

My Friend, Lord Ganesha



HINDUISM TODAY



In Hinduism, believing in God is only a first step toward an ever-deepening personal experience of God's presence. In this regard many of the great saints and sages of Hinduism have had visions of Lord Ganesha and have shared them with their devotees, thus strengthening their devotees' faith and understanding of this divine being. In ancient times Saint Auvaiyar wrote of her experience of the elephant-faced God in her devotional poem "Vinayaga Ahaval." "Desiring to make me yours this instant, you, like a mother, have appeared before me and cut the delusion of unending births." In modern times, my Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, had many experiences of Lord Ganesha, whom he considered a dear friend. He observed, "There are a great many liberal Hindus and/or Western-influenced Hindus who don't think of Ganesha as a real being. To them He is a symbol, a superstition, a way of explaining philosophy to children and the uneducated. But this has not been my experience of our loving Lord. I have seen Him with my own eye. He has come to me in visions several times and convinced my lower mind of His reality." Of course, the *murti*, or form, of Lord Ganesha does contain important symbols, such as the noose and the goad, which relate to His creating and removing obstacles. And it is true we can learn a great deal about Ganesha and the other Deities through studying such symbols, but what is even more important is to know that Ganesha is a real being whom we can know and love. ¶ We have arranged group pilgrimages to India since 1969, and some pilgrims on various programs definitely had visions of Lord Ganesha, as well as other Deities. Some witnessed the stone or bronze *murti* moving and smiling at them or turning into a human-like figure. Others, with eyes closed, saw the Deity's face as real as any living person. 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. The shakti of Lord Ganesha is a gentle, loving force which has the power to move the devotees' awareness into a peaceful, contented state, free of any worry, fear, anger or other negative emotion. ¶ This Educational Insight is drawn from Gurudeva's book, *Loving Ganesha* (www.gurudeva.org/resources/books/lg/), delving into the nature of the elephant-faced Deity, what He is like, what functions this great God performs and how each seeker can make Him a vital part of daily life on the path of experience.

Santguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami



SHAYLA DINES SLEEN

Above, devotees offer a ghee flame to the elephant-faced Deity during Ganesh Chaturthi in India. Top of page, HINDUISM TODAY founder Santguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami holds a stone murti of Lord Ganesha. He gifted three dozen such murtis to budding temples outside India to encourage initial patterns of worship.

The Benefits of Befriending Ganesha

We sincerely hope that this chapter will serve to bring you closer to Lord Ganesha. We are deeply grateful to Gurudeva for his inspiring words of wisdom, drawn from his book, *Loving Ganesha*, which fill the following 13 pages. One comment that he makes especially stands out to me as central: "Among all the wonderful Hindu Deities, Lord Ganesha is the closest to the material plane of consciousness, most easily contacted and most able to assist us in our day-to-day life and concerns." In giving this some thought, I developed a list of eleven ways in which Ganesha can benefit your everyday life. These benefits were written for youth, as that is the best time to develop a closeness with Ganesha, but they apply equally to adults.

- ✿ strengthen memory
- ✿ stimulate intelligence
- ✿ solve problems easier
- ✿ study well in school
- ✿ stabilize emotions
- ✿ improve your character
- ✿ experience good timing
- ✿ increase domestic harmony
- ✿ increase self control
- ✿ remove obstacles in your path
- ✿ be more successful in life

Through the worship of Lord Ganesha, we feel better about life, rising above the lower emotions of insecurity, fear, anger and jealousy and instead experiencing peace and contentment. Tuning in to His shakti and being, through attending puja at the temple or even just visualizing Him in your mind, helps raise you up into the *muladhara* chakra and therefore out of anger and fear into a calm state of mind. In fact, you can slowly seal off these lower states of mind and keep awareness permanently lifted above the animal instincts of fear and anger through the regular worship of Lord Ganesha. He sits on the chakra of memory; and when we are stable in that chakra, focused and concentrated, our memory is strong and our intellect keen.

Lord Ganesha's worship can enable us to tune in to the natural flow of events that allows us to be in the right place at the right time. Have you noticed that some days our timing is excellent and yet other days everyone we go to see has just left, the store just closed, we missed our bus by one minute? The worship of Ganesha quiets the aggressive intellect, allowing you to be guided by intuition, which can change a day of bad timing to one of perfectly good timing. Everyone knows Lord Ganesha is the Lord of Obstacles, able to both place a barrier in our path when our direction is less than perfect and to remove barriers that keep us from achieving our highest aspirations in life. By bringing our consciousness close to Him, we give permission for Him to positively influence our life in these subtle, often unseen, ways.

When you start each day's study, or come upon a difficult subject, pray for Ganesha's clear mind. See and feel a bright yellow light around your head. Feel smart. Strongly desire to understand. When you have a problem in life, at school, home or work, Lord Ganesha will help you. Ganesha knows everything about you and everybody you know, from

the past into the future. But you must ask for His help. See Ganesha's majestic face and with mental force ask for help and explain the problem. Lord Ganesha will send you ideas and thought power, introduce you to new attitudes, help you to understand other people, help you use wisdom and not emotions to face life's many experiences, and when that happens you will be more successful in all you undertake.

It is very clear that worshipping Lord Ganesha can benefit our life in many ways, provided we have developed a closeness with Him to the point where He is our friend. Ganesha is then able to help us become happier, more successful and more cultured Hindus who value the temple as an indispensable part of our life.

Knowing that the Gods are real beings and that the purpose of going to the temple is to experience their blessings is what transforms the temple from a cultural hall to a truly sacred place.

For the full, online version of *Loving Ganesha*, go to www.himalayanacademy.com/resources/books/lg/



The great Lord Ganesha has been prayed to, worshiped and adored in one form or another since time began; and time itself began with His creation. He, above all others, is the God, the great Mahadeva, to be invoked before every act and especially worshiped and prayed to when changes occur in our lives as we move from the old established patterns into new ones. Lord Ganesha is always there to steady our minds and open the proper doors as we evolve and progress. He never, ever fails. He is always there for us when we need Him.

Hindus around the world pray to Ganesha for help and guidance as He leads us out of an agricultural age through the technological and information eras and on into the new age of space. Many are still on the farms; others are in the offices and in the factories; while still others land on the moon and orbit through space. With a mind more intricate than the most complicated computers in the world all hooked together, but as simple as an on-and-off switch, Ganesha knows all aspects of these transitions, in unfailing continuity, from one era to another. He is totally aware, at every point in time, of the mother in her home, the farmer in his field, the astronaut orbiting this planet, the corporate worker at his desk and the factory technician performing his tasks.

For thousands of years in the villages of Vedic India, Lord Ganesha has been and is today in towns and cities in many countries, a powerful and immediate presence in everyone's lives. He was and is the one prayed to when starting a business or an enterprise of any kind. Today factory workers approach a small shrine dedicated to

Him before commencing their daily work, so that nothing might go wrong. Businessmen beg His help in adjusting the stock market to their advantage, and farmers, of course, chant His 108 names while planting their seeds, rice, other crops, or trees. When no rain comes, images of our loving Lord are seen throughout Bharat land submerged in water up to His neck, so that His great mind may become impressed with the people's crying needs. When Grand-

ma is sick or the crops are not coming in on time, when the children are growing up wrongly by adopting alien ways, Hindus diligently pray to our loving God for help in restructuring their lives. He is the supreme Lord of Dharma, and we pray to Him for guidance in the direction of our lives.

Worship of Lord Ganesha is immediate. One has but to think of His form to contact His ever-present mind. Close your eyes for a second, visualize His large elephant head and experience the direct communication that has immediately begun. This is similar to punching in a code at a personal computer terminal which gives immediate access to the entire network of computers, large and small. On this remarkable and universal Inner-net, obscure and necessary information and answers to every question are now available as needed through the direct link with Lord Ganesha. Wherever we are, whatever we are doing, we

can use the computer terminal of our own brain and code in the divine image of Lord Ganesha and gain complete access to His vast computer-like mind. Ganesha's mind has been programmed by the history of experience over eons of time and naturally encompasses the intricacies of the universe and the cycles of life in all their rami-



Adopted by the Elephant God

Seekers of Truth come from many backgrounds, many religions, and have trod many paths. Having become acquainted with Lord Ganesha, they may wonder how their past can participate in their present aspirations. "What am I doing worshipping an elephant-faced God and loving it?" they may wonder. "What do I do now to harmonize this unfoldment with my previous upbringing?"

There is a way to reconcile this subconscious dilemma. Let's not "pack it away in denial," as they say; let's face up to the spiritual awakening. Truth is, you have a loving friend in Ganesha, who, if we may use the word, is the pope of the Hindu religion. And you are by no means alone. One fourth of the human race is acquainted with Ganesha—twenty-five percent of the people on this planet—1.25 billion, and that number is growing year by year.

Our loving Ganesha leads his devotees deep into the oldest religion on planet Earth. There are two ways to come into Hinduism. One is to be born into the Hindu religion and be carried in your mother's arms to

the temple, there to be inwardly and psychically connected to our loving God, Ganesha. So strong are those early impressions and samskaras that they carry you through life. Another way is to unfold naturally to the point of being ready to formally enter Hinduism, to supplicate, to sincerely entreat the guardians of that religion to allow you to be a part of that immense and ancient tradition. You have to want to be a Hindu so strongly, so sincerely, that Lord Ganesha lifts you out of the fog of the materialistic conscious mind, establishing a connection and a relationship with you. This is a personal relationship with the Deity. There is nobody in-between—just you and the God, Lord Ganesha. It's like being adopted, in a way. If you were an orphan or abandoned on the streets of São Paulo or Chennai or on the streets of wherever there are little kids running around, you would be "free." You could go through life listening to no one and exercising unrestricted free will, free instinctive will. If you had a developed intellect, then you could exercise an intellectual will. You could do anything that you wanted to do, absolutely anything. Of course you would find that as you attempted to fulfill your

fictions and simplicities. Our great God Ganesha sits contentedly upon the *muladhara* chakra. This chakra controls the forces of memory within every creature. Worship of Him strengthens your memory, builds character and brings knowledge from the within. It also protects you from the lower forces which reside in the little-known chakras below the *muladhara*. These darker chakras govern fear, anger, jealousy and the confused thinking centered around self-preservation.

Wherever His devotees are—in the home, the factories, the offices, the hospitals, the marketplace, orbiting in space or tilling the

soil on the farm—Lord Ganesha is ever there. Intimate access is acquired by simply loving Ganesha and holding His robust image in your mind. Carefully visualize the large head and ears, His long trunk, massive body, big belly and the objects He holds in His many hands. Look into Ganesha's eyes. Train yourself to see Him within your own mind with your eyes closed. This is the key. Hold His form steady in your mind through the power of visualization. Now you can talk to Him. Pronounce the words mentally into His ear. He is listening though He will never speak back but take into His vast mind your prayer and slowly work it out. You must simply

speak all of your questions and your problems into His right ear. When you are finished, open your eyes. Go on with your day and go on with your life. Wherever you are, remember this simple way of making contact with Lord Ganesha and as a good seeker exercise this psychic power, this siddhi.

Starting today and in the days to come, you will notice how He answers questions and solves problems for you through the course of your daily life. You will notice how He influences events and decisions slowly and subtly, in unseen ways. Situations will change for you, unexpected doors will open, and accustomed ones will close as you are propelled through His grace toward your inevitable glorious future. Read and reread the above formula for immediate access to Lord Ganesha until it is firmly implanted in your subconscious memory patterns, and then begin to make contact with Him often through each day wherever you are and whatever you are doing. Yes! Lord Ganesha is immediate, and you have immediate access to Him. Wherever you are, remember this and as a seeker on the path through life's experiences exercise this siddhi. It is your right to do so.

Once a psychic connection is made with Lord Ganesha—the Deity who manifests in several forms, including the elephant-headed Lord of Categories and Remover of Obstacles—one is brought slowly into the mysteries of the Sanatana Dharma. Such an inner connection, which can be as subtle as a feeling, as tenuous as a dream or as bold as a

personal visit, is also an entering into one's own *muladhara* chakra, governed by the planet Mercury, for every opening into a new chakra is also an introduction to the Deity who governs that state of consciousness and the planet to which that chakra is connected.

The Sanatana Dharma, known today as Hinduism, is the only living religion on the planet that does not look to a human founder for its source of inspiration, scripture or historical beginning. It is timeless and ageless. Sanatana Dharma, the root religion of humankind, looks inward for its origins, into the subtle, superconscious realms within the microcosm, which it calls the *Karanaloka*, *Sivaloka* or Third World. This great religion has no single organized headquarters on the material plane. Nor does it have a one hierarchy. Who then is in charge of Hinduism? Why, it is none other than our loving Ganesha! He doesn't live in Rome, nor in Salt Lake City. Lord Ganesha lives simultaneously everywhere Hindus worship and pray within themselves. He doesn't have to be reappointed from time to time, because yugas and yugas ago He was permanently and irrevocably appointed when He was created for this work.

Ganesha, the Gatekeeper

Yes, it is the Great Ganesha who is the gateway for seekers into the world's most ancient faith. He is the inner authority, the guardian, the one who grants access to the spiritual mysteries of the Sanatana Dharma. All Hindus worship Him, regardless of their sectarian or philosophical positions. He truly binds them together in His love. This great God is both the beginning of the Hindu religion and the meeting ground for all its devotees. And that is only proper, inasmuch as Ganesha is the personification of the material universe. The universe in all of its varied and various magnificent manifestations is nothing but the body of this cheerfully portly God.

Ganesha sits on the psychic lotus of the *muladhara* chakra, the ganglia of nerves at the base of the spine within everyone. This chakra governs time, matter and memory. As the spiritual aspirant

or Murugan, outside of your own limited concepts. It is Ganesha who introduces you to the millions of Gods of the Hindu pantheon, no one else. That is the way it works." Yes, little by little, slowly, imperceptibly, a relationship evolves, a very personal, loving relationship, between the

devotee and the elephant-faced God. Psychic protection is granted; physical protection, mental and emotional protection are all granted as boons by Him. He will not allow His devotees to use their free, instinctive willfulness to make more negative karma by getting into difficulties. Rather, He will guide them carefully, protecting them every moment along the way so that their natural birth karmas may be worked through and good karma created by right living. This is His main concern. Lord Ganesha loves and cares for His devotees. Once the devotee is connected to Him through the awakening of the *muladhara* chakra, loneliness is never experienced.

Ganesha is a truly wonderful, loving God. He has an

extraordinary knack for unweaving complicated situations and making them simple. He can unweave His devotees from their karma, simplifying and purifying their lives. But this only happens after they have



established a personal relationship with Him. Soon thereafter, changes begin to happen in their lives; and when they go through difficult times, they no longer become angry or live in fear or worry. When difficult times come, they know it is because they are being unwound from accumulated and congested, difficult karmas, or being turned in a new direction altogether. They know that at such a time they have to consciously surrender their free, instinctive willfulness and not fight the divine happenings, but allow the God's divine will to guide their life. Such is the spiritual path of total surrender, known as *prapatti*.



PHOTOS BY SHAMA DRESSLER

Right, devotees immerse a large image of Ganesha during His grand departure festival in Mumbai. Above, a devotee shows off the clay Ganesha she has made for the festival. Below right, a man dances in ecstatic devotion as Ganesha hovers nearby in His subtle body.



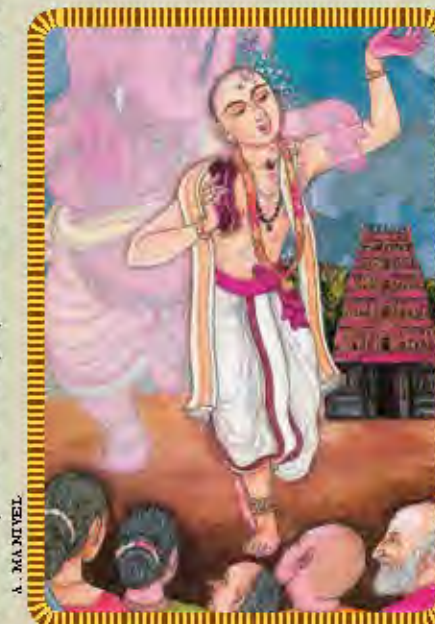
"Adopted" continued. . .

desires, you were limited, sometimes prevented, by the natural forces within and without. But you could attempt anything.

If you were fortunate enough, foster parents might come along to help you. They would adopt you and take you into their home. Your new mother would begin to lovingly guide and direct your life. You are a part of their family now, and your well-being, your education, your training all now come under their will, to which you must adjust yourself and obey. They will watch over you and discipline you morning and night. They will protect you from getting into trouble with your "free will." The modern concept of freedom leads to the darker chakras

below the *muladhara* chakra. Anguish is there.

It is the same when you evolve a relationship, a personal relationship, with the Deity Lord Ganesha. He will not allow you to use your free will to get into difficulties. Guiding you carefully and protecting you along your way in your natural karma through life is His concern. Someone once said, "I worship Lord Siva. I worship Lord Murugan, but I have never really gotten acquainted with Lord Ganesha." I responded, "You worship Siva and Lord Murugan, and that is wonderful. But unless you have established a personal relationship with Lord Ganesha, your worship of any of the Gods is probably more according to your own thoughts and fancy than true worship. Until you have established a rapport with Lord Ganesha, you cannot establish a relationship with Krishna, Ayyappan, Amman, Vishnu, Rama, Hanuman, Lakshmi, Sita, Radharani, Siva



A. RAMANUJAM

is lifted up from fear and confusion into conscious awareness of right thought, right speech and right action, the *muladhara* chakra becomes activated. It is then that the seeker, with heart filled with love, encounters the holy feet of Lord Ganesha. As the spiritual seeker worships the loving elephant-faced God, clearness of mind comes more and more as he automatically and very slowly enters the Hindu path to enlightenment. Once the connection is firmly established between the devotee and Ganesha, all of the currents of the devotee's mind and body become harmonized. After that strong connection is made, should he falter on the spiritual path, he has gained divine protection.

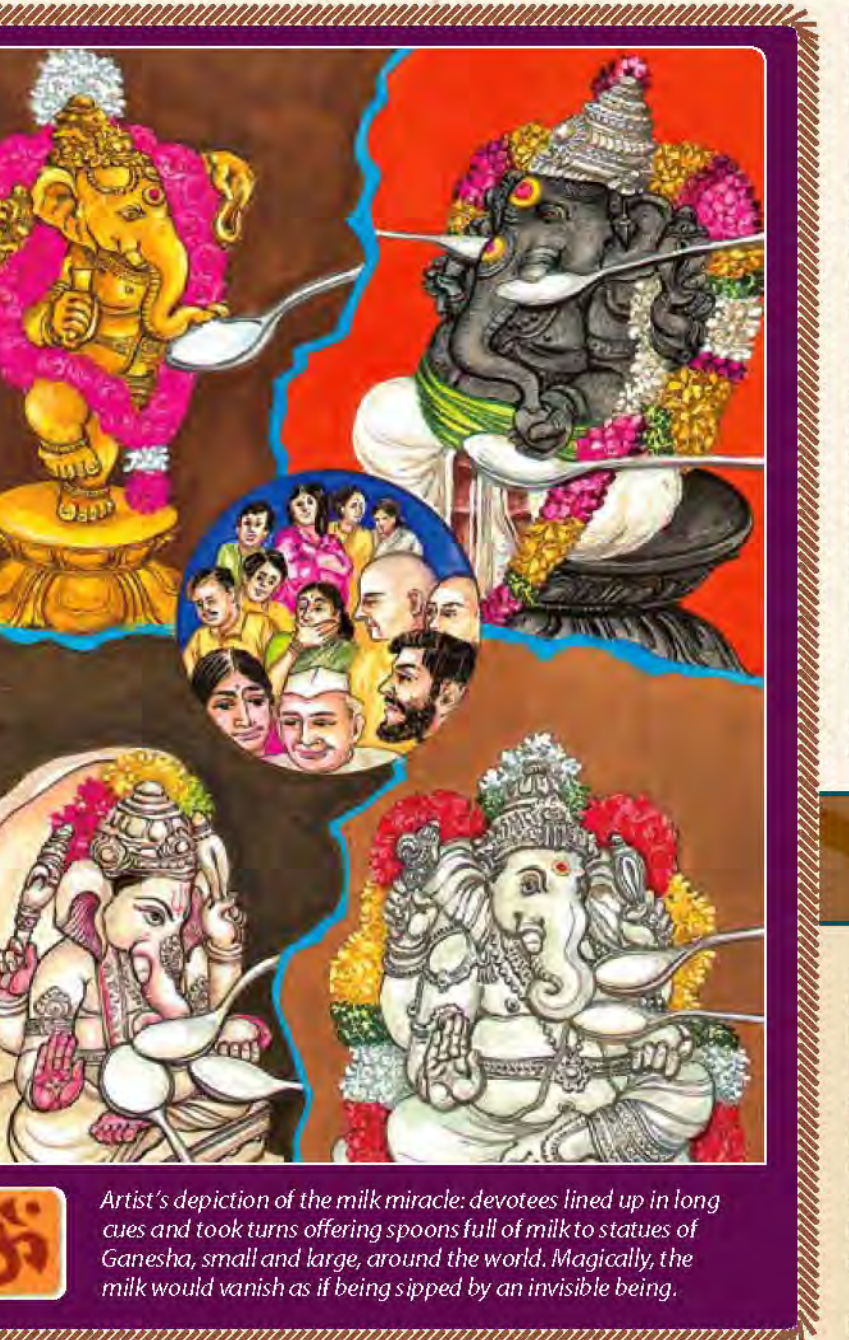
But the seeker loses one thing. He loses his free, instinctive willfulness. It is lost forever. Yet it is not a great loss. Man's own personal willfulness, his animalistic free will, is a feeble and insignificant force when compared to Lord Ganesha's divine will. When beholden to God Ganesha and inwardly awakened enough to be attuned to His will, it is then quite natural that the instinctive will bows down. Personal likes and dislikes vanish. Limited faculties of reason and analysis are overpowered and subdued by a greater will, a cosmic will, the will of dharma. When sufficient humility has been awakened, it is easy to surrender personal, instinctive willfulness to the greater subsuperconscious will of dharma. It happens most naturally, but very slowly, because Lord Ganesha, of all the many Gods, proceeds with methodic deliberation. He is the careful, loving guide on the inner path of all seekers.

Among all the wonderful Hindu Deities, Lord Ganesha is the

closest to the material plane of consciousness, most easily contacted and most able to assist us in our day-to-day life and concerns. In His hands Ganesha wields a noose and a goad. With the noose He can hold you close or hold obstacles close. Ganesha can capture and confine both blessings and obstacles. With the goad, Ganesha can strike and repel obstacles. This Lord is called the Remover of Obstacles; but He also places obstacles in our way, for sometimes his devotees are proceeding in the wrong direction, and His obstacles block their progress and guide them slowly back onto the straight path of dharma. When instinctive willfulness causes the seeker to decide to step out of the boundaries of dharma, the Lord of Obstacles is there to block the way. His emblem is the swastika, symbolizing His circuitous course in guiding the seeker through life's perplexing experiences.

The Meaning of Grace

"What about the grace of the Deity?" seekers ask. Grace is received from the God when you are consistent in your worship, consistent in your discipline, consistent in your bhakti, your devotion. With such a foundation in your life, a great shakti, a force or power, will come from Lord Ganesha. This is grace. It is uplifting. It comes unexpectedly. When grace comes, your mind may change and your heart may melt. Your sight will become clear



A. MANTIVEL

Artist's depiction of the milk miracle: devotees lined up in long cues and took turns offering spoons full of milk to statues of Ganesha, small and large, around the world. Magically, the milk would vanish as if being sipped by an invisible being.

and penetrating. You may say, "I have been graced to see everything differently." New doors will begin to open for you, and as you go through them, your life will become more full, more wonderful. And the grace of it is that it would not have ordinarily happened to you.

By grace we are directed deeper into spiritual life, pointed in the right direction, carefully guided on the San Marga, the straight path to our supreme God. After grace has been received, our thoughts are enlivened, our life is inspired with enthusiasm and energy, and we live daily in the joyous knowledge that everything is all right, everything is happening around us in accord with our karma, our dharma and God's gracious will.

The Gods Are Real Beings, Not Mere Symbols

Many people look at the Gods as mere symbols, representations of forces or mind areas. Actually, the Gods are beings, and down through the ages ordinary men and women, great saints and sages, prophets and mystics in all cultures have inwardly seen, heard and been profoundly influenced by these superconscious, inner-plane, inner-galactic beings. Lord Ganesha is just such a being. He can think just as we can think. He can see and understand and make decisions—decisions so vast in their implications and complexity that we could never comprehend them with our human faculties of limited understanding.

In recent history, missionaries and others from the Western religions have told the Indian people over and over again that their Gods are not real beings, but merely symbols of spiritual matters—

The Milk-Drinking Miracle of 1995

It all began on September 21, 1995, when an otherwise ordinary man in New Delhi dreamt that Ganesha, the elephant-headed God of wisdom, craved a little milk. Upon awakening, he rushed in the dark before dawn to the nearest temple, where a skeptical priest allowed him to proffer a spoonful of milk to the small stone image. Both watched in astonishment as it disappeared, magically consumed by the God. Within hours, news spread like a brush fire across India that Ganesha was accepting milk offerings. Tens of millions of people of all ages flocked to the temples. The unworldly happening brought worldly New Delhi to a standstill, and its vast stocks of milk, more than a million liters, sold out within hours. Just as suddenly as it started in India, it stopped, in just 24 hours. But it was just beginning elsewhere, as Hindus in India

reports from around the world. Everywhere the story was the same. A teaspoonful of milk offered by touching it to Ganesha's trunk, tusk or mouth would disappear in a few seconds to a few minutes—not always, but with unprecedented frequency. Reuters news service quoted Anila Premji, "I held the spoon out level, and it just disappeared. To me it was just a miracle. It gave me a sense of feeling that there is a God, a sense of Spirit on this Earth." Not only Ganesha, but Siva, Parvati, Nandi and the Naga, Siva's snake, took milk. This "milk miracle" may go down in history as the most important event shared by Hindus this century, if not in the last millennium. It has brought about an instantaneous religious revival among nearly one billion people. No other religion has ever done that before! It is as if every Hindu who had, say, "ten pounds of devotion," suddenly has twenty.

Miracles witnessed by many people happen from time to time in Hinduism as in other faiths, but they're rare. As a young boy, the tenth-century saint, Nambi Anbar Nambi, inspired Lord Ganesha to actually eat the offerings placed before Him. Saint Jnaneshvara

of Maharashtra became famous 600 years ago for having a water buffalo recite the *Vedas* before a group of arrogant priests.

Naturally there are skeptics—10 percent of Hindus, according to our very unscientific poll, all of whom moved swiftly to distance themselves from the phenomenon. "Capillary action," coupled with "mass hysteria," is the correct explanation, concluded many scientists within a few hours. Aparna Chattopadhyay of New Delhi replied to these scoffers in a letter

to the Hindustan Times: "I am a senior scientist of the Indian Agriculture Research Institute, New Delhi. I found my offerings of milk in a temple being mysteriously drunk by the Deities. How can the scientists explain the copper snake absorbing the milk I offered with a spoon kept at a good distance away from it?" Scientific or not, gallons of milk were disappearing with hardly a trace. A leading barrister in Malaysia was dumbfounded when he watched a metal Ganesha attached to an automobile dashboard absorb six teaspoons of milk. In Nepal King Birendra himself made offerings to the God. Deities in Kenya and other countries took gallons of milk while sitting in shallow metal trays with no drains.

The worldwide press coverage was nearly as amazing as the miracle itself. Of course, the event dominated the news in India for days. But once it started outside India, local and leading national papers, such as the New York Times and Washington Post in America, and the Financial Times in UK, picked up the story. The international wire services, Reuters and Associated Press, carried a dozen articles a day on what had now been named the "Milk Miracle." Many in India are unaware of how warmly the Western press embraced the miracle. In many countries reporters came to the temples and personally offered milk.

Temples mobbed after 'milk miracle'

THOUSANDS of people mobbed temples in the Indian capital of New Delhi yesterday after a rumour that idols of Hindu gods were drinking milk brought as offerings.

Traffic was halted as police struggled to control crowds who gathered outside hundreds of temples with jugs and saucers of milk for the marble idols of Ganesha, the Hindu god of wisdom and learning, and Shiva, his father, the god of destruction.

The rumours began around midnight after a Hindu in

called their relatives in other parts of the world. Soon our HINDUISM TODAY offices were flooded with

Statue of Hindu God, Ganesha, drinks milk

Phenomenon witnessed in Fiji and around the world



Believers thirst for a miracle from Hong Kong to Southall

Wonder of milk draws thousands

Thousands of devotees lined up in long queues to offer milk to the statue of Lord Ganesha in New Delhi yesterday.



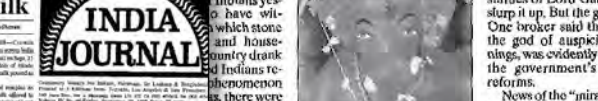
Millions queue to witness 'Act of God'

Millions of devotees lined up in long queues to offer milk to the statue of Lord Ganesha in New Delhi yesterday.



India's thirsty statues drink a nation dry

India's thirsty statues drink a nation dry. The phenomenon has spread across the country, with devotees offering milk to statues of Lord Ganesha and other deities.





and unfortunately many have begun to believe this and look at their Gods in this way. Even among Hindus there are quite a few who don't believe in inner-world beings. Their belief is restricted to the people they see in the physical world, and that is all. You dare not tell them differently. It is very difficult, but not impossible, to introduce them to the grand philosophy which is based solely on worship, meditation, inner discipline and the search for Absolute Truth. But this is too high-minded for those living in the everyday materialistic consciousness. For the knowledge of inner worlds to become accepted, a personal realization has to occur. This is a slow process for the materialist, a very slow process, and only Lord Ganesha can help it along. To contact Lord Ganesha, it is imperative that the materialist visit one of His temples or shrines, to make initial contact. It only takes one meeting

Around the World

Maha Ganapati, of course, belongs to all mankind, not to Hindus alone. To the Chinese He is embodied in the form of a massive dragon, whose physical immensity depicts His incredible and irresistible force. To some Chinese He is Kuan-shi tien or Ho Tei, the large-bellied God of Happiness. To the Polynesians in Hawaii He is God Lono.

The South Indian and Sri Lankan Tamils call him by the affectionate term Pillaiyar, "Noble Child." The Tibetans know Him as T'ogshdag, and the Burmese worship Maha-Piennne. In Mongolia His name is Totkharour Khaghan. Cambodians offer worship to Prah Kenes, and the Japanese supplicate Vinayaksa or Sho-ten. By some He is envisioned as the feminine Mother Nature, and even

nonbelievers seek to understand Him through personifying His great powers as Fate, Destiny or Numen. The ancient Egyptians may have known Him as a minor but very popular Deity, Bes, grotesque, pot-bellied and cheerful. The Romans called Him Janus and sought His blessings at the outset of any new venture. On His festival on the first of January (the month named after Him) He was treated with special cakes; mutual good wishes were exchanged and people made presents of sweets to one another for a good omen for the new year. In the West He is ubiquitous as the corpulent jolly Santa Claus, the dispenser of boons and gifts, especially to children, who knows our thoughts, words and deeds and bestows rewards accordingly. The Buddhists and Jains also honor Ganesha. In one form or another, He is honored throughout the world.

Hindus worship the great God Ganesha at countless pujas per-

formed daily on every continent. In temples and home shrines Lord Ganesha is worshiped today in India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Malaysia, Java, Bali, Borneo, Tibet, Myanmar, Siam, Afghanistan, the Middle East, China, Indo-China, Japan, the Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago, Hawaii and the Pacific Islands, Africa, Mauritius, Reunion, Europe, Australia, Canada, South America, the United States and elsewhere.

Every Hindu village and community has an image of the God Ganesha, and one of the many forms of Ganesha is found in every Hindu temple. The eminent scholar M. Arunachalam wrote, "Ganesha is usually installed at the entrance to the central sanctum, at the south, and also at the southwestern corner in the first court, of every Siva temple. Besides, He is placed on the first eastern *goshta* (niche) on the other southern wall of the *ardha mandapa* (secondary hall) in the dancing pose, known as

Mantras to Ganesha—Using the Magic of Sound

Japa, or recitation, is the spiritual practice of devotedly repeating a mantra, generally a specified number of times, such as 108, often while counting on a strand of beads, called a *japa mala*, while conscientiously concentrating on the meaning of the mantra. The repetition should be dutifully slow. This brings *punya*, merit, to the devotee. It should not be thoughtlessly mechanical or hurried, the so-called rapid-fire or machine-gun *japa*. Such casual, nonchalant negligence and disregard for contemplative traditions brings *papa*, demerit, to the devotee, creating internal strife, community opposition and turmoil for all concerned.

Japa is a form of devotional worship, invocation, supplication, praise, adoration, meditation and direct, experiential communion. Unless we are actually in a state of samadhi (total absorption), which is rare for most people, *japa* provides a means to disengage from our racing thoughts and our memories of the past—mostly the bad ones. The repetition of positive, uplifting, spiritual mantras over and over again lifts consciousness and causes the *muladhara* chakra to spin clockwise. We feel uplifted. Life does not look so bad, and neither does the past. A sense of forgiveness comes and the future looms bright. The past is forgiven and forgotten.

What is important for us to realize is that each Mahadeva can be experienced, expressed, in a mantra form that corresponds to that Being. This phenomenon is akin to remembering someone by his name rather than his face. When we utter such a mantra, we call forth the Mahadeva or cause a particular inner truth to rise up in our minds. Then we feel His presence and enjoy.

Repeating mantras slowly purifies the mind, like running fresh water continually into a container of discolored water. A fresh stream of water causes the mud at the bottom of a container to rise and flow out over the top edges, eventually to be completely replaced by crystal-clear water. Similarly, *japa* cleanses the mind of impurities as the pure vibrations of the mantras loosen and wash away the impure vibrations.

Lord Ganesha is invoked through the mantra Aum. The *Mandukya Upanishad* elucidates the inner meaning of Aum, which embodies the highest wisdom. Aum has three syllables. A represents the waking state. U represents the dreaming state. M represents the state of deep sleep. Aum in its entirety, plus the moment of silence which follows it, represents the shanti, the peace beyond understanding. Thus, Aum *japa* performed as an invocation to Lord Ganesha, the Lord of Wisdom

and Knowledge—while love is welling up from our hearts and tears are for no reason flowing simultaneously—calls forth the knowledge of the entirety of our existence in these four categories of consciousness. These are realms that God Ganesha rules over as Lord of Categories, and this is the knowledge that He can grant devotees who perform Aum *japa* and meditation on the meaning of Aum.

For Aum *japa* to be effective, the mantra must be pronounced correctly. The first syllable is A, pronounced as the English word "awe" but prolonged: "aaa." The second syllable is U, as in "roof," pronounced "oo" but prolonged: "ooo." The third syllable is M, pronounced "mmm" with the front teeth gently touching and the sound prolonged: "mmmm." Each repetition is sounded for about seven seconds, with two seconds on A, two seconds on U and three seconds on M, with a silence of about two seconds before the next repetition. The three syllables are run together: AAUUMM (silence), AAUUMM (silence), AAUUMM (silence). On the first syllable, A, we feel the solar plexus and chest vibrating. On the second syllable, U, the throat vibrates. The third syllable, M, vibrates the top of the head. Thus, proper chanting of Aum is a high form of yoga, moving energy from the lower chakras of the body up to the highest chakra, or energy center—the *sahasrara* chakra at the crown of the head.

Another traditional way to do this *japa* is to take a full breath and then chant the AUM three times as you exhale. The first repetition is

audible, the second is more quiet and the third is barely audible, as you concentrate within. Then inhale slowly as you visualize the image of our loving Lord Ganesha in your mind. Then repeat the AUM again three times as you exhale. The breathing should not be forced, but natural, slow, gentle and rhythmical. We can use a *japa mala* with 108 beads and pass over one bead for each repetition, or do the *japa* for a prearranged period of time.

Two other Ganesha mantras are commonly used. One is Aum Shri Ganeshaya Namah, meaning "Praise to Lord Ganesha." This is the mantra of invocation, adoration and worship. It is repeated at the beginning of pujas, and it can be used for *japa* to invoke Ganesha's blessings for the auspicious beginning of a task, project, change of life, community undertaking or simply to offer Him our praise. Another special mantra is Aum Gam Ganapataye Namah. This is Lord Ganesha's *mala* ("root") mantra. It is also known as His *bija* mantra, for it combines Ganesha's *bija* ("seed") sound, *Gam*, with the phrase, "Praise beto Ganapati." This mantra is used for yoga *sadhana* in which we invoke Ganesha and merge ourselves with His supreme knowledge and peace.

When the *ganas* and *devas* of Lord Ganesha are finally attracted to the home shrine, the room will feel filled with spiritual energy. This feeling indicates that Ganesha's *ganas* are present, eager and willing to do whatever they can to maintain shanti, peace, within the home and bind the family together.



Top of page, a gallery of Ganesha images, from greeting cards, posters and temples; right, Ganesha in the Aum; above, a devotee performs japa.



Nartana Ganapati, in many temples. The tip of His trunk will curve to the left and touch the *modaka*, generally held in the left hand. In a few rare cases the trunk will curve to the right to touch the *modaka* on a right hand. Here He is called Valampuri (right turned) Vinayaga" (*Festivals of Tamil Nadu*, 1980, p. 112).

While Ganesha shrines are found at all Hindu temples, they often stand alone as well. They are often quite humble, not uncommonly a simple roadside shrine such as the one between Jaffna and Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka or along the roadsides here and there in South India. Here travelers stop to break a coconut and burn a bit of camphor before the Lord of Obstacles to pray for a safe and successful journey. There is a similar shrine near the university in Chennai. Many years ago a young man discovered a tree that formed the shape of Ganesha's head in its gnarled trunk. He began worshiping and soon took a vow not to leave the site. Travelers and students about to take their exams come to the shrine to seek Lord Ganesha's blessings. Such tree shrines enjoy the patronage of thousands of worshipers annually.

Historically His image is often found in places of danger, such as steep slopes, river crossings or where two roads cross. Here His *murti* may be a rough-hewn stone or even a trunk of a bo or ban-yan tree which has taken the form of the God Ganesha. A natural stone, or *svayambhu* ("self-created") *murti*, may also be the object of worship. Researcher Alice Getty wrote: "The most celebrated *svayambhu murtis* of Ganesha are found in Kashmir, where there are three famous and most powerful formless stones which from ancient times have drawn pilgrims to their shrines. One, which is near the village of Ganesh-bal, is in the river Lidar near its right bank, and is still an important place of pilgrimage.... Another rock in Kashmir which has been worshiped from most ancient times as a symbol of Ganesha under the name of Bhimasvarnin is at the foot of the hill Hari-Parbat near Srinagar.... The most

remarkable of these *svayambhu murtis* in Kashmir is the one on a cliff along the Kishen-Ganga known as Ganesh-Gati" (*Ganesha, a Monograph on the Elephant-Faced God*, by Alice Getty, 1971, p. 22-23).

Perhaps the most famous Ganesha temple in India is the Uchi Pillaiyar Koyil at Trichy. Uchi means "at the top." This large temple (also known as the Rock Fort Temple), built on a hilltop, commands a breathtaking view of the city and of the river Kaveri. Another large Ganesha temple is the Pillaiyarpatti Temple near Karaikudi in Ramanathapuram District, also in Tamil Nadu. In New Delhi there is the Siddhi Buddhi Vinayagar temple situated in Vinayagar. The Mukkuruni Pillaiyar inside the huge Meenakshi Temple complex in Madurai, India, is also quite famous. This *murti* is ten to twelve feet tall. Mukkuruni refers to a large measure of rice (about forty pounds). Here the priests cook a huge *modaka* ball for Ganesha using this measure. Hence the name Mukkuruni Pillaiyar. Also in Madurai, Lord Ganesha is worshiped as Vyaghrapada Ganesani, in female form with tiger feet. The Ganesani *murti* in *sukhasana* pose resides at Suchindram. There are two other temples in India with the female Ganesha form. One is at a tenth-century temple dedicated to sixty-four yoginis in Bheraghat, a village near Jalpur. The other is the Tanumalaya Swami Temple in Suchindram, Kerala. In Tibet She is worshiped as Gajanani.

A five-headed Ganesha mounted on a lion resides at Nagapattinam. At Vellore, India, Ganesha is enshrined as Valampuri Vinayakar, with his trunk



SHAMA DRESSLER



SHAMA DRESSLER

Above, a parade in Mumbai; left, a devotee prays intently and offers incense; below, a graceful Ganesha in granite carved in Bangalore



CAROLE KAHN

turned to the right instead of to the left. This *murti* is considered very auspicious. Highly revered Ganesha shrines are also found in the Siva temple of Tirunelveli in the Kanyakumari temple at the southern tip of India, and in Rameshvaram and Chidambaram. Our loving Ganesha is especially beloved in Maharashtra, where eight temples form one of His most sacred pilgrimages, and dozens of other sites are designated for his adoration. (Go to www.gurudeva.org/resources/books/sglg_ch-13 for an extensive list of prominent Ganesha citadels.) It is said that to make a visit on hardship pilgrimage (third-class on trains, on foot or by crawling) to 108 Ganesha temples and roadside shrines is most auspicious to smooth out the karmas of the future by dissolving, through His grace, the negative karmas and mistakes of the past, made knowingly or unknowingly. Penance of this sort deliberately condenses into a short period, or puts all in one place, the suffering that would otherwise be encountered over a long span of time.

The garden island of Sri Lanka has fourteen well-known Ganesha temples. There is an unusual Vinayaka at the Siva temple in Central Java, which is presently an archeological tourist site being restored by the Indonesian government. Lord Ganesha here sits with the soles of His feet pressed together, much like a child would sit, or as a yogi might sit in deep samadhi.

Shri H. Krishnamurthi writes in *Tattvaloka* (Feb.-March 1990): "Several images of Ganesha have been discovered in the excavations of Central America and Mexico. It is said that in Mexico the name of Ganesha is

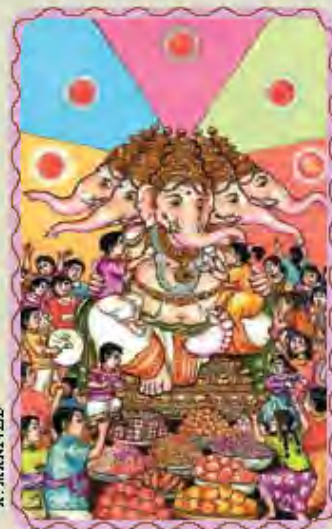
Festivals for Ganesha



Opulent Hindu festivals are times of joyous celebration marked by special observances. There are many festivals each year, several to each of the Gods. Festivals are characterized by acts of piety—penance, fasting, *sadhana*, pilgrimage—and spiritual rejoicing: singing, dancing, musical performance, parades, feasting, storytelling, scripture-reading and elaborate pujas. Here we briefly present the major festivals that honor Lord Ganesha.

Ganesha Chaturthi

Ganesha Chaturthi, also known as Vinayaka Chaturthi, is the festival day celebrating the birth of Lord Ganesha. One of the great national festivals of India, and the foremost annual festival to Ganesha, it is celebrated on the *chaturthi*, or "fourth day" after the new moon, in August/September. We decorate the temple and home shrine with banana leaves, sugarcane and strings of mango leaves, making it look like a small for-



A. MAMUEL

Children bring offerings during Pancha Ganapati. The five colored rays above Ganesha represent his five shaktis.

est. We bring baskets of fruits and sweets, especially *modaka* balls, and place them before the sanctum. He receives special pujas throughout the day and often a festival parade. Each year we obtain or make a small or large soft clay image of Ganapati and use it for worship at home for two to ten days after Ganesha Chaturthi. Then we bid Him fond farewell, honoring His departure, or *visarjana*, with a grand parade, as we carry Him to the water's edge on a palanquin bedecked with flowers and accompanied by puja, music, dancing and celebration. Clay images of Ganesha specifically prepared for the event are ceremoniously dissolved in the ocean or other body of water at this time by devotees all over the world, signifying His withdrawal into all-pervasive consciousness. This final day is known as Ganesha Visarjana.

Vinayaka Vratam

Vinayaka Vratam is a 21-day festival honoring Lord Gane-

sha beginning on the full moon day in the month of Karttikai—November/December. During these days, *Vinayaka Purana*, or stories, are recited in the temples, and special pujas are conducted at every Ganesha temple. Many devotees observe the *vata* (vow) of attending daily puja at a Ganesha temple and taking only one meal a day, in the evening.

Pancha Ganapati

Pancha Ganapati is a modern festival of the Five-Faced (*pancha* means "five") Ganesha held in Hindu homes from December 21 through 25. Pancha Ganapati is a Hindu expression of this natural season of worship, gift-giving and celebration. A festive shrine is created especially for the five-day event in the main living room of the home. Each day sweets,

fruits and incense are offered to Pancha Ganapati, ideally prepared and presented by the children. Puja is performed and hymns and bhajanas are sung in His praise. Each day gifts are given to the children, who place them unopened before Pancha Ganapati, to open on the fifth day.

On each day the family focuses on one of Ganesha's five shaktis, through discussion, gift-giving, apology and appreciation. On day one we draw forth Ganesha's first shakti to create a vibration of love and harmony among immediate family members. On day two we draw forth Ganesha's second shakti to establish a vibration of love and harmony among neighbors, relatives and close friends. On day three we strive to create love and harmony among business associates, the casual merchant and the public at large. On day four we draw forth the vibration of joy and harmony that comes from music, art, drama and the dance. On day five we strive to bring forth the special rewards and fulfillments that only religion brings into our life. We focus this day on our connection with Ganesha, the Lord of Dharma, by holding five special pujas for Him through the day. After the grand evening puja, gifts are distributed and joyously opened. Happy children. Happy parents. Happy God.

Virakosha." India's Birla Science Institute announced a new find: "A piece of evidence was connected with the legend of Ganesha's writing down the [Mahabharata] epic to the dictation of Vyasa. A metal plate depicting the elephant-headed Deity holding an etching stylus has been found in Luristan in Western Iran and has been dated to around 1200 BCE (Motilal Banarsidass Newsletter Dec. 1993)."

Among the most renowned of Ganesha's temples in Malaysia are the Siddhi Vinayagar temple of Petaling Jaya and the Kotta Malai Pillaiyar Temple of Kuala Lumpur on the busy street of Paduraya. The latter is a small temple, but extremely powerful, said to be the most popular Ganesha temple in the land. Also notable are the Jalan Pudu (Pasar Road) Pillaiyar Temple and the Poyyata Vinayagar Temple of Melaka. In Hawaii our Kadavul Hindu Temple has a three-ton, six-foot-tall Ganesha. At the Saiva Dharmashala at Riviere du Rempart, Mauritius, we have dedicated a Spiritual Park and erected a grand pavilion around a five-ton, nine-foot tall, five-faced *murti* of Ganesha, Panchamukha Ganapati, in a mango grove. In Edmonton, Canada, New Zealand and Nandi, Fiji, Seattle, Salt Lake City, Bethesda, Denver, Scottsdale, Sebastian, Anchorage and Chicago there are exquisite stone *murtis* of the elephant-faced God, gifted by my *aadheenam* to the born Hindu communities, conferring blessings for new temples. In Great Britain Ganesha is enshrined at each of the nation's several new temples, including the Shree Ganapati Temple in Wimbledon, and is the presiding Deity at the and at temples in Switzerland, Germany and Denmark.

The religion of the earliest known North American Indians bears many analogies to and apparently has sprung up from the same ultimate sources as our own venerable Sanatana Dharma, a fact that is evidenced by their rituals and religious beliefs and symbols. One of Lord Ganesha's oldest symbols, the swastika, was one of the central motifs used in the designs and patterns of many American Indian tribes and is still seen today in their beautiful blankets and

pottery. So the great God Ganesha is not really new to the Western countries, but quite old. His recent coming into prominence is more our remembering Him in lands where He has always been. But it is in this twentieth century, in the decades of the 70s and 80s, that Lord Ganesha came to be traditionally enshrined in magnificent multi-million-dollar Hindu temples. We find Him in New York, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Concord, Livermore, Fremont, Denver, Houston, Nashville, Edmonton in Canada and hundreds of other places. These shrines have brought forth the *murti*, or physical image, of Ganesha as Gajanana, the Elephant-Faced. Ganesha's presence in North America at the beginning of the growth of Agamic Hinduism in the West ensures its success.

As Hinduism emerged in North America in the twentieth century, Ganesha led the way. One of the first traditional temples to be built was the large Maha Ganapati Temple in Flushing, New York. As each community sought guidance and direction in establishing religious roots, I constantly urged the trustees of each temple society, who came seeking guidance from Kauai's Hindu Monastery in the Hawaiian Island chain, to first begin their congregations in the worship of Ganesha in order for their temple to come up quickly.

We would often present the group with large or small stone image of the great God and give them the blessings for His worship to begin. Thus, at

many a new temple site, a Ganesha image was established in a small shrine while construction and fund raising proceeded. This occurred in Fiji, Edmonton, Livermore, Fremont, Salt Lake City, Houston, Denver, Chicago, Lansing, Bethesda, London, Germany and elsewhere. Priests were brought from India, devotees flocked to the shrines, the worship began, and the funds to construct the temple began to flow. This practice has now become a tradition in the West as Hindus have learned from experience that once Lord Ganesha is worshiped, it is actually He who builds the temple in a most wonderful and inspiring way, and they are His helpers.

Visions of Ganesha

Lord Ganesha's vivified presence in the Western world has already culminated in many special visions of Him by both born and formally converted Hindus living in North and South America. In hopes of spiriting onward the worldwide fellowship of Hindus around the globe, a few such visions will be included here anonymously.

Lord Ganesha has been worshiped here and there in North and South America in many small ways by devotees from India for

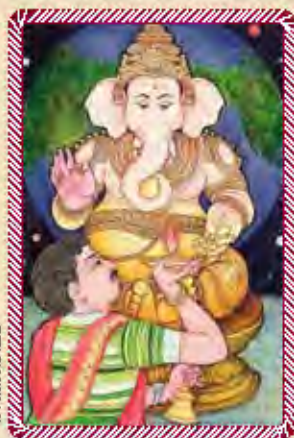
Left, this stunningly ornate Ganesha shrine at Bangkok's World Trade Center is a favorite place of worship for Thai Hindus and Buddhists. Below, Bodhinatha receives an elephant's blessing in Madurai. Below left, a devotee performing puja perceives Ganesha as a real, living being.



Connecting with Ganesha through Puja

Love and joy come to Hindu families who worship Lord Ganesha in their home through the traditional ceremony known as puja. By means of such sacred rites and the divine energies invoked, each family makes their house a sacred sanctuary, a refuge from the concerns and worries of the world. Pujas can be as simple as lighting a lamp and offering a flower at the Lord's holy feet; or they can be elaborate and detailed, with many chants and offerings. The indispensable part of any puja is devotion. Without love in the heart, outer performance is of little value. But with true devotion, even simple gestures are sacred ritual. Every morning, all around our planet, millions of Hindus perform puja in their home.

A superb definition of puja is given in *South Asian Folklore: An Encyclopedia*. "A puja is a ritual performance that honors a being or an object and provides the context for the transaction between worshiper and deity in which a visual and substantive connection can occur. The most common expression in theistic Hinduism today, pujas are done outdoors, in homes, temples, at natural sites, and within a devotee's mind and body.



The external focus of a puja is a *murti* (form), which may be a respected living being, such as a teacher or guru; a stone, wood, or metal icon of a deity; an aniconic image, such as the Ganges River; plants; animals; the implements of one's profession or subsistence; or any form to which devotion and a relationship of dependence is to be demonstrated" (Routledge, 2002).

One need not be initiated to perform simple puja invoking our Loving Ganesha. All that is required is that the celebrant believe in the laws of karma and reincarnation, which are the cornerstones of Hindu ethical and philosophical doctrine. Ganesha worship is enjoyed by all, Hindus and non-Hindus alike, as He is the first God to be worshiped. It is not wise for an *ardha*-Hindu, or half Hindu, to centralize worship on Siva or Murugan or other Gods until full commitment has been made through receiving the traditional sacraments, called *samskaras*. Home puja is performed at least once a day, usu-

ally in the early morning. It is traditional to not partake of food at least three hours before puja, so puja is usually done prior to meals.

All Hindus attend puja at their local temple at least once a week and maintain a sacred shrine at home, which esoterically functions as an extension of the temple. The shrine room is meticulously cared for and not used for purposes other than worship, prayer, *japa* yoga, scriptural study and meditation. Here puja, home liturgy, is performed daily, generally by the head of the house. All members of the family attend.

Creating a home shrine is not difficult. The altar should be close to the floor, since most of the puja is performed while seated, or when there are small children in the home it is often higher, out of their reach. For a Ganesha shrine, an image, or *murti*, of Lord Ganesha is placed at the center of the altar.

The entire puja, of which this is a summary, can be learned in the following chapter. Puja is a ritual welcoming of a holy person or deity, to

whom all precious substances and comforts are offered. Offerings are made with the right hand.

The offering of food is an important part of puja, such as cooked rice or freshly cut fruit. After the puja, the food offerings—along with holy ash (*vibhuti*), sacred water (*tirtha*), sandalwood paste (*chandana*), red powder (*kunkuma*) and flowers (*pushpa*)—are passed out and enjoyed as *prasada*, for they have been imbued with the blessings of the God.

After the sacraments are passed out, everyone present can chant Aum three times and then sit quietly and direct their worship to God within themselves. Externalized worship traditionally is followed by internalized worship, yogic quietude enjoyed in the aftermath of the puja. The simple practice of mentally chanting Aum followed by a period of meditation and self-reflection makes devotees strong enough to face the external world with enhanced willpower, true confidence and a heart filled with love, realizing that we are truly one world, one family.

many years since the turn of the century. But not until events in the early 1970s brought about the building of a large Ganesha temple in New York did Lord Ganesha take up a formal public residence. The sequence of events affirmed the ancient tradition wherein the Deity Himself decides when and where His temple is to be built. It is not a man or a woman or a group of people who make that decision on personal inspiration. Rather, the Deity, the God, informs us that the time has come for His temple to come up and then we, in turn, proceed to help Him manifest it in the material world. The message from the God containing the direction of when and where to build His home is traditionally given by Him to holy men, gurus, swamis or sants who are respected by the community and are in personal touch with the Gods. Such religious leaders also have spiritual insight into the religious progress of the community. Lord Ganesha may strengthen the instructions of such holy men through a dream or vision to a devotee.

The Maha Ganapati Temple in Flushing, New York, began with two gentlemen from India who had been living in New York for several years. One of these hailed from a long line of temple builders; the other was a devout man who performed regular religious and yoga *sadhana*. This man had returned to India. He had a vision one night. He found himself soaring high above New York City until he came above an abandoned church in an area near his former residence. He came over the steeple, which opened as he moved down to land in front of the altar. Lo! There on the altar was Lord Ganesha Himself, who said nothing to him but just smiled. Immediately upon awakening, with his heart filled with love and the vision of the Great God still fresh in his inner mind, this sant phoned the temple builder who was then serving at the United Nations in New York.

The temple builder asked him to come to New York right away. Travel arrangements were made, and within 24 hours the two of them were driving around the Queens section of New York in search of Lord Ganapati's new home. They finally came upon the

old church that was the very one seen in the vision and which was for sale at the time! There could be no doubt that Ganesha had shown where to put His temple. The building was subsequently purchased. After many years of hard work, with the blessings and sanction of Shrilashri Pandrimalaiswami, Ganesha was installed and consecrated in an orthodox shrine to receive traditional public worship.

Since 1972 many other devotees have seen Lord Ganesha in their visions and dreams. For example, several pilgrims on the 1981 India Odyssey, a spiritual pilgrimage to the holy lands of ancient Bharat (India), had life-altering visions of Lord Ganesha at the Shri Kumbhalavalai Temple in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. Such visions of Lord Ganesha clarify much about the way this great Lord works. While the visions took place within the subtle minds of His devotees, or our microcosm, this subtle space is in fact enormous and quite a macrocosm of its own.

Just as Lord Ganesha's vehicle, the tiny rodent, ferrets out every secret space and hidden area of the house, so does this Great Mahadeva have the ability to move within the seemingly most obscure and intricate areas of our minds. He is the master of both the big and the small, the macrocosm and the microcosm. Lord Ganesha's great gift is the entire



Left, Gurudeva sees Lord Ganesha in a vision, who tells him to rub a little oil on the sharks' noses; right, devotees attend puja in a Ganesha temple; below priests raise the aratisthane at the crescendo of puja to the five-faced elephant Deity at Kumbhalavalai Temple in Alaveddy, Sri Lanka.



Personal Testimony about Ganesha



Kamala Garneau, Edmonton, Canada. "During the last year of my degree, I was facing a very important interview for entrance into an internship program. As the interview drew near, I went to the temple and sat and prayed to Lord Ganesha. I told Him that I would make coming to see Him daily a priority in my life for a minimum of two weeks and as long as I could after that, and prayed for Him to remove any obstacles blocking my path from having a successful interview and being accepted into the program. The next day I woke up early and went to the temple for the puja. This routine continued, and the day of the interview drew near. On the day of the interview, I was reviewing some possible interview questions my family and I had prepared. Later, as I was brushing my teeth, three different interview questions just entered my mind. They were somewhat unusual and a little complicated to answer, so I mentally prepared answers to them as I drove to the interview. As it turned out, I was asked all three of those questions in exactly the same way they came to me. Thanks to Lord

Ganesha, I had already prepared my answers and was easily able to handle them and finish the interview successfully. That night I went to the temple and thanked Lord Ganesha for helping me. A few months later I was accepted into the program."



Sheela Venkatakrishnan, Chennai. "Ganesha is in myriad shapes and forms sit around my home, reminding me of who I am and what I can become! Tears wash away with just one look in the sheer joy that emanates from every form He took. Acceptance becomes a way of life. Surrender comes as a shield from strife. It becomes easy to amble along with the heart singing a sweet, sweet song! Ganesha, my friend, my guide, stands strong when all seems wrong. He lights up the way every day and shatters all that stands in the way of what I will become one day! A shining soul such as He. You are Him, and He is me!"



Vikmeswaran, Kuala Lumpur. "Since my teens, I have been acquainted with this beautiful God. He was my guide since then. I first got to know Him when I saw His *svayambhu* form in an old tree where people used to pray to Him. I would go and burn camphor to Him whenever I could. I wasn't a devout person, and I was very much attached to the ideologies of the West. Still, my daily life somehow was centered around Him. I used to sit at the tree simply watching His beautifully formed face with its huge trunk. He somehow communicated with me whenever I was there with Him, and gradually my life turned

deeper. I am still learning about Lord Ganesha, still communicating with Lord Ganesha, still loving my Lord Ganesha. Every single obstacle that I face in my life, Pillaiyar removes for me; even the littlest problems are solved by Him."



Chamundi Sabanathan, California. "My most vivid experience with Lord Ganesha occurred at the old temple on Sacramento Street in San Francisco, not long after His *murti* was installed. I was seated at the back of the room, but suddenly had the experience of being at His feet, prostrating with overwhelming devotion."



Home Puja

A Simple, Traditional Worship Ceremony to Lord Ganesha that Anyone Can Perform—with English Translation, Illustrations And Internet Resources to Facilitate Learning the Chants

THE HINDU FORM OF HOME WORSHIP, KNOWN AS puja, is unique in all the world. Quite fittingly, it arises from the magnanimous spirit of hospitality that Hindu people are famous for. All guests are received and treated as God in the Hindu home, and God is no exception. During this daily morning rite, family members gather in their well-appointed shrine room to honor God as their royal guest. They receive Him warmly, offer a seat, serve water to quench His thirst, bathe and dress Him in beautiful clothes, burn the finest incense for His enjoyment, honor Him with light and flowers and feed Him a sumptuous meal. It is an intimate, personal interaction with God. Throughout the puja, the officiant chants sweetly to the Deity in Sanskrit, describing these kindly acts and beseeching His blessings. Finally, he thanks the Deity for His presence, bids Him farewell and humbly apologizes for any errors he may have committed. It is a ritual performed daily in millions of homes. In a sense, each Hindu has a private temple right in the home, and invites God to abide there, close to the family. Mystically, it keeps open the channels to the superconscious, divine areas of the inner worlds, bringing peace, health, prosperity and happiness to family members. Intellectually, it keeps religious beliefs strong. Emotionally, it cultivates a burgeoning love of God, known as bhakti. Puja literally



means “worship, adoration.” Home puja is a personal version of the public puja performed in temples by priests. The forms of puja vary widely between Hinduism’s four main denominations and its hundreds of lineages, but all puja finds its basis in sixteen offerings, *shodasha upachara*.

These also vary somewhat, depending on the scriptural source that is followed, but one popular list is the following: 1) *Āvāhanam*, invoking; 2) *Āsanam*, offering a seat; 3) *Pādyam*, offering water for cleansing feet; 4) *Arghyam*, offering water for cleansing the palms; 5) *Āchamanīyam*, sipping water; 6) *Snānam*, ceremonial bath; 7) *Vāstram*, offering vestments; 8) *Yajñopavītam*, offering sacred thread; 9) *Chandanam*, offering sandalwood paste; 10) *Pushpam*, offering flowers; 11) *Dhūpam*, burning incense; 12) *Dīpam*, waving lighted camphor; 13) *Naivedyam*, offering food; 14) *Añjali*, praying with folded hands; 15) *Pradakshinā*, circumambulation; 16) *Udvasanam*, farewell. Lord Ganesha is the God honored and worshiped by all Hindus, so here we present a puja for this universally beloved, boon-giving Lord of Beginnings and Ruler of Obstacles, which can be performed by anyone, young and old, Hindu or non-Hindu, Vaishnava or Shakta, Saiva or Smarta. It is Lord Ganesha who bridges all distinctions and unifies all peoples, and it is through His worship that we ultimately come to know all the other Gods.

A young Hindu family share in morning worship, as father performs the traditional rite of worship called puja, honoring and invoking the blessings of the Elephant-Headed Lord of Dharma, the Deity worshiped by Hindus of all lineages.





Family members have donned traditional clothing and gathered in their shrine room for morning worship. They are just completing their preparations and are about to begin the daily ritual that keeps the home safe, harmonious and spiritually vibrant.



Unlike the puja we are presenting in this chapter, some home pujas are long and elaborate. Here a priest performs a long Siva puja in an Indian home shrine during Mahasivaratri.

