



A Hinduism Primer

1. Nine Beliefs of Hinduism

(Courtesy Himalayan Academy)

Our beliefs determine our thoughts and attitudes about life, which in turn direct our actions. By our actions, we create our destiny. Beliefs about sacred matters--God, soul and cosmos--are essential to one's approach to life. Hindus believe many diverse things, but there are a few bedrock concepts on which most Hindus concur. The following nine beliefs, though not exhaustive, offer a simple summary of Hindu spirituality.

1. Hindus believe in a one, all-pervasive Supreme Being who is both immanent and transcendent, both Creator and Unmanifest Reality.
2. Hindus believe in the divinity of the four Vedas, the world's most ancient scripture, and venerate the Agamas as equally revealed. These primordial hymns are God's word and the bedrock of Sanatana Dharma, the eternal religion.
3. Hindus believe that the universe undergoes endless cycles of creation, preservation and dissolution.
4. Hindus believe in karma, the law of cause and effect by which each individual creates his own destiny by his thoughts, words and deeds.
5. Hindus believe that the soul reincarnates, evolving through many births until all karmas have been resolved, and moksha, liberation from the cycle of rebirth, is attained. Not a single soul will be deprived of this destiny.
6. Hindus believe that divine beings exist in unseen worlds and that temple worship, rituals, sacraments and personal devotionals create a communion with these devas and Gods.
7. Hindus believe that an enlightened master, or satguru, is essential to know the Transcendent Absolute, as are personal discipline, good conduct, purification, pilgrimage, self-inquiry, meditation and surrender in God.
8. Hindus believe that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered, and therefore practice ahimsa, noninjury, in thought, word and deed.
9. Hindus believe that no religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others, but that all genuine paths are facets of God's Light, deserving tolerance and understanding.

Hinduism, the world's oldest religion, has no beginning--it precedes recorded history. It has no human founder. It is a mystical religion, leading the devotee to personally experience the Truth within, finally reaching the pinnacle of consciousness where man and God are one. Hinduism has four main denominations--Saivism, Shaktism, Vaishnavism and Smartism.

2. Five Obligations of all Hindus

1. **WORSHIP, UPASANA:** Young Hindus are taught daily worship in the family shrine room -- rituals, disciplines, chants, yogas and religious study. They learn to be secure through devotion in home and temple, wearing traditional dress, bringing forth love of the Divine and preparing the mind for serene meditation.

2. **HOLY DAYS, UTSAVA:** Young Hindus are taught to participate in Hindu festivals and holy days in the home and temple. They learn to be happy through sweet communion with God at such auspicious celebrations. *Utsava* includes fasting and attending the temple on Monday or Friday and other holy days.

3. **VIRTUOUS LIVING, DHARMA:** Young Hindus are taught to live a life of duty and good conduct. They learn to be selfless by thinking of others first, being respectful of parents, elders and swamis, following divine law, especially ahimsa, mental, emotional and physical noninjury to all beings. Thus they resolve karmas.

4. **PILGRIMAGE, TIRTHAYATRA:** Young Hindus are taught the value of pilgrimage and are taken at least once a year for darshana of holy persons, temples and places, near or far. They learn to be detached by setting aside worldly affairs and making God, Gods and gurus life's singular focus during these journeys.

5. **rites of passage, SAMSKARA:** Young Hindus are taught to observe the many sacraments which mark and sanctify their passages through life. They learn to be traditional by celebrating the rites of birth, name-giving, head-shaving, first feeding, ear-piercing, first learning, coming of age, marriage and death.

3. Four Facts of Hinduism

These four facts--karma, reincarnation, all-pervasive divinity and dharma--are the essence of the *Vedas* and *Agamas* and the fabric of every Hindu's life. Speak of them to all who will listen. They are the heritage of all souls.

Karma

According as one acts, so does he become. One becomes virtuous by virtuous action, bad by bad action.

Yajur Veda, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.4.5

Karma literally means "deed" or "act" and more broadly names the universal principle of cause and effect, action and reaction which governs all life. Karma is a natural law of the mind, just as gravity is a law of matter. Karma is not fate, for man acts with free will, creating his own destiny. The Vedas tell us, if we sow goodness, we will reap goodness; if we sow evil, we will reap evil. Karma refers to the totality of our actions and their concomitant reactions in this and previous lives, all of which determines our future. It is the interplay between our experience and how we respond to it that makes karma devastating or helpfully invigorating. The conquest of karma lies in intelligent action and dispassionate reaction. Not all karmas rebound immediately. Some accumulate and return unexpectedly in this or other births.

Reincarnation

After death, the soul goes to the next world, bearing in mind the subtle impressions of its deeds, and after reaping their harvest returns again to this world of action. Thus, he who has desires continues subject to rebirth.

Yajur Veda, Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.4.6

Reincarnation, punarjanma, is the natural process of birth, death and rebirth. At death we drop off the physical body and continue evolving in the inner worlds in our subtle bodies, until we again enter into birth. Through the ages, reincarnation has been the great consoling element within Hinduism, eliminating the fear of death. We are not the body in which we live but the immortal soul which inhabits many bodies in its evolutionary journey through samsara. After death, we continue to exist in unseen worlds, enjoying or suffering the harvest of earthly deeds until it comes time for yet another physical birth. The actions set in motion in previous lives form the tendencies and conditions of the next. Reincarnation ceases when karma is resolved, God is realized and moksha, liberation, is attained.

All-Pervasive Divinity

He is the God of forms infinite in whose glory all things are--smaller than the smallest atom, and yet the Creator of all, ever living in the mystery of His creation. In the vision of this God of love there is everlasting peace. He is the Lord of all who, hidden in the heart of things, watches over the world of time.

Krishna Yajur Veda, Shvetashvatara Upanishad 4.14-15

As a family of faiths, Hinduism upholds a wide array of perspectives on the Divine, yet all worship the one, all-pervasive Supreme Being hailed in the Upanishads. As Absolute Reality, God is unmanifest, unchanging and transcendent, the Self God, timeless, formless and spaceless. As Pure Consciousness, God is the manifest primal substance, pure love and light flowing through all form, existing everywhere in time and space as infinite intelligence and power. As Primal Soul, God is our personal Lord, source of all three worlds, our Father-Mother God who protects, nurtures and guides us. We beseech God's grace in our lives while also knowing that He/She is the essence of our soul, the life of our life. Each denomination also venerates its own pantheon of Divinities, Mahadevas, or "great angels," who were created by the Supreme Lord and who serve and adore Him.

Dharma

Dharma yields Heaven's honor and Earth's wealth. What is there then that is more fruitful for a man? There is nothing more rewarding than dharma, nor anything more ruinous than its neglect.

Tirukural 31-32

When God created the universe, He endowed it with order, with the laws to govern creation. Dharma is God's divine law prevailing on every level of existence, from the sustaining cosmic order to religious and moral laws which bind us in harmony with that order. Related to the soul, dharma is the mode of conduct most conducive to spiritual advancement, the right and righteous path. It is piety and ethical practice, duty and obligation. When we follow dharma, we are in conformity with the Truth that inheres and instructs the universe, and we naturally abide in closeness to God. Adharma is opposition to divine law. Dharma is to the individual what its normal development is to a seed--the orderly fulfillment of an inherent nature and destiny.

4. Hinduism – A Splendorous Lotus with Four Superb Petals

For over 200 years, Western scholars have struggled to understand Hinduism, a faith whose followers seemed (to outsiders) to arbitrarily worship any one of a dozen Gods as the Supreme, a religion vastly diverse in its beliefs, practices and ways of worship. Some Indologists labeled the Hinduism they encountered polytheistic; others even coined new terms, like henotheism, to describe this baffling array of spiritual traditions.

Few, however, have realized, and fewer still have written, that India's Sanatana Dharma, or "eternal faith," known today as Hinduism and comprising nearly a billion followers, is a family of religions with four principal denominations Saivism, Shaktism, Vaishnavism and Smartism. This single perception is essential for understanding Hinduism and explaining it accurately to others. Contrary to prevailing misconceptions, Hindus all worship a one Supreme Being, though by different names.

For Vaishnavites, Lord Vishnu is God. For Saivites, God is Siva. For Shaktas, Goddess Shakti is supreme. For Smartas, liberal Hindus, the choice of Deity is left to the devotee. Each has a multitude of guru lineages, religious leaders, priesthoods, sacred literature, monastic communities, schools, pilgrimage centers and tens of thousands of temples. They possess a wealth of art and architecture, philosophy and scholarship.

These four sects hold such divergent beliefs that each is a complete and independent religion. Yet, they share a vast heritage of culture and belief karma, dharma, reincarnation, all-pervasive Divinity, temple worship, sacraments, manifold Deities, the guru-shishya tradition and the Vedas as scriptural authority. In this eight-page Insight, drawn from Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami's *Dancing with Siva*, we offer a synopsis of these four denominations, followed by a point-by-point comparison.

Each of Hinduism's philosophies, schools and lineages shares a common purpose: to further the soul's unfoldment to its divine destiny. Nowhere is this process better represented than in the growth of the renowned lotus, which, seeking the sun, arises from the mud to become a magnificent flower. Its blossom is a promise of purity and perfection.

Saivism

Saivite Hindus worship the Supreme God as Siva, the Compassionate One. Saivites esteem self discipline and philosophy and follow a satguru. They worship in the temple and practice yoga, striving to be one with Siva within.

Shaktism

Shaktas worship the Supreme as the Divine Mother, Shakti or Devi. She has many forms. Some are gentle, some are fierce. Shaktas use chants, real magic, holy diagrams, yoga and rituals to call forth cosmic forces and awaken the great kundalini power within the spine.

Vaishnavism

Vaishnavites worship the Supreme as Lord Vishnu and His incarnations, especially Krishna and Rama. Vaishnavites are mainly dualistic. They are deeply devotional. Their religion is rich in saints, temples and scriptures.

Smartism

Smartas worship the Supreme in one of six forms: Ganesha, Siva, Sakti, Vishnu, Surya and Skanda. Because they accept all the major Hindu Gods, they are known as liberal or nonsectarian. They follow a philosophical, meditative path, emphasizing man's oneness with God through understanding.

What Is the Deeply Mystical Saiva Sect?

Saivism is the world's oldest religion. Worshiping God Siva, the compassionate One, it stresses potent disciplines, high philosophy, the guru's centrality and bhakti-raja-siddha yoga leading to oneness with Siva within. Aum.

Seated on Nandi, his bull mount, the perfect devotee, Lord Siva holds japa beads and the trident, symbol of love-wisdom-action, and offers blessings of protection and fearlessness. Mount Kailas, His sacred Himalayan abode, represents the pinnacle of consciousness.

Saivism is ancient, truly ageless, for it has no beginning. It is the precursor of the many-faceted religion now termed Hinduism. Scholars trace the roots of Siva worship back more than 8,000 years to the advanced Indus Valley civilization. But sacred writings tell us there never was a time when Saivism did not exist.

Modern history records six main schools: Saiva Siddhanta, Pashupatism, Kashmir Saivism, Vira Saivism, Siddha Siddhanta and Siva Advaita. Saivism's grandeur and beauty are found in a practical culture, an enlightened view of man's place in the universe and a profound system of temple mysticism and siddha yoga. It provides knowledge of man's evolution from God and back to God, of the soul's unfoldment and awakening guided by enlightened sages. Like all the sects, its majority are devout families, headed by hundreds of orders of swamis and sadhus who follow the fiery, world-renouncing path to moksha. The Vedas state, "By knowing Siva, the Auspicious One who is hidden in all things, exceedingly fine, like film arising from clarified butter, the One embracer of the universe by realizing God, one is released from all fetters." Aum Namah Sivaya.

What Is the Magic and Power Of Shaktism?

Shaktism reveres the Supreme as the Divine Mother, Shakti or Devi, in Her many forms, both gentle and fierce. Shaktas use mantra, tantra, yantra, yoga and puja to invoke cosmic forces and awaken the kundalini power. Aum.

Shakti, depicted in Her green form, radiates beauty, energy, compassion and protection for followers. Wearing the tilaka of the Shakta sect on Her forehead, She blesses devotees, who shower rosewater, hold an umbrella and prostrate at Her feet.

While worship of the divine mother extends beyond the pale of history, Shakta Hinduism arose as an organized sect in India around the fifth century.

Today it has four expressions devotional, folk-shamanic, yogic and universalist all invoking the fierce power of Kali or Durga, or the benign grace of Parvati or Ambika. Shakta devotionalists use puja rites, especially to the Shri Chakra yantra, to establish intimacy with the Goddess. Shamanic Shaktism employs magic, trance mediumship, firewalking and animal sacrifice for healing, fertility, prophecy and power. Shakta yogis seek to awaken the sleeping Goddess Kundalini and unite her with Siva in the sahasrara chakra. Shakta universalists follow the reformed Vedantic tradition exemplified by Sri Ramakrishna. "Left-hand" tantric rites transcend traditional ethical codes. Shaktism is chiefly advaitic, defining the soul's destiny as complete identity with the Unmanifest, Siva. Central scriptures are the Vedas, Shakta Agamas and Puranas. The Devi Gita extols, "We bow down to the universal soul of all. Above and below and in all four directions, Mother of the universe, we bow." Aum Chandikayai Namah.

What Is the Devotional Vaishnava Sect?

Vaishnavism is an ancient Hindu sect centering on the worship of Lord Vishnu and His incarnations, especially Krishna and Rama. Largely dualistic, profoundly devotional, it is rich in saints, temples and scriptures. Aum.

Vishnu is the infinite ocean from which the world emerges. He stands on waves, surrounded by the many-headed Seshanaga, who represents agelessness and is regarded as an extension of divine energy and an incarnation of Balarama, Lord Krishna's brother.

The worship of Vishnu, meaning "pervader, " dates back to Vedic times. The Pancharatra and Bhagavata sects were popular prior to 300 bce. Today's five Vaishnava schools emerged in the middle ages, founded by Ramanuja, Madhva, Nimbarka, Vallabha and Chaitanya. Vaishnavism stresses prapatti, single-pointed surrender to Vishnu, or His ten or more incarnations, called avataras. Japa is a key devotional sadhana, as is ecstatic chanting and dancing, called kirtana.

Temple worship and festivals are elaborately observed. Philosophically, Vaishnavism ranges from Madhva's pure dualism to Ramanuja's qualified nondualism to Vallabha's nearly monistic vision. God and soul are everlastingly distinct. The soul's destiny, through God's grace, is to eternally worship and enjoy Him. While generally nonascetic, advocating bhakti as the highest path, Vaishnavism has a strong monastic community. Central scriptures are the Vedas, Vaishnava Agamas, Itihasas and Puranas. The Bhagavad Gita states, "On those who meditate on Me and worship with undivided heart, I confer attainment of what they have not, and preserve what they have." Aum Namō Narayanaya.

What Is the Universalistic Smarta Sect?

Smartism is an ancient brahminical tradition reformed by Shankara in the ninth century. Worshiping six forms of God, this liberal Hindu path is monistic, nonsectarian, meditative and philosophical. Aum.

Adi Sankara lived from 788 to 820 ce, a mere 32 years, yet he gave Hinduism a new liberal denomination Smartism. Here, wearing sacred marks, he holds his writings and is flanked by the six Deities of the Smarta altar: Surya the Sun, Siva, Shakti, Vishnu, Kumaran and Ganesha.

