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त्रिविधं नरकस्येदं द्वारं नाशनमात्मनः ।
कामः क्रोधस्तथा लोभस्तस्मादेतत्त्रयं त्यजेत् ॥

श्रीमद् भगवद् गीता १६-२१

*trividhain narakasyedain dvaraim nasanam atmanah
kamah krodhas तथा lobhas tasmad etat trayam tyajet*

Shrimad Bhagavad Gita 16-21

The three kinds of doorways to hell are lust, anger and
greed; therefore these three are so destructive to the
embodied self must be abandoned.



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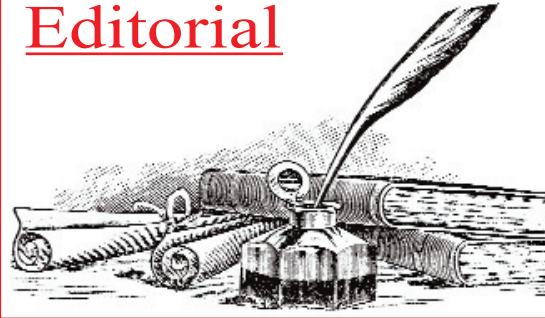


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Why The Best Laid Plans Fail ?

Often times, as we traverse through life, attempts to motivate and inspire us mostly always include the words "Pursue Your Dreams"; "Dream Big"; "Set Goals"; or, "Without Goals, you will never accomplish anything". And, I am sure we are all aware of the famous American, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech.

Editorial



So I try hard to recall the dream. But, inevitably, I have to let it go! concept here is that if you have a dream or a thought that "sticks in your mind", and tugs at your 'heart'; and your innate desire is to "live that dream", then, your next steps should be to make note of the dream, set goals and

develop a plan. Most of all, be committed to executing the plan and attaining the desired outcome.

Throughout my life, two words, "Dreams and Goals", have been continuously implanted in my thoughts as I careened through college and career, and mulled my options. My greatest challenges were always about turning my dreams into reality and I had the good fortune to hear many Gurus explain how to make this happen. For me, the "Dream" was my destination or outcome, and my "Goal" was to design and traverse the path to successfully reach my destination. How, and when I got there depended solely on my actions, or my inactions.

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the definition of "Dream" is: A series of thoughts, images, or emotions which occur during sleep. Many, if not all, would have heard the song "Row row row your boat, gently down the stream, merrily merrily merrily merrily, life is but a dream". And, you would have also have heard many motivational speakers tell you to "Follow your Dreams".

Dreams can also be thoughts of a desired goal or purpose, (an aspiration), which, if followed, can be accomplished/realized. As the saying goes, "It's all in the mind". Some of us may "luck" into our desired destination, but some of us will have to work hard and overcome obstacles to get to our desired destinations. And then, if you are like me, you would wake up some days knowing that you had a dream during the night. But upon opening your eyes, your dream disappeared.

The plan becomes your "road map" and the "goals" your interim and final destinations - the outcome of your dream, or that thought that you wish to convert to something real and tangible.

I often hear a lot of people talk about a desired outcome, create a well laid out plan, and never reach the finish line. Most times, this is due to commitment and inaction on our part.

One of the most common plans that fail is the personal weight-loss/fitness plan. At the beginning of each year, many vow to lose ten, twenty or more pounds because of overeating during the holiday season. We make a promise to eat better, exercise, be healthy and reach established goals, even by a certain date. That is a good start. But as each day goes by and we are presented with options, we shift our target date, and eventually forget the goal, making various excuses for our failures. The truth usually is that the plan failed because we were either not committed, or/and we failed to execute the plan or both.

So, in conclusion, whatever your objectives may be, set your goals, develop a plan and execute with commitment and in accordance with your goals. Your Dreams can become reality.





Purushartha

The Goals of Life

By Dr. D.C. Rao

The goals that each human being might seek to achieve in his/her life are categorized by Hindu scriptures in four groups:

1. **ARTHA**: the pursuit of material security and prosperity;
2. **KAMA** (pronounced kaama): fulfill desire;
3. **DHARMA**: doing the right thing in keeping with one's own essential nature; seeking to sustain, protect, and nourish the environment in which one lives;
4. **MOKSHA**: liberation from the cycle of birth and death; freedom from sorrow.

Each of these goals is legitimate, and is even necessary at some stage of life. But leading a purposeful life requires skill in how one defines and pursues each goal and how one finds the right balance among competing goals of life. The first two goals, artha and kama, appeal to our instincts. They can be simply paraphrased as "making money" and "having fun," which describes the bulk of the activities of most human beings. But they do also have a spiritual dimension. The other two goals, dharma and moksha are explicitly spiritual in nature.

ARTHA: Each of us is endowed with a physical body that needs food, clothing, shelter and a minimum level of physical comfort. Providing for these needs is an aspect of artha. Without artha, it is impossible for anyone to pursue the loftier goals of Dharma and Moksha. Each human being owes a debt to parents and family for protection, nourishment and support, at least in the early years of life; and each adult feels an obligation to provide these to his/her children and spouse. Thus the pursuit of Artha to meet the basic needs of the family is an essential goal of life. By extension, promoting the material prosperity of the community in which one lives is also a commendable human aspiration. However, there are two ways in which the pursuit of Artha can come into conflict with the broader goals of life. The first is when we use deceit

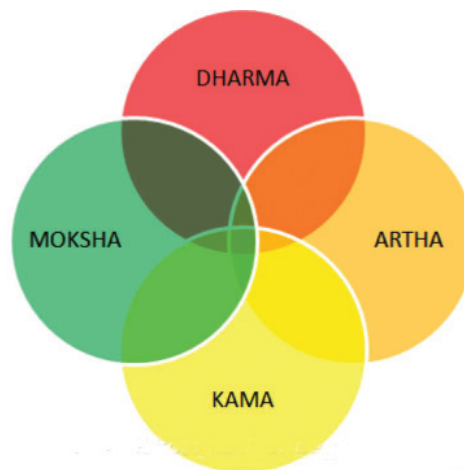
and exploitation to garner more wealth for ourselves and our families, at the expense of the well-being of others. The second is when we fail to distinguish between "need" and "want," leading to limitless greedy acquisition and an obsessive pursuit of wealth at the expense of other aspects of a fulfilling life. Recognizing this as a common human failing, scriptures advise a practice of charity as an antidote to an excessive focus on artha.

KAMA: The force of desire is one of the deepest forces in nature and has fundamental cosmic significance in Hindu scriptures. Desire is the very source of the creative urge that led to creation of the world and is a prerequisite to the acquisition of

knowledge and the motivation to act. The most basic form of desire in all living beings is the urge to survive, which inspires remarkable feats of courage and endurance. One aspect of the urge to survive is the urge to procreate. In animals, desire is mostly expressed as instinct-preferring certain foods, the tendency to live in groups, the marking of territory, mating habits etc. In

human beings, the force of desire finds more varied expression. Most commonly, it is seeking pleasure by indulging the senses of sound, touch, sight, taste and smell. The scope of such sensory pleasures is vastly greater in human beings than in animals, and is ever expanding. In addition, human beings entertain subtler forms of desire such as ambition for fame and power, a thirst for knowledge and the drive to master nature.

The Upanishads have classified human desire into three broad groups: the desire for wealth, the desire for progeny and the desire to be loved and respected by others. These categories encompass both artha and kama. More generally, all these desires may be seen as deriving from a desire to be happy. The issue is whether the pursuit of artha and kama alone is likely to lead to a



fulfilling life characterized by happiness and peace of mind. From this perspective, the scriptures contain strong cautionary remarks. First, the actions in pursuit of artha and kama must always be in consonance with the principles of dharma, the third goal listed above. When actions violate dharma, the karmic consequences of such wrong actions will inevitably bring unhappiness and agitation in this or in future lives. Second, the scriptures point out that as long as one seeks happiness in external sources - sensory pleasure, acquisition of objects and building relationships with others - happiness is bound to be ephemeral. Lasting happiness can only be based on sound spiritual practices designed to lead to the fourth goal, moksha.

DHARMA: is traditionally stated first in the list of goals, to emphasize that dharma should be the ethical foundation for all aspects of life, including the pursuit of artha and kama. The root meaning of dharma is "to sustain or nourish." A practical interpretation of dharma is: those actions that best sustain and uphold our own integrity and that of our surroundings. Dharma is not simply a set of laws. It is a highly nuanced set of guidelines whose application requires individual discretion, based on one's particular role and the context of a specific situation. The challenge for human beings is to discern their dharma and develop the mental discipline to live by it.

Scriptures provide some guidance by explaining the right dharma for the different stages of life: student, householder, retired and renunciate. Another technique used in the scriptures is to define the dharma appropriate to different human temperaments. When each person fulfills the dharma appropriate to his or her individual temperament, stage of life and role in society, the collective impact is best for the stability and prosperity of society as a whole.

Although there is voluminous literature on dharma, it is generally agreed that there are three guiding principles that are most important in guiding actions on the path of dharma.

1 Ahimsa, non-injury: avoiding violent actions, harsh words and hurtful thoughts.

2 Satya, truthfulness: being truthful to oneself and to others in thought, word and deed.

3 Brahmacharya, non-indulgence: a disciplined life that abstains from sensory excess.

Recalling that dharma is one's own essential nature, enquiring deeply into our own essential nature as human beings is an important aspect of the pursuit of dharma. This aspect of dharma is known as the fourth goal, moksha.

MOKSHA: Moksha is liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth known as samsara. Those whose lives are consumed by the pursuit of artha and kama gradually come to realize that their lives are an endless struggle. Driven by likes and dislikes, they lurch between happiness and sorrow, faintly aware that life might have greater meaning and purpose. The pursuit of moksha involves study, reflection and practice of a variety of ways to realize the full potential of being a human being. Those who seek moksha work to transform their minds so that they become aware of the Divine's presence everywhere, at all times, in themselves, in every other human being, and in the whole of creation.. Such a person rises above sorrows and spreads peace and joy.

All four goals - dharma, artha, kama and moksha - have a place in life. Human beings can realize their full potential only when dharma is the foundation of their lives and moksha the culmination. The relationship among the four goals is dramatically illustrated in the ancient Swastika Symbol: the bottom left and top right arms of the swastika represent artha and kama, which plateau in the extent to which they confer happiness. The bottom right and top left arms represent dharma and moksha, whose benefits are unlimited. The pursuit of dharma and moksha pays far greater dividends in the long run than the pursuit of artha and kama.

About the Author



Dr. D. C. Rao

retired from the World Bank in 1995 to pursue an intensive adhyatmic education and practice. He is a Trustee at the Chinmaya Mission, Washington D.C. and actively associated with the Himalayan

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The American Guilt Syndrome

By Rajiv Malhotra

The subconscious mind of a victim of heinous crime often responds to the trauma by developing a Victim's Guilt Syndrome. This is a psychological defense mechanism to prevent dealing with an external adversary. This is accomplished by internalizing the adversary within the victim's own notion of selfhood. For instance, rape victims are often known to acquire guilt, as a rationalization that the rape was due to their own fault and that they even deserved it. Fearful of dishonor, they hide in shame over their status as rape victims. A variation of this pathology also exists amongst some kidnapping victims, a prominent example being the case of Patricia Hearst. After being kidnapped by a terrorist organization, named The Symbionese Liberation Army, in the 1970s, this young woman, who was from a billionaire family joined her captor's ideology.

Utilizing this human tendency, colonialists engineered the minds of their subjects into an inferiority complex as part of the psychology of governance; and then 'upgraded' the status of a small slice of the ruled community to be the sepoys (with physical power) and the Macaulayites (with intellectual power) to help rule over the rest. This also happened to the Irish, in the form of a new category of Irish being created by British rulers, called the Anglo-Irish. This syndrome is the basis of 'Hindu shame' that is so prominent on many American campuses today, with Indian American Macaulayite faculty members becoming role models of self-hate.

In the wake of the terrorist attack, are we as Americans being made to feel guilty of having caused the terrorism of which we are also the victims? The topic, 'Why did America cause hate against itself?' has become a common theme for college discussions in the past three weeks. Most anti-war activism is rooted in the theory that US foreign policy and Israel's attitude towards the Palestinians caused Islam to become nasty. Hence, Americans are being asked to accept the responsibility for their own victim-hood, and to be apologetic to the Muslim world.

However, Islamic jihad predates Israel and the

existence of the United States by a thousand years. For 1,300 years, a great many individuals, societies and rulers have interpreted Islamic jihad as a license to kill infidels, and as a mandate for expansionism. The seventh century invasion of Sindh (India) by Arabs was explicitly celebrated as jihad, and history is filled with waves of Islamic plunders of India. Modern day Afghanistan and Pakistan were largely Buddhist until these conquests. The Taliban's atrocities look benign by comparison. These Islamic jihads, such as those by Mohammed of Ghazni, Ghauri, and all the way down to Aurungzeb, were not rationalized by the conquerors based on any dispute. Rather, these were justified as wars to kill infidels and destroy their idols. Therefore, attempts to rationalize terrorism by blaming US and Israeli policies ignore the history of jihad that precedes the existence of the United States and Israel. This guilt is part of the denial and internalization of the problem, so as to avoid dealing with the external reality that appears too ominous.

Today's leftist anti-war ideology is based on the communist struggle against capitalism, and this is the wrong framework to analyze the problems of Islamic terrorism. The Taliban is not fighting for economic development or modernization the way communist terrorists did. Islamic fundamentalists are fighting against the forces of modernization in general, as these seem to threaten the stranglehold of fundamentalist dogma and the power of the clergy. They are equally against capitalism and communism, and against any model for secular 'progress'. The leftists need a new ideology today, since the 'communism versus capitalism' dialectic is obsolete and irrelevant. Unfortunately, many leftists are left with slogans and anger but no resources to bring to the 21st century.

I am disappointed that very few leaders from the Islamic public relations machinery, which has swung into rapid deployment, call for honest introspection on the part of Islam itself, especially to re-examine its own policies towards non-Muslims. Islamic law divides the world into two categories: 'dar-ul-Islam' (the world of Muslims) and 'dar-ul-harb' (the world of non-Muslims, also called kafirs). Muslim law demands different

standards and norms by which Muslims must deal with insiders and outsiders. Such built-in chauvinism towards others is dangerous and deserves public attention. Pan-Islamic organizations should focus on Muslims' respect and responsibilities towards others, and not just push for greater rights and privileges for Islam.

In medieval Europe, Muslims tolerated Jews better than the Christians did. But in the 20th century, minority religions have been oppressed in Islamic countries. The rights of non-Muslims in Islamic countries need to be made comparable to the rights Muslims demand for themselves in the west. Islamic leaders should create Islamic commissions and forums on pluralism, where non-Muslims could submit complaints and get a fair hearing on instances of Muslim hate speech against infidels, prejudicial laws or practices in Islamic countries towards non-Muslims, and crimes committed in the name of Islam. They should reject Islamic triumphalism, since it has led to 'religious cleansing' of religious minorities in virtually every Islamic state since World War II (as evidenced by a decline in the percentage of religious minorities). No religion is free from radical elements, and no religion is essentially radical. There are many moderate and liberal Islamic scholars, but they fear the clerics, and their voices are subdued.

Pan-Islamic global organizations have a westernized face of peace and tolerance, in contradistinction with a different internal face of Islam back home. The rulers of Islamic societies who deal with the west are projecting an image that is democratic and peace-loving, whereas the Muslim clergy who control the religious teachings and interpretations often tend to be radical exclusivists and expansionists. Hence there is a 'westernized Islam' that is practiced by a small elite and a different 'native Islam' that is practiced by the vast majority. This has resulted in a good guy / bad guy role-playing, in which Islamic lobbyists are the good guys claiming to save the west from some bad guys of Islam.