Puja, the worship of a murti through water, lights and flowers in temples and shrines, is the Agamic counterpart of the Vedic yajna rite, in which offerings are conveyed through the sacred homa fire. These are the two great streams of adoration and communion in Hinduism, drawn from Hinduism's two massive compendiums of revealed scripture—the Vedas and the Agamas.

Instructions for Establishing a Home Shrine And Performing Puja to Lord Ganesha

In performing the puja, preparation is of utmost importance—gathering flowers, cleaning the altar and puja tray, making ready the oil lamps and preparing the fruit and/or cooked food offering. It is common to chant a Ganesha mantra or softly sing devotional songs while performing these tasks. This quiets the mind and brings one's awareness close to Him. Indeed, all this preparation is an integral part of worship.

As you see in the photos, there are a number of traditional implements needed for the puja, such as a metal tray, holy water cups and spoons, ghee lamp, camphor lamp, as well as puja supplies, like holy ash and sandalwood paste. These are now available at Indian grocery stores, and online at www.minimela.com. For more information on setting up an altar, see Chapter 22, "Hindu Home Sanctuary."

Before beginning the puja, check the altar to make sure all necessary articles are there, so that you don't have to interrupt the flow of puja to get a missing item. Arrange all the items the same way for each puja so you can reach automatically when needed, with those most frequently used closest at hand.

Hold the attitude that, as *pujari*, you are a servant of the Gods, a channel for the spiritual energies. Only thoughts of God are on your mind as you perform puja, thus enhancing the outpouring of divine blessings. Tradition provides a caution: you should never perform puja during or within 31 days of experiencing severe anger or other deep emotional upset, but it is all right to attend.

Also, puja is not performed or attended by women during their menses, or by anyone who has a wound that is bleeding. Puja is a yoga, or link, between this and inner worlds. Therefore, you must be at your best in mood and emotion to assist in making this connection. Before performing puja, you should be freshly dressed, clean and undistracted by daily concerns. Having bathed beforehand, enter the shrine room and prostrate.

The form of prostration differs for men and women. Men perform "eight-limbed obeisance," *astanga pranama*, a fully prone pose in which hands, chest, forehead, knees and feet touch the ground. Women perform "five-limbed obeisance," *panchanga pranama*, a kneeling pose in which hands, head and knees touch the ground (with ankles crossed, right over the left).

When everything is ready, take your seat in a cross-legged posture in front of and to the left of the altar, facing the Deity but turned slightly to the right. Close your eyes, sit quietly for a moment and tune your nerve system to God Ganesha and the sacred puja you are about to perform. If others are attending, be careful not to sit directly in front of the Deity, thereby blocking their view of the altar. Generally one remains seated throughout the ritual, though in some shrines it may be more comfortable to stand during the *arati* or throughout the puja. When small children are in the home, the shrine room is locked so they do not disturb the contents. If a lockable room is not available, the altar is raised so as to be out of reach, and the puja is performed

standing up. Those attending will usually sit during most of the ceremony, then stand during the final *arati*. However, this again may be left to individual discretion in consideration of the height of the shrine.

During the ritual, you will be making many offerings. Most offerings are made with the right hand, never just the left, though there are occasions when both hands are used.

The offering of food is an important part of puja. Traditionally a simple dish of cooked rice is prepared especially for the Deity, with cooking utensils reserved for this purpose alone. If cooked food is not offered, then freshly cut fruit may be substituted. Keep the offering covered until the point in the puja when the *pranas* (life energies) of the food are offered to the Deity. Keeping the food covered helps to preserve purity and contain the *pranas*, which the Gods and *devas* can see, absorb, enjoy and reflect back to cleanse the auras of devotees. After the puja, the food offerings—along with holy ash (*vibhuti*), sacred water (*tirtha*), sandalwood paste (*chandana*), red powder (*kumkuma*) and flowers (*pushpa*)—are passed out and enjoyed as *prasada*.

A recording of sacred chanting from the *Vedas* may be played softly before the puja begins. At the high point, as the *arati* is presented, loud drums and *nagavanas* resound. As the sacraments are passed out by the *pujari*, the divine musical ragas are heard softly played on the *vina*, or Vedic chanting or devotional songs may be played.

After the sacraments are passed out, encourage everyone to sit quietly for a while to enjoy the *sannidhya*, the ever-present feeling of the Divine, that the God, Gods, inner-plane gurus and *devas* suffuse in the shrine room. Such internalized worship naturally follows a puja. Those who perform daily *japa* will find this an ideal time for that *sadhana*.

Internalizing worship in this way gives you and all members of the family strength to face the outside world, its daily challenges and, yes, school tests. Internalizing worship is the core of the Sanatana Dharma. It is the root, stem and blossom of the highest chakra, the 1,000-petalled lotus. It is the force that gives the strength to resist temptation, to turn others from their bad ways and to face up to and live through birth karmas, *prarabdha* karmas, that are brought with you in this life. It gives the courage to resist making new, especially unwanted, karmas to be faced at a later date. It gives the willpower needed in this Kali Yuga to survive. It gives the love which provokes the understanding to overlook and forgive, then forget. Finally, internalized worship gives the peace of mind, the *shanti*, in which all saints, sages, mahatmas and great seers dwell, in their *jnana*, their wisdom, of how things work in their universe of which we are a vital part.

Many people are hesitant to do puja, specific, traditional rites of worship, because they feel they don't have enough training or don't understand the mystical principles behind it well enough. Most Hindus depend on the priests to perform the pujas and sacraments for them, or to train them to perform home puja and give them permission to do so through initiation, called *diksha*. However, simple pujas, such as this one, may be performed by anyone wishing to invoke grace from God, Mahadevas and *devas*. Mothers, daughters, aunts, fathers, sons, uncles, all may perform puja within their own home, and do, as the Hindu home is considered to be nothing less than an extension of the nearby temple.

The Ganesha puja presented on the following pages consists of a series of Sanskrit chants to be intoned while performing the indicated actions and visualizations. Each chant is given in three forms, first in Sanskrit's traditional Devanagari script, second in transliterated for those who speak English, and third in a



Te presents a ghee lamp to Siva, Shakti and Ganesha during a long ritual in which he bathes the Deities with water, honey and other precious substances.

freely-rendered English translation. Each translation is followed by detailed instructions to guide the *pūjārī*'s actions.

The chants of the simple Ganesha puja given here are in Sanskrit, Hinduism's ancient scriptural language. Time spent mastering the pronunciation is time well spent. Ideally, training is received personally from a priest, pundit or other person proficient in Sanskrit, so that you can chant the verses properly. Such a teacher will generally begin by teaching the alphabet and will offer training in reading in the Devanagari script, as well as the transliteration to help English-speaking students. Learning Sanskrit is not mandatory, and for those who do not have a teacher, we have a voice recording of this entire puja for learning the mantras properly. It is available at www.himalayanacademy.com/audio/chants/. A key to Sanskrit pronunciation for the transliteration system used in this puja is available online at www.himalayanacademy.com/resources/sanskrit/.

Devotion During Sacred Rituals

While correct chanting is important, the essential part of any puja is devotion. Without love of God and the Gods, outer performance is of little value. But with true devotion, even the simplest puja can be a profoundly sacred experience. Devotion is facilitated by the belief that you really are communing with the Divine through puja, that the Gods and *devas* do actually hear your prayers, enjoy your intonations and respond by sending blessings that purify your aura and protect your home. Though you can't see them with your physical eyes, they are there nonetheless. As you perform or attend puja, visualize the Deity sitting before you, accepting your offerings, pleased to be in your company, delighted with your love and hospitality. Think of the God as a part of your fam-

ily, a grand being who is concerned with your welfare. Through strong visualization and sincere devotion, your sensitivity to the darshan will grow and your relationship with the Deity will become strong and close.

Cultivating devotion is called *bhakti yoga*. Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami stressed its importance in this way, "Bhakti yoga is love on all levels of consciousness—physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. The greatest inhibiting factor in practicing *bhakti yoga* is the doubting, cynical, intellectual mind. Doubt and skepticism harden the heart and narrow the mind. The bloom of *bhakti* softens the heart and relaxes the intellect. Through *bhakti yoga*, the yoga of devotion, the combative mind becomes erased, absorbed into the consciousness of the One Self, the Being permeating all beings. With the help of devotion, you can soar within. You can not only pull away detachedly from unwholesome areas of the mind, but it is possible to keep your self in an inward state of expanded consciousness."

Use and Care of the Shrine Room

Keep the shrine spotlessly clean, and decorate it for festivals and special holy days. Visit your shrine before you leave the home, seeking blessings and protection as you leave its shelter, and go there again for purification upon returning. Worship in heartfelt devotion, so the Gods' grace flows freely toward you and loved ones. Make the shrine a refuge for all family members, a haven where they can find peace and solace, where they can connect with the Gods, offer their praise and pray for practical needs. Train your children to worship in the shrine before each important event in life, such as a major exam at school or when faced with a personal challenge or problem.

HOME PUJA PREPARATION & PURIFICATION

आचमनम् Āchamanam

Water Sipping By the Pūjārī



ॐ सुमुखाय स्वाहा
ॐ एकदन्ताय स्वाहा
ॐ गजकर्णकाय स्वाहा

Aum sumukhāya svāhā
Aum ekadantāya svāhā
Aum gajakarṇakāya svāhā

Aum! Hail to the God whose face is always shining!
Aum! Hail to the God who has only one tusk!
Aum! Hail to the God with huge elephant ears!

Holding the spoon with your left hand, take a spoonful of water from the cup and place it in the right palm to rinse the hand, letting the excess fall onto the floor or a tray. Put another spoonful of water into the right hand, intone "Aum sumukhāya svāhā" and sip the water. Repeat for the second and third lines, then rinse the right hand again.

विघ्नेश्वर प्रार्थना Vighneśvara Prārthanā

Ganeśa Invocation

ॐ शुक्लांबरधरं विष्णुं शशिवर्णं चतुर्भुजम् ।
पसन्न वदनं ध्यायेत् सर्वविघ्नोपशान्तये ॥

Aum śuklāmbardharam viṣṇuṃ
śaśivarnam chaturbhujam
prasanna vadanam dhyāyet
sarvaviḥṇopāśāntaye

Aum. O Lord dressed in splendid white, pervading the universe, shining radiantly like rays of the full moon, having four mighty arms and a charming, happy face, we meditate on you that all obstacles may be quelled.



Salute Lord Ganeśa by holding hands in *añjali mudrā*, the prayerful pose. Then, while reciting the verse, tap your temples lightly with your knuckles three times, as in the photo. Alternatively, you may cross your arms before your face, the left hand tapping the right temple and vice versa. Return your hands to *añjali mudrā* while reciting the last words of the chant.

संकल्पम् Saṅkalpam

Dedication of Pūjā, Statement of Purpose

ॐ अद्य पूर्वोक्त एवांगुणसकल
विशेषेण विशिष्टायां अस्यां शुभतिथौ
ॐ महागणेश्वरं उद्दिश्य महागणेश्वरप्रीत्यर्थं
महागणेश्वरप्रसादसिद्ध्यर्थं
यथा शक्ति (name of city) देशे (period of day)
ध्यानावाहनादि गणेशपूजां करिष्ये ।
ॐ अप उपस्पृश्य

Five periods of the day (insert one in chant)

उषः काल	ushaḥ kāla, dawn
प्रातः काल	prātaḥ kāla, morning
मध्याह्नकाल	madhyāhṇakāla, noon
सयंकाल	sāyaṅkāla, evening
उर्ध्वयामकाल	ūrdhvyāmakāla, night

Aum adya pūrvokta evaṅguṇasakala
viśeṣeṇa viśiṣṭāyāṁ asyāṁ śubhatithau
Aum Mahāgaṇeśvaraṁ uddīśya
Mahāgaṇeśvara prītyartham
Mahāgaṇeśvara prasāda siddhyartham
yathā śakti (chant city) deśe (insert the time of day)
dhyānāvāhanādi Gaṇeśa pūjāṁ karishye
Aum apa upasprīśya

At this particularly auspicious moment, time and place, on this auspicious day, so that we may realize the fullness of your grace, to the best of our ability this (insert time of day) Gaṇeśa pūjā we shall now perform. Aum. By touching pure water we become pure.

While reciting this statement of purpose, take a pinch of rice and hold it at chest height in your closed right palm, with open left hand underneath. Insert the time of day and the place where indicated. As you chant the last word, karishye, gently toss the rice toward the base of the image. Then, with

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the left hand, place a spoonful of water into your right palm and ritually wash both hands with the water by wiping the palms together a few times as you recite “Aum apa upa sprīṣya.” Once the saṅkalpam has been chanted, the pūjā must not be interrupted or abandoned until the concluding mantras are recited.

WORSHIP AND OFFERINGS BEGIN

आवाहनम् आसनम् *Welcoming and Offering a Seat*
Āvāhanam, Āsanam

ध्यायामि । आवाहयामि ।
रत्नसिंहासनं समर्पयामि ।

dhyāyāmi, āvāhayāmi, ratnasinhāsanaṁ samarpayāmi

We now meditate on you, O Lord, and invite you to sit upon the jewel-studded, lion throne we have prepared for you.



Offer a pinch of rice to the Deity as you chant each of the three words before “samarpayāmi.” Visualize Gaṇeśa seated on a gem-studded throne before you, smiling, full of blessings, waiting to be honored as a guest in your home.

अर्घ्यम् *Washing the Lord's Feet and Hands*
Arghyam

पादयोः पाद्यं समर्पयामि ।
हस्तयोः अर्घ्यं समर्पयामि ।

pādayoḥ pādyam samarpayāmi
hastayoḥ arghyam samarpayāmi

We now humbly bathe each of your white lotus feet and gently wash each of your precious hands, Lord Gaṇeśa.

With your right hand offer a spoonful of pure water by holding it up before the Deity momentarily and then placing it in the tīrtha cup. This is how all water offering is done throughout the pūjā. As you chant the first line, visualize yourself bathing the feet of Gaṇeśa. Offer a second spoonful of pure water as you intone the next line and visualize yourself washing His hands.



Offer a spoonful of pure water to Gaṇeśa. Visualize His accepting it in His Hand and sipping it.

आचमनम् *Offering Water to Quench His Thirst*
Āchamanam

ॐ भूर्भुवः सुवः आचमनीयं समर्पयामि ।

Aum bhūr-bhuvah suvaḥ āchamanīyaṁ samarpayāmi

Aum! In all three worlds, we humbly offer you fresh, pure water for sipping.

स्नानम्
Snānam

Ritual
Bathing

ॐ सुरसिन्धुसमानीतं सुवर्णकलशस्थितम् ।
स्नानार्थं गृह्यतां शम्भो सलिलं विमलं गणेश ॥
गङ्गास्नानं समर्पयामि

Aum surasindhu samānītaṁ suvarṇakalāśāsthitaṁ ।
snānārthaṁ grīhyatāṁ śambho salilam vimalam gaṇeśa ॥
gaṅgāsnānam samarpayāmi

We now bathe you, beloved Lord Gaṇeśa, the pure one, with the water that was brought from the Ganges in the golden pot. We have bathed you in sacred Gaṅgā water.

While ringing the bell and reciting this verse, dip a flower into the tīrtha water and gently sprinkle the Deity. Do this three times or more. Hold the flower in your right hand in the mṛigī mudrā, the stem between your third and fourth fingers. If the altar design allows, you may pour water over the mūrti, rather than sprinkling it during this chant.



अलङ्कारम् *Adornment and Offerings*
Alaṅkāram

वस्त्रार्थं मङ्गलाक्षतान् समर्पयामि
उपवीतार्थं मङ्गलाक्षतान् समर्पयामि
ॐ गन्धं गृहाण सुरभिमन्थकासुरसूदन ।
कुङ्कुमदिसमायुक्तं कुलाचलनिकेतन ॥
दिव्य परिमल विभूति चन्दन कुङ्कुमम् समर्पयामि

vastrārtham maṅgalākṣatān samarpayāmi
upavītārtham maṅgalākṣatān samarpayāmi

Aum gandhaṁ grīhāṇa surabhim andhakā surasūdana,
kuṅkumadi samāyuktaṁ kulāchalaniketana
divya parimala vibhūti chandana
kuṅkumam samarpayāmi

We give you this auspicious unbroken rice, our magnificent Lord, that you may enjoy resplendent clothing. We give you auspicious unbroken rice, Lord Gaṇeśa, that you may be handsomely adorned with a white, cotton sacred thread. Aum. O Lord, the destroyer of the demon Andhakāsura, you who resides in the Himālayas, please accept the good smelling chandana with kuṅkuma and choice offerings.

Dress the Deity. Offer a pinch of unbroken rice while chanting each of the first two lines. Repeat the third and fourth lines over and over as you decorate the Deity with flowers. The last line is recited once while applying vibhūti (holy ash), chandana (sandalpaste) and kuṅkuma (red powder).



पुष्पम् Pushpam

Offering Flowers

तदुपरि मङ्गलाक्षतान् समर्पयामि ।
पूजार्थं नानाविधपत्र पुष्पाणि समर्पयामि ।

tadupari maṅgalākṣhatān samarpayāmi
pūjārtham nānāvidhapatra pushpāṇi samarpayāmi

We now offer this auspicious unbroken rice. And for the fulfillment of our devotion, we offer many kinds of fresh, blooming flowers, our peerless Lord.

A pinch of rice is offered with the first line. A handful of flowers is offered with the second.

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धूपम् Dhūpam

Offering Incense

ॐ वनस्पत्युद्भवैः दिव्यैः नानागन्धसमन्वितैः ।
आघ्रेयधूपदीपानां धूपोऽयं प्रतिगृह्यताम् ॥
दशाङ्गं गुग्गुलोपेतं सुगन्धं सुमनोहरम् ।
आघ्रेयः सर्वदेवानां धूपोऽयं प्रतिगृह्यताम् ॥
धूपमाघ्रापयामि धूपानन्तरमाचमनीयं समर्पयामि
मङ्गलाक्षतान् समर्पयामि

Aum vanaspatyudbhavaiḥ divyaiḥ
nānāgandhasamanvitaiḥ,
āghreyadhūpadīpānām dhūpo-yam pratigrihyatām.
daśāṅgam guggulopetam sugandhan sumanoharam,
āghreyah sarvadevānām dhūpo-yam pratigrihyatām.
dhūpamāghrāpayāmi
dhūpānantaram āchamanīyam samarpayāmi
maṅgalākṣhatān samarpayāmi

The finest incense, of magical qualities, of full and varied fragrances, Lord Gaṇeśa, we set aflame and offer to you in this, our home. Incense of the finest resins and perfumes, incomparable in sweetness and aroma, to be inhaled and enjoyed by you and all the Gods and devas, we offer to you in this, our home. Eagerly we offer to you, our resplendent Lord, fine resin incense, of heavenly odor, bewitching to the mind, rising out of a ghee-fed flame. We offer it to you in this, our home. This fine incense we have duly



offered for your pleasure. And we again offer you cool, sweet water for sipping and auspicious unbroken rice.

During this chant, make three circles before the Deity with lighted incense held in your right hand while ringing the bell with your left hand. Complete the third circle and trace an Aum as you chant the fifth line, dhūpamāghrāpayāmi. At that point raise the incense higher and ring the bell louder. Put the incense down, and recite the next two lines. With the first, water is offered, with the second, a pinch of rice.

दीपम् Dīpam

Offering The Light

ॐ साज्यवर्तित्रयोपेतं प्राज्यमङ्गलदायकं ।
दीपं पश्य दयाराशे दीनबन्धो नमोऽस्तु ते ॥
ॐ आवाहिताभ्यः सर्वाभ्यो देवताभ्यो नमः ।
दिव्य मङ्गलदीपं सन्दर्शयामि ।
दीपानन्तरमाचमनीयं समर्पयामि ।
मङ्गलाक्षतान् समर्पयामि ।

aum sājyavarti trayopetam prājyamaṅgala dāyakam,
dīpam paśya dayārāśe dīnabandho namo-stu te.
aum āvāhitabhyah sarvabhyo devatabhyo namaḥ,
divya maṅgala dīpaṁ sandarśayāmi,
dīpānantaramāchamanīyam samarpayāmi,
maṅgalākṣhatān samarpayāmi

O the Compassionate, the friend of devotees! See this lamp offered which is lighted with ghee and three wicks and which is the provider of abundant auspiciousness. Salutations to you!

नैवेद्यम् Naivedyam

Offering Food

सत्यं त्वर्तेन (chant in morning)
ऋतं त्वा सत्येन (chant if evening) परिषिञ्चामि ।
ॐ अमृतमस्तु अमृतोपस्तरणमसि स्वाहा ।
ॐ गणेशाय स्वाहा । ॐ गणेशाय स्वाहा ।
ॐ गणेशाय स्वाहा ।

satyaṁ tvartena (chant if in morning)
ṛitaṁ tvā satyena (if evening) parishiñchāmi
Aum amṛitamastu amṛitopastaraṇamasi svāhā
Aum gaṇeśāya svāhā, Aum gaṇeśāya svāhā,
Aum gaṇeśāya svāhā

We add Truth to Truth. Aum. May this sweet and pungent food be transformed into nectar. We humbly offer to you this food.

While reciting the first part of the mantra, uncover the food offering. Then, while chanting the last line and

Aum! Salutations to all the Gods invoked! This divine, auspicious light we offer to you. After that, we offer you pure water for sipping and auspicious unbroken rice.

Offer the oil light to Lord Gaṇeśa and ring the bell as you chant this hymn. As with the incense, circle three times then draw the Aum with the flame. Then raise the flame and ring the bell louder, then stop ringing. Offer water, then a flower or a pinch of rice.



ringing the bell, circle a spoonful of water over the food and offer it to the Deity. While ringing the bell softly, gently waft the aroma and vital essences of the food or fruit toward the Deity. Do this by sweeping the right hand over the food with a flower held between your fingers, stem upward. The palm is facing downward as it moves over the food, then rotates upward as the sweep approaches the Deity, bringing the aroma and prāṇa toward His nose and mouth. As you complete the third line, gently toss the flower toward the feet of the Deity at the end of the sweep with all the love in your heart.



ॐ आवाहिताभ्यः सर्वाभ्यो देवताभ्यो नमः ।
नानाविधमहानैवेद्यं निवेदयामि ।
यथाशक्तिसमर्पितमहानैवेद्यम् कृपया स्वीकुरु ।

Aum āvāhitābhyah sarvābhyo devatābhyo namaḥ,
nānā vidha mahānaivedyam nivedayāmi,
yathāśakti samarpita mahānaivedyam kṛipayā svīkuru

Aum! Salutations to all the Gods invoked! Because we are offering you our very best, Lord Gaṇeśa, in all sincerity and love, please consider the essence of this food as among the finest meals you have ever received. To the best of our ability in the worship of you, we offer this food and humbly beg that you will receive it.

Ring the bell loudly as you recite the above chant, pick up a flower or a pinch of rice and hold it at chest height in the fingertips of the right hand. As the last word is spoken, gently release the rice or flower at the feet of the Deity. Then put down the bell and raise your hands above your head in devout prayer that Gaṇeśa will accept the meal. While your hands are raised, close your eyes and visualize Gaṇeśa accepting and partaking of the meal. After a moment, lower your hands and intone Aum quietly.



ALL PHOTOS BY DINODIA



In this section of the pūjā, chant the “garland of Gaṇeśa’s 108 names.” As you intone each name, offer with your right hand a flower, some flower petals or a pinch of rice. The names are attributes of the Deity, each delineating an aspect of His wondrous nature. Each name is preceded by the mantra Aum and followed by namaḥ, meaning “obeisance, adoration or homage to.” Thus the first line is chanted Aum Vināyakāya Namaḥ (pronounced, “na-ma-ha”).

विघ्नेश्वराष्टोत्तर
शतनामावलिः
Vighneśvarāṣṭottara
Satanāmāvaliḥ
Chanting Gaṇeśa’s
108 Names

विनायकाय	Vināyakāya	..... the remover (of obstacles)
विघ्नराजाय	Vighnarājāya	..... the ruler of obstacles
गौरीपुत्राय	Gauriputrāya	..... the son of Gauri
गणेश्वराय	Gaṇeśvarāya	..... the lord of categories
स्कन्दाग्रजाय	Skandāgrajāya	..... Skanda’s elder brother
अव्ययाय	Avyayāya	..... the inexhaustible one
पूताय	Pūtāya	..... the pure one
दक्षाय	Dakshāya	..... the dexterous one
अध्यक्षाय	Adhyakshāya	..... the great presider
द्विजप्रियाय	Dvijapriyāya	..... who loves the twice-born
अग्निगर्वच्छिदे	Agnigarvacchide	..... who destroyed fire’s ego
इन्द्रश्रीप्रदाय	Indraśripradāya	..... who restored Indra’s wealth
वाणीप्रदाय	Vanipradāya	..... who gives eloquence
अव्ययाय	Avyayāya	..... the inexhaustible one
सर्वसिद्धिप्रदाय	Sarvasiddhipradāya	..... giver of fulfillment
सर्वतनयाय	Sarvatanayāya	..... the son of Śiva
शर्वरीप्रियाय	Śarvaripriyāya	..... loved by Pārvatī

सर्वात्मकाय	Sarvātmakāya	..... the soul of all
सृष्टिकर्त्रे	Sṛisṭikartre	..... the creator
देवाय	Devāya	..... the resplendent one
अनेकार्चिताय	Anekārchitāya	..... worshiped by multitudes
शिवाय	Śivāya	..... the auspicious one
सुद्धाय	Śuddhāya	..... the pure one
बुद्धिप्रियाय	Buddhipriyāya	..... who loves intelligence
शान्ताय	Śāntāya	..... the peaceful one
ब्रह्मचारिणे	Brahmachāriṇe	..... the celibate one
गजाननाय	Gajānanāya	..... the elephant’s faced
द्वैमातुराय	Dvaimāturāya	..... who has two mothers
मुनिस्तुताय	Munistutāya	..... who is praised by sages
भक्तविघ्नविनाशनाय	Bhaktavighna vināśanāya	..... who destroys devotees’ obstacles
एकदन्ताय	Ekadantāya	..... who has one tusk
चतुर्बाहवे	Chaturbāhave	..... who has four arms
चतुराय	Chaturāya	..... the ingenious one

शक्तिसंयुताय
लम्बोदराय
शूर्पकर्णाय
हरये
ब्रह्मविदुत्तमाय
कालाय
ग्रहपतये
कामिने
सोमसूर्याग्नि
लोचनाय
पाशाङ्कुश
धराय
चण्डाय
गुणातीताय
निरञ्जनाय
अकल्मषाय
स्वयंसिद्धाय
सिद्धार्चित
पदाम्बुजाय
बीजपूर
फलसक्ताय
वरदाय
शाश्वताय
कृतिने
द्विजप्रियाय
वीतभयाय
गदिने
चक्रिणे
इक्षुचापधृते

श्रीदाय
अजाय
उत्पलकराय

श्रीपतये
स्तुतिहर्षिताय

Śaktisamīyutāya	..... united with power
Lambo darāya	..... who has a large belly
Śūrpakarnāya	..... with fan-like ears
Haraye	..... destroys evil with lion-like courage
Brahmaviduttamāya	..... foremost knower of God
Kālāya	..... the master of destiny
Grahapataye	..... lord of planets
Kāmine	..... who is love
Somasūryāgni lochanāya	..... whose eyes are the moon, sun and fire
Pāśaṅkuśa dharāya	..... who holds a noose and a goad
Chaṇḍāya	..... who is fierce-looking
Guṇātītāya	..... who transcends qualities
Nirañjanāya	..... who is without blemish
Akalmashāya	..... who is without impurity
Svayaṁ si ddhāya	..... self-fulfilled, perfect
Si ddhārchita padāmbujāya	..... whose lotus feet sages worship
Bijapūraphalāsaktāya	..... who is fond of pomegranates
Varadāya	..... the boon giver
Śāśvatāya	..... the eternal, unchanging one
Kṛitine	..... the skillful one
Dvijapriyāya	..... fond of the twice-born
Vītabhayāya	..... who is fearless
Gadine	..... who wields the mace
Chakriṇe	..... who wields a discus
Ikshuchāpadhṛite	..... who holds a sugarcane bow
Śrīdāya	..... the bestower of wealth
Ajāya	..... the unborn one
Utpalakarāya	..... who holds a proud blue lotus flower
Śrīpataye	..... the Lord of wealth
Stutihar shitāya	..... who delights in praise

कुलद्रिभृते
जटिलाय
कलिकल्मष
नाशनाय
चन्द्रचूडामणये
कान्ताय
पापहारिणे
समाहिताय
आश्रिताय
श्रीकराय
सौम्याय
भक्तवाञ्छित
दायकाय
शान्ताय
कैवल्य
सुखदाय
सच्चिदानन्द
विग्रहाय
ज्ञानिने
दयायुताय
दान्ताय
ब्रह्मद्वेष
विवर्जिताय
प्रमत्तदैत्य
भयदाय
श्रीकण्ठाय
विबुधेश्वराय
रामार्चिताय
विधये
नागराज
यज्ञोपवीतवते
स्थूलकण्ठाय
स्वयं कर्त्रे
सामग्रोषप्रियाय

Kulādrībhṛite	..... who supports Himālaya. His family’s mountain
Jaṭilāya	..... who has matted hair
Kalikalmasha nāśanāya	..... the destroyer of sins in the Kaliyuga
Chandrachūdāmaṇaye	..... who wears a moon upon his head
Kāntāya	..... the beloved, loving one
Pāpahāriṇe	..... the consumer of sins
Samāhitāya	..... absorbed in meditation
Āśritāya	..... who is our refuge
Śrīkarāya	..... who manifests prosperity
Saumyāya	..... the amiable one
Bhaktavañchita dāyakāya	..... the grantor of devotees’ desires
Śāntāya	..... the peaceful one
Kaivalya sukhadāya	..... bestower of unsullied liberation
Sacchidānanda vighrahāya	..... embodiment of existence-knowledge-bliss
Jñānine	..... the great wisdom
Dayāyutāya	..... full of compassion
Dāntāya	..... who has self-control
Brahmadvesha vivarjitāya	..... who is free from aversion to knowledge
Pramattadaitya bhayaḍāya	..... who brings terror to demons
Śrīkaṇṭhāya	..... with beautiful throat
Vibudheśvarāya	..... Lord of the Wise
Rāmārchitāya	..... worshiped by Rāma
Vidhaye	..... who is the destiny of all
Nāgarāja yajñopavitavate	..... whose sacred thread is a king cobra
Sthūlakaṇṭhāya	..... of stout neck
Svayaṁkartre	..... who is self-created
Sāmagho shapriyāya	..... who loves the sound of Sāma Veda

परस्मै

स्थूलतुण्डाय

अग्रण्ये

धीराय

वागीशाय

सिद्धिदायकाय

दूर्वाबिल्व

प्रियाय

अव्यक्तमूर्तये

अद्भुतमूर्तिमते

शैलेन्द्रतनुजोत्सङ्ग खेल्नोत्सुकमानसाय

Sailendratenujotsaṅga khelanotsukamānasāya

who is happy to play in the lap of His mother,
Pārvati, daughter of the mountain Lord

Parasmai who is supreme

Sthūlatuṇḍāya who has a stout trunk

Agrāṇye the leader

Dhīrāya the courageous one

Vāgīśāya the Lord of speech

Siddhidāyakāya bestower of fulfillment

Dūrvābilva priyāya

..... who loves dūrvā grass and bilva leaves

Avyaktamūrtaye

..... the manifestation of the Unmanifest

Adbhutamūrtimate of wondrous form

स्वलावण्यसुधासारजित मन्मथविग्रहाय

Svalāvaṇya su dhāsārajita manmathavi grahāya

..... who defeated Manmatha, the God of love, by His sweet beauty

समस्त

जगदाधाराय

मायिने

मूषिकवाहनाय

हृष्टाय

तुष्टाय

प्रसन्नात्मने

सर्वसिद्धि

प्रदायकाय

Samasta jagadādhārāya

..... the supporter of all the worlds

Māyine the source of illusory power

Mūshikavāhanāya who rides the mouse

Hṛishṭāya the joyful one

Tuṣṭāya the contented one

Prasannātmāne the bright kindly-souled one

Sarvasiddhi pradāyakāya

..... the grantor of all fulfillment



ALL PHOTOS BY DINODIA

मन्त्र पुष्पम्

Mantra Pushpam

Worship

With Flowers

ॐ योऽपां पुष्पं वेदं ।

पुष्पवान् प्रजावाँन् पशुमान् भवति ।

चन्द्रमावा अपां पुष्पम् ।

पुष्पवान् प्रजावाँन् पशुमान् भवति ।

य एवं वेदं । योऽपामायतनं वेदं ।

आयतनवान् भवति ॥

ॐ श्री महागणेश्वराय नमः

मन्त्रपुष्पाञ्जलिं समर्पयामि ।

Aum yō-pām pushpam vedā,
pushpāvaṇ prajāvāñ paśumān bhāvati,
chandramāvā apām pushpam,
pushpāvaṇ prajāvāñ paśumān bhāvati,
ya evaṁ vedā, yō-pāmāyatanaṁ vedā,
āyatānavān bhavati.

Aum Śrī Mahāgaṇeśvarāya namaḥ
mantra pushpāñjaliṁ samarpayāmi

The one who understands the beauty of the blooming powers of the Supreme Being is blessed with beautiful, blooming life, progeny and cattle. The moon is certainly the bloom of those powers. One who realizes the qualities of the moon, which are nothing but the blooming divine powers, is blessed with a blooming, beautiful life of perfection, progeny and cattle. One who realizes this principle and realizes the source from whom all these powers have come himself becomes the abode of those divine powers. Aum, salutations, Lord Mahāgaṇeśa, we respectfully offer you this flower mantra.

While chanting this mantra, hold a handful of flowers before you in añjali mudrā, hands cupped loosely around the flowers at chest height. Recite the verses with adoration. As you intone the last word, samarpayāmi, lower your hands (as shown in the photo) and toss the flowers into the air above the murti, sending a shower of blossoms upon the God with feelings of gratitude and loving devotion.

आरती

Ārati

Worship

With Flame

ॐ साज्यं त्रिवर्त्तिसंयुक्तं वह्निना योजितं मया ।

गृहाण मङ्गलारतिं ईशपुत्र नमोऽस्तु ते ॥

ॐ आवाहिताभ्यः सर्वाभ्यो देवताभ्यो नमः ।

दिव्यमङ्गलदीपं सन्दर्शयामि ।

आचमनीयं समर्पयामि ।

मङ्गलाक्षतान् समर्पयामि ।

aum sājyaṁ trivartisaṁyuktam vahninā yojitaṁ mayā,
grihāṇa maṅgalāratim īśa putra namo-stu te.
aum āvāhitābhyaḥ sarvābhyo devatābhyo namaḥ
divya maṅgaladīpaṁ sandarśayāmi
āchamanīyaṁ samarpayāmi
maṅgalākṣhatān samarpayāmi

O Gaṇapati, Son of God Śiva, please accept this auspicious āratī prepared by me with ghee, three wicks and fire. My salutations to you! Aum! Salutations to all the Gods invoked! This divine, auspicious light we offer to you. After that, we offer you pure water for sipping and auspicious unbroken rice.

During this chant, hold the lit oil lamp or camphor burner in your right hand and the bell in your left. While ringing the bell and slowly reciting the āratī mantra, make three circles clockwise before Gaṇeśa with the flame. Stop at the top of the third circle, lower the lamp slightly and trace the symbol of Aum in Sanskrit or in your native language.

Then lift the flame slightly above the Aum that you placed in the ākāśic ether and ring the bell louder for all three worlds to hear. Keep ringing loudly while chanting the above two-line salutation to the devas ("āvāhitābhyaḥ ... sandarśayāmi"). Put down the bell and the lamp and then, with the flame still burning, offer a spoonful of water with "āchamanīyaṁ samarpayāmi," then a pinch of rice with "maṅgalākṣhatān samarpayāmi."

रक्षधारणम्

Rakshadhāraṇam

Prayer for

Protection

इन्द्र स्तोमेनपञ्चदशेन

मध्यमिदं वातेन सगरेण

रक्ष रक्षां धारयामि ।

indra-stomēna pañchadaśeṇa
madhyamidaṁ vātēna sagarēṇa
raksha rakṣāṁ dhārayāmi

O Indra, Lord of material and spiritual prosperity, please protect the space between the heavens and earth as well as the mind between the body and the soul with the help of fifteen noble powers and virtues (five prāṇas, five jñānendriyas and five karmendriyas). Your protection and blessings sustain me.

As you recite this mantra, make three circles above the burning flame with a flower held in the right hand, stem upward (photo next page). With the last words, toss the flower gently toward the Deity and place your hands in añjali mudrā while facing the altar. Now offer the flame at chest level to all present, allowing each to draw both hands through it and lightly touch the eyes three times (photo next page, upper right). The Gods and devas can see us



through the flame and send blessings. If especially honored persons are present, such as one's guru, parents or teacher, take the flame first to them. Then proceed clockwise to the others. In some cases, the pujārī may stand near the altar while devotees come forward to receive the flame. If no one is attending the pūjā, you may personally draw blessings from the flame, but not otherwise. Finally, present the flame once more to the Deity, then extinguish it with a wave of the right hand or by snuffing it out with a flower.



Before reciting the above verse, place a pinch of rice in your left palm, then transfer it to the right palm. Add to the rice three spoonfuls of water and close the hand (left photo). Hold the rice before you as you face the Deity, the left hand under the right hand, and recite the mantra. As you intone the last words, let the rice and water fall into the tīrtha cup (right photo). The sacraments may then be given out in the following order: holy ash, blessed water, sandalpaste, red powder, food and flowers. If no one is attending the pūjā, you may partake of the sacraments yourself, but not otherwise. If many devotees are attending, a second person may help pass out the sacraments, except for the holy ash, which is always given by the person who performed the pūjā.



अर्पणम्
Arpanam

Final
Consecration

अनया यथा शक्ति कृत
(state period of day)

पूजया भगवान् सर्व देवात्मकः
श्री महागणेश्वराः सुप्रीतः
सुप्रसन्नो वरदो भवतु

anayā yathā śaktikṛita
(state period of day from list on page I-4)
pūjayā bhagavān sarva devātmakah
śrī mahāgaṇeśvaraḥ supritah
suprasanno varado bhavatu

To the best of our ability we have performed this (state time of day) pūjā and worshiped you, dear Lord, the brightest of all the Gods. May it please you. May it be enjoyed by you. Surrounded by your presence, we place ourselves in your care, loving Gaṇeśa.



Sharing the blessed offerings: at left holy ash is distributed, a small pinch into the right hand of each devotee; at right, the father of this household applies the sacred dot on his daughter's forehead.

Below, the family offers final prayers at the conclusion of their morning puja.



विसर्जनम्
Visarjanam

Farewell and
Apologies

ॐ आवाहनं न जानामि न जानामि विसर्जनम् ।
पूजाञ्चैव न जानामि क्षम्यतां परमेश्वर ॥
मन्त्रहीनं क्रियाहीनम् भक्तिहीनं सुरेश्वर ।
यत् पूजितं मया देव परिपूर्णं तदस्तु ते ।
अन्यथा शरणम् नास्ति त्वमेव शरणम् मम ।
तस्मात् कारुण्यभावेन रक्ष रक्ष गणेश्वर ॥
ॐ तत् सत् ॐ

Aum āvāhanam na jānāmi na jānāmi visarjanam,
pūjāñchaiva na jānāmi kshamyatām paramēśvara.
mantrahīnam kriyāhīnam bhaktihīnam sureśvara,
yat pūjitam mayā deva paripūrṇam tadastu te,
anyathā śaraṇam nāsti tvameva śaraṇam mama,
tasmāt kāruṇyabhāvena raksha raksha gaṇeśvara.
Aum tat sat Aum.

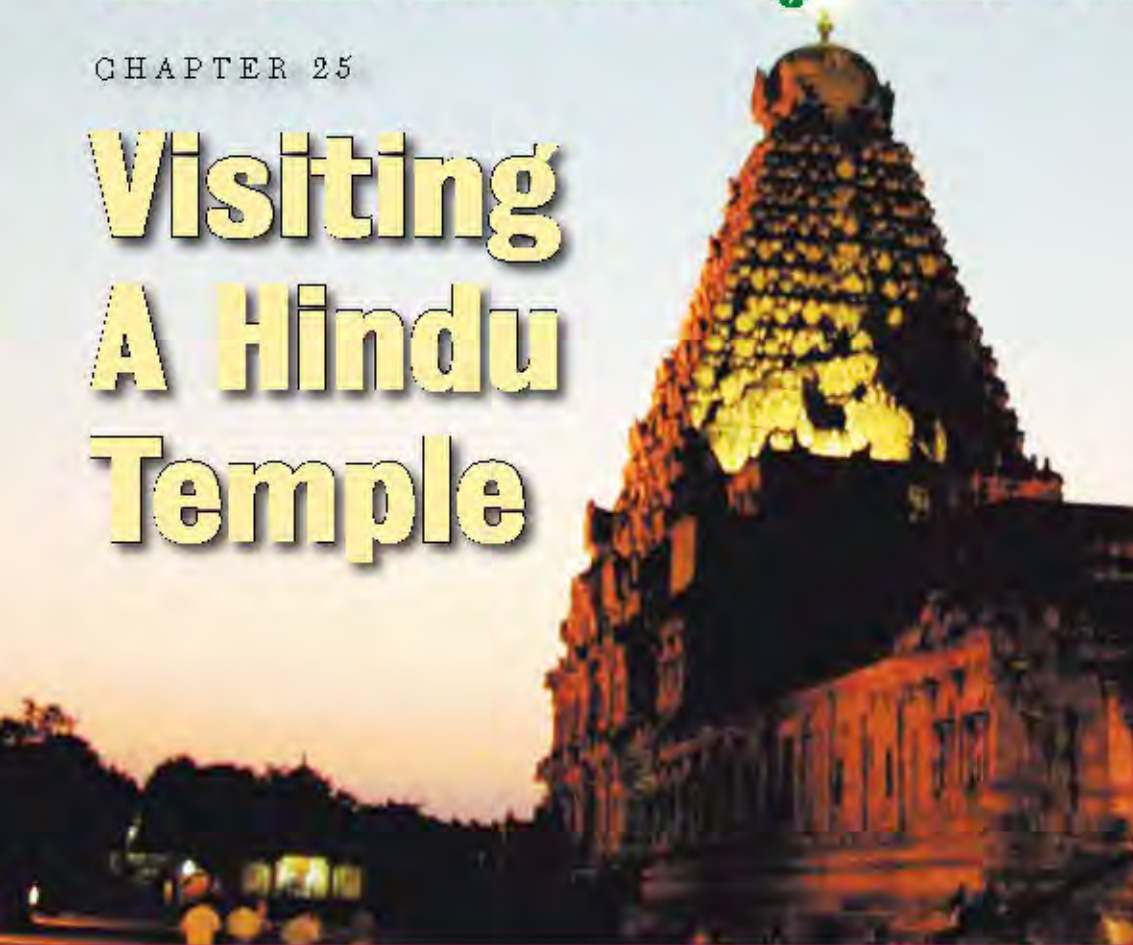
O Lord, we do not know the proper means of inviting you or, when taking our leave, how to wish you farewell. A full knowledge of priestly rites has not been imparted to us, so you must overlook and forgive any mistakes or omissions. We know little of mantras or pious conduct, and we are strangers to true bhakti. Nonetheless, please forgive us and regard our attempts as exact and complete—because you are our only refuge. With your compassionate nature, Lord Gaṇeśa, we beseech you, please protect those who pray. That which is Truth is Aum.



This concluding apology is recited with hands in añjali mudrā. It is a formal and devout end to the worship service. As the final words, "Aum tat sat Aum," are spoken, it is customary to clap your hands together three times. All may now prostrate.

It is traditional and most uplifting to meditate for a few minutes after the pūjā, rather than rushing off to daily duties. There is great personal benefit in such internalized worship, eyes closed, mind still, following, deep within yourself, the prāṇas that the pūjā has created. Externalized worship is the bhakti path; internalized worship is the yoga path. Both together make the complete circle that sustains devotees in their spiritual life, making them strong and kindly in moving the forces of the world in their daily life. This dual-pronged effort towards self-transformation and right living is the very foundation for the final goal of all seekers: moksha, freedom from rebirth.

Visiting A Hindu Temple



A Guide to the Inner and Outer Workings of Hindu Places of Worship

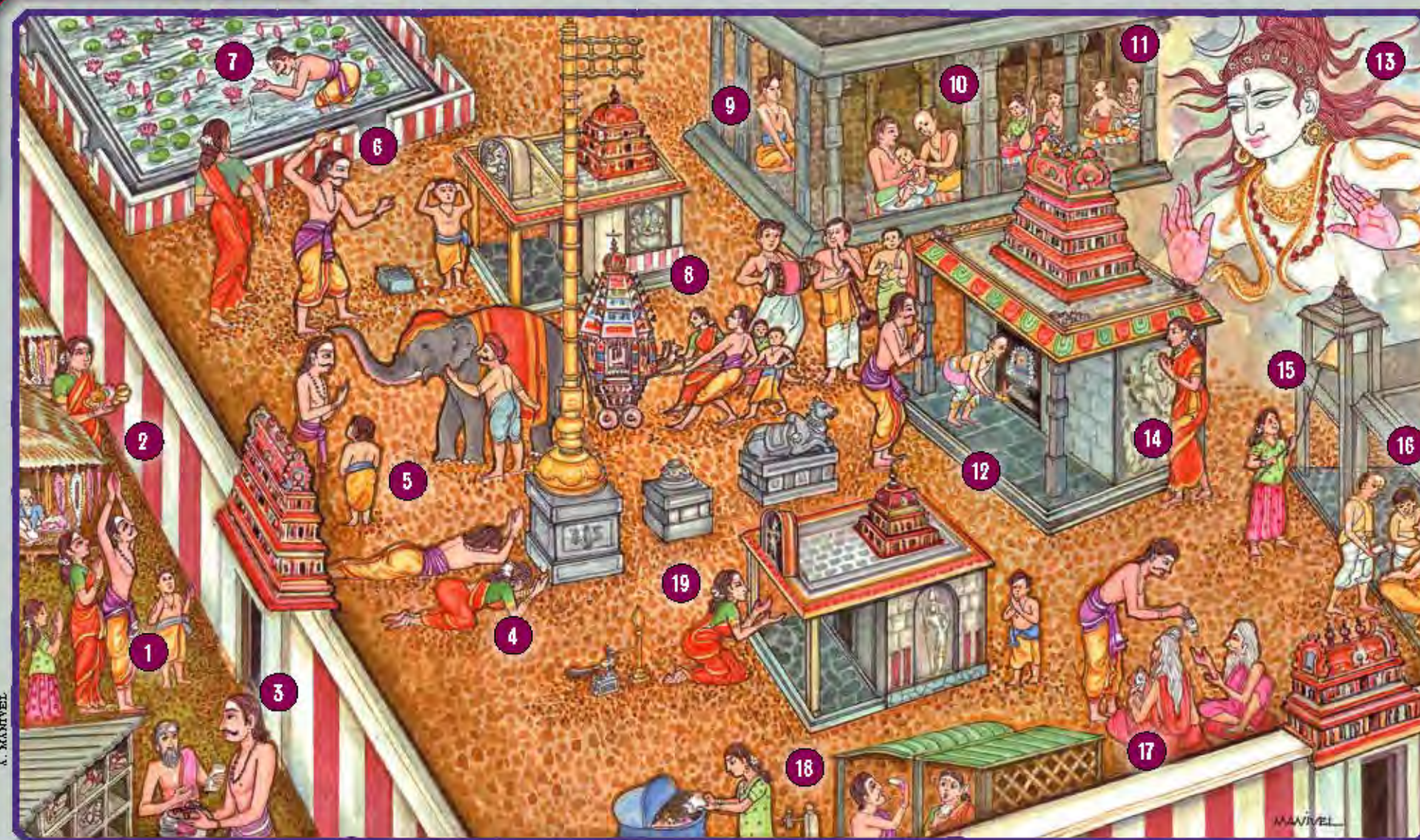
The Hindu temple is a sacred space where man and God commune. It is the home of God and the Gods. Within these sacred abodes, priests conduct puja rites—presenting flowers, water, incense, lights, food and other choice offerings—to honor God and the Gods and invoke their presence and blessings. In this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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

The many Gods are perceived as divine creations of that

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The physical representation of the God, be it a stone or metal image, a yantra or other sacred form, simply marks the place that the God will manifest in or hover above in His etheric body. It can be conceived as an antenna to receive the divine rays of the God or as the material body in or through which the God manifests in this First World. Man takes one body and then another in his progression through the cycles of birth and death and rebirth. Similarly, the Gods in their subtle bodies inhabit, for brief or protracted spans of time, these temple images. When we perform puja, a religious ritual, we are attracting the attention of the



Approaching the Temple

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

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

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

Look and Feel Your Best



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

Prepare Mentally; Bring a Gift



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

Prostrate to the Deity



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

Worship Wholeheartedly



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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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



Attending the Puja Ceremony

Conducted by a trained priest called a pujari, a Hindu worship service or puja, literally "adoration," is similar to a grand reception for a king. Pujas can last from ten minutes to several hours, but all follow one basic pattern. First, the pujari purifies himself, the sacred implements and the place of worship. He chants in Sanskrit the time, place and nature of this particular puja. Through hand gestures (*mudras*) and chants, he beseeches the Deity to come and dwell in the image. Ringing a bell and chanting mantras and hymns from the ancient *Vedas* and *Agamas*, the pujari then offers pre-



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

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

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

Partaking of the Sacred Flame

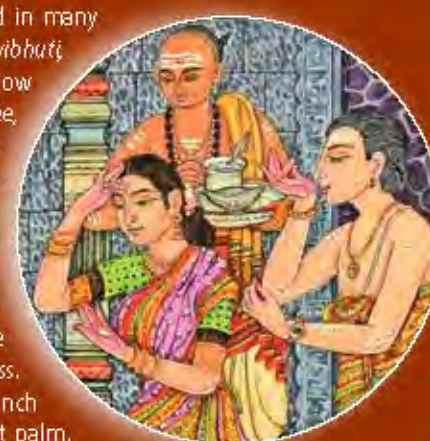
The sacramental lamp which has just been offered at the high point of the puja is sometimes passed among the devotees. The devas can see and bless you through this flame as it lights up your face. Sometimes you, too, can glimpse into their world. When the priest comes to you with the lamp, hold your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



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

Receiving Holy Ash & Water

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





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



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

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

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

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

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



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

simple act brings the devas in the Second World right into your home, where they can bless the rest of the family who perhaps did not go to the temple. Each Hindu temple throughout the world has its own rules on how to proceed and

what to do within it. In some temples, in fact most temples in South India, all the men are required to take off their shirts and enter bare-chested. However, if you are in a business suit in the South Indian temple in New York, that's all right. You are not required to take off your shirt. Every temple has its own rules, so you have to observe what everybody else is doing the first time you go.

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

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

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

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

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



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

The Hindu looks to the Gods for very practical assistance. He devoutly believes that the Gods from their dwelling in the Third World are capable of consciously working with the forces of evolution in the universe and they could then certainly manage a few simpler problems. He devoutly believes that the Gods are given to care for man on the planet and see him through his tenure on Earth, and that their decisions are vast in their implications. Their overview spans time itself, and yet their detailed focus upon the complicated fabric of human affairs is just as awesome.

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

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

Accepting Other Sacraments

Internalizing Your Worship

Invoking Special Blessings

Celebrating Rites of Passage

Chandanam, or sandalwood paste, is a traditional precious substance, valued for its wonderful scent. A small dab is placed in your hand by the priest, which you transfer to your left palm with a wiping motion. Dip your right-hand ring finger into the paste and apply it with a small circular motion between the eye-

brows. Kumkum, a red powder, is next. The priest will either place a small pinch in your right hand or invite you to take some from the container which he holds for you. Apply the kumkum on top of the sandalwood, creating a dot, *bindi*, which represents the third eye of spiritual seeing.



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

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



An *archana* is a short puja for an individual, usually done after the main puja. It is a way of asking God for something specific, such as success in school or business, or to express thanks for good fortune. Inform the priest that you want an *archana*. You should bring fruit and flowers, as well as the *archana* fee, on an offering tray, which can also have a coconut, incense, kumkum, camphor and sandalwood

paste. As you stand before the shrine, the priest will ask your name, *gotra* (family lineage), and *nakshatra* (birth star). During the *archana*, pray for your special needs. Afterwards the priest will return part of your blessed offerings to take home.



A central part of every Hindu's life, *samskaras* are sacred rites of passage. You can arrange for a *samskara* with the temple priest. There is a charge for these rites, which usually include a puja and *homa*, or fire ceremony. The priest will set an auspicious time, explain how to prepare and what to bring, as well as what you do during the ceremony. The principal *samskaras* held in temples, homes or

halls are: name-giving (11 to 41 days old for a child, or anytime for an adult entering Hinduism); first solid food (6 months old); ear-piercing (1, 3 or 5 years old); head shaving (1 to 4 years old); first learning (4 years old); initiation into Vedic study (9 to 15 years old); marriage and funeral.





Holy Festivals

Insights into the Annual Celebrations Hindus Enjoy the World Over

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

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



LEFT: SHAMS HAKKI IN SHAMSUDIN

DINO DIA / SHAMA M. KETIA R

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

Ram Navami

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

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



DINODIA/P.F. WALLA

(LEFT) DESHAKALAN CHOWDHURY (RIGHT) DINODIA/P.F. WALLA



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

Raksha Bandhan

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

Ganesha Chaturthi

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

Dipavali (or Diwali)

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

Holi

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

Guru Purnima

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

Krishna Janmashtami

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

Navaratri

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

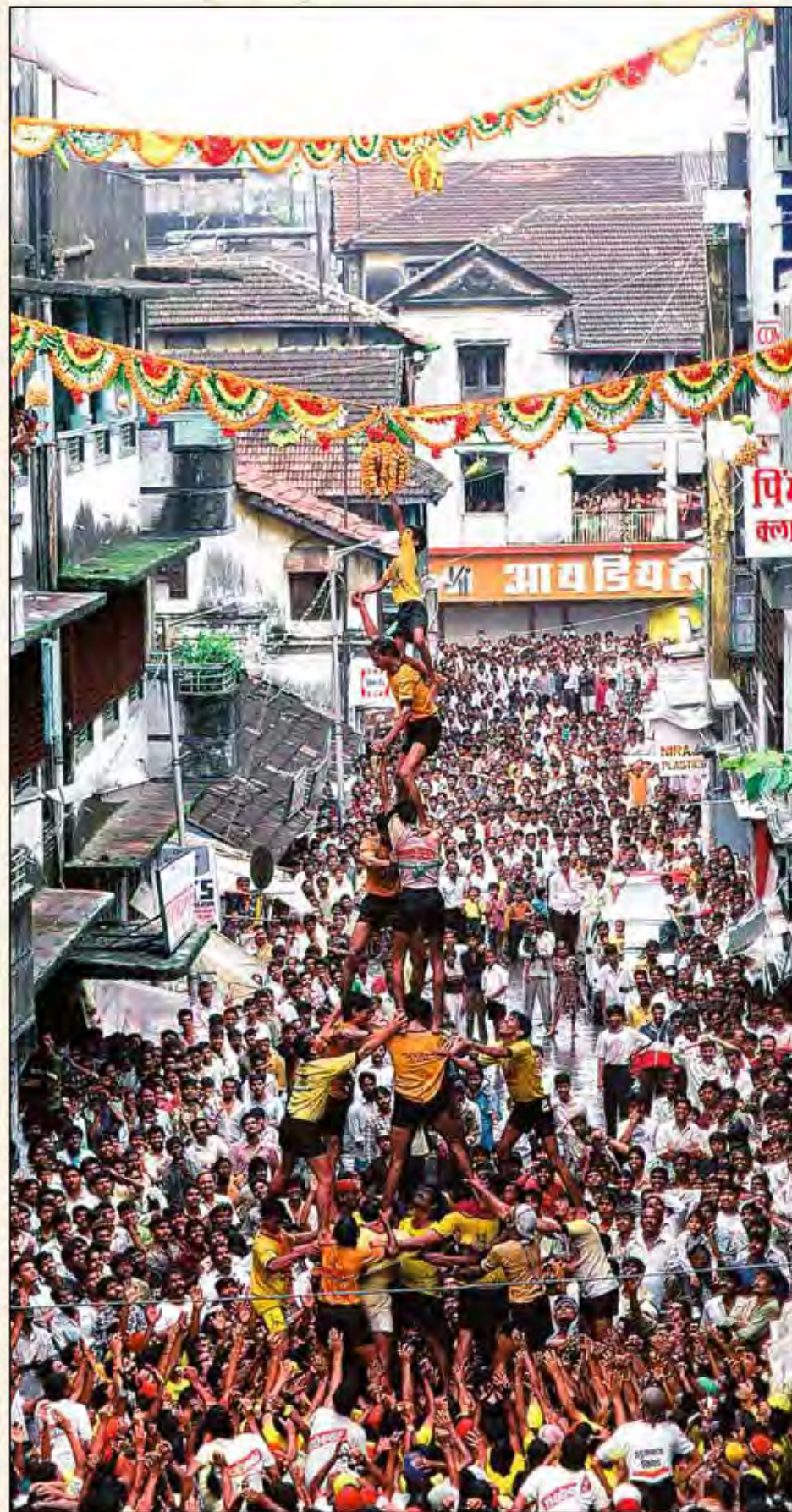
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God, Gods and guru: (above) priest offers holy ash to the guru's sacred sandals on *Guru Purnima*; (below) North Indian devotees crowd about a *Sivalinga* to offer milk and garlands during *Mahasivaratri*; (far right) a pyramid of daring youth attempt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



HINDUISM TODAY



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

Mahasivaratri

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

Setting Festival Dates

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



DIPAVALI: RAMA DEVA

COMMENTARY

The Inner Light

Amidst the parties and fireworks, let us not forget the real meaning of Dipavali

BY RAMA DEVAGUPTA

“FROM FALSEHOOD LEAD ME TO TRUTH, FROM DARKNESS lead me to light, from death lead me to immortality.” Nowhere else is the symbolism of these lines from the *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad* better expressed than in the celebration of Dipavali. Popularly known as the Festival of Lights and abbreviated to Diwali in contemporary usage, Dipavali is the most important festival for the world’s Hindu population. With its arrays of lighted lamps, firecrackers and festivities, Dipavali transforms the desolate, fall moonless skies by filling them with laughter, happiness and radiance. Like other religious festivals of the world, Dipavali is associated with several different legends and has deep social and spiritual significance. It is primarily known for the worship of the Goddess Lakshmi, who symbolizes wealth and prosperity. In North India, it

is a commemoration of Lord Rama’s triumphant return to Ayodhya after vanquishing the forces led by Ravana. In South India, Dipavali is celebrated in remembrance of Lord Krishna’s victory over Narakasura. In addition, it marks the end of the rainy season and the harvesting cycle, and therefore it is also the festival of the Kharif or new crop.

Whichever story one might prefer, Dipavali celebrations all over the world are universally marked by majestic fireworks, a variety of cultural programs, a spirit of sharing and brotherhood, and, most importantly, the lighting of lamps (*dīpas*) in several rows (*vali*) inside and outside the house. It is these luminous *dīpas* that contain the

essence of Dipavali. Just as light dispels the darkness of the night and shows the right path to a weary traveler, the lighting of lamps on the night of Karttik Amavasya, when the new moon is in Tula or Libra, symbolizes the victory of goodness over evil, justice over injustice, light over darkness and wisdom over ignorance.

Since the beginning of time, spiritual aspirants have sought light as the culmination of their journey. What is this internal, divine light of which the *dīpas* on Dipavali night, or those set before the family deity during morning and evening prayers, are only an external representation?

One of the most illustrious conversations on this subject can be found in the *Bṛihadaranyaka Upanishad*, wherein King Janaka of Videha, whose courtroom was famed for spiritual discussions con-

Dipavali: (left) devotee contemplates her offering tray and sacred lamps; (right) traditional clay lamp is set upon the drawing of a swastika and other auspicious symbols made with colored rice flour

ducted by the most distinguished rishis of his time, once asked of Sage Yajnavalkya: “Revered Sage, enlighten me! What is the light of man? What is it that allows him to function in this world?”

Yajnavalkya gave a simple and straightforward answer. “The sun is his light, O King,” he said. “If there were no sunlight, people would be unable to perform their duties in this world. By the light of the sun activity is possible, and it is by the light of the sun that one sits, moves about, completes all work and becomes content.” In a series of questions, Janaka presses the sage on the issue, finally asking what light there would be in the absence of all external manifestations. Yajnavalkya gave a very revealing answer. “O King Janaka!” he said. “Know that when everything else fails, the Soul, the inner Self, will be the guide. It is the Self that will be the light.”

This light, which is equated with the Supreme and supposed to be the consciousness of life, is expressed as follows in the *Chandogya Upanishad* (3.13.7): “There is a Light that shines beyond all things on Earth, beyond us all, beyond the heavens, beyond the highest, the very highest, heavens. This is the Light that shines in our heart.”

Unfortunately, we are oblivious to it most of the time. Even when we read and hear about its presence, we are unable to see the Light, mainly because this flame, which the *Vedas* say is tinier than the tiniest of atomic sparks and hidden in the innermost chamber of the human heart, is now covered by layers of grossness, complexities and impressions. Also, due to our outward-turning senses, tendencies and attachments to the fruits of action, we are unable to turn our eyes inward—at least not until compelled by external circumstances. But we must be able to do so somehow, if the lower self is to become one with the Ultimate Being. But this union is not as easy as it appears in words. The journey is filled with obstacles: darkness and ignorance, misleading visions.

In Arjuna’s vision of Lord Krishna in His Cosmic Form on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, the experience of the transcendental Reality is associated with brilliance, splendor and light: “If a thousand suns should rise all at once in the sky, such splendor would resemble the splendor of that great Being.... Then Arjuna, who was filled with amazement, whose hair was standing on end, bowing his head to the Lord with joined palms, said: ... ‘With infinite power, without beginning, middle or end, with innumerable arms, the Moon and Sun being Your eyes, I see You, the blazing fire Your mouth, burning all this universe with Your radiance.’”

Fascinating and awesome as such visions might be, even the experience of light ought not be the final goal. If that were so, the *Bhagavad Gita* would have ended with the Eleventh Teaching. But it does not. According to Krishna Himself, the supreme state is that which the Sun does not illumine, nor the Moon, nor the fire, for it is the Light of Pure Consciousness. These words are analogous to those found in the *Svetasvatara* (6.14) and *Katha Upanishad* (5.15). “There the Sun shines not, nor the Moon, nor the stars, lightnings shine not there and much less earthly fire. From His light all these give light, and His radiance illumines all creation.”

