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BOOKS

Becoming a Hindu

A manual for self-conversion

By Bob Ledwidge, Australia, editor of "Living Traditions"

It is amazing to see the influence of Hinduism in the so-called "Western world." We may attend a yoga class, see a TV program on reincarnation, talk about "karma" or even try and meditate, but we don't see these things as any more than individual techniques. So many of our spiritual ideas come from the East, such concepts as the oneness of life, reincarnation, karma and so forth, but we generally don't think about their origins.

When we are exposed to the power of Eastern techniques, practices or traditions, we seem to experience them in isolation and do not consider the next logical step conversion. In the West we see

Christianity, Islam and related Abrahamic religions as offering conversion and yet do not contemplate this option in relation to Hinduism.

This may be because Hinduism is not evangelical. It does not hawk its faith on street corners or wish to manipulate for converts. It makes conversion hard work and puts demands on the individual before he can enter the faith. It wants informed and reasoned conversions, not quick switches at the high of an emotional presentation. This system of "ethical conversion" is central to *How to Become a Hindu*. While the author, Hinduism Today publisher Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, explains how Hinduism welcomes converts and offers a range of heartfelt and persuasive conversion stories, he emphasizes the need for intelligent, informed and fully consensual conversion. This process involves confronting one's prior religious (or secular) ideological attachments, dealing with them and making an informed separation from them. In the case of previous religious commitments, this can include formal dialog with one's prior religious mentors or community, and formal release from it. Further to this is the importance of formal entry into a sect of Hinduism, including taking a Hindu name, entering a Hindu community and the naming ritual.

At the same time, Subramuniyaswami works to present

a realistic view of the world's religions. Rather than promoting the sugar-coated illusion that all religions are the same, he offers an informed and erudite, but brief, summary of the characteristics of the major religious traditions and their similarities and differences. This way, the potential convert can truly evaluate his or her prejudices, ideological focuses and baggage, so to speak. It can sometimes be astounding, even a bit frightening, when we confront the beliefs that we have locked away in our own unconscious minds and realize their power.

How to Become a Hindu is a unique and important work. It is the only book on conversion to Hinduism readily available and which communicates directly to the Western mind. It is clear, precise and self-assured. It offers a vision of Hinduism as a living faith that has something of great beauty, depth and power to offer those who are seeking. It is a controversial work in that it is proudly Hindu and makes no apologies; and in a Western world saturated with consumerism, relativism and materialism this vision can be confronting. At the same time, it can also be a wake-up call to those who have studied, thought and contemplated but not realized that the next step is available.

How to Become a Hindu is pre-eminently practical, with advice, a selection of Hindu names and step-by-step outlines of the process of "ethical conversion."

How to Become a Hindu by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniaswami, Himalayan Academy, 107 Kaholalele Rd. Kapaa, Hawaii 96746 USA.

web: <http://store.himalayanacademy.com>.

A Woman's Book of Healing

By Tara Katir, Kapaa, Hawaii

According to vedic tradition each person is born to a purpose. My story

is an example of how someone can become alienated from her truest self, but rediscover her identity, strengths and gifts by becoming attuned to the rhythms of her family and cultural heritage." So begins *The Path of Practice, A Woman's Book of Healing with Food, Breath and Sound* by Bri. Maya Tiwari (420 pages, Random House, ^{us}\$24.95), a profoundly inspiring personal journey of a return to health and spiritual unfoldment.

Bri. Tiwari's odyssey began in 1975 with a diagnosis of ovarian cancer at age 23. Through a winter of intense inner searching and facing the truth of herself,

Bri. Tiwari perceived a profound truth, the "body is the temple of your spirit. Our joy and well-being do not depend on our physical body, but on learning more about the spirit within us and the greater life force of the universe. This knowledge of spirit will actually help you take better care of your body and yourself as a whole."

This gentle book is a marvelous guide of daily sadhanas outlined by Bri. Tiwari detailing how you can live life "consciously in the present moment" and "recover

your natural rhythms and align yourself and your inner cycles with the universe." She shares how a "dis-eased" body can be made whole through prayanama, meditation, cultivating inner silence, recognizing our karma as a precious teacher, understanding sound as a healer, and more. Tiwari clearly presents how anyone can practice the many sadhanas.

Bri. Tiwari has crafted a beautifully written and inspiring book, filled with practicable things one can do for a more

healthful and spiritually uplifted
life.

The Path of Practice, A Woman's
Book of Healing with Food, Breath
and Sound by Bri. Maya Tiwari,
Ballantine Publishing Group, 201
East 50th Street, New York, NY,
10022 USA

web: www.randomhouse.com/bb/.

Feminine Ayurveda

By Jesse Abbot,
Connecticut

As modern people increasingly recognize and want to explore the rich relationships between different facets of our lives, such as diet,

lifestyle and physical, emotional and spiritual health, people are becoming more and more interested in ayurveda, the 5,000+ year-old Indian science of life. *Ayurveda for Women: A Guide to Vitality and Health* by Dr. Robert E. Svoboda (183 pages, Healing Arts Press, ^{US} \$14.95) is a thorough and satisfying explanation of

India's signature approach to women's health.

With its intimate grasp of the powers, qualities and issues particular to females, ayurveda could be argued to be more "feminist" than much modern thinking claiming that affiliation.

