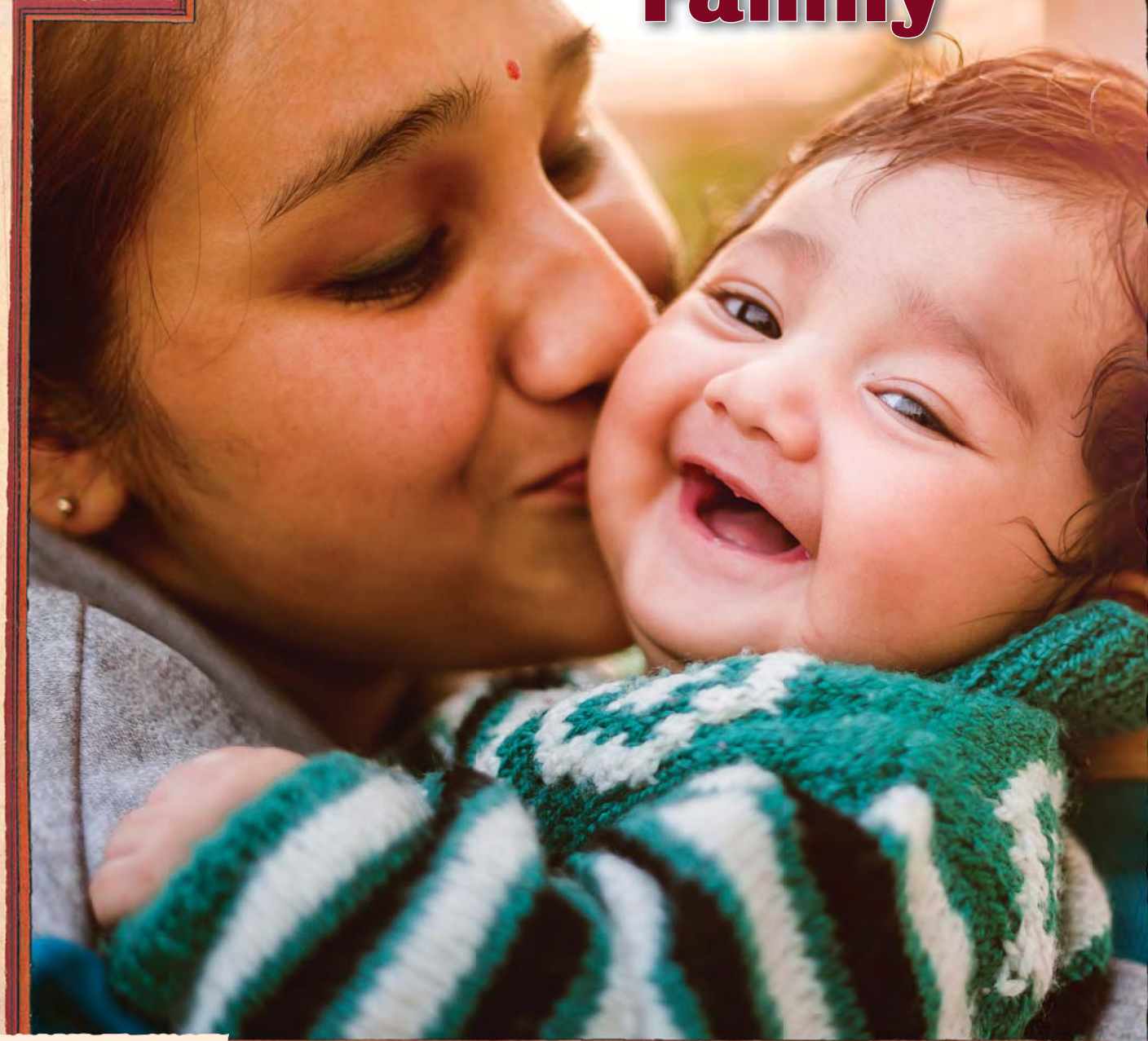


# HINDUISM TODAY

Affirming Sanatana Dharma and Recording the Modern History of a Billion-Strong Global Religion in Renaissance



## The Clash of Career and Family



(Cover) A mother lovingly holds her young child. By putting motherhood first, she is able to devote as much time, energy and love as is needed; (above) We explore several perspectives of India's fascination with homeopathic medicine (page 54)

JULY/AUGUST/SEPTEMBER, 2018 • THE HINDU YEAR VILAMBA, 5120

*Bodhinatha Veylanswami*

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### INTERNATIONAL

- FEATURE: Uncover the Treasures of Tiruvannamalai and the Holy Hill of Arunachala 18  
TEACHING: Chinmaya Mission's Teaching Programs 62  
EDUCATION: Hindus Are Satisfied with California's Final Decision on School History Textbooks. Mostly. 66

### LIFESTYLE

- FAMILY: Honoring the Crucial Role of the Homemaker in a Stable and Healthy Society 30  
INSIGHT: How Enlightened Souls Have Left Their Bodies and 10 Reasons Not to Fear Death 38  
HEALTH: Homeopathic Medicine, India Style 54  
WORSHIP: Encounters with Goddess Kodiya Ma at My Ancestral Village in Gujarat 60

### OPINION

- IN MY OPINION: How I Became a Hindu 9  
PUBLISHER'S DESK: How to Achieve Serenity Through Affectionate Detachment 10  
LETTERS 12  
MINISTER'S MESSAGE: Swamini Svataavidyananda Untangles the Conversion Problem 13  
FROM THE AGAMAS: Measuring the Heights of Yogic Contemplation 17  
OPINION: A 13-Year-Old Malaysian Youth Speaks Candidly of His Pilgrimage to America 70

### DIGESTS

- GLOBAL DHARMA 6  
QUOTES & QUIPS 14  
DIGITAL DHARMA 86

**USA Contacts:** Letters to the editor, subscription and editorial inquiries may be sent to HINDUISM TODAY, 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii 96746-9304 USA, [letters@hindu.org](mailto:letters@hindu.org). HINDUISM TODAY (ISSN# 0896-0801; USPS# 023082), July/August/September, 2018, Volume 40, No. 3. Subscriptions from USA and Canada 1-877-255-1540; subscriptions, copies or bulk orders from other countries 1-808-822-7032, ext. 103; [subscribe@hindu.org](mailto:subscribe@hindu.org); advertising: 1-888-464-1008, [ads@hindu.org](mailto:ads@hindu.org). HINDUISM TODAY is published four times a year in January, April, July and October by Himalayan Academy, a non-profit educational institution at 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii 96746-9304 USA. Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, Founder; Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, Publisher; Paramacharya Sadasivanatha Palaniswami, Editor-in-Chief. Global subscriptions: US\$35/1 year, \$65/2 years, \$95/3 years, \$155/5 years, \$299/lifetime. **International Contacts:** In Malaysia: Sanathana Dharma Publications, Kovind Enterprise, No. 17, Jalan Ungu U9/29, Sunway Kayangan, 40150 Shah Alam. Tel: 016-380-2393; E-mail: [silveraraj05@yahoo.com](mailto:silveraraj05@yahoo.com). In Singapore: Sanathana Dharma Publications, Blk 210 #06-326, Pasir Ris Street 21, 510210. Tel: 9664-9001; E-mail: [dsam55@gmail.com](mailto:dsam55@gmail.com). For permission to republish a HINDUISM TODAY article, e-mail [letters@hindu.org](mailto:letters@hindu.org). Printed in USA. Periodicals postage paid at Kapaa, Hawaii, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to HINDUISM TODAY, 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, Hawaii, 96746-9304.

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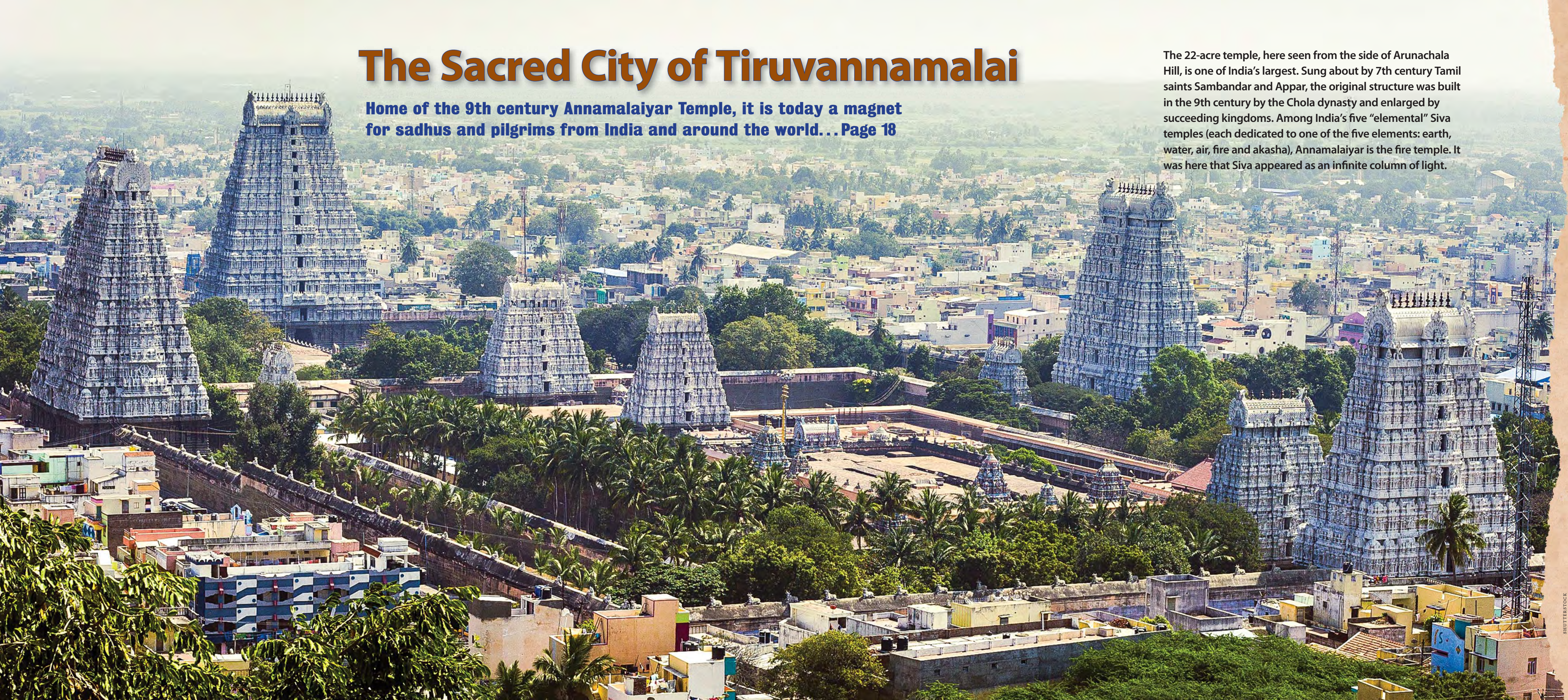
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UK . . . . . GBP 5



# The Sacred City of Tiruvannamalai

**Home of the 9th century Annamalaiyar Temple, it is today a magnet for sadhus and pilgrims from India and around the world... Page 18**

The 22-acre temple, here seen from the side of Arunachala Hill, is one of India's largest. Sung about by 7th century Tamil saints Sambandar and Appar, the original structure was built in the 9th century by the Chola dynasty and enlarged by succeeding kingdoms. Among India's five "elemental" Siva temples (each dedicated to one of the five elements: earth, water, air, fire and akasha), Annamalaiyar is the fire temple. It was here that Siva appeared as an infinite column of light.





# GLOBAL DHARMA

INDIA

## Minority Status Granted

IN MARCH, 2018, KARNATAKA'S Congress government granted minority status to Lingayats, a sect of the Virashaiva tradition founded by Basavanna in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Among the benefits of being granted minority status is the freedom to run educational and religious institutions without interference or takeover by the State government. Currently India only grants this freedom to minority religions and not to the majority Hindus. In Karnataka there is a considerable political component involved, as Lingayats are a substantial voting bloc in the state.

Aarti Ramachandran explains

the uniqueness of the Lingayats and Virasaivas in *The Wire*: "In addition to their demand, the faction of religious and political leaders at Bidar held that Lingayats and Virashaivas are not one and the same, as they are commonly held to be. According to them, Virashaivism was a sect of Shiva worship within Hinduism, whereas the Lingayat religion is an independent religion based on the *Vachanas*—the poetic corpus left behind by Basavanna. This, according to them, was the founding text of Lingayat worship. Therefore, they ought to be recognized as separate from both Virashaivas (who are one of the



**MASS PROTEST:** A Lingayat rally in Bidar, India, in July, 2017. Fully 50,000 Lingayats came to voice their demand for a separate identity.

many sects within the Lingayat community) and Hindus."

The cabinet mentioned Lingayats and Virashaiva Lingayats separately in order to pacify disgruntled Virashaivas, who were left out of the separate-minority-religion designation.

The movement was led by water resources minister M.B. Patil of the Congress party in Karnataka; its catalyst was S.M.

Jamdar, a retired IAS officer.

Jamdar said Lingayats had separate religion status for 800 years until 1871, before it was taken away without reason in 1881.

To avoid backlash from other communities, the government added that this decision "should not affect the existing benefits available to other religious or linguistic minorities."

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

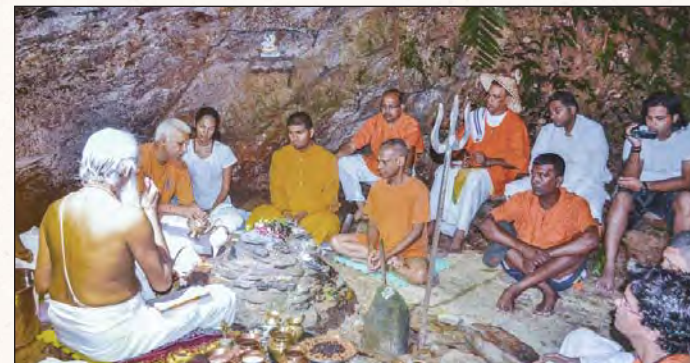
## Walking for God

THE SECOND SHIVGANGA MAHA Yatra, a 67-mile trek from Ganga Dhara in Blanchisseuse to Patirama Shiva Mandir, was successfully completed in February, 2018. Sixty pilgrims—from Trinidad and the US—participated. The yatra was organized by the Chinmaya Mission of

Trinidad and Tobago under the leadership of H.H Swami Prakashananda.

In 2019, the Shivganga Yatra, covering 50 miles (80km) will take pilgrims from Ganga Dhara in Blanchisseuse to the famous Temple in the Sea in Waterloo, Trinidad.

**GRAND FINALE:** Yatris gather for the final abhishekam to Swayambhu Sri Patirama Siva



USA

## Correcting Yoga and Spreading Culture

THREE ACHARYAS, SELECTED BY the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (an official agency of the Indian Government), have been promoting Indian culture in America starting in 2016. Given the title "Yoga and Indian Culture Acharya," they are experts in Sanskrit, yoga and Hindu scripture. They were appointed initially for two years, extendable by two more. They have diplomatic passports. Based in Washington DC, New York and Chicago, they are mandated to travel around the country and organize events that promote

Indian culture.

Perna Arya, appointed on December 7, 2016, serves at the Indian consulate in Chicago. She completed her PhD from Gurukul Kangri University in Haridwar with a thesis on "Naturopathy in Vedic Literature." Dayashankar Vidyalkar, serving at the Indian Consulate in New York, learned Sanskrit in Gujarat. He told *The Hindu*: "I taught yoga in Parliament House for nearly 15 years and serve on several advisory boards of government departments." He opines that the entire world was

"guided by the wisdom of the *Vedas* at one time, but we lost that due to various factors. After Independence, this is the first time that India has a government thinking its heritage should be propagated. That is why I am here." Mokshraj, with a PhD in the *Vedas* from Rajasthan Sanskrit University, joined in January, 2018.

The three acharyas concur that yoga's spiritual dimension has been undermined by commercialization. Acharya Mokshraj explains, "Our responsibility is to take yoga to each individual,



**SPIRITUAL AMBASSADORS:** Mokshraj, one of the three Yoga and Indian Culture Acharyas

without cost, so that they can reduce their medical bills and lead peaceful lives."

ABU DHABI

## A Gift Of Land

INDIAN PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi officially launched the construction of the first BAPS Hindu Mandir in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, on Sunday, February 11, 2018. The temple is to be built on 55,000 square meters of land and completed by 2020. Made possible

with a generous gift from the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the temple will be a symbol of global peace and harmony.

Several thousand devotees, well-wishers and guests from all over the world participated in the ground-breaking ceremony marking the first step in the construction of the traditional stone temple. Representatives of all Indian religious denominations and communities, as



**ANOTHER TEMPLE BY BAPS:** Puja Ishwarcharandas Swami performs the foundation stone laying ceremony

well as representatives of the Jain, Sikh, Muslim, Christian and other faith communities

attended the ceremony. The BAPS organization has 1,200 temples worldwide.

SYMBOLS

## Ganesha Immigrates to Southern California

IT'S A STORY WHERE FICTION becomes fact. The arrival of the railroads in Southern California in the later years of the 19th century created a huge real-estate boom. A wave of immigrants from the eastern United States began to arrive. New towns with new names began to spring up. One such town was Pomona in eastern Los Angeles county, which sprang up on a large Mexican rancho. It was named after



the Roman Goddess of orchards.

One of the real estate developments in the new city was called Ganesh Tract. It included homes on Ganesha Place, a street that bends to the right when seen from above. It exists to this day. Around the same time, in 1888, Ganesha Park was started by Patrick Tonner, a land developer, on six acres of land, which he planted with eucalyptus trees. It was the city's first park. Tonner named it Ganesha Park after (to his understanding) the God of good things and water. The hills to the southwest of the park became known as Ganesha Hills.

Seventy years later a High School named after Ganesha, with His elephantine image on its crest, opened two miles to the west on what was then known as Ganesha Boulevard. Ten years

later a new wave of immigrants arrived from India, bringing with them their love of Ganesha. Now, 130 years after that park was created, Ganesha is being worshipped daily at 15 Hindu temples in the Pomona area. And that old Mexican rancho? It is now home to another wave of immigrants, this time from the South. Ninety-two percent of the students at Ganesha High School live in homes where Spanish is spoken.

**GOD, SHOW ME A SIGN:** (clockwise from left) The Ganesha Park's entry sign; old street sign near Ganesha High; a view of Ganesha Hills in 1904; Ganesha High School Cheerleaders during football season



SINGAPORE

## Most Diverse Country?

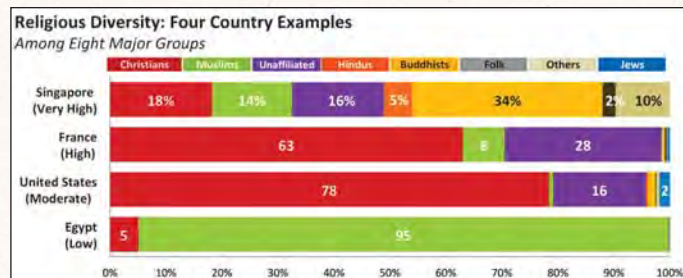
RESEARCH REVEALS THAT Singapore is the most religiously diverse country in the world. A 2010 study, carried out by the Pew Research Center in Washington D.C., ranked 232 countries on a scale of 1 to 10, with a score of 10 being the most diverse.

The study measured the Religious Diversity Index (RDI) of each country based on the percentage of the population in the following categories: Buddhist,

Christian, folk religions, Hindu, Judaism, Islam, other religions and religiously unaffiliated. Singapore rated 9 in the study.

According to the 2015 Singapore General Household Survey on residents, the city-state is 34% Buddhist, 14% Islamic, 18% Christian, 11% Taoist and 5% Hindu; and 16% claim no religious beliefs.

Singapore encourages religious diversity by celebrating dates and events significant to



**MELTING POT:** All it takes is a glance at the Pew chart to see how diverse Singapore is compared to other nations. Data is from 2010.

each group. Public holidays include everything from Easter to Hari Raya, to Diwali. Community associations

concurrently organize large-scale events around holidays, including Chinese New Year and Hari Raya Puasa.



## Dancing Monks of Assam

**S**ATTRIYA DANCE HAS BEEN cultivated by Hindu monks for five centuries as a way of worshiping the flute-playing Lord Krishna. In April, 2018, the US public experienced it for the first time when the Antoinette Westphal College of Media Arts & Design in Philadelphia hosted a series of master classes, demonstrations, a lecture and a performance. The event featured the Dancing Monks of Assam, led by Bhabananda Barbayan, on their first US tour from monasteries on the river island of Majuli in the Northeast Indian

state of Assam. This form of dance honors Sri Krishna and his incarnations, narrating the playful, sensuous and fantastical story of His life as recounted in ancient epics.

Sattriya originated in the monasteries of Assam. For centuries it remained confined to the monasteries, where celibate monks practiced, nurtured and preserved it as part of their daily rituals. Women had little access to this dance form until the mid-20th century.

In 2000 the government of India incorporated Sattriya



**THE SATTRIYA DANCE:** Introduced in the 15th century by a great Vaishnava saint and reformer of Assam, Mahapurusha Sankaradeva, as a powerful medium for propagation of the Vaishnava faith

into its pantheon of classical arts. It is an unbroken, living tradition that includes drama, dance, song and a special form of choreographed yoga. The monks

consider their art "an offering to the universe." A one minute clip can be seen here: [bit.ly/dancingMonks](http://bit.ly/dancingMonks)

## YOGA

## Long Live Yogini Tao Porchon-Lynch

**T**AO PORCHON-LYNCH, RECOGNIZED by the Guinness World Records as the "World's Oldest Yoga Teacher," will turn 100 in August, 2018.

Porchon founded the Westchester Institute of Yoga in 1982. At the age of 87 she took up ballroom dancing; since then she has won more than 750 first-place awards as a competitive dancer. At age 96 she appeared on NBC's "America's Got Talent," receiving a standing ovation. In addition to teaching eight classes a week, she hosts yoga retreats and speaks at more than 20 conferences yearly.

Her life experiences, spanning continents and major historical events, are as fascinating as her personal achievements are impressive. Born and raised in



French-colonized Pondicherry to an Indian mother and French father, she first got a glimpse of yoga in that city. She started to learn the asanas by watching boys practicing at the beach.

During the war, she was part of the French resistance. Afterwards she worked as a model in

France and England, then moved to the US and became a Hollywood actress. She went on to become a writer, producer and international film broker.

In the 1950s she trained under some of the biggest names in yoga, including B.K.S. Iyengar and Indra Devi, and taught yoga

**NO EXCUSES:** Tao performs an advanced yoga posture better than someone in their fifties—half her age. Her motto: There's nothing you can't do.

to Hollywood actor Clark Gable. Continuing her passion for yoga, she has certified and trained hundreds of teachers.

Forever a student, Porchon continues to learn ballroom dancing. When asked why she wanted to participate in "Dancing with the Stars"—after having had two hip replacements—she didn't skip a beat: "To show people that it's possible. If you believe in it, anything is possible."

## BRIEFLY...

**IN APRIL, 2018, CHENNAI-BASED** artisans R. Selvanathan Sthapati and T. K. Bharani received Craft Council of India's (CCI) Kamala awards for "Outstanding Contribution for Preservation of Indian Art, Craft and Tradition"

and "Excellence in Craftsmanship," respectively. The awards, instituted in 2000, also marked the 115th birth anniversary of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, social reformer and founder of CCI.

**SCIENTISTS AT THE INDIAN INSTITUTE** of Technology reported in April, 2018, their conclusion that the Indus Valley civilization was wiped out 4,350 years ago by drought that lasted 900 years. The study was published in the Quaternary International Journal.

Global Dharma news provided by

### HINDU PRESS INTERNATIONAL

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**HINDUISM TODAY** was founded on January 5, 1979, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927–2001). It is a nonprofit educational activity of Himalayan Academy, with the following purposes: 1. To foster Hindu solidarity as a unity in diversity among all sects

and lineages; 2. To inform and inspire Hindus worldwide and people interested in Hinduism; 3. To dispel myths, illusions and misinformation about Hinduism; 4. To protect, preserve and promote the sacred *Vedas* and the Hindu religion; 5. To nurture and monitor the ongoing spiritual Hindu renaissance; 6. To publish resources for Hindu leaders and educators who promote Sanatana Dharma. Join this *seva* by sending letters, clippings, photographs, reports on events and by encouraging others.



Founder:

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

Publisher:

Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami

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## IN MY OPINION

## How I Became a Hindu

Born into a white Hindu home, I felt shy about my religion until my first pilgrimage to India

BY DEVALA REES

**T**HE WAY IN WHICH I BECAME a Hindu is by far the most common: by birth. What makes it unusual are my race and nationality. I am a white American, born and raised in the rural central US. The house in which I grew up was much like a Hindu temple in many ways, with thirty-six murtis of the Gods and Goddesses filling almost every room. Each morning my priestess-like mother worshiped each of them with Sanskrit mantras, *arati* and delicious *prasadam*, which I would then eat for breakfast. Throughout my childhood I learned puja from her and came to love performing the worship myself.

However, when I went to school, or almost anywhere else outside of our home, it felt like stepping into an alien realm. No one I knew shared my world of loving, colorful Deities, incense and mantras. In my early childhood, Hinduism was a tradition of my home, not my community. But when I felt lonely or scared, I always mentally called on Krishna and felt a glowing, golden grin of comfort enter my heart. I always had something to hold onto. In the evenings at home, my mother and I sang *stotrams* and *ashtakams* to the Gods before bed, and in this way I learned many chants and songs.

My lack of a Hindu community outside the home changed at age 12. That year I met the woman whom I would take as my guru: Mata Amritanandamayi. I first saw her for just a week in Santa Fe, New Mexico. That week was a key turning point in my feeling fully like a Hindu. Previously, I'd been missing a vital element: the immeasurably profound treasure of a living guru. Apart from my mother, my guru and her community of shishyas have been, by far, the greatest influence on my spiritual life. While my guru lives in Kerala, India, she tours the US annually and I always visit her. When she is away, I study and practice her teachings from afar. The initiation she gave me utterly revolutionized my spiritual practice, and remains the basis of my sadhana to this day. The mantra she whispered in my ear feels



like a supercharged direct link to God, powered by her grace. It exerts a palpable benefit on my mental and emotional state whenever I direct my attention to it.

Not long after finding my guru, I also discovered a growing community of Hindus in my home town. Many Indian families moved to the

area so their children could attend a Hindu-influenced school there that was originally started by the Transcendental Meditation movement. This influx of Hindus soon created a demand for a public temple.

I soon met a pandit named Parthasarathi Vempati who arrived from India. He would found the Sri Devi Mandir in our small but eclectic town. From my teenage years until today, I've regularly participated local pujas and *homas*, community events and festivals with Panditji. Thus Panditji has been a profoundly beneficial teacher in my discovery of the deep satisfaction of bhakti. While they're certainly not necessary for everyone, I personally love the intricate dynamics of outward devotional ritual. I find they lend a rich and enjoyable framework to the unfolding experience of my inner relationship with God.

Even after all this, not until I was a college freshman did I openly call myself a Hindu among people of different traditions. Before that I had been reticent to share such a deeply important part of my personality. I definitely felt like a cultural minority.

Partly for this reason, one of the most joyous experiences of my life was my first pilgrimage to India at age 20. Spending a month living in a flourishing and proudly Hindu society was perhaps the final influence that led me to comfortably and openly identify as Hindu and publicly embrace the camaraderie and solidarity of Hinduism as a worldwide community.

DEVALA REES, 27, is a Business Intelligence Analyst at FoodChain ID. A staunch Hindu, he actively contributes to his local Hindu community in Fairfield, Iowa. Email: [Devalarees@gmail.com](mailto:Devalarees@gmail.com)



# Achieving Affectionate Detachment

Peace of mind requires letting go of the past. Here are tools that help, including burning up our hurts and reactions.

BY SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI

**M**OVIES OFTEN DEPICT A SON OR daughter who, now an adult, holds deep-seated hard feelings toward one or both parents for things that happened while growing up. For example, in one emotional film scene, a daughter rattles off a long list of unhappy interactions with her mother: "When I was ten years old, you did this to me, and then on my twelfth birthday that happened. When I was fifteen, you said this.... When I was twenty, I brought a boy home and you were unkind to him. When I was twenty-two, ..."

Piling up childhood reactions is as natural as it is debilitating. As grown-ups, we can continue adding to our subconscious stockpile of you-did-this-to-me resentments. Recently a man who was filled with resentment told me about how unfairly his business partners had treated him. His mind was totally absorbed in the past: "One partner cheated me by doing this four years ago. Two years ago another partner did that; and last month this happened!"

Did the son or daughter demonstrate any good feelings toward the parents? Did the businessman like or respect his partners? No. There were only disturbed feelings between them. There was no affection; it was "unaffection." Was there attachment to the hurtful memories? Yes, powerful clinging to the past and frequent mental rehashing of unsavory events.

I call this common condition "unaffectionate attachment." It's a state of mind filled with bitterness, misunderstandings, bad memories and even grudges. Anyone can fall into this abyss. Some live there throughout life. On the spiritual path, our goal is to remain free of such burdens. So, if we become overwhelmed by past acrimonies, we need to learn how to extract ourself.

My Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, emphasized the art of working with the mind's natural tendencies as a fundamental part of spiritual life. "When the aspirant is able to meet ordinary happenings and respond to them in the effortless wisdom born of detachment, that indicates that his striving is genuine. When he is able to encounter conditions that send ordinary people into states of disappointment or discouragement and when his emotional nature indicates mastery over these lesser states of consciousness, he is well on his way toward filling the gaps of a natural growth of the instinctive vehicles—body, emotions and intellect."

To maintain equilibrium on the path, we need to clear the subconscious mind of such negative attachments. Significant "unaffectionate attachments" in the subconscious will cause the mind to constantly dwell on the past. It's not hard to see how this hampers our creativity and progress in the present, diminishing our quality of life. One of the victims is our ability to meditate. Unresolved emotional is-



issues in the subconscious can make it impossible to quiet the thinking process when sitting for meditation. In his *Yoga Sutras*, sage Patanjali describes these blockages as externalizing samskaras that need to be transformed. My guru gave specific practices for removing them from the mind. The primary method he gave is *vasana daha tantra*, known as journaling in Western terminology. He defined it as writing down the events that trouble us and then burning

the paper in an ordinary, non-ceremonial fire. Watching our concerns, our hurts and negative recollections disappear in the flames is cathartic, impressing the mind with the possibility of riddance of past traumas. We can even write and burn letters to people we hold animosity against. This simple practice is effective in removing from the subconscious mind unaffectionate attachments to past experiences. It needs to be said that we don't forget those past hurts and unfairnesses. Rather, the negative emotion is dissolved, released or burned away. Watching the paper burn is helpful in achieving this result. For deep-seated hurts, the writing and burning may need to be repeated several times.

For powerfully traumatic memories, such as being beaten frequently by a parent, simply writing it down may not be sufficient. The negative impression, or samskara, may be so deep that you have to do something physical to achieve release. For such instances, Gurudeva has given the flower *prayashchitta*, or penance. It consists of putting up in the shrine room a picture of the person you are resenting and then every day for 31 days placing a flower in front of the picture while sincerely forgiving him or her.

What happens when we perform practices like *vasana daha tantra* and the flower penance? We arrive at stage two, "unaffectionate detachment." We still don't like the person, but at least we are not thinking negatively about them all the time. We have partially detached ourselves. We may have no fondness, no love, but we are no longer dwelling endlessly on the past, no longer resentful. We have understood the situation.

