

Why Be A Hindu: The Advantages of the Vedic Path

Written as a short guide to promote and preserve the genuine purpose, values and understanding of Hinduism, the Vedic spiritual process.

Stephen Knapp

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The website listed above contains much more information about Stephen=s spiritual work, his books and The World Relief Network. You will also find many additional articles on numerous and important topics that he has written, as well as many photographs of festivals and the holy places of India taken during Stephen=s travels, and links to additional websites for more information and resources.

Other books by Stephen Knapp include:

- The Secret Teachings of the Vedas
- The Universal Path to Enlightenment
- The Vedic Prophecies: A New Look into the Future
- How the Universe was Created and Our Purpose In It
- Toward World Peace: Seeing the Unity Between Us All
- Facing Death: Welcoming the Afterlife
- Proof of Vedic Culture=s Global Existence
- The Key to Real Happiness
- Destined for Infinity

Preface

This booklet is my response to the fact that sometimes I get a little concerned, as I was when I took one of my tours of India (June, 2001), when I see the efforts of those who try to demean and unnecessarily promote serious misunderstandings about Hinduism, the Vedic culture. This often times is done in the attempt to convince others of the greatness of some of the minority religions there. This is something that is increasingly going on in India. It is also increasing in other parts of the world in what is called AHindu bashing.@ I have also witnessed young Hindus who have moved to the West and sometimes exhibit confusion or disregard in their attitude toward their own culture, some of which is a result of the Western attitudes and misunderstandings toward Hinduism.

So this booklet is written in response to that confusion, trouble, and the unnecessary campaigns for conversion. All of this is merely due to a lack of a clear understanding of Vedic culture and what it offers. So I wanted to bring out some simple yet important points, in the form of this booklet, that I thought people should consider in their view of the Vedic spiritual path.

One point to understand while reading this book is that the name Hinduism is, basically, a relatively modern term for the ancient Vedic spiritual path. So when I say AHindu,@ I mean the Vedic philosophy, otherwise known as *Sanatana-Dharma*, and someone who is following that direction. I know there are many distinctions and specific schools of thought within the umbrella term of AHinduism.@ However, I am writing this for a wide and general audience. So I am using the term in a liberal and collective way to include all people who follow the Vedic process or portions of it.

Hinduism, or Vedic culture, is not merely a religion. It is a spiritual path and way of life. Quite honestly, nothing compares with it. And I know. I grew up in the West as a Christian, studying the Bible from cover to cover due to my own curiosity. However, when I was about 19 years old, I still had many questions that were not and could not be answered within the Christian philosophy. So, I made great studies of the various religions and civilizations throughout the world, finally finding the Vedic culture as perhaps the most profound tradition of all. It is one that offers more insights into life and the purpose of it, especially the spiritual aspects, than any other culture one can find today. In this way, I found the kind of answers I needed in the Vedic literature, especially in the *Bhagavad-gita*, *Bhagavat Purana* and others. Only then did things of this world begin to make sense to me. I went on studying the Vedic philosophy and spiritual science and became an initiated disciple of His Divine Grace Srila A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, and was given the spiritual name of Sri Nandanandana dasa. I have continued practicing and studying the principles of Vedic philosophy ever since, as well as researching other religions of the world.

So what=s so great about Vedic culture and its philosophy? This booklet describes some of the elementary details that differentiates Hinduism, the Vedic path, over all others. And I am glad to share this with my fellow human beings who are open-minded enough to consider the various avenues that can help us understand more about our spiritual identities and the purpose of life. This is not an attempt to say that the Vedic path is better than anything else for everyone, but there are distinct advantages worth considering from which a person can benefit.

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Points of Consideration

1. WHAT DOES HINDUISM STAND FOR?

Hinduism is, basically, the modern name for the Vedic way of life, especially the spiritual path usually associated with India. Previously, those who followed the Vedic system were also called Aryans. It is often considered that the Vedic Aryans were a race of people. However, Aryan actually means a standard of living, an ideal. It was the Sanskrit speaking people of thousands of years ago that gave the word *arya* to signify a gentleman, an ideal person, someone on the path of purity. It was a term meant for those who were on the cutting edge of social evolution. Another way of interpreting the word *aryan* is that *ar* also means white or clear. *Ya* refers to God. *Ya* also refers to Yadu, or Krishna. Thus, *aryan* means those who have, or are developing, a clear path or a clear consciousness toward God.

In this way, we can understand that Aryanism, Vedic culture, or modern Hinduism, is a way of life. It is not a race of people or merely a sectarian creed or religion. It belongs to no particular country or race. It is a path that upholds a code of conduct which values peace and happiness and justice for all. Thus, it is a path open for all who want to be trained to be happy with simple living and high thinking, while engaged in proper conduct, a moral life, and selfless service to humanity and God. Therefore, anyone who wants to live in such a manner may be called an Aryan, a member or follower of the Vedic culture, no matter from which race or country a person may come.

So what does it mean to follow this Vedic Aryan path? It generally means to learn the ways of a spiritually progressed person. This includes understanding one's spiritual identity, knowing that he or she is not the temporary body but is spirit soul, that there is *karma* or reactions for one's activities, and rebirth in another life after death in which one reaps the reward or punishment for his or her own good or evil thoughts, words, and deeds. By having a solid understanding of such spiritual knowledge, there is automatically a respect for all others regardless of race, sex, position, or species. This brings a moral and peaceful social behavior in everybody toward everyone. By having respect for everyone's spiritual identity, this also brings an innate happiness in us all.

We can understand that we are only visiting this planet for a short time, and that we are all in this together. In other words, my contribution to your well-being, especially spiritual

well-being, will be an automatic contribution to my own existence. In this way, society at large is in a state of constant improvement. Thus, together we all work toward attaining a clean mind and a pure heart. That is the goal of the Vedic Aryan way of life, and all those who seriously follow it.

Not everyone, however, wants to reach this stage of life or follow this path. That is why the Vedic system installs rules for moral behavior and regulatory sacraments and practices beginning from the prenatal stage all the way through death. Of course, many of these moralistic rules are also quite common in other forms of religion and behavior. However, anybody who is unwilling to follow such rules for a balanced moral standard is dubbed a non-Aryan, which simply indicates one who is not so civilized. Such a person is not on the spiritual path of life, regardless of what other standards or principles of etiquette he may follow. So a person who lacks spiritual tendencies and acts on the bodily platform of existence, willing to do whatever he likes, or who thinks he is a white body, or a black body, or from this country or that, and who holds loyalty only to that conception and shows it by criticizing everyone who is not like him, is a non-Aryan. He is one who works against the standards of Hinduism, even he if calls himself a Hindu, or anything else for that matter. In this way, we can see the need to return to the Vedic standards of life through authentic spiritual education.

Therefore, the Sanskrit word Aryan means a way of life that aims at the elevation of everyone in society to a higher level of consciousness, as we find in the broadest foundation within Hinduism. It means to assist ourselves through a disciplined and godly life to understand the purpose of our existence as well as to become a spiritually realized person. It means to recognize the divinity in each of us. It means to perceive the divine energy that permeates the creation, knowing that we and all others are but manifestations of the Divine, the same Supreme Creator, Father of all. It also means that we help every other individual soul understand this, because by helping others we help ourselves.

