

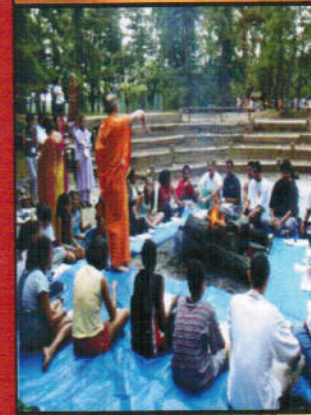


2nd Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference

Sustaining Dharma through Mandirs



August 10th - 12th 2007
Edison, NJ





બેસ્ટ વોર્કશોપ્સ ઓર ૨^{ન્દ}
હિન્દુ લાન્ડોર
ઇક્સપોઝિશન
કોન્ફરન્સ

ॐ **Asato Ma Sadgamaya
Tamaso Ma Jyotir gamaya
Mrityorma Amritam gamaya
Om Shanti Shanti Shantihi**

*Lead me (by giving knowledge) from
the unreal to the real; from darkness
(of ignorance) to the light (of
knowledge); from death (sense of
limitation) to immortality (limitless
liberation)*

Drs. Ila & Jitendra Sukhadia
and Family

2nd HINDU MANDIR EXECUTIVES' CONFERENCE

Organized by Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America

Holiday Inn, 3050 Woodbridge Avenue, Edison, NJ 08837

2007 Convention Souvenir

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EDITORIAL

Hinduism (Sanatana Dharma) Embraces its Future in North America

Hinduism is very much alive and strong in the continent of North America. This is clear from the many articles submitted in this souvenir. We have authors with varying backgrounds, ranging from the Swami jis, temple executives, scholars, community members and leaders, and even young children.

The second Hindu Mandir Executive Conference is helping to give this new phase of Hinduism in North America the opportunity to the Mandirs to become focal point in serving the Hindu community as well as uniting the Hindus. Several articles in this souvenir address the issues faced by the young generation in understanding Hinduism and its relevance to their life. The articles have also proposed potential solutions so that the Mandir's can take a lead in imparting immense values of Hindu religion and culture to the future generations.

What comes through all the articles is the concern of the writers for sustaining Hinduism, need for its better understanding and opportunities for addressing issues of the young who will carry the torch of Hinduism.

With such a conference, a new chapter in the practice of Hinduism in North America is unfolding. These are challenging and interesting times in this materialistic society. Yet, there is room for everyone to help achieve the goal of keeping Hinduism vibrant in North America for the generations to come.

Whilst there is concern to help the young to be better educated and involved, there is also great optimism in being able to meet this challenge. It is a testament to the work of the mandirs that everyone looks to them to help achieve this goal.

With all the sincerity at our command, we commend you to become inspired and involved in the cause of helping to sustain and expand the practice and understanding of the greatest gift of India to mankind, its Vedic culture and religion.

Sat Sanatana-dharma ki jaya!
Om tat sat

Editorial Committee Members:

Kalpita Abhyankar
Hari Rama dasa
Satya Dosapati

Umesh Shukla
Nachiketa Tiwari
Neela Waghmare

For Information on Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference initiative, contact Dr. Nachiketa Tiwari, Organizing Secretary, VHPA at mandirsangam@vhp-america.org, Tel.: 508-261-1274; web sites: www.vhp-America.org, <http://mandirsangam.vhp-america.org>

Disclaimer

Views expressed in this Souvenir are of authors and do not necessarily represent the views or policies of the organizers of HMEC. They are meant to generate awareness about the needs of Hindu society as viewed by the authors.

Message from Swami Dayananda Saraswati



I am pleased to know that the temple executives are meeting again to discuss about various issues concerning the teachings of Hindu Dharma to both Children and Adults. I am sure we can evolve certain outlines for these programs in the conference. I request the organizers to keep this in mind while preparing agenda for the conference.

With best wishes and love,
Swami Dayananda Saraswati

Message from the President, VHP of America



Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America Inc. (World Hindu Council of America)

37 Kimberly Road, West Hartford, CT 06107

Tel.: 860-521-2173 Email: president@vhp-america.org Website: www.vhp-america.org

The Hindu Mandir Executive Conference (HMEC) is an initiative undertaken by Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America (VHPA). The intent is to develop strategies for Hindu mandirs to meet the social and spiritual needs of Hindu-American children and youth. The task is to help shape their future, to manage the speed and magnitude of change in coming times. This focus will ensure Hindu mandirs and other religious and spiritual institutions will be self-sustaining, and keep the tree of Dharma well nourished in America, our adopted land.

It is encouraging to see the initiative now in its 2nd year. At the conference, we will be blessed by the presence of Puja Swami Dayanand Saraswati, who successfully brought a number of Hindu institutions together under *Acharya Dharma Sabha*. We will seek his guidance and blessing for the success of our noble task.

Now that HMEC has entered the 2nd year, we must seek to make it sustainable over the long term. For the tree of Dharma to flourish, we have to fully involve and engage our children and youth in Hindu dharma and Hindu institutions. The wisdom of our *rishis* is that a value system needs an investment of social capital. By this, we not only help ourselves, and our children and grand children, but the larger American society and humanity as well.

Let us all work together in finding ways to sustain this effort, and lay a foundation for the future of Hindu dharma in this adopted land, our *karma bhumi*.

Jyotish B. Parekh
President, VHP of America

Message from His Holiness Sri Sri Ravi Shankar



I congratulate all the members of Hindu community for coming together to communicate the true essence of Hinduism to the world. I would like to emphasize some key points about Hinduism, the oldest religion of the planet.

Hinduism believes that all forms of worship reach the One Divinity. As all rivers merge into a single ocean, any type of worship reaches the same cosmic intelligence.

Hinduism is not polytheism but believes in one God, one Divinity. The One is represented by many names and forms.

Hinduism is not about idol worship. Idols are used to represent the inexpressible. They are a symbol or medium to worship the omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient Divinity.

Divinity is the material cause of the universe ('*upadhana karana*'). Hinduism believes that the whole creation is made of five elements: Earth, Water, Fire, Air, and Ether.

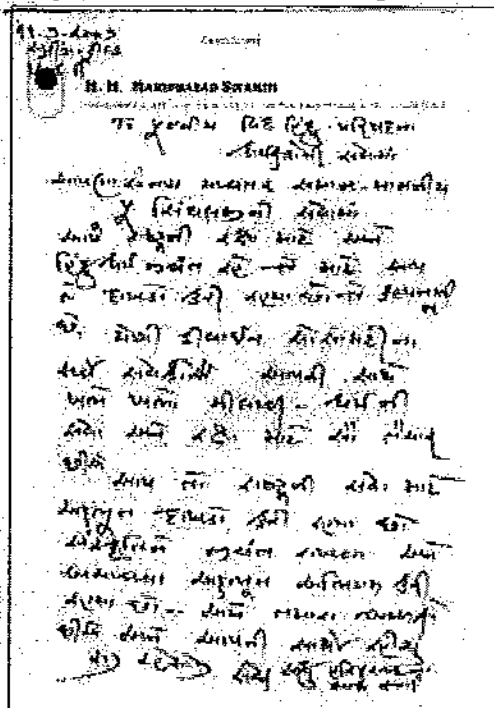
Honoring nature, caring for the environment is part and parcel of the Hindu tradition. Caste discrimination is not sanctioned by the Hindu religion. Every Hindu should be educated to the fact that many of the sacred texts were written by the Dalits.

Vedas and Vedanta philosophy is the essence of Hinduism. It is the closest religion to science. Today's youth need to be educated on these principles.

We need to make Temples not just a center of rituals and congregation but lighthouses of philosophy and knowledge, which are the basis of Hinduism.

With love and Blessings,
Sri Sri Ravi Shankar

Message from His Holiness Hariprasad Swamiji



July 11, 2007

H.H.Swami Hariprasad Swamiji
Yogi Divine Society
Springfield
U.S.A.

To,

For the service of Respectable Honorable Volunteers for Vishwa Hindu Parishad and For the service of
Respectable Shree Singhal ji

Honorable Sir,

Your efforts for the sustenance of Hindu Dharma and for the Protection of our Nation are incomparable
and beyond the scope of imagination.

All the members and volunteers of the Yogi Divine Society are with you, shoulder to shoulder, for the
service and protection of our religion.

You have initiated a Great Yagna for keeping our culture and civilization alive and thriving. We, all your
children, are with you now and will always be with you.

Your humble servant,

Sadhu Hariprasad ji.
Jai Swaminarayan.

Message from the President,
VHP International



VISHVA HINDU PARISHAD

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Ref#VHP/583.32/38/2007

Dated: June 22, 2007



We are glad the second annual Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference is scheduled at Edison, New Jersey on August 10, 11, 12, 2007, and that a large number of Mandirs from the USA, Canada and other countries of the Americas are expected to attend. It is cheering that Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswatiji Maharaj has consented to deliver the keynote address. My thanks to Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America that it is facilitating this grand event.

It was an achievement for the first conference last year in Atlanta to take a stand for Hindu unity, for a Hindu Seva Divas (Hindu Service Day), for the right perspective on Hinduism in school textbooks, and a zero tolerance on the desecration of Hindu Mandirs. I hope, the Action Taken Report (ATR) will give an update on the extent to which these resolutions have been realized so far. It is a great compliment to your annual conference that a few other countries are now contemplating to follow your example, emulating your mission, to protect, preserve and promote Hindu Dharma in their countries.

I hope the focus of the Annual Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference will always be the next generation, born and brought up in the Americas. I hope that your core activities will enable them to appreciate our holistic *kula-aachaar*, our culture, and their own Hindu identity, both of which only enrich and sweeten the culture of their host countries. It is rightly said: *'If you want 1 year of prosperity, grow grain. If you want 10 years of prosperity, grow trees. If you want 100 years of prosperity, grow people.'*

I offer my humble prayers at *Prabhu's Sricharan* for the grand success of your Conference!

With best wishes,
ASHOKSINGHAL
PRESIDENT

Message from H. H. Pujya Chidanand Saraswatiji

A temple is not a building. It is the abode of the Lord. A temple's strength is not in its bricks. Its fortitude comes from the dedication of its members. A temple is not held together by plaster and mud. Its glue is the piety and devotion of the community. A temple is not simply a place we visit. It should be the axis around which our lives revolve.

July 22, 2007

Dear Divine Souls Sanjay Mehtaji and all the organizers of the HMEC,

I hope that — by God's grace — this finds you and all your loved ones in the best of health and happiness. It is wonderful to know about the Hindu Mandir Executives Committee meeting from August 10-12 in New Jersey. This is such a wonderful, divine, and auspicious occasion. You are all already achieving so much and providing so much for your individual Hindu communities through your individual mandirs. I am so impressed by your commitment and dedication to God, to your culture and to your community.

Even birds can build homes for themselves, but to build a home for God, an abode of the Lord takes true dedication and piety. That is what a temple is: a real home of God. This temple will serve not only as a temple of worship, but by God's grace, it will also serve as a temple of education, a temple of culture, a temple of unity and a temple of sanskaras. However, now, by joining together into the Executive Committee and working together to ensure that programs are implemented within the temples and also between/amongst the temples for our youth you will certainly bring even greater benefit to all the Hindus living in USA.

Creating an environment where the youth understand, appreciate and love their Hindu culture is a crucial need today, as is uniting all Hindu temples under one umbrella. When we are all united in the name of Sanatan Dharma we can truly bring the message of peace, harmony and universal brotherhood to the world. I am so impressed to see the way you are all coming forward to fulfill these needs. I pray to the Lord Almighty to infuse your temples, the HMEC and your lives with even more piety, even more devotion and even more divinity.

When are you all coming to India? Whenever you come, it would be wonderful if you came to Rishikesh. The holy waters of Mother Ganga and the sacred Himalayas are calling you. Please know that Parmarth Niketan is your ashram and you are always welcome.

I send you all and all your loved ones my deepest blessings and prayers.

In the service of God and humanity,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading 'Swami Chidanand' followed by a small '36' symbol.

Swami Chidanand Saraswati



PARTICIPATING HINDU ORGANIZATIONS

1. Hindu Association of North West Arkansas, Bentonville, AR
2. Mandir of Irvine, Irvine, CA
3. CT Valley Hindu Temple Society, Middletown, CT
4. Hindu Temple of Florida, Tampa, FL
5. Sanatan Dharam Mandir, Tampa, FL
6. Augusta Hindu Temple Society, Augusta, GA
7. Hindu Temple of Atlanta, Riverdale, GA
8. Kadavul Temple, Kappa HI
9. Hindu Temple of Central Indiana, Indianapolis, IN
10. Datta Yoga Center, Baton Rouge, LA
11. Om Temple, Om Center, N. Billerica, MA
12. Sadhu Vasvani Center, Dracut, MA
13. Satsang Center, Goffstown, MA
14. Sri Lakshmi Temple Ashland MA
15. Greater Baltimore Hindu Jain Temple, Finksburg, MD
16. Mangal Mandir, Silver Spring, MD
17. Bharatiya Temple of Metro Detroit, Troy, MI
18. Hindu Temple of St. Louis, St. Lois, MO
19. Saraswati Mandiram, Epping, NH
20. Arsha Bodha Center, Somerset, NJ
21. Govinda Sanskar Kendra, Jersey City, NJ
22. Hindu American Temple and Cultural Center, Morganville, NJ
23. India Cultural Hindu Temple (Gandhi Mandir), Wayne, NJ
24. India Temple Association, Berlin, NJ
25. Shree Ram Mandir, Metuchen, NJ
26. Shree Yoga Vedanta Ashram (Sant Asharam Bapu), Matawan, NJ
27. Shri Sanatan Mandir, Parsippany, NJ
28. Shri Swaminarayan Mandir (S.S.S.M), Secaucus, NJ
29. Forum For Religious Freedom, Staten Island, NY
30. Hindu Temple - Albany, Loudonville, NY
31. Hindu Temple & Cultural Society of Western New York, Getzville, NY
32. Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha of the W.I. Inc. (Shiva Mandir), East Elmhurst, NY
33. Sikh Association of Staten Island, Inc., Staten Island, NY
34. Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Saylorsburg, PA
35. Bharatiya Temple and Bharatiya Cultural Center, Montgomeryville, PA
36. Hindu Jain Temple, Monroeville, PA
37. Hindu Temple Society, Allentown, PA
38. India Heritage Research Fund, Camp Hill, PA
39. Samarpan Hindu Temple, Philadelphia, PA
40. Sri Venkateshwara Temple, Penn Hills, PA
41. Sri Ganesha Temple, Nashville, TN
42. Barsana Dham, Austin, TX
43. Dallas FW Hindu Temple, Irving, TX
44. Hindu Temple of Central Texas, Temple, TX
45. Hindu Temple of San Antonio, Helotes, TX
46. Hindu Temple of the Woodlands, Woodlands, TX
47. Durga Temple, Fairfax Station, VA
48. Rajdhani Mandir, Chantilly, VA
49. All World Gayatri Pariwar, USA
50. Art of Living Foundation, USA
51. BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, USA
52. Bharat Sevashram Sangh of North America, USA
53. Brahman Samaj of North America, USA
54. Chinmaya Mission, USA
55. Federation of Jain Associations in North America (JAINA), USA
56. Gayatri Parivar of Northeast America, USA
57. Hindu Coalition Initiative of North America, USA
58. Hindu Students Council, USA
59. Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh, USA
60. Hindu University of America, USA
61. International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), USA
62. Sanskruti Pariwar, USA
63. Yogi Divine Society, Hari Dham, USA
64. Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America, USA
65. Hamilton Hindu Samaj, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
66. Lakshmi Narayan Mandir, British Columbia, Canada
67. Radha Krishna Mandir, Nova Scotia, Canada
68. Ved Vignan Mahavidya Peeth, Nova Scotia, Canada
69. Vedic Society of Nova Scotia, Canada

(List as of July 17, 2007)

Resolutions from HMEC-2006

Hindu Mandir Executives Take Stand for Unity and Service

Hindu *Mandir* (Temple) executives representing 57 temples from more than 20 states of US, Canada and Caribbean Islands converged in Atlanta to attend the first ever Hindu *Mandir* Executive conference (HMEC), from June 23rd through June 25th. They traveled from as far as British Columbia in Canada, Hawaii, California, Florida, and the heartland of America, with a mission to nourish, protect and sustain Hindu Dharma in America.

The executives represented a wide cross-section of the Hindu community from a young second-generation *Mandir* president from Augusta, Georgia, to an elderly lady representing a Hindu *Mandir* in North Carolina. These attendees, who numbered over 110, included physicians, scientists, businesspersons, homemakers, and engineers who, in addition, are temple executives with a deep commitment to fulfilling the spiritual and social needs of Hindu-American community. The group was diverse in terms of age, ethnicity, generation and national origin as well.

During the conference *Mandir* executives deliberated on the evolving social, religious, cultural and spiritual needs of a 2.5 million strong diverse and vibrant Hindu-American community. In the concluding session of the conference, the delegates unanimously passed the following resolutions for further consideration by their temple's boards.

On the Hindu Unity

We, the Hindu *Mandirs* of Americas, hereby declare that all Hindus stand as one regardless of the *panthas* (path), *sampradaya* (tradition), or country of origin. We are all members of one proud Hindu family, which is one billion strong. All *Mandirs* stand united as one, even though our specific traditions may not be identical, and our spiritual paths are diverse. We, hereby, resolve solemnly to dedicate ourselves to the common good of Hindu community worldwide.

On Hindu Seva Divas (Hindu Service Day)

By declaring this solidarity with the international Hindu family we resolve to dedicate ourselves to community Seva (service) that is fundamental to our Dharma. The Hindu *Mandirs* of Americas, hereby resolve, that all the *Mandirs* in Americas will celebrate annually a common day of volunteer service, called the Hindu Seva Divas whereby all Hindu *Mandirs* will take leadership role in organizing community service activities in their respective local areas. The Hindu Seva Divas shall be held on the first weekend in October every year.

On Education on Text Books

As Hindu *Mandirs* in Americas, we resolve to help meeting the educational needs of our children and youth so that they develop into confident Hindu-American citizens. In this regard, we the Hindu *Mandirs* in Americas, gravely note the serious deficiencies and gross distortions in school textbooks in the US about Hinduism, its culture and traditions resulting in embarrassment, discrimination and other social problems for our youth. We, hereby, resolve to take leadership role in our respective school districts in getting these distortions in textbooks about Hinduism corrected as soon as possible.

On Zero Tolerance for Desecration of Hindu Mandirs

Hindu *Mandirs'* Executives of Americas strongly condemn targeted vandalism (hate crime), wanton destruction and desecration of Hindu *Mandirs* any where in the world. The Hindu *Mandirs* shall not remain quiet in view of increasing frequency of targeted attacks on Hindu *Mandirs* throughout the world. We shall oppose, by all lawful means, such malicious acts of vandalism and intolerance directed against any Hindu *Mandir*.

