

HINDUISM TODAY  
NEPAL'S YOUTH SPEAK OUT  
RAISING HINDU CHILDREN  
GROWING UP HINDU IN THE USA  
APRIL/MAY/JUNE, 2021

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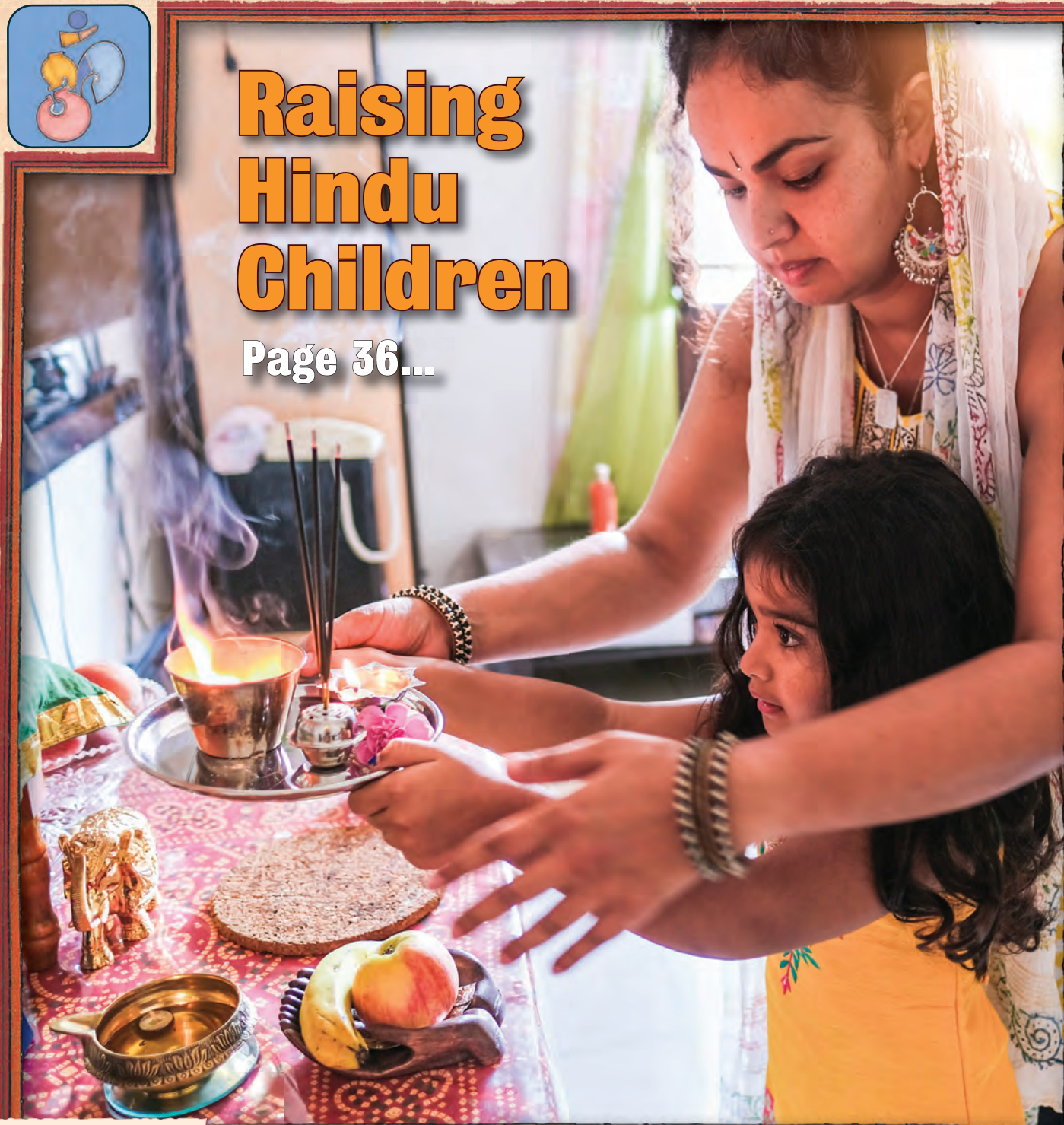
# HINDUISM TODAY

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



## Raising Hindu Children

Page 36...



(Cover) A mother teaches her daughter how to do an arati to a small shrine they have in their home; (above) Our publisher asks: "What makes a puja powerful and sacred?" Here, the day's worship is performed at the Panchbhaktar Temple in Jammu.

APRIL/MAY/JUNE, 2021 • THE HINDU YEAR PLAVA, 5123 • प्लव

*Bodhinatha Veylanswami*

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### INTERNATIONAL

- Feature:** We Ask Nepal's Hindu Youth About Their Views of Religion and Culture 18  
**Volunteering:** Sewa International Lends a Hand During the Challenges of Covid-19 30  
**Publications:** The Enduring Success of India's Largest Printer of Affordable Religious Texts 52

### LIFESTYLE

- Food:** An Ode to the Wonders of Rice with Spice 34  
**Insight:** We Explore the Art of Raising Children as Good Hindus 36  
**Spiritual Life:** The Empowering Benefits of a Daily Religious Routine 64  
**Ancient plants:** Appreciating Cilantro—that Oh-So-Versatile Green and Spice 66

### OPINION

- In My Opinion:** When a Hindu Is Asked, "But What's Your Real Name?" 9  
**Publisher's Desk:** The Essentials for Creating a Strong and Meaningful Puja 10  
**Letters** 13  
**From the Upanishads:** A Vedic Hymn Speaks of the Nature of Death 17  
**Opinion:** Four Hindu Youth Candidly Share the Challenges of Childhood in America 58

### DIGESTS

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

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**Indra Jatra:** On September 19, 2019, devotees crowded Kathmandu's Durbar Square in front of the old royal palace to witness the raising of the *Lingo*, a tall pole made from a tree. It is erected as a central part of this Nepalese harvest festival, thanking God Indra for an abundance of rain

# Nepal's Hindu Youth Discuss their Faith

Our reporter queries Nepalese youth about their cultural, religious and social views. Page 18...





# GLOBAL DHARMA

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

## Fashioning Abu Dhabi's First Hindu Temple

EVEN WHILE NAVIGATING THE challenges of Covid-19, the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha continues to make progress on the first formal Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi, the capital and second most populous city of the United Arab Emirates. After the final design was completed in early 2020, the foundation was laid in April.

According to an article in *Gulf News*, the first released images of the temple's design show an amphitheater overlooking the temple as well as classrooms, a community center, gardens, food court, a library and more. The temple's 25,000 cubic feet of stones are being sourced and carved primarily in Rajasthan and Gujarat.

BAPS mentioned that since

this will be the first Hindu temple in the city, it is important that it feature components that all UAE Hindus can relate to. This goal is expressed in the architecture, which covers a range of Indian geography, traditions and belief systems, which include teachings from the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* and *Puranas*.

You can learn more about the temple design in this video: [youtu.be/G3mOTSJmUbU](https://youtu.be/G3mOTSJmUbU).

### From India to the UAE:

(above) At a worksite in Rajasthan, stone panels for the Abu Dhabi Hindu temple are inspected by BAPS swamis; (right) a digital rendition of the completed temple within the larger BAPS complex



AFGHANISTAN

## Hindus & Sikhs Flee Their Afghan Homeland

THE HINDUS AND SIKHS WHO live in Afghanistan are an interwoven community. With more similarities than differences, they attend the same places of worship while being respectful of each other's faiths and generally supporting each other while living in a majority Islamic country.

The Afghani Hindu and Sikh community once comprised as many as a quarter-million people, but is now down to a population of less than 700, according to an article from AP News. This reduction has been due largely to the general lack of safety and government support faced by the community, who feel threatened by local extremism.

Just last March, 25 Sikhs were killed in Kabul when a gunman attacked their place of worship.

In 2018, a suicide attack in Jalalabad killed 19 people, including a community leader who was seeking election to parliament. Another community leader, now living abroad, says he fled

Afghanistan several years ago after his brother was kidnapped and killed by gunmen in Kabul.

In 2010, the Afghan government created a chair in the National Assembly for religious

minorities, but many view the action as merely symbolic.

Many of the nation's remaining Hindus and Sikhs are now leaving the country. Groups of nearly 200 at a time are making their way to India, with some saying they will then continue on to Europe or Canada.

Hamdard, a struggling member of the community, told AP News, "It's hard to leave our birthplace, but we have no other option.... Afghanistan does not want us anymore." Seven of his relatives were killed in the attack in March.

**Seeking new homes:** The final traces of Afghanistan's Sikh and Hindu communities are leaving the country in response to religious discrimination and violence. They now look to India for temporary asylum.



BRAZIL

## Hanuman Helps Brazil to Heal



IN JANUARY, 2021, BRAZIL'S PRESIDENT JAIR Bolsonaro thanked India and Prime Minister Modi for the country's help in supplying Brazil with an initial batch of two million doses of AstraZeneca's Covishield vaccine. Brazil has reported one of the highest Covid-19 death tolls in the world. In his appreciation, President Bolsonaro tweeted a graphic of Hanuman carrying the vaccine from India, just as He had retrieved the sanjeevani plant for Lakshmana, as narrated in the Hindu epic *Ramayana*.

India has also flown vaccines to Seychelles, Mauritius and Myanmar, with supplies contracted to fly to Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Morocco and Bangladesh as well.



ODISHA

## Theives Pillage Heritage Sites

IT WAS RECENTLY DISCOVERED THAT 22 of 31 ancient statues have been stolen from the 13th century Daksha Prajapati Temple in Banpur town in Odisha. The statues are all made of the eight-metal (*ashtadhatu*) alloy (gold, silver, copper, zinc, lead, tin, iron and mercury). The statues stolen, valued at thousands of dollars, include those of Gopinath Dev, Kaliyugswar Dev, Maa Kanaka Durga, and Chandrasekhar Dev. The temple is currently under the supervision of the

Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), as it is of great cultural, architectural and religious significance.

Local historian Anil Dhir told the *Hindustan Times* that 48 reports of missing statues were filed in different police stations of the Prachi Valley in the last decade, but only one recovery was made. Odisha has been a major hub of stolen antiquity exportation, with some 300 valuable statues gone missing statewide.

VEGETARIANISM

## Veggie School Lunches Are In Hot Demand

ACCORDING TO A REPORT released by Friends of the Earth, many public schools throughout the US are moving towards plant-forward menus which provide adequate options for vegetarian and vegan students, who are growing in number. A 2017 study of California's Oakland Unified School District revealed plant-based menus are easier on school budgets and have clear health and environmental benefits. The District saved \$42,000 by reducing meat in lunches. This positive trend gives Hindu students better access to dharmic foods.

An October 2020 article released by the Hindu Council of Australia noted that the number of people leaning toward vegetarian diets in Australia has risen by nearly a million in the last decade. However, the article reported that students

increasingly report feeling their meat-free diets are not supported. Some schools are using outdated curriculum teaching that eating meat is necessary for health. One student said classmates who want to eat vegetarian are prevented by their parents because of this concept. When his brother gave a pro-vegetarian presentation in class, highlighting the negative environmental impacts of animal agriculture, he was afterwards contradicted by the teacher.

These same problems appear throughout the US, where many students face meat-forward health curriculums, and the commonly held belief—espoused by students, teachers and parents—that a vegetarian diet is lacking in essential nutrients. Meanwhile, Friends of the Earth, highlights the positive

trend that more schools are finding value (financial and otherwise) in healthy plant-based food options.

In a recent national survey of US K-12 school food directors, 55.2 percent said they offer vegetarian options for middle schools, with 68 percent offering them in

high schools. In a review of the 25 largest school districts in the US, 23 serve vegetarian meals at least once a week, with 13 districts offering them daily. Much of this dietary drive is coming from parents and students, as vegetarianism and veganism continue to grow in popularity.



**A nutritious school lunch:** Students at Colorado's Boulder Valley School District enjoy a healthy plant-based school lunch



## A New Gateway to Nallur

THE NALLUR KANDASWAMY TEMPLE IN JAFFNA, SRI LANKA, IS one of the most significant temples to the nation's Tamil people, as well as to many devotees abroad. This powerful shrine to Lord Murugan is a center of life for many islanders and is full of activity during its annual festival days. If you're traveling to Jaffna from Colombo, you'll eventually come to a fork in the road where the right-hand path leads you, for two miles, directly to the temple. On the auspicious day of this year's Thai Pongal in January, an opening ceremony was held for a newly created archway gate over the road, welcoming visitors to the main road to the temple. The first vehicle through the archway was Nallur Temple's bullock cart, carrying a traditional offering of rice. Several community leaders attended the event, including the head of Nallai Aadheenam, Sri La Sri Somasundara Paramacharya Swami, Dr. Aru Thirumurugan, Rishi Thondunathan and others.

**Two miles to God:** (clockwise from right) The temple bullock cart enters the gateway; an aerial view of the road; Nallur Kandaswamy Temple in Jaffna



## BRIEFLY...

**THE UTTAR PRADESH GOVERNMENT** has banned "unlawful religious conversions" with immediate effect. A new ordinance contains stricter provisions to flag conversions carried out by allurements, coercion, use of force or fraudulent means, and for marrying women with the objective of converting them to other religions. The Uttar Pradesh cabinet approved the draft ordinance that prescribes up to 10 years imprisonment for those found guilty of such conversions. The promulgation comes a month after Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath vowed to end "love

jihad," the deliberate targeting of Hindu women by Muslim men with the objective of converting the wife after marriage. The ordinance authorizes "aggrieved parents, siblings or close relatives" to file information reports of any violations. It noted that if a person reconverts to his/her immediately previous religion, the same shall not be deemed to be religious conversion.

**THE KERALA HIGH COURT MADE** an important ruling in late December 2020 pertaining to the movable and immovable properties dedicated to the presiding Deity of a given

temple, in this case the famously wealthy Sri Krishna Temple in Guruvayur. According to *Outlook India*, the court ruled that all properties dedicated to the Deity shall vest in the murti, and that the temple committee had no power to divert funds to any government or non-government agency. "All the properties, including movable and immovable properties and money, dedicated to or endowed in the name of Lord Guruvayurappan or any property acquired in any manner by Guruvayur Devaswom shall vest in the murti of Lord Guruvayurappan, consecrated in the Sri Krishna Temple, Guruvayur."

**AN ARTICLE IN INDIA TIMES** reports that the University of Regina in Ottawa, Canada, has

decided to return an Indian statue of Goddess Annapurna which was found to have been stolen from a shrine in Varanasi more than a century ago. The university has made clear that this is an effort to help the global trend of righting historical wrongs, and particularly the damaging legacy of colonialism.

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## IN MY OPINION

# "What's Your Real Name?"

## Reflections on the cultural, religious and social importance found within our moniker

BY KESHAV FULBROOK

I was 23 when I was given the name Keshav during my *namakarana samskara* at the Hindu Temple of Las Vegas, my birth town. Many Hindu organizations such as Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Sangh Pariwar, Arya Samaj and Kauai Adheenam all strongly encourage the adoption of a Hindu name if one was born in a non-Hindu family and seeks formal entrance into Hinduism. Many do not consider an aspirant eligible for *diksha* or further initiations without this first step. It is a step I took and am glad I did. I am well known by *Keshav*, especially among the Hindu community. My name is the subject of a lot of questions though, which leads me to reflect on how names are viewed by different people and why.

During my travels in India and Nepal, most people were enthusiastic to know about my interest in Sanatana Dharma which led me to pursue my local study of several Indian languages, as well as Nepalese. Though my experience over all was positive, I was occasionally met with confusion.

In India you will run into many Michaels and Jacobs who converted to Christianity and took Christian names. Similarly, Sikhs, Jains, Muslims and Hindus are all identifiable in India based on name, and if conversion does take place, often it is accompanied with a change in name. Due to the prevalence of this custom in Asia, I had thought that the reason behind a white guy taking a Hindu name would be intuitively understood. However, this is not always the case. To some people, a Hindu name has more to do with being Indian than being part of a trans-national Hinduism. Similarly, at least in the US, many people may not think of a name like Michael in Biblical terms. To them, changing one's name on adopting or converting to another religion may seem odd.

Unfortunately, a one-way cultural adoption of Western values is often the norm, while the reverse is commonly met with puzzlement. The world wears jeans, but a



Westerner in a dhoti will garner stares. Names in particular seem to be associated with a sense of identity in a way more intimate than things like dress, faith, etc. So when one introduces oneself with a name that doesn't fit someone else's projection of who a person ought to be, based on our heuristic about them, we almost feel the person is disingenuous.

This reveals to a great degree the power of these projected expectations in shaping behavior, because just a small handful of negative experiences can outweigh a lifetime of positive reinforcement. Thankfully, my personal experience in this area has been overwhelmingly positive, with just a few outlying events.

For every step someone takes down a road less traveled—in which the person finds meaning—the more it clears the way for others in similar shoes. Vamadeva Shastri, Ram Das and countless others have been along this road, as well as less publicly known sadhakas.

All in all, it is about commonplace exposure and numbers. I am definitely far from the first non-hereditary Hindu, but may be the first many have met personally. Most questions are not malicious, but come from genuine curiosity and a desire to connect and understand.

The less spiritually or religiously inclined a person is, the stranger a name change and its motivations will seem to them. I've noticed this even among second- or third-generation non-resident Indians—some of whom may themselves have adopted a more Western name. Many seem unaccustomed to a reversal of this. Their question is phrased most often as "What is your real name?" I can only respond, "Keshav is my real name."

KESHAV FULBROOK, 28, is pursuing a political science degree and has been a stalwart member of the Hindu tradition since he was 19. He is currently affiliated with Arsha Vidya Gurukulam. Contact: [fulbrookb22@gmail.com](mailto:fulbrookb22@gmail.com)



# Essential Ingredients for a Powerful Puja

Pondering the mystical elements and knowledge behind Hinduism's major form of temple worship

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

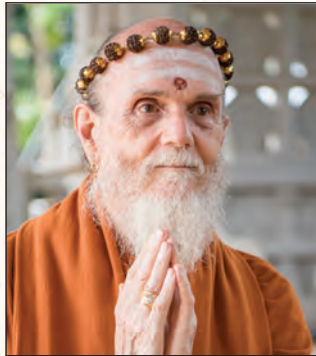
LET'S COMPARE WORSHIPING THE MURTI in the temple to the preparation of a vegetable curry. To prepare a curry, you start by cleaning raw vegetables, removing skins or inedible parts and cutting all to size. In a pan, you heat up a splash of oil, adding whole spices, dried peppers, seeds and a dollop of dry dal. Once the seeds pop and become fragrant, add curry leaves and onions. Brown slightly, add tomatoes and simmer for a short time. Next add salt, spice powders, such as turmeric and curry powder, and simmer a bit more. Finally, add raw, steamed, boiled, baked or fried vegetables and cook until complete. As any good cook will attest, lots of ingredients are required to turn a bland vegetable into a tasty curry. Such a dish feeds our body, while our soul is nourished by puja in the temple.

For a puja to be powerful, a known process must be followed and a number of important ingredients need to be present.

1. The first is the nature of the temple's connection to the inner worlds, which varies considerably from temple to temple. It needs to be a strong one. We can compare this to connecting a computer network to the Internet. A T1 connection, for example, can transfer only a small amount of data compared to the fastest optical connections. The strength of the temple's connection to the inner worlds depends upon three factors: whether it was founded in connection with a vision of the Deity; the number of years it has maintained devout pujas without a break; the number and strength of pujas performed each year.

2. The second ingredient for a powerful puja is that the chosen day be auspicious for the Deity being worshiped. An annual festival, such as Ganesha Chaturthi for Lord Ganesha, is a highly auspicious time for worship. The monthly Chaturthi tithi is also more favorable than other days of the month for Ganesha worship. In both cases, the auspiciousness relates to the exact period that the tithi or nakshatra is in power. For example, in Hawaii, Ganesha Chaturthi in 2020 was from about 7am on September 21, until 5am, September 22. For the convenience of devotees, some temples hold annual festival pujas on the weekend even though the actual and most propitious time was a few days before. This is not ideal.

3. The third ingredient is the skill, knowledge, purity and mystical understandings of the priest or priests who are performing the puja, and the depth of their devotion. During the puja, through mantras, mudras and mystical ritual, the priests invoke the Deity. They beseech the God to indwell the image, to accept the prayers of the votaries, and to shower blessings and love on all. My guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, provides additional insights into this process: "When you worship the God in the temple, through puja and ceremony, you



are bringing that Divinity out of the microcosm and into this macrocosm. You supply the energy through your worship and your devotion, through your thought forms, and even your physical aura. The pujari purifies and magnetizes the stone image for this to take place. The Gods and the devas are also magnetizing the stone image with their energy, and finally the moment is ready and they can come out of the microcosm into this macrocosm and bless the people. You observe that they stayed only for an instant, but to them it was a longer time. The time sense in the inner worlds is different."

A trend in modern Hinduism is to conduct pujas in languages other than Sanskrit. One justification for this is that devotees will be able to understand what is being chanted. Of course, this idea is not supported by the *Vedas* and *Agamas*, the two scriptures that are the source of the mantras. Traditionally, all mantras are only chanted in Sanskrit. It is my experience that mantras chanted in a regional language do not generate the power they do when Sanskrit is used. Gurudeva affirmed that puja chants work best in Sanskrit, which most effectively invokes the Deity's presence. Devotional singing works well in regional languages which have innumerable expressive hymns capable of melting the heart in love of God. He also offered that local languages shine in providing precise explanations and interpretations.

4. The fourth ingredient is one that will surprise some of our readers—the devotional actions of attending devotees make a significant difference in the puja's power. This came to my attention many years ago in the pujas done by the monks at Kauai Aadheenam. The monks do a number of pujas late at night or early in the morning when there are no devotees present. It became clear that the presence of devotees in a reverent mood is important ingredient for a powerful puja. Why? Because devotees supply energy through their worship, their yearning for blessings, through their thought forms, and even their physical aura.

5. A fifth ingredient is offering of cut fruit, cooked food, water, fragrant flowers and milk. These play an important part in the inner workings of the puja. The Deity does not utilize the gross physical substance being offered, but rather utilizes the life energy or prana within it as the priest presents the offering.

The same principles hold true for the fire ritual known as yajna or homa. Jayendrapuri Mahaswami, head of Kailash Ashram in Bengaluru, visited our monastery in Hawaii a few years ago. His three priests performed an elaborate yajna in our Kadavul temple with elaborate offerings of grains and woods they had brought from India.



Afterwards Swamiji explained that Agni, the God of fire, takes the offerings to the Deity in a purified form for the Deity to use in blessing those present.

When the five ingredients described above are all present in a puja, that ceremony is definitely going to be a powerful event in which significant blessings come forth from the inner worlds. In a medium length puja, this blessing from the Deity takes place during the final arati. In a more elaborate one, blessings also pour forth when the curtain is opened to reveal the newly-dressed Deity. It is at these two moments that the Deity and His helpers, or devas, reflect back the prana they have received into the aura of each devotee, purifying it of subconscious congestions. Devotees so blessed leave the temple feeling uplifted and relieved of burdensome mental conditions. Some become motivated to live more peaceful lives, have greater harmony in the home and more tolerance in the community. Some will be inspired to bring forth and perpetuate traditional Hindu culture in the form of sacred music, art and dance.

Others may receive a life-changing message from the Deity. Gurudeva describes this mystical process: "To understand darshan, consider the everyday and yet subtle communication of language. You are hearing the tones of my voice through the sensitive organ, your ear. Meaning comes into your mind, for you have been trained to translate these vibrations into meaning through the knowing of the language that I am speaking. Darshan is a vibration, too. It is first experienced

**Seeking God's blessings:** A priest pours milk over the Sivalingam on Sivaratri at the Paris Ganesh Temple in France

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

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

The next time you attend a temple puja or homa, reflect on the many elements, subtle and gross, that go into making it a holy connection, a profound communion with God and the Gods.





## LETTERS

### Navigating Tough Times

The article "Navigating Challenging Times" means the world to me, because this is one of the most difficult times of my life. I am incarcerated; my release is soon. However, I am exiting prison and entering an outside pandemic world filled with fear and anxiety in which I must become a productive member of society. I must remember to "face issues of today... rather than dwell on history and the past" and rely on the infinite God, Satyam Jnanam Anantam Brahman! I stay in today, and await my next copy of HINDUISM TODAY.

ANGELIQUE MATHIS, #86158  
BOISE, IDAHO, USA

### Ambassadors of Dharma

Namaste Bijay bhai! What an inspirational OpEd ("Why I Became a Dharma Ambassador") in the Jan. 2021 issue of HINDUISM TODAY! You led the reader from youth in Bharat to early confusion in America, all the way to your successes today, a journey that thousands of others are also undertaking. Your article in this international magazine, combined with Zoom technology, will help and inspire so many more to also become Dharma Ambassadors around the world.

EASAN KATIR  
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### Diwali for the World

Because of this pandemic, in Trinidad and Tobago we have had to cancel several major cultural and religious programs—namely Divali Nagar, Carnival, Panorama—and even political assemblies. The populace has taken it with great ease and cooperation. This is a

commendable sacrifice for which we must applaud ourselves.

Still, it is disheartening to undergo these traumatic times. Let all peoples, regardless of social, economic, cultural or ethnic stock, use the message of Divali to usher the world into order and respect, so that the lights of Divali would become infinite.

We in Trinidad and Tobago must respect and imbibe the teachings that Divali provides, and take a serious look at its message of truth, honesty and integrity as a lesson for a peaceful society and world, devoid of false values, violence and convulsions which take us nowhere.

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### Faith and Reason

I read with confusion and disappointment Pradeep Srivastava's letter to the editor in response to Dakshinamurthy's response to his previous LTE. Mr. Srivastava makes the claim that "Belief in God is thus indeed a matter of faith. But unlike Abrahamic religions, which rely on blind faith, Hinduism encourages and emphasizes faith stemming from intuition and direct experience that can be felt but cannot be described."

Is this true? Natural theology, as taught in the Christian faith [distinct from the more mainstream "revealed theology"], relies on no authorities, including the Church or Scripture, but rather natural reason coupled with science. That is not to say that natural theology necessarily contradicts the Church or the Bible, but that the proofs for God's existence and goodness may be found solely within the bounds of reason and science. The God of Western theism does not contradict or "transcend" the laws of logic. God, according to the

Western tradition, cannot do anything logically contradictory, such as squaring a circle. By contrast, the Upanishadic or Vedantic Deity seems to flout the laws of nature by being unknowable through the intellect, and yet one must rely on the intellect of a human guru to gain realization of Brahman. If Brahman is beyond thought, words, etc. then it is literally meaningless to speak of Brahman, as Wittgenstein and the Logical Positivists would say. By contrast, Hindu thinkers such as Sriharsha and Bhartrihari believe that reason is inherently unreliable and that one should simply have faith in the religious authorities who composed the shastras. Even Shankaracharya said that while reason and logic may serve as aides to help one understand scripture, they are not (contra the natural theologians of the Christian tradition) independent means to knowing God. Of course, Chaitanya and Swaminarayan tried to rescue Brahman from absurdity by bifurcating Brahman into Parabrahman (Personal Deity) and Brahman (impersonal effulgent light emanating from God's personal being, similar to the light emanating from the Holy Spirit). However, there are problems with these Vaishnava interpretations that would take a longer letter to respond to in full.

W. KENNEDY  
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### Barred from Entering Temples

It is with great dismay, though not surprise, that I read of the pathetic and vulgar behavior of so-called custodians of Hindu shrines, be they in Nepal or India or anywhere in the world, who would allow entry to an Indian of the Abrahamic faith but not an African or white person who is more dedicated to his Hindu belief than most Hindus of Indian

origin. This is not racism; it is something worse, and certainly not a behavior endorsed by any Hindu anywhere in the world.

