

ॐ पूर्णमदः पूर्णमिदं  
पूर्णतुपूर्णमुदच्यते ।  
पूर्णस्य पूर्णमादाय  
पूर्णमेवावशिष्यते



RAJDHANI MANDIR

patrika

That (Absolute Brahman) is Infinite. This (Manifest Brahman, the universe) is also infinite. This infinite has emanated from that infinite. Infinite being taken out from the infinite, what remains is also infinite.

---Ishvaraya Upanishad.

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## RELIGION

### Hinduism

by Dr. G.V.V. Rao

A few weeks ago my daughter Awho is in the tenth grade at Robinson High School in Fairfax, Virginia, came to me and said that her sociology class is studying Hinduism. One of her class mates 'researching' the Hindu practices and beliefs on death came up to her and said "Aren't you lucky you live over here. If you were in India and your husband were to die, you would be thrown alive on his funeral pyre to burn and die!" This shocked her and she asked me to explain Hinduism to her class. With the permission of her teacher Mrs. Fredrickson, I did that just last week. It was a delightful experience. I found the students quite receptive and curious. They asked a lot of questions - and I am glad they did. It gave me an opportunity to dispel some of their misconceptions and at least give them some appreciation for our religion.

While the view of women being forcibly burnt alive is an extreme case of misconception, we all face other questions. Simple as they may sound, some of them are hard to explain. Examples: Why do you wear the red dot? What is so sacred about the cow? Is it true that some Hindus are untouchable - are you one of them? What is this caste business anyway? Why don't you guys date - what do you have against fun? Is it true that you worship three million gods? How do you keep track of who to worship, when, and why?

We make our best effort to respond, sometimes sounding defensive. Often the questioner leaves with greater skepticism. This problem is particularly more serious for our children whose classmates have fewer inhibitions about asking tough questions - sometimes with sarcasm. Our children have to come up with a ready answer with much lesser exposure to Hinduism than their parents. Certainly they are at a serious disadvantage, not having had a chance to even read some of the scriptures and puranas



Vegetarian Cake

pakwaan

by Chanda Bhatia

- 1/2 can (14 oz) sweetened condensed milk
- 5 oz self rising flour
- 2 oz margarine
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1/2 tsp baking soda
- 1 tsp vanilla essence
- 2 1/2 oz water

Preheat oven to 400°. Mix together everything except water. Add water in small quantities till the batter is well blended. Bake in a greased pan (6" diameter) for 10 minutes. Reduce temperature to 300° and bake for another 10 minutes.

Please send us your favorite recipes for publication in this column.

(Ramayana, Mahabharata, etc.). Most parents who grew up in India would have been exposed to the fundamentals of Hinduism either voluntarily or involuntarily. Yet we find it hard to answer some of these questions.

In order to correct this problem and at least give a sense of appreciation for the fundamentals of Hinduism to my children, and others in the community that had shown interest, I have been conducting Bala Vikas classes for about ten years. I shall attempt to share some of these perspectives in this space in this paper on a regular basis. I am delighted to have been given this opportunity and thank the editors for it. While the articles will follow a logical sequence; questions, comments, suggestions and other perspectives from the readers will always be welcome and I shall endeavor to address them in this column. I hope that this would be an enriching experience for all Hindus, particularly those of us who are proud to practice it in an alien environment.

Dr. Rao is an Associate Professor at George Mason University, and will be contributing to this column as a regular feature in the Patrika.

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## RELIGION

### THE FUNDAMENTALS

Each religion is characterized by three distinct aspects: Philosophy, Rituals and Mythology. Philosophy is a statement of beliefs, according to that religion, on the relationship between man and God. Also, it forms the intellectual basis for human ethical values respected by the followers of that religion. Rituals are procedures for conducting worship (puja) and social ceremonies (such as marriage, birth, death, etc.) Mythology represents stories of persons that are believed to have followed the ideals and tenets of a certain religion and thus become examples to be followed by the followers of that religion.

In certain religions such as Islam or Christianity, all aspects of the religion (i.e., philosophy, rituals and mythology) are codified in one book such as the Koran or the Bible. The distinction between the different aspects is sometimes not clear, and hence the insistence, by fundamentalists, on following the "scriptural" word literally without adjusting it to the time/place context.