That itself is a natural state of being when we can perceive God as the Supersoul, Paramatma, within everyone. All of this is encouraged by, and increases, a natural faith in an all-pervading Supreme Being. Such faith and focus on the Supreme can elevate us to return to our real spiritual home after death, that one infinite and eternal existence, which is one of the most important goals of the Vedic lifestyle. Once we are relieved of the body, or the bodily concept of life, then there is no longer any question as to what and who we really are. Offering this opportunity to society for reaching that level of understanding is one of the most important purposes of the Vedic path. This is the essence of what Hinduism stands for. Now let's consider the following points as to the advantages of the Vedic path.

2. HINDUISM IS THE OLDEST LIVING CULTURE IN THE WORLD.

Look around. Do you find any other culture that has lasted as long as the Hindu or Vedic culture? Do you see any other culture that after no less than 5,000 years, if not much longer, is still thriving and dynamic, practicing many of the same traditions as it did from thousands of years ago? Sure, you have other old cultures, like the Egyptian, the Inca, Maya, Aztec, all of which go back about 5,000 years, but none of these are still living cultures. They are all gone,

leaving us but remnants and artifacts to figure out what really was their culture.

For the Vedic civilization, it is not something that we really need to decipher from old remnants. The traditions and practices that you presently see have been going on for many thousands of years. Its history is well documented in the *Puranas*, much of which even historians have not researched as well as they should. Through such study it is obvious that the Vedic society has a prehistoric origin. While most of the *Living@* cultures that we find today, and the most popular religions, are a modern creation in the sense that they have only come about within the past 1400, 2000, and 2500 years with the advent of the Muslim, Christian, or Buddhist religions. However, the Vedic culture goes back much farther. Many scholars have noted the antiquity of the Vedic civilization. For example, in his *Discourse on Sanskrit and Its Literature*, given at the College of France, Professor Bournouf states, *AWe will study India with its philosophy and its myths, its literature, its laws and its language. Nay it is more than India, it is a page of the origin of the world that we will attempt to decipher.@*

In this same line of thinking, Mr. Thornton, in his book *History of British India*, observed, *AThe Hindus are indisputably entitled to rank among the most ancient of existing nations, as well as among those most early and most rapidly civilized. . . ere yet the Pyramids looked down upon the Valley of the Nile. . . when Greece and Italy, these cradles of modern civilization, housed only the tenants of the wilderness, India was the seat of wealth and grandeur.@*

The well-known German philosopher Augustus Schlegel in his book, *Wisdom of the Ancient Indians*, noted in regard to the divine origin of Vedic civilization, *AlIt cannot be denied that the early Indians possessed a knowledge of the God. All their writings are replete with sentiments and expressions, noble, clear, severely grand, as deeply conceived in any human language in which men have spoken of their God. . .@*

Max Mueller further remarked in his *India--What It Can Teach Us* (Page 21), *AHistorical records (of the Hindus) extend in some respects so far beyond all records and have been preserved to us in such perfect and legible documents, that we can learn from them lessons which we can learn nowhere else and supply missing links.@*

On the antiquity of the Vedic society, we can respect the number of philosophies, outlooks on life, and developments in understanding our purpose in this world that has been imbibed and dealt with during the course of its existence. Through all of this, it has formed a commentary and code on all aspects of life and its value, the likes of which can hardly be found in any other culture today. Thus, with age comes wisdom. And the nature and depth of the Vedic wisdom can hardly be compared with anything else that is presently available. Anyone who has taken a serious look at it will agree. It is universally applicable to all.

3. THE VEDIC LITERATURE IS THE OLDEST AND MOST COMPLETE SCRIPTURE FOUND ANYWHERE.

It is agreed by any scholar of history or religion that the earliest spiritual writings that can

be found are the Vedic *samhitas*, such as the *Rig-veda*. In History of Ancient Sanskrit Literature (page 557), Max Mueller observed, "In the *Rig-veda* we shall have before us more real antiquity than in all the inscriptions of Egypt or Ninevah. . . the *Veda* is the oldest book in existence. . ."

In the same book (page 63) Max Mueller also noted, "The *Veda* has a two-fold interest: It belongs to the history of the world and to the history of India. In the history of the world the *Veda* fills a gap which no literary work in any other language could fill. It carries us back to times of which we have no records anywhere."

The *Rig-veda*, as old and profound as it, nonetheless, represents only a portion of Vedic thought and wisdom. It was further expanded and explained in numerous other portions of Vedic literature. The whole library of ancient Vedic texts covers a wide range of contemplation, experience and learning in regard to an extraordinarily diverse number of topics.

To explain briefly, we first find the most ancient four Vedic *samhitas*, namely the *Rig*, *Sama*, *Yajur*, and *Atharva Vedas*. Then there is the *Brahmanas*, treatises explaining the techniques of the rituals in the *Vedas*, and the *Aranyakas*, further explanations for those renunciants who live in the forest. After this we find hundreds of *Upanishads*, the foremost of which are 108, out of which eleven are the most famous, such as the *Katha*, *Mundaka*, *Brihadaranyaka*, *Shvetashvatara*, *Prashna*, *Chandogya*, and others. These continue to elaborate on the Vedic spiritual truths. The *Vedanta Sutras* are also codes that contain the essence of spiritual truths that require fuller explanations by a spiritual teacher.

Beyond these are the *Itihasas*, or the histories, which are contained in such large volumes as the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, of which the famous *Bhagavad-gita* is a chapter. These contain not only an immense library of stories and moral principles, but some of the loftiest spiritual teachings that anyone can find. Furthermore, they can act as guidebooks for one's life, as well as explain the step by step processes for achieving one's own spiritual enlightenment. This is also true of the *Puranas*, out of which there are 18 greater or *Maha Puranas* and another 18 lesser or *Upa Puranas*. There are also many regional or *Sthala Puranas*. All of these give many stories of the past histories of the world, and even the universe, as well essential spiritual teachings that are universal in nature that everyone could benefit by studying.

We also find additional *Sutras*, books of codes that explain such things as rules for householders, as in the *Griha-Sutras*, or codes of duty and other topics. The *Vedangas* contain the auxiliary sciences, such as phonetics, grammar, astronomy, etc. Then there are the *Upavedas*, or lesser *Vedas*, which deal with the arts and sciences such as dancing and music (*Gandharva-veda*), holistic health (*Ayur-veda*), or the art of war, and even architecture. Beyond this there are thousands more books that are the books of great spiritual masters and Vedic teachers that are commentaries on the original Vedic texts. All of these are in pursuance of the Vedic path.

In this way, within the Vedic scripture, one can find music, dance, art, biographies on great saints and personalities, and stories that contain every level of emotion. They also exhibit lessons of truth, etiquette, philosophy, and examples of how others have lived and attained the heights of spiritual consciousness and freedom from further material birth.

