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Vishwa Dharma Digest

## VHPA AND HINDU AMERICA

*A 55-YEAR JOURNEY OF CULTURAL CONTINUITY*

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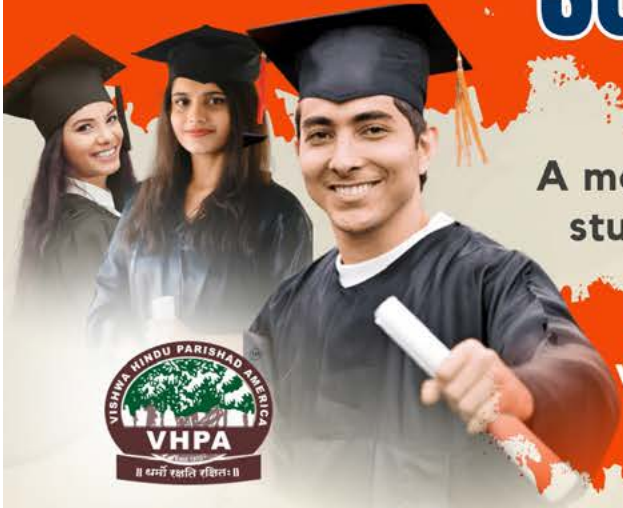






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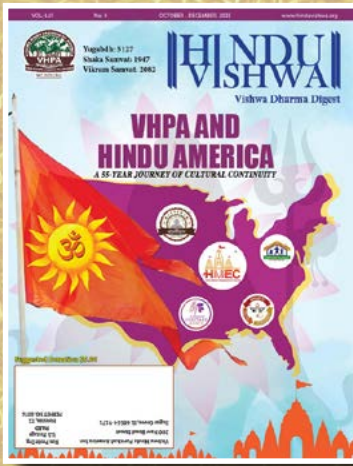
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'न प्रहृष्येत्प्रियं प्राप्य नोद्विजेत्प्राप्य चाप्रियम् ।  
स्थिरबुद्धिरसम्मूढो ब्रह्मविद् ब्रह्मणि स्थितः

- श्रीमद्भगवद्गीता 5.20

na prahṛṣhyet priyaṁ prāpya nodvijet prāpya chāpriyam  
sthira-buddhir asammūḍho brahma-vid brahmaṇi sthitaḥ

Established in God, having a firm understanding of divine knowledge  
and not hampered by delusion, they neither rejoice in getting  
something pleasant nor grieve on experiencing the unpleasant.

- Bhagvad Gita, 5.20

## ABOUT THE HINDU VISHWA

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World Hindu Council of America (VHPA), founded in 1970 and incorporated in the state of New York in 1974, is an independent, nonprofit, tax-exempt and volunteer-based charitable organization serving the needs of Hindu community in USA. It aims to build a dynamic and vibrant Hindu society rooted in the eternal values of Dharma and inspired by the lofty ideal of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, i.e. "the entire creation is one family".

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## IN THIS ISSUE

### Hindu Festivals Under Siege Wokeism, Commercialization, and the Erosion of Dharmic Traditions



16

### Bhagvad Geeta for Children 7



34

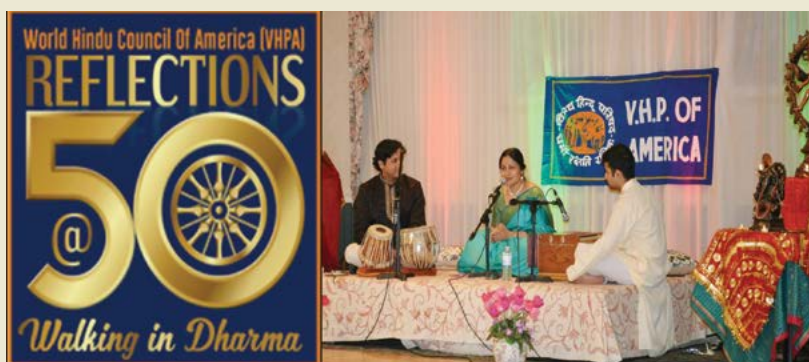
### Yoga as a Science of Consciousness



38

Editorial	3
Support-A-Child Fundraiser KalAsangamam Held in Billerica, MA	14
Mirror, Mirror on the Wall, Who's the Fairest of Them All	22
Feeling Good Within Oneself	25
What is Śāstra	28
HWN Organizes Online Webinar on Symbolism Behind Timeless Hindu Stories	33
Book Review : Metamorphosis	36

## VHPA AND HINDU AMERICA



5





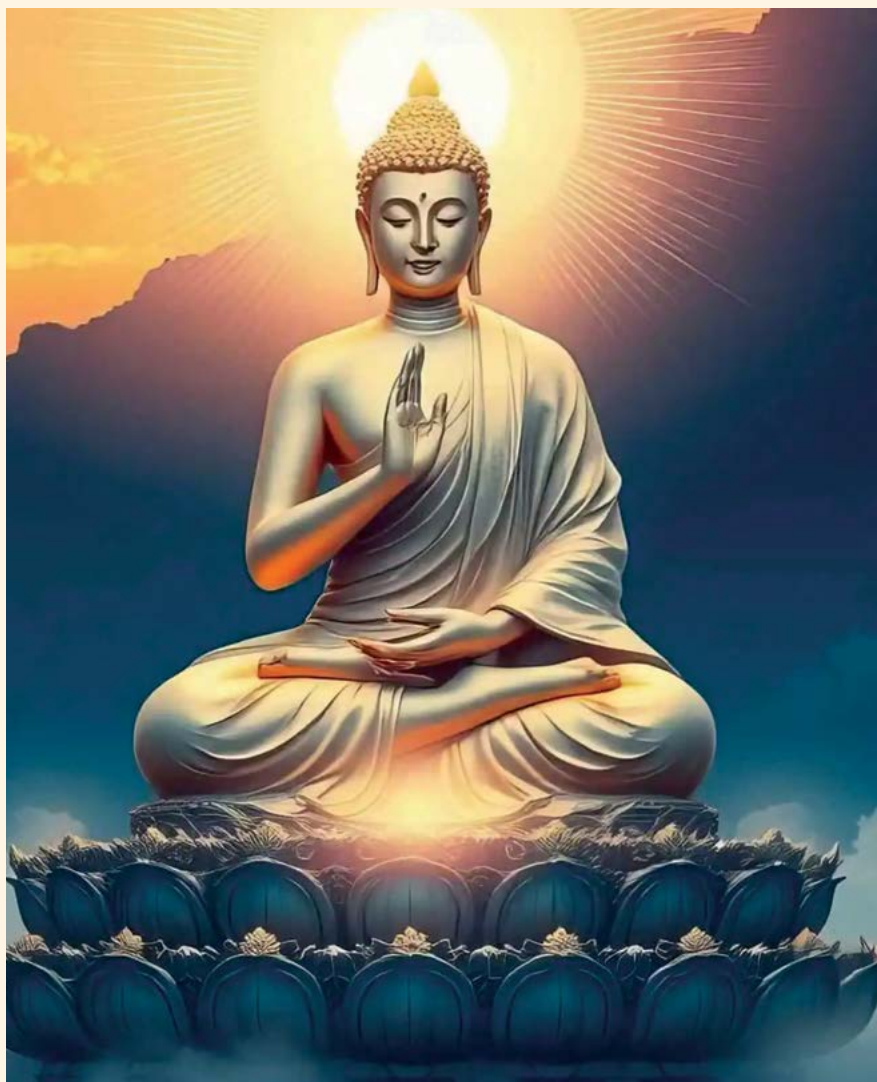
# Migration, Identity, and the Dharmic Middle Path in a Turbulent World

Integration does not demand abandoning one's roots; it demands respecting the host culture's laws, identity, and social fabric. Hindus modeled this for millennia. Jews, Zoroastrians, Buddhists from Southeast Asia, and Tibetans found refuge and dignity in India. They integrated without erasing the local ethos. This balanced coexistence—openness anchored in confidence and coherence—is the Dharmic model of migration. Integration was mutual, never imposed.

**H**uman migration is as old as humanity, yet its consequences have never been more complex. As Hindus in the global diaspora—especially in the United States—we live with two simultaneous truths. We have personally benefitted from lawful, orderly immigration; and we come from a civilization repeatedly reshaped, often violently, by ideological invasions, forced conversions, and demographic aggressions. These dual memories must shape our understanding.

Hindu Dharma gives us a subtle but firm lens. “वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्” reminds us to see the world as one family. The ethos of “अतिथि देवो भव” teaches reverence toward the guest—but it applies to guests, not invaders. Dharma celebrates hospitality, but only when it rests on mutual respect, not unilateral surrender.

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India. They integrated without erasing the local ethos. This balanced coexistence—openness anchored in confidence and coherence—is the Dharmic model of migration. Integration was mutual, never imposed.

Yet Dharma is equally categorical about order and sovereignty: “धर्मो रक्षति रक्षितः”—Dharma protects those who protect it. Boundaries, whether personal, cultural, or national, are not contradictions to compassion; they are what make compassion sustainable.

History offers countless warnings of how societies destabilize under forced migration, demographic engineering, or religiously motivated expansionism. No civilization knows this more intimately than ours. Waves of violent incursions, backed by absolutist creeds, scarred India’s cultural continuity. The memory of persecution, destruction of knowledge systems, and the imposition of medieval sharia is recorded in history.

As an example, recent events in India illustrate the difference between legitimate immigration and deliberate infiltration. Reports from border regions highlight large-scale illegal entries from Bangladesh—organized flows enabled by political patronage and porous borders. States like West Bengal face demographic inversion, where entire districts have shifted religiously within a single generation. This is demographic aggression, strengthened by vote-bank politics that turns illegality into political capital.

The United States faces its own parallel reckoning. The recent Trump-era policies—stricter asylum standards, enhanced border enforcement are attempts

to restore order to a system strained by mass migration. Regardless of political preference, the principle is unmistakable: a nation unable to control its borders ultimately disintegrates.

Hindu Americans understand this intuitively. We contribute academically, economically, and culturally without demanding exceptions or parallel systems. Our civilizational memory reminds us of what happens when masses are imported without integration.

The Dharmic approach does not demonize refugees or economic migrants, it simply insists on distinguishing the deserving from the dangerous, the lawful from the lawless, and the guest from the aggressor. Diversity is meaningful only when held together by a cohesive identity. Without shared norms, diversity becomes division.

The “fruit bowl” metaphor illustrates multicultural harmony—distinct identities enriching the whole. But even a fruit bowl needs a container, and each fruit must complement, not contaminate, the rest.

“समत्वं योग उच्यते”—balance is the highest discipline. Compassion must walk with caution; hospitality with responsibility. As diaspora Hindus—shaped by memory, guided by Dharma, and grateful to our adopted lands—we can advocate a balanced view of migration grounded in civilizational ethos: humane, realistic, and anchored in wisdom. One that honors the world as one family—and the right of every family to protect its home. ■





# VHPA AND HINDU AMERICA

## A 55-YEAR JOURNEY OF CULTURAL CONTINUITY – PART II

● By Jai G. Bansal, VP of Education and Prachar, VHPA Abstract

VHPA's vision is to cultivate “a dynamic, vibrant Hindu society inspired by the eternal values of Dharma and the lofty ideal of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam,” which translates to “the entire creation is one family.” This vision encompasses a society that evolves with the times, fostering knowledge, innovation, and the timeless wisdom of the Rishis in every endeavor. It aspires for excellence in sciences, arts, and technologies, embracing courage to explore universal truths.

### Dive into Pillars of VHPA



Samskār



Sampark



Prachār



Sevā

### VHPA's Guiding Principles

VHPA operates on the foundational principles of Dharma, a concept in Indic philosophy that transcends the limited definition of “religion.” Dharma is the natural law which upholds, integrates, and sustains this universe. In the human plane, Dharma represents a holistic philosophy rooted in ethics, righteousness, duty and a balanced way of life, guiding individuals to live in harmony with moral values across all aspects of existence.

VHPA's vision is to cultivate “a dynamic, vibrant Hindu society inspired by the eternal values of Dharma and the

lofty ideal of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam,” which translates to “the entire creation is one family.” This vision encompasses a society that evolves with the times, fostering knowledge, innovation, and the timeless wisdom of the Rishis in every endeavor. It aspires for excellence in sciences, arts, and technologies, embracing courage to explore universal truths. A vibrant society, brimming with energy and creativity, that nurtures aspirations, preserves cultural and intellectual heritage, and thrives through prosperity, resilience, and the joy of collective progress.

Reflecting the inclusive essence of Hindu Dharma, VHPA embraces its diverse spiritual paths, philosophies,





and practices. Unlike organizations limited to specific sects or traditions, VHPA unites Hindu Americans across sampradayas, including Jainism, Sikhism, and Buddhism, acknowledging them as integral components of the Dharmic heritage. The philosophy “All temples are VHPA’s temples, and all Swamis are its Swamis” encapsulates its unwavering commitment to unity and diversity.

Initiatives such as the 1998 Dharma Sansad, where leaders from diverse spiritual backgrounds gathered to discuss shared objectives, exemplify VHPA’s dedication to collective progress. This inclusive approach resonates deeply with Hindu Americans as they navigate the complexities of multicultural and multi-religious environments. By strengthening the collective identity of the Hindu diaspora, while honoring the richness of its traditions, VHPA remains a vital force in preserving and promoting the values of Hindu Dharma.

### As Stephen Knapp puts it

When it comes to Vedic culture, more popularly known as Hinduism, many people find it difficult or impossible to define it in a concise or adequate manner. It differs quite a bit from the conventional and western monotheistic religions with which many people are familiar. Hinduism is pluralistic. In other words, it does not claim any one prophet or savior; it includes all aspects of God; it does not subscribe to any one philosophy or dogma; it includes various schools of thought and ways of understanding spiritual Truth; it includes a variety of religious rites or sacraments; it does not exclude any particular scripture that can help a person understand more about God and spiritual Truth; and it does not say that you have only one life in which to become spiritually perfect or you will go to eternal damnation. Thus, Vedic philosophy is more of a way of living and an outlook on life than a religion.

Central to VHPA’s mission is Seva, or selfless service, a principle deeply embedded in Hindu Dharma. Seva emphasizes humility, compassion, and the welfare of society, and VHPA exemplifies this spirit through a wide range of initiatives. These efforts include supporting underprivileged communities, organizing cultural and spiritual programs for the diaspora, and engaging in disaster relief. What makes VHPA’s approach unique is its emphasis on silent seva—acts of service performed without expectation of recognition or reward. This ethos is vividly demonstrated at VHPA camps, where senior volunteers quietly take on humble tasks, such as cleaning bathrooms, inspiring others through their example of humility and dedication. By framing service as a way of life rather than a duty, VHPA promotes spiritual growth while fostering a sense of unity and purpose within

the community.

VHPA’s commitment to seva extends beyond the Hindu community to the broader American society, reflecting the universal values of Hindu Dharma. Through its community service projects and interfaith initiatives, VHPA encourages harmony and mutual respect, demonstrating that the values of compassion and selflessness transcend cultural and religious boundaries.

Sustaining the cultural heritage (timeless values) is another pillar of VHPA’s mission, especially for first-generation Hindu immigrants and their children. Living in a foreign land presents unique challenges to maintaining cultural identity, and VHPA meets this challenge by emphasizing that culture is a living entity, not a static artifact. It believes that while the core essence of Hindu culture must be preserved, each generation must reinterpret and adapt it to stay relevant in changing times. This philosophy is brought to life through programs like Bal Vihars, which serve as cultural and spiritual incubators for children. In these nurturing spaces, young minds learn about Hindu traditions, scriptures, and values, laying a strong foundation for their identity.

Cultural sustenance efforts extend beyond children to include adults, who reconnect with their roots through VHPA’s festivals, workshops, and camps. These programs provide opportunities to celebrate heritage while adapting to the multicultural environment of the diaspora. By fostering pride and a sense of belonging, VHPA ensures that Hindu culture thrives, evolving yet rooted in its timeless principles.

The principle of Karma Yoga, as outlined in the Bhagavad Gita, forms the philosophical backbone of VHPA’s activities. This principle advocates performing one’s duties selflessly and without attachment to the outcomes, emphasizing the importance of action over results. For VHPA volunteers, Karma Yoga is not just an abstract concept but a guiding force in their daily lives. Whether organizing events, mentoring youth, or participating in community projects, they focus on the act itself, cultivating a mindset of humility and equanimity. Over time, this practice fosters personal growth, spiritual fulfillment, and resilience in the face of life’s challenges.

