

How to Become a Hindu a Guide for Seekers and Born Hindus by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniswami [published by Himalayan Academy, Hawaii]

A history making manual, interreligious study and names list with stories by Westerners who entered Hinduism and Hindus who deepened their faith.

A. Reviews and Comments

1. Srimadjagadguru Shankar Acharya, Goverdhan Math, Puri, Orissa, India, Sri Swami Nischalananda Saraswatiji Maharaj

On the basis of philosophy, Sanatan Vedic Aryan Hindu Dharma accepts godliness in all living beings. Vasudhaiva kutumbakam: "The whole world is one family." All living beings are children of the Immortal Power, God or Ishwara. Hindu Dharma sends out a message for all persons to be free from agony and fear, and to be healthy, happy and pious.

The Hindu Dharma is like the holy river Ganga, whereas all other sects, faiths and religions are like canals from Ganga. The existence and utility of all other religions depend upon Hindu Dharma. The Holy Quran, etc., do not recommend cow slaughter. Instead, they support cow protection. In this situation, all those who find their roots in the Vedas, who accept the holiness of the cow and believe in protecting the cow family can become Hindus, while keeping other's welfare in mind. But it is proper to follow the tradition for social arts, like food, marriage, etc.

Based on this principle, any person who has faith in the Vedas, believes that India is a pious land (punya bhoomi), who has sympathy and wants to protect the cow is acceptable to His Holiness as a Hindu. Those have been proselytized by deceptive methods or by physical force must be permitted to go back to their original religion on the principles of human rights. Such persons form the majority of Muslims and Christians in India. They can be brought back to the Hindu fold by creating the proper atmosphere, providing proper facility and by love and affection. Amongst Hindus who have gone astray, due to the influence of Western education, communism, existentialism and materialism, a proper reeducation program is required. They need enlightenment in the scientific basics of Hindu philosophy, principles of Dharma Rajya (rightful government) and Ram Rajya (just government).

This book, especially the story of Sri Sita Ram Goel, is very educative. Thus, it is proper to give practical form to the principle of becoming Hindu, while keeping a racial and genetic priority in view. This elucidative book will provide immense help to those who wish to enter the Hindu fold, and also the younger generation of Hindus living outside India.

2. Swami Asimatmananda, for Srimat Swami Ranganathanandaji, President, Belur Ramakrishna Math and Mission, West Bengal, India

Revered Maharaj appreciates this honest effort to guide sincere seekers wishing to follow the Hindu way of life. He points out that the doors of Hinduism had been kept closed to “outsiders” for centuries. Swami Vivekananda himself gave his famous call to Hindus to broaden their outlook. One of his interviews on conversion has been quoted in detail in the book. There are many devotees associated with the Ramakrishna Order who were not born into the Hindu faith but have accepted Hindu names of their own accord. Scores among them have gone on to take, and faithfully keep, formal lifelong vows of brahmacharya and sanyasi.

The Prabuddha Bharata, the monthly English journal of our order, has been serializing, since February, a transcript of a question and answer session conducted by Revered Swami Ranganathanandaji Maharaj at Chicago, in 1982, at the request of the local Vedanta Society. In it, several questions pertaining to Hinduism, including about conversion, have been answered by reverend Maharaj. Revered Maharaj conveys his love to Satguru Swamiji as well as to all the inmates of Kauai’s Hindu Monastery.

3. Dada J.P. Vaswani, head of the worldwide Sadhu Vaswani Mission, renowned Sindhi religious leader and eloquent lecturer, Pune, India

True conversion is not a mere change of label but an inner transformation of mind and heart. The great task that lies ahead of us is that of converting Hindus—in India and abroad—into true Hindus, acutely aware of the rich heritage that belongs to them as children of the ancient rishis of Bharatvarsha. The emphasis of the rishis was not on words but on life. When the Hindus bear witness in deeds of daily living to the great ideals of Sanatana Dharma, then indeed will India shine once again in the splendor of the new morning sun. Hence the value of How to Become a Hindu. It has been written with clarity of thought, perceptivity of mind, a depth of feeling and a great sense of commitment. It answers many questions that perplex the youth of today. India is passing through a dark period of her destiny, because Hindus have forgotten how to live as Hindus. They need to be taught the truths proclaimed by their prophets and avatars and by Him who said, “Renouncing all rites and writ duties, come unto Me for single refuge. I shall liberate thee from all bondage to sin and suffering. Of this have no doubt!” Millions of Hindus are waiting to be converted into true Hindus. I am one of them. I welcome this publication and breathe out an aspiration that it may find a place in every Hindu home—and heart.

4. Sri Swami Satchidananda, Founder/Spiritual Head of Satchidananda Ashram; Founder, Light of Truth Universal Shrine (LOTUS); renowned yoga master and visionary; Yogaville, Virginia

Since ancient times Hinduism has been known as Sanatan Dharma, which means the Eternal Truth. As such, the Hindu religion has a long history of accepting anyone and everyone who is on the path toward eternal truth. Hinduism does not discriminate against any sincere seeker. Whosoever is devoted to the search for that Eternal Truth is embraced by the religion of Hinduism. Therefore, Hinduism is perhaps the most universal and welcoming faith of all time. *How to Become a Hindu*, by revered Satguru Sivaya Subramuniaswami, is the first authoritative book to give those who wish to embrace Hinduism more formally and more fully all the inspiration and guidance to enable them to do so. This book is encyclopedic in its breadth and depth, answering any and every question regarding Hindu faith, its beliefs and rituals. Finally, there is a book that teaches aspirants how to embrace the faith that is always ready to embrace the true seeker.

5. Pandit Vamadeva Shastri (Dr. David Frawley), Vedacharya; Director of the American Institute of Vedic Studies; Author, *How I Became a Hindu*; Santa Fe, New Mexico

Many people throughout the world are attracted to the Hindu religion because of its great yogis and powerful spiritual practices. However, if they want to become Hindus, they are told, even by Hindus, that it is not possible. Or, if it is possible, they are not given an easy way to do so. The result is that people looking for a higher religious identity, such as they see in Hinduism, will become Buddhists or try to accommodate themselves to their original religious backgrounds that they found wanting in the first place. Many people have the misconception that Hinduism does not take on new members, and some Hindus seem to confirm this. They identify Hinduism with caste or with some India-based ethnicity, not with a global religion, though this has always been its basis as Sanatana Dharma, the universal or eternal tradition of truth.

Now at last a modern Hindu teacher addresses this issue of conversion to Hinduism directly, with kindness and sensitivity, yet firmness and clarity. In *How to Become a Hindu*, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniaswami shows sincere seekers a clear and practical path to enter into humanity's oldest and broadest spiritual and religious tradition—to forge a direct connection to great yogis and rishis that they have long admired. As perhaps the world's foremost Western-born Hindu guru, Sivaya Subramuniaswami himself provides the best example of what is possible through formally becoming a Hindu, as do his many Western swamis that bring out *HINDUISM TODAY*, the world's most authoritative magazine on Hindu Dharma.

All students of Hindu-based teachings, like yoga, Vedanta, Vedic astrology or ayurveda, should examine this book to understand the background tradition that their disciplines are based upon and which may be necessary to facilitate their deeper practices. All Hindus, particularly those who don't know how to explain their many-sided religion, should read this book to find out how to do so. All those interested in the religions of the world should examine the book carefully to correct the rampant misconceptions about Hinduism that have been fostered by missionary creeds. The world would do better with more Hindus. The Hindu religion is notably more diverse, tolerant and mystical and contains a much greater variety of spiritual teachings than larger, better funded and more aggressive faiths. It represents the native and pagan traditions of the world that contain the key to the older and more experiential spirituality of humanity that so many people are looking for today.

With more real Hindus the world would be a kinder and more understanding place to live in, with yoga and meditation as the foundation of human life and culture. Those who accept the Hindu religion from the point of view set forth in How to Become a Hindu will be better able to spread its universal message of not only One God but One Self in all beings. Let us hope that this book travels far and wide, not only outwardly but also in the minds, hearts and souls of all people.

B. Dedication (Samarpanam)

How to become a Hindu is dedicated to my Satguru and all those before him in our lineage, dating back 2,200 years, Siva Yogaswamî (1872–1964), paramaguru of over two million Sri Lankan Hindus, had the vision, the foresight, to fulfill my request to enter the Saivite religion in 1949 and receive my namakaran a samskara and the love and support to this day of the Tamil religious community for over fifty years. Today he and I work together, he in his world and I in mine, to stabilize, encourage and enlighten the Sri Lankan Hindus, who for a decade and a half have experienced an unexpected diaspora into all major and minor countries. We have established temples and dedicated shrines, published books in their language, and given solace to those suffering in leaving their homeland, so fraught with war.

We have worked to keep them reminded of their ancient and historic culture of music, art drama and the dance, literature and so much more, to keep it all as it once was, without a break in continuity. This book is also dedicated to all swamis who for decades have taught the ancient Sanatana Dharma in the West and thus effectively brought tens of thousands of devout souls half way into the Hindu religion, and now, through a more carefully defined ethical conversion, will complete the process. Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), one of the foremost progenitors of Hinduism in the Western world, noted: “Why, born aliens have been converted in the past by the thousands, and the process is still going on.”

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D. Author's Introduction (Granthakara Bhumika):

Those who know history know that the concept of changing one's faith is nothing new to Hinduism. Long before Islam or Christianity had even begun, Jainism and Buddhism contended with the Sanatana Dharma for the allegiance of India's masses. Great Hindu saints, such as Adilakara (788-820), Appar (ca 700) and Sundarar (ca 800), gained fame in large part through their opposition to these nascent religions—an opposition so aggressive and so successful as to practically abolish both in the land of their birth. The other edge of conversion's sword figured when South Indian kings colonized Cambodia, Bali and other parts of Southeast Asia, for in those days the way of things was the way of kings: the religion of the ruler was the religion of his subjects.

The Indian kings who dominated regions like Indonesia brought their new subjects into Saivite Hinduism. While Hindus today are worried about Christian efforts to "save the Pagans," millions in the West are quietly adopting Hinduism in a remarkable and little-discussed silent conversion, a conversion no less powerful and far more extensive than in the past. Sincere seekers in Europe, Africa and the Americas are starting to call themselves Hindu and seek formal entrance into the faith. They are the result of 150 years of Hindu philosophy surging out from India in several waves: first as scriptural translations, then itinerant holy men such as Swami Vivekananda, and most recently as part of the diaspora of Hindus out of India, Sri Lanka and Nepal, and the resulting establishment of temples and ashrams in nearly every country of the world.

The central Hindu concepts of karma, dharma, reincarnation and the presence of the Divine in all things are now understood by tens of millions not born in the faith but exposed to it through music, film and television, and even commercial advertising. To the born-Hindu of today, the question of entering Hinduism may seem unnecessary, for by one common definition Hinduism is a way of life, a culture, both religious and secular. The Hindu is not accustomed to thinking of his religion as a clearly defined system, distinct and different from other systems, for it fills his every experience. It encompasses all of life. This pure, simple view has to do, in part, with Hinduism's all-embracing quality, to accept so many variations of belief and practice into itself. But this view ignores the true distinctions between this way of life and the ways of the world's other great religions. There is no denying that Hinduism is also a distinct world religion, and to hold otherwise in today's world is fraught with risk. If Hinduism is not a religion, as many Western academics and nonreligious Indians still assert, then it is not entitled to the same rights and protections given to religion by the nations of the world.

As just one example, in colonial Trinidad, Hinduism was not recognized as a religion, Hindu marriages were therefore considered illegal, Hindu children illegitimate and unqualified to inherit property. A great deal of Hindu ancestral property was forfeited to the colonial Christian government. The claim that Hinduism is "not a religion" weakens its position socially and legally with respect to other religions in the world community. Among Hinduism's four major denominations—Vaishnavism, Saivism, Shaktism and Smârtism—only certain Smârta lineages, those represented by the Sankarâchâryas of Sringeri and Puri, do not accept converts. Smârta priests serving in American temples have consistently refused to perform the nâmakaran a samskara, the name-giving ceremony for non-Hindus by which they could enter the religion.

But the spiritual leaders and priests of the remaining sects—representing perhaps 85 percent of Hindus—actively engage today in conversion rites.

The hundreds of Hindu swâmîs, pandits and lay persons who regularly travel outside India are a relatively passive band, offering a reasoned presentation of beliefs that listeners are only expected to consider and accept or reject. There is no proselytizing, no tearing down of other faiths and no active attempt to gain new followers. Hindu philosophy is free from the missionary compulsion to bring the whole world into its fold in a kind of spiritual colonialism and cultural invasion. This latter form of conversion, which has gone on in India for centuries, ever since Muslims and Christians discovered the subcontinent, has seriously disrupted communities, turned son against father, wife against husband, friend against friend. Coupled with the enticement of material gain and destruction of ancient traditions, it has destroyed lives. The Hindu form of preaching does none of this, and ironically this nonintrusive attitude itself is bringing many toward Hinduism.