Unlike Islam or Christianity, Hinduism evolved over a long time and hence the distinctions between the philosophy, rituals, and mythology are quite clear. In fact, there is enough flexibility in the evolutionary process that seemingly divergent interpretations and ritualistic practices exist in different regions, without compromising or conflicting with

the fundamental philosophical beliefs.

Rigveda, the earliest Hindu scriptures (in fact known to be the earliest of any religious scriptures in human history), clearly depicts the awe and wonder with which man approached nature. It is full of hymns in praise of Varuna (the water God), Agni (the fire God), Surya (the sun God), Chandra (the moon God), etc., who are all perceived to be representations of divinity helping humanity through their powers. By Yajurveda period, methods of worship were fairly well refined and specific rituals were developed for daily worship as well as for special social occasions such as birth, marriage, death, etc. In fact, even today, most Hindu rituals follow the stipulations of Yajurveda with little, if any, modification. Samaveda focuses on the fine arts and is set to music. Atharva Veda is a treatise on medicine and science, representing results of advanced research in science and technology.

Upanishads (also known as Vedanta - end of the Vedas), represent the philosophical underpinning of Hindu religion. They take the form of the proceedings of seminars and symposia on metaphysics. Typically a Rishi, an intellectual, postulates a theory on the relationship between man and God, or on the fundamental nature of man. Then the assembled experts, including sometimes his own students, ask questions and raise issues. The proponent of the theory defends his thesis or accepts logically sustainable modifica-

tions and the process results in a universally accepted principle that can stand the rigors of intellectual analysis - much as we do in modern scientific conferences. The essence of the theories developed in Upanishads is codified in succinct text book form in Bhagavad Gita, which occurred at a historically much later time frame than the Vedas and Upanishads. Sometimes, the Bhagavad Gita is referred to as Vedanta Sara (essence of Vedanta).

Puranas (Ramayana, Mahabharata, Bhagavata, etc.) are stories of heroes and Heroines that followed the ideals of the Vedas and Vedanta in their day to day lives, thus demonstrating the practicability of the theories enunciated earlier. Of course, they did run into problems with the limitations of human nature and were subjected to extreme conflicts in their conscience. The story of how they resolved their conflicts within the limits of the well established Vedic principles (dharma) makes up the drama that sustains its freshness till today not just in India, but also everywhere in the world; thus making them classics of world literature and civilization.



By Dr. G.V.V. Rao is an Associate Professor at George Mason University.



# Hinduism: The Philosophical Base

by Dr. G.V.V. Rao

In the last article, it was mentioned that Hinduism had a distinct evolution with clear historical and theological demarcations between philosophy, rituals, and mythology. Philosophy forms the bed rock on which the religious traditions and cultural history are built. It is tribute to the strength of the philosophical foundations of Hinduism that it has been observed continuously for several millennia and has withstood several cultural, religious and political onslaughts. By comparison other great cultures such as Babylonian, Mesopotamian, and ancient Egyptian and Roman lifestyles remain only in history books and current lifestyles of those areas do not bear much resemblance to the cultures of historical lore.

Contrary to common perceptions, even among its adherents, the Hindu philosophy is neither complex, nor shrouded in mysticism. It is a straight forward concept - simple yet highly logical.

The basic belief of Hindus is that the human soul is nothing but a reflection of the Divine. In other words, the human soul is part of the all pervading, omnipresent, and omniscient Universal Brahman (God). This concept is best expressed in the famous aphorism "Aham Brahmasmi", I am the Brahman. It is further explained in a most logical and rational statement in the Isavasya Upanishad:

Purnamadah, Purnamidam,  
Purnatpurnamudachate  
Purnasya, Purnamadaya,  
Purnameva Vasishyati!

That (Absolute Brahman) is infinite. This (manifest Brahman - the individual soul) is also infinite. This infinite has emanated from that infinite. After taking out this infinite from that infinite, the remainder also is infinite.

This is the essence of Vedanta philosophy.

