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Published by Anonymous on Apr. 02, 2006

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How to help us realize exciting new possibilities

Thank you so much for the well written and moving article on Tirumala temple. Reading it brought back many feelings of my family's own pilgrimage there four years ago. We had originally visited to pray for a baby. As I looked into His calm face and all became still, I sensed the world turning, the universe forming and falling away, deaths, births, catastrophes and blessings. And through it all He was there, face calm, smiling slightly in His magnificence. As I left the sanctum, I found to my surprise that I had tears of joy running down my face. Two years later, we carried our first-born child up the seven hills to the temple to present to Him. She had her first head-shaving, as her father, grandparents and past generations did before her. A word of advice for non-Indian pilgrims: It is best to dress as traditionally as possible and be accompanied by a local devotee. Because of my light skin, I was pulled aside and asked to sign a statement that I was indeed a Hindu before being allowed to continue on.

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Why Hindus Are the Happiest

A recent study concludes that Hindus are one of the happiest groups of people on Earth. George Harrison once said, as reported in Hinduism Today, "Through Hinduism, I feel a better person. I just got happier and happier." There are many reasons why Hindus are so contented, but I'll point out some of the reasons I believe are important: Hindus believe in reincarnation and karma, which means every

human being is at a different level of consciousness, so they have different spiritual needs. Hinduism provides this, as it gives complete freedom of thought and belief. There are some Hindus who are happy doing pujas while others are happy doing yajnas and still others are happy just meditating. There are some who like to go on pilgrimages, while others prefer not to go to temples. Some like to read spiritual books, and some believe God has no form. Some Hindus enjoy going to temples or satsangs while others like to follow and worship a guru. People of different levels of consciousness are all happy doing their thing. This diversity of spirituality does not exist in religions like Islam and Christianity, which have only one God with one name, one book and only one way to worship, on the same day. Hindus not only have many spiritual books, but there are some still being written. Hindus are also happy because they respect and love people of all religions and believe in nonviolence. Hindus not only worship murtis (idols) but they can worship man as God as well. This variety of spirituality makes man very happy and contented.

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Vedanta in Brazil

In 1996 when I returned from London to Brazil I started to practice hatha yoga. I spent six years in London, where I could have had many more encounters with Hindu culture, philosophy and history. But, no, it was in Rio de Janeiro, in a very populated neighborhood, that I first met yoga. First it was only hatha yoga, but soon enough I started to feel some changes within me. I started to feel happier inside, lighter. It was subtle, and I could not understand it. In 1999 I heard about a Vedanta school called Vidya Mandir in the heart of Copacabana, a very busy, famous place in Rio. I started to study there with Gloria Arieira, the founder and director. She studied with her guru, Swami Dayananda, from 1974 to 1978, staying at his ashram in Mumbai. Since I started to study at Vidya Mandir, it all began to make sense for me. Vedanta has changed my life slowly and gradually into a new perspective. I feel in my heart and in my mind this knowledge sinking in, and I have begun to see life and why things are the way they are with less resistance, more compassion, understanding that there is an order and a reason for everything. I got answers I couldn't find anywhere else. I even stopped seeing my psychologist. Now I see that "the whole universe is one great family." I have subscribed to Hinduism Today, and I can tell you that if I have a religion, I would say I feel very close to Hinduism.

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Yoga Renamed Is Still Hindu

I think that Hindus have contributed to the development of the "Christian Yoga " concept, albeit indirectly ("Yoga Renamed Is Still Hindu, " Jan/Feb/Mar 2006). I wonder how many yoga classes and schools run by Hindus display the Indian flag and emphasize the use of Sanskrit terminology. How much Hindu culture is promoted in these classes? I would like to cite the example of Tae Kwon Do, the Korean martial art. The Tae Kwon Do school in my area, which is run by Koreans, displays the Korean flag along with the US flag, to which students bow before entering the classroom. Students, even children, are required to learn Korean words. I feel that in our quest to make yoga more palatable to the Western taste we have neglected its religious and cultural roots ourselves. What then can we expect from a non-Hindu yoga teacher teaching yoga to fellow non-Hindus?

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Non-vegetarian Airline Meals

My wife and I traveled from London to New York on American Airlines. Prior to the flight I called and asked for "a Hindu meal that is strict vegetarian and contains no meat or fish " to ensure not even fish, which some classify as vegetarian, would be in the meal. I was told that a "Hindu Vegetarian Meal " had been booked. On the flight we were presented with a meal containing meat. The stewards were unable to do anything and suggested we take up the matter with their customer service department, and we did so upon returning home. In a letter from them, they claimed "Hindu meals are not vegetarian." A couple of months after two follow-ups, still not accepting fault, they clarified, "Hindu meals were not always vegetarian " and explained further, "While some Hindus are strict vegetarians, there are some who will eat some meats, apart from pork and beef. Whilst I certainly regret that you were unhappy with being served chicken in your meal, there was a period of

time where halal chicken was served in the Hindu meals." They offered air miles or flight vouchers in compensation. But to us, such statements were insulting to our religion. We declined the offer. Clearly, big international airlines have a conflicting perception of Hindus. More so, they seem to change the contents of the meals, most likely according to availability. Would they do the same on Kosher and Halal meals? If they clearly can make such statements about Hindu meals, I am sure they do so with others, too. I hope to bring awareness of this to fellow Hindus. We must stop large airlines from making such irresponsible statements and making changes to meals as and when they like, misleading customers.

