Saivism in The Sierras
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A fresh, clean breeze brings the pungent smells of pine and rich, fertile soil as the first rays of dawn light the sky. Summer is over and the air has taken on a fresh zest of coolness. Big city sights are miles away. Here, nestled in 77 acres of forest atop a mountain in the foothills of the Sierras, a quiet group of sincere spiritual aspirants are gathering to greet the day.

These residents of the Holy Mountain Monastery and Retreat Center at Shri Giri Ashram perform sadhana and service in a strict Hindu tradition under the spiritual direction of Sat Gurudevi, Savitripriyaswami, who founded Shri Giri Ashram in 1984 "to preserve the ancient Saivite Hindu Dharma." Savitripriya's resident monks and nuns, though mostly Western born, are staunch champions of Hinduism.

Savitripriya teaches that "Hinduism is the source of all yogas and the mother of all religions...and that the True-Self and consciousness of man is divine, immortal and identical with God, the Absolute Spiritual Reality." She personally instructs her students in the practice of yoga and meditation which is at the very center of her teachings, stressing that the lessons of yoga must be applied in daily life. Her students balance their inner study with a demanding program of work and service around the Ashram.

Savitripriya had a profound realization of God in 1968. In 1975, after several years of secluded, spiritual discipline, she was ordained into the Holy Order of Sannyas by her Smarta Sampradaya Guru, His Holiness, Shri Gurudeva, Swami Chidbhavananda of South India. This initiation brought her into the lineage of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and, through him, the great Saint Sankarachariya. In 1976 she founded the ashram of Holy Mountain to uphold the tradition of Shaivite Hinduism.

At Holy Mountain Monastery a weekend guest program is offered to those interested in short-term yoga instruction. For those seeking a more extensive study, a year-round, residence program is available through Holy Mountain University which offers Associate, Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral Degrees in the "theory and practice of Hinduism." A few initiates live at the Ashram as full-time monastics. The Ashram is supported by its teaching programs as well as the work of its monastics in writing and publishing English translations of Hindu scriptures.

To those who would ask Savitripriya the secret of their destiny she would answer: "We are the author of our own life. Through our actions today we write our future of tomorrow."

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