If this is the logic behind human existence, then why are we all different? How can we explain the distinct features of size, shape, color, language, etc., that differentiate us from each other? From a Vedantic point of view, there is no difference at all between the souls in each of us, as all are part of the same infinite Brahman, which in fact is the sum total of all our individual souls, which are infinite in themselves. The addition or subtraction of any one individual soul (infinite) will still result in the remainder of an infinite Brahman, from which the individual soul emanated in the first place.

In simpler, more down to earth terms, just like one looks different when attired in different clothes, but remains the same person inside, the Absolute Brahman manifest in different forms whose distinguishing features such as size, shape, color, language, etc., are only external and do not in any way change the essential nature behind these distinctions. Even the emotional behavioral content which seems to emanate from one's "inner nature", are in reality external to the Brahman within each of us which is by its nature pure, omnipresent and omniscient. Once we realize this, the external differences will vanish. Normally human "nature" tends to focus on the external "differences", just as one tends to "feel" different when wearing different outfits, while in fact remaining unchanged inside. You "feel" casual while wearing casual clothes, and "formal" while wearing a formal business suit, but you are not different inside. Similarly the Absolute Brahman (God) appears different in different manifest forms, but remains unchanged in essence.

Realization of this truth in thought, word and deed is the goal of all human souls. In other words, when one understands this principle and lives it, one automatically sheds all worldly distinctions and becomes liberated from the limitations of worldly existence. This is called *Nirvana*, liberation: or *Moksha*, merger with the infinite Brahman from which one started in the first place. Swami Vivekananda concisely

the essence of vedanta in one simple sentence: "Loss of ego is attainment of God." It is our ego focused on our limited body and surroundings such as wealth, possessions, etc., that puts limits on our ability to soar into the realization of our essential inner nature which in fact is the Absolute Brahman.

In the next article we shall consider some methods to attain this realization, as taught by that Great Jagat Guru (Universal teacher), Sri Krishna, in Bhagavadgita.

Dr. G.V.V. Rao, Associate Professor, George Mason University, has been writing this series of articles on Hinduism. This is the third in the series.

## CLASSIFIED

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Wanted a beautiful, homely match for handsome Sharma (Brahmin) boy 26 yrs, 5'7", B.Com, immigrant. Correspond with Pandit Amarnath Ji, 4420 Briarwood Ct, #35, Annandale, VA 22003, Phone (703) 256-6958.

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## Hinduism: The Essence of Sadhana

by Dr. G.V.V. Rao

In the discussion of the Philosophical Base, in the last article, it was described how the human soul is in fact the same as The Absolute Brahman (God) and the realization of this fact is the goal of all human souls. The process leading to this realization is called Sadhana (practice).

In explaining this process, permit me to borrow from that great teacher of Vedanta, Swami Chinmayananda. Swamiji makes even complex and abstract concepts seem simple by using popular illustrations and easy to follow

vises the mind and the body to keep away from the beautiful food in front of you. The body and mind rebel and try to ignore the advice of the intellect. Once again the intellect argues that you should not base your actions on temptation, but on rational thinking of the consequences of those actions. This is just an example. Almost every moment of our life, we are faced with this constant internal struggle. Sometimes the intellect wins and we do the right thing. Often it fails and we tend to follow the instincts of the body. Sorrow and misery are the results of conflict between the body, mind, and intellect. Happiness and serenity will be the char-

acteristics of a person whose body, mind, and intellect think and act in harmony.

Of course this presumes that one's intellect is capable of thinking rationally and advising/guiding the mind and body in the right direction. Intellectual ability, the ability to compare results and analyze experiences, is unique to humans as opposed to

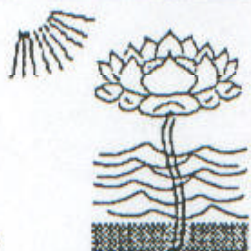
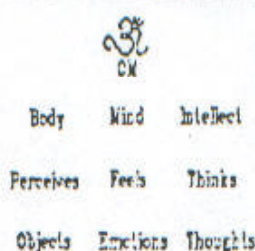
other animals which basically act on the basis of body-mind instincts. Their intellectual reasoning is severely limited to simple reactions of memory of reward and punishment. A dog will jump on your clue because of memory of the bone you threw when it did so last time. However its ability to choose the timing or intensity of its actions is limited.

