

[Letters](#)

Category : [January/February/March 2004](#)

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Planned giving for Posterity

Accept my greetings and good wishes. I just received the October issue and appreciate your kind gesture in sending us extra copies. It was kind of you to carry the article on the "World Hanuman Conference " which was hosted here in April, 2003. May I take this opportunity to express my appreciation for the magazine as a whole. The regularity of its appearance, the editorial content, photographs, current events and the dialogue on ethical issues have won our appreciation. We pray for the continued success of the magazine.

Swami Saradananda, President Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa,
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On Caste and Parenting

I was really caught up in the article on caste ("Caste in Transition, " Apr/May 2003). Even in Malaysia, caste seems to still be important, especially in marriage. I am totally against the caste system. Sadly, though time marches on and more people are educated, the perception of caste has not changed. As mentioned in the article, only the middle class are getting out of it slowly, the rich and poor still uphold it. I don't believe caste is a factor indicating wisdom, knowledge or character. I have come across many people who claim to be upper class or brahmin but do not behave like one. It's upsetting that caste is still so important as to cause the break up of marriage plans. As the article points out, just as we refer to people by vocation as "blue collared " or "white collared, " caste was initially based on work. But now it differentiates people. Caste should never be grounds for marriage or deciding whom to mix with. What really counts is the character and the person

himself.

I was also struck by the efforts at education in Thailand ("Hinduism: Thai Style, " Jul/Aug 2003). Everything starts from home. In search of money, luxury and meeting the hard demands of life, parents are unintentionally neglecting their kids. As much time and effort as they spend on turning kids into "graduates " should be put into instilling religious values into their children.

I don't think I would be so religiously inclined if my parents and grandma had not instilled the values into me at a young age. I am a college graduate, exposed to Western culture, and yet I still have strong values. But when kids are curious about something and parents just shut them off, that is where the nonbelieving thing starts coming in. And today, negative influences are just prowling out there waiting to grasp the weak ones. One who is not rightly equipped with knowledge of his own religion is prone to confusion and conversion.

This basically boils down to the importance of parents' role in making sure our culture does not fade over time. Parents should educate themselves in their own religion. That is the first step. Then only can they think of educating their children. Religious organizations also must play a part in educating ignorant people who separate religion and their life, who believe, if you are religious, you can't enjoy life. But Hinduism is a way of life. Why look for the honey when it's in your hands?

Mohana Vilashiny, Klang, Malaysia, rudra_79@hotmail.com

Sanskrit Has Magic

One thing I am seeing in Mauritius is that in many temples rituals are being conducted in Tamil and no more in Sanskrit. There are many people who are trying to push the Indian priests out of Mauritius to implement Tamil rituals everywhere. I think that it is a sad thing, because the magic which the Sanskrit mantras create is no longer there in the Tamil rituals.

Nuckiren Pyeneandee, Mauritius, nuckiren@hotmail.com

How Can Sanskrit Be Unifying?

With reference to the letter to the editor "Sanskrit, A Unifying Force " (Jul/Sep, 2003), I'd like to state: God understands all languages and God listens to all people. Sanskrit is not the only language that God understands. In India, the study of Sanskrit was denied to many segments of the Hindu population, as it was deemed to be a prerogative of only the privileged caste. How can Sanskrit be a unifying force when the Gautama Dharma Shastra, 12.4-6 (translated by Georg Buhler), states, "If a sudra listens intentionally to (a recitation of) the Veda, his ears shall be filled with (molten) tin or lac. If he recites (Vedic texts), his tongue shall be cut out. If he remembers them, his body shall be split in twain." The Dharma Shastras are smritis, ("remembered writings "), written by men who had vested interests and enforced as laws. The Dharma Shastras are not the holy Vedas, which are sruti ("revealed, heard from God "). God understands all languages and all people. God does not discriminate.

Jumuna Vittal, New Jersey, USA, Vittalj@aol.com

Teach Peace Universally

In Hinduism Today I was happy to read Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami's article, "Teaching Children to Forge a Peaceful Future, " (Jul/Sep, 2003). I feel that peace is possible, but it has to be taught on a universal scale. Here's a proposed strategy for achieving peace at the world level. No. 1: Teach all children the noble qualities of love, compassion, respect, understanding and brotherhood. No. 2: Teach all children to reflect upon their own thinking, and what may be the consequences. No. 3: Teach all children reverence for life hurting anyone causes suffering that one would not like inflicted on oneself. No. 4: Teach all children what the ego is and its power. No. 5: Teach all children acceptance of one another based on understanding, empathy, sharing, love and respect.

The United Nations can convene a meeting of the departments or ministries of

education of all the countries to formulate a core curriculum and to develop ways and means of implementing it. The curriculum will lay emphasis on the items listed above and on implementation at the grade one level. It will need to be a core subject, no less than language, science and mathematics. It will need to be taught until children grasp the fundamental importance of them, and apply them in life.

If the above values are taught in the formative years of children, then just as they learn the other subjects, they will also learn the values that bring peace, love, respect, happiness and shared coexistence into everyday life, and make it manifest in the world. This need not be a religious course, but a course in shared human values that will reap rich dividends. At the individual level, people will live more harmoniously, free of domestic and communal violence. This certainly is desirable!