The most important books for spiritual instruction, as most everyone will agree, are the *Bhagavad-gita* and Srila Vyasadeva's own commentary on the Vedic texts, the *Bhagavat*

Purana. He was the original author of the essential Vedic scriptures. These will bring anyone to various levels of spiritual knowledge, the likes of which surpass conventional religious principles. The *Bhagavat Purana* brought out everything that Vyasadeva neglected to explain in his previous writings. Therefore, anyone who studies Vedic knowledge should not neglect reading the *Bhagavat Purana*, also called the *Srimad-Bhagavatam*.

Through this short review of the Vedic texts, one can get an idea of how thorough and comprehensive is this science. These scriptures reveal the form of God, His personality, the loving nature of God, His greatness, mercy and compassion like no other scripture available. It also shows the unique paths to God in ways that are far more detailed and beyond anything that other scriptures present. Everyone, no matter whether they are religionists, philosophers, politicians, artists, celebrities, or renounced swamis, will appreciate and benefit from the continued study of this most ancient, sacred, and most complete of all spiritual literature. Therefore, those who are devoted Hindus and practitioners of the Vedic system never give up the reading and study of the Vedic literature, knowing that newer and loftier levels of understanding and perceptions into the secrets of life are awaiting them.

Naturally, there is wisdom and understanding available through all of the great books and religions. But to fathom the vast depths of Vedic knowledge is to flow through such a grand gallery of realizations and levels of consciousness that a person can merely get a glimpse of the innumerable considerations that have been made within the development of the Vedic lifestyle regarding all aspects of life. It has been said that the Vedic scripture remains ever fresh with newer and newer realizations, insights and wisdom. Thus, it could be advised that a person can spend a lifetime reading and studying the Vedic scripture and never end in finding newer and higher levels of understanding.

4. THE VEDIC PATH HAS A MOST DEVELOPED AND COMPLETE SPIRITUAL PHILOSOPHY.

As we can see from the previous description of the Vedic scripture, the Vedic philosophy is the most extensive you can find anywhere. It covers so many aspects of life, both material and spiritual, that it is more comprehensive than any other philosophy or lifestyle that you can find. So many viewpoints on life, the material manifestation, God, and our spiritual nature have already been thoroughly considered and thought out that there is little, if anything, that the Vedic philosophy has not already dealt with and spoke about. Everything is there, more of which than most people are aware. Because of this it has attracted thinkers and philosophers from all over the world and from all points in time. The West in particular has, and still does, look to India for the loftiest spiritual knowledge, and for what the churches or synagogues have not delivered. This may include practical spiritual guidance in self-discovery, an integrated world view, spiritual and emotional fulfillment, and even true mystical or spiritual experiences. The spiritual processes that are explained in the Vedic teachings go far beyond the conventional idea, as presented by most religions, that people should merely have faith and pray to God for forgiveness of their sins in order to be delivered to heaven. Naturally, we all have to be humble before God. That is what is encouraged and developed. This is especially in the loving devotional path, wherein a person can purify his or her consciousness through the spiritual practices that are fully explained in the Vedic teachings, even though this takes time and serious dedication and

sincerity.

The point is that the Vedic process does not discourage one from having his or her own spiritual realizations, which are often minimized, neglected or even criticized in other religions, which often teaches that the church alone is what maintains your connection with God. But in the Vedic system it is taught that we are all spiritual and loving parts of God, and automatically have a relationship with Him. Therefore, such experiences are considered a proof that the process is successful at helping one elevate his or her consciousness. One's consciousness resonates at various frequencies, depending on the level of one's thoughts, words, and actions, as well as the images and sounds that one absorbs through contact with objects and activities. By learning how to undergo the proper training, one can include the practices that will bring one's consciousness to a level in which one can perceive that which is spiritual. The more spiritual you become, the more you can perceive that which is spiritual. The whole idea is to bring one to perceive his or her spiritual identity and relationship with God. Thus, it must be a scientific process, used under the guidance of a spiritual master for it to be successful. If the process is not complete, or if the student is not serious, then of course the results will not be as expected. Yet, if the proper spiritual process is explained correctly, and the student is sincere in his or her efforts, the effects will be there. This is why for thousands of years philosophers and spiritual seekers from around the world have come to India, or have been influenced by the Vedic system: It gives practical results when properly performed.

5. THE VEDIC LITERATURE OFFERS MORE INFORMATION ON THE SCIENCE OF LIFE AFTER DEATH, KARMA AND REINCARNATION.

Sure, all religions indicate there is life after death. However, they normally offer only the most basic understanding that if you are good and a believer, maybe you will go to heaven. And if you are predominantly bad, you will go to hell. But only the Vedic philosophy offers detailed information on how exactly this works, and how we create our future with every thought, word and deed. And how that future may not only be in a heavenly world or on a hellish planet, but how it can be another life similar to what we are experiencing now on this earthly globe.

After all, we can look around this planet Earth and see that some people live a nice heavenly existence. They may live in beautiful weather and landscapes, in pleasant surroundings, and in a lovely house, with plenty of money, etc. While someone else may live in a country torn by war, with famine and drought all around, dealing with disease and poverty, and so on. Or we can see that even within the same family, someone may be born and become educated, wealthy and accomplished, while a sister or brother may be born blind, deformed, uneducated, and grow to have a hellish life filled with difficulty. Why is there such a difference? The fundamental religions may give only basic answers, like it is the will of God. Yet the Vedic knowledge can go into great details to explain how such occurrences are arranged by nature to provide the necessary facilities for each individual to have what he or she desires and deserves according to their past actions, words and consciousness.

6. THE VEDIC PHILOSOPHY OFFERS A MOST COMPLETE UNDERSTANDING OF GOD AND THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION.

In all of the religious books one can gather, you will find nowhere else but in the Vedic texts such a complete description of the Supreme Being and the spiritual dimension. Nowhere else is the understanding given that God is an impersonal force (the Brahman effulgence in which God shows His potency of existence/eternality), as well as Paramatma, the localized incarnation known as the Supersoul in everyone=s heart (in which God shows His potences of existence and knowledge), and, ultimately, Bhagavan, the Supreme Personality who creates this world and overlooks all things (in which God shows His potencies of existence, knowledge and pleasure pastimes). Nowhere else is there offered such a complete understanding of all aspects of God, from His impersonal characteristics to His individual and supreme nature.

Nowhere else can you find such details of God=s personality, what He looks like, how He lives and sports with His friends, or that He even DOES have friends and sports with them. Nowhere else can you find that God has devotees who play the parts of parents and relatives, but in a perfect spiritual family. Nowhere else but in the Vedic texts, especially in the likes of the *Bhagavat* and *Vishnu Puranas* or *Mahabharata*, can you see how God takes care of His friends and devotees, how He reveals Himself, how He engages in the most loving pastimes with those who love Him most, or even that you CAN engage in loving pastimes with God. Nowhere else is it explained how God, through His causeless mercy, descends into this world to exhibit His pastimes in order to give us a chance to learn how to become attracted to Him.

