Bharat Sevashram Sangh: Benevolent Band of Sadhus

April/May/June, 2011

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Among Earth’s last remaining rainforests, the Amazon jungle (left) is under siege. In Thomas Kelly’s photo on the right, entire forests are set ablaze to clear the land, mostly for cattle raising. Such irreparable change is driven by economic desire, without thought of future generations.

Earth is changing dramatically. What is the Hindu view of the environment, and how can that perspective help humanity’s current crisis? ... page 36
Yoga Takes Center Stage!

The stadium was flooded with pride and joy as 130,000 cheered. Swami Ramdev’s Patanjali Yogapeeth performed coordinated dance presentations during the opening ceremony at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium. About 825 students from Delhi and various other cities in India, many of them trained by lithe, young yogis and yoginis, put on a coordinated display of strength and flexibility. The seven-minute display of strength and flexibility was a human figure, formed by laser lights, sitting in lotus posture. Don’t miss the YouTube coverage!

Not Binding?

Divorce case brought by a Hindu man and a Christian woman who claimed to have converted to Hinduism resulted in a Delhi high court decision, December 30, 2010, that questions the validity of any Indian inter-religious marriage. In India there are separate marriage laws for Hindus, Christians and Muslims which only apply to couples of the same faith. In this case, the judge, Justice Kailash Bambhur, said “a bare declaration that he is a Hindu by a person born in another faith is not sufficient to convert him to Hinduism” and that facts and documentation would be required to convince the court that conversion had taken place. On the issue of formal conversion see: www.gurudev.org/hbh

Inter-Religious Marriages

Sanskrit Success Story

On October 30, 2010, the Sydney Sanskrit School held a successful Sanskritotsav Sanskrit festival with children putting on skits and plays, speaking only Sanskrit. The school was started in 2006 by Dr. Meena Srinivasan, who holds a PhD in Sanskrit and has been teaching Sanskrit for over 35 years. It is a registered nonprofit organization recognized under the NSW Government Department of Education’s Community Language Scheme. Three teachers teach thirty students in weekly two-hour classes. Some students won the Minister’s Community Language awards in 2007.

Target Hindu Refugees

How Churchill Starved India

In November 2010, I observed the rites at the scenic fishing village of Cedros in the beautiful southwest peninsula of Trinidad and Tobago. Devotees gathered early in the morning under tents at the beach, prepared an altar and sang bhajans. Panditji performed hawan and pujas. Jalapadas, or sacred flags, were erected to celebrate Her glory and the victory of positive over negative. Devotees made offerings to the water and then took a purification shan, or bath, in the ocean. The atmosphere created by the humility and devotion of everyone gathered, from the very old to the very young, was truly uplift- ing and inspiring.

Don’t miss the YouTube coverage!

Report by Dr. P. Bahadursingh

Ma Ganga Goes to Trinidad

Ma Ganga worship is as relevant today as it was thousands of years ago. Though She is located in Mother India, Her waters flow wherever She is worshipped. Ma Ganga is not just a physical river; She is a powerful presence which flows on the outside and also inside our own hearts. Ma Ganga’s descent upon the earth to purify mankind is celebrated during the auspicious month of Kartik. The festival, known as Kartik Snan, was brought to Trinidad by East Indian immigrants more than one hundred and fifty years ago and continues to be celebrated annually. In November 2010, I observed the rites at the scenic fishing village of Cedros in the beautiful southwest peninsula of Trinidad and Tobago. Devotees gathered early in the morning under tents at the beach, prepared an altar and sang bhajans. Panditji performed hawan and pujas. Jalapadas, or sacred flags, were erected to celebrate Her glory and the victory of positive over negative. Devotees made offerings to the water and then took a purification shan, or bath, in the ocean. The atmosphere created by the humility and devotion of everyone gathered, from the very old to the very young, was truly uplift- ing and inspiring.

Report by Dr. P. Bahadursingh

Ma Ganga continues to be adored all over the world. After the worship of the river Ganga’s descent in Trinidad, victory flags are planted all forms of transport on the coast of Bengal. Economies were crashing. Without boats for trade, with rice prices beyond reach out to these families. The South Baptist Convention is one of the richest and most powerful evangelical Christian organizations in the world. Their North American Mission Board (http://bit.ly / eUDb3L) has an article detailing the history and opportunities for ministry among the Nepali and Bhutanese refugees who started to come to the US in 2008. The article focuses on the work of Rev. Samee Cho, a Korean pastor of both The Nepal Baptist Church of Baltimore and The Bhutan Baptist Church, which he established with the help of converted refugees. Rev. Cho works in the Baltimore area as well as on foreign missions. He planted his first Korean Church in Baltimore in 1999. At the time, he and his wife Young frequented a Korean restaurant where they met a Nepali waitress, Nina Shrestha, and her husband. The Cho became friends with the Hindu couple and eventually converted them. The friendship with the Hindu couple sparked an interest for Cho in the Nepali people. A primary tool for conversion is offering of medical fairs, which provide not only free medical services but also Bibles and “the message.”

Below: A 1943 issue of Life features a story on starvation in Bengal

T HE NOVEMBER 2010 RELEASE of Madhusree Mukerjee’s book, Churchill’s Secret War: The British Empire and the Ravaging of India During World War II, has readers reeling. Between 1939 and 1945, the Brit- ish used India’s entire output of timber, woolen textiles and other goods, as well as three-quarters of its steel and cement, for defense. But few know the full story. To prevent Japanese invasion, the British cof finated all forms of transport on the coast of Bengal. Economies were crashing. Without boats for trade, with rice prices beyond
By Water Instead of by Fire

In 2010, Colgate-Palmolive was granted a patent in the world’s largest toothpaste producer and is looking to step into India’s multibillion-dollar Indian oral hygiene market.

The problem is the ingredients—which include clow oil, camphor, black pepper and cumin—date back to antiquity on the subcontinent. India’s increasingly vocal activists allege that the patent is the latest act of biopiracy—whereby Western corporations plunder and attempt to own India’s ancient medicinal technology. The Association of Manufactur- ers, Yogaswami, a yogi, and the American Indian body that promotes traditional remedies, is demanding the patent be taken legal action against Colgate.

Sandy Sullivan, Colgate’s director of innovation, says “The toothpowder’s ingredients have been used by the common Indian man for thousands of years. So how can it be patented?”

But the dispute is likely to become a test case for who owns India’s folk medicines—a repository potentially worth billions. India is one of 17 nations to form the Group of Like-Minded Megadiverse Countries, an alliance that has accused richer countries of tapping the emerging world’s resources for medicine and cosmetics without paying royalties.

India is in the process of creating 34 million web pages to document its ancient medical tech- niques in order to block claims by foreign profits. See: US Patent 7766084

Sandy Sullivan, (left) inventor of the resomation chamber, with his engineer manager Craig Sinclair. Sandy claims, “This is a true paradigm shift—a game-changer—in body disposition.”

In my opinion: The Sacred Act of Eating

A Hindu of the famous Brahmin lineage, Lord Agastya, worked out a system of agriculture and diet 6400 years ago. Yoga, the science of life, includes a strict and scientific food diet. People who have been to the Himalayas see the influence of Agastya in the food habits of the Himalayan people. He also wrote the first yoga manual which contained the spiritual aspect of life, including food. This is how the science of food was brought to India, and it is widely followed till date.

In the last two decades, food science has been the subject of wide research and scientific inquiry, but the spiritual wisdom of the Vedas is still largely unknown. The Vedas contain principles of Ayurveda, which is a system of medicine based on an understanding of the interaction between the body, mind, and spirit. Ayurveda emphasizes the importance of a balanced diet and lifestyle for maintaining health and well-being.

Hindus believe that the act of eating is a sacrifice to the Supreme, unified by the recognition that food is a source of energy, culture, and connection. It is a time to appreciate the nourishment that the food provides, to express gratitude for the gifts of nature, and to connect with the divine. The act of eating is not just about satisfying hunger, but about grounding oneself in the present moment and feeling connected to the world around us.

In my opinion, the act of eating is a sacred ritual that connects us to the divine and to the earth. It is a time to be mindful and to appreciate the food we are about to consume. It is a time to express gratitude and to connect with the divine. It is a time to be present and to enjoy the moment.

Hindus believe that the act of eating is a sacrifice to the Supreme, unified by the recognition that food is a source of energy, culture, and connection. It is a time to appreciate the nourishment that the food provides, to express gratitude for the gifts of nature, and to connect with the divine. The act of eating is not just about satisfying hunger, but about grounding oneself in the present moment and feeling connected to the world around us.
When Kios Embrace Hinduism

For best results in passing on your faith, present concepts as life-enhancing tools rather than life-restricting rules

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

**Why Are We Vegetarian?**

In Hinduism, vegetarianism is well established, and not eating meat is seldom a target for criticism. In other countries, however, being a vegetarian is the exception, and vegetarian children are often the brunt of ridicule, peer pressure and bullying. Adding injury to insult, in most school cafeterias and at social events, veggie options are meager, unimaginative and unhealthy. There is practically nothing a vegetarian student can eat.

Little wonder that children want to take the easy way out and abandon a vegetarian diet. However, there are compelling reasons for being a vegetarian. The main one is that eating meat affects their consciousness in a negative way, bringing them into the instinctive nature.

Explain to children that if they want to live in higher consciousness, they will have to give up meat. As a Hindu, you become food. Everything influences consciousness.

**Why Must We Go to the Temple Every Week?**

When answering these questions in a way that transforms them into tools, let’s review some basic concepts. These are what I call “big ideas.”

**Two Big Ideas**

The first big idea is that everything affects our consciousness. My guru, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, was outspoken on this topic. He stated, “Vegetarianism is very important. In my fifty years of ministry, it has become quite evident that Hinduism gives us for connecting with our soul nature and experiencing consciousness.”

The second big idea is that each of us is a soul, a divine being living in a physical body, and we have a three-fold nature.

The intuitive nature is the source of discriminating thought. The intuitive nature consists of our lower, animal instincts, such as self-preservation, procreation, hunger and thirst. It also includes the emotions of greed, hatred, anger, fear, lust and jealousy. This is our animal nature.

The instinctive nature or another. My guru, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, explained: “What you think, that you become. If you think God, you become God. If you think monkey, you become monkey. If you think God, you become God. If you think monkey, you become monkey.”

The spiritual nature is the source of our refined emotions, pure consciousness, truth and love. This is our spiritual nature.

Using this pair of big ideas, we are now ready to answer the three questions.

**Why did we choose meat at this age?**

**What should we know about the Deity?**

**What is the Deity’s blessing?**

Temple worship will help them remain calm and centered even in difficult circumstances. They will find that going in the right spirit is a way of pulling themselves back together. It is also a place for assuaging long-held hurts.

Teach children to go to the temple and place their problems at the feet of the Deity, to bring offerings and talk to the Deity about their unhappiness, just as if they were talking to a friend in this physical world. There, with the Deity, they will go through a deep, inner process and receive blessings from the Deity if they open themselves in the right way. They may find that when they leave the temple they can’t remember what the problem was that is a sign of success.

Conveying Hinduism to children:

A father and daughter pour water over a Sivalingam together. Through personal experience, youth embrace their religion as their own, finding that it strengthens and enhances their life.

**Conveying Hinduism to children:**

A father and daughter pour water over a Sivalingam together. Through personal experience, youth embrace their religion as their own, finding that it strengthens and enhances their life.

**Why Can’t I Listen to Hip-Hop Music?**

Music, especially when listened to for extended periods, strongly influences our state of consciousness. Whatever children listen to brings them into one state of consciousness or another. My guru, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, was outspoken on this topic. He felt that the type of music played in the home and the message it delivers are crucial. He stated that great care should be exercised to exclude the carrier music and lyrics of lower consciousness. “The drug culture and its demonic music erode the very fabric of human character and culture.” If your child catches this idea, her musical preferences will evolve—not because of rules and regulations, but because she realizes that worship that is powerful Hindu tool, and not just another adult rule, she will ask you to take her to the temple every week.

**Remember that Tools Out-Perform Rules!**

Taking time to give sensible answers to your child’s questions about every Hindu practice is definitely worthwhile. Include in your answer your child’s questions about every Hindu practice is definitely worthwhile.
Letters

I am from Australia and now live in Canada. My mother was born in Madras, India, and my father was born in India. I am currently teaching a Grade 11 English class. I am very concerned about this issue. Too many of the Christian evangelists are coming by the van loads, because they have discovered that children rapidly absorb information about Hinduism. They constantly stand at the gate and force their religious pamphlets on the Hindu students. I am very concerned about this issue. My heart is filled with anger and guilt. I am teaching Hinduism to Hindus. I respect every religion, but does that mean the court has made all children illegitimate only if it’s among members of their own faith? The courts have already pronounced that marriages invalid if the couple aren’t Hindus. Pooja, and honest McKenna had open their door for everyone of the same faith. It seems like it negates the Supreme Court decision. The apex court has given a clear statement that the Hindu marriages are legally binding in India. This decision gives assurance to all the Hindus the world over that their marriage is legally valid. They also have the right to file for a divorce, if they so desire. The Hindu marriage is a lifelong commitment. It is a social contract and a religious sacrament. It is a sanctified act that is looked upon by the Hindu deities to be of great importance. It is a divine institution. Hinduism is a liberal and diverse religion, and it is my duty as a teacher of Hinduism to teach the basics of Hinduism to children aged 6 to 17 years of age. In our experience, most 90% of teachers and students in schools being Hindu, I am sure school heads should be able to provide a session for teaching religion once a week before or after the school hours. Volunteers should start teaching the basics of Hinduism to children in temples; temple committees should create the space for teaching and invite religious leaders to conduct the classes. It is much important to educate Hindus: volunteers should start teaching the basics of Hinduism to children. My parents had given generously to the Hinduism Today magazine so the magazine stays strong for the future.

Dilip Amin

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Aya Fernandez

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World religions class in an all-girls Catholic high school. I have been blessed to have compiled across your years, I put together your YouTube video related to Chapter 7 of What Is Hinduism?”. God, Soul, World.” You are filled with so much knowledge and understanding of Hinduism. Thank you for your efforts in spreading the truth with accuracy, knowledge, wisdom and hard work.

Dilip Amin

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[Letters will be edited for space and clarity and may appear in electronic versions of Hinduism Today.]
To drink pure water from a shallow pond, one should gently take the water from the surface without disturbing the mud at the bottom. If you desire to be pure, have firm faith and slowly go on with your devotional practices without wasting your energy in useless scriptural discussions and arguments. Keep your mind like clear water, for God is above all arguments. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836-1886)

Transformation is more important than information. Sri Suktchi Amma, head of the Narayani Peedom of Malakiddi, Tamil Nadu, India

God defined is God denied. To define is to limit. Yet, the deepest of my consciousness calls on Him as pure love. Sadhu Vaswani, (1879-1956) founder of Sadhu Vaswani Mission

The caste system is opposed to the religion described in Vedanta. Caste is a social custom, and all our great preachers have tried to break it down. Every sect has preached against caste, and every time it has only riveted the chains. Caste is simply the outgrowth of the political traditions of India; it is a hereditary trade guild. Interaction with the West has broken caste more than any teaching. Swami Vivekananda (1861-1902)

When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do?—John Maynard Keynes (1883-1946), British economist

Well, it’s a pleasure to meet you. Now, tell me, are you a Sunni or a Shia Hindu? An American congressman upon being introduced to the directors of the Hindu American Foundation in 2004. HAF frequently uses this story to illustrate the importance of their work.

We can do whatever we want to the environment and no harm will come, because the Bible says God won’t allow the earth to be destroyed. John Shinkus, Republican congressman from Illinois, member of the Energy and Commerce Committee

Why do people who know the least know it the loudest?