Returning to our movie example, in the next scene the mother responds to the daughter's outburst, "I did the best I could in raising you." Suddenly the daughter accepts that her mother had her own challenges and was not perfect. She realizes it was unrealistic for her to expect a perfect childhood. They had now reached an understanding that released the attachment. But, still, it didn't awaken affection. They maintained a cold relationship.

Of course, that is not the goal. The goal is "affectionate detachment."



Early in his ministry, Gurudeva gave a deceptively simple method to reach this next level: "The best way to keep the actinic (spiritual) force flowing through the physical body is practicing the art of giving—doing little things for others you have not been asked to do."

That's not difficult, right? Try it yourself and you will find that, yes, it does work. It actually takes us from unaffectionate detachment to affectionate detachment. It builds up love and good feelings toward those to whom we had hard feelings in the past. Of course, one act of giving doesn't change everything. But repeated over and over again—offering little gifts, doing things for others that they don't anticipate—changes the feelings between people. It creates more love, more kindness and warmth.

This is an important practice to incorporate as a perpetual behavior, because life always gives us the opportunity to develop new hard feelings. Harmony is something we have to work at the rest of our life, because we will be interacting with people the rest of our life. For those on the spiritual path, getting along with people, ensuring that new hard feelings don't develop, is an essential part of karma management.

The resultant harmony is empowering, but Gurudeva takes it even further. He says that giving "eventually leads to greater actinic understanding." That means we not only have good, kind feelings about others but we also understand their nature better. Part of the reason we don't get along with some people is that we don't understand them. A natural assumption is that "everyone is like me." In reality, you may not meet anyone just like you your whole life. People are dif-

**BURNING THE PAST:** One way to resolve hurts and hard feelings is to perform *vasana daha tantra*. This discipline calls for writing down unresolved experiences from our past and burning them in a simple pit or cauldron.

ferent, sometimes very different. If we are unaware of or fail to appreciate such differences, misunderstandings and hard feelings can arise. Our attitudes and interactions naturally improve when we are sensitive to the differences, needs and limitations of others.

When the attitude of affectionate detachment is the daily norm, not only do we have kindly feelings toward others; we also understand them in an intuitive, actinic way. It is not an intellectual analysis. It is an intuitive sense of who a person is, what karmas he or she has brought into this life. And because we appreciate that person's nature, we make allowances and get along with them better.

That completes the process of achieving affectionate detachment. We start with unaffectionate attachment and then move to unaffectionate detachment. From there we move to affectionate detachment, which comes in two stages. The first stage is expressing more love and kindness towards others. The second stage is understanding others more clearly, cognizing the nature of family, friends and acquaintances in an intuitive way, from the inside out, and therefore loving them more and being able to get along with them better. The deeper truth is that we are learning about ourself the whole time, and our inner changes are reflected in our relationships.





## LETTERS

### Grand Chakra Journey

I immensely enjoyed reading your article, "Our Grand Chakra Journey" (HINDUISM TODAY, April/May/June, 2018). I find a stunning similarity between the chakra concept of Hinduism, which was conceived by our sages thousands of years ago, and "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs," which was presented by Abraham Maslow much later, in 1943.

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### Empty Nest Syndrome

Like Vatsala and Prabhakar Joshi, my husband and I never experienced an empty nest syndrome—we've been too busy teaching!

From the time we retired we have been actively involved in teaching "The Vedic Heritage Teaching Program" to school kids. The weekends are heavy with classes, and weekdays are spent preparing lessons and activities for the children. Over the last 16 years we have managed to teach hundreds of students. The ages range from 7 to 16 years. Ours is a ten-year program. The students start from level one and progress to level four; many have completed the ten-year syllabus. We have also been involved in training teachers for this program. Six of them have successfully completed training and started classes in their areas.

Our children and grandchildren live away

from us and, we keep in contact. We find our retirement days are very fruitful—the service we do is rewarding. Parents and students are very appreciative of this program.

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### Hindus Have a New Year?

The new Hindu generation considers January 1st as the Hindu New Year. Like many other nations and religions, Hindus do have a New Samvat (New Year). Perhaps the Samvat is the oldest among all the New Years available on earth. The Samvat is ahead of the Christian New Year by 57 years. To appease other religions, the Indian government did not approve the suggestion of the calendar committee, which recommended the Samvat as India's calendar. Now the Modi government has started talking and celebrating Hindu festivals. For the first time after independence I heard the media say, "Makar Sakranti and Uttarayan." For the first time the Samvat 2075 will be celebrated officially in many states.

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### Leaving Breadcrumbs

I have been a subscriber to your print edition for well over 10 years. I find it to be the most

well produced and beautiful magazine I have ever read, as well as being the most interesting and informative about the beautiful Santana Dharma. For this reason, I continue to subscribe to your print edition so that I can leave it behind at airports, on planes, trains and cars. This is my small Western way of spreading the way of life that has been of immense value to me in living mine.

ANN YOOST BRECKE  
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### Welcome Home

We just arrived home from our journey to India to find the April/May/June, 2018 edition of HINDUISM TODAY on my desk with my article, "A Grand Chakra Journey" in it illustrated with my paintings! A very pleasant surprise! It is public now. And it had to pass a lot of tests, where you were the final one. It was truly an honor to work with you.

PIETER WELTEVREDE  
NETHERLANDS

LETTERS with writer's name, address and daytime phone number should be sent to:

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Letters may be edited for space and clarity and may appear in electronic versions of HINDUISM TODAY.

## MINISTER'S MESSAGE

# Hindus Must Stand and Be Proud

The right to profess one's faith cannot include a mandate to proselytize others

BY SWAMINI SVATMAVIDYANANDA

THE NOBLE INJUNCTION TO "LOVE ONE'S neighbor as oneself" in Christianity has a counterpart in the Hindu *Taittiriya Upanishad*: "May you be one for whom the guest is a manifestation of God. (*Atithidevobhava*)." The word *atithi* actually refers to someone who arrives without an appointment—a drop-in guest who comes unexpectedly. When faced with such a guest, the *Vedas* enjoin us to cultivate the same attitude of joy and elation that one might have when face to face with God. Conversely, Hindu rituals and worship revolve around invoking God into one's home and treating Her/Him as a revered guest.

Just as the guest should be treated as a manifestation of God, God should be treated as an honored guest.

I have mused over this religious imperative and pondered its possible influence in the repeated colonization of India. The first reaction of ancient Hindu rulers to anyone who came to India, including Alexander the Not-So-Great and Not-So-Great Britain, was to treat them as a revered guest. Travelers or visitors were generally welcomed with food and drink. Many Hindu rulers also made land grants to visitors for construction of homes and places of worship.

History shows that we had two types of guests. There were people who fled persecution and sought refuge in India, notably the Zoroastrians from Iran and the Jewish people. These guests respected the hospitality of the kings and lived in harmony with the people. Then there were "guests" whose intentions were to pillage, conquer and colonize by exploiting the vulnerabilities of their hosts. It is easy to see the face of God in the first type of guest, but greatly challenging to view the face of God in the invaders and colonizers, whose main mission was to subjugate and exploit by inculcating a sense of inferiority among the people they attacked.

British rule, in India and elsewhere, relied on missionary education and Christian evangelism as the two indispensable arms of the colonial enterprise. Lord Macaulay, a great proponent of introducing British education in India, wrote to his father in 1836: "No Hindu who has received an English education ever remains sincerely attached to his religion. Some continue to profess it as matter of policy; but many profess themselves pure Deists, and some embrace Christianity. It is my firm belief that if our plans of education are followed up, there will not be a single idolater among the respectable classes in Bengal, thirty years hence. And this will be effected without any efforts to proselytize; without the smallest interference with religious liberty; merely by the natural operation of knowledge and reflection. I heartily rejoice in the prospect."

The scars of enduring nearly a thousand years of colonization run deep; and the continued policies of the colonizers for several decades after independence, under the dubious rubric of "secularization," have ensured a steady erasure of Hindu identity. Therefore, to this day, even after seven decades of independence, the Hindu intelligentsia in India find it difficult to embrace their religious identity without agony or apology. What it means to be a Hindu is often a



matter of private torment, not something publicly stated or debated. When an identity is maimed, it cannot be easily reclaimed.

At the national level, this angst takes many forms. In an alarming trend, some Hindu religious groups have attempted to abnegate the epithet and umbrella of Hinduism by petitioning the government for minority status. One such petition from a well-established group claimed that their teachings had nothing to do with Hinduism, as they believed in universal love and compassion. This petition was struck down by the Supreme Court of India a few years ago on the grounds that teachings of love and compassion are very much part of the Hindu ethos.

Another petition for minority status, filed recently by a Hindu monastic order in South India, is currently awaiting a court hearing.

Such instances are testaments to a collective anomaly about religious and national identity. They reflect the sad truth that one is accorded better treatment as a religious minority in India than as a member of a majority religious group.

The nascent resurgence of Hindu identity in contemporary India, in all its complexities, must be understood within two contexts: as the yearning to discover oneself by shedding the colonial legacy of self-denial and self-loathing, and as a retaliation against the continued evangelization and "cross-planting" practices by missionaries and evangelicals of various denominations.

The right to profess one's faith cannot include a mandate to proselytize others, thereby eroding their rights to practice their own faiths freely. I expressed these views at the 2006 Vatican conference on conversion in Lariano, organized by the Pontifical Council of Interreligious Dialogue. It was commendable that for the first time the Pontifical Council sought to examine the effects of proselytization by listening to the spokespeople of the cultures most affected by that practice. The few leaders of indigenous religious traditions in attendance shared powerful testimonies of the effects of proselytization in their countries. The decimation of diverse cultures and the erasure of traditional religious identities in various parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America sadly sounded all too familiar.

Two of the resolutions that emerged from this radical conference read: "We affirm that while everyone has a right to invite others to an understanding of their faith, it should not be exercised by violating others' rights and religious sensibilities. At the same time, all should heal themselves from the obsession of converting others. Freedom of religion enjoins upon everyone the equally non-negotiable responsibility to respect faiths other than our own, and never to denigrate, vilify or misrepresent them for the purpose of affirming superiority of one's own beliefs."

SWAMINI SVATMAVIDYANANDA SARASWATI, initiated by Swami Dayananda Saraswati, is the head of Arsha Vijnana Gurukulam. This piece is from her address at the Hindu Catholic Dialogue on November 11, 2017, at the Sri Siva Vishnu Temple in Lanham, MD



**NORI MUSTER:** "I try to help people touch into a sound philosophy that can sustain them, even if for just a moment."

When she was a little girl growing up in Los Angeles, Nori Muster would peruse her mother's yoga books and let her imagination soar. "I felt at home there, among the yogis, and gurus and Gods—a closeness that has stayed with me ever since."

By the time Nori was a teenager, the roaring 1960s had come into full swing. "It was a time of amazing energy," she explains. "It

## Keeping the Vision Alive for Us All

### How one devotee and HINDUISM TODAY help each other

seemed the whole world was swept up in a vision of hope, peace and brotherly love. We were sure a wonderful new era was at hand. Everyone was looking toward India, suddenly. The yogis, gurus and Gods of my younger years came right into our peace marches and protests and festivals. As we know now, some of the promise of that time did not materialize. But the best part of it did remain and is still alive today. Certainly the Gods have taken permanent residence everywhere, including within me."

After two pilgrimages to India and a long association with a Hindu-based group, she was keen to share what she had learned—and she has done so ever since. She has authored books, worked with the young, the poor, the depressed, the troubled. "I have really just wanted to serve the Gods and pass on the lessons of my journey and experience." Today Nori teaches at Mesa Community College in Arizona.

"Since the mid-80s, HINDUISM TODAY has been my constant supporter. It encompasses the whole of this amazing culture, the philosophy, puja, the trends, issues of the day, environment, vegetarianism. It covers all that we should know and understand. It keeps the vision alive for us all, reminding us regularly of why we are here on Earth and who we are and are not. It has helped sustain me nearly my whole life, and I enjoy supporting it in return." Nori does support the magazine generously, through advertising (see pg. 80 of any issue), introducing the magazine to bookstores, and especially through donating to the HINDUISM TODAY Production Fund.

Like Nori Muster, you too can help HINDUISM TODAY "keep the vision alive for us all." Donate to the HINDUISM TODAY Production Fund at: [www.hheonline.org/donate/pf](http://www.hheonline.org/donate/pf). Read about the fund at: [www.hheonline.org/productionfund](http://www.hheonline.org/productionfund), or contact us at: 1-888-464-1008 • [hhe@hindu.org](mailto:hhe@hindu.org)



## QUOTES & QUIPS

### I believe any sensible man is unknowingly a Hindu

ALAIN DANIELOU (1907–1994), French historian, Indologist and noted Western convert to and expert on Saivite Hinduism

The distinction between liberated, aspirant and bound subsists only so long as this Elixir of Experience is unknown to one. The enjoyer and the enjoyed, the seer and the seen, are merged in the non-dual, which is indivisible. The devotee has become God, the Goal has become God, the Goal has become the path; this indeed is solitude in the universe. DNYANESHWAR (1275–1296), 13th-century Marathi saint, poet and philosopher

In a sense, I argue, Hinduism is an open-source faith allowing many ideas to flow in and providing nuances and directions of thought that assimilate and accommodate constantly and consistently. SANJEEV SANYAL, Indian economist, bestselling writer, environmentalist and urban theorist

Keep the name of Rama always in your mind, remembering it with love. It will feed

you when you're alone, bless you when you feel cursed, and protect you when you're abandoned. To the crippled it's another limb. To the blind it's another eye. To the orphaned it's a loving parent. GOSWAMI TULSI DAS (1532–1623), Hindi poet

Not to know the Self is, indeed, the greatest of tragedies; it is to lay waste our powers and miss a chance that has been given to us, so rare, so sacred, so divine. SWAMI CHINMAYANANDA

In Sanatana Dharma, there is no single life, no single judgment, or eternal punishment. In fact, there is no judgment at all as such, for the idea is to help and not to judge and condemn. The inner dynamics of incarnation is not reward or punishment but self-improvement, and ultimately self-discovery and

self-recovery, moksha. RAM SWARUP (1920–1998), a foremost spokesperson of Hindu spirituality and culture in India

"Fetch me a fruit of the banyan tree."

"Here is one, sir."

"Break it."

"I have broken it, sir."

"What do you see?"

"Very tiny seeds, sir."

"Break one."

"I have broken it, sir."

"Now what do you see?"

"Nothing, sir."

"My son," the father said, "what you do not perceive is the essence, and in that essence the mighty banyan tree exists. Believe me, my son, in that essence is the Self of all that is. That is the Truth, that is the Self. And you are that Self, Svetaketu!" Chandogya Upanishad, ch. 6

Within man exists an ocean of bliss. Yet he willingly prefers to live a life full of misery, pain and suffering. This is the tragedy of human life. JAGADGURU SRI CHANDRASEKHARA BHARATI MAHASWAMIGAL (1912–1954), 34th pontiff of the Sarada Peetham

Sanatana means Eternal. In its purest form, this religion is Sanatana, because it is based on Truth. Truth is immortal and is never annihilated. Our true Sanatana Dharma, in its purest form, can never be exterminated. SWAMI RAMA TIRTHA (1873–1906), teacher of Vedanta

We're not trying to explain the unexplainable, just trying to help those who are sincere figure out where to go to experience it. SATGURU BODHINATHA VEYLANSWAMI, publisher of Hinduism Today

If you live completely each second, you will experience many days inside each twenty-four hours. SATGURU SIVAYA SUBRAMUNIYASWAMI (1927–2001), founder of Hinduism Today



## DID YOU KNOW?

### 4 Types of Temple Consecration

By Selvanathan Sthapati

THE HINDU TEMPLE IS A LIVING ORGANISM; it is considered a form of God. Extensive rituals, spanning several days, are performed by trained professional priests to establish the sanctity of a new temple. Similar rites are performed to restore the sanctity of a temple after renovation and other disturbances. These rites are called kumbhabhishekam.

A little known fact is that there are four distinct types of kumbhabhishekam ceremonies: avardhanam, anavardhanam, punaravardhanam and andharitham. These mystical rites are clearly explained in the Mayamatha, Manasara and Kasyapa Shilpa Shastras and in some Agamic texts.

Avardhanam means renovating and restoring an abandoned temple, be it an old or ancient structure. After the physical



renovations, the temple is empowered with Agamic rituals and the performance of avardhana kumbhabhishekam.

Anavardhanam names the form of kumbhabhishekam performed to consecrate a newly built temple.

Punaravardhanam refers to repairing and renovating an existing temple. This is normally done every 12th year. The rite performed thereafter to restart the temple is called punaravardhana kumbhabhishekam.

The fourth type of consecration is andharitham. It is performed to remove any disturbance to the spiritual ambience which

has been caused by either natural or unnatural happenings. Natural disturbances include flooding or any damage caused by fierce weather. Unnatural disturbances include theft, military attacks, or a death occurring in the precincts. These disturbances are rectified and the spiritual ambience renewed by reciting Agamic mantras and performing fire ceremonies for peace.

.....  
(above) Brass spires (kalasa) that will adorn the tower are infused with life by priests as part of consecrating a new temple. When installed, they will be bathed with sanctified water at the peak of the rites.

## BASICS

### Nine Hindu Beliefs

1. Hindus believe in a one, all-pervasive Supreme Being who is both immanent and transcendent, both Creator and Unmanifest Reality.
2. Hindus believe in the divinity of the four Vedas, the world's most ancient scripture, and venerate the Agamas as equally revealed. These primordial hymns are God's word and the bedrock of Sanatana Dharma, the eternal religion.
3. Hindus believe that the universe undergoes endless cycles of creation, preservation and dissolution.
4. Hindus believe in karma, the law of cause and effect by which each individual creates his own destiny by his thoughts, words and deeds.
5. Hindus believe that the soul reincarnates, evolving through many births until all karmas have been resolved, and moksha, liberation from the cycle of rebirth, is attained. Not a single soul will be



6. Hindus believe that divine beings exist in unseen worlds and that temple worship, rituals, sacraments and personal devotionals create a communion with these devas and Gods.
7. Hindus believe that an enlightened master, or satguru, is essential to know the Transcendent Absolute, as are personal discipline, good conduct, purification, pilgrimage, self-inquiry, meditation and
8. Hindus believe that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered, and therefore practice ahimsa, noninjury, in thought, word and deed.
9. Hindus believe that no religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others, but that all genuine paths are facets of God's Light, deserving tolerance and understanding.





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FROM THE AGAMAS

## Who Can Know Its Depth?

The third and final series detailing a yogi's peak yogic experience on Earth

*The following text continues and ends the second chapter of the knowledge section of Sarvajnanottara Agama, verses 33–63. Narrated by Lord Siva to Lord Skanda, this Agama outlines yogic preparation, posture, breath control, mantra and perception of the 36 tattvas, or categories of existence. Then it discusses the nature of the Self and the relationship between the meditator and Lord Siva. In this installment, the aftermath of Self-Realization is described.*

**H**AVING ABANDONED ALL worldly activities, being free from desire for worldly enjoyments, keeping the company of worldly-minded persons away, released from all attachments related to location, lineage, caste and stages of life such as celibacy, householder and so forth, the refined and enlightened seeker should contemplate the essential nature of himself. Guided by the Self within, he affirms, "This is the mantra I recite; this is the Deity I worship; this is the mode of my meditation; this is my way of austerity." Having abandoned all differentiated notions, the truth-seeker should one-pointedly contemplate the state of his own Self. Firmly fixing his contemplation from the three positions—difference, non-difference and both—and having trained his mind to be motionless, he should engage in no other discipline.

The essential nature of the Self is inconceivable to those desirous of worldly enjoyments, but it is well attainable by those intent on their final liberation. In its embodied state, the Self—having constricted and insignificant knowledge—is comparable to an inert object. In its liberated state, it is pure and unlimited consciousness. Keeping his mind completely still, the aspirant can now experience the bliss of his own Self. That bliss—accessed by renouncing the tattvas, which hide the soul's real nature—is supreme, unchanging and ineffable, infinite and incomparable. This state is known as *unmanibhava*.

All varnas and stages of life hold different rules regarding directions, locations and appropriate times in respect to the systematic practice of the disciplines of yoga. But no such rules are laid down for those devoted to the experience of the supreme Self. For the sadhaka who meditates in this way and who becomes established in the Self, past deeds and their fruit do not exist. There is nothing to be performed now or in the future. There is no command, no external insignia, no observable regulations; he is free.

In all activities and in all occasions—whether he walks or stands, is awake or asleep, eats or drinks, whether he is assaulted by stormy winds, extreme cold or excessive heat, whether afflicted by the fruits of his past deeds, indigence or disease, whether distressed by indigestion, fever and other ailments—the sadhaka who meditates on his own Self maintains detachment from external matters. Attaining calmness, he remains self-content and evolves as a pure, transcendental being.

"I exist in my own self. I have not come here from another place; nor am I going anywhere. I will not come in the future; nor will I go. I have not been born; nor will I be embodied again. All the bodies absorbed in the Self are thus evolved beyond nature, *prakriti*—which is associated with ever-persisting phenomena, conditioned by past deeds of younger souls. The deeds of those bound souls are affected by the bodies which evolve from maya, and continue reincarnating through maya because of karma. As such, I do not perform even an insignificant action." With this firm resolution the knower of Reality is liberated from karma and maya. The sadhaka becomes all-pervasive by the constant practice of non-dual meditation.

With constant practice, he reaches a bodiless state and becomes permanently immersed. For such an accomplished yogi, there is no initiation, no sacrament, no mudra, no mandala, no incantation, no worship, no meditation, no oblation; no performance of rituals or fasting is ordained for him. Drinking the nectar of *Sivajnana*, God knowledge, and roaming about according to his own wish, he becomes eternal like Me, Lord Siva. The victorious yogi becomes absolutely free from the cosmic phenomenon of creation and absorption.

As earnestly affirmed by an oath, I swear this is truth. O Guha! There is nothing to be known as superior to this truth. Being of absolute purity and pure consciousness, the rare yogi purifies all manifestation with his glance. Unbound and unshrouded, he sees—through his pure contemplative vision—all things and all beings as pure expressions and manifestations of Siva.

DR. S. P. SABHARATHNAM SIVACHARYAR, of the Adisaiva priest lineage, is an expert in ancient Tamil and Sanskrit, specializing in the *Vedas*, *Agamas* and *Silpa Shastras*. This excerpt is from his completed translation of the revered *Sarvajnanottara Agama*.



**THE KNOWER OF ALL:** Just as a lamp gets extinguished when its oil is exhausted, so the yogi extinguishes his former self, in perfect meditation, when ego identification ceases to exist

நாம் நமது அகிம்சை ஆளாயினால் அது நமது அகிம்சை ஆகிவிடும்.

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The Annamalaiyar “Fire Temple,” dedicated to Siva, lies at the foot of Arunachala Hill where, according to the Siva Puranas, Siva appeared as an infinite pillar of fire to Vishnu and Brahma. The temple and hill have been popular places of Hindu pilgrimage for millennia and are now known worldwide through the popularity of sage Ramana Maharshi.



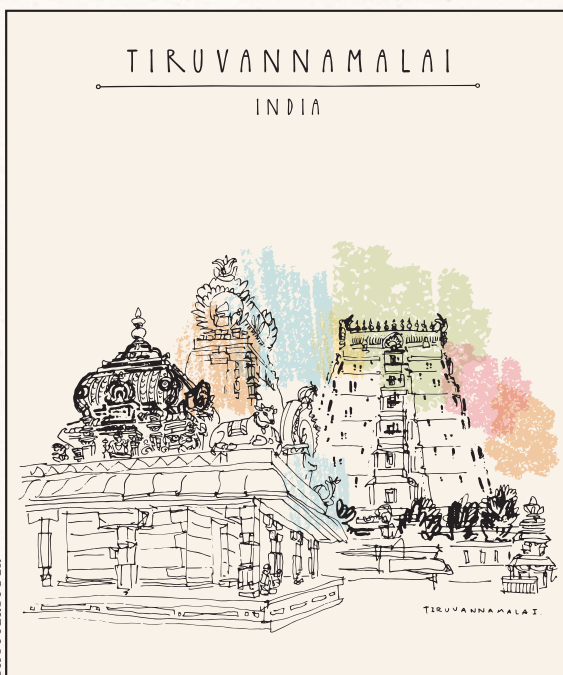
# The Holy Town of Tiruvannamalai

(above) Looking across the temple tank towards Annamalaiyar's central sanctums and towering rajagopurams, framed by Arunachala Hill; (inset) convinced of His superiority, Lords Vishnu and Brahma bow before Lord Siva as He appears out of the infinite pillar of fire



REPORTED BY RAJIV MALIK, DELHI

**T**HE TOWN OF TIRUVANNAMALAI surrounds Arunachala Hill, a premier place of pilgrimage for Siva worshipers. Anyone you meet here will recount the Puranic story that this is where Siva appeared to Brahma and Vishnu as a pillar of fire. Lord Vishnu and Lord Brahma were disputing which was the greater God, the story goes, when suddenly a seemingly endless pillar of fire appeared before them. They agreed that whoever could find its end would be acknowledged as the greatest. Vishnu took the form of a boar and burrowed into the earth, while Brahma took the form of a swan and flew upwards. Neither succeeded. Upon their return, Lord Siva revealed Himself from the pillar of fire, and both Gods acknowledged Him as supreme. Each fall this event is celebrated during the Karthika Deepam festival, which attracts over three million devotees. An enormous pot of ghee is ignited on the hilltop, creating a pillar of fire that can be seen for miles.



dynasties. From the 17th century onward it suffered under Muslim and then British rule, but today it stands as a marvelous and well-kept example of Dravidian architecture, with a full slate of daily worship and festivals.

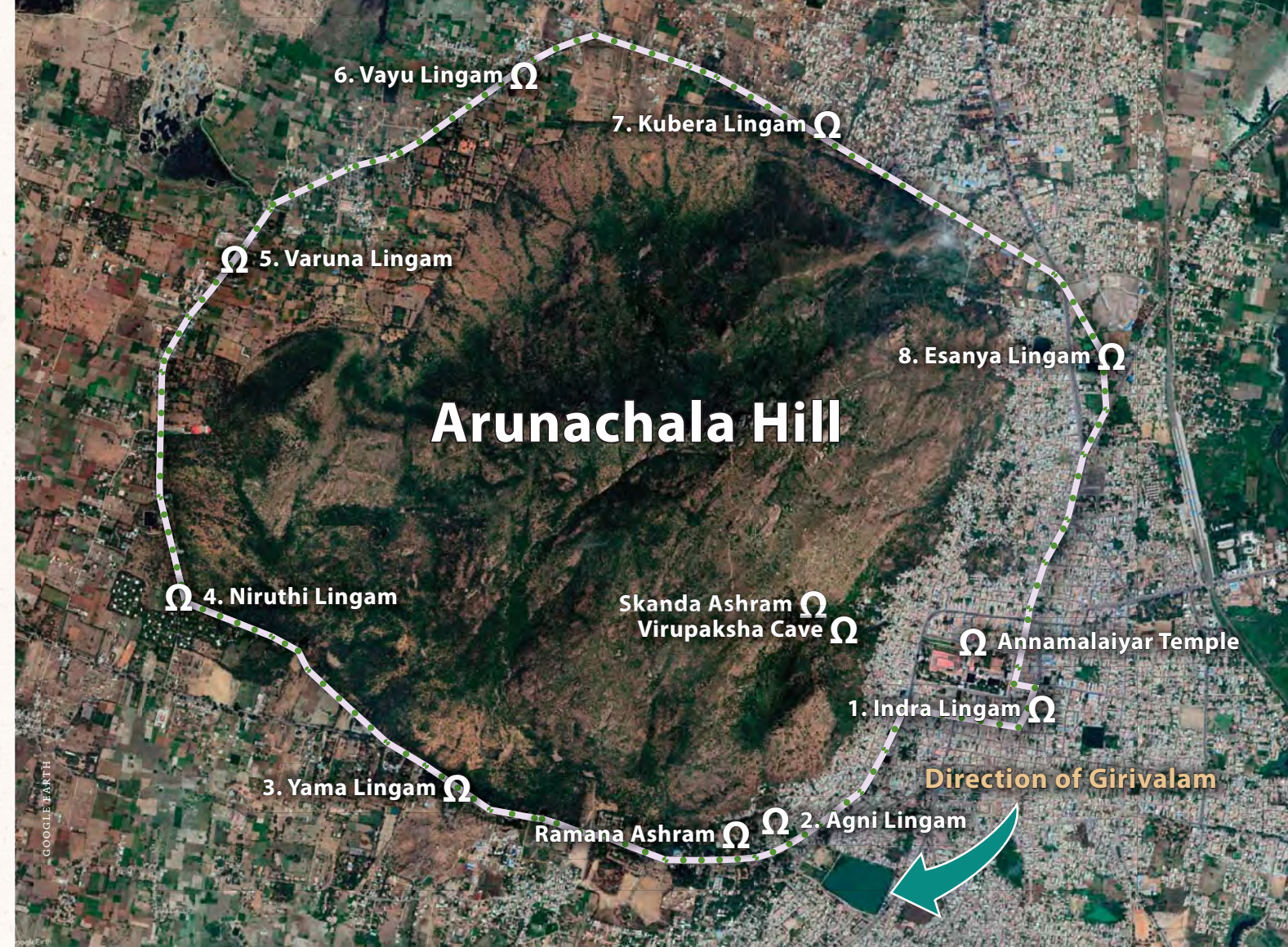
In recent times the town gained fame as the residence of Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950). His ashram remains the most popular destination in the area [see sidebar, page 23]. It is a place of profound sadhana, with thousands of visitors seeking to discover "Who am I?"—the question Ramana posed to each

one who came before him. Other famous saints have lived here too, including Ramana's contemporary Sesahadri Swami and, more recently, Yogi Ramsuratkumar. As well, there are popular sadhus among the hundreds who call this place home, some with established ashrams, and others wandering through the town, sleeping and eating where they will.

Hundreds of thousands of devotees assemble here each full-moon day to do girivalam, the barefoot nine-mile circumambulation of Arunachala Hill. They come from miles around, including from Chennai, to undertake this penance. A substantial number are young professionals.

In this article we cover these main places, people and events, beginning with girivalam. Our reporting was assisted by local advocate Palani Raj, recommended by Jayendra Puri Swami of Kailash Ashram, Bengaluru. For imagery, we engaged local photographer Sundaram Sethu.

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**EXPERIENCING TIRUVANNAMALAI:** (below, left to right) Ramana Maharshi; a family departs his ashram; devotees begin and end the nine-mile girivalam at the front entrance of Annamalaiyar Temple; barefoot pilgrims stride the sacred path at night to avoid the intense daytime heat



## The Ashram of Ramana Maharshi



RAMANASHARAMA



THOMAS KELLY

## Girivalam: Worshipful, Barefoot Circumambulation of the Sacred Hill



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## Circling the Hill

Our trio arrived for the full moon of January 30, 2018, which coincided with the Thaipusam festival. There was also a full eclipse of the moon on the 31st. Most pilgrims for the girivalam (literally, “around the mountain”) arrive in the late afternoon. They circle the hill after sundown, avoiding the heat of the day, then return home. Most come by bus, some by car or train. Huge temporary bus stands are set up at several points around the city so as not to interfere with the movement of the pilgrims. Buses arrive every few minutes to discharge passengers. All are in a festive mood, with the women dressed in colorful saris. Ila Maram, a senior traffic officer, tells us the rush is less this time because of the Thaipusam Murugan festival, the lunar eclipse and the full moon falling on a working day instead of a weekend. The rapid arrivals and



**GIRIVALAM LINGAM SHRINES:** Devotees undertaking girivalam queue up at the Easanya Lingam shrine, last around the hill

departures explain how this relatively small town of 145,000 can manage many times its population of pilgrims.

