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Letters

Jai to Madhvacharya

I recently received your July/August/September 2008 issue, including the article "Difference Is Real! The Life and Teachings of Sri Madhva, One of India's Greatest Spiritual Masters." Ever since, I am inspired and enlightened. Thank you.

T.N. Seshan Palakkad, Kerala, India

We Need Real History

It is a sad fact that Vedic/Hindu history and culture does not get any coverage in the mainstream of society. I watch The History Channel avidly but have yet to see any programs about our history. Western Christian, Jewish and Muslim history gets the limelight. The Mughal invasion is airbrushed as a great event. How many people know that over 10,000 temples were destroyed and their wealth looted? Many Hindus were taxed, killed or converted during this time.

Everyone is still fed the fallacious story that all North Indians are offspring of Aryan invaders. All these misconceptions and falsities need to be highlighted. This biased world view has pushed our religion into the realms of myth. We need to be proactive and educate the world that our religion is not a myth but a vibrant way of life, a great, peaceful religion with a wealth of knowledge and teachings.

Documentaries should be made and shown on channels like National Geographic, BBC Knowledge and The History Channel, or a new channel needs to be created to convey the real story of Indians/Hindus to the masses. Other religions and groups have an upper hand because they have channels dedicated to their views, opinions and propaganda. Daily we are besieged on every news channel about the plight of the Palestinians. How many people know about the Kashmiri pandits who are

refugees in their own homeland, or the millions of Hindus who lost their lives and homes in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Kashmir? The current plight of Hindus in Afghanistan and Pakistan is sad; they must live in fear and as second-class citizens.

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Iraivan Temple

The Jul/Aug/Sep 2009 feature story by Lavina Melwani, "Siva's Sanctuary in Tropical Hawaii," is excellent. It is a must-read for anyone planning a pilgrimage, as then only will they be able to appreciate the painstaking efforts made by Gurudeva, Bodhinatha, the swamis, yogis and sadhakas, the silpis and the many devotees to build this once-in-a-lifetime, wondrous temple. Though it was overlooked, mention must be made of Gurudeva's foresight to ensure the future retirement benefits of the silpis back in Bengaluru, which makes them a happy, working family team. Where else have we heard of silpis' making donations to the temple project they are working on in the West?

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Thanks for "What Is Hinduism?"

Thank you for making the book What is Hinduism? available for free on your website. I have downloaded it and enjoyed every page. I was influenced by the typical Western false ideas and prejudices about Hinduism, but now I have learned a lot about this fantastic religion. I must say I feel like a Hindu myself.

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Questionable Dairy Ethics

As a vegetarian, I am no longer sure that dairy is ethical to eat. Dairy herds experience a lot of pain. Calves are wantonly farmed to make their mothers produce milk, then killed as a byproduct. Cows no longer producing sufficient milk get slaughtered, often without anesthesia. Even organic producers use factory farming methods and grossly misrepresent their "happy cow" production facilities. I am beginning to wonder if there really is a difference between eating cows and milking them, then killing them. If someone is willing to hand over their reproductive rights, have their children taken away from them, and give you the food they were making for their young, shouldn't we in turn give them a protected, peaceful, caring home through the end of their natural lives? If we aren't willing to fairly compensate the cow for its services nowadays, how can ingesting dairy be justified more than any other animal product?

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Well Water Removes Sin?

I read with interest your article, "Washed in the Waters of Rameswaram" (Apr/May/Jun 2009). I understand that this South Indian temple has 22 wells that relieve pilgrims' karmas and bestow blessings. I am a Hindu, who was born in India, but ever since I was a teenager, I always had trouble believing in the notion that one can wash one's sins off just by taking a dip in the waters of the Ganges River. Therefore, I have trouble accepting that just by getting drenched by the waters of Rameswaram's wells one can wash off one's sins. Can somebody explain to me how that is consistent with the teachings of the Upanishads and Gita? How do we know that this effect of the sacred bath is nothing but a placebo effect, caused by the phenomenon of self-fulfilling prophecy? I feel rejuvenated every morning after taking a shower, so what's so surprising if people feel rejuvenated by taking a bath at Rameswaram? If it were that easy to wash one's sins off, then the law of karma would be meaningless! A man can commit all the sins he wants to commit and then wash them all off by taking a bath in the sacred waters. I would urge Hinduism Today to focus more on the basics of Hinduism, instead of glorifying the fringe and controversial elements of Hinduism.

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Hindu Genocide in Sri Lanka

It is refreshing to learn through the article "Meet the Young Hindu American Foundation" (Apr/May/Jun 2009) that HAF has taken on the issue of the human rights of minority Hindus in different countries, such as Malaysia, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. I would like to urge HAF to also take on the ongoing genocide of Hindus in Sri Lanka, not only during the over 25 years of civil war between the majority Sinhala Buddhists and the minority Tamil Hindus, but since the war officially ended in May this year.

At a UNCHR hearing in Geneva in March 1998, Joaquin Mbomio of North South XXI stated that 1,800 Hindu temples had been destroyed by the Sinhala army. In the three months ending the middle of April, the UN estimated that 6,500 civilians had been killed, while it has no official figure after that date. A report by The Times (UK), claiming a source in the UN, says that the number now appears to be at least 20,000. But no one knows the real numbers, since the government has banned the UN, relief agencies such as the International Red Cross and reporters from entering the areas of conflict.