When we were young kids growing up in America, we were told to always finish dinner. Our mothers said, ‘Think of the starving children in India.’ But now I tell my children: Finish your homework. Think of the children in India who will make you starve if you don’t.’ Thomas Friedman, columnist for The New York Times

We are all bubbles in the ocean. The bubble is in the ocean; the ocean is in the bubble. Satguru Sivya Yogaswami, (1872-1954), Sri Lankan mystic

Silence is not the absence of communication. It is saying everything without words.

Offer oblations in love, light golden lamps. Spread incense of fragrant wood and lighted camphor in all directions. Forget your worldly worries and meditate. Worshiping thus, there is nothing that you cannot attain. Worshiping thus, you shall inherit the wealth of Indra, heaven’s king. Worshiping thus, you shall gain miraculous powers. Worshiping thus, you shall attain moksha. Tirumantiram, verses 2009-2006

Faith is the bird that feels the light and sings when the dawn is still dark. Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), Indian poet

Siva’s devotees know a society is only as free as the freedom enjoyed by its minorities. Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927-2001), founder of Hinduism Today

DID YOU KNOW?

Ardra, the Dancing Star

Abena is the star that names one of the 27 lunar mansions of Hindu astrology. It is known as Siva’s star, a cosmic representation of His third eye, red and intense. Called Betegeuse in the West (a medieval Arabic name), it fascinates and astounds modern astronomers. Though it is one of the most studied of stars, it defies description, as it changes in brightness, shape and even color with flickering gusts.

Scientists call Ardra “mysterious” and “elusive” in their published works, infecundly calling this massive orb “the dancing star.” Hindus might find the name apt—after all, Siva is Nataraja, King of Dance. Many of our ancient saints, as well as contemporary devotees, have had such visions. You may not be able to see these subtle beings, but you can feel their presence as a rarified holy atmosphere. After such an experience, we leave with our mind filled and thrilled with its shakti in every nerve current of our body. A sanctified Hindu temple is filled with hosts of devas. When we return home, lighting an oil lamp brings along the power of the temple. This simple action gives the devas a focal point, inviting them into the home shrine to bless and protect the family.

600 light-years, Siva’s star is colossal. For sake of comparison, if it were the size of a football stadium, Earth would be a speck of dust, and the Sun no larger than a mango.

Ardra is soaring a transitional point in its evolution. Tomorrow, perhaps, or several thousand years from now—it will enter a supermassive stage. In that act, marking the height of this cosmic performance, Ardra will convert most of itself into light and cosmic rays, sending its energy out to the universe in a blinding flash. When that happens, it will outshine the full moon in our sky for months and be visible even during the day.

After that, Ardra will be a small neutron star, unimaginably dense, spinning incredibly fast. Just a cup of matter from a neutron star’s core weighs more than all the mountains of the Himalayas combined.

BASICS OF HINDUISM

The Esoterics of Hindu Worship

Ring the bell, light the aarti, chant the mantra and there He is—a God subtly manifested, a Lord of the Cosmos beheading your call. The mystical nature of worship is a mighty aspect of Hinduism, though simple in its mechanism. By humble antics or through the soaring complexity of week-long rituals, the result is always a connection between worlds. Vela lift, doors open: God comes to us.

Hindus do not worship stone images. Those who say such things do not understand the inner workings of the temple. When invoked, the Deities arrive in their subtle bodies of light. They hover in and above the stone image and bless devotees, cleansing auras and eating karmas. If your third eye is open, you can see the God or Goddess and enjoy personal darshan. Many of our ancient saints, as well as contemporary devotees, have had such visions. You may not be able to see these subtle beings, but you can feel their presence as a rarified holy atmosphere. After such an experience, we leave with our mind filled and thrilled with its shakti in every nerve current of our body. A sanctified Hindu temple is filled with hosts of devas. When we return home, lighting an oil lamp brings along the power of the temple. This simple action gives the devas a focal point, inviting them into the home shrine to bless and protect the family.

Offer oblations in love, light golden lamps. Spread incense of fragrant wood and lighted camphor in all directions. Forget your worldly worries and meditate. Worshiping thus, there is nothing that you cannot attain. Worshiping thus, you shall inherit the wealth of Indra, heaven’s king. Worshiping thus, you shall gain miraculous powers. Worshiping thus, you shall attain moksha. Tirumantiram, verses 2009-2006.
Hindu History Lesson Series Is Completed!

F
ive years ago, Hindus in California found out just how poorly our religion is portrayed in that state’s history books for sixth grade (the only year when Hinduism is taught). They also discovered that, despite a great deal of work and expression of concern to the State Board of Education, fixes for the books were not going to come easily. At the State’s adoption stage, the books were already finished; so only minor changes were allowed. While some progress was made, the entire approach needed to be revamped to bring to the presentation of Hinduism the accuracy and respect accorded other religions in the same books. Thus was born our five-year effort to write an accurate history of India and Hinduism for the fifth-grade American student. The five 16-page lessons will soon be published as a book.

In writing the fifth lesson, we at HINDUISM TODAY found that little appreciation has been given modern India’s founders for their genius, skill, and courage in creating the world’s largest democracy out of the ruins of Colonial India. Between 1947 and today, India united itself as astounding progress occurred: the life expectancy doubled; percent of work income doubled; and the national rate of growth more than doubled; poverty was reduced by half; and literacy increased six-fold. These figures resulted from successful building. It is significant, India unity over these last sixty years has sustained Hinduism’s unity.

*Thanks to the expertise of its authors, Chapter Five is a comprehensive and well-written piece, covering a lot of ground. Quite a service to the younger members of the Hindu community.*

Klaus Klostermaier, PhD, Professor Emeritus, Department of Religion, University of Manitoba, Canada

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Hinduism: Endurance
End Times

India as Colony: 1858 – 1947

Hindu India: 200 CE to 1100 CE

In this lesson, the World’s Largest Democracy is Born; Building a Unified Nation; Hindu Metaphysics, the Seven Chakras, Hindu Ideas, the Impact Today

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FROM THE AGAMAS

Death: The Yogi’s Instruction Manual

Guiding the soul to depart the body through the top of the head

The following text is from chapter nine of the knowledge section of the Agamars Agama, “Departure and Absorption of the Soul.” The chapter discusses how the sadhaka, or sincere devotee of Siva, should approach death.

The sadhaka should draw out his soul in the form of astr, contemplating Ekaksana Rudra and His Shakti, and unite it with the brahma

From the Agamars through the process of ishna yoga, concentration. The soul drawn out in this way departs from his body.

All other aspects of the soul depart from various parts of his body, such as legs and arms, and accumulate again in the plane of Brahma.

Having departed from the brahma, the soul, associated with all of its essential aspects, swiftly passes through the outer region of the Brahma, known as Isaka-sadri (region of visible and invisible worlds). Getting itself separated from this region and from the dual state of knowledge and ignorance, it enters into the Great Lord, Siva, who is very subtle.

At this stage, the attending sadhaka (an associate of the liberated sadhaka) should keep the body from which the soul has departed to its new abode. Opening the postures of sakti and svara, in the form of astr and cover it with clothes and offer perfumes. He should touch the head of the body with the accomplishment of the mantra “Samhara Bhuti Oṃ.”

Then the attending sadhaka should offer oblations into the fire with the mantras pertaining to the Lord of Vedas and contemplate the departed soul as identical with the Supreme Lord, in a systematic way as ordained in the Agamars.

In this way, the soul gets liberated from the bonds through the process of soma yoga. There is no doubt about this.

Dr. S.P. SABARADHARAN "Shaivacarya," 67, of the Adiśiva purse, is an example in contemporary Tamil and Sanskrit, specializing in the Vedas, Agamas and Śiśa Shastris. This excerpt is from his recent translation of the revered Agamars Agama.
The Bharat Sevashram Sangha is a spiritual brotherhood of Hindu monks and volunteer workers founded in 1917 by Acharya Srimat Swami Pranavananda Maharaj. Today it comprises over 100 ashrams, 450 local religious centers called "Milan Mandirs" and hundreds of service and educational projects, all under the direction of 500 BSS monks. It is one of the India's largest modern-day monastic orders, on the scale of the Ramakrishna Mission and BAPS Swaminarayan. The organization flourished even in the darkest days of the British era, feeding the starving, educating the ignorant and uplifting the Hindu masses.
Our report first covers the life of Acharya Pranavananda Maharaj, the founding of the BSS, and its organizational components. Then our correspondent shares his week-long tour of the BSS headquarters in Kolkata and a few of their projects in the states of West Bengal and Bihar, in Eastern India.

By Rajiv Malik, Delhi

Acharya Pranavananda Maharaj was born in 1896 on the auspicious full-moon day in the month of Maghi (February 28) in Bajitpur, in what is now Bangladesh. The boot of British colonialism rested firmly on India's neck and the masses were being mobilized to ferment independence. That same year Gandhi moved to South Africa to begin the fight for the rights of Indians and only three years had passed since Swami Vivekananda's triumphant appearance at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. The boy's birth would later be interpreted as fulfilling India's desperate call for great leaders.

In January 1904, at age 28, he was initiated into sannyas, Hindu monasticism, by Swami Govindanandadaji and received the name Acharya Swami Pranavananda Maharaj. A month later, a group of his young followers also took sannyas. As part of the Dasanami orders of Adi Shankara, they formed the core group of the BSS. The monks are Saivites, though Acharya did not favor making such distinctions among Hindus.

Over time, Acharya set up a 12- to 14-year monastic training program. Aspirants to monastic life spend their first two years as a volunteer worker under the close guidance of a senior monk. Those who qualify are given the sacred thread ceremony, and undergo further training to prepare them for initiation as a sannyasin. The monks, strict about celibacy, strive to always do their work in groups. They are pure vegetarians who do not take onion, garlic, coffee or tea. Occasionally an aspirant will leave the ashram and marry. Swami Biswatmananda, BSS chief coordinator, said, "All such sannyats, aspirants who choose a householder's life later come and repent their decision. But they cannot be accepted back."

Swami Parameshananda of the New York BSS center explained their training program. "Based on his svadharma [personal innate tendencies and inclinations], he is assigned responsibilities whereby he grows and matures naturally. It is for this reason the Sangha is a complete body. Some monks become great speakers and some great cooks, etc., all without sacrificing their spiritual life. Acharya, as their guru, guides the Sangha from behind the curtain." Acharya Pranavananda set lofty goals for his eager band. He felt that sannyasins, and perhaps only sannyasins, could save Hindu dharma. "The Hindus are not so much in need of ideas and ideals," he declared, "as they are in need of strength, unity, organization, power of self-defense and a will for self-expansion. Ideas and ideals they have enough; they have enough of plans and programs. But everything has become meaningless, and the Hindu population is to be vitalized by an infusion of tremendous energy."

Acharya wrote to one of his monks: "Man possesses unlimited strength, infinite capacity for work and boundless perseverance. It is because they cannot always realize that, most of them are so miserably inert. Since it is necessary to set before the country a new ideal of 'sannyas,' a number of monks like you have to shed every drop of blood to purge the highly corrupt state prevailing in the country, by forgetting all thoughts of personal ease and comforts in the supreme cause of the Great Liberation of the world. You are to stimulate a good deal of activity among the monks of India now lying idle if the stigma that is now attached to them is to be removed. The more men come into contact with you, the more they will be attracted and deeply impressed by your wonderful stamina and strength, manliness and manhood and your tremendous capacity for action. You are heroes in the field of action and should not waste your time over ordinary matters. A man who is born must die. And each one shall depart when his term is over."

As guru, he warned his monks to not hold personal agendas: "If each acts according to his own plans and ideas, then disunity, dissensions, divisions and disputes will step in. If, heedless of others' ideas and feelings, the monks go on with their individual ideas and desires, then the enormous strength of the Sangha will fall to pieces. The monks must relentlessly sink their own whims and hobbies in the great will of the guru and must behave according to His commandments, teachings and injunctions. Then and only then will the will and power of the guru work smoothly through all."

In 1924, Acharya set up "mobile preaching units," which today number seven. These are groups of ten or more sadhus that carry Acharya's teaching to the masses. They travel with a team of musicians who perform bhajan and kirtans. They are on the road for a year at a time, traveling by train to save money. They gather each year in Banaras for a Sadhu-Led Organization.

A S adhu-Led Organization

(Counter-clockwise from upper left) The young boy to Swami Pranavananda's right became BSS General Secretary Swami Bhuvanandadasji Maharaj (below), who passed away on January 46, just as this article was going to press; BSS Swamis in Sivaratri procession in Baliyagunge, Kolkata, February 12; Swami Deobrotranandadasji, Swami Biswatmanandadasji perform aarti during guru pujas.
Sadhus Introduce Modern Skills to Replace a Disappearing Lifestyle in the Tribal Areas

Sadhus, or holy men, have been an integral part of Hinduism since ancient times. Their role has been to act as a bridge between the divine and the devotee, offering spiritual guidance and leading lives of renunciation. In recent times, the pattern of life has been changing rapidly, and some sadhus have taken it upon themselves to introduce modern skills to their fellow tribesmen. This has been particularly important in areas where the traditional way of life is being threatened by external influences.

In the tribal areas, Sadhus have introduced modern skills such as education through moral and spiritual publications, tribal welfare and uplifting of the weaker sections of society, and income generating activities with other volunteers. They have also provided a common center for all Hindus, including the untouchables and tribes, to work in unity and cooperation.

The Sadhus have also been instrumental in organizing funds for the BSS, which is an organization that is dedicated to the welfare and uplifting of the weaker sections of society. They have also been active in organizing funds for the BSS in Action, which is a program that focuses on the education of tribal students.

In conclusion, Sadhus have been playing a vital role in preserving the traditional way of life in the tribal areas and introducing modern skills to replace a disappearing lifestyle. Their work is crucial in ensuring that the spiritual traditions of Hinduism are preserved for future generations.
Through a havan or yagna (a purifying fire ceremony), 30 or 40 supplicants at a time are welcomed back into Hinduism. Acharya pointed out that the ancient Hindu rituals converted millions and accommodated them into society, expanding Hindu society, as it stands at present, is still steeped in meaningless superstitions and conservatism and is not ready to tolerate re-conversion and re-accommodation of the renegades and the tribals. What is needed is to wake up the sleeping masses.” The BSS has been criticized and attacked by some for its re-conversion activities. Acharya observed in his life, “After a thousand years’ slumber, the Hindus are bound to get up. I shall compel each one of them to count his heads by saying, ‘I am a Hindu,’ ‘I am a Hindu.’ I shall infuse in them great strength. The Hindu has learning, intelligence, wealth and capability. They also form the majority; and when there is unity among themselves, they will become indomitable in the world. Through the Mandir, all the problems of the Hindu families and society will be solved.”

Disaster relief has been a BSS speciality from its founding. They are able to mobilize thousands of volunteers within hours of putting out a call. According to Swami Bishwatmananda, “When Bangladesh became independent in 1971 and millions of refugees swarmed into India, our swamis took steps into the 10 districts of Bangladesh itself to distribute relief material.”

BSS has seven ashrams in Bangladesh, managed by 11 swamis. Swami observes, “Life for Hindus in Bangladesh is gradually becoming better. There is less pressure under the new government. A few years back, things were not that good. But we are not able to do re-conversion work there. Swami Pranavananda remains a respected figure in Bangladesh, and all school children read his life story in their textbook. Unfortunately the work suffers from lack of government support and public donations.

Today the BSS is established in dozens of countries of the Indian diaspora. These include Fiji, UK, Central and South America (Guyana, Trinidad, Suriname, etc), US and Canada. They have been particularly effective and popular in Guyana, which has produced more than 15 monks, including Swami Nityanandaa of the London branch and Swami Parameshananda (both of whom assisted with this article) of New York. The current president of Guyana, Bharrat Jagdeo, once taught in a BSS school and remains friendly with the organization. BSS holds consultative status as a NGO with the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

My Experience with the BSS

In early December, 2010, this reporter was instructed by Hinduism Today to prepare a feature story on the organization. This would not be my first encounter with BSS. In researching earlier Hinduism Today articles, I have had the exceeding good fortune and blessings to attend over the last decades all four Kumbha Melaac at Prayag, Nasik, Ujjain and Haridwar. At each, I visited the large BSS camp promoting Acharya’s teachings and the organization’s work. At the Kumbha Melaas, the BSS is most prominent not for their religious work but for their team of lifeguards. These expert young swimmers, wearing saffron-colored banners around their bodies, work closely with the official river police to ensure the safety of pilgrims taking their holy bath. Such service, I was to soon discover, is typical of the BSS mission of stepping in where help is needed most.