The circumambulation begins and ends in front of Annamalaiyar Temple. The girivalam path is a well-maintained two-lane road with trees along both sides. An attempt in 2017 to widen the road, which included cutting down these trees, was met by stiff local resistance. Fortunately, the tree cutting part of the plan was subsequently abandoned. In places, the road is lined with shops; at others it is open on both sides. Streetlights have been installed, and with the full moonlight one can easily walk without

the need for a hand-held light. Soon after sunset, when the road has cooled from the blistering heat, it is packed with pilgrims, nearly all barefoot.

Along the route are many sacred places. The most important are the Ashta (eight) Lingam temples, located roughly at the eight compass points around the hill. Neglected during a century-plus of British rule, these were renovated by Moopnar Swamigal in the early 1900s. Swamigal believed the restoration of these shrines was needed to revitalize the fields of energy and influence that surround Arunachala hill. It is not required to worship inside all eight temples, and some are a bit off the path, but devotees acknowledge each as they pass.

It is said that undergoing the walk around the holy mountain removes sins, fulfills desires and brings spiritual freedom. Devotees move along the road silently in a meditative state or chanting “Annamalai Haro Hara!” or “Aum Namah Sivaya.” There is little talking; in fact, it is a bit difficult to get people to stop for an interview, so strong is their intent.

We encounter a group of five from Kanjivaram, about 62 miles away, doing girivalam in the daytime. One of them, Manikandan, explains they came by bus. They started out at 6am, arrived by 10am and will return the same evening. Agricultural workers, they were not deterred by the hot pavement: “We do not mind walking barefoot in this heat, as we are doing this for God. It is our belief that many realized siddhas walk on this path and do girivalam on auspicious days, and we feel that we will get their powers and blessings only if we walk here barefooted.”

Manikandan add, “All of us have greatly benefitted by coming here on auspicious days. We feel peaceful and happy after performing girivalam. We have benefited more in spiritual terms than material terms. Our health and well-being have also improved.”

Another pilgrim we meet is Thangavelu, 62, who says something inside him had told him to wait and talk to us. “I normally do not speak with anyone and just keep chanting ‘Aum Namah Sivaya’ as I walk on the path. I do not come with friends, as they indulge

in gossip.” He says he has done girivalam 238 times—monthly for 20 years!

Ramu Subramaniam is among a group of young professional men who arrived from Chennai. He explains the motivation: “There is definitely some higher level of divine energy here which we feel whenever we come to this area. We all experience certain things, and that is the reason we come here again and again. If there are any problems that we face, we find them solved after we have gone through girivalam.”

One of the many sadhus present along the path tells us pilgrims offer them money without being asked, and this covers their travel expenses. Various NGOs and religious organizations have organized feeding programs both for sadhus and pilgrims.

Each of the Ashta Lingam temples is noted for a particular boon. The second, the Agni Lingam, is known for blessings of good health; the third, Yama Lingam, for solving financial problems and granting long life; the fourth, Niruthi, for childless couples to conceive, and so on. In front of each temple is a

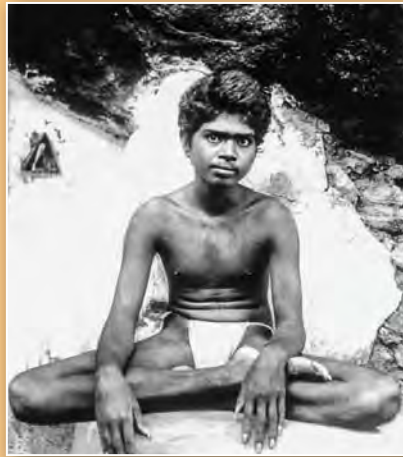
## The Austere Life of Sage Ramana

Excerpted from Hail Arunachala by B. Palani Raj

**B**hagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950), the great sage of Arunachala, was responsible for spreading the grace and glory of Tiruvannamalai to all parts of the world. His method of Self-Realization by inquiry attracted the attention of multitudes of people both in India and abroad. Bhagavan’s biography, spanning a half century spent in this holy place, is the history of Arunachala for that period.

Sri Ramana was born in 1879 in Tiruchuzhi Village, about thirty miles south of Madurai in Tamil Nadu, to a brahmin couple, Sundaram Iyer, an uncertified pleader (unlicensed attorney nevertheless allowed to represent people in the local court) and Alagammal. The child was named Venkataraman, and he did his schooling in Tiruchuzhi followed by studies in Scots Middle School and the American Mission School in Madurai. In November, 1895, one of his relatives informed him that he had been to Arunachala. The very mention of the name Arunachala inspired the young Venkataraman and stirred in him a desire to visit that holy place. In July, 1896, even though he was in robust health, a mysterious apprehension of his death seized him; this impelled him to introspect what would happen to the “I” within him even if his body suffered death. The inward search drew him to Arunachala where he sought and achieved the ultimate goal of *nirvakalpa samadhi*, Self Realization.

Sri Ramana reached Tiruvannamalai in 1896 at the age of 16. Upon his arrival, mysteriously all the gates and inner doors of the big temple of Arunachaleshwara opened wide to receive him. Later he arrived at the holy Ayyankulam tank near the temple where he set aside his sacred thread that marked his identity as a brahmin, and did away with the clothes covering him, retaining only a small piece



**THE MEDITATOR:** Ramana, in 1902 when he was 22 years old

to wear around his waist as a loincloth—his chosen attire for the rest of his life. He chose several places for his meditation in and around the temple: Guru Murtham, Patala Lingam in the big temple, a place near Subramanya Temple, the Mangai Pillaiyar Temple, the Mango Tree Grove, and Virupaksha cave on the hill itself.

Within a short period Sri Ramana became popular and had a number of followers, who used to chant the verses of “Akshara Manamalai,” a song composed by the sage. At that time a great poet and versatile scholar, Kavyakanta Ganapati Sastri, who did medita-

tion for 12 long years and yet could not grasp the true meaning of *tapas* (ascetic practice), approached Sri Ramana, who until then had been keeping silence in his enlightened state.

The great sage broke his long silence and explained in Tamil as follows: “If one watches where the notion ‘I’ springs in the mind, the mind is absorbed into that. That is *tapas*. When a mantra is repeated, if attention is directed to the source where the sound is produced, the mind is absorbed in that. That is *tapas*.” The words of Sri Ramana convincingly satisfied all spiritual questions of Kavyakanta. This same scholar suggested to his devotees that “Ramana Maharshi” was the proper appellation for Sri Ramana and that they should address him as “Bhagavan.”

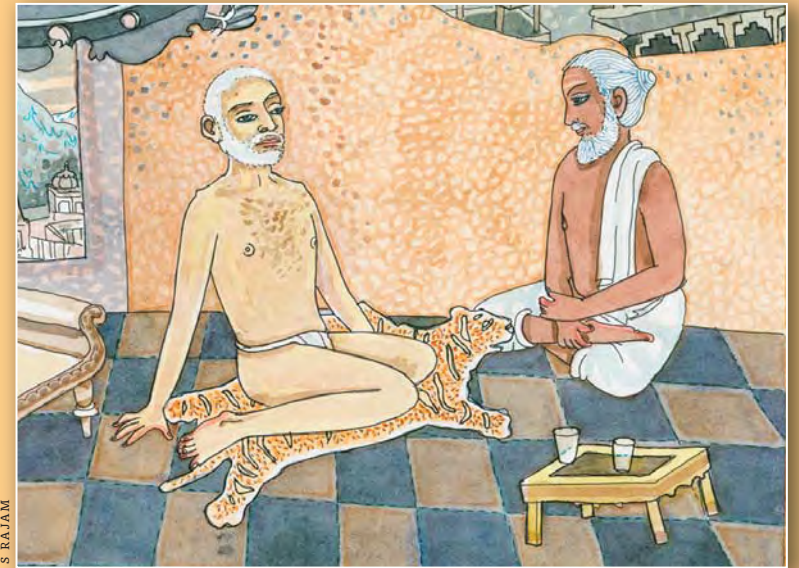
Kavyakanta took Mr. Frank Humphreys, an Assistant Superintendent of Police, to Bhagavan in 1911. Humphreys was the first European to visit Bhagavan, and his impressions were recorded in London’s *The International Psychic Gazette*: “I could only see his body was

not the man, it was the instrument of God, merely a sitting motionless corpse from which God was radiating terrifically. My own sensations were indescribable.” Humphreys questioned him, “Master, will I be helpful to the world?” Bhagavan’s answered, “Help yourself, then you will help the world.” Thus, Humphrey’s explained, the whole teaching of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi pivoted on his philosophy, ‘Know thyself, and you will know everything and have nothing more to know.’ Bhagavan advocates a very simple process of self-enquiry, namely asking oneself, ‘Who am I?’

Paul Brunton was a European journalist who visited Sri Ramana in the 1930s and gave a graphic picture of the great saint in *A Search in Secret India*, published in 1934. The Westerners who read this book and his two other books, *Secret Path* and *Message from Arunachala*, flocked to Ramana Ashram in great numbers. The famous English writer Somerset Maugham came, and his reminiscences were reflected in his novel *The Razor’s Edge*.

To some devotees at Ramana Ashram the Maharshi was revolutionary because of his notion that women and sudras (low castes) are fit enough to learn the Vedic teachings. He had employed as his close attendants men of depressed classes and a Muslim, and he had ridiculed the practice of untouchability as far back as 1917. His compassion enveloped both humans and animals. Maharshi was responsible for educating devotees about the beneficial effects of circumambulating Arunachala and himself set an example of going around it with his followers for quite a long period of time.

On his deathbed Bhagavan remarked, “They say I am going away, but where could I go? I am here.” His luminous presence is felt to this day by his devotees in Sri Ramana Ashram. As Pascaline Mallet remarks in her 1938 book, *Turn Eastwards*, “It was as if he had been living in a sphere beyond the limitations of time and space.”



**D**URING A PILGRIMAGE TO INDIA, the famed sage of Sri Lanka, Siva Yogaswami (1872–1964), visited Ramana Maharshi sometime in the 1930s or 40s. Their meeting was remarkable in its simplicity: the two sat in silence for an hour in Ramana’s austere room. Even when they met and parted, not a word was exchanged. After hearing of the visit, people were eager to find out what had transpired. Yogaswami

told them, “We said all there is to say.” Later he added, “We did not go with any desire. *Summa* we went. We stayed for about an hour. He did not speak at all. He is a great hero (*mahaviran*).” By *summa*, Yogaswami meant “perfect stillness, communion in silence.” Siva Yogaswami was the guru of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, founder of HINDUISM TODAY magazine.





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table where one can light a camphor lamp; many pilgrims just do this and do not go inside.

Roadside shops are numerous. Several,

**LOCAL ASHRAMS:** (above) Swami Raman Swaroopananda in his office; (below) the huge main hall at the Yogi Ramsuratkumar Ashram

selling devotional CDs, blare loud music from speakers. This and other disturbances are an unfortunate side effect of the popularity of girivalam. Long stretches of the road now have commercial establishments on both sides. There are even high-rise buildings that block your view of the holy hill as you walk.

Overall, I noticed a marked difference

between the pilgrims I spoke with here and those at the Kumbha Melas. There, many are rural folk, carrying their luggage on their head as they proceed through the Mela grounds, where they will stay for the night or longer. Here, the pilgrims look wealthier and healthier. They are peaceful and calm as they do this hours-long walking meditation. Since they will soon return home, they need not worry about accommodations or luggage. At most, they might be carrying a small bag.

Circling back around to the entrance of Arunachaleshwara Temple, we come upon a scene of mild chaos as those ending the girivalam mingle with those just beginning. Men are tossing offerings of camphor into a huge burning pot in front of the entrance, oblivious to the heat from the fire. Many of the women are lighting beautifully decorated earthen lamps on the ground and drawing kolam designs around them. So uplifted is everyone that few wish to be interviewed. Bhupati, age 30, kindly spoke with us. He credits his practice of girivalam for his good job, excellent wife and lovely son. The strong sense of devotion is overwhelming.

#### Local Ashrams

Tiruvannamalai is world famous for SRI RAMANA ASHRAMA, which experiences a constant stream of Indian and international visitors. As a reporter I have been to many ashrams, temples and pilgrimage destinations, including Amarnath Cave, and



attended all four Kumbha Melas. But here at Ramana Ashrama the serious level of self enquiry surpasses all of them. Everything revolves around the three words, "Who am I?" Devotees meditation intently in the ashram's Old Hall, where Ramana Maharshi used to give darshan, in the Om-shaped Virupaksha cave partway up Arunachala hill where he lived from 1899 to 1916, and at Skandasramam, the nearby tree-shaded hermitage where he lived from 1916 to 1922.

Ramana himself explained, "The thought 'Who am I?' will destroy all other thoughts, and like the stick used for stirring the burning fire, it will itself in the end get destroyed. Then, there will arise Self-Realization." It is the charming custom of this place to always refer to Ramana in the present tense, to acknowledge that he has not passed on, but is still living here on a subtle plane.

## Srisiva Jothi Mona Siddhar

One of the most impressive living saints we met here was Srisiva Jothi Mona Siddhar, head of the Dharma Paribalana Trust. (In the Tamil tradition a siddha is a highly accomplished sadhu or yogi, a "perfected one.") His picturesque ashram (below) is about 20 miles from Arunachala Hill, nestled between a hill of boulders and a rice field. It has a constant flow of 500 devotees a day, a large free feeding program, and is noted for successfully counseling those who are addicted to alcohol. Swami spoke to us in Tamil, translated by Palaniraj.



**SPIRITUAL COUNSELING:** (left) a thoughtful moment while advising devotees; (below) his beautiful ashram

blessings of all the siddhas there and the blessings of Lord Siva. This mountain is Lord Siva. That is true. I don't see it as a mountain. It is Siva Himself. This is Linga. It is nothing but Linga. In this form of Linga, it is Siva. This is the very base axis of the whole world. From here only all siddhis are obtained by others. Anyone who comes in contact with this place is blessed.

"Here you have to realize who 'I' am. If you realize who 'I' am through self-inquiry, nothing else is needed. But people forget. They go into bad ways and spoil their bodies. This should be prevented. In coming to Tiruvannamalai, knowing thyself should be the ultimate motive. An ordinary man asks for wealth. It is a different set of people who seek realization of themselves.

"When I was a householder confronted with problems in my family, I went in search of the ultimate truth through self-inquiry and came here, to Tiruvannamalai. This area is full of caves where I did penance for seven years, taking no solid food; only tea. Through such sadhana, I attained this position.

"This material body can decay. It will perish, whereas the soul is permanent. If you realize the soul is permanent, if you come to that level, then you will be able to see the other siddhas who are in subtle forms. I am in contact with such siddhas because I have attained that level.

"People must be aware of imposters. Nowadays there are so many people in the guise of swamijis. Those who just extract money from people are the imposters. A person who is not after money is the real swamiji.

"Those people who come to me, they are all blessed. Their ills are removed. They are taken to a higher level. Then they will be able to do sadhana. Sadhana is nothing but chanting the name of Siva. 'Om Namah Sivaya' is the best sadhana one can do. I myself don't believe in giving diksha (initiation), but try to uplift everyone who comes in contact with me.

"Like the Earth revolving around the Sun, if you go around the mountain, you get the

"People coming to me complain about the sufferings they confront in life. My job is to give solutions for that suffering. That is the first step. Then after some time, when they are getting rid of their problems, we instill in their mind the concept and importance of self-inquiry. First their physical needs have to be met, and then only are they asked to seek the higher levels. Only then are they in a position to pursue self inquiry. A man who is hungry may not understand."



## Yogi Ramsuratkumar Ashram





Nearby and almost equally well known is SESHADRI SWAMIGAL ASHRAM. Seshadri Swami (1870–1929) was a slightly older contemporary of Ramana and first to recognize him as a great spiritual being. He spotted the boy meditating in the Patala Lingam cave of Annamalaiyar temple, convinced him to move to a better location for his meditations and helped heal the insect bites he had suffered while in samadhi. Seshadri also protected him from local boys who tried to disturb him.

Seshadri was known as the “Saint with the Golden Hand.” People say that when he was four years old, he entered a shop and requested his mother buy him an image of Krishna he had picked out. The shop owner, charmed by the young boy’s sincerity, gave him the statue, one of many which had just been delivered. By the end of the day, the shop had sold out all of the Krishna statues, a most unusual event and one which led the shop keeper to say the boy had a golden hand.

Seshadri Swamigal Ashram is less crowded than Ramana Ashram, and very peaceful. There are a number of small shrines and the samadhi (burial) places of Seshadri Swami



RAMSURATKUMAR (1918–2001). While Ramana and Seshadri represent an austere, meditative approach to spiritual life, Ramsuratkumar’s orientation is devotional. Originally from Uttar Pradesh, Yogi was also known as “Fan Swami” for the palmyra fan he used to carry. He was humble and down to earth, always referring to himself as a “mad beggar.” For many years he lived on the streets. In his latter years he oversaw the construction of this ashram.

We visit this ashram several times, and always it is overflowing with devotees and pilgrims. A group of pundits from Maharashtra, specialists in *Shukla Yajur Veda*, are spending several weeks here, and we hear their Vedic chanting when we visit. The huge main hall, Pradhan Mandir, can accommodate 4,000 people at a

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**ABOUT TOWN:** (clockwise from above left) priest performs arati worship at the Agni Lingam temple along the holy path; students of the Vedic gurukulam of Ramana Ashram; the ashram’s free feeding for sadhus; Mooku Podi Siddhar, in green, walks past Annamalaiyar Temple

time. In the middle of this is a majestic metal statue of Ramsuratkumar which he installed himself. There is also a small Vedic gurukulam at this ashram.

The chant most often heard in this hall is the Yogi’s name: “Yogi Ramsuratkumar.” The saint gave this to his devotees as the best way to maintain touch with him. Also heard here is the mantra “Om Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram.” Yogi’s guru, Papa Ramdas, had initiated him with this mantra.

Once the ashram was built, Ramsuratkumar gave darshan to devotees in a small hut located inside this hall. The hut now houses a life-like statue of him. On the southern side is the samadhi shrine where lie his mortal remains, and along the walls are paintings of scenes from his life.

This ashram has perhaps the best infrastructure of any in Tiruvannamalai since it is a modern ashram, recently constructed. A huge kitchen is adjacent to a very neat and clean dining hall, where meals are provided free of charge for saints and devotees.

We spoke with two of Yogi’s senior disciples, Ma Devaki and Ma Vijay Lakshmi, who related three of his key sayings: “Remembering God is life. Forgetting God is death;” “Remembering God is dharma. Forgetting God is adharma;” and “My Father alone exists, nothing else, nobody else.” By “Father,” the

two disciples explained, he sometimes meant his guru, and other times his Supreme God, though to him there was no difference.

KAILASH ASHRAM here, a branch of Sri Kailash Ashram in Bengaluru, was founded in 1999 in collaboration with the government of Tamil Nadu. It runs a full-time music school with 72 students under the direction of Ravi Shankar, an expert in the nadaswaram horn. The school offers training in vocal, thavil, devaram, nadaswaram, Bharatanatyam, violin and mridangam. Its students often perform at the Annamalaiyar Temple, especially during the Karthika Deepam festival. They are also invited to other cultural and religious events in the town.

SRI ARUNACHALA RAMANA ATMA VIDYA MANDIR is a new establishment on the outskirts of town, run by Swami Ramana Swaroopananda. He greets us most warmly, as he just recently visited HINDUISM TODAY’s headquarters in Kauai, Hawaii. In fact, we repeatedly meet people here who are familiar with the magazine or have even met its founder, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, during one of his several visits here.

Fluent in both Tamil and English, Swami Swaroopananda has set up this temple/ashram based on the teachings of Ramana Maharshi. He is especially known for his spiritual discourses, and is a major proponent of

girivalam. He deplores the commercialization of the girivalam route, which he feels is distracting to the serious pilgrims. He is also concerned about developments on the hillside itself which, in some places, already obscure the view of the hill.

Swami explained, “Again and again, Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi said, ‘Even Mount Kailash is only the abode of Lord Siva; but here Arunchala is Siva himself.’ That is why our Nandi here faces the hill. Ramana had seen inside the hill with his inner vision and said it is a garden with a waterfall and lake where yogis and siddhas are meditating continuously. He said if you come here and sit at the feet of Arunachala, your mind just melts and you become one with Siva. Arunachala, which is outside, is within us as our Self. That is the purpose of this place: self-inquiry—Who am I?”

He mentioned how the famous musician Ilayaraja and the even more famous actor Rajinikanth have been instrumental in promoting the area. Both hold Ramana Maharshi in high regard and often pilgrimage here.

### Saints, Sadhus and Siddhars

Shortly after arriving in Tiruvannamalai, we are told of Mooku Podi Siddhar, also known as “snuff swami” for his love of powdered tobacco. He lives at the Bhupati Coffee Shop

## Streets, Ashrams and Temples of Tiruvannamalai





and sleeps on a bench under a green cloth which usually completely covered him. He seldom speaks, and only rarely looks anyone in the eye. Any glance of acknowledgement from him is considered a great blessing. He is known to shout at and chase away some people. But for all this, he is considered one of the most spiritually powerful of all sadhus in the area.

One day we stop at the coffee shop just as the scruffy holy man is coming out and starting to walk on the main road. Immediately a large number of people start to follow him, hoping he will offer them some form of recognition. Traffic on the road nearly comes to a stop as onlookers salute him with folded hands. He walks about ten minutes to Udupi Brindhavan restaurant, where he is immediately served food and afterwards enjoys several packets of snuff devotees left for him.

According to our guide, Palaniraj, he sleeps and eats wherever he pleases, and none will chase him away. For me this encounter is an extraordinary experience, his direct glance alone putting me into a state of bliss. Like Srisiva Jothi Moni Siddhar (sidebar page 25), Mooku Podi is regarded as a siddhar of the highest caliber, though certainly his manner is strange. These are people one only hears stories about from distant places and times; actually meeting one face to face is an



experience not easily forgotten.

By comparison, SADHVI VARALAKSHMI, age 60, is a far more traditional and sedate person. Born in Andhra Pradesh, she was so attracted by Arunachala Hill and Ramana Maharshi during a visit that she decided to settle here permanently. She did girivalam daily for 22 years, and eventually built a

temple to Goddess Lalithambigai, a form of Durga. She also founded the Ramana Maharshi Old Age Home. Both are located in her well-appointed ashram where we meet.

She has a charming presence, blissful and contented. She will chant "Ramana" or "Arunachala" periodically as one sits with her. She doesn't teach in the sense of giving lectures, does not accept any disciples, but directs everyone to the Ramana's teachings.

MADHAVI KANUMURI, 45, is not a sadhvi, but considers Ramana Maharshi her guru and calls herself a spiritual counselor. She explains the mission of her Arunachala Ramana Sundara Charitable Trust: "Now that I am blissful and contented, I want to share my experiences with others, so that they can also attain this state of blissfulness. I offer spiritual counseling to around 2,000 people. I hold satsang classes and programs for the empowerment of women."

In a chance meeting at Kailash Ashram we were introduced to a young and dynamic sannyasini, SADHVI AMBA, who resides

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**THE TOWN'S PEOPLE:** (above) Sadhvi Amba; (below, left to right) Chile-based tour operator Andres, fourth from right, with his group from South America; lone sadhu walks the girivalam path during the day

here while her own ashram, Antakarna Dhyana Nilayam, is being built. She considers herself a disciple of Bhagwan Nityananda of Ganeshpuri, though he attained Mahasamadhi before she was born.

Our interview with her is profound. Here we will share only her views on girivalam, reserving the rest for a future issue. "The experience during girivalam just calms you intensely, completely blanks out all your thoughts for the entire three and a half hours, especially if you are chanting 'Om Namah Shivaya.' You can literally feel some layer of karma getting cleansed, some burden is getting shifted from you, and you can feel that emptiness within. This is a land of spiritual discipline, of knowledge. If you want to attain anything spiritually, this is the hub. I have been to many places in Himalayas. I have circumambulated Mount Kailash. But the feeling, the energy that I find in Arunachala is something I have not experienced elsewhere."

#### Westerner Seekers

We encounter many foreign seekers in smaller and larger numbers at every ashram and along the girivalam path. Their sincerity is impressive. Local sources informed us that on a typical day 50 to 60% of the devotees at Ramana Ashram are non-Indians, a like number at Seshadri Ashram and perhaps

10% of those participating in girivalam on any given day. During the hottest season their numbers will be much less.

Andres Wormull, 45, has been to Tiruvannamalai nearly twenty times, bringing groups from his home country of Chile to share the magic of the place. He tells us, "I just explain a little bit to my group members about Arunachala. The rest they have to feel themselves. After all, there must be a reason why, over the ages, all the mystics and saints have given so much importance to this holy place. That is the difficult part; you have to shut your mind so that your heart opens."

Meenakshi Ammal, 66, originally from Ireland, is one of several we meet who were instructed by Satya Sai Baba to move here. She is a kind and graceful lady who runs a huge website, [www.arunachalasamudra.org](http://www.arunachalasamudra.org). She was most helpful in our research for this article. Among many insights she shared with us, one on Ramana's teachings stood out: "He said that self-inquiry was the only sadhana that has no danger, because self-inquiry is the only sadhana that attenuates, thins, the mind. When you do mantra and sutra, you create a powerful mind to destroy the mind. When you do self-inquiry you are reducing the mind, withdrawing your vasa-nas [impressions from the past] and everything else."

"While our Indians want to go and settle abroad for gaining material gains," observes Swami Brahmananda Saraswati, "foreigners leave their material possessions and settle here so they can live in blissfulness and peace. There are thousands who have settled here once they tasted the nectar of Arunachala."

#### In Conclusion

Scriptures clearly state that one who has had the darshan of Arunachala will be liberated; that the significance and importance of Arunachala is so great that just by its remembrance, *smaranam*, thereafter one will be forever liberated and blessed. Everyone we met in Tiruvannamalai pointed this out. The place and its people are quite unlike what one finds in Haridwar/Rishikesh, where pilgrims go to bathe in the Ganga, worship at some temples and visit a few ashrams, but then embark on river rafting and other holiday activities. Here one does not find such duality of purpose diluting the spiritual efforts. Arunachala's impact is unique in that here devotee focus entirely on sadhana—from the pilgrims on girivalam to the longer-term residents in the area's many ashrams, and even among many common folk who happen to live here. All in all, Arunachala Hill and the surrounding area is an extraordinary place. 🍵

## Where the World Comes to Meditate







SHAN SHOI

CULTURE

## In Defense of the Full-Time Homemaker

Though indispensable to strong, healthy families and a stable society, homemakers are under-appreciated, disdained and misunderstood

VANDANA NATHOO, MAURITIUS

**T**HURSDAY MORNING. ALANKRITA GUJADHUR, a homemaker in Floreal, Mauritius, has a hectic day ahead as she makes plans for an elaborate dinner party this evening for a few important clients of her husband. She needs to grocery shop, then head off to the farmers' market, and make sure she takes the dog for its vet appointment. She does all the errands herself so that her husband can relax when he gets home, allowing him to focus on being the breadwinner. Both spouses find that her being at home allows him to thrive in the workplace, secure in the thought that the family is safe and taken care of. He can take on more responsibility, work late and travel whenever needed, without having to worry about finding time for that school meeting. He finds that weekends are actually relaxing, instead of racing around to get chores done.

Panna Gill, a 41-year-old stay-at-home mum in Guragaon, Delhi, has just finished serving breakfast to her family and is getting lunch boxes ready for school. When her hus-

band arrives home in the evening, the bills will be paid, the house clean and a home-cooked meal ready on the stove. She's looking forward to a calm day at last, after a hectic few days of helping her 10-year-old study for a national exam.

At the risk of sounding too laid back, Panna values finding time for herself on those rare quiet, reflective afternoons when chores are done and just before the children are back from school—a time not filled with lists of accomplishments, but with peace and quiet: a long drive to an exhibition she's been yearning to see, enjoying a new book or a phone conversation with someone with whom she's lost touch. Those are her moments, a time to rediscover herself and do the things she never had time for as a working woman. Staying at home is a newfound luxury she feels humbled and grateful for on a daily basis.

Aarty Punjabi, a 35-year-old mother in California, has been busy with her young child since early morning. Her to-do list is longer than usual today; besides organizing

her home and preparing the meals, she needs to book the next family holiday and get the car serviced in time to pick up her eldest. On other days, she tries to catch an occasional coffee with a friend, coupled with a good dose of volunteering at the Art of Living center, which she finds extremely fulfilling. Being a homemaker has given her more time for reflection, introspection and, of course, spiritual pursuits. Beyond the obvious joys of spending her days with her children, there have been benefits to staying at home she could not have imagined. Yes, being a traditional housewife is a joy in itself.

Such women exist in millions and are incredibly important to families and to our society, yet they are under-appreciated, hardly respected, and live under the controversial name of "homemaker." These women work for the people they love the most. Recognition isn't through an appraisal but happens when the family praises their food. Job satisfaction doesn't come in the form of a promotion or salary hike but through the tacit gratitude for their willingness to com-

promise on a career for the good of the family. These are women who know in their hearts that staying home to raise their children is a good choice for the whole family. Whether they do it from the outset of their marriage or make the challenging shift from career woman to stay-at-home mother, it is a choice that is incredibly rich and rewarding, albeit challenging. In her book *In Praise of Stay-at-Home Moms*, Dr. Laura Schlessinger, a highly experienced licensed marriage/family therapist, affirms: "Realize that your current sacrifices will make for lasting bonds and a stronger family, in addition to a more cohesive community."

Hindu teachings speak of how men and women generally dwell in different natures and have different but complementary roles, advising that a wife and mother find and give strength to the family and community through her sacred role as a homemaker. Memorably, they explain that "the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world." The homemaker is also a higher conduit for our ancestral traditions. She is key to ultimately ensuring the strength and continuity of our Hindu culture and beliefs.

Perusing these teachings can be stinging to those of us raised among liberal forces in mass media, academia or even those surrounding us. Most people are entrenched in opposition to this traditional role. The idea often sounds primitive to the modern woman herself, in a society where she is encouraged to act, think and behave like a man. The crucial role of a homemaker—the child's first guru and the preserver and enhancer of the shakti of the home, the family and the community at large—has been so effectively disparaged in the last several decades that any reference to this lifestyle is perceived as an attempt at subjugation. This dharma has nothing to do with subjugation.

I was myself raised by an educated, ambitious mum who affirmed to me daily that I could do everything and more than my brothers could do. After my university scholarship, I went on to a full-time career in banking, climbing the corporate ladder till I reached senior management. I read the teachings of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami with much interest early in my marriage but was quick to dismiss the traditional role as inapplicable to the not-so-Stepford-oriented me. I loved the rest of the teachings enough, so I persevered. Then I had my first child. One day when I got home from work, my mum greeted me excitedly at the door saying my son had taken his first steps! I con-



AMAN GUJADHUR

**OUTSOURCING PARENTHOOD?:** (opposite) Aarty Punjabi with her two children during a typical day. Aarty has decided to be the one to establish culture and family values to her kids. (above) Roshan and Vandana Nathoo enjoy time as a family.

gratulated them both while trying to hide the immense sense of regret about all the moments I was missing out on. When I became pregnant with my second, the principles of stay-at-home parenting really started to make logical sense. I resigned and started my own business delivering training to the banking sector one week a month and writing the courses from home the rest of the time. After my third child, I innately felt that my role as a homemaker was my personal expression of unselfish love and took steps to gradually cease all my commercial activities. Many people around me, Hindus and others, struggled to find acceptance with this.