Smarta means a follower of classical smriti, particularly the Dharma Shastras, Puranas and Itihasas. Smartas revere the Vedas and honor the Agamas. Today this faith is synonymous with the teachings of Adi Shankara, the monk-philosopher known as *shanmata sthapanacharya*, "founder of the six-sect

system." He campaigned India-wide to consolidate the Hindu faiths of his time under the banner of Advaita Vedanta. To unify the worship, he popularized the ancient Smartha five-Deity altar Ganapati, Surya, Vishnu, Siva and Shakti ¶ and added Kumara.

From these, devotees may choose their "preferred Deity, " or Ishta Devata. Each God is but a reflection of the one Saguna Brahman. Shankara organized hundreds of monasteries into a ten-order, dashanami system, which now has five pontifical centers. He wrote profuse commentaries on the Upanishads, Brahma Sutras and Bhagavad Gita. Sankara proclaimed, "It is the one Reality which appears to our ignorance as a manifold universe of names and forms and changes. Like the gold of which many ornaments are made, it remains in itself unchanged. Such is Brahman, and That art Thou." Aum Namah Sivaya.

Comparing the Four Major Denominations

As just seen, the spectrum of Hindu religiousness is found within four major sects or denominations: Saivism, Shaktism, Vaishnavism and Smartism. Among these four streams, there are certainly more similarities than differences. All four believe in karma and reincarnation and in a Supreme Being who is both form and pervades form, who creates, sustains and destroys the universe only to create it again in unending cycles. They strongly declare the validity and importance of temple worship, in the three worlds of existence and the myriad Gods and devas residing in them.

They concur that there is no intrinsic evil, that the cosmos is created out of God and is permeated by Him. They each believe in maya (though their definitions differ somewhat), and in the liberation of the soul from rebirth, called moksha, as the goal of human existence. They believe in dharma and in ahimsa, noninjury, and in the need for a satguru to lead the soul toward Self Realization. They wear the sacred marks, tilaka, on their foreheads as sacred symbols, though each wears a distinct mark. Finally, they prefer cremation of the body upon death, believing that the soul will inhabit another body in the next life. While Hinduism has many sacred scriptures, all sects ascribe the highest authority to the Vedas and Agamas, though their Agamas differ somewhat. Here, now, is a brief comparison of these four denominations.

On the Personal God/Goddess

Saivism: Personal God and temple Deity is Siva, neither male nor female. Lords Ganesha and Karttikeya are also worshiped.

Shaktism: Personal Goddess and temple Deity is Shri Devi or Shakti, female, worshiped as Rajarajeshvari, Parvati, Lakshmi, Sarasvati, Kali, Amman, etc. the Divine Mother.

Vaishnavism: Personal God and temple Deity is Vishnu, male. His incarnations as Rama and Krishna are also worshiped, as well as His divine consort, Radharani.

Smartism: Personal God and temple Deity is Ishvara, male or female, worshiped as Vishnu, Siva, Shakti, Ganesha and Surya or any Deity of devotee's choice, e.g., Kumara or Krishna.

On the Nature of Shakti

Saivism: Shakti is God Siva's inseparable power and manifest will, energy or mind.

Shaktism: Shakti is an active, immanent Being, separate from a quiescent and remote Siva.

Vaishnavism: No special importance is given to Shakti. However, there are parallels wherein the divine consorts are conceived as the inseparable powers of Vishnu and His incarnations: e.g., Krishna's Radharani and Rama's Sita.

Smartism: Shakti is a divine form of Ishvara. It is God's manifesting power.

On the Nature of Personal God

Saivism: God Siva is pure love and compassion, immanent and transcendent, pleased by our purity and sadhana.

Shaktism: The Goddess Shakti is both compassionate and terrifying, pleasing and wrathful, assuaged by sacrifice and submission.

Vaishnavism: God Vishnu is loving and beautiful, the object of man's devotion, pleased by our service and surrender.

Smartism: Ishvara appears as a human-like Deity according to devotees' loving worship, which is sometimes considered a rudimentary self-purifying practice.

On the Doctrine of Avatara

Saivism: There are no divine earthly incarnations of the Supreme Being.

Shaktism: The Divine Mother does incarnate in this world.

Vaishnavism: Vishnu has ten or more incarnations.

Smartism: All Deities may assume earthly incarnations.

On the Soul and God

Saivism: God Siva is one with the soul. The soul must realize this advaitic (monistic) Truth by God Siva's grace.

Shaktism: The Divine Mother, Shakti, is mediatrix, bestowing advaitic moksha on those who worship Her.

Vaishnavism: God and soul are eternally distinct. Through Lord Vishnu's grace, the soul's destiny is to worship and enjoy God.

Smartism: Ishvara and man are in reality Absolute Brahman. Within maya, the soul and Ishvara appear as two. Jnana (wisdom) dispels the illusion.

Spiritual Practice

Saivism: With bhakti as a base, emphasis is placed on sadhana, tapas (austerity) and yoga. Ascetic.

Shaktism: Emphasis is on bhakti and tantra, sometimes occult, practices. Ascetic-occult.

Vaishnavism: Emphasis is on supreme bhakti or surrender, called prapatti. Generally devotional and nonascetic.

Smartism: Preparatory sadhanas are bhakti, karma, raja yoga. The highest path is through knowledge, leading to jnana.

Major Scriptures

Saivism: Vedas, Saiva Agamas and Saiva Puranas.

Shaktism: Vedas, Shakta Agamas (Tantras) and Puranas.

Vaishnavism: Vedas, Vaishnava Agamas, Puranas and the Itihasas (Ramayana and Mahabharata, especially the Bhagavad Gita).

Smartism: Vedas, Agamas and classical smriti Puranas, Itihasas, especially the Bhagavad Gita, etc.

Regions of Influence

Saivism: Geographically widespread, strongest in South and North India, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Shaktism: Geographically widespread, most prominent in Northeast India, especially Bengal and Assam.

Vaishnavism: Geographically widespread, especially strong throughout India, North and South.

Smartism: Geographically widespread, most prominent in North and South India.

Paths of Attainment

Saivism: The path for Saivites is divided into four progressive stages of belief and practice called charya, kriya, yoga and jnana. The soul evolves through karma and reincarnation from the instinctive-intellectual sphere into virtuous and moral living, then into temple worship and devotion, followed by internalized worship, or yoga, and its meditative disciplines. Union with God Siva comes through the grace of the satguru and culminates in the soul's maturity in the state of jnana, or wisdom. Saivism values both bhakti and yoga, devotional and contemplative sadhanas, or disciplines.

Shaktism: The spiritual practices in Shaktism are similar to those in Saivism, though there is more emphasis in Saktism on God's Power as opposed to Being, on mantras and yantras, and on embracing apparent opposites: male-female, absolute-relative, pleasure-pain, cause-effect, mind-body. Certain sects within Shaktism undertake "left-hand " tantric rites, consciously using the world of form to transmute and eventually transcend that world. The "left-hand " approach is somewhat occult in nature; it is considered a path for the few, not the many. The "right-hand " path is more conservative in nature.

Vaishnavism: Most Vaishnavites believe that religion is the performance of bhakti sadhanas, devotional disciplines, and that man can communicate with and receive the grace of the Gods and Goddesses through the darshan (sight) of their icons. The paths of karma yoga and jnana yoga lead to bhakti yoga. Among the foremost practices of Vaishnavites is chanting the holy names of the Avataras, Vishnu's incarnations, especially Rama and Krishna. Through total self-surrender, prapatti, to Vishnu, to Krishna or to His beloved consort Radharani, liberation from samsara (the cycle of reincarnation) is attained.

Smartism: Smartas, the most eclectic of Hindus, believe that moksha is achieved through jnana yoga alone defined as an intellectual and meditative but non-kundalini-yoga path. Jnana yoga's progressive stages are scriptural study (shravana), reflection (manana) and sustained meditation (dhyana). Guided by a realized guru and avowed to the unreality of the world, the initiate meditates on himself as Brahman, Absolute Reality, to break through the illusion of maya. Devotees may also choose from three other non-successive paths to cultivate devotion, accrue good karma and purify the mind. These are bhakti yoga, karma yoga and raja yoga, which certain Smartas teach can also bring enlightenment.

5. God and Gods of Hinduism

Devotion to God and the Gods of Hinduism is known as Bhakti. It is an entire realm of knowledge and practice unto itself, ranging from the childlike wonder of the unknown and the mysterious to the deep reverence which comes with understanding of esoteric interworkings of the three worlds. Hinduism views existence as composed of three worlds.

The *First World* is the physical universe; the *Second World* is the subtle astral or mental plane of existence in which the devas, angels and spirits live; and the *Third World* is the spiritual universe of the *Mahadevas*, "great shining beings," our Hindu Gods. Hinduism is the harmonious working together of these three worlds.

The most prevalent expression of worship for the Hindu comes as devotion to God and the Gods. In the Hindu pantheon there are said to be three hundred and thirty-three million Gods. Hindus believe in one Supreme Being. The plurality of Gods are perceived as divine creations of that one Being. So, Hinduism has one supreme God, but it has an extensive hierarchy of Gods. Many people look at the Gods as mere symbols, representations of forces or mind strata, or as various Personifications generated as a projection of man's mind onto an impersonal pure Beingness.

Many Hindus have been told over and over that the Gods are not really beings, but merely symbols of spiritual matters, and unfortunately many have accepted this erroneous notion about the Gods. In reality, the *Mahadevas* are individual soul beings, and down through the ages ordinary men and women, great saints and sages, prophets and mystics in all cultures have inwardly seen, heard, and been profoundly influenced by these superconscious inner plane beings. Lord Ganesha is such a being. He can think just as we can think. He can see and understand and make decisions - so vast in their implications and complexity that we could never comprehend them with our human faculties and understanding.

"Great indeed are the Gods who have sprung out of Brahman."

-Atharva Veda

A Hierarchy of Gods Guide Hinduism

A unique and all-encompassing characteristic of Hinduism is that one devotee may be worshipping Ganesha while a friend worships Siva or Vishnu or Kali, yet both honor the other's choice and feel no sense of conflict. The Hindu religion brings us the gift of tolerance that allows for different stages of worship, different and personal expressions of devotion and even different Gods to guide our life on this earth.

Hinduism is a family of four main denominations - Saivism, Shaktism, Vaishnavism, Smartism - under a divine hierarchy of *Mahadevas*. These intelligent beings have evolved through eons of time and are able to help mankind without themselves having to live in a physical body. These great *Mahadevas*, with their multitudes of angelic devas, live and work constantly and tirelessly for the people of our religion, protecting and guiding them, opening new doors and closing unused ones.

In the *Vedas*, God is called *Brahman*, the Supreme Being who simultaneously exists as the absolute transcendent *Parabrahman*, as omniscient consciousness or *shakti* power and as the personal prime Deity. The word *Brahman* comes from the Sanskrit root *Brh* which means to grow, manifest, expand, referring to the *Brahman* Mind of pure consciousness that underlies, emanates and resonates as all existence. *Brahman* is simultaneously *Purusha*, the Primal Soul. He is perfection of being, the original soul who creates/emanates innumerable individual souls - including the Gods. Some Gods, such as Lord Ganesha, did not undergo evolution as we know it, but were emanated as mature *Mahadevas* whose minds simultaneously govern and interpenetrate specific orders of space and time. They are so close to *Brahman* that they fulfill their cosmic functions in perfect accord with God's wisdom, intent and action.

"He who is beyond all exists as the relative universe. That part of Him appears as sentient and insentient beings. From a part of Him was born the body of the universe, and out of this body were born the Gods, the earth and men."

- Rig Veda

As God and the Gods are individual soul beings, so too is humankind. The soul body is a body of light which evolves and matures into the likeness of *Purusha Brahman* just as the seed of a tree one day becomes a tree. Within this body of light and consciousness exist, without beginning or end, the two perfections of *Parabrahman* and *Satchidananda*. *Satchidananda* is the superconscious mind of the soul body - the mind of *Brahman*. *Parabrahman* is the inmost core of the soul. We are That. We do not become That.

"He who sparkles in your eyes, who lights the heavens and hides in the souls of all creatures is God, your Self."

- Siva Yogaswami of the Natha Sampradaya

Our soul body is slowly evolving. Man has five bodies, each more subtle than the last. Visualize the soul of man as a lightbulb and his various bodies or sheaths as colored fabrics covering the pure white light. The physical body is the outermost body. Next comes the pranic body, then the physical body's subtle duplicate, the astral body. Then there is the mental or intellectual body in which one can travel instantaneously anywhere. Then comes the body of the soul. This is the body that evolves from birth to birth, that reincarnates into new outer sheaths and does not die when the physical body returns its elements to the earth. The soul body eventually evolves as the body of golden light, the golden body of the soul. This soul body in its final evolution is the most perfect form, the prototype of human form. Once physical births have ceased, this soul body still continues to evolve in subtle realms of existence. This effulgent body of the illumined soul, even after *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*, God-Realization, continues to evolve in the inner worlds until the final merger into *Brahman*.

"When beholding by this yoga, he beholds the Gold-colored maker, the Lord, the Purusha, Brahman, the cause."

- Maitrayana Upanishad

Do God and the Gods have Gender?

Esoterically, it must be admitted that none of the Gods has a wife. Their consorts are not to be considered as separate from them, but as aspects of their being, as their *shakti* or power. The *Mahadevas* who live in the *Third World* cannot be likened to men and women who live on the earth. They exist in perfectly evolved soul bodies, bodies which are not properly differentiated by sex. They are pure beings made of pure consciousness and light; they are neither male nor female. To better understand these Divine Gods, we sometimes conceive them as being the man if they are strong in expression or the woman if they are gentle and compassionate. There are no husbands and wives in the vast, superconscious realms of the *Third World*. The husband/wife notion is a puranic myth. The term *Goddess* can refer to a female perception or depiction of a *Third World* being (*Mahadeva*) in its natural state, which is genderless, or to a *Second World* being residing in a female astral-mental body. For example, Lakshmi and Sarasvati are not wives of Vishnu and Brahma, but personified powers of a sexless Deity who extends abundance and learning through the motherly empathy of a female form. And many of the village deities who protect children and crops are actually souls living close to earth in the astral plane, still functioning through the astral female or male body that is a duplicate of their last physical body.

*"They meditate on Her to become immortal. The Lord of immortals blesses you.
He who wears the Ganga and contains Her - strive to reach Him."*

- St. Tirumular of the Natha Sampradaya

Communicating with God and the Gods

It is in the Hindu temple that the three worlds meet and devotees invoke the Gods of our religion. The temple is built as a palace in which the Gods live. It is the home of the Gods, a sacred place unlike every other place on the earth. The Hindu must associate himself with these Gods in a very sensitive way when he approaches the temple.

Though the devotee rarely has the psychic vision of the Deity, he is aware of the God's divine presence. As he approaches the sanctum sanctorum, the Hindu is fully aware that an intelligent being, greater and more evolved than himself, is there. This God is intently aware of him, safeguarding him, fully knowing his inmost thought, fully capable of coping with any situation the devotee may mentally lay at his Holy Feet. It is important that we approach the Deity in this way - conscious and confident that our needs are known in the inner spiritual worlds.

