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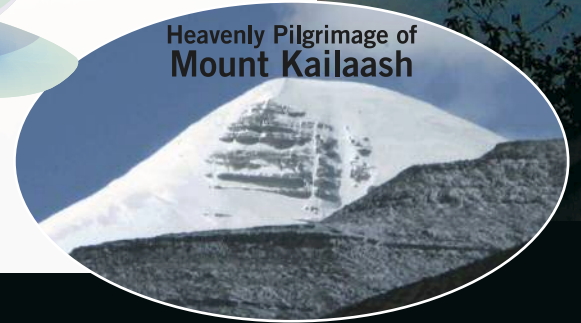
# HINDU VISHWA Vishwa Dharma Digest



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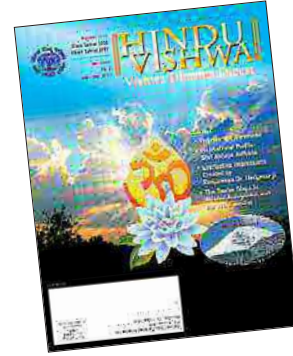
No. 3

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तेषां सततयुक्तानां भजतां प्रीतिपूर्वकम् ।।  
ददामि बुद्धियोगं तं येन मामुपयांति ते ।। ॥ अ १०-१० ॥

*tesam satata-yuktanam bhajatam priti-purvakam  
dadami buddhi-yogam tam yena mam upayanti te*

To those who are constantly devoted and worship Me  
with love, I give the understanding by which they can  
come to Me.



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July-September 2010





## CONTENTS

### EDITORIAL

THE QUESTION OF ONE GOD

page 3



Crossing Named After  
Dr Jitendra Sukhadia  
**In Tribute**

by *Prakash Waghmare* page 4

Everlasting Impressions Created by  
Poojaneeya Dr. Hedgevar ji

by *Dr. Savita P. Joshi,*  
*Prabhkar G Joshi*

page 6

49 Million Hindus Missing  
From Bangladesh Census

page 8

Mount Kailash

by *Dr. Prabhakara Rao*

page 9



New Jersey Ekal Vidyalaya  
Foundation Raises \$325,000

page 13

Inspirational Profile Shri Abhaya Asthana

By *Sanjay Mehta*

page 14



Saying it with stones

by *T.S. Subramanian* page 16

The Twelve Steps in Alcohol Anonymous and  
the Vedic version

by *Greesh C. Sharma*

page 19

2

Hindu Youth Graduation Day  
in a NJ Temple

By *Dahyabhai and Sushila Patel* page 22



**Vedanta  
and  
Vipassana**

By *Shobhana Vora*



**COVER  
STORY**  
page 23

Swami Mukundananda  
illuminates hearts in Atlanta GA  
by *Vasav Mehta*

page 25

'Portraits of a Nation-  
History of Ancient India' by  
Kamlesh Kapur

*Kalyanaraman* page 26



De-busted meditative  
Buddha statue found near Sikkal  
by *P.V.Srividya*

page 27

Hindu youth inspire through  
leadership and cohesion

page 28



Muslim Scholar roots for Sanskrit

By *Ashutosh Shukla*

page 29

Karmanye Vadhikaraste

By *S. Mitra*

page 30



American Hindus: How to Cultivate Your  
Culture in America

By *Stephen Knapp*

page 34

Take care of your health

By *Siddheshwari Devi (Didi Ji)*

page 37

What's a rabbi doing  
on Assi ghat?

by *Aditi Bhaduri*

page 38



*"Oh! You from India? Hindu? I now know Hindus are not polithics. I thought otherwise before," exclaimed the French lady to an Indian tourist visiting Paris. "Yes. Hindus are not too political," agreed the tourist, apologetically. "No, no. I mean not polithics; you know. Hindus also believe in One God," clarified the host lady, gracefully gesturing "1" with her raised forefinger. The tourist had a flash of intuitive comprehension. "Oh! You mean Hindus are not polytheists. That's right. We Hindus are monotheists, just like you." The profound question of One God so easily settled, the French Christian soul was utterly happy that she was finally communicating, despite her faulty English and clumsy accent.*

It is a common misconception. Most westerners think Hinduism espouses polytheism: the theology of a multiplicity of Gods, with the Capital 'G'. They often misconstrue (some of them, in the business of spreading Christianity, on purpose) the distinction of One God versus many gods and goddesses, with little 'g'. Every Hindu instinctively puts his or her faith in One God, the Almighty, Omniscient, Omnipresent, Supreme Power and the Ultimate Reality, 'Nirgun Brahma', whose veneration and hymns of praise the Vedas and Upanishads eloquently sing, regardless of in which ('Sagun') form he or she chooses to worship and to remember the Divine. Academic definitions apart, in heart every Hindu perceives his or her chosen god or goddess to be a symbolic personification of some aspect(s) of that Ultimate Reality: certain aspects representing the primary forces of Nature ('Vayu' – the god of Wind; 'Agni' – the god of Fire; 'Varun' – the god of Water; 'Shashank' – the Moon god; and so on) or certain divine power or noble human attribute ('Prajapati' – the Grand Master managing the Creature-World; 'Prapitamah', literally meaning the Great Grandfather, pointing to 'Brahmaa' or the Creator aspect of the Godhead; 'Saraswati' – the goddess of Learning, Wisdom and Music; and so on.)

But, as Arjun, praying to the Virat-Roop (Quitessential and All-Encompassing Form) of Krishna, says, the

Almighty Himself manifests Himself in all different Forms humans try to envision and venerate: indeed 'Vayu', 'Agni', 'Varun', 'Shashank', 'Prajapati' and 'Prapitamah' also are but different Forms of the Godhead Krishna (BhagvadGeeta 11-39). God alone pervades All (BG 13-13); so naturally no two Gods exist. Not only that, the Best in every divine quality or even in earthly Nature and Creatures – be it the letter of alphabet, mountain, tree, horse, elephant, serpent, sage – is but a manifestation of Only THAT (BG 10-25 to 10-30). Where, then, is the question of a multiplicity

## THE QUESTION OF ONE GOD

of the Ultimate Reality – Brahma (Note the distinction between the two words: Brahma and Brahmaa.)?

Worshiping different gods and goddesses is merely remembering a limited aspect of One God, just like viewing the projection of a higher (infinite!)-dimensional entity or event in one or two dimensions – a tract most commonly employed in science and naturally suited for the severely limited mental capability of a common man. Hindus venerate One God in all His infinitely numerous manifestations or forms and names, mythological and historical characters with godly qualities: Incarnation of God for emancipation of Man or Nature. Far more than Christians and Muslims do, Hindus indeed believe in One God. ■

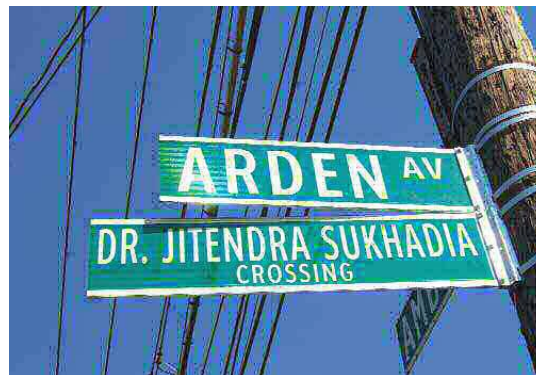




# Crossing Named After Dr Jitendra Sukhadia In Tribute

by *Prakash Waghmare*

**O**n a Sunday afternoon, March 21, 2010, in the presence of family, friends, colleagues and members of the City Council of Staten Island,



India Movement ('AIM for Sewa') for the eradication of illiteracy in tribal areas in India. He was the recipient of several awards and honors in the United States and India. He was a brilliant pediatrician, conscientious community leader and a legendary philanthropist who touched countless lives through his generosity, spirit of



**4** NY, the intersection of Arden Avenue and Amboy Avenue was named "Dr Jitendra Sukhadia Crossing" as a tribute to Dr Jitendra Sukhadia's wide ranging and exceptional humanitarian work. Dr Sukhadia, who passed away on March 21, 2008 had been a past president of the New York area Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA) for several years and had spearheaded its local activities. He was also a board member of All

help and commitment. Hon. Councilman Mr. Vincent Ignicio, NJ Assembly Member Mr. Upendra Chivukula and scores of Indian dignitaries from various organizations graced the occasion. In the words of Dr Jitendra Sukhadia's wife, Dr Ila Sukhadia, the street naming ceremony was a fitting homage by the people of Staten Island to immortalize his ideals and that she was grateful and felt humbled. Dr Jitendra Sukhadia had lived in Staten Island for more than three decades.



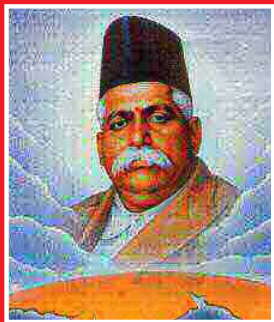


Speaking on the occasion, Hon. Councilman Mr. Vincent Ignacio, said, "Dr Sukhadia was not only an exemplary citizen of our community who lived an American Dream but also an inspiration for what we all can be". Dr Ryan McMahon, Dr Sukhadia's colleague and President of Medical Staff at Richmand Hill Medical Center, while praising Dr Sukhadia's professionalism said, "Jitendra was a guide, a mentor to everyone at the hospital and always resorted to long term rather than short term solutions for medical complexities". Dr Dharmi Kanuga, a family friend for many decades, emotionally lamented, "when life gave Jitendrabhai hundred



reasons to cry, he always found thousand reasons to smile. He touched people's hearts like very few could". The most endearing tribute was paid by one of Dr Sukhadia's patient, Devon Catugno, who after overcoming numerous medical and physical

complications is now a graduate student. He elaborated, "Dr Sukhadia was not only the healer of my body and spirit but truly believed in me a lot more than I believed in myself". His mother portrayed Dr Jitendra Sukhadia as a lifetime friend rather than a caregiver alone, who not only treated and nurtured Devon to overcome all the obstacles he faced but also encouraged him to strive for higher goals. Dr Jitendra Sukhadia's daughter, Dr Sajani Raman, who coordinated this well-attended event, wished her father were present to witness the community's outpouring of love and regard for



# Everlasting Impressions Created by Poojaneeya Dr. Hedgevar ji

*Dr. Savita P. Joshi, IL,  
formerly Vijaya S. Sohoni*

*With assistance from  
Prof. Prabhakar G. Joshi*

6  
July-September 2010

Subjective and objective sciences suggest that permanent impressions on the human mind are created at a young age. A small percentage of people get an opportunity to come in contact with national and international dignitaries from a very young age. We were one of those fortunate ones. It happened because our parents were unique personalities who were founders, leaders and promoters in our communities. Thus, present and future saints, swamis, ministers, governors, kings, queens and nobles visited our place, stayed with us and had meetings at our residence. As a result, the young ones in the house like me got tremendous, rare opportunities to serve, meet with and receive blessings from a number of illustrious people.

One of those highly respected, nationally known persons was most honorable Param Poojaneey Aadya Sir-Sangha-Chaalak late Dr. Hedgevar ji. Not once but many of his visits to our place enriched our young minds. The promising impressions that we carry are enduring. Dr. Hedgevar ji was tall and well built and he had a big heart. His outstanding and dynamic personality as well as his uncommonly fine qualities was easily noticeable. While in his company any person would have nothing but noble, positive and creative thoughts. His magnificent, positive thinking and high quality Hindu philosophical thoughts would quickly create powerful & positive vibrations in the minds of people who associated with him. They would easily get inspired to become part of his laudable, organizational work. Every person has a combination of 3 gunas – Sattva (good), Raja (ambitious), and Tamas (aggressive). Doctor ji was an incarnation of nothing but Sattva. People around him like us, would always feel his never ending desire to help human beings. A burning fire to achieve independence for India & to re-establish a powerful Hindu raashtra was alive in him day and night.

