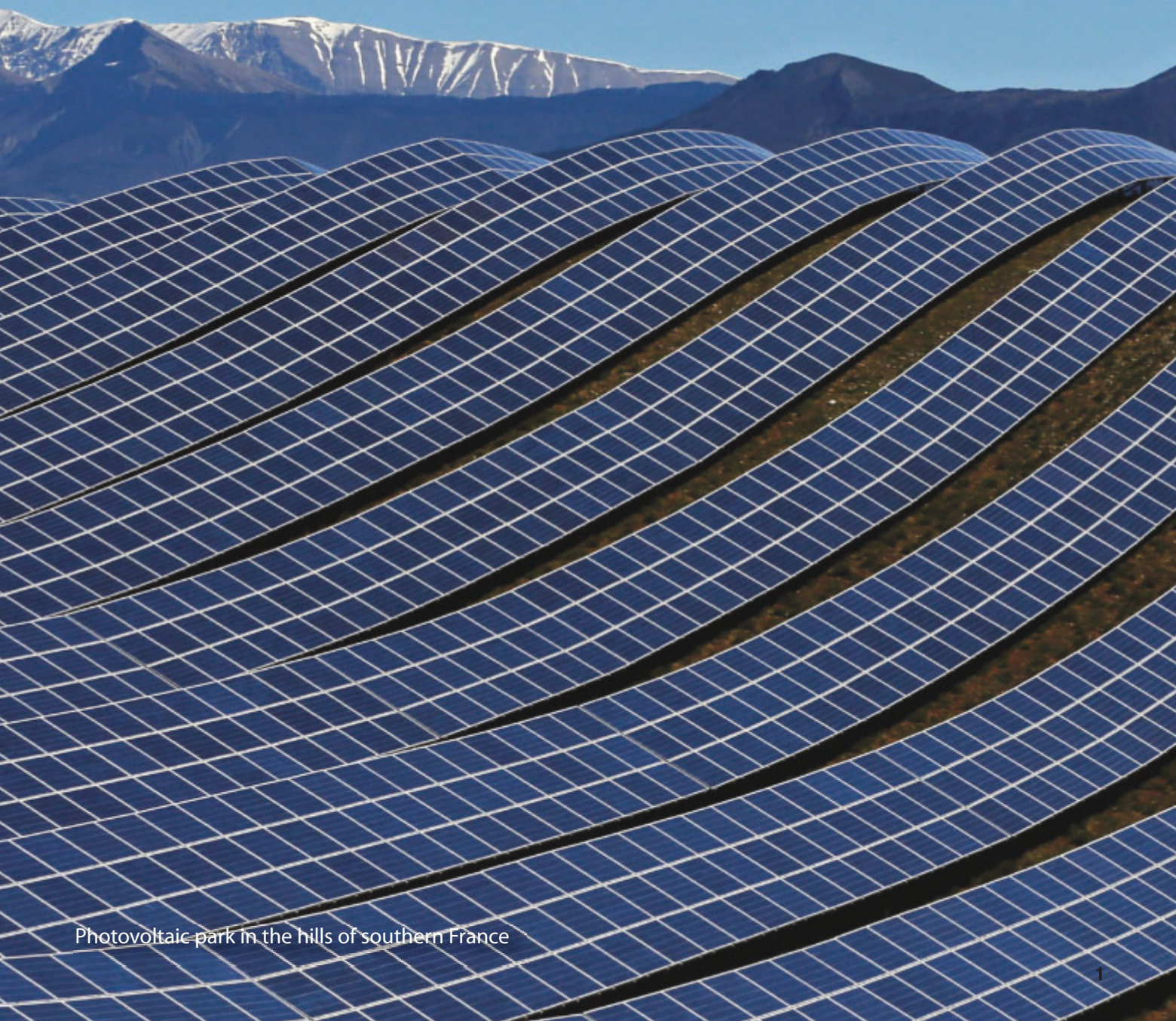
Guru's Wisdom

Fifty-Two Editorials from Hinduism Today Magazine

By Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami



Photovoltaic park in the hills of southern France

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By Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami

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Psychotria Pollen: Victor Sykora



Scales on the underside of a butterfly wing

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The painted hills of Mitchell, Oregon

INTRODUCTION

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

As a small group of renunciate Hindu monks at Kauai's Hindu Monastery in Hawaii, we have produced the international magazine Hinduism Today since 1979, tracking, monitoring and encouraging the current renaissance of the grandfather faith of the human race. Each quarterly issue of the magazine focuses on Hinduism as it is in today's world by featuring profiles of important teachers, major institutions, historic trends, temples and pilgrimage sites and Hindu dance, music and crafts. The magazine is enriched by educational articles, timely opinion pieces and an ever-popular cartoon.

In 2007 we were inspired to assemble forty-six of the magazine's 16-page educational insight sections and publish them as a book called *What Is Hinduism?* Rare is the book that presents Hinduism in a comprehensive, contemporary, complimentary way—as a family of faiths and philosophies—that a modern, English-speaking audience can relate to, understand and appreciate. Rare, too, is the book that leaves Hindus feeling proud of the name. *What Is Hinduism?* is such a gem. Exploring it, readers stop now and then and sigh, "Ahh, now I get it. Now I understand this basic Hindu concept." Of course, having this material in a single publication makes it far more accessible than having to Google forty-six issues of the magazine!

Our very first anthology of talks and writings was called *Satguru Speaks on Hindu Renaissance*. It was produced by Jiwa Distributors of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and released on Mahasivaratri, February 19, 1993. It contains seventeen of Gurudeva's inspired talks, all pertaining to the concept of Hindu renaissance, the resurgence of our religion that he saw taking place. The chapters include: Courage, Courage, Courage; Final Conclusions for all Mankind; The Hand that Rocks the Cradle Rules the World; Hinduism: Solidarity in Diversity; Stand Strong for Hinduism; and Love of the Gods.

Guru's Wisdom, the third anthology drawn from our repository of teachings, captures fifty-two of my Publisher's Desk editorials. The topics vary widely—from the practical to the esoteric—but all have one element in common. They are based on my observations of what is happening at the present time in the lives of individuals, families, temple groups and Hindu society as a whole. These essays are being translated into eight languages: Tamil, Hindi, Gujarati, Kannada, Marathi, Italian, Russian and Spanish. Let me share how these topics evolved.

One source is the private darshan meetings I have most weeks of the year with families visiting our Hawaii monastery. In 2003 an amazingly high number of families asked me the exact same question: "We are so busy with our professional and family life that we have little or no time to devote to religion. What can we do?" It was as if a being in the inner world wanted to make sure this topic was written about. The answers I gave provided the basis for the Publisher's Desk entitled "Work Is Worship," published in July 2004. It presented the Hindu perspective that career and family should not be viewed as separate from religious life; they are integral to fulfilling one's dharma, and work can indeed be transformed into worship.

Another question I hear year after year has to do with meditation: "Swami, when I sit down to meditate, my mind goes all over the place and I am unable to control it. What should I do?" The answers I gave over the years formed the Publisher's Desk titled "Letting Go of Past and Future." The article advises meditators to divide their thoughts into five categories and apply a different prescribed technique to quiet each category.

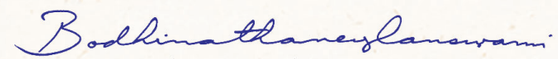
Over the years, my interactions with young Hindus attending university or recently graduated have provided opportunities to observe historic trends in modern Hindu society. Many college students of all faiths, not just Hinduism, end up questioning their religious beliefs to the extent of adopting an atheist point of view accompanied by a new-found commitment to secular humanism. In talking to parents about this trend, almost none had ever heard of secular humanism. To address this issue, I wrote the Publisher's Desk "Hinduism: the Original Humanism" which reveals that Hinduism has a strong humanist tradition within it, suggesting there is no need to give up Hinduism to be a humanist.

A more recent trend coming out of universities is young adults' declaring themselves "Spiritual But Not Religious"—SBNR for short. To these individuals, *not religious* refers to not identifying with any of the world's major religions; and *spiritual* refers to striving for personal experience of their divine or soul nature. This is common among students of all religious affiliations. Parents I spoke with were unaware of the SBNR trend. My column in the magazine provided "Five Suggestions for SBNRs," offering specific guidance to help these individuals, who have opted out of organized religion, to still make spiritual progress.

The trend among young Hindu adults that surprised me the most was the lack of any daily practice. Traditionally, Hindu teens undergo a ceremony to mark the commencement of daily sadhana, such as *sandhya vandana* (morning and evening worship), Gayatri mantra, puja or a mantra japa to a Deity, such as Vishnu or Siva. I learned that most university students have no such practice and do not attend a Hindu temple. In other words, they are not at all engaged in worship, meditation or scriptural study for those four to eight years of school. This led to the Publisher's Desk "A Ten-Minute Spiritual Workout." It outlines a short, daily routine consisting of four types of practice and encourages parents to have their children take it up around the age of fifteen, with the hope they will create and maintain good habits during their university schooling. After that, the ideal is to lengthen the daily workout. The monks even developed an app to guide this practice.

Today reading about Hinduism is more often done in digital, rather than printed, form. The Publisher's Desk articles are available on the Hinduism Today website in formats that can be read on a computer or mobile device. I have recorded many of them as videos, as well as produced graphically rich Powerpoint presentations that have been recorded as videos. These are available on the Hinduism Today YouTube channel. I have found that the Powerpoint format, because of the engaging graphics, is most effective in holding the attention of children. When traveling, I present the Powerpoint slideshows at temples and other gatherings.

We thank our Singapore devotees for inspiring us to assemble this book of essays in order to share them with the world. (For access to more writings, see: bit.ly/BODHI)



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CHAPTER ONE

What Is Hinduism?

- Hinduism in a Nutshell
- Defining Our Faith
- Hinduism: Religion or Way of Life?

Lava flow on the Big Island of Hawaii

PUBLISHER'S DESK • APRIL 2009

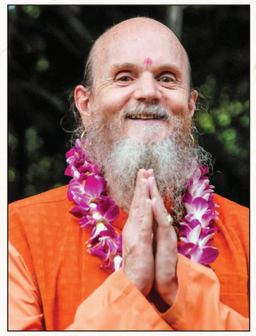
Hinduism in a Nutshell

Our publisher offers a basic summary that you can proudly present to gatherings in your community

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

Hindus in the West are sometimes invited to give a talk explaining their religion at a local college, schoolroom, Rotary Club, interfaith group or church. Some have confided to me that they do not feel qualified to give such a presentation. There is clearly a need for an authentic, non-academic introduction to Hinduism that can be presented with confidence on such occasions. I prepared this Publisher's Desk (drawn from our book What Is Hinduism?*) as a broad summary of our faith that can be drawn upon to properly educate others in the basics of Hinduism, minus all the misconceptions and myths. It may help when next you are called upon to present our faith to others. You can get the text here: www.himalayanacademy.com/view/what-is-hinduism*

IF YOU ASK GOOGLE "WHAT IS HINDUISM?" YOU will get over 200,000 results. Many are from outsiders offering their best take; many are from antagonists taking their best shot. Too few are knowledgeable; fewer still are authentic. Rare is the answer that goes beyond parochial sectarian understandings; scarcely any encompasses the huge gamut implied in the question. For these reasons alone, this introduction to Hinduism was inevitable.



HINDUISM TODAY magazine founder, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927–2001), well understood the challenges that all religions face in today's world, whether from outside or within. He wrote that every religion consists of the spiritual precepts, practices and customs of a people or society—transmitted from generation to generation—that maintain the connection with higher realms of consciousness, thus connecting man to God and keeping alive the highest ideals of culture and tradition. Gurudeva, as he was affectionately known, observed that if this transmission misses even one generation, a religion can be lost for all time, left to decay in the dusty libraries of history, anthropology and archeology. He strove to protect the religion he loved so dearly. He would ask rhetorically, "Where are the once prominent religions of the Babylonians, Egyptians, Aztecs, Mayans, American Indians or Hawaiians?" Little remains of them. Not long ago it was feared by some and hoped by many that Hinduism—the religion of a billion people, one sixth of the human race living mostly in India—would meet the same fate. That it survived a history of religious conquest and extermination that wiped out virtually every other ancient religion is exceptional.

Ironically, this noble faith, having withstood the ravages of invasion, plunder and brutal domination by foreign invaders for over a thousand years, stumbled into the 20th century to meet the subtler forces of secularism and the temptations of materialism. Christian propaganda, fabricated by 16th-century Jesuit missionaries, empowered by the 19th-century British Raj and carried forth today by the Western and Indian media, had dealt heavy blows over the centuries to the subjugated, prideless Hindu identity. A typical Christian tactic was to demean the indigenous faith, impeaching it as rife with superstition, idolatry, antiquated values, archaic customs and umpteen false Gods. India's Communist/secular media stressed caste abuse and wretched social ills, branding as radical, communal and fundamentalist all efforts to stand strong for anything Hindu.

But an unexpected Hindu resurgence has burst forth across the globe in the last twenty years, driven in part by the Hindu diaspora and in part by India's newfound pride and influence. Hinduism entered the 21st century with fervent force as recent generations discovered its treasures and its relevance to their times. Hinduism is going digital, working on its faults and bolstering its strengths. Leaders are stepping forth, parents are striving for ways to convey to their children the best of their faith to help them do better in school and live a fruitful life. Temples are coming up across the Earth by the thousands. Communities are celebrating Hindu festivals, parading their Deities in the streets of Paris, Berlin, Toronto and Sydney in grand style without worrying that people might think them odd or "pagan." Yoga is being universally practiced, in all faith communities. Eloquent spokesmen are now representing Hinduism's billion followers at international peace conferences, interfaith gatherings and discussions about Hindu rights. Hindu students in high schools and universities are going back to their traditions, turning to the Gods in the temples, not because their parents say they should, but to satisfy their own inner need, to improve their daily life, to fulfill their souls' call. When it comes time to explain our religion in any of these settings, we offer the following:

Many Faiths Under One Name

A major reason why those new to Hinduism find it difficult to understand is its diversity. Hinduism is not a monolithic tradition. There isn't a one Hindu opinion on things. And there is no single spiritual authority to define matters for the faith. There are several different denominations, the four largest being Vaishnavism, Saivism, Shaktism and Smartism. Further, there are numberless schools of thought, or sampradayas, expressed in tens of thousands of guru lineages, or paramparas. Each is typically independent and self-contained in its authority. In a very real sense, this grand tradition can be defined and understood as ten thousand faiths gathered in harmony under a single umbrella called Hinduism, or Sanatana Dharma. The tendency to overlook this diversity is the common first step to a faulty perception of the religion. Most spiritual traditions are simpler, more unified and unambiguous.



DINODIA

A pious culture: *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, a Deity worshiped by Hindus of all lineages.*

All too often, despite its antiquity, its profound systems of thought, the beauty of its art and architecture and the grace of its people, Hinduism remains a mystery. Twisted stereotypes abound that would relegate this richly complex, sophisticated and spiritually rewarding tradition to little more than crude caricatures of snake-charmers, cow-worshipers and yogis lying on beds of nails.

Fortunately, there is an easier, more natural way to approach the vastness of Hinduism. From the countless living gurus, teachers and pandits who offer clear guidance, most seekers choose a preceptor, study his teachings, embrace the sampradaya he propounds and adopt the precepts and disciplines of his tradition. That is how the faith is followed in actual practice. Holy men and women, counted in the hundreds of thousands, are the ministers, the defenders of the faith and the inspirers of the faithful.

Four Basic Principles

One way to gain a simple (though admittedly simplistic) overview is to understand the four essential beliefs shared by the vast majority of Hindus: karma, reincarnation, all-pervasive Divinity and dharma. We could say that living by these four principles is what makes a person a Hindu.

1) Karma: Karma literally means "deed" or "act" and more broadly names the universal principle of cause and effect, action and reaction which governs all life. Karma is a natural law of the mind, just as gravity is a law of matter. Karma is not fate, for man acts with free will, creating his own destiny. The *Vedas* tell us, if we sow goodness, we will reap goodness; if we sow evil, we will reap evil. Karma refers to the totality of our actions and their concomitant reactions in this and previous lives, all of which determines our future. It is the interplay between our experience and how we respond to it that makes karma devastating or helpfully invigorating. The conquest of karma lies in intelligent action and dispassionate reaction. Not all karmas rebound immediately. Some accumulate and return unexpectedly in this or other births. The *Vedas* explain, "According as one acts, so does he become. One becomes virtuous by virtuous action, bad by bad action" (*Yajur Veda, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 4.4.5).

2) Reincarnation: Reincarnation, punarjanma, is the natural process of birth, death and rebirth. At death we drop off the physical body and continue evolving in the inner worlds in our subtle bodies, until we again enter into birth. Through the ages, reincarnation has been the great consoling element within Hinduism, eliminating the fear of death. We are not the body in which we live but the immortal soul which inhabits many bodies in its evolutionary journey through samsara. After death, we continue to exist in unseen worlds, enjoying or suffering the harvest of earthly deeds until it comes time for yet another physical birth. The actions set in motion in previous lives form the tendencies and conditions of the next. Reincarnation ceases when karma is resolved, God is realized and moksha, liberation, is attained. The *Vedas* state, "After death, the soul goes to the next world, bearing in mind the subtle impressions of its deeds, and after reaping their harvest returns again to this world of action. Thus, he who has desires continues subject to rebirth" (*Yajur Veda, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 4.4.6).

3) All-Pervasive Divinity: As a family of faiths, Hinduism upholds a wide array of perspectives on the Divine, yet all worship the one, all-pervasive Supreme Being hailed in the *Upanishads*. As Absolute Reality, God is unmanifest, unchanging and transcendent, the Self God, timeless, formless and spaceless. As Pure Consciousness, God is the manifest primal substance, pure love and light flowing through all form, existing everywhere in time and space as infinite intelligence and power. As Primal Soul, God is our personal Lord, source of all three worlds, our Father-Mother God who protects, nurtures and guides us. We beseech God's grace in our lives while also knowing that He/She is the essence of our soul, the life of our life. Each denomination also venerates its own pantheon of Divinities, Mahadevas, or "great angels," known as Gods, who were created by the Supreme Lord and who serve and adore Him. The *Vedas* proclaim, "He is the God of forms infinite in whose glory all things are—smaller than the smallest atom, and yet the Creator of all, ever living in the mystery of His creation. In the vision of this God of love there is everlasting peace. He is the Lord of all who, hidden in the heart of things, watches over the world of time" (*Krishna Yajur Veda, Shvetashvatara Upanishad* 4.14-15).

4) Dharma: When God created the universe, He endowed it with order, with the laws to govern creation. Dharma is God's divine law prevailing on every level of existence, from the sustaining cosmic order to religious and moral laws which bind us in harmony with that order. In relation to the soul, dharma is the mode of conduct most conducive to spiritual advancement, the right and righteous

path. It is piety and ethical practice, duty and obligation. When we follow dharma, we are in conformity with the Truth that inheres and instructs the universe, and we naturally abide in closeness to God. *Adharma* is opposition to divine law. Dharma is to the individual what its normal development is to a seed—the orderly fulfillment of an inherent nature and destiny. The *Tirukural* (verses 31–32) reminds us, "Dharma yields Heaven's honor and Earth's wealth. What is there then that is more fruitful for a man?" "There is nothing more rewarding than dharma, nor anything more ruinous than its neglect."

Hinduism's Unique Value Today

There are good reasons for Hindus and non-Hindus alike to study and understand the nature of Hinduism. The vast geographical and cultural expanses that separate continents, peoples and religions are becoming increasingly bridged as our world grows closer together. Revolutions in communications, the Internet, business, travel and global migration are making formerly distant peoples neighbors, sometimes reluctantly.

It is crucial, if we are to get along in an increasingly pluralistic world, that Earth's peoples learn about and appreciate the religions, cultures, viewpoints and concerns of their planetary neighbors. The Sanatana Dharma, with its sublime tolerance and belief in the all-pervasiveness of Divinity, has much to contribute in this regard. Nowhere on Earth have religions lived and thrived in such close and harmonious proximity as in India. For thousands of years India has been a home to followers of virtually every major world religion, the exemplar of tolerance toward all paths. It has offered a refuge to Jews, Zoroastrians, Sufis, Buddhists, Christians and nonbelievers. Today over one hundred million Indians are Muslim, for the most part magnanimously accepted by their majority Hindu neighbors. Such religious amity has occurred out of an abiding respect for all genuine religious pursuits. The oft-quoted axiom that conveys this attitude is *"Ekam sat anekah panthah,"* "Truth is one, paths are many." What can be learned from the Hindu land that has given birth to Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism and has been a generous protector of all other religions? India's original faith offers a rare look at a peaceful, rational and practical path for making sense of our world, for gaining personal spiritual insight, and as a potential blueprint for grounding our society in a more spiritually rewarding worldview.

Hinduism boasts teachings and practices reaching back 8,000 years and more, its history dwarfing most other religions. In fact, there is no specific time in history when it began. It is said to have started with time itself. To emphasize the relative ages of the major religions and the antiquity of Hinduism, Raimon Panikkar, author of *The Vedic Experience,* cleverly reduced them to proportionate human years, with each 100 years of history represented by one year of human life. Viewed this way, Sikhism, the youngest faith, is five years old. Islam, the only teenager, is fourteen. Christianity just turned twenty. Buddhism, Taoism, Jainism and Confucianism are twenty-five. Zoroastrianism is twenty-six. Shintoism is in its late twenties. Judaism is a mature thirty-seven. Hinduism, whose birthday remains unknown, is at least eighty years old—the white-bearded grandfather of living spirituality on this planet.

The followers of this extraordinary tradition often refer to it as Sanatana Dharma, the "Eternal Faith" or "Eternal Way of Conduct." Rejoicing in adding on to itself the contributions of every one of its millions of adherents down through the ages, it brings to the world an extraordinarily rich cultural heritage that embraces religion, society, economy, literature, art and architecture. Unsurprisingly, it is seen by its followers as not merely another religious tradition, but as a way of life and the quintessential foundation of human culture and spirituality. It is, to Hindus, the most accurate possible description of the way things are—eternal truths, natural principles inherent in the universe, that form the basis of culture and prosperity. Understanding this venerable religion allows all people to fathom the source and essence of human religiosity—to marvel at the oldest example of the Eternal Path that is reflected in all faiths.

While 860 million Hindus live in India, forming 85 percent of the population, tens of millions reside across the globe and include followers from nearly every nationality, race and ethnic group in the world. The US alone is home to 2.4 million Hindus, roughly two-thirds of South Asian descent and one-third of other backgrounds.

Hindu Scriptures

All major religions are based upon a specific set of teachings encoded in sacred scripture. Christianity has the *Bible*, for example, and Islam has the *Koran*. Hinduism proudly embraces an incredibly rich collection of scripture—in fact, the largest body of sacred texts known to man. The holiest and most revered are the *Vedas* and *Agamas*, two massive compendia of *shruti* (that which is "heard"), revealed by God to illumined sages centuries and millennia ago. It is said the *Vedas* are general and the *Agamas* specific, as the *Agamas* speak directly to the details of worship, the yogas, mantra, tantra, temple building and such. The most widely known part of the *Vedas* are the *Upanishads*, which form the more general philosophical foundations of the faith.

The array of secondary scripture, known as *smriti* (that which is "remembered"), is equally vast, the most prominent and widely celebrated of which are the *Itihasas* (epic dramas and history—specifically the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*) and the *Puranas* (sacred history and mythology). The ever-popular *Bhagavad Gita* is a small portion of the *Mahabharata*. The Vedic arts and sciences, including ayurveda, astrology, music, dance, architecture, statecraft, domestic duty and law, are reflected in an assembly of texts known as *Vedangas* and *Upavedas*. Moreover, through the ages God-Realized souls, sharing their experience, have poured forth volume upon volume that reveal the wonders of yoga and offer passionate hymns of devotion and illumination. The creation of Hindu scripture continues to this day, as contemporary masters reiterate the timeless truths to guide souls on the path to Divinity.

A clear sign that a person is a Hindu is that he embraces Hindu scripture as his guide and solace through life. While the *Vedas* are accepted by all denominations, each lineage defines which other scriptures are regarded as central and authoritative for its followers. Further, each devotee freely chooses and follows one or more favorite scriptures within his tradition, be it a selection of *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita,* the *Tirumantiram* or the writings of his own guru. This free-flowing, diversified approach to scripture is unique to the Hindu faith. Scripture here, however, does not have the same place as it does in many other faiths. For genuine spiritual progress to take place, its wisdom must not be merely studied and preached, but lived and experienced as one's own.

The Nature of God

Some descriptions of Hinduism wrongly state that Hindus do not believe in a one Supreme Being but worship a multiplicity of supreme Gods. A common way that this misconception shows up is in the idea that Hindus worship a trinity of Gods: Brahma, the Creator, Vishnu, the Preserver, and Siva, the Destroyer. To the Hindu, these three are aspects of the one Supreme Being. Indeed, with its vast array of Divinities, Hinduism may, to an outsider, appear polytheistic—a term avidly employed as a criticism of choice, as if the idea of many Gods were primitive and false. But ask any Hindu, and he will tell you that he worships the One Supreme Being, just as do Christians, Jews, Muslims and those of nearly all major faiths. If he is a Saivite, he calls that God Siva. If a Shakta Hindu, he will adore Devi, the Goddess, as the ultimate Divinity. If he is a Smarta Hindu, he will worship as supreme one Deity chosen from a specific pantheon of Gods. If a Vaishnava Hindu, he will revere Vishnu or one of His earthly incarnations, called avatars, especially Krishna or Rama.

Thus, it is impossible to say all Hindus believe this or that. Some Hindus give credence only to the formless Absolute Reality as God; others accept God as personal Lord and Creator. Some venerate God as male, others as female, while still others hold that God is not limited by gender, which is an aspect of physical bodies. This freedom, we could say, makes for the richest understanding and perception of God. Hindus accept all genuine spiritual paths—from pure monism, which concludes that "God alone exists," to theistic dualism, which asks, "When shall I know His Grace?" Each soul is free to find his own way, whether by devotion, austerity, meditation, yoga or selfless service.

God is unimaginably transcendent yet ubiquitously immanent in all things. He is creator and He is the creation. He is not a remote God who rules from above, but an intimate Lord who abides within all as the essence of everything. There is no corner of creation in which God is not present. He is farther away than the farthest star and closer than our breath. If His presence were to be removed from any one thing, that thing would cease to exist.

A crucial point, often overlooked, is that having one Supreme God does not repudiate the existence of lesser Divinities. Just as Christianity acknowledges great spiritual beings who dwell near God, such as the cherubim and seraphim (possessing both human and animal features), so Hindus revere Mahadevas, or "great angels," who were created by the Supreme Lord and who serve and adore Him. Each denomination worships the Supreme God and its own pantheon of divine beings. The elephant-faced Lord Ganesha is among the most popular, and is perhaps the only Deity worshiped by Hindus of all denominations. There are Gods and Goddesses of strength, yoga, learning, art, music, wealth and culture. There are also minor Divinities, village Gods and Goddesses, who are invoked for protection, health and such earthy matters as a fruitful harvest.



DEV RAJ AGARWAL

Fervent faith: *Perhaps nothing better captures the grandness of Hinduism than the Kumbha Mela, here celebrated in Haridwar by tens of millions of devotees. It is the largest human gathering on the planet, a devotional conclave that has been observed for centuries.*

The Nature of the Soul

What does Hinduism say about the soul? The driving imperative to know oneself—to answer the questions "Who am I?" "Where did I come from?" and "Where am I going?"—has been the core of all great religions and schools of philosophy throughout history. Hindu teachings on the nature of self are as philosophically profound as they are pragmatic. We are more than our physical body, our mind, emotions and intellect, with which we so intimately identify every moment of our life, but which are temporary, imperfect and limiting. Our true self is our immortal soul, the eternal, perfect and unlimited inner essence, a pure being of scintillating light unseen by the human eye, undetectable by any of the human senses, which are its tools for living in this physical world.

Our soul is the source of all our higher functions, including knowledge, will and love. It is neither male nor female. The essence of our soul, which was never created, is immanent love and transcendent reality and is identical and eternally one with God. The *Vedas* explain, "The soul is born and unfolds in a body, with dreams

and desires and the food of life. And then it is reborn in new bodies, in accordance with its former works. The quality of the soul determines its future body; earthly or airy, heavy or light."

The *Vedas* teach that the Divine resides in all beings. Our true, spiritual essence is, like God, eternal, blissful, good, wise and beautiful by nature. The joining of God and the soul is known as yoga. We spend so much of our time pursuing beauty, knowledge and bliss in the world, not knowing that these objects of our desire are already within us as attributes of our own soul. If we turn our focus within through worship and meditation, identifying with our true spiritual self, we can discover an infinite inner treasure that easily rivals the greatest wealth of this world.

Hinduism is a mystical religion, leading the devotee to personally experience the Truth within, finally reaching the pinnacle of consciousness where the realization is attained that man and God are one. As divine souls, we are evolving into union with God through the process of reincarnation. We are immortal souls living and growing in the great school of earthly experience in which we have lived many lives. Knowing this gives followers a great security, eliminating the fear and dread of death. The Hindu does not take death to be the end of existence, as does the atheist. Nor does he look upon life as a singular opportunity, to be followed by eternal heavenly existence for those souls who do well, and by unending hell for those who do not. Death for the Hindu is the most exalted of experiences, a profound transition from this world to the next, simultaneously an end and a new beginning.

Despite the heartening glory of our true nature spoken of in scripture, most souls are unaware of their spiritual self. This ignorance or "veiling grace" is seen in Hinduism as God's purposeful limiting of awareness, which allows us to evolve. It is this narrowing of our awareness, coupled with a sense of individualized ego, that allows us to look upon the world and our part in it from a practical, human point of view. The ultimate goal of life, in the Hindu view, is called moksha, liberation from rebirth. This comes when earthly karma has been resolved, dharma has been well performed and God is fully realized. All souls, without exception, are destined to achieve the highest states of enlightenment, perfect spiritual maturity and liberation, but not necessarily in this life. Hindus understand this and do not delude themselves that this life is the last. While seeking and attaining profound realizations, they know there is much to be done in fulfilling life's other three goals: righteousness, wealth and pleasure.

In some Hindu traditions, the destiny of the soul after liberation is perceived as eternal and blissful enjoyment of God's presence in the heavenly realms, a form of salvation given by God through grace, similar to most Abrahamic faiths. In others, the soul's destiny is perfect union in God or in the Infinite All, a state of oneness.

The Nature of the World

From the Hindu perspective, the world is the place where our destiny is shaped, our desires fulfilled and our soul matured. Without the world, known as maya, the soul could not evolve through experience. In the world, we grow from ignorance into wisdom, from darkness into light and from a consciousness of death to immortality. The whole world is an ashram in which all are evolving spiritually. We must love the world, which is God's creation. Those who despise, hate and fear the world do not understand the intrinsic goodness of all. The world is a glorious place, not to be feared. The *Vedas* advise, "Behold the universe in the glory of God, and all that lives and moves on Earth. Leaving the transient, find joy in the Eternal."

There is a false concept, commonly found in academic texts, that Hinduism is world-negating. This depiction was foisted upon the world by 19th-century Western missionary Orientalists traveling in India for the first time and reporting back about its starkest and strangest aspects, not unlike what Western journalists tend to do today. The wild-looking, world-renouncing yogis taking refuge in caves, denying the senses and thus the world, were of sensational interest, and their world-abandonment became, through the scholars' eyes, characteristic of the entire religion. Hinduism's essential, time-tested monastic tradition makes it no more world-negating than Christianity or Buddhism, which likewise have traditions of renunciate men and women living apart from the world in spiritual pursuits.

While Sanatana Dharma proudly upholds such severe ways of life for the few, it is very much a family-oriented faith that supports acquisition of wealth, the pursuit of life's pleasures and a full engagement in society's spiritual, intellectual and emotional joys. The vast majority of followers are engaged in family life, firmly grounded in responsibilities in the world. Young Hindu adults are encouraged to marry; marriages are encouraged to yield an abundance of children; children are guided to live in virtue, fulfill duty and contribute to the community. The emphasis is not on self-fulfillment and freedom but on duty and the welfare of the community, as expressed in the phrase, *"Bahujan hitaya, bahujan sukhaya,"* meaning "the welfare of the many and the happiness of the many."

Hindu scriptures speak of three worlds of existence: the physical, subtle and causal. The physical plane is the world of gross or material substance in which phenomena are perceived by the five senses. It is the most limited of worlds, the least permanent and the most subject to change. The subtle plane is the mental-emotional sphere that we function in through thought and feeling and reside in fully during sleep and after death. It is the astral world that exists within the physical plane. The causal plane pulsates at the core of being, deep within the subtle plane. It is the superconscious world where the Gods and highly evolved souls live and can be accessed through yoga and temple worship.

Hindus believe that God created the world and all things in it. He creates and sustains from moment to moment every atom of the seen physical and unseen spiritual universe. Everything is within Him. He is within everything. God created us. He created time and gravity, the vast spaces and the uncounted stars. Creation is not the making of a separate thing, but an emanation of Himself. God creates, constantly sustains the form of His creations and absorbs them back into Himself. According to Hinduism, the creation, preservation and dissolution of the universe is an endless cycle. The creation and preservation portion of each cycle is a period of approximately 309 trillion years, at which point Mahapralaya, the Great Dissolution, occurs. Mahapralaya is the absorption of all existence—including time, space and individual consciousness, all the worlds and their inhabitants—in God, a return of all things to the source, sometimes likened to the water of a river returning to the sea. Then God alone exists until He again issues forth creation.



MIKE BRYGIDER

A dynamic clergy: *Traditional priests, 121 in all, pose at Sringeri Sadhana Center in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania, during a break in the 1997 Vedic worship ceremony, the biggest ever performed on American soil.*

Hinduism in Practice

Hinduism has three sustaining pillars: temple worship, scripture and the guru-disciple tradition. Around these all spiritual disciplines revolve, including prayer, meditation and ritual worship in the home and temple, study of scripture, recitation of mantras, pilgrimage to holy places, austerity, selfless service, generous giving, good conduct and the various yogas. Festivals and singing of holy hymns are dynamic activities.

Temples hold a central place of importance in Hindu life. Whether they be small village sanctuaries or towering citadels, they are esteemed as God's consecrated abode. In the temple Hindus draw close to the Divine and find a refuge from the world. God's grace, permeating everywhere, is most easily known within these holy precincts. It is in this purified milieu, where the three worlds (physical, astral and causal) commune most perfectly, that devotees can establish harmony with God, the Gods and their angelic helpers, called devas. Traditional temples are specially sanctified, possessing a ray of spiritual energy connecting them to the celestial worlds.

Temple rituals, performed by Hindu priests, take the form of puja, a ceremony in which the ringing of bells, passing of flames, presenting of offerings and intoning of chants invoke the devas and Gods, who then come to bless and help the devotees. Personal worship during puja may be an expression of festive celebration of important events in life, of adoration and thanksgiving, penance and confession, prayerful supplication and requests, or contemplation at the deepest levels of superconsciousness. The stone or metal Deity images enshrined in the temple are not mere symbols of God and the Gods; they are not mere inert idols but the forms through which divine love, power and blessings flood forth from the inner world of the Gods into this physical world. Devout Hindus adore the image as the Deity's physical body, knowing that the God or Goddess is actually present and conscious in it during puja, aware of devotees' thoughts and feelings and even sensing the priest's gentle touch on the metal or stone.

Priests, known as *pujaris*, hold a central place of honor and importance. Each temple has its own staff of priests. Some temples appoint only one, while others have a large extended family of priests to take care of the many shrines and elaborate festivals. Most are well trained from early childhood in the intricate liturgy. These men of God must be fully knowledgeable of the metaphysical and ontological tenets of the religion and learn hundreds of mantras and chants required in the ritual worship. Generally, pujaris do not attend to the personal problems of devotees. They are God's servants, tending His temple home and its related duties, never standing between the devotee and God. Officiating priests are almost always married men, while their assistants may be unmarried young men or widowers.

Hindus consider it most important to live near a temple, as it is the center of spiritual life. It is here, in God's home, that the devotee nurtures his relationship with the Divine. Not wanting to stay away too long, he visits weekly and strives to attend each major festival, and to pilgrimage to a far-off temple annually for special blessings and a break from his daily concerns.

For the Hindu, the underlying emphasis of life is on making spiritual progress, while also pursuing one's family and professional duties and goals. He is conscious that life is a precious, fleeting opportunity to advance, to bring about inner transformation, and he strives to remain ever conscious of this fact. For him work is worship, and his faith relates to every department of life.

Hinduism's spiritual core is its holy men and women—millions of sadhus, yogis, swamis, *vairagis* (ascetic renunciates), saints and satgurus who have dedicated their lives to full-time service, devotion and God Realization, and to proclaiming the eternal truths of Sanatana Dharma. In day-to-day life, perhaps no facet of dharma



THOMAS KELLY

Divine light: *At the height of puja, a priest lights the sacred lamp which he will lovingly wave before the Deity as an act of veneration, carrying out liturgy that is thousands of years old. Such ceremonies facilitate communion between this physical world and the realms of the Gods and angels.*

is as crucial as the spiritual teacher, or satguru. These holy men and women are a living spiritual force for the faithful. They are the inspirers and interpreters, the personal guides who, knowing God themselves, can bring devotees into God consciousness. Hindus believe that the blessing—whether a look, a touch or even a thought—coming from such a great soul helps them in their evolution, changes patterns in their life by cleaning up areas of their subconscious mind that they could not possibly have done for themselves. They further believe that if his shakti is strong enough, and if they are in tune with him enough, they will be empowered to really begin to meditate.

In all Hindu communities there are gurus who personally look after the spiritual practices and progress of devotees. Such preceptors are equally revered whether they are men or women. In few other religions are women allowed such access to the highest seats of reverence and respect.

Within the Hindu way is a deeply rooted desire to lead a productive, ethical life, following dharma. Among the many virtues instilled in followers are truthfulness, fidelity, contentment and avoidance of greed, lust and anger. A cornerstone of dharma is ahimsa, noninjury toward all beings. Vedic rishis who revealed dharma proclaimed ahimsa as the way to achieve harmony with our environment, peace between people and compassion within ourselves. Devout followers tend to be vegetarian and seek to protect the environment. Many individuals of all faiths 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. Their traditions have always valued nature and cared for it. They find it natural to work for the protection of the Earth's diversity and resources to achieve the goal of a secure, sustainable and lasting environment.

Selfless service to God and humanity, known as seva, is widely pursued as a way of softening the ego and drawing close to the Divine. Charity, dana, is expressed though myriad philanthropic activities, especially feeding others.

Hindus wear sectarian marks, called tilaka, on their foreheads as sacred symbols, distinctive insignia of their heritage. Rather than burial, they prefer cremation of the body upon death, which quickly releases the soul from its earthly frame, allowing it to continue its evolutionary journey.

Perhaps one of Hinduism's most refreshing characteristics is that it encourages free and open thought. Scriptures and gurus encourage followers to inquire and investigate into the nature of Truth, to explore worshipful, inner and meditative regimens to directly experience the Divine. This openness is at the root of Hinduism's famed tolerance of other cultures, religions and points of view, encapsulated in the adage, *"Ekam sat viprah bahuda vadanti,"* meaning "Truth is one; the wise describe it in different ways." The Hindu is free to choose his path, his way of approaching the Divine, and he can change it in the course of his lifetime. There is no heresy or apostasy in Hinduism. This, coupled with Hinduism's natural inclusiveness, gives little room for fanaticism, fundamentalism or closed-mindedness anywhere within the framework of Hinduism. It has been aptly called a threshold, not an enclosure.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, renowned philosopher and president of India from 1962 to 1967, summarizes in *The Hindu View of Life:* "The Hindu recognizes one Supreme Spirit, though different names are given to it. God is in the world, though not as the world. He does not merely intervene to create life or consciousness, but is working continuously. There is no dualism of the natural and the supernatural. Evil, error and ugliness are not ultimate. No view is so utterly erroneous, no man is so absolutely evil as to deserve complete castigation. There is no Hell, for that means there is a place where God is not, and there are sins which exceed His love. The law of karma tells us that the individual life is not a term, but a series. Heaven and Hell are higher and lower stages in one continuous movement. Every type has its own nature which should be followed. We should do our duty in that state of life to which we happen to be called. Hinduism affirms that the theological expressions of religious experience are bound to be varied, accepts all forms of belief, and guides each along his path to the common goal. These are some of the central principles of Hinduism. If Hinduism lives today, it is due to them."

Nine Beliefs of Hinduism

These nine beliefs summarizing the essential Hindu theology are drawn from chapter fourteen of our book *What Is Hinduism?* That chapter also presents nine corresponding beliefs of Christianity, which can be referenced if your talk is being given to a Christian group. Seeing the two side by side is quite revealing for those understanding Hinduism for the first time.

1 Reverence for Our Revealed Scriptures

Hindus believe in the divinity of the *Vedas*, the world's most ancient scripture, and venerate the *Agamas* as equally revealed. These primordial hymns are God's word and the bedrock of Sanatana Dharma, the eternal religion which has neither beginning nor end.

2 All-Pervasive Divinity

Hindus believe in a one, all-pervasive Supreme Being who is both immanent and transcendent, both Creator and Unmanifest Reality.

3 Three Worlds and Cycles of Creation

Hindus believe there are three worlds of existence—physical, astral and causal—and that the universe undergoes endless cycles of creation, preservation and dissolution.

4 The Laws of Karma and Dharma

Hindus believe in karma—the law of cause and effect by which each individual creates his own destiny by his thoughts, words and deeds—and in dharma, righteous living.

5 Reincarnation and Liberation

Hindus believe that the soul reincarnates, evolving through many births until all karmas have been resolved, and moksha—spiritual knowledge and liberation from the cycle of rebirth—is attained. Not a single soul will be eternally deprived of this destiny.

6 Temples and the Inner Worlds

Hindus believe that divine beings exist in unseen worlds and that temple worship, rituals, sacraments as well as personal devotionals create a communion with these devas and Gods.

7 Yoga Guided by a Satguru

Hindus believe that a spiritually awakened master, or satguru, is essential to know the Transcendent Absolute, as are personal discipline, good conduct, purification, pilgrimage, self-inquiry and meditation.

8 Compassion and Noninjury

Hindus believe that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered, and therefore practice ahimsa, "noninjury."

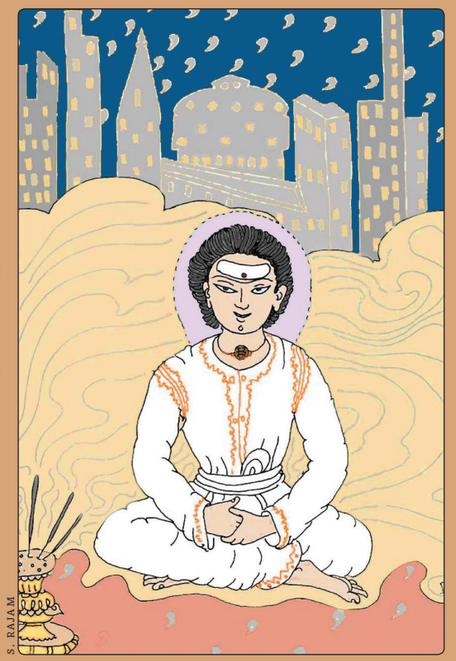
9 Genuine Respect for Other Faiths

Hindus believe that no particular religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others, but that all genuine religious paths are facets of God's Pure Love and Light, deserving tolerance and understanding.

Defining Our Faith

A threefold answer to the often-asked questions: "Who Is a Hindu?" and "What Is Hinduism?"

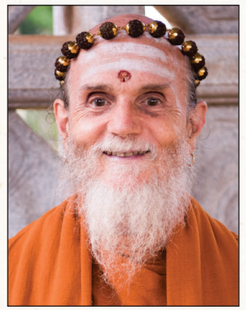
BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI


S. RAJAM





I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY RECENTLY TO GIVE A number of lectures, classes, seminars and presentations at our monastery in Hawaii, in Hindu temples in Toronto and Edmonton and at the Dharma Summit 2005 conference of North American Hindu temples and institutions in New Brunswick, New Jersey. During question-and-answer sessions and in casually talking to those attending, discussions arose on "Who is a Hindu?" and "What is Hinduism?" The concerns of those asking the questions varied considerably, and therefore the nature of my answers also varied somewhat. I compiled my responses in a threefold answer that you may find useful when these commonly asked questions come up in your community, business or social circles.



1. Hinduism Is the Eternal Faith

The first part of the answer to "Who is a Hindu?" and "What is Hinduism?" is that Hinduism is the Sanatana Dharma, or "eternal religion." It is the innate, perennial philosophy. Hinduism does not have a founder. It has neither a beginning nor an end. It is coexistent with man himself. It is not one man's teaching or interpretation. Nor is it limited to a single facet of religion. It consists of the entire prism. It is a God-centric religion. The center of it is God. All other religions are prophet-centric. Here is a quote from my Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, on this concept: "The search for Truth, for God, is called the Sanatana Dharma, or the Eternal Path, because it is inherent in the soul itself, where religion begins. This path, this return to his Source, is ever existent in man, and is at work whether he is aware of the processes or not. There is not this man's search and that man's search. And where does the impetus come from? It comes from the inside of man himself. Thus, Hinduism is ever vibrant and alive, for it depends on this original source of inspiration, this first impulse of the spirit within, giving it an energy and a vibrancy that is renewable eternally in the now."

The idea that Hinduism resides within each of us, in our soul, was highlighted in HINDUISM TODAY about ten years ago in an article about Pat Robertson. As part of his goal of making the United States a Christian nation, the evangelical Baptist leader made an outrageous public statement that Hindus should not be allowed to immigrate to the United States. The late and distinguished spokesman for Hinduism, Ram Swarup of New Delhi, gave an insightful reply which we printed. In part he stated: "Robertson wants to keep out Hindus from America. But would he be able to keep out Hinduism from the seeking humanity? Hinduism resides in all seeking hearts, and whenever man's seeking for God becomes spiritual, Hinduism, or the tradition of Sanatana Dharma, automatically comes in. In what way and how long could man's innermost truth be kept away from him?"

As expressed in this statement and in Gurudeva's insight, the Hindu concept is that each soul is moving ever closer to God over a period of many lives. And when a soul reaches sufficient spiritual maturity, it naturally awakens a conscious desire to know God as its inmost essence, to experience Truth personally. This spiritual longing then leads the soul to take up the practices and study the philosophy of Sanatana Dharma in order to complete the process of knowing itself. Thus it is quite clear, from the Hindu point of view, that you cannot keep Sanatana Dharma out of a country when it already resides within the soul of every person in that country, waiting to be expressed at some point in the future. We can compare the inherent search for Truth that exists within the soul to a dormant seed hidden in the soil waiting for the right conditions to sprout. This first response is the philosophical and mystical definition of Hinduism.

2. Hinduism Is the Religion of the *Vedas*

The second part of the answer to "Who is a Hindu?" and "What is Hinduism?" is that Hinduism is the Vaidika Dharma, or religion of the *Vedas*. In other words, Hinduism encompasses all religious traditions that accept the *Vedas* as scriptural authority. Religious traditions in India that do not accept the *Vedas* are Indian but not Hindu. Among these are Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism, which rejected the *Vedas* and thus emerged as completely distinct religions, dissociated from Hinduism, while still sharing many philosophical insights and cultural values with their parent faith.

The *Vedas* are revealed scripture, or *shruti*, meaning "that which is heard." They are timeless teachings transmitted to rishis, or seers, directly by God thousands of years ago. For countless centuries the *Vedas*, particularly their *Upanishads*, have been the basis of philosophical inquiry, debate and commentary. This attention has given rise to countless schools of thought. Revealed scripture is also the subject of deep study, meditation and yogic practice, to realize the wisdom of the ancients within oneself. Most of Hinduism's sacred mantras are drawn from shruti, used for rites of worship, both public and domestic, as well as personal prayer and japa. Though sometimes the *Bhagavad Gita* is put forward as Hinduism's core scripture, its "Bible," this, of course, is not the case. The *Bhagavad Gita* is a historical epic, or *Itihasa*, accepted as a central scripture by Vaishnava and Smarta followers, but not so regarded in the Shakta or Saiva traditions. The *Vedas* are the revealed scriptures that all Hindus hold in common.

It is also vital to mention that scripture in Hinduism does not have the same place as it does in many other faiths. Hinduism is premised on realization. To be enlightened, one must have personal experience of the truths set out in the *Vedas*. It is not sufficient, in Hinduism, to simply own, read and believe in a holy text, even the *Vedas*.

Another point regarding Vaidika Dharma is that sometimes the words *Hindu* and *Indian* are used in ways that make them synonymous. Of course, they are not. All Hindus are not Indians, and all Indians are not Hindus. Strictly using the term Hindu to refer only to those whose religion accepts the authority of the *Vedas* helps keep this confusion of terms from arising. This second response is the scriptural and liturgical definition of Hinduism.

3. Hinduism Is a Family of Faiths

The third part of the answer to "Who is a Hindu?" and "What is Hinduism?" is that Hinduism is a religion comprised of four primary sectarian traditions, known in Sanskrit as *mata:* Saivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism and Smartism. For Saivites, God is Siva. For Shaktas, Goddess Shakti is supreme. For Vaishnavites, Lord Vishnu is God. For Smartas—who see all Deities as reflections of the One God—the choice of Deity is left to the devotee. In other words, Hinduism is not just a one faith but a family of myriad faiths, which hold such divergent beliefs that each is a complete and independent religion. Yet, they share a vast heritage of culture and belief: karma, dharma, reincarnation, all-pervasive Divinity, temple worship, sacraments, manifold Deities, the guru-shishya tradition and a reliance on the *Vedas* as scriptural authority.

Grasping this overview of Hinduism's structure is essential to gain a clear understanding of the contemporary Hindu temple. I have met many Hindus, particularly in North America, who find the multiplicity of Deities present in many temples to be a source of confusion. This is even more the case in temples that have Deities from Saivism, Vaishnavism and Shaktism all in the same hall. An understanding of the four traditions can provide worshipers with valuable insights into the quandary, making it clear which parts of a temple are traditionally Vaishnava, for example, and which represent the other denominations.

Three layers of wisdom: *Our three pieces of art depict: 1) Hinduism as the innate, eternal truth ultimately sought by every soul; 2) the Indian religious tradition that accepts the* Vedas *as scriptural authority; 3) a family of four primary sects, or faiths.*

Including the denominations of sectarian worship in answering the question "Who is a Hindu?" also helps distinguish the Hindu from the non-Hindu who is studying Hindu philosophy or practicing yoga. The importance of this distinction may not be readily apparent. Like other religions, Hinduism has a hierarchy of beings in the inner worlds who work with those in the physical world who are Hindus by birth or conversion. This working together of the inner and outer worlds happens most fully in the temple. In those sacred precincts the Deity and the multitude of angelic beings, or devas, are able to bless, uplift and purify devotees. Those who hold a Hindu philosophy but have not fully entered the faith do not receive the same blessings from the Deity, as they have not given the Deity permission to work with them in this way. Permission is given when one formally joins the Hindu religion. It is also important to mention that Hindus new to the religion through birth or conversion do not simply join Hinduism. Rather, they join one of Hinduism's denominations and receive a traditional name through the *namakarana samskara*, name-giving sacrament.

Here are some insights from Gurudeva on blessings being received from the Deity: "The Gods can be and are seen by mature souls through an inner perception they have awakened. This psychic awakening is the first initiation into religion. Every Hindu devotee can sense the Gods, even if he cannot yet inwardly see them. This is possible through the subtle feeling nature. He can feel the presence of the Gods within the temple, and he can indirectly see their influence in his life."

We offer this explanation as a catalyst and encourage readers to send letters to the editor sharing additional reflections on what makes a Hindu a Hindu.

Hinduism: Religion or Way of Life?

Confronting the long-standing misapprehension about our faith: that Hinduism is just a way of life

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

"Isn't Hinduism simply a way of life?" this is a question I am frequently asked at satsang gatherings. It invariably makes for spirited discussion, as there is avid interest and a lively diversity of opinion. Years ago, Swami Chinmayananda, founder of Chinmaya Mission, gave a dramatic lecture on the subject (bit.ly/hinduism-way-of-life). Here are key excerpts: "'Hinduism is not a religion. It is a way of life.' You can today hear it in every drawing room wherever youngsters are sitting and discussing Hindu culture and India. You can hear them blabbering this quotation: 'Hinduism is totally different; it is not a religion. Then what is it? It is a way of life.' This is a false statement! No thinking man will accept it or give it any credit at all. What an abominable stupidity is wrapped up in such an attractive sentence! 'Hinduism is not a religion; it is a way of life.' Oh! I see! And Christianity? It is a religion? Oh! So it is not a way of life? What is religion without a way of life? How can there be a way of life without religion? Think! It is a self-contradiction to say it is not a religion; it is a way of life. If Hinduism is not a religion, it is only a way of life; then Christianity is a religion and therefore no way of life. What is religion without a way of life? Does not a religion guide us in our world, in our life? So, it is an empty, high-sounding statement."



Swamiji goes on to explain that the notion originated with German Indologists who, in the late 1800s, translated the word *mata* as *religion:* "The Germans, who first tried to translate our Sanskrit literature, unfortunately made a great mistake. They used *mata* for *religion:* 'Buddha mata,' the religion of Buddha; 'Chraistava mata,' the religion of Christ; 'Muhammediya mata,' Islam. Then they came to Hindu mata, and the poor Germans got confused, because in the Hindu religion there are very many mata. It is a composite mata. *Mata* comes from the Sanskrit word *mati,* meaning '*buddhi,*' 'intellect.' That which is crystallized in the intellect is called a mata. *Mata* only means an opinion! Hindu religion contains Shankara mata, Ramanuja mata, Madhva mata. Various acharyas who have given various viewpoints of life, and the attitudes or the thoughts of the *Upanishads*—they are all called mata, mata, mata. So they [the Germans] came to the conclusion that Hinduism is not a religion. Then, what is it [they wondered]? It is 'the way of life!'"

Hindus inquiring about the merits of this infamous statement are generally not immersed in the practice of Hinduism. They may have in mind that the sum total of Hinduism is to follow dharma, to live virtuously and fulfill one's duty, and that there is no need to do more. Hinduism is a way of life, but it is a spiritual way of life, encompassing good conduct, worship, selfless service, scriptural study and meditation. And what is the definition of a spiritual way of life? Religion!

While Sanatana Dharma is, as the Germans observed, a family of faiths, it also stands strong and proud as a religion in its own right. These faiths all share certain common elements of culture, liturgy, scripture and basic philosophy as reflected in the core beliefs: karma, dharma, reincarnation, all-pervasive Divinity and more. Hinduism gloriously fulfills all the qualities of a religion in every sense of the word.

Remember, the German indologists were no friends of Hinduism. Their redefinition of our faith as a non-religion was a powerful criticism, one that, unfortunately, Hindus themselves adopted. It is intellectual suicide and a global public relations disaster to deny that our faith is a religion. Hinduism stands proudly with the great faiths of the world, and it does this not because it is a way of life. Vegetarianism is a way of life. Nonviolence is a way of life. But neither is a religion and neither will be invited to a parliament of the world's religions, as Swami Vivekananda was back in 1893. He was invited and he spoke to the world from that Chicago podium precisely because he was a Hindu.

Yes, there are those who think using the "H-word" demeans something. But they are wrong. They are neglecting the import of the word *religion* on the global stage as well as in the local community, among other faith groups. Standing together under the banner of Hinduism, we enjoy the many protections given to religions, and we have a respected, unified voice to the media, to government, to boards of education and planning departments. We have known quasi-Hindu groups who normally refuse to use the H-word, but eagerly adopt it when they seek credibility in the broader community, such as in court cases.

Hinduism's finest future is to stand side by side with other religions, not other ways of life. Hindus who parrot the notion that Hinduism is not a religion are not serving Sanatana Dharma well. They have failed to see how wrong-headed this posturing looks in the eyes of the world. What if the Muslims claimed Islam is not a religion but just a way of life? Or Christianity? Judaism? They don't do that. They are proud of their spiritual identity. But for various reasons, including the persistent nuisance of the colonized mind, Hindus hold on to this self-destructive fallacy. Numerous swamis who established movements in the West in the mid 20th century perpetuated this idea as a means to teach Vedanta, yoga and meditation to Christians and Jews without provoking religious objections. As a result, such concepts have become household words but without being acknowledged as Hindu. Swami Chinmayananda said it so well: "It is an empty, high-sounding statement." One we can all avoid.

Happily, this is changing in small but important ways. The Hindu youth we encounter today are proud of their religion, eager to learn more about it. In universities the world over, Hindu students want to stand proudly side by side with students of other religions. The Hindu American Foundation's "Take Back Yoga" campaign, which works to reestablish the practice as having its roots in the world's oldest faith, is a bold indictment of the "way of life" argument.

In each satsang I hold, one basic question invariably arises: "How can I make Hinduism practical in daily life?" I stress that to know and practice Hinduism in the fullest sense, one should engage in all the areas it encompasses: dharma, worship, selfless service, philosophical study and meditation. Together these five make for a complete physical, mental, emotional and spiritual regimen to follow throughout life.

Devotional practice without philosophy can easily turn into superstition. Philosophy without devotion and selfless service can devolve to mere intellectual argumentation and speculation. Taking Hinduism as only a way of life, one misses out on the inner benefits of devotion and philosophy. And without meditation, one has no way to experience the oneness of soul and God, atman and Brahman, of *jiva* and Siva, which leads to illumination and liberation. Let's look at these five layers more closely.

Dharma is the foundation of Hindu religion, as encapsulated in the code of conduct called *yamas*. *Yama* means "reining in" or "controlling" the base, instinctive nature, such as the tendency to become angry and harm others, to lie or manipulate events in our favor, and to steal to acquire something we desire and otherwise could not have. Such expressions of one's instinctive nature need to be harnessed, as actions based on them create negative karma and keep one constantly in an upset state of mind. Dharma also includes a wide array of cultural observances.

Seva, selfless service, is the next facet of Hindu practice. Many individuals serve through giving a monetary donation to a religious or other nonprofit organization. While it is easy to open your wallet or purse and give, say, $50, selfless service offers a more serious commitment, requiring the sacrifice of one's time. Selfless service need not be limited to the temple; it can be done at work, at school, wherever we are in the world.

Devotional practices, such as attending puja at a temple, going on pilgrimage, conducting puja in one's home shrine and repeating a mantra on japa beads, deepen humility and raise the subtle energies to the higher chakras of cognition and divine love.

Scriptural study builds a firm foundation of philosophical clarity, an accurate understanding of God, souls and world that enhances and informs every aspect of one's life. Such study includes the *Vedas, Agamas,* the texts of one's denomination and the teachings of the saints and sages of one's guru lineage. Choice of study material should be in consonance with one's sectarian philosophy. For example, if one's lineage is advaitic, that study should reinforce the idea that we are already one with God, that nothing has to happen for this to be true.

Meditation and other yogic sadhanas, the fifth aspect of Hinduism, are the doorway to personal realization. Meditation can propel the individual beyond philosophical concepts about Divinity to actual experience of those truths. This can be compared to reading about the taste of a ripe, juicy mango versus actually taking your first bite. Which would you prefer? There are two primary approaches. The first, raja yoga, consists of regulated breathing, sense withdrawal, concentration and meditation. The second, jnana yoga, is a path of scriptural study, reflection and constant, profound meditation.

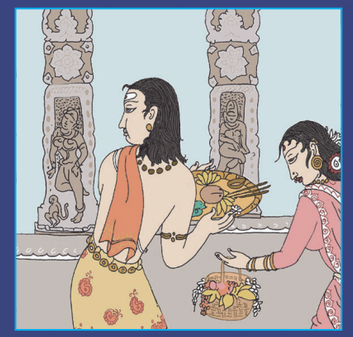
These five religious dimensions are found in all of Hinduism's diverse lineages, with each sect and sampradaya treasuring and preserving its own cultural, devotional and philosophical uniqueness.

Five Facets Of Faith

In essence, Hinduism is a spiritual way of life, a full-fledged religion consisting of five key elements: dharma, worship, selfless service, philosophical study and sadhana/meditation.



1. Dharma, Culture



2. Worship, Devotion



S. RAJAM

3. Selfless Service



4. Philosophical Study



5. Sadhana & Meditation

CHAPTER TWO

The Nature Of God

- I Want to See God!
- One God, Many Divinities
- The Hindu Trinity Myth
- God of Fear or God of Love?
- Who Is the Greatest God?

Fractals in nature

PUBLISHER'S DESK • JULY 2018

"I Want to See God!"

Some pertinent suggestions to sincere seekers on where and how to look for Divinity

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



THE FOCUS OF MANY RELIGIONS IS ON HELPING those who do not believe in God to believe in God. For them, belief in God 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 just believing in God to experiencing God for themselves.

There is a classic story from the life of Swami Vivekananda, one of Hinduism's most well-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. It was, in part, his college-age intellectual challenge to their religiosity. He never got a clear and authoritative answer from anyone until he met Sri Ramakrishna. It was during his second meeting with the saint that he asked the question, "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.

Ramakrishna was taking the young seeker beyond belief in God and pointing toward direct experience of the Divine. It is clear that the Hindu's belief in God is only a step toward the eventual experience of God. An important second point is that in Hinduism the experience of God, in the sense of complete God Realization, is the ultimate goal of life. It is an experience we will all eventually have when our soul has achieved sufficient spiritual maturity. It is the experience which liberates us from the need to be reborn on Earth. It is, to the Hindu, everybody's goal.

A great 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." In our own guru parampara, Satguru Yogaswami thundered a similar *mahavakya* (great saying): "Tanai Ari," "Know thy Self." His disciple Markanduswami liked to stress that "Yogaswami didn't give us a hundred-odd works to do, only one: 'Realize the Self yourself,' or 'Know thy Self' or 'Find out who you are.'" "Yogaswami said, 'You can't find the truth in a thousand books or by listening to people talk. You must realize the Self by yourself!' "

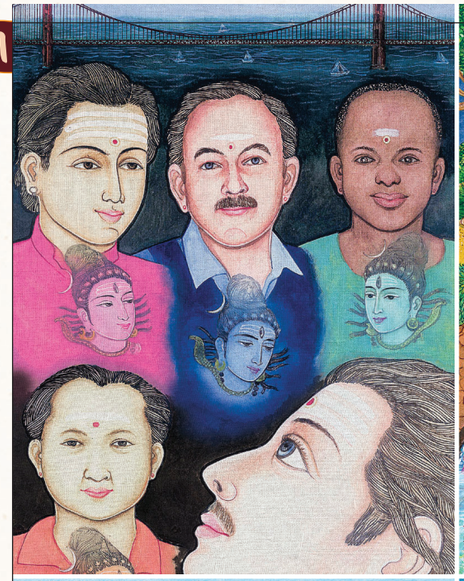
This experience is called God Realization or Self Realization. Hinduism distinguises between self with a small s, which is the ego, and Self with a capital S, which is the soul. In Western self-improvement terminology, self realization refers to manifesting the full potential of your outer self. In Hinduism, the first step toward realizing the Self is claiming one's identity as a spiritual being, a divine soul. The next step is realizing the soul's essence, which at the deepest level is also God's essence, so in experiencing our inmost nature we also experience God.

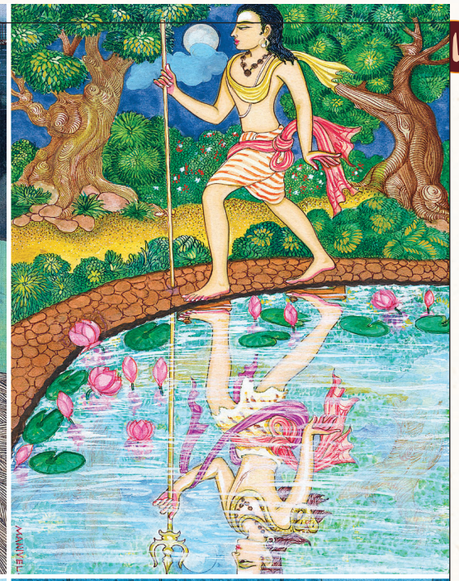
Besides God, religion is also concerned about evil. Again, Hinduism looks at evil as internal to man, not external. Evil relates to man's instinctive nature, which is capable of wrong actions based in anger and violence. We can say that man's nature is threefold: instinctive, intellectual and spiritual. The goal is to subdue the instincts, direct the intellect, harness the ego and manifest the spiritual nature.

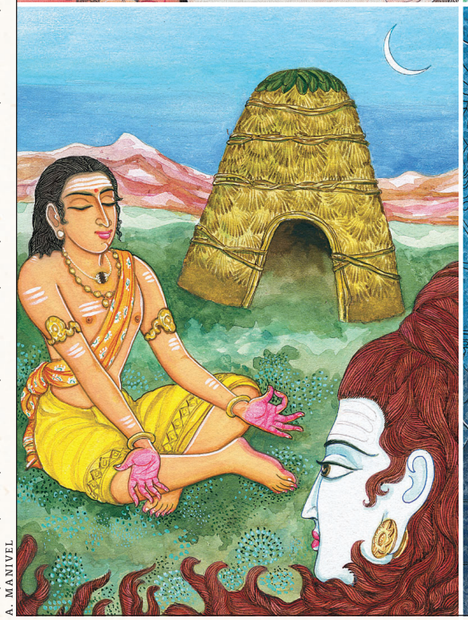
Though many individuals are inspired by the thought of seeing God, to most, the experience seems distant and unattainable. This is because they think of jumping somehow from a zero percent consciousness of God's presence to 100 percent awareness of God's presence. This is where one's concept of enlightenment may be a barrier—that enlightenment is an instantaneous event coming out of nowhere, totally transforming us like a flash of lightning. It is more helpful to think of enlightenment as a gradual process which involves increasing our control over our instinctive nature, directing our thoughts better and expressing more and more of our innate Divinity. Said another way, we do not need to wait for the total, transforming and liberating experience of complete God Realization to know God in simpler ways. This approach allows us to start seeing God now.

Let's look now at some specific suggestions on where and how to first look for God. To experience God, do we sit on a mountaintop, go into a cave or simply close our eyes? Where do we go to see God? Perhaps the easiest place to start is to see God in great religious teachers. We feel a spiritual aura about them that is uplifting. We see a light in their eyes that we do not see in others'. The mere sound of their words encourages us to live a more spiritual life.

Another way to see God, which is a little more difficult but still easy to do, is to look deeply into the eyes of another person. Look beyond the personality, go deeper than his or her intellect and see the pure life energy, which is God. The great saying, mahavakya, that describes this approach to experiencing the Divine is found in the Tamil word *Uyirkkuyir*, "God is the Life of our life."









A. MANIVEL

Ways to see God: *(clockwise from top) A devotee sees God within other people; a seeker sees the Divine in nature, and in his own image reflected in a pond; a priest envisions Lord Siva while performing puja; a yogi meditates to see God within.*

This practice does not stop with people, but should also include trying to see the life energy in trees, birds and animals. This is because God is our life. God is the life in all beings. Becoming aware of this life energy in all that lives is becoming aware of God's presence within us. A beautiful verse from the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* elucidates this concept: "He who knows God as the Life of life, the Eye of the eye, the Ear of the ear, the Mind of the mind, he indeed comprehends fully the Cause of all causes." In Hindu culture, every time we greet another person with the traditional gesture of namaskar, we have the opportunity to practice looking deeply enough into his or her eyes to see God within as the life of their life. This is fulfilling the deepest meaning of *namaskar,* which means, "I greet God in you."

A third place to look for God is in the Hindu temple. This is the devotional or theistic approach. The Hindu temple is not simply a place we go to socialize or listen to lectures on Hinduism. It is a sacred place, built and maintained in such a way that we can go there and experience the Divine. Invoked by ordained priests through daily puja rituals, the Gods and angelic beings, or devas, in the inner, spiritual worlds are able to bless us through the Deity's image in the temple. The image is like a temporary physical body the Gods use during temple ceremonies.

Though a devotee may have a vision of God, the more common way we experience the Gods and devas is as an uplifting, peaceful energy, or shakti, that radiates out from the image. It is easiest to feel these blessings at the peak of the puja, when the flame is held high. The Gods' blessings are most strongly felt on their major festival days, such as Vinayaga Chaturthi for Lord Ganesha.

A fourth place to look for God is within ourselves, through the practice of meditation. Meditation is internal worship—going deeply enough into ourself to find that part of us that is identical with God. At first we experience God as peaceful and blissful feelings, later as a brilliant, clear white light, later still as a consciousness that permeates all, and finally as Transcendent Reality, which is timeless, formless and spaceless.

Meditation is the essence of ashtanga yoga, which means "eight limbs." The first two limbs, which are often glossed over by eager yoga students, are yama and niyama, Hinduism's ten ethical restraints and ten religious observances. These form a very necessary, secure basis for meditation, a foundation of good character without which no progress in spiritual life can be made. The restraints are noninjury, truthfulness, nonstealing, divine conduct, patience, steadfastness, compassion, honesty, moderate appetite and purity. The observances are remorse, contentment, giving, faith, worship of the Lord, scriptural listening, cognition, sacred vows, recitation and austerity. Once this platform of virtuous living is established, ashtanga yoga's subsequent six limbs can be pursued, beginning with asana (sitting quietly in yogic posture) and pranayama (breath control). Then pratyahara, sense withdrawal, brings awareness into dharana, concentration, then into dhyana, meditation. Dhyana finally leads to samadhi, God Realization.

The key to deepening our experience of God is the regular practice of spiritual disciplines. And it is fair to say that no other religion contains such a vast range of spiritual practices, from such fundamental virtues as noninjury and purity, to temple worship, advanced yoga practices and meditation.

Even though God pervades us and the entire universe, in the beginning stages we don't see Him. This is because He has intentionally hidden Himself from us, allowing us freedom to grow and learn through experience and eventually strive to find the Self within. This is called His veiling grace. Once we awaken to a certain stage and yearn with all our heart to see and know God, we can do so by seeing Him in great religious teachers, in the eyes of other people, and by seeing Him as the Life of the life within all that lives. In the temple we can experience God's peaceful energy, or shakti. And within ourself, we can come to know God through the fine art of meditation. Through all these joyous spiritual practices of Hinduism, we can become more and more aware of God's presence within and around us. But be patient! This is a gradual process. It takes practice, lifetimes of practice.

One God, Many Divinities

A guide to the complexities of Deity images in Hindu temples and the nature of our temple consecration rites

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



RECENTLY I GAVE A TALK AT THE MAHA Kumbhabhishekam (consecration) for the Enfield Nagapooshani Ambaal Temple in London. Since many present at the event were new to Hinduism, I began with a basic introduction to the temple itself. Here is my message.

One's first visit to a Hindu temple can easily give the impression that Hinduism has a multiplicity of Supreme Gods. That can be a natural assumption, given the many shrines and holy images one encounters. However, it is not correct. While Hindus do believe in many Divinities, all believe in a One Supreme Being. A verse from Hinduism's oldest scripture, the *Rig Veda*, is often quoted to express this idea. In Sanskrit it states: *"Ekam Sat, viprah bahudha vadanti,"* and in English it reads "Truth is One; sages describe it variously." In a Hindu temple it is not uncommon for the Supreme Being to have more than one shrine. In each of these shrines God is depicted in a different way, such as male, female, both male and female, dancing or blessing. At the Enfield temple, in the main shrine we encounter the Supreme Being in the form of the Goddess Nagapooshani Ambaal, following a tradition from Nainativu, an island near Sri Lanka's northern peninsula. In this London temple, the Supreme Being is represented in four other forms as well: Sivalingam, Lord Nataraja, Dakshinamurti and Bhairava. We might find a parallel in a Christian church where Jesus is worshiped on the cross, in a manger and with the apostles. Jesus is a one Lord, but with different forms and meanings. Seeing his multiple images, we do not conclude there are multiple Christian Lords.

Like the Abrahamic religions, Hinduism believes God has created great divine beings to perform various functions. The Abrahamic traditions call these archangels; Hindus call them Lords, Divinities or Gods—while not mistaking them for God! Most Hindu temples have side shrines dedicated to some of these great beings. The Enfield temple, for example, contains shrines to Lords Ganesha, Muruga and Anjaneyar. These divine beings are secondary to the main Deity, just as archangels, such as St. Michael, are secondary to the Supreme Being in Abrahamic faiths.

Over fifty churches in the greater London area are named St. Michael's Church. Who is St. Michael? He is not, in fact, a saint but the chief among angels, patron of warriors, mariners and the suffering. Three other archangels—Raphael, Gabriel and Uriel—are often glorified; London has churches dedicated to both Raphael and Gabriel. Some Jewish traditions recognize as many as ten archangels. These beings, like the Hindu Divinities, function as helpers of God, fulfilling specific responsibilities. A Christian or Jew worshiping St. Michael or Mother Mary is not worshiping a second Supreme God, but rather an elevated being who enjoys God's grace. Similarly, in a Hindu temple we have a one God, but many blessed and heavenly Divinities, helpers of the Creator of all.

In understanding the nature of God and Divinities in the Hindu temple, there is a third factor to consider. The Hindu religion is not a single, homogenous faith; it is a complex family of faiths that, while similar, are also different one from the other.

Most obviously, the three main denominations worship the Supreme Being by a different name. To Saivites, God is Siva. To Vaishnavites, God is Vishnu; and Shaktas venerate the Supreme as Shakti. In many temples, especially in the diaspora, these traditions overlap. Thus, in the Enfield temple, which is of the Saiva denomination, there is a major shrine to Lord Vishnu, the form of the Supreme Being worshiped by Hindus of the Vaishnava denomination. While this presence of seemingly distinct Supreme Gods can confound outsiders, Hindus know what is being represented, and rather enjoy the inclusivity of it all. There are few sharp lines in this elastic, all-embracing family of faiths. At the same time, the strictest of Vaishnavites would not have an image of Siva in their temple, and the most traditional of Saivites would never allow a Krishna in theirs.

This blending has been fostered by Hinduism's fourth major denomination, the prominent Smarta Sampradaya. This liberal Hindu stream of philosophy, culture and tradition brings together, on personal altars and in public temples, all three major forms of the Supreme Being—Vishnu, Siva and Shakti—as well as secondary Divinities, especially Ganesha, Surya and Muruga. All are seen as equal reflections of the one Saguna Brahman, and any one of them may be worshiped as the Supreme Being. In some temples following this ultra-inclusive pattern, one may even find altars to Jesus, Mother Mary, Mohammed or Buddha.

Another subtlety Hindus enjoy that could confound non-Hindus regards gender. While philosophically God is beyond gender, He/She is commonly represented as male or as female, or both. Hence the Goddess is revered not only in Shaktism, but in Vaishnavism and in Saivism as well, though by different names and personalities. This is the subtle explanation behind the Supreme Being in the Enfield Temple being worshiped in the personage of Nagapooshani Ambaal (Shakti), surrounded by various forms of Siva, including Nataraja and Sivalingam. Despite the separate shrines, Shakti/Siva are philosophically understood as one and inseparable.