The conference was facilitated by Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America
www.vhp-america.org 732-744-0851 office@vhp-america.org

Agenda for Second Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference

Holiday Inn, Edison, NJ

FRIDAY, AUGUST 10, 2007

Session	Time	Topic	Chair/Speaker
Session 1	7:00 PM	<i>Inaugural Ceremony</i>	Dr. Ram Bajaj
		Deep Prajwalan and Opening Remarks'	
		Invocation of Devi Bhagwati for Strength	Ma. Sri Karunamayi
		Message	
		Parichay	All
		Shri Sanatan Mandir Sunday School -	Shri Ajit Kothari
		Evolution and Growth	
		Practical Problems Faced by Upcoming	Dr. Y.V. Rao
		Mandirs in a Small Community	

Dinner 8:30 PM DINNER

SATURDAY, AUGUST 11, 2007

Yoga	6:30 AM	Yoga	Shri Sudhir Parikh
	7:00 AM	Yoga ends	
Breakfast	7:15 AM	BREAKFAST	
Session 2	7:55 AM	<i>Welcome Session</i>	Smt. Mano Mishra
		❧Deep Prajwalan	
		❧Ekatmata mantra	
		❧Bhavgeet	
		❧Welcome Address	
		❧Opening Remarks VHPA President	Shri Jyotish Parekh
Session 3	8:15 AM	<i>Keynote Address: Role of Mandirs in Sustaining</i>	Swami Dayananda
		<i>Hindu Dharma in North America</i>	Saraswati
		❧Remarks on Conference and Going Forward (15)	Dr. Nachiketa Tiwari
Session 4	9:15 AM	<i>The Hindu Mandir: Roles and Challenges in the</i>	Smt. Kanaka Prabhu
		<i>21st Century</i>	
		❧Hindu Mandir as an Integrated Resource for Hindus	Dr. M. G. Prasad
		❧Challenges to Hindu Temples from the Indian	Dr. Kumar Nochur
		Government	
		❧Save Temples Campaign - What did we learn?	Dr. Prakasarao Velagapudi
		❧A Broader Perspective for Hindu Mandir Executives:	Shri Mahesh Mehta
		Global Hindu Awakening	
Services	10:30 AM	<i>Action Update - Newsletter</i>	Sushri Keya Dave
Session 5	10:35 AM	<i>Mandirs & Worship - Continuity of Hindu Traditions</i>	Dr. Raghavan Pratiwad
		<i>Through Proper Understanding and Practice</i>	
		❧Engaging Youth Effectively in Hindu Worship	Shri Nikunj Trivedi
		Practices	

		✽Making Hindu Dharma Appealing to Non Hindus and Hindus of Non Indian Origin	Smt Beth Kulkarni
		✽Enabling Temple Leadership to Effectively Communicate with Youth and Children	Swami Tadatmananda
		✽Continuity of Hindu Traditions	Shri Sachhin Phagu
Services	11:50 AM	Action Update – Website	Shri Vijay Narang
Lunch	11:55 AM	LUNCH	
Session 6	12:55 PM	<i>Mandirs & Samskriti – Dharma as Source and Goal of Cultural Expression</i>	Dr. Rita Frenchman
		✽Engaging Youth in Dharma through Culture – My Experiences	Sushri Neeta Chauhan
		✽Supporting Indic Studies in the Academia	Dr. Sharad Parikh
		✽Enjoyment and Learning through Cultural and Festival Activities	Swamini Jnaneshwari Devi
		Promoting Hindu Values – Vegetarianism	Shri Nirmal Doshi
Services	2:10 PM	Action Update – Hindu Awareness Yaatra	Sushri Bhakti Mehta
Session 7	2:15 PM	<i>Mandirs & Education: The Challenge of Accurate Understanding & Depiction of Hindu Dharma</i>	Shri Kaushik Joshi
		✽The California Textbook Story – A Summary	Shri Rajkumar Manikam
		✽The Maryland Textbook Success	Shri Shivaram Sitaram
		✽From Bal Vihar to Youth Vihar	Shri Dahyabhai Patel
		✽Bringing Mandirs and Youth Together Through National Geeta Elocution Contest	Shri Bharat Jani
Break	3:30 PM	TEA BREAK	
Session 8A	3:45 PM	<i>Mandirs & Seva – Seva as the Binding Glue of a Community</i>	Shri Kirthi Vasan
		✽Hindu Seva Divas: The Albany Experience	Shri Balakrishna Mattur
		✽Engaging Youth and Children through Seva	Dr. Meena Chintapalli
		✽Case Study: Outreach Programs for US Schools through Art of Living	Shri Vikas Chawla
		✽Mandir: A Center for Support and Guidance	Shri Gadadhara Pandit Das
Session 8B	3:45 PM	<i>Mandirs & Seva – Seva as the Binding Glue of a Community</i>	Dr. Rama Belagaje
		✽Yoga and Samkirtan to Promote Unity and Health; Experiences at the Satsang Center	Shri Sudhir Parikh
		✽Hindu Community Outreach Service – Serving Sick & Disabled	Dr. V. Raja Bandaru
		✽Bringing a New Mandir to Life – OM Mandir	Shri Tej Tandon
		✽It's Your Dharma! Care to Learn and Share the Learning	Dr. Kishan Kriplani

Session 9A	5:00 PM	<i>Effective Operation of Mandirs</i>	Smt. Manju Shrivastava Shri Jeff Armstrong
		❧International Hindu Speakers to Foster Hindu Renaissance	
		❧What Does Hindu University of America Offer to Mandirs	Shri Om Baweja
		❧Networking Mandirs – Next Steps	Dr. Bapineedu Kuchipudi
		❧Producing Effective Priests – Vidya Bhathi Peetha	Dr. Yegnasubramaniam
Session 9B	5:00 PM	<i>Workshop for Youth – 2008 Vision and Action</i>	Shri Samir Rawal
		Sachin Phagu, Keya Dave, Samir Rawal, Nikunj Trivedi, Neeta Chauhan, Anjaneya Singh, Patanjali Rambrich, Nandi Shetty, Radhakishan Shetty, Bhakti Mehta, Sambavi Swaminathan	
Services	6:15 PM	<i>Action Update – Hindu Library Network</i>	Dr. Vipul Patel
Dinner	6:45 PM	DINNER	
Break	7:45 PM	CULTURAL PROGRAM	

SUNDAY, AUGUST 12, 2007

Yoga	6:30 AM	<i>Yoga</i>	Prof. Krishan Verma
	7:00 AM	<i>Yoga Ends</i>	
Breakfast	7:15 AM	BREAKFAST	
Session 10	8:00 AM	<i>Special Session on Marriage and Restoration of Hindu Pride and Identity</i>	Swami Bodhinatha Veylanswami
		❧Restoring Hindu Pride and Identity	Dr. Aruna Pal
		❧Enhancing the Appeal of Hindu Weddings	Prof. Krishan Verma
Session 11	9:30 AM	<i>Youth Session</i>	Sushri Keya Dave Shri Nikunj Trivedi Shri Nandi Shetty
		❧Report on Youth Workshop	
		❧Experiences of Engaging Youth in Mandir Administration: Case Study	
Services	10:00 AM	<i>Group Insurance for Mandir Employees</i>	Shri Lalit Goel
Session 12	10:15 AM	<i>Closure: Resolutions, Action Items, and Going Forward, Vote of Thanks, & Prarthana</i>	
		❧Resolutions and Action Items	
		❧Parting Thoughts	Sri Sri Vishvam ji Maharaj
		❧Vote of Thanks	Dr. Rajender Kapoor
		❧Prarthana	
Lunch	12:00 PM	LUNCH & Adjourn	

HINDU MANDIR EXECUTIVES' CONFERENCE — WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO?

Nachiketa Tiwari, Convener, HMEC

This is the second year of Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference (HMEC). At the time of writing this piece, 70 organizations have registered for HMEC. Vis-à-vis 2006, HMEC has clearly grown in significant terms. Within two years of its existence, the idea of Conference has certainly spread far and wide amongst the *mandir* community.

But then, the Conference is not an end itself. It has to serve a higher purpose. The Conference is the first step of a serial process aimed at engaging our youth more effectively with Hindu values, develop a credible national leadership for Hindus, and enhance the efficiency of *mandirs*. These are the needs of the Hindu-American. During the initial phase of her presence in America, the immigrant Hindu successfully strove to be financially secure. That is a story that needs no retelling. The Hindu-American's strategy for financial security has essentially operated at the level of an individual.

However, in the fourth decade of substantial Hindu presence in America¹, the gears have to shift. Or else, we surely will run into a mid-life crisis of our own making. Our focus has to move from survival to sustenance. That requires us to gel as a community. We have to transition from a group of 2.5 million individuals to a community 2.5 million strong. The *mandirs* can serve as the nuclei around which 2.5 million American Hindus can crystallize as a community. By history and tradition, the Hindu has organized itself primarily around two pillars - *mandirs* and *sadhus*. It is through these institutions, that he has discovered his identity, existential purpose and direction.

Today, over 500 *mandirs* dot continental America. Through these *mandirs*, a very robust foundation of Hindu *dharma* has been laid in America. Perhaps, the next task is to develop a credible Hindu leadership. The leadership of *mandirs* has to transform itself into a national Hindu leadership. Such a leadership will emerge only once we realize that despite the multiplicity of the traditions which are collectively associated with the term "Hindu", our values are essentially one and the same. And so are our concerns, and needs. For instance, all of us, regardless of our specific spiritual proclivities, are deeply concerned as to how our young remain positively engaged with our traditions and values. This is not a trivial concern rooted in emotion. Rather, we sense this need because we know experientially, that we have survived, and flourished in America because of our Hindu values. The value system which has helped us survive as an individual will also help us succeed as a community. Our values which helped us succeed on the material plane will also help us grow along the spiritual dimension. Thus, our *mandirs* have to evolve into *gurukuls*, which inculcate these values in all. This reminds of Baba Dioum who once remarked²: "In the end we will conserve only what we love. We love only what we understand. We will understand only what we are taught." Working together towards such an end requires leadership.

The Conference is a medium through which this "leadership stuff" can happen. It is also a medium through which *mandirs* can become more effective and efficient. Two years back, there was no effective means of communication between *mandirs* of America. Today we have two: a newsletter, and an electronic network. Together, these tools help us connect almost all the *mandirs* of America. This is a direct consequence of the first Conference. These tools really work well. For instance, a particular *mandir* executive got ten candidates applying for the position of a priest within a day of posting of his requirements on the net. This inventory of tools, which can help enhance *mandirs*' operational efficiency, will grow with time.

Increased efficiency of *mandirs* will help *mandirs* allocate more resources for fulfilling the needs of community. Also, we will get more connected with each other. Joseph Cambell, the famous American philosopher had once remarked: "The next great step for the human family will be to recognize, in our daily lives, the unity that already exists". Our seers had already coined a term for such unity: *dharma*. And further, through the Rgveda's *sangathan sukta*, they prescribed a fairly straightforward approach for achieving it. The *sukta* says: "*Meet together, talk together, let your minds apprehend alike, in like manner as the ancient Gods, concurring, accepted their portions of sacrifice. Common be the prayer of these, common be the acquirement, common be the purpose, and associated be the desire. I repeat for you a common prayer; I offer for you a common oblation. Common be your intentions, hearts, and thoughts, so that there may be thorough union amongst all*". If the conferees at HMEC-2007 figure out innovative ways to put the prescriptions of this *sukta* into practice, then, in Bollywood-speak, "our life will be set".

¹ Hindus immigration to America started in substantial numbers only in 1960s.

² A prominent African environmentalist

The Temples and Their Role

Swami Veditatmananda, Arsha Vidya Gurukulam

Need for Prayer and Worship

For the successful completion of an endeavor, three factors are needed: adequate effort, time and grace (*daivam*). An adequate effort at the right time and for the right length of time is certainly required. But our knowledge and our power are limited and therefore many factors, known and unknown are not within our control. We do not call all the shots. And therefore, in spite of our best efforts, we are not always successful. We require that the known and the unknown factors be favorable to us for us to be successful. That is called *daivam* or grace of God, who is in the form of the order, who is the controller of all laws. We need God's help or grace so that we can avoid sorrow, disease, suffering or failure and achieve health, wealth, happiness and success.

Scriptures reveal that God is both the maker and the material of the creation. He is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent and benevolent. His grace can be invoked by worship and prayer. Prayer can be performed for material as well as spiritual success. A prayer or worship can also be an offering to God without seeking any personal reward. It can be an expression of gratitude or an expression of wonderment and joy and appreciation of the glories and the grace of the Lord. But prayer in one or the other form is necessary. It is the part of the life of every religious and spiritual person. In Hinduism, prayer and worship are in the form of rituals such as *pūjā*, *homa* etc, oral worship in the form of singing the glories of the Lord, chanting or recital and mental worship by way of meditation. The devotee can perform one or more forms of worship in one or more sessions

Prayer or worship is a deliberate action and hence yields a result in keeping with the law of *karma*, which is the law of cause and effect as expressed by a well known statement: As you sow, so you reap. It looks as though prayer or worship does not always bring the desired result. But the result is subtle. It may not be in the form of what we want and when we want. But it is there for sure. A prayer or worship never goes unrewarded, if performed with faith and devotion.

Role of Temples

A temple is a sacred place, a place of worship. It is the house of God. Since God is not only the Maker, but is also the Material, he is equally present everywhere. However, that presence is like the presence of fire in the wood. Wood has to be churned to make the fire manifests as sparks and then as flame; that is when we can experience it. Similarly, God has to be made manifest by certain rituals such as consecration, then we can experience his presence. Since God is everywhere, he can be invoked in any name and form. In Hinduism, certain names and forms and materials are prescribed by scriptures as most suitable for invoking the divinity. Hence in temples, we have an image or images and/or symbols in which life is infused, and stipulated worship performed regularly. Various festivals are also celebrated. A number of devotees visit the temples and express their devotion. As a result of all these, the temple sanctum acquires a certain power and it becomes possible to experience his presence, to invoke devotion in oneself, even if one has an unrefined heart. Most Hindus have an altar at their homes where they perform worship, but temple still retains its valuable place in the life of a devotee.

A temple provides a set-up and an atmosphere to help the devotee visualize the divine and establish contact with it. Here, within its sanctum sanctorum (holy of holies), is placed an image or icon and devotees utter prayers with handful of flowers and lovingly perform rituals of worship with incense and lamps. To their God, they bring their hopes and fears, they visit him to share their happiness and sorrow and they believe that if one comes with pure intentions, God hears their prayers and sees what is in their heart.

Hindus have a deeply personal relation with their God. The Hindu way of worship is a personal communion with God. Tradition of congregational worship is not predominant. Even when a crowd gathers around the inner sanctum sanctorum to watch the priests perform the rituals and to hear their chanting, each one prays on

his/her own. This is a very personal faith and hence mass chanting of prayers or sermons are not very common in temples. Each devotee prays individually to the deity. The Hindus hold conversation with God like one would with a respected and revered person or a friend. The deity is propitiated, cared for and loved. The deity is worshiped and fed, music is played and dance is performed for its entertainment. God is also taken out on chariot rides.

Gods have their consorts, they have their favorite vehicles, trees, fruits, flowers and foods. For Hindus, a temple is where you worship and pray, ring bells, and chant *mantras* and *stotras*. It is also a place where learned people come and share their wisdom. It is a joyous center of festivals, music, dance and fairs.

Even though God is one (and *Vedanta* teaches that all there is, is God), his manifestations are many. God possesses all the attributes, but a given deity such as *Brahmā*, *Vishnu*, *Rudra* etc., represent some of the attributes predominantly and devotees with different emotional make up and upbringing find it easier to relate to a given manifestation or deity. A given manifestation is called a devata or a deity and *Vishnu*, *Rudra*, *Subrahmanya*, *Durgā* and others are examples of such deities. One can invoke the limited or the limitless from any deity.

What can Temples in the USA do in sustaining Hindu Dharma?

The following are some suggestions:

The management of a temple in the US should create an environment as described above. May there be learned priests performing rituals and chanting, may there be frequent religious discourses, festivals and if possible, activities of community service.

There is no formal set-up for religious education in Hinduism at the present time and hence we find that Hindus are much ignorant about their own religion. There is faith and devotion, but not much understanding. Therefore, propagation of our religion among our own people, educating the Hindus about their own *dharma* is very important. It is important that Hindus are informed enough to feel proud of their heritage, the variety and the beauty of the system of worship, the tolerant and inclusive nature of the tradition, the profundity of the spiritual thought and the great contribution to mankind

through a vast number of enlightened spiritual leaders over the many millennia.

Proper education of the religion is important also because of the deliberate and systematic attempt in disparaging all aspects of Hinduism by certain sections within India and by some scholars and intellectuals in the West. This has created and continues to create a great deal of misunderstanding about or even resentment towards Hindu scriptures, their Gods and their traditions and practices. Temples should organize regular classes conducted by well-informed people to educate both adults and children about Hinduism, particularly about the controversial aspects that create misunderstanding. Temples should also, from time to time, invite learned people and spiritual and religious leaders and organize a series of lectures or workshops.

Hinduism has wonderful rituals, but the uninitiated or uninformed people find them too long, too complicated and even unnecessary. Temples should encourage the priests or some other learned people to explain the need for rituals, their symbolism and their salient aspects. Most rituals are in Sanskrit which is not understood by most people and therefore there is need to create some English translation or equivalent English composition for the benefit of the second and future generations that will follow. The temples that are built now will be ultimately attended by the future generations and the rituals and other practices will have to be made understandable by them and also be made interesting to them. For that purpose, temples will have to establish a set-up where traditional priests can be trained to communicate with the America-born Indians.

The stories of *itiḥāsa* and *purāṇa* are sometimes very confusing and misleading when only literal meaning is conveyed. The priests and others telling such stories as in *Satya Narayana Katha* and the other books have to understand and convey the symbolic meaning contained in the stories and anecdotes. These very stories, told to the faithful, do not create any reaction and they achieve the purpose of conveying the subtle spiritual truths and experiences. But when they are told to the rational listeners, many questions arise from the apparent contradictions or transgressions. Convincing explanations are required, otherwise the very purpose gets defeated. The narrators of the stories should have the insight and sensitivity for the narration to serve the purpose. Temples should take initiative to provide this training to the priests and narrators of the stories.

Temples can also contribute to the learning by organizing libraries of books, videos etc., and also by organizing exhibitions depicting the salient features of the religion and culture. In all of these efforts, sensitivity to the mindset and intellectual and cultural orientation of the America born Indians is very important, because, ultimately it is they who should attend and support the temples.

Apart from being the centers of festivals, temples can also become centers of community service, where the members of the community can participate and identify with the institution. Community should be encouraged to perform weddings and other rites in the temples because that will create a more lasting effect on the minds of

those going through those rites, attending those rites, particularly if the rituals are simplified and explained.

In India, temples have occupied the most central place in the life of the Hindus for centuries and they have been one of the greatest factors in keeping together the diverse factors of the society. The same can and should happen with the temples in the West also.

Om Tat Sat.

Swami Veditatmananda
Arsha Vidya Gurukulam
Saylorsburg, PA, USA
July 18, 2007

Best Wishes to 2nd HMEC From

Shri Haridham

Hindu Swaminarayan Temple, Lake Haiwatha, NJ

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Why Hindu Mandir Executives' Conference?

Dr. Ila Jitendra Sukhadia, HMEC Coordinator

On behalf of the coordination host committee, it is my great pleasure to welcome you for participating in the HMEC 2007. Your presence at the conference reveals that you believe in the great cause of Hindu unity. Here the word "Hindu" is used as a broader term, encompassing all the religions which originated in our motherland Bharat (India) including Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Vedic Sanatan Dharma, and all its offshoots.

"Dharma" means one's own duty. If we obey all the principles of Dharma like righteousness, honesty, non-violence, refraining from stealing, and not accumulating unnecessary things at the cost of others, then that very Dharma will protect us. Unlike some religions, Hindu religion does not promise heaven after death if you did not harm others, did not do anything wrong, or even if you did not kill other innocent people in the name of religion. In fact, our religion teaches us the correct way of life, vision of life and tells us "do not do to others which you will not do to yourself". It gives us freedom from limitation and sorrow as well as the ultimate knowledge that you are full and complete, you are that Brahman- the ultimate bliss and happiness which you are looking for. No other religion in the world will teach you this truth and this is why I'm very proud to be a Hindu.

We have a great team to work with. We have already started the networking and we work in harmony with enthusiasm, spirit, dedication, and devotion because we strongly believe in the cause. One may ask why HMEC? My perspective on this question is as follows:

1. To unite and strengthen Hindu community
2. To connect with each other at individual and group levels
3. To develop bonding and working relationships
4. To find common ground and expand on that
5. To connect and have a network of temples, religious and spiritual organizations and enable them to share their viewpoints
6. Help each other in the time of need and crisis

7. Temples are powerhouses where so many people come together even without personal invitation and practice their faith. Group prayers enhance our faith and identity
8. Our religious practices make us think as though we have lots of gods and goddesses and hence become a source of division. However, according to our scriptures, these gods and goddesses are only different aspects of one Divine Lord. As per our beliefs not only there is one God, but everything surrounding us is a manifestation of God. Creation and Creator are only one. And since we are all a part of this creation, we are all connected with each other. We are one with God. So where is the difference?

9. Tangible advantage is that we can help each other:

- a. For finding a priest
- b. Training a priest
- c. Building a temple
- d. Ordering deities
- e. Sanctum and Pran Pratishtha
- f. Help solve visa issues for priests
- g. Group health insurance
- h. Group liability and temple property insurance
- i. Help solve legal issues

10. Community reach out and Seva project
11. Involvement of youth and young adults to carry the torch for future survival and sustenance of Hindu way of life.
12. Last but not least there are organized efforts by other religions toward forced and tactful conversions. Conversion of religion is a violence and we must organize ourselves to stop that and stand up for our rights. Unity amongst us is a sure way to that goal.

So, we pray to Almighty Bhagwan to help us, give us strength, wisdom and courage to do the right work at the right time which is now.

A Small Gesture of Love

Shiva Pal (12 years old)

As we all know, temples are the focal point of our society. God is the creator, the sustainer, and the destroyer, as well as gives us good luck, bravery, happiness, justice, etc. Something that we also know is that our temples are sometimes not clean. We should not keep our holy-places dirty, for they are the dwelling-places of God. Furthermore, a clean mandir is helpful to us. A good clean mandir is quite useful because it will stop the spread of dirtiness-related diseases. It is also useful for first impressions, (new members, small children, etc.) But cleanliness isn't easy. In order to maintain cleanliness in our temples we have to make a commitment. The youth should try to clean up the mandir after each activity with their parent's permission. Although the act is very small, god will still appreciate this small gesture of love and devotion.

My View of a Role of Mandir

Krishna Dosapati (13 year old)

"Who is god? Where does he reside? How do we know he really is there?" These are questions that occur to people as they watch the local priest at the temple chant names after names of the lord. Acquiring spiritual knowledge is only possible if one has a teacher. Knowing shlokas without understanding them is useless.

Normally, temples are means by which people can watch the priest perform a yagna or a puja. Many temples, however give significant importance to bala-viharas or classes where people can learn and understand God.

The Arsha Vidya Gurukulam in Saylorsburg, Pennsylvania, is a suitable example. There are classes for both children and adults. Kids who begin coming there at a very early age are exposed to our rich heritage which stays with them throughout their lives. They also feel more confident about school and are able to answer the questions thrown at them. As a teenager, I think it is wonderful to be able to go there and share my thoughts and feelings with peers of my own age and race.

There is also a similar ashram called the Arsha Bodha Center, which is located in Somerset, New Jersey. For teens and children, Swamiji conducts a class twice a month. He helps remove misconceptions spread about Hinduism, and tells us the Puranic stories.

Temples are the only thing we, as the second generation, can rely on for knowledge. They are what keep India alive, even in America.

The Challenges of Mixed-Religion Marriages and How Couples, Families and Community can Best Respond

Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami

More and more Hindus in western countries are marrying non-Hindus. This trend is occurring among Hindus born in Western countries or who immigrated at a young age to these countries. Naturally, they identify strongly with the Western country and culture they grew up in and have little or no connection with the country of their parents' origin. As children of Hindu parent, they are a minority in school, and most of their friends are non-Hindus. Little wonder they so often marry outside their faith. As one young man told his parents who brought him to the US from India as a child, "If you didn't want me to become an American, why did you bring me here?"

