the now—eternal.*

*From life to life,
Body to body,
Doth Thy Flame set
The four chambers
Of my heart
Alight.*



*On the Grounds of Shiva at Yogyakarta, by Dr. Arjunan Subramaniam
Desa Parkcity, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 11th September, 2019*

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DOCUMENTARY SERIES

Hidden Drummers of India

By Ratnavathy Sivalingam, Malaysia

IT'S NOT JUST THE RHYTHMS THAT INSPIRE me, but the story behind these age-old traditions and the musicians who are drumming new life into them!"

Meet Ireland-born Ruairi Glasheen, an award-winning percussionist, composer, presenter, filmmaker and educator with an unwavering devotion and love for percussion instruments from the world over. Several years ago, this passion brought him halfway around the globe to South India. While there, he produced a three-part documentary series called *Hidden Drummers of India*, with the intention of exploring the wealth and wonder of Indian percussion. Largely shot in Tamil Nadu and Bengaluru, the series places special focus on the less famous, centuries-old *kanjira* drum. Also spelled *khanjiri* or *ghanjira*, this South Indian frame drum hails from the tambourine family and is typically used in Carnatic music recitals, bhajans and

folk music. Exquisitely and meticulously filmed, the series features renowned *kanjira* players such as Anirudh Athreya, Lata Ramachar, Harihara Sharma, Shree Sundarkumar and Sunad Anoor alongside phenomenal Carnatic percussionists Anoor Ananthakrishna Sharma, Ghatam Giridhar Udupa and Sachin Prakash.

Hidden Drummers of India is a sequel to Glasheen's earlier documentary, *Hidden Drummers of Iran*, which features experts of the *tonbak* (an Iranian goblet drum) from around the country.

In an interview with the *Times of India*, Glasheen passionately affirmed that India is the greatest place on the globe to be a percussionist and one without a second for its rich tradition of percussion instruments. "After Iran, it was clear to me that the next film would be in India, as there are so many phenomenal instruments and inspirational players I want to learn from," he stated.

Glasheen's decision to highlight the *kanjira* in the documentary was based on matters dear to his heart. Firstly, the *kanjira* resembles the *bodhran*, an Irish percussion instrument that sparked his love for drums as a child. He also strongly believes these traditional instruments are a part of a drummer's culture, identity and roots and need to be preserved to avoid their extinction. Additionally, it is laborious to become proficient in the *kanjira*, despite its humble size. "It's arguably one of the hardest percussion instruments from the Indian subcontinent to master, with only a handful of players who specialize in it," Glasheen

www.hinduismtoday.com



RUAIRI GLASHEEN

Keeping the beat: (clockwise from left) The well known and wildly popular tabla drum set; Glasheen drumming with ghatam artist Giridhar Udupa; Lata Ramachar, India's only female *kanjira* performance artist

remarks. Hence, it is paramount that the *kanjira* be preserved and its expert players be brought to the attention of the world in appreciation of their unique talent.

Hidden Drummers of India is an absolute pleasure to watch, elevating me to a sublime state of mind. It filled my heart with immense pride to belong to such a rich tradition of percussion instruments. Since its premier in August 2020, the series has garnered more than 300,000 views, and well-deserved accolades from percussion lovers all over the world who feel that it deserved to be released on platforms such as Netflix and National Geographic. This is true indeed. The series must reach far and wide for the world to experience the sheer brilliance of South Indian percussion—which, Glasheen believes, is the heartbeat of Indian culture. The full series can be found here:



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RUAIRI GLASHEEN

RATNAVATHY SIVALINGAM is a mother and entrepreneur in Malaysia who builds children's confidence via storytelling, presentation skills and creative writing. She can be contacted at: ratnavathys@yahoo.com.