MANSUKH M. CHHIBA  
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### Telugu Poets

I am looking for information on Telugu poets as part of my research on the Bhakti movement. Your article on Tamil, Kannada and Malayala poet-saints has helped me greatly in getting an insight into their times and works. Can you kindly share a link to articles on Telugu poets, please?

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*Numerous Telugu poets contributed abundantly to the Bhakti Movement, such as Bammara Pothana (15th c.), who authored the Potana Bhagavatam, a translation of the Sanskrit Bhagavata Purana into Telugu. Telugu Bhakti saints are especially prevalent in the Carnatic music world. Prominent examples include saint-composers Thyagaraja, Annamacharya and Bhadrachala Ramadasu, whose kritis (compositions) form a major part of any Carnatic musician's repertoire. A wonderful book of English*

*translations of Annamacharya's poems is God on the Hill (amazon.com/God-Hill-Temple-Poems-Tirupati/dp/0195182847). Thanks for your interest!*

Lakshmi Chandrashekar Subramanian

### Accolades

**Editor's note:** Below are a few of many comments from our 2020 Digital Dharma Drive donors. Their inspiration adds to our inspiration, by which we hope to inspire others.

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"Uplifting and educational content conveyed with brilliant simplicity and grace. The love, effort and blessings of the monks are apparent."

"You are doing a great service of taking Sanatana Dharma to the future generations! I would like to be a part of your great service! Thank you!"

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Swami Durganatha Shanmuga, Administrator



## Angels Who Teach What a Good Life Is

### How two men help broadcast Hinduism's calming and inspiring philosophy

**G**OPAL GRANDHIGE AND DARIN BAHL were both born in the US in 1975. They met in 2002, married in 2009 and now live in Tampa, Florida. Both consider themselves ardent Hindus and enthusiastically support HINDUISM TODAY. Gopal is a surgeon who was raised in a devout home where, he recalls, "I saw my parents, already so steeped in Hinduism, reading each issue of our magazine cover to cover."

Darin owns a company that "designs spaces" for events, weddings, galas, etc. He was raised in a Catholic family. "But as soon as Gopal introduced me to Hinduism," he shares, "it filled my soul. I went to Hindu holy spots; I attended ceremonies; it all changed me forever. And I have a mother-and-a father-in-law who are like angels in my life. They are constant reminders of what a good life is. I felt the wisdom of the ages pouring through them as I saw them walk through our situation."

"HINDUISM TODAY was a big help at that delicate time," stresses Gopal. "When my parents were trying their best to figure out

what to think, the magazine provided a lot of clarity and a lot of peace. We'll always be grateful for that.

"The regular arrival of issues is in itself a constant reminder that no matter how much you know, there's still more to discover inside those covers, and inside yourself. It's a call to action, to walk down the path a little farther."

"And it is so approachable, so welcoming," adds Darin, "it makes you want to learn and make progress. Its simple, clear, easy going language brings even the deepest articles within reach. It's amazing that it is so deep, yet approachable by Hindus and non-Hindus alike. We love its live-and-let-live attitudes. It has taught me to do what used to be oh, so hard: looking inward rather than outward. I don't know how else I would have learned that."

"We support many charities, but giving to HINDUISM TODAY is special because we feel so close to it and blessed by it. At the same time, we are serving society, helping a truly vital source to thrive, one worthy to calm and inspire others as it has done us. We cannot ourselves broadcast all that wonderful



### "My mother- and father-in-law are like angels in my life."

Dr. and Mrs. Grandhige, Darin and Gopal prepare for a feast.

philosophy needing so desperately to be known, but we can help the HINDUISM TODAY staff do it for us, dedicating their whole lives to it as they do."

You can help Hinduism's soothing message be heard by supporting HINDUISM TODAY, its voice. Donate at [bit.ly/help-HT](http://bit.ly/help-HT),

Or contact us at:  
1-888-464-1008 • [support@hindu.org](mailto:support@hindu.org)



QUOTES & QUIPS

“Eventually, all that one has learned will have to be forgotten”

Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950)

That which is formless, which is of the nature of supreme consciousness, is eternally existing in eternal abidance, eternally free from the constricting bonds, free from mutations, indescribable, beyond the illustrative reasons and parables, beyond gender, indestructible, free from likes and dislikes, beyond the knowable and definable existents, inconceivable and beyond doubt—That is my real Self. There is no doubt of this identity. *Raurava Agama Vidya Pada 2.6-7*

Thoughts are giant-powers. They are more powerful than electricity. They control your life, mold your character and shape your destiny. **Swami Sivananda** (1887-1963)

The Eternal Religion, the religion of the rishis, has been in existence from time immemorial and will exist eternally. There exists in this Sanatana Dharma all forms of worship—worship of God with form and

worship of the impersonal Deity as well. It contains all paths—the path of knowledge, the path of devotion and so on. Other forms of religion, the modern cults, will remain for a few days and then disappear. **Ramakrishna Paramahansa** (1836-1886)

Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication. **Leonardo da Vinci** (1452-1519)

A religion that takes no account of practical affairs and does not help to solve them is no religion. **Mahatma Gandhi** (1869-1948)

Everything we call real is made of things that cannot be regarded as real. **Niels Bohr** (1885-1962), *Danish physicist*

If you are irritated by every rub, how will your mirror be polished? **Rumi** (1207-1273 ce)

Men are born soft and supple; dead, they are stiff and hard. Plants are born tender and pliant; dead, they are brittle and dry. Thus whoever is stiff and inflexible is a disciple of death. Whoever is soft and yielding is a disciple of life. The hard and stiff will be broken. The soft and supple will prevail. **Lao Tzu** (4th or 6th century bce), *author of the Tao Te Ching*

I stayed up all night to see where the sun went, and then it dawned on me.

The only way to keep your health is to eat what you don't want, drink what you don't like, and do what you'd rather not. **Mark Twain** (1835-1910), *American author*

It is not things that disturb us, but our interpretation of their significance. **Epictetus** (55-135 ce), *Stoic philosopher*

Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose. You are already naked. There is no reason not to follow your heart. **Steve Jobs** (1955-2011), *co-founder of Apple Computer*

God respects me when I work, but God loves me when I sing. **Rabindranath Tagore** (1861-1941)

Forever is composed of nows. **Emily Dickinson** (1830-1886), *American poet*

Since you alone are responsible for your thoughts, only you can change them. **Paramahansa Yogananda** (1893-1952)

Instead of solid accomplishments, the man pursues pleasures and self-gratification. He will never achieve anything so long as he is surrounded by dissipating temptations. **I Ching**, *the Chinese Book of Changes*

When you teach a wolf to meditate, he becomes aware wolf.

That which is selfish is immoral, and that which is unselfish is moral. **Swami Vivekananda** (1863-1902)

A life spent making mistakes is not only more honorable, but more useful than a life spent doing nothing. **George Bernard Shaw** (1856-1950), *Irish playwright*

The expectation that success in meditation will come quickly is incorrect. Not only must you sustain your practice for a long time, but without interruption and with devotion. **Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami**, *publisher of HINDUISM TODAY*

We cultivate purity by thinking, speaking



and doing only that which is conceived in compassion for all. **Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami** (1927-2001), *founder of HINDUISM TODAY*

FUN & GAMES

Hidden Words

BELOW IS THE LIST OF WORDS YOU'RE tasked to find within the grid to the right. Find and circle each of the words. They may run horizontally, right to left or left to right, vertically ascending or descending and even diagonally. Some words may overlap. After circling all the letters of each word, the remaining scrambled letters will reveal two special hidden words. Enjoy a few minutes of fun!

**Words to find:** Agama, Aum, Avatar, Ayurveda, Bhagavadgita, Bliss, Bodhinatha, Chakra, Chant, Devotion, Diet, Eclipse, Endurance, Faith, God, Guru, Heaven, Idols, Inspiration, Journey, Karma, Kauai, Lingam, Mantra, Meditation, Mind, Moksha, Nirvana, Noble, Ode, Path, Peace, Penance, Quartet, Ram, Realm, Religion, Shlokas, Sivaya, Sublime, Tenet, Time, Tradition, Vision, Vam, World, Yam.

E	S	P	I	L	C	E	C	N	A	R	U	D	N	E	A
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R	E	L	I	G	I	O	N	T	D	D	S	L	O	D	I
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BASICS

Why Do Hindus Worship the Cow?

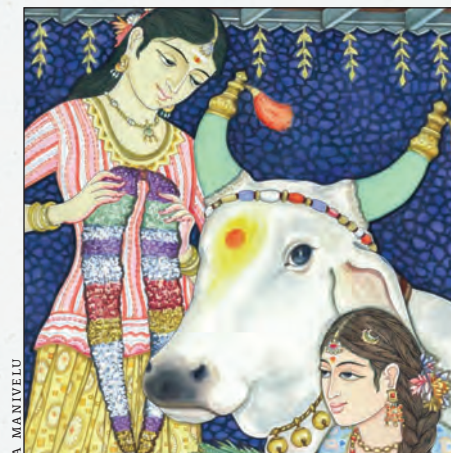
HINDUS REGARD ALL LIVING CREATURES as sacred—mammals, fishes, birds and more. We acknowledge this reverence for life in our special affection for the cow. At festivals we decorate and honor her, but we do not worship her in the sense that we worship the Deity. To the Hindu, the cow symbolizes all other creatures. The cow is a symbol of the Earth, the nourisher, the ever-giving, undemanding provider. The cow is so generous, taking nothing but water, grass and grain. It gives and gives and gives of its milk, as does the liberated soul give of spiritual knowledge. The cow is so vital to life, the virtual sustainer of life, for many humans. The cow is a symbol of grace and abundance. Veneration of the cow instills in Hindus the virtues of gentleness, receptivity and connectedness with nature.

The only cow-question for Hindus is, “Why don't more people respect and protect this remarkable creature?” Mahatma Gandhi once said, “One can measure the greatness of a nation and its moral progress 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 sub-human world.”

In the Hindu tradition, the cow is honored, garlanded and given special feedings at festivals all over India, most importantly the annual Gopashtama festival. Demonstrating how dearly Hindus love their cows, colorful cow jewelry and clothing is sold at fairs all over the Indian countryside. From a young age, Hindu children are taught to decorate the cow with garlands, paint and ornaments. The cow and her sacred gifts—milk and ghee in particular—are essential elements in Hindu worship, penance and rites of passage. In India, more than 3,000 institutions called goshalas, maintained by charitable trusts, care for old and infirm cows. And while many Hindus are not vegetarians, most respect the still widely held code of abstaining from eating beef.

By her docile, tolerant nature, the cow exemplifies the cardinal virtue of Hinduism,



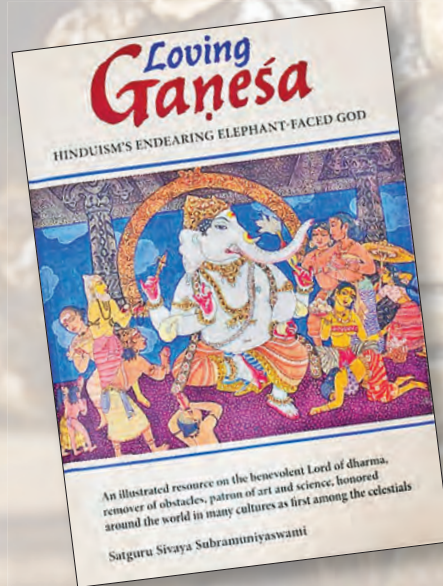
noninjury, known as *ahimsa*. The cow also symbolizes dignity, strength, endurance, maternity and selfless service. In the *Vedas*, cows represent wealth and joyous Earthly life. From the *Rig Veda* (4.28.1;6) we read. “The cows have come and have brought us good fortune. In our stalls, contented, may they stay! May they bring forth calves for us, many-colored, giving milk for Indra each day. You make, O cows, the thin man sleek; to the unlovely you bring beauty. Rejoice our homestead with pleasant lowing. In our assemblies we laud your vigor.”

Drawn from the teachings of



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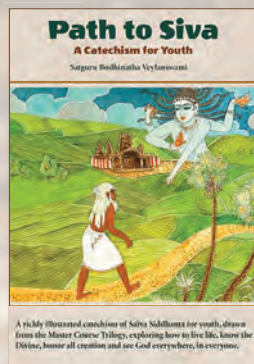
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## FROM THE UPANISHADS

# At Life's End

## Vedic elucidations on the natural transition from human life

The following is a translation of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad's chapter four, section four, from *The Principal Upanishads* by S. Radhakrishnan. This Upanishad belongs to the Shukla Yajurveda. The following verses, 1 to 13, edited for clarity, are part of a dialogue between King Janaka of Videha and Sage Yajnavalka.

- 1 When this self comes to weakness, confusion and when difficult breaths amass, he gathers to himself his particles of inner light and descends into the heart. When the person behind the eye turns within, he becomes unobservant of outer light.
- 2 Those around him say: "He is becoming one, he does not see; he does not smell; he does not taste; he does not speak; he does not hear; he does not think; he does not touch; he does not know." The point of his heart becomes bright, and by that light the soul departs, either through the eye or through the head or through other parts of the body. When he thus departs, life departs after him, and after it all the vital breaths follow. He becomes one with the intelligence which departs with him—his knowledge, his work and his past experiences.
- 3 Just as a caterpillar, having come to the end of a blade of grass, draws itself together before reaching for the next blade, so does this individual draw itself together in making the transition to another body.
- 4 As a goldsmith takes a piece of gold and turns it into a new and more beautiful shape, so does this soul—after having thrown away the body and dispelled its ignorance—make unto himself another, newer and more beautiful shape, like that of the ancestors or of the gandharvas, or of the Gods, of Prajapati or of Brahma.
- 5 That soul is, indeed, Brahman, but is identified with the mind, with life, sight, hearing, earth, water, air, ether, light, darkness, desire, disinterest, anger, quietude, righteousness, wickedness and with all things. This is what is meant by saying that it consists of this (what is perceived) and consists of that (what is inferred). According as one acts, according as one behaves, so does he become. The doer of good becomes good, the doer of evil becomes evil. One becomes virtuous by virtuous action, bad by bad action. Others, however, say that a person consists of desires. As is his desire, so is his will; as is his will, so is the deed he does; whatever deed he does, that he attains.
- 6 On this there is the following verse: "Being attached, he, together with the work, attains that result to which his subtle body or mind is attached. Exhausting the results of whatever work he did in this life, he returns from that world to this for (fresh) work." This is for the man who has desires. But the man who is without desire, who is freed from desire, whose desire is satisfied, whose desire is the Self; his breaths do not depart. Being but Brahman, he is merged with Brahman.
- 7 On this there is the following verse: "When all the desires that dwell in the heart are cast away, then does the mortal become immortal, then he attains Brahman, here, in this very body." Just as the slough of a snake lies on an anthill, dead, cast off, even so lies this body. But this disembodied, immortal life is Brahman only, is light indeed.
- 8 On this there are the following verses: "The narrow, ancient path which stretches far away has been found by me, has been realized by me. By it, the wise, the knowers of Brahman go up to the heavenly world after the fall of this body, having been freed, even while still alive."
- 9 "On that path they say there is white, blue, yellow, green and red. That path was found by a brahmana and by it goes the knower of Brahman, the doer of right and the shining one."
- 10 That self is, indeed, his will; so is the deed he does; whatever deed he does, that he attains.
- 11 Those worlds covered with blind darkness are called joyless. To them after death go those people who have not knowledge, who are not awakened.
- 12 If a person knows the self as "I am this," then wishing what, and for desire of what should he suffer in the body?
- 13 Whoever has found and has awakened to the self that has entered into this perilous, inaccessible place (the body), he is the maker of the universe, for he is the maker of all. His is the world; indeed, he is the world itself.



S. RAJAM

SARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN (1888-1975) was an Indian philosopher and statesman, India's first Vice President (1952-1962) and second President (1962-1967).





SUDIP GURUNG

SURVEYS

# Nepal Youth Speak Out

## Meet a generation balancing the nation's religious and cultural heritage with the impact of modern philosophies and issues

BY NIKKI THAPA, KATHMANDU

**M**Y WORK WITH PHOTOGRAPHER Thomas Kelly as his photo editor brought me into touch with HINDUISM TODAY some 15 years ago. Three years ago I left that job to pursue my own interests in running my website, [askmeaboutnepal.com](http://askmeaboutnepal.com), and Healing Hands Nepal, my nonprofit organization, both of which allowed me to travel extensively in Nepal. As I traveled, my interest in Hinduism increased day by day with new discoveries about Nepal's variety of customs, temples, culture and traditions. When I suggested to the editors that I report on these experiences, they countered with the proposal that I survey Nepal's youth, ages 18 to 28, as a HINDUISM TODAY article had done two years ago in India.

I had the same questions: How does one tap into the pulse of the youth? How do I find the right sample? As with that article, I also concluded it wasn't really possible to assemble a truly representative group. I ended up focused mostly on urban youth among my circle of friends and contacts. All had to be born into Hindu families, regardless of their current beliefs.

That settled, I studied the questionnaire distributed via Google's survey platform. When I read the questions, I was stunned by their depth.

The opening question was, "Do you today self-identify as a Hindu?" If the answer was yes, the questions delved into their ideas of God and other religious practices and beliefs, including karma, dharma and reincarnation; how Hinduism manifests in their personal lives, and the differences between themselves and the older generations in their household. If the answer was no, we asked if they were atheists, agnostics, "spiritual but not religious," or in the "I just don't care" category. We wanted to know at what point did they become estranged from Hinduism? What issues, philosophical or otherwise, did they find troubling? How do they interface with the celebration of Hindu festivals

**Nepal's youth:** (Left) Three young Nepalese enjoying their hike on the Mardi Trekking rout in front of the Mt. Annapurna massif; Amrita Tamang who works in digital marketing sits before an ornate door in Kathmandu



COURTESY AMRITA TAMANG

and other events, which are so prevalent in Nepalese culture? Finally, what they would want to change about Hinduism?

Through social media, I invited a group to participate. All agreed, but only 22 completed the lengthy online form. One of them jokingly said, "Nikki, these questions are way more complicated than my final year's math questions."

I followed up by phone with further questions. I also conducted a few group chat sessions, because I wanted to know how one reacted to another's point of view and in what way. I made mental notes as I ran the recordings past my sister and her friends and randomly put questions to people at my office. Note that the reports are based on city youth. Views from the rural areas likely vary sharply.

### BEING HINDU IN NEPAL

One thing that became immediately clear is that despite being next-door neighbors and sharing the ancient traditions, being a Hindu in Nepal is not the same as being one in India. For one thing, at just four percent Muslim and one percent Christian, politics and religion in Nepal are not so intertwined as they are in India (which was a major complaint of the Indian youth). Ninety-three percent

of Nepalese are Hindus, Buddhists or Kiratist (an indigenous religion), and these religions remain intertwined in various ways, including overlapping Deities and in the celebration of festivals. Religious tolerance is so strong in Nepal that any religion's festivals are equally celebrated by everyone.

When King Prithivi Narayan Shah unified Nepal into one nation in the 18th century, he declared Nepal as the "Real Land of Hindus." He said, "This is not a nation gained by my trifling efforts; this is the garden of all four main castes and 36 tribes/subcastes." He urged citizens to never leave the traditional dharma of the ancestors. It is deeply relevant that Nepal was never colonized by the British, so was spared the cultural consequences of such dominance. Until 2008, Nepal was officially a Hindu nation, and politicians continue to end every speech with "May Pashupatinath [Lord Siva] always protect us."

Here the four main castes are based on racial makeup and occupation. Brahmins and kshatriyas are Indo-

Aryans; vaishyas and shudras are of Mongol ethnicity. The details beyond this broad distinction are complex and would require another article, if not an entire book, to explain. For example, the Sherpa tribes in the high mountain regions are vaishyas and follow Buddhism. The hill region tribes, such as the Tamangs and Gurungs, celebrate Buddhist and Hindu festivals and have their various life rituals performed by lamas. The Magar tribe (mine) is totally Hindu, with our life rituals performed by brahmins. The Newars, the natives of Kathmandu Valley, are Hindu and Buddhist in equal ratio. All these castes and sub-castes speak their own regional languages as well as Nepali, the official language.

With religion come superstition and orthodoxy as a package deal. Some are fun to follow and others are not. We don't wear newly bought clothes on Mondays, because we believe the clothes will tear easily if worn first on that day. Wednesdays are considered "Late-days;" no new task is initiated on this day. It is inauspicious to buy or move to new houses on Tuesdays or Saturdays, as these days are ruled by malefic planets, Mars and Saturn. Seeing sandals placed upside down or empty water vessels sitting outside one's house when departing are inauspicious signs. One should fix the position of sandals and



fill the vessel (meant for passers-by) before embarking on a journey. A curious one is when a cat crosses our path we are supposed to stop and wait for someone else to pass first. There is no valid explanation to any of these customs, but we continue to practice them.

Girls are banished from their residence for 14 days when they get their first period, menarche, because they are supposedly impure at that time. The banishing event recurs every month for four days during the menstrual cycle. All Hindu households practice this exile moderately, but girls in the mid- and far-western regions of Nepal are forced to live in a cattle shed—a practice called *chaupadi*. This harmful practice has been outlawed because of its impact on mental and physical health, but it still persists due to superstitious beliefs, community endorsement and gender disparity. Many of our interviewees loathe the practice, as do I.

### BEING YOUNG IN NEPAL

We discovered many commonalities among the youth we spoke with. Nearly all have parents who are fairly religious, maintain a home shrine where they perform daily worship and engage a designated family priest who frequently comes to perform various pujas. None miss out on the popular festivals, which provide great opportunities for celebrating with family and friends, augmented today with the posting of hundreds of photos of the events on social media. Many youth express an aversion to the social divisions within the country and to certain practices, such as the aforementioned *chaupadi*. Just

about everyone had watched at least some of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* TV series as children. In this meat-eating country, there was a solitary vegetarian among those we interviewed.

Unlike what Palak encountered in India, where the youth were discouraged by the political exploitation of religion, I would say there was a definite positive outlook on the value of Nepalese religion and culture, one

**“The beauty of my culture, tradition and religion, fulfills me, makes me very happy. It is my cultural root which takes me back to my origin.”**

**SANDIP MAHARJAN**

as yet unpolluted by the politicians. For example, youth from the Newar communities are working to rediscover the Newar culture, which they believe has not been adequately preserved by their parents, who did not understand its value. With that introduction, let us now meet (in no particular order) those who responded to our questions.

**Sandip Maharjan** is a 22-year-old business management student at People's College. He is a Newa Buddhist and actively blogs about Nepalese festivals, lost heritages, Gods and temples. He celebrates all the festivals, but his favorite is Indra Jatra, the biggest carnival of Kathmandu Valley.

“As a child, I loved listening to stories from

my grandfather about Newari culture, tradition, festivals, and the Gods and Goddesses who protected the Kathmandu Valley in ancient times. My father, on the other hand, knows nothing about our culture. With my like-minded friends, I created two Facebook pages, Mysterious Nepal and Inherited Heritage, where we make posts about forgotten temples, history, cultures, etc.”

Sandip's family visits the neighborhood temple every day after worshipping in their family shrine in the mornings. He loves stopping by his neighborhood temple every morning to pray for a happy day ahead. He wants to hear ringing bells, watch people do puja and see the pigeons feeding on offerings. It is one of the most majestic and relaxing sights, he says. For him, God is a source of an unseen energy that you can feel through faith and belief. God can be in any form and anywhere.

The only tradition Sandip wishes he could nullify that his parents follow is applying excessive vermilion paste on the Gods in the name of offerings. He thinks doing so degrades the beauty of beautifully carved idols.

He identifies himself as Hindu, he believes in the institution and feels that being religious fulfills him. “In what way?” I asked in a follow-up phone conversation. “I write

.....  
**Religious experience in Nepal:** (left to right) Contemplative sites, like this one being enjoyed by Sandip, abound in the spectacular country; Teej celebration, full on; father and daughter being blessed during the 2019 Indra Jatra festival.

## From Solitary Introspection to Nepal's Festival Life



**SANDIP MAHARJAN**



SULVA SHRESTHA

# Nepal's Fulsome Festival Calendar



SIRAJ AHMAD

**N**OT A SINGLE MONTH IN MY COUNTRY passes without the celebration of a festivity of one sort or the other, nor is there a single locality without its own way of celebrating major festivals or the traditional procession of a local Deity. Ninety percent of our festivals are religious, or, more accurately, begin with religious ceremonies, shift to spirited celebration in the streets and end with friendly feasting and fun with friends and family. This has been our way of celebrating since time immemorial.

Here's a list of the major festivals (*jatras* or *chad parva* in Nepali), celebrated either nationwide, in certain regions or by specific ethnic groups, but all on a grand scale. We follow the lunar calendar, so festival dates change each year, and even get adjusted mid-year in some instances.

We start, of course, with **New Year**, which is the first day of our month of Baisakh and falls on April 14 in 2021 (all dates here are for 2021). It's a public holiday celebrated by each of the various communities in their own way, with the festivals in Bhaktapur the most famous and boisterous.

Next comes **Mata Tirtha Aunshi** on the new moon of April (the 21st this year) during which everyone pays homage to their mother, either in person or, if she's passed on, through prayers to her spirit at Mata-tirtha Pond on the outskirts of Kathmandu, or at the Pashupatinath Temple. We call this Mother's Day here—it predates the Western

holiday by centuries, but the idea is the same.

**Buddha Jayanti** (literally “Buddha's birthday,” but also the day of his enlightenment and death), May 26, is a national holiday and celebrated by many Hindus as well. On **Guru Purnima**, July 24, we honor our teachers, but it is not a national holiday. For **Janai Purnima** on the full moon day of August, those wearing the sacred thread, *janai*, will change them. It's a public holiday celebrated nationwide by eating kwati, a soup made of nine types of beans. Everyone ties a sacred thread called *doro* around their wrist to purify their soul and protect them from harm. Like the Indian festival Raksha Bandan, it honors the bond of love and affection between brothers and sisters, with sisters tying the colorful *rakhi* bracelet on their brother's wrist. It is an auspicious time for Nepali Shamans to perform rites at Kumbeshwar in Patan, Gosaikunda in Langtang and Charikot in Dolakha.

The following day is **Gai Jatra**, the cow festival, in Kathmandu Valley, a public holiday to commemorate the death of loved ones.

In addition to Mother's Day, we also have a Father's Day, **Kushe Aunsi** (not derived from the Western holiday, which is even more recent than Mother's Day), an ancient festival to show respect and gratitude to one's father and ancestors. It's on September 7 this year, celebrated by everyone, but not a public holiday. If the father has passed on, the *shradda*, yearly death rituals, are performed.

**Haritalika Teej**, or just Teej, is Nepal's well-known women's-only festival, a national holiday in which all dress in red. It falls on September 9 this year on. Married women fast and pray to Lord Siva on this day for their husband's well-being and long life, while unmarried women fast in the hopes of getting a suitable match like Lord Siva. Two days after Teej is **Rishi Panchami**, also a festival just for women. On this day we pray to the Sapta Rishis and Arundhati, wife of Vashistha, who devoted their lives for the well-being of mankind and society. All women, including girls who have experienced menarche, take part in the worship, seeking forgiveness for any errors committed during their monthly periods.

The eight-day Newar community festival of **Indra Jatra**, which takes place in September this year, is to thank the God Indra for abundant rain for rice cultivation. It's the biggest street festival of the year, featuring masked dancers and the procession of the royal Kumari, along with Gods Bhairabh and Ganesh, through the ancient areas of Kathmandu. The last day, the 23rd, is a public holiday.

**Dashain**, which corresponds to Navaratri and Vijaya Dashami in India, is here a five-day holiday, this year from October 12 to 16, and the biggest for all Nepalese. As in India, it honors Goddess Durga and involves lots of family gatherings and feasting. A few weeks later, November 2 to 6 this year, is **Tihar**, the second-biggest national festival, involving the worship of crows, dogs, cows, oxen and the Goddess Lakshmi, with the fifth day being the festival of brothers and sisters. The last three days are national holidays.

