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Minister's Message

Convey the Teachings!

It is up to us to explain Hinduism to the brilliant new generation. They are interested!

By Sri Jayendra Puri Mahaswamiji

In this audio interview His Holiness Sri Jayendra Puri Mahaswamiji talks about young Hindus in America

During a recent visit to the US, Swamiji visited Kauai's Hindu Monastery, where we took the opportunity to interview him about the impressions American Hindus had left on him.

What did you see in young Hindus raised in America?

I have spoken to young children in my recent visit to America, from six-year-old Hindus to teenagers. A girl from Jersey City, who was silent while her parents avidly interacted with me, is a good example. After the formal ceremonies, the girl came forward and asked me many questions. She actually had listened intently to what I explained during my pada puja satsang and brought good questions that related to her personal life.

The questions of the average youth about spiritual matters are very deep now, more so than a few years ago. An eleventh-grade boy asked me, "Swami, have you seen God? And if you have, can you explain it to me? I don't seem to believe that there is any God." On this trip I have come across many of this age who have similar questions about God, questions that usually would surface only later in life.

I recently talked for a long time to that young seeker of Truth. He had been through the Western, modern education system, so I used takashastra, logic. I told him, "You have seen this building where we are sitting now. Naturally you presume that there is a builder. From a particular machine, you presume there is a manufacturer and some systematic intelligence behind it. So can you imagine such a wonderful creation as our world, consisting of so many real ideas, so many species and you and me, that doesn't have an intelligence behind it? You cannot." He hesitantly said, "Yes, yes." So, I continued, "Inside of you there is some power which is making you move. Inside me there is the same power, making me speak. A car cannot move without energy. Similarly with my body and yours. But what is this power?" He analyzed my arguments little by little. When I said the sum of all actions and all ideas and all power is God, he was convinced and sighed, "Now I know there is a God."

How can we encourage them to attend the temples?

Temple worship, so central to our religion, is something we have to carefully explain. The first step for the young to understand the value of temple worship is to meditate upon "janma mrithu jerra riadi," meaning "the reason for their earthly birth." Why are we born? And is death in our hands? And during old age, can you stop decay and disease? Such is life, we are all afflicted with these things without knowing why. Not only this, but all of us are internally inspired to find something meaningful. That propels us to realize something beyond us, some shakti beyond us.

How to connect ourselves with this shakti? I ask the children and the youth, "Are you always successful in whatever you do? No, it's not like that. You don't control everything. You know that there is one factor which is not in our hands: the divine power." Temple worship will give you more power to achieve things in a better manner--not only material things, but to go further and find out the meaning of life.

It is common for me hear, "Why do we need temples? Isn't the murti just a statue? Our elders say that God is present everywhere." They deserve good answers. I explain with an analogy. Sunlight is everywhere but the Sun, in spite of its mighty heat, cannot burn even one small piece of paper under normal circumstances. But get one magnifying glass, keep one piece of paper below it and then let sunlight pass through. The paper will go up in flames. It happens not because of the glass,

which is simple, uncomplicated and costs just a few dollars, but because of the sunlight it intensifies. Similarly, God is, by some technical means, brought into the temple to bless us, the jivas. That is done by a pranapratishta (ritual consecration) of the murti and by Sanskrit mantras. The difference between Sanskrit and normal language is crucial; it creates greater impact. Mantras are selective sound vibrations experienced by rishis over thousands of years.

What else is important to explain to the next generation?

When I talk to our youth, I also pass on the respect for our ancient sages. I say to them, "How can you believe in the existence of the rishis? Rishis are great people, like sage Vedavyasa, who have given us spiritual knowledge." I myself have never seen a rishi, but I believe in them. To make my point, I inquire, "Have you seen the Mahabharata? Have you seen the Ramayana? Can you write a book like that? Could you write one particle of the Mahabharata? Just read them and see the power of the rishis. They are spiritual scientists."

I often explain two important Hindu practices, sadhana and meditation. Sadhana, daily spiritual practice, begins only when you are clear about your goal. When I ask, "Are you satisfied with what you are doing?" I often hear, "We are living, just like everybody, achieving things." But I ask, "Is that all? What is the purpose of life?" Most will say it is happiness. But is there such a thing as unwavering happiness? When you discover you need God to be your goal, then you begin true sadhana. Then comes meditation, or dhyanam in Sanskrit. It is a continuous flow of mental energy in one direction. For beginners, I suggest meditating on Lord Ganesha's white form. The moment we have the mind flowing to Lord Ganesha's white form, detached from all other colors or thoughts, one thing ties to another in a seeker's mind.

When I am asked how to reach a deeper state of meditation, I explain that one needs a guru for that. I say, "You have done your practice many times, but your mind is still wavering." One needs help to reach the source of the mind, which is the source of everything. What I can understand, a child maybe will not. Similarly, we cannot understand what an advanced yogi sees, but we hear about it from him. He helps us awaken our positive energies with discipline, and he makes us proceed toward realizing God.