SHUTTERSTOCK

Consecration: *Thousands of devotees gather on September 10, 2010, at the opening ceremony of the Sri Maha Kaliamman temple in Serdang, Malaysia, to witness and get blessings as priests on the temple tower pour sanctified water over seven golden spires.*

The Consecration Rites

Our second topic is the nature of the ceremony that is performed to give life and spiritual power to a temple. In Sanskrit it is called *kumbhabhishekam*, a term sometime preceded by *maha*, meaning "great." Kumbhabhishekam is the combination of the two words *kumbha*, a water vessel, and *abhishekam*, the rite of pouring kumbhas filled with sanctified water over the copper spires (which resemble inverted kumbhas) on the crown of the temple. Kumbhabhishekam names the formal inauguration of a new temple and its periodic reconsecration, usually at twelve-year intervals, following renovation, extensive cleaning and renewal.

The English term for such a ceremony is consecration, meaning "to make sacred." For such a blessing to be holy, God's presence must be invoked. At a mahakumbhabhishekam, this is done through priestly disciplines and sacred fire ceremonies called *homa* or *yajna*, conducted in a temporary structure called a *yagasala* built just for that purpose. Fire is used in many religions in one form or another. In Hinduism it is believed that fire can be seen in the heavenly inner worlds. By lighting a fire, intoning sacred chants and ringing a bell, we invite benevolent inner-world beings to come and bless all present. These blessings build in intensity and accumulate over a number of days in the water pots near each sacred fire. On the final day, the water in the pots is poured over the temple spire and bathes the various Deities and objects being made sacred. This holy ablution occurs at the high point of the ceremony. It is preceded by days of ceremonies and followed by a month of special daily rituals.

Significance of Deity Images

Our third topic is the use of statues in Hindu worship. As part of the kumbhabhishekam ceremonies, all the statues that are being installed in the shrines are purified and infused with divine energy. Thereafter, the statue is considered a murti, an image that has been made worthy of worship and in which the Deity is present. In other words, the great inner-world being uses the image as a temporary physical body through which He/She blesses the devotees present. Thus we can see that Hindus are not worshiping the icon itself. They are worshiping the holy Deity within it. Though many regard the image simply as a symbol for God, the most devout and mystical regard it as God Himself or Herself.

The priestly rituals are based squarely on the principle of invocation: beseeching conscious, intelligent, compassionate higher powers in the inner worlds. Hinduism recognizes multiple planes of existence, unseen worlds filled with souls of all stages of evolution. We experience these subtle, nonphysical dimensions of being in our thoughts and emotions all the time. During sleep, we leave the physical world and become fully active in unseen realms. At death we shed our physical body and reside in the inner planes until we are again born in a physical body.

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The Hindu Trinity Myth

How temples can publicize their philosophy and lineage to counteract the misconception that Hinduism is polytheistic

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



A FEW YEARS AGO A NON-HINDU PROFESSOR who teaches world religions at a Texas University visited our monastery to learn more about Hinduism. His first question was, "Is it true that Hindus worship a trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva? That is what the textbooks teach. That is what the professors tell their students." Though I was aware of the wide scope of this misconception, I was aghast to see it taken as fact.

We explained to him that this idea is based on stories from the *Puranas*, but it has no relevance in actual Hindu practice or theology. Some texts seek to draw credence for this idea from the massive *trimurti* (three-faced) stone carving of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshvara as one being in the Elephanta Caves (ca 700). However, a more sensible view is that this 16-foot-tall carving is a paradigm of the oneness of Divinity. One might even surmise that the Elephanta image was carved to glorify the famous Vedic verse (*Maitri Upanishad* 5.2): "That part of Him which is characterized by tamas is called Rudra. That part of Him which belongs to rajas is Brahma. That part of Him which belongs to sattva is Vishnu." Is this a prayer to a trinity of three Gods? No. It is a prayer of adoration to the One Supreme Lord.

The professor was truly amazed to hear this, having never actually spoken to a Hindu about it before. He thanked us for the clarification and pledged to change his syllabus for the coming year to state that Hindus actually worship a one Supreme Being and are not polytheists. Unfortunately, most teachers of world religions continue to indoctrinate students with the misunderstanding that Hindus are polytheistic. Hindus were never polytheistic in the sense that there are many equal Gods. Henotheism (literally "one God"), which philosophers also call inclusive monotheism, better defines the lofty Hindu view. It means the worship of one God without denying the existence of other Gods.

Whether there is one or more Supreme Gods can be traced to two distinct but intertwining streams of Hindu thought and tradition. There is the original Vedic-Agamic Hinduism, with its high-minded philosophical edicts, its vast knowledge about ritual and theology and a wealth of mystical insights into God, man and world. And there is the more recent Puranic Hinduism, with its folk narratives and myths, its teachings of culture and religious practices, its vast record of history, architecture, medicine and geography and, of course, the popular and sometimes implausible stories about the Gods. Vedic-Agamic Hinduism is ancient, for the authoritative *Vedas* and *Agamas* have their source deep in human history, 6,000 to 8,000 years ago, while Puranic Hinduism is more recent and based on secondary scripture.

Another source of confusion in this regard is the Hindu temple itself, when not properly explained. We walk in the door and encounter a multiplicity of shrines, each with a different Deity. How does the onlooker reconcile the one Supreme God of the *Upanishads* with the profusion of Gods we encounter in the temple? This final section of the *Vedas* states that God is the Supreme Reality referred to as Brahman, transcendent and immanent, one and indivisible, infinite and eternal, all-pervading, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss—as well as the Personal Lord.

This is where the knowledge of Hinduism's four denominations or sectarian traditions is quite helpful. The *Tamil Lexicon* by the University of Madras defines them as follows: "Saivam: The religion which regards Siva as the Supreme Being and is exclusively devoted to His worship, of sixteen sects. Shaktam: The religion which enjoins the exclusive worship of Shakti as the Supreme Being. Vaishnavam: The religion which holds Vishnu to be the Supreme Being." The definition for the Smarta or Vaidika Sampradaya is found under *Shanmatam:* "The six Vedic religious systems: Saivam, Vaishnavam, Shaktam, Ganapatiya, Kaumaram, Sauram." In other words, Smartas have a choice to worship any one of the six Deities—Siva, Vishnu, Shakti, Ganesha, Subramanya and Surya—as the Supreme Lord, as their Ishta Devata, or preferred Deity.

However, we don't want to leave the impression that all Hindu denominations hold the Smarta viewpoint that all Gods are "aspects" of the Supreme Being. In Saivism, for example, God Siva is the Supreme Being and Ganesha and Subramanya are separate Gods who assist Him. These Gods are not symbolic representations, but real spiritual beings, somewhat akin to the archangels of Christianity.

A uniquely confusing situation we find in the West is that Supreme God Vishnu and Supreme God Siva are sometimes equally enshrined side by side in the same temple to accommodate various allegiances. This gives the wrongful impression that the practicing Hindu worships more than one Supreme God. This problem does not occur in India, where only one Deity is enshrined as the central God in any temple.

Indeed, we know of US temples which on their website describe Siva as the destroyer and Vishnu as the preserver. Of course, this is not how knowledgeable Saivites or Vaishnavites look at it. To Saivites, Siva is the entire Supreme Being, not merely the dispenser of destruction. To Vaishnavites, Vishnu is the entire Supreme Being, not just the Lord of preservation. That we worship the Supreme Being above all others is clearly the view of Hinduism's revealed scriptures (shruti), the *Vedas* and *Agamas*.

Not all Hindus are familiar with the category of scripture called the *Agamas*. The *Agamas* were part of an oral tradition of unknown antiquity which some experts consider as ancient as the earliest *Vedas*. The *Agamas* are the primary source and authority for temple construction and ceremonies. Each of the major denominations—Saivism, Vaishnavism and Shaktism—has its unique *Agama* texts. Smartas recognize the *Agamas*, but don't necessarily adhere to them, relying mainly on the smriti texts, such as the *Dharma Shastras*, *Puranas*, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*.

In the *Saiva Agamas*, for example, Lord Siva is described as the Supreme Being, performing all three divine actions of creation, preservation and destruction. Quite often two additional actions are included: His veiling and revealing graces. The *Raurava Agama* states, "The birth of the world, its maintenance, its destruction, the soul's obscuration and liberation are the five acts of His dance." No wonder Saivites take great exception to the statement that Siva is the God of Destruction, a concept that finds its source in the *Puranas*.

I have been to a number of temples that have equal shrines for Venkateshvara and Siva. If such a temple took the Puranic approach, it would say that at the Sri Venkateshvara shrine we are worshiping Vishnu, the God of Preservation, and at the Sri Sivalingam shrine we are worshiping Siva, the God of Destruction. In the Agamic approach, we would say the Venkateshvara shrine is of the Vaishnava denomination of Hinduism, which worships the Supreme Being as Vishnu. The liturgy, or temple ritual, is conducted according to the *Pancharatra* or *Vaikhanasa Agama*. The Sri Sivalingam shrine is of the Saiva denomination of Hinduism, which worships the Supreme Being as Siva. The liturgy is conducted according to the *Kamika* and *Karana Agamas*.



S. RAJAM

Holy texts: *Hindu spiritual texts are vast, scribed on palm leaves, manuscripts, carved in stone tablets and more. The artist shows our most revered scriptures, the* Vedas *and* Agamas, *delivered from God's hand, while other scriptures are man-made.*

The misunderstanding created by the *Puranas* is not a new problem. Arumuga Navalar (1822–1879) was a devout and brilliant Saivite working to reeducate the Saiva community of Jaffna, Sri Lanka, following the departure of the Portuguese and two centuries of foreign domination and anti-Hindu preaching. The Christians were criticizing Hinduism as superstitious, childish and polytheistic, quoting from the *Puranas* to prove their point. Navalar boldly defended his faith, even translating the Bible into Tamil to show its own failings and immaturities. The missionaries loved the Puranic tales which speak ("absurdly," Navalar declared) about the marriages of the Gods and promote a multiplicity of Supreme Gods.

Navalar believed in the Gods, the Mahadevas, and worshiped Lord Murugan devoutly. But he knew his faith spoke of a single Supreme Being and wanted his fellow Saivites, who were languishing under missionary assaults, to understand the traditional view. He spoke against the storybook aspects of the *Puranas*, making it clear to Saivites that the *Agamas* are spiritually superior and should be the source of their faith and practice. Still, he defended the greatness of the *Kanda Purana*, which he saw as high-minded and inspiring. He succeeded in bringing Saivism back to life by showing his people the true, mystical purity of Hinduism.

The point that Arumuga Navalar was making is: don't take the Puranic stories literally. They are a major source of misconceptions about Hinduism. When the *Puranas* are taken as the authority on Hinduism, the high philosophy of the revealed scriptures is obscured and confusions arise. For temples in the West, the Vedic-Agamic approach is what is needed to create clarity about Hindu temple worship in the minds of Hindu youth, as well as the non-Hindu community. We are encouraging all temples to help create this clarity of Hindu belief by stressing on their websites and in their publications that, first and foremost, Hindus all worship a one Supreme Being, though by different names and through different traditions.

We also suggest that temples share more information on their traditions, such as: 1) Mata: whether the liturgy is of the Vaishnava, Saiva, Shakta or Vaidika tradition; 2) Agama: the name of the Agama (or other scripture) that governs the ceremonies; 3) Murti: the form of the main Deity and a brief history of its worship in India; 4) Archaka: the background of the priesthood; 5) Darshana: the philosophy or philosophies taught at the temple; 6) Anubhuti: any divine experience, dream, vision or inspiration that led to the temple's creation. For such a description for our own Kadavul Hindu Temple, go to www.himalayanacademy.com/monastery/temples/kadavul.

There is no reason for Hindus to endure the criticism of polytheism when we have the glorious *Vedas* and *Agamas* to guide the way and offer wisdom about our worship of the one Supreme God. Hopefully this article will help Hindus respond to misconceptions they may encounter.

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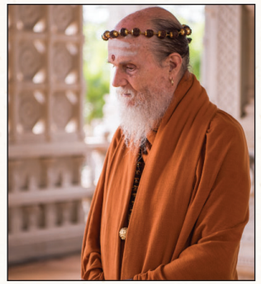
God of Fear or God of Love?

Love is the basis of worship in all Hindu denominations, expressed through bhakti yoga toward one's chosen Deity

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



On a recent teaching journey I met Ravindran, who was raised in India but had lived in the West for many years. He was openly grappling with lingering questions about beliefs he learned while growing up. He shared that Hindus in his region feared that if they didn't regularly and properly propitiate the Deities of their village, the Gods and Goddesses would be upset, and this would cause negative events in their life. Thus, they were kept busy appeasing a multiplicity of Deities that had been worshiped for generations. The premise of this type of worship is fear, specifically that if we lapse in our ritual obligations we will be punished, or we will suffer, in some way.

I assured Ravindran that the great Gods of Hinduism do not live in a consciousness of wrath, hurtfulness, judgment, retaliation or pettiness. They are beings of love and light, showering their blessings on each of us, regardless of our failings, frailties and omissions. With this belief as its cornerstone, Hinduism is a joy-based religion in which one never need fear God, never worry that God will be offended or exact some punishment if we do not perfectly perform our puja. Worship in its highest sense is an outpouring of love. God is love and nothing but love.

My Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, affirmed: "Hinduism is such a joyous religion, freed of all the mental encumbrances that are prevalent in the various Western faiths. It is freed of the notion of a vengeful God. It is freed of the notion of eternal suffering. It is freed from the notion of original sin. It is freed from the notion of a single spiritual path, a One Way."

Ravindran told me more about his village's belief. When negative events occurred, such as a death of a child, a flood or a sudden illness, the elders looked for lapses in the mandatory rites, believing that the Deities must be penalizing them for neglecting some aspect of the worship. He hoped that a better understanding of the nature of the Gods would help overcome such superstition.

Hindu philosophy teaches that all events in our life, be they positive or negative, are the result of actions we performed in the past. A distressing situation is a self-created misfortune, not a punishment from God. Life itself, taking place within the realm of duality, is a playground of natural forces, a classroom for embodied souls to experience joy and sorrow, elation and depression, success and failure, health and sickness, good times and bad. The divine beings who reside in the deeper realms of consciousness are always there to assist embodied souls in their journey through samsara. Puja rituals are performed not to propitiate them or mollify their wrath, but to adore them and invoke their blessings and guidance.

Ritual appeasement does have a scriptural purpose, to protect against the negative energies and efforts of astral entities who actually do seek to upset the lives of embodied souls. Gurudeva taught that the best way to guard against such malevolent beings is to build a positive spiritual force field by invoking the protection of higher and more powerful benevolent beings—the Gods of Hinduism. Astral entities are powerless where there is harmony, cleanliness and close communion with the Gods and their devas.

On that same journey a teenage boy, leaning forward in earnest, asked, "Do I have to worship all the Deities in the temple, or can I focus on just Lord Ganesha? I am finding that by keeping a singular focus I am getting much closer to Him. I'm beginning to form a connection that I've never had with any of the other Deities."

I replied in the affirmative, that it is fine to focus on just one Deity. In fact, this is the pattern followed by most Hindus. However, it is only fitting to honor and acknowledge all the Divinities when in the temple. I shared, "When attending puja to another Deity, worship sincerely and show deep respect; but you need not strive to feel as close to that Deity as you do to Lord Ganesha."

In Sanskrit, the Deity of one's most pious attention is called *Ishta Devata*, literally, "cherished or chosen Deity." Vaishnavas may choose among many Divine forms: Vishnu, Balaji, Krishna, Radha, Rama, Lakshmi, Hanuman and Narasimha, as well as the Shaligrama, a black-colored fossil found in the sacred river Gandaki. Smartas traditionally choose their Ishta from among six Deities: Siva, Shakti, Vishnu, Surya, Ganesha and Kumara, or any of their traditional forms. Shaktas, who worship the Divine as the Goddess Shakti, may focus on one among Her many forms, from the furious Kali to the benign and graceful Parvati or Ambika. Saivites direct their worship primarily to Siva, as represented by the Sivalingam, Nataraja and Ardhanarishvara. Many Saivites choose Lord Karttikeya, also known as Murugan or Skanda, as their Ishta Devata. My Gurudeva, a staunch Saivite, taught us to worship Siva as the Supreme God while starting with the worship of Lord Ganesha, who is "the closest God to the material plane of consciousness, most easily contacted and most able to assist us in our day-to-day life and concerns."

An analogy to friends is helpful. Teenagers have many friends, but it is common to have one best friend with whom we share the most intimate and personal details of our life. Having an Ishta Devata is like that, and the feeling we should have toward that Divinity is the same as the feeling we have for our best friend. Holding a singular focus helps us to draw closer and closer to that Deity.

Another approach to understanding the Deity's compassionate nature, and in the process ridding ourself of any lingering fear, is to think of the God or Goddess as the parent and ourself as the child. In fact, the Deity is the perfect parent, because no matter what we do, He/She always sends us blessings and love. When we make mistakes, He never becomes angry or punishes us. The Deity's love is perfect love, existing at all times, in all circumstances for all souls.



A. MANIVEL

Worship based on love: *Two devotees, husband and wife, prostrate before Lord Siva in total surrender, or prapatti. Their love of God brings them into a profound proximity to the Divine.*

xIn developing a closeness with the Deity, we eventually discover and bask in that perfect love. The *Tirumantiram* affirms this idea: "The ignorant foolishly say that love and Siva are two, but none of them knows that love alone is Siva. When men know that love and Siva are the same, love as Siva they ever remain."

In giving talks on the topic of love of God, I often share the similarity of the Vaishnava and Saiva concepts. In the Chaitanya school of Vaishnavism, for example, bhakti is seen as progressing through five stages: neutrality toward God, servitude to God, friendship with God, parental feelings for God, and relating to God as a lover to the beloved. Saivism expresses a parallel concept. The first stage is called the *dasa marga*, "path of servitude," with the soul relating to God as servant to master. In the second stage, *satputra marga*, our relationship is as a child to his parents. In the third stage, *sakha marga*, God is like a friend. In the fourth stage of maturity, called *san marga*, or "true path," God is our dearest beloved. Both denominations emphasize the soul's coming ever closer to God, in stages that begin with bhakti yoga, which leads the devotee to an intense love of God. Some common bhakti practices are:

- **shravana:** Listening to sacred texts and stories of God
- **kirtana:** Singing devotional hymns and bhajans
- **smarana:** Remembering the presence and name of the Divine (this includes mantra repetition)
- **pada-sevana:** Service to the holy feet, which includes serving humanity
- **archana:** Attending ritual worship in the temple and attending or conducting worship in one's home shrine
- **vandana:** Prostrating to the Deity
- **atma-nivedana:** Complete self-surrender

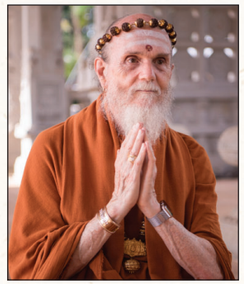
Bhakti yoga develops qualities that make communion possible, such as love, selflessness and purity, leading to self-effacement and surrender to God. It is in this idea of the need for surrender, prapatti, that the members of all sects merge in oneness. We know that we have attained prapatti when we effortlessly know that everything that happens is due to the grace of God and not our own actions. There is no trace of fear in this mode of worship.

In a letter he wrote to a young man, our paramaguru, Yogaswami (1872–1964), explained the unitive perspective to be held not only toward God, but toward everything. "I am with you and you are with me. There is no distance between us. I am you. You are I. What is there to fear? Look! I exist as you. Then what must you do? You must love. Whom? Everyone. To speak more clearly, your very nature is love. Not only you, but all are pervaded by love. But there is no 'all,' for you alone exist. All are you!"

Who Is the Greatest God?

Rivalries abound in the world, even among Hindus, who occasionally vie for the supremacy of their Deity: Vishnu or Siva

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



HAVE YOU EVER HEARD A DISCUSSION between two or more Hindus as to who is greater, Vishnu or Siva? As is the case with many philosophical issues in Hinduism, there is, of course, more than one point of view.

Historically, the rivalry of sects has occasionally become violent. In 1760 two great throngs vying for supremacy clashed on the final day of bathing at the Kumbha Mela in the holy city of Haridwar. Violence ensued, and Saiva and Vaishnava *naga babas* turned the festival into a killing ground. In all, 18,000 monks died that day.

In modern times, the rivalries are more verbal than physical, but they are real and not infrequent. In fact, they arise more lately, because Saivas and Vaishnavas are mixing freely. A Hindu family's friends and neighbors are just as likely to be from another sect—unlike in olden days, when sectarian communities were more isolated and homogeneous. Plus, these days one can find Vishnu and Siva side by side in the same temple, something unheard of even 50 years ago. Such temple arrangements themselves confuse worshipers, provoking them to wonder, "Who is the greatest among the Gods?"

Our first answer is based on the Vaishnava scripture *Srimad Bhagavatam* (also called *Bhagavata Purana*), in which Lord Vishnu/Krishna is the Supreme, all-embracing God of all Gods. The *Bhagavatam* enjoins devotees of Lord Krishna to not disrespect Lord Siva, but to worship Him as the greatest of the devotees of Lord Krishna. In other words, a Krishna bhakta also prays to Lord Siva, but asks Siva to assist him in attaining devotion to and the favor of Supreme Lord Krishna. The *Bhagavatam* also contains a story about Siva seated in meditation, eyes closed, chanting on japa beads. It is stated that He is meditating on Lord Vishnu's transcendental form and chanting Vishnu's holy names. In the *Bhagavatam*, Siva is subservient to Lord Vishnu, though He is above the category of an ordinary living being, or jiva. In this position Siva is sometimes referred to as a demigod. In this answer, which represents a Vaishnava point of view, Vishnu is proclaimed to be greater than Siva.

A second answer is found in a story from the Saiva scripture *Siva Purana*. Brahma and Vishnu were engaged in an argument about who was greater. The dispute grew so intense that the world was threatened. The devas requested Lord Siva to intervene. Siva appeared before them in the form of a fiery column of light, called Jyotirlinga, of which they could perceive neither the beginning nor the end. A contest was devised by the two: the one who first found either end of the Jyotirlinga would prevail as the greater. Vishnu mounted his boar (varaha) and tunneled downward through the nether worlds; Brahma, mounting his swan (hamsa), ascended through the upper worlds. Failing to find the bottom, and totally exhausted, Vishnu returned to the surface. Brahma, failing to find the summit, resorted to a dishonest ruse. Encountering a ketaki flower falling through space, Brahma cajoled it to falsely testify that He had reached the pillar's summit. Upon returning to the surface, he was boasting of his achievement when suddenly Lord Siva appeared in the middle of the Jyotirlinga and unequivocally declared Himself to be beyond their ken and thus the greatest. Brahma was castigated by Lord Siva for his deceit. Thus Brahma is not worshiped in any temple in India, except in Pushkar, a few miles from Ajmer, in Rajasthan. In this answer, which represents a Saiva point of view, Siva is manifestly greater than Vishnu.

Sometimes the rivalry between the Vaishnavite's staunch adoration of Lord Vishnu and the Saivite's steadfast adoration of Lord Siva goes to extremes. This is illustrated in a classic story that took place at the Shankaranarayanar Temple in the Tirunelveli District of Tamil Nadu, where the main murti is one half Siva (Shankara) and the other half Vishnu (Narayana). One day an overly zealous Saivite entered the temple to worship the Lord. Before offering incense, he plugged the nostril of Vishnu with cotton to prevent Him from enjoying the fragrance. Seeing that happen, an equally bigoted Vaishnavite made his offering, plugging Siva's nostril so only Vishnu would enjoy the offering. The story demonstrates the foolish nature of fanatical sectarianism.

How is it that one *Purana* extols Vishnu as the Supreme and another elevates Siva? Swami Sivananda, founder of the Divine Life Society, explained, "*Vishnu Purana* glorifies Vishnu and in some places gives a lower position to Siva. *Siva Purana* glorifies Siva and gives a lower status to Vishnu. This is only to instill and intensify devotion for the respective Deity in the hearts of the devotees. In reality, no Deity is superior to another. You must understand the heart of the writer." Swami's commentary continues, providing a third answer to our question. "Accordingly, the scriptures hold that Vishnu and Siva are ultimately the same. Smarta theologians have cited many references to support this point. For example, they interpret verses both in the Sri Rudram, the most sacred mantra in Saivism, and the Vishnu Sahasranama, one of the most sacred prayers in Vaishnavism, to show this unity... Shri Shankara also has said in very clear terms that Siva and Vishnu are the one, all-pervading Soul." In this answer, which represents a Smarta point of view, Vishnu and Siva are equal; more precisely, they are identical.

This same teaching is found in the *Shikshapatri*, a Vaishnava text written by Bhagwan Swaminarayan. "The *Vedas* proclaim Narayan and Shiv as one and as Brahmaswarup—God's true nature—and, therefore, they should be known accordingly." Bhagwan Swaminarayan enjoins his devotees: "In the month of Shravan they shall worship or engage the services of pious brahmin devotees to worship Shiv with *bilva-patras* (leaves) and the like."

Sometimes the story of the worship of Shankaranarayana by the equally intolerant Vaishnavite and Saivite devotees is marshaled as proof that sectarianism is inherently narrow-minded and all Hindus would be better off being nonsectarian. However, there is another approach to sectarianism, which is the ground for our fourth answer to the question "Who is greater, Vishnu or Siva?" We can call this the tolerant sectarian approach. The *Tamil Lexicon*, published by the University of Madras, contains these terse but excellent definitions: "Saivam: The religion which regards Siva as the Supreme Being and is exclusively devoted to His worship, of sixteen sects. Vaishnavam: The religion which holds Vishnu to be the Supreme Being."

A tolerant sectarian Hindu accepts both of these points and does not conclude that one is true and the other false. They are simply two different names and two different concepts of the Supreme Being. The idea that there can be multiple valid viewpoints about the Supreme is certainly a core Hindu concept. It is captured in the *Rig Veda* (1.164.46): *Ekam Sat viprah bahudha vadanti*, "Truth is One, sages describe it variously."

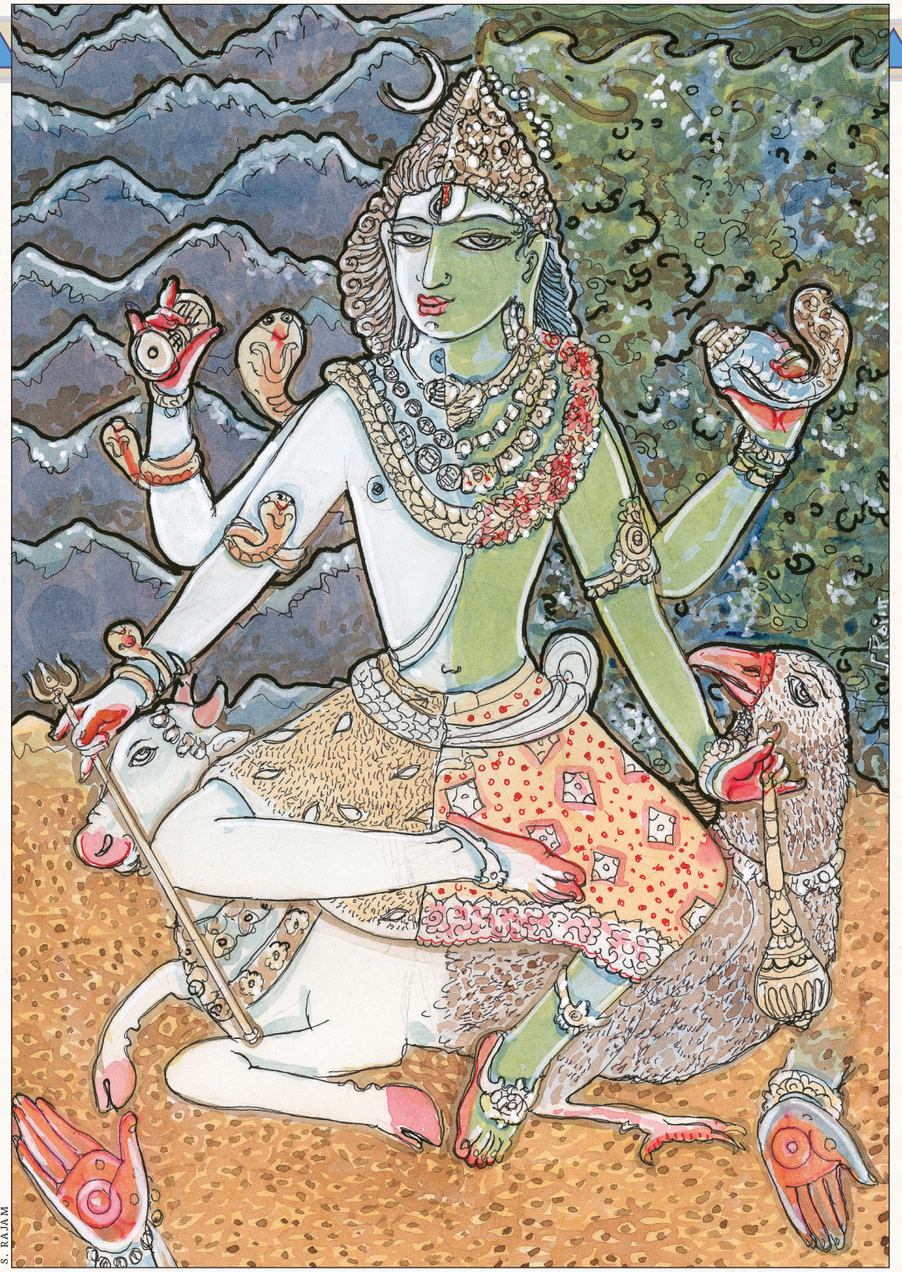
Renowned philosopher Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, president of India from 1962–1967, offers a definition of Hinduism that stresses the same point. "The Hindu recognizes one Supreme Spirit, though different names are given to it." The conclusion of this tolerant sectarian viewpoint is the same as the Smartas'—"Vishnu and Siva are equal." The basis for this conclusion, though, is different. Here the reason they are equal is that each is the Supreme Being to a different Hindu denomination.

Clearly there is a need for a tolerant, rather than a fanatical or bigoted, sectarianism in today's Hindu world. One of the reasons is that many temple societies outside of India have shrines or adjacent temples to both Siva and Vishnu, with priests of both traditions working closely together, and devotees of both denominations attending.

We had the privilege of attending the 2004 kumbhabhishekam of the Siva temple at the invitation of the Hindu Temple Society of Greater Atlanta. Siva's sanctum was built adjacent to a temple for Venkateshvara, Lord Vishnu, which had been constructed years earlier. During our visit, we were greatly impressed that Vaishnava priests were helping in the Saiva ceremonies and vice versa. The smooth working together of these two priesthoods, and of Siva's and Venkateswara's devotees, was uplifting and encouraging. It shows how well these traditions can cooperate and blend their energies without giving up their distinct beliefs and customs. I have observed this interdenominational harmony elsewhere, including the Hindu temple in Memphis, Tennessee, which, in addition to Vaishnava and Saiva priests, also engages priests of the Smarta tradition.

In this area, my guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, gave some helpful advice to his followers, who are, of course, Saivites: "Siva's devotees, with hearts as big as the sky, love and accept Smarta, Shakta and Vaishnava Hindus as brothers and sisters, even if not accepted by them, and keep harmony by not discussing differences."

The next time you are involved in a discussion about who is superior, Vishnu or Siva, feel better prepared, as you now have four different points of view to which you can confidently refer. And who knows, you may be inspired to develop a fifth point of view—such is the nature of Hinduism!



S. RAJAM

Harihara: *The traditional statue, with Vishnu (Hari) on the right holding the conch and Siva (Hara) on the left bearing the trishula, portrays the view that they are a one Deity or, to some, different aspects of the Supreme God.*

CHAPTER THREE

Raising Children

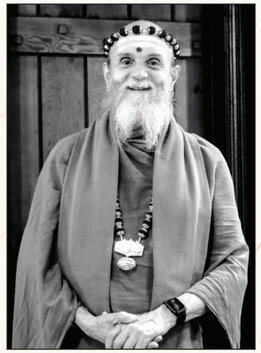
- Nine Qualities to Cultivate in Children
- Teaching Peacefulness to Children
- When Kids Embrace Hinduism
- How to Improve the World
- Growing Up without Prejudice

Foot of a beetle by Dr. Igor Siwanowicz, 100x

Nine Qualities to Cultivate in Children

Children benefit immensely when parents, their first gurus, teach thoughtfully with specific goals in mind

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



EVERY FATHER AND MOTHER IS INDEED A guru—in fact, an individual's first guru, teaching by example, explanation, giving advice and direction. When we think of gurus, we automatically think of teaching; thus looking at parents as gurus highlights the importance of what parents teach their children, grandchildren and possibly even their great-grandchildren.

A swami is an individual's second spiritual guru. A simple analogy will point out why swamis are deeply concerned about what parents teach their children. Imagine being a young man or woman's second dance teacher. If the first teacher has not been systematic in teaching the basics of dance, the second teacher may end up spending years undoing what the first teacher ineptly taught before he can advance the student further.

A common problem many individuals have when entering adult life is a negative self-concept. This is the sense of feeling that you are inherently flawed and inferior and that others are vastly superior to you. Parents create this in their children through frequent critical comments, such as "How could you do such a stupid thing?" "You're so dumb!" "You'll never amount to anything." It can take the swami years of working with the individual to help him replace a low self-esteem with a sense of personal worth. This would be totally unnecessary if the parents had raised the child wisely to cultivate good character.

There are nine key qualities we want our children to possess in order to be happy, religious and successful when they reach adulthood.

1. **Positive Self-Concept**
2. **Perceptive Self-Correction**
3. **Powerful Self-Control**
4. **Profound Self-Confidence**
5. **Playful Self-Contentment**
6. **Pious Character**
7. **Proficiency in Conflict Resolution**
8. **Parental Closeness**
9. **Prejudice-Free Consciousness**

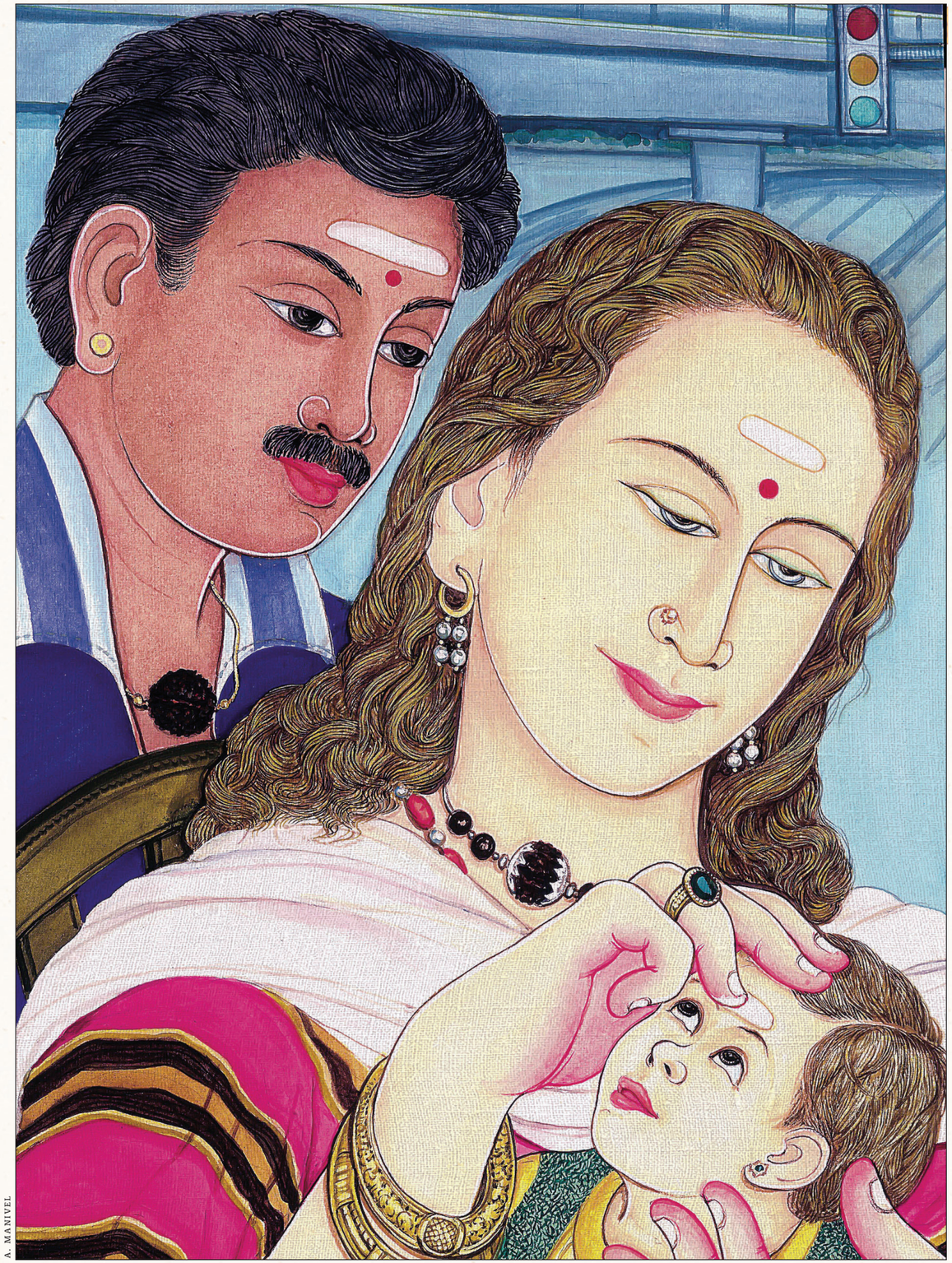
We will explore each of these to see what children should be taught, or not taught, by the parents to develop that quality.

1. Positive Self-Concept is in action when we think of ourselves as a worthy individual deserving of a wonderful life. 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. This can occur in two distinct situations. The first is simply making these kinds of remarks as a form of teasing or joking. This, of course, needs to be stopped and replaced with remarks that encourage and praise the child. Parents should also not allow their children to call each other names, such as fat or lame. 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, "What you did was very foolish, but you are smart, and I'm sure you now know better and won't do that again." Having a positive concept about his outer self allows the child to accept the Hindu teaching that his inner self is a divine being, a radiant soul.

2. Perceptive Self-Correction is shown when we are able to quickly learn the lesson from each experience and resolve not to repeat our mistake. How do parents develop this quality? By teaching kids 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, asking the child to think about what he did and how he could avoid making that mistake again. Perceptive self-correction enables us to quickly learn from our mistakes, refine our behavior accordingly and thereby make more rapid progress on the spiritual path.

3. Powerful Self-Control is restraining 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 of Hinduism's Code of Conduct, known as the *yamas*, 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. It is through emphasizing 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.

4. Profound Self-Confidence is exemplified when a child is confronted with a difficult task and his first response is the



A. MANIVEL

First gurus: *Two Hindus from different cultures are raising a child in Chicago. Mother is placing holy ash on the infant's forehead for protection and blessings. They have vowed to raise the child using the principles of positive discipline.*

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? It is first through the child's possessing a positive self-concept. It is then through helping the child be 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 successfully at school in the future. Self-confidence makes one magnetic to success in both outer and inner endeavours.

5. 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 dissastified about what they don't have. It is nurtured by the family spending time together filled with play and laughter. The ability to remain fun-loving, joyful, secure and content enables one to face with far greater equanimity the ups and downs of life.

6. Pious Character is expressed 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? 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 of Hinduism's Code of Conduct, known as the *niyamas*, 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. It 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 life the joys of Divine blessings.

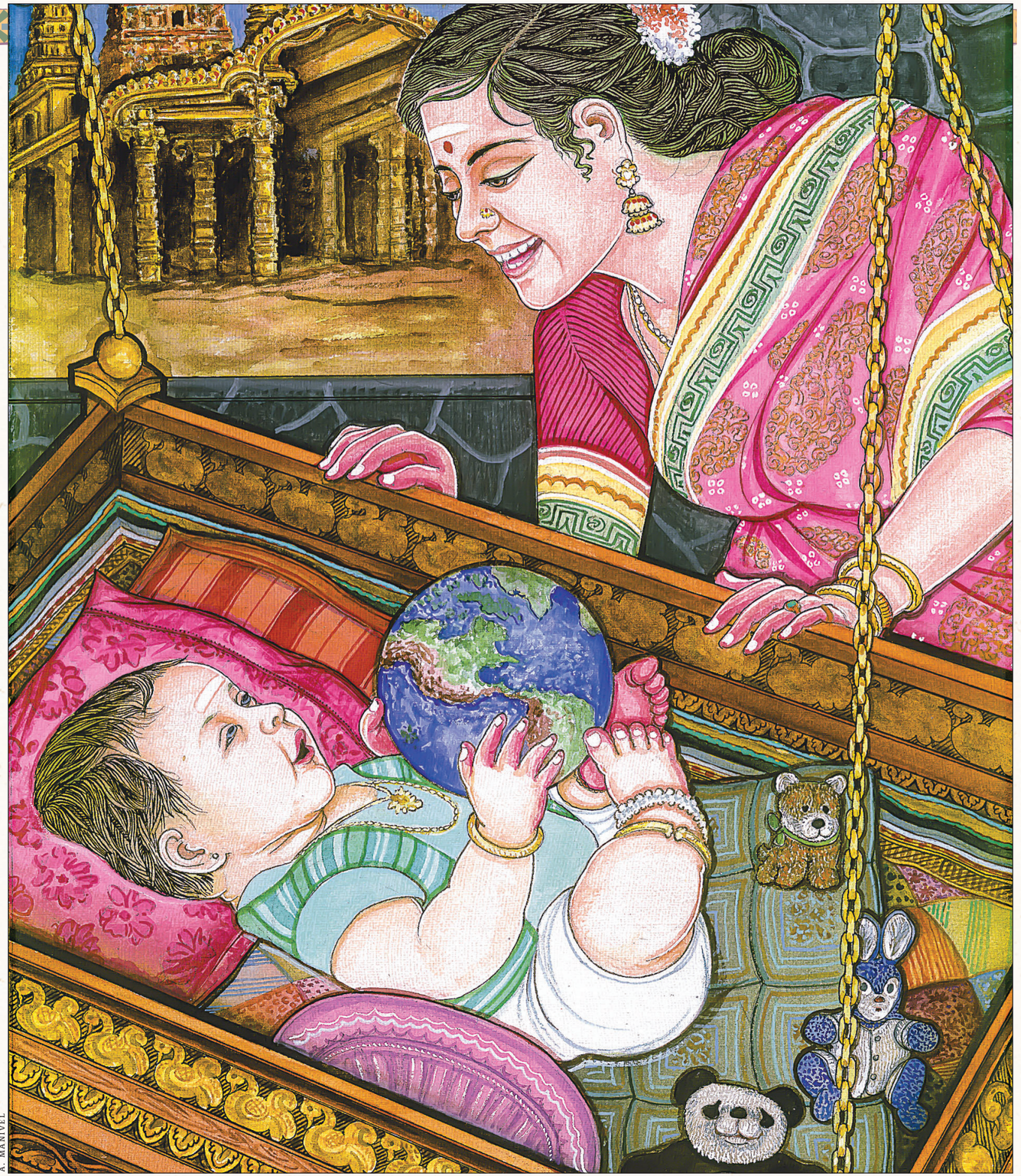
7. Proficiency in Conflict Resolution is exemplified when we work out disagreements with others by using intelligence and seeking for a win-win situation. How is this cultivated in youth? It is through the parents demonstrating these qualities themselves. Children learn that this behavior is expected 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." Illustrations of what to do and what not to do can be drawn from the people they see in television and movies. It 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. Proficiency in conflict resolution keeps our life sublime and our subsconscious mind free of the disturbances caused by memories of unresolved disagreements.

The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world: *A mother sings a traditional lullaby as her child plays with a small Earth, signifying the global impact all mothers of the world have in passing along religious culture and values to their children. She is raising him near the Nallur Murugan Temple in Jaffna, Sri Lanka.*

8. Parental Closeness is fulfilled 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, we know of many instances when a boy reached adulthood, moved out of the home and maintained as little contact with his father as possible. 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, and using reason without blame and shame. The use of physical violence, anger, irrational punishments, 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 bonding with his sons and the mother bonding with her daughters, through developing common interests in hobbies or games and working on them together. It is protected when parents create a nonthreatening atmosphere of love in their home 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. Distance develops in a threatening atmosphere where children will keep secrets, each secret adding to the distance between the child and the parents. A loving relationship between child and parents powerfully influences all subsequent relationships, even one's relationship with God.

9. 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 which 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. Again, 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.

Summary: A wise mother wrote to me recently 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 we may think we are just helping our children be more happy, successful and religious, in truth we cannot separate ourselves from them. Their growth and spiritual evolution is our own as well.



A. MANIVEL

Teaching Peacefulness to Children

Cultivate a prejudice-free consciousness that readily embraces differences in race, religion and nationality

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



CONDITIONS IN THE WORLD TODAY ARE certainly troubling—wars between countries, wars within countries, plus a growing threat of international terrorist acts. The shocking attacks in New York on September 11 naturally heightened everyone's concern about these problems.

One of the immediate consequences of 9/11 was the television coverage depicting people in a number of countries who do not much like, some even strongly hate, the United States, even to the point of wishing violence upon it. Watching these startling reports on television, we were again reminded of the extent and seriousness of the problem of prejudice in the world today.

Attitudes of prejudice toward those of a different race, nation or religion can start simply as distrust, which can then deepen into dislike and deepen further into hatred, which can turn into a desire to inflict injury. Are we born with such attitudes? Certainly not. As children, we are taught them at home, at school and even in some religious institutions.

In the last few months a number of resolutions have been passed objecting to the US war with Iraq. Thousands of people have objected by demonstrating in the streets all over the world, including the US. These actions are sincere and make a point, but they certainly do not address the core of the problem, which is hatred.

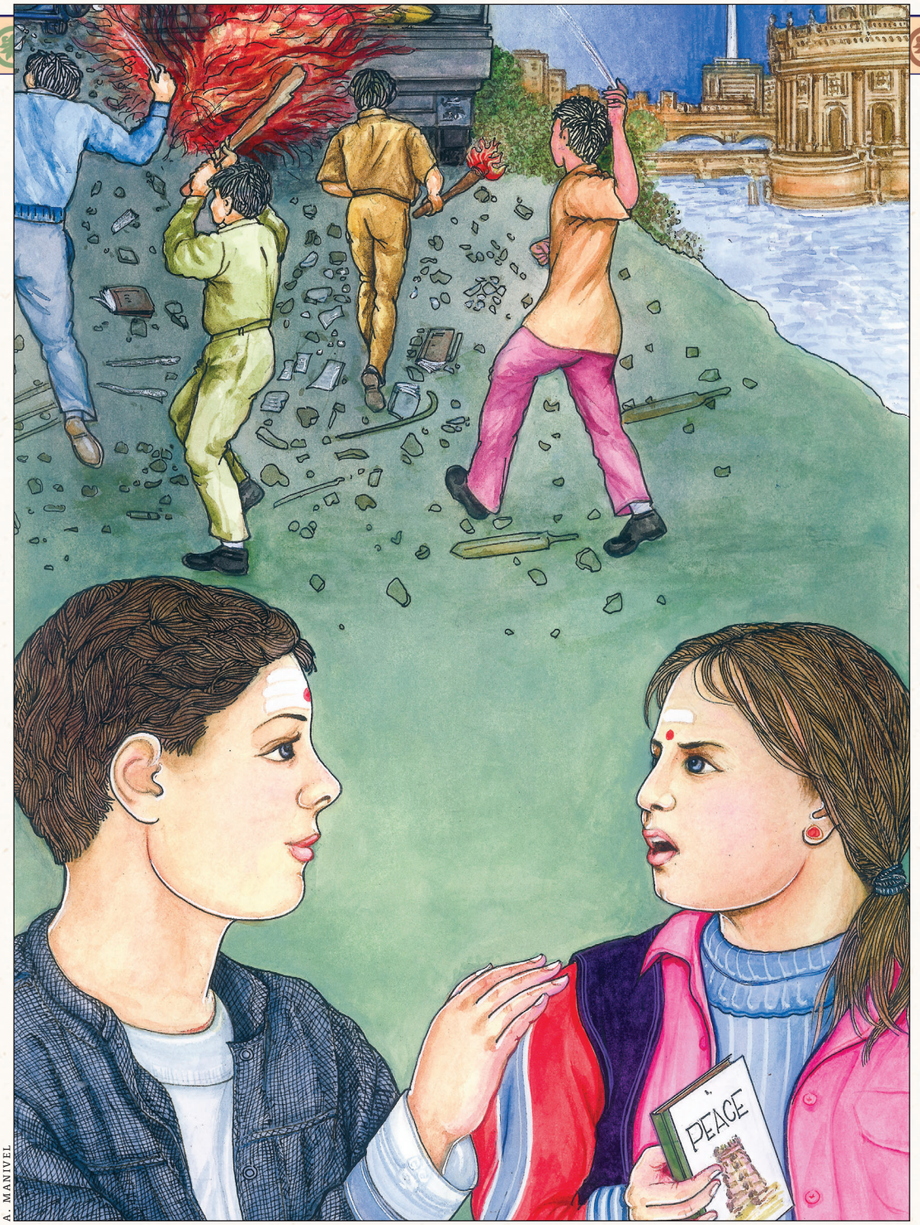
People have been raised to hate those of different ethnic groups, faiths or countries. The solution, though admittedly a long-term one, is that we need, in the century ahead, to teach all children tolerance, openness to different ways of life, different beliefs, different customs of dress and language. We need to stop teaching them to fear those who are different from themselves, stop teaching them hatred for peoples of other colors and other religions, stop teaching them to see the world as a field of conflict, and instead instill in them an informed appreciation and a joyous reverence for the grand diversity we find around us. Instead of teaching children to be intolerant and to dislike and distrust, hate and inflict injury on those who are different, we can teach them to be tolerant, to like and trust, befriend and help. Of course, the central place to convey such a crucial message to the next generation is in the home. Secondarily, it can be strengthened in classes at the temple and school and through special community activities.

It is in the home that we can enduringly change the world for the better. It is the qualities we cultivate in our children that create the world of the future. Therefore, the most effective form of protest to the violence is to give more thought to what our children are learning as they grow up. In this regard, every father and mother is indeed a guru—in fact, a child's first guru, teaching by example, explanation, giving advice and direction. The quality we wish parents to develop in the child is a prejudice-free consciousness—an open-mindedness that readily embraces differences in ethnic background, religion and nationality.

How can parents nurture a prejudice-free consciousness? Through complete avoidance of remarks that are racially or religiously prejudiced, and through discussing with children any prejudice they hear from others at school and elsewhere and correcting it. We—meaning we of all nations and cultures—can teach children to avoid generalizations about people and instead to think about specific individuals and the qualities they have. Even positive generalizations should be avoided, as they encourage us to not look at the qualities of specific individuals. When we say, even positively, that Chinese are good businessmen or Germans are efficient and precise, we promote stereotypes that blind us to the truth that all individuals are unique. TV and movies can provide useful situations to discuss with your children, not leaving the conclusions to their youthful minds. Tolerance can be developed by having our children meet, interact and learn to feel comfortable with children of other ethnicities and religious backgrounds.

There are a few key Hindu beliefs that are the basis for Hindu tolerance. The first belief is on the nature of God. Hinduism has a wide diversity of traditions, but followers of the different traditions respect one another and worship side by side in many temples. Hinduism has four major denominations. To Saivites the Supreme is Siva. Shaktas refer to the Supreme as Shakti, Smartas call the Supreme Being Brahman, and to Vaishnavas He is Vishnu. However, the important point is that each Hindu is worshiping the same Supreme Being. The name is different, the tradition is different, but it is the same Supreme Being that is being worshiped by all Hindus. An ancient verse from the *Rig Veda* (1.164.46) is often quoted in this regard: *Ekam sat viprah bahuda vadanti.* "Truth is one, sages express it variously."

Hindus also believe that there is no exclusive path, no one way for all. They profoundly know that the God they worship is the same Supreme Being in whom peoples of all faiths find solace and peace. Since the inner intent of all religions is to bind man back to God, Hindus honor the fact that "Truth is one, paths are many"—*Ekam sat anekah panthah.* Nonetheless, Hindus realize that all religions are not the same. Each 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.



A. MANIVEL

Living peacefully: *A sister and brother are growing up in Europe. While nonreligious youth run wild and vandalize property, they are grateful for their Hindu upbringing, which provides good values and moral direction, teaching them the merits of a tolerant life.*

Another Hindu belief that gives rise to tolerance of differences in race and nationality is that all of mankind is essentially good, that we are all divine beings, souls created by God. Hindus do not accept the concept that some individuals are evil and others are good. The *Upanishads* tell us that each soul is emanated from God, as a spark from a fire, then begins a spiritual journey, which eventually leads back to God. All human beings are on this journey, whether they realize it or not. So when a Hindu sees a person whom others call bad or evil, he thinks to himself, "This is a young soul, acting in terrible ways, but one day, in the course of many lives, he will realize his errors and adhere to dharma." The Hindu practice of greeting one another with "namaskara," worshiping God within the other person, is a way this philosophical truth is practiced on a daily basis. *Ayam atma Brahma,* "The soul is God."

This is taken one step further in the adage *Vasudhaiva kutumbakam,* "The whole world is one family." Everyone is family oriented. Most of what we do is for the purpose of benefiting the members of our family. We want them to be happy, successful and religiously fulfilled. And when family is defined to be the whole world, it is clear that we wish everyone in the world to be happy, successful and religiously fulfilled. The Vedic affirmation that captures this sentiment is *Sarve janah sukhino bhavantu,* "May all people be happy." Albert Einstein once observed, "A human being is a part of the whole, called by us Universe, a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty" [H. Eves, *Mathematical Circles Adieu*, Boston, 1977].

Of course, this doesn't mean we should teach children to gaze naively at everyone through rose-colored glasses, especially those who have been taught to hate others because of their particular race, religion or nationality. It means not looking at people through distortive lenses of malice, bigotry or bias. Hatred is a reality in this world and needs to be responded to realistically. While being aware of the prejudices of others and the philosophies they have been taught, we can still choose to see their Divinity and hold no prejudice—no ill-feeling or hatred—toward them.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Hindu concepts became more and more popular and influential in the West. Every year more Westerners take up the belief in karma and reincarnation as a logical explanation of what they observe in life. One of the most visible uses of Hindu values in the West in the 20th century was by Dr. Martin Luther King. After many years of thought, Dr. King selected the Hindu principle of ahimsa, as exemplified by Mahatma Gandhi's tactic of nonviolent resistance, to overcome the unjust laws of racial discrimination in the US. In 1959 Dr. King spent five weeks in India discussing with Gandhi's followers the Mahatma's philosophy and techniques of nonviolence to deepen his understanding before putting them into use.

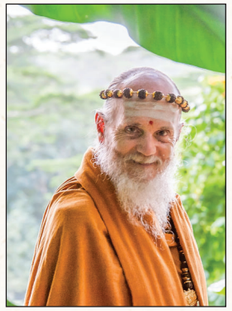
Perhaps in the 21st century the world can again turn to Hindu values, choosing this time the value of tolerance, raising children with a prejudice-free consciousness as a way of creating a future for this planet that is free from war and terrorism.

Teach your children, and show them by your example, that tolerance should not be mere passive acceptance of those who are different—an aloof tolerating—but rather a heartfelt empathy and proactive effort to befriend and help.

When Kids Embrace Hinduism

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

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



ALL TOO OFTEN, HINDU CONCEPTS AND practices are explained to children and youth as rules rather than as tools. Rules restrict what we can do in life and have the sense of making things less enjoyable. Kids, especially, rebel at too many rules. Tools, on the other hand, make them more effective and improve their quality of life. We can transform cumbersome rules into appealing tools by clearly explaining the processes involved in a practice or custom and the benefits it has to offer. The object is to catch the child's interest, to show how Hinduism will help her make spiritual progress and enjoy a happier and more successful life. It is inspiration, not rules, that drive people forward, and children are no different in this regard.

Imagine a teenager challenging her parents about three family practices: "Why are we vegetarian?" "Why do we need to go to the temple every week?" "Why can't I listen to hip hop music like my friends do?" Unfortunately, parents may not take the time to give thoughtful, complete answers to such questions, and instead take the easy route, decreeing, "It's what our family has always done." Because many of their friends don't have to follow such a strict code of conduct, youth hearing this answer can easily conclude that Hinduism is a just a set of rules that makes life restrictive and unhappy.

Before answering these questions in a way that transforms them from rules into tools, let's review some basic concepts. These are what I call "big ideas."

Two Big Ideas

The first big idea is that everything affects our consciousness. My guru's guru, Yogaswami of Sri Lanka, explained: "What you think, that you become. If you think God, you become God. If you think food, you become food. Everything influences consciousness."

The second big idea is that each of us is a soul, a divine being living in a physical body, and we have a threefold nature. At the deepest level, we are a pure, radiant, blissful soul. That is our spiritual or intuitive nature. We also have an intellectual nature and an instinctive nature. So, we have three aspects: spiritual (knowing, being), intellectual (thinking) and instinctive (feeling). The instinctive nature consists of our lower, animal instincts, such as self-preservation, procreation, hunger and thirst. It also includes the emotions of greed, hatred, anger, fear, lust and jealousy. This is our desire/feeling nature. The intellectual nature is our faculty of reason and logical thinking. It is the source of discriminating thought. The intuitive nature is the mind of light, of omniscient knowing, omnipresent awareness, pure consciousness, truth and love. This is our spiritual nature.

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

Why Are We Vegetarian?

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

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

Explain to children that if they want to live in higher consciousness, in their soul nature, in peace and happiness and love for all creatures, they cannot eat meat, fish, shellfish, fowl or eggs. The reason for this is that 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, biochemically, into the flesh of butchered creatures.

In other words, meat eating will strengthen their instinctive nature and make them more prone to these lower emotions. By eating meat, they will become angry more often and experience darker moods. My guru stated, "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." Children who are awakening to this understanding all over the world are becoming vegetarians all on their own. And these days, with a GPS-enabled iPad, a little research and creativity, vegetarian options can be discovered just about anywhere.

Why Must We Go to the Temple Every Week?

Explain to children that worshiping in the temple is one of the traditional ways Hinduism gives us for connecting with our soul nature and experiencing *ananda*, the natural bliss of the soul. They can visit the temple in state of discontent, receive the blessings of God and the Gods and go away uplifted and happy. How is this possible? The Deity's blessings have cleared their mind and aura of congested thought forms and emotions, allowing them to reconnect with their inner self. The blessings lift them out of their instinctive nature and soften their intellectual nature, bringing them into their spiritual nature.



HINDUISM TODAY

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

Once children catch the idea that temple worship is a great tool for stabilizing their emotions when they get upset, their reluctance to join the family will change. The temple will become important to them, not just to mom and dad. Temple worship will help them remain calm and centered even in difficult circumstances. They will find that going in the right spirit is a way of pulling themselves back together. It is also a place for assuaging long-held hurts.

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

Of course, the benefits of attending a temple every week are not limited to times that they are emotionally upset. Even when everything is going well in their life, worshiping at the temple with sincerity and attentiveness takes them deeper into their soul nature. They will be more compassionate and understanding, better able to deal with the challenges that come to them in life. Once your child realizes that worship is a powerful Hindu tool, and not just another adult rule, she will ask you to take her to the temple every week.

Why Can't I Listen to Hip-Hop Music?

Music, especially when listened to for extended periods, strongly influences our state of consciousness. Whatever children listen to brings them into one state of consciousness or another. My guru, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, was outspoken on this topic. He felt that the type of music played in the home and the message it delivers are crucial. He stated that great care should be exercised to exclude the crass music and lyrics of lower consciousness. "The drug culture and its demonic music erode the very fabric of human character and culture." If your child catches this idea, her musical preferences will evolve—not because of rules you impose, but because she understands how different kinds of music influence her mood and mind. At the very least, she will avoid crude, negative hip-hop and listen only to the genre's higher strains. Ideally, the music played in the home should be beautiful Hindu music played on traditional instruments, which takes everyone in the family into their refined and cultured soul nature.

Tools Out-Perform Rules!

Taking time to give sensible answers to your child's questions about every Hindu practice is definitely worthwhile. Include in your explanation how the practice or restriction influences her consciousness. This will greatly increase the chances of her enthusiastically following the practice. And in some instances, your child will become inspired to urge other Hindu youth to give it a try as well!

How to Improve the World

Three attitudes to help us cope with our planet's conflict-ridden condition and one strategic, long-term way to change it

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



RECENTLY A GROUP OF DEVOTEES LAMENTED to me about the dreadful condition of the world, asking my opinion about the best perspective those on the spiritual path can hold. It is certainly on everyone's mind, with all the unusual problems we face. My answer was that there are multiple viewpoints we need to hold. One is that, yes, it is good to try to improve conditions, while keeping expectations reasonable. A second point of view we can remember is that trying to change the world is a little like trying to straighten a dog's tail. It keeps going back the way it was, no matter what you do. The key is to find the right balance between working to improve the world and accepting it as it is, knowing that you can't totally transform it overnight and that change does not come easily.

A third, more philosophical, view to hold is that everything is as it should be. Humanity's plights and predicaments all have a divine purpose. In striving to improve the world, we don't want to feel that things are not supposed to be the way they are. We may wish it were different but, in fact, it is a natural playing out of what has been set in motion in the past. We can, to a limited degree, direct and guide the flow of events and encourage things to play out in a better way, but the forces of past actions still continue to powerfully influence and define the present. Those with spiritual insight know that the world is in a perfect state of evolution at every point in time.

In the months after 9/11, visitors meeting with me in our guru temple here on Kauai would often ask, "What do you think about these terrible events?" Their sense was that conditions had never been worse. Reflecting back on recent history, I responded, "Well, times have been worse. All you have to do is go back to World War II. We were not just fighting terrorists who hijack somebody else's airplane. We were fighting Japan and Germany, two very powerful military bodies with thousands of planes, who were causing havoc in the world. Over sixty million people were killed in that war, mostly civilians. That was a far more serious problem by comparison."

Europe gives us another example. For as long as history tells her story, European countries were fighting one another. But what are they doing today? They are working together as the European Union. They've joined together. Do we foresee Germany attacking England ever again? No. A change in consciousness took place in Europe. That's a good sign, and it's just one example of how the world is changing for the better.

The Roots of Conflict: The fundamental challenge is the tendency to divide the world into "we-they" rather than maintaining the inclusive "we" perspective. In the "we-they" perspective, "they" are different than we are, and we tend to emphasize all of their unseemly or negative qualities. If we strive to keep everything as a "we" and maintain the principle of inclusiveness, then we minimize that tendency. All groups have the tendency to polarize and split. Even a large family will split into "we-they." It is a natural tendency of humankind to divide into two groups that have problems with one another. "We" consciousness is strengthened by focusing on what is held in common. "We-they" consciousness is strengthened by focusing on differences.

An ultimate "we" consciousness has been experienced by several astronauts when looking at Earth from outer space, seeing mankind's commonality rather than dissimilarity. Sunita Williams' experience during her 195 days on the International Space Station space in 2007 radically altered her perspective of life. From 350 km in orbit, the earth appears a magnificently beautiful whole. She says: "It is hard to imagine people arguing down there, not to mention fighting. It looks so peaceful... so calm down on Earth. From space, there are no borders that you can see. We are lucky to live on such a planet and we should not take it for granted. After my space experience, I am a lot more tolerant of people and opinions, of everything."

How do we solve, or at least minimize, the tendency to divide us? Through persistently teaching the opposite. Our Gurudeva, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, took a simple step by creating large granite signs for the island of Kauai that say, "One Island, Many Peoples, All Kauaians." These were installed by the county at prominent locations to emphasize the unity of all the many peoples of Kauai. He created similar signs for Mauritius to strengthen unity, because in every community there is the tendency to split. In the Kauai community the tendency is to divide according to ethnic background.

Gurudeva was inspiring acceptance and counteracting the force of prejudice. He knew that prejudice toward those who are of a different race, nation or religion can start simply as distrust and then deepen into dislike and deepen further into hatred, which can turn into a compulsion to inflict injury.

Are children born with attitudes of prejudice and hatred? No. They learn such things at home, from their family and friends, and at school from teachers and classmates. Prejudice toward other ethnic groups, religions or nations is even taught in religious institutions.

The long-term solution, one that will take many decades, is to instill prejudice-free consciousness in future generations. People who are older are set in their ways and unlikely to change. But each new generation starts out with a blank slate. Children can be taught tolerance, acceptance and openness toward those who are different. With each new generation, we have an opportunity to teach positive, unifying beliefs. And one of the biggest changes that can take place in society occurs as members of a new generation mature into positions of influence and power. If they are imbued with unbiased, spiritual attitudes, conditions in the nations they serve in will improve.



SHUTTERSTOCK

All in the family: *Parents have the golden opportunity to instill prejudice-free consciousness in their offspring, through their example and words. Children so raised are full of amity and acceptance of others.*

This is where opportunity lies, in encouraging parents to raise their children in such a way that they are free of prejudice. And then do it again with the next generation, and then do it again and again. Do that for enough generations and we will change the world in a major way. But it takes time. We can all help in our own spheres of influence—family, friends, work, community—doing our part to instill a prejudice-free consciousness in youth and thus transform attitudes that divide peoples, neighbors and nations.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. expressed the goal eloquently, "I have a dream that one day my children will be perceived for the content of their character rather than by the color of their skin." That is the point, to see the person, not their ethnicity or their religion and impose negative generalizations on them. Even positive generalizations and preconceived notions should be avoided, as they, too, obscure this genuine interaction. For example, some say the Chinese are industrious. But, in truth, not all Chinese are hard-working, and even thinking in such positive stereotypes prevents you from seeing an individual as he or she is.

There are two cardinal principles that naturally motivate Hindus to be free of prejudice and not fall into the "we-they" consciousness. The first is that every person is a divine soul. Even a terrorist or a criminal is a divine being, though one needing many lives of further evolution. There are no people who are evil intrinsically. Their behavior may be evil, destructive, but everybody is divine on the inside. Therefore, everybody is important. Even the terrorist is important; even the criminal is important. They deserve to be encouraged to come up in consciousness. It is the duty of spiritual people to strive to lift everyone up in consciousness, whether they are for us or against us.

The second Hindu principle that inspires prejudice-free consciousness is that the whole world is a one family: *Vasudhaiva kutumbakam*. That is a powerful statement, because everyone understands family. When we say the whole world is family, we mean that we hold the same positive, loving attitude toward everybody that we do toward our own kinfolk. We want them to be happy, do well and prosper. Saying and believing that the whole world is our family confers an attitude that excludes no one.

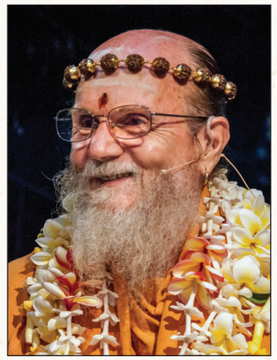
Underlying these two concepts is the knowledge of reincarnation and karma. Change and evolution occur over many lifetimes. The purpose of human birth is to grow and learn in the great school of earthly experience. Karma, the law of cause and effect, is the great and always just teacher. All souls are on this wondrous journey, whether they know it or not. Gurudeva used to say, "You have to be careful whom you hate, because you might end up being born in that group in your next life." Thus you will see what it's like to be on the other end of your hatred.

Summary: I find it clarifying to hold three complementary attitudes toward the world. First: we do want to try and improve it. Second: we want to remain realistic about how much and how quickly it will change. Third: we strive to accept everything that is as the way it should be, even though it may not be the way we would prefer it to be. It is the way it is because of what has happened in the past. A Buddhist monk put it well: "The world is perfect, with plenty of room for improvement." To gradually make the world a more peaceful place, we can spread the idea of raising children with a prejudice-free consciousness. Less prejudice means less hate; less hate means less violence. While we can't change the world overnight, we can change it over many generations.

Growing Up without Prejudice

Conflict and violence have their roots in hatred learned during youth. By teaching children tolerance, we create a more peaceful future.

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



CONDITIONS IN THE WORLD TODAY ARE deeply troubling—wars between countries, profound social conflicts within countries, and almost daily incidents of terrorist acts. The shocking series of coordinated assaults in Paris on November 13, 2015—France's deadliest attack since World War II—has Western nations on high alert. Attacks in Africa and Asia, while less publicized, are even more common, and equally devastating. The vicious hatred expressed by extremists toward those they seek to destroy dominates the news. Watching reports of these tragic events, we are reminded of how prejudice—and its big brother, malice—can change the world for the worse.

Attitudes of prejudice toward those of a different race, nation or religion can start simply as distrust, then deepen into dislike and fester into hatred, which can turn into an instinctive impulse to inflict injury. Are we born with such attitudes? Certainly not. As children, we are taught them at home, at school and, especially sadly, even in some religious institutions. Many people are raised to hate those of different ethnic groups, faiths or countries. Parents and radical teachers instill that hatred in the young innocents, often perpetuating centuries-old antagonisms.

The way in which our children shape the future will depend upon the qualities of character we cultivate in them. Therefore, in the long run, our most effective personal solution to violence in our modern world is to dutifully nurture what our children are learning as they grow up. My Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, spelled this out in a message he gave to 700 religious and political leaders in 1990 at the Global Forum for Human Survival, Development and Environment in Moscow: "We need, in the century ahead, to teach all children tolerance, openness to different ways of life, different beliefs, different customs of dress and language. We need to stop teaching them to fear those who are different from themselves, stop teaching them hatred for peoples of other colors and other religions, stop teaching them to see the world as a field of conflict, and instead instill in them an informed appreciation and a joyous reverence for the grand diversity we find around us."

For too many nations, cultures and faiths this is easier said than done. Animosities built up over the decades between opposing groups are so entrenched that even peaceful coexistence seems impossible. Then there are factions who, believing their way is the only way and their enemies are disposable, justify and glorify their hatred and intolerance. Gurudeva explained, "When the fundamentalists of any religion teach an unrelenting duality based on good and evil, man and nature or God and Devil, this creates friends and enemies."

Hinduism, with its long history of tolerance, can take steps to strengthen its exemplary commitment to nonviolence and to set examples for others. Above all, we must not fall prey to the instinctive, reactionary fears and violent urges that are tearing apart so many nations, communities and families today.

Instead of teaching our children to be intolerant—to dislike and distrust, hate and inflict injury on those who are different—we must teach them to be tolerant, to like and trust, befriend and help. The quality we urge parents to develop in children is a prejudice-free consciousness, an open-mindedness that readily embraces differences in ethnicity, religion and nationality.

The central place to cultivate this virtue is in the home. Every father and mother is, in fact, a child's first guru, teaching by example and explanation, giving advice and direction. Secondarily, this important attitude should be discussed and strengthened in classes at the temple and in school, and encouraged through community activities that expose children to diverse cultures.

Tolerance is nurtured through teaching children to appreciate the positive qualities of others, and by completely avoiding prejudiced remarks in the home against any race, religion or nationality. It is helpful to discuss with our children any bigoted comments they hear at school and elsewhere and be a gentle voice of wise correction. We must teach them to think of people as unique, divine individuals with an array of karmas and qualities that make them who they are.

Even positive stereotypes can embolden a sense of otherness and should be avoided. TV and movies can provide useful learning moments to discuss such matters with children, not leaving them to make their own youthful conclusions. Tolerance can be developed by having them meet, interact and learn to feel comfortable with children of other nationalities, ethnicities and religious backgrounds. Hindu organizations can be proactive by organizing culturally enriching activities and outings for the children of their members. Fortunately, fewer and fewer things are strange to the children of this Internet era. Their exposure to borderless knowledge gives them an innate sense of planetary citizenship. Sometimes we need only nudge them in that direction. One key lesson to pass on to the children is this: we need not feel threatened by our differences.

Sri Sri Chandrashekharendra Saraswati, Shankaracharya of Kanchi, expressed this beautifully in "Maithrim Bhajata," an ode to universal brotherhood, which was performed by MS Subbulakshmi at the 50th anniversary of the United Nations in 1966. In English (translated by Lakshmi Chandrashekar Subramanian, who sings it here: bit.ly/MaithrimBhajata) it reads:



Leaders of the future: *(left) Children born in the new millennium have a more profound global consciousness than earlier generations, a native sense of the oneness of the human family (photo by Shutterstock).*

"Cultivate friendship, which will conquer the hearts of all. Look upon others as thyself. Renounce war, renounce competition. Renounce aggression on others' properties. Mother Earth is abundant and ready to give us all that we desire. God, our Father, is very compassionate to all. So, restrain yourself, donate your wealth, be kind to everyone. May all people of this world be happy and prosperous."

A few key Hindu beliefs provide the basis for millennia of Hindu tolerance. The first is embodied in an ancient verse from the *Rig Veda* (1.164.46): *Ekam sat viprah bahuda vadanti*, "Truth is one; sages express it variously." Hinduism has a wide diversity of traditions, but followers of the different paths respect one another and worship side by side in many temples. We have four major denominations. To Saivites, the Supreme is Siva. Shaktas refer to the Supreme as Shakti. Smartas call the Supreme Being Brahman; and to Vaishnavas He is Vishnu. However, the important point is that each Hindu is worshiping the same Supreme Being. The name is different, the tradition is different, but the same Supreme Being is being worshiped by all Hindus.

This statement from the *Vedas* can be expanded beyond Hinduism to include all the world's religions. In fact, a Tamil verse often chanted in Siva temples states, *Tennadudaiya Sivane Pottri; Ennattavarkum Iraiva Pottri*. This translates as: "He who is praised as Siva in the South of India is praised everywhere else as God." What this means is that people around the world worship the Supreme Being, and Siva is one of the many names of God. Gurudeva said it simply, "Saivites profoundly know that God Siva is the same Supreme Being in whom peoples of all faiths find solace, peace and liberation."

He wrote: "Hindus also believe that there is no exclusive path, no one way for all. Religious beliefs are manifold and different. Hindus, understanding the strength of this diversity, wholeheartedly respect and encourage all who believe in God and do not seek to interfere with anyone's faith or practice. Since the inner intent of all religions is to bind man back to God, Hindus honor the fact that 'Truth is one, paths are many.' Nonetheless, Hindus realize that all religions are not the same. Each 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."

Another belief that gives rise to Hinduism's innate acceptance and open-mindedness is that all of mankind is essentially good, that we are all divine beings, souls created by God. Hindus do not accept the concept that some people are evil and others are good. The *Upanishads* tell us that each soul is emanated from God, as a spark from a fire, then begins a spiritual journey that ultimately leads back to God. All human beings are on this journey, whether they realize it or not. Gurudeva noted, "This basic belief creates the attitude of sublime tolerance and acceptance toward others. Even *tolerance* is insufficient to describe the compassion and reverence the Hindu holds for the intrinsic sacredness within all things." So when a Hindu sees a person who is performing horrible deeds, whom others call bad or evil, he thinks to himself, "This is a young soul, acting in terrible ways, but one day, in the course of many lives, he will realize his errors, atone and adhere to dharma." By greeting one another with namaskara, palms held together to honor God within the other person, Hindus practice this truth on a daily basis. The *Upanishads* assure us, *Ayam atma Brahma*, "The soul is God."

There can be no denying that we live in tumultuous times, with millions of people being forced to leave their homelands as refugees from terror, victims of bigotry and hatred. But let not the vicissitudes of politics and regional turmoil shake us from the basic truths on which Hinduism stands. Instead, let us bravely persist in passing on to the next generations the all-too-rare virtue of prejudice-free consciousness so that they may, as leaders of the future, shape the world into a more peaceful place.