My research began at the BSS main ashram, in the Ballygunge area of South Kolkata. When it was first established, the land was completely undeveloped. Now, it is a posh, upscale community, with the ashram occupying over an acre of prime land. Entering through an unexpectedly narrow corridor, the visitor finds an expansive area containing the temple, large reception hall, administrative offices and quarters for the monks.

Shortly after my arrival, I participated in the evening aarti, with hundreds of devotees and 20 of the monks of all age groups performing the worship and chanting the Vedic mantras. I soon met Swami Biwsanatmananda, the headquarters’ chief coordinator, who took several hours of his busy schedule to answer questions and introduce me to Swami Abhayananda, a senior monk serving as BSS Joint Secretary. The latter swamiji explained the thinking behind their style of worship. “During the Muslim rule, our people were separated from our scriptures. Gargi, a lady was an expert on Vedas, yet we started saying that women could not study and recite Vedas. Then it was said that only brahmans could study Vedas, and no one else could. Others who tried to study were mistreated and punished. But Acharya Pranavananda said that everyone is entitled to study Vedas and everybody can recite ‘Aum.’ He said everybody could participate in the performance of yagnas or havans, including reciting the mantras and making offerings. Every Sunday we conduct such a yagna at each of our centers.”

The next day, I met Swami Buddhahananda, who is BSS General Secretary and one of the few remaining direct disciples of Acharya. Eighty-eight and suffering from various ailments, he delighted in showing me a charming photo on his wall (see page 20) of himself at the age of ten with Acharya.

“Early in life, I realized that this was the path for me,” he said. “When I used to go to my home, I felt as if someone had compelled me to go. However, when I was in the ashram, I felt at home. I felt that this is the work I belong. Since my childhood, I understood this. I came in touch with Acharya in a very natural manner. Acharya Mahatya told me that I was connected to him for many past births.” Just as this article was going to press, I was informed that Swami Buddhahananda had passed away—my interview with him the last he was to give.

Later, I was shown the rooms that house the portraits of Acharya’s direct disciples, men who had joined Acharya while young and spent their entire lives in service of the Sangha. Each was garlanded with fresh flowers, and the perfume of incense filled the rooms. Householders and monks alike visit these rooms to seek blessings.

Monastic Training Center

In the evening, I visited the BSS training center in the Gaudiyan colony of South Kolkata, about ten kilometers from the headquarters. This center, where 50 monks are in training, is located on several acres of land, with a Silva temple in the middle. When I arrived, a dozen brahmarachars, beginning monks, were rescuing slokas from the Bhagavad Gita as part of their evening routine, then singing bhajans. Swami Girishananda, who heads this center, explained that in addition to the monastic training, the center provides medical assistance, an ambulance service for the needy, a computer training center and a hostel for 20 school children ages 10 to 15. The chil-
Secular and Religious Education through “Preaching Parties” and Schools

dren attend government schools, and they receive religious education at the center. They even perform some of the temple ceremonies. Swamiji said, “We try to teach them and treat them with love. There is no physical punishment given to the children, even when they do not strictly follow the rules.” I spoke with Swamik Bhasaaj on a Brahmacari trainee from Assam who joined BSS in 2009. He explained, “I am a graduate and have studied many religious books. After I realized that this world is an illusion, I decided to leave the world and come here. Now I have no connection with my parents. I want to attain God in this very birth. When some children have studied many religious books.

The only thing that is always with me, and that keeps me blissful.”

Now realized that this world is an illusion. His mother murali said, “We try to teach them English medium schools and tribal children.

Service to the Tribal Peoples

On December 14, I took the early morning train to Jamshedpur, accompanied by Swami Bishnu Maharaj, a young BSS sadhu and photographer. Jamshedpur, or “Steel City,” was built in the 1900s by Jamshedji Tata as a huge industrial complex near the area’s iron mines. The BSS center here began as a Milan Mandir and developed into a seven-acre campus with a temple, four schools and residences. According to Swami Shiva-roopananda, the senior monk here, they have nearly 2,400 students commuting from their homes—597 in English medium schools and over 1,700 in Bengali schools. In addition, student hostels house 510 tribal children, including children from what are called the “tribal colonies.”

The “tribal” people, by way of clarification, are those original inhabitants of India who maintained a tribal culture of living in the forests, practicing limited agriculture and having no fixed homes. Many of them have been influenced to a great extent by modern civilization—if it is accurate to call our civilization a stratum. But now I am happy with my decision. No family wants their child to leave home and become a sannyasin. But then everybody has his own samskaras (tendencies). India has hundreds of millions of people, but how many choose this path? So far as I am concerned, God and Acharya Maharaj have brought me here.”

The next day, I was driven to the outskirts of Kolkata to visit BSS’s huge 500-bed hospital, which serves the city residents and the poor villagers of the adjacent Twenty Four Parganas district. Though the hospital opened just two years ago, the government already handles 2,000 patients a day. Brahmacari Sunanjan Maharaj, one of the young monks looking after this project, told me the Sangha has hospitals and clinics all over India, but this is their first big multi-specialty facility. It stands on a large plot of land slated for future expansion.

Large weekly yagna ceremonies are a feature of BSS centers.

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The truly primitive tribal people are different. They are still trying to live as they have for the last several thousand years. However, their very existence is threatened by the encroachment on their forests, the onslaught of modern disease and alcohol abuse. It is to this group of primitive tribals that BSS has done its most outstanding and innovative outreach, likely saving them from extinction.

The free resident school here is part of that program. BSS has succeeded where the government has failed. Even the Catholics turned over one of their tribal projects in this area to the RSS rather than let it fail.

We traveled next to the Sunder Nagar Tribal Girls School, about 20 km from Jamshedpur. Founded in 2006 as the first school in the state just for tribal girls, it has 100 students and is completely free. It is an exemplary school, neat, clean and obviously well run by its elderly managers, Ashish Ranjan Dasgupta and his wife, Anusha. The girls have learned to chant Vedic mantras and have adjusted to the BSS vegetarian diet. Ashish Dasgupta told me, “They are all tribal and primitive tribal girls. Some of their tribes have already disappeared, and others are just fading away. These children come from the areas which are affected by the Maoist insurgency—and may even include some children of the Maoist leaders.” The girls I spoke with were smart and confident, a good sign of the quality of training they are receiving at the BSS school.

The school was built with funds from the Indian Government’s Ministry of Tribal Welfare. I learned that the BSS has always had mixed feelings about accepting government aid. Prior to independence, the British had, of course, no interest in helping the group. Initial relations with the Congress Party in the 1950s were not smooth; BSS was regarded as too Hindu for the party’s taste, and, in any case, the government is particular about whom it allows to deal with the tribals. Their willingness now to work with BSS is a strong endorsement. In recent years, the organization has cautiously accepted state funding for some of its education projects.

Acharaya also warned the monks not to accept donations from rich people which came with strings attached. Far better, he counseled them, to collect small donations from those who gave freely, expect nothing in return and will not interfere with the work.

Leaving the girls’ school, we went to a tribal craft center run by Vinod Murmu and his wife under the auspices of BSS. Acharaya set up many such craft centers during his lifetime to provide backward Hindu communities a means of income. BSS deemed that leprosy had been eradicated, it ceased funding the work—leaving existing lepers without help. A local industrialist, Raj Kumar Agarwal, stepped in, but the center’s upkeep has suffered. Patients’ stories here were much the same as Murmu’s. Darulsh Gohe, head of the colony, told me, “Our own families abandoned us, but BSS has treated us as if we were their own.”

We returned in late evening to the Jamshedpur main center. I was impressed to see the temple full of tribal boys joined in the chanting of mantras and singing of bhajans, in stark contrast to their brethren in the big cities who spend their evenings watching soap operas on television.

The next day would be quite special, as we were traveling into Saskatchewan, one of the primitive tribal areas. Not many years ago, visitors would have been met with warning shots from unclad tribal archers! On our way, we stopped at Debangi village, 40 km from Jamshedpur. We visited a boys’ school, an industrialist, Kamaraj Kumar, stepped in, and has been influenced to a great extent by modern civilization—if it is accurate to call our civilization an illusion. We took the early morning train to Jamshedpur, accompanied by Swami Bishnu Maharaj, a young BSS sadhu and photographer. Jamshedpur, or “Steel City,”...
The area was quiet, with hardly a vehicle or even a bullock cart in sight, not to mention any sign of electricity or running water. Swami Devabratananda offered some background. “Fifty years ago, the government tried to care for the tribals of the area; but, they made little progress, and finally asked BSS to take over. We drafted a program to train the men in agriculture and the women in weaving, and to educate the children. We started with just 23 families. Once the Sahar community saw that these families were earning an income, tribe members from distant villages started to come here. They are doing very well. Today, those who used to live naked are making clothes for the children. We also find ourselves closer to Hinduism because of the dedication and commitment of the BSW. BSS has its own retail outlets for the products, and sales are good, with retail prices ranging from Rs. 30 to Rs. 400. The BSS has its own retail outlets for the products, and sales are good, with retail prices ranging from Rs. 30 to Rs. 400.

BSS provides education for the children reported to me that due to the reduced used to live naked are making clothes for the children. Many wanted their children there specifically because it was run by the dedicated Hindu swamis. During my visit with the BSS, I was taken with the scene was reminiscent of the old way is gone, and a life of poverty and alcoholism should not be the sole alternative.

**“Carry On”**

During my visit with the BSS, I had an unusual direct experience of the swamis’ dedication and discipline. One night, while interviewing some young volunteers in Swami Biswatmananda’s room in the Kolkata headquarters, I was informed that one of the elderly swamis had passed away. His body had just been brought to the temple a few yards from me. Swami Biswatmananda came to pay his respects to the departed soul, as I should leave off the interviews. I was firmly told, "Carry on."

The scene was reminiscent of Acharya’s own passing, at which time there were 82 monastics in his order. On his deathbed, he decreed that none of the monks, even Swami Satchidananda, who was to succeed him as president of the Sangha, was to leave his presence; he said, “I want to die and explain that the old way is gone, and a life of poverty and alcoholism should not be the sole alternative. BSS has also been providing education for the children reported to me that due to the reduced use of sticks to discipline the children, instead, we talk to the child and explain that corporal punishment is absolutely banned. No sticks are used to discipline the children. Instead, we talk to the child and explain that breaking the discipline is not good for them. We also took into their home life and see if there’s something there is affecting their behavior. In an extreme case, we may suspend the child, but even then, after a few days, the child may come back reformed.”

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Giants Who Reawakened Indian Dance

Freed from the label of brutish exoticism, Indian dance flourished in Europe through the efforts of talented performers and their unlikely Russian muse

By Kusum Joshi, United Kingdom

This is the third and final part in a series of articles about Indian dance in the West.

The UK's Awe for India

The shift in the West's perception of India was gradual but decisive. In Britain, it started in the first decade of the 20th century. Key proponents included Sir William Rothenstein, artist and Principal of London's Royal College of Art; Dr. Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, an archaeologist turned artist historian and Indophile; and a small group of leaders from various art fields. This pro-India movement was sparked by a quarrel. In a meeting of London's prestigious Royal Asiatic Society on 21 January, 1901, Sir George Birdwood expressed contempt for Indian fine art, saying its symbol "outrages artistic sensibilities, virtuosity and Indian dance heritage."

But Pavlova never gave up. Her desire to meet India's legendary temple dancers, combined with her stature as a classical artist, inspired some of them to return to their homeland to seek out, salvage and develop their own ancient Indian classical dance heritage.

Pavlova first found three immensely talented young Indians with the potential to become traditional dancers but who were pursuing other careers. They were Uday Shankar, an aspiring painter; Leela Roy, a musician; and Bulleemi Devi, a classical ballerina who looked like "a godsend from the Orient," in Ram Gopal's words. By convincing the trio to return to their roots, and by teaching them the secrets of modern stagecraft and dance, Pavlova had a momentous impact on Indian classical dance.

Pavlova's love for India had a profound effect on Western classical dance as well. So impressed was she by the ethereal beauty of the paintings in the Ajanta caves that, not long after returning from her first Indian tour in 1910, she developed a ballet called Ajanta Frescoes. Under Indian inspiration, Pavlova also developed Hindu Wedding and Sishu and Krishna, traditional ballet choreographies infused with India's color and visual orientalism.

A Russian Godmother for Indian Art

The most important European dancer of the early 20th century Russian prima ballerina Anna Pavlova, widely revered as the greatest ballerina of all time, was the first world-class ballet dancer to tour around the world. Her technical skills were not perfect, but her ardor and creativity on stage are unmatched to this day. (Below) The 1930 pro-India art manifesto.

Pavlova also developed a ballet called Uday Shankar in the 1930s. A Russian Godmother for Indian Art

The details have been lost to history, but during that production Uday and Pavlova met. Soon after, Uday left the Art College to pursue dance. Rothenstein, who held his Indian protégé in high esteem and had great expectations of him as a painter, was disheartened: "I urged Uday Shankar to reconsider his decision. Later I learned that Uday had joined Pavlova in America. I thought of him as a lost soul."

Despite Rothenstein's disappointment, he was overjoyed when he later saw Uday Shankar perform. "I saw at once I had been the undereognized artist, critic, and student of art, and in the best art of India a lofty and adequate expression of the religious emotion of the people and of their deepest thoughts on the subject of the divine.

We hold that the existence of a distinct, potent, and living tradition of art is a possession of priceless value to the people of India, and one which they, and all who admire and respect their achievements in the field, ought to regard with the utmost reverence and love."

Confident that we here speak for a very large body of qualified Indian opinion, we wish to assure our brother craftsmen and students in India that the school of national art in that country, which is still showing its vitality and increasing capacity for the interpretation of Indian life and thought, will never fail to commands our admiration and sympathy so long as it remains true to itself.
would. Uday Shankar’s dancing, his poise and gestures, had grace and gravity. The musicians had the same gravity as they sat before their sitars, vinas and drums. And the women! What exquisite gestures in their hands, what reticence in their movements. I had been shocked more than once seeing so-called Indian dancers by [Western] women whose immostest dress and movements were entirely without the delicate sensuality of the Indian Bayaderes. There was a religious atmosphere throughout Uday’s entertain-

ment. I went behind the performance to offer my congratulations. Catching sight of me, he at once left the circle surrounding him and bending low, to my embarrassment, he made the gesture to take the dust from my feet.

Uday Shankar’s success as a dancer in Europe in the 1940s was due in no small measure to his association with Pavlova. He worked for about a year as a choreographer and dancer for her company, touring Europe. During this time, Pavlova gave him invaluable insights and experience that enabled him to advance his career as an Indian dancer on the world stage.

Working with Pavlova shaped Uday into a disciplined artist and familiarized him with the essential elements of successful stagecraft. Above all, he guided him to develop his dance not by looking westward, but by turning his gaze towards the traditions of India. It was she who inspired him to supply inspiration from the treasure house of his own Indian cultural background, folklore and heritage.

During the late 1920s, Uday Shankar and his associate Alice Bone spent a year traveling all around India, meeting and acquiring whatever they could to develop and fulfill their artistic aims. They examined ancient Indian miniatures and paintings in the Buddhist caves at Ajanta and the Hindu temples of Orissa and the Dec-

can. They observed various Indian dance styles, both classical and folk. To enlarge their repertoire as a dancer, Shankar made a selection from the gamut of Indian hand gestures (hasta madras) and gained mastery of the nine basic emotions—the navaratas—described in Bharata Muni’s ancient Indian dance treatise, Natya Shastra.