Dr. Jagessar Das, BC, Canada, dasj@shaw.ca

Support Arts and Crafts

I recently subscribed to your magazine and am busy recommending it to one and all. It is stellar in terms of content, look, feel and objective. What I liked particularly was your mention of social and environmental issues relating to Hindus, such as the treatment of elephants, forests of Orissa, and the condition of the temple singers of Tamil Nadu. Hinduism very much includes environmental sensitivity and sublime art forms.

It would be wonderful if you could also mention what the reader can do to contribute. Is there a nongovernmental trust or association out there that we could help with? There are Hindus all over the world, and we feel frustrated when we see problems but don't know what we can do to help. Also I would request you to continue your good work of focusing on rare and threatened arts and crafts. Hinduism stands the risk of losing its rich culture and the more you could highlight issues such as these the stronger our religion will be. Some of the areas that come to mind are states such as Rajasthan and the Northeast (primarily due to missionary activities). Please let us know what we can do to help in these areas. An option would also be to set up an arts and crafts fund for different states in India. Thank you again.

Monisha Malhan, New York, USA, monisha_malhan@yahoo.com

Thrilled By Your Content

I was thrilled at reading your article encouraging the youth to write their minds on vegetarianism ("Why I'm a Vegetarian " Oct/Nov, 2003), and the other October articles. Those rare pictures from the extraordinary article on the world renowned maestro M. S. Subbulakshmi are most appreciated ("Sweet Soul of Song "), as was the article on virunthombal ("Hindu Hospitality "). It is becoming a thing of the past to the diaspora in Europe and North America. Even back home in Sri Lanka, it is quietly vanishing, as materialism takes over our historic culture. The Hindu of the Year award to Tiruchi Swamigal is most suited, though it would have been a crowning ceremony, were it awarded by Gurudeva! The magazine is now treading into a wider area of interest, viz., anger management, etc., which I am certain will interest a wider group of readers.

Thiru Satkunendran, Ontario, Canada, thiru.satkunendran@sympatico.ca

Let's Start Hospitality Day!

I have been a reader of Hinduism Today for the last twenty years or so, but I have never been as excited as when I read this article on Hindu Hospitality by Lavina Melwani in your latest edition. This article brings out what Hinduism really stands for in society and more. I am persuaded to think in terms of celebrating Earth Day (which is as yet not really a public holiday) jointly as Hospitality Day also. Over time, governments could be persuaded to have this day declared a public holiday the world over in the hope that people could use this day as a bridge builder and a day of goodwill between the different communities, races, religions, etc., in the world. Initially, Hindu families in countries other than India could invite a family of the majority community to come and dine and spend the day or evening at a Hindu home. We could bring out our understanding of hospitality in the traditional Hindu way by lighting a lamp upon arrival of the guests and performing a small puja to mother Earth. We would need to reach out to our guests to demonstrate that all humanity is really one. In India and other countries where Hindus are a majority community, a member of the so-called untouchable society or the poor could be invited by the well-to-do's, giving them a chance to iron out the differences and

bring the minorities into the mainstream of Hinduism. This celebration of Earth Day with Hospitality Day could boost relations with the majority community and reduce doubts, misunderstandings and other differences over time. I want to sound out this idea to the readers of Hinduism Today to get feedback.

Bramh D. Mishra, Texas, USA, Mishrab4@aol.com

Lighten Up On Western World

I am an avid reader of your magazine as well as several of your related online publications regarding Hinduism. I really enjoy learning about the religion, the culture and actively try to practice what I have learned. However, I am disappointed in the lack of tolerance of the Western world within the teaching of Hinduism. There is only one religion portrayed as the "Western religion, " and that is Christianity. Not only is the disdain for the Western way of life apparent, but it seems that every lesson for Hindus to learn is somehow related back to how poorly the Christians live their lives in America. I thought Hinduism was the religion of tolerance and acceptance. And in clumping all Westerners and their influences into the Christian religion, Americans such as myself, looking toward a better life and influence for future generations, are simply discounted because we don't exist within the Christian confine. Christianity is NOT the only religion in the West, and hopefully some can remember that it is not a choice one makes to be born into any lifestyle. It is a choice how you live your life, and though one way may not coincide with your approval, it doesn't make it a bad thing.

Meri Visnic, Colorado, USA, merixmas14@msn.com

Corrections

'The letter to the editor, "Priests Decline, " in the Apr/Jun, 2003, issue was wrongly attributed to Jumuna Vittal. The person who sent us that letter is actually Thiruvengadam Ramakrishnan, at rama-t@cox.net

'In our Oct/Dec, 2003, issue the doctor who is taking a patient's blood pressure in the photo, 3rd from the left, page 52, "Pill-free Clinic Relieves Pain, " is Dr. Chanderashekar, not Dr. Abhishek Jain.

Buy Dharma Futures

'The Hindu Heritage Endowment is dedicated to the long term financial support of a wide variety of Hindu causes. Anyone can start an endowment for a particular Hindu art or craft. The exact nature of the endowment is up to the donors. See <http://www.hheonline.org> for details.