The human soul, the divinity within, is behind one's intellect. In that sense human intellect is complete (Purna) and potentially extremely powerful. However its actual unfoldment and utility in day to day life depends on one's own VASANAS, one's orientation and attitude conditioned by the composite of past actions and experiences. In a child, which does carry the result of Vasanas from all its

previous lives, the Vasanas are subdued. But soon it relearns all the basics like ability to walk, ask for food, and learn mathematics etc. In each life one gets a unique opportunity to develop the Vasanas deeper and take one's intellect to newer heights until the divinity within is fully realized and one becomes part of the Absolute Brahman (God). This opportunity is open to one at every moment of one's existence. Since the essential goal of life is to attain full realization and become part of God (OM) one should use one's equipment (Body, Mind, and Intellect) in the pursuit of that goal - or in other words one should use and refine one's Vasanas to open the gates of wisdom that leads to God, while avoiding the temptations of outward objects and emotions attached to them. One may ask if it really is possible to disassociate oneself from worldly concerns and focus entirely on God (one's inner self). Consider the example of the lotus. Even though it is a product of mud and water and is constantly surrounded by them, the lotus blossoms in sunshine. In fact mud and water cannot attach or soil lotus petals which keep their beauty and lustre in spite of the surroundings. The essence of Sadhana is to attain such a state where the intellect, surrounded by body and mind which function in the external world, keeps itself detached from the world but shines in the glory of God (the inner self). It is to emphasize this point that lotus is used as a symbol of Hindu concept of spirituality.

We are fortunate to have the guidance / inspiration of great teachers who attained that level of spirituality through diligent sadhana. In future articles we shall consider some techniques taught by these great teachers to guide us in our own Sadhana. But for now let me leave you with the exhortation of Swami Vivekananda "ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED!"

Dr. G.V.V. Rao, Associate Professor, George Mason University, has been writing this series of articles on Hinduism. This is the fourth in the series.



*Even though it is a product of mud and water and is constantly surrounded by them, the lotus blossoms in sunshine.*

charts. One such chart, which forms the backdrop to practically all his lectures is shown above.

The human being is a composite of Body, Mind, and Intellect. The body perceives external objects and sends a message to the mind which feels the emotions relevant to those objects. For example when your eyes see, or nostrils smell the aroma, of a beautiful dinner the mind feels the emotions of wanting to eat that dinner right away because of the memory of the taste/satisfaction you felt when you ate a similar meal. However your Intellect which acts as a repository of experiences, tries to think and analyze the situation. When you ate a similar meal last time you had a bloated and upset stomach and suffered for two or three days. Based on these sobering thoughts, your intellect ad-



## Hinduism: The Four Paths

by Dr. G. V. V. Rao

The discussion so far focused on the Vedic and Upanishadic Vedantic concept of divinity of the human soul and the essence of human endeavor *Sadhana* being to realize this knowledge. Note that at no stage of this discussion was God identified as an accountant keeping track of one's good and bad actions to be followed by a reward or punishment commensurate with the nobility or viciousness of one's actions. Instead, it is explained that each person is directly in control of the process of release *moksha* from the bondage of body and mind (which are subject to death and rebirth), and thus merge with Brahman (God).

While all this sounds logical, one might wonder how exactly does one realize one's divinity. Surrounded by, and constantly influenced by, the body/mind limitations with which one usually identifies one self, it appears impossible to transcend them and look for the elusive soul, albeit its reputation of being divine! Fortunately there is detailed practical guidance available from several great sages/seers and teachers who have reached the goal of divinity or have traveled far enough along the path to be able to guide others. Such a guide is known as Guru (teacher). The best known of such gurus is Sri Krishna, who is also referred to as Jagat Guru (Universal teacher). The knowledge he transmitted to Arjuna (symbolizing the human seeker) as codified in Bhagavad Gita is the most authentic and practical guide relied on through centuries by many successful seekers.