Unlike Christianity, Islam has resisted attempts at reformation and enlightenment, to secularize and/or pluralize it. Since the Sunni Muslim law was frozen by order of the caliph in the 10th century, the only mechanism which exists in Islam to update the law is the 'fatwa', which may be considered as the case law of



Islamic jurisprudence. There are many 'muftis' who can issue fatwas, and the Holy Quran and the Hadith are often misinterpreted to promote extreme positions. The equivalent situation would be if Christian churches were criminal courts, in which preachers were judges, and were empowered to issue harsh verdicts for violation of Christian law.

Islamic leaders should immediately set up a panel to amend the sharia (Islamic Law), especially as it pertains to non-Muslims, and make it compatible with democracy and pluralism. Either they should delete references to non-Muslims entirely, or they should invite non-Muslim representatives from all religions to participate in formulating balanced, ethical, and fair norms for treating non-Muslims. They should invite and encourage critical examination of Islamic history and texts by all, without intimidation, just as is common for other world religions.

Before proclaiming any and every fight by a fellow Muslim anywhere in the world as a freedom struggle, Islamic leaders must first introspect: could a religion whose clergy subverts the freedom to disagree, the freedom to question and doubt, the freedom of other religious choices and of democracy, be capable of fighting for freedom? Freedom must begin at home.

The dialog between the west and Islam should involve introspection by both sides. Meanwhile, Islam, Inc.'s unholy media war should voluntarily require ceasefire.





Is Hinduism a Monotheistic Religion?

By Dr. David Frawley (Pandit Vamadeva Shastri)

There has been a considerable debate extending from recent centuries to current interfaith dialogues as to whether Hinduism is a monotheistic religion, and if so whether Hinduism can perhaps be included among the great monotheistic traditions of the world.

This question of Hinduism and monotheism reflects certain preconceptions that should be carefully examined. First is the idea that monotheism is a higher form, if not the highest form of religion, which is both debatable and controversial.

Second, if Hinduism is not monotheistic, the general implication is that Hinduism must be polytheistic, meaning heathen, pagan, primitive, superstitious and idolatrous. This view also implies the superiority of monotheism over different formulations of the sacred that may have their own value.

Third is the implication - which unfortunately many Hindus take - that if Hinduism is accepted as another monotheistic faith that Hinduism will be afforded more respect in the world in which monotheistic faiths predominate. Yet one could propose to the contrary that turning Hinduism into another monotheistic faith could as likely make Hindus more vulnerable to conversion by faiths claiming to be more purely monotheistic than Hinduism could ever be.

Moreover, monotheism has a considerable baggage and a history that has often been intolerant, oppressive and violent. There are many important thinkers, philosophers, scientists and artists in the West who have long criticized or rejected monotheism. And many great

mystics and yogis from throughout the world have also questioned the superiority of monotheism, its practices and institutions, over spiritual approaches to Self-knowledge and Self-realization not tied to one belief system or another.

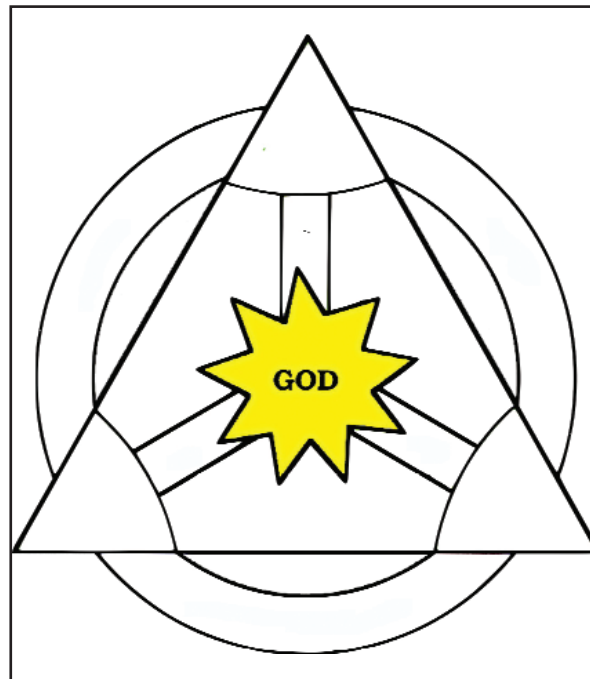
Hinduism and its Confrontation with Monotheistic Traditions

European colonial thought centuries ago judged Hinduism as polytheistic and pagan, like native and pagan traditions from throughout the world, not as monotheistic. This judgment required that monotheists convert Hindus, along with all similar non-monotheistic traditions, a process that has not come to an end.

Yet since the time of Swami Vivekananda in the late nineteenth century the deeper teachings of Hinduism have become popular and better known in the world, and have been found to contain profound mystical philosophies of Self-realization and a recognition of Consciousness as the Supreme Reality behind the universe, much like advanced trends in

modern science. Hindu Yoga and Vedanta contains an understanding of higher states of consciousness, mystical insights, and an awareness of the infinite and eternal - recognizing the vast extent of the universe that appears to go far beyond monotheistic systems and their circumscribed perspectives.

However, as Hindus have come in contact with monotheistic traditions, particularly in countries where monotheism prevails, they have tended to emphasize a similarity between Hinduism and monotheism that is not always correct or to their advantage, and can appear to be a form of self-denigration or self-betrayal. Some





Hindu and Yogic groups have proclaimed that they are also monotheistic, implying a belief in One God, perhaps also one book and one savior, though this may be a Hindu formulation of deity, a Hindu book as scripture, or a great Hindu teacher as the one savior or prophet. Other Hindus would equate the One God of monotheistic traditions with the One Reality, the Supreme Self of Vedantic and Yoga philosophy that is the same and equal in all beings, ignoring the fact that the One God of monotheism is part of a dualistic formulation and is not addressed as the Self of all.

The One God of Exclusive Monotheism

The One God of monotheism is not usually a unitary reality or universal truth but an exclusive being that demotes, denies or rejects all other paths or formulations of divinity. Such a One God is a "singularity," a one opposed to others, not a universality that embraces all. This is quite different from the unitary Deity of Vedic and yogic thought defined as Atman or Purusha, the Supreme Self.

Such "exclusive monotheism" rejects the worship of the One Reality according to different names and forms. Not surprisingly, the votaries of the One God are usually engaged in plans to convert all of humanity to their particular views, rejecting all others as inferior, out of date or wrong.

Hinduism, on the contrary, honors many paths and levels of spiritual experience, form-based and formless, personal and impersonal. Hinduism includes elements of what western thought might call monism, theism, pantheism and polytheism, but as part of a many sided and multileveled approached to the sacred that honors the freedom of the individual to search out the truth from all perspectives. Yet all these western philosophical terms for religion, including monotheism, are incomplete and cannot encompass the full range of Hindu teachings.

Monotheistic systems generally hold to salvation by belief or by good works that takes the soul into some eternal heaven or paradise after birth as the highest goal, with all other souls condemned to sorrow, if not eternal damnation. They usually reject the karma, rebirth and liberation approach of Hinduism that rests upon Yoga and meditation and cannot be achieved by belief or action alone. Hinduism emphasizes individual spiritual experience through Yoga and Vedanta over any creed or formula. Hinduism does not teach any final heaven or hell, or salvation by belief or works, such as most monotheistic traditions promote.

Theism in Hinduism

There are very ancient, sophisticated and philosophically profound theistic forms of Hinduism that recognize a single creator or cosmic lord behind the universe, what we could call "Hindu Theism." Hindu theism, however, is not exclusive but inclusive, allowing for a variety of names and forms of the deity as masculine or feminine, father or mother, as well as beyond all names and forms.

Hindu theism does not deny a multiplicity of deities on various levels but regards these as manifestations or developments from the same Divine power.

There are also Hindu approaches that are not theistic or place theism at a lower level. Samkhya philosophy aims at the realization of the inner consciousness or Purusha principle but does not make any One God the basis of that. Advaita or non-dualistic Vedanta regards that realization of the Supreme Self transcends the dualistic world of God and soul.

Buddhism, a related dharmic tradition to Hinduism, does not recognize any God or creator apart from karma. Nor does the Jain tradition.

The Hindu view of the universe is much more than what is regarded in the West as monotheism. The Hindu view is not that there is only one God but that everything is God, meaning by the term God, a unitary being, consciousness and bliss. The Hindu view is that Truth is One and that if one had to choose between truth and God, one would be better off choosing truth.

There are some mystics in monotheistic traditions who may have views similar to the Hindu view of Being-Consciousness-Bliss as the supreme reality behind all existence. But these mystics have remained on the periphery of mainstream monotheistic groups and have often been rejected or oppressed by the more orthodox.

What is Hinduism?

Hinduism as Sanatana Dharma or the Eternal and Universal Tradition accepts all paths to truth or divinity, though it may place these on different levels. Theism is part of this universal approach, but not an exclusive monotheism, and it exists along with many other approaches personal and impersonal, including not only in religion but also in art, philosophy, and science.

To call Hinduism monotheistic or to try to scale it down into the perimeters of western monotheistic religions is misleading and erroneous.

Hinduism is not simply a monotheistic religion. It has more in common with traditions regarded but as pagan and polytheistic. And these negative judgments and



stereotypes of Hinduism and other traditions by the monotheists as primitive, pagan and polytheistic are also wrong.

When people ask me whether as a Hindu I believe in God or not, my reply is that I recognize a unitary consciousness behind the universe, but I do not accept the finality of any God born of human historical revelation or limited to any belief system.

We should recognize Hinduism for what it is and monotheism for what it is. Hinduism is like the great banyan tree that stands beyond all limitations and definitions. Monotheism has its primary focus from which it seldom deviates and which usually promotes uniformity.

Hindus should not apologize for not being monotheistic; they should be happy that their tradition never found it helpful to become reduced to any exclusive belief system.

Hindus need not try to make Hinduism appear more monotheistic in order to gain acceptance by others. Hinduism provides a spiritual alternative to the exclusivism and intolerance that is common in monotheistic systems, which many people are questioning. Hinduism draws people to individual spiritual experience beyond the boundaries of churches and dogmas, granting an inner freedom to find the truth.

Hindus accept that the Divine (not one god) has many manifestations extending to every rock, plant, person, planet and star, from the ground on which we stand to the farthest reach of time and space and beyond. We can discover that Divine face and presence of consciousness everywhere, but for this to occur, we must first discover it within our own hearts and in the hearts of all beings.

How Should Hindus Approach Monotheistic Traditions?

How then should Hindus approach monotheistic traditions? First they should study them carefully and listen to what the main texts and teachers of monotheistic traditions are actually saying. Hindus should try to find out what motivates monotheistic groups to seek to convert not only Hindus but Buddhists, Sikhs and all pagan and native groups. They should not romanticize monotheism as monism or Bhakti Yoga in another form, but should be aware of the monotheistic agendas that are still adverse to them.

This is not to say that one cannot find valuable teachings in monotheism, just as one can also find them in traditions called polytheistic. And if monotheistic groups do want to expand their views to the unitary

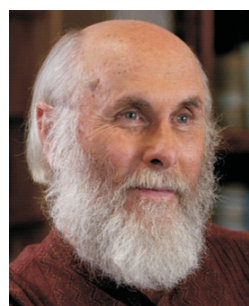
reality such as we find in Hinduism, Hindus should welcome that. But to do so, monotheistic groups must first recognize that they have not only misjudged Hinduism and pagan traditions in general but perhaps reality itself.

In any case, we live in a vast universe with many different individuals and cultures and a number of views on any topic are likely to always exist. There can be no monolithic final view of religion, philosophy, art, science, or even medicine. Nor is it desirable, as an examination of many different points of view may be necessary to find the highest truth that dwells beyond the limitations of the mind in the light of consciousness alone. As we move towards a new planetary age, we must accept this diversity of all life, which is of both Spirit and Nature. A background unity is certainly there but it exists above and beyond all divisions of name and form, not as one point of view against another. Not only Hindus but many traditional people and ancient cultures seem to be better aware of that background but many-sided unity than what we would call organized religion. We all share a common humanity and spirituality that we should honor, but we must also honor freedom and diversity in developing it.

About the Author

Dr. David Frawley (Pandit Vamadeva Shastri)

D. Litt., author of several books, is a western born teacher or guru in the Vedic tradition. In India, Vamadeva is recognized as a Vedacharya (Vedic teacher), and includes



in his scope of studies Ayurveda, Yoga, Vedanta and Vedic astrology, as well as the ancient Vedic teachings going back to the oldest Rigveda.

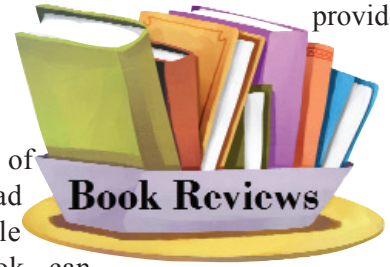
Vamadeva is a recipient of the prestigious Padma Bhushan award, one of the

highest civilian awards by the government of India, "for distinguished service of a higher order to the nation," honoring his work and writings as a Vedic teacher, which he received in March 2015.

Source: <http://www.hinduhumanrights.info/is-hinduism-a-monotheistic-religion/>

Geetavyakaranam

provide



Reviewed by Jayant Daftardar

The book Geetavyakaranam authored by Mrs. Lalita and Mr. Prabhakar Kalavade and published by Sharada Gaurav Granthamala is a scholarly work to explain Sanskrit grammar in a simple language. This book also explains each verse from Hindu Holy book Shrimad Bhagawad Gita in simple Marathi. Any reader familiar with Devanagari script and grammar will appreciate the importance of this book as it fills a much felt void experienced by many students and readers of Gita.

The book Geetavyakaranam endeavors to disseminate the complex Sanskrit verses of Gita and manages to do so without losing the original essence of the rich language. While translation is a great way to share literature with other cultures, in the process, the quality of the original composition is often compromised. Geetavyakaranam facilitates the understanding of the Sanskrit shlokas in simple Sanskrit, allowing the reader to appreciate not just the philosophy of Gita, but also the beauty of the lyrical Sanskrit language. The reader is able to decipher the meaning of the verses in the original language, without having to read the translation.