Uday Shankar never tried to perfect a spe-
cific Indian dance style. Instead, he picked whatever appealed to him from every dance style he saw. His Uday Shankar Company of Hindu Dancers and Musicians reflected his confidence and the sweep of his creativity and ambition. He built up and carted with the tour an array of 150 musical instruments including the sitar, vina, sarangi, sarod, wind instruments like the shehnai and various flutes as well as diverse percussion instru-
ments from all over India. Before setting out from India, he also repudied in some of his close relations, most importantly his little brother Ravi Shankar, who would one day become a world-famous sitar virtuoso.

The Magnetic Madame Menaka

A Triumphant Debut in Paris

Once back in Europe, the troupe rehearsed rigorously for their debut at the Theatre des Champs Elysees on March 3, 1931. Suc-
cess smiled on them, and from the Uday Shankar Company of Hindu Dancers and Musicians was a big hit in France. Shankar would go on to become a pioneer of modern dance in India, a world-renowned Indian dancer and choreographer. Known for adapting Western theatrical techniques to traditional Indian classical dance, he effectively placed Indian dance on the world map.

His programs often juxtaposed contrasting forces or qualities. Though the style, spirit and theme of his dances were In-
dian, they were meticulously planned, crafted, cut to size, fitted to Western tastes, abounding in repetitive move-
ments and patterns with modern lighting effects. Secondly, he introduced diversity and versatility into a variety of moods. He utilized orchest-
ral music as well as ancient and classical dance themes, all the while emphasizing the strengths of Indian dance, such as the exec-
utable face of oppositions in Sivakami dances. Thirdly, he utilized the great skills and attention paid to details of dance costumes, jewelry, music and props. Finally, in keeping with the essence of Indian culture, his performances had an uplifting, spiritual quality.

Shankar enthralled European audiences and left them with a deep impression of the beauty, mystique and grandeur of Indian dance. But Pavlova, not Uday, saw his triumph. She contracted pneumonia in January 1931. When her doctors told her she did not have long to live, she refused any treatment; “If I can’t dance, then I’d rather be dead.” Three weeks after she died, days before her 90th birthday and barely a month before Shankar’s debut in Paris, but Anna, creator of the role The Dancer, took over and completed the course of both Eastern and Western dance.

In keeping with Indian classical dance tra-
ditions, Leila regarded dance not as a method of entertaining audiences or a means of self-
expression, but as an elevating spiritual ac-
vivity. In an article published in 1935, she ex-
plained: “I cannot lay too much importance on the fact that one must master all the traditional technique. We must strenuously discourage all attempts to bluff the public by senseless posturing and posing on the stage. We do not want our dance to become an exotic and erotic presentation for the de-

tection of the West. It must express the life and emotions of our nation and not be mere ethnographic posturing.”

Leila established her own dance troupe in 1935 and started dance classes for new students from non-devadasi backgrounds at her residence. That same year, she staged her first dance drama, Krishna Leela, at the Opera House in Bombay. During her short but packed dance career, other significant new dance dramas that she choreographed and staged were Deva Vijaya Nrtya (1935), Menaka Lasyam (1938) and Kalismadhan and Malavikagnimitram (both in 1939). Dif-

erent but not bound by tradition, she dis-
covered traditional Kathak lyrics and took the help of trained musicians to create orchestral ensembles, a break from the traditional way Indian music was played.

Thus her productions were a clever merger of tradition and innovation. The artistic input she received from high-caliber artists and teachers lent her work authenticity and sophistication—effects that Anna Pavlova had encouraged. After founding the Menaka Indian Ballet company, Leila became known as Mr. or Mrs. Shokhey. Her enthusiastic hus-
band, taking advantage of a brief official trip for attending an international Intergov-

On the road: (left) Uday Shankar’s ener-
gy, Poorna, is a perfect counterpoint to the gentle grace of his troupe’s more feminine dances
Reflecting on the state of Hinduism in America, the ever-increasing importance of temples and the young leaders who must soon take the reins

BY TEJAS DAVE

I HAVE OFTEN HEARD THE QUESTION, “WHY DO WE NEED TEMPLES when God is said to be omnipresent, existing everywhere?” Let me answer by saying this: air is everywhere, but we still need a fan to feel that air; God is everywhere, but we need a mandir to feel God’s presence.

Our Hindu Dharma has made tremendous contributions and progress within American society since the introduction of our eternal religion here by Swami Vivekananda over a century ago. Fewer than 20 years later, the United States saw the establishment of its first mandir, the Vedanta Center in Boston, by Swami Paramananda. In the 100 years since then, more than 500 mandirs have been built across the United States and Canada, serving the religious needs of over two million Hindu Americans.

These temples, 10,000 miles from the Hindu motherland, have become sanctuaries for prayer and centers of devotion. In addition, they provide a haven for celebrations, festivals and other customs away from their ancestral home—the need to inculcate Hindu philosophy in the new generation and to hold children’s classes to impart Vedic knowledge. As a result, our American mandirs have become centers of learning.

And yet, while these great strides have been made, mostly by first-generation Hindu Americans, the wheel of time continues to turn. Soon it will come time for a new generation to assume leadership of Hindu mandirs and organizations and expand them even further, to adequately fulfill the needs of an ever-growing population. It is for this reason that the Hindu Mandir Executives’ Conference (HMEC) was convened. It was not to reminisce upon the past, but to envision the future. The purpose of the conference is to build a better future, a future that continues to be protected by the umbrella of Sanatana Dharma.

I would like to make it clear that while we seek to continue our Hindu faith into the future, we must also accept the existence of all other religions. In his 1893 address to the World Parliament of Religions, Swami Vivekananda stated that all paths eventually lead to the same goal, and that is God. We must embrace the philosophy of svamadhiaha kutumbahkam, “all mankind is one family.”

As we approach this future over the next few years, we must ensure that temples do not become simply architectural marvels for society to gawk at while passing on the road. Temples must retain their sanctity. An electric fan, no matter how expensive, will do no good if it is not plugged in. Similarly, temples must remain connected to their source of energy, God, through the continuity of religious practices and social services. Service to man is service to God.

The purpose of the HMEC is to understand these issues and the rapidly changing needs that our community faces. As our numbers continue to grow and our age spectrum continues to broaden, it will be necessary to further enhance the mandate’s role in our lives. For the torchbearers of Hindu tradition and current leaders of Hindu temples, it is now time to search for, nurture and train the protectors of this legacy into the future. And for college and high-school students, such as myself, it is now time to understand the rich and vast culture that we are charged with sustaining. It is time for an active effort to enfranchise and empower the next generation of leaders.

This conference has taken big steps toward that goal. We, the Coalition of Hindu Youth, the future of this community, now stand united, with a clear understanding of what we must do. Throughout the conference we voiced our opinions about and learned the value of these mandirs, and we have made these mandirs our own. Now it is up to us to take the torch passed to us by our role models, the first-generation Hindu Americans, and ensure that the flame of Hindu unity and spiritual prosperity will be everlasting. Let me end with the theme of the conference, which comes from the Rig Veda: “Let us be united. Let us speak in harmony. Let our minds apprehend alike. Common be our prayer; common be the end of our assembly; common be our resolution; perfect be our unity.”

Tejas Dave, 17, attends high school in Pearland, Texas, where he is vice president of his school’s speech and debate team. He is a volunteer teacher for the Sri Meenakshi Temple’s Vedic Heritage School and coordinator for the temple’s annual youth camp. Tejas speaks about Hinduism on the Voice of Sanatan Hinduism and Sri Meenakshi Temple radio shows. E-mail: tejas@chynetwork.org
The above three words in Sanskrit and eleven in English express the essential Hindu outlook on the world. It is a reverential attitude towards all of life, from the smallest animal and tallest tree, to the longest river and mightiest mountain, and even the stars and planets. Writing in *Living with Siva*, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami urges: “Let’s worship the Earth. It is a being—intelligent and always giving. Our physical bodies are sustained by her abundance. When her abundance is withdrawn, our physical bodies are no more. The ecology of this planet is an intricate intelligence. Through sacrifice, which results in tapas and sadhana, we nurture Mother Earth’s goodwill, friendliness and sustenance. Instill in yourself appreciation, recognition. We should not take advantage of all this generosity, as a predator does of those he preys upon.”

On the Abrahamic view of man and world, Swami Dayananda Saraswati shares, “If one believes that God created the Earth with its flora and fauna for human consumption and pleasure, the attitude cannot be expected to be kind to nature.”

A quick glance at the headlines of the science and environment section of any major news outlet in the world today—let alone specialist publications dedicated to covering ecological issues—shows that it is the latter attitude and not the classically expressed Hindu viewpoint that holds sway in the world today, no matter the continent or nation. The Hindu Declaration on Climate Change, presented in December 2009 at the Parliament of the World’s Religions in Australia, expresses clearly the state of affairs: “Our beloved Earth, so touchingly looked upon as the Universal Mother, has nurtured mankind through millions of years of growth and evolution. Now centuries of rapacious exploitation of the planet have caught up with us, and a radical change in our relationship with nature is no longer an option. It is a matter of survival. We cannot continue to destroy nature without also destroying ourselves.”

How far we have drifted from the reverential sentiment expressed in “My salutations to you, O Bhudevi, consort of the all-pervasive Lord, forgive me for placing my feet upon.”

Mother Earth is suffering so much, I feel so sad. We don’t have reverence for our Mother Earth; that is why in modern times we are mercilessly using all of this modern equipment and chemicals. There is so much pollution. Thought pollution is the worst—so many negative thoughts. When we have the spiritual flavor in life, we are never going to entertain these negative instincts in the mind. The mind will become so pure because of meditation and true devotion. With that devotion we will become selfless, and then Mother Earth will feel comfortable with us in her lap. Our holy rishis give us many remedies, including daily yajna using medicinal plants, which heals nature.

*AMMA Shri Karunamayi*
Climate Change in Photos

THOMAS KELLY, PHOTOGRAPHER

Most of the photos in this insight were taken by Thomas Kelly, a resident of Nepal, as part of project called Climate Change Globally, in which he documented the impact of global warming in Nepal, Mongolia and South America. He writes: “I captured images showing deforestation in the Himalayan regions, major flooding in the southern Nepal belt (ripping apart and shifting of agricultural land), the change of bird migration patterns, the permafrost melting in northern parts of Mongolia leading to invasive shrubbery taking over lichen fields (a favorite and essential food for the reindeer), an invasive plant species Mikania micrantha (Michaia Jhar) that is spreading at an alarming rate in Chitwan National Park (strangling indigenous plant and tree life and affecting the eating patterns of the Greater One-Horned Rhino), the aggressive water hyacinth spreading over fishing ponds (impacting fishing patterns), glacial lakes bursting, the drying up of high Himalayan forests (resulting in forest fires), the drying up of water springs needed for drinking (irrigation is also drying up) and the water mills used for grinding wheat have stopped). It’s incredible what a ripple climate change can have. You wouldn’t think builders would be affected, but of course they are. Construction experts say traditional knowledge about how to build houses is dying out. Now homes have thinner walls and the roofs need less support. It just isn’t as cold as it used to be, nor does it snow as much, so we’re forgoing traditional insulation and construction techniques and materials.”

Nature’s new severity: (left) Deforestation in Nepalese middle hills results in the washing away of precious topsoil during monsoons, river silt-up and swollen rivers carving greater swaths, taking away valuable agriculture land. Banks of upper watersheds are breaking, flooding lower areas.

By Harming Earth, We Harm Ourselves

SWAMI MAHATMANANDA, WISE EARTH MONASTERY

Hindu thought envisions the Earth as divine: the body of the universe is God; the Earth is the Goddess (Bhudevi). India is a sacred land connected by thousands of pilgrimage routes leading to sacred places, considered themselves to be Gods and Goddesses. Infinite numbers of Deities represent Nature: Agni, the fire of manifestation, is central to this theme. Because we humans are intricately replicated from the identical principles of the cosmic nature, the deities recognized that changes caused due to ininduced human activities would result in imbalances in seasons, rainfall patterns, crops and atmosphere, and degrade the quality of water, air and earth resources. In so doing, the human memory and intelligence, as a self-organizing, self-generating organism, becomes dull and potentially inert. This, in turn, affects our relationship to self-wisdom and our interactions with nature’s resources.

Vasudeva Sarvam, Divinity in All

The attitude of Vasudeva sarvam bestows reverence for all things. It contrasts starkly with the dominant outlook today, rooted in scientific materialism and dualistic Western metaphysics, in which humans are separate from nature and God is separate from both. While Western civilization considers human life to be sacred, Hinduism views all of life, all of existence, as sacred. The mainstream of the modern environmental movement recognizes the folly of taking more from nature than can be perpetually regenerated—but only because the eventually resulting ecosystem collapse would cause harm to humans. In general, the environmental movement stops short of recognizing intrinsic value in what is nonhuman. Frequently, it denies the sacred altogether.

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, Global Village

Once we understand that everyone and everything we see is an expression and emanation of the Divine, we naturally embrace the globe as a village, Vasudhaiva kutumbakam. As Dwivedi expresses it, Mother Earth ‘supports us with Her abundant endowments and riches; it is She who nourishes us; it is She who provides us with a sustainable environment; and it is She who, when angered by the misdeeds of Her children, punishes them with disasters’. Dwivedi’s words are an apt paraphrase of the Atharva Veda’s 63rd verse Bhumi Sukta, Hymn to Earth, which focuses on nature and the dependence of humans upon Mother Earth, how She does not discriminate between species. To Her, all are important. Dwivedi highlights a prayer for the preservation of the original fragrance of the Earth so that it can be sustained for future generations, and another specifying that when digging is done in the Earth, it should be done in a way that no serious damage is done to Her body or

Ether, air, fire, water, earth, planets, all creatures, directions, trees and plants, rivers and seas—they all are organs of God’s body. Remembering this, a devotee respects all species.

WHEREVER YOU LOOK IN HINDU SCRIPTURE, YOU FIND REFERENCES reinforcing the central pillar of Hindu environmental thought: All is God, all is Divine, all is to be treated with reverence and respect, all is sacred. As O.P. Dwivedi points out, three grand concepts build on this truism: Vasudeva sarvam (the Supreme resides in all beings); Vasudhaiva kutumbakam (the family of Mother Earth—the original “global village”); and Sarva bhuta hita (the welfare of all beings) (Hinduism and Ecology). Add to those the law of karma—by which the effects of our deeds return to us—and you have a deep repository of ecological thought and practice.

At the highest level, there is no distinction in composition between the world we perceive and the Divine. Rather than being created out of a separate substance, the universe and everything within it, the planet we inhabit and everything upon it, is emanated from the Divine. The process of creation is analogous to a spider creating its web. The Mundaka Upanishad states: “As a spider spins and withdraws its web, as herbs grow on the earth, so also from the Imperishable arises this universe” (3:2.17).

The Brihadaranyakopanishad (3:5:2) speaks of creatures and the creation: “This earth is honey for all creatures, and all creatures are honey for this earth. This shining, immortal person who is in this earth and with reference to oneself, this shining immortal person who is in the body, he, indeed, is just this self. This is immortal; this is Brahma; this is all.

Srimad Bhagavata Mahapuranam (2.2.41)
An Ancient Peace Chant

May the Goddess Waters be auspicious for us to drink. May they flow, they flow, with blessings upon us. May the Earth be pleasant and free from humans. May our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents (to a lesser degree) all did this without thought of the future consequences. Instead, it wasn’t until the last decades of the twentieth century that we began to recognize that there might be a long-term problem with this behavior. It’s clear as day: we, the human race, created the threatening circumstances we and future generations now face. Our environmental karma is of our own creation. As a global civilization, we continue the same practices today, even though the modern theory makes no reference to the Divine, or to conscious causality or emotion in the creation of natural disasters. However, with a slight shift of perspective, it is easy to see the connection between the challenges we are experiencing (global warming and the ensuing host of environmental changes) and our misdeeds toward Mother Earth. We have unhallowed the atmosphere through excessive greenhouse gas emissions and wantonly destroyed precious forests for logging and conversion to agriculture. The resulting upheavals can be viewed as the manifestation of a natural response, as the Earth attempts to restore a more natural order and thus protect her many and varied forms of life.