Sri Krishna prescribed four paths of *Sadhana* to reach one's inner self (Brahman). They are JNANA YOGA (Path of KNOWLEDGE); BHAKTI YOGA (path of DEVOTION); KARMA YOGA (path of UNSELFISH SERVICE) and RAJA YOGA (path of MEDITATION).

JNANA YOGA is based on the hypothesis that seeking knowledge (truth), in whatever form, will ultimate-

ly lead one to the only universal truth, that is that Brahman (God) is the only reality and everything else is but an illusion *maya*. Once one realizes that knowledge, one becomes enlightened and all body/mind concerns will lose their importance leading one to complete identification with the Brahman within. While it is difficult to explain this phenomenon of seeking true spiritual knowledge, an attempt can be made by giving a worldly example. While each one of us achieves a limited knowledge of Physics commensurate with the amount of effort we put in; some one like Einstein personifies extraordinary dedication of good part of his body/mind faculties in pursuit of the knowledge of Physics to achieve a stature that sets him apart as a unique pursuer of that knowledge. Of course, this is knowledge of worldly (physical) objects perceived and dealt with by body/mind faculties. JNANA YOGA refers to spiritual knowledge, that is the knowledge of the true nature of one's self. A comparable example (to that of Einstein) of one who achieved that height of realization in a spiritual sense is Sankaracharya. BHAKTI YOGA requires complete and unquestioning devotion *sampurna saranagati* to God. Ramakrishna Paramahansa said that if one can lose one self in the thought of God like a sugar crystal loses itself in a glass of water, then one reaches the ultimate goal through Bhakti Yoga.

The idea is if one is so intensely devoted to God that one loses all consciousness of one's body and mind, then all worldly concerns (associated with body and mind) disappear and one can identify fully with the Divinity within. Sri Krishna asserts in the Bhagavad Gita that a true and sincere devotee is assured of complete success in achieving divinity *Naumbhakta Pranasyati*. Hanuman, Jesus Christ, and Ramakrishna Paramahansa are examples of Bhakti Yogis.

KARMA YOGA stipulates that if one recognizes that the same Brahman (God) exists in all beings around and serves everyone around with true devotion and care putting aside all selfish (body/mind) concerns then one attains the ultimate. The key is unselfish service, that is service to others without expectation of any personal benefit in

return. (*Karmanyevadhikarast...* Gita Ch III - 47). Mahatma Gandhi and Mother Teresa are good examples of Karma Yogis.

RAJA YOGA refers to constant meditation on the true nature of God (Brahman). As explained in Upanishads, Brahman, (the God within) transcends all worldly (body/mind) limitations. Hence deep meditation on the true nature of Brahman leads one to unshackle one self from the body/mind limitations and thus become one with the Brahman within. Buddha, and Swami Vivekananda are good examples of Raja Yogis.

The paths described above are not mutually exclusive. In fact they are complimentary and most seekers *Sadhak* such as you and I follow elements of all the above paths. Being steeply entrenched in the worldly concerns (*maya* - illusion) caused by body and mind, the effort *Sadhana* to detach ourselves from those concerns and refocus our energies on the true nature (of divinity) is an arduous task. Any method which helps us achieve that should be pursued as demonstrated by the examples cited above and may other great teachers past and present.

In the next issue we shall consider practical difficulties faced in our *sadhana* and methods of coping with them.

Dr. G.V.V. Rao, Associate Professor, George Mason University has been providing us with this study of Hinduism. This is the fifth in the series



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## RELIGION

# Avatars

Dr. G. V. V. Rao

In previous articles the philosophical basis of Hinduism was explained. It may be recalled that the basic premise was that each individual soul is in fact divine. Realization of the divinity within and *living it* is the purpose of human existence. When this truth is realized, life as identified with the physical body ceases. In that sense there is no God external to you.

How can this be reconciled with the concept of a creator, and the Avatars of God, such as Rama, Krishna etc., we worship as God? If one takes a close look at the concept of Avatars, this apparent anomaly can be explained easily, and logically.