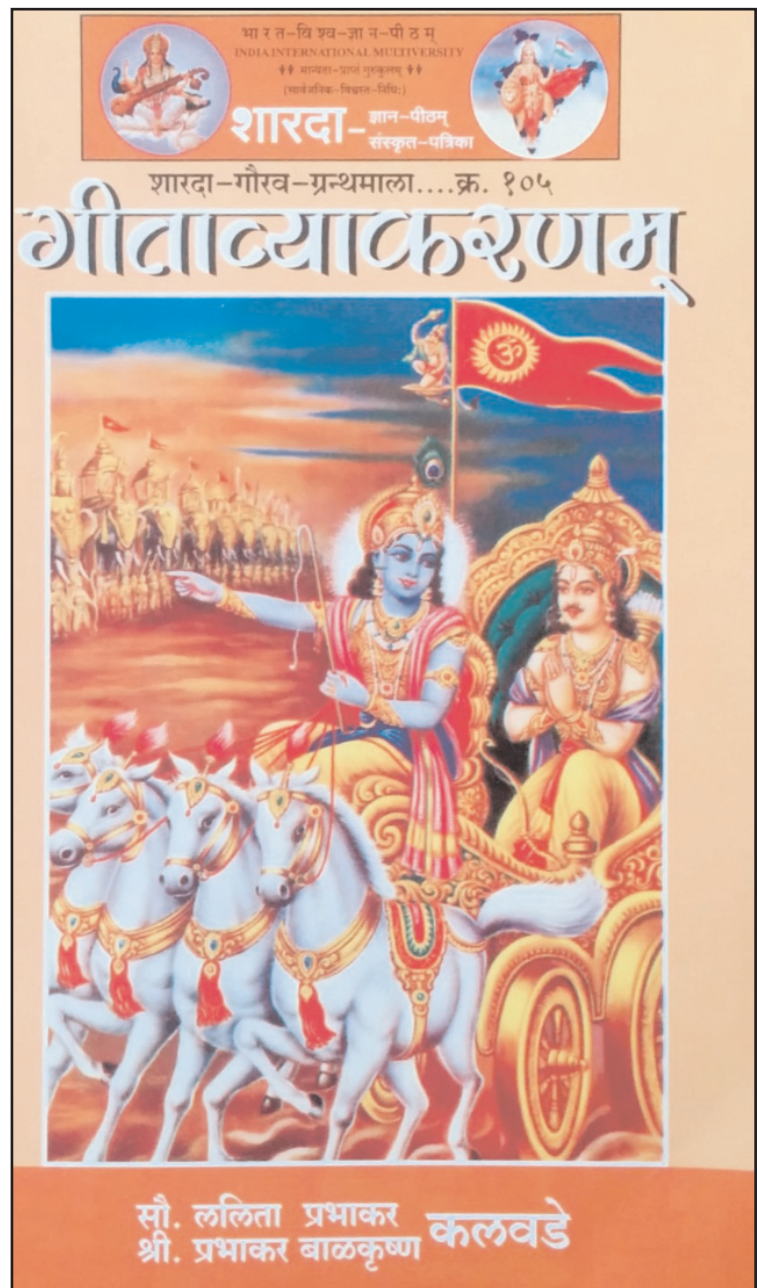
The book will lend itself well to novice learners as well as Sanskrit scholars. The book includes grammatical analysis of each word of every verse, making it an invaluable resource for learning Sanskrit grammar. Teaching or learning grammar in context especially through an epic like Gita is quite a novel approach and will be highly appreciated. The appendices and lists of unfamiliar words with their meaning are very helpful tools. A simple explanation of each verse is also provided in Marathi, which can serve as a comprehension check for the reader.

One thing that would make this book useful to the wider audience is to provide the English language translation of Devanagari grammatical terms for easy reference. Without this cross reference, the book will be useful only to those who are well versed with Devanagari grammar. But this simple addition as an appendix will increase the appeal multifold.

Geetavyakaranam is an excellent initiative to

grammatical analysis of
Shrimad Bhagavad
Gita in a simple
language. This book can
serve as an excellent source for Marathi commentary on
Gita as well as reference book for Sanskrit grammar.
Sharada Gaurav Granthamala and the authors Mrs. and
Mr. Kalavade deserve heartfelt congratulations for this
scholarly work.

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The Ramayana on the Need for a Proper Leader, (Part - I)

By Stephen Knapp (Sri Nandanandana Dasa)

Sometimes people think that the ancient Vedic literature no longer has any real usefulness in this day and age. That it is little better than an antique of foregone days. However, this article shows the universal and ever-relevant nature of the Ramayana, and how it explains the symptoms of society when there is no ruler, or when there is an unqualified leader. This is from the discussion between Markandeya and the great sages and Visishtha when they urge him to install a proper king onto the throne. When there is no such ruler of a country, they describe an assortment of symptoms and problems in society that become prominent, and thus spoil life for the citizens. The descriptions are of a society that is falling apart, wherein the citizens are troubled by the lawlessness and corruption that abounds.

However, these symptoms are what we find so common in today's world, which shows the timeless nature of the instructions given by these great sages.

Nonetheless, in other situations in the Ramayana, we find remedies for these problems. Such as when Vibhishana instructs Ravana on some of the duties of a king, which we briefly look at. However, Ravana did not like being instructed in this way because he was not interested in acting like a good king anyway, similar in ways to some of the rulers we see today.

Furthermore, the descriptions of Ayodhya when Lord Rama returns to lead the people shows the effects on society when there is a good and proper ruler, and how such a ruler should lead society for the ultimate good of everyone. It also shows the influence that such a king can have all over the land, which we obviously need more than ever in this world. So let us look at these descriptions.

The results of a leaderless society

This especially points out how the Ramayana held views on the means for a harmonious society, and what helped provide or prevent it. This section outlines how a society without a leader, or without one that is qualified, will never be harmonious, and will actually exhibit symptoms that will prevent such a united society. Although these describe a time thousands of years ago when facilities were different, it can still be compared to



what we would expect to see, or not see, in this day and age. Amazingly, many of the symptoms that are described are the same conditions as we see in society today.

The reason why I wanted to elaborate on these teachings is that as we look around this world, many parts of it seem to be falling apart with each passing day. How can we change things? It is time that people of the world understand what to look for in a leader if we are going to live harmoniously with ourselves or with nature. It is time that we know who to elect if we are going to have a leader who provides the right kind of protection and guidance, and who holds and practices the proper virtue if we are going to steer society in the right direction. And that is, unfortunately, not someone



we often see today. It is not that the Ramayana is some kind of outdated book that no longer provides any wisdom, we will in fact see that it still holds practical advice that will help us correct our misguided aims of life by reconsidering the insight as given by the sages in the Ramayana. So let us take a look at some of these verses, and we will see many of the same indicators right now of a leaderless society that it describes.

This is from the Ayodhya Kanda, Canto 67, verses 9-38, as described by Markandeya and other great sages to urge Vasishtha to install a qualified prince onto the throne.

"In a land destitute of a ruler, the thundering cloud wreathed with lightning does not drench the earth with rain water." 9

So here we see that drought is common when there is no proper ruler, or when society is misdirected. In such a situation, people no longer work in harmony with nature so that it reciprocates with the needs of the people. People often feel that nature is something to dominate and control, to take what they want from it. But actually we are a part of nature and should be in harmony with it. Otherwise, nature merely reflects the mass consciousness of the people who inhabit the planet, and thus drought is not uncommon.

"In a rulerless land, handfuls of seeds are no longer scattered (for fear of uncertainty of crops). (Nay) in a rulerless land, a son is not amenable to the control of his father, nor his wife amenable to the control of her husband (there being no executive authority to enforce correct conduct)." -10

Herein we see that a leaderless society becomes lawless, with no respect for authority on any level.

"In a rulerless land, people do not construct assembly halls (for public gatherings, there being no such gatherings), nor do joyous men plant lovely gardens (for fear of their being destroyed by enemies of peace and order) or build sacred houses (such as temples and buildings for the free accommodation of travelers and strangers, etc.)" 12

In this way, no one builds elaborate structures since the lawless or the enemies will come and destroy them because of a lack of respect for the culture, or to drive out those who are not of the same disposition or religion.

"In a rulerless land, festivals (in honor of deities) in which actors and dancers exhibit their art in a highly ecstatic mood, and convivial gatherings promoting the welfare of the state do not gather strength." 15

Again this shows how a sophisticated culture will be set to ruin by adharmic forces if there is not a ruler who can gather the means to defend it.

"In a rulerless land, parties to a law-suit are not able to have their dispute settled, nor are those given to hearing stories from the Puranas, etc., pleased with such stories told by those to whom the narration of such stories is agreeable." 16

It may be somewhat amusing to see this description being a result of a rulerless land, especially in India where lawsuits are known to take many months or even years. Without a qualified leader who can execute an efficient system of law and order, the court system becomes increasingly backlogged with cases that are not resolved, not because they can't be dealt with, but because of a lack of efficiency and honesty in the judicial system, and the interest of the courts to resolve such cases without accepting bribes or other complications before such cases are heard.

"In a rulerless land, virgins decked with gold ornaments do not for their part go united to gardens to sport at dusk (for fear of being abducted or violated by miscreants)." 17

These days no one can go out at night or even in daylight without the risk of being robbed or abducted. This is surely a sign of a lack of proper leadership wherein the citizens know that a crime will be punished, and people will be protected. Without good leaders, criminals know they can get away with many criminal acts.

"In a rulerless land, wealthy husband and cowherds, even though well protected (by their attendants) do not sleep with open doors (for fear of thieves and dacoits)." 18

Again, all doors to a house must be locked where there are criminals, or those who have no respect for authority, which means the authority is too weak to uphold the law and give appropriate punishment to criminals.

"In a rulerless land, the sound of plucking the bow-string with the palm produced by Kshatriyas uninterruptedly discharging arrows while practicing the use of bows is not heard." 21

This merely indicates that those like the police or soldiers meant to protect the people are in limited numbers, and are not around to help keep law and order. This is usually because the leaders put their interests and priorities in other directions rather than in protecting law abiding citizens or in building a strong military or police force to defend the country and citizens.

"In a rulerless land, merchants travelling far and wide do not safely move about fully equipped with abundant salable goods." 22

"In a rulerless land, nothing is one's own in the eyes



of anyone. Like fishes, men always devour one another.
31

Again, here we see that in a land without a qualified ruler, merchants cannot move about without the fear of being robbed or killed for their merchandise. In such a case, society is hardly civilized at all.

"In a rulerless land, there is no acquisition of property and no security of possessions. Nor is the army able in a rulerless land to vanquish the foes in a battle." 24

Even the army becomes ineffective and without proper direction when there is no qualified leader, thus leaving the country vulnerable and unable to oppose its foes, or uphold law and order.

"In a rulerless land, self-controlled ascetics moving all by themselves and contemplating on the Self with their own mind and taking up their abode wherever the evening falls do not move about (freely for want of hospitable householders)." 23

Herein it is described how ascetics who hold the knowledge of the spiritual path are not very abundant, prominent, nor are they often respected. People in general lose interest in such topics when there is no ruler to show by example how to uphold, respect or protect the Dharmic path.

"In a rulerless land, men well-versed in sacred lore do not meet (freely) holding disputations in forests and groves." 26

Again we see the lack of respect for those who hold within themselves spiritual knowledge, who no longer roam about ready to give such wisdom to the masses,

knowing that they may simply meet with the contradictions and criticisms of materialistic people.

"In a rulerless land, flowers, sweetmeats and sacrificial fees are not brought together for the worship of deities by self-controlled men." 27

In fact, even proper worship, pujas, and Dharmic traditions are soon lost without a leader who will uphold their protection. This means that such a leader must follow or at least respect the Dharmic traditions and the deep spiritual knowledge that is preserved therein.

"A state without a ruler is really no better than rivers without water, a woodland without grass and cows without a keeper. 29

"If there is no king demarcating good and evil in the world, oh, this world will be reduced to (utter) darkness as it were and nothing can be clearly perceived." 36

In other words, a land without a qualified ruler is a wasteland wherein the real goal of life is not understood, nor is it practiced, and mere existence with the attempt to avoid so many problems is all that is left to achieve, and that also only with great struggle. With this as the standard, such a society is reduced to utter ignorance of the true purpose of life.

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ALL ABOUT TRUTH!

From as long as I can remember, we were always told to "TELL THE TRUTH". As kids, we were punished for telling lies. I grew up hearing statements such as "Thou Shalt not Lie"; "Honesty is the best policy"; "It is a sin to lie"; "God is truth"; and, as Hindus, the saying "Satyameva Jayate" reigned loudly at Hindi School, every afternoon after regular school.

Today, the above statements seems to have lost their value or presence in society, and I am amazed at the amount of people that feel it necessary and find it easy to lie. Sometimes, they just lie to make themselves look good, to be accepted in a certain "inner circle", or to gain for themselves, be it for a job, money or some other material gain. Such people don't even appear to fear the consequences that could result when the truth becomes known. In my childhood, even the 'smallest' lie was not accepted. It was always perceived that telling the truth, no matter what, was the right thing to do. And, punishment was readily doled out, and was relative to the "magnitude of the lie".

So, why is it so difficult for people to tell the truth, accept the truth and, face the consequences, whatever they may be? In all religions, truth is propagated. So, are people no longer fearful of the effects and

consequences of lies? Most times, when people lie, it is because they are afraid that they may lose out on something that has a value to them, or something they really badly want or need. They may be even protecting themselves, or someone else. They believe that these needs would only be fulfilled if they lie. So, do these circumstances make it ok to lie? One might argue that if telling a lie will yield a good or better outcome, then it is ok. But, can you really enjoy the outcome knowing that it came about by dishonest means? Even Mahatma Gandhi said, "Truth never damages a cause that is just".

One might also argue that, at times, it may be quite ok to tell a small lie, or, a white lie. For example, a child may lie for fear of punishment from mom or dad; a victim in a life or death situation may very well lie under such circumstance, to be saved. Is this wrong? There are many other situations that may force people to lie in exchange for a good outcome. Is this wrong? If not, are there some guidelines within religions that stipulate when it is ok to lie and when not? E.g. is it accepted, and are you forgiven if you preface your lie with a disclosure, such as, "I have to lie, and here is why."? When is lying ok? ■



CAPEEM Files Lawsuit in Federal Court in California

California Parents for the Equalization of Educational Materials (CAPEEM), a Hindu-American advocacy organization, and three community members filed a civil rights lawsuit in federal court this morning against public school officials at the California Department of Education, State Board of Education, and several school districts throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. The case challenges the discriminatory treatment of Hinduism in California's history-social science curriculum and the official endorsement of other religions, based upon the U.S. Constitution.

The curriculum framework adopted by the State Board of Education last summer devotes almost half the discussion of Hinduism to the caste system, which it portrays as a supposed Hindu religious belief. For every other religion, the SBE followed its policy of refusing negative examples that would instill prejudice - there is no mention of negative interpretations of Christianity that supported slavery or condemned same-sex relationships.

The Complaint alleges numerous other ways the California curriculum treats Hinduism unfairly and differently from all other religions. Every faith except Hinduism is taught from the perspective of the believer, using the characters, narrative and values of the religion's teachings. Hinduism is not described with characters and stories and is barely acknowledged as a religion at all.

Arvind Kumar, a Director of CAPEEM said: "It is unfortunate that State Board officials have chosen to single out Hindu children for such negative treatment. We submitted many suggested revisions to the curriculum last year but almost all were refused, leaving us no choice but to bring this case."

Arti Kapoor of San Ramon is deeply troubled by what is being taught about Hinduism in schools: "As a mother of two children in California public schools and a member of the Hindu community, I have seen the pain and embarrassment the current curriculum causes our



families. I hope this lawsuit will force the Department of Education to correct the discrimination we now face."

Glenn Katon, an Oakland-based civil rights attorney with Katon Law who is representing the plaintiffs, said: "Minority religions deserve fair treatment by the California public school system and it is clear that this curriculum discriminates against Hindus, which the Constitution does not allow."

Professor Barbara A. McGraw, who is Director of the Center for Engaged Religious Pluralism at Saint Mary's College, attended most of the hearings leading up to the SBE's adoption of the curriculum framework. She notes that "California's public school curriculum has treated Hinduism unfairly for many years, putting so much emphasis on the caste system that it has virtually ignored Hinduism's many virtues. At the same time the curriculum overlooks social harms related to other religions. This disparity not only does a disservice to Hindus, but to all students."

The Complaint can be found at CAPEEM's website.

