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Impressions from My Travels

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During an April interview in Hawaii, Swami Pragyananda shared his thoughts about Hinduism in the many countries he visited this year.

As I was flying from London to New York, I was talking to the airline stewards on the plane. One was a Black African from Ghana, the other a Muslim from Iran. Finally, each one came and asked, "Swami, can you bless me?" I replied, "My blessings only work if you are vegetarian. If you are vegetarian, I will definitely bless you." They replied, "Can you give us ten minutes?" I said, "Fine." Then they came again and asked, "Can we take fish and eggs?" I said, "No." They replied, "Give us another ten minutes." Again they came and now agreed, becoming vegetarians on that very flight.

I tell people, "Your body is a temple, a very pious place. Don't make it dirty. Don't make it a cemetery, a mobile graveyard." I can convince Americans and Europeans in a short time, but sometimes it takes longer to convince Indians. I am going to put at my temple in Delhi a sign like you have here in Kauai, that no one can go in unless they are dressed in Hindu clothes and are a vegetarian. Otherwise, they have to stand and worship outdoors. Some people can't give up meat eating. So when they want to grow spiritually, they are restricted, because they cannot accept this idea in their personal daily life.

God, prayer, nonviolence, karma and reincarnation-these are the five essential beliefs that every small kid needs to know. The parents must learn these things

first. In America, when the children are small, the parents are not worried. They think, "The small ones, oh, let them grow, we'll think about it later." But when they are big, the parents say, "You must go to the temple. You must have the blessing of the swamis, blessing of the Lord." But this is wrong. We must make our small children knowledgeable Hindus. The younger generation is sometimes misled because of Christian people. They say, "There is only one, Christ, who can give you heaven." Our children need to know that Christ is not the only one. Christ was born only 1,995 years back. But our Sanatana Dharma is as old as the universe is old, the oldest religion of the world.

I have been to ten countries in the last year. I find Hinduism is doing best in Mauritius, Fiji, Suriname and Singapore. Mauritius is just like India. So is Fiji, because they speak the language, and the religion, food, dress-everything-is the same. They have Christianity there, but not that much. Our people there have protected our religion. If we treasure the culture and religion, the culture and religion will protect us. But if we can't protect the culture and religion, how will the culture and religion protect us? Dharma protects those who believe in dharma.

In Guyana and Suriname, you'll find hundreds of small temples. They are only open for one day, just like a church. I told them, "You take food daily, rest daily and drink water daily. Prayer is also for your soul daily. Not only once in a week."

Once when I was in London, there was a lady who fooled many people, and took a lot of money. She claimed that the Goddess Devi came into her body. When I came, she started saying, "I am Gayatri. Swamiji, because you are Gayatri devotee, Gayatri has come." I told her, "Gayatri never came in my body, how is this possible? If She came, She would come first in my body, not your body, because I am vegetarian and you are not." Her sister-in-law had Lakshmi Mata and Durga Mata coming into her body; the whole family was doing it-Gayatri Mata, Lakshmi Mata, Santoshi Mata, all the Matas. So suddenly I sat up very straight. I shouted, "I am Pitri, the Father. Why have you come without my permission? Bring scissors, I want to cut her hair." The frightened woman confessed and said, "O, Swami please forgive me. I beg your pardon." I said, "Just tell the other people who are sitting here that you are a fake. You are not doing this, but making money out of it." So we are here to fight foolishness and hypocrites. We have to eradicate and remove this shrewdness. Then there are wise people who will come.

Swami Pragyanda is an exponent of the Gayatri Mantra and the worship of the

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Letters