In Vedic literature there is no reference to Rama, Krishna, Siva, Durga or any of the Gods as we know. In Vedantic discussions, which form the basis of Hindu philosophy, God was referred to only as *Brahman*, and it was clarified that such a Brahman indeed is nothing but your own soul. Hence the mahavakyas (great aphorisms), *Aham Brahmasmi* (I am the Brahman), and *Tatwamasi* (I am that).

While these statements are still the basis of Hindu philosophy, and their logic was never questioned, it was realized that it is very hard for common people to visualize the true nature of the Brahman, much less to understand and live by the attributes of (really an attributeless) Brahman. Hence intellectuals such as Vyasa and Valmiki, explained these concepts through logical stories of human beings with attributes of God. In other words, if the Brahman of the Maha Vakyas, and Upanishads takes a human form, He would look like Rama or Krishna. In so doing, they created for these characters moral, ethical and human dilemmas like all of us face in real life, and described how they faced them. Their basic guiding principle always was protection of *Dharma* (a uniquely Hindu concept with no translation anywhere else). In practical terms, it was the need to live by Vedic edicts, and protect the basic ethical principles described in Vedic literature. This is why you find constant references in the Puranas (Ramayana, Maha Bharata and Bhagavata), to Vedic knowledge and Vedic Dharma. There are extensive dis-

cussions between the characters in these epics involving conflicts viewed with different points of view, and finally resolved by the Avatar according to His interpretation of the Dharma.

Even the earliest of the Avatars of Vishnu, Mathya (fish), is described as having been born to protect the Vedas from the Rakshasa named Somaka. This clearly illustrates that the Vedas precede the concept of Avatars. Looking at it logically, one concludes that Vishnu has taken various forms at various times to protect the Vedic Dharma. This is exactly what Vishnu stated in His Avatar as Krishna (*Yada yadhi dharmascha glanir bhavati, etc.*), "whenever Dharma declines, I shall appear as an Avatar to protect and reestablish it". In fact, as Krishna, Vishnu explained the Vedic knowledge in much simpler form, in Bhagawad Gita, giving practical, doable guidelines (in the form of the four paths - Bhakti, Jnana, Karma and Raja), for the realization of the Brahman within. Also, He explained clearly, in Bhagawad Gita, the attributes of a person who has realized the Brahman within (*sthitapragna*). Viewed in this light, one sees no conflict at all in the Vedic philosophy (sanatana dharma - the eternal way), and the Puranic concept of Avatar.

At a practical, personal level, one may understand that indeed all of us possess the divinity within us. However, our ignorance (*maya*), and ego (*ahamkara*) cloud this knowledge and thus prevent our full realization of this divinity. With the aid of the path shown by example by Avatars Purushas (divine personalities, such as Rama, Krishna etc.), in the way they handled human situations, we should remove the layers of ignorance, and penetrate the clouds of selfishness, until we realize the divinity within us in its full effulgence, at which time we will be relieved of this earthly bondage represented by the physical body (*pancha bhutanic* - made of physical earthly material), and attain the knowledge of the Brahman within, which indeed is the salvation (*moksha*).



This is the Sixth article in a series being contributed by Dr. G. V. V. Rao, Associate Professor, George Mason University.

## ICCC SPEECH CONTESTS

India Cultural Coordination Committee will hold two speech contests on **Sunday, February 28, 1993** on the eve of the ICCF Founders Day.

### YOUTH CONTEST

For ages up to 17. Topic is up to contestant as long as it has something to do with India or Indian Community in the U.S.

### ADULTS CONTEST

The speech topic should have something to do with Indian Community in the U.S.

### PLACE & TIME

Potomac Community Center, 11315 Falls Road, Potomac, MD. Youth: 5-6 P.M.; Adults: 6-7 P.M.

### INFORMATION

Dr. Suresh Chandra (703) 379-0897

## YOUTH DAY CELEBRATION

Sri Siva Vishnu Temple has announced the celebration of Youth Day on **March 13 and 27**.

Competitions will be conducted for different age groups (elementary, intermediate, high school and college), in essay writing, speech, recitation, sloka recital, and coloring, at the Student Union II building of George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, on March 13, 1993.

At a special function at the Siva Vishnu Temple in Lanham, Maryland, prizes will be distributed and other entertainment will be provided by youth groups.