Source: www.capeem.org/pressroom.php?item0=1

Be Truly Beautiful



By Siddheshwari Devi (Didi Ji)

I meet many people in my daily life. In one of my recent conversations with a psychiatrist, I came to know that he treats children as young as five for depression. This was an eye opener. Children that young!

It also turns out that he treats many adolescents who are struggling with body image issues. Young people, who are going through the natural process of puberty and struggling with normal issues of acne and facial hair, are especially hard on themselves. Looking at the heavily made up models and movie stars whose publicity photos are airbrushed to perfection, young girls hold themselves up to impossible standards of beauty. Not only this, they are completely unaware of what truly constitutes beauty. Furthermore, they are not learning about how our Creator defines beauty.

It is our duty to teach our children what being beautiful really means. This is what Ramayan says:

Ears that do not hear the glory of God are mere snake holes.

Eyes that do not behold the Divine sight of Saints are like the artificial eyes on peacock plumes.

The **head** that does not bow to God and Guru is like a bitter gourd.

The one whose **heart** has no devotion for God, is dead though he seems to be living.

The **tongue** that does not glorify God is like a tongue of a frog that utters only croaking sounds.

A person who does not experience joy upon hearing God's pastimes has a heart made of stone.

The fool who only devotes his mind to the pleasures of the senses after attaining human birth is like a person who takes poison in exchange for nectar.

God loves and graces the one with a pure heart.

A beautiful person is one who treads the path of righteousness.

Be truly beautiful, Hold No Grudge

We tend to hold grudges when we believe that we have

been wronged by someone. Those grudges manifest themselves in many ways. We sometimes stop talking to the person and even the people close to the person. We badmouth the person in front of others. We may even ask our family and friends to choose sides.

Our scriptures not only teach how to reach God but they also help us manage our behavior and attitudes in our relationships. Here are some examples from the Ramayan that we can learn from.

When Mother Kaushalya found out that Shri Ram was being exiled for fourteen years and that Kaikeyi was the reason behind it, she held no grudge against Kaikeyi and continued to treat her lovingly. When Bharat returned to Ayodhya, he was distraught and blamed his mother Kaikeyi, but Kaushalya held no grudge. Instead, she wiped away Bharat's tears and comforted him. She embraced him lovingly over and over again.

When Mother Sumitra found out that her son Lakshman had decided to accompany Shri Ram and Seeta to the forest, her advice to him was, "Regard Seeta as your mother and Ram as your father. Accompany them to the forest and serve them faithfully."

When the three mothers, Bharat and Shatrughna came to meet Shri Ram in the forest, he first greeted Kaikeyi and touched her feet before greeting his own mother Kaushalya. Then he comforted her when she blamed herself for the sequence of events. Seeta treated not only Kaushalya and Sumitra but also Kaikeyi with great respect without holding a grudge.

We must learn from the great ones and hold no grudges. It is only a mirage

A thirsty animal crossing the desert detects water in the distance and excitedly rushes towards it only to find out that it was a mirage. We too rush towards the mall, movie, casino, party and the restaurant for happiness. In the end we find that it was only a mirage and that we have received only temporary pleasures. After some time we are back to square one, searching for happiness all over again.

There is a gross misconception that rules our mind,



which is that we can find true happiness in people, places and objects. No doubt there is a semblance of happiness in the world, but it is only a mirage. The same thing which makes you happy at times makes you miserable at times also. The same person who is a source of happiness at times becomes a source of unhappiness.

If there were happiness in the material world, everyone would have received it all the time from everyone, everything and in every place. You experience happiness in your own son, but not in your neighbor's child. If there were happiness in children, every child in the world would have been a source of happiness to everyone in the world. If money were the source of happiness, the wealthiest people would be truly happy.

Let today be the day when we decide that happiness is not out there somewhere, but right inside of us.

Lessons from Nature

After installing Sugreev as the King of the kingdom named Kishkindha, Lord Ram and Lakshman camped on the hills outside the kingdom. The rainy season had set in and it was getting difficult to continue the journey to find Mother Seeta. They decided to wait out the season camping in the mountains. During this time, Shri Ram would give discourses to his younger brother, Lakshman,

on devotion.

Many of the examples that Shri Ram gave to Lakshman were taken from Nature. Some of these lessons are as follows:

- ♦ **Just as mountains endure the heavy downpour, a Saint tolerates the comments and behavior of a non-believer.**
- ♦ **Just as water coming from various directions gathers into a pool, virtues find their way into a devotional heart.**
- ♦ **Just as the water of a stream becomes still once it merges into the ocean, so does the individual soul find eternal bliss on attaining God.**
- ♦ **Just as it becomes dark during the day because of rain clouds, the light of wisdom can be very easily obscured by wrong association.**
- ♦ **Just as fish are very happy in deep water, so a devotee is very happy once he takes refuge in God.**
- ♦ **Just as the small rivulets rush with great speed towards the river, so does the soul that does not love God feel elated even with a small worldly fortune.**
- ♦ **Just as the water becomes muddy the moment it descends on earth, the soul is enveloped in Maya as soon as it is born.**

Visit www.radhamadhavsociety.org

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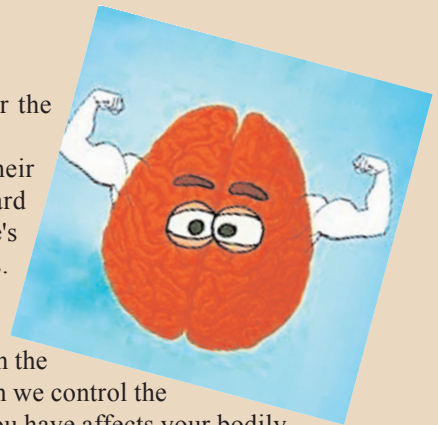
Brain over Body

For centuries, people have been trying to solve a dilemma: can mind conquer the matter? Can our brains control our bodies?

The world has seen many people who have shown extraordinary control over their bodies. Buddhist meditators have shown control over their body temperature, Harvard psychologist Ellen Langer helped people lose weight using the placebo effect; but there's one man who definitely stands out, whose capabilities have outdone everyone else's. Prahlad Jani, an Indian saint, claims to have survived without eating and drinking since 1940. He was tested for two weeks in the Sterling hospital in Hyderabad, and he stayed there without eating, drinking, urinating or defecating. Jani raised questions in the minds of people, such as "can we control our bodies, and bend it to our will?" or "can we control the world around us with just a thought?" Well, research says you can. Every thought you have affects your bodily chemistry, either temporarily or permanently. Thinking about something causes your brain to release neurotransmitters, which literally control all of the bodily functions.

For example, if you produce negative thoughts constantly, the cells will release a protein specific to that emotion, which means you are basically programming your cells to receive more of that same protein. This very process can also help you stay happy and positive, even at 7:30am on school days!

Every time you think, whether it's about the homework you have to do, or the new season of The Walking Dead, you are reprogramming your genes. Who you are as a person is decided by the circumstances you live in, the things you face in life. Your genes don't change, but the genetic activity does. The kind of friends you have, the place you grew up in, and it all determines how your genes fire up. They make you the person you are. You decide the kind of person you end up becoming through your thoughts. So, the next time you get irritated because the Wi-Fi is too slow, take a deep breath and try to keep yourself happy, because, soon, it'll come to you naturally. If you want it enough, you can conquer your very body with just your brain.



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based in Washington DC, is studying Journalism as a subject in High School and is part of Editorial board of School's newsletters and Yearbook.

Maha Shivaratri

By Swami Sivananda

INTRODUCTION

Maha Shivaratri falls on the 13th (or 14th) day of the dark half of Phalgun (February-March). The name means "the night of Shiva". The ceremonies take place chiefly at night. This is a festival observed in honor of Lord Shiva. Shiva was married to Parvati on this day.

People observe a strict fast on this day. Some devotees do not even take a drop of water. They keep vigil all night. The Shiva Lingam is worshipped throughout the night by washing it every three hours with milk, curd, honey, rose water, etc., whilst the chanting of the Mantra Om Namah Shivaya continues. Offerings of bael leaves are made to the Lingam. Bael leaves are very sacred as, it is said, Lakshmi resides in them.

Hymns in praise of Lord Shiva, such as the Shiva Mahimna Stotra of Pushpadanta or Ravana's Shiva Tandava Stotra are sung with great fervor and devotion. People repeat the Panchakshara Mantra, Om Namah Shivaya. He who utters the Names of Shiva during Shivaratri, with perfect devotion and concentration, is freed from all sins. He reaches the abode of Shiva and lives there happily. He is liberated from the wheel of births and deaths. Many pilgrims flock to the places where there are Shiva temples.

The Story of King Chitrabhanu

In the Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata, Bhishma, whilst resting on the bed of arrows and discoursing on Dharma, refers to the observance of Maha Shivaratri by King Chitrabhanu. The story goes as follows.

Once upon a time King Chitrabhanu of the Ikshvaku dynasty, who ruled over the whole of Jambudvipa, was observing a fast with his wife, it being the day of Maha Shivaratri. The sage Ashtavakra came on a visit to the court of the king.

The sage asked, "O king! Why are you observing a fast today?"

King Chitrabhanu explained why. He had the gift of remembering the incidents of his previous birth.

The king said to the sage: "In my past birth I was a hunter in Varanasi. My name was Suswara. My livelihood was to kill and sell birds and animals. One day I was roaming the forests in search of animals. I was overtaken by the darkness of night. Unable to return home, I climbed a tree for shelter. It happened to be a bael tree. I had shot a deer that day but I had no time to take it home. I bundled it up and tied it to a branch on the tree. As I was tormented by hunger and thirst, I kept awake throughout the night. I shed profuse tears when I thought of my poor wife and children who were starving and anxiously awaiting my return. To pass away the time that night I engaged myself in plucking the bael leaves





and dropping them down onto the ground.

"The day dawned. I returned home and sold the deer. I bought some food for myself and for my family. I was about to break my fast when a stranger came to me, begging for food. I served him first and then took my food.

"At the time of death, I saw two messengers of Lord Shiva. They were sent down to conduct my soul to the abode of Lord Shiva. I learnt then for the first time of the great merit I had earned by the unconscious worship of Lord Shiva during the night of Shivaratri. They told me that there was a Lingam at the bottom of the tree. The leaves I dropped fell on the Lingam. My tears which I had shed out of pure sorrow for my family fell onto the Lingam and washed it. And I had fasted all day and all night. Thus did I unconsciously worship the Lord.

"I lived in the abode of the Lord and enjoyed divine bliss for long ages. I am now reborn as Chitrabhanu."

Spiritual Significance of the Ritual

The Scriptures record the following dialogue between Sastri and Atmanathan, giving the inner meaning of the above story.

Sastri: It is an allegory. The wild animals that the hunter fought with are lust, anger, greed, infatuation, jealousy and hatred. The jungle is the fourfold mind, consisting of the subconscious mind, the intellect, the ego and the conscious mind. It is in the mind that these "wild animals" roam about freely. They must be killed. Our hunter was pursuing them because he was a Yogi. If you want to be a real Yogi you have to conquer these evil tendencies. Do you remember the name of the hunter in the story?

Atmanathan: Yes, he was called Suswara.

Sastri: That's right. It means "melodious". The hunter had a pleasant melodious voice. If a person practices Yama and Niyama and is ever conquering his evil tendencies, he will develop certain external marks of a Yogi. The first marks are lightness of the body, health, steadiness, clearness of countenance and a pleasant voice. This stage has been spoken of in detail in the Swetaswara Upanishad. The hunter or the Yogi had for many years practiced Yoga and had reached the first stage. So he is given the name Suswara. Do you remember where he was born?

Atmanathan: Yes, his birthplace is Varanasi.

Sastri: Now, the Yogis call the Ajna Chakra by the name Varanasi. This is the point midway between the eyebrows. It is regarded as the meeting place of the three nerve currents (Nadis), namely, the Ida, Pingala and the Sushumna. An aspirant is instructed to concentrate on that point. That helps him to conquer his desires and evil

qualities like anger and so on. It is there that he gets a vision of the Divine Light within.

Atmanathan: Very interesting! But how do you explain his climbing up the bael tree and all the other details of the worship?

Sastri: Have you ever seen a bael leaf?

Atmanathan: It has three leaves on one stalk.

Sastri: True. The tree represents the spinal column. The leaves are threefold. They represent the Ida, Pingala and Sushumna Nadis, which are the regions for the activity of the moon, the sun and fire respectively, or which may be thought of as the three eyes of Shiva. The climbing of the tree is meant to represent the ascension of the Kundalini Shakti, the serpentine power, from the lowest nerve center called the Muladhara to the Ajna Chakra. That is the work of the Yogi.

Atmanathan: Yes, I have heard of the Kundalini and the various psychic centers in the body. Please go on further; I am very interested to know more.

Sastri: Good. The Yogi was in the waking state when he began his meditation. He bundled up the birds and the animals he had slain and, tying them on a branch of the tree, he rested there. That means he had fully conquered his thoughts and rendered them inactive. He had gone through the steps of Yama, Niyama, Pratyahara, etc. On the tree he was practicing concentration and meditation. When he felt sleepy, it means that he was about to lose consciousness and go into deep sleep. So he determined to keep awake.

Atmanathan: That is now clear to me; you certainly do explain it very well. But why did he weep for his wife and children?

Sastri: His wife and children are none other than the world. One who seeks the Grace of God must become an embodiment of love. He must have an all-embracing sympathy. His shedding of tears is symbolical of his universal love. In Yoga also, one cannot have illumination without Divine Grace. Without practicing universal love, one cannot win that Grace. One must perceive one's own Self everywhere. The preliminary stage is to identify one's own mind with the minds of all created beings. That is fellow-feeling or sympathy. Then one must rise above the limitations of the mind and merge it in the Self. That happens only in the stage of Samadhi, not earlier.

Atmanathan: Why did he pluck and drop the bael leaves?

Sastri: That is mentioned in the story only to show that he had no extraneous thoughts. He was not even conscious of what he was doing. All his activity was confined to the three Nadis. The leaves, I have said



before, represent the three Nadis. He was in fact in the second state, namely, the dream state, before he passed into the deep sleep state.

Atmanathan: He kept vigil the whole night, it is said.

Sastri: Yes, that means that he passed through the deep sleep state successfully. The dawning of day symbolizes the entrance into the Fourth state called Turiya or super consciousness.

Atmanathan: It is said that he came down and saw the Lingam. What does that mean?

Sastri: That means that in the Turiya state he saw the Shiva Lingam or the mark of Shiva in the form of the inner lights. In other words, he had the vision of the Lord. That was an indication to him that he would realize the supreme, eternal abode of Lord Shiva in course of time.

Atmanathan: So it appears from what you say that the sight of the lights is not the final stage?

Sastri: Oh no! That is only one step, albeit a difficult one. Now think of how the story continues. He goes home and feeds a stranger. A stranger is one whom you have not seen before. The stranger is no other than the hunter himself, transformed into a new person. The food was the likes and dislikes which he had killed the previous night. But he did not consume the whole of it. A little still remained. That was why he had to be reborn as King Chitrabhanu. Going to the world of Shiva (Salokya) is not enough to prevent this. There are other stages besides Salokya. These are Samipya, Sarupya and finally Sayujya. Have you not heard of Jaya and Vijaya returning from Vaikunta?

Atmanathan: Yes, I have understood now.

Lord Shiva's Assurance

When creation had been completed, Shiva and Parvati went out to live on the top of Mount Kailas. Parvati asked, "O venerable Lord! Which of the many rituals observed in Thy honor doth please Thee most?"