The physical representation of the God, be it a stone or metal image, a yantra or other sacred form, simply marks the place that the God will manifest in or hover over in his etheric body. It can be conceived as an antenna to receive the divine rays of the God or as the material body in or through which the God manifests in this *First World*. When we perform puja, a religious ritual, we are attracting the attention of the devas and *Mahadevas* in the inner worlds. That is the purpose of a puja; it is a form of communication. To enhance this communication we establish an altar in the temple or in the home. This becomes charged or magnetized through our devotional thoughts and feelings which radiate out and affect the surrounding environment. You can feel the presence of these divine beings, and this radiation from them is known as *shakti*.

Shakti is a vibration. It is first experienced in the simple physical glimpse of the form of the Deity in the sanctum. Later that physical sight gives way to a clairvoyant vision or to a refined cognition received through the sensitive ganglia within your nerve system: the chakras. Through these receptors a subtle message is received, often not consciously. Perhaps not immediately, but the message that the *shakti* carries from the *Mahadeva* manifests in your life. This is the way the Gods converse. It is a communication more real than the communication of language that you experience each day.

How God and the Gods Help Us

Visiting a Hindu temple, receiving the *shakti* from the majestic Gods of our religion, can altogether change the life of an individual. It alters the flow of the pranas or life currents within his body. It draws his awareness into the deeper chakras. But the change is slow. He lives with the experience for months and months after his visit to the temple. The devotee comes to know and love the Deity.

The Deity extends sublime psychic assistance, but **never** tests or punishes a devotee. *Shakti* coming from the great temples of our Gods can change the patterns of karma dating back many past lives, clearing and clarifying conditions that were created hundreds of years ago and are but seeds now, waiting to manifest in the future. Through the grace of the Gods those seeds can be removed, if the manifestation in the future would not enhance the evolution of the soul.

"As the worshipper sees the image of his Deity in stone, clay, wood, or painting, then the God grants light from the Self completely of His own accord. Thus as fire from wood, the moon casts its reflection in the water pot spontaneously."

- Karana Agama

If a temple or shrine is not available for worship, then it is possible to establish a communication with the Deity through visualization. Take for example, Lord Ganesha, the elephant-headed governor of nature, dharma, science and knowledge. Worship of Lord Ganesha is immediate; to think of His form is to contact Him. Close your eyes for a second, visualize His murthi or form and a direct communication has begun. This is like punching in a code on a computer terminal which gives immediate access to a central supercomputer. All information and answers to every question are now available. Wherever we are, whatever we are doing, we can use the computer terminal of our brain and code in the divine image of Lord Ganesha. We have complete access to His grand computer mind which has been programmed over eons of time and naturally encompasses the intricacies of the universe in all its ramifications and simplicities.

Toward Ultimate Communion: Yoga

Hindus look to God and the Gods for very practical assistance - from affairs of employment, family, heart to knowledge both secular and superconscious. A Hindu devoutly believes that the Gods from their dwelling in the *Third World* are capable of consciously working with the forces of evolution in the universe and they could then certainly manage a few simpler problems.

He devoutly believes that the Gods are given to care for man on the planet and see him through his tenure on earth and that their decisions are vast in their implications. Their overview spans time itself, and yet their detailed focus upon the complicated fabric of human affairs is just as awesome.

It is through the sanction of the Gods that the Hindu undertakes the practice of yoga - that orthodox and strictly Hindu science of meditation that leads to union of the many with the One. Yoga is the culmination of years of religious and devotional service and can only be successful with the support of the Gods who are the sentries guarding the gates of the various strata of consciousness. This sanction, once obtained, can and does allow the kundalini force within the core of the spine to safely rise and merge with the Supreme that all Hindus know is the Absolute - timeless, causeless, and spaceless. But first much work has to be done, much work and worship.

Finally, it must be clearly understood that God and the Gods are not a psychological product of the Hindu religious mind. They are far older than the universe and are the fountainheads of its galactic energies, shining stars and sunlit planets. They are loving overseers and custodians of the cosmos, earth and mankind.

The Hindu cosmological terrain envelopes all of humanity. It is not exclusive. Hinduism has historically accepted converts from other religions and adoptives (those with no previous faith) into its knowledge and practices. The Vedic rishis spoke of guiding strangers into the full embrace of the *Sanatana Dharma*, "the Eternal Path" and into the universal sanctuary of the Hindu pantheon.

A vedic rite called *vratyastoma* purified those returning to Hinduism and Swami Vivekananda declared, "Why, born aliens have been converted in the past by crowds, and the process is still going on." Each citizen of earth so interested has the option of entering the Hindu religion.

6. Karma and Reincarnation

The twin beliefs of karma and reincarnation are among Hinduism's many jewels of knowledge. Others include dharma or our pattern of religious conduct, worshipful communion with God and Gods, the necessary guidance of the Sat Guru, and finally enlightenment through personal realization of our identity in and with God. So the strong-shouldered and keen-minded rishis knew and stated in the Vedas.

And these are not mere assumptions of probing, brilliant minds. They are laws of the cosmos. As God's force of gravity shapes cosmic order, karma shapes experiential order. Our long sequence of lives is a tapestry of creating and resolving karmas-positive, negative and an amalgam of the two. During the succession of a soul's lives-through the mysteries of our higher chakras and God's and Guru's Grace-no karmic situation will arise that exceeds an individual's ability to resolve it in love and understanding.

Many people are very curious about their past lives and expend great time, effort and money to explore them. Actually, this curious probing into past lives is unnecessary. Indeed it is a natural protection from reliving past trauma or becoming infatuated more with our past lives than our present life that the inner recesses of the muladhara memory chakra are not easily accessed. For, as we exist now is a sum total of all our past lives.

In our present moment, our mind and body state is the cumulative result of the entire spectrum of our past lives. So, no matter how great the intellectual knowing of these two key principles, it is how we currently live that positively shapes karma and unfolds us spiritually. Knowing the laws, we are responsible to resolve blossoming karmas from past lives and create karma that, projected into the future, will advance, not hinder, us.

Karma literally means "deed or act," but more broadly describes the principle of cause and effect. Simply stated, karma is the law of action and reaction which governs consciousness. In physics-the study of energy and matter-Sir Isaac Newton postulated that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Push against a wall. Its material is molecularly pushing back with a force exactly equal to yours. In metaphysics, karma is the law that states that every mental, emotional and physical act, no matter how insignificant, is projected out into the psychic mind substance and eventually returns to the individual with equal impact.

The akashic memory in our higher chakras faithfully records the soul's impressions during its series of earthly lives, and in the astral/mental worlds in-between earth existences. Ancient yogis, in psychically studying the time line of cause/effect, assigned three categories to karma. The first is sanchita, the sum total of past karma yet to be resolved. The second category is prarabdha, that portion of sanchita karma being experienced in the present life. Kriyamana, the third type, is karma you are presently creating. However, it must be understood that your past negative karma can be altered into a smoother, easier state through the loving, heart-chakra nature, through dharma and sadhana. That is the key of karmic wisdom. Live religiously well and you will create positive karma for the future and soften negative karma of the past. Truths and Myths About Karma

Karma operates not only individually, but also in ever-enlarging circles of group karma where we participate in the sum karma of multiple souls. This includes family, community, nation, race and religion, even planetary group karma. So if we, individually or collectively, unconditionally love and give, we will be loved and given to. The individuals or groups who act soulfully or maliciously toward us are the vehicle of our own karmic creation.

The people who manifest your karma are also living through past karma and simultaneously creating future karma. For example, if their karmic pattern did not include miserliness, they would not be involved in your karma of selfishness. Another person may express some generosity toward you, fulfilling the gifting karma of your past experience. Imagine how intricately interconnected all the cycles of karma are for our planet's life forms.

Many people believe in the principle of karma, but don't apply its laws to their daily life or even to life's peak experiences. There is a tendency to cry during times of personal crisis, "Why has God done this to me?" or "What did I do to deserve this?" While God is the creator and sustainer of the cosmic law of karma, He does not dispense individual karma. He does not produce cancer in one person's body and develop Olympic athletic prowess in another's. We create our own experiences. It is really an exercising of our soul's powers of creation. Karma, then, is our best spiritual teacher.

We spiritually learn and grow as our actions return to us to be resolved and dissolved. In this highest sense, there is no good and bad karma; there is self-created experience that presents opportunities for spiritual advancement. If we can't draw lessons from the karma, then we resist and/or resent it, lashing out with mental, emotional or physical force. The original substance of that karmic event is spent and no longer exists, but the current reaction creates a new condition of harsh karma.

Responsibility resolving karma is among the most important reasons that a Sat Guru is necessary in a sincere seeker's life. The Guru helps the devotee to hold his mind in focus, to become pointedly conscious of thought, word and deed. Without the guidance and grace of the Guru, the devotee's mind will be splintered between instinctive and intellectual forces, making it very difficult to resolve karma. Only when karma is wisely harnessed can the mind become still enough to experience its own superconscious depths.

Karma is also misunderstood as fate, an unchangeable destiny decreed long ago by agencies or forces external to us such as the planet and stars, or Gods. Karma is neither fate nor predetermination. Each soul has absolute free will. Its only boundary is karma. God and Gods do not dictate the experiential events of our lives, nor do they test us. And there is no cosmic force that molds our life. Indeed, when beseeched through deep prayer and worship, the Supreme Being and His great Gods may intercede within our karma, lightening its impact or shifting its location in time to a period when we are better prepared to resolve it. Hindu astrology, or Jyotisha, details a real relation between ourselves and the geography of the solar system and certain star clusters, but it is not a cause-effect relation.

Planets and stars don't cause or dictate karma. Their orbital relationships establish proper conditions for karmas to activate and a particular type of personality nature to develop. Jyotisha describes a relation of revelation: it reveals prarabdha karmic patterns for a given birth and how we will generally react to them (kriyamana karma). This is like a pattern of different colored windows allowing sunlight in to reveal and color a house's arrangement of furniture. With astrological knowledge we are aware of our life's karmic pattern and can thereby anticipate it wisely. Reincarnation: A Soul's Path to Godness

The soul dwells as the inmost body of light and superconscious, universal mind of a series of nested bodies, each more refined than the next: physical, pranic, astral, mental. In our conscious mind we think and feel ourselves to be a physical body with some intangible spirit within it. Yet, right now our real identity is the soul that is sensing through its multiple bodies physical, emotional and mental experience. Recognizing this as reality, we powerfully know that life doesn't end with the death of the biological body. The soul continues to occupy the astral body, a subtle, luminous duplicate of the physical body. This subtle body is made of higher-energy astral matter and dwells in a dimension called the astral plane. If the soul body itself is highly evolved, it will occupy the astral/mental bodies on a very refined plane of the astral known as the Devaloka, "the world of light-shining beings." At death, the soul slowly becomes totally aware in its astral/mental bodies and it predominantly lives through those bodies in the astral dimension.

The soul functions with complete continuity in its astral/mental bodies. It is with these sensitive vehicles that we experience dream or "astral" worlds during sleep every night. The astral world is equally as solid and beautiful, as varied and comprehensive as the earth dimension-if not much more so. Spiritual growth, psychic development, guidance in matters of governance and commerce, artistic cultivation, inventions and discoveries of medicine, science and technology all continue by astral people who are "in-between" earthly lives. Many of the Veda hymns entreat the assistance of devas: advanced astral or mental people.

Yet, also in the grey, lower regions of this vast, invisible dimension exist astral people whose present pursuits are base, selfish, even sadistic. Where the person goes in the astral plane at sleep or death is dependent upon his earthly pursuits and the quality of his mind.

Because certain seed karmas can only be resolved in earth consciousness and because the soul's initial realizations of Absolute Reality are only achieved in a physical body, our soul joyously enters another biological body. At the right time, it is reborn into a flesh body that will best fulfill its karmic pattern. In this process, the current astral body-which is a duplicate of the last physical form-is sluffed off as a lifeless shell that in due course disintegrates, and a new astral body develops as the new physical body grows. This entering into another body is called reincarnation: "re-occupying the flesh."

During our thousands of earth lives, a remarkable variety of life patterns are experienced. We exist as male and female, often switching back and forth from life to life as the nature becomes more harmonized into a person exhibiting both feminine nurturing and masculine intrepidity. We come to earth as princesses and presidents, as paupers and pirates, as tribals and scientists, as murderers and healers, as atheists and, ultimately, God-Realized sages. We take bodies of every race and live the many religions, faiths and philosophies as the soul gains more knowledge and evolutionary experience.

Therefore, the Hindu knows that the belief in a single life on earth, followed by eternal joy or pain is utterly wrong and causes great anxiety, confusion and fear. Hindus know that all souls reincarnate, take one body and then another, evolving through experience over long periods of time. Like the caterpillar's metamorphosis into the butterfly, death doesn't end our existence but frees us to pursue an even greater development.

Understanding the laws of the death process, the Hindu is vigilant of his thoughts and mental loyalties. He knows that the contents of his mind at the point of death in large part dictate where he will function in the astral plane and the quality of his next birth. Secret questionings and doubt of Hindu belief, and associations with other belief systems will automatically place him among like-minded people whose beliefs are alien to Hinduism.

A nominal Hindu on earth could be a selfish materialist in the astral world. The Hindu also knows that death must come naturally, in its own course, and that suicide only accelerates the intensity of one's karma, bringing a series of immediate lesser births and requiring several lives for the soul to return to the exact evolutionary point that existed at the moment of suicide, at which time the still-existing karmic entanglements must again be faced and resolved.

Two other karmically sensitive processes are: 1.) artificially sustaining life in a wholly incapacitated physical body through mechanical devices, drugs or intravenous feeding; and 2.) euthanasia, "mercy killing." There is a critical timing in the death transition. The dying process can involve long suffering or be peaceful or painfully sudden: all dependent on the karma involved. To keep a person on life support with the sole intent of continuing the body's biological functions nullifies the natural timing of death. It also keeps the person's astral body earthbound, tethered to a lower astral region rather than being released into higher astral levels.

An important lesson to learn here is that karma is conditioned by intent. When the medical staff receives a dangerously ill or injured person and they place him on life support as part of an immediate life-saving procedure, their intent is pure healing. If their attempts are unsuccessful, then the life-support devices are turned off, the person dies naturally and there is no karma involved and it does not constitute euthanasia.

However, if the doctors, family or patient decide to continue life support indefinitely to prolong biological processes, (usually motivated by a Western belief of a single life) then the intent carries full karmic consequences. When a person is put on long-term life support, he must be left on it until some natural biological or environmental event brings death. If he is killed through euthanasia, this again further disturbs the timing of the death. As a result, the timing of future births would be drastically altered.

Euthanasia, the willful destruction of a physical body, is a very serious karma. This applies to all cases including someone experiencing long-term, intolerable pain. Even such difficult life experiences must be allowed to resolve themselves naturally. Dying may be painful, but death itself is not. All those involved (directly or indirectly) in euthanasia will proportionately take on the remaining prarabdha karma of the dying person. And the euthanasia participants will, to the degree contributed, face a similar karmic situation in this or a future life.

Finally, there is exercising wisdom-which is knowing and using divine law-in the overall context of any situation. For example, a vegetative person in a coma is on long-term life support in a hospital when a patient is brought in for emergency treatment requiring that same life support equipment. Weighing the two karmas, a doctor could dharmically unplug the comatose patient in order to save the other's life. Moksha: Freedom From Rebirth

Life's real attainment is not money, not material luxury, not sexual or eating pleasure, not intellectual, business or political power, or any other of the instinctive or intellectual needs. These are natural pursuits, to be sure, but our divine purpose on this earth is to personally realize our identity in and with God. This is now called by many names: enlightenment, Self-Realization, God-Realization and Nirvikalpa Samadhi. After many lifetimes of wisely controlling the creation of karma and resolving past karmas when they return, the soul is fully matured in the knowledge of these divine laws and the highest use of them.