The **Chhat** festival in early November is the biggest festival of Southern Nepal's Terai region. It centers around the worship of the Sun God and His sister Chhati Mai. **Maghe Sankranti**, in mid-January, marking the end of the month with the winter solstice, is a special day for the Tharu community of Southern Nepal and the Magars.

Of course, in this land sacred to Siva, **Maha Shivaratri** is celebrated nationwide, this year on the night of March 11, just as it is across the Hindu world. **Fagu Purnima** is the national spring festival—Holi in India—and celebrated the same way with the tossing of colors upon everyone.

In **Ghode Jatra**, “Horse Parade Festival,” the Newars of Kathmandu pay homage to the local Goddess and enjoy family feasts. The Nepal Army's horse races at Tundikhel ground are a popular event. It is officially the last festival of year; this year on April 11. 🐎



about my religion for my Facebook page, I study a lot for that. Whenever I finish writing about one aspect, I learn about others, too. That beauty about my culture, tradition and religion fulfills me, makes me very happy. It is my cultural root which takes me back to my origin."

If he had to change one thing about Hinduism it would be the ranking of the caste system that prevails, because he likes a world where everyone is treated equally.

**Amrita Tamang**, 26, is a research associate with the Think Aloud digital marketing company in Kathmandu and an aspiring actress. Her family are vaishyas. Her parents are quite religious people who follow the rites and rituals of any normal Nepali family. But neither she nor her siblings do the daily ritual on their own.

"I don't know if it is a surprising thing, but my parents follow both Hinduism and Buddhism. We celebrate Dashain and Tihar and, at the same time, our righteous rituals are performed by a lama according to the Buddhist tradition. So, we actually are not hardcore followers of just one religion. I even visit a church sometimes."

Amrita has immense respect for the Hindu religion, but she dislikes the menstrual taboos. She also hates the animal sacrificing ritual at many festivals in the name of God. I asked her, "How can you eat meat and not

approve of slaughtering?" She replied defensively, "I don't eat meat by choice, I eat it because my doctor was concerned about my protein count and prescribed it to me."

Amrita loves Tihar, the festival of lights, and the fifth day, Bhai Tika, is her favorite. They have a gathering on that day; her

**"What we do in life is karma, what we serve to people is dharma and what we get after death is reincarnation."**

**PRAJAN DANGOL**

paternal aunts come to her house and they celebrate Bhai Tika. Making *selrotis* (a famed Nepalese sweetbread) for this special occasion brings her great happiness, because all her family members love eating them.

**Manish Pandit** is a 25-year-old teacher at the Caspian Valley College of the Kathmandu Schools of Hospitality Management, which he co-owns with his friends.

Manish's parents are quite religious and sometimes superstitious but flexible, which he attributes to the fact that they were brought up at a time when the literacy rate of the country was very low. He has noticed that the religiousness of a person tends to increase more as they grow older, and his

parents' case is no different. He offered, "I guess people become wiser with age and experience and tend to incline more towards believing in the existence of God, so they are more drawn to religion than youngsters."

If there is one thing he could change about Hindu customs, it would be to alleviate the physical pain that a mourner goes through during the 13-day rituals following a death in the family. Sons shave their heads, put on white loincloths and are confined to one room where they are impelled to sleep on the floor. They eat one meal a day, of rice and ghee with no salt, for the entire 13 days while they observe the death rites for their parents. Mourners are considered ritually impure, and people avoid touching them.

Manish hates it that at this time of grievance when mourners need the support of friends and family (maybe hugs, too), tradition obliges mourners to go through such solitary austerities.

He is not a hardcore believer in Hinduism, but he is certain there is a powerful entity that governs the functioning of the universe, whatever it may be called. He feels there are so many aspects of life that we do not know and understand and everything around us works in so many mysterious ways, how could all this be possible without such an overarching entity.

Manish believes in karma, because nothing in life comes free. One has to pay for

everything one does here; the only difference is when, how much and in what currency. If you do good, you will be good and if you intentionally do bad you must pay a heavy price.

**Prajan Dangol**, 26, served as a teenage priest for five consecutive years during the Shikhali Jatra festival at the Rudrayani and Shikhali temples in Khokana. Now he is an IT engineer at Dish Home TV Station.

It's obvious that his family is religious, given that they are priests in Nepal's tantric tradition. They start their day with morning puja at home to Laxmi, Bhimsen and Buddha and then to Goddess Rudrayani at their family temple.

He appreciates his parents' lifestyle; but given a chance, he would like to introduce a modern approach to fit the religion into a busy schedule, so that life and religion can coexist. He would minimize the length of rituals and the cost involved, so that everyone could fit a decent puja into their budget. There should not come a time when people avoid ancestral customs by giving excuses of

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**The Youth of Nepal:** (counter clockwise from left) Femita Khadka, dental surgeon; Prajan Dangol from a priest family, Manish Pandit, teacher; Sajja Malla, business student; Nepal's famed festival sweetbread, selroti



WIKICOMMONS

time and money.

He celebrates festivals, mainly at his community temples of Goddesses Shikhali and Rudrayani. He fasts on special days for both the Deities while preparing a big puja in their honor, doing it with honesty and respect. Hinduism is an important aspect of his life.

For Prajan, God is what people believe in even though they can't see Him. He says, "I believe in karma, dharma and reincarnation because they are the three aspects of human beings. What we do in life is karma, what we serve to people is dharma and what we get after death is reincarnation."

**Sajja Malla**, 20, is majoring in business studies at Presidential Business School. Her parents perform morning and evening puja. They do not eat until they make water

offerings to God and forefathers. She doesn't participate in everyday puja but happily follows Hinduism, which she fondly calls "my religion." "I search for God in the images and statues at temples. I pray whenever I see one, although I am unsure of their physical existence. But I do believe in energy and consider there is a higher self. That might define the Supreme to me."

She loves going on pilgrimage with her family and cherishes the times of visiting Muktinath in northwest Nepal and Pathivara in Taplejung district. Both temples are worshiped with equal reverence by Hindus and Buddhists.

She celebrates Teej, Dashain, Tihar, Holi, etc, but above all loves and enjoys the vibes of Tihar. "These five days make the best time of the year. The entire place is covered with lights and flowers, and everywhere people are cherishing their family and friends. The rangoli and other decorations enhance the existing joy of spending time with family, and playing cards. The sounds of the Deusi Bhailo songs and firecrackers all around add to the fun of the festival, like the icing on a cake. Besides all that, the day of Bhaiteka is precious to me as it is followed by the fun of shopping and packing gifts for my brothers. It's the festival whose preparation is as much fun as the festival itself!"

Sajja said, "I try reflecting on my actions to guide me when I am wrong. As I believe in

## Let's Hear from a Country's Youth



**FEMITA KHADKA**

COURTESY FEMITA KHADKA



**PRAJAN DANGOL**

COURTESY PRAJAN DANGOL



**MANISH PANDIT**

COURTESY MANISH PANDIT



**SAJJA MALLA**

COURTESY SAJJA MALLA



karma, I try not to spend my energy on every bad event and let karma take charge. I am aware that you get what you give; however, I believe people should help when they can without expecting a return. Regarding reincarnation, though I have not experienced or heard of it in my personal circle, I have heard stories and I believe them."

Sajja has suffered from migraine headaches from childhood, and practices *anulom vilom* (cross breathing) learned from her mother, as it provides relief. She studied yoga with Isha Foundation and benefited greatly. "Dharma, artha, kama and moksha are the four beliefs of Hinduism, which I guess not only works for Hindus. Every being ever born comes with the time they are destined with. The beginning and end are not in our hands. But the living process relies on our actions heavily. The fact that we are taught to do good deeds in life definitely influences us ethically. It leads us in a good path, and hence our actions manifest in our hereafter." I was particularly impressed at Sajja's level of spiritual understanding at just age 20. Most her age are into fashion, Instagram and relationships, while she is exploring her inner self.

Sajja says the one thing about the religion she wishes she could uproot is gender inequality. "Speaking honestly, I think Hinduism has been supporting patriarchal practices for ages. It has deeply implanted the idea in the society that men are superior to women, which at present has taken on

new forms. I've never seen a female priest in a temple, and I object to widows having to remove their jewelry and colorful clothes. And I'll certainly never understand why even today, in the name of religion, females are treated as "untouchables" during their period."

**Shefali Shrestha**, 25, is in customer relations at a Siddhartha Bank in Kathmandu. She identifies herself as Hindu, believes

**"People are still fixated on discriminating on the basis of their caste, gender, culture, skin, class and so on, which to my thinking no religion has ever taught us to do."**

**SHEFALI SHRESTHA**

in God and has faith in Hinduism. To her, God is someone who created the world and taught us to love all living beings and believe in ourselves. She says watching the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* taught people to respect elders, love the younger ones, have faith in oneself, be good and do good without giving up. She believes in karma—that good will return to us in some way some day.

She would not change anything about Hinduism. Rather, she feels that it's people who need to reform their perspective on

religion. "People have made up beliefs which I don't think any religion has ever taught us. Even in today's modern world, people are still fixated on discriminating on the basis of their caste, gender, culture, skin, class and so on, which to my thinking no religion has ever taught us to do."

"There isn't much difference between my thinking about Hinduism and that of my parents. I'll be honest, they used to strictly believe in the caste system and were superstitious, but not anymore. With time, they have changed their thinking and are slowly adapting to modern traditions."

**Femita Khadka**, 25, is a dental surgeon at a Nepal Medical College. Her family is very religious. Every day starts with puja, her mother fasts on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and they have a family priest conduct Griha Shanti puja trimonthly to ward off negative energy and increase the family's prosperity. Even their birthday celebrations start with puja.

With religion comes superstition, she said. Her family forbids females entering into the kitchen or shrine during their menstrual cycle days. As an obedient Hindu daughter, it is not an issue for her to follow, but is also part of why she calls herself spiritual but not religious. As a 12-year-old girl

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**Interviewees:** (left to right) Shefali Shrestha, banker; Roni Shakya, women's health trainer; Suprime Lal Amatya, computer science graduate

she was treated as an untouchable during her first menstruation cycle. Out of nowhere, her parents locked her in a room for 15 days, telling her that she now was impure, and she must not let the impurities rub off on males of the family. At the end of this process, called *gufa rakhne*, meaning "cave retreat," is the rite of passage when a girl becomes a woman. She dresses like a bride in a red sari. A priest conducts a puja to purify her and celebrate her stepping into womanhood.

Many women fast on Teej festival without a drop of water for the whole day and faint. Her grandmother fasts despite suffering from abdominal problems. She thinks these kinds of religious traditions in the name of God are self-imposed and unnecessary. Femita doesn't like the idea of limiting Hindu temples only to Hindus. She also doesn't like the practice of buying overpriced small murtis of the Gods to take home.

She loved Lord Krishna's character from the *Mahabharata*. "He taught us that the goal of life is to be happy and that we need to welcome every challenge patiently because God loves testing us."

**Suprim Lal Amatya**, 24, is a computer science graduate from Kathmandu University of Science who now runs an online grocery store, Ghar Aangan Service.

Suprim is born in a Newar Hindu family who firmly believe that chanting mantras while praying to God with a pure heart will rid them of pain, misery and sufferings. He feels that their prayers and daily worship at their shrine room are their greatest strength amidst their daily struggle. "They worship early morning at sunrise with the bathing of the Gods and arati. Again at dusk a puja is also done." For Suprim, Hinduism means to carry out the daily worship and celebrate festivals with family and friends. He likes the religion the way it is.

Still, he says, "Even if I consider myself a Hindu, I'm not much of a believer. Yes, I do worship the Gods, but I don't think I've got a strong faith in them." Buddhism also appeals to him because, he says, Buddha was born as a normal prince but achieved something that no one else ever could. Thus, people consider him God, follow his path and want to achieve supreme knowledge like he did.

Suprim's family go to temples for birthdays and festivals. He is considered the lazy one when it comes to going to temple—he pays respect from afar, looks at the temple and touches his head and chest three times in a gesture of salutation.

As with everyone else, he loves the festivals,

especially the Rato Macchendranath Jatra (in April/May) when the 60-foot-tall chariot is pulled with thick ropes through the streets of Patan by hundreds of devotees. "I myself have volunteered to pull the chariot several times. During this festival, I get to meet my friends, enjoy and return home full of memories. We also organize a feast at home for



our close relatives."

**Helen Rai**, 24, an IT professional from Udaypur, rated her parent's religiousness as 55 on a scale of 1 to 10. Her own rating is probably a bit lower. She's the only one interviewed whose family does not maintain a home shrine or perform daily worship. She considers herself neither Hindu nor atheist: her simple answer is "I just don't care."

Still, Helen and her family make time to go to temples on special occasions, such as birthdays, and celebrate the festivals with relatives. But she feels forced to attend Hindu events like weddings; she says she does so because "I have no other choice."

Helen comes across as a person who believes more in practicality than the written theory of Hinduism or any religion. She would rather learn moral behavior from religious television shows than follow a religion that comes with the baggage of dos and don'ts. And if there were one thing she would change about Hinduism, it would be the prejudice that it has created which supports sexism and racism.

**Roni Shakya**, 25, is a sexual and

reproductive health and rights trainer certified by the World Health Organization. She works for the Mary Stopes organization (among others) promoting women's equality and rights. Her family are technically Newa Buddhists, but like many of the Newas, they identify themselves as Hindus. Roni feels it more accurate to call herself "spiritual but not religious." She believes in God and that His superior powers will always protect mankind in need.

Roni's great-great-grandparents were religious for whatever reason and equally followed Hindu and Buddhist traditions. That is what came down to her grandparents, parents and eventually to her generation. As a first-born Shakya girl, she was expected to become a Buddhist nun and serve in a community temple for the rest of her life. It did not sit well with her. "I love eating, I love dressing up, I love my job, I love traveling, and at the same time I have immense respect for God, so if you let me live my life my way and serve God at the same time, I will happily serve as a nun." Her implicit refusal created quite an uproar in her Shakya community, and the leaders are still upset with her.

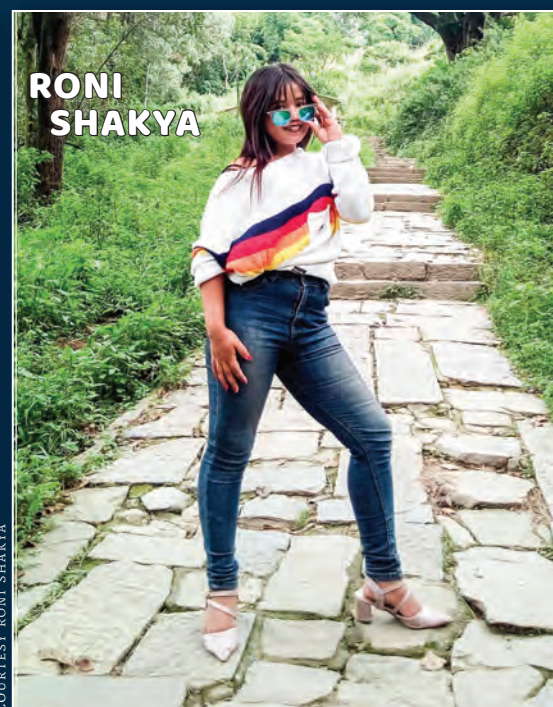
As an advocate and trainer for menstrual hygiene, she objects to the customs around menstruation, such as women being forbidden to receive tika or prasad on Dashain if they are experiencing their menses. These and related restrictions, such as the chaupadi system, pushed her away from religion. Personally, she chooses to participate in all the functions despite having her period.

She is against the offering of animals at temple, even though she herself enjoys eating meat. Since there is already a system of places and people to supply meat, slaughter at the temple is unnecessary. "I am also against the casteism that is so pervasive among Hindu people."

**Tajbij Gartaula**, 27, a social worker, was born into a brahmin family. They begin each day with worship of God, their ancestors and their family Deity, attend the temple and festivals, and go on pilgrimage regularly. "These activities show that my parents are religious and Hinduism is an important aspect of my life." Tajbij jokingly says he likes Dashain and Tihar the most, because he gets new clothes for the occasion. Tajbij comes across as a kind-hearted person despite his masculine tone. He strongly believes in karma and takes responsibility for his actions.

"For me God is the one who decides my future depending upon how much hard work I do to become successful. Hinduism has always taught me to respect my elders and love younger ones." However, personally

## Balancing Ancient and Modern Ways





performing everyday puja at the home shrine, making mandatory visits to temples and donning the sacred thread is not religion to him—in this he differs greatly from his parents.

**Astha Shrestha**, 27, has just graduated as a dental surgeon but hasn't yet found a job. Her parents are "moderately" religious. They believe in God but do not perform any elaborate rituals, nor offer flowers, oil lamps and incense sticks every morning at a home shrine. Her mother goes to the temple every Saturday, and other members go during festivals.

For Astha, God is a belief, a hope, a trust that keeps people sane. Hinduism is a religious institution that is very important to her, but it doesn't dominate her life. She believes in equality and religious tolerance, "live and let live" and doesn't agree with her parents' bias against other religions.

"I believe that all the things we say or do have effects. So, karma and dharma have meanings more intellectually than in a spiritual way. I'm a bit skeptical about reincarnation."

**Hirmun Adhikari**, 24, is a hotel management student who belongs to an Upadhyaya brahmin family from Nepalgunj, Southern Nepal. Upadhyaya are the highest-ranking brahmins. They are allowed to study the *Vedas* and become family priests authorized to perform the samskara rites of passage, such as marriage. His father, however, was a manager at the Tribhuvan airport in Kathmandu and worked 18 hours a day at his job to support the family. It left him no time for even the home rituals.

Despite being a Hindu, Hirmun went to a premier Catholic school in Lucknow, India, with both Christians and Muslims where, he says, he learned about religion and "what it is to live in a peaceful, secular environment." As a Hindu, he folds his hands respectfully in namaste when his mother does puja at their home shrine or twice daily recites the prayers given by their priest. He loves celebrating festivals, praying to God and going to temples in search of inner peace and

**"The world is moving faster, and there need to be some changes that fit us. Religion is made for us; we are not made for religion."**

**HIRMUN ADHIKARI**

the path of truth—what he calls practical Hinduism, whose principles he respects. But, he says, he "does not pray the way the Hindu books want us to." Also, "to be honest, I have no knowledge about karma, dharma or incarnations. These are, from what I've heard, the essentials of Hinduism."

His parents have been to many pilgrimage destinations in India, but he has only gone to Ayodhya and Varanasi. He would have preferred to go hiking with his friends in the mountains but was instead "dragged to Varanasi" by his parents. Once there, though, he became enamored by the spectacular evening Ganga arati (worship with oil lamps) at Dasawamedh Ghat and forgot what he was complaining about. He attended three

evenings of worship and ever since has felt a special attachment to the holy city.

He thinks that *God* is a term given to us to make us believe there is something in this world that helps us in the form of energy. He sees little value just in Hinduism being the oldest religion, especially when that's taken to mean it shouldn't change. He finds it illogical that Hindus are allowed to eat certain types of animals but not others.

Hirmun complains about Hinduism being used for political purposes, personal gain and business. He feels the various festival rituals are losing their originality by being modernized wrongly.

When asked what he would change about the Hindu religion, he said, "I would change the inferiority complexes and restrictions. The world is moving faster, and there need to be some changes that fit with us. Religion is made for us; we are not made for religion."

**Neelam Ghale**, 27, is an English teacher who comes from a moderately religious background. Her parents perform daily worship at home, fast on certain days, visit the temples and celebrate the festivals. As a Hindu, she doesn't eat beef, because it is the symbol of the Goddess Lakshmi (as well as the national animal of Nepal).

For Neelam, God is divine and Hinduism is her way of living and belief. She maintains a home shrine of her own at her new home, following her and husband's family's tradition. She also offers water to a peepal tree (*Ficus religiosa*, under which Buddha found enlightenment) as did her parents. She

follows these religious activities as a conscious life style choice, while her parents took it as compulsion.

**Himani Shree Pokharel**, 22, comes from a brahmin family of Khandbari Sankhuwasabha district and is presently studying public health in Kathmandu. "My mother is a religious woman," she explains, "and has strong faith in God and the culture she inherited. She fasts, holds pujas and performs all the religious activities. My dad is very supportive of her."

Her father taught her and her brother meditation from a young age to connect them to the spiritual self and also as a mental discipline. But she finds the meaning of meditation has changed course for her as she grew older and continued her journey of self-discovery. It has shifted to finding time to do things that give one joy. For Himani, that became doodling, painting, reading and so on.

Himani self-identifies as a Hindu. She likes going on pilgrimage. She has been on many in Nepal with her family, and there are Indian destinations on her bucket list. At temples, she finds peace in the smell of incense, ringing of bells and enchanting atmosphere. Like everybody else, she loves Tihar, making rangoli, lighting oil lamps, singing

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**Blending the old with the new:** (left to right) Hirmun Adikara, hotel management student from a priest family; Astha Shrestha, dental surgeon; Himani Shree Pokhrel, also in public health; Neelam Ghale, English teacher

Deusi Vailo songs and enjoying the special foods. Religious TV programs, such as the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, taught her to be honest.

"Hinduism is an important aspect of my life because it has contributed a lot to the person I am today, be it my morals, values, empathy, kindness and so on." But she wouldn't follow anything that she can't comprehend simply in the name of religion. She would impart the same to her children, if she has any in the

**"I have always kept my faith apart from what I learn in school, so I don't think the two worlds ever got a chance to collide."**

**HIMANI SHREE POKHAREL**

future. "I would be very happy if my children followed my religion and tradition without me having to force them."

"God is someone who guides us through this journey of life. They don't necessarily have to be a single person or an all-powerful being. As the concept of God is different for everyone, divine forms may be different for everyone. I have always kept my faith apart from what I learn in school, so I don't think the two worlds ever got a chance to collide."

**Achyut Kiran Adhikari**, 21, from Gorahi Dang is a medical student at Kathmandu University of Medical Science. He belongs to a fairly religious family and enjoys all the holidays, especially Holi, because he loves playing

with the colored powders.

Achyut claims that he learned moral values, religious principles, standing up for one's rights, being truthful to oneself, kindness and forgiveness from religious TV programs. That doesn't mean he follows all the customs, like his parents tend to, just because something is tagged as religious. He likes to do his own research, correlate things with science and then may apply those he feels are good.

He says, "God is the Almighty that is above all the explainable as well as unexplainable forces. I don't think of a particular person or an image as God but rather as a virtue that helps me walk in the right track." He worships his God every day with rice, flowers and incense. When he has time, he visits nearby temples to gain inner peace. Achyut practices meditation as taught by his grandparents. He chants Aum, which he believes vibrates even in the vast nothing. He claims the chanting brings him nearer to himself.

"Karma is what we do, dharma is what we should be ideally doing. Regarding reincarnation, I believe that though the physical form can be destroyed, the soul cannot. So, yes, a soul might take another body and reincarnate.

"Hinduism, the Sanatana Dharma, is itself quite scientific, but the addition of things through time for someone's selfishness has corrupted its real values. I would like to have a thorough research done, because there are

## Many Youth, Many Views



**HIRMUN ADHIKARI**

COURTESY HRIMUN ADHIKARI



**ASTHA SHRESTHA**

COURTESY ASTHA SHRESTHA



**HIMANI SHREE POKHAREL**

COURTESY HIMANI SHREE POKHAREL



**NEELAM GHALE**

COURTESY NEELAM GHALE



a lot of things we still have to know about Hinduism.”

### COMPARING TO INDIA'S YOUTH

This article was developed along the same lines as HINDUISM TODAY's 2019 piece, “Hindu Youth in India Speak Out about the Role of Religion in their Lives,” written by Palak Malik. An obvious question at this point, then, is: “How do the youth in the two countries compare?”

While the two nations are adjacent, their histories are quite different. Nepal was never colonized or subjected to Macaulay's education system. Conversion to another religion was illegal until 1990, and the country was officially Hindu until 2008. Neither Islam nor, until recently, Christianity, have had a noticeable presence.

Compared to Indian youth, we found Nepalese youth are more observant Hindus. For us, Hinduism manifests subconsciously in our everyday life when we go to the temple or participate in festival celebrations, and those experiences continuously nurture our cultural values. At the same time, a deep understanding of Hindu philosophy is rare here. There is only a meager chance that you will find a book written in Nepal dedicated to Hinduism. Usually there are just sporadic mentions of our religion in books on Nepali festivals and culture. We are more concentrated on how our festivals and cultures formed, what era they came into existence and how to preserve our heritage and long-lost art styles. Most of us would rather watch the *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata* on TV than read the books in print, even the

*Bhagavad Gita*. The only holy book we want to read is *Swasthani Brata Katha*, which we do in a ceremonious manner each year in the month of Magh (January/February). It is the story of the Goddess Swasthani, a form of Shakti, and derived from the *Skanda Purana*. It is very dear to us as it is very Nepalese, unlike the aforementioned epics.

Many Nepalese youths said they are both learning and unlearning how Hinduism guides their life. They are questioning the blind practices their families have followed

**“I don't think of God as a particular person or an image, but rather as a virtue that helps me walk in the right track.”**

**ACHYUT KIRAN ADHIKARI**

for generations, blending in modern ideas to walk the path of spiritual awakening. They want to discard or modify customs such as chaupadi and patriarchy that were introduced here in the name of religion. The new generations want to make changes in the culture introduced, not in the theoretical philosophy of Hinduism.

There is no denying that Nepal is an under-developed country. People are still dependent on family; individuality has not yet fully developed. The power of voicing an opinion, other than on politics or gender disparity, is a new idea for us. Still, I was impressed by how articulate some of the interviewees were. I

realize that you, our readers, may find the answers under-thought because you are more exposed to those of Indian youths, who are advanced by a 1,000 miles over the Nepalese. But for me as a Nepali, I am very encouraged by their insightful responses.

### CONCLUSION

Many people opened up their heart for this article giving their honest take on Hinduism and religion. Most said yes, we have to save our tradition, go back to our roots, keep the activities alive and pass these values on to our children. There were few outright rebels against Hinduism. Everyone seems to know how to blend their secular/modern approach into their parents' way of following traditions. Everybody enjoys festivals, especially the two biggest, Dashain and Tihar, which we call “Dashain Tihar” in one breath. Here in Nepal, coming together as a family to celebrate festivals is being a Hindu.

The idea of yoga as a spiritual practice is still nascent here, but yoga as a fitness regime became popular long ago when Baba Ram Dev appeared at wee hours in the morning on TV, forcing all the obese ones to lose weight.

I was pleased that almost all believe in dharma and karma—that “What goes around comes around.” What the next generations need, in my opinion, is to become

morally sound and keep their heritages intact as they make choices in life.