The Lord replied, "The 14th night of the new moon, in the dark fortnight during the month of Phalgun, is my most favorite day. It is known as Shivaratri. My devotees give me greater happiness by mere fasting than by ceremonial baths and offerings of flowers, sweets and incense.

"The devotee observes strict spiritual discipline in the day and worships Me in four different forms during each of the four successive three-hour periods of the night. The offering of a few bael leaves is more precious to Me than the precious jewels and flowers. My devotee should bathe Me in milk at the first period, in curd at the second, in clarified butter at the third, and in honey at the fourth

and last. Next morning, he should feed the Brahmins first and, after performing the prescribed ceremonies, he can break his fast. O Parvati! There is no ritual which can compare with this simple routine in sanctity."

Parvati was deeply impressed by the speech of Lord Shiva. She repeated it to Her friends who in their turn passed it on to the ruling princes on earth. Thus was the sanctity of Shivaratri broadcast all over the world.

The two great natural forces that afflict man are Rajas (the quality of passionate activity) and Tamas (that of inertia). The Shivaratri Vrata aims at the perfect control of these two. The entire day is spent at the Feet of the Lord. Continuous worship of the Lord necessitates the devotee's constant presence in the place of worship. Motion is controlled. Evils like lust, anger, and jealousy, born of Rajas are ignored and subdued. The devotee observes vigil throughout the night and thus conquers Tamas also. Constant vigilance is imposed on the mind. Every three hours a round of worship of the Shiva Lingam is conducted. Shivaratri is a perfect Vrata.

The formal worship consists of bathing the Lord. Lord Shiva is considered to be the Form of Light (which the Shiva Lingam represents). He is burning with the fire of austerity. He is therefore best propitiated with cool bathing. While bathing the Lingam the devotee prays: "O Lord! I will bathe Thee with water, milk, etc. Do Thou kindly bathe me with the milk of wisdom. Do Thou kindly wash me of all my sins, so that the fire of worldliness which is scorching me may be put out once for all, so that I may be one with Thee-the One alone without a second."

Offer this inner worship to Lord Shiva daily: "I worship the jewel of my Self, the Shiva residing in the Lotus of my heart. I bathe Him with the water of my pure mind brought from the river of faith and devotion. I worship Him with the fragrant flowers of Samadhi-all this so that I may not be born again in this world."

Here is another formula for the supreme worship of the Lord: "O Shiva! You are my Self. My mind is Parvati. My Pranas are your servants. My body is your house. My actions in this world are your worship. My sleep is Samadhi. My walk is circumambulation of you. My speech is your prayer. Thus do I offer all that I am to you. ■

Source: www.dlshq.org/religions/shivaratri.htm

Reproduced from the book Hindu Fasts and Festivals by Swami Sivananda.

CNN's 'Believer With Reza Aslan'

Promotes Xenophobia And Hinduphobia

Wthin days of seemingly racially motivated shooting of two Hindu engineers in Kansas, CNN is unleashing a program that is certain to promote xenophobia, specifically, Hinduphobia.

The six-part CNN series, "Believer with Reza Aslan," purports to demystify some of the world religions, however, from the promotional material and review articles about the show, it is clear that the show paints Hindu dharma (spiritual, religion and cultural tradition) by accentuating a lesser understood tiny sect of a faith that count seventy ascetics among a one and a quarter billion adherents, whose mainstream practices and philosophical underpinnings have flourished for thousands of years.

Mr. Aslan attributes the quest for societal-equality in Indian society to Aghori influence, ignoring the fact that underpinning of this equality is inherent in the most ancient of Hindu scriptures, including Rig Veda, the earliest scripture of Hindu dharma. As most non-practicing Hindus, Mr. Aslan has not gained deeper understanding of difference between varna (caste label that is acquired based on profession and is not based on birth) and jaati (family association that traditionally

passed through inheritance).

A self-professed Muslim, Mr. Aslan has an interesting way to denigrate other religions. He promotes moderate Islamic Sufi tradition as mainstream in the media, while ignoring the outrages inflicted by more prominent Wahabi ideology. On the other hand, Mr. Aslan generalizes fringe elements of Hindu faith, while ignoring the peaceful, non-violent, all accepting and universal ideals of Hindu dharma.

AHAD believes that this crass representation of Hindu faith will do little to promote interfaith understanding. It will promote ignorance about Hindu traditions and promote ridicule of Hindu children in the schools. For example, a teacher has requested CNN on Facebook if the Hindu related episode will be available for teaching ancient Indian history to her sixth grade class! We believe that more schools will use these half-baked, un-researched and inappropriate content to portray Hindu traditions as mainstream and this will have wider Hinduphobic societal impact than CNN can imagine.

We welcome Mr. Aslan to meet with practitioners of mainstream Hindu faiths. Learn about Hindu faith from

our saints, priests and ascetics, and experience the practice of Hindu traditions from its practitioners and not merely from the libraries of Harvard or known Hindu haters.

As a major global media outlet, CNN must hold itself to higher standards. To ensure that the educational ideals of this series are met, AHAD demands that Hindu related episodes in the series be reviewed by



practicing Hindu experts before they are aired. AHAD will be glad to provide such experts. After the Hindu related episodes are aired, Hindu scholars must be invited to discuss the content of the show on air, and provide a deeper Hindu perspective.

Major Hindu Organizations Unite to Demand Apology from CNN

All initial protest petitions and protest letters went unheeded and didn't stop CNN from airing the show on March 5th, which prompted more protests against Reza Aslan's Hinduphobic "Believer" show. It gained more steam as major Hindu organizations united to demand apology from CNN.

On Saturday, March 11, AHAD co-sponsored a protest by dozens of Hindu organizations in New York, NY to protest the show that denigrated Hindu dharma and depicted the holy city of Varanasi as a "city of death." Members of AHAD and VHPA also participated in community led protests in Atlanta, Houston, and, Washington, DC. Additional community protests are planned in Chicago and San Francisco, where AHAD and VHPA members will participate.

Utsav Chakrabarti, the Washington DC based coordinator of World Hindu Council of America (VHPA) said, "We express complete support towards a multitude of Hindu organizations and Indian American groups that joined hands to protest CNN's dangerous misrepresentation of the Hindu community. We also thank the plethora of individuals and organizations that came together to lead the efforts to voice our concerns to CNN."

Ajay Shah, convener of AHAD said, "Mr. Aslan has caused serious harm to Hindu community and put the safety of Hindu children in schools across the US in jeopardy. Instead of propagating ignorance and hatred couched in sophistry, Mr. Aslan, a practicing Muslim, should meet with practitioners of mainstream Hindu faiths. Learn about Hindu faith from our scholars, saints, priests and ascetics, and experience the practice of Hindu traditions from its practitioners and not merely from the libraries of elite institutions or known Hindu haters." He added that "CNN has failed to hold itself to higher standards. Despite being alerted about the offensive content, CNN proceeded to air the show without consultation with practicing Hindu experts."



Mr. Shah stated that, the Hindu organizations demand the following:

1. An on-air apology from CNN and Mr. Aslan for offending a billion strong Hindu community
2. No further airing of the offending episode
3. A promise to consult practicing Hindu scholars nominated by Hindu Mandir Executive Council (HMEC), before programs relating to the Hindus are aired.

The following organizations have formally joined AHAD actions, with more organizations preparing to join in next few days:

- ♦ Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference (HMEC)
 - ♦ Ekal Vidyalaya
 - ♦ World Hindu Council of America (VHPA)
 - ♦ Hindu Swayamsewak Sangh (HSS)
 - ♦ Overseas Friends of Bharatiya Janata Party (OFBJP)
 - ♦ Samskrit Bharati
 - ♦ Sewa International
 - ♦ US Hindu Alliance (USHA)
 - ♦ Param Shakti Peeth
 - ♦ Om Kriya Yog Spiritual Center of Barphani Dham (Ramanadachrya Sampraday)
 - ♦ Global Indians for Bharat Vikas (GIBV)
 - ♦ Gayatri Chetna Center of NJ
 - ♦ Gayatri Gyan Mandir of Itasca, IL
 - ♦ Overseas Hindu Sabha
 - ♦ Hindu Community Center, NJ
 - ♦ American Hindus Against Defamation
- About American Hindus Against Defamation (AHAD)

American Hindus Against Defamation (AHAD) is the first and the most prominent Hindu organization in USA. A project of World Hindu Council of America (VHPA), AHAD has been actively monitoring media and products to ensure accurate representation of Hindu dharma, culture, images and icons.

How I became a Hindu and a Hindu Activist

By Vincent Bruno

Background and Early Childhood

Like most Westerners today, I come from a Judeo-Christian background. Through my family life I have a mild Catholic background, but the major influence on my childhood was primarily the many strains of Protestantism. I remember my very first introduction to Christianity, a family member had bought me a cross necklace. I remember the cross being placed around my neck, and then I was lifted up to look at myself in a bathroom mirror. It was a shallow ceremony with no real meaning for me, but I remember having a peculiar feeling I could not identify, it almost felt bad.

During my first year of school, I attended what is known as Catechism classes, after school sessions at the Catholic Church where you learn about religion. Again,

like almost everything in Catholicism, it was all very superficial and ritualistic. We sat in an oily wooden brown church room where an older grey woman talked a little bit about Jesus and the apostles. We were all given rosary beads and brought to chapel where we prayed to statues of Mother Mary. The experience was nothing more than a little boring, one little girl got in trouble for hiding in the bleachers, but I have to say I barely learned anything and felt even less.

Things began to change after my first year of school, for the next 2-3 years I moved around a bit and was introduced to the Protestant world. During this time I attended "Sunday School", religion classes for young children hosted in the basements of Protestant churches. For a reason that only the gods know, I was shifted from one church to another, I experienced Lutheranism, Methodism and Evangelicalism. One thing I remember about Sunday school vs Catholic Catechism was that





Protestant education was a little more lively and engaging. While my Catholic experience had been very solemn, the Protestant churches seemed a little brighter, we colored pictures and talked about Jesus in a little more detail, people moved around much more and the whole atmosphere was much lighter and energetic than in the Catholic Church. However, the experience began to darken somewhat when I was introduced to some of the more fundamentalist evangelical strains. The large stone and wooden white Lutheran and Methodist churches gave way to the smaller boxy Churches of the charismatics. All of a sudden I was watching grown men on stage screaming about how they physically wrestled with the devil every night, there were tons of theatrics and screaming, I remember feeling so disturbed. I also found it odd that after these almost violent sermons that everyone would return to normal and all the children would start playing in the church halls.

However there was another influence in my life at this time, fantastical children's movies which carried pagan undertones. I remember watching the movie "Legend" directed by Ridley Scott over and over again, it was my favorite. The prologue to the story and the entire story line carried a message which immediately resonated with me, that there was a "balance" to the universe, that the forces of light and dark are best kept in equilibrium and harmony, and when one of these forces overpowers the other, legendary heroes are born in the quest to restore the balance. The filmography was image after image of extremes, white unicorns and dark demonic castles. At the end of the movie good seems to win, but darkness was shown to be ever present, in everyone, creating the tension needed to move the story along, the situation leading to the rise of heroes. Before his final demise, the major antagonist of the story, a devil-like lord, makes it clear that without his darkness the light becomes meaningless, he actually gives the good and the light context, and he makes it valuable.

Another favorite movie of mine was the "Dark Crystal" directed by Jim Henson and Frank Oz. The message of the movie was very similar to that of Legend, the balance, and union of dark and light. The film follows the journey of a creature named Jen as he seeks to find his destiny as the one who would restore the crystal of power and restore order to a broken world. The idea was that there was originally a whole crystal which represented the union of dark and light, good and evil, into a harmonious, perfect and beautiful whole. The crystal was guarded by a race of super beings who contained both good and evil within themselves. They were extremely wise and ruled over a beautiful natural

world.

However, something seemed to have gone wrong and the crystal was shattered, breaking the union of dark and light. With the breaking of the crystal also came the breaking of the super beings, they divided into two separate races. The Skeksis were an evil, power hungry, science minded race who ruled over the land with their cruelty, but they were so exploitative that they were killing off their planet and in the process themselves. Now the other race that came out of the breaking of the crystal were the Mystics, they were very gentle, wise and nature loving, but they were too passive to do anything to thwart the evil Skeksis, and so their goodness was impotent. What I found most interesting was that at the end of the movie, the Mystics do not defeat the Skeksis, but when the main protagonist Jen restores the crystal, the Mystics and the Skeksis merge together and are restored as the previous superbeings that they had once been. Nature and science, power and wisdom recombine and the world is restored to a natural paradise. This message of the union of the opposites, the combination of the whole, this would carry through the rest of my life.

Deeper into Christianity

While the overarching themes of these movies and similar one stirred something inside me, they were eventually phased out as I was brought deeper and deeper into Christianity. More and more I learned that it was not the union of dark and light, but the overcoming of one power over another which would save the world. After the charismatic evangelical churches with all the screaming, came my final Christian home within the Jehovah's Witnesses (JW). The JW sect is extremely fundamentalist, taking a literal interpretation of the bible, they also take great pains to erase all paganism from their culture so as to be pure Christians. Because Christmas, Easter and birthday customs all come from pagan, non-Judean culture, they are forbidden.

Around the age of 9 years old I began intense bible studies with a pair of German Jehovah's Witnesses who taught me the bible from cover to cover, using JW approved learning materials. I was forced over and over again to learn the histories of the Jews of Israel and how it led up to coming Christian messiah of Jesus. I was taught in a very deep and systematic way the predictions and esoteric codes found in the prophetic books such as Daniel and Revelations. Throughout the entire bible, old and new testament, I found a haughty, self-centered, thieving, deceptive, ungrateful, but above all else hateful people.

The Israelites and Christians had one set of main



victims, the pagans and "idolaters". In the bible stories, the Jews of Israel stole the land of Canaan from the pagan Canaanites by use of both force and deceptions, eventually enslaving and exploiting the conquered people. Later Jesus, who was supposedly so full of love, along with his disciples continued to demonize the pagans, seeming to take pleasure in their abjection, equating them with murders and thieves, though it had been Israel who had done all the murdering and thieving. The God of Israel was always destined to overthrow the demonic false religions of the earth, there was nothing to learn from anyone else, and there would be no synthesis, just the god of Israel conquering all others, destroying those humans who refused to follow him.

The hate and stupid cruelty I found in biblical history and morality appeared all around me in my personal life. As a Jehovah's Witness I was more or less socially isolated from the world, taught that nominal Christians were steeped in pagan practices (which they are), and that all other religions were demonized as well, including Hinduism. I remember one lecture about Hinduism which immediately rubbed me the wrong way, we were taught that Hindus were unclean, that they worshiped rats and that their society was stricken with plagues due to their false religion and unclean ways. I really could not formulate at the time why I was upset, but I was angry nonetheless. Jehovah's Witnesses are obsessed with demons, demonology, witchcraft and the occult. In a supposed attempt to keep their people away from paganism, Jehovah's Witnesses constantly focus on identifying all practice and symbols which they feel come from non-Israelite sources, in their quest to purge themselves of paganism they focus on magic and esotericism constantly. As a youth I was constantly bombarded with images of paganism and the occult, always told to avoid these practices as they were the teachings of demons! Hinduism was of course included in this.

Fascination with Paganism

I cannot explain what happened, but I know it arose from constant social and spiritual abuse, always being surrounded by hate and disdain, something inside me began to resonate with the pagans we were trying so hard not to be. I don't know why, but for some reason I have always been attracted to statues and idols, and when the JW's and the bible gleefully spoke of the Canaanite's idols being destroyed, I became very angry. I began to identify with the Canaanites, I hated the invading Israelites and their one hateful, slaving, bloodthirsty and deceptive god. The astrology, magic



and idolatry of the pagans struck me, I felt like I was one of them, even though they only lived inside the bible.

