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## Letters

Jai Swami Gopal Sharan

Gopal Sharan ("2009 Hindu of the Year," Oct/Nov/Dec, 2009) makes me very happy, and he deserves it. I am blessed to have come into contact with him and continue to enjoy his grace through the Maha Lakshmi Vidya Bhavan in Honor Oak, London

Kwabena Ofori-Awuah, Jr. London, UK

ao1994 \_@\_ yahoo.co.u

### Gays Are Now Legal in India

I was pleased to see the article about the Delhi High Court decision regarding Section 377 ("Gays Are Now Legal in India," Global Dharma, Oct/Nov/Dec, 2009). Too many religions cast judgment or condemn lesbians, gays, bisexual and transgender individuals, seeing them as broken or sinful. We as Hindus, however, have portrayed same-sex relations and gender variance as normal from Vedic times to the present day through rituals, in the Ramayana and Mahabharata, in paintings and in temple sculpture. Thus, it is refreshing to see Hinduism Today enlightening Hindus that our religion does not judge and recognizes the discrimination facing the LGBT community. While I appreciate the magazine's focus on explaining aspects of worship, I would also like to see more on how Hinduism deals with complex social issues like abortion and family planning, sexual orientation or the role of women in leadership in the temple (not just in the family). Where do the Vedas, differing sects of Hinduism or current Hindu leaders sit on the moral and social questions of the day?

Kalpana Krishnamurthy Portland, Oregon, USA

kalpana60 \_@\_ hotmail.com

## Well Water Removes Sin?

In his letter in the Oct/Nov/Dec 2009 issue, Pradeep Srivastava expresses his concern about claims made for the spiritual benefits of bathing in the waters of Rameswaram Temple, which he argues may be a kind of "placebo affect." I can understand his skepticism that a single ritual, no matter how spiritually charged the location, could wash away one's sins. I would respond that for those who bathe in the wells, the experience is the culmination of a pilgrimage with many aspects. In my own case, the journey began with forming the desire and intention to go, then saving money, making travel arrangements, reorganizing my work and making prayers for obstacles to be removed. In other words, the planning and preparation began to reshape my life over a period of several months. On the trip itself, I was blessed with the company of holy men, the good example of fellow pilgrims and the experience of worship in sacred places. All of these aspects of pilgrimage contributed to my experience of the wells and their special powers. Rather than a passive experience, like popping a pill, pilgrimage to Rameswaram offered me an active plan for spiritual growth. I cannot say that my life since has been without sin or error. But the feeling of lightness and rejuvenation that I experienced after bathing in the wells gives me a vivid sense of what such a life might feel like, and an aspiration to continue to work towards it.

Lucy Soutter  
London, UK

lucy.soutter \_@\_ virgin.net

I have two responses to the sacred bathing issue. First, I believe that temples are holy places, where God and the devas are nearer, or more easily accessible. The sadhana or practice of bathing will remove karma. This will be especially effective if this is the high point of a pilgrimage during which pilgrims will have considered their karma, past actions and spiritual path. Second, one of the things I have learned from many born Hindus is humility and trust in the loving grace of God when faced with differing beliefs. I would say to Mr. Srivastava that while following a path based solely on the Gita and the Upanishads is important to you in this life, and that is great, please remember that others are on different paths, and this is also great for them.

Chris Brooking    Bradford, West Yorkshire, UK

cjbrooking \_@\_ googlemail.com

## A Priestly Clan Under Siege

Rajiv Malik's article ("A Priestly Clan Under Siege," Oct/Nov/Dec, 2009) is very one-sided. First of all, the Tamil Chola kings built these magnificent granite temples for all the Tamils, not just for the Brahmins. In my opinion, the Tamil Nadu government has replaced the Tamil kings and administers the temple on behalf of all the Tamils. The temples of Tamil Nadu have an advisory committee at the state level, and Hindus from all castes are well represented in that committee. It works with the administrators of the temples. Each temple has its own management committee made up of local representatives from all castes. That is how it should be done in Chidambaram. As far as Malik's words, "Though the massive stones of Lord Siva's temple still hold firmly," I beg to differ. He must not have seen the temple. I have visited three times in the last two years and have seen the crumbling walls. The temple needs major repairs and renovations. Mrs. Thirumagal, the government's commissioner, is on the right track. Hopefully she'll work on the renovation, which has been neglected for a very long time

Vaidehi Ganesan Herbert Kilauea, Hawaii, USA

vi \_@\_ kolam.info

As a devout Hindu, I am proud of the work you are doing in bringing out a quality publication that revives interest in Hinduism among all readers. However, when I came across this article in the latest issue, I realized that Hinduism Today can unwittingly be a propaganda machine for disinformation and discriminatory, biased opinions. The Chidambaram temple has been under the stifling control of the hereditary priestly clan that your article talks about for too long. This system of hereditary priesthood is the last remaining bastion of Brahmin caste-based superiority over lower castes. The Dikshitar claim that they have the sole right to the temple priesthood and are upset over this self-claimed right being snatched by the government. Who was it that gave them their hereditary rights? Have those rights ever been reviewed or reevaluated based on the changing life and times? How much revenue does the temple earn? What happens to all the income? The Dikshitar are not accountable to anyone right now. For the information of the author, most of the big temples in Tamil Nadu have long been under the administrative control of the government. I have personally found such temples to be the best managed and best maintained ones. Unlike the impression sought to be created by the article, the government Board is not an evil and greedy entity aiming to gobble up an ancient temple and deprive the poor, suffering priests of their jobs

and incomes. On the contrary, it is a well-managed and efficient body that has successfully taken over and streamlined the administration of many struggling temples.