I think even when they say they don't believe in God and don't worship God in the traditional way their parents do, the fact that they go to temple for “inner peace” shows that deep down they perhaps unknowingly believe in God. Otherwise, why would they find peace or think that energy is balanced at His door? 🍵

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**Celebrating heritage:** (left to right) *Tajbij Gartaula, social worker; Achyut Kiran Adhikari, medical student; pulling the chariot during the Bisket Festival in Bhaktapur, a weeklong event marking the ancient solar new year*

## The Author

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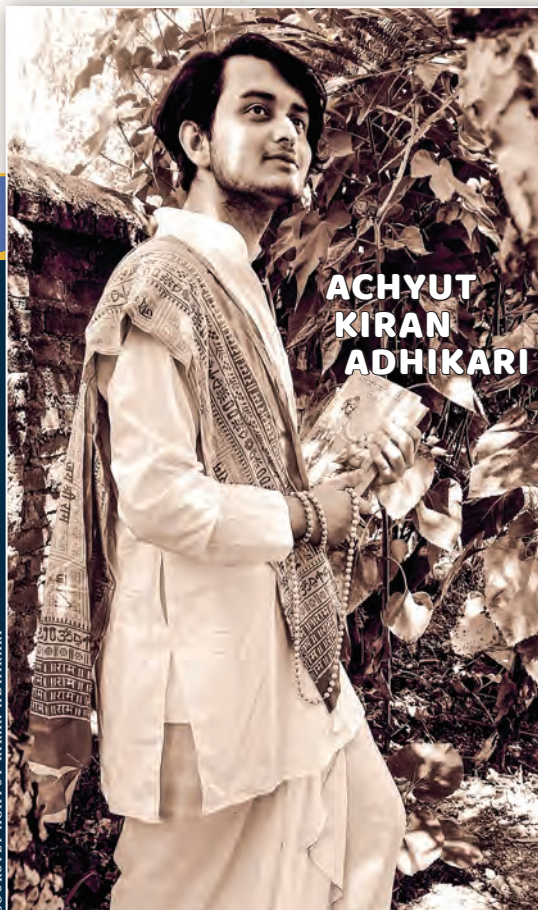
## A Bright Future Forward

**TAJBII  
GARTAULA**



COURTESY TAJBIJ GARTAULA

**ACHYUT  
KIRAN  
ADHIKARI**



COURTESY ACHYUT KIRAN ADHIKARI



THOMAS KELLY



# Sewa Tackles the Covid-19 Crisis with Strategic Tools

Teams from BAPS, HSS and Chinmaya Mission join Sewa International on the front lines to help the most vulnerable during the continuing pandemic

BY VIDYASAGAR TONTALAPUR, COLORADO  
SEWA INTERNATIONAL (SEWA MEANS service) is a Hindu faith-based Indian-American charity. In March 2020, when the US detected its first Covid-19 infections, Sewa responded by opening non-medical helplines. Within weeks the US economy tumbled, colleges closed and companies laid off workers. Anxious families called in to learn how to protect themselves. Stranded Indian students wanted help to pay apartment rent and buy food. Sewa realized it had to scale up its response as the nerve-racking crisis spread globally.

On March 22, fourteen travelers from India visiting the US rushed to the John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York. Scared

of Covid-19, they wanted to return home—but India had closed its airports to overseas flights the previous night. Now penniless, these tourists started searching for housing. They found a gurdwara in Queens, New York, but could not stay long: the Sikh temple soon had to shut its doors to obey the lockdown declared by the state of New York.

Stranded in a foreign city, they called the Indian Consulate in New York. The consulate turned to Sewa International, calling Sewa's non-medical Covid-19 helpline: "A few travelers from India are stuck in Queens. Can you take care of them?"

Take care of them Sewa did, with warmth and diligence. For two months, volunteers hosted the marooned travelers in Connecti-

cut motels, shifting them from motel to motel a few times when management forced them to vacate in response to other motel guests who became alarmed at having neighbors wearing beards and turbans.

With no restaurants open, the meals were initially supplied by Indian-American homes in New Jersey. One motel opened its kitchen for the travelers, and volunteers brought in pots and pans. Some cooked, others washed dishes as the group started making meals. One

**Team Sewa:** (below) Volunteers are a spirited force for good; (right) bringing masks and basic necessities to a Native American reservation in Arizona



person with a cough caused alarm; volunteers took him to a physician and learned that he suffered from a common cold; he tested negative for the novel coronavirus. Finally a chartered Air India rescue flight became available. Sewa workers pooled money to buy flight tickets, arranged a taxi, and sent the stranded visitors home on May 14.

Before leaving, the grateful travelers presented siropas to the volunteers in an emotional get-together. In the Sikh tradition a siropa, a saffron cloth placed around the neck, is a symbol of great honor. Sewa volunteers earned many such accolades as they continued to serve people in distress during the Covid-19 pandemic.

By size and revenue, Sewa is a small charity. It has 4,500 volunteers and received eight million dollars in revenue in 2019. Yet, it achieved what many bigger, wealthier nonprofits failed to accomplish. Sewa made an impact in the community by providing the exact service most needed at the moment. It supplied masks and protective gear to front-line workers who were risking their lives. It distributed food to the hungry and homeless when job losses caused hardship. Its volunteers served people selflessly, expecting nothing in return. They put into practice a principle the Hindu culture and tradition has espoused from time immemorial: *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, "the whole world is one family." All Dharmic traditions—Hindu, Sikh, Jain and Buddhist—adhere to this vision. During the pandemic, temples, gurdwaras, bha-jan and kirtan groups joined hands to serve. Language and regional associations, cultural organizations and yoga groups added their might. Together they enabled themselves and their adopted homelands to fight the disease.

Sewa International is present in 26 countries, with 46 chapters in the US alone. The group partners with India's Sewa Bharati, a non-governmental service organization (NGO) started in 1979. Sewa has provided pandemic relief in many countries besides the US and India. It is active in Canada, UK, Australia, Nepal, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Trinidad & Tobago, to name a few.

Patience, consistency and hard work have helped Sewa make an imprint on the US national nonprofit scene as a charity to reckon with. Founded in India in 1979, Sewa had to wait until 2003 for its US debut. Unprecedented immigration of tech workers from India to the US accelerated its activities in later years. In 2017, when Hurricane Harvey devastated Houston, Sewa dove deep into relief work. Its rescue and rehabilitation efforts received full praise from Houstonians and the US media. During the floods in the Indian states of Gujarat (2017) and Kerala (2018), Sewa saved many lives and restored villages by rebuilding houses and schools.



## Gearing Up

A few weeks into the pandemic, the need for protective gear grew severe in the US. San Mateo County, CA, was ready to order a US Air Force plane to pick up N-95 masks from Sewa's Houston office, but the charity sent the masks by courier. San Mateo's Covid-19 Incident Commander, Roberto Manchia, wrote to Sewa, lauding the charity for providing vital resources to healthcare workers. "Sewa's gift of N-95 masks will allow these professionals to fulfill their mission of caring for the sick while staying healthy and able to continue to serve," he wrote.

An acute shortage of masks had put caregivers' and frontline workers' lives at risk. Many Indian-American physicians treating Covid-19 patients were contracting the virus. Requests for masks from doctors and their families and friends flooded Sewa's Covid-19 WhatsApp groups. The message was unambiguous: people on the frontline fighting the pandemic needed protection. Sewa knew what the community wanted. They had to make decisions and find ways to stem the growing fear in the community.

"It tested our ability to respond to an emerging crisis. We had to do what was needed most at the moment. The challenge was to devise a plan to sustain the momentum and continue relief work," Prof. Sree Sreenath, Sewa's past president, recalled. He

reported that Sewa procured 300,000 masks and hundreds of gallons of sanitizers within a few days. Health clinics thanked Sewa by posting photos of the masks received in their social media messages.

The increasing number of infections and deaths caused a high alert in the country. Like the nodes of a massive banyan tree, volunteers formed small groups across the country. Their homes became virtual war rooms for planning and organizing the complex relief work. A team of 200 physicians, attorneys, career specialists and yogis focused their attention on the health and economic angles of the pandemic. To date, they have conducted 102 webinars on wellbeing, immunity, work and immigration issues.

Next came the Sewa Sankalp initiative, which aimed to combine Dharmic resources to ward off the Covid-19 threat and build cooperation and collaboration among various Dharmic groups. It was an ambitious effort to bring all Dharmic groups together in service to the community. Volunteers sent the Sankalp Patra (a letter of intent) to 1,000 Dharmic organizations, and 500 of them signed the pledge. Several Dharmic institutions gave money, material and volunteers to the Sewa relief work in key cities.

The Dharma Coalition Report prepared by Sewa provides a high-level view of this relief work, featuring 98 Dharmic organizations to



start with. Among the many organizations profiled in the report are Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS), Chinmaya Mission, Vedanta Society, Hindus of Greater Houston, Hindu American Federation (HAF), Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Gayatri Parivar, Arya Samaj of Greater Houston, BAPS Sri Swamy Narayan Mandir and Gujarati and Jain Samaj. By joining hands with Sewa or working on their own, Dharmic institutions helped soften the blow of the pandemic, serving meals, food packets, milk and other essentials to the needy.

Sewa has distributed 686,500 N-95 and KN-95 surgical and 103,000 homemade masks, and it has served over 100,000 hot meals and food packets across the country. Volunteers served meals at health care facilities, senior care centers and fire stations. They delivered boxes of masks to police stations and county offices. Sewa's mask drives helped plug a critical gap of protective gear in many cities, including Houston, TX; Atlanta, GA; Fremont, CA; and Parsippany, NJ.

By late August, Sewa's relief work was gaining traction and slowing the march of the virus. Those without time to volunteer reached for their wallet, donating \$1.25 million to the charity. Shifting gears to focus on feeding the hungry, volunteers organized food drives for low-income apartments. They donated \$100,000 in cash and groceries to food banks. By the end of October, volunteers had distributed 285,000 pounds of food, vegetables and fruits. The Bay Area Sewa chapter supplied a million dollars' worth of food and other essentials to the poor.

The Federal Emergency Management



**Heavy lifting:** (above) Preparing a shipment of vegetables and fish for the hard-hit Navajo Nation in Arizona; (right) passing out food at the Catalina Apartments

Agency (FEMA) organized a virtual Partnership Day in July and posted Sewa's video in its virtual day exhibit. Sewa International was the lone Hindu charity featured, although others had also been active (see sidebar below). Arun Kankani, Sewa's president,

looks at FEMA's recognition as a "sign that Sewa's disaster relief work is of a quality that merits national attention." It shows how Sewa International brought national recognition to the concept of community service in America.

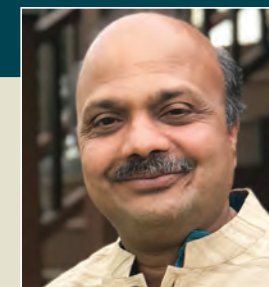
"Service Above Self" and "Unity and Diversity" are two principles that guide Sewa International. They reflect Sewa's work and its pluralistic ethos that celebrates diversity. Worship, or puja, in the Hindu tradition is akin to sewa to God. Utmost sincerity and de-

votion mark this Hindu ritual. In the Dharmic worldview, all work is service and worship. Service is devoid of selfishness; it involves sacrifice and is one of the four paths to liberation from worldly bondage. To Dharmic people, the centrality of service is encapsulated in the ancient Hindu adage, "Serving humanity is serving Divinity (Nar Seva Narayan Seva)." As Arun Kankani says, "Seeing service this way should help redefine faith-based non-profit work in the world by providing dignity and coercion-free service to the needy."



## About the Author

Vidyasagar Tontalapur, a journalist turned software engineer, lives in Superior, Colorado. He is deeply interested in Sanathan Dharma, technology and its impact on society and international affairs. He volunteers as Sewa's Director of Communications. Writing, nature and travel are his other passions.



# Helping Hands

## Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS)

The Burmese Buddhist refugee community in Oakland, CA, saw its livelihood disappear early in the wake of the pandemic. Forced shutdowns mandated by the state hit this small community hard. While the spread of Covid-19 made them fearful, dried-up local jobs dealt a severe blow to their income. They sought help from the Alameda Shakha (branch) of the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh (HSS). Answering their call, HSS launched the "Each One Feed One" campaign. Each family attending HSS' weekly children program, Balagokulam, adopted one refugee family. For over three months, HSS volunteers provided food kits to the community and helped it endure the crisis.

HSS volunteers in Seattle, WA, helped the local Native American community defeat hunger. They collected 115,000 pounds of potatoes, 100,000 pounds of onions and 36,000 gallons of milk from local farmers and sent them to the native elders in Toppenish, WA. HSS also partnered with Sewa International to send large quanti-



**Young leaders:** (above) Two Chinmaya Mission teens fill a car with toys and games to bring to Los Angeles residents in lockdown

ties of food to the Navajo Nation in Arizona. Elsewhere in the nation, about 2,000 HSS volunteers conducted Covid-19 relief operations in 198 cities, helping 45,000 families. They assisted stranded students and delivered masks and hot meals to frontline workers. They also collected and donated money, food and essential supplies to local homeless shelters and food banks. Many Hindu temples and language, cultural and religious organizations collaborated with HSS in the relief work.

## Chinmaya Mission, USA

Swami Chinmayananda said, "Charity must come from within, as an expression of an irrepressible urge of one's own heart." These words inspired the volunteers of the organization he founded to serve people during the pandemic. Chinmaya Mission conducted relief activities in various cities in the US, Canada, and Trinidad. The mission distributed over 17,000 pieces of personal protective equipment (PPE) in the US and 20,000 masks in Trinidad. They delivered non-perishable food and essential items in Houston, Chicago, Los Angeles, Seattle, Peoria, IL, and Columbus, OH.

Families attending Chinmaya mission's Bala Vihar program cooked and served hot meals to healthcare workers and the needy. They delivered groceries, masks, medicines and essential supplies to the vulnerable. The mission donated over \$263,600, mostly to local food banks, community centers and hospitals. The children of the Bala Vihar centers did their part by donating their monthly allowance for

the pandemic relief work. With matching donations from their parents, the little ones had a bigger impact.

## BAPS Charities

BAPS Charities served the frontline workers and provided succor to vulnerable enclaves in many cities. As the charity arm of Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), it had a wide reach and impact. Sri Swaminarayan mandirs across the country became nerve centers of the relief work. Headed by the selfless monks of the Sanstha, these temples helped coordinate volunteers and relief work. BAPS volunteers cooked and served over 27,000 hot vegetarian meals in several places. They also provided 30,000 food packages, snacks and beverages to firefighters, police, and the needy. They served food to the entire staff in several hospitals in Los Angeles, Boston, Houston, San Antonio and many other places.

BAPS focused on enabling physicians and nurses treating the Covid-19 patients. It supplied N-95 masks and other personal protective equipment (PPE) to clinics and hospitals. In about six months, they supplied 123,380 units of PPE, including medical gloves and child monitors. Groceries and sanitary items topped the list of items it supplied to county schools, food banks and soup kitchens. BAPS also extended a helping hand to other charities. The charity donated \$170,500 to several foundations, health and senior care facilities and community centers.





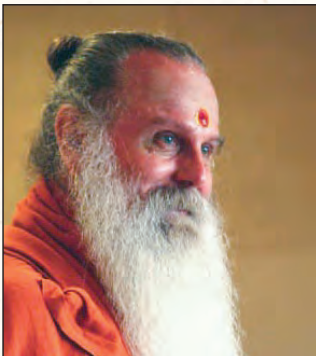
## EDITORIAL

# Rice with Spice Is Twice as Nice

The fascinating biography and “I-didn’t-know-that” facts of the unpretentious grain that feeds half the world

BY SADASIVANATHASWAMI, EDITOR

**Prolog:** Behold life's passing into paradise. How like a languid Vedic sacrifice, with days and years poured into soulful flames in rites precise. How random—less, this intertwined device, where lice have cats and cats have mice. How bountifully it folds eternity into each tiny trice, and hugely unconcise, with fire and ice and fifty thousand kinds of rice.



DEEP WITHIN THE GRANITE MOUNTAINS of Colorado, where you might expect to find a secret Defense Department arsenal of missiles awaiting the end of the Cold War thaw, lies another kind of stockpile. It is a dark, clinically sterile series of cold chambers, kept meticulously at -18°C and a relative humidity between 25 and 30. This is not the vault for a lethal chemical gas antidote or a vaccine for some exotic virus. These chambers, officially called the National Seed Storage Laboratory and maintained by the United States Department of Agriculture, hold one of the strategic guarantors of human survival—hundreds of thousands of seeds, including 18,313 varieties of rice. If that sounds like a lot, it's a mere fraction of the planet's diversity. India alone (where rice is said to have originated) had 110,000 varieties under cultivation over the centuries, according to Debal Deb, India's leading rice conservationist. Today most of India's rice comes from fewer than ten varieties.

Joe Biden is not spending all that money to save Uncle Ben's pre-cooked, short-grain, sticky white, highly polished, nutrition-free, artificially enriched rice for future generations. Uncle Ben's is a kind of paradigm of the West's naivete and historical neglect of rice. It opted for quick-cooking, high-yielding grains, while the East bred its strains for taste and texture. To export, the West selected for long shelf life; in the East 90% of all rice is consumed within eight miles of the fields where it is grown, so shelf life is not critical. Did you know that rice yields 6,000 pounds per acre and that 25% of the meager 20 pounds of rice each American consumes in a year is imbibed as beer or added to pet food?

“As rice goes, so will go the world's encounter with starvation,” Dr. Charles Balach, the Texas-based guru of America's rice breeding program, now retired, told me when I spoke with him. This is a man who knows his rice. He bred the variety that feeds most American appetites, a task that took him 8 years (15 years can be devoted to manipulating just the right combination of genes). He observes, “Rice has been cultivated for at least 7,000 years in China. Farmers spent generations selectively getting the ‘bad’ genes out of a strain, and it's very easy for us to introduce those back inadvertently as we try to improve a strain.”



That's exactly what happened, says Dr. Robert Dilday of University of Arkansas' Rice Research Center. “Breeders here were going for the high yields. In the process we didn't recognize, and thus we left out, important strengths.” Fortunately, there is a germ plasm program and collection, the one mentioned above. “There are thousands of very ordinary varieties there, seemingly useless. But they may hold some special quality we will want in the future, and it will be there. That's the beauty, and the justification, for this massive collection effort.”

Dr. Dilday is beguiled by the variants: from the Japanese Super Rice Kernel (twice the length of the longest long grain, akin to a 12-foot-tall person) to the messy Purple Bran that when it flowers “stains your fingers like you were picking blackberries.” The new Green Super Rice (with the help of Bill and Melinda Gates and a Chinese academy) draws its hardy genetics from a mix of 250 varieties. The result is a tough rice that thrives in difficult conditions and requires no herbicides.

Americans are relative newcomers to rice cultivation, with a mere 300 years spent growing a handful of types. They are partial to wheat. Rice may sustain half the world, but in America it has been an export commodity known only in an insipid encounter with an anonymous soup ingredient or as a rare substitute for potatoes. Not anymore. There is a rice revolution going on in North America, and a smaller one in Europe, driven by the West's newfound awareness of the health benefits of traditional Asian rices and an expanding population of rice-consuming ethnic groups. Basically, when immigration laws changed in the 1960s to allow more Asians in, millions answered the call. From Thailand, Cambodia, India, Korea and China they brought with them their culture, their clothing, their language and, of course, their penchant for rice.

When a Thai housewife cooked the Texas long-grain (which traces its roots to Indonesia, then Madagascar and thence to South Carolina in the 17th century), she was totally underwhelmed. Where was the taste? What happened to the sweet aromas she was accustomed to? Nothing. Zip. Not only that, who could eat this Yankee carbohydrate with chopsticks? Not even a black belt epicure could handle this dry grain where every pellet was an individual. In India it is said “Rice should be like brothers: close but not stuck together.” But Thais were accustomed to rices that, like Thai people, stick together (stickiness is determined by the ratio of two different starches, amylose and amylopectin). Some varieties are so sticky that if you put a chopstick in a bowl, the entire mass comes out together. Thai gourmets and gourmands love that kind. They break it off with their hands, dipping it deeply into a spicy gravy. My theory is that cultures that eat with chopsticks evolved sticky kinds, fork-eaters selected very dry specimens, and those of us who eat with our hands developed in-between varieties.

Faced with their finicky family's famished frowns, Asian women forsook all hope of getting decent rice in the US and began importing



SHUTTERSTOCK

it. Tons of it. In fact, 900 million pounds last year, nearly 10% of all the rice consumed in America. Farmers who didn't know a Basmati—which means “Queen of Fragrance”—from a Jasmine suddenly woke up to the new reality. Asians had highly sophisticated tastes and would not settle for anything less than what grandma had cooked over an open fire. They were even willing to pay a premium for quality, a big one. Aged Basmati sells for nearly \$6 a pound! The wheels of free enterprise cranked up. Breeding programs began, expensive ones focused on one goal: produce and market in the US an aromatic rice that equals that most popular of all imports, Thai Jasmine.

Thai Jasmine is the queen of short-grained sticky rices. Its smell is alluring, its texture is described as not-too-wet-not-too-dry, and its taste is savory sweet. American breeders imported a Thai strain from the famed International Rice Research Institute in Manila. They crossed it with a high-yielding Philippine stock, added a little of this DNA, a sprinkle of that and after many years celebrated the christening of Jasmine 85. It was to be the import killer. Hundreds of acres went under the Texas plow in 1989. Thai cooks by the thousands eagerly hauled home the first heavy bags of Jasmine 85, steamed it in the old country way, served it up and—“Yuck”—never went back for more.

“What happened?” marketers mourned. “What happened?” southern farmers fretted. “What happened?” rice breeders brooded. No one could explain. It tasted and smelled the same. It cooked the same. It looked the same. It was cheap. Yet it was a giant flop. Spurious stories spread that only US rats would touch it. Thai rodents preferred starvation. Well, that was the story.

This real-life disaster was a turning point in US rice consciousness. Americans, who pride themselves as the world's most efficient rice farmers, realized they couldn't detect differences that Asians readily perceived. They had made the mistake of not putting a single Asian on their select quality committee. “Before this experience, we didn't recognize the subtlety of it. Or maybe we didn't believe it. Now we believe. It started with the Asians, but now the Anglos are picking up on it,” Dr. Bill Webb confided to me.

**Diversity:** Above are fifteen of the fifty thousand known kinds of rice, of which a single one dominates the Western market

Imports continue to grow and US researchers now respect the preferences of the strong Asian market. For a while they redoubled their efforts to match qualities found in Southeast Asia. In private they confess, “We're no longer trying to replace the rices from India and Pakistan, but to develop a kind of poor-man's Basmati.” Nor can they just bring seed rices in and plant them. It's against the law. Besides, rice adapts itself to climates, to soils and weather patterns, not to mention birds, insects and diseases. All grains must be bred to US conditions. Those who touted the glories of Texas Long Grain now speak wistfully of approximating a Punjabi Basmati or an Italian Arborio. In the 1990s they were avidly breeding Purple Bran, Spanish Bahia, Black Japonica and dozens of others, hoping to capture the burgeoning niche market for specialty, fragrant rices.

Global trading agreements like the WHO and NAFTA have the plan to breed aromatic US rices, since the law now allows for import of aromatic rices in exchange for export of high-yield US rice that can feed more people and animals around the world. In most global markets, the US rice industry faces tough competition from Asian suppliers, with Thailand being the world's largest rice exporting country, followed by Vietnam, Pakistan, India and China. Including the United States, these six countries account for more than four-fifths of the total volume of annual rice exports. For the record, our own hands-down favorite rice, one with nary an equal in all three worlds, is the ruddy, fluffy Red Country rice, known as *uraris* in Tamil, grown in the fertile paddy fields of Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

**Epilog:** How nice is rice, especially served with spice. How it can, at meager price, twice or thrice each day suffice. How gentle and how very free from vice are those whose fodder, in the main, is rice.





SHUTTERSTOCK

INSIGHT

# Raising Children As Good Hindus

## Parents Are the First Gurus in Religion, Culture and Character



Many Hindu families visiting our Hawaii monastery, particularly those with young children, ask if I have any advice for them. I usually respond with one or two strategic suggestions. I always stress the importance of presenting Hinduism to their children in a practical way so that it influences each child's life for the better. Hindu practices should, for example, help children get better grades in school and get along well with others. Of course, there is not enough time in a short session to present all the many guidelines that a parent would find useful. Therefore, I decided to write up a full complement of suggestions to be handed to Hindu families in the future who want to know ways to present Hinduism to their kids. You hold the results in your hands: a parent's guidebook of minimum teachings to convey to children. It is based on the teachings of my satguru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of HINDUISM TODAY, distilled from insights he gained from over 40 years of closely working with hundreds of families in a score of nations. This booklet presents a survey of character building designed to augment any Hindu tradition or denomination. The key is this: start teaching early and don't stop until your children leave the home. Even if you did nothing more than what is outlined in these pages, that would be enough to send them on their way as good Hindus, well equipped to live as happy, effective citizens of the modern world.

*Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami*

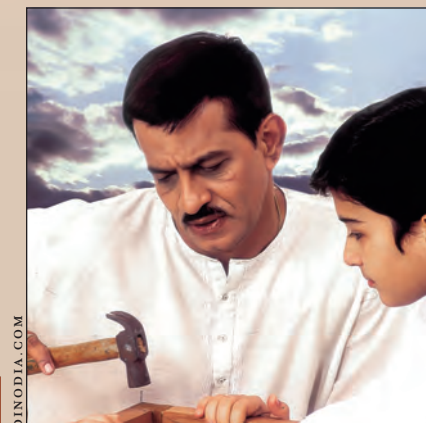
### Contents

#### IMPARTING BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES

- Part 1 • Teach and practice Hinduism in your home.
- Part 2 • Teach about the soul and our purpose on Earth.
- Part 3 • Teach about Hinduism's greatness.
- Part 4 • Teach about Hinduism and other religions.
- Part 5 • Teach how to live positively in the world.
- Part 6 • Teach how Hinduism lets us know God.

#### BUILDING GOOD CHARACTER

- Part 1 • Cultivate nine key spiritual qualities.
- Part 2 • Guide your children with love, not fear.



*Working together on projects is an ideal way to pass on your values, insights, skills and wisdom*



## PART ONE TEACH AND PRACTICE HINDUISM IN YOUR HOME

### Take responsibility for being the primary teachers of Hinduism to your children

It is wonderful that many temples have in place educational programs for the youth that are both effective and popular. However, it is important for parents to have the attitude that these programs supplement but do not replace the need for them to teach Hinduism to their children in the home. Parents are indeed the first guru. They teach in different ways: by example, explanation, feedback and giving advice and direction. The child's deepest impressions come from what the parents do and say. If parents follow a systematic approach to teaching children Hinduism during the formative years, Sanatana Dharma will be fully integrated into their minds, assuring that it will be with them for life.

### Without your help, there is no guarantee that your children will follow their faith as adults

Look around at the younger generation of Hindus and you will find many who have no interest whatsoever in the Hindu religion. One hundred years ago, before movies, television and computers, in the cities and villages of India and Hindu communities in other countries, the Hindu temple was the most interesting place in town. Besides the pujas and festivals, there were dramas, dances, discourses and musical concerts. The temple was a social and educational center as well. In our modern world we have compelling movies, television and computers, and many Hindu children would much rather spend their free time enjoying these with their friends than being at the temple. Why is this? There are many reasons. Nowadays, families are not so close. And it used to be far easier to get children to come to the temple, since it was the center of village life and there was not much competition for their attention. Times are different. Today's children often consider the temple boring compared to the all-pervasive and ever more

compelling secular forms of entertainment that are available. So, parents are challenged more than ever to answer kids' puzzling queries—as grandparents did not have to do—by giving sensible, pragmatic explanations of temple worship and Hinduism's rich array of cultural and mystical practices. Kids today want answers that make sense to them. They are not at all content with "That's the way we have always done it." When parents are unable to meet this challenge, Hinduism does not become meaningful and useful to their children. Many youth today do not view the practice of their faith as important to making their life happier and more successful. This is the challenge every Hindu parent faces. But all is not lost. New generations are eager to hear the lofty truths, and those truths can be explained in ways that engage and inspire young seekers, counterbalancing the magnetic influences of the modern world.

### Establish a shrine in the home

Hinduism is in no way more dynamically strengthened in the lives of children and the family than by establishing a shrine in the home. The home shrine works best when it is an entire room. That way it can be strictly reserved for worship and meditation, unsullied by worldly talk or other activities. This is the ideal. However, when that is not possible, it should at least be a quiet corner of a room, more than a simple shelf or cabinet.