Karma

An understanding of karma ties together these three grand concepts, informing us that our current condition is the combined product of our past actions (in this life and previous incarnations) and actions that we take today. In this way, we are constantly creating our future, in the months, years, decades and even lifetimes to come. Clearly, our actions also influence our family and community, today and into the future.

Consider climate change, one of the most pressing environmental issues of our time, as a lesson in karma. How did we cause greenhouse gas concentrations to rise so high that they are forcing myriad climatic changes? Through well over a century of burning fossil fuels, through cutting down forests and through increased raising of animals for meat. Many of our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents to a lesser degree all did this without thought of the future consequences. Instead, it wasn’t until the last decades of the twentieth century that we began to recognize that there might be a long-term problem with this behavior. It’s clear as day: we, the human race, created the threatening circumstances we and future generations now face. Our environmental karma is of our own creation. As a global civilization, we continue the same practices today, even though the negative effects are becoming more and more apparent by the month. In some ways, it will be extremely hard to stop our harmful practices, not to mention reversing the damage we have already caused.

Who will suffer the worst of the environmental problems we have created? Certainly not our parents. Even those of us who are adults today may not bear the brunt of them. It will be our children, perhaps it is possible to bring forth a new era

Here is the doctrine of the four yugas. We are living in the Kali Yuga, which started around 3102 BCE. This is the worst of all the four ages, and things are going to go downhill. However, there is a very important point which is often overlooked. The same texts that talk about these ages, like the Manasmitri, also say that the king is the maker of the age. That is, the sequence of the ages can be reversed by a political initiator, to put it in modern idiom. This is found in the Mahabharata and in many scriptures from ancient India in which the king said that he established the golden age in this age of the Kali Yuga. So here we have a very clear provision of intervention to prevent environmental degradation, especially by the state.
grandchildren and great-grandchildren who suffer the consequences. Supposing a forest at the headwaters of a large river is excessively cleared. The loggers may accrue immediate economic benefits, but over the years great numbers of animals may die due to habitat loss, and disastrous flooding may result as hillsides wash away and cause blockages downstream. Similarly, emissions of invisible greenhouse gases create atmospheric overload and dangerous climate changes decades after the actions that caused them. Such long-term environmental changes, one leading to another, cannot be easily halted or reversed.

The Five Elements
In the Hindu conception of the cosmos and the environment, the five great elements (pancha mahabhutas) are central: space (akasha), air (vayu), fire (agni), water (apas) and earth (prithivi). All emanate from prakriti (cosmic matter). Though each element has its own form and characteristics, all are interconnected and interdependent. The Taittiriya Upanishad tells us: “From Brahmman arises space, from space arises air, from air arises fire, from fire arises water, and from water arises earth.”

Akasha, space, is the most subtle of the five, and there is no place where it is not. Akasha is not nothingness, like the popular conception. Akasha is the life that flows into all. This one life sleeps in the mineral and the stone. This one life stirs in the vegetable and the plant. This one life dreams in the bird and the animal. This one life is awake in man.

Apas, water, is the source and sustainer of life. Its immense sacredness is rivaled only by its practical value to human agriculture, health, enjoyment and the development of civilization. In the form of Earth’s rivers, water is so vast in its life-giving and life-sustaining properties that it is worshiped as the mother of life, as Mother Ganga. Earth, the densest of the five elements, is the ground upon which life takes place. It is the body of the Divine, a living organism, metaphysically, metaphysically and biologically. Hindus have cognized this for millennia, knowing that all creatures are intimately connected to the Earth. Without its gifts we are nothing. In the latter half of the 20th century, modern science has caught up with this truth, conceiving of the Earth as a self-regulating organism called Gaia, a name for which Dhanaraj, Bhumidri or Bhumi—Hindu names for the Goddess—could easily be substituted.

Though self-regulating and dynamically interacting, the five great elements of existence can be pushed out of balance by human action, creating conditions intolerable to life in general. What are the imbalances confronting the Earth?

Akasha is being thrown out of balance through excessive and constant noise, as is found in modern cities and towns with never-ending motor vehicle traffic, the hum of air conditioners and computer servers, defines daily life, is a function of air in collaboration with the other elements. Even rocks are subject to wind erosion. Agni, fire, has been worshiped since ancient times. Fire purifies, fire destroys, fire inspires. From the Sun, to lightning, to fire in its mundane and sacred forms, agni brings warmth and visibility to the world. The Vedas sing its praises: “I magnify the Lord (Agni), the divine, the priest, minister of the sacrifice, the offerer, supreme giver of treasure. To you, dispeller of the night, we come with daily prayer, offering to you our reverence” (Rig Veda 1.1.5).

Water, apas, is the source and sustainer of life. Its immense sacredness is rivaled only by its practical value to human agriculture, health, enjoyment and the development of civilization. In the form of Earth’s rivers, water is so vast in its life-giving and life-sustaining properties that it is worshiped as the mother of life, as Mother Ganga.
Wildlife and the people who live in the watersheds; and we have cleared for timber and agriculture—often for industrial monoculture—disposed of non-biodegradable trash and plastics in rivers, ponds off of chemical fertilizers and pesticides into streams; we have run into rivers and oceans; farmers have irrigated so aggressively that water tables have become lowered, and have allowed run-off to grow. Each of those processes is affected by pollution.

The element water has been drastically disturbed by human activity. We have dumped human sewage and industrial effluent into rivers and oceans; farmers have irrigated so aggressively that water tables have become lowered, and have allowed run-off to grow. Each of those processes is affected by pollution.

The practical manifestation of this understanding is the virtue of ahimsa, nonviolence in thought, word and deed. Seeing the presence of God in all life and therefore not harming it is the foundational ethic of Hindu thought.

The Hindu reverence for the cow epitomizes this respect for all creatures. The cow symbolizes all other animals and the Earth itself. It is the nourisher, ever-giving and understanding, representing life and the sustenance of life. The cow is generosity incarnate, taking nothing but water and grass and continuing to give and give milk. It also symbolizes dignity, strength, endurance, maternity and selfless service. The cow and her life-giving gifts, foremost among them milk and ghee, are essential in Hindu worship. Through the labor of the bull, where mechanized agriculture is not the norm, fields are plowed and grains and vegetables are grown. Veneration of the cow instills the virtues of gentleness, receptivity and connectedness with nature. Protection of the cow is important both ethically and practically.

Mahatma Gandhi observed, “One can measure the greatness of a nation by the way it treats its animals. Cow protection to me is not mere protection of the cow. It means protection of all that lives and is helpless and weak in the world. The cow means the entire subhuman world.”

We may question whether the subhuman world is weak and helpless. In many ways, it is modern humans that are the helpless ones, absent high technology. But Gandhi’s words are profound at the core. The way in which a people treats animals—with respect and dignity on one end of the spectrum, or as commodities for human ownership, use and disposal at the other—says much about them and likely indicates the way in which they treat one another as well.

A central part of treating animals with respect is not killing them for food. That said, both traditional and current Hindu teachings contain various views on meat-eating. Priests and religious leaders, as well as those people pursuing yoga and meditation, tend to be vegetarian. On the other hand, soldiers, police officers and others whose duties require the maintenance of aggressive qualities generally eat meat. Furthermore, many people may eat primarily vegetarian diets out of economic necessity as much as ethical virtue.

Swami Dayananda Saraswati cites the Tirukural, saying, “Killing animals and eating their flesh is against all morality.” Swami Tyagananda of the Ramakrishna Order offers, “In the tradition I come from, we are not fanatic about vegetarianism, but we recognize that food that is filled with satvic, which is vegetarian food, can be helpful in one’s own spiritual practice.” Professor Arvind Sharma reminds us that historically Hinduism has been more guarded than Jainism in espousing strict vegetarianism: “A passage in the Mahabharata says there is nothing wrong with eating meat, eating wine, but abstention therefrom is highly meritorious. It’s a no-fault position; you can eat meat, but it’s better not to.”

However, knowing what we do now about the impact of a meat-centric economy, we can now measure the impact of meat on human prosperity and well-being. If we assume that a direct comparison can be made with other meat-eating cultures in the world, industrial monoculture agriculture and the vast majority of the world’s populations would be better off for not eating meat, not for the sake of the animal or the environment, but for humanity itself.
What Will it Take to Avert Dire Climate Change?

The average per-capita carbon footprint for people living in the United States is approximately 18 tons per year, though it has fallen in the past few years due to recession. The average in Europe is about half that, with China coming in at about 6 tons. In India the number drops to roughly 2 tons. If the goal is to keep temperature rise below 2° Celsius—the threshold above which many dangerous climatic changes are said to become unavoidable—and if we accept that every human has the right to similar levels of development, then 2 tons is roughly what each human being needs to produce. In this one statistic the enormity of combatting climate change becomes clear.

Changing Landscapes: (Right) In this section of Brazil, cattle farming has replaced the tropical rainforest; (below) increasingly, wind turbines offer an alternate source of energy in many regions of the world.

In this one statistic the enormity of combatting climate change becomes clear.

What Can We Do?

Humility will not make progress in resolving the myriad environmental problems we face without dedicating time, effort and willpower. Determined action is needed on all levels: personal, community and national. Even in ancient times—when the world population was much smaller than today and our potential impact was miniscule in comparison—rulers and thinkers alike recognized that guidance and regulation of human activities was needed to protect the environment.

In numerous places, the Vedas and other scriptures encourage environmental protection. “Do not harm the environment; do not harm the water and the flora; Earth is my Mother; I am Her son; may the waters remain fresh, the trees guaranteed the fertility of the soil and purified the air and water.”

In recent memory, and historically, we have a number of examples of communities and individuals applying the principles of good environmental stewardship that are latent in Hindu thought.

The Bishoils, founded by Guru Jambheshwar in the 15th century, are sometimes called the first environmentalists of India. Originally from the Marwar area of Rajasthan, they now number one million and live more widely across India, practicing environmental conservation, protection of trees and animals as part of daily religious duty. Two of the sect’s 29...
Having Concern for Others

SWAMI AVDHISHANAND GRIFF, JUNA PETHI
AND ACHARYA SHASHI, UTTARAKHAND

The approach that we should take the maximum wealth available to us from nature, be it oil or metals, and that we should maximize our power with nuclear weapons—these contribute to our global problems. Our Hindu dharma has given us certain important values to implement in our day-to-day lives, including being satisfied with whatever we have. Learn to share, learn to give first, and then enjoy. This attitude will bring about harmony in society. Hinduism is a tradition which has always cared for the growth and religious sensitivities of each and every individual—not only cared for but helped them equally to grow individually. Today the absence of this attitude has created agitation and given rise to crime and imbalance in society. The attitude that “I shall grow at the cost of others” is considered improper in Hinduism. It is a great sin against ahimsa, the principle of nonviolence, to be insensitive to the rights and demands of others and to afflict pain or hurt on them—both physically, and by hurting their religious sentiments, their belief systems.

HINDUISM & THE ENVIRONMENT

Injunctions are directly concerned with environmental protection: 1) Be compassionate to all living beings, and 2) Don’t cut green trees. Not killing animals is a given.

In the early 1970s, the Chipko movement took to tree hugging to prevent felling of forests in Chamoli district, Uttarakhand. Women from villages recognized that economic and environmental devastation would result from the logging that had been authorized by the Government Department of Forests and staged a direct action campaign to stop it. One need not be part of a spiritual community to uphold environmental protection. There is much that each of us can do, if we observe the traditional virtues with an environmental focus and take to heart the environmental themes in Hindu scripture and the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi.

Though Gandhi was not directly concerned with the environment, and still less with conservation of nature, many of his teachings have environmental implications. In fact, his life and message have been inspirational to the environmental writers and campaigners. His concerns about industrialization, about the treatment of animals and the virtues of vegetarianism, about the importance of recycling, about preserving and strengthening local production of goods, all have direct applicability to today’s problems. His aphorism, “There’s enough in the world for everyone’s need but not everybody’s greed,” is as vital today as it was a hundred years ago. Indeed, on the streets of Copenhagen during the COP15 UN climate change conference in December 2009, campaigners prominently passed round stickers displaying the words “Need Not Greed” and the iconic image of Gandhi, simply dressed, walking staff in hand.

Central to applying that aphorism are two ethics: (restraint) and (simplicity), which is another key is the principle of (nonviolence) to be a given.

Another key is the principle of (nonviolence), simplicity, which is closely tied to satsanga, contentment. When we live every day with a sense of gratitude for our health, while seeking serenity in life, it becomes that much easier to live simply and not identify with what we have or don’t have, what our neighbors have that we don’t, or what is being advertised as the key to happiness. Gandhi advised, “Live simply, so others may simply live.”

What Are the Greatest Treasures?

Cold mining, like at this site, is tearing up the Brazilian rainforest and ruining many of the sacred rivers; insect, a devastating strip mining operation in Colorado.

Enviromental Protection

As a Spiritual Practice

SWAMI TEJANANDA, RAMANERISHA MISSION, BOSTON

Hinduism sees the cosmos as pervaded by the Divine. So, taking care of the universe is the same as worshipping the Divine. Environmental protection, preventing environmental degradation, becomes a form of spiritual practice, a form of worship. I think this idea of oneness provides us the foundation for understanding the close connection we have with the environment. Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the founder of the order to which I belong, experienced divine immnance in a radical way. In a state of samadhi, he once stood before a patch of green grass and experienced excruciating pain when a person walked over that grass. It’s not simply a theoretical concept, in actual practice we really are one. It is one big ocean of matter in which every material object, including our own body, is part. I sometimes call existance the four oceans. At the level of matter, there is one continuous whole. Similarly, at the level of thought, when we speak about the cosmic mind, each mind can be seen as a small wave in this ocean of thoughts and ideas. Even at the level of emotions and feelings, it’s one big ocean. And, of course, at the level of spirit it’s one big ocean. This oneness is something which mystics have realized, and we also can realize it. That is why I feel that in helping and taking care of the environment we are really taking care of our own self. By hurting the environment we are hurting ourselves.
While some environmental issues seem beyond the control of the individual, there is still much a person or a family can do. Many lists of things you can do to green your life focus on myriad small steps, such as recycling, but to get an overview, there are three important areas on which to concentrate: what you eat, how you use energy and how you get around.

1. Your Diet: The environmental benefits of being vegetarian, particularly when you also eat organically grown produce, are numerous. A vegetarian diet reduces your personal carbon emissions by over one ton per year, compared to someone who eats meat, while a vegan diet reduces it even further.

2. Your Power: If your electricity supplier offers an option to use renewable energy, choosing this is a great way to lower your home's environmental impact. Whether or not you have such an option or not, there are many ways to reduce your power consumption and thus be more Earth friendly: go solar, improve insulation, install timers and motion sensors, air-dry your clothes, use rechargeable batteries, turn off lights, use on-demand gas water heaters and LED lights, hand tools rather than power tools, etc.

3. Your Transportation: Choose the least damaging way of getting from point A to point B, the one with the lowest carbon footprint. Aviation, for example, is hugely energy intensive. Just one long flight a year, say New York to London, nearly equals in carbon emissions the entire yearly emissions of the average Indian citizen. A train or bus creates a small fraction of the pollution it takes to get around.

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Example: Let’s Clean up the Ganges!

Swami Chidanand Saraswat, Parmesh Nirkan, Uttarakhand

The Hindu younger people are more receptive to environmental protection, and when the young people are involved, the whole family will be involved. However, their parents think, “Since Ganga washes out sins, why can’t it handle this little bit of trash also?” They have to understand that Ganga can wash your sins but it has a limit when taking care of your trash. What we call holy we can make ugly. That should not happen. The holy program should not become the ugly program. The holy places should not become ugly places.