Everything in the bible began to rub me the wrong way and I started my path to "rebellion", which I now know was the beginning of my path to the happiness of Hinduism. I began secretly reading pagan books in local libraries, I found everything I could on the occult, numerology, astrology and pagan lore. I became obsessed with omens and divination, something completely outlawed in biblical morality. I also indulged in my fascination with idols, buying statues of old Greek gods like Venus. As my fascination with paganism and the occult grew, so did the suffocating pressure of my Christian upbringing. Eventually I began snapping at my teachers when they discussed how everyone else, non-Christians, were following false teachings and would not be rewarded by god, I was sick of listening to ugly and hypocritical people carry on with such sanctimony.

Eventually I attached myself to the only organized paganism I could find, and that was "witchcraft". At the age of 13 I announced myself as a "witch" to the JW's. Their response was swift and twisted. I was proclaimed to be "possessed", I was socially isolated and constantly filled with guilt and fear. Old JW women fed me terror stories of young people who dabbled in witchcraft who were now locked up in insane asylums, gnawing at their wrists. Members in my congregation began saying that my presence disturbed them, and so I had to sit in the back of the service hall. The depth and breadth of my abuse I will not go into here, however within some time I caved into pressure, I repented and returned to Christianity, I felt so broken. However, it did not take long for my spirit to begin yearning for freedom again,



and I could not tolerate how they constantly demonized others. The straws began to break when I could no longer listen to these people speak of Hindus and Buddhists like they were people of the dark, I eventually escaped Christianity, a very difficult ordeal which I will write on later.

Quest begins

By the time I was a late teenager I had left Christianity and began embarking on differing ideas. I felt lost, there was a hole in my life, I had lived and breathed biblical morality and prophecy for years, upon dropping it, life felt meaningless and empty. I began to latch on to any and every philosophy I could find, hoping to find a new meaning in life. Over the next several years I became a serious student of and ardent supporter of Communism, than Capitalism, than Atheism, Scientism and countless more. The gulf that was left in my soul from the vacating of Christianity was so deep that no one philosophy could complete me. I began trying to scrape together every ideology and religious practice on earth into a whole that would make me feel complete. I tried calling myself a "pantheist" so I could practice any idea at any time, depending on what seemed to work best. I delved into every paganism on the earth, every political and economic system, but in the end nothing seemed to have it all, no group or idea had grasped the universe and human life in its entirety, and so I eventually fell into nihilism. For many years I began to believe that life had no meaning at all, that there was no real best way to live, and that perhaps it would be best if there were no life at all. Old Christian doubts began to haunt me, at times I thought I had made a huge mistake. Yet I still maintained an interest in paganism, the occult, and other social philosophies, I was always involved in something new, I was always trying to bring everything together into an idea which covered everything. I needed science and mysticism, the rational and irrational, capitalistic-communism, like the stories of "Legend" and the "Dark Crystal" I needed the union of the opposites.

Years went by, I was a vegetarian, into animal rights, looking for spirituality in biology, getting interested in transhumanism, reading about the "New World Order", going to school in the sciences, darting from one book or group to the others, falling into despair and depression in between. This continued for a long time, until one day I was in college and I saw a flier for a Hindu meetup. It was odd, for I had been interested in every single idea on this earth but Hinduism was the last thing I had ever thought of looking into. Almost everything I had ever seen about Hinduism made it look weak and dirty. To be

honest when I thought of Hinduism I thought of sickly people seated in wreckage, worshiping cows and being ruled over by anyone and everyone, it was really not something I had been interested in.

Curiosity in Hinduism

However, it had just so happened that I had recently seen something about Hinduism which had gotten me curious. In my ideological travels I had come across a video produced by a Christian evangelist named Caryl Matrisciana, the title of the work was "Gods of the New Age". Matrisciana had been raised a Christian in India and was now spreading word across the West of the "dangers" of Hinduism. While I now know her portrayal of Hinduism is completely inaccurate, she made Hinduism seem like it had a "dangerous mind", the very idea that it was even capable of being dangerous made me think that Hinduism must at least have some kind of substance. I was interested in learning more about these "secretive" dangerous Hindus, I attended the meeting.

The college Hindus had arranged for a pundit (Hindu priest) to come teach a few lessons on basic Hinduism. The pundit from Trinidad broke down Hinduism very simply and scientifically. From my first lesson in Hinduism I learned the basic idea that there is some power (Brahman) which cannot be completely defined by humans, this power animates the universe. Brahman is the electricity which lights up the bulbs, and everything humans can perceive is like a light bulb connected to the power source. Hinduism is a quest to better understand the power that animates the cosmos, it tries to lead our minds to higher knowledge (Veda) through rituals, philosophy and symbolism. The power that moves the universe is so great and complex, humans cannot completely know it, but we can better grasp its lower manifestations, we can learn the rules which govern our world, physically, socially, economically and ethically. Because the ultimate nature of the power source (Brahman) is unknown, Hinduism has developed a myriad of interrelated paths which allows the practitioner to search for truth in the universe freely, without becoming detached and lost from community. Whether your path is theist, purely philosophical, ritualistic or practical (yoga/meditation), you remain connected to others on the same path, we can all observe each other, learn from one another, and grow together, without becoming overly competitive and insular.

Vedas

While eternal knowledge could never be contained in a book, Hinduism is woven together by the Vedas, sets of hymns which personify different energy types and concepts like love, war, law and family into gods who



can be understood literally or figuratively. These gods, manifestations of concepts and energies, are not "supernatural" in their essence, they are higher beings using the same "rta" (natural law of science) as we humans, they are simply more advanced and enlightened, they are closer to the knowledge of the godhead than we are. Hinduism is always inviting us to become more like the gods, to become closer to the "Veda", the source of eternal universal knowledge. Why couldn't these concepts be simply stated, why do they need to be wrapped in mythology some might ask. Well pure rationalism and science cannot explain a cause which is always one step ahead of our intellect, we need a system which is flexible enough to envelope science and rationalism without becoming overly constrained by the limits of the human mind. Hindu legends, rituals and practices allow us to explore the universe unbound by our rational minds, however when we return we are asked to go about the task of implementing the abstract into the real and concrete.

Throughout Vedic literature, again and again we see that we are asked to organize the physical world in such a way which allows our society to better access transcendent consciousness, only so that these new ideas can be physically implemented on earth to bring us to the next level. For example, through experimentation, Vedic society has found that it is best not to focus all of your time and energy on liberating oneself from physical, mental, emotional and spiritual chains (Moksha). Even though ultimate freedom and power comes when we are no longer slavishly dependent on

anything, we must take our human nature into account. We all have wants and desires which control us to some extent, and to deny this reality would be to ignore a natural law. It would have a weakening effect. And so Hindu society does not ask us to focus only on transcendent liberation (Moksha), we are also encouraged to seek wealth (Artha), pleasure (Kama) and perform duties to our society (Dharma). How is anyone supposed to focus on obtaining higher levels of consciousness when they are starving, uncomfortable and no one is doing anything to properly run the society?

So then Hinduism has us beg the question, what is the best way to go about gaining wealth (Artha), pleasure (Kama) and performing our social duties (Dharma) so that we may eventually obtain higher levels of physical, intellectual and spiritual freedom (Moksha)? Hinduism is a democracy where groups are encouraged to socially, religiously and spiritually experiment, yet remain bound together under a pantheon of personified deities so that we do not become too scattered or disconnected.

Because of this freedom, Hinduism has seen the rise and fall of countless philosophical, theological and practical movements. Those strains of Vedic inspired thought which prove to be most stable over time are incorporated into Hinduism as a common theme, but if circumstances change, there are always new experiment which can be done to find the most appropriate path for the times. For example, in the sphere of economics (Artha) and duty to society (Dharma), Hindu experimentation has found that societies are most stable where each occupation is owned and operated by





communities of related individuals. Ancient Europe once operated under the Guild system, extended families and community networks ran certain trades such as stone masonry or flour grinding (in Hinduism Guilds are called Jatis). Community based ownership of a profession creates a stable economic system which is by default dedicated to uplifting the community which operates it. The Western world is now beginning to see the pitfalls of pure Capitalism and Communism, neither system is able to provide economic growth and at the same time communal solidarity. However this is not to say that Hindu economic theory has nothing to learn from its competitors, Hinduism is not afraid to look for better ways to do things.

Just as Hinduism has developed a major yet flexible economic system through trial and error, it has done the same, philosophically and religiously. While the cosmology of the Vedas is highly condensed and there is no mention of any use of idols or dancing in worship, later Hindu saviors of Vedic civilization realized that during modern times people need more detailed explanations. They also need more stimulation to keep them engaged in deeper philosophical thought. Vedic scholars looked around them, they used alluring tribal customs and practices to keep the common people focused on more lofty ideals, thus Hinduism saw the induction of Vedic infused idolatry and ritual music in order to keep the masses engaged. Hindus were also not afraid to create atheistic interpretations of Vedic theology. When your society could disintegrate over disagreements between hyper-rationalists and theists, why not create separate atheist schools of philosophy to smooth over the divide? We don't all have to be best friends but we don't need to fight. Now this is not to say that every new invention or adaptation will last forever, perhaps idolatry will become a burden. Rituals will be too cumbersome, scientific discourse too boring, and thus what was useful for maintaining the civilization in one era becomes obsolete in the next. However the general system of differentiated polytheism (each god an aspect of the unknown power) remains a stalwart in the upholding of human civilization. It is this mix of fluidity and consistency that has allowed Hinduism to become the oldest living society on earth.

Embraced Hinduism

After leaving Christianity, I mentally searched the entire earth, looking for a system that was comprehensive enough to fulfill every human desire, a system that was immutable but flexible, a system that was intelligent enough to be scientific but humble enough to not be confined to human rationalism alone, a

system that could provide a defined but adaptive economic, social and moral ethos, and I finally found it in Hinduism. I can say that it really only took one lesson and some internet searching for me to realize I had finally found what I had been looking for. It has been 5 years since I officially adopted the eternal religion and called myself a Hindu, and I have not been able to think my way out of Hinduism yet, and I am certain I never will. Now before I get into my move into Hindu activism, I would like you to remember my early fascination with uniting the light and the dark, my love for the message behind movies like "Legend" and the "Dark Crystal, how heroes rise in the quest to balance these forces. One of the cleverest ways Hinduism has found to keep its message alive has been to adapt Vedic concepts into story forms known as epics. These epics keep the civilization captivated by use of exciting narratives incorporating romance, danger and magic, all the while imbuing deeper philosophical concepts about life and the universe, forcing the reader to think deeper than they would naturally. One such epic is the Ramayana.

The Ramayana tells the story of a young prince named Rama who is banished from his kingdom through the jealousies of his stepmother. Accompanied by his beloved wife Sita, and his loyal brother Lakshmana, Rama goes out into the forest, his destiny ominous and unknown. What is necessary to turn this plot around? What needs to happen to prevent Rama from returning to his kingdom after his exile, an old beggar with no name, no youth and no reason to ever further mention his name? What will make Rama a hero? Only the triumph over a darker force could raise Rama to the status of hero and make his return to his kingdom worthwhile. Rama finds his necessity to become a hero when Sita is kidnapped by a demonic king named Ravana. Sita is whisked away by Ravana in his flying chariot to his kingdom of Lanka. Now Rama must rescue his wife, but first he must travel to Lanka, and in the process raise an army to defeat the powerful king Ravana. Of course Rama goes through a series of trials where he meets several different races of people, often helping them, endearing them to him, and finally gaining their loyalty as his soldiers who are willing to follow him to recapture his wife. As everyone might expect, eventually Rama fulfills the mighty task of defeating the powerful demon king Ravana, rescuing Sita, and returning to his nation a mighty and renowned warrior.

Yes, Ravana did play the part of the necessary evil, the catalyst which allowed Rama to rise as a hero, but what happened to Ravana? In the traditional Judeo-



Christian ethos, Ravana would be written off as pure evil, a satanic energy who was defeated, vanquished, caste into hell or death, with no real redeeming qualities. However, Ravana's role in Hinduism is much more nuanced than this. In the Ramayana and accompanying lore, we find that despite his arrogance and domineering, Ravana was actually a strong devotee of the god Shiva (lord of necessary destruction), he was also extremely scholarly, an inventor and a good ruler loved by his people. Now what did this intellectual, spiritual and military titan think when Rama was coming to defeat him? Who is this, I will crush him! However, as the battle continues and Rama's true strength and godly power is revealed, Ravana begins to realize that Rama is no ordinary man but is an incarnation of the god Vishnu (social preservation), sent to earth on a divine mission to restore virtue in his society; remember Rama was exiled in the first place over jealousy and family squabbles. So what happens when Ravana realizes that Rama is really a god-man sent on a divine mission? Does Ravana back down, does he retreat, and does he surrender? No, Ravana goes out to fight Rama one last time, knowing he will lose, but he does it to give Rama his victory, his triumph over "evil". Ravana makes sure Rama becomes a hero while restoring the powers of good and evil.

For his final wisdom and sacrifice, this demonic king is not sent to any fiery hell but obtains moksha, liberation, and is rewarded with heavenly bliss in another realm. After reading this epic and absorbing its message, I fell in love with Hinduism. Later, in Puranic legend I was to find demons who worshiped gods, gods who fell from grace, scholars who become thieves and thieves who become kings. In Hinduism the light and the dark intermingle, creating a story where heroes are created and lessons are learned. In Hinduism this is called Lila, the divine play, the story that the gods, heroes and mortals are all living together, where good and evil meet, creating the whirlwind which lifts us to higher levels of understanding. This was the message I always knew was true and had found in the pagan inspired children's cinema of the West.

Why I Became a Hindu Activist

Now that I have gone through this long explanation I will quickly explain why I became a Hindu activist, working to expose the atrocities committed against my people by our enemies, Islamic radicals especially. You can imagine that after all these long lonely years, thinking that the greatness of ancient pagan civilization was not only lost, but was never great enough to have survived in the first place, that when I found the living breathing tradition of Hinduism, which far surpassed all the ideas of past and present combined, I was amazed and overjoyed. I

immediately felt at home with the Hindu people I met and quickly made infinite friends and acquaintance. I attended Hindu temples where I found gods with whom I resonated so deeply, their stories and backgrounds were as complex as myself and more so, yet still so relatable and easy to understand. As I have always done with everything I threw myself deeply into the Hindu community, including online forums where I met Hindus from all around the world, places like India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

It was at this time that I began to be barraged by insanely horrible stories about the plight of Hindus and other minorities living in the Islamic States of Pakistan and Bangladesh which border India's northern borders. Islam, like Judeo-Christianity, is based upon the supremacy of a "one true god" who has all the pagan "idolaters" of his region slaughtered and declares that eventually his religion will reign supreme. The Koran is similar to the Bible in many ways. While there are obvious differences between Christianity and Islam, I began to notice similarities between the two, albeit Islam seemed to be far more barbaric. At first I could not believe the stories of kidnappings, rapes, murders, forced conversion and the legal oppression of Hindus and other non-Muslims under these Islamic regimes, it all seemed too heinous, but I eventually came to see through personal experience (LONNNNG STORY) that Islam was simply another cruel oppressor of human progress, and this version was attacking the precious gem of Hinduism I had just found after so many years of searching. I quickly vowed to do everything in my power to lift Hindus and the rest of humanity from this horrendous burden. I could not bear to lose Hinduism to another darkness, there is nothing left and I have nowhere else to go. Hinduism has become a lifeline, my fate is bound with its fate and the fate of our people. Hinduism will certainly survive and resurge as a global empire, however the actions we take today will determine whether this glorious future is realized now or in a future beyond our time, as for me I need it now, I cannot wait.