To achieve those valuable goals, Doctor ji founded the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh – RSS in 1925. Naturally it needed sincere, honest and hard-working individuals to expand this profound work and shakhas (branches). Due to his unique qualities thousands of people were attracted to him, to his laudable mission and to his new organization. Valuable persons from other institutions and from the outside world became his friends or disciples. Late, Hon. Shri Bapusaheb Sohoni, my father, was a leading attorney, a known leader in the community and of the Scout organization. He had attended in 1933, the international Scout festival known as Scout-Jamboree. During the tour, he took special pains to learn about the life of the western youth. On his return, leaders in Akola, India, organized for him a procession from Akola railway Station, followed by a public program. Late Shri Chitale was the Akola-Sangha-Chaalak. He immediately arranged a meeting between Doctorji and Bapusaheb.





Doctorji very impressively outlined the lofty mission and purpose of RSS. He emphasized the urgency of awaking the masses to enliven the Hindu values. He called for a dire need to have strong, well-knit Hindu groups to build Hindu Rashtra. Bapusaheb enthusiastically agreed to pursue the work and to strengthen the newly founded RSS. There were so many similarities between the two of them that they could think, talk, and walk like one person. Immediately, Bapusaheb took Sangh Pratidnyaa (vow) in the presence of Doctor jiI and Shri Chitale ji. How lucky we, young ones, were to witness in person that memorable moment!

My mother the Late, Hon. Kamla bai Sohoni, wrote a series of articles on contemporary topics like Hindu Dharma, Creation of a Real Human being, and Arya-Sanskriti. The articles were published by prestigious newspapers like Kesari and garnered great acclaim. Doctor ji also, appreciated the quality of those articles. In addition, my father was appointed as the Pranta-Sangha-Chaalak by Doctor ji.

The Sangha work grew by leaps and bounds in Vidarbha and elsewhere. Bapusaheb started Prabhat-Shakha (early morning class) for elderly RSS workers. Evening classes were naturally for the youth and youngsters. With humble pride, we can write that the first such Shakha was held where Doctor ji Samadhi is in Nagpur. Doctor ji immensely commended Bapusaheb in person and in public numerous times. Whenever Bapusaheb went to Nagpur from Akola for his professional, legal cases, Doctor ji personally used to come to his residence. Doctor ji created ranks of devoted, sincere, courageous leaders and workers like Bapusaheb all over India. He could easily and freely mix with people of all ages in a very informal and friendly manner. Always the air was full of inspiration in their presence. No one ever felt himself/herself small or embarrassed.

Once incident stands out in my mind. The occasion was my eldest sister's marriage in 1937. Guests came not only from Vidarbha but also from most of the provinces in India. To our great fortune, Doctor ji could grace the occasion. During the week, group after group came to our house, resting, eating and enjoying the occasion. At one meal, Doctor ji took the heavy bucket full of Kesari Srikhand (India's special dish for occasions) and started serving the guests, such was his humility and modesty. Suddenly, he captured the hearts of hundreds of guests and of those who saw the pictures and read it in the newspapers.

After my father's acceptance and entry in the Sangha,

Doctor ji always stayed at our house when he visited Akola. Many Sangh meetings and intellectual activities took place at our residence under his leadership. Policy decisions were made at those meetings. We were fortunate to serve and entertain these sincere sevaks and could reap invaluable benefits from these enriching experiences.

Doctor ji was certain that Bharat would be number one nation under the banner of a Hindu nation. He wanted to see the Bhagva (Saffron color) flag proudly flying everywhere in India which he felt was a true and just demand for the people of India. He always dreamed and lectured on the magnificent idea of Hindu Nation for the welfare of the Indians and the whole world. He was very broad-minded and with an open heart acknowledged efforts for achieving independence for India by other organizations. He also attended programs of other organizations also. For example he participated in the protest arranged by the Congress party called "Ghanti Chhaa kaa Satyagrah", movement to ring the bell at Sonya Maruti temple in Pune, India. Doctor ji took part in the movement. Of course it was unfortunate for India that, as soon as he rang the bell on that day he was arrested.

Doctor Ji founded the RSS fully to support the independence movement. RSS was also founded by him for Hindu unity and to establish and sustain Hindu Raashtra. He did this so that there would be peace and prosperity in India. He knew that India would become a strong, reliable nation under Hindu leadership. That is the origin of Indian continent. His profound ideals are the guiding force for all of us who are spread in all the 140 or so countries in the world. His leadership was targeted at developing enlightened Hindu people who would abide by all the enriching Hindus values and would lead humble but powerful and prosperous lives which would be a positive influence in the universe. The "Shakha technique" to establish strong Hindu Unity was very remarkable to achieve his magnificent goals. His system of serving the country through Shaakhaas created Hindus who have profound attitudes of humility, equality among all, and provide selfless service without ego. Through his unparalleled leadership and his humble but strong, and selfless service to the nation, one would feel in his magnetic personality, the vibrations of Yashti, Samasthhi, Srushti & Parameshti. We therefore, offer our humble Saprem Namaskaar (salute) to this illustrious son of India --late, hon. Dr. Hedgevar ji, Aadya Sir-Sangh-Chaalak of RSS. ■



# 49 Million Hindus Missing From Bangladesh Census

*Explosive Book by SUNY Professor Gives New Light to the Indian Partition Story. Empire's Last Casualty : Indian Subcontinent's Vanishing Hindu and Other Minorities*

**I**t's a study of effects of religious communalism on a pluralistic, tolerant, multi-religious society and focuses on the loss of indigenous, Hindu population from the land of their ancestors; and on changes brought about since a multi-religious progressive region of Colonial British India was partitioned in 1947, and its effects on Hindu and non-Muslim (Buddhist and Christian) minorities, on pluralism and on indigenous cultures.

After Britain's Muslim-Hindu partition of Bengal Province, East Bengal became Muslim-majority East Pakistan, a part of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, unleashing regular, merciless anti-Hindu pogroms by intolerant Islamists. West Bengal remained in India, with Muslim minority and ever-growing massive Bengali Hindu refugees who turned towards left extremism.

Following a 1971 war of independence against West Pakistan, Bangladesh gained independence, creating the second largest Muslim-majority nation. That war was concurrently anti-Hindu anti-Bengali genocide by Islamic Republic's army and its Bengali and Urdu speaking Islamist allies.

The book documents the decade-wise "missing" Hindus from Bangladesh Census: over 49 million; larger than 163 of 189 nations listed in World Bank's April 2003 World Development indicators database-and over 3.1 million (larger than 75 of 189 nations) Hindus lost their lives through the process of "Islamization".

Documenting three million-plus lost lives have been painful and difficult; especially when Hindus cremate their dead. Additionally rivers of the world's largest delta washed away signs of mass murder leaving no clue. All attempts have been made to justify the data presented in the book, hardly-known to the world and rarely discussed in Bengal itself. ■

### ■ About the Author

**Dr. Sachi (Sabyasachi) Ghosh Dastidar** is a Distinguished Service Professor of the State University of New York at Old Westbury. He has taught in the U.S., Kazakhstan and India. He has also worked in Florida, Tennessee and West Bengal. Dastidar was an elected Board Member of a New York City School district making him the first Bengali-American to hold a popularly elected position in the U.S.

Sachi Dastidar has authored seven books, *A Aamar Desh*, (1998), *Regional Disparities and Regional Development Planning of West Bengal* with Shefali S. Dastidar (1990), *Central Asian Journal of Management, Economics and Social Research* (2000) and *Living Among the Believers* (2006). He has written over 100 articles, short stories and travelogues.

His awards include Senior Fulbright Award, Distinguished Service Professor of the State University of New York, and honors from New York City Comptroller, NYC Council Speaker, Residents of Mahilara, Madaripur and Uzirpur, all of Bangladesh, Assam Buddhist Vihar, and from Kazakhstan Institute. He has traveled to over 63 countries in all seven continents including Antarctica.

Probini Foundation ([www.probini.org](http://www.probini.org)) that his wife and he founded helps educated the orphaned and the poor in 18 institutions in Bangladesh, West Bengal and Assam. ■







**M**ount Kailash is considered as the holiest mountain in the world. Although Mount Everest (29,069 ft) is the tallest mountain of the world, the honor of “the holiest mountain” in the Himalayan Range goes to Mount Kailash. This mountain is the merging place of both physical and devotional forces. According to Hindu Scriptures, Mount Kailash is an abode of Lord Shiva, Goddess Paarvathi, and their sons Lord Ganesh and Lord Subramanya. It is mentioned in the Ramayana that there is no better mountain range other than the Himalayas, because in the Himalayas there are two holy places – Mount Kailash and Maanasarovar. Just as sun rays in the morning melt the fog, the sight of Mount Kailash vanishes all sins of a human being. It is a natural temple that fills the surrounding region with divine power. Mount Kailash glows in the cold moonlight, impenetrable and eternal, a symbol of ultimate perfection.

Not only the Hindus in India but also the Buddhists in Tibet consider the Mount Kailash as the holiest place. They call this mountain “Kang Rinpoche” meaning “The Snow Jewel”. The followers of Jainism call this mountain “Asthapada Parvat”. Near this mountain, Jain saint, Rishi Banatha attained enlightenment. Tibet’s native people, the Bonpo, also consider this as a holy mountain. They call this mountain as a “Nine Storied Swastika” mountain. Like Hindus, they consider the Swastika a symbol of

strength.

Kailash mountain is about 22,028 feet high and is always covered by snow. The mountain’s white cone glitters like a great ice-diamond in the sky. Mount Kailash stands out among other small mountains nearby. Sometimes melting of the snow on the south side of Mount Kailash creates a figure of Swastika.