Through the practice of yoga, the Hindu bursts into God's superconscious Mind, the experience of bliss, all-knowingness, perfect silence. His intellect is transmuted, and he soars into the Absolute Reality of God. He is a jnani, a knower of the Known. When the jnani is stable in repeating his realization of the Absolute, there is no longer a need for physical birth, for all lessons have been learned, all karmas fulfilled and Godness is his natural mind state. That individual soul is then naturally liberated, freed from the cycle of birth, death & rebirth on this planet. After Moksha, our soul continues its evolution in the inner worlds, eventually to merge back into its origin: God, the Primal Soul.

Every Hindu expects to seek for and attain moksha. But he or she does not expect that it will necessarily come in this present life. Hindus know this and do not delude themselves that this life is the last. Seeking and attaining profound spiritual realizations, they nevertheless know that there is much to be accomplished on earth and that only mature, God-Realized souls attain Moksha.

God may seem distant and remote as the experience of our self-created karmas cloud our mind. Yet, in reality, the Supreme Being is always closer to you than the beat of your heart. His Mind pervades the totality of your karmic experience and lifetimes. As karma is God's cosmic law of cause and effect, dharma is God's law of Being, including the pattern of Hindu religiousness. Through following dharma and controlling thought, word and deed, karma is harnessed and wisely created.

You become the master, the knowing creator, not a helpless victim. Through being consistent in our religiousness, following the yamas and niyamas (Hindu restraints and observances), performing the pancha nitya karmas (five constant duties), seeing God everywhere and in everyone, our past karma will soften. We may experience the karma indirectly through seeing someone else going through a situation that we intuitively know was a karma we also were to face. But because of devout religiousness, we may experience it vicariously or in lesser intensity. For example, a physical karma may manifest as a mental experience or a realistic dream; an emotional karmic storm may just barely touch our mind before dying out.

The belief in karma and reincarnation brings to each Hindu inner peace and self-assurance. The Hindu knows that the maturing of the soul takes many lives, and that if the soul is immature in the present birth, then there is hope, for there will be many opportunities for learning and growing in future lives. Yes, these beliefs and the attitudes they produce eliminate anxiety, giving the serene perception that everything is all right as it is. And, there is also a keen insight into the human condition and appreciation for people in all stages of spiritual unfoldment.

7. Basic Vedic Principles

Herewith are ancient Vedic texts extracted from humanity's most profound faith; Hinduism, preserved and collected over five thousand years ago; almost all of the principles are prescribed for practice by the major religions and faiths of the world, please spend a few minutes to read it.

Hinduism's Code of Conduct

Twenty keys for spiritual living in contemporary times

Ten Vedic Restraints - YAMA

Yama 1 - Noninjury, Ahimsa

Practice noninjury, not harming others by thought, word or deed, even in your dreams.

Live a kindly life, revering all beings as expressions of the One Divine energy. Let go of fear and insecurity, the sources of abuse. Knowing that harm caused to others unfailingly returns to oneself, live peacefully with God's creation. Never be a source of dread, pain or injury. Follow a vegetarian diet.

Yama 2 - Truthfulness, Satya

Adhere to truthfulness, refraining from lying and betraying promises. Speak only that which is true, kind, helpful and necessary. Knowing that deception creates distance, don't keep secrets from family or loved ones. Be fair, accurate and frank in discussions, a stranger to deceit. Admit your failings. Do not engage in slander, gossip or backbiting. Do not bear false witness against another.

Yama 3 - Nonstealing, Asteya

Uphold the virtue of nonstealing, neither thieving, coveting nor failing to repay debt.

Control your desires and live within your means. Do not use borrowed resources for unintended purposes or keep them past due. Do not gamble or defraud others. Do not renege on promises. Do not use others' names, words, resources or rights without permission and acknowledgement.

Yama 4 - Divine Conduct, Brahmacharya

Practice divine conduct, controlling lust by remaining celibate when single and faithful in marriage. Before marriage, use vital energies in study, and after marriage in creating family success. Don't waste the sacred force by promiscuity in thought, word or deed. Be restrained with the opposite sex. Seek holy company. Dress and speak modestly. Shun pornography, sexual humor and violence.

Yama 5 - Patience, Kshama

Exercise patience, restraining intolerance with people and impatience with circumstances. Be agreeable. Let others behave according to their nature, without adjusting to you. Don't argue, dominate conversations or interrupt others. Don't be in a hurry. Be patient with children and the elderly. Minimize stress by keeping worries at bay. Remain poised in good times and bad.

Yama 6 - Steadfastness, Dhriti

Foster steadfastness, overcoming nonperseverance, fear, indecision and changeableness.

Achieve your goals with a prayer, purpose, plan, persistence and push. Be firm in your decisions. Avoid sloth and procrastination. Develop willpower, courage and industriousness. Overcome obstacles. Never carp or complain. Do not let opposition or fear of failure result in changing strategies.

Yama 7 - Compassion, Daya

Practice compassion, conquering callous, cruel and insensitive feelings toward all beings. See God everywhere.

Be kind to people, animals, plants and the Earth itself. Forgive those who apologize and show true remorse. Foster sympathy for others' needs and suffering. Honor and assist those who are weak, impoverished, aged or in pain. Oppose family abuse and other cruelties.

Yama 8 - Honesty, Arjava

Maintain honesty, renouncing deception and wrongdoing. Act honorably even in hard times. Obey the laws of your nation and locale. Pay your taxes. Be straightforward in business. Do an honest day's work. Do not bribe or accept bribes. Do not cheat, deceive or circumvent to achieve an end. Be frank with yourself. Face and accept your faults without blaming them on others.

Yama 9 - Moderate Appetite, Mitahara

Be moderate in appetite, neither eating too much nor consuming meat, fish, shellfish, fowl or eggs. Enjoy fresh, wholesome vegetarian foods that vitalize the body. Avoid junk food. Drink non-alcoholic beverages in moderation. Eat at regular times, only when hungry, at a moderate pace, never between meals, in a disturbed atmosphere or when upset. Follow a simple diet, avoiding rich or fancy fare.

Yama 10 - Purity, Saucha

Uphold the ethic of purity, avoiding impurity in mind, body and speech. Maintain a clean, healthy body. Keep a pure, uncluttered home and workplace. Act virtuously.

Keep good company, never mixing with adulterers, thieves or other impure people.

Keep away from pornography and violence. Never use harsh, angered or indecent language. Worship devoutly. Meditate daily.

Ten Vedic Practices - NIYAMA

Niyama 1 - Remorse, Hri

Allow yourself the expression of remorse, being modest and showing shame for misdeeds. Recognize your errors, confess and make amends. Sincerely apologize to those hurt by your words or deeds. Resolve all contention before sleep. Seek out and correct your faults and bad habits. Welcome correction as a means to bettering yourself. Do not boast. Shun pride and pretension.

Niyama 2 - Contentment, Santosha

Nurture contentment, seeking joy and serenity in life. Be happy, smile and uplift others. Live in constant gratitude for your health, your friends and your belongings, Don't complain about what you don't possess. Identify with the eternal You, rather than mind, body or emotions.

Keep the mountaintop view that life is an opportunity for spiritual progress.

Niyama 3 - Giving, Dana

Be generous to a fault, giving liberally without thought of reward. Tithe, offering one tenth of your gross income (dashamamsha), as God's money, to temples, ashrams and spiritual organizations. Approach the temple with offerings. Visit gurus with gifts in hand. Donate religious literature. Feed and give to those in need. Bestow your time and talents without seeking praise. Treat guests as God.

Niyama 4 - Faith, Astikya

Cultivate an unshakable faith. Believe firmly in God, guru and your path to enlightenment. Trust in the words of the masters, the scriptures and traditions. Practice devotion and sadhana to inspire experiences that build advanced faith. Be loyal to your lineage, one with your satguru. Shun those who try to break your faith by argument and accusation.

Niyama 5 - Worship, Ishvara-Pujana

Cultivate devotion through daily worship and meditation. Set aside one room of your home as God's shrine. Offer fruit, flowers or food daily. Learn a simple puja/prayer and the chants. Meditate after each puja/prayer. Visit your shrine before and after leaving the house. Worship in heartfelt devotion, clearing the inner channels to God, Gods and guru so their grace flows toward you and loved ones.

Niyama 6 - Scriptural Listening, Siddhanta Shravana

Eagerly hear the scriptures, study the teachings and listen to the wise of your lineage. Choose a guru, follow his path and don't waste time exploring other ways.

Read, study and, above all, listen to readings and dissertations by which wisdom flows from knower to seeker. Avoid secondary texts that preach violence. Revere and study the revealed scriptures, the Vedas and Agamas.

Niyama 7 - Cognition, Mati

Develop a spiritual will and intellect with your satguru's guidance. Strive for knowledge of God, to awaken the light within. Discover the hidden lesson in each experience to develop a profound understanding of life and yourself. Through meditation, cultivate intuition by listening to the still, small voice within, by understanding the subtle sciences, inner worlds and mystical texts.

Niyama 8 - Sacred Vows, Vrata

Embrace religious vows, rules and observances and never waver in fulfilling them.

Honor vows as spiritual contracts with your soul, your community, with God and guru. Take vows to harness the instinctive nature. Fast periodically. Pilgrimage yearly. Uphold your vows strictly, be they marriage, monasticism, nonaddiction, tithing, loyalty to a lineage, Vegetarianism, non-smoking or non-alcoholism.

Niyama 9 - Recitation, Japa

Chant your holy mantra daily, reciting the sacred sound, word or phrase given by your guru. Bathe first, quiet the mind and concentrate fully to let japa harmonize, purify and uplift you. Heed your instructions and chant the prescribed repetitions without fail. Live free of anger so that japa strengthens your higher nature. Let japa quell emotions and quiet the rivers of thought.

Niyama 10 - Austerity, Tapas

Practice austerity, serious disciplines, penance and sacrifice. Be ardent in worship, meditation and pilgrimage. Atonement for misdeeds through penance (prayashchitta), such as 108 prostrations or fasting. Perform self-denial, giving up cherished possessions, money or time. Fulfill severe austerities at special times, under a satguru's guidance, to ignite the inner fires of self-transformation.

8. The Hindu Ethic of Non-Violence

Exploring Non-Injury as a Way to Achieve Harmony with Our Environment, Peace Between Peoples and Compassion Within Ourselves.

Many are the sources of Hindu thought which inspire men and women to live the ideals of compassion and nonviolence. The rishis who revealed the principles of dharma or divine law in Hindu scripture knew full well the potential for human suffering and the path which could avert it. To them a one spiritual power flowed in and through all things in this universe, animate and inanimate, conferring existence by its presence. To them life was a coherent process leading all souls without exception to enlightenment, and no violence could be carried to the higher reaches of that ascent.

These rishis were mystics whose revelation disclosed a cosmos in which all beings exist in interlaced dependence. The whole was contained in the part, and the part in the whole. Based on this cognition, they taught a philosophy of non-difference of self and other, asserting that in the final analysis we are not separate from the world and its manifest forms nor from the Divine which shines forth in all things and all peoples. From this understanding of oneness arose the philosophical basis for the practice of noninjury and Hinduism's ancient commitment to it.

We all know that Hindus, who are one-sixth of the human race today, believe in the existence of God everywhere, as an all-pervasive, self-effulgent energy and consciousness. This basic belief creates the attitude of sublime tolerance and acceptance toward others. Even tolerance is insufficient to describe the compassion and reverence the Hindu holds for the intrinsic sacredness within all things. Therefore, the actions of all Hindus are rendered benign or ahimsa. One would not want to hurt something which one revered.

On the other hand, when the fundamentalists of any religion teach an unrelenting duality based on good and evil, man and nature or God and Devil, this creates friends and enemies. This belief is a sacrilege to Hindus because they know that the attitudes which are the by-product are totally dualistic, and for good to triumph over that which is alien or evil, it must kill out that which is considered to be evil.

The Hindu looks at nothing as intrinsically evil. To him the ground is sacred. The sky is sacred. The sun is sacred. His wife is a goddess. Her husband is a god. Their children are devas. Their home is a shrine. Life is a pilgrimage to mukti or liberation from rebirth, which once attained is the end to reincarnation in a physical body. When on a holy pilgrimage, one would not want to hurt anyone along the way, knowing full well the experiences on this path are of one's own creation, though maybe acted out through others.

In Sanskrit himsa is doing harm or causing injury. The "a" placed before the word negates it. Very simply, ahimsa is abstaining from causing hurt or harm. It is gentleness and noninjury, whether physical, mental or emotional. It is good to know that nonviolence speaks only to the most extreme forms of wrongdoing, while ahimsa (which includes not killing) goes much deeper to prohibit the subtle abuse and the simple hurt.

In his commentary on the Yoga Sutras, sage Vyasa defines ahimsa as "the absence of injuriousness (anabhidroha) toward all living beings (sarvabhuta) in all respects (sarvatha) and for all times (sarvada)." He noted that a person who draws near one engaged in the true practice of ahimsa would be freed from all enmity. Similarly, Patanjali (circa 100 ce) regards ahimsa as the yogi's mahavrata, the great vow and foremost spiritual discipline which those seeking Truth must follow strictly and without fail. This was not meant merely to condemn killing, but extended to harm caused by one's thoughts, words and deeds of all kinds--including injury to the natural environment. Even the intent to injure, even violence committed in a dream, is a violation of the principle of ahimsa.

Beliefs, attitudes and actions interact to produce peace or violence. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (IV, 4, ii, 6) says: "Here they say that a person consists of desires. And as is his desire, so is his will. And as is his will, so is his deed; and whatever deed he does, that he will reap." Every belief creates certain attitudes. Those attitudes govern all of our actions. Man's actions can thus be traced to his inmost beliefs about himself and about the world around him. If those beliefs are erroneous, his actions will not be in tune with the universal dharma.

For instance, the belief in the existence of an all-pervasive Divinity throughout the universe creates an attitude of reverence, benevolence and compassion for all animate and inanimate beings. This equals ahimsa, non-hurtfulness. The belief in the duality of heaven and hell, the white forces and the dark forces, creates the attitude that we must be on our guard, and that we are justified in giving injury, physically and emotionally to others whom we judge to be bad, pagan or unworthy for other reasons. Such thinking leads to rationalizing so-called righteous wars and conflicts. We can sum this up from the Hindu, Buddhist and Jain traditions: ahimsa is higher consciousness, and himsa, hurtfulness, is lower consciousness.

Hindus oppose killing for several reasons. Belief in karma and reincarnation are strong forces at work in the Hindu mind. They full well know that any thought, feeling or action sent out from themselves to another will return to them through yet another in equal or amplified velocity. What we have done to others will be done to us, if not in this life then in another. The Hindu is thoroughly convinced that violence which he commits will return to him by a cosmic process that is

unerring. Two thousand years ago South India's weaver saint Tiruvalluvar said it so simply, "All suffering recoils on the wrongdoer himself. Therefore, those who desire not to suffer refrain from causing others pain." A similar view can be found in the Jain scripture Acaranga Sutra:

To do harm to others is to do harm to oneself. You are he whom you intend to kill. You are he whom you intend to dominate. We corrupt ourselves as soon as we intend to corrupt others. We kill ourselves as soon as we intend to kill others.