CHAPTER FOUR

Family

- The Art of Listening
- Using TV as a Spiritual Tool
- Planning: the Key to Success



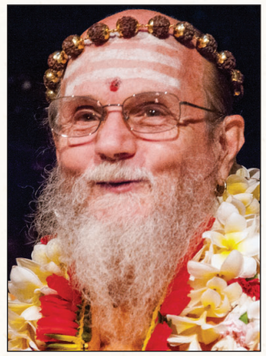
The yeast Saccharomyces cerevisiae

PUBLISHER'S DESK • JULY 2015

The Art of Listening

With the modern distraction of digital media, we must be more mindful than ever of person-to-person communications

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



Sound is regarded as divine in Hinduism, so it is fitting that listening has always held a central role in the faith. Our core scriptures, the *Vedas* and *Agamas*, are referred to as *shruti*, which means "that which is heard," as they were originally heard by rishis as an aural transmission directly from God. In the early days of human civilization, prior even to writing, shruti was faithfully preserved without alteration (important because this is the word of God) by means of aural instruction from guru to shishya. This went on generation after generation for thousands of years. Considering the vast body of texts, it is remarkable that this was achieved, and more remarkable still when you know it was accomplished by requiring students to learn each verse in eleven different ways, including backwards.

Fortunately, this traditional way of learning the *Vedas* and *Agamas* by listening is still practiced in today's priest training schools. In a typical learning session, the teacher chants a verse once, then the students as a group recite it twice, striving to be faithful to the subtleties of pronunciation and rhythm they hear in the teacher's chanting. This is not a now-and-again thing. The recitations go on for long hours every day, and every day for years and years. Students begin young, as early as five, when memory is strong.

Anyone who has seen a great documentary knows how powerful the human voice is as an instrument for communication and sharing of knowledge, so much more effective than reading. Consider *pravachan,* the popular lectures given by teachers who have personally experienced the truths they are explaining. In these dynamic discourses, the teacher presents the essentials of the *Vedas, Upanishads* and other scriptures, and those who listen absorb those deep teachings with all of their senses from one who knows. In this sharing, this speaking and hearing, subtle knowledge is transmitted from knower to seeker in a way that cannot be matched by reading. Multiple levels of information are conveyed through such speech—inflection, emotion, emphasis, conviction and subtle intimations.

My Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, wrote on this idea: "Because sound is the first creation, knowledge is transferred through sound of all kinds. It is important that one listen to the highest truths of a sampradaya from one who has realized them. The words, of course, will be familiar. They have been read by the devotee literally hundreds of times, but to hear them from the mouth of the enlightened rishi is to absorb his unspoken realization, as he re-realizes his realization while he reads them and speaks them out."

I like to think of listening as an art. The idea is that to fully grasp the subject being presented requires attentiveness to the speaker and concentration on the meaning of what is being said. For a mystically profound subject, intuition is also needed to deeply understand what the speaker means, a meaning that lies beyond his words. When attentiveness, concentration and intuition are all present, listening becomes an art.

This is as true today as it was 2,200 years ago when a village weaver wrote the ethical masterpiece *Tirukural.* He devotes a full chapter, ten couplets, to "Learning by Listening." Here are three of Tiruvalluvar's verses: "In Heaven, Deities feed from sacrificial fires. On Earth, men who feast on listening are their equal." "The most precious wealth is the wealth acquired by the ear. Indeed, of all wealth, that wealth is paramount." "If not pierced by acute listening, ears may hear and yet remain deaf."

As we all know, the art of listening faces a new challenge in our modern age: digital distraction. Computers and mobile phones, and the constant stream of stimuli they offer, profoundly challenge everyone's ability to focus, listen and learn. A *New York Times* article entitled "Growing up Digital, Wired for Distraction" addressed the issue:

"Researchers say the lure of these technologies, while it affects adults too, is particularly powerful for young people. The risk, they say, is that developing brains can become more easily habituated than adult brains to constantly switching tasks—becoming less able to sustain attention. 'Their brains are rewarded not for staying on task but for jumping to the next thing,' said Michael Rich, an associate professor at Harvard Medical School and executive director of the Center on Media and Child Health in Boston. And the effects could linger: 'The worry is we're raising a generation of kids in front of screens whose brains are going to be wired differently.'"

That was written in 2010. Since then the number of smartphone users in the US alone has tripled. In any public place, it seems everyone is carrying a phone and accessing it often. It could be called device addiction.

The *Times* article goes on to say that researchers have found that students' use of technology is not uniform. Their choices tend to reflect their personalities. Social butterflies tend to be heavy texters and Facebook, Twitter or Instagram users. Students who are less social may escape into games, while drifters or those prone to procrastination might surf the Web or watch videos.

The Hindu home is crucially impacted by digital distraction. Important Hindu teachings, its principles, stories and ethics, are traditionally conveyed to young children by their grandparents. Parents communicate what is needed for their teenage children to understand the new duties they are maturing into. Parents also regularly share information about current happenings in the family and future plans. All this person-to-person communication is impeded when family members turn constantly to their digital world and stop having meaningful conversations with one another. A common sight these days is a family sitting together with each member fixated on his or her phone or tablet, with no talking or listening taking place. Though they share the same room, their minds are elsewhere.

It would be unwise to allow digital information to overwhelm us even more than life's modern conveniences already have. The Amish, a small religious community in the US, have taken an extreme stand against modernism, living as people did two centuries ago in an effort to preserve their culture and perpetuate their religion. One documentary tells the story of an Amish family that eliminated all possibilities for modern distractions, including digital, by having no electricity in the home. For most of us that would be too radical. A more balanced solution for Hindu families is to establish set times for digital study and enjoyment and other times for healthy in-person communication with family members and friends (with digital devices turned off).



SHUTTERSTOCK

Time together: *A family gathers around the challenges of the game of Jenga. It is such simple human interactions that create strong bonds and open channels of communication.*

Recently a young Hindu couple proudly told me that digital devices are banned from the dinner table in their home, a simple rule that is enriching their interactions and strengthening their relationships. A number of families have reined in digital distractions by requiring that their children's computers remain in the living room, where family members can provide oversight. Others have found tools to restrain where their children can go online.

For his devotees, Gurudeva designated Monday as Family Home Evening, a time for sharing among family members. "On Monday evening, Siva's day, the family members get together, prepare a wonderful meal, play games together and verbally appreciate one another's good qualities. They don't solve any problems on that day. They just love each other, and everybody has a voice, from the littlest child to the oldest senior." The television and all digital devices are turned off. It's a time for listening, real listening. Being a good listener can lead to being a good conversationalist—another fine art jeopardized by digital distraction.

I developed a simple sadhana called Supportive Conversation to strengthen bonds with a family member or friend. Here it is.

1. Stop what you are doing when approached, smile, face the person, extend a kind greeting and give him or her your full attention. Put down or turn off your mobile device.

2. Listen carefully. Do not interrupt. Concentrate on what is being said. If it is troublesome to you, remember the adage, "Seek to understand before seeking to be understood." Get engaged and show support by responding sincerely and constructively.

3. Ask for elaboration, especially if the person is sharing an emotional experience. Be patient, listen with all of your senses. If you feel it is taking too long, affirm mentally that you have all the time in the world.

4. Practice empathy; put yourself in the other person's place. If you were speaking, you would want others to fully listen. Remember, you don't have to provide solutions, just a caring ear. Your hearing the story is enough.

Perhaps the art of listening will enjoy a comeback with the help of digital media, as the word spreads virally on what we miss without it. Listening is how we most naturally learn. It is a skill that needs to be perpetuated, even honed, from generation to generation. Parents need to carefully guide their children's development, to avoid digital distraction, develop the listening art and hopefully, if all goes well, awaken intuition and compassion for others. Adults need to make sure they themselves are not indulging excessively in a digital world. This will insure that the knowledge and practices of Hinduism continue to thrive in this digital era.

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Using TV as a Spiritual Tool

Television, like real life, can help us work through our karma, if we approach it in the right way

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



TELEVISION IS A LITTLE LIKE GOD: it's everywhere. Traveling by plane and staying in hotels, you encounter TV at dawn in the hotel's fitness center, then in the breakfast cafe and later at the airport and even on the plane 30,000 feet above the Earth! Settling down that night in your next hotel three thousand miles away, the TV is there; and sometimes it has already been turned on for you! Talk about ubiquitous influences.

A well-researched web article notes that close to 100 percent of the adult population watch some television every day in the media-saturated societies of North America, Western Europe, East Asia and in most Latin American countries. In the rest of the world—with the exception of some African countries and India, where the percentages are 56 percent and 64 percent, respectively—TV is the daily fare of 70 to 85 percent of the adult population.

The best TV shows are viewed all over the world. When my guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, visited South Africa in the 1990s, he was advised not to hold events on Wednesday nights because the popular American soap opera "Dallas" was on that night, and everyone would stay home to watch it. When populations around the globe view the same material on television, it unifies the thinking, for better or worse, and thus the actions, of Earth's peoples. Gurudeva observed, "Today, television has become an instrument to convey knowledge and bring the world together, set new standards of living, language, styles of dress and hair, ways of walking, ways of standing, attitudes about people, ethics, morality, political systems, religions and all sorts of other things, from ecology to pornography."

Television, like the fashion world, has its own trends over the decades. There was a time, back in the 60s, when nearly every show was about cowboys and Indians, set in America's Wild, Wild West. Then came the era of quiz shows, like the "$64,000 Question" and "Truth or Consequences." Around the same time, there was a wave of Carol Burnett– and Ed Sullivan–type talent shows. Later, TV featured evening dramas: "Dynasty," "Falcon Crest" and a galaxy of others. More recently, humanity has been inundated with stories about detectives, crime scene investigators, lawyers, reality shows and dirty, rotten scoundrels.

Lately, we have a new breed of fiction and nonfiction programming with mystical themes: prescient dreams, immortality and reincarnation, humans with remarkable powers such as reading minds, seeing and speaking to the dead, stopping time, listening to people's thoughts and flying through space and time. It's a fascinating evolution to follow, and I find it encouraging that viewers are interested in these mystical ideas and themes, interested in the untapped potential of the human mind.

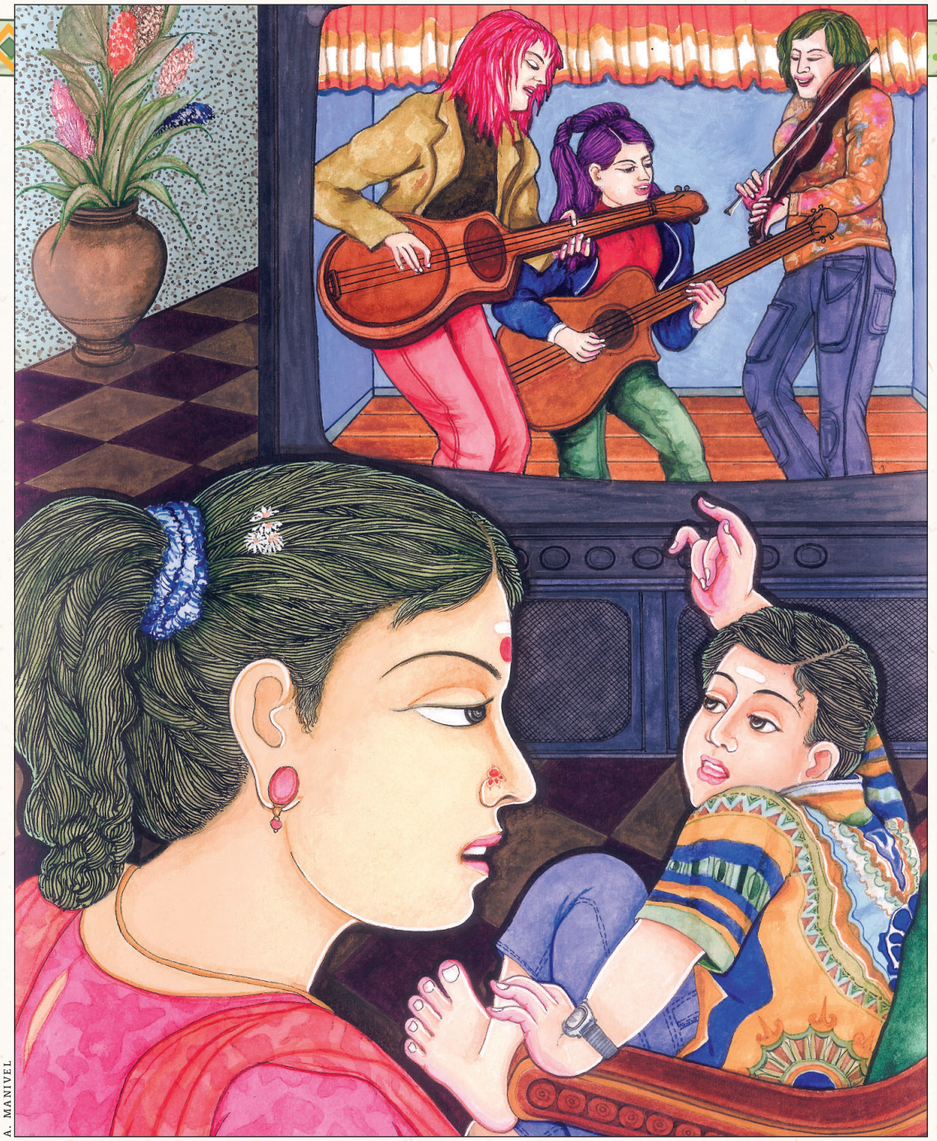
How does significant exposure to television affect us? Is it making us wiser or worldlier? Is it a help or a hindrance to our spiritual progress? The key lies in how we approach it and what we watch. Approached in the right way, TV can be a tool for spiritual progress.

To elucidate this point, let's compare TV to the world. Our paramaguru, Siva Yogaswami, noted: "The world is an ashram, a training ground for the achievement of moksha [liberation]." Of course, for that to be true for you, you have to make it that way; you have to hold that perspective. What is the world to a carefree, fun-loving high schooler? It's a place to party, kick back and hang out. To an up-and-coming entrepreneur, the world holds the promise of lots of money. That's his focus. Others are focused on fulfilling a profession or perfecting an art. To some, it's all about relationships, making friends, building a family. In short, the world is what we make it. It's not something unto itself that we all look at the same way.

To the practicing, mystically awakened Hindu, the world is fundamentally a place to make spiritual progress, where we face our karma and grow from experience. Karma normally comes to us through individuals or groups of people. It is not always pleasant. Situations don't always work out fairly. Sometimes we are mistreated. Philosophically, we know that this is the result of our *prarabdha* karmas. How we face such situations is crucial. The instinctive response is to retaliate: "This person is mistreating me, so I'm going to mistreat him in the same way." But if we do retaliate, we create new negative karma which will return to us as painful experiences in the future. That is not spiritual progress.

As I explained in our "Karma Management" Insight (Oct/Nov/Dec, 2002), the goal is 1) to not retaliate; 2) instead, accept the karma that comes to us as our own creation; and 3) ideally, forgive and forget the whole event, rather than holding onto it and letting it gnaw at us on the inside. When we successfully handle a karma according to these three principles, we make spiritual progress. We are looking at the world as an ashram.

Gurudeva explained this beautifully: "Hindus know that the object of life is to go through our experiences joyously and kindly, always forgiving and compassionately understanding, thus avoiding making unseemly *kriyamana* karmas in the current life which, if enough were accumulated and added to the karmas we did not bring into this life, would bring us back into another birth, and the process would start all over again."



A. MANIVEL

TV as education: *A Hindu mom takes time to talk with her son about the rock music program he is viewing so he understands the nature of the music and the lifestyle and values it promotes.*

Like living in the world in the right spirit, viewing television from the correct perspective can help us face and manage our karma. As Gurudeva noted, "Television has afforded us the ability to work through our karmas more quickly than we could in the agricultural age. On TV, the 'other people' who play our past experiences back to us, for us to understand in hindsight, are actors and actresses, newscasters and the people in the news they broadcast. Hindus know nothing can happen, physically, mentally or emotionally, but that it is seeded in our prarabdha karmas, the action-reaction patterns brought with us to this birth. Therefore, on the positive side, we look at television as a tool for karmic cleansing. The great boon that television has given humanity, which is especially appreciated by Hindus, is that we can soften our prarabdha karmas quickly by analyzing, forgiving and compassionately understanding the happenings on the screen, as our past is portrayed before us, and as we work with our nerve system, which laughs and cries, resents, reacts to and avoids experiences on the TV."

That is a powerful idea: that television is a tool for karmic cleansing. It's all in our approach, our attitude, toward it. Specifically, television helps soften our karmas. The karma still comes to us, but we have prepared ourself to receive it by watching similar situations on television and gaining an understanding the nature of that kind of action and reaction. We have "pre-lived" it through the actors and actresses. Thus, when the karma comes, we don't react as strongly, or it comes to us in a less disruptive way. We handle it with less emotion and more wisdom, less reaction and more understanding.

Parents can help their children learn to use television to increase spirituality by watching programs together and discussing them afterwards. Talk about the various characters, their actions and the consequences of those actions. A good perspective to convey is that "All men are your teachers. Some teach you what to do, and others teach you what not to do." Oftentimes on today's television programs the principles of reincarnation and karma are presented in one form or another. This can be pointed out and discussed to see how accurately the concept was presented. There's even a popular comedy about karma, called "My Name Is Earl," which tells of a man working hilariously to resolve his past misdeeds. Mystical practices, which are common in recent shows, such as being able to read other's thoughts or seeing the future in a dream, are also useful to talk about with children, drawing out lessons to be learned.

Before the widespread viewing of television, storytelling was a common form of entertainment. Gurudeva describes this shift: "Television at its best is storytelling. We used to sit around and tell stories. The best storyteller, who could paint pictures in people's minds, was the most popular person in town. In every country, at every point in time, humans have sat down and been entertained, and entertainers have stood up and entertained them."

The advantage of storytelling is that the teller or reader of the story can choose tales with strong dharmic themes and avoid those with adharmic ones. With television, while you do have the choice of what shows to watch, the themes and plots are in the hands of the writers and producers, who come from all sorts of backgrounds. So, it can take some creativity on your part to find ways to view television—personally and with your children—so that it strengthens you spiritually, makes you wiser rather than worldlier.

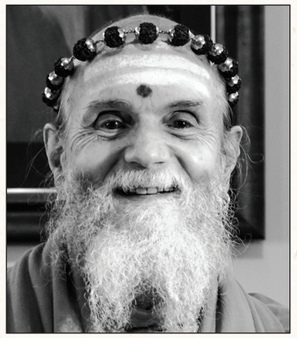
Definitely, we don't want to watch TV too much. Gurudeva's advice is: "Siva's devotees may watch television and other media for recreation and to keep informed about the world, limiting viewing to about two hours a day. They avoid nudity, foul language, crudeness and excessive violence.... Television can be very entertaining and helpful, or it can be insidiously detrimental, depending on how it is used. Therefore, fortify your mind with a thorough understanding of what you are watching."

Planning: the Key to Success

When problems arise, rather than restructuring your buildings, look to your business and family planning

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

A NEW TREND IN HINDU COMMUNITIES around the world is the widespread, one could even say faddish, application of the principles of the ancient Hindu science of *vastu* to the design of businesses and homes. Vastu has always been used in the construction of Hindu temples and in village home design. In theory, the widened use of vastu in the Hindu community and beyond is a positive development.



Vastu unfolds the scientific principles and models of spiritual art and architecture to yield a harmonious flow of energy in the physical environment, giving rise to good health, wealth, intelligence, happiness and attunement with the wider universe.

Renowned Indian architect and *Vastu Shastra* expert Dr. V. Ganapati Sthapati explains: "In literal terms, *vastu* means 'to dwell' or 'to exist' and *shastra* means science. The main aim of vastu science is to create building spaces to live in harmony with subtle nature."

Following vastu principles of design can certainly make businesses more successful and homes more harmonious. However, the problematic trend is to emphasize it above all else—thinking that the sole cause of obstacles and lack of success is the flawed layout of one's home or office. For example, the sales of a business drop precipitously, and a vastu expert is consulted. He asserts that the cause is the poor layout of the space and advises: "Rebuild the structure according to my vastu design and your problems will quickly disappear!"

We know of many Hindus who received such advice over the last few years, some who inadvisedly spent large sums of money taking down and rebuilding parts of their home or office—or moving to a new location—in anticipation that this would solve all their problems. The truth is that in most cases it did not.

Designing one's home and business spaces according to vastu principles is an excellent goal. When asked, we encourage Hindus to have their new home or business designed in this way. The traditional, all-granite hand-carved Iraivan Temple we are building here in Hawaii follows the guidelines of vastu as interpreted by Dr. V. Ganapati Sthapati, whom we quoted above. Regarding vastu remodeling, he observes, "Modifications of a building lead to a disturbance of energy inside the enclosed space. Hence the shastras do not recommend any post-construction alterations.... As our modern age has created a lifestyle crisis, many architects and designers are now turning to the ancient traditions of vastu for inspiration. Sadly, this has led to a lot of exploitation and misinterpretation."

Common sense tells us that there are many causes for not being successful. In my experience, the most common one is lack of proper planning. In the words of French author and aviator Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, "A goal without a plan is just a wish."

Planning in Business

Let me share a story. A young couple who had pilgrimaged to our Kauai monastery told me of their ambition to give up their current employment and open an ice cream shop in Florida. I encouraged them to develop a solid business plan before starting and suggested working with their local Small Business Administration (SBA), a government agency that gives sound advice to small businesses for free. They opened the shop soon after but never took the time to develop a business plan. A few months later they e-mailed me lamenting that the new business was not doing well. Little wonder, I thought.

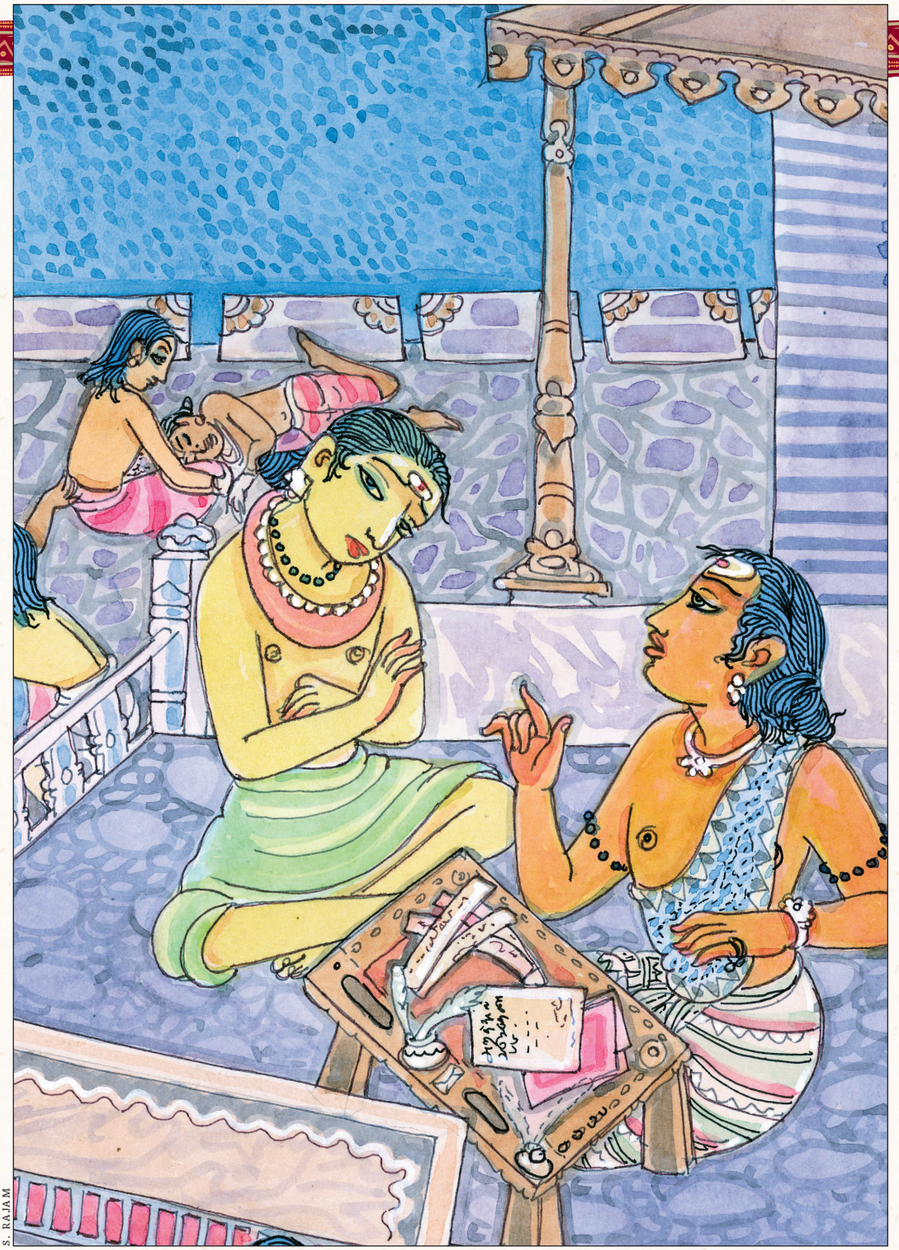
My guru strongly counseled devotees on the importance of planning. He wrote a sutra expressing the relationship of planning to success: "Siva's devotees approach each enterprise with deliberate thoughtfulness, and act only after careful consideration. They succeed in every undertaking by having a clear purpose, a wise plan, persistence and push."

The quality and comprehensiveness of our plan is a major factor in our ultimate success. Thus it is wise to draw on all the planning resources available to us. There are many good books and software programs on business planning. However, it is essential to also seek out first-hand advice from experts in the field. Ask them key questions about the opportunities and challenges. In large ventures, it is advisable to hire a professional consultant. Creating a plan when starting a business is crucial. That plan must then be updated every few years to keep up with our rapidly changing world.

Once your plan is complete, inaugurate it through prayer. Go to the temple on an auspicious day and worship Lord Ganesha through attending puja, having an *archana* or a special abhishekam or homa beseeching His blessings for a grand success.

Personal and Family Planning

Of course, the benefits of planning are not limited to the business or financial side of life. Personal life can also benefit, for a plan keeps us focused and motivated toward specific goals in life's various departments. Though the connection may not be immediately apparent, having an up-to-date personal plan is quite helpful for our spiritual advancement, as it helps us maintain a balanced approach to living.



S. RAJAM

Don't blame the building: *This businessman is being warned that recent downturns in his company can be traced to the inauspicious engineering of his office, there in the background, which should be rebuilt to assure success. He explains his own solution, exhibiting his detailed business plan for a better future.*

To help you create a business plan, there are scores of resources available. You can find web listings of specialized software for business plans. Search engines give you hundreds to choose from. But if you google "Personal Plan Software" or "Family Plan Software," how many do you find? Zero. A search for books to buy on the subject? Again: countless titles on business planning but none on personal planning.

It is clear we have to create our own approach in this area. We can, however, draw a few important points from business plan resources. They all start by listing the objectives, then outlining the strategy to accomplish them, including financial considerations.

A business develops goals for its various departments, such as production, sales, marketing and finance. For our personal plan, it is useful to divide life into its major departments. My guru designated a fivefold division that encompasses all aspects of life—spiritual, social, cultural, economic and educational—to which we have added a sixth: physiological.

Our first step is to list our goals or objectives in each of the six areas. Ask six questions and write down the answers to each. What are the family's (or individual's): 1) spiritual goals? 2) social goals? 3) cultural goals? 4) economic goals? 5) educational goals? 6) physical and health goals?

As you begin this process, the question will sooner or later arise of how many years ahead to plan: one, two, three, six, ten? Gurudeva recommended a six-year time frame as ideal, then each year adding one more year to the plan to keep it always six years into the future. However, if six years seems a bit daunting at first, a good minimum period to start with is three years. Here are some sample goals in each area.

Spiritual: Yearly pilgrimage to a temple or holy place, even if it's just a few hundred miles away. For example, Singapore devotees enjoy group pilgrimages to temples in neighboring Malaysia.

Social: Extended-family gatherings. Special family outings. When is the last time your family went horseback riding?

Cultural: Children taking dance and music lessons. Attending cultural performances as a family. Adults taking time to paint, play music and sing.

Economic: Saving for the children's education. Saving for retirement.

Educational: Children's secular education. Adults acquiring new skills. Training to advance career. Learning about herbs, healing, making preserves; arts and crafts.

Physiological: All health goals, diets, *pancha karma* and other therapies and fasting regimens, exercise and care of one's physical environment, including clothing and hobbies, can be included in this category.

As with a business plan, it is necessary to revise your personal plan periodically to adjust to major changes in circumstances, such as moving to a new community, job change, retirement, caring for an elderly parent, children leaving home when they marry or go off to college, large inheritances, and severe illness or accident.

When challenges arise, it is important to act swiftly, tactically and responsibly to find the cause and apply the proper remedy. Don't listen to those who would solve your problems, and build their own business, by rebuilding or rearranging your house or offices. It's not, in my experience, an effective solution. Work instead on your plan. Who knows, you may become so successful that, as your plan manifests your aspirations, five years from now you can put up a new building designed according to the venerable wisdom of vastu!

CHAPTER FIVE

Our Soul's Grand Journey

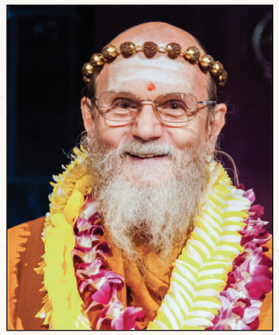
- The Journey to Liberation
- How Our Soul Matures
- Advancing through Life's Four Stages
- Sinner or Divinity?
- Behold the Sacred Lotus Flower

Antelope Canyon, Arizona

The Journey to Liberation

Though moksha may seem remote, there is wisdom in keeping this ultimate goal in mind as we live our day-to-day life

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



"THE RISHIS ASKED THE GODS: 'WHAT MUST A person do if he wishes to reach the blissful state of union with God? Is there a state that not only confers upon us supreme, unbroken bliss, but also puts an end to pain, sorrow and suffering? Does this process of reincarnation go on forever?' The Gods explained: 'No. Each time the soul takes on a new body, it gets closer and closer to becoming perfect. To gain a better birth each time, one must live according to the natural laws that Hinduism proclaims and live out the karma in this life positively and fully while at the same time refraining from creating painful new karmas. After a number of such excellent incarnations, and after God Realization has been attained, the soul body becomes mature enough that it no longer needs to take a physical incarnation. Instead, it continues its evolution on inner planes of consciousness. This release from samsara is called moksha. The soul is said to be freed from the bondage of birth and death.'" With this dramatic passage, my Gurudeva, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, explained liberation from rebirth.

To attain life's ultimate purpose, three qualifications must be met: Earthly karma must be resolved; dharma must have been well performed and God must be realized. The *Upanishads* assure us,"If here one is able to realize Him before the death of the body, he will be liberated from the bondage of the world" (*Katha Upanishad* 2.3.4).

Why Even Think About It?

I have found a sure-fire way to put an audience to sleep within five minutes. It's to talk at length about moksha. Why is this? The challenges of day-to-day living are a sufficient focus; there is no mental real estate to also think about moksha. After all, there are three other more immediate goals: dharma, wealth and love. Few seem to incorporate moksha into their philosophical framework. Most have only the vaguest concept of what existence after liberation would be like. Besides, why think about something that seems so far off, something to be concerned about in a future life? Knowing that release comes only when the soul is ripe for realization, having matured through many lives, the average devotee concludes that moksha is as remote as Jupiter, strictly the concern of yogis and sadhus.

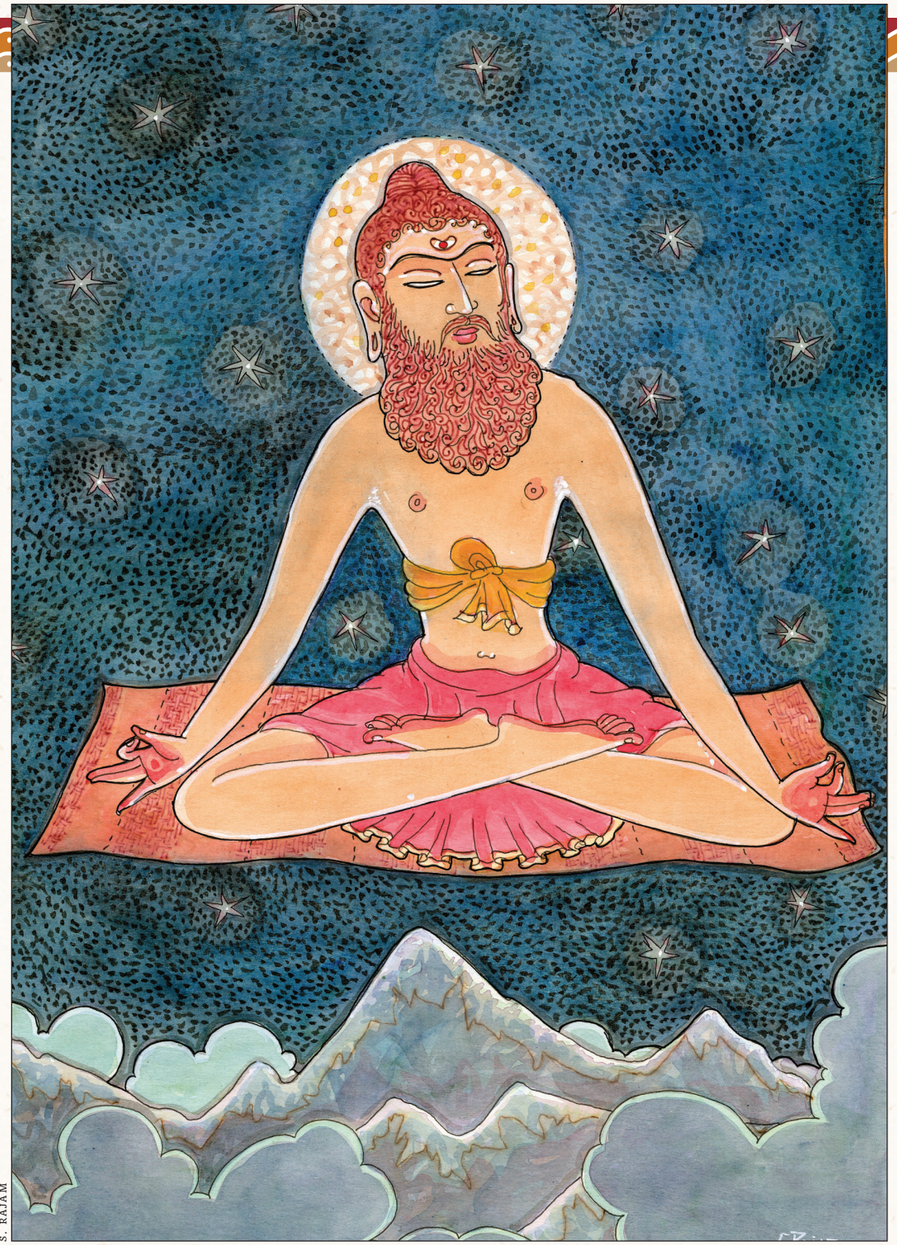
The challenge is to make life's ultimate spiritual attainment relevant to day-to-day family life. In public presentations I refer to moksha as the X-marks-the-spot destination and then describe the journey that leads to it. While the destination may be distant, the journey toward it is already happening, whether we recognize it or not. I ask listeners to visualize a mountain with a winding path leading to the summit, which is blissful experience of God Realization and moksha. In each life we are born near the same point on the path we reached at the end of our last life. Ideally, in each lifetime we move farther up the path toward the mountaintop; we don't stand still or go backwards. Standing still results from living a materialistic, self-centered life. Going backwards is the price we pay for adharmic deeds, such as serious violence and dishonesty.

This singular, long-term goal defines the direction of dharma in the well-lived life and provides a north star for all navigating the rough seas of Earthly existence. Most souls have much to do and achieve before striving for it directly, though all hope to attain it ultimately. It is achieved only after a certain level of perfection has been attained, maturity of the soul sufficient to harness the forces of instinct, intellect and emotion. Happily, Hinduism affirms that every person on Earth will eventually reach the unitive state of moksha and be free from rebirth.

To describe how we can move toward moksha, I use the analogy of dance. I ask listeners, "What is most needed for a youth to become good at Hindu classical dance?" Invariably, most respond with the answer I have in mind: "Practice!" Reading books about dance won't make you a good dancer. Nor will attending classes without practicing what you have learned. Regular practice is needed to keep the body limber and to master the art. Making strides on the spiritual journey to liberation is the same. To grow and evolve into our divine potential requires regular practice, ideally daily practice. The spiritual advancement we make is directly related to the time and effort we devote to religious practices. Sage Patanjali stresses this in his *Yoga Sutras* (verse 1.21; 22): "For those who have strong dedication, samadhi is near. Whether one's practice is mild, medium or intense also makes a difference."

Being "on the Path"

My Gurudeva taught, "When the soul has had enough experience, it naturally seeks to be liberated, to unravel the bonds. That begins the most wonderful process in the world as the seeker steps for the first time onto the spiritual path. Of course, the whole time, through all those births and lives and deaths, the soul was undergoing a spiritual evolution, but unconsciously. Now it seeks to know God consciously. That is the difference. It's a big difference." He stressed that seekers who are devout, who are sufficiently awakened to practice yoga, to seek the inner meaning of life have arrived at this crucial stage. While liberation may be lifetimes away, this is indeed the time to cognize the goal and begin molding yourself for it by living in a way that brings advancement and unfoldment of your soul.



S. RAJAM

Above and Beyond: *Having fulfilled karma and dharma, the yogi realizes God within and reaches the state of perfect freedom.*

But who has the time in a normal day for a generous period of spiritual practice? Many tell me they have no time at all. Employment, transportation, eating, entertainment, exercise, home duties and spending time with family and friends take up the whole day, every day. As a solution, I recommend shortening the period of sadhana but doing it regularly. For youth I suggest a ten-minute "spiritual workout" of worship, introspection, affirmation and study. (See my full description of the subject in essay 41.) If you are following dharma and performing regular daily sadhana, you can be assured you are moving forward in a significant way in this life on your journey to liberation. As we make progress, we gradually learn to sustain refined states of consciousness, without descending into the lower-chakra realms of fear, anger, jealousy, confusion and malice. After liberation, our consciousness abides fully in the three highest chakras—vishuddha, ajna and sahasrara, force centers of divine love, divine sight and illumination.

Gurudeva reminded us: "We have taken birth in a physical body to grow and evolve into our divine potential. We are inwardly already one with God. Our religion contains the knowledge of how to realize this oneness and not create unwanted experiences along the way. The peerless path is following the way of our spiritual forefathers, discovering the mystical meaning of the scriptures. The peerless path is commitment, study, discipline, practice and the maturing of yoga into wisdom. In the beginning stages, we suffer until we learn. Learning leads us to service; and selfless service is the beginning of spiritual striving. Service leads us to understanding. Understanding leads us to meditate deeply and without distractions. Finally, meditation leads us to surrender in God. This is the straight and certain path, the San Marga, leading to Self Realization—the inmost purpose of life—and subsequently to moksha, freedom from rebirth."

What's Your Definition?

The point in evolution at which a soul earns release and the understanding of what happens afterwards is described in many ways. Most schools of Hinduism recognize the condition of *jivanmukti*, the state of liberation while still embodied. Whether achieved while living or at the point of death, moksha marks an end to one's earthly sojourn and a graduation to a more refined level of existence. We can get a sense of the range of perspectives from the ancient *Brahma Sutra*, which cites a number of then-current views: that upon liberation the soul (jiva) attains nondifference from Brahman (IV.4.4); that it gains the attributes of Brahman (IV.4.5); that it exists only as pure consciousness (IV.4.6); that even though it is pure consciousness from the relative standpoint, it can still gain the attributes of Brahman (IV.4.7); that through pure will alone it can gain whatever it wishes (IV.4.8); that it transcends any body or mind (IV.4.10); that it possesses a divine body and mind (IV.4.11); and that it attains all powers except creatorship, which belongs to Ishvara alone (IV.4.17).

While these views vary, they all describe a state of being and evolution that far transcends normal mortal consciousness. Isn't that something worth thinking about, something worth striving for? It is the state of great souls such as our paramaguru, Siva Yogaswami, who lives vibrantly in the Sivaloka, inner worlds, showering blessings to devotees on Earth. It is the highest of human achievements, the pinnacle and very purpose of all other experiences in life—the revolutionary transcendence of limited identity in favor of unitive consciousness and all-pervasive love. All the worlds rejoice when an old soul is freed from samsara, the cycle of birth, death and rebirth.

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How Our Soul Matures

People the world over are working for spiritual advancement. But just what is the soul and how does it progress and mature?

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



IN HINDU THOUGHT THE CONCEPT OF LIFE AND the soul are synonymous. For example, the Sanskrit word *jiva* refers to both and contains the meanings of individual soul, living being, life, vitality, energy, spirit and strength. The Tamil word *uyir* has the same double meaning, of life and soul.

The soul, which is so perplexing and seemingly out of reach to many, can be understood simply as life itself. One of the advantages of this simple description is that it makes it easy to experience the soul. How can we do this? Just look into a mirror. Specifically, look deeply into your eyes and see the light and sparkle within them. That life, vitality, willpower and awareness is your soul, your divinity, the real you, that which continues on after the physical body's passing. Looking into the eyes of another, you can become aware of the life within that person and thereby see the soul and acknowledge his or her divine nature.

The Tamil word *uyirkkuyir* takes this concept of divinity one step further. It is translated as "God, who is the Life of life, the Soul of the soul." A philosophical phrase that conveys the same meaning is "God is the essence of the soul," implying that if you look deeply enough into the soul, you will experience God.

How do we know, when seeing the life within ourselves or others, if we are experiencing the individual, evolving soul, or experiencing God as the essence of the soul, the Life of life? Here is one way to make that distinction. When we are perceiving an individual soul or souls, there is a sense that every soul is separate from the others. However, when we perceive God as the Life of life, that sense of separateness is replaced with a sense of oneness. Thus, if you can look at a group of people and be aware of the divine oneness that pervades them all, you would be seeing God in them. This deeper experience is achieved through internalizing our awareness, going deeply inside ourselves through worship or meditation.

An analogy can be made to japa beads. We can focus on the beads and perceive them as 109 separate beads. We can also focus on the cord on which they are strung and see the oneness that connects all the beads. A popular story about Paramaguru Yogaswami illustrates this point. There were four people gathered to sing devotional songs in his small hut one day. Yogaswami asked, "How many are here?" Someone replied, "Four, swami." Yogaswami countered, "No. Only one is here." He saw the unity; they saw the diversity.

The Hindu idea that God is inside every person as the essence of the soul, which can be experienced today, is quite different from the concept of Western religions that God is up in heaven and cannot be experienced by those living on Earth. They believe they have to die to meet God. Gurudeva often spoke of the immediacy of God's presence: "God is so close to us. He is closer than our breathing, nearer to us than our hands or feet. Yes, He is the very essence of our soul."

Turning now to the goal of life, we know the Hindu perspective is that life's ultimate purpose is to make spiritual progress. This is also described as evolving, maturing or unfolding spiritually. All of these terms refer to enjoying ever more profound realizations of God—personal experiences that deepen our understandings of life and transform our very nature—culminating in moksha, liberation from rebirth on planet Earth.

We can usefully distinguish here the Hindu view of the spiritual destination—experience of God and subsequent liberation—and the journey to that destination, which we are speaking of here. By focusing on the journey and the steps in front of us, we progress more surely and swiftly.

Let's ask the question, "What, exactly, is it that makes this spiritual progress?" Not the personality. Not the intellect. Not the emotions. It is, of course, the soul. In thinking of spiritual progress, it is helpful to understand the concept of the soul as a human-like, self-effulgent form comprised of the life and light we previously talked about. Technically, there are two terms in Sanskrit for this immortal soul body: *anandamaya kosha*, "bliss body," and *karana sharira*, "causal body." Just as our physical body matures from an infant into an adult, so too does this self-effulgent body of light mature in resplendence and intelligence, evolving as its consciousness expands, gradually strengthening its inner nerve system, progressing from ignorance of God to intimate communion with God. In Sanskrit, this advancing on the path is called *adhyatma prasara*, spiritual evolution. It is a process that takes place over many lifetimes, not just one.

Gurudeva shared, from his own experience, a mystical description of the soul body in *Merging with Siva*: "One day you will see the being of you, your divine soul body. You will see it inside the physical body. It looks like clean, clear plastic. Around it is a blue light, and the outline of it is whitish yellow. Inside of it is blue-yellowish light, and there are trillions of little nerve currents, or quantums, and light scintillating all through that. This body stands on a lotus flower. Inwardly looking down through your feet, you see you are standing on a big, beautiful lotus flower. This body has a head, it has eyes, and it has infinite intelligence. It is tuned into and feeds from the source of all energy." Similar descriptions of the soul as a body of light are found in our sacred scriptures and in yogis' writings.

Hastening progress: Let's turn now to the question of what can we do to hasten the unfoldment of our soul. In Hindu thought, there are fourteen great nerve centers in the physical body (*sthula sharira*), in the astral body *(sukshma sharira)* and in the body of the soul *(karana sharira)*. These centers are called *chakras* in Sanskrit, which means "wheels." Esoterically, spiritual unfoldment relates to the raising of the kundalini force, the serpent power, and the subsequent awakening of these chakras within our subtle bodies. Everyone has all of the chakras, though they usually are content to live in only a few.



A. MANIVEL

Mature souls: *Spiritual men and women gather in a sacred forest retreat in India. Their efforts to transform themselves, though strenuous, have brought purity, deep insight and a maturity of soul. Their radiant auras are a sign of their attainment.*

There are six chakras above the muladhara chakra, which is located at the base of the spine. When awareness is flowing through these chakras, consciousness is in the higher nature. There are seven chakras below the muladhara chakra, and when awareness is flowing through them, consciousness is in the lower nature. Most Hindu teachings regarding the chakras focus on the yogi's awakening, balancing or stimulating the muladhara chakra and the six above. These seven centers of consciousness govern, in order, memory, reason, willpower, direct cognition, divine love, divine sight and illumination/Godliness. However, my guru has a different emphasis. He states that spiritual unfoldment is not a process of awakening the higher chakras, but of closing off the chakras below the muladhara. The seven chakras, or *talas*, below the spine, down to the feet, are all seats of instinctive consciousness, the origin, respectively, of fear, anger, jealousy, confusion, selfishness, absence of conscience and malice.

Brahmadvara, the doorway to the Narakaloka located just below the muladhara, has to be sealed off so that it becomes impossible for fears, hatreds, angers and jealousies to arise. Once this begins to happen, the muladhara chakra is stabilized and consciousness slowly and naturally expands into the higher chakras. As the kundalini force of awareness travels along the spine, it enters each of these higher chakras, energizing them and awakening, in turn, each function according to the intensity of spiritual effort.

This understanding of the centrality of sealing off the lower chakras highlights how important emotional control is to our spiritual progress. Certainly the emotion that is the most important for people on the spiritual path to control is anger. Just possessing the knowledge that anger prevents us from experiencing the higher chakras increases our motivation to live a life that is totally free from this devastating force. Anger comes in many forms, ranging from frustration and resentment to uncontrollable rage. In its simplest shade, it is an instinctive, emotional protest to happenings at a particular moment. "Things are just not right!" anger shrieks. 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. To those who are anger-prone, I advise replacing that fuming reaction with an affirmation that everything is just as it should be in God's perfect universe.

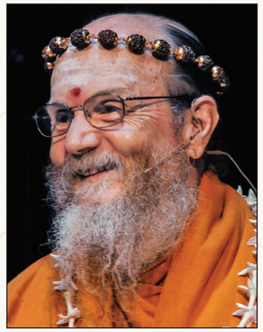
An initial focus on controlling anger and the other lower emotions and instincts is wisely built into the traditional concept of yoga as having eight limbs. The first limb is *yama*, which means restraint and is exactly what we have described—controlling our base emotions and instincts. Unfortunately, many modern yoga teachers and texts leave out this essential step that allows us to keep awareness above the lower chakras. Having sealed off the lower chakras, we are naturally drawn to be of service to others, to worship regularly and thereby deepen our devotion to God and to look within through meditation to experience our soul nature and eventually God's indwelling presence as our very essence.

The regular practice of these traditional spiritual disciplines not only keeps our awareness in the higher chakras, it also provides nourishment to our soul body. The soul body starts to grow within the emotional body. Gurudeva described this growth process by saying that the soul body grows like a child, fed by all of our good deeds. All of our service and selfless actions toward others feed that body. All of our working with ourselves to conquer instinctive emotions is food for that body, as it draws from the central source of energy. Finally, the spiritual body matures to the point where it becomes aware in the superconscious, intuitive mind, taking on more spiritual force from the Infinite. Ultimately, it takes over the astral emotional-intellectual body. And after moksha is achieved, it continues maturing in the inner worlds.

Advancing through Life's Four Stages

Applying the wisdom of ashrama dharma lends dignity and increasing purpose to every decade of life, but requires some new thinking

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



Rajiv's London classmates are a raucous bunch of teenagers, flush with vigor, carefree and oblivious to future responsibilities. They see him as a stodgy fellow—smart, handsome, likeable, but missing out on the fun. "You're only young once!" Jeremy chides, "Why not party with us?" Rajiv lives in a different world, having learned from his parents that life is measured in four stages, and that we reincarnate again and again—so we are young many, many times. He saves his energies for the important stuff, building his knowledge and character in preparation for the family stage, which he will enter in his twenties. Disinterested in fooling around, he hopes to win the hand of a cultured girl with whom to share this lifetime and bring children into the world. Rajiv even looks forward to his elder years when, having fulfilled his duties, he will withdraw into his soul nature, the eternal Rajiv, seeking God Realization as he lives out this earthly tenure. Rajiv is convinced that each phase of life has a natural purpose, and that each is more rewarding than the last. For now, he chooses to study as hard as he can, and play a little in between.

Rajiv's plan is founded on Hindu tradition which divides an individual's lifespan into four stages, or ashramas. This division, called *ashrama dharma,* is the natural expression and maturing of the body, mind and emotions through four progressive stages. It was developed millennia ago and detailed in scriptures known as the *Dharma Shastras,* highlighting the fact that our duties differ greatly as we progress from youth, to adulthood, senior years and old age. The *Maitri Upanishad* states: "Pursuit of the duties of the stage of life to which each one belongs—that, verily, is the rule! Others are like branches of a stem. With this, one tends upwards; otherwise, downwards."

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, in *The Hindu View of Life,* summarizes: "The four stages—of *brahmacharya,* or the period of training, *grihastha,* or the period of work for the world as a householder, *vanaprastha,* or the period of retreat for the loosening of the social bonds, and *sannyasa,* or the period of renunciation and expectant awaiting of freedom—indicate that life is a pilgrimage to the eternal life through different stages."

This paradigm is as important and precious now as it was a thousand years ago, shared by all Hindus, regardless of caste or gender. However, the ancient descriptions may not translate perfectly to our modern life. Society has changed too much from how it was in Vedic times in India. For example, it would not work for all 50-year-olds to take up the life of a forest hermit, begging for their food. That would not be accepted by 21st-century society. In some countries forest hermits would end up in jail as homeless vagrants or trespassers, hungry ones at that. A certain amount of reinterpretation is needed to allow contemporary Hindus to utilize the wisdom of this natural evolution of life. As a starting point, let's review the traditional descriptions.

The first stage, or ashrama, is brahmacharya, student life, and those in this ashrama are called *brahmacharins,* "those of divine comportment." It was usually a period of twelve years, from age seven or eight to age 19 or 20. The student lived in his guru's home and learned scriptures, philosophy, science and logic. He was also taught how to conduct the Vedic fire ceremony. The brahmacharin was expected to follow a strict code of conduct, including celibacy, speaking the truth, gentleness in speech, physical austerities such as cold-water baths and eating sparingly at night. Serving the teacher and participating in the household duties were as much a part of his life as formal learning.

The second stage is householder life, grihastha dharma, and those in this ashrama are called *grihasthins.* After returning to his family home, the student was expected to marry and raise a family, earning well by righteous means to provide for his wife and children, support his parents and give generously to charity. His religious duties included scriptural study and performing a daily Vedic fire ceremony in the home.

The third stage is vanaprastha, hermit life, and those in this ashrama are called *vanaprasthins,* "forest dwellers." Generally around the age of 50 or 55, after the birth of grandchildren, the *Shastras* explain, the householder is expected to hand over the responsibilities of the family to his children and retire to the forest. He may take his wife, if she is willing to share his life of austerities, or leave her with his sons. He is to continue the daily fire ceremony, observe continence and devote himself to contemplation on God, all to prepare himself for life's final phase.

The fourth stage defined in scripture is sannyasa, renunciate life, and those in this ashrama are called *sannyasins.* When the forest recluse felt enough inner strength to totally renounce all possessions and lead the life of an itinerant monk, he would embrace sannyasa, after entrusting his wife to the care of the children. In this stage he was to move about constantly from place to place, begging his food and devoting himself to japa, meditation, worship of his Deity and contemplation of scriptures.

Looking next at how these ancient descriptions of the ashramas can be updated to better apply in contemporary society, my guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, considered that in modern times each ashrama is a 24-year period, applying equally to men and women: brahmacharya being the first 24 years of life; grihastha extending from age 24 to 48; vanaprastha from age 48 to 72; and sannyasa from age 72 onward.

The goals of brahmacharya remain the same today, but some of the details may no longer apply, such as living in the home of one's teacher. Intense learning is still the main focus. Ideally, one acquires training in the profession he or she will follow in adult life. On the religious side, the basics of Hinduism are to be learned, along with memorizing mantras and conducting a puja in the home shrine, a practice that has largely replaced the Vedic fire ceremony in modern times. Students should be taught self-discipline, celibacy and other positive character qualities.

The descriptions of the grihastha ashrama also stand the test of time. The main focus is on marriage, bearing and raising children, serving society through one's career, earning income, taking care of elders and being charitable. Daily puja is conducted in the home, which ideally the entire family attends. Today the grihasthin is the primary teacher of Hinduism to his or her children, a duty the guru fulfilled in ancient times. This ashrama is a busy time of engagement in the world while advancing one's family and profession.

It is in defining the vanaprastha stage that need arises to rethink the old definitions. Becoming a forest dweller at age 48 is not an option for most people. Instead, my guru described this as a natural time to help and guide the younger generations as an advisor and elder. Brahmacharins and grihasthins can actively seek out the advice of vanaprasthins and draw on and benefit from their years of experience. For example, many Hindus in this age group mentor youth through community programs, teach Hinduism to children, serve on the boards of trustees or committees of temples, or fulfill leadership roles in secular nonprofit organizations. This is a time of giving back to the community what one has learned, while slowly retiring from professional and public life.

The parameters of the sannyasa ashrama have also widened. A small percentage of modern Hindus follow the model of taking up sannyasa after retirement, renouncing the world and wandering among the thousands of sadhus and sannyasins of India, many of whom took up the mendicant path in their 20s and 30s. This pattern of elders taking up sannyasa is okay for single people, widows and widowers, and it still works in parts of India where society honors and cares for such holy men and women. But in most areas of the world, it is neither accepted nor understood.

A number of Hindus turning age 72 have asked me what they should do differently in the years ahead. My advice is to simply intensify whatever religious practices they are already observing. If you perform a daily puja for 30 minutes, increase it to an hour. If you meditate daily for half an hour, increase it to an hour. If you go on pilgrimage for two weeks once a year, increase it to a month. Once these changes have become a firm habit, one would naturally be inclined to devote even more time to religious practices. After age 72, as the physical forces wane, is the time to turn within and withdraw from worldly involvement.

My guru gave this helpful description of the third and fourth ashramas for modern times: "It is during the latter stages of life that family devotees have the opportunity to intensify their sadhana and give back to society of their experience, their knowledge and their wisdom gained through the first two ashramas. The vanaprastha ashrama, age 48 to 72, is a very important stage of life, because that is the time when you can inspire excellence in the brahmacharya students and in the families, to see that their life goes along as it should. Later, the sannyasa ashrama, beginning at 72, is the time to enjoy and deepen whatever realizations you have had along the way."



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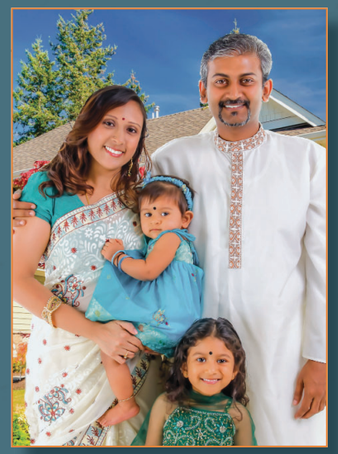
1. Student, age 12–24
Brahmacharya Ashrama



2. Householder, age 24–48
Grihastha Ashrama

Four dynamic stages: *1) As a student, gaining knowledge in math, science and other fields; 2) supporting and raising a family; 3) as a grandparent, semi-retired, devoting more time to religious pursuits and community programs while guiding one's offspring and their children; 4) as the physical forces wane, withdrawing more and more into religious practices.*



3. Senior Advisor, age 48–72
Vanaprastha Ashrama



4. Religious Devotion, age 72 and onward
Sannyasa Ashrama

Sinner or Divinity?

While some faiths view man as sinful by nature, Hinduism holds that our inmost self is the divine and taintless soul, or atma

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



In today's world of global communication, we encounter a multiplicity of views about the nature of man on a regular basis. At one extreme, each human being is inherently weak, imperfect, sinful and—without divine redemption—will remain helplessly so. At the other extreme, each human is inherently divine.

This is one of the themes I talked about with Hindus in the Caribbean in August of 2011. I was told in Trinidad last year that this message—"You are a sinner in need of redemption"—is being promoted strongly in an effort to convert Hindus. I am often asked, "What should we say when confronted with this argument by strong-willed evangelists? What is the Hindu view?" Let's explore three quotations from prominent swamis to define our perspective.

The first is from Swami Vivekananda's address to the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893, in the bold manner in which he affirmed truth as he saw it: "Being and becoming are different aspects of the same reality and are only relative to our intelligence. Man has the promise and potentiality of divine realization, of spiritual perfection, and therefore is God in the making; for even his humanity is intelligible only if regarded as an individualized self-expression of God. It is derogatory to human nature, therefore, to attribute sin to man. Besides, God being the sole and supreme Reality, how could a foreign element like sin invade the sanctuary of being? The Hindus refuse to call you sinners. Ye, divinities on earth, sinners? It is a sin to call man so! It is a standing libel on human nature."

Swami Chinmayananda, founder of Chinmaya Mission, explained: "Man is essentially divine. But the divinity in him is veiled by the unbroken series of desires and thoughts arising in his bosom. A variety of these grades and concentration of these create the variety of human beings. To remove the encrustation of desires and thoughts, and unfold the divinity inherent in man, is the ultimate goal envisaged by the scriptures."

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, my Gurudeva and founder of Hinduism Today, gave a succinct description of our divine nature: "Deep inside we are perfect this very moment, and we have only to discover and live up to this perfection to be whole. We have taken birth in a physical body to grow and evolve into our divine potential. We are inwardly already one with God. Our religion contains the knowledge of how to realize this oneness and not create unwanted experiences along the way."

These opposite perspectives on man's nature—sinner and divinity—were candidly juxtaposed during a 2012 interfaith panel discussion in Midland, Texas, at which I represented Hinduism. The issue arose as clergy from five faiths responded to the question "In your faith, is humanity considered a one family?"

My answer was: "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. Hindus do not accept the concept that some individuals are evil and others are good. Hindus believe that each individual is a soul, a divine being, who is inherently good. Scriptures tell us that each soul is emanated from God, as a spark from a fire, beginning a spiritual journey which eventually leads back to God. All human beings are on this journey, whether they realize it or not."

The next speaker, Dr. Randel Everett of the Baptist Christian faith, put forth a distinctly different perspective. "The idea of the oneness of humanity—this is where Christianity would differ from some of the religions. We do believe in the oneness of humanity but that the oneness of humanity is that we are a fallen people. We do not believe that we are inherently good. We believe we are inherently selfish and self-centered, and that's why we need to be rescued or redeemed—that Christ rescues us from the domain of darkness."

Looking more closely at the Hindu belief that man is not inherently sinful—rather, the essence of man is divine and perfect—a further question arises: "What is the Hindu view of sin?" Gurudeva responds in *Dancing with Siva*: "Instead of seeing good and evil in the world, we understand the nature of the embodied soul in three interrelated parts: instinctive or physical-emotional; intellectual or mental; and superconscious or spiritual.... When the outer, or lower, instinctive nature dominates, one is prone to anger, fear, greed, jealousy, hatred and backbiting. When the intellect is prominent, arrogance and analytical thinking preside. When the superconscious soul comes forth, the refined qualities are born—compassion, insight, modesty and the others. The animal instincts of the young soul are strong. The intellect, yet to be developed, is nonexistent to control these strong instinctive impulses. When the intellect is developed, the instinctive nature subsides. When the soul unfolds and overshadows the well-developed intellect, this mental harness is loosened and removed."

> "There is a spirit which is pure and which is beyond old age and death; and beyond hunger and thirst and sorrow. This is atman, the spirit in man. What you see when you look into another person's eyes, that is the atman, immortal, beyond fear; that is God."
>
> Sama Veda, Chandogya Upanishad 8.7.3-4

This understanding of man's threefold nature—instinctive, intellectual and spiritual—explains why people act in ways that are clearly not divine, such as becoming angry and harming others. There is more to man than his essence or inner nature. We also have an outer nature. However, man's actions, whether beneficial or harmful, sinful or divine, are all expressions of a one energy. That energy finds expression through the chakras, fourteen centers of consciousness within our subtle bodies.



MIDLAND REPORTER-TELEGRAM

Interfaith in Texas: *Left to right, leaders of Judaism, Hinduism, the Baptist Church, Catholicism and Islam discuss their religions' beliefs in a public forum.*

Many of us have seen the system for water usage at temples in India: a long pipe with faucets along its length from which many people draw water to wash their hands and feet before entering the temple. That's a nice analogy to energy and the chakras. Our subtle body is like a pipe with fourteen spigots. Water is water; it can come out of any of the spigots. It's still water. Energy can come out through any of our chakras; it's still energy.

Energy flowing through the higher chakras expresses the superconscious or spiritual nature. How do we control or direct our energy to keep it flowing through the higher chakras? Gurudeva used to say, "Energy goes where awareness flows." We control our energies through consistent meditation and devotional activities in the home shrine, chanting, performing puja, attending puja and going to the temple on a regular basis. Listening to and playing refined music and performing traditional dance and other creative arts are also ways of channeling the energies through the higher chakras.

Our regular activities determine how our energy flows. If we are engaged in spiritual pursuits, occasionally we might get up to the chakra of divine love. And hopefully we frequent the chakra of direct cognition, in which we are able to look down on our mind and understand what we like and don't like about ourselves, and work steadily to change what we don't. And we get into the chakra of willpower. These are the qualities we tend to manifest if we are engaged in regular spiritual/religious activities.

If we are not elevating the energies, we are just living an ordinary life in the force centers of willpower, reason, memory, maybe fear and occasionally anger. If we see the flow of energy impersonally, then we can control it through the activities we choose to engage in.

I like to say that we have an inner perfection and an outer imperfection. We can take heart in identifying more with the inner perfection, our soul nature, and realize the outer has its problems, which we can work on—and that is the purpose of our life on earth, to work on ourselves, to learn, evolve and ultimately know God. With this attitude, born of the belief in our divinity, we are more detached from our shortcomings and difficulties. It's just energy flowing through our various chakras, more water flowing through one spigot or another. It is not who we are. We realize that we can control that energy flow. "Which spigot shall I turn on today? How do I want my energy to flow? Which negative habit do I want to improve today?" It all becomes easier to tackle because we look at it in an impersonal way.

The concept of the fourteen chakras can help us put our failings into perspective so that we do not become discouraged by them. Shortcomings, such as occasionally being hurtful toward others, do not at all change the fact that our essence is divine. We can deepen our experience of inner divinity and overcome shortcomings by consistently following the various practices found in the Hindu religion. When we feel good about ourselves, we can more readily identify negative patterns and change them. If we have a negative concept of ourself, believing that we are inherently flawed and sinful, we are not in such a good position to advance on the spiritual path. And one thing we can all feel good about is that Hinduism assures us not only that we are not sinners, but that every human being, without exception, is destined to achieve spiritual enlightenment and liberation.

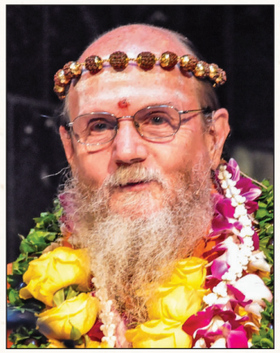
14 Chakras, Centers of Consciousness

NAME	ATTRIBUTE
7. sahasrara	illumination
6. ajna	divine sight
5. vishuddha	divine love
4. anahata	direct cognition
3. manipura	willpower
2. svadhishthana	reason
1. muladhara	memory
1. atala	fear, lust
2. vitala	raging anger
3. sutala	retaliatory jealousy
4. talatala	prolonged confusion
5. rasatala	pure selfishness
6. mahatala	absence of conscience
7. patala	malice, murder

Behold the Sacred Lotus Flower

Progressing from our instinctive to intellectual to spiritual nature, our soul unfolds to resplendence like a beautiful lotus

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



THE HINDU VIEWPOINT IS THAT THE SEED OF Divinity is within everyone. My guru's guru, Siva Yogaswami of Sri Lanka, had a down-to-earth way of expressing this idea. "See everyone as God. Don't say, 'This man is a robber. That one is a womanizer. The man over there a drunkard.' This man is God. That man is God. God is within everyone. The seed is there. See that and ignore the rest." It is definitely reassuring that there is no one who isn't a divine being—that no one ends up in an eternal hell. Rather, it's just a question of when an individual's divine essence will express itself. It may be a few more lives before it does. After all, spiritual unfoldment is a slow and inexorable process.

My own guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, chose an insightful analogy for the process of spiritual unfoldment, which in Sanskrit is called *adhyatma vikasa*. He spoke about the lotus, how its seed starts in the pond's dark mud. Its roots give rise to a stem that reaches up through the water into the air. From the stem evolves a bud, tiny at first, which grows into a flower that slowly opens its exquisite petals to the sun, the central nectar and pollen calling to the bees. Gurudeva compares that process to man's nature and spiritual unfoldment. The mud is the instinctive mind. We all start out in the mud in one lifetime or another. In our early evolution we are crude and unkind. We tend to hurt other people and think more of ourself than others. Maybe we even end up in jail. We all start down there, in the roots, immersed in the darkness of the instinctive mind, crashing around like a bull in a china shop.

Life follows life as we live and learn. Finally we get some control over our instincts and move up into the water, which is the intellectual mind. We become a thinking person, someone who is able to make decisions logically, someone who has basic control over the instinctive emotions so that when threatened he or she doesn't automatically become angry and fight.

At this point we are an instinctive-intellectual person, living partly in the mud of our animal nature, partly in the water of our intelligence. Such a person has no sense of God and the sacredness of life. The world is full of people like that, the atheists, materialists and existentialists. They are oblivious to the spiritual purpose of life, a purpose that goes beyond this incarnation.

Then what happens? The stem rises above the water's surface. It rises out of the water into the air, which represents intuition, our spirituality or some sense of the existence of God. We start to think about religion; we start to think about spiritual practices. Just being an instinctive and an intellectual person, just pursuing ordinary things, worldly pursuits, no longer satisfies us. But the bud is closed, yet to mature and open. The closed bud knows God is out there but has had no direct experience of Him.

What causes the bud to open? Learning and maturing life after life, grace of enlightened beings, blessings of the Deity and spiritual practice. To open the bud, we have to consciously strive.

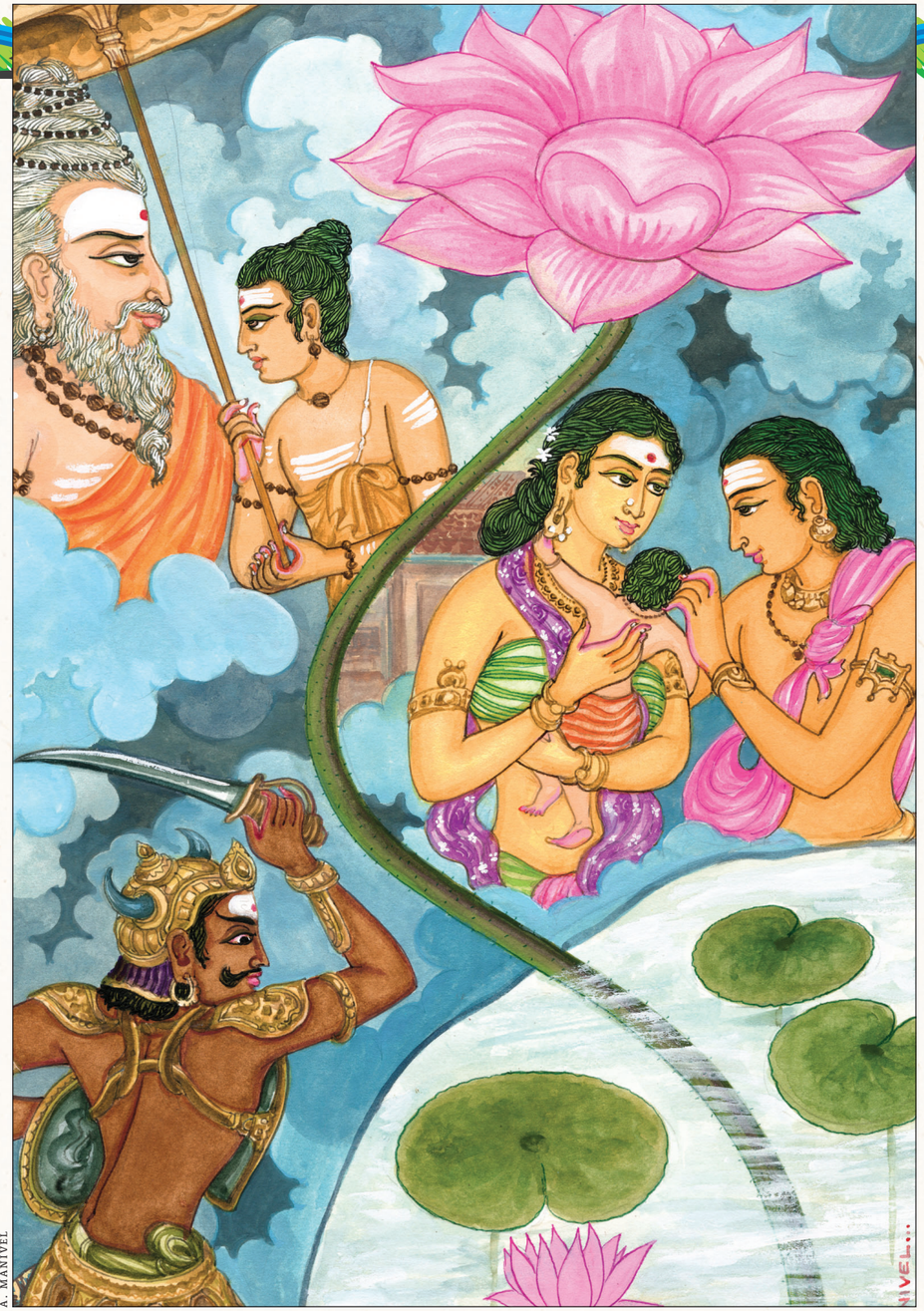
Hinduism gives us religious practices that can be grouped into four categories. The first is simply good conduct, character building, charya. It is the foundation for deeper practices. Second is selfless service, seva or karma yoga—doing things for other people we don't have to do. That's how I define it. If in our place of work we do something for someone else out of the goodness of our heart, that counts as seva. Seva doesn't have to be done at a temple or an ashram. If we go to work and only do what we're paid for, no seva is taking place.

The third category of practice is devotion, bhakti, which we express at a temple as well as at the temple we have in our own home. Maintaining a home shrine and worshiping there daily is an essential practice. The fourth is meditation, dhyana. Meditation is a bit advanced and requires a teacher's help to do well at it. Most people I speak with say, "I try and meditate but I can't control my thoughts." They don't have a teacher. They haven't had someone personally explain the art of meditation to them. It's an unusual person who can learn meditation by himself.

Thus, the four categories of practice are good conduct, service, devotion and meditation. What happens when you take up some of these practices and perform them on a regular basis? The bud slowly opens. Your Divinity, which waited silently in the seed, blossoms.

Many Western ideas and goals are based on the underlying attitude that there is only one life—or there may be only one life—so we had better do everything we can in this life. We had better achieve God Realization in this life, just in case. The Hindu attitude, based on the confidence that we live many lives, is: "I know I'm coming back; no rush. I will do as much as I can in this lifetime, and there will be ample time for further advancement." The Hindu approach is to make spiritual progress in every lifetime—open the bud a little bit more. We are content to move forward by consistent practice, with whatever intensity we can sustain, without rushing, without fear of falling short. We rest assured that the seed of Divinity resides within each of us.

Hinduism takes that idea one step further: eventually each of us will have the realization of God, our indwelling Self. The *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* states, "He who with the truth of atman, the soul, unified, perceives the truth of Brahman as with a lamp, who knows God, the unborn, the stable, free from all forms of being, is released from all fetters." This is quite different from the concept, prevalent in Western faiths, that God is in heaven and cannot be experienced by those living on Earth. Gurudeva often spoke of the immediacy of this divine presence: "God is so close to us. He is closer than our breathing, nearer to us than our hands or feet. Yes, He is the very essence of our soul."



A. MANIVEL

Spiritual evolution: *The lotus, symbol of spiritual growth, rises out of the mud, up through the water and into full bloom. Our passage through many lives is similar. We begin with base, instinctive traits, such as violence, evolve to dharmic family living, and finally blossom as an awakened spiritual being.*

Back to our analogy of the lotus flower. When the lotus flower is sufficiently open, we begin living consciously in our spiritual or intuitive nature. Let's ask the question, "What is it that makes spiritual progress? What is it that unfolds?" It is the soul. In thinking about spiritual unfoldment, it is helpful to understand the nature of the soul. We distinguish between the soul body and its essence. The essence is twofold: unchanging pure consciousness and transcendent Absolute Reality, beyond time, form and space. The soul body is a human-like, self-effulgent being of light which evolves and matures. This immortal soul body is referred to in Sanskrit as *anandamaya kosha* (sheath of bliss). It is the soul body that, like the lotus flower, unfolds. The soul's essence is eternally perfect, identical with God.

Just as our physical body matures from an infant to an adult, so too does this self-effulgent body of light mature in resplendence and intelligence, evolving from life to life, gradually strengthening its inner nerve system, progressing from ignorance of God to God realization.

Gurudeva shared his own mystical experience of the soul body in *Merging with Siva*: "One day you will see the being of you, your divine soul body. You will see it inside the physical body. It looks like clean, clear plastic. Around it is a blue light, and the outline of it is whitish yellow. Inside of it is blue-yellowish light, and there are trillions of little nerve currents, or quantums, and light scintillating all through that. This body stands on a lotus flower. Inwardly looking down through your feet, you see you are standing on a big, beautiful lotus flower. This body has a head, it has eyes, and it has infinite intelligence. It is tuned into and feeds from the source of all energy."