The fact that many attend a university that is some distance from their parents' home, and therefore need to live in a dormitory or apartment with other students, also contributes to the likelihood of marrying a non-Hindu. Mixed religious marriages are more common among Hindu girls than boys. An unverified statistic we were given a few years ago for the Houston, Texas, area is that ninety percent of Hindu girls and fifty percent of Hindu boys marry a non-Hindu.

In a mixed religious marriage, there is a strong possibility that the children will not be raised as Hindus. Thus, a mixed marriage in which the children are not raised as Hindus is, in reality, a form of conversion—a type of conversion is rarely discussed or recognized. Over decades, this trend could eventually lead to the Hindu community's virtual disappearance in these Western countries. It's a serious matter that will define the future of Hinduism in the West. Some of the challenges in mixed-religion marriages and possible solutions to deal with them are outlined below:

Challenge of Parental Acceptance: A major difficulty these young couples can face is lack of acceptance by the Hindu parents. Sometimes the parents' negative reaction is so strong that they virtually disown their son or daughter. They even refuse to speak of the union, which then becomes a taboo, an unresolvable problem that creates tremendous strain and hurt among all members of the extended family. The non-Hindu parents may also react to their child's marrying outside the family's traditional religion.

Advice: In any and all cases, my guru's advice to parents is that if you truly love your child you automatically love whomever he or she loves. That's what love is. It is unconditional, not to be taken away when a grown son or daughter makes a major choice in life with which you disagree. Also, family problems need to be talked about and resolved—not to be swept under the carpet.

I advise couples that they can help prevent such unacceptance. For one thing, don't rush into the marriage. Give your parents time to adjust and provide ample opportunities to get to know your prospective spouse and his or her parents. Use reason and avoid emotion when discussing the proposed marriage. Parents are impressed to see their son or daughter becoming a better, more mature person. Show them by your actions that the relationship with your spouse-to-be makes you a more responsible adult, more aware of your duties in life and better at fulfilling them. Above all, keep the dialog going.

Challenge of Religious Training: After marriage, the question of the children's religious upbringing can cause contention. Consider a Hindu man married to a Christian woman. The two naturally hold different opinions on what is best for their child's spiritual upbringing. Some couples conclude that it is best to expose the child to both religions, in this case Hinduism and Christianity. This approach doesn't work. At the least, it confuses the child, who ends up with no strong religious identity. At worst, the child may be turned against Hinduism.

A child's exposure to fundamentalist religions is particularly problematic. These faiths believe theirs is the only true religion and that all peoples should be converted to their faith. When such zealots find out that the child has a Hindu parent and attends Hindu events, they may become openly aggressive in systematically criticizing Hinduism and turning the child against it. It is impossible for even tolerant parents to protect their children from such assaults, which are unforeseeable when the marriage begins. Recently we heard of a Hindu woman whose husband joined a fundamentalist Christian group. He subsequently made his wife discard her sacred jewelry and refused to allow medical care for their children, insisting that God alone would heal them.

Advice: A young couple should discuss and decide the issue of which religion their children will be raised in before they are married. Religion may seem unimportant to both—a non-issue—before marriage. However, for many couples it takes on profound significance when the first child is born.

Challenge of Community Acceptance: Another problem is lack of acceptance in the Hindu community and at local temples. If, for example, the wife is non-Hindu, women devotees of the temple may deliberately make her feel like an unwelcome outsider.

Advice: The phenomenon of mixed religious marriage needs to be thought about, discussed and embraced with compassion. It is too large and crucial to be overlooked. The future of the Hindu diaspora is at stake. As a minimal solution, one person at each temple can be appointed to work with mixed couples to assure they feel welcome in the group.

Challenge of Becoming a Hindu: Another problem is the misconception that you have to be born a Hindu to be a Hindu. There are certainly Brahmanical traditions that do not accept that non-Hindus can become Hindus. However, many Saivite, Shakta and Vaishnava traditions have historically extended their arms and welcomed others into the Hindu fold.

If there is no channel for the non-Hindu partner to become a Hindu, the likelihood increases that the Hindu will convert to the spouse's religion or fall away from religion altogether.

Advice: Temples need to decide if they want to have a program for bringing non-Hindu spouses into Hinduism. Temples that choose to have such programs can establish, as a regular part of their educational offerings, special classes to prepare and qualify non-Hindu spouses to formally enter Hinduism through receiving the name-giving sacrament.

Challenge of Raising Hindu Children in the West: If you consider it important that your grandchildren be Hindus, you need to give careful thought to the religious training you are providing your children as they grow up.

Advice: If you teach your children the misconception that all religions are the same, that it doesn't make a difference which religion you follow, it will be more likely that your child will marry a non-Hindu, and less likely your grandchildren will be raised Hindu. However, if you teach your children that religions are different and Hinduism is unique and great, then chances are much higher that your grandchildren will carry on your Hindu heritage. To help ensure this, it is crucial that you integrate religion into the family routine. Have a home shrine at which the entire family worships daily. Take the family to the local temple once a week and for festivals. Make sure your children acquire a good intellectual understanding of Hindu traditions and are shown how Hinduism can benefit their life in so many practical ways.

*Note: The article is a summary from the original publication in **Hinduism Today** - July/August/September 2005.*

BEST WISHES FOR 2nd HINDU MANDIR Executives' Conference

**BHUPENDRA, VEENA KAPADIA
& FAMILY**

Spiritual Libraries in Temples: Why and How?

Dr. Vipul Patel, Member of Gayatri Pariwar

Temples are not just places of worship but are also lighthouses for individual and social reform. They can be called “vyaktitva nirman ki prayogshala”, the laboratory where good character is built and righteous thinking is inculcated. As such, a temple is incomplete without a “Pustakalaya”, a library, with inspiring and life transforming literature.

Pandit Shriram Sharma Acharya, founder of All World Gayatri Pariwar (www.awgp.org) wrote:

The seeds of all soul-level revolutions originate from the minds of illuminated thinkers and seers. Their inspiring literature spreads like a wild fire to other receptive minds. The process continues as a ripple effect and spreads globally. The sparks join together and transform themselves into all-encompassing Effulgent Light – chasing away all that is impure, obscure, wicked, and divisive, or, in one word, Evil.

He also used to say that if one is in the company of good books, ‘Hell will feel like a Heaven.’

And, to illustrate the power of books, he gave two examples from history. The first, the Red Book of Karl Marx, which brought almost half of the world population under communist rule. The second, the role played by small booklet Bibles to spread Christianity into new regions of the world.

In temples in the USA, we are blessed with a relatively large space and also with financial resources to have a library within that space. However, only a small percentage of temples have libraries at the present. I feel every temple should have a library that will also help the temples achieve their objectives of spiritual and social reforms in a more effective manner.

For the youngsters growing in the USA, these libraries will be a resource to learn cultural values and enjoy the experience. For instance, at the Arsha Bodha Center’s library (www.arshabodha.org), I have seen a large number of children spending hours reading books while their parents attend other programs. There are Amar

Chitra Katha stories, ancient epic stories, activity books (from the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam), and inspiring biographies of great personalities. The children sometimes get so absorbed they do not want to go home with their parents. These youngsters also continually borrow books from the library.

What can be an easier way to inculcate values and expose children to the greatness of our culture? Imagine if these libraries were also equipped with audio visual facilities and had a large collection of audio and video that will appeal to these youngsters!

Our next generation is bright and intelligent, and has a curiosity, a hunger, to learn new things. What can we do to arouse their interest to learn the values of the Vedic culture and quench their thirst with information that they can easily understand? Isn’t it our duty to make an effort to become facilitators? If we can not make it possible for them to understand the reason behind cultural and spiritual values, whether in the form of tradition, beliefs or rituals – allowing them to evaluate them - we may save them from a life of worldly pleasures that will cost them their inner peace.

Youngsters, today, are the generation “WHY?” They have little interest in anything they do not understand to be logical. Conversely, if logical explanations are found, this same generation will go the extra mile to understand their heritage, beyond what most of us may have done. Personally I have found myself unable to fully satisfy the curiosity of young minds. However, as a facilitator of material on self discovery, I have been amazed with the grasp of the youth. And what can be better material than a library? Besides spiritual subjects, books on yoga, India travel guides, and even books on Indian dresses and Indian decor can also help them relate to their culture and to feel proud of it.

One of the more intriguing subjects is Vedic science. Most adults grew up with limited exposure to the scientific basis of Indian spirituality or ancient Indian sciences, especially in the context of modern science. Times have now changed. In the age of information technology, it is

relatively easy to expose youngsters to their rich scientific heritage. Two years ago during a visit to the BAPS Swaminarayan Temple, Chicago, I was impressed with the display about the scientific knowledge from ancient India. Last year, an informative and intriguing display was put up by the Hindu Sevak Sangh in locations across the USA. Why not have similar exhibits hosted in every Temple Library? Now that we have a network of temples, why not share resources of such material with one another?

Allocating space for a library is perhaps the easiest task; the real challenge is the acquisition of suitable books and materials and the proper management of the library. To make a start, in case of financial limitations, make a plea to temple visitors to donate spiritual books and children's material for the library. In addition, I am amazed with the collection of books at the Arshavidya Gurukulam's (www.arshavidya.org) bookstore/library. Others can benefit from their experience in the acquisition of books and in the management of a library.

For the management of a library, the model used by the Arsha Bodha Center may help. In the initial days, the library was a self-service, with self check-in/check-out using a register for entries and an empty shelf for returned books. Once or twice a week, a limited number of volunteers re-arranged the books back on the shelves and called those in the register who were late in returning books. In the USA some may get lazy in returning the books on time but are unlikely to steal the books.

Another option is for senior citizens to manage the library. Grants/assistance may be available from local government for the transportation of these senior citizens. A library with audio-visual facility and computers can also serve as a meeting place for the elderly. The opportunity to get involved in volunteer work can make them feel proud and make it natural for their grand children to get connected to the temple.

Another major role a library can play is to establish harmony between the various Hindu organizations or sampradayas. A reason that has historically hindered cooperation between various sampradayas or organizations is our attachment to the teachings that transformed our lives. We have somehow surmised that everyone will benefit only from those teachings that changed us. In some cases, the teachings become based on monologues of a few individuals. Yet, all claim to be based on the Vedic teachings. For this to be true there has to be some harmony and unity behind the diversity and apparent differences.

Having a library with books containing teachings of many masters and many traditions will help foster this unity and for Hindus to become a powerful collective force. With exposure and access to a vast literature, a self refinement process will start and respect for diversity and value for unity will go hand in hand.

It is my heartfelt request to the trustees and directors of all temples to start a library in their temple, and to all spiritual organizations to make available their life transforming literature and other material to temple libraries. I have been involved with donating the literature published by All World Gayatri Pariwar to any temple or spiritual library that would like to receive them, and am glad that over 35 temples have so far accepted the offer. We have started to place a large number of books, audios and videos on our websites www.awgp.org and www.akhandjyoti.org. I will be glad to share our experiences with anyone who may be interested.

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Government Control of Hindu Temples in India

A Blatant Violation of Secularism & Religious Freedom

Kumar Nochur and Krishnan Ramaswamy, *The Foundation for Religious Freedom*
(Abridged from the original)

Both India and America are secular. While America more or less scrupulously adheres to the separation of church and state, in India the picture is dramatically different. Even though India is officially a secular democracy, state governments in India can take over Hindu temples and their properties, can appoint the people who will run temple committees and operations, and can take away *hundi* collections and other donations from temples and use them even for non-Hindu purposes. *And they have been doing this for almost six decades now all over India.* Such government interference does not occur with places of worship of non-Hindu faiths. They are left alone by the government, and are allowed to own and operate their institutions autonomously, without state interference. In secular India, with an 83% majority of her citizens being Hindus, Hindu temples are singled out for government control and management.

Status of Hindu Temples

This astounding fact of a supposedly secular government operating, selling the assets of, distributing the collections of, and in other ways imposing state control — often with appointees who are non-Hindu, and even anti-Hindu, bureaucrats or politicians — over Hindu temples, is directly responsible for the pathetic condition of many Hindu temples in India. Many magnificent, old temple buildings are deteriorating; and even the daily cleaning of the precincts is often neglected. Some temples don't even have oil for their lamps because the paltry rupees the government promised when it took over the temple seldom come on time, and priests on miserly salaries are reduced to abject poverty.

While there are many causes for the problems faced by temples, chief among them is the misappropriation of temples' lands and monies during the last century, starting even before our Independence. For instance, the British government took over the properties of the famed Puri Jagannath temple in 1878. Continuing the stance of the British and its proxies towards the appropriation and looting of Hindu temples, Indian politicians have concocted the flawed, and blatantly anti-secular, Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Act (HRCE Act) in 1951 to "provincialise the administration of Hindu

Religious Institutions." Over the years, the state governments have taken over thousands of temples, generally under the pretext of preventing "mismanagement" by Hindus. Thousands of small and medium temples, in addition to nationally and historically important temples such as Jagannath in Puri, Tirupati, Kashi Vishwanath, Vaishno Devi, Shirdi, Guruvayoor, Chamundi Devi, Dattapeeth, Kali Mandir of Patiala, Amarnath, Badrinath, and Kedarnath, are already under government control, and have been so for decades in many cases.

Examples and Effects of Government Interference
The devastation caused to Hindu temples, as a direct consequence of the HRCE act, is illustrated by a few examples:

- The famous Siddhi Vinayak Temple in Mumbai was "nationalized", i.e. the state government took over its previously independent board of trustees, in 1981. Various political and government appointees have siphoned off crores of rupees out of the temple's coffers. Some of this money is given out as 'donations' — of Rs. 50 lakhs or more — to other non-profit institutions, selected on the basis of political connections. These organizations may not serve Hinduism or Hindu devotees at all. Such donations continued even after the Bombay High Court issued a prohibitory order stopping them. During 2004-2005 alone, seven crore rupees were paid out to such beneficiaries out of the temple's inflow. The government appointed trustees of this temple also spent over Rs. 24 lakhs of the temple's money in two days on a lavish marketing event held at a seven star hotel to discuss how to promote temples as tourist attractions! In other words, the hard-earned money that devotees offer out of love and a sense of duty to a Hindu religious institution is being used for non-Hindu purposes.
- In 2002, from the 2,07,000 temples in Karnataka the government took in revenues of Rs. 72 crores, returned Rs. 10 crores for temple maintenance,

and granted Rs. 50 crores for madrasas, and Rs. 10 crores for churches. The fundamental question to be asked is: Why is money from Hindu temples disappearing into government accounts in the first place, to be distributed to other third party interests, be it non-Hindu or otherwise? Why did only six crores make it back to the temples that generated the Rs. 72 crores? How can this happen if there is a surplus Rs. 66 crores of Hindu temple money in the hands of the government? An estimated 50,000 temples have shut down during the last five years in Karnataka due to lack of resources.

- Under the openly evangelical regime of Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y. Samuel Rajsekar Reddy, the Tirumala Tirupati Devaswom (TTD) authority, frontal assaults have been made on the very hills of the beloved temple of Lord Balaji in Tirupati. In March 2006, the government demolished a centuries old, 1000 pillar *mantapam* in the Tirumala complex. The state government has not denied a charge that 85% percent of revenues from the TTD, *which collects over Rs. 3,100 crores every year as the richest temple in India*, are transferred to the state exchequer. The non-temple use of this colossal amount of money is not fully accounted for by the government. Temple watchdog groups have alleged that the government has allocated Rs. 7.6 crores of TTD money towards repairs and renovations of mosques and churches in a recent year. JRG Wealth Management Limited, a Christian owned organization, was given a lucrative contract to procure materials for the prasadam that is given to temple devotees. On January 21, the Chief Minister announced the sponsorship, using TTD money, of a hockey tournament in his parents' name. An attempt to take over five of the seven hills that belong to Lord Venkateswara, *according to legal deeds*, and hand them to Christian institutions, was thwarted last year only when Hindu religious leaders, under the aegis of the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha united to lodge strong, and unprecedented, protests. TTD wealth is being distributed as gold bars "for the poor", with no transparency as to who the "poor" are who will get the temple's riches. There are plans to build a ropeway to the hills to make it a commercial tourist attraction. While owing the TTD Rs. 1,500 crores already from various earlier proceeds, the

government is trying to take away another Rs 500 crores from TTD for irrigation projects! There are allegations of TTD appointees being non-Hindus, but these are hard to verify since many Hindus who convert to other religions keep their original names for various benefits. TTD's medical and educational institutions have also been turned into centers for proselytization.

- Elsewhere in Andhra Pradesh, out of 420,028 acres owned by temples in Vishakhapatnam, Kakinada, Guntur, Kurnool, Warangal, and Hyderabad, 60,843 acres were allowed to be occupied illegally by professional land grabbers. The state government, the inheritor of the responsibility under the HRCE Act to prevent such actions, did nothing to prevent these incursions, even though it has a staff of over 77,000 people (paid from a 15% charge on temple revenues) to look after temple interests. In August 2005, the state decided to sell 100,000 acres of the Sri Narasimha Swamy Temple in Simhachalam and other nearby temples. On March 14, 2006, the government auctioned 3,000 acres of temple lands in East Godavari district. Proceeds from these sales rarely reach the temples, which have to depend on the same government for doles to light their lamps and pay priests. 884 acres of endowment lands of the Sri Rama temple at Bhadrachalam have been allocated to Christian institutions by the current government. In Simhachalam, 300 acres belonging to the temple have been allocated for churches and convent schools, who even exercise an illegal authority to stop devotees from visiting the temple atop the hill! There is also an attempt afoot to take over the 500 year old Chilkur Balaji temple.
- In Sabarimala, the forested hill with the famous temple of Lord Ayyappa in Kerala, 2,500 acres of temple property have been sold by the communist government controlled Travancore Devaswom Board to a non-Hindu group. Even though this Board gets about Rs. 250 crores every year in income, it is almost bankrupt today, after years of government diversion of funds. Rs 24 crores from the Guruvayoor Devaswom have been spent on a drinking water project in ten nearby panchayats, which include 40 churches and mosques. Some of these non-Hindu beneficiaries of these schemes have larger

revenues than the Devasvom, but none of them pay towards the project.

- In Bihar, government control over temples through its Endowments department has led to, according to the Religious Trust Administrator, *in the loss of temple properties worth Rs. 2000 crores.*

More Government Control on the Horizon

While these tales of the terrible fate of Hindu temples under government control can be multiplied a thousand fold, and the collapse of the Hindu religious infrastructure as a direct result of government control can be documented in painful detail, it is more important to pay attention to the even more ominous threats of assault that are now on the horizon.

The Maharashtra government, literally bankrupt due to profligacy (including an Indian Enron scandal of mammoth proportions) and bad economic policies, is moving forward with a bill that would enable it to take over the 4.5 lakh Hindu temples in the state. The outpouring of contributions to temples by millions of Hindus is seen as a huge cash flow opportunity by politicians of all stripes all around India. In Kerala, the communist state government has promulgated an ordinance on February 4, 2007 to disband the Travancore and Cochin Autonomous Devaswom Boards (TCDB) and usurp their already limited independent authority over 1800 Hindu temples. In Orissa, the state government is on its way to sell some 70,000 acres of Jagannath temple endowment lands due to a financial crunch brought about by its own mismanagement of the temple's assets. The government in Rajasthan is planning to auction off temples and transfer their control to the highest bidders, *even if they are from the other religions*. Under the 'Apna Dham, Apna Kam, Apna Nam' scheme, a 30-year lease would be signed between the state government and private bidders on a Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT)! Many other outrageous proposals of the same kind abound across states.

Response from the Hindu Community

The Hindu community, after decades of apathy, disunity, and sporadic court fights to secure their rights to practice their religion without government control, has now belatedly woken up to address these fresh assaults. Local leaders have formed coalitions to take matters to court to prevent new takeovers and the sales of temple properties. The existence of the HRCE Act makes it an uphill legal battle to challenge and overturn the government's stranglehold over Hindu temples and their

assets. Recent court victories in Karnataka and Rajasthan are encouraging in this regard.

Online petitions and signature campaigns, often led by NRI Hindus have become a standard tool of the newly awakened Hindu community. Influential sections of Indian media, especially the English TV and press, have a covert or overt anti-Hindu position, and stories of government atrocities against Hindu temples rarely make it into the news pages. The collusion between missionary and communal forces and political parties hostile to Hindus, have further complicated the equation of elements that work against the religious freedom of Hindus. Thanks to blogs, websites, bulletin boards, and email forums that have recently sprung up, awareness about these issues is growing. Even as Hindu awareness grows, and the call for action mounts, the media and political parties are quick to discredit these grassroots and democratic efforts of Hindus by labeling them "fundamentalist" and "communal".

The attack on Hindu temples is an attack on the body and soul of Hinduism. Others may not understand our ways of worship, but to the practicing Hindu all Deities represent the One Supreme Reality and Being in diverse ways and forms that make the divine accessible to all levels of spiritual temperaments. The images of our Gods and Goddesses are not just idols. They are profound and splendid representations of the One in its many manifestations. Our priests should not be reduced to the status of government servants who have to depend on miserly salaries from the state that has usurped their traditional means of sustenance, and who are thereby forced to demand money, sometimes so aggressively, from devotees. Our acharyas should not be sidelined to being helpless observers even as the institutions they are vested with leading are being rendered insolvent.

The Way Forward

If Hindu temples are mismanaged or corrupt, as often alleged to justify their takeover, the sad record of Indian state governments with regard to governance and corruption in general, and their sorry record with the temples they already control in particular, hardly makes them a better candidate to look after the welfare of yet more temples! If Hindu temples need better management, the communities which support them should form the independent bodies to do so. If the traditional administrations of our temples need revamping for modern times, such reforms and reorganization should be led by practicing Hindus and their leaders, and not by outsiders from the government or non-Hindu constituencies.