I was in the fortunate position to be able to make my own decision to stay home. To me, being home is incredibly empowering. Aspiring to become a better person, a better mother, a better cook or a better spouse is also being ambitious. In my home, the competition is with myself, not with anyone else. Mothers at home must not let their sense of self-worth be measured in terms of how much they don't earn; they should be free to stay home without feeling pressured to justify their education, or fearing being labeled. Sadly, a mother at home is often portrayed as lazy, a waste of education, undervalued, weak or antiquated. But women, mostly mothers who do this, know what a responsible job raising children is and how much work is involved in making a house a home. The flow of the family dynamic becomes easier when one partner stays home full time to care for

the household. Staying home reduces stress for the entire family, ultimately creating a home filled with strength, success and love.

Certainly, it isn't always rosy—after being an independent woman, I am hit hard by the stigma that is associated with being "just" a housewife when I'm asked what I do. Yes, I may now be dependent on my husband for money, but then he is dependent on me for so many things as well; a well-maintained house, healthy and tasty home-made food, lovingly raising our children and so much more. A homemaker is a powerful, influential position that should be held in awe, not disgraced. Let us hold the hand of every woman who finds contentment in making home and family a priority, and tell her that she is not less. She is more. She is a dying breed, and she is valuable beyond words. Every day I unlearn a little of what I was taught about career and relearn the lost arts of maintaining home, cultivating relationships, hands-on childrearing, family traditions and all the aspects of nurturing.

As a society we need to adjust the narrative if we are serious about rebuilding the family unit. A man in a loving home will be happy to go to work recharged and fulfilled. Relationships will also certainly have a lot more longevity if both partners are fulfilling their part of the contract. Of course, second to providing and protecting, husbanding is also part of men's responsibility to the marriage equation—making and keeping the marriage gratifying and fulfilling for his wife as well. The husband is the strong second part of a successful homemaker equation. Only if he values his wife's presence at home can this arrangement work equitably.

Surely, providing girls with all the education they need and desire remains vital, and they should be encouraged to work and climb the corporate ladder until they get married, or at least until they have children. This opportunity will allow them to prove their mettle—and learn firsthand that the corporate world isn't as glamorous as it's made out to be. But real empowerment is having the right to choose between home-making and a career—certainly, neither path should be shamed. The choice to become a home-maker is a personal decision, as it is one of the most selfless acts a person can make. The choice must be made first by the mother, second, by the spouse, and then by the family as a whole. Once financial arrangements are discussed, she will then find that the experience of staying home full time is an endearing one. The responsibility of





AMAN GUADHUR

caring for a family comes with great rewards.

No one is saying being a homemaker is going to be easy. Some days will be harder at home, with a 24-hour job and a never-ending to-do list; you would rather fix your hair, put on your makeup and high heels and dash out the door for a full work day and forget about everything for the next ten hours. Making the transition from a businesswoman is an overwhelming life change. The decision to stay home for the well-being of other people and raise a wholesome household, sacrificing one's personal security, takes a serious amount of dedication and courage.

When I started out on this topic, I had the misconception that this was a cultural issue mostly specific to Hindus or at best, to Eastern thinking. The more I read, the more I realized that this concept is very much present in most other cultures.

In Catholicism, for example, many proclaim that the traditional marriage model is very similar to what is espoused in the Bible. Many calling themselves agnostic or atheist also subscribe to it. There are numerous YouTube videos, established since its inception or more recently, about homemaking by Stay-at-Home-Mums (SAHM), with a respectable number of followers. These bloggers also animate websites, with followers on Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and other social media. The topic is subject to much debate online, but surprisingly, not at all written off by the audience. Like vegetarianism, staying home to care for one's family seems to be a growing trend in the West and a declining trend in the East!

#### ON CAREER AND EMPOWERMENT

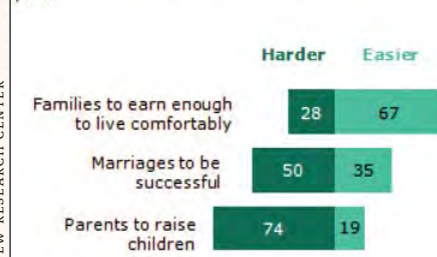
All too often, a career is associated with empowerment. Too many women equate their identity with their work, not seeing it as just one part of their life. Young women who have been pushed their entire lives to "achieve" and "reach their potential" are afraid that if they step off the corporate ladder in order to care for children, they will never climb back to the same level. Unfortunately, that's often true. You might not be CEO if you choose to make family your first priority, and that's a loss. But sacrificing the chance to create a close relationship with your children and raise them in the best possible manner is a

loss, too. It is a brave call to shift our priorities from the feverish pursuit of professional success to the more satisfying nurturing of our children.

We need to validate the role of the mother and the work that goes into it, instead of perpetuating the myth that the work that takes place in the home is somehow less meaningful, less valuable, less important. Today, so many career women are constantly trying to juggle everything from house to kids. People can do many things at once, but they cannot do them all well at the same time. Many career women are emotionally and physically exhausted with guilt and stress and are torn

#### Women, Work and Families

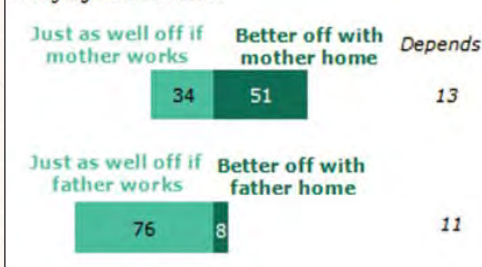
% saying the increasing number of women working for pay outside the home has made it easier/harder for ...



**RESEARCH RESULTS:** A 2013 Pew Research Center survey finds that the public is of two minds about the gains mothers have made in the workplace—most recognize the clear economic benefits to families, but many voice concerns about the toll that having a working mother may take on children or even marriage. About half (51%) of survey respondents said children are better off if a mother is home and doesn't hold a job. Only 8% say the same about a father.

#### The Public Differs in Role of Fathers and Mothers

% saying children are ...

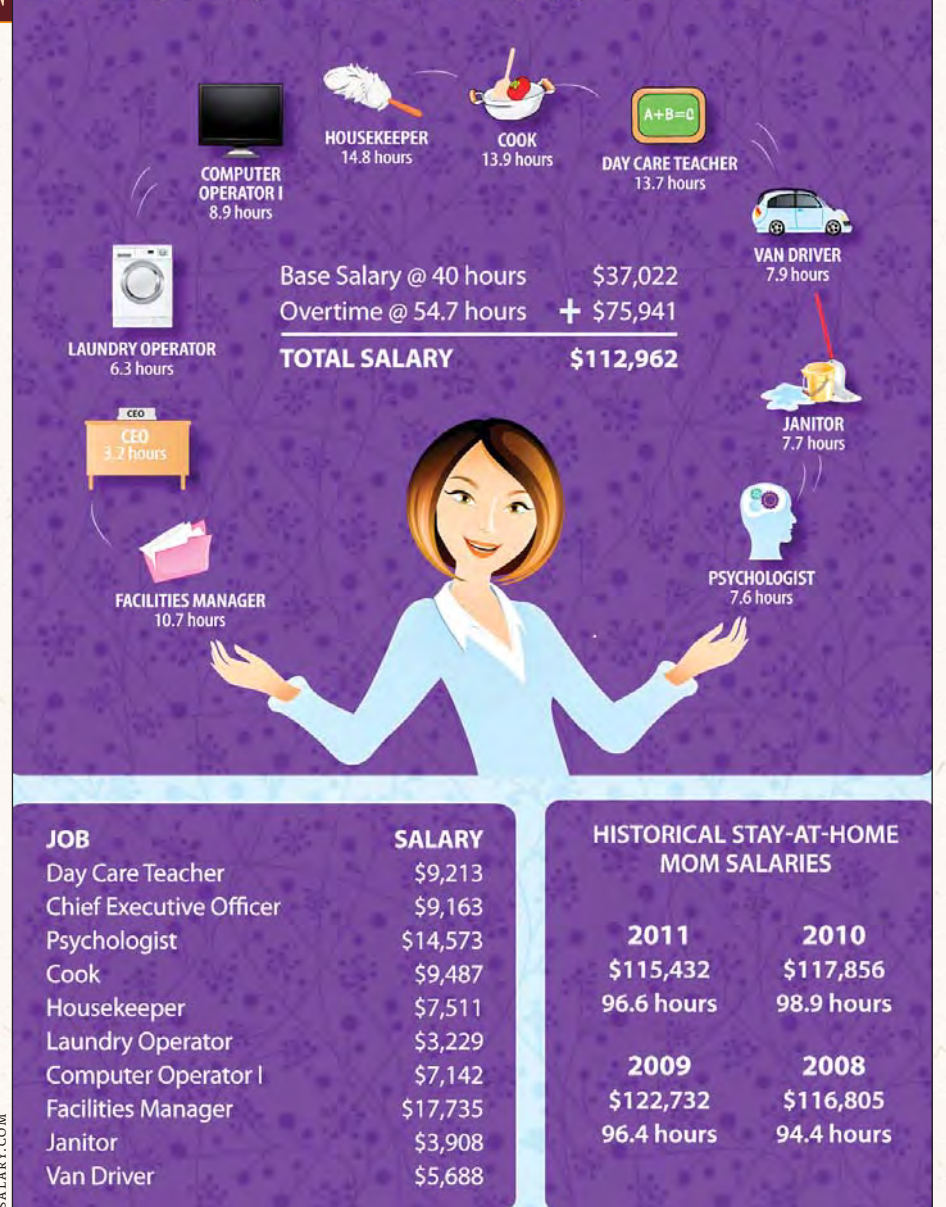


**SUPERMOM:** (left) Vandana Nathoo spends part of each day teaching her children values and religious tenets they might not receive from school or a housesitter. The kids—Tarun, 12; Kapil, 9, and Kavish, 7—all participate in the day's lessons with critical feedback; (right) Infographic shows the various skills required by a homemaker. The hypothetical salary shows the monetary value of her work at home.

when they have to leave a sick child at home or constantly have to miss school events. Suzanne Venker, author of five books on marriage, feminism and gender politics, argues that women cannot be successful in the workplace and at home simultaneously. They can achieve the balance they so desperately seek only by planning their careers around motherhood, rather than planning motherhood around their careers. Drawing on extensive research and her own experience as a mother and a teacher, she makes a powerful case for the link between the problems of today's children and the absence of mothers from the home. "If motherhood were viewed as the full-time job it is," Ms. Venker contends, "it would not be considered something we could do on the side, and women would be less inclined to try to balance career and motherhood, only to discover, many stress-filled years later, that it cannot be done." Let's face it—working mothers have heroically accepted the deal they have been handed, the debilitating task of being a man and a woman at once.

Why can't we have it all, many women say? "The Balance Myth," as the judicious mingling of career and home is known, says blogger "The Thinking Housewife," is often a casual neglect of children, marriage or home—certainly of a home in which the kids do grow up, the home is taken care of, food is served daily and chores do get done. Many a working woman, except those in mentally easy jobs or with grown-up children, has had to compromise on one or more aspects of taking care of children, husband or home. Sometimes all she lays aside is her own peace and composure. Many surveys demonstrate a precipitous decline in female happiness. Economist Stevenson and Wolfers, in the "Paradox of Declining Female Happiness," analyzed the happiness trends of US citizens between 1970 and 2005 and discovered that American women rated their overall life satisfaction higher than men in the 1970s. By the 1990s, women were less happy than men. This relative unhappiness softened after the turn of the century, but men continue to enjoy a higher sense of subjective well-being that is at least as high, if not higher, than women's.

On average, stay-at-home Moms juggle 94.7 hours of work.



Sometimes the most important thing she neglects is the love of her husband, or perhaps moral guidance for her children, mostly in their teenage years. Of course, some full-time homemakers neglect home, too. They are certainly not better than working women. They simply have more time and energy to accomplish the same things.

#### ON CHILDREN

The natural family structure—where young children are cared for in their own home by those closest to them—is no longer the norm around the world. Not so long ago, most families could afford the mother in the home. Stacked against them now are various government policies and a strong feminist movement, while a political and social elite has devalued the role and the importance of care in the home.

We often mistake money, ambition and status as the standard for productivity. But

don't we admire the inherent nobility of our grandmothers, who chose to selflessly nurture a human being from infancy to adulthood out of sheer duty and love? Caring for children is not an item to be checked off on our bucket list but a responsibility to uphold and a privilege to enjoy. Children are whole individuals who need to be nurtured with constant reassurance and warmth. We need to think of mothers at home as a long-term investment in families. By investing in them, we invest in the future of our family as well as that of society, as we raise boys and girls to be strong and good and turn them into peaceful and loving men and women. Certainly, whilst this nurturing comes at a cost, it also comes with great and lasting benefits to children. When you make this choice, you get those very things you thought you would lose being home—confidence, self-respect and peace. Of course, there's the oft-stated saying that on our deathbeds it won't be ac-



colades we will reach for or bank balances but the hands of our children. The memories that will touch us most are not the corporate successes but the meaningful moments with our family.

A pertinent *New York Times* article last year by Erica Komisar states, "As a psychoanalyst and parent-guidance expert, I have seen society increasingly devalue mothering while idealizing work. At the same time, I have seen an epidemic of troubled children who are being diagnosed and medicated earlier and earlier with ADHD, early aggression and other behavioral and social disorders. Many people say these two phenomena are utterly unrelated. I believe they are connected. These disorders, I believe, are at least in part children's responses to stress in the environment and an inability to regulate emotional responses to it. In my clinical practice over the past 20 years, I have seen again and again ways that these disorders connect to the absence of mothers on a daily basis in children's lives." I personally found that serenity comes as you find more time to take things calmly and easily; I became a much more patient mother when I stayed home, more present for my hyperactive middle child who found it difficult to sit still for even five minutes. I refused to go the psychologist way and found that the more TLC and communication I provided him with, the better things got.

Importantly, research shows that children from traditional nuclear families, in which the mother takes care of the kids and the father brings home the bread, fare better statistically than in any other type of familial

arrangement.

The National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey for the years 1988–1994 analyzed 219 households with single-parents and 780 dual-parent households as predictors for primary outcome variables of children's Body Mass Index (BMI), dietary nutri-

ent intakes and blood cholesterol. Children of single-parent households were significantly more overweight than children of dual-parent households.

The documentary *Demographic Winter* demonstrates how pulling women out of the home and putting them into the workforce has not only made them less happy, but "has created a dying population in America along with a rising rate of child delinquency. Beyond the better citizens and contributors to society that housewives groom and the happier lives they enjoy, marrying a career woman is fraught with difficulties." Even Penelope Trunk, who helps women manage their careers, admits: "The conclusion, that marriages and families work better with a full-time housewife, is hard to swallow but hard to deny."

#### ON DOMESTICITY

The home serves as our refuge, the place for our basic needs and so much more. It's where we find solace, rest and comfort. It is a place of protection from the world and all that it demands. With all the diverse roles that the home plays in our life, it makes sense that someone's duty is to stay true to keeping it a home. I emphasize making my home an oasis of warmth, a world that my family looks forward to coming back to and winding down in. All guests in my home consistently comment on that vibe.

Homemakers need to cultivate the skills, not only of housekeeping, but the more profound objective of creating a home. Homemaking is the deliberate cultivation of love, connection and productivity in family rela-

tionships. Homemaking is about comforting, communicating and caring for each other, close friends and extended families, as well as the occasional guest. Anyone can keep house; not everyone knows how to make a home.

Domesticity is tiring, often frustrating and mundane, but it is also in this routine that we create love through the simplest acts such as mending those buttons on that favorite shirt, baking a cake to celebrate, making that special dish that will bring the family together at dinner or simply chatting with the kids about their day. Without these domestic acts, without the homemaker, there would be no home. This, of course, is easier for me to say, as I have gone the corporate route and I am content in the feeling of "been there, done that." However, I have met quite a few conflicted women attempting to do it all—frantically trying to juggle commuting, workloads and deadlines, plus the stress of keeping house and raising children. I have also witnessed lots of mindless technology, social media and TV being used to keep the children busy, thereby taking the place of quality time with family. My mother was a school principal, and I saw how stressed and perpetually busy she was, juggling her responsibilities between a career and home. I envied my cousins who were fetched from school by their mums and those greeted back home with fresh, hot pakoras and a patient, listening ear about their day.

#### THE TWO-INCOME TRAP

Many women work solely for economic reasons, and that is certainly an excellent reason.



**CULINARY CULTURE:** Vandana is there, at home, to transfer basic culture to her kids. This includes mita hara, controlling one's appetite and keeping within a reasonable level of fitness.

However, bestselling author Suzanne Venker claims that the two-income family is a trap for many. Her argument is that it encourages people to think about family solely in terms of economics, when, in fact, breadwinning is only part of the equation. The burnout that results from not having someone home to do everything mothers have historically done is huge, she contends. Another interesting expose on this subject, from Elizabeth Warren and her daughter Amelia Tyagi, shows that, astonishingly, sending mothers to work has made families more vulnerable to financial disaster than ever before. Today's

two-income family earns 75% more money than its single-income counterpart of a generation ago but has 25% less discretionary income to cover living costs. In *The Four Laws of Debt-Free Prosperity*, author Blaine Harris states: "Your level of expenses will always rise to your level of income unless you protest to the contrary." Indeed, because we spend what we make, we grow accustomed to a certain lifestyle that is predicated on two incomes, at which point it seems impossible for one parent to stay home. But as it turns out very rarely would the decision to move to one income result in having to cut

## The Spiritual Homemaker's Vital Role

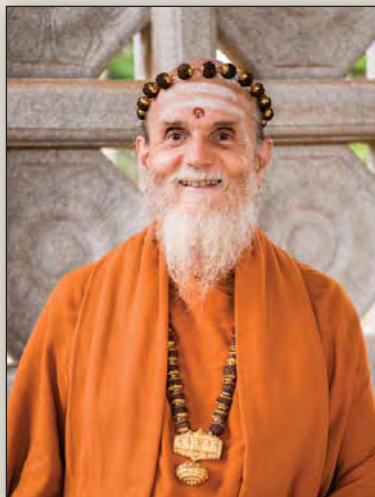
IN TODAY'S WORLD, RELIGIOUS COUPLES WHO CHOOSE TO HAVE THE wife follow the path of homemaker commonly make their decision based on perspectives of faith. The Hindu perspective is built around family cohesiveness and the belief that life is an opportunity for spiritual unfoldment, and that, after many incarnations on Earth each soul attains God-realization and liberation from the cycles of rebirth. In each life, we play a different role, with unique duties and challenges.

During his fifty years of ministry, my guru, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, visited many hundreds of Hindu homes. Often these families had achieved material abundance, with both husband and wife leading successful, full-time professional careers. However, most importantly, he also noticed that in such homes there was little spiritual vibration or religious activity. From his perspective, the priorities of a traditional Hindu life were not being upheld. Instead, professional and material success had become the priority, and spiritual

progress was given little or no attention. He concluded that the modern trend for Hindu wives to have full time careers was taking a serious toll on spiritual progress, not just for the couple, but also for their offspring. He decided that there was no point in even giving initiation, diksha, to his married devotees unless the family was following the ancient dharmas for men and women, called *purusha dharma* and *stri dharma*. In Himalayan Academy's *Hindu Lexicon* these are defined as follows:

**PURUSHA DHARMA:** "Man's duty." Man's proper pattern of conduct; traditional observances, vocation, behavior and attitudes dictated by spiritual wisdom. Characterized by leadership, integrity, accomplishment, sustenance of the family. Notably, the married man works in the world and sustains his family as abundantly as he can.

**STRI DHARMA:** "Woman's duty." Traditional conduct, observances, vocational and spiritual patterns which bring spiritual fulfillment and



societal stability. Characterized by modesty, quiet strength, religiousness, dignity and nurturing of family. Notably, she is most needed and irreplaceable as the maker of the home and the educator of their children as noble citizens of tomorrow.

From the point of view of a Hindu guru, the benefit derived from a couple's following *purusha* and *stri dharma* is that the home is more likely to be cohesive, stable and strongly religious. Of course, for this to happen the wife needs to value the spiritual strength of the home more than a professional career. Experience tells us two things. First, running a home and a career is nearly impossible without overly stressing the wife and mother. Second, her decision to stay at home is a form of renunciation. Just as a monk gives up the possibility of career in order to empower his spiritual life and the monastery, so the woman surrenders her career opportunities to empower her family. Like a monk, she contentedly stays within the precincts of her home. Like a monk, she renounces the call for social validation and interaction, success, name and fame. Like a monk, she focuses on her inner-most spiritual and familial duties.

My Gurudeva taught: "The struggle for women's liberation has affected women the world over—in India, Iran, Europe, Japan and elsewhere. In North America, I began a campaign informally called the Hindu Women's Liberation Movement. It is not what you might expect. Its purpose is to liberate our Hindu women from the liberators, to save them from worldliness and to allow them to fulfill their natural dharma as mother and wife. For a religious woman, being

liberated starts with resigning from her job and coming home. Once she is home, she is liberated and liberated and liberated. Working in the world keeps her in the outer dimensions of consciousness, while being at home allows her to live in the depth of her being. I have seen this work many times. There are so many distractions and influences in the world today that divert women away from being a wife and mother."

A religious family life is strongly dependent on having a dynamic shrine room in which daily puja is performed with all family members attending. This power is amplified when personal daily vigils are held by husband and wife for the purpose of japa, scriptural study and meditation. Ideally, the family attends weekly worship at a nearby temple and goes on yearly distant pilgrimage.

Gurudeva stressed that one of the possibilities for pure couples is that they could give birth to a son who would become a monastic, a leader of the faith far into the future. He wrote: "Each fellowship family prays to birth a son for the monastery. Prior to conception, parents mix with the swamis and beseech the Gods to bring through a divine soul destined to perpetuate our lineage."

Undeniably, for modern Hindu women, the cultural pressures to have a full-time career are strong. However, we hope that some women will take time to reflect on following the traditional Hindu *stri dharma* to further the most important goal of life, which is spiritual unfoldment. This can be her gift to her husband and children, to the religion and, ultimately, to the world.



into providing for the basic needs of our families.

Of course, the economics of a single income will require a more frugal lifestyle, at least in the beginning, in order to avoid the debt spiral. Many women go halfway by choosing remote jobs, telecommutes, flexible schedules, part-time job shares, freelance jobs or, even better, turning a passion into a home business. More companies offer options to collaborate in one of these ways, thereby embracing working from home as a way to attract top talent, boost productivity and provide work-life balance to employees who are increasingly stretched thin in their jobs and in life. Additionally, there are women who choose “jobs” instead of careers. While they may indeed work, their minds and time are not taken up with the strategizing, workloads and harsh deadlines required by a full-fledged, long-hours career. Many such talented women decide to become secretaries or schoolteachers because these jobs leave them freer to look after their homes; I know of a few qualified chartered accountants who work as accounting teachers and make a point of reaching home at the same time as their kids get back from school.

Another trend is bloggers and vloggers who have made this their sole source of income. [Livingonadime.com](http://Livingonadime.com), which has both husband and wife living on one income of solely blogging about ways to be frugal, advises: “With one less income, we are actually able to put more in savings than we did before.” One thing most people don’t realize is just how much money can be saved by staying home and not working. Meals eaten out alone can cost thousands. Just do-



**HER DECISION:** Aarty Punjabi gardening with her two young children, a typical day

on bringing them down. When we were short of our retirement fund, I was adamant against trading my kids and home for outside employment. Down the line, we have much more, in both material terms and contentment, than I would have ever made if I’d left the helm of the ‘home ship.’”

#### TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES

Men are traditionally protectors and providers, in nearly all cultures since the start of time. It’s biological. However, plenty of men are not like that anymore; decades of suppression by women and feminists have got in the way of their basic instinct to be strong, to protect and provide. When they are being brave and strong, they are called domineering; and when they provide, they are called patronizing.

Gender roles in the past brought harmony to most couples, since women and men could take care of each other in their own different ways. Equality does not mean sameness—female nature is inherently different from male nature. Trying to act against our nature means us playing at being men and, of course, we make poor men; harmonious gender relations are dependent on men being men with all their masculine glory, and women being women with all their feminine power and the vulnerabilities that come with it. If relationships are cultivated in love and we each play to our strengths and work in tandem, both parties can live

ing stuff around the house like painting, garage sales and bargain grocery shopping can make staying home worth it. Not only that, but all the day-care costs—gas, second car maintenance and repair, insurance and payments—really add up. Heidi Aas, a Colorado mom with two children away from the nest, makes this statement: “The truth is, after taxes and other work-related expenses, most second incomes add little, if any, real money to the family’s bottom line. Expenses are higher because no one has the time to work

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together in harmony, in loving homes, loving marriages and loving families. When we work against each other, we experience a breakdown in marriages, as statistics now show.

Every relationship has its polarities that maintain the balance for ongoing attraction and connection. Where masculine energy is single-focused, action-oriented and practical, feminine energy is fluid, intuitive and creative. Working with our natural tendencies, my husband’s role is in providing and mine is in nurturing. Both are equally important and necessary. I learned early on in my marriage that there was harmony when I was a soft place to land. Since then, I strive to be supportive of my man’s dreams and appreciative of his efforts instead of belittling or competing with him. Our grandmothers and other seasoned women attest to their successes at home, which occurred only after paying attention to their own nature, instincts and intuitions. They were consistent in fulfilling their full responsibility without expecting immediate returns. This is also a popular idea shared by best-selling author Laura Doyle in her book *The Surrendered Wife*: “When women know exactly what their role in the marriage is, and what they provide in terms of value to the relationship, they fulfil their roles to the other spouse and support them, so that they can in turn fulfil their role and support you.”

In Hinduism, this is called the ida and pingala natures. A more modern version of this has surged in many communities, both online and off. This new-age movement also speaks of how masculinity and femininity are meant to balance each other to create a harmonized marriage, family, community

and world at large. In their own words, a traditional woman is “someone who embraces the fact that a man will not stay with you for your career but will enjoy you because you’re nice to him, you are feminine in nature, you make him feel good,... psychological femininity being the most important, but that can be enhanced by a sense of femininity—grace, elegance, manners and poise. This doesn’t just mean the surface stuff, like

“In the home, the mother is likened to the Shakti Deity. She is the power, the very soul of the home. None other. So she has to be there. She has to be treated sensitively and kindly, and with respect .”

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

lose two points of BMI’ or ‘be better at baking;’ this means honestly reflecting on your life (including work, relationships and other endeavors), identifying your flaws, and then working to resolve them. Being open to change and growth is important over the life of a relationship.”

In *Why Women Still Can’t Have It All*, author Anne-Marie Slaughter suggests, “Men don’t have to make the kind of sacrifices and compromises women make.” She says the hypothesis that women can have high-powered careers if men are willing to share the parenting load equally “assumes that most women will feel as comfortable as men do about being away from their children, as long as their partner is home with them.” Too many women are searching for meaning outside the home rather than in it.

For decades, feminists have belabored the idea that work should be central to

#### RESOURCES

1. The evidence that staying at home during a child’s first years of life can have long-term benefits (e.g. *Carneiro, Loken and Salvanes 2009, Blau and Grossberg 1992, Waldfogel, Han and Brooks-Gunn 2002, Berger, Hill and Waldfogel 2005, Ruhm 2004*) is already strong. That’s why many industrial nations guarantee at least some paid parental leave for working mothers and fathers. What’s been less clear is that stay-at-home parenting also benefits older children. This is highlighted in this Stanford U research: [bit.ly/moms-at-home](http://bit.ly/moms-at-home)
2. New findings from the UK’s national “well-being” index show that those classed as economically inactive because they are caring for a family or home are also among the happiest people. [bit.ly/rewarding-lives](http://bit.ly/rewarding-lives)
3. A Gallup Poll ([bit.ly/womens-desire-to-work](http://bit.ly/womens-desire-to-work)) shows that more than half of women in the U.S. with children under the age of 18, 56%, would prefer to stay home over going to work, and 39% of women without children under the age of 18 said they wanted the role of home-maker.
4. From Pew’s survey of nearly 2,000 parents with children under 18, more than half of working parents say they find it hard to balance their careers and family lives. See it here: [bit.ly/career-and-family](http://bit.ly/career-and-family)



Vandana Nathoo, married to Roshan Nathoo and mother to three boys, is a happy homemaker based in Mauritius. She teaches Sunday school classes on Hinduism, which she hosts in her home.

## Voices from Dad

### Ravi Baichoo, Mauritius

HOW CAN I USE MERE WORDS TO DESCRIBE what mothers do for their children? The first that comes to me is the oft-quoted Sanskrit adage: “Matha Pitha Guru Deivam”—the mother is above all.

I was the youngest of my siblings, and my elders always tell me the stories of how I used to want my mother to myself and be the one most important to her! In the beginning, things were most difficult financially, and she tried working as a teacher in a “Patshaala.” Later she took up a part-time job nearby in the village, but finally resorted to dedicate her time to the family. I often wonder how she managed to cope with eight

children, being married at a very early age, and a job.

It all made sense to me when we had our own kids. That’s when I realized just how much a mother does. When my wife decided to leave her professional career and dedicate her time to motherhood, I fully supported the decision. People often call this a sacrifice, but we see it as a blessing and simply, part of the universal gift of being a Mother.

### Ravi Visswanathan, USA

It wasn’t until my wife and I, both with full-time careers, faced the challenges of parenting our children, that I started to analyze my own childhood growing up in Asia, Australia,

Africa and South America.

My mom was at home, which allowed her to be always present for my siblings and me, especially when we returned home from school. Although she enjoyed her work as a librarian while in Australia, she made the decision to stay home and raise a family full time.

A beautiful smile, a reassuring touch, and soothing words truly complemented my mother’s genuinely caring attitude, which always placed her children’s and husband’s needs, well-being and comfort before her own. In addition, my mom’s tasty and nourishing meals ensured our health was well taken care of. The stability my mom provided by being at home enabled the family to progress spiritually.

### Ashvin Beezadhur, UK

After the birth of our son, my wife and I decided that she would stay at home to bring up our firstborn. At that time we had several reasons for doing so. The thought of leaving our baby in child care did not appeal to us, as we felt the right setting for a baby of such a tender age should be at home. In our opinion, mothering can simply not be replicated by any other caregiver. Our son was breastfed until he turned two; if my wife had been working, this would not have been possible. This decision did put us at a financial loss, as we had to let go of one income, but in the end we chose our children over greater material gains. We had planned for my wife to return to work once our son was older, but we did not anticipate the life we

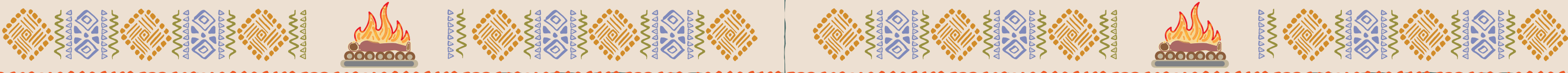


now live.

Our daughter was born four years later, and both our children were great at teaching us a few lessons. They taught us that they needed their mother at home even though they grew up to be more independent. They needed their mother not only to take care of their immediate needs like personal care and feeding but also to have time and energy to listen to them and guide them in both their spiritual and material life.

When we first searched for answers on whether my wife should become a homemaker or not, we were guided by Gurudeva’s teachings, and for that we are grateful. This decision has also enabled me to focus on my work, as I know my wife is there for my children and also for me.