The first Westerner to graduate from a traditional ayurvedic college and certified to practice in India, Svoboda holds true to the woman-empowering possibilities of this tradition. He organizes the book according to the three traditional doshas—human

constitutional tendencies that must be kept in balance for health to exist. These are vata, kinetic energy, kapha, potential energy, and pitta, the metabolic force regulating all transformations in the body. Svoboda then applies these principles to childhood,

womanhood and "the wise woman" (old age) as the three stages of a woman's life.

Moving through these stages creates the context for a conversational yet detail-packed discussion branching

into many practical medical topics, from the various roles of breastfeeding, massage, nourishing foods vs. sweets and puberty in the healthy development of growing girls; to hormones, exercise, meditation, diet and sexuality in womanhood; to topics

for the woman elder:
grandparenting,
menopause,
osteoporosis and
hormone replacement,
rejuvenation, a
purposeful life, the
place of prayer and the
meaningful acceptance
of death. All of these
subjects are discussed
straightforwardly and
engagingly.

Svoboda closes the body of the book with a pithy meditation on "Nature: the ageless one," proposing the power of relying on Nature as a guide through life. For Svoboda, healing is in fact rooted in the primordial feminine, Mother Nature, the Goddess, etc. The book

concludes with two highly useful appendices: the first on food guidelines for basic doshas, or constitutional types, and the second covering herbal remedies.

This is a book, really,

for all women and men
who want to clarify how
to nourish and
advocate for healthy
and whole women and
girls.

Ayurveda for Women by
Dr. Robert Svoboda,
Healing Arts Press, P.O.
Box 388, Rochester,

Vermont 05767 USA. Ph:
800.246.8648

web:.

www.innertraditions.com

Domestic Abuse

By Tara Katir, Kapaa, Hawaii

Domestic violence,
once a dark, heinous
secret concealed
behind closed doors,
is now a repugnant
truth brought to

light. Margaret
Abraham's
sociological study,
Speaking the
Unspeakable, Marital
Violence among
South Asian
Immigrants in the
United States (234
pages, Rutgers
University Press, ^{us}

\$22), documents the cultural and ethnic complexities of marital violence within the South Asian immigrant community. Marital violence as defined by Abraham is physical, sexual, verbal, mental or

economic coercion,
power or control
perpetrated on a
woman by her
spouse or extended
kin. She explains
how immigration
issues, cultural
assumptions, and
unfamiliarity with
American social,

legal, economic and other institutional systems, coupled with stereotyping, make these women especially vulnerable to domestic violence.

Abraham
interviewed
twenty-five women
from a number of
South Asian
countries who
represented
diverse religious,
educational and
occupational

backgrounds. Their voices are the heart of the book, describing in their own words, the variety of abuses they experienced. While the women's own cultural patterns made it

difficult for them to
seek help from
outside, more
perfidious are
those whom
Abraham calls
"partners in crime"
those individuals
who are indifferent
or may keep a

"strategic silence"
to the victim's
plight, and at worst
are active
participants in the
abuse.

She concludes by

outlining the strategies these women used to resist their abusive spouses. "Their stories contradict the traditional image of South Asian women as docile and

submissive, willing to accept the abuse perpetrated against them. We see the way in which the women play an active role in challenging their abusive husbands." Additionally,

Abraham spotlights
the many
organizations that
assist South Asian
women who are
victims of abuse.
The once
acceptable belief
that marital abuse
is a private

concern is shifting to the belief that it is a public issue, an issue requiring everyone's concern and readiness to speak out against. Real-life accounts of marital abuse are not what I

would suggest for
an uplifting
evening read, but
this book has an
urgent, compelling
message. Abraham
brings to light a
problem afflicting
every community
and in the end

shows how
someone can find
help.

Speaking the
Unspeakable,
Marital Violence
Among South Asian
Immigrants in the

United States,
Margaret Abraham,
Rutgers University
Press, 100 Joyce
Kilmer Avenue,
Piscataway, New
Jersey 08854-8099
USA

Newly Released

Not many teens
are wildly
enthusiastic
about school.
For inspiration,

check out The
Teenagers'
Guide to School
Outside the Box
by Rebecca
Greene (260
pages, Free
Spirit Press, ^{us}
\$15.95). Greene

charts an
amazing array
of alternative
educational
possibilities
designed to
rouse just about
any jaded
student's

interest. This
nifty book is a
superb
reference for
any family
looking for
exciting
educational
tools and

courses for their
kids.

The Ultimate
Spiritual Path
by Swami

Rajarshi Muni's
Yoga (184
pages,
Llewellyn
Publications,^{us}
\$14.95) covers
the topics of
karma,

reincarnation,
consciousness,
purification
and more.

Swami says,
"Yoga is
neither a
religion by

itself nor part
of any other
religious
system." This
opinion,
common
among yoga
teachers,

ignores the
obvious fact
that yoga is a
part of
Hinduism.
Swami
concludes with
a nice

description
and application
of the yamas
and niyamas,
pranayama,
simple
meditation
practices and a

glossary.

The Teenagers' Guide to School Outside the Box, Rebecca Greene, Free Spirit

**Publishing
Inc., 217 Fifth
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200,
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55401 USA.**

email:

help4kids@freespirit.com

web:

www.freespirit.com

Yoga, the
Ultimate
Spiritual Path
by Swami
Rajarshi Muni,
Llewellyn
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P.O. box

64383, Dept.
1-56718-441-
3, St. Paul,
Minnesota
55164-0383
USA.

web:

www.llewellyn.com