The diversion of the wealth of Hindu temples by the states in the first place, and their use to fund non-Hindu purposes, is a flagrant travesty of the principle of separation of religion and state. Government officials looking to take over and exploit yet more Hindu temples should instead consider appropriating some non-Hindu religious organizations first, to restore some balance and equality to their strange brand of secularism. If they dare not do so, they should immediately cease and desist from controlling Hindu institutions and liquidating their assets, even if there be misguided statutes that are in place that give them the legal right to do so. And full reparations should be made to all the temples that have been devastated over the decades through a combination of the HRCE Act and various land reforms that have selectively annexed only Hindu properties in so many states.

A major breakthrough towards obtaining the freedom of Hindu temples from government control has been made with the establishment of the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha in 2003. The convener of the meeting, Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati, emphasized the need for Hindu religious leaders to have, united voice to speak for Hindus and their institutions. Currently the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha is pioneering a movement to challenge the constitutional validity of the HRCE Act and its derivatives, and to prevent further government incursions

into Hindu religious affairs. Through the Forum for Religious Freedom (FRF), incorporated as a US non-profit organization, efforts are under way to support the Acharya Sabha with the financial resources needed to mount a legal challenge to overturn the HRCE Act and to take measures to prevent further annexation by the states of our religious infrastructure. The viability of Hinduism rests in the health and vitality of our temples. All Hindus should consider it their *dharma* to make sure that this important mission of the Acharya Sabha is properly funded towards accomplishing this crucial objective. The reverse discrimination against Hindus and our institutions by a supposedly secular government cannot be allowed to continue any more. The time has come to secure for the majority Hindus of India the same secular rights and religious freedom that the followers of all minority religions already enjoy.

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For the Sake of Our Children

Swami Tadatmananda, Arsha Bodha Center, Somerset, NJ

Hundreds of temples have been built in North America over the past twenty years to meet the ever-growing needs of a burgeoning Hindu population. In communities from coast to coast, dedicated individuals have joined forces to undertake these worthy projects, investing their hearts, energy, and hard-earned dollars. The temples they build are places to gather, not simply to worship, but also to preserve their religious and cultural heritage for themselves and for their children.

When funds are being solicited to build a new temple, potential donors are frequently exhorted to "give generously for the sake of our children." Tens of millions of dollars have been raised by invoking this quite legitimate concern for the religious and spiritual well-being of the next generation. Why, then, do so many temples seem to neglect the needs of the very children in whose names they were built?

The primary activity of every temple is *puja*, ritual worship accompanied by the recitation of Vedic *mantras* and Sanskrit *slokas*. For adult worshipers, *puja* is a prayerful, contemplative act blessed by the Lord's holy presence. But for many youngsters, *puja* is a boring and irrelevant annoyance forced upon them by their parents. Their disaffection is apparent in many temple halls where young children can be seen running and playing while teenagers congregate downstairs or out in the parking lot.

Why is it that the peace and sense of reverence enjoyed by their parents seems to elude these youngsters? If you ask them, they are likely to answer, "We don't understand the rituals, we don't know what they're chanting, so how can you expect us *not* to be bored?" Their orientation obviously differs from their parents'. Many adults, even if they do not thoroughly understand the symbolism of *puja* and the meaning of the *mantras*, are nonetheless able to participate fully in the *puja* — in their hearts. They are blessed with *shraddha*, faith, and therefore to understand all the details of *puja* is not necessary. *Shraddha* opens their hearts to the Lord. Their children, on the other hand, may not be blessed with such strong faith.

Most of these adults, having been raised in India, have a great advantage over their children. They grew up in a culture pervaded by religious values and observances. In India, temples are ubiquitous and visited frequently. Religious festivals are enthusiastically celebrated by entire communities. Altars are found not only in homes, but even on the dashboards of autorickshaws. Families include grandmothers or pious aunts who enjoy narrating the exploits of Krishna, Rama, and Shiva to the children.

Those fortunate enough to have been raised in such a religious culture are naturally blessed with *shraddha*. But life is very different for children raised in North America, one of the most secular countries in the world. Religion here is private, hidden away in the temple, church or synagogue and rarely discussed in public. Imagine a taxi or bus here with an altar on the dashboard — unthinkable! Consequently, children growing up here are not likely to be blessed with as much *shraddha* as their parents.

Not only do these children lack *shraddha*, they also seem disinclined to do anything without being told *why* it is to be done. "But why, Mom, *why*?" is a question all too familiar for parents here. Such insistence on knowing "why" extends to religious activities, including *puja*. Youngsters ask, "If God is one, *why* do we pray to so many forms? *Why* do we pray to idols? If God is everywhere, *why* do we have to go to the temple to pray?" Their questions often remain unanswered, creating further obstacles for them.

Some parents are not adequately prepared to satisfy their children's thirst for understanding. Perhaps they did not ask "why" so frequently as children in India. When they attended *pujas*, their meager understanding was not an obstacle because of their *shraddha*. And because they grew up without being compelled to seek answers, they may not be sufficiently informed as adults to help their children understand. But this observation does not explain why children raised here have such a burning desire to know "why."

The answer may be found in the different educational systems used here and in India. Classes in India are less interactive, with more emphasis on rote learning. Asking questions is not much encouraged. Also, teachers there are more highly respected and regarded as authority figures. Therefore, many children are afraid to interrupt a class with their questions. On the other hand, children here are always encouraged by their teachers to ask questions. They are taught to think independently and not to accept statements without understanding "why." For this reason, it should come as no surprise when a boy, having been asked by his mother to take out the garbage, asks, "Why?" Such responses are not necessarily born of disrespect for the parents, but instead might be the result of Western education's emphasis on independent inquiry.

These two issues — lack of *shraddha* and a questioning attitude — must be addressed if children raised here are to become involved in temple activities. And if they fail to become involved, who will support the temples after their parents retire? To address these issues is a responsibility currently neglected by many temples. Yet it is a responsibility that can be and must be fulfilled. How? Through a commitment to the religious education of children.

Formal religious education may not have been necessary for those raised in India, but it is essential for children raised here. Youngsters need the opportunity to learn about the religious teachings, culture, practices and prayers that form the essence of Hinduism. The more they understand, the more enthusiastic they will be about participating *pujas* and other temple functions. And when they do participate from childhood onwards, *shraddha* will grow in their hearts just as it did for their parents. Religious education can fill the gap of faith that results from growing up in such a secular culture.

Every Hindu temple should provide regular classes on Hindu religion and culture for children, conducted by well-trained teachers. Only then will the children's needs be met. Our Christian brethren know this very well. Most of their children attend Sunday school weekly from first grade until high-school. Our Hindu children deserve the same opportunity.

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The California Textbook Controversy: A Short Account

Arumugaswami, Managing Editor, Hinduism Today magazine

Let us begin with a bit of history, just how and when did religion come to be taught in American schools? In the 1940s a series of Supreme Court rulings effectively eliminated religious teaching of any kind in the US education system. Then in the 70s and 80s the court said religion could be taught, not to indoctrinate, but as part of world history. Schools could not teach religion, but could teach "about religion." California was one of the first states to take advantage of the change and incorporated religion in its texts for the 1991 school year.

At the time, *Hinduism Today* examined those textbooks and consulted with leaders of other religions about them. We reported the results in our October, 1991, issue. Just about everyone was unhappy with the books. Our evaluation was that Islam and Hinduism were the most poorly presented, followed by Buddhism, Catholicism and Judaism. Unfortunately, the Hindu community paid little attention to the texts or our report. It was not until 2005, 14 years later, that Hindus took issue with the books.

California law mandates that during the sixth grade every student must study ancient civilizations, including India. Every six years the State of California Board of Education considers texts for this purpose and put them through a review process. The proposed books were made available in 2005 to the public. Two Hindu organizations, the Vedic Foundation and the Hindu Education Foundation suggested "edits." The process allows for only minor changes, such as the rewording of a sentence, omission of part of a paragraph, change in an exercise or an alternative photograph or chart. The board decides which edits to accept, the books are adjusted accordingly and placed in the schools. When it was all over in 2006, even with the anti-Hindu intervention of Dr. Witzel of Harvard, 73% of the edits proposed by Hindus were adopted. But major problems remained.

In general, the problems with the books fell into three areas: 1) The Aryan Invasion theory is presented as absolute fact. This theory, or a variation on it, remains central to the depiction of ancient India in every text, even though it has no supporting historical evidence. 2) The ten proposed 2005 textbooks displayed remarkable

lapses of scholarship. For example, The Oxford University Press book, the *Ancient South Asian World*, states: "But not everyone in South Asia is Hindu. Some, like most Nepalese, are Buddhist." In fact Nepal is 89% Hindu. 3) There are racist or insensitive remarks. The Oxford book recounts the story of the Ramayana and concludes, "The monkey king Hanuman loved Rama so much that it is said that he is present every time the Ramayana is told. So look around—see any monkeys?" Remember George Allen, the Republican candidate for president, calling an Indian photographer a "macaca," a monkey? The Indian community likewise took the Oxford book statement as a racist affront, as the likely reaction among sixth graders would be for the students to look, with ridicule, at any Indian in the class.

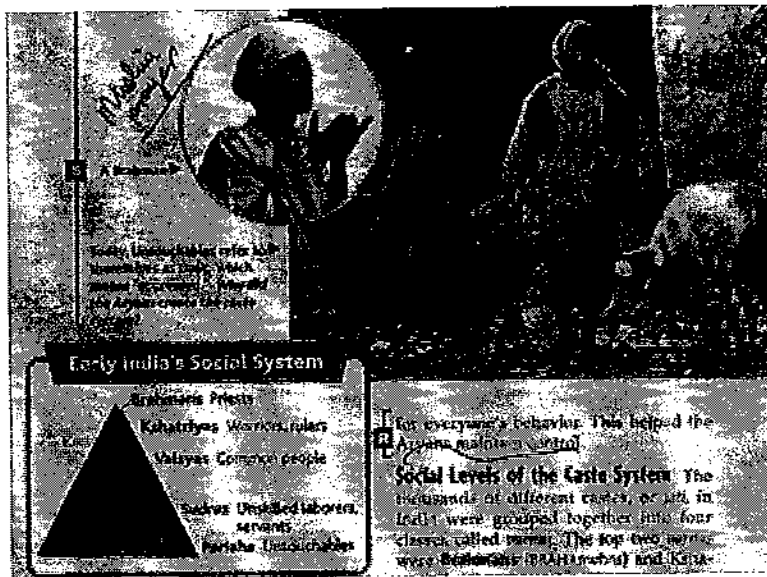
Let's look at some examples of the requested edits: Vedic Foundation and Hindu Education Foundation asked that the following three sentences be deleted from one book: "There was one group that did not belong to any varna. Its members were called untouchables. They performed work other Indians thought was too dirty, such as collecting trash, skinning animals, or handling dead bodies." The California Board of Education committee decided to omit the sentence, "Its members were called untouchables." This left the images of a class of people being consigned to work with garbage, animal skins and corpses for the 11-year-old students to imagine. Another edit involved this sentence: "If you had earned bad karma, you might come back as a chicken, a fish, or a pig.... Even a mosquito had a soul." This was thankfully deleted.

One exercise read: "Use the Internet to learn about Hindu customs concerning one of these topics: the Ganges River, cows, funerals, diet." The Hindus requested that loftier topics such as nonviolence or ayurveda to be considered for inclusion as research subjects instead. The committee decided to leave this exercise unchanged. Imagine the dynamics of a classroom with two Indian students, and the ridicule that could follow cursory research by sixth graders on cows or burning ghats.

Almost without exception each book's photos of Hindus were negative while photos of other religions were positive. This one shows a "brahmin" and an untouchable

or Dalit. The brahmin is, in fact, a Muslim, praying in the distinctive manner of Muslims and is not a Hindu at all. The disturbing picture of the Dalit, a profoundly negative

even though this institution was justified theologically from the Bible. The consequences of it remain with us today in racist discrimination against African Americans.



Two lawsuits followed brought by Hindus. The first was by the Hindu American Foundation. They sued the Board of Education and won in State court, the judge concluding the Board followed invalid "underground regulations." He ordered the Board of Education to revamp its policies for future textbook reviews. The second suit was brought in federal court by California Parents for the Equalization of Educational Materials. Their suit claims the Board of Education has violated the civil rights of Hindu school children by advancing an inaccurate and derogatory picture of Hinduism in the sixth grade books, and that the Board failed to adequately address voiced Hindu concerns. It is proceeding.

There are two sets of guidelines for California textbooks. One is called the "Framework." It is an outline of the topics to be covered under each

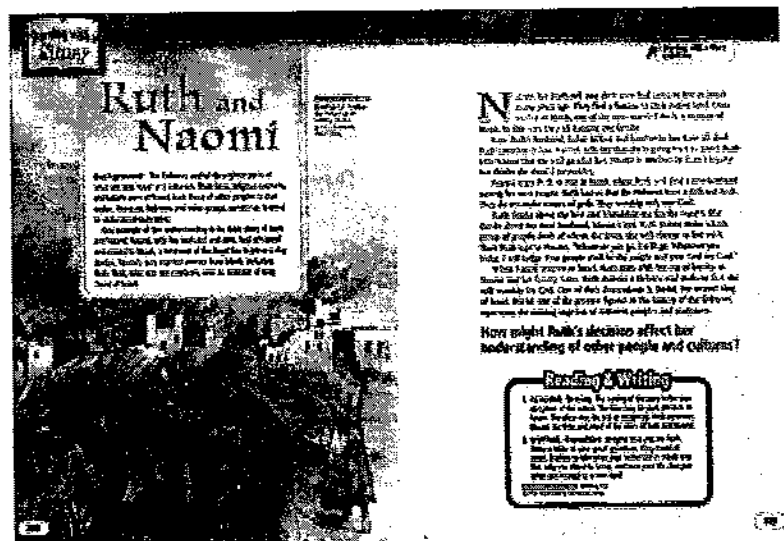
social image, has no parallel in the presentations of the other religions. (photo 1)

subject. The second, which we'll come back to in a minute, is the "Standards" for social content. As to the Framework, let us review a summary of what is to be

In contrast to the pigsty image used for Hinduism is this beautifully illustrated story of Ruth and Naomi, used in chapter on Judaism's early history. (photo 2)

For another comparison, let us look at an example of the 186 edits proposed by the Institute for National Resource Center for Accurate Jewish Content in Schools—whose sole job is to review textbooks. Nearly every one of their edits was accepted by the Board of Education: The original text read: "King Herod was known for his cruelty and the additions he made to the Jewish temple in Jerusalem." The Jews raised this objection: "The statement of Herod's cruelty is another instance of unnecessary negative information about Jewish kings."

The Judaism edits were reviewed by Naomi Janowitz, Professor of Religious Studies, UC Davis, a Jew, and David Nystrom, Professor of Biblical Studies, North Park University, a scholar of Christianity. Their decision was to delete the objectionable statement. Repeatedly, statements about slavery in ancient Israel were deleted,



covered under Judaism and ancient Israel and what is to be covered under ancient India. You will note the difference.

The Jewish standards include: the concept of God; Ethical teachings and central beliefs; Impact of Jewish thinking on civilization; Major religious figures; Exodus; and the Jewish diaspora.

The Hindu standards include: Nothing on God, beliefs, saints or ethics; emphasis on the Aryan Invasion; Brahmanism, a discarded concept; the caste system; and the aesthetic and intellectual traditions. Improving the textbooks ideally would involve improving the Framework for ancient India, though even within this existing framework a thought publisher can do a decent job with Hinduism.

The Jews, we observed, repeatedly pointed out statements that were in violation of California's "Standards for Evaluating Instruction Materials for Social Content." In terms of the study of religion, this set of rules, commonly called the Social Content Standards, is designed to prevent any religion from being put in a bad light, or for its members to be shaken in their beliefs. Remember, we are talking about 11 year olds in sixth grade, and just because a statement about a religion is historically accurate doesn't mean it belongs in their books.

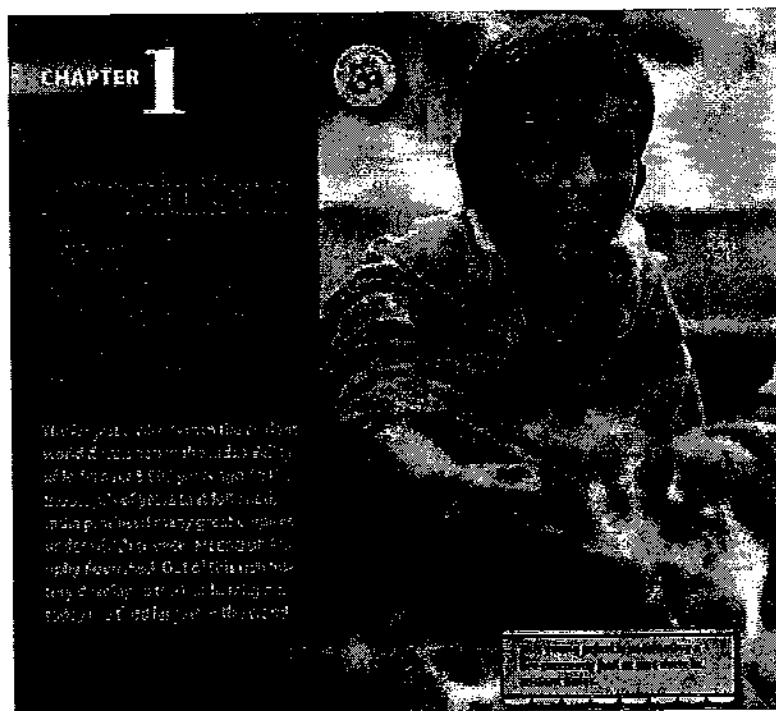
The social content standards provide our strongest support in demanding an equal and sympathetic treatment of Hinduism. The declared purpose of the social content standards is for "Students to accept religious diversity while remaining secure in any religious beliefs they may already have." The standards require that books "Depict diversity of religious beliefs without displaying bias toward or prejudice against any of those beliefs."

The Social Content Standards prohibit adverse reflection. "No religious belief or practice may be held up to ridicule and no religious group may be portrayed as inferior."

Every textbook under consideration in California portrayed both Jainism and Buddhism as improvements upon Hinduism. The Jews are sensitive to this issue and corrected every instance where Christianity was portrayed as an improvement or replacement for Judaism.

The last relevant social content instruction states in part, "Any explanation of a religious belief or practice should not encourage or discourage belief." Yet, we have the real-life case where one parent in California reported that her child came home from his sixth grade class on the day they covered Hinduism and said, "Mommy, I don't want to be a Hindu any more." Clearly the books do not fulfill the California social content standards, which are nothing more than a common-sense list of criteria for dealing with religion in a multi-religious, multi-ethnic grade school setting.

We at Hinduism Today magazine pondered how best to help rectify this the California textbook situation. Our solution: Research and write an accurate and sympathetic history lesson that can serve as a model for future California textbooks. (photo 3)



The result is the 16-page lesson for sixth grade titled "Hinduism From Ancient Times. We hope this Hindu history lesson will be a model for the textbook industry, one that is academically sound and acceptable to the Hindu community. We have published 65,000 copies for distribution. The printed version can be ordered in bulk at www.hinduism-today.com/education. It is also available for free download at the same site as a PDF file. This site also contains endorsements of the lessons and supporting websites.

Our principal consultant for this lesson was Dr. Shiva Bajpai of Northridge University who ensured the text met high academic standards. Notable scholars such as Dr. Anantananda Rambhachan and Dr. Klaus Klostermeyer

have endorsed the results. Various Hindu organizations both participated in and endorsed the lesson.

Existing textbooks do not accord Hinduism the respect that is mandated any religion taught in a public school, and they suffer from serious lapses in scholarship. Specifically we recommend: 1. The presentation of Hinduism in public school textbooks should be on the same

level as the presentation of other religions. 2. The academic standards of the textbooks must be improved. 3. The State Board of Education, textbook manufacturers, the Hindu community and academics must continue working together to improve these books. We hope our 16-page Hindu history lesson serves as a useful contribution to this ongoing process.

BEST WISHES TO ALL JAIN, BUDDHA, SIKH & VEDIC HINDU ORGANIZATIONS OF NORTH AMERICA PARTICIPATING IN 2nd HMEC

From A Well Wisher

Multi-Faceted Role of a Devaalaya (Hindu Mandir)

M.G. Prasad, Maplewood, New Jersey

Introduction

Sanatana Dharma or Hindu Dharma emphasizes that the ultimate goal of human life is to seek and realize the Omnipresent and Omniscient Brahman, the source of happiness and bliss. This goal is achieved through a pure mind and with efforts directed to a pursuit of spiritual knowledge, a development of true devotion, cultivation of selfless service attitude, etc. This journey through human life is successfully accomplished by achieving the four-fold objectives of our life namely Dharma (righteous knowledge), Artha (righteously earned money), Kama (righteous desires) and Moksha (bliss). In this journey, a Devaalaya (or Mandir) plays an important role. In the Vedic scriptures, the Agamas, it is said "deho devaalayaha proktaha dehi devo niranjanaha" which means that the Devaalaya represents the body of a living human being with God as the Indweller.