Because of the knowledge of reincarnation, the Hindu knows that he may one day be in the same position of anyone he might be inclined to harm or persecute. The Hindu who is consciously aware within his soul knows that he is the time traveller and may incarnate, take a body of flesh in the society he most opposed, in order to equalize his hates and fears into a greater understanding which would result in the release of ignorance. The knowledgeable Hindu is well aware of all these possibilities.

Ahimsa is certainly not cowardice; it is wisdom. And wisdom is the cumulative knowledge of the existing divine laws of reincarnation, karma, dharma, the all-pervasiveness and sacredness of things, blended together within the psyche or soul of the Hindu.

Peace is a reflection of spiritual consciousness, and violence is a reflection of unevolved or base consciousness. The Hindu knows that at this time on this planet those of the lower nature, unevolved people, are society's antagonists. Being unevolved, they are of the lower nature, self-assertive, confused and protective of their immediate environment. All others are their enemies. They are jealous, angry, fearful. Many take sport in killing for the sake of killing, thieving for the sake of theft, even if they do not need or use the spoils. This is the lower nature, and is equally distributed among the peoples of the world in every nation, society and neighborhood. Those of the higher nature--ten, fifteen or twenty percent of the population--live in protective environments. Their occupation is research, memory, education, which is reason; moving the world's goods here and there, which is will. Those of yet a higher nature delve into the mysteries of the universe, and others work for universal peace and love on earth, as groups and individuals. The Hindu knows that those of the lower nature will slowly, over an experiential period of time, come into the higher nature, and that those of the higher nature, who have worked so hard to get there, will avoid the lower nature and not allow themselves to be caught up in it. Hindus believe in the progress of humanity, from an old age into a new age, from darkness into a consciousness of divine light.

There is a spiritual urge in every soul for peace. Even if a person is violent now, he or she inwardly yearns for peace. Man is essentially an instinctive, intellectual and superconscious, or soul, person. The instinctive nature is based on good and

bad, mine and yours, up and down pairs of opposites. The soul nature is based on oneness, humility, peace, compassion, love, helpfulness. The intellectual nature is based on trying to figure both of these two out. It juggles knowledge from the lower nature to the higher nature and from higher nature to the lower nature. It works out formulas, finds solutions and processes knowledge.

The key is yoga, yoking the soul with the energies of the physical body (the instinctive nature) and yoking the energies of the soul with the energies of the mind (intellectual nature) and then, simply, one becomes consciously conscious in the soul. This is an experience to be experienced, and for the Hindu it is personal experience of God which is essential for liberation. The Hindu strives to be consciously conscious of his soul. When those soulful qualities are unfolded, he is filled with a divine love and would not hurt a flea if he could help it.

People everywhere today are wondering, what's the best way to teach peace to the world? The best way is to teach families to be peaceful within their own home, to settle all arguments and contention before they sleep at night, even if they stay up for three days, so the children can see that peace can be attained and then maintained through the use of intelligence. Humans do not have horns or claws, nor do they have sharp teeth. Their weapon is their intelligence. Children must be taught through the example of parents and by learning the undeniable facts of life, the basic tenets--that an all-pervasive force holds this universe together, that we create with this force every minute, every hour, every day, and because time is a cycle, what we create comes back to us. It is up to the parents to create the peacemakers of the future. It is always up to the parents. And remember, we teach children in only one way--by our own example.

Parents must teach children to appreciate those who are different, those who believe differently. Teach them the openness that they need to live in a pluralistic world where others have their unique ways, their life and culture. Teach them the value of human diversity and the narrow-mindedness of a provincial outlook. Give them the tools to live in a world of differences without feeling threatened, without forcing their ways or their will on others. Teach them that it never helps to hurt another of our brothers or sisters.

An individual can find total peace within himself, not through meditation alone--for peaceful actions must follow introspection--not through drugs, not through psychology or psychiatry, but through control. Peace is the natural state of the mind. It is there, inside, to be discovered in meditation and then radiated out to others.

How do we bring individuals to this point? Of course, if the educational system promotes it, in every community the greatest potential for peace will be achieved.

The educational system is controlled by the adults, so they have to come to terms with the fact that they must not be hurtful--physically, mentally or emotionally--and accept the basic principles of the sanatana dharma: all-pervasive energy, cause and effect and coming back in a physical birth until all scores are settled. Once the adults accomplish this, these basic principles of life will naturally be passed on to the next generation.

Some souls are always coming up through the instinctive nature, and thus even though mature souls have achieved peace, others are coming along the path. In a complete humanity, there are always those of higher consciousness and those of lower consciousness. At this time on the planet, it is the intrinsic duty of higher-consciousness people to be more self-assertive, let their voices be heard and take up the banner in a heroic way, join committees, enter government, while at the same time maintaining the peace within their own home and holding a benign reverence for all living beings.

Ahimsa begins in the home, in the bedroom, in the kitchen, in the garden, in the living room. When himsa, harmfulness, arises in the home, it must be settled before sleep, or else those vrittis, those waves of the mind, which were disturbed by the creation of the situation, will go to seed to erupt at a later time in life. We cannot expect the children to control themselves if the parents do not control themselves.

Those who attain a personal peace by controlling their instinctive nature become the spiritual leaders of human society. People who do become these leaders retroactively control the masses because of their spirit, their soul force--not because of the mind force, their cleverness, their deceptions, their political power, their money or contacts. They are the people in the higher consciousness who control lower consciousness by lifting up the masses, as parents are supposed to uplift their children.

According to Hinduism, to have a nonviolent world would simply mean that all individuals have to somehow or other reconcile their differences enough so that the stress their differences produce can no longer take over their mind, body and emotions, causing them to perform injurious acts. Again, this would begin in the home. Peaceful homes breed gentle people. Gentle people follow ahimsa. Furthermore, the belief structure of each individual must allow for the acceptance of the eternal truths, which I mentioned before--returning to flesh to reabsorb back the karmic energies released in a previous life, and of course, the belief in the existence of an all-pervading power. As long as our beliefs are dualistic, we will continue to generate antagonism and that will erupt here and there in violence.

At an international and national level, we must become more tolerant. Religious leaders and their congregations need to learn and teach tolerance for everyone

and everything, for other faiths. First this must be taught to the religious leaders themselves, the rabbis, imams, roshis, swamis, acharyas, bhikkus, sants and priests. Tolerance and intolerance are basic attitudes found in our belief systems. These are things that one can learn.

In our various nations, in the United Nations and other world bodies we can promote laws which recognize and take action against crimes of violence. The world must as a body come to the conclusion that such crimes are totally unacceptable. To abhor violence is a state of higher consciousness.

Someone who was previously violent can become nonviolent. It is a matter of realizing what life is really all about and how harming others violates our own inner being. When an injurious act is committed, it makes a mark deep within the mind of the violator. Those individuals who become penitent bring higher energies into themselves, and these energies slowly heal this mark.

But there is more to it than this. Certain kinds of spiritual "therapy" must go along with the penitent mood for a total healing to occur, which would be absolution. This therapy is finding a way to pay back society for the harm caused in that act of violence. It may be working as a nurse's aid or as a volunteer to help in the healing of people who have been victimized by the violent acts of others. The modern laws of community service are good, but for a total healing and change of heart, the service to the community should be more directly related to the actual crime the person committed. Finally, over a long period of time, the matter is totally resolved in the mind of the person and those who know him. Then he would be as much a nonviolent as he was previously a violent person.

Spiritual revelation or realization can bring someone who previously felt ok about it to not feel ok about injurious acts. One example that people are familiar with is the experience of the astronauts who orbit the earth. From their cosmic perspective they see no borders, no divisions, only a one small planet, and this has tended to make them peacemakers. Their journey in space has been called the Overview Effect and would indeed be a revelation of higher consciousness. In deep states of consciousness such visions also happen and do change peoples' lives. But contemplative experiences come for the most part to contemplative people.

Many people do have life-transforming mystical experiences, a soldier on a battlefield, someone who nearly dies. These experiences can change our view of the universe, but transforming experiences come to real nice people, people with love and trust. Maybe they are not too intelligent and get drawn into situations where they are overtaken by a fit of temper. But their remorse is immediate. A contrite or penitent reaction to hurting others is the sign of a higher consciousness person. Maybe the karma they caused is heavy, but their soul goes to work on the situation and the healing process starts within their mind.

Possibly the intensity of the violent mishap, which we might say is an uncontrolled mishap, itself creates a deep remorse which catalyzes the big awakening into higher consciousness.

Many groups on the planet today believe that killing and violence for a righteous cause is just and proper, and thus that war is dharmic. They would not agree with the idea that violence is necessarily of the lower nature. A righteous cause is only a matter of opinion. Conditions at hand may force a situation where violence or killing seems to be necessary. However, going to war affects the lives of innocent people. It's a big karmic responsibility. Combat through war, righteous or not, is lower consciousness. Religious values are left aside to be picked up and continued when the war is over or in the next life or the one after that. Higher consciousness people will not fight even if their lives depend on it. They are conscientious objectors, and there have been many in every country who have been imprisoned or killed because they would not take up arms against their brother and sister humans. This is the strictest Hindu law. But all 750 million Hindus are not living in a perfect state of ahimsa all of the time. Hindus, like other human beings, unfortunately do kill people. In self-defense or in order to protect his family or his village, the Hindu may have to hurt an intruder. Even then he would harbor no hatred in his heart. Hindus should never instigate an intrusion, or instigate a death, nor seek revenge nor plot retaliation for injuries received. They have their courts of justice, punishment for crimes and methods of defense against the aggressor or the intruder. Before any punishment, so to speak, all other avenues of persuasion and intelligence would be looked into, as Hindus believe that intelligence is their best weapon. In following dharma the only rigid rule is wisdom. My Sat Guru Siva Yogaswami said, "It is a sin to kill the tiger in the jungle. But if he comes into the village, it may become your duty." A Hindu would give warnings to the tiger, would try to capture the tiger without injury.

Have you ever noticed that some people work for peace and others seem always to work for contention? There are two kinds of children or souls that are born on this planet and spoken of in our Vedas and other scriptures. Some come to earth from up down and others from down up. This means that the children who come to earth from up down come from a place in the inner world of higher consciousness and the children who come to earth from down up come to earth from a place in the inner world of lower consciousness. We call the place of higher consciousness the Devaloka and the place of lower consciousness the Narakaloka. The Devaloka is a heaven world and the Narakaloka is not.

The Narakaloka exists wherever violence and hurtfulness take place, whether in the inner or outer world. We see such things in action on television. On the astral plane the terrible happenings perpetuated by Narakaloka people are much worse than in the physical world. Children who are born into earth consciousness from the Narakaloka will not respond to meditation, yoga or any kind of quieting controls.

They are strangers to self-discipline, and enemies to their own parents. But the children who are born into earth consciousness from the Devaloka do respond to meditation, yoga and all kinds of methods of self-control. These are the gentle people. Self-control & personal advancement are the reasons they have taken a birth. How then to tell the difference between these two kinds of people? The mere fact that someone becomes penitent would show us that they are really a Devaloka person. This is because Narakaloka people don't become penitent. There is another way to tell the difference and that is by looking into the eyes of the person. Narakaloka people generally have dull or sullen eyes, whereas Devaloka people have bright, clear, wide-open eyes. The former come from the world of darkness, the latter from the world of light. It is difficult to tell the difference at times because the Narakaloka people are very cunning, and they will try to appear in the way they feel they should to meet up to your standards. They must be tested.

Peace will only come when the Narakaloka people are lifted up and made to obey the new standards in the world, standards which must be set by the Devaloka people. It is when the Devaloka people are in charge that peace will truly come; it can come in no other way. So, if the Devaloka people really desire to have a peace on earth, they should not be shy but take charge.

There is no other way, because the problems of conflict reside within this low-minded group of people who only know retaliation as a way of life. To antagonize others is their sport. They must be curtailed off and seen for what they are. Improvement has to come through their own self-effort. But, they are always overly stimulated by doing so many misdeeds that self-effort toward any kind of improvement is never even thought of. From their soul's evolution they must learn, and their own mistakes will be the teacher.

People of the lower-nature cannot be made peaceful. Narakaloka people are not open to persuasion. They are kings in their own domain. There are many doors into higher consciousness, and if the Devaloka people get too involved with people of a lower nature, they may have violence awakened within them. Lower consciousness people are always looking for recruits to bring into their world. This sounds like a sad story, but it is nonetheless true. You see it happening around you every day.

It would, of course, be wonderful to think that all people in this world are the same--and they are in the deepest sense. But our sages and rishis and wisdom itself tell us that we cannot expect the same of everyone in this birth. By recognizing the differences in each soul's maturity, we also recognize the process of reincarnation, which gives us young souls and old souls. However, the problem is not only with people of the lower nature, it is also with people of the higher nature.

We must affirm again that at this time on the planet it is the solemn duty of higher-consciousness people to be more self-assertive, let their voices be heard and take up the banner of peace in a heroic way, join committees, enter government, while maintaining the peace within their own home and holding a benign reverence for all living beings.

Nonviolence should be redefined to include not only killing, but also causing injury physically, mentally or emotionally--even in the most subtle ways. We can injure ourselves, we can injure our environment, we can injure nature's other creatures and thus be a source of pain and sorrow. Or we can live a harmless life and be a source of healing and joy.

On a personal level, much can be done. Vegetarianism is a natural and obvious way to live with a minimum of hurt to other beings. Those who minister among Hindus have learned that vegetarian families have far fewer problems than those who are not vegetarian.

The abhorrence of killing of any kind leads quite naturally to a vegetarian diet. If you think about it, the meat-eater is participating indirectly in a violent act against the animal kingdom. His desire for meat drives another man to kill and provide that meat. The act of the butcher begins with the desire of the consumer. When his consciousness lifts and expands, he will abhor violence and not be able to even digest the meat, fish and eggs he was formerly consuming. The opposite of causing injury to others is compassion and love for all beings. A great Hindu scripture puts it nicely: "How can he practice true compassion who eats the flesh of an animal to fatten his own flesh?"

If children are raised as vegetarians, every day they are exposed to noninjury as a principle of peace and compassion. Every day they are growing up, they are remembering and being reminded to not kill. They won't even kill another creature to feed themselves. And if you won't kill another creature to feed yourself, then when you grow up you will be much less likely to injure people.

By our own decisions and actions, in everything we do, we promote peace or we promote violence. What can we do as individuals or institutions to responsibly promote noninjury? Make a list of all the things you have purchased in the last six months, which bring harm to humans, animals, fish, fowl and other sentient beings. Read the labels on simple things like glue or soap and scratch off the list all the things that contribute to violent acts or aid in the destruction of the planet. Then find the willpower to not, for convenience sake, fall back into purchasing these things again. This is something you can do in the next twenty-four hours.

Talk about peaceful means of dealing with problems, not allowing even your words to promote injury & harm. Let your words bring peace into others' lives & hearts.

Work on your own consciousness. Purify yourself so that you are free from anger, free from hatred, free from wanting anyone to suffer either at your own hand or in any other manner.