There is another aspect to spiritual unfoldment. Choose the one Hindu saint, swami or yogi, living or passed on, who you feel achieved the greatest spiritual attainment. Now imagine and accept the idea that his or her attainment is your own potential. That is the surprising truth. The potential to achieve what anyone else has achieved spiritually lies within you to be manifested at some point in your future. Perhaps that thought will motivate you to put just a bit more effort into those spiritual practices! Visualize the lotus flower in full, magnificent bloom—that is the symbol of your full, resplendent spiritual potential.

Of course, that potential only becomes practical when you strive. If you are serious in your seeking, ask yourself a series of questions: How am I applying the four kinds of practice in my life now? Good conduct? Seva? Bhakti? Meditation and yoga? Which areas are most in need of my attention and increased effort? What do I need to do in order to improve? Then do it.

CHAPTER SIX

Harmony With Others

- We Are Whom We Meet
- The Power of Kindly Speech
- Achieving Affectionate Detachment
- Giving's Secret Gifts

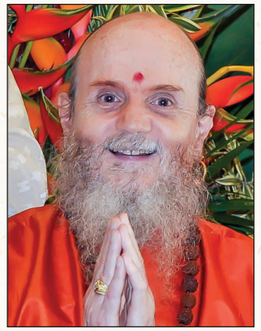


Hatched butterfly eggs on a raspberry plant
National Geographic, 500x

We Are Whom We Meet

The company we keep affects our attitudes, speech and actions as profoundly as the foods we eat

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



WE ARE ALL FAMILIAR WITH THE PHRASE "WE are what we eat." The Hindu viewpoint on this is that the different types of food we consume have a significant influence on our state of mind and emotions. For example, eating meat, which is known to be a *tamasic* food, opens the door to lower consciousness and makes it harder to stay out of the states of fear, anger, jealousy and the remorseful emotions that follow. Consuming too many spicy foods and stimulants, or *rajasic* foods, can overexcite our physical and intellectual activity. On the other hand, pure, or *sattvic,* foods, such as fresh fruits and vegetables that grow above the ground, foster our intuitive or soul nature. For maximum spiritual progress, it is best to eat plenty of sattvic foods, to be moderate in the intake of rajasic foods and to avoid tamasic foods. The *Chandogya Upanishad* (7.26.2) teaches: "When the food is pure, mind becomes pure. When the mind becomes pure, memory becomes firm. And when a man is in possession of a firm memory, all the bonds which tie him down to the world are loosened."

Today I want to expand the idea that "We are what we eat" by pointing out that our companions are an equally important influence on our state of mind and emotions—hence the title "We are whom we meet." The ethical scripture *Tirukural,* in Chapter 46, "Avoidance of Base Company," has ten insightful verses describing how powerfully we are influenced by the company we keep. Here are two of the verses. "As water changes according to the soil through which it flows, so a man assimilates the character of his associates." "Even perfect men, possessing the mind's full goodness, are fortified by pious fellowship."

Our actions, speech, state of consciousness and attitudes toward life are all strongly influenced by our companions, just as they are by the food we eat. Therefore, it is important to surround oneself with good, religious, higher-consciousness people. Every few months, I receive an e-mail from someone saying that he or she used to perform sadhana (regular religious practices), but stopped some time ago and now wants to get started again. The advice I give always includes attending a weekly satsang with others who are also performing sadhana. It can be difficult to sustain sadhana if you are striving alone. We need the companionship of others on the path to keep our sadhana strong, especially during difficult times in life. As my Gurudeva, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, often said: "The group helps the individual and the individual helps the group."

Of course, we must choose wisely, as companions can also influence us negatively. Here is a story to illustrate. A teenage boy starting his first year at high school made new friends who had a habit of swearing. The boy never swore previously, but because he spent significant time with his new friends, he soon adopted their crude language.

One of the times in life when religious companions are extremely important is during the university years, especially for students living away from home. The most obvious negative influence comes from fellow students who are more interested in partying than studying. A less visible, but equally erosive, influence comes from anti-religious instructors who propound atheism or existentialism and may even overtly demean Hinduism. Such encounters can instill negative habits and bring about loss of faith.

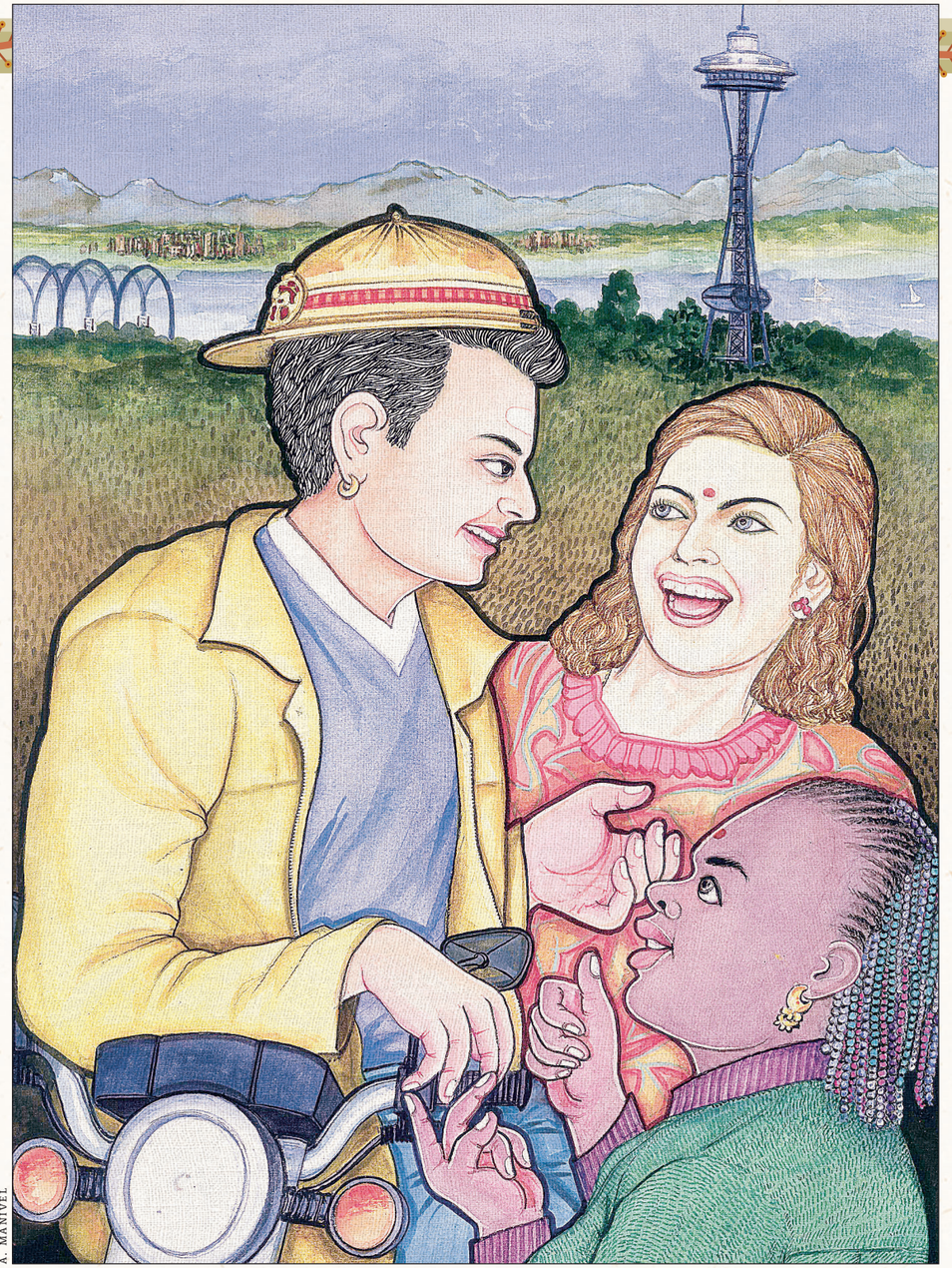
How to find suitable religious companionship? Universities are not necessarily close to satsang groups that could be attended regularly. For students whose university is close to a temple, we suggest visiting it weekly. If the temple is too far for a weekly visit, at least make an effort to attend during major festivals. Joining a Hindu students' group offers prime opportunities for interacting with peers who are spiritually inclined. If there is none at your school, but there are a good number of Hindu students at the university, consider founding a branch of an established Hindu students group on your campus. Other possibilities are to participate in an Indian cultural group, a yoga class or a meditation program.

Reinforcing Your Aura: Despite our best intentions to maintain pure companions, sometimes it can be necessary to interact at length with people who are strongly materialistic or even hedonistic. The challenge is to do so without letting their emotions penetrate and influence our own. If this does happen, you will experience their moods and emotions and may interpret them as your own.

If you could see the subtle energies of such an exchange, you would know that you have absorbed into your aura the dark reds, muddy browns and greens from another person's aura. You simply did not have enough prana in your aura to ward off the intrusion. Such thought forms and undesirable colors from others' auras are often called psychic influences.

The aura is a luminous, colorful field of subtle (or astral) energy radiating within and around the human body. The colors of the aura change constantly according to the ebb and flow of your state of consciousness, thoughts, moods and emotions. Fortunately, there are yogic exercises you can employ to vitalize your aura. Here is one such exercise from my guru:

"Sit quietly, breathe deeply and mentally get in touch with your *pranic* (energy) body, first by visualizing it and secondly by feeling it. The pranic body of most people extends out from the physical body about one or two inches, depending on the level of vitality. Of course, the pranic body also completely permeates the entire physical body. As you sit quietly, breathing deeply and slowly, become intimately aware of the vitality, the prana, running throughout the physical body. As you breathe in, feel the vitality of your body. Feel the magnetic energy within it. Feel its life. Then, as you breathe out, mentally and through feeling release some of this vitality, this prana, this life force, and send it out into your aura. Keep sending it out on the outbreath to the aura's outer edges all around your body, from your head to your feet. The outer edge of the human aura is about three or four feet away from the physical body. After you have charged your aura with vital prana in this way about nine times (nine breaths), you should begin to feel a magnetic shell being built around the outer edge of your aura. You will feel very secure and content as you sit within your own aura, which is charged with prana from your own pranic body. You are protected from all kinds of psychic influences, seen and unseen."



A. MANIVEL

Making friends: *A group of teens gather to talk and share, not far from the Seattle Space Needle in Washington state. Positive peer groups are essential to young men and women, taking them through the difficult teenage years protected and unscathed.*

Despite our best efforts to keep our aura strong and not take on the worldly emotions of others, some of their thoughts and emotions can end up in our aura and influence us by lowering our consciousness and depressing our mood. What can be done? These darker colors can be changed to lighter colors—and hence a more positive mood—by the blessings we receive from the Deity and devas when we go to the temple or home shrine. They can also be changed by the practice of meditation. The practice of regularly purifying our aura by temple attendance and meditation keeps our consciousness higher and our state of mind happier.

A very important time to purify the aura is when we return home from being out in the world. The practice I prescribe is to first bathe and then enter the shrine room for the blessings of the Deity and devas which, when received, will dispel worldly forces and help us regain a state of God consciousness.

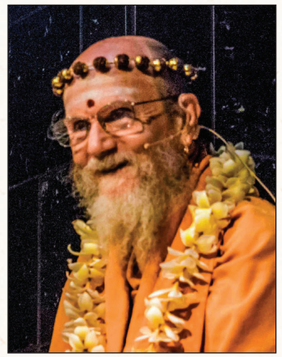
Attending temple pujas can be an even more powerful way of purifying the aura. An aspect of puja in the temple that is not widely understood is how it relates to the flow of prana. Except for the concluding arati, puja is a process of giving prana to the Deity. This is done through offering cut fruit, cooked food, water, fragrant flowers and milk. Then, during the final arati, the Deity and his helpers, or devas, reflect back this prana into the aura of each devotee, purifying it of subconscious congestions. The devotee so blessed leaves the temple feeling uplifted and relieved of mental conditions he had been burdened by.

Here is a final word of advice from my Gurudeva on the importance of spiritual companionship: "To sustain *shaucha,* purity, it is important to surround oneself with good, devonic company, to have the discrimination to know one type of person from another. Too many foolish, sensitive souls, thinking their spirituality could lift a soul from the world of darkness, have walked in where even the Mahadevas do not tread and the devas fear to tread, only to find themselves caught in that very world through the deceit and conniving of the cleverly cunning. Let's not be foolish. Let's discriminate between higher consciousness and lower consciousness. Higher-consciousness people should surround themselves with higher-consciousness people to fulfill shaucha." The *Tirukural* observes: "Purity of mind and purity of conduct, these two depend upon the purity of a man's companions."

The Power of Kindly Speech

Words can hurt others, so it's always good to avoid harsh language, backbiting and even friendly teasing

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



One of the key teachings of my guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, is that we are a soul, a divine being. However, we live in a physical body, as embodied souls, with strong thoughts and emotions. Thus, we have a soul nature, an intellectual nature and an instinctive nature. He describes this plurality as three phases of the mind: superconscious or spiritual (which is the soul); intellectual or mental; and instinctive or physical-emotional.

It is the instinctive, animal-like nature which contains the tendencies to become angry, jealous, fearful or hurtful to others. Part of making progress on the spiritual path is learning to control the instinctive mind. This is where the yamas, the ten ethical restraints, come into play. They provide a list of tendencies we need to subdue. The classical Hindu depiction of restraining the mind is the charioteer pulling back on the reins of a team of three, four or five horses to keep them under control. The yamas are the reins which help us control our instinctive and intellectual natures, which are like strong steeds that can work for us or run wild if not kept in check.

The first yama is noninjury, ahimsa: not harming others by thought, word or deed. Noninjury, as we all know, is a central Hindu principle. Of course, most of us do not indulge in physical violence. We may conclude from this that ahimsa presents no challenge to us. However, looking more closely at the definition of ahimsa, we see that it includes not harming others by our thoughts or words. Hence those following a spiritual life need to practice noninjury in our speech and even our thoughts.

To make progress on the spiritual path, we need to focus on our weak points and strive to improve them. Furthermore, we need to hold the attitude that no matter how well we are doing in a particular practice, we can always do better, find ways to further refine our behavior. Speech is perhaps our most powerful tool for communication and a worthy focus for our attention.

Gurudeva provides a fourfold guideline to judge if our speech is appropriate: "Speak only that which is true, kind, helpful and necessary." Let's take the example of a friend who is overweight. We are genuinely worried that it is vital for his health to lose some weight. We voice our concern by saying, "Ravi, you are way too heavy." Our message passes the test of helpfulness but fails the test of kindness. We need to express our concern more diplomatically. Perhaps, "I hope you won't mind my saying this, Ravi, but it would be good for your health to get serious about diet and exercise." Even helpful words need to be expressed in a kindly way if they are to have the intended effect. There are four common forms of hurting others with our speech: joking, teasing, gossiping and backbiting.

Joking & Teasing

Let's look at some examples that illustrate joking and teasing. First example: a peer has a special privilege or position. We grumble, "Look at Mr. I'm-better-than-you! Why was he exempted from the work we had to do today?" Second example: someone speaks with a foreign accent. You mimic his faulty pronunciation and laugh. Third example: a coworker has difficulty multiplying numbers. When she struggles with a calculation, you make fun of her. The rationale is "I'm joking," "Just being humorous," "Entertaining my friends." In truth, your words are *himsa*; you are harming others through your speech and justifying it by saying you are just joking, as if humor removes or exempts the hurt. Words can cause real pain, even if they are said in jest. Many don't realize this. Critical humor comes at the expense of the person you are joking about. In evaluating these examples with our fourfold test, we can see that they are neither true, kind, helpful nor necessary.

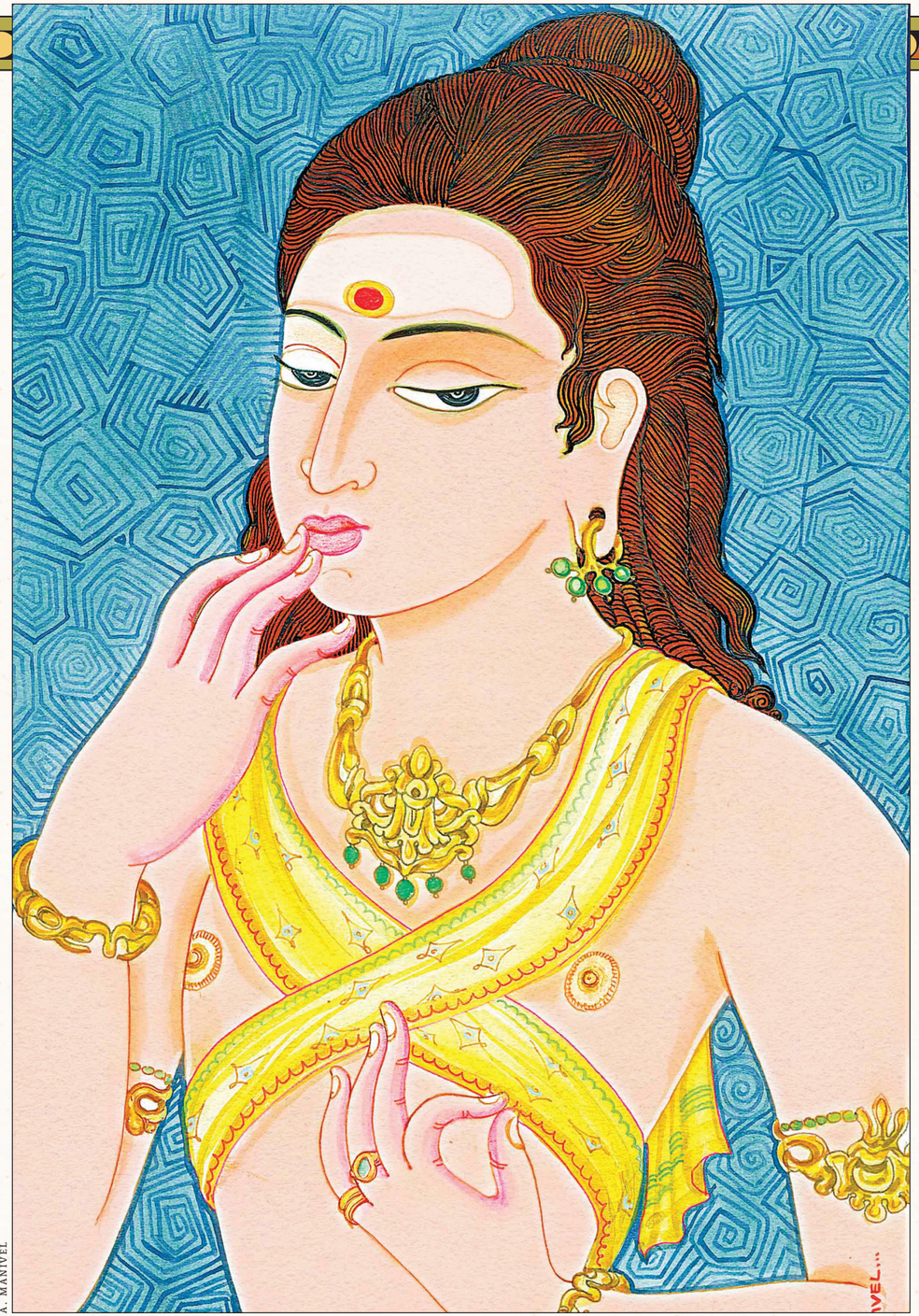
Gossip

Gossip is talking about the details of others' personal lives for the delight of it when they are not present. It's like creating and watching our own soap opera. Such talk entertains those present at the expense of the person being gossiped about. Some wives regularly gossip about their husbands, on the phone or on the Internet, with other wives. Some husbands complain about their wives among coworkers. Such idle talk may perhaps pass the test of being true, but it fails the other three tests: kindness, helpfulness and necessity. Husbands need the support of their wives to be successful. Wives need the support of their husbands to be secure. Telling tales and teasing disastrously undermine support in any relationship.

Backbiting

Last but not least is backbiting. Finding faults in another and sharing such shortcomings with others is a hobby many enjoy. It is so much easier to look for faults in others and complain about them than to see the same faults in ourselves and correct them. The *Tirukural* challenges in verse 190, "If men perceived their own faults as they do the faults of others, could misfortune ever come to them?" And in verse 188: "If men are disposed to spread the faults of friends, what deadly harm might they do to strangers?" Backbiting clearly fails our speech test.

The fact is that unless we are responsible for someone's upbringing or training, such as parents to their children or supervisors to their staff, it is best to ignore the faults of others and focus instead on finding and improving our own shortcomings. Improving ourselves produces positive spiritual advancement; criticizing others does not. The next time you find yourself dwelling on the faults in others, ask if you might have that same fault, for what disturbs you in others often indicates what you need to improve in yourself.



A. MANIVEL

Control of speech: *Here a man reflects on the effects of his words, resolving, by his gesture, to speak only that which is true, kind, helpful and necessary.*

Focusing on Three Virtues

For those on the spiritual path, it is not terribly difficult to avoid backbiting, gossip and hurtful humor. But controlling and refining our speech on more subtle levels is a lifetime sadhana.

Three virtues we can focus on are courtesy, tact and sensitivity. Courtesy is being polite, respectful and considerate of the needs and feelings of others. Tactfulness is being diplomatic and skillful in dealing with people and situations, responding to disagreements judiciously, and maintaining harmony by seeking solutions that offend no one. Sensitivity is holding a delicate appreciation of others' ideas, attitudes and natures, listening carefully in conversations and not interrupting, striving to uplift rather than dominate. The *Tirukural* warns, "Not knowing the companionable art of cheerful conversation, men estrange even friends by divisive discourse" (verse 187).

As a general strategy, Gurudeva directed us to "Think before you speak." Reflecting on what we are going to say is necessary, as it protects us from speaking inappropriately. Thus, control of speech has two parts. First, before you speak, stop and consider what you will say. Second, determine if your words meet the test of being true, kind, helpful and necessary. This simple practice can avert many difficulties. It can also be applied after a comment has slipped out, providing important lessons to guide future conversations.

Tirukural Verses

We can learn much about speaking pleasant words from the ancient weaver, Tiruvalluvar, who devoted chapter ten of his *Tirukural* to the subject. Here are four verses to live by.

"Poverty-producing sorrow will not pursue those who speak joy-producing words to all they meet" (verse 94).

"If a man seeks to do good while speaking sweet words, his virtues will wax and his vices will wane" (verse 96).

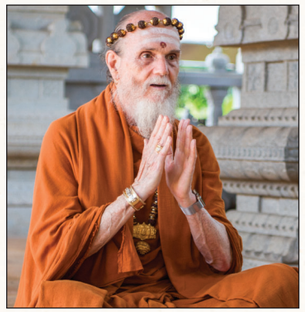
"Words yield spiritual rewards and moral excellence, when they do not wander far from usefulness and agreeableness" (verse 97).

"To utter harsh words when sweet ones would serve is like eating unripe fruits when ripe ones are at hand" (verse 100).

Achieving Affectionate Detachment

Peace of mind requires letting go of the past. Here are tools that help, including burning up our hurts and reactions.

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



Movies often depict a son or daughter who, now an adult, holds deep-seated hard feelings toward one or both parents for things that happened while growing up. For example, in one emotional film scene, a daughter rattles off a long list of unhappy interactions with her mother: "When I was ten years old, you did this to me, and then on my twelfth birthday that happened. When I was fifteen, you said this.... When I was twenty, I brought a boy home and you were unkind to him. When I was twenty-two, ..."

Piling up childhood reactions is as natural as it is debilitating. As grown-ups, we can continue adding to our subconscious stockpile of you-did-this-to-me resentments. Recently a man who was filled with resentment told me about how unfairly his business partners had treated him. His mind was totally absorbed in the past: "One partner cheated me by doing this four years ago. Two years ago another partner did that; and last month this happened!"

Did the son or daughter demonstrate any good feelings toward the parents? Did the businessman like or respect his partners? No. There were only disturbed feelings between them. There was no affection; it was "unaffection." Was there attachment to the hurtful memories? Yes, powerful clinging to the past and frequent mental rehashing of unsavory events.

I call this common condition "unaffectionate attachment." It's a state of mind filled with bitterness, misunderstandings, bad memories and even grudges. Anyone can fall into this abyss. Some live there throughout life. On the spiritual path, our goal is to remain free of such burdens. So, if we become overwhelmed by past acrimonies, we need to learn how to extract ourself.

My Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, emphasized the art of working with the mind's natural tendencies as a fundamental part of spiritual life. "When the aspirant is able to meet ordinary happenings and respond to them in the effortless wisdom born of detachment, that indicates that his striving is genuine. When he is able to encounter conditions that send ordinary people into states of disappointment or discouragement and when his emotional nature indicates mastery over these lesser states of consciousness, he is well on his way toward filling the gaps of a natural growth of the instinctive vehicles—body, emotions and intellect."

To maintain equilibrium on the path, we need to clear the subconscious mind of such negative attachments. Significant "unaffectionate attachments" in the subconscious will cause the mind to constantly dwell on the past. It's not hard to see how this hampers our creativity and progress in the present, diminishing our quality of life. One of the victims is our ability to meditate. Unresolved emotional issues in the subconscious can make it impossible to quiet the thinking process when sitting for meditation. In his *Yoga Sutras*, sage Patanjali describes these blockages as externalizing samskaras that need to be transformed. My guru gave specific practices for removing them from the mind. The primary method he gave is *vasana daha tantra*, known as journaling in Western terminology. He defined it as writing down the events that trouble us and then burning the paper in an ordinary, non-ceremonial fire. Watching our concerns, our hurts and negative recollections disappear in the flames is cathartic, impressing the mind with the possibility of riddance of past traumas. We can even write and burn letters to people we hold animosity against. This simple practice is effective in removing from the subconscious mind unaffectionate attachments to past experiences. It needs to be said that we don't forget those past hurts and unfairnesses. Rather, the negative emotion is dissolved, released or burned away. Watching the paper burn is helpful in achieving this result. For deep-seated hurts, the writing and burning may need to be repeated several times.

For powerfully traumatic memories, such as being beaten frequently by a parent, simply writing it down may not be sufficient. The negative impression, or samskara, may be so deep that you have to do something physical to achieve release. For such instances, Gurudeva has given the flower *prayashchitta*, or penance. It consists of putting up in the shrine room a picture of the person you are resenting and then every day for 31 days placing a flower in front of the picture while sincerely forgiving him or her.

What happens when we perform practices like vasana daha tantra and the flower penance? We arrive at stage two, "unaffectionate detachment." We still don't like the person, but at least we are not thinking negatively about them all the time. We have partially detached ourselves. We may have no fondness, no love, but we are no longer dwelling endlessly on the past, no longer resentful. We have understood the situation.

Returning to our movie example, in the next scene the mother responds to the daughter's outburst, "I did the best I could in raising you." Suddenly the daughter accepts that her mother had her own challenges and was not perfect. She realizes it was unrealistic for her to expect a perfect childhood. They had now reached an understanding that released the attachment. But, still, it didn't awaken affection. They maintained a cold relationship.

Of course, that is not the goal. The goal is "affectionate detachment." Early in his ministry, Gurudeva gave a deceptively simple method to reach this next level: "The best way to keep the *actinic* (spiritual) force flowing through the physical body is practicing the art of giving—doing little things for others you have not been asked to do."



SHUTTERSTOCK

Burning the past: *One way to resolve hurts and hard feelings is to perform vasana daha tantra. This discipline calls for writing down unresolved experiences from our past and burning them in a simple pit or cauldron.*

That's not difficult, right? Try it yourself and you will find that, yes, it does work. It actually takes us from unaffectionate detachment to affectionate detachment. It builds up love and good feelings toward those to whom we had hard feelings in the past. Of course, one act of giving doesn't change everything. But repeated over and over again—offering little gifts, doing things for others that they don't anticipate—changes the feelings between people. It creates more love, more kindness and warmth.

This is an important practice to incorporate as a perpetual behavior, because life always gives us the opportunity to develop new hard feelings. Harmony is something we have to work at the rest of our life, because we will be interacting with people the rest of our life. For those on the spiritual path, getting along with people, ensuring that new hard feelings don't develop, is an essential part of karma management.

The resultant harmony is empowering, but Gurudeva takes it even further. He says that giving "eventually leads to greater actinic understanding." That means we not only have good, kind feelings about others but we also understand their nature better. Part of the reason we don't get along with some people is that we don't understand them. A natural assumption is that "everyone is like me." In reality, you may not meet anyone just like you your whole life. People are different, sometimes very different. If we are unaware of or fail to appreciate such differences, misunderstandings and hard feelings can arise. Our attitudes and interactions naturally improve when we are sensitive to the differences, needs and limitations of others.

When the attitude of affectionate detachment is the daily norm, not only do we have kindly feelings toward others; we also understand them in an intuitive, actinic way. It is not an intellectual analysis. It is an intuitive sense of who a person is, what karmas he or she has brought into this life. And because we appreciate that person's nature, we make allowances and get along with them better.

That completes the process of achieving affectionate detachment. We start with unaffectionate attachment and then move to unaffectionate detachment. From there we move to affectionate detachment, which comes in two stages. The first stage is expressing more love and kindness towards others. The second stage is understanding others more clearly, cognizing the nature of family, friends and acquaintances in an intuitive way, from the inside out, and therefore loving them more and being able to get along with them better. The deeper truth is that we are learning about ourself the whole time, and our inner changes are reflected in our relationships.

Giving's Secret Gifts

Consistently contributing to your religion has the power to draw spiritual fulfillment and material wealth into your life

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



GIVING, KNOWN AS *dana* IN SANSKRIT, is built into all aspects of Hindu life—giving to the holy man, giving to the temple, giving to the astrologer, giving to the teacher, giving to a swami or a satguru for his support, over and above all routine giving to his institution. The *Tirukural*, an ancient South Indian ethical scripture, says, "The foremost duty of family life is to serve duly these five: God, guests, kindred, ancestors and oneself." This is understood by all Hindus. However, the idea that giving can be a powerful tool for attracting financial abundance is an idea that many Hindus do not have in mind.

In two verses in its chapter on hospitality, the *Tirukural* provides compelling reasons for giving: "If a man cares daily for those who come to him, his life will never suffer the grievous ruin of poverty." "Those who never sacrifice to care for guests will later lament: 'We hoarded wealth, estranged ourselves, now none will care for us.'"

Materialistic thinking holds that if we hoard all the wealth we get, we will end up with more riches in life's full season. The *Tirukural* is saying the opposite: If you use your wealth to help others and care for guests, you will prosper more than if you hoarded it. Why is this? Because if we generously give to others, we will—by karma's unfailing law—attract more wealth in this and future lives.

The merit we earn through giving to others comes back to us through attracting abundance in the future. The Tamil word *punniyavan* relates to this idea. It has a double meaning: "a person of great religious merit" and "a lucky person." This concept also appears in astrological readings in which it is clear that an individual will easily attract abundance because of the good he did in past incarnations, such as in this assessment from a computerized chart: "This is an intelligent devotee, born to get money effortlessly due to past life merit." Clearly our ability to attract lasting financial abundance is directly related to the amount of religious merit we have accrued through our previous good deeds. But not all wealth comes through good deeds, and people do become rich in unrighteous ways. The *Tirukural* speaks of such wealth: "A fortune amassed by fraud may appear to prosper but will all too soon perish altogether."

It is easy to see other practical advantages of giving, too. Our reputation grows in the community. Our circle of friends expands. We become someone people want to associate with, want to do business with and, yes, want to give to. That doesn't happen with people who are stingy and selfish.

A third verse from the *Tirukural* shares another secret about giving: "Charity's merit cannot be measured by gifts given. It is measured by measuring the receiver's merits." What a brilliant insight, and so counter to common thinking. It is natural to presume that giving one hundred dollars would create more merit than giving fifty dollars. But the saint tells us it's not just about the money, it's also about the merit of the recipient. Giving a little to a man of great spiritual attainment is more meritorious than giving a lot to an ordinary beggar.

My satguru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, spoke of this concept: "Karma is an unfailing natural law, simply explained by this example: Give a beggar 10 rupees. You are not giving, you are investing in your future. Somehow 20 rupees will find its way back to you. He has given you the opportunity to give. When we give expecting to receive, the law will still work, but if we give 10 rupees, we get back 10 rupees. Unselfish giving doubles the return. Giving to a temple is different again; every 10 rupees given brings back 100 rupees in return. God pays a better interest. Giving is an investment in the future; it is not parting with something."

We can learn more about charity's efficacy from a story I heard about the Nattukottai Chettiars at Palani Hills Temple, an account documented in the temple's palm-leaf manuscripts. It begins around 1600 with the arrival in Palani township of Kumarappan from Chettinad district in India's southern region. Kumarappan was the first merchant to establish a salt trade in the region of Palani. He stayed in the house of the Palani Temple priest and operated his business in the nearby street. From the beginning, he marked up his margin of profit by one-eighth and gave the markup as a *makimai* offering to the Deity of Palani Temple, Lord Velayutha. *Makimai* is a Tamil word for a donation to charity consisting of a fixed percentage of profit, income or harvested crops.

Kumarappan's donations were used, in part, to buy food that was prepared by the priest's wife and offered to the Deity by the priest. So successful was he that four years later he brought five more salt traders to Palani. All followed his example of tithing to the temple, and all flourished. News of their success reached the Pandyan king in Madurai, and Isaniya Sivachariar, the king's guru and chief Saivite priest of South India, at whose behest Kumarappan established an annual pilgrimage to Palani, which is popular to this day. Later, when entrusted with managing all funds donated to the temple, he established an endowment to provide food and shelter for pilgrims. Not only did the salt trader's generosity bring him and his clan material success and social prominence, it supported pilgrims and built up the resources of Palani Hills Temple, so much so that today it is one of India's richest temples.



Giving to God: *A husband and wife, having flourished in life, credit their religion for the abundance that has come to them. Each month they bring one-tenth of their income, placing it at the feet of Dakshinamurti. It is their way of supporting the temple that has been their refuge and the swamis (behind) who have guided them on the path.*

How can we determine how much to give to religious endeavors? One guideline for this comes from the *Dharma Shastras*, which caution that a householder should never give gifts beyond his means and should not make his family and dependents suffer on account of his generosity. In his *Hindu Encyclopedia*, Swami Harshananda notes that these shastras suggest ten percent of earnings as a general guideline, and they extol giving as a sacred act that helps earn religious merit and conquer greed.

Our own Saiva Siddhanta Church has, at its core, a membership that gives ten percent of their gross income to the support of our mission, monastery and monks. But we are not alone. Consider this verse still followed today by members of the Gujarat-based BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, written some two hundred years ago by Bhagwan Swaminarayan: "My disciples shall give in donation one-tenth of their income, or food grains, if that be their agricultural income, in the service of Lord Krishna." BAPS is one of Hinduism's most wealthy and dynamic spiritual institutions. How much stronger and more effective would Hinduism be if all Hindus followed these examples and tithed to the institution of their choice?

A useful way to assess the extent of one's means to give is to create (if you don't already have one) a detailed monthly household budget showing income and all the major categories of expense, such as rent or mortgage, transportation, food, clothing and religious giving. No matter if your income is small or large, a valid approach is to start with a modest monthly donation to your favorite religious institution that easily fits into your budget.

As that regular giving accrues merit, which in turn attracts more abundance into your life, you will be able to periodically increase the amount of your religious donations up to the ideal of ten percent. Some individuals may have the ability to give more than ten percent, such as those who are single or those who are self-employed, as exemplified by our salt merchant, Kumarappan.

The best way to approach religious giving is to make it the first expense when you receive your paycheck. This has a number of advantages. 1) You do not forget to make your donation. 2) You do not spend that money on yourself and find you are unable to give to your religion this month. 3) Because you have made the religious donation your first priority, you become more conservative when faced with buying unnecessary or frivolous things.

Many Hindus do not give in a systematic way to the Hindu institution they support, such as a local temple or ashram. Instead, they wait to be asked for a donation, which they then willingly give. Compare this to setting aside money for retirement. How many people rely on their investment manager to call and remind them to send in funds for their retirement account? None. Disciplined people are consistent in contributing monthly to their retirement savings, without being reminded, because they know they will benefit from it. Similarly, it is beneficial both to yourself and the institution you support to be just as regular in your charitable giving, and not wait to be asked. You benefit, because your religion is strengthened, and you don't miss months when you weren't reminded and thereby lose the merit of that giving. And the institution benefits by receiving a steady, reliable stream of income.

In conclusion, consistent, ardent giving to religious institutions, to God, is a duty of all Hindus. The abundance of merit you earn by giving regularly and generously creates for you—through the law of karma—greater spiritual rewards, worldly success and financial abundance in this and future lives.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Yoga

- Which Yoga Should I Follow?
- Surrender Is Central to All Yogas
- Can Everyone Benefit from Yoga?
- The World Is an Ashram
- Four Ways We View the World

Insect egg, by Martin Oeggerti

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Which Yoga Should I Follow?

Exploring four popular approaches to four spiritual regimens: karma yoga, bhakti yoga, raja yoga and jnana yoga

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



IN MODERN HINDU TEXTS, THE MOST COMMON summary of Hindu spiritual practice is the system of four yogas: *karma* (action), *bhakti* (devotion), *raja* (meditation) and *jnana* (knowledge). Let's start with a short description of each and then ponder the question, "Which yoga or yogas should I pursue at this time?"

Karma yoga is the path of action. It begins with refraining from what should not be done. Next we seek to renounce actions motivated solely by selfish desires, those actions that benefit only ourselves. Then comes the desire to conscientiously fulfill our duties in life. An important aspect of karma yoga is performing selfless service to help others. When we are successful, our work is transformed into worship. My paramaguru, Yogaswami of Sri Lanka, captured the essence of this ideal when he said, "All work must be done with the aim of reaching God."

Bhakti yoga is the path of devotion to and love of God. Practice focuses on listening to stories about God, singing devotional hymns, pilgrimage, intoning a mantra and worshiping in temples and one's home shrine. The fruition of bhakti yoga is an ever-closer rapport with the Divine, developing qualities that make communion possible—love, selflessness and purity—eventually leading to prapatti, self-effacement and total surrender to God. My guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, gave this insightful description: "God is love, and to love God is the pure path prescribed in the *Agamas* (a category of revealed scripture). Veritably, these texts are God's own voice admonishing the *samsari*, reincarnation's wanderer, to give up love of the transient and adore instead the Immortal. How to love the Divine, when and where, with what mantras and visualizations and at what auspicious times, all this is preserved in the *Agamas*."

Raja yoga is the path of meditation. It is a system of eight progressive stages of practice: ethical restraints, religious observances, posture, breath control, withdrawal, concentration, meditation and enstasy, or mystic oneness. The focus is on restraining the modifications of the mind so that our awareness—which usually takes on the forms of the mind's modifications—can abide in its essential form. The restraint of these modifications is achieved through practice and detachment. My guru used the term consciousness to explain the modifications of the mind: "Consciousness and awareness are the same when awareness is totally identified with and attached to that which it is aware of. To separate the two is the artful practice of yoga."

Jnana yoga is the path of knowledge. It involves philosophical study and discrimination between the Real and the unreal. Though the word jnana is derived from the verbal root *jñā*, which simply means knowing, it has a higher philosophical connotation. It is not only intellectual knowledge but also intuitive experience. It starts with the former and ends with the latter. Jnana yoga consists of three progressive practices: *shravana* (listening to scripture); *manana*—thinking and reflecting; and *nididhyasana*—constant and profound meditation. Four great sayings from the *Upanishads* are often the subject of reflection: "Consciousness is Brahman;" "That thou art;" "This Self is Brahman;" and "I am Brahman." Swami Chinmayananda, founder of Chinmaya Mission, taught: "The goal of jnana yoga is, through discrimination, to differentiate between the Real and the unreal and finally come to realize one's identity with the Supreme Reality."

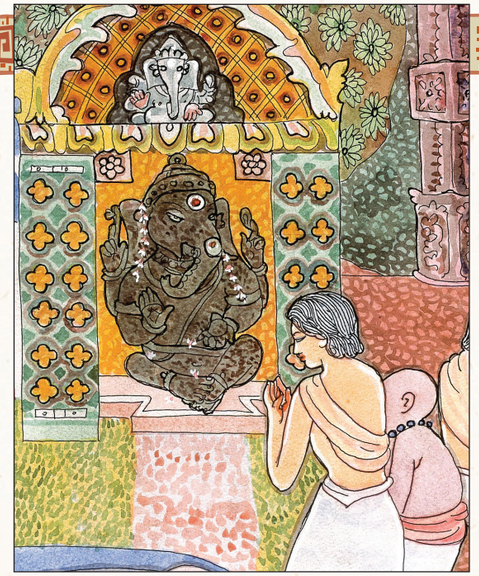
Having looked in brief at each of the four primary yogas, let's focus on how they are approached in various schools of thought. This may help you to choose the yoga (or yogas) that is right for you to practice at this state of your spiritual unfoldment.

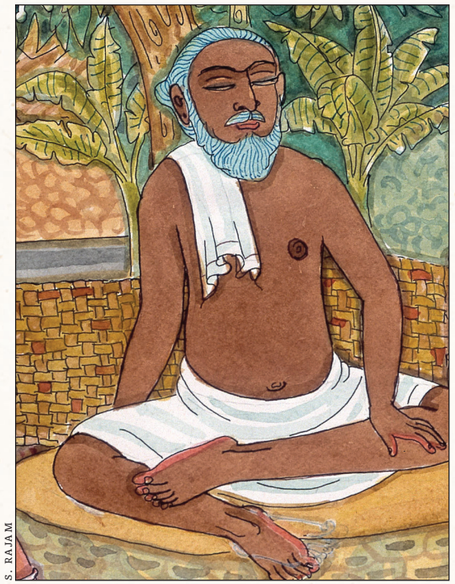
The first and most widely known approach is to choose one of the yogas based on your temperament. The Vedanta Society of Southern California puts forth this approach on its website: "Spiritual aspirants can be broadly classified into four psychological types: the predominantly emotional, the predominantly intellectual, the physically active, the meditative. There are four primary yogas designated to 'fit' each psychological type." In this approach, bhakti yoga is recommended for the predominantly emotional, jnana yoga for the intellectual, karma yoga for the physically active and raja yoga for the meditative person.

However, it is sometimes advised that seekers who are intellectually inclined should stay away from jnana yoga. Linda Johnson explains this in her book *Hinduism for Idiots*. "Think you're smart? Surprisingly, Hindu gurus often advise bright people to take up the path of devotion, not jnana yoga. That's because very intelligent people often benefit more by learning to open their hearts. Jnana yoga is not so much for intellectuals as for people with a strongly developed mystical sense and a burning desire for the actual experience of God Realization."

A second approach is to choose one of the yogas as your primary focus based on your temperament but to also practice the other three yogas in a secondary way. Swami Sivananda, founder of the Divine Life Society, maintained that though seekers naturally gravitate toward one path, the lessons of each of the paths must be integrated by every seeker if true wisdom is to be attained. The motto of his organization is, "Serve, Love, Meditate, Realize," referring respectively to the four yogas: karma, bhakti, raja and jnana.







S. RAJAM



Progressive stages: *The four yogas, clockwise from upper left: In the karma yoga stage, seekers till the land; in bhakti yoga, the Deities are worshiped; in jnana yoga, wisdom is unfolded through perfect discrimination; in raja yoga, the senses are withdrawn.*

A third approach emphasizes that one or another of the four yogas is the highest path and should be followed by everyone. It is common for Vaishnava organizations to put forth bhakti yoga, or devotional practices, as the path for all followers. That is to say, Vaishnavism focuses on self-transcending love and surrender as the principal means of liberation. In addition, karma yoga is advised as a purificatory preparation for the practices of devotion. Sri Ramanuja states that in preparation for meditation, or the contemplative remembrance of the Divine, one should engage in karma yoga.

Some Vedantic traditions put forth jnana yoga as the path for all. For example, in the Smarta tradition of Adi Shankara, karma yoga is performed as a preliminary sadhana leading one to jnana yoga, which is defined as meditation based on philosophical discrimination. This idea is found in Shankara's *Vivekachudamani*: "Work is for the purification of the mind, not for the perception of Reality. The realization of Truth is caused by discrimination, not in the least by ten millions of acts."

A fourth approach is that the practice of karma yoga, bhakti yoga and raja yoga constitute a prerequisite for taking up jnana yoga, or experiencing unity with God, enlightenment. Swami Ramakrishnananda of the Vishwa Dharma Mandalam in New York City wrote: "Before delving into jnana yoga, it is important that a disciple grows and develops in service, or karma yoga, in devotion to God, or bhakti yoga, and in meditation, or raja yoga, because in studying this philosophy without preparation one risks transforming oneself into a 'lip Vedantist,' a person who talks about that which he does not truly know."

Swami Vishnudevananda of Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres propounded a similar idea: "Before practicing jnana yoga, the aspirant needs to have integrated the lessons of the other yogic paths—for without selflessness and love of God, strength of body and mind, the search for Self Realization can become mere idle speculation."

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami saw wisdom in this fourth approach. He stated, "Karma yoga and bhakti yoga are the necessary prelude to the higher philosophies and practices." In fact, he taught that the yogas (or padas) are cumulative stages. Moreover, none should be abandoned as one advances on the path. About bhakti, he said, "We never outgrow temple worship. It simply becomes more profound and meaningful as we progress through four spiritual levels. In [karma yoga or] the charya pada, the stage of selfless service, we attend the temple because we have to, because it is expected of us. In the kriya pada [bhakti], the stage of worshipful sadhanas, we attend because we want to; our love of God is the motivation. In the yoga pada, we worship God internally, in the sanctum of the heart; yet even the yogi immersed in the superconscious depths of mind has not outgrown the temple. It is there—God's home on the earth plane—when the yogi returns to normal consciousness. So perfect is the temple worship of those who have traversed the jnana pada that they themselves become worship's object—living, moving temples."

Confused as to which yoga or yogas to choose? Of course if you have a teacher, this is an excellent point of discussion to have with him or her. If you don't have a teacher, then a conservative approach is to work first on karma yoga and bhakti yoga. These yogas work swiftly with the ego and clear all-important barriers to deeper realization, barriers too many neglect to resolve on the path. The benefits of their practice include a slow purification of the mind, developing of greater humility and selflessness and a growing sense of devotion and certainty that all our actions are steadily moving us closer to God.

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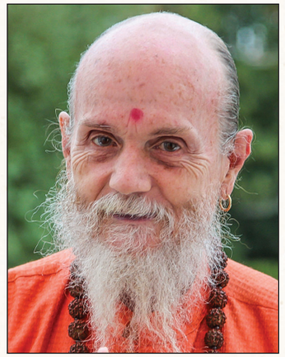
Surrender Is Central to All Yogas

It is perhaps a great cosmic irony that to attain our immortal Self we must relinquish our personal self

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE NOT RELIGIOUS MAKE progress toward achieving their goals in life by self-effort. Whatever they accomplish is, from their perspective, solely the result of what they do to achieve it. People who are religious have another factor in their life—the help of divine forces. Even in Buddhism, which does not recognize a Supreme Being, the idea of surrendering to a higher power is present, as followers take refuge in the Buddha, the teachings and the brotherhood. Religious individuals invite blessings into their lives by practicing self-surrender, humble submission or taking refuge in the Divine.

Before individuals have surrendered to the Divine, their free will is likely an expression of their instinctive nature, focused on accomplishing what they desire, which often entangles them more in the world. If that instinctive willfulness is thwarted or they fail to achieve their goals, the reaction is often frustration and anger. Fear and worry are also commonly experienced. Devotees who have surrendered to Ishvara, God as a person, no longer become angry or live in fear or worry. As my Gurudeva wrote,"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."

Devotion in Bhakti Yoga

When looking at self-surrender within Hinduism, it is natural to think first of bhakti yoga. In fact, an alternate term for bhakti yoga is *sharanagati yoga*, the yoga of self-surrender. This is the practice of devotional disciplines, worship, prayer, chanting and singing with the aim of awakening love in the heart and opening oneself to God's grace. Such practices are done at the temple, in nature and in the home shrine. Bhakti yoga seeks communion and ever closer rapport with the Divine, nurturing qualities—such as love, selflessness and purity—that make such a profound relationship possible.

In Hinduism, the soul comes closer and closer to God through these practices. In Vaishnavism, the devotee is seen as progressing through five levels of relationship with God: neutrality, servitude, friendship, parental affections, and belovedness. Saivism has a similar paradigm for the relationships between jiva and Siva. The final stage is called *prapatti* or *atmanivedana*, defined as unconditional submission to God.

My guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, shared: "You might ask how you can love something you cannot see. Yet, the Gods can be and are seen by mature souls through an inner perception they have awakened. This psychic awakening is the first initiation into religion. Every Hindu devotee can sense the Gods, even if he cannot yet inwardly see them. This is possible through the subtle feeling nature. He can feel the presence of the Gods within the temple, and he can indirectly see their influence in his life."

Devotion in Karma Yoga

While most commentators agree that surrender is central to bhakti yoga, few acknowledge its importance in karma and raja yoga. Karma yoga is the path of service and sacred action. In its most profound sense, it is performing all actions in a spiritual manner, as a conscious offering to the Divine. This can be conceived of as worshiping God by serving all beings as His living manifestations. The fruit of all action is surrendered as service to the Lord, a concept known as *Ishwara arpana buddhi* in Sanskrit.

Normally karma yoga is done at a temple or ashram, but it is wise to extend service as widely in your life as you can, such as helping others in your workplace, performing beyond what is expected, willingly and without complaint. Performing menial tasks in the home, temple or ashram is an effective way to restrain pride and nurture humility. Practically speaking, this can include washing dishes, laundering clothes, caring for the kitchen and bathrooms, working in the gardens, washing the windows and sweeping the paths—all without seeking or expecting praise.

Performing our work with the aim of reaching God naturally leads to the perspective that each task is an offering to the Lord. Every act, from the grandest to the lowliest, becomes a sacred rite. Work is worship. The whole of life is sanctified, and the conflict between secular and spiritual ceases to exist.

Karma yoga can ultimately lead to the realization that the universe is all the action of God. This insight gives the perspective of not merely renouncing the fruit of action but also surrendering the sense of being the doer. My Gurudeva shares an insight on this: "Having the Self as a point of reference and not the material things, with the life force constantly flooding through these nerve currents, you are actually seeing what you are doing as part of the cosmic dance of Siva [Ishvara], as the energy of Siva flows in and through you." Paramaguru Yogaswami put it simply in one of his four great sayings: "Siva is doing it all."



S. RAJAM

Perfect surrender: *Two devotees, graced with a vision of God Siva as an infinite pillar of light, rush to humble themselves before the Source of all.*

Devotion in Raja Yoga

Surrender has a seldom-recognized place in raja yoga as well, as Patanjali noted in his *Yoga Sutras*. Raja yoga begins with ethical restraints and religious observances followed by ever-deepening stages of concentration, meditation and contemplation. Samadhi is the goal of yoga, a oneness between the meditator and the object of meditation, and surrendering to God, to Ishvara, is the key to attaining it. Patanjali speaks of it as *Ishvara pranidhana*, the fifth essential observance (niyama), the surrender of our limited self-identity to the infinite perfection of Ishvara, the source of the yoga teachings. This surrender is the acceptance of God's perfection and our desire to be influenced by that as we progress on the yoga path. We seek divine blessings, wisdom and ultimately union, samadhi, through the grace of the adi (first) guru of yoga.

Before developing Ishvara pranidhana, progress in yoga is self-centered. We think, "I am making yogic progress through my striving and dispassion." Ishvara pranidhana supplements such effort with reliance on Ishvara to bestow the ultimate grace called samadhi.

Swami Hariharananda Aranya interprets Patanjali's thinking: "Through contemplation on God as on a liberated being, the mind in the normal course also becomes calm and thereby concentrated. From knowledge derived through such concentration, the spiritual needs of a yogin are met."

Let us compare this to taking a test in school. If you were to simply study and take the test, you would get a B+. However, by also sincerely seeking God's blessings, you do better and earn an A. In all complex fields, an individual can only go so far on his or her own. To truly master any discipline, a qualified teacher or coach is needed. What better teacher for raja yoga than its progenitor and first guru—Ishvara? Taking Ishvara as your teacher is done through the practice of Ishvara pranidhana.

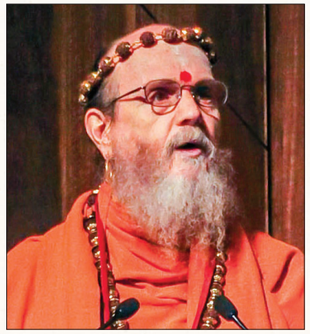
My guru gives an insightful description of how the advanced meditator practices self-surrender, or giving up, while experiencing God's absolute state (Si) and God's all-pervading consciousness (Va): "While in a dual state of assuming some personal identity, he states, 'Siva's will be done,' as his new and most refined sadhana of giving up the last of personal worldliness to the perfect timing of the infinite conglomerate of force and non-force within him. This he says as a mantra unto himself when he sees and hears in the external world. But when eyes and ears are closed, through the transmuted power of his will he merges into the samadhi of Va and Si and Si and Va, experiencing Reality as himself and himself as Reality."

As we have shown, surrender is present in three major yogas: bhakti, karma and raja. Its role is central to realizing the deepest attainments of all three disciplines. It is perhaps an irony that to attain our immortal Self we must relinquish our personal self.

Can Everyone Benefit from Yoga?

While openly available, yoga is rooted in Hindu scripture, teaches Hindu practices and leads to oneness with God. Practice with caution!

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



One of the events we were privileged to participate in at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Melbourne was an interreligious panel entitled "Practicing Yoga: Covert Conversion to Hinduism or the Key to Mind-Body Wellness for All?" At this largest-ever interfaith gathering, many panels, including this one, focused on the interface of cultures and religions. With yoga becoming so popular in the world, it was a natural candidate for reflection, and the results were, as you will see, fascinating. The Parliament defined the issue and points of discussion thusly:

"The science of yoga has grown enormously on the global stage in the last few decades due to widespread recognition of its physical and mental health benefits. Hinduism teaches that yoga is comprised of eight steps, of which the popularly practiced postures are an integral part. Although yoga's origins are Hindu, its practitioners come from virtually all faiths. The United States alone has about 20 million practitioners, with hundreds of millions worldwide. However, the Hindu roots of yoga and the use of Hindu chants, such as the sacred syllable 'Om,' appear to have created apprehensions that the practice of yoga leads to de facto conversion to Hinduism. Yet, as a pluralistic, non-exclusivist and non-proselytizing religion, Hinduism teaches that one need not become a Hindu or repudiate one's own faith to practice yoga and reap its benefits. How founded is the fear of conversion? Is the practice of yoga inconsistent with the tenets of other religions? Can interfaith dialogue help individuals, irrespective of faith, reap the immense benefits that follow from the practice of yoga? The aim of this program is to foster understanding among faith traditions and to create a sustainable basis for the practice of yoga by all."

Rev. Ellen Grace O'Brian, Spiritual Director of the Center for Spiritual Enlightenment and a minister in the kriya yoga tradition, moderated the panel discussion. Five panelists presented diverse viewpoints. Dr. Amir Farid Isahak, a practicing Malaysian Sufi, said that, in his interpretation, yoga can be practiced by Sufis without compromising their religion, provided they are careful about which practices they choose and as long as they focus on a goal of achieving proximity to God, but not unity. Professor Christopher Key Chapple shared information on the philosophical goals of yoga as expounded in Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*. He also spoke of the presence of yoga in Jainism and Buddhism, to demonstrate that long ago yoga moved beyond the boundaries of Hinduism.

Leigh Blashki of the Australian Institute of Yoga stressed that yoga practice should be not divorced from the spiritual disciplines that are its core. Suhag Shukla, a Hindu who grew up in the US and is now a board member of the Hindu American Foundation, was adamant that yoga and its path of meditation are vital Hindu practices, integral to the religion. My presentation noted that today most popular yoga schools present yoga as a path of unitive mysticism, a meditative regimen that ultimately leads to experiencing the soul's oneness with God. Here is my summary of the issue.

Yoga: Unitive Mysticism

The term yoga refers to a wide variety of Hindu practices. Therefore, it is always helpful when discussing yoga to modify the word with a second term to clarify what particular kind of yoga is being discussed. The yoga that is the subject of this panel is commonly referred to as *ashtanga yoga*. *Ashta* means eight, and *anga* means limb. The idea is that this system of yoga comprises eight progressive practices. Sage Patanjali is credited with being the first person to present the ancient tradition of yoga in a systematic way. He did this in his *Yoga Sutras*, a famous literary work thought to date back as far as 200 bce. For simplicity, when I use the word yoga in this presentation, I am referring to ashtanga yoga.

Vamadeva Shastri, a respected author on yoga, astrology and ayurveda, rightly states that the meditative side of yoga is little known: "Yoga today is most known for its asana (yogic posture) tradition—the most popular, visible and outward form of the system. Buddhism, by comparison, is known as a tradition of meditation, as in the more popular forms of Buddhist meditation like Zen and Vipassana. Many people who have studied yoga in the West look to Buddhist teachings for meditation practices, not realizing that there are yogic and Vedantic forms of meditation which are traditionally not only part of the yogic system but its core teaching! In the *Yoga Sutras*, only three sutras out of two hundred deal with asana. The great majority deal with meditation, its theory and results."

To understand yoga's meditative aspect, it is helpful to look briefly at each of the eight limbs or categories of practice. The first limb is *yama*, the ethical restraints, of which the most important is ahimsa, noninjuriousness. The second limb is *niyama*, specific religious observances, including puja in one's home shrine and repeating mantras. The third limb is asana, the yogic postures that are so widely practiced as a regimen called hatha yoga. The remaining five limbs are all related to meditation: *pranayama*, breath control; *pratyahara*, sense withdrawal; *dharana*, concentration; *dhyana*, meditation; and *samadhi*, enstasy, or oneness with God.

Sometimes it is said that the roots of yoga are Hindu. To develop this botanical metaphor more fully, I would affirm that, yes, the roots of yoga, its scriptural origins, are Hindu. But the stem of yoga, its practice, is also Hindu. The flower of yoga, mystical union, is also Hindu. In other words, yoga, in its full glory, is a vital part of modern Hinduism.

Yoga is practiced on a large scale in Hindu communities around the globe. The fact that yoga is also pursued by many non-Hindus does not negate it as a Hindu practice. Let's draw a parallel to Vipassana, the popular Buddhist meditative system. The practice of Vipassana by those who are not Buddhist does not lessen the fact that Vipassana is a Buddhist practice, not merely a practice that has its origins in Buddhism.

Can non-Hindus Benefit from yoga? Clearly, more and more people today, including adherents of other religions, are convinced that this is possible. Take, for example, the title of an opinion piece in an August 2009 edition of *Newsweek*: "We're All Hindus Now." The article quotes the view of Stephen Prothero, religion professor at Boston University, on the American propensity for "the divine-deli-cafeteria religion." He states: "You're not picking and choosing from different religions because they're all the same. It isn't about orthodoxy. It's about whatever works. If going to yoga works, great—and if going to Catholic mass works, great. And if going to Catholic mass plus the yoga plus the Buddhist retreat works, that's great, too."

However, it is equally true that the leaders of some religions have spoken out strongly against the practice of yoga by their followers. For example, the Vatican has issued a number of warnings to Catholics about yoga over the years. In 1989 it warned that practices like Zen and yoga can "degenerate into a cult of the body" that debases Christian prayer. Further, the Church leaders cautioned, "The love of God, the sole object of Christian contemplation, is a reality which cannot be 'mastered' by any method or technique."

In 2008 the leading Islamic council in Malaysia issued an edict prohibiting the country's Muslims from indulging in the practice of yoga, fearing its Hindu roots could corrupt them. The council's chairman, Abdul Shukor Husim, explained the decision: "We are of the view that yoga, which originates in Hinduism, combines a physical exercise, religious elements, chanting and worshiping for the purpose of achieving inner peace and ultimately to be at one with God. For us, yoga destroys a Muslim's faith. There are other ways to get exercise. You can go cycling, swimming."

In a search on the web, another informative example turned up. In 2001 the Reverend Richard Farr, vicar of St Mary's church in Henham, England, made a decision that became the talk of the Essex village and beyond: he banned a 16-strong group of yoga enthusiasts



HINDUISM TODAY

Yoga panelists: *(left to right) Rev Ellen Grace O'Brian of the Center for Spiritual Enlightenment in San Jose, California; Suhag Shukla, Esq., legal counsel for the Hindu American Foundation; Professor Christopher Key Chapple of Loyola-Marymount University; Leigh Blashki, director of the Australian Institute of Yoga; Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, publisher of Hinduism Today magazine in Hawaii; Dr. Amir Farid Isahak, a Qigong and Reiki Master of Malaysia.*

from taking lessons in his church hall. Yoga is, he said, an un-Christian practice: "I accept that for some people it is simply an exercise. But it is also often a gateway into other spiritualities, including Eastern mysticism."

The Christian and Muslim leaders we cite as examples stated no concerns that the practice of yoga might result in conversion to Hinduism. However, all three expressed the concern that yoga practice is in conflict with the tenets of their religions. As Abdul Husim expressed it, "Yoga destroys a Muslim's faith."

This predictably raises the question, "What are the tenets of yoga?" We find an authoritative answer in the teachings of B.K.S. Iyengar, one of the most renowned modern teachers of yoga. His system, known as Iyengar Yoga, is widely popular, as evidenced by the thousands of teachers listed on his website. There, in answer to his most frequently asked question, "What is yoga?" he states, "Yoga is one of the six systems of Indian philosophy. The word *yoga* originates from the Sanskrit root *yuj,* which means 'union.' On the spiritual plane, it means union of the Individual Self with the Universal Self. Sage Patanjali penned down this subject in his treatise known as *Yoga Sutras*."

Another popular yoga teacher, Bikram Choudhury, founder of Bikram Yoga, defines it in a similar way on his website, stating that yoga means union of the Individual Soul (Atman) with the Universal Soul (Brahman). He states, "*Atman* and *Brahman* are Hindu ideological terms that are used as a reference for the mind, whereas there truly is only Oneness."

Clearly, it is not just its specific practices, such as chanting the mantra "Om," that make yoga Hindu. It is the philosophy itself. The fact that the goal of yoga philosophy is mystical experience—or, more precisely, a mystical experience of the oneness of the soul with God—is the most central attribute that makes it inherently Hindu.

Conclusion: It is naive to take yoga as a physical system of exercise devoid of its philosophical, spiritual and cultural underpinnings. This profound spiritual discipline is ineluctably rooted in Hindu scripture. It is a path of religious practice on all levels, and its goal is enlightenment, Self Realization. It may not be an advisable practice for followers of religions in which unitive mysticism is unacceptable, as stated by the religious leaders of such faiths. Those who are affiliated with liberal religions and those with no formal religious ties can definitely benefit from the practice of yoga, physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. However, a caution to all who follow the path of yoga: be prepared to become gradually more and more aware of the unity of all that exists!

Yoga has eight limbs: *(Below) To depict raja yoga, artist Rajeev NT has chosen a spritely theme. Four children have found a banyan tree in the forest, with eight branches representing the eight limbs of ashtanga yoga. (Right) Yogi Patanjali meditates in padmasana beneath the holy banyan tree (Ficus bengalensis), with its roots woven deeply into the earth. Its eight limbs, representing the eight stages of yoga, reach for the sky. The illustration reminds us that a yogi must be grounded to soar within. A five-headed serpent, symbolizing the kundalini power, surrounds him.*



RAJEEV NT

Yoga Is One of the Six Classical Hindu Philosophies



PIETER WELTEVREDE

Among the most compelling facts supporting the deep association of yoga with Hinduism is its place as one of the six foundational philosophical systems that have been studied and debated for nearly a millennium. Here is a thumbnail sketch of those schools, known in Sanskrit as the Shad Darshanas ("six perspectives"). There are hundreds of Hindu darshanas, of which six have been distinguished: Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Sankhya, Yoga, Mimamsa and Vedanta. Each was tersely formulated in sutra form by its founder or first well-known exponent and elaborated extensively by other writers. These systems are varied attempts at describing Truth and the path to it. Elements of each form part of the Hindu mosaic today.

Nyaya: "System, rule; logic." A system of logical realism, founded sometime around 300bce by Gautama, known for its systems of logic and epistemology and concerned with the means of acquiring right knowledge. Its tools of enquiry and rules for argumentation were adopted by all schools of Hinduism.

Vaisheshika: "Differentiation," from *vishesha,* "differences." A philosophy founded by Kanada (ca 300bce) teaching that liberation is to be attained through understanding the nature of existence, which is classified in nine basic realities (dravyas): earth, water, light, air, ether, time, space, soul and mind. Nyaya and Vaisheshika are viewed as a complementary pair, with Nyaya emphasizing logic, and Vaisheshika analyzing the nature of the world.

Sankhya: "Enumeration, reckoning." A philosophy founded by sage Kapila (ca 500bce), author of the *Sankhya Sutras.* Sankhya is primarily concerned with "categories of existence," tattvas, which it understands as 25 in number. The first two are the unmanifest Purusha and the manifest primal nature, Prakriti—this male-female polarity is viewed as the fundament of all existence. Prakriti, out of which all things evolve, is the unity of the three *gunas: sattva, rajas* and *tamas.* The Sankhya and Yoga schools are considered an inseparable pair. Their principles permeate all of Hinduism.

Yoga: "Yoking; joining." The ancient tradition of philosophy and practice codified by Patanjali (ca 200bce) in the *Yoga Sutras.* It is also known as *raja* yoga, "king of yogas," or *ashtanga* yoga, "eight-limbed yoga." Its object is to achieve, at will, the cessation of all fluctuations of consciousness, and the attainment of Self Realization. Yoga is wholly dedicated to putting the high philosophy of Hinduism into practice, to achieve personal transformation through transcendental experience, samadhi.

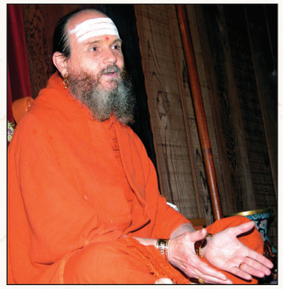
Mimamsa: "Inquiry" (or Purva, "early," Mimamsa). Founded by Jaimini (ca 200bce), author of the *Mimamsa Sutras,* who taught that the correct performance of Vedic rites is the means to salvation.

Vedanta: "End (or culmination) of the *Vedas,*" sometimes termed Uttara ("later") Mimamsa. For Vedanta (the "end," *anta*, of the *Vedas*), the main basis is the *Upanishads* and *Aranyakas*, rather than the hymns and ritual portions of the *Vedas*. The teaching of Vedanta is that there is one Absolute Reality, Brahman. Man is one with Brahman, and the object of life is to realize that truth through right knowledge, intuition and personal experience. The *Vedanta Sutras* (or *Brahma Sutras*) were composed by Rishi Badarayana (ca 400bce).

The World Is an Ashram

Life is demanding and you have no time for spiritual pursuits? Everyday happenings offer abundant opportunities to evolve.

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



In Hinduism we are fortunate to have many God-Realized souls to guide us along the spiritual path. Their teachings are so profound and powerful that they penetrate our normal consciousness and give us new insights into how to live to maximize our spiritual progress.

Our paramaguru, Yogaswami, of Jaffna, Sri Lanka, gave us one such gem when he said, "The world is an ashram, a training ground for the achievement of moksha, liberation."

Yogaswami's statement has a parallel in William Shakespeare's play "As You Like It."

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages.

Here is a paraphrase of Shakespeare's lines, adapted to reflect Yogaswami's spiritual meaning:

All the world's an ashram,
And all the men and women are divine souls;
They are spiritually maturing through earthly experiences,
And one soul in its time takes many births,
And thus evolves into oneness with God.

Let's look more closely at what it means to say that all the world's an ashram. An ashram, of course, is the residence and teaching center of a swami or spiritual preceptor. It is a place we go to learn about our religion and make spiritual progress. When we go out the door of our home to go to work, school or elsewhere, do we have in mind that we are going to an ashram, that our actions during the day in the office, factory, hospital, classroom or elsewhere will help us evolve spiritually and bring us closer to moksha? Probably not. When we come home and reflect back on the day, do we feel we made spiritual progress while out of the home? Probably not. Why is this? It is because we have not been trained to look at life in this way. We think of the ashram as a place of spiritual advancement, and we regard the world as a place of mundane tasks and distractions from our spiritual work. The common idea is that what we do in the ashram, the home shrine or the temple is what brings us spiritual progress, and what we do at the office or in the classroom has nothing to do with our spiritual life.

This common perspective is not the viewpoint of great souls such as Yogaswami. Such souls know that much spiritual progress can be made during our time in the world if we hold the right perspective. I call this approach "spiritualizing daily life." Let's bring this concept down to Earth by dividing the occasions for spiritual progress when out in the world into two categories: facing life's challenges and finding opportunities to serve.

First, let's look at facing life's challenges. Life is going to come to you whether you want it to or not. Joyful, easy times, difficult times, happy days and sad—it is all coming. It is all there, in your karma. It can't help but come. So you don't have to go looking for it. You don't have to go try and do something different. You can't avoid it. You can't hide from it.

Life's challenges will come to us. What is going to happen is going to happen. But where the focus should be, for those on the spiritual path, is on how we respond to these challenges. Why? Because that is where we have a choice. For example, a small infant keeps us awake all night by crying. How do we respond to it? Does it upset us? Do we complain? Or, do we just accept it and respond back with lots of love? In every experience of life we have control over our response. It can be impulsive or thoughtful. It's our choice.

When accused of something that we didn't do, how do we respond? When we face challenges at work—say our boss is unfair with us, yells at us—what is our reaction? We want to yell back, but cannot. So, do we go home and yell at the spouse? In all such cases, we have choices. It is not the challenges that come, but how we face those challenges that makes the difference. We can react emotionally without thinking about spiritual principles. We can get angry or despondent. We can worry a lot and become irritable.

Or we can decide to control any emotional reactions that we might have. We can choose to live without anger. We can choose to cultivate patience. We can choose to be kinder to other people, to be more generous. That is what makes us spiritually stronger. As we curb our instinctive nature, our soul nature shines forth. In other words, if we get angry now and then, let us try and eliminate anger altogether. If we get impatient with people who seem to explain things at great lengths when they could be explained in a short way, let's learn how not to get impatient. Let us learn how to accept that verbosity is their nature.

Here is the list of six common challenges we face in life that provide us with good opportunities for spiritual progress if we respond in a wise manner with self-control.

First Challenge: *Mistreatment by Others.* Life provides us a steady stream of experiences in which we are mistreated by others. Rather than retaliate or hold resentment, we can forgive and respond with kindness.

Second Challenge: *Our Own Mistakes.* When we make a major error, we have a choice to wallow in self-doubt and self-deprecation or to figure out how to not repeat the mistake.

Third Challenge: *Difficult Projects.* When faced with tasks that stretch our abilities, we can do the minimum just to get by or be inspired to do our best by looking at them as opportunities to improve our concentration, willpower and steadfastness, all of which will enhance our meditation abilities and inner striving.



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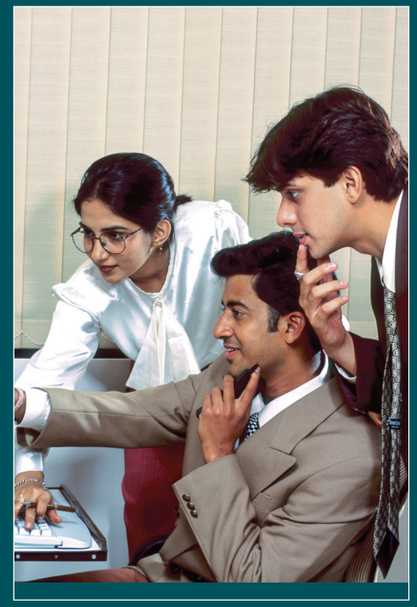


Opportunities are everywhere: *Left: Finding ways to help others in our daily life, however simple the gesture, brings us spiritual rewards. Right: Our daily work, whatever it may be, brings opportunities to learn patience, cooperation, poise and a genuine appreciation for others who share our life and career.*

Fourth Challenge: *Disturbed Emotions.* When we get upset by life's experiences, we have a choice to suffer the emotional upheaval or to strive to pull ourselves out of it as quickly as possible.

Fifth Challenge: *Interpersonal Conflicts.* When serious disagreements, quarrels or arguments occur, we have a choice to hold a grudge and perhaps even shun the person or to resolve the matter and keep the relationship harmonious.

Sixth Challenge: *Gossip and Backbiting.* When those around us indulge in gossip, rumors, backbiting and intrigue, we have a choice to join in or to not participate and even, among those close to us, make it clear that we do not approve.

The second category of occasions for spiritual progress when out in the world is what I call finding opportunities to serve. Here is an introduction to this concept from Gurudeva's *Living with Siva* which beautifully illustrates the idea of spiritualizing daily life through service.

"Go out into the world this week and let your light shine through your kind thoughts, but let each thought manifest itself in a physical deed of doing something for someone else. Lift their burdens just a little bit and, unknowingly perhaps, you may lift something that is burdening your mind. You erase and wipe clean the mirror of your own mind through helping another. We call this karma yoga, the deep practice of unwinding, through service, the selfish, self-centered, egotistical *vasanas* [subconscious inclinations] of the lower nature that have been generated for many, many lives and which bind the soul in darkness. Through service and kindness, you can unwind the subconscious mind and gain a clear understanding of all laws of life. Your soul will shine forth. You will be that peace. You will radiate that inner happiness and be truly secure, simply by practicing being kind in thought, word and deed."

There are many opportunities to help others at home, work, school, in the neighborhood and community. We have developed a list of six simple practices. Let me briefly introduce them.

First Opportunity: *Seeing God in Those We Greet.* When greeting someone, we strive to look deeply enough into them to see God, to see them as a divine being evolving through experience into oneness with God. Our attitude is then naturally helpful and benevolent.

Second Opportunity: *Volunteering.* There are many opportunities each day to step forward and offer to help in ways that are beyond what is required of us. An attitude of humble service diminishes the ego and strengthens our spiritual identity. One important spiritual attitude to hold is to be willing to help when called upon, to not resist or refuse—to be as open to helping others as you are in doing things for yourself.

Third Opportunity: *Expressing Appreciation.* We can uplift and encourage others by sincerely expressing how grateful we are for their help, friendship and importance in our life.

Fourth Opportunity: *Helping Newcomers.* In our modern world, people move around a great deal. Thus there is a steady flow of newcomers at work, at school, in our neighborhood and at our temple. Stepping forward to welcome and help orient them to their new environment is an excellent way to be of service.

Fifth Opportunity: *Offering Hospitality.* Everyone can find creative ways to be hospitable in the home, at school and even at work.

Sixth Opportunity: *Making Encouraging and Complimentary Remarks.* Make a point to say something encouraging and complimentary to everyone you meet. Their day will be brighter because of it, and so will yours.

In conclusion, having a great day needs to mean more than getting a bonus at work or an A on a school test. It should include the spiritual progress you made that day through effectively facing life's challenges and the ways in which you helped and uplifted others. Our list of twelve practices is a good beginning, but hopefully you will keep expanding it as additional insights come from your striving to maximize the spiritual progress you can make from the experiences and opportunities each day brings. Also, parents can teach children to consciously strive for spiritual progress each day at school by facing life's challenges and finding opportunities to serve.

