Digital Dharma: Websites
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W E B S I T E S

Himalayan Academyâ□□Yes, Thatâ□□s Usâ□□Launches Prodigious New Website

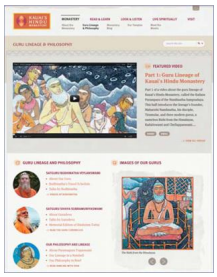
WE ARE PROUD TO ANNOUNCE A major upgrade to our paramount website, www.himalayanacademy.com, which hosts, in addition to Kauai Hindu Monasteryâ□□s daily blog, the entire archive of our founderâ□□s publications, audio, video and lots moreâ□□a total of 18 GB of data! In terms of content, we believe it to be the largest Hindu website in existence.

Our previous website had some twists and turns. Despite a vast treasure trove of resources, it was hard for users to access them. Our old flat-file-based site was tedious to maintain and resistant to growth. The monasteryâ□□s web outreach was not keeping up with modern technologies. Tackling these issues required funding, and the websiteâ□□s users responded generously to our 2010 and 2011 Digital Dharma Drives, contributing over two years toward the upgrade.

The monks first went into think-tank mode, in early 2011, to tackle issues of navigation and access. Following models from other resource-deep sites such as those of National Geographic and Apple, they prototyped a new navigation and entry-level page schema. They contracted with one of Americaâ□□s top design firms, Happy Cog, who helped them (at a generous, for-monks-only price) further refine and design the graphical user interface. In the meantime, Atritex in Chennai

was hired to turn dozens of our publicationsâ□□our core assetsâ□□into ebooks. Making the library available across all platforms and devices was, and continues to be, a key element in the upgrade strategy.

Next the monks began collaborating with a brilliant software engineer in Brazil, Andre Garzia, using Happy Cogâ□□s page designs, to build a new page-assembly system using LiveCode and RevIgniter technologies. The resulting website (see screen shots at right) is elegant, fast, easy to navigate and comprehensive. Books can be downloaded free of charge in popular ebook formats (PDF, ePub and Kindle) or read online using Monocle, a web-based reader for ebooks.



The biggest change of all is behind the scenes: the site is now database-driven. The monks spent two years researching and designing their own media database, grounded on the Dublin Core and the W3C Media Annotation Initiative. Metadata about all the media, books, pamphlets, photos, artwork, slideshows and audio are stored in a MySql database and presented dynamically. This allows the site to be easily scaled up, adding more and more resources. The database-driven design allows for the easier development of digital tools for education to support Hindu parents and teachers.

The new site gives access to all 2,000-plus audio and video talks by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami and Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami. Hundreds of videos on various subjects, formerly only available on YouTube, can now be searched for and viewed on the site. A deep archive of rich photography is available in our slideshow archives, heretofore completely hidden. Other new or more easily accessible features are being added, including: 1) thousands of original paintings and drawings, many in Hindu themes and traditional Indian styles; 2) a new library of music, including traditional bhajans and the Natchintanai songs of Paramaguru Siva Yogaswami of Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

Screenshots of the new site: The Guru Lineage and Philosophy page shows the siteâ□□s new look and feel; Monocle on-site ebook reader for Guru Chronicles, (the reader allows viewers to flip through books right there on the webpage); the siteâ□□s extensive video library page.

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The monks are grateful to those who contributed to the 2010 and 2011 Digital Dharma Drives, which supplied the funds that made this whole undertaking possible.

The new site will be up on January 1, or earlier, at www.himalayanacademy.com