D1. How One Enters Hinduism

A direct result of hundreds of swâmîs and yogîs coming to the West, and of tens of thousands of Westerners journeying to India, is the desire by some non-Hindus to enter Hinduism. This is an issue I began facing five decades ago. In answer to the question, “Gurudeva, how did you become a Hindu?” I would answer that it wasn’t a dramatically awesome, big experience for me to enter the oldest religion in the world. I grew up in Hinduism. As with many Americans, I had no prior religion, though I was raised by those who had lived long in India and were enamored of its culture and worldview. Hinduism was, therefore, my first faith. A very dear friend of our family, a graduate of Stanford University in California, had the opportunity to be the guest of the Mahârâja of Mysore for five years. There she learned Indian art, dance, culture and the Saiva religion. When my mother passed on, when I was nine years of age, she assisted my father in raising me, and from that moment on India was a vital part of my life.

I knew at ten years of age how to wear a dhotî, how a turban should be wrapped, how women drape a sârî, how the dance of Siva Natarâja should be danced, how incense should be used to purify the atmosphere of the home and how Indian food should be eaten. My father passed on when I was eleven, and the drama continued.

Thus, I was brought up in Hinduism first through culture, music, art, drama, dance and all the protocols of Indian life. This remarkable person lectured and gave presentations to the public on the beauty and glory of Indian culture. At that time there were only five or six Hindu families living in the Northern California area. So what she had to offer was very welcome to the western people. At youth summer camps held at her beautiful chalet on Fallen Leaf Lake, near Lake Tahoe, I learned the worship of Lord Siva Natarâja. At the beginning of my teens, this was very important to me, and it led me into the Vedânta philosophy, which I pursued through listening to lectures of Indian swâmîs at the Vedânta Society in San Francisco and in reading books. I was most inspired by the life of Swâmî Vivekânanda and his four small volumes: Râja Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga and Inspired Talks. I was especially impressed by his masterful poem, “The Song of the Sannyâsin.” Only years later would I discover that my satguru, Yogaswâmî, as a young man about my same age, had been inspired by a personal encounter with Swâmî Vivekânanda when the Indian monk visited Colombo on his way back from America to India. So, following the path of charyâ, which leads into kriyâ which leads into yoga—the culture, the protocols and philosophy, which lead into practice—I started learning yoga: diaphragmatic breathing, concentration, meditation. Then I was told, “Now you need to find your guru.

This is the next step. You need to find your guru, and your guru is in Sri Lanka.” At twenty years of age, I took the first ship to leave for India after the Second World War and celebrated my twenty-first birthday days before going ashore and walking through the grand Gateway to India in Mumbai. Traveling by train to Chennai and then to Sri Lanka was a remarkable and remarkably hot experience. During my first year in Sri Lanka, everyone wanted me: the Muslims, the Buddhists and the Christians. I felt very, very special, being appreciated by so many people. Being an orphan, you are not often wanted. But I found that their way of thinking, their protocols and their philosophy didn’t compare with what I had learned of Indian culture, art and the philosophy of Vedânta.

After I was in Sri Lanka for about a year, Satguru Siva Yogaswâmî sent one of his closest disciples to Colombo from Jaffna, in the northern part of the island, to fetch me, an elegant gentleman from the vaisya caste, the Chettiar community. Kandiah Chettiar began taking me to the Hindu temples. For the first time, I experienced how Saivites worship the Gods, about pûjâ and the priests, about the mysteries of the temples and their connection to the inner worlds. Now the pattern was complete. I had been taken into the Tamil Hindu community and was preparing myself to formally enter Hinduism when the timing was auspicious. Kandiah Chettiar finally took me to Jaffna to prepare me to meet my satguru, whom Chettiar called “a living God.”

This was the very last increment to this adventure. When we finally met in 1949, I asked Satguru Siva Yogaswâmî, “Please bring me into the Hindu religion, fully and formally.” And he did just that, giving me the name Subramuniya through the nâmakaran a samskara, name-giving sacrament. That’s how I became a Hindu. I also later received my dîkshâ as a sannyâsin from the great saint of Sri Lanka, who instructed me to “build a bridge between East and West” for all his devotees to the lands beyond Sri Lankan shores—Malaysia, Singapore, Mauritius, Europe, Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and many other countries—preparing the way for the visarjana, the diaspora, of the Sri Lankan Tamil people forced by the great civil war that started in 1983. Until his departure he communicated with me, year after year, through Kandiah Chettiar. Upon returning to the US, the first thing I did was to change my name legally to my new Saivite Hindu Name. The judge took it in stride and quickly granted the request. In 1957, at age thirty, I began my public teaching mission in San Francisco.

It later became clear to me that I was a Hindu in my last life and that I was born in the West to perform the mission that I am performing now. I learned about the mission that I am doing now from psychics when I was 17 or 18 years of age. I am performing it now. I have a Western body, an American passport and free transportation from India to the US, with the natural sequence of events.

In my life, I went from charyâ, to kriyâ, to yoga, to jñâna, following dharma’s progressive path, which we must remember is a progressive path. It begins with finding out what the path is in the charya stage, then living the path through sâdhana in the kriyâ stage, then going in and realizing the Self in the yoga stage, which culminates in the jñâna stage of bringing out what you have realized. Some people think, “When you get to the yoga stage, you don’t have to do the worship, you don’t have to do the service. You just do the yoga.” In our Saiva Siddhanta philosophy, when you get to the yoga stage and the jñâna stage, you still enjoy the worship, you still enjoy the service. These are dear and intricate parts of your life.

While in Sri Lanka, I was taken to Christian gatherings, to Catholic gatherings, to Islamic gatherings, to Parsi gatherings, and I found them all very nice people. But at that time I was on the yoga path, and those religions did not include the yoga mârگا. They did not encourage

meditation and Self Realization, which was my particular path that I got started on very early in life—seeking full identity of my own inner Self. Having been orphaned at a young age, I was independent and free. I didn't have to answer to anyone, except myself. So, I was on the path to find the Self to answer to. Finding the Self within, which is solid, immovable, which is the same year after year as the mind fluctuates and goes around it, was a great realization, a great stability.

Also, these other religions didn't have the understanding of reincarnation and karma, which provided me a logical explanation of so many things that happen in life. I did meet wonderful people, though, from the Islamic, the Christian, the Protestant, the Catholic and the Buddhist communities. I would say Buddhism influenced me most in the monastic path, because I visited and lived in many Buddhist temples in Sri Lanka. I was received by the monks there. I saw how they lived, saw how they dressed, and that influenced in a very strict way the monastic protocols that we later put into action in our own monastic order. I was being prepared to go to the northern part of the country, the Tamil Hindu area which was quite strict at that particular time, very orthodox.

Formalizing the Process The experience of my own entrance into Hinduism in my twenties set the pattern for my ministry in the years to come, when I worked to apply the same pattern for others who wished to fully enter Hinduism through self-conversion. I ultimately developed a six-step pattern of ethical conversion that results in a sincere and lasting commitment to the Hindu faith, or any faith for that matter. I found it useful to distinguish between the convert, a person with clearly prior commitments to another faith, and the adoptive, a person with no prior religious affiliations, who is free, without severance formalities, to embrace and enter the faith of his or her choice.

The most innovative step in this form of ethical conversion— and what truly makes it ethical—is the mandatory severance from any former faiths. The devotee is asked to go back to his prior religious leader, priest, rabbi, minister, imam, etc., and explain his change of belief, culture, etc., in a face-to-face meeting. Typically, the leader may attempt to talk the devotee out of his intention, though some will immediately honor the depth of his new commitment and understanding.

It was in 1977 that I imposed the strict conversion/adoption edict that stands in place to this day among my congregation. Only as full-fledged Hindus, committed 100 percent to the Hindu religion, with no other religious obligations inhibiting their participation in the culture, philosophy and lifestyle, could they settle at last into the religion of their soul. Anything less, and they would remain half-Hindus. Only in completely entering the Hindu fold, I perceived, would followers be able to pass the fullness of our teachings on to their children. Many, I realized, had lived as Hindus in past lives, and now, born in the West, were merely rediscovering the religion of their soul. Having found it, they would be content with no other religion.

To not provide a way for formal entrance to Hinduism would be to leave them between religions, stranded, in a sense, with no religion at all. Research began, and it was soon discovered that, indeed, Hinduism does and always has accepted newcomers, though the issue is generally handled discreetly.

Formal entry is accomplished through a simple ceremony, no different that the naming of a young Hindu child. The procedure was formalized and performed in our Kadavul Hindu Temple on the Garden Island of Kauai. Each devotee repeated a verbal oath before God, Gods and guru and gathered devotees, promising to be eternally faithful to the principles of the Sanātana

Dharma as he entered the Saivite Hindu religion through this “sacramental name-giving.” I asked that a certificate be issued which devotees could use later for the legal name-change, and which also proved useful for entering strict temples in India when on pilgrimage. The pattern was set, and hundreds entered Saivite Hinduism in this way, joyously bringing their children into Hinduism in the same manner thereafter and raising them as orthodox Hindus. The process continues to this day. Soon a new generation of born Hindu children emerged from these converted and adoptive Hindu parents. A new gotra, or spiritual clan, was quick to form in the West, called the Subramuniya Gotra.

Entrance into Hinduism was simpler for those who had little early training in the religion of their parents. This group made up the majority of the clan, which continues to be the case. For those confirmed or baptized or deeply indoctrinated in a non-Hindu religion or philosophical system, the transition was more involved. I established a counseling office at our Himâlayan Academy in San Francisco to assist aspirants in identifying their religious loyalties and convictions. Many students chose not to take this serious step and drifted away. Thus, the Saivite souls, as I call those who are inwardly destined to follow Siva, were distinguished from those who had yet another path to follow.

After 1977, only those who formally entered the religion were accepted as my sishyas, though non-Hindus were and are availed an introductory study of Saivism through the Academy’s Master Course study programs. Students with predominant non-Hindu backgrounds who wished to enter Hinduism, having completed Book One of The Master Course, were advised of the requirement to first sever their prior religious commitments. This generally meant returning to the religious institution of their childhood, there to obtain a severance through convincing their former religious leader that they had embraced the Saivite Hindu religion and intended to enter it formally.

This severance was also documented in writing, in most cases through a letter from that institution. It soon became clear that this honest approach, with the burden of severance falling entirely on the devotee, was a vital step in the personal spiritual unfoldment of these individuals, resolving long-standing subconscious conflicts between the old faith and the new. In cases of deep former commitment devotees were asked to study their former faith so as to prepare a point-counterpoint of its beliefs and those of Saivite Hinduism.

They were also asked participate in the activities of their former faith, attend services and share in social events with the congregation. In several instances, devotees became re-inspired with their original religion and changed their minds about converting to Saivism. We were happy for all who rediscovered their path in life in this way, having reawakened their spiritual/religious nature through their participation in the vibrant and compellingly uplifting ceremonies of Hinduism. It was not a surprise to us, for Hinduism has such a power, such a magic, being the oldest living tradition, being so full of the divine, having never put their Gods into exile, as did most other ancient faiths when they encountered the newer religions. Hinduism kept the original path intact, pure and unashamed, rich and bold in its ways, colorful and so profound. No wonder some souls upon seeing and experiencing this were re-inspired inwardly and returned to their born religion with a new hope and vision.

Among those who have entered Hinduism in recent years in the West are former Jews, Taoists, Buddhists, Christians of all denominations, Muslims, atheists, existentialists, agnostics, materialists, new age seekers and others. Nâmakaran a samskaras are now performed in the West by many qualified Indian priests—Saivites, Saktas, Vaishnavites and Smârtas—each performing the name-giving for adults and their children as is traditionally done for each Hindu child.

In the early eighties, when Hindu devotees of other lineages, such as Smârtism, Vaishnavism and Shaktism, began seeking admittance to Saiva Siddhânta Church, I established similar procedures to help them make the transition to Saivite Hinduism. This was found necessary, for while the great Hindu lineages share many common beliefs, each is also different and distinct enough to be considered a separate religion in its own right. Devotees who had been initiated by other gurus were not allowed initiation from me unless they obtained a formal release from their former initiator. Those with strong non-Saivite backgrounds were required to study the differences in belief between those school and the Advaita Saiva Siddhânta of my Church so that they could make the necessary inner adjustments to becoming a good Saivite, all based on the principle that former commitments must be dissolved before new ones can be made.

Why Is a Formal Process Needed? In 1966, the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), a prestigious, multi-million member Hindu organization, issued this definition: "Hindu means a person believing in, following or respecting the eternal values of life, ethical and spiritual, which have sprung up in Bharatkhand [India] and includes any person calling himself a Hindu." While self-declaration remains the basic way to enter the faith, the VHP's 1998 Dharma Samsad, an annual meeting of Hindu spiritual leaders held that year in America, called for the development of "a process for accepting willing non-Hindus into the Hindu fold, which is an important concern among Hindus living in America." Those concerns include intermarriage, including the need for a non-Hindu spouse to adopt the religion of HINDU his or her mate and for the couple to raise their children in a purely Hindu home. These are some of the reasons a formal process is needed.

Another reason is the standing policy of most Indian swâmîs in the West to not formally convert their devotees to Hinduism. They generally give an informal Hindu first name only, and thereby create what may be called an ardha Hindu—"half-Hindu"—who finds himself separated from his old faith by newfound beliefs and practice, but not fully embraced by his new one. The situation gets especially precarious when it comes to raising children. Are they Hindus, Christians, Jews? The practical outcome I have observed in the last twenty years is that such offspring are raised with no formal religion at all and are left adrift to fend for themselves in an unforgiving world.