Furthermore, nowhere else are there such elaborate explanations of the spiritual world and what goes on there, or how we can truly enter that region, and what the areas are that surround the cosmic creation. Also, nowhere else can you find such detailed descriptions of how the universe was created. Often you will find in a scripture a simple allegory for people to believe that gives only the slightest ideas of how the worlds were created. But in the Vedic literature, there are complex explanations of how and when things took place in order to manifest the universe as we see it now. [My book, *How the Universe was Created*, gives these details.]

For these reasons, anyone of any religion can study the Vedic scripture to add to whatever spiritual understanding they already have. Or if they don't have any spiritual understanding, then you just found the mother lode, the main vein of spiritual knowledge of which all others are but portions.

7. HINDUISM AND THE VEDIC LITERATURE HAS MANY DIRECT WORDS AND INSTRUCTIONS FROM GOD.

The Vedic literature is filled with stories and conversations of instruction, and many of those instructions are given directly by God or one of His many incarnations. Other spiritual paths may provide a few commandments that are said to be given by God, or books given by His representatives or prophets. And these certainly can be helpful for the guidance of mankind. However, no where else but in the Vedic scripture do we find such a collection of direct instructions given by Lord Krishna, Lord Vishnu, or the Lord=s other forms that direct us in explicit methods of reaching spiritual realizations and perfection.

No where else can you find such lofty and spiritual advice as that related in books like the *Bhagavad-gita*, or the *Bhagavat Purana* and other numerous Vedic texts. No culture or religion has anything that compares, or that go far beyond basic moralistic rules to provide the higher

principles of direct spiritual realization. These instructions are a scientific process in which the results are assured to cleanse our minds and purify our hearts, if we sincerely follow the formula. Therein lies the doorway through which we can perceive our own spiritual identity and then the numerous aspects of the Absolute Truth.

8. THE VEDIC PATH OFFERS THE MOST LOVING AND BEAUTIFUL FORMS OF GOD.

Not only does the Vedic literature describe the innumerable aspects of God, but also relates the knowledge of the numerous incarnations and forms of God. In these incarnations He performs innumerable pastimes for multiple purposes. Out of all these, which are completely spiritual in nature, we find such beautiful attributes and forms as Lakshmi and Vishnu, or Sita and Rama, and Sri Sri Radha and Krishna as the most sublime. In fact, the forms of Radha and Krishna have been described at length for Their superb qualities and features of incomparable beauty. Plus, the depth of Lord Krishna's loving nature and pastimes with His closest associates is like none found elsewhere. There is no other culture or spiritual path that has any such knowledge of God, or that can present such loving and beautiful forms of God who displays such deep and nectar-like pastimes and personality. Therefore, the Vedic process offers the deepest insights into the most confidential forms and loving disposition of the Supreme Lord. These pastimes often cannot be understood by those who view the Supreme as an angry and jealous God, as some religions do. They do not know the more sublime nature of spiritual relations with the Supreme because there is no information about it found elsewhere.

9. THE VEDIC CULTURE HAS SOME OF THE GREATEST SPIRITUAL TEACHERS AND MASTERS THAT YOU CAN FIND.

In any of the authorized *sampradayas*, or lines of disciplic succession, you can find greatly learned and fully realized spiritual masters. These lines of gurus and disciples include the Brahma, Sri, Shiva or Kumara *sampradayas*. In these lines, the highest levels of spiritual knowledge has been carefully handed down from person to person, guru to disciple. Therein we have received the blessings and elaborate instructions from such teachers, as well as witnessed their lifestyle and numerous miracles, as some people would call them. The histories and biographies of such saints and teachers show their ability to affect others, and provide examples of how some have entered directly into the spiritual dimension, or even communed with God on a regular basis.

They are the living proof that the Vedic system and spiritual methodology works for anyone who takes it seriously. Whether one is reaching toward attaining the highest levels of love of God, or simply for *moksha*, liberation, and higher levels of spiritual understanding, the great sages and teachers of the Vedic path have shown how it is indeed possible. They have not only taught by example of what is possible when one attains spiritual perfection in this life, but some have left vast written instructions on how we can do the same. All we have to do is follow in their footsteps.

10. VEDIC CULTURE OFFERS A MOST DIRECT PATH TO PERSONAL SPIRITUAL REALIZATIONS AND ENLIGHTENMENT.

The Vedic process, *Sanatana-Dharma*, directly teaches what is the spirit soul and what are your spiritual nature and position. Such teachings are easily found in the *Bhagavad-gita* and other important Vedic scripture. It then provides the system which engages you in the activities that awaken your perception of this. The key is that it prepares your consciousness, through various practices, to operate on higher levels of reality, and ultimately on the spiritual strata. This increases your awareness and allows for the ability to perceive the higher planes of existence that pervade this multidimensional universe. In this way, the more spiritual you become, the more you can detect that which is spiritual. Through this means of continual development, spiritual life no longer remains a mystery, but becomes a reality to experience. This is why Lord Krishna says in the *Bhagavad-gita* that this spiritual knowledge of the Vedic system is the king of education, the most secret of all secrets, and the perfection of religion because it gives direct perception of the Self, the soul, by realization. It is eternal and joyfully performed.

11. BECAUSE HINDUISM IS ONE OF THE MOST EXPRESSIVE PATHS, IT IS ALSO ONE OF THE MOST EMOTIONALLY FULFILLING.

There are some religions that make no hesitation about stifling music and other forms of art because they think that it is too sensual. Others simply may not utilize much of it except in songs. However, the ancient Vedic path incorporates many forms of self-expression. The idea is that it can be used in the service of the Supreme, and, thus, becomes a means for focusing one's attention and consciousness on God. Thus, it becomes a spiritual energy and a tool for expressing and raising one's devotion to the Lord.

Prayer for example, has been an integral part of the Vedic system since time immemorial. The Vedic literature is full of devotional and descriptive *mantras*, verses and prayers. These are not only utilized in one's daily devotions and meditations, but they are also incorporated into devotional songs. There are all kinds of music within the Vedic culture. Anyone who even begins to listen to the Indian style of music will quickly notice that it is quite different from other forms and is a complete science by itself. Not only are there numerous forms of instruments, but also very different styles of music and devotional songs that are used in worship, dance, drama, or in ceremonies.

There are also numerous forms of expressive ritual and ceremony. Many of these are conducted inside the temples, and many are performed outside or in the open allowing for all to participate. Some are only performed by priests while people watch with great enthusiasm.

Many of these ceremonies have also been moved to include dance. Such dances often utilize old movements and expressions that have been passed down through many generations, while others are based on the artist's own interpretation of an ancient legend. There are also numerous plays and dramas that involve the stories of the Lord, as taken from the ancient Puranic legends. These are prominently performed over holidays or during festivals. Such plays and dance also use many forms of make up, costumes, and ornaments to better present the emotions,

characters, and general performance of the drama. Some of these use a few actors, while others use large acting troupes. There are also numerous festivals in Vedic culture. These vary in expression according to locality, or upon which of God=s forms the festival focuses.

Much can also be said about the art work that is found within Vedic culture. There are not only ornaments, jewelry, but also a wide variety of painting styles that are used in the worship and display of the forms and pastimes of the Lord. Painting and sculpture are like sciences unto themselves in the way such artists are trained. Nonetheless, any artist has full opportunity to express his or her devotion to God through this art. Thus, such art and expression becomes a means for one=s personal spiritual insights, realizations and enlightenment.