Four Ways We View the World

Meditative, philosophic, scientific and supramundane are dynamic perspectives we can employ every day

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



IN HIS MYSTICAL LANGUAGE OF MEDITATION, CALLED Shum (pronounced shoom), my Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, brought forth a unique insight: four perspectives through which people look at the world. While this is a bit more esoteric and abstract than most Publisher's Desk subjects, I think you will find it interesting and useful. Let me introduce you to these varied ways you can view the cosmos.

1. Shumif: The first perspective is *shumif* (shoomeef), simply defined as awareness flowing through the mind, the mind itself being unmoved. This is the perspective we hold in meditation. Awareness, our identity, is a traveler, able to move freely about, investigating various areas of the mind, like a visitor to the various regions of the United States. If he wants to experience San Francisco, he travels there. If he wants to see Denver, which is much different from San Francisco, he travels there. He is moving, and the cities are stationary. Similarly, in the shumif perspective your awareness is the traveler in the mind, and the various parts of the mind—emotion, thought, intuition—are stationary. One of the goals of meditation is to increase your ability to move freely and at will.

In our ordinary way of thinking and speaking, if we are upset we complain, "I'm upset. That's the way I am. After a while, I probably will be calm again." But from the shumif perspective we say, "My awareness has ended up in the area of the mind that is always upset. Do I want to be here or not? No, this is ruining my day!" So, we affirm, "OK, I don't want to be here," and we apply certain tools for moving to an area of mind that is more wholesome and pleasant. But first we have to have the concept that we can move—that it is within our power to change where we are in the mind. Similarly, if a visitor to the Mojave Desert decides, "It's too hot here for me," he knows he can simply move on.

2. Simnif: The second perspective is called *simnif* (simneef). From this vantage point, the mind is moving, and the intelligence of the person observing remains stationary. Looking through a microscope at a drop of water, what do we see? Movement. You see many different things in motion. You are the stationary observer, and what you see is moving. You are stationary when looking into an ocean and seeing schools of fish moving here and there. That is the perspective of science or any field of knowledge based on the observation of matter. These first two cosmic points of view, shumif and simnif, are exactly opposite.

3. Mulif: The third perspective, *mulif* (mooleef), is philosophical, metaphysical and psychological. Gurudeva gave the following description: "Mulif is the way of words, the way of the scholars of philosophical intellect. It is the perspective of some of the religions of the world. It is the perspective that all realization, all understanding, is worked out within and among people and their minds. In this perspective, one is unaware of the Gods, the three perfections of Lord Siva, the existence of beings on other planets, spacecraft. It is more of a subjective, intellectual perspective as to the nature of the universe, God and man. Realization is often attained in mulif through simply understanding deep philosophical concepts. This would be an intellectual realization, not a spiritual one."

For example, we may talk about the absolute perfection of God—Parasiva or Parabrahman—as timeless, causeless and spaceless. To know and understand such a truth is good philosophy, but it is not the same as experiencing it. To make that distinction is important. Experiencing it is in the shumif perspective. Describing it is in the mulif perspective. Mulif is necessary, philosophy is necessary, because we have to understand intellectually what it is we are trying to experience; but we don't want to accept the concept as the experience itself. As Sage Yogaswami once admonished a scholarly disciple, "It is not in books, you fool."

4. Dimfi: The fourth, *dimfi* (deemfee), is the perspective of space or worlds—inner worlds and outer worlds. Our most common use of dimfi in Hindu practice is in our worship of the Deities in the temple. The Deities abide in the inner worlds. This is the vantage point of theism. The Deity is separate from us; the Deity is greater than we are. Through prayer, we draw forth the blessings of the Deity. That is the spirit of temple worship. It is, as Gurudeva explains, "the focus or consciousness that acknowledges, understands and communicates with God and Gods, beings on the astral plane, people from other planets. It is here that all psychic phenomena take place and the mind is open to all kinds of possibilities, of the extraterrestrial, out-of-body experiences, etc. Here reincarnation is understood. Mulif and dimfi are exactly opposite."

These four major perspectives create what Gurudeva once called one's "inner mind styling." Many people live in just one of them their entire life without realizing it. An experienced meditator, however, can learn to consciously live in two, three or more at the same time. How can we relate these viewpoints to everyday life? Let's take a common problem—depression—and look at how a Hindu devotee might alleviate it from each of these approaches.

The simnif, or scientific, perspective is often favored. We solve our sorrows by taking an anti-depressant drug, such as Prozac, to chemically alter our mood. The chemistry of medical science is our way out. It sounds dubious, but that's what's going on in the world. Even young children are being put on these medications. In severe cases, drugs may be necessary, but they do have side effects and don't come without an overhead, shall we say. However, simnif can be used positively for changing one's state of mind: applying the wisdom of ayurveda, exercising more, performing hatha yoga and improving one's diet.

Discussing the depression with a friend, counselor or psychologist is the solution from the mulif, or psychological, perspective. The counselor tries to talk someone into feeling better about themselves, talk them out of the problem, by gaining a new understanding. A professional counselor might advise, "You are a wonderful, divine being! You are perfect. Every experience is a good experience if you learn something from it."

Going to the temple for relief is the dimfi, inner-plane, approach. It's not commonly prescribed for depression, but it should be—going to the temple and placing your problems at the Feet of the Deity. We bring offerings, talk to the Deity about our unhappiness and go through a deep, inner process, just as if we were talking to a person in this physical world. But we receive blessings from the Deity, if we open ourselves in the right way. A force is awakened which you don't get from a person—a blast of divine energy that helps remove the problem. Sometimes, if it works out well, you may go away not even remembering what the problem was. That's a sign of success.

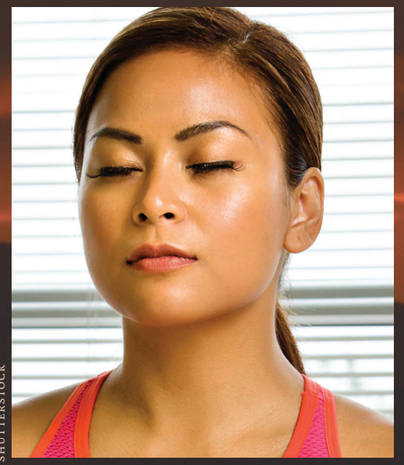
Alleviating depression through meditation is the shumif, or meditative, approach, moving awareness into a happier state of mind, then looking back and cognizing the karmas involved. This is the most advanced method, because the hardest time to meditate is when we're upset, sad or bothered. Still, it can be done.

Oftentimes you can use more than one perspective to help someone out of a slump. Start with mulif to improve the person's mood, reminding him he is a divine being. Listen closely and empathize with his situation, while trying to give him an overview. Then you can move on to dimfi. Recommend that he go into the temple or shrine room and talk to Ganesha about it, place the matter at His Feet and beseech the Mighty One to adjust his emotional state. If he is a good meditator, you can suggest that he then sit down and meditate: "Go into the energies in the spine and become positive again. That powerful spiritual energy is right there within you, and you know how to access it." He may also benefit by getting more fresh air and exercise. In this way, you can use all four perspectives to uplift him.

We try to avoid the all-too-frequent simnif approach of prescribing drugs for depression. A devotee whose spouse recently passed away at a young age told me, "I've been advised by a doctor that I'm depressed because of my grief and should take some drugs." My goodness! Drugs have become a panacea, but grieving is a natural process common to all cultures, because it takes time, often a year or more, to recover from the shock. Rather than confusing grief with depression and taking a drug to make it go away, the better approach is to follow the wisdom of ayurveda, talk about the problem to gain a proper philosophical perspective, beseech divine beings for blessings and change your consciousness through the use of your will.

Explore these four ways of looking at the universe. They hold the ability to enrich and broaden your life experiences.

Four modes of the mind: *Meditative (awareness moving through the mind), scientific (awareness is stationary, observing movement in nature), philosophic (study and understanding), supramundane (cognizance of inner and outer worlds beyond the mundane, such as the world of the Gods)*



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Shumif, the meditative perspective



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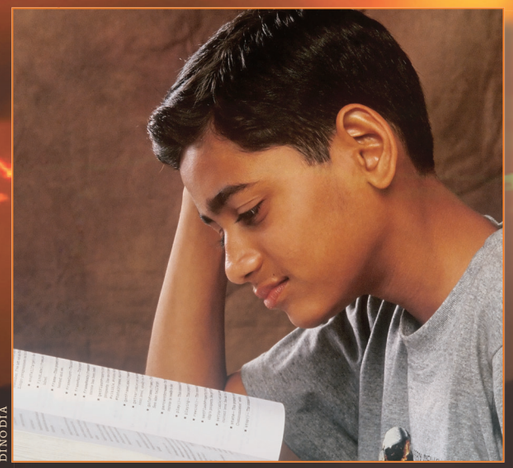
Simnif, the perspective of science or observation



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Mulif, the philosophical perspective



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Dimfi, the perspective of inner and outer dimensions

CHAPTER EIGHT

Worship

- Our Three Kinds of Temples
- Drawing Close to Ganesha
- Making Your Home God's Home
- Work Is Worship

Juvenile Starfish, by Evan Darling

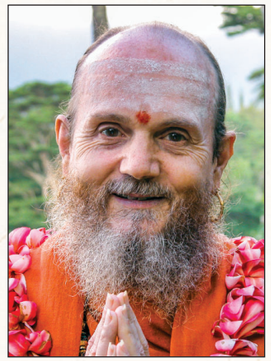


PUBLISHER'S DESK • JULY 2019

Our Three Kinds of Temples

The community temple, the home shrine and the sanctuary inside you are readily available to stabilize and uplift your daily life

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



IT WOULD BE HARD TO OVERESTIMATE THE POWER and importance of the temple in Hindu culture and spiritual practice—the home of God to which we go for solace and connection with the divine. When we think of temples, we naturally think of community temples, those always welcoming, often ornate, magical spaces which I like to call *pura mandiras*. Worshiping in these temples is a central practice in Hinduism. But there is a broader, seldom discussed understanding of the temple in Sanatana Dharma which embraces two other sacred places of communion as equally important. One is the home shrine, or *griha mandira*, and the other is the soul temple or *atma mandira*.

The Community Temple, Pura Mandira

Hindu communities revolve around the local temple, which serves as the hub of culture, worship, festivals and more. For the devout, the ideal is to attend a puja at the community temple daily, or at least once a week, and to participate in the major holy festivals celebrated within its precincts. This allows us to experience the blessings of God and the Gods regularly and to enjoy frequent fellowship with other devotees, which is uplifting and engaging. Though God is everywhere, it is easiest to receive His blessings at the temple. My Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, had many insights into temple mysticism: the ray of the temple, its subtle force field and how the three worlds work together in that sacred space. All this was apparent to his inner sight. He wrote, "If you could view the temple from the inner worlds, you would see a brilliant ray coming from the Third World, or world of the Gods, 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. 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."

Regular worship at the community temple deepens our humility and our devotion to God. It also purifies and lifts our energy into higher chakras. In addition to worship, we can also perform service (seva, or karma yoga) at the temple and accrue even more spiritual benefits. The *Tirumantiram*, an ancient scripture by Rishi Tirumular, lists a number of traditional chores in verse 109: "The simple temple duties, lighting the lamps, picking flowers, lovingly polishing the floors, sweeping, singing the Lord's praise, ringing the bell and fetching ceremonial water—these constitute the *dasa marga* (path of the servant)." Additionally, those who are qualified can volunteer to teach Hinduism to the youth.

If you are finding fulfillment by worshiping in your community temple, don't stop there. Consider extending your devotional life to the *griha mandira*, or home shrine.

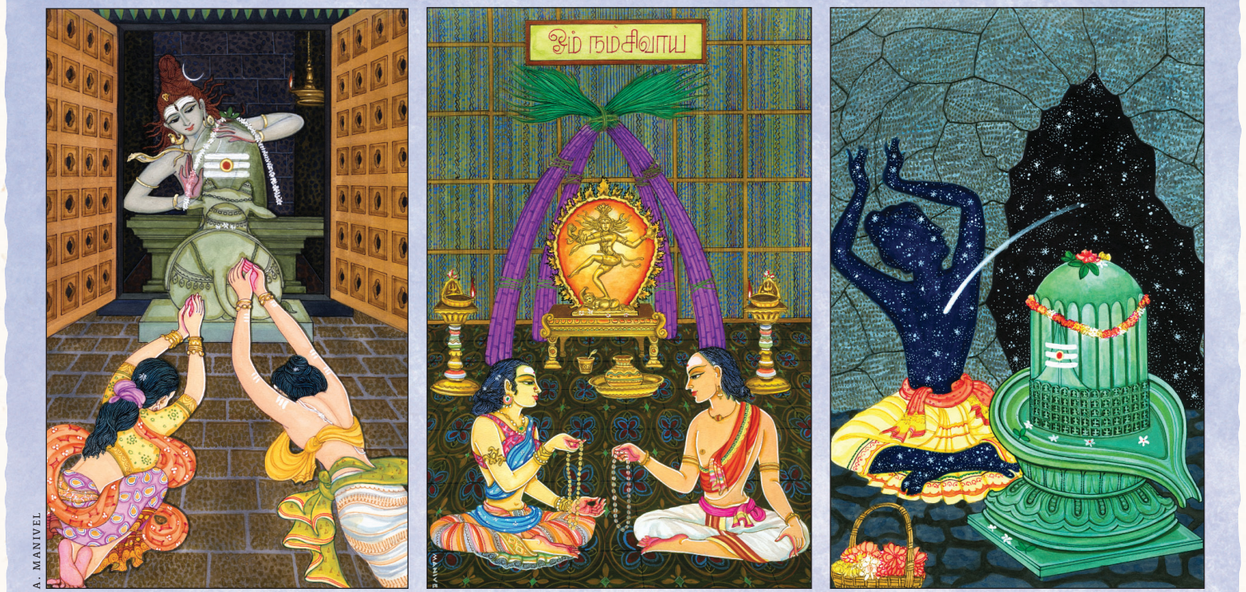
The Home Shrine, Griha Mandira

The ideal Hindu home centers around the home shrine, a special room set aside and maintained to create a temple-like atmosphere which holds us close to our spiritual goals and practices. In this holy space we conduct puja, read scripture, perform sadhana, sing bhajana and do japa. Here we can always feel the presence of God and the Gods, whom we honor especially in the morning and evening and before meals, which we offer to them before we partake. Here worship traditionally begins before dawn, with the simple act of dedication for the coming day. After a bath, morning puja is performed, usually by the husband. The wife and older children may also perform their own puja at another time of day. The form of home worship, called *atmartha puja*, is simple: we lovingly invoke the Deities, tender choice offerings and beseech their blessings for our family and the world. This early morning worship begins the day on a religious note, blessing the work and activities that follow. Evening devotionals include a simple arati, bhajana, meditation and reading of scripture—a day's-end routine that carries family members to lofty, celestial realms during sleep. The temple-like atmosphere of the shrine room can prevail throughout the home if family members handle disagreements and difficult issues in a harmonious, professional way, avoiding arguments and expressions of anger.

You can bring some of the power of the community temple into your home shrine by lighting an oil lamp when you return from the temple. This sacred act brings devas who were at the temple 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. This is one of my guru's unique insights into the mysticism of temple worship.

How elaborate should the home puja be? It can vary from short and simple to long and complex. Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Mahaswamiji (1894–1994) of Kanchi Kamakoti Pitham commented, "Every family must perform puja to Ishvara. Those who find it convenient to do so may conduct elaborate types of puja after receiving proper initiation into them. Others need perform only a brief puja, not lasting more than ten minutes or so. Office-goers must offer at least this brief worship. The sacred bell must ring in every home."

Ideally, all members of the family gather together in the shrine room for a puja each morning. Additionally, visiting the shrine at other key times brings special benefits. Visiting the shrine before leaving the home reminds you that work is also worship when approached in a spiritual way, a strategic attitude that helps you maintain a religious perspective during your time out of the home. Visiting the shrine upon returning home provides a few moments to release any negative, worldly vibrations you have taken on while away. Visiting before an important event, such as a job interview or a major exam at school, you can pray for special blessings and guidance. Retreating to this oasis when emotionally disturbed or reflecting on a personal problem reminds you to spiritually center yourself and overcome the challenge or upset condition with the blessings of God and the Gods. These are several ways the home shrine can benefit the family. By your example you teach these practices to your children—practices that will sustain them as they make their passage through life.



Three modes of communion: *(left to right) A man and woman prostrate to God in their local temple; a husband and wife perform japa, reciting the Lord's name together in their home shrine room; a yogi in meditation communes with God inside himself.*

Performing your own individual puja in the home shrine with sincerity and regularity unfolds a relationship with the Divine that is likened to that of a child to a parent, called *satputra marga*, or "path of the dutiful child." The *Tirumantiram* summarizes, "Puja, reading the scriptures, singing hymns, performing japa and unsullied austerity, truthfulness, restraint of envy and offering of food—these and other self-purifying acts constitute the flawless satputra marga" (verse 1496).

If you are finding fulfillment by worshiping in the home shrine, don't stop there. Consider worshiping in the *atma mandira*, if you are not already practicing yoga meditation.

The Soul Temple, Atma Mandira

The third place of worship is the temple within the body, which I call the atma mandira. My paramaguru, Yogaswami of Jaffna, Sri Lanka, said, "God lives in this house built of earth, water, fire, air and ether. Therefore, keep the house clean and the mind pure, and conduct yourself with calmness." His disciple Markanduswami recounted his guru's instructions: "Yogaswami said, 'Leave your relations downstairs, your will, your intellect, your senses. Leave the fellows and go upstairs by yourself and find out who you are. Then you can go downstairs and be with the fellows.' "

Yogaswami was describing the internal form of worship—meditation in the sacred chamber of the soul, wherein we quiet our physical body, still our astral and mental bodies, become centered in our immortal, spiritual body of light, and strive for, discover, near and ultimately merge with God within. Through meditation, we temporarily set aside our mundane concerns and experience our refined, spiritual nature that is always serene and centered, the source of intuition, solace and strength for all our activities. Consistent practice of meditation has the power to increase our concentration, observation, understanding, compassion, appreciation, cooperation, mental acuity, emotional stability, willpower and our ability to see God in all things and all people.

Awakening Wisdom

God abides in all three of these temples. In the community temple He is worshiped in elaborate, formal ways, mystical ways that bring His shakti, or power, into the inner chamber to bless the world. In the home shrine He is worshiped in simple, loving ways which bring His presence into the home to guide the family through karma's sometimes difficult passages and bless their pursuits. In the chamber of the heart He is worshiped as the Life of life, as the Self of ourself, to awaken peace of mind, insight, inspiration and enlightenment. The three temples stand as a central pillar of Hindu life.

Successful worship in the three temples over many lifetimes culminates in *jnana*, divine wisdom, which we see in an enlightened being, a soul in its maturity, immersed in the blessed realization of God, while living out earthly karma. In verse 1444 of the ancient yogic text *Tirumantiram*, Rishi Tirumular sums up our thoughts: "Being the Life of life is splendorous jnana worship [achieving jnana]. Beholding the Light of life is great yoga worship [meditation]. Giving life by invocation is external worship [performing puja]. Expressing adoration is charya [attending puja]." As you see, our experience of the three temples of Hinduism is an ancient one that survives in the 21st century.

PUBLISHER'S DESK • JANUARY 2016

Drawing Close to Ganesha

How sincerely approaching Him as a real being can deepen your relationship with the Lord of Obstacles

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



HINDUISM IN THAILAND, A PREDOMINANTLY Buddhist nation, has been the subject of several articles in HINDUISM TODAY magazine over the years. To many people's surprise, the country has a number of Hindu temples, including a large and ornate Ganesha shrine right in the middle of Bangkok's financial district. Our journalist asked several Thais why so many in the country worship regularly at Hindu temples. The common answer was, "The worship of Buddha helps us in a purely spiritual way, whereas worshiping the Hindu Gods helps in our daily life."

My Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, stressed this same idea: "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. Worship of Lord Ganesha leads the devotee most naturally to the other great Gods....Lord Ganesha is a Mahadeva, a Great God, created by Lord Siva to assist souls in their evolution. He is the elephant-faced Patron of Art and Science, the Lord of Obstacles and Guardian of Dharma, the first son of Siva. His will prevails as the force of righteousness, the embodiment of Siva's karmic law in all three worlds."

Many great saints and sages of Hinduism have had visions of Lord Ganesha and shared them with their devotees, thus strengthening their faith in the Gods of Hinduism and expanding their understanding.

In ancient times Auvaiyar, a Tamil mystic who had visions of Ganesha, shared her experiences in devotional poetry. In "Vinayaga Ahaval" she wrote, "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, Gurudeva shared his mystical perspectives and experiences of Ganesha in a book called *Loving Ganesha*: "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."

Since 1969 we have arranged group pilgrimages to India, where traveling seekers have had life-changing visions of Lord Ganesha and other Deities. Such visions, born of the intensity of pilgrimage and inner striving, would often come in the form of the stone or bronze murti moving and smiling at them, or becoming an animated, human-like figure. With eyes closed, some devotees inwardly saw the Deity's face, as real as any living being.

Though not many have such powerful visions, in the year 1995 hundreds of thousands of Hindus experienced firsthand the widely publicized milk miracle in temples around the world. They watched as devotees offered milk to murtis of Lord Ganesha, who actually drank the milk. The remarkable happening was recorded by video cameras and well documented in world media. This increased many people's faith in the reality of Lord Ganesha.

In his many inspired talks to large crowds in South India's ancient temples, Gurudeva explained that the stone or metal Deity images are not mere symbols of the Gods; they are the form through which their love, power and blessings flood forth into this world. Knowing that the Gods are real beings and that the purpose of going to the temple is to experience their blessings transforms the temple from a cultural hall to a truly sacred place for the devotee. Some readers may wonder what I mean by saying that Lord Ganesha and the other Gods are real beings. If they are real, where do they live? To answer that question, let's provide some background. Hindu scripture speaks of three worlds of existence: the physical plane, the subtle or astral plane, and the causal plane.

The physical plane is the world we perceive with our five senses, the realm of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. Of the three worlds, this is the most limited, the least permanent and the most subject to change. Within the physical plane exists the subtle or astral plane, the mental-emotional sphere. We function in this realm through thought and feeling and reside there fully during sleep and after death. There, in our astral body, we meet other souls who are sleeping or have died and do not have a physical body. We function constantly in this in-between world by our every thought and emotion.

Deep within the astral plane exists the causal plane—the world of light and blessedness, the highest of heavenly regions, extolled in the scriptures of all faiths. This is the superconscious world, where the Gods and highly evolved souls abide. It is this world that we seek to access through deep meditation and through temple worship, which opens a channel for the Gods' blessings. This most refined realm is not distant. It exists within us as the abode of our divine Self, our pure immortal soul being.



SHUTTERSTOCK

A global God: *(left) Lord Ganesha embodied in an elegant life-like statue gracing the town of Kuta, Bali, Indonesia. The golden writing on His trunk includes the Sanskrit Aum.*

My Gurudeva often said that religion is the working together of the three worlds. In a sanctified temple, we can readily experience the Gods and devas as an uplifting, peaceful, divine energy, or shakti, radiating out through the murti from the causal plane. It is easiest to feel these blessings at the high point of the puja, when the flame is held before the Deity, or after the puja, in a quiet moment of reflection. The shakti of Lord Ganesha is a gentle, soothing force. Even a subtle encounter with the Lord of Obstacles has the power to bring us into the secure consciousness of the muladhara chakra, the force center of memory where Ganesha resides. This blessing keeps us above the lower seven chakras, home of the base emotions such as jealousy, fear and anger.

There is a Tamil saying, "Ganesha is my support," "*Ganapati tunai*," which conveys the idea that Lord Ganesha looks after us and influences everything in our life for the better. You can develop a close relationship with Lord Ganesha, in which He feels like a good friend, if you take the time to get to know Him through bhakti yoga, the practice of devotional disciplines, worship, prayer, chanting and singing with the aim of awakening love in the heart and opening yourself to the Deity's grace.

The 2,200-year-old South Indian scripture *Tirumantiram* declares, "Five-armed is He, elephant-faced, with tusks protruding, crescent-shaped, son of Siva, wisdom's flower; in heart enshrined, His feet I praise."

A Practice for Contacting Ganesha

In Loving Ganesha, Gurudeva detailed the following spiritual practice that you can use to contact the Lord of Obstacles:

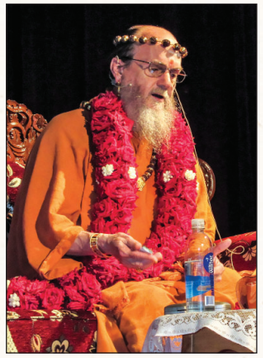
"Wherever His devotees are—in the home, the factories, the offices, the hospitals, the marketplace, orbiting in space or tilling the soil on the farm—Lord Ganesha is ever there. Intimate access is acquired by simply loving Ganesha and holding His robust image in your mind. Carefully visualize the large 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."

Making Your Home God's Home

Establish a formal shrine room as the family's place of communion with the Divine through worship and meditation

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



A UNIQUE ASPECT OF HINDUISM IS THAT everyone can be a priest and be in charge of one's own temple. That temple is your home shrine, which you can spiritualize, or turn into a mini-temple, through conducting daily puja. This process works best when the shrine is a separate room, strictly reserved for worship and meditation, unsullied by worldly talk and other activities. That is the ideal. When that is not possible, it should at least be a quiet corner of a room—more than a simple shelf or closet. Make the shrine a refuge for all family members, a place of peace and solace where they can connect with God and offer their praise, prayers and practical needs.

The late Sri Sri Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Mahaswamiji of Kanchipuram Kamakoti Pitham commented on the necessity of home puja: "Every family must perform puja to Ishvara. Those who find it convenient to do so may conduct elaborate types of puja after receiving proper initiation into them. Others need perform only a brief puja, not lasting more than ten minutes or so. Office-goers must offer at least this brief worship. The sacred bell must ring in every home."

Here's a story to show how our efforts to perform puja in the home shrine can start simply and gradually become more elaborate. The Shekhar family always kept a shrine room in their home. Over the years the husband systematically learned more and more about conducting puja. In the beginning he just chanted a simple mantra to Lord Ganesha while waving incense. Then he learned a few more chants and began passing the arati flame at the end of puja. Finally he learned the entire Ganesha atmartha puja, which he now does every morning before breakfast. He finds performing the full puja deeply satisfying and notes that it uplifts all members of the family as well. (The Ganesha atmartha puja is available with text and audio files at www.himalayanacademy.com/looklisten/chanting)

About Personal Puja

Many people do not realize it, but personal worship is a fundamental element of what we call Hinduism's Code of Conduct, the *yamas* and *niyamas*, or restraints and observances. And this code, comprising steps one and two in ashtanga yoga, is often regarded as the foundation for meditation. Worship, one of the ten niyamas, is known as Ishvarapujana. It refers to puja that we conduct for ourselves rather than the rites done by a priest on our behalf. This worship, performed in the home shrine, can range from simply offering a flower to performing a full and formal puja. Puja conducted by a lay person, called *atmartha* puja, is regarded as a personal worship rite; whereas the public puja held by a priest in a temple is called *parartha* puja. After performing atmartha puja, it is customary to sit for a few minutes in meditation, internal worship, taking in to the soul level the refined feelings, the prana, that the puja has created and which still remains in the room. In this way, we receive maximum benefits from the puja.

My Gurudeva observed that some people are afraid to perform puja. Why? They often feel they lack sufficient training or don't understand the mystical principles behind it well enough. Many Hindus depend on the priests to perform the pujas and sacraments for them. However, Gurudeva points out, as did Maha Swamiji of Kanchipuram, that simple pujas may be performed by anyone wishing to invoke grace from God, Gods and devas. Love of the Deity is more important than ritualistic perfection. Those wishing to perform advanced atmartha puja can receive training and permission to do so through initiation, called *diksha*, from qualified priests.

Gurudeva placed one important restriction on performing atmartha puja: "If a serious outbreak of anger is experienced, one must refrain from doing puja for thirty-one days. Simple waving of incense before the icons is permissible, but not the passing of flames, ringing of bells or the chanting of any mantra, other than the simple recitation of Aum."

He invoked this restriction knowing that an angry person would invoke, in the Second World, asuras that can upset us rather than the devas that bring us blessings. In fact, to successfully spiritualize the home, there is a need to minimize expressions of anger, as well as swearing. Take as an analogy assembling a complex jigsaw puzzle. Performing the puja is the equivalent of correctly fitting ten puzzle pieces together. Minor anger takes away five pieces, simple swearing two and a major argument twenty. Clearly, we will never finish the puzzle unless we bring anger and swearing under control. In other words, even the most sincere efforts we put into increasing the spirituality of our home will not succeed if we nullify them with outbursts of anger and swearing.

Keeping in Touch

All Hindus have guardian devas who live on the astral plane and guide, guard and protect their lives. The shrine room is a space for these permanent unseen guests, a room that the whole family can enter and sit in and commune inwardly with these refined beings, who are dedicated to protecting the family, generation after generation. "A token shrine in a bedroom or a closet or a niche in a kitchen is not enough to attract these Divinities," Gurudeva counseled. "One would not host an honored guest in one's closet or have him or her sleep in the kitchen and expect the guest to feel welcome, appreciated and loved."



HINDUISM TODAY

Worshiping together: *Three generations gather in the home shrine for puja. At the conclusion, the father shares prasadam, which all are eager to receive, knowing God has blessed them through this sacrament.*

The most cultured Hindu homes center around the home shrine, a special room set aside and maintained to create a temple-like atmosphere in which we conduct puja, read scripture, perform sadhana, sing bhajans and do japa. This sacred space serves as a solitary refuge, a meditation chamber. It is a safe room in which we retreat from the world, draw into ourself and get in touch with our superconscious intuition. It is a place to face ourself, to write and burn confessions and make new resolutions. It is a place to dissolve problems in the light of inner knowing with the help of our guardian devas.

You can strengthen the vibration of your home shrine by going to the temple regularly, ideally once a week, and making extra visits during festivals. Lighting an oil lamp in the shine room when you come home from the temple brings the temple's religious atmosphere into your home. Mystically, that simple act brings devas who were at the temple right into the home shrine, where, from the inner world, they can bless family members and strengthen the home's religious force field.

Gurudeva takes the idea of having a separate shrine room, in which God and the devas can dwell, one step further. He states that cultured and devout Hindus dedicate their entire home to God: "The ideal of *Ishvarapujana*, worship, is to always be living with God in God's house, which is also your house, and regularly going to God's temple. This lays the foundation for finding God within. How can someone find God within if he doesn't live in God's house as a companion to God in his daily life? The answer is obvious. It would only be a theoretical pretense, based mainly on egoism."

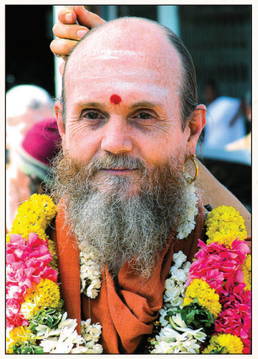
Hindus who believe in God's presence in their home naturally wish to honor Him, even feed Him. They lovingly place food before His picture, leave, close the door and let God and His devas partake of the meal. Gurudeva observed: "God and the devas do enjoy the food; they do so by absorbing the pranas, the energies, of the food. After the meal is over and everyone has eaten, God's plates are picked up, too. What is left on God's plate is eaten as prasadam, a blessed offering. God is served as much as the hungriest member of the family, not just a token amount. Of course, God, Gods and the devas do not always remain in the shrine room. They wander freely throughout the house, listening to and observing the entire family, guests and friends. Since the family is living in God's house, and God is not living in their house, the voice of God is easily heard as their conscience."

Gurudeva challenges each of us: "The psychology and the decision and the religion is, 'Do we live with God, or does God occasionally visit us?' Who is the authority in the home, an unreligious, ignorant, domineering elder? Or is it God Himself, whom the entire family, including elders, bow down to because they have resigned themselves to the fact that they are living in an ashrama of God? This is religion. This is Ishvarapujana."

Work Is Worship

Career and family should not be viewed as separate from religious life. They are integral to fulfilling your dharma.

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



OVER THE LAST YEAR, I HAVE MET WITH a surprising number of Hindus visiting our Hawaii temple and monastery who have shared the concern that "We are so busy with our professional and family life that we have little or no time to devote to religion." Their perspective is based on the concept that work and worship are totally separate. Worship is what is done in the temple and shrine room. Work is what is done in the fields, the factory or the office. The attitude is, "We are working to earn money to support ourselves; we are worshiping to receive the blessings of the Gods." The two realms are unrelated when viewed in this way.

This, of course, is not the highest Hindu perspective. Great souls tell us that work, when performed in the right spirit, is worship. What is it that transforms work from a secular pursuit into a religious one? It is the overview that through the process of living life we unfold spiritually. It is the knowing that through fulfilling our natural duties in life, honestly and to the best of our ability, we make spiritual progress. Why? Because work puts us in situations where we interact with other people, especially when we hold our dharmic responsibility over an extended period. Through interacting with others, we learn important lessons and, as a result, gradually deepen our understanding, improve our behavior and become a more spiritual person. In doing so, we work through the karma we created in the past and create new karma to be faced in the future. With this in mind, we can see that our daily work contributes to our spiritual progress just as much as attending pujas in the temple, worshiping in our home shrine, going on pilgrimage, singing bhajans, meditating or studying scripture. Paramaguru Yogaswami captured the essence of this perspective when he said, "All work must be done with the aim of reaching God."

From the Hindu perspective, all of life is sacred, and performing our duty is dharma. Dharma is a rich term that means "way of righteousness, religion and fulfillment of duty." From this lofty view, every deed is a part of our religious practice. Everything we do is an act of worship and faith. There are no purely secular activities. Our worship in the temple is part of our dharma, and our work or occupation is part of our dharma.

We all have certain duties in life. It is the duty of children to go to school and become educated. It is the duty of adults to earn an income to properly raise, educate and care for their children. Our natural profession in this life is based on the professions we have fulfilled in our past lives, plus the karma we bring into this life. This is our *svadharma*, our ideal pattern in life, and fulfilling it to the best of our ability causes us to make spiritual progress. The mystic law is that no challenge can come to us that exceeds our inner ability to rise up to overcome it. Paramaguru Yogaswami stressed this point to his devotees in Sri Lanka a half century ago: "Do your work. Work is svadharma—following your pattern."

One day, after I had explained all of this, a devotee from Los Angeles asked, "How can I bridge the gap in my life? I have a job that I don't enjoy, and my boss is not kind to me. It's only my few minutes in meditation that give me any solace. My work doesn't seem like worship at all!" In response, I offered four remedies: 1) integrate religious practice into the workplace; 2) seek opportunities to help and serve others; 3) strive to see all your actions as serving God; 4) utilize your efforts at work to strengthen your powers of meditation and worship, and build good character.

1. Bring Spirituality into Your Work

A basic way we can make our work a form of worship is to introduce religious practices into our work routine. Doing this, even in small ways, brings blessings to our place of work and gives it a more spiritual atmosphere. Many devotees take a five-minute meditation/yoga break twice a day. Others keep a small photo of their guru or chosen Deity nearby to keep them uplifted and reminded of their highest aspirations. A woman in Maryland said that twice daily she sits for a moment, breathes deeply and basks in appreciation for God's ever-flowing grace. A New York grocery store owner keeps a shrine in the corner where he does puja every morning, asking Ganesha to bless his business for the day and remove any negative forces and obstacles. The stone craftsmen here on Kauai perform a ceremony each morning at the worksite before commencing their work of erecting Iraivan Temple, and once a year hold an elaborate ceremony to worship their tools, so that God may work through those tools in the year to come. My Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, tells us: "Ganesha influences events 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."

2. Seek Ways to Serve

Gurudeva told a group of devotees, "Give and give until it hurts." He was prescribing the means to overcome selfishness—a quality that is as prevalent today as ever. He was also pointing to an effective way to make our work part of our worship. The secret lies in helping others in selfless ways—with no expectation of payment, presents, praise or prestige. This is a spiritual practice known as karma yoga, or union through service. Karma yoga produces spiritual progress in that certain past negative karmas can be mitigated, meaning lessened, as well as new positive karmas created for the future. Normally it is thought of as service done at a temple or ashram, but it is wise and prudent to extend it as widely in your life as you can, such as helping others in your workplace beyond what is expected, willingly and without complaint. This counteracts the instinctive tendency to only serve oneself, to promote one's own goals and career and to help others only begrudgingly—which ultimately makes you a lonely, unhappy, limited person. The fact is, the more selfish we are, the less happy we are. And the less selfish we are, the happier we are. Gurudeva gives an excellent summary of the benefits of karma yoga: "Through service and kindness, you can unwind the subconscious mind and gain a clear understanding of all laws of life. Your soul will shine forth. You will be that peace. You will radiate that inner happiness and be truly secure, simply by practicing being kind in thought, word and deed."



S. RAJAM

Working in the home: *A mother prepares dinner for her family. Fulfilling her homemaker dharma offers daily opportunities for spiritual growth, as she holds the belief that her home is God's home and all her actions are service to Him.*

3. Dedicate Your Actions to God

The Hindu concept that work is worship defines a lofty, refined way of living—taking each situation, each duty, each challenge and encounter as an opportunity to grow, to learn, to serve and thus mature into your highest spiritual potential. No matter what type of work it is, be it at home or in an office building, whether pleasant or distasteful, interesting or monotonous—with the right attitudes, willpower and persistence, you can transform it from secular labor to a spiritual exercise that will advance you on the path and uplift you and all those around you. This can be achieved by perceiving all your spiritual, mental and physical actions as fulfilling the will and design of God, rather than merely fulfilling personal ambitions. Try this, even at work. Yogaswami's words to a young man just starting his career were, "You are going out to work. You must dress well and look dignified. Everything should be an offering to God. The world is an altar."

4. Work on Yourself

All the good habits and self-control we develop in our outer life are useful in our inner life as well. For example, if we develop good concentration in our school studies as a youth and carry this on in our adult life by being focused on the tasks we do at work, we will have developed a strong ability to concentrate. So, when we sit down to meditate, our thoughts are naturally concentrated and it is easy to control the mind. However, if we let our mind wander during our studies and as an adult daydream while working, when we sit down to meditate, we will find it impossible to control our thoughts.

Another important ability we develop in our work is willpower. Willpower is the strength to carry out one's decisions, wishes or plans. People who regularly make plans and fail to carry them out lack willpower. For example, a student plans to get up early all week to study for his tests, but when his alarm rings, he shuts it off and decides to continue sleeping instead. We cultivate willpower by finishing and doing well every task we undertake—in fact, doing it a little better than our expectations. Nothing is done with half our mind thinking about something else. Nothing is dropped in the middle. Developing these two important habits produces an indomitable willpower. First, finish each task. Second, do it well. My guru taught, again and again, "The more you use your personal, individual willpower, the more willpower you have."

The workplace is a veritable classroom for spiritual progress. Life brings us many opportunities to fail and every opportunity to succeed at the tests it offers us as we strive to be the best we can be. If your boss is mean to you, be grateful for the karmic challenge and go out of your way to be kind to him. If, as a homemaker, your daughter continually makes you furious, study out how to control your anger. If you find a fellow employee intolerably annoying, look to yourself to see what it is that keeps you from accepting him just the way he is. The list of opportunities is endless.

One of the profound beliefs of Hindus is that God is in all things. Therefore, for us, there is no meaningful division between secular and religious life, for God is always there, in our job, in our boss, in our projects, if only we are subtle enough to see that truth.

CHAPTER NINE

Dharma

- Making Dharma Your Own
- Temple as the Source of Culture
- What Is True Success?
- Be a Spiritual Leader!
- Noninjury: the Foremost Virtue

Wasp's eyes

Making Dharma Your Own

Understanding and applying to your daily life five dimensions of Hinduism's complex principle of virtue, duty, ambition and livelihood

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



DHARMA IS A COMPLEX AND COMPREHENSIVE term with many meanings, including religion, divine law, law of being, way of righteousness, ethics, duty, responsibility, virtue, justice, goodness and truth. In its most general sense dharma is that which sustains the orderly fulfillment of an inherent nature or destiny. It comes from the Sanskrit root *dhṛ*, "to sustain; carry, hold." Thus we can say that dharma is that which sustains the cosmos, human society and each member of society. Relating to the individual soul, it is the mode of conduct most conducive to spiritual advancement, the right and righteous path. As the meaning of dharma is so broad, I find it best not to translate it into English but rather use the word *dharma* itself, which works since the term, like so many Sanskrit words, is gradually being absorbed into the English language.

A book traditionally studied at a young age in Tamil schools is Saint Auvaiyar's ancient work *Atti Chudi*. It consists of 109 one-line verses that, while teaching the alphabet, provide guidelines on right living. The first verse is on dharma. It says: "*Aram* (dharma) *seya virumbu*," or "Desire to fulfill dharma." This shows the long-standing importance of dharma in Hindu education. And it sounds so simple! However, dharma has so many subtleties that many youth find it challenging to relate to the concept. In response, we explore here five aspects of the term and their application in life.

1. Right Living Begins with Ganesha: The first and core meaning of dharma is living virtuously and fulfilling duty. It includes all the noble behaviors that we know are right and good. One learns to be selfless by thinking of others first, being respectful of parents, elders and swamis, following divine law, especially ahimsa, which is mental, emotional and physical noninjury to all beings. My guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, taught that the worship of Lord Ganesha puts one naturally on the path of virtuous living. "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 is lifted up from fear and confusion into conscious awareness of right thought, right speech and right action, the muladhara chakra becomes activated....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."

2. Two Paths, Two Dharmas: Recently I gave a presentation at a weekend retreat of the Hindu Students' Association. One of many written questions submitted to me in advance showed a common misunderstanding. "We talk about detachment from maya, but for most of us our career and living is centered around worldly subjects and concerns. How can we reconcile this fact with our larger desire to separate from the material world?" In their pursuit of dharma, these youth were struggling with the Upanishadic concept of self-abnegation, thinking that it applies to all Hindus, thinking they should be more detached from worldliness. I pointed out that it is vital to understand that in Hinduism there are two distinct paths: that of the householder, called grihastha dharma, and that of the renunciate, sannyasa dharma. Self-abnegation and detachment from maya belong to the renunciate path, not the householder path. This distinction of two paths is our second aspect of dharma.

To quickly cognize the differences between the two, take a look at the ancient ethical masterpiece *Tirukural* by Tiruvalluvar. In Part One, entitled "Virtue" or "Dharma" (aram), Section Two is "The Way of the Householder," and Section Three is "The Way of the Renunciate." Scanning the chapter titles immediately reveals the deep distinctions. Chapters in the householder section include: Wife, Children, Love, Hospitality, Gratitude, Possession of Self-Control and Avoidance of Covetousness. The final three chapters focus on giving to others so generously as to achieve renown in the community. Chapters in the renunciate life section include Austerity, The Impermanence of All Things, Renunciation, Knowledge of Truth and Eradication of Desire. Without even reading the actual verses, it is clear that detaching from the materialistic world is a goal for those on the renunciate path but not those on the householder path.

For Hindu monks, the *Tirukural* stresses renunciation of wealth. For the householder, becoming wealthy is encouraged—with the goal of generously sharing one's abundance with others. A contemporary example of the latter is a person Hindu youth and young adults readily relate to—Mark Zuckerberg, cofounder and CEO of Facebook. Mark celebrated the birth of his daughter in December 2015 by pledging to give away 99 percent of his Facebook shares. Money from the shares, currently valued at US$45 billion, will go to projects and charities that advance human potential and promote equality.

3. Which Stage of Life? Our third aspect of dharma is ashrama dharma—the natural expression and maturing of the body, mind and emotions through four progressive stages. This idea was developed millennia ago and detailed in scriptures known as *Dharma Shastras* to highlight the fact that our dharma, or duty, changes and evolves as we mature from youth to adulthood, senior years and old age. My guru considered that in modern times each ashrama is a 24-year period, applying equally to men and women, as follows:

- BRAHMACHARYA: student, birth to age 24, learning, pursuing secular and religious studies
- GRIHASTHA: householder, age 24 to 48, raising a family, fulfilling a career or profession, serving the community
- VANAPRASTHA: elder advisor, age 48 to 72, offering one's experience to help others
- SANNYASA: retiree, age 72 onward, withdrawing from society and devoting more time to religious practices

4. Four Positive Goals: Our fourth key to dharma is to understand it as one of the four goals of life. The Sanskrit term is *purushartha*, which literally means "human wealth." These are four pursuits in which people may legitimately engage. Also called *chaturvarga*, "fourfold good," they form a cornerstone of Hindu ethics: 1) dharma, or duty and piety; 2) *artha*, wealth; 3) *kama*, love and enjoyment; and 4) moksha, enlightenment and liberation from rebirth. It is vital to note that while dharma is a goal in its own right, it is also the guiding principle of the other three goals, as it defines the proper way to pursue wealth, pleasure and moksha. Do we acquire wealth in a virtuous and honest way? Are spouses faithful to one another? Dharma—virtue and piety—is the steady guide for artha and kama, ultimately leading the soul to moksha.

5. Your Occupation: A fifth aspect of dharma relates to one's profession. In Sanskrit it is called *varna* dharma. As we read in *Dancing with Siva*: "Varna dharma defines the individual's obligations and responsibilities within the nation, society, community, class, occupational subgroup and family." In some professions the principles, or dharma, that guide it are defined in formal declarations. For example, Western medical doctors take the Hippocratic Oath, which includes this promise: "I will apply, for the benefit of the sick, all measures which are required, avoiding those twin traps of over-treatment and therapeutic nihilism." Lawyers take an oath, one version of which states, "I will employ, for the purpose of maintaining the causes confided to me, such means only as are consistent with truth and honor..." Other professions, such as certified public accountants, have a written code that members are expected to follow. The hundreds of occupations without formal oaths or codes have traditional expectations which constitute an informal understanding of their dharmic ideas. The idea is that when individuals fulfill their respective varna dharma, the whole of society functions smoothly. Pondering this fifth dimension of dharma keeps us reminded of the ethics, goals and guidelines of our occupation.

By meditating on and understanding these five aspects of dharma, youth and adults can unfold a much better sense of dharma's place in their life and thus strive in an informed way to fulfill the first verse of *Atti Chudi:* "Desire to fulfill dharma."











SHUTTERSTOCK

How dharma flows: *(top to bottom) A mother applies a tilaka to her daughter's forehead as a sign of purity; family men seek guidance from a swami; this family exemplify three of life's stages; a youth has discovered happiness in the pursuit of life's dharmic goals; two paramedics apply their professional training in a moment of emergency.*

Temple as the Source of Culture

By consciously connecting the home shrine to the temple, the family sustains tradition and strengthens relationships

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



For some twenty-five years, from about 1975 to 2001, Hinduism Today's founder, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, was instrumental in helping temples get established. Gurudeva guided 37 temples in the United States, Canada, Guadeloupe, Denmark, England, Fiji, Germany, Mauritius, New Zealand, Reunion, Russia, Sweden and Sri Lanka—giving each community or temple an icon of God, usually Lord Ganesha, and guidance when needed. He also helped dozens more temples by sharing his global experience and understanding of community building or by publicizing their project in Hinduism Today.

Why did Gurudeva devote so much energy to helping establish the temples of organizations with no formal ties to his own? He did it because of a strong conviction that it is the temple that perpetuates Hindu culture. As he explained, if Hindus move to a country and do not build a temple, after a few generations their precious culture will have been lost.

At a satsang held in July 2000, a devotee asked Gurudeva: "What's happening to Hindu culture? It seems in Bollywood, actors and actresses are turning Western and encouraging everyone else to do so. Will Hindu culture, or Indian culture, last very long after this?"

Gurudeva responded: "We can see in the world today that combative culture—where people do not get along but sometimes pretend to get along when they do not get along—comes from the offices and the factories and the nonreligious activities. Indian culture may be going down in India, but it is definitely coming up in the West because of the worship within the temples. It's our relationship with God, the Gods and the Goddesses that establishes our relationship with men, women and children. Culture comes from being sensitive to other people's feelings as we are sensitive within the temple to the feelings of the Gods and the vibration emanating from the inner sanctum. Without religion in one's life and the practice of that religion in the home shrine, in the temple, and pilgrimage once a year to a far-off place, culture quickly fails and the competitive culture comes into play."

He continued, "While there are many that are trying to bring the best of the West to the Far East, there are still in the West many who are trying to bring the best of the Far East into the West. As long as religion and worship and the practice of pilgrimage and all the refinements of our great religion are present, culture will be there."

The Hindu temple can act as a powerful spiritual hub that radiates out Hindu culture and devotional practices into the homes of families who attend regularly, at least once a week. The process of strengthening culture can happen on a number of levels.

The most basic is simply learning and following the many traditions and protocols associated with visiting a temple. No devout Hindu will approach the sacred home of God without proper preparation. The simple necessities include a bath, donning clean clothes and preparing an offering tray, whether simple on a normal day or elaborate for a festival. These acts are all important parts of temple-going.

On arrival we need to wash our feet and handle shoes in the specified way. Then the customary prostrations to the Deities, followed by circumambulation and presenting our offerings with a loving heart. When attending puja, men and women may be required to sit on separate sides of the mandapam. At key points throughout the rites we pray and respond in specific ways. As children follow the parents' traditional protocols, they develop an appreciation for worship and sacred objects, respect for elders, an understanding of the importance of physical cleanliness and mental purity, and a fondness for familial and communal devotion.

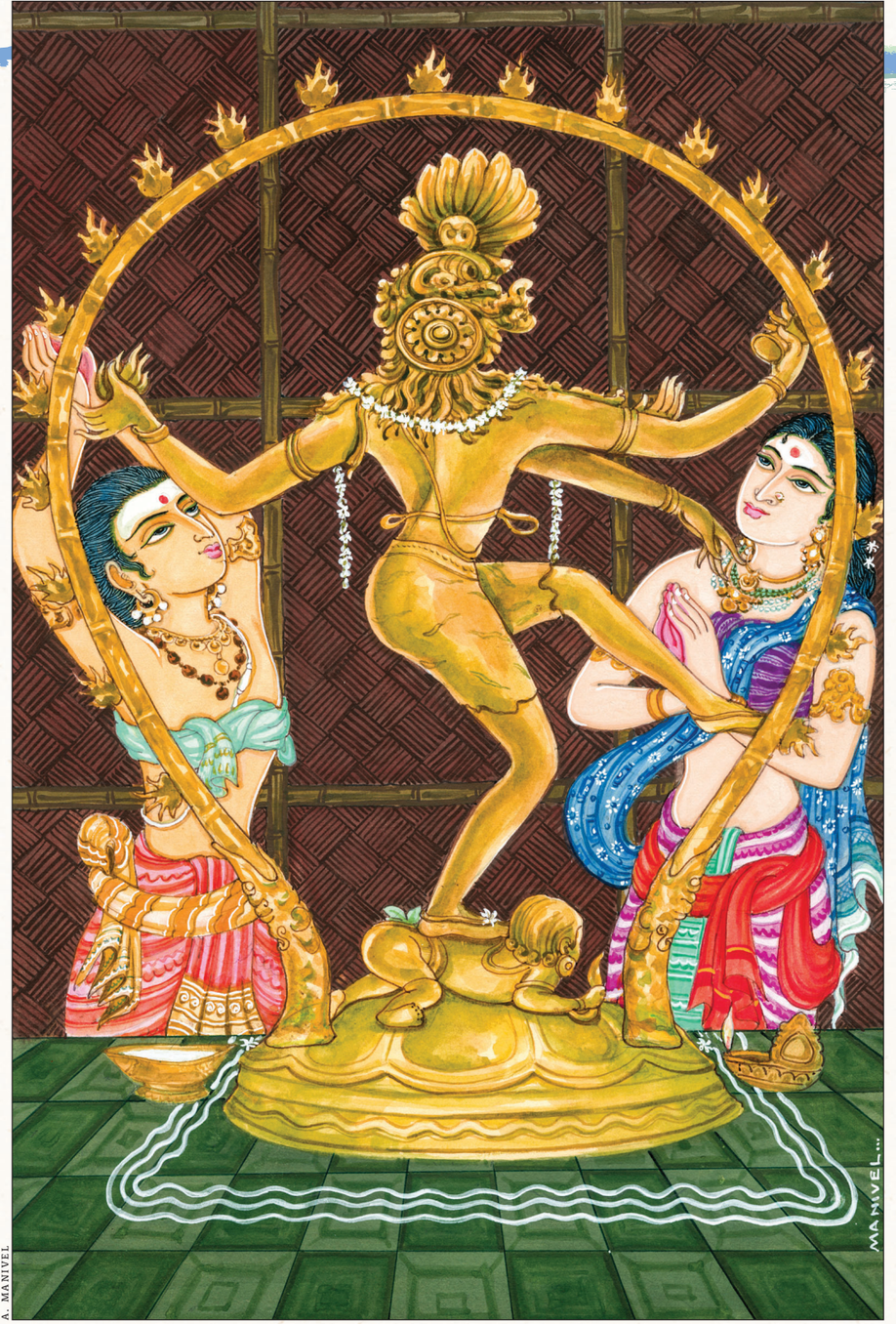
After years of such practice, essential character qualities, such as humility and devotion, can deepen. Devotion here means love of God. These qualities, which are present in every cultured Hindu, may not develop in an individual growing up in the West unless he or she participates in regular worship.

The second level of the temple's influence on the home begins when a shrine is established in the home and worshiped at daily. Wherever possible, it should be a separate room, not in a cabinet or on a shelf. Such a dedicated space makes everyone living in the home think more about God, reflect more on their behavior and be less inclined to become angry or argue, as they are living in God's presence.

Going to the temple every week can actually bring some of the temple's sanctity into the shrine room. My guru taught that lighting an oil lamp in the shine room after coming home from the temple brings the temple's shakti into your home. That devotional act brings devas who were at the temple into the home shrine, where, from the inner world, they can bless the family and protect the home.

The temple's third level of cultural influence begins when a family member, generally the father, performs regular puja in the home. In a sense, he becomes the family priest, emulating the temple priests while following a simpler, non-public liturgy known as atmartha puja. Such a full puja done daily steadily strengthens the home's religious vibration.

Quite fittingly, the structure of the puja ceremony arises from the magnanimous spirit of hospitality for which Hindu culture is famous. All guests are received and treated as God, and God is no exception. During this daily morning puja 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, flowers, chanting and offerings of food. It is an intimate, personal interaction. Throughout the puja, the officiant chants sweetly to the Deity in Sanskrit, describing these kindly acts and beseeching His blessings. Finally the pujari thanks the Deity for His presence, bids Him farewell and humbly apologizes for any errors he may have unknowingly committed.



A. MANIVEL

God in the home: *Each day in this Saivite shrine room, God Siva is worshiped as Nataraja, Lord of the Divine Dance. By lighting a simple oil lamp after coming home from the temple, the family forges subtle connections which sustain and uplift all in the home.*

The fourth level of temple influence on the home begins when the shrine is strong enough that we feel that the main Deity of the shrine, for example Lord Siva or Lord Venkateshvara, is the head of the house. When that happens, we would never think of having a meal without first offering a portion to God. We would naturally want to always worship God, even if briefly, before leaving the home and upon returning.

For Hindu culture to strengthen the home to this extent, the entire family needs to be involved. To illustrate, let me share a story. One of our devotees was responsible for the Sunday morning Hinduism classes for a group in Singapore. He found that parents would commonly drop the children off, go shopping for two hours, return and pick them up, all the while expecting the teachers to make their children better Hindus. Though this approach works for learning the fine arts, such as dancing or playing an instrument, it does not work for Hinduism.

The difference is this. For children to learn dance or music, the parents need not know how to dance or play the instrument. However, for Hinduism to be learned, it is necessary for the whole family to practice it together. This is because Hinduism is an all-encompassing spiritual way of life, informing every aspect of the family's daily and weekly routine, and not just in the shrine room. Having the children study Hinduism at the temple is important. But if the parents are also involved in the study, there is much greater potential for actually augmenting Hindu culture and religious conversations in the home. In fact, some Hindu groups will not accept children into classes unless the parents also enroll in a parallel study for adults.

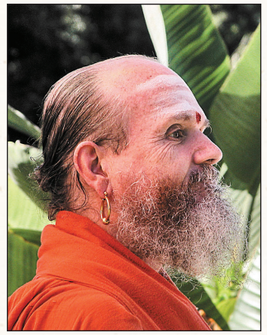
I like to compare Hindu temples to an electrical distribution system. On the remote Hawaiian island of Kauai, where we live, there is one main electrical generating plant with power lines to five distribution substations to which customers in each region are connected. This can be likened to a ray of spiritual energy coming from the celestial worlds (electrical plant) to five temples (substations), each with a connection which powers the homes of devotees who worship there regularly (customers). The electricity lights up the house and empowers all sorts of appliances. The energy from the temple illumines the family's path and enlivens the culture.

PUBLISHER'S DESK • OCTOBER 2004

What Is True Success?

Hinduism favors and furthers the pursuit of wealth, pleasure and happiness—all guided by dharma

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



IN TODAY'S MATERIAL WORLD, SUCCESS IN LIFE is popularly measured by looking solely at people's professional and family life. Do they have a good, well-paying job and a large home with a highly educated spouse and intelligent children? If the answer is yes, then they are considered to be successful. We will take that as our initial definition of success and throughout this article deepen and broaden it in important ways.

Parents are naturally focused on making sure their children are as successful in life as possible, which is good. However, unfortunately, some Hindu parents feel that their children's participation in Hindu religious activities and studies is a complete waste of time, meaning that it contributes nothing at all to their becoming successful. This attitude is based on incorrect concepts, such as the following: 1) Hinduism encourages us to look at the world as unreal and thus take no interest in material success; 2) Hinduism values world-renunciation and thus stands against the acquiring of wealth and the enjoyment of life; 3) Hinduism's devotional practices and attending the Hindu temple are only for field and factory workers and not for educated professionals. These three concepts are, of course, incorrect, because Hinduism, when properly taught and practiced, helps us be more successful in all dimensions of life.

Four Legitimate Goals: Let's begin deepening our understanding of the Hindu view of success by looking at the concept of the purusharthas, a term which literally means "human wealths or goals." These are four pursuits in which humans may legitimately engage. Also called *chaturvarga*, "fourfold good," they form a cornerstone of Hindu ethics. They are piety, wealth, pleasure and liberation. The achievement of the second and third of these goals, wealth and pleasure, is clearly identical to our initial definition of success, and thus we can see that Hinduism—contrary to what many people believe—is vitally concerned with an individual's being successful in worldly life. Said another way, wealth and pleasure—artha and kama—are natural goals of all humans, including Hindus.

Artha is material welfare and abundance, money, property, possessions. It includes the necessities of life—food, money, clothing and shelter—and extends to the wealth required to maintain a comfortable home, raise a family, fulfill a career and perform religious duties. My Gurudeva adds a broader meaning to artha when he describes it as embracing financial independence, freedom from debt, worthy children, good friends, leisure time, faithful servants, trustworthy employees, the joys of giving, feeding the poor, supporting religious mendicants, worshiping devoutly, protecting all creatures, and offering hospitality to guests. In other words, artha measures not only riches but also the quality of life, providing the security needed to pursue kama, dharma and moksha.

Kama is earthly love, aesthetic and cultural fulfillment, pleasures of the world (including sexual), joys of family and friends, intellectual satisfaction, happiness, security, physicality, creativity, usefulness and inspiration.

Moksha, or *mukti*, is freedom from samsara, the rounds of birth and death. It occurs after karma has been resolved and realization of the Self God has been attained. The desire for moksha only comes after a soul has pursued and been successful in fulfilling dharma, artha and kama for numerous lives, so that it is no longer attached to worldly joys or sorrows. Said another way, those who renounce the world in this life in one-pointed pursuit of moksha do so having achieved worldly success and fulfillment in past lives.

While dharma is a goal in its own right, it is also the guiding principle of the other three, as it defines the proper way to pursue wealth, pleasure and moksha. Do we acquire wealth in a virtuous and honest way? Are spouses faithful to one another, or not? These are concerns of all the world's religions, including Hinduism. Dharma, piety, now enters the picture. Dharma is the fulfillment of virtue, good works, duties and responsibilities, restraints and observances, performing one's part in the service and upliftment of society. It includes religious disciplines and the pursuit of truth under a guru of a particular lineage (parampara) and tradition (sampradaya). It is the steady guide for artha and kama, and ultimately it leads the soul to moksha.

Building Good Character: Parents, of course, want their children to bring honor to the family name, to be pillars of their community and to be of unblemished character. They know that without good character true success is not possible. Good conduct and good character are not taught in most secular schools. Therefore, the natural place to learn them is in a children's class on Hinduism. Academic studies teach us how to read and write. But religious studies teach us what to read and write, which is equally important. Good conduct is the foundation of all other practices in Hinduism.

Happiness: From the Hindu point of view, happiness is the natural outcome of the fulfillment of the purusharthas. Many adults have told me that they are surprised that even though they have, after many years, achieved the professional and family goals they thought would make them happy, they find they are not happy. This can be discouraging, disillusioning and depressing, even leading some to commit suicide. In looking back, many realize they neglected their religious life, dharma, at the expense of seeking wealth and worldly enjoyments. They see now that they are not content, not fulfilled, because they failed to devote equal energy to spiritual practice, attending the temple, meditation, hearing the words of enlightened teachers and studying the scriptures.



S. RAJAM

A happy home: *In Vedic times, a successful family gathers on their balcony. Father embraces his youngest son, while the older son plays a vina. Mother listens to the music, gratified to spend these sweet moments and thus pass the dharma to the next generation.*

Many resolve at this point to teach their children what they learned the hard way, that dharma is the center pole of success, and happiness is its flag of victory. Dharma includes holding firm to a religious view of life and the universe—embracing the wisdom of Sanatana Dharma on all levels of our being—a view which my guru said is simply the best description of the way things actually are. This means seeing the world as the arena of our evolution as divine beings on a spiritual journey extending many lifetimes, knowing that we come from God, live in God and ultimately will merge in God. Abiding by this spiritual, mountaintop perspective, facing each challenge as our own self-created karma, gives us the inner stability, poise and contentment that we call enduring happiness, known in Sanskrit as *ananda*, the natural bliss of the soul. It enables us to achieve success after success in all areas of effort, and it strengthens us to withstand the ups and downs, joys and sorrows, gains and losses that are natural to life on Earth. Striving for and achieving one's goals exercises the nerve system not only of the physical body, but of the inner bodies as well, strengthening the soul body and furthering its evolution. That prowess can then be applied to all future endeavors, including spiritual pursuits. It can be carried from life to life. Through this process we learn that while real fulfillment is not to be found in the outer world, the world trains us how to find the peace and happiness we already have within ourselves.

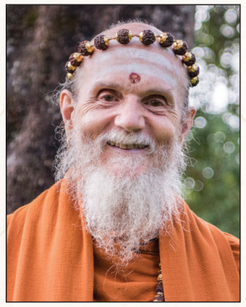
Hindu parents in temple societies across the US and Canada are realizing the importance of teaching these values to their youth, and they are seeking out programs and systems to do so. They are realizing that academic studies and Hindu practices we pursue in our youth have the effect of refining our desires to the point where we can, as adults, be religious enough to experience enduring happiness through connecting with our inner, spiritual self in three traditional ways: meditation, devotion and service. Through meditation, we go deep into the lotus of the heart and experience our inner self, our inner light, our spiritual energy. Through worship in the temple, we open ourselves to the blessings of the Deities. We can come to the temple in an unhappy state, receive the blessings of God and the Gods and go away uplifted and happy. Why? Because the blessings have cleared our mind and aura of congested thought forms and emotions, allowing us to connect with the same blissful state that can be achieved through meditation. And through helping and serving others, trying to make them happy, we naturally forget about ourselves and our problems. When we see the smile on the faces of those we are helping, it brings a smile to our face, opening access to our inner happiness.

In summary, the popular, materialistic view of success focuses narrowly on wealth and pleasure. To achieve lasting happiness, the hallmark of real success, the devout Hindu broadens the scope of success by pursuing dharma with the same vigor and enthusiasm. Hindus who fulfill this complete and high-minded paradigm will naturally be looked up to not only by their family, but by their community and nation, as embodying what it truly means to be a successful person. Hindus should be proud that their religion provides the tools they need to be truly successful in life. So, let us banish the three illusions that discourage parents from imparting the knowledge and use of those tools to their children. Let's fulfill our duty to the next generation, knowing that: 1) our faith furthers personal success in the highest sense; 2) that it is fully supportive of acquiring wealth and enjoying life; and 3) that meditation, temple worship and helping others are sophisticated, success-building tools appropriate for Hindus of all walks of life. Knowing that it will contribute pragmatically to their success in life, let's confidently teach Hinduism to the youth!

Be a Spiritual Leader!

Uplift the spirit of everyone you meet by expressing kindness, gratitude, appreciation and encouragement

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



FROM AUGUST 28 THROUGH 31 OF THE YEAR 2000, two thousand of the world's preeminent religious and spiritual leaders, representing the many faith traditions, gathered at the United Nations in New York City for a "Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders" to pledge themselves to work for peace. Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of HINDUISM TODAY, was among the Hindu delegates. Speaking at one gathering, he delivered the message: "For World Peace, Stop the War in the Home." The talk was also published as his Publisher's Desk column in the November/December 2000 issue:

"When asked by the United Nations leaders how humanity might better resolve the conflicts, hostilities and violent happenings that plague every nation, I answered that we must work at the source and cause, not with the symptoms. That is what we do in ayurvedic medicine, focus on the causes, on establishing the body's natural balance and health. That way, we are not always working with illness and disease, we are spending time and resources instead to establish a healthy system that itself fights off sickness. To stop the wars in the world, our best long-term solution is to stop the war in the home. It is here that hatred begins, that animosities with those who are different from us are nurtured, that battered children learn to solve their problems with violence."

The summit caused me to reflect on the difference between a religious leader and a spiritual leader. The conclusion I came to is that a religious leader is a leader of a recognized religion. A spiritual leader is someone who is expert in uplifting the spirit of others. Some religious leaders are also spiritual leaders, and some are not. Some spiritual leaders are also religious leaders, and some are not. My Gurudeva was definitely both. In fact, he was an expert in uplifting the spirit of others no matter what their religion or ethnicity. How did he accomplish this? By speaking encouraging words. You, too, can be a spiritual leader. Simply make it a point to say something encouraging, complimentary and high-minded to everyone you meet. Their day will be brighter because of it, and so will yours. Your words may be just what they needed to escape a moody morning and discover a new energy for the day. Isn't that what spiritual leaders do, change the energy, elevate the spirit so people connect with their intuition and open themselves to the highest course of action for the day?

When encountering people you know, you can ask about some aspects of their life, such as their children or recent travel, and show an interest in their well-being. Gurudeva was skilled at this form of empathy. As a result, he was an important source of upliftment and encouragement for many people on Kauai from all walks of life.

Meetings are excellent opportunities for encouraging others. Listen attentively to each individual's ideas, and when they are good ideas be sure to compliment them. If someone is a bit shy in presenting an idea, make a few encouraging remarks to help him or her feel more confident. Control yourself by not dominating every meeting with your ideas and presence.

Another way to be a spiritual leader is to uplift others by expressing gratitude for their help, friendship and presence in your life. Those who are full of gratitude lack nothing. They are filled with divine energy, complete, with nothing to require for their further happiness, nothing to regret. Their spirit is whole, their life is rich beyond measure. So, naturally, they are the spiritual leaders to others who feel less than perfect in their lives. Gratitude may seem an ordinary thing, but it is the touchstone of spiritual maturity. Showering your gratitude on others teaches them of their own fullness. One of the first ways to do so is to greet everyone with a good morning, afternoon or evening, and a smile. Keeping your mood elevated lifts everyone around you. Being kindly reminds them to show others kindness. Be the opposite of a complainer.

Unfortunately, it is an all-too-common way of our times that when something is done that is good, helpful or loving, it is overlooked, treated as something expected. No acknowledgment is shown, no appreciation is expressed. But if a shortcoming is seen, everyone is swift to point it out, and often in an unkind manner!

Let's look at some common examples of not being grateful or expressing appreciation. 1) The mother of two teenage boys works hard every day to take care of her sons' needs at home and at school. They take her efforts totally for granted and never say, "Thanks, Mom." 2) A wife is faithfully attentive to her husband's needs and supportive of his career. The husband never bothers to acknowledge her constant care. 3) A husband works hard to financially support his family, even toiling weekends to earn extra income. The wife, thinking it his duty, never expresses any gratitude for his tireless efforts. 4) A supervisor takes extra time with his staff to help improve their skills and advance their position. But not one of them ever expresses thanks for his leadership.

Gurudeva developed two sadhanas in this area, one for gratitude and one for appreciation. He advised fulfilling the sadhana of gratitude first, then the sadhana of appreciation. The sadhana of gratitude is to take out paper and pen and list all the good that has come into your life during the past five years. As memory is stimulated, the list will grow. Gurudeva suggests that if you find yourself not able to even recall one good thing, write several times, "I am a spiritual being of light maturing in the ocean of experience." This will stimulate a positive memory, which will soon be followed by more. Feelings of loving appreciation will begin to flow toward those who helped you in the good times. Feelings of acceptance and forgiveness will also well up for the bad times. This sadhana echoes the wisdom found in the *Turukural's* chapter on gratitude: "It is improper to ever forget a kindness, but good to forget at once an injury received."

Focusing on the good things in our life leads naturally to the sadhana of appreciation. This sadhana is to approach those to whom you are grateful and tell them, while looking deep into their eyes, how much you esteem and value them. Be specific. That is the key. Don't just say something general, like, "You are wonderful." Rather, point out specific qualities so that the person knows you really, deeply feel what you are saying, that it is not just a surface compliment. Convince him or her that you are sincere by your kind words and smiling face.

To prepare yourself for the appreciation sadhana, you can practice on yourself! Stand before a mirror, looking into your eyes, and say aloud, "I am grateful to you and appreciate your being in my life." You can then describe some of the many good actions you have done during the past five years. Once you feel comfortable appreciating yourself, you are ready to begin appreciating others. This exercise helps overcome any shyness you may feel.

Special events are great times to express appreciation. Birthdays are perfect opportunities, as are Mother's Day, Father's Day and Grandparent's Day. In many nations there is even a boss's day. A few years ago a number of our youth devotees in Malaysia held a surprise Mother's Day event. They wrote to me about it: "After the normal satsang events, bhajans and meditation, we announced our surprise, got each amma (mom) to come forward and stand in front, and each of her children put a huge garland on her and gave her a bookmark, a card, and a beautiful single rose package (all done by us), and prostrated to each amma's feet, hugged her and wished her well on this day. By now, most ammas were already busy wiping away tears from their eyes!"

One of the obstacles to expressing appreciation is the fact that, unfortunately, no one else is doing it. Extra courage then is needed to be the first to do so. For men, the culture may say without saying that real men don't express appreciation. In that case, even more courage is required! A less personal way to express appreciation is in a note accompanying a gift. A gift that you make yourself conveys care and heartfelt sincerity.

My guru encouraged us to express appreciation to family members and friends, spiritual mentors, business associates and community leaders as often as we can. Remember, when sharing your love with others, be specific, smile and realize you are helping change the world for the better. Those you uplift will learn from your example and later uplift others in their life.

He wrote: "We are essentially pure souls temporarily living in a physical body. We can and should use our God-given gift of free will encased in love to make a difference in the world today, even if it is in a small way. All of us making the same difference together do so in a big way. Shishyas should be grateful to their gurus, husbands to their wives, wives to their husbands, parents to their children, children to their parents, students to their teachers and teachers to their students. It's far more effective to praise others and appreciate what we have than to find fault and complain about what we don't have!"



SHUTTERSTOCK

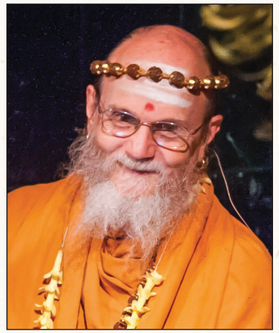
Expressing appreciation: *Telling people how important they are in our lives can be done with a simple note and a gift, or, more effectively, in person as you look into their eyes and recount their positive qualities and contributions.*

PUBLISHER'S DESK • JULY 2014

Noninjury: the Foremost Virtue

Belief in the law of karma and accepting the divinity of all beings are the twin pillars of ahimsa, compassionate nonhurtfulness

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



Noninjury is the first and foremost ethical principle of every Hindu. In Sanskrit this virtue is called ahimsa. The *Mahabharata* extols its importance, saying, "Ahimsa is the highest dharma. It is the highest purification. It is also the highest truth from which all dharma proceeds." An excellent definition is found in the *Shandilya Upanishad*: "Ahimsa is not causing pain to any living being at any time through the actions of one's mind, speech or body." Note the threefold nature of this nonhurtfulness: It applies not only to our actions, but also to our words and even our thoughts.

Is the principle of nonviolence absolute under all circumstances? My Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, answered this question by stipulating a few "regrettable exceptions." The first exception applies to extreme circumstances, such as when faced with imminent danger, in which case individuals may elect to injure or even kill to protect their life or that of another. Another exception applies to those who are members of a police force or armed forces. However, even those individuals should not use violence unless absolutely necessary. The Los Angeles police department, as an example, has a policy called minimum use of force that is in consonance with this Hindu viewpoint. "The police should use physical force to the extent necessary to secure observance of the law or to restore order when the exercise of persuasion, advice and warning is found to be insufficient to achieve police objectives; and police should use only the reasonable amount of physical force which is necessary on any particular occasion for achieving a police objective."

A common justification for using violence is retaliation for injuries to you, members of your family, your religion or nation. There are many in the world today who believe that in those instances you have a duty to personally retaliate. This is commonly referred to as the "eye for an eye" mentality. However, Hinduism does not support this idea. In fact, our oldest scripture, the *Rig Veda*, speaks against it: "Return not blow for blow, nor curse for curse, neither meanness for base tricks. Shower blessings instead."

Rather than retaliation, Hinduism favors using society's established channels for finding a remedy. Take as an example a common movie plot. Someone shoots and kills your brother during a robbery, and the rest of the film is devoted to your chasing down the robber and shooting him to punish him and get even. What, then, happens in the next life, the sequel? There is definitely a negative karma to be faced for killing in revenge. Perhaps another robbery will take place and you will be killed. Better to let the police take care of the robber. The policeman has taken an oath to uphold the law and therefore creates no negative karma if, in capturing the criminal, he has no choice but to injure him.

When it comes to harming others through words, speaking harshly to individuals or yelling at them is obviously included and should be avoided. In addition, there is the more indirect approach of utilizing joking, teasing, gossiping and backbiting to harm others. How do we know if we are speaking in a way that is harming or that is helping another? An effective fourfold test is to be sure what we are saying is true, kind, helpful and necessary. If it is, then it will certainly be nonhurtful.

You may be wondering how backbiting can hurt someone, as they are not present to hear the criticism. It is the thought force that they feel. The same applies to critical thoughts that we don't verbalize. Both are the most subtle form of injury. My guru described it in an interesting way: "When you defile others, mentally and verbally, through backbiting gossip about the happenings in their lives, you are hurting them. You are actually making it difficult for them to succeed, to even persist where they are. They sense, they feel the ugliness that you are projecting toward them."

Looking again at our definition of ahimsa from the *Shandilya Upanishad*, we note the phrase "not causing pain to any living being." In other words, ahimsa extends beyond human beings. It includes animals, insects and plants as well. A verse in the *Yajur Veda* speaks directly to this idea: "You must not use your God-given body for killing God's creatures, whether they are human, animal or whatever."