Ganga does not just give spiritual life to people; it gives livelihood. Forty percent of the people in this country live in this basin where Ganga flows. If the water is not here, how will their life be here? If the water is polluted, how will their health not be polluted? It is connected with their health, their livelihoods, for generations to come.

Where do we begin? Action is the way.

Commitment is the way. Implementation is the way. There should be an A-to-Z plan for Ganga: how the problem started, what the problem is, and how to take care of it. We must take care of it from all avenues.

There are four kinds of pollution going into Ganga. Number one is the sewage, which is very important to handle. For sewage we are working with the government. But government alone is not enough. You need the people’s participation. To get the people’s participation you need leaders who can inspire people, who can bring them together to serve for the cause. That can be done by the spiritual leaders, the saints. Bringing the government and spiritual leaders together is being handled very carefully and successfully. Number two is garbage being thrown in the Ganga. People think, “My home is my home, but the street, that’s not mine. My farm is mine, but the road is not mine. That’s the government’s road, the borough’s road, or the municipality’s road; it’s not mine.” But that is not correct. It’s not just “your home is your home.” The street is also yours. “My home, my street. My Ganga, my country.” Until we have this kind of relationship with the environment, that kind of awareness will not come.

Third is industrial pollution. That is a very challenging job. For that we are talking to industries. Some are nice; some are sometimes not so nice. For those we are going to the courts. We have done a few court cases, and as a result orders are given by the governments, and change is being implemented. The fourth kind of pollution is religious pollution. People go on the banks of Ganga, use their flowers in worship and then throw into the Ganga their flowers and whatever plastic container they brought them in. They think Ganga can take care of it. We are stopping this. In the temples and in the ashrams, so much religious trash comes in the form of flowers. This is wonderful to offer to God but afterwards it has to be taken away. For that we have a flower van. It collects every week all those flowers—going from temple to temple, from ashram to ashram—and takes them to the field where they can make a fertilizer. All these forms of environmental degradation need to be handled simultaneously.

Insights from the Vedas & Ayurveda

Giridhara Shastri (Dr. David Frawley)

The Upanishads teach us that everything is Brahman ("sarvam-khalidam Brahma") or Satchidananda, Being-Consciousness-Bliss, differing by apparent names and forms only, not by essential nature. This does not mean that God created the world, but that God and the world are one as the manifest and unmanifest aspects of the same ocean of consciousness. All life is not merely interdependent but is one at its core with the Supreme Truth.

The famous Bhumi Sukta, or Hymn to the Earth, of the Atharva Veda speaks of the mystical origin of the Earth in the meditations of the rishis: “Which in the beginning dwelled in the waters of the ocean, which the wise seers found by their magic wisdom power, the Earth whose heart is in the supreme ether, covered by the Earth’s kingdom” (XII.1.8).

This Earth is meant as a place of worship and as a place to be worshiped, not merely as a playground for us to pursue our own personal gratification. This honoring of the Earth as an altar for inner and outer worship should be the basis of our relationships with the Earth and with the entire world.

This Vedic honoring of the sacred nature of all life is called pujna, sometimes translated as “sacrifice,” but which really refers to a sacred way of life and action that recognizes the divine presence in all things and strives to live in harmony with it. Our life should be a ritual in which we strive to pursue a way of right action in harmony with the rhythms of nature and of the spirit through which nature works.

The practice of yoga arose as the inner sacrifice, or antarayaga, the offering of speech, breath and mind into the divine flame of awareness or Agni within our hearts. The yoga asana itself is meant to establish a sacred connection with the Earth. Yoga itself should be a sacred art of communing with all of life.

Ayurveda

Ayurveda warns of epidemic diseases, both physical and psychological in nature, that can arise through damage to our environment. The Charaka Samhita (III.6.23) discusses in detail disease—causing effects of polluted and disturbed air, water, land and seasons as a cause of destruction of entire countries. Twenty-eight factors of damage to air, water and land are listed, of which we can find all occurring in the world today. Besides harmful factors to the outer world, they include perverse and selfish behavior on the part of human beings, their fall from ethical behavior and disregard for spiritual practices, particularly unrighteous conduct by the rulers of a country and, above all, violence and war.

Charaka states that when natural time cycles like the seasons become disrupted, the situation becomes most dangerous. Yet he also states that such collective problems and diseases can be avoided and countered by health practices like pancha karma, by a sacred life and the practices of yoga and meditation. Clearly our disruption of the environment has consequences both of a material and spiritual nature, though these may take some more decades to fully manifest, as nature works on a slower time cycle than human beings. We must reconnect ourselves with universal peace and once more come to honor the Earth and nature in order to solve this dire situation.

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HINDU RENAISSANCE

The Power of Vedanta

How my father’s profound grasp of philosophy sustained a family of enlightened Hindus and prepared each of us to be a global citizen

BY ANITA RAINA THAPAN

A child of two civilizations—Indian and French—I was in a position to appreciate the power of the Hindu way of life when it is backed by knowledge and right understanding.

My father, a British Indian Army officer, met my mother, the daughter of a French colonial civil servant, in Saigon at the end of WWII. Theirs would be a lifelong relation-

ship of devotion, commitment and struggle. Neither family was happy when the young couple announced their intention to marry. Political conditions in India, the Far East and France in the late 1940s also delayed matters considerably; but finally, after four long years of waiting, they were married in India in 1949.

My Mother Becomes a Hindu
My father, a Kashmiri pandit, was deeply rooted in Hinduism. He had a sound understanding of the Bhagavad Gita and also of our great epic literature. He had made it clear to my mother that since they would always live in India, the family would have to be Hindu and my mother would have to adopt the ways of the Indian family. As a first step, before the wedding, a shraddha ceremony was performed for my Catholic mother. She was then declared a Hindu and, thereafter, married by Arya Samaj rites.

Converting to Hinduism was not difficult for my mother. The Catholicism that she had been exposed to by the French nuns in Saigon created a great distaste in her heart. The French community in the city was small; when any particular member was absent from Sunday service at the cathedral, it was noticed. Whenever my French grandmother would have served a worthy purpose.

The Gita’s Influence on My Childhood
As a young child, I was sent as a boarder to a convent because missionary schools in India were, at that time, considered to be the best in terms of education and discipline. Besides, my father was posted in small cantonments where schooling was not always great. The Christian Catholic nuns in my school were horrified to hear that my Catholic mother had two children who had never been baptized. That was the reason, I was nourished, a great sin, and the nuns set about praying daily for the soul of my mother. So, as a child, I agonized about what was right and what was wrong until my father took me out of the convent! All my misgivings were slowly put to rest by his firm and convincing reasoning.

The philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita left its imprint on me through his attitude and advice at crucial moments of my childhood. I found that setbacks which the world considered as “failures” were not considered so by my father if I had worked and done my best. They were celebrated for the sincerity of intention and effort, which he emphasized, would, in the long run, bear fruit. At the same time, when I met with well-deserved failures, instead of being punished, my father would patiently explain that playfulness at the wrong time and lack of focus could only lead to such pathetic results. He would brush aside my tears assuring me that no successful individual had reached her goal without failure, that I must learn from such sorry experiences and ensure they never happened again. Then they would have served a worthy purpose.

I Discover Chinmaya Mission
It was only when I became a mother myself that I truly began to appreciate the vital need of passing to the younger generations the scriptural, chanting the Gita and understanding the wisdom of Hindu culture through the medium of story. We had the opportunity to meet Swami Chinmayananda several times. We visited the ashram in Sidhbari, Himachal Pradesh, to attend camps, and the children soaked in the values and discipline of ashram life.

Education Deters Conversion
After three years, in 1991, we moved to Manila, Philippines, where I saw the vital role played by the Bal Vihar in the local Hindu community. Since the 1970s, the Hindu community in Southeast Asia had become increasingly concerned by the younger generations’ growing susceptibility to the “Born Again” Christians. Several conversions had taken place. At the time, the religious life of the community revolved around rituals, with no understanding of their significance. There was no knowledge of Hindu philosophy, and the local temple offered no spiritual guidance.

It was in the yoks that the Chinmaya Mission found its way to this region and started working to instill pride in Hindu religion and tradition. Teaching that the Bhagavad Gita is the Hindu equivalent to the Bible or the Koran, the Chinmaya Bal Vihar helps the youth maintain their Hindu identity while growing up in a Christian or Muslim country. Visiting swamis of the Mission reinforce this pride and identity, and trips to pilgrimage sites and ashrams in India create bonds with their land of origin.

From my extensive interviews with the Siddha Hindu groups and missionaries in charge of them, as also from the sevikas conducting Chinmaya Mission Bal Vihar classes, it became apparent that conversion to Christianity seemed to have slowed down in the 1990s as the effects of the Chinmaya Bal Vihar began to be felt. In today’s age of scientific enquiry, Vedanta, as expounded by Swami Chinmayananda, gives young people a whole new perspective on life. It challenges the intellect, inspires devotion and selfless service and evokes great reverence and awe for the depth and scope of Hindu thought. Above all, it offers the vision of unity, which is the greatest need of the world today.

Swami Chinmayananda set in motion a great Hindu renaissance reaching Hindus across the world. His successor, Swami Tejamanilananda, has knitted these different communities into one large family. Thanks to these great masters, I, like numerous others, have found my path. They have given me clarity, conviction and direction. They have touched my mother’s heart, bringing her solace in the evening of her life after the loss of her husband and son. Above all, they have anchored my children in an enlightened Hinduism even as they have blossomed into global citizens, at ease in any culture and society.

Anita Raina Thapan’s e-mail is phoebe@me.com

Chinmaya Mission Delhi: Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami (center) visiting the Delhi Mission in April, 2010. (left to right) Mr. Mathur (in charge of books), Anita Raina Thapan, Mrs. Parveen Bahi (president, Chinmaya Mission Delhi), Swami Chidrupananda (Acharya, Neida center), Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, Swami Gurupriyananda (Acharya, Chinmaya Ranjan Centre, Delhi), and two of Bodhinatha’s monks, Acharya Aromagayu and Sadhabha Nandnanda.
THEOLOGY

All Religions Are Not the Same

Let us be very clear and forthright about our heritage: Hinduism has a profound depth and unique features not available in other faiths

BY SWAMI NIKHILANAND

NEE GOAL WE OFTEN HEAR VOICE OF THOSE who believe in ancient literature is to preserve the authenticity of the teachings of Hinduism and pass that heritage on to future generations. There is a statement many of us male which undermines these efforts. We often say, “All religions are the same.” Why? It is very difficult for us to say this, unless one does not want to offend anyone. This is a safe, politically correct, fallback position. Sometimes, they are, in fact, different. Many of the concepts of Hinduism, we fail to recognize its uniqueness and greatness. If Hinduism were the same as all other religions, then why would we care if our children convert to any other religion? Why would we organize conferences to preserve our essential teachings and develop better ways of teaching them to our kids? If Hinduism were the same as all other religions, then why was it not raised Hindu, have chosen Hinduism over other religions?

It is true that there can be two Gods. There cannot be a separate God, a separate Jewish God, etc. Our Vedas state, “Brahma brahma neham na stitham.” God is one and absolute. There can be no ‘other’ God. Whichever God, chosen by this universe, is worshipping the same God. And all theistic religions agree on certain general characteristics of God. God is perfect, absolute, divine, omnipotent, all-knowing, all-powerful, blissful, etc. This is the extent of the description available in other religions, but not in Hinduism. The Sastras and the Vedic hymns reveal the knowledge of God on a much deeper level. This is both what makes Hinduism great and also what makes it more challenging to comprehend.

Some Hindus complain that it is so easy for the members of other religions to summarize the teachings of their religion. It is easy to summarize the teachings of any religion. And all from a very practical point of view. Which illustrate the greatness of Hinduism. So remember, there are similarities between Hinduism and the other religions of the world, and as Hindus we respect all religions, nonetheless, there are features of Hinduism which are found in other religions and which make Hinduism great.

Swami Nikhilanand, a disciple of Saigadguru Shree Kripalu Maharaj, adopted Hinduism as a young man, and received the order of sannyas in the ragafla tradition of Vrindavan, India.

INTERPRETING RAMAKRISHNA

BY DR. KUSUMITA PEDIERSEN, NEW YORK

INTERPRETING RAMAKRISHNA: KALI’S CHILD REVISITED by Swami Tyagananda and Pravrajika Vrajaprana is an account of Jeffrey Kripal’s book Kali’s Child. The Mythical and the Erotic in the Life of Ramakrishna and the storm of controversy it raised. Drawing on the ideas of psychoanalysis, Kali’s Child seeks to show that Ramakrishna was a conflicted homosexual who had been sexually abused as a child and as an adult also had traumatic sexual encounters. It views Ramakrishna’s samadhi as a kind of defense mechanism and finds sexual meanings in many of his visions, words and actions.

Kripal states that “Ramakrishna’s mystical experiences were constituted by mystico-erotic energies that he neither fully accepted nor understood,” and his interpretation of Ramakrishna’s “secret” serves as a case study that Kripal sees as confirming his strong-held views on the continuity of mystical experience and sexuality. It should be added that any assessment of Jeffrey Kripal’s thinking on this broad topic cannot be based only on Kali’s Child, his first book, but must take into account his earlier writings, including the work of which is now extensive (and most of which does not concern Ramakrishna).

Ramakrishna is the result of more than ten years of research and analysis by two senior numatolics of the Ramakrishna Order. The book is written with an exemplary combination of civility, deep research, and concern for accuracy. It is painstakingly thorough as well as probing and reflective. Interpreting Ramakrishna is an indispensable work for anyone concerned with the Kali’s Child debate and how Ramakrishna is understood, and is of interest for the study of mysticism more generally. Also, it should take a significant place in the record of how India and the West have understood one another—or failed to do so.

It begins with a history of Ramakrishna Hindu scholarship from the earliest source texts to the present and continues with an initial overall critique of Kali’s Child and its author’s approach. This is followed by a summary of reviews of Kali’s Child and the debate following its publication. Next a chapter is devoted to central themes in the cross-cultural interpretation: the relation of mysticism and sexuality; the symbolism of the linga and yoni; and allegations that Ramakrishna disliked and feared women (here the restoration of the voices of women who knew Ramakrishna well, passed over in Kali’s Child, is especially welcome). The nature of Tantra and Vedanta, and their relation, are also addressed.

Another chapter describes in detail problems, theories, and implications in Kali’s Child. Interpreting Ramakrishna deals throughout with issues of mis-translations, “span” translations and paraphrases, cultural and religious mistakes, factual errors and the tactic of building an argument by introducing a point as speculation and later repeating it as fact. When questions of translation or construal arise, the authors’ translation and Kripal’s translation are examined, the original Bengali passages, and the authors’ translation and Kripal’s translation are commented on, the various ways an interpreta-

tion is affected by worldview and motivation and expressing hopes for dia-

logue and the emergence of “postwestern” (a phrase coined by Richard King).

A book launch organized this past Oc-

tober by the Dharma Academy of North America, Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion, the scholars who spoke praised the meritorious scholarship, substance and balance of Interpreting Ramakrishna and also asked that the next step be taken, beyond critique. They called for ongoing constructive thought on Ramakrishna by “insiders” in vigorous ex-

change with “outsiders,” showing why Ra-

makrishna is important in the twenty-first century. A final thought from this reviewer: the time has come for an entirely new criti-

cal and fully annotated translation of the Sri-Ramakrishna-Kathamatha, the key primary source on Ramakrishna (the record of his sayings and events in the final years of his life by Mahendranath Gupta, known as Karmal, needed in the second phase of Ramakrishna studies, to which Interpreting Ramakrishna has already made a major important contribution.