The analogy provides further spiritual insight. The Gopura at the main entrance of the Mandir represents the feet, the prayer hall represents the heart, the entrance to sanctum sanctorum represents the neck, the sanctum sanctorum itself represents the head and the walkway around the temple represents the hands. The walking from outside world to the inside of a devaalaya represents that a seeker is getting into meditation to dwell upon God within. The various activities such as worship, learning, cultural observances and service ought to help the seeker-devotee to develop a meditative mind. Then, with a meditative mind, he can travel within, through the path of yoga (meditation), to realize God within. Thus we see that our rishis gave us the devaalaya to be used as a laboratory for our spiritual development. Devaalaya is a very special place that plays a multi-faceted role in the spiritual development of any seeker. However, for a Hindu it is essential for he is recommended to live near a temple, to be able to visit it often. What follows is a brief account of the various roles a devaalaya plays in a Hindu's life, and how he can use a devaalaya as a multi-faceted resource.

Devaalaya as a Poojaalaya, a place for offering worship

Devaalaya as a place of worship provides a seeker a practical and experiential way to express his devotion, to personally connect with God through His Vighraha, His Form in the Temple. The term Vighraha means that which specially captures the mind of a devotee. The postures of the vighrahas are based on the yogic visions of the sages. These vighrahas are sculpted, sanctified and worshipped based on the Agamas, and meditating on them helps the devotee to advance on the spiritual path. In a devaalaya, all the five senses, namely, listening to mantras, offering of flowers, seeing the vighraha, drinking the holy water and smell of incense are used by the devotee to focus his mind on the worship of the God. The subjective, or personal, relationship between the devotee and God through worship is very important in his spiritual development. There are sixteen offerings used in a worship of God namely (1) invoking God in the Vighraha, (2) offering a seat to Him, (3) washing His feet, (4) washing His hands, (5) water for His sipping, (6) His sacred bath, (7) His sacred cloth, (8) His sacred thread, (9) offering sandal paste, (10) flowers, (11) incense, (12) waving an oil lamp for Him, (13) offering Him food, (14) offering betel leaves and coconut, (15) waving of a camphor lamp, (16) clockwise circumambulation around Him and prostration before Him. Thus, we see pooja is similar to receiving a respected and beloved guest. In addition to going to a devaalaya, every Hindu is required to have at home a special room with an altar for the vighraha to offer pooja. Offering pooja at home or a devaalaya is the synthesis of devotion, knowledge and action, which offers tranquility to the devotee. In the words of a yogi-seer, Sriranga Sadguru of Ashtanga Yoga Vijnana Mandiram, Mysore, India, "the worship of Deities with rituals at home or the devaalaya should be carried out with a child-like loving mind by the devotees, as little children play with joy using their toys as medium"

"In whatever way men love Me, in the same way they find My love; various are the ways of men, but in the end they all come to Me."--Bhagvat Geeta

Devaalaya as a Vidyaalaya, a place for education

The spiritual, philosophical and religious aspects of Sanatana Dharma are based on the experiences of great rishis. They did not speculate. They provide knowledge on every aspect of life. Yoga in all its different forms is itself practical. Thus it is important the devaalaya is also a resource for knowledge. In addition to ritualistic worship, effort should be made to give the knowledge behind the rituals. Either through trained priests or knowledgeable practitioners, educational talks should be given to devotees during the rituals. Time should be allocated to answer any questions. Concepts such as the four hands of the vigraha representing the blessing of four-fold objectives namely dharma, artha, kama and moksha and the inseparable nature of masculine and feminine principles being worshipped as deva and devi, etc, should be imparted. Regular classes should explain the meaning of the various mantras and to study scriptures such as the Bhagavad-Gita, the Upanishads, etc. In addition to the year-round classes, additional programs such as workshops, guest lectures, camps, etc, are essential to educate both youngsters and adults. One of the reasons for youngsters not coming in large numbers to temples is due to lack of educational programs and youth related activities.

Devaalaya as a Kalaalaya, a place for cultural arts

Music, dance, painting, etc, form the vibrant part of Sanatana-dharma. It is well known that seekers have realized Godh through music and dance. At the time of celebrating festivals at the Devaalaya, special cultural programs, that include educational aspects, should be arranged. Various themes corresponding to the festivals such as Shivaratri, Ramanavami, Krishna Janmashtami, etc, should present appropriate dance or dramas that may help the youngsters understand and appreciate better. Cultural fairs need to be arranged in which classical art forms are emphasized. Exhibitions with Hindu themes need to be arranged at the devaalaya.

Devaalaya as a Sevaalaya, a place for service

Volunteers form the core work group of a Devaalaya. Any work done in the devaalaya in the areas of worship, education, crowd management, fund raising, facility maintenance, etc, can be seen as service. And, specific programs for serving the community such as free health fairs, counseling for students and adults, senior citizen

oriented activities, outreach to hospitals and nursing homes, feeding the poor, etc, are also service.

Concluding Remarks

We see that a Devaalaya is a place where all facets of Sanatana-dharma, namely, Jnana (knowledge), Bhakti (devotion) and Karma (service), come together. The management of a Devaalaya, made up of volunteers, is to make sure that all the above four aspects of a Devaalaya are equally emphasized. One way to ensure equal emphasis is by requiring that all decision takers, trustees and directors of the board, be involved in one of the four areas of worship, education, culture and service. It is important that the management board truly work towards making the volunteers in all areas feel that their services are contributing to the Devaalaya. All these areas need to be budgeted properly. It is to be remembered that Devaalaya provides an opportunity for all volunteers, including trustees and directors, to get rid of their ego and make progress in their spiritual development through serving the common cause, namely, God.

About the author: Dr. M.G. Prasad is a spiritual disciple of yogi-seer Sriranga Sadguru of Ashtanga Yoga Vijnana Mandiram, Mysore, India. Prasad has been associated over the years through educational activities with several temples in New Jersey, New York, Albany, Pittsburgh and Houston. He has written several books on Hinduism. He is a featured speaker on RBC Radio program in New York. Prasad with his wife Geetha has produced more than 25 cultural shows and dance dramas on Hinduism with children, youth and adults through the cultural organization TARANGA. (www.taranga.us)

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Challenges Faced by Hinduism in America and Suggestions to Meet Them

Raghavan N. Pratiwadi

The number of Hindu Temples in US has increased manifold in the last 35 years. Most of the Hindu communities have a nearby Temple to go to. Temples have served many needs of the community, in addition to worship – such as providing language classes, shloka classes, etc. – allowing for Hinduism to not only survive but grow in this country.

However, new challenges face the Hindu community. The main challenge is to enable the younger generation to be well rooted in Hinduism. They need to be well rooted and also have a sense of pride as a Hindu. If this goal is achieved we will have a generation who will not only preserve and grow the religion but will also sustain the existing Temples.

There are some difficulties that need to be recognized before attempting to come up with any solution.

1. We are a minority religion. The young do not have the luxury of a Hindu environment that most of parents had when growing up.
2. Children have to confront other majority religions, which can sometimes be hostile to beliefs of Hinduism.
3. Parents are not always able to answer questions on religion by youngsters. Questions may pertain to deity worship, many Gods, rituals, food habits, religious marks and symbols, caste system, etc.
4. And, maintaining a Hindu environment at home.

From the above, it is evident that the answer is education, education and education. Temples are a great venue and resource for education. And, the following are some suggestions which will help achieve this.

1. Parents must create a Hindu environment at home. Subscribe to magazines like Hinduism Today, Chinmaya publications, etc. and read them with the children. Parents must take children to the Temple at least once a week. Make children volunteer for

work at the Temple. Temples must conduct camps and retreats for parents and children. Education must be the focus in these camps and retreats.

2. Temples can provide after-school classes for children. The children could be bussed from schools to the Temple by volunteers. This will require planning and organization by the Temples.
3. Temples to organize annual tours to India that are based on visiting Hindu holy places and historic sites and meeting with Hindu leaders and gurus.
4. Temples to actively participate in efforts like Mandira Sangam.
5. Adopt a standard Hinduism course curriculum to be taught at the Temples.
6. Develop and adopt a standard book references or web links indexed by topic about Hinduism.
7. Develop internet facility on the lines of youtube.com or facebook.com for matrimonial purposes.
8. Educate youngsters in the rich scientific heritage of India.
9. Bring to the notice of children what great western philosophers like Thoreau, Emerson, Toynbee etc., have said about Hinduism. Temples can publish a small pamphlet and distribute it for free.

The above are a few but useful suggestions.

About the author: Raghavan N. Pratiwadi is the Education Liaison – Member of Board of Trustees, Guruvayoorappan Temple – Morganville, NJ

“Ano bhadrah kratavo yantu visatah” (“let noble thoughts come in from all directions of the universe”) – Rig Vedic invocation

Reforming Our Mandirs' Practices

Smt. Vasanti Gopinath Jayaswal

There is a certain *pramashakti* associated with traditions. This *shakti* is at its peak only when many factors come together. When factors change or fail to come together this *shakti* is decreased and may often be completely absent. The mental makeup of the human being is the most important of all the factors that contribute to the *shakti* of traditions. If we wish to maintain any tradition we must be cognizant of its essential benefit to the psyche of the human being. Once we understand that then we must go about adjusting and fine tuning traditions in order to make it relevant and viable. A blind adherence to tradition will only result in its ultimate demise or at best its glaring contribution to unhealthy practices.

The human psyche is undergoing rapid changes all over the world. These changes are affecting our behavior at all levels. Religious practices are not immune to these changes. There was a time in Bharat when most temples came into existence as a direct result of battles won by kings. A few came into being because of a revelation experienced by a *sadhak*. Places abounding in natural beauty or wonder were chosen to be sites for worship. Today coffee tables surrounded by committees bring temples into shape. Most convenient locations, selection of a plethora of deities are topics of discussion here. The tallest building in any town is no longer the temple; it houses instead gods of economy. Yet here we are in the US observing the sprouting of temples galore everywhere. Surely they are physical evidences of an urge felt by an immigrant community of hoary traditions. To ensure the healthy expression of this urge we must be ready to boldly reform many a practice associated with our temples. Reformation is to be done without hurting the essence of this tradition of Mandirs.

Cleanliness

Temple precincts should be kept clean at all times. Littering by devotees and priests must be strictly prohibited, whatever it takes to do so.

Aesthetic Sense

Temples that are modified churches and halls often ig-

nore the value of maintaining the individuality of murthis. While the main deity can be enclosed in a simple small garbha griha in a central spot, the remaining deities are better housed in alcoves along the walls. This allows for better focusing of the mind. Discreet and subtle illumination can enhance the beauty of murthis. During Aarti to have glaring lights on the murthi is worse than eating by candle light in a room already well lit.

Modifying Some Acharas

Abhishekas always end up in gallons of milk and other precious ingredients going to waste. It is better to perform abhisheka to small utsava murthis so that these ingredients have a better chance of getting consumed by devotees. Costly ornaments and clothes that adorn the deities may be auctioned regularly while still in a good condition. Proceeds may be used for charitable purposes.

Introducing New Sevas

During dusk, group chanting of simple mantras such as Om namoh Narayanaya, or Om namah Shivaya etc may be kept as a regular feature conducted by responsible sevaks. The chanting is to be done softly and may be accompanied by a minimal drum beat in order to provide a calming atmosphere. In addition many a young Hindu who knows only English, who cannot recite sahasranamas or chalisas and who cannot relate to the boisterous bhajan and jagarans will feel participatory in this clime.

On weekends, time must be set apart for General Community Prayers. Praying for the sick and troubled will ensure a sense of bonding with the community at large. These prayers whose thoughts can be taken from the Vedas may be composed in simple and comfortable English. Small booklets for this purpose can be sponsored.

Role of Priests

On arrival priests should be given an orientation to life here as well as be trained in "Conversational English." More important they should be coached in the Basic features of Devatopasana and if need be in the agama related to the temple.

Dakshina

Fees for all sevas such as archanas and havens should be calculated in such a way that it should include the dakshina. Receipts should clearly state this information. Priests keep one copy for their records. Dakshina received in total should be distributed equally amongst all priests. This will avoid the problems of favoritism and eliminate misunderstandings regarding misappropriations. Devotees should no longer give dakshina directly to priests. This will facilitate priests to regard the temple's growth as their growth. They will also concentrate more on connecting better with the deity through our paddhatis rather than focus on whom and what?

Community Services

All temples no matter how small they are must conduct regular programs to serve children, the parents and the elderly in Hindu families. These programs should be aimed at helping families cope with life so that temples become havens of comfort and refuge for those whose heritage is unique. Heads of religious organizations who reside here as well as men and women recognized for their character, knowledge, wisdom and experience, drawn from the community, can become a valuable source of help in such programs.

Temples must coordinate once a month seva to the needy at large in the form of participating in soup kitchens and visits to hospitals and homes for the old folks. To let the community at large know that once a month this is available from the temple would go a long way in the accepting our people as non isolationists.

Knowledge off the Walls

Temple precincts could afford to have posters that allow a quick look at our darshanas, our samskaras, list of our sacred books, symbolism and so on.

Training Programs

Mandirs must train eligible men and women to conduct many of our samskaras from birth to death. Samskaras must be performed in an intelligent manner. In this way more families can access precious rituals that give joy and healing.

The youth should be encouraged and trained to take an active role in the maintenance of our mandirs. It would be great if Universities such as the Hindu University of America could oversee these programs and facilitate trainees to earn credit units.

Putting the Tilak on America

There are many sacred rivers, mountains and lakes in this land that were beneficiaries of honor received from the Adivasis, or Native Americans. Today they are crying out for the lack of it. As Hindus we can truly appreciate the divinity seen in Nature and therefore new programs can be devised as field trips coordinated by temples. A parikrama of Mount Rainier, a Rudra homa in the Poconos, a Vanamahotsava in Sedona, a Varuna puja in a boat in mid ocean and a sing along bhajan and hike along the Colorado River will draw the divinity of this beautiful country into us in our own special Hindu way!

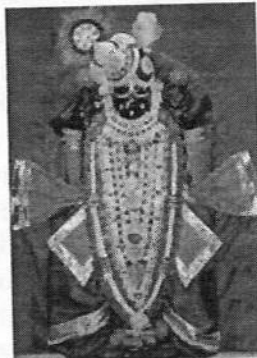
Mandirs must play a bold and much more active role in the health and vigor of the Hindu Community. They must earn the support of the community in ways that will outlast financial support. Mandirs could end up becoming the core from where the vibrancy of our people will be charged again and again. It is possible that our land of origin that seems to look to the West so much, may find answers that will result in a renaissance in the practice of Sanatana Dharma.

"After a study of some forty years and more of the great religions of the world, I find none so perfect, none so scientific, none so philosophical and none so spiritual than the great religion known by the name of Hinduism. Make no mistake, without Hinduism, India has no future. Hinduism is the soil in to which India's roots are stuck and torn out of that, she will inevitably wither as a tree torn out from its place. And if Hindus do not maintain Hinduism, who shall save it? If India's own children do not cling to her faith who shall guard it. India alone can save India and India and Hinduism are one." —Annie Besant

WITH BEST COMPLIMENTS TO 2ND HMEC

Shree Dwarkadhish Temple

717 Washington Road, Parlin, NJ 08859



Swami Shreeji



With Best Compliments to HMEC 2007

Yogi Divine Society (YDS) is a phenomenon that transforms humans into super-humans by developing quality of life, integrity in character and piety in behavior. Physically, it is a socio-religious organization based on the principles of the Swaminarayan religion. The society is named after H.D. Swami's guru, Guruhari Yogiji Maharaj. The name essentially signifies a society dwelling in the divinity envisaged by Yogiji Maharaj. The activities are carried out under the inspirational guidance of Swami according to the ethos and principles set forth by Lord Swaminarayan. The society is structured to make every activity, independent of its nature, develop the member to supreme manifestation.



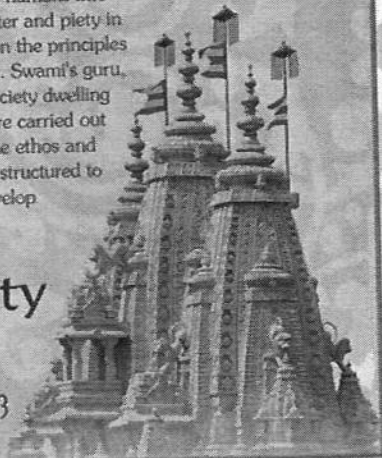
Yogi Divine Society

140 Lincoln Avenue

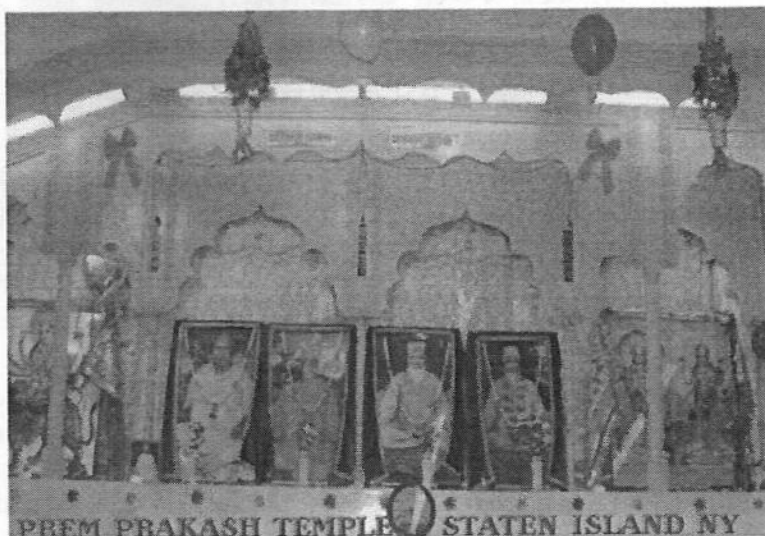
Lake Hiawatha, NJ 07034

Tel : 973.334.7211 Fax : 973.334.7213

WWW.YDS.ORG



**** Om Shree Satnam Sakhi ****



BEST WISHES FOR 2ND HINDU MANDIR EXECUTIVE CONFERENCE.

**May Bhagawan bless your efforts to help Mandirs of North
America in sustaining Hindu Dharma.**

Prem Prakash Mandir was opened on Fathers' Day in June 2005 under the guidance of our Satguru Swami Bhagat Prakashji Maharaj. Prem Prakash Mandir is a part of a much bigger organization by name of PREM PRAKASH MANDAL which has branches all over the world.

At present, there are 2 resident saints on the premises who are taking care of the temple on a day to day basis. Their names are Sant Naresh & Sant Jitender.

The temple is open 7 days a week from 8 AM - 8 PM. Every Saturday, there is satsang from 7 - 9 PM. First friday of every month, Sindhi satsang of Sai Jhulelal is done. First sunday of every month, Satya Narayan katha is done. Every other month, Mata Di Chowki is done. Aarti is done every day in the morning at 9AM & evening 7 PM.

Our website is www.premprakashtemple.com. All religious programs are done in the temple, for e.g. Janmashtmi, Shivratri, Navratra ashtmi etc. The temple is open to everybody. The saints of Prem Prakash Mandir are very learned & are available to everyone all the time.

180 Burgher Ave., Staten Island NY 10304, 718-351-0483

It's Your Dharma!

"Care to Learn and Share the Learning"

Kishin J. Kripalani, PH.D, Arsha Bodha Center, NJ

Today many more religious and cultural programs are offered by Hindu religious organizations than in the past. As members of the Hindu community, we can greatly expand these initiatives of religious organizations by participating in a uniquely rewarding campaign. The slogan of this campaign is "Care to learn and share the learning" meaning, that you care to learn about Hindu Dharma and share your learning with others, with the aim that others will carry on the same "Care and Share" motto themselves and thus create a continuous cycle reaching out to ever increasing audiences. When we become emissaries of our heritage, we will multiply the efforts of religious organizations manifold and spread the knowledge of Hindu Dharma.

The principle behind the "Care and Share" theme is to teach Hindu Dharma as it might be taught in a college level course, one possibly titled "Hindu Dharma 101". The rationale and the course for mid-September, 2007 to be given by the Arsha Bodha Center in Somerset, New Jersey are presented below.

Rationale for an Academic Hindu Dharma Course

It has been commonly said that Hindu religion is the least understood religion in the world, and arguably one not well understood even by its own followers. Therefore, there is a need to formally educate ourselves and future generations about Hindu Dharma.

Hindu children and young adults are now growing up in a society with different religious and cultural backgrounds. Youngsters are faced with many challenges because of these differences. When they have little or no knowledge of their religion or culture, they feel embarrassed and vulnerable when non-Hindu others may ask them about these. "Why do you worship so many weird looking gods? And cows! Do you practice the caste system?" If they are empowered with a background knowledge of their religion and cultural heritage, they will handle such questions with ease and self-confidence. Having a clear identity will enhance their self-esteem.

An added benefit of this course is it offers a solid foundation to a student who wants to pursue spiritual growth by learning from enlightened gurus and swamis.

Hindu Dharma Course

At the Arsha Bodha Center, the course will be prepared and taught by two or three senior students of the Center under the guidance of the resident Swamiji of the Center, Swami Tadatmananda. In the tradition of this ashram, no fees will be charged.

The course will be open to all, including teenagers and adults. It's hoped that parents will learn and, in turn, teach their children and grand children, and that retired persons will create groups from among their own circle of friends and families. Teenage students will hopefully become articulate spokespersons of their cultural heritage and develop a sense of pride in being Hindus and teach others as they grow up.

The course will be presented in three modules, each with its defined syllabus, given through six or seven lectures of about 1-1/4 hour each. The advantage of the modular nature is to maintain flexibility for students. Attendees can more readily commit themselves to a series of six lectures at a time and see in advance what they will learn in a given module. If the syllabus were presented as a continuous course of five months or so, the attrition rate can be quite high. In the interest of wider audience participation classes are planned to be held weekly on Thursday evenings. Below is an abbreviated model course based on this concept (full syllabus available upon request).