The north side of the mountain looks like a snake’s head. A small mountain in front of Mount Kailash is called Nandi. If you look at the satellite photo of the Kailash mountain range, the mount looks like a big Shivalinga. The snow cover on the west side of Kailash Mountain looks like a big “Aum”. About 18 kilometers from Mount Kailash on the south side, there are two big lakes. One of them is the holy Maanasarovar and the other is called “Raakshasa Taal”. Tibetans call the



Shiva put an elephant's head on Ganapati's body and revived him. Shiva blessed as the remover of all obstacles in life and that is why we offer prayers to Ganapati before starting any auspicious work. People feel the divine presence of Mount Kaailash so they prostrate themselves before it. People also



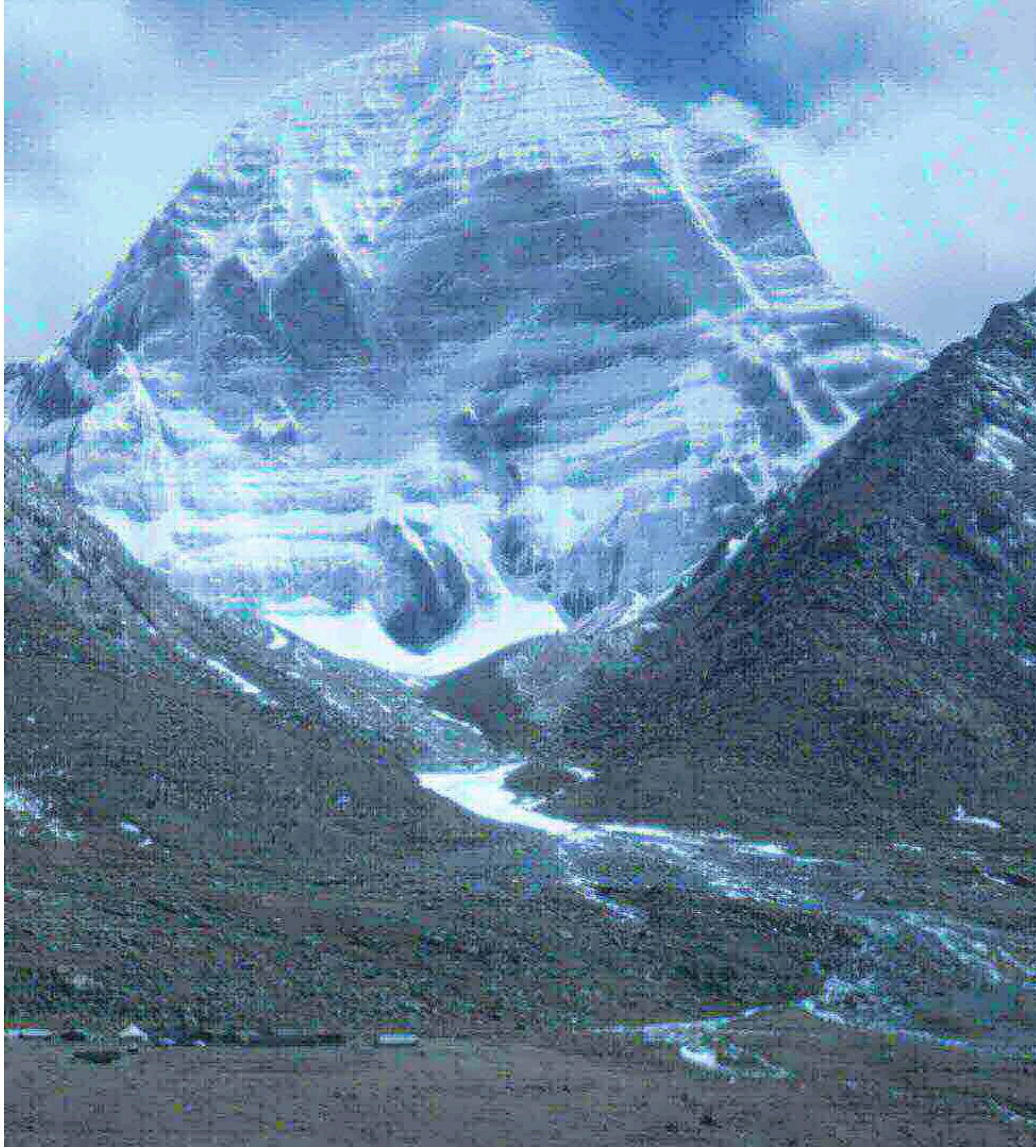
Maanasarovar as Tso Mapham (The Undeclared Lake) or Tso Rinpoche (The Jewel Lake). Its clear waters are reported to have miraculous healing properties. The Maanasarovar is circular resembling the sun, whereas the Raakshasa Taal looks like a half moon. Although these lakes are near each other, the Maanasarovar water is considered holy and people drink it and use it to bathe, whereas the Raakshasa Taal water is considered unholy and poisonous.

People do not touch and even the birds or animals do not drink the Raakshasa Taal water.

On the northeast side of Mount Kailash, there is a small lake with green waters called "Gowri Kund". Tibetans call this lake as Tsjenpo Tso (Lake of Mercy). At an altitude of 18,400 feet it is one of the highest lakes in the world. According to Hindu scriptures, Gowri created Ganapati to guard the place while she was taking a bath. When Shiva returned Ganapati prevented him from entering the area. An enraged Shiva severed Ganapati's head. Gowri was heartbroken and to console her,

try to circumambulate the mountain. This 54 kilometer or 34 mile walk around Mount Kailash is called "Parikramaa" or "Pradakshinaa" by the Hindus, whereas the Tibetans call it "Kora". While doing the parikramaa, Hindus chant the mantra "Om Namah Shivaaya" with a rosary of prayer beads to receive Shiva's blessing, whereas Tibetan Buddhists chant "Om Mani Padme Hum" meaning Happiness in the Peaceful Life, while turning the prayer wheel during their kora. The starting point for the parikramaa is about 15,000 ft high. The walking path is by the side of small rivers between two mountains where one can see beautiful waterfalls. On the





second day one has to walk from one mountain to another on a pass called Dolma Pass, which is at an altitude of 18,600 feet. Dolma is the name of a favorite Goddess of Tibetan Buddhist's. They pray to Dolma, also called Tara Devi, for a safe passage through this pass. The Dolma Pass is the physical and emotional high point of the entire parikramaa and a solemn ritual combines with joyous celebration. At Dolma Pass, pilgrims tie prayer flags on ropes that have been strung

from the Dolma stones. On the third day of the parikramaa, one walks by the side of Gowri Kund. People cover about 20 km. on the first day, about 18 km. on the second day and about 14 km. on the third day to complete the parikramaa. There are a few guest houses along the way to stay and sleep at the end of the day. The temperature at night falls below zero degree centigrade. There are two types of parikramaas.









The Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains do the parikramaa in a clockwise direction, while the native Tibetan Bonpo people do the kora in an anti-clockwise direction. In an act of supreme devotion, some Buddhist pilgrims prostrate themselves the entire 34 mile path around Kailaash. Protected only by a canvas apron and wooden mitts, the Bonpo people raise their hands before sliding down into full length prostration almost 20,000 times during their two week circumambulation of the mountain. People believe that visiting and just looking at Mount Kailaash is a great achievement in one's life, whereas completing the parikramaa removes all their sins. We are proud of the achievement of Swami Pranavananda from India who, between 1928 and 1949, completed the parikramaa around Mount Kailaash twenty five times and around Maanasarovar twenty three times. ■

*Prabhakara Rao and Shashikiran Kunigal from Denver, Colorado and Tarun Krishnamurthy from Bangalore, Karnataka visited Mount Kailaash and Maanasarovar area from May 18 through May 21, 2010. Prabhakara Rao can be reached at [prabrao@comcast.net](mailto:prabrao@comcast.net) ■*



### New Jersey Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation Raises \$325,000



*Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation's (E.V.F.) benefit concert on Saturday, May 15 by SA RE GA MA PA sensation Sanjeevani Bhelande & Group in Edison, NJ, was a smashing success. Enchanting Sanjeevani not only took the capacity crowd down the memory lane by singing nostalgic melodies of Lata, Asha, Noor Jahan and Geeta Dutt but also kept the listeners spellbound - so much that the concert had to be extended by an hour on popular demand. By evening's conclusion, more than \$175,000 was raised for Ekal schools, bringing the week's total of New Jersey's just three concerts (incl. Cherry Hill & Mahwah, NJ) to \$325,000. For \$365/yr (dollar-a-day), an Ekal Vidyalaya School provides non-formal basic education and hygiene training to a group of 30 to 40 underprivileged children in tribal, remote villages of India, where many times there are no approachable roads or basic facilities. ■ Visit [www.ekalvidya.org](http://www.ekalvidya.org)*



# Inspirational Profile

## Shri Abhaya Asthana

By *Sanjay Mehta*

**I** have been working with VHP of America for past 14 years. One of the important reasons that I joined VHPA was its vision of

influenced and inspired me with their dedication towards VHPA. One of them is Shri Abhaya Asthana. I will call it Ishwar's grace that both of our families moved to Boston in 1996. My journey of inspiration and thought sharing with Abhaya ji started in the very first meeting in



**Shri Abhaya  
Asthana with  
his family**

**14**

July-September 2010

serving the Hindu Society. As it is said in the professional world that retaining an employee is more important than hiring, similarly for me, staying with VHPA for 14 years (and more to come) is more important than just joining it. VHPA's most valuable factor is the great number of selfless people who serve the organization and work for the greater cause. There are many who have

1997 at Mahesh bhai Mehta's residence. I felt as if I have known him as my elder brother for many births.

I have decided to write about him so that, like me, many parents of second generation Hindu Americans can be inspired by his character and be better equipped in serving and sustaining our Dharma. It is a very common statement given by our community members that we do not get time



for Samaj work. Abhaya ji and Jaya bahen are example of parents who have performed the Samaj work while spiritually nurturing themselves and their children born and raised in this country, at the same time performing their family and professional duties. Abhayaji's character can be presented in four areas:

### **Abhaya ji as a Parent**

He has three children born and raised in America; Abhaya ji and Jaya bahen's strong academic background is well reflected on Shefali, Saurabh, and Samir's education from MIT, Harvard, and UMich. And now he is preparing himself to work with his grandson Shreyas.

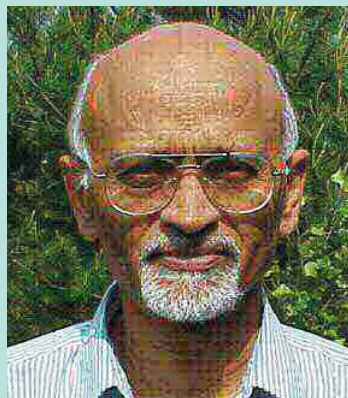
Abhaya ji has made sure that all three children are taught Hindu values through daily practice at home, Balvihar and camps, and other youth programs. All three are well versed in Hindi, too. Openness and intellectual discussions with children is one of Abhaya ji's greatest strengths.

### **Abhaya ji as Abhaya uncle (Tauji)**

To my daughter and son, and to many other children of Balvihar and camps across the country similarly, Abhaya ji is an uncle or Tauji who can inspire them intellectually and at the same time be playful and a hallmark of creativity. They can sit around him for hours glued through love of a parent away from parents. He spends time in children's activities with an equal passion, and is able to impart many Samskars (values) to children of all ages.

### **Abhaya ji as a VHPA office bearer**

VHPA is blessed to have a person like Abhaya ji as an office bearer. He always comes up with new ideas and proposals, while respecting the work of senior members who have found and established the organization and upholding its vision. He gets so engrossed in preparing or giving a presentation for VHPA that I call this act of his as Abhaya ji's 'PowerPoint Samadhi'. In a number of meetings, I have taken liberty to create well-intentioned jokes on him and his style. The best part is that the laughter I hear the loudest, comes from Abhaya ji himself. His openness, humility, and great sense of humor



make him so special to VHPA or any other organization that he comes in contact with. After personally observing and reading about the three facets, stated above, of Abhaya ji's character, someone would think that he is a fulltime social worker. He derives his strength from Adhyatmic Sadhana (spiritual practices) to fulfill those roles and at the same time succeed in the following:

### **Abhaya ji as a Scientist**

Abhaya ji has worked at Lucent Technologies as a scientist for 30 years with the same enthusiasm he has for VHPA, BalVihar, or home. His commitment and dedication at work is reflected in 9 patents he has in his name at Lucent. On Dec 5, 2008 Abhaya ji received Alcatel-Lucent Bell Labs' highest individual honor 'Bell Labs Fellow' award from the President of Bell Labs Inc for his outstanding technical leadership and nine patents and over 100 publications. Many of us say that major chunk of our time is consumed between job and home affairs, no or little time is left for other activities (Mandir, Samaj, Seva). Of course, all of us cannot be Abhaya ji, but aspire to be like him. We can draw inspiration from his character, commitment, simplicity, humbleness, and wisdom which are encapsulated in spirituality and immense support of his better-half, Jaya bahen. To sum it up, I close with a quote, "Many know the way, and few actually walk it". ■





*Unearthing history: The ten memorial stones, six with Kannada inscriptions, found near Kondaharahalli village.*

# Saying it with stones

by T.S. Subramanian

*FOCUS The memorial stones discovered in the Kondaharahalli village belong to the 10th tenth century C.E.*

16

July-September 2010

Ten memorial stones, six of them with Kannada inscriptions, have been discovered at near the hills close to Kondaharahalli village, six km west of Bommidi in Dharmapuri district, Tamil Nadu. All the stones have identical sculptural representations and belong to the 10th century C.E. (Common Era).