This philosophy also shapes VHPA’s approach to leadership and teamwork. Volunteers are encouraged to lead from behind, prioritizing collective goals over individual recognition. This decentralized model of leadership reflects the essence of selflessness and collaboration, enabling the organization to function cohesively while remaining true to its values. The practice of Karma Yoga within VHPA creates an environment where service becomes a shared journey, uniting individuals in their pursuit of spiritual and





*Get up, and set your shoulder to the wheel  
– How long is this life for? As you have come  
into this world, leave some mark behind.  
Otherwise, where is the difference between  
you and the trees and stones?*



community well-being.

Unity in diversity is a hallmark of Hindu Dharma, and VHPA celebrates this principle by fostering harmony within the Hindu community. The organization's vision of unity is not about homogenizing traditions but about embracing their coexistence. Through inclusive programs and events, VHPA brings together practitioners from various sampradayas, encouraging dialogue and collaboration. This effort strengthens the collective identity of the Hindu diaspora, providing a sense of shared purpose while honoring the richness of individual traditions. In a globalized world where cultural cohesion is often tested, VHPA's commitment to unity serves as a stabilizing force for the community.

Beyond community building, VHPA emphasizes personal growth through the teachings of Dharma. Hindu Dharma offers a holistic framework for leading a balanced and meaningful life, and VHPA integrates these teachings into its programs. Members and volunteers are encouraged to embody values such as honesty, compassion, and self-discipline in their daily lives. Activities like yoga, meditation, and spiritual discussions provide opportunities to align actions with these principles, fostering inner peace and clarity.

While VHPA is deeply committed to serving the Hindu community, it also recognizes the importance of engaging with the broader society. By building bridges across cultural and religious divides, VHPA fosters mutual respect and understanding, emphasizing shared human values. Its outreach efforts, including educational initiatives and interfaith dialogues, showcase the universal relevance of Hindu principles and their ability to contribute positively to the society at large.

Through its commitment to inclusivity, seva, cultural preservation, and spiritual growth, VHPA not only

strengthens the Hindu diaspora but also inspires harmonious coexistence within a diverse world. By embodying the timeless values of Hindu Dharma, it provides a model of living with purpose, compassion, and unity.

## A Glimpse of VHPA's 50+ Year Journey

For over fifty years, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA) has played a pivotal role in shaping the Hindu American community through its unwavering commitment to cultural preservation, education, and service. By empowering future generations with the universal values of Hindu Dharma, advocating for Hindu interests, and fostering interfaith understanding, VHPA has left an indelible mark on the diaspora. The timeline below highlights key milestones in VHPA's journey and its enduring impact on the Hindu American movement.

### Major Milestones

**1970** - Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA) established.

**1973** - Began Hindu Vishwa magazine publication in Brooklyn, NY.

**1974** - VHPA incorporated in the State of New York.

- First Bal Vihar started in Hartford, CT.
- VHPA Bookstore started in Salem, NH.
- Approved as a 501(C)(3) Tax exempt corporation by the IRS.

**1978** - Seva – Service for Humanity program started. Since its inception, millions of dollars have been raised for victims



of earthquakes, floods, poverty, and funded construction of hospitals, schools, hostels, waterworks, and temples in Bharat and elsewhere.

- Seva in America started.

**1979** - The first Youth camp conducted in Rhode Island.

**1983** - First Regional Hindu Conference in Orlando, FL.

**1984** - The first-ever International Hindu Conference in the U.S. held at Madison Square Garden, New York, drawing over 4500 delegates from more than forty countries.

- 'One Teacher One School' started by Friends of Tribal Society (FTS) renamed Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation in 1999 to provide education to tribal and rural children; eventually spun off as an independent organization. Over its 35-year journey, the foundation has provided literacy to ten million children, expanded healthcare access to 855,000 individuals, and vocationally trained 17,400 women.

**1985** - Support-a-Child (SAC) launched; today it supports education of over four thousand under-privileged children in India.

- First Youth Conference held at Voorhees, NJ.
- Hindu University of America (HUA) launched as a loosely affiliated organization and eventually spun off as an independent entity.

**1989**- Hindu Unity Year celebrated with more than 100 programs across the country. Finale at Newington, CT with 108 Yagna Kunds.

**1990** - Hindu Students Council (HSC) established to create an organized Hindu presence on college campuses. Today, operating as an independent entity, HSC runs several dozen chapters across universities and has expanded its efforts to high schools.

**1993**- Global Vision 2000 Conference in Washington, DC draws 8,000 Delegates from more than 50 countries.

- Global Hindu Electronic Network, precursor of today's VHPA websites launched.
- First Hindu Youth Conference by HSC at Global Vision 2000 is attended by 2000 Youth.

**1997** - American Hindus Against Defamation initiative started to counter Hindu hate, defamation and protect the sanctity of Hindu symbols, culture, and customs.

**1998** - Dharma Samsad of Religious and Spiritual leaders held at Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Saylorsburg, PA.

**1999** - Dharma Prasar Yaatra – Fourteen days continuous travel by Dharma Gurus to 14 locations across the country; finale at Whippany, NJ with 2000 attendees.

**1999** - Dharma Samsad of Religious and Spiritual leaders held at Radha Madhav Dham, Austin, TX.

**2000** - Hosted 108 Dharma Gurus from Bharat who participated in UN's Millennium Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders.

- Reception for Millennium Peace Summit Delegates and Shri A. B. Vajpayee, Prime Minister of Bharat at Staten Island, NY.

**2001** - The 'Vishwa Dharma Prasar Yatra', sponsored by Hindu Leaders Forum, was aimed at mobilizing all religions and cultures to help prevent violence due to ethnic, religious, and sociological differences. Leading Hindu spiritual leaders visited 50 major cities in 40 countries to spread the message of peace, brotherhood, and tolerance and to acquaint people with the rich Hindu heritage. In the United States, the VDPY began in Miami on August 20 and then travelled to Atlanta, Washington DC, Chicago, and Los Angeles.

**2004** - Hindu American Vanaprasthi Network started, officially renamed HAVAN in 2011.

**2006** - Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference (HMEC), renamed Hindu Mandir Empowerment Council in 2024, launched at Atlanta.

- Hindu Awareness Yaatra initiated a nationwide program of tours of saints and scholars to awaken the society.

**2010** - Coalition of Hindu Youth (CHY) launched.

**2012** - Hindu Women's Network (HWN) launched.

- Hindu Mandir Priests' Conference (HMPC), an annual event, launched at Pittsburgh, PA.

**2013** - Science and Sanatan Dharma Scholarship launched.

**2018** - World Hindu Congress held in Chicago, IL; over 2500 delegates from more than 50 countries attended.

**2019** - Threads 2019 Conference held in Boston, MA, to celebrate the multi-faceted contributions of Hindu Americans to the society; more than 500 delegates and 60 prominent speakers participated.

**2020** - Advocacy initiative HinduPACT (Hindu Policy Research and Advocacy Collective) USA launched, along





with its several branches including Hindu Lounge, a YouTube based Talk show.

- First Virtual Conference Reflections@50 held in September to celebrate and chronicle VHPA's 50-year proud history.

**2021** - Stop Hindudvesha initiative launched with the mission to explore and expose the phenomenon of Hindu Hate.

- The celebration of October as Hindu Heritage Month launched, now formally recognized by more than half the states in the U.S., and many countries across the globe.

**2022** - Released 'Hinduism and America: How Hindu Dharma is Transforming the West,' a coffee-table book that chronicles the journey of Hindu thought in the U.S.

- Sharda Scholarship program launched to support rising high school seniors from the Hindu community who aspire for higher studies.

**2023** - Launched American Hindu Lifetime Contribution Award to honor individuals enriching America with lifelong dedication to Hindu values, culture, spirituality, and fostering harmony and understanding.

**2024** - Shri Ram Rath Yatra conducted across the US, traveling over 24,000 miles by road in 66 days, visiting more than 850 Hindu mandirs in 49 states. The remaining 50th state, Hawaii, visited in January 2025

- Shri Ram Mandir Jhanki (float) participated in the India Day Parade, New York City – a historic first.

## A Closer Look at Some of VHPA's Impactful Initiatives

VHPA's commitment to preserving and promoting Hindu culture is reflected in its diverse range of initiatives aimed at education, empowerment, and community building. These efforts focus on nurturing cultural and spiritual values in the younger generation, providing educational opportunities to underserved communities, and fostering intellectual growth and engagement across all age groups. By addressing the needs of both individuals and communities, VHPA's programs embody a vision of holistic development rooted in the principles of Dharma. The following section delves deeper into these initiatives,

highlighting their impact on the Hindu diaspora and their contributions to society at large.

### BalVihars

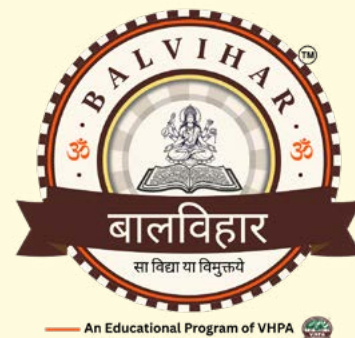
BalVihar was the first major initiative launched by the VHPA to address the growing need among early Hindu immigrants to connect their children with their cultural heritage. Established in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1974, it aims to instill Hindu

values, cultural pride, and social responsibility in younger generations, ensuring they remained rooted in their heritage while thriving in their new homeland.

The concept quickly gained popularity, expanding as more parents recognized their value. Initially improvised, the program soon became well-structured and aspirational for families. Parents became increasingly involved, leading to the program's rapid growth. By the late 20th century, numerous states had established thriving BalVihar centers, including Irvine - California, Texas, Atlanta – Georgia, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Chicago – Illinois, and Washington, D.C. Over the years, thousands of children have benefitted from the program, which continues to flourish nationwide.

The establishment of the Hindu Mandir Executive Council (HMEC) in 2006 further bolstered the growth of BalVihars. Mandirs were encouraged to incorporate BalVihars into their activities, providing children with direct exposure to rituals, traditions, and philosophy. The popularity of BalVihars led to similar programs being introduced by temples and other cultural institutions, enhancing their reach and impact.

Built on the four foundational pillars of the VHPA - Samskar, Prachar, Sampark, and Seva - BalVihars aim to nurture well-rounded individuals and future leaders. Samskar emphasizes respect for Hindu traditions and provides opportunities to explore Hindu values, scriptures, and heritage. Prachar encourages children to share their learning with peers, address misconceptions in school curricula, and raise awareness of Hindu culture. Seva fosters a sense of responsibility through community service, transcending differences in race, religion, or nationality. Sampark focuses on building personal relationships and cultivating a sense of belonging to a larger Hindu family. Together, these pillars create a holistic environment for learning and growth.





The curriculum includes Hindi language instruction and lessons on Hindu Dharma. Physical and spiritual development activities such as yoga, Surya Namaskar, and meditation are integrated alongside cultural engagement through inspirational stories, bhajans, crafts, and festival celebrations. Character-building discussions center on values and community service, ensuring children develop a balanced intellectual, physical, and spiritual outlook. A typical schedule may feature prayer, yoga, games, bhajans, shloka recitation, and storytelling, offering a comprehensive mix of activities.

A key feature of Bal Vihar is its emphasis on fostering a close-knit community. Teachers (shikshaks) create a familial atmosphere, while families are encouraged to connect outside of sessions. This approach ensures that the program feels like an extension of the family rather than a formal school, strengthening bonds and reinforcing shared values.

Over the past five decades, VHPA BalVihars have produced thousands of graduates, many of whom are now leaders in the Hindu movement in America. Early participants have become parents, enrolling their own children in BalVihars or even establishing new centers. Second and third generation adults are now running BalVihars and related programs, ensuring the continuity of this vital cultural initiative. The consensus among families is clear: Bal Vihar instills values and a sense of identity that schools cannot provide, enabling children to excel while contributing to the broader American society.

BalVihars have also served as incubators for other youth-oriented initiatives. Volunteers inspired by the success of BalVihars developed summer camps, youth conferences, and similar programs, further enriching the cultural education landscape. These extensions provide opportunities for deeper engagement and foster the next generation of Hindu community leaders.

As we look at the future, the demand for BalVihars far exceeds the number of existing centers. To meet this need, the vision is to establish Bal Vihar programs within a 10-mile radius of every community, akin to the accessibility of public schools. In areas with lower concentrations of Indian families, online Bal Vihar programs could serve as an alternative. By expanding access, VHPA aims to ensure that every child has the opportunity to connect with their heritage and grow into a proud and capable member of the Hindu community.

### Support-A-Child (SAC)

Support-A-Child (SAC) is a philanthropic initiative by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA) aimed at



transforming the lives of underprivileged children in India. Since its inception in 1985, SAC has provided education, lodging, and boarding for children from economically disadvantaged families, including those in rural and remote tribal regions with minimal access to basic amenities. As a volunteer-driven nonprofit organization, SAC operates across 27 chapters in 16 states in the United States, demonstrating its wide reach and the dedication of its supporters.

SAC's mission is supported by its committed volunteers, who organize fundraising events across the U.S. These events not only generate resources for the program but also promote Indian art and culture by showcasing performances from talented artists. SAC volunteers collaborate with renowned performers from India and local talent in the U.S., hosting events such as Kavi Sammelan, Kathak dance performances, Santoor-Tabla Jugalbandi, and Puppet shows. Through these programs, SAC integrates cultural promotion with its goal of supporting education for needy children.

The initiative is characterized by its transparency and efficient use of resources. SAC ensures that donations reach their intended recipients with minimal overhead costs. It partners with several trusted organizations in India, such as Bharat Kalyan Prathishthan (BKP), Sewa Bharati, and Vivekananda Kendra, which operate hostels and schools in underserved areas. BKP, a key collaborator, manages hostels in cities and remote tribal regions where poverty and lack of infrastructure prevent access to education. SAC-supported facilities operate in states such as Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand, Assam, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, and Maharashtra, providing children with a supportive environment to pursue their education.

A distinctive aspect of SAC's approach is its commitment to fostering emotional connections between donors and beneficiaries. Donors receive annual progress reports and photographs of the children they support, ensuring transparency while creating meaningful bonds that deepen their engagement with the cause.





In recent years, SAC has also introduced a pilot internship program for young Indian American students. This initiative allows participants to stay in SAC-supported hostels in India, fostering personal connections with the residents and a greater understanding of their challenges and aspirations. Rooted in Swami Vivekananda's philosophy that serving humanity is a form of divine service, SAC bridges the Indian American community with their heritage while empowering children to break the cycle of poverty through education.

### HinduMandir Empowerment Council (HMEC)



Over the past half-century, two significant developments have shaped the Hindu diaspora in North America and the Caribbean: a substantial increase in Hindu migration and the establishment of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA). As Hindus settled in these regions, they built temples, ashrams, and missions to facilitate the practice of Sanātana Dharma through worship, festival celebrations, and community gatherings. VHPA has played a critical role in preserving, protecting, and promoting Hindu Dharma, with one of its key initiatives being the Hindu Mandir Empowerment Council (HMEC).

In 2023, the Hindu Mandir Empowerment Council was officially announced as the new name of the Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference. This evolution reflects an expanded mission to unify all three pillars of Hindu houses of worship: priests and acharyas, temple management, and congregations. HMEC is the largest annual gathering of temples in North America and the Caribbean, bringing together past and present temple executives, priests, volunteers, saints, scholars, and spiritual leaders from Hindu Mandirs and organizations. Its roots can be traced to a vision articulated by Swami Dayananda Saraswati in 1998 in Saylorsburg, Pennsylvania, to create a network of temples and institutions fostering leadership and sustainability across generations.

Over the last 19 years, HMEC has successfully organized 17 conferences in major cities across the United States, Canada, and Trinidad, building a strong and vibrant network of Hindus. These conferences have provided a platform for sharing knowledge, best practices, and experiences, fostering unity and collaboration among temples and organizations. This growing network has enabled HMEC to serve as a unifying force, offering guidance and tools to strengthen Hindu temples and the broader community.

HMEC has spearheaded several impactful initiatives rooted in spirituality and collective action. Key achievements include Hindu Sewa Divas, a day dedicated to community service; the publication of the Antyesti Samskar and Vivah Samskar books on Hindu rites; a Hindu Mandir Safety Guide; the Bhagavad Gita Scholarship for youth; and the Hindu American Vanprasthi Network (HAVAN). These initiatives empower temples to serve not only as religious centers but also

as hubs for civic and community engagement.