Paramahamsa Sri Ramakrishna (1868–1868) was one of the great saints and mystics of recent Hinduism, a champion and exemplar of monistic thought, who threw off the ancient Hinduism myth of the devotion of Mother Kali and a staunch monist who taught oneness and the pursuit of nirvikalpa samadhi, the highest state of realization. He was the great Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), who Indianized Hindu thought and philosophy. The well-known historian, Arnold Snyder, wrote, “Religion is not just a matter of study, it is something that has to be experienced and to be lived.” This book, Kripal’s The Mythical and the Erotic in the Life of Ramakrishna, has perhaps never before been attained by any other religious genius, in India or elsewhere.

The spiritual power that Sri Ramakrishna passed on to his disciples has lived on in the hearts of millions of Hindus throughout India and institutions worldwide—a veritable wellbeing for the Hindu Renaissance.
Come, Hear the Wisdom of Mataji Vanamali

When a wandering sage visits, spiritual insight showers on the community

Interview by Vatsala Sperling, Vermont, US

The hidden caves of the Himalayas have long been home to great souls in search of the Supreme Reality. From time to time, renunciates have descended from the majestic mountains and traveled to the plains of India, from one village to the next, spreading spiritual insight. Such wandering monks, called parivrajaka, are a time-honored tradition in India. Recently, Mataji Vanamali, a renunciate from Vanamali Ashram, Rishikesh, India, happened to pass through my city of Rochester, Vermont. I had the unique honor of hosting this parivrajaka in my humble home. The local book-publishing company, Inner Traditions, arranged for Roschester’s Hindu community to have Mataji’s darshan. As the sadhvi generously shared her insight and wisdom, I thought you would enjoy her wise words, excerpted below.

Generations, Honoring the Elders and the Stages of Life

The role of elders in society, and their care, is becoming a problem in India, just like it is in America. But in our Hindu culture we have a system in place for that. Our social order was established by wise ancestors, many elder parents tend to cling to power, money and control over the next generation. They do not want to let go. They do not volunteer to back off and let the children take charge. They blame their children for being ungrateful and heartless, having forgotten all sacrifices they made. In our demanding modern times, forcing young and harried couples into the role of care-providers is causing a great deal of tension and unhappiness on everyone involved.

If the parents are truly evolved people, they will gladly loosen their hold. Parents must grow up and renounce the world and allow their children to take charge. The old parents should voluntarily pursue spiritual life and take renunciation from the familial engagement.

Arranged Marriages, Love and Divorce

All marriages have the same goals. In the West, the way people marry impresses on the couple the idea that since they have created their own marriage, they also have the freedom to destroy it, to get a divorce anytime, without any consideration for family, children or the society. In India, quite on the contrary, in making the union themselves they have accrued a greater responsibility, becoming accountable for its success and continuation.

In the process of assisted marriage, the couple has the support of their family and society. They feel more secure. Their marriage survives a lifetime and even beyond. Since it is not based exclusively on physical attraction, it is much more stable. Answerable to the community, they are not quick to divorce.

But many Hindus begin to think that our traditional way of securing a marriage is a bore! Those are increasingly self-involved people. Parents can stop this trend by giving their children firm Hindu values, educating them about how marriage is more than just a coming together of two bodies. Marriage involves two souls, two families, two lineages, and it has to be honored. It should be seen as a way to spiritual self-fulfillment and not just a quick way to fulfill physical needs and wants. My suggestion is: take marriage seriously; work hard and honestly to be true to your marriage vows.

The Value of Samskaras

I cannot stress enough the value of good samskaras and ideas that we put into the children in early life. They are learning from example, even when they don’t seem to be listening.

Unfortunately, if both parents are working, they are compelled to send their all-too-young children to day-care or pay baby sitters. Kids spend most of their time in front of the TV. This seemingly innocuous practice messes up their growing neural network because of the fast pace of editing. Such fast-moving and loud images cause children to go numb to surroundings, lose the ability to imagine and become unable to sustain focus and mental concentration for more than a few minutes. With hours of ‘sedentary samadhi’ in front of the TV, children begin to suffer from many issues for which they are dragged to doctors. Where is parent involvement in this lifestyle?

Mothers should take a few years off work until the kids are ready for school. The mother must spend as much time as possible with the kids, giving them a healthy start, love and support for their all-round growth and development. She can always return to the work-force once the kids have grown.

Parents have to understand that advice given just in words has no value. For a child, it’s all about examples, events and actions. The samskaras prescribed by our religion have a deep effect, planting the seeds of dharma. After childhood, at home, parents can set positive examples, such as speaking the truth, not stealing, not lying, not cheating, refraining from foul and abusive language, refusing to engage in abusive and manipulative behavior and staying loyal to their family.

On the Importance of Brahmacharya for the Youth

Keeping the mind pure and free is the very first objective of brahmacharya. Brahmacharya is not just physical, but spiritual. A true brahmachari does not fill his mind with lustful thoughts. Hinduism recognizes that sex is a necessary and normal part of life, but sex is problematic when it becomes an obsession, as the media has it. Complete brahmacharya for our youth today—in mind and body—is practically impossible because the entire atmosphere is charged with messages of lust and greed.

Our Hindu religion does not prescribe lifetime celibacy for everyone. It advocates marriage for the vast majority of people as young adults, so that their sexual energy can be channeled and focused into the spouse and is not running wild. If a young person wants to commit to lifetime brahmacharya for spiritual reasons, he must know that it is a difficult path to take, and distractions are many.

Being a Proud Hindu Anywhere

The ancient Hindu way of performing any ritual or performance, coined by the West to define what in India has always been the one spiritual law. You will know a Hindu, a follower of Sanatana Dharma, by his behavior, beliefs and conduct. Those who prefer the term ‘Vedic’ should not do so out of an inferiority complex or a sense of shame about being a Hindu. If people in this situation knew even a little about the great depth, beauty and meaning of Sanatana Dharma, they would become proud to call themselves Hindus.

Advice for All Hindus

My message is follow the humble example of Hanuman, who embodies shakti (power) and bhakti (devotion). Without bhakti, pure shakti gives rise to arrogance. But coupled with bhakti, it gives direction and purpose to life and aids in spiritual evolution. By combining bhakti and shakti, you will find a positive expression and purpose, giving you peace of mind.

Vatsala Sperling, PhD (below right), is a Clinical Microbiologist and a Homeopath, author of several books for children and co-author with her husband of Yve Seven Lifetimes. She lives in Vermont with her husband and their son, Mahat. E-mail: vsg7nextreations.com

Hindus outside India are in a unique situation. Children in Western schools are being taught about a bindi, about their elephant God, about their beautiful and unashamedly feminine Goddesses, and about stone statues with many hands and faces. We must educate these children starting with the ABC’s of Hinduism today. These children are often growing up with Christmas trees instead of ghee lamps and firecrackers on Deepavali day. They feel ashamed to be known as Hindus and begin drifting away. The kids need information and answers, and that is the parents’ responsibility.

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Guyana's Hindus Face Gay Quandry

When a constitutional amendment proposed to end discrimination against homosexuals, Guyanese Hindus asked themselves, "Where do we stand?"

By Vidyaratha Kissoon

The beautiful republic of Guyana, nestled on the lush northeastern coast of South America, is a young nation solidifying its identity. After being ruled by the Dutch, the British, and finally the British, the country achieved independence in 1966, becoming the only South American state in the Commonwealth. Guyana's ethnic heritage is varied—mostly Indian and African, but also Native American, European, and Chinese. It is a nation of many peoples and traditions finding their way toward harmony, and its laws reflect this process. Revisions and amendments to the constitution are relatively common.

In January, 2001, the Congress of Guyana voted to pass a constitutional amendment that would forbid discrimination based on sexual orientation. However, this amendment never became law; the president, Bharrat Jagdeo (a Hindu), succumbed to internal pressure and did not sign it. This left in place legislation which is a legacy of the British colonial period—legislation which criminalizes consensual same-sex activity and cross-dressing. The United Kingdom itself repealed such legislation in 1967, but most former colonies retained these Victorian laws. It was only in 2009, for instance, that India's Supreme Court ruled that its anti-gay laws were unconstitutional.

Guyana's proposed 2001 constitutional amendment would not have repealed Guyana's laws that make homosexual activity a felony. But it would have, for example, protected an employee from being fired simply because he or she is homosexual. Despite its modest goal, the anti-discrimination amendment has been languishing for a decade.

Opposition and Another Chance

The debate is complicated by the country's many cultures and religions and their varied views on morality and justice. Who was adjudged to have a decisive role? Guyana's population is 75% Christian (17% Pentecostal, 8% Roman Catholic, 7% Anglican, 25% other denominations), 18% Hindu and 7% Sunni Muslim.

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Guyana is a religiously plural and tolerant country. Freedom of worship is a constitutional right, and each of the main groups has its own representation in the laws that govern the country. But as of January, 2011, those colonial-era discriminatory laws remain in full force.

Hindu Perspectives

Guyana is a religiously plural and tolerant country. Freedom of worship is a constitutional right, and each of the main groups has its own representation in the laws that govern the country. But as of January, 2011, those colonial-era discriminatory laws remain in full force.

We belong: Hindu activists meet at the Organization of American States, in a search for equality.

Guyana's international treaty obligations encompassing civil and political rights enjoin the government not to discriminate on the grounds of sexual orientation.

A second opportunity to pass the law came in May, 2003, when the constitution was undergoing other reforms. The amendment bill reached the Parliament, but there was no vote; the National Assembly deferred the discussion to a constitutional committee, effectively placing it in a legal limbo.

National Pride

In truth, more was at play than just the rights of a class of people. National pride became a complicating issue when some people started saying that acceptance of homosexuality was a Western imposition on Guyana. Just last year, in 2010, this idea was summarized by Cabinet spokesperson and head of the Presidential Secretariat Dr. Roger Luncheon: the "government is unlikely to tamper with legislating homosexual activity and cross-dressing. For these issues to be addressed, the government must be convinced that it would be the desire of the people of Guyana and not an agenda being foisted on society by the developed world."

Also in 2010, Guyana participated in the United Nations' Periodic Review of Human Rights, which resulted in recommendations that the government repeal all laws which criminalize consensual same-sex activity. Former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, speaking in November, 2010, said that Guyana’s "discriminatory laws and prevailing homophobic practices prevent gay men from accessing the health services" and called for the repeal of those laws. But as of January, 2011, those colonial-era discriminatory laws remain still in full force.

Hindu activists meet at the Organization of American States, in a search for equality.
Hindu organizations are strong and numerous, some of them dating back to the early 20th century: the Arya Samaj, Guyana Hindu Sabha, Deodat Tillack’s Kali Organisation, Guyana Pandits’ Council, Guyana Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha and local Hindu organisations like Youth Bhaiwan. Beautiful mandirs adorn cities and villages, serving as havens for selfless service. Hindu festivals are widely celebrated. But community debate has uncovered a simple truth: there is no unified policy in Hinduism about homosexuality. In general, the matter is ruled by common sense, wisdom and tradition. But tradition can be a fluid concept, dependent on regional practices and collective memory; it shifts from generation to generation. One example is the strong influence of British thought on Hindu morals in the last few centuries (see sidebar below).

“Indian culture has always had multiple expressions of gender identity and sexual orientation,” says Pandit Deodat Tillack, priest at the Shri Samayapuran Mariamma Temple. “The major festivals around Lord Aravan and the worship of Bahuchar Mata, called ‘hijra’ in Guyana, are widely celebrated. Lord Krishna is believed to be a favorite of the third-sex and the worship of Bahuchar Mata, called ‘hijra’ in Guyana, is a good omen in a marriage ceremony. The influence of Anglo-Saxon patriarchism has meant that the anglicised groups in modern India pretend they do not know of the sacred aspect of the Third Sex and heterosexual practices.”

A Scripture, a Scholar, Science and a Sage: Reviewing Homosexuality in Hinduism

On the fifth day after a woman’s period, copulation leads to miscarriage; and if akasha (ether) is dominant, the child will end in miscarriage; and if fire prevails, the pregnancy will not bring forth children it should not and will end in miscarriage; and if akasha (ether) is dominant, the child will not be born. Advice in such matters should not be permitted. Pandit Dhanasar was not able to provide a reference explaining where in the Vedas one could find that dictum; he explained that a pandit’s training is largely oral, often bypassing written sources.

The Inter-Religious Organisation, an interfaith body that represents some of Guyana’s religious organizations, spoke against the anti-discrimination law. It officially supported the view that acceptance of homosexuality is a Western imposition on Guyana. But Swami Aksharananda, one of its co-chairpersons, vehemently disagreed. He explained that a pandit’s training is largely oral, often bypassing written sources.

The lives of tens of thousands are deeply affected by these discussions. For Guyanese who are gay or lesbian, the reactions of society strongly shape their comfort with who they are. The colonial-era laws impose an onerous choice: on one hand, Indian custom and the Hindu community, but the strongest voices supporting the anti-discrimination law have come from Hindus. Swami, pandits and local leaders are finding common ground—not in sup- porting homosexuality, but in denouncing society’s oppression of that minority. Keeran Persaud is a community leader, president of the Cummings Lodge Industry Hindu Society and a sevak of the Hindu Swamijevansh Sangh. Active in helping the gay men interviewed, he advocates acceptance: “Hinduism calls on its followers to be compassionate, by educating them- selves to overcome prejudices.” Amaresh, a member of the Bharata Sevastham Sangha and president of the Yuvaa Shakti Sangh at the Radha Krishna Mandir, agrees: “I would urge any person to live a dignified life, which leads to a peaceful coexistence with the society. Prejudices must be born out of ignorance and fear; our work can help in the education necessary to overcome them.”

Pandit Nanda Sahado of the Triumph

The American Psychiatric Association stated in 1973 that homosexuality is not a disorder and “implies no impairment in judgment, stability, reliability or general social or vocational capabilities.” After thoroughly reviewing the scientific data, the American Psychological Association adopted the same stance in 1974, “to the end that the history of homosexuals in removing the stigma of mental illness that has long been as- sociated with homosexual orientations.” The Supreme Court of the United States in 1996 ruled that “homosexual persons do not violate civil rights laws.” Mental health professionals and researchers have long recognized that being homosexual poses no inherent obstacle to leading a happy and fulfilling life, and that the vast majority of gay and lesbian people function well in the full array of social institutions and interpersonal relationships.

Sexual intercourse is a natural reproductive function. It also serves through its intimacy to express and nurture love. It is love which overcomes a thousand wrongs, transforming it from an animal function to a human fulfillment. Intensely personal matters of sex are not legislated, but left to the judgment of those involved, subject to community laws and customs. Hindus neither condemn nor condemn birth control, sterilisation, masturbation, homosexuality, petting, polygamy or pornography. It is a key vehicle to draw harsh conclusions against any part of human nature, though scripture prohibits adultery and forbs abortion except to save a mother’s life. Advice in such matters should be sought from religious leaders and spiritual leaders. The only rigid rule is wisdom, guided by tradition and virtue.

Saguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

Hindu presence: The distinctively Indian character of Bahuchar Mata temples is a common sight

Impacting Personal Lives

The demeaning treatment of their personal lives is a heavy burden on homosexuals in Guyana. Many of them have suffered because of their differences, either in form of discrimination in their workplaces and relationships, aspiring to move in the society, and even in form of discrimination in their relationships and living together. Pushed to the shadows, most seek their happiness in secret, hoping to avoid legal conse- quences through leniency, anony- mity or lack of institutional support.

Outcome

There is a consensus yet in the Hindu com- munity, but the strongest voices supporting the anti-discrimination law have come from Hindus. Swami, pandits and local leaders are finding common ground—not in sup- porting homosexuality, but in denouncing society’s oppression of that minority. Keeran Persaud is a community leader, president of the Cummings Lodge Industry Hindu Society and a sevak of the Hindu Swamijevansh Sangh. Active in helping the gay men interviewed, he advocates acceptance: “Hinduism calls on its followers to be compassionate, by educating them- selves to overcome prejudices.” Amaresh, a member of the Bharata Sevastham Sangha and president of the Yuvaa Shakti Sangh at the Radha Krishna Mandir, agrees: “I would urge any person to live a dignified life, which leads to a peaceful coexistence with the society. Prejudices must be born out of ignorance and fear; our work can help in the education necessary to overcome them.”