Also, by setting a standard of ethical conversion, Hindus can help alter the oftentimes predatory nature of religious conversion. Applying this idea to another faith, if every Hindu who wanted to become a Christian went successfully through an ethical conversion, there would be no claims by Hindus that he had been bribed, coerced, enticed or otherwise forced into the change. Of course, there would also be fewer conversions! finally, at this time in history religions are looking for ways to get along better and work for humanity's common spiritual good rather than fight over followers. Unfortunately, the continuing disruptive conversion tactics of the aggressive Abrahamic missionary religions are rarely on the agenda at global conferences. By advocating ethical conversion, Hindus can help the world overcome the single greatest obstacle to interfaith harmony.

Entering Hinduism has traditionally required little more than accepting and living the beliefs and codes of Hindus. This remains the basic factor of conversion or adoption, although there are, and always have been, formal ceremonies recognizing an individual's entrance into the religion. The most obvious sign of the adoptive is the Hindu name. People can feel uneasy about changing their name, but a look into Western names reveals them to be remarkably fluid, frequently changed as the result of minor circumstances. Those names which are not descriptive of one's occupation or family are most frequently derived from the Christian Bible

and signify a follower of Christianity. An individual who rejects belief in the doctrines of Christianity must also reject the name given him under that religion, for reasons that we will explain later.

D2. The Audience of This Book

If you are a student of comparative religions, a truth-seeker, an onlooker or a devout Hindu, you will enjoy this book. Perhaps you have studied Hinduism and now feel it is your religion. If this is the case, as it has been for so many who have been exposed to Eastern thought and beliefs, and if you are of another religion and sincerely wish to become a Hindu formally, you will be happy to know that it is possible to do so. The process is not at all difficult, and though each situation is unique, it generally follows the pattern outlined herein. Should you be a born Hindu, especially if you were educated in a Catholic or Protestant Christian school or studied existentialism or secular humanism in a university, this book will certainly broaden and enhance your understanding of religious loyalty and belief and inspire you to rededicate yourself consciously and subconsciously to the Hindu dharma.

This book is designed to serve three audiences: first, non-Hindus interested in entering the Hindu religion; second, Hindus changing from one Hindu sect or denomination to another; and third, mature Hindu elders who can help converts and adoptives make the necessary adjustments for full entrance into the community; as well as derive inspiration about their own faith and deepen their own spiritual life. To some, the mention of the last purpose may seem out of place, but let it be known that everyone's faith can be strengthened and self-conversion even applies to those born to the religion, spiritually speaking.

Yes, I am referring to "bringing Hindus into Hinduism." It is another well kept secret that I have been bringing Hindus into Hinduism most of my life. Hindus by and large don't understand the basics, let alone the depths, of their religion. For those seeking deeper waters, soul-searching, education and steps toward severance may be required to pave the way for a clear understanding of their born faith, leading to a happier future. Many Hindus, though born into the religion, have grown up attending Catholic schools. But if you ask them about the effects, they generally say, "I really didn't pay much attention to what the nuns and fathers were saying." We know from experience that this is impossible. Because of such influence and other programming, many Hindus are Hindus in name only.

When serious Hindu seekers discover the path, and the more esoteric, metaphysical aspects of their born religion, they must face and deal with the dragons that may lurk in their subconscious. You will discover a wonderful example of this in the Chapter One story of our friend Sri Sita Ram Goel, one of India's greatest living thinkers. Though born in a Hindu family, He became an atheist and a communist in his youth, a disbeliever and a heretic to his father's faith. Yet, due to his sincerity and intelligence, one experience led to another and he, too, became a Hindu, after fully reconciling with his former mentors.

Again, a few may inquire whether such emphasis is necessary, whether it may be more efficient to focus solely on matters of spiritual discipline, sâdhana and philosophy and avoid these technical tangents. Our answer is that these matters are really not so tangential as they might seem. For those once involved in another religion, the subject of this book is a most crucial one. What is being discussed is commitment, and commitment precedes the practice of deeper spiritual disciplines and meditations. By commitment I mean fully embracing one's religion, fully practicing one's religion, fully serving one's religion. Only in this way will the spiritual disciplines, sâdhana and philosophy take hold and produce lasting results. Only in this

way, no longer as an onlooker, will the convert or adoptive become an intrinsic part of an evergrowing international community constituting one sixth of the human race.

D3. Are You a Hindu?

Belief is the keynote of religious conviction, and beliefs vary greatly among the different religions of the world. Psychologically speaking, what we believe forms our attitudes, shapes our lives, defines our culture and molds our destiny. To choose our beliefs is to choose our religion. Compare your beliefs to the beliefs of Sanâtana Dharma. If you find yourself at home with Hindu beliefs, the attitudes they produce and the culture that is lived by a billion-plus souls, then obviously you are a Hindu. It is that easy.

But formally entering any new religion is a serious commitment, one which must certainly be considered deeply. This book outlines the purpose and the requirements of that auspicious and important step. It is a most individual experience, often joyful, sometimes painful and always challenging, especially for those severing from other loyalties. That is as it should be. Severance from a former religion or philosophy should be a memorable experience, sharp, clean-cut, with no ragged edges left. Then entrance into Hinduism is clear and completely positive.

Entrance to Hinduism should not be sought because friends are doing it or because this is the next step in a course of study. It must come from the heart, from a deep, inner sense, an inner knowing that this is the natural dharma of your soul. This book records the conclusions of over fifty years of work and research in the field of personal belief and religious conviction which occasionally culminates in the need to transcend the boundaries of one's born faith and seek solace in another. How to Become a Hindu is thus a practical manual to help guide those seeking to ratify their self-declared commitment to the Sanâtana Dharma in all its dimensions: spiritual, social, cultural, economic and educational. It's a package deal.

How do you know if you are a Hindu deep inside? If an elder, your guru or a friend has given you a Hindu name? If you have met a swâmî or yogî, pandit or satguru who speaks out the truths you always knew to be the way of the universe? If you feel in your heart of hearts that no other religion suits you better, expresses your native spirituality more profoundly, offers you a way to personally know the Divine within you? Let's analyze and through the process of elimination find out. If you believe, as your guru does, in the existence of God everywhere and in all things, you are certainly not a Christian, Muslim or Jew. If you believe in one Supreme God and many Gods, you are certainly not a Christian, Muslim, Jew or Buddhist. The Buddhists, like the Jains, don't believe in a personal God. They don't like to use the word God. They don't feel the concept of God is part of their deepest understanding.

They do not accept a creator, or a knowing God who guides His creation. I was deeply impressed at hearing the Dalai Lama and the head of a Japanese Buddhist tradition make a strong and articulate point of this to several hundred spiritual leaders at the Presidents' Assembly at the Parliament of the World's Religions' 1993 centennial in Chicago, where they appealed to the other religions to please not include the use of the word God in a key declaration, called "Toward a Global Ethic," that all faith leaders were asked to affirm and to sign. Significantly, the word God was left in that document.

If you believe in the law of karma, action receiving its comparable just due, you might be a Buddhist, but then you have the personal God problem. But you are certainly not a Christian, Jew or Muslim, because their doctrines do not include karma. If you believe in reincarnation, punarjanma, "being born again and again," you might be a Buddhist or a Jain, but then there is

the God problem again. But again, you are not a Christian, Jew or Muslim, because they adamantly reject these Vedic revelations, though Hasidic Jews do attest to reincarnation.

In summary, your religion is the group that you are the most comfortable with, those who think like you, share the same ideals, according to their similar philosophies. Another point: if you are attracted to Hindu temples, well then certainly you are not a Christian, Buddhist, Zoroastrian, Jew or Muslim. The 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions brought all these faiths together, and it became very clear to me that the religions of the world are happy to be different, unique, not the same. They celebrated these differences, while also affirming an inner oneness. As one of the three presidents of Hinduism at the Presidents' Assembly, along with Swâmî Chidânanda Sarasvatî and Mâta AmRitânandamâyî, I can say that each one of the leaders of the world's religions knows who the others are and is not about to change. The whole idea that all religions are one may be true in spirit, but in actuality, no.

One path or another must be chosen and then lived fully. We don't hear born Hindus saying much anymore, "I'm a Christian; I'm a Muslim; I'm a Jew," as they used to proclaim in the '70s. Today they are proudly saying, "I am a Smârta, a Vaishnavite, a Sakta or a Saivite." Much of this change is due to the courageous stand that Hindu leaders of all denominations and traditions have taken.

If truly you find you are the Hindu an elder, friend or guru saw in you by giving you a Hindu name—they usually give Ananda, Shanti or Jyoti for starters—then take the next step and accept the culture, the conventions the fullness of the world's oldest spiritual tradition, with its yogas and its multitudinous wisdoms. Carefully choose the sect within the Sanâtana Dharma, the old Sanskrit name for Hinduism, that you will devote your life to following.

D4. Entrance Procedures

It is important to know that one cannot simply enter "the Hindu religion." That is not possible. It is necessary to enter one of Hinduism's specific sects or denominations. Even in these tempestuous times, the subtle differences of Hindu lineages are clearly and methodically demarcated by our priesthoods. After mind searching, soul searching and study, having assured yourself beyond question that yes, indeed, you are a devout follower of the Sanâtana Dharma, go with your Hindu friends to a Hindu priest in a temple of your choice and arrange for the name-giving sacrament, nâmakaran a samskara. Your beliefs and way of life have affirmed your inner decision to become a Hindu. This ceremony brings you formally into the Hindu community, recognizing and ratifying your proclamation of loyalty and wholehearted commitment to the Sanâtana Dharma and validating, now and forever, your Hindu first and last name on all legal documents.

Chapter seven describes all the steps in detail. Included there is a model nâmakaran a certificate that you can photocopy or re-typeset to document the event, signed by the priest and several witnesses, especially members of the community you are entering, who will share your joy in becoming a full-fledged Hindu. Then have your new name made legal on your passport, social security or ID card, credit cards, insurance documents, driver's license, telephone listing and more. More information on arranging for the nâmakaran a samskara and other matters can be found on our Website at ww.himalayanacademy.com/basics/conversion/.

We call upon Hindu religious leaders to welcome and embrace adoptive and converts and not say they disqualify for one reason or another. Leaders, priests, heads of aadheenams, mathas and âshramas, pandits, managers of temples and devotees, make it your duty to bring in those who were Hindus in their last life, those who are brand new to Hinduism but have a deep

interest in it and those who were born into the religion but drifted away and now seek to return, who want to know in their aspiring hearts, “How can I enter Hinduism?”

Now we have the overview of what is to come. Travel with me through this documentary book about full and formal entrance into my beloved Hindu faith, the oldest spiritual tradition on Earth, the divine family that is over a billion strong and growing. You are interested, I know you are, as you have read this far. Read on, read on. You will never look back and regret that you did.

Love and blessings from this and inner worlds.

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami 162nd Jagadâchârya of the Nandinâtha Sampradâya’s Kailâsa Paramparâ Guru Mahâsanni dhânam Kauai Aadheenam, Hawaii, USA Satguru Pûrnimâ, July 15, 2000 Hindu year Vikrama, 5102

CHAPTER 1: Personal Encounters with Hinduism

(Hindudharmenasaha Mama Sagamah)

Here are the true histories of individuals and families who formally entered Saivite Hinduism over the years. We begin with Hitesvara Saravan, a former Baptist who discovered Hinduism later in life and recently completed his conversion. Hitesvara and the others whose stories lie herein consented to share their firsthand experience in severing his former religious commitments and then entering the Hindu faith. These inspiring real-life stories illustrate the six steps of ethical conversion (see Chapter Seven) in captivating detail. Each story is written from a delightfully different angle. Enjoy.

My Conversion from the Baptist Church How I Was Uplifted and Transformed by the Saivite Hindu Teachings. By Hitesvara Saravan. Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniaswami, has blessed me with the name Hitesvara Saravan, which I interpret to mean One who cares for others born of the Lake of Divine Essence. My former name was Alton Barry Giles, a name from Scottish heritage. It was not until I was in the vânaprastha âsrama, at 56 years old, that in July of 1997 I typed the word Hindu into a search engine on an archaic, text-only computer. This brought me into a new conscious realization as I came upon a text in Gurudeva's website about the five sacred vows of the sannyâsin, which I printed and studied.

These words touched me at a soul level. Through exploration of the website over the next few days, I was brought into a small group of devotees in San Diego and then to the local mandir. My conscious journey into the beliefs of my soul intensified. I had not met Gurudeva in person. I had not even seen a picture of him until my first satsanga in August. I had been aware, however, for many more than twenty years that I had an inner, spiritual guide—a gentle, kind man urging me onward. Now I know that Gurudeva has been with me all my life. I began the joy of being able to communicate with Gurudeva by e-mail and to be introduced to him by phone, but I was not to meet him in person until December of that year.

Why did I come in person to Gurudeva so late in life? I had many experiences from which to learn, many past life karmas to mitigate. I had many years of living below the mûlâdhâra. I had the need to overcome fear of God from my fundamental Baptist upbringing in a very religious family. I had even been told by my mother that my lack of belief and lifestyle meant that I was going to go to hell. She cried. I had to overcome alcoholism and drug addiction and its effects, which I did in 1982, sexual promiscuity by becoming celibate in 1992, renouncing meat eating, also in 1992, and learning to rise above all of the lower emotions, such as fear, anger and resentment.