Don't buy endangered plants, animals or products from exploited species such as furs, ivory, reptile skin and tortoise shell. Volunteer your time to help groups who are sincerely working for a peaceful world. Learn more about other cultures and philosophies, so your appreciation of them is genuine and deep. Work to strengthen your community and the people near you. Reduce stress in your life. Be joyful. Do all this and you will do much to bring peace and tranquility to your part of the world. This is what Mahatma Gandhi did, and look what a difference he made. One person who lives ahimsa truly can be an instrument of peace for many. And you can make a difference too by affirming within yourself the vow not to injure others either physically, mentally or emotionally. Remember this one thing: peace and the choice to live the ideal of noninjury are in your own hands.

This discourse was given on December 15, 1989, by H.H. Gurudeva Sivaya Subramuniaswami at the request of the Institute for Peace at the University of Hawaii, and for the Global Forum on Human Survival which was held in Moscow January 14-19, 1990. We wish to thank the Hindu Businessmen's Association of Northern California for sponsoring an extra 10,000 of these 4-page fliers which are available, along with other free literature, by writing to Hinduism Today Public Service Department, P.O. Box 157, Hanamaulu, Hawaii 96715 USA.

Sacred Texts Speak On Ahimsa

The roots of ahimsa are found in the Vedas, Agamas, Upanishads, Dharma Shastras, Tirumurai, Yoga Sutras and dozens of other sacred texts of Hinduism. Here is a select collection.

Peace be the earth, peaceful the ether, peaceful heaven, peaceful the waters, peaceful the herbs, peaceful the trees. May all Gods bring me peace. May there be peace through these invocations of peace. With these invocations of peace which appease everything, I render peaceful whatever here is terrible, whatever here is cruel, whatever here is sinful. Let it become auspicious, let everything be beneficial to us.--Atharva Veda: X. 191. 4

Let us have concord with our own people, and concord with people who are strangers to us; Asvins, create between us and the strangers a unity of hearts. May we unite in our midst, unite in our purposes, and not fight against the divine spirit within us. Let not the battle-cry rise amidst many slain, nor the arrows of the War-God fall with the break of day.--Atharva Veda

Let your aims be common, and your hearts be of one accord, and all of you be of one mind, so you may live well together.--Rig Veda X . 191

The twice-born should endure high-handed criticism; he should insult none. While yet in his body, he should not pick enmity with anyone; he should not return anger with anger; decried, he should say a good word.--Dharma Shastras: VI.

Nonviolence, truthfulness, nonstealing, purity, sense control--this, in brief, says Manu, is the dharma of all the four castes.--Dharma Shastras: X.

One should never do that to another which one regards as injurious to one's own self. This, in brief, is the rule of dharma. Yielding to desire and acting differently, one becomes guilty of adharma. --Mahabharata XVIII:113.8.

Those high-souled persons who desire beauty, faultlessness of limbs, long life, understanding, mental and physical strength and memory should abstain from acts of injury.--Mahabharata XVIII:115.8.

Ahimsa is the highest dharma. Ahimsa is the best tapas. Ahimsa is the greatest gift. Ahimsa is the highest self-control. Ahimsa is the highest sacrifice. Ahimsa is the highest power. Ahimsa is the highest friend. Ahimsa is the highest truth. Ahimsa is the highest teaching.--Mahabharata XVIII:116.37-41.

It is the principle of the pure in heart never to injure others, even when they themselves have been hatefully injured.--Tiru Kural, Verse 312.

If a man inflicts sorrow on another in the morning, sorrow will come to him unbidden in the afternoon.--Tiru Kural, Verse 319

What is virtuous conduct? It is never destroying life, for killing leads to every other sin.--Tirukural, Verse 321

Many are the lovely flowers of worship offered to the Guru, but none lovelier than non-killing. Respect for life is the highest worship, the bright lamp, the sweet garland and unwavering devotion.--Tirumantiram, Verse 197

May all beings look at me with a friendly eye. May I do likewise, and may we all look on each other with the eyes of a friend.--Yajur Veda: 36.18.

Spiritual merit and sin are our own making. The killer of other lives is an outcast. Match your words with your conduct. Steal not, kill not, indulge not in self-praise, condemn not others to their face.--Lingayat Vacanas

If the diet is pure the mind will be pure, and if the mind is pure the intellect also will be pure.--Manu Samhita

Ahimsa is not causing pain to any living being at any time through the actions of one's mind, speech or body.--Sandilya Upanishad

Whatever I dig from Earth, may that have quick growth again. O Purifier, may we not injure your vitals or your heart. --Atharva Veda XII

When one is established in non-injury, beings give up their mutual animosity in his presence.--Yoga Sutras

Without doing injury to living things, flesh cannot be had anywhere; and the killing of living beings is not conducive to heaven; hence eating of flesh should be avoided.--Dharma Shastras

Everyone should make offerings to all creatures; thereby one achieves the propitiation of all creatures. Every day one should make gifts, even if it be only with a cup of water: thus one achieves the propitiation of human beings.--Yajur Veda

The injury that we have caused to heaven and earth, mother or father--from that sin may the domestic fire ceremony pull us out.--Taittiriya Aranyaka

Without congestion, amidst men, She who has many heights, stretches, and level grounds, who bears herbs of manifold potency, may that Earth spread out and be rich for us. Let all the people milk Her with amity.--Rig Veda XII. 1

The peace in the sky, the peace in the mid-air, the peace on earth, the peace in waters, the peace in plants, the peace in forest trees, the peace in all Gods, the peace in Brahman, the peace in all things, the peace in peace, may that peace come to me.-- Rig Veda X

Do not injure the beings living on the earth, in the air and in the water.--Yajur Veda

The Lord said, 'Fearlessness, purity of heart, steadfastness in knowledge and devotion, alms-giving, self-control and sacrifice, study of the scriptures, austerity and uprightness, nonviolence, truth, freedom from anger, renunciation, tranquility, aversion to slander, compassion to all living beings, freedom from covetousness, gentleness, modesty, courage, patience, fortitude, purity and freedom from malice and overweening conceit--these belong to him who is born to the heritage of the Gods, O Arjuna.'--Bhagavad Gita: Chapter 16

Hindu Leaders Speak On Ahimsa

"Refrain from killing knowingly even the trifling insects like a louse, a bug or a mosquito. Use no violence even to gain possession of a woman, wealth or kingdom. Never kill any animals even for the purpose of sacrifice. Non-violence is the greatest of all religions." --Swami Sahajanand

"O lover of meditation, become pure and clean. Observe nonviolence in mind, speech and body. Never break another's heart. Avoid wounding another's feelings. Harm no one. Help all. Neither be afraid nor frighten others." --Swami Muktananda

"Someone who believes in violence and continues causing injury to others can never be peaceful himself." --Swami Satchidananda

"To be free from violence is the duty of every man. No thought of revenge, hatred or ill will should arise in our minds. Injuring others gives rise to hatred."--Swami Sivananda

"You do not like to suffer yourself. How can you inflict suffering on others? Every killing is a suicide. The eternal, blissful and natural state has been smothered by this life of ignorance. In this way the present life is due to the killing of the eternal, pristine Being. Is it not a case of suicide?"--Ramana Maharishi, 1935

"The Hindu sage who sees the whole of life.. If he does not fight, it is not because he rejects all fighting as futile, but because he has finished his fights. He has overcome all dissensions between himself and the world and is now at rest.... We shall have wars and soldiers so long as the brute in us is untamed."-- Dr. S. Radhakrishnan.

"By ahimsa Patanjali meant the removal of the desire to kill. All forms of life have an equal right to the air of maya. The saint who uncovers the secret of creation will be in harmony with Nature's countless bewildering expressions. All men may understand this truth by overcoming the passion for destruction." --Sri Yukteswar to Paramahansa Yogananda.

"If you plant eggplant, you can pluck eggplants. If you sow goodness, you can reap goodness. If you sow evil, you will reap evil. Do good to all. God is there, within you. Don't kill. Don't harbor anger." --Siva Yogaswami

"The test of ahimsa is the absence of jealousy. The man whose heart never cherishes even the thought of injury to anyone, who rejoices at the prosperity of even his greatest enemy, that man is the bhakta, he is the yogi, he is the guru of all." --Swami Vivekananda

"Strictly speaking, no activity and no industry is possible without a certain amount of violence, no matter how little. Even the very process of living is

impossible without a certain amount of violence. What we have to do is to minimize it to the greatest extent possible."--Mahatma Gandhi My Socialism, 34-35.

"We are all of the same race and religion. We are holy beings established in Divinity itself. This truth can be understood only by those who have grasped it through the magical charm of a life of dharma--not by other means. Because of that, sages have emphatically proclaimed again and again that it is necessary to love all existing lives as one's own."--Siva Yogaswami.

"Do good to all. God is there, within you. Don't kill. Don't harbor anger."--Siva Yogaswami.

"May all be happy. May we never see a tear in another's eyes!"--Sri Sri Sri Balagangadharnath Swamiji.

"Using words that do not offend and not speaking ill of others is tapas of speech."--B.K.S. Iyengar.

8. How to Win an Argument with a Meat Eater

Here now is The Hindu Virtue of Vegetarianism, with facts on the dangers of meat-eating, the "new four food groups," excerpts from *Food for the Spirit*, and quotations from Scripture.

- Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

This booklet was created in response to requests from readers of Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami's Publisher's Desk column in *Hinduism Today*. Permission is hereby given to photocopy and distribute it freely in your community. For a catalog of Himalayan Academy Publications, write to Himalayan Academy Publications, 107 Kaholalele Road, Kapaa, HI 96746, USA. Or call or fax us and leave your name, address and phone number for a introductory packet of literature (worldwide) and a free three month complimentary subscription to *Hinduism Today* (USA only.)

Published by

Himalayan Academy

I. Must We Kill in order to Live?

Vegetarianism, known in Sanskrit as Shakahara, was for thousands of years a principle of health and environmental ethics throughout India. Though Muslim and Christian colonization radically undermined and eroded this ideal, it remains to this day a cardinal ethic of Hindu thought and practice. A subtle sense of guilt persists among Hindus who eat meat, and there exists an ongoing controversy on this issue on which we hope this humble booklet will shed some light.

For India's ancient thinkers, life is seen as the very stuff of the Divine, an emanation of the Source and part of a cosmic continuum. They further hold that each life form, even water and trees, possesses consciousness and energy. Nonviolence, ahimsa, the primary basis of vegetarianism, has long been central to the religious traditions of India-especially Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Religion in India has consistently upheld the sanctity of life, whether human, animal or, in the case of the Jains, elemental.

The Sanskrit for vegetarianism is Shakahara, and one following a vegetarian diet is a shakahari. The term for meat-eating is mansahara, and the meat-eater is called mansahari. Ahara means "to consume, or eat," shaka means "vegetable," and mansa means "meat or flesh." The very word mansa, "meat," conveys a deep appreciation of life's sacredness and an understanding of the law of karma by which the consequence of each action returns to the doer. As explained in the 2,000-year-old Manu Dharma Shastra, 5.55, "The learned declare that the meaning of mansa (flesh) is, 'he (sa) will eat me (mam) in the other world whose flesh I eat here.' "

There developed early in India an unparalleled concern for harmony among life forms, and this led to a common ethos based on noninjuriousness and a minimal consumption of natural resources—in other words, to compassion and simplicity. If homo sapiens is to survive his present predicament, he will have to rediscover these two primary ethical virtues.

"Is vegetarianism integral to non injury?" In my book, *Dancing with Siva*, this question is addressed as follows: "Hindus teach vegetarianism as a way to live with a minimum of hurt to other beings, for to consume meat, fish, fowl or eggs is to participate indirectly in acts of cruelty and violence against the animal kingdom. The abhorrence of injury and killing of any kind leads quite naturally to a vegetarian diet, shakahara. The meat-eater's desire for meat drives another to kill and provide that meat. The act of the butcher begins with the desire of the consumer. Meat-eating contributes to a mentality of violence, for with the chemically complex meat ingested, one absorbs the slaughtered creature's fear, pain and terror.

These qualities are nourished within the meat-eater, perpetuating the cycle of cruelty and confusion. When the individual's consciousness lifts and expands, he will abhor violence and not be able to even digest the meat, fish, fowl and eggs he was formerly consuming. India's greatest saints have confirmed that one cannot eat meat and live a peaceful, harmonious life. Man's appetite for meat inflicts devastating harm on the earth itself, stripping its precious forests to make way for pastures. The Tirukural candidly states, 'How can he practice true compassion who eats the flesh of an animal to fatten his own flesh? Greater than a thousand ghee offerings consumed in sacrificial fires is not to sacrifice and consume any living creature.' "

Amazingly, I have heard people define vegetarian as a diet which excludes the meat of animals but does permit fish and eggs. But what really is vegetarianism? Vegetarian foods include grains, fruits, vegetables, legumes and dairy products. Natural, fresh foods, locally grown without insecticides or chemical fertilizers are preferred.

A vegetarian diet does not include meat, fish, fowl or eggs. For good health, even certain vegetarian foods are minimized: frozen and canned foods, highly processed foods, such as white rice, white sugar and white flour; and "junk" foods and beverages-those with abundant chemical additives, such as artificial sweeteners, colorings, flavorings and preservatives.

In my forty years of ministry it has become quite evident that vegetarian families have far fewer problems than those who are not vegetarian. If children are raised as vegetarians, every day they are exposed to nonviolence as a principle of peace and compassion. Every day they are growing up they are remembering and being reminded to not kill. They won't even kill another creature to eat, to feed themselves. And if they won't kill another creature to feed themselves, they will be much less likely to do acts of violence against people.

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami

II. Five Reasons to Be a Vegetarian

In the past fifty years millions of meat-eaters have made the personal decision to stop eating the flesh of other creatures. There are five major motivations for such a decision.

1) The **DHARMIC/SCRIPTURAL LAW** reason

Ahimsa, the law of non injury, is the Hindu's first duty in fulfillment of his religious obligations to God and God's creation as defined by Vedic scripture.

2) The **KARMIC CONSEQUENCES** reason

All of our actions including our choice of food have karmic consequences. By involving oneself in the cycle of inflicting injury, pain and death, even indirectly by eating other creatures, one must in the future experience in equal measure the suffering caused.

3) The **SPIRITUAL CONSCIOUSNESS** reason

Food is the source of the body's chemistry, and what we ingest affects our consciousness, emotions and experiential patterns. If one wants to live in higher consciousness, in peace and happiness and love for all creatures, then he cannot eat meat, fish, shellfish, fowl or eggs. By ingesting the grosser chemistries of animal foods, one introduces into the body and mind anger, jealousy, fear, anxiety, suspicion and a terrible fear of death, all of which are locked into the flesh of butchered creatures. For these reasons, shakaharis live in higher consciousness and mansaharis abide in lower consciousness.

4) The **HEALTH** reason

Medical studies prove that a vegetarian diet is easier to digest, provides a wider range of nutrients and imposes fewer burdens and impurities on the body. Vegetarians are less susceptible to all the major diseases that afflict contemporary humanity, and thus live longer, healthier, more productive lives. They have fewer physical complaints, less frequent visits to the doctor, fewer dental problems and smaller medical bills. Their immune system is stronger, their bodies are purer, more refined and skin more beautiful.

5) The **ECOLOGICAL** reason

Planet earth is suffering. In large measure, the escalating loss of species, destruction of ancient rain forests to create pasture lands for livestock, loss of topsoils and the consequent increase of water impurities and air pollution have all been traced to the single fact of meat in the human diet. No single decision that we can make as individuals or as a race can have such a dramatic effect on the improvement of our planetary ecology as the decision to not eat meat. Many seeking to save the planet for future generations have made this decision for this

reason and this reason alone.