All are invited to participate in the festivities on both days. For details please call: Dr. G. V. V. Rao, at (703) 425-7866.

## CLASSIFIED

Suitable match for handsome Agarwal boy 28, 5'-10" C.A., C.P.A., own house, high income. No bars. Photo must. Contact (703) 878-9025. 13648 Green Wood Drive, Dale City, VA - 22193



## All Drops Of Water Lead To The Same Ocean

by Dr. G.V.V. Rao

In previous articles we looked at the basic tenets of Hinduism, and how certain great teachers and Avatars (incarnations of God) illustrated their viability in facing problems in the human realm. Let us now consider issues of immediate concern to us in our present day world, and see how these Hindu tenets can be applied. The most demanding question of the day appears to be religious intolerance. Some of the savage behaviour, claimed to be engaged in to "protect" one or the other religion, makes one wonder, if we would be better off abandoning religion, for it seems to evoke the worst in these "protectors" of religion.

Swami Vivekananda's address to the Parliament of Religions in Chicago a century ago, in 1893, directly touched on this subject. Quoting from the Vedic hymn:

*Akashat Patiranti Suryam, Yashogadha Gaganam  
Sarva Deva Namaskaraha, Keshavam Pratyagat*

Meaning, like all drops of water that fall from the sky go to the same ocean, all prayers said anywhere by any body go to the same God.

Swamiji exhorted his fellow delegates, to the world Parliament of Religions to find ways to coexist with mutual respect. The Parliament did end on an upbeat note pledging to find ways to avoid "discord and destruction", and promote "harmony and peace".

In the hundred years since, the world has changed profoundly. Time and space have shrunk, and today any two people in far off corners of the world, and even outer space, can see and speak with each other instantaneously. However, two persons sitting across a table seem to have lost their ability to communicate, particularly if the subject is religion.

In Bosnia, people who have lived peacefully as neighbors for centuries are suddenly killing each other. Some people calling themselves Christian, are raping, maiming and killing women and children just because they are Muslim.

In Israel, innocent people, including the old and unarmed, are being kidnapped and killed just because they are Jews. The Government of Israel is doing no better. They abandoned hundreds of men on a

desolate mountain ledge exposed to cold and elements, just because they are Muslims.

In Waco, Texas, a man calling himself Jesus Christ acquired an arsenal fit for an army to "protect" himself and his followers, and finally perished in hell fire. What an irony!? Jesus was an incarnation of peace and compassion.

In India, a few people calling themselves Hindu destroyed a mosque to rebuild a temple. Perhaps they forgot that the prayers said in the mosque also go to the same God. In retaliation Muslims destroyed dozens of temples, and thousands of innocent people were killed in the conflict.

What should we do? What can we do? Should we abandon religion, as religion seems to be at the root of all these vicious conflicts.

**"An eye for an eye will make  
the whole world blind"  
...Mahatma Gandhi**

I plead not. Religion is still the most ennobling feature of human existence. It establishes a relationship between man and God, defined as noble, kind and compassionate in all religions.

Let us look at a few examples where religion was used as the ennobling principle. Mahatma Gandhi, a Hindu, firmly believed in the basic Hindu tenet that all souls are divine, including the souls of those that beat, tortured and imprisoned him. His theory was that they behave in those violent ways because of ignorance of their true nature which is divine and hence intrinsically noble. If you retaliate through violence, it would only exasperate the situation. Instead if you respond with love and compassion, it will help the errant souls to realize their true divine nature. In the process, you would also progress spiritually closer to identifying yourself with the divinity within you. He summarized his politico-religious philosophy into a one liner: "An eye for an eye will make the whole world blind". I hope they realize this and heed to his advice, before every one in Bosnia, Israel and India become blind

Another example, a living example, is Mother Teresa. I am sure she is motivated in her charity by her deep Christian convictions, and sees the divine in the poor and destitute that come to her for help. Certainly she does not turn them away if they cannot produce an ID card from a catholic church.