I had to commence on the path toward purity to find and learn many lessons from experience before I would be ready to wholeheartedly and completely dedicate myself to the San Mârگا, the straight path. I had previously rejected the idea of any one person being my teacher. Now I know this was just in preparation until I met my one teacher, the guru of my soul, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniaswami. I had been introduced to the Eastern religions in a fleeting way all throughout the 70s and 80s. I had heard Krishna murti, had glimpses into Buddhism and Taoism, but it never fully formed in my mind that the beliefs of my soul were Hindu beliefs. I had only heard briefly about Hinduism and only from a Western perspective. In the 90s, after I renounced meat and sex, my spiritual path intensified. I read the Yogi Publication Society's books. I heard about Vivekananda and read his works, as well as Autobiography of a Yogi. I read some of the literature from the Theosophical Society; Light on the Path in particular struck home with me. From January, 1997, until I came into the Saivite fold I attended SRF (Self Realization Fellowship) services in San Diego, but was put off by the fact that while I believed

in the concept of “saints of all religions,” the pictures of Jesus on the altar and the references to Jesus did not sit well with me.

Simultaneously with meeting Gurudeva’s followers and having accessed the website, I began receiving the daily lessons from Dancing with Siva. Every one of Gurudeva’s beautiful words spoke to my soul. I realized that these were and had been always the beliefs of my soul. I had found my true path. From that day forward, and with greater intensity after my first beautiful experience of darshana and meeting Guru deva in December of 1997, I have tried to undauntingly move forward as I have been guided and led. I obtained and avidly read and reread Dancing with Siva and Loving Ganesa. I read “The Six Steps of Conversion.”

There has never been any doubt in my mind that this is what I wanted to do, not so much to convert to Saiva Siddhânta but to return to it formally, albeit for the first time in this lifetime. I attended the local mandir for Siva and Ganesha pûjâs starting the first month after accessing the website and mixed with Hindus during festivals. There was immediate welcoming and acceptance.

I wrote a point-counterpoint between Saiva Siddhânta and Baptist belief. I realized that I had never been comfortable with my Baptist upbringing. I had, for example, never comprehended the concept that in the Old Testament God was vengeful, calling down plagues, killing first-born sons, but then it seemed that this God changed upon the birth of Jesus and he was now kind and loving. It made no sense that God would change. I always believed in God, but the God of the Baptist religion did not equate with my inherent knowledge of God.

I commenced assigned sâdhanas, books one and two of The Master Course, the teachers’ guide, the Loving Ganesha sâdhana among them, and of course daily reading of Dancing with Siva. I learned and began daily Ganesha pûjâ, râja and hatha yoga, and made efforts at meditation. I let Gurudeva know that I wished to make a formal conversion. On March 9, 1998, I received the blessing of my Hindu first name based on my astrology and the syllable hi. My first name was Hitesvara, “God of Welfare,” caring for others. I was now ardha-Hindu Hitesvara Giles. I was then permitted to pick three last names for Gurudeva to choose from. I chose Kanda, Saravan and Velan.

I attended several Baptist Church services locally, including Easter services. I made arrangements to travel to Boston on April 30 to meet with my father and brother and the minister of the church where I was brought up to fulfill the formal severance’s third step of conversion and to inform my family of my decision. I had not been to the Baptist church for 38 years, except for my mother’s funeral and one other occasion. My father is a non-demonstrative person. He is very strict. He had never once said to me the words “I love you.” The most physical contact we had since I was a small child was for him to shake hands with me. Mother and father had both lamented that I was going to go to hell because of my lifestyle. I had continued, however, a good though distant relationship with them in later years, but I was concerned that father would be upset by my decision, and there was a possibility that he could disown me. That was acceptable, but I wanted to try to honor and respect him for his ways and to not upset him, and it was important to me that I be clear and try to have him understand my decision and sincerity. I therefore wrote him some letters. I told him about my Hindu beliefs in God, and after meditation it came to me to write him a loving letter in which I reminisced about all of the good times that I could remember throughout my years of living at home.

I had received some advice and had listened to the testimony of several of Gurudeva’s devotees on their experiences in conversion. There was no question that I did a great deal of introspective searching and meditation on the process and that it was fiery and humbling.

However, I remained undaunted and firm, but I did need to expend great effort and newfound willpower. I had some difficulty reaching and convincing long distance in advance the minister to meet with me, but before I left on my trip he agreed.

When I arrived at our family home after greeting my father and brother, I immediately set up a Ganesha shrine and a picture of Gurudeva in my bedroom. The next day before dawn I performed Ganesha pûjâ and prayed for obstacles to be removed. I then spoke to my father, having prepared an outline in advance and explained to him the beliefs of my soul and also that I was in the process of receiving a Hindu name and that I would be giving up forever the family name.

My father's love remained outwardly hidden from me, however he listened and in his way showed his acceptance by remaining silent and not commenting on anything I had said. I invited him to join me in my meeting with his minister, Reverend Vars. My father declined, however my brother agreed to go with me. On Saturday I went to a brook where I had played as a child and performed Ganga Sâdhana, imparting to the leaves and flowing water all of my vestiges of Christianity and giving wildflowers I had picked to the water in thanks.

The meeting was set for the following Monday. I attended the Baptist church service on that Sunday with my brother and listened to Reverend Vars' sermon, which was on being joyful, gentle, having good, noble qualities. I introduced myself to him and also met briefly with many of my father's old friends. My father had stopped going to church at 86 due to fragility and weakness. That Monday my brother and I arrived at the church at the appointed time. I believe that Lord Ganesha and Gurudeva were there with me. Reverend Vars was very cordial. I spoke to him, explaining that I was grateful to have had a religious upbringing, talked about my years of spiritual questing, how his sermon had touched me, as it indeed was our belief as well to be gentle and to live a good life with good conduct. I had some trepidation that he might be spouting hellfire and damnation to me. However, I had prepared a great deal and sent prayers to the Kadavul Temple in Hawaii and had prayed to Ganesha to remove obstacles and to smooth the way. I was so blessed.

I explained to the Reverend Vars my belief that I have, and always had, a Hindu soul, my belief in temple worship, divine beings, and in having a spiritual preceptor. I explained the Hindu beliefs of reincarnation and karma. Reverend Vars listened respectfully and told me that he had had chaplaincy training, where he had learned some about other religions, although he could not personally accept concepts like reincarnation. He turned to my brother and asked how he felt about what I was doing. My brother indicated that he would prefer it if I were to be a Christian but that he would support my choice. I asked Reverend Vars if he would write me a letter of release. He stated that he would do so and mail it to me. I thanked him. I then offered him a copy of *Dancing with Siva, Hinduism's Contemporary Catechism* to give him additional insight into the Hindu religion. He accepted and said, "I will read this." Baptist letter of severance received by Hitesvara Saravan. Upon my return to San Diego I received the letter from the Baptist church.

On May 28, 1998, I received word that Gurudeva had chosen Saravan for me as my Hindu last name. On May 31 I filed a petition in San Diego Superior Court to change my name. The court date was set for July 28. I also arranged that day for the name change to be published on four weekly dates prior to the court date. It was as though my father had waited for me to tell him my news and that he had blessed me, for on July 16, 1998, my father made his transition quietly in his sleep. My mother had made her transition in 1992. I appeared in court on July 28. The judge questioned the reason for my decision and promptly signed the decree. I immediately began the process of having legal papers changed, such as driver's license,

social security and all of the many other places and documents that were necessary. I then informed all of my business associates and acquaintances of my decision. After my thirty-one-day retreat subsequent to my father's death, I asked Gurudeva's blessing to have my nâmakaran a samskara. Gurudeva sent a Church member, Sadhunathan Nadesan, and we met that day. I explained to him my Hindu beliefs, and he asked me some questions concerning these. I received Gurudeva's blessing, and subsequently Sadhu and I talked to the priest of our local mandir.

The priest was somewhat surprised, as he had never performed a name-giving ceremony for an adult, but he consulted with his guru, who knew of our beloved Gurudeva, and we provided him with information concerning conversion, including a copy of the Six Steps to Conversion and a copy of a sample certificate. He agreed to perform the ceremony. On the auspicious day of August 26, 1998, at a most beautiful ceremony performed by our local Hindu priest and looked over and blessed and attended by the Gods and devas and devotees of Gurudeva, I, Hitesvara Saravan, was "...thus bound eternally and immutably to the Hindu religion as a member of this most ancient faith," and guardian devas were invoked from the Antarloka to protect, guide and defend me. Jai Ganesh.

I published in the newspaper a notice of my nâmakaran a samskara. Our beloved Gurudeva was and is with me every step of the way. I received the following e-mail message from Gurudeva: "We are all very pleased that you have made this great step forward in your karmas of this life. Congratulations. Now the beginning begins. Don't proceed too fast. Don't proceed too slowly. Steady speed in the middle path." My life changed forever. Continuous blessings have been flowing ever since from our beloved Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami. Hitesvara Saravan, 58, is the Administrator for the California Department of Health Services in San Diego and has oversight responsibilities for hospitals, nursing homes, home health agencies and hospices. Our Release From the Jewish Faith The Story of Facing Our Rabbi and Being Accepted by the Hindus of Denver. By Vel Alahan. I was nervous as I sat with my former rabbi to discuss my change of religion.

He turned out to be a fine, astute, intelligent man. We explained what we were doing, and he gave arguments in response. Basically he wanted us to give him a chance to start over with us. But we explained what we had been through and that we could not refute the inner knowing that had come from within ourselves about the truth of our Saivism. We brought a witness with us, an old friend who lives in the neighborhood near the synagogue. We told him that based on our own inner experience we believed in Saivite Hinduism and in Gurudeva as our guru. We explained how our worship is set up and the striving for eventual knowledge of Lord Siva, merger in Lord Siva. Based on the fact that I was a normal person, successful in the business world, with a family and children, he believed what I said and respected my convictions.

I explained to him why I had come: because I needed to A) test myself in the face of my former religious commitments and B) in the presence of my former rabbi and Jewish inner plane hierarchy, in the Jewish institution, state my inner commitment and my desire to leave Judaism. He had his arguments. We just had to stay strong. I held fast to my inner commitment. My outer mind was fluxing and swaying a bit, but I always had the inner part to hold onto. He would not write a letter of severance. He felt that by writing such a letter he would be doing a wrong act himself. But he wished us well, gave his blessings and complimented us on our fine intellectual knowledge of our religion and of Judaism. We introduced the witness and explained why we had brought a witness, so that in the event that the rabbi would not write a letter, the witness could write a letter stating what had happened.

We were well prepared, and that is a key point. If one were to go unkempt, unemployed, he would not get the respect. And if you are unprepared, you will fumble a bit. Afterward the meeting was over I felt a sense of release. I felt wonderful. I couldn't believe I had actually done it. Of course, there were the details to be faced afterwards, the announcement and all. But it felt good. And we did not hurt the rabbi's feelings; though he did say he was sad to lose one of his fold and expressed his view that "Once a Jew, always a Jew." But he never had to face anything like this before and he said so, that it was something new to him and he would have to take it in on the inside and come to terms with it inside himself.

Actually, much of the experience of our severance took place earlier, when we had been advised by the Academy to read some books on Judaism and then meet with the author and discuss Judaism with him. We also did extensive pointcounterpoints comparing Judaism with Saivism. At that time, that was a huge psychic battle, almost like a storm. And psychically it was not like fighting another person, but the other forces were defeated. It was a major inner struggle. During the early years of our conversion process, we stayed away from the Denver Hindu community, though we visited the Indian food store regularly and paid our respects to the Ganesha shrine there. We realize this would be the Deity of the future Hindu temple. At home, without fail, we did Ganesha pûjâ for a number of years with the whole family attending.

When we reached the stage to contact the Hindu community, and we made an appointment to meet with the Gangadharam family, Pattisapu and Sakunthala. We told them that we wanted to get to know the people and relate to them socially. They talked with us and took us into the community. They became our appa and amma and treated us very nicely. We explained that we intended to have a nâmakaran a samskara later with our Gurudeva, and they immediately said, "We will do a nâmakaran a. We insist. It will be good for the community as a whole." Interaction included playing tennis with some of the community, dinners, hiking, teas, Telegu new year, Tamil new year.

Things progressed, and when the time was right and after we had seen the rabbi and chosen our names, the nâmakaran a was arranged. Mrs. Gangadharam planned the day according to Hindu astrology. And a priest was there from the Pittsburgh Temple, Panduranga Rao. Many people were there. A new sari was given to my wife to wear and a shirt and veshti was given to me. It was very nice the way they took care of us. During the ceremony, our "parents" signed our names in rice and repeated the required words Vel Alahan's Colorado state name-change document. before the community and Gods. Then we walked around and touched the feet of anyone who was an elder and gestured namaskâra to anyone younger. Food was served afterwards, prasâdam from the pûjâ. Vel Alahan, 52, is a partner in a home building center in Vail, Colorado.

From Judaism to Hinduism My Successful Struggle for Release From Judaism to Enter Hinduism. By Valli Alahan. To convert from Judaism to Hinduism was a very big experience in this life. I didn't know that I would do it; it was nothing I ever planned on. But what happened in studying meditation and then later on, Hinduism, now seems inevitable and quite logical. Our Gurudeva believes that it is best for a person to be fully of one religion, not half this and half that. When we began our inner study, I quite easily accepted Lord Ganesha and what little I knew of Hinduism. I was ready to sign on right then. What I didn't know was that it is a very big process to consciously leave one's birth religion, especially Judaism at that time, with the confusion surrounding it as being a race-religion. So we were caught temporarily. With the grace of Lord Ganesha and Lord Murugan, our opportunity to convert moved along very slowly and with veiled sureness.