# How Enlightened Beings Die

## Ten Stories of the Final Moments of Great Sages & Ten Reasons Hindus Do Not Fear Death



INTRODUCTION BY RAMAI SANTHIRAPALA, LONDON; STORIES BY THE EDITORS



PIETER WELTEVREDE

There are two indubitable certainties: we were born, and we will die. This is not meant as a morose statement, but as an encouragement to consider the deeper purpose of our existence as an opportunity for spiritual progress. Hindus believe in samsara, the cyclical journey of life, death and rebirth, until such a time that one is freed from this pattern, thus achieving moksha, or spiritual freedom. Knowing this, adepts spend a lifetime preparing for their transition, the *mahaprasthan*, and effortlessly flow from life to death. Sushila Blackman's book *Graceful Exits* is a compendium detailing the grand departures of Hindu, Tibetan and Chinese Buddhist masters. It is that book upon which this Insight is based.

**A Medical Perspective:** The lenses through which I approach this book are twofold; first and foremost as a practicing Saivite Hindu and secondly as a medical doctor. I am trained in anaesthesia and intensive care medicine. In my field conversations on death and dying are not uncommon. This has left me contemplating the effects of life-support machines and powerful drugs on the mystical transition that is known as death. Recurrently I have found myself having soul-searching end-of-life discussions at a point when a patient is too sick to converse and a family remains unprepared for the loss of a loved one—it felt too little too late. In these highly emotive moments patients and families frequently cling to the chance of life, any chance, as to a piece of driftwood in a stormy sea.

In many cases there would have been a timely window of opportunity for such conversations when patients could still express their wishes, such as when they consult with a surgeon or anesthesiologist before what is termed "high risk surgery" or with a cancer doctor during counseling for a course of chemotherapy. Even more ideal would be discussing end-of-life wishes as a routine conversation with the family doctor, just as one might review a routine blood pressure check, further demystifying the cultural taboo in the West sur-



SURESH MUTHUKULAM

rounding the word *death*.

There is a palpable change in consciousness happening within the medical profession today, with doctors themselves stating, when surveyed about their own end-of-life wishes, that less is more. For example, colleagues and I surveyed anesthesiologists at University College London Hospital. We found that over half were strongly concerned they might be given overly aggressive care at the end of their own life. They value quality of life over quantity.

In 2014, leading Harvard surgeon Professor Atul Gawande courageously published a landmark book entitled *Being Mortal*. Along with BBC's Reith Lectures, this book turned the spotlight on the increasing medicalization of death, highlighting the disparity between what patients truly value and how they actually die. Home is often cited as the preferred place of death by patients, yet the majority continue to die in healthcare institutions. How beautifully this desire to be at home echoes the wisdom of the East, where the dying are dutifully surrounded by prayerful vigils and the loving attention

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The artist depicts Mahakala (a form of Siva), the Hindu Deity who oversees time and dwells in cremation grounds. He, with Kali, is responsible for the dissolution of the universe at the end of each kalpa.

of close family. The purpose of such preparations is to encourage the soul to exit through the highest chakra, as well as to notify astral-plane helpers of an imminent arrival. So revered is the time of transition that my Guru says to be near a realized soul at the time of samadhi is a blessing that surpasses 1,008 visits at other times.

As I pondered the medical profession's move from the science of postponing death to the art of dying, *Graceful Exits* appeared in my inbox as an intriguing window into the spiritual nature of the transition known as death.

At the end of the upcoming stories, I will offer a review of Sushila Blackman's book, which is short in pages but profound in wisdom.

**Ten Tales of Transition & Our Artists**

In the pages to follow we share the last moments of ten great souls. Their stories can inform our own understandings of death and our ability to be present at the passage of others. As you will see, death to the spiritually awakened is not a fearsome thing. It can be playful or prayerful, but it is always powerful. The ten sages were painted by Pieter Weltevrede of Amsterdam, and the illustrated numbers were created by Ayala Wise who specializes in sacred geometry ([TheMandalaWorkshop.com](http://TheMandalaWorkshop.com)).





## DEATH IS UNREAL

The first reason not to fear death is that it does not exist. According to Hindu mysticism, death is a myth, a kind of alternative fact repeated again and again, foisted on us as real, like the fabled unicorn. Death does not exist in the sense most people define it. It's like the sun coming up in the morning. People say the sun is rising and think of it that way, but the sun doesn't come up; the earth revolves to reveal the sun. Similarly, death does not end our existence: we just drop off our outer shell and continue our journey in the inner worlds.

If we have not yet achieved moksha, we eventually return to physical birth to resolve our remaining karmas. While most people fear it as a bugaboo, death is actually a miraculous leap in our evolution.



PIETER WELTEVREDE

## RAMANA MAHARSHI

1879–1950

In 1947, at age 68, Ramana Maharshi was suffering from cancer. When the doctors suggested amputating his left arm above a large tumor, Ramana replied with a smile: "There is no need for alarm. The body is itself a disease. Let it have its natural end. Why mutilate it? A simple dressing on the affected part will do." Two operations were performed to remove the tumor, but it appeared again, as large as a coconut. Indigenous systems of medicine were tried, and homeopathy, too, but the disease did not yield to treatment. The sage, supremely indifferent to suffering, remained unconcerned. He sat as a spectator watching the disease waste the body; his eyes shone as bright as ever, and his grace flowed toward all beings. Many were coming to say goodbye to the master. In this tradition, it is regarded as a special blessing to be near a realized soul at the time he or she gives up the body. Ramana insisted that the crowds be allowed to have his darshan, and he had his bed placed in a public courtyard. Devotees came and went for weeks as his body slowly diminished. Ramana had compassion for those who grieved, and he sought to comfort them by reminding them of the truth that he was not the body. The Great Departure came on April 14, 1950. That evening the sage gave darshan to all present in the ashram. They sat singing his favorite hymn to Arunachala, the form of Siva as an infinite pillar of light. He asked his attendants to help him sit up. He smiled as a tear trickled down his cheek, and at 8:47pm his breathing stopped. As instructed, devotees prepared a pit in the earth and placed the body there in yogic pose, encasing it in salt. Such interments of great masters are revered as supremely holy. Later a Sivalingam was installed above the crypt and a temple was built around it, thus capturing the sage's divine consciousness.

## GAUTAMA, THE BUDDHA

CIRCA 563–483 BCE

As he was approaching his own death, Gautama, the Buddha, gathered his monks together and said: "Of all footprints, those of the elephant are supreme; of all meditations, that on death is supreme." When all had gathered during his final hours, the Buddha gave a sermon.

"It is not appropriate to grieve in an hour of joy.... You all weep, but is there any cause for grief? We should look upon a sage as a person who has escaped from a burning mansion.... It does not matter whether I am here or not; your salvation does not depend upon me, but upon practicing the Dharma, just as a cure depends not upon seeing the doctor, but upon taking his medicine.... My time has come, my work is done.... Everything eventually comes to an end, even if it should last for an eon. I have done what I could for myself and others, and to remain longer would be without purpose.

"Recognize that all that lives is subject to the laws of impermanence, and strive for eternal wisdom. When the light of knowledge dispels ignorance, when the world is seen as without substance, the end of life is seen as peace and as a cure to a disease. Everything that exists is bound to perish. Be therefore mindful of your salvation. The time of my passing has come."



## REINCARNATION

The second reason not to fear death is that we all reincarnate. Death is not the end of the line. Our scriptures tell us that instead of defining death as an end of ourself, we should realize it is but one phase of the larger reincarnational process.

Many young children and the best of mystics remember their past births, and their remembrances are a reminder that we, too, have lived and died before and will live and die again. The fact of reincarnation can be a great solace for those who look upon death with trepidation. We have many more chances to get it right!





## DEATH IS NATURAL

The third reason not to fear death is that releasing the body is the way of things. All that lives ultimately dies. It is the return of the mortal to the immortal, the time-bound to the infinite source. Some describe it as a river flowing back to its source, the ocean. The water is not destroyed in that merging. That which was two becomes one again. Those who have had near-death experiences report it is not painful. Near-death studies reveal it is a time of elevated consciousness, unity, light and love. It can also be accompanied by great mental lucidity and out-of-body awareness.

Those who have returned from death report they could hear the doctors' conversations about their heart stopping, could see their family mourning. Much is being revealed by these explorations into the moment of departure.



## BHAGAVAN NITYANANDA

1897–1961

Three months before Bhagavan Nityananda took mahasamadhi, his disciple Mataji came for darshan. Learning that he had developed a serious ear infection, she began to weep. The master chided, "Why are you crying? Don't cry. More work is possible in the subtle world than in the gross." Two months before his departure, Nityananda virtually stopped eating. He just drank water and occasionally ate some fruit. His body, once massive, grew gaunt and feeble. No amount of imploring could persuade him to take food. Doctors were sent for, but he was disinterested in physicians and drugs, not wishing to keep the body any longer. One devotee asked, "Baba, it gives me great pain to see your present condition and weak body. Why can't you use your divine powers to cure your illness?" The master answered, "This body is mere dust and mud. Spiritual power is not to be used for such things." About 9:30 on the final morning, Bhagavan directed that coffee be served as prasad to all present. With a smile, he gave a fruit to a young boy, then took two or three very deep breaths. His eyes assumed the *shambhavi mudra*, turned upward to the third eye. Devotees watched as the *sushumna* nerve throbbed between his brows. The sound *Aum* was heard in the room as his life breath merged in the cosmos.

## SOCRATES

470–399 BCE

At the age of 71, the Greek philosopher Socrates was accused by the government of Athens of arousing skepticism, inventing new Deities and corrupting the youth of the city. A trial found him guilty, and he was condemned. He was given the choice to be exiled and never teach again, or to accept death by drinking poison hemlock. Socrates boldly rejected exile and opted for death by his own hand. On the fateful day, his distraught disciples gathered around him in the state prison. Even as he reached for the bowl of hemlock prepared by the executioner, Socrates continued to teach, unmoved by his impending demise. After drinking the poison he told those present he was praying for a fortunate transfer from this world to the next. His last words were, "Crito, we owe a rooster to Asclepius. Please, don't forget to pay the debt." Asclepius was the Greek god of medicine, and a rooster was a normal offering of thanks for recovery from illness. Socrates believed he was cured of the disease of life, and was not frightened by his death. This mundane farewell showed the sage's detachment from death's approach. It also points to a common end-of-life practice of mystics, who strive to resolve all karmas, make amends, settle debts, seek and give forgiveness.



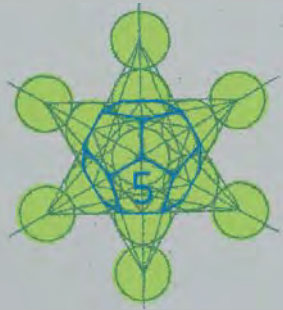
## DEATH IS LIBERATION

The fourth reason not to fear death is that it is liberation, a joyous and elevating experience. Hindus call death the Great Departure. For a master, death is not a loss but a release from *samsara*, for which the Sanskrit word is *moksha*. Enlightened ones know that the world beyond earthly embodiment is greater, sweeter and more profound.

Neem Karoli Baba, when he saw his departure was near, told his sorrowful disciples, "Today I am being released from Central Jail forever."

He understood that death is a most exalted state. Isn't it foolish to fear letting go of the limited physical to be embraced by the infinite Self within?





## DEATH IS A RELEASE FROM SUFFERING

The fifth reason not to fear death is that it removes earthly pains and sufferings. When the soul lets go of the body, the mind is released from debilitating and sometimes unbearable pain.

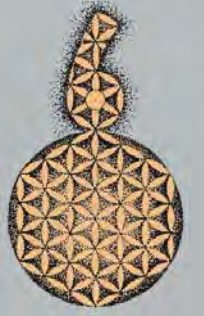
Transition also marks the promise of a physical and mental upgrade, turning in worn-out equipment for new, fully functioning parts. It is more beginning than end.



## MILAREPA

1052–1135

Milarepa was a renowned yogi of Tibet with vast occult powers. His death was brought about by poison, prepared by an enemy named Tsaphu-wa and delivered by the man's lover. Immediately, as the woman approached, Milarepa cognized her nefarious intent. Realizing his greatness, she fell at his feet, weeping in remorse, and begged him to allow her to consume the deadly food herself. Refusing her offer, Milarepa himself imbibed the poisoned curd, saying, "My life has almost run its course; my work is finished; the time has come for me to go to another world." His devotees gathered sacred offerings and performed a puja, pleading with their master to invoke his powers to prolong his life with them. But the yogi was firm that he had exhausted his karmas, had made friends of his enemies and with the blessings of his guru was prepared for his next journey. The poison slowly did its work, and days later Milarepa gave his "final testament of precepts." This last sermon was offered during his cremation, as he sat majestically within the flames in his Indestructible Body, with Gods and devas filling the sky: "In the samsaric ocean of the lokas three, the great culprit is the impermanent physical body, busy in its craving search for food and dress; from worldly works it never finds relief. Renounce, O Rechung, every worldly thing. ...O gurus, devas, dakinis: combine these three into a single whole and gain experimental knowledge—this life, the next life, and the life between. Regard them as one, and make thyself accustomed to them as one."



## DEATH IS EASY

The sixth reason not to fear death is that is a normal human experience, like sleep. People who have been with hundreds of dying people report that something miraculous, even sacred happens in the final hours and moments. The dying surrender to the process; they don't resist. In fact, they are drawn to their destination with awe and even eagerness. A sign of this can be found in the last six words spoken by Apple founder Steven Jobs: "Oh Wow! Oh Wow! Oh Wow!"

Death is a natural experience, not to be feared any more than sleep. It is a quick transition from the physical world to the astral plane, like walking through a door, leaving one room and entering another. Some yogis consider that each night, when we sleep, we experience a micro death.





## EVERYBODY DOES IT

The seventh reason not to fear death is that it happens every day to so many. Each day on Earth 155,000 people die. That's over 6,500 every hour, or 108 every minute. There is no reason to fear what so many experience each day.

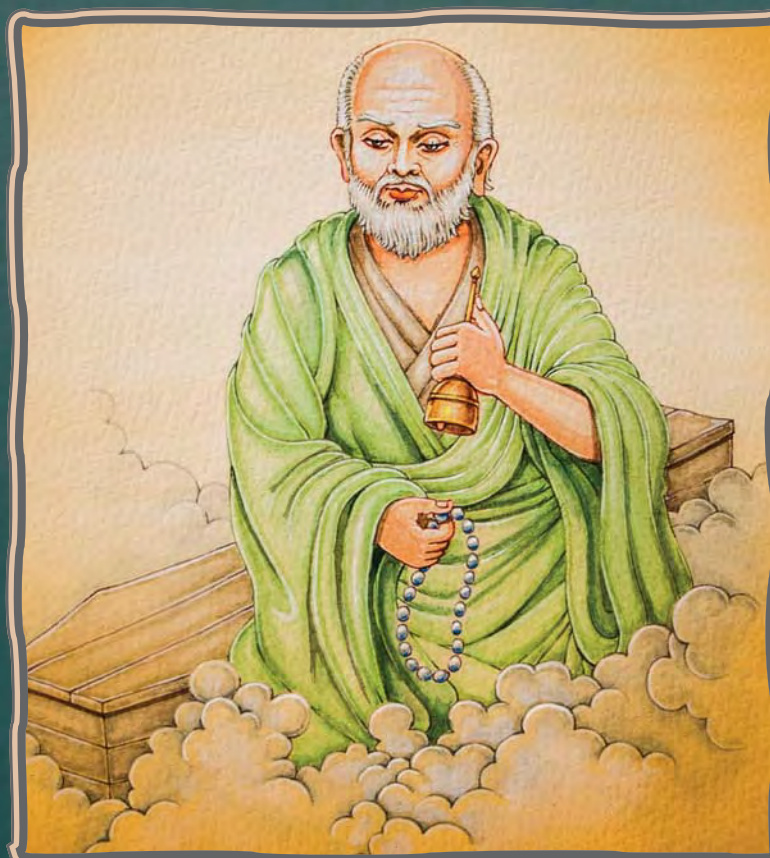
Here is an interesting factoid: the Population Reference Bureau estimates that throughout known history 108.2 billion people have lived and died. That's 15 times as many as are alive on Earth today.



## P'U-HUA

770–860

When the Chinese monk, wanderer and eccentric Master P'u-hua sensed his end was near, he announced to the people of the nearby town that he would go the next day to the Eastern Gate and die there. Wishing to be at this extraordinary event, the whole community walked in procession behind him and assembled to pay their final respects. P'u-hua then announced: "A funeral today would not be in accord with the mythical Blue Crow. I will pass away tomorrow at the Southern Gate." The next day most people followed him again, but upon his arrival he decreed, "It would be more auspicious to leave by the Western Gate tomorrow." On the third day fewer people came, and he decided on the North Gate instead. Some say this was his way of having only the most ardent followers attend his Great Departure and not just the curious. On day four, P'u-hua walked alone outside the city walls and laid himself into the coffin. He asked a traveler who chanced by to nail down the lid. Somehow the news spread, and the people rushed to see him. Upon opening the coffin, they found no body inside, but from high up in the sky they heard the ringing of the master's hand bell.



## CHIH-HSIEN

CIRCA 830–905

Just before the Chinese Zen master Chih-hsien passed away in 905, he asked his attendants, "Who dies sitting?" They answered, "A monk." He inquired further, "Who dies standing?" They replied, "Enlightened monks." He then walked seven steps, with his hands at his sides, and died. Many Buddhist monks regard such a fully conscious death as a sign of spiritual attainment. They prefer to leave the body sitting upright in meditation, or while standing or even walking in the garden—rather than lying down—so as to release the body with full intent and awareness.



## NATURE POINTS THE WAY

The eighth reason not to fear death is that methods have been provided. Look at nature, how effortlessly creatures expire. At our monastery when the cats or cows near their end, they simply stop eating, lie down under a tree in the pasture and release the body. In the Jain tradition, *santhara* is the practice of voluntarily fasting to death by gradually reducing the intake of food and liquids. Not undertaken lightly or unilaterally, it requires a public declaration, community consent and guidance under an ascetic. This manner of exiting the body is viewed in Jainism as the thinning of human passions and the body, and a means of destroying rebirth-influencing karma by withdrawing from all physical and mental activities. This is not considered suicide by Jain scholars because it is not an act of passion, nor does it employ poisons or weapons. A sacred vow is taken before the ritual preparation and practice begins. Though rare in modern times, this formal fasting to death is being rediscovered in India.

There is debate about the practice between the right-to-life and freedom-of-religion viewpoints. The Rajasthan High Court banned the practice in 2015, ruling it suicide. Later that same year, the Supreme Court of India reversed the lower court's decision and lifted the ban, which made it legal again in India to do a simple thing: stop eating.





## SAGES & SCRIPTURE ASSURE US

The ninth reason not to fear death is the assurance of holy ones and our sacred scriptures. Here are a few gems to guide the way:

“Desireless, wise, immortal, self-existent, full of bliss, lacking in nothing is the one who knows the wise, unaging, youthful soul within him. He fears not death!”

*Atharva Veda X, 8, 446*

“From goodness, understanding is reached. From understanding, the Self is obtained, and he who obtains the Self is freed from the cycle of birth and death.”

*Maitreya Upanishad 4.3*

Death is like falling asleep, and birth is like waking from that sleep.

*Tirukural 339*

“A man of discrimination and wisdom is not afraid of death. He knows that death is the gate of life. Death, to him, is no longer a skeleton bearing a sword to cut the thread of life, but rather an angel who has a golden key to unlock for him the door to a far wider, fuller and happier existence. It is necessary for your evolution.”

*Swami Sivananda*

The *Katha Upanishads* declares, “There is one part of us which must die; there is another part which never dies. When a man can identify himself with his undying nature, which is one with God, then he overcomes death.”

*Swami Paramananda*



## A TIBETAN MONK DATE UNKNOWN

Certain Tibetan yogis have mastered the winds—the pranas, or inner airs, that flow through the subtle body. One day one such being, a retreat master at a monastery in Kham, asked his attendant: “I am going to die soon. Please look in the calendar for an auspicious date.” Though stunned, the attendant examined the calendar and told the master that all the stars were auspicious on the following Monday. “That is three days away. Well, I think I can make it,” the master replied. A little later, the attendant returned to the room and found the master sitting upright in yogic meditation posture, so still that it seemed he had already passed away. There was no breathing, but a faint pulse was perceptible. The attendant decided not to do anything, but to wait. At noon he heard a deep exhalation, and the master returned to his normal condition, spoke in a joyful mood, and asked for his lunch, which he ate with relish. He had been holding his breath for the whole of the morning session of meditation. The master taught that the human life span is counted as a finite number of breaths, and believing he was near the end of these, he held his breath so that the number would not be reached until the auspicious day. Just after lunch, he took another deep breath, and did not exhale until evening. He did the same the next day, and the next. When Monday came, he asked for confirmation: “Is today the auspicious day?” “Yes,” the attendant replied. “Fine, I shall go today.” Within hours, without illness or difficulty, the master passed away in meditation.

## SUBRAMUNIASWAMI

1927–2001

On October 6, 2001, doctors in Hawaii discovered Gurudeva had advanced metastasized cancers in his colon, small intestine and brain. Three teams of specialists confirmed that he had not long to live. Ten days later he informed his senior monks that he had decided to fast to death. He had taught of this traditional way of leaving a terminally ill body, called *prayopavesha*, and now he would himself follow that difficult regimen, preferring the conscious departure of the yogi to weeks or months of medical intervention and systemic deterioration leading to loss of consciousness. Gurudeva asked how long this would take. After hearing about others who had fasted in this manner, he said, “So, in about 24 days it will be over and I will be with you 24 hours a day, not just during sixteen waking hours.” In the ensuing weeks, his own departure was not the most onerous work. It was assuaging the sorrow in the hearts of his monks. He offered encouragement and solace, at one point whispering, “Everything that is happening is good. Everything that is happening is meant to be.” His goal now was to resolve all karmas and depart through the crown chakra. One evening the monks gathering around his bed took turns reading from his seminal talk, *The Self God*. In the dim light, the room bristled with shakti. Breaking the silence, Gurudeva commented, “So, the Self God was true in the 1950s and it is still true in the 2000s.” All laughed in acknowledgment that the Absolute Truth is always the same, always true, transcending life and death. There is a form of breathing, called Cheyne-Stokes, that the dying experience for a few hours. A deep breath is taken and held for up to a minute, when another such breath comes. When Gurudeva did this for ten days, his doctor said, “That’s astonishing. It can only be attributed to his lifetime of meditation.” At one point, in the dark of night, Gurudeva told the monks that Yogaswami, his own guru, had come to him. He then said, “Everything is finished. All is complete.”



## AWARENESS IS IMMORTAL

The tenth reason not to fear death is that you are awareness, and awareness is eternal and deathless. The new science of consciousness is exploring multiverses, non-local awareness and cosmic unity. The old science (still alive and well and in the majority) tells us life begins with protobacteria, evolves to single-celled then multicellular organisms, into fungi, plants, protozoa, insects, worms, reptiles, and mammals, such as *Homo sapiens*. With advanced animals and humans came the cerebral cortex, which they say creates consciousness.

Old-school scientists don’t know what consciousness is, but they are certain that it is an epiphenomenon of matter, and when the brain dies, consciousness ceases to exist! The new science retorts, “No, no, no. The brain does not create consciousness. Consciousness creates the brain, and continues after brain death.” Evidence of the nonmaterial existence of consciousness is drawn from near-death experiences, out-of-the-body experiences, non-local awareness, reincarnational experiences and the wild world of quantum physics. Consciousness studies confirm what Hindu mystics have been saying for millennia: you are the All and Everything.



# 4 Takeaways

## ON THE TRANSITION CALLED DEATH

### 1. As Natural as Possible

Sages hold a natural death in high regard, and choose to pass without mind-numbing drugs and high-tech machines, at home if possible, surrounded by those we love. Avoid heroic medical measures that diminish the quality of life, remembering Abraham Lincoln's adage: "It's not about the days in your life, but the life in your days." Cremation of the body is a natural choice for Hindus.



### 2. Don't Mourn Excessively

Those who leave the earth plane often remain aware of those who remain. Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami described how the emotional traumas and attachments of those still living can affect the departed soul, who is naturally saddened to see loved ones suffering. Knowing this, it is good to mourn, but not over much.



### 3. Elevate the Mind

The moment of death is crucial. Where we are in consciousness at that final moment sets the direction of our onward journey. If we are in fear, or lodged in any of the other lower chakras, we will end up on the lower astral plane, a realm of misery and suffering, until our next birth. But if we are in the world of love and light, we will soar into the higher superconscious realms.



### 4. Turn to Spiritual Masters

When most people think of dying, they tend to be more concerned with avoiding pain and suffering than with confronting the meaning of death and how to approach it. We need good role models to place death in its proper perspective and show us how to leave this world gracefully. For this, we can turn to the spiritual masters of all faiths. Hindu gurus will remind us we are not our body, mind or emotions. We are pure consciousness—an immortal spirit that never dies.



## "Die Before You Die"

**Y**ou must die before you die." In this enigmatic axiom, Sage Yogaswami expounds one of the rarely discussed goals of the spiritual path—to experience the death of ego before physical death. Great souls regard the death of the ego as an affirmation of life, not a disgust with or denial of life. Their understanding of death and willingness to face it consciously informs their existence, making life more precious, more known.

To die before you die is to discover your spiritual Self before you release your physical body. The ego does not let go willingly; thus this is not a practice for the timid who cannot look into the face of their own foibles and flaws. It is more the work of resolute contemplatives than career-beguiled achievers, of the rare ones who seek to diminish desires and repeal preferences. The term *death* in the Hindu perspective is really a synonym for *transcendence*. When the ego dies, one enters into a greater understanding of

Self. Similarly, when the body dies, one enters a vaster identity. Ironically, dying in this way is perhaps the most alive one will ever be.

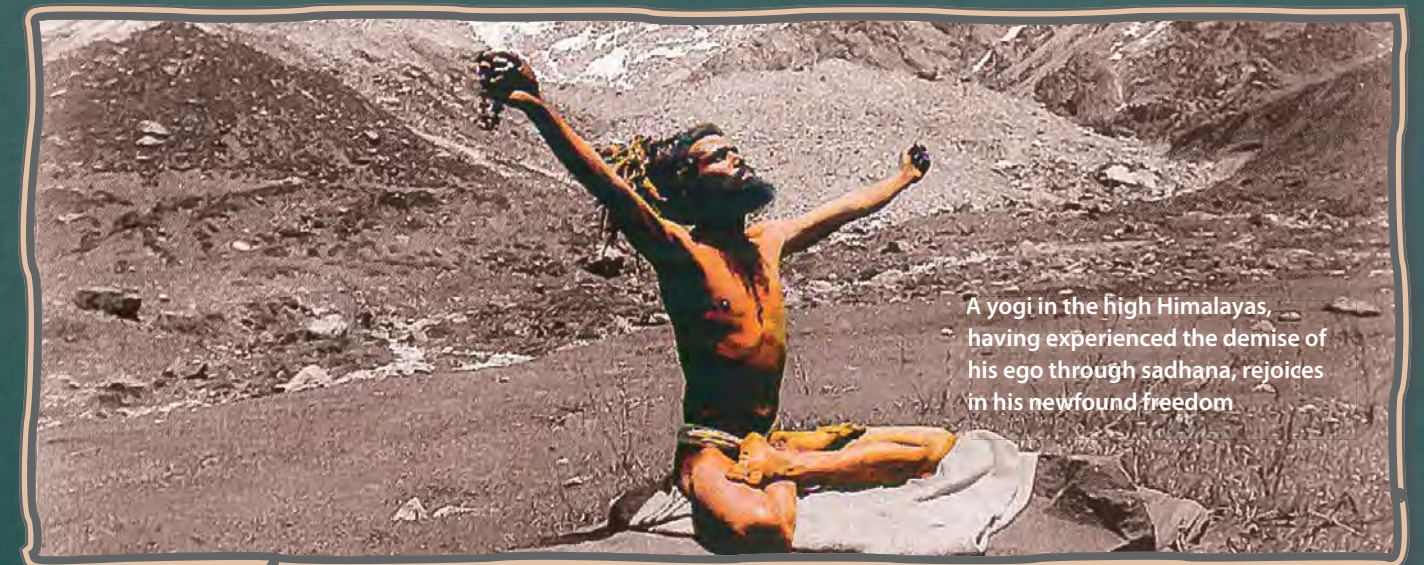
This theme is voiced in the *Katha Upanishad* (2.3.13): "There are two selves, the separate ego and the indivisible *atman*. When one rises above 'I, me and mine,' the *atman* is revealed as one's real Self." Eventually, we are all forced to let go of the material world through the natural and ineluctable process of death. It is a profound teaching of the Eastern faiths that ardent, mature spiritual aspirants can achieve this level of perfect detachment while still living.

How is this done? A conscious ego death can be initiated through revelatory meditation, raja yoga, other forms of intense sadhana or divine grace. By

balancing our karmas, by finding perfect stillness, by severing all bonds and felling all false identifications, we are thrust beyond the realm of change into the changeless. The holy texts advise that such an advanced discipline be undertaken with the guidance of a guru who knows well both the person and the process.

**"Just as a lamp gets extinguished when the oil is exhausted, so the yogi extinguishes his former self when ego identification ceases to exist in perfect meditation."**

*Sarvajnanottara Agama, Yoga Pada, verse 51*



A yogi in the high Himalayas, having experienced the demise of his ego through sadhana, rejoices in his newfound freedom

Even if the ultimate obliteration of separateness is not achieved, there are practical benefits to the effort. It humbles us and keeps our words and actions in alignment with our higher intentions. It removes conflict, confusion and separateness from our existence. Milarepa, a Tibetan yogi of the 9th century, explained, "Life is short and the time of death is uncertain; so apply yourself to meditation." Those who die before they die learn that

there is no death. For them, the transition called death, when it comes, is not disquieting. For them, death is not a frightening foe but a familiar friend. When death is seen as transformation into something greater, it can be fearlessly looked forward to with curiosity, and even joy. As J. K. Rowling put it, "To the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure." In the words of Rumi, "Our death is our wedding with eternity."





# Graceful Exits

## Reviewing Sushila Blackman's Brave Book about Dying

BY RAMAI SANTHIRAPALA, LONDON

The background to *Graceful Exits* stems from author Sushila Blackman's experience during the samadhi of her guru. She eloquently speaks of the despair and sorrow that followed the passing of her beloved Swami Muktananda. Then there arose an immersive "liquid pool of clear, crystalline light" which emanated as assurance that her guru was still alive within her. A further realization came that she would reside with her guru upon her own passing. A sense of peace and joy ensued. Subsequently, for reasons consciously unknown to her, Sushila collected stories of the departures of great siddhars, and her book *Graceful Exits* was born. The reason for this book became apparent as she soon faced her own experience of dying

following a diagnosis of advanced lung cancer. She courageously and joyfully received this news as a blessing and dutifully prepared for her great transition. Less than two months after writing the afterword, Sushila Blackman made her transition. *Graceful Exits* serves as her legacy, offering insights on death and informing us how great ones prepare and depart this earthly plane.

### Observation 1: Conscious Control

The first clear observation from this collection of stories is the conscious control the masters took of their "big day," as Sushila speaks of it. Even where medical interventions were sought, it seemed masters

Artist S. Rajam shows Yogaswami, the great guru of Jaffna, Sri Lanka, hovering in his astral body as devotees gather for his cremation in 1964

took care to have a transition free from drugs and machines. "Tomorrow, when I raise my hand, you must not give me an injection," Seki Seisetsu, head of all the Rinzaï temples in Japan, told his doctor on the night of October 2, 1943, as he prepared to take his last breath surrounded by his monks who chanted sweetly.