In the modern era, Shri Ram Chandra of Shahjahanpur for almost fifty years taught meditation on the “divine light in the heart,” according to the Sahaj Marg system of Raja Yoga. In *Voice Real*, he writes, “Every saint has used the word *light* ... and that is the best expression for Reality. But that creates some complication, because when we talk of light, the idea of luminosity becomes prominent, and we begin to take it

as glittering. The Real Light carries with it no such sense and may be represented as ‘light without luminosity.’ It refers only to the real substance or, more appropriately, to ‘substanceless substance,’ which is associated with neither light nor darkness, but beyond both.”

It is painfully evident that words and descriptions of spiritual Light can convey only so much. As Babuji says, understanding comes by intuitive capacity and practical experience in the spiritual field.

We should be celebrating the Festival of Lights in renewal of our quest for that spiritual Light. But today, few, if any, attach such reverence to the occasion. Instead, it has become a night of entertainment, gambling pleasure and consumption. Just as the candles and electric lights of modern society have gradually replaced the traditional *dīpas*, the focus of the prayers has shifted from the journey from darkness to light to the quest for fortune and wealth.

To appreciate the spirit behind this festival and pass on its significance to others, one needs only to consider the traditional lamps that are popular even today in the small towns and villages of India. These *dīpas* represent the four essential elements that are required in the seeker: detachment (the clay container), devotion to the Lord (the oil), prayer and meditation (the cotton wick), and spiritual wisdom (the matchstick to light the lamp). It is noteworthy that on Dipavali the first lamp is lit with a matchstick, after which that lamp is used to light the whole array of lamps inside and outside the house. The first lamp symbolizes divine effulgence, while the other lighted lamps represent the light in individual hearts. Together, they reiterate the eternal truth pronounced in the *Vedas*: “The One willed to become the Many.”

As the flames of all these lamps burn brightly and reach upward through the entire night, they show the possibility that, with the removal of darkness, grossness and ignorance, the tiny flickering light in our hearts can also shine brightly, illumining the whole universe. May we all progress speedily to the highest levels of spirituality—from darkness to light, and beyond.



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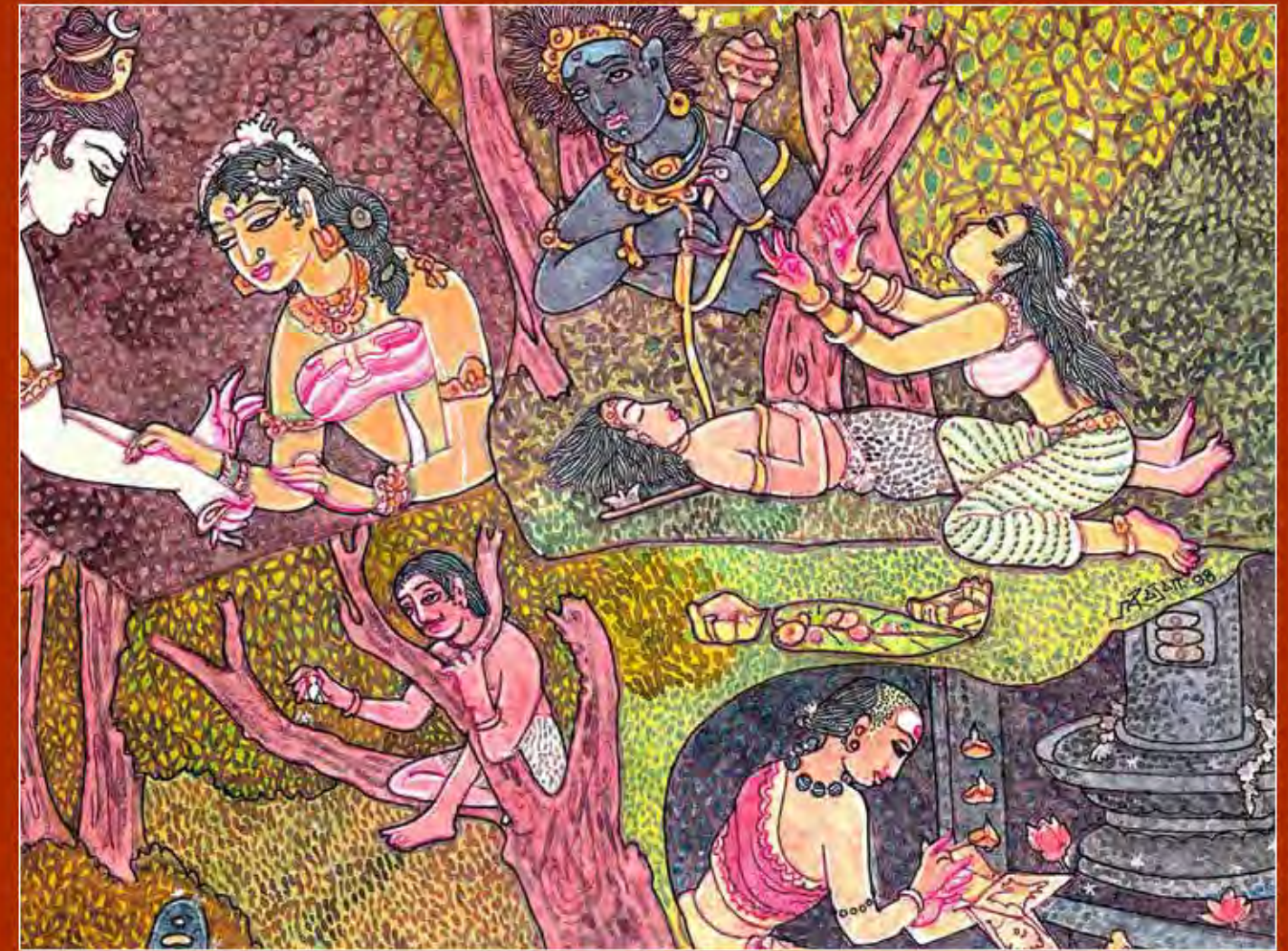


Home Festivals

Annual Observances That Uplift the Family & Spiritualize the Household

HINDUISM IS A CELEBRATORY RELIGION, AND NOWHERE CAN THIS BE SEEN MORE clearly than in the yearly cycle of home festivals. In 1998, renowned Chennai artist S. Rajam sought to immortalize the sights, sounds and foods of the Saivite and Vaishnavite festivals of Tamil Nadu in 12 pieces of art, one falling in each month of the year by the Tamil calendar. A few of these

are specific to South India, but most have counterparts in all of Bharat. In each he depicted typical scenes one might encounter during the festival day, as well as the Gods and Goddesses worshiped. The explanations of the art were dictated by the artist himself. At family gatherings, parents, grandparents and relatives can elaborate from their childhood experiences.

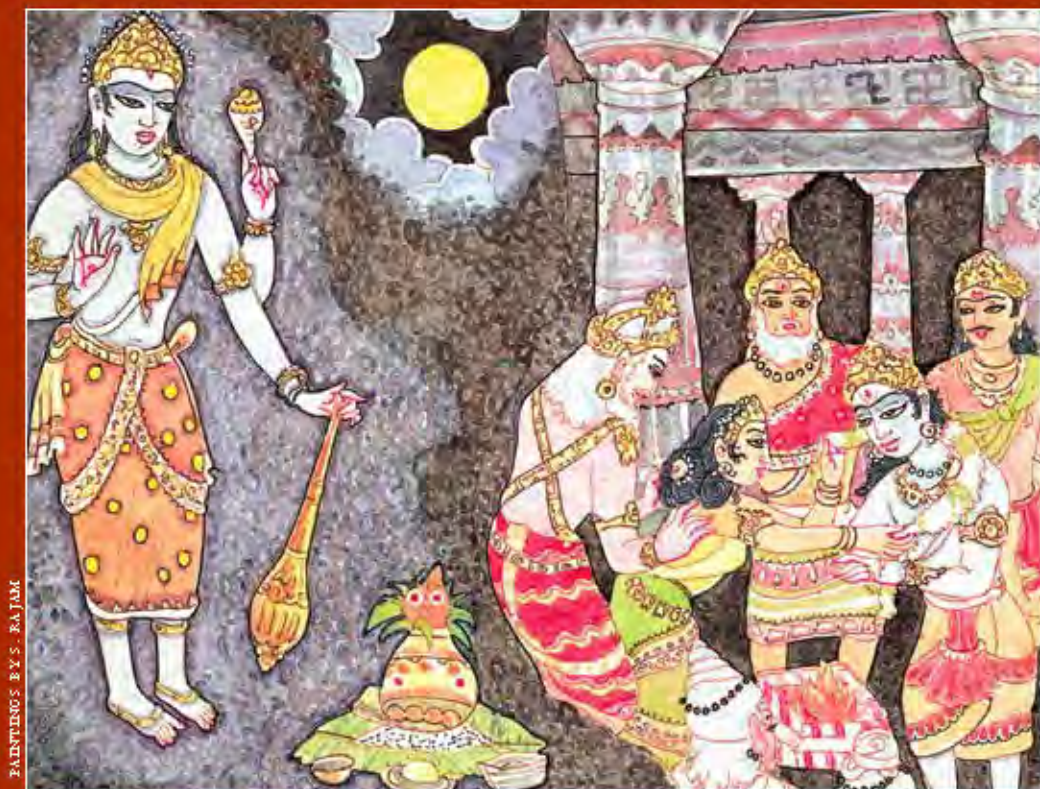


Thai (mid-January/mid-February)

At left the Sun God, Surya, is being worshiped with the outdoor cooking of a large pot of rice from the recent harvest. The overflowing of the dish is called "pongalo-pongali," and thus this festival is known as Thai Pongal. Other crops, like sugarcane, bananas and turmeric, are also offered. *Kolams* (hand-made rice flour patterns) are drawn in the form of the chariot, with the Sun and Moon in the center. On this day cows and other animals are decorated and fed special foods, and their owners prostrate to them. Crows and other birds are offered food on leaves of turmeric. Sisters pray for the welfare of brothers, and elders bless the children. Thai Pongal is celebrated by the poorest farmers and the wealthiest householders.

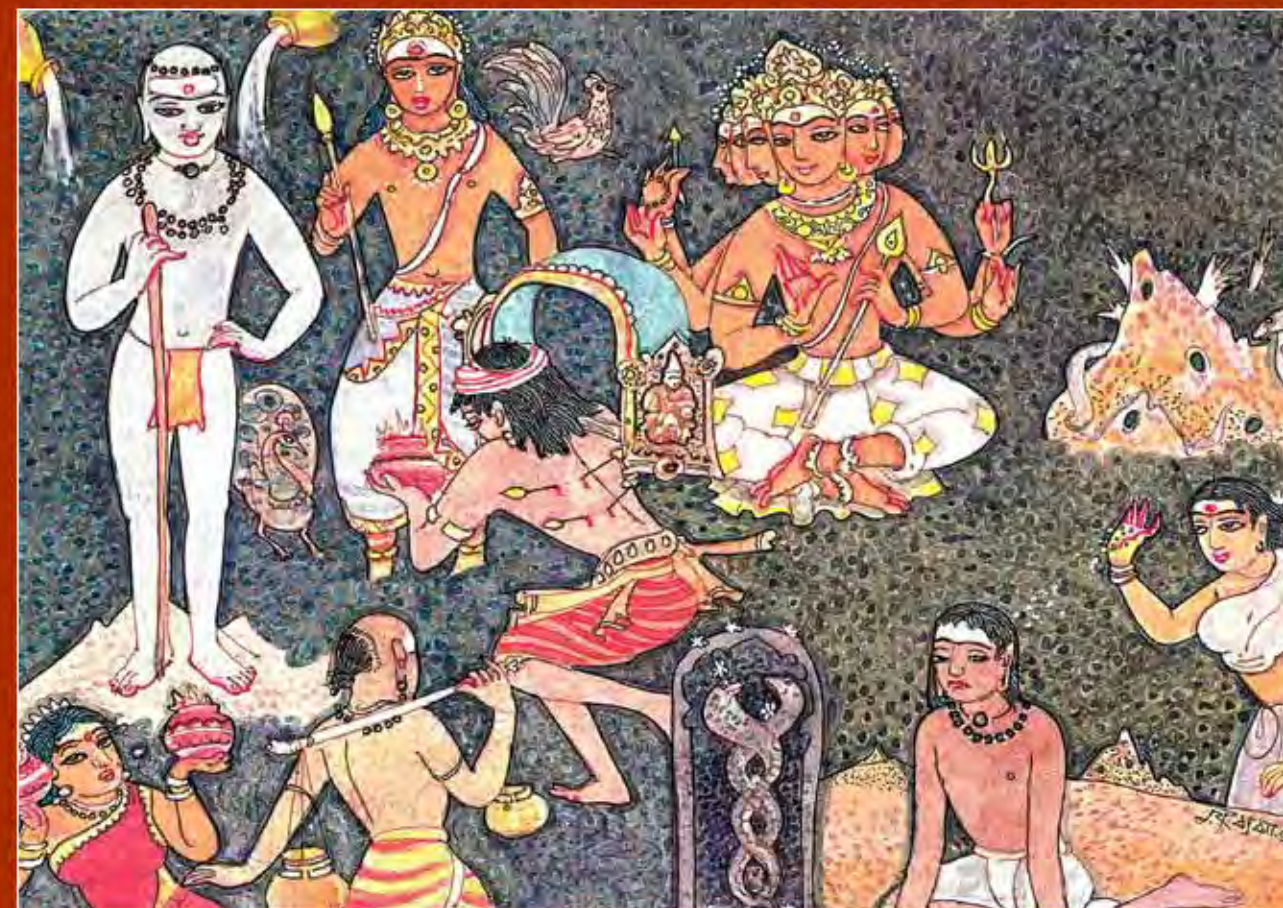
Masi (February/March)

Above, this is the month of Mahasivaratri, Siva's great night. In the above painting four stories associated with the festival are told. At lower left a hunter has been cornered in a tree-top by wild beasts, where he must spend the night. To avoid sleep, he plucks leaves from the bilva tree, sacred to Lord Siva, and drops them upon a Sivalinga below—a traditional form of worship. Many undertake fasts and stay awake the whole night, praying to Lord Siva both at home and in temples (lower right). The home observance of Karadainombu (upper right) derives from the story of Savitri and her husband, Satyavan. They enter a forest, where he dies. When Lord Yama, the God of Death, comes to take his life, Savitri persuades Yama to let him live. The intent of the observance is that wives not be separated from their husbands. Another explanation of this festival (upper left) is that on this day Lord Siva tied a thread to Parvati's right hand after their marriage as a sign of protection and fidelity.



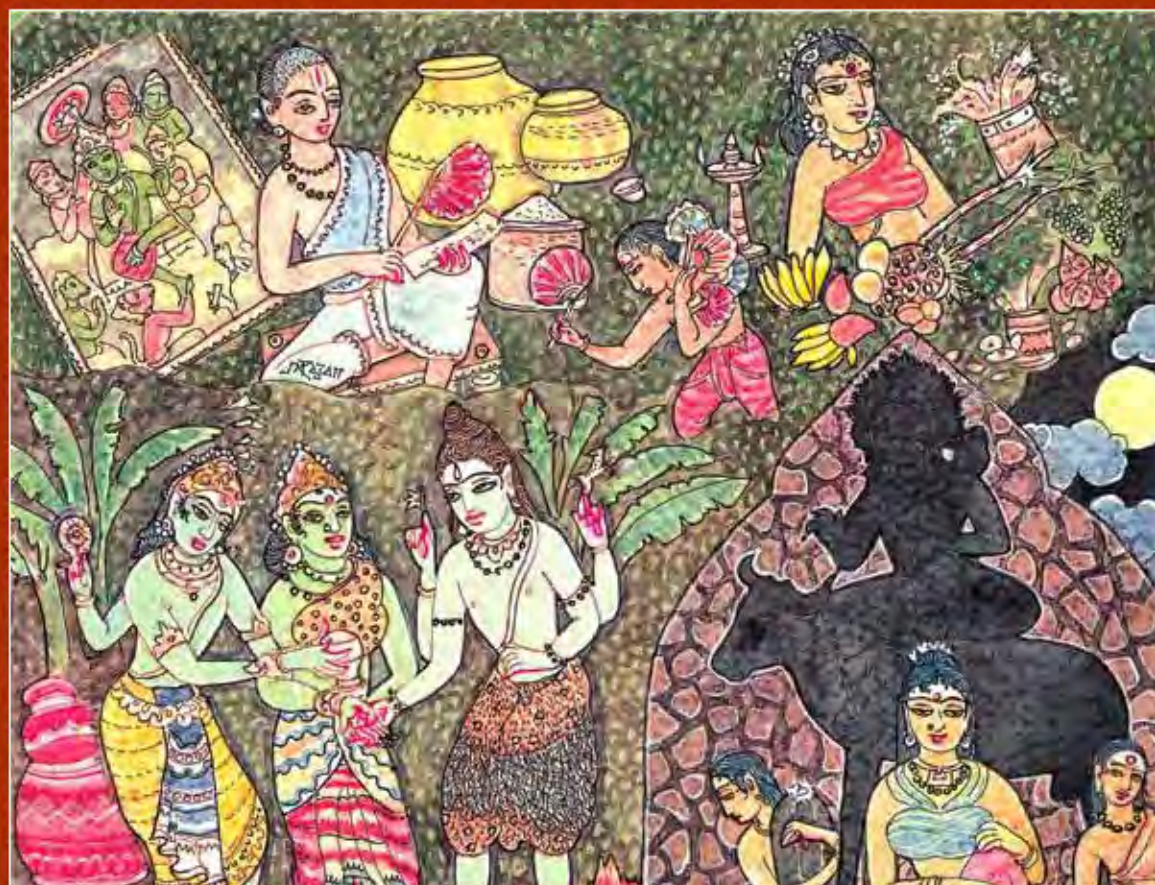
Panguni (March/April)

This month brings the popular nine-day festival of Ram Navami, celebrating the birthday of Lord Rama, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu. When the full moon rises, Vishnu in the form of Satyanarayana is worshiped before a decorated kumbha pot with a branch of mango leaves placed in its mouth and a coconut on top. Rice is spread on banana leaves and the sacred vessel is completed with a tray of fruits, flowers and betel leaves and nuts. This month is also known for Sita's marriage to Rama. King Janaka, Dasaratha and priests surround the sacred fire, as Sita garlands Rama in Janaka's royal palace.



Chitrai (April/May)

This month (right) begins with the completion of Ram Navami, the nine days of celebration of Lord Rama's birth ages ago, which started in the previous month. At the upper left we see a decorated picture of Lord Rama's coronation. Next (proceeding clockwise) comes a Vaisnava priest telling the stories of Lord Rama's birth and life; behind him are great pots of *paanagan*, a delicious drink of sugar and ginger, and a basket of *sundal*, spiced chickpeas, served to the storyteller's guests, who also receive palm fans, as this is the hot season. Tamil New Year often falls on April 14 (as does the New Year of several other communities). The lady at upper right is shown with the new clothes and jewelry which are part of the celebration, as well as bananas, mangos and the ingredients for *vipon pu pachadi*, a combination of bitter neem blossoms, sugar and mango—a reminder to face the unpleasant in life with a sweet smile. At lower left is the marriage of Siva and Parvati, Meenakshi Kalyanam, with brother Vishnu pouring the sacred Ganga water on their joined hands. At lower right is the dark form of Yama, Lord of Death, who figures in three stories associated with this month; that of Savitri, who won her husband back from Yama in a battle of wits; Nachiketas, the boy who extracted three boons from Him; and Markandeya, who won eternal youth from Lord Yama through the worship of the Sivalinga.



Vaikasi (May/June)

This month is devoted to the worship of Lord Murugan, who is honored on Vaikasi Visakham (above). He is shown at far left as Palani, the renunciate, dressed in loincloth, wearing a necklace of rudraksha beads, sacred ash covering His body and holding the sannyasin's staff. To the right He is shown as a prince, with His peacock, and farther to the right as the six-headed Arumugam. Devotees approach Him doing penance by piercing their bodies with small spears and carrying various offerings, including pots of milk and a *kavadi*, a kind of portable arched shrine. At lower right is depicted Naga Chaturthi, celebrating an ancient story in which a young boy bit by a cobra was saved from death when his sister's prayers caused the sands of the cobra's anthill to counteract the poison.

Ani (June/July)

This is the one month of the year when there are no home festivals—coinciding not uncoincidentally with an intense month of agricultural effort. However, during Ani, major temple festivals are held for Lord Siva as Nataraja, King of Dance (above left), and for Siva and Parvati.



PAINTINGS BY S. RAJAM

Adi (July/August)

There are two major home festivals this month. The first is Adi-Perukku, in honor of the Kaveri River. Women and girls go to the nearest river where they place offerings on a bamboo tray (upper left) into the water, then have a feast upon the riverbank. Varalakshmi Vratam ("vow to bring Lakshmi") is also a ladies' festival, in which paintings of the Goddess of Wealth are made upon the walls (upper right), kumbha pots intended for worship are decorated with Her image, beside the pot are placed various cosmetics, comb, beads, etc., and worship is done. Then the ladies sing songs inviting the Goddess to their home. Kozhukkatai, rice and jaggery cakes, are a favorite of the day. In the evening, friends are invited to the home and given clothing, coconuts and sweets.



Avani (August/September)

This is a busy month, with two major festivals celebrated both at home and at the temple. Krishna Jayanthi, the birth of Lord Krishna, comes first. In the painting at right is the rescue of the baby Krishna, who was born in a prison. His father carries him across a swollen stream while the seven-headed serpent, Adi Seshan, protects the incarnation of Lord Vishnu from the storm. In the home, offerings of butter and yogurt are made to Krishna's image, and footprints made with red powder reveal his path from the home's front door to the shrine room, suggesting that Krishna has come to participate. Ganesha Chaturthi is a mammoth festival across all of India, ten days in celebration of His manifestation. Shown in the center of the painting is a statue of Lord Ganesha and a devotee offering obeisance by pulling his ears and bobbing up and down, a practice called *thopukarannam* in Tamil, done only for Ganesha—one explanation being that it is to make the Baby Ganesha laugh. The icon of Ganesha is made by the devotees from river clay and painted and decorated. At festival's end is the Visarjana, or departure, when the clay icon is placed into the river the Deity is bid farewell. In North India Visarjana is celebrated by millions of people. At far right in the art is depicted



the story of Ganesha consuming so many sweet offerings that He had to tie a snake around his belly to keep it from bursting. Ganesha chastised the Moon for laughing at His predicament, and as penance the Moon has ever since waxed and waned through the month instead of remaining constantly bright.



Purattasi (September/October)

Navaratri ("nine nights") is the principal festival this month (above left). The Goddess is worshiped in Her many forms, and on the ninth day, Sarasvati (center of the painting) is invoked to bless musical instruments, account books, agricultural instruments and home tools (upper left). On Vijaya Dasami, the day following Navaratri, Goddess Durga is invoked as children are given their first instruction, worship their school books and honor their teacher (bottom left). A decorated display of dolls (lower right) is displayed through the nine days, then dismantled and stored on the tenth day. Vijaya Dasami is also the birthday of Lord Venkateshwara (upper right), presiding Deity of Tirupati Temple in Andhra Pradesh, India's wealthiest temple.

Aippasi (October/November)

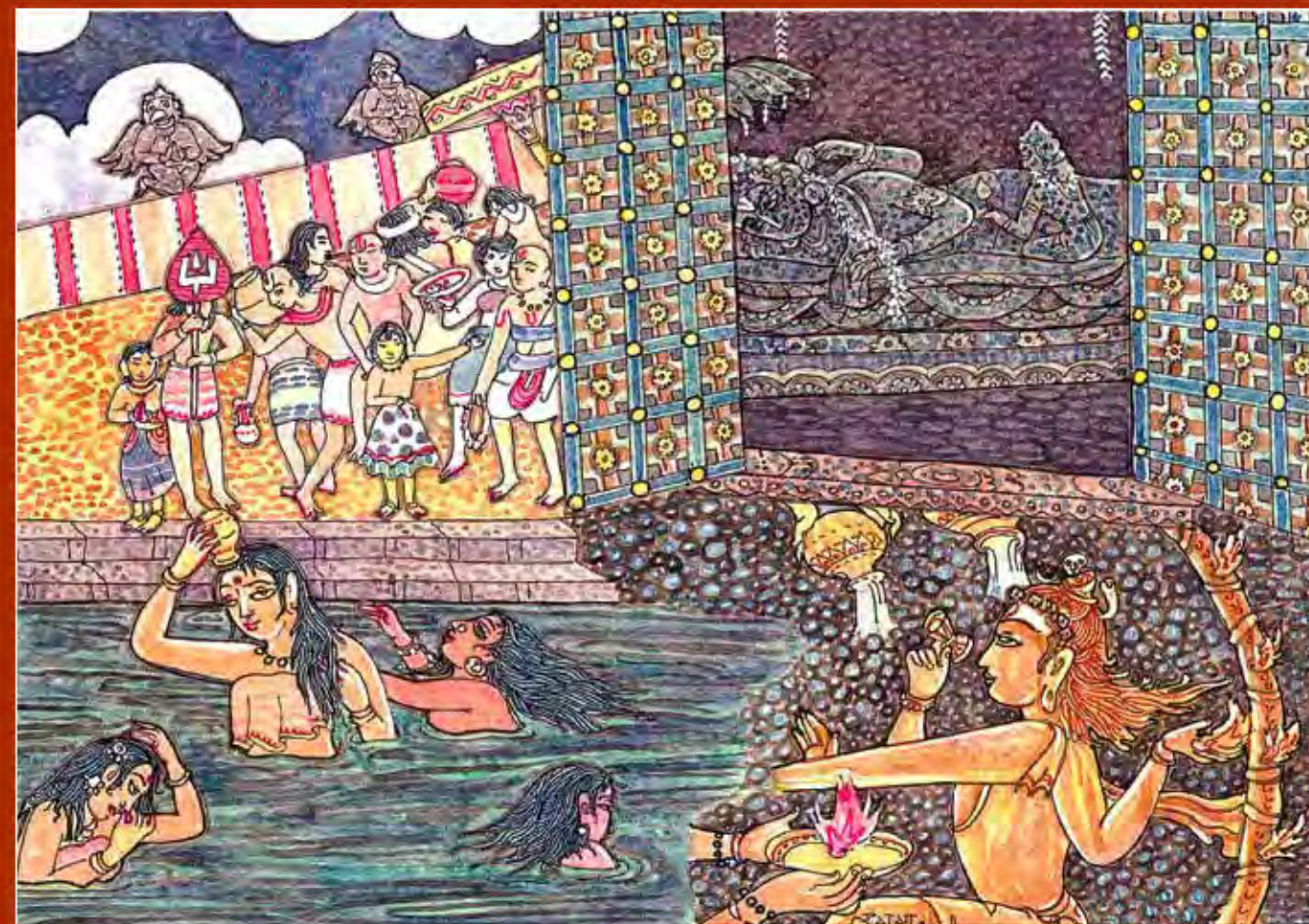
Skanda Shasti is the first festival of this month (right), commemorating the victory of Lord Murugan over the demon Sura, of the higher, spiritual self over the lower nature. Dipavali is the major event of Aippasi, celebrated everywhere. Hindus live and by Buddhists and Jains, too. In one story of its origins, Vamana, the dwarf avatar of Lord Vishnu, requests the amount of land from King Bali that He can cover in three steps. Granted the request, Vamana covers with his first step all of the Earth, with the second all of the sky, and then asks the king where to take the third step. The king offers his own head (lower left), and in commemoration of the king's humility, the day was established. In another story, Lord Vishnu (center) kills the demon Nagasvaran with His discus. The various observances (lower right) of Dipavali include an oil bath, gifts of new clothes, fireworks (sufficiently indulged in Chennai to rattle dishes off the kitchen shelves), oil lamps for display and abundant pots of delicious food. The early morning bath is always considered to be in the Ganga itself, so one greeting of the day is, "Did you have the Ganga bath?"



PAINTINGS BY S. RAJAM

Karttikai (November/December)

Krittika Dipa (right) is a joyous one-day festival held on the Krittika nakshatra (when the moon is in Pleiades constellation). Also called Sivalaya Dipa, it is celebrated most famously at Tiruvannamalai (upper left in the painting), on top of Arunachala Hill, home of saint Ramana Maharshi. A bonfire is lit on top that can be seen for miles around. Karthigai Purnima, the full-moon day, honors Lord Murugan. In one traditional story, six sparks from Siva's third eye became six babies (lower left), later gathered into one six-headed Arumugam (center) by Parvati. Celebrations include lighting hundreds of oil lamps, especially the standing lamp (right) of the home. On this day in Orissa, devotees make banana leaf boats and float them in the river with oil lamps (lower left).



Markali (December/January)

During Tirupuvai (below, in upper left of painting), people bathe (lower left) and gather in the early morning to go on procession singing devotional Vaishnava songs (upper left). Especially popular are those of the 9th century lady saint Andal, venerated as one of South India's greatest devotional poets. On Vaikunth Ekadasi, the 11th day of the lunar month, the doors of the huge temple of Srirangam are opened to devotees from morning to night for darshan of Rangam, an aspect of Lord Vishnu, sleeping on Adishani, the serpent king (upper right). Another famed festival is Ardra Darshana, when Siva Nataraja is decorated and taken from the temple in procession throughout the community (lower right). Especially the ill and those of old age seek to have a glimpse of Nataraj. A renowned sweet, aurudra kalli, is made with vegetables on this day.

S. Rajam concluded his descriptions by saying, "All of these festivals are earnestly conducted. People wait for the day with their mind on God. The purpose is to gather in the home and worship for the prosperity of the family and of all mankind."

Kumbha Mela

Cosmic Alignment and Divine Presence Empower Humanity's Grandest Religious Observance



Contested prize: After eons of churning, depicted in this painting by Harish Johari, the Ocean of Milk yielded the *Amrita Kumbha*, pot of the nectar of immortality. As angelic beings flew off with the pot, drops fell at four places—Haridwar, Prayag, Ujjain and Nasik—forever empowering them as sites of the Kumbha Mela.

coveted result—the pot (*kumbha*) of nectar (*amrita*), by consuming which anyone would become immortal. As they churned mightily, the first substances to be released were deadly fumes and gases. These Lord Siva took upon Himself to consume and neutralize, thus saving the world's inhabitants from certain death. These poisons turned His throat blue and resulted in His name, *Nilakantha*. After many aeons of churning, the ocean yielded a series of treasures, the last of which was Dhanvantari, the great healer, who held in his hands the desired chalice of ambrosia.

The asuras immediately demanded their share of the prize, but the devas reneged on their agreement, knowing that if their rivals were to drink the nectar they would be eternally unbeatable, and too great a power to keep in check. The asuras, sensing their position, snatched the *kumbha* and fled. With the asuras momentarily distracted by Lord Vishnu, the devas retrieved the pot and fled. In their haste they let one drop of nectar fall at Haridwar, Prayag, Ujjain and Nasik.

"Since the beginning," explains Sri Mahant Rudra Giri Ji, of the Atal Akhara, "the Kumbha Mela was attended by 350 million devas and 88,000 rishis. It was started to promote and propagate our ancient heritage. Even now these devas and rishis participate." A few of the angelic beings, devas, are able to return with each pilgrim to their home, carried, in a mystical sense, in the pot of Ganga water that each pilgrim collects and places on his home altar. Thus the blessing of the pilgrimage is extended months, even years, beyond the actual event.

Esoterically, it is taught that the *kumbha* represents higher consciousness, the *sahasra* chakra. The *amrita* that it holds symbolizes mankind's attainment of that higher reality—the true source of immortality.

According to researcher Subhas Rai, the cosmic alignments associated with the festival are chosen so as to increase the efficacy of the pilgrims' bathing. He believes the combined power of river Ganga and the auspicious planetary positions generates unique purifying power.

Pilgrimage to sacred rivers is an ancient practice, believed by historian S.B. Roy to exist in India as far back as 10,000 BCE. Megasthenes, the 4th century BCE Greek visitor to India, described what could have been a Kumbha Mela, but the likeliest first reference is by the Chinese pilgrim Hsuen-Tsang, who resided in India from 629 to 645 CE. He wrote that King Harshavardhan attended, on every fifth year of his reign, a month-long "ageless festival" at Prayag that attracted up to half a million people from all walks of life.

When references to the Kumbha Mela appear clearly in the 14th century, the *mela* has all of its modern characteristics—the places, the bathing, the hoards of pilgrims and legions of mendicants. Many believe its organization to be the work of Adi Shankara, the great 8th-century Indian saint, though nothing in his writings supports the assertion. By the 14th century the presence of large numbers of militant sadhu orders was also a clear feature, especially after the wholesale slaughter of Mela pilgrims in 1398 by Muslim general Timur, shortly after he leveled Delhi because the reigning sultan was "too tolerant" of Hindus. Similar martial monastic orders have developed in other religions, such as the 12th-century Christian Knights Templar and Hospitalers in Europe—also to protect pilgrims against Muslim oppression—the Shao Lin monks of Kung Fu martial arts fame in China, the Buddhist monastic police of Tibet and the Zen master archers and swordsmen of Japan. Sadly, through the centuries mendicant militancy has led to frequent murderous Kumbha

THE TENS OF MILLIONS OF HINDUS who came to the Kumbha Mela at Haridwar this year were nearly all of modest means. After days of travel, many spent a mere 24 hours in the holy city at the gateway to the Himalayas. They chanted *Jai Ganga Ma*—"Hail Mother Ganga"—took their sacred bath in the frigid river, collected a pot of holy Ganga water and then headed home. One typical pilgrim, an illiterate woman, traveled with her family by crowded bus from West Bengal, slept in the open and ate at the free feeding tents. "We are poor, but we have enough. I asked God not for money but for peace and salvation"—so easily did this humble villager capture the essence of the world's greatest act of pilgrimage, the Kumbha Mela.

For her and millions of others, the religious ritual of pilgrimage—one of the five obligatory duties of every Hindu—began with the first plans to attend, and encompasses the entire process of getting ready, freeing oneself from worldly affairs, traveling to the site, taking the bath, meeting the sadhu-mendicants or just observing them from a distance, and the return home. At nearly every *mela*, pil-

grims have been killed in one mishap or another, so each who came duly considered the possibility, however small, that they might not return. For the true devotee, pilgrimage is among the most profound religious practices, one in which material gain—so often the motivation for their prayers at local temples—is superseded by higher aspirations.

The Kumbha Mela takes place every three years in rotation at Haridwar, Prayag (Allahabad), Nasik and Ujjain, according to the placement of Jupiter in the Zodiac. A modern innovation, there are also popular half-melas, *ardha-kumbhas*, every six years at Haridwar and Prayag. It is at Prayag, where the Yamuna River joins the Ganga, that the largest number of human beings in history gathered—15 million on February 6, 1989. Haridwar, logistically less convenient, managed ten million on April 14, 1998. Still, that's five times this year's two million Muslim pilgrims who journeyed to Mecca for the Haj, the second largest gathering.

Every religion, as a matter of doctrine or custom, engages in the practice of pilgrimage to holy places. Among the world's prime des-

tinations are Bodhi Gaya, where Buddha attained enlightenment; Jerusalem, sacred to three religions; Lourdes in France; Amritsar, the Ise Shrine in Japan; and the various Jain sites throughout India.

The Kumbha Mela is unique for its sheer size, and for being a meeting both of ascetics and lay people. Some of the ascetics are *naga* sadhus, naked monks who practice the severest austerities and leave the mountains and jungles only for the *mela*. Just the sight of them—and there are thousands—is a blessing to the lay pilgrims.

Within the several-month period of the *mela* are set auspicious bathing days, usually coinciding with festivals of the period. Most important are the days for the *shakti* *snan*, "royal bath," in which the holy men, *naga* sadhus first, go in procession to the river.

Asked the origin of the event, nearly every pilgrim will narrate the ancient story from the *Puranas* of the time when the devas (gods or angels) and the asuras (their rivals) cooperated to "churn the Ocean of Milk"—an act which promised to yield countless treasures. With Mount Meru as the post and the serpent Shesha as the churning rope, they set about their task. They agreed to share the most

Mela battles over who gets to bathe closest to the supremely auspicious moment—the very issue which caused this year's fight.

Many orders of sadhus gather at the Mela. A large portion are members of a dozen or more orders called *akharas*, the most prominent being the Juna and Niranjani—the two who tangled this year. Others include the Agan, Alakhiya, Abhara, Anand, Mahanirvani and Atal. Most orders are Saivite, three are Vaishnavite and a few are Sikh orders patterned after the Hindu monastic system. *Akhara* is Hindi for a “wrestling arena,” and can mean either a place of verbal debate, or one of real fighting. Each *akhara* may contain monks of several different Dasanami orders—the ten designations—Saraswati, Puri, Bana, Tirtha, Giri, Parvati, Bharati, Aranya, Ashrama, and Sagara—regularized by Adi Shankara in the 8th century. Thus, the *akharas* overlap with the Dasanami system. There are also *sannyasi* orders, such as the Nathas, that exist outside the Dasanami system. The *akharas*’ dates of founding range from the sixth to the fourteenth century. The development of the *akharas* and the Kumbha Mela took place over the same time span and are likely related. *Akharas* may include thousands, even tens of thousands, of sadhus. Several *akharas* run hundreds of ashrams, schools and service institutions.

The Kumbha Mela is a time to elect new *akhara* leadership, discuss and solve problems, consult with the other *akharas*, meet with devotees and initiate new monastics. During Muslim and British times, the *mela* gathering of pilgrims and sadhus was a significant force in the preservation of Hinduism and the continued identity of India as a Hindu nation. “Kumbha weaves our nation into one,” said Mahant Ganga Puri of the Mahanirvani Akhara.

One little-known purpose of the Mela is to review *smriti*, the codes (*shastras*) of law and conduct which govern Hindu society. Unlike the *Vedas* and other revealed scriptures, these codes are meant to be adjusted according to changes in time and circumstance. Rameshphai Oza explained, “The saints from all over India should get together at the Mela to discuss not only religious and spiritual matters, but also the problems faced by the contemporary society. Their solutions offer a new system and a new *smriti*.” Ramesh is a world renowned performer of *kathak* (preaching through song and sermon on the life of Lord Rama and other Hindu heroes).

Many are the motivations and benefits for Hindus to attend the Kumbha Mela, the most popular pilgrimage of the day. It is a time to gain a new look on life, to purify one self and to regain the sense of Godly aspiration as the central purpose for this earthly incarnation.

With Jono Lineen, British Columbia

PAJDEV GUPTA

TIMELINE

10,000 bce: Historian S.B. Roy postulates presence of ritual bathing.

600 bce: River *melas* are mentioned in Buddhist writings.

400 bce: Greek ambassador to Indian King Chandra Gupta reports on a *mela*.

ca 300 ce: Roy believes present form of *melas* crystallizes. Various *Puranas*, written texts based on oral traditions of unknown antiquity, recount the dropping of the nectar of immortality at four sites after the “churning of the ocean.”

547: Earliest founding date of an *akhara*, the Abhara.

600: Chinese pilgrim Huen-Tsang attends *mela* at Prayag (modern Allahabad) organized by King Harsha on a five-year cycle.

ca 800: Adi Shankara believed to have reorganized and promoted *kumbha melas*.

904: Founding of Niranjani Akhara

1146: Founding of Juna Akhara

1300: Kanphata Yogi militant ascetics employed in army of King of Kanaj, Rajasthan

1398: Timur lays waste to Delhi to punish Sultan's tolerance toward Hindus, proceeds to Haridwar *mela* and massacres thousands. Hindu ascetics arm themselves.

1565: Madhusudana Saraswati organizes fighting units of Dasanami orders.

1684: French traveller Tavernier estimates 12 million Hindu ascetics in India.

1760: Saivites battle with Vaishnava sects at Haridwar; 1,800 are killed.

ca 1780: British establish the order for royal bathing by the monastic groups (the same order is followed today).

1820: Stampede leaves 430 dead at Haridwar *mela*.

1906: British calvary intercede in *mela* battle between sadhus.

1954: Four million people, one percent of India's population, attend *mela* at Allahabad, hundreds perish in a stampede.

1989: *Guinness Book of World Records* proclaims 20-million-strong *mela* crowd at Allahabad on February 6 “the largest-ever gathering of human beings for a single purpose,” a record soon broken by another Kumbha Mela.

1998: Haridwar Mela attracts 25 million pilgrims in four months, ten million on April 14.

2001: Most recent *mela* at Allahabad, attended by an astonishing 70 million pilgrims.

2003: Most recent *mela* at Ujjain and Nasik.

2007: *Ardha-mela* at Allahabad. Main bathing date: January 19.

2010: Next *mela* at Haridwar. Main bathing date: April 14.

2013: Next *mela* at Allahabad.

“In the midst of the Waters,
the Lord is moving,
surveying men's truth and
men's lies. How sweet
are the Waters, crystal
clear and cleansing! Now
may these great, divine
Waters enliven me!”

Rig Veda VII.49.3

Haridwar: With all but a few of Her devotees fast asleep by Her shores, the River Ganga silently rushes past Hari ki Pauri Ghat late at night. (below) Novitiate nuns in yellow saris meditate with ordained nuns before Goddess Durga at a Haridwar ashram.

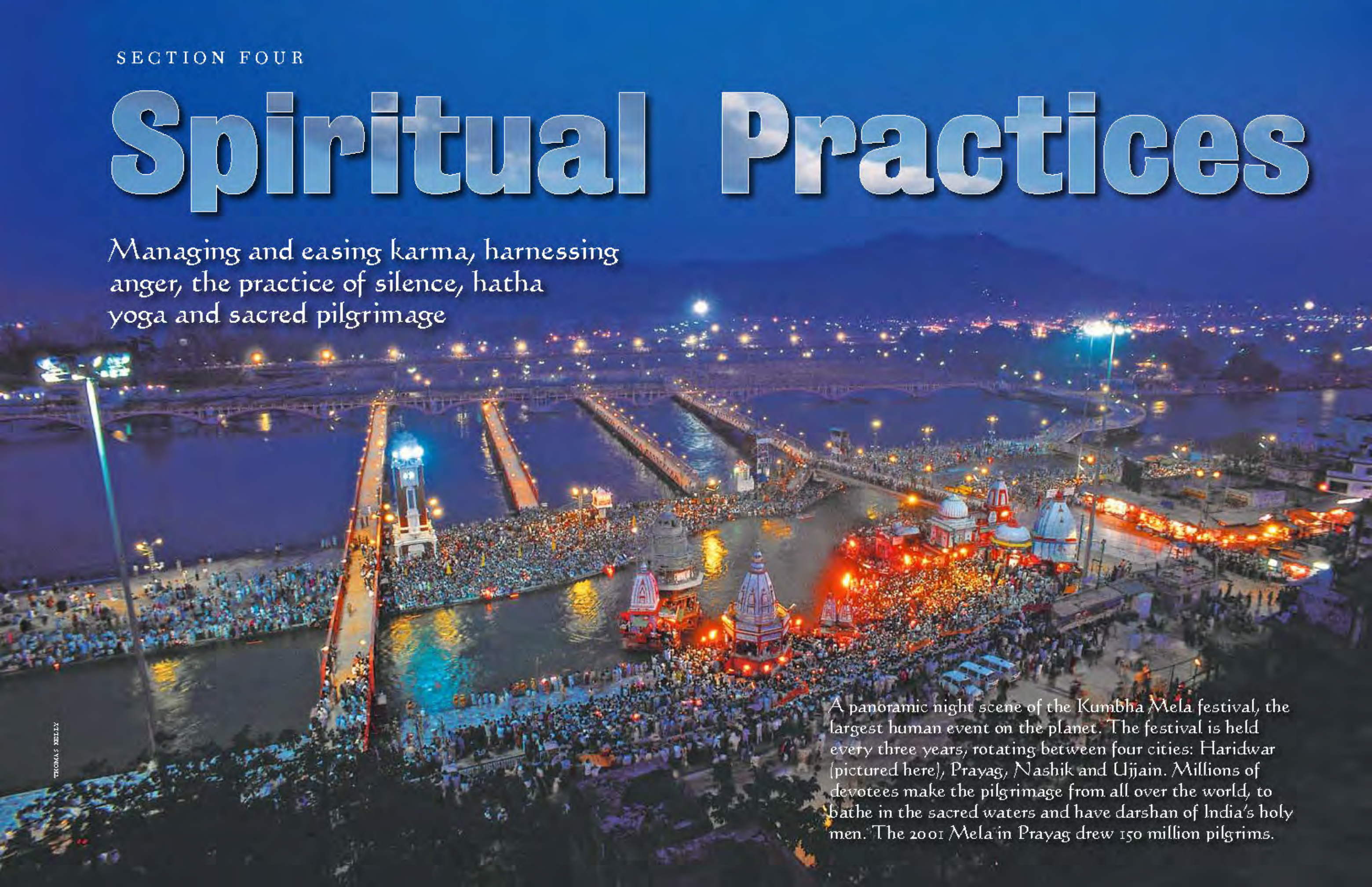


THOMAS KELLY

SECTION FOUR

Spiritual Practices

Managing and easing karma, harnessing anger, the practice of silence, hatha yoga and sacred pilgrimage



A panoramic night scene of the Kumbha Mela festival, the largest human event on the planet. The festival is held every three years, rotating between four cities: Haridwar (pictured here), Prayag, Nashik and Ujjain. Millions of devotees make the pilgrimage from all over the world, to bathe in the sacred waters and have darshan of India's holy men. The 2001 Mela in Prayag drew 150 million pilgrims.



Karma is Self-Generated: A man's actions create his future karmas to be experienced, just as if he carved himself out of a stone with his own hands—as the man in the painting is doing. In the background, Lord Ganesha, the Lord of Karma, confers blessings with His raised right hand.

Karma Management

A Step-by-Step Guide to Help You Effectively Deal with Your Karma

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

THE CONCEPT OF KARMA HAS SPREAD BEYOND THE CONFINES OF THE ASIAN RELIGIONS that conceived it to become a core concept of today's yoga and New Age movements. It is now mentioned regularly on American mainstream television programs and in the movies. Last year in discussing the concept with a junior college class in Hawaii, a student expressed contemporary culture's astute definition of karma as "What goes around comes around." Unfortunately, most individuals' understanding of karma is at best limited to thinking about it as an abstract principle without applying it to their own life. This is equivalent to a student's learning and understanding all the laws of nutrition, being able to get an "A" on any test on the subject, but following a personal diet of junk food three times a day. What he learned is not influencing how he lives. The study of karma is effectively approached in a three-step process: 1) dispelling common misconceptions about karma; 2) acquiring a correct intellectual understanding of karma's key concepts; 3) managing your own karma by utilizing the correct understanding of karma to refine your actions and reactions in life.

Two Misconceptions

1 You have no doubt heard the most common false concept about karma on a number of occasions. It goes something like this: "Nothing but bad things happen to me. It's my karma, and even when I strive to do better, my striving has no effect upon it. So why should I even try to make my life amount to anything? It's truly hopeless."

This misconception must be rejected for two important reasons. The first is that you can actually change your karma through the principles of effective karma management. The second is that how you live in this life creates the karma you will face in your future lives. So, why not consciously use the law of karma to create a future that is filled with pleasant experiences rather than painful ones?

2 A second common false concept about karma, which you have probably also heard, goes like this: "My life is in a state of chaos. Everything is going wrong, and it all started three months ago when Saturn entered Taurus and my karma changed. I have been advised that if I can successfully appease Saturn through having a priest do regular Sani puja, my problems will go away.

Therefore, that has become the entire focus of my religious life at this time." The fallacy of this attitude is that, yes, karmic difficulties indicated by your astrology can be mitigated, but not simply by paying a priest to do Sani puja. If that is all you are doing to work with your situation, that's not enough. In working through the trying times of life, your primary powers are willpower, devotion and understanding. Such karma can be mitigated through specific actions performed by the individual, such as those outlined below, but not merely by giving over such duties to others.

A second reason this misconception must be rejected is that it attributes the cause of our problems to the planet Saturn rather than to our own actions in the past. It is like pleading with the jailer to release you from your cell simply because being incarcerated is an unpleasant experience, having forgotten about the crime you committed that put you in prison in the first place. Planets don't determine your karma, and neither do the actions of others. It is self-created, and you are the source of it all—good, bad and mixed.

Ten Correct Concepts

ONE: Karma means act or deed.

Let's begin with the word karma itself. What does it mean? Karma means "action" or "deed," such as in the common phrase karma yoga, "union through action."

TWO: The law of karma is the law of cause and effect.

When we say "the law of karma," we refer to the law of action and reaction, also called the law of cause and effect. This law states that what we sow we shall reap in this or future lives. Benevolent actions (*punya*karma or *suka*rma) will bring loving reactions. Selfish, hateful acts (*papa*karma or *kuka*rma) will bring suffering. Every action that we perform in life, every word we speak, even every thought that we think, has its reaction.

THREE: Karma is just and self-governing.

The law of karma is a divine, self-governing system of justice that automatically creates the appropriate future experience in response to the current action. However, unlike the justice systems of a country, which only punish the misdeeds of those who are caught, tried and found guilty, karma punishes misdeeds and rewards good deeds whether they are known or not. For example, if a man robs a bank and is never caught, no punishment is received through man's law. However, he will inevitably face the consequences of his crime through the law of karma. Similarly, the good deed of giving money regularly but anonymously to a charity will be rewarded, even though no one knows the giver's name.

FOUR: Karma is our teacher.

Through understanding the consequences of their actions, individuals sooner or later learn to refrain from committing a particular misdeed. Any good system of justice does not want repeat offenders. It wants individuals to understand the error of their ways and reform their behavior. You've heard Alexander Pope's famous phrase that to err is human, to forgive is divine. Well, we can adapt his adage and say to err is human but to err only once is divine, meaning those who are striving to live a religious life are self-reflective and learn quickly from their mistakes. This is what we mean by saying "Karma is our teacher." It teaches us to refine our behavior—hopefully sooner rather than later. One way to tell a young soul from an old soul is to observe how quickly he learns karma's lessons in life.

FIVE: We each have our individual karma.

Karma also refers to our individual karma that we carry from life to life, both the karma to be resolved in this life, and the karma to be resolved in a future life. To understand this better, let us reflect again on the criminal justice system. Justice is known for moving slowly. It can take a number of years before a convicted criminal receives his punishment. The law of karma is even slower. The consequences, or fruits of actions, known as *karmaphala*, may not come for a number of lifetimes. Thus, the karma we are born with is

comprised of rewards and punishments from many past lives that have yet to manifest, and are yet to be resolved.

SIX: There are three types of individual karma.

Our individual karma is of three types: *sanchita*, *prarabdha* and *kriyamana*. *Sanchita* is the sum total of past karmas yet to be resolved. *Prarabdha* is that portion of *sanchita* karma scheduled to be experienced in the present life, shaping its events and conditions, including the nature of our bodies, personal tendencies and associations. *Kriyamana* is karma you are presently creating. While some *kriyamana* karmas bear fruit in the current life, others are stored for future births.

SEVEN: Astrology indicates the patterns of karma.

Prarabdha karma determines one's time of birth, which dictates one's astrology, which in turn delineates the individual life pattern by influencing the release of these karmas. Thus, an individual will experience certain astrological periods as difficult and other periods as auspicious and positive. Astrology does not dictate our karma, rather our karma determines our astrology, so understanding our horoscope helps us knowledgeably manage our karma as it arises to be faced.

EIGHT: Karmas are either active or inactive.

Sanchita, *prarabdha* and *kriyamana* karmas can each be divided into two categories: *arabdha*, "begun" or "undertaken" karma that is sprouting; and *anarabdha*, "not commenced," "dormant," or seed karma. An analogy can be drawn to a garden in which a variety of seeds have been planted. Some types of plants will sprout in a few days, others will take weeks and still others lie dormant for months. Similarly, some of our karmas will manifest in the next few years, some toward life's end and others in a future life.

NINE: We create our own future.

Our actions in the present are creating what we will experience in the future, even in future lives. The point here is that when we think of karma, we tend to think of the past. We reflect upon the rewards and punishments from the past that are now manifesting and what we must have done to create them. However, we must also think about our future in this life and lives to come. Our actions in the present are influencing that future, making it pleasant or unpleasant. Therefore, before acting, a wise person reflects on that action's karmic consequences and thereby consciously molds his future.

TEN: Life is all about resolving karma.

The ultimate future to consider is liberation from the cycle of birth and death, *samsara*. As long as we have karmas to resolve, we will be reborn on Earth. Thus, individuals who are intent upon spiritual progress take the creation and resolution of karma quite seriously. Not only do they strive to act wisely in the present, they perform extra religious practices to rid themselves in this life of karmas that would normally only manifest in future lives. This is a profound practice performed by sagacious *sannyasins* especially.



Ten Principles for Effective Karma Management

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

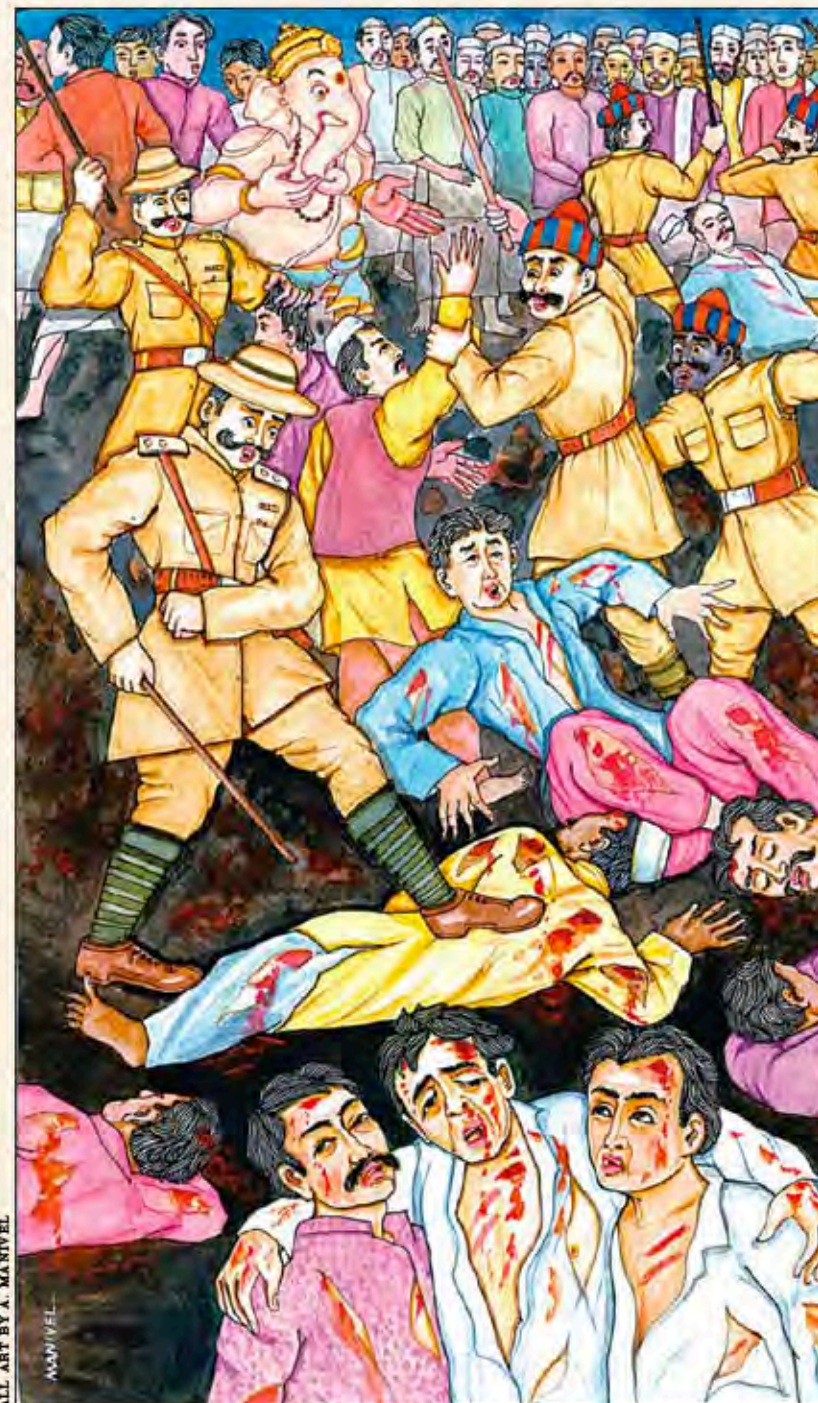
A FEW YEARS AGO, I WAS ONE OF TWO speakers at a lecture in Perth, Australia. I spoke on enlightenment, stressing that it is a gradual process, a deepening of the ability to experience God, starting with seeing God as the light in the eyes of everyone you look at. The second speaker, a prominent Malaysian Hindu leader, made the point that a modern trend of Hindus is to consider the traditional wisdom given by swamis as old-fashioned and not lend it much weight. Instead, many Hindus are fascinated with the modern, secular self-improvement-seminar approach, which quite often takes its principles from Hindu thinking but gives them a modern packaging. So, today we are taking that modern approach to karma. You've heard of stress management workshops? Well, this is a karma management program, designed for workshops, in which we will learn the ten principles for effective karma management, drawn from the teachings of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (Gurudeva). This fulfills the third step of learning about karma, which is to apply our understanding of karma to our own life and thus refine the way we act in and react to life. Gurudeva taught: "It is easy to study the law of karma and to appreciate it philosophically, but to realize it, to apply it to everything that happens to you, to understand the workings of it as the day goes by, requires an ability to which you must awaken."

FIRST PRINCIPLE

Forego Retaliation

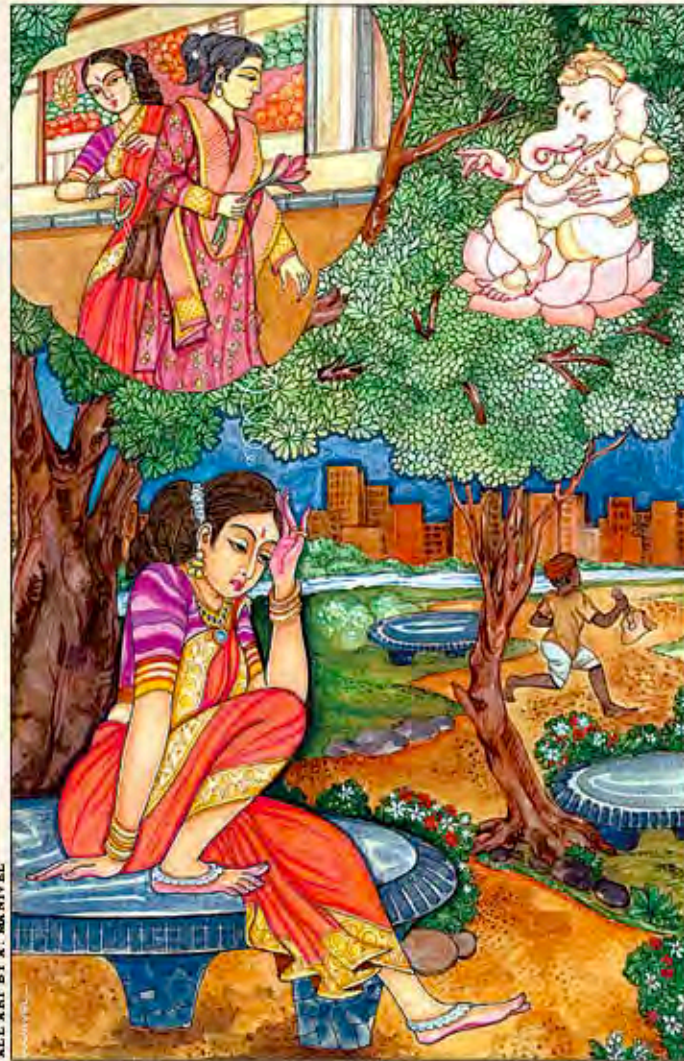
1 There is no need for you to be the instrument to return a karmic reaction to someone else. For example, an individual is really nasty to you, so you feel the impulse to retaliate and be nasty to him. If you follow that tack, you will create a new unseemly karma to face in the future. Better to let the law of karma take its own course without your intervention, which will generally happen through some other person with less self-control who does not understand this law of life.

Let us take another example: a classic cowboy movie plot. Someone shoots and kills the hero's brother during a robbery, and the rest of the film is devoted to his chasing down the outlaw and shooting him in revenge. What, then, happens in the next life, the sequel? There is definitely a karma to be faced for killing in revenge. Perhaps another robbery will take place and the hero will be killed. Wisdom tells us that it is better to let the



ALL ART BY A. MANIVEL

1 FOREGO RETALIATION: The protest march led by Gandhi on May 21, 1930, is attacked by police as they approach Dharasana Salt Factory. The protestors did not retaliate or defend themselves, but allowed the injustice of the attack to recoil on the British administration that ordered it. In each of the paintings commissioned for this article, Lord Ganesha, who governs karma, looks on.



2 ACCEPT RESPONSIBILITY: The lady is recovering from having her purse stolen by the fleeing robber. She is remembering a time when she stole a valuable necklace from another lady's purse, realizing that the karma of that theft has now caught up with her.

sheriff apprehend the outlaw and bring him to justice. The sheriff has taken an oath and is authorized to uphold the law and therefore creates no negative karma in capturing the outlaw, even if he has no choice but to kill him in the process.

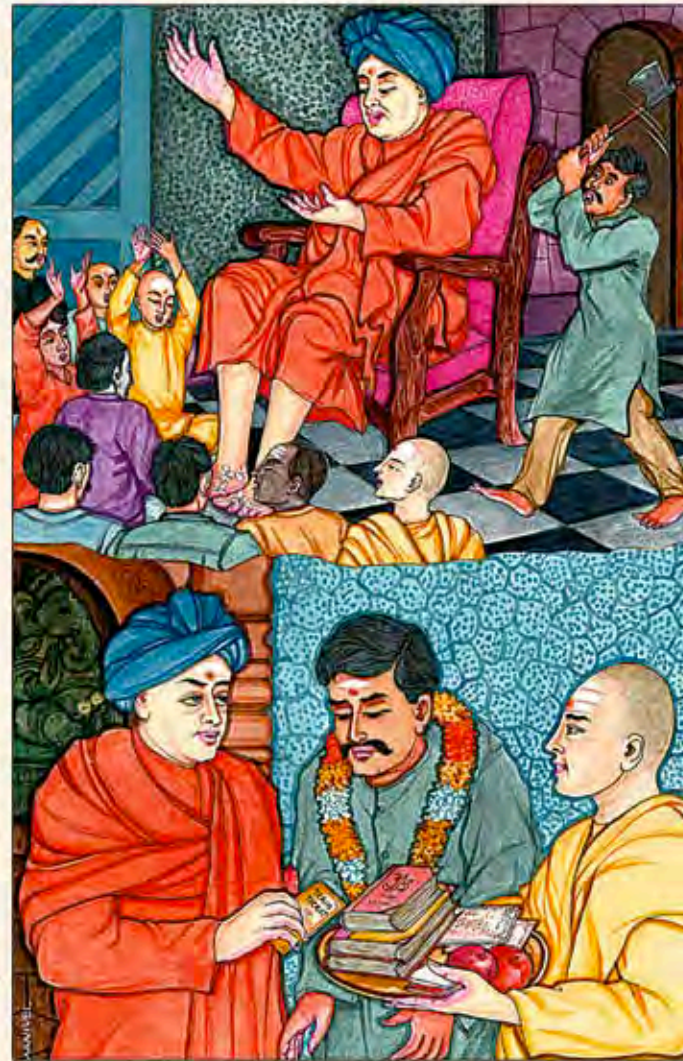
Gurudeva said, "Retaliation is a terrible, negative force. When we retaliate against others, we build up a bank account of negative karma that will come back on us full force when we least expect it."