I knew my true beliefs were in Hinduism and that I, the soul, had no binds. I felt that even if I could not convert in this life, I would hold my beliefs and it would work out later on. I also believed that Gurudeva would not have us go through this for nothing. Still it was discouraging to be halfway "there." I wanted to be the same religion as my Gurudeva. The longer it took, the more conviction and appreciation for Hinduism developed. Vel and Valli's notice announcing their conversion, authored by Robert L. Norman, the witness to their meeting with the rabbi. We had to counterpoint our beliefs: Judaism and Hinduism. We (my husband and I) spoke to a rabbi in Israel over the telephone, after reading his book claiming Judaism predated and was the true source of Hinduism. And we wondered if we would ever resolve the conflicting karma of the birth religion and the religion of our soul.

One morning I woke up from a dream where I was yelling at the Jewish angels in a fiery way, asserting that "I am not Jewish!" I read from the Tirumantiram, and it gave courage and security. This went on for seven or so years. Then, with the grace of our Gurudeva, we were informed that we could amalgamate with the Denver Hindu community. It was a great joy to be around a generation of Indian Hindus that were very kind, open and understanding. Eventually they arranged for our nâmakaran a. The name-giving sacrament came after we formally declared apostasy to a rabbi in Denver. It was almost anti-climactic after the long wait, but still a little nerve-wracking because who could know what his reaction would be. We had a detached witness attend, and basically, without insult, the rabbi let us go. We published our change of religion in the local newspapers and with great joy began using our full Hindu names. This was a very meaningful experience that caused me to personally examine and pull up old roots and claim Hinduism as my true path.

Valli Alahan, 53, is a housewife, mother and grandmother in Vail, Colorado. My Excommunication from Greek Orthodoxy Sent Back To My Old Church, I Learned Hinduism Is The Only Religion for Me. By Diksha Kandar. My present Saivite Hindu name is Diksha Kandar; my former name was William Angelo Georgeson. I met Gurudeva in 1969, studied with him in California and India, and entered one of his monasteries in January of 1970. At that time a full conversion to Hinduism was not required, so I served in his monasteries until 1976, at which time he decided that a full conversion was necessary to thoroughly cleanse and clarify the minds of his devotees who had been involved in other religions prior to their exposure to Hinduism. I had been born and baptized in the Eastern Orthodox Christian religion, which is the original Christian religion that first emerged in Greece after the death of Christ. But beyond being baptized in it as a baby, I never participated in it and didn't know much about it.

Yet as a monk, I had come to understand that this potent baptism had connected me up with inner world guardian angels who were obligated to guide me through life according to their Christian mindset, which I had previously adopted simply by being born into a Greek Orthodox family. In 1976 Gurudeva informed me that because the Eastern Orthodox Faith is such an old and strong faith, it was considered a race-religion that I was bound to for life, and that I should return to that faith to participate in it fully and permanently. This was heartbreaking for me, and I remember openly crying about this unhappy situation of not being allowed into Hinduism. I obeyed and returned to the city where I was baptized to practice Eastern Orthodox Christianity. I worked closely with the priest there and helped him with the church services.

I very carefully studied this faith from its origins and learned its beliefs, which were very different than my Hindu beliefs, Orthodox Christian religion, which is the original Christian not only different, but very conflicting on many important points. Since I understood that Hinduism was not an option to me, I never discussed my Hindu beliefs with my Christian priest, because I could see that there was not a resolution in the discussion of them. But in studying it out, I

learned about a deep, mystical tradition that went back centuries in Greece. I felt if I could find a Christian monastery that lived the ancient spiritual tradition of the Church, then I would enter into that Christian monastery. I offered written prayers to Lord Ganesha to help make this happen. Soon I was corresponding with an author in England who said he knew of such monasteries in Mount Athos, Greece. After six months of serving in the Greek Orthodox Church, I communicated all of this to Gurudeva. When he saw that I was clinging to my Hindu beliefs and did not share the beliefs of the Eastern Orthodox faith, he told me that now that I clearly understood the differences between the two faiths, if I wanted to, I could return to Hinduism after getting a letter of excommunication from the Christian Church, and after being refused the Christian sacraments offered by my priest and after getting my name legally changed to a Hindu name.

What a happy day, and I did not hesitate to set all this into motion. But the priest would not write such a letter, because to do so would be to consign me to everlasting hell, which he could not do in good conscience. The priest's wife came to me in tears, saying she was not crying because she was going to miss me but because of the condemnation of my soul to everlasting hell. I tried to console her, but it was no use. So then I went to the Church Bishop in San Francisco to see if he would write a letter of excommunication, but he would not discuss the issue with me.

After another six months of effort, the Archbishop of North America in New York finally Diksha Kandar's letter from the Greek Orthodox Church. wrote a letter (see p. 20) that said I was no longer a member of the Eastern Orthodox Christian faith—another very happy day. It is this act by the Archbishop which severed my connection with the inner worlds and guardian angels of Christianity, and I felt a definite release. My brother, an attorney, had my name legally changed for me. Finally, I had my nâmakaran a samskara on January 5, 1979—Gurudeva's birthday—at Kadavul Hindu Temple in Kauai, which formally entered me into the inner and outer worlds of Hinduism and connected me up with Hindu guardian devas to guide me through life in accordance with my Hindu mindset, which to me accurately reflects the reality of all that is in all three worlds. I was given mantra dīkshâ, initiation into the sacred Pañchâkshara Mantra, by Guru deva on September 9, 1982, at the famed Siva Natarâja temple in Chidambaram, South India.

These were two of the most important days of my life. The whole excommunication process took exactly one year—to the day—to accomplish. There is no religion on Earth that comes close to comparing with the greatness of all that is Hinduism, most especially Saivite Hinduism. In what sect of Hinduism would you find a woman weeping because someone's soul was eternally lost? After returning to Gurudeva's monastery, I served for many years as a temple priest at the Palaniswami Sivan Temple in San Francisco and later in Concord, California. I was always treated with the utmost respect by the Indian community who came to the temple. They were always very impressed to hear my story of all the effort that I went through to become a Hindu, and I felt totally accepted by them as a Hindu and as a temple priest. Other Hindu priests also totally accepted me, and I am indebted to one very fine priest, Pandit Ravichandran, for his help in training me in priestly demeanor, protocol and the learning of the Sanskrit language for doing Hindu pûjâs.

Most importantly, I am in-debted to my satguru for making it possible for me to be a Saivite Hindu through and through, legally, physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, consciously, subconsciously and spiritually in this and inner worlds. Diksha Kandar, age 58, lifetime brahmachârî for 31 years; served 23 years as a sâdhaka in Gurudeva's monasteries, including

-serving as a priest in the temples in San Francisco, Concord and Virginia City. He presently works as a waiter in Seattle, while organizing outreach satsangs.

Changing Over to a Saivite Name With My Family's Blessings, I completed the Legal Processes and Had a New Name-Giving Rite in Malaysia. By Sivaram Eswaran. I was born into a Malaysian Hindu family and did not belong to any Hindu sect or religious group. Therefore, I didn't convert to become a Hindu and was free enough to choose to be a Saivite Hindu. I am a student of Himâlayan Academy preparing to become a member of Saiva Siddhânta Church. One of the requirements was to bear and legally register a Saivite Hindu name, first and last, and use it proudly each day in all circumstances, never concealing or altering it to adjust to non-Hindu cultures, as per sûtra 110 of Living with Siva. My original birth name was Raj Sivram Rajagopal. This name was incompatible with my Hindu astrology naming syllable, and the last name, Rajagopal, is a Vaishnavite name.

Therefore, I had to do a complete name change. At this point my mother and relatives were unhappy about my proposed name change. Commonly in Eastern Hindu culture, especially in my family, a complete name change of an adult is discouraged. It's because they feel that this would indicate disrespect to parents and family elders, Sivaram Eswaran's decree of name-change, Malaysia. Difficulties to legalize the new name, and it would be a hot topic among the surrounding society. However, I managed to convince them with my strong intentions of becoming a Saivite Hindu, a member of Saiva Siddhânta Church, to have a name compatible with my astrology chart and the numerological naming system.

Understanding and respecting my decision, my mother and relatives gave their full blessings for the name change. With the blessings of my beloved Satguru Sivaya Subramuniaswami and the guidance of Acharya Ceyonswami and Sannyasin Shanmugana tha swami, I accepted Sivaram Eswaran as the best and most suitable Saivite name for myself. According to Malaysian law, any addition, correction or complete name change in the birth certificate can only be done within the age of one year old. The birth name remains the same in the birth certificate and the new name is only considered an additional name to the original one, if a person intends to change his name after the age of one year old. However, this additional name would only be approved with valid reasons and supporting documents attached to the formal application. Knowing all this, I made a name change application to the Malaysian Registration Department.

This application was attached with my valid reasons and supporting letters from Satguru Sivaya Subramuniaswami, a relative and a close friend. About five months later, I received the approval letter from the department. At this point I was given a temporary identity certificate, and a year later I received my new identity card. My name remained the same in the birth certificate but the addition was done in the identity card as Sivaram Eswaran @ Raj Sivram s/o (son of) Rajagopal.

Once I received the new identity card, I went on to correct my name in all other departments, documents, certificates, passport, driving license and bank books. Everything went on well. With the blessings of my beloved Gurudeva, on 26 May 1999 morning, my nâmakaran a samskara was conducted by the priests at Waterfall Sri Ganesha Temple, Penang, Malaysia. The ceremony was done in a complete Saivite tradition with a homa fire. The ceremony was witnessed by my mother, family members, close relatives and friends, and by the head of my Church extended family, Kulapati Thanabalan Ganesan and his wife.

After the name change, everyone started calling me Sivaram Eswaran, and my signature was also changed. I could also feel some physical changes in myself. The change didn't end here,

but dragged on and started to uplift my life. After my nâmakaran a samskara, I felt like a newborn baby at the age of 23 on the spiritual path. I could really feel the change and differences in my daily life when I compare this period to the time when I was known as Raj Sivram s/o Rajagopal. My life started improving well, plans started to manifest, needs were catered on time and life now seems to be more successful then ever. I really prefer and enjoy this new birth after the death of Raj Sivram s/o Rajagopal on 26 May 1999. Believe it or not, it's really a wonderful life after a name change! Sivaram Eswaran, 24, lives in Penang, Malaysia. He is a final year undergraduate with University Utara of Malaysia pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in Public Management.

How I Found My Guru Rejecting Christian Science Early in Life, I Discovered Hindu Yoga and a Saivite Master. By Easan Katir. When I was fourteen, an out-of-body experience revealed that there was more to life than this world, so I set out to find out all I could about inner things. I read lots of books, and the one book I used for spiritual practices said "this book is good, but it is much better if you have a spiritual teacher, a guru." I didn't have one. I had taken Hindu yoga books to the Christian Science Sunday school my parents sent me to, and remarked to the teacher, "These books are saying the same thing as your books, aren't they?" He said, "No, they're not, and don't bring those books here again!" So I didn't, and I also never went back.

When I was nineteen I attended a hatha yoga class at Fresno State University once a week. One week I showed up, and someone at the door said, "The class has been cancelled, but there is a speaker here instead, and you can stay if you want to." Not having anything else to do, I stayed. A few minutes later, in walked this tall being with white hair and huge eyes. He sat down in full lotus in the front of the room. He began speaking in a language I'd never heard before. A young monk sat next to him and translated into English. The language was Shûm, the language of meditation. I thought this was awesome, and knew that I had found my spiritual teacher. I studied through correspondence, then went on Inner search pilgrimages to India, Sri Lanka and Switzerland. I was a monk for four years at Gurudeva's monastery, Kauai Aadheenam in Hawaii, where I "grew up" and was educated.

I vividly remember the day in 1975 when Gurudeva took a machete in hand, carved the San Mârga path through the Hawaiian jungle and discovered the svayambhû Sivali^ga. My formal adoption of Hinduism took place at the Chidambaram Natarâja Temple in South India in an initiation ceremony conducted by the dikshitar priests and Gurudeva. For a few years, I didn't see Gurudeva or know of his whereabouts. I pilgrimaged to the Lord Ganesha temple in Flushing, New York. Sitting in front of the Sivali^gam after the pûjâ, I saw a vision of Gurudeva in orange robes with his hand on my head.

About five minutes later, I felt something on my head. I opened my eyes, looked up, and there was Gurudeva in orange robes, with his hand on my head. He said, "Because you have come to this temple, your whole life will change." Soon afterwards, a marriage was arranged in Sri Lanka to a Hindu girl. Now, twenty years later, we have two children who are carrying on the Hindu culture in the deep, mystical way Gurudeva has taught us. We've been blessed to help with parts of his grand mission as well. We toured China, Hong Kong and Malaysia to raise funds for Iraivan Temple, carried the yantras for Kadavul Hindu Temple from India, helped found the Concord Murugan Temple, resurrected the British subscription base of Gurudeva's international magazine, HINDUISM TODAY, helped Sri Lankan refugees and with Iniki hurricane relief in 1992 at Kauai Aadheenam, and helped the Mauritius devotees with the installation of the nine-foot-tall Dakshin âmûrti at Gurudeva's Spiritual Park on that beautiful island.