A way that many Hindus honor this injunction is by following a vegetarian diet. *The Tirukural*, an important scripture on ethics written some two thousand years ago, has an entire chapter on vegetarianism, "Abstaining from Eating Meat." It states that vegetarianism is the way of insightful souls who have realized that meat is the butchered flesh of another creature and that such restraint is an act of greater value than a thousand ghee offerings consumed in sacrificial fires.

A nonviolent approach is even extended to insects. Instead of thoughtlessly killing household pests, stop their entry. Likewise with garden insects or predators—instead of killing them, keep them away by natural means. A regrettable exception is that when predators, pests, bacteria and disease threaten the health or safety of human beings or their animals, they may be eradicated.

There are two philosophical principles which form the basis for ahimsa. The first is the law of karma. The knowledge that if we harm another, we will be harmed in the future is a powerful motivation to refrain from violence. The *Tirukural's* chapter entitled "Avoidance of Injuring Others" offers pertinent insight: "If a man visits sorrow on another in the morning, sorrow will visit him unbidden in the afternoon."

A second basis for ahimsa is the perception of the Divine shining forth within all things, all beings, all peoples. When we see the Divine in someone, we naturally do not want to hurt them. Pious Hindus even see the Divine within people who are acting in evil ways, such as criminals or terrorists, and therefore seek not to harm them. An amazing example of this arose in Bali in 2002 when terrorists bombed a bar, killing over 200 people. The Balinese Hindus held a ceremony that sought forgiveness for the perpetrators.

We should guard against taking on the Western perspective that some people are intrinsically evil, the enemy, and therefore it is all right to treat them inhumanely. The law of karma does not distinguish between hurting an enemy or hurting a friend. The *Tirukural* affirms: "Harming others, even enemies who harmed you unprovoked, surely brings incessant sorrow."

Beyond these two philosophical bases, the *Tirukural* provides two more motivations for nonviolence. The first is that it is simply how high-minded people act: "It is the principle of the pure in heart never to injure others, even when they themselves have been hatefully injured." And the second is that it is a way of encouraging the injurer to reform his behavior and give up violence. The *Tirukural* puts it well: "If you return kindness for injuries received and forget both, those who harmed you will be punished by their own shame."

A lack of compassion will obstruct our practice of ahimsa. When we are overly self-centered and oblivious to the feelings of others, we can hurt someone and not even be aware of it. Here are a few suggestions for deepening our sense of compassion for people. One simple way is to take care of animals. This is particularly helpful in teaching compassion to children. They learn to understand the needs of the animal and how to take care of it without unnecessarily disturbing or hurting it.

Another way to increase compassion is by gardening and growing plants. For the plant to survive, we need to understand its nature and properly take care of it. We can't put a sun-loving plant in the shade and expect it to do well. We can't over-water a plant that needs a small amount of water and expect it to thrive. Nurturing plants and animals prepares us to care for our fellow human beings.

A third suggestion relates to computers and computer games. Unfortunately, these days many children grow up spending way too much time alone immersed in a computer, playing often violent video games. This can stunt their normal emotional growth and social development. They can become strangers to compassion, lacking in healthy feelings for others. A more balanced upbringing is needed, a reasonable amount of computer access balanced out by healthy interaction with family members, friends and others.

Here is a concluding quote from my guru which beautifully ties together the ideals of nonviolence and compassion: "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."



S. RAJAM

Regrettable exceptions: *While nonviolence is a guiding principle for Hindus, there are instances when violence is permitted. One such exception is the legal enforcement of law and the protection of society and the nation. Here a general directs the army, whose duty may rightly include unavoidable injury.*

CHAPTER TEN

Practice

- The Aim of Hindu Practices
- A Ten-Minute Spiritual Workout
- Path to Higher Consciousness
- Hinduism and Modern Life

An olive grove in Zaghouan, Tunisia

The Aim of Hindu Practices

Dharma, seva, puja and raja yoga lead to purification of the mind, which is the essence of all spiritual endeavors

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



Often in presenting Hinduism's practices, the actions themselves are described with little or no explanation of their purpose. This may have worked well in days of yore, but today practitioners demand clear reasons and insights into their sadhanas. Four traditional practices can inform our exploration. 1) Hindus are taught to follow dharma and refrain from adharmic actions, such as harming others, stealing and lying. 2) Seva, selfless service, is to be done regularly. 3) Puja is performed or attended in the home shrine daily, and weekly at a nearby temple. 4) The disciplines of raja yoga, which include profound forms of meditation, are a daily practice for the most devout.

What makes these practices important? A rationale for religious practices in Western faiths is that they define the good path which leads the observant to heaven. However, that is not why they are important in Hinduism and other Eastern religions.

To begin answering the above question, let's examine a core Hindu belief: man's innate divinity. Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, articulated it beautifully: "Deep inside we are perfect this very moment, and we have only to discover and live up to this perfection to be whole. We have taken birth in a physical body to grow and evolve into our divine potential. We are inwardly already one with God. Our religion contains the knowledge of how to realize this oneness and not create unwanted experiences along the way."

An analogy will illustrate this idea. Imagine a pond of water with large gold nuggets at the bottom. If the surface of the pond has ripples due to wind, or if the water is clouded by mud or pollution, we cannot see the gold nuggets from above. The nuggets represent our soul nature; the ripples on the surface of the pond represent an active intellectual mind; and the water's cloudiness represents subconscious impurities. In order to experience our soul nature and its oneness with God, our intellect must be quiet and our mind must be pure. We also need to be a sensitive and humble observer.

This analogy reveals the answer to our question "What is the reason Hindu spiritual practices are important?" They are important because of their impact on our mind. That impact is threefold: 1) they purify the mind; 2) they quiet the intellect and 3) they spiritualize the ego, thereby allowing us to eventually experience our divine essence. Here I will focus on the first of these, but keep in mind that the other two are equally essential to spiritual progress and effort.

An entry in the *Encyclopedia of Hinduism* (India Heritage Research Foundation) tells us: "*Shuddhi* means purification. *Chitta* is mind. Purification of the mind *(chitta-shuddhi)* may be called the essence of all spiritual endeavors." Purification is the process of removing or resolving subconscious impressions, called *samskaras*, of past misdeeds and troublesome experiences from this and past lives. Note that more commonly *samskara* refers to a sacrament or rite done to mark a significant transition in life, such as the marriage rite, vivaha samskara. These sacraments make deep and positive impressions on the mind of the recipient, inform the family and community of changes in the lives of its members and secure inner-world blessings. Here the term *samskara* refers to the imprints left on the subconscious mind by all experience, which then mold one's nature and affect the course of life.

The *Encyclopedia* explains, "Mental impurities are the root cause of pleasure and pain, and therefore they perpetuate the cycle of birth and death. Breaking this cycle and thus putting an end to sorrow *(duhkha)* is the goal of Hindu religion and philosophy. The surest means of achieving this goal is chitta-shuddhi." The four practices mentioned above—dharma, seva, puja and yoga—purify the mind in the following ways.

Dharma: Adhering to dharma and refraining from adharmic actions, such as harming others, stealing and lying, assures that we are not increasing the mind's impurity.

Seva: Also known as karma yoga, seva is a powerful tool for reducing mental impurities. Adi Shankara expressed this in *Vivekachudamani*: "Work is for the purification of the mind, not for the perception of Reality. The realization of Truth is brought about by discrimination, not in the least by ten millions of acts." My guru encouraged devotees to perform four hours of seva each week, especially service focused on helping others: "Lift their burdens just a little bit and, unknowingly perhaps, you may lift something that is burdening your mind. You erase and wipe clean the mirror of your own mind through helping another. We call this karma yoga, the deep practice of unwinding, through service, the selfish, self-centered, egotistical vasanas of the lower nature that have been generated for many, many lives and which bind the soul in darkness."

Our own *Hindu Lexicon* explains, "Vasanas are subliminal inclinations and habit patterns which, as driving forces, color and motivate one's attitudes and future actions and thereafter contribute to mental fluctuations, called *vritti*." A vasana is created when two samskaras blend together, forming an amalgam that is stronger than either individual experiential impression. Swami Harshananda writes in *A Concise Encylopaedia of Hinduism*: "Vasana is a strong impression in the mind. It is so strong that, when it arises in the mind, a person is forced to act without thinking of the consequences." Vasanas can be negative or positive. It is, of course, the negative ones we want to soften through seva.



S. RAJAM

Practice, practice, practice: *A bhaktar offers fresh cow's milk to the Sivalingam, part of his daily spiritual disciplines which also include meditation, service and following a virtuous path.*

Puja: Attending pujas at a temple and in the home shrine, our third primary practice, purifies the mind through the exchange of prana, an aspect of puja and homa that is not often discussed. Puja is a process of giving prana to the Deity through offerings of fruit, cooked foods, water, incense, fragrant flowers and milk. Then, during the culminating arati, the Deity and his helpers, or devas, reflect back this prana into the aura of each devotee, purifying it of subconscious congestions. The devotee so blessed leaves feeling uplifted and relieved of mental burdens.

After an elaborate homa performed in our Hawaii temple by his three priests, Jayendrapuri Mahaswamiji of Kailash Ashram in Bengaluru, India, explained that Agni, the messenger God of fire, conveys the offerings in a purified form to the Deity, who then uses the prana to bless those present. The effect of such blessings can be life-altering, as Gurudeva observed: "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."

Raja Yoga: Rishi Patanjali extols the purifying power of our fourth practice, raja yoga, in his *Yoga Sutras*: "When the [eight] limbs of yoga are practiced, impurities dwindle and radiant knowledge manifests, leading to discrimination as to their difference." He particularly highlights the purifying effect of austerity, *tapas,* which is part of the second limb, niyama. Tiruvalluvar's *Tirukural* provides this insight: "As the intense fire of the furnace refines gold to brilliance, so does the burning suffering of austerity purify the soul to resplendence." This verse may bring to mind images of yogis subsisting on nettle soup in a remote Himalayan cave or bathing in freezing waters. Though tapas does embrace such intense practices, it also includes easier ones that can be done by anyone.

A simple form of tapas is sacrifice, giving up a cherished possession—be it money, time or a physical object—to manifest a greater good. Sacrifice, while similar to charity, is distinguished by some form of self-denial. Examples I like are fasting for a day and giving the money saved to a Hindu institution, and saving money for charity by going on a budget vacation instead of a fancy one.

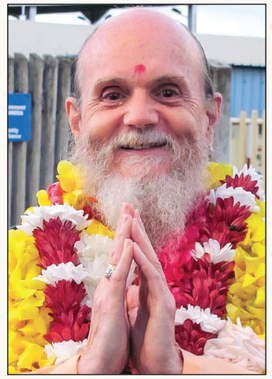
Performing penance to atone for misdeeds is another form of tapas. This is done through such acts as 108 prostrations before the Deity in the temple, walking prostrations around a temple, and *kavadi*, a penance offered to Lord Murugan (also known as Karttikeya). Gurudeva elaborates, "Austerity is the powerful bath of fire and bright rays of showering light that washes the soul clean of the dross of its many past lives, and of the current life, which has held it in the bondage of ignorance, misgiving, unforgivingness and the self-perpetuating ignorance of the truths of the Sanatana Dharma."

We can take joy in the fact that Hindu practices well performed impact our mind and transform our consciousness. It is through purifying the mind, quieting the intellect and spiritualizing the ego that we are able to grow and evolve and ultimately experience our soul nature and its oneness with God. Our paramaguru, Yogaswami of Sri Lanka, described this process: "When worldly attachment and impurity of the mind disappear, then there is *atma-darshan*."

A Ten-Minute Spiritual Workout

An abbreviated daily regimen designed for those who find that today's busy life allows little or no time for introspection

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



NOWADAYS THE IDEA OF PERFORMING A daily physical workout is widespread. Nearly everyone appreciates the need to stay fit and healthy for a productive, contented life. Three types of exercise are recommended: endurance, flexibility and strength. Each has specific benefits. Endurance activities, such as walking, running and swimming, increase vitality and keep the heart, lungs and circulatory system healthy. Flexibility activities, such as hatha yoga, T'ai Chi and dancing, keep the muscles relaxed and the joints mobile. Strength activities build muscle tissue and keep the skeletal system strong. These include calisthenics, weight/resistance exercises and climbing stairs.

Taking care of our physical body is essential; but for optimum performance in life, all dimensions of our being need attention: physical, emotional/intellectual and spiritual. Each is important and deserves its share of attention. Of the three, the spiritual, or superconscious, dimension is typically the most neglected, even though it is the core of our being, our real identity. My Gurudeva wrote: "We have to adjust our subconscious to the idea that we are a superconscious being, rather than an instinctive being or an intellectual being driven by the impulses of the five senses. Awareness is the core of us."

We maintain physical health through exercises. We nourish our intellectual nature through learning new things all through life, expanding and strengthening our mental abilities. The emotional nature is sustained by tending closely to interpersonal relations, practicing surrender and acceptance, by striving to build good character qualities, serving others and living a balanced life.

We give time to our spiritual nature by performing daily religious activities. I like to call this a spiritual workout. During this time, we are reminded that life's inner purpose is to make spiritual progress, moving forward toward the ultimate goal of experiencing God, Self Realization, and subsequently moksha, liberation from the cycle of rebirth. It is not so much a matter of exercising our spiritual nature as it is taking time to experience it. The scripture *Tirumantiram* shares: "Step by step, practice withdrawal of the mind and look inward. One by one, you will witness the myriad good things within. Now and here below, you may meet the Lord for whom the ancient *Veda* still searches everywhere."

Generally we are so wrapped up in our outer nature that we are hardly aware of our true, glorious inner reality. This can go on life after life, as it does for many people, who only begin to think of greater realities when nearing the point of death.

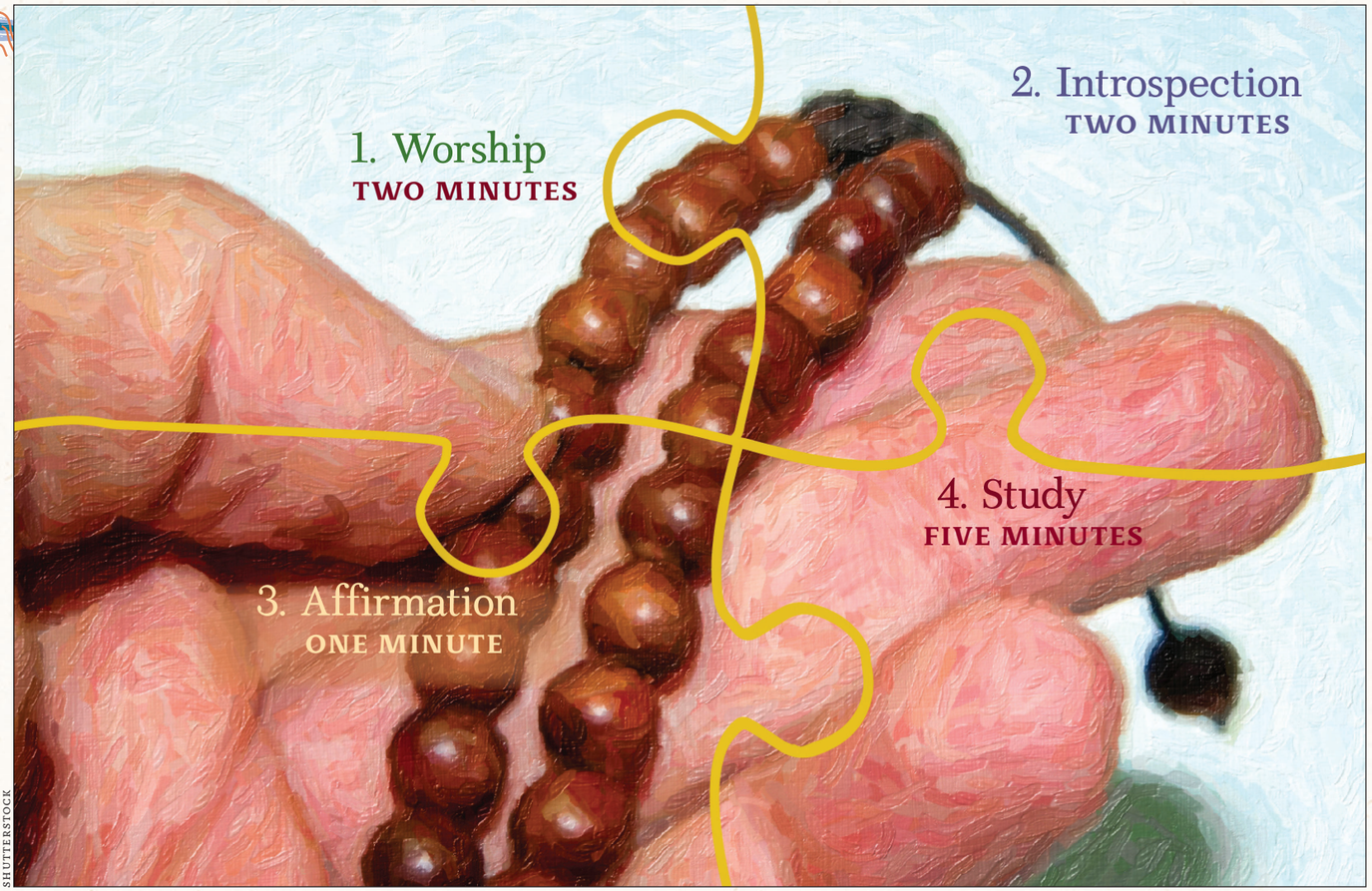
The benefits of such times of quiet retreat from life's hustle and bustle are underrated and overlooked, as life in the 21st century becomes more and more hectic and externally demanding. Many orthodox families living in India still manage to reserve time for their spiritual being by performing an early morning puja in their home shrine, followed by repetition of a mantra while counting on japa beads.

The predominant trend in India and other countries, however, is that fewer and fewer families follow such disciplines. Sitting with me, so many say the same thing: "We just can't seem to find the time for puja, japa or meditation." Time devoted to employment, transportation, eating, entertainment, physical exercise and spending time with family and friends takes up the whole day. The traditional one-hour daily religious workout is proving to be too long and, because the benefits are not well understood, it is commonly skipped altogether. My Gurudeva spoke of those benefits, "As a result [of your daily religious practices], you will be able to brave the forces of the external world without being disturbed by them and fulfill your dharma in whatever walk of life you have chosen. Because your daily sadhana has regulated your nerve system, the quality of your work in the world will improve, and your mood in performing it will be confident and serene."

So, what's the solution? I focus primarily on the youth, for their patterns are not too rigid to change. I devised a ten-minute program consisting of four activities that can be performed whenever time is available. Hopefully, the brevity and flexibility of the time of day, along with a clear sense of the spiritual benefits, will motivate students to adopt this workout or, equally as good, customize a routine of their own. I suggest this practice be taken up around age fifteen and maintained throughout high school and university. After schooling, it is hoped that those serious about their spiritual life will increase their workout to half an hour.

The spiritual workout consists of four activities: worship, introspection, affirmation and study. The worship portion involves repeating a mantra to a chosen Deity or reciting nine or more names of the Deity, offering grains of rice to a murti or picture with each repetition or name. For example, if worshiping Lord Ganesha, one might intone the mantra Aum Sri Ganeshaya Namah or another of your choice or lineage. Alternatively, a short bhajan can be sung while looking at the Deity's picture or murti. Devote two minutes to this simple expression of reverence and gratitude.

The introspection portion consists of chanting the mantra Aum nine times with eyes closed. 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



SHUTTERSTOCK

syllable is M, pronounced "mm" 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: AAUUMMM (silence), AAUUMMM (silence), AAUUMMM (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. Devote two minutes to this.

Affirmations are statements repeated to oneself to place specific impressions in our subconscious mind to produce positive results in the future. This portion of the workout consists of repeating nine times the affirmation "I'm all right right now." Two other affirmations that can be used are "All my needs will always be met" and "I can, I will, I am able to accomplish what I plan." The threefold key to effectively utilizing affirmations is: 1) keep the mind focused on the meaning of what you are saying, 2) hold in your mind a visualization that shows the result you want to achieve and 3) feel in the present how you will feel later, when you have achieved what the affirmation describes. Devote one minute to this.

The study portion consists of reading a sacred Hindu text that provides you new knowledge and insight. It is important to choose a work that you find clear and inspiring, avoiding those that seem obscure or technical. Devote five minutes to this.

What are the benefits of these four religious practices? The benefit of the worship portion is that it increases our devotion to the Deity, enhancing our relationship with Him or Her. It is a natural first step toward eventually performing a full rite of worship (atmartha puja). The introspective practice of chanting Aum produces a calming effect on the mind and raises our energies into the more spiritual part of the mind, moving you into the higher chakras. It provides a natural first step toward the deeper practices of meditation, such as regulating our breath (pranayama) and withdrawing energy from the senses (pratyahara), focusing the thought process (dharana) leading to experiencing our inner soul nature (dhyana and samadhi). Repeating an affirmation each day helps us become more positive and self-confident, making us more successful in everything we do. Affirmations are also a great antidote to worry. The study of sacred texts increases knowledge of our faith and catalyzes insights into Hindu philosophy and practices.

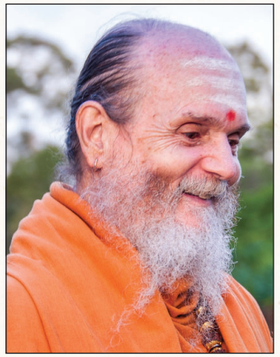
It is important to keep in mind that the amount of spiritual advancement we make toward our ultimate goal of experiencing God, Self-Realization, and the subsequent liberation from the cycle of rebirth, or moksha, is directly related to the amount of time we devote to religious practices.

Sage Patanjali mentions this is in his *Yoga Sutras* (1.21–22): "For those who have strong dedication, samadhi is near. Whether one's practice is mild, medium or intense also makes a difference." The sage is indicating that spiritual progress is not based only on how much time we devote to our practices, but also on how much dedication, energy or effort we put into it. His third verse on this topic (1.23) states: "Samadhi may also come through devotion to Ishvara." This means that effort and dedication can be supplemented by the blessings or grace we receive due to our intense devotion to God.

Path to Higher Consciousness

How following Hindu principles develops the refined character needed to move from anger and fear into lofty states of mind

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



IT IS NOT UNCOMMON TO HEAR HINDUS ASK rhetorically, "Aren't all religions pretty much the same?" In fact, people of all faiths can be heard asking this. A related statement echoes this sentiment: "Living a virtuous life and helping your fellowman is the essence of all religions, isn't it?"

Our editors' study of the world's major religions finds similarities but also significant differences between religions. By presenting information on the world's religions in brief and easily comparable write-ups, the article seeks to dispel "the myth that all religions are one, that they all seek to lead adherents by the same means to the same Ultimate Reality." They don't, as a conscientious review of the article will show.

For example, from the Hindu perspective, it is not the attainment of heaven that is difficult. Remaining there is the challenge, as explained in the *Mundaka Upanishad*. After death those who have performed daily rituals and humanitarian works earn the grace of access to heaven. However, the merit of their good deeds is eventually exhausted, and they are once again born on Earth. The Upanishad offers two ways to remain in heaven and ultimately transcend that realm and merge in eternal oneness with God. The first is the attainment of a serene mind and controlled senses, which leads to renunciation of the world and the acceptance of a guru capable of guiding seekers to God Realization. The second path is retirement to the forest in one's elderly years, there to live in solitary, performing intense austerities and worship of a Deity. To the Hindu mind it makes sense that achieving a permanent stay in heaven requires more than mere virtuous living and humanitarian acts.

As the Insight mentions, "Hinduism is a mystical religion, leading the devotee to personally experience the Truth within, finally reaching the pinnacle of consciousness where man and God are one." Wikipedia's take on this, slightly edited by me, reads like this:

"Higher consciousness, superconsciousness and God-consciousness are expressions used in Hinduism to denote the consciousness of a human being who has reached a higher level of development and who has come to know reality as it is.... Evolution in this sense is not that which occurs by natural selection over generations of human reproduction but evolution brought about by the application of spiritual knowledge to the conduct of human life, and of the refinement of the mind brought about by spiritual practices. Through the application of such knowledge to practical self-management, the awakening and development of faculties dormant in the ordinary human being is achieved. These faculties are aroused by and developed in conjunction with certain virtues such as lucidity, patience, kindness, truthfulness, humility and forgiveness toward one's fellow man—qualities without which higher consciousness is not possible."

Let's look more closely at the word consciousness. Our Himalayan Academy lexicon describes it as "perception, awareness, apprehension. There are many layers or levels of consciousness, ranging from the ordinary, everyday consciousness of our body and mind to omniscient states of superconsciousness. Consciousness aware only of itself is Pure Consciousness."

The principles and practices of Hinduism are designed to help us ascend to ever higher levels of consciousness, moving out of negative states to positive ones, from positive states to creative ones and from creative states to divine knowing, the highest state, which is the unitive consciousness of soul and God. This happens in small steps, in a gradational approach, over a period of many lives.

The most common negative states of consciousness that Hindus work to overcome are fear and anger. My guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, gave a number of techniques for reducing and then eliminating altogether these powerful instinctive forces. He emphasized the worship of Lord Ganesha, the benevolent elephant-faced Lord of Obstacles: "Worship of Lord Ganesha is immediate. One has but to think of His form to contact His ever-present mind. 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."

Progressing through levels of consciousness by applying Hindu principles and practices has similarities to the modern idea of self-improvement. It also has some important differences. It adds God and the soul as central elements. It also brings in the larger time frame required by reincarnation. We are looking for these changes to take place over a number of lives, and we know we have all the time we need to achieve our goals.

As in any system of self-improvement, it is important to start at the beginning. In the Hindu approach, that means focusing on our conduct and making sure it aligns with dharmic ideals. An appropriate place to start is with overcoming basic instinctive patterns, which can be thought of as belonging to the lower chakras. The ten classical restraints called yamas outline qualities that help control lower-consciousness tendencies: noninjury, truthfulness, nonstealing, divine conduct, patience, steadfastness, compassion, honesty, moderate appetite and purity. As we become established in these, more character refinements can be developed, such as courageousness, industriousness, joyfulness, observation and respect. This evolution of character is a natural movement from lower to higher consciousness.

Character is the sum total of mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual. On the spiritual path, the first phase of effort is to build, improve and transform our character.

The foundational importance of character is not limited to religion. A school of modern mental health called Positive Psychology states: "We have discovered that there is a set of human strengths that are the most likely buffers against mental illness: courage, optimism, interpersonal skill, work ethic, hope, honesty and perseverance. Much of the task of prevention will be to create a science of human strength whose mission will be to foster these virtues in young people" (Prof. Martin Seligman, University of Pennsylvania, 1998).

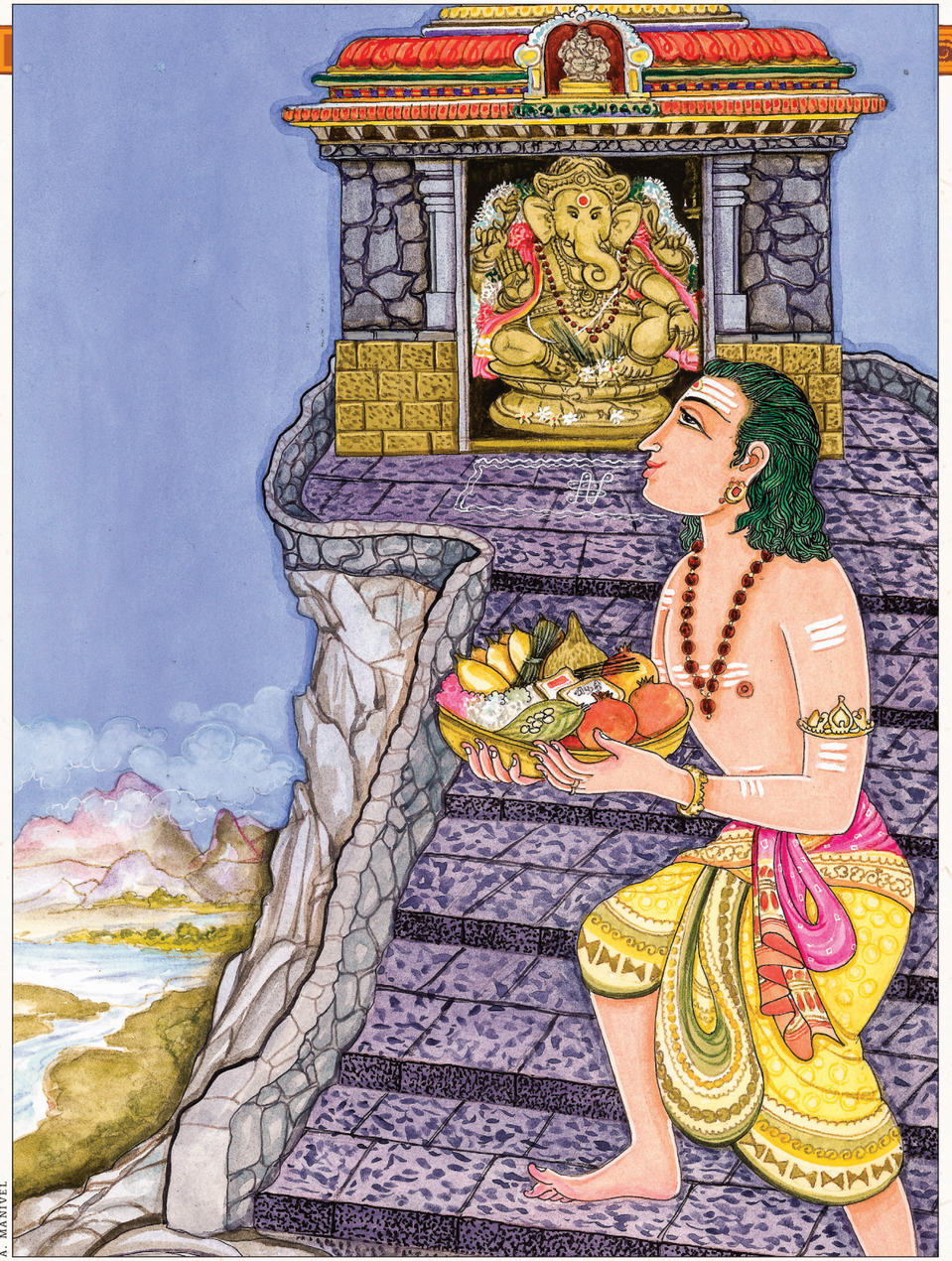
In addition to cultivating those human strengths, we can renounce actions motivated solely by selfish desires—actions that give us additional pleasure, wealth or possessions but do nothing for our family, friends or associates.

Good character is rooted in duty. We all have certain duties to perform. The duties of those following the path of family life in Hinduism change according to age. This is called ashrama dharma. For example, in the second ashrama, grihastha, age 24-48, the primary focus is raising a family and fulfilling a career. Some think spiritual life draws us away from the world and our duties in it, but, in fact, duty well performed matures our spiritual search, and spiritual practices enhance the performance of duty.

Those sincerely striving for higher consciousness can add new activities to life that are purely selfless, helping others in truly giving ways, with no expectation of payment, presents, praise or prestige. This matures our character. Often such service is done at a temple or ashram, but it is wise and prudent to extend such altruism as widely in your life as you can, such as helping others in your workplace beyond what is expected, willingly and without complaint.

Selfless service has an added depth when it involves sacrifice, the giving up a cherished possession, be it money, time, intelligence or a physical object, to manifest a greater good. Sacrifice is similar to charity but has a touch of self-denial, such as fasting for a day and giving the money saved to a Hindu institution or giving up an expensive vacation for a budget vacation and donating the savings to charity.

Selflessness, dutifulness and overcoming fear and anger are all part of the great and difficult work of transforming our nature. As we achieve these, we are naturally led to devotional practices and meditative disciplines. Worship, meditation and the several yogas then open new possibilities for refining character and lifting our consciousness. Hinduism's gradational approach to mysticism requires patience. Correctly understood, this approach blesses us with the fulfilling knowledge that we are making tangible progress toward the eventual goal of God Realization, and averts any sense of frustration that we have not yet achieved it.



A. MANIVEL

Step by step: *Artist A. Manivel shows a seeker ascending steps to a small Ganesha shrine at the top of a knoll. With offerings in hand, he consciously works within himself to mold his life in accord with dharma, knowing that he must overcome the baser, instinctive emotions and reactions before gaining access to the divine states of mind his guru has spoken of.*

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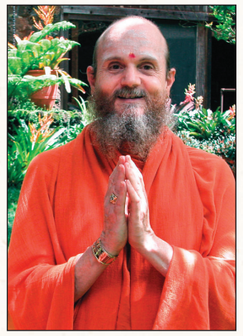
Hinduism and Modern Life

Does humanity's most enduring faith maintain its relevance amid the challenges of 21st-century life?

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



Some months back in Australia, a group of Hindu teens asked me what relevance Hinduism and temples have to modern life. They said it as though the answer were obvious: None. But they were callow and yet to be schooled in the noble religion they had been born into. After our session, their question echoed in my mind for days. It is a question on many minds, deserving a complete answer. I would like to share with our readers the four major virtues that I singled out for those students, virtues which make Hinduism profoundly relevant in today's world: nonviolence, tolerance, worship and life's four noble goals.

The Virtue of Nonviolence: On November 13, 2006, we watched with interest a television report on the groundbreaking ceremony inaugurating a memorial to American civil rights hero Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in Washington's front yard, the National Mall. President Bush said he was proud to dedicate the memorial in its "rightful place," between monuments to Thomas Jefferson, who "declared the promise of America," and Abraham Lincoln, "who defended the promise of America." Dr. King, Bush offered, "redeemed the promise of America."

Dr. King came from a staunch Christian family. His grandfather was a Baptist preacher. His father was pastor of Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church. King earned his own Bachelor of Divinity degree from Crozer Theological Seminary in 1951 and his Doctor of Philosophy from Boston University in 1955. While at the seminary, King became acquainted with Mohandas Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolent social protest. On a trip to India in 1959, King met with followers of Gandhi. During these intimate discussions, he became more convinced than ever that nonviolent resistance is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom.

Dr. King went on to effectively utilize the Gandhian principles of nonviolent social protest to bring to the world's attention the unjustness of US racial discrimination laws, which were subsequently changed. Dr. King and all the millions he impacted would certainly affirm the relevance of the key Hindu principle of nonviolence in modern society.

The world has changed significantly in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Everyone has become more aware, and increasingly appalled, by the rampant incidents of brutality occurring worldwide every month. A great deal of violence is based upon the concept of the strategic necessity of retaliation—"An eye for an eye." "If they kill one of us, we must kill one of them." Contrarily, Hindus view retaliation as unwise. Gandhi made an insightful statement to counterpoint the call for revenge. He warned: "An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind." He also declared, "I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent."

In a world awash in wars and conflict of every kind, Hinduism's gentleness and noninjury by thought, word and deed is more than relevant. It is a necessity for the future of humanity.

The Wisdom of Tolerance: The Hindu value that complements and underlies the principle of nonviolence is that of tolerance. The Hindu belief that gives rise to tolerance of differences in race, religion and nationality is that all of mankind is good; we are all divine beings, souls created by God. Hindus do not accept the concept that some individuals are evil and others are good. Hindus believe that each individual is a soul, a divine being, who is inherently good. The *Upanishads* tell us that each soul is emanated from God, as a spark from a fire, and thence begins a spiritual journey which eventually leads back to God. All human beings are on this journey, whether they realize it or not. The Upanishadic *mahavakyam*, or great saying, that expresses this is *Ayam atma brahma*, "the soul is God." The Hindu practice of greeting one another with namaskara, worshiping God within the other person, is a way this philosophical truth is practiced on a daily basis.

This is taken one step further in the Vedic verse *Vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, "The whole world is one family." Everyone is family oriented. All that we do is for the purpose of benefiting our family. We want them all to be happy, successful and religiously fulfilled. And when family is defined as the whole world, then it is clear that we wish everyone in the world to be happy, successful and religiously fulfilled. The Vedic verse that captures this sentiment is *Sarve janah sukhino bhavantu*, "May all people be happy." Certainly the key principle of tolerance is a major demonstration of the relevance of Hindu teachings to our modern world in providing a more compassionate and universalistic worldview, one that embraces the growing pluralism in world societies.

Effective Forms of Worship: One question the teens in Australia asked was, "If God is omnipresent, what is the need to build big temples to worship Him. The cost of construction is quite large; plus after it is built you have the ongoing cost of monthly maintenance. Couldn't all that money be spent in a better way?"

I asked a question in response: "Since God is omnipresent, shouldn't we able to experience Him equally everywhere? For example, God permeates this room. By looking intently at the room shouldn't you be able to experience God? In theory you should." I then asked, "How many of you can see God permeating this room?" All present had to admit that they could not.



DINODIA

Kids want to know: *Like so many children all over the world, this young girl enjoys ready access to information of every kind. Her father wisely supervises her Internet explorations. Hinduism offers an ethical and philosophical framework that, if taught to the young, helps keep everything in proper perspective and guides them on a path of earthly success, intellectual growth and spiritual progress.*

Practically speaking, God's omnipresence is a marvelously subtle form of consciousness, too subtle for most of us to experience unless we are skilled in meditation. I continued by giving the following series of analogies with other objects that are difficult to see. If we want to see a distant galaxy, we must go to an observatory and use a powerful telescope. To look into the nucleus of a cell, we go to a laboratory and use an electron microscope. Similarly, to see God, we go to the temple and experience God through the sanctified murti, or statue, of the Deity. Temples—and particularly the murtis within them—can connect us with the Divine because they are especially sacred. There are three reasons for this: construction, consecration and continuous daily worship.

A temple is designed and built according to strict rules laid down in scripture. This governs what shrines are included in the temple, the shrines' location and the overall dimensions of the temple. Consecration occurs through the powerful ceremony called *kumbhabhishekam*, during which a large number of priests perform elaborate rites for days on end. Thereafter begins the routine of daily worship conducted by professional priests. In these three ways, the temple and the murtis within them are sanctified and endowed with potent energies.

Hindu temples in every corner of the world offer Hindus an achievable way to experience God's sacred presence. Divinity's presence uplifts those attending the temple, inspiring them to bring forth and perpetuate traditional Hindu culture in the form of sacred music, art and dance. As such, the temple becomes the hub of religious life in the surrounding Hindu community and thus is undeniably relevant to modern life.

Four Noble Pursuits: Hinduism's relevance to modern life is perhaps most personally important in the sphere of spiritual fulfillments and worldly attainments. Each Hindu seeks the highest and best for self and family, including closeness to God and blessings in every arena of experience. Hinduism has tools, maps and guidelines for reaching those very human goals. Consider the concept of the *purusharthas*, Hinduism's four traditional pursuits. The first two are wealth and love, known in Sanskrit as artha and kama. Common to all mankind, these embrace the pursuit of love, family, children, career and financial abundance. The third is dharma, which provides direction and balance to the first two. Dharma is piety, virtue and right living. It includes the ideals of seeking wealth and love in an ethical manner, being honest in business and loyal to one's spouse. The fourth noble pursuit is moksha, spiritual illumination and liberation from rebirth on Earth. Liberation comes when all our karmas are resolved, dharma has been fulfilled and God has been realized. Hindus know that dharma, artha and kama are not ends in themselves. They provide the necessary surroundings, relationships and experiences which help the embodied soul mature over many lives and attain an ever-deepening God consciousness. This maturing process eventually culminates in moksha, at which point the soul has outgrown the need to continue its cycle of birth, death and rebirth. The goal of moksha, which sharply distinguishes Hinduism from Western religions, reminds us not to become so enthralled with the world that we neglect our foremost aim: God realization and liberation.

It is hard to imagine a mega-message greater than Hinduism's call for human concord, noble aims for our worldly existence and spiritualizing of our daily life. In addressing these fundamental human needs, no system of thought and theology is more germane. Having visited communities around the world, I am convinced that Hinduism remains vitally relevant in this era of space travel and global communications, and of worldliness and conflict on every continent. This vitality derives from its yoga, its teaching of all-pervasive Divinity, its health system of ayurveda, its mystical architectural system of vastu, its immense cultural gifts and so much more. It is relevant in providing the human race a profound self-understanding—illumined insights into life and consciousness, into human nature and our highest purposes. We can restate the Australian youths' question: "Is there any religion in the world that is more relevant today than Hinduism?" Our answer is a resounding no.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Self Awareness

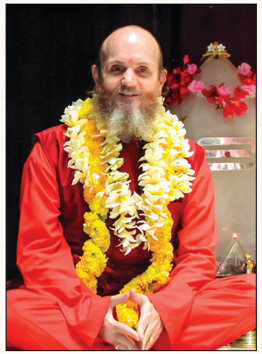
- Improving Our Character
- Letting Go of Past and Future
- An Alternative to “Happiness”
- Managing Chronic Stress
- Using the Power of Affirmation

Epoxy bristles trapping a 2.5 micron sphere

Improving Our Character

If we start at the beginning and work systematically, we can replace undesirable qualities with their opposites

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



SPIRITUAL LIFE IS NOT DIFFERENT FROM THE rest of life, it is just the best of life. Imagine a woman hears that Ramakrishna saw God as clearly as we see an apple in our hand, or a man hears of great yogis who realize the Truth of the universe in a life-transforming avalanche of light culminating in a sense of the oneness of it all. Seeing this, the man or woman might decide to meditate for days under a tree or in a cave. Or they might fast for days, go on arduous pilgrimages and practice mystic mantras for hours on end. Would they succeed by these efforts? Experience says probably not.

Real life offers a key for their journey. Imagine someone who goes to a piano concert and hears the world's greatest artist. The music is mesmerizing, the pianist's skill is flawless, soaring, perfect, and our listener decides, "This is my path. This is what I want to do." He sits at the piano, attempting to equal the master's work, but great music does not resound. No matter how many hours are spent, no matter how sincere the effort, he cannot achieve what he heard at the concert.

Why? He does not realize the work required to reach that level of expertise. To be successful, it is vital to start at the beginning of the path, not in the middle or at the end. If the fundamentals are skipped, our efforts will not yield sustainable spiritual progress. In the case of the pianist, the fundamentals are music theory, neural and muscular training, development of memorization, cultivating an interpretive ear and practice, practice, practice. It is no different in spiritual life. The great ones did not sit in a cave and in a short time attain enlightenment. They worked on themselves for years, decades. lifetimes. They did sadhana, they changed their habits, their desires, their reactions, their very character. If we wish to achieve what they achieved, we must do the same. We must work for it.

The fundamentals, the foundation upon which our spiritual growth rests, is our character. What exactly is character? Character is the sum total of mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual. On the spiritual path, the first phase of effort is to build, improve and transform our character. My guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, observed:

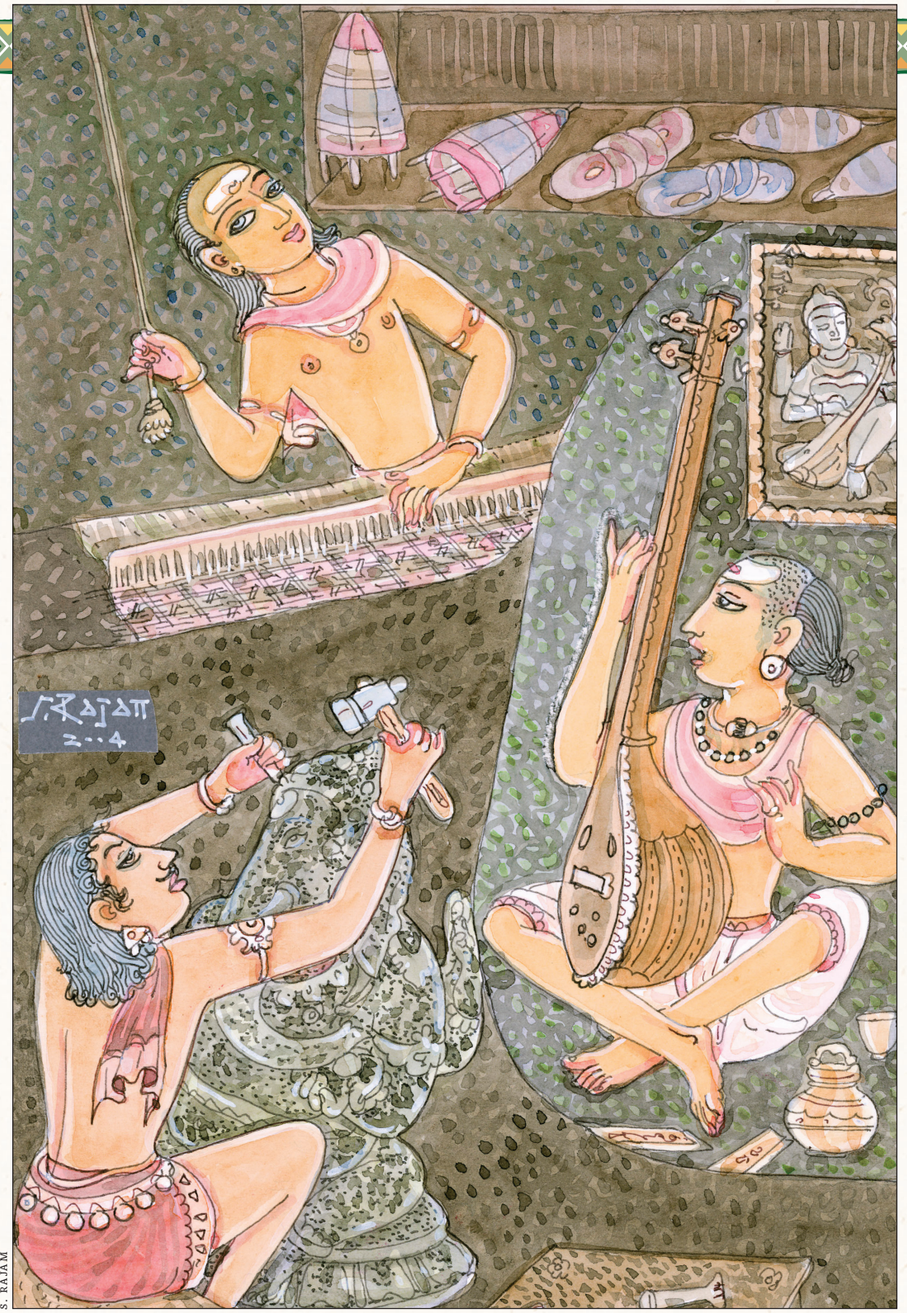
"It is true that bliss comes from meditation, and it is true that higher consciousness is the heritage of all mankind. However, the ten restraints [yamas] and their corresponding practices [niyamas] are necessary to maintain bliss consciousness, as well as all of the good feelings toward oneself and others attainable in any incarnation. These restraints and practices build character. Character is the foundation for spiritual unfoldment. The fact is, the higher we go, the lower we can fall. The top chakras spin fast; the lowest one available to us spins even faster. The platform of character must be built within our lifestyle to maintain the total contentment needed to persevere on the path. These great rishis saw the frailty of human nature and gave these guidelines, or disciplines, to make it strong. They said, 'Strive!' Let's strive to not hurt others, to be truthful and honor all the rest of the virtues they outlined."

Swami Chinmayananda, founder of Chinmaya Mission, directly related spiritual growth to character transformation: "If we organize our life in such a way so as to discover the great potential within us, and if we order our behavior so as to nurture and nourish that potential, our life will be well spent. Our success lies in the amount of transformation we can bring about in our character and behavior."

My guru explained, "To build character, to act in accordance with the yamas, a person has to realize that, having acted instinctively, he experienced consequences that he does not want to experience again; so, now he realizes that he should follow these restraints and not go through those consequences again. This is the foundation; without this foundation there is no spiritual growth, no fruit. Trying to realize the highest realizations before laying this foundation would be like taking a lime tree that was cut off from its roots and putting it into a bucket and expecting it to bear fruit. Of course it will not."

Each of us has many character qualities. A character quality is a habit, a usual pattern or way of thinking, speaking or acting. Most people have a mixture of positive character qualities (such as being enthusiastic, punctual, dependable, kindly or sincere) and negative qualities (such as being sarcastic, lazy, tardy or deceptive).

We have all heard the common excuse for negative character qualities: "That's the way I am. What can I do about it? I'm simply a lazy person." Hinduism teaches that the character we are born with in this life is the result of the sum total of our actions in previous lives. Some individuals are clearly pious from birth, others are of a mixed nature and still others are self-centered and devious. However, Hinduism also teaches that we can change the character qualities we are born with through self-reflection and self-effort, by observing and controlling how we think and act in the present, particularly by the repetition of positive thoughts and actions. The more often we express and reflect on the character quality we desire to cultivate, the stronger it will become.



S. RAJAM

Building character: *Three men exemplify the quality of industriousness, perfecting the arts of weaving, stone carving and playing the tambura.*

Accepting the idea that we can change a negative character quality, such as laziness, is a necessary first step. Once that perspective is held, the following four-step approach to developing the opposing positive character quality is helpful:

1. Understand the positive quality
2. Cognize its expressions
3. Realize its benefits
4. Practice its expressions

In utilizing this process, we can keep in mind the following principle from Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras:* "For the repelling of unwholesome thoughts, their opposites should be cultivated. Unwholesome thoughts, such as harming someone and so forth—whether done, caused to be done, or approved, whether arising from greed, anger or infatuation, whether mild, moderate or extreme—never cease to ripen into ignorance and suffering. This is why one must cultivate their opposites."

Let's see how this four-step process can be utilized to replace laziness with industriousness.

First: Understand the Positive Quality. Make sure you have a clear understanding of the character quality you wish to cultivate. A good way to approach this is to define it in your own words. Let us define industriousness as "hard-working, willing to work long hours to finish a project." Its opposite, laziness, is "a disinclination to work hard, preferring to remain idle." Then meditate on the positive quality.

Second: Cognize its Expressions. Make a list of thoughts, words, attitudes and behaviors that are representative of people who possess the positive quality. Then make a parallel list for the opposite trait.

INDUSTRIOUSNESS	LAZINESS
Do the task now	Postpone the task
Work late to finish	Stop as early as possible
Maximize productivity	Do the minimum

Third: Realize its Benefits. List the benefits of having the quality. This can include insights into the problems caused when its opposite is followed.

INDUSTRIOUSNESS
- Greater ability to serve family and community
- Opportunities for career advancement
- Appreciation from associates
- Enhanced self-esteem
- Avoid criticism

Scripture can provide insights. The *Tirukural* offers valuable thoughts on industriousness, saying, "Good fortune of its own accord ferrets out and finds the man of unflagging energy." Of laziness it warns: "Procrastination, forgetfulness, sloth and sleep—these four shape the ship bearing those destined for ruin."

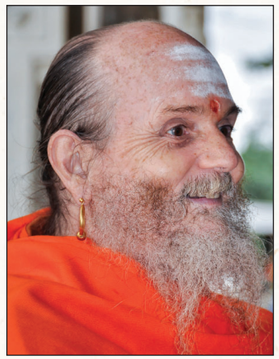
Fourth: Practice its Expressions: Begin to regularly practice the actions that will develop the habit pattern of the positive character quality. Observe closely, to begin to experience the benefits that result. Set realistic goals. Be careful not to set the goal too high, lest you fall short, become discouraged and give up the effort. For the quality of industriousness, focus on increasing your productivity for the day by five percent. This can be accomplished by working faster, working longer or a combination of both.

Slowly, character will evolve and the many traits that define you will be transformed, bringing a deeper spirituality and a more secure material existence to your daily life. Remember: Consistency is the key to the conquest of karma.

Letting Go of Past and Future

A peaceful and effective life is waiting for those who undertake the not-so-easy work required to live in the eternal now

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



MANY INDIVIDUALS FIND THAT WHEN they sit down to meditate their mind is constantly thinking about past and future events. They find that their mental power is seriously dispersed rather than being intensely focused. Though less obvious, this can also happen when we visit a temple. My guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, gives an insightful description of this phenomenon. "How many times have you gone to the temple without being fully there? Part of you was there, part of you was living in the past, part of you was trying to live in the future; and there you were, emoting over the things that happened that should never have happened, and fearful of things that might happen in the future, which probably won't happen unless you continue being fearful of their happening until you create them!"

Focusing the mind, controlling our thoughts, is clearly central to successful meditation. The fact that Patanjali chose this subject for the first sutra of his *Yoga Sutras* affirms its centrality to the meditative process: "Yoga is restraining the mind stuff from taking various forms." Beyond helping us be successful in meditation, a focused mind benefits us in other ways. With a focused mind, we will be more successful in our outer activities at work and at school. Another plus is that a focused mind is a peaceful, contented mind. From that peaceful platform we can turn within and more easily contact our intuition, our superconscious mind, the inner voice, and benefit from the wisdom and creativity it provides.

A good way to measure the level of mental distraction you are experiencing is to walk outdoors with young children. They will always notice many more details of the surroundings than you because their minds are not yet drawn to past and future concerns. Having established the goal—a focused mind, a mind that is not constantly wandering into the past and future—what are some specific techniques we can apply to harness our thoughts?

Keeping up with the Past: Let's look first at how we can conquer unnecessary thoughts about the past. Often we think about past events because they are not resolved. They are events that we do not fully understand or accept. Reconciling the past gives freedom and clarity, as Patanjali explained: "As soon as all impurities have been removed by the practice of spiritual disciplines—the limbs of yoga—a man's spiritual vision opens to the light-giving knowledge of the Atman."

It is helpful to distinguish between recent unresolved events and those that happened some time ago. The subconscious mind will for some weeks throw up or present recent events to the conscious mind many times a day. This is a clear indication that an experience is unresolved. After a few weeks, the subconscious will stop its frequent reminders and suppress the experience. Suppressed experiences accumulate in the subconscious, creating an anxious, troubled nature.

It is good, therefore, to act to resolve each experience while this reminding process is going on rather than to simply wait it out and forget about the happening. It often works to seek a resolution to the matter by discussing it with those involved. If we have hurt the feelings of others, an apology may be appropriate. If our feelings have been hurt, then we may need to forgive others. In such ways, the emotional component of the experience can be defused and the matter resolved.

Unresolved experiences that happened some time ago will also come to mind, but less frequently than recent ones. It is usually no longer appropriate to apologize or seek apology, as the other parties would not understand why we are bringing up the matter after such a long time. A good alternative is to write down anything from your past that concerns you and burn the paper, holding the intent that the memory will be neutralized. If you are successful with your subconscious journaling, you will still remember, but without the attending emotions.

Resolving the past may be more of a challenge than one expects. A common problem is an inability to forgive someone—such as an abusive father—for how they treated us. A helpful philosophical approach is to focus on the law of karma by affirming that something we did in the past caused those experiences to come to us in the present. Our father was simply the means through which that karma was experienced. Rather than continuing the unproductive pattern of blaming him, we can inwardly thank him for providing us the opportunity to face our difficult karmas. It is amazing how a simple change in our attitude toward such a thing can transform our reaction to it.

Reining in the Future: How can we conquer unnecessary thoughts, especially negative anticipations, of the future? Many such thoughts fall into the category of worry. We are concerned that certain events may happen, sometimes to the extent of becoming fearful. A remedy that Gurudeva stressed is to employ a simple affirmation. When the mind starts to worry, say to yourself, "I'm all right, right now." Keep repeating this affirmation until you are convinced that everything is fine in the present moment.

Mulling over major decisions is another type of concern about the future. A common practice is to ponder the decision often but without thinking it through and reaching a conclusion, instead jumping each time to another topic. Hence, it becomes a source of worry. An effective way to dispatch the matter is to make a formal appointment with yourself at a time you are free to focus on it fully—for example, 10am on Saturday morning. If you find yourself mulling it over before then, discipline your mind by affirming, "I have an appointment on Saturday to decide this matter, and therefore there is no need to think about it right now."

These and other techniques can be used to focus the mind in the present rather than dwelling on the past or the future. Once the strong pulls of past and future have been subdued, we can concentrate on reducing the miscellaneous thoughts about current concerns, such as plans for the day or the news we saw on TV last night. These can be restrained by practicing pranayama, breath control. A simple, effective technique is to breathe in for nine counts, hold for one count, breathe out for nine counts and hold for one count. After breathing in this way for a few minutes, your thinking process will naturally calm down.

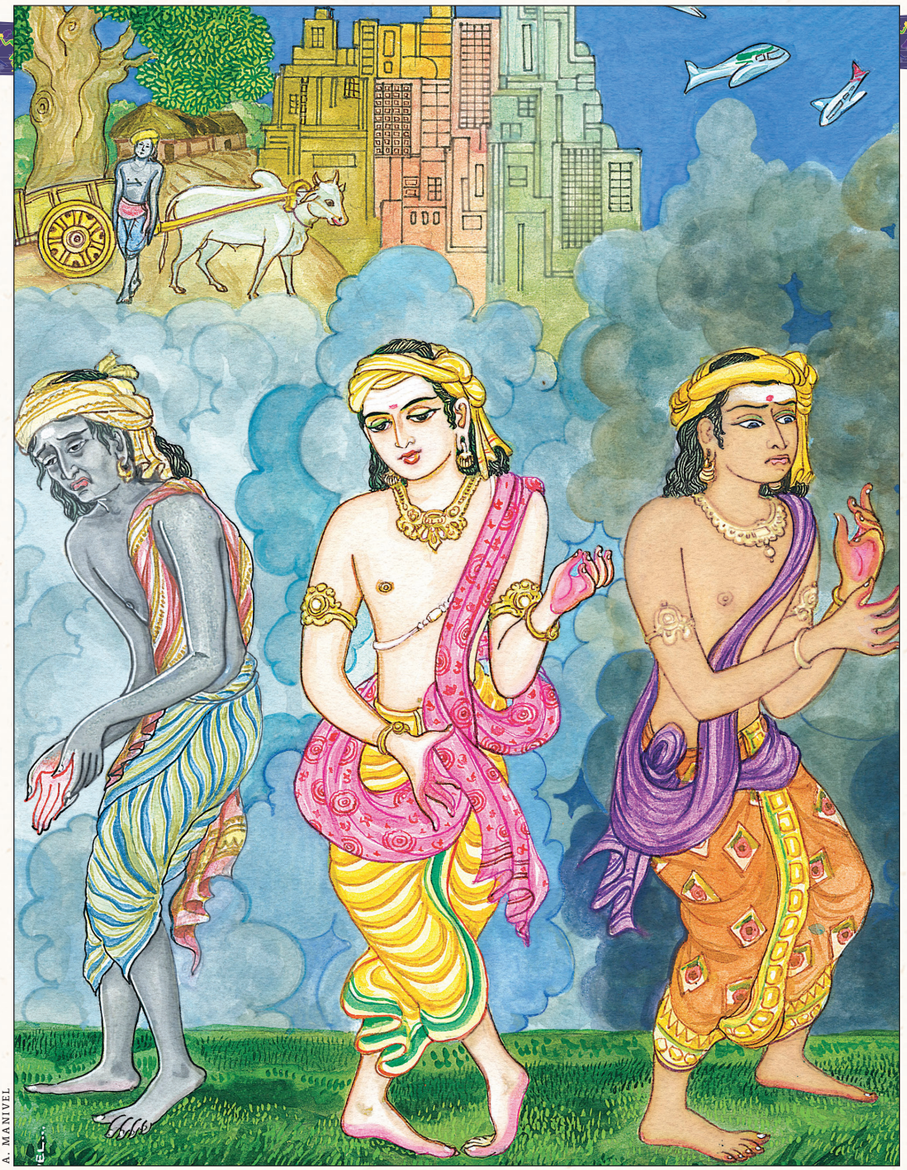
When we manage to center our mind in the present and quiet the cacophony of miscellaneous thoughts, we experience a higher state of consciousness. Gurudeva refers to this as the eternal now: "The mind lives in the past, and the mind tries to live in the future. But when you quiet your mind, you live in the present. You are living within your soul, or the higher state of your mind which is undisturbed by the things of time."

The Mountaintop Perspective: One of the abilities available to us once we have freed ourselves of vexations of past and future is to clearly see patterns in our life, and in the lives of others. It is the proverbial state of being able to see the forest instead of the trees. In his early teaching years Gurudeva cultivated this ability by taking his devotees on pilgrimage each month to the top of a nearby mountain from which they could look down on the cities below. This practice was helpful in developing the skill of perceiving the overview.

An example of a typical mental pattern that can be seen and then improved upon is the habit of making a decision to pursue a project but then giving it up when the first major obstacle is encountered. Once this tendency to quit is perceived, we can work to create a new habit of persevering in our endeavors even when faced with obstacles. A second example is the tendency to make resolves to increase our spiritual practices, sadhanas, but then relinquishing our commitment after spending time with nonreligious friends. This problem can be overcome by spending more time with spiritual friends and less time with naysayers.

Another benefit that comes from living in the eternal now is the ability to turn within and feel the spiritual power within the spine. There is a dynamic force there that, when experienced, gives us renewed inspiration and positiveness. When we are feeling a bit discouraged, we can find new energy and enthusiasm to meet the tasks at hand by quieting our thoughts and tuning in to this spiritual force felt along the spine.

Let me share a final insight from Gurudeva on experiencing the eternal now: "Can you visualize yourself, right at this instant, balanced on the top of a tall tree? If the tree were to bend too far forward, you would fall to the ground, or down into time and thought. If it were to bend too far back, you would again fall. Balanced on the top of this tree, you can look out over the countryside and enjoy everything you see. But if you stop to think about one thing of the past, you would become so engrossed in what you are thinking about that you again fall to the ground. You find that you cannot live in a thinking consciousness balanced so high. Here you live in the eternal now, with great awareness of what is around you and within you, but with no thought on it."



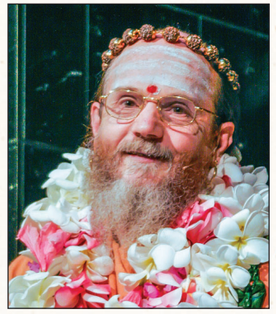
A. MANIVEL

Present, past or future?: *Three men represent states of mind people dwell in. One lives regretfully in the past, recalling poor childhood days when father drove a bullock cart. Another lives anxiously in the future, worrying about what may come. A third abides in the eternal now, serene, secure and centered.*

An Alternative to "Happiness"

A simple practice which internalizes consciousness allows us to find life's deeper joys and be content in all circumstances

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



If asked, "Is your life focused on pursuing happiness?" many people will readily say, "Yes." If asked, "Have you found and been able to sustain that happiness?" the same people would likely confess they have not. Hinduism directly addresses the fleeting nature of happiness. My guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, stated, "True happiness and freedom cannot be found in the world, for earthly joy is inextricably bound to sorrow, and worldly freedom to bondage."

The *Mundaka Upanishad* (3.11.1–2) presents this truth in a story. "Two birds, united always and known by the same name, closely cling to the same tree. One of them eats the tree's sweet fruit, while the other looks on without eating." The bird enjoying the fruit represents the jivatma, the embodied soul, and the bird simply witnessing represents Paramatma, the transcendent Self. The story continues, "While enjoying the fruit, the first bird moans, bewildered by his limitations. But when he beholds the Other, the glorious Lord worshiped by all, he becomes freed from sorrow."

In these verses, the *Vedas* indicate a way to overcome the cycle of joy and sorrow, happiness and sadness that we experience when living in our outer, instinctive/intellectual consciousness. It is overcome by becoming aware of our innate Divinity and abiding in spiritual consciousness. Paramaguru Yogaswami describes this in one of his *Natchintanai* songs: "Joy and sorrow—both are maya. The atman, never from love divided, is the very form of knowledge. Therefore, these two will not touch you. Can a mirage wash away the earth? At the gracious, holy feet of the true, all-knowing guru, to the limit of your power, let your heart grow soft and melt."

Let's imagine that we can step inside ourself, deep into our spiritual nature. Let's imagine further that this journey consists of four steps. After taking those four steps, we find ourself immersed in endless inner space, pure awareness and the transcendent source of that awareness. This is the realm of the deepest samadhis. Three steps within take us to the level of brilliant inner light and the possibility of visions of Deities and rishis. Two steps bring us to the level of divine love for all beings. One step inward takes us to a consciousness that is content, creative and intuitive.

Initially, it could be frustrating to try to take four, three or even two steps within, as we are not yet able to move to those rarefied levels. A more practical approach is to master taking the first step within during our early morning sadhana time and strive to hold that creative consciousness throughout the day. The other steps are always there, awaiting our future mastery.

The Chakras

Our analogy of four steps within relates directly to the chakras. These are the nerve plexuses or centers of force and consciousness located along the spine within our inner bodies. There are seven primary chakras. The first three relate to the instinctive/intellectual mind, which is being experienced by the fabled bird who is enjoying the tree's fruits. The first chakra (located at the base of spine) is the muladhara, which governs memory. The second is the svadhishthana (below the navel), governing the realm of reason. The third is the manipura (solar plexus), the center of willpower. Without going within, it is natural to live our daily life in the confines of these first three chakras, rarely experiencing anything beyond them.

The fourth chakra, anahata (at the heart), the center of direct cognition, is the realm we experience by taking the first step within. It is referred to in scriptures as the lotus of the heart.

The fifth chakra, vishuddha (at the throat), the center of divine love, is the realm experienced when we take the second step within. The sixth chakra, ajna (at the third eye), the center of divine sight, is experienced when we take three steps within. The seventh, sahasrara (located at the crown of head), the center of illumination and Godliness, is experienced when we take the fourth step within.

Let's explore what we experience when we take that first step and function in the anahata chakra. Gurudeva described it as the realm of artists, inventors, creators of all kinds. Each time you design or create anything, you are bringing the beauty of the within through your nerve system into manifestation. It is a beautiful place to be, and you can be there all of the time by feeling the power in your spine. The minute you feel that radiant energy, you disconnect from instinctive/intellectual consciousness and soar into inner consciousness.

A few minutes of breath control will help you to feel the energy in the spine. One simple technique is to breathe nine counts in, hold one count, then breathe out nine counts and again hold one count. After a few minutes of this pranayama, become aware of the spine and the spiritual energy within it. Visualize a clear tube in the center of your spine being filled with yellow light coming down from the top of your head. Then inwardly see this pure life force flowing through the spine and out into the nerve system.



UNKNOWN

Centers of consciousness: *In this Madhubani painting—a style practiced in Nepal and Bihar, India, that uses natural dyes and twigs—a yogi sits on a mat, his chakras aligned along the spine.*

Challenges

Having begun our day in a consciousness of contentment, creativity and intuition, we soon encounter the many ways that security can be lost. How can we sustain the sublime state we achieved by taking one step within? The most basic requirement is following the yamas, Hinduism's ethical restraints. Adharmic actions, such as lying and hurting others, disturb the mind and emotions and draw us out into the swirl of external consciousness.

Not letting disagreements turn into arguments is also crucial. Disagreements are natural, but they should be handled in an intelligent and harmonious way. We must always be willing to compromise to keep discussions from turning into conflicts. Domestic arguments are the most destabilizing. A major cause of such strife is the misguided view that the home is a natural place to let off steam, to vent frustrations that have built up through the day at work or school. For the sake of harmony, we must change that approach and instead consider the home a sanctuary for the entire family, never regarding it as a place where we can upset others with our emotions. Gurudeva insisted that the home "should have an even higher standard of propriety than the office, the factory or the corporate workplace." To avoid contention in the home, we can choose other ways to throw off stress: walk through a park or along a beach, visit a yoga studio or workout facility or stop to pray at a temple on the way home.

Contentment & Gratitude

Every day we are assaulted by a barrage of advertisements promising greater happiness if we acquire whatever they are promoting. This constant enticement presents a major challenge to sustaining a contented consciousness. Fancy new cars, faster computers, attractive clothes—all promise the ever-elusive state of mind called happiness. We can rise above this false allure by holding the perspective that we are content with what we currently have. If we acquire something more, it will not be because we think it will make us happier but because it will benefit our family in a meaningful way.

Gratitude is an important aspect of holding an inner consciousness. A key to nurturing gratitude is giving thanks for all the good things in our life. We are grateful for our family and friends, grateful for our job or school, grateful for the home we live in, grateful for the wisdom and practices of our religion.

"I'm All Right, Right Now"

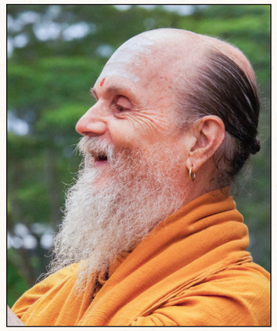
The affirmation "I'm all right, right now," a metaphysical tool that Gurudeva gives us in *Merging with Siva*, is also helpful in sustaining an inner consciousness. It is a way to live in the eternity of the moment, where we feel perfect in the now, with no future to worry about and no past to regret. You can perform this excellent practice now and again throughout the day. Practice it by asking yourself, "Am I not all right, right now, right this instant?" And answer, "I'm all right, right now." Keep asking and answering until you feel positive, self-assured and centered in the anahata chakra.

When we look at the world as providing our happiness, life is a constant series of emotional ups and downs. When we derive our contentment from within, life is joyous, and we can share that joy with others.

Managing Chronic Stress

Almost everyone these days is challenged by the growing intensity of life. Here are some tools to maintain balance.

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



On a regular basis I meet Hindus who, like most of the world, are emotionally distraught and mentally agitated due to the constant stress of their daily activities. This seems to be especially common when both husband and wife are pursuing demanding careers under employers who expect them to perform at exceptional levels for long hours. It is not uncommon to learn that they are also raising two or more children. The daily demands of work and family are more than can realistically fit into a twenty-four hour day. In some instances, after many years of constantly having too much to do on a daily basis, serious stress results.

Some types of stress are self-correcting. We are laid off from our job and after being in that situation a few months experience the stress of no monthly income. However, when we find a new job, the stress automatically goes away. A hurricane destroys our home. The stress is immediate and significant but once we have built a new home, it again resolves itself. The incessant demands of daily activities creates a kind of stress that is different, one that no event takes away. In fact, it can grow more intense from year to year. Faced with this kind of chronic stress, it is prudent and healthy to find ways to reduce it.

My guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, gave a number of helpful practices for stress management. The first was breath control. He wrote: "The mystic's goal is to control awareness while he is in the conscious mind (the external world)—to know where he is in consciousness. When he finds he is aware in the conscious mind and the five senses have become his ruler, he then controls his awareness within the conscious mind itself. He does this in a number of ways. One way is through the control of breath. Breath is life, and life is breath. Breath is the controlling factor of awareness. Awareness rides on breath. Breath is also a controlling factor of our willpower. A seeker must develop a dynamic will to walk the path of enlightenment, so that he does not stumble or falter, but continues onward no matter how difficult the path seems to be."

When it comes to breathing, the fundamental practice is to be sure you are breathing from your diaphragm and not from your chest. This is the natural way to breathe. It is how babies naturally breathe. However, once we take on life's tensions, the diaphragm tightens and we tend to expand the chest when we breathe. The diaphragm can be felt right below your solar plexus, in the area where the ribs separate. To locate it, place your fingertips on the diaphragm and cough. When your fingers are directly on the diaphragm, they will jump as you cough. An easy way to learn diaphragmatic breathing is to lie on the floor and place a book on your tummy. When you inhale while relaxed, the diaphragm will extend itself downward in the abdomen, causing the book to rise. When you exhale, the diaphragm completely relaxes and the book returns to its starting position. In this way tension is released and stress is reduced. Gurudeva commented on this: "You will experience that when the nerve currents are quieted through diaphragmatic breathing, it is impossible to be frustrated, and it is possible to absorb within yourself, into the great halls of inner learning, into the great vacuum within you, all of your problems, troubles and fears, without having to psychoanalyze them."

Once you grasp the basics of diaphragmatic breathing, you can practice it while sitting upright, even in a chair, or when walking. Whenever you need to relax, such as before (and during!) an important meeting or exam, just take one minute to breathe deeply from the diaphragm. A second practice for reducing chronic stress, the yoga break, also involves breathing. Lie on your back on the floor or any flat, firm surface. With arms at your sides, take a deep breath and command your body and mind to relax, to let go of all thoughts and tensions. Visualize yourself floating on a cloud, above all the troubles and turmoils of daily life. With eyes closed, inhale, breathing from the diaphragm while visualizing a powerful light flooding into your solar plexus that fills your body and mind with energy. Exhaling, feel this light energy moving out from the solar plexus into every part of your body, and visualize it expelling all of your thoughts and tensions. Repeat this for five minutes and you will feel less stressful, for as the body relaxes, so does the mind. Gurudeva wrote: "Freedom from worldly tensions is only achieved to the degree in which people are able to control the forces of their own mind. In this control they are able to lean upon the power of their own inner security, found in the eternity of the moment. In that moment, your inner strength is found. So, take your yoga break whenever you feel even a little tired physically, a little nervous, a little distraught. That is the time, not when you have time."

A third practice for managing stress is taking time each morning for a short spiritual/religious practice. Gurudeva called this a daily vigil and gave this comment on it: "Devout Hindus perform daily vigil, called *sandhya upasana,* usually before dawn. This sacred period of puja, japa, chanting, singing, hatha yoga, meditation and scriptural study is the foundation of personal life." Holding a daily vigil in the morning helps center us and deepen a sense of religiousness for facing the coming day.

I outlined a simple format for a daily vigil in my January/February/March 2014 Publisher's Desk entitled "A 10-Minute Spiritual Workout." It describes an abbreviated daily regimen designed for those who find that today's busy life allows little or no time for introspection. It is now available with various chants and practices as a free mobile app designed by the monks and entitled "Spiritual Workout." A fourth practice is that of hatha yoga, a yogic system of bodily postures, asanas, done in specific sequences and with coordinated breathing. Postures range from simple to difficult. The simple ones are sufficient to practice for reducing chronic stress. Gurudeva gave this description of the benefits of hatha yoga: "The purpose of hatha yoga today again is the same—to keep the physical body, emotional body, astral body and mental body harmonious, healthy and happy so that awareness can soar within to the heights of divine realization. Each asana carefully executed, with regulated breathing, the visualization of color and the hearing of the inner sound, slowly unties the knotted vasanas within the subconscious mind and releases awareness from there to mountaintop consciousness. Hatha yoga opens up the consciousness, because when the height of the energy, the zenith, is reached in each posture and we change to the next posture, a small or large adjustment occurs within the physical and astral nerve system." See the article on hatha yoga in the March 2001 issue of Hinduism Today for details on the system of 24 postures taught by Gurudeva.

My guru also spoke of a totally different approach, suggesting that we change our relationship with stress, turn its inevitability to our advantage. He counseled, "People are confused about stress these days. There is a solution, and that is a change in consciousness, changing the way we are programmed.... This means accepting stress as a 'yes-yes,' not a 'no-no.' In the old days, yoga wasn't just an Indian anti-stress pill. It made the mind and nerve system more intense, not less so. Stress is a natural reaction to intensity. Stress is our teacher, helping us to withstand intensity. Look into the bathroom mirror and mentally say to yourself, 'Stress is making me strong.' It really does. Try to believe it. Begin to enjoy stress and the strength that it is giving you. Where would our world leaders, our religious leaders and parliamentarians, be if they did not accept and transcend stress? ... Accomplished businessmen, fantastic athletes, high-strung artists and fine musicians are asking for more. They want it. They thrive on it. They know it is making them perform at a higher level than normal. They know that weaker souls can't take it, and that gives them a special place in the universe, at the top."