Tirukural: "Forget anger toward all who have offended you, for it gives rise to teeming troubles."

SECOND PRINCIPLE

Accept Responsibility

2 Karma generally manifests through other people, and thus it is easy to see the other person as totally responsible for what happens to us. For example, you are attacked by a mugger who strikes you and steals your valuables. You are quite upset with the malicious thief. However, the mystical perspective is to see yourself as responsible for whatever happens to you. You are, through your actions in the past, the creator of all that you experience in the present. You caused your loss; the thief is just the instrument for returning your karma to you.



3 FORGIVE THE OFFENDER: Swami Sivananda was once attacked by a man wielding an axe. Devotees restrained the man and locked him in an ashram room. Sivananda came to the man, forgave him for the attack and let him go.

Of course, it is easy to apply this principle when the effect is an enjoyable one (we know intuitively when we get good things that we deserve them) and not so easy to apply it when it is not enjoyable, but in both cases we are equally responsible. In the end, you have no one to praise but yourself when your life is filled with successes and no one to blame but yourself when your life is filled with difficulties.

Gurudeva said, "As long as we externalize the source of our successes and failures, we perpetuate the cycles of karma, good or bad. There is no one out there making it all happen. Our actions, thoughts and attitudes make it all happen. We must accept and bear our karma cheerfully."

Tirukural: "Why should those who rejoice when destiny brings them good moan when that same destiny decrees misfortune?"

THIRD PRINCIPLE

Forgive the Offender

3 Take as an example a teenage boy on the way home from school. One day a gang of boys teases him for being different in some way and beats him up. A common response is for the teenager to feel angry at the boys and harbor ill feelings toward

them for years. This is problematic, however, as it keeps the lower emotions of anger constantly churning in his subconscious mind. Unless he forgives them, he perpetuates the event in his own mind, long after it is over.

Gurudeva often told the story of when a man attacked Swami Sivananda, hitting him forcefully in the head with an axe during evening satsang at his Rishikesh ashram. Swamiji's followers were outraged and angrily subdued the man. But Swami Sivananda responded with the opposite sentiment. He asked that the man not be punished or turned over to the police. The next day he met with his attacker and gave him a train ticket home, several spiritual books and money. Swami said, "Thank you so much for being the instrument to bring this karma back to me. Now I am free of it." He felt no anger toward the man whatsoever.

Tirukural: "If you return kindness for injuries received and forget both, those who harmed you will be punished by their own shame."

FOURTH PRINCIPLE

Consider the Consequences

4 Quite often our actions are based upon an emotional reaction to what someone has done or said to us. The consequences of such actions are often not clearly and carefully thought about. For example, someone insults you, so you insult them back. If you did reflect, you would see that the consequence of harming someone else with your words in the present is for you to be harmed again in the future by someone else's words. This behavior creates an endless cycle of being harmed and harming others, which is only stopped by considering the consequences before acting and not harming back. Mahatma Gandhi once said, "An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind." So, too, instinctive retaliation ultimately makes the whole world angry. The principle of considering the karmic consequences pertains equally to positive actions. The wisest approach is to not simply react to things that happen to us, but to take time to consider the karmic repercussions of all actions before we take them.

The habit of considering the consequences before acting can be developed at an early age when parents and teachers utilize positive discipline methods to help children face the natural and logical consequences of their actions. An insightful letter from Lord Ganesha on consequences in Gurudeva's book *Loving Ganesha* reminds us: "Keep track of your paces, for your walk makes marks. Each mark is a reward or a stumbling block. Learn to look at the step you have made and the step you have not made yet. This brings you close to Me."

Gurudeva elucidates our fourth principle: "It is our reaction to karmas through lack of understanding that creates most karmas we shall experience at a future time."

Tirukural: "All suffering recoils on the wrongdoer himself. Thus, those desiring not to suffer refrain from causing others pain."

FIFTH PRINCIPLE

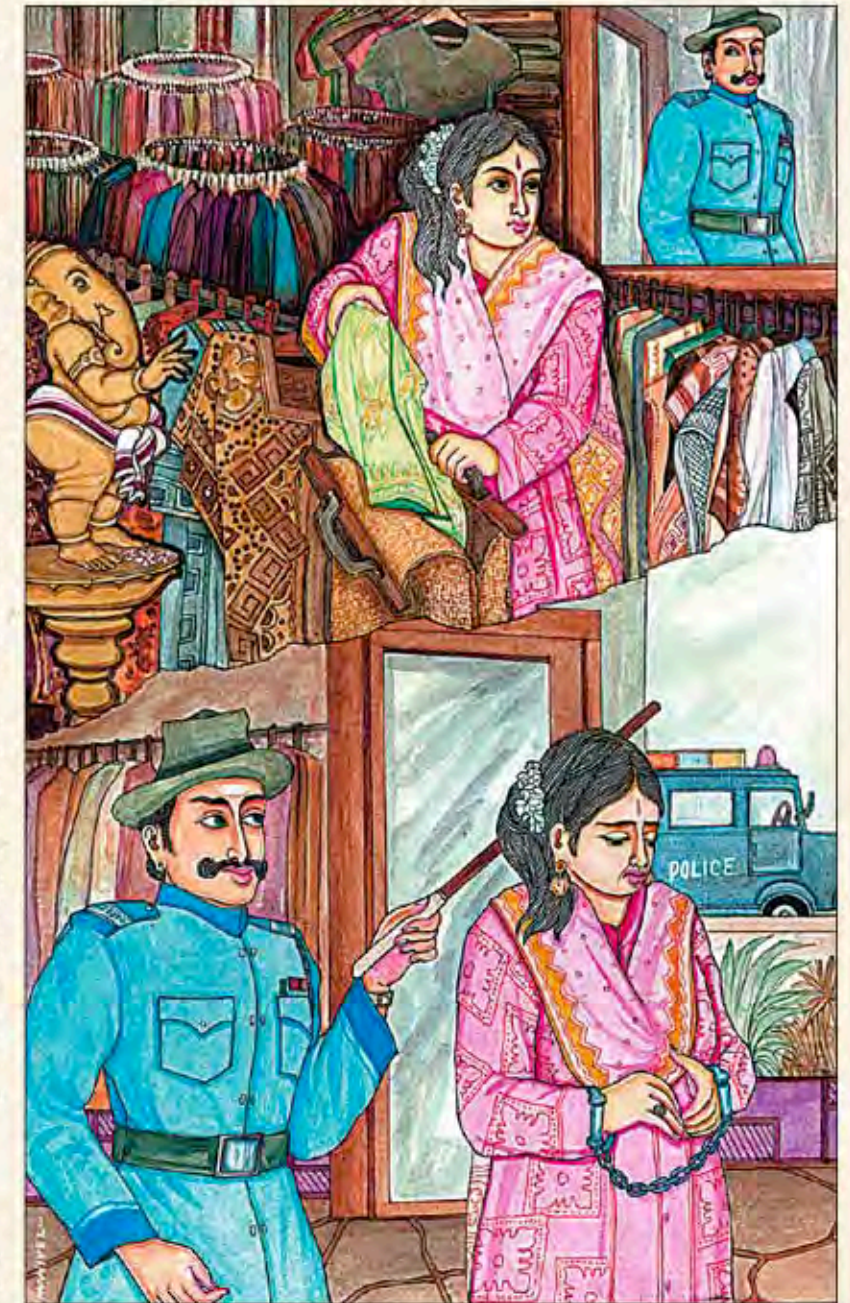
Create No Negative Karmas

5 Now that we have a good grasp of the karmic consequences of various kinds of actions, what is needed next to progress even further in the management of karma is a firm commitment to refrain from actions that create new negative karma. Perhaps we should all take a pledge, such as "I promise henceforth to refrain from all actions that create negative karmas."

This is actually not as difficult as it sounds. How do we know if a specific action will create negative karma or not? Scriptures such as the *Tirukural* may make mention of it. We can ask a Hindu religious leader his or her opinion. We can ask our parents or elders. And once we get the knack of it, our own conscience will be able to provide the answer most of the time.

Gurudeva advises us: "Wise handling of karma begins with the decision to carry the karma we now have cheerfully, and not add to it. A firm decision to live in such a way as to create no new negative karmas is a sound basis for living a religious life, for following the precepts of dharma and avoiding that which is adharmic."

Tirukural: "What good is a man's knowledge unless it prompts him to prevent the pain of others as if it were his own pain?"



4 CONSIDER THE CONSEQUENCES: This well-to-do lady didn't restrain herself from stealing a nice outfit in a department store, even though she could have afforded to buy it. Spotting her in the act, a security guard arrests her and leads her out in handcuffs to the waiting police van and a day in court.

Seek Divine Guidance

6 We don't have to manage our karma totally on our own. Help is available, divine help, in fact. Such help comes from none other than Lord Ganesha, who has the duty of helping sincere devotees manage their karma in the best way possible.

Once, through sincere worship, an individual develops a personal relationship with Ganesha, he naturally drops off any remaining adharmic patterns of behavior and becomes fully established in a dharmic life. Lord Ganesha helps you not only become established in dharma, but in the best personal dharmic pattern for this life, known as *svadharma*, your natural occupation and duties to family, friends, relatives, deceased relatives, community, guru and temple.

When we seek His permission and blessings before every undertaking, Ganesha, as the Lord of Obstacles, guides our karmas through creating and removing obstacles from our path, similar to a mother's watching over her young children at play. He also has an extraordinary knack for unweaving complicated situations and making them simple. He can unweave His devotees from their karma, clarifying and purifying their lives. How can we invoke this divine guidance when we encounter karmic difficulties? Simply by chanting His name or a simple mantra, or placing a flower at His feet, visiting His temples for puja, meditating on Him or just visualizing His holy form and inviting Him mentally to help in our time of need. He will respond.

Gurudeva comments on *svadharma*, "Such a life is the fulfillment of all previous efforts and thus erases the uncomplimentary deeds and adds beneficial ones, so a next birth can be most rewardingly great and useful to the whole of mankind."

Tirukural: "Draw near the Feet of Him who is free of desire and aversion, and live forever free of suffering."

SEVENTH PRINCIPLE

Mitigate Past Karma

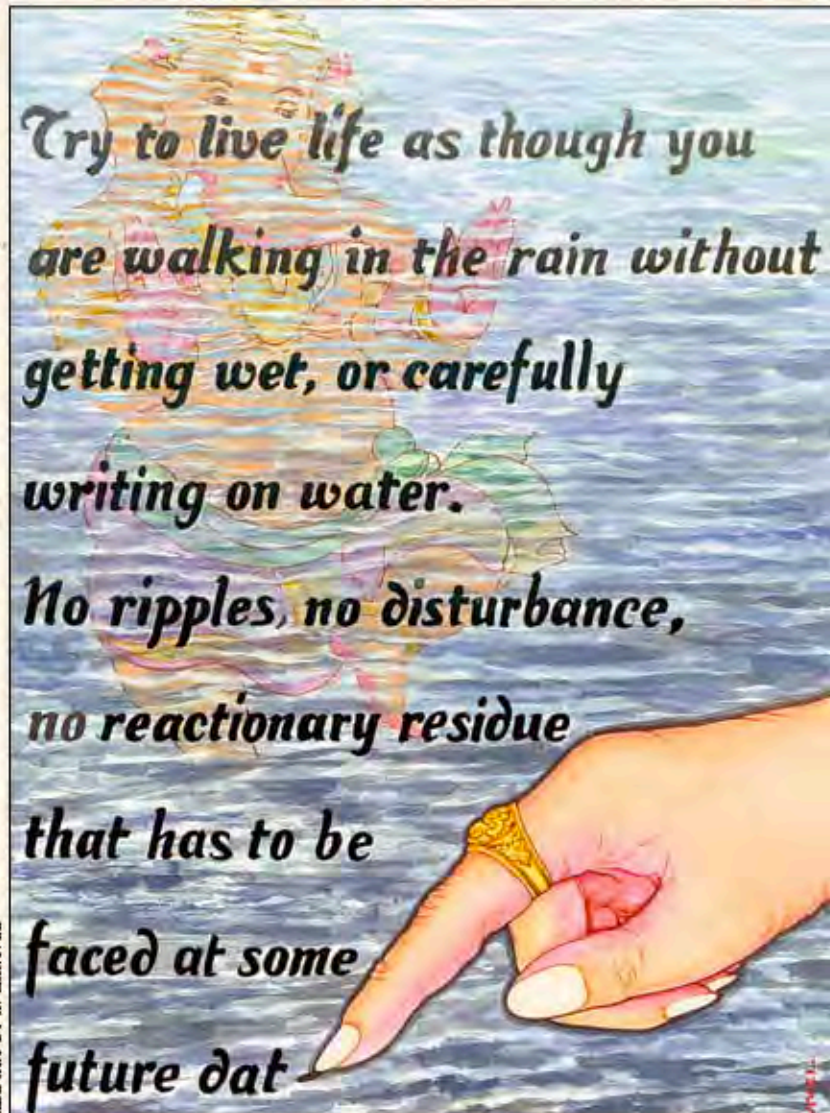
7 Once we have stopped acting in ways that create new negative karma, our life will be sublime enough to focus on ridding ourselves of karmas of the past, mitigating them, meaning to make less harsh, painful or severe.

To better understand mitigation, let's make another comparison to the judicial system. A man commits armed robbery and receives a ten- to twenty-year sentence. But due to good behavior in prison, he is paroled after only five years. He has mitigated his sentence, made it less severe, through his good behavior.

Let's now take an example of karma that is mitigated. You are destined to lose a leg in this life because you caused someone to lose his in a past life. If you are living a selfish, low-minded kind of life, the karma would come full force and you would lose your leg. However, if you are a kindly person who regularly helps others, the karma would be mitigated and you might read in the morning paper about someone losing a leg and take on the emotion of that experience as if it had happened to you. Later on when hiking you stumble and your leg is injured, but not severely. The full force of the karma was softened by your kind and helpful actions.

There are several methods by which we can mitigate our karma:

Following dharma: Living virtuously, in itself, helps modulate the release of karmic seeds, evening out the ebb and flow of karma and minimizing "karmic explosions" that might otherwise occur. Thus



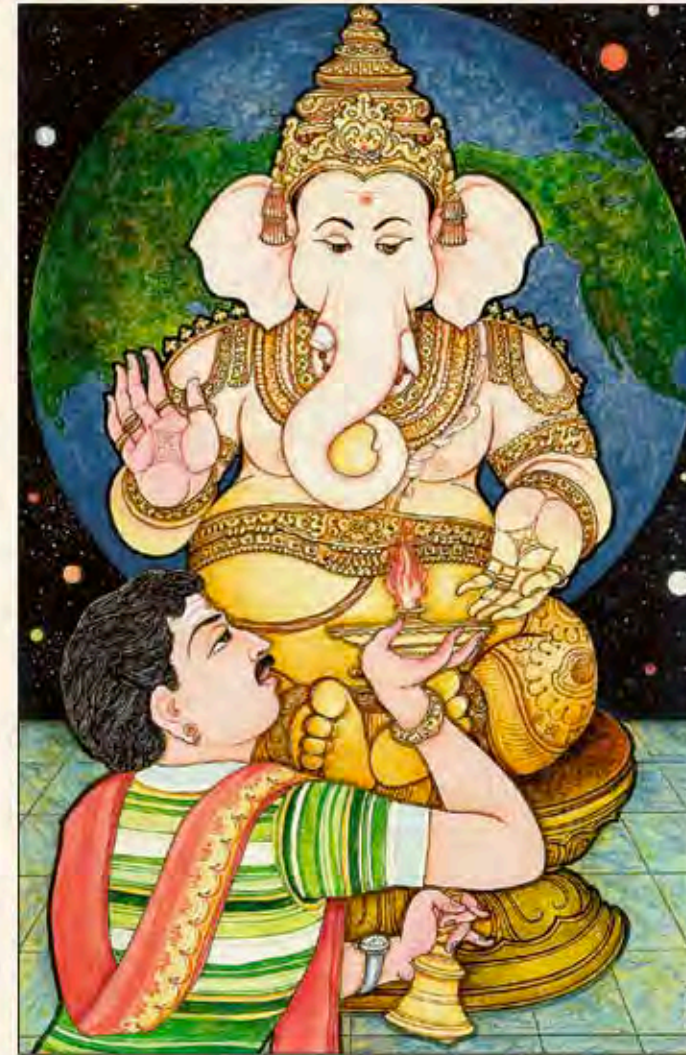
5 CREATE NO NEW NEGATIVE KARMA: Satguru Subramuniyaswami often said we should "live like writing on water." He meant that our actions should be so considered that we pass through life without making ripples of bad karma that return to us in the future.

negative karmas in one's individual pattern are naturally avoided or mollified and positive karmas accentuated and brought into fruition.

Karma yoga: Helping others—karma yoga, performing good deeds—and thus acquiring merit which registers as a new and positive karma is one way of alleviating the heaviness of some of our past karma.

Bhakti yoga: Worship, bhakti yoga, that is intense enough to cause us to receive the grace of the Gods can change the patterns of karma dating back many past lives, clearing and clarifying conditions that were created hundreds of years ago and are but seeds now, waiting to manifest in the future. The key concept here is intensity. Dropping by the temple for fifteen minutes on the way home from work is unlikely to accomplish such a transformation.

Pilgrimage: Pilgrimage is an excellent way to generate an intensity of worship. Over the years, Gurudeva's devotees have pilgrimaged to India, visiting major temples such as Chidambaram, Rameshvaram and Palani Hills. Many have come back transformed. They physically look a little different, behave differently and fit back into life in a more positive way than before. Their karma was changed by the grace of the Gods.



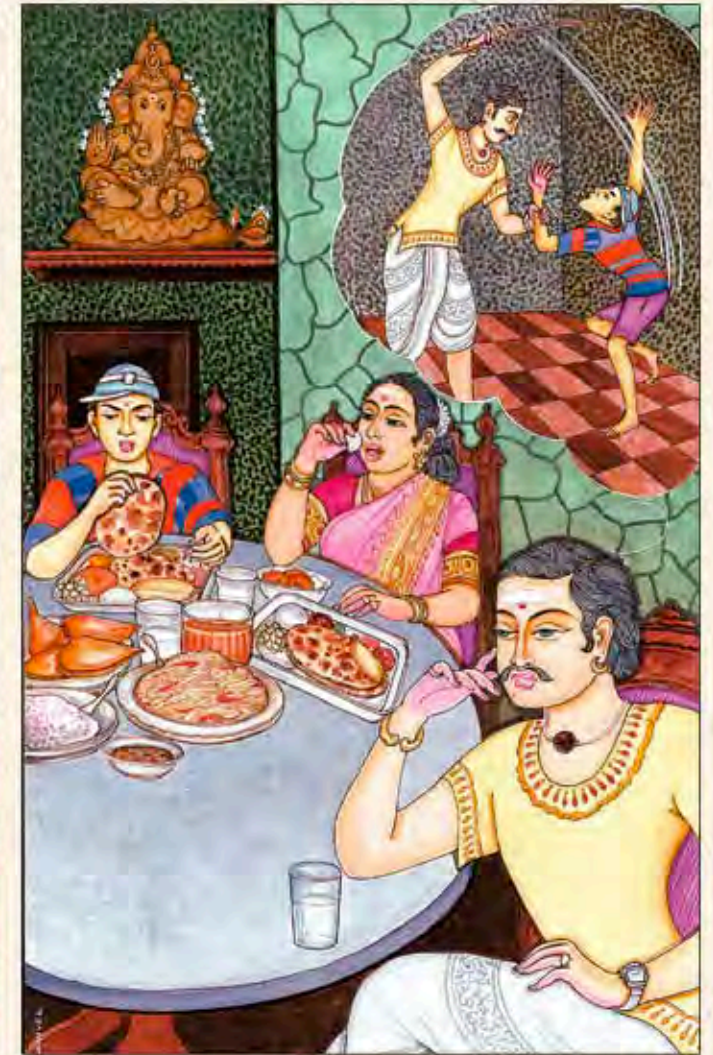
6 SEEK DIVINE GUIDANCE: Seeking to clarify some difficult karmas he is facing, this devotee invokes Lord Ganesha. The Lord of Obstacles is able to bring simplicity to complex situations. After worshipping Him, our duty becomes clear, and the right course of action to resolve our situation unfolds to our inner intelligence.

Vows: A vrata, or vow, can also generate an intensity of worship, such as fasting during the day and attending the temple on each of the six days of Skanda Shashthi or the 21 days of Vinayaga Viratam.

Penance: Penance, prayashchitta, is a sixth way to mitigate karma. This is like punishing yourself now and getting it over with instead of waiting for your karma to manifest a punishment in the future. A typical form of penance is to perform walking prostrations, such as around a sacred lake or mountain, up a sacred path or around a temple.

Often it is advised to perform penance that is directly related to a misdeed. Let's take the example of a teacher who frequently used corporal punishment to discipline students but now strongly feels hitting children for any reason, even for discipline, is wrong. An appropriate penance would be to print and distribute to teachers literature on alternatives to corporal punishment. This type of penance should only be undertaken after a certain degree of remorse is shown and the urgency is felt by the devotee to rid his mind of the plaguing matter.

Gurudeva said, "When pre-dawn morning pujas, scriptural reading, devotionals to the guru and meditation are performed without fail, the deeper side of ourselves is cultivated, and that in itself softens our karmas and prolongs life."



7 MITIGATE PAST KARMA: In a fit of anger, this man beat his son earlier in the day, even though he vowed to his guru that he would never again strike his child. As he fasts in a self-imposed penance for his misdeed, he feels regretful and renews his resolve to raise the boy without violence.

Tirukural: "Be unremitting in the doing of good deeds; do them with all your might and by every possible means."

EIGHTH PRINCIPLE

Accelerate Karma

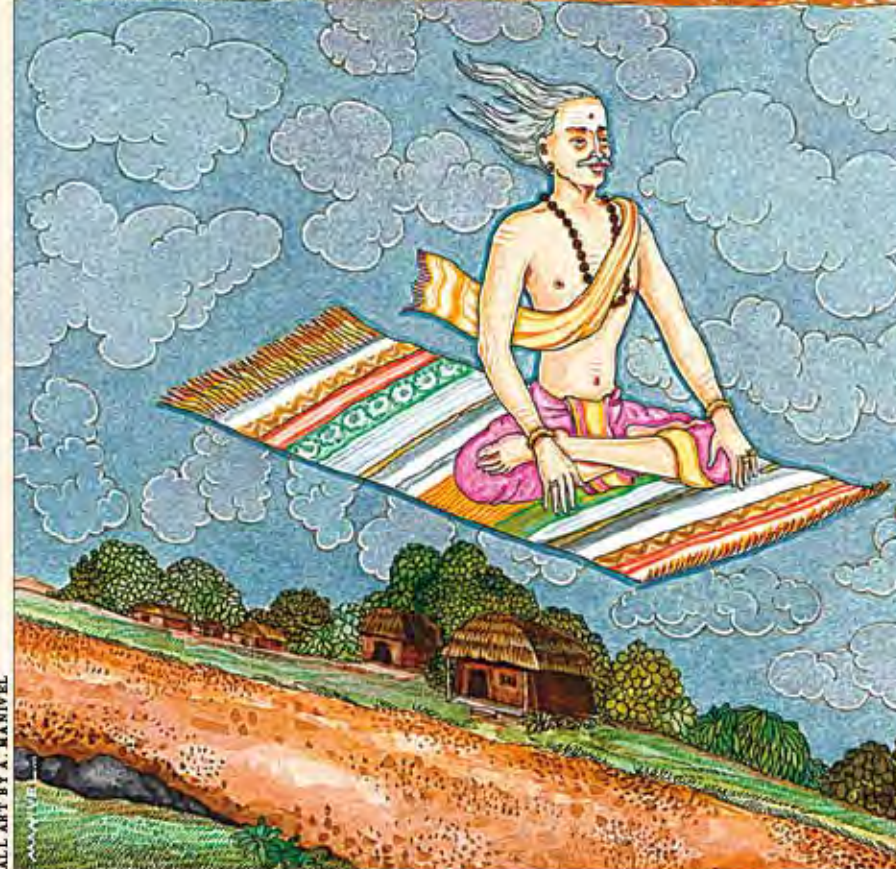
8 Why wait twenty more births to achieve spiritual maturity when you could achieve it in two births? That is the idea behind accelerating karma. When we begin meditating and performing regular daily *sadhana*, preferably at the same time each day, our individual karma is intensified. In our first four or five years of striving on the path we face the karmic patterns that we would never have faced in this life had we not consciously intensified our spiritual practices. Those on the spiritual path resolve much more karma in a lifetime than others. They could be called professional karma managers.

Of course, family duties in the *grhastha ashrama* don't allow much time for *sadhana*. Thus, the principle of karma acceleration is best fulfilled in the stage called *sannyasa*, both by those following the path of the monk and by everyone after age seventy-two. Retirement can be more than playing golf. It is an opportunity to intensify

our spiritual practices and thus accelerate our karma.

Gurudeva said, "By this conscious process of purification, of inner striving, of refining and maturing, the karmas come more swiftly, evolution speeds up and things can and usually do get more intense. Don't worry though. That is natural and necessary. That intensity is the way the mind experiences the added cosmic energies that begin to flow through the nervous system."

Tirukural: "Not allowing a day to pass without doing some good is a boulder that will block your passage on the path to rebirth."



8 ACCELERATE KARMA: By intensifying our spiritual practices, we can accelerate our spiritual progress. The difference in rate of resolution of karma is as great as the difference in speed between a flying carpet and the ponderous bullock cart.

NINTH PRINCIPLE

Resolve Dream Karma

9 Though some of our dreams are only the result of thoughts occurring in our own mind, other dreams are astral experiences, of being conscious in our astral body and interacting with others in their astral body. These astral-plane actions create karma, just as do our physical-plane actions. This is the basis of the Hindu ideal that one would not steal or injure even in a dream.

Why? Because such transgressions create negative karma that will come back to you. These are real karmas that may eventually manifest on the physical plane. However, this can be avoided if you happen to have further dream experiences in which appropriate actions are taken to dissolve the karma. More commonly, though, we can resolve dream or astral-plane karmas in the same way we would physical-world experiences, by performing penance for them in our waking state, while remembering the high standards of virtue and good conduct that should always be maintained, even during sleep. For instance, if in an emotional dream you injured someone intentionally, you could perform a simple penance the next day to atone, such as fasting one meal.

Gurudeva said, "These kinds of dreams—when a person is in his astral body and can feel what he touches, emotive to his experiences, think and talk—are not what is known as the dream state. This is an astral experience, similar to the death experience, but the astral body is still connected to the physical body."

Tirukural: "The highest principle is this: never knowingly harm anyone at any time in any way."

TENTH PRINCIPLE

Incinerate Karma

10 In the practice of yoga, we can burn up negative seed karmas without ever having to live through them. What we have to do is find the seed and dissolve it in intense inner light. Let's take the analogy of growing alfalfa spouts. You place the seeds in a jar and keep them moist until they sprout. But if you heat the seeds in a frying pan before putting them into the jar, they will no longer sprout. Similarly, karmas exposed to intense inner light are destroyed.

A meditation adept, having pinpointed an unmanifested karmic seed, can either dissolve it in intense light or inwardly live through the reaction of his past action. If his meditation is successful, he will be able to throw out the vibrating experiences or desires which are consuming the mind. In doing this, in traveling past the world of desire, he breaks the wheel of karma which binds him to the specific reaction which must follow every action. That experience will never have to happen on the physical plane, for its vibrating power has already been absorbed in his nerve system. This incineration of karmic seeds can also happen during sleep.

Gurudeva explains it in this way, "It is the held-back force of *sanchita* karma that the yogi

seeks to burn out with his kundalini flame, to disempower it within the karmic reservoir of *anandamaya kosha*, the soul body."

Tirukural: "As the intense fire of the furnace refines gold to brilliance, so does the burning suffering of austerity purify the soul to resplendence."

Conclusion

No matter how deep our understanding of karma may be, actually applying our understanding of karma to the events in our daily life can still be a challenge. Why is this? Our humanness gets in the way; our ego is challenged and we react to preserve our self image; our emotions are stirred and we respond impulsively, without intellectual reflection; our attitudes are prejudicial against certain religious or ethnic groups and we feel justified

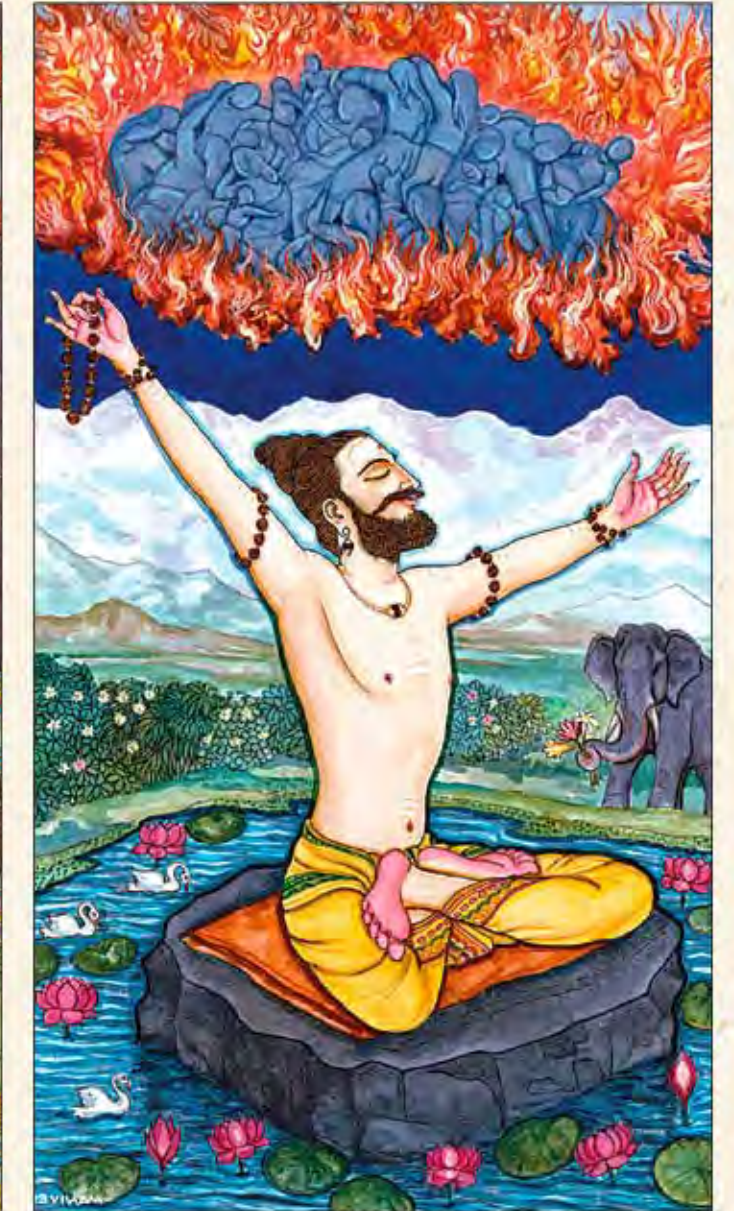


9 RESOLVE KARMA IN DEEP SLEEP OR MEDITATION: In her dream, a child is going through a traumatic experience and her deceased grandmother is comforting her. Karma can be experienced and resolved in such dream states.

in striking out at them, because they are not "our people."

How can such human weaknesses be overcome? It is by perfecting our character, which Gurudeva defined as "the ability to act with care." This is done through mastering Hinduism's Code of Conduct, the ten *yamas*, restraints, and the ten *niyamas*, observances. (See Chapter 42, "Hinduism's Code of Ethics.") With a strong character in place, the mastery of karma becomes natural to us. Gurudeva mystically summarizes this process as follows:

"Bhakti brings grace, and the sustaining grace melts and blends the karmas in the heart. In the heart chakra karmas are in a molten state. The throat chakra molds the karmas through *sadhana*, regular religious practices. The third eye chakra sees the karmas past, present and future as a singular oneness. And the crown chakra absorbs, burns clean, enough of the karmas to open the gate, the door of Brahman, revealing the straight path to merging with Siva."



10 INCINERATE KARMA: This yogi is joyously coming out of a deep meditation in which he has uncovered and "fried" the seeds of future karma, depicted as the human forms in the flames above him. He faced this karma on the subtle plane, before there would be a physical manifestation.

Karma and Reincarnation

Insights from Swami Vivekananda on
How We Each Forge Our Own Destiny

JUST BEFORE THE TURN OF THE 20TH CENTURY, SWAMI VIVEKANANDA, A BRILLIANT young Hindu monk from India, preached about the great law of karma in the United States to all who drew near. He explained, “Any word, any action, any thought that produces an effect is called karma. Thus, the law of karma means the law of causation, of inevitable cause and effect. Whatever we see or feel or do, whatever action there is anywhere in the universe, while being the effect of past work on the one hand, becomes on the other, the cause in its turn and produces its own effect. Each one of us is the effect of an infinite past. The child is ushered into the world not as something flashing from the hands of nature, as poets delight so much to depict, but he has the burden of an infinite past. For good or evil, he comes to work out his own past deeds. This makes the differentiation. This is the law of karma. Each one of us is the maker of his own fate.”

Through the ripening of the fruits of his actions he does not attain any rest, like a worm caught within a whirlpool. The desire for liberation arises in human beings at the end of many births, through the ripening of their past virtuous conduct.

YAJUR VEDA, PAINGALA UPANISHAD

2.22



*We create our own
destiny, moment
by moment.*



RAMAKRISHNA VIVEKANANDA CENTER

Swami Vivekananda's spiritual ardor was set ablaze by the great Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Swamiji (1863–1902) is best known for his electrifying address to the World Parliament of Religions in 1893, to which he traveled without invitation to represent Hinduism but was invited to speak through a chance meeting with a Harvard professor. Thus began two years of inspired lectures that have influenced millions of seekers. Returning to India, he founded the Ramakrishna Mission, which thrives today internationally, with over 100 centers and nearly 1,000 sannyasins. Swamiji is credited—along with Tagore, Aurobindo, S. Radhakrishnan and others—with sparking the modern Hindu revival.

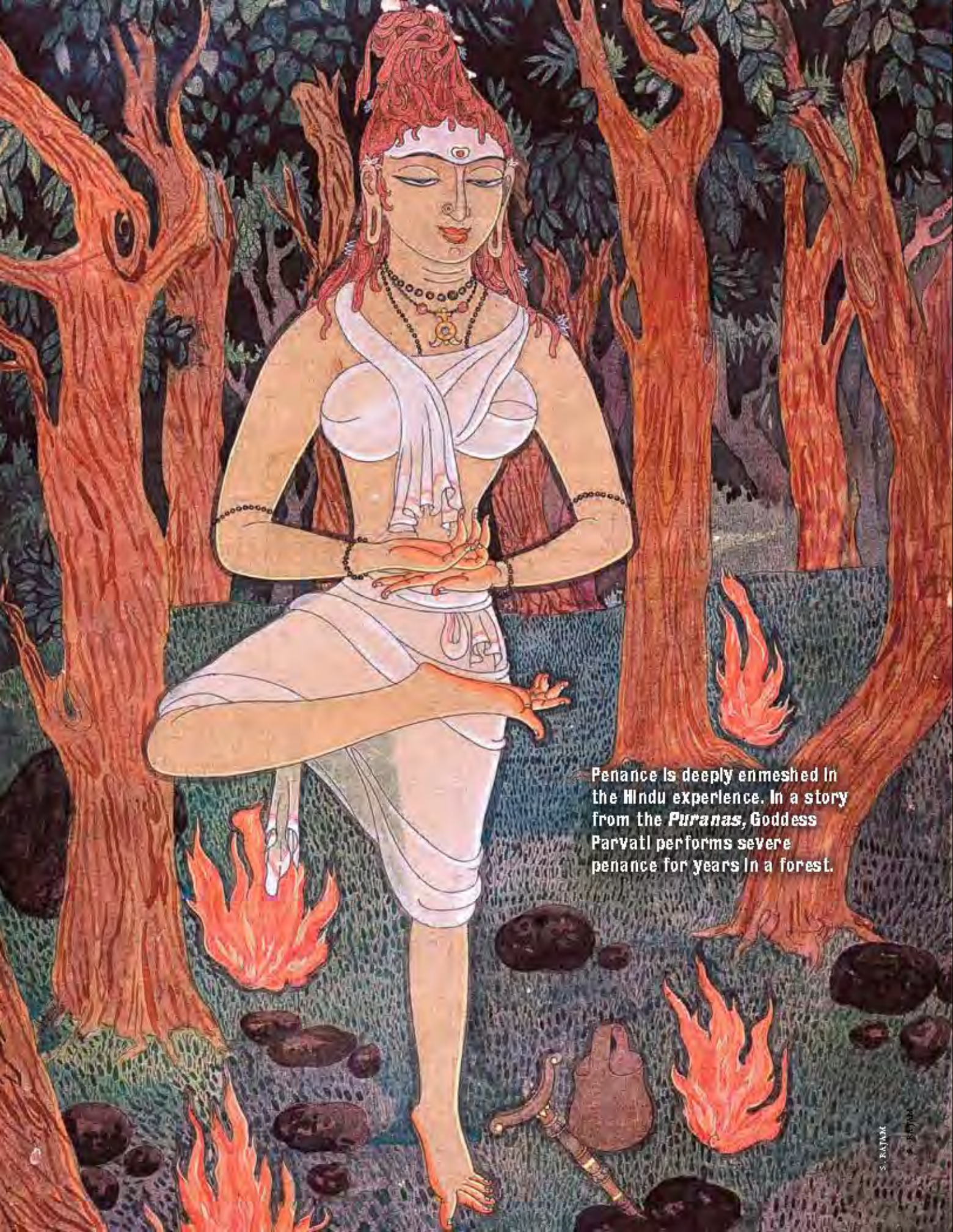
The idea of rebirth runs parallel with the doctrine of the eternity of the human soul. How is it that one man is born of good parents, receives a good education and becomes a good man, while another comes from besotted parents and ends on the gallows? How do you explain this inequality without implicating God? Then, too, what becomes of my freedom if this is my first birth? If I come into this world without experience of a former life, my independence would be gone, for my path would be marked out by the experience of others. If I cannot be the maker of my own fortune, then I am not free. But if this is not my first birth, I can take upon myself the blame for the misery of this life, which is the result of the evil I have committed in another, and say I will unmake it. This, then, is our philosophy of the migration of the soul: We come into this life with the experience of another, and the fortune or misfortune of this existence is the result of our acts in a former existence, and thus we are always becoming better, till at last perfection is reached."

Swami Vivekananda

"According to one's deeds, according to one's behavior, so one becomes. The one who does good becomes good, the one who does evil becomes evil. One becomes virtuous by virtuous action and evil by evil action. That to which the heart is attached, toward this, the subtle body moves together with its action, which still adheres. Attaining the goal of whatever actions he performed here on Earth, he goes once more from that world to this world of action."

Yajur Veda,
Brihadaranyaka
Upanishad 4.5.6

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Penance is deeply enmeshed in the Hindu experience. In a story from the *Puranas*, Goddess Parvati performs severe penance for years in a forest.

How to Ease Karma

Using the Power of Penance to Mitigate the Effects of Misdeeds

A FEW YEARS AGO, A DEVOUT HINDU COUPLE PULLED up to the drive-in window of their local Taco Bell fast-food Mexican restaurant in Ventura, California, and ordered a bean burrito—one of the few items on the menu these strict vegetarians could eat. After a few bites, the man suddenly realized that his spicy burrito was made not with beans but ground beef—the first time in his life he had ever tasted the flesh of the sacred cow. Aghast, he did the American thing: he sued Taco Bell, demanding the company pay for his expenses to return to India to do penance: specifically, to bathe in the Ganga River. Unfortunately, he lost the suit on the technicality that he could not prove to the court's satisfaction that he had actually consumed any beef. Early in the proceedings, HINDUISM TODAY was contacted by an attorney in the case and asked about the need for purification. We explained that indeed the man's plight was quite real, and he did need to do something for having inadvertently eaten beef, a transgression codified in the Hindu law books.

We wrote to Swami Paramananda Bharati of Bangalore, our 1990 "Hindu of the Year," for advice. Swami, who is attached to Sringeri Mutt, replied by email, explaining that because the offense was unintentional, the *prayashchitta*, penance, could be relatively simple—the chanting of mantras for about half an hour a day for eleven days. Realizing that Hindus would like to better understand the ancient system of *prayashchitta*, we enlisted Swami's help in researching the concept. He, in turn, drafted Mrs. B.G. Sreelakshmi of Bangalore, with the approval of Sringeri Mutt, to research the texts. Mrs. Sreelakshmi submitted a lengthy analysis from which we have drawn this article. For her complete text see www.hindu.org/penance/.

Karmic Basis: The guiding principles of penance in Hindu philosophy are derived from the law of karma, the principle of cause and effect. The doctrine of karma is complex, with many subtle distinctions and categories. But for the purpose of understanding penance, we may consider karma as two-fold: the meritorious or good, called *punya* or *sukarma* in Sanskrit; and the undesirable or bad, termed *papa* or *dukarma*. *Papa* includes all forms of wrongdoing from the simplest infraction to the most heinous crime. According to Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra*s (2nd century BCE), man's inclination toward wrong action arises from the five *klesas* ("troubles" or "af-

flictions"): ignorance, ego, attachment, aversion and fear (or "will to live"). In the broadest sense, the entire system of reincarnation is an elaborate form of penance, for we are born with the body, family, circumstances and even longevity and propensity toward disease brought about by our past actions. *Prayashchitta* is, however, an act of limited aim, intended only to mitigate or avoid altogether the *karmaphala*, "fruit of action," of some action we have taken in this lifetime. Actions from our past lives are not considered within reach of ordinary *prayashchitta*. The *karmas* of past lives can only be assuaged or erased altogether by intense *tapas* or austerities under the guidance of a guru, or by the extraordinary grace of God. *Manu Dharma Shastras* 11.54 states, "Penance, therefore, must always be performed for the sake of purification, because those whose sins have not been expiated are born again with disgraceful marks." *Prayashchittas*, in other words, permit us to resolve the *papa* created in this life and not carry it into the next.

Dharma as Guide: *Papa* arises in two ways, from the commission of what is forbidden and the omission of what is ordained by dharma. "How does one become aware of dharma?" asks J.R. Churpura in his book, *Teaching of Dharmasastra*. "To say it again in another way: not from books of law or ethics, nor from sacred scriptures, nor by means of scientific theories, nor because public opinion or a special group of people expect it from him. But an enlightened person becomes aware of an urge within himself and, because it demands satisfaction, he follows and obeys."

Failure to follow dharma occurs in three ways according to *Manu Dharma Shastras*: by the body, by the speech and by the mind. "Broadly speaking," states this *shastra*, "it is the mind that is the instigator of all actions. For example, coveting another's wealth by unfair means, desiring that evil befall another and adherence to false doctrines are evil mental actions. Abusing others, speaking untruth, detracting from the merits of all men and talking idly are four kinds of evil vocal sins. Taking what has not been given, injuring sentient beings against the injunction of the *shastras* and adultery are bodily sins. A man obtains the result of a good or evil mental act in his mind, that of a verbal act in his speech and that of a bodily act in his body. [*Manu* 12.3-8]"

Manu and the other *dharma shastras* contain long lists of actions for which *prayashchitta* is advised. These range from what the modern



Softening karma: In a traditional analogy, karma is described in a bow and arrow analogy. The full complement of arrows in quivers represent *sanchita karmas*, all those possessed by a soul (frame one). The *prarabdha karmas* (frame two) are all the *karmas* a person brings into the present life. When a man is impelled to act

(frame three), he sets one of these *karmas* in motion (frame four). Should the action have unexpected negative consequences for which the man is remorseful (frame five), it is possible for him to do a penance (frame six, in this case, chanting of a mantra), resulting in the breaking of the karmic cycle (frame seven).

penal code calls "capital crimes," such as murder, to felonies such as adultery, theft and cow killing, to misdemeanors like gambling, and what could be termed "civil offenses" such as "living outside the four *ashramas*." *Manu* offers a general list of wrongdoings, which reads, in part: "Killing a brahmin, stealing, adultery, giving false information to the king, forgetting the *Veda*, reviling the *Vedas*, eating forbidden food, stealing a deposit, a horse or diamonds, incest, casting off one's teacher, mother, father or son, selling goods which one ought not to sell, injuring living plants, subsisting on the earnings of one's wife, sorcery, cutting down green trees for firewood, assault, killing an animal, accepting presents from blamed men, killing insects or birds, and stealing fruit, firewood or flowers." [*Manu* 11.55-

71]. The list of transgressions is remarkable, differing only in details from modern penal codes, even though some of these lists are from books as old as the *Rig Veda* (c. 4000 BCE). They also contain very modern—for the West—concepts such as the protection of plants and animals. One special form of transgression is association with a person guilty of great crimes. The *papa* was considered transferred by sitting, sleeping, travelling, conversing or dining together—such association required half the penance of the actual crime.

Efficacy: Why should it be accepted that *prayashchitta* should destroy *papa*? This was a question even in ancient times. Some held that the *prayashchitta* did not actually destroy the *karmaphala*, but made the person fit for transaction with society. Others held, based

on Vedic passages such as "One who performs the *Aswamedha* [horse] sacrifice is absolved of all sins," that *prayashchitta* actually fulfills the *karma*. Pleas to forgive transgressions of *dharma* were evident in the earliest *Vedas*, such as *Rig Veda* 7.89.5, "Varuna, whatever wrong we men have done against the divine beings, whatever rules of yours we have flouted through nonvigilance, do not on that account of sin strike us down." The ancient commentator *Apararka*, however, observed that repentance is less arduous than penance and not enough to destroy *papa*. He said repentance and not repeating the act are important aspects of *prayashchitta*, but they cannot independently take the place of penances for their efficacy.

Manu 11.228-234 makes the definitive declaration: "By confession, by repentance, by austerity and by reciting the *Veda* a sinner is freed from guilt, and, in case no other course is possible, by liberality. In proportion as a man who has done wrong, and himself confesses it, even so far he is freed from guilt, as a snake from its slough. In proportion as his heart loathes his evil deed, even so far is his body freed from that guilt. He who

has committed a sin and has repented is freed from that sin, but he is purified only by the resolution of ceasing to sin and by thinking 'I will do so no more.' Having thus considered in his mind what results will arise from his deeds after death, let him always be good in thoughts, speech and actions. He who, having either unintentionally or intentionally committed a reprehensible deed desires to be freed from the guilt of it must not commit it a second time. If his mind be uneasy with respect to any act, let him repeat the austerities prescribed as a penance for it until they fully satisfy his conscience."

Law and Order: Every society has evolved some system of punishment to check erring behavior, with the belief that fear of punishment would deter error in the future. Within the Hindu tradition, there are three sources of punishment: the king, the *parishad* (assembly of wise men) and the individual himself. *Prayashchitta* is the correct term for punishment originating from any of these three. However, in the present context, we shall explore only punishment that is self-inflicted, in consultation with one's guru or religious guide and guided by the scriptures. Societies recognize that self-correction is the best correction. It has been, for example, relatively fruitless to jail a few wife-beaters for their crimes, because there has been little impact upon the large number of such men whose transgressions remain unknown to the law. When wife-beating reaches epidemic levels, as it has, then law enforcement is powerless, and other methods must be employed to educate, raise awareness and provide the means for individuals to convince themselves to stop their wrong behavior and make amends.

Mitigating Circumstances: Just as in modern law, due consideration is given to the circumstances of any transgression of *dharma*. The penance differs first between an act intentionally committed and the one committed through ignorance (or unaware, as with our Taco Bell incident), and between an act done only once and one done repeatedly. Consideration is given to who instigated the act, who approved of it and who committed it. If these are different people, the most responsibility lies with he who performs it, according to *Apastamba Dharma Shastras* 2.11.19. *Prayashchittas* are of two kinds, for actions committed secretly and those committed

openly. *Manu* and others hold that if a man's act is known only to himself, then he may perform secret expiation. If more than a year is allowed to pass, the penances would have to be double. Caste is also a factor, and the *Vishnu Samhita* states that the *prayashchitta* for a *kshatriya* (warrior), *vaisyas* (businessman) and *sudra* (worker) should be three-quarters, one-half and one-quarter, respectively, of what is prescribed for the brahmin priest. Several texts provide for lesser punishments for the very old, the young and the ill. For a child below five, no punishment is suggested for any wrongdoing. For a child between five and eleven, his father, brother, relative or friend has to undergo the *prayashchitta* for him, an ancient acknowledgement of modern rediscoveries that families are responsible for children's behavior, even legally.

Administration of Prayashchitta: The sage *Angiras* writes, "Having committed a sin, one should not hide. If one hides, the sin increases. Controlled in speech, one should approach the *parishad*." The steps were then fourfold: confessing before the *parishad*, declaration by the *parishad* of the appropriate *prayashchitta*, actual performance of the penance, and the announcing by the *parishad* of the transgressor's freedom from crime or taint. The *parishad* was advised not to reduce penance through af-

flection, greed, fear or ignorance, lest they themselves incur *papa*. According to the *shastras*, one should follow the *prayashchitta* therein recommended to erase the *papa* incurred by an act. At first glance, some of these penances appear either too severe or too lenient, or not logically connected to the transgression. But it must be kept in mind that confession and repentance are required prerequisites to *prayashchitta*. From the Hindu point of view, the critical act is to repent and resolve to not repeat the transgression, thus to transform one's behavior, change one's ways permanently. The *prayashchitta* is only sometimes to make full amends for the crime. Principally it is

Means of atonement: (from left to right) *Yogi* chants a *mantra* on *rudraksha* beads. Caves in *Lubrak*, northern *Nepal*, used for silent retreats. Hindu boys roll from temple to temple in the town of *Sankhu*, *Nepal*. A year earlier, this girl was brought gravely ill to this temple. Here she wears the healing *neem* leaves as she walks and prostrates toward the temple with her family in thanks. *Nepalese* women observe a yearly three days of penance through fasting and ritual bathing to ensure a happy and productive marriage. The observance is based on the penance of Goddess *Parvati*.

What Is the Hindu View of Sin?

THE SANSKRIT WORD *PAPA* IS OFTEN translated as *sin*. According to the specific meaning of *sin*, "a transgression of religious or moral law, especially when deliberate," the translation is accurate. However, the concept of sin in the West carries certain theological baggage which does not reflect Hindu philosophy. For example, there is the idea of "original" or "inherent" sin, a result of Adam's disobedience to God in the Garden of Eden. This is, according to Christian theology, shared by all people, and can only be removed by faith in Jesus. Hinduism does not hold to this doctrine of original sin.

Western theologies tend to consider sin a crime against God, whereas Hinduism views it as an act against *dharma*, moral order and one's own self. The absence of reincarnation or *karma* in Christian thinking makes their understanding of sin far different from that of the Hindu.

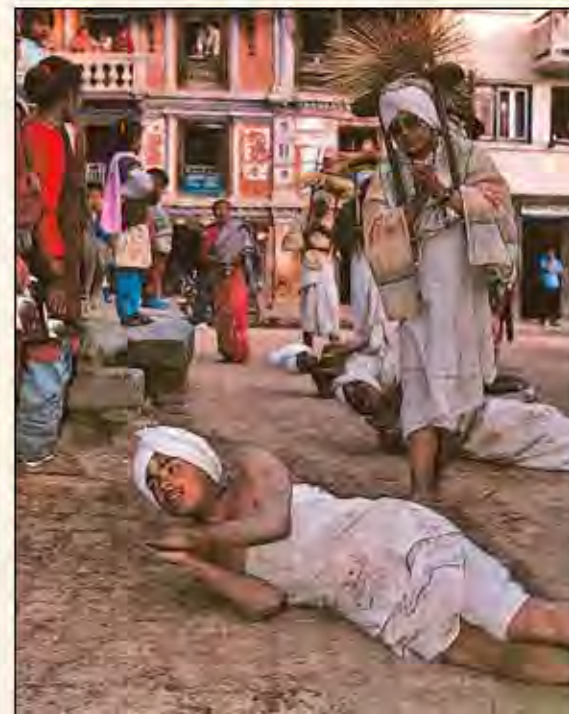
What to do about sin created in the present life—known as "actual sin" as contrasted with original sin—created the great division between the Catholics and the Protestants.

The Protestants said that faith in Jesus is the only way to remove that sin too, while the Catholics adhered to a complex system of confession and penance. In the Middle Ages, there were "penitential books" in Europe listing sins and penances, plus the more dubious system of "indulgences" whereby one could escape bodily penances such as fasting by an appropriate donation to the church's building program. In the 17th century, Martin Luther declared that faith alone, not penance and especially not indulgences, was efficacious in absolving sin.

Hindu writers educated in Christian schools tend to mix in these Christian concepts of sin while discussing *papa*, or undesirable *karma*. At times, the idea of an original sin creeps in, one that cannot be erased or evolved out of. At other times, the Protestant scorn for penance appears, and doubt is thrown by the writer upon the whole concept of *prayashchitta*. Occasionally one will find Hindu priests or gurus disparagingly cast as akin to Catholic priests, somehow ordained to "forgive" sins, when they serve no such function.



PHOTOS BY THOMAS KELLY



to subvert the future karma which would otherwise result by forestalling the thoughts, words and deeds which create negative karma. *Prayashchitta* is not an "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" proposition. The penance serves both to assuage the guilty conscience by suffering some punishment, and in a subtle way, to thwart the future karma of one's act. The objective is repentance, not retribution.

Some of the *prayashchittas* given in the old texts were extremely severe, resulting in the painful death of the person. One can be put off by reading in *Manu Dharma Shastras* that such and such a sinner should be punished in such and such a horrendous manner. Punishment in all ancient societies tended to be harsh.

Contemporary Penances: In modern times, *prayashchitta* can be placed in nine categories: confession, repentance, *pranayama* (breath control), *tapas* (austerity and sacrifice, such as head shaving), *kriya yoga* (self study and worship of God), *homa* (sponsoring of expiating ceremony, especially the fire sacrifice), *japa* (recitation of scriptures and mantras), *danam* (gifts, such as to temples and priests), fasting (either complete or by abstaining from certain foods) and pilgrimage. It is likely that even in the early times these were also the most common *prayashchittas*, as each is described in the ancient scriptures.

Confession and repentance have been explained as prerequisites for any further *prayashchitta*. By *pranayama*, certain specific patterns of breath control, one regains control of his mind and emotions. This is applied for lesser offenses. *Tapas* or austerity includes, according to Gautama, celibacy, sleeping on the ground and bathing thrice daily. Another common austerity is prostrating repeatedly while encircling a temple. Much more arduous are the prostrations around an entire city, such as Vrindaban, or a mountain, such as Kailas. The carrying of *kavadi*, a kind of portable shrine on an arch, while having the skin pierced by numerous small spears is a popular austerity among South Indians today. Austerity is a frequent aspect of certain famous pilgrimages, especially those undertaken barefoot. The sponsoring of religious ceremonies, particularly the *homa* or fire sacrifice, as a *prayashchitta* is mentioned in the *Taittiriya Aranyaka*, a section of the *Krishna Yajur Veda*. *Japa* includes both the repetition of simple mantras, such as "Om," and the recitation of various *Upanishads*, or even the entire *Vedas*. *Dana* (gifting) is frequently mentioned, even as atonement for serious crimes. The gift of a cow to a priest or a temple is commonly required. As of April, 2000, a good milk cow in America sold for US\$2,050, so one could translate these ancient fines given in number of cows to dollars. The construction by Lord Rama of the Rameshvaram Temple in South India as penance for the killing of his enemy Ravana, a brahmin, is an example of penance by religious gift. The later shas-

tras even prescribed bathing in the 22 wells of Rameshvaram as *prayashchitta* for killing a brahmin. Fasting is also a very common *prayashchitta*—it costs nothing to fulfill, and it even saves money! There are many kinds of whole and partial fasts described in the texts, some of which appear to be ayurvedic or medicinal remedies. Finally, pilgrimage is an especially favored *prayashchitta*, though the texts warn that a mere physical act of pilgrimage and a bath in holy waters without a change of heart would not be enough. Nor is anything to be gained, they warn, by abandoning one's duties and fleeing on pilgrimage. Certain pilgrimage destinations, especially Banaras, are renowned as places to rid oneself of *papa*.

In a list provided by Swami Paramananda Bharati, the *prayashchitta* for stealing food is fasting and Sun worship; that for stealing temple funds is fasting and giving gifts of gold, silver and clothes. Making false claims for a medicine can be remedied by fasting and public feedings. An act of ingratitude should be countered by fasting and the feeding of fifty persons, of backbiting by worship and gift of ghee.

Swami's Insights: Swami Paramananda Bharati states, "All sin originates from the love for the body and the ego. Otherwise, the *jivatma*, the individual soul, is by nature very pure. In this sense the real culprits in sin are only the body and the ego. So the cleansing process consists in punishing the body and the ego. That is, indeed, the logic unconsciously followed by the state when it punishes offenders. But the state does not understand the complexities of the soul and its progress. Therefore, it cannot decide the quality or the quantity of punishment, which differs from person to person for the same crime. It is only the *shastra* that can decide it. If the state gives punishment according to the *shastra*, the offender is fully redeemed. But we can never expect the state to be spiritual and follow the *shastra*. So this is to be done by the offender himself. When one inflicts punishment to oneself according to the *shastra*, it is called *prayashchitta*. In the absence of *prayashchitta*, the offender is bound to receive punishment either in the same life or in ensuing lives in the form of disease and other types of grief." In practice, one should consult one's guru, spiritual guide or a scholar of the *shastras* to receive recommendations for penance for a specific act.

Pilgrimage and prostration: (left) Pilgrims feed a camphor burner at the famed Yellamma ("Universal Mother") shrine in Karnataka State, India. (right) Buddhist pilgrims circle Mount Kailas in the Himalayas. Wearing wooden gloves and a sheepskin apron, they will prostrate, stand, take two steps forward, and prostrate again along the full 33-mile path encircling the sacred mountain.

A Satguru's Contemporary Experience

HINDUISM TODAY's founder, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, administered penance to devotees for over 40 years. Here are his insights on the subject based on his decades of experience.

THE GURU HAS TO KNOW the devotee and his family karma over a long period of time before *prayashchitta* is given. Otherwise, it may have the wrong effect.

Penance is for religious people, people who practice daily, know the philosophy and have a spiritual head of their family, people who genuinely want to reach a state of purity and grace. It is not for nonreligious people. Just as in the Catholic Church, penance is given to you by the spiritual preceptor. It is not a do-it-yourself, New Age kind of thing. Those who try to do it themselves may overdo it. It takes a certain amount of talking and counseling to gain an understanding of what is involved. Before doing any of the physical *prayashchittas*, I have devotees do the Maha Vasana Dahan Tantra—"great purification of the subconscious by fire"—writing down and then burning ten pages of memories, good and

bad, for each year of their life to the present day. This may automatically clear up events of the past. Also, I've experienced that sometimes just telling the confession to the guru is sufficient *prayashchitta* and nothing else is necessary. What they thought was bad was not bad at all, just normal happenings, but the conscience suffers until that fact is known.

This *prayashchitta* article [on the preceding five pages] we've done with great difficulty, the blessings of the Shankaracharya of Sringeri Mutt and the help of Swami Paramananda Bharati and Mrs. B.G. Sreelakshmi. It is just enough to know about *prayashchitta*. There is a lot in *Manu Dharma Shastras* which absolutely does not apply at this time.

Anger, I have observed, is the most difficult fault for people to overcome, because it comes in so many different forms—pouting, long silences, shouting, yelling, swearing. Some people are just angry all the time because they live in the lower nature, constantly engaged in mental criticism and arguments. Anger can eventually be controlled by putting a

sum of money—\$5.00, for example—in a jar each time one becomes angry and then donating that money to an orphanage or other charity. It soon

their parents. They put up a picture of the person who beat them—father, mother or teacher—and every day for 31 days place a flower in front of the picture and while doing so sincerely forgive the person in heart and mind. Some are able to see the experience as their own karma. They forgive their parents and experience a great deal of freedom. Others have so much hatred and resentment toward their parents they can't do it at all. This has also worked for someone who has a mental conflict with their employer. There is a severe penance, too, for him who beats his children, involving private self-punishment and public lectures against corporal punishment.

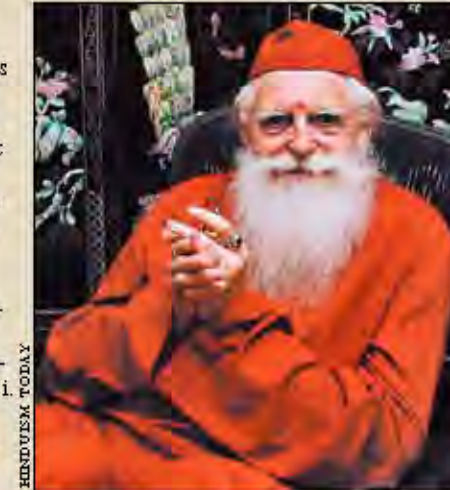
Preceptor in action: Subramuniyaswami sharing how he administers penance

gets too expensive to get angry. However, for devotees who are wealthy, that doesn't work. For them, I've found the penance of fasting for the next meal after they get angry works.

The "flower penance" has proven useful, especially to young people who have been beaten and abused by

For wife-beating, I advise *kavadi*, putting small spears in the body and circumambulating the temple 108 times. This is a very serious matter, one which has broken up the home and created a rotten birth in the next life. To atone for that is very difficult. Without resolve and remorse, no penance will work.