Due to the government blockade of food and medicine for months, the 290,000 civilians that have survived the aerial bombing look like holocaust survivors. They are currently kept in camps surrounded by barbed wire, reminiscent of the Nazi concentration camps. Even after the declaration of victory and the end of war, the government has sustained its refusal to give international aid organizations unhindered access to the refugee camps, something the UN is demanding. During a limited, government-controlled visit, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon stated that the camps were the "most appalling" scenes he has ever seen in the world. More than in any other country, the Hindus in Sri Lanka are paying a high price for being Hindu, and it would be a worthy cause for HAF to be a voice for these voiceless Hindus.

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Resurgence in Temples

Kerala is justly proud of its rich cultural heritage. In ancient times, Hindu temples were the epicenters of all cultural and artistic activities. Traditional artists were patronized by temples and those associated with them. However, we see that today this socio-cultural activity of the temple is often restricted to conducting temple festivals. Few temples can boast of participating in welfare activities in the vicinity. Apart from being a place of worship for believers, it does not partake in their joys or sorrows. The temple has no provision to help the needy or intervene in family disputes, avert suicides, help conduct weddings for the poor, etc. Very few temples run charitable institutions that are aimed at the welfare of the needy. One should rethink the role of the temple in the face of the revenue it generates and adds to the state exchequer.

In stark contrast to the complacency of our Hindu institutions stands the active participation of the Muslim and Christian clergy in the welfare of their believers. True Hinduism as a creed is all-encompassing, benevolent and encourages questioning of its basic tenets. Certainly, in this modern world one cannot be bound by dogmas of earlier times, but the lackadaisical approach of today's Hindu leaders has alienated many a believer and made him vulnerable to the lures of faiths that promise timely intervention and help. The Muslim believer benefits from the moral and financial support from the moulavi, and the poor Christian benefits by help from the parish. Where does the Hindu go? Who will help him? The tragedy is that Hindus are a minority in the world, and we are neither protected nor assisted in our own country.

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News About India

My mother lives in Germany, and she delights in telling me when India makes it to the local paper. The heat wave with temperatures above 44 degrees, and people dying because of it, is reported every year. The news that a child died in school

after having been punished by her teacher also found a space. In recent times, she mentioned economic news, like the takeover of a Bavarian company by an Indian. The usual stereotype of India as poor and corrupt, of course, is always strengthened. When "Slumdog Millionaire" got all those Oscars, my mother told me happily that the film was about India.

She sounded quite excited about a discussion on TV related to the Pope's visit to Israel. An elderly Jewish theologian on the panel said that the Orient and especially India were far ahead of the Occident in the past, that India laid the basis for our mathematics, that it had great scientific knowledge and that its art, music and dance are outstanding. Then my mother related something the panelist said that made me sit up: Ancient Indians knew that we are all children of the same God and that there is only one God. Of course, this is not really news in India. Everyone here knows that the Deity they worship is one aspect or one name of the whole, and they don't mind if their friends use another form and another name to adore the Divine. The acknowledgement from a Jewish theologian on German national TV that in ancient times the people of India worshiped the one God of all humanity signifies, however, a change, and was therefore news to me.

Oh, what all this realization would entail if it were to spread: no more fights over religion, no claims of exclusivity of truth, no attempts to convert anyone. Everyone would be free to use his brain and find out for himself who he really is deep inside--and maybe find God instead.

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Keeping Hinduism's Inner Power Flowing
Genuine striving and generosity can change the world

Alok lathi's words of praise were surprising at first. "Simply having Hinduism Today on your shelf is a blessing," he said, "even if you don't read it!" He elaborated: even more valuable than its content, he felt, is the shakti, or power, the magazine carries, and he illustrated with a story that begins at the time of India's independence.

His mother, Bharati, grew up in Vinoba Bhave's ashram, renowned for strict spiritual disciplines--and, little girl or not, a great deal was expected of her. When she moved to the USA in 1965, she brought her training and practice with her and, for the rest of her days, lived immersed in hours of daily sadhana. "She was the family's spiritual dynamo," explains Alok, "deeply influencing us--and countless others, too. After Mother made her way to the inner worlds in 2003, much started coming to us from the inside. I was driven to deepen my sadhana, meditations and seva, and my father grew more passionate to support worthy Hindu causes." Alok concludes, "Just as Mother's years of sadhana generated a shakti that bears fruit to this day, Hinduism Today, because of the practices done by those who create it, gives off a power that enlivens all of dharma and countless souls everywhere, far beyond its circle of readers. Without it, there would be a hole there."

Both father Raghunath, who lives in New Mexico, and Alok, who lives in San Francisco, generously support the Hinduism Today Production Fund, which is a part of Hindu Heritage Endowment. "I want to dedicate my life to helping Hinduism," confides Raghunath. "Hinduism is the salvation of a human being. It is so vital. And Hinduism Today is doing so much that supporting it is the least we can do."

Please consider donating to the Hinduism Today Production Fund, too, so your magazine can grow from strength to strength and send ever more salutary shakti around the world. Learn more about the Production Fund at

www.hheonline.org/productionfund/ and ask to receive our Production Fund e-newsletter at www.gurudeva.org/email-news

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