### 2: Death Comes as No Surprise

The sages cited in this book knew when the time had come. The clarity with which some described their moment of death left even the closest of devotees in disbelief. Swami Vivekananda, disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, told devotees at the end, "A great tapasya and meditation has come upon me, and I am making ready for death." Subsequently, he made plans, even marking where he wished to be cremated on the monastery grounds. Three days later he made his transition at a tender 39 years of age, having fulfilled all he came to do. Sadasiva Brahmendra, who lived in the eighteenth century in Tamil Nadu, instructed ardent followers to build him a cave and enclose him inside it. His followers did so, with reluctance. Nine days later a bilva tree emerged from the site, and close devotees had visions of their master's entering samadhi.

### 3: Wait for the Right Moment

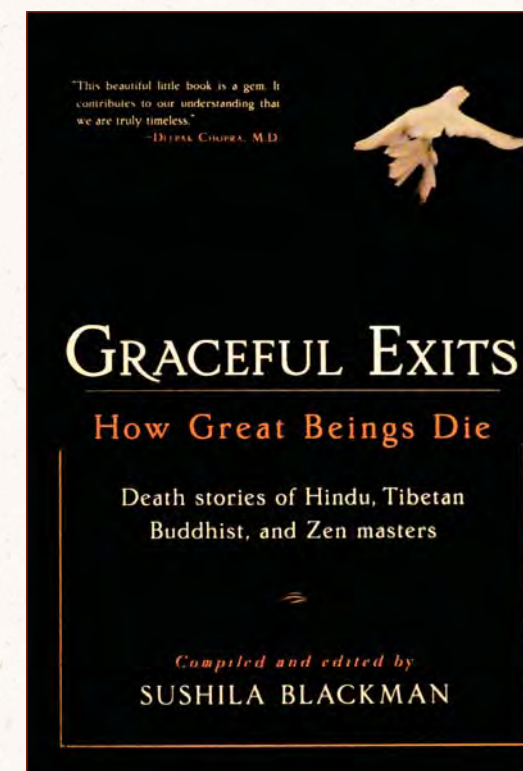
In the ancient *Tirukural*, Tiruvalluvar writes, "So potent is the power acquired through disciplined self-denial that those who attain it may even delay the moment of death" (Kural 269). Humbly I share an experience of my own grandfather. He passed on my mother's shoulder whilst in a hospital in Sri Lanka's Northern Peninsula, only to return to life upon hearing her tears, stating, "I was on the way to Kataragama (a holy abode of Lord Murugan in southern Sri Lanka) when I heard your call and returned." He made his transition peacefully at home shortly afterwards. *Graceful Exits* describes many such experiences. A Tibetan yogi living in historical Kham instructed an attendant, "I am going to die now, so would you please look in the calendar for an auspicious date." Upon the suggested auspicious day arising, the masters asked, "Is today the auspicious day?" "Yes," replied the attendant. "Fine, I shall go today," the yogi answered and with effortless ease transitioned in his meditation that day.

### 4: Death Is Simple

In the words of my guru, death is described as a quick transition, akin to walking through a door, leaving one room and entering another. The simplicity with which great souls perceive the experience of death is exemplified by a short but sweet story in *Graceful Exits*. Tenth-century Chinese Zen Master, Dasui Fazhen, was asked, "How are you at the time when life-death arrives?" He answered promptly, "When served tea, I take tea; when served a meal, I take a meal."

### 5: Any Final Words of Wisdom, Master?

Common to many of these stories was the aspiration by close shish-



yas to capture final words of wisdom as their master prepared to leave this earthly plane. On June 21, 1963, Swami Sivana-nda spoke, "Happiness comes when the individual merges in God." These were his last recorded words. In Japanese tradition, Buddhist masters give their last words as a death poem. Sushila Blackman introduces us to this concept, giving an example from Buddha toward the end of his life:

Of all footprints  
That of the elephant is supreme;  
Of all mindfulness meditations  
That on death is supreme.

In some cases, devout followers were scolded for asking for "last words." Their master responds that their entire life has been filled with teachings and there is no more to be said. Japanese Zen Master Bankei speaks fervently when confronted by the tears of his closest students, "How do you expect to see me if you look at me in terms of birth and death?"

### 6: Find That Which Never Changes

The deep impression I had from reading *Graceful Exits* is the impermanence of life and permanence of an essence beyond—the atma. Ubiquitously felt through reading these stories, from a number of Eastern traditions, is the one-pointed focus these great masters had on identifying with this universal essence. Some stories recalled how this intense meditation drew the masters to others who had passed on ahead. Swami Brahmananda, while absorbed in blissful meditation, spoke of seeing Sri Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, Premananda and Yogananda come before him. Days later he made his transition.

### Final Reflections

*Graceful Exits* serves as a poignant reminder of the worlds beyond that which the physical eyes can see and of the great karmic play that is life and life beyond. This book has affirmed a cause close to my heart: that we ought to deliver end-of-life care tailored to the individual, respecting those who say "Thanks, but no thanks" to the latest innovative life-sustaining technologies. My inspiration and courage to step into such a cause comes from the end of life of my great master, Sivaya Subramuniyaswami, who declined hospitalization and further tests and opted for the *tapas* of a religious and self-willed death by fasting, called prayopavesha.

*Graceful Exits* provides a humble reflection that each moment is an opportunity to strive onwards to find our truest nature through dharmic living, whilst knowing the benefits of such focus may only become apparent in the clarity of one's own transition. Ultimately, the lesson from these enlightened masters is to move out of fear of the end of this earthly life and gain the perspective that our truest nature is a permanence that flows from lifetime to lifetime. The question I ask myself, and you, is what will you do today to move closer to the precious opportunity of a graceful exit? A good first step would be to pick up your own copy of this distinctive collection of tales of the amazing departures of great masters.



# Homeopathy's Healing Powers

India leads the world in large-scale adoption of this natural, non-invasive health system offering remedies that rebalance mind, body and vital force

In our multi-part article, homeopathic doctor Vatsala Sperling explains how Indian doctors take the practice to a whole new level. Her long interview with Dr. Mahesh Gandhi (below) introduces an innovative application of its modalities to mental health, an area in which Western medicine provides little hope beyond masking symptoms with drugs.

VATSALA SPERLING

**“W**HAT YOU LEARNED IS A HANDFUL of dirt, what you haven't learned is the Earth.” I grew up hearing my mother repeat this quotation from Avvaiyar, the Tamil poet-saint, while she tried to make education fun for me. This idea, planted firmly in my mind, has enabled me to study homeopathy and establish a practice in the US where a small part of my clientele are people with unresolved psychological and emotional issues. I have found homeopathy to be harmonious with my Hindu and Saivite upbringing. Most of my homeopathy teachers, including Dr. Divya Chhabra, are from India. When Dr. Divya invited me to her clinic in Mumbai to learn her unique homeopathic case taking method, “Leap to the simillimum” (for finding the remedy that is most likely to restore health), I accepted readily and wondered if I might discover how Indian prac-



**From plants, minerals and animals:** Dr. Rajneesh Sharma MD, a homeopath, author and researcher from India, in his pharmacy full of homeopathic remedies. Elements from the natural kingdom form the basis of homeopathy's thousands of remedies.

tioners use homeopathy to address mental suffering.

Soon after reaching Mumbai, I hailed a cab for Sun and Sand hotel, Juhu. En route,

I conversed with the cabbie, Mehboob. After learning that I am a homeopath visiting India to further my education, Mehboob showed me a card, “For Rs. 80 per year, this

card lets me receive unlimited homeopathic treatment for myself and family in a clinic run by Punjab Kesari, a social work organization.” Unexpectedly, within minutes of my arrival in India a cabbie was telling me about his devotion to homeopathy: “I swear by God—after experiencing deep healing from homeopathy, you will not look elsewhere.”

“Deep healing” became a much-contemplated concept during my stay. Dr. Divya told me, “For deep healing, you must go past human delusions, cross the metaphoric wall separating the conscious from the unconscious and find the remedy that is revealed from the patient's unconscious mind.” She explained that her practice of classical homeopathy is based on the teachings of Jung and Freud and their understanding of the unconscious mind.

Homeopathy was founded by Dr. Samuel Hahnemann, MD (1755–1843) while trying to understand the mechanism of the medicinal action of Peruvian bark in the treatment of malaria. After decades of experimentation, Hahnemann established homeopathy as a medical science based on natural laws; for example, the Law of Similars. He recognized disease as a dynamic disturbance in the vital force. To counteract the disease state, he created a method of dilution and succussion that resulted in dynamization of raw medicinal substances so that a dynamic disease state could be cured by a dynamic remedy, when it is selected on the basis of the Law of Similars. Beyond this, he gave no further explanation.

Presently, nanotechnology is able to measure changes in coherence and cluster formation of water molecules when they are exposed to electromagnetic energy and demonstrate that the dynamic process of se-



**Dr. Bhawisha and Sachindra Joshi:** This innovative husband and wife treat the whole person, not just the immediate diagnosis

rial dilution and succussion creates an energy field that enables water molecules to memorise the substance they have come in contact with. Based on this memory, a water molecule cluster formed after exposure to gold is totally different from clusters formed after exposure to sea salt. These unique water clusters are used in preparation of homeopathic remedies; and when given on the basis of the Law of Similars they are able to disperse in the body via fluids, and convey the information of the healing potential of the raw substance they have come in contact with, and elicit clinically, subjectively and objectively observable changes in symptoms.

Though Hahnemann did not have the scientific vocabulary and technology of the 21st century, he had created a new system of medicine. Patients came to him from afar. With a non-invasive, natural, logical and straightforward approach, he cured the sick and re-established balance in their vital force.

Hahnemann's work spread worldwide. In the early 1900s, the American Medical Association teamed up with pharmaceutical companies and suppressed medical doctors in the US from practicing homeopathy.

Anti-homeopathic groups calling themselves “scientific” began spreading misinformation: “Homeopathic remedies are diluted to the point that they do not contain even a molecule of the medicinal substance. How can they cure? Homeopathy is a placebo effect.” The natural laws that govern disease and health, the role of the vital force, clinical evidence and the unique method of choosing and preparing medicines that match the patient's disease state were completely disregarded. To this day, opponents of homeopathy brush aside evidence coming from nanotechnology laboratories of the Indian Institute of Science, research work on the memory of water, and the proofs from the laboratory of Nobel Laureate Luc Montagnier. Truth be told, the burden of proof, for those seeking it, does not lie with homeopathy but rather with the 18th- and 19th-century mechanistic model of science whose limitations prevent it from seeing beyond the visible.

In India, homeopathy was never suppressed. Over 207 medical schools teach homeopathy, and over 100 million Indians use only homeopathy for their medical care. It is popular among the common people, like the cabbie, Mehboob, as well as celebrities. There are over 200,000 practicing homeopaths, and 12,000 graduates are added annually.

In terms of clinical application and research in homeopathy, India is the world leader. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has

## Homeopathy for Mental Disorders

**D**uring my stay at Dr. Divya's clinic, she learned about my interest in approaching mental health issues using homeopathy. She told me about a medical doctor and psychiatrist, Dr. Mahesh Gandhi, who uses homeopathy for treatment of mental illness. I wondered if he encountered and treated the type of psychological issues that I knew my Hindu brothers and sisters face in the USA. I contacted him for an interview for HINDUISM TODAY.

**VS:** How does homeopathy inform your chosen field of psychiatry?

**MG:** Psychiatry is based on a biological/chemical model of disease. Everything is seen as a disturbance in the body and the neurotransmitters. Psychotherapy and psy-

chiatric analysis are time consuming. Before the 1950s, psychiatry was not a mainstream medical field. Since the 1950s, drug-based treatments have been giving quicker results. This progress has come at a price. Allopathy and psychiatry focus on the disease and lose sight of the patient as an individual. For every diagnosis there is a drug. When the root cause is not treated, a drug-based solution is temporary. Drug- and lab-test-based treatments are ok for acute infections and deficiency states; but for chronic illnesses, people must explore other options for their well-being instead of becoming drug-dependent. The suppressive nature of allopathy and psychiatry upsets people who want a drug-free and holistic approach to health. In homeopathy, patients are understood as individuals

and listened to, and they feel a general sense of well-being.

**VS:** What are the various mental health issues you encounter in your practice?

**MG:** I see patients with anxiety, panic disorders, phobias, post-traumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, bipolar manic depressive disorder, schizophrenia, paranoia, anorexia and bulimia, addictive tendencies, children's problems—bedwetting, behavioral disorders, ADHD, autism, mental retardation—geriatric and sexual problems. With homeopathy, all these conditions respond beautifully. For some issues, homeopathy is best as the first-line treatment. I advise parents to see a homeopath before drugging their kids. With drugs, kids will get better

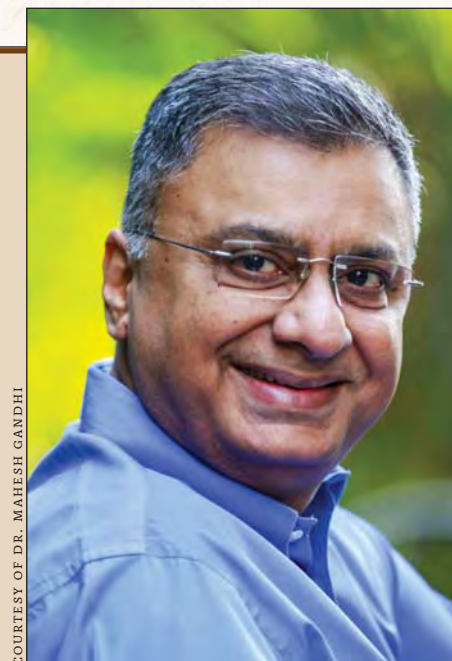
only for a short time and the problem never goes away fully. Pharmaceutical companies bring out more and more drugs for younger and younger kids. It is a very risky and scary situation.

**VS:** What is the general awareness among people for homeopathy and its place in mental illness?

**MG:** Before I became a homeopath, patients came to me for drug-based psychiatric treatment. Now, with increasing awareness about side-effects, people refuse drugs and ask for homeopathy.

**VS:** Can grief, loss and abandonment issues be treated with homeopathy?

**MG:** Yes. I just saw a man in his 40s who lost his wife to cancer. He loves and idolizes his dead wife and will never let her go from his mind. Many psychiatrists have given him antidepressants, but he continued to grieve



**Dr. Mahesh Gandhi:** He specializes in mental disorders

and be depressed. I told him that instead of remembering his wife with sadness, he can remember her with joy. During case-taking, I explored all areas of his life, his personality and relationships. I didn't give him antidepressants. With a homeopathic remedy that matches his state of grief, now he remembers his wife with a happy smile.

**VS:** Do you engage with patients in an empathetic manner? Mainstream medicine is about detachment, distance and impersonalisation.

**MG:** As a homeopath, I listen first, without giving advice about acceptance, logic, fate, destiny, karma and God's role in our life. I do not lecture patients about cultivating



established AYUSH, a ministry that promotes Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha, Homeopathy, Naturopathy and Sowa Rigpa as viable medical care systems for the country.

What makes homeopathy so successful in India? In my view, the Vedic and Ayurvedic understanding of man and nature prepares India to embrace and assimilate homeopathy, which has many principles and laws that are totally consistent with India's ancient Vedic philosophy. Take for example what is called

"case-taking." This is the homeopathic science and art of listening, observing, asking questions and conducting extremely detailed inquiry about the presenting complaint, its time-line, and the entire personality of the patient so that a highly individualized picture of the state of their body, mind and emotions emerges clearly. This information allows the homeopath to understand the disease process and choose an individualized remedy on the basis of the law of similars that would

restore balance to the vital force.

While staying true to the principles of homeopathy, Indian homeopaths have pioneered many different case-taking and treatment methods suitable for our complex and hectic modern life. For example, Dr. Bhawisha and Sachindra Joshi, my teachers, have come up with a method of plotting human maturity, growth and developmental stages on a periodic table grid as used for the elements. They have extended the same idea to

the entire animal kingdom and used the natural behavioral patterns of animals for plotting them in a similar periodic table. During case-taking, they look for parallels between human and animal behavior as well as energies for selecting a suitable remedy from the animal kingdom for their patients.

Following this method, the Joshis have reported astonishing cures for many different ailments. The Joshis say, "Homeopathy is so individualized, it takes into account the entire

personality of the patient. Irrespective of the case-taking method, it brings about deep and lasting healing. No matter what the disease is—tonsillitis, eczema, asthma or depression—in every single case, when we consider the whole person and not just their diagnosis, we can prescribe remedies that remove the problem from inside out without any suppression and side effects."

Dr. Dinesh Chauhan an international teacher with a thriving charitable and volun-

teer work in India, has pioneered a "Scientifically intuitive case-witnessing process." His style, an offshoot of the Sensation Method, is designed to ask a minimum number of questions to get to the simillimum. Once a remedy exactly similar to the core inner state of the patient has been achieved, Dr. Chauhan creates a space where the patient is able to observe his entire energy pattern and behavior. Dr. Chauhan claims that by mirroring the inherent patterns and energies back to the



## The Other Song Academy

Inspired by the Vedic view of the natural world, contemporary homeopathic thinker Dr. Rajan Sankaran has developed a homeopathic approach he calls the Sensation Method. He proposes that in the sick state, our Vital Force stops playing a healthy music that is natural to it and begins to play an erratic tune loudly. He calls it *The Other Song* and explains that the symptoms and sensations expressed by the body, mind and spirit during illness are nothing but the sounds of this erratic tune. This is how the Vital Force draws our attention to what needs to be healed and cured. In his research of over 30 years, Dr. Sankaran has found that erratic tunes of the human Vital Force are

mirrored by the natural characteristics of the non-human components of nature, which can be used for preparing homeopathic remedies using Hahnemann's method of trituration, dilution and succussion. During homeopathic case-taking by the Sensation Method, the patient—by way of expressing energy and describing his complaints—reveals, unbeknownst to himself, the specific source in nature from which his Vital Force draws an erratic tune for the expression of his symptoms. When a remedy indicated by the patient is administered to him as per the Law of Similars, he experiences a remarkable cure. Using Dr. Sankaran's *Sensation Method*, practitioners from around the world re-

**Using the sensation method:** Dr. Rajan Sankaran (center, blue shirt) has assembled a team with dean Dr. Meghna Shah (back row, fourth from left)

port over 80% success rate in treating their patients.

During my stay in Mumbai, I visited Dr. Sankaran's institute, aptly named The Other Song Academy, and met the dean, Dr. Meghna Shah, faculty members and a group of international students. Dr. Meghna pointed out, "At The Other Song Academy we provide comprehensive postgraduate homeopathic medical training and offer patients highly individualized homeopathic treatment in combination with meditation, yoga, lifestyle modification and balanced nutrition."

gratitude and learning a lesson. I listen with deep empathy because the patient needs to be heard. Homeopathy deals with emotions and feelings. There is a human touch.

**VS:** Can homeopathy help people traumatized by sexual, familial and communal violence?

**MG:** When tragedy strikes, some people cannot forget and move on. They get stuck and experience trauma. One patient said to me that in her childhood a thief broke into her house and raped her at knife-point. She described this event very calmly. I asked her about her feelings during the event. She said,

"I felt that my life is more important. I will let this crazy man finish his misdeed and go away. I will get over it and move on with my life." In this case, this patient's personal attitude helped her get over what could otherwise be described a highly traumatic event. When people come to me with various traumas in their background, I always check into their feelings and thoughts at the time when the event was happening. This gives me a clue whether they are stuck or have moved on. Assessing an individual's response and reaction to a situation allows us to understand people as individuals; and at that point we can provide an individualized remedy to

help them. In that way homeopathy is a very humanistic healing modality.

**VS:** How can homeopathy help patients with substance dependence and addictions? In the USA alone, 65,000 people died in 2016 from opioid overdose.

**MG:** Substance abuse and dependence is a reflection of the disturbance in the Vital Force. With homeopathy, we work to calm down the habits of self-medication by exploring the root cause that enables the patient to become dependent on the substance. Once the Vital Force is balanced, the habits go away and people don't need crutches.

## Homeopathy 101

- Based on natural laws, and similar to ayurveda in recognizing the role of the five koshas.
- Views sickness as a disturbance in the vital force.
- Case-taking involves in-depth inquiry into symptoms, bodily sensations, desires, aversions, fears, dreams, lifestyle, stressors like job, relationships, failures, deprivations, etc. Questions are asked about family dynamics, relatives, parents, children, grandparents and the timeline of illness. Practitioners are trained to explore and listen patiently, without judgment or prejudice.
- Homeopathy recognizes that certain individuals consider themselves possessed by spirits that make them behave abnormally. This phenomenon is described in homeopathy *materia médica* and repertory as *cacodemomania*, and an expert homeopath might be able to help using some of the hundreds of available remedies.
- Remedies are made by triturating, diluting and succussing so that the toxicity inherent in the crude substance is removed and the hidden healing energy/potential is unlocked and enhanced. The more diluted the remedy, the higher its potency and power.
- Remedies are non-toxic, non-addictive, have no side-effects and are suitable for all age groups, for almost any acute and chronic, physical, mental and emotional sickness.
- A low-cost alternative care for the body, mind and spirit.
- Remedies are not prescribed generically for various diagnostic labels (for example, *Nux vomica* for headache, *Natrum muriaticum* for allergies, *Calcarea Phosphorica* for bone pain and so on). Rather, remedies are selected on the basis of individualization of symptoms and patient vitality.
- Remedies are prepared according to the method established by Hahnemann. They come in various forms—powders, liquids and pills. Remedies vary in potency. Mother tinctures are closest to the crude medicinal substance. Diluted remedies come in decimal X, centesimal C, millesimal M, and fifty-millesimal Q or LM potencies.
- The homeopath matches the potency to the patient's vitality stage of suffering. Remedies can be given once, or repeated as often as needed, and stopped or changed when improvement is seen or when symptoms change.

**VS:** Do people with gender-related trauma find help with homeopathy? In the West, gays, lesbians and transgender people are making headlines with their choices.

**MG:** Gender-related trauma is increasing in India. I do not treat people for their sexual orientation because it is not a disease. Some feel guilty for having attraction for the same sex, and with homeopathy their sense of guilt can be addressed without changing their orientation. In the end a person has to feel happy and OK with himself, irrespective of whether he spends his life with a woman or a man. I am not going to tell him his choice is right or wrong, or what choices he should make, but I

will help him become comfortable and happy with his choice. To that end, homeopathy can help because homeopathy is totally patient-centered. They are not judged on the basis of morality, good and bad, right and wrong, social standards, stigmas and religious dogma. Sometimes a patient wants to know if I can change him as a person. My answer is no. Homeopathy does not turn a tiger into a cat or a cat into a horse. It just facilitates them to be a better version of themselves. That is the beauty of homeopathy.

**VS:** Do you find any similarity between ayurveda and homeopathy?

**MG:** In ayurveda, we have the concept of pancha kosha—*annamaya* (food), *pranamaya* (vital force), *manomaya* (mind), *vijnanamaya* (intellect) and *anandamaya* (bliss). When a person journeys from the outermost to the innermost fifth kosha, he can uncover his true self, the atman, and he might find the ultimate unity between atman and Paramatman. Amongst the five koshas, the three outer koshas are subject to change. The central kosha, *anandamaya*, is about sat-chit-ananda, and remains unaffected by the changes in the outer koshas. However, disturbances of the outer koshas can temporarily cloud the *anandamaya* kosha. When in too much pain





COURTESY DR. DINESH CHAUHAN



VATSALA SPERLING

patients, the homeopathic healer becomes the very first simillimum to the patients. Dr. Chauhan reports that patients with severe psychologically disruptive states get better after undergoing the “scientifically intuitive case-witnessing process”—even before any remedy is administered—because now they themselves fully.

Indian homeopaths I have studied with have shown a deep understanding of the stages of human development, from gestation to death, but not just in terms of the birth, growth and death of the physical body. They understand the spiritual, mental and emotional development of human beings and how life begins in the creative principle of the feminine energy, moves through the seven chakras, and ends in the transformative principle of the masculine energy. Each of these energies, like Shiva and Shakti, is essential for the existence and completion of the other. Steeped in this knowledge, a homeopath is able to have a person describe his life narrative and express his experiences of family dynamics, gestation and birth process and the developmental stage, where he might

be stuck and where he manifests disease symptoms. Then, receiving a homeopathic remedy that matches and reflects the developmental stage he is stuck in brings on profound healing.

#### HOMEOPATHY, A LIFE PATH

I come from a background of hardcore science. With a doctorate in clinical microbiology, I have served as the chief of clinical microbiology services in a multi-specialty children's hospital in India and worked for years alongside accomplished medical doctors and surgeons. I am a homeopath now because homeopathy speaks to my innate nature and view of life.

It occurs to me that, in being human, we are very much a part of nature, which encompasses other animals, minerals and plants. According to the Vedic enunciation, “Vasudhaiva kutumbakam,” The whole world is one family. When one component of nature suffers, other parts of nature offer salvation. Homeopathy has successfully grasped and employed this philosophical concept for the amelioration of human suffering.

**Sharing India with USA:** (left) Dr. Dinesh Chauhan (far left) meets with homeopathic practitioners in a Massachusetts seminar (our author is seated on the far right). (above) Dr. Divya Chhabra, one of the author's teachers, with a clinic in Mumbai

From my homeopathic adventures in India, I returned home fully convinced that, truly, every client is a spiritual being on a path and stage of inner development that is unique to him; and in this moment in time he is experiencing illness due to an imbalance in his vital force. When a suitable homeopathic remedy is administered that mirrors the sick state, his vital force will shine once again and he will be well again. Both health and disease have a higher purpose. We can choose to view disease as a punishment or as an opportunity for learning the lessons we are meant to learn during our spiritual growth and development. Homeopathy allows for such contemplation and offers support to the vital force so that it can accomplish its higher purpose in life.

and physical suffering, it becomes difficult to remain focused on the inner bliss. When you throw a coin in a pond, so many ripples are made that you cannot see the bottom. When the water settles, you can see the coin and the bottom. As homeopaths, we remove the ripples and imbalances of the annamaya, pranamaya and manomaya koshas so that their functions and expressions change for the better. In a way, we homeopaths help our patients with their true spiritual purpose and help them move toward their anandamaya kosha. This is the ultimate goal of human beings on the Earth.

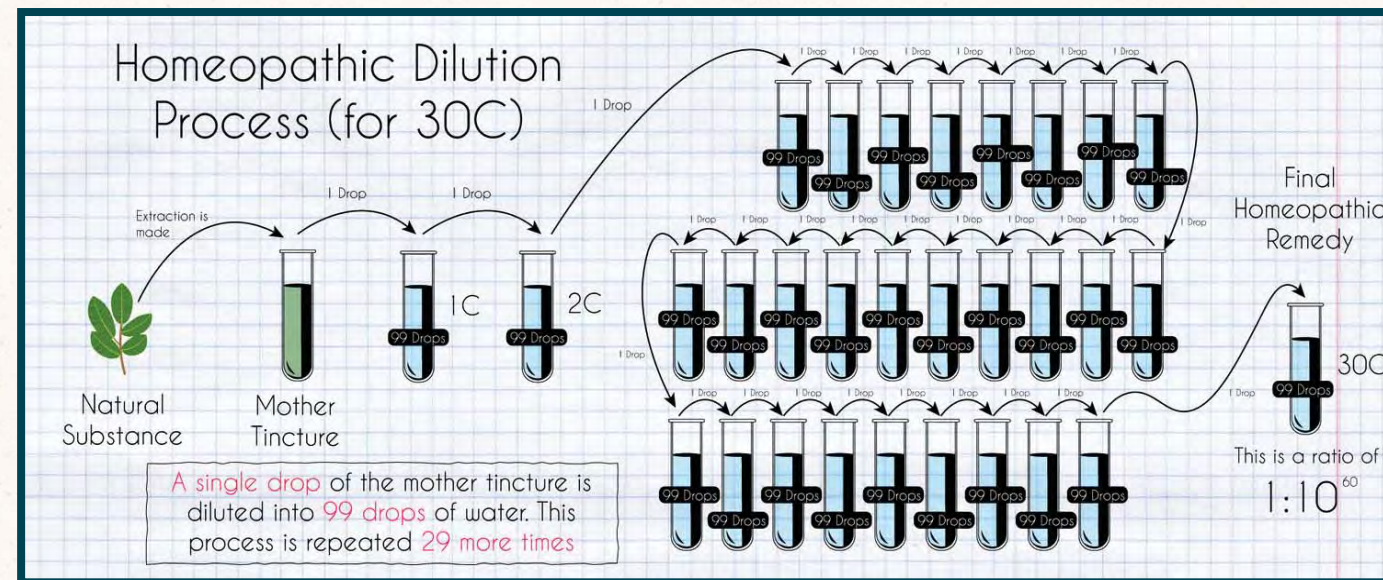
Both ayurveda and homeopathy are holistic. Both work on the core constitution, the ko-

shas, and both recognize the unique energetic patterns of an individual. Ayurveda talks about balance of *vata*, *pitta* and *kapha*. Homeopathy recognizes the imbalance of wind, bile and phlegm and considers changes in these for selection of remedies. Both systems advise about lifestyle and habits. Sick people experience abnormal cravings and desires, such as craving for sugar, salt, stimulants and unhealthy foods. In this picture, healthy diets and habits, exercise and clean environment all have a place alongside homeopathic medicines. With highly individualized homeopathic treatment, people begin to make healthy choices and invite health-promoting habits and energies into their life.

**VS:** Can allopathic and homeopathic medicine work together?

**MG:** The allopathic medicines are material doses of chemicals. Homeopathy is energy medicine. Material medicine and energy medicine work at different levels. Material medicine (allopathy) affects the body. It is good for accidents and emergencies. Energy medicine (homeopathy) affects the Vital Force. It is good for managing chronic cases and deep-seated emotional and mental disturbances. They can be used side by side. Every stream of medicine has its place in healthcare.

**VS:** What is your approach to patients who want to stop medications?



**Serial dilution and succussion:** These are the foundations of homeopathic pharmacopeia. Medicating potency (1C) is made by mixing one drop of the mother tincture with 99 drops of alcohol-water mixture and succussing (shaking vigorously) 100 times. Thirty repetitions of this process gives 30C medicating potency. Addition of a few drops of medicating potency to blank lactose pills gives a 30C remedy. The material form of the original medicinal substance does not exist beyond 12C (Avogadro's number). After this potency, the

medicinal substance exists in nano-particles. A remedy prepared by serial dilution and succussion, and selected according to the Law of Similars (simillimum), can balance the Vital Force and cure the symptoms it is able to produce when ingested in raw form. *Natrum muriaticum*, diluted sea salt, helps with headaches. *Arnica*, from the plant Wolf's bane, helps with sore muscles. *Euphrasia*, from the plant Eyebright, helps with eye discharges.



THE AUTHOR, Vatasala Sperling, (right, with Dr. Dinesh Chauhan) has been writing for HINDUISM TODAY for the past 22 years. She practices classical homeopathy in Vermont and sees clients from many countries via Skype.

## More Resources

**Homeopathy and Psychiatry:** Personal Evolution Model, by Mahesh Gandhi, MD. 2017, [www.drmareshgandhiclinic.com](http://www.drmareshgandhiclinic.com)

**Homeopathy, Science or Myth:** by Bill Gray, North Atlantic Press.

**Organon of the Medical Art:** by Samuel Hahnemann, edited by Wenda O'Reilly. 1996, Birdcage Press, California, USA.

**Homeopathy for Today's World:** Discovering Your Animal, Mineral or Plant Nature, by Rajan Sankaran, MD. 2011, Healing Arts Press, Vermont, USA.

**Explore Your Inner Human-Animal**

**Connection:** The Joshis' Approach, by Bhawisha Joshi, MD 2014, [www.drjoshisclinic.com](http://www.drjoshisclinic.com)

**www.vithoulkas.com:** Dr. Vithoulkas is credited with reviving homeopathy in the West after completing his homeopathic education in India.