Hindu Dharma Syllabus (Abbreviated Version)

Module I

- Origin and Evolution of Hinduism: Chronology from the Vedic period to modern times; periodic transitions within Hindu religion; saints and religious personalities of India

Module II

- Hindu Scriptures: Vedas; agamas, etc
- Philosophy: *Isvara*; *atma*; *brahman*; reincarnation; law of karma; karma yoga; meditation; *bhakti*

Module III

- Core Concepts: Dharma; *darshanas*; deities; the four -goals, stages, -castes; mantras; puja; festivals
- Common Misconceptions: Many Gods; cow worship; fatalistic outlook; self-negating life approach; caste system; Aryan invasion

Conclusion

Academic courses on Hindu Dharma can enable many of us to pass on our religious and cultural identity to our youth, not only within our families but also to bigger audiences. We can all be emissaries of our heritage. Let our future generations be proud for being Hindus, and let them cherish these memories because we helped them identify their roots.

Author's contact: Kishin Kripalani, E-mail: kripalani@msn.com

2nd HINDU MANDIR EXECUTIVE CONFERENCE

BEST WISHES

from

*BHARAT, PRAGNA PATEL
& FAMILY*

Living in a Dual Culture

Sambavi Swaminathan

Growing up as an Indian American presents its own challenges. We live in two different cultures, one that is practiced at home and the other being the mainstream culture. Naturally, imbibing the best of both requires diligence and learning. The culture of the Indian subcontinent, which is my heritage, is very rich and diverse. The best exposure to it, of course, starts at home with one's parents. However, what our parents would have imbibed through sheer osmosis by living in the culture and with many resources (grand parents, uncles, aunts, teachers and even the wise person on the street) to learn from, is not possible for us. Hence, this presents the challenge and difficulty in properly learning the culture and deriving the best out of it.

While learning from parents is a great start and despite their best interests for the children, we need additional sources to rely on for a true understanding of the great and ancient culture of India. Sometimes, our parents' knowledge is also limited as things that they simply accepted as the norm, are not acceptable to us without the proper explanations and rationale.

I was particularly fortunate to find such an outside resource to learn about my culture and heritage at the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Saylorsburg, PA. This saved my life. The Gurukulam, otherwise referred to as the Ashram by my fellow teenagers, is founded by Pujya Swami Dayanada Saraswati in 1986. Swamiji founded the Ashram with the intent that it serves as a place of learning for the Indian living in the United States. The best thing that ever happened to me was being exposed to the Ashram. Pujya Swamiji has a way of relating to young adults and teenagers and teaching the concepts of the culture and the scriptures in a clear and concise way, bearing in mind the issues we face and our needs. His teaching has the appeal not only in terms of its logic but also in terms of the teaching being incorporated in every day life and situations.

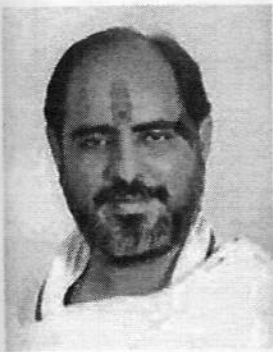
The Ashram has brought out a series of Vedic Heritage Books that were prepared by Swamiji's students and under his guidance. These books have explained in detail and systematically the nuances of the Indian culture, Hindu religion, and the Hindu way of life. The books have been prepared in a series of volumes addressing students from Grade 1 through Grade 11. Temples across the United States should start a Vedic Heritage program using these books for the curriculum. The Ashram can provide the necessary training for the volunteer teachers to teach these Vedic Heritage classes.

It is great to have a place of worship for the Hindus in the United States. In this regard, the proliferation of temples across the country is a blessing. However, worship should be accompanied by learning; education should complement religion. Only a proper understanding of the rituals and the chanting of the mantras would help to create a value for them. Once the young Indian Americans learn the 'value of the value' as Pujya Swamiji calls it, they will take interest in the temples and preserve them for their children.

I am proud to be an Indian American, enjoying the benefits of two great cultures. I had the good fortune of my parents exposing me to the Ashram, which provided the learning of the ancient Vedic Culture. There should be more such places of learning in the United States. We can begin by introducing the Vedic Heritage Educational programs in the Temples. As per Pujya Swamiji's quote from the Bhagavad Gita, "na hi jnanena sadrsam." This means that there is nothing equal to knowledge.

About the author: Sambavi is the daughter of Smt. Suseela Swaminathan and Dr. V. Swaminathan of Bridgewater, NJ and is a sophomore at the University of New Haven, Connecticut.

"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." — *Sant Jnaneshwar*



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Shri Sanatan Mandir: Evolution and Growth

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Website: <http://www.sanatanmandirnj.org>

In 1986, a small group of families established Indian Community Center Corp (ICC), a New Jersey Tax Exempt Organization, to serve the religious, educational, cultural and charitable needs of adults and children of Indian families residing in North New Jersey. In 1989, ICC founded **Shri Sanatan Mandir**, located on 4.5 acres of picturesque property in Parsippany. Its setting is much like an Ashram or Gurukul where devotees receive tranquility through prayer and worship. Through its **Shri Sanatan Mandir Sunday School**, ICC teaches Hindi and Gujarati languages, culture and religion to children, and through its **Shri Sanatan Mandir Senior Center**, it provides services to seniors.

Shri Sanatan Mandir

The Mandir conducts regular religious programs such as bhajans, kirtans, katha and spiritual lectures and

- August 1992 – Pran Pratishtha Mahotsav and installation of idols of Shri Krishna and Radhaji, Adyashakti Ambamataji, Shri Ganeshji, Shri Hanumanji and Shivling. The ceremony was performed by Dadaji Krishnashankar Shastriji.
- July 1993 – Shrimad-Bhagawat Gyana Yagna, a nine-day discourse by the leading Bhagawatacharya. Pujya Shri Rameshbhai Oza (Bhaishri) at the Expo Hall in Edison, NJ. Over 5,000 devotees attended this magnificent event each day.
- July 1998 and July 1999 - Shrimad Bhagavad-Geeta Gyan Yagna, a three-day discourse by Pujya Shri Bhupendrabhai Pandya.
- July 2000 – Shri Ram Katha, a nine-day discourse by Pujya Shri Rameshbhai Oza (Bhaishri) at the Expo Hall in Secaucus, New Jersey. Thousands



celebrates major festivals such as Diwali, New Year, Janmashtami, Shivratri, Ram Navami, Navratri, and others. A calendar of celebrations is published every year. Landmark festival events organized by the Mandir have included:

- of devotees attended the katha over the nine-day period.
- July 2002 – Shikhar Pratishtha guided by Pujya Bhaishri.

- July 2004 – Gita Gyan Yagna three day discourse by Pujya Shri Rameshbhai Oza (Bhaishri) for the benefit of Vidya Vikas Charitable Trust.
- June 2007 – Shri Hanumat Charitra Katha, a three day spiritual discourse by Pujya Shri Rameshbhai Oza (Bhaishri) at the Parsippany Hills High School, Parsippany, NJ. Over 1,000 devotees learned the attributes of a true devotee of Lord Ram.

Shri Sanatan Mandir also sponsors many discourses throughout the year by famous and revered saints from India such as Yug Purush Mahamandelshwar 108 Swami Parmanadji Maharaj, Didimaa Sadhvi Ritambara Devi, Gurumaa Anandmurti, Swami Adhyatmanandji, Acharya Vijayji, Professor Prema Pandurang, Smt. Jaya Row, Acharya Akhilji Maharaj, Diwakari Deviji from Barsana Dham and others. The Mandir sponsors and hosts classical musical concerts, Matajiki Chowkis, Akhand Ramayan recitations, Navratri Garbas and many other dance/drama programs.

Shri Pravinbhai Maheta (Shastriji) is the resident priest at our Mandir. He and his family perform all religious activities with great enthusiasm. The variety of Shringars and Vaghas of the idols are always a special treat for the devotees. The celebrations are accompanied by melodious divine music by Shri Kiran Kothari, Trupti Parikh, Forum Shah and their associates.

Shri Sanatan Mandir Sunday School

The goals of the school are to share traditional Indian heritage, and instill values and culture in the students. The school conducts classes on Gujarati, Hindi, culture and scriptures. Student membership has grown

significantly over the years. This year 195 students have enrolled, with 50 on the waiting list. Such has been the growth classrooms in a local elementary school - in Parsippany – have had to be rented since last September. There are some 75 teachers and volunteers in all. Numerous awards and recognition for its quality curriculum point to the School's tremendous success. The language courses of the school are accredited by the Boards of Education of Parsippany and Morristown.

Shri Sanatan Mandir Senior Center

The Center schedules a variety of activities including religious discussions, bhajans, health awareness seminars, birthday celebrations, field trips to temples, picnics etc. Over 150 seniors and their families get together once a month.

Charitable Activities

As a community charitable organization, ICC/Sanatan Mandir donates funds for education, healthcare and natural disaster relief through organizations like Vidya Vikas Charitable Trust, Share and Care Foundation, Vishwa Hindu Parishad and others.

Record of Accomplishments

ICC has established an excellent record of serving the community for over 15 years. These accomplishments were possible due to donor generosity and hard work by volunteers. With the growing Indian population in the Parsippany area, ICC faces a challenge to provide adequate facilities for its devotees. With the grace of God and blessings of all the revered saints, this challenge will also be met successfully.

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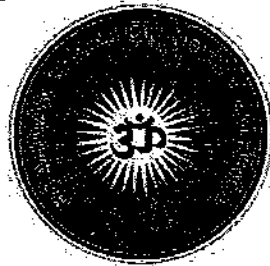
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Preserving Hindu Dharma Through Mandirs

Naman Misra, Staten Island, NY.

The Hindu population in the United States is comprised mostly of immigrants from many different countries from around the world. Since Hinduism has not gained a strong foothold in the nation, some feel that the religion may considerably weaken. On the contrary, America is a viable home for the further nurturing of this unique religion. Over time, America has developed into a religious and culturally harmonious nation. By law, we are allowed to congregate and freely express our beliefs. Our people should feel lucky that they can avail this basic right considering that there is minimal freedom of religion in many other nations. Although America is a nation whose ideals we can only hold the utmost respect for, it is absolutely necessary that we preserve our Dharma through a common medium. This medium is the mandir. Hindu temples must not only serve as places of worship, but also as institutions of our Dharma. In order to keep our faith strong, temples need to attract the youth, raise awareness for issues affecting Hindus, and organize in charity efforts. These three aspects will strengthen our community regardless of our population.

The support of young Hindus is essential to the prosperity of Hinduism for the Diaspora. A problem plaguing the youth today is that they do not know much about their heritage. For them, only a few resources are available to learn about Sanatan Dharma. American textbooks teach about "monkey gods" and "idol worship", as witnessed in the California textbook controversy. As a result of reading and believing these misconceptions, the youth feel embarrassed of their religion and culture. This feeling of embarrassment leads them into being wary of the traditions of their families. It will benefit the youth if religion classes discuss the extensive work of great teachers like Swami Vivekanand and Sri Aurobindo. Mandirs must take up the cause to teach the youth the true essence of Hinduism in order to instill pride in their hearts and minds. Another effective method of attracting youth into the Hindu realm is to host activities that are "youth-friendly". The young Hindus in America can easily befriend one another since they share a common culture. Activities such as sports leagues or cultural shows can be organized in order to bring them together. The benefit of having sports leagues within temples is

that it creates a sense of belonging and unity among the youth. Cultural shows allow the youth to become interested in the practices of Hindu Dharma while they have fun.

There are many issues that affect Hindus throughout the world. These issues range from persecution they face to caste based discrimination. Without proper information about these issues, Hindus will not be able to help solve these pervading problems. Mandirs need to inform their respective congregations of what is happening to their Hindu brethren. It should be noted that human rights organizations tend not to speak about the abuses against Hindus. By obtaining sufficient information, mandirs could take lead in providing facts to such organizations.

Charity work is important for a mandir to gain recognition in society. Mandirs can get their congregation to participate in local charity activities. Not only should mandirs help in these events, it would also be helpful to aid national charities and Hindu charities working in this country and abroad. By uniting together as an organization each mandir can send volunteers for relief efforts. This practice will allow hundreds of Hindus to work together towards one cause under one banner.

Mandirs can easily become actively involved in sustaining the Hindu Dharma. By becoming members in the HMEC, mandirs will gain support in problems they face. A number of churches in the United States are being bought by land developers or being transformed into houses of worship for other faiths. The HMEC will prevent this situation from happening to Hindu mandirs. In order to preserve our age-old faith, the youth must be reeled in and interest must be created amongst them. Hindu awareness needs to be raised so we, as a united community, can make a difference in society. We must vehemently practice Seva for the good of humanity and the good of ourselves. With congregation, we can form unity but with segregation, we will be led into disunity.

About the author: The author is a senior at Curtis High School in Staten Island, NY. He regularly volunteers at The Staten Island Hindu Temple and also at the VHPA.

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Courage to change the things I can,
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Monday: 6:30 - 8PM: Shiv Puja (Rudra Abhishekam)

Tuesday: 6 - 8PM Sundar Kand & Hanuman Chalisa Path

Spiritual Education – Thoughts and Experiences

Chith K. Puram, Ph.D.

Introduction

With the growing number of Hindus in North America, there is a need for more educational opportunities for Hindus to learn about their religion. Across the continent, Hindus have created educational forums related to Sanatana Dharma. A pertinent and honest exercise is to first assess the level of interest and readiness for spiritual education amongst the target population and then design the program accordingly. This paper presents my findings on this subject based on practical experience in Hindu spiritual education and from a study of this subject.

For every action or endeavor, there needs to be a driving force. Take for example, the conventional education provided in schools and colleges. High school and college students are driven by financial security, the need to get a job, and social expectations/acceptance. Often times a parent is the driving force for a student.

However, the driving forces are different for *spiritual* education. Spiritual education does not provide the means to any *material* end; therefore many do not regard it as essential or even important. Some parents do not realize the need to retain their cultural and spiritual heritage, so do not successfully pass on the values of Sanatana Dharma to their children.

Three Categories

Individuals may be divided into three categories for the purpose of spiritual education. The three categories are

- (1) activists,
- (2) those "on the fence," and
- (3) those who do not want to learn.

The needs of the three categories are very different, and we should understand them when we plan and implement spiritual educational programs.

The first category is comprises those who will learn on their own. These individuals are motivated and driven by their own desire to learn, they seek out information and often times teach themselves.

The third category describes those who have an aversion for Santana Dharma and do not want to know about it. They shut out spiritual knowledge for various reasons, including indifference, lack of knowledge, and preconceived notions.

Category 2 consists of those who do not fall into either of the two above-mentioned categories. These individuals are not averse to knowing about the cultural heritage and spiritual knowledge of Sanatana Dharma. However, they are not motivated to seek out the knowledge on their own.

The percentage of people who are activists (Category 1) is small. Category 3 is larger. But Category 2, those individuals who are "on the fence" and need some guidance, is likely the largest category.

Age Groups

From the North American experience, people may be classified into four groups based on age. It must be emphasized that these age groups are only indicative of stages in life and the age ranges are meant to be approximate.

The first age group consists of children and adolescents under the age of 18 years. They may be studying at home or going to school staying at home. They have strong parental control and support.

The young generation between 18 and 30 years of age may be classified as a second age group. These young adults are likely in college away from home or are working and living on their own.

The third age group consists of those in the age group between 30 and 50 years. These are mature youngsters

who may or may not be married, and some may have children. Their desire for spiritual education may be founded upon the desire to teach their children what they themselves were not formally taught. Their interest in a spiritual education may also stem from worries about the spiritual and cultural future of their children. These individuals are often hard-pressed for time, pulled in different directions by their career, family, social life, and their children's conventional education. They may be aided or impeded by their parents who may be in their sixties or older.

The final age group consists of those who are above 50 years of age. These individuals are often empty nesters, with children in college and/or out of the home. Those in

audience. They are a floating population, "liberated" from family controls and experiencing the world outside.

Group P3 also require close attention since they have the capacity to influence the values and mores of their children. However, they may need significant guidance in teaching their children.

Group P4 may be the most difficult to educate. Many of these individuals have reached their career goals and obtained financial security, yet do not have the handicaps or challenges associated with old age. This can result in a complacency that precludes spiritual education. However, those in this group who have the realization that there are things beyond their control are at an ideal stage at which to further their spiritual education.

Two Pilot Programs - Youth and Adult

Readiness to Learn	Age Group			
	Under 18	18-19	30-50	Above 50
Active (A)	A1	A2	A3	A4
Passive (P)	P1	P2	P3	P4
Uninterested (U)	Difficult to Educate			

this group are more likely to be financially settled with significant career accomplishments.

Putting the Groups Together

The two sets of categories and groups described above are represented in chart form here. The age groups are depicted along the horizontal axis, and on the vertical axis are the categories based on readiness to learn. Note that the middle row of passive learners need the most attention, since they need help in learning, and are willing to learn.

Group P1 needs support, facilities, teachers, and guidance from Hindu temples. The task of educating this group cannot be overemphasized since they are the citizens of tomorrow.

Group P2 poses a unique problem as they are not a captive

A pilot program of a school to teach scriptures and epics of Hinduism was started in February 2000 at the Meenakshi Temple (MTS), Pearland, TX. The program was started in a trailer with twenty-six students and six volunteer teachers. Through the efforts of committed volunteers and dedicated students, the program now continues at a permanent Youth Center building with class rooms. The **Vedic Heritage School of MTS** has over 200 students and several volunteer teachers. The school curriculum is the one developed by Swami Dayananda Saraswati and his Arsha Vidya Gurukulam. Courses on Hindu epics, puranas, Vedas, Bhagavad Gita and Indian language classes are offered at the school, and at the end of every year, the students put on a hugely popular talent show for the community.

An adult education class was started at MTS in October 1999 with one educational session per month. The class has grown and now meets five times a month. The

attendance in these classes varies from four to forty students depending upon the topic. Unlike the Vedic Heritage School for youth, the composition and number of attendees of the adult classes change considerably between sessions and months. The topics covered in these classes / lectures include Bhagavad Gita, Srimad Bhagavatam, Upanishads, and Ramayanam. Most of the participants belong to the P4 group. It has been observed that great effort is required to retain the interest of this group of attendees. Since the background of the attendees varies considerably, communicating the same message to this diverse group sometimes poses a problem.

Conclusions and Future Direction

The Vedic Heritage School at MTS caters to school-age children in groups A1 and P1. The school's success comes primarily from parents wanting to impart Hindu heritage and religious beliefs to their children. Opportunities to display their children's talent have also been found to be a major motivating factor for parents.

What happens when these students graduate from high school and leave home? A worthwhile future endeavor would be to create educational programs geared towards young adults to ensure that the A2 and P2 groups continue to further their spiritual education as they enter halls of conventional higher education. .

While education for children is traditionally highly structured and takes place in a lecture format, adult education (for the A3, A4, P3, and P4 groups) requires a more creative approach. Seminars with emphasis on group discussions are a promising medium of providing spiritual education. **Education of adults also serves to reinforce the spiritual development of their children.**

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this note are of the author and do not represent those of the Sri Meenakshi Temple, Pearland, TX or the MTS board.

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BEST WISHES FOR 2nd HINDU MANDIR EXECUTIVE CONFERENCE

RASHMI MEHTA & FAMILY

Best Wishes
to
2nd Hindu Mandir Executives'
Conference
from

Sodhani Foundation

Dharmo Rakshati Rakshatah!

(Protect Dharma and it will protect you.)

Expanding the Role of Mandirs in America

By Shobhna Vora, M.D.

Imagine 25, 2nd and 3rd generation Hindu Americans coming to your Mandir every night for one week during summer vacation for almost two hours. Imagine a seven-year old child who tells his/her mom, "Come on, it's time to go to the temple" instead of the parents persuading him/her to go as he sits in his room, complaining. Do you think this is impossible? It is not. This is possible if we know how to involve the young children and youth of today.

In my experience, the 2nd and 3rd generation Hindus can be motivated to learn about their religion. I have just completed teaching a four-night Ramayana in English to 25 kids between the ages of 5 and 15 at a mandir. Why did they come each night during their summer break? They not only enjoyed the stories but they understood it more because it was in English. We cannot expect our youth to come to the temple and to take on the future leadership if we only provide kathas and pujas in Sanskrit. It is important to make our great religious tradition accessible to the new generation by communicating them in English. We also can use the stories of Rama and Sita and Arjuna and Krishna to talk about what it means for the children today.

As a Bal Vihar teacher for many years and as someone who has performed kathas and Hindu weddings and pujas in English, here are some of my suggestions to leaders of Mandirs across America so that Mandirs become a more important space for all segments of our community.

1. Mandirs can have volunteers or priests who can do short religious rituals in English. But it is also important that the symbolic meaning of each ritual be explained to the 2nd and 3rd generation of Hindus. These kids want to know "Why?" For example they want to know why do we use the coconut or light the lamp in ceremonies? Similarly, the young adults who want a Hindu wedding ceremony in English also want to know the reason for the seven steps or the walk around the fire. The explanation for these rituals can be taught by volunteers who are retired and who

have an interest in teaching the young and/or priests who are fluent in English. Mandirs can have joint workshops on how to teach the youth our ceremonies in English.

2. Mandirs can offer Ramayana, Bhagvat, and Bhagvad Gita Katha in English at least once per year for seven evenings/days. This can be ideally done during the school winter, spring, or summer breaks. These teachings will generate an interest and love for our scriptures.
3. Mandirs can provide space for other activities such as: classical dance or music classes, language course, yoga workshops. Mandirs can charge a small fee for use of their space, if necessary.
4. Mandirs can provide space for families to hold meetings such as: women's support group, senior citizen gatherings, tutoring for tests like SAT or MCAT, "story hour" for young kids similar to those in public libraries, and other enrichment programs.
5. Mandirs can organize regular Health Days with the support of physician volunteers in the community.