HINDUISM TODAY



PHOTOS BY THOMAS KELLY



ANGER Management

Seven Ways to Tame Your Most Destructive Emotion

By Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami



TWO CARS BANG FENDERS AT AN INTERSECTION; tempers flare and a fist fight breaks out. In a store nearby, a man stomps off in a fury, cursing the clerk for declining his credit card. In an apartment up the street, a mother screams at her daughter to clean up her room. Down the block, a schoolgirl pouts because her father won't let her date an older boy. Nearby, a man slaps his eight-year-old son because he won't sit still in the car. Anger is everywhere. It is the most powerful and hurtful emotion we possess. Yet, the average person succumbs to it helplessly, even willingly, lapsing into insane episodes now and again without thinking much about it. Many defend it as a tool they would not live without.

Anger is expressed in a wide range of ways. Low-minded individuals take delight in being angry with others and expressing that anger in aggressive and violent ways—gang wars, robbery, vandalism and more. They deliberately use anger and violence to get what they want from life. Then there are the mass of generally law-abiding people who live a normal, working life but are seriously angry on the inside about one thing or another and express that anger regularly in their words and actions. They are angry at life and have neither the means nor the motivation to eliminate this hurtful force from their lives.

The Perils Of Anger

The Tirukural Chapter 32
By Saint Tiruvalluvar, 200 BCE

1 It is restraint that restrains rage when it can injure. If it cannot harm, what does restraint really matter?

2 Wrath is wrong even when it cannot cause injury, but when it can, there is nothing more evil.

3 Forget anger toward all who have offended you, for it gives rise to teeming troubles.

4 Anger kills the face's smile and the heart's joy. Does there exist a greater enemy than one's own anger?

5 If a man be his own guard, let him guard himself against rage. Left unguarded, his own wrath will annihilate him.

6 Anger's fire engulfs all who draw near it, burning even friends and family who risk rescue.

7 As a man trying to strike the ground with his hand can hardly fail, just as surely will one who treasures his temper be destroyed.

8 Though others inflict wrongs as painful as flaming torches, it is good if a man can refrain from inflammatory tantrums.

9 If hostile thoughts do not invade his mind, all his other thoughts may swiftly manifest.

10 As men who have died resemble the dead, so men who have renounced rage resemble renunciates.

Anger and the Spiritual Path: Finally, there are those who are striving to live a life following spiritual principles but are at times unable to control their anger and as a result end up hurting others and breaching Hinduism's core principal of nonviolence, *ahimsa*, as well as creating new negative karmas to live through in the future. It is to these individuals, who are striving to control anger, even eliminate it from their pattern of behavior, that this chapter is addressed.

To improve our understanding and control of anger, it is helpful to look at the concept of the threefold nature of man: 1) superconscious or spiritual, 2) intellectual or mental and 3) instinctive or physical-emotional. It is the instinctive nature, the animal-like nature, that contains the tendencies to become angry and harm others. The goal of living a religious life is to learn to control these animal instincts—as well as the ramifications of the intellect and the pride of the ego—and thereby manifest one's spiritual nature. Spiritual striving produces gradual improvement in harnessing and transmuting our instincts, intellect and ego, with the entire process of soul evolution spanning many lifetimes.

Anger is the instinctive behavior of responding to challenging situations by becoming frustrated, upset, enraged to the point of

attacking others with words or fists. Webster compares the terms for anger as follows: "Anger is broadly applicable to feelings of resentful or revengeful displeasure; *indignation* implies righteous anger aroused by what seems unjust, mean or insulting; *rage* suggests a violent outburst of anger in which self-control is lost; *fury* implies a frenzied rage that borders on madness; *ire*, chiefly a literary word, suggests a show of great anger in acts, words, looks, etc.; *wrath* implies deep indignation expressing itself in a desire to punish or get revenge."

Learning to control anger is such an important part of harnessing the instinctive nature that the 2,200-year-old, South Indian scripture on ethics, the *Tirukural*, devotes an entire chapter to the subject. It is, in fact, the chapter that precedes "Avoidance of Injuring Others"—the order of these chapters itself suggesting that to successfully practice nonviolence we need to first control anger. The *Tirukural* warns that anger gives rise to teeming troubles. It kills the face's smile and the heart's joy. Left uncontrolled, it will annihilate you. It burns even friends and family who try to intervene, and easily leads to injuring others.

A few years ago we had a perfect opportunity to observe serious anger. Two carpenters were building a house next door to

the monastery. One carpenter, James, was more prone to anger than the other. Every few minutes, when something didn't work out right, he would react by swearing loudly and at length. About once a week the two men would have a huge argument and James would drop his tools, stomp off the job and drive away with tires squealing in defiance. It was definitely an interesting study in anger and human nature, showing how anger is simply an accepted part of life for many people.

Swami Budhananda (1917-1983) of the Ramakrishna Mission noted in a series of talks on anger (published in *Vedanta Kesari*, www.sriramakrishnamath.org): "The evil effects of anger are innumerable. The first thing that happens to an angry person is that he forgets the lessons of wisdom he has learnt in life. After that, he loses control over his thoughts and emotions. He becomes overactive, with his highly charged ego as his only guide. He loses his power of discrimination, sense of proportion, and becomes aggressive in manner, hostile to his own welfare. When anger becomes the second nature of a person, physical health and equanimity of mind suffer, and inner peace vanishes in a trice. Anger can destroy friendships, families, business partnerships, professional prospects. Communal and ethnic riots, arson,

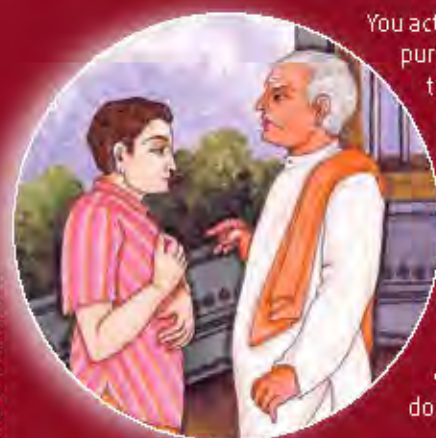
Wars, suicides, murder and many other forms of crime are basically products of anger. In fact, anger makes even a handsome person look ugly. I suggested to a friend, who is remorseful about his flashes of anger, that he keep a large mirror facing his office desk. In case the anger-prone person has a lively sense of humor, this mirror-therapy is likely to work."

People's natures are quite different in their tendency to anger. Some are usually calm, but occasionally flare up. Others anger quite easily. Many people are quite selective about whom they get angry with—perhaps just their spouse.

My Gurudeva, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, observed that anger is the most difficult fault to overcome, because it manifests in so many different forms: pouting, long silences, shouting, yelling, swearing and more. In *Living with Siva*, Gurudeva lists the eight forms of anger from the book *Angry All the Time* (see sidebar): 1) sneaky anger; 2) the cold shoulder; 3) blaming and shaming; 4) swearing and yelling; 5) demands and threats; 6) chasing and holding; 7) partly controlled violence; 8) blind rage. These are called the eight rungs on the ladder of violence, an analogy that Gurudeva found quite helpful in showing how anger can easily snowball. For example, an evening might start

Eight Rungs on the Ladder of Violence

1: Sneaky Anger



You act and speak normally but purposely neglect to do certain tasks others have asked you to do, pretending that you forgot all about the duties. Example: A teenage boy, upset with his father for firmly disciplining him, retaliates with sneaky anger by chronically "forgetting" to do his household chores.

2: The Cold Shoulder



You shun another person and make it clear you are mad about something. However, you absolutely refuse to let him or her know what it is. Example: A wife is upset with her husband for working late and, rather than talk the issue through, gives him the silent, cold shoulder for the entire evening.

3: Blaming and Shaming



You fault others for something that happened and then tell them they are "no good" in order to make them feel shame. Example: an employee makes a simple mistake at work, and her boss is upset. Rather than help resolve the problem, he points blame at her, demeaning and intimidating her with personal criticisms.

4: Swearing, Screaming, Yelling



You lose control over your speech and scream and yell at others. Those who have a habit of swearing are most prone to this form of anger. Example: A teenage girl has admitted to a minor wrongdoing at school. Her teacher, known for his foul mouth, yells at her harshly, using cruel, out-of-control words to punish her.

"The *chitta-vrittis*, the thought-waves, which being gross, we can appreciate and feel. They can be more easily controlled, but what about the finer instincts? How can they be controlled? When I am angry, my whole mind becomes a huge wave of anger. I feel it, see it, handle it, can easily manipulate it, can fight with it; but I cannot succeed perfectly in the fight until I can get down to its causes." SWAMI VIVEKANANDA, RAJA YOGA

with a mild expression of anger that seems harmless enough but soon escalates into shouting and swearing and culminates in physical violence.

Anger and the Chakras: We gain useful insights into the nature of anger and how to control it by relating it to the Hindu system of chakras, the subtle centers of consciousness within each individual (see sidebar). There are seven primary chakras along the spinal column and in the head. When our awareness is flowing through these chakras, consciousness is in the higher nature. The seven chakras, or *talas*, below the spine, down to the feet, are all seats of instinctive consciousness, the origin of fear, anger, jealousy, confusion, selfishness, absence of conscience and malice. The eighth rung on the ladder of violence—blind rage—corresponds to the second lower chakra, called *ottala*. Gurudeva explains, “Anger comes from despair or the threatening of one’s self-will. When people are in the consciousness of this chakra, they are even angry at God. With their wrath, they often strike out at those around them, leaving a trail of hurt feelings behind them. From sustained anger arises a persistent, even burning, sense of resentment.”

When someone goes into a blind rage, he has dropped far below the chakras of memory and reason—the *muladhara* and *svadhisthana*. Therefore it is no wonder that afterwards he may not even remember what happened. His consciousness was totally in the *ottala* chakra, having given up its normal faculties of memory and reason.

Many people think that sneaky anger and the cold shoulder are natural and harmless. Gurudeva warns that, while they are not as vicious as yelling and screaming or throwing objects against the wall, these practices stimulate the lower chakras and over time can easily lead to the more violent expressions of anger, as well as the experience of other lower-chakra emotions, such as fear and jealousy. For these reasons, it is best not to indulge in either sneaky anger or the cold shoulder. Sarcasm and cynicism can also be forms of anger. Gurudeva said, “People who are cynical are expressing their anger and contempt with snide remarks. They may seem to be joking, but their sharp feelings

come across anyway, which stimulates that lower chakra until one day their cynicism will turn into really good anger. Then they build up new karmas they never had before, which they will live with until they are faced with those karmas.”

Swearing is even more problematic, as it stimulates the lower chakras to a greater degree than sneaky anger, the cold shoulder or cynicism. Therefore, it is quite important in managing anger to break the habit of swearing.

Step One for Conquering Anger: For those on the spiritual path who are striving to control anger, there is an important first step. That is to acknowledge that anger is a serious problem that easily leads to violence and is a quality that should be totally absent from those dedicated to making progress in their spiritual life.

I gave the following advice via e-mail to a devotee who was working to refrain from expressing occasional anger toward a parent: “Thank you for sharing the details regarding your angry encounters with your parent. I would suggest you reflect on the seriousness of disharmony in the home. It is taking a few steps backward in spiritual progress. When you do *sadhana*, you move forward. But if you become angry regularly, you step backward, and as a result you could end up standing still. It is like trying to save money for a special purpose. You save for a while, but then become angry, which is like spending what you saved for the last month. It is difficult to make your financial goal. By taking anger more seriously, you are more motivated to avoid it at all costs.”

The devotee recently e-mailed again saying the advice had helped her cope with the force of anger. She had taken the first step—acknowledging that it is a serious problem, an unacceptable mode of behavior for those on the spiritual path.

Seven Remedies: With this resolve firmly in mind, she was ready to take the second step, which is to apply remedies to improve her behavior. On pages 274–277, in the illustrated sidebar, we offer seven remedies. The first is to affirm the Hindu philosophy that everything in the universe is perfect; the entire physical, mental, emotional and spiritual flow of events is moving in perfect harmony and exquisite coordination according to the divine laws of karma and dharma. Each happening is as perfect

as an ocean wave or a butterfly’s wing. Anger is an instinctive-emotional protest to what is happening at a particular moment. “Things are just not right!” anger declares. The source of peace and contentment is the opposite sentiment—a wholesome, intelligent acceptance of life’s conditions, based on the understanding that God has given us a perfect universe in which to grow and learn, and each challenge or seeming imperfection we encounter is an opportunity for spiritual advancement. Gurudeva wrote: “We are all growing toward God, and experience is the path. Through experience we mature out of fear into fearlessness, out of anger into love, out of conflict into peace, out of darkness into light and union in God.”

The second remedy is a first-aid technique to apply during angry outbursts. It is to visualize light blue flooding out from the center of your spine into your aura, displacing the blackish reds that anger automatically displays in the colorful field of subtle energy radiating within and around your body. Mystically, this has the effect of moving your awareness out of the angry state of mind into a more peaceful mood. The third remedy is to worship Lord Ganesha, the elephant-faced Lord of Dharma, a compassionate God, ever available to assist embodied souls with immediate needs to further their evolution. Remedy four is a penance, setting aside a specified sum of money every time you experience anger. The fifth remedy is to skip the next meal if you become angry. These two sacrifices are designed to remold deep-seated subconscious patterns, called *vasanas*, convincing your subconscious that you are serious about controlling your anger, and gradually subduing any occurrence of wrath. Remedy six, the flower penance, is a way of letting go of angry feelings that you hold toward another person. Offering flowers with

Wheels of Consciousness

The fourteen chakras are centers of force and consciousness within the inner bodies of man—with corresponding nerve plexuses, ganglia and glands in the physical body. Where we reside in the range of chakras deeply influences our state of mind, our actions and reactions. Anger is the predominant consciousness of the *vitala* chakra, second among the seven lower chakras, all of which are instinctive realms of distress, darkness and confusion.

- 1 SAHASRARA... Illumination—CROWN OF HEAD
- 2 AJNA... Divine sight—THIRD EYE
- 3 VISHUDDHA... Divine love—THROAT
- 4 ANAHATA... Direct cognition—HEART
- 5 MANIPURA... Willpower—SOLAR PLEXUS
- 6 SVADISHTHANA... Reason—BELOW NAVEL
- 7 MULADHARA... Memory—BASE OF SPINE
- 8 ATALA... Fear & lust—HIPS
- 9 VITALA... Raging anger—THIGHS
- 10 SUTALA... Retaliatory jealousy—KNEES
- 11 TALATALA... Prolonged confusion—CALVES
- 12 RASATALA... Selfishness—ANKLES
- 13 MAHATALA... Consciencelessness—FEET
- 14 PATALA... Malice & murder—SOLES OF FEET

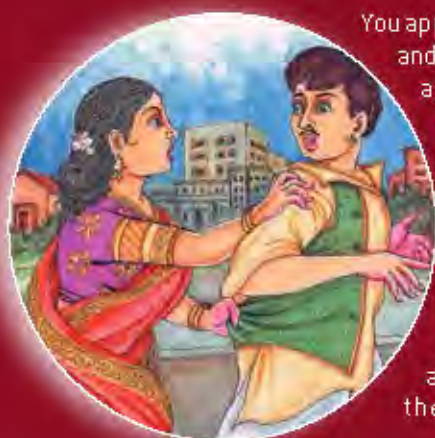


5: Demands and Threats



You demand that others behave as you want them to or threaten you will do something drastic if they don't, such as hurt them or yourself. Example: An argument between two business partners gets out of hand and reaches the point where the younger threatens to beat up his associate unless he gets his way.

6: Chasing and Holding



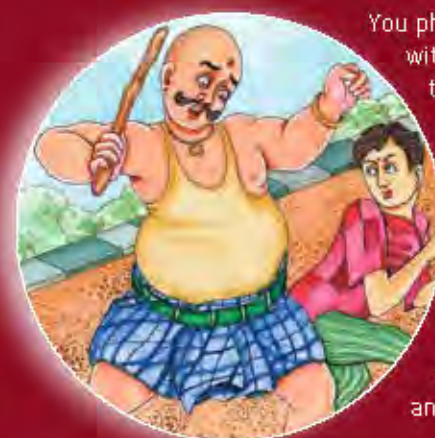
You approach or pursue others and physically restrain them against their will and prevent them from leaving your presence. Example: A woman's fiancée has been accused of seeing another woman. Incensed, she follows him to work, grabs him desperately and insists they talk about the problem right now.

7: Partly Controlled Violence



You physically strike someone for the purpose of forcing him or her to do what you want, but without losing control. Example: A young boy is caught stealing at a neighbor's home. The owner, outraged, confronts the boy and swats him several times with a stick, wrongly thinking that this will reform the errant youth.

8: Blind Rage



You physically attack a person with total loss of control, to the extent that when you return to normal consciousness, you may not even remember the incident. Example: A sassy teenager deliberately insults an overweight stranger. Instead of just scowling, the fiery man flies into a blind rage and beats him mercilessly.

a loving heart has the effect of dissolving the resentment and awakening forgiveness—be it toward a parent, spouse, employer, sibling or friend. The seventh remedy is to perform three kindly acts toward someone who has disturbed you. For a loved one or close acquaintance, the acts can be performed openly. For others, such as business associates, employers or fellow employees, your good deeds may be done subtly, even without their knowledge. It may be difficult to fulfill this, as it requires you to go against the instinctive compulsion to hold on to hard feelings. But acting kindly toward offenders releases you from the grip of seething anger, as surely as the sun dispels a morning fog, dissolving it in the light of higher consciousness. The seven remedies are designed to help seekers objectify their anger, to see it in a clear, detached manner, as a force that they have the power to harness and transmute into higher forms of expression and ultimately be free of it altogether.

Diet and Ayurveda: What we eat influences our state of consciousness and where we are in the chakras more than most people realize. The Hindu ideal of following a strict vegetarian diet has many benefits, including lessening the tendency to become angry. Eating meat, fish, fowl and eggs, on the other hand, opens the door to lower consciousness and makes it harder to stay out of the states of fear, anger, jealousy and the subsequent remorseful emotions that follow. Temperament is largely a matter of diet. The *Chandogya Upanishad* (7.26.2) teaches: “When the food is pure, mind becomes pure. When the mind becomes pure, memory becomes

Anger's Rousing Threat . . . and Retorts from Patience, Universal Love and Discrimination



ANGER: “I will make the people blind and deaf. I will overpower them with wrath and suffocate them with rage. I will catch hold of even wise men. They shall neither harken to what concerns their own happiness, nor reflect what they had read in the scriptures. In a moment I can destroy even the learned, the famous, those who are attentive to duties, the charitable and the mighty

potentates. I can infuse fury, resentment, wrath, indignation into the minds of all in the twinkling of an eye. I am very powerful. I will disturb the *tapas* of the aspirant and even yogis and destroy serenity. **ATMAN**, the soul, despaired, “Alas, who will help me now?” **KSHAMA**, the virtue of Patience, spoke up: “I will! I will pull

out the venomous tooth of this demon, Anger.” **VISHVA PREMA**, Universal Love, cried out, “I will! I am the water to quench the fire of anger.” Finally, **VIVEKA**, Discrimination, roared: “I will! When I rise, anger dies.”

Swami Sivananda
founder, Divine Life Society

firm. And when a man is in possession of a firm memory, all the bonds which tie him down to the world are loosened.” A vegetarian diet helps put us in touch with our higher consciousness and is therefore quite helpful in increasing our control over anger, as well as the other lower states of mind.

In the healthcare industry, anger is viewed as an insidious malady that, if not harnessed, leads to serious illness, causing high blood pressure, various diseases and even fatal heart attacks. It is addressed with prescription drugs, aromatherapy, massage

and homeopathy. The Hindu medical science, ayurveda, views anger as a primary sign of imbalance of the three bodily humors, known as *doshas*. Dr. Virender Sodhi of Bellevue, Washington (www.ayurvedicscience.com), explained, “Anger is under the control of the *pittha dosha*. *Pittha* is intelligence, anger, digestion, fire, sight and so on. At the mental level, we have four drives: anger, attachment, ego and desire for sex. Although all these are normal animal behaviors, imbalance in these leads to imbalance of their respective *doshas*. Just as attachment increases *kapha*, anger increases *pittha*. Imbalance in *pittha dosha* can cause excessive anger,

liver maladies, hypertension, etc. Balance is achieved by calming yoga, *shitali* pranayama, walks, mantra, self analysis and diverting the anger into a different form. Ayurvedic medicine also advises cooling foods and environment.”

Dr. Vasant Lad, director of the Ayurvedic Institute (www.ayurveda.com) in Albuquerque, New Mexico, offers basic remedies for anger in *The Complete Book of Ayurvedic Home Remedies*:

“*Pittha* is necessary for right understanding and judgment, but when it gets disturbed or out of balance, it creates misunderstanding and wrong judgment, leading to anger and hostility. Here are several simple home remedies to cool down that hot *pittha* and keep tempers under control.

“**Diet:** Perhaps most important, a person who becomes angry easily or often should follow the *pittha*-pacifying diet, especially avoiding hot, spicy and fermented foods, citrus fruit and sour fruit. Favor simple, bland foods and cool drinks, and avoid alcohol and drinks with caffeine.

“**Keep Cool:** It's also not recommended for people with a *pittha* body type to take saunas or steam baths, to get overheated from exercise or sports, or to be in too much direct sun.

“**Oil Massage:** Rub some *bhringanj* oil or coconut oil on your scalp and on the soles of the feet. That will help to bring down the excess *pittha*. You can do this every night before getting in bed to regularly moderate *pittha*.

“**Sandalwood Oil:** Another simple and effective way to help balance your emotions is to place a drop of sandalwood essential oil on the third eye area between your eyebrows, as well as on the throat, breastbone, navel, temples and wrists.

“**Herbal Teas:** Take ½ teaspoon of chamomile and 1 teaspoon of fresh, finely chopped cilantro leaves and steep them in 1 cup hot water for about 10 minutes. Allow this tea to cool before you drink it. You can drink it three times a day, after each meal.

Seven Remedies for the Habit of Anger

Have you ever suggested to someone who was furious at you that he shouldn't get so angry? Perhaps you offered, “It certainly doesn't make me feel very good when you unleash that force on me! And it's not good for you either!” What was the result? He just got madder, right? “How dare you tell me not to get angry, you #@*%\$! !” The point is, no one can change a person except that person himself. We only change when we want to change. Are you ready? Controlling anger could well be viewed as the very first exercise in spiritual life, because it stands so squarely between the soul and peace of mind while living in a physical body. Nothing is more fundamental to conquer, and doing so unleashes great energy and provides emotional stability for all other endeavors. The work is well worth the effort. So, here are some sharp tools—powerful enough to make even a nice person nicer. They are philosophical, penitential, meta-

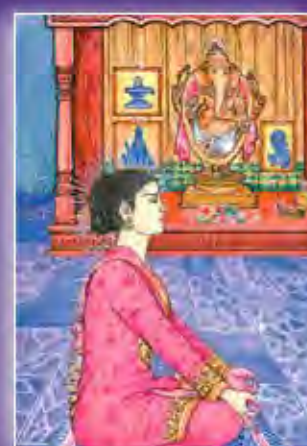
1: Affirm: Everything Is Perfect!



From a mountaintop perspective, God is everywhere, in all things, and everything is in a state of balance and perfection at every point in time. Affirm this Hindu wisdom regularly to cultivate patience and wise acceptance, even of situations that tend to arouse anger. To do so, be seated, close your eyes, breathe deeply and affirm quietly to yourself, “I'm all right right now, and everything is as it should be from a mountaintop point of view.”

“When your subconscious has been cleared of past reactionary patterns and reprogrammed thoroughly, you do not take exception to things that happen in the world. In understanding, you love everyone and embrace every event. You intuitively sense just what they are all going through, because you have in your memory banks knowledge of each happening acquired during all the lives you have ever lived.” SARGURU SHIVAYA SUBRAMUNYASWAMI

2: Fill Your Aura with Light Blue 3: Worship Lord Ganesha



If you are overtaken by anger and resentment—emotions which fill your aura with blackish red, streaked with yellow—sit in meditation, breathe and visualize light blue entering your aura and surrounding your body. The light blue will neutralize the fiery reds, and before you know it the anger and resentment will be gone. Simply relax and visualize soothing blue radiating out from the center of your spine into your inner and outer aura.



The worship of Lord Ganesha is helpful in overcoming all emotional problems, including anger. As He is seated on the *muladhara* chakra, tuning in to His *shakti* helps raise us up into the *muladhara* chakra and therefore out of anger and fear into a calm, stable state of mind. In fact, you can slowly seal off these lower states of mind and keep awareness permanently lifted above fear and anger through the regular worship of Lord Ganesha.

Sage Reflections

I will permit no man to narrow
and degrade my soul by
making me hate him.

Booker T. Washington

If you are patient in one moment
of anger, you will escape a
hundred days of sorrow.

Chinese proverb

Nor he who owns the least of things,
nor he whom anger chains, can
ever pass through maya's gates.
So, give these up, sannyasin bold!
Say "Om Tat Sat, Om!"

Swami Vivekananda

There is nobody who lives
happily with anger.

Shantideva

When we speak with hatred and
anger, it leads to unhappiness
pain and misery. So one should
always be soft spoken.

Yajur Veda 3, 54

If we could read the secret
histories of our enemies, we
should find sorrow and suffering
enough to disarm all hostility.

Longfellow

Suppose you have a weakness of
getting angry easily. Now, what you
should do is this: Once you become
normal again, go and sit in the family
shrine room if you have one, or sit in
solitude; then regret and repent your
own anger and sincerely pray to your
beloved deity or to Mother Nature,
seeking help to get rid of it.

Shri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi

To remove anger is not so difficult
as to decide to remove it and
to maintain that decision.

Sri Aurobindo

There should be no yelling in the
home unless there is a fire.

David O. McKay

A nagging sense of discontent, a
feeling of being dissatisfied, or of
something being not right, is the fuel
that gives rise to anger and hatred.
Generally, this discontent arises
in us when we feel that either we
ourselves, or someone we love, or
our close friends are being treated
unfairly or threatened: people are
being unjust toward us or our close
friends.... The idea is to stop it at

an early stage, rather than wait for
that anger or hatred to arise fully.

The Dalai Lama

Resentment is like taking poison and
waiting for the other person to die.

Malachy McCourt

Worshippers of Siva who are victim to
anger or hatred refrain from medita-
tion, *japa* and kundalini yoga. They
confess sins, do penance and engage
in bhakti and karma yoga to raise
consciousness. Aum Namah Sivaya.

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

Ghee Nasya: Dip your little finger into a jar of *brahmi ghee* (or plain ghee) and lubricate the inside of your nostrils with a small amount. (Make sure your nails are trimmed so you don't scratch yourself.) Then gently inhale the ghee upward. This sends a calming message to the brain.

Shitali Pranayama: Make a tube of your tongue; breathe deeply through your mouth down into your belly, hold the breath for a few seconds; exhale through your nose. Do about 12 repetitions.

Yoga Postures: Good yoga asanas for *pitta* include the camel, cobra, cow, boat, goat and bridge poses. Avoid the headstand or other inverted poses, such as the plow and shoulder stand.

Meditate: There is an ancient method of meditation that involves watching your every emotion come and go, without either naming it or trying to tame it. As the feelings arise, breathe deeply and exhale the emotions out."

Anger and Spiritual Striving: Anger is a natural emotion, a protective function of the instinctive mind, not to be vilified or feared. It is a part of our nature, and it is normal to express

it—that is, if we are content to live on the instinctive level of our being, which many people are. But each soul inevitably reaches a point where it seeks to harness the natural instincts. Gurudeva explained, "Anger is also, like fear, an instinctive control, and at one time served its purpose. The onrush of anger served to protect man's private interests in critical situations by injecting adrenaline into his blood and thus preparing him for defense. But as man evolves closer to his real, actinic being, he discovers that actinic love, understanding, compassion and wisdom are higher qualities than anger."

Managing anger is important for anyone who seeks success at sophisticated endeavors and stable, wholesome relationships. For aspirants seeking self-transformation on the spiritual path, it is absolutely essential, for only when the lower nature is subdued can the divine nature be fully expressed.

Daily spiritual efforts designed to bring forth the divine nature are known as *sadhana*, such as *japa*, meditation and yoga. As Gurudeva wrote, *sadhana*, spiritual discipline, is "the mystical,

mental, physical and devotional exercise that enables us to dance with Siva by bringing inner advancement, changes in perception and improvements in character. *Sadhana* allows us to live in the refined and cultured soul nature, rather than in the outer, instinctive or intellectual spheres." But, Gurudeva warned, every time you become angry, you destroy one month's worth of spiritual striving and practice, or *sadhana*. So, if you don't control anger, performing *sadhana* is a waste of time. Hence, the number-one *sadhana* is anger management. Gurudeva is adamant that seekers refrain from any serious meditative practices until anger and other lower emotions have been harnessed. "Those who remain prone to anger should not do *raja* yoga or any form of intensive mantra, *japa*, or pranayama amplification of the energies into higher chakras—lest that collective energy plummet into the corresponding lower chakras and be vented through fear, anger and jealousy. Rather, they should perform the always healing *vasana dha tantra* [writing down and burning recollections of the past] and confine themselves to karma yoga, such as clean-

ing in and around the temple and picking flowers for the pujas. These simple acts of *charya* [humble service] are recommended, but should not be extended to intense worship. Then, and only then, their life will be in perspective with the philosophy of Sanatana Dharma and begin to become one with Siva's perfect universe. Brahmadvara, the door to the seven chakras below the *muladhara*, will then be sealed off as their experiential patterns settle into the traditional perspective of how life should be and each individual should behave within it."

When working to harness the instinctive nature, what is it that tells us how well we are doing? It is the subtle irritation, the seed of wrath, that precedes every form of anger, from the cold shoulder to blind rage. Viewed in this way, the impulse to anger is—at the beginning of the path, the intermediate stages and even subtly at the upper reaches—our astute teacher, signaling to us each split-second opportunity to be more patient, more understanding, more compassionate and to find a better way to cope with tense situations and keep closed the door to the lower chakras.

4: Pay for Each Burst of Ire



An effective and practical financial remedy is to put a sum of money, such as five dollars, in a jar each time you become angry, and later donate that money to a favorite orphanage or temple. Consistently performed, this penance soon makes it too expensive to get angry! This remedy impresses the subconscious mind that expressions of anger have karmic costs, and that anger can be completely eliminated by sincere efforts to overcome it.

5: Don't Eat the Next Meal



For those who can easily afford to put five dollars in a jar frequently, an alternate penance is fasting. Each time anger arises, simply skip the next meal. Denying yourself a meal has a potent impact, deeply impressing your subconscious mind. If you follow this without fail, the instinctive nature soon catches on that whenever it expresses anger it will soon experience hunger, and in this way is motivated to better control this destructive emotion.

6: Offer Flowers



Put up a picture of the person you are angry with and for 31 days place a flower in front of the picture. While doing so, sincerely forgive the person in heart and mind. When it becomes difficult to offer the flower of forgiveness, because hurtful memories come up from the subconscious mind, write down the memories and burn the paper in a trash can. Say, "I forgive you, for I know that you gave back to me the karma that I set in motion."

7: Perform Three Kindly Acts



If you have gotten upset with another person, do three kindly acts to make up for it. This releases you from your anger and guilt even if he or she is unaware of your good deeds. Example: A husband shouts abusively at his wife after returning from work. After apologizing, he takes her dining to a place of her choosing, buys her an item that she needs for the kitchen and gives her some freetime by taking care of the younger children for a half-day.

Silence Is Golden

ART WOLFE



Oasis: The French Polynesian island of Bora Bora, a quiet citadel in the midst of the central South Pacific, the ocean called Peaceful

Mind and Emotions Are Calmed As We Observe Mauna, Restraint of Speech

MANY THINK OF SILENCE SIMPLISTICALLY, AS JUST THE absence of noise, or not speaking words. But silence, like life itself, is more complex and subtle than that. We all seek silent moments, islands in the sea of sound, to reflect upon and reap the lessons from life's experiences. Usually our quest for quietude is an outer search. We vacation to paradise or hike into the hills to escape the daily din. While Hindu saints and scriptures do emphasize the importance of serene surroundings as an aid to introspection, they stress more the cultivation of silence within. Outer peace is simply a means to help us find inner silence. Ultimately, we learn to maintain and enjoy our innate serenity regardless of the cacophony that surrounds us. This is the basis of the Hindu practice of *mauna*, the vow to remain silent, and it is why some subdue speech altogether. *Mauna* is not the exclusive province of the sage. Brilliant orators and well-to-do intellectuals have also chosen to curb their speech. Mahatma Gandhi was perhaps the most prominent public figure to observe *mauna*. He tamed his tongue every Monday, communicating on that day only through writing.

The late Swami Nirmalananda of Karnataka had served the Army Postal Service in Europe during World War II. He later held various government posts in India. He travelled the globe and studied well the world's religions and philosophies. In the end, his burning search for truth culminated in silence. "If you desire to live in peace," he said, "hear all that falls on your ears, see all that appears before your eyes, realize that everything is in accordance with the eternal law of nature, and be silent." He did not speak for eleven years, and thereafter spoke sparingly. When he did, it was with clarity and conviction. "Wisdom to me is not a set of words, but freshness and emptiness of the mind. Empty the mind by self-observation, self-awareness and inner attention. Thus make the mind shine like a mirror. Then nothing is seen or known but the limitless radiance of eternity. This is a wonderful

source of ever-renewed joy and inspiration beyond words."

Mauna is practiced in varying degrees by spiritual leaders, ascetics, aspirants and householders alike, throughout India and abroad. Still, popular belief holds that the vow of silence can be followed only by ascetics and sages, that it lies beyond the capability of ordinary mortals. HINDUISM TODAY correspondent, Choodie Shivaram of Bangalore, dispels this misconception. "I have seen ordinary people observing *mauna* in daily life. A very orthodox elderly cook in our house during my school days strictly observed *mauna* one day of the week. No matter how much we joked about her stony silence, she never budged. So, too, my great grand-aunt, Kadakka, observed *mauna* on certain days of the week. She insisted that we children keep perfect silence at least during meals. Of course, despite our valiant efforts, our childish giggles could not be contained."

Choodie continues, "In my childhood, an old friend of my father, Shri Chandrasekhar, would chat with me and my young friends. I had not seen him for many years, and I was shell-shocked last year when he refused to talk to me. Only later did I learn that he was observing *mauna*. Now in his eighties, Chandrasekhar spends most of his time at the Ramakrishna Math. He has been observing *mauna* for the past 17 years. Although with a wife and children, he speaks only for two hours on the first of every month. Even then, he is very choosy about to whom he speaks, and how much. Always clad in a white *dhoti* and half-sleeved white shirt, a sling bag over his shoulder, simplicity is his way of life."

Choodie heard Chandrasekhar's insights on his singular talking day last month: "Often people take me to be some worthless being looking at my dress and silence. But it just does not matter to me. I began by talking for only one hour a day. After about one year, I began talking only once in a fortnight and gradually made it once a month. Now, I speak only two hours once a month. I plan to give it up totally. Besides talking, my communication is limited to writ-

ten conversation with the *brahmacharis* in the ashram. That, too, is only done when I have to pass on some message or give instructions. I do not communicate with anyone else. I'm only a listener now. Silence teaches you to listen."

Prema Pandurang of Chennai is perhaps an unlikely candidate to have spontaneously taken a 41-day vow to remain mute. Premia is a famous religious lecturer in South India. She was a professor of English at Chennai's Presidency College for twenty-three years. She told HINDUISM TODAY's publisher how silence came to her. "For a long time, I had been a speaker. One day I woke up and said, 'Now, let me see how it sounds—how it feels—if I don't speak.' It was not that anything in the world disgusted me. It was more the thought that there was so much sound around me, and I was creating most of it. I said, 'Let me be in silence and watch.'" Premia found the silence profound, and wrote down her inspirations in a small book, *Reflection on Silence*. She now continues her silence every Tuesday.

As austere as *maunis* may seem, most still shy away from the absolute vow. The strictest observance of *mauna*, utter silence, can seem unnatural to onlookers and impossible for those wishing to attempt it. Such a deliberate denial of human interaction is a stark withdrawal from a world structured and sustained with words. In *Sadhus, The Holy Men of India* (1991, Brijhasi, New Delhi), author Ramesh Bedi describes an encounter with a most extreme *mauni*. "Sadhus who take the vow of silence include those who will condescend to communicate with others by gesture or by writing things down and also those who take the absolute vow of silence, the *kashtha mauna* vow. *Kashtha* means wood. So this is the vow 'to be silent like a log of wood.' The *kashtha mauna* sadhu will partake in no communication at all with others. Only very penitential ones are capable of undertaking this vow. One such *sadhu* I encountered in 1968, in the foothills of the Shivalik Hills off Haridwar, even refused to accept the fruits and edibles offered to him. Having offered him a handful of mulberries once, I returned the next week to discover that these lay where I had left them. He didn't even look at them. Nearby villagers would regularly bring offerings of food, but the ascetic ate none of it, living on the wild fruits he found in the jungle."

More common are those who observe complete silence for shorter periods and those who communicate through writing. Baba Hari Dass of the Mount Madonna Center of California currently "talks" tersely through a book-sized chalkboard. But even he abandoned all outward expression for a period. "I was in *kashtha mauna* for one year. I did not use anything to communicate. There is always an advantage in removing the mind from worldly attachments, whatever the means. *Mauna* is one of the means." Baba gave up speaking over forty years ago. Sri Tiruchi Maha Swamikal of Kailash Ashram, Bangalore, undertook *mauna* for two years while living in a cave in the region of

Tayumaneshwarar Temple, Tamil Nadu. The purpose of his vow was to "contemplate deeply upon his upcoming divine mission." Swami tells stories of the many snakes encountered in the cave. As they passed him by harmlessly, he found that even wild animals are tamed by a true practitioner of *mauna*.

Quest for quiet: To abruptly stop speaking may be too stern a step for most. But the benefits of *mauna* can be obtained in less arduous ways (see the Seven Sadhanas of Silence, pp. 280-281). If you have the desire, dedicating some time to silence can be easy. Dada J.P. Varwani advises, "First thing when you wake up in the morning, observe silence for at least ten minutes. This will help you to gather your thoughts." Sri Tiruchi Swami recommends that people with busy schedules fix a day or two in a week, or an hour or two in a day, for *mauna*. He elaborated to HINDUISM TODAY, "An ordinary devotee can observe *mauna* daily during before or after the morning worship (personal or communal) for a duration of about one to three hours. One can also be silent for one to three hours during the evenings before or after sunset. Silence can be practiced one or two days a week while keeping aloof from one's normal schedules and activities. A visit to the temple can become extra special by including the discipline of not speaking. Also, one can make the vow of silence a part of one's pilgrimage. All days are suitable for *mauna*. The longer we can detach ourselves mentally from daily trivialities, the better."

Recalling her own profound experience of silence, Premia Pandurang implores, "There is so much stress and tension today that everyone must observe silence—some time away from mother, father, child and wife, friends and everyone—at least a half-hour every day with no telephone calls in some corner of the house where one can see nature. Just sit and silently think about what you are doing. You'll be different. It is necessary. It brings your high blood pressure down, makes your pulse beat normally. You start recollecting whatever you've done and you start planning for what you're going to do. For this introspection you need silence, and that is why for the past eight years I've observed silence on Tuesdays."

One of the foremost reasons to curtail conversation is to conserve energy. Abstinence from speech transmutes the creative energies of the mind in the same way that sexual abstinence, *brahmacharya*, transmutes the physical energies. Baba Hari Dass explains, "We talk only by exhalation. The more we talk, the more we have to exhale and the more life energy we lose. Energy is lost primarily in two ways—by sex and by talking. The origin of both sound and sex is the *muladhara* chakra at the base of the spine. When we talk, we use tremendous energy. This can be felt if you stop talking for a few days and then start talking again. The energy we preserve through silence can be used for meditation."

A more mundane impetus for *mauna* is simply to stay out of

Stony silence: Quiet boulders study the Australian sky



ART WOLFE

Speech needs company, silence needs solitude. Speech wants to conquer others, silence helps conquer oneself.

Speech makes friends or foes, silence befriends all. Speech demands respect, silence commands it.

Speech is earth-bound, silence is heaven-bound. Speech educates, silence exalts. Speech is subjective, silence objective.

Speech has regrets, silence none. Speech has limitations, silence is boundless. Speech needs effort, silence a lot more.

Speech is human, Silence is Divine. While speaking you are heard by creatures, in silence you hear the creator.

Silence leads to a stillness of the mind, then to introspection, then to self-cleansing, finally to liberation.

Premia Pandurang

trouble. Chandrasekhar confessed, "I have committed many mistakes. I have been harsh to people and have hurt many with my speech. Finally, I realized the importance of silence. In *mauna*, the mind projects all of our faults. They come like flashes. We begin to look within and see our mistakes. This helps us to rectify ourselves. This can solve many of life's petty problems. The natural mind is filled with compassion and Divinity. I think *mauna* is the first step towards realizing God. It detaches us from worldly pleasures."

In this regard, Rev. Swami Satohidenanda, founder of Integral Yoga Institute, shares a Sanskrit proverb—"Mauna kalaka nasti." He explains, "*Mauna* means silence; *kalaka* means problems or quarrels and *nasti* means nonexistent. So this saying tells us, 'When you are silent, there are no quarrels.' By talking, we create problems because we do not know how much to talk, how to talk, what to talk and when to talk. So, the immediate benefit of *mauna* is to avoid problems. The other benefits then follow. The silence of speech leads to the silence of mind, because if you decide not to speak, what good are thoughts? Every time a thought comes, you cannot express it with words, so the mind ultimately says, 'Alright, what is the point of my thinking?' You get into a thoughtless state. But there is one more *mauna*, the bodily silence. That means you don't move around. You stay in one place. That helps the silences of speech and mind also." Swami's institute holds occasional silent retreats where participants study yoga and meditation, all the while remaining silent. During one retreat, he jested in his jovial way, "Observe all, but refrain from talking I will do all the talking for you. Whatever you want to say, just leave it to me... I think you cannot talk too much about silence."

The *Ribhu Gita* tells us, "Sitting in silence is the holy ablution. Sitting in silence is the *japa*. Sitting in silence is the worship. Sitting in silence is the highest. Read silently to yourself about the experience that all is Brahman. In a moment, all the *punya*, merit, which would result from a million *asvamedha*, horse sacrifices, can be obtained" (verses 16.42 and 33.29).

Quiet inspiration: L to R: The ever-silent Baba Hari Dass of California. Karnataka's late Swami Nirmalananda, speechless for 11 years. The late Homi Baba of Banaras, silent for 40 years. A *sadhu* offers a mute blessing. Prema Panchurung, silent for 41 days in 1996.

Seven Sadhanas of Silence

Some silence is golden, others are silver and a lot prove out just to be heavy metal—copper, iron, zinc or tin. A few kinds of silence are brazen brass. Silence can be learned. Let's begin at the bottom, by silencing the brass. To do this there is a *sadhana*, spiritual discipline, the first of the Seven Sadhanas of Silence.

The brass *sadhana* is to conquer jealousy, which bemoans, "She has more than I do. He gets everything he asks for, while I get nothing or very little. It's unfair." This noise goes on daily in the mind of those are in the jealousy chakra (*sutala*), located in the knees, which has to stop spinning in the astral areas of the inner mind to make way for peace of mind. How do we do this? It is easy. Just begin to stop talking to yourself about what is unfair.

Let all mental arguments go. Drop the subject. Be silent about the issue. Such a silence provides a place for harmony of minds, while too much noisy complaining about "me and mine" gives no room for others.

The silence of tin is an even worse din. Have you ever heard a child beat on a tin can? That's how the force of anger sounds, "clank, clank, clank." Not musical, not melodious, not even nice. The noise of anger, which vibrates in the *vitata* chakra located in the thighs, has to be quieted to enjoy even the smallest sliver of silver peace. How do we do this? Well, it is expensive. A monetary sum is paid for each outburst or even unexpressed wave of anger. A jar, labeled "anger penance," is established in the shrine room, into which a monetary sum is placed each time anger is experienced—the greater the expression, the larger the sum. The money collected is sent to the charity of one's choice on the first day of each month.

The silence of zinc comes next. It is quieting the force of fear. Yes, fear can produce a very noisy mind. But it is not beyond being controlled and courted into obedience. Fear creates. Often we create what we fear and make it happen by fearing that it might. We give it that energy, that possibility in our life. Fear vibrates in the *atala* chakra, located in the hips. To bring fear under control is a powerful accomplishment. How do we do this? One way is through the power of affirmation, reprogramming the subconscious mind. An affirmation is a series of positive words in line with a visual concept repeated time and time again. It can be repeated mentally or, pref-

erably, verbally. Here is an effective affirmation for overcoming fear. "I am the complete master of all my forces. My spiritual energies govern and control the force fields wherever I am for the highest good. Through understanding, being a pure soul, full of spirited life, I am filled and thrilled with unlimited power now and forever." While repeating this affirmation, visualize a bright white protective shell around your outer aura with a round opening at the top. As you persist, the trembling voice of fear will desist.

Now, the silence of iron. Many of us have strong memories, which become stronger as years go by. As strong as iron, they are there, rusting away in the *maladhara* chakra at the base of the spine. How do we silence memory? Write down or type in your computer all that you want to forget. Then burn up the paper. Writing down problems and burning them in any ordinary fire brings them from the subconscious into the external mind, releasing the suppressed emotion as the fire consumes the paper. The memory still exists, but it has lost its emotional power.

With the past thus stilled, we come to the silence of copper. We are climbing up the ladder of the chakras when we try to silence our reason, which in most of us is the noise of asking rhetorical and intellectual questions over and over again. Questions that have no answers. "Why did he do that? Does he not know better?" And on and on and on. It is important for seekers to silence the tendency to rationalize, to explain away, to excuse and defend the ego. To silence this *sadashisthana* chakra, located at the kidney level, some basic *yo ga* must be done to empower the higher self. Controlled breathing, pranayama, helps harness and slow down the prana, energy, that spins this chakra, as does hatha yoga. Sit quietly with the spine in a straight line. Breathe naturally, as a baby breathes, by using the diaphragmatic muscles below the solar plexus. Inhale. The diaphragm pushes the stomach wall out, as the lower lungs inflate. Exhale. Relaxing the diaphragm, the air is expelled. Then pull the diaphragm in to push out the last bit of air. Nine counts in, hold one, nine counts out—this is a basic *sadhana* for the silence of copper.

With the intellect quieted a bit, we can seek the silence of silver, stilling the willpower located at the solar-plexus *manipura* chakra, which spins constantly, being the nerve center that interconnects all the forces of the physical and astral bodies. How to quiet willpower? Competitiveness and aggression must stop, for these direct the prana, or energies, down to the lower chakras. The force of willfulness in its negative expression makes noises about self preservation—"Take care of me first and forget others." This can be counteracted by the practice of speaking only that which is true, kind, helpful and necessary. The silver *sadhana* is to use willpower positively to

control the tongue, to be a helpmate to silence by speaking little, and never boasting of ambitions or attainments.

With the willpower subdued, the silence of gold comes into view—without the L, it is God. So get the L out of it. Here silence is truly the voice of God. To quiet the *anahata* chakra, heart center, of understanding, soul knowing, vision and peaceful thoughts is not to be a metaphysical know-it-all. It means not being a prophet or big ego in speaking about how others should live, but rather silently living the example of how one should be.

Then we come to the platinum *vishuddha* chakra, in the throat. Here resides the force of divine love. Love is understanding, forgiveness, compassion and benevolent, selfless giving. It is the chakra that the yogis enter to be truly silent. Here they cannot speak. Here they feel good and fulfilled. True, writing on a chalk board communicates the essentials; other than that, in a room alone such yogis are silent. Not blank in consciousness. Silence does not mean emptiness as much as divine fullness. They are all-seeing, for the *vishuddha* chakra energies stimulate the third eye—the *ajna* chakra, the all-seeing, never-sleeping sight of the soul. Here we are truly silent. In a room crowded with noise, we hear but a little of it. In meditation we soar beyond into the infinite of infinities.

How to quiet the highest chakras, which are quietness itself? The titanium metal of the *ajna* chakra of divine sight and the multifaceted gems of the *saahasrara* chakra at the top of the head? Do they speak, think, reason? Those who know and have experienced say no. These *jiwanmuktas* are content in their silent knowing, not knowing all that they know. Their ever-watching presence on today's apparently hurting planet is an earned *sukarma*, good karma, for the human race. They are the beginning and end of all. They see the cosmic panorama of which the *Vedas* speak. "He contains all works, all desires, all perfumes and all tastes. He encompasses the whole universe; he is beyond speech and beyond desires. He is my atman within my heart, he is Brahman" (*Sama Veda, Chandogya Upanishad* 3.14.4.4). "Now, what people call 'the practice of silence' is really the disciplined life of a student of sacred knowledge, for only by leading such a life does one find the atman and meditate" (*Chandogya Upanishad* 5.5.4.3).

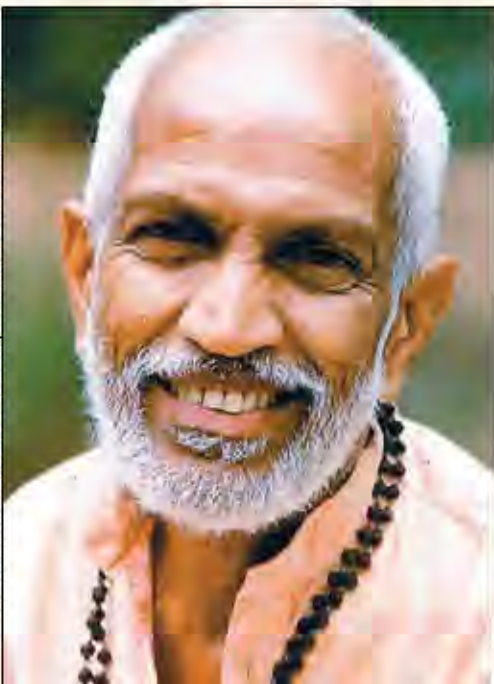
When to be silent then? Astrologers have an answer: one day each week, on the day ruled by one's current *mahadasha* planet—i.e., Monday for Moon *dasha*, Tuesday for Mars, etc. Some astrologers advise fasting and nonspeaking on that karmically critical day. If you don't know such details of your horoscope, an easy and pragmatic alternative is on the same day of the week you were born. Enough said.



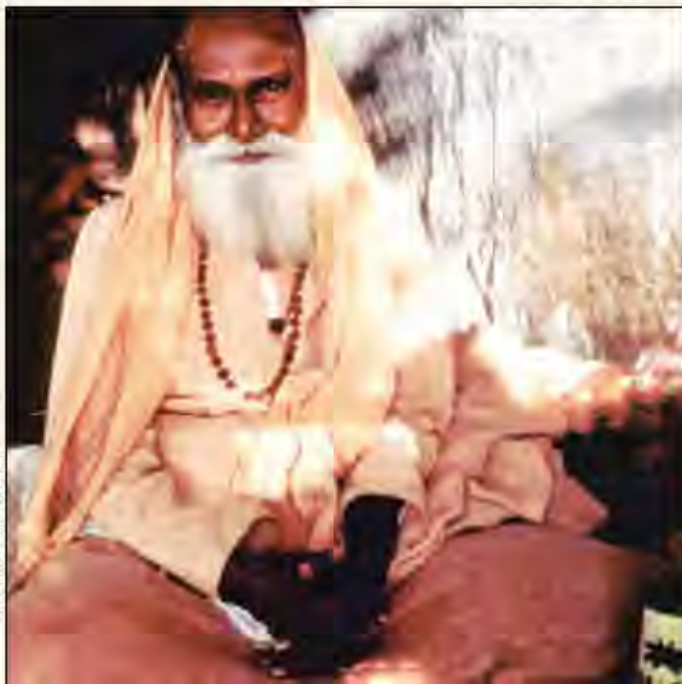
Vishvamitra: Beyond words



VIEWA S HANTINETHAN (RIGHT), SRI RAMA PUBLISHING (LEFT)



S. VEINEN P. KUYLER

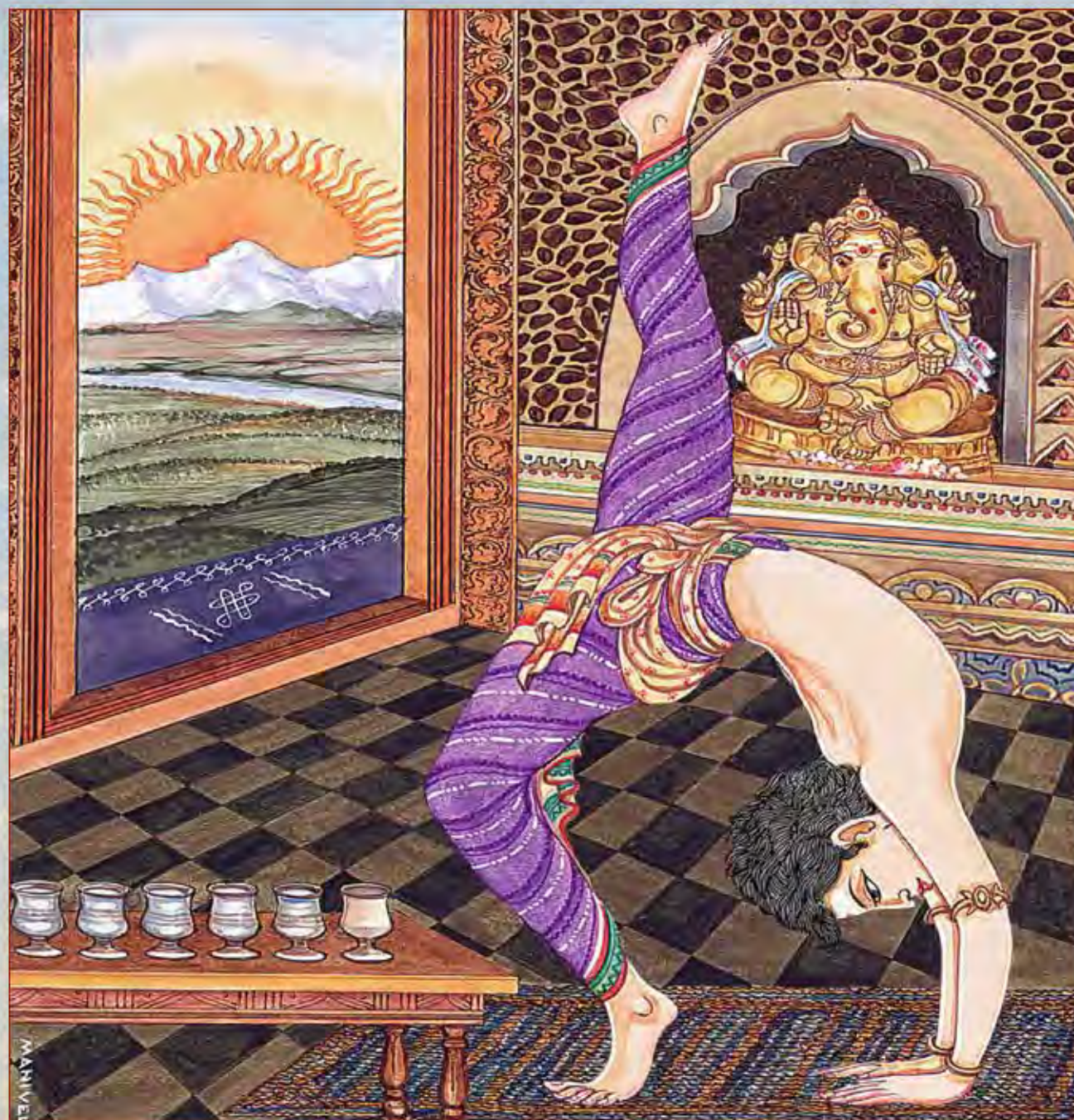


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DEWA PATAN





CHAPTER 34

Hatha Yoga

A 24-Posture System of Body Tuning and Preparation for Meditation

HATHA YOGA IS A SYSTEM OF HANDLING THE PHYSICAL body so that the mind and the nerve system are calmed and quieted. It is primarily a means to prepare oneself for meditation. Hatha yoga is founded on a principle of putting the physical body into a position so that the nerve currents in the physical body get tuned up to a perfect pitch. It is like tuning the strings on a violin; if you tune the violin just right, then each string will be in harmony with the other strings.

This chapter consists of original illustrations and instructions for 24 asanas organized in eight sets of three to be performed in series. While there are many more complex hatha yoga routines, these 24 relatively easy poses provide a good, balanced system for daily use. To prepare yourself for an effective meditation, this routine is all you will ever need. For the very best results, hatha yoga should be taught personally by a qualified teacher. The instructions and illustrations given here are a rudimentary aid. For more elaborate regimens, inquire at a recognized school specializing in hatha yoga.

Asanas elongate, tone and strengthen muscle tissue, massage the organs, stimulate the nerves and balance the *pingala* and *ida nadis*. From the hundreds of known asanas, these 24 affect all the major parts of the body. Each pose is to be held in relaxed stillness for 30 to 120 seconds, without straining. As maximum stretch and flexibility are approached, a subtle stimulation of the physical and psychic nerve system begins to occur.

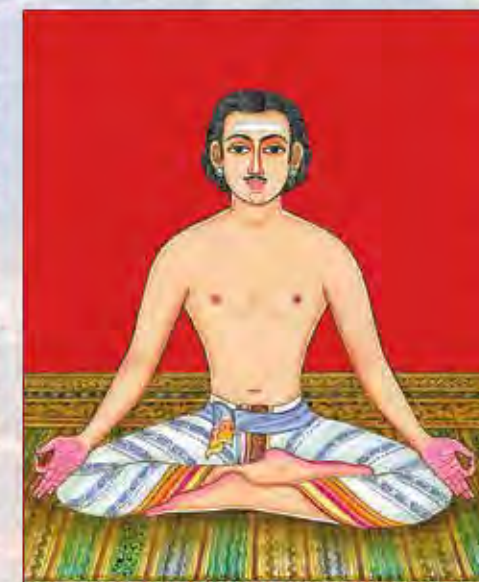
Perform the postures daily in the privacy of your own room, without drawing attention to yourself. Naturally, they should not be performed after meals. Don't worry if you can't perform them perfectly, or if some are difficult for you. Do the best you can. Progress at your own pace, rather than in a competitive manner. With practice, you will find the body becoming more supple, reflecting the mind's flexibility, alertness and freedom from subconscious repressions.

By controlling breath we control thought and life energy, or prana. Yogis call this pranayama. The pranayama for these asanas is simple: breathe in for nine equal counts (ideally

counting with *mathura*, the heartbeat), then hold one count, breathe out nine counts, hold one, and so on. Breathe deeply, fully and diaphragmatically, rather than shallowly expanding the upper chest. Harnessing the breath's three phases (inhalation, retention and exhalation) directs the flow of prana, calming and relaxing body and mind.

When physical tensions are released through hatha yoga, mental-emotional tensions are automatically dissolved. This is a great secret and a wonderful tool that you can use every day of your life. Free the mind of thoughts and tensions and you will be more aware, more alive, more serene. As you perform the hatha yoga asanas, put out of your mind all thoughts relating to your work, family, friends, associates, problems and challenges that normally concern you. Relax. Relax. Relax. Be completely at peace with yourself and fully enjoy this contemplative art.

Try to sense the inner and outer nerve system reaching a crescendo of energy as you sustain each pose. When this peak is felt, gracefully shift during the outbreath to the next asana. The whole series of 24 poses is like a dance, and a deliberate flow from one to the next is a key to perfect serenity. Each set includes a color visualization to quiet the mind and intensify healing. The color of the background wall in each illustration is the color to visualize while in that pose. Mentally fill your body with that color, from your head to your

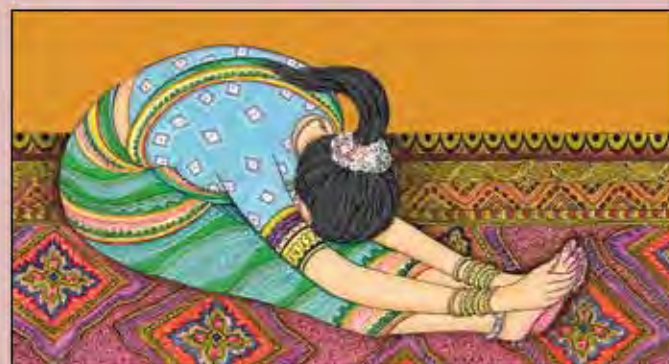
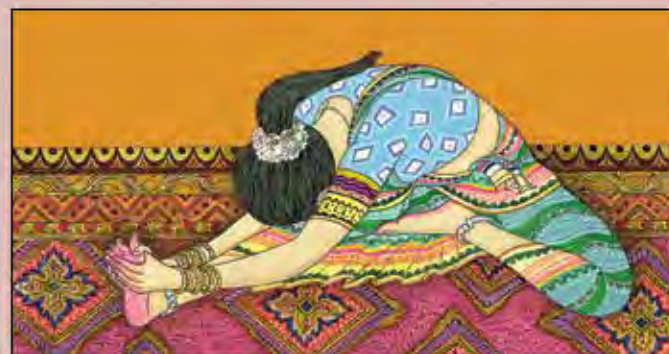
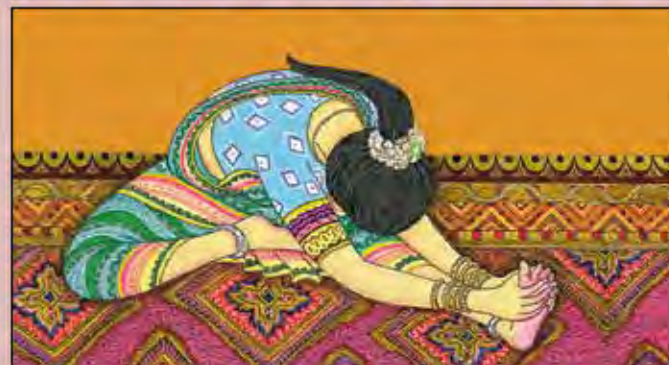
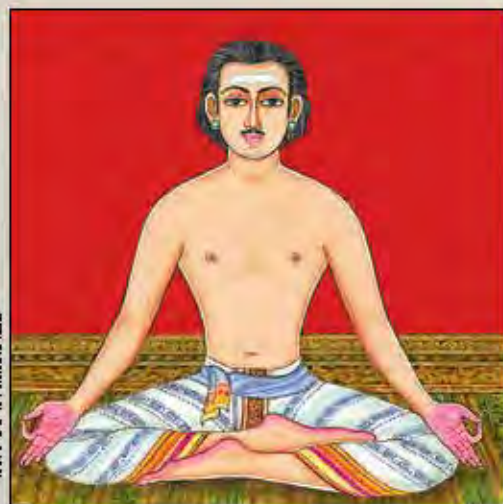
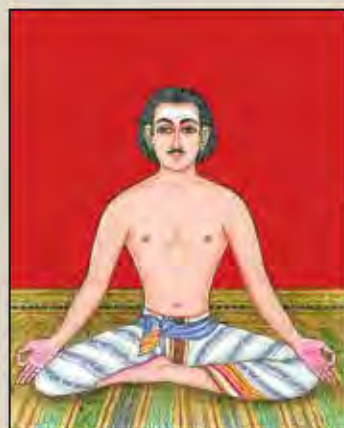


toes; or imagine yourself suspended in space, surrounded on all sides by the color shown with the pose. If tensions in the body or mind are discovered, visualize them flowing away with the outbreath. At the end, plunge into meditation. Tradition sets the best times for hatha yoga at dawn, noon and twilight. Minimally, only 12 minutes of time is needed.