According to Dr. K. Rajan, head, Department of History, Pondicherry University, the memorial stones were erected in the Tamil country between the first millennium B.C. and the Vijayanagara period (16th century A.D.), in memory of men who were killed in cattle raids or when they were attacked by a tiger or an elephant. These stones are different from the hero stones: the latter were erected to honour valiant men killed in battle, or those who lost their lives while defending their villages or womenfolk. The hero stones are called 'nadu kal' in Tamil.

The earliest memorial stones were the Iron Age burial monuments put up between 1,000 BCE (Before Common Era) and 3rd BCE. They were in the form of cairn circles, stone circles, cist burials, dolmens, menheirs and anthropomorphic figurines. Such memorials were found all over India.

### Symbols galore

The Kondaharahalli stones were discovered a few months ago by R. Ramesh, assistant archaeologist, Archaeological Survey of India (Chennai Circle) following information he received from C. Chandrasekar, lecturer, Government Arts and Science College, Dharmapuri. The first stone has a carving of a man holding a bow and a sword. He is shown with arrows piercing his neck and abdomen. On his left, four animals are portrayed, which represent a cattle raid. Above the hero, there is a small sculptural representation that shows him in a seated position with two apsaras on either side. There are three horse riders at the foot of the hero. One of them has an umbrella above his head, denoting that he is a chieftain or a leader, explained Dr. Rajan. An eight-line inscription is found engraved in Kannada characters and refers to a hero called Macayya, son of Hocayya, who (Macayya) had a title called Sarasattikarakandarpa. He died in a cattle raid that took place when Sabhatukadeva, son of Byaliciradeva, who belonged to the Pallava line and bore titles such as 'Pallava-kula-tilaka', 'Sri Piruthuvi-vallabha', 'Kanchipura-paramesvara', 'Sri Manipathi-raj' and 'Jagadeka-malla', was ruling the region.

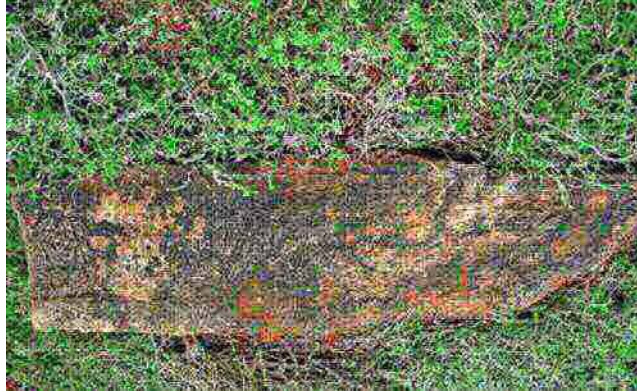


## No linguistic borders

The stones showed that linguistic borders did not exist at that time (10th century C.E.). People who spoke different languages moved about freely from one area to another, Dr. Rajan said.

Professor Rajaram Hegde of Kuvempu University, Shimoga, Nagarjuna, Deputy Superintending Archaeologist, ASI and Sathyabhama Badhreenath, Superintending Archaeologist, ASI, read the Kannada inscriptions.

The stones have undergone distinct changes in size and substance over a period of time. The earliest of them were big in size and were erected mainly for men who lost their lives during cattle raids, that is, while trying to steal cattle from other villages. The stones metamorphosed into hero-stones, which were installed to commemorate a heroic act – his dying in a battle or while trying to



carvings of the heroes in whose memory they were raised.

S. Suresh, who belonged to Pulimaankombai, found these hero stones. They were lying in his father's field for a long time and Suresh discovered to his delight that they had inscriptions too. When research scholars

S. Selvakumar and V.P. Yatheeskumar, working under Dr. Rajan, who was then Head, Department of Epigraphy and Archaeology, Tamil University, Thanjavur, were on a field visit to Pulimaankombai, they learnt about the existence of these stones. While Dr. Rajan said the Brahmi inscriptions of Pulimaankombai could belong to a period prior to 3rd century B.C., other specialists said they belong to 2nd century B.C. The stones, about three feet in height and about one to 1.5 ft wide, were probably installed as part of the urn burials, which are found in the area. According to Dr. Rajan, the first of these hero stones has three lines in Tamil-Brahmi, reading 'Kal pedu tiyan antavan kudal ur akal.' This meant that this stone was raised in memory of a man called Tiyan Antavan of Pedu village, who died during a cattle raid that took place in another village called Kudal Ur, which could be



***The rare memorial stone, found at Thathapatti and another memorial stone with the script that refers to Tiyan Antavan of Pedu village (see below).***

defend his village from intruders and so on. Three hero stones with Tamil Brahmi inscriptions were discovered at Pulimaankombai village, 15 km from Andipatti in Theni district, in Tamil Nadu on March 23, 2006. They are rare because that they are among the earliest Tamil Brahmi inscriptions discovered so far and all of them do not have

identified with the Gudalur area near Cumbum. Tolkappiyam, the earliest known work on Tamil grammar, refers to cattle raid as 'ur koli akal pucan marre.'

The second hero stone's inscription reads as: ' (a)nur atan (n)an kal.' The stone was erected in memory of a person named Atan who belonged





to a village. The third inscription reads: 'Vel ur patavan avvan.' This stone was put up in memory of Patavan Avvan of Vel Ur. The characteristic feature of the early Tamil language tradition was the separate writing of the grammatical suffixes beginning with vowels without being enjoined to the main word. Thus 'Vel Ur' and 'Kudal Ur' were written separately. In modern Tamil, they are written together as Velur and Kudalur. This language tradition was followed in these three hero stones.

† ப  
க ல்  
kal

பேடுதியன் அந்தவன்  
pēṭutiyāṇ antavaṇ

கூடல் ஊர் ஆகோள்  
kūṭal ūr ā kōl

Dr. Rajan said, "Palaeographically, orthographically and linguistically, these hero stones are considered to be the earliest. They are, therefore, important in the study of the early historic period of Tamil Nadu."

At Thathapatti, just a few km from Pulimaankombai, was found another hero stone with a Tamil Brahmi inscription, reading 'n ation pakal paliy kal.' More important, this was engraved on a menheir. This menheir, which was erected on a grave, entombed an urn. (Both Pulimaankombai and Thathapatti are situated on the banks of the Vaigai).

The Tamil Sangam literature (2nd century BCE to 2nd century CE) has clear references to sepulchral monuments raised in memory of heroes.

Subsequently, 'nadu kals' or hero stones were planted as part of the burial and this has been described by more than 25 Sangam poets.

"These references clearly suggest that hero stones were installed with inscriptions during the Sangam age. However, such inscribed stones were eluding archaeologists till the Pulimaankombai discovery. These four discoveries corroborate the literary descriptions," said Dr. Rajan. ■

[www.hindu.com/thehindu/fr/2010/07/30/stories/2010073051170700.htm](http://www.hindu.com/thehindu/fr/2010/07/30/stories/2010073051170700.htm)







# The Twelve Steps in Alcohol Anonymous and the Vedic version

by **Greesh C. Sharma, Ph.D.**

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**W**e have all heard of the "12-Step Program" originally developed by alcoholics as a self-help program. The original Twelve-Step recovery group is Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) that was founded in 1935. Today there are thousands of recovery groups modeled after the AA program. Those who followed the "12-steps" "compulsively" achieved such great success that the program has been adopted for all sorts of addictive behaviors, such as gambling compulsions and drug addiction. Without a doubt, the most widely recommended "therapy" for people struggling with chaos in life (including various forms of "addictions," many "mental illnesses," and conditions such as "codependency") is a recovery group that employs a Twelve-Step program. However there are no secularists or spiritual anonymous. The major concern that I and many of my peers have with AA (and other such



recovery groups) is that contrary to their assertion, they do constitute a quasi religious system entrenched in Christianity. AA and other recovery movements are false religions with a cult-like culture, attempting to promise mankind a better and happier life. During my clinical practice for the past 45 years, I have had many individuals who were unable to relate or accept AA model due to their secular orientation. Typically they were more cognitively oriented with needing to sustain their separateness and individuality.

There is a profound difference between spirituality and religion. In essence, spirituality can be defined as being "all inclusive", "all accepting"; a belief system unconditionally rooted in "oneness with the entire creation". Religions on the other hand are rooted in claims of monopoly on god, heaven, salvation and even on burial grounds. Religions exclude, and discriminate against all those who have not surrendered to their respectively prescribed messiah, book or the building of worship. A few religions do not even allow their members to go for professional (science based) services or allow their children to play with their peers if they belong to other faiths. One cannot therefore be religious and spiritual at the same time. Spirituality and religions are in juxtaposition.

20

July-September 2010

Thus I propose the following modifications of the 12-Steps Program incorporating Sankhya Yoga (Patanjali's Eightfold Path) Dharma wisdom as it does not require a person to conform or relinquish their individuality or advocate one dogma for all. These 12-Steps are not only for people afflicted with addictions or disorders, but apply to all those pursuing happiness, spirituality and seeking personal growth.



Dharma simply means independently chosen/preferred personal philosophy of life most conducive to one's personal-social context and Sankhya Yoga is one philosophical system (model) among many. Sankhya-Yoga based prescriptions/procedures are called "Eightfold Path" to address "psycho-somato-socio-spiritual" needs of an individual as well as of the community. The aim is to prevent pathology i.e. disorders, dysfunctions, perversions, chaos, disintegration or fragmentation and to promote highest possible personal growth ranging from better adjustment to wholesome integration.

The 12-Steps quoted (AA) exactly as written in Alcohol Anonymous literature are followed by Dharma based modifications.

**STEP 1:** We admitted we are powerless over alcohol-that our lives had become unmanageable (AA).

We came to realize and believe that ego (I, Me and Mine) must go, be stripped and melted in order to





be free from it all.

**STEP 2:** Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity (AA). We came to realize that all desires must be surrendered to and be governed by spirituality.

**STEP 3:** Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him (AA).

We came to realize that in order to experience the higher self and the universal spirit; we must look after others, nurture the weak and vulnerable including addicts.

**STEP 4:** Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves (AA). We decided to take full responsibility for our karmas.

**STEP 5:** Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs (AA).

We came to believe that we must overcome our character defects by learning, understanding, integrating and living a satvik life.

**STEP 6:** Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character (AA).

We will stop indulging in behaviors like eating, sleeping, working, socializing, talking and even thinking in excess. We will only partake what is needed to sustain health and life.

**STEP 7:** Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings (AA).

We will engage in daily discipline, detoxify our bodies (Yama), train our minds (Niyama), and seek company of persons grounded in spirituality (Satvik).

**STEP 8:** Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all (AA).

We will practice sankhya-yoga, acquire wisdom and improve personal integration via nishkam seva (Actions and service without ulterior motives.).

**STEP 9:** Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others (AA).

We will see oneness in all and so work to nurture it all.

**STEP 10:** Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it (AA). We will seek an experienced, spiritually sophisticated mentor for guidance.

**STEP 11:** Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out (AA). We will continue to practice humility so to free ourselves from arrogance and ignorance that would interfere with our personal growth and our preparation to serve others.