Our children and youth are the future ambassadors for maintaining and spreading the beauty and wisdom of our scriptures; therefore, I believe that the more activities that are geared towards them will help solidify the mandir as an important community center.

I know it is a challenge to interest our future generation Hindus in the work of the Mandir, but with our efforts and our dialogue with each other, it is definitely possible.

*Author's contact: Shobhna Vora, M.D.,
Phone: 949-707-1101*

The Role of Mandirs in Sustaining Dharma in America

Damodar Prabhu

Mandirs are the focus for all aspects of everyday life in the Hindu community – religious, cultural, educational and social. It is the mandirs that have to rise to the challenge of providing Hindus with a basic spiritual education and a deep sense of identification with Sanatan (Hindu) Dharma. The temple is a place where one can transcend the world of a human being. It is a place where God may be approached and divine knowledge discovered to attain enlightenment and liberation. We believe, the divine invisible hands have brought all of us together as one family for a higher purpose in life and gave us the wisdom and knowledge to pass our rich cultural treasures to future generations. The temple cements our ties to the community, as it does to our religious and cultural heritage; and is a meeting ground for the young and the old alike.

At the same time, there is an alarming level of ignorance of the essence of Sanatan-dharma, particularly amongst the younger generation who have grown indifferent to vital Hindu traditions; which do not strike them as having anything significant to contribute to the world and its problems. Still there are young people with abiding, indestructible and inexhaustible faith in Sanatan-dharma.

They are confident of the ability of Sanatan-dharma to solve our problems. It offers answers to questions about day-to-day living, even in a scientific and technological world. To understand and practice dharma is to see our life become meaningful and fascinating. There is no doubt Sanatan-dharma provides solutions to every problem provided we spend enough time and energy in exploring it through study of scriptures and practicing it on a day-to-day basis with unflinching dedication.

Therefore the goal of a mandirs is to diffuse knowledge, to preach ethical and spiritual principles of Sanatan-dharma, not only in America but elsewhere as well. This will contribute greatly to the welfare of humanity as a whole.

About the author: Damodar Prabhu has been deeply involved with the Sri Venkateswara Temple in Pittsburgh, from its inception stage. He has also been involved with National Council of Hindu Temples, and was its chairman in 1998. He takes a keen interest in issues pertaining to Hindu dharma, and frequently gives lecture presentations in the USA and India.

The Importance of Religion

Millie Pal (12 years old)

Whenver we hear about a child disrespecting his/her parents and breaking rules we can't help but think what has happened to our culture. Whatever happened to the shloka "pitru devo bhava", treat you parents like god? After hearing this, we begin to lose hope, thinking that no matter what, we shall all be doomed to having offspring who ignore our culture. Yet, even though we cannot change what has already happened, we can prevent it from happening in the future. We can prevent the loss of our culture by educating our children from their early childhood. Every night, we can teach them a new thing about our culture like reading them a passage from the Bhagwad Gita, or teaching them how to improve when they do something bad.

Going to your local Mandir can help too. The Mandir is the heart of our religion, it is where we pray and mingle with our fellow brothers and sisters. The mandir provides us hope and happiness, and let's us worship Bhagwan in a peaceful manner. Strong family bonds can also be obtained while going to mandirs, for the child knows that his parents care enough for him to squeeze in some time to in their busy schedule to bring them to their local mandir. The child will also know that God is always with him, and that God will help them make good choices if he works hard. So remember, even though it seems that there isn't a way to pass down our precious cultures and tradition to the rebellious youth of this age, there is.

Re-positioning Mandirs for the Contemporary Age

Vijay S. Shertukde

Mandirs play a very important and emotional role in our life. This is the place where we Hindus communicate with God. In *Mandir* we conduct rituals and religious ceremonies with faith. There are many deities in *mandir*. We worship them all. Most of us may have a problem understanding the meaning of the rituals or *mantras* we use. We grew up in a similar system of beliefs back in India. We accepted what was told to us by our elders with blind faith. We accepted our religious beliefs and practices without questions. But this may not be acceptable in the present environment. We lack awareness. Blind faith is not awareness. This awakening is necessary.

The *Mandir* is also a platform where the ideology of Hindu system of beliefs will come face to face with the reality of the contemporary situation that is challenging and threatening the very existence of this system of beliefs, specially with our youngsters who also face the other system of beliefs. Our youngsters are growing up in an environment where they tend to question the very system of beliefs that we followed for so many years. For them it is very difficult to accept our system of beliefs just based on faith. They need answers. This may be true for many adults also who are settled here. They are all looking for answers. The main focus is to identify some of the issues and make an attempt to rectify/clarify them to meet the challenges of the present; then we could succeed in bringing the awareness. *Mandir* is the suitable platform to discuss these issues, and the time has come to make an aggressive effort re-position the platform of *Mandir* to face the challenges of the contemporary age.

Issues

The concept of many gods versus one god, carrying out mystic rituals without understanding them, fear of diverse thought processes and complicated philosophy are some of the major issues. Let us briefly review them. Then we can refocus our attention to see how this platform of *Mandir* can help us re-position ourselves, keeping the global view of unity in perspective. There are many more issues and concerns that we will be dealing as we continue this re-positioning process. This is just a beginning.

Discussion and Resolution

Issue 1 - Monotheism through polytheism

The monotheistic concept and transition to the polytheistic concept - from one came many and the controversy of "many" took over. This is a subject that has created confusion. Philosophy in the scriptures of Hinduism namely *Veda*, *Upanishada*, and *Geeta* revolves around concept of Brahman-the Supreme Reality. Hindu theism includes the idea that there is only One Reality. However, the concept of *Ishwara* became more and more apparent in later Vedic Scriptures. Although the undertone of these scriptures points towards one and only ultimate truth, the concept of gods and goddesses continued all the way to the present time and has reached all layers of Hindu population as represented in an iconic (*moorty*) form in *mandirs*. This does not create any problem for a common person in India. They use the word *Bhagwan* that represents various deities. They realize that God is all pervading. But this creates a problem especially for youngsters who are brought up in an environment which is predominantly monotheistic. What we accepted back in India without question, now need explanation. Seeing many deities in iconic form created some questions. Unfortunately, many parents in US did not realize that or could not provide satisfactory explanation.

Re-positioning - The present need is to get the religious leaders - *Mandir* Executives - together to focus more on providing explanation about the aspect of the Supreme Reality and its relation to various deities as represented in various *mandirs* around. If we could do that then we will do justice to *Sanatana Dharma's* deep and vast spirit. (See issue 3). It is very important for all of us to understand the monotheistic nature of Hinduism.

Issue 2 - Mystic of Rituals

From the most scholarly to the common man, we all follow rituals, recite mantras, and perform *puja* and *aarti* with faith in the language that most of us may not understand. The children have asked me the questions about the rituals and prayers when I go to teach them in the temple. Their common complaint is that their parents never explained the meaning of the rituals, prayers or *mantras*. These prayers and *mantras* are in Sanskrit. The children told

me that their parent do not know Sanskrit. We need to address this issue very aggressively.

Re-positioning - We have to change these practices. Rather than routine rituals, puja, aarti, and mantra we can have prose narration explaining the meaning of those rituals, puja, aarti, and mantra or the philosophy of *Veda*, *Geeta*, and *Upnishada*. Many good books are available to do that. The immediate result will be that we may get much better participation from youngsters as well as adults, because now they will understand the process and its meaning, on which they can concentrate, think, discuss if necessary, and not follow something blindly.

Issue 3 - Is the philosophy of Hinduism too vast or diverse to comprehend?

Hinduism is a religion with diverse thought processes. It has too many scriptures to read. The philosophy is too vast to understand. These diversities and vastness are confusing to many Hindus and especially to young Hindu children. They carry this fear in their mind. Because of this fear they prefer to stay away from the conversations or reluctant to participate in public discussion about Hinduism.

Philosophy of any religion, like sciences, and technologies is vast. When some one is pursuing the details of any knowledge, it needs time, effort, and concentration of mind to seek that knowledge. It is applicable to any religion, any philosophy and any science. The same is true for Hindu Philosophy. Hindu traditions encourage their followers to explore different avenues that would lead to the realization of the divine, and provide a system for such realizations. From that point of view Hindu Dharma does have many scriptures, it analyzes many alternate philosophies and diverse thought processes to reach the unique ultimate Supreme Reality. This is a scientific process. For our day to day discussion one should be familiar with the basics of Hinduism. One could get acquainted with the basic philosophy of Hinduism through simple translation of *Geeta*. It is not such a complex issue as one thinks.

Re-positioning - This is not a diversification. It is an intellectual discussion. It is a realization of TRUTH. It is a science. It is Hindu point of views on religious and social issues to point out the deeper wisdom that the Hindu

sages have gathered through millennia of experience. The contribution came from various sources at different times. It is like a gathering of various rivers of thought processes to form the ocean of knowledge. It is the ocean of unity in diversity. At present, many Hindus do not realize this ocean of unity. They carry this misconception of diversity and are reluctant to participate in various Mandir activities. This is a good task for *Mandir* executives to put this thought process in simpler modules, to make people aware about the concept of Hind religion in a simple language. This is a kind of brain storming process and is useful for both youngsters and adults alike. This will change the perception about Hinduism and remove the misconception of diversity and vastness. Once this misconception of segregate ideas of complexity is removed from the mind then one can really feel comfortable to gain more knowledge about Hindu philosophy, get rid of the cloud of ignorance, and practice Hindu Dharma more openly and not get bogged out under this complex of so called "diversification." This will make many people, both young and adults, to participate more in Mandir activities. This will also attract the non-Hindus and all can experience this wonderful religious concept that could offer peace and harmony to the whole world. This spiritual pursuit is offered to mankind to live happily ever after.

The Final Thought

It is a difficult task to arrive at a consensus on acceptable solutions to the issues outlined. Thousands of years of practices, traditions and blind faith will pose problems to arrive at the acceptable conclusion in re-positioning. The question is what we all can do together and how should we re-position ourselves to resolve these issues to bring unity? The Hindu *Mandir* Executive Conference provides the excellent platform where gathering of various executives from different *Mandirs* can discuss these problems that we face today, form a network in USA and globally, gather input from various sources, provide support, and continue brainstorming sessions to re-position ourselves, which will eventually provide the unified directives for the generations to follow. The philosophy of Hinduism does not harm other religions. It's all inclusive concept that embraces all religions. Hindu Dharma is the mother of all religion. It is up to us to make this vision of *Swami Vivekananda* a reality.

"I am embroiled myself in Karma and got this body. Brahman is my father and Maya is my mother. I am formless and in everything. I fill all space and am omnipresent. I am water, in land, in crowds and also in solitary wilderness. I am in the fire and in ether." - Shirdi Sai Baba

Vegetarianism and Our Heritage

Nirmal Dosi, Satya Dosapati

Four major religions have come out of India. They are Hindu, Buddha, Jain, and Sikh. They all believe in non-violence, consumption of vegetarian foods, and reincarnation, among other beliefs. Since a person is born according to their karma, he or she can also be born an animal life form. When person eats meat, we don't know whom he is eating, who that animal was in his last life. Here is what the various dharmas say:

Buddha Dharma: Several dangerous diseases flourish due to meat eating. So give up meat eating.

Hindu Dharma: Only vegetarian food is meant for humans. Many diseases originate due to meat eating.

Jain Dharma: Non-vegetarian food is originator of violence and increaser of sin. Non – violence and kindness to living beings is kindness to oneself. For thereby one's own self is saved from sins and resultant sufferings.

Sikh Dharma: Religious seeking, prayers and rites get destroyed due to use of meat, and drink.

Once a person becomes meat eater, his chain to his dharma is broken, he loses his identity, and joins his hands in allegiance to other religious groups (Christian, Muslims, Jews, etc.). And, by staying vegetarian, he holds on to his heritage.

Violence against other living beings:

We are surrounded by trees, plant, vegetables, earth, water, fire and air. There are living beings with one active sense to those that have all five active (touch, taste, smell, hearing and seeing). There are worms and ants, to the pigeons and snakes, to the cows, lions and monkeys, with all five senses active and some rational thinking capabilities. We are destroying them all simply for the sake of our tongues or wanton destruction. Such violence against other living beings by human beings, who ought to know better, is selfish and unpardonable.

Sending animals to slaughter houses for commerce and eating is the height of demonic behaviour. Cows are particularly to be revered. Instead, milk producers use artificial insemination; extract the milk, meant for the calf, while killing the calf for a special kind of meat. All the slaughter of cows, sheep, goats, chickens and pigs for eating is inhuman. And Vedic scriptures say all meat eaters will have to go to hell and later become the same animal they are now eating.

Violence against environment

The worldwide number of animals killed for food in year 2000 was 45 billion, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization. This included 306 million cattle, buffalo, and calves, 1.2 billion pigs, 795 million sheep and goats, and 42.7 billion chickens, ducks, turkeys and geese. Raising such large number of animals demands extensive land, water and fuel resources as well as cause enormous pollution to rivers and air. If entire human population excrement is 1%, the excrement of animals raised for food in the world is 99%. According to EPA, in US alone 35,000 miles of river in 22 states was polluted by this excrement. Each quarter pound burger causes 55 sq ft of tropical rain forest to be cut down. It takes 16 lbs of plant protein to generate 1 lb of meat protein. 1 lb of meat requires 2500 gallons of water. The fuel energy used (in transporting and storing with refrigeration) of meat can drive a car for 20 miles. Plant produce from 87% of agricultural land in the world is used for feeding animals. The plant produce saved from just 10% reduction in meat eating in US alone can feed the entire world. Worldwide 57 billion pounds of sea life is wasted because humans catches all types of animals in the net but consumes only small part of it. The result is virtual disappearance of marine life in hundreds of miles across coastal areas. It is now widely accepted that meat eating is one of the biggest contributors for the global warming.

Violence against Health

Meat eating is now known to be a major contributor to health problems. In US alone, the rate of increase in meat and milk consumption coincides with heart problems, cancer, diabetes and other diseases. Because animals are raised to grow quick in pathetic, crowded conditions, large doses of antibiotics and hormones are fed, which get concentrated in the meat consumed by human beings. It is now being recognized that human digestive system and teeth are more similar to herbivorous animals than that of carnivorous animals. The lengthy and winding intestine of humans and herbivorous animals is designed for vegetarian food rich in fiber and slow to be absorbed compared to short and straight intestines of carnivorous animals which are designed to move meat which is devoid of any fiber and get spoilt quickly.

Vision of Vedic Religions

Only when we see the effects of the meat eating habits of world population today do we see the wisdom of Vedic seers

who understood the importance of Vegetarianism for protection of animals, environment and our health. Vegetarianism is not only non-violence towards animals, but also towards environment and our own selves. Vedic seers emphasized Vegetarianism as important factor in spiritual life.

How Mandirs can help?

Mandir administration can help this cause by substituting soy milk or other alternatives instead of cow milk for Abhishekam etc because of extreme violent nature involved in milk production. When selecting vendors for Mandir

cafeteria and other purposes, Mandirs can encourage those who cater vegetarian foods only. Mandirs can disseminate to devotees, information from organizations such as PETA, PCRM (Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine) and Farm Sanctuary that educate about these issues. In children education programs, children could be taught about advantages of Vegetarianism and how it is in keeping with our dharma.

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BEST WISHES FOR 2nd HINDU MANDIR EXECUTIVE CONFERENCE

*RAMAN and TARA PATEL
&
FAMILY*

Paramus, NJ

Hindu Temples and Youth

Naresh Chand, Ph.D.

Bhagwan Krisna tells Arjuna (Verse 16, Ch.7 in Bhagwat Gita) that four kinds of virtuous men worship Him – the one in distress (Artah), the one who wants security and pleasure (Artharthi), the one who wishes to know Him (Jijnasu), and the one who knows Him (Jnani).

चतुर्विधा भजन्ते मां जनाः सुकृतिनोऽर्जुन ।
आर्तो जिज्ञासुर्लब्धी ज्ञानी च भरतर्षभ ॥

The majority of devotees who go to the temples are Artah and Artharthi. They either seek help or good luck from God. Most Hindu youth born in the USA are not in these groups. Born in the land of non-Hindus, they desire to know their roots, themselves and Him. Therefore a majority of Hindu youth can be classified as Jijnasu. This should be recognized by temples and efforts should be made to address their needs. Besides having priests, temples should have Acharyas who hold regular satsangs at the intellectual levels. When the youth attend some ritualistic events, there should be explanations of mantras being chanted or why a particular deity is being worshiped. Otherwise most of the events in the temples will be irrelevant to the needs of a Jijnasu. Presently, whatever youth gets from their surroundings is self conflicting and in most cases their families are of no help because most of them are ignorant of the fundamentals of Hindu Dharma.

To make the situation worse, the youth is exposed to anti-Hindu publicity by the media involving non-Hindus. There are some social evils that a few Hindus practice at home and in community such as dowry system and its related deaths, discrimination based on caste, etc that needs to be contended with. The result is a spiritual vacuum and distrust in their Dharma. In some cases, this leads to a revolt that will manifest itself in choosing to marry a non-Hindu, even among children of hard-core Hindu families.

The temples therefore can play a great role in teaching Dharma and to help youth in discovering "WHO AM I" (self-realization) through reasoning, wisdom, knowledge, right actions and devotion to Him. Essence of Hindutva must be presented in a clear, crispy and concise manner so that even 10 years old children can understand. It is

wrong to assume that Hinduism is so complex and can only be understood by very mature minds and that youth minds are so contaminated that they are not receptive to real knowledge. While performing any ritual, it should be properly explained. Mantras have little values unless they are understood and are sung from heart. The electronic media could be used to explain the meaning while chanting the mantras. Youth should be involved in management of the temples. All temples should agree to a common definition of Hindu Dharma and its essence.

Bhagwan Krishna emphasizes the importance of Karma-Yoga in Bhagwad Gita. This is what our youth wants to get involved in, especially in seva projects. Youth group should be formed based on age. These youth groups should be encouraged to hold meetings in temples to discuss issues that youth in America face today. Hindu parents tend to ignore some of these issues. Here are some projects which could be quite popular among Hindu Youth.

- Mentoring programs - either older youth can mentor younger youth. Or there can be mentorship (career, education, etc) from adults
- Tutoring programs, Hinduism and language classes, Yoga, meditation, and dance classes
- Indian cooking classes
- Social service events - soup kitchens, building homes etc.
- Youth trips to India (Jews are entitled to free trips to Israel.)
- Sports activities
- Marriage and relationship counseling
- Services for women - domestic violence, etc (churches provide much needed support to abused women)

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Religious Conversions

Naresh Sharma, M.D

Amongst the world religions, the Sanatana Dharma (also known as Hindu religion) and Judaism do not preach a doctrine of conversion and therefore do not actively engage in conversion whereas Christianity and Islam preach a doctrine of conversion, believe in conversion, and actively engage in conversion.

It must be accepted that one has the right to convert into any other religion if one chooses to do so by one's own freewill and on voluntary basis. Such a conversion without any outside interference or pressure is one's own right. Historically Mankind has practiced religious conversion. Rulers in the past have enforced conversion on their subjects and society in general followed the religion of the ruling hierarchy of their land. It appears that religious conversion has always been used to maintain power, maintain control.

Religious conversion can either be **voluntary** or **involuntary**. Involuntary or forced religious conversion has been achieved by the use of force such as sword, bullet, techniques including crucifixion, burning, torturing etc; political manipulation, taxation relief and financial incentives, social status, employment, permission to practice polygamy, deceit, providing salvation, and marriage.

People have also converted into another religion voluntarily. Dissatisfaction with one's own religion, desire to achieve social status advancement, escape from poverty and religious or political persecution, insufficient knowledge of or indifference towards one's own religion, peer pressure, need to survive, lack of self-esteem and confidence, abuse, neglect, ill-treatment by the peers, peer pressure and marriage have successfully been used for voluntary conversion.

Conversion by a large number of people, frequently reported in the media, has occurred both on voluntary and involuntary basis in India. We must as a society consider the reasons and consequences of such conversions on a mass scale.

Following appear to be prominent reasons for such conversions.

1) Lack of basic amenities including water, food, housing and clothes,

2) lack of education i.e. illiteracy,

3) lack of jobs, and

5) peer factors.

These factors appear to be created by socioeconomic and political climate and are correctable. It is not surprising that promise of food, money, clothes, better living conditions, jobs, a lifestyle with respect and treatment of equality will attract a large population to accept another religion as a means of improving quality of and advancing into a higher strata of socioeconomic life.

The most important and relevant social factors in today's India appear to be so-called **Caste System** and **Untouchability**.

An objective study of history of India will reveal that there are no historical records or doctrine preaching practicing of caste system during its golden period. Scriptures clearly inform us and tell us that one is known and recognized by one's deeds, that is so-called karma and actions and not by their birth. It did not matter what they were born into, what mattered was how they practiced and lived their life.

However, for the reasons beyond the scope of discussion here, with the passage of time, a social structure practicing class society based on so-called castes evolved. In this society, you were now recognized and treated by what you were born into. Efforts were made and means were designed to let people stay into their own "caste", thereby preventing advancement, growth, freedom of choice and significantly restricting one's abilities. Under this so-called caste system driven society, the curse of **untouchability** developed.

Later Indian society was subjected to enforced conversion under foreign domination. Loss of resources and wealth eventually led to a status where a large poor population lacked access to food, hygiene, clothes, jobs, education, and eventually even social dignity.