**dynamis.edu/teaching:** Homeopaths Dr. Jeremy Sherr and his wife Camilla are homeopaths with great success in using homeopathy for treating over 40,000 AIDS victims in South Africa.



**MG:** Weaning off drugs is possible. It should be done gradually under expert supervision.

**VS:** Many old cultures believe that possession by malevolent entities results in mental illness. Any comments?

**MG:** Psychiatry was built upon the concept of entity possession. In India we think we are haunted by our karma. In Hahnemann's time, mental health patients were considered possessed and were treated worse than animals. Those cruel practices were based on ignorance. Even now some people believe that mental illness is a form of possession by negative entities. Some mental health patients are convinced that they are possessed, and

therefore they behave in an aberrant manner. I try to educate them as needed. In the homeopathic repertory and *materia medica*, we have a huge section on mind, fears, delusions, illusion, and various other mental symptoms and behavioral anomalies that patients experience when they feel possessed. Homeopathy has a way of understanding these conditions and alleviating them by giving remedies.

**VS:** How can homeopaths give a hint to their patients about the side effects of drugs without picking a fight with the pharmaceutical companies?

**MG:** Leave the big pharma alone. Just practice good homeopathy. Let people decide what

they want to use. People know about side effects. They are brainwashed into believing there are no alternatives to drugs. I tell them to explore holistic options. The same can be said about the skeptics. They do what they want; we do what we can.

**VS:** Any message for people who might have family members with mental health disease?

**MG:** Be open minded and hopeful. Many things can be done to help these patients. Homeopathy offers a safe, gentle, noninvasive, holistic and spiritually oriented alternative that is in tune with the ancient healing modalities like ayurveda. Be bold in your choice, and try homeopathy.



# Learning from Akhilandeshwari Ma

Returning to my ancestral village in India, I encounter unexpected insights from an ancient form of the Mother Goddess

BY SHIVALI BHAMMER, NEW YORK

**A**BOUT AN HOUR FROM THE GUJARATI town of tankara is my ancestral Indian village. The Marlet Mataji Temple there is said by locals to be over 11,000 years old. My grandmother used to take the bus from Tankara to Marlet Mataji and worship one of the forms of the Mother Goddess, Khodiyar Ma. She had eleven children during her life, so I'm sure she would have identified more easily with the female personification of Divine consciousness than with the male! I recently traveled with my father for my first visit to this temple.

After what seems a very long time from when my father told me "It's just close by," we finally park our car and clamber our way up through a small alleyway to the temple. The road which leads one to the temple steps is broken and in picturesque ruin from the heavy monsoon rains. There are many cement companies in the area, making the air murky yellow and difficult to breathe. As we enter the temple, I nod to the cow out front, as she resembles a stalwart guard whom you would not want to challenge.

Before we arrive at the sanctum to meet one of Khodiyar Ma's physical representations, we pass numerous photos of children who are the result of parents who had initially not been able bear them, but had then prayed to the Goddess and found success. The temple itself is constructed around a tree, grown where the original murti was formed thousands of years ago. A trisula standing against the tree is so tall that it bends sideways and has to be supported. This trisula is said to grow two or more inches every year. My father personally attests to this truth. He has been coming here since childhood, and dishonesty is not one of his traits. The trisula does look abnormally tall.

There is a certain energy in this space. I would describe it as a "root- edness." You feel like you are deeply connected with the womb of the Earth and that there is something much bigger around you. I have never been a devotee of the Mother Goddess, but here I am certainly intrigued.

Hindus and non-Hindus alike flood the gates of India to visit Her temples and look with fascination upon the sacred and powerful



PIETER WELTEVREDE

murtis. Believers and non-believers will sit there for a few minutes and perhaps say a prayer just in case the Divinity exists. However, Hinduism is far more profound, and the message is so subtle and beautifully intricate that unless you strive to go a little deeper, you might miss it altogether.

Khodiyar Ma is the name many Gujaratis use in referring to the Goddess, and they have their own folk story of how Khodiyar Ma came to be. She is very much the Vedic Goddess more formally known as Akhilandeshwari Ma. This name means "She Who is never not broken." *Akhila* means "whole" or "complete," but *akhilanda* means the double negative "never not broken;" and *eshwari* comes from Ishwari, meaning the Supreme Ruler. Today people may chant and praise Akhilandeshwari Ma, but unless you breakdown the name and understand the Sanskrit, you are missing the very nectar of the fruit. In her name alone lies her purpose and truth.

In religion, philosophy and culture, we are usually focused on the completeness of something, both in ourselves and outside of ourselves. As a society, we are obsessed with perfection and are constantly striving to have everything in place, so we can feel whole and final. Many personifications, descriptions and depictions of the Supreme Consciousness across all religions focus on transcendence, completeness and wholeness. However, the existence of Akhilandeshwari Ma completely flips this concept on its head.

She represents the very opposite: she represents the parts or pieces—not the whole. She represents every fragmented shard of us strewn across a floor of our most challenging moments. She represents our complete brokenness. I am drawn to her because, in the recognition of these shattered pieces of my self, I am embracing a truth that, ironically, brings me far closer to the concept of completeness than I would be otherwise.

Why is acknowledging our own seemingly broken, incompleteness so appealing? I think it is because the Goddess represents the power and creativity to pull ourselves back together as we wish to be, the



SHIVALI BHAMMER

**A HOME FOR THE GODDESS:** (far left) Artwork by Pieter Weltevrede depicting Akhilandeshwari Ma; (above) Shivali and her father talk with a local during their visit to the Marlet Mataji Temple

power to constantly recreate ourselves again and again. If we were complete and whole, without an incomplete imperfection, we would be void of change, evolution and creative expression; we would be stagnant. Existence would be unsavory and stale.

This is not to be misinterpreted as conflicting with the Hindu teaching of stillness. Stillness and tranquility are fundamental when balancing these broken and changing facets of both the more illusory physical world and the deeper truths of our inner spiritual workings.

If we have a puzzle to solve, it is up to us to determine how we wish to put it together. If we did not have pieces within us, how then would we move, adapt and change our life to one day complete it? This challenge is only possible because we are disassembled. Only by accepting this fractured nature within us are we enabled to grow and to face the trials and tribulations of the world. Akhilandeshwari Ma is beautiful because she reminds you of who you are and who you have the potential to be. The Goddess takes consciousness and places all that energy, and the reins that direct it, back into your hands—which is truly empowering.

In life, many people continuously feel perplexed and disheartened when things go wrong. Some of these events are consequences of our own behaviors and desires, and sometimes we cannot trace the cause, although there must be one. Akhilandeshwari Ma teaches us to embrace that challenge as a good thing, rather than letting it overwhelm us. She shows us that it is only through this incomplete nature of ours that we can continue to perfect ourselves. We are part of a cosmic play that is in constant dance and movement. Feel that change within you; and instead of letting difficulty engulf you, reengineer it to allow you to express yourself on a higher level. To put it simply, don't moan that you're broken; rather be happy that you can break so you can continuously remake yourself!

We must remember that consciousness is all pervading. It is both

in the pieces of ourselves and in the spaces between. We can never truly lose ourselves, though we may feel that we have when we are only identifying with one part of us. When you identify with all the seemingly broken parts of you, you can start to see the unity in everything and you can acknowledge life's discomforts as a perfecting rearrangement of the whole.

The symbolism of Akhilandeshwari Ma doesn't stop with Her name. Her chosen mode of transport is a crocodile. The uneducated eye sees only a Goddess standing on an animal, but further exploration reveals that this Vedic Goddess stands upon a crocodile because it embodies our human fears. In Vedanta, fear of death can be broken down into many basic fears—fear of failure, fear of inadequacy, fear of rejection and fear of loss. Like a crocodile, fear is forever gnawing at us with its razor-sharp teeth, ready to swallow us up for breakfast. Fear itself drives us to feel this insurmountable grief and has the power to disable us from putting ourselves back together when things go wrong. What a Goddess! Akhilandeshwari Ma stands right on top of the crocodile and uses it as her vehicle on the lake. The Goddess refuses to succumb to fear, which would eat her up and plunge her into the dark depths of the water. Instead, she stands atop that fear, harnessing it boldly as a tool and gaining strength from it. We often hear phrases like "The only thing to fear is fear itself" or "Stand up against your fears." This is precisely what Akhilandeshwari Ma, one of India's oldest depictions of the Goddess, demonstrates. Don't be swallowed by your fears. Trample them; stand tall upon them. Use that very fear as a transport into a greater vision of yourself and your life.

In my own temple, I had never had a murti of an Indian Goddess, but after this visit I picked up a small murti of Akhilandeshwari Ma, or Khodiyar Ma as we call her. She is dressed in a beautiful, brightly colored sari. She holds the trident proudly in one hand, while the other hand offers blessings. Her face is beaming as she stands upon Her crocodile. Here lies the reason for "idol worship" by Hindus: it is not because we believe a physical object is God, it is because every time I wake up and I look at Her, I am reminded of how I am like the Goddess: never not broken! I can be completely shattered, yet I am fearless, I am beautiful, and I am ready to stand tall.



# My Love for Chinmaya Mission

My family's association with this Hindu organization and its teachers lifted me from tragedy while inspiring religious education and daily devotion

BY KUMUDHA VENKATESAN, USA

CRYED LIKE A CHILD FOR MONTHS AFTER the passing of my father in 2013. Suddenly everything came to a standstill for me. My whole life, I had loved, respected and revered him. As I grew up, he taught me math and drawing. We would discuss everything from politics to philosophy, religion and astronomy. He was my role model. I vividly remember his fascination with the perfect creation and management of our universe by Lord Krishna. Always brimming with optimism, he was loving, caring, inspiring and compassionate to everyone. He always performed his duties to the best of his abilities and in full surrender to the Divine.

After traveling to India for the funeral rites with my husband, mother-in-law and son, I returned to the US with a heavy heart. The difficult karma kept coming, and I fractured my right hand on the journey home. For the following few weeks I was overwhelmed with intense pain, sadness and grief. I found myself hating life every morning. My caring mother-in-law and husband cooked food for the family every day for the next two months, while I would sit in my room for hours, staring at a beautiful picture of Lord Krishna, asking, "Why did my father die? Why am I feeling so sad?" Sometimes tears rolled down my face. Engulfed with sadness and anger, I could only nod my head when friends offered condolences. My mother, siblings and cousins in India also tried to console me, to no avail. Soon I no longer felt like praying; I lost interest in my favorite activities, such as listening to music or going for long walks. I was on the verge of becoming an atheist. My husband—my best friend and soulmate—tried to comfort me. He urged me to pray, to recite the *Vishnusahasranama* and *Aditya Hrudayam* every day.

Then one day my mother-in-law told us about Chinmaya Mission's Balavihar—classes on Hinduism for youth, offered on Sundays. She felt my son would get a good exposure to Hinduism there. I didn't really like the idea, as Sunday was a day of rest and relaxation for our family, but I conceded. Before I knew it, my son began to consider it the best day of his week! He started by learning stories from the *Ramayana* along with the chanting of several shlokas. That

year a local *Bhagavad Gita* and *Upanishad* discourse was to be given by Swami Tejomayananda himself, disciple of Swami Chinmayananda and head of the Chinmaya Mission until 2017. The title was *Essence of the Bhagavad Gita*. Though I resisted, my husband finally coaxed me into attending.

Listening to the enlightening words of Swamiji, I was instantly transported to another world. When Swamiji said, "The human soul is eternal and immortal. Fire and weapons cannot destroy it," I felt as if I was



ALL PHOTOS: CHINMAYA MISSION

hearing Lord Krishna Himself. These few words had a profound impact on me and on my depressed state of mind. Listening further, my mind became calm and refreshed. I wanted this divine talk to go on eternally. A state of peace and tranquility persisted long afterwards, uplifting and reenergizing me, rekindling my interest in our ancient scriptures and philosophy. As Swami Vivekananda said, "Super-divine strength is the only way, the one way out. By it alone we can pass through all these intricacies, through these showers of miseries, unscathed." Here I felt as though that Super-divine had

intervened during my life's darkest period.

Soon I was reading a *Gita* translation by Pujya Gurudev (Swami Chinmayananda). I wholeheartedly agreed with its wisdom. As with my father, I was learning of karma, dharma (righteousness), virtue, meditation, mantras, and the three *gunas*: *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. I started to read spiritual books, many by Swami Chinmayananda, absorbing his words, his legacy and his meditative simplicity. By divine grace, I started to follow a more spiritual way of life. I now began my day with a simple puja and at least a ten-minute meditation. I worked to follow Lord Krishna's sage advice: "Do your duty to the best of your abilities." As Swami Chinmayananda said, "Start living the divine life. Then yours shall be the daily experience of the blessings of the Lord, even in your simple domestic life."

Recently my husband and I took part in Swami Iswarananda's enriching workshop, *Life of I: On the Sadhana Trail*. Swami expounded Vedanta teachings with numerous interesting stories from everyday life. I was in a state of spiritual bliss when Swami articulately explained how prayer, *japa* and meditation can take our mind towards purity and goodness.

## Chinmaya Mission

I've heard that when Pujya Gurudev was sitting on banks of Mother Ganga, She told him to spread the knowledge of Vedanta. In 1954, on the power of that vision, he and his devotees founded the religious organization known as Chinmaya Mission. Through numerous spiritual talks, Pujya Gurudev motivated and inspired thousands of Hindus across India and the world to follow the path of dharma in order to eventually attain *moksha* (freedom from rebirth). Swami Tejomayananda says, "Pujya Gurudev is an infinite goodness, perfectly integrating love, light, devotion and knowledge." Throughout his life, Pujya Gurudev played a pivotal role in helping to revive the essence of Hinduism in many parts of India after the nation's freedom from the British. His powerful speeches captivated diplomats at the United Nations, inspired college students in American universities, and created a worldwide movement that runs entirely on volunteer work.

Swami Chinmayananda said, "True

religion has two important constituents: its philosophy and its ritual. Ritual without philosophy is only superstition, while philosophy without ritual practices amounts to madness." The mission's philosophy is based in Vedanta, or "the conclusion of the Vedas,"—the foundation of Hinduism. Swami Chinmayananda says, "Vedanta is a philosophy; it is a science of life, an art of living, a religion, and much, much more..." Chinmaya Mission works to epitomize Vedic knowledge for everyone, of all ages. The goal is to provide to individuals, from any background, the wisdom of Vedanta and the practical means of spiritual growth and happiness, enabling them to become positive contributors to society. The Mission's motto is "To give maximum happiness to the maximum number for the maximum time." Today there are around 500 Chinmaya Mission centers across the world working towards the fulfillment of this mission statement, primarily through its teaching programs, study-groups, spiritual discourses and Hindu family camps.

Swami Swaroopananda currently heads Chinmaya Mission worldwide. He and the many swamis and acharyas continue imparting the eternal knowledge of the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Upanishads* to young children, teenagers, adults and seniors, including Westerners who are curious to learn about Vedanta and Hindu culture.

## Balavihar

For many Indian Americans, Chinmaya Mission is synonymous with Balavihar. Balavihar programs are offered worldwide by the mission's many centers. Through classrooms, games, arts, crafts, stories and more, the program aims to reinforce spiritual and cultural values for prekindergarten through twelfth grade. Pujya Gurudev was deeply concerned about Hindu children growing up in Western countries. He stated, "Training of our children can be done between the ages of 6 to 12. Between ages 12 to 18, it can be done to an extent, but after 18 the tree has set and one will have to go through fire in order to become hot and pliable enough to change." He also stated, "Children are not vessels to be filled, but lamps to be lit." The mission's youth programs nurture and mold children through devotional *bhajans*, scriptural learning, cultural crafts and inspiring stories from the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*.

My son's attendance at Balavihar each week has had a noticeably positive effect on him. Now he says a few shlokas every day, first thing in the morning and last thing at night. He knows more shlokas and Puranic stories than I do! He has started to meditate for short periods consistently each day and then writes "Sri Rama Jayam" eleven times. He is inspired to learn Sanskrit, and he loves

PASSING ON TRADITION: (far left) Swami Chinmayananda, founder of Chinmaya Mission; (clockwise from top-left) devotees gather in Houston to celebrate Mahasivaratri; Swami Tejomayananda visits the center in Los Angeles, California; young children assemble before beginning their Balavihar classes for the day; five youth perform a short skit, dressed as sadhus offering worship

to narrate the moral stories he hears from his Balavihar classes. Now both my son and mother-in-law regularly chant *Hanuman Chalisa*. In my experience, Chinmaya Mission has been a spiritual platform for steady devotion towards the Divine. Even though we are staying thousands of miles away from India, I feel so fortunate that my son is able to learn about Hindu festivals, culture and traditions here at home.

A core volunteer and fifth-grade Balavihar teacher told me, "Hindu children should enroll in Balavihar because it helps to inculcate the dharmic values in a fun-filled way. Balavihar makes them clearly understand what it means to truly be a Hindu." Sudha Malhotra, president of our local Chinmaya Mission Alpharetta, told me, "The essence of Balavihar is to build a foundation for imbibing the teachings of Vedanta, to bring about a positive transformation in their lives. It goes







beyond learning shlokas and reading interesting stories.”

Parents play an integral role in Balavihar as well. Not only do they themselves often attend classes while their children do (most centers require it), but usually parents will volunteer to be teachers. My husband enjoys being a back-up teacher in my son's class. This year he is teaching *Bhagavad Gita* chanting to children. Many adults in our Chinmaya Mission are eager to do service. During special events, such as our annual Krishna Mela, teachers, parents and volunteers spend many hours organizing and coordinating.

Teenagers in 8th grade and above are in Junior Chinmaya Mission Yuva Kendra (CHYK). These teenagers read and discuss interesting books such as *Hindu Culture*, written by Swami Tejomayanandaji, *Self-Unfoldment*, written by Pujya Gurudev, and more. Sudha Malhotra says, “*Self-Unfoldment*, for example, is a text that covers all concepts related to Vedanta. The teenagers’ curiosity about life makes our discussions very enriching. With the pressures of high school, these teachings give teenagers a huge edge over others and lay a strong foundation.” These teenagers actively participate in community service by teaching underprivileged children, organizing bake sales, and volunteering at community shelters and old age homes. They also learn more advanced practices such as pranayama and meditation. Sudha Malhotra told me, “Hindu culture enables Balavihar teenagers to gain a deeper understanding of the significance behind the Hindu beliefs and practices. The teenagers also take field trips to churches and mosques to learn about other religions and share about Hinduism. This deepens peoples’ understanding of Hinduism.” A local ninth grader told me, “I

love the discussions about Vedanta. They have helped me immensely in facing all types of challenges and issues at school. I also enjoy meditation and silent walks—activities which help me focus on inner positivity.”

#### Our Favorite Day of the Week

Every Sunday I look forward to our local Chinmaya Mission assembly. After gathering in the main hall, we start by chanting the sacred word “Aum” three times. We then humbly chant the *Shanti Mantra* and then the profound *Guru Stotram* to bless us with the spiritual power of the Guru. This is all followed by a minute of peaceful silence. Chinmaya Mission’s pledge is recited by the children, teachers, volunteers and parents. This powerful pledge was spoken out intuitively by Pujya Gurudev. It reads like this:

“We stand as one family, bound to each other with love and respect. We serve as an army, courageous and disciplined, ever ready to fight against all low tendencies and false values within and without us. We live honestly the noble life of sacrifice and service, producing more than what we consume and giving more than what we take. We seek the Lord’s grace to keep us on the path of virtue, courage and wisdom. May Thy grace and blessings flow through us, to the world around us. We believe that the service of our country is the service of the Lord of Lords and devotion to the people is the devotion to the Supreme Self. We know our responsibilities. Give us the ability and courage to fulfill them. Om Tat Sat.”

Swami Mitranandaji says, “The Chinmaya Mission pledge is practical and educative. Your growth is guaranteed if you apply it.”

During these weekly assemblies, a divine atmosphere fills the hall, and I feel so confident about our eternal religion and our rich

heritage and tradition. As I see dedicated volunteers and teachers engaged in their selfless work, Pujya Gurudev’s words flash in my mind: “Brood less, smile more and serve all.”

For me, each Sunday is like taking part in satsang. Hearing divine *bhajans*, seeing the devoted children and the dedicated teachers and volunteers doing their selfless service, all inclines my mind towards noble thoughts and the Divine. For myself and thousands of others, our mission centers are like spiritual oases. Swami Tejomayananda in the book *Satsanga* says, “Satsang is the greatest blessing. Do not wait for any greater grace from the Lord.” Here, spiritual practices and selfless service go hand in hand.

#### Other Programs

Chinmaya Mission centers worldwide also offer a vast variety of programs and events, such as camps for youth, walkathons, music and language learning, rural development programs and more. The aforementioned CHYK program offers retreats, summer camps and motivational talks by eminent scholars and acharyas. It acts as a great way to harness the huge potential of energetic young adults and direct it towards their religious lives. Recently, in our Chinmaya Mission, Junior CHYK presented “Yuva Connect” where teenagers discussed everything from stress to social media and from meditation to drug addiction. Numerous Hindu children who are not part of Balavihar also participated in this thought-provoking seminar.

The Youth Empowerment Program (YEP) is another such initiative, providing those between ages 18 to 28 an opportunity to serve others for one year, working with downtrodden communities in education, agriculture and infrastructure. Also, the Chinmaya Organization for Rural Development (CORD)



**A SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY:** (far left) members in San Jose prepare for the “Om Run;” youth camps include many outdoor activities apart from classes, such as canoeing; (above) a group of young adults enjoy one of the many Chinmaya Mission youth camps. This one is titled “Meditation Demystified;” Singers Ashwin and Lakshmi Chandrashekar of Yuva Rhythms record their music; youth sit and talk together during “Yuva Connect”

is empowering underprivileged communities in India and Sri Lanka by providing roads, constructing schools and helping the areas of agriculture, education, healthcare and sanitation. Swami Tejomayananda says, “CORD is a bond of love and understanding, encouraging a process of sharing which enriches both the giver and the receiver.” Yuva Rhythms, a group of highly talented singers, is creating new music styles to enthrall children and adults with devotional songs, stotras and bhajans. Recently Yuva Rhythms sang beautiful divine bhajans and songs incorporating traditional and Western music in our local Chinmaya Gurukul, enticing Indian-American children to learn more traditional music and shlokas.

There are also many programs to nourish Indian languages, traditions and culture. In our local center children learn Kannada, Tamil, Telugu, Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati, Hindi or Sanskrit. They regularly perform songs in these languages to showcase their education. Traditional dances such as Kathak and Kuchupudi are also taught, as well as yoga for youth and adults. In 2017 Chinmaya Vishwavidyapeeth was started in India, integrating modern education with ancient Hindu traditions and Vedic culture. Youth can graduate in Sanskrit, Indic traditions and Indian Performing Arts. Chinmaya Naada Bindu (CNB) offers long-term and short-term study in traditional Indian music and dance. It teaches tabla, Bharatanatyam, and Hindustani flute in serene foothills at Chinmaya Viboothi near Pune, in India. Chinmaya Mission’s informative television series, *Upanishad Ganga*, delves into Vedic teachings in the form of engaging stories.

Thanks to the Internet, we can instantly connect to our teachings. I listen to Pujya Guruji’s, Swami Iswaranandaji’s and Swami Abhedanandaji’s inspiring talks on YouTube. My sister, a busy mother in Bengaluru, listens to Swami Iswaranandaji’s talk on the *Bhagavad Gita* each week. Pujya Guruji regularly conducts e-satsangs so spiritually inclined Hindus across the world can gain eternal knowledge. The “ChinmayaChannel” on YouTube regularly uploads videos of spiritual talks and interviews.

By the Divine grace, my life has changed for the better after my association with Chinmaya Mission and its swamis and members. A few years ago, I was always in a hurry to finish my everyday work. My stovetop was always messy with spill-over, and burnt pots and pans were a staple in my kitchen. After I started traveling on this spiritual path, my kitchen is much cleaner and I’m constantly thinking about Lord Krishna while I’m chopping vegetables and cooking, and sometimes I repeat my favorite mantra, “Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya.” It’s interesting to observe the changes in myself.

Years ago, shopping gave me immense pleasure, but now I only buy things that are absolutely necessary. Listening to spiritual talks, performing meditation and volunteering gives me solace, while learning from the



*Upanishads* and reflecting on their wisdom has become an integral part of my daily life. I feel I have become more tolerant, compassionate, calm and confident. As Swami Chinmayananda said, “Silently hear everyone. Accept what is good. Reject and forget what is not. This is intelligent living.” I no longer get angry, annoyed or disturbed when I encounter unpleasant conversations and situations in life. I also notice that I no longer have strong likes and dislikes. Now, like my father, I try to do my best in everything and leave the rest to the Divine.



ALL PHOTOS: CHINMAYA MISSION









### The Final Board of Education Meeting

The final step in the textbook adoption process occurred on November 9, 2017, when the State Board of Education met to officially adopt, reject or change the recommendations submitted by the review panels. As early as 6:30 am, hundreds of Hindu American parents, children and community advocates from across the state began lining up at the California Department of Education building in Sacramento for this final hearing. Some carried signs asking for dignity and fairness in the treatment of Hinduism. As the morning progressed, hundreds more Hindu Americans from diverse backgrounds continued to arrive. They were joined by allies from other communities, including the Asian Pacific Islander Public Affairs Association, NAACP Sacramento Chapter and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.

The Hindu American Foundation reports that while Hindu Americans waited in line patiently and respectfully for their turn to testify before the Board, members of one group, South Asian Histories for All (SAHFA), tried to cut ahead of people in line and bypass CDE staff and security personnel.

SAHFA had also been active at the end of the 2016 Framework adoption process, demanding—and achieving to some extent—increased emphasis on caste-based discrimination, even though social structure was already prominent in the Framework.

Far outnumbered by the coalition led by the Hindu American community, SAHFA activists attempted to halt the adoption process, even threatening a lawsuit. The board, however, disregarded their demands. Also of little impact were their written submissions and testimonies, which sought to perpetuate the colonial and Orientalist stereotypes of Hinduism as an oppressive religion and culture.

This was due in part to the much larger presence of Hindu Americans and their supporters. Hundreds had signed up to testify. The coalition included over 75 interfaith and community groups, 17 state and federal elected officials and 38 leading academics, all supporting the Hindu community's quest for accurate and equitable textbooks. Prior to the hearing, the SBE received letters from state and federal political leaders, including Congresswoman Tulsi Gabbard, Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi, California Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom, and California

state legislators Tony Mendoza, Bill Dodd and Kevin McCarty. California State Assembly member Ash Kalra (D-San Jose), the first Indian Hindu American to serve in the state legislature, spearheaded a letter from a bipartisan group of 11 state legislators. In addition, the board was inundated with 7,000 letters

content about Hinduism and ancient India.

### What It Means

The decision to reject Houghton Mifflin Harcourt represented a clear victory for the Hindu American community and demonstrated its ability to impact the fortunes of a major publisher in the state. After the 2005 adoption process, for instance, the then-separate companies of Houghton Mifflin/McDougal and Harcourt represented, respectively, 19% and 11% of the California textbook market. These two companies later merged to form the current HMH publishing company, collectively accounting for 30% of textbooks used in California.

While most school districts will follow the SBE approved list of books, some may choose not to adopt new textbooks and others could still select HMH. But HMH's new market share will likely be drastically less than it was in 2005, costing the company a substantial amount of money. The Board's decision will also have larger implications, with other publishers taking notice and being more cognizant of the Hindu community's concerns in the future.

Unlike the review panels, the SBE has the ability to require substantive edits to the texts. The board voted to approve positive edits to improve the depiction of Hinduism and India in many other textbooks. Some of the approved textbooks, however, such as McGraw Hill, still contain deeply problematic content. On the other hand, TCI and Pearson are much better than the rest, not only in their treatment of Hinduism, but of other religions as well.

These improvements for India and Hinduism across multiple publishers should eventually be reflected in textbooks nationally. As America's largest textbook market, California sets the standard for the nation's textbooks. For example, its progressive views of LGBT history and the inclusion of Sikhs will likely be reflected in books across the nation over time.

In terms of specific changes, many of the inaccurate, stereotyped and exotic images and captions depicting Hinduism and India as poor, primitive, weird and dirty were removed and will be replaced with more appropriate images depicting Hinduism as a lived tradition. Textbooks will contain more respectful and accurate descriptions of basic Hindu concepts, including dharma, karma,



HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT



HG



DISCOVERY EDUCATION

**Rejected and accepted:** (top left) Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's grade 6 chapter opening for its India chapter—their book was rejected; (top right) HMH section on the Maurya Empire shows laborers working alongside monkeys; (bottom) Discovery Education—accepted—used this image of modern slums and poverty in their section on Ancient India

from concerned Hindu American parents, children, educators and community members from across California, including immigrant Hindus from Fiji, Caribbean and India.

After hearing hundreds of testimonies for several hours, the Board members unanimously rejected Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's textbook programs for Grades K-6 and Grades 6-8. Reasons included highly flawed content and adverse reflection of Hindus and the LGBT community. These books included the most egregious descriptions of Hinduism, describing the *Vedas* as a book of "spells and charms" and "secret rituals," while entirely leaving out the *Upanishads* and misquoting the *Bhagavad Gita*. Similarly, their materials were replete with stereotypical images and



HINDUISM TODAY

bhakti, moksha and yoga, and Hindu scriptures such as the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*.

Compared to previous versions, new textbooks do a better job of discussing Indian social structures and differentiating between the concepts of *varna* and *jati*. Some publishers cover the historical evolution of *varna* and *jati* when discussing caste and mention the contributions of Hindu sages from so-called low-caste backgrounds, such as Vyasa and Valmiki. Many have removed or minimized content that depict other religious traditions in India (e.g. Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism) as improvements over Hinduism, though some of that still exists. This is analogous to the manner in which Jesus and the development of Christianity were previously discussed in relation to Judaism—specifically, that Judaism was an imperfect prelude to Christianity. Comparisons that portray one group as inferior to others have long been prohibited by the SBE's Standards for Social Content, which states, "No religious belief or

practice may be held up to ridicule, and no religious group may be portrayed as inferior."

Finally, the new textbooks will be more nuanced in their discussions on the origins of Ancient Indian civilization, dismissing the now-debunked Aryan Invasion Theory (even though it remains in the Content Standards) and presenting alternatives to the Aryan Migration Theory, while noting that there is still ongoing debate on this subject. There is also less emphasis on other Orientalist constructs, such as Brahmanism.

Individual school districts in California may adopt new textbooks from the approved list. And a new policy allows them to adopt other materials that are in accord with the Framework, even if not specifically approved by the SBE.

The new texts and programs will likely go into use with the 2018-2019 school year. Hindu Americans will continue working towards improving textbook content at the state and national level whenever

**Community effort:** (left to right of front row) Mary Yin Liu, APAPA National Treasurer; Julian Canete, CEO, California Hispanic Chamber of Commerce; Samir Kalra, HAF Managing Director; Vijay Simha, Joint General Secretary of HSS (USA); Glenn Fujii, APAPA National Executive Director.

opportunities arise. This effort includes several initiatives to provide supplementary materials for use in the classroom, such as through HAF's Hinduism 101 teacher training program, various HEF programs, and HINDUISM TODAY's *History of Hindu India* book and YouTube documentaries.

Hinduism Today editors, the Hindu American Foundation and the Hindu Education Foundation all contributed to this report.