An Important Caution: Individuals with neck or back problems should abstain from poses that place strain on the spine, such as the headstand, *shirshasana*, and the shoulder stand, *sarvangasana*.

SET 1

1. Bend the right leg back around the thigh and tuck the right foot along the contour of the buttocks. Bring the left leg in front of the torso, tucking it close to the groin. Hands are on the knees, palms up, thumb and index fingers touching, in the *akasha mudra*. Keep the spine (the powerhouse of the body) straight, the head erect and balanced at the top of the spine. 2. Next reverse leg positions. 3. In the third pose tuck the right leg into the groin area, then place the left leg in front of it, with the left heel in front of the right heel. This is a variation of the accomplished pose, *siddhasana*, सिद्धासन. Keep both legs resting fully on the floor. Visualize deep, ruby red for physical vitality during this first set.

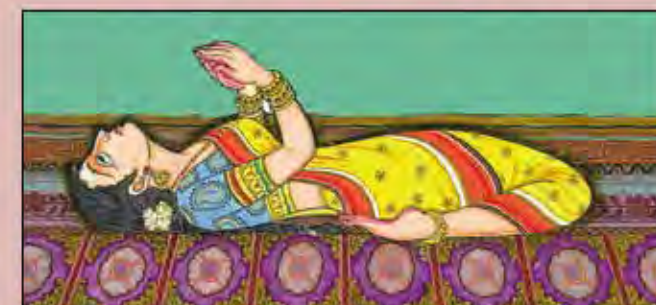
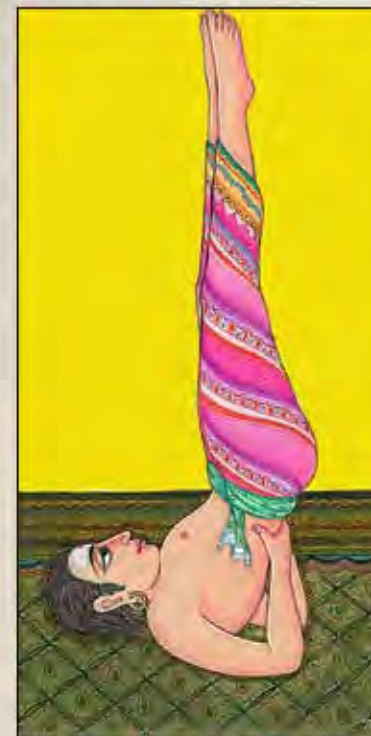


SET 2

4. From the last pose of set one straighten the left leg, lean forward and grasp the left foot with the thumb and index fingers of both hands. This is the *janu shirshasana*, जानुशिरषासन, head-to-knee pose. Relax into the position, letting the head drop lower and lower until it rests on the knee. In full flexibility the elbows lower to the floor, and the torso rests on the leg. 5. Repeat these steps on the right side. 6. Then extend both legs (a little bend is OK at first) into the forward bend, *pashchotmottanasana*, पश्चिमोत्तानासन. Grasp the toes with the thumb and index fingers and let the head gently fall to the knees. With practice, the elbows will lower to the floor. In this set, visualize marigold orange for pure, selfless service.

SET 3

7. Lying face-up on the floor, raise the legs and—with the hands in the mid-back region to support the body—raise the torso until the entire body is vertical over the shoulders. This is the shoulder stand, *sarvangasana*, सर्वाङ्गासन. Keep the spine straight, feet together, torso perpendicular to the floor. 8. Lower the legs slowly over the head until the toes touch the floor. Then lower the arms, palms down. This is the plough pose, *halasana*, हलासन. 9. End the set with the corpse pose, *shavasana*, शवासन, by lowering the legs to the floor in front of you. Let the hands rest loosely by the sides, palms down. Every muscle is relaxed. Visualize sun-glow yellow for purified intellect during this third set.

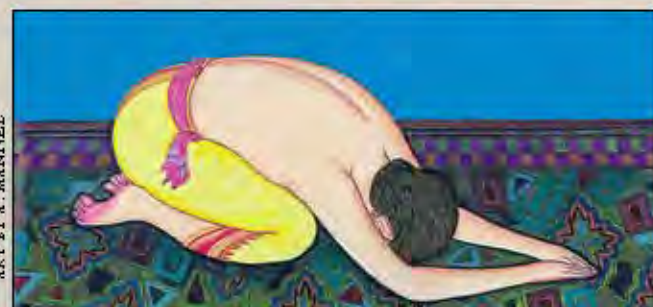
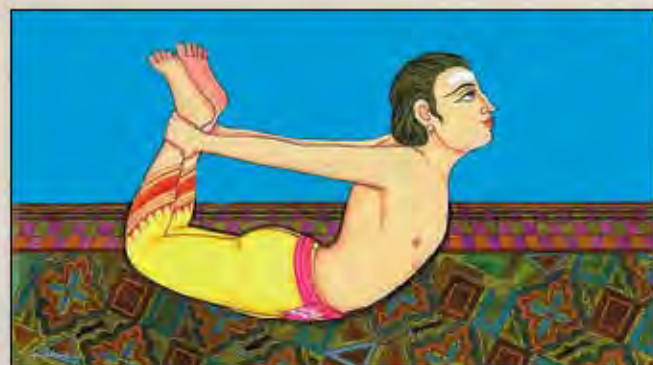
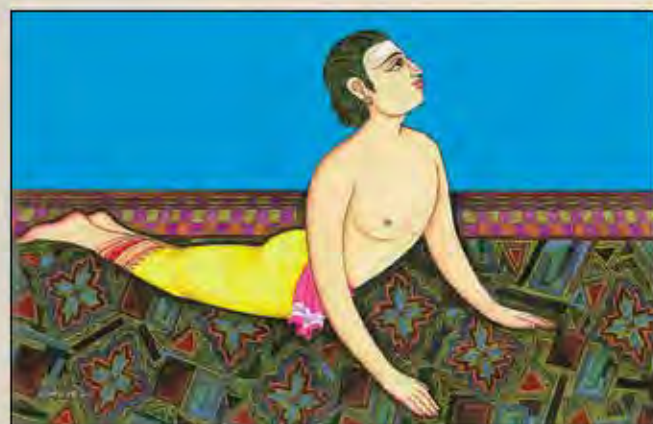


SET 4

10. Kneel and spread the feet apart, sitting between the ankles, hands on the knees, palms down. This is the heroic pose, *virasana*, वीरासन. 11. Still kneeling, arch back as far as possible until the head touches the floor behind you in the couch pose, *paryankasana*, पर्याङ्गासन. Hold the palms together over the chest in *namaskara*. 12. When you reach the right pitch of energy, bring the torso up (ideally without aid from the arms) and bend forward until the forehead touches the floor, palms down near the head, buttocks on the floor between the ankles. In this set, visualize emerald green for physical and emotional health.

SET 5

13. Move the upper body forward, inhale, arch the back slowly and extend the arms until straight, in the cobra pose, *bhujangasana*, भुजङ्गासन. Hold for two or three breaths, then lower the torso gracefully. **14.** Bring the legs up, reach back and clasp the ankles. Inhale as you pull the legs up and raise the head and upper body into the bow pose, *dhanurasana*, धनुरासन. Look up and back. Hold for two or three rounds of breathing. Exhale as you release the legs and lower to the prone position. **15.** Rise into a kneeling position, buttocks on the ankles, in the *panchanga pranamasana*, पञ्चाङ्गप्रणामासन, forehead on the floor, arms forward, palms down. In this set, visualize bright royal blue for peace of mind.



ART BY A. MANTIVEL

SET 6

16. From the last asana, move the body forward and form a triangle of forearms and head, hands clasped behind the head, fingers interwoven. The hairline touches the floor. Raise the body slowly, keeping the knees bent. Pause, then extend the legs vertically into the headstand, *salamba shirshasana*, सालम्बशीर्षासन. Keep most of the body weight on the arms, not the head. **17.** When ready, bend and tuck in the knees and carefully lower into the curled pelvic pose for at least 8 cycles of breath to allow the blood to equalize. **18.** Slowly rise into the

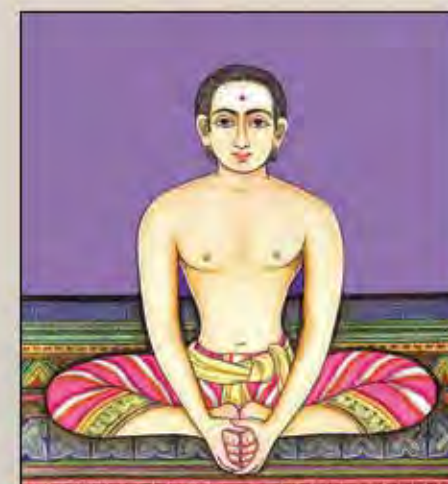


upright pelvic pose, hands on knees, palms down. Keep the head down momentarily against the chest in a *bandha*, or lock, and then straighten the neck. Visualize purple for the flooding forth of spiritual knowledge.



SET 7

19. Sit on the left hip and place the right foot over the left knee. Insert the left arm under the bent right knee. Extend the right arm behind the back and clasp the left hand with the right (as an easier alternative, grasp the right knee with the left arm). Keep the spine as straight as possible. This is the spinal twist, *matsyendrasana*, मत्स्येन्द्रासन. Turn the head slowly to the left each time you inhale, and back to the right as you exhale. **20.** Repeat the posture on the opposite side. **21.** Finally, bring the soles together and hold the feet with both hands in the bound-eagle pose, *baddha*



konasana, बद्धकोणासन. Let the knees lower to the floor. Throughout this set visualize lavender to purify karma through divine sight.



SET 8

22. Extend the right leg and place the left ankle high on the right thigh. Stretch forward and clasp the right foot with the thumb and index finger. This is a variation of the head-to-knee pose, *janu shirshasana*, जानुशीर्षासन. **23.** Repeat this same procedure on the left side, with the right foot on the left thigh.

24. Finally, assume the lotus posture, *padmasana*, पद्मासन. The right foot is already on the left thigh. To complete the lotus, carefully place the left foot on the right thigh. Spine straight with the hands resting in the lap, palms open, right hand on top, with the thumbs gently touching in *dhyana* mudra. Visualize white during this set to attain moksha, freedom from rebirth.



Sacred Pilgrimage

Seeking God, Begging for Boons and Atoning for Misdeeds at 14 Holy Places

FIVE DUTIES, PANCHA KRIYA, FORM THE TRADITIONAL MINIMAL practices expected of every Hindu: *upasana* (worship), *utsava* (holy days), *dharma* (virtuous living), *tirthayatra* (pilgrimage), and *samskara* (rites of passage). Thus, most Hindus proceed on pilgrimage from time to time, choosing from among the seven sacred rivers or seven liberation-giving cities, the twelve Siva *mandirs* or the vast temple complexes of Mathura and Vrindavana, or thousands more holy places of India. Some visit the hallowed sanctuaries of Sri Lanka, Bali, Nepal and Bangladesh, Southeast Asia or the modern temples of Europe, America and Australia. How we follow the pilgrims' way is more important than where we go.

The concept of *darshana* is inextricably woven into *tirthayatra* (literally "journey to the river's ford") and all of its encounters, mundane and metaphysical. In fact, one cannot understand how a Hindu experiences pilgrimage without a deep appreciation for the not-so-obvious concept of *darshana*, which means "sight or vision." The direct encounter, or seeing, of the Divine, is the ideal that carries a Hindu on pilgrimage. He wants to see holy men and women, to see holy shrines, to see the images abiding in the ancient sanctums. Ultimately, he wants to see God, to have a personal, life-changing, bliss-engendering, karma-eradicating vision of Truth within himself. The pilgrim also wants to be seen by God, to reveal himself, uncover himself, stand before God and be known to Him. *Darshana* is the essence of every pilgrim's journey, the rationale, the inner and outer goal. Working diligently with himself, the pilgrim observes his *yogas* and his *sadhana*s (disciplines) so that his seeing may be pure and untainted. Traditional questors' practices of *snana*, the sacred bath, especially at the confluences of rivers, and *mundana*, shaving of the head, are part of attaining that purity.

Pilgrimage is a pan-human religious behavior, practiced by all cultures in much the same manner and for similar reasons—boons, expiation of sins, healing, nearness to God and enlightenment. A pilgrim of ancient Egypt testified, "I made myself a stranger to all vice and all Godlessness, was chaste for a considerable period, and offered the due incense in holy piety. I had a vision of God and found rest for my soul." The Aborigines of Australia travel to Ayer's Rock and other places of the continent. American Indian tribes undertake a "vision quest" at their sacred places. The Olympic Games were originally part of a pilgrimage to the temple of Zeus in Olympia, Greece. The Christians of the Middle Ages traveled to the holy city of Jerusalem, often at great personal peril. Muslims are expected once in their life to perform the *hajj*, the visit to Mecca, holiest city of Islam—about 10 percent are able to do so.

Buddhists visit the four sanctified sites: Buddha's birthplace in Lumbini, Nepal; his place of enlightenment at Bodhi-gaya, India; Deer Park (Sarnath), where he gave his first sermon; and Kusinara, where he had his great departure. Jains pilgrimage to Mount Abu in Rajasthan and Parasnath in Bihar; Sikhs to the Golden Temple at Amritsar; Shintoists to Mount Fuji in Japan. There are numerous places in China sacred to Taoists and Confucianists. Catholics

are ardent pilgrims—four million a year to Lourdes in France, a million to Fatima in Portugal, to name just two destinations. Protestant Christians are possibly unique for rejecting the practice of pilgrimage as "childish and useless works," but even they can be found at Lourdes or Jerusalem. Not only the practices but even the people are the same. What Hindu pilgrim would not recognize from his own experience the Christian characters of John Bunyan's novel *Pilgrim's Progress*—Mr. Worldly Wiseman, Mrs. Hopeful, Mr. Faithful, Mrs. Much-afraid and Mr. Ready-to-halt?

Pilgrimage is not a vacation, a chance to "get away from it all" and enjoy scenic vistas in far-off lands. The true blessing of pilgrimage comes with singlemindedness of purpose, rather than combining it (especially as a secondary purpose) with visits to relatives or the handling of business or professional concerns. Pilgrimage is a going toward holiness and a going away from worldly life. Sri Swami Satchidananda of the Integral Yoga Institute told HINDUISM TODAY, "There is a tradition that when you take a pilgrimage you temporarily become a *sannyasi* [renunciate]. It is called *yatra-sannyasa*. You go as a *sannyasi*, doing with simple things and depending on God."

"Pilgrimages," explains Swami Chidanand Saraswati (Muniji) of Parmarth Niketan, in Rishikesh, "may be undertaken for realizing specific desires; as a *prayashchitta* (penance) for cleansing one's sins or for spiritual regeneration. Seekers go on pilgrimages in quest of knowledge, enlightenment and liberation. The great acharyas like Shankara, Ramanuja and Madhva went on pilgrimages to teach Sanatana Dharma." Pilgrims perform the *shraddha* rites at an auspicious place in honor of their ancestors. They seek the company of holy people. By such proximity, the pilgrim hopes to absorb a bit of the saint's religious merit, or maybe to capture a glimpse of the lofty state of the knower's consciousness.

The *Mahabharata*, in the *Tirthayatra* section, lists hundreds of holy destinations. Sage Pulastya describes to Bhishma a tour circumambulating all of India in a clockwise fashion, beginning from Pushkara in Rajasthan, then to Somnath and Dwarka in the West, to the Himalayas, across the top of India through Varanasi and Gaya to the mouth of the Ganges in the East, then southward to Kanyakumari, back up the western side of India to Gokarna in Karnataka, and ultimately returning to Pushkara. The existence of this pilgrimage route in ancient times proves, they say, that undivided India was a one culture unified by a one religion. In *Hindu Places of Pilgrimage in India*, Surinder Mohan Bhardwaj states, "The number of Hindu sanctuaries in India is so large and the practice of pilgrimage so ubiquitous that the whole of India can be regarded as a vast sacred space organized into a system of pilgrimage centers and their fields." The continuous circulation of tens of millions of pilgrims throughout India has forged a national unity of great strength. Swami Chidanand explains, "Pilgrimages have culturally and emotionally unified the Hindus. They have increased the generosity of people. Pilgrims learn and appreciate the many subcultures in the different regions, while also appreciating the overall unity."

The pilgrim, according to Sage Pulastya, must have content-

ment, self-control and freedom from pride and anger. He must eat light, vegetarian food and regard all creatures as his own self. "The pilgrims," notes Ma Yoga Shakti, "should not entertain anything which is not spiritual. A pilgrim must go with total surrender, with a total faith in God, that it is only with God's grace that he can finish the pilgrimage." All along the way, there is help from others. "People know you are a pilgrim," Swami Satchidananda continued. "They say, 'We cannot go ourselves. We are all busy in the world. Please, by helping you, you can go and get some benefit, and parts of it will come to us.'" Pilgrims often sense a divine guidance during their journey, as obstacles unexpectedly disappear and needed assistance comes in a timely, unplanned fashion. Helping pilgrims is an important obligation. The *langar*, free vegetarian kitchen, and free rest houses at pilgrimage sites are common methods of assistance.

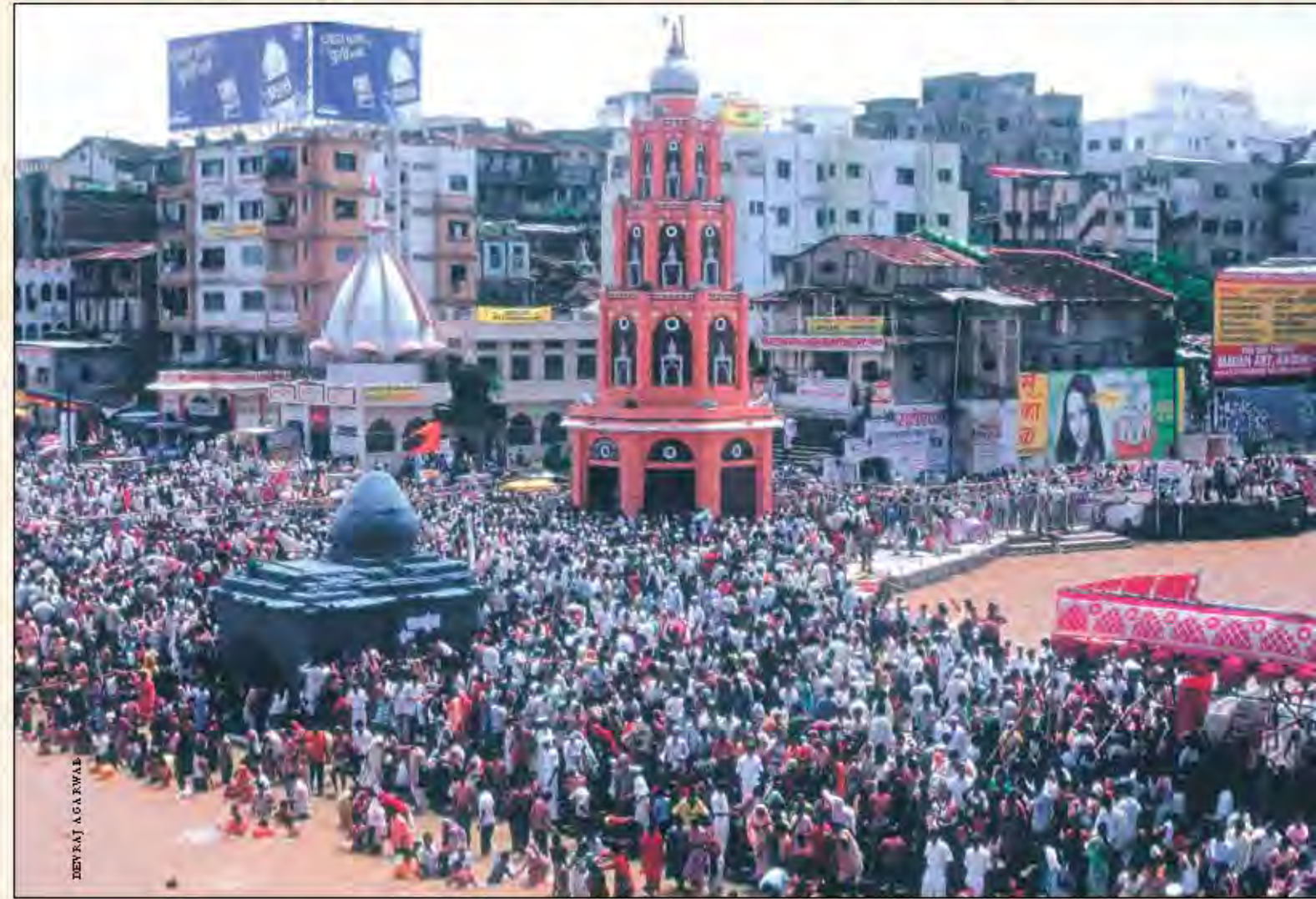
In addition to participation in the normal temple or festival events, the pilgrim's devotional practices include circumambulation, bathing, head shaving, *shraddha* offering to ancestors and prostration. Prostration and circumambulation are sometimes combined in the rigorous discipline of "measuring one's length"—prostrating, rising, stepping forward two paces and prostrating repeatedly around a sacred site. There are pilgrims who undertake this formidable penance the entire 33-mile path around Mount Kailas. Many destinations have a prescribed set of observances for pilgrims. Some, such as that to the temple of Lord Ayyappa in

Pilgrims crowd along the edge of the Godavari River in central Nashik town during a main bathing day at the Kumbha Mela, one of the largest pilgrimage events in the world.

Sabarimala, have complex disciplines requiring months to complete.

Pilgrims pay obeisance to every Deity along their way. After worshipping at all the shrines in each temple, one finds a quiet place in meditation. *Manasa-puja*, "mental ritual worship," is then performed to the Deity who stands out most strongly in one's mind, explained Swami Satchidananda. It is not enough to run from shrine to shrine taking *darshana* for "just five minutes," as the tour guides insist. One must also reflect internally in meditation and thus become open to receiving the gracious boons of the God. Even a life-changing vision of God may come to the pilgrim in his meditation, or later in a dream.

Swami Prakashanand, an ardent devotee of Radha-Rani, explains how to conclude a sacred journey. "Normally while going to a holy place people think of God, but as soon as they have the *darshan* of the Deity and they start back home, their mind is totally engrossed in business affairs. This is not correct. While coming back he should be further engrossed in feeling the closeness of God. Otherwise it is a sight-seeing trip." It is customary to return with holy water, *vibhuti* (holy ash) and other temple sacraments and place them upon the home altar after lighting a lamp. This establishes the holy places' blessings in the home and keeps the pilgrimage alive for months.



Divine Destinations

THE EARLIEST PILGRIMAGE DESTINATIONS ARE THOUGHT TO BE the *saptarudhis* (seven holy rivers), hence the Sanskrit term for pilgrimage, *tirthayatra*, literally "journey to the river's ford." These seven rivers—Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Sarasvati, Narmada, Sindhu and Kaveri—remain preeminent among holy sites on their own accord and in association with the temples along their course. Each Hindu sect holds certain sites in high regard, though few Hindus would pass up the opportunity to visit any of the great sanctuaries. Paramount is the **Kumbha Mela**, the largest gathering of humans in the world, according to the *Guinness Book of World Records*. The 2001 *mela* at Prayag attracted 70 million pilgrims in six weeks, 30 million on January 24 alone. The month-long festival is held four times in each 12-year cycle of Jupiter, once each at **Haridwar**, **Prayag**, **Nashik** and **Ujjain**. A bath in India's sacred rivers yields immeasurable blessings. Hundreds of thousands of holy men emerge from caves and forests to bestow their blessings on humanity at the Kumbha Mela.

Haridwar, where the river Ganges enters the Gangetic Plain, is the gateway to the sacred Himalayan shrines, *tirthas* and ashrams. It attracts thousands of pilgrims year-round. The Kumbha Mela is held here when Jupiter is in Aquarius and the Sun in Aries—such as in January-February of 1998. **Prayag**, "place of sacrifice," attracts tens of millions who travel great distances and endure hardships for a purifying bath to absolve sins and seek *moksha*, freedom from rebirth, in the confluence of three rivers—Yamuna, Ganga and the invisible Sarasvati. This city holds the biggest Kumbha Mela of all when Jupiter is in Taurus and the Sun in Capricorn, last occurring in January-February of 2001. Near the source of the Godavari River in Maharashtra, **Nashik** is revered as Lord Rama's forest home during exile. One of ten cave temples here was Sita's abode, from which Ravana abducted her. Shrines of the area include the Kapleshvara and Tryambakeshvara Siva temples. The Nashik *mela* (festival) is much smaller than those of Haridwar and Prayag. It occurred most recently in August-September 2003, when Jupiter and the Sun were

Pilgrimage moments: Elderly women hike 46 km to Anamath cave in Jammu. Evening Ganga puja in Varanasi. Quiet moment of meditation before Lord Vishnu at Badami, Karnataka State. The infirm are carried by hired porters to difficult sacred destinations.

in Leo. Historic **Ujjain** is one of India's seven cities of liberation. This site of the Kumbha Mela on the Shipra River in Madhya Pradesh shelters an array of destinations, including the Mahakala Siva Temple and the Amreshvara Jyotir Linga. Its most recent *mela* was attended by 30 million pilgrims in April-May 2004, when Jupiter entered Leo with the Sun in Aries. A biannual Kumbha Mela of the South was begun in 1989 by Sri Sri Tiruchi Mahaswamikal and Sri Sri Sri Balagangadharanathaswami of Bangalore at an auspicious site near Mysore.

Among the foremost religious retreats for Saivites is **Chidambaram**, the great Siva Nataraja temple, site of the Lingam of Akasha, located in Tamil Nadu. It was here that Lord Siva performed the Tandava dance of creation, overcoming the arrogance of the *rishis*, and where sage Patanjali later lived and wrote the *Yoga Sutras*. Here also lived Rishi Tirumular, author of the *Tirumantiram*. The glistening roof of the main sanctum contains 17,500 solid gold tiles, one for each breath a human takes in a day.

High north in Uttar Pradesh is **Kedarnath**, one of the twelve Jyotir Linga temples of Lord Siva. It was established at the foot of the Himalayas by the five Pandavas after the Mahabharata war to atone for their sins. Recent improvements have made the previously arduous ascent to this 12,000-foot sanctuary easier, but unfit trekkers are still cautioned about the cold and the 5,000-foot hike from Gaurikund, the last motorable outpost.

One of the greatest and most austere pilgrimages, **Mount Kailas**, Himalayan abode of Lord Siva, is sacred to five religions. Pilgrims perform a three-day, 33-mile circumambulation of the peak. At the foot of Kailas lies Lake Manasarovara, symbolizing a quieted mind, free from all thought. Kailas is the Mount Meru of Hindu cosmology, center of the universe. Within 50 miles are the sources of four of India's auspicious rivers.

The Ramanathaswamy Sivalinga Temple at **Rameshwaram** near India's southern tip was built by Lord Rama in penance for killing Ravana, a brahmin. Two Lingams (egg-shaped icons) are worshiped there, established by Sita and Hanuman. Each day the *abhishekam* (bathing) is performed with Ganges water. The temple is enormous in extent, with a mile of stone corridors. Pilgrims bathe in the sea and at 22 wells, each of which removes a particular kind of sin.

Pilgrims to **Varanasi**, Siva's City of Light, bathe at the *ghats* (river steps) along the River Ganges to cleanse the sins of a lifetime. Most pilgrims attend Sivalinga *puja* (devotional rites) at Kashi Vishwanath, foremost of the 1,500 temples here. The devout journey here at life's end.

One of the greatest Shakta temples is **Vaishno Devi**. Those who climb the mountain trail in the Trikuta mountains north of Jammu are rarely disappointed as they implore the Goddess for boons. It was here in the Himalayan foothills that Vaishno Devi, a devotee of Lord Vishnu, defeated the demon Bhaironatha. Though hidden within a cave, the shrine receives more than 20,000 pilgrims a day, even when wintery snows are piled deep outside.

At the very tip of India, where the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea meet, lies the ancient shrine of **Kanya-kumari**, Goddess Parvati as the eternal virgin. It was here that She defeated the demon Bana. Boats take pilgrims offshore to the Vivekananda Rock Memorial, erected where the young swami recognized his mission to begin a Hindu renaissance.

Madurai, the Athens of India, holds the labyrinthine Meenakshi Sundareswara temple. Here Siva came as Somasundarar to wed the Pandyan Princess Meenakshi, a manifestation of Parvati. Thus, this edifice encases two temples, one to Siva and another to Shakti. The towering entry gates, 1,000-pillared hall, sacred tanks and shrines vibrate with thousands of years of worship at this seven-walled citadel on the Vagai River.

Only a few centuries ago the **Kaighat** temple was established in what was then a remote jungle near the river Ganges. The now highly congested Calcutta expanded to envelope the shrine, which is filled daily with devotees' cries of "Kali Ma, Kali Ma," beseeching blessings from the incomparable Protectress and Mother of liberation.

Kamaksha is the Goddess of Love. Her holiest sanctuary is a small temple built on the rock of Nila Hill near Gauhati in Assam. The town and its legends are described in the *Mahabharata* and the *Kalki Purana*. This temple of magic for the sincere devotee contains no image of the Goddess, but in the depths of the shrine is a cleft in the stone, adored as the *yoni* of Sakti.

Vaishnavites revere **Ayodhya**, birthplace of Lord Rama, "Jewel of the Solar Kings." Here devotees worship and seek the blessings and boons of the seventh incarnation of God Vishnu. This orthodox Vaishnava town in Uttar Pradesh is among Hinduism's seven most



Pilgrim: Searching for God

sacred cities. Temples and shrines in every quarter honor famous sites of Rama's celebrated life, including the reclaimed Ram Janma-bhoomi shrine and a temple to His devout servant, Hanuman.

Mathura is the birthplace of Lord Krishna, eighth incarnation of God Vishnu. Mathura and nearby Vrindaban and Gokula are an outdoor paradise for devotees visiting places of the Lord's youth. A ten-mile circumambulation of the city takes enchanted pilgrims to dozens of shrines and bathing spots for this beloved God's blessings.

Puri, in the state of Orissa, is the site of the famous Rathayatra, car festival, held around June each year at the sprawling, 900-year-old Jagannatha temple complex. A million pilgrims flock for darshana of God Vishnu as Lord of the Universe, and His brother and sister, Balabhadra and Subhadra. Using 500-meter ropes, throngs of devotees pull 40-foot-tall wooden chariots to the Gundicha temple.

Along with Yamunotri, Gangotri and Kedarnath, **Badrinath** lies in the area known as Uttarkhand, high in the Himalayas. During the half-year when not blocked by snow, hearty pilgrims climb 10,000 feet to the temple of Badrinarayana, where God Vishnu sits in meditation with a large diamond adorning His third eye and body bedecked with gems. Pilgrims take a purifying bath at the Tapt Kund, a sacred hot water pool.

India's richest and most popular temple, **Tirupati**, daily draws 25,000 pilgrims. They joyfully wait hours for a precious two seconds of darshana of the two-meter tall, jet-black image of the wish-fulfilling Sri Venkateswara, or Balaji. His diamond crown is the costliest ornament on Earth. The temple is a Dravidian masterpiece of stonework, gold and jewels. Head-shaving here is a prized testimony of penance and devotion, and famed *laddu* sweets are the pilgrim's prized gift of blessed food.

In ancient times the *rishis* of the *Rig Veda* sang in praise of pilgrimage: "Flower-like the heels of the wanderer, his body grows and is fruitful; all his sins disappear, slain by the toil of his journeying." So meaningful is pilgrimage in the Sanatana Dharma, the world's oldest religion, that Hindus today have thousands of destinations, at which God awaits the pilgrim.

Recommended Resources: Hindu Places of Pilgrimage in India [comprehensive study for North Indian sites], Swinder Mohan Bhardwaj, University of California Press, 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, California, 94720. Pilgrimage: Past and Present in the World Religions [useful for Western faiths], Simon Coleman and John Eklund, Harvard University Press, 79 Garden Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 02138. Pilgrimages and Journeys, [fine children's book], Katherine Prior, Thomson Learning, 115 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York, 10003. A Historical Atlas of South Asia [maps and historical accounts], Joseph E. Schwartzberg, Oxford University Press, 200 Madison Avenue, New York, New York, 10016. Journeys to the Land of the Gods [a pilgrim's diary especially good for South Indian sites], Rajalingam Rajathurai, Printworld Services Pvt Ltd, 80 Genting Lane, #04-02 Genting Block, Ruby Industrial Complex, Singapore 349353.



PHOTOS BY STEPHEN F. HUYLER (ALL TO RIGHT) © GORDON WILSHIRE (LEFT)



SECTION FIVE

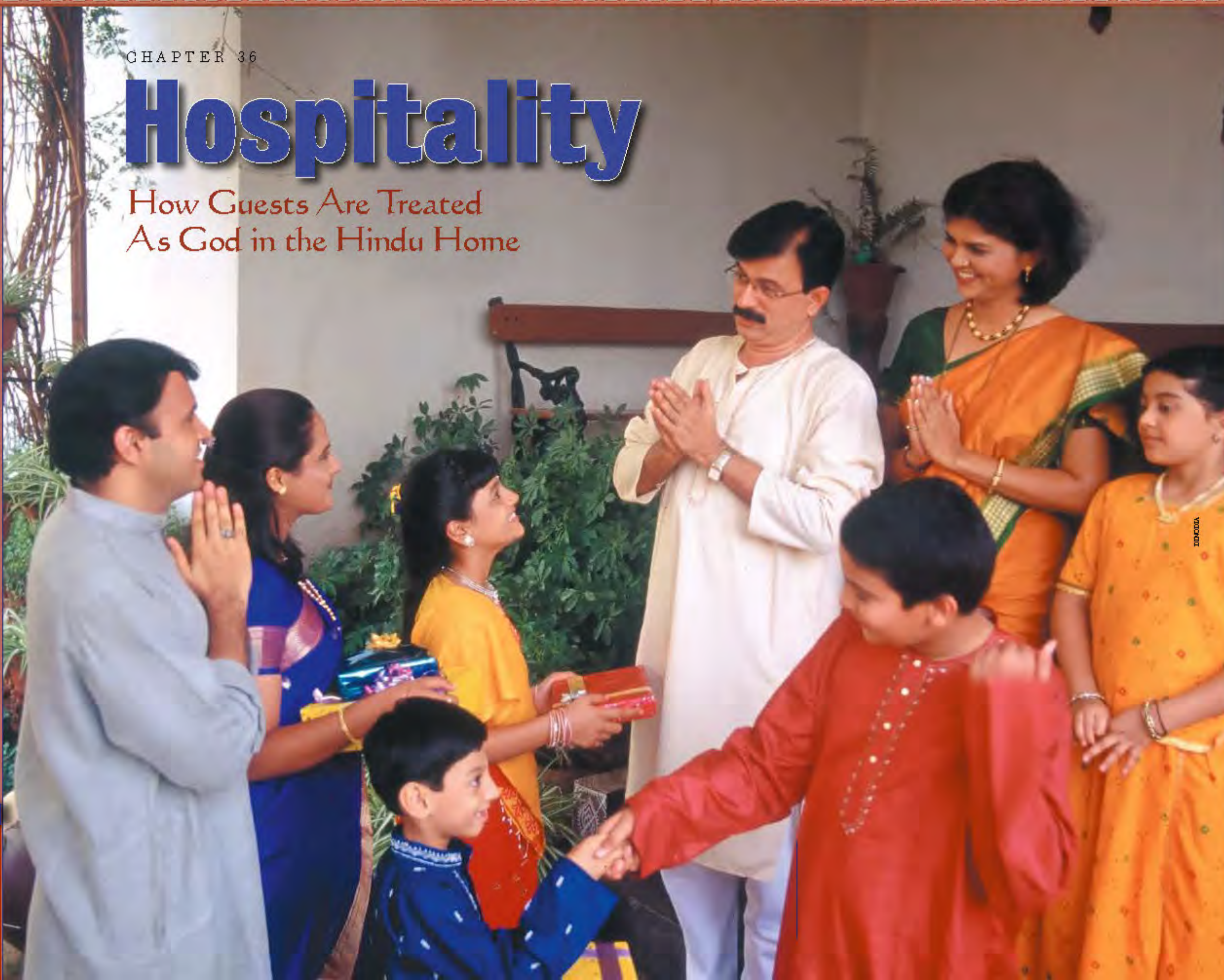
Family Life And Culture

Raising children as good Hindus, cues and clues for travelers, rites of passage, the duties of homemaking, and honoring Hindu heros

Above, a family celebrates Dipavali in their Toronto home, playing Hindu music and singing bhajanas. Hindu family life is strong and precious. Their dress and refinement exemplify one aspect of the traditions discussed in this section of *What Is Hinduism?*

Hospitality

How Guests Are Treated
As God in the Hindu Home



BY LAVINA MELWANI, NEW YORK

BE ONE TO WHOM THE mother is a God. Be one to whom the father is a God. Be one to whom the teacher is a God. Be one to whom the guest is a God." So advises the *Tattirija Upanishad* of the *Yajur Veda*, affirming the remarkable Hindu reverence for a guest. The Sanskrit word for guest is *atithi*, "without time," i.e., "one who has no fixed day for coming." It remains today the accepted custom of Hindus to visit friends, relatives and even strangers without notice. Hosting guests is one of the five central religious duties or "sacrifices" of the Hindu householder: paying homage to seers, to Gods and elementals, to ancestors, to living beings and, *manushya yajna*, "homage to men," which includes gracious hosting of guests. The ancient Tamil scripture, *Tirukural*, says, "The whole purpose of earning wealth and maintaining a home is to provide hospitality to guests." In this article we explore the many facets of Hindu hospitality, from how to receive a guest to how to behave in the home, to the impact of modernization, urbanization and the advent of the nuclear family upon this most ancient and revered obligation of our faith.

WELCOME!

Arriving guests are warmly greeted at the entryway by the entire family. In a well-adjusted, cohesive family, receiving visitors is a joyous event.

Do you think you are the perfect Hindu host? Well, here's a story that will make you reevaluate your hospitality skills, for the host in this tale is none other than Lord Krishna. When his boyhood friend, Sudama—hungry, impoverished and in rags—arrived at the palace, the guards refused to allow him in. But Lord Krishna, overjoyed to see his old friend, received him with open arms and joyfully led him to his throne. He personally washed Sudama's feet and fed him with his own hands. Sudama had brought a humble gift, a handful of parched rice tied in the corner of his shawl and was too ashamed to give it to Lord Krishna in front of all the fine courtiers, but Lord Krishna opened it with delight and ate the grains with pleasure and appreciation. To him, the true value of this meager gift lay in the affection with which it had been offered. Similar stories abound in our scriptures and histories.

Although I did not grow up in a particularly religious household, the concept of hospitality was still very traditionally Hindu, both in giving and receiving. I remember we stopped at a friend's home in Mathura after a pilgrimage to Haridwar. The hosts received us like VIPs, with open hearts and minds. We ate a wonderful vegetarian meal in the cool evening air in their garden, and then, as the stars came out, the string beds were brought out into the open, for family and guests, each covered with a mosquito net to ward off insects.

Another time, I was with my older brother, who had to stop at an acquaintance's home in Old Delhi to pick up some paperwork. The family knew we were coming and had prepared a feast. In this very Hindu home, we removed our shoes, washed our hands and feet and sat on the immaculate kitchen floor with the hosts while a brahmin cook served us one of the most memorable meals I have ever eaten.

Indeed, you can never leave an Indian household without

gaining a few ounces, for you will certainly be plied with some snacks, some tea at the very least, or a glass of cold rose sherbet in the heat of summer. In our home in New Delhi, family and friends came to us from everywhere, and they certainly got more than a glass of water: delicious meals, a comfortable bed, domestics hanging over their every need and, yes, even a guided tour of Delhi, and, sometimes, even Agra. Nor was the hospitality reserved just for visiting guests. Daily food was never eaten without my mother's consecrating a small portion to God, and a portion being given to a passing needy person or a cow.

Relatives came and were joyously received, especially on days of *shraddha* when the priest, uncles, aunts and cousins would descend on the house to honor the memory of ancestors. The house would take on an almost festive air, as scores of children erupted out of the arriving cars. After prayers and feeding the priest, the aroma of sizzling *puris* and *pakodas* wafted from the kitchen while elders embarked on a massive talkathon.

Sundari Katir of California told HINDUISM TODAY, "When I was growing up in Sri Lanka, guests would always be visiting us from different parts of the country and India. The whole household would jump into action. My mother would assemble the meal, and we children would get our rooms all ready, because we would give them up and sleep on mats on the floor. It was such a natural thing to do, and we were always delighted to have guests. Today my brother Ranjan is one of the few relatives left in Colombo, and he carries on the tradition. He treats everyone as God, with good food, comfortable beds and heartfelt hospitality. I have become a better hostess after observing him."

God as Guest: The most common Hindu form of worship, *puja*, is, in fact, an act of hosting. Rare is the Hindu home without a shrine for the Deities. From huge family temples of marble in the homes of the wealthy to modest shrines, Hindus revere their

Gods. Daily, images of the family Gods are bathed, clothed and offered fruit, flowers and incense, accompanied by chanting and the tinkle of the bell, all in the format of hosting a guest. The full 16-step *puja* begins with an invitation for God to come to the home, continues through offering of a seat, washing the feet with water, offerings of drink and food, garments and incense, flowers, etc., until finally the God is thanked and bid adieu. While the standard human guest would receive less adulation, a holy man visiting a family's home may well be welcomed and worshiped in this complete manner.

Festivals bring a more intense program to host God. At Dipavali, the Festival of Lights, when Goddess Lakshmi visits the homes of devotees, there is a frenzy of cleaning, sweeping and painting as homes are beautified and decorated with hundreds of earthen lamps to greet Her.

Guest as God: At the very heart of Hinduism is the belief that the Almighty permeates everything. Indeed, the Hindu belief in the presence of the Paramatma in every living thing transforms each one of us into God. The ancient Hindu texts say the guest has to be shown honor by the host's going out to meet him, offering him water to wash his feet, by giving him a seat, lighting a lamp before him, providing food and lodging and accompanying him some distance when he departs. Thousands of years have passed, but this code of etiquette remains little changed from the ancient scriptures.

In the *Manu Dharma Shastras*, for example, the host is directed thus: "All the food shall be very hot, and the guests shall eat in silence. Having addressed them with the question: 'Have you dined well?' let him give them water to sip, and bid farewell to them with the words: 'Now rest.'" K. T. Acharya in *Indian Food: A Historical Companion* points out that guests had an honored rank in Vedic society and, after being ceremoniously received, were

offered the ambrosial beverage, *madhuparka*, consisting of ghee, curd, milk, honey and sugar.

According to the *Dharma Shastras*, hosting guests is one of the five obligatory sacrifices or duties of the householder. Anusarana states, "The host should give his eye, mind and agreeable speech to the guest, he should personally attend on him and should accompany him when he (the guest) departs; this sacrifice (*yajna*) demands these five fees."

The visit of a holy person is given extra special attention, and for good reason. *Vridhdha Harta Dharma Shashtra* says that if a *bramachari* ascetic stays as a guest in a householder's home for a single night, the latter's accumulated sins are destroyed, and when such an ascetic takes food at a man's house, it is Vishnu Himself who is fed.

Common Sense: It should be clearly stated that Hindu hospitality does not extend to being careless with the safety of one's family and home. Even Krishna's guards kept Sudama—a brahmin at that—outside the gates. When HINDUISM TODAY's founder, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (Gurudeva), was in Sri Lanka as a young man, he experienced wonderful hospitality across the island from all the communities. Part of the time he stayed in the traditional Tamil village of Alaveddy at the home of Kandiah Chettiar, one of his teachers, receiving instructions on, among other things, the hosting of guests. One day, Chettiar had given food to a suspicious-looking man at the gate, rather than inviting him to the porch of the house. When the young Gurudeva asked why he didn't invite the man in, Chettiar replied, with characteristic frankness, "Because he would steal everything in the house." The *Dharma Shastras* discuss at some length the issue of unworthy or even dangerous guests, yet advising that, no matter what the circumstances, the visitor should at least receive food.

Village Traditions: Sheela Venkatakrishnan of Chennai, Tamil

Tips for Being a Good Guest

A GUEST MAY BE ANYONE FROM a close relative to a total stranger, and rules naturally vary accordingly. What is summarized here is for a visitor somewhere between the two extremes.

Arrival: It is traditional that a guest need not inform a host of his impending arrival. However, in today's busy world, more and more often guests do give advance notice. The host may insist that no advance notice is necessary, and close friends or relatives may even take advance notice as an affront, a disturbing sign that all may not be well with the relationship.

Duration: It is very impolite of the host to ask how long the guest is staying. But, as a guest, you should convey this information in an casual manner. In a gesture of hospitality, the host will naturally retort that you should really stay much longer.

Gifts: Gifts are always given to hosts by guests when staying overnight in a home. The value of the gift varies greatly, of course, depending on the guest's circumstances and resources.



Surprise: Guests may even arrive unannounced.

It is proper to give a separate gift for the wife and the husband. The wife receives the nicest item. Small items should also be given for the children. In Sri Lanka, giving goes the other way as well. It is common for the host to give a gift to the guest, especially those poorer.

Helping: In a home without servants, considerate guests can help with housework and chores, as well as care for their quarters, even if the host insists it is not necessary. You can also help with cooking, as well as invite your hosts out for a meal.

Graciousness: It is an insult to refuse any offered drink or food. Blend into the family's rhythms. Be a genuine friend, taking real interest in the family's life and treating the children lovingly, as you would your own. Conversely, one should not meddle in family affairs, nor later make unflattering observations to others about one's hosts.

Thanks: After returning home, remember to send a warm and sincere thank-you letter, hand-written, mentioning some specific detail of your visit that you most appreciated.

Honing the Art of Hosting

HOSTING IS MORE AN ATTITUDE than a set of practices. The perfect host is truly open to guests and honestly delighted with their presence. That said, here are some specifics to keep your hosting up to par.

Welcome: Greet the guest with *namaskara*, invite him cheerfully into the house. Invite him to sit comfortably in the best surroundings. Speak pleasantly to him, inquiring about his welfare.

Refreshments: Always offer the guest something to eat and drink. Usually tea or juice is served, along with snacks. At least a glass of water is offered (with a smile and apology).

Hosting: Guests who are members of the extended family will just fit in to the family routine. When a bit more formality is called for, the father, if present, will speak with the guest. If not present, the mother and a son will fulfill this role, and if no son is present, the mother may act as hostess, but



Welcome! A pleasant reception is the first step.

only with the accompaniment of someone close to the family. The children may go off to play among themselves, stay with the adults or come and go.

Wife Home Alone: If the lady of the house is home alone and a male visitor comes to see her husband, it is not proper for her to invite him in, or for him to expect to enter. Rather, he will leave a message and depart.

Punctuality: Life is generally more relaxed in the East than in the West. A good guideline is to not be surprised or offended if your guest arrives late or early. However, be punctual in your own engagements, as this is appreciated.

Duration of Stay: It is quite impolite to ask a guest how long he intends to stay, but it is good protocol for guests to make their plans and itinerary known from the outset.

Goodbyes: Always see your guest to his transport, and wave and watch until they are out of sight.



An enjoyable visit results when both guest and host are experts in the art of congenial conversation.

Nadu, told HINDUISM TODAY, "You offer your guest the same love and respect that you would offer to God. Simple! A striking example of hospitality is when the whole town of Kumbakonam, where my father hails from, turns host during the week of the Mahamaham." Thousands upon thousands of people come for the holy bath in the tank of the Kumbareswaran temple, and every home opens its doors to accommodate and feed all who reach its doorstep. No one is turned away.

Sheela explained, "Houses in the villages and towns of Tamil Nadu usually have a fairly large platform just outside their front door, called a *thinnai*. This serves two purposes. One is temporary storage of grain during the harvest and also an airy place to sleep during the hot and humid summers. It is not unusual for a traveller to use this as a resting place. You could open your front door in the morning and find someone sleeping on your *thinnai*. This is where you would find the strangers during Mahamaham. Of course, family and friends would be accommodated inside the house. But everyone is fed, irrespective of caste. It is possible that in the morning there is one set of people, in the afternoon another and a totally different group at night. The meals served would be according to whatever time of day it is. Also, the bath area often has a separate access from outside the house."

In her grandfather's day, Sheela noted, it was the practice for the head of the household to stand at his door step at mealtime and ask loudly, not once but thrice, "Is there someone who needs to be fed?" Sometimes a traveler or a poor man would come in for food. It was only after the guest had been fed that family would eat—one of the explicit instructions in the *Dharma Shastras*. The *Apastamba* says, "He who eats before his guest eats destroys food, prosperity, progeny, cattle and the merit of his own house."

Hospitality permeates Indian culture, both on a personal and institutional level. In Tamil Nadu, many of the bigger and older temples have the *annadanam* scheme—a daily free feeding. Recently, with the active patronage of the government, many more temples have revived this practice, where they feed a minimum

of 100 people each day at noon. Muslim *darghas* have adopted this practice, while the Sikh *gurudwaras* have always followed it. Mention also has to be made of the Hyderabad brand of hospitality that has few parallels. Made famous by the Muslim *navab*s of Lucknow, those on the receiving end enjoyed courtesy, food, drink and congeniality—all served with an elegant world-class flourish. Every ethnic and religious subculture of India puts a premium on hospitality.

Little wonder, then, that in multicultural India these varied streams of hospitality have coalesced to produce a generous and warm people. Visitors to India come away with awed stories of the way they were embraced and included in every family celebration—in fact, made part of a larger, extended family. Often these relationships last over the years.

You cannot go to even the humblest home without being honored with food and Indian drink, as Janet Chawla found out some years back. Chawla, an American who married a Sikh and now lives in New Delhi, believes the charm of India is in the graciousness of its people, although it is getting less so in the big cities. She feels there is a grace, a way of sitting together, singing together at weddings. People in small villages, she says, really are very giving, sharing the little they have.

"In America, if we were sitting and working together, and I had a sandwich—I would open it and eat it alone. An Indian would never do that," she says. "There is this kind of culturally prescribed sharing which I find very gracious." Janet didn't mention it, but some Westerners visiting India can find the level of hospitality discomfiting, especially the tradition of never leaving a guest alone. That impinges upon the Westerner's desire for privacy and "personal space"—concepts absent from the Indian milieu.

Hospitality at Home: Hindu tradition lays great stress on the respect due to guests. The greatest hurt for a guest is the thought that the host or hostess does not enjoy one's presence. Therefore, Hindus go out of their way to make each guest feel welcome. It is proper protocol to drop whatever one is doing, no matter

how important, to entertain a visitor. One of the privileges of friendship in the East is being able to drop by any time without advance notice.

Mitesh Patel, whose family hails from Kathiawad region of Gujarat, says that in his hometown hospitality is extended to everyone: "When a guest comes to our house, we rarely let them go without offering a good meal. We don't feel that guests are a burden, whether they are staying for few hours or few days, and offer them full assistance."

He gives the example of his uncle who left the ancestral village 30 years ago to settle in the city of Rajkot. Three decades later, if anyone from the village comes for a medical checkup to the big hospital in the city, his uncle makes sure healthy, home-made meals go out to the patient every single day.

The level of hospitality depends upon several factors, the most obvious being family ties. Traditionally, any known or unknown member of one's extended family—and the Hindu extended family includes not only blood relatives to several degrees removed, but also all the in-laws by marriage—is basically treated just like a member of the immediate family. It would not be uncommon, for example, for a student at the university to stay with distant relatives throughout his entire schooling.

Then there are friends, business acquaintances, people from the same village or state and so on, all of whom have some connection to the host. They, too, may be treated just like a member of the extended family, as Janet Chawla experienced, though commonly a bit more formally. We can see from Sheela's description of her childhood village that the homes were designed to accommodate even total strangers in a convenient fashion.

The concept of hospitality extends to welcoming customers to business settings, where it certainly makes good sense. Go into a sari shop in crowded marketplaces and the owner will automatically offer you a soft drink in the heat. If you're shopping for an expensive wedding trousseau, they are even more solicitous—offering coconut water, a snack and drinks from the market. I re-

call my father in his jewelry store not only offering soft drinks, *paan* in silver containers and candy, but also giving the kids who came to the shop small items as gifts.

Untouchables: Yet, one does have to admit that Hinduism's glowing hospitality report card does have one very big black mark on it, something which the Gods probably did not ordain but which wily man has reinterpreted for his own gain—the treatment of the so-called lower castes. It is really quite inconceivable that a loving religion, which proclaims that God is in every living thing, would denigrate a whole class of human beings as untouchables.

The story of everyday village India is full of the low castes being turned away from village wells, being castigated for worshipping at the temple or merely for passing by the home of a brahmin. While things are improving in the big cities where caste and creed lose their importance in the great economic bazaar and where politicians see the lower castes as potential votes, the village scene remains woefully medieval. Buried in the back pages of newspapers are frequent stories of atrocities, which should shock us all from our complacency and our conceit of just how "hospitable" we may really be.

Loss of Tradition: In the larger hospitality picture, things seem to be changing for the worse as the time-honored extended family finally battles modernity. Dr. T. H. Chowdary of Hyderabad writes, "As people leave their villages and joint families break up and the educated move to flats in the cities, the old idea of hospitality is fast dying. In the villages and small towns in the past, in the evening when beggars came for food, whatever was left in the house would be given away. In those days of no refrigeration, food could not be kept. Now in the towns and cities, surplus is stored in refrigerators, which have thus come to be known as *garibmar*, the killers of the poor."

"Even when brothers and sisters and such near ones come, one silently wishes that they will stay in a hotel and, at best, they might come for a dinner or a breakfast," he goes on. "What to

Serving food is a host's duty. To omit this courtesy is a serious affront, as it is for the guest to refuse what is offered.





A fond farewell puts a sweet end to the guests' experience, and creates anticipation for the next visit.

speak of caring for the parents or relatives when the wife and husband have no time even to talk to one another! Or when the one-year-old child, the only child, is put in a day-care center so that both the wife and husband can earn enough to satisfy their ideas of modern comforts, including that refrigerator or new TV.

"What to speak of hospitality for friends and unknowns," says Chowdary, "when the nuclear family of wife and husband are saying that the old father must stay with one son and the old mother with another son? They want to separate the old parents, considering them burdens to be shared by the sons."

As Chowdary observes, with women joining the work force in large numbers, and time, effort and budgets stretched by modern life, the old-time hospitality is often compromised. Earlier, visitors could just drop in, but now hosts get agitated to find unexpected guests on the doorstep—a far cry from the hospitality of the village home's *tharavai*.

Sheela Venkatakrishnan agrees: "In recent years, the trend has become, as Gurudeva said, 'The women going out of their homes to work.' Living in nuclear families, who is there to take care of the home, leave alone a guest? You tend to think twice about visiting a friend or relative, not wanting to impose or inconvenience them in any way." Still, she points out that they have many relatives in joint families who welcome them with open arms. She herself lives in a joint family in Chennai where someone is always home: "The doors of our home and our hearts are open to God and all whom He chooses to send our way."

The Diaspora Adjusts: The picture, however, is bleaker in the diaspora, where immigrants struggle with the beliefs they grew up with and the pressures of their new environment. Most manage to keep the hospitality intact for family and close friends. Some go to extraordinary lengths, sponsoring relatives and even opening up their homes to them till they get settled.

The Gujarati community is particularly strong in this respect, and many continue to live in large, extended families abroad. This sense of caring is extended to the entire community and,

in fact, many Patels have managed to do so well in the motel business because of their unity and financial support of friends and relatives. No wonder the Gujaratis command a whopping portion of the motel industry. They are well-trained in the ways of hospitality, for as one of the successful hoteliers, H.P. Rama, affirms, "We Indians believe the guest is God."

Mitesh Patel, who lives in Edison, New Jersey, came to the US when he was 15, so he has seen life on both continents. Now 24, he believes that Hindu hospitality has lessened in the US, Canada and the UK, but not in India: "I believe the reason is quite simple. NRIs are busy making big bucks in these countries. Sometimes even family members don't see each other for a few days because they are busy working, so they feel that it's hard to accommodate a guest."

Indeed, living abroad, notions of hospitality do undergo a change. Also, abroad, one would never dream of dropping in on acquaintances without calling ahead. This is a culture where even children do not just play but have organized "play dates" scheduled out weeks in advance.

Indians living abroad do have to contend with housework, their jobs and the daily commute, all without the support of extended family or domestic helpers. So their standards of hospitality have diminished. Some compromise, putting guests in hotels or taking shortcuts in their care. Truly generous hospitality in any society or home depends on the strength, integrity and security of the family unit.

Changing Attitudes: Summer, especially, means an endless barrage of guests from India and points in the diaspora. Homes become as crowded as the Grand Central Terminal, and hosts are faced with a multitude of tasks. As one exhausted woman, whose house was full of summer guests, told me, "Houseguests are like fish: after three days, they stink."

She didn't know it, but this adage appeared in the 1736 edition of *Poor Richard's Almanac* by Benjamin Franklin, one of America's founding fathers. He said, precisely, "Fish and houseguests stink after three days." The statement, and the attitude behind

it, stand in stark contrast to the Hindu view of the guest as God. And it's not just an American trait. Shakespeare wrote with a similar attitude in *King Henry VI, Part I*, "Unhidden guests are often welcome when they are gone." In all fairness, there are many hospitable Americans and Britishers, but offering hospitality is not the religious obligation it is for Hindus. It is also relevant that, in the Hindu village, true strangers were served on the porch, or even at the compound gate, in order to preserve the sanctity and safety of the home.

While the pressures of life in the West are there for the hosts, to some extent their attitudes have also changed. The rhythms of the place where you live impact you. Leading frenetic lives in the West, people tend to become more brusque, more cynical. Like Franklin, they begin to regard the guest as an unwelcome nuisance. Standards of hospitality are indeed changing, and one wonders how far we should embrace modernization at the expense of true hospitality?

What to Do? Gurudeva once observed, "The guest is God, not an intruder. All Hindus have a heart to receive the guest as God. This is very important for us to remember, because guests come and guests go. Often, guests come and never come back, because of subtle inflections in the voice, because it was forgotten to serve even a glass of water, which is traditional in Hindu culture. The guest is God, not an intruder. When someone steps up to you, drop your work. People are more important than paper. People are more important than giving oneself to the computer. People are more important than anything else. People are the working out of your karma."

Yes, it may help to remember an old Indian saying *Dane dane pe lakha hai khane wale ka naam*—"On each grain is written the name of the eater." The people who turn up on your doorstep are meant to be there, part of your karma, part of the big cosmic play. Of course, it's hard to see it quite that way when you are under stress at work and still have to produce dinner for your guests by 7:00 PM!

For Hindus caught in the modern world of hurry and scurry,

it would be good to reaffirm their duty toward guests and to refresh their memories on how to be perfect hosts—and perfect guests. There is etiquette for both roles, and if each plays his part well, the whole experience can be rewarding.

Hosts should give of themselves with a generous and open heart, exerting every effort to make their visitors' stay a memorable one, where the kindnesses and warmth are vast, even if the budget is tight. They should do all they can to entertain and help visitors in a new and bewildering place.

Guests should attempt to be considerate, informing their hosts of their length of stay in advance. They should pick up after themselves and not add to the harried hostess' tasks. Bringing small gifts for the family members, entertaining the children or perhaps offering to take the family out to dinner are practical and appreciated gestures.

Hospitality is a virtue that has many benefits for the receiver and the giver, as these small kindnesses smooth social connections and build relations. It also shows the next generation the way to continue the beliefs of our ancestors. And of course, often the shoe is on the other foot—and the host himself becomes a guest. So he should treat his guests as he himself would like to be treated.

There are so many stories of God Vishnu himself donning beggar's raiment and coming to the door for alms. So, the next time the doorbell rings, welcome your guests with an open heart. Look beyond the facial features, the clothing and the physical bodies into the eternal soul which glows within each of us like the purest of gold. This is the Self that scripture says is immortal, the one that water cannot wet, sword cannot cut nor fire burn. And so, bending low, with folded hands, welcome the divine Paramatma, the God who is within each of us.

The author, **Lavina Melwani**, a popular free-lance correspondent, was born in Sindh, grew up in New Delhi and has lived in Hong Kong and Africa. She currently resides in New York with her husband and two children. **T. H. Chowdary**, Information Technology Advisor, Government of Andhra Pradesh, contributed to this article.

The Holy Kural on Hospitality

THE SOUTH INDIAN ETHICAL MASTERPIECE, *Tirukural*, composed in Tamil couplets by Saint Tiruvalluvar (ca 200 BCE), devotes an entire chapter to hospitality. This sagely compendium of practical advice, called "a bible on virtue for the human race," is so pithy, so profound and so sacred that it is sworn upon today in South Indian courts. Here now are verses 81 to 90.

The whole purpose of earning wealth and maintaining a home is to provide hospitality to guests.

When a guest is in the home, it is improper to hoard one's meal, even if it happens to be the nectar of immortality.

If a man cares daily for those who come to him, his life will never suffer the grievous ruin of poverty.

Wealth's Goddess dwells in the hospitable home of those who host guests with a smiling face.

If a man eats only after attending to guests' needs, what further sowing will his fertile fields require?

The host who, caring for guests, watches hopefully for more, will himself be a welcomed guest of those whose home is Heaven.