The COVID-19 pandemic posed unprecedented challenges, but HMEC rose to the occasion by strengthening connectivity and outreach through its network. Weekly prayers sessions were livestreamed across North America, involving multiple spiritual organizations and community members. Guidelines for temple reopening were developed and disseminated, and funds were raised to support struggling temples and priests. This proactive response underscored HMEC's commitment to serving the Hindu community during crises.

Another remarkable achievement was the Shree Ram Janma Bhoomi (RJB) celebrations, held from 2020 to 2024. These events included family-led home pujas, collective chanting by priests across 60 temples in North America, and the Mandir Reconstruction Shilanyas in 2020. For the RJB Murti Pran Pratishtha Mahotsav in 2024, more than 100 priests participated in a virtual curtain-raiser event, and around 800 temples across the U.S. joined the grand celebrations. Between March and May 2024, the Shree Ram Lalla Rath Yatra, organized with the support of VHPA leadership and volunteers, traveled over 24,000 miles across 49 states, visiting more than 850 temples. Thousands of devotees participated, receiving prasadam and blessings from Ayodhya. The Rath Yatra set a world record for the most temples visited and the longest distance traveled by road for a religious event, reflecting the community's devotion and unity.

The Hindu Mandir Priests' Conference (HMPC), an offshoot of HMEC, was established to address the evolving role of priests in North America. Since its inception in 2012



in Pittsburgh, HMPC has facilitated meaningful dialogues between priests, temple management, and the younger generation of Hindus. These conversations have uncovered challenges and opportunities for practicing Sanātana Dharma in the modern age, providing critical insights for sustaining Hindu traditions and rituals. In 2024, the 11th HMPC was held as part of HMEC, where 13 priests were recognized with prestigious awards for their exemplary contributions.

The HMEC network has laid a strong foundation for impactful initiatives and collaborations that will continue to strengthen Hindu temples and organizations across North America and the Caribbean. The success of the Shree RJB celebrations serves as a catalyst for envisioning new opportunities and deepening ties among temples and the broader community. Through these collective efforts, HMEC and VHPA are paving the way for the preservation, growth, and flourishing of Sanātana Dharma for generations to come.

## Hindu Heritage Month



Hindu Heritage Month (HHM) stands as a testament to the power of simple yet transformative ideas. Conceived in 2021, HHM emerged from the recognition that October holds special significance for Hindus worldwide, as it is a time when many of their major

festivals take place. Traditionally celebrated within families, small groups, or individual organizations, HHM brings these celebrations together under a unified banner to share their cultural richness with a broader audience using modern technology.

The growth of HHM has been remarkable. In its inaugural year, nearly 100 organizations joined the celebrations, hosting a similar number of events across the United States and Canada. States and cities across the U.S. issued proclamations recognizing HHM, and the U.S. House of Representatives formally acknowledged the contributions of Hindus to society. Over the years, the initiative has expanded in both reach and scope, now involving participants from 15 countries, from New Zealand in the South to Norway in the North. The enthusiasm within the global Hindu community reflects the universal appeal of HHM's mission to celebrate shared traditions while embracing diversity.

The success of HHM can be attributed to a few key factors. First, it is a truly collective endeavor. HHM

belongs to no single organization; instead, it is driven by the collaborative efforts of many, each contributing their unique perspective. This inclusivity fosters unity while respecting the autonomy of participating groups. Second, its open framework allows individuals and organizations to celebrate in their preferred way, at any time during October, provided the events align with the fundamental values of Hindu Dharma. This decentralized approach mirrors the spirit of the Kumbh Mela, which operates as an autonomous yet unifying system. While VHPA provides the technological infrastructure, the broader community drives the movement, ensuring its organic and grassroots nature.

HHM also offers a model for fostering collaboration and unity within the Hindu community. Its success demonstrates the potential of collective efforts in addressing shared goals and creating lasting impact. This model can inspire similar initiatives in other areas, leveraging the strength of shared values and vision to achieve meaningful outcomes.

Looking ahead, there are several priorities for HHM's continued growth. Expansion remains critical - engaging more organizations, hosting a greater variety of events, and reaching additional countries. The scope of events should also evolve, connecting timeless Hindu principles to contemporary issues. For instance, the concept of Ahimsa (non-violence) can be linked to environmental sustainability, showcasing the relevance of Hindu values in addressing global challenges.

Youth involvement is another crucial focus. Empowering the next generation to take leadership roles will ensure HHM remains vibrant and relevant for years to come. Additionally, strengthening connections with elected representatives and society at large will amplify HHM's impact, fostering understanding and respect for Hindu culture and values.

Hindu Heritage Month has already established itself as a unifying and inspiring initiative. By continuing to grow, diversify, and engage meaningfully, it has the potential to further enrich the global community while preserving and promoting the timeless wisdom of Hindu Dharma.

## HINDU WOMEN'S NETWORK (HWN)

The Hindu Women's Network (HWN) is an initiative of the World Hindu Council of America (VHPA) that aims to create a supportive and empowering environment for Hindu women living in the United States. Through fostering communication, collaboration, and mutual support, the network aspires to strengthen families and society by promoting emotional, spiritual, and financial well-being. HWN serves as a beacon of hope and guidance, drawing upon the ancient wisdom and values of Hindu culture to





address contemporary challenges faced by women and their families.

At the core of HWN's mission is the cultivation of three fundamental abilities among Hindu women: "Shakti" (strength), "Seva" (selfless service), and "Sadhana" (spiritual practice). By embracing these qualities, the organization aims to empower women to uplift themselves and others, contribute to societal welfare, and achieve spiritual enlightenment. These core principles align with the broader vision of instilling self-esteem and self-respect within women, encouraging them to take on leadership roles in their families and communities.

One of the primary goals of HWN is to invoke "Matru-Shakti," emphasizing the inherent strength of women as nurturers and leaders. The network provides a platform to address social, cultural, and health-related issues, offering a supportive space where women can discuss challenges, share solutions, and

inspire each other. HWN seeks to create opportunities for networking, enabling women to utilize their skills and talents for the greater good of society.

To achieve its ambitious goals, HWN focuses on several key initiatives. First, it highlights the role of women as torchbearers of Hindu samskaras (values and traditions), ensuring that cultural heritage is passed down through generations. Second, it empowers women to help others by providing opportunities to connect and collaborate. Third, the organization envisions, develops, and executes programs that address the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual development of women. Through these initiatives, HWN creates an environment where women can thrive and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

The positive impact of HWN's initiatives is evident in the feedback received from participants. The success of various events and seva

(service) activities has motivated volunteers to continue their efforts and incorporate suggestions from participants to improve future programs. These events provide an excellent platform for initiating meaningful conversations, celebrating sisterhood, and fostering a sense of belonging among Hindu women in America.

Looking ahead, the Hindu Women's Network envisions a future where every woman is inspired to strengthen her family and contribute to society in a harmonious and balanced manner. By forming a dynamic and vibrant national network, HWN aims to foster collaboration at both local and national levels, leveraging the collective skills, talents, and wisdom of Hindu women. This initiative aspires to create a lasting impact, empowering women to achieve their full potential while staying connected to their cultural roots.

Hindu Women's Network stands as a powerful initiative dedicated to the empowerment of Hindu women through the principles of strength, service, and spirituality. By offering support, fostering collaboration, and promoting cultural values, HWN continues to pave the way for a brighter and more inclusive future for Hindu women and their families in America. ■

## About the Author



Dr. Jay G Bansal has also been a keen student of India's seminal contributions to the world. He has written extensively on the subject and given talks on international platforms, most recently at the G-20 Interfaith Forum in September 2022. He has also co-authored a highly acclaimed coffee table book titled "Hinduism and America: How Hindu Dharma is Transforming the West." This work attempts to capture the 250-year history of how Hindu thought has traveled to the West, and how it has been received.

Currently Dr. Bansal is serving as the vice president of education as well as a member of the Executive Board of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America.



# Support-A-Child Fundraiser KalAsangamam Held in Billerica, MA

**I**t was standing room only at the annual Support-A-Child fundraiser KalAsangamam, held on a sunny afternoon on Nov 1, 2025, at Om Hindu Community Center in Billerica, MA.

This year's theme was "By the Youth, For the Youth." All performers were younger but extremely accomplished students of the various vocal and instrumental music and dance schools.

Before the program, all attendees got to sample some delicious Samosas and mouth-watering Pani Puri along with garam garam chai. That got everyone in a good mood to enjoy the wonderful program.

The program started at 3 PM with Lamp Lighting by the chief guests Smt.Mona and Sri.Vishwanath Khaitan, while young Atharv recited the deep prajwalan mantra. This was followed by a Ganesh invocation by young students of Smt. Aparna Balaji, 27 students sang in one voice and set the tone for the rest of the evening.

Smt. Aparna Balaji was the emcee for the cultural part of the program, while Sri. Pranay Tiwari handled the fundraising appeals and other parts of the program. Smt. Aparna's melodious voice and expert hosting led us through the cultural part of the program. The audience was treated







to the beautiful strains of numerous violins as students of Smt. Smita Krishnan performed a classical piece. Then Sri. Pranay took over with the first appeal of the day by a 12-year-old boy, who talked about how his own comfortable upbringing made him think about children in other less fortunate circumstances and how they lived, and motivated him to make an impassioned appeal for people to support at least one child. Moved by his fervor, several people came forward and pledged to support one or more children.

Next was a saxophone and tabla recital, which was appreciated by all. In quick succession there were dances by students of Smt. Jeyanti Ghatraju, Smt. Sapna Krishnan and Smt. Sailaja Tummala, all appreciated and well received by the audience. Interspersed between these performances were appeals for support of underprivileged but deserving children in India, and details of the kind of support they received, and what people living in the USA could do for them. Appeals were made by young adults and a past big supporter of several children, who spoke of his own experiences in his journey with the SAC program.

In all, the program was a big success. 154 children were supported, which exceeded the goal of 130 set by the organizers.

After the program, everyone was treated to a finger-licking dinner cooked by the volunteers of OmHCC. All agreed it was a very entertaining program, along with being

very informative.

Support a Child was established in 1985 as an initiative of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA), to help eradicate illiteracy and improve living conditions of children from poor and disadvantaged families in India. A non-profit organization registered in the USA, SAC is run totally by volunteers' efforts, with minimal overhead costs. Through these fund-raisers, Support-A-Child hopes to be the conduit between the well-meaning, generous donors and the truly needy sections of the populace back in India. The donations are used to run schools and hostels, and to provide nutritious food and medical assistance for needy children in several Indian cities. ■

*For more information or to donate, please visit [www.sacusa.org](http://www.sacusa.org)*





# Hindu Festivals Under Siege

## Wokeism, Commercialization, and the Erosion of Dharmic Traditions

● By Rati Agnihotri

Hindu festivals illustrate this tension vividly. Once expressions of deep philosophical meaning and community bonding, they are increasingly reduced to consumerist spectacles. Commercialization and a shallow pursuit of “fun” have replaced ritual, reflection, and reverence.

**A**cross India, traditional rituals are giving way to vacations, hashtags, and corporate promotions. This essay investigates how the blending of secular modernity and global consumerism is transforming Hindu festivals from sacred observances into hollow displays of lifestyle and leisure.

- The woke and secular portrayal of Hindu festivals has reduced them to shallow versions of the deep values, traditions, and way of life they truly represent.
- Excessive commercialization now works hand in hand with wokeism, eroding Hindu traditions and weakening the cultural fabric.
- A growing number of urban Indians are choosing vacations



- during the “festive season” instead of celebrating festivals in the traditional way with their families.
- The Hindu community must act to limit the damage and ensure that commercialization does not strip festivals of their true cultural and spiritual essence.

- As traditional knowledge fades rapidly, documenting rituals and customs has become essential to prevent future generations of Hindus from becoming disconnected from their cultural and civilizational roots.

The past decade has marked the beginning of Bharat’s De-Macaulization—a gradual liberation





of the Indian psyche from colonial conditioning. The uncritical reverence once accorded to English and Western epistemic systems is slowly giving way to pride in indigenous knowledge and Vedic wisdom. This civilizational resurgence is visible in the construction of the Ayodhya Ram Mandir, the revival of ancient pilgrimage centers, the growth of Dharmic tourism, and the inclusion of India's civilizational ethos in its foreign policy and national self-image.

Yet beneath these large-scale shifts, India's cultural microcosm tells a more complex story. Urban civil society and media spaces remain dominated by left-liberal and woke sensibilities, distancing many Indians from their cultural roots. This duality—civilizational reawakening at the macro level and erosion at the micro—creates a paradoxical national mood.

Hindu festivals illustrate this tension vividly. Once expressions of deep philosophical meaning and community bonding, they are increasingly reduced to consumerist spectacles. Commercialization and a shallow pursuit of “fun” have replaced ritual, reflection, and reverence. The same cultural forces that label traditional attire “ethnic” now repackage festivals in secular or trendy forms, stripping them of meaning. What remains is a hollow celebration—vibrant in form but fading in spirit—marking a quiet but steady cultural amnesia among urban Indians.

This article will examine this growing disconnection, exploring how India's civilizational renaissance coexists with subtle but significant cultural erosion.

### Wokeism Meets Crass Commercialization

StopHinduvesha has discussed in its previous stories[1] how wokeism targets Hindu festivals to propagate anti-Hindu narratives and forcefully secularize them. From the whole narrative-building exercise around the burning of firecrackers in Diwali to the covertly Hinduphobic agenda of commercials like the much-talked-about Tanishq

ad,[2] Hindu festivals have been slowly turned into a tool of denigrating Hindu traditions.

However, an equally significant but highly overlooked issue is the over-the-top commercialization of Hindu festivals, which works in tandem with wokeism to erode Hindu traditions and culture. In the Indian context, wokeism has intersected with aggressive market dynamics to alienate Indians from their own cultural and Dharmic roots.

From Diwali cocktails[3] [4] to Diwali parties and club nights, the festival is used as a promotional tool to sell all kinds of products and services. Obviously, there is nothing wrong with promoting cocktails or marketing club parties and hangouts. But why drag a Hindu festival into all this? From Holi to Diwali, Hindu festivals are being repackaged as trendy capitalist culture products, endlessly open to distortion and experimentation. That's why, to those unfamiliar with the traditional aspect of the festival, Holi now evokes images of rave parties and hedonistic revelry, while Diwali evokes images of dressing up in “ethnic glam” and posing alongside diyas and lights. In other words, one becomes a carnival in popular imagination, while the other becomes akin to a cool night party. What's worse is that even people celebrating these festivals are gradually abandoning traditions and rituals in favor of “fun” and “relaxation”.

From Diwali and Navratri spa offers to the sacred bond of Rakshabandhan being used to sell holiday packages, resort stays, or dinners, Hindu festivals have become convenient marketing props. In the process, the Hindu community is being misled. An upwardly mobile urban middle class in India, groomed in secularism, drifts further from its traditional roots when bombarded with feel-good “secular” images of Diwali shopping, Rakshabandhan dinner, and Navratri dandiya nights at luxury clubs.

The hashtag “diwalicelebration” has about 1.5 million posts on Instagram. Yet, one hardly sees any content on the traditional roots of Diwali and its Hindu origins. The social media feed of Diwali is filled with influencers marketing everything from jewelry, saris, home-décor and bakery products in the name of Diwali.

Similarly, the commercialization of Navratri has hollowed out its essence – Devi Puja, Sattvic lifestyle, inculcation of Sattvic values, etc. From Navratri thalis to Navratri mocktails,[5] the sacred worship of the nine forms of Maa Durga has been trivialized into a marketing trend.

The homogenization of Hindu festivals under the banner of secularism altogether strips them of their Dharmic and cultural essence. When Deepawali celebrations are reduced to lighting of lamps, exchange of designer gift hampers, and posing in “ethnic wear”, the rich regional and familial



traditions of the festival are diluted or lost.

For example, the hill state of Uttarakhand has many versions of Diwali – Raj Bagwal in Tehri district, Igas in the areas near Tehri, Mangseer Bagwal Diwali, and Kumaoni Diwali, among others. In each of these versions of Diwali, local folklore of the region enriches the celebrations, which are very specific and unique. For example, in Kumaoni Diwali, sugarcane stalks are known to be hung from the balcony of the house so that “the Gods can use them as stairs to enter the house”. Also, pots used for worshipping Mahalaxmi are painted with traditional Aipan art designs of Kumaon, Uttarakhand.[6]

Then, there is the unique Dev Deepawali of Varanasi, celebrated 15 days after the main Diwali celebration. During this festival, homes and temples are illuminated with thousands of earthen lamps, and processions of deities move through the streets amid fireworks and devotional singing. Every temple has its own distinct rituals, which add to the Dharmic significance of the celebrations.[7]

Hindu festivals embody a rich repository of cultural practices, rituals, and traditions passed orally from one generation to the next. The beauty of Hindu Dharma lies in its dynamism – its ability to evolve while retaining its essence. Apart from the regional differences, each family has its own distinct rituals passed down through generations. For example, the Holika Dahan practice varies slightly from family to family, even within the same region. Similarly, the Lashmi-Ganesh Puja rituals of Diwali differ across households, reflecting the flexibility and continuity of the Hindu way of life.