About the Author

Vincent Bruno,

has adopted the eternal religion (Sanatan Dharma) and has been engaged in activist work for more than five years. He is the president of the "Justice For Hindus" organization, He has recently begun writing on a more personal level so as to flush out bigger ideas and give insight into what makes a Westerner become a Hindu.

Source: hindusentinel.com/20161218/became-hindu-activist/



Mutual Acceptance - not Tolerance, is the need of the hour

By Dr. Sheenu Srinivasan

For centuries the word tolerance has been interpreted as a virtuous quality. The dictionary definition of tolerance is one's "ability or willingness to tolerate something, in particular the existence of opinions or behavior that one does not necessarily agree with." Is it a good quality? Of course it is! Does it work? It has generally not; in the context of enhancing mutual understanding among people and making the world a better place. It probably brings some satisfaction to the one who is tolerating but it does precious little to the other. Let us examine the concept, especially in the context of our theme of connecting with the community. To me it means that I have no objection to your way of life, your beliefs, your choice of god and your mode of worship. My question is: who am I to judge you or your views? Tolerating puts us on two different planes - not on the same plane and that is a problem.

Tolerating you is simply to let you be. My wise friend, the late Dr. Frank Lockard, in trying to teach me to be careful with what I touch in the woods taught me what you all know: "Leaves three, leave be", i.e. do not touch but simply leave them alone as it pertained to poison ivy! But people are neither poison nor ivy!

The attitude of tolerance towards another person is an easy one if one wants to practice it. Easier, by far, than acceptance. Acceptance requires understanding. Understanding requires study, capacity to: listen, analyze, discuss, compare and contrast - clearly a harder approach. However that effort on your part to understand, for example, me, may allow a chance for me to do the same about you and may possibly lead to a change in my views and my preferences to be more like yours. Or - it may not. But the effort alone brings us together and closer, as it demonstrates a clear genuine interest on one's part, in regard to the other person's. If instead, you tolerate the other person, it then becomes a one way street! Mutual acceptance through understanding

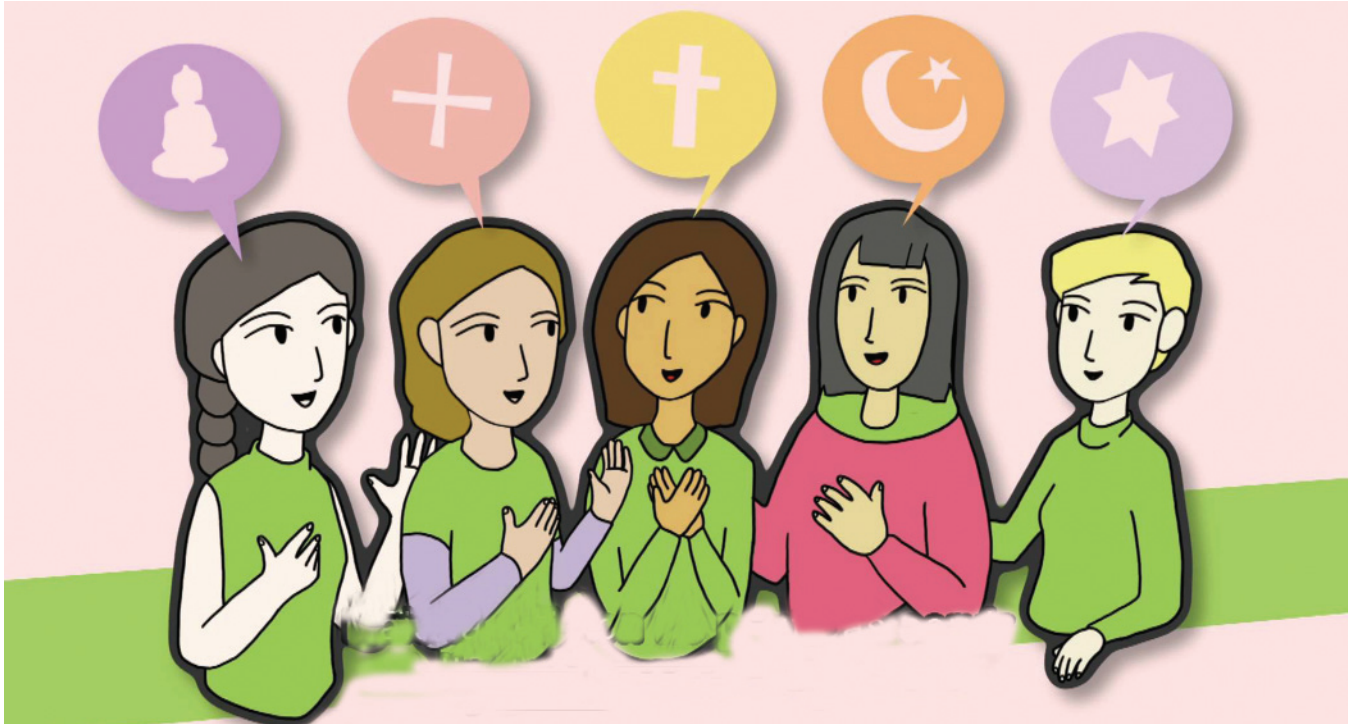
however brings us on the same plane and enhances our relationship, and now it is a two way street - an equation.

Most of us have learned to be tolerant and that is admirable. It is necessary but not sufficient. It is a first step and may be used to climb higher to the harder concept of acceptance. I know it is an additional burden and will require investment of time and thought.

Religious leaders in the past have talked about the concept of a universal religion. The most eloquent expression of that came on September 19, 1893 from Swami Vivekananda in his Chicago address when he said, that such a religion "must be one which will have no location in place or time; which will be infinite, like the god it will preach, and whose sun will shine upon the followers of Krishna and of Christ, on saints and sinners, alike. It will not be Brahminical or Buddhist, Christian or Mohammedan, which in its catholicity will embrace in its infinite arms, and find a place for every human being."

We all know that this great concept has not come about in practice. It is clearly an ideal and remains so. It's not practical but I think it's not even necessary as a formal structured organization. What we do here in Glastonbury each year comes close to this concept as we listen to other views from other faiths and enjoy them. Perhaps we need to do this more frequently not just at Thanksgiving and perhaps less formally. As I said before, it demands the precious resource of time but it is worth it. I see no better alternative as we deliberate and pray tonight for a caring community and a peaceful world.

Dialog, not monolog is the key. Look around any conflict around the world. If you trace back any of them, it likely leads to a world unresponsive to a simple, normal and natural desire i.e. the cry 'Talk To Me!' People want to be heard, respected, understood, accepted, appreciated and even admired, if we can. But a dialog is essential for that to happen. What is the first sign of trouble in a relationship? The dreaded phrase: We Need to Talk!!



So let us continue the dialog. We may even form a group among ourselves, travel together and attend a service in a church or a mosque or a puja ceremony in a temple. For example you will learn if you were to visit a Hindu temple, there is no such thing as a sermon! If you probe deeper into their other rituals such as for example a wedding you will be surprised to find parallels between traditions! I have. The emphasis then becomes learning when we explore that way.

We may even be able to exploit modern technology to skype, so we can view and listen by signing on to a service in a church different from our own, and observe, learn and appreciate without compromising our own belief system. We may thus skype together! This would enhance our understanding of the other and to appreciate their approach, even as we adhere to our own approaches. Mutual acceptance, appreciation and adherence.

A few years ago I wrote a visitors' manual called Pada Yatra (Prayer Walk) for those who visit the Hindu temple in Middletown. I was inspired by the Christian tradition of the stations of cross. Each "station" in this manual became a sanctum for a deity representing the One in that form. At the end of that book on page 51, I said "We sincerely hope and pray that as you complete the tour, you will go home with the faith in your own faith reinforced".

So the concept of mutually accepting and appreciating need not be feared. In the process we will discover how connected we truly are. We are a large family in this home called earth. We just saw the interest

in distant countries around the world about our election - not only among leaders but also among people. Why should they care? There are, of course, selfish interests. But, by and large it is that powerful, unrecognized element called connectivity that is playing its part. Let us acknowledge it, nourish it and spread it. And unleash that power of connectivity.

It should work because the holiest of holy scriptures of the Hindus - the Vedas - declared over 5000 years ago: (*ekam sat vipraa: bahudaa vadanti*) : Truth is one but the wise express that truth in different ways. Truth is indeed one! That shall serve as the basis for mutual acceptance, appreciation even as we adhere to our own beliefs.

* These remarks were made at the Interfaith Thanksgiving Service held at the First Church of Christ, Glastonbury, CT, November 22, 2016, 7 PM.

Dr. Srinivasan's

recent books include: *The Bhagavad Gita: A Thread through the Eighteen Gems*", *Yaksha Prashna, Hinduism for Dummies* and *Vedic Wedding: Origins, Tradition and Practice*.

By Maria Wirth

When I was in high school in Germany, I had a recurring fantasy. I imagined one day that the news anchor announces that science has found proof that God exists. This was at a time when doubts started creeping in whether it was true what I had believed so strongly in childhood, and such an announcement, I felt, would settle the issue once for all.

In the 1960s, when science made great strides for example in space exploration. Yuri Gagarin, the first astronaut in space, allegedly said after returning to earth that he had not seen any God out there. His statement did not carry too much weight, as he was Russian, and we Germans generally did not trust any Russian during the height of the cold war.

Still, for those of us who knew a little about history and were interested in science, 'religion' - which meant Christianity in Germany - came under scrutiny

This claim seemed to be more of a tool to frighten people into falling in line with the doctrine. Furthermore, why would the creator of all human beings punish the majority of them with hell because they believed in another religion? Why did this God not let everyone be born in a Christian family if he wants everyone to believe in the Bible? Or be born into a Muslim family if he wanted all to follow the Quran?

It did not make sense and I was not interested anymore in religion, even more so when I read in the library of my uncle, who was a priest, about the violent history of the Church and its suppression of scientific knowledge. Can anyone imagine the pain of a scientist who knew for sure that the earth goes around the sun but had to keep quiet because it was politically incorrect to have such a (correct) view? How painful must it have been for Galileo, for example, to realize that the Church was the sole arbiter of what is true, even if it is clearly



SCIENCE

AND

RELIGION

and did not come out of it unscathed. My elder sister was one of the first in our small town to officially reject her membership in the Church, undoubtedly influenced by her husband, who did so as well. My mother was very concerned - not so much that my sister would now burn in hell for all eternity, but about what 'the people will think'. I, only 15 at that time, got the message not to follow suit.

It was a big dilemma. I intuitively believed in God, a supreme, all-mighty Being, that is the cause of our existence and somehow 'knows' what we think, feel and do. But, I could not reconcile what religion told me about this God. I could not believe that he is so unfair, even cruel, that he would let me burn forever in hell only because I had skipped Sunday mass.

Now, being older, this fear had left me. Eternal hell after a life of a few years simply did not make sense.

not true?

Fortunately, courageous men like Voltaire and others struggled hard and succeeded to restrict the power of religion. Secularism was introduced, blasphemy laws repealed, and now science flourished in Europe. However, there was no connection to religion. Religion did not foster science. Science flourished in spite of religion, not because of it. Or did it?

Strangely, there is no clear-cut definition of 'religion'. The common denominator is usually that religion is about the belief in and worship of the Divine, God or whatever name one chooses. Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism are the major religions. Minor ones are Jainism, Sikhism, Shintoism, Taoism, etc. Yet why are all these different traditions put into one basket and called 'religion'? Is this justified?



'Religion' comes from Latin and means 'to bind'. It was first used for the Catholic Church. Later, when the Turks were at the gates of Vienna, Islam was also called 'religion'.

Since Christianity and Islam both have fixed doctrines contained in certain books and both claim that only their doctrine is true, and whoever does not believe this will burn in hell, it can be safely assumed that the term religion indicated that the followers were bound to the exclusivist doctrine of Christianity or Islam respectively - over many centuries, even at the threat of death, if they tried to loosen the bond. They had to 'religiously' stick to the tenets given by the clergy, like going to mass on Sunday or praying five times a day at specified times.

In exchange for this loyalty to the doctrine, the believers were left in peace from blasphemy laws and promised heaven after death. Further they were assured that they are on the 'right' path when there are 'wrong' paths as well. In short, God loves them, but not the others.

Where does Hinduism fit in in this scenario? Actually, it doesn't. It does not bind its followers to a fixed doctrine. It not only allows a free enquiry, but also encourages it. No blind belief in unverifiable dogmas is demanded. Yet in the 19th century, the term religion was being used for the ancient traditions from India, China and Japan, as well. And intriguingly, all those traditions got an 'ism' added: Hindu-ism, Buddh-ism, Tao-ism, Jain-ism...

Usually an -ism is associated with a narrow doctrine, developed by one person like Marxism, Stalinism, Maoism or has otherwise a negative image like Nazism or "Islam-ism", which is meant to be seen as different and worse than Islam. That Juda-ism, which always was at the receiving end of Christianity and Islam, also got an -ism just would confirm that the -ism is not as 'noble' as the ending of the two "only true" religions.

Did the west try to obfuscate the fact that the Eastern traditions, foremost of all the Indian, had profound philosophies at their core and portray them also as 'belief-systems' with unverifiable dogmas at their core? For millennia these eastern traditions have lived harmoniously together without fighting each other but rather debating each other, in stark contrast to Christianity and Islam.

One thing is clear: Christianity/Islam on one side and India's traditions on the other are two very different categories:

One group makes unverifiable claims about the truth, demands blind belief in those claims and threatens with

dire consequences, while the other group freely enquires into the truth by inner exploration, debates, guided by the ancient texts and saints who had experienced being one with all.

For one group the goal of life is to reach heaven and avoid hell after death by religiously sticking to the doctrine which is taught. The other group sees the goal in realizing the blissful truth that we are one with all in the depth of our own being while we are alive.

One group depends on conversion and indoctrination to gain followers, while Hinduism is Sanatana (eternal) Dharma (righteous way of living).

Every Christian or Muslim had forefathers who were not Christians or Muslims. At the start, often the sword was used to convert, as the 'truth' of the dogmas was not self-evident and even went against common sense. Later, indoctrination of children and blasphemy laws kept the followers subdued.

The reason why conversion is necessary for the dogmatic religions is simple:

Suppose a community on some island is completely unconnected to the modern world. They will never become Christians or Muslims because they need to be told a story from the past about God sending his only son to earth 2000 years ago, or about Allah sending Mohammed as his last prophet some 1400 years ago.

Yet if these islanders deeply enquired into what is true and how to live a righteous life, they might come to similar conclusions like Sanatana Dharma, as it does not depend on some event in history. It requires deep enquiry into That what truly is - eternally.

Yet let me go back to my personal discovery of a connection between science and 'religion'.

Meanwhile, I had stopped going to mass. When I told my mother, her reaction was, "And what if you go to hell?" "I won't go to hell", I replied. If there is a God, he surely won't be so petty-minded to insist on a specific way of worshipping him. I also had had some inkling that indeed, there may be a God. An article on modern physics had explained that all is basically one energy and the different forms in this world are not really solid or separate entities. Strangely, this made sense and I felt: If there is a God then that one energy must be him.