In this way, there are numerous forms of expression that are used in Hinduism, making it one of the most emotionally rewarding and expressive spiritual paths that you can find.

12. HINDUISM, VEDIC CULTURE, OFFERS A SCIENTIFIC WAY OF LIFE, FROM DIET, LIFESTYLE, DAILY SCHEDULE, ETC.

With all the topics that are covered in the Vedic scripture, it provides the means for a most well-rounded and balanced lifestyle, both materially and spiritually. For example, in regard to meditation, it recommends that the best time to do so is in the early morning during the *brahma-muhurta* hour, which is just before sunrise. Why? Because this is best since it is before the business and noise of the day begins. It is just after getting rest, arising during the time when *satya-guna*, the mode of goodness, is prominent, and before the mind is disturbed by so many thoughts of the day.

Regarding diet, it is recommended that you eat your biggest meal while the fire of digestion is at its peak, which is usually around noon or shortly thereafter. This is also when the sun is at its highest. This helps relieve one from indigestion and associated diseases.

Diet is also further divided not only by different foods at certain times of the day, but also by whether the food is in the mode of goodness (*sattvic*), passion (*rajasic*), or darkness (*tamasic*). Foods in goodness are vegetarian (fruits and vegetables) that promote health, peace of mind, happiness, and enlightenment. *Rajasic* foods are often based on taste and can be spicy. These lead to mental agitation, passion, and disease. *Tamasic* foods include those that are old, often of little taste, stale, of little nutritional value, and can lead to delusion, laziness and sleep. So simply by the study of food one can direct the diet toward a happier and more peaceful life.

In regard to the way to divide one=s existence, there are four *ashramas* of life. We are students in the first part of our life, called the *brahmachari ashrama* for men. In the second part of our life most people are married householders, called the *grihasta-ashrama*. After we have associated with our wife and had children that have grown and married, then it is time to take up the retired order of life, the *vanaprastha-ashrama*, and begin to relieve ourselves of the responsibilities of married life. Then when we are ready, usually before we are too old, it is suggested that we take up the renounced order of life, *sannyasa-ashrama*, so that we can devote ourselves completely to reaching God after death. In this way, by following these *ashramas*, or orders of life, we not only have a fulfilling material existence, but also reach spiritual perfection so as to not waste this valuable form of human life.

These are just a few examples of how the Vedic recommended lifestyle and science is meant to help one live a balanced existence for happiness and progress both materially and

spiritually.

13. ANYONE IN ANY POSITION CAN BE A HINDU AND PRACTICE AND BENEFIT FROM THE VEDIC TEACHINGS.

It does not matter whether one is in a high class or low class position, wealthy or poor, educated or uneducated, old or young, man or woman, anyone can plug into some portion of the Vedic teachings and participate. This will benefit one in any number of ways. If one wants to be healthier, happier, more peaceful, more enlightened spiritually, a person can find that the Vedic path can do this.

It also does not matter whether one is Indian or a Westerner born outside India, one can still adopt the Vedic teachings or incorporate them into his or her life for so many benefits. There are no limitations in the Vedic teachings regarding who can join in. All that is required is sincerity. Sincerity is the essence of purity. With that one's progress is assured.

Sanatana-Dharma means the eternal nature of the soul. Each and every being is a soul, so this includes everyone. Thus, each person is entitled to participate in this universal process regardless of whatever their temporary position is at present, and make genuine spiritual progress.

14. THE VEDIC PATH VIEWS ALL RELIGIONS AS TRUTH, OR PORTIONS OF THE ONE TRUTH, AND WAYS OF SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT.

There is no discrimination toward other religions in Hinduism. Hinduism views all authentic religions with a potential to raise the consciousness of its followers to a higher level of understanding God, themselves, and humanity. This is merely one of the beautiful aspects of Hinduism; that it provides the greatest latitude of diversity in the ways of understanding God. That is why you can mix Hindus with anyone, and they can peacefully coexist, just as you presently have Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, and others all living together peacefully. But as soon as you mix those of other religions who are dogmatic in their views, there is trouble. The reason is that there is no room for diversity of thought in such people. They think that in the eyes of God no one else is saved. They think they must *Asave* everyone by making everyone else just like them. And the way that is done is by converting all others to their own dogmatic beliefs. Thus, they give no credence or understanding toward any religion but their own.

The world could be a peaceful place if it were not for the constant attempt by various groups to control and convert. It is on this account that there have been so many years of bloodshed, slaughter and torture to force others to be of only one religion. Such religions cause themselves not to be united with God, but to stand separated from God for not providing the way to see the spiritual nature and Divinity in all beings. Such religions actually create disharmony between man and God because of forcing their followers to focus on our superficial differences rather than our deeper unity and commonality as beings of one common God.

In this way, *Sanatana-Dharma* is not a religion that stands separate from others. It is not that Hinduism or Vedic culture opposes other spiritual paths. But it represents and provides the means through which anyone can attain the highest spiritual understanding possible. It helps one

understand who and what we really are, above and beyond all the superficialities that are often found in the fundamental and materialistic religions. Therefore, once again, anyone, no matter what religion or culture one may be, can still use the Vedic path to increase his or her overall understanding of him or herself, the universe, and God, and awaken our natural spiritual love for one and all.

15. HINDUISM, VEDIC CULTURE, DOES NOT PRESENT GOD AS A HINDU, MUSLIM, CHRISTIAN, OR SIKH GOD.

Since Vedic culture is universal in nature, it does not present a God in a regional theme, or belonging to a Achosen@ people. Nor do we find God in the Vedic understanding to prefer a certain people. What you do find is a God who is loving to one and all, and especially to His devotees. What we find is a God who rewards one=s love with love, according to their surrender and loving mood, regardless of region, race, or even species.

It is this sort of God who is truly universal, and not subject to regional ties or local constrictions, but who extends Himself to one and all. It is this kind of God who is found in any and all religions, the understanding of Whom is limited only by the lack of knowledge within any particular religion or people. If all such people could expand their awareness of the greatness of God, then surely such mature persons would see the same God everywhere, in all religions. This fullness of awareness would lead to God as we know Him as described in the Vedic scripture.

16. THIS IS WHY HINDUS, THE FOLLOWERS OF THE VEDIC PATH, CAN LIVE PEACEFULLY WITH THOSE OF OTHER RELIGIONS.

Since Hindus in general, and those with a mature understanding of God as mentioned in the previous point, are more aware of the many different aspects of God, and see the same God in all religions, there is no friction between them and those of other distinct faiths. They can live peacefully with others without the need to feel that everyone else is doomed to hell, or must be converted to be Asaved.@ Hindus recognize the same God though worshiped in many ways. Thus, what is the difficulty? There is no problem. This is true of sincere worshipers of any religion. A sincere and mature Christian can easily get along with a sincere Hindu, who can easily get along with a sincere and mature Muslim, who can get along with a sincere Sikh, Buddhist, and so on.