Truly, through Gurudeva's ever-flowing blessings, I've experienced much of the four noble goals of human life written of in the scriptures, with Siva as the Life of my life on the path of Hindu Dharma, the broad four-lane expressway to Siva's Holy Feet. Aum Nama`Shivaya. Easan Katir, 48, lives in Sacramento, California, a Certified Financial Planner with American Express. He entered Hindu Dharma in 1972. My Whole Family Became Hindus Years of Study, Introspection and Praying, Brought Us Into The World's Greatest Religion. By Isani Alahan. I was introduced to Gurudeva's teachings in 1970 through a local hatha yoga class held at the Parks and Recreation Department in the town where I lived, Carson City, Nevada. The woman teaching the class would lend the students weekly lessons written by Guru deva, then known as Master Subramuniya, which we would return the following week in exchange for another. As time went on I read more about yoga and the wonderful benefits for the body and mind, which I could feel after a few weeks. At this time I decided to become a vegetarian. I was sixteen years old.

A few years passed in which I completed high school, experienced travel to Mexico and across the US and the worldly education of Sri Vishvaguru Mahâ-Mahârâja. In 1972 my interest in studying Shûm, Gurudeva's language of meditation, manifested. After signing up to study The Master Course audio tape series, I attended the weekly satsanga in Virginia City, Nevada, where the vibration was very actinic. During the first satsanga, the monks chanted Shûm. I had a memorable vision of Lord Siva Natarâja on the banks of the sacred Ganga. My life had changed. I was, needless to say, impressionable, and Gurudeva, in his tape course, repeatedly said, "Travel through the mind as the traveler travels the globe." I went to Europe for four months, experiencing the great civilizations of Greece, Italy, Morocco and Turkey. I had my first encounter with people of the Muslim faith.

I learned a lot and repeatedly read Guru deva's books. When I returned to the US, I moved to the Bay Area to be near Gurudeva's San Francisco center, as the monastery in Virginia City had been closed to women at the time. I met Gurudeva in the spring of 1973 at a festival at the San Francisco Temple. I went on Gurudeva's Himâlayan Academy Innersearch Travel-Study Program to Hawaii that summer. Then, per Gurudeva's instructions, I moved back home with my parents. In January, I attended another Innersearch to Hawaii. I really enjoyed what I was learning, and I took my brahmacharya vrâta. I studied at home, but there wasn't a strong support group at the time, and I lacked the inner strength to really stay on track on my own to do the daily sâdhanas well. In 1975 I married my husband of 25 years. My husband was accepting of my beliefs, but wasn't interested in studying with Gurudeva at the time.

I continued my studies, and in 1980 I legally changed my name to Isani Alahan from Ardith Jean Barton, but kept my husband's last name, Pontius. In December of 1982 I completed my conversion to Saivite Hinduism from Catholicism. I worked closely with the yogîs and swâmîs in Kauai as they guided me through the relatively easy process. I prepared a statement of apostasy and took it to the local priest. He looked at it and agreed to sign my formal release from the Catholic Church. As I took a deep sigh of relief and quietly said that I was grateful the process had been so easy, he hesitated and asked me to leave the room. When I returned, he had changed his mind. He told me he had called the Bishop in Reno and was told he could not sign the paper. Later I learned this was not true, and the Bishop had been out of town. The swâmîs encouraged me to try another priest in the town where I was born. He was understanding, but also declined.

During the next few weeks, all but one of my family members were very encouraging and understanding. Only my eldest sister, who was the last remaining practicing Catholic of my siblings, was emotional and angry. My parents even apologized for not being able to help me

in some way. Within a few weeks, I called the Bishop to make an appointment to meet with him. He told me to go back to the original priest, who would sign my declaration of apostasy. I returned to the local rectory and met a priest of Chinese descent. He was very warm and accommodating. He explained how he understood the Hindu concept of ethical conversion. He signed my declaration and wished me the best. The next few weeks were extremely magical, as I had my nâmakaran a samskara at Kauai Aadheenam on December 25, 1982, with my two year old daughter, Neesha, and an old family friend, Nilima Visakan, now Nilima Srikantha.

Then we were off for six weeks of Innersearch with Gurudeva and forty pilgrims, visiting temples and ashrams throughout Malaysia, Sri Lanka (Yogaswami's shrine was a personal highlight) and Tamil Nadu, India. It was a fantastic spiritual experience that continues to reverberate in my mind today. At the time, my husband was not a Hindu, but our three daughters were given Hindu first names at birth, while keeping his family name. We raised the children according to Hindu Dharma and Gurudeva's guidance. In 1984 we moved to the Seattle area. During the ten years we lived in Seattle, my children and I gathered with the other local Saiva Siddhânta Church members for weekly satsanga. We also met with the local Hindu community for festivals. We studied Bhârata Nâtyam and Carnatic vocal music. We had open house at our home for local Hindus to learn more about Guru deva's teachings. My children attended the summer camps put on by Church members in Hawaii, and we stayed in the flow of Gurudeva's mind even though we lived far from the other communities of Church members. All through these years, I prayed that my husband would become a Saivite Hindu and accept Gurudeva as his satguru.

With my husband's permission, I would write the same prayer weekly, and during our weekly homa I would burn the prayers, asking the devas to please help our family to worship together and to live in closer harmony with Gurudeva's teachings. In 1993 my husband formally adopted Saivism, legally changed his name from Victor Dean Pontius to Durvasa Alahan. He became a vegetarian, stopped smoking and gave up catch-and-release fishing, which was his favorite hobby. He had his nâmakaran a samskara on MahaShivratri in Kauai in 1994 and became a member of Gurudeva's Saiva Siddhânta Church. That fall we moved to the island of Kauai to live near the holy feet of our beloved Gurudeva. In November, 1996, my husband and eldest daughter went on pilgrimage with Gurudeva to India for a month.

My daughter was interested in studying Bhârata Nâtyam, and my husband, under Gurudeva's guidance, left my daughter in India so that she could attend Kalakshetra College of Fine Arts and get a diploma in Bhârata Nâtyam. She started college in June of 1997, and the rest of the family, my husband, myself and two younger daughters, moved to Chennai, Tamil Nadu, in November of 1997. The past three years have had their moments of difficulty, but overall they have been a peak experience of my life, a fulfillment of my heart's desires. I am now looking forward in the spring of 2000, following my daughter's graduation from Kalakshetra, to moving back to Kauai with my family and joining the other families there.

Jai Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniaswaminatha! Isani Alahan, 46, has for the past three years lived in Chennai, India, where she works in the home, cooking South Indian âyurvedic meals for her family of five and does home-school with her youngest daughter. She is also studying Carnatic music, Sanskrit, hatha yoga and the Kerala health system known as Kalaripayattu. My Husband and I and Our Lifelong Quest From Vietnam to Yoga; Austerity in British Columbia to a Fulfilling Life in Family Dharma. By Amala Seyon.

My first introduction to Hinduism was when I met my husband. He had been going through a very soul-searching time, asking God why the Vietnam war, why the rioting in the streets of America, and what does materialism have to offer the soul? While going through this trying

time and praying, he took a world religion class at the university. One day a born Hindu man came to his class and talked about the Hindu religion. All the concepts of Hinduism were the truths my husband was looking for. This Hindu man had a meditation center and invited anyone in the class to come. My husband started going on a regular basis. During this time my husband asked me to marry him. He explained to me about the Hindu religion and took me to the meditation center. I was so happy to hear some of the concepts, like God is within you, the law of karma, the evolution of the soul.

I felt like I had been in a cage, like a bird, and someone opened the door, and I was able to fly into something much bigger and deeper. My husband told me that if we got married this was the path he wanted us to take. I accepted that and supported it fully. This started the process, to our surprise, of a confrontation of Western and Eastern philosophies. Our first encounter was in finding someone to marry us. We wanted to have a religious blessing, and so my husband went to the Hindu meditation center and asked this saintly man if he could marry us. He explained that his visa did not allow him to perform the ceremony. So we went to my family's Christian minister and asked him to marry us. He asked us to meet with him as he did with all young couples wishing to marry.

During this meeting he asked my husband a series of questions. Do you believe Jesus Christ is the only Son of God? Do you believe that the Holy Bible is the only word of God? The questioning went on for some time, and at the end of the interview he told my husband that not only could he not marry us but he was going to call my parents and tell them that he was against having me marry someone who was not a Christian. My minister went on to say that he couldn't marry us because he didn't believe in marrying Amala Seyon's decree of name-change, state of California. couples from different religious beliefs. We then had to confront my mother, who was very much a Christian. This was all emotionally hard for her because of the belief that you could only be saved through the belief in Jesus Christ.

She was very disappointed, and the issue caused a major disruption in our family. Finally, they accepted our marriage, and my husband located his past minister, now a professor of world religions at the university close by, who agreed to marry us. This brought to the forefront our Hindu beliefs to our family and friends. It was puzzling at the time, because my husband's spiritual teacher had told us that all religions are one. After our marriage, we started reading all we could on Hinduism. My husband mistakenly followed the statements in Hindu scripture that we now realize were intended for monks. We sold and gave away all our wedding gifts and went to live in very remote areas of British Columbia. He read from morning until night and sat by a river for hours on end, but we finally realized we were not making real spiritual progress, and I was lonely living in remote areas and even on a deserted island.

We started searching and praying, and one day someone invited us to meet our Gurudeva, Sivaya Subramuniaswami. We recognized what a great soul he was immediately, and we started our studies with him. We had two daughters at the time, but had not had our name-giving sacrament into the religion as yet. So, when our children were five and three years old, we all had our name-giving together, formally entering the Saivite Hindu religion. Gurudeva was very patient with us and helped my husband and me understand the dharma of family people and the limitless depths of the Hindu faith. My children were raised in the Hindu religion, and we spent a lot of years living near a Hindu temple, learning the culture and mixing with born Hindus at the Flushing, New York, Ganesha temple.

We learned so much and felt so naturally a part of the Hindu heritage. We followed a home school curriculum and taught our children in the home until they were twelve years old. We felt it important to get the Hindu convictions in strong, so they would know their religion. Our

daughters are now both married and are wonderful mothers who stay home and care for their children. Our oldest daughter is married to a wonderful Hindu man from Mauritius in an extended family that showers her with love. We now live on the little island of Kauai and serve the community and the broader Hindu family through our many activities, all guided by Gurudeva himself. We are so very grateful to our guru. Aum Nama`Shivaya. Amala Seyon, 51, entered Hinduism in May 1975. A homemaker on Kauai, she and her husband live within walking distance of the Kadavul Hindu Temple. I'm So Proud to Be a Saivite Disillusioned with Catholicism, I Wound Up with No Faith at All, Then Discovered a Whole New Way of Perceiving Life and Beyond. By Asha Alahan.

It all seems like lifetimes ago. I had been raised in a Catholic family. My mother was a devout Catholic, my father had converted to Catholicism right before they were married. I was a happy child, believing in God, loving God and just doing as I was told. But when I reached my teens, I started to question many of the beliefs and became very disillusioned with the Catholic Church. So I left and became nothing! At eighteen I moved away from my parents' home to live with my older sister in Santa Barbara, California. I loved God and knew that something was really missing, but did not quite know where to begin searching. My subconscious was so programmed that it was the Catholic Church or nothing.

As children we were not even allowed to enter other places of worship; it was considered a sin. So I just did nothing! It wasn't until I was twenty-one that I knew my life was on a down-hill spiral and I had to do something. I returned to my parents' home and tried going to the local Catholic Church again. But I still felt that their religion did not hold the answers for me. It was not long after that I was married to my wonderful husband, and he introduced me to Gurudeva's teachings. He showed me the "On the Path" book series and I listened to the original Master Course tapes that he had. It was all so new and exciting. The words were so true, and Gurudeva's voice was so penetrating. It was a whole new way of perceiving the world and beyond—almost a little scary, as my subconscious mind kept trying to remind me of all the previous programming from early childhood and the Catholic school I had attended.

Finally, we were able through an invitation from Gurudeva to come to Kauai for Satguru Pûrn imâ. I was about seven months' pregnant with our first child. When I saw Gurudeva I was so surprised at what a tall person he was, with his white, flowing hair. His darshana was so powerful, I was almost overwhelmed. I had never been in the presence of such a refined soul. This was all so new to me. We continued our studies and finally came to a point where we were able to give Gurudeva three choices for our new Saivite Hindu names.

After receiving our new names, we went to tell our parents about this. Both sets of parents lived in the surrounding area, and we saw them often, so even though this was new (our name change), it wasn't a surprise. But they did take a while to adjust. It was interesting that it was my father who first started to call me by my new name, and it wasn't long after that my mother did also. We continued our studies with Gurudeva and Asha Alahan's severance letter from her Catholic church. to follow the steps towards severance. I had been confirmed in the Catholic Church so I needed to go back to the original parish where this had taken place and talk to the priest, have him understand my position and ask if he would please write a letter of severance for me. By the time I had finished speaking with him, he was unsure on what to say to me.