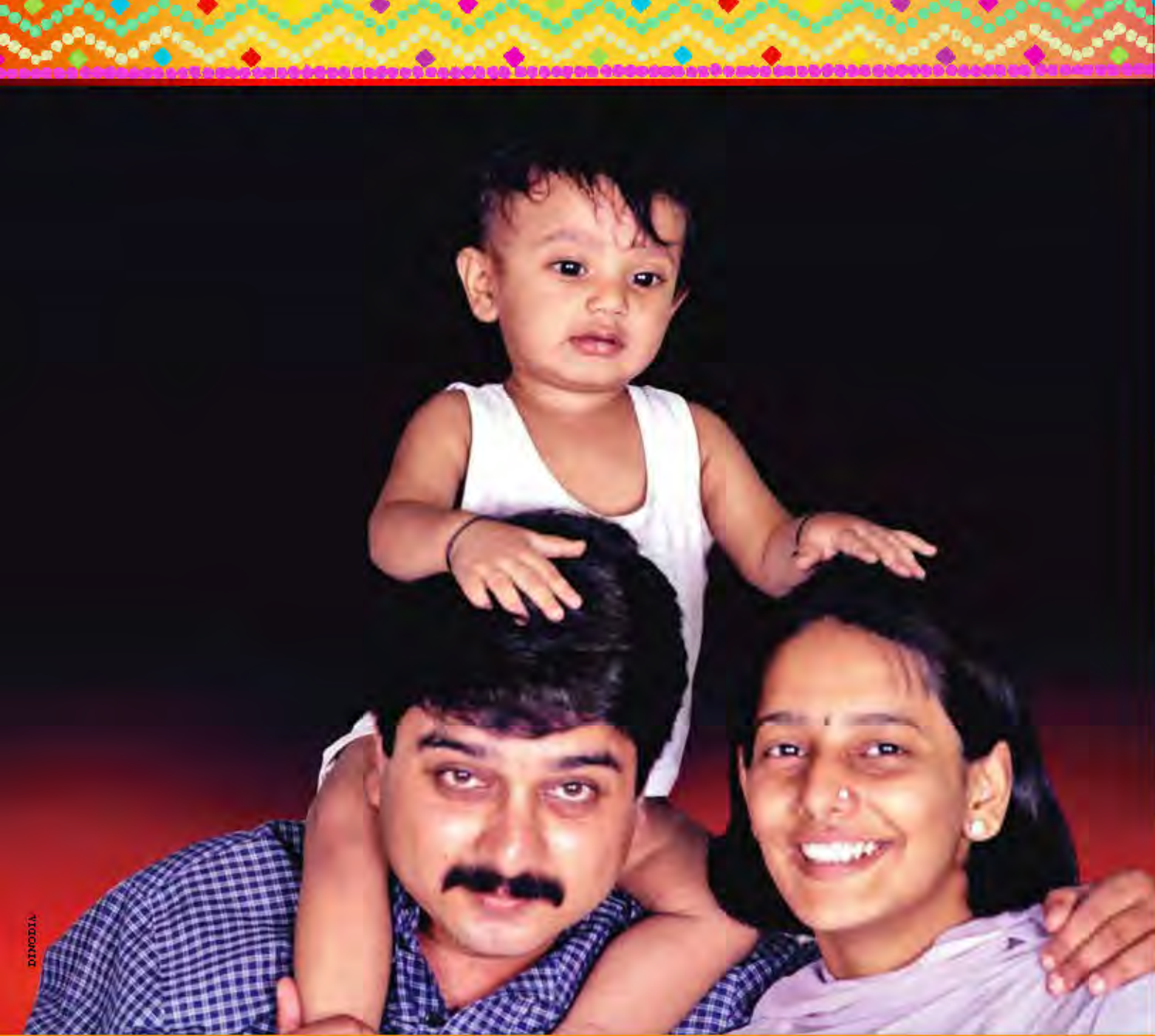
Charity's merit cannot be measured by gifts given. It is measured by measuring the receiver's merits.

Those who never sacrifice to care for guests will later lament: "We hoarded wealth, estranged ourselves, now none will care for us."

The poverty of poverties is having plenty yet shunning guests. Such senselessness is only found in senseless fools.

The delicate anicham flower withers when merely smelled, but an unwelcome look is enough to wither a guest's heart.





CHAPTER 37

Raising Children As Good Hindus

Parents Are the First Gurus in Religion and Character Building

Many Hindu families visiting our Hawali monastery, particularly those with young children, ask if I have any advice for them. I usually respond with one or two general 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: the 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 gridwork of character-building designed to augment any 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 16 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

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IMPARTING BELIEFS AND ATTITUDES

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

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 many different ways, such as by example, explanation, and giving advice and direction. The child's deepest impressions come from what the parents do and say. Therefore, if the parents follow a systematic approach to teaching the child Hinduism as he or she grows up, Sanatana Dharma will be fully integrated into his or her life, making it less likely to be sidelined or abandoned in adult years.

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 practicing 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 festivals, there were dramas, dances and musical concerts. The temple was a social and educational center as well. In our modern world we do have movies, television and computers, and many Hindu children would much rather spend their free time enjoying them with their friends rather than being at the temple. Why is this? There are many reasons. Families are not so close and trusting. And it used to be far easier to get children to come to the temple, since it was the center of village life. Times are different, and 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 to 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 a meaningful and useful part of their children's lives. Many youth today do not view the practice of their faith as important to making their life happier, more religious 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 powerfully 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, and more than a simple shelf or closet.

ALL PHOTOS BY DINODIA



KIDS LEARN
PRIMARILY
THROUGH
OBSERVATION

YOUR EXAMPLE
AS A PARENT IS
WHAT THEY LEARN
FROM THE MOST

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. Worship in heartfelt devotion, clearing the inner channels to God and the Gods, so their grace flows toward you and loved ones. Make the shrine a refuge for all family members, where they 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 *sadhana*s and *yoga*s. 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.

CHARACTER BUILDING, PART ONE

CULTIVATE NINE SPIRITUAL QUALITIES



ALL PHOTOS BY DINODIA

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 wrote to me once on e-mail 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 be more happy, successful and religious, in truth parents cannot separate themselves from their children. The child's growth and spiritual evolution is the parents' as well. There are nine key qualities we want our children to possess. We will explore each of these to see what children should be taught, or not taught, by parents to develop that 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

I. 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 comes to correcting 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 Gurudara wrote: "Praise your children. Celebrate their Divinity. Enjoy them and enjoy good times with them."

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 religious atmosphere of the temple can be brought home with you if you simply light an oil lamp 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 a more spiritual being and are thus able to experience spiritual consciousness more deeply. This eventually leads to a profound experience of God consciousness which brings to a conclusion our pattern of reincarnation on Earth. This 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. He or she wants to experience love,

family and children, as well as a profession, wealth and respect. 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.

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."



THE WHOLE FAMILY SHOULD
ENJOY AT LEAST ONE FORMAL
MEAL TOGETHER EACH DAY

Teach that, among humans, 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 then is there such a disparity among men? Clearly some act like saints and others act like sin-

ners. Some take delight in helping their fellow man while others delight in harming him. The Hindu explanation is that each of us started the journey at a different time, and thus some are young souls, at the beginning of the spiritual path, while others are old souls, near the end. Our *paramaguru*, Jnanaguru Siva Yogaswami, in speaking to his 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 men 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 understand and 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.

Man's nature can be described as three-fold: 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 and to manifest one's spiritual nature.

It is the instinctive nature in man 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 a person many lives to rise to a higher consciousness and live in his spiritual nature. Thus the Hindu approach to such a man, which children can be taught from an early age, is not to label him as evil, but rather to focus on restraining his hurtfulness and helping him learn to control these instincts and improve his 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 to-

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. It is 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."

tally in the outer, instinctive mind. What the ignorant see as evil, the enlightened see as the actions of low-minded and immature individuals."

PART THREE TEACH OF HINDUISM'S GREATNESS

In still 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 universally 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.

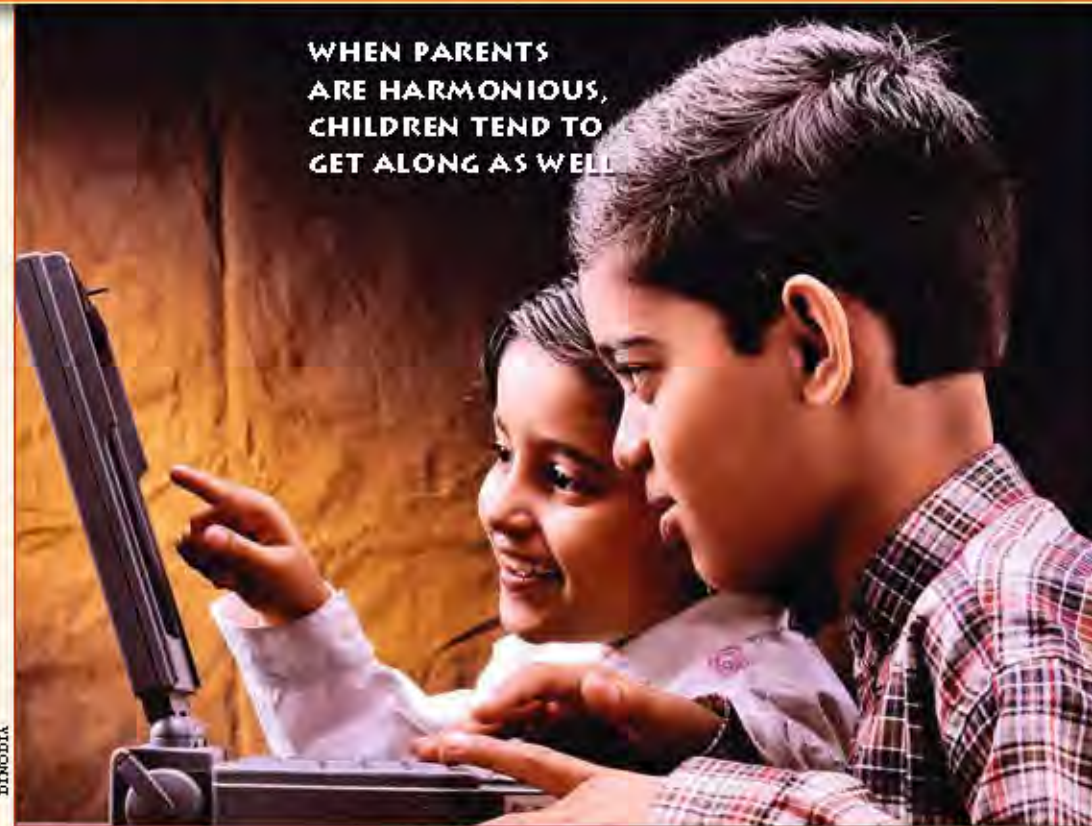
The traditional Hindu vegetarian diet has many benefits, both personal and planetary.

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, and 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

WHEN PARENTS ARE HARMONIOUS, CHILDREN TEND TO GET ALONG AS WELL.



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 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 acknowledge this reverence for life in our special affection for the cow. Mahatma Gandhi once said about the cow, "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 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. Certainly one of the best-known exponents of nonviolence was Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. King, after decades of careful thought on the problem of racial

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, as 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 is what produces the sense of self-confidence 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 developing youth magnetic to success in both outer and inner endeavors.

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 playful, joyful, secure and content enables one to face with far greater 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."

discrimination in the United States, 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 even spent five weeks in India personally discussing with Gandhi's followers the philosophy and techniques of nonviolence to deepen his understanding of them before putting them into actual use.

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.

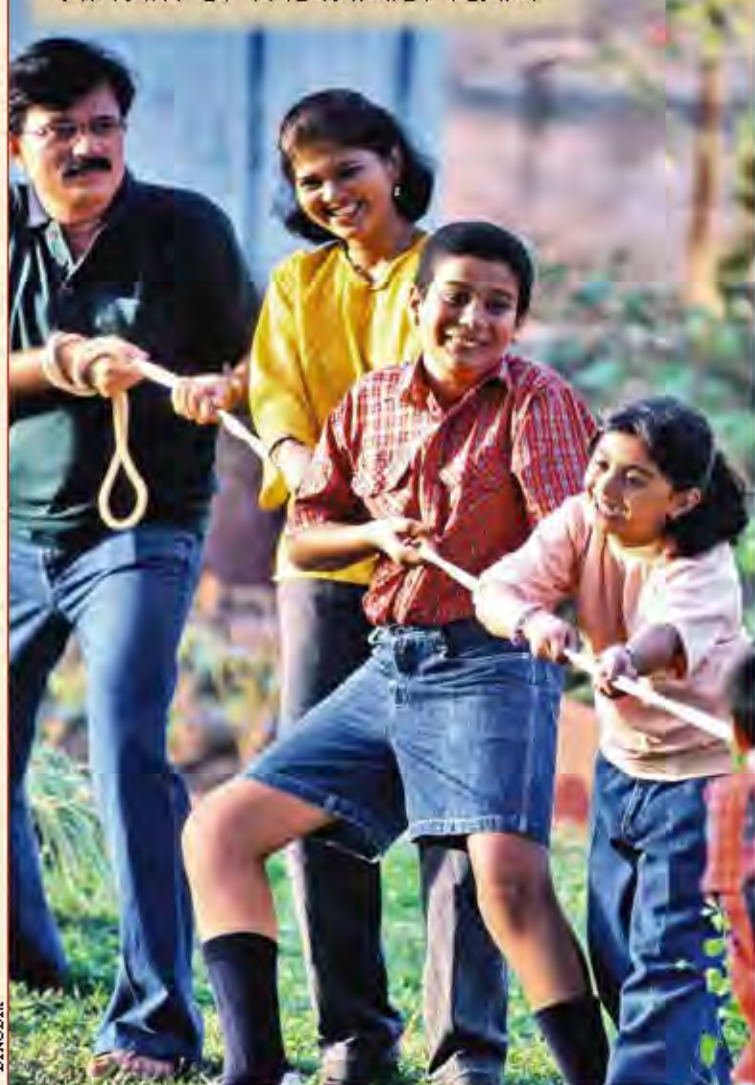
Hinduism has great tolerance and considers the whole world to be a family.

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," worshipping God within the other person, 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 inter-racial, 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

CHILDREN NEED TO BE VALUED AS PART OF THE FAMILY TEAM



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.

In the second half of the twentieth century Hindu concepts became more and more popular and influential in the West. For example, 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 spiritually.

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.

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

6. DEVELOP A PIOUS CHARACTER



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. It is 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



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. It is 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' following the wisdom of 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 ones' lives sublime and their subconscious minds free of the disturbances caused by memories of unresolved disagreements.

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, worshiping 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.

TAKING TIME TO TEACH AND SHARE BUILDS CLOSENESS AND TRUST



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. However, this does not mean that all religions are identical and it doesn't 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 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 no such teachings in Christianity. More than that, such teachings 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. However, some religions are per-

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 then 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 punishment, blame and shame cause distance. Closeness comes when quality time is spent together in activities that all members of the family enjoy. It is developed by the father's binding with his sons and the mother's binding 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 love in which their children feel free to tell them everything they have done without fear of the consequences. They know their parents love them, no matter what. A loving parental closeness is powerfully reflected in 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 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 a 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 from others at school and 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. It is through having our 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."

sonal computers, some are minicomputers, others are mainframe computers, but Hinduism is a supercomputer.

Belief in God is only the first step in Hinduism. Beyond that, it offers four ways to personally experience God. The first two ways involve seeing the Divine in other people.

In some religions the ultimate experience offered is to have a strong belief in the existence of God. In Hinduism, however, believing in God is only a preliminary, though important, step toward an ever deepening personal experience of God's presence. 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 are in the inner, spiritual worlds and 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 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 which 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. In meditation we first experience God as peaceful, blissful energies and feelings, later as a brilliant, clear white light and later still as truth, consciousness and bliss, called *Satchidananda*, which permeates all of existence. Ultimately, under a *sadguru's* careful guidance, we realize God as the absolute and transcendent reality that is timeless, formless and spaceless. In Hinduism, this is regarded as the summit of all knowing, the highest spiritual attainment which leads to *moksha*, spiritual liberation.

Children can be taught the basics of meditation at an early age, including 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 certainly part of progressing on the Hindu path. However, much 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 also participate in the meditations.

Hinduism's spiritual practices fall into four categories.

It is fair to say that no other religion contains such a vast wealth of spiritual practices, from such fundamental virtues as noninjury,



truthfulness and honesty to the advanced yoga practices of breath control and meditation. 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, respecting elders and atoning for misdeeds.

✧ **Service is the second category.**

Service, also called *karma yoga* or *sewa*, 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. Another form of *sewa* is holding religious feedings at a temple once a month. Children love to be helpful and can be encouraged to find religious expressions of this urge.

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 beat students when they make mistakes. Supervisors yell at workers when they make a mistake. No wonder many adults feel terrible when they make a mistake. Therefore, to spiritually benefit from our mistakes, we need a new attitude toward them which opens the door for insight, which leads to improvement. We can view them instead as wonderful opportunities to learn. In disciplining our children, it is important to focus on finding out what lack of knowledge or necessary train-

ing caused their misbehavior and then providing them with 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 as described above, 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 something. Otherwise he never would have made the mistake. There is some knowledge the child is missing, and 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 far more time-consuming process than a swift slap on the behind, but 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. There are many forms of corporal or physical punishment and verbal abuse: spanking, hitting, pinching, using harsh or angry words. These all cause the child to become resentful and fearful, and 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, the alternative forms of punishment—loving, positive strategies, such as time-out, logical consequences and denial of privileges—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 again.

✧ Devotion is the third category.

Devotion, or bhakti yoga, centers around regularly worshipping the Deity at the temple and inwardly 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 our own 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 *namas-kara*, prostrate at the shrine and learn songs and chants in praise of their favorite Deity.

✧ Meditation is the fourth category.

Meditation is also called raja yoga, or ashtanga yoga as it consists of eight limbs. The practice of meditation begins with asana—sitting quietly in yogic posture—and pranayama, breath control. *Pratyahara*, sense withdrawal, brings awareness into *dhanena*, concentration, then into dhyana, meditation. Dhyana finally leads to samadhi, God Realization. *Jnana* yoga is also a type of meditation that involves philosophical study and discrimination between the Real and the unreal. Children can follow the first phases of meditation for short periods, learning to sit in lotus posture, 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 spiritual 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 spiritual progress just as much as attending pujas in the temple, studying the holy texts, meditating and worshipping 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 has an insightful explanation of this process: “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

ENJOYING MUSIC AS A FAMILY BRINGS DEVOTION INTO DAILY LIFE.



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, *kritya*, 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 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. Therefore, *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.



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 onto 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 others. Now that we are aware of those consequences, we certainly won’t follow that path again. Recently a group of chil-

dren in Australia started a fire in a small forest where 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 evaluating such situations and committing to a new approach, we are able to teach 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 between us. A personal apology can fix this if we know them well. However, in many situations we are not close enough to the individual to verbally apologize. In that case, a generous act can adjust the flow of feelings back 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 with whom they share some cookies or candy.

A fourth step may be needed if the mistake is a major misdeed, for example, if we did something that was dishonest. In this case, even if we resolve to not repeat the misdeed and apologize to those involved,

we may still feel bad about having done it. In this case we need to perform some form of penance, *prayashchitta*, to rid ourself of the sense of feeling bad 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 learn from their mistakes quickly, avoid making them again and progress more quickly 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 parents who can set the patterns for resolution of karmas in their kid’s lives.

Cultural Cues & Clues

Keys to Hindu Protocol for Novice Pilgrims to the Holy Lands

NEARLY EVERY INDIGENOUS PEOPLE on Earth is reevaluating, rediscovering and reappreciating its ancient ways, the traditions of the forefathers. Tradition is the best of the past that has been carried forward for the future. Among Hindus, too—a people of many nationalities comprising one sixth of the human race—the old, refined culture of simple, wholesome living is being recognized as a way of wisdom. As the age of information gathers speed at the dawn of the millennium, efforts are being made in every community to preserve and pass this knowledge on to future generations. This movement rides on a new pride, a renaissance of inspiration, a recuperation from centuries of British domination of India in which Hindu dignity was systematically undermined through the Macaulay education system. Today, as well, there is a burgeoning interest among Westerners to understand and adopt Hindu ways. Those seeking to fully live the Hindu culture who have been raised in non-Hindu environments face many challenges. Hindu culture is



the pristine embodiment of a profound philosophy. It is an Eastern culture that gives freedom within the bounds of duty to elders, spouse and children. Western culture gives freedom to the individual, irrespective of the hurts he may inflict on others. The sense of duty is the foundation of Hindu culture, and in performing duty one finds freedom within oneself through yoga. Culture arises out of the attitudes, which are the outgrowth of the belief structure, of an individual

or collective group. To be cultured means to exemplify the highest qualities of one's society, religion or philosophy. There are countless ways the Hindu attitudes of compassion, respect and self-effacement are expressed. The keys below were developed by travelers to India who learned the hard way how to get along in a different culture. We summarize their cues and clues as a simple guide for novices and to assist Western seekers pilgrimaging in the holy lands to fit in as smoothly and unobtrusively as possible.

Respect

Hindu culture is an expression of love, respect, honoring others and humbling one's own ego so that the inner nature, which is naturally pure and modest, will shine forth. This is exemplified in the Hindu greeting in which we honor the Divinity within each person, knowing that God is everywhere and in all things. By this and other acts of reverence, such as the following, Sanatana Dharma's truths are brought to the forefront of the mind many times each day.

Respect for Elders: Respect for elders is a keystone of Hindu culture. This acknowledgment of seniority is demonstrated through endearing customs such as: sitting to the left of elders, bringing gifts on special occasions, not sitting while they are standing, not speaking excessively, not yawning or stretching, not putting one's opinions forward strongly, not contradicting or arguing, seeking their advice and blessings, giving them first choice of seats, inviting them to take their food first or serving them first.

Honoring Parents: Cultured Hindus serve their parents and close relatives all through life, honoring them through obedience and affection, and by providing support and comfort during old age.

Name Protocol: Youngers never use the proper name of their elders. A Tamil younger brother, for example, refers to his elder brother as *annai* (brother), or *perannai* (elder brother). The elder may use the name of the younger. Children refer to adults as auntie or uncle. Adults refer to each other as elder or younger brother or simply brother (likewise for women). Only men the same age occasionally use the first name. A Hindu wife speaking of her husband, rather than using his given name, uses terms such as "my husband," "him" or, for example, "Jothi's father." When addressing yogis, swamis or *sadhakas*, one uses the title, not personal pronouns nor the name alone. For example, one would not ask, "What do you want?" Instead, one would inquire, "What does swami want?"

Touching Feet: One touches the feet of holy persons in recognition of their Divinity and attainment. A dancer touches the teacher's feet before lessons. Children prostrate on the floor and touch the feet of their mother and father at special times, such as New Year's day, birthdays and before parting for a journey.



Hosting Guests in the Home

Hindu tradition lays great stress on the respect due to guests. All guests are God. Who comes in many forms. The greatest hurt is the thought that the host or hostess does not enjoy one's presence in their home. Therefore, Hindus go out of their way to make each guest feel welcome. It is proper protocol to drop whatever one is doing, no matter how important, to entertain a visitor. One of the privileges of friendship in the East is being able to drop by any time without advance notice. Visitors may also leave in the same casual way, saying "I'll be going now," without necessarily even saying goodbye.

Refreshments: It is customary to always offer your visitor something to eat and drink. Usually tea is served, but at least a glass of water should be offered (with a smile and apology). Likewise it is an insult for the guest to refuse food or beverages, or to not even sip a glass of water, even when time is short.

Hosting: Children generally leave the room, with a smile, when guests enter. The mother remains close by to serve as needs arise. The father, if present, will speak with the guest. If not present, the mother and a son will fulfill this role, and if no son is present, the mother may act as hostess, but only with the accompaniment of someone close to the family.

Wife Home Alone: If the lady of the house is home alone and a male visitor comes to see her husband, it is not proper for her to invite him in, nor for him to expect to enter. Rather, he will leave a message and take his leave.

Punctuality: Eastern life is generally more relaxed than in the West. A good guideline is do not be surprised or offended if your guest arrives late or early. But be punctual in your own engagements, as this is appreciated.

Giving Gifts: Gifts are always given when one stays over night as a guest in someone's home. The value of the gift varies greatly, depending upon circumstance. It is proper to give a separate gift for the wife and the husband. The wife receives the nicest item.

Duration of Stay: It is quite impolite to ask a guest how long he intends to stay, but it is good protocol for guests to make their plans and itinerary known from the outset.

Exchange of Prana

Prana is the life principle, the subtle energy that emanates from the psychic force centers called chakras. Religious people, being sensitive to the various expressions of prana, are careful in how they manage their own energies and discriminating about the pranas they receive from the world around them. Prevailing pranas create a forcefield, positive or negative. The ideal Hindu home is a positive forcefield, kept strong through right thought, word and deed.

Homecoming: Upon arriving home from work, it is customary to immediately bathe and enter the shrine room for special blessings to dispel worldly forces, quiet the mind and regain a centered, spiritual consciousness.

Giving and Receiving: Giving and accepting things, presenting offerings to the Deity, etc., is properly done with both hands, to endow more energy to the object. This exchange of energies is vital for friendship and harmony through wholehearted release by the giver and conscious acceptance by the recipient.

Throwing Things: Throwing an object to another person, even to a close friend, is improper. Cultured Hindus consider this crude, even mildly violent.

Greetings: Hindu men traditionally greet one another with hands in *anjali* mudra (prayerful pose), then, with palms still held together, extend their hands to one another, in a two-handed handshake. This is a deliberate transfer of prana. The hands of one man, usually the less senior, are gently clasped between the other's. Each looks smilingly into the other's face while bowing slightly in humility.

Doorways: It is inauspicious to converse inside or through doorways. Similarly, to exchange or give or lend an object, one first steps inside the room, or the recipient steps out of the room, so that both parties are in the same space.

Auspiciousness: To ensure optimum timing for important events, Hindus guide their life by the map of auspiciousness, determined by astrology and indicated in the annual almanac, called *panchang*. It provides vital information about the subtle but powerful affect of the planets and stars, indicating the prevailing forces of each day, the best times for innovations, travel, planting crops, routine work, personal retreat, seminars, marriages and other sacraments.





Modesty & Reserve

Interactions in public between men and women are generally more restrained in Asian culture than in Western culture. For the most part, men socialize with men, and women with women. Men never touch women in public, such as helping a woman out of a car, unless the lady is very elderly or infirm. In the temple (see art), women worship on the left, and men on the right.

Hindu Clothing: Traditional Hindu attire is modest and dignified, elegant yet never enticing, worn by staunch Hindus always at home, in the temple and at religious or cultural events. Women wear rich costumes and jewelry for religious and cultural events. They never expose breasts, navel or thighs.

Chastity: Sexual purity is a cardinal virtue, controlling lust by remaining celibate when single and faithful in marriage. Boys and girls are taught to value and protect their chastity as a sacred treasure, and to save the special gift of intimacy for their future spouse.

Chaperoning: Parents chaperone and monitor friendships of sons and daughters, closely guiding the private and social life of their children and teaching them the importance of wholesome companionship. Dating is traditionally not permitted, and marriages are arranged to ensure the most auspicious match.

Fidelity: Sexual/psychic energies are carefully directed and contained in the close-knit family. The wife's duty is to give her energy to her husband and make him strong. The husband protects and provides for the family. Children give their energy to their parents, their first gurus, obey and heed their good example.

Displaying Affection: Married couples in Asia do not hug, hold hands or kiss in public. Even embracing at airports and train stations is out of the question.

Propriety: It is improper to praise the beauty of another man's wife (or daughter) lest one inadvertently suggest an improper interest in her. All older women are viewed as one's mother and younger women as a sister. Also, one does not praise the beauty of a child or infant, protecting young ones from jealousies.

Garlanding: Women do not garland men, and men do not garland women. Such exchanges are restricted to the marriage ceremony. However, a woman can garland her husband or her *satguru*.



Womanly Protocol

Women in Hindu society are held in the highest regard, far more respected and protected, in truth, than in the West. This does not imply the kind of equality or participation in public interactions that are common in the West. A woman will often be given preferential treatment in India at such places as ticket counters. At meals, though, the men are usually expected to go first. Feminine refinements are expressed and protected through numerous customs, including the following.

Modesty: The qualities traditionally most admired in Eastern women are shyness, self-effacement and modesty of dress and deportment. Self-assertive or bold tendencies are regarded with circumspection.

Mixed Company: In mixed company, Hindu women will keep in the background and not participate freely in conversation. This, of course, differs among family and close friends. When male guests are in the home, the women will appear when it is proper. Visitors do not expect or ask to meet them.

Walking with Husband: The wife walks a step or two behind her husband, or, if walking by his side, a step or two back, always giving him the lead. (In the West, the opposite is often true.)

Serving Meals: At mealtime, women traditionally follow the ancient custom of serving the men first before eating.

Chaperoning: It is customary for a woman leaving the home to always be accompanied, generally by her husband, mother-in-law, sister-in-law, mother, daughter, sister or another lady close to the family, or among a group of both men and women. Women in traditional areas rarely even walk across the street alone, unless they are older. Living alone, too, is unusual.

Moving in Public: Generally, it is considered improper for women to speak with strangers on the street, much less strike up a casual conversation. Drinking or smoking in public is viewed as a sign of moral laxity.

Shelter and Care: When away from home, husbands contact their wife each day to express their love and inquire about her day.

Monthly Retreat: During their monthly period, Asian women do not prepare food, attend social gatherings or attend the temple or home shrine.



Body Language

Hindus know that God is everywhere and in all things. This realization brings dynamic contentment and appreciation for the fact that life is to be lived joyously. This understanding is expressed in Hindu deportment, or "body language." Every movement of the body, the face, hands, eyes, mouth, head, etc., has a meaning. Children and newcomers to the culture are taught to adopt refined body language and to become sensitive to the thoughts and feelings of others, who may be "talking" even when not speaking.

Kindly Words and Countenance: Hindus strive to keep a pleasant expression on their face, a gentle smile and a kind word for everyone they meet through the day. They know in their heart of hearts that everything in the universe is in a perfect state of evolution at every point in time.

Care in Sitting: It is a grave insult to sit with one's legs outstretched toward a temple, a shrine or altar, or another person. One never sits higher than elders or holy persons. Worshiping in the kneeling pose is not acceptable among Hindus. Youths follow the example of traditional elders.

Gestures of Humility: As stated in scripture, humility is strength not a weakness, pride is a weakness, not a strength. For example, orthodox Hindus will place their hand in front of their mouth when speaking to another, especially an elder, in a gesture of respect. Humility is expressed in ways of standing, sitting, listening, greeting others and more.

Prideful Postures: Prideful postures are to be avoided, such as sitting with one foot placed on the opposite thigh, or with arms folded or chin held exceedingly high, or with hands on the hips with head cocked to the side. These gestures are signs of arrogance and a superiority complex.

Pointing: Pointing with the forefinger of the right hand (or shaking the forefinger in emphasis) is never done. This is because the right hand possesses a powerful, aggressive *pranic* force. Pointing the index finger channels that force into a single stream. The harshness of this energy would be felt in the nerve system of the recipient. To show direction or emphasis, the entire hand is used as a pointer, with the palm up and the thumb held alongside the forefinger.



Purity & Pollution

Purity and its opposite, pollution, are a fundamental part of Asian culture. While they imply a strong sense of physical cleanliness, their more important meanings extend to social, ceremonial, mental, emotional, psychic and spiritual contamination. Here are several ways purity is preserved.

Cleanliness: Hindus keep their home environment clean and uncluttered to create a strong spiritual vibration and not attract negative forces. They seek fresh air and sunshine and surround themselves with beauty.

Personal Health: Hindus keep strong and healthy through a balanced ayurvedic diet, moderate daily exercise, hatha yoga and vigorous work.

Well-being: Mental and spiritual purity is maintained through daily meditation and worship, scriptural study, right living and right thinking.

Purity and Food: In a market, one does not touch food one does not intend to buy. One cooking food for others would never taste of a dish and then put the spoon back in the pot. One does not touch the lips to a water vessel used by others, nor lick postage stamps or offer to another food one has partaken of.

Sanctified Food Offerings: The opposite is true in the case of the *satguru's* food offerings. Food that the guru has tasted of is revered as sacred. This, and the water from the washing of the holy feet, is sought after and imbibed by devotees for the great spiritual blessings that it contains toward moksha.

Offerings: One does not sniff flowers picked for offering—even the smell is for the Gods, not for us. Flowers that fall to the ground should not be offered. Offerings are carried with both hands on the right side of the body, so as to not be breathed on. All items are washed in preparation, then wrapped or covered.

The Left Hand: The left hand is considered impure because it is used for personal hygiene by washing after answering the call of nature. Handing another person anything with the left hand is considered a subtle insult.

Footwear: Shoes, being impure, are not worn inside the temple or home. Carrying shoes is also avoided. One apologizes immediately if one's footwear touches another. This is done by touching the right hand to where the foot touched the other person, then touching the hand lightly to the left eye and then the right.

Rites of Passage



Personal Ceremonies that Sanctify and Celebrate Life's Crucial Junctures

FOR THE HINDU, LIFE IS A SACRED JOURNEY; and every step from birth to death is marked, and thus acknowledged, through traditional ceremony, called *samskara*. A *samskara* is an enduring impression etched into the malleable substance of a person's mind at a psychological point in life. During these Hindu rites of passage, a temple or home ceremony deeply influences the soul and directs life along the path of dharma. There are many types of *samskaras*, from the rite prior to conception to the funeral ceremony. Each one, properly observed, empowers spiritual life, preserves religious culture and establishes bonds with inner worlds as the soul consciously accepts each succeeding discovery and duty in the order of God's creation. Religious *samskaras* serve two purposes. First, they mark clearly within our minds the occasion of an important life transition. Second, they solicit special blessings from the devas and Deities, society and village, family and friends. These blessings and feelings of love have a markedly positive effect, stabilizing the mind so that the deeper meanings of life can unfold within us. Of the many Hindu *samskaras*, eight are illustrated and described in this chapter.

Namakarana, Name-Giving

(Pictured at left) The Hindu name-giving rite, *namakarana* *samskara*, is one of the essential rites of passage. It is performed in the home or the temple, usually when the child is 11 to 40 days old. The father whispers the infant's name in his right ear.

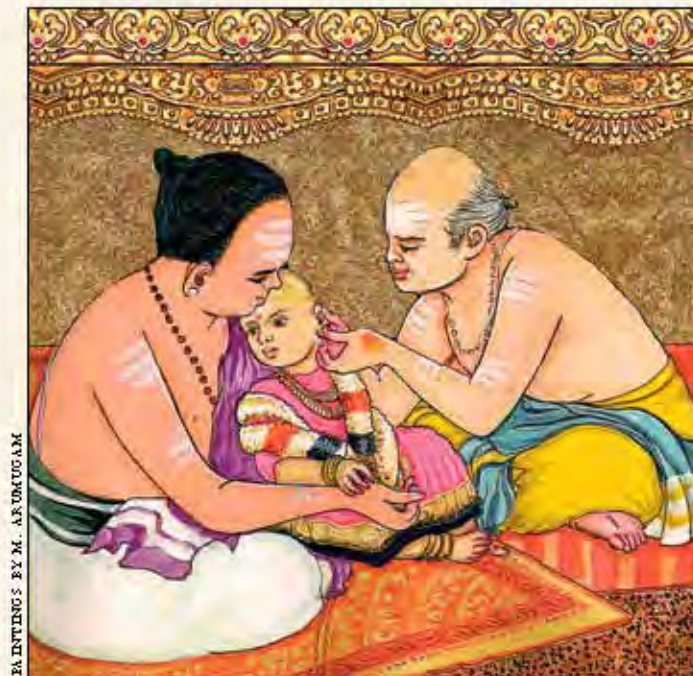


Anna Prasana, First Solid Food

During the *anna prasana* *samskara*, solid food is fed to the child for the first time. This is done by the father or the mother in the temple or at home. The choice of food, such as rice, offered to a child at this crucial time of life is said to help forge his or her destiny.

The best rendering of *samskara* in English is made by the word *sacrament*, which means "religious ceremony or act regarded as an outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace." *Sacrament* also means "confirmation of some promise or oath; things of mysterious significance, sacred influence and symbol."

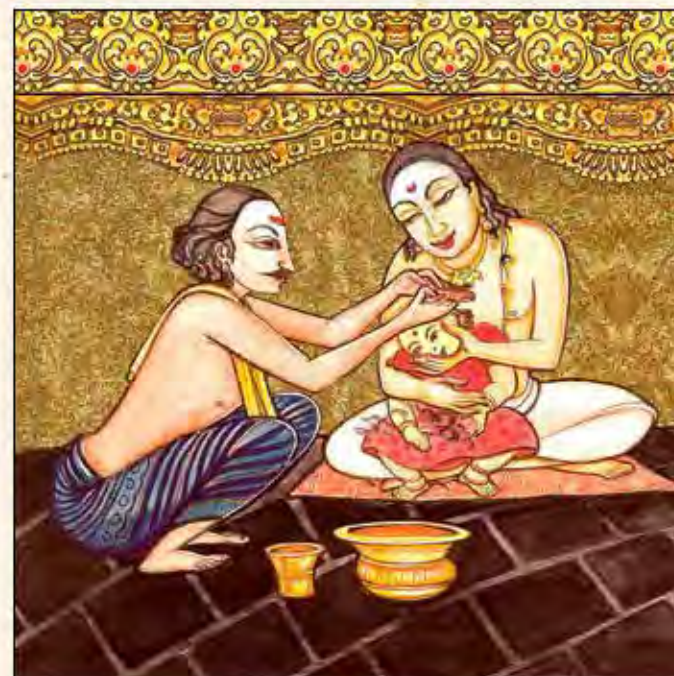
Sri Raj Bai Pandey, *Hindu Samskaras*



PAINTINGS BY M. ANJURUJAM

Karnavedha, Ear-Piercing

The ear-piercing ceremony, for both boys and girls, is performed in the temple or the home, generally on the child's first birthday. Health benefits are said to derive from this ceremony.



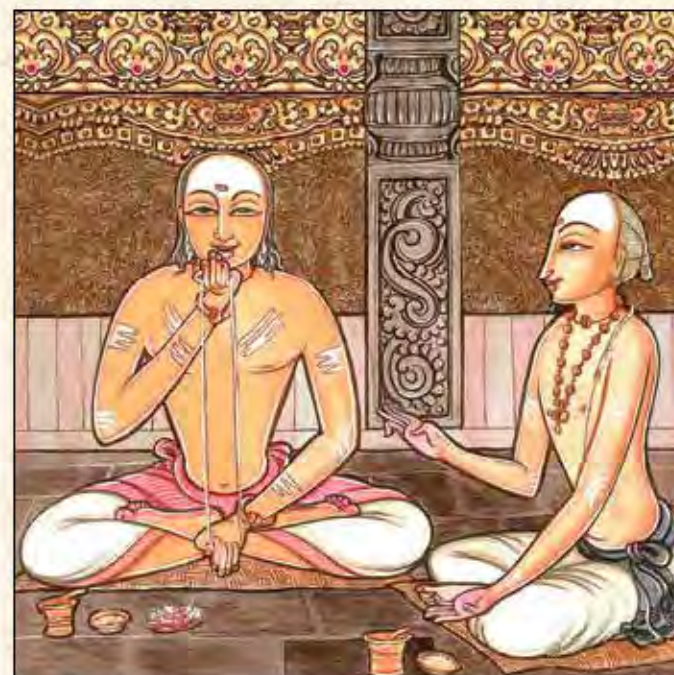
Chudakarana, Head-Shaving

Ceremonial head-shaving is usually performed before the end of the third year in the home or temple. The shaven head denotes purity and egolessness and is said to mitigate past life karma.



Vidyarambha, Learning Commencement

The official beginning of the child's education is performed in the home or temple, during the fourth year, when he or she writes the first letter of the alphabet in a tray filled with uncooked rice.



Upanayana, Initiation

The ceremonial presentation of the sacred thread is performed in the temple or home between the ages of 9 and 15, when a boy begins the study of the *Vedas*. Thereafter, he is considered "twice-born."



Vivaha, Marriage

The marriage ceremony is performed in a temple or special hall around the sacred *koma* fire. Lifetime vows and seven steps before God and the Gods consecrate the holy union of husband and wife.



Antyesti, Funeral

The funeral ceremony is performed or arranged by the relatives according to local traditions. It includes preparation of the body, cremation, rites of mourning, purification and remembrance.

Seven Other Rites of Passage

In addition to the primary personal ceremonies, there is a rich collection of other traditional *samskaras*. Here is a sampling.

Keshanta Kala

When a boy first shaves his facial hair, this indication that he has come of age is celebrated in the temple or at home with the *keshanta* *samskara*. It is a joyous time of gift-giving, yet it is serious as well. Often a vow of *brahmacharya* (celibacy) is taken at this same time.

Ritu Kala

As puberty dawns for a young girl, the *ritu kala* home-ceremony is performed to acknowledge her first menses. New clothing, jewelry and her first sari are given as she joyously and openly joins the young adult community.

Samavartana

This ceremony—literally, "returning home from the house of the guru"—marks the end of studentship and indicates formal closure to the *brahmacharya* period of life. The young person now must choose one of two paths: the *grihastha* path (family life) or the renunciate path (monastic life).

Nishchitārtha or Vagdana

This is the betrothal ceremony in which a man and woman are declared formally engaged by their parents with the exchange of jewelry and gifts. Based on this commitment, they and their families begin planning a shared future.

Punsavana

The literal meaning of the term *punsavana* is "the quickening of a male child." Not practiced today, this ceremony was performed by the husband for the wife beseeching the birth of a son, primarily as an assurance for the continuance of the family line.

Simantonmayana

This is the "hair-parting" rite. Not commonly practiced today, this ancient ceremony of parting the hair of the pregnant wife was performed to bring cheer as well as ward off evil spirits.

Jatakarma

During the later days of pregnancy, a woman may have the *jatakarma* *samskara* performed. This rite, based on a verse from the *Atharva Veda* written specifically to assure safe childbirth, was designed to yield blessings for life as well as protection from harm for both mother and child.

Honoring The Arts of Homemaking

An Artist's Portrayal of the Hindu Wife's Traditional Domestic Duties

TODAY, COMMUNITIES AND PEOPLES ALL OVER THE WORLD ARE RE-evaluating how we live. As a global community, we are seeking more sustainable ways of life, seeking solutions to the myriad problems that our modern ways have caused since the Industrial Revolution—global warming, pollution of our air and water ways, concretization of our lands, deforestation, and the social ills of crime, poverty, abuse and broken homes. Peoples are evaluating old, traditional system to learn or relearn how we got along in the old days, without so many conveniences, when life was simpler, less competitive, less stressful and frantic. In this chapter, we bring you a collection of painting by S. Rajam, a gifted artist and musician born in a South Indian village in the old days of 1918, that depict the daily rituals commonly performed by Hindu wives and homemakers all over India, during his time and for centuries before. The same rituals can still be found today in villages and urban centers. The scenes in his 14 pieces follows the sequence of a day, from morning to dusk.

Then, as now, the wife and mother carries a momentous responsibility—the creation of a stable home and the raising of a fully functioning family. Her role, apart from the competitive, breadwinner world of men, is every bit as essential as her husband's. Rightly performed, each part of her daily ritual is done with a mindfulness based on knowledge of the workings of subtle energies, and of unseen angelic beings—the guardian *devas* of family members—and the aid they give. For example: the home's doorways and windows are seen as portals through which either helpful or antagonistic beings can enter. So daily decorating of entryways entreats guardian *devas* to allow access only to those who will strengthen and support the family. Similarly, she knows the womanly energy she imbues into a meal during its preparation can increase the health of all who partake of it, or, if negative, contribute to illness and distress. She also understands that clothing and other possessions respond to care or neglect just as people do, and that cleanliness and love bring forth a refined spiritual vibration. All her efforts serve to make the home a holy place. Indeed, each of the duties depicted in Rajam's art has esoteric and mystical aspects to be discovered and developed by the intuitive woman.

To urban wives and those living abroad, some of the tasks may seem irrelevant and the methods outdated, even demeaning. Rajam hopes modern Hindu individuals will discover how each duty relates to the current household environment. This woman's rustic tools may be replaced with electric utensils and food processors. Even the modern refrigerator door can be transformed into a place of blessing by daily posting a freshly ink-jetted *kolam* design upon it. With applied intuition and ingenuity, similar modernization of each of these principles will move them meaningfully into the future. And some of the simplicity may be revived in our efforts to find sustainable ways to survive on into the future.



Family life, however full, remains empty if the wife lacks the lofty culture of the home.
Tirukural, verse 52

Storytelling

Before going to bed, children are fed light foods out in the open air. When the moonlight is seen, mother tells stories to inspire the child to linger and eat more.



Collecting Water

In the morning, women meet at the well to gather water for the day and to clean cooking utensils.



Bathing

The women bathe in the river at hidden places specially reserved for them. They apply fresh turmeric root to the skin as a toner, skin color enhancer and anti-bacterial. Early European visitors were so impressed with the daily bathing ritual of Indian women that upon returning home they slowly convinced the rest of Europe of the merits of bathing more than once a week or month.

Sanctifying the Doorway

Here, the home's entryway is adorned with turmeric paste and red kumkuma powder. The daily morning decoration is a blessing intended to beseech guardian devas to allow entry only to beings, both physical and subtle, who will benefit the family and home environment, rather than causing discord.



Decorating the Entry

As the day begins, kolams are painted at the home entrance. First, water is mixed with cow dung and sprinkled on the ground. Then geometric designs are applied with powdered rice in many colors, guided by a trained thumb and index finger.



Caring for Clothing

Some women bathe in the temple tank. Before the bath, they wash their saris and other garments and spread them on the steps, later to find them fully dried in the hot Indian sun upon returning from their bath.



Preparing Rice

Each day a small quantity of rice paddy is taken from the reservoir and pounded to separate the husk to provide grain for the day's meals. Pure and religious thoughts are pounded into the paddy as well.



Temple Worship

Before the noon meal, wives visit the temple, bringing an offering basket of coconut, ghee for the temple lamps, betel leaves, flower garlands and fruits.



Preparing Meals

In this scene, vegetables are washed and cut with the aid of a knife-like blade affixed to a wooden platform. The platform includes a seat for the woman, which makes for effortless cutting and minimal fatigue—the original “Cuisinart.” (Right) Once yesterday’s milk curd and becomes curd, it is stirred into butter and boiled into ghee. The woman vigorously churns the frothing liquid in big pots with a ladle of wood turned with a cord.

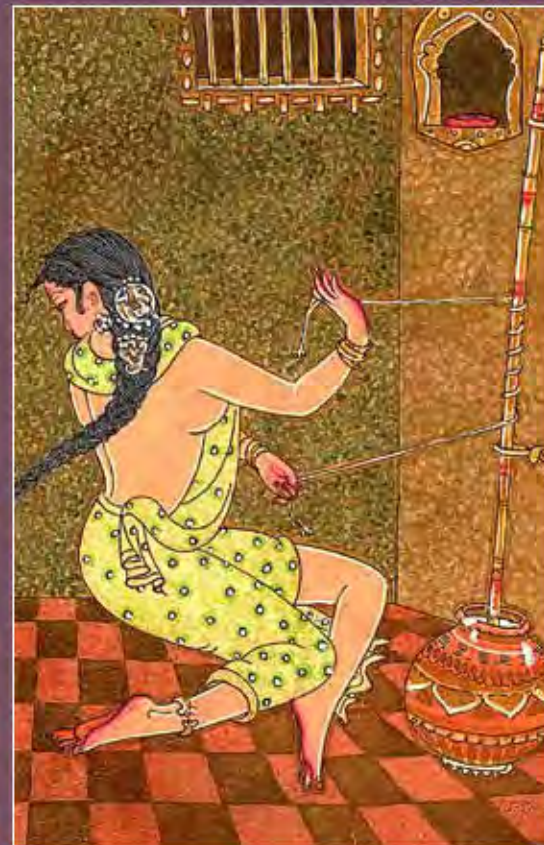


Grooming

(Left) In the evening the wife dons casual or formal dress, combs and braids the hair, marks the forehead with kum-kuma and applies jewelry.

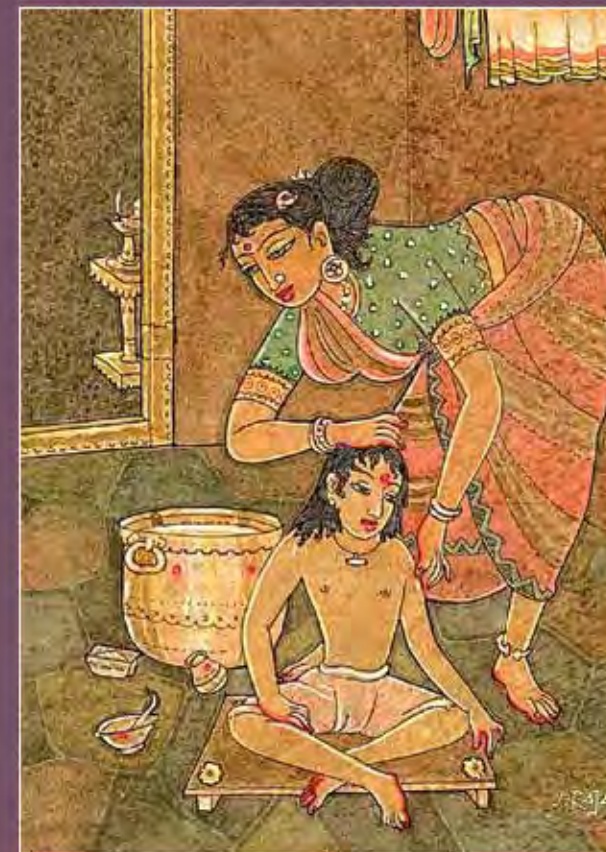
Care of Children

(Right) During the Dipavali festival a healthful ayurvedic oil bath is given to all. Children are attended to first, in the hour before sunrise. Oil is applied to skin and hair, then rinsed off.



Making Garlands

She collects fragrant flowers and with deft fingers assembles them on fine string according to color. Garlands are used in the shrines and to decorate the pictures of the Gods throughout the home.



Caring for the Home Shrine

Evening is time for cleaning the home's oil lamps, adding fresh ghee or oil and lighting them in the shrines. The woman prostrates to receive blessings from the Deities and devas who guide her family's life of dharma. Devotional songs are sung as the day winds down.

Hail Hindu Heroes!

Celebrating Some of India's Champions of Virtue, Strength and Spirituality

BEGINNING TWO CENTURIES AGO, THERE AROSE throughout India a retinue of talented, high-souled and dedicated men and women who were great by any standard in the history of humankind. They consecrated their life and works to the resurrection of their motherland. They lit the lamp of liberty, articulated a new era, safeguarded India's individuality and spirituality, strengthened her people's intentions and preserved their way of life. These are some of the contemporary heroes of Hinduism. Here we briefly recount their stories and achievements, while artist Sabaji Bhagwan Polaji of Mumbai provides the portraiture.

Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1825-1883): "Back to the Vedas." This was the clarion call of Swami Dayananda Saraswati, religious leader, social reformer, gifted speaker and prolific writer. Swamiji founded the now global fellowship of the Arya Samaj. His writings include commentaries on the *Rig, Yajur* and *Sama Vedas*, an encyclopedic work on Hinduism called *Satyarth Prakash*, a book of prayers and a work on Sanskrit grammar. Swami rejected idol worship and polytheism. He fought against superstitions, child-marriage, the hereditary caste system and forced widowhood. He advocated women's education, a single national language and the study of Sanskrit.

Born in 1825 in Kathiawar (now in Rajkot district of Gujarat), Mulshankar, as Swami Dayananda was known as a boy, left his

.....
All art is from the book ARCHITECTS AND BUILDERS OF MODERN INDIA by Bharatiya Vidyā Bhawan, USA © 1997

home at the age of 21. He wandered the country for 20 years and learned the *Vedas* from scholars. His Guru, Virajanand of Mathura, the blind saint with a giant intellect, gave him his mission. Swamiji passed away at Ajmer on October 30, 1883, having been poisoned.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836-1886): There is one principle of pure consciousness. It is both personal and impersonal. It can be reached through the path of love, knowledge and selfless action. Man should aim at Self realization, and morality is the foundation of spiritual perfection. This, in essence, is the teaching of Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

Born at Kamarpukur village of West Bengal, on February 18, 1836, Gadadhar, as he was known as a youth, showed spiritual inclinations even in his boyhood. He had an artistic temperament and a beautiful voice. His brother took him to Calcutta when he was 20 and made him a priest at the Kali Temple at Dakshineswar. Ramakrishna not only had visions of the Supreme Goddess but had practical training in tantra. His whole life was an uninterrupted contemplation of God. Through his profound spiritual realizations, he demonstrated the reality of God and restored faith in religion for many. People flocked to him from far and near, seekers of truth of all races, creeds and castes. His small room in the Dakshineswar temple garden on the outskirts of the city of Calcutta became a veritable parliament of religions. The teachings of Ramakrishna were spread all over the world by his foremost disciple, Swami Vivekananda.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941): Poet, novelist, critic, philosopher, nationalist and educationist, Tagore is the greatest of modern Bengali writers and a treasure of Indian literature. Tagore gave exquisite expression to the joy of being one with the river and the mountain,

the sky and the stars, the grass and the flowers. His poetry exalts nature and mysticism. His was an aesthetic approach to life and art, but his faith was anchored deep in the Brahman of the *Upanishads*. Tagore wrote more than 1,000 poems and 2,000 songs, besides novels, short stories, plays and essays. He was a musician of the highest order and a painter of delicate sensitivity. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913 for his collection of poems entitled *Gitanjali*.

Born to affluence of Devendra Nath Tagore and Sharada Devi in Calcutta, Tagore was educated mostly at home. He studied for a while at the University College, London, in 1878. He was married to Mrinalini in 1883. He founded Shanti Niketan in 1901, a school which later became famous as Vishwa Bharati, or World University. Tagore fervently protested the partition of Bengal (1905). His song *Jana Gana Mana* is the National Anthem of India.

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902): As the foremost disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda not only spread the teachings of his master but carried the message of Vedanta to the West. He is hailed as a "bridge-builder between East and West." He consecrated his own life to the moral and spiritual upliftment of his nation and humanity.

Born on January 12, 1863, in Calcutta, of Shri Vishwanatha Datta and Bhuvaneshwari Devi, Narendranath Datta, as Swami was called, had his early education at home. He later graduated in arts and law. A self-proclaimed rationalist and agnostic, Narendranath came under the influence of Ramakrishna almost by chance, and he was immediately captivated by the unqualified spirituality of Ramakrishna. He took the name Swami Vivekananda as a *sannyasin* before departing for America. Vivekananda became famous after addressing the Parliament of Religions on September 11, 1893 in Chicago, USA. The brilliant light that was Swamiji went out on July 4, 1902, when he had just turned 39. He is the one of the greatest modern interpreters and promoters of the Advaita Vedanta philosophy.



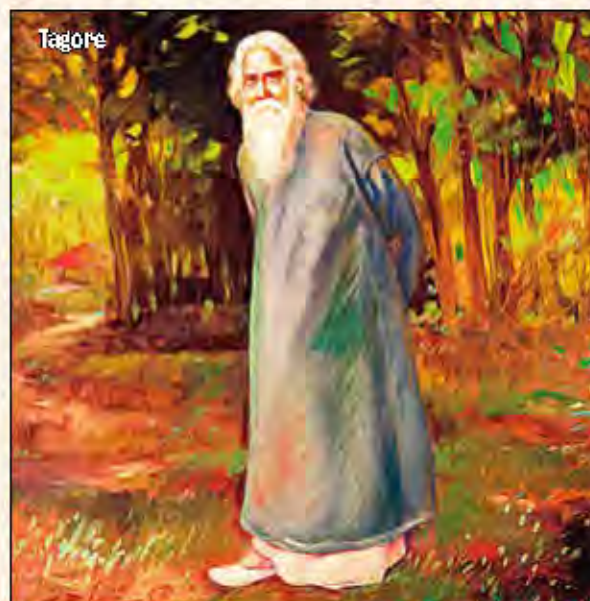
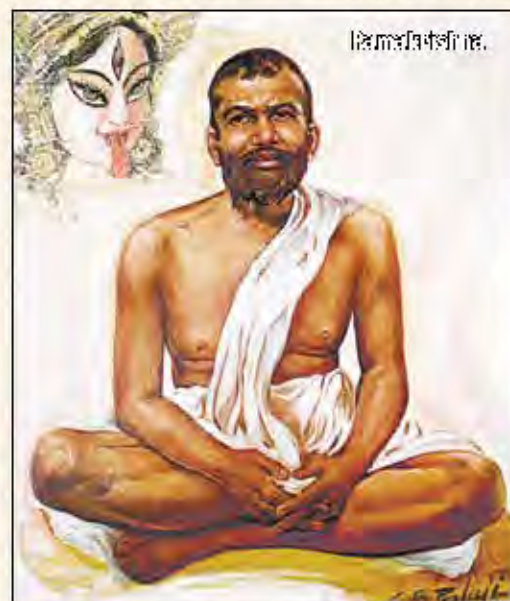
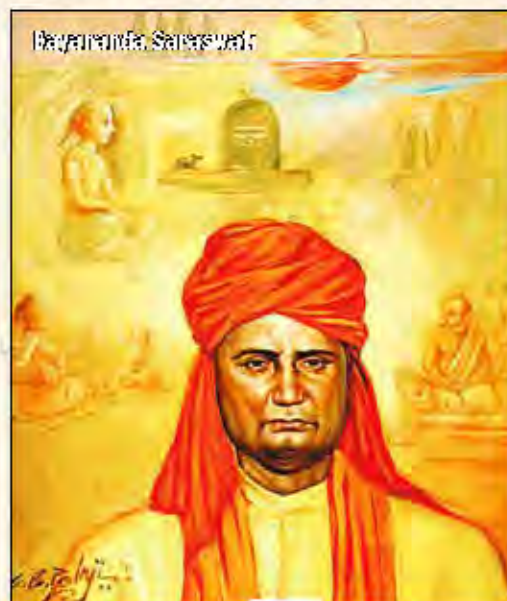
Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948): Mahatma Gandhi is looked upon as the "Father of the Nation" in India. He had an overwhelming influence on the people in the country during his lifetime. Albert Einstein hailed Gandhi as: "A man who has confronted the brutality of Europe with the dignity of a simple human being, and thus at all times has risen superior. Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth." Gandhi demonstrated that the essential strength of man is spiritual. Injustice and tyranny

should be fought with truth and nonviolence as the guiding principles. Gandhi roused the masses of India into action for winning freedom from foreign rule.

Born on October 2, 1869, in Gujarat, Gandhi had his education in India and England. He left for South Africa in 1893 to argue in a civil suit. Moved by the plight of Indian settlers, Gandhi demonstrated the efficacy of his unique strategy—*satyagraha*—in fighting for their legitimate rights. Returning to India in 1915, Gandhi launched a series of movements against the British rule, including noncooperation, civil disobedience and the Quit India Movement in 1942. He was sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment. On January 30, 1948, the apostle of peace and nonviolence fell to an assassin's bullets.

Mahayogi Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950): One of the greatest pioneers of the Indian Renaissance, Sri Aurobindo was educated in England and was proficient in Greek, Latin and English. Yet there was no greater or more brilliant exponent of Indian culture from the point of view of the Vedic spiritual tradition. He was no philosopher content with weaving verbal rhetoric. He was a yogi, an integrated personality whose life was a *sadhana* towards realizing the Self Divine. He has been described as the "Poet of Patriotism" and the "Prophet of Indian Nationalism." Aurobindo envisaged the emergence of a *superman*, the truth-conscious being, one who has realized the Divinity within himself as the goal of human evolution.

Born on August 15, 1872, Aurobindo attended schools in England



from the age of seven. He returned to India in 1893, taught French and became Professor of English at the Baroda State College. He was in Baroda for 13 years. Aurobindo was drawn into politics in 1905 when Bengal was partitioned. He was associated with the Bengali daily *Yugantar* and the English daily *Bande Mataram*. He followed Tilak in his political thinking and was with the extremists at the Surat session of the Congress in 1907. Aurobindo was arrested in 1908 for revolutionary activity and acquitted after one year. He became a spiritual aspirant during his imprisonment and chose to pursue a spiritual mission. He went to Pondicherry and stayed on there till his *mahasamadhi* on December 5, 1950. He wrote copiously in his inimitable, elevated literary style.

Sadhu T.L. Vaswani (1879-1966): An eminent educationist, great social reformer, philosopher and a man of God, Thanwardas Lilaram Vaswani lived a life of selfless service. Spiritually inclined from his childhood, he called upon youth to be dedicated to the service of the Motherland with faith in God. He considered character-building to be the essential prerequisite for nation-building. He organized many educational organizations and youth centers for promoting education and inculcation of ethical and spiritual values.

Vaswani was born in Hyderabad, Sind, on November 25, 1879. His father was well versed in Persian and knowledgeable about the lives of the Sufis. A brilliant student, Vaswani served as professor and principal in various colleges during 1903-1919. He resigned his principalship in 1919 and decided to devote the rest of his life to the service of his motherland. Vaswani, a great orator, was one of the earliest supporters of Gandhi's noncooperation movement.

Returning to Hyderabad, in 1929 he started an organization called "Sakhi Sat-Sang," devoted to women's causes. He presided over a number of conferences and meetings connected with humanitarianism, religion and peace during the third and the fourth decades of the century. Following partition, Vaswani settled in Pune in 1949 and set up a number of educational institutions. He has been hailed as "a thinker and a revealer of the deep truth of the spirit." He passed away on June 16, 1966, in Pune. A 10-foot statue of Sadhu T.L. Vaswani stands before the Pune Railway Station. In 1969, the government of India brought out a postal stamp in memory of him.

Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950): Ramana Maharshi was born on December 29, 1879, at Tiruchuli, a small town near Madurai, in South India, as the son of Sundaram Aiyar, a middle-class brahmin lawyer, and his wife Alagammal. The Maharshi was named Venkataraman, and after his elementary education at Tiruchuli, he was sent to

Madurai for schooling. He was living in his uncle's home then. It was there, when he was 17, that he had a great spiritual experience in a confrontation with death. He felt that he was to die just then, and his conscious mind was driven inwards by the question "Who is this 'I' who is dying?" From the innermost recesses of his being the realization came: "I am the soul (Atma or Self), not the body." From that time onward, he dwelt in the radiance of the spirit. The fear of death left him forever.

On August 29, 1896 he left his family in Madurai and ventured to Tiruvannamalai, where he remained until his departure from this world in 1950. Beginning in 1922, an ashram grew up around him at the foot of the hill. People from all walks of life went to the sage and invariably experienced profound peace as well as gaining practical solutions to their problems. Though the Maharshi was ever ready to explain doctrinal or philosophical matters, it was mainly his very presence that was his greatest blessing to devotees. The Maharshi once explained to a visitor, "Bhagavan's teaching is an expression of his own experience and realization." The Maharshi attained Mahasamadhi on Friday, April 14, 1950.

Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975): Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, one of the three early recipients of the Bharat Ratna Award, was a great philosopher, educationist and humanist. He was the President of India during 1962-67 and was hailed as the philosopher-king of India during 1962-67 and was hailed as the philosopher-king of Plato's conception. He explained the ancient wisdom of the Indian sages in terms intelligible to the modern mind. Radhakrishnan's specific contribution to thought consists of his philosophy of religion and idealist view of life. Additionally, he gave much impetus to the comparative study of religions. Radhakrishnan offered a reasoned defence of religion. He was an exceptional writer and speaker, in a style that was dignified and impressive. His intellect was encyclopedic. Science and religion, literature and the fine arts, all these he elucidated with rare insight.

Born in Tiruttani, Tamil Nadu, in September, 1888, Radhakrishnan had his education at Tiruttani, Tirupati, Vellore and Chennai. He started his career as a lecturer and moved to Mysore and Calcutta to occupy prestigious professorial chairs. He was Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics at Oxford during 1936-39. Radhakrishnan held the offices of Indian Ambassador to Russia, 1949-52, Vice President of the Indian Union, 1952-62, and President of India, 1962-67.

Acharya Vinoba Bhave (1895-1982): A scholar and a saint, Acharya Vinoba Bhave was a beacon of hope and solace to millions in India

and abroad. He was Mahatma Gandhi's spiritual successor. Vinoba was born in a village in Maharashtra's Kolaba district on September 11, 1895. As a youth, he was drawn to Gandhi and his unique "Weaponless War" for India's freedom. Like the Mahatma, Vinoba was also ahead of his time. His *bhoodan* (gift of land), *sampattidan* (gift of wealth), *jeevadan* (gift of life) and other movements are logical extensions of Gandhi's programs of national reconstruction. Believing in communal amity, he abolished every trace of untouchability from his heart. In order to understand his Muslim neighbors, he studied the *Koran* in the original Arabic for one year. His *padayatra* (foot journey), a part of his *bhoodan* movement, was a demonstration of the Gandhian doctrine of trusteeship.

Of the many teachings of the *Gita* which Vinoba highlighted in his talks, one of the most important was the role of self-help. "The *Gita* is prepared to go to the lowest, the weakest and the least cultured of men. And it goes to him not to keep him where he is, but to grasp him by the hand and lift him up. The *Gita* wishes that man should make his action pure and attain the highest state." Vinobaji passed away at Paunar on November 17, 1982. He was posthumously honored with the Bharat Ratna Award in 1984.

Rukmini Devi Arundale (1904-1986): She is the resuscitator of the Indian classical dance, Bharata natyam, which was almost given up in the early decades of the present century. Rukmini Devi Arundale returned the dance to respectability. She looked upon dance not as mere entertainment but as a means of spiritual transformation, and she brought the spirit of the temple to the stage.

Born in an orthodox brahmin family, she later became a member of the Theosophical Society. Her taking up dance was a significant challenge. Bharata natyam was then learned and performed in the temples by Devadasis (women servants of God) who were looked down upon by society. Rukmini Devi had to struggle against this convention and its stigma. She created a stir in the conservative society of Chennai in the twenties by marrying George Arundale, an educationist and one of the leaders of the Theosophical movement in South India. She trained in music and dance under great masters. With a view to fostering these arts and preserving them in their pristine purity, she founded the Kalakshetra (Temple of Arts) in Madras. The institution today is world renowned.

Rukmini Devi was a member of the Rajya Sabha. She was an ardent champion of vegetarianism and carried on a crusade against ritual animal slaughter. She was even proposed as a nominee for the presidency of India in 1977.



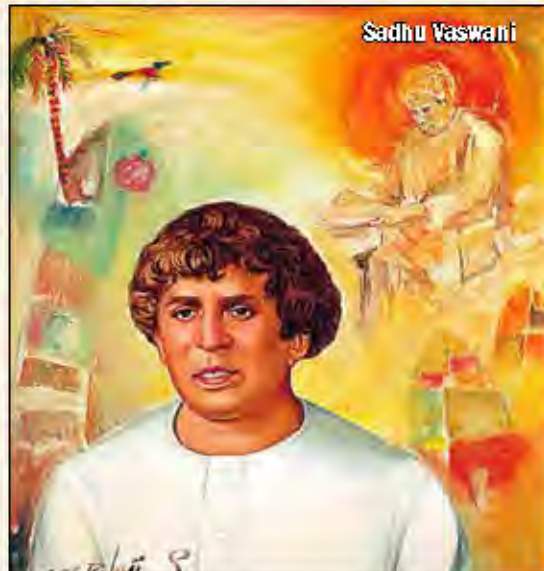
At the canvas: Artist Polaji honors India with his brush

Heroic Artistry

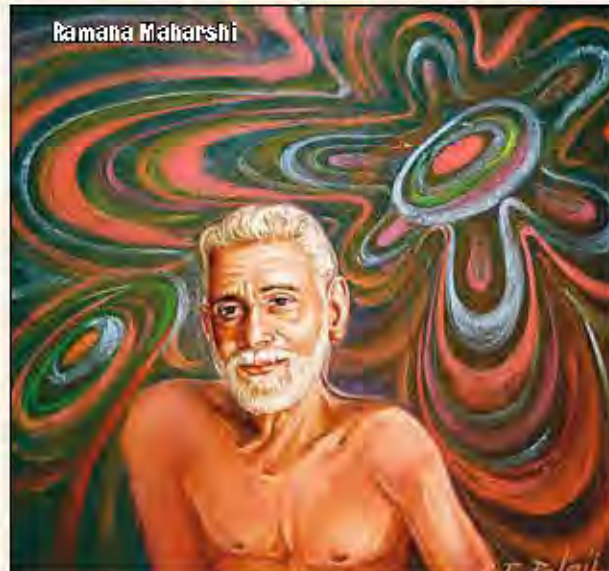
THE PORTRAITS IN THIS ARTICLE WERE LOVINGLY RENDERED by Sabaji Bhagwan Polaji. Born September 2, 1943, Polaji came to Mumbai, where he earned his degree from Sir J.J. College of Art. He then worked as a teacher in the B.L. Ruia School situated in the suburb of Vile Parle. Polaji is a prolific award winner, both nationally and internationally, earning successive awards for "Best Teacher." Other accolades include the India Awards for Child Welfare and Good Citizens Award. He has organized seven hundred art camps, as well as many seminars and workshops in countries like America and Belgium. His love of youth is evident to all, and he is especially dedicated to the betterment of orphans and disabled children. Polaji has a thorough knowledge of Indian history, particularly of India's independence, and this has helped him to execute these portraits with devotion and insight. Each painting shows the individual along with some glimpse of his or her achievements and accomplishments, so that any viewer can visually gain an idea of their contributions to Mother India and Hinduism.

SABAJI BHAGWAN POLAJI, 7/8 PIRAMALINGAR, SWAMI VINOBAGANDA ROAD, GOREGAON (WEST), MUMBAI 400062, INDIA.

SHARADITA VIDYA BHAVANI, 305 SEVENTH AVENUE, 17TH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10001 USA. TEL: 212-289-3833.



Sadhu Vaswani



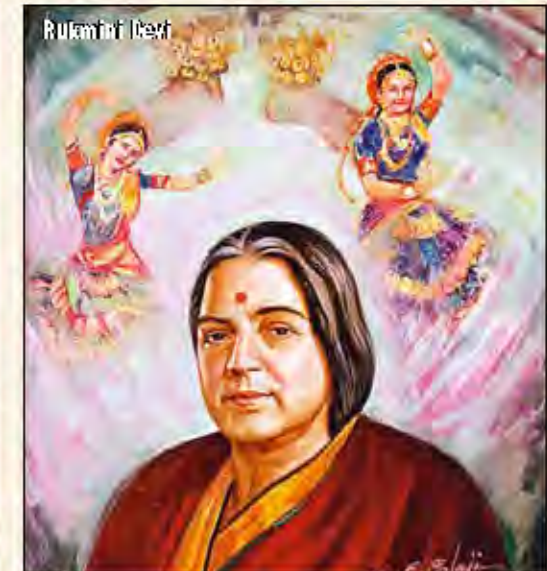
Ramana Maharshi



Radhakrishnan



Vinoba Bhave



Rukmini Devi

Hindu Ethics

A code of conduct, vegetarianism, sensitive medical issues, and ahimsa—nonhurtfulness in thought, word and deed



A council of renunciate Hindu leaders gathered to discuss current ethical and religious issues in light of dharmic principles at the Kumbha Mela of 2004 in Ujjain at the camp of Maharishi Sarkhani Ji Maharaj (center left).

Hinduism's Code of Conduct

Twenty Keys for Spiritual Living in Contemporary Times

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

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

everyone in society, and assumed to be fully intact for anyone seeking life's highest aim in the pursuit called yoga.

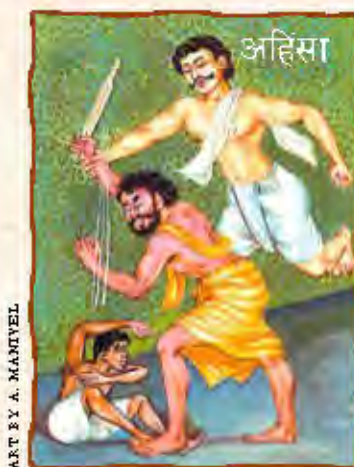
Sage Patanjali (ca. 200 BCE), raja yoga's foremost proponent, told us, "These *yamas* are not limited by class, country, time (past, present or future) or situation. Hence they are called the universal great vows." Yogic scholar Swami Brahmananda Saraswati revealed the inner science of *yama* and *niyama*.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

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

The Ten Vedic Restraints, Yama यम

1. Noninjury, Ahimsa

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



2. Truthfulness, Satya

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



3. Nonstealing, Asteya

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



4. Divine Conduct, Brahmacharya

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



5. Patience, Kshama

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



6. Steadfastness, Dhriti

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



7. Compassion, Daya

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



8. Honesty, Arjava

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



9. Moderate Appetite, *Mitahara*

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



10. Purity, *Saucha*

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



5. Worship, *Ishvara-Pujana*

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



6. Scriptural Listening, *Siddhanta Shravana*

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



The Ten Vedic Practices, *Niyama* नियम

1. Remorse, *Hri*

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



2. Contentment, *Santosha*

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



7. Cognition, *Mati*

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



8. Sacred Vows, *Vrata*

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



3. Giving, *Dana*

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



4. Faith, *Astikya*

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



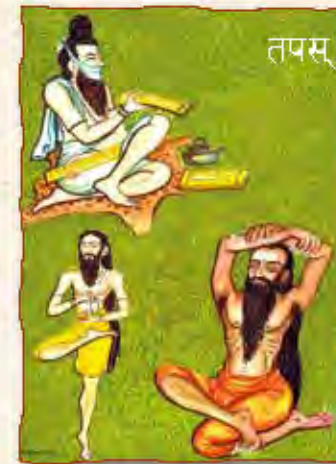
9. Recitation, *Japa*

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



10. Austerity, *Tapas*

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





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

The Meat-Free Life

Five Reasons to Be a Vegetarian & Ten Arguments Against Eating Meat

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

Reason 1 Dharma

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

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

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

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

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

Vegetarianism, an Ancient Hindu Ethic

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

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

Is Vegetarianism Integral to Noninjury?

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

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

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

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

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

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

Vegetarian Animals

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

Food and Consciousness

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

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

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

Dharma

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

Hindus Were the First Vegetarians

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

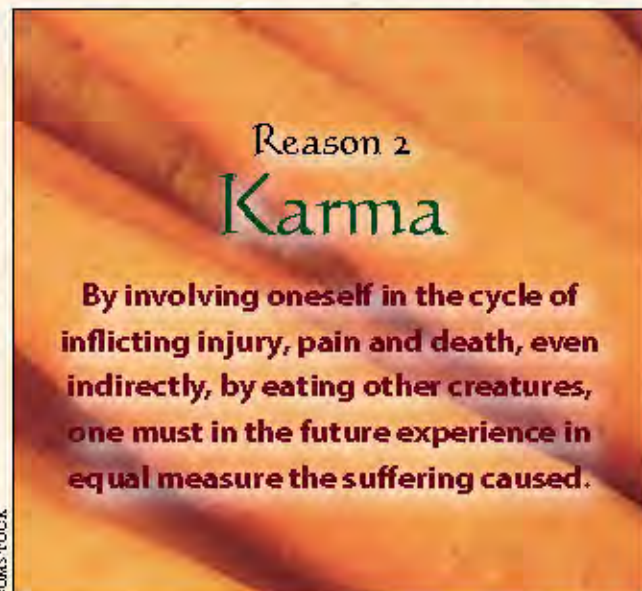
"That vegetarianism has always been widespread in India is clear

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

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

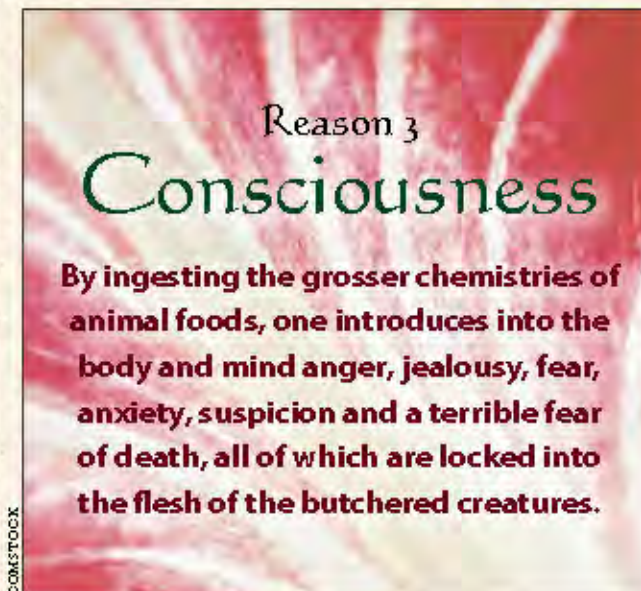
Common Dietary Concerns

Those considering a vegetarian diet generally worry about getting enough nutrients, since the belief that meat is a necessary part of keeping strong and healthy is still extremely widespread. Recently a group of eminent doctors called the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM), themselves members of the American Medical Association, have decided to change the US consciousness on human nutrition, particularly among the medical community. The PCRM is a nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C., consisting of doctors and laypersons working together for compassionate and effective medical practice, research and health promotion. Founded in 1985, the PCRM is supported by over 3,000 physicians and 50,000 laypersons. PCRM president (and vegetarian) Neal D. Barnard, M.D., is a popular speaker and the author of *The Power of Your Plate*. Armed with



Reason 2 Karma

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



Reason 3 Consciousness

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



decades of nutritional research data, PCRM addresses these dietary concerns head-on:

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

Other concerns are allayed by the PCRM as follows:

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

2. **Iron** is plentiful in whole grains, beans and fruits.

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

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

5. Vegetarian children also have high nutritional needs, but these, too, are met with a vegetarian diet. A vegetarian menu is "life-extending." As children, vegetarians may grow more gradually, reach puberty somewhat later, and live substantially longer than meat-eaters. Be sure to include a reliable source of vitamin B12.

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

Converting to Vegetarianism

Making the transition from carnivore to herbivore is not as hard as you might think. According to the book, *The New Vegetarians*, by Sonia Partridge and Paul Amato, 73% of vegetarian converts stated that the transition was not difficult. It

is easier for people who do some homework on the subject and have a bit of cooking skill. The time it takes for people to totally convert varies greatly. About 70% of people make the transition gradually, while 30% stop all at once. Red meat is almost always abandoned within the first year, followed by fowl, fish and eggs.

One recommended method for the transition is to set a series of goals for yourself. Start simply with getting through one day without meat. Then, try one weekend, then one week. Make a realistic timetable for reaching each goal. Two to three months might be reason-

able for some people, while six months to a year might be better for others. Rewards can also help. For a major accomplishment such as a week without meat, treat yourself to a nice vegetarian meal out.

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

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

Vegetarians are often asked "Don't you miss eating meat?" For about half of beginning vegetarians the answer is yes, according to *The New Vegetarians*. They miss the texture and flavor of meat in the early weeks and months. Almost everyone though, gets over this within six months to a year and for many it becomes nauseating even to think

about eating meat. Eighty-two percent of fully adapted vegetarians say there is no way they would consider eating flesh again.

Conclusion

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

"Why should we ever think of eating meat, fish, fowl, eggs, anything with eyes or, as some say, with two or more senses. The cock-a-doodle-doo who wakes us up in the morning is dinner on the table at night. How gruesome

How ruthless to thus forever close the eyes of an animal, or have someone else do it for them in order that they may buy the carcass, closing their eyes to the fact, which is even worse, and keeping their own eyes closed to that creature's suffering to consume it without conscience during jovial small talk over the dinner table. How easy in turn for such a person to turn and maim or kill a fellow human in the same way in times of stress as a natural reaction, in 'justifiable righteousness.' As the *Tirukural* proclaims, compassion cannot be found in the hearts of those who eat meat.

Reason 4 Health

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

Reason 5 Environment

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

Wisdom from Saints and Scriptures

Vedas, Shastras and Sutras Alike Decry the Killing and Eating of Animals

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

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

Rig Veda Samhita 10. 87. 16

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

Rig Veda Samhita 10. 37. 11

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

Rig Veda

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

Atharva Veda Samhita 19. 48. 5

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

Yajur Veda Samhita 12.32

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

Thirumandiram

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

Yoga Sutras 2.35

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

Sandilya Upanishad

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

Manu Samhita

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

Mahabharata, Arsi. 115.40

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

Mahabharata, Arsi. 115.47

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

and memory should abstain from acts of injury.

Mahabharata 18. 115.8

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

Tirukural Verse 251

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

Tirukural Verse 252

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

Tirukural Verse 253

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

Tirukural Verse 254

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

Tirukural Verse 255

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

Tirukural Verse 256

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

Tirukural Verse 257

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

Tirukural Verse 259

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

Tirukural Verse 260

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

Mahatma Gandhi

How to Win an Argument With a Meat-Eater

Facts and Figures You Need to Change Opinion

IN THE PRECEDING PAGES WE HAVE DISCUSSED the benefits and practical considerations of a vegetarian diet. Here we approach the issue from another perspective, examining the devastating harm caused by a meat-laden diet—not only to the animal which is killed and eaten, but also to the meat-eater himself, to humanity as a whole and to our very planet. The following presentation is based on the poster, “How to win an argument with a meat-eater,” published by Earthsave, of Felton, California, giving facts from Pulitzer Prize nominee John Robbins’ book, *Diet for a New America*. Our version details ten arguments against meat-eating.

1. The Hunger Argument

The world’s massive hunger problems could be greatly alleviated by reducing or eliminating meat-eating. Vast quantities of food suitable for humans are fed to livestock for meat production—wasting most of its protein in the process; in addition, the huge acreages now used as pasture for meat animals would produce much more human food if converted to grains and vegetables.

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

2. The Environmental Argument

Many of the world’s massive environmental problems—including global warming, loss of topsoil, loss of rain forests and species extinction—could be solved by the reduction or elimination of meat-eating. The meat industry’s voracious need for pasturelands is the primary force driving the destruction of old-growth for-

ests—which are essential to the survival of the planet. Their destruction is a major cause of global warming and of the rapidly escalating losses of topsoil and endangered-species habitat. Two hundred sixty million acres of US forestland have been cleared for meat production. An alarming 75% of all US topsoil has been lost to date, and fully 85% of this loss is directly related to livestock raising. Another devastating result of meat-eating is the loss of plant and animal species. Each year 1,000 species disappear due to destruction of tropical rain forests for cattle grazing and other uses—driven by US demand for meat. The rate is growing yearly.

3. The Cancer Argument

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

4. The Cholesterol Argument

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

It is strange but true that US physicians are as a rule poorly educated in the single most important factor of health, namely diet and nutrition. As of 1987, of the 125 medical schools in the US, only 30 required their students to take a course in nutrition.

The average nutrition training received by the average US physician during four years in school is only 2.5 hours. Thus doctors in the US are ill equipped to advise their patients in minimizing foods, such as meat, that contain excessive amounts of cholesterol and are known causes of heart attack. Heart attack is the most common cause of death in the US, killing one person every 45 seconds. The male meat-eater’s risk of death from heart attack is 50%. The risk to men who eat no meat is only 15%. Reducing one’s consumption of meat, processed dairy products and eggs by 10% reduces the risk of heart attack by 10%. Eliminat-

ing all of these products from one’s diet reduces the risk of heart attack by 90%.

Thirty-three percent of all raw materials (base products of farming, forestry and mining, including fossil fuels) consumed by the US are devoted to the production

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



of livestock, as compared with two percent to produce a complete vegetarian diet.

5. The Natural Resources Argument

The world’s natural resources are being rapidly depleted as a result of meat-eating. Raising livestock for their meat is a very inefficient way of generating food. Pound for pound, far more resources must be expended to produce meat than to produce

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

6. The Antibiotic Argument

Another danger of eating meat is the fact that large amounts of antibiotics are fed to livestock to control staphylococci (commonly called staph infections). The animals being raised for meat in the United States are diseased. The livestock industry

attempts to control the various diseases by feeding the animals huge quantities of antibiotics. Of all antibiotics used in the US, 55% are fed to livestock. But the disease-causing bacteria are rapidly becoming immune to the antibiotics, thus endangering humans who depend on these antibiotics to combat disease. The percentage of staphylococci infections resistant to penicillin, for example, has grown from 13% in 1960 to 91% in 1988. These antibiotics and/or the super-resistant bacteria they were intended to destroy remain in the meat that goes to market. The European Economic Community banned the importation of US meat because of this routine feeding of antibiotics.

7. The Mad Cow Argument

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

Only one-tenth of one percent of US cattle slaughtered for meat are tested for BSE by the USDA (US Department of Agriculture). When a Kansas beef producer decided to test all of their own cattle for BSE, the USDA actually blocked companies from selling them the testing kits. Despite the rarity of the disease, its human form (believed to be caused by eating infected meat) killed over 150 people, mostly in Britain, between 1986 and 2003.

8. The Pesticide Argument

US-produced meat contains dangerously high quantities of deadly pesticides. Many people believe that the USDA protects consumers’ health through regular and thorough meat inspection. In reality, fewer than one out of every 250,000 slaughtered animals is tested for toxic chemical residues. A study of mothers’ milk in the US has clearly demonstrated that these chemicals are ingested by the meat-eater:

a. Ninety-nine percent of the meat-eating mothers in the study produced milk with significant levels of DDT—compared to only 8% of the vegetarian mothers’ milk. This shows that the primary source of DDT is the meat ingested by the mothers.

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

c. The average breast-fed American infant

contains nine times the permissible level of the pesticide dieldrin, which (though now banned in the US) continues to accumulate in the food chain and often exceeds safety guidelines in fish and seafood.

9. The Ethical Argument

Many people have become vegetarians after reading about or personally experiencing what goes on daily at any one of the thousands of slaughterhouses in the US and other countries, where animals suffer the cruel process of forced confinement, manipulation and violent death. Their pain and terror is beyond calculation. Most slaughterhouse workers are not on the job for long and have the highest turnover rate of all occupations. It also has the highest rate of on-the-job injury.

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

10. The Physiological Argument

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7. Carnivores must lap liquids, as a cat does; vegetarian animals take liquids in by suction through the teeth.

Medical Ethics

Hindu Insights on 25 Sensitive Areas Frequently Encountered by Physicians

HINDU MEDICINE, KNOWN AS AYURVEDA, THE “science of life,” has a highly developed system of practical ethics derived from the Hindu principles of nonhurtfulness, the sanctity of all life, the existence of the soul separate from the body and a willingness to accept life’s circumstances as defined by one’s karma and dharma.

In 1999, HINDUISM TODAY was approached by the Texas Medical Association to help them revise and expand a book on medical issues called *Faith of Our Patients*. When it was first published in 1978, the booklet dealt with the Catholic, Protestant and Jewish views of 14 “problem areas” most frequently encountered by physicians, including autopsy, abortion, artificial insemination, prolongation of life and organ transplants. They had recently expanded their list and sought to include the views of Hinduism and Buddhism to accommodate increased religious diversity among their patients.

To respond to their request, we enlisted the help of Swami Bua, Swami Satchidananda, Swami Ranganathananda of the Ramakrishna Mission, Swami Chidanand Saraswati (Muniji), Swami Omkarananda, Swami Pragyand, Swami Tejomayananda of Chinmaya Mission, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami and his successor, Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami. We also consulted with Dr. Virender Sodhi, an ayurvedic and allopathic doctor in Washington, and Cromwell Crawford of the University of Hawaii, an Indian-born specialist in Hindu medical ethics. The assembled responses below represent the broad consensus of this group, with occasional differing opinions. It remains a work in progress, to be updated as required.

Fortunately, as pointed out by Professor Crawford, the ancient sages of ayurveda, Sushruta and Charaka, carefully considered and documented the ethics of their profession and its various medical procedures. They did so within the context of a Hindu view of man, which, as Swami Ranganathananda put it, “is that his essential, real nature

is the atman or Self which is immortal, self-luminous, the source of all power, joy and glory. Everything that helps in the manifestation of the divinity of the soul is beneficial and moral, and everything that obstructs this inner unfoldment is harmful and immoral.” With this over-arching principle in mind, it was the aim of the ayurvedic physician to preserve the well-being of the community through maintaining health and removing the threats to life of humans and nonhumans. The ancient healers held that pathogenesis, the development of disease, is not caused randomly or simplistically by external agents through infection or injury. Rather, the development of any disease is also an expression of karma: the results of an individual’s past actions. It is hoped that this compilation of Hindu medical ethics will provide a spiritual view of the medical concerns faced by all Hindus, one that will balance the prevailing humanistic view by presenting a traditional Hindu perspective from which to evaluate these important matters of life, death and the beyond.



Hospitalization: A doctor administers care to an infirm woman in her final years, when pain control, prolongation of life, organ transplants and the right to die become real, pressing issues.

in a 24-hour-a-day vigil.” Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami wrote, “Blessed with the knowledge of impending transition, we settle affairs and take refuge in *japa*, worship, scripture and *yoga*—seeking the highest realizations as we consciously, joyously release the world. Our soul never dies; only the physical body dies. We simply step out of the physical body and are in our astral body, going on in the mind as usual. For Hindus, death is nobly referred to as *mahaprasthan*, ‘the great journey.’ The awareness, will, memory and intelligence which we think of as ourselves continue to exist in the soul body. We approach death as a *sadhana*, as a spiritual opportunity. To leave the body in the right frame of mind, in the right consciousness, through the highest possible *chakra*, is a key to spiritual progress.”

Pain Control

Hindus regard pain management as an important duty of caretakers. “If an individual opts to undergo the pains, he or she should be left alone,” Swami Bua noted. “Otherwise, it is the duty of the people around to help reduce his suffering. If a person is relieved of pain, his thoughts become sublime with gratitude and the feelings of amity, affection and love. Nobody should be allowed to die with the feelings of bitterness, feelings of wanting or feelings of unfulfilled duties. We should do everything possible to keep the dying person comfortable till his end, which is determined by Him.” Opiates and other drugs have been used for this purpose in Hindu medicine for thousands of years, according to Dr. Sodhi. However, he explains, “They try not to administer so much pain-killer as to alter or lose consciousness.” Excessive pain-killers can dull awareness and inhibit the conscious transition that is the Hindu ideal.

Prolongation of Life

Ayurveda classifies disease as either *sadhya*, those that can be effectively treated and cured, or *asadhya*, those that cannot. It further classifies untreatable diseases as those which can be managed for an acceptable quality of life, such as diabetes, and those which cannot, such as terminal cancer. If treatment cannot provide the patient a quality life, then it is considered better to give no treatment beyond palliative measures.

The “Right to Die”

It is the law in many parts of America that a hospital must do everything possible to keep a patient alive as long as possible, no matter what his state of consciousness, or the prognosis for a useful existence. If the patient’s financial resources are exhausted, then the state must pay. To avoid being kept alive against his own wishes, he must make a “living will” in advance, to specify under what conditions he declines further treatment, and to assign a person to make that decision for him if he cannot. A living will can preserve the resources of a family, avoiding costly and ineffective heroic treatment. Hindus accept the natural timing of life and of death and do not strain to gain a few months of struggle-filled life at great effort and expense.

“Do-Not-Resuscitate” Orders

Part of a living will deals with “Do-not-resuscitate” orders. These instructions tell the doctors when they should not use cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) or other measures to revive a person if his heart or breathing has stopped. Again, the decision centers around the likely quality of a life so revived. A drowning or heart-

End-of-Life Issues

Hindus regard death as a most exalted human experience, the migration of the soul from one dimension of consciousness to another, a transition we have all experienced many times. Death is not to be feared, neither unnecessarily accelerated nor relentlessly delayed. In considering the following end-of-life issues the Hindu seeks to preserve the natural timing of death, while humanely comforting and being present for the patient in a spiritual environment.

Preparation for Death

“With our strong conviction that all our actions in the present life will be the cause for the effects in our future life,” says Swami Bua, “a wise Hindu facing death goes into introspection of all his deeds during the present life and sincerely tries to make amends for the wrong deeds. Wherever it is beyond correction, he repents and wholeheartedly prays for forgiveness in the form of chanting mantras. He plans to visit holy places and temples, health permitting. When and if he becomes immobile due to physical conditions, and the indications are that he is nearing his end, his children assemble around him and give him holy water from the Ganges. They sing bhajanas, holy songs, and chant mantras, often



A. MANTVIL

attack victim may, after resuscitation, go on to a full recovery. But for terminally ill patients, resuscitation may only delay the inevitable, prolong the suffering and interfere with the natural timing of death. Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (Gurudeva) noted, "To make heroic medical attempts that interfere with the process of the patient's departure is a grave responsibility, similar to not letting a traveler board a plane flight he has a reservation for, to keep him stranded in the airport with a profusion of tears and useless conversation. To prolong life in the debilitated physical body past the point that the natural will of the person has sustained is to incarcerate, to jail, to place that person in prison. The prison is the hospital. The guards are the life-support machines and the tranquilizing drugs."

Removal of Life Support

A critical and closely related issue any living will should address is the removal of life support. Modern machines can keep patients alive when they are unable to breathe or take nourishment, and when organs cease to function, including the heart. Life-support patients may be in near-normal consciousness, semi-conscious, comatose or "brain dead," with no brain wave activity at all. Even common kidney dialysis machines and ventilators qualify as "life support," for if turned off patients would die. A much discussed issue is whether turning off a life support machine is "killing" the patient or "letting him die." The issue is further complicated by rapidly advancing technology whereby ever more seriously ill or injured patients can be kept alive.

In Dr. Sodhi's opinion, removal of life support would be justified in a case where there is no brain-wave activity, for "according to ayurveda, that person is dead. Sustaining his condition is more like the torture of the soul, and ayurveda prohibits it." While



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ancient Hindu medicine did not anticipate many of the abilities of today's complex machines, it did discuss the issue of nourishment, which is a part of any life-support system. Hindu scripture allows for the termination of food and water at the request of a terminally ill patient who chooses a self-willed death by fasting, *prayopavesha*. The patient can specify in advance in his living will under what conditions nourishment, hydration or other life support should be withheld. Knowledge of the patient's intentions [or wishes] alleviates the karmic burden of the doctors and family. The ideal, Gurudeva counseled his own devotees, is to not be put on the life support machine in the first place when there is little chance of recovery.

Assisted Suicide

Hindu philosophy does not support "assisted suicide," deliberately causing the death of a patient at the patient's own request by drugs, overdose of painkillers or other lethal means. In extreme circumstances of unbearable agony where others turn to euthanasia or mercy killing, Hindus know the sufferer may refuse food and water.

Suicide

Hindus believe that life is sacred—God's grace—and therefore it is not ours to end. Suicide only postpones and intensifies the karma one seeks escape from, requiring several lives to return to the evolutionary point that existed at the moment of suicide, thus it is a spiritual step backwards. In cases of terminal illness, under strict community regulation, tradition does allow *prayopavesha*, self-willed religious death by fasting, as stated above. Gurudeva taught, "The Vedic rishis gave the anguished embodied soul a way

to systematically, nobly and acceptably, even to loved ones, release itself from embodiment through fasting. The person making such a decision declares it publicly, which allows for community regulation and distinguishes the act from suicide committed privately in traumatic emotional states of anguish and despair. Ancient law-givers cited various stipulations for *prayopavesha*: inability to perform normal bodily purification; death appears imminent, or the condition is so bad that life's pleasures are nil. The gradual nature of *prayopavesha* is the key factor in distinguishing it from sudden suicide, for it allows time for the individual to settle all differences with others, to ponder life and draw close to God." It also gives the person time to reflect and reconsider his decision.

Definition of Death

"When the physical body dies, this automatically severs the silver cord that connects the astral and physical bodies," Gurudeva explained in *Merging with Siva*. Metaphysically, this is the point of death. Physically, death can be defined as the cessation of breath, heartbeat and brainwave activity, in that order. Even then, it may be possible to revive a person, and the patient may report a "near-death experience" of beginning the transition to the next world but being pulled back. Decay of the body is the definitive sign of death.

Autopsies

Autopsies are the examination of a dead body to learn the cause of death. Hindus believe that autopsies are disturbing to the still aware soul which has just separated from the body and should therefore be avoided unless required by law. Similarly, embalming, which replaces the blood with a preservative fluid, is ill-advised.



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Near life's end: (left to right) as this grandfather grows old, his daughter takes good care of him at home rather than placing him in a nursing home; a man's heart and breathing has stopped—doctors administer CPR in hopes of reviving him; too often these days, huge amounts of drugs are given to patients before they die.

Use of the Body After Death

In ancient times, doctors around the world used dead bodies to understand anatomy and practice surgery. In India, the bodies used for this purpose were those unclaimed by relatives or friends. According to Swami Bua, "In the Vedic Age, dissection and mutilation of body were considered detrimental to the fulfillment of life. Yet, if we consider that once the spirit leaves the body, the lifeless body has no karmic obligations, then it may be okay." Swami Pragyand points out that autopsy and dissection were practiced by Sushruta, an early pioneer of ayurveda. Swami Tejomayananda says, "The body of the deceased is treated with reverence. The feelings and sentiments of the family also do not favor dissection. People have some fear that the astral body may be hurt by these intrusions or some harm may come to the family." Gurudeva similarly held that what happens to the dead physical body is disturbing to the soul, and did not advise his devotees to donate their bodies to science.

Burial and Cremation Practices

Cremation, ideally held within 24 hours, is the traditional system of disposing of dead bodies. It has the benefit of releasing the soul most quickly from any lingering attachment to the earth plane. Should it be necessary to preserve the body a few days to allow time for distant relatives to arrive, refrigeration or use of dry ice is recommended, rather than embalming. Hindus do not bury their dead, except infant children and godly saints.

Matters of Birth

Hindus consider children a gift from God, and the conception, development and birth of a child are sacred events, honored by a ceremony, or *samskara*, marking these rites of passage. Today's medical technology has developed many means for conceiving children (and for their disposal before birth). Hindus have a general unwillingness to interfere with nature and a special aversion to abortion, based on the belief in reincarnation and the sanctity of marriage.

Conception

From the Hindu point of view, conception connects a soul from the next world to this world, and the state of mind at the moment of conception—including the purity and spiritual intent of both partners—is a major factor in determining who is born into the family. Prospective parents often offer prayers at the temples, perform spiritual disciplines and visit saints for their advice and blessings in their effort to conceive a worthy child. In Western thinking, no emphasis is placed on the state of mind of the parents at conception, and there is little understanding of the ways parents can affect the "quality" of the souls born to them.

Birth Control

While revering conception as a divine act, Hindus have little hesitation to practice birth control, and there are remedies specified in ayurveda both for facilitating and preventing conception. Yes, as Swami Bua reminds us, restraint and moderation are important. "Hindu scriptures explain how to beget a child. They specify the days, time and methods. That means they would have known also how not to beget a child! But willful control of conception by external means was not advocated. The preferred control was through restraint, as wasting of life seeds was considered unhealthy and unethical. Birth control now is highlighted as a prime duty of every citizen to the society and nation. But one fears that these open discussions are licensing the society towards promiscuity, since the weak minds take the shortest route to pleasures, however fleeting they may be, unmindful of consequences."

Sterility Testing

While ostensibly harmless, sterility tests can cause serious social and emotional difficulty if one is deemed sterile, including inability to find a spouse, cancellation of proposals and the ruin of marriages once it is known "who is to blame" for the lack of children. "This should not be resorted to as a routine test," says Swami Bua. "Doubting the manliness of a man and femininity of a woman is degrading them. What will happen to those who fail the test? Will anybody come forward to marry them? Even though procreation is the main aim of a marriage, it is not the only aim. After a reasonable time following the marriage, if there has been no conception, and if a mature couple desire to get tested with a view to take corrective action, it may be done." Dr. Sodhi points out that, while ayurveda has no tests for sterility, the likelihood of children is one of the major considerations when evaluating a couple's astrology prior to marriage.

Artificial Insemination

Fertilization of the egg by mechanical introduction of sperm is universally acceptable when the sperm is provided by the woman's husband. But questions arise with donated sperm from another man. Because conception creates a psychic bond between a man and a woman, even if they don't meet physically, fertilization in this manner may have a similar karma as adultery. "In Sanatana Dharma initiation into married life is sanctified by sacred sacramental rites," says Swami Tejomayananda. "The offspring of such a union is blessed and protected by the holy mantras and rites. If there is some defect or obstruction in either partner, artificial insemination may be resorted to, but with the husband's sperm only. If the procedure succeeds, it may be taken as the will of the Lord for that couple. Use of seeds from the sperm banks or from any living person other



DIGITAL STOCK



From conception to birth: (clockwise from top) A woman undergoes an ultrasound exam; human embryo with the umbilical cord connecting to the placenta; fertilized human egg just starting to divide

than the husband is not proper. It will amount to bearing child outside holy wedlock." However, as Professor Crawford points out, the *Manu Dharma Shastra* did allow a woman to conceive a child by another man, usually her husband's brother. Swami Bua mentions this tradition also. "The *Rig Veda* and *Atharva Veda* prescribe the procedure called *niyoga* to enable a childless widow or the wife of an impotent man to raise progeny with his consent. But even with this, the attitude of an average Hindu woman considers the one who has given her a child as her respectful husband." Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami points out that one has to consider the likely negative impact of artificial insemination on a marriage. The husband would not be the child's true father, resulting in a weak relationship with the child and even with the wife who required another man to conceive the child.

In Vitro Fertilization

Even with present-day technology, the creation of "test-tube babies," the fertilization of the egg outside the womb and its subsequent placement in the womb, is expensive and unreliable. As with artificial insemination, it is acceptable if the egg and sperm are from the husband and wife. Like other medical advances, in vitro fertilization introduces unknown factors that may bring unintended consequences, not necessarily positive or conducive to spiritual progress, which is life's real purpose. Hindus regard the natural way of things as endowed with God's infinite intelligence and often ask, "Are humans wise enough to tinker with the cosmic order of life?"

Abortion

Hindu scripture and tradition clearly prohibit abortion, except to save the life of the mother. It is considered an act against *rita* (universal order) and *ahimsa* (noninjury). In the words of Swami Omkar-ananda, "Imagine, through millions of abortions around the world, day in and day out, how many wonderful scientific and spiritual geniuses—doctors, men of excellence of every kind, sages, saints, benefactors of mankind, builders of a better culture and civilization—are destroyed even before they can take a breath of fresh air here on Earth!" Hindu ethics also do not justify aborting a fetus because of actual or potential deformity or mental retardation, for each birth, normal or not, is revered as having a divine purpose to be understood, not manipulated. Nevertheless, abortion is performed today by Hindus in India and elsewhere—in particular, the selective termination of female fetuses following ultrasound examination. Professor Crawford calls that practice "a perverted use of modern science, a scarcely concealed form of female infanticide." Gurudeva summarized in sutra 34 of *Living with Siva*, "Followers know abortion is, by Vedic injunction, a sinful act against dharma fraught with karmic repercussions. Scripture only allows it to prevent the mother's death, for it is a greater sin for a child to kill the mother." "In the modern context," says Swami Tejomayananda, "attention must be focused on the prevention of pregnancy by educating and creating awareness in the parents." Abortion, should it occur, creates a karma to be faced in the future, but is not regarded as an unforgivable "sin." A penance could mitigate the karma, such as adopting a baby who might otherwise have been aborted if no home was provided.

Selective Termination of Multiple Fetuses

Multiple births are rare, except when a couple is undergoing fertility treatments. These often result in multiple fetuses, creating a potentially dangerous condition for the mother. Under the principle that abortion is allowed to save the mother's life, Dr. Sodhi believes that selective abortion is acceptable when a specific pregnancy poses such a threat. It is an unfortunate choice to have to make, and it is hoped that future technology will reliably produce only one fetus.

NESTLE/GETTY IMAGES PHOTO RESEARCHERS

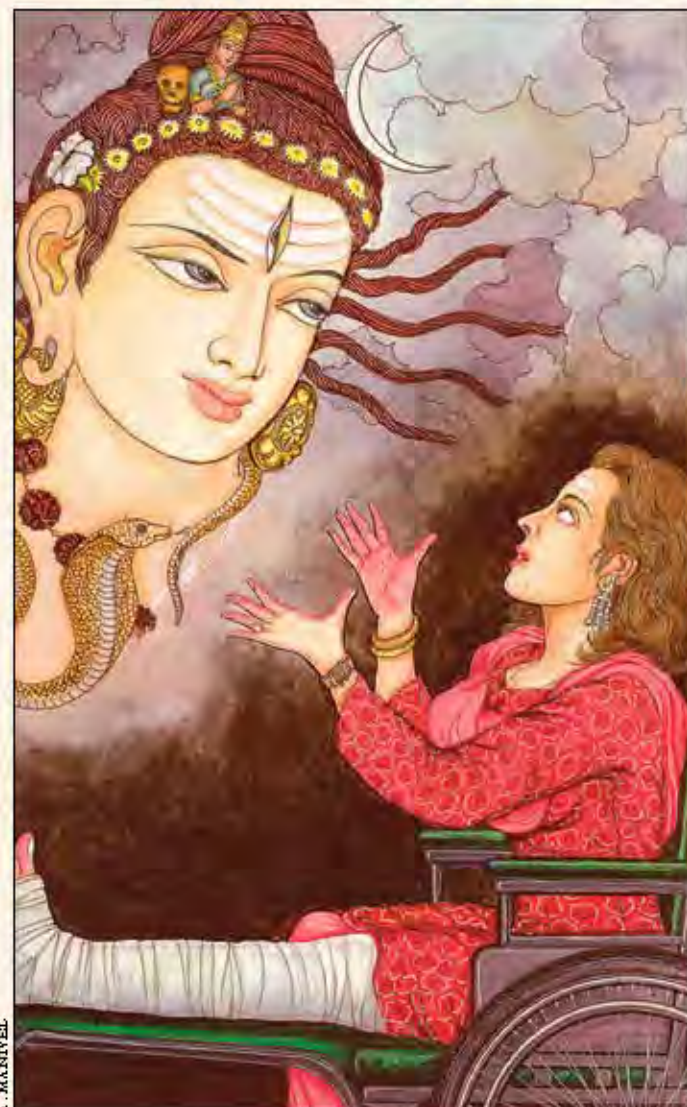


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Pain-Relief Drugs for Newborns

Pain relief for children should be carefully chosen to not form, or lay the seeds for, a future addiction. Swami Bua says, "Some people think that the pains of a newborn baby are the consequences of its previous birth and that we should allow the baby to experience and sustain them so that remnants of the previous birth are left behind. But we should also realize that the God has brought this baby to our hands expecting us to comfort it and protect it and help it to grow as a healthy and worthy human being. So, it is the duty of the parents and the people nearby to do whatever is possible to relieve the baby of the pain." "According to ayurveda," says Dr. Sodhi, "the baby has as sensitive a nervous system as an adult, just not as developed. So pain medicine is okay, if necessary. Morphine was used for thousands of years in the form of opium, applied on the baby's skin for pain relief."

Circumcision

Hindus consider the practice of circumcision for males unnecessary and do not practice it. Doctors should be alerted to Hindu views on this often-standard procedure. A circumcised Hindu boy could face ridicule and discrimination. In rare occasions, the procedure is required as a medical necessity for an adult, but is kept secret.



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Other Concerns

There are additional important ethical considerations regarding organ transplant, blood transfusion, faith healing and dietary laws.

Organ Transplants

Hindus generally believe that the recipient of a major organ, such as the heart, liver or kidney, takes on some of the karmas of the donor. Evidence of this transfer of karma can be found in documented cases where the organ recipients took on the interests, emotions, food preferences, etc., of the donor, especially after a heart transplant. Transplants apparently create psychic connections with the donor, whether living or dead. Also, the fact that part of a deceased donor's physical body still "live" may interfere with his reincarnation pattern, keeping him close to the physical plane and to the recipient. Swami Tejomananda offers, "The Hindu way of life is to accept the inevitable, to go through the karma, exhaust it and be free to take on new life to evolve further spiritually." Swami Bua is supportive. "Let us encourage and support the scientists and medical men who are working with pure intentions towards a painless, diseaseless society. We should only guard against unscrupulous traders in human organs." Swami Chidanand Saraswati (Muniji) feels that it is "important to donate organs" in the Hindu spirit of giving and sacrifice. Dr. Sodhi offers: "Some transplants, such as the cornea, are okay, but not the heart, which is the seat of the soul according to ayurveda. If the quality of life is going to be very good after the transplant, I might not

have a problem, but if they have to be on harsh drugs all the time, maybe transplanting is not the best idea." Swami Satchidananda says "What are we doing by transplanting organs? By replacing organs in a body which is clearly dying, we are not allowing the soul to fulfill its karma in this life by dying at the proper time and getting a new body. The trend of science seems to want to keep the soul indefinitely in the same old body with repaired parts. This is not the correct thing to do."

Blood Donations/Transfusions

"In early times there were some hesitations on the basis of caste and religion, for blood transfusion," says Swami Bua, "But now, considering the necessity of blood transfusion during any surgery, people are accepting it." Blood transfusions differ from organ donations in that the body of the recipient completely replaces the foreign blood.

Religious or Faith Healings

Hindus make use of all means of healing, be they medical, astrological or metaphysical. The last includes mantras and yoga, seeking the guidance of a guru or performing temple ceremonies for the direct blessing and intervention of God, Gods and devas. "A Hindu has an ardent faith in the powers of prayers and in the Supreme God," says Swami Bua, "The patient will go to the doctor—ayurvedic or allopathic—all the while praying to God for recovery." "Healing with mantras was very popular in ancient times," says Swami Pragyand, "Even now it is being practiced for various ailments." Swami Tejomananda notes, "In healing



Other issues: (left to right) A Hindu prays for Lord Shiva's grace to help her heal; surgeons operate on a patient; blood transfusion

by prayers, Divine Grace comes in. If the karma is nearing exhaustion, or it is only a weak karma, or the healing will help the person in his spiritual pursuit, or if the Higher Power has some work to be done through the person, then a cure may be effected." Dr. Sodhi adds, "In ayurveda, specific pujas, or ceremonies to the Gods, are sometimes prescribed for patients."

Dietary Ethics

Yes, vegetarianism is a central aspect of Hinduism, and of even broader import is the ayurvedic wisdom that health is directly dependent upon diet. A Hindu vegetarian who is hospitalized will need to coordinate with the staff to be served proper food unless he can have family or friends bring his meals. The ayurvedic prerogative is to eat a diet that prevents disease and enhances spiritual life. When ill, a drastic change in diet may be the best cure, as seen in the improvement of heart patients put on a vegetarian diet. "The scriptures recognize the fact that food has a great influence on the mind," says Swami Tejomananda, "When food is pure, mind is pure," state the Upanishads. Mothers prepare food with love in the heart for the children. These positive vibrations are absorbed and the persons who partake of the food imbibe them. Eating is an act of worship."

There remain several areas of concern in medical ethics which will be addressed in future articles in HINDUISM TODAY, including genetic engineering, genetic testing, stem-cell research, cloning and animal to human transplants. If you have insights or comments, feel free to e-mail them to us at letters@hindu.org



Ahimsa: To Do No Harm

Exploring the Cardinal Virtue of Noninjury in Thought, Word & Deed

BY SATGURU SIVAYA SUBRAMUNIASWAMI

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

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

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

Nonviolence has long been central to the religious traditions of India—especially Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Religion in India has consistently upheld the sanctity of life, whether human, animal

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

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

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

Many groups on the planet today advocate killing and violence and war for a righteous cause. They do not agree with the idea that violence, himsa, is necessarily of the lower nature. But a righteous cause is only a matter of opinion, and going to war affects the lives of a great many innocent people. It’s a big karmic responsibility. Combat through war, righteous or not, is lower consciousness. Religious values are left aside, to be picked up and continued when the war is over, or in the next life or the one after that. It is said that in ancient India meat would be fed to the soldiers during military campaigns, especially before combat, to bring them into lower consciousness so

that they would forget their religious values. Most higher consciousness people will not fight even if their lives depend on it. They are conscientious objectors, and there have been many in every country who have been imprisoned or killed because they would not take up arms against their brother and sister humans. This is the strictest



expression of Hinduism's law of ahimsa.

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

own kinsmen. Hindus for a long time have taken this text as justification for war and conflicts of all kinds, including street riots and anarchy. But all that aside, no matter how it is interpreted, let us not be mistaken that the *Bhagavad Gita* gives permission for violence. The *Mahabharata* (of which the *Gita* is a part) itself says, "Ahimsa is the highest dharma. It is the highest purification. It is also the highest truth from which all dharma proceeds" (18.112.25). An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth is definitely not a part of true Hindu doctrine.

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

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

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

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

should have stood up for the village and protected it with their lives.

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

Is it violent to own a dog who would put his teeth to the throat of a vicious intruder? I don't think it is. If nonviolence is to be something that the world is going to respect, we have to define it clearly and make it meaningful.

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

What's the best way to teach peace to the world? The best way is to first teach families to be peaceful within their own home, to settle all arguments and contention before they sleep at night, even if they stay up for three days, so the children can see that peace can be attained and then maintained through the use of intelligence.

Taking Care of Business, Nonviolently

Ahimsa is not just a prohibition against physical and emotional assault



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

BY SATGURU SIVAYA SUBRAMUNIYASWAMI

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

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

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

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

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

Vegetarianism is a natural and obvious way to live with a minimum of hurt to other beings. Hindu scripture speaks clearly and forcefully on vegetarianism. The *Yajur Veda* dictates: "Do not injure the beings living on the Earth, in the air and in the water." The beautiful *Tirukural*, a widely-read 2,000-year-old masterpiece of ethics, speaks of conscience: "When a man realizes that meat is the butchered flesh of another creature, he will abstain from eating it" (257). The *Manu Samhita* advises: "Having well considered the origin of flesh and the cruelty of fettering and slaying corporeal beings, let one entirely abstain from eating flesh," and "When the diet is pure, the mind and heart are pure." In the yoga-infused verses of the *Tirumandiram* warning is given of how meat-eating holds the mind in gross, adharmic states: "The ignoble ones who eat flesh, death's agents bind them fast and push them quick into the fiery jaws of the lower worlds" (199).

Vegetarianism is very important. In my fifty years of ministry, it has become quite evident that vegetarian families have far fewer

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

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

Saints and Scriptures Speak on Ahimsa

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

Dharma Shastras 10

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

Ramana Maharishi

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

Mahabharata 18:113.8

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

Swami Sivananda

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

Tirukural 319

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

Swami Sahajanand

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

Mahabharata 18:116.37-41

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

Sri Yukteswar

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

Sandhya Upanishad

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

Mahabharata 18:115.8

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

Yoga Sutras

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

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan



PHOTO: SHOCK

SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Harnessing Speech

Contemplation and Discipline Insure Ahimsa in Your Daily Interactions

BY SWAMINI MAYATITANANDA

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

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

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

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

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

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

nonhurting that would finally help her to communicate its wondrous essence to her son.

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

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

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

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A. MANTVEL

The voice of ahimsa:
Thinking before speaking

LIGHTEN UP!



Spices in the Melting Pot



Manick Sorcar

Electrical engineer of Denver, Colorado, and son of the late P.C. Sorcar, India's legendary magician, Manick Sorcar is undoubtedly a top expresser of the US Indian immigrant experience. His illustrations, touching the heart of cultural integration challenges, are compiled in two volumes—*The Melting Pot*, *Indians in America*, and *Spices in the Melting Pot*, both available via his website at www.manicksorcar.com. But Sorcar doesn't stop here. What began as an effort to teach his two daughters their heritage, led him to create an award-winning series of one-on-one animated videos for children, mixing his hand-drawn art with computer-generated art and animation, along with original music, to showcase Indian culture.



Frank & Ernest



It's all right to hold a conversation, but you should let go of it now and then.

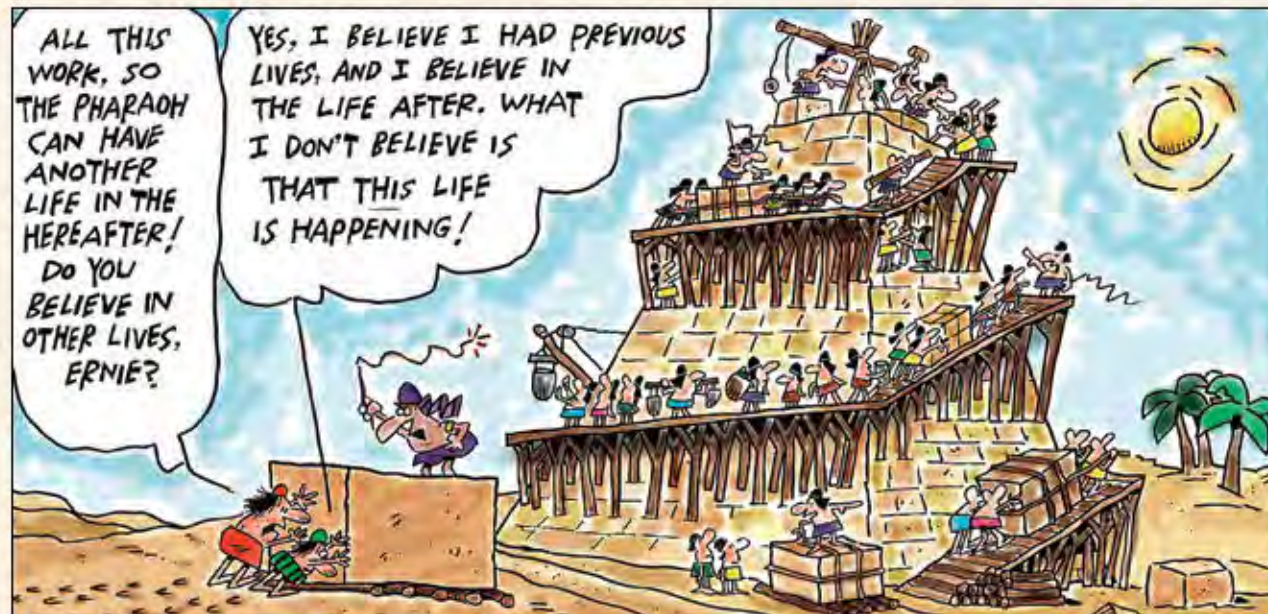
Bob Thaves

Frank & Ernest are the stars of Bob Thaves' innovative single-panel comic strip. Read by 25 million people daily, Frank & Ernest are as comfortable offering whimsical comments on the creation of the universe as they are about taxes or software. Drawing since boyhood, Bob's formal art training consisted of studying various cartoonists and their work. An industrial psychologist by day, he moonlighted as a magazine cartoonist before starting Frank & Ernest. Bob passed away in 2006, and his son Tom continues to lead a team effort to produce the strip. More than 5,000 episodes of Frank & Ernest may be found at www.frankandernest.com.



"Maybe there is something to reincarnation—I know I come back to life every day at five o'clock!"

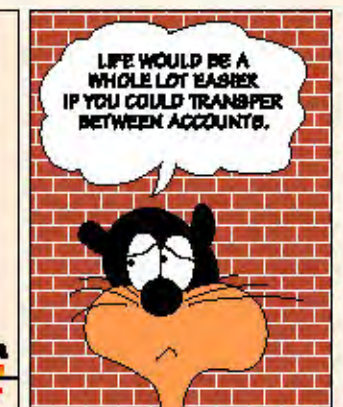
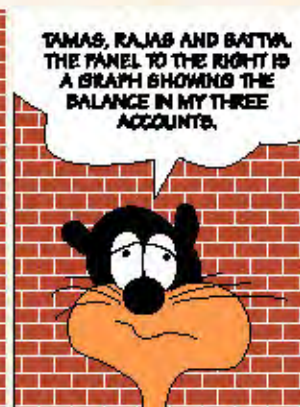
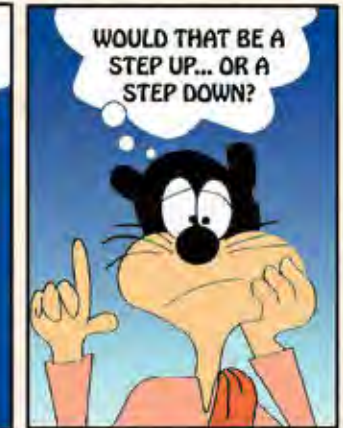
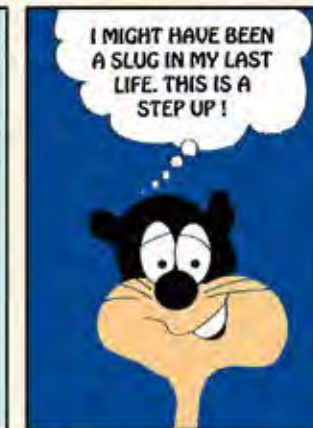
Frank & Ernest as they leave the Mega Corp in a cartoon by Thaves.



Barry Geller

Barry Geller, creator of Karma Kat, is a devotee of Swami Prakashanand Saraswati. After raising a family of three children he became a graphic designer and illustrator. His work was published in *Fortune*, *Time*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Esquire* and others. His awards include citations of merit from the New York Society of Illustrators and publication of his work in the Swiss graphic arts annual, *Graphis*. Barry and his wife, Nan, live at Barsana Dham in Austin, Texas.

Karma Kat



Calvin & Hobbes



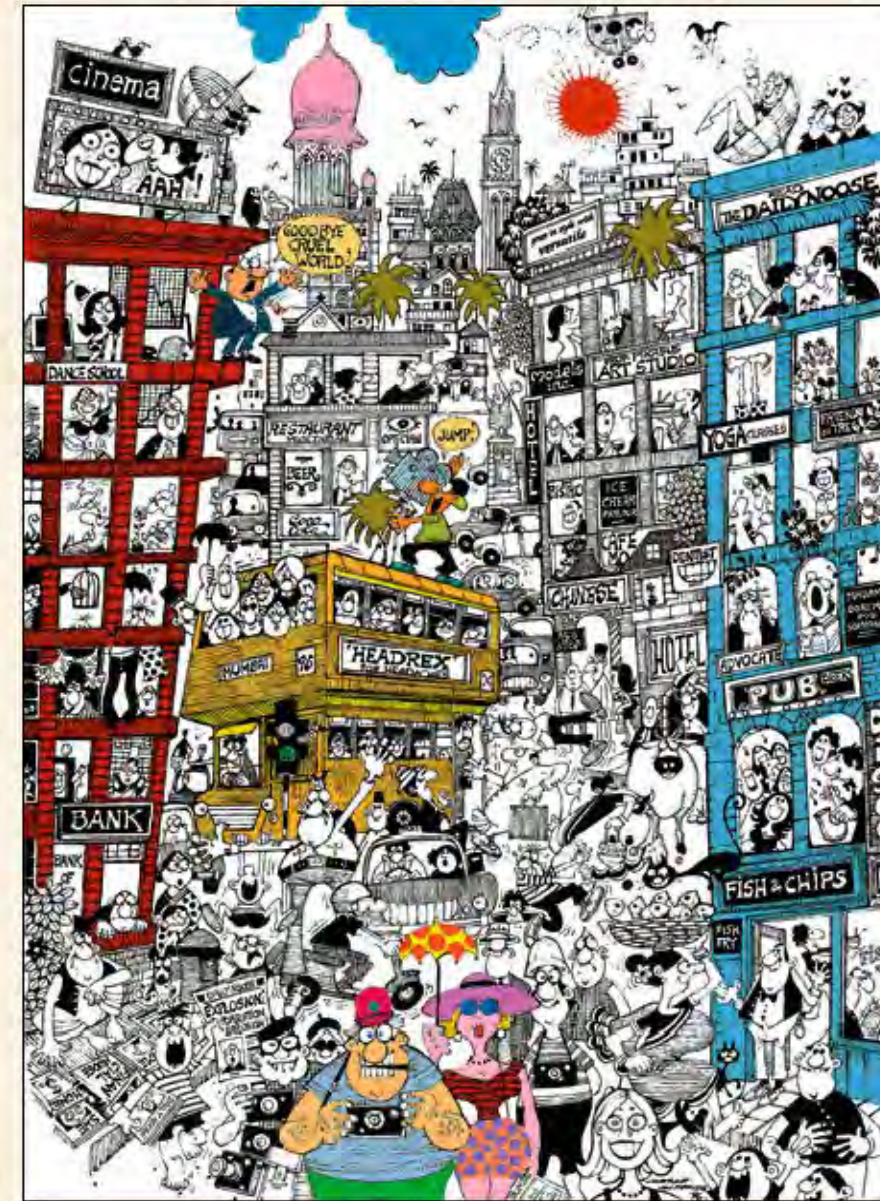
Bill Watterson

Bill is the creator of *Calvin & Hobbes*, an engaging chronicle of a six-year-old's psyche, which appeared in more than 2,400 newspapers when it ceased publication January 1, 1996. In announcing his retirement, Bill said he was eager to work at a more thoughtful pace, with fewer artistic compromises.



Randy Glasbergen

Randy lives in New York. He began his cartooning career in high school. He has been a full-time freelance cartoonist since 1972. More than 20,000 of his cartoons and comic illustrations have been published around the world. More of his cartoons may be found at www.glasbergen.com



Mário de Miranda

One of India's finest cartoonists, Mario was born at Damán in 1936, grew up in Goa and was educated at Bangalore and Mumbai. After working many years for *The Times of India*, he now freelances, drawing for *The Economic Times* and a strip for *The Afternoon* in Mumbai. He is married, has two sons and lives in Goa. Check out his Mumbai scene on the left and others below, all depicting the amazing country of India.