I had the great fortune to meet Mother Theresa a few years ago. At that time we were living in the Philippines. She was visiting Manila, and our family was among over one hundred thousand people who thronged to see her. Fortunately I was pushed close to her. As soon as I reached near her, I bent and touched her feet as is the Hindu custom. She smiled and said you must be Hindu. I said "Yes mother, and in my view you are an incarnation of Goddess Durga". She smiled benignly, put her hand on my head and blessed. It was a magical moment that I will cherish for the rest of my life. For me it was an opportunity to see the divinity within me, and in fact in all of us, in its purest form in flesh and blood. In other words, I met a true Avatar! My convictions as a Hindu strengthened as a result of this encounter with a Catholic nun!

I am convinced that the solution to today's strife lies in religion. People who turn to violence in the name of religion are in fact thieves and murderers using religion to shield their thuggery. What is needed is a program of religious education to make them realize the essential divinity within themselves, and in every one around them.

Let me conclude by quoting another hymn from the Rigveda:

*Om, Sahasranamatu, Sahasraubhnamaku,  
Sahasvinyam Karavavahu  
Tejasvinavadhita Mastu, Manadvishavahau  
Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti.*

Meaning, O Lord, please grant us the wisdom to live together and work together, without petty differences, in the pursuit of your knowledge which will lead us to true peace within us and among us.

This seventh article in this series is based on a prize winning speech given by Dr. Rao to the Fairfax Toastmasters Club.



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## The Temple and Your Sadhana

Dr. G.V.V.Rao

The Bhoomi Poojan and eventual completion of the temple opens up immense opportunities for everyone to pursue their spiritual journey - *sadhana*. While Hinduism allows each person to develop one's own form of *sadhana*, there are several practical ways which the Temple can assist the pilgrim in this progress. Sanathana Dharma, the formal name of Hinduism, is based on the philosophical tenet that every soul is indeed divine. The process leading to realization of this truth and living is called *sadhana*. Most *sadhaks* (seekers of truth) practice a combination of the following four paths prescribed in the Bhagavad Gita.

**Bhakti Yoga** is the path of devotion. It requires complete and unquestioning surrender to the will of God. Hanuman as the central character in Ramyana and Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa are personifications of Bhakti Yogis. Ramakrishna Paramahansa compared one's losing oneself completely in contemplating God to a sugar crystal losing itself in water. The temple provides the environment either for quiet contemplation of God or for involvement in participation in the ritual services for one's *Ishtadevatha*.

**Karma Yoga** is the path of active involvement in work. The same divinity exists within everyone around us. A karma yogi recognises this truth and serves one's fellow beings. Mahatma Gandhi and Mother Teresa are examples of this way of life. The large number of dedicated volunteers who are indeed the backbone of the temple are excellent examples of *sadhaks* following the principles of karma yoga. There are several further opportunities for service in the name of the temple to community at large. Provision of food and clothing to the homeless, provision of free medical care to those who cannot afford it - these are some examples. It must however be remembered that true observances of karma yoga requires that this form of service be done without any selfish motive or egotistic expectation.

**Jnana Yoga** is the path of Knowledge. It is based on the hypotheses that seeking knowledge in its purest form will ultimately lead to the only universal truth - God, the divinity within oneself. The temple is an organised place for lectures, seminars, for like minded people to meet and share knowledge. The temple is also a source for study of vedic knowledge and a place to develop a library of well-organised works on spiritual knowledge.

**Raja Yoga** is the path of meditation. It refers to constant meditation on the true nature of divinity within oneself and thus unshackling oneself from the illusory identification with worldly possessions. This is perhaps the most difficult path. The temple provides the members of the congregation - immigrants in search for a good quality of life - an excellent vehicle to share and invest some of our material wealth by helping to create and sustain an institution symbolising the principals of Hinduism. The great Ramana Maharishi and Sri Ramakrishna chose temples as their abodes and platforms for inspiring generation of *sadhaks*.

With the successful completion of the Bhoomi Poojan, and the ensuing activity leading to completion, it is useful to remember that the Mandir allows us as devotees to create a great institution that would provide enhanced opportunities for service for generations to come.

Dr. G.V.V.Rao teaches at George Mason University, conducts classes for children through Bal Vikas and is a regular contributor to the Patrika.

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