However, as the urban middle class increasingly replaces traditional celebrations with modern and secular versions, a gradual loss of cultural memory is taking place. Fewer people recall why certain rituals exist or what they symbolize. The transition from devotion to decoration and from meaning to marketing reflects not just changing lifestyles but the fading of collective knowledge.

### **When Family Festivals Turn into Foreign Vacations**

The unique essence and Dharmic context of Hindu festivals are rapidly being erased under the homogenized idea of “festive season”.

Under the flashy banner of the festive season, festivals like Navaratri, Durga Puja, Dussehra, and Diwali are slowly losing their cultural relevance and becoming indistinguishable from the global Christmas-New Year marketplace. The trend reflects a systematic effort at the subtle secularization of Hindu festivals, and urban Hindus

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are embracing it unquestioningly.

Most alarming is the growing tendency among urban Indians to treat the “festive season” as vacation time rather than a period of traditional celebration at home. A recent Times of India report says that Indian travelers are increasingly opting for solo trips this festive season, with millennials leading the shift. The most popular destinations included the UAE, Vietnam, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Germany. Nearly two-thirds of visas issued for Germany were linked to Oktoberfest travel. The report added that family reunions are being replaced by solo trips, marking a clear change in how festivals are experienced. [8]

“In recent years, the idea of a festive break has taken a





dramatic turn due to rising disposable incomes, exposure to global cultures, and the ease of travel. This shift has created opportunities to blend celebration with exploration, turning festivals into memorable vacations”, yet another news report observed. [9]

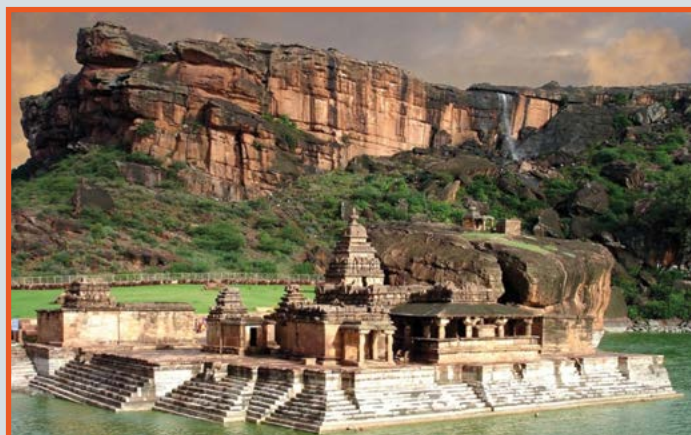
A 2024 report by The Times of India cites the findings of an American Express survey, which found that 97 percent of Indians planned to travel during the 2024 festive season, with 33 percent having already booked their travels. Leisure was the top motivation for 63 percent of the respondents. [10] The report detailing the long festive weekend calendar is telling of the sorry state of affairs of Hindu traditions and culture in Hindu-majority India. When festivals that once embodied civilizational and cultural consciousness of the society become mere holiday breaks, it signals a society gradually losing its cultural moorings.

For a society already battling culture erosion, it's deeply troubling when people prefer discounted foreign vacations over celebrating time-honored traditions at home. The language of the “festive season,” crafted to commercially exploit India's consumer base, effectively strips Hindu festivals of their Hinduness. What was once a spiritual and community experience is now a marketing category.

“Global citizenship,” or being a citizen of the world, is a popular concept today. According to the UN, “Global citizenship is the umbrella term for the social, political, environmental, and economic actions of globally minded individuals and communities on a worldwide scale”. [11] Many argue that the growing desire among Indians to experience other cultures during the festive season reflects this ideal. But true global citizenship cannot flourish at the cost of dismantling indigenous traditions and knowledge systems. In a highly unequal global order characterized by Western hegemony and the dominance of the Abrahamic narrative, global citizenship for Hindus often translates into detachment from their cultural and civilizational roots. When wokeism and modernity intersect with the rhetoric on “global citizenship”, it actively works to amplify the erasure of the belief systems and way of life of already endangered cultures and civilizations. That's precisely what's happening with Hindus at the moment.

## Guarding Tradition in a Commercial Age

The commercialization of festivals cannot be altogether wished away. However, the Hindu community can take steps to minimize the damage and turn the tide in its favor by ensuring that commercialization doesn't detract from the essence of Hindu cultural traditions and values. Below are



a few ways the Hindu community can turn the tide amidst the growing wave of wokeism and secularism that threatens the civilizational roots of Bharat:

■ **Revival of the Temple Ecosystem:** Renowned author Stephen Knapp has written extensively on promoting Vedic culture in the modern world. He places a lot of emphasis on the revival of the temple ecosystem, arguing that temples should act as classrooms for disseminating Vedic knowledge. Knapp suggests that temples should hold classes for adults to *help them better understand the traditions and rituals they observe*. [12]

The revival of local temple ecosystems can begin to undo the damage caused by the over-commercialization of Hindu festivals. Community temples should reinvent themselves as vibrant spaces for collective celebration, where festivals are observed with traditional rituals and shared devotion. Such public celebrations would ensure that even those unfamiliar with the practices or unable to perform rituals at home can participate and reconnect with their heritage.

Given that future generations in India may grow up unaware of how to celebrate Hindu festivals traditionally, this revival must begin now. Temples should adopt creative and engaging formats—especially to attract the younger



crowd—while staying true to the core of Hindu values and customs. Interactive programs, bhajan evenings, storytelling sessions, and children’s workshops can all serve as ways to keep traditions alive in an appealing, modern context.

■ **Media Vigilance:** The Hindu community must collectively act as an informal ombudsman to ensure Hindu festivals and traditions are portrayed respectfully in popular culture and media representation.

Social media has emerged as a powerful tool in this regard. In recent years, netizens have actively called out Hinduphobic undertones in advertisements and entertainment media. Collective online activism has, in several cases, compelled major brands to withdraw objectionable campaigns. The controversial Tanishq ad is a prime example. In October 2020, the popular jewelry brand Tanishq released an ad around Diwali, which portrayed a Muslim mother-in-law organizing a traditional Hindu baby shower ceremony for their Hindu daughter-in-law. The ad didn’t go well with netizens, who felt it subtly glorified ‘love jihad’. Due to public outrage, the brand had to ultimately take down the ad. [13]

■ **Innovative Marketing Practices to Revive Tradition:** Members of the community must adopt innovative marketing practices to make people appreciate the traditional aspects of Hindu festivals in a fun and engaging way. It could involve hosting Goddess-themed quizzes in cafes, schools, etc., during Navratri; organizing traditional Ramayana performances at cultural centers around Dussehra and Diwali; and conducting traditional Diya-making workshops for kids.

Young social media influencers can play an important role in developing fun and engaging content that teaches people about various rituals and traditions associated with popular Hindu festivals, such as Holi, Diwali, Dussehra, and Rakshabandhan. A write-up published by Pragyata[14] offers a striking example: it described how a

wave of Chhath Puja videos on social media captured the ritual’s devotional spirit through soulful songs dedicated to Chhath Maiyya. “In the midst of a plethora of run-of-the-mill online content, the soulful Chhath Puja videos set to Chhathi Maiyya’s melodies are a breath of fresh air,” the writer observed.

■ **Hindu activism:** The Hindu community must also consolidate and collectively pressure the government to establish mechanisms for maintaining the sanctity of Hindu festivals and preventing their appropriation or misuse. Amid growing concerns about Garba-Dandiya events becoming soft targets for “love jihad,” the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) issued an advisory ahead of the 2025 Navratri celebrations, urging organizers across Maharashtra to restrict non-Hindu participation. The VHP emphasized that despite increasing commercialization, every Garba or Dandiya night begins with an offering to the Goddess and is, by nature, an act of worship. It remains a sacred event, *not an entertainment platform for those outside the faith*. [15]

Hindu festivals often become vehicles for anti-Hindu propaganda largely due to misplaced notions of secular leniency within the Hindu community. Only through organized Hindu advocacy can the sanctity of these festivals be safeguarded. Collective cultural assertion is essential to ensure that sacred spaces and occasions remain true to their Dharmic intent.

■ **Hindu Billionaires Must Do Their Bit:** Hindu billionaires already play a significant role in sponsoring celebrations and events related to Hindu festivals. However, they must exercise discernment to ensure they do not inadvertently support anti-Hindu narratives disguised as ‘inclusive’ or secular initiatives. By monitoring how their funding is utilized and directing it toward projects that deepen public understanding of Hindu traditions, these influential individuals can help preserve the authenticity of Hindu festivals. Supporting educational campaigns, temple-based celebrations, and media content rooted in traditional values can go a long way towards sustaining civilizational continuity.

■ **Documenting Traditions and Rituals:** Traditions and rituals are passed on orally from one generation to the next. These are rarely documented, at least, not in formats that resonate with modern sensibilities. Temple priests and pundits have long been the custodians of ritual knowledge, yet their position in society has been steadily eroded due to decades of ideological hostility and loss of respect for their vocation. As panditae itself declines, so does the living memory of ritual practice. To prevent this knowledge from disappearing, systematic documentation has become critical. Festivals, prayers, and rituals must





be recorded and preserved in accessible forms—through books, films, digital archives, and educational initiatives—to ensure future generations remain connected to their roots.

## Closure

Hindu Dharma today stands as one of the few surviving non-Abrahamic faiths. Yet the growing disconnect of Hindus from the Dharmic essence of their festivals threatens this legacy. Unless urgent steps are taken now, the community may soon face cultural amnesia and a loss of continuity with its civilizational past.

## Citation

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# Mirror, Mirror on the Wall, Who's the Fairest of Them All

## THE AMOEBA AND THE MIRROR

● By Sarika Jaswani

30 years back in the dimly lit bio lab, on a damp glass slide, illuminated by a cold cone of microscope light, there was a perfect thin section of the cell that I was trying to draw on my thick practical book. To the naked eye, it was almost nothing—less than a speck, a translucent suggestion of movement. Under magnification, however, it became a world unto itself: a shifting sac of cytoplasm, a restless droplet with appetite and intention. It advanced, retreated, engulfed, adapted. It did not know if it was alive, yet it acted like something determined to stay that way.

For most of us, this is where the story ends. The amoeba is a footnote of biology, an early chapter in the long evolutionary novel that culminates, triumphantly, in us.

But what if the amoeba is not the primitive but the mirror? What if, in the unfocused outline of this single-celled wanderer, we glimpse the truth of our own existence?

This is the uncomfortable premise at the heart of a quiet philosophical movement, one reignited 30 years later while reading the strange, stark idea known as David Harding's mirror experiment. It is not science, not quite psychology, but something more elusive—an inquiry into whether the “self” we defend and define even exists in the way we assume. In ‘Face to Face’ the author dives into the “mirror experiment” (“the no-head experiment,” or “Headless Way mirror exercise”) is a contemplative/experiential exercise rather than a laboratory experiment. The purpose is to shift your awareness from the usual “I am inside this head/body” perspective, to a more direct “I am the awareness from which my head, body, and the world appear.” The experiment is aimed at revealing the illusion of a bounded “self” — the idea that “you are your body, inside your head.” Instead, Harding argues, what you really are is ever-present awareness; the body, head, thoughts, “you” as an individual: they are just appearances within awareness.

The amoeba and the mirror, together, form a story about what life is, what we are, and why we -the homosapiens, cling so fiercely to the illusion of being more than biology.



### I. The Creature That Doesn't Know It's Alive - And Lives Perfectly Anyway

Ask a biologist why the amoeba fascinates researchers after centuries of study, and you'll hear two answers. One is technical: the amoeba blurs the boundaries of what a cell “should” be capable of. The other is existential.

It's the simplicity that tricks you,” says one microbiologist I spoke with. “You think you're looking at something basic, but you're actually watching the minimum viable template of living behavior.”

An amoeba has no brain, yet it navigates.

No senses, yet it detects.

No consciousness, yet it responds.

It extends pseudopods—a kind of liquid limb—and surrounds its food. When conditions worsen, it hunkers down into a protective cyst. When conditions improve, it resumes its roaming. All instinct. All reaction. No internal monologue required.

What is astonishing is not that the amoeba does so little, but that we do so much in the same way. Strip away the layering—society, language, ambition, narrative—and





human life is built on the same ancient machinery. Hunger. Comfort. Fear. Desire. Movement. Reaction.

At the smallest scale, we are amoebas with better costumes.

## II. The Human Story: A Billion Cells Trying to Feel Singular

The human body contains about 37 trillion cells. Each one is a descendant—by unbroken lineage—of organisms like the amoeba. We are, biologically speaking, compendiums of cooperation. A consortium pretending to be a singular entity.

That pretense is crucial to how we survive socially. We use words like “I” and “me” and “self” because the alternative—the admission that we are a chorus rather than a solo—is psychologically destabilizing.

Philosophers have tried for millennia to pin down what this self actually is. Neuroscientists have joined the pursuit in recent decades, only to discover that the brain is more parliament than king, a coalition of impulses competing for behavioral dominance.

Which brings us back to the mirror.

## III. Nothing Stares Back: The Harding Mirror Experiment

The idea circulated quietly for years, mentioned in essays and late-night philosophical forums: try standing before a mirror and locate, with absolute specificity, the “you” you believe yourself to be.

Not your face.  
Not your expression.  
Not your history, roles, or narrative.  
Just the “you” behind the looking.

Harding’s claim—provocative and almost rude in its simplicity—is that you won’t find it. You will find a reflection, but not a self. A collection of features, but not an owner. The eye looks for a controller and finds only an interface.

To some, this thought is liberating. To others, it feels like a psychological trapdoor.

If the amoeba shows that life can operate without identity, Harding’s mirror suggests that even our identity—our grand differentiator—may be little more than a well-rehearsed illusion held together by memory and cultural reinforcement.

In this view, humans are astonishing in scale but hollow at the core: complex behavior wrapped around a vanishing point.

## IV. The Grand Contradiction: Acting Like Gods with Amoeba Foundations

And yet, for creatures who may be fundamentally empty of “self,” we live as though the world is ours to define, divide, and possess.

We hoard objects.  
We draw borders.  
We accumulate wealth.  
We claim credit and territory and status.

We behave like the crowned sovereigns of Earth, as if ownership were a biological imperative rather than a cultural invention. At times, humanity appears as a species-wide performance of self-importance—an insistence that we are the protagonists of the planet’s story.

But beneath the performance, the machinery is familiar. The amoeba gathers nutrients; we gather assets. The amoeba avoids danger; we avoid discomfort. The amoeba responds to chemical gradients; we respond to emotional ones.

Scale exaggerates the difference but does not erase the continuity.

We are microscopic logic expressed macroscopically.

## V. What the Amoeba Knows That We Don’t

The amoeba contracts and expands.  
We inhale and exhale.  
Life persists in every form.

The Bhagavad Gita teaches that the true Self, the Ātman, is not the body or the shifting personality but the unchanging, ever-present awareness that witnesses all experience. It describes this Self as unborn, undying, indivisible, and present equally in all beings, and liberation arises when one recognizes this inner reality and acts without attachment or ego. This vision of a spacious, witnessing consciousness parallels the experiential insight described by Douglas Harding, who emphasized seeing that one’s sense of “I” is not confined to the body but is an open field of awareness. In the Gita, realizing this deeper Self dissolves the illusion of separation, transforms action into selfless service (karma yoga), and frees one from fear, desire, and the burdens of personal identity. Thus, while expressed in a rich spiritual and devotional context, the Gita’s core message aligns with the insight that our real identity is the limitless awareness in which the world and the body appear.

The amoeba does not wrestle with meaning; it simply lives. It does not project itself into the future, nor curates a



past. It is metabolically honest—everything it does is what it must do to remain alive.

Humans, by contrast, often live inside stories rather than inside experience. Our sense of self is a narrative we carry like a fragile heirloom. Harding's mirror threatens that heirloom by asking us to look directly at its seams.