He denied me the letter and suggested that I speak with the Archbishop of that diocese. I called and made an appointment with this person. I felt since I was going to a higher authority than the local priest that this should be easier. I was wrong. I thought he might understand my

position and agree to write a letter for me. I was wrong. Well, he was not at all happy (even on the verge of anger) and totally refused to let me explain myself.

So I left, wondering where I might go next. In the area where we lived there were some old California missions that were still functional (as places of worship) so I decided to speak with a priest at the nearby mission. I knew the moment I walked into this priest's office that I had been guided by divine beings—he was the one to speak with. He had symbols of the major world religions hanging on his walls. We spoke for a while, and then he wrote me a letter (p. 37) stating that he understood that I wished to sever all previous ties with the Catholic Church and would soon be entering the Hindu religion and then wished me well. Gurudeva suggested that I come to Kauai's Kadavul Hindu Temple to have my nâmakaran a samskara. Which I did. It was a magical samskara. At the time I don't think I realized the deep profoundness of that experience, finally finding the place where my soul knew it belonged. I am so proud to be a Saivite Hindu. I am proud of my Hindu name and often get compliments from people who hear it for the first time. I am grateful and appreciate all that Gurudeva has for me all these years, guiding me gently and offering me opportunities to make changes on the outside as well as on the inside.

Jai Gurudeva. Jai! Asha Alahan, 44, lives in the San Francisco East Bay, California. She formally entered Saivism in 1985 at Kauai Hindu Temple. Asha, whose husband and children are also Hindus, is a wife, mother and housewife and a home-school teacher to all her children. Excommunication and Facing the Family The Priest Tested My Mettle, and My Parents Accepted My Decisions. By Kriya Haran. I was born in New York City of a very strong Roman Catholic background. I went to church regularly. I was also an altar boy for a while. I made my communion and confirmation in the neighborhood church. I went to Catholic school for seventh and eighth grade, and my brother went into a monastery for a short time. I was formally excommunicated from the Catholic Church in 1978. I was lucky, as I was in New York City at the time, worshiping at the Ganesha Temple in Queens. I remember a few difficult parts of my excommunication.

I think I was really coming to terms with my religious beliefs at that time. I was studying intensely with Gurudeva and one must have that total commitment and faith in your beliefs in Hinduism, because when you get excommunicated and are not of any religion it is a scary feeling. You realize how important religion is in one's life. Facing my family was difficult and emotional. I didn't know how they would react to my decision. Also, I was worried about how they would react to my name change. Surprisingly, they accepted my decision with no arguments. They saw how much I had changed for the better since my Kriya Haran's letter of excommunication. association with Gurudeva, the swâmîs and other monks of Saiva Siddhânta Church. The other scary event I experienced was going to the archdiocese of New York City and facing the intimidating priests and nuns. I had to do this in order to get excommunicated.

They simply do not want to let you go. They make excommunication an uncomfortable experience. I was (and still am) so sure of my Hindu beliefs that I would not take "no" for an answer, especially when the priest put his feet up on the desk and lit up a cigarette. The priest and I got into a heated discussion about Catholicism, Hinduism, heaven and hell, but my convictions and ties to Gurudeva were too strong for the priest. In the end, I succeeded in getting excommunicated (letter, p. 40). Kriya Haran, 57, lives in Seattle, Washington, where he owns and operates his own taxi cab.

He became a Hindu on January 4, 1979. Reconciliation Was Arduous I Had Been a Catholic, Mormon, Buddhist, New Age Person and More. By Damara Shanmugan. In 1989 a friend and

manager of a metaphysical bookstore gave me a little booklet as a thank you gift. She said, "It is by an American master known as Gurudeva." I read I'm Alright, Right Now every night for one month before going to sleep. Deep inside I knew that every word it contained was "the Truth," not just someone's interpretation of the Truth. At the end of 1989 I sent away for The Master Course by mail and became a correspondence student of the Himâlayan Academy. At this time in my life I was very active in the New Age movement. I worked full time and was also a massage therapist and rebirther.

For years I had been going from Damara Shanmugan's letter from her Mormon church. ing from teacher to teacher. All of them without exception taught, "Be your own guru, a real one is unnecessary," and "religion is what is wrong with the world." For almost one year, I studied from afar, being careful not to get too close to this strangely familiar Hindu world. I first met with Gurudeva in person on October 4, 1990. Any plans I had to only dangle my toes in the warm waters of Hinduism completely dissolved on that day. Just simply sitting in the presence of this wonderful enlightened being caused a shift within me that I could both feel and understand. I was forty-four years old at that time. I began to do pûjâ every day as best I could and continued to study The Master Course teachings by mail and in seminars. Unbelievably, I was moving toward membership in the only Hindu church on planet Earth.

I probably hold the record for the most religions severed from! I had been born and raised a Catholic, attending ten years of Catholic school until 1960. In 1981 I became a Mormon and was very active as both a Ward and Stake Relief Society cooking teacher. By 1985 I found myself practicing Zen Buddhism and exploring the New Age movement. By nature, I do not have a very confronting personality, and over the years I had just drifted from one thing to another. By December, 1991, I had completed all the necessary study to move toward becoming a Hindu. The next step was to reconcile what I now believed as a person aspiring to become a Hindu against all the beliefs I had held in the past. I took a whole month of vacation from work and spent that entire time searching my heart and soul, reconciling each belief as a Catholic, Mormon, Buddhist, New Age person and, yes, I even absorbed some beliefs from the drug culture and secular humanism.

I wrote over three-hundred pages of confessional prayers during that month. During this "gut-wrenching" time I had terrible pains in my stomach and more than a Damara Shanmugan's letter from her Buddhist teacher. few times came very close to asking to be taken to the hospital. Why would I put myself through this? Was there some outside force making me do it? For the very first time in my life I knew from the inside out that I was finally on the right path for me. My family did not take the change very well, and yet they all had to admit that I was happier and more content than they had ever seen me before. They decided to tolerate the changes.

On January 1, 1992, I was given my new name, Damara Shanmugan. Such a beautiful and unique name. Damara means outstanding and surprising, an assistant of God Siva. Shanmugan literally means, "six-faced," one of the many beautiful names of Lord Murugan, the God of Yoga. Now began the formidable tasks of legally changing my name and obtaining a letter of severance from all former religious affiliations. But I was no longer just a drifter. A newfound courage was born of the knowing, without a shadow of a doubt, exactly what I believed from the inside out—not the outside in.

I visited the Social Security Office, Department of Motor Vehicles, payroll department of my employer and filed a petition with the county of San Diego for a future court date in August of 1992. Every bill, card, account and license had to be corrected. Each phone call required an

explanation, “Just as Cassius Clay became Muhammad Ali....” I went back to the Catholic Church that I had attended until nineteen years old.

As I attended mass each Sunday for a couple of months, I recognized the comfortable and soft feelings of this huge church. I realized that I had been guided and nurtured by kind, inner plane beings, angels, all through my childhood. I understood that there is no competition for souls in the inner worlds. And yet I also knew that what they were preaching I no longer believed. I was bounced back and forth between the diocese and the parish when I called to get an appointment for excommunication.

Finally one day when I was in the neighborhood, I just stopped by the rectory and asked to see the priest. They showed me in, and I told my story of wanting to be a Hindu and needing a letter of severance to move along my spiritual path. The forthcoming letter was beautiful, kind and loving beyond my wildest hopes and dreams. I understood the wisdom of closing this door with love and understanding. When I went back to the Mormon ward I had attended for three years, I had a similar experience. The official letter of severance took months to arrive from Salt Lake City. And they sent many people to my home during that time to try to get me to change my mind. I discovered that I possessed an unwavering certainty within. This was a great surprise, for I had never been aware of this part of my character before. Finally, I visited my New Age teacher, who loved and practiced Zen Buddhism. I could literally feel the deep karmic issues between us dissolving away.

Another kind and loving letter was forthcoming. My stomach was totally at peace now. Wow, I had done it! Not bad for a nonconfrontational person like myself. I made plans to travel back to the Garden Isle of Kauai for my nâmakaran a samskara. Just before leaving I had an incredible experience. One evening while sitting on the couch fully awake, I had a vision that is clearer today than it was on that night. I was surrounded by all the guardian angels who had helped me as a Christian. There were thirty or forty beautiful beings all around me. They were celebrating my becoming a Hindu! All around us was great celebration and joy. Then, off to the left, appeared another group of beautiful beings. I was lovingly escorted over to the new group, and I moved over to join them. I knew these to be my new guides, devas and Mahâ devas of Hinduism. There was genuine celebration and pure joy among all these inner plane beings—no competition, no sorrow.

I can still feel the love and well wishes of the former group. The official ceremony took place in July of 1992, in the small monastic Kadavul Temple on Gurudeva’s paradise property in Kauai. There was a blazing fire in the homa pit and I was asked to stand between the Earthkeeper crystal and the six-foot-tall Siva Natarâja during the last part of the ceremony. I don’t remember my feet touching the ground. Gurudeva gave me a small damaru, Siva’s drum, symbolizing creation. I felt like a brand new person, a new name, new religion, new culture, new way of dressing, new way of acting and a totally new way of seeing and relating to the world and people around me. It was an awesome day, and the feelings are stronger now than they were then. Hinduism cannot be forced upon someone.

Rather, Hinduism is found from the inside. Hinduism is a yearning vibration that can only be satisfied by finding and practicing Sanâtana Dharma, the Eternal Truth. For me, Hinduism is none other than my own integrity, ever urging me on. On November 1, 1992, I became a member of Saiva Siddhânta Church. I continue to make changes on the outside to match the unfolding truth and beauty from within. Damara Shanmugan, 53, lives in La Mesa California with her 80-year-old mother. She became a Hindu on July 12, 1992.

Damara is the Founder of The SHIVA (Saivite Hindu Information for the Visually Assisted) Braille Foundation. She has also been teaching hatha yoga in the San Diego area since 1993. From the Masonic Order and Roman Catholicism How Our Quiet Life in Alaska Was Turned Inside Out When We Vacationed to Hawaii. By Shyamadeva and Peshanidevi Dandapani. In February of 1994 we decided to take a relaxing vacation somewhere in the warm sunshine without a busy sightseeing schedule. Kauai presented itself in a roundabout way, and since we had visited Hawaii before (although not Kauai) it seemed to meet our needs. The roundabout got us to Kapaa, where we stayed at the Islander on the Beach. Three days into our vacation we went into the Lazarus Used Bookstore, where Peshanidevi, my wife, began collecting books. She soon handed me a pile to purchase.

On top was a copy of the second edition of Dancing with Siva. I picked it up and looked at it, and on the back was a short biography and picture of the author, Satguru Sivaya Subramuniya swami. Upon reading it, I said to my wife, "This author is right here on Kauai, and there is a temple here." We bought our books and went back to the hotel. At this point we both seemed to be totally compelled, propelled and impelled to locate Gurudeva and the temple. We found a listing for Subramuniyaswami, Satguru Sivaya, in the local phone directory. There was also a phone listing for his Daily Sermonettes. We called, but there was no answer at the first number, so we called the Daily Sermonettes number and received darshana from Gurudeva for the very first time.

After a few more attempts, Peshanidevi was able to talk with Yogi Rishinatha. She explained that we had found a copy of Gurudeva's book in the bookstore and would like to come to the temple and asked what the proper protocols were for visiting the temple. He gave instructions on what sections to read and directions for coming to the temple the next morning at 9:00 for pûjâ. We were both very excited the next morning as we drove up Kuamoo Road. With our Safeway flower bouquet in hand, we made our first walk up the path to the temple. Seeing the 16-ton black granite Nandi and the temple for the very first time was breathtaking. We washed our feet and entered the temple. It was beyond words.

It was as if we had finally arrived back home after a long and arduous journey. Yogi very graciously welcomed us and guided us through the protocols, including prostrations to God and Gods. We sat down, the only two people in the temple that morning, as Ceyonswami began the pûjâ. We did not know Sanskrit but somehow seemed to intuit the deeper beauty and meaning of the pûjâ. Afterwards, we bought the newest edition of Dancing with Siva and Living with Siva. We purchased one of the tri-folds of Lord Ganesha, Lord Murugan and Lord Siva, plus postcards of the Deities, pamphlets and incense. We felt so alive that it was difficult to leave such an awesome experience and place. Upon arriving back at the room, we made a small shrine with our pictures and flowers and began reading.

The next day we returned to the temple. And this time, after the pûjâ Ceyonswami came out to talk with us. It was so incredible to be in his presence. He was so loving, gentle and kind. We told him about finding Gurudeva's book and how we came to the temple. He explained some about Vedic astrology and asked if we would like to have our astrology done. We said, "Yes" and gave him our birth data. He said he would have it for us the next day. Again, we left dragging our feet, not wanting to leave the temple. After the pûjâ the next day, Swami asked us if we would like to meet Gurudeva. Yes, of course! When? Wait here. We can remember feeling His loving energy before he walked through the curtain. We could feel the love. And then we fully prostrated to our beloved Gurudeva for the very first time. It was as if we had done it many, many times before.

