Christian Snake Charmer's Death Bespeaks The Extreme of Man's Quest for Faith
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Rev. Prince Lived and Died by Biblical Prophecies Which Say to Take up Serpents and Consume Poison

Criticisms against Hinduism generally focus on its extremes. Is colorful, spectacular forms - whether orthodox or heterodox - are easily misunderstood. Detractors ignore its sublime philosophy, love-based faith and introspective disciplines. They focus instead on obscure practices even most Hindus have nothing to do with.

The story of the Rev. Charles Prince, who believed that taking up serpents and drinking poison was a pronouncement of victory over evil, hints at the truth - all faiths have practices that others find strange but which have meaning to believers. Like many others of other religions. Rev. Prince sought through his exotic actions to find meaning in life, demonstrate his faith and be close to God.

Rev. Prince was a stocky, solid, 47-year old man who lived literally by Mark 16:18 of the Christian Bible: "They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." People who knew him said he had an unusual zeal for religion in a fundamental sect of Holiness that believes literally every word in the Bible.

Rev. Prince was a widely known and well-liked evangelist in the Holiness Church. He criss-crossed the South delivering sermons. He would walk on snakes' backs and sing as he lit the rag wick of a bottle filled with kerosene and let the flames caress his chin and neck. Rev. Prince was preaching to a floor-bouncing congregation in the Apostolic Church of God on Saturday night, August 17, in Greenville, Kentucky, when a yellow timber rattler he was holding struck the second joint of his left thumb.

He continued the sermon and drank from a flask of deadly strychnine before he was carried away to Carl Reed's house in Limestone. The gifted preacher, whose father later said "went too far," died two days later, never abandoning his interpretation of the Word. Members of the faith from Tennessee, North Carolina, West Virginia and Kentucky gathered at his bedside. His only medicine large does of faith as friends tenderly touched his body and head with their palms, trying to relieve the agony that pounded at him in waves.

This was not his first embrace with death. Eight times before he had been bitten while preaching in the name of the Holiness Church in Jesus Name. There were days when he was sick from those bites, and very few ever realized that at one time he was quite afraid of the cottonmouth moccasin.

In an interview just before his death. Rev. Prince said there are snakes that some followers of his faith are instinctively afraid of, that send fear to the core of their faith. The interview was with Fred Brown of The Knoxville News-Sentinel, who is in the process of doing a full-scale documentary on the group and whose editor released this story for use in Hinduism Today.

Rev. Prince said he only worried about getting bitten when his faith flickered. In the years of handling serpents, he had found peace with himself and with his faith. In the end, there was absolutely no fear in him. There was nothing to fear. Prince said, because God was his best friend.

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