Yet perhaps the point is not that we are nothing. Perhaps it is that we are both nothing and everything: Nothing, in the sense that the "self" we defend is impossible to locate. Everything, in the sense that life—at any scale—is a continuous, ceaseless phenomenon expressing itself through us.

## VI. The Final Reflection

Stare long enough at an amoeba, and its formlessness becomes oddly familiar. Stare long enough into a mirror, and your form becomes strangely foreign.

Somewhere between those two perspectives lies the truth of being human: not a sovereign self, not a meaningless blob, but a perpetually shifting constellation of impulses, memories, behaviors, and reactions—a structure built on ancient logic and layered with modern illusion.

We are, perhaps, small.

We behave undeniably, as though we are large.

We may be nothing in essence.

We act as though we are everything in practice.

And Life, in all its scales, seems content to let both be true. Life itself doesn't draw lines—life flows, evolves, mutates, adapts. But the human mind is a boundary-making engine. It carves distinctions so it can predict, remember, plan, and survive. Yet the paradox is that the line is imaginary. We

spend our lives defending a boundary that life itself never acknowledges. Amoeba, mirror, cosmos—none of them insist on a distinction. Only we do. The same cognitive machinery that lets us build cities also convinces us that our stories, preferences, and anxieties are the center of the universe.

Exactly—many of our problems arise precisely because of the sense of a fixed, separate identity. When we cling to the idea of "I" as a bounded, sovereign self, we build a fragile fortress of expectations, desires, and fears around it. We measure life against this imagined center: "What do I want? What threatens me? Who is right, who is wrong?" Every disappointment, conflict, or anxiety is amplified by this lens because it feels personal, as though the world revolves around that small, constructed self.

Without this rigid sense of identity, much of the tension that drives suffering softens. Pain is still felt, decisions still need to be made, life still unfolds—but the stakes feel lighter. There is no "I" to be insulted, no ego to be defended, no imagined control to be lost. The problems do not vanish entirely, but their gravity changes: they become phenomena passing through awareness rather than personal crises. In other words, the suffering isn't inherent in the events themselves, it arises because we attach them to a story about who we think we are.

This is why reflection, observation, and the kind of awareness Harding and the Gita speak of matter. By loosening the grip of the rigid identity, we can meet life directly, see it clearly, and respond with presence rather than reaction. The problems were never the problem; the problem was the "I" that insisted on taking them personally. ■

## About the Author



Doctor by profession. **Sarika Jaswani** is a Crochet Artist, Art Tutor, Writer of Children's Stories. A philanthropist at heart she runs a non-profit by selling her fiber art on Etsy. A published poet who passionately reads & writes poetry. An art Lover, bird lover, she's a dreamer and blogger. Her poetry has been received well by various online literary magazines and anthologies.





# FEELING GOOD WITHIN ONESELF

● By Maria Wirth

In Ayurveda, health is defined as “well-being within oneself.” This inner well-being can be nurtured, and one can become more sensitive to it.

Suman, the wife of my landlord’s caretaker, began massaging her baby twice a day for about 20 minutes already two weeks after giving birth – vigorously, as if she were working with chapati dough. “When babies are massaged, they feel good inside later on,” she explained. Apparently, she knows “well-being within oneself” from her own experience.

I wasn’t massaged as a baby and only discovered in India what it means to feel good inside, or even to be able to feel ‘inside’ at all. Yoga, pranayama, and meditation helped me. These are methods practiced in India for millennia, making people receptive to simply FEELING their inner selves without thoughts commenting on these feelings. These methods direct attention inward, where more blissful tranquility is present than we realize. Simply being aware how it feels inside, and even if you don’t feel anything, staying with it for a while, helps to direct attention in the right direction – towards our essence.

A vibrant stillness, pulsating with intense joy, is what remains when the ego stops making noise with negative thoughts and feelings. It is the invisible foundation of everything, the subtle essence in everything, hidden deep within every person, regardless of their external circumstances. And this essence is accessible precisely

because it is contained within each human being, much like the ocean is contained within every wave, or rather, every wave is made entirely of ocean.

Theoretically, accessing this essence sounds easy: Attention must shift away from objects (one’s own person and thoughts are also objects in this sense) and toward attention itself. In other words, consciousness, which normally is aware of objects in this universe, must become aware of itself, or rather, recognize itself.

In practice, it’s not so easy, because it requires at least some moments of stopping thoughts, going deeper, and feeling this wonder of one’s own existence within. Perhaps consciously folding one’s hands in gratitude and noticing the goosebumps, and not brushing them off as insignificant and moving on in our daily routine. Access to one’s own





essence is possible at any moment. Inner stillness and joy are, so to speak, waiting to be discovered. They are always ready, always present, and they may wonder why people seem to prefer inner noise and restlessness to this stillness and joy.

### **The mind pulls outward but it's worthwhile to resist this pull**

Yet strangely, it appears to be more satisfying to read the newspaper, or watch TV (nowadays it is looking at the mobile), or make a cup of coffee than to quietly turn inward.

For many years in India, I had no home and therefore had no newspaper, no telephone, no television, and no kitchen, and therefore plenty of time for meditation. I regularly sat for an hour each morning and evening, and earnestly asked for help to recognize my true self. Yet, I cannot say that I clearly felt my essence. It seemed more as if I were merely looking at the veils that conceal it.

Once, I even stayed for three days in a room furnished with only a bed, table, and chair, resolving not to write, not to read, and not even to go out onto the veranda. The housekeeper cooked for me, so I had nothing to do – I either sat on the floor trying to meditate, did yoga, or lay on the bed. Enlightenment didn't come, but in the days following my retreat, an article poured out of me, which a psychology professor in Germany happened to read. He felt, I would be the right person to contribute a chapter on the Bhagavad Gita to a reader for psychology students. And a few years later I came to know that a philosophy professor of my own Alma Mater, Hamburg University, recommended to his students my articles to learn about Indian philosophy. Thus, my retreat led to a greater engagement with the world. It was personal evidence that meditation is not escapism.

### **Moderation and a pure aspiration are needed**

However, some Westerners overdo it and can be very rigid when it comes to their spiritual practice. In the 1980s, I met Gopi Krishna in Dehradun, who had written several books on Kundalini energy. He knew that it is dangerous to overdo meditation – in a manner of “come hell or high water”. He had done just that himself and had subsequently suffered under mental problems for 12 years.

Kundalini is a powerful force, not to be trifled with. Because of his books, he attracted Westerners who had also meditated too rigidly, and I met several of them. Most had problems, and Gopi Krishna's main advice was to lead a moderate life.

“We Indians don't need to meditate. Only you foreigners do,” a friend once remarked with a smile. He had picked up a Frenchman in the city who was wandering aimlessly through the streets of Dehradun after a 10-day Vipassana meditation retreat. My friend offered him a place to stay for a few days and was then stunned at how inflexibly the man adhered to his meditation schedule. Indians are generally adaptable: his family only ate their meals when it suited their guest (in my view, they shouldn't have waited).

### **Small, but helpful reminders**

Life in India these days is hectic, and few Indians take the time for meditation. They leave it to the hundreds of thousands of sadhus, or ashramites who have dedicated themselves, so to speak, to the professional and full-time search for truth.

Nevertheless, many begin their day with a small puja at home. In the morning, before the first passenger boards the auto-rickshaw, taxi, or bus, many drivers hang a small garland of flowers in their vehicle, fold their hands, and close their eyes for a moment. They surely do it with genuine fervor, for they truly risk their lives anew each day and need divine protection.

Many shop and restaurant owners also light an incense stick and pass it before a small shrine in a corner of their







shop before attending to their first customer. They may be asking for good business, but it is a prayer nonetheless. There are also countless moments throughout the day when many pause and remember the divine. Every time I pass a small temple in one of the three-wheeled share taxis, several of the passengers look in its direction, lower their heads, and respectfully touch their eyes. Even 'modern' young men in jeans and with fancy hairstyles do it.

In the evenings, many light an oil lamp in the prayer room or in front of the house before switching on the lights. And at sunrise, many spontaneously fold their hands, and I get goosebumps.

Incidentally, according to the Vijnanabhairava, a text of Kashmir Shaivism, goosebumps are very valuable. It's a moment when thoughts stop, and therefore an insight into one's own being is possible if one consciously "catches" this moment.

I am often amazed by the many small "reminders" that basically everything in this world is a miracle. According to the Indian calendar, we are currently living in the Kali Yuga, the darkest of all ages, where the world has become materially dense and separated itself from the divine. But in India, this separation doesn't seem to be quite as complete as elsewhere. People are aware that Ishwara or Bhagawan (they have many names for what in English is called God) is present in this world and in themselves. They see the divine in earth, water, fire, air and in living beings – an attitude that we in the West are slowly learning to appreciate, although for centuries we devalued such views as a "primitive nature religion".

One consequence of this Indian perspective is feeling protected within the Divine, rather than being a lone fighter in the world, or rather 'against' the world. This is probably a reason why Indians are generally calmer. They have a powerful ally right within themselves, always present, in whom they can fully trust. This brings a certain lightness to life. And when one manages to fully surrender to this inner Presence, it occasionally draws one into the still eye of the world's storm, where it is at home and where absolutely nothing can harm one. And who knows, perhaps it will let one be at home there – in a loving embrace.

For this is possible, the Indian rishis claim, supposedly from direct experience. ■

## About the Author



Maria Wirth is a German and came to India for a holiday after finishing her psychology studies at Hamburg University. She visited the Ardhha Kumbha Mela in Haridwar in April 1980 where she met Sri Anandamayi Ma and Devaraha Baba, two renowned saints. With their blessing she continued to live in India and dived into India's spiritual tradition, sharing her insights with German readers through articles and books. For long, she was convinced that every Indian knows and treasures his great heritage. However, when in recent years, she noticed that there seemed to be a concerted effort to prevent Indians (and the world) from knowing how valuable this ancient Indian heritage is, she started to point out the unique value of Indian tradition.

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Source: <http://mariawirth.com/feeling-good-within-oneself/>

The above article is part 2 of a chapter for the German anthology "Wege der Stille".

Link to the first part: <https://mariawirth.com/inner-stillness-in-outer-noise/>

Latest book by Maria Wirth

Title: "Why Hindu Dharma is under attack by Muslims, Christians and the Left" 2025

link: <https://www.amazon.in/dp/8119670655>



# What is Śāstra (शास्त्र)?

● By Dr. Bharat C. Patel

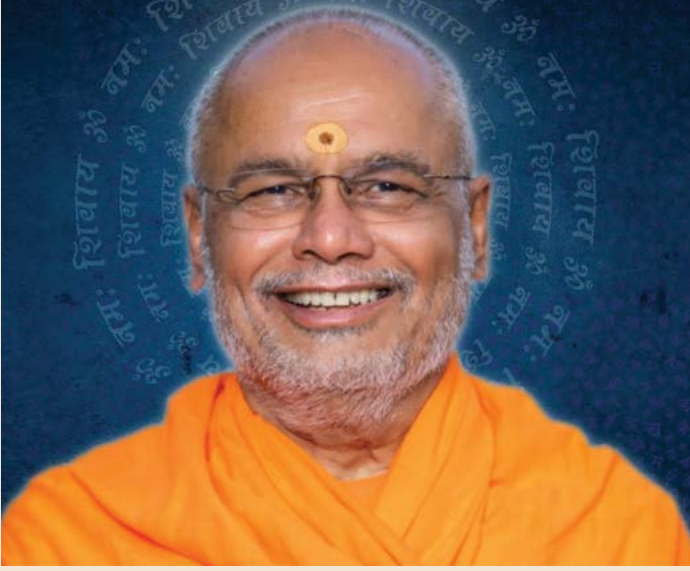
The word Śāstra (शास्त्र) is derived from the Saṃskṛta (संस्कृत) root Śās (शास्), meaning to rule, to command, to dictate, or to control. Accordingly, one meaning of Śāstra (शास्त्र) is शासनात् शास्त्रं, śāsanātśāstram, that which rules over you. You are essentially ruled or controlled by your Ahaṃkāra (अहंकार), your individuality, by your values, goals, ideals, notions, or prejudices. Your likes and dislikes control you. They dictate your life. In other words, the Gati (गति) of the Jīvātmā (जीवात्मा), the movement of the individual, all that is ruled by them. That is Śāsanam (शासनं). In a nutshell, you are bound, ruled over, or driven by your own Ahaṃkāra (अहंकार), that Kartābhoktā (कर्ताभोक्ता) Jīvātmā (जीवात्मा). How are you bound? Being a doer, when you engage in Karma (कर्म), you give rise to Karmaphala (कर्मफल). To exhaust those Karmaphalāni (कर्मफलानि), you have to take innumerable births. That is the order. The master seems to be your own Ahaṃkāra (अहंकार). To release yourself from that Śāsanam (शासनं), from the rule of Ahaṃkāra (अहंकार), you have to submit yourself to the rule of Śāstra (शास्त्र). What kind of ruling must one submit to? One must submit to live a life of Śāstra (शास्त्र). Living a life of Śāstra (शास्त्र) means to do Vihitakarma (विहितकर्म) and refrain from doing Niṣiddhakarma (निषिद्धकर्म). Vihitakarma (विहितकर्म) means prescribed or ordained duties. One must do whatever Śāstra (शास्त्र) asks one to do. Niṣiddhakarma (निषिद्धकर्म) means forbidden acts. One must not do whatever is prohibited by Śāstra (शास्त्र). This submission, allowing oneself to be ruled by the demands of Śāstra (शास्त्र), living as per ordained injunctions and prohibitions, leads one to complete freedom, शासनात् त्रायते इति



शास्त्रं, śāsanātrāyateitiśāstram, that which releases one from Śāsanam (शासनं), from ruling or from bondage is Śāstra (शास्त्र). How does Śāstra (शास्त्र) free one from bondage? It does so by providing knowledge, शिष्यते शिक्षते अनेन इति शास्त्रं, śiṣyateśikṣateanaitiśāstram, that which teaches, that which provides knowledge is Śāstra (शास्त्र).

We are all ruled or dictated by our likes and dislikes, our values. Our value for Karma (कर्म) and Karmaphala (कर्मफल), our desire to enjoy, our desire to fulfill certain Bhogāḥ (भोगः), and certain Kartavyakarmāṇi (कर्तव्यकर्माणि), certain do's, push us to do certain things. That is bondage. To release ourselves from the bondage of Ahaṃkāra (अहंकार), the rule of Ahaṃkāra (अहंकार), we need to submit to the rule of Śāstra (शास्त्र), and that rule is such that it will lead us like an assembly line, where the product is led from the beginning to the end. It leads you to a point where you want to be free from the rule of Śāstra (शास्त्र). How to





be free? That methodology, that means of freedom from the rule of Śāstra (शास्त्र), is also given by Śāstra (शास्त्र) itself.

Śāstra (शास्त्र) rule is twofold. One, it rules over you to release you from the rule of Ahaṁkāra (अहंकार), and at the same time, it helps you to discover the means or lead you to the means to release yourself from the rule of Śāstra (शास्त्र). It provides the means, शिष्यते इति शास्त्रे, śiṣyate iti śāstram.

The same Śāstra (शास्त्र) gives Upaniṣad (उपनिषद्) by which you are released from any ruling. There is a Vākya (वाक्य), निस्त्रैगुण्ये पथि विचरतां को विधिः को निषेधः, nistraiguṇyepathivicaratām ko vidhiḥ ko niṣedhaḥ, there is no injunction, Vidhi (विधि), or any prohibition, Niṣedha (निषेध) for the one treading on the path that is free from the three Guṇāḥ (गुणाः), the constituents of Prakṛti (प्रकृति). There is nothing that you are told to do, and there is nothing that you're told not to do. Bhagavāna Śrī Kṛṣṇa (भगवान् श्री कृष्ण) says the same thing in the third chapter of Gītājī (गीताजी), “न मे पार्थास्ति कर्तव्यं लिषु लोकेषु किञ्चन, नानवाप्तमवाप्तव्यं वर्त एव च कर्मणि, na me pārthāstikartavyaṁ triṣulokeṣu kiñcana, nānavāptamavāptavyaṁ vartaeva ca karmaṇia. Hey Arjuna! Even though there is no duty for me in all three worlds and no unacquired thing to acquire, I am engaged solely in action. निस्त्रैगुण्यो भवार्जुन, निर्वन्द्वो नित्यसत्त्वस्थो निर्योगक्षेम आत्मवान्, nistraiguṇyobhavārjuna, nirdvandvonyasattvasthonyogakṣema ātmavān. Hey Arjuna! You be free from the three constituents, free from dualities, without desire for gain and preservation, always remain in virtuosity, and focused on the self. Accordingly, the teaching of Śāstra (शास्त्र) gives you the means for freedom.