Sanatana Dharma allowed under its banner various sects, subgroups, sub-religions, and beliefs to coexist with peace, harmony, respect and love. However, the development of various groups, divisions, subdivisions, sub-religions have also led to lack of unity.

It is a common widely accepted belief that if you are not born into Sanatana Dharma (as a Hindu), you cannot be converted into a Hinduism. However, the author is unaware of any doctrines written or outlined in our scriptures that prevent or forbid us from accepting other people back into Hinduism or Sanatana Dharma if they choose to do so on voluntary basis.

We can take pride in the fact that we have never attacked someone else's land and we have never enforced other people to convert and accept our religion and way of life by force and we must continue to be so. That is the great strength of our culture, our religion, and our belief. However, we must also begin to accept voluntary conversion into Hinduism (Sanatana Dharma).

Prominent religious leaders and the groups must come together and discuss this important issue. It is now extremely important that we work towards eliminating these factors that has led to lack of unity, poverty and illiteracy and have made us easy targets for conversion. This is of vital importance for our survival as well as for sustenance of religion, culture and heritage.

We must work towards removing **Poverty, Untouchability and Illiteracy**, to provide education, to improve the living standards and provide basic amenities of life such as electricity, water supply, sanitary conditions to every one in India especially to those who are extremely unfortunate.

In summary, historically the poor in India seem to have been neglected and perhaps up to a certain degree exploited especially in India's recent history. Perhaps those who have "Have" may have been indifferent and often intolerant of those who "Do Not Have" but time has now come for a change in **Attitude**, to develop **Awareness** and **Empathy** and take **Action** towards prevention of involuntary religious conversion. We must begin to implement the measures so that future generations in India have better opportunities, better living standard, better education, and better understanding of our history, religion and culture.

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Seva, Selfless Service: A Path to Eternal Peace and Happiness – A Role for Mandirs

Umesh Shukla, Ph.D., Belle Mead, NJ

Attainment of peace and happiness is the ultimate objective of human life. Pursuit of material wealth or professional success can provide temporary peace and happiness. However, the ever lasting peace and true happiness cannot be achieved by pursuit of material wealth or professional success.

When we pursue personal happiness without considering the needs of those around us, we become anxious and frustrated, anchorless and cut off from the parts of us that are in others. Meditation and other relaxation techniques can give a temporary relief from such anxiety and frustration and calm the mind. The main reason the mind spins is because it is controlled by excess desires for personal gratification. The mind is disturbed when it encounters difficulty in meeting its desires and remains focused on the problems. A desire to elevate another helps to regain control of the mind.(i.e. *only a* higher taste can replace a lower taste). The focus of trying to help another person out of his or her problem shrinks our own; and a healthy sense of our own self begins to grow. Selfless service or *seva*, therefore, is an antidote for anxiety, depression, loneliness, and other manifestations of a person cut from the universe that nourishes him.

Therefore, the only way to achieve lasting peace and happiness is by performing *seva* to the needy. Performing service is also the best form of service to God. It glorifies the human as a divine and dignified being, whilst also eradicating many social evils and deficiencies in the society. Love of God and service of man is the secret of life. The more energy is spent in elevating and serving others, the more divine energy flows to you.

The motto of Ramakrishna Mission, founded by Swami Vivekananda, was, *atmana mokshattam jagat dhvitayacha*, 'to achieve one's own salvation, one must work for the world's welfare.'

In Bhagavad-Gita, Bhagawan Krishna explains that a true *sannyasi*, enlightened person, is the best *sevak*, person who performs *seva*, as he gives up his individuality, ego, agenda and puts others needs ahead of his own. Bhagawan Krishna further explains that a *karma-yogi*, also a *sevak*, is the person who performs his duty with devotion and helps others for doing good to the world.

But in reality such an attitude helps the *sevak* in his own spiritual growth. The world is there with or without us. Hence, to think that we can do good to the world is a false notion. **We want to do good to others because we want to improve ourselves.** Therefore, we should be thankful to those who help us improve ourselves or allow us to do *seva*. Trees are exemplary: they always do good to others by providing fruits and shade even to those who abuse them, and fuel for fire or wood for buildings even after death.

We can perform *seva* by offering any one or more of the following: advice, attention, clothing, education, food, health, hope, knowledge, laughter, leadership, life, love, money, shelter, skills, time, etc. All forms of *Seva* directly or indirectly require time. ***Seva* needs to be performed throughout the life and not just in later parts of life to assure continued spiritual growth.** It is easy to say that one does not have time to perform *seva*, but it is the attitude of *seva* that is critical. Once the attitude of *seva* is developed, it will have a priority in your lives and finding time will no longer be an issue. One can perform different kinds of *seva* depending up on one's interest.

By doing selfless and humble service, you purify your heart and fill it with divine virtues. Egoism, hatred, jealousy, arrogance and selfishness vanish. And, humility, love, sympathy, tolerance, and mercy develop. The sense of separateness is annihilated; and one begins to feel oneness or unity of life. You develop a broad heart with broad, generous views on life. Eventually, you get knowledge of the Self and feel unbounded joy.

One can perform different kinds of *Seva* depending up on one's expertise and interest. There are countless organizations through which one can perform *seva*.

One does not have to wait for any help or guidance from others to begin performing *seva*. Selfless service at all times leads to the fulfillment of our highest aspirations.

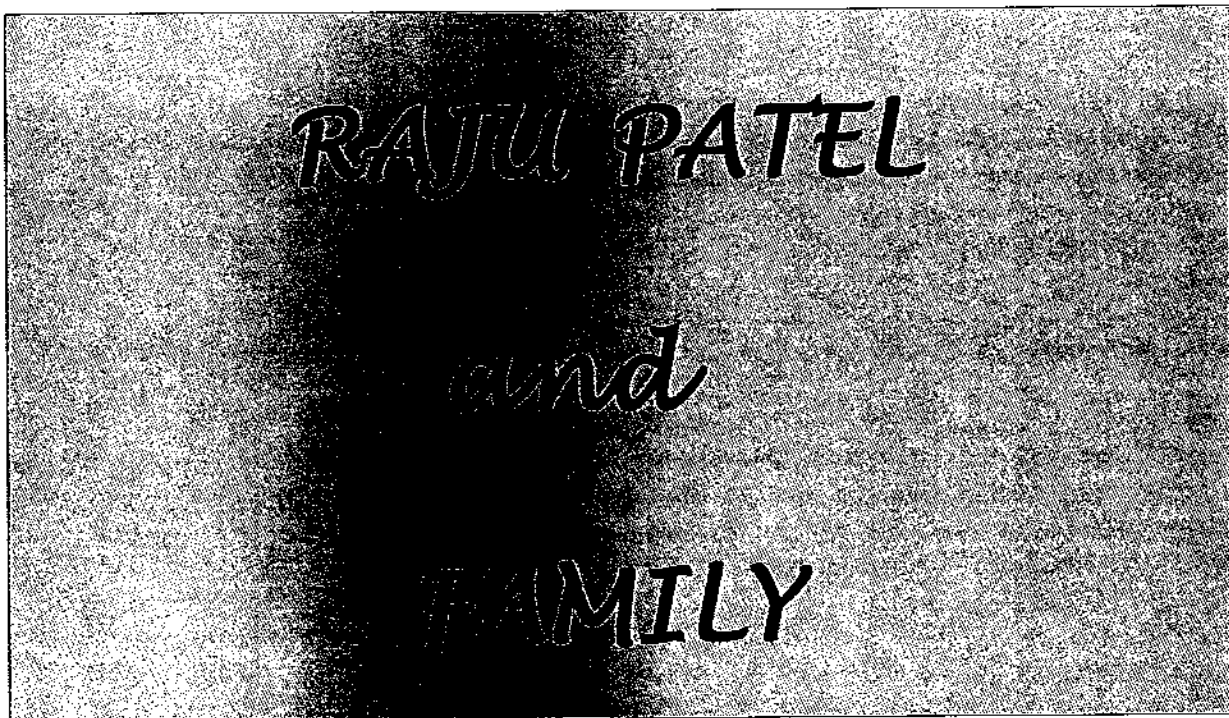
It is a great privilege that God has given us the opportunity to serve Him. If we remember this we will be blessed.

There is no better place in the community than Mandirs in serving as the role model for teaching not only the

children and youth but also the many grown-ups why and how to perform *seva*. The Mandir can be a focal point for offering various types of services to the community with the help of the *sevaks*. Such an activity will be mutually beneficial to the Mandir as well as the community and the individuals who perform *seva*.

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BEST WISHES FOR 2nd HINDU MANDIR EXECUTIVE CONFERENCE



Temple: Vision, Mission and Leadership

Arvind Patel, HMEC Coordinator, Sanskruti Parivar, USA

In Shrimad Bhagavad-Gita, Lord Krishna says that one can reach God by following the paths of either **Bhakti Yoga** (path of devotion), **Jnana Yoga** (path of eternal knowledge), **Dhyana Yoga** (path of meditation) or **Karma Yoga** (path of selfless service). The perfect mandir should, therefore, ideally offer all these aspects. Or, as I like to put it:

M:	Meditation (Dhyana Yoga)
A:	Actions – Selfless Service (Karma Yoga)
N:	(K) Knowledge (Jnana Yoga)
D:	Devotion (Bhakti Yoga)
I:	Individual's spiritual Growth
R:	Residence of God

Mandirs help devotees sustain and promote Dharma

Humans have four pursuits in life: *artha* or economic development, *kaama* or sense enjoyment, *dharma* or religious duty and *moksha* or liberation. Here I want to explore the pursuit of *dharma* further.

Dharma, religious activity, as practiced in India has survived and thrived under both a monarchy and a democracy. Under a monarchy, a king supported and sustained *dharma*, which therefore only needed faith and daily observance by the practitioner. Without a Vedic king, in a democracy, the pursuit of *dharma* requires two additional pillars of a supportive government role and a supportive society. The lack of these explains the many problems faced by Hindus in modern times.

A supportive government and society is as important as faith and practice in the successful pursuit of *dharma*. And, therein lies the challenge for the Hindus, and a challenge to every temple to compensate for these pillars, and help realize the directions of the Bhagwad Gita.

To improve upon one's personal faith and practice, leading to a pious and virtuous life, may be termed as "individual dharma", while the support roles of government and society may be called "samaj dharma".

According to Rishis and Sages, an individual is also indebted to society. In modern times, devotees can relinquish this debt by helping to create government and social support for samaj dharma.

In the USA, there were few Hindu temples in 1960's. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, there were more than 500. This indicates a strong desire, dedication and quest to sustain *dharma*.

Our temples can be divided into three categories:

1. Temples under the guidance of Gurus belonging specific sampradayas
2. Temples managed by representatives of community at large
3. Temples managed and operated by a few individuals with strong leadership skills

Although all temples are dedicated to strengthen faith and provide services to devotees, there are different operational deficiencies, leadership styles and program diversities among these temples.

Large temples with ample resources have some aspects of a perfect temple, with opportunities for expansion of their activities. Some have become self sufficient, and the leadership appears to be confident, dedicated and highly motivated. At others, successful leadership is isolated, and offers limited benefits to its community. Therefore, the larger more successful temples need to reach out to the others. It could be by simply visiting other temples, carrying message of respect and appreciation for their efforts. This will create an immensely positive effect and fellowship, create unity and strengthen the Hindu society. In Bharat, *sadhu sammelans* are organized regularly to help create a unified front and to help guide Hindu society. We need to do the same at institutional as well as personal level. Following this formula, temples can organize combined youth conferences, youth camps, senior citizen programs, civic activities and many more programs to fulfill the needs of the society.

Careful analysis of activities of any given temple (e.g., Shri Hanuman Temple) or religious institution (e.g., Swadhyay Parivar) shows that their core activities fall in one or two of the following categories, that is, Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga, Jnana Yoga or Dhyana Yoga. Very few institutions conduct all four. It follows, therefore, that another institution's may be complimentary to that of my own. Complimentary strengths are always welcome. It is time to break barriers between temples and their

boundaries, and to appreciate, admire and join hands to achieve our common goal of sustaining *dharma*.

—Arvind Patel
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Formless

*Whatever takes form is false.
Only the formless endures.*

*When you understand
The truth of this teaching,
You will not be born again.*

*For God is infinite,
Within the body and without,
Like a mirror,
And the image in a mirror.*

*As the air is everywhere,
Flowing around a pot
And filling it,
So God is everywhere,
Filling all things
And flowing through them forever.*

Ashtavakra Gita 1: 18-20

ओ विज्ञानी

ओ विज्ञानी!

माना कि तु पौहुँच गया है,
चन्द्रलोक में,
मगर ना देखा चन्द्रदेव को,
इसी लिए, तु ढोल बजा कर,
गला फाड़कर जिल्लाता है,
चन्द्रलोक, चन्द्रदेव का पता नहीं है ।

झुठा वेद पुराण नहीं है,
कैसे कहते भगवान नहीं है ?
हिरण्यकशिपु ने खंम्भा देखा,
मगर कहा, प्रह्लाद, पिताजी!
खंम्भा मे भगवान खड़े है!
फिर भी, उसने खंभा देखा,
और विहँस कर बोला, बेटा!
यह खंभा है, भगवान नहीं है ।

चर्म चक्षु से जिसने देखा -
इँटै देखी, पत्थर देखा,
जिसने देखा भक्तिभाव से, दिव्य दृष्टि से,
उसने देखा, कण-कण में भगवान खड़े हैं ।

जितना साफ रहेगा दर्पन,
उतनी साफ रहेगी छाया,
जब तक तिमिर रहेगा फैला,
मुक्त नहीं होगा मानव-मन,
तब तक वह कहता जायेगा,
यह पत्थर है, भगवान नहीं है ।

गंगा नदी दिखायी देती इन आँखों से,
लेकिन गंगा माँ के दर्शन ?
बहुत कठिन है ।
रोज पकाती आग हमारे घर में भोजन,
लेकिन दर्शन अग्निदेव के ?
बहुत कठिन है ।
प्राण बाँटता है कण-कण में
पवन देवता,
लेकिन, दर्शन उसके बोलो,
बहुत कठिन है ।

तन की आँखें बन्ध करो,
फिर खोलो, अपने मन की आँखें,
फिर देखोगे, रूप अनूठे,
नये-नये संसार अनेकों,
अपनी अक्षमता के कारण,
देख नहीं पाते जिसको हम,
जान नहीं पाते जिसको हम,
बोलो! क्या वह सत्य नहीं हैं ?

लालबाबा

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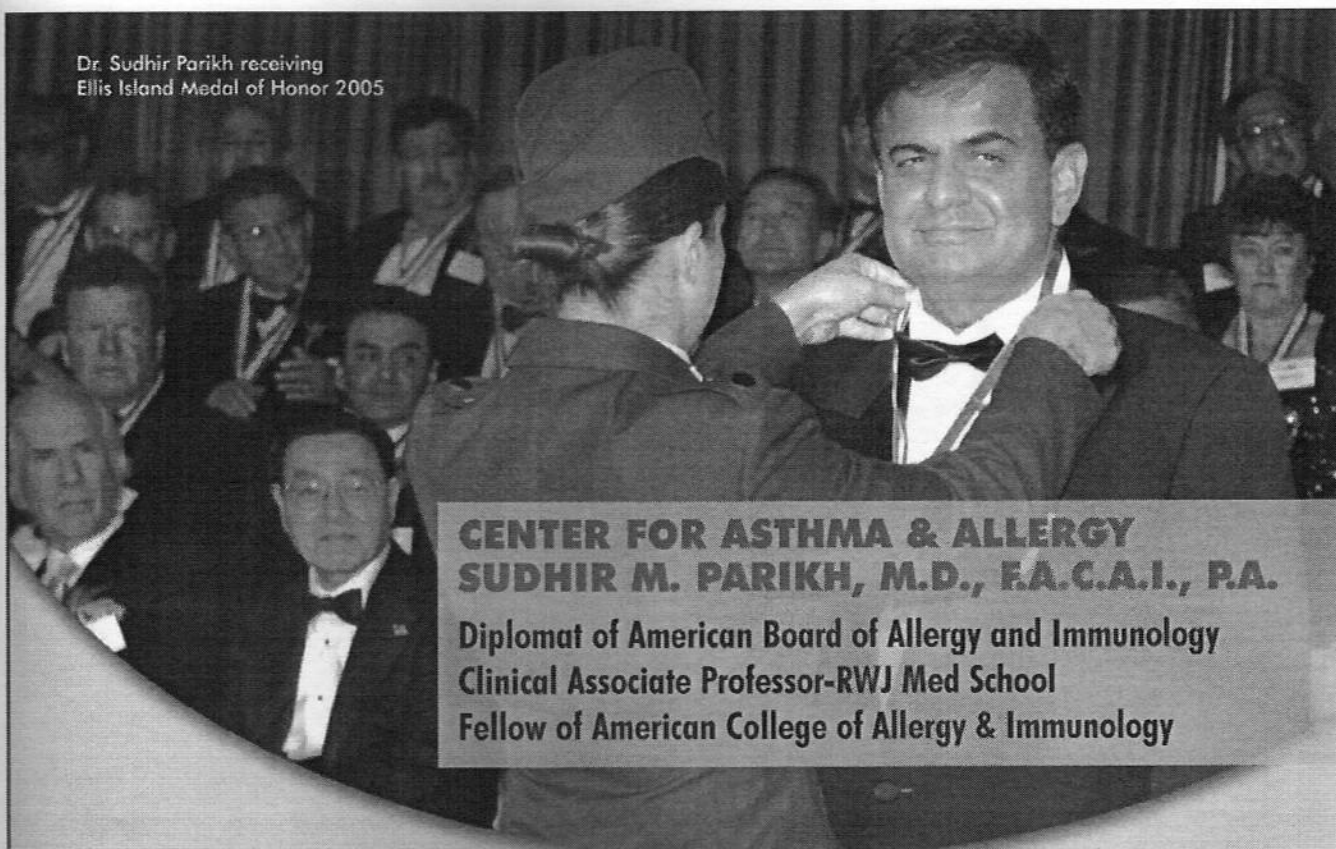
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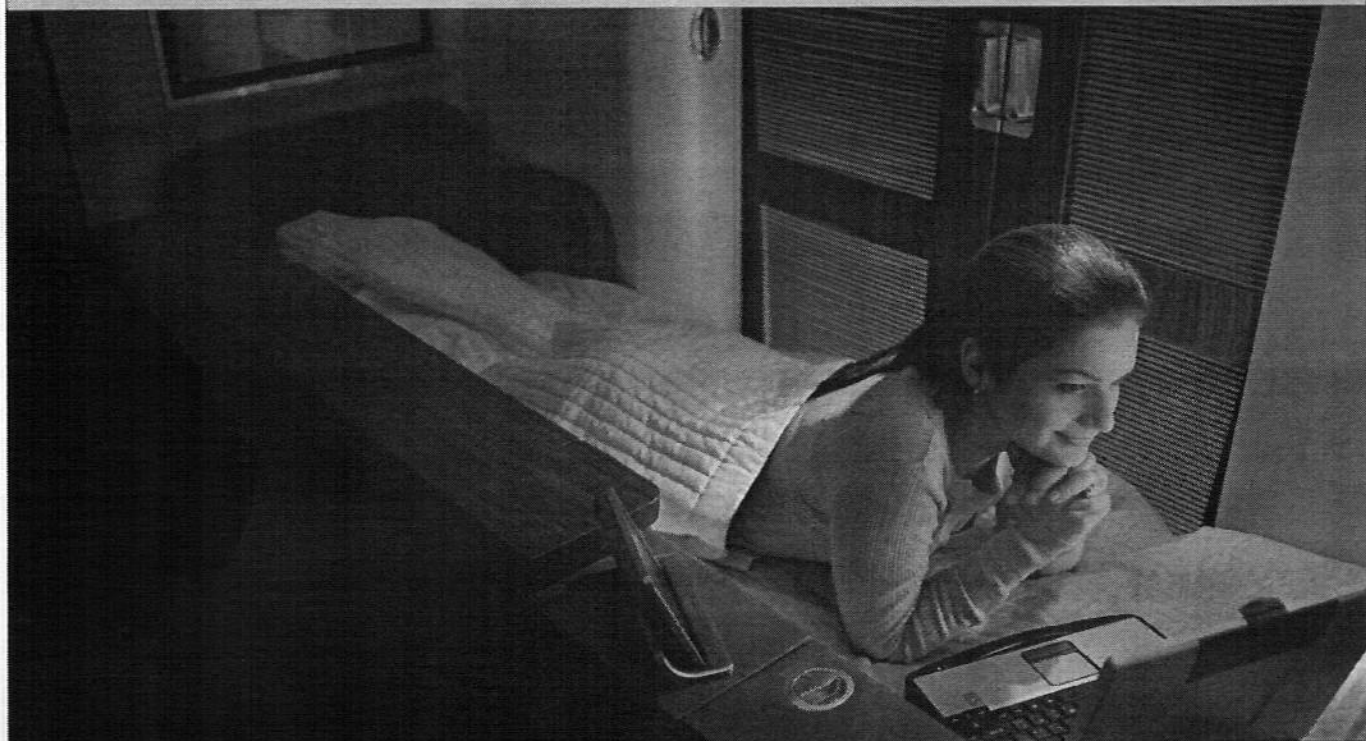
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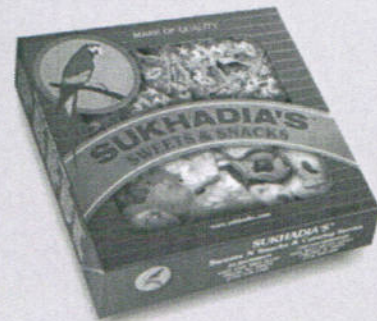
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