III. How to Win an Argument with a Meat-Eater

While their numbers are rapidly growing, vegetarians are still a minority, and it is not unusual to be confronted with a meat-eater who not only protects his own right to eat flesh, but argues aggressively that vegetarians should join him in his carnivorous diet. Carnivores may regard non meat-eaters as a strange lot who munch on "rabbit food," and whose diet doesn't have the substance to make them strong, productive human beings. The following presentation is designed to turn the tables on such discussions by showing the devastating effects of meat-eating both on individuals and on our planet. It is based on a richly informative poster entitled, "How to win an argument with a meat-eater," published by Earthsave, an organization based in Felton, California, giving facts from Pulitzer Prize nominee John Robbins' book *Diet for a New America*. Below are eight separate arguments against meat-eating and in favor of a vegetarian diet.

1. The Hunger Argument against meat-eating

Much of the world's massive hunger problems could be solved by the reduction or elimination of meat-eating. The reasons: 1) livestock pasture needs cut drastically into land which could otherwise be used to grow food; 2) vast quantities of food which could feed humans is fed to livestock raised to produce meat.

This year alone, twenty million people worldwide will die as a result of malnutrition. One child dies of malnutrition every 2.3 seconds. One hundred million people could be adequately fed using the land freed if Americans reduced their intake of meat by a mere 10%.

Twenty percent of the corn grown in the U.S. is eaten by people. Eighty percent of the corn and 95% of the oats grown in the U.S. is eaten by livestock. The percentage of protein wasted by cycling grain through livestock is calculated by experts as 90%.

One acre of land can produce 40,000 pounds of potatoes, or 250 pounds of beef. Fifty-six percent of all U.S. farmland is devoted to beef production, and to produce each pound of beef requires 16 pounds of edible grain and soybeans, which could be used to feed the hungry.

2. The Environmental Argument against meat-eating

Many of the world's massive environmental problems could be solved by the reduction or elimination of meat-eating, including global warming, loss of topsoil, loss of rain forests and species extinction.

The temperature of the earth is rising. This global warming, known as "the greenhouse effect," results primarily from carbon dioxide emissions from burning fossil fuels, such as oil and natural gas. Three times more fossil fuels must be burned to produce a meat-centered diet than for a meat-free diet. If people stopped eating meat, the threat of higher world temperatures would be vastly diminished.

Trees, and especially the old-growth forests, are essential to the survival of the planet. Their destruction is a major cause of global warming and top soil loss. Both of these effects lead to diminished food production. Meat-eating is the number one driving force for the destruction of these forests. Two-hundred and sixty million acres of U.S. forest land has been cleared for cropland to produce the meat-centered diet. Fifty-five square feet of tropical rain forest is consumed to produce every quarter-pound of rain forest beef. An alarming 75% of all U.S. topsoil has been lost to date. Eighty-five percent of this loss is directly related to livestock raising.

Another devastating result of deforestation is the loss of plant and animal species. Each year 1,000 species are eliminated due to destruction of tropical rain forests for meat grazing and other uses. The rate is growing yearly.

To keep up with U.S. consumption, 300 million pounds of meat are imported annually from Central and South America. This economic incentive impels these nations to cut down their forests to make more pasture land. The short-term gain ignores the long-term, irreparable harm to the earth's ecosystem. In effect these countries are being drained of their resources to put meat on the table of Americans while 75% of all Central American children under the age of five are undernourished.

3. The Cancer Argument against meat-eating

Those who eat flesh are far more likely to contract cancer than those following a vegetarian diet.

The risk of contracting breast cancer is 3.8 times greater for women who eat meat daily compared to less than once a week; 2.8 times greater for women who eat eggs daily compared to once a week; and 3.25 greater for women who eat butter and cheese 2 to 4 times a week as compared to once a week.

The risk of fatal ovarian cancer is three times greater for women who eat eggs 3 or more times a week as compared with less than once a week.

The risk of fatal prostate cancer is 3.6 times greater for men who consume meat, cheese, eggs and milk daily as compared with sparingly or not at all.

4. The Cholesterol Argument against meat-eating

Here are facts showing that: 1) U.S. physicians are not sufficiently trained in the importance of the relation of diet to health; 2) meat-eaters ingest excessive amounts of cholesterol, making them dangerously susceptible to heart attacks.

It is strange, but true that U.S. physicians are as a rule ill-educated in the single most important factor of health, namely diet and nutrition. Of the 125 medical schools in the U.S., only 30 require their students to take a course in nutrition. The average nutrition training received by the average U.S. physician during four years in school is only 2.5 hours. Thus doctors in the U.S. are ill-equipped to advise their patients in minimizing foods, such as meat, that contain excessive amounts of cholesterol and are known causes of heart attack.

Heart attack is the most common cause of death in the U.S., killing one person every 45 seconds. The male meat-eater's risk of death from heart attack is 50%. The risk to men who eat no meat is 15%. Reducing one's consumption of meat, dairy and eggs by 10% reduces the risk of heart attack by 10%. Completely eliminating these products from one's diet reduces the risk of heart attack by 90%.

The average cholesterol consumption of a meat-centered diet is 210 milligrams per day. The chance of dying from heart disease if you are male and your blood cholesterol is 210 milligrams daily is greater than 50%.

5. The Natural Resources Argument against meat-eating

The world's natural resources are being rapidly depleted as a result of meat-eating.

Raising livestock for their meat is a very inefficient way of generating food. Pound for pound, far more resources must be expended to produce meat than to produce grains, fruits and vegetables. For example, more than half of all water used for all purposes in the U.S. is consumed in livestock production. The amount of water used in production of the average cow is sufficient to float a destroyer (a large naval ship). While 25 gallons of water are needed to produce a pound of wheat, 5,000 gallons are needed to produce a pound of California beef. That same 5,000 gallons of water can produce 200 pounds of wheat. If this water cost were not subsidized by the government, the cheapest hamburger meat would cost more than \$35 per pound.

Meat-eating is devouring oil reserves at an alarming rate. It takes nearly 78 calories of fossil fuel (oil, natural gas, etc.) energy to produce one calorie of beef protein and only 2 calories of fossil fuel energy to produce one calorie of soybean. If every human ate a meat-centered diet, the world's known oil reserves would last a mere 13 years. They would last 260 years if humans stopped eating meat

altogether. That is 20 times longer, giving humanity ample time to develop alternative energy sources.

Thirty-three percent of all raw materials (base products of farming, forestry and mining, including fossil fuels) consumed by the U.S. are devoted to the production of livestock, as compared with 2% to produce a complete vegetarian diet.

6. The Antibiotic Argument against meat-eating

Here are facts showing the dangers of eating meat because of the large amounts of antibiotics fed to livestock to control staphylococci (commonly called staph infections), which are becoming immune to these drugs at an alarming rate.

The animals that are being raised for meat in the United States are diseased. The livestock industry attempts to control this disease by feeding the animals antibiotics. Huge quantities of drugs go for this purpose. Of all antibiotics used in the U.S., 55% are fed to livestock.

But this is only partially effective because the bacteria that cause disease are becoming immune to the antibiotics. The percentage of staphylococci infections resistant to penicillin, for example, has grown from 13% in 1960 to 91% in 1988. These antibiotics and-or the bacteria they are intended to destroy reside in the meat that goes to market.

It is not healthy for humans to consume this meat. The response of the European Economic Community to the routine feeding of antibiotics to U.S. livestock was to ban the importation of U.S. meat. European buyers do not want to expose consumers to this serious health hazard. By comparison, U.S. meat and pharmaceutical industries gave their full and complete support to the routine feeding of antibiotics to livestock, turning a blind eye to the threat of disease to the consumer.

7. The Pesticide Argument against meat-eating

Unknown to most meat-eaters, U.S.-produced meat contains dangerously high quantities of deadly pesticides.

The common belief is that the U.S. Department of Agriculture protects consumers' health through regular and thorough meat inspection. In reality, fewer than one out of every 250,000 slaughtered animals is tested for toxic chemical residues.

That these chemicals are indeed ingested by the meat-eater is proven by the following facts:

A. Ninety-nine percent of U.S. mother's milk contains significant levels of DDT. In stark contrast, only 8% of U.S. vegetarian mother's milk containing significant levels of DDT. This shows that the primary source of DDT is the meat ingested by the mothers.

B. Contamination of breast milk due to chlorinated hydrocarbon pesticides in animal products found in meat-eating mothers versus non meat-eating mothers is 35 times higher.

C. The amount of the pesticide Dieldrin ingested by the average breast-fed American infant is 9 times the permissible level.

8. The Ethical Argument against meat-eating

Many of those who have adopted a vegetarian diet have done so because of the ethical argument, either from reading about or personally experiencing what goes on daily at any one of the thousands of slaughterhouses in the U.S. and other countries, where animals suffer the cruel process of forced confinement, manipulation and violent death. Their pain and terror is beyond calculation.

The slaughterhouse is the final stop for animals raised for their flesh. These ghastly places, while little known to most meat-eaters, process enormous numbers of animals each year. In the U.S. alone, 660,000 animals are killed for meat every hour. A surprising quantity of meat is consumed by the meat-eater. The average per capita consumption of meat in the U.S., Canada and Australia is 200 pounds per year! The average American consumes in a 72-year lifetime approximately 11 cattle, 3 lambs and sheep, 23 hogs, 45 turkeys, 1,100 chickens and 862 pounds of fish! Bon appetite!

People who come in contact with slaughterhouses cannot help but be affected by what they see and hear. Those living nearby must daily experience the screams of terror and anger of the animals led to slaughter. Those working inside must also see and participate in the crimes of mayhem and murder. Most who choose this line of work are not on the job for long. Of all occupations in the U.S., slaughterhouse worker has the highest turnover rate. It also has the highest rate of on-the-job injury.

IV. Humans Have neither Fangs nor Claws

A ninth and most compelling argument against meat-eating is that humans are physiologically not suited for a carnivorous diet. The book *Food for the Spirit, Vegetarianism in the World Religions*, summarizes this point of view as follows. "Many nutritionists, biologists and physiologists offer convincing evidence that humans are in fact not meant to eat flesh._" Here are seven facts in support of this view:

"Physiologically, people are more akin to plant-eaters, foragers and grazers, such as monkeys, elephants and cows, than to carnivora such as dogs, tigers and leopards.

"For example, carnivora do not sweat through their skin; body heat is controlled by rapid breathing and extrusion of the tongue. Vegetarian animals, on the other hand, have sweat pores for heat control and the elimination of impurities.

"Carnivora have long teeth and claws for holding and killing prey; vegetarian animals have short teeth and no claws.

"The saliva of carnivora contains no ptyalin and cannot predigest starches; that of vegetarian animals contains ptyalin for the predigestion of starches.

"Flesh-eating animals secrete large quantities of hydrochloric acid to help dissolve bones; vegetarian animals secrete little hydrochloric acid.

"The jaws of carnivora only open in an up and down motion; those of vegetarian animals also move sideways for additional kinds of chewing.

"Carnivora must lap liquids (like a cat); vegetarian animals take liquids in by suction through the teeth.

"There are many such comparisons, and in each case humans fit the vegetarian physiognomy. From a strictly physiological perspective, then, there are strong arguments that humans are not suited to a fleshy diet."

V. The Health Benefits of Vegetarianism

It was only recently that smoking only recently became recognized as a health and environmental hazard. As a result of research and education on a habit once believed to be not only harmless but stylish, most major U.S. cities have banned smoking of cigarettes, cigars or pipes in all public places. Smoking has also been outlawed in government offices and completely eliminated from all domestic U.S. air flights. Now, another, even more devastating problem is under scrutiny. Its threat to health and the environment is being realized based on overwhelming evidence amassed by recognized authorities over the past fifty years. Recently a group of eminent doctors called the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM), themselves members of the American Medical Association (AMA), have gathered to change the U.S. consciousness on human nutrition, particularly among the medical community. The PCRM is a nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C., consisting of doctors and lay persons working together for compassionate and effective medical practice, research and health promotion. Founded in 1985, the PCRM is supported by over 3,000 physicians and 50,000 lay persons PCRM president Newal D. Barnard, M.D., is a popular speaker and the author of *The Power of Your Plate*.

As stated by the PCRM in their 1991 literature, "A vegetarian diet has been advocated by everyone from philosophers, such as Plato and Nietzsche, to political leaders, such as Benjamin Franklin and Gandhi, to modern pop icons such as Paul McCartney and Bob Marley. Science is also on the side of vegetarian foods. A multitude of studies have proven the health benefits of a vegetarian diet to be remarkable.

"Vegetarian is defined as avoiding all animal flesh, including fish and poultry. Vegetarians who avoid flesh, but do eat animal products such as cheese, milk and eggs are ovo-lacto-vegetarians (ovo = egg; lacto = milk, cheese, etc.). The ranks of those who eschew all animal products are rapidly growing; these people are referred to as pure vegetarians or vegans (vee'guns). Scientific research shows that ovo-lacto-vegetarians are healthier than meat-eaters, and vegans are healthier than ovo-lacto-vegetarians." It should be noted that the Indian Hindu tradition has always been lacto-vegetarian, permitting the consumption of milk products.

The PCRM literature lists a host of health benefits of a vegetarian diet, including the following:

Preventing cancer: "Numerous epidemiological and clinical studies have shown that vegetarians are nearly 50% less likely to die from cancer than non vegetarians."

Preventing heart disease and lowering blood pressure.

Preventing and reversing diabetes.

Preventing and alleviating gallstones, kidney stones and osteoporosis.

Preventing and alleviating asthma.

VI. The New Four Food Groups

In 1991 the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine submitted a proposal to change the official "four food groups" which have been promoted by U.S. nutritionists in the U.S. for the past 35 years. Their proposal reflects the fact that the long-held belief in meat as an essential dietary element is being displaced with new findings on the harmful effects of a meat-centered diet. The PCRM Update, May-June 1991, explains, "On April 8, 1991, PCRM unveiled a proposal to replace the Four Basic Food Groups. The Four Food Groups have been part of U.S. government recommendations since 1956, but promote dietary habits which are largely responsible for the epidemics of heart disease, cancer, stroke and other serious illnesses in this country. _The old four groups were meat, dairy, grains and fruits/vegetables.

The 'New Four Food Groups' are grains, legumes, vegetables and fruits. Meat and dairy will lose their food group status [by this proposal]. The 'New Four Food Groups' represents a nutrition plan that is based on healthy, fiber-rich plant foods rather than the former emphasis on cholesterol-and-fat-laden foods. 'The meat and dairy groups were the principal sources of cholesterol and saturated fat, which is the biggest culprit in raising blood cholesterol,' says PCRM Nutritionist Virginia Messina, M.P.H., R.D. 'These foods are simply not necessary in the human diet.' " PCRM poster offers the following description of the four new food groups.

1. Whole grains includes breads, pastas, rice, corn and all other grains. Note the emphasis on whole grains rather than refined grains. Build each of your meals around a hearty grain dish-grains are rich in fiber and other complex carbohydrates, as well as protein, B vitamins and zinc.

2. Vegetables are packed with nutrients; they provide vitamin C, beta-carotene, riboflavin and other vitamins, iron, calcium and fiber. Dark green, leafy vegetables such as broccoli, collards, kale, mustard and turnip greens, chicory or bok choy are especially good sources of these important nutrients. Dark yellow and orange vegetables such as carrots, winter squash, sweet potatoes and pumpkin provide extra beta-carotene. Include generous portions of a variety of vegetables in your diet.