This is quite different from those fundamental people who label God according to their faith, or who become defensive when apparent differences arise. This is what causes superficial distinctions and designations that grow into religious differences that for a spiritually mature person do not exist. It is only a lack of spiritual and Godly awareness and understanding that keep people pointing fingers at each other and from cooperating and respecting each other. A true religionist can easily recognize another=s devotion to God without getting caught up in what may seem to be external differences. It is the essence of spiritual life that matters. That is our focus.

17. HINDUISM HAS NO CONCEPT OF JIHAD, HOLY WARS, CRUSADES, OR

MARTYRDOM ON ITS BEHALF.

Unlike other religions that tend to be extremists or exceptionally dogmatic in its views, Hinduism, or Vedic culture, has no concepts that relate to being a martyr, as found in Christianity, or the Islamic jihad. These are not ideas that make much sense to the Hindu. Why? Because for Hindus spiritual life is not about fighting others for the supremacy of one religion over another. Hinduism treats all religions with respect because it has its own sense of security and strength in its approach to God, which is the hallmark of a mature spiritual path. Religion and any spiritual process is to help an individual better understand who he is and what is his or her relation to God, and what is his purpose in the universe. If a person is truly trying to progress in this way, then of what purpose is there in participating in a holy war, or to die becoming a martyr for a cause fighting against another religion? This is not the purpose of any spiritual path. This is why there is not much discussion in the Vedic literature to demean other religions, nor is there any campaign against any so-called "false gods" as you find in the more rigid or dogmatic religions.

The reason for this is not that Hinduism is not interested in "saving" people. The reason is that the Vedic culture allows anyone the freedom to undergo whatever may be necessary for their own spiritual development and particular realizations. The Vedic literature, if studied to its fullest depths, supplies all a person needs in order to understand the highest levels of spiritual Truth. Nonetheless, if a person still has different avenues to investigate in spiritual matters, the Vedic culture allows that person to do so, even if the person may risk undergoing a slow process to the highest levels of spiritual realizations. This is a personal choice for everyone. Therefore, forceful conversions or tyrannical religious rule or competition amongst religions make no sense to the Hindu. What makes sense is the freedom for each individual to reach an appreciation of everyone being a spiritual being, all going back to God, but at their own pace. Nonetheless, the Vedic spiritual teachers always try to encourage everyone toward the best use of their time and energies in their spiritual pursuits. That is how people are guided in the Vedic culture, as opposed to forceful conversions or dogmatic regulations.

Religions that view other spiritual paths as competitors will never understand the Vedic path, which is more open. They will only hold on to their fear that makes them think that only their way is the right way, and all other paths lead to hell, as if they need some reassurance that they are correct. Hinduism does not have such fear of being wrong. Followers of the Vedic path acquire their own spiritual realizations that assure them of their own progress. That is the sign of real spiritual advancement when the change of consciousness is directly perceived. That is the difference between the Vedic path and the more fundamental and fear-based religions that depend on mere blind faith in the process, without experiencing any perceptive results in one's change of awareness and consciousness.

For Christianity, only when they accept the value of other religions, and the right of others to follow the creeds and processes of their choice, can the universal love as taught by Jesus Christ truly illuminate from their churches and pulpits. Then they can get along with those of other religions without the condemnation that all others are going to hell. After all, no truly loving God will cast His children into an eternal hell without the chance of correcting themselves. Therefore, the Vedic culture offers a deeper understanding of the true loving nature of God than the religions that are merely based on fear of God.

18. FOLLOWERS OF VEDIC PHILOSOPHY DO NOT TARGET OTHERS FOR CONVERSION.

Hindus do not take it upon themselves to convert others to Hinduism. They never target a certain religion or faith to be subject to their criticism or attempts to be converted to Hinduism. They feel that the focus of any spiritual path should be on God, not on making or accumulating converts like some network marketing scheme that counts profits in terms of the quantity of followers it has. The effort should be in giving high quality spiritual education and, thus, by purity, inspire others to go toward God. Therefore, they have no motive to spread hate or lies or discord amongst any other community or religion. On the other hand, it is seen that Christians often view Hindus as pagans or heathens, meaning, in essence, that they are Godless and doomed to hell, and must accept God in the form of Christianity in order to be saved. Muslims also view Hindus as idolaters or polytheists, and thus damned per the descriptions of the Koran, or so they say. Yet, Hindus are free from any such doctrine or attitude toward Islam or Christianity. Nonetheless, when Hindus begin to react to this constant criticism of their religion by such dogmatists, it is primarily an angry backlash and a defense of their culture rather than an attempt to start friction or trouble with those of other faiths. After all, how long can Hindus continue to be as tolerant as they have been toward those of other religions who are so aggressive in their attempts to make converts and who take advantage of this tolerant attitude? It should be expected that sooner or later Hindus will no longer tolerate this never ending bombardment of propaganda against Hinduism that is used to sway more people toward misunderstanding what Hinduism or Vedic culture is in an effort to make converts.

We should point out that real Hinduism, Vedic culture, is a most broad-minded and gentle way of life, and is not interested in campaigning for making converts. It is not part of the Hindu values to indulge in violence. Hinduism lets anyone choose the path they wish to take. However, we will find more and more cases where Hindus will speak out and react against the deliberate use of lies and demeaning propaganda that is used to spread strong misunderstandings of what the Vedic path really is. If missionaries of other religions are purposely creating harm to Hinduism, then the Hindus have the right to protect themselves and their culture. In India we find that such tensions often take place in the tribal areas more than in the urban areas where access to legal ramifications is easier, and where there is greater scrutiny of public pressure. Ultimately, there would be peace among all religions in India and elsewhere if there was not the constant attempt by certain faiths who continually campaign to convert others to their way of worship.

19. HINDUISM ACCEPTS THAT EVERYONE HAS THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE ONE'S OWN PATH TO ENLIGHTENMENT OR SALVATION.

An example of this is the Kumbha Mela festival, which recently took place in Allahabad in January, 2001. There were more than 71 million people attending through its duration, and 5,000 different *ashramas* or schools of philosophy at the festival, all with similarities with one another, yet with particular distinctions as well. Yet, they all got along and cooperated and respected each other in their participation of this holy festival. You cannot find such a huge gathering amongst those of any other religion.

There are different sects in Islam, and many different denominations in Christianity, all with their differences and criticisms of each other. So much so that wars between two major sects in Christianity (Catholics and Protestants) have been killing each other for hundreds of years. They are highly critical of each other and also get upset when one makes converts from the other side, even though both are Christian paths. However, you will never find this within the ranks and genuine schools of Vedic culture.

20. HINDUISM OFFERS A UNIVERSAL GOD AND CONSCIOUSNESS, BEYOND A MERE LOCAL TRADITION.

Often you find a religion based on the history, background and needs or development of a regional people. But in the Vedic culture we find a universal history not only involving the people of India, but other areas of the world, as well as other planets and different dimensions of the universe. Thus the spiritual teachings that the Vedic philosophy provides are universal, for all living beings.