Yet in the 1970s, we students at Hamburg University were so 'modern and progressive' that we would have rather bitten our tongues than admit that we believed in God. Yet it was ok to be interested in Buddhism or Transcendental Meditation (TM) or Bhagawan Rajneesh, as Osho was called then.

Even more than TM, the Hare Krishna 'sect' was demeaned and ridiculed by the media. Their followers



were portrayed as weird, mad chaps. Hinduism already had a bad image. I had learnt in primary school that it was about a terrible caste system and untouchables. Now the media did their best to make it look even worse.

In December 1979 I planned to go to Australia with a stopover in India. This stopover became a turning point in my life. It lasted 37 years. Ironically, the reason why I stayed on in India was because of the much maligned Hinduism. I realized the amazing depth and breadth of Hinduism and wondered, why it was portrayed so wrongly as a primitive, oppressive religion when it is actually the best option for mankind. The Dalai Lama said that India has great potential to help the world. He is right and the negative propaganda in the west is wrong. Hinduism is least dogmatic and closest to the truth. If it binds at all, it binds or rather unites (yog) the individual with the Divine.

Back to my stopover. I visited the southern tip of India, Kanya Kumari. A little distance off the coast on a huge rock, there is a memorial for Swami Vivekananda. At a bookstall there, I bought 'Jnana Yoga'. I had not heard of Swami Vivekananda, but wanted to learn about Indian thought while in India.

Swami Vivekananda had swum to this rock to meditate in December 1892. His guru, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, had died in Calcutta six years earlier. The young man had realized that under British rule his countrymen had purposely been cut off from their culture. He wanted to wake them up, and give them back their self-respect and pride in their Hindu tradition.

On this rock, he decided to participate at the World Congress of Religions in Chicago in 1893, and present Advaita Vedanta, one of the highest flowerings among the different Indian philosophical systems. Advaita

Vedanta is explained in the Upanishads, the last part (=anta) of the Vedas, and postulates that essentially, everything is a Whole (a-dwaita = not two).

Swami Vivekananda became the star of the World Congress. He got a standing ovation, and was asked to give a lecture tour in the US. He was sought after by influential persons, including scientists like Tesla. But the Christians went after him. In his own words at a lecture at the Victoria Hall in Madras, after coming back to India, he said, "There is not one black lie imaginable that the Christian missionaries did not invent against me.

They blackened my character from city to city, poor and friendless though I was in a foreign country. They tried to oust me from every house and to make every man who became my friend my enemy. They tried to starve me out."

Why did the Christians do this? Did they fear that people would realize that *Advaita Vedanta* made far more sense than their dogmatic belief-system?

I read 'Jnana Yoga', and it was fascinating. Swami Vivekananda expressed clearly what I vaguely had felt to be true. For example, that all is interconnected or rather: ONE. Everything in this creation including ourselves is permeated by the same great intelligence, like waves are permeated by the same ocean. The waves may be convinced that they are separate from the ocean as they have a distinct form and name. But ultimately all the waves are nothing but the one great ocean and nothing is lost when their form is lost. Similarly, though we may consider our person as separate from others, in truth we are the one consciousness and nothing of substance is lost when form and name are lost.

Further, Swami Vivekananda claimed that the so called reality is not really real. It is a sense deception, in a similar way, as at dusk a rope is mistakenly seen as a snake, even though in reality there is only a rope. Truly true, he claimed, is our inner being (Atman) that permeates everything and makes all appearances miraculously shine forth. It is infinite, eternal. It is not an object that can be seen with the eyes or thought of with the mind.

"Brahman is not what the eyes can see but That whereby the eyes can see. Brahman is not what the mind can think but That whereby the mind can think..." declares the Kena Upanishad. It is however possible to



be Brahman. Rather, we are it already - "Ayam Atman Brahman" (the individual consciousness is one with the universal consciousness) is one of the Mahavakyas (great utterances) of Vedanta.

Now this ocean analogy of all being one sounded almost like that article on modern physics which I had read in high school. How come? Did the scientists discover this independently or were their theories inspired by the Vedas? Had the scientists reflected on the profound insights of the Indian rishis?

Indeed this had been the case. The great scientists who were responsible for replacing Newton's paradigm of a universe full of separate 'things' with an interconnected, homogeneous Whole were inspired by Vedanta: Heisenberg, Schroedinger, Pauli, Einstein, Oppenheimer, Tesla and others, all knew about and reflected on India's ancient wisdom.

In 1982, an international conference on the "convergence of ancient wisdom and modern science" was held in Mumbai and I wrote about it for a German magazine. The program for the conference explained that India was purposely chosen as the venue, as the scientific theories propounded were based on ancient Indian insights. This was as explicit as it could get: Indian wisdom helped scientists to formulate their theories.

Fritjof Capra, Rupert Sheldrake, Karl Pribram and other scientists explained that new research in physics, biology, neurology and other subjects clearly pointed to a convergence between ancient wisdom and modern science. Scientists, while searching for the substance of things, had stumbled upon a homogeneous ONE energy. Matter and energy are interchangeable and the three dimensional space and the linear time have become the four dimensional space-time-continuum that is beyond human imagination. There are no separate objects or separate existences. Everything is related and is in perpetual movement. Fritjof Capra likened it to Shiva Nataraj - the dancing Shiva.

So it was now scientifically approved that our senses deceive us and that nothing that the senses perceive truly exists. (In tune with the ancient Indian concept of Maya.) And science is considered as the highest authority regarding the truth. Is this view justified?

Psychology also got a major facelift at the conference thanks to transpersonal psychology. It was a new branch that was based on the Hindu concept of Atman - the transpersonal or transcendental essence in all human beings. The core of Vedanta are the four Mahavakyas of the Upanishads, which proclaim that Atman (the individual consciousness) is one with Brahman (the

universal consciousness), like in "Ayam Atman Brahman".

Finally Sanatana Dharma got its due, I felt. The comforting knowledge of unity would surely not stay only in the heads of some scientists but would influence the lives of the common people. After all, according to Hinduism, the goal of life is to realize what we truly are - not a separate person but Satchitananda, - blissful awareness.

My optimism was wrong.

If anything, there were even greater attempts to hide the profound philosophy and the contribution of India to science since the early 1980s and to prevent the common man from appreciating the Hindu way of life.

Let's take transcendental psychology. At the conference in 1982, Swami Muktananda gave a presentation of the non-dual tradition of Kashmir Shaivism. The participants were taken to his ashram in Ganeshpuri. It was not made a secret that he was the guru of Christina and Stanislav Groff, who organized the conference on behalf of the Association of Transpersonal Psychotherapy.

Yet today, in the internet age, Wikipedia says about "transpersonal psychology" at the start:

"Amongst the thinkers who are held to have set the stage for transpersonal studies are William James, Carl Jung, Robert Assagioli and Abraham Maslow. Commentators also mention the psychedelic movement, the psychological study of religion, parapsychology, and the interest in Eastern spiritual systems and practices, as influences that shaped the early field of transpersonal psychology."

Not a word about India. Sanatana Dharma or Hinduism, which deserved to be mentioned before all other contributors, is missing. The long Wikipedia piece ends with a revealing remark:

"According to Cunningham, transpersonal psychology has been criticized by some Christian authors as being 'a mishmash of 'New Age' ideas that offer an alternative faith system to vulnerable youths who turn their backs on organized religion (Adeney, 1988)".

Those Christian authors do not offer arguments to rebut the new (ancient) theory of a transpersonal self but call it names: "mishmash of new age ideas". They fear that vulnerable youth will turn their back on organized religion.

Why do they threat this scenario? Obviously they do not even try to evaluate whether the 'I'-feeling could indeed be transpersonal and the same in all: whether the new theory could be closer to the truth is not an issue for



them. Loyalty to the 'revealed truth' overrides it. The mind is stuck in a straitjacket.

A pious Christian cannot allow himself to think freely. The Christian doctrine is the unquestionable truth for him. Of course this applies not only to authors but also to scientists. There may be self-censorship regarding the theories they propose.

Can a pious Christian archaeologist even consider that human civilization started millions of years ago? How would he explain that God sent the Bible so late to humankind? He would be in serious trouble. A genuine dialogue between science and religion within his mind cannot happen. A Hindu in contrast would have no problem; on the contrary, he is encouraged to think in huge timeframes. Even one mahayuga (cycle of the four yugas) lasts 4,32 million years and there are many much greater cycles.

Could Schroedinger, Heisenberg, Einstein and others have pushed the frontiers of science and even done away with the reality of individual persons if they had been pious Christians? Probably not.

Yet strangely, even today western scientists consciously or unconsciously close their eyes to the huge contributions of India to science. For most of them, the world ends in Greece.

In an interview with National Geographic in 2015, the Nobel Prize-winning theoretical physicist Steven Weinberg talked about great scientists. He went back to Archimedes, Aristotle, Ptolemy, Galileo, Newton and Leibniz, but not a word about India. For example, that the Rig Veda, the most ancient scripture in the world, in 10.22.14 already stated that the earth goes around the sun, yet Copernicus is credited with this discovery. Or that the Rishis had estimated the age of the universe correctly. Is Weinberg ignorant about those contributions? Why would he not mention for example the Baudhyana sutras which contained the Pythagoras Theorem long before Pythagoras was born, or Aryabhatta who was a path-breaking mathematician and Astronomer of the 5th century CE? Why are Indians not credited with the work they did, but their insights were often lifted and appeared under western or Arabic names? The infinity Foundation is documenting the Indian knowledge of science and technology in 20 volumes and substantiated many such cases.

Al Jazeera aired a documentary on the great Muslim scientists recently, yet if one looks closer, the source of many of the inventions those scientists are credited with, for example the decimal system or algebra, is India. In India even the steel (Wootz) of the famed Damascus sword was produced.

Dogmatic religions never fostered science. What sadder example can there be than the burning of the great Nalanda University by Islamic marauders in 1193 AD. The collected treasure of the best minds was turned into ash and thousands of students were killed. Voltaire rightly said, "Those who can make you believe in absurdities can make you commit atrocities."

Yet times are changing. The awareness that we would be better off without dogmatic religions is growing. Christianity is losing its hold over the mind of its followers in the west. And Islam is more and more scrutinized, too, in spite of media trying its best to out 'Islamophobia' as unacceptable.

But let's find out why science flourished in India in ancient times and why Sanatana Dharma did not obstruct it. The reason is simple: Sanatana Dharma or Hinduism is based on science, or rather, it is science. Veda (from Sanskrit) means knowledge and science (from Latin) means also knowledge. Science is defined as knowledge gained from observation and experimentation. The rishis added one more method - knowledge gained from inner exploration. This inner exploration or meditation lifts Hindu Dharma actually above science, and the arrogance which scientists often show towards Hindu practices is unwarranted and stems from ignorance.

"Science is also a religion. It also depends on belief", a friend who holds a doctorate in physics, once said provocatively. He has a point. The scientists believe in theories that seem to explain what they observe. Yet they don't know for sure whether they are true. For example mainstream scientists still hold that consciousness is a kind of by-product of the brain. They may have to revise this theory ultimately.

Maybe one could say that science is in between Christianity and Islam on one side and Sanatana Dharma on the other. It is not rigid as the dogmatic religions are, because it is open to change if new insights emerge. But it is lacking the most important knowledge - the knowledge of That which alone is true.

Scientists have discovered the oneness of all, but for them the oneness is dead, without life. The rishis have discovered the oneness many thousand years earlier, but for them this oneness is alive and knows itself. So far the rishis have never been proven wrong in areas which were tested, like the age of the universe or even the distance between the sun and the earth.

Would it not make sense for modern scientists to take their claim seriously that the underlying all-pervading, pure consciousness - Satchitananda - is the eternal truth, and names and forms are more like virtual reality. The truth is not something abstract, cold, and theoretical. It is



the conscious, loving essence in all.

It follows that everything is sacred, everything is permeated by Satchitananda. So is it really so incomprehensible when Hindus worship rivers, trees, the sun or the cow who gives so much to human beings and herself is so peaceful with the most beautiful eyes? Is it not arrogance and hypocrisy on the part of western scientists, when they rush to debunk as superstitious unexplained happenings, which Hindus consider as wondrous, yet keep mum when miracles are ascribed to Christian 'saints' like to Mother Teresa recently?

Are Hindus not far more on target when they see Divinity in all? Is it not true? Is it 'more true' to see the sun only as a ball of helium? Or water only as H₂O? The Aerospace Institute in Stuttgart conducted research which indicated that water has memory. Does it not mean it is alive?

Or take the cow: Now scientists discovered that the indigenous Indian cows give better milk than for example Jersey cows. Traces of gold were confirmed in the milk of Indian cows which is useful in Ayurveda. Swami Ramdev is setting up special cow research institutes, to confirm the long held Indian beliefs about the usefulness of even the cow urine for example. How long will western scientists mock Indians worshipping the cow or using her urine as medicine?

Great scientists like Einstein did not demean spiritual practices but were aware of the huge amount of knowledge that they are NOT aware of. Lesser scientists quickly ridicule what is unfamiliar to them. Or are these scientists caught in their fixed Christian belief system and cannot think beyond it?

According to Indian texts, we live presently in a dark era, the Kali Yuga, where people are materialistic and their mind power is weak. They wrongly think that they are only body and mind. Many thousand years earlier, in the Satya Yuga, Treta Yuga and Dwarpara Yuga, human beings had a better connection to the spiritual dimension of their own being. For them "Aham Brahmasmi" was more real than it is for us today.

Yet the realization of true knowledge won't come by thinking. It comes by sinking into the vast intelligence from where thoughts emerge. Intuition springs from there. And somebody who can tap this intelligence naturally can bring superior knowledge into his mind and express it.

When the mind is stilled by dropping thoughts, the divine dimension of one's being shines forth. True inspiration and intuition come from this level, and true happiness as well. It is this, our true nature, which we are all seeking in our pursuit of happiness. We won't find

lasting happiness among the names and forms.

And how to drop thoughts? In the Vijnanabhairava, one of the texts of Kashmir Shaivism, 112 methods are described. Maybe they are already patented in the west and come to India in the form of seminars held by foreigners charging hefty fees? The participants from the English speaking Indian elite would not notice, as they still, like under British rule, don't learn anything about their tradition, not even about their ancient history.

The Chhandogya Upanishad describes how the sage Uddalaka prodded his son Svetaketu to know "That by knowing which everything is known" and how he helped him along with valuable questions and metaphors. Today, scientists like Hawking, also search for 'That by knowing which everything is known' but they still have a blind spot. They don't search where it is to be found: Within their own consciousness.

And no, I don't dream anymore that the anchor in a news broadcast announces that scientists have discovered proof that God exists. I realized that scientific proofs are valid only within assumptions that have been proven already not to be absolutely true. The apple falls down, ok, but ultimately there is no apple...

"I am" alone is self-evident. It is the truth that needs not to be proven. This truth is our greatest treasure. It is supreme, blissful Intelligence. It is within all of us. In English one could call it 'God'.

About the Author



Maria Wirth

is a German and came to India for a holiday after finishing her psychology studies at Hamburg University. She visited the ArdhaKumbhaMela in Haridwar in April 1980 where she met Sri

Anandamayi Ma and Devaraha Baba, two renowned saints. With their blessing she continued to live in India and dived into India's spiritual tradition, sharing her insights with German readers through articles and books. For long, she was convinced that every Indian knows and treasures his great heritage. However, when in recent years, she noticed that there seemed to be a concerted effort to prevent Indians (and the world) from knowing how valuable this ancient Indian heritage is, she started to point out the unique value of Indian tradition.

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