It is exactly like how children were brought up in a typical Indian family a few decades ago. Today, though, it is different with the influence of Western culture. In those days, children were often asked by their parents to do or avoid certain things. They had to live under their parents' rule. No independence, "Do it this way. Don't do it that way." The child had to ask their parents what to do. The parents' rule was imposed. Later on, the parents never ruled, but submitted to the rule of the child when they became old. In the same way, Śāstra (शास्त्र) ordains us to follow certain injunctions and not to do certain things. As of now, our lives are governed by our likes and dislikes. Śāstrika (शास्त्रिक) injunctions release one from the hold of likes and dislikes. In other words, they may look a little hard, but the Śāstra (शास्त्र) makes a person a human being. It is a very loaded statement. Each one of us is born human. But what is to be human in our conduct? Who is a human being, and what is so special about humans? It is certainly not the physical appearance or the physical differences we have with other physical sentient beings. One thing that sets us apart is our freedom of choice. We are not governed or programmed by nature. In the modern jargon of programming, a dog has a dog's program software, or a cat has a cat's program software. A cat never wants to be a dog, and a dog never wants to be a cat. Each one of them has its own software.

A cat eats certain things and behaves in a certain way, and it never wants to be a fish. Even though the master has a swimming pool, they never feel like going for a swim every day. It doesn't want. We humans have freedom. However, one characteristic of freedom is that it is also available for misuse and abuse. There is a possibility, and there is a potential for misuse and abuse. What is the proper use of freedom? When can we say "I'm free?" As very aptly said by Pūjya Svāmī Paramātmānanda Sarasvatījī (पूज्य स्वामी परमात्मानन्द सरस्वतीजी), "I am free when I have the capacity not to do the things when I feel like doing. When I like doing something and I know, either through common sense or Śāstrika Darśana (शास्त्रिकदर्शन), that it is wrong or improper, I can hold myself. I am free when I have the capacity to push myself to do the things I need to do, even if I don't feel like it. That's what I call freedom. To do things I don't feel like doing, and not to do things I feel like doing if they're against Śāstra (शास्त्र) rules. When you become what is in the Śāstra Draṣṭi (शास्त्रद्रष्टि), you gain freedom; you become a relatively free person. That is a human being.

That person who can live a life of Dharma (धर्म) is a human.



आहार निद्रा भय मैथुनं च सामान्यमेतत् पशुभिर्नराणाम्, धर्मो हि तेषां अधिकोविशेषो धर्मेण हीनाः पशुभिः समानाः, āhāranidrābhayamaithunaṃ ca sāmānyametatpaśubhirnarāṇām, dharmo hi teṣāmadhikoviśeṣodharmenaḥiñāḥpaśubhiḥsamānāḥ. Hunger, sleep, fear, and sexual desire are the instincts that are common to humanity and animals. It is especially Dharma (धर्म) that humanity possesses additionally, and a person bereft of Dharma (धर्म) is like a beast. There is no difference between animals and such human beings when they don't live a life of Dharma (धर्म). That is called spontaneous living.

To begin with, we are instinctual; then we become deliberate, "I deliberately do certain things and I don't do certain things." Through that deliberate practice, one becomes a spontaneous person, so that one cannot just do anything other than what is righteous, what is Dharma (धर्म). A classic example is Mahatma Gandhi, who confessed that in his childhood, he spoke untruths, committed some cheating, did Himsā (हिंसा), and even ate non-vegetarian food. Then, when he decided, "From now on I have to live a life of Dharma (धर्म), I have not to do any Himsā (हिंसा), I need to speak truth, I should not cheat or steal," he became a deliberate person. He tried to push himself deliberately to live a life of Dharma (धर्म), and later on, he became a spontaneous person, so that he could not speak untruth. It is said, "रामो विग्रहवान् धर्मः, rāmovigrahavāndharmaḥ." Rāma (राम) was spontaneously committed to Dharma (धर्म). When you are a spontaneously Dhārmika (धार्मिक) person, or in terms of modern lingo, when you are a spontaneously ethical person committed to values, committed to duties, that person becomes a human being. That human being with that Śāsanam (शासने) discovers the knowledge to be free from the bondage of Saṃsāra (संसार), to be free to do and not do. Duryodhana (दुर्योधन) had a mentality, "जानामि

धर्मं न च मे प्रवृत्तिर्जानाम्यधर्मं न च मे निवृत्तिः, jānāmidharmaṃ na ca me pravṛttirjānāmyadharmam na ca me nivṛttiḥ. I know what Dharma (धर्म) is, but I cannot abide by it. I know what Adharma (अधर्म) is, but I cannot escape it. I know what I should be doing, but I'm unable to do it. I know what I should not be doing, but I can't stop doing it." That is a total lack of growth. Internal growth comes when you live a life of Dharma (धर्म), duty, giving, and contributory life, not going by your fancies, not going by what is improper, and going by what is proper. When you don't become a Duryodhana (दुर्योधन), you become an example of an instinctual person. Yudhiṣṭhira (युधिष्ठिर) is an example of a spontaneous person. He could not speak untruth, even though he tried deliberately to speak untruth on the battlefield of the Mahābhārata (महाभारत) when Droṇācārya (द्रोणाचार्य) asked, "अश्वत्थामा हतः, aśvatthāmāhataḥ? Is Aśvatthāmā (अश्वत्थामा) killed?" Yudhiṣṭhira (युधिष्ठिर) responds, "अश्वत्थामा हतः, aśvatthāmāhataḥ." Yes, Aśvatthāmā (अश्वत्थामा) is dead. But then he could not stand himself telling untruth, so he added, "नरो वा कुञ्जरो वा, narovākuñjarovā, I don't know a man or an elephant." But at that time Bhīma (भीम) made so much noise that Droṇācārya (द्रोणाचार्य) did not hear नरो वा कुञ्जरो वा, narovākuñjarovā. Everybody knew that in spite of pushing Yudhiṣṭhira (युधिष्ठिर) to tell untruth, he would not be able to do so. Even if he was convinced by whatever means, he couldn't speak untruth. That is a spontaneous person. And, in between, there is a person with conflicts – this or that – धर्मसम्मूढचेताः, dharmasammūḍhacetāḥ, like Arjuna (अर्जुन), an instinctual person.

All of us are born instinctual. We have to be deliberate and later on, spontaneous. Spontaneous living means submitting oneself to the rule of Śāstra (शास्त्र). When you submit to that rule, after some time, you discover an urge to be free from the rule of Śāstra (शास्त्र). You feel like releasing yourself from the rule of Śāstra (शास्त्र). That is called Mokṣecchā (मोक्षेच्छा). For a person with Mokṣecchā (मोक्षेच्छा), the Śāstra (शास्त्र) itself gives the means to attain total or absolute freedom. That means is called Upaniṣad (उपनिषद्) or Vedānta (वेदान्त). That is Śāstra (शास्त्र). That which teaches, that which enlightens, that which gives knowledge, शिष्यते शिक्षते अनेन इति शास्त्रं, śiṣyate śikṣate anena iti śāstram. One of the traditional meanings of this is परमात्म वचनं शास्त्रं, paramātmavacanam śāstra - ईश्वर वाक्य, īśvaravākya. The Vedāḥ (वेदाः) are nothing but ईश्वर निःश्वास, īśvaraniḥśvāsa, revealed through the Ṛṣayaḥ (ऋषयः), who never claimed that this is what we are writing or telling. They all have said that





it is from Īśvara (ईश्वर). Therefore, it is said ऋषयो मन्त्रदृष्टारः न तु मन्त्रकर्तारः, ṛṣayomantradrṣṭārāṇnatumantrakartārah. Ṛṣayaḥ (ऋषयः) are not the creators, but the seers of the Mantrāḥ (मन्त्राः). Those Mantrāḥ (मन्त्राः) got revealed to them because they lived a life full of purity. They lived a life of penance, a life of devotion, a life lived in the awareness of Īśvara (ईश्वर). Most religions claim their holy book to be a revelation from their subjective God. However, there is a major difference between their revelation and what is revealed to the Ṛṣayaḥ (ऋषयः). Their revelations are all non-verifiable beliefs and certain dos and don'ts. What is revealed in the Veda (वेद) is knowledge. When it is knowledge, it is verifiable. It is not something that you have to just believe in.

Pūjya Svāmī Paramātmānanda Sarasvatījī (पूज्य स्वामी परमात्मानन्द सरस्वतीजी) often says, "Over the last two decades, I have attended many international religious conferences, wherein, without exception, the host always introduces the speakers as leaders of various faiths. It pains me to hear when someone introduces me as a leader of the Hindu faith. Hindūdharma (हिन्दूधर्म) is a teaching tradition. I am not a leader of a faith-based religion. I represent the religion of wisdom, of knowledge. We have a teaching tradition, and therefore, Veda (वेद) was called Vedajñāna (वेदज्ञान), the book of knowledge. That which gives knowledge, that which releases one from bondage, and that is Śāstra (शास्त्र). So when the word used is Śāstram (शास्त्रं), it primarily means knowledge to gain total freedom. Discovering the fact that I am ever free, नित्यमुक्तोऽस्मि, nityamukto'smie. Discovering the fact that I am Ānanda (आनन्द), आनन्दोऽहं, ānando'ham. Discovering the fact that I am complete, I am Pūrṇa (पूर्ण), पूर्णोऽहं, pūrṇo'ham. Discovering the fact that I am limitless, अनन्तोऽस्मि, ananto'smi. That is Śāstra (शास्त्र)."

Ṛṣayaḥ (ऋषयः), who had the vision of the Śāstra (शास्त्र), also had the tradition of teaching, and out of sheer Karuṇā (करुणा) or compassion, they thought of teaching and writing to help fellow human beings to discover their true nature, a nature that is fullness. What they wrote was साक्षात्भगवद्वाक्य, sāṅṣāṭbhagavadvākya. It is a revelation of Īśvara (ईश्वर). It is not only the revelation of Īśvara (ईश्वर), but it is Īśvara (ईश्वर). Knowledge is Īśvara (ईश्वर), and the Jñeyam (ज्ञेयं), the thing to be known by this knowledge, is Īśvara (ईश्वर) - वेदैश्च सर्वैरहमेव वेद्यः, वेदान्तकृद्वेदविदेव चाहम् vedaiśca sarvairahameva vedyah vedāntakṛdvedavideva cāham. By all Vedas, I am the one to be known. I am the knower of the Vedas and the cause of the Vedānta (वेदान्त). Śāstra (शास्त्र) is given by Bhagavāna (भगवान्) himself. The subject matter is

he, and he himself gives this wisdom to the Ṛṣayaḥ (ऋषयः), and then we receive this in tradition. That knowledge is called Upaniṣad (उपनिषद्). That is Śāstra (शास्त्र).

Pūjya Svāmī Paramātmānanda Sarasvatījī (पूज्य स्वामी परमात्मानन्द सरस्वतीजी) emphatically says, "When Śāstra (शास्त्र) says you have to do, you have to do." Śāstra (शास्त्र) says, "वेदव्यं, veddhavyam. You have to pierce it. You have to know it." Why? The reason is that the goal revealed by our Śāstra (शास्त्र) is Mokṣa (मोक्ष). None of the other religions, other than the Hindu religion, talks about Mokṣa (मोक्ष). They all talk about salvation or going to heaven. We never say that. Our Śāstra (शास्त्र) talks about going to heaven, but at the same time, it says that you will come back having gone there. You cannot go to heaven just by being faithful. You go to heaven by doing Dharmakarmāṇi (धर्मकर्मणि), which are certain specific Karmāṇi (कर्मणि) for going to heaven. Having gone there, you will come back. Heaven is not the end. Our goal is Mokṣa (मोक्ष). Mokṣa (मोक्ष) is knowledge, and knowledge is Mokṣa (मोक्ष). Knowledge of what? Knowledge of the absolute truth that is "me." What does that mean? The knowledge that, "अहम् अनन्तः, ahamanantaḥ. I am limitless." The knowledge that the self is limitless, the self is non-dual, is Mokṣa (मोक्ष). That should be known, because "I want it." Look at the difference: our Śāstra (शास्त्र) doesn't give you a goal. All other religions give a goal: "Do this, and you will go to heaven. Or, do this, and you will go to Jannat and have some Hoors." Our Śāstra (शास्त्र) doesn't say, "The goal is Mokṣa (मोक्ष)." It just clarifies the goal that you want. Śāstra (शास्त्र) is not adding a new end. Śāstra (शास्त्र) says, "This is what you want." Śāstra (शास्त्र) provides clarity on exactly "What I want." What one ultimately wants is clarified by Śāstra (शास्त्र).

You may say, "How do you say I want Mokṣa (मोक्ष)? I don't want Mokṣa (मोक्ष). No, no, no. I want a car. I want a mobile. I want a house. I want a good job." Someone may say, "I want to get married." Another one may say, "I want to travel; I haven't traveled in a long time." They may say, "That is our Mokṣa (मोक्ष)." That is true, but the goal is to obtain a car, a mobile, a house, a job, marriage, or travel. The question is, why do you want those things? Why do you want a car? Why do you want a mobile? Why do you want a house? Why do you want a good job? Why do you want to get married?

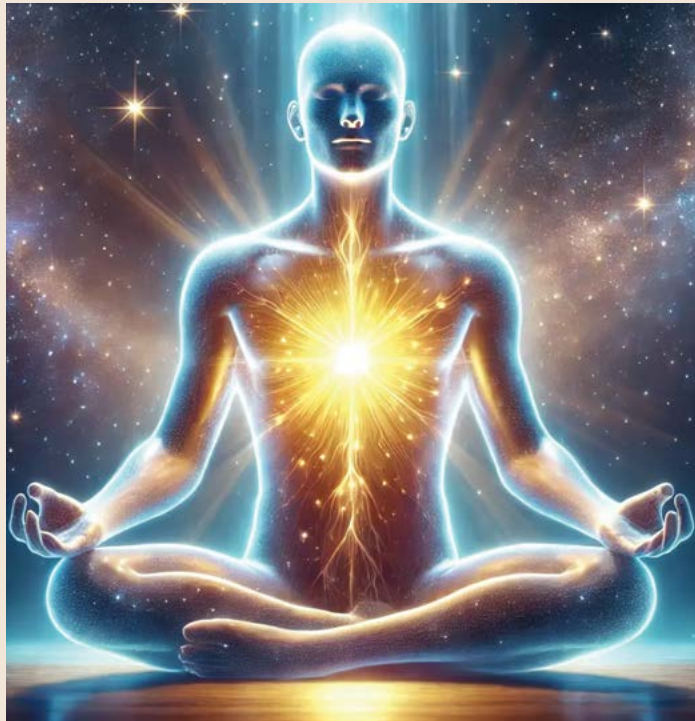
Why do you want to travel? Because "I am unhappy. I am incomplete without them." Each one of us wants Mukti (मुक्ति), freedom to be released, to be free. Free from what?



Each one of us is looking for freedom from Duḥkha (दुःख). Every moment of our life, every pursuit of our life, right from childhood, all the pursuits for toys, cars, mobiles, homes, or other things, whatever one wants, is only from one objective: "Freedom from Duḥkha (दुःख). I want total happiness. That's what I want." That is what every human being is seeking. Śāstra (शास्त्र) also says, "That is what you want." What we are seeking unknowingly, Śāstra (शास्त्र) helps us to discern the problem. It also gives the solution. That solution is not somewhere hereafter. "It is you. The problem is you, and the solution is you." You don't need to look for a solution. You just need to know yourself; the Ātmā (आत्मा) is Pūrṇa (पूर्ण).

पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं पूर्णात्पुर्णमुदच्यते पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते, pūrṇamadaḥ pūrṇamidam pūrṇātpuṇnamudacyate pūrṇasya pūrṇamādāya pūrṇamevāvaśiṣyate. You are complete, and that is the solution. That is what each one of us wants. Therefore, that is the goal revealed by our Śāstra (शास्त्र). Śāstra (शास्त्र) is not adding a new goal. It provides clarity on what we are seeking. We want that, and Śāstra (शास्त्र) is providing the solution that what you are seeking is you. "तत् त्वम् असि, tat tvam asi." That thou art. What you are seeking is you.