The Vedic path is not based on blind faith in a regional understanding of God, or the history of a particular people. It is based on the understanding that Vedic philosophy is a part of the natural laws that exist throughout the creation. Thus, they are universal laws and principles that are applicable to all. By following these natural principles, as outlined in the ancient Vedic texts, one can acquire a higher level of understanding and consciousness in which a person can directly perceive the spiritual nature of everyone and all that exists. Through this means, a person can perceive his or her own spiritual identity, and one's unity with all of creation. Therefore, the Vedic philosophy is a universal approach.

The Vedic doctrine also is beyond merely using and basing its outlook on locality. It is not merely Indian. Even though many of the events, such as those found in the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*, took place in India, and numerous Vedic personalities and incarnations of God had pastimes in India or live there, many of it's concerns spread outside India, and even to other planets. However, the teachings and philosophy are based on the science of the soul, which includes us all. Therefore, this knowledge of the soul is not limited to a particular region or locality. It is universal.

This also goes with knowledge of God. The Vedic outlook explains that God is not God for a particular region or area. Or that the people of a certain area must conform to a particular code of conduct or worship. God is not a Jewish God who chooses a special people to be His own. You will not find that in the Vedic tradition. In the Vedic texts you will find God who is a loving God, concerned with everyone, and not just humans, but those on other planets, those existing in the bodies of other species, even those in other universes. It doesn't matter where you are, or in what body you exist. God is concerned for you and wants you to know that, which is why He appears in this world and sends so many messengers all over the universe.

Furthermore, Hinduism is not based solely on one personality or teacher. It is not like Catholicism which has one pope who is said to be the sole authority over all other Catholics who must obey the dictates of this one man. Hinduism can and does accept the teachings of numerous spiritual guides. Even if a person is initiated by a particular spiritual teacher or guru, it is often seen that the disciples, once having clearly understood the teachings of their own master, may also consider the teachings of other advanced devotees or masters in their *sampradaya*, or

disciplic line of authorities. In fact, it is recommended that to be sure of following the spiritual path correctly, any instructions should be compared to a system of checks and balances. These are guru (the spiritual master), *sadhu* (other spiritual authorities), and *Shastra* (the instructions in the Vedic texts). If these all line up with the same instruction, then there is no problem. If any one of them differs, then it should be investigated as to the reason why. If something is off track or not correct, then it should be adjusted. This is how one can always be sure that he or she is following the proper spiritual methods without going too far the wrong way, or without being misguided by a guru who may not be as pure or advanced as people may think. Thus, the Vedic system again provides a means for assuring yourself of the authority and potency of the method and teacher you accept.

21. HINDUISM PROMOTES SEEING GOD IN ALL LIVING BEINGS.

Without a doubt, the Vedic scripture provides descriptions and narrations meant to help one increase his or her awareness of God in all beings. Anyone who studies the essential Vedic texts will soon see a difference in his or her recognition of how God is within everyone, accompanying the *jivatma* (individual soul) as the Paramatma (Supersoul). You will never find anywhere else the information on the Supersoul as we find in the Vedic texts. This information helps us see the Divinity within all living beings and how everyone is a part of the Supreme in spiritual quality. Such an awareness and perception will naturally increase our respect and concern for all living creatures. We will realize that all life is sacred. We will more clearly understand how our love for God will be exhibited by how much we care and cooperate with others.

22. IN HINDUISM YOU CAN ASK ALL THE QUESTIONS YOU WANT WITHOUT BEING CONSIDERED A BLASPHEMER OR A DOUBTING PERSON.

This is something that many of us do not think about. However, in some religions you cannot even ask too many questions without your own faith being called into consideration. In some religions, if you ask too many questions it is thought to be challenging, which means that you doubt the religion. While in Hinduism you can ask all the questions you want because it is considered a part of one's spiritual process of understanding.

Much of the Vedic literature was written in a question and answer process between student and teacher. Thus, therein we find hundreds of thousands of questions and answers, all of which deal with innumerable topics or various views of understanding and describing the Absolute Truth and the means to perceive it. Having your questions answered is a natural way to increase your spiritual understanding and faith, and eradicate your doubts. However, in some religions asking too many questions is taboo, or improper, partly because it can reveal how little is really understood in a fundamental or elementary religion, and how they still expect blind faith to be the major qualification of their followers. Thus, genuine spiritual understanding in such religions is not increased unless the people look elsewhere for fuller answers to the deeper questions.

23. HINDUISM IS LIKE THE MILLION DOLLAR CULTURE.

The reason why the Vedic philosophy is the million dollar culture is because just as when a millionaire automatically has all his ten dollar problems solved, so one who follows the Vedic philosophy has all his ten dollar questions answered. There are so many cultures and religions in the world, all of which may offer basic moralistic rules if not higher spiritual knowledge. But such paths often deal only with the ten dollar questions, and sometimes with difficulty. The Vedic system, however, goes much more deeply into dealing with more advanced levels of spiritual understanding. Thus, it is like the million dollar philosophy which, because of its depth of awareness and insight, already incorporates all these 10 dollar questions. In this way, it is not necessary to be distracted by 10 dollar religions or philosophies when you already have one worth a million dollars as we find in the Vedic knowledge.

As a Hindu, we do not need to be saved from what is already saving us, from what is already delivering us to a higher level of consciousness, a higher level of spiritual understanding. All we have to do is go deeper into the Vedic path, the Vedic literature, the Vedic system. That will do more for us than comparing Hinduism with other religions, or considering how some other religion will provide us with better material facility or something, while placing God as secondary.

24. THE VEDIC PROCESS OFFERS THE EASIEST PATH BACK TO GOD.

Of course, this point may seem like it is merely a matter of opinion, but if we analyze things we can see that the Vedic system can be very easy and trouble free. It is merely a matter of love. That is the main thing.

Love is the most natural emotional need and longing any of us have. Simply dovetailing and realigning our love toward God is the easiest process for spiritual development. All religions explain this. However, the most personal aspects of the Vedic teachings go into the greatest details of how to develop this loving tendency toward God, and how such an eternal loving relationship with the Supreme Being is manifested and maintained. The Vedic descriptions of the pastimes of the Supreme Lord are like none found anywhere else, along with explanations of His friends and relatives, His personality, His dress and appearance, and so much more, all of which are provided to invoke our loving attraction to this Supreme object of our affection. The easiest part of the Vedic system that helps us accomplish this is through the process of *bhakti-yoga* (the yoga of awakening our loving devotion to God) and *harinam* (associating with God through the chanting of the Lord's holy names). It has been shown many times, and by many great sages, and through the instructions in the Vedic scripture, that our natural and continuous loving propensity, when directed toward God, is not only the means but also the end of the path. Such love becomes the impetus to always think of God, which is the easiest and most constant form of meditation. This is what purifies our heart, delivering us to the freedom from the cycles of repeated birth and death, and to our eternal home in the spiritual sky. The spiritual world is that place wherein our natural spiritual love can manifest to its fullest and most unlimited degree.

