

[The Hindu Fascination With The Guinness Book of Records](#)

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Guinness Brewing Company began their now-famous log of world records to solve one of the Empire's most urgent problems - heated, even violent, nightly arguments in countless British pubs over who was the world's tallest, fastest or strongest person, animal, thing ad infinitum. Little could Guinness have guessed in 1954 that they themselves would one day set a world's record - the largest-selling copyrighted book (61 million copies in 35 languages). Many of the achievements in the Guinness Book of World Records are true testaments to the wonders of nature and the untapped resources of our bodies and minds. But then there are other records - such as eating 7,175 peas in 60 minutes with chopsticks, or steering a motorcycle facing backwards from the top of a ten-foot ladder mounted on the seat for 120 miles - that announce our lunier side. Of late the obsessive drive to be the world best (never mind what for) has intensified, and Hindus are running at the head of the pack.

Hinduism is in Guinness in respectable force for astounding talents such as that of Shakuntala Devi who once beat a computer in multiplying two 13-digit numbers and Sri Chinmoy devotee Ashrita Furman who holds the book's most records.

If the continual stream of records and attempted records reported by Indian papers is any indication, the sillier side of record making has also struck Hindus full force. For example, there is Mr. Anantha Kumar of Bangalore, India, who wrote India's national anthem, "Jana Gana Mana," a saying by American poet Robert Frost and his own home address (a total of 515 legible letters) on a grain of rice. His accomplishment, which was reported even in the Wall Street Journal, fell almost immediately to Mr. S.K. Apharya of Jaipur in Rajasthan, India, who managed 638 characters. Then there are the record-holding Hindus who cooked an 18-foot samosa, grew 21 feet of hair, memorized pi to 21,811 digits (since lost to a Japanese who did 40,000), whistled for 45 hours, disco danced for 463, went bankrupt with US \$238 million debt, performed 500,000 eye operations, have the longest name at 4,478 letters, longest fingernails (168 inches), failed England's driving test 47 times and roller skated under a string set at a mere 6.5 inches

above the ground!

Records for Religion

Superhumans and stunts aside, Hinduism itself holds some world records in religion. Guinness says we have the longest measurement of time the kalpa of 4.32 billion years. Astronomer Carl Sagan once noted that the very existence of such a measurement indicated that Hindus had a more accurate idea of the age of earth than any other civilization. The 12th-century Vishnu Temple of Angkor Wat in Cambodia is the largest religious building ever made, 8/10th mile on a side - big enough to enclose four Vatican Cities. No Hindu will be surprised to learn that the Kumbha Mela is the largest gathering of human beings ever, with the 1977 crowd of 12.7 million owning the record.

In the individual marathon events, Hindus hold records in many traditional yoga practices. For example, the silent Indian sadhu Masram Bapu remained on the same spot by the roadside in the Village of Chitra, India, for 22 years (1960-1982) and holds the world record for what Guinness has chosen to call "camping out." Another India sadhu, called Poondyswami, sat without moving in the South Indian village of Poondy for a similar length of time. In 1969 he told a young Hinduism Today staffer who asked why he never moved, "Mind absorbed in God. No place to go."

Jagdish Chander, 32, wanted to go someplace. He crawled a world-record 870 miles in a period of 15 month ending March 9th, 1985 to propitiate his Ishta Devata, Mata.

Swami Maujgiri Maharji stood up for a record 17 years, from 1955 to 1973 as penance in Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh. At night he would lean against a plank to sleep. He died in 1980 at the age of 85. It was rumored that he said, "Mind absorbed in God. No place to sit."

Hindu also have the record for longest continuous singing, held by devotees of Acharya Prem Bhikuji of Jamnagar, India. The Acharya started the Akhand

Rama-Dhoon on July 31, 1964. It has been continued in rotation by Bhikuji's devotees to the present day.

There are other world-record holders who have studied yoga, meditation and Hindu philosophy. One we discovered is Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, a Muslim and the all-time top scorer in professional basketball, with 38,387 points over 19 years. Kareem told HINDUISM TODAY during a 1987 visit to our editorial offices, "I credit my accomplishments in sports to yoga. I could not have achieved what I did without that training."

Records Hindus Should Have, But Don't

Would you believe that we don't hold the world record for fire walking, that quintessential Hindu practice? It belongs to 11 Americans in Washington State who walked a fire with an average temperature of 1,546[?]F in 1987.

R. Meenakshisundaram of Madras already holds a longer record for "nonstop talking" of 260 hours. But Rev. Ronald Gallagher at the Baptist Temple in Virginia, USA, gave the longest sermon - 120 hours. Meenakshisundaram should be able to get this record by discoursing on a religious subject. While he is doing it, V. Jeyarama of Tamil Nadu can cheer him on with his peerless clapping: 67 hours of 160 claps per minute audible at 120 yards.

But the real shocker for Hindus is that the bed of nails record is held by the Rev. Ken Own, 48, of Glamorganshire, Wales. That determined clergyman lay on sharp, six-inch nails spaced two inches apart for 300 hours. Guinness does mention that the Hindu sadhu Silki claims to have done 111 days in Sao Paulo Brazil in 1969, but he did not have documented "unremitting surveillance." We propose that a concerted effort be made to regain our unrivaled supremacy in such austerity.

HINDUISM TODAY'S Record

The closest we come to a world record is five miles - the distance between our editorial office and the top of Mount Waialeale, locally claimed as the world's wettest place. "Not so," say our Indian visitors, "It is really Cherapunji in India." And just as was intended, Guinness steps in to settle this friendly argument. The real wettest spot in the world is Tutunendo in Colombia, South America, with 463.4 inches rainfall a year. Cherapunji (450 inches/year) has the highest recorded amount for one year, 1,041.78 inches. And our 5,000-foot ex-volcano, Waialeale? It wins most rainy days - 350 per year and 460 inches/year.

What do all those British pub goers do who have their arguments similarly - if not so amicably - settled? They try to set new records. According to Mr. Day, of the 25 applications for new records Guinness receives daily, the most numerous are for highest score in 24 hours in the popular pub games of darts and snookers.

Super Humans

Shakuntala Devi made a world record in 1980 by correctly multiplying 2,465,099,754,779 by 7,686,369,774,870 in 28 seconds. In 1977 she derived the 23rd root of a 201-digit number in 50 seconds, faster than a powerful computer programmed for the contest. She is a Ganesha bhaktar, daily worshipped the elephant-headed Lord of - among other areas - mathematics. As a child, she had swallowed a small clay image of Ganesha, and her family attributes her powers to this event.

"As a kid, I thought sports was a waste of time," Ashrita Furman told HINDUISM TODAY. "Even when I started meditation and the search for Self-Realization, I still thought so." Ashrita then found his guru, Sri Chinmoy (himself a superb athlete) and took to heart Chinmoy's teachings on self-transcendence. "There is never any end," Chinmoy taught him, "You can always go beyond." So to demonstrate this philosophy, Ashrita decided to set records for the Guinness book, starting with "jumping jacks" (27,000). "I'd find a record for which I had no capacity and then meditate and train." For one record he somersaulted 12.25 miles, watched by national magazines and newspapers. "It was so painful that at 7 miles I started shouting, 'I am not the body. I am soul.' Over and over." Observers of his endurance attempts report that when he appears totally exhausted, he stops to meditate upon a picture of Sri Chinmoy for a few minutes and will suddenly resume with tremendous renewed energy. Four other Chinmoy devotees hold Guinness world records: David Fank for whistling and skateboarding, Chris Riggio for egg-and

spoon balancing Sipra Lloyd for fire-eating and Sadhak Hurst for one-man band (331 hours).

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