PūjyaSvāmīParamātmānandaSarasvatijī (पूज्य स्वामी परमात्मानन्द सरस्वतीजी) says, "We Hindus should know what Hinduism is?" The Indian Supreme Court and many



politicians say, "Hinduism is a way of life." It is not a way of life. The way of life is not the end; it is just the means. Hinduism is the vision of the truth. And the truth is you. That is what is revealed. The truth revealed is Brahman (ब्रह्मन्). Truth is Ātmā (आत्मा). That is the truth. To own up to the vision of truth, our Śāstra (शास्त्र) has provided a view of life and a way of life. View of life is Caturvidhapuruṣārtha (चतुर्विधपुरुषार्थ) – Dharma (धर्म), Artha (अर्थ), Kāma (काम), and Mokṣa (मोक्ष). It is how you look at your life. Kāma (काम) and Artha (अर्थ) are natural Puruṣārtha (पुरुषार्थ). But they should be on the foundation of Dharma (धर्म). Dharma (धर्म) itself is not the end. Mokṣa (मोक्ष) is the end. So view of life is the Prāpti (प्राप्ति) of Dharma (धर्म), Artha (अर्थ), Kāma (काम), and Mokṣa (मोक्ष). And the way of life is our Varṇāśrama (वर्णाश्रम), Brahmacarya (ब्रह्मचर्य), Gṛhastha (गृहस्थ), Vānaprastha (वानप्रस्थ), and Saṁnyāsa (संन्यास). But the goal is discovering, "I am नित्य मुक्त, nitya mukta, चिदानन्दरूपः शिवोऽहं शिवोऽहम्, cidānandarūpaḥśivo'hamśivo'ham." That discovery is the goal. That is what Hinduism is.

Since it is a matter of knowledge, every knowledge presupposes certain qualifications. Qualification means to gain the frame of mind, which in the Śāstrika (शास्त्रिक) language means to gain an Antaḥkaraṇa (अन्तःकरण) that is Śuddha (शुद्ध) and Ekāgra (एकाग्र), a mind which is pure and focused. The mind is the means by which we understand, gain, and possess this knowledge. For that, Śāstra (शास्त्र) requires Karma (कर्म). If you want Mokṣa (मोक्ष), you better do Karma (कर्म). Mokṣa (मोक्ष) is the goal where you have no choice. It is not subjectivity. It is universal. You have a choice in what you want to eat and what not to eat, what dress you want to wear and what dress not to wear, where you want to go and where not to go. You have all the choices. But you have no choice in whether you want to be happy or not. Should you not have a choice to be unhappy? There is no choice. "I don't want to be unhappy." It is choiceless. Nobody wants to be unhappy. And "I want to be happy" is also a choiceless thought. It is not subjective. It is universal. To gain this universal urge within you, you require a frame of mind to understand Śāstra (शास्त्र). That frame of mind is gained by performing certain Karmāṇi (कर्माणि). Therefore, Karmāṇi (कर्माणि), as the Veda (वेद) told us, are to be done. You have no choice but to do so if you want Mokṣa (मोक्ष). However, it is not a matter of choice. You have already chosen. Choicelessly, you are seeking Mokṣa (मोक्ष) because choicelessly you are seeking Ānanda (आनन्द), choicelessly you are seeking happiness. ■





# HWN ORGANIZES ONLINE WEBINAR ON SYMBOLISM BEHIND TIMELESS HINDU STORIES



The Webinar started with a shloka recitation by the students of Bal Vidya Mandir in Ashland, MA. Twenty children from ages 7 to 10 recited the Ganesh and Saraswati Stutis in one voice. Next came a bhajan on Sri Krishna, sung melodiously in Carnatic music style by an 11-year-old girl.

**H**indu Women's Network held an online Webinar on Nov 15, 2025, from 2 to 4 PM. The topic of the webinar was "Symbolism Behind Timeless Hindu Stories". This was a unique webinar, because all the panelists were High School students, and the moderator was a Junior in college.

The Webinar started with a shloka recitation by the students of Bal Vidya Mandir in Ashland, MA. Twenty children from ages 7 to 10 recited the Ganesh and Saraswati Stutis in one voice. Next came a bhajan on Sri Krishna, sung melodiously in Carnatic music style by an 11-year-old girl.

Sarayu was the moderator of the program. She introduced the panelists and mentors, summarized the discussions after each presentation, and seamlessly wove them all together. The panelists presented stories from the Itihasas, Puranas, and other sacred Hindu texts. There were a vast variety of stories, from the Ramayan, Mahabharat, Bhagwat Purana, Shiva Purana and other sources. Stories like Ganesh and Kartikeya Janam, Samudra Manthan, Prahlad, Sanjeevani Parvat, Ram Ravan Yudh, Ganga and Abhimanyu. With each story, the panelists expertly wove their interpretations and symbolism into the story, making it interesting not only for children but also for the adults in the audience. Some of their insights were incredible. Viewers

commented that they had learned a lot from the stories, and many said they were hearing about the symbolism for the first time. One viewer said, "you managed to engage us and teach us at the same time, without being preachy or boring." Another commented, "even though I knew the story of the Ram-Ravan Yudh, the way you explained it made it come alive. I learned a lot from the symbolism of the story."

The panel discussions followed by a lively question and answer session, in which panelists and mentors both answered difficult questions put to them by the viewers.

The webinar ended with a vote of thanks and the closing prayer.

Hindu Women's Network (HWN) gives a voice to the Hindu women's perspective on contemporary issues affecting all women. HWN develops programs for holistic physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual development. HWN's goal is to form a vibrant network of Hindu women to promote collaboration and communication at local, national, and international levels.■

For more information or to start a chapter of Hindu Women's Network in your area, please visit <https://hinduwomennetwork.org/>



# Bhagvad Geeta for Children 7

From a series of talks by Sanjay Mehta, transcribed and  
compiled by **Jaya Asthana**

## Chapter 3 (contd): Karma Yog

To re-cap: In the second chapter, Bhagwan talked about Gyan (knowledge), not just what I know, but also what I understand. He says “I am not just this body. I am the atman.” The body is alive because of the Atman. For example, if someone asks you what is Math? There are many ways of explaining what Math is, but in simple terms, Math teaches us how to calculate. That is the essence of Mathematics.

If we cannot calculate, there is no mathematics. In the same way, the Atman is the essence of the body, without it, the body will not exist.

In the third chapter, Bhagwan talks about Karma, which is action. There are three concepts in any Karma: the first is action, which is Karma itself. The second is Karta: the doer who does the action, and the third is Karmaphal, the result of the action. We get entangled in these three. We look at the karmaphal, the result of the action.

Arjun had the same problem, he was attached to and thinking about the karmaphal, about what the result will be if he fought with his family members. We all have this problem; we are entangled in the fruit of the action. This is because of Moh, which means attachment. Moh causes us to get attached to the Karmaphal. We get anxious because we focus on the results. Bhagwan tells us that the result will always be there, so don't get distracted and think about other







things, focus on the Karma, the action.

**Shloke 27:**

prakṛiteḥkriyamānāniguṇaiḥkarmāṇisarvaśaḥ  
ahankāra-vimūḍhātmākartāhamitimanyate

In fact, all actions are being performed by the modes of Prakriti (Primordial Nature). The fool, whose mind is deluded by egoism, thinks “I am the doer.”

What makes us do Karma or action? Prakriti (our nature) makes us do Karma. There are three things in our nature: buddhi (intellectual faculty), instinct (just the action), dullness or inertia (laziness). In order to use our nature, we use our buddhi, our instinct along with buddhi, and inertia (laziness). These three qualities drive us to do karma.

Everything happens on its own, but when I say I am the doer, this is my result, that is my Ahankar, my ego. The more I say I am the doer, I get the result, that becomes a problem. The problem with ahankar is that your ego separates you from your atma, your divine nature. Basically, we are all good, but our ego separates us from our divine atma.

A student asked his teacher, “how do I understand that ego will be a problem in my life?” The teacher took him to a swimming pool and asked the student to jump in the water. Since he was a good swimmer, the student jumped into the water without any hesitation. The teacher then tied a 50-pound weight to the student’s back and asked him to jump in the water again. The student was unable to swim, in spite of being a good swimmer. He started drowning with the heavy weight on his back. He asked the teacher to save him, otherwise he would drown.

That heavy weight is Ahankar. When we have Ahankar, it drags us down. It makes us frustrated, depressed; we fight for small things. All people, even babies have ahankar. If you take a toy from a baby, the baby will get frustrated and cry. The baby’s ahankar is small, but as he grows, the ahankar grows with him. When we are big, we have a big ego. Ahankaris like a seed, which is small in the beginning, but when we feed it, it becomes big, it can grow into a big tree. Ahankar is the cause of all the disagreements in our lives and in society.

**Shloke 35:**

śhreyānsa-dharmoviguṇaḥ  
para-dharmātsv-anuṣṭhitāt  
swa-dharmenidhanamśhreyāḥ para-  
dharmobhayāvahaḥ

One’s own duty, though devoid of merit, is preferable to the duty of another well performed. Even in death the performance of one’s duty brings blessedness; another’s duty is fraught with fear.

Arjun is a Kshatriya, a prince, so his duty is to fight, so he can protect his people. Just like a soldier protects the country, so all can live in peace.

Everyone has their own karma, which is according to their intrinsic nature. We must perform our own karma which is in keeping with our nature. That is more important than looking at someone else’s karma. People may say you are doing the wrong thing, but if you know that it is right, you should be confident enough to do it. What is the right action for you may not be the right action for another person. You should look at your own actions. Blindly doing what someone tells you to do may result in your downfall. ■





# *Book Review*

# Metamorphosis

## A Poetic Journey Through Grief, Growth, and Grace

*By Sarika Jaswani*

In her soul-baring poetry collection *Metamorphosis* (2024), Sarika Jaswani leads readers through a deeply personal odyssey of loss, healing, and transformation. Released via Amazon's KDP platform, this self-published collection unites free-verse poetry with the author's own hand-drawn sketches, creating a multi-sensory experience that explores the complex terrain of emotional rebirth.

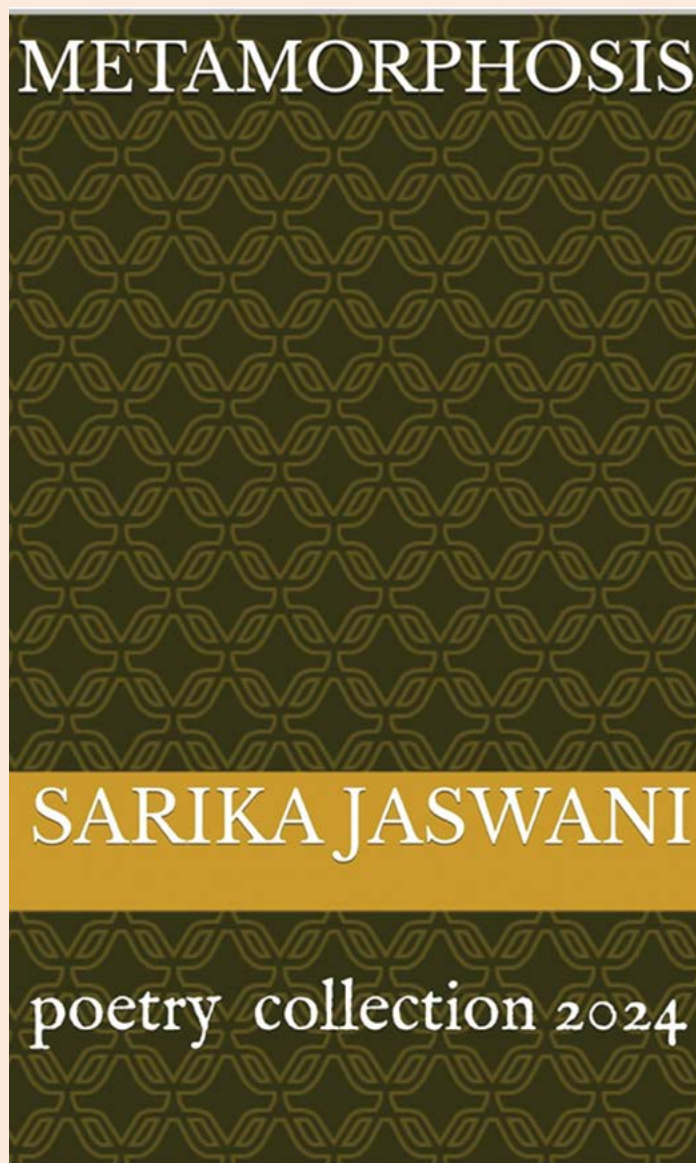
### Thematic Core: A Journey of Self-Discovery

Jaswani describes *Metamorphosis* as “a journey of self-discovery”—a phrase that encapsulates the essence of the collection. Her poems navigate liminal emotional spaces: the aching transition from grief to healing, the silence between goodbye and acceptance, and the fragile moments of rediscovered strength. Nature metaphors, body imagery, and artistic symbols abound throughout the work, weaving a tapestry of transformation.

### Style and Voice: Intimate, Visual, Freeing

Jaswani's voice is unflinching yet gentle, crafting intimate snapshots of internal struggle and awakening. She often employs visceral imagery—blood, feathers, vines, stitching—to depict wounds, both physical and emotional. Her tone is conversational, with enjambment mimicking the rhythm of the mind processing trauma.

Each poem is paired with a minimalist line sketch that mirrors the mood or message of the verse. These drawings do not merely decorate but expand the poetic landscape, offering an emotional echo for readers to engage visually.







### Standout Piece: "Between Two Ferns"

Among the most powerful pieces in the collection is "Between Two Ferns," originally published as part of the All About My Mother series. Here, Jaswani evokes the pain of witnessing a loved one's final moments via a hospital screen:

"I roll hours on prayer beads  
Between drips of IV, hiss of ventilators sway  
your masked breaths  
Pixelated screen once had slimmed distances now fails to  
meet the grudge for not holding your hands  
I yell 'I LOVE YOU' over and over again"

The emotional weight of these lines is matched by the imagined accompanying sketch: two ferns nearly touching, separated by an invisible divide. The poem captures the brutal tenderness of pandemic-era goodbyes and highlights Jaswani's ability to distill universal grief into deeply personal lines.

### Comparison to Earlier Works

While *Metamorphosis* carries the emotional depth of Jaswani's earlier pieces like "Sauvignon Night" and "Pen Muses," it marks a notable maturation. Her earlier work often explored themes of identity and creativity through metaphor and wit. Here, the emotional stakes are higher, the tone rawer. The voice remains recognizably hers, but with greater clarity and spiritual vulnerability.

### Reader Response: Varied but Engaged

Public reception has ranged from admiring to ambivalent. Some readers find the *Metamorphosis* direct and relatable.

### Author Q&A

**Q: "Metamorphosis" is such a deeply personal work. Was it difficult to write?"**

Sarika Jaswani: Absolutely. Some of the poems were written during moments of immense grief and uncertainty. But through the act of writing—and later, sketching—I found clarity. It became not just an artistic process, but a healing one.

**Q: The sketches are beautiful complements. How do you see the relationship between image and word?**

*Rating: 4.5/5*

*Metamorphosis may not be for everyone, but for those willing to sit with vulnerability, it offers a poetic mirror for their own transformations.*

*Book is available  
on amazon.com*

Jaswani: For me, poetry and art breathe the same air. Sometimes, a feeling won't resolve itself in words, so I draw it. The visual elements in this collection are like silent verses—they echo the poems, but in their own language.

**Q: If readers take away one message from *Metamorphosis*, what would you want it to be?**

Jaswani: That transformation doesn't need to be loud. It can be a quiet shift. And even in pain, there is a path forward.

### Final Verdict: A Gentle Thunderclap

*Metamorphosis* is a triumph of emotional articulation. Sarika Jaswani has crafted a work that is as vulnerable as it is strong, as quiet as it is insistent. Through carefully chosen words and evocative sketches, she invites readers not just to observe transformation, but to feel it happening in real time. For those navigating their own metamorphosis, this collection is a companion and a guide.

**Recommended For:** Readers seeking emotional honesty, fans of visual-poetry hybrids, and those drawn to themes of grief, healing, and spiritual rebirth.