Naturally, as important as having a shrine is worshipping there daily. In the shrine room offer fruit, flowers or food. Visit your shrine when leaving the home, and upon returning from work or outings. Worship in heartfelt devotion, clearing the inner channels to God and the Gods, so their

### Sharing festivals and establishing a home shrine bring religion into a child's life



grace flows toward you and loved ones. Make the shrine a refuge where all family members can find peace and solace, where they can connect with the Gods and offer their praise, prayers and practical

needs. Train your children to worship in the shrine before any important event in life, such as a major exam at school, or when faced with a personal challenge or problem. Following this simple, traditional practice in a sacred space within the home will do much to make Hinduism relevant to them on a day-to-day basis.

### Worship together in the home shrine each morning

A popular saying in English is "The family that prays together stays together." In Hinduism, ideally this refers to all members of the family participating in the morning worship in the home shrine before breakfast. The children can be trained to always bring an offering of a flower or at least a leaf. The exact routine followed depends on the family's religious background and lineage. Typical practices include a simple *arati* or a longer *puja*, singing devotional songs, repeating a mantra, reading scripture and then meditating or performing simple *sadhanas* and *yogas*. As the children get older, they can take on greater responsibilities during the morning worship. A number of Hindus have told us that what kept them a staunch, practicing Hindu, despite exposure in their youth to other religious traditions at school and elsewhere, was the fact that the entire family practiced Hinduism together in the home.

### Worship together as a family at a local temple once a week

Attending a *puja* at the temple every week allows us to experience the blessings of God and the Gods on a regular basis. This helps keep us pure as well as strong in our religious commitments. The religious vibration of the home shrine is also strengthened by going to the temple regularly. Specifically, some of the spiritual atmosphere of the temple can be brought home with you if you simply light an oil lamp

## CHARACTER BUILDING, PART ONE

# CULTIVATE NINE SPIRITUAL QUALITIES



Parents can consciously and systematically develop key qualities in their children that will help them to be happy, religious and successful when they reach adulthood. A wise mother e-mailed me once saying, "I truly believe we live out part of our karma through our children, and we grow and improve as they do." Though parents may think they are just helping their children improve, in truth parents cannot separate themselves from their children. The child's growth and spiritual evolution is the parents' as well. There are many qualities we want our children to possess. We will explore nine of these to see what children should be taught, or not taught, by parents to develop each quality. The nine qualities are:

- ❖ Positive Self-Concept
- ❖ Perceptive Self-Correction
- ❖ Powerful Self-Control
- ❖ Profound Self-Confidence
- ❖ Playful Self-Contentment
- ❖ Pious Character
- ❖ Proficiency in Conflict Resolution
- ❖ Parental Closeness
- ❖ Prejudice-Free Consciousness

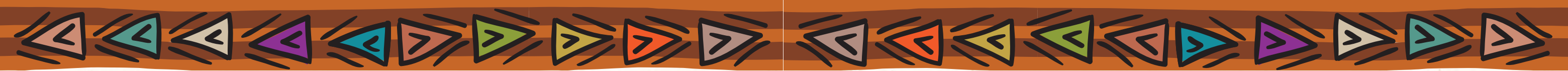
## 1. DEVELOP A POSITIVE SELF-CONCEPT



A positive self-concept arises when we think of ourselves as a worthy individual deserving of a wonderful life. How is this accomplished? It is through being generous with your praise and appreciation, making children know they are loved and valued, that who they are makes a difference and life is full of promise. Unfortunately, many children reach adulthood with a negative self-concept, feeling that others are better than they are and life has little to offer. A negative self-concept is developed through verbally running down a child through teasing, joking or insulting remarks. This, of course, needs to be stopped and replaced with

encouragement and praise. When it becomes necessary to correct misbehavior, it is wise to distinguish between the person and the behavior. The behavior was foolish, not the person. For example, you can tell your children when they misbehave, "What you did was very foolish, but you are smart, and I'm sure you now know better and won't do that again." Parents should also not allow their children to call each other names, such as "fat" or "lame." Having a positive concept about one's outer self allows the child to accept the Hindu teaching that one's inner self is a divine being, a radiant soul. My Gurudeva wrote: "Praise your children. Celebrate their Divinity. Enjoy them and enjoy good times with them."





in your shrine room when you return from the temple. This sacred act brings devas who were at the temple right into the home shrine room, where from the inner world they can bless all family members and strengthen the religious force field of the home.

PART TWO  
TEACH ABOUT THE SOUL  
AND OUR PURPOSE ON EARTH

Teach that life's purpose is spiritual advancement

The Hindu view of life is that we are a divine being, a soul, who experiences many lives on Earth, and that the purpose of our being here is spiritual unfoldment. Over a period of many lives we gradually become more spiritual and are thus able to experience divine consciousness more deeply. This eventually leads to a profound experience of God, which brings to a conclusion our pattern of reincarnation on Earth. This achievement is called moksha, liberation. A great lady saint of North India, Anandamayi Ma, stated the goal of God Realization quite beautifully: "Man is a human being only so much as he aspires to Self Realization. This is what human birth is meant for. To realize the One is the supreme duty of every human being."

Teach the four traditional goals of life

The four traditional Hindu goals of life are duty (dharma), wealth (artha), love (kama) and liberation (moksha). The Hindu has the same ambitions as do others: to experience love, family and children, as well as a profession, learning, security, wealth and usefulness. Dharma enjoins the Hindu to fulfill these ambitions in an honest, virtuous, dutiful way. Although dharma, artha and kama are often seen as ends in themselves, their greatest value is in providing the environment and experiences which help the embodied soul mature over many lives into an ever-deepening God consciousness—culminating in moksha, the fourth and final goal: liberation from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

Teach that there are young souls and old souls

Each soul is emanated from God, as a spark from a fire, and thus begins a spiritual journey which eventually leads it back to God. All human beings are on this journey, whether they realize it or not; and, of course, the journey spans many lives. One might ask, if all are on the same journey, why is there such a disparity among men? Some people act like saints and others behave like sinners. Some take delight in helping others, while others delight in harming them. The Hindu explanation is that each of us started the journey at a different time. Some are young souls, at the beginning of the spiritual path, while others are old souls, near the end.

Our paramaguru, Siva Yogaswami, in speaking to devotees, described life as a school, with some in the M.A. class and others in kindergarten. Knowing the differences in spiritual maturity, he gave to each accordingly. Hindus do not condemn some people as evil and extol others as good but rather see all as divine beings, some young, some old and some in the intermediary stages. If children are taught this central Hindu principle, they will be able to accept the otherwise confoundingly wide range of differences among people as part of God's cosmic plan of spiritual evolution.

Teach about man's threefold nature

Our nature can be described as threefold: spiritual, intellectual and instinctive. One or more of these aspects predominate uniquely in each of us according to our maturity and evolution. The spiritual nature is the pure, superconscious, intuitive mind of the soul. The intellect is the thinking, reasoning nature. The instinctive aspect of our being is the animal-like nature, which governs the physical body and brings forth strong desires and lower emotions such as anger, jealousy and fear. The goal is to learn to control these animal instincts as well as the ramifications of the intellect and the pride of the ego, so as to manifest our spiritual nature.



Festivals like Diwali are perfect for family sharing and passing on our culture

It is the instinctive nature that contains the tendencies to harm others, disregard the prudent laws of society and stir up negativity within the home, the nation and beyond. Those who are expressing such tendencies are young souls who have yet to learn why and how to harness the instinctive forces. It may take such persons many lives to rise to a higher consciousness and live in their spiritual nature. Thus the Hindu approach, which children can be taught from an

early age, is not to label them as evil, but rather to focus on restraining their hurtfulness and helping them learn to control these instincts and improve their behavior.

Gurudeva describes this in an insightful way: "People act in evil ways who are not yet in touch with their soul nature and live totally in the outer, instinctive mind. What the ignorant see as evil, the enlightened see as the actions of low-minded and immature individuals."

2. DEVELOP PERCEPTIVE SELF-CORRECTION



Perceptive self-correction is evident when we are able to quickly learn the lesson from each experience and resolve not to repeat our mistakes. How do parents develop this quality in children? By teaching them that making mistakes is not bad. Everyone makes mistakes. It is natural and simply shows we do not understand something. It is important for the parent to determine what understanding the child lacks and teach it to him without blame. When parents discipline through natural and logical consequences, children are encouraged to learn to reflect on the possible effects of their behavior before acting. Such wisdom can be nurtured through encouraging self-reflection by

asking the child to think about what he did and how he could avoid making that mistake again. Perceptive self-correction enables young ones to quickly learn from their inevitable mistakes, refine their still-developing behavior accordingly and thereby make more rapid progress on the spiritual path. Gurudeva observed: "Children are entrusted to their parents to be loved, guided and protected, for they are the future of the future. However, children can be a challenge to raise up into good citizenship. There are many positive ways to guide them, such as hugging, kindness, time spent explaining, giving wise direction and setting the example of what you want them to become."

3. DEVELOP POWERFUL SELF-CONTROL



Powerful self-control is the ability to restrain destructive emotions, such as anger, when we are tempted to express them. How is such control cultivated in children? It is through parents never expressing such emotions themselves. Children learn by observing their parents, whether it's acceptable to behave emotionally or not. Self-control is cultivated by referring often to the ten restraints (yamas) of Hinduism's Code of Conduct, finding illustrations of these ideals in daily life, on television and in movies. The yamas are noninjury, truthfulness, nonstealing, divine conduct, patience, steadfastness, compassion, honesty, moderate appetite and

purity. Self-control is also cultivated through emphasizing, from an early age, the traditional Hindu imperative to maintain chastity until marriage. Self-control leads to self-mastery, enabling one to be more successful in achieving outer and inner goals. Gurudeva noted: "Children who see their mother and father working out their differences in mature discussion or in the shrine room through prayer and meditation are at that moment given permission to do the same in their own life when they are older. They become the elite of society, the pillars of strength to the community during times of stress and hardship. These children, when older, will surely uphold the principles of dharma and will not succumb to the temptations of the lower mind."



### PART THREE TEACH OF HINDUISM'S GREATNESS

#### Instill in your children a pride in Hinduism based upon its wise precepts for living

Since the middle of the twentieth century, Hindu teachings have become more widely understood throughout the world. As a result, cardinal aspects of the Hindu approach to living have been taken up by many thoughtful individuals of diverse religions and ethnicities far beyond India. This is because they find them to be wise and effective ways of living. Hindu precepts that are being widely adopted in the 21st century include:

- ❖ Following a vegetarian diet
- ❑ A reverence toward and desire to protect the environment
- ❖ Solving conflicts through nonviolent means
- ❖ Tolerance towards others
- ❖ Teaching that the whole world is one family
- ❖ The belief in karma as a system of divine justice
- ❖ The belief in reincarnation
- ❖ The practice of yoga and meditation
- ❖ Seeking to personally experience Divinity

Teach your children how the unique wisdom of their born faith, especially in the principles listed above, is being more appreciated and adopted by spiritual seekers than ever before. Swami Chinmayananda, in his first public talk in 1951, made a powerful statement about the effectiveness of Hinduism: "The true Hinduism is a science of perfection. There is, in this true Hinduism, a solution to every individual, social, national and international problem. True Hinduism is the Sanatana Dharma of the *Upanishads*." Children whose peers do not value Hinduism will take heart in Swami's pride-instilling words.

#### The traditional Hindu vegetarian diet has many benefits, both personal and planetary

More and more individuals are switching from the meat-eating diet of their parents to a vegetarian diet as a matter of conscience based upon their personal realization of the suffering that animals undergo when they are fettered and slaughtered. This is, of course, also the Hindu rationale for a vegetarian diet. It is based on the virtue of ahimsa: refraining from injuring, physically, mentally or emotionally, anyone or any living creature. The Hindu who wishes to strictly follow the path of noninjury naturally adopts a vegetarian diet. A common saying that conveys this principle to even the smallest child is, "I won't eat anything that has eyes, unless it's a potato."

A second rationale for vegetarianism has to do with our state of consciousness. When we eat meat, fish, fowl and eggs, we absorb the vibration of these instinctive creatures into our nerve system. This chemically alters our consciousness and amplifies our own instinctive nature, which is the part of us prone to fear, anger, jealousy, confusion, resentment and the like. Therefore, being vegetarian is a great help in attaining and maintaining a spiritual state of consciousness. Some individuals take up vegetarianism for this reason alone.

A third rationale for vegetarianism is that it uses the planet's natural resources in a much wiser way. In large measure, the escalating loss of species, destruction of ancient rain forests to create pasture lands for livestock, loss of topsoil and the consequent increase of water impurities and air pollution have all been traced to the single fact of meat in the human diet. No one decision that we can make as individuals or as a race can have such a dramatic effect on the improvement of our planetary ecology as the decision to not eat meat. Many seeking to save the planet for future generations have become vegetarians for this reason.

By teaching the value of a vegetarian diet to our youth, we protect their health, lengthen their lives, elevate their consciousness and preserve the Earth that is their home.

#### Hindus hold a deep reverence toward planet Earth and toward all living beings that dwell on it

Many thoughtful people share the Hindu view that it is not right for man to kill or harm animals for food or sport. They believe that animals have a right to enjoy living on this planet as much as humans do. There is a Vedic

Family outings and adventures create important bonds of love



verse in this regard that says: "Ahimsa is not causing pain to any living being at any time through the actions of one's mind, speech or body." Another Vedic verse states, "You must not use your God-given body for killing God's creatures, whether they are human, animal or whatever."

Hindus regard all living creatures as sacred—mammals, fishes, birds and more. They are stewards of trees and plants, fish and birds, bees and reptiles, animals and creatures of every shape and kind. We particularly express this reverence for life in our special affection for the cow. Mahatma Gandhi once said, "One can measure the greatness

of a nation and its moral progress 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."

Many individuals are concerned about our environment and properly preserving it for future generations. Hindus share this concern and honor and revere the world around them as God's creation. They work for the protection of the Earth's diversity and resources to achieve the goal of a secure, sustainable and lasting environment. Children today, as never before, have a native understanding of the

## 4. DEVELOP A PROFOUND SELF-CONFIDENCE



Profound self-confidence is exemplified when a child is confronted with a difficult task and his first response is the certainty that he can accomplish it. Unfortunately, many children reach adulthood lacking self-confidence and have as their first response the feeling that they will be unable to accomplish the task—that it is too difficult. How is profound self-confidence cultivated? Firstly, through being sure the child possesses a positive self-concept. Secondly, through helping the child be repetitively successful at progressively more difficult tasks as he or she grows up. A pattern of many successes going into our subconscious mind produces the sense of self-con-

fidence and the feeling that we will be equal to any task. For example, a father teaches his son carpentry from age ten through eighteen. Each year the father helps the son make something that is more complex, never giving him a project that is too advanced, praising each achievement. Self-confidence is cultivated by watching for failures at school or at home and compensating for them. If the child is shy and has trouble at school with public speaking, work personally or through a tutor to overcome that shyness so he or she can speak comfortably before groups of people in any situation. Self-confidence makes youth magnetic to success.

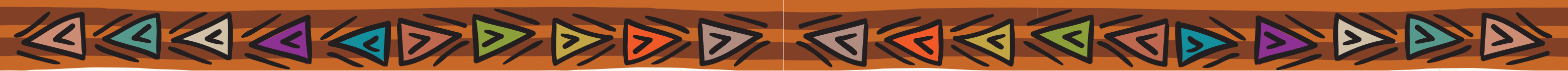
## 5. DEVELOP A PLAYFUL SELF-CONTENTMENT



Playful self-contentment is expressed when a child's usual mood is fun-loving, happy and satisfied. How is this developed? It is through the parents' living and verbalizing the philosophy that life is meant to be lived joyously. It is by holding the perspective that happiness does not depend on external circumstances but is a consciousness we can claim, whether life is free of or filled with challenges. It is by teaching the children to be satisfied with what they have in the present, rather than dissatisfied about what they don't have. It is nurtured by the family spending time together filled with play and laughter. The ability to remain joyful, secure and content enables one to face with equanimity the

ups and downs of life. Gurudeva described the contentment, *santosha*, that we should teach children: "True santosha is seeing all-pervasiveness of the one divine power everywhere. The light within the eyes of each person is that divine power. With this in mind, you can go anywhere and do anything. Contentment is there, inside you, and needs to be brought out. It is a spiritual power. So, yes, do what makes you content. But know that contentment really transcends worrying about the challenges that face you. Santosha is being peaceful in any situation. The stronger you are in santosha, the greater the challenges you can face."





place of mankind as part of the Earth, and it is our duty to reinforce this in their young minds.

**Hinduism is respected for solving conflicts through nonviolent means**

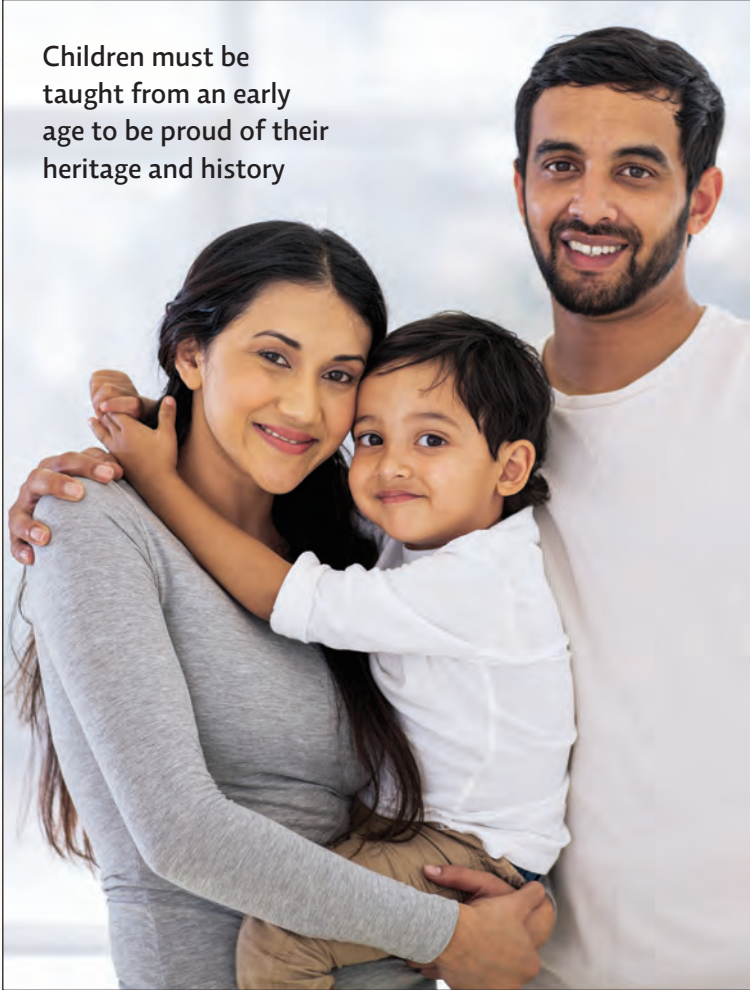
Mahatma Gandhi's strong belief in the Hindu principle of ahimsa and his nonviolent methods for opposing British rule are well known throughout the world. The nonviolent approach has consciously been used by others as well. One of the best-known exponents of nonviolence was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. After decades of careful thought on the problem of racial discrimination in the United States, Dr. King selected the Hindu principle of ahimsa, as exemplified by Mahatma Gandhi's tactic of nonviolent resistance, as the most effective method for overcoming the unjust laws that existed in America at the time. In 1959, Dr. King spent five weeks in India personally discussing with Gandhi's followers the philosophy and techniques of non-violence before putting them into use in the West.

Children learn conflict resolution at an early age, establishing patterns that will serve them throughout life. Some learn that fists, force and angry words are the way to work things out. Others are taught that diplomacy and kindly speech serve the same purpose more effectively and yield longer-lasting results. Children pick up these things largely through example in the home, by witnessing how Mom and Dad work out their differences.

**Hinduism has great tolerance and considers the whole world to be a family**

In the world of the twenty-first century, a prime concern is the many wars and clashes between peoples of different religions, nationalities and ethnicities based on hatred on one or both sides. The opposite of hatred is tolerance, and in that Hinduism excels. The Hindu belief that gives rise to tolerance of differences in race and nationality is that all of mankind is good, we are all divine beings, souls created by God. Therefore, we respect and embrace the entire human race. The Hindu practice of greeting one another with "namaskara," worshiping God within the other person,

**Children must be taught from an early age to be proud of their heritage and history**



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is a way this philosophical truth is practiced on a daily basis. Hindus do not believe that some individuals will be saved and others damned, nor in a chosen people, nor in a starkly divided world of

good and evil filled only with the faithful and the infidels. Hinduism respects and defends the rights of humans of every caste, creed, color and sex, and it asks that those same rights be accorded its billion followers. Hindus think globally and act locally as interracial, international citizens of the Earth. They honor and value all human cultures, faiths, languages and peoples, never offending one to promote another.

This is taken one step further in the ancient verse, "The whole world is one family." Everyone is family oriented. All our efforts are focused on benefiting the members of our family. We want them all to be happy, successful and religiously fulfilled. And when we define family as the whole world, it is clear that we wish everyone in the world happiness, success and religious fulfillment. The Vedic verse that captures this sentiment is "May all people be happy." By teaching our children this broad acceptance of peoples, even those who are very different from ourselves, we nurture in them a love for all and a compassionate tolerance that will serve them well throughout their lives.

**Many people throughout the world firmly believe in karma and reincarnation**

Hindu concepts have become more and more popular and influential in the West. Every year thousands of Westerners take up the belief in karma and reincarnation as a logical explanation of what they observe in life. A contemporary expression of the law of karma is "What goes around comes around." Karma is the universal principle of cause and effect. Our actions, both good and bad, come back to us in the future, helping us to learn from life's lessons and become better people. Reincarnation is the belief that the soul is immortal and takes birth time and time again. Through this process, we have experiences, learn lessons and evolve spiritually. Finally, we graduate from physical birth and continue learning and evolving on inner planes of consciousness without the need for a physical body until, ultimately, we merge in God. The belief in karma and reincarnation gives children a logical explanation to what otherwise may seem an unjust, indifferent or Godless world. They can be taught that challenging questions such as the following all have logical explanations when viewed through the beliefs of karma and reincarnation.

- ❖ Why do some innocent children die so young?
- ❖ Why are some people so much more talented than others?
- ❖ Why do some people act in evil ways?
- ❖ Why is it that a mean-spirited person may succeed and a good-hearted person fail?

Belief in a single life makes it hard to reconcile such things, causing one to question how a just, benevolent God could allow them to happen. But an understanding of karma—as God's divine law which transcends this one incarnation and brings to bear our actions from many past lives on Earth—offers profound insight. That innocent child may have been a child murderer. That musical genius may have so perfected his art in a past life that he inherits a rare talent at birth and becomes a child prodigy.

The beliefs of karma and reincarnation give a spiritual purpose to our life. We know that the reason we are here on Earth is to mature spiritually, and that this process extends over many lives. We know that karma is our teacher in this process, teaching us both what to do and what not to do through the reactions it brings back to us in the future. So, our current incarnation—the nature of our body, family, inclinations, talents, strengths and weaknesses—is specifically designed by us to help us face the fruits of our past actions, both positive and negative, and thus learn and evolve.

**Hinduism boldly proclaims that man can experience God**

Throughout the world today, many who are on the mystical path want to have a personal spiritual experience. They want to see God. Hinduism not only gives them the hope that they can achieve their goal in this lifetime, but it gives them the practical tools, such as the disciplines of yoga and meditation, through which this goal eventually becomes a reality.

The focus of many religions is on helping those who do not believe in God to believe in God. Belief in God, in such faiths, is the beginning and the end of the process. Once you believe in God there is nothing more to do. However, in Hinduism belief is only the first step. Hindus want to move beyond believing in God to experiencing God. To the Hindu, belief is but a preparatory step to divine, daily communion and life-transforming personal realization.

## 6. DEVELOP A PIOUS CHARACTER



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Pious character is evident when we naturally treat others with kindness, generosity and appreciation. It is fulfilled when we seek the blessings of God, Gods and guru throughout life. How can this be cultivated in children? It is through the parents' demonstrating these qualities themselves. Children learn that this behavior is expected of them by observing their parents' actions. Piety is cultivated by referring often to the ten observances (*niyamas*) of Hinduism's Code of Conduct and pointing out their relevance in daily life, on TV and in movies. The *niyamas* are remorse, contentment, giving, faith, worship of the Lord,

scriptural listening, cognition, sacred vows, recitation and austerity. Pious character is nurtured by teaching the child to worship and pray in the home shrine or at the temple before important events, such as beginning a new school year or before final examinations. Pious conduct brings into our children's lives the joys of divine blessings. Gurudeva outlined the ideal: "Hindu children are always treated with great respect and awe, for one does not always know who they are. They may be incarnations of a grandmother, grandfather, aunt or uncle, dearly beloved mother, sister, brother, respected father, a yogi or rishi returned to flesh to help mankind spiritually. We must ask, 'Who are these souls? What is their destiny in this life? How can I help?'"

## 7. DEVELOP PROFICIENCY IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

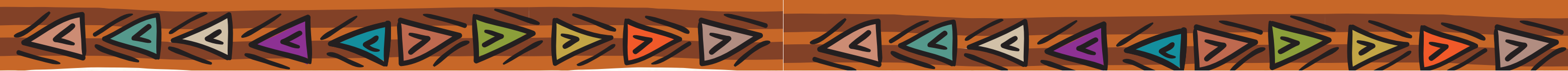


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Proficiency in conflict resolution is exemplified when we work out disagreements with others by using intelligence and seeking for a win-win situation. How is this cultivated in youth? It is through the parents' demonstrating these qualities themselves. Children learn that this behavior is expected of them by observing their parents' actions. Diplomacy is taught by sitting down with children any time they use anger, physical force or verbal injury to prevail in a conflict and discussing with them how it could have been settled with intelligence rather than violence. It is through replacing the idea of "I want me to win

and you to lose" with that of "I win when everybody wins." Kids can learn from parents that it is through taking a humble attitude, rather than a dominant position, that conflicts are resolved smoothly and easily. Illustrations of what to do and what not to do can be drawn from the people they see in television and movies. Proficiency in conflict resolution is nurtured by parents' resolving their husband-and-wife disagreements before going to sleep, as this teaches by example the importance of facing and solving a conflict rather than fleeing from it. Mastery of resolving differences keeps our young one's lives sublime and their subconscious minds free of the disturbances caused by memories of unresolved disagreements.





There is a classic story from the life of Swami Vivekananda, one of Hinduism's best-known modern teachers, that illustrates the Hindu perspective of experiencing God. When Vivekananda was still a university student, he asked many of the foremost religious leaders in the Calcutta area where he lived if they had seen God. However, he never got a clear and authoritative answer from any one of them until he met Sri Ramakrishna. During his second meeting with Sri Ramakrishna, he asked the great sage, "Sir, have you seen God?" Calmly Sri Ramakrishna replied, "Yes, I see Him as clearly as one sees an apple in the palm of the hand; nay, even more intently. And not only this, you can also see Him." This deeply impressed the young Vivekananda, who soon after accepted Sri Ramakrishna as his guru.

By teaching children about Hinduism's stress on personal Godly experience, we set them on a path of self-understanding, self-perfection and discovery of the Divine that does not rely on the beliefs or reports of others. This gives them an appreciation of each step in life—be it pleasant or unpleasant—as an integral part of a joyous spiritual journey.

**PART FOUR**  
**TEACH ABOUT HINDUISM AND THE OTHER WORLD RELIGIONS**

**Teach about the Vedic statement "Truth is One, sages describe it variously"**

Hinduism is often misunderstood as being polytheistic, worshipping many Gods, none of which is supreme. It is important to correct this misconception in the minds of children. They can be taught that Hindus revere the great beings of light, called Mahadevas, just as the Catholics honor the Archangels of Heaven. But Hindus all worship the one Supreme Being, known in the various denominations by different names. Even more than that, Hindus believe that the immanent-transcendent Lord they worship is indeed the same God worshiped by all peoples of all faiths and religions of the world. As a country only has one king, we can school the young ones, so the universe has only one Supreme Being. The oneness of God is easily understood when we

see that the different religions use various names to describe the same Truth. Teaching this to our young ones resolves many misconceptions, both within Hinduism itself and between Hinduism and the varied faiths of the world.