**STEP 12:** Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs (AA).

Having realized the value of spirituality, we will devote our lives and energy to it by serving others.

The Generic Twelve step Journey can be a powerful self help tool or it can be practiced as a group session or a community education project. Modification may be necessary depending upon the time, place and people involved. In other words, it is not the final document and it can be used as a personal or interpersonal tool. Families can be engaged as support system as well as the workplace. ■



# Hindu Youth Graduation Day in a NJ Temple

*By Dahyabhai and Sushila Patel*

**O**n Sunday, June 13, 2010, the very first time for ITA youth program, a special Dharmic Graduation ceremony was conducted for the youth members who graduated from 2009-10 class of youth program run by our Mandir. The ceremony was conducted per Vedic tradition as an extension of regular youth program with blessings from God, Guru and family. Youth graduation blessings, normally conducted every year in Mandir as a small part of Youth Annual Day celebration, was a grand event with full Vedic ceremony. We had about 15 youth members graduating from 2010 youth program class and 10 were

part of the ceremony. The program started with the introduction and full outline of the program agenda. Also, the history of Dharmic way of education and graduation in Vedic times and four phases of human life cycle was explained. With a prayer to Goddess Saraswati by priest Shri Shuklaji, the long but interactive Vedic Graduation was conducted by a friend, Ms. Shobha Mehta

from Arya Samaj. The blessing ceremony was well structured, scripted and conducted in following order for each graduate



individually:

1. Shobha Mehta
2. Dahyabhai and Sushilaben Patels as Guru
3. Parents and adult members of family.

Each graduate gave a short speech about the impact of youth program on their self-esteem, their life in youth program and their future plans for higher education. The ceremony concluded with Aarti and MahaaPrasaad. Jai Shri Krishna. ■

*About the authors: For 15 years, Dahyabhai Patel and his wife Sushila, have been running Hindu Youth Program at Mandir in Berlin, NJ ([www.Indiatemple.org](http://www.Indiatemple.org)) for 13 to 18 year age group.*

22

July-September 2010







## Vedanta and Vipassana

*By Shobhana Vora*



**V**edanta is one of the most ancient philosophies of Sanatan Dharma. Vipassana is a technique of meditation taught by Gautam Buddha about 2,500 years ago. Both Vedanta and Vipassana are complementary to each other. Some of the names used in the teachings of Vipassana seem different than those of Vedanta. However, the subtle meanings of both remain the same. For example, Moksha of Sanatan Dharma is the same as Nirvana of

Vipassana. Likewise, Puma is the same as Shunnya. Also, God (Brahman or Ishwara) is the same as Awareness. Vedanta teaches that suffering is caused by one's false identification with body, mind, intellect and external possessions. The teachings of Bhagwat Gita help one to face the struggles of life both objectively and calmly. For example, Lord Krishna explains to Arjuna that he needs to



fight with the unrighteousness or Adharma. This must be accomplished not out of anger or emotional reaction, but with a conscious choice. Whenever one acts in this

world with a calm and clean mind, then the result will ultimately be positive. Unwise reactions will bring negative, painful consequences and suffering. Our false identification is the root cause of egocentric desires and actions.

Human beings all over the world want to be happy, joyful, peaceful, loving and free.

This is in fact our true nature. Wrong identification and impurities of the mind prevent one from experiencing the true nature. Vipassana teaches



us how to experience the changing sensations of the body and mind. Sitting in meditation is necessary for an extroverted mind to turn inward. After diligently practicing the technique of Vipassana, one can observe objectively the changing sensations within the body and thereby can confirm that change is indeed a part of nature. The constant awareness of the changing world allows one to accept the challenges of life events and thereby allowing one to cope with life better. As the practice ripens, one can neutralize strong likes and dislikes thereby curbing the ego.

**24** Both Vipassana and Vedanta teach how to purify, calm, and sharpen the mind which leads to the final goal of happiness and freedom from misery. They both give the intellectual and experiential understanding of Dharma. It is important to note that Dharma is not some type of organized religion or sect. Simply stated, Dharma stands for the universal law of nature for example, the law of cause and effect. Any action done with a purified,

calm and sharp mind will always be righteous.

Therefore, Dharma can also be considered our duty to act in a righteous manner at all times.

The first six chapters of Bhagvad Gita provide an explanation of how to act in life with strong character. The middle six chapters explain how to keep the balance of mind. And the final six chapters teaches us how to develop wisdom in living a joyful and peaceful life. This commonly is known as Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, and Gyan Yoga, respectively. Vipassana teaches the three important steps which are Sheela, Samadhi, and Panya.

Sheela represents strong moral character. Samadhi represents the balance of mind, and Panya represents wisdom.

Vedanta teaches how to listen and reflect on the truth described within the scriptures.

The final goal will be reached only through meditation. The student needs to practice meditation in the beginning. After certain progress, one can observe the thoughts and actions throughout the day of routine daily life.

In conclusion, peace is the final goal of both Vipassana and Vedanta. One can see one's own progress by following the 5-step approach of "PEACE", as described below.

### PEACE

- P** purity of feelings, thoughts, speech and action; A positive attitude in life
- E** equilibrium of feelings, thoughts, speech and action
- A** attitude adjustment, alertness at every moment, association with goodness, action without reaction
- C** compassion, courage, character, cheerfulness, cooperation, contentment
- E** expansion from individuality to cosmic consciousness, eternity, excellence in every action, extinguishing the ego, experience of bliss

I have gained this insight through the study and application of Vedanta and Vipassana. ■





# Swami Mukundananda illuminates hearts in Atlanta GA

*Report and Pictures*

*by Vasav Mehta*

*Awe Inspiring! Phenomenal!*

*Indescribable! Outstanding!*

**T**hese are the words of some of the people who have been touched by the words of wisdom and the personality of Swami Mukundananda, a renowned saint from India who was at the Global Mall, Norcross, Georgia recently, as part of Hindu Awareness Yatra, one of his 12 states tours of USA. This was a highly successful series of program for Yoga, Meditation, and spiritual discourses followed



by Chanting and Mahaprasad, held at the Global Mall from August 8 to 14th. The discourse was named "Science of Devotion and Grace" and it was arranged by Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA) also known as World Hindu Council of America.

Swamiji is a graduate of Engineering and Management from two world famous institutes in India- Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) and Indian Institute of Management (IIM) respectively. He is a long-time disciple of Jagadguru Kripaluji Maharaj and has pioneered the Jagad Guru Kripalu Yog system that incorporates both material and spiritual knowledge for the complete physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual health of humankind.

Swamiji teaches the true philosophy of attaining God realization by practice of sincere devotion as per the Vedas, Upanishads and other sacred texts. In order to achieve this goal, a healthy body and mind is absolutely essential. His programs imbibe the age old Hindu traditions of Yog, Meditation & Pranayam to

purify the body, and Divine knowledge to cleanse the mind, which leads to the true upliftment of the soul.

There also was a week-long program "The Path To Happiness" with Yoga sessions and Meditation in Sanatan Mandir, Smyrna GA from August 1st to 7th, arranged by Sanatan Mandir and VHP Of America. It was well organized and well attended by Mandir devotees. The first part of the session focused on Yoga & Meditation. The second session focused on devotional chanting and spiritual discourses for purification of the mind and each day ended with Mahaprasad.

Some of the reactions from attendees were "I have enjoyed Swamiji's Yog, Meditation and Pranayam as well as his discourse. Swamiji makes difficult subject of Hindu scriptures understandable and memorable by giving simple, easy to understand examples."



Some of them attended complete discourse series from Aug 1st in Sanatan Mandir to 14th ending at Global Mall without missing a single yoga or discourse session. One attendee said "The discourses are very purifying, thought provoking, enjoyable and inspirational urging devotees to surrender their egos and live a spiritual life. I hope you arrange Swamiji's series again next year? Please inform me." The feedback from all the participants and devotees was very enthusiastic and positive. Swamiji's program was very enlightening and hugely popular. ■



## Book Review

### 'Portraits of a Nation- History of Ancient India' by Kamlesh Kapur

ISBN-978-81-207-5212-2 Published by Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd. (May, 2010).

**T**his book is a path-breaking work on Ancient History of India, an overarching portrayal of what India was in ancient times, giving a global context for the significant events during a time frame of around 6000 BCE to 1000 CE (Current Era).

This book should be held in every library and research institution and used as a textbook in every school for students interested in the study of ancient Hindu civilizations. All of this material is taken from primary sources and from the research material prepared by historians while evaluating multiple sources. The book deals with the following issues:

- The origin of early civilizations in the subcontinent
- The rise of Agrarian communities and industrialized urban centers,
- The development of internal and external trade,
- The role played by geography in the emergence of prosperous kingdoms,
- The dispersal of people and the homogeneity of Indians over the past 10 millennia,
- The role played by the mighty rivers such as Sarasvati river and Cauvery river in supporting prosperous people,
- The creativity of the people all over the continent,
- The scientific developments and discoveries which laid down the foundations of mankind's progress down the centuries.

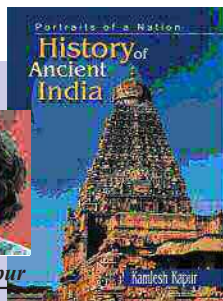
Geographical contiguity and the continuity of Indian culture How the genetic evidence corroborated with archaeological evidences and internal evidence of Vedic and post Vedic literature helped construct a non mythical account of Indian history? Discussion of Indian culture, civilization and the Vedic Tradition in the global context, the book presents strong evidence that the cultural tradition and civilizational contributions have not as much moved from the Near West to India as they have gone in the opposite direction. The book traces the

emergence of Indus-Sarasvati (or Harappan) settlements along with other contemporaneous settlements in the Central and Eastern India with the same cultural thread. Five chapters give the details of the key concepts, practices and beliefs of four religions of Indian origin and the process of assimilation. The book highlights the role played by philosophy of pluralism, acceptance, and understanding in creating a composite culture of unprecedented length of time. For the first time, the history of Southern India is given alongside the key events in Northern India.

Researches in the field of ecology, natural history and genetics have given us enough pointers enabling us to write a fairly accurate history of Ancient India. This book ties up all this new evidence with the internal evidence from the literary sources. Dropping up several theories and assumptions, it focuses attention on the contributions of Indian civilization and culture to mankind. It is a comprehensive work highlighting those historical events and developments which left significant impact on the heritage of mankind. Supplemented by numerous illustrations of ancient relics, inscriptions, maps and pictures, it makes an interesting reading.



Kamlesh Kapur



*The history of India has been written and rewritten several times, each time with a different context. Historical narratives act as a powerful vehicle of culture and tradition from generation to generation. Therefore it is essential to give an authentic narrative of India's past using*

*all the new evidence which has surfaced through archaeological excavation in the Indus-Sarasvati region. Researches in the field of ecology, natural history and genetics have given us enough pointers enabling us to write a fairly accurate history of Ancient India. This book ties up all this new evidence with the internal evidence from the literary sources. Discarding several theories and assumptions, it focuses attention on the contributions of Indian civilization and culture to mankind. It is a comprehensive work highlighting those historical events and developments which left significant impact on the heritage of mankind. Presented in a non invasionist model, this book attempts to reclaim the accurate chronology of Ancient Indian history and do away with many myths and prevailing misconceptions surrounding it. Supplemented by numerous photographs and illustrations of ancient relics, inscriptions and maps, it makes an interesting read meant for students and general readers.*

■ Kalyanaraman





## De-busted meditative Buddha statue found near Sikkal

by P.V.Srividya

*Beheaded or de-busted statues may point to a transition to Shaivism*

**NAGAPATTINAM:** The lower half of what appears to be a de-busted statue of Buddha seated on a plank in a meditative posture stands at Pallianthoppu, some ten kilometres from Sikkal in Nagapattinam.