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Non-Hindus Entering Temples

I am rather perturbed at the reaction of the priests when a non-Hindu entered their temple ("Thai Princess Denied Entry to Puri Temple, " Hindu Press International, Nov. 22, 2005). I was born and bred in a country that was ruled by apartheid and practiced this very principle, except that it was done on the basis of race. This is not acceptable. Furthermore, India supported South Africa greatly in our struggle against oppression. Mahatma Gandhi made his point very clear, and the incident of his being thrown off the train in our capital of Pietermaritzburg is used to teach our children that it is wrong to discriminate on the basis of color or creed. Is India moving backward or forward?

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Wardrobe of the Gods

I find your web site on Hinduism very helpful and informative about the vast diversity of Hindu culture, and I have gained so much knowledge from it. Just today

as I was reading one of the articles, a thought came to mind about how well the Lords are dressed. We don't see people dressing like that today. Where and when did this style of dress come from, and how come we stopped dressing like we dress the Gods? I have seen many gurus and sadhus, but their dress code doesn't match that of the Gods. How beautiful they are and how sad it is that all of this has not been passed down to the current generation.

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When invoking and worshiping a God in a temple or shrine, the intent is to treat Him as one would treat a great king who has come to visit. In ancient times, Indian kings dressed in the elaborate, colorful, highly decorated manner that is still used when dressing Hindu temple Deities today.

Crooked Catholic Chicanery

Your recent piece on the Catholic Church's deceptive activities ("Catholic Church Expands Deceptive Program of 'Indianization,' " Hindu Press International, Oct. 30, 2005) is very interesting. I am Canadian of British background, as well as a teacher and writer on yoga. My heart is in the Upanishads and the life and teachings of Ramana Maharshi. I consider Gandhi to be the greatest modern example of karma yoga in its highest expression. The Catholic Church is doing the same nonsense in India which it has done to the native peoples of Canada since the fifteenth century. Reading about Christian-run schools in India reminds me of a horrifying period in Canadian Native history. Canada's infamous residential schools (sixty percent of which were run by the Catholic Church) indoctrinated aboriginal children with Catholic dogma, forbade them to speak their native tongues, disparaged their cultural values and made every effort to assimilate them into white society. These wonderful indigenous peoples have been demoralized, and their cultural and spiritual traditions completely undermined by the pernicious influence of this chauvinistic institution. It is simply enslavement done in the name of Jesus. Hidden From History, by Kevin Annett, gives a full account of the devastation caused to the aboriginal peoples of Canada. Does this sound familiar? It should, because this is essentially what the Catholic Church, their phony sadhus and other evangelical churches are doing in India today. Hindus, take note! Furthermore, the Government of India must take a strong stand against efforts to convert Hindus, especially

among those who are weak and vulnerable. Respecting religious freedom does not mean tolerating aggressive proselytizing. If anything, proselytizing is itself a violation of human rights and should be stopped whenever and wherever it raises its ugly head. Hindus must all become little Gandhis when it comes to protecting the Sanatana Dharma, i.e. nonviolent warriors. As a devotee of the Sanatana Dharma myself, I often repeat a prayer that was spoken by the modern sage, Ramana Maharshi: "O Vinayaka, who wrote on a scroll the words of the great sage Vyasa and who presides at the victorious Arunachala, do remove the disease of ignorance which is the cause of repeated births and protect, graciously, the great and noble Upanishadic faith, which brims with the honey of the Self."

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Our Digital Edition is Launched

This issue is our first to offer a digital duplicate, downloadable from the web at no charge. Hinduism Today thus becomes available to countless new readers. Even more significantly, the digital edition opens up vast new worlds of information and enjoyment. Here are two examples: 1) on page 23 the caption for the musical fountains of Akshardham invites you to go to the digital edition, click on the photo, and see a 15-minute movie of Akshardham (instructions are in "Digital Dharma, " back cover), and 2) on page I-5, in the article teaching a simple home puja, click on the blue url in the digital edition and hear it chanted in Sanskrit--then use that link to learn how to properly chant the puja! The possibilities for "rich media " are endless. Read about a guru, then hear him speak; read about a dance troupe, then watch them perform; find an interesting concept and click to learn more.

Our publisher, Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, envisions a near future where the family TV, computer and multimedia system merge as a one "entertainment center." Everyone sits together "surfing " Hinduism Today on a large screen, enjoying text, voices, images, artists, leaders, bringing Hinduism's treasures into vibrant life--a boon for busy people, families and, especially, youth! In years and decades to come, we will need the financial means to remain at the forefront of this fast-moving field and bring readers the very best, always. You can be a part of this

exciting endeavor. The Hinduism Today Production Fund, which is a part of the Hindu Heritage Endowment, will provide future editors with grants to produce ever finer print and digital editions. Please consider becoming a Benefactor of Hinduism Today by making the Fund a beneficiary in your estate plan of a gift of \$5,000 or more--in your will, in your life insurance, in a revocable living trust or charitable remainder trust. Contact us and ask for the Hinduism Today Production Fund flyer.

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