**Teach the correct meaning of the Vedic statement "Truth is One, paths are many"**

Some Hindus teach their children that all religions are one, thinking this is a way to describe Sanatana Dharma's broad vision. However, this is a problematic distortion of the Hindu belief that "truth is one, paths are many." Teaching this to children will cause them to be half-hearted Hindus, never fully committed to their faith and not inspired to pass it on to their offspring. I have seen this attitude create indifferent Hindus who passively attend their non-Hindu spouse's church, presumably thinking it doesn't really matter, and who think it is best to raise their children "in both religions."

The correct teaching is that Hindus believe that all religions worship the same truth, the same Supreme Being, but that all religions are not identical and it does matter which religion you follow. The beliefs and practices of the world religions are, in fact, quite different. The God they worship is one, but each of the many paths is quite distinct. This knowledge will help children see the world's array of faiths in a realistic light while pursuing their Hindu path with full dedication.

**Hindus believe that all of the major world religions are valid paths and everyone is well placed in their chosen faith**

Hindus do not proselytize, meaning they do not try to convert



**Taking time to teach and share builds closeness and trust**

members of other religions to Hinduism. Proselytizing is based upon the belief that one's religion is the only true religion and therefore everyone in another religion should join it. Hindus hold the opposite point of view, which is that all faiths are good and the members of those religions are just fine remaining in the religions they are in. Each religion has its unique beliefs, practices, goals and paths of attainment, and the doctrines of one often conflict with those of another. Even this should never be cause for religious tension or intolerance. Hindus respect all religious traditions and the people within them. They know that good citizens and stable societies are created from groups of religious people in all nations.

However, it is important to teach children that while Hindus do not proselytize, Hinduism does, and always has, accepted new members into the religion who seek to participate at its deepest levels. It is simply not true, as uninformed commentators too often say, that you have to be born a Hindu to be a Hindu. When asked by a devotee about this idea, Swami Vivekananda responded, "Why, born aliens have been converted in the past by crowds, and the process is still going on."

Hindus who marry a non-Hindu spouse who is interested in the Sanatana Dharma wisely encourage him or her to study and eventually enter the faith so they can together raise their children as devout Hindus, rather than being torn between two faiths.

**PART FIVE**  
**TEACH HOW HINDUISM GRANTS EXPERIENCE OF GOD**

**Hinduism has advanced practices within it that many religions do not have**

If you simply want to live a virtuous, pious life and be part of a community of fellow believers, you will discover that all religions are similar at that basic level. But if you have the desire to personally experience God, you will only find the advanced practices that lead to that divine experience in a few religions. A good example of this fact has been occurring in Catholic monasteries for decades. Some of the monks in these monasteries have the desire to personally experience God. What do they do to pursue this? They turn to Hindu scriptures, such as Patanjali's *Yoga Aphorisms*, for guidelines in deep meditation and inner spiritual attainments, as there are few such teachings in Christianity. Such teachings, however, are regarded by the Catholic Church as heretical, and the Vatican has directed monks and nuns to cease all yoga practices and return to the path of prayer. Applying a modern analogy, one could say that all religions are computers designed to answer our questions about life and God, but some religions are personal computers, some are minicomputers, others are

**8. DEVELOP PARENTAL CLOSENESS**



Parental closeness finds fulfillment when children reach adulthood and choose to spend time with their parents because they really enjoy being with them. A strong bond of love and understanding exists. Sadly, the opposite is often the case. How is parental closeness developed? It is through expressing love by hugging and saying often the three magic words "I love you." Distance is developed by never expressing love. Closeness is nurtured by correcting a child's misbehavior with positive discipline methods, such as time-out and appropriate, natural and logical consequences. The use of physical violence, anger, irrational punishments, blame and shame cause distance. Close-

ness comes when quality time is spent together in activities that all members of the family enjoy. It is developed by the father's bonding with his sons and the mother's bonding with her daughters, through developing common interests in hobbies or games and working on them together. It is protected when parents create in the home a nonthreatening atmosphere of trust in which their children feel free to tell them everything they have done without fear of harsh consequences. They know their parents love them, no matter what. A loving parental closeness strengthens all subsequent relationships children develop, even their relationship with God.

**9. DEVELOP A PREJUDICE-FREE CONSCIOUSNESS**



Prejudice-free consciousness manifests when we see God in everyone and fully embrace differences of ethnic background and religion. Are we born with prejudices? Absolutely not! These are all learned, at home, at school and elsewhere. How is prejudice-free consciousness developed? It is through teaching our children that the whole world is our family and all human beings are divine beings. It is through complete avoidance of remarks that are racially or religiously prejudiced. It is through discussing with our children any prejudice they hear at school or elsewhere and correcting it. It is by teaching children to avoid generalizations about people and, instead, to think about

specific individuals and the qualities they have. Television and movies can provide useful situations to discuss. Acceptance of others is nurtured by having children meet, interact and learn to feel comfortable with children of other ethnicities and religions. Tolerant individuals help communities function with less friction and misunderstanding. Gurudeva teaches us: "Every belief creates certain attitudes. Our attitudes govern all of our actions. Belief in karma, reincarnation and the existence of an all-pervasive Divinity throughout the universe creates an attitude of reverence, benevolence and compassion for all beings. The natural consequence of this belief is ahimsa, nonhurtfulness."





Children need to be taught the proper place of screens in their life

mainframe computers, but Hinduism is a supercomputer.

#### Hinduism offers four ways to personally experience God; the first two ways involve seeing the Divine in other people

In Hinduism, deepening personal experience of God's presence is essential. Perhaps the easiest place to start is to see God in great religious teachers. We feel a spiritual aura about them that is different, uplifting and inspiring. We see a light in their eyes and feel a love in their presence we do not find in others.

The second way to see God is to look deeply into the eyes of another person. Look beyond his or her personality, deeper than the intellect, and see the individual's pure life energy as God. In Hindu culture we

have an opportunity every time we greet other people through the traditional gesture of *namaskara* to practice looking deeply enough into their eyes to see God within them as the Life of their life. This practice is an excellent way for children to learn that all people are divine beings.

#### The third and fourth ways we can experience God are through temple worship and meditation

The third way to see God is through the Deity's image in the Hindu temple. This is the devotional, or theistic, approach. Gods and devas, from in the inner, spiritual worlds, are able to bless us through the image in the temple. The image is like a temporary physical body

they use during temple ceremonies. Though occasionally a devotee may have a mystical vision of the God, the more common way we experience the Gods and devas is as an uplifting, peaceful, divine energy, or shakti, that radiates out from the image. It is easiest to feel their blessings at the high point of the puja when the flame is held high. If taught the joys of temple worship while toddlers, children will develop a devotional relationship with the Deities that will strengthen and guide them throughout life.

The fourth way to see God is in meditation, which is a form of internal worship. This is the monistic, or unitive, approach to experiencing God—going deeply enough into our inner consciousness to find the essence of our soul, which is identical with God. Children can be taught the basics of meditation at an early age, beginning with sitting up straight, regulating the breath and performing hatha yoga to quiet the mental and physical energies. These practices will help them remain centered, and they will mature naturally into deeper inner experiences as they grow up.

#### Hinduism focuses on personal, spiritual transformation through the regular practice of disciplines called *sadhana*

Reading spiritual books is an essential part of progressing on the Hindu path. However, even more important is the regular practice of religious disciplines. Our emotional, intellectual and spiritual natures are all significantly enhanced and developed through performing such disciplines regularly over a period of many years. The more consistently we practice, the greater the speed of our progress. Establishing good patterns of spiritual practice, called *sadhana*, begins in childhood, in the home. The most successful pattern in the home is for parents to have their young children join them in their morning devotionals and, as they mature, invite them to join in the yogas and meditations.

#### Hinduism's spiritual practices fall into four categories

Hinduism's array of spiritual practices can be divided into four categories: good conduct, service, devotion and meditation.

#### ❖ Cultivating good conduct is the foundational practice

Cultivating good conduct, or developing good character, is the foundation of all other practices in Hinduism. Good conduct begins with overcoming basic instinctive patterns, such as the tendencies to become angry and hurtful. The ten classical restraints, called *yamas*, help us overcome such tendencies. These restraints are: noninjury, truthfulness, nonstealing, divine conduct, patience, steadfastness, compassion, honesty, moderate appetite and purity. Following the *yamas* naturally leads into ten religious observances, called the *niyamas*: remorse, contentment, giving, faith, worship of the Lord, scriptural listening, cognition, sacred vows, recitation and austerity. By simply memorizing these twenty ideals, a child learns much about what is expected by his faith. Good conduct includes performing one's duty to family and community, honoring holy men and women, respecting elders and atoning for misdeeds.

#### ❖ Service is the second category

Service, also called *karma yoga* or *seva*, refers to religious service given without the least thought of reward, which has the magical effect of softening the ego and bringing forth the soul's innate devotion. An example of service is performing simple chores at the temple, such as sweeping the floors or polishing the brass. Other forms of *seva* include holding feedings for the impoverished at a temple once a month, providing support for disaster victims, visiting prison inmates and helping the homeless. Children love to be helpful and should be encouraged to find religious expressions of this urge.

#### ❖ Devotion is the third category

Devotion, or *bhakti yoga*, centers around regularly worshiping the Deity at the temple and striving to awaken a profound love of God in our hearts, soften our intellect and develop a deep sense of humility. It includes devotional singing, pilgrimage and performing or attending puja in the home shrine room. For children, this can be as simple as bringing a flower to the shrine each morning before school. Kids love the Gods, especially Lord Ganesha, and they can, even as toddlers, be taught to hold hands in *namaskara*, prostrate at the shrine and learn songs and chants in praise of their favorite Deity.

## CHARACTER BUILDING, PART TWO

# GUIDE CHILDREN WITH LOVE, NOT FEAR



Children make mistakes not because they are bad, but because they lack knowledge or training.

For all of mankind, no matter where one is on the path, spiritual advancement comes from improving one's behavior. We do this by learning from our failures as much as from our successes. Unfortunately, this process is often inhibited by the idea that somehow we are not supposed to err. We grow up being scolded for our mistakes by our parents. Some teachers ridicule and even beat students when they make mistakes. Supervisors yell at workers when they blunder. No wonder many adults feel terrible when they don't do well. To spiritually benefit from our mistakes, we need a new attitude that opens the door for insight, and leads to improvement. We can view

mistakes instead as wonderful opportunities to learn. In disciplining our children, it is important to focus on finding out what lack of knowledge or training caused the misbehavior and then providing the needed guidance. This process can be understood in the light of desire, action and wisdom. We desire that our children behave well, but if our actions in correcting them create fear, resentment or feelings of inferiority, then they will not improve and we will have subverted our goal. By treating a child's errant behavior with love and understanding, we discover our own wisdom in handling kids, and we help them grow to a healthy maturity, equipped to guide their own children with love and wisdom.

#### Focus on solutions instead of punishment.

For some parents, disciplining their children for misbehavior is simply a matter of punishment. But *discipline* means "to teach," so punishment misses the point if it is not accompanied by taking a moment to gently teach and kindly help the child, to encourage, uplift and inspire. In many cases the child who erred simply does not know or understand some-

thing. There is some knowledge the child is missing. Thoughtful parents need to figure out what that knowledge is and teach it to the child in a way he or she can grasp and remember. This is a more time-consuming process than a swift slap on the behind, but it leads to far more permanent and positive results.

#### There are better forms of discipline than corporal punishment and verbal abuse.

When children seriously misbehave, punishment, of course, needs to be part of the response. The various forms of corporal or physical punishment and verbal abuse—spanking, hitting, pinching, using harsh or angry words—all cause the child to become resentful and fearful. In this state of mind he is unable and unwilling to focus on the lesson the parent intends to provide. Such punishments inevitably create a distance between parent and child and lower the child's sense of self-worth. On the other hand, alternative forms of punishment—loving, positive strategies, such as time-out, logical consequences and denial of privileges—



❖ **Meditation is the fourth category**

Meditation is also called raja yoga, or ashtanga yoga as it consists of eight limbs. The two foundational limbs are yama and niyama, discussed earlier. The third and fourth are asana—sitting quietly in yogic posture—and pranayama, breath control. Pratyahara, sense withdrawal, brings awareness into dharana, concentration, then into dhyana, meditation. Dhyana leads to samadhi, God Realization, and ultimately blossoms into the state called jnana. Children can learn to sit in lotus posture for short periods, to breathe diaphragmatically and to quiet their mind and emotions through attention and concentration. When they are more mature, you can take them to a swami or yoga teacher to learn the deeper aspects.

PART SIX  
**TEACH CHILDREN HOW TO LIVE  
POSITIVELY IN THE WORLD.**

**Train children that the world is a positive place  
filled with opportunities for growth**

The world in this sense refers to the arena of life, including where we interact with people the most, such as the home, school and our place of work. In Western thought, these are not considered spiritual places. However, in Hinduism they are. There is no sharp distinction between the sacred and the secular. In the words of our *paramaguru*, Siva Yogaswami, “The world is an ashram—a training ground for the achievement of moksha.”

What is it that transforms the world from a secular place into a sacred one? It is the understanding that it is through the process of experiencing life that we unfold spiritually. It is the knowing that through fulfilling our natural duties, honestly and to the best of our ability, we make spiritual progress. Why? Through interacting with others, we learn important lessons and, as a result, gradually deepen our understanding, improve our behavior and become more spiritual.

In the process, we work through karmas we created in the past and create new karmas to be faced in the future. Our daily activities, encounters and emotional reactions contribute to our progress just as much as attending pujas in the temple, studying the holy texts, meditating and worshiping in our home shrine. Paramaguru Yogaswami captured the essence of this perspective when he said, “All work must be done with the aim of reaching God.”

**Teach that life is a classroom in which  
we learn important lessons**

Life is a process of learning through trial and error and thereby advancing spiritually. Gurudeva explained: “Life is a series of experiences, one after another. Each experience can be looked at as a classroom in the big university of life if we only approach it that way. Who is going to these classrooms? Who is the member of this university of life? It’s not your instinctive mind. It’s not your intellectual mind. It’s the body of your soul, your superconscious self, that wonderful body of light. It’s maturing under the stress and strain.”

Children live much of their day learning, often in a classroom, so the idea that all of life is a school for our soul will come easily to them, and it will teach them to value lessons wherever they come from.

**Teach about the three great powers: desire, action and wisdom**

Important insights into the soul’s maturing process can be gained by looking at the three *shaktis* of God—*iccha*, the power of desire, *kriya*, the power of action and *jnana*, the power of wisdom—which are also the three powers of the soul. We first have a desire, and when the desire becomes strong enough we act. In young souls the action may be ill-conceived and wrongful, or adharmic, lacking in wisdom. For example, we want a computer, so we simply steal one. We need money, so we borrow with no intention to repay. The soul is repeating a cycle of similar experiences, moving back and forth from desire to action, desire to action.

In the case of the adharmic action of stealing, eventually the soul will learn the lesson that theft is not the best way to get what we need or want. This may come from the difficult experience of being caught, or by seeing the suffering our actions cause in others. Such

are more effective and conducive to the child’s learning the lesson from the experience, cooperating with the parents in a wholesome way and not repeating the behavior.

**Teach children how they can wisely respond to  
their mistakes through a four-step process.**

The most common first reaction to making a mistake is to become upset, get emotional about it or, if it is a serious mistake, to feel terribly burdened and even depressed. That is a natural first reaction, but if it is our only reaction, it is not enough. We need to cope with the emotional reaction to the action and move on to the second step, which is the learning stage.

A good second step to resolving a mistake is to think clearly about what happened and why, and find a way to not repeat the same error in the future. Perhaps we were not being careful enough, and resolving to be more careful next time will prevent the problem from recurring. Perhaps we were simply uninformed or we didn’t think things through. But with the additional knowledge learned from our blunder we can resolve to do better the next time a similar situation arises. Perhaps we created unintended negative consequences for ourselves or



Grandparents  
are invaluable  
mentors for the  
young ones

learning is the *jnana shakti*, soulful wisdom, coming forth and causing one’s behavior to improve. This process works for virtuous, or dharmic, actions as well. For example, we volunteer at the temple to teach children’s classes once a month. We are uplifted by the feeling that helping others gives us and decide to help out every week and even participate in meetings to plan out the classes. Selfless action

and the reaction it has on us brings an inner joy. In this way, *jnana* guides us to decide to undertake even more service and thus feel more joyful. We have again improved our behavior. If children are taught about these three basic forces at work in their life, they will seek to understand desire, think about action and strive for wisdom.

others. Now that we are aware of those consequences, we certainly won’t follow that path again. Recently a group of children in Australia started a fire in a small forest. Several innocent people were seriously burned. The children were caught, and as part of their discipline the judge directed them to visit the victims in the hospital to see the consequences of their actions. This impressed them deeply. By getting children to evaluate the effects of their deeds, we enable young ones to move from regretting “I shouldn’t have done it” to pledging “I won’t do it again.”

A third step may be needed if our mistake directly involved other people. Perhaps we have hurt their feelings or created a strain in the relationship. A personal apology can fix this if we know them well. If we are not close enough to the individual to verbally apologize, a generous act can adjust the flow of feelings into a harmonious condition. For example, children can be taught to include those they have hurt or offended among a group of friends invited to a party or simply sharing some cookies or other goodies.

A fourth step may be needed in the case of a major misdeed, for example, if we did something that was dishonest. In this case, even if

we resolve to not repeat the wrongful action and apologize to those involved, we may still feel bad. In this case we need to perform some form of penance, *prayashchitta*, to rid oneself of the sense of guilt about our actions. Typical forms of penance for adults are fasting, performing 108 prostrations before the Deity or walking prostrations up a sacred path or around a temple. These are too severe for younger children, but they can do simpler penances such as skipping dessert one meal or renouncing a favorite TV program one night.

**Help your children perfect the art of  
learning quickly from mistakes.**

The spiritual path is a series of experiences, and sometimes those experiences are mistakes that we make. If we teach our children to be self-reflective, they can quickly learn from their errors, avoid making them again and move forward on the spiritual path. If children are constantly making the same mistakes over and over and over again, they are not making good progress. This is something for parents to be alert to, for it is they who can set the patterns for resolution of karmas in their kids’ lives.



# Gita Press Runs into Its Next Century

The venerable religious press has printed more than 700 million books and pamphlets, including 141 million copies of the *Bhagavad Gita*



BY TIRTHO BANNERJI, INDIA

THE MOST UBIQUITOUS BOOKS FOUND IN Hindu households throughout India are the *Shrimad Bhagavad Gita* and *Ramcharitmanas*, often side by side with the booklet *Hanuman Chalisa*. A majority of these come from Gita Press in Gorakhpur. Why is that? Their nominal price is a key reason, but it's also because of their impeccable content, easy-to-grasp language, nicely laid-out text and top-quality printing.

In two years, on April 29, 2023, Gita Press—Hinduism's largest printer, publisher and distributor of religious literature—will turn 100. But the company continues to plod on unassumingly, without making noise about its huge body of work and incredible achievements.

By March 2019, Gita Press had produced 141.3 million copies of *Bhagavad Gita* in various editions, 108.7 million copies of the *Ramcharitmanas* plus other works by Goswami Tulsidas; 25.2 million copies of the *Puranas* and *Upanishads*, five million copies of *Hanuman Chalisa*, 198.6 million copies of small books, especially for children and the less educated; and 160 million copies of scripture-based booklets, pamphlets and texts on topics related to spiritual growth.

"Since its inception, Gita Press has published over 700 million books," states Dr. Lal Mani Tiwari, the production manager. The books are not restricted to Hindi and Sanskrit. Hindu religious titles, commentaries and translations are brought out in English, Malayalam, Telugu, Gujarati, Tamil, Marathi, Odiya, Kannada, Urdu, Assamese, Bangla, Punjabi and Nepali. *Kalyan*, its most popular Hindi periodical, has a subscriber base of over 230,000, and its English version, *Kal-*



*yana-Kalpataru*, has over 100,000 subscribers. Just imagine its range of readership!

Visiting the press campus, one marvels at the architectural brilliance of its famed entrance gateway, which depicts the country's popular temple styles. The entrance pillars are designed after the pillars of Ellora cave temple. The circular hollow in the middle portion, behind the chariot of Sri Krishna and Arjuna, is carved like the mouth of the Ajanta cave temple. A replica of Meenakshi Temple's architecture adorns the entry peak. Designs and graphics overhead portray Badrinath, Dwarka, Puri and Rameswaram,

India's four major pilgrimage destinations. *Satyamvad dharamamchar* ("Speak truth and practice dharma") is engraved on the door. Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first president of India and a great scholar, inaugurated this grand structure on April 29, 1955.

Gita Press functions on a sprawling 3.2-acre (1.3-hectare) lot. As with any press, it has four main departments: pre-press, printing, binding and distribution. It recently acquired a US\$15 million German press capable of better and more efficient printing, which helps cut production expenses. Lal Mani said they have also imported machines



**Sacred printing:** (clockwise from left) Gita Press logo; ornate entrance to the press plant; large single-color press with paper rolls in foreground; saddle stitching assembly line; the on-site book-store for visitors; on-site bookstore

from Japan and Italy to increase output and efficiency. The roar of the massive, state-of-the-art machines resonates through the premises—there's nothing quiet about book production. Each year they go through 4500 tons of paper.

The grandeur of the equipment is matched by the seamlessness of the operation. Every worker does his part with clinical precision and in sync with every other. Timing is crucial. As the books roll out, they are carefully stacked on pallets and moved to the bindery for finishing, then over to the shipping department. To watch the entire process—seeing the singular written word transformed into its mass-printed embodiment—is to be impressed with the magnitude of the accomplishment.

## Priced for Maximum Distribution

Traveling by train in India, one notices Gita Press stalls on every platform. Sales outlets fan across the country, from Chennai to Hardwar and from Surat to Cuttack. Lal Mani estimates there are more than 2,500 booksellers and 50 stalls in railway stations across India, all doing a brisk business. By one rough estimate, 50,000 Gita Press books







ATUL PATEL



ATUL PATEL



ATUL PATEL

of different kinds are sold every day. A copy of *Bhagavad Gita* can be procured for 42 cents and a booklet of *Hanuman Chalisa* for as little as six cents. How do they keep the prices so low?

Gita Press is run by a trust, on a nonprofit basis. It does not solicit external funding, donations or advertisements. Lal Mani explains: "Gita Press is not meant to make profits; it doesn't want to mint money. It is governed by a board of trustees. Nothing is spent on the top management. The books are published using the latest state-of-the-art machines. Because of all these factors, the production costs are low and books are made available at subsidized rates."

Any losses incurred are offset in part from the revenue generated by *Kalyan* magazine, the Gita Ayurveda medicine brand and Hast Nirmat Vastra Vibhag, their popular clothing stores in several cities (see pages 56–57).

#### Custodian of Hindu Culture

Readers of the publications unanimously believe no other institution in the world has done such yeoman service to promote Hindu philosophy and culture. Their common refrain is: The legacy of Gita Press will endure for ages and continue to safeguard the scriptures.

Scholars reading these books over many years deeply respect the institution and recommend its publications to others far and wide. Professor Murli Manohar Pathak, head of Department of Sanskrit & Prakrit Languages in Deen Dayal Upadhyaya (DDU) Gorakhpur University, states, "Since my childhood, I have seen Gita Press books in my house. My grandfather was an avid reader of *Kalyan* magazine. It rubbed off on me. It was full of interesting information and imparted knowledge in a very unobtrusive way. I was in Ujjain for a long time and always promoted Gita Press books among people and booksellers alike. My younger brother stays in London, and whenever he comes here, he carries bundles of their books back with him." Pathak also attends programs held by Gita Press and feels its tradition is too well established and deep rooted to fizzle out due to various modern onslaughts.

Dr. Vishwanath Tiwari, former president of the National Academy of Letters (Sahitya Akademi) and professor in the Hindi Department in DDU Gorakhpur University, says Gita Press books have been a permanent fixture in his family, "an integral part of my upbringing." Vishwanath underlines that people recognize Gorakhpur largely through

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**Book production:** (top to bottom) Four-color press recently acquired from Japan; hand assembly of signatures into books; the shipping department



GITA PRESS



GITA PRESS



GITA PRESS

**Art exhibit:** (clockwise from above) view of the spacious on-site art museum at Gita Press; visitors study close up the art on display; Goswami Tulsidas' Ramcharitmanas in handwritten edition; same text as bound books—they've printed more than 108 million copies to date



ATUL PATEL

Gita Press. "In fact, it is Gita Press that has put Gorakhpur on the world map."

Gorakhpur is also famous, of course, for the Gorakhpur Math (monastery) founded by the 11th-century saint Gorakshanath of the Nath Sampradaya (tradition), and after which the city is named. Gorakhpur Math has been active in Indian politics for more than a century; its present head, Yogi Adityanath, is chief minister of the state of Uttar Pradesh.

No matter where he travels in India, Dr. Tiwari encounters people familiar with Gita

Press. Once, outside the Golden Temple in Amritsar, he spoke with a Sikh shopkeeper aged around 85, whose mother—age open to conjecture—was also sitting there. "When I told them my association with Gita Press, the old woman asked me if I could send her a copy of Tulsidas' *Sunderkand*, a section of the *Ramayana* describing Hanuman's journey to Sri Lanka. Similarly, while I was visiting Meenakshi Temple in Madurai, a Marwari shopkeeper asked me to send him a copy of Tulsidas's *Kavitawali*."





### Leela Chitra Mandir

Visitors to the Gita Press campus should not miss the Leela Chitra Mandir art gallery, which contains a large collection of paintings by iconic Indian artists dating back to different eras. Around 684 paintings, arranged according to the sequence of events, portray the anecdotes and teachings of Lord Rama and Lord Krishna. One of these shows Lord Krishna washing the feet of his dear friend Sudama to welcome him as he comes calling at his kingdom.

Many other paintings are aesthetically displayed in the gallery, including a series of 92 vintage Mewari-style paintings depicting Sri Krishna Lila. The walls are adorned with marble plaques displaying all 700 verses of the *Bhagavad Gita* and 700 couplets of various saints.

There's also a library of Hindu religious books containing old and rare copies of the *Bhagavad Gita* with commentaries in various languages. The archives contain over 3,500 manuscripts, including 100 interpretations of the *Bhagavad Gita*, according to Wikipedia. For anyone researching a particular Hindu scripture, the library is a treasure trove and an ideal place to pore over the texts.

### Origins During the Freedom Struggle

Gita Press was founded April 29, 1923, to propagate and protect Sanatana Dharma. It was a time when religious conversions were peaking and India was in the grip of the British regime. Jaya Dayal Goyandka, Ghanshyam Das Jalan and Hanuman Prasad Poddar joined hands to establish the press for spiritual reawakening and moral righteousness.

During its first four years, Gita Press printed only ancient scriptures. The canvas and spectrum widened in 1927, when Poddar started the magazine *Kalyan*. This gave a new face to Gita Press. Apart from preaching religious ethics, meditation, yoga and dharma,

**Press grounds and outlets:** (above) part of their three-acre campus in Gorakhpur; (below) typical Gita Press bookstall, as found all over India—this one is in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh

*Kalyan* also started addressing social concerns and topical issues that India was grappling with at the time. Even as spirituality remained the central theme, an undercurrent of nationalistic fervor ran in Poddar's incisive editorials. In the 1950s he opposed the

political leaders and academicians. Among these were Mahatma Gandhi, Madan Mohan Malviya, S. Radhakrishnan, Rabindranath Tagore, Gopinath Kaviraj, Radhakamal Mukherjee and Rajendra Prasad. Almost all wrote for *Kalyan*, and their diverse writing helped the journal reach dizzying heights.