Gurudeva gives us our fifth practice: "But you have to handle stress. How do you handle it? Like anything else. You go to God on the inside; you go to God in the temple and finally you get rid of your stress, from the inside out, and you are a better person because of it, because you have had to expand your nerve system. You have had to stretch your nerve system. You have had to use brain cells that you never used before, to stretch out your mind, awaken new capacities. It is not easy."



SHUTTERSTOCK

Daily assault: *Like the executive above, millions are facing the special challenges of modern life, whether in the boardroom, the schoolroom or the family living room.*

Using the Power of Affirmation

We mold our lives constantly by what we think and say. With positive affirmation, you can harness this creative force to improve your life.

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



THE IDEA BEHIND AFFIRMATIONS IS THAT through the repetition of positive statements, we can improve our self-concept, make greater progress on the spiritual path and in general increase our magnetism to success. To progress spiritually, a positive self-concept is essential. For this, the use of affirmations can be quite helpful.

What exactly is a positive self-concept? It is thinking of ourself as a worthy individual deserving of a wonderful life and fully capable of achieving it. Unfortunately, many of us reach adulthood with a negative self-concept, feeling that others are better than we are and life has little to offer. A negative self-concept occurs when, while growing up, we are criticized constantly or cruelly by our parents and teachers. Having a positive concept about our outer self allows us to identify with our spiritual nature so that we truly feel we are a divine being.

Let's look for a moment at changing our self-concept from a negative one to a positive one. If our physical body becomes weak due to a serious illness, after the illness is gone everyone knows that we can overcome the resultant physical weakness and, through consistent exercise, regain our normal strength again. If, however, because of difficult experiences our outlook on life has become negative, and we feel that we just can't be successful, many people assume this is something that cannot be changed. However, just as we can strengthen the body's muscles through exercise and become fit again, we can also remold the subconscious mind and change its composition through the power of affirmation.

What exactly is an affirmation? As our Gurudeva, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, explains, an affirmation is a series of positive words repeated time and time again in line with a visual concept. Such a statement can be repeated mentally, or preferably verbally, many times a day. The idea is if one feels "I can't," he cannot. If he is always criticizing himself and lamenting over what he cannot do, then he can reverse this pattern and change the flow of magnetic mental force, enliven its intensity by saying orally and feeling through all the pores of his body "I can. I will. I am able to accomplish what I plan." Gurudeva calls this remolding the subconscious and gives useful insights to seekers on how to accomplish this: "My devotees succeed by remolding subconscious magnetic forces. They purge the dross through writing and burning past transgressions and current problems and then use positive affirmations."

There is a very important key to being successful in affirmations: when repeating the affirmation, simultaneously think, visualize and feel what the affirmation is manifesting. Think means to consciously be aware of what the affirmation means. Not thinking would be to repeat the affirmation out of habit while thinking about something else. Visualize means to create a mental picture depicting the affirmation. For example, see yourself making a plan to earn extra money to remodel your home. See yourself earning the money and doing the remodeling. Feel means to have the same feeling you will have when this is consistently happening in your life. In the case of the above affirmation, it is the feeling of confidence and success that goes along with being able to accomplish what you plan. You need to feel now how you will feel in the future when you are successful and confident. Until you awaken this feeling, you should not expect the affirmation to work.

Why don't you try this practice for five minutes a day in the morning, at noon and in the evening and see the positive results it produces? Simply repeat out loud the affirmation "I can. I will. I am able to accomplish what I plan" while utilizing the three keys of thinking, visualizing and feeling. During this exercise, you may find yourself feeling "I can't. I won't. I am not able." If that is the case, it shows that there is a strong negative self-concept in the subconscious mind. Therefore, great benefits to your spiritual and material life will occur if this exercise is continued for a long period of time, because it will result in the negative self-concept being replaced by a positive one.

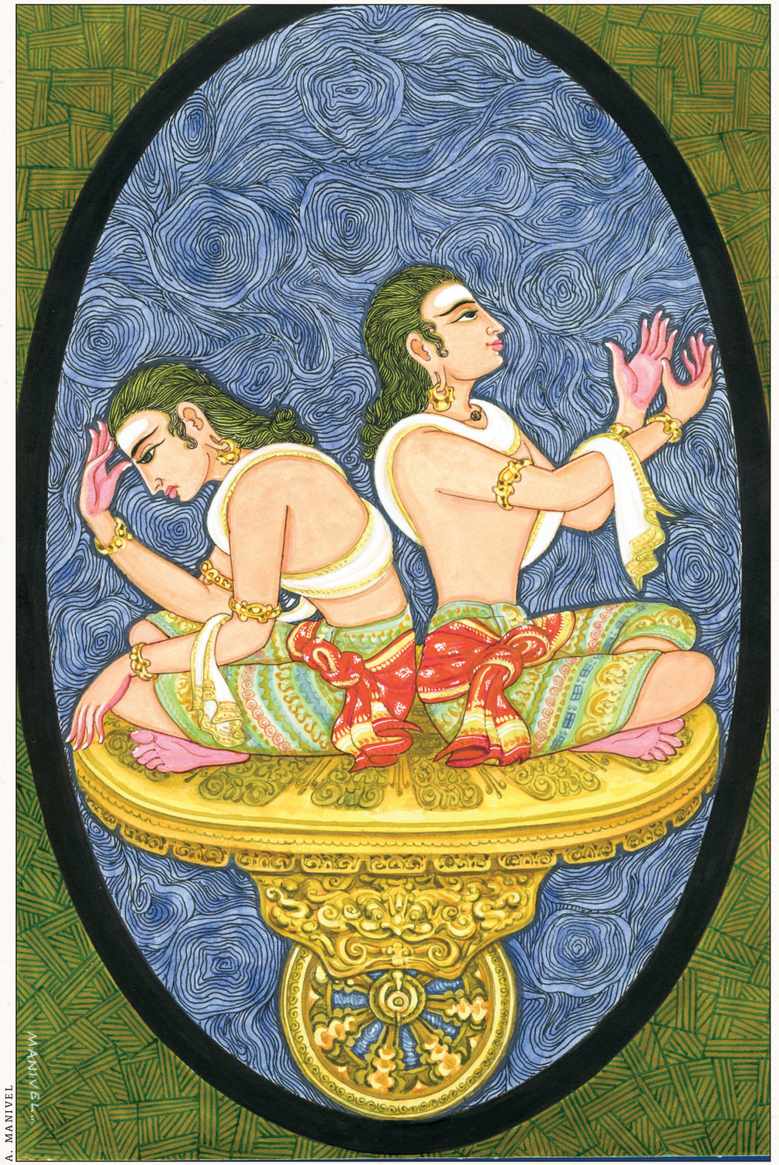
If you like, a longer affirmation can be used in your daily exercise, such as the following one. When done in the early morning, this affirmation sets a positive mood for the day. "I am now open to a flow of spiritual energy in which I perceive the most worthy course of action for this day. My service, being selfless, opens new doors of supply, making available all of the tools required so that my work will be beautiful, energetic and influential to the highest degree."

Here is another affirmation that is more of a purely divine nature that strengthens our identity as a spiritual being. It is most effective when repeated several times before sleep and upon awakening. "I am not my body, mind or emotions. They are but shells of the infinite energy that flows through them all. I am this energy. I am its source."

However, as in the saying "Be careful what you wish for," the power of affirmation needs to be used with wisdom. Affirmations remold the subconscious mind and thereby change our future. Therefore, we need to be careful that the future we are creating is one in which the responsibilities and challenges are within our abilities to successfully handle. It is wiser to choose a future that is a natural step up in life from where we are than one that is many, many steps away from us. For example, it is a natural next step for someone who is renting an apartment to purchase a modest house, while purchasing a mansion would probably be too big a step up to successfully handle.

For many years, as part of our pre-dawn worship, the monastery has repeated an affirmation. We recite it aloud together. It has been effective in reminding all the monastics of the overview of what we are doing and the importance of integrating the blessings of the Deities into our everyday affairs. A few years ago we developed a similar affirmation for families to repeat together every morning. We have included it in the sidebar, and suggest that all members of your family recite it together each day.

In conclusion, through repeating positive statements you can improve your self-concept, make greater progress on the spiritual path and in general increase your magnetism to success. Remember, success depends upon utilizing the threefold key—to think about the meaning, create a visualization for this meaning and feel how you will feel when this is consistently happening in your life.



A. MANIVEL

Affirmations at work: *A seeker is seated upon a fabled one-wheeled chariot, which represents the movement of his mind. The power to go in any direction—toward gloom and failure or upliftment and success—lies in his words and thoughts, symbolized by the swirling threads.*

A Daily Affirmation for Families

We, the Patel (substitute name) family, beseech the grace of Lord Ganesha to manifest His blessings of peace and harmony within our home and to joyfully fulfill the spiritual, social, economic, cultural and educational goals of family life as outlined in Hindu scripture. We dedicate ourselves, individually and together, to our daily worship, spiritual disciplines and study. Knowing that bonding is essential, we hold daily family meetings and weekly gatherings to cooperatively solve problems and create a loving, uplifting atmosphere in which each member develops discipline, responsibility and the spirit of divine service. We remain close-knit and cultivate unity by talking together about the experiences of our day and extend our affection and harmony to other families as well. We take time for training, and we value mistakes as opportunities to learn. To us, the guest is truly God, welcomed and honored with heartfelt hospitality. Through our thoughtfulness, care and compassion, we allow an abundance of gold to accumulate within our home. We give generously of our income and our time to further our religion. We are filled and thrilled with God's Cosmic Energy, creatively alive and in tune with the universe.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Spiritual Progress

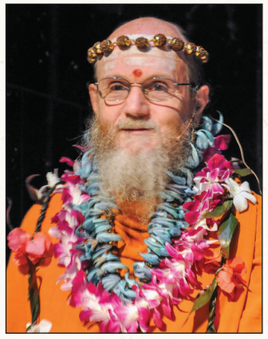
- The Three Stages of Faith
- Practice Makes Perfect
- Mistakes Are Part of the Spiritual Path
- Lessons from a Simple Sage

Mold on a tomato, by Dean Lerman, 4x

The Three Stages of Faith

We progress from blind faith to conviction bolstered by philosophy, and finally to certainty forged in the fires of personal experience

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



FAITH IS CENTRAL TO ALL THE WORLD'S RELIgions. *Webster's* dictionary defines religious faith as unquestioning belief in God and religious tenets that does not require proof or evidence. The Hindu view of faith is somewhat different. This is because in Hinduism faith is not a static state; rather, it is constantly deepening through personal experience and growth. The spiritual truths of Sanatana Dharma, initially accepted without proof, are ultimately proved through personal experience. Swami Chinmayananda, founder of Chinmaya Mission, succinctly conveyed this concept: "Faith is to believe what you do not see. The reward of faith is to see what you believed."

My Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, presents this deeper aspect of faith by citing an old saying favored by pragmatic intellectuals, "Seeing is believing," and then states that a more profound adage is "Believing is seeing." He goes on to explain that today's scientists and educators see with their two eyes and pass judgments based on what they currently believe. The rishis of the past and the rishis of the now and those yet to come also are seers. Their seeing is not with the two eyes; it is with the third eye, the eye of the soul. Gurudeva observed, "The intellect in its capacity to contain truth is a very limited tool, while faith is a very broad, accommodating and embracing faculty. The mystery of life and beyond life, of Siva, is really better understood through faith than through intellectual reasoning."

The focus of many religions is on helping those with no faith in God to believe in God. For Western faiths, belief in God is the beginning and the end of the process. Once you have come to believe in God, there is nothing more to do. Your salvation is assured. However, in Hinduism belief is only the first step. Hindus want to move beyond just believing in God to experiencing the Divine for themselves.

Faith, called *astikya* in Sanskrit, is the fourth of ten spiritual practices called *niyamas*, literally meaning "to unleash." The niyamas are ethical and religious practices that release or cultivate one's refined, soul qualities. These observances comprise the second limb of the ashtanga ("eight-limbed") yoga system, which is codified in numerous scriptures.

Gurudeva summarizes faith as a Hindu practice: "Astikya is to 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."

Like faith, the world's creation is addressed in all religions. A common Hindu view is that God creates and is His creation. This panentheistic vision contrasts with other religious views, such as "creation out of nothing" and "non-creation," the view that reality is beginningless and eternal. The Hindu view of God's creating the world from Himself is described in the *Mundaka Upanishad*: "As a spider spins and withdraws its web, as herbs grow on the earth, as hair grows on the head and body of a person, so also from the Imperishable arises this universe."

Examining these concepts of faith and creation together enables us to make an interesting comparison between the perspectives of a modern scientist and a Hindu sage. The scientist's natural question is, "How can you prove the existence of God?" The sage's natural rejoinder is, "How can you deny the existence of God?" This polarity arises from the fact that everything the scientist perceives is matter, and everything the sage sees is God.

The cultivation of faith can be compared to the growth of a tree. As a young sapling, it can easily be uprooted, just as faith based solely on belief can easily be shaken or destroyed. Faith bolstered with philosophical knowledge is like a medium-size tree, strong and not easily disturbed. Faith matured by personal experience of God and the Gods is like a full-grown tree which can withstand external forces. Let's look more closely at faith's three developmental stages.

Blind Faith: Faith in its initial stage is simple belief without the support of either knowledge or experience. Keeping our faith strong in this phase depends heavily on the company we keep. We need to associate with spiritual companions and avoid worldly and nonreligious people. Attending a weekly satsang with like-minded devotees is sustaining. Having the darshan of visiting swamis and other Hindu religious leaders helps keep our faith strong, as we see them as living examples, souls who know from experience the principles we believe in.

Informed Conviction: Faith in its second stage is belief strengthened by a sound understanding of Hindu philosophy. Gurudeva called this the bedrock on which faith is sustained. It is established by studying in a systematic and consistent manner to increase your knowledge about Hindu philosophy and practices. Such a study can include comparing Hinduism with the world's other major religions to understand how they differ and how they are similar.

Personal Realization: In the third stage of faith, personal experience transforms informed conviction into certainty. Gurudeva refers to this inner knowing as advanced faith, established by one's own spiritual, unsought-for, unbidden revelations, visions or flashes of intuition, which one remembers even stronger as the months go by, more vividly than something read from a book, seen on television or heard from a friend or a philosopher. Gurudeva stresses that spiritual experiences—when verified by what yogis, rishis and sadhus have seen and heard and whose explanations centuries have preserved—create a new, superconscious intellect. This type of faith, more a knowing than a conviction, is unshakable.



In God's Hand: *Having attained the third stage of faith, this woman, artistically held in God's protective palm, expresses the bliss of knowing that Divinity upholds and abides within all existence, including herself, and that everything is in perfect order at every point in time.*

As we evolve spiritually, faith matures. I have seen so many devotees growing into a deeper relationship with God, a more profound acceptance of Divinity in their lives. Here are some examples.

First Example: A girl attends the local temple weekly with her parents but never thinks much about Hindu beliefs and practices. As a teenager, she enjoys reading books about holy men and women, the stories of their lives and their wise sayings. The experience of these great souls noticeably deepens her conviction in the precepts she was taught at the temple as a child.

Second Example: A young man attends an *upadesha* by a visiting swami whose presence is radiant with spiritual light. His talk increases the seeker's faith and inspires him to intensify his religious practices.

Third Example: While worshiping at an ancient shrine to Lord Ganesha during a pilgrimage to Sri Lanka, a man has a life-altering vision. The Lord of Obstacles walks out of the shrine and stands before him, giving blessings, then walks back into the shrine. This dramatic experience convinces him, through and through, that the Gods are real.

Fourth Example: A woman meditates every morning, but her thinking always distracts her and she never goes deeply within. One morning, for no apparent reason, distractions recede and she finds herself going in and in and in and staying in an expansive, peaceful state for a long time. Returning to normal awareness, she sees life differently, holding a new perspective that God is a consciousness permeating all, and she is that consciousness. The belief that the soul and God are one takes on new meaning to her.

Fifth Example: A faith-building experience that many Hindus shared occurred in 1995. It all began when one man in New Delhi had a dream that Ganesha craved a little milk. In the early morning he went to a temple where a priest allowed him to offer a spoonful of milk to the small stone image. Both watched in astonishment as the milk disappeared. Within hours news had spread across India that Ganesha was accepting milk offerings. Tens of millions of people of all ages flocked to temples across the globe and had the same experience. A Reuters report quoted Anila Premji: "I held the spoon out level, and it just disappeared. To me it was a miracle. It gave me a feeling that there is a God, a sense of Spirit on this Earth."

An important aspect of deepening our faith is building confidence in our innate divinity and our ability to experience it. We are fortunate in the modern Hindu world to have enlightened men and women in whom we can recognize high spiritual attainments. In them we have living examples of the illumined state we hope to one day achieve. We must remember that their attainment is our own potential; it is, in fact, the spiritual destiny of each soul in this or a future life. The path to such attainment involves regular practice of devotion and meditation, which leads eventually to personal experiences of the Divine.

Practice Makes Perfect

Five core disciplines for bringing our inner perfection into our intellectual, emotional and instinctive nature

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



"Practice makes perfect" is certainly a commonly used phrase. Normally it refers to how we can acquire a skill that we do not have. For example, let's say we type twenty words a minute with two index fingers. We make a decision to improve that skill and attend a typing class for six months, practicing every day. We master the skill of typing with all ten fingers, without looking at the keyboard, at an average speed of fifty words a minute! Our practice made our typing more perfect. When this concept is applied to efforts in our spiritual life, it takes on a different meaning. This is because our inner essence, our soul nature, is already perfect. Our practice, or self effort, is to bring that inner perfection into our outer intellectual, emotional and instinctive nature. Thus we could modify the adage to be "practice manifests perfection."

Swami Ranganathananda (1908–2005) of the Ramakrisha Math and Mission expressed this idea beautifully in an article we published in 1999 on medical ethics. He stated that the Hindu view of man "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."

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of Hinduism Today, gave a succinct description of our divine nature: "Deep inside we are perfect this very moment, and we have only to discover and live up to this perfection to be whole. We have taken birth in a physical body to grow and evolve into our divine potential. We are inwardly already one with God. Our religion contains the knowledge of how to realize this oneness and not create unwanted experiences along the way."

In giving talks on the idea of how we can grow and evolve into our divine potential, I frequently use the analogy of dance. I ask the audience, "What is most needed for a youth to become good at Hindu classical dance?" Invariably, many state the answer that I have in mind: "Practice!" Reading books about dance won't make you a good dancer. Nor will attending classes without practicing what you have learned. Regular practice is needed to make the body limber and master the many movements, positions, gestures and expressions. Likewise, to grow and evolve into our divine potential—to manifest our inner perfection in our outer intellectual and instinctive nature—requires regular practice.

A core practice that I recommend focusing on first is daily worship in the home shrine, preferably before dawn. Every Hindu home should have a place of worship. It may be as simple as a shelf with pictures of God or it can be an entire room dedicated to worship and meditation. Many families have a spiritual guide or guru and display his or her picture in the shrine. If you are living away from home, such as at a university, a single photo may have to do. In this sacred space we light a lamp, ring a bell and pray daily. The most devout hold a formal worship ritual, or atmartha puja. This regular daily worship is called *upasana*. Residents go to the shrine for blessings before leaving for work or school. At other times one may sit in the shrine to pray, chant the names of God, sing devotional songs, read from scripture or meditate. The home shrine is also an excellent place to re-center oneself through prayer and reflection when emotionally upset.

A second expression of Hindu worship is *utsava*, holy days, observing the same day each week as a holy day and celebrating the major festival days through the year. On their weekly holy day, the family clean and decorate the home altar, attend the nearby temple and observe a fast. To make such weekly visits practical, Hindus seek to live within a day's journey of a temple. Those who do not live close enough to a temple to visit weekly go as often as they can and do their best to attend the major festivals.

The temple is a sacred building, revered as the home of God. This is because of its mystical architecture, consecration and the continuous daily worship, or puja, performed thereafter. Puja is performed by qualified priests, invoking the Deity by chanting Sanskrit verses from scripture and making successive offerings which conclude with arati—the waving of an oil lamp in front of the Deity while bells are rung loudly. The Deity image, or murti, is especially sacred. It is through the murti that the presence and power of the Deity is felt by devotees who attend the puja for blessings and grace.

A third expression of Hindu worship is pilgrimage, or *tirthayatra*. At least once each year, a journey is made for darshan of holy persons, temples and places, ideally away from one's local area. During this sojourn, God, Gods and gurus become the singular focus of life. All worldly matters are set aside. Thus pilgrimage provides a complete break from one's usual day-to-day concerns. Special prayers are kept in mind, and penance or some form of sacrifice is part of the process. Actually, the preparation is as important as the pilgrimage itself. In the days or weeks before a tirthayatra, devotees perform spiritual disciplines such as decreasing the intake of heavier foods while increasing lighter foods, fasting one day a week, reading from scripture each night before sleep, and on weekends doubling the time usually spent in religious practices. These three forms of worship—daily puja, holy days and pilgrimage—help us to manifest our inner perfection in our outer nature.

A fourth aspect of Hinduism that can be embraced as a core practice is dharma, or virtuous living, living an unselfish life of duty and good conduct, which includes atoning for misconduct. One learns to be selfless by thinking of others first, being respectful to parents, elders and swamis, following divine law—especially ahimsa, which is mental, emotional and physical noninjuriousness toward all beings. An important focus for upholding dharma is to uphold the ten ethical restraints, or yamas. The first restraint, ahimsa, is the foremost. The others are: *satya*, truthfulness; *asteya*, nonstealing; *brahmacharya*, sexual purity; *kshama*, patience; *dhriti*, steadfastness; *daya*, compassion; *arjava*, honesty, straightforwardness; *mitahara*, moderate appetite and vegetarianism; and *shaucha*, purity.

Our fifth practice is the observance of traditional rites of passage, called *samskaras*. At these crucial ceremonies, an individual receives the blessings of God, Gods, guru, family and community as he or she commences a new phase of life. The first major samskara is *namakarana*, the name-giving rite, which also marks formal entry into a particular sect of Hinduism. It is performed 11 to 41 days after birth. At this time, guardian devas are assigned to see the child through life. *Annaprashana*, the first feeding of solid food, is held at about six months. *Vidyarambha* marks the beginning of formal education, when a boy or girl ceremoniously writes the first letter of the alphabet in a tray of uncooked rice. *Vivaha* is the rite of marriage, an elaborate and joyous ceremony in which the homa fire is central. *Antyeshti*, the funeral rite, guiding a soul in its transition to inner worlds, includes preparation of the body, cremation, bone-gathering, dispersal of ashes and home purification.

These five practices are referred to as the *pancha nitya karmas*, "five eternal practices," by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, who notes, "We could say that they are an amalgam of all the counsel of the *Vedas* and *Agamas* to guide daily and yearly religious life. These five obligatory religious practices are simple and applicable for all. Study them and put them into practice in your own life."

- **Upasana, worship**
- **Utsava, holy days**
- **Tirthayatra, pilgrimage**
- **Dharma, virtuous living**
- **Samskaras, sacraments**

These five duties, faithfully performed, are powerful tools to help us grow and evolve into our divine potential. Many Hindus go one step further in their striving by receiving initiation, known as diksha, from a qualified priest or guru. Mantra diksha is the primary initiation, the empowerment of a specific mantra as a personal sadhana, and the assignment to chant it as a daily practice for a minimum number of repetitions, such as 108. A second diksha is initiation to perform a specific form of puja, and the commitment to perform it daily in the home shrine.

In Hinduism, it is not enough to just be—or to wait for grace. The most devout know that each life on Earth is an opportunity for advancement and therefore take advantage of the many tools their faith provides. Following these five traditional observances brings forth, day by day, the perfection that lies waiting within each of us.



ARTISTICALLY ADAPTED FROM PHOTO BY SRI NARAYANI PEEDAM

Dance and spirituality: *Dancers reach the pinnacle of their craft by three things: practice, practice, practice. Similarly, spiritual progress comes through following the disciplines of our path.*

Mistakes Are Part of the Spiritual Path

Blunders are, in truth, opportunities to improve our behavior and thereby make spiritual progress

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



SINCE SEPTEMBER 11, THERE HAVE BEEN INcreased statements by Western leaders condemning some men as being evil and extolling others as being good. This, of course, is not the Hindu perspective. But since it is so common, it is good to take time to reflect on the Hindu point of view regarding good and evil. For those who are parents it is good to discuss the Hindu view with their children, to make sure our and our children's thinking on the matter remains uninfluenced by Western thought.

The Hindu viewpoint is that all of mankind is good, for we are all divine beings, souls created by God. In fact, we are all one family, "*Vasudhaiva kutumbakam*—the whole world is one family." Each soul is emanated from God, as a spark from a fire, on a spiritual journey which eventually leads back to God. All human beings are on this journey, whether they realize it or not, and the journey spans many lives.

If all are on the same journey, why is there such a disparity between men? Clearly, some act like saints and others act like sinners. Some take delight in helping their fellow men, while others delight in harming them. The Hindu explanation is that each of us started the journey at a different time. Thus some are at the beginning of the spiritual path, while others are near the end. In other words, there are young souls and there are old souls. Our paramaguru, Jnanaguru Siva Yogaswami, in speaking to devotees, described life as a school, with some in the M.A. class and others in kindergarten, and to each he gave lessons according to the level of advancement.

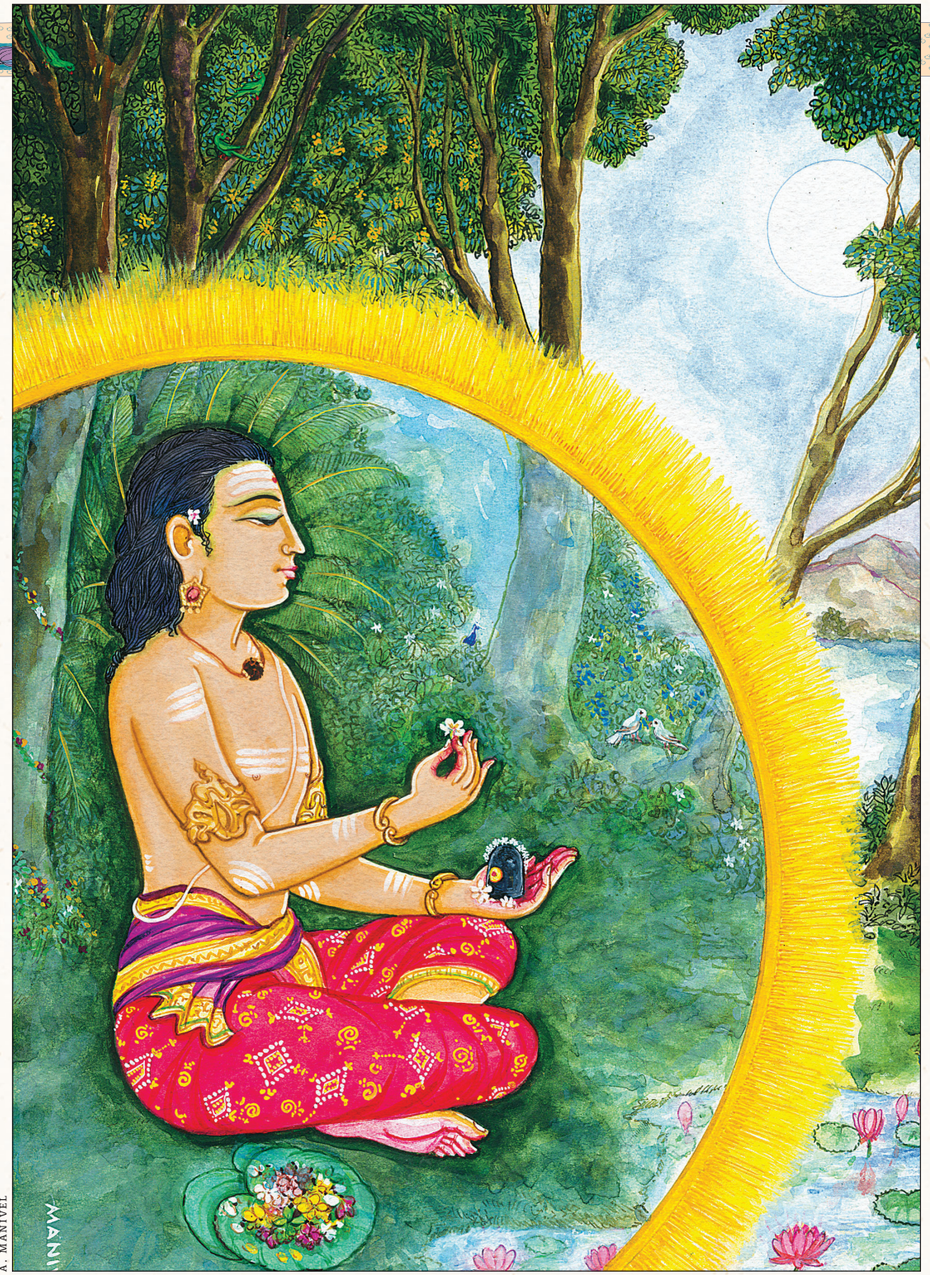
Man's nature can be described as threefold: spiritual, intellectual and instinctive. It is the instinctive nature, the animal-like nature, which contains the tendencies to harm others. Men who are expressing those tendencies are young souls who need to learn to harness this force. The Hindu approach to such a man is not to label him evil, but rather to focus on helping him learn to control his instincts and improve his behavior. Gurudeva, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, said insightfully: "People act in evil ways who are not yet in touch with their soul nature and live totally in the outer, instinctive mind. What the ignorant see as evil, the enlightened see as the actions of low-minded and immature individuals."

Important insights into the soul's maturing process can be gained by looking at the three shaktis of God Siva—*iccha*, the power of desire; *kriya*, the power of action; and *jnana*, the power of wisdom—which are also the three powers of the soul. We first have a desire, and when the desire becomes strong enough, we act. In young souls the action may be ill conceived, even against dharma. For example, a man wants a computer, so he steals one. Money is needed, so he robs a bank. The soul is often caught up in repeating a cycle of similar experiences, moving back and forth from desire to action, desire to action, until the needed lesson is learned. In the case of the adharmic action of stealing, eventually he will learn the lesson that this is not the best way to acquire possessions. This learning is the jnana shakti, wisdom, causing his behavior to improve.

This process is the same for dharmic actions. Say we are helping out as a volunteer at the temple, teaching children's classes once a month. We like the feeling of helping others in a meaningful way and so decide to help out every week and even participate in regular meetings to plan the classes. We are doing a selfless action, and the reaction it has on us is to feel more inner joy. The jnana is to resolve to do even more service and thus feel more joyful. We have improved our behavior.

A recent segment on television described an innovative prison in California. As we all know, the usual approach is to regard jail simply as a time punishment by confinement for a number of years. Under this approach, many of the prisoners released repeat the same crimes and return to jail again and again. Their behavior shows no improvement. In fact, they may learn the criminal's craft while serving their sentence. In this innovative prison program, the warden had initiated a regimen that included counseling, yoga and other therapeutic activities to improve the behavior of prisoners so they would not repeat their crimes and return to jail. The program is showing an excellent success rate.

For all of mankind, no matter where one is on the path, spiritual advancement comes from improving one's behavior. Said another way, it comes from learning from one's mistakes. Unfortunately, this process is often inhibited by the idea that somehow we are not supposed to make mistakes, that mistakes are bad. We grow up being scolded for our mistakes by our parents. Teachers ridicule 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. To spiritually benefit from our mistakes, we need a new attitude toward them. Gurudeva described mistakes as "wonderful opportunities to learn." He compared learning from life's experiences to progressing through the classes at a university. He proclaimed: "Life is a series of experiences, one after another. Each experience can be looked at as a classroom in the big university of life if we only approach it that way. Who is going to these classrooms? Who is the member of this university of life? It's not your instinctive mind. It's not your intellectual mind. It's the body of your soul, your superconscious self, that wonderful body of light. It's maturing under the stress and strain."



A. MANIVEL

The soul's effulgence: *In a secluded forest grove this concentrated devotee worships a small stone image of God. Around him we see his aura—the soul's natural radiance—glowing as a circle of golden yellow light as a result of his purity and earnest devotion.*

Those who are parents can teach their children that making mistakes is not bad. Everyone makes mistakes. It is natural, and simply shows we do not understand something about the matter at hand, or we have been inattentive. It is important for parents to determine what understanding the child lacks and teach it to him without blame or shame. 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, asking the child to think about what he did and how he could avoid making that mistake again.

A common first reaction to having made a mistake is to become upset, to become fretful or angry about it, or if it is a serious mistake to become deeply burdened and even depressed. That is a natural first reaction, but if it is our only reaction, it is not enough. To progress, we need to cope with the emotional reaction to the action and move on to the learning stage.

A good second reaction to a mistake is to think clearly about what happened, why it occurred and find a way to not repeat the mistake in the future. Perhaps we were not being careful enough, and simply resolving to be more circumspect next time will prevent the problem from recurring. Perhaps we lacked some important knowledge, and now we have that knowledge, which we can simply resolve to use next time.

Perhaps we created unintended consequences that caused significant problems to us or others. Now that we are aware of the consequences, we certainly won't repeat the action. Those who are striving to live a spiritual life are self-reflective and learn quickly from their blunders. In fact, one way to tell a young soul from an old soul is to observe how quickly he cognizes his error and learns not to repeat the same mistake.

A third remedy may be needed if the misstep involved other people. Perhaps we have hurt someone's feelings or created a strain between us. A direct apology can fix this if we know them well. If we are not close enough to the individual to be able to apologize, a generous act toward them can often adjust the flow of feelings back into a harmonious condition. For example, hold a small dinner party and include them among the guests.

A fourth remedy may be needed if one commits a major misdeed: for example, if we did something that was dishonest. Even if we have resolved to not repeat the misdeed and apologized to those involved, we may still feel guilty about the transgression. By performing some form of penance, prayashchitta, we can rid ourselves of the sense of feeling bad about ourself. Typical forms of penance are fasting, performing 108 prostrations before the Deity or walking prostrations up a sacred path or around a temple.

All of this does not mean we don't punish those who act in evil ways. Societies and nations must protect themselves with appropriate actions that restrain wrongful behaviors. But even while punishing those who act with malicious intent, let us remember they, too, are souls on the journey of spiritual maturity and discovery. Let the focus be not on categorizing men as good or evil but on encouraging all to improve their behavior, by applying the appropriate remedies and sanctions.

Lessons from a Simple Sage

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

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This narrative reveals a vital theme in Yogaswami's teachings: esoteric insights about nothingness and not knowing. In life, the normal emphasis is on acquiring knowledge, or replacing a lack of knowledge on a subject with knowledge. For example, we purchase a new computer. Knowing little about it, we read the manuals, talk to experts and end up acquiring enough information to use the computer. We have replaced a lack of knowledge with knowledge.

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



A. MANIVEL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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


Pine Skin
Dr. Wutian Wu 10x

GLOSSARY

absolute: Lower case (absolute): real, not dependent on anything else, not relative. Upper case (Absolute): Ultimate Reality, the unmanifest, unchanging and transcendent Parasiva—utterly nonrelational to even the most subtle level of consciousness. It is the Self God, the essence of man's soul.

abyss: A bottomless pit. The dark states of consciousness into which one may fall as a result of serious misbehavior; the seven chakras (psychic centers), or talas (realms of consciousness), below the muladhara chakra, which is located at the base of the spine.

actinic: Spiritual, creating light. Adjective derived from the Greek *aktis,* "ray." Of or pertaining to consciousness in its pure, unadulterated state.

adharma: "Unrighteousness." Thoughts, words or deeds that transgress divine law in any of the human expressions of dharma.

adhyatma prasara (adhyātma prasāra): अध्यात्मप्रसार "Spiritual evolution." The gradual maturation of the soul body, *anandamaya kosha,* through many lives. *Prasara* means, "coming forth, spreading; advance, progress." See: *evolution of the soul.*

adhyatma vikasa (adhyātma vikāsa): अध्यात्मविकास "Spiritual unfoldment." The blossoming of inner or higher (adhi), soul (atma) qualities as a result of religious striving, sadhana. Vikasa means, "expanding, opening, developing," as a flower unfolds its petals, or the chakras unfold theirs as a result of kundalini awakening. See: *spiritual unfoldment.*

affectionate detachment: The power and wisdom of love born of understanding. Not becoming engrossed in the problems or negative attachments of others. As opposed to "running away" from the world or being insensitively aloof, affectionate detachment allows for more genuine, wholesome relationships with people and things.

affirmation: *Dridhavachana.* "Firm statement." A positive declaration or assertion. A statement repeated regularly while concentrating on the meaning and mental images invoked, often used to attain a desired result.

Agama (Āgama): आगम The tradition; that which has "come down." An enormous collection of Sanskrit scriptures which, along with the *Vedas,* are revered as shruti (revealed scripture). Dating is uncertain. They were part of an oral tradition of unknown antiquity which some experts consider as ancient as the earliest *Vedas,* 5000 to 6000 bce. The *Agamas* are the primary source and authority for ritual, *yoga* and temple construction. Each of the major denominations—Saivism, Vaishnavism and Shaktism—has its unique *Agama* texts. Smartas recognize the *Agamas,* but don't necessarily adhere to them and rely mainly on the smriti texts. See: *shruti.*

ahimsa (ahiṁsā): अहिंसा "Noninjury," nonviolence or nonhurtfulness. Refraining from causing harm to others, physically, mentally or emotionally. Ahimsa is the first and most important of the *yamas* (restraints). It is the cardinal virtue upon which all others depend. See: *yama-niyama.*

ajna chakra (ājñā chakra): आज्ञाचक्र "Command wheel." The third-eye center. See: *chakra.*

Ambika (Ambikā): अम्बिका "Mother." A benign form of the Goddess, one of the central Deities of the Shakta religion, along with Durga, Kali and Parvati. See: *Shakti.*

anahata chakra (anāhata chakra): अनाहतचक्र The heart center. "Wheel of unstruck [sound]." See: *chakra.*

ananda (ānanda): आनन्द "Bliss." The pure joy—ecstasy or enstasy—of God-consciousness or spiritual experience. In its highest sense, ananda is expressed in the famous Vedic description of God: *sat-chit-ananda,* "existence-consciousness-bliss"—the divine or superconscious mind of all souls. See: *God Realization, Satchidananda.*

anandamaya kosha (ānandamaya kośa): आनन्दमयकोश "Bliss body." The body of the soul, which ultimately merges with Siva. See: *soul, kosha.*

Anandamayi Ma (Ānandamāyī Mā): आनन्दमायीमा Godly yogini and mystic Bengali saint known for her purity and sadhanas, including not eating unless fed by her devotees (1896-1982).

anugraha shakti (anugraha śakti): अनुग्रहशक्ति "Graceful or favoring power." Revealing grace. God Siva's power of illumination, through which the soul is freed from the bonds of anava, karma and maya and ultimately attains liberation, moksha. Specifically, anugraha descends on the soul as shaktipata, the diksha (initiation) from a satguru. Anugraha is a key concept in Saiva Siddhanta. It comes when anava mala, the shell of finitude which surrounds the soul, reaches a state of ripeness, *malaparipakam.* See: grace.

arati (āratī): आरती "Light." The circling or waving of a lamp (usually fed with ghee, camphor or oil) before a holy person or the temple Deity at the high point of puja. The flame is then presented to the devotees, each passing his or her hands through it and bringing them to the eyes three times, thereby receiving the blessings. Arati can also be performed as the briefest form of puja. See: *archana, puja.*

archana: अर्चन A special, personal, abbreviated puja done by temple priests in which the name, birthstar and family lineage of a devotee are recited to invoke individual guidance and blessings. *See: puja.*

Antarloka: अन्तर्लोक The subtle (astral) world. See: *loka.*

Ardhanarishvara (Ardhanārīśvara): अर्धनारीश्वर "Half-female Lord." Lord Siva in androgynous form, male on the right side and female on the left, indicating that: 1) Siva (like all Mahadevas) is genderless; 2) Siva is All, inseparable from His energy, Shakti; 3) in Siva the ida (feminine) and the pingala (masculine) nadis (psychic nerve currents) are balanced so that sushumna is ever active.

asana (āsana): आसन "Seat; posture." In hatha yoga, *asana* refers to any of numerous poses prescribed to balance and tune up the subtle energies of mind and body for meditation and to promote health and longevity. While the physical science of hatha yoga can dramatically influence health and general well-being, it is primarily a preparation for the deeper *yogas* and meditations. See: *hatha yoga, raja yoga, yoga.*

ashrama dharma (āśrama dharma): आश्रमधर्म "Laws of life development." Meritorious way of life appropriate to each of its four successive stages (ashramas), observing which one lives in harmony with nature and life, allowing the body, emotions and mind to develop and undergo their natural cycles in a most positive way. The four stages are:

1) **brahmacharya:** Studentship, from age 12 to 24.
2) **gṛihastha:** Householder, from 24 to 48.
3) **vanaprāstha:** Elder advisor, from 48 to 72.
4) **sannyāsa:** Religious solitary, from 72 onward.

ashtanga yoga (ashṭaṅga yoga): अष्टाङ्गयोग "Eight-limbed union."

The classical raja yoga system of eight progressive stages or steps as described in numerous Hindu scriptures including various *Upanishads*, the *Tirumantiram* by Saint Tirumular and the *Yoga Sutras* of Sage Patanjali. The eight limbs are: restraints *(yama)*, observances *(niyama)*, postures *(asana)*, breath control *(pranayama)*, sense withdrawal *(pratyahara)*, concentration *(dharana)*, meditation *(dhyana)* and contemplation *(samadhi/Self Realization)*. See: *yama-niyama, yoga.*

ashram (āśrama): आश्रम "Place of striving." From *shram,* "to exert energy." Hermitage; order of life. Holy sanctuary; the residence and teaching center of a sadhu, saint, swami, ascetic or guru; often includes lodging for students. Also names life's four stages.

astral body: The subtle, nonphysical body (sukshma sharira) in which the soul functions in the astral plane, the inner world also called Antarloka. See: *soul.*

astral plane: The subtle world, Antarloka. See: *loka.*

asura: असुर "Evil spirit; demon." (The opposite of *sura: "deva;* God.") A being of the lower astral plane, Narakaloka. Asuras can and do interact with the physical plane, causing major and minor problems in people's lives. Asuras do evolve and do not remain permanently in this state. See: *evil, evolution of the soul*

atheism: The rejection of all religion or religious belief, or simply the belief that God or Gods do not exist.

atma (ātman): आत्मन् "The soul; the breath; the principle of life and sensation." The soul in its entirety—as the soul body plus its inner divine essence. Our true, eternal identity in the deepest level, beyond a physical body, emotions, external mind or personality. See: *soul.*

atmartha puja (ātmārtha pūjā): आत्मार्थपूजा "Personal worship rite." Home puja—Sanskrit liturgy performed in the home shrine. See: *puja.*

Aum: ॐ or ओम् Often spelled *Om.* The mystic syllable of Hinduism, placed at the beginning of most sacred writings. As a mantra, it is pronounced *aw* (as in *law*), *oo* (as in *zoo*), *mm*. Aum is explained in the *Upanishads* as standing for the whole world and its parts, including past, present and future. It is from this primal vibration that all manifestation issues forth. Aum is the primary, or mula mantra, and often precedes other mantras. Its three letters represent the three worlds and the powers of creation, preservation and destruction.

aura: The luminous, colorful field of subtle energy radiating within and around the human body, extending out from three to seven feet. The colors of the aura change constantly according to the ebb and flow of one's state of consciousness, thoughts, moods and emotions. Higher, benevolent feelings create bright pastels; base, negative feelings are darker in color. The aura consists of three aspects: the prana-aura, the outer aura and the inner aura. The prana-aura is the reflection of the physical body, the life force. The outer aura extends beyond the physical body and changes continuously, reflecting the individual's moment-to-moment panorama of thought and emotion.

Auvaiyar: ஔவையார் A woman saint of Tamil Nadu (ca 800 ce), a contemporary of Saint Sundarar, devotee of Lord Ganesha and Karttikeya, or Murugan, and one of the greatest literary figures in ancient India. (See Essay 17) Among her most famous works are *Atti Chudi, Konrai Ventan, Ulaka Niti, Muturai* and *Nalvali*. Her Tamil primer is studied by children to this day. An earlier traditional date for Auvaiyar of 200 bce is from a story about her and Saint Tiruvalluvar.

awareness: *Sakshin,* or *chit.* Individual consciousness, perception, knowing; the witness of perception, the "inner eye of the soul." The soul's ability to sense, see or know and to be conscious of this knowing. When awareness is indrawn (pratyak chetana), various states of samadhi may occur. Awareness is known in the *Agamas* as chit-shakti, "power of awareness," the inner self and eternal witness. See: *consciousness.*

ayurveda (āyurveda): आयुर्वेद "Science of life." A holistic system of medicine and health native to ancient India. The aims of ayurveda are ayus, "longevity," and arogya, "diseaselessness," which facilitate progress toward ultimate spiritual goals. Health is achieved by balancing energies (especially the doshas, bodily humors) at all levels of being, subtle and gross, through innumerable methods, selected according to the individual's constitution, lifestyle and nature.

Bhairava: भैरव "Terrifying." Lord Siva as the fiery protector. He carries and is represented by a trishula (trident), a symbol often enshrined as guardian at the entrance to Siva temples. See: *Siva.*

bhajan (bhajana): भजन Spiritual song. Individual or group singing of devotional songs, hymns and chants. See: *bhakti.*

bhakti: भक्ति "Devotion." Surrender to God, Gods or guru. Bhakti extends from the simplest expression of devotion to the ego-decimating principle of prapatti, which is total surrender.

bhakti yoga: भक्तियोग "Union through devotion." Bhakti yoga is the practice of devotional disciplines, worship, prayer, chanting and singing with the aim of awakening love in the heart and opening oneself to the grace of God, Gods or one's spiritual preceptor. Bhakti yoga seeks ever closer rapport with the Divine, developing refinedd qualities such as love, selflessness and purity. See: *bhakti, prapatti, yajna.*

bilva: बिल्व Wood-apple (or bael) tree, *Aegle marmelos,* sacred to Lord Siva. Its leaves, growing in threes, are offered in the worship of the Sivalinga. The delicious fruit when unripe is used medicinally.

Bodhinatha Veylanswami: भोधिनाथ "Lord of Wisdom, Holder of the Vel." (1942–) The current preceptor of the Nandinatha Sampradaya's Kailasa Parampara, and Guru Mahasannidhanam of Kauai Aadheenam, ordained by his *satguru,* Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, in 2001.

Brahma (Brahmā): ब्रह्मा The name of God in His aspect of Creator. Saivites consider Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra to be three of five aspects of Siva. Smartas group Brahma, Vishnu and Siva as a holy trinity in which Siva is the destroyer. Brahma the Creator is not to be confused with 1) *Brahman,* the Transcendent Supreme of the *Upanishads;* 2) *Brāhmaṇa,* Vedic texts; 3) *brāhmaṇa,* the Hindu priest caste (also spelled brāhmin). See: Brahman, Parameshvara.

brahmachari (brahmachārī): ब्रह्मचारी An unmarried male spiritual aspirant who practices continence, observes religious disciplines, including sadhana, devotion and service, and who may be under simple vows.. Also names one in the student stage, age 12–24 or until marriage. Feminine counterpart: *brahmachāriṇī.* See: *ashrama dharma, bramacharya.*

brahmacharya: ब्रह्मचर्य "Divine conduct," the fourth yama. Controlling lust by remaining celibate when single, maintaining purity by restraining from sex in thought and deed and transmuting the energies of the physical body.

brahmacharya ashrama (brahmacharya āśrama): ब्रह्मचर्य आश्रम See: *ashrama dharma.*

Brahmadhvara: ब्रह्मध्वर The door to the lower seven chakras and the Narakaloka, just below the muladhara. For the higher chakras to come into power, this door must be shut through practices such as sadhana and right thought, word and deed, so that fears, hatreds, angers and jealousies can no longer arise.

Brahman: ब्रह्मन् "Supreme Being; Expansive Spirit." From the root *brih,* "to grow, increase, expand." Name of God or Supreme Deity in the *Vedas,* where He is described as 1) the Transcendent Absolute, 2) the all-pervading energy and 3) the Supreme Lord or Primal Soul. Not to be confused with *Brahmā,* the Creator aspect of God.

brahmin (brāhmaṇa): ब्राह्मण "Mature" or "evolved" soul. Originally, the class of pious souls of exceptional learning. From *Brahman,* "growth, expansion, evolution, development, swelling of the spirit or soul." A mature soul showing exemplary wisdom, tolerance, forbearance and humility. Today the term more often refers to a caste.

Buddha: बुद्ध "The Enlightened." Usually the title of Siddhartha Gautama (ca 624–544 bce), a prince of the Shakya clan, a Saivite Hindu tribe in eastern India on the Nepal border. He renounced the world and became a monk. After his enlightenment he preached the doctrines upon which his followers later founded Buddhism.

Buddhism: The religion based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, known as the Buddha (ca 624–544 bce). He refuted the idea of man's having an immortal soul and did not preach of any Supreme Deity. Instead he taught that man should seek to overcome greed, hatred and delusion and attain enlightenment through realizing the Four Noble Truths and following the Eightfold Path.



Catholicism: The doctrine, system and practice of the Catholic Church; a major Christian denomination.

causal body: *Karana sharira,* the inmost body; the soul form, also called *anandamaya kosha,* "bliss sheath." See: *soul.*

causal plane: The highest or most subtle realm of existence, Sivaloka.

chaitanya: चैतन्य "Spirit, consciousness, especially higher consciousness; Supreme Being."A widely used term, often preceded by modifiers, e.g., sakshi chaitanya, "witness consciousness," or bhakti chaitanya, "devotional consciousness," or Sivachaitanya, "God consciousness."

chakra: चक्र "Wheel." Any of the nerve plexes or centers of force and consciousness located within the subtle bodies of man. Each corresponds to a certain nerve plexus, ganglion or gland of the physical body and to a specific realm of consciousness. The seven best-known chakras, situated along the spinal cord, are the realm of dharma and spiritual striving. They can be seen psychically as colorful, multi-petaled wheels or lotuses. Seven others, below the spine, constitute the lower or hellish world, called Narakaloka or patala. Most people function in just a few of these 14 chakras.

The seven spinal chakras are: 1) **mūlādhāra** (base of spine): memory, time and space; 2) **svādhishṭhāna** (below navel): reason; 3) **maṇipūra** (solar plexus): willpower; 4) **anāhata** (heart center): direct cognition; 5) **viśuddha** (throat): divine love; 6) **ājñā** (third eye): divine sight; 7) **sahasrāra** (crown of head): illumination, Godliness.

The seven lower chakras, from highest to lowest, are 1) **atala** (hips): fear and lust; 2) **vitala** (thighs): raging anger; 3) **sutala** (knees): retaliatory jealousy; 4) **talātala** (calves): prolonged mental confusion; 5) **rasātala** (ankles): selfishness; 6) **mahātala** (feet): absence of conscience; 7) **pātāla** (soles of the feet): murder and malice.

charya (charyā): चर्या "Conduct [stage]." Stage of service and character building. See: *pada, Saivism.*

charya pada (charyā pāda): चर्यापाद "Conduct stage." Stage of service and character building, the first of four progressive and cumulative stages of maturation on the Saiva Siddhanta path to enlightenment. See: *pada.*

consciousness: *Chitta* or *chaitanya.* 1) A synonym for mind-stuff, *chitta;* or 2) the condition or power of perception, awareness, apprehension. The myriad gradations of consciousness include the simple sentience of inanimate matter to the consciousness of basic life forms, the higher consciousness of human embodiment, and omniscient states of superconsciousness, leading to immersion in the One universal consciousness, Parashakti. See: *awareness, mind.*

consecrate: To declare holy or designate for sacred or religious use.

contemplation: a state of religious or mystical absorption resulting from sustained meditation. See: *raja yoga, samadhi.*

continence (continent): Restraint, moderation or, most strictly, total abstinence from sexual activity. See: *brahmacharya.*

crown chakra: See: *Sahasrara chakra.*



Dakshinamurti (Dakshiṇamūrti): दक्षिणामूर्ति "South-facing form." Lord Siva depicted sitting under a pipala (bo) tree, silently teaching four rishis at His feet.

dāna: दान Generosity, giving. The third niyama. See: *yama-niyama.*

darshan (darśana): दर्शन "Vision, sight." Seeing the Divine. Beholding, with inner or outer vision, a temple image, Deity, holy person or place, with the desire to inwardly contact and receive the grace and blessings of the venerated being or beings. Not only does the devotee seek to see the Divine, but to be seen as well, a direct and personal two-sided apprehension central to Hinduism. See: *Mahadeva.*

dasa marga (dāsa mārga): दासमार्ग "Servant's path." See: *pada.*

Deity: See: *Mahadeva.*

Destroyer: Epithet of God Siva in His aspect of Rudra. See: *Siva.*

deva: देव "Shining one." A being inhabiting the higher astral plane, in a subtle, nonphysical body. *Deva* is also used in scripture to mean "God" or "Deity." See: *gana, Mahadeva.*

Devaloka: देवलोक "Plane of radiant beings." Realm of the anahata chakra. The higher area of the Antarloka. A synonym of Maharloka. See: *loka.*

Devi (Devī): देवी "Goddess." A name of Shakti, used especially in Shaktism. See: *Shakti, Shaktism.*

dharana (dhāraṇā): धारणा "Concentration." From *dhri,* "to hold." See: *raja yoga.*

dharma: धर्म From *dhri,* "to sustain; carry, hold." Hence dharma is "that which contains or upholds the cosmos." Dharma is a complex and comprehensive term with many meanings, including: divine law, ethics, law of being, way of righteousness, religion, duty, responsibility, virtue, justice, goodness and truth. Essentially, dharma is the orderly fulfillment of an inherent nature or destiny. Relating to the soul, it is the mode of conduct most conducive to spiritual advancement, the right and righteous path. The four basic areas of dharma are 1) **ṛita dharma:** universal law; the inherent order of the cosmos; 2) **varṇa dharma:** social duty, accordIng to one's station in life; 3) **āśrama dharma:** the duties of the various age groups (student, householder, elder advisor and religious solitaire); and 4) **svadharma:** individual dharma, which depends on one's personal karma and nature.

Dharma Shastra (Dharma Śāstra): धर्मशास्त्र "Religious

jurisprudence." All or any of the numerous codes of Hindu civil and social law composed by various authorities. The best known and most respected are those by Manu and Yajnavalkya, thought to have been composed as early as 600 bce.

dhyana (dhyāna): ध्यान "Meditation." See: *raja yoga.*

diksha (dīkshā): दीक्षा "Initiation." Solemn induction by which one is entered into a new realm of spiritual awareness and practice by a teacher or preceptor through bestowing of blessings. Denotes initial or deepened connection with the teacher and his lineage and is usually accompanied by ceremony. Initiation, revered as a moment of awakening, may be conferred by a touch, a word, a look or a thought. See: *satguru.*

dimfi: (Shum) The space aspect of the mind. The perspective of space travel, *devas* and Gods; inner communication. Pronounced *deemf-ee*. See: *Shum, Shum perspectives.*

dualism: *Dvaita*. See: *dvaita-advaita.*

dvaita-advaita: द्वैत अद्वैत "Dual-nondual; twoness-not twoness." *Dvaita* and *advaita* define two ends of the vast spectrum of Hindu philosophy. **—dvaita:** The doctrine of dualism, according to which reality is ultimately composed of two irreducible principles, entities, truths, etc. God and soul are seen as eternally separate. **—advaita:** The doctrine of nondualism or monism, that reality is ultimately composed of one whole principle, substance or God, with no independent parts. In essence, all is God. Monistic theism is a dipolar view which encompasses both monism and dualism. See: *monistic theism.*



ego: The external personality or sense of "I" and "mine;" *anava*. Broadly, individual identity. In Saiva Siddhanta and other schools, the ego is equated with the tattva of ahamkara, "I-maker," which bestows the sense of I-ness, individuality and separateness from God.

emanation: "Flowing out from." *Abhasa.* Shining forth from a source, emission or issuing from. A monistic doctrine of creation whereby God issues forth manifestation like rays from the sun or sparks from a fire.

enlightenment: Self Realization, *nirvikalpa samadhi;* the ultimate human attainment. Enlightenment is the experience-nonexperience resulting in the realization of one's transcendent Self—Parasiva—which exists beyond time, form and space. Each tradition has its own understanding of enlightenment, often indicated by unique terms.

enstasy: A term coined in 1969 by Mircea Eliade to contrast the Eastern view of bliss as "standing inside oneself" (enstasy) with the Western view as ecstasy, "standing outside oneself." The closest English equivalent for *samadhi.* See: *raja yoga, samadhi.*

essence (essential): The most important, ultimate, real and unchanging nature of a thing or being. **—essence of the soul:** See: *atma, soul.*

evil: That which is bad, morally wrong, causing harm, pain, misery. Western religions typically regard evil as a moral antagonism to God. Hindus hold that evil consists of unvirtuous acts *(pap*a or adharma), performed when the instinctive-intellectual mind dominates and obscures our deeper, spiritual intelligence. The evildoer is viewed as a young soul, still ignorant of the value of right thought, speech and action. **—intrinsic evil:** The concept of inherent, inborn badness. Hinduism holds that there is no intrinsic evil—that the real nature of man is his divine, soul nature, which is pure goodness. See: *evolution of the soul, sin.*

evolution of the soul: *Adhyatma prasara.* In Saiva Siddhanta, the soul's evolution is a progressive unfoldment, growth and maturing toward its inherent, divine destiny, which is complete merger with Siva. The soul is created in the Sivaloka and takes on denser and denser sheaths—cognitive, instinctive-intellectual and pranic—until finally it takes physical birth in the Bhuloka. Then it experiences many lives, maturing through the reincarnation process. Siva continually creates souls, so there are young souls just beginning to evolve, and old souls nearing liberation from rebirth. See: *chakra, pada, soul.*

existentialism: A philosophy that emphasizes the uniqueness and isolation of the individual in a hostile or indifferent universe, regards human existence as unexplainable, and stresses freedom of choice, and responsibility for the consequences of one's acts.



festival: A time of religious celebration and special observances. Most festivals recur yearly, their dates varying slightly according to astrological calculations. They are characterized by acts of piety (elaborate pujas, penance, fasting, pilgrimage) and rejoicing (songs, dance, music, parades, storytelling and scriptural reading).

First World: Bhuloka, the physical universe. See: *loka.*



gana (gaṇa): गण (usually plural) "Throng; troop; retinue; a body of followers or attendants." A troop of demigods, God's attendants, devonic helpers.

Ganapati (Gaṇapati): गणपति "Leader of the *ganas.*" A name of *Ganesha.*

Ganesha (Gaṇeśa): गणेश "Lord of Categories." Or: "Lord of attendants *(gana),"* synonymous with *Ganapati.* Ganesha is a Mahadeva, the beloved elephant-faced Deity honored by Hindus of every sect. He is the Lord of Obstacles (Vighneshvara), revered for His great wisdom and invoked first before any undertaking, for He knows all intricacies of each soul's karma and the perfect path of dharma that makes action successful. He sits on the muladhara chakra and is easy of access. See: *Mahadeva.*

Ganesha Chaturthi (Gaṇeśa Chaturthī): गणेश चतुर्थी The birthday of Lord Ganesha, a ten-day festival of August-September that culminates in a spectacular parade called Ganesha Visarjana. It is a time of rejoicing, when all Hindus worship together.

Ganges (Gaṅgā): गंगा India's most sacred river, 1,557 miles long, arising in the Himalayas above Hardwar under the name Bhagiratha, and named Ganga after joining the Alakanada (where the Sarasvati is said to join them underground). Also, the Goddess (Ganga), Who is embodied by the river.

God: Supernal being. Either the Supreme God (known by many names, such as Siva, Shakti and Vishnu) or one of the Mahadevas, great beings such as Ganesha and Karttikeya, who are among His creation. See: *Gods.*

Goddess: Female representation or manifestation of Divinity; Shakti or Devi. *Goddess* can refer to a female perception or depiction of a Mahadeva, which in actuality is genderless, or to an astral-plane being residing in a female astral body. To show the Divine's transcendence of sexuality, God is sometimes depicted as having qualities of both sexes. See: *Ardhanarishvara.*

God Realization: Direct and personal experience of the Divine within oneself. It can refer to either 1) **savikalpa samādhi** ("enstasy with form") in its various levels, from the experience of inner light to the realization of Satchidananda, the pure consciousness or primal substance flowing through all form, or 2) **nirvikalpa samādhi** ("enstasy without form"), union with the transcendent Absolute, Parasiva, the Self God, beyond time, form and space. Here the expression *God Realization* is used to name both of the above samadhis; whereas *Self Realization* refers only to nirvikalpa samadhi. See: *raja yoga.*

Gods: Mahadevas, "great beings of light." The plural form of *God* refers to extremely advanced beings existing in their self-effulgent soul bodies in the causal plane. The meaning of *Gods* is best seen in the phrase, "God and the Gods," referring to the Supreme God and to the Mahadevas, who are His creation. See: *God, Mahadeva.*

grace: "Benevolence, love, giving," from the Latin *gratia,* "favor," "goodwill." God's power of revealment, *anugraha shakti* ("kindness, showing favor"), by which souls are awakened to their true, Divine nature. Grace in the unripe stages of the spiritual journey is experienced by the devotee as receiving gifts or boons, often unbidden, from God. The mature soul finds himself surrounded by grace. He sees all of God's actions as grace, whether they be seemingly pleasant and helpful or not. For him, his very love of God, the power to meditate or worship, and the spiritual urge which drives his life are entirely and obviously God's grace, a divine endowment, an intercession, unrelated to any deed or action he did or could perform.

In Saiva Siddhanta, it is grace that awakens the love of God within the devotee, softens the intellect and inaugurates the quest for Self Realization. It descends when the soul has reached a certain level of maturity, and often comes in the form of a spiritual initiation, called shaktipata, from a satguru.

Grace is not only the force of illumination or revealment. It also includes Siva's other four powers—creation, preservation, destruction and concealment—through which He provides the world of experience and limits the soul's consciousness so that it may evolve. More broadly, grace is God's ever-flowing love and compassion, karunya, also known as kripa ("tenderness, compassion") and prasada (literally, "clearness, purity").

grihastha ashrama (gṛihastha āśrama): गृहस्थ आश्रम "Householder stage." See: *ashrama dharma.*

grihastha dharma (gṛihastha dharma): गृहस्थधर्म "Householder law." The virtues and ideals of family life. This dharma includes all nonmonastics, whether married or single. In general, grihastha dharma begins with the completion of the period of studentship and extends throughout the period of raising a family. In Hinduism, family life is one of serving, learning and striving within a close-knit community of many relatives forming a joint family and its broader connections as an extended family under the aegis of a spiritual guru. Each is expected to work harmoniously to further the wealth and happiness of the family and the society, to practice religious disciplines and raise children of strong moral fiber to carry on the tradition. See: *ashrama dharma, dharma.*

guna (guṇa): गुण Any of the three constituent principles of prakriti, primal nature: sattva, rajas and tamas. All things are composed of combinations of these primary qualities.

guru: गुरु "Weighty one," indicating an authority of great knowledge or skill in a particular subject, such as music, dance, sculpture, but especially religion. A prefix is often used for clarity: *kulaguru* (family teacher), *vinaguru* (vina teacher) and *satguru* (spiritual preceptor). In Hindu astrology, *guru* names the planet Jupiter, also known as Brihaspati. According to the *Advayataraka Upanishad* (14–18), *guru* means "dispeller *(gu)* of darkness *(ru)."* See: *satguru.*

Gurudeva: गुरुदेव "Divine or radiant preceptor." An affectionate, respectful name for the guru.

guru parampara (guru paramparā): गुरुपरंपरा "Preceptorial succession" (literally, "from one teacher to another"). A specific line of spiritual gurus within a sampradaya, in authentic succession of initiation; the chain of mystical power passed in authorized continuity from guru to guru.

guru-shishya system (guru-śishya system): गुरुशिष्य "Master-disciple" system. An important educational system of Hinduism whereby the teacher conveys his knowledge and tradition to a student. Such knowledge, whether it be Vedic-Agamic art, architecture or spirituality, is imparted through the developing relationship between guru and disciple. See: *guru, satguru.*



Hanuman (Hanumān): हनुमान् (Hindi) "Large jawed." The powerful monkey God-King of the epic, *Ramayana,* and the central figure in the famous drama, *Hanuman-Nataka.* The perfect devoted servant to his master, Rama, this popular Deity is the epitome of *dashya bhakti.*

Hara: हर A name for Siva. See: *Hari-Hara*

Hari: हरि A name for Vishnu. See: *Hari-Hara*

Hari-Hara: हरिहर "Vishnu-Siva." Also known as Shankaranarayana, an icon of the Supreme One, in which the right half is Siva and left half is Vishnu. It symbolizes the principle that Siva and Vishnu are not two separate Deities. See: *Siva, Vishnu.*

hatha yoga: हठयोग "Forceful yoga." Hatha yoga is a system of physical and mental exercise developed in ancient times as a means of rejuvenation by rishis and tapasvins who meditated for long hours, and used today in preparing the body and mind for meditation. Its elements are asanas, cleansing practices, breath control and hand gestures (mudras), all of which regulate the flow of prana and purify the inner and outer bodies. See: *mudra, raja yoga.*

heaven: The celestial spheres, including the causal plane and the higher realms of the subtle plane, where souls rest and learn between births, and mature souls continue to evolve after moksha. *Heaven* is often used by translators as an equivalent to the Sanskrit *Svarga.* See: *loka.*

hedonist: One who is immersed in hedonism, the obsessive pursuit of pleasure.

hell: Narakaloka. An unhappy, mentally and emotionally congested, distressful area of consciousness. Hell is a state of mind that can be experienced on the physical plane or in the sub-astral plane after death of the physical body. It is accompanied by the tormented emotions of hatred, remorse, resentment, fear, jealousy and self-condemnation. However, in the Hindu view, the hellish experience is not permanent, but a temporary condition of one's own making. See: *asura, evil, loka, Narakaloka.*

Himalayan Academy: An educational and publishing institution of Saiva Siddhanta Church founded by Sivaya Subramuniyaswami in 1957. The Academy's objective is to serve Hindus worldwide by spreading the teachings of Sanatana Dharma through the monthly magazine HINDUISM TODAY, Innersearch travel-study programs, *The Master Course* trilogy of *Dancing with Siva, Living with Siva and Merging with Siva,* as well as other publications and web resources.

himsa (hiṁsā): हिंसा "Injury;" "harm;" "hurt." Injuriousness, hostility—mental, verbal or physical. See: *ahimsa.*

Hindu: हिन्दु A follower of, or relating to, Hinduism. Generally, one

is understood to be a Hindu who practices the faith, having been born into a Hindu family, or having adopted the religion as one's own. Acceptance into the fold is recognized through the name-giving sacrament, a temple ceremony called namakarana samskara, given to born Hindus shortly after birth, and to self-declared Hindus who have proven their sincerity and been accepted by a Hindu community. Traditions vary greatly, but all Hindus rely on the *Vedas* as scriptural authority. On July 2, 1995, the Supreme Court of India adopted as an "adequate and satisfactory formula" this definition by B.G. Tilak: "Acceptance of the *Vedas* with reverence; recognition of the fact that the means or ways to salvation are diverse; and the realization of the truth that the number of gods to be worshiped is large, that indeed is the distinguishing feature of the Hindu religion."

Hinduism (Hindu Dharma): हिन्दुधर्म India's indigenous religious and cultural system, followed today by nearly one billion adherents, mostly in India, but with the large diaspora in many other countries. Also called Sanatana Dharma, "Eternal Religion" and Vaidika Dharma, "Religion of the *Vedas*." Hinduism is the world's most ancient religion and encompasses a broad spectrum of philosophies ranging from pluralistic theism to absolute monism. It is a family of myriad faiths with four primary denominations: Saivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism and Smartism. These four hold such divergent beliefs that each is a complete and independent religion. Yet, they share a vast heritage of culture and belief—karma, dharma, reincarnation, all-pervasive Divinity, temple worship, sacraments, manifold Deities, the guru-shishya tradition and a reliance on the *Vedas* as scriptural authority. See: *Hindu.*

Hinduism Today: The Hindu family magazine founded by Sivaya Subramuniyaswami in 1979 and published quarterly by Himalayan Academy to affirm Sanatana Dharma and record the modern history of a billion-strong global religion in renaissance, reaching 150,000 readers in over 100 countries. See: *Himalayan Academy.*

holy ash: See: *vibhuti.*

homa: होम "Fire-offering." A sacred ceremony, *yajna,* in which the Gods are offered oblations through the medium of fire in a sanctified fire pit. See: *yajna.*



icon: A sacred image, usually of God or a God. English for *murti.* See: *murti.*

immanent: Indwelling; inherent and operating within. Relating to God, the term *immanent* means present in all things and throughout the universe, not aloof or distant. Not to be confused with *imminent,* about to happen; *emanate,* to issue from; *eminent,* high in rank. Compare with: *transcendent.*

initiation (to initiate): See: *diksha.*

instinctive: "Natural" or "innate." From the Latin *instinctus,* participle of *instingere,* "impelling," pricking," "instigating." The drives and impulses that order the animal world and the physical and lower astral aspects of humans—for example, self-preservation, procreation, hunger and thirst, as well as the emotions of greed, hatred, anger, fear, lust and jealousy. See: *mind, yama-niyama.*

instinctive mind: *Manas chitta.* The lower mind, which controls the basic faculties of perception, movement, as well as ordinary thought and emotion. See: *chakra, mind.*

instinctive-intellectual mind: The mind in ordinary consciousness, governed either by instinctive or emotional desires and fears or by intellectual concepts and reason.

intellect: The power to reason or understand; power of thought; mental acumen. See: *mind.*

intellectual mind: *Buddhi chitta.* The faculty of reason and logical thinking. It is the source of discriminating thought, as contrasted with the ordinary, impulsive thought processes of the instinctive mind.

intuit: To know or sense without resorting to rational processes.

intuition (to intuit): Direct understanding or cognition, a source of knowing which bypasses the roundabout processes of reason.

invocation (to invoke): A "calling or summoning," as to a God, saint, etc., for blessings and assistance. Also, a formal prayer or chant.

Ishta Devata (Iṣhṭa Devatā): इष्टदेवता "Cherished or chosen Deity." The Deity that is the object of one's special pious attention.

Ishvara (Īśvara): ईश्वर "Highest Lord." Supreme or Personal God. See: *Parameshvara.*

Islam: The religion founded by Prophet Muhammad in Arabia about 625 ce. Islam connotes submission to Allah, the name for God in this religion. Adherents (known as Muslims) follow the "Five Pillars" enjoined in their scripture, the *Koran:* faith in Allah, praying five times daily facing Mecca, giving of alms, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and pilgrimage.

Itihasa (Itihāsa): इतिहास "So it was." Epic history, particularly the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* (of which the *Bhagavad Gita* is a part). This term sometimes encompasses the *Puranas,* especially the *Skanda Purana* and the *Bhagavata Purana* (or *Shrimad Bhagavatam).* All are *smriti.*



Jainism (Jaina): जैन An ancient non-Vedic religion of India made prominent by the teachings of Mahavira ("Great Hero"), ca 500 bce. The *Jain Agamas* teach reverence for all life, vegetarianism and strict renunciation for ascetics. Jains focus great emphasis on the fact that all souls may attain liberation, each by his own effort. Their great historic saints, called Tirthankaras ("Ford-Crossers"), are objects of worship, of whom Mahavira was the 24th and last. Today, Jains number about six million, living mostly in India.

japa: जप "Recitation." Practice of concentrated repeating of a *mantra,* often while counting the repetitions on a mala, a strand of beads. It may be done silently or aloud. A major sadhana in Hindu spiritual practice, from the simple utterance of a few names of God to extraordinary feats of repeating sacred syllables millions of times for years on end. See: *mantra, sadhana.*

jiva (jīva): जीव "Living, existing." From *jiv,* "to live." The individual soul, *atman,* during its embodied state, bound by anava, karma and maya. See: *evolution of the soul.*

jivanmukti (jīvanmukti): जीवन्मुक्ति "Liberation while living." The state of the *jivanmukta.* Contrasted with *videhamukti,* liberation at the point of death. See: *moksha, videhamukti.*

jnana (jñāna): ज्ञान "Knowledge; wisdom." The matured state of the soul. It is the wisdom that comes as an aftermath of the kundalini breaking through the door of Brahman into the realization of God. Jnana is the awakened, superconscious state working within the ordinary experience of the world, flowing into daily life situations. Jnana is sometimes misunderstood as book knowledge, as a maturity or awakening that comes from simply understanding a complex philosophical system or systems. See: *jnana pada.*

jnana pada (jñāna pāda): ज्ञानपाद "Stage of wisdom." In Saiva Siddhanta, jnana is the last of the four successive padas (stages) of spiritual unfoldment. It is the culmination of the third stage, yoga pada. See: *pada.*

jnana yoga (jñāna yoga): ज्ञानयोग "Union of knowledge." The esoteric spiritual practices of the fully enlightened being, or jnani. An alternative meaning, popularized by Swami Vivekananda, is the quest for cognition through intellectual religious study, as one of four alternate paths to truth, the other three being bhakti yoga, karma yoga and raja yoga.

jyotisha: ज्योतिष From *jyoti,* "light." "The science of the lights (or stars)." Hindu astrology, the knowledge and practice of analyzing events and circumstances, delineating character and determining auspicious moments, according to the positions and movements of heavenly bodies. In calculating horoscopes, jyotisha uses the sidereal (fixed-star) system, whereas Western astrology uses the tropical (fixed-date) method.



Kali (Kālī): काली "Black" Goddess. A form of Shakti in Her fierce aspect worshiped by various sects within Shaktism. She is dark, nude, primordial and fiercely powerful, as of a naked energy untamed. But from the perspective of devotees, She is the incomparable protectress, champion of sadhana and mother of liberation.

karma: कर्म "Action," "deed." One of the most important principles in Hindu thought, karma refers to a consequence or "fruit of action," which sooner or later returns upon the doer. What we sow, we shall reap in this or future lives. Selfish, hateful acts will bring suffering. Benevolent actions will bring loving reactions. Karma is a neutral, self-perpetuating law of the inner cosmos, much as gravity is an impersonal law of the outer cosmos. Karma is threefold: sanchita, prarabdha and kriyamana. **—sañchita karma:** "Accumulated actions." The sum of all karmas of this life and past lives. **—prārabdha karma:** "Actions set in motion." That portion of *sanchita karma* that is bearing fruit and shaping the events and conditions of the current life, including the nature of one's bodies, personal tendencies and associations. **—kriyamāna karma:** "Being made." The karma being created and added to sanchita in this life by one's thoughts, words and actions, or in the inner worlds between lives. Kriyamana karma is the karma that is being sown and will be reaped in the future.

