

[He Gave Us Earthly And Philosophical Tools](#)

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## He Gave Us Earthly And Philosophical Tools

Honoring Gurudeva's numberless achievements and reflecting on his perceptions of the three pillars

SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

As most readers are aware, our beloved Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder and publisher of HINDUISM TODAY, passed away last November, leaving a half-century legacy of work that sparked a Hindu renaissance and a global fellowship led by a monastic order from five nations to continue his vision.

Gurudeva departed from this world as valiantly as he had lived in it. After spending all of August traveling and teaching in Europe in his dynamic manner, he returned to suddenly learn on October 9, 2001, that he had advanced intestinal cancer. When teams of eminent specialists in three states all concurred that the most aggressive treatments would be ineffective, he declined any treatment beyond palliative measures and courageously decided to follow the yogic practice,

called prayopavesa in Sanskrit scripture, to abstain from nourishment and take water only from that day on. He left his body peacefully on the 32nd day of his fast, at 11:54 pm on Monday, November 12 in Chitra nakshatra, surrounded by his monastics. His death itself was a potent lesson in courage and detachment.

In the first weeks of his fast, Gurudeva initiated me as the new satguru and seamlessly transferred his responsibilities to me. Concerned for others, even on his deathbed, days before his Great Union he whispered in assurance, "Everything that is happening is good. Everything that is happening is meant to be." He asked devotees worldwide to carry his work and institutions forward with unstinting vigor, to keep one another strong on the spiritual path, to live in harmony and to work diligently on their personal spiritual sadhanas, noting, "You are all over-qualified to carry on."

This entire issue of the magazine is dedicated to this contemporary rishi, each feature focusing on another color in his vivid rainbow of deeds. The world map on the gatefold hints at his global impact. Letters to the Editor carries personal tributes culled from hundreds of communications received in the weeks surrounding his transition. In "Making of a Master" you will read Gurudeva's own account of the training that prepared him for his mission, along with a biographical timeline.

In three feature sections we attempt to capture diverse aspects of his genius. "Mystical Master" explores his inner side, profound realizations, visions and yogic teachings. "Renaissance Rishi" focuses on his transforming impact on the Hindu world, reviving tradition, rekindling pride and dispelling misconceptions and misunderstandings. "Gracious Guru" takes you into his tropical ashram, capturing his monastic order and the lives of his congregation.

As you might imagine, it was a rich and enriching experience for those of us who had the privilege of creating this special issue of HINDUISM TODAY. Not just a few tears were quietly shed as we perused thousands of photos and recalled our many years, almost 40, with a being who was our preceptor, mother, father and best friend all rolled into one. But, emotions aside, he raised us to be strong, and he assured us that he would be helping us "twenty-four hours a day" from the inner worlds. To this we can each now personally attest. With this brief introduction, on with the show! May this commemoration of the life of a rare, illuminated soul, beloved by all who knew him, inspire you to go forth with courage on the path of which he so brilliantly taught, the path of personal self-transformation through sadhana leading to realization of God, the Divine within all.

## The Three Pillars of Hinduism

As Gurudeva's successor and the new publisher, it is my responsibility to oversee and further HINDUISM TODAY'S mission of spreading knowledge of Hinduism worldwide and countering myth and misunderstanding. I had the honor to work closely with Gurudeva for 37 years, assisting him in ministering to his Church members and to the broader Hindu world. During that time, I discerned that his approach to each situation was designed to strengthen what he called the three pillars of Hinduism: the temples, the philosophy and the satgurus. He worked systematically, dynamically at this through this magazine, his books and courses, his bold, often fiery, inspired talks, and in private encounters with thousands of devotees and students.

Gurudeva was in touch with dozens of Hindu communities in North America and Europe over the last twenty years. Whenever speaking to them, he would stress the central importance of building traditional temples, explaining that the temple is needed to preserve Hindu culture. Without temples, he stated, the culture will gradually disappear. He was affirming that Saint Auvaiyar's dictum, "Do not live in a village that has no temple," still applies to us in modern times.

Temple groups often sought his message for the souvenir celebrating their kumbhabhishekam, consecration ceremony. In June, 2000, he wrote to Hindus in Toronto: "Many blessings on the occasion of the kumbhabhishekam of the Canada Kanthaswamy Temple in Scarborough on July 7, 2000. Temples are indeed the center of our lives, with everything we have coming from them. Through temples the great Gods are able to contact and inspire us to improve our lives, to see God everywhere, to seek love and harmony in all situations, starting in our home and then with everyone we meet. As we become more stable in this harmonious relationship, we are inspired to bring forth the culture, to share what we have so it may be passed on to the next generation."

Temple trustees regularly visited Kauai Aadheenam, primarily to update Gurudeva on the status of their temple, sharing current problems and seeking his advice. Many of these temples had been in existence for ten or more years, had a well-established priesthood and a routine of daily pujas and yearly festivals. Gurudeva encouraged the trustees of such mature temples to take the next step of starting a teaching program to educate the younger generation. He knew that in most instances the younger generation has very little understanding of the outer meaning or inner esoterics of the pujas; nor do they understand the nature of the Gods. Thus he suggested the trustees

regularly invite swamis to visit their temple and give talks on these important matters.

When visiting temples, as well as in personal discussions with Hindus, Gurudeva stressed the importance of acquiring an understanding of the basics of Hindu philosophy, most perfectly expressed in the Vedas and Agamas, our scriptures of highest authority, but also in many other holy texts. He would point out that Hinduism has four principal denominations—Saivism, Shaktism, Vaishnavism and Smartism—and each is philosophically somewhat different than the others. Thus, he asked Hindus when listening to talks and reading books to determine which denomination within Hinduism is being presented. This core message, heard by thousands, caused many Hindus to reflect more deeply on the question: "To which of these four denominations do I belong?" As a result, Hindus became knowledgeable about their heritage and were more inclined to declare themselves Saivites or Smartas, Vaishnavas or Shaktas.

Gurudeva strengthened the place of the preceptor in Hinduism. He did this by putting forward distinguished swamis and their messages, such as through the Minister's Message page in HINDUISM TODAY, by encouraging temples to invite swamis to come and lecture, and by the example he set in working with his

own sishyas, close devotees. Gurudeva gave initiation neither quickly nor casually. Rather, he insisted on an extensive preparation that included study, subconscious purification and penance. He also closely guided the lives of each of his devotees, in recent years making use of e-mail as a most effective way to communicate with such a geographically widespread group. In his latest book, *Living with Siva*, Gurudeva shared his perspective on guiding his sishya's lives: "Preceptors are not entertainers, content to be lauded or bowed down to in adulation. Rather, they must benefit their followers' lives, lessen their karmic burdens and strengthen the family, hold marriages together, as well as seek out potential religious leaders and train them well. They must follow the karmas of each individual and each family year after year, and they must be there for devotees when needed most."

Gurudeva never faulted Hinduism's past and never feared for its present or future. If the temples are destroyed, he would declare, the philosophically adept will see that they are rebuilt. If the scriptures are burned, the satgurus will rewrite them, and if the satgurus disappear, the Gods in the temples will guide old souls to reincarnate to teach about dharma and God Realization.