After Independence, Poddar continued to write until he passed away in 1971. The Indian government issued a postage stamp in his memory in 1992. *Kalyan* still publishes his commentaries on the philosophical traditions of India. *Kalyan* remains prominent to this day; but the popularity of Gita Press rests on the religious books it publishes, with the demand soaring higher year after year.

### Brief Period of Labor Unrest

In December 2014, the press was shut down after talks between the management and workers became deadlocked. The employees went on strike. Their demands included a raise in salary. There were plans developed to shift to another place.

"Unfounded rumors triggered misunderstanding among the workers," Lal Mani explains. "They felt they were not getting the legally required minimum wages that they were en-

titled to, even though Gita Press was paying far more. I myself went with them to the labor commissioner. When the doubts were dispelled, the workers realized their mistake and resumed work unconditionally."

Three years later, in 2017, social media was rife with the false news that the press was facing closure due to financial constraints



Hindu Code Bill, which revised Hindu personal laws regarding marriage, inheritance and adoptions. The bill was extremely controversial. Although it improved the rights of Hindu women, it did nothing for women of other religions whose personal laws were not touched by the new Indian government.

Poddar had good rapport with many po-



**Affiliated ashram and school:** (top) Gita Bhawan in Rishikesh with its 1,000 rooms, all free for pilgrims; (below left and right) students at the Rishikul Brahmacharya Ashram in Rajasthan

and was unable to pay its workers. "People with vested interests fabricate news and spread such rumors, mostly on social media, off and on," explains Lal Mani. "They often appeal to people for donations of money to salvage the press, but which they would then pocket themselves." Gita Press has over 400 workers, who are paid regularly in compliance with the Wages Act. The functioning of the press continues as smoothly as ever.

### Ancillary Organizations and Projects

Gita Bhawan, with five locations in Rishikesh, is the largest and best-known organization affiliated with Gita Press. It has a thousand free rooms for pilgrims, vegetarian food, an Ayurveda department and huge lecture hall. The multiple bathing ghats along the River Ganga in front of the Bhawan are used extensively by devotees. The Laxmi Narayan Temple is located on the premises. Given the room price (nothing), it is not surprising that visitors are advised: "Rooms will be extremely fundamental with just a bed inside." They have no website, but can be reached at 91-135-243-0122—though apparently they are closed since July 2020 on account of the pandemic.

The Rishikul Brahmacharya Ashram in Churu, Rajasthan, was established in the same year as the press, 1923, to impart free education through the ancient gurukul tradition. At present it has 100 students, who pay a monthly fee of \$5.47 for food, lodging, education, clothes and medicine. They learn *Vedas*, Sanskrit and Hindi.

The Gobind Bhawan Karyalaya in Kolkata dates back to 1928. In addition to raising public awareness about Hinduism through sale of the Gita Press books, the society offers Ayurvedic medicines and clothes at cheap prices. Gita discourses and other lectures take place from time to time in their huge auditorium. Their handloomed clothing is



sold there in Kolkata and at outlets called Hast Nirmat Vastra Vibhag located in Gorakhpur, in Kanpur, and at Gita Bhawan in Rishikesh.

Finally, to help victims of natural calamities, Gita Press has a cell called Seva Dal that provides humanitarian services to people affected by flood, drought or earthquake. The team rendered commendable help during the 2017 earthquake in Uttarakhand, the flood of the same year in Gorakhpur, and the 1999 cyclone in Odisha, one of the largest ever to strike India.

### Ready for Its Next Century

"Serving humanity for truth and peace"—that's the motto Gita Press abides by. The one-of-its-kind institution propounds the tenets of *Bhagavad Gita* and moral principles that can improve one's quality of life through spiritual well-being. At its core is the vision to raise spiritual consciousness by publishing religious texts.

Now the institution is bracing to meet the challenges posed by e-books and Kindle. Says Lal Mani. "Today's generation want to read books online. There's a growing demand for e-books. We have collaborated with Amazon to put our books online. We are uploading a lot of material to our website ([gitapress.org](http://gitapress.org)). Our team will explore and utilize more

platforms when the need arises."

"But," he emphasizes, "I feel that when you plan to recite *Bhagavad Gita* or *Ramcharit-manas*, you feel most comfortable reading from a physical book. When today's youth get inclined towards spirituality as they age and experience life, they will realize the importance of recitation while reading the printed texts. Reading them on Kindle or mobile phone will never be fully possible, and moreover it won't give one that quintessential content. So, the print will always hold its sway."

Professor Pathak, quoted earlier, believes Gita Press serves as a link to connect us to religion, faith, culture and spirituality in this fast-paced world. So, whether books are read online or in physical form, the popularity of Gita Press will grow and continue to influence and leave an impact on the masses in a huge way, as it has over the years.

Echoing similar sentiments, Dr. Vishwanath emphasizes that Gita Press will keep flourishing irrespective of all future challenges. Religion and faith will have a natural fascination, and reading about them will never go out of fashion. But, he stresses, the youth of today must be offered spirituality, philosophies and metaphysics in a way that satisfies their appetite for logic, because tradition must coexist with rationality.





SHRI RAM MANDIR, ONTARIO

NEXT GENERATION

A Forum for Budding Hindu Authors

Four stories from HINDUISM TODAY's intern writing program bode well for the future of Hindu journalism



Our attempt to solicit more youth voices for Hinduism Today started with a largely unsuccessful appeal to overly-busy college-age Hindus but led to an

enthusiastic response from middle and high school students, who demonstrate in these four insightful articles that they are quite up to the task

This Is How One American-Raised Hindu Prays

By Shaina Grover, 16

GROWING UP IN AMERICA IS OBVIOUSLY NOT THE SAME AS growing up in India, and being a Hindu raised in America and India are two very different experiences. Being raised in India will often mean that a child has a greater understanding of their religion, its practices and beliefs. Being raised as a Hindu in America can be a little confusing. While we follow some aspects of Hindu culture and aim to understand them, we also must follow American culture. Our identity is a mixture of both Hindu and American beliefs. And it's not just the kids raised in America—their parents, who immigrated to the US, definitely don't participate in the same traditions as they used to. I'm a Punjabi Hindu, so in my family we believe you shouldn't do certain things on Tuesdays and Thursdays, such as the laundry. My grandparents, who lived their entire lives in India, follow this strictly and probably understand the reasoning

behind it. Although my parents and I try to follow these to the best of our abilities, certain things in our lifestyle as a person living in the US often interfere. Essentially, even though we are Hindus, living in America has diminished how much we participate in certain Hindu traditions. That's not to say we don't follow anything properly, or that we aren't in touch with our culture and religion. Looking back on my life, I've probably been praying or participating in one puja or another since before I knew what that was. I've sat in front of the temple, with my eyes closed, palms touching, "praying," before I even understood what belief was, what worshiping was, or what praying even meant. As I grew older, I enrolled in Hindi classes and started lessons in Kathak, a North Indian classical dance style, which I still take. Both allowed me to learn more about our culture. In Kathak, the goal is to

tell a story through dance and expressions. More often than not, these stories are about different Gods. Whether it's a playful dance about Krishna and Radha Ji, or a story about Hanuman Ji saving a village, as I became older I came to understand the deeper meaning behind the dances. By talking to and listening to my grandparents and parents, I learned about the different Gods, the mythology and why traditions are the way they are. For example, as a little kid, I didn't know why we would light oil lamps or do fireworks on Diwali, but when I was old enough to understand, I read the Ramayana and learned the origin of the festival in His triumphant return to Ayodhya. I was able to take these stories, make connections and see how this applied to my life. Out of the several themes in the story, one of them being good versus evil, I learned to incorporate in my everyday life the belief that good always triumphs over evil. My parents told me to pray and participate in pujas, so I did, and they taught me about their beliefs, but that does not mean I pray because I have to. Even though the habit of prayer was instilled in me by my parents from a young age, I continue to pray because I believe in the Gods and Their role in our lives. An important distinction to keep in mind is the difference between believing and praying. Even though I believe that there is a higher power and that the Gods we worship and pray to can provide us guidance in our lives and They have the power to change our lives, this isn't the same thing as praying. You may believe in the Gods, but do you take the time to sit down in your home shrine or go to the temple to communicate with these Gods? For me, praying isn't something I spend a big part of my day doing. When I remember, I will quickly stop by the temple, but oftentimes it's not for more than a minute. However, on festivals such as Diwali, Navaratri, Janmashtami, and more, we sit down in our temple and pray as a family. This is time that is set apart for praying that day. There are some youth who will pray every day for a certain

amount of time, while others will only do it with their families, but it's still not as much as the generations before them. In my family, my mom does puja in the morning and she even fasts once a week. My grandparents do that and more. Every Thursday, my grandparents attend a satsang gathering (by Zoom during the pandemic). They always light an oil lamp in the morning and pray before starting their day. All in all, growing up in America is definitely a different lifestyle than growing up in India or immigrating to the US after college. The way you are brought up and the things you are taught are different. The reality we need to face is that as the world itself becomes more modernized and children more educated, they develop their own opinions and drift farther and farther away from our culture, regardless of where they live. However, even if your culture and religion are not a big part of who you are, that's okay, as long as you don't forget or ignore them. It is important to at least make an attempt to learn more about your culture and participate in its traditions. While it may not always make sense, the only way you can achieve something out of praying is by setting aside time and giving your prayers your undivided attention—something even I struggle with. By spending time with my grandparents, listening to their stories, reading books, etc., I have gained a deeper understanding of my Hindu background.

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Born in Minnesota, Shaina Grover is a sophomore at Northwood High School in Irvine, California. She has an interest in STEM and enjoys traveling, dancing, reading and playing the violin. shainagrover514@gmail.com

There are some youth who will pray every day for a certain



COURTESY SHAINA GROVER

We're here: (far left) local school children, including a large percentage of Indian origin, get a tour of the Shri Ram Mandir of Mississauga, outside Toronto, Canada; (left) Shaina poses during her uncle's wedding; (below) Sanjeevani Dedge

I Made Better the Way My Classmates Studied India

By Sanjeevani Dedge, 12

EVER SINCE I WAS LITTLE, I HAVE BEEN deeply involved in my culture and traditions and wanted others to learn about them as well. For example, I showed my entire first-grade class the sun salutations, with my parents' help. We distributed posters so everyone could practice at home. My class enjoyed the experience so much that we practiced it several times again throughout the year. Growing up further, I came to understand that California social studies class for 6th and 7th grade had inaccurate and unfair content on Hinduism. I decided to do my best to change that. During my 6th-grade year, I realized that the class was spending quite a while on other ancient civilizations, and I was nervous that there would not be enough time

left for ancient India. My suspicions came true, and I was concerned that my teacher would not get enough time to cover India. I most certainly wanted my classmates to learn about ancient India's achievements, traditions, economics and social structure as well! I discussed these problems with my school friends, the teacher and also my parents. They understood my concerns, and we brainstormed what we could do. Hearing how my friends in other schools had a similar learning experience—being able to study only the geography of ancient India—inspired me to suggest that my dad also talk about ancient India in class to add to what my teacher covers. He talked with my teacher and the vice-principal, and they were very cooperative and glad to have my dad teach in my class. Ahead of his session, my dad handed pamphlets of "History of Hindu India" to the



COURTESY SANJEEVANI DEDGE





class and shared the resources over Google drive as well. He presented two full sessions over two days, and my classmates and teachers enjoyed it. I was delighted because he not only briefly covered again the important geographic sites of ancient India, such as Mohenjo Daro and Harappa, he also covered the Hindu roots in ancient India, contributions of Hindu women, sages Valmiki and Vyasa, history of the Vedas and other important traditions.

That same year (2019), I introduced my classmates to Diwali. To me, Diwali symbolizes light over darkness, good over evil. At home, I celebrated by making a mud fort in our driveway ([bit.ly/diwalifort](https://bit.ly/diwalifort)), lighting oil lamps and distributing sweets to friends. Earlier, when I was in 5th grade, my mom did a presentation to my class and drew a rangoli design with rice flour on the floor in front of the classroom door. This year I wanted all my classmates to learn about it as well. So, a few of my Indian friends and I talked to my teacher about how we could explain Diwali, and we took her permission to share different Indian sweets with the class. Everybody loved learning about

Diwali and tasting all the different sweets my friends and I had brought, and it was great to see everybody having such a great time! I learned many things throughout this year-long experience. The most important things were being proactive regarding your values by voicing your concerns, reaching out to others and finding help. Overall, it was great to witness my classmates learning so much about India. I loved seeing how my contributions changed their learning experience for the better. With this positive thought in mind, I look forward to the rest of my middle and high school history class experiences.

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*Sanjeevani Dedge was born in Santa Clara, California, and now lives in San Jose. Now a 7th-grade student at Dartmouth Middle School, she is the student council representative for her class. She enjoys dance, swimming and reading. [sanjeevanisdedge@gmail.com](mailto:sanjeevanisdedge@gmail.com)*

## Understanding Today's Hindu Youth

By Rutvij Holay, 15

**O**FENTIMES, WE HEAR ABOUT HOW OUR youth have lost touch with our culture, and how our community must establish programs to regain it. These programs have succeeded in some aspects, but have failed in many others, likely due to the lack of a youth perspective.

In my 15 years of life, I've been blessed to meet many Hindu youth across our diaspora. I've met those who could speak fluent Sanskrit, and those who only spoke English. I've met some who would go on to Harvard, and some who preferred to start with community college.

I've also met many parents who watch movies like "Miss Indian-American" and claim that they understand all second-generation Indians. There are dangers in using such absolutes. Hindu Americans cannot be considered a monolith. By understanding the commonalities and differences among us, we may be able to plan programs that truly ensure our culture remains in this nation far longer than we do.

One key factor in these differences is location. A Hindu living in my hometown of Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, for example, lives very differently than a Hindu in Florence, Kansas. Population plays a role in this. Some things are obvious, such that in areas like Pahrump, Nevada, it is harder to maintain Hindu culture. The five Hindu families that live there do the best they can with weekly gatherings in the lone Indian restaurant, the Pourhouse. However, it's hard to run any religious or cultural classes, and they have to rely on online courses.

It might be assumed, following this, that a higher population is always better for a community. In truth, this only applies to an extent. In my conversations with one young man from Texas, he revealed to me that his apartment and town were full of Indians. I assumed that festivals such as Diwali or Holi would be celebrated with great zest by the whole community. In reality, the people simply split up into their various communities of Marathis, Punjabis, Tamilians and all the other various Indian groups rather than uniting around a common identity. Thus, it becomes clear that just as a lack of population is a threat to our culture, so too is overpopulation a threat to our unity. Both must be taken into account when planning any programs. For better or worse, our community is filled with a diversity of linguistic groups and different subcultures. This creates unique situations both between and within various ethnic groups.



COURTESY RUTVIJ HOLAY

For example, out of those who are fluent in their mother tongue, it is rare to find any who are fluent in more than one Indic language. This fact restricts the method of communication between friends of different communities to English, that being the only language everyone can understand.

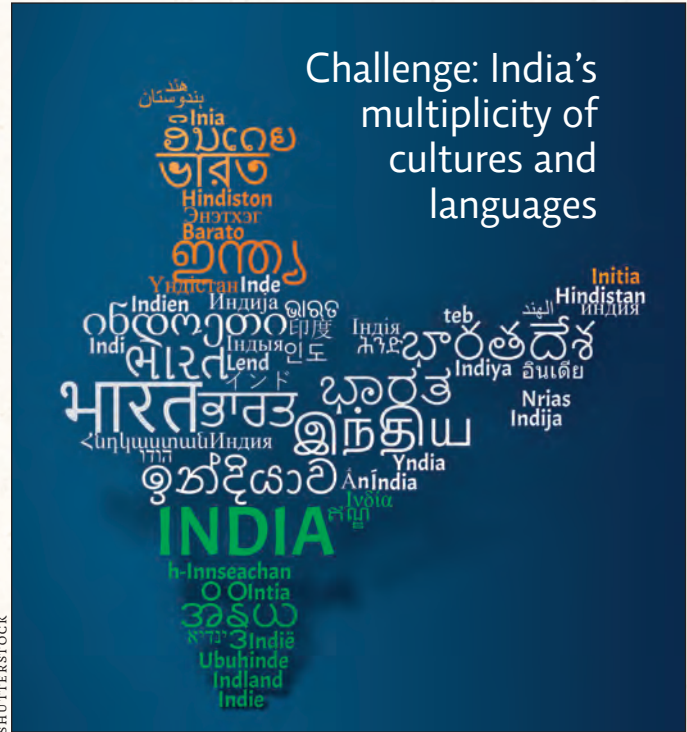
The effect of this on individual linguistic groups varies, depending on the population and unity of the group. For example, the imposition of English hits harder in communities from India's northeastern states, whose US populations, and thus opportunities to speak their mother tongue, are limited. The imposition of English on the youth of these populations can easily lead to a

lack of cultural knowledge at best, and extinction of their languages in the United States at worst, a fate we must all work to prevent.

Aside from the populations of these linguistic groups, we can also find varying degrees of cultural pride within them. Tamil youth, for example, have taken great pride in their culture due to groups like SoCal Tamil Youth Leadership and Entrepreneurship, which allow them to volunteer with their Tamil peers. This pride then extends to the classroom as well, where I've seen many Tamilians speaking with each other in Tamil, an act that serves as an inspiration to us all.

Though the Gujarati community doesn't speak in Gujarati as much in school, there is a significantly higher level of pride in their community as well, due to their abundance of community organizations such as the Gujarati Samaj and Swadhyay Parivar, which leads to Gujarati youth showing no hesitation to talk about their culture, even with non-Gujarati friends. This pays dividends in the long run.

Contrast this with youth from my home state of Maharashtra, and you'll find a far different picture. I've met only two Marathis who were willing to talk with me in Marathi, and countless more who have yelled at me for doing so. Many Maharashtrians in America don't know the language. The reason behind this is clear when we contrast the institutions created by Marathis to Gujarati and Tamilian institutions. While there are Marathi language schools, they only teach the language rather than why it is important to speak it, and only briefly touch on the idea of being a Hindu in a Western world, something first-generation Hindus have taken for granted. This lack of community easily leads to a lack of culture. This problem isn't confined to the Marathi community, nor is it the case that only Gujaratis and Tamilians care about their culture. However, it is clear that



**Finding commonalities:** the millions of Indians in the US tend to form separate organizations based on language

the challenges we face strongly depend on how well our subculture teaches us about our traditions. Those who are born in a more unified population with large numbers, such as the Tamils, are far more likely to preserve their culture than those born in communities with fewer numbers, such as the Marathis.

There are, however, certain unifying factors amongst our diverse population. One of the better ones is a drive for academic success, one that has led to our people holding a high position in this society. Yet, at the same time, as with many religions, it is not uncommon to hear of youth skipping Holi functions to study, or refusing to join Hindu activities since they believe they won't help them get into college.

For those in cities with a high level of education, such as Irvine, California, this competition is increased, and I have heard many Hindus tell me they skip their morning prayers, known as *sandhyavandanam*, because they have to study, or drop out of their Bal Vihar classes in middle school to focus on schoolwork. It becomes evident, then, that to retain these youth, we must ensure that we appeal to their self-interest.

Various groups, including non-Hindu ones, have tried to solve these issues for their people. Many Muslims have their kids take Arabic classes, and have them attempt to learn the *Koran* by heart, which is in

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**BAPS youth:** (right) young devotee reciting mantras on his *japa mala* during an event

stark contrast with those Hindus who rarely teach their kids more than a few verses from the *Gita*, or how to perform *arati* worship. Personally, I've met many in the Chinese community who have told their kids that they must ask for their food in Chinese if they wish to eat. Even amongst those groups who don't put in as much effort teaching a language, the offering of that language—such as Spanish, Chinese or French—at schools inherently makes it easier for them to learn it, a luxury that speakers of Indic languages don't have.

While local temples or community groups have tried to deal with these disadvantages by running events for youth and holding classes, these are local. They can't help the many Hindus who live outside of the major Indian population centers. In addition, because there are few opportunities to participate in internships and gain volunteer hours in the Hindu community, many students and parents aren't interested in such programs after the kids reach middle school and have other extracurricular classes and activities.

It should be noted, however, that the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh did hold an internship program for students in the summer of 2020. If such programs continue, a rise in their membership is probable. Also, groups like Sanskrita Bharati have tried to incentivise students by accrediting their Sanskrit as a Foreign Language course, and even giving a certificate from the University of Pennsylvania at the end of the course. Similarly, courses in other Indian languages could be accredited so students not interested in Sanskrit could be engaged. As the *Rig Veda* says, there are many paths to one truth. If students are interested in a certain area of Hinduism, we must make sure study in that area is open to them.

It's clear, then, that Hindu students are diverse and face a wide variety of challenges. Any program that seeks to educate them must find ways to cross local barriers and help students feel pride both in their regional tradition as well as wider Hindu culture. In addition, such programs must also offer benefits that will directly help students succeed in their career, and try to cater to the interests of as many students as possible. If such steps are implemented, it is likely that the program will succeed.

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*Rutvij Holay of Irvine, California, is a budding Hindu political activist who is presently working with his local school district and a textbook company to change how Hinduism is depicted in education. He can be reached at [rutvij.holay@gmail.com](mailto:rutvij.holay@gmail.com).*



BAPS



# How Meditation Made Me a Better Dancer

By Santhanaa Hariharaputran, 16

WHAT IS MEDITATION? IS IT THE ART OF engaging in contemplation or reflection for the purpose of attaining an elevated level of spiritual awareness? Or is it something that goes beyond the mind and transmutes into an art form of beauty and grace?

As an Indian-born child raised in America, my interactions with the distinctive skill of meditation were quite limited. In fact, my perception of meditation before the age of seven consisted of grown ups posing in awkward positions and closing their eyes for prolonged periods of time. Our generation believed meditation and yoga were activities done by adults whose mobile abilities were very limited or those who were so tired from life's abundantly tiring activities that they were completely fine with sleeping in a rather uncomfortable position.

Every summer I went back to India where I had a close-knit group of friends, most from my Bharatanatyam dance class. If it were closely examined, my little group of dance buddies could easily fit into the modern-day friend-group stereotype. We had a class clown, we had a "Mom" of the group, there was the one who was always hungry, and then there was me, the "go-with-the-flow" girl. The four of us pretty much made up 95% of the entertainment in our class. When we weren't dancing, we were joking around and participating in witty debates and discussions with other classmates. Since most of the entertainment in our class came from the four of us, it only seemed fit that our class clown (let's just call him Krishna, since I don't think he'd like his real name here) was creating all the drama.

To the outside world, Krishna and our dance teachers (whom we called our gurus) never got along with each other, due to Krishna's playful misbehavior that only seemed to happen in class. I remember the first time our gurus openly expressed annoyance at his conduct.



COURTESY SANTHANAA HARIHARAPUTRAN

It was a normal dance session and our gurus were teaching the older students a class, which none of the rest of us could identify as a meditation session. As if on cue, Krishna walked in with his usual carefree demeanor and started mocking how everyone looked like they were sleeping, in a class that was supposed to be filled with spirit and energy. Unlike their usual routine of laughing off whatever he said, however, our gurus were mildly annoyed and told Krishna to sit through the lesson with them. Class, as we knew it, ended for the rest of our group and we waited for Krishna to be released from his "punishment." We never talked about what happened during the session, but Krishna seemed so interested that he joined the following day also. Naturally, the rest of us wanted to witness this fascinating event, so we joined the session out of curiosity.

To us, the hour-long session felt like an eternity. We could not keep quiet for longer than two minutes at a time, though that wasn't the case with Krishna. To our astonishment, he followed every single instruction from our gurus with utmost silence and respect, bewildering even the older kids. After the session, our initial shock at Krishna's sudden open display of respect turned into a mild worry. We decided to confront him about his new-found courtesy towards our gurus and all that they do.

He replied in a manner so simple it was hard to catch the seriousness in his voice, "Our gurus taught me about the importance of meditation." That was it. He did not add to this simple sentence and left us worrying about whether he got hit in the head and forgot about his usually extremely playful self. His response, however direct it was, still piqued my curiosity. I asked him more about it the next day, but did not get a response any more informative than his previous one. He seemed to imply I should ask our gurus myself. So I did.

Our gurus were pleased to find such young students asking so many questions about an art form they would usually reserve for the more experienced students and told us all about the importance of meditation and yoga in dance. We learned about each of the chakras we utilize when dancing and how we could achieve better control over our movements through meditation. We learned about the existence of a superior power, and how surrendering to this higher power would help us become one with the forces spiritually, and with Mother Earth physically. Unfortunately, none of us really knew what was meant by "superior power." We tried clarifying with our gurus, but they could only offer that we would know it when we felt it.



REUTERS/GEORGE SILVA



NADAM

**Silence within, dance without:** (clockwise from top left) Santhanaa during a 2020 performance on Maha Sivaratri at the Siva Kameshwari Temple, Irvine; a youthful dance group at a 2013 Narthan Academy of Dance and Music performance, Bengaluru, India; meditation class for girls in Caracas, Venezuela

gurus about the question until they gave their final answer in terms that we could understand, or at least think about. They said, "Many say that practice makes perfect, but what good is practice when the mind, soul and body are not connected? What good is that practice when there is no focus or control?"

With that, we practiced meditating every day before and after our dance sessions, and each following dance routine reflected the calm tranquility and utter control of our meditation. The first day was rough. Our little seven-year-old bodies were filled with energy no matter how long we danced, so the amount of time in which we could sit still was less than five minutes. By the end of the month, however, we were all keeping pace with the older kids. We could sit through hour-long sessions without having any interruptions by us, and our dancing improved greatly. I know "greatly" could be taken as a relative term, but by the end of the first month, I could see how each of my symbolic hand gestures, *mudras*, were more defined and how the speed and precision of each step were enhanced. We were able to control our core and minimize flailing around. For a group of seven-year-olds, the change in how we delivered our expressions was truly mesmerizing to the audience.

I still practice meditating whenever I get the time to do so, and I still practice Bharatanatyam as well. I participate in weekly dance classes and try my best to meditate for at least ten minutes before and after class, which helps me get into the mood of dancing. It is similar to a cleansing ritual, only I'm washing away everything that happened during the past week from my mind. What I meditate away during this ritual depends purely on the type of dance piece we are practicing each lesson. If the dance is supposed to be happy, then I wash away all the stressful or otherwise bad things that may

have occurred during the week. If the dance piece is supposed to be sad, then I meditate focusing on anything sad that has happened. Of course, I am not doing this to hurt myself in any way, but only to bring out the expression needed to convey the story of the dance. Even dancers with the best facial expressions and the cleanest moves might not have the stamina needed to complete difficult pieces. For them, most dance teachers recommend meditation.

A key component of meditation is controlling your breathing. When we do more meditation and learn to control our breathing, we use less oxygen when dancing, thereby increasing our stamina. Meditation not only helps with stamina and control, but it also helps with stress. Now, I would be lying if I were to say that meditating relieved all my stress and that I am living a stress-free life, because really, only music does that for me. However, I am able to minimize my anxiety through meditation because it helps me focus. So, when I focus on a task that would otherwise make me feel overwhelmed, I am able to get it done quicker by meditating a couple of minutes beforehand and improving my focus. Of course, sometimes a few minutes is not enough, due to the amount of pressure an average teenager experiences. But I usually feel a difference a couple of minutes into whatever activity that I am working on—usually a sense of productivity and sometimes an adrenaline rush to motivate my system to work on and finish the task at hand. So yes, meditation not only helps with controlling my movements and with readying myself for the precise execution of my dance, but it also helps me de-stress and gain a better perspective on life. I have been meditating for the past eight years, and am proud to say that I have experienced the extensive benefits meditation brings of peacefulness, control and stamina in both my dance and my life.