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POINT-COUNTERPOINT: HOMOSEXUALITY IN HINDUISM

Beware of Alien Morals

By Swami Aksharananda

So, who or what poses the greatest dangers to society? Is it homosexuality, or is it religious intolerance? The clear and unambiguous answer is that the greatest danger lies among those aggressive, intolerant religious creeds of the world that see unbelievers and those who promote them as violating the "natural law" as agents of the devil and enemies of God.

We must guard against the self-appointed arbiters of morality, the moral policewomen, who claim to derive their authority and inspiration from ancient and divine writings, that implicitly and explicitly, leave no room for tolerance of religious differences—or other diversities such as sexual orientation. This brings us to the claim that having a liberal and enlightened attitude towards homosexuality and gay marriage would lead to the damnation of our nation and to our extinction.

The most extraordinary claim, however, is that homosexuality is a product of Western culture, a new form of decadence. From Finland to Italy and across the Atlantic to the United States and Canada, liberal, compassionate, and much of it contributed by homosexuals themselves, freedom, sophistication and culture, music, art and a sense of community have been fostered where neither the family continues to prosper. There are no signs of perdition. The family and the community are both strong and healthy.

There is no sign of the kind of moral liberties which allow homosexuality. The fact of the matter is that homosexuality is as old as humanity itself. It has been practiced for untold centuries, in one form or another, even in those societies where, today, death can be the penalty for homosexuals.

We must also be concerned about what is glibly and untruthfully invoked to be the position of scriptures on homosexuality. There is no controversy here. It is true that the Vedas do not contain any reference to homosexual acts. While Hinduism does not approve of homosexuality, it admits of a wide range of sexual orientations. The Hindu scriptures are silent on homosexuality, but they do not deny its existence. They speak of the moral and civic duties of the individual, and they are clear that homosexuality is not a virtue, but a sin.

Swami Prayagandha Maharaj, Akhand Mahamandleshwar of the Awhau Akhara: Gay marriages do not fit in our culture and heritage. All those who demand the approval of such marriages in India are doing so under the influence of the West. Inherent Western practices have no place in our culture; we should not blindly follow. Sanatan Dharmas has gone for this and we do not even discuss it.

Shri Mahant Madhushudan Giri, Awhau Akhara: This issue is not just a problem for Hinduism, but to the whole human civilization. Today, people are changing their religions and nationalities; we are even changing their sex. We have to allow people to live in their own way. If they choose to live in a particular way, we should respect their choice. We should not say that we can stop them? Religion has no role in this.

Malhar Bahu Ramji Prun, Juna Akhara: These questions are contemporary in nature and context. To somehow project that to the Vedas, Rama Kathas or the Mahabharata and look for answers there is not appropriate. The rules book has then described a society with different goals, ideas, costumes, diets and everything else. We do not have a final rule book in Hinduism, even the Maha Smriti says that local traditions can override its guidelines. There has never been a single authority to represent all Hindus and give them on morality. Ours is a pluralistic society and the community has to exercise its wisdom.

Maharishi Sankha Priya Mahatya, from Gujrat: This is just ahdarmic. If these relations were to be accepted, then why was creation created? When Brahma directed Manu to create the world, Manu clearly said that the creation could not be made without women. Hindu dharma cannot sanction man-to-man marriages.

Arshad Ali Khan: Hindu folk traditions believe members of the third sex are auspicious because, akin to the Gods or a soul, they are not bound by gender

So Say Our Sadhus

Opinions are far from unanimous

By Pandit Shailendra Shri Sheshnaranay J Vaidyaka

Digambar Sadhu of the Simshathsa Samiti: Whatever is done in hinduship becomes a wrong act and is treated as a sin. But whatever is done is openly involved criticism for some time but ultimately may gain acceptance. People who are bent upon doing something would do it anyway. Why not give them the liberty to live in their own way? Our scriptures have no reference to homosexuality. Therefore, we have nothing to say.

Nirvaneedhatwa Dwarka Shri BS Devananda, Mahamandleshwar of the Mahanirvan Akhara: Gay marriages definitely would pollute our society. Such perverted activities used to be carried out by a few. To give legitimacy and social acceptance to it would be a big injustice to our social life. This is an activity which people do not do openly, therefore it is a social crime. It should stay secret. Scriptures may or may not give a guideline, but if we see this in the context of society, we find it to be absolutely wrong. It portrays a very dark side of our society.

Acharya Mahamandleshwar Swami Adhishananda, Juna Pertrahshedsvar: Homosexuality is unnatural, uncommon and unusual. It is not marriage, because it is just connected to the body, it is only fun. This is sheer madness that comes from the West where they use the Bible. Our scriptures, which are superior, are against it.

Shri BS Kapalkal Mahakaal Bhairavandara Saraswati, from New Delhi: Certainly this is going to give people bad diseases which will be a great problem to gay-friendly USA in the times to come. US Government should also take action against such people immediately. India does not have such issues. The day a demand for gay unions is raised in India will be a black day for the country.

Mahamandleshwar Swami Banwari Prun, Juna Akhara: Our tradition does not approve of gay marriage, but our scriptures do not outline a clear direction. The Bhagwat has a story which I have mentioned earlier. Even when Bhagwath was born out of physical union of both his mothers. Same-sex marriage is against the laws of God. Now, whether such marriages can keep such couples happy and peaceful should be answered only by gays—not by us, who hold no idea what it is all about.

So, where does Hinduism stand on homosexuality?

1. The scriptures of all religions condemn homosexuality, as homosexuality means that we are giving in to our desires, forgetting our responsibilities.

2. US Government should also take action against such people immediately.

3. There is no such thing as homosexuality. There is no reference to homosexuality in our scriptures.

4. Gay marriage is against the laws of God. Now, whether such marriages can keep such couples happy and peaceful should be answered only by gays—not by us, who hold no idea what it is all about.

A CORRESPONDENT’S ADVENTURE

T Mikes 2004, and I had been assigned to ask the Mela’s constellation of saints “How does Hinduism view homosexuality?” What about gay marriage? In retrospect, I realize that HINDUISM TODAY was ahead of its time. This became a hotly debated topic in India a few years later. Raising the subjects of homosexualit'y and gay marriage was not easy. Hindu holy men hardly enjoyed discussing these contentious subjects amongst the crowds. Some sadhus briskly asked me to switch off the tape recorder. They reasoned the inquiry behind my inquiry; I did have any agenda. But the revered spiritual leaders slowly opened up, at times hesitantly and eventually, to go ahead and ask these difficult questions.

The Mela sadhus carry great authority. Here is what they had to say in 2004, in Ujjain, about homosexuality and gay marriage.

In India, questions about homosexuality are often met with answers about gay marriage, as if one was the inexorable consequence of the other. This was a hushed subject at the time, before the Supreme Court of India decriminalized gay sex in 2009 and hurled the topic onto the public stage.

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PHOTO JOURNALISM

The Sadhus of India & Nepal

Sadhus are an enigma to me, living the mystery of ancient questions that have no answers. Mystics, yogis, wanderers, even tricksters, dervishes, madhavins, and charlatans, their body-painted bodies confront us with essential questions at the heart of existence. I found them wandering through crowded, polluted urban centers begging in the villages and on what is left of forest and mountain pilgrimage trails. Like walking mysteries of the human soul, for me, sadhus provoke the question: “Who am I? What do I need? What really is important? And the more ancient pre-settled desire to wander in search of God.” Most importantly, they remind us that the answer for all things only lies within our own elusively humble hearts.

In my adopted home of Kathmandu, some sadhus survive primarily off alms made from almsgiving tourists to photograph them. They are a spectacle to love to play their assigned role in the illusion or drama of society. Their masks are thickly painted on their naked bodies. Sadhus have formally abandoned conventional time; and their world is dense with its own cosmic acceptance within the sadhu mandala.

As a photographer, I loved how they allow their bodies to become symbols of the sacred—from walking around naked to remind us of our naked selves, to wearing ash to remind us what are bodies, to dreadslocks to remind us of our natural wild natures devoid of social convention. Their body-painted texts that speak volumes regarding sacred symbolism.

A sadhu’s body is a map of the Hindu universe, for the body is a microcosm of the macrocosm. To each new situation we seek to respond with creativity and wisdom, and each new situation with courage and flexibility. When a disciple reaches spiritual maturity, he attains a deep relationship with the Divine, becoming a sage who may blend traditional and innovative concepts of karma, reincarnation and dharma.

Hinduism, in the course of its long history, has been changing circumstances today we live the evolutionary encounter of Hinduism and Western culture. As the sadhus, their world is dense with its own cosmic acceptance within the sadhu mandala. The two prongs are painted with white earth. The white line drawn over the nose represents a lotus. The red dot represents Rudra, consort of Vishnu. Sacred body painting: A sadhu meticulously paints the mark, or tilaka, of his set on his forehead and body. Marks vary from set to set. His is a Vaishnava tilaka. It is made from clay or ground sandalwood. The U-shaped white line between the eyes is symbolic of the red-white sole of Lord Vishnu resting on a lotus. It is worn by the Badogas and Acharis. The Tangal sectarians draw a crown. The two prongs are painted with white earth. The white line drawn over the nose represents a lotus. The red dot represents Rudra, consort of Vishnu.

PHILOSOPHY

East Meets West

Hinduism is transforming Western consciousness, and our ancient religion is evolving in response

BY SWAMI SHANKARANANDA

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Deftly Introducing Our Hindu Religion

This newest publication from the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, led by Sri Pramukh Swami Maharaj, is a marvellous summary of the entire spectrum of the Hindu tradition in all of its grand diversity. Hinduism, An Introduction, by Sadhu Vivekajivandas, in two full-color volumes is a worthy addition to any Hindu's library.

So often in books on general Hinduism one philosophy is given as if it and alone is what all Hindus believe. One Deity is mentioned as if all Hindus only worship Him or Her. Hinduism, an Introduction takes a different view: "Hinduism is a grand mosaic of many sampradayas [traditional teaching lineages], philosophies, rituals, festivals, mandirs [temples], holy places, sadhus and shastras, and is often referred to by many scholars as a family of 'religions.' Within these rich diversities, one can perceive common threads that bind Hinduism into a fascinating, profoundly religious form subscribed to by nearly one-sixth of humanity." Notably, the set shows the reader many facets of modern Hindu temple worship—a topic commonly ignored in introductions to Hinduism. The scriptures upon which the ceremonies and architecture are based, the Agamas, are well detailed. The centrality of rituals in Hindu life is succinctly stated: "Rituals form an integral part of worship and have been practised from generation to generation in countless homes...[the] mantras. They are deeply embedded in the Hindu culture. Hindus believe that the Deity is present in the sacred murti [temple image]."

Through presenting the multiplicity of Deities in Hinduism, the book stresses that Hindus all worship a one Supreme Being. Chapter Two begins: "The traditional defining principles of most Hindus are the belief and faith in one Supreme Divine Reality or Parabrahma...[who] manifest in various forms. The belief in one Supreme God is called Keshvaravada." This is a helpful counter to what is unfortunately still encountered in many introductions to Hinduism which is that Hindus believe in a trinity of Gods: Bhagwan, Vishnu and Shiva.

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It is amazing how well the magazine is doing. Yogi Jothinatha, one of Kauai's Hindu Monks to secure Hinduism Today's future. He says that a strong fund will also protect the magazine from financial ups and downs, so it never goes Vol. 32, No. 10, October to December 2010

Strategizing Hinduism Today's future: Paramacharya Palaniswami, editor-in-chief (center), Sannyasin Shumuganathaswami, charitable funds manager of HIEE (right) and Yogi Jothinatha confer with publisher and satguru Bodhinatha Vemular.

The fund already supports special articles, staff training in digital technology and video production. Yogi fairly glows when he talks about the explosion in outreach brought about by digital technology. "All of our issues are now up on Scribd, for example. And, in just a few months, the we have garnered nearly 200,000 views, there. Our cool videos on YouTube tell a similar story. And the best part," he explains, "is that most of those viewers are youth, always our favorite audience. Here again we are counting on the growth of the Production Fund to allow Hinduism Today to seize one of the future's new, golden opportunities."

He says that a strong fund will also protect the magazine from financial ups and downs, so it never goes dire strait as did failed Newsweek, or The New York Times who recently announced plans to eventually abandon their printed edition. "We prefer to model ourselves on the National Geographic Magazine, which has thrived for 113 years and grows more spectacular with each issue, and to send teams of reporters anywhere in the world at any time to gather great stories. We can do a hundred times better," Yogi insists, adding that hiring translators, is another opportunity for dramatic expansion that editors want to tap as soon as the Production Fund allows.

The campaign started just as the economy melted down and contributions have come in rather haltingly so far, Yogi pointed out. He encourages those who feel currently strapped to consider including the Production Fund in their estate plans. "Hinduism Today is there for the long haul, and your help will be powerful." Donating $1,000 or more outright or in an estate plan makes one an honored benefactor of Hinduism Today. Anyone wanting more about the Production Fund, or wanting to help in our efforts is encouraged to contact Yogi at 1-808-634-5407 or at jothi@hindu.org. Donations may be made online at www.hieneonline.org/donate-production-fund. And one can become a benefactor at www.hieneonline.org/become-benefactor.
Together, let’s build a Hindu American voice that is heard by our government

Like you, HAF cares about effective dialogue with our elected officials to ensure our government is attentive to the Hindu American community. HAF aims to seize every opportunity to let them know who we are and how they can best represent us. We are actively working to educate public policy leaders about Hinduism and the needs of our community. Enter the world of HAF to find inspiration in an organization that advocates for all of us by reaching out to public policy leaders, media, academia and interfaith groups. Visit our website, and become a member today.

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Part 1

1. There is a lingering pain. It comes oft and then again. In what dreams each other greet?
2. Or is it a sadness setting of moments. To meet my friends at the gate.
3. It comes oft and then again.
4. If together shall brave, once more, then again.
5. In colours of deep red hue.
6. But know not you have: Awake!
7. No grain, no fruit his stillness yields. It is not a race
8. A selfless soul
9. Than a feather Decends.
10. It is not a race
11. The Wine of eternity...
12. Waiting and waiting
13. The weeds are a daily nuisance,
14. Did I send Thee
15. Menaka, in tatters is our mutual bond.
16. The hermit on the mountain side
17. Did I with the poor share?
18. I have gone to the world beyond.
19. The souls from the mist
20. The other side.

Part 2

1. My body is the key
2. The souls from the mist
3. I leave creation to creation;
4. Layer on layer.
5. The brilliance of the Central Sun
6. The Tapavan snow.
7. Stand sentinels, each to each, in align.
8. Feeding the sea of your anger.
9. A helping hand knows no gate;
10. She will release information
11. No rule is written in stone in His Kingdom.
12. By scriptures I left behind.
14. To Life on another plane of consciousness...
15. He is the Lord of Light beside.
16. He is the eternity,
17. By thought a villa I built
18. Cannot be touched but felt,
19. For that you are: Awake!
20. The Eye that watches over you.
21. The Laws of Light, In remembrance of

The laws of Light

I live in the moment—the brilliance of the Central Sun Unfolds the radiance of your soul. Scale the daunting height, Breath by breath, into a child's delight.

8. Map the tributaries of your envy, Select the door of stillness, The silence of your being. Stop! Danger.

9. My self on self shall judge If I bore you on a yoke, And did I proud that you shared? Or did I for my self care? A Heart more in weight

10. There are no weeping willows in my garden; A Heart more in weight

11. A helping hand knows no gate;
12. A helping hand knows no gate; No emails, no faxes, no cell, By scriptures I left behind.
14. To Life on another plane of consciousness...
15. He is the Lord of Light beside.
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