Karttikeya (Kārttikeya): कार्त्तिकेय Child of the Pleiades, from *Krittika,* "Pleiades." A son of Siva. A great Mahadeva worshiped in all parts of India and the world. Also known as Murugan, Kumara, Skanda, Shanmukhanatha, Subramanya and more, He is the God who guides that part of evolution which is religion, the transformation of the instinctive into a divine wisdom through the practice of *yoga.* He holds the holy Vel of jnana shakti, which is His power to vanquish darkness or ignorance.

kirtana (kīrtana): कीर्तन "Praising." Devotional singing and dancing in celebration of God, Gods or guru. An important form of congregational worship in many Hindu denominations. See: *bhajana.*

kosha (kośa): कोश "Sheath; vessel, container; layer." Philosophically, five sheaths through which the soul functions simultaneously in the various planes or levels of existence. They are sometimes compared to the layers of an onion. The koshas, in order of increasing subtlety, are as follows. **—annamaya kośa:** "Sheath composed of food." The physical or odic body, coarsest of sheaths. **—prāṇamaya kośa:** "Sheath composed of prana (vital force)." Also known as the pranic or health body, or the etheric body or etheric double, it coexists within the physical body as its source of life, breath and vitality, and is its connection with the astral body. Prana moves in the pranamaya kosha as five primary currents or vayus, "vital airs or winds." Pranamaya kosha disintegrates at death along with the physical body. **—manomaya kośa:** "Mind-formed sheath." The lower astral body, from manas, "thought, will, wish." The instinctive-intellectual sheath of ordinary thought, desire and emotion. It is the seat of the indriyas, sensory and motor organs, respectively called jnanendriyas and karmendriyas. The manomaya kosha takes form as the physical body develops and is discarded in the inner worlds before rebirth. It is understood in two layers: 1) the odic-causal sheath (buddhi) and 2) the odic-astral sheath (manas). See: indriya, manas. **—vijñānamaya kośa:** "Sheath of cognition." The mental or cognitive-intuitive sheath, also called the actinodic sheath. It is the vehicle of higher thought, vijnana—understanding, knowing, direct cognition, wisdom, intuition and creativity. **—ānandamaya kośa:** "Body of bliss." The intuitive-superconscious sheath or actinic-causal body. This inmost soul form (svarupa) is the ultimate foundation of all life, intelligence and higher faculties. Its essence is Parashakti (Pure Consciousness) and Parasiva (the Absolute). Anandamaya kosha is not a sheath in the same sense as the four outer koshas. It is the soul itself, a body of light, also called karana sharira, causal body, and karmashaya, holder of karmas of this and all past lives. Karana chitta, "causal mind," names the soul's superconscious mind, of which Parashakti (or Satchidananda) is the rarified substratum. Anandamaya kosha is that which evolves through all incarnations and beyond until the soul's ultimate, fulfilled merger, vishvagrasa, in the Primal Soul, Parameshvara. Then anandamaya kosha becomes Sivamaya-kosha, the body of God Siva.

The physical body (annamaya kosha) is also called sthula sharira, "gross body." The soul body (anandamaya kosha) is also called karana sharira, "causal body." The pranamaya, manomaya and vijnanamaya koshas together comprise the sukshma sharira, "subtle body," with the pranamaya shell disintegrating at death.

Krishna (Kṛishṇa): कृष्ण "Black." Also related to *krishtih,* meaning "drawing, attracting." One of the most popular Gods of the Hindu pantheon. He is worshiped by Vaishnavas as the eighth avatara, incarnation, of Vishnu. He is best known as the Supreme Personage depicted in the *Mahabharata,* and specifically in the *Bhagavad Gita.*

kriya (kriyā): क्रिया "Action." 1) In a general sense, *kriya* can refer to doing of any kind. Specifically, it names religious action, especially rites or ceremonies. 2) The second stage of the Saiva path, religious action, or *kriya pada.* See: *kriya pada, pada.*

kriya pada (kriyā pāda): क्रियापाद "Stage of religious action; worship." The stage of worship and devotion, the second of four progressive and cumulative stages of maturation on the Saiva Siddhanta path of attainment. See: *pada.*

kriyamana karma (kriyamāna karma): क्रियमानकर्म The karma currently being created. See: *karma.*

kukarma: कुकर्म Distressful karma accrued from wrongful actions. See: *Karma.*

Kumara (Kumāra): कुमार "Virgin youth; ever-youthful." A name of Lord Karttikeya as an eternal celibate. See: *Karttikeya.*

kumbha: कुम्भ "Jar or pot; water vessel."

kumbhabhisheka (kumbhābhisheka): कुम्भाभिषेक "Water-pot ablution." The formal consecration of a new temple and its periodic reconsecration, usually at twelve-year intervals, following renovation, extensive cleaning and renewal. The rites culminate with the priests' pouring sanctified water over the temple spires, which

resemble an inverted pot (kumbha).

Kumbha Mela: कुम्भ मेला Kumbha Mela is a Hindu pilgrimage that occurs on astrologically auspicious times four times every twelve years, rotating among four sacred locations in India. They are the largest human gatherings on Earth, attended by thousands of saints and tens of millions of pilgrims.

kundalini (kuṇḍalinī): कुण्डलिनी "She who is coiled; serpent power." The primordial cosmic energy in every individual which, at first, lies coiled like a serpent at the base of the spine and eventually, through the competently guided practice of yoga, rises up the sushumna nadi. As it rises, the kundalini empowers each successive chakra. Nirvikalpa samadhi, enlightenment, comes as it pierces through the door of Brahman at the core of the sahasrara. If enlivened prematurely and without the guidance of a satguru, the kundalini can cause physical, mental and emotional ailments. See: *chakra, samadhi.*



Lakshmi (Lakshmī): लक्ष्मी "Mark or sign," often of success or prosperity. Shakti, the Universal Mother, as Goddess of wealth. The consort of Vishnu. Usually depicted on a lotus flower. Prayers are offered to Lakshmi for wealth, beauty and peace.

liberation: Freedom from the cycle of reincarnation. See: *moksha.*

linga (liṅga): लिङ्ग "Mark." See: Sivalinga.

loka: लोक "World, habitat, realm, or plane of existence." A dimension of manifest existence; cosmic region. Each loka reflects or involves a particular range of consciousness. Bhuloka is the physical plane. The Antarloka (astral plane) and the Sivaloka (causal plane) are the ever-present substratum of physical existence, most frequently experienced by humans during sleep and deep meditation. See: *heaven, hell, three worlds.*

lower chakras: See: *chakras.*



Mahabharata (Mahābhārata): महाभारत "Great Epic of India." The world's longest epic poem. It revolves around the conflict between two kingdoms, the Pandavas and Kauravas, and their great battle of Kurukshetra near modern Delhi in approximately 1424 bce. Woven through the plot are countless discourses on philosophy, religion, astronomy, cosmology, polity, economics and many stories illustrative of simple truths and ethical principles. The *Bhagavad Gita* is one section of the work. The *Mahabharata* is revered as scripture by Vaishnavites and Smartas.

Mahadeva (Mahādeva): महादेव "Great shining one; God." Referring either to the Supreme God or any of the highly evolved beings who live in the highest planes in their natural, effulgent soul bodies. It is said in scripture that there are 330 million Gods. See: *Gods, Siva.*

mahasamadhi (mahāsamādhi): महासमाधि "Great enstasy." The death, or dropping off of the physical body, of a great soul, an event occasioned by tremendous blessings. See: *samadhi.*

mahatma (mahātma): महात्म "Great soul." Honorific title for those held in highest esteem, especially saints. See: *atma.*

mahavakya (mahāvākya): महावाक्य "Great saying." A profound aphorism from scripture or a holy person. The most famous are four Upanishadic proclamations: *Prajanam Brahma,* "Pure consciousness is God," (*Aitareya Upanishad); Aham Brahmasmi,* "I am God" (*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad); Tat tvam asi,* "Thou art That" (*Chandogya Upanishad);* and *Ayam atma Brahma,* "The soul is God" (*Mandukya Upanishad).*

manipura chakra (maṇipūra chakra): मणिपूरचक्र "Wheeled city of jewels." Solar-plexus center of willpower. See: *chakra.*

mantra: मन्त्र "Mystic formula." A sound, syllable, word or phrase endowed with special power, usually drawn from scripture. Mantras are chanted loudly during puja to invoke the Gods and establish a spiritual force field. Certain mantras are repeated softly or mentally for japa. Hinduism's universal mantra is Aum. To be truly effective, such mantras must be given by the preceptor through initiation.

marga (mārga): मार्ग "Path; way." From *marg,* "to seek." See: *pada, San marga.*

materialism (materialistic): The doctrine that matter is the only reality, that all life, thought and feelings are but the effects of movements of matter, and that there exist no worlds but the physical. Most materialists are atheists—perhaps accepting a cosmic, material, prime mover, but no personal God. An Indian school of thought which propounded this view were the Charvakas.

maya (māyā): माया "She who measures;" or "mirific energy." The substance emanated from God through which the world of form is manifested. Hence all creation is also termed maya. Maya is a key concept in Hinduism, originally meaning "supernatural power; God's mirific energy," often translated as "illusion."

mind (five states): A view of the mind in five parts. **—conscious mind:** *Jagrat chitta* ("wakeful consciousness"). The ordinary, waking, thinking state of mind in which the majority of people function most of the day. **—subconscious mind:** *Samskara chitta* ("impression mind"). The part of mind "beneath" the conscious mind, the storehouse or recorder of all experience (whether remembered consciously or not)—the holder of past impressions, reactions and desires. Also, the seat of involuntary physiological processes. **—sub-subconscious mind:** *Vasana chitta* ("mind of subliminal traits"). The area of the subconscious mind formed when two thoughts or experiences of the same rate of intensity are sent into the subconscious at different times and, intermingling, give rise to a new and totally different rate of vibration. This subconscious formation later causes the external mind to react to situations according to these accumulated vibrations, be they positive, negative or mixed. **—superconscious mind:** *Karana chitta.* The mind of light, the all-knowing intelligence of the soul. The Sanskrit term is *turiya,* "the fourth," meaning the condition beyond the states of wakefulness (jagrat), "dream" (svapna), and "deep sleep" (sushupti). At its deepest level, the superconscious is Parashakti, or Satchidananda, the Divine Mind of God Siva. In Sanskrit, there are numerous terms for the various levels and states of superconsciousness. Specific superconscious states such as: *vishvachaitanya* ("universal consciousness"), *advaita chaitanya* ("nondual consciousness"), *adhyatma chetana* ("spiritual consciousness"). **—subsuperconscious mind:** *Anukarana chitta.* The superconscious mind working through the conscious and subconscious states, which brings forth intuition, clarity and insight.

mind (individual): At the microcosmic level of individual souls, mind is consciousness and its faculties of memory, desire, thought and cognition. Individual mind is chitta (mind, consciousness), and its threefold expression is called antahkarana, "inner faculty" composed of: 1) **buddhi** ("intellect, reason, logic," higher mind); 2) **ahaṁkāra** ("I-maker," egoity); 3) **manas** ("lower mind," instinctive-intellectual mind, the seat of desire). From the perspective of the 36 tattvas (categories of existence), each of these is a tattva which evolves out of the one before it. Thus, from buddhi comes ahamkara and then manas. These three are faculties of the manomaya kosha (astral or instinctive-intellectual sheath). Anukarana chitta, subsuperconsciousness, the knowing mind, is the mind-state of the vijnanamaya kosha (mental or intuitive-cognitive sheath). The aspect of mind corresponding directly to the anandamaya kosha (causal body) is karana chitta, superconsciousness.

mind (three phases): A perspective of mind as instinctive, intellectual and superconscious. **—instinctive mind:** *Manas chitta,* the seat of desire and governor of sensory and motor organs. **—intellectual mind:** *Buddhi chitta,* the faculty of thought and intelligence. **—superconscious mind:** *Karana chitta,* the stratum of intuition, benevolence and spiritual sustenance. Its most refined essence is Parashakti, or Satchidananda, all-knowing, omnipresent consciousness, the One transcendental, self-luminous, divine mind common to all souls.

mind (universal): In the most profound sense, mind is the sum of all things, all energies and manifestations, all forms, subtle and gross, sacred and mundane. It is the inner and outer cosmos. Mind is maya. It is the material matrix. It is everything but That, the Self within, Parasiva, which is timeless, formless, causeless, spaceless, known by the knower only after Self Realization. The Self is the indescribable, unnameable, Ultimate Reality. Mind in its subtlest form is undifferentiated Pure Consciousness, primal substance (Parashakti or Satchidananda), out of which emerge the myriad forms of existence, both psychic and material.

Mohammad: Founder of the Islam religion (570–632), a preacher of the Quraysh Bedouin tribe who called for an end to the "demons and idols" of the Arab religion and conversion to the ways of the one God, Allah. See: *Islam.*

moksha: मोक्ष "Liberation." Release from transmigration, *samsara,* the round of births and deaths, which occurs after karma has been resolved and nirvikalpa samadhi—realization of the Self, Parasiva—has been attained. Same as *mukti.* See: *evolution of the soul.*

monism: "Doctrine of oneness." 1) The philosophical view that there is only one ultimate substance or principle. 2) The view that reality is a unified whole without independent parts.

monistic theism: Advaita Ishvaravada. Monism is the doctrine that reality is a one whole or existence without independent parts. Theism is the belief that God exists as a real, conscious, personal Supreme Being. Monistic theism, also call panentheism, embraces both monism and theism, two perspectives ordinarily considered contradictory, since theism implies dualism. Monistic theism simultaneously accepts that God has a personal form, that He creates, pervades and is all that exists (therefore the soul is, in essence, one with God) and that He ultimately transcends all existence. See: *dvaita-advaita.*

mudra (mudrā): मुद्रा "Seal." Esoteric hand gestures which express specific energies or powers. Usually accompanied by precise visualizations, mudras are a vital element of ritual worship (puja), dance and yoga.

muladhara chakra (mūlādhāra chakra): मूलाधारचक्र "Root-support wheel." Four-petaled psychic center at the base of the spine; governs memory. See: *chakra.*

mulif: (Shum) The perspective of the mind in its intellectual, philosophical state. Pronounced *moo-leef.* See: *Shum perspectives.*

murti (mūrti): मूर्ति "Form; manifestation, embodiment, personification." An image, icon or effigy of God or a God used during worship. Other Deity representations include symbols, e.g., the banyan tree, and geometric emblems or designs such as yantras and mandalas.

Murugan: முருகன் "Beautiful one," a favorite name of Karttikeya among the Tamils of South India, Sri Lanka and elsewhere. See: *Karttikeya.*

Muslim: Literally, "surrendered," "submitted" to, or "reconciled" with God's will. "True believer." A follower of Islam.

mystic: 1) One who understands religious mysteries or occult rites and practices. 2) Inspiring a sense of mystery and wonder.

mysticism: Spirituality; the pursuit of direct spiritual or religious experience. Spiritual discipline aimed at union or communion with Ultimate Reality or God through deep meditation or trance-like contemplation. From the Greek *mystikos,* "of mysteries." Characterized by the belief that Truth transcends intellectual processes and must be attained through transcendent means.



nadi (nāḍī): नाडी "Conduit; river." A nerve fiber or energy channel of the subtle (inner) bodies of man. It is said there are 72,000 nadis. These interconnect the chakras. The three main nadis are ida, pingala and sushumna. **—Ida** is pink and feminine. It flows downward, ending on the left side of the body. It is the channel of physical-emotional energy. **—Pingala** is blue and masculine. It flows upward, ending on the right side of the body. It is the channel of intellectual-mental energy. **—Sushumna** is the major nerve current which passes through the spinal column from the muladhara chakra at the base to the sahasrara at the crown of the head. It is the channel of kundalini.

naga (nāga): नाग "Serpent," often the cobra; symbol of the kundalini coiled on the four petals of the muladhara chakra.

nakshatra: नक्षत्र "Star cluster." Central to astrological determinations, the nakshatras are 27 star-clusters, constellations, which lie along the ecliptic, or path of the sun. An individual's nakshatra, or birth star, is the constellation the moon was aligned with at the time of birth. See: *jyotisha.*

Namah Sivaya (Namaḥ Śivāya): नमः शिवाय "Adoration (homage) to Siva." The supreme mantra of Saivism.

namakarana samskara (nāmakaraṇa saṁskāra): नामकरण संस्कार "Name-giving" and formal entry into one or another sect of Hinduism, performed 11 to 41 days after birth. The name is chosen according to astrology, preferably the name of a God or Goddess. At this time, guardian *devas* are assigned to see the child through life. One who converts to or adopts Hinduism later in life would receive this same sacrament. See: *samskara.*

Narakaloka: नरक Abode of darkness. The nether worlds. Similar to the Western concept of hell, but temporary. Naraka is a gross region of the Antarloka. Naraka is a congested, distressful area where demonic beings and young souls may sojourn until they resolve the darksome karmas they have created. Here beings suffer the consequences of their own misdeeds in previous lives. Narakaloka is understood as having seven regions, called *tala,* corresponding to the states of consciousness of the seven lower chakras. They are described as places of torment, pain, darkness, confusion and disease, temporary abodes for the evolving soul. Hinduism has no eternal hell. See: *asura, chakra, hell, loka.*

Narayana (Nārāyaṇa): नारायण "Abode of men." A name of Lord Vishnu.

Nataraja (Naṭarāja): नटराज "King of Dance," or "King of Dancers." God as the Cosmic Dancer. Perhaps Hinduism's richest and

most eloquent symbol, Nataraja represents Siva, the Primal Soul, Parameshvara, as the power, energy and life of all that exists, and depicts His five cosmic powers: creation, preservation, dissolution, veiling grace, and revealing grace. This is Siva's intricate state of Being in Manifestation. The dance of Siva as Natesha, Lord of Dancers, is the rhythmic movement of the entire cosmos. All that is, whether sentient or insentient, pulsates in His body, and He within it. Like Ardhanarishvara, this icon depicts both male and female elements, symbolizing the inseparable nature of Siva-Shakti. See: *Parameshvara, Siva.*

Natha (Nātha): नाथ "Master, lord; adept." 1) An ancient Himalayan tradition of Saiva yoga mysticism whose first historically known exponent was Nandikesvara (ca 250 bce). 2) The extraordinary ascetic masters (or devotees) of this school. The *Nathas* are considered the source of *hatha* as well as *raja yoga.*

nirvikalpa samadhi (nirvikalpa samādhi): निर्विकल्प समाधि "Undifferentiated trance, enstasy (samadhi) without form or seed." The realization of the Self, Parasiva, a state of oneness beyond all change or diversity; beyond time, form and space. *Vikalpa* means "diversity, thought; difference of perception, distinction." *Nir* means "without." See: *Parasiva, samadhi.*

niyama: नियम "Spiritual observance." See: *yama-niyama.*

old soul: One who has reincarnated many times, experienced much and is therefore further along the path than young souls. Old souls may be recognized by their qualities of compassion, self-effacement and wisdom. See: *evolution of the soul, pada.*

omnipresent: Present everywhere and in all things.

omniscient: Possessing infinite knowledge, all-knowing.



pada (pāda): पाद् "The foot (of humans and animals); quarter-part, section; stage; path." 1) Names the major sections of the Agamic texts. 2) The corresponding stages of practice and unfoldment on the path to moksha. According to Saiva Siddhanta, there are four padas, which are successive and cumulative. In accomplishing each one, the soul prepares itself for the next. **—charyā pāda:** "Good conduct stage." The first stage where one learns to live righteously and serve selflessly, performing karma yoga. **—kriyā pāda:** "Religious action; worship stage." Stage of bhakti yoga, of cultivating devotion through performing puja and regular daily sadhana. **—yoga pāda:** Having matured, the soul now turns to internalized worship and raja yoga under the guidance of a satguru. It is a time of sadhana and serious striving when realization of the Self is the goal. **—jñāna pāda:** "Stage of wisdom." Once the soul has attained Realization, it is henceforth a wise one, shedding blessings on mankind. This stage is also called the San Marga, "true path," on which God is our dearest beloved, implying transcendence of individuality and merger with the Divine.

pada puja (pāda pūjā): पादपूजा "Foot worship." Ceremonial worship of the guru's sandals or holy feet, often through ablution with precious substances and offering of fruit and flowers. After the ceremony, the water of the bath, the fruit and other precious substances are partaken of as prasada by the devotees.

paduka (pādukā): पादुका "Sandals." *Shri paduka* refers to the sandals of the preceptor, the traditional icon of the guru, representing his venerable feet and worshiped as the source of grace.

pancha mahayajna (pañcha mahāyajñas): पञ्चमहायज्ञ The householder's five daily sacrifices: to Gods, ancestors, rishis, creatures and men.

pancha nitya karmas (pañcha nitya karmas): पञ्चनित्यकर्म "Five constant duties." A traditional regimen of religious practice for Hindus: 1) *dharma* (virtuous living), 2) *upāsanā* (worship), 3) *utsava* (holy days), 4) *tirthayātrāa* (pilgrimage) and 5) *saṁskāras* (sacraments).

pandit (paṇḍita): पण्डित "Learned one." A Hindu religious scholar or theologian, well versed in philosophy, liturgy, religious law and sacred science.

papa (pāpa): पाप "Wickedness or sin;" "crime." 1) Bad or evil. 2) Wrongful action. 3) Demerit earned through wrongdoing. Papa includes all forms of wrongdoing, from the simplest infraction to the most heinous crime. The degree of papa accrued from an action depends on various factors, including the karma, dharma and spiritual advancement of the individual, the intent or motivation, as well as the time and place of the action. *Papa* is the opposite of *punya* (merit, virtue). See: *evil, karma, punya.*

Parabrahman: परब्रह्मन् "Supreme (or transcendent) God." A synonym for Nirguna Brahman, Absolute Reality, beyond time, form and space. Same as Parasiva. See: *Brahman, Parasiva.*

paramaguru: परमगुरु "Grand preceptor." The guru of a disciple's guru.

Parameshvara (Parameśvara): परमेश्वर "Supreme Lord or Ruler." God Siva's third perfection, Supreme Mahadeva, Siva-Shakti, mother of the universe. In this perfection, Siva is a person. The term *Primal Soul* designates Parameshvara as the original, uncreated soul, the creator of all other souls. See: *God, Primal Soul, Siva.*

parampara (paramparā): परंपरा "Uninterrupted succession." See: *guru parampara.*

parartha puja (parārtha pūjā): परार्थपूजा "Public liturgy and worship." See: *puja.*

Parashakti (Parāśakti): पराशक्ति "Supreme power; primal energy." God Siva's second perfection, which is impersonal, immanent, and with form—the all-pervasive, Pure Consciousness and Primal Substance of all that exists. There are many other descriptive names for Parashakti—Satchidananda ("existence-consciousness-bliss"), light, silence, divine mind, superconsciousness and more. Parashakti can be experienced by the diligent yogi or meditator as a merging in, or identification with, the underlying oneness flowing through all form. The experience is called *savikalpa samadhi.*

Parasiva (Paraśiva): परशिव "Transcendent Siva." The Self God, Siva's first perfection, Absolute Reality. Parasiva is *That* which is beyond the grasp of consciousness, transcends time, form and space and defies description. To merge with the Absolute in mystic union, called Self Realization or nirvikalpa samadhi, is the ultimate goal of all incarnated souls, the reason for their living on this planet, and the deepest meaning of their experiences.

pasha (pāśa): पाश "Tether; noose." The whole of existence, manifest and unmanifest. That which binds or limits the soul and keeps it (for a time) from manifesting its full potential. Pasha consists of the soul's threefold bondage of anava, karma and maya.

Patanjali (Patañjali): पतञ्जलि A Saivite Natha *siddha* (ca 200 bce) who codified the ancient raja yoga philosophy which outlines the path to enlightenment through purification, control and transcendence of the mind. His great work, the *Yoga Sutras,* comprises some 200 aphorisms and is the foremost ancient text on meditative *yoga.* See: *raja yoga.*

penance: *Prayashchitta.* Atonement, expiation. An act of devotion (bhakti), austerity (tapas) or discipline (sukritya) undertaken to soften or nullify the anticipated reaction to a past action. Penance is uncomfortable karma inflicted upon oneself to mitigate one's karmic burden caused by wrongful actions (kukarma). It includes such acts as prostrating 108 times, fasting, self-denial, or carrying kavadi (a form of public penance), as well as more extreme austerities, or tapas. Penance is often suggested by spiritual leaders and elders. See: *kukarma, papa, sin.*

Personal God: See: *Ishta Devata, Parameshvara Primal Soul.*

plane: A stage or level of existence. See: *loka.*

polytheism: Belief in or worship of many Gods.

prana (prāṇa): प्राण Vital energy or life principle. While *prana* usually refers to the life principle, it sometimes denotes energy, breath, the power or the animating force of the cosmos, the sum total of all energy and forces.

pranayama (prāṇāyāma): प्राणायाम "Breath control." The fourth limb of raja yoga. See: *raja yoga.*

prapatti: प्रपत्ति "Throwing oneself down." Intense bhakti, total, unconditional submission to God, often coupled with the attitude of personal helplessness, self-effacement and resignation.

prarabdha karma (prārabdha karma): प्रारब्धकर्म "Action that has been unleashed or aroused." See: *karma.*

prasada (prasāda): प्रसाद "Clarity, brightness; grace." Food offered to the Deity or the guru, or the blessed remnants of such food.

pratyahara (pratyāhāra): प्रत्याहार "Withdrawal." The drawing in of forces. In yoga, the withdrawal from external consciousness. See: *raja yoga.*

prayashchitta (prāyaścitta): प्रायश्चित्त "Predominant thought or aim." Penance. Acts of atonement, burning karma before it manifests. See: *penance.*

preservation: The act of maintaining or protecting. One of Siva's five cosmic powers. See: *Siva.*

Primal Soul: The uncreated, original, perfect soul—Siva Parameshvara—who emanates from Himself the inner and outer universes and an infinite plurality of individual souls. The essence of all is His own essence. God in His personal aspect as Lord and Creator, depicted in many forms: Nataraja by Saivites, Vishnu by Vaishnavites, Devi by Shaktas. See: *Siva, Parameshvara.*

psychic: "Of the psyche or soul." Sensitive to spiritual processes and energies. Inwardly or intuitively aware of nonphysical realities; able to use such powers as clairvoyance, clairaudience and precognition. Nonphysical, subtle; pertaining to the deeper aspects of man.

puja (pūjā): पूजा "Worship, adoration." An Agamic rite of worship performed in the home, temple or shrine, to the murti, shri paduka, or other consecrated object, or to a person, such as the satguru. Its purpose is to purify the atmosphere around the object worshiped, establish a connection with the inner worlds and invoke the presence of God, Gods or one's guru. 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. See: *yajna.*

punarjanma: पुनर्जन्म "Reincarnation." From *punaḥ,* "again and again," and *janma,* "taking birth." See: *reincarnation.*

punya (puṇya): पुण्य "Holy; virtuous; auspicious." 1) Good or righteous. 2) Meritorious action. 3) Merit earned through right thought, word and action. Punya includes all forms of doing good, from the simplest helpful deed to a lifetime of conscientious beneficence. Each act of punya carries its karmic consequence. Punya is earned through virtuous living, following the multi-faceted laws of dharma. Punya depends on purity of acts according to various factors including 1) the karma and evolution of the individual, 2) degree of sacrifice and unselfish motivation and 3) time and place. It is the opposite of *papa.*

Purana (Purāṇa): पुराण "Ancient lore." Hindu folk narratives containing ethical and cosmological teachings relative to Gods, man and the world. There are 18 major *Puranas,* which are designated as Saivite, Vaishnavite or Shakta. See: *smriti.*

Pure Consciousness: See: *mind, Parashakti, Satchidananda.*

purushartha (purushārtha): पुरुषार्थ "Human wealth or purpose." The four pursuits in which people may legitimately engage, also called chaturvarga, "fourfold good"—a basic principle of Hindu ethics. **—dharma:** "Righteous living." The fulfillment of virtue, good works, duties and responsibilities, restraints and observances—performing one's part in the service and upliftment of society. This includes pursuit of truth under a guru of a particular parampara and sampradaya. Dharma is of four primary forms. It is the steady guide for artha and kama. **—artha:** "Wealth." Material welfare and abundance, money, property, possessions. Artha is the pursuit of wealth, guided by dharma. It includes the basic needs—food, money, clothing and shelter—and extends to the wealth required to maintain a comfortable home, raise a family, fulfill a successful career and perform religious duties. Artha measures not only riches but quality of life, providing the personal and social security needed to pursue kama, dharma and moksha. It allows for the fulfillment of the householder's five daily sacrifices, pancha mahayajna: to God, ancestors, devas, creatures and men. **—kāma:** "Pleasure, love; enjoyment." Earthly love, aesthetic and cultural fulfillment, pleasures of the world (including sexual), the joys of family, intellectual satisfaction. Enjoyment of happiness, security, creativity, usefulness and inspiration. **—moksha:** "Liberation." Freedom from rebirth through the ultimate attainment, realization of the Self God, Parasiva. The spiritual attainments and superconscious joys, attending renunciation and yoga leading to Self Realization. Moksha comes through the fulfillment of dharma, artha and kama (known in Tamil as *aram, porul* and *inbam,* and explained by Tiruvalluvar in *Tirukural*) in the current or past lives, so that one is no longer attached to worldly joys or sorrows. It is the supreme goal of life, called *paramartha,* "supreme weath."

quantum: Quantity or amount. In the quantum theory of modern science: a fixed basic unit, usually of energy. **—quantum particles of light:** Light understood not as a continuum, but as traveling bundles each of a same intensity. Deeper still, these particles originate and resolve themselves in a one divine energy. **—at the quantum level** (of the mind): Deep within the mind, at a subtle energy level.



rajas: रजस् "Passion; activity." See: *guna.*

raja yoga (rāja yoga): राजयोग "King of *yogas,*" also known as *ashtanga yoga,* "eight-limbed *yoga.*" The classical yoga system of eight progressive stages to Illumination as described in various yoga *Upanishads,* the *Tirumantiram* and, most notably, the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali. The eight limbs are: 1) *yama,* "Restraint." 2) *niyama,* "Observance." 3) *āsana,* "Seat or posture." 4) *prāṇāyāma,* "Breath control." 5) *pratyāhāra,* "Withdrawal." 6) *dhāraṇā,* "Concentration." 7) *dhyāna,* "Meditation." 8) *samādhi,* "Enstasy."

Rama (Rāma): राम Venerated hero of the *Ramayana* epic, and one of the two most popular incarnations of Vishnu, along with Krishna. His worship is almost universal among Vaishnavas, and extensive

among Smartas and other liberal Hindus. He was a great worshiper of Siva, and a Siva temple, called Rameshvaram, was built in his name at the southern tip of India.

Ramanuja (Rāmānuja): रामानुज Philosopher saint, great bhakta (1017–1137), founder of one of five major Vaishnava schools, and considered the greatest critic of advaita. In his famous *Shri Bhashya* on the *Brahma Sutras*, he countered Sankara's absolute monism, point-by-point, with his qualified monism, called *Vishishtadvaita Vedanta*.

Ramayana (Rāmāyaṇa): रामायण "Life of Rama." One of India's two grand epics (Itihasa) along with the *Mahabharata*. It is Valmiki's tragic love story of Rama and Sita, whose exemplary lives have helped set high standards of dignity and nobility as an integral part of Hindu dharma. Astronomical data in the story puts Rama's reign at about 2015 bce. See: *Rama*.

reincarnation: "Re-entering the flesh." *Punarjanma;* metempsychosis. The process wherein souls take on a new physical body through the birth process. It is a repetitive cycle which originates in the subtle plane (Antarloka), the realm in which souls live between births and return to after death. There they are assisted in readjusting to having died and eventually prepared for yet another birth. The quality and nature of the next birth depends on the merit or demerit of one's past actions (karma) and on the needs of their unique pattern of development and experience (dharma). The cycle of reincarnation ends when karma has been resolved and the Self God (Parasiva) has been realized. This condition of release is called moksha. Then the soul continues to evolve and mature in the subtle planes, without the need to return to physical existence. See: *evolution of the soul, pada, pasa*.

revealing grace: See: *anugraha shakti, grace*.

***Rig Veda* (Rig Veda): ऋग्वेद** *"Veda* of verse *(rik)."* The first and oldest of the four *Veda* compendia of revealed scriptures (shruti), including a hymn collection *(Samhitas),* priestly explanatory manuals *(Brahmanas),* forest treatises *(Aranyakas)* elaborating on the Vedic rites, and philosophical dialogs *(Upanishads)*. The oldest and core portion is the *Samhita,* believed to date back, in its oral form, as far as 8,000 years. It embodies prayerful hymns of praise and invocation to the Divinities of nature and to the One Divine. See: *shruti, Veda*.

rishi (ṛishi): ऋषि "Seer." A term for an enlightened being, emphasizing psychic perception and visionary wisdom. In the Vedic age, rishis lived in remote retreats, either alone or with disciples. Such great souls were the inspired conveyers of the *Vedas*. See: *Veda*.

Rudra: रुद्र "Controller of terrific powers;" or "red, shining one." The name of Siva as the God of dissolution, the universal force of reabsorption. Rudra-Siva is revered both as the "terrifying one" and the "lord of tears," for He wields and controls the terrific powers which may cause lamentation among humans. See: *Siva*.

sacrament: 1) Holy rite, especially one solemnized in a formal, consecrated manner, which is a bonding between the recipient and God, Gods or guru. This includes rites of passage (samskara), ceremonies sanctifying crucial events or stages of life. 2) *Prasada*. Sacred substances, grace-filled gifts, blessed in sacred ceremony or by a holy person. See: *prasada, samskara*.

sadhana (sādhana): साधन "Effective means of attainment." Religious or spiritual disciplines, such as puja, yoga, meditation, japa, fasting and austerity. The effect of sadhana is the building of willpower, faith and confidence in oneself and in God, Gods and guru. Sadhana harnesses and transmutes the instinctive-intellectual nature, allowing progressive spiritual unfoldment into the superconscious realizations and innate abilities of the soul.

sadhu (sādhu): साधु "Virtuous one; straight, unerring." A holy man dedicated to the search for God. A sadhu may or may not be a yogi or a sannyasin, or be connected in any way with a guru or legitimate lineage. Sadhus usually have no fixed abode and travel unattached from place to place, often living on alms. See also: *sannyasin*.

sadhvi (sādhvī): साध्वी Feminine form of *sadhu*. See: *sadhu*.

sahasrara chakra (sahasrāra chakra): सहस्रारचक्र The cranial psychic force center of divine consciousness. "Thousand-spoked wheel." See: *chakra*.

Saiva Siddhanta Church: "Church of God Siva's Revealed Truth," founded in 1949 by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami.

Saivism (Śaiva): शैव The religion followed by those who worship Siva as Supreme God. The oldest of the four sects of Hinduism. There are many schools of Saivism, all firmly based on the *Vedas* and *Saiva Agamas*.

sakha marga (sakhā mārga): सखामार्ग "Friend's path." See: *pada*.

samadhi (samādhi): समाधि "Enstasy," "Sameness; contemplation; union, wholeness; completion, accomplishment." Samadhi is the state of true yoga, in which the meditator and the object of meditation are one. Samadhi is of two levels: 1) **savikalpa samādhi,** identification or oneness with the essence of an object. Its highest form is the realization of the primal substratum or pure consciousness, Satchidananda; 2) **nirvikalpa samādhi** ("enstasy without form" or "seed"). The ultimate spiritual attainment: the realization of the Self, Parasiva, in which all modes of consciousness are transcended and Absolute Reality—beyond time, form and space—is experienced, bringing in its aftermath a complete transformation of consciousness. See: *Parasiva, raja yoga, Satchidananda*.

sampradaya (sampradāya): संप्रदाय A living stream of tradition or theology within Hinduism, passed on by oral training and initiation. A living stream of tradition or theology within Hinduism, passed on by oral training and initiation. The term derives from the verb *sampradā*, meaning "to give out," "render," grant, bestow or confer; to hand down by tradition; to bequeath. *Sampradaya* is thus a philosophy borne down through history by verbal transmission. It is more inclusive than the related term *parampara,* which names a living lineage of ordained gurus who embody and carry forth a sampradaya. Each sampradaya is often represented by many paramparas.

samsara (saṁsāra): संसार "Flow." The phenomenal world. Transmigratory existence, fraught with impermanence and change, joy and suffering. The cycle of birth, death and rebirth; the total pattern of successive earthly lives experienced by a soul.

samsari (saṁsārī): संसारी "One in samsara;" "wanderer." A soul, during transmigration, engrossed in the joys and sorrows of worldly existence; one who is not striving for liberation (moksha), someone who is not "on the path."

samskara (saṁskāra): संस्कार "Impression, activator; sanctification, preparation." 1) A deep impression made on the subconscious mind by experience (in this or previous lives), which then influences one's nature, responses, and states of mind, either positively or negatively. 2) a Hindu sacrament or rite, a bonding between the recipient and God, Gods or guru, performed to create beneficial samskaras and mark a significant transition of life. These make deep and positive impressions on the mind of the recipient, inform the family and community of changes in the lives of its members and secure inner-world blessings. Some of the most important samskaras are namakarana, name-giving; vivaha, marriage; and antyeshti, funeral rites.

Sanatana Dharma (Sanātana Dharma): सनातनधर्म "Eternal religion" or "Everlasting path." A traditional designation for the Hindu religion. See: *Hinduism*.

sanctum sanctorum: "Holy of holies." *Garbhagriha* in Sanskrit. The most sacred part of a temple, usually a cave-like stone chamber, in which the main icon is installed. See: *temple*.

San Marga (San Mārga): सन्मार्ग "True path." The straight, spiritual path leading to the ultimate goal, Self Realization, without detouring into unnecessary psychic exploration or pointless development of psychic powers, or siddhis. A san margi is a person "on the path," as opposed to a samsari, one engrossed in worldliness. *San Marga* also names the jnana pada.

sannyasa (sannyāsa): संन्यास "Renunciation." "Throwing down or abandoning." Sannyasa is the repudiation of the dharma of the householder, including its obligations and duties, and the acceptance of the even more demanding dharma of the renunciate. See: *sannyasa dharma, sannyasa diksha*.

sannyasa ashrama (sannyāsa āśrama): संन्यास आश्रम "Renunciate stage." The period of life after age 72. See: *ashrama dharma*.

sannyasa dharma (sannyāsa dharma): संन्यासधर्म "Renunciate virtue." The life, way and traditions of those who have irrevocably renounced prerogatives and obligations of the householder, including personal property, wealth, ambitions, social position and family ties, in favor of the full-time monastic quest for divine awakening, Self Realization and spiritual upliftment of humanity. Traditionally, this dharma is available to those under age 25 who meet strict qualifications. Alternately, the householder may embrace sannyasa dharma after age 72 through the customary initiatory rites given by a sannyasin and then diligently pursuing his spiritual sadhana in a state of genuine renunciation and not in the midst of his family. These two forms of sannyasa are not to be confused with simply entering the sannyasa ashrama, the last stage of life.

sannyasa diksha (sannyāsa dīkshā): संन्यासदीक्षा "Renunciate initiation." This diksha is a formal rite, or less often an informal blessing, entering the devotee into renunciate monasticism, binding him for life to certain vows which include chastity, poverty and obedience, and directing him on the path to Self Realization. See: *sannyasa dharma*.

sannyasin (sannyāsin): संन्यासिन् "Renouncer." One who has taken sannyasa diksha. A Hindu monk, swami, and one of a world brotherhood (or holy order) of sannyasins. Some are wanderers and others live in monasteries. The sannyasin is the guardian of his religion, immersed in it constantly, freed from worldliness, freed from distraction, able to offer his work and his worship in unbroken continuity and one-pointed effectiveness. He undertakes certain disciplines including the purification of body, mind and emotion. He restrains and controls the mind through his sadhana, tapas and meditative regimen. He unfolds from within himself a profound love of God and the Gods. His practice of upasana, worship, is predominantly internal, seeking God within.

Sanskrit (Saṁskṛita): संस्कृत "Well-made," "refined," "perfected." The classical sacerdotal language of ancient India, considered a pure vehicle for communication with the celestial worlds. It is the primary language in which Hindu scriptures are written, including the *Vedas* and *Agamas*.

Satchidananda (Satchidānanda): सच्चिदानन्द "Existence-consciousness-bliss." See: *Parashakti*.

satguru (sadguru): सद्गुरु "True weighty one." A spiritual preceptor of the highest attainment and authority—one who has realized the ultimate Truth, Parasiva, through nirvikalpa samadhi. He is always a sannyasin, an unmarried renunciate—a free being able to lead others securely along the spiritual path. All Hindu denominations teach that the grace and guidance of a living satguru is a necessity for Self Realization. He is recognized and revered as the embodiment of God, Sadasiva, the source of grace and liberation. See: *guru*.

satputra marga (satputra mārga): सत्पुत्र मार्ग "True son's way." The stage of kriya, in which our relationship with God is as a child to its parents; characterized by puja, reading the scriptures, singing hymns, performing japa and unsullied austerity, truthfulness, restraint of envy, offering of food and other self-purifying acts. See: *pada*.

satsanga (satsaṅga): सत्संग "Holy gathering." Association of devotees for temple or home worship, celebration, selfless service and religious studies.

sattva guna (sattva guṇa): सत्त्वगुण "Perfection of Being." The quality of goodness or purity. See: *guna*.

savikalpa samadhi (savikalpa samādhi): सविकल्पसमाधि "Enstasy with form (or seed)." Experience of pure consciousness. See: *samadhi*.

Second World: The astral or subtle plane. See: *loka*.

Self (Self God): God Siva's perfection of Absolute Reality, Parasiva—That which abides at the core of every soul. See: *Parasiva, Siva*.

Self Realization: Direct knowing of the Self God, Parasiva. Self Realization is known in Sanskrit as *nirvikalpa samadhi,* the ultimate spiritual attainment. See: *nirvikalpa samadhi*.

seva (sevā): सेवा "Service," karma yoga, an integral part of the spiritual path, doing selfless, useful work for others, such as volunteer work at a temple, without preference or thought of personal gain. Seva, or Sivathondu in Tamil, is the central practice of the charya pada. See: *pada*.

shad darshana (shaḍ darśana): षड् दर्शन "Six views;" "six insights." Six classical philosophies distinguished among the hundreds of Hindu darshanas known through history: Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Sankhya, Yoga, Mimamsa and Vedanta. Each was tersely formulated in sutra form by its "founder," and elaborated in extensive commentaries by other writers. They are understood as varied attempts at describing Truth and the path to it. Elements of each form part of the Hindu fabric today.

—**Nyāya:** "System, rule; logic." A system of logical realism, founded sometime around 300 bce by Gautama, known for its systems of logic and epistemology and concerned with the means of acquiring right knowledge. Its tools of enquiry and rules for argumentation were adopted by all schools of Hinduism.

—**Vaiśeshika:** "Differentiation," from vishesha, "differences." Philosophy founded by Kanada (ca 300 bce) teaching that liberation is to be attained through understanding the nature of existence, which is classified in nine basic realities (dravyas): earth, water, light, air, ether, time, space, soul and mind. Nyaya and Vaisheshika are viewed as a complementary pair, with Nyaya emphasizing logic, and Vaisheshika analyzing the nature of the world.

—**Sāṅkhya:** "Enumeration, reckoning." A philosophy founded by sage Kapila (ca 500 bce), author of the *Sankhya Sutras*. Sankhya is primarily concerned with "categories of existence," tattvas, which it understands as 25 in number. The first two are the unmanifest

Purusha and the manifest primal nature, Prakriti—the male-female polarity, viewed as the foundation of all existence. Prakriti, out of which all things evolve, is the unity of the three gunas: sattva, rajas and tamas. Sankhya and Yoga are considered an inseparable pair whose principles permeate all of Hinduism. See: prakriti, purusha.

—Yoga: "Yoking; joining." Ancient tradition of philosophy and practice codified by Patanjali (ca 200bce) in the *Yoga Sutras*. It is also known as raja yoga, "king of yogas," or ashtanga yoga, "eight-limbed yoga." Its object is to achieve, at will, the cessation of all fluctuations of consciousness, and the attainment of Self Realization. Yoga is wholly dedicated to putting the high philosophy of Hinduism into practice, to achieve personal transformation through transcendental experience, samadhi. See: yoga.

—Mīmāṁsā: "Inquiry" (or Purva, "early," Mimamsa). Founded by Jaimini (ca 200bce), author of the *Mimamsa Sutras,* who taught the correct performance of Vedic rites as the means to salvation.

—Vedānta (or Uttara "later" Mimamsa): "End (or culmination) of the Vedas." For Vedanta, the main basis is the *Upanishads* and *Aranyakas* (the "end," anta, of the *Vedas),* rather than the hymns and ritual portions of the *Vedas*. The teaching of Vedanta is that there is one Absolute Reality, Brahman. Man is one with Brahman, and the object of life is to realize that truth through right knowledge, intuition and personal experience. *The Vedanta Sutras* (or *Brahma Sutras*) were composed by Rishi Badarayana (ca 400bce).

Shakti (Śakti): शक्ति "Power, energy." The active power or manifest energy of God that pervades all of existence. Its most refined aspect is Parashakti, or Satchidananda, the pure consciousness and primal substratum of all form. In popular, village Hinduism, the unity of Siva and Shakti is replaced with the concept of Siva and Shakti as separate entities. Shakti is represented as female, and Siva as male.

Saiva Siddhanta perceives God Siva as a one Being, beyond yet encompassing the duality of male and female; His Shakti is inseparable from Him.

In the yoga mysticism of all traditions, divine energy, *shakti,* is experienced within the human body in three aspects: 1) the feminine force, ida shakti; 2) the masculine force, pingala shakti; and 3) the pure androgynous force, kundalini shakti, that flows through the sushumna nadi. Shakti is most easily experienced by devotees as the sublime, bliss-inspiring energy that emanates from a holy person or sanctified Hindu temple. The term *shakti* also refers to the three shaktis, powers, wielded by Siva: iccha (love), kriya (action) and jnana (wisdom). See: *Ardhanarishvara, Parashakti, Shaktism, Siva.*

Shaktism (Śākta): शाक्त "Doctrine of power." The religion followed by those who worship the Supreme as the Divine Mother—Shakti or Devi—in Her many forms, both gentle and fierce. Shaktism is one of the four primary sects of Hinduism. Shaktism's first historical signs are thousands of female statuettes dated ca 5500 bce recovered at the Mehrgarh village in India. Four major expressions of Shaktism are evident today: folk-shamanism, yoga, devotionalism and universalism. There are many varieties of folk Shaktism gravitating around various forms of the Goddess, such as Kali, Durga and a number of forms of Amman.

saligrama (sālīgrāma): सालीग्राम A fossilized shell worshiped by the Vaishnavas as an iconic symbol of Vishnu.

Shankara (Śaṅkara): शङ्कर "Propitious Creator." Derived from the Sanskrit elements *sham,* meaning "auspicious," and *kara* meaning "maker." 1) A name of Siva, architect of the cosmos. 2) One of Hinduism's most extraordinary monks, Adi Sankara (788–820), preeminent guru of the Smarta Sampradaya, noted for his monistic philosophy (Advaita Vedanta), his many scriptural commentaries, and his formalizing of ten orders of sannyasins with pontifical headquarters at strategic places across India. He lived only 32 years, but traveled throughout India and transformed the Hindu world of that time. See: *Smartism, Vedanta.*

shaucha (śaucha): शौच "Purity." See: *purity-impurity, yama-niyama.*

shastra (śāstra): शास्त्र "Sacred text; teaching." 1) Any religious or philosophical treatise, or body of writings. 2) A department of knowledge, a science; e.g., the *Dharma Shastras* on religious law, and the *Artha Shastras* on politics.

shishya (śishya): शिष्य "A pupil or disciple," especially one who has proven himself and been accepted by a *guru*. See: *diksha.*

shruti (śruti): श्रुति "That which is heard." Aurally, or clairaudiently, received scripture. Hinduism's revealed scriptures, of supreme theological authority and spiritual value. They are timeless teachings transmitted to rishis, or seers directly by God Siva and the Gods thousands of years ago. Shruti is thus said to be *apaurusheya,* "impersonal," or rather "suprahuman." Shruti essentially consists of the *Vedas* and the *Agamas,* preserved initially through oral tradition and eventually written down in Sanskrit. Most mantras are drawn from shruti, used for rites of worship, both public and domestic, as well as for personal prayer and japa. See: *Agama, smriti, Veda.*

Shum: A Natha mystical language of meditation revealed in Switzerland in 1968 by Sivaya Subramuniyaswami.

Shum perspectives: The four perspectives of the mind: **—mulif**: intellectual/philosophical; **—shumif:** individual awareness; **—simnif:** scientific/intellectual; **—dimfi:** space travel, devas and Gods, inner communication. See: *dimfi, mulif, shumif, simnif.*

shumif: The perspective of the mind as a solid and individual awareness traveling from one area of the mind to another. Pronounced *shoom-eef.* See: *Shum, Shum perspectives.*

siddha: सिद्ध A "perfected one" or accomplished *yogi*, a person of great spiritual attainment or powers. See: *siddhi.*

siddhanta (siddhānta): सिद्धान्त "Final attainments;" "final conclusions." Siddhanta refers to ultimate understanding arrived at in any given field of knowledge.

siddhi: सिद्धि "Power, accomplishment; perfection." Extraordinary powers of the soul, developed through consistent meditation and deliberate *tapas,* or awakened naturally through spiritual maturity and *yogic sadhana*. The supreme *siddhi* is realization of the Self, Parasiva.

simnif: (Shum language) The perspective of the mind in its scientific, intellectual state. See: *Shum, Shum perspectives.*

sin: Intentional transgression of divine law. Akin to the Latin *sons,* "guilty." Hinduism does not view sin as a crime against God, but as an act against dharma—moral order—and one's own self. See: *karma.*

Siva (Śiva): शिव The "Auspicious," "Gracious," or "Kindly one." Supreme Being of the Saivite religion. God Siva is All and in all, simultaneously the creator and the creation, both immanent and transcendent. As personal Deity, He is Creator, Preserver and Destroyer. He is a one Being, perhaps best understood in three perfections: Parameshvara (Primal Soul), Parashakti (Pure Consciousness) and Parasiva (Absolute Reality). See: *Parameshvara, Parashakti, Parasiva, Satchidananda.*

Sivalinga (Śivaliṅga): शिवलिङ्ग "Mark," "Token" or "Sign of Siva." The most prevalent emblem of Siva, found in virtually all Siva temples. A rounded, elliptical, aniconic image, usually set on a circular base, or pitha. The Sivalinga is the simplest and most ancient symbol of Siva, especially of Parasiva, God beyond all forms and qualities. The pitha represents Parashakti, the manifesting power of God. Lingas are usually of stone (either carved or naturally existing, svayambhu, such as shaped by a swift-flowing river), but may also be of metal, precious gems, crystal, wood, earth or transitory materials such as ice.

Sivaloka (Śivaloka): शिवलोक "Realm of Siva." See: *heaven, loka.*

Siva Purana (Śiva Purāṇa): शिवपुराण "Ancient [lore] of Siva." 1) A collection of six major scriptures sacred to Saivites. 2) The name of the oldest of these six texts, though some consider it a version of the *Vayu Purana.*

Skanda: स्कन्द "Quicksilver;" "leaping one." One of Lord Karttikeya's oldest names. His form as scarlet-hued warrior God. See: *Karttikeya.*

Smarta (Smārta): स्मार्त "Of or related to smriti," Hinduism's secondary scriptures. See: *Smartism.*

Smartism (Smārta): स्मार्त Sect based on the secondary scriptures *(smriti)*. The most liberal of the four major Hindu denominations, an ancient Vedic brahminical tradition (ca 700 bce) which from the 9th century onward was guided and deeply influenced by the Advaita Vedanta teachings of Adi Shankara. Its adherents rely mainly on the classical smriti literature, especially the Itihasas *(Ramayana* and *Mahabharata,* the latter of which includes the *Bhagavad Gita),* *Puranas* and *Dharma Shastras*. These are regarded as complementary to and a means to understanding the *Vedas*. Smartas adhere to Shankara's view that all Gods are but various representations of Saguna Brahman. Thus, Smartas are avowedly eclectic, worshiping all the Gods and discouraging sectarianism. The Smarta system of worship reinforces this outlook by including the major Deity of each primary Hindu sect of ancient days: Ganesha, Surya, Vishnu, Siva and Shakti, with the addition of a sixth Deity, Kumara. One among them is generally chosen as the devotee's preferred Deity, Ishta Devata.

smriti (smṛiti): स्मृति That which is "remembered;" the tradition. Hinduism's nonrevealed, secondary but deeply revered scriptures, derived from man's insight and experience. Smriti speaks of secular matters as well as spiritual lore, ranging from day-to-day rules and regulations to enlightened teachings. See: *Mahabharata, Purana, Ramayana.*

soul: The real being of man, as distinguished from body, mind and emotions. The soul—known as atman or purusha—is the sum of its two aspects, the form or body of the soul and the essence of the soul.

—essence or nucleus of the soul: Man's innermost and unchanging being—Pure Consciousness (Parashakti or Satchidananda) and Absolute Reality (Parasiva). This essence was never created, does not change or evolve and is eternally identical with God Siva's perfections of Parashakti and Parasiva.

soul body: *Anandamaya kosha* ("sheath of bliss"), also referred to as the "causal body" (karana sharira). Names the soul's manifest nature as an individual being—an effulgent, human-like form composed of light. It is the emanational creation of God, destined to one day merge back into Him. During its evolution, the soul functions through four types of outer sheaths that envelop the soul form—mental, instinctive-intellectual, vital and physical. See: *evolution of the soul, subtle body.*

spiritual unfoldment: The unfoldment of the spirit, the inherent, divine soul of man. The gradual expansion of consciousness as kundalini shakti slowly rises through the sushumna. The term *spiritual unfoldment* indicates this slow, imperceptible process, likened to a lotus flower's emerging from bud to effulgent beauty. See: *evolution of the soul.*

Sri Rudram (Śrī Rudram): श्रीरुद्रम् "(Hymn) to the wielder of awesome powers." Preeminent Vedic hymn to Lord Siva as the God of dissolution, chanted daily in Siva temples throughout India. It is in this long prayer, located in the *Yajur Veda, Taittiriya Samhita,* in the middle of the first three *Vedas*, that the Saivite mantra *Namah Sivaya* first appears.

states of consciousness: See: *mind (five states).*

subsubconscious mind: *Vasana chitta* ("mind of subliminal traits"). See: *mind (five states).*

subsuperconscious mind: *Anukarana chitta.* See: *mind (five states).*

Subramuniyaswami: சுப்பிரமுனியசுவாமி Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of HINDUISM TODAY, 162nd *satguru* (1927–2001) of the Nandinatha Sampradaya's Kailasa Parampara. He was ordained Sivaya Subramuniyaswami by Sage Yogaswami on the full-moon day of May 12, 1949, in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. Before his meeting with Yogaswami, he had attained nirvikalpa samadhi in the caves of Jalani. Recognized worldwide as one of foremost Hindu ministers of our times, he contributed to the revival of Hinduism in immeasurable abundance. He was simultaneously a staunch defender of traditions, as the tried and proven ways of the past, and a fearless innovator, setting new patterns of life for contemporary humanity. He is succeeded by Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, the 163rd *satguru* of the Kailasa Parampara.

subtle body: *Sukshma sharira,* the nonphysical, astral body or vehicle in which the soul encases itself. When the soul is physically embodied, the subtle body includes the pranic, astral and mental sheaths; after death, when the pranic sheath has disintegrated, it consists of only the astral and mental sheaths. Just before rebirth or when higher evolutionary planes are entered, the astral sheath is dropped off and the subtle body consists of only the mental sheath. See: *soul body.*

Sufism: A mystical Islamic tradition in which Muslims seek to find the truth of divine love and knowledge through direct personal experience.

sukshma sharira (sūkshma śarīra): सूक्ष्मशरीर "Subtle body," or astral body. See: *subtle body.*

superconscious mind: *Karana chitta.* The intuitive mind; the all-knowing intelligence of the soul. See: *mind (five states).*

superstition: A belief or practice not supported by experience or reason.

Supreme God: Highest God, the source or creator of all other Gods, beings and all manifestation. See: *Brahman, Shakti, Siva, Vishnu.*

sushumna nadi (sushumṇā nāḍī): सुषुम्णानाडी "Most gracious channel." Central psychic nerve current within the spinal column; channel for the kundalini.

swami (swāmī): स्वामी "Lord; owner; self-possessed." He who knows or is master of himself. A respectful title for a Hindu monk, usually a sannyasin, an initiated, orange-robed renunciate, dedicated wholly to religious life. As a sign of respect, the term *swami* is sometimes applied more broadly to include non-monastics dedicated to spiritual works. See: *sannyasa dharma, sannyasin.*

swamini (swāminī): स्वामिनी The feminine form of *swami.*



tala: तल "Plane or world; level; base, bottom; abyss." Root word in the names of the seven realms of lower consciousness centered in the seven chakras below the muladhara chakra. See: *chakra, hell, Naraka.*

tamas(ic): तमस् "Force of inertia." The quality of denseness, inertia, contraction, resistance and dissolution. See: *guna.*

tapas: तपस् "Heat, fire; ardor." The tenth niyama: purificatory spiritual disciplines, severe austerity, penance and sacrifice. The endurance of performing extreme religious austerities, with the aim of spiritual transformation and unfoldment. Tapas is austerity of a severe, psyche-transforming nature, compared to the simpler, more sustained austerity of sadhana.

temple: *Mandira.* An edifice in a consecrated place dedicated to the worship of God or the Gods. From the Latin *templum,* "temple, sanctuary; marked space." Hindu temples, over one million worldwide, are revered as sacred, magical places in which the three worlds most consciously commune—structures especially built and consecrated to channel the subtle spiritual energies of inner-world beings. The temple's psychic atmosphere is maintained through regular worship ceremonies (puja) invoking the Deity, who from the Third World uses His installed image (murti) as a temporary body through which bless those living on the earth plane, the First World.

theism: Belief that God exists as a real, conscious, personal Supreme Being, creator and ruler of the universe. May also include belief in the Gods.

three worlds: The primary hierarchical divisions of the cosmos. See: *loka.*

Third World: Sivaloka, "realm of Siva." The spiritual realm or causal plane wherein Mahadevas and highly evolved souls live in their own self-effulgent forms. See: *loka, heaven.*

tilaka: तिलक Marks made on the forehead or the brow with clay, ashes or sandalwood paste as an indication of sectarian affiliation. Vaishnavas wear a vertical v-shaped tilaka made from clay. The Saivite tilaka, called tripundra, consists of three horizontal strips of holy ash with a dot near the middle, or between the eyebrows. Wearing the tilaka is an expression of religious affiliation and pride in one's beliefs.

Tirukural: திருக்குறள் "Holy couplets." A treasury of Hindu ethical insight and a literary masterpiece of the Tamil language, written by Saiva Saint Tiruvalluvar (ca 200 bce). One of the world's earliest ethical texts, the nonsectarian *Tirukural* could well be considered a bible on virtue for the human race. It is sworn on in South Indian courts of law.

Tirumantiram: திருமந்திரம் "Holy incantation." The Nandinatha Sampradaya's oldest Tamil scripture; written ca 200 bce by Rishi Tirumular. It is the earliest of the *Tirumurai* texts, and a vast storehouse of esoteric yogic and tantric knowledge. It contains the mystical essence of raja yoga and siddha yoga.

Tiruvalluvar: திருவள்ளுவர் "Holy weaver." Tamil weaver and householder saint (ca 200 bce) who wrote the classic Saivite ethical scripture *Tirukural.*

tithing: *Dashamamsha.* "One-tenth sharing." Religion's dues. The spiritual discipline, often a vrata (vow), of paying one-tenth of one's gainful and gifted income to a religious organization of one's choice, thus sustaining spiritual education and upliftment on Earth. Such giving is called *makimai* in the Tamil tradition.

tithing vow: *Dashama bhaga vrata.* "One-tenth-part vow." A promise tithers make before God, Gods and their family or peers to tithe regularly each month—for a specified time, or for life.

transcendent: Surpassing the limits of experience or manifest form. In Saiva Siddhanta, a quality of God Siva as Absolute Reality, Parasiva, the Self. Distinguished from *immanent.* Compare with *immanent.*

transmute, transmutation: To change something from one form to another; used in spiritual endeavors to describe changes of thought and energy.

trishula (triśūla): त्रिशूल "Trident."A three-pronged spear or trident wielded by Lord Siva and certain Saivite ascetics.It symbolizes God's three fundamental shaktis or powers—icça (desire, will, love), kriya (action) and jnana (wisdom). The trishula is also held by Lord Ganesha.



unfoldment: Opening gradually, especially in stages. See: *evolution of the soul, spiritual unfoldment.*

Upanishad: उपनिषद् "Sitting near devotedly." The fourth and final portion of the *Vedas,* expounding the philosophical meaning of the Vedic hymns. The *Upanishads* are a collection of profound texts which are the source of Vedanta philosophy and have dominated Indian thought for thousands of years. They are philosophical chronicles of rishis expounding the nature of God, soul and cosmos, exquisite renderings of the deepest Hindu thought. It is generally thought that the earliest were written down in Sanskrit between 500 and 600 bce. These popular and approachable texts, widely available in many languages, revolve around the identity of the soul and God, and the doctrines of reincarnation, of karma and of liberation through renunciation and meditation. See: *shruti, Vedanta, Vedas.*

upadesha: उपदेश "Advice; religious instruction." Often given in question-and-answer form from guru to disciple. The satguru's spiritual discourses.



vairagi (vairāgī): वैरागी "Dispassionate one." An ascetic who lives by the principle of vairagya, renunciation. Also names a particular class of mendicants, generally Vaishnavas, of North India who have freed themselves from worldly desires.

Vaishnavism (Vaishṇava): वैष्णव One of the four major denominations of Hinduism, representing roughly half of the world's one billion Hindus. It gravitates around the worship of Lord Vishnu as Personal God, His incarnations and their consorts. The doctrine of *avatara* (He who descends), especially important to Vaishnavism, teaches that whenever adharma gains ascendency in the world, God takes a human birth to reestablish "the way." There are either 10, 22 or 34 *avataras* of Vishnu, according to various scriptures. The most renowned avataras are Rama and Krishna. The last to come will be Kalki, the harbinger of a golden age on Earth. Vaishnavism stresses the personal aspect of God over the impersonal, and bhakti (devotion) as the true path to salvation. The goal of Vaishnavism is the attainment of mukti, defined as blissful union with God's body, the loving recognition that the soul is a part of Him, and eternal nearness to Him in Vaikuntha, heaven. Foremost among Vaishnava scriptures are the *Vaishnava Agamas, Bhagavad Gita* and *Bhagavata Purana.*

Vaishnavite (Vaishṇava): वैष्णव: Of or relating to Vishnu; same as *Vaishnava.* A follower of Vishnu or His incarnations. See: *Vaishnavism.*

vanaprastha ashrama (vānaprastha āśrama): वानप्रस्थ आश्रम "Forest-dweller stage." See: *ashrama dharma.*

varna dharma (varṇa dharma): वर्णधर्म "The way of one's kind." The hereditary social class system, generally referred to as *caste,* established in India in ancient times. Within varna dharma are the many religious and moral codes which define human virtue. Varna dharma is social duty, in keeping with the principles of good conduct, according to one's community, which is generally based on the craft or occupation of the family. Strictly speaking it encompasses two interrelated social hierarchies: 1) **varṇa,** which refers to the four classes: brahmin, kshatriya, vaishya and shudra; and 2) **jati,** the myriad occupational subgroups, or guilds, which in India number over 3,000. Hence this dharma is sometimes called jati dharma. The varna dharma system—despite its widespread discrimination against harijans, and the abuse of social status by higher castes—ensures a high standard of craftsmanship, a sense of community belonging, family integrity and religio-cultural continuity. Caste is not unique to Hinduism and India. By other names it is found in every society. The four varnas, or classes, and myriad jatis, occupational castes, or guilds, form the basic elements of human interaction. See: *dharma, jati.*

vasana (vāsanā): वासना "Abode." Subconscious inclinations. From *vas,* "dwelling, residue, remainder." The subliminal inclinations and habit patterns which, as driving forces, color and motivate one's attitudes and future actions. Vasanas are the conglomerate results of subconscious impressions (samskaras) created through experience. Samskaras, experiential impressions, combine in the subconscious to form vasanas, which thereafter contribute to mental fluctuations, called vritti. The most complex and emotionally charged vasanas are found in the dimension of mind called the sub-subconscious, or vasana chitta. See: *samskara, vasana daha tantra.*

vasana daha tantra (vāsanā daha tantra): वासनादहतन्त्र "Purification of the subconscious by fire." Daha means burning, tantra is a method, and vasanas are deep-seated subconscious traits or tendencies that shape one's attitudes and motivations. Vasanas can be either positive or negative. One of the best methods for resolving difficulties in life, of dissolving troublesome vasanas, the vasana daha tantra is the practice of burning confessions, or even long letters to loved ones or acquaintances, describing pains, expressing confusions and registering grievances and long-felt hurts. Also called spiritual journaling, writing down problems and burning them in any ordinary fire brings them from the subconscious into the external mind, releasing the supressed emotion as the fire consumes the paper. This is a magical healing process. See: *vasana.*

vastu (vāstu): वास्तु A traditional Hindu system of space design which promotes well-being by constructing buildings in harmony with natural forces.

Vastu Shastras (Vāstu Śāstras): वास्तुशास्त्र Various ancient texts on vastu, "the science of time and space," in the words of renowned Indian architect, Sri V. Ganapati Sthapati. The *Vastu Shastras* are categorized as part of the *Sthapatyaveda,* science of architecture, classed among the *Upavedas,* which are secondary Vedic texts discussing such areas as statecraft, health and music. Vastu unfolds the scientific principles and models of spiritual art and architecture to yield a harmonious flow of energy in the physical environment, giving rise to good health, wealth, intelligence and happiness.

Veda: वेद "Wisdom." Sagely revelations which comprise Hinduism's most authoritative scripture. The *Vedas* are a body of dozens of holy texts known collectively as the *Veda,* or as the four *Vedas: Rig, Yajur, Sama* and *Atharva.* In all they include over 100,000 verses, as well as additional prose. The knowledge imparted by the *Vedas* ranges from earthy devotion to high philosophy. The oldest portions of the *Vedas* are thought by some to date back as far as 6,000 bce, written down in Sanskrit in the last few millennia, making them the world's most ancient scriptures. They, along with the *Agamas,* are shruti, that which is "heard." See: *shruti, Upanishad.*

Vedanta (Vedānta): वेदान्त "Ultimate wisdom" or "final conclusions of the *Vedas*." Vedanta is the system of thought embodied in the *Upanishads* (ca 1500-600 bce), which give forth the ultimate conclusions of the *Vedas.* Through history there developed numerous Vedanta schools, ranging from pure dualism to absolute monism.

Vedic-Agamic (Vedic-Āgamic): Simultaneously drawing from and complying with both of Hinduism's revealed scriptures (shruti), the *Vedas* and the *Agamas,* which represent two complimentary, intertwining streams of history and tradition. The difference between Siddhanta (the Agamic tradition) and Vedanta (the Vedic tradition) is seen in the fact that while the *Vedas* represent man looking for God, the *Agamas* hold the perspective of God looking to help man. Further, while the *Vedas* are voiced by rishis, God or the Goddess is the narrator of truth in the *Agama* texts. It is said the *Vedas* are general and the *Agamas* are specific.

vegetarian: *Shakahara.* Of a diet which excludes meat, fish, fowl and eggs. Vegetarianism is a principle of health and environmental ethics that has been a keystone of Indian life for thousands of years. Vegetarian foods include grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes and dairy products. Natural, fresh foods, locally grown, without insecticides or chemical fertilizers, are preferred. The following 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, or prepared with unwholesome ingredients).

veiling grace: *Tirobhava shakti.* The divine power by which Siva limits the soul's perception of Truth by binding or attaching the soul to the fetters of anava, karma and maya—enabling it to experience the lessons it needs to grow and evolve as an individual being. See: *grace.*

Venkateshvara (Veṅkaṭeśvara): वेङ्कटेश्वर "Lord of the Venkat Hills." A name of Vishnu. See: *Vishnu.*

vibhuti (vibhūti): विभूति "Resplendent, powerful." Holy ash, prepared by burning cow dung along with other precious substances, such as milk, ghee and honey. It symbolizes purity and is one of the main sacraments given at puja in all Saivite temples and shrines. Saivites wear three stripes on the brow as a distinct sectarian mark, as do many Smartas. See: *tilaka.*

videhamukti: विदेहमुक्ति "Disembodied liberation." Release from reincarnation through nirvikalpa samadhi—the realization of the Self, Parasiva—at the point of death. Blessed are those who are aware that departure, mahasamadhi, is drawing near. They settle all affairs, make amends and intensify personal sadhana. They seek the silver channel of sushumna which guides kundalini through the door of Brahman into the beyond of the beyond. They seek total renunciation as the day of transition looms strongly in their consciousness. Those who know that Lord Yama is ready to receive them seek to merge with Siva. They seek nirvikalpa samadhi as the body and earthly life fall away. Those who succeed are the videhamuktas,

honored as among those who will never be reborn. Hindu tradition allows for vows of renunciation, called atura sannyasa diksha, to be taken and the orange robe donned by the worthy sadhaka or householder in the days prior to death. See: *jivanmukti.*

Vinayaga Chaturthi (Vināyaka Chaturthī): विनायक चतुर्थी See: *Ganesha Chaturthi.*

Vinayaka (Vināyaka): विनायक "Remover." A name of Lord Ganesha, meaning the remover of obstacles (sometimes preceded by *vighna,* "obstacle"). See: *Ganesha.*

Vishnu (Vishṇu): विष्णु "All-pervasive." Supreme Deity of the Vaishnavite religion. God as personal Lord and Creator, the All-Loving Divine Personality, who periodically incarnates and lives a fully human life to reestablish dharma whenever necessary. See: *Vaishnavism.*

vrata: व्रत "Vow, religious oath." Often a vow to perform certain disciplines over a period of time, such as penance, fasting, specific mantra repetitions, worship or meditation. Vratas extend from the simplest personal promise to irrevocable vows made before God, Gods, guru and community.

world: In Hindu theology, world refers to 1) **loka:** a particular region of consciousness or plane of existence. 2) **māya:** The whole of manifest existence; the phenomenal universe, or cosmos. In this sense it transcends the limitations of physical reality, and can include emotional, mental and spiritual, physical realms of existence, depending on its use. Also denoted by the terms *prakriti* and *Brahmanda.* See: *loka.*



yajna (yajña): यज्ञ "Worship; sacrifice." One of the most central Hindu concepts—sacrifice and surrender through acts of worship, inner and outer. Specifically, *yajna* refers to:

1) A form of ritual worship dating back to Vedic times, in which oblations—ghee, grains, spices and exotic woods—are offered into a fire according to scriptural injunctions while special mantras are chanted. Agni, the God of fire, is revered as the divine messenger who carries offerings and prayers to the Gods. The ancient *Veda Brahmanas* and the *Shrauta Shastras* describe various types of yajna rites, some so elaborate as to require hundreds of priests, whose powerful chanting resounds for miles. While today yajna is less prevalent than puja (worship in temples with water, lights and flowers), the ancient rite is still widely performed, and specialized training for its performance is carried on in priest academies in India. Yajnas on a grand scale are performed for special occasions, beseeching the Gods for rain during drought, or for peace during bloody civil war. In temples, Vedic yajna has its Agamic equivalent in the agnikaraka ceremony, commonly known as homa or havana.

2) Personal acts of worship or sacrifice. The *Upanishads* suggest that one can make "inner yajnas" by offering up bits of the little self into the fires of sadhana and tapas until the greater Self shines forth. The five prescribed daily yajnas, **pañcha mahāyajña,** include homage to 1) holy men through study of the *Vedas,* 2) homage to Gods and elementals, 3) homage to ancestors, 4) homage to living beings and 5) homage to humans. See: *dharma, homa, puja.*

yama-niyama: यम नियम Hinduism's fundamental ethical codes, constituting the first two of the eight limbs of raja yoga. The yamas (ethical restraints) and niyamas (religious practices) are the essential foundation for a Hindu's spiritual progress. They are codified in numerous scriptures including the *Shandilya* and *Varuha Upanishads, Hatha Yoga Pradipika* by Gorakshanatha, the *Tirumantiram* of Tirumular and the *Yoga Sutras* of Patanjali. All the above texts list ten yamas and ten niyamas, with the exception of Patanjali's classic work, which lists only five of each. The **yamas** are 1) *ahiṁsā,* noninjury; 2) *satya,* truthfulness; 3) *asteya,* nonstealing; 4) *brahmacharya,* sexual purity; 5) *kshamā,* patience; 6) *dhṛiti,* steadfastness; 7) *dayā,* compassion; 8) *ārjava,* honesty and straightforwardness; 9) *mitāhara,* moderate appetite; and 10) *śaucha,* purity. The **niyamas** are 1) *hrī,* remorse; 2) *santosha,* contentment; 3) *dāna,* giving; 4) *āstikya,* faith; 5) *Īśvarapūjana,* worship of the Lord; 6) *siddhānta śravana,* scriptural listening; 7) *mati,* cognition; 8) *vrata,* sacred vows; 9) *japa,* recitation; and 10) *tapas,* austerity. See: *Essay 42.*

yoga: योग "Union." From *yuj,* "to yoke, harness, unite." The philosophy, process, disciplines and practices designed to yoke individual consciousness with transcendent or divine consciousness. Yoga is essentially a one eightfold system, called raja yoga or ashtanga (eight-limbed) yoga. Historically, however, various aspects have been emphasized as separate, independent yoga systems in themselves. Popular today are hatha yoga (the third limb, asana, emphasizing bodily fitness in preparation for meditation), kriya yoga (the fourth limb, emphasizing breath control), as well as karma yoga (selfless service) and bhakti yoga (devotional practices) which could be regarded as an expression of raja yoga's first two limbs (yama and niyama). See: *raja yoga.*

yoga pada (yoga pāda): योगपाद The third of the successive stages in spiritual unfoldment in Saiva Siddhanta. See: *pada.*

***Yoga Sutras (Yoga Sūtras):* योगसूत्र** The great work by Saivite Natha *siddha* Patanjali (ca 200 bce), comprising some 200 aphorisms delineating ashtanga (eight-limbed) yoga, also called raja (kingly) or siddha (perfection) yoga. Still today, it is the foremost text on meditative *yoga.* See: *raja yoga.*

Yogaswami (Yogaswāmī): யோகசுவாமி "Master of *yoga.*" 161st *satguru* of the Nandinatha Sampradaya's Kailasa Parampara. Sri Lanka's most renowned contemporary spiritual master (1872–1964), a Sivajnani and Natha *siddhar* revered by both Hindus and Buddhists. He was trained in and practiced *kundalini yoga* under the guidance of Satguru Chellappaswami, from whom he received *guru diksha.* Sage Yogaswami was in turn the *satguru* of Sivaya Subramuniyaswami.

yogi (yogī): योगी One who practices yoga, especially kundalini yoga or raja yoga. (More properly *yogin.* Feminine, *yogini.*)

young soul: A soul who has gone through only a few births, and is thus inexperienced or immature. See: *evolution of the soul, soul, soul body.*

yuga: युग "Eon," "age." One of four ages which chart the duration of the world according to Hindu thought. They are: Satya, Treta, Dvapara and Kali. In the first period, dharma reigns supreme; but as the ages revolve, virtue diminishes and ignorance and injustice increases. In the Kali Yuga, the fourth age, righteousness is one-tenth that of the Satya Yuga. True worship and sacrifice cease, and base consciousness is prominent. Calamities, disease, fatigue and faults such as anger and fear prevail. People decline and their motives grow weak. At the end of the Kali Yuga, which we are now in, the cycle begins again with a new Satya Yuga.