Sai Ravikumar

Calgary, Alberta, Canada

### Help Us in South Africa

I live in Durban, South Africa. We have a huge problem here with Hindus converting to Christianity either by force, trickery or sheer ignorance. They are being converted by Indian pastors who criticise us, our practices and our culture. It works like this: The Christians will typically announce that a friend should be brought to church just to visit. Next they appear at that person's house with the intention to convert them and their entire family on the spot. Another trick is to bring a friend to church who is undergoing some sort of difficulty, such as the recent death of a spouse. The entire congregation stands up and welcomes the newcomer, making him or her feel very special. They pray for that person, and within a week or two he or she is made to throw his or her praying lamp and Deity statues into the sea or river and is then fully converted to Christianity. New converts are taught that Hindus are sinners, worship idols and will go to hell. They are told that they are following a superior religion and will be punished seven times more if they convert back to Hinduism. Christians have capitalized on the fact that we all don't understand Sanskrit or our Indian mother tongue and therefore don't understand what our priests are saying and chanting. They have well organized youth groups, sports days, widows clubs. They provide transport that comes right to followers' doorsteps to take them to the church. They have inter-church gatherings and meetings which allow youth to meet fellow Christians, find spouses and make friends. If a Hindu marries a Christian, the Hindu is the one who must convert, never the Christian. Our Hindu temples are not equipped to handle this. I have never seen so many Indian Christians or churches spring up as I have seen in the last five years. We need expert help from Hindus everywhere before it is too late. Please help.

Avitha Singh Durban, Kwazulu Natal, South Africa

singhavitha2 \_@\_ gmail.com

Friendship Evangelism

When I was asked to locate an article relating to Hinduism in current society on your website, I became intrigued by the article "Friendship Evangelism" (Oct/Nov/Dec, 2009). I am a nondenominational Christian and was in no way offended by the article, but more surprised. It's fascinating how friendship evangelism is actually counterproductive and tends to be offensive among many religions

Amber H. live4him92 \_@\_ verizon.net

### Christmas, So What?

I do not agree with the idea that running away or avoiding exposure to a particular culture is the way to protect Hinduism ("Much Ado About Christmas," Oct/Nov/Dec, 2009). Hinduism is more than just a religion. The best way to enlighten the younger generations, including myself, is by making them understand what Hinduism is, and I would like to point out to the author that Hinduism is not all about visiting temples or wearing saris in the USA, it's more about an approach towards life. As parents, you can always be the role models for children and make them understand. If you take enough care, you can influence them more than anyone else

Dinoop Ravindran Menon Graz, Austria

dinusrmenon \_@\_ gmail.com

Hindu parents do not have to give in to their children's peer pressure about celebrating Christmas. That is a Christian holiday for Christians to celebrate, not the whole world. Don't feel guilty. They have many beliefs that they would like you to also believe, but remember, that is their religion, not yours! I haven't celebrated Christmas for 20 years. When I am asked why, I respond, "I'm not Christian!"

LuAnn Mitchell Portland, Oregon, USA

lulutoo18 \_@\_ yahoo.com

## Corrections

In "Sri Swami Gopal Sharan Devacharya, 2009 Hindu of the Year" (Oct/Nov/Dec, 2009) the Kusum Sarovar does not have any clinic and is not part of Golok Dham, and the photos captioned "Dharmic citadel" and "Spirituality and joy" on pages 22 and 23, respectively, were provided by the Golok Dham Ashram

In "A priestly Clan Under Siege" (Oct/Nov/Dec, 2009), it is incorrectly stated that Mr. Arumugaswami is an oduvar, a singer of sacred Tamil songs called Devarams. He is a devotee from Chidambaram.

## Keeping the Light of Understanding Bright How to distribute Hinduism's most precious gifts

Among the many sublime ways readers tell us of their appreciation, once in a while, there appears a stirring declaration: "Your magazine has transformed our lives!" One such has come from the Mrunal Patel family of Midland, Texas. "Since we discovered Hinduism Today at a friend's house," explained an enthusiastic Mrs. Patel, "everything's changed for us. It has given us a depth of understanding that we couldn't have imagined. It has given us pride, unity of mind and a shared purpose. Our priorities are altogether different. We do puja and sadhana together, the three of us, every day, and we all live the same way, which is much different from before. We have found our path for this life." Thirteen-year-old Pooja adds, "I am amazed how Hinduism Today addresses all Hindus everywhere, of every tradition, of any age. It is as much a guide and resource for me as for my parents. And I feel just as enlightened and encouraged by it as they are. How precious is that?" The Patels wanted to give back to Hindu-ism Today, partly out of gratitude and mostly, explains Mr. Patel, "to help the magazine reach more souls and give them the same chance to find their path and destiny that we had. There can be no greater gift." To make as meaningful an offering as they could, the family studied various estate planning options, then chose what seemed to them most apt for their circumstance. They made a bequest to the Hinduism Today Production Fund, a part of Hindu Heritage Endowment, by naming it as one of the beneficiaries of a charitable life insurance policy. Mr. Patel encourages others to do a similar thing: "Bequests are powerful forms of giving, that guarantee the magazine's strength into the far future." Please consider including the Production Fund in your estate plan, so as to enable Hinduism Today to reach ever more souls eager to find their way. Ask to receive our Production Fund e-newsletter at [www.gurudeva.org](http://www.gurudeva.org)/email-news. Or read more about the Production Fund and estate planning options at: [www.hheonline.org](http://www.hheonline.org)/productionfund then click planned giving options. Or contact us at 808-634-5407 or [hhe\\_@\\_hindu.org](mailto:hhe_@_hindu.org)