Pallianthoppu, a garden land tucked away in the outreaches of Vignapuram hamlet in Puducherry village, hosts the red-brownish sandstone 28 cms long, 40 cms broad and 28 cms wide remains of the statue. The land belongs to presiding deity Navaneedheashwarar Swamy of Sikkal Singaravelavar temple.

The find by K.Ramachandran, a revenue official, assisted by a bunch of enthusiasts of history and archaeology, could help sieve through historical significance of the archeologically virgin region of Nagapattinam, as it offers a geographical contiguity and a certain historicity to the find. The moot point for this discovery was triggered off by an inscription at Anathanarayanan temple in the village of Avarani, also called Abarnadhari. Chitrakleha Perumpalli reads the inscription on the northern Goshtam (northern wall of sanctum sanctorum) below the Brahma stone idol at Anathanarayanan temple. The temple which is about six km from Sikkal, has mooted points for further research on potential Buddhist sites in the area.

According to Mr.Ramachandran, historical curiosity led to the search after accidentally stumbling upon the inscription. The inscriptions on the temple sandstone could have pointed out to a random clue as temple hosts assembled sandstones brought from elsewhere. But, according to Mr.Ramachandran, Perumpalli means Jain or Buddhists sites.

"The region here is known for its Buddhist and Jain linkages." That led to the search, and usually any evidence



**MAJOR FIND:** De-busted remains of a Buddha statue at Pallianthoppu at Vignapuram hamlet near Sikkal in Nagapattinam.

could fall within a few kilometre radius, he says.

A former Revenue Inspector in Thirukuvalai, he was aware that the revenue records did not point out to any Chitrakleha Perumpalli in the area. Several visits and local queries led to Pallianthoppu that was surveyed as 226-1 in revenue records where the statue was found.

The statue is seated with folded legs on a wooden plank. According to Ramachandran, the plank invariably points to meditative posture. Further elimination was required as it could point to a Jain statue.

However, the folds of the cloth between the ankle and the folded feet, and the chipped portion of what is presumed to be the Bhoomi Spraksha mudhirai (right palm in a meditative gesture pointing to the ground) on the right side of the statue strengthens the presumption of the identity of the statue as that of Buddha's.

According to him, the village is adjacent to Vadakalathur, the Shiva temple to which the famed Kalayanasundarar idol belongs. Vadakalathur is a well-know Pallava settlement. Beheaded or de-busted statues may point to a transition (since any pointers to persecution should be researched) from Buddhism to Shaivism and the geographical contiguity of the sites can be a potential treasure trove for further research. The finding can provide new insights into archaeological findings in the region and historical enthusiasts of Varalatu Arvalar Kuzhu(History Enthusiasts' Association), Nagapattinam of which Mr.Ramachandran is a member, now seek the intervention of department of Archaeology to fill the gaps. ■

[www.thehindu.com/2010/04/23/stories/2010042351690200.htm](http://www.thehindu.com/2010/04/23/stories/2010042351690200.htm)



## Hindu youth inspire through leadership and cohesion

Conference team: Divesh Lal, Rajan Chandrasekaran, Swami Vigyaanandji, Nikhil Rughani, Brij Pal Singhji, Arjun Nidigallu and Krishna Ramarathinam, Pritika Sharma, Akanksha Khanna, Aditi Bhatia, Thanvi Kuppanda, Bhavana Satyamurthy and Pooja Sashi.



Government and community leaders panel: Laurie Ferguson, Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, Aparna Vats, Julie Owen MP and Chris McAlpine.

Members of the AHYC2010 conference team with members of the government and community leaders panel: Rajan Chandrasekaran, Krishna Ramarathinam, Chris McAlpine, Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, Nikhil Rughani, Aparna Vats, Julie Owens, Brij Pal Singh, Laurie Ferguson, Arjun Nidigallu and Bhavana Satyamurthy.







Following the yoga workshop Keenan Crisp, Nikhil Rughani, Elisha Young, Mayumi Staley, Rosie Macdonald and Janaki Rughani demonstrate the Tree Pose.

**L**aurie Ferguson joined 250 participants at the inaugural Australian Hindu Youth Conference at the University of Western Sydney, Parramatta Campus on April 10.

The theme of the Hindu Youth Australia conference was Developing Leadership amongst Australian Hindu Youth, with the aim to inspire, engage and enrich the youth about Hindu Dharma and help them identify themselves as Hindu Australians.

The conference featured panel discussions, dance, chanting and music demonstrations, a yoga workshop and lectures on cultural identity and leadership.

The conference was supported by the Australian Government's Diverse Australia Program. Mr Ferguson spoke of its significance in promoting peace and cultural diversity. ■

## Muslim Scholar roots for Sanskrit

By Ashutosh Shukla

**I**n his Solapuri topi, full sleeved kurta-pyjama, Pandit Ghulam Dastagir Birajdar could easily be mistaken for a villager trying hard to make a living in the city. The fact is that this 75-year-old scholar would much rather have people see him that way.

A Muslim by faith and a teacher by profession, Birajdar has a simplicity and diction that most villagers are associated with. Birajdar gave an hour-long talk at the Bedekar Wadi, Girgaum, last week on the importance of Sanskrit.

A scholar in Sanskrit, well versed in Marathi, Kannada, Hindi, Urdu, Arabic and a bit of English, Birajdar pitches strongly for Sanskrit, a language

that he has mastered. Birajdar is a member in the state government's advisory body for Sanskrit education.

"Besides Karnataka, no other state has Sanskrit as a language, as after the local, national and English languages, there is no scope," he said.

Birajdar considers learning Sanskrit his destiny. "Solapur Mahanagar Palika night school happened to be the only one with Sanskrit as the medium of communication. I wondered if the Brahmin teacher would let me in. But, he said my religion was at home not at school. That made a profound impression on me, and I became a teacher of the language," he said. At home, Birajdar spends time reading the Quran and Vedas. "The Quran and Vedas have a similar message-the good of humanity. Only the ways of achieving it are different," he said. He is now translating the Quran into Sanskrit. ■

[www.dnaindia.com/mumbai/report\\_muslim-scholar-roots-for-sanskrit\\_1381636](http://www.dnaindia.com/mumbai/report_muslim-scholar-roots-for-sanskrit_1381636)



## Karmanyevadhikaraste Karmanyevadhikaraste Karmanyevadhikaraste Karmanyevadhikaraste **Karmanyevadhikaraste** Karmanyevadhikaraste Karmanyevadhikaraste Karmanyevadhikaraste Karmanyevadhikaraste

By S. MITRA

One of the oft-quoted verses in **Bhagavad-Gita** begins with the word **karmanyevadhikaraste** that I find mind boggling and would like to discuss at some length.

The complete verse reads

**Karmanyevadhikaraste ma phaleshu kadachana  
Ma karmaphalaheturbhura te sangastwakarmani. - 2:47**

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन।

मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्मा ते संगोऽस्त्वकर्मणि - २:४७

**I**t comprises a part of an address by Sribhagavan to Arjuna. How this verse was interpreted in those days by people who spoke Sanskrit as part of their daily life, I cannot venture to guess. However the straightforward interpretation based on the word-by-word translation reads

"You have the right only to work but not to the result (of that work). Do not regard yourself as the cause of the result of that work and never should you resort to inaction".

As the story goes the **Mahabharata**, and that includes **Bhagavad-Gita**, contain quite a few **kutaslokas** or verses which are difficult to comprehend. The author Vyasa chose to compose such verses to confound Lord Ganesha who agreed to be his scribe. **Ganesha** had imposed the condition that he would quit writing if he had to wait for **Vyasa's** dictation.

Vyasa added the condition that Ganesha would have to comprehend everything that he wrote or stop to ask Vyasa for the meaning. Vyasa added these kutaslokas to give himself breathing room as Ganesha worked to understand them. Since such verses have not been identified, I wish to claim this particular verse as one of them.

**Adhikara** is commonly interpreted as the right, so the first half of the verse reads 'you have only the right to act (but) no right to the result of that action'. How to resolve the two seemingly contradictory statements is what makes this verse truly difficult. Two questions that come to mind are

How can one undertake any action without the desire for the result?

Does anyone have the **adhikara** or the right to perform any action without any justification or against appropriate social convention?

These questions point towards alternate interpretations of the word **adhikara** itself beyond the obvious. We must analyze the context in which **Sribhagavan** made that statement. The circumstances that led to the confrontation between the **Pandavas** and the **Kauravas** in the battlefield of **Kurukshetra** must be put in context. **Arjuna** certainly had the right to fight to regain the kingdom that was taken away from the Pandavas by deceit. The kshatriya code of honor





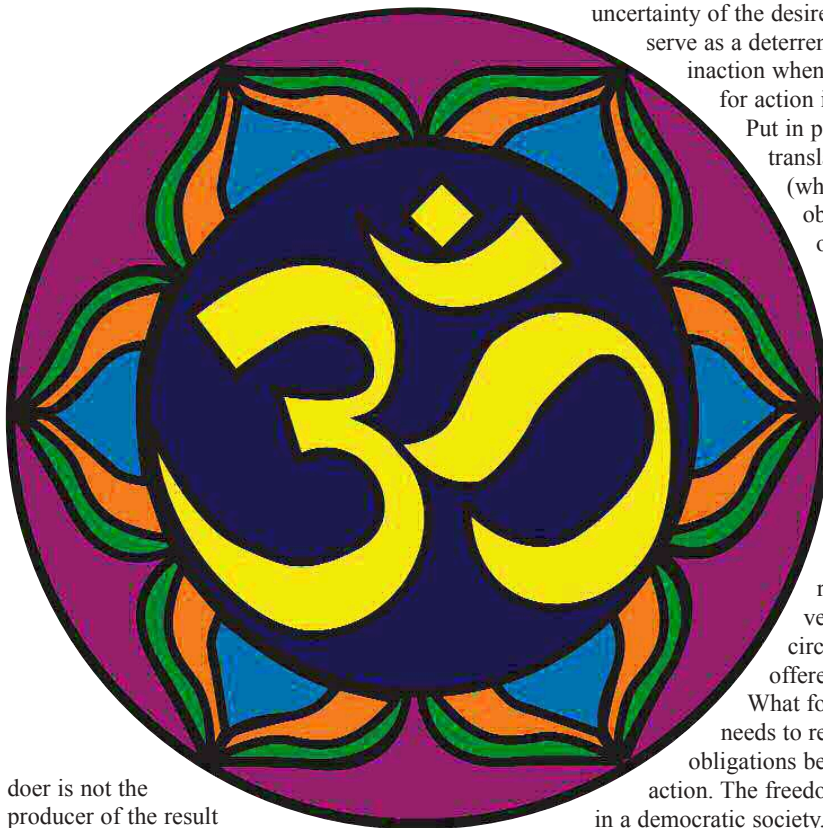
would not allow **Arjuna** to retreat in the face of the enemy making him duty bound to fight. We now have at least two different interpretations of the word **adhikara**, namely right and obligation or duty.

Before proceeding further a little digression may not be out of order. Usually, the lesson imparted in this verse is based on the verse alone and as such do not provide any reference to the context of what went before. This approach gives the impression that the verse is self contained and therefore could have appeared anywhere in the text.