## Lessons Learned

Samir Kalra, Managing Director, Hindu American Foundation: "The California textbook adoption process provided many critical lessons for the Hindu American community that can be applied to future challenges and situations. One of the most important lessons is to continually build and cultivate relationships with diverse stakeholders who can support Hindu American initiatives when necessary. In the context of the textbook issue, the community's ability to leverage relationships and build coalitions

was significant to showing the Department of Education that the culturally competent, equitable and accurate representation of Hinduism and Indian culture in textbooks is important to a broad cross-section of ethnic, religious, social, cultural and civil rights organizations, as well as political leaders. Furthermore, the process demonstrated that these types of challenges require a sustained long-term effort, patience and a multi-pronged strategy. Success and creating change often takes time and is frequently determined by a number of factors."

Vaishali Vaval, a mother of two daughters who go to San Jose Union School District:

"For me it underscored the need of community to get civically engaged in academic processes. It has been distressing to witness that irrespective of the Indian-American community's significant contributions in mainstream America's scientific, industrial and financial dimensions, we as a community remain so far behind in civic engagement in the academic dimension. Especially in matters that are sensitive to future generations of Indian and non-Indian Americans, we can no longer afford to be passive watchers of biases and prejudices that exist in textbooks. We must become involved civically, for everyone's dignity."





## TRAVELOGUE

# My Unusual Monastery Experience

### A young man's taskforce seva at Kauai's Hindu Monastery in Hawaii

BY JAGATHEESHWAR ARAVINDRAJ

TEMPLES, PILGRIMAGE, BEING RELIGIOUS, BECOMING a monk, taking vows, going to a monastery, no sugar at all—oh no! How am I going to survive this?

Hi, my dear friends, or should I say aloha. My name is Jagatheeshwar and I'm 13 years old. I live in Malaysia and I am a vidya shishya of Kauai's Hindu Monastery, which is also known as Saiva Siddhanta Church. You guys may think I am talking about this particular Hindu monastery because I am a part of it, but it's actually because of my spiritual and fun experience there.



(work group) meeting. At first I was in the Siddhidatta Kulam. That group's three main priorities are growing and harvesting food, keeping the Narmada Stream flowing and general monastery maintenance. I was working in the hydroponic greenhouse. First, I thought that they just put a layer of nets on the top of the garden and called it a hydroponic greenhouse. But I learned that it was exactly like a professional greenhouse. It had all the equipment, such as the nursery channels, pH reading system and more. I had the job to help harvest vegetables to feed the monks.

In October, 2017, my father, his friend and I went to the monastery, which is located in Kapaa on the island of Kauai. Our flight from Malaysia to Honolulu took approximately 15 hours and 45 minutes. It goes without saying, we were jet lagged. A minor miracle actually happened at Honolulu airport when we almost missed our flight to Lihue, but with Lord Siva's grace we made the flight. Back to the point, we traveled to this remote monastery to perform "Siva seva," task force—that is, to help the monks for a month.

The first few days we took rest and didn't start working, since we were so tired and needed to energize ourselves. On the fourth day we had to be in the Kadavul Temple, the main temple in the monastery. We were staying in a nearby house which is called the Subramuniya Ashram. When I was in Kadavul Temple, I always felt like the main Deity, Lord Nataraja, was dancing the dance of bliss. This dance is known as "Tandavam," which we celebrate with abhishekam, and puja during Ardra Darshanam.

I even do not hesitate to tell that I am lucky because the time we were in the monastery was the time of our guru, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami's, Mahasamadhi, the passing of an enlightened soul. During the day we celebrated our guru's Great Departure, as it is called. I felt his presence everywhere. I also attended Skanda Shashti, a special day for Lord Murugan, one of the three main Deities. When I was in the temple for the abhishekam, I even felt like Lord Murugan was moving just in front of me, and the divine energy was spreading all over my body.

Something is missing here...oh, yes, it's Iraiyan Temple. How can I forget this? Iraiyan is another temple which I was amazed by, mainly because while is still not fully built yet, I felt like it was completely done in its astral form. With the blessings of God the temple is being built by hand from pure crystal granite stone. I got to know that both of the monastery's temples are powerful. When I had to pass by Iraiyan Temple, the scenery of the rainforest was filled with rudraksha, albesia and monkeypod trees. The waterfall which on the Wailua River is so mesmerizing. I can't find such scenery in any other place. I was the lucky one since I managed to swim in this sacred river. This was one of my thrilling, shocking and spiritual experiences.

Then came the day when we started to work. We woke up early in the morning, brushed our teeth, bathed and walked to the monastery. We took our breakfast there and we started working after our kulam

On the way back from the greenhouse, I saw that everyone was moving around in all-electric vehicles called Rangers. I thought to ask for permission to drive one. I remember thinking, is this a monastery or a technology park? The next day I asked my team leader if I could drive the Ranger, and the answer was yes, but only with a monastic in the seat next to me. I gradually learned how to drive it with his guidance. It wasn't a tough task, but controlling my foot on the accelerator took time. The next day was a retreat so I had a little bit more time to sleep in the morning, and we went to the beach. It was a lot of fun. I learned how to boogie board and I had an ice cream cone from one of the most famous ice cream shops in Hawaii.

After a few days, I was moved to the Ganapati Kulam, the magazine studio. It was totally different there, because I had to work with a computer. Another thing that I like to do is to chop vegetables for lunch or dinner. If you come to help here like I did, you won't have to worry about the food because it's so tasty that you may forget about sugary and fried foods for your whole life.

The monks here are the type of guys I have never seen before. They are so calm; they don't even worry about anything. We can describe them as calm as a millpond. They treat you just like we treat close family members. All of these encounters, experiences and places in the monastery are what makes this a special and unique place.

Even though I had lots of challenges and obstacles, I am happy because I learned many lessons. I managed to help the monks and learned a lot of new things from my mistakes.

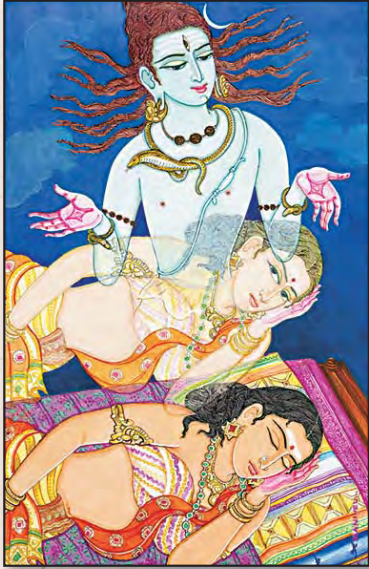
To conclude, I wish that you guys don't get a shock after listening to all of this. Everything that I just wrote is a motivation for you guys, but my actual message is that we who are young need to spend some time on God, religious activities, sadhanas, pilgrimage, practicing ahimsa, doing prayers and more. At least spend ten minutes a day on these things. It's not as boring as you think. If you spend just 10 or 15 minutes of your time, God will give you twice the amount you gave. I hope the youth take this message as a start that links you to God or to your religion. Thank you for reading my story.

JAGATHEESHWAR ARAVINDRAJ, 13, son of Aravindraj Chandrasekaran of Klang, Malaysia, is a young student of Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami who came to the monastery to serve for one month

# Hindu Heritage Endowment

## DEATH & DYING: PREPARATIONS FOR TRANSITION

In this issue, the editors have created a special 16-page feature on death from an enlightened point of view. So naturally we thought to discuss the topic as it relates to HHE. People ask, "What should a person do to prepare to die?" Everyone is prepared to die, and whether it happens suddenly or slowly, intuitively each individual knows exactly what he is experiencing and about to experience. Death, like birth, has been repeated so many times that it is no mystery to the soul. The only problem comes with conflicting beliefs, which produce fear and anxiety about death. This temporary ignorance soon subsides when the failing forces of the physical body reach a certain level. At this point, the intelligence, the soul itself, is there. We can compare this to restless sleep and deep sleep. ¶When one knows he is going to depart the physical body, he should first let everybody know that he knows and give relatives security by explaining to them that soon they won't be seeing him in a physical body anymore. He should consciously go over his wealth and his properties. From the Hindu point of view, the knowledge of one's imminent departure begins the sannyasa ashrama for the individual. The devotee traditionally divests himself of all material belongings, effecting a conscious death before the actual death. He is the executor of his own will, taking care of everybody and not leaving these things to others to deal with after his passing. ¶After everything is settled, all personal possessions disposed of, then he begins meditation and awaits the fruitful hour, trying to exit through the highest chakra of the attainment of this life. Each chakra is a door through which we can depart. The dying should always remember that the place where one will reincarnate is the place that he is thinking about prior to death. So, choose your desires wisely. The last thoughts just before death are the most powerful thoughts in creating the next life. One must also realize that if he and others are aware that he will soon depart, others in the inner worlds also realize he will soon be making his transition and are busy making adjustments and preparations for his arrival. ¶With a sudden death—uncalled for, unbidden and unexpected—a totally different sequence of events occurs. There is no settlement of affairs, and the chaotic situation, emotional and otherwise, persists in the inner worlds and even into the next life. Property is not distributed, and nothing is settled. Negative karmas and positive karmas are all cut short. The situation can be summed up in one word, *unfulfillment*. Once in the inner world, the deceased feels this unfulfillment and is restless and anxious to get back. He is in a place he did not intend to be, and does not want to stay. So, in the inner world he is with a whole group of those who almost immediately reenter the flesh, for he is too agitated to stay very long on the inner planes. It's like an emergency ward or intensive care unit. ¶Chances are, it would be difficult for such a soul to get a birth. Perhaps there would be an abortion or miscarriage a couple of times before there was a successful birth. These are the disturbed children we see, emotionally distraught, needing special care. They cry a lot. ¶In preparation for death, one can soften the karmas of future births by making amends with others, settling scores, doing everything to tie up loose ends, seeking the forgiveness of those harmed, to get the mental-emotional matters of this life all worked out."



A woman has just made her transition. Though her physical body lies lifeless, her astral remains fully aware as she thinks of Siva.

This article was extracted from the book Merging with Siva, lesson 351.



JANUARY TO MARCH ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

|                                                  |            |                                                    |          |                                                              |                                              |          |
|--------------------------------------------------|------------|----------------------------------------------------|----------|--------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|----------|
| <b>Kauai Aadheenam Monastic Endowment</b>        |            | Rekha & Kaushik P. Patel                           | 299.00   | Thom Drinkwater                                              | 50.00                                        |          |
| Anonymous                                        | US\$177.27 | Suresh Puthigai                                    | 299.00   | Prabhakar C Ghosh                                            | 90.00                                        |          |
| Gopal & Darin Grandhige                          | 5,000.00   | Sandrasegaram Sabapathipillai                      | 299.00   | Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn                                 | 4.40                                         |          |
| Roshan Harilela                                  | 375.00     | Srinalini Sankar                                   | 299.00   | Rajendra Giri                                                | 108.00                                       |          |
| Gunasekaran Kandasamy                            | 149.37     | Neha Shah                                          | 299.00   | Rajagopal Krishnan                                           | 20.00                                        |          |
| Srinivas R. Madaboosi                            | 150.00     | Suresh Shankarakrishnan                            | 499.00   | Kulagan Moonesawmy                                           | 8.85                                         |          |
| Mira Das & R. Mahalingam                         | 250.00     | Sai Singh                                          | 120.00   | Subramaniam Pennathur                                        | 50.01                                        |          |
| Gayatri Rajan                                    | 75.00      | Indra & Sabapathy Sivayoham                        | 299.00   | Gayatri Rajan                                                | 75.00                                        |          |
| Chamundi Sabanathan                              | 78.75      | Krishnapillai Srikanthan                           | 299.00   | Leslie Rosa Gil                                              | 21.00                                        |          |
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| Jai Sivakumara                                   | 324.00     | Vivaan Syal                                        | 299.00   | Claire Simons                                                | 1,000.00                                     |          |
| Keith Wallach                                    | 54.00      | Suzanne Szalay                                     | 299.00   | Total                                                        | 1,753.26                                     |          |
| Other Donations                                  | 40,000.00  | Visvalingam Velmurugu                              | 299.00   | <b>Hindu Orphanage Endowment Fund</b>                        |                                              |          |
| Total                                            | 46,696.39  | Shashi Visweswaraiah                               | 299.00   | Benevity                                                     | 260.00                                       |          |
| <b>Iraivan Temple Endowment</b>                  |            | Raj Vrittamani                                     | 499.00   | Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn                                 | 2.93                                         |          |
| Anonymous                                        | 177.27     | Laurel Wright-Feighery                             | 299.00   | Tamnash Gupta                                                | 108.00                                       |          |
| Gunasegaran Chitravelloo                         | 36.91      | Srujana & Madhukar Yedulapuram                     | 299.00   | Roshan Harilela                                              | 375.00                                       |          |
| Amey Surendra Gangal                             | 33.00      | Total                                              | 9,774.18 | Gunasekaran Kandasamy                                        | 746.83                                       |          |
| Dinesh Kumar Jayaram                             | 22.16      | <b>Gurudeva's Trilogy Distribution Fund</b>        |          |                                                              | Chamundi Sabanathan                          | 78.75    |
| A. Paranthaman                                   | 14.77      | Vel Mahalingum                                     | 17.68    | Rodney & Ilene Standen                                       | 30.00                                        |          |
| Jayaram Rajaletchumi                             | 36.91      | Manogaran Mardemootoo                              | 58.58    | Total                                                        | 1,601.51                                     |          |
| Indrani Shanmugasundram                          | 36.91      | Jai Sivakumara                                     | 500.00   | <b>Loving Ganesha Distribution Fund</b>                      |                                              |          |
| Other Donations                                  | 97,772.00  | Total                                              | 576.26   | Mano Navaratnarajah                                          | 225.00                                       |          |
| Total                                            | 98,355.66  |                                                    |          |                                                              |                                              |          |
| <b>Kauai Aadheenam Annual Archana Fund</b>       |            | <b>Kadavul Nataraja Ardra Abhishekam Endowment</b> |          |                                                              | <b>Spiritual Park of Mauritius Endowment</b> |          |
| Thirujnanam Arnassalon                           | 17.73      | Gowri Nadason                                      | 90.81    | Anil Kumar                                                   | 27.00                                        |          |
| Anonymous                                        | 318.72     | Parimala Selvaraj                                  | 93.00    | <b>Positive Discipline Endowment</b>                         |                                              |          |
| Juhivaasana Koothan                              | 8.85       | Bala Sivaceyon                                     | 10.00    | Vinaya Alahan                                                | 22.00                                        |          |
| Anil Kumar                                       | 27.00      | Anonymous                                          | 27.09    | <b>Tirumular Sannidhi Preservation Fund</b>                  |                                              |          |
| Saroja Devi Manickam                             | 2.50       | Total                                              | 220.90   | Shyamadeva Dandapani                                         | 36.00                                        |          |
| Ashwini Maureemootoo                             | 17.68      | <b>Kauai Aadheenam Matavasi Medical Fund</b>       |          |                                                              | Srinivas R. Madaboosi                        | 300.00   |
| Saroja Maureemootoo                              | 5.97       | Shyamadeva Dandapani                               | 36.00    | Total                                                        | 336.00                                       |          |
| Jogendra Moorooogen                              | 4.43       | Devajyothi Kondapi                                 | 324.00   | <b>Hindu Heritage Endowment Administrative Fund</b>          |                                              |          |
| Vidyadevi Moorooogen                             | 4.43       | Mira Das & R. Mahalingam                           | 250.00   | Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund                                | 100.00                                       |          |
| Shanmugam Muthukumar                             | 29.40      | Kulagan Moonesawmy                                 | 17.68    | <b>Murugan Temple of North America Pillaiyar Shrine Fund</b> |                                              |          |
| Subramaniam Pennathur                            | 49.98      | Gowri Nadason                                      | 178.65   | Pathmini Saravanapavan                                       | 150.00                                       |          |
| Suresh Shankarakrishnan                          | 251.00     | Rajeswary Ramamoorthy                              | 225.00   | Sayanthan & Anupama Sivanathan                               | 5.00                                         |          |
| Total                                            | 737.69     | Aran Sambandar                                     | 108.00   | Total                                                        | 155.00                                       |          |
| <b>Hinduism Today Lifetime Subscription Fund</b> |            | Jai Sivakumara                                     | 500.00   | <b>Thank You Bodhinatha Fund</b>                             |                                              |          |
| Rahul Aggarwal                                   | 299.00     | Vayudeva Varadan                                   | 54.00    | Anonymous                                                    | 1801.17                                      |          |
| Veena & Om Agrawal                               | 299.00     | Anonymous                                          | 108.36   | Amarnath & Latha Devarmanai                                  | 324.00                                       |          |
| Hemakheshaa Naatha Batumallah                    | 20.00      | Other Donations                                    | 4,800.00 | Debashis Ghosh                                               | 300.00                                       |          |
| Mekaladeva Batumallah                            | 20.00      | Total                                              | 6,601.69 | Gunasekaran Kandasamy                                        | 250.93                                       |          |
| Gunavadee Caremben                               | 5.88       | <b>Iyarappan Temple Trust</b>                      |          |                                                              | Michael Kempinski                            | 2,160.00 |
| Somasundaram Caremben                            | 5.88       | Krishanth Rajasooriyar                             | 45.00    | Mano Navaratnarajah                                          | 150.00                                       |          |
| Sukanta Caremben                                 | 5.88       | <b>Tirunavukkarasu Nayanar Gurukulam</b>           |          |                                                              | Mrunal Patel                                 | 501.00   |
| Shirish Dayal                                    | 299.00     | Anonymous                                          | 324.00   | Kishore & Suhasini Racherla                                  | 153.00                                       |          |
| David Frawley                                    | 299.00     | <b>Sri Subramuniya Ashram Scholarship Fund</b>     |          |                                                              | Sumathi Raja                                 | 450.00   |
| Gopal & Darin Grandhige                          | 299.00     | Anonymous                                          | 324.00   | Aran Sambandar                                               | 162.00                                       |          |
| Sundar Iyer                                      | 299.00     | <b>Kumbhalavalai Ganesha Temple Endowment</b>      |          |                                                              | Peter Smith                                  | 200.00   |
| Michael Kempinski                                | 499.00     | Mano Navaratnarajah                                | 75.00    | Gananatha Subrahmanyam                                       | 8.25                                         |          |
| Kanwal K. Kher                                   | 299.00     | Nuckiren Pyeneeeandee                              | 44.35    | Courtney Turner                                              | 20.00                                        |          |
| Satkurunathan Maheshwaran                        | 299.00     | Total                                              | 119.35   | Anba Dayananden Valayten                                     | 11.49                                        |          |
| Milind Makwana                                   | 299.00     | <b>Hinduism Today Production Fund</b>              |          |                                                              | Vayudeva Varadan                             | 63.00    |
| Bhaveshan Moorghen                               | 8.85       | Ron & Jennifer Burke                               | 150.00   | Michael Wasylkiw                                             | 648.00                                       |          |
| Shanda Kumaran Moorghen                          | 8.85       | Anonymous                                          | 68.00    | Total                                                        | 7,202.84                                     |          |
| Udeyadeva Moorghen                               | 8.85       |                                                    |          |                                                              |                                              |          |
| Krish Muppuru                                    | 299.00     |                                                    |          |                                                              |                                              |          |
| Sriram & Revathi Naganathan                      | 299.00     |                                                    |          |                                                              |                                              |          |
| Abhilash Nambiar                                 | 299.00     |                                                    |          |                                                              |                                              |          |
| Cassan Pancham                                   | 299.00     |                                                    |          |                                                              |                                              |          |
| Hakoo & Snehlata Patel                           | 299.00     |                                                    |          |                                                              |                                              |          |

JANUARY TO MARCH ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

|                                              |        |  |                                            |          |                                              |                                |          |
|----------------------------------------------|--------|--|--------------------------------------------|----------|----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------|
| <b>Udayan Care Endowment Fund</b>            |        |  | <b>Yogaswami Hindu Girls' Home</b>         |          |                                              | Arunasalam Vathavooran         | 75.00    |
| Rajendra Giri                                | 151.00 |  | <b>of Sittandy Endowment</b>               |          |                                              | Total                          | 1,073.78 |
|                                              |        |  | Anonymous                                  | 551.91   |                                              |                                |          |
| <b>Sri Chandra Madhab Debnath Endowment</b>  |        |  | Marlene Carter                             | 162.00   |                                              | <b>Jaffna Kannathiddy Kali</b> |          |
| Shyamal Chandra Debnath                      | 150.00 |  | Subramaniam Pennathur                      | 50.01    |                                              | <b>Kovil Endowment</b>         |          |
|                                              |        |  | Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan              | 200.00   |                                              | Anonymous                      | 27.09    |
| <b>Murugan Temple Yalpanam Festival Fund</b> |        |  | Total                                      | 1,263.92 |                                              |                                |          |
| Pathmini Saravanapavan                       | 150.00 |  |                                            |          | <b>Pakistan Hindu Empowerment Fund</b>       |                                |          |
|                                              |        |  | <b>Siva Poomi School Trust</b>             |          | Ishani Chowdhury                             | 150.00                         |          |
| <b>Manitha Neyam Trust Fund</b>              |        |  | Anonymous                                  | 50.00    | Anil Kumar                                   | 27.00                          |          |
| Bala Sivaceyon                               | 10.00  |  |                                            |          | Michael Zimmermann                           | 5.00                           |          |
|                                              |        |  | <b>Bharatiya Ekta Mandir of</b>            |          | Total                                        | 182.00                         |          |
| <b>Taos Hanuman Fund</b>                     |        |  | <b>Arizona Endowment</b>                   |          | <b>Digital Dharma Endowment</b>              |                                |          |
| Anonymous                                    | 27.09  |  | Harold Magalnick                           | 50.00    | Anonymous                                    | 8,651.63                       |          |
|                                              |        |  |                                            |          | Rajendra Giri                                | 108.00                         |          |
| <b>Manjung Hindu Sabha Orphanage Fund</b>    |        |  | <b>Murugan Temple of North</b>             |          | Carole Kahn                                  | 108.00                         |          |
| Rajendra Giri                                | 151.00 |  | <b>America Puja Fund</b>                   |          | Gunasekaran Kandasamy                        | 74.68                          |          |
|                                              |        |  | Vayudeva Varadan                           | 54.00    | Vicki Lim                                    | 25.00                          |          |
| <b>Swami Vipulananta Children's</b>          |        |  |                                            |          | Thulasidas Nadarajah                         | 100.00                         |          |
| <b>Home Endowment</b>                        |        |  | <b>India Hindu Temple Cleaning Fund</b>    |          | Total                                        | 9,067.31                       |          |
| Canaganayagam Kugendra                       | 400.00 |  | Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn               | 2.93     | <b>Insurance Premiums</b>                    |                                |          |
|                                              |        |  | Kulagan Moonesawmy                         | 17.68    | Mrunal Patel                                 | 3,003.00                       |          |
| <b>Hindu Literature Fund</b>                 |        |  | Total                                      | 20.61    |                                              |                                |          |
| John & Abha Wiersba                          | 153.00 |  | <b>Anantha Ladies Home Endowment</b>       |          | <b>Kauai Aadheenam Renovation</b>            |                                |          |
|                                              |        |  | Sayanthan & Anupama Sivanathan             | 10.00    | <b>Endowment</b>                             |                                |          |
| <b>Hinduism Today Complimentary</b>          |        |  |                                            |          | Other Donations                              | 600.00                         |          |
| <b>Subscription Fund</b>                     |        |  | <b>Cows of Kadavul and Iraivan Temples</b> |          |                                              |                                |          |
| Rajagopal Krishnan                           | 20.00  |  | <b>(Kovil Maadu) Endowment</b>             |          | <b>Total Contributions</b>                   | <b>\$191,910.53</b>            |          |
|                                              |        |  | Anonymous                                  | 52.38    |                                              |                                |          |
| <b>Himalayan Academy Book</b>                |        |  | Kunal & Sanyogeeta Ghurbhurn               | 4.40     | <b>Funds at Market Value, March 31, 2018</b> |                                |          |
| <b>Distribution Fund</b>                     |        |  | Srinivas R. Madaboosi                      | 150.00   |                                              |                                |          |
| Shyamadeva Dandapani                         | 36.00  |  | Seeday Mootoosamy                          | 108.00   | Total Endowment Funds                        | \$15,839,160.86                |          |
| Nrusimhayya Manda                            | 30.00  |  | Natraj Narayanswami                        | 33.00    |                                              |                                |          |
| Total                                        | 66.00  |  | Sivaruban & Nishiya Sivanesan              | 200.00   | <b>Grand Total</b>                           | <b>\$15,839,160.86</b>         |          |
|                                              |        |  | Sabapathy Sivayoham                        | 300.00   |                                              |                                |          |
| <b>Kauai Aadheenam Yagam Fund</b>            |        |  | Jayesh & Darshana Upadhyay                 | 151.00   |                                              |                                |          |
| Anonymous                                    | 33.00  |  |                                            |          |                                              |                                |          |

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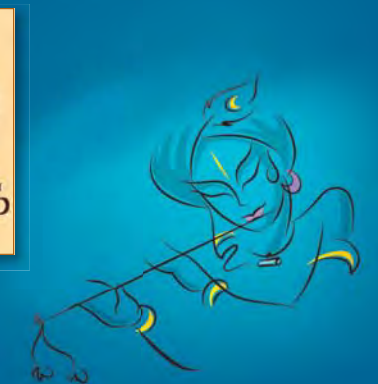
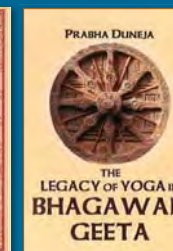
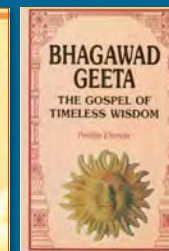
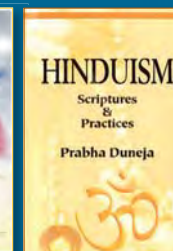
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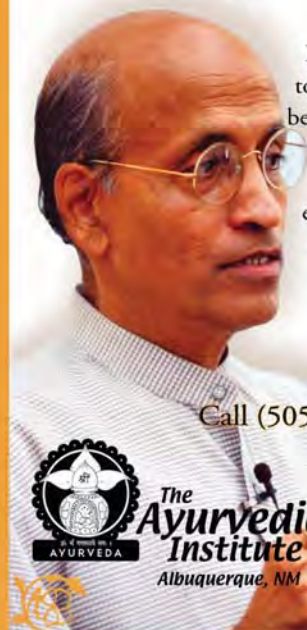
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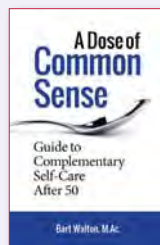
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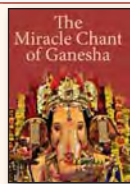
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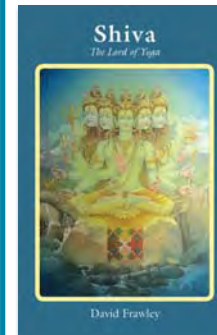
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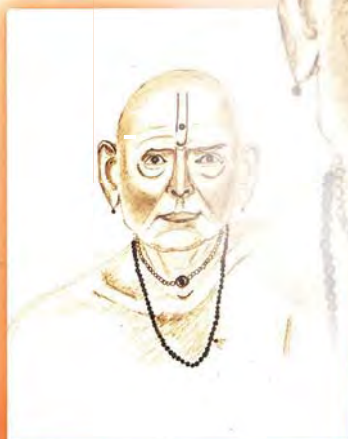
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# DIGITAL DHARMA

YOUTUBE

## Tackling Tough Issues

www.hinduismtoday.com

THE MISSION OF THE YOUTUBE channel "Dharma Speaks" (which unfortunately is anonymous) is to clear up common questions and misconceptions about Hinduism, the Sanatana Dharma. Less than two years old, it has a limited number of videos, but each is packed with information, philosophical exploration and vivid imagery, presented clearly in a rational manner.

Hinduism's many different philosophies are one common source of confusion to non-Hindus. These schools of thought are described here as various time-tested paths one can follow toward the ultimate goal of oneness with God. The narrator explains that by following one of these traditions, we can make reliable progress. Otherwise, it is easy to fall prey to misunderstandings; a lot of new, untested ideas and practices are floating around out there! Though God is unfathomable to the limited mind, the intellect can guide our progress more wisely if it is given a sound frame of reference.



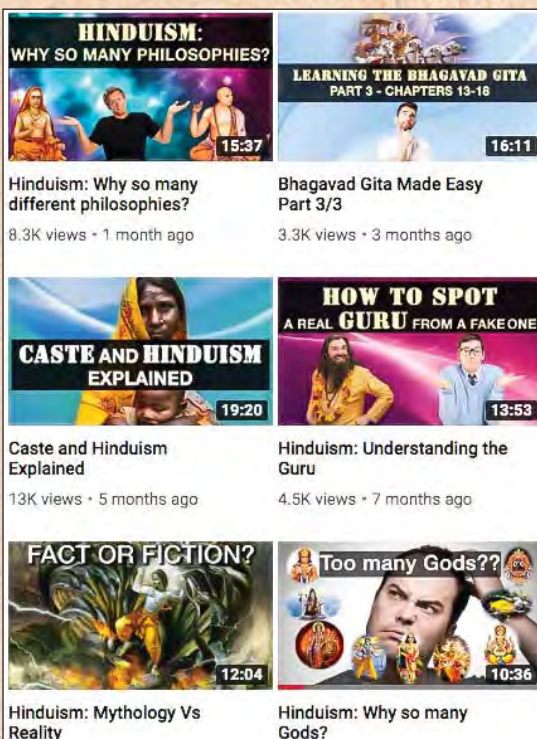
In one video, the apparently conflicting philosophies of Advaita, Vishishtadvaita and Dvaita are likened to the threefold nature of light, which can be seen as a particle, a wave, or both, depending on how it is observed. Likewise, these three philosophies are different perspectives, different views of God and our relation to God from where we stand in consciousness. Each is valid from its own perspective.

We should strive to cultivate humility and devotion through external worship.

A recurrent theme at Dharma Speaks is the difference between book-knowledge and experiential knowledge. Hinduism's scriptures do not say, "Believe this or else;" they are guidebooks for one's spiritual practice—and Hindu practices, followed correctly over time, lead to direct personal experience of truth on many levels.

Video resources:

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People wishing to malign Hinduism often invoke the caste system. But as one video asserts, today's birth-based caste system was imposed by the British in order to divide the people of India and solidify their control over the country. Historians might quibble with this characterization. No doubt the British used caste to their own ends and one result of their policies was to make it more rigid, but to say they "imposed" it is a bit of a stretch. This video also depicts the chaos that results from abdicating one's natural (character-based) varna dharma—as seen today, when governments are guided by corporations rather than by high-minded leaders.

In another video, the purpose, importance and effectiveness of devotional practices, particularly temple worship and the use of murtis (images)—so seldom understood by non-Hindus, are covered

in full. The narrator stresses that images and other symbols can be a powerful way to convey deep meaning, and humans of all known cultures have used them to relate to Divinity. Hindu murti worship, particularly in the temple, is deeply meaningful. The temple murti—having been consecrated in the Prana Pratishtha ritual—serves as a portal through which God's grace and presence are experienced. Hindu saints and sages have taught that as long as we have a physical body,

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LINKS TO ALL 18 CHAPTERS OF THE *Bhagavad Gita*, beautifully chanted in Sanskrit, can be found at [gitachanting.wixsite.com/gita](http://gitachanting.wixsite.com/gita). Each verse is a separate audio clip, with the Devanagari script and the English transliteration.

The clips are hosted on Soundcloud, which seems suited to help youth—and adults—learn other Hindu scriptures as well. Though the person-to-person oral tradition may be nearly extinct, modern technology can go a long way toward making our holy texts accessible to all, far into the future.