3. Legumes, which is another name for beans, peas and lentils, are all good sources of fiber, protein, iron, calcium, zinc and B vitamins. This group also includes chickpeas, baked and refried beans, soy milk, tofu, tempeh and texturized vegetable protein.

4. Fruits are rich in fiber, vitamin C and beta-carotene. Be sure to include at least one serving each day of fruits that are high in vitamin C—citrus fruits, melons and strawberries are all good choices. Choose whole fruit over fruit juices, which don't contain as much healthy fiber.

VII. Common Dietary Concerns

Those considering a vegetarian diet generally worry about getting enough nutrients, since the belief that meat is a necessary part of keeping strong and healthy is still extremely widespread. Armed with decades of nutritional research data, the PCRM addresses this issue head-on:

"The fact is, it is very easy to have a well-balanced diet with vegetarian foods. Vegetarian foods provide plenty of protein. Careful combining of foods is not necessary. Any normal variety of plant foods provides more than enough protein for the body's needs. Although there is somewhat less protein in a vegetarian diet than a meat-eater's diet, this actually an advantage. Excess protein has been linked to kidney stones, osteoporosis, and possibly heart disease and some cancers. A diet focused on beans, whole grains and vegetables contains adequate amounts of protein without the 'overdose' most meat-eaters get."

Other concerns are allayed as follows:

"Calcium is easy to find in a vegetarian diet. Many dark, green leafy vegetables and beans are loaded with calcium, and some orange juices and cereals are calcium-fortified. Iron is plentiful in whole grains, beans and fruits."

Vitamin B12: There is a misconception that without eating meat one cannot obtain sufficient v. B12, which is an essential nutrient. This simply not true. The PCRM advises: "Although cases of B12 deficiency are very uncommon, it is important to make sure that one has a reliable source of the vitamin. Good sources include all common multiple vitamins (including vegetarian vitamins), fortified cereals and fortified soy milk."

"During pregnancy one's nutritional needs increase. The American Dietetic Association has found vegan diets adequate for fulfilling nutritional needs during pregnancy, but pregnant women and nursing mothers should supplement their diets with vitamins B12 and D.

"vegetarian children also have high nutritional needs, but these, too, are met within a vegetarian diet. A vegetarian menu is 'life-extending.' As young children, vegetarians may grow more gradually, reach puberty somewhat later, and live substantially longer than do meat-eaters. Do be sure to include a reliable source of vitamin B12."

Besides the fortified cereals and soy milk mentioned above vitamin B12 sources that are widely available are multiple vitamins, brewers yeast and other potent dietary supplements.

Those interested in supporting or learning more about the work of the PCRM should write to PCRM, P.O. Box 6322, Washington, D.C., 20015.

VIII. Vegetarianism in Hinduism

Food for the Spirit, Vegetarianism and the World Religions, observes, "Despite popular knowledge of meat-eating's adverse effects, the non vegetarian diet became increasingly widespread among Hindus after the two major invasions by foreign powers, first the Muslims and later the British. With them came the desire to be 'civilized,' to eat as did the saheeb. Those actually trained in Vedic knowledge, however, never adopted a meat-oriented diet, and the pious Hindu still observes vegetarian principles as a matter of religious duty.

"That vegetarianism has always been widespread in India is clear from the earliest Vedic texts. This was observed by the ancient traveler Megasthenes and also by Fa-hsien, a Chinese Buddhist monk who, in the fifth century, traveled to India in order to obtain authentic copies of the scriptures.

"These scriptures unambiguously support the meatless way of life. In the Mahabharata, for instance, the great warrior Bhishma explains to Yudhishtira, eldest of the Pandava princes, that the meat of animals is like the flesh of one's own son, and that the foolish person who eats meat must be considered the vilest of human beings [Anu. 114.11]. The eating of 'dirty' food, it warns, is not as terrible as the eating of flesh [Shanti. 141.88] (it must be remembered that the brahmanas of ancient India exalted cleanliness to a divine principle).

"Similarly, the Manusmriti declares that one should 'refrain from eating all kinds of meat,' for such eating involves killing and leads to karmic bondage (bandha) [5.49]. Elsewhere in the Vedic literature, the last of the great Vedic kings, Maharajah Parikshit, is quoted as saying that 'only the animal-killer cannot relish the message of the Absolute Truth [Shrimad Bhagavatam 10.1.4].' "

IX. Scriptures Against Killing and Meat-Eating

Hindu scripture speaks clearly and forcefully on non killing and vegetarianism. In the ancient Rig Veda, we read: "O vegetable, be succulent, wholesome, strengthening; and thus, body, be fully grown." The Yajur Veda summarily dictates: "Do not injure the beings living on the earth, in the air and in the water." The beautiful Tirukural, a widely-read 2,000-year-old masterpiece of ethics, speaks of conscience: "When a man realizes that meat is the butchered flesh of another creature, he must abstain from eating it."

The Manu Samhita advises: "Having well considered the origin of flesh and the cruelty of fettering and slaying of corporeal beings, let one entirely abstain from eating flesh." In the yoga-infused verses of the Tirumantiram, warning is given of how meat-eating holds the mind in gross, adharmic states: "The ignoble ones who eat flesh, death's agents bind them fast and push them quick into the fiery jaws of hell (Naraka, lower consciousness)." The roots of non injury non killing and nonconsumption of meat are found in the Vedas, agamas, Upanishads, Dharma Shastras, Tirumurai, Yoga Sutras and dozens of other sacred texts of Hinduism. Here is a select collection.

Vedas and agamas, Hinduism's Revealed Scriptures

LET YOUR AIMS BE COMMON, and your hearts be of one accord, and all of you be of one mind, so you may live well together. Rig Veda Samhita 10.191

Protect both our species, two-legged and four-legged. Both food and water for their needs supply. May they with us increase in stature and strength. Save us from hurt all our days, O Powers! Rig Veda Samhita 10.37.11. VE, 319

One who partakes of human flesh, the flesh of a horse or of another animal, and deprives others of milk by slaughtering cows, O King, if such a fiend does not desist by other means, then you should not hesitate to cut off his head. Rig Veda Samhita, 10.87.16, FS 90

Peaceful be the earth, peaceful the ether, peaceful heaven, peaceful the waters, peaceful the herbs, peaceful the trees. May all Gods bring me peace. May there be peace through these invocations of peace. With these invocations of

peace which appease everything, I render peaceful whatever here is terrible, whatever here is cruel, whatever here is sinful. Let it become auspicious, let everything be beneficial to us. Atharva Veda Samhita 10. 191. 4

Those noble souls who practice meditation and other yogic ways, who are ever careful about all beings, who protect all animals, are the ones who are actually serious about spiritual practices. Atharva Veda Samhita 19.48.5. FS, 90

If we have injured space, the earth or heaven, or if we have offended mother or father, from that may Agni, fire of the house, absolve us and guide us safely to the world of goodness. Atharva Veda Samhita 6.120.1. VE, 636

You must not use your God-given body for killing God's creatures, whether they are human, animal or whatever. Yajur Veda Samhita 12.32. FS, 90

May all beings look at me with a friendly eye. May I do likewise, and may we all look on each other with the eyes of a friend. Yajur Veda 36.18.

Nonviolence is all the offerings. Renunciation is the priestly honorarium. The final purification is death. Thus all the Divinities are established in this body. Krishna Yajur Veda, Prana Upanishad 46-8. VE, 413-14

To the heavens be peace, to the sky and the earth; to the waters be peace, to plants and all trees; to the Gods be peace, to Brahman be peace, to all men be peace, again and again-peace also to me! O earthen vessel, strengthen me. May all beings regard me with friendly eyes! May I look upon all creatures with friendly eyes! With a friend's eye may we regard each other! Shukla Yajur Veda Samhita 36.17-18. VE, 306; 342

No pain should be caused to any created being or thing. Devikalottara agama, JAV 69-79. RM, 116

The Mahabharata and Bhagavad Gita, Epic History

The very name of the cows is aghnya, indicating that they should never be slaughtered. Who, then could slay them? Surely, one who kills a cow or a bull commits the most heinous crime. Mahabharata, Shantiparva 262.47. FS,pg. 94

The purchaser of flesh performs himsa (violence) by his wealth; he who eats flesh does so by enjoying its taste; the killer does himsa by actually tying and killing the animal. Thus, there are three forms of killing: he who brings flesh or sends for it, he who cuts off the limbs of an animal, and he who purchases, sells or cooks flesh and eats it -all of these are to be considered meat-eaters. Mahabharata, Anu. 115.40. FS, pg 90

He who desires to augment his own flesh by eating the flesh of other creatures lives in misery in whatever species he may take his birth. Mahabharata, Anu. 115.47. FS, pg. 90

One should never do that to another which one regards as injurious to one's own self. This, in brief, is the rule of dharma. Yielding to desire and acting differently, one becomes guilty of adharma. Mahabharata 18.113.8.

Those high-souled persons who desire beauty, faultlessness of limbs, long life, understanding, mental and physical strength and memory should abstain from acts of injury. Mahabharata 18.115.8.

Ahimsa is the highest dharma. Ahimsa is the best tapas. Ahimsa is the greatest gift. Ahimsa is the highest self-control. Ahimsa is the highest sacrifice. Ahimsa is the highest power. Ahimsa is the highest friend. Ahimsa is the highest truth. Ahimsa is the highest teaching. Mahabharata 18.116.37-41.

He who sees that the Lord of all is ever the same in all that is-immortal in the field of mortality-he sees the truth. And when a man sees that the God in himself is the same God in all that is, he hurts not himself by hurting others. Then he goes, indeed, to the highest path. Bhagavad Gita 13. 27-28. BgM, pg. 101

Nonviolence, truth, freedom from anger, renunciation, serenity, aversion to fault-finding, sympathy for all beings, peace from greedy cravings, gentleness, modesty, steadiness, energy, forgiveness, fortitude, purity, a good will, freedom from pride-these belong to a man who is born for heaven. Bhagavad Gita 16.2-3. BGM, pg. 109

Tirumantiram and other Scriptures

Many are the lovely flowers of worship offered to the Guru, but none lovelier than non-killing. Respect for life is the highest worship, the bright lamp, the sweet garland and unwavering devotion. Tirumantiram 197

SPIRITUAL MERIT and sin are our own making. The killer of other lives is an outcast. Match your words with your conduct. Steal not, kill not, indulge not in self-praise, condemn not others to their face. Lingayat Vachanas

AHIMSA IS NOT CAUSING pain to any living being at any time through the actions of one's mind, speech or body. Sandilya Upanishad When mind stuff is firmly based in waves of ahimsa, all living beings cease their enmity in the presence of such a person. Yoga Sutras 2.35. YP, pg. 205

Those who are ignorant of real dharma and, though wicked and haughty, account themselves virtuous, kill animals without any feeling of remorse or fear of punishment. Further, in their next lives, such sinful persons will be eaten by the same creatures they have killed in this world. Shrimad Bhagavatam 11.5.4. FS, pg, 90

The Tirukural, Preeminent Ethical Scripture

Perhaps nowhere is the principle of non meat-eating so fully and eloquently expressed as in the Tirukural, written in the Tamil language by a simple weaver saint in a village near Madras over 2,000 years ago. Considered the world's greatest ethical scripture, it is sworn on in South Indian courts of law.

It is the principle of the pure in heart never to injure others, even when they themselves have been hatefully injured. What is virtuous conduct? It is never destroying life, for killing leads to every other sin. 312; 321, TW

Harming others, even enemies who harmed you unprovoked, assures incessant sorrow. The supreme principle is this: never knowingly harm any one at any time in any way. 313; 317, TW

What is the good way? It is the path that reflects on how it may avoid killing any living creature. Refrain from taking precious life from any living being, even to save your own life. 324; 327, TW

How can he practice true compassion Who eats the flesh of an animal to fatten his own flesh? TK 251, TW

Riches cannot be found in the hands of the thriftless. Nor can compassion be found in the hearts of those who eat meat. TK 252, TW

Goodness is never one with the minds of these two: one who wields a weapon and one who feasts on a creature's flesh. TK 253, TW

If you ask, "What is kindness and what is unkind?" it is not killing and killing. Thus, eating flesh is never virtuous. TK 254, TW

Life is perpetuated by not eating meat. The clenched jaws of hell hold those who do. TK 255, TW

If the world did not purchase and consume meat, there would be none to

slaughter and offer meat for sale. TK 256, TW

When a man realizes that meat is the butchered flesh of another creature, he must abstain from eating it. TK 257, TW

Perceptive souls who have abandoned passion will not feed on flesh abandoned by life. TK 258, TW

Greater than a thousand ghee offerings consumed in sacrificial fires is to not sacrifice and consume any living creature. TK 259, TW

All that lives will press palms together in prayerful adoration of those who refuse to slaughter and savor meat. TK 260, TW

X. Hindu Religious Leaders on Non Injury

The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be measured by the way in which its animals are treated. Mahatma Gandhi

As long as human society continues to allow cows to be regularly killed in slaughterhouses, there cannot be any question of peace and prosperity. A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

Refrain from killing knowingly even the trifling insects like a louse, a bug or a mosquito. Use no violence even to gain possession of a woman, wealth or kingdom. Never kill any animals even for the purpose of sacrifice. Non-violence is the greatest of all religions. Swami Sahajanand

O lover of meditation, become pure and clean. Observe nonviolence in mind, speech and body. Never break another's heart. Avoid wounding another's feelings. Harm no one. Help all. Neither be afraid nor frighten others. Swami Muktananda

Someone who believes in violence and continues causing injury to others can never be peaceful himself. Swami Satchidananda

To be free from violence is the duty of every man. No thought of revenge, hatred or ill will should arise in our minds. Injuring others gives rise to hatred. Swami Sivananda

By ahimsa, Patanjali meant the removal of the desire to kill. All forms of life have

an equal right to the air of maya. The saint who uncovers the secret of creation will be in harmony with Nature's countless bewildering expressions. All men may understand this truth by overcoming the passion for destruction. Sri Yukteswar to Paramahansa Yogananda

If you plant eggplant, you can pluck eggplants. If you sow goodness, you can reap goodness. If you sow evil, you will reap evil. Do good to all. God is there, within you. Don't kill. Don't harbor anger. Sage Yogaswami

We are all of the same race and religion. We are holy beings established in Divinity itself. This truth can be understood only by those who have grasped it through the magical charm of a life of dharma-not by other means. Because of that, sages have emphatically proclaimed again and again that it is necessary to love all existing lives as one's own. Sage Yogaswami

The test of ahimsa is the absence of jealousy. The man whose heart never cherishes even the thought of injury to anyone, who rejoices at the prosperity of even his greatest enemy, that man is the bhakta, he is the yogi, he is the guru of all. Swami Vivekananda

Strictly speaking, no activity and no industry is possible without a certain amount of violence, no matter how little. Even the very process of living is impossible without a certain amount of violence. What we have to do is to minimize it to the greatest extent possible. Mahatma Gandhi, *My Socialism*, 34-35.

You do not like to suffer yourself. How can you inflict suffering on others? Every killing is a suicide. The eternal, blissful and natural state has been smothered by this life of ignorance. In this way the present life is due to the killing of the eternal, pristine Being. Is it not a case of suicide? Ramana Maharshi, June 1935

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