Since that is not the case, it is only proper to follow the trend of the interaction between **Arjuna** and **Sribhagavan** from at least some of the preceding verses. In the preceding few verses, we come across an interesting verse in which **Sribhagavan** defines **Vedas** as injunctions based upon three **gunas** and he asks **Arjuna** to rise above them. He exhorts Arjuna to try to acquire the most important knowledge of all, which is the knowledge of the **Self** or the **Atman**. That knowledge alone provides freedom from all dualities and ambiguities about what is the right course of action as well as the attitude one must bring to bear for its execution. **Arjuna's** hesitation to fight and the supporting arguments put forward by him were based on his less than perfect knowledge of what was right and what was not. **Sribhagavan** points out that the knowledge of the Self-alone unerringly determines what is right and what is not. There is no certainty that any action will always produce the expected outcome without fail. So we can come up with a third meaning of the word **adhikara**, that is, control over the outcome. We can recall another statement made in an earlier verse by **Sribhagavan** (Gita 2:37) as an illustration of this phenomenon. There he said very forcefully that the outcome of this war is not certain and cannot be known beforehand. Arjuna may either get killed and



go to heaven or win the war and enjoy the kingdom. In this light, the first half of this **kutasloka** can be understood as the suggestion to get involved into activities that one has either the right or the obligation to perform, while keeping in mind the uncertainty of the anticipated outcome. That is to say, the doer can exercise his right and/or obligation over his getting involved in the action but he should not expect a definite outcome that, to a large extent, is determined by doers beyond his control. The article entitled '**Daivam chaibatra panchamam**' published in the April-June issue of this journal may be seen for an elaboration of this point. Since the outcome may turn out to be different from the expected, it follows that the



doer is not the producer of the result of his action. As a matter of fact, this idea of **karmaphala** not being under the control of the doer can be extended to the **karma** or the action itself. That is to say, the willingness to exercise the right or accept the obligation to act is no guarantee that the action can even be properly executed. The unseen force or the power that controls the functions of any living being must cooperate with the doer who wants to act. On a mundane level, even a simple task like putting food in the mouth may not be taken for granted if stricken with severe arthritis at

32

July-September 2010

the elbow. Once that simple task is accomplished the eater has no control over the digestive process. As **Sribhagavan** said, (Gita 15:14) 'becoming the digestive fire I .....

In the second half of this verse **Sribhagavan** is putting forth in forceful words that one should never regard oneself as the producer of the outcome of one's action as there are a myriad of known and/or unknown determinants that contribute to the end result. However this

uncertainty of the desired outcome should not serve as a deterrent or become an excuse for inaction when one rights and duties call for action in a given situation.

Put in perspective the verse can be translated as, "you have the right (where appropriate) and/or obligation (when called for) only to act. However, to avoid disappointment you should never crave for the result that the action was expected to produce (it may be different and undesirable). Never also think that as the doer you are the producer (for there are other known and/or unknown doers that must cooperate) of the result. Mind that (and this is very important) under no circumstances should these be offered as excuses for inaction.

What follows then is that one needs to reflect on one's rights and obligations before undertaking any action. The freedom of choice does not, even in a democratic society, mean, that the actor should be able to claim to pursue any goal in life. This is so because one may not have the necessary ability or qualification required for such an endeavor. **Sribhagavan's** advice in this regard is very clear and to the point and that is, one will always be better off by following one's own nature or **Prakriti** in selecting the right course of action. Under no circumstances should one relinquish it in favor of **paradharma** even though the latter may appear to be more attractive. In no uncertain terms **Sribhagavan** has pointed out that any attempt to embrace **paradharma** will be wrought in disastrous consequences.

Let us pray to Sribhagavan to give us the courage to chart the course of our lives guided by **His** immortal advice. ■

*Dr. Samarendra Nath Mitra is an Emeritus Professor of Sociology of Emory University in Atlanta. He received Masters degree in Statistics from Calcutta University in Statistics and Ph.D in Sociology from the University of Chicago.*



# Do you believe in life after death? We do.

Well, not exactly as it is preached in the Bhagvad Gita, but not too unlike it either. Death comes to an individual but life goes on for the individual's family. Coping with the feeling of loss is hard enough. But surviving in the material world is harder, especially if the dear departed individual was the sole breadwinner. Like the good book expounds, death may be in destiny's hands, but duty rests with you. Duty towards your dependents. To provide for them and ensure provision in case of your sudden departure to the other world. Life Insurance can be sensible, practical and above all, the right thing to do.

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# American Hindus: How to Cultivate Your Culture in America

By Stephen Knapp  
(Sri Nandanandana dasa)

One thing I have witnessed is: how 20, 30 or more years ago, Indians who came to America concentrated on their careers, not their culture. Yet, many of them have now turned to their culture and have become better Hindus than if they stayed in India. Some may have realized that the American dream is not all it's exalted to be; or, more simply, that in order to feel more complete and fulfilled, it is better that they still have a strong connection with their Vedic traditions. It may also be because they want their children to be trained-up in the culture of their homeland. So, now many of them have reconnected with the spiritual customs and traditions of Vedic India.

However, a problem that many Indian Hindu families are facing is that many of their children, growing up in the West, are losing interest in their culture. That can partly be because the parents don't show enough interest, or at least that is the impression that such children get. But, it is also encouraging to see that those children who do take an interest are often becoming more dedicated Hindus than their own parents. Yet, many times they exhibit divisive trend: being Gujarati, or Bengali, or Tamil, and so on, just as people in India do and have done historically. This is detrimental to American Hindus. So, as American Hindus, we should first

recognize ourselves as spiritual beings, followers of Sanatan Dharma. Only after that should we recognize each other as Indians, or connected with India. Let us make sure that the Vedic knowledge or the Sanatan Dharma remains a guiding light for everyone, all over the world, and accessible for those who seek deep spiritual knowledge, over and above mere pious religion. That is the way it is meant to be. I have often said that Vedic culture is the last bastion of deep spiritual truth. If we lose that, then all of humanity is in for a very dark future.



### AN EIGHT POINT ACTION PLAN

**FIRST**, as I mentioned, we need to respect each other as spiritual beings, followers and friends on the path of Vedic Dharma. This would also induce the desired unity among American Hindus.

**SECONDLY**, we utilize our freedom to assemble and rejoice in the Vedic festivals and celebrations that we can observe. This makes way for the joys of life, and also creates many samskaras of these happy times in the minds of our children, the memories of which last for many years and propel them to do the same, in turn, with their children. This is love, love for God and love for each other as parts of God.

**THIRDLY**, the Indian community in America is one





of the wealthiest. According to Vedic Dharma, such wealth is a tool to either help spiritualize your life, or build a crown on your head, the weight of which will only drag you down into darker realms in the next life if you are a miser. There also is nothing more beneficial than to help secure the spiritual progress of others, whoever they may be. We may start with our own families, but when we contribute to the construction of new temples, and to the maintenance and the programs and festivals held at existing temples, it is certainly the most beneficial use of our money and our earnings. And when used in this way, it purifies our soul and the time we spent in earning it. Why not be a little more moderate in expenditure in social functions purely for prestige, and spend more money for really benefiting others and future generations by giving for the preservation of the Dharma.

**FOURTH,** educating yourselves and the youth in the Vedic customs and its philosophy is of extreme importance. The prime reason why some Hindus convert to other religions is not because the other faiths are more organized and well-funded, though this may sometimes be the case. But it is primarily because Hindus are not educated well enough in their own traditions and Vedic philosophy. They may go to the temple and do puja, but they may not even know its significance, or the spiritual knowledge that is a part of the Vedic tradition, or the depth of this spiritual philosophy. Thus, it is important that everyone is educated properly. This can be done by holding regular group classes and discussions in the temple.

**FIFTH,** we have to promote the good and the depth of this Vedic culture. Such promotion may start amongst other Hindus, or within our family, Indian community, etc. Or it may also be done in ways to share our culture with other non-Hindus who are interested, such as inviting them to a festival, to the temple and showing them around, or just having a lunch with them at the local Indian restaurant and sharing the stories of your own life on how your culture has had positive affects on you. You can simply give them a brochure, or a booklet or book



that explains the basics of the philosophy so they can start to understand it or look more deeply into it.

(And I've got plenty of free brochures or booklets on my website that I can send you if you need them.)

Such promotion may also include advertising the activities at the local temple, or about the festivals that are being held, announcing that all in the community are welcome to attend. Such promotion may also involve preparing publications, websites, radio programs, and other ways that help people to get to know about the unique and profound characteristics of the Vedic culture.

To give an example, I was giving a presentation to around 120 people of an Interfaith group at the Cincinnati Hindu temple. It was a presentation on how the Divine appears in Vedic art and the various forms and deities.

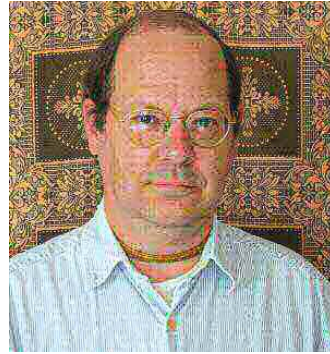
Later, as the people were given a tour of the temple and further explanations of the temple deities, so many people came up to me to express how much they liked the presentation and slide show. But they also would say that though they have been Catholics, or practicing Jews for years, they have never felt a strong connection to their religion. But they were really attracted and felt a kinship with what they experienced at the Hindu temple that evening. So, we encouraged them to visit more often and read about the Vedic traditions to learn more about it. This proves that you never know what can happen, and that people from all walks of life can feel



attracted to the Vedic culture and philosophy. We need to realize how special this spiritual culture is and not be hesitant to share it with others.

**SIXTH**, we must object to all prejudice against Vedic culture and Hinduism in the media. Why are people so easily writing and publishing any unfair criticism about India and Hindus and Hinduism? Because they know that in most cases, nothing will be done about it; no one will stand up against them. This attitude must change. In America free press is for everyone; you can also write to the editor of any publication to object to something you disagree with. If someone denigrates a Hindu or Hinduism, it is not so difficult to write a letter and demand an apology. But if that same letter is circulated to a large group, along with the email or address of the editor, and many people start signing it and sending it in, it will flood the editor's office or email address and certainly get noticed. In today's world of communication, a program of protest could be put together and accomplished within a few days. We also need to process lawsuits as well. Utilizing part of our money in defense of Vedic Dharma in lawsuits against slander or other crimes against Vedic culture will also help make sure that people become more cautious about committing such acts again. These and other methods need to be taken into consideration to make sure that people and the media realize that Hindus are a force to be reckoned with. American Hindus must clearly understand that they cannot remain silent or wonder who will be the fodder for the next racist policeman or person who wants to take their anger out on them. For too long Hindus have not been organized and have remained apathetic to what has gone on around them or to them. This needs to change.

**SEVEN**, American Hindus must become politically active. This does not simply mean that you vote, or that you attend fundraisers for your favorite candidate to have a photo with them that you can hang on your wall. American Hindus can also volunteer in large numbers in political campaigns to show the force that we can have, that politicians realize we are a great force that they will want on their side. But we should also vote as a block. We should look seriously at the issues any candidate is addressing, and then vote for the person who will be best for the interests of American Hindus and relations between the U.S. and



India. American Hindus can also run for school-boards, city-councils, for Mayor, and for State Governor. We should see that as not merely a chance to get into office, but a chance to show the influence of

Vedic thought and ideas on the issues of the day, and a chance to show the beauty of the Vedic culture. I had a friend who ran for office in Hawaii. He had no money, no influence, but as he appeared on television shows, and in debates, he gained influence and support. He did not win the election, but everyone knew of his connection with Vedic culture and people admired him.