25. HINDUISM ADVOCATES A UNIVERSAL RATHER THAN A SELF-CENTERED CONSCIOUSNESS.

As explained earlier, the Vedic philosophy is a universal philosophy. It asserts that every individual is a part of the universe and in microcosm represents the macrocosm. A thorough study of Vedic astronomy will reveal that the universal form is also inside our body, and that the body represents the cosmos in miniature. In such a light, it can also be understood that man cannot be separate from family, society, country, or the universe itself. In other words, he or she is a multidimensional being who is connected in many ways to the multidimensional universe. A universal consciousness means that we perceive this connection, and how we are related to each and every being in some way. Therefore, our actions are connected to those around us, even to the plants and animals. Thus, it is recommended that we act as proper caretakers of all other living entities so that we do not do anything that will wrongly affect or create harm, even unknowingly, to others, which would only be reflected back on ourselves. Therefore, whatever we do will have a direct or no less than subtle effect on all and everything around us. This understanding also promotes the fact that we need to remember that we are all stewards and caretakers of the planet, the land, each other, and all creatures.

In Western countries people are brought up in the idea of consumerism. This is the basis in which people tend to think of themselves and their own happiness first. In Vedic society, people are raised to see things differently, to see that everyone shares in the results of other's actions, and that everyone shares in looking after the needs of others before considering one's own. However, this is not as noticeable as it used to be due to the people falling away from the Vedic system and being more attracted to the principle of consumerism of the West.

26. HINDUISM PROMOTES THE CAUSE OF REAL CARE AND CONCERN FOR OTHERS.

By understanding our spiritual nature, and being able to perceive that nature in all other living beings, we naturally care for and are concerned about all others. This does not only mean the material benefits, such as making sure the hungry are fed, or the poor are clothed. But this also extends to the care for the soul. Naturally, it can be difficult to take care of the material or bodily needs of all other living beings. However, the point is that as long as we have these material bodies, there will be a constant drive to care for the problems that our material body will create for us. Therefore, by giving everyone the chance to advance spiritually can also help each person to solve this problem. Once a person has made enough spiritual advancement that they no longer need a material body and become free from any continued rounds of birth and death, then all such problems will naturally be solved. This is the true care and concern of the Vedic system.

Some people may nonetheless criticize Hinduism for what appears to be the issue of the untouchability of the low castes, the disrespect for widows, poverty, etc. However, these issues are not so much the problem or product of the Vedic system in as much as they are social issues that have developed because of society falling away from the Vedic path. To explain briefly, the caste system as we see it today is a perverted remnant from the *varnashrama* system of the Vedic culture. *Varna* is a legitimate Vedic system by which a person is recommended for a type of work and social service according to his or her mental and intellectual caliber, ability and tendencies.

Thus, if a person showed a proclivity for study and religious pursuits, then he may be trained to be a Brahmin. If he exhibited a talent for business, then he may be trained to be a Vaishya. A child of feeble intellect that preferred performing menial tasks would then be trained in the ways of serving those in the higher *varnas*, as a Sudra. Nonetheless, his dignity was preserved and he had full rights as any other person.

However, the caste system we see today is that if you are born in the family of a Brahmin, then you are accepted to be a Brahmin. And if you are born in a Sudra family, then that is where you remain. Thus, through the years, the higher castes have shown an attitude of exclusivity above the lower castes. There is no justification for this, since it is clearly taught in the Vedic literature, such as the *Bhagavad-gita* and *Bhagavat Purana* that everyone is born in ignorance. Thus, everyone is at first a Sudra until it is determined what mental or intellectual tendencies and abilities a person has. Only then may it be determined what *varna* or caste a person is likely to belong. In other words, just by being born in the family of a doctor does not mean that you are automatically a doctor. You must be trained, tested and qualified. If you do not become qualified, then you are no doctor, but must be something else. Similarly, if you are born in a Brahmin family, but go out smoking, drinking, eating meat, etc., then you are no Brahmin, but you actually have a low-caste mentality. Furthermore, in the true Vedic *varnashrama* system, even if you were born in a low-caste family, if you exhibited good intellectual ability, then you were not forced to remain in the low-caste category. You could be trained for other purposes and skills.

These problems would all be resolved if people would actually study more seriously the Vedic literature and regain the spiritual standards that more strictly follow the Vedic path. Then there would certainly be more of the genuine care and concern that the Vedic system promotes. This would naturally be there if we all saw each other as spiritual beings but merely in different types of bodies. With this sort of spiritual perception, we all lose sight of the materialistic distinctions between us and easily become more loving, caring, and cooperative with everyone.

27. WITH OR WITHOUT A CHURCH OR INSTITUTION, HINDUISM SHOWS AND ESTABLISHES THAT EVERYONE HAS A PERSONAL AND INDEPENDENT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, WHICH ONLY NEEDS TO BE REAWAKENED.

This is an important point. There are other religions that teach that your only connection with God is through the church, or the institution, without which you are excommunicated or eternally damned. Unlike this, the Vedic system teaches that everyone is a spiritual being, and, thus, automatically a part of a loving God with an eternal relationship with Him. This relationship only has to be reawakened, which is the purpose of the many instructions given by God in the Vedic texts. It is also the purpose of the spiritual teachers who try to help everyone revive this eternal but dormant relationship. To rejuvenate such a relationship simply depends on one's sincerity to advance by following these instructions. It is not subject to an institution or a pope who alone claims to be in touch with God and knows the ultimate truth, upon whom we all are dependent, and who can dictate restrictions as he likes. In fact, any spiritual teacher is only as good to the degree in which he is at being a representation of God's love for us, or at being a transparent medium for the spiritual instructions of God and the previous *acharyas* or authorities. The church or institution also is only good to the degree in which it represents the genuine spiritual tradition, as found in the Vedic system. If there is any blockage or ulterior motive in the

spiritual teacher or institution in this transference of love and knowledge, then it may actually misrepresent God=s true message and mislead people in their search for God=s love.

In this way, a church or establishment is meant to provide the proper facility and opportunity for people to advance and experience God=s love. Without a connection to a church or organization does not mean that a person is eternally condemned or will never have a chance of revitalizing one=s relationship with God. An organization is not, nor can it ever be, the controller of whether a person has a relation to God, or goes to heaven or hell. This is completely dependent on the individual soul and his or her consciousness or sincerity. The fact is that since we are all spiritual beings, everyone has a personal relationship with God, and no one else can interfere with that. It only needs to be revived, which is the purpose of the Vedic process.

28. IN ESSENCE, HINDUISM, THE VEDIC SYSTEM, OPENS THE DOOR TO THE REAL MEANINGS OF LIFE.

After practicing and living by the principles of the Vedic philosophy, you can bring a perceptive and obvious change in your life, as well as into your own sphere of influence. By beginning to awaken your awareness of your spiritual identity and your relationship with the Supreme, you can easily feel a new level of happiness, peace, and contentment. You will have a clearer understanding of who you are, where you have come from, and your purpose in life. You will have a better focus on why we are here and what needs to be done while living in this material world. Little things that you may have taken so seriously, that may have bothered you will no longer have the same affect on you. You will see with a clearer view of what really matters in life, and the superficialities that are not important. You will see that there is only one universal religion, and that is *Sanatana-Dharma*, awakening the natural proclivity and needs of the soul, and regaining our real spiritual identity and relationship with God. It is merely a matter of learning how to love and serve God. That is the heart of the Vedic path.