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





SADHANA

## A Daily Regimen of Hindu Practices

Advice for establishing a regular routine of spiritual practice leading to a more fulfilling inner life and a more effective outer life

BY SUGANTH SRICHANDRAMOHAN,  
TORONTO, CANADA

**W**E BECOME SUCCESSFUL IN THE world by following a daily regimen of spiritual and material practices. Some people follow only a material regimen. They may achieve physical success, but their life may become unbalanced or unfulfilled over time. The question “Now what?” will begin to lurk within their daily routines, as they have denied a core component of their being, the inner self. Bringing forth success and a higher version of ourselves goes far beyond just making more money or having a higher position at work. This success is bringing forth what is deep within us to the world around us—affecting the world around us more than it affects us; in essence, to change the world around us to our will. As Hindus, we are fortunate to have many practices that assist us in a holistic life of success, both material and spiritual.

We all relate to the world around us. There are two ways we do this. Firstly, we are affected by the world. Secondly, we affect it. I have found we can enhance our ability to



affect the world by following certain Hindu practices. We can strengthen our aura and willpower, bringing forth a stronger version of ourselves to the world, by flowing awareness within Hindu mental constructs, performing daily puja, and using affirmations, mantras and various meditation techniques. This enables us to influence the world around us more than it affects us.

A secondary by-product of these practices is that you see the world for what it is, and many of its supposed charms fall away. You become more focused on what you want from the world and how it relates to your inner life and your inner being. You become more successful in the world—but your primary purpose for that success is not just to make gains in the world, but to bring forth the truth of your inner world to the outer world.

Having a strict daily regimen and routine based on sadhanas built around spiritual and material development balances our inner and outer nature. In a holistic life, the spiritual and material are not two separate things. Both must be looked after.

These sadhanas include the performance of pujas and meditations for the “spiritual side” along with eating healthy and exercising the body for the “material side.” The more intense this practice, the quicker and more lasting the results.

For example, if you eat one apple a day and think you are eating healthy, while the rest of your meals come from fast-food restau-

**Making time for your sadhana:**  
(counter-clockwise from left) A Hindu family gathers at their home shrine to perform Ganesha worship together; author Suganth Srichandramohan from Toronto, Canada; a coloring-book drawing done by Suganth's daughter Shreya, depicting her father performing his daily practice

rants, your practice is not intense and may not produce the outcome you are looking for. Eating every meal healthy and drinking plenty of water, with perhaps the occasional indulgence of a piece of chocolate, is a better practice. The results of a healthier body and clearer mind will manifest quickly. Everyone recognizes this extreme example. But the same is true for spiritual routines (sadhanas).

If you have a five-minute meditation and then go out into the world of work and come home and watch Netflix for an hour after taking care of the kids, you are not performing your spiritual sadhanas intensely. The results will be like eating an apple a day and thinking you have a healthy lifestyle.

So, what should we do?

### Creating Your Routine

We should build a daily regimen of sadhanas that strengthen us both spiritually and materially. Each component should serve a particular, clearly understood purpose.

Once you have built some of the components of your regimen, then make it a daily habit. There is strength in routine. The conscious effort of building a daily routine and ensuring that we follow it for a few weeks is the hard part. Once it becomes a routine, we don't need to think about doing it. All other daily tasks fall around these sadhanas you have set for yourself.

Here are some simple sadhanas you can start with, a balanced regimen that will let you test the waters:

- 1) Learn and perform a simple puja to invoke the devas and create a higher vibration. This can be as simple as ringing a bell and waving incense or a small flame before the Deities at your personal shrine.
- 2) Perform a simple pranayama, such as breathing in for nine counts, holding the breath for one count, breathing out for nine counts, holding one count, and repeating.
- 3) Repeat an affirmation of positivity, while feeling and visualizing the results you want to occur in your life.
- 4) Walk at least 10,000 steps each day, ideally outdoors.

5) Perform hatha yoga to remain limber and balance your mind by balancing your body.

### Prioritizing Your Regimen

We all have priorities. Either we have chosen our priorities or they have been thrust upon us. We may say we don't have time for certain things like exercise, but what we are really saying is that we have prioritized other things in our life over our health.

So we have to re-prioritize what is important for us. Since this regimen has the power to alter our physical and spiritual life for the better, it is well worth the effort. We should also let others understand our priorities, to avoid conflict with other important priorities. This is especially true when you begin

getting the notes from someone who attended. But if you miss five or six classes, either you will need to spend a few days catching up or you will fail the course. The same is true for your spiritual routine. Take it as seriously (or more seriously) as you would a university course.

If part of your sadhana is to do a certain set of affirmations, but you had no time to complete it today, then do it twice tomorrow. Not in a rush, one set after the other, but perhaps once in the morning and once in the evening. You must perform both sets well, just as you would a single day's set.

Be gentle with yourself. Don't be a fanatic. You may genuinely need to pause the regimen at times, but don't simply skip a day and make excuses because you are feeling lazy.

For example, my regimen is on hold when I am on vacation or a religious pilgrimage. Otherwise, seven days a week it will be performed—or made up if missed.

### When and How to Start?

Start immediately. Start small. Do a simple five-minute meditation and daily reading for ten minutes. Do something. The longer you wait to start, the less likely you will build a strong daily regimen. Then, as your small practice becomes routine for a month or two, watch for the benefits. In the beginning the changes are subtle and hard to see, but they will be evident if you look do a mental review back to the time you began.

Over time, you will feel the need to intensify your regimen. This may not happen for several years; don't be in a rush. Over the last few years I have intensified my practice. Now I sometimes have an hour in the morning, an hour in the early evening and then some more time in the late evening. I even have a practice in the middle of some days. This may seem too intense for some, but the results have been outstanding.

This was a long and slow process of many years. I only got to where I am because I made the choice to intensify my practice and to shut out many frivolous activities. But there was no sense of deprivation from giving up those activities. They just fell away as I found something better, something more real.

SUGANTH SRICHANDRAMOHAN, 38, lives in Canada with his wife and daughter. He enjoys reading and writing about Hinduism. You can see his blog posts at [www.hinducorner.com](http://www.hinducorner.com). He runs a nonprofit, the Saiva Dharma Foundation, to help war-affected children in Sri Lanka. Email: [nadarajah@hinducorner.com](mailto:nadarajah@hinducorner.com)







SPICES

# The Wonders of Coriander

For at least four thousand years, this versatile herb has enlivened the dishes and drinks of cuisines across the world

BY LAKSHMI SRIDHARAN, CALIFORNIA  
**C**ORIANDRUM SATIVUM, POPULARLY known as cilantro or Chinese parsley, is an aromatic herb as well as a spice. The name *coriander* is derived from the Greek word *koris*, meaning—unfortunately—“bedbug.” To the Greeks, crushed unripe coriander seeds and leaves smelled like crushed bedbugs. Fortunately, that’s not the way the rest of the world thinks of coriander! Widely used in Indian, Mexican, Chinese and Middle Eastern cuisines, the favored spice has found its way into cuisines all over the world. It is extensively used in Sidha and Ayurvedic medicine.

*Coriandrum sativum* appears to be native to Europe and West Asia. It shows up on a

16th-century-bce shipping manifest written in ancient Greek and likewise in the Middle East and India at least from Vedic times. It has been cultivated for thousands of years in India, China, Egypt, and Central America. Confusingly, in the US, the leaves are commonly known as cilantro and the seeds as coriander. Outside the US, the leaves and stems are called coriander and the dried fruits are known as coriander seeds.

Coriander belongs to the Apiaceae family, which includes dill, fennel, anise, parsley, celery, Queen Anne’s lace, carrots and more. Its leaves are finely divided, resembling those of parsley—hence the name *Chinese parsley*. It is a herbaceous plant with bright green leaves and small white or pale-pink flowers

formed in umbrella-like clusters that grows to a height of 32 inches. All parts of the plant are edible. Unlike parsley, the tender leaves are aromatic. The globular fruits are about a quarter inch in diameter, green in color when mature and unripe, yellow-brown when dried.

One can easily grow cilantro from seed or from seedlings bought from a nursery. Though indigenous to tropical countries, it grows happily outdoors anywhere the air temperature is above 60° F and thrives best in sunny locations. Crush the mature fruits gently to release the seeds and then sow them outdoors directly in the soil or in containers on a sunny porch or balcony. One can also use kits available for growing herbs.



COURTESY LAKSHMI SRIDHARAN



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**A special spice:** (clockwise from left) a bowl of whole coriander seeds with ground seeds and fresh leaves; South Indian parota, a favorite coriander-enhanced dish; vegetable korma likewise benefits from the versatile herb; sprouts easily grown in a window planter box; the dried fruit; the size of this coriander field in Thailand is testament to its popularity



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During germination, which takes about a week, keep the soil moist but not soggy. After germination, the plant prefers a drier soil. The plant will produce an abundance of tender leaves and, if the temperature is high enough, will bolt to produce flowers and seeds. But don’t worry if you lack a green thumb or the inspiration to grow herbs; you can easily find cilantro in any grocery store.

## Health Benefits

Incorporated into one’s diet, Coriander is anti-hyperglycemic, that is, it decreases the glucose levels in the blood. This is especially helpful for those suffering from diabetes. In addition, coriander is touted for other pharmacological effects, such as anti-hyperlipidemic (lowers triglyceride and bad lipid levels), anti-proliferative (inhibits proliferation of cell growth) and hypotensive (lowers blood pressure to counteract hypertension). It is also a digestive stimulant, and the leaves are

an excellent source of antioxidant flavonoids.

For an aromatic tea, soak coriander seeds in boiling water for a few minutes, and strain. This healthy brew is said to help to control blood sugar levels, cure food-borne bacterial infections, flu, sore throat, cold, etc. A blend of crushed cilantro leaves in buttermilk promotes digestion.



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## Culinary Uses

The entire plant is used for culinary purposes. The leaves with their citrus overtones are used extensively for flavoring stir-fried vegetables, soups, salads, salsa, etc. Indians use the leaves in making chutney, unleavened bread (parotas and chapatis) and crepes. People all over the world use coriander seed as a spice to flavor food and beverages. It is a common ingredient in Indian curry powder and a main component of South Indian sambhar and rasam. The seeds are used to flavor liqueurs in Russia and Scandinavia and as a flavoring agent in gin and certain kinds of European beer. Whole and ground seeds are used in baking, sausages, pickles, candies, sauces, soups, pastries, buns, cakes and other confectioneries. It may even be one of the ingredients in the secret formula for Coca-Cola. The leaves and seeds of this versatile herb add flavor, aroma and health benefits to our food in everyday cooking.



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		Krishanth Rajasooriyar	60.00	Thiru Satkunendran	100.00
		Total	75.27	Nutanaya Sivaceyon	11.85
<b>Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund</b>		<b>Anantha Ladies Home Endowment</b>		Adi Srikantha	50.00
Anonymous	22.00	Yogesh Patel	50.00	Anonymous	3533.07
		Sayanthan & Anupama Sivanathan	30.00	Total	4,487.01
		Anonymous	50.00		
		Total	130.00	<b>Kauai Aadheenam Info-Tech Fund</b>	
<b>Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home of Sittandy Endowment</b>		<b>The Endowment for Global Hindu Rights</b>		Dheeptha Baskaran	15.00
Benevity	540.00	Hitesvara Saravan	51.00		
N. Balasubramanian	5,000.00			<b>Kauai Aadheenam Feed the Monks Fund</b>	
Yovani Curpen	25.00	<b>Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples (Kovil Maadu) Endowment</b>		Benevity	502.00
Alok Kadakia	50.00	Arun Aaroreen	75.00	Dheeptha Baskaran	15.00
Thamby Kumaran	108.00	Yuvaraj Athur	51.00	Rajul & Heidi Gandhi	450.00
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Total	7,635.88	Jonathan Rajpaul	202.00	Anonymous	2002.00
		Padmini Samuthiran	162.00	Total	3,851.21
<b>Siva Poomi School Trust</b>		Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan	150.00	<b>Insurance Premium</b>	
Rick Harter	108.00	Jayesh & Darshana Upadhyay	101.00	Mrunal Patel	3,003.00
Hitesvara Saravan	51.00	Arunasalam Vathavooran	75.00		
Total	159.00	Anonymous	225.65	<b>Kauai Aadheenam Renovation Endowment</b>	
		Total	1,704.58	Other Donations	600.00
<b>Bharatiya Ekta Mandir of Arizona Endowment</b>		<b>Jaffna Kannathiddy Kali Kovil Endowment</b>			
Vanguard	1,000.00	Benevity	480.00	Total Contributions	\$89,803.88
		Nigel Subramaniam Siva	108.00		
<b>India Hindu Tribals Endowment</b>		Anonymous	108.36	<b>Funds at Market Value, Dec 31, 2020</b>	
Kamalesh & Krishna Gangopadhyay	1,000.00	Total	696.36		
Pritesh Patel	51.00			Grand Total	\$19,555,721.86
Anonymous	32.4				

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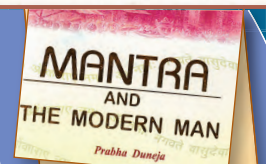
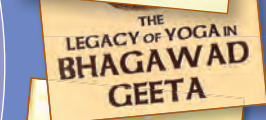
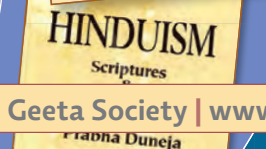


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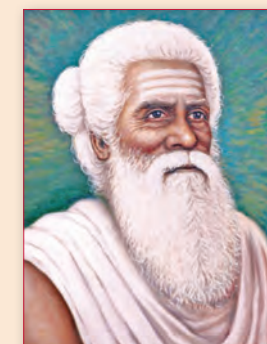
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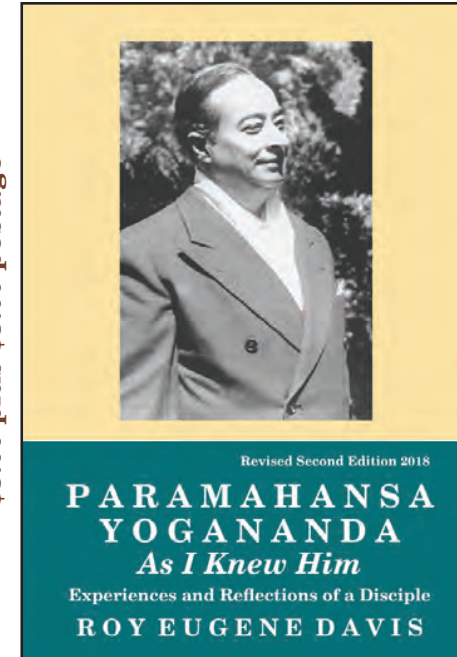


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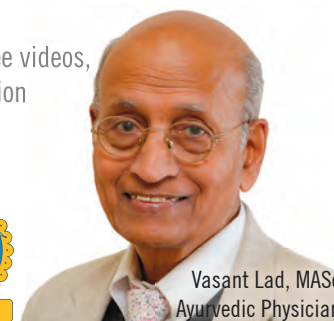
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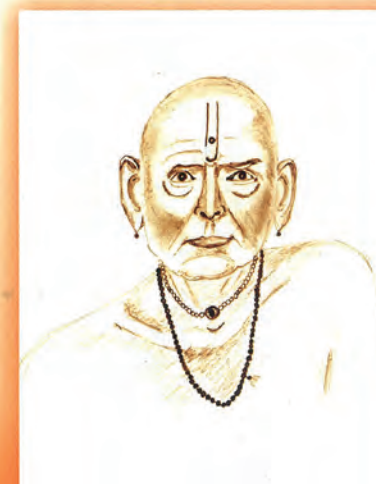
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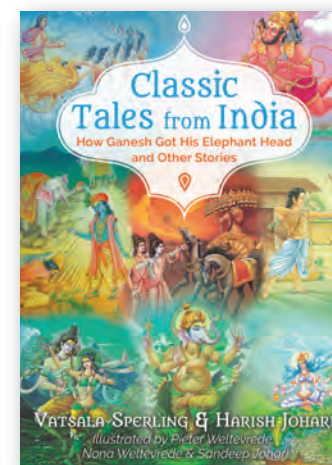
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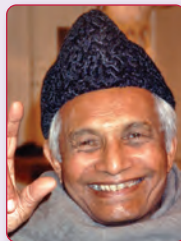
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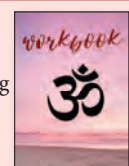
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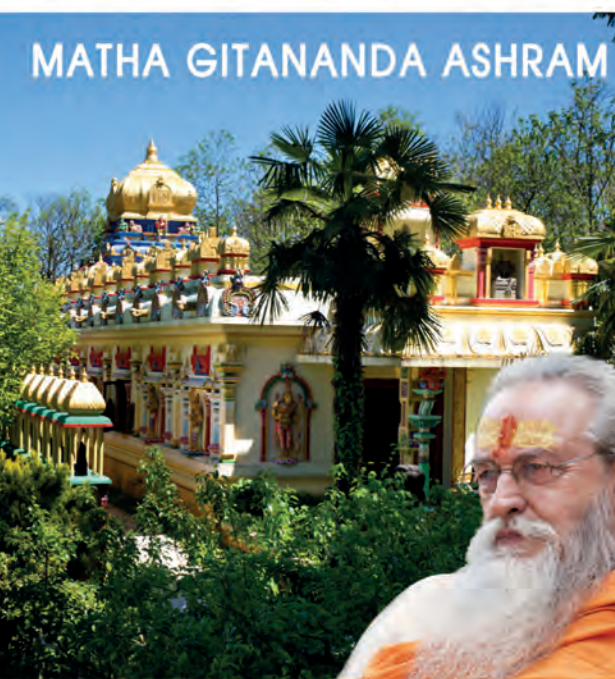
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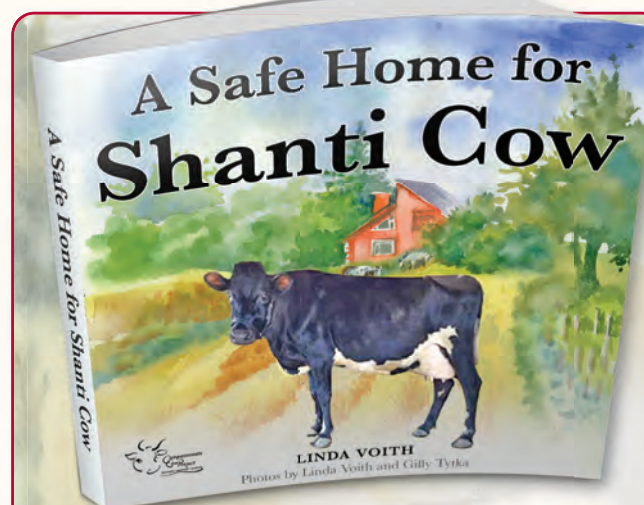
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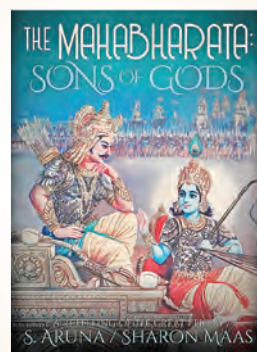
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The Hindu University of America provides education in knowledge systems based in Hindu thought involving critical inquiry, ethics, and self-reflection. Committed to fostering the culture and traditions of Hindu Dharma in an atmosphere of academic excellence and freedom, it prepares students for service, leadership, and global engagement.

## Vision

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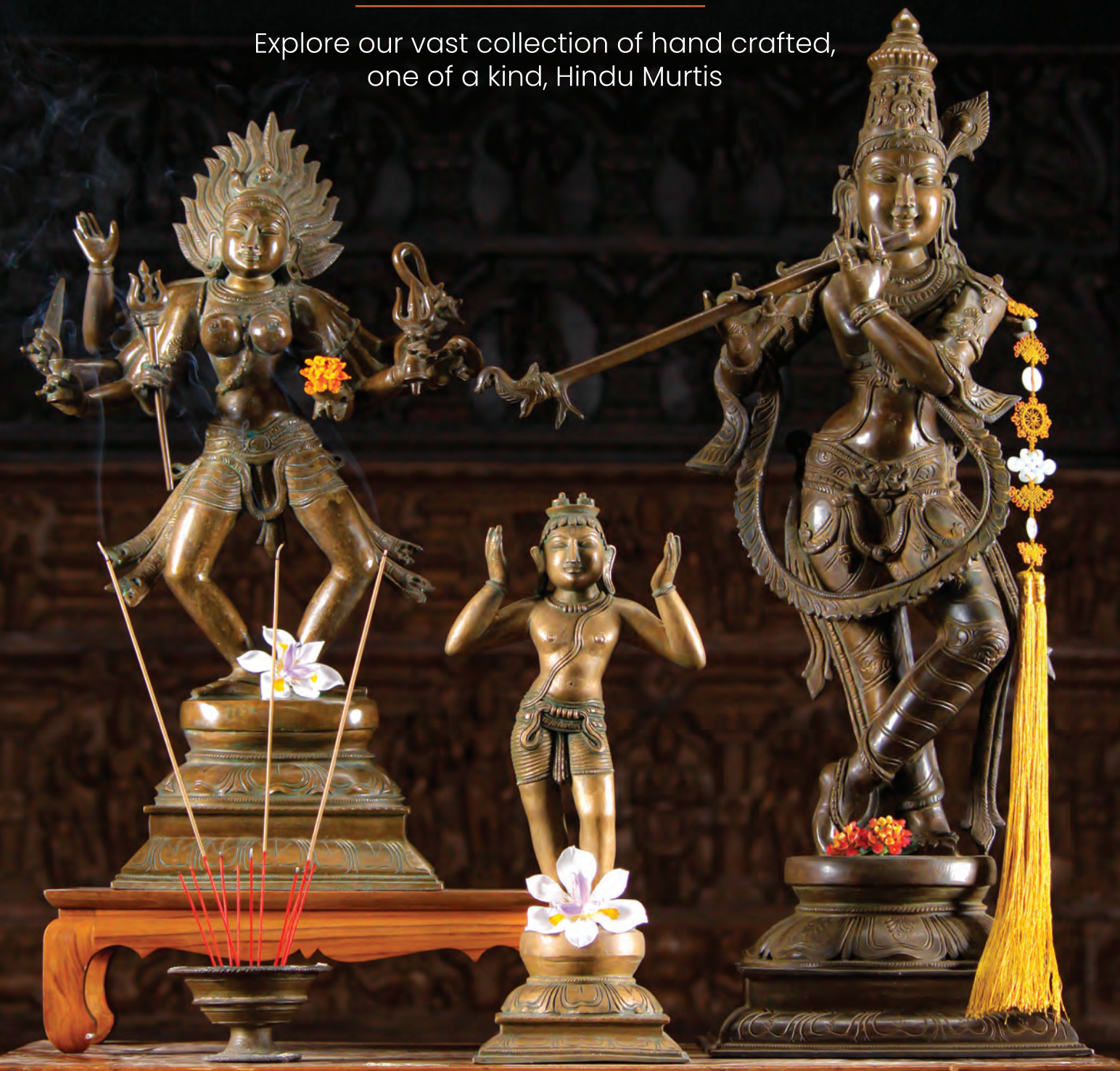




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*My chest heaves,  
My heart pounds,  
At first sight of Thee.*

*And the River of Life that am I  
Yearns to reach the Ocean  
That art Thou.*

*By night Thou art my Light;  
By day, the Sun Logos:*

*Standing before Thee,  
I have no shadow:*

*Chandi Prambanan  
24<sup>th</sup> August 2019 at Prambanan, Yogyakarta  
by Dr. Arjunan Subramaniam  
Desa Parkcity, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia*

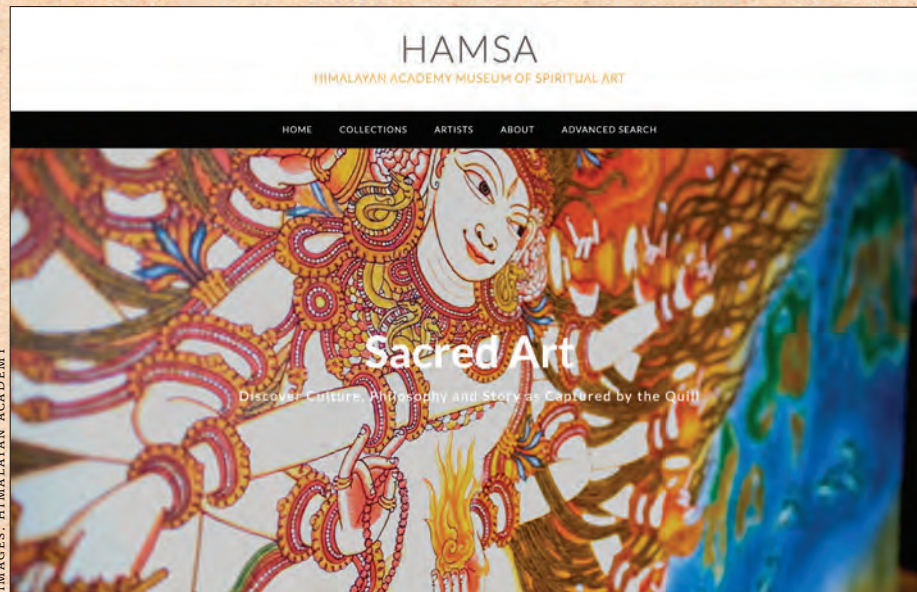
*Thou who art  
The ganglion of Lights.*



# DIGITAL DHARMA

ART

## HAMSA: Himalayan Academy's Museum of Spiritual Art



IMAGES: HIMALAYAN ACADEMY

FOR OVER FIVE DECADES, THE MONKS AT Kauai's Hindu Monastery in Hawaii have been commissioning and collecting works of art. These find expression in Himalayan Academy's many publications, books, apps and web projects, including articles for HINDUISM TODAY. For decades this burgeoning treasure trove was barely searchable and largely unavailable. That changed a few years ago with the original release of HAMSA, the Himalayan Academy Museum of Spiritual Art website. In 2020, the site was rebuilt for a more user-friendly experience and bolstered with even more art.

Indian spiritual art has no equal in the world for scope, quantity, devotion and philosophical significance. Among the thousands of images available, you will find here are rare masterpieces, sacred Hindu symbols, illustrated alphabets, decorative borders, educational depictions of Deities, culture, philosophy, legend, children's stories and more. While much of this work was commissioned by Himalayan Academy, you'll find other treasures too, such as the lifetime work of celebrated artist Sundaram Rajam, which includes over 900 paintings.

Every piece of artwork found on HAMSA

is available to you for free, for personal projects and/or in service to dharma. Just click on an image to see the larger size and drag it to your desktop or save it to your phone. But for any commercial use, written permission must be obtained from the copyright holder, Himalayan Academy, by writing to: [contact@hindu.org](mailto:contact@hindu.org). To get an image at its original resolution, or if you would like to add something to the collection, you can contact [appdev@hindu.org](mailto:appdev@hindu.org).

The artwork of HAMSA is searchable in several ways. You can search by artist, by collection (such as "background patterns" or "line art"), or by using the "Advanced Search" function to explore by tag, title and description.

In Sanskrit, *hamsa* names the Indian goose (*Anser indicus*) or a swan, and represents the Ultimate Reality and the spiritually pure soul. The flight of the hamsa symbolizes moksha—the release from *samsara*, the cycle of birth, death and rebirth, which then commences our soul's continued evolution in the inner worlds. An apt name for a resource that possesses so much philosophical and artistic beauty. Here is the URL: [himalayanacademy.com/hamsa](http://himalayanacademy.com/hamsa)

[www.hinduismtoday.com](http://www.hinduismtoday.com)

**The best things in life are free:** (clockwise from left) The new homepage of HAMSA; two paintings by Chennai artist Maniam Selvan; you can easily explore the site's content by collection, artist or by invoking the site's advanced search function



EXPLORE BY ARTIST