**EIGHT**, the last point is dealing with interfaith marriages. This is happening on an increasing level. But statistics have shown that most interfaith marriages dissolve, ending with divorce, especially when the issue of children comes up and the decision has to be made regarding how they are going to be raised, and what religion will they follow. The fact is that most Hindu boys and girls who marry outside the Hindu fold either convert or allow their spouse to have control over the children in regard to their faith. Therefore, whenever an interfaith marriage occurs, most likely by the next generation or two, that family will no longer be following Vedic culture. This may be viewed as great damage to the Vedic tradition. That is why the fourth point about educating yourselves, your children and giving them the right association and friendship through temples and youth or Dharmic camps can be so helpful for them to realize the depth of what the Vedic philosophy has to offer, and to keep them in the Hindu fold.

These are a few powerful ways in which the community of American Hindus can work together to cultivate and benefit from the oldest living, spiritual tradition on earth, as well as to preserve and protect the Vedic tradition. Let us all help each other to do this. Dharmo Rakshati Rakshitah. Jai Sri Krishna. ■

Visit: [stephen-knapp.com](http://stephen-knapp.com)



# Take care of your health

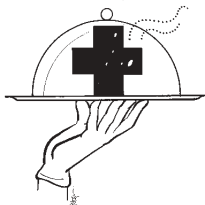
By Siddheshwari Devi (Didi Ji)

If you are running after financial security or a better future for your children and ignore your health, you will be in for a terrible surprise. Ill health will overshadow everything else that you may be doing correctly in life.

Gentlemen, do not use the excuse of being too busy to take care of your physical wellbeing. Ladies, no good will come out of being martyrs for the sake of your family. Children, do not think that you are too young to bother with good health. Just as you are never too old to start taking care of your health, you are never too young to do so either.

**Simple steps must be taken to bring about drastic results over time.**

- Replace the cans of soft drinks and cups of tea/coffee with fresh sparkling water.
- Take heed of the old saying, "An apple a day keeps the doctor away."
- Be mindful of what and how much you are eating.
- Do not watch TV during your meals.
- Take daily walks.
- Eat colourful vegetables to get various nutrients.
- Opt for fresh food rather than canned and



prepackaged.

- Chew your food properly as there are no teeth in the stomach.
- Do not eat too much or too little.
- Make physical activity part of daily schedule, such as climbing stairs instead of taking the elevator at work.

Health is wealth. Guard this wealth carefully. ■

Visit [www.radhamadhavsociety.org](http://www.radhamadhavsociety.org)

## Letter to Editor

I wish to express my heart-felt gratitude to you for publishing my article "A Proposal: Hindu Mandir Yatra USA" in the Souvenir issue of the Hindu Vishwa. As you are aware I am the author of the book "Hinduism: Path of the Ancient Wisdom". Although I have received numerous letters from many Swamis, learned scholars, and other readers commending the book, there has not been any significant sale of the book. I am not myself so much worried about this aspect, but I do feel in good faith that it is a useful compliment to the books on this subject, especially for Hindu Youth Diaspora. I have

therefore uploaded all 65 chapters on the web site [www.hinduismpath.com](http://www.hinduismpath.com). I shall be grateful if you will kindly communicate this information along with your personal comments and endorsement to Hindu community at large both in USA, and also in other parts of the world, including India. Without such support, it will not be possible to send across this message. I shall indeed feel very honored and fulfilled if I can render any useful service to our community through my writings on Hindu religion and culture.

Once again thanking you very sincerely

Namaskar  
■ Dr Badlani





## New-age travellers

# What's a rabbi doing on Assi ghat?

by Aditi Bhaduri

Varanasi is one of those cities which claim to be the world's oldest continuously inhabited cities. Along with Hebron, Jerusalem and Damascus. And looking at the town - bruised and crumbling with antiquated infrastructure, it's not hard to believe that. But something else sets Varanasi apart from the others. While I have never encountered sadhus and saints in the narrow cobbled paths of Hebron, Jerusalem or Damascus, it seemed quite in the nature of things when suddenly one sweltering day last week I saw a rabbi, complete in his black hat and coat climb, up the steps on Assi Ghat. I wracked my brains - why would a rabbi visit Assi in the heat of April? Could he be part of the Hin-Jew tradition which blossomed in the last decade as ties between India and Israel burgeoned?

38

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Representatives of this community certainly abound. My friend and Israeli writer Yael Lotan, who recently succumbed to cancer, was a striking representative of this community. Her review of RK Laxman's English translation of Mahabharat did much to disseminate information about the wisdom of this epic in Israel. And Yael (in whom India lost a wonderful unofficial cultural ambassador) was one of those who had made it a point to visit Varanasi, to 'soak in the ethos of Hinduism', though she always lamented the fact that Israelis mix up Hindi with Hindu. Alas, the ethos that Varanasi today offers is difficult



for a Hindu to reconcile with. The once beautiful ghats, the leitmotif of the town, are crumbling and caked with dung, roads are almost non-existent, humans have to give way to beasts, drugs are offered at the cheapest of prices and commercialism abounds. Nevertheless, that it is a hit with Israelis is easy to see.

Hotels near the ghats do not boast of names like Vaikunth or Kailash, but those like Haifa and Yaffa. Stores and guesthouses advertise their wares and services in Hebrew. Menus on offer are humus, falafel, baba ghanouj and pitta bread. And it is quite natural to walk into the modest Hayat café and order a cup of delicious Arabic kahwah laced with cardamom. And that is why perhaps the Rabbi blended in quite well in the mosaic of Varanasi, and it was quite natural to find out that he was in town to celebrate Pesach or Passover! (I remember Yael telling me once that she 'was amazed by the presence of orthodox Jews running around in black suits and hats in Pahar Ganj, Delhi'. Rabbis make sure that they are never too far away from their flock - even if some are on their way to being lost). And it seemed quite in Varanasi's nature of things to host a Passover celebration. For even though the hot season is beginning and the tourist season is ending, and even though tourism, according to local tourism official, has declined after the November 2008 Mumbai attacks, there are still enough Israelis - all

Jews - for a reasonable celebration.

Neeraj Pande, whose Om guesthouse is the venue for the celebrations - the Rabbi and a few other Israelis had taken over an entire floor - says that Israelis account for almost 40 percent of all Varanasi's tourists. Many of them are low-budget tourists who put up at guesthouses like his where rooms range from Rs 150 to Rs 450. They are usually war-wearyed young people travelling on vacation after completing their conscription in the Israeli Defence Forces.

India is cheap, vast, varied, and one of the few places in the huge Asian landmass where Israelis can move around in relative

safety, our 26/11 notwithstanding. Pande is also sceptical about the popularity of his guesthouse with them. The day I visit him, I see security officials from the police inspect the floor where the Israelis have put up. A young Israeli, who calls himself David, and studies law in the University of Tel Aviv, shows them around. He is a tourist, he says, come simply to sightsee in Varanasi, but there is a buzz in the air that he is from the security services.

There are, however, other tourists like the young sun-burnt man with dreadlocks who says he is from Haifa, but does not tell me his name. What about the security? Does he feel safe? Yes, he says, he feels safer here than home. Why is he here? To combine his search for moksha with some hashish, but that does not stop him from wishing to celebrate Passover.

Others like Ami, visiting Kolkata, combine exotica of 'Hindu' Varanasi with lessons in the tabla at one of the many individual tutors available there. And for yet others like Tamar, it is studying about ancient Indian history at the Benaras Hindu University. It was the popularity of Varanasi with Israelis that made entrepreneur cum Congress activist Ravi Shankar Mishra float the now popular Haifa restaurant. It offers staple Middle Eastern mezze - the humus (a chick pea mash), falafel (chick pea pakodas), labneh (sour cream),





tahina (sesame sauce dip), tabbouleh (a vegetable salad), and baba ghanouj (an eggplant dish). Soon he also went on to establish a hotel, finding the hospitality industry lucrative. (In spite of Varanasi's bruised and dishevelled appearance, it does fill the coffers of UP).

The brains behind the middle-eastern cuisine, however, are two brothers from Jordan - Tahseen and Mohamed. While Tahseen, who helped establish Haifa, soon moved on to other pastures like Goa, his brother Mohamed has remained in Varanasi. He runs the cafe Hayat, where the food - truth be told - is of better quality than at the other restaurants offering the same fare.

Mohamed has tried to do up the modest café on the lines of a Bedouin tent from his native Jordan. Though originally a Palestinian Muslim from Haifa, he has lived in Jordan all his life - where his parents arrived as refugees. But that does not stop him from catering to his many Israeli guests in Varanasi. "I try to help them out, they love the food here. Though Israelis try to pass off humus and falafel as Israeli or Middle-Eastern cuisine, it is Arabic," he says with a tinge of pride in his voice. Mohamed is not just hospitable but also a great cook and in a jiffy tosses up a moussaka - Arab style with potatoes - for me.

And are Israelis fine with him? "I offer them all my hospitality, they are my guests and here we have the Middle-Eastern bond in common. Even in Jordan Israelis are treated well." Mohamed, who has been around in Varanasi since 1999 recalls that when the Sankat Mochan temple was bombed he had been running a café close to it. He immediately set about helping guests get back to their guesthouses. "After Mumbai attacks, I similarly helped guests contact travel agents and go to Kathmandu, Bangkok or any other place as few foreigners in Varanasi wanted to remain in India then." So he remains trusted by his guests and by the local populace at large, recalling no instance of communalism. His only lament is that tourism in 2009 has seen only 10 percent of the usual rush. He hopes to utilise the off-peak season to refurbish the café. "Sixty percent of my clientele are Jews, either from Israel or from other countries," he says with a contented smile.

So while Passover is celebrated in this seat of Sanatana Dharma, an Arab caters to his Jewish clientele. Varanasi, thus, remains true to at least one ancient Indian ethos - of Vasudeva Kuttumbakam, scoring in this aspect, if in nothing else, over the other claimants to the distinction of being the world's oldest continuously inhabited town. ■

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Paramakanthi Srinivasan



Dr. Mahesh Mehta



Shri. Arvind Sant



Shri. Subhash Mehta



Late Shri. Pranjivandas B. Patel

# FAQ

## on Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) of America (VHPA)

### Who were the founders of VHPA?

VHPA was founded on October 19th 1970 and incorporated in the state of New York on May 16, 1974 by Dr. Mahesh Mehta, Shri Pranjivan Patel, Shri Subhash Mehta, Shri Arvind Sant and Shri M P Srinivasan.

### What is the nature of the organization?

VHPA is an independent, nonprofit, tax exempt 501(c)(3) and volunteer-based charitable organization serving the needs of Hindu community in US.

### Why was VHPA founded?

VHPA was founded to address social, educational, cultural, intellectual and spiritual needs of the Hindu society in the US and to network with other Hindu organizations with humanitarian causes worldwide.

### Who is a Hindu according to VHPA?

According to VHPA Hindus are those who believe in, practice, or respect the spiritual and religious principles having origins in Bharat (India), which includes Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs and people of various religious sects within the Hindu ethos.

### What is the vision of VHPA?

VHPA was founded with a grand vision of building a dynamic Hindu society inspired by the eternal values of Dharma and the lofty ideal of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam meaning the entire creation is one family.

### Why is the name of the organization Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America similar to Vishwa Hindu Parishad in Bharat?

Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bharat was founded in 1964 and it was the only Hindu organization of its kind at the time founded by prominent personalities from Vedikas, Jains, Sikhs and Buddhists, whereas VHP of America was independently founded in 1970, six years later in the US. Keeping the vision of Hindu unity in mind the organization in the US was named similarly.

### Is VHPA a branch of any other organization?

No. VHPA is an independent organization in the US governed by the laws of the US with its own constitution.