**Caution For:** Traditionalists who prefer structured verse or abstract symbolism over personal lyricism. ■



# Yoga as a Science of Consciousness

*By Dr. David Frawley (Pandit Vamadeva Shastri)*







**Yoga has always been defined as a vidya or a way of knowledge. Yoga, which means union, aims at uniting the individual human being with the universal and transcendent consciousness. This requires a radical change in how we think, feel and look at life.**

### **Need for Higher Consciousness and Self-Awareness**

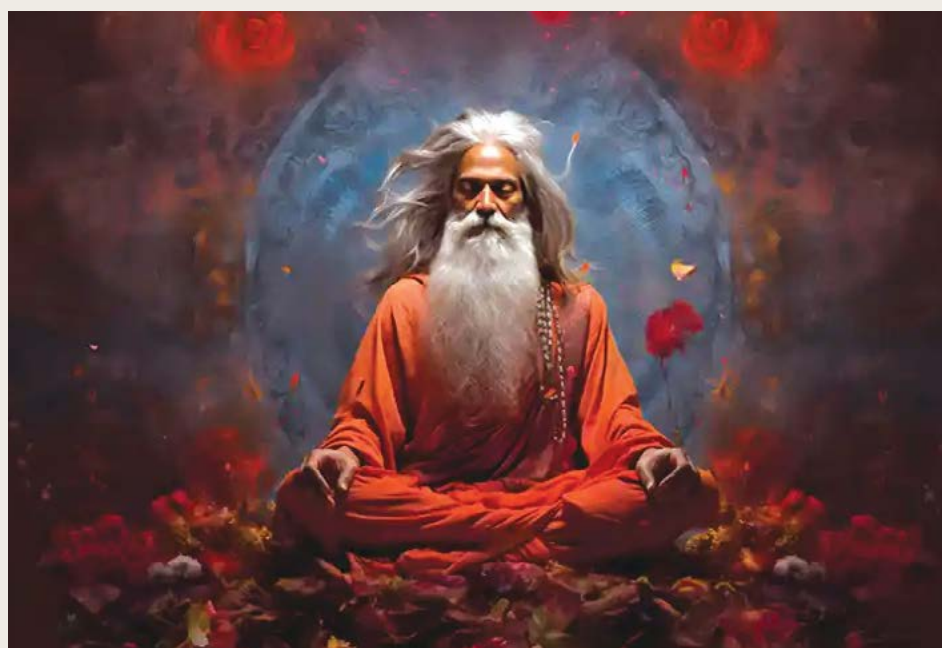
**H**ow can we bring a higher consciousness into the world to create peace and harmony, removing all division and conflict?

That is the foundation of the practice of Yoga. As long as we are trapped in self-centered thoughts and emotions, we cannot end the many problems in our personal lives or in the world, or discover the real purpose of our human life.

Yoga provides us improved well-being for body and mind, which is very significant, but goes beyond that as well. Yoga helps us connect with our true nature as pure consciousness and the nature of the universe itself in a way that may be as valuable as what modern science is discovering today.

Yoga has always been defined as a vidya or a way of knowledge. Yoga, which means union, aims at uniting the individual human being with the universal and transcendent consciousness. This requires a radical change in how we think, feel and look at life.

Yoga in the original sense is a science of consciousness, showing how to develop a higher awareness.



This is not to say that Yoga is the same as modern science but that it constitutes another type of science with its own value and methodology that can complement what science offers.

### **Vedic Background of Yoga**

Yoga as a term arises in Vedic texts, starting with the mantras of the Rigveda, one of the oldest books in the world. Yoga as a philosophy is intellectually articulated in the Upanishads that discuss the nature of consciousness according to an inquiry into the most fundamental question of human life, “Who

am I?” Upanishadic teachings are summarized in the Bhagavad Gita, which teaches various aspects of Yoga, with each chapter constituting a Yoga approach of its own.

The primary principles of Yoga were codified in a brief summary in the Yoga Sutras. Eventually many different Yoga teachings arose expanding into a vast system, like a gem with many facets.

Yoga Sutras defines Yoga as cittavrittinirodha, “calming the movements of the mind”, our individualized or conditioned form of consciousness. This definition implies an analysis and observation



of all our mental activities. These are described as right knowledge, wrong knowledge, imagination, memory and sleep.

YogaSutrasclarifiesthisstatement, tadadrastuhsvarupeavasthanam, meaning “then there is abidance in the nature of the Seer.” Who is this seer? It is the pure consciousness, the true Self behind the body and mind, the Atman or Purusha of Upanishadic thought.

Yoga consists not merely of an intellectual examination but a profound meditative inquiry. Yoga is correlated with samadhi, the ultimate stage of Yoga practice. Samadhi is the state of unity consciousness in which the mind’s agitation is put to rest, and comes to function like a mirror to reflect the truth of reality. Samadhi is the ultimate foundation of the Vedic way of knowing.

## Nature of Yogic Science

Yogic science begins with a different orientation than modern science. Modern science follows an outward orientation of the mind to discern the names, forms and quantities of the external world, which allows us to uncover the secret powers of nature and harness them through technology.

Yoga teaches us that there is another potential of the mind, an inner movement that extends our awareness beyond our human frontiers into the cosmic. The aim of Yoga is to discern the eternal essence of consciousness from the changing outer names, forms and quantities of the external world.

Ordinarily the mind’s knowledge is born of three factors of sensory perception (which includes its extension in various instruments), reason (which includes measurement

and mathematics), and statements of learned or authoritative people (which includes the tradition of science).

Yoga teaches us that such mental knowledge reveals only the surface of reality, not the depths of pure consciousness that are boundless – to recognize which the mind must become silent and concentrated, receptive to the whole. Science is also beginning to discover that its laws have their limits beyond which subtler energies come into play that provide a very different view of reality.

## Neuroscience and Yoga

Neuroscience today is learning how consciousness is related to brain function. It has verified through research that Yoga and meditation can relieve stress and promote higher brain activity.

Yet modern physics has







deconstructed physical reality, revealing that apparent physical objects are but illusions of the senses. What actually exists behind physical reality are subtle waves and particles out of which force fields arise and create the appearance of solid matter. Some scientists posit a unitary field of consciousness to explain the coherence of the laws of nature, an insight shared by yogic science.

Modern medical science, however, has not progressed in taking us beyond the belief in physical reality. It tries to understand human consciousness according to subtle chemical reactions in the brain. It does not as yet posit a unitary field of consciousness behind the brain, which Yoga has long proposed, and which seems logical given what physics suggests, though this may be its next step of development.

While neuroscience can describe the brain correlations of consciousness, we cannot reduce consciousness to the brain, any more than we can reduce physical reality to what our senses show. To try to explain consciousness relative to the workings of the brain is like trying to understand a person through

his shadow. The movements of the shadow reflect the movements of a person, but cannot reveal who he is or the true nature of his existence.

Neuroscience can prove to society that Yoga and meditation have positive values for body and brain, but science must learn the yogic way of knowledge to truly understand all that Yoga can offer as a science of consciousness. This would require a new yogic neuroscience, which means looking beyond the body, nervous, brain and brain chemistry to a deeper reality of Consciousness, transcending time, space and person for a boundless Self-awareness pervading the entire universe, the Atman/Purusha of Yoga and Vedanta.

### Yogic Way of Experimentation

Yogic science requires that we observe our bodies and minds, as we would examine objects in the external world. It teaches us that we are not the body or the mind. The body is our external instrument of action in the physical world. The mind is our internal instrument of organizing information. We are the inner being,

the real person or true consciousness behind these instruments.

Yogic science requires experiments but these are done in our own minds through expanding our awareness. Yoga rests upon a code of behavior to keep our awareness clear and focused, as defined in the yamas and niyamas of Yoga practice, like the yogic attitude of ahimsa or non-violence to promote peace within and around us.

The yogic approach to asana brings health to the body but also calms the body to support a higher awareness. The yogic approach to the breath and prana affords more vitality but also helps us unfold a deeper energy of consciousness. The yogic approach to the senses encourages us to use the senses in a contemplative manner and no longer be conditioned by sensory reactions, opening our inner intuitive vision.

The yogic approach to concentration shows us how to cultivate a positive power of attention for deeper learning and clearer perception. The yogic approach to meditation, its prime practice, enables us to turn our minds into vehicles of a higher awareness beyond the distortions of our mental conditioning. This leads us to the yogic state of samadhi or unity consciousness that reveals the true nature of reality as unlimited Being-Consciousness-Bliss, Sat-Cit-Ananda.

### The Way Forward through the Yogic Science of Consciousness

For humanity to truly progress in civilization, not only in terms of



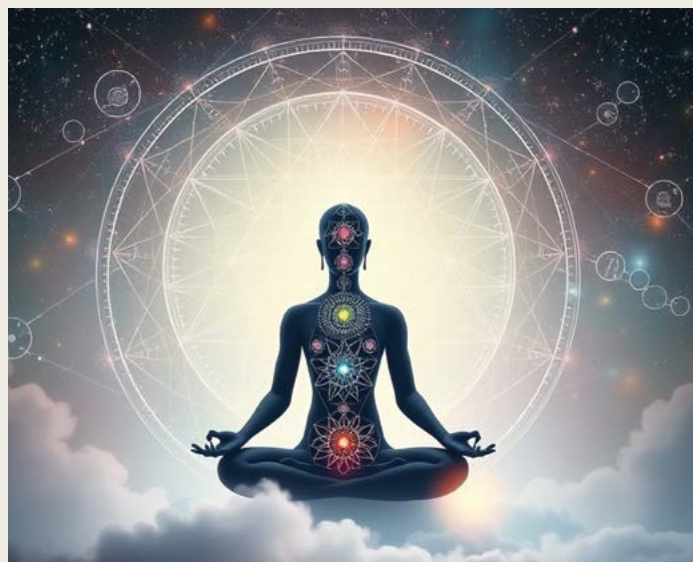


technology but also in terms of consciousness and cosmic intelligence and how to harmoniously apply it, we must cultivate both the inner and the outer sciences, both yogic science and modern science. We must understand their interface, their similarities and their differences. We need a comprehensive and integral way of knowledge that addresses our full human potential and the supreme goal of life of higher awareness leading to the Infinite.

For this purpose, it is important to introduce Yoga into schools as part of a healthy and conscious life-style and attitude. This should begin with Yoga asanas but extend to yogic practices relative to the prana, senses and mind. Above all, we must learn the cultivation of attention in order to make better decisions and have a correct perception in all that we do.

Without a meditative mind it will be very hard to apply our new information technology in a way that does not overwhelm us. Yet the educational systems in the world today are doing little to address our declining attention spans and lack of internal calm, except to develop new drugs to deal with them that are both expensive and have many side effects.

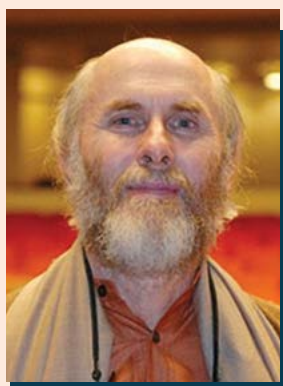
Yoga addresses this deficiency of attention in a systematic manner. Yoga links us not just to a new technology but to a new consciousness and new view of



Self that is unifying rather than dividing. This requires a yogic way of life and a yogic culture, such as India has preserved for the world, based upon yogic science.

Yoga is the beginning and the end, the past and the future, the eternal essence that we must strive to know so we can understand the conscious universe in which we live. Then all life will be Yoga, and unity will be our core experience of existence. ■

### About the Authors



Dr. David Frawley (Pandit Vamadeva Shastri) is a Vedacharya and one of the leading exponents of Vedic knowledge in an interdisciplinary approach worldwide. The American Institute of Vedic Studies serves as a vehicle for his work, offering on-line access to go along with his many published writings.

His work is highly esteemed by numerous students and followers as well as by many organizations worldwide – he was awarded India's prestigious Padma Bhushan award in 2015 for his distinguished service to the nation! He also has a National Eminence Award from the South India Education Society (SIES)

With a D. Litt (the highest possible degree in Yoga & Vedic sciences) from SVYASA and a second D.Litt from Ram Manohar Lohia University, Dr Frawley's commitment to education shines through with online courses available at the American Institute of Vedic Studies on top of over 50 extensively published books sold the world over.

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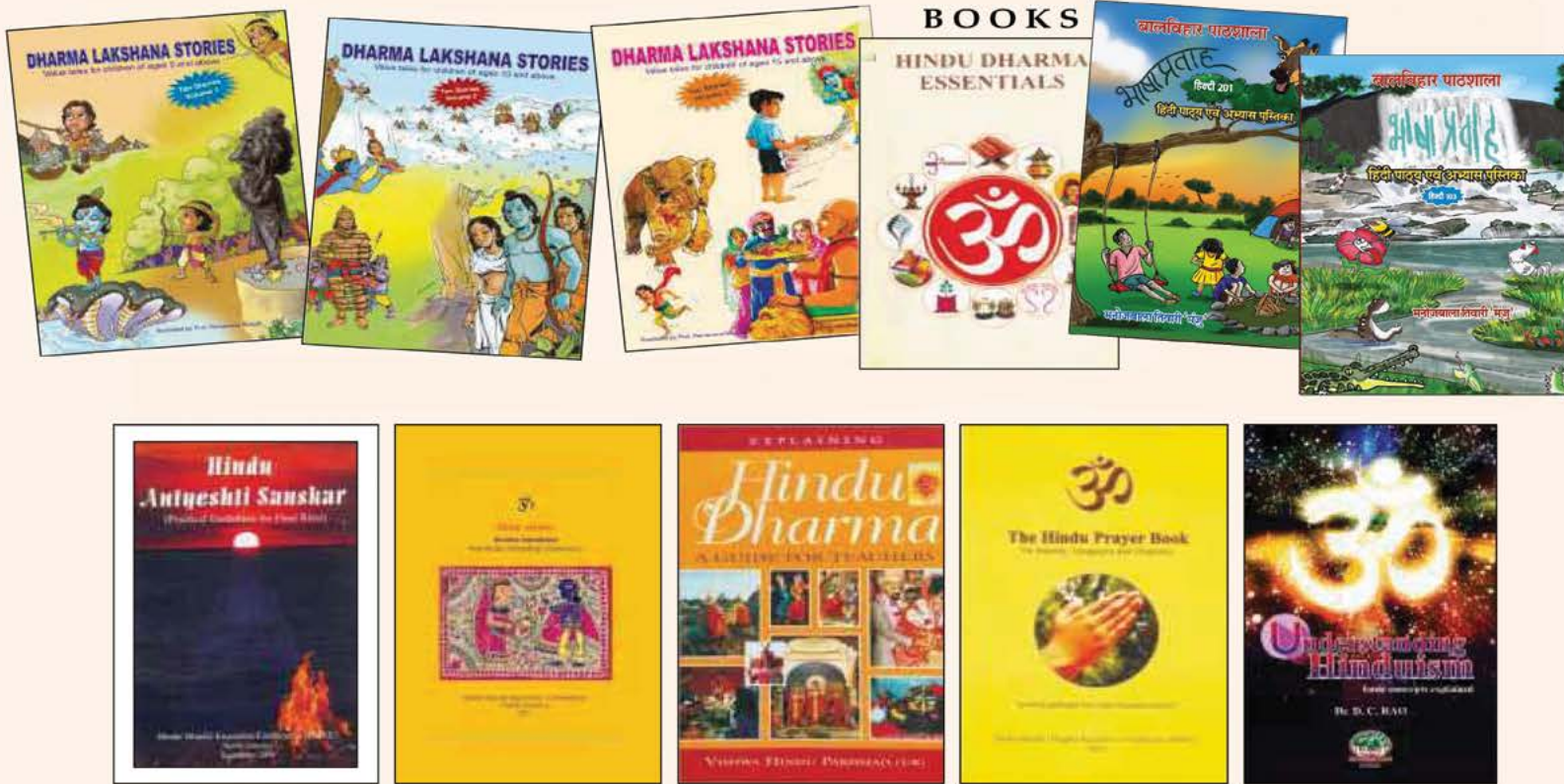


ॐ असतो मा सद् गमय । तमसो मा ज्योतिर्गमय । मृत्योर्मांमृतम् गमय ।।

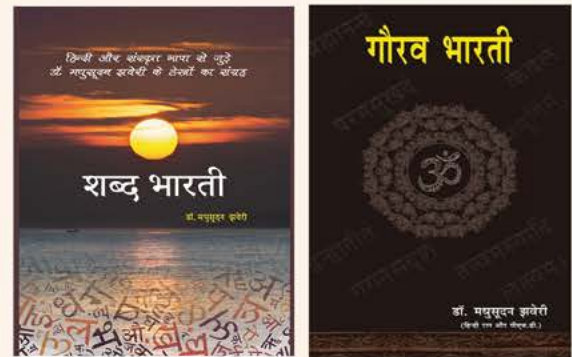
Om, Asato Maa Sad Gamaya; Tamaso Maa Jyotir Gamaya Mrityor Maa Amritam Gamaya

ॐ शांतिः शांतिः शांतिः

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