As he sat down in his chair, he looked at us and said, “I see you are dancing with Siva.” At that moment we knew we had found our Guru, our Precious Preceptor, our Teacher. At that moment our lives were forever changed. Later Ceyonswami gave us our astrology and explained some of it to us. He also talked about becoming vegetarian, which we were not. He gave us a wonderful little pamphlet entitled, “How to Win an Argument with a Meat-Eater.” Unbeknownst to us, we had just become vegetarians. Our vacation had turned into a pilgrimage (in fact, it was the last vacation we have taken) and we had come back home to the Sanâtana Dharma, the religion of our souls. During our two-week stay on Kauai, we received Gurudeva’s darshana three times. Each time we were amazed at the power and how much we enjoyed it. We left the island, full of both sadness and joy, and went home to Alaska.

We set up a small shrine and every time we sat in the darshana of God, Gods and guru, we longed to return to Kauai and stay forever. We wanted to renounce the world to serve God and guru. That was not possible, but we did begin our first sâdhanas in Himâlayan Academy. In June we took our first three vrâtas. We pilgrimaged back to Kauai in November of 1994 for Krittika Dîpam. We stayed with the Katir family in their bed and breakfast, and we really increased our learning curve. We met and began merging with the island Church families. This was another special homecoming and a magical time with Guru deva. During this pilgrimage, we truly began to embrace the Sanâtana Dharma and returned home to Alaska with more sâdhanas, to talk to our family and friends about becoming Hindus, and to begin merging with the Hindu community in Anchorage.

For the most part everyone was tolerant of our enthusiasm about becoming Hindus, but no one wanted more information. We had already leased out our house in preparation for moving to Kauai, so we rented an apartment and continued our studies and began the conversion and severance process with the most patient of kulapatis! Kulapati Deva Seyon gently nurtured us through this most intense time. It was our in-depth study to review our lives, to determine our true beliefs, where they came from and if they were still valid for us. There were many rewrites and surprises. We returned to our previous influences (myself to the Freemasons, and Peshanidevi to the Catholic Church), studying and participating with them again to be positive that we wanted to change our path. It was difficult to go back, because it did seem we were regressing.

However, we knew that we were building a solid foundation on which to begin our new journey. We returned to Kauai for the Pañcha Silanyâsa Stone Laying ceremony in April of 1995. It was an incredible pilgrimage. To be back on Kauai, at the holy feet of our beloved satguru and at this most auspicious time in the evolution and manifestation of Iraivan Temple, was such a remarkable and life-changing time. We met and merged with more of Gurudeva’s global Church family, and we received our Hindu names, Shyamadeva Dandapani and Peshanidevi Dandapani. Such beautiful and long names! Gurudeva instructed us to legally change our names and to sever from our former religions by going back and fully embracing our former beliefs and writing a point-counterpoint for each one of them. I returned to the Masonic Lodge and fully embraced Freemasonry for the next thirty days. I attended the lodge and participated fully in all its ceremonies and rituals.

Everyone was glad to see me return, as it had been a few years since I had last attended lodge. At the end of the thirty days, I was completely convinced that I no longer held the inherent beliefs of the Masonic Order. Even with all the years of being a very active Mason—and my father also being a very well-known Mason—I knew it was neither my belief nor my path. The Masons say, “Once a Mason, always a Mason.”

The only way to sever the vows was to become a self-imposed apostate. I prepared a letter declaring that I was a self-imposed apostate to the Masonic vows and beliefs, and that I was converting fully to Saivite Hinduism. I read the following letter in open lodge before all the members present and a copy was given to the secretary to be recorded into the minutes of the meeting on June 8, 1995, at Kenai Lodge No. 11.

To: The Worshipful Master, Wardens, Officers and Members of Kenai Lodge No. 11 "I am here to terminate my Masonic membership as a self-imposed apostate. Apostasy means "an abandoning of what one has believed in, as a faith, cause, principles, etc." I am abandoning, and I have already abandoned, my former Masonic, Biblical and Christian beliefs. I do this of my own free will and accord and with a full understanding of the principles, landmarks, tenets and beliefs of Freemasonry. I also realize that taking this step will terminate my membership in all Masonic concordant bodies. My decision is made with the application of the strictest ethical principles of honesty and integrity. It is why I have chosen to do this in person at a stated communication of this Lodge.

This is a personal decision. It is the spiritual path I have chosen to live. If I did not do this, I firmly believe it would affect my spiritual unfoldment as a Hindu. I accept the finality of my decision. I would expect from this day forward to no longer have any privileges as a Mason. I have made my decision and will live by it. In fact, my decision to become a Saivite Hindu includes adopting a Hindu name. Yesterday the Kenai Superior Court approved my legal name change to my new Hindu name, Shyamadeva Dandapani. It will be official in approximately thirty days. In closing, I want each of you to know that this is my sole decision. It does not nor should it ever reflect on any member of my family or any member of this Lodge. I also want you to know that I acknowledge all the goodness that your friendship has brought into my life over the years.

I am thankful to each and every one of you, for it has helped guide me on my path as a seeker of the Truth. I sincerely wish each and every one of you the very best that this life has to offer." The only question came from the secretary, who asked, "Are you sure you do not want a demit?" to which I replied, "I am sure." I remained until the Lodge closed. Afterwards, a number of the members came up and wished me well on my path. I felt a great sense of relief and release. Peshanidevi returned to the Midwest to attend mass and meet with the priest who had given her instructions for being baptized a Catholic.

He had continued as a personal friend for some thirty years, even though she had not practiced that religion since her divorce in 1971. Two hours of discussion did not produce a letter of release, because he said, "Once a Catholic, always a Catholic." He took it very personally but promised a letter to follow. A month later it arrived (p. 54). The fire was strong but the bond was broken. We applied for our legal name change and announced it in the newspapers. We made our court appearance, and the judge asked why we were doing it and if there was anyone in the court that objected. We told him for religious conversion to Hinduism, and no one objected.

The whole process took less than five minutes and would become effective in thirty days. Gurudeva then blessed us with the news that we would have our nâmakaran a samskara at Satguru Pûrn imâ. We were overwhelmed with his love and blessing. On the auspicious day of July 9, 1995, in Kadavul Hindu Temple we made the irrevocable step of having our nâmakaran a samskara. We felt the blessings of Lord Siva and Gurudeva pour forth on us as we sat before God, Gods and Gurudeva and took this momentous, life-changing step onto the perfect path back to the lotus feet of our loving Lord Siva.

We “declared of our own volition acceptance of the principles of the Sanâtana Dharma, and having severed all previous non-Hindu religious affiliations, attachments and commitments, hereby humbly petition entrance in the Saivite Hindu religion through the traditional nâmakaran a samskara and plead for recognition of this irrevocable conversion to Saivite Hinduism.” Thank you, Siva! Thank you, Gurudeva!

We had come home to the religion of our souls. We experienced so much love, joy and emotion during the Peshanidevi’s heartfelt letter from her Catholic priest. nâmakaran a samskara. And it affirmed our beliefs that we are Saivite souls and that we had been with Gurudeva in previous lives. The fire of conversion was really roaring once we made our legal name change and nâmakaran a samskara official in the newspapers and by mailing out a few hundred personal announcements to our parents, family, relatives, friends, clients and business associates.

We mailed them the following announcement on a card with a beautiful Tamil Aum on the front: “To our dear family, friends, business associates, clients and customers: Eighteen months ago, Ron and Francine Moore went on a Hawaiian vacation to Kauai. While shopping in Kapaa at Lazarus Used Bookstore, we found the book, Dancing with Siva, by Satguru Sivaya Subramuniaswami. Since that moment our lives have forever changed. We discovered that Gurudeva, as he is affectionately known, was right there on Kauai. We located the Kadavul Hindu Temple. We attended the worship service. We had the privilege to meet Gurudeva. We knew we had found the religion of our souls and a preceptor to guide us on the path. We have just completed our ethical conversion to Saivite Hinduism and this is our announcement of that momentous event. We feel very grateful to live in a country that allows freedom of religion.

We thank God and all of you for your love, understanding and support. We will be happy to assist anyone with pronunciations or to answer questions. Shyamadeva Dandapani (formerly known as Ronald Hance Moore) and Peshanidevi Dandapani (formerly known as Francine McPherson Moore) at a nâmakaran a samskara (name-giving sacrament) held at their request on the auspicious day of July 9, 1995, at the Kadavul Hindu Temple on the Garden Island of Kauai, were duly given their Hindu names in accordance with the traditions of Saivite Hinduism. They have made this irrevocable conversion to Saivite Hinduism, and they respectfully request everyone to use their new names in all instances from this day forward. Their new names have been legally changed by the courts and became effective July 7, 1995. The phonetic pronunciation is She-ah-ma-day-va Dawn-duh-pa-nee and Pay-shawneeday-vee Dawn-duh-pa-nee.”

The name change seemed to make our conversion very real to others, and many were quite alarmed. Our daughter was visibly frightened to enter our shrine room, and she forbid her young children to spend the night with us anymore. She was willing to use our new names and said that whatever we wanted to do was okay, but it was not for her. She would not accept any literature from us or talk about Hinduism. The two sons said about the same but were less rigid. My parents and siblings felt total rejection because of the family name, and they disowned us. They said that if their name was not good enough for us, then they had no son and daughter. Peshanidevi’s parents are deceased, but she had been like an adopted daughter to my parents for years. My wife’s grandmother and her brother were the only family members who were really happy for us.

And they showed it by immediately beginning to learn how to pronounce and then use our new names. In my work, a few close friends fully accepted our new names and life without question.

However, there was a period of about one year where I received a lot of fire and testing. Many Saiva Siddhânta Church members had shared their stories of conversion with us, so we were a little bit prepared. We felt so strongly in what we were doing, that we could continue on our path with love and joy. Life with Gurudeva just gets better and better, and there is so much more. Now we knew why we were here and where we were going.

We thank you, Gurudeva, from the lotus of our hearts for all your gifts and blessings. Shyamadeva and Peshanidevi Dandapani, both age 54, live in Wailua, Hawaii on the island of Kauai. Shyamadeva a commercial real estate broker specializing in site acquisitions and leasing for local, regional and national real estate clients. Peshanidevi is a domestic goddess and homemaker.

From the Sister Faith of Taoism My New Hindu Name was Perhaps the Biggest Hurdle for My Chinese-American Family. By Indivar Sivanathan. In retrospect, one can look at the journey of discovering why we are here, how we will get there, and appreciate the “chance” happenings, the signs, that have brought us to the present. For me the search really began in adolescence, and the awareness of being a religious seeker came in my early twenties. After meeting Gurudeva for the first time, and receiving my nâmakaran a samskara several years later, I finally felt as if I had come home. Early life was growing up in Hawaii in the 1950s and 60s. My parents are second-generation Chinese-American, and we were raised with a grandmother, uncles, aunts and lots of cousins.

Father and Mother did not believe in imposing religious beliefs on their children; consequently no formal religion was taught at home. However there were small observances around births, deaths, auspicious and inauspicious times, and paying homage to our departed grandparents. My mother would recount stories and beliefs held by her parents, about spirits, the nature of people by reading their faces, and myriad other observances about how to live life. We had one uncle who was a Southern Baptist! After his constant insistence we attend Sunday School, Mother finally assented. I remember sitting in the pulpit while the pastor was preaching at the top of his lungs that we were all “born in sin” and were “dirty” and “bad.” Fortunately as a four-year old I thought, “I haven’t done anything wrong” and dismissed the sermon. After sitting in the psalm singing group later, I definitely decided all this was not for me.

Fortunately my parents did not force or encourage future visits to the church. Then the university experience: humanism, existentialism, self-expression in the 1960s and getting as much experience as one can; then living in Europe and then becoming clear that this pursuit of experience for its own sake was a dead-end street. Perhaps the soul was starting to push itself forward, beginning thoughts of changing my life and direction entirely. The first thing was to live a pure life, so I decided to become a vegetarian. The next was to start studying with a good teacher. But where to start? At this time came two innerplane dreams, one taking place in Zürich, Switzerland. An elephant was running through town, its mahout unable to control him. Seeing him charge toward me, I projected a thought to him, and he answered rather humorously.

He then hoisted me up on his back with his trunk and carried me around the lake which surrounds the town. In December of the same year the Saiva Siddhânta Church conducted an Innersearch Study Program on the Big Island of Hawaii.

One very chilly morning we gathered in a room where a picture of a being with an elephant’s head and a human body was displayed. I thought, “My God, what have I gotten myself into!” and in a split second remembered the dream in Zürich. It was then I realized our Great Lord Ganesa had brought me to this point, and would always be there for me. After the dreams in

Switzerland, a major chapter of my life was coming to an end. Many of the aspirations and self-propelled ambitions had come to naught. At my lowest point, I was fortunate to have a session with a psychic healer (Betty Bethards) who had just returned from Hawaii where she had visited a mystical bookstore.

She read material written by a “white-haired man” who had an âsrama on Kauai. She said the books were “right on” and suggested I start studying there, as “he wasn’t very high” (chuckle). After reading *The Clear White Light* and other “On the Path” books by Gurudeva, wonderful inner things began to happen. On January 5, 1974, I met him for the first time, and the connection was cemented. When students were informed that in order to continue studying with Gurudeva and the reasons for doing so, like many others who were born and raised in a non-Hindu culture, all the anxieties and fears of disassociation came up to the forefront: loss of friends, strained work relations because of being thought different, not to mention the same happening in one’s family. Interestingly, Gurudeva had to tell me what religion I had to sever from: Taoism.

Fortunately a Ta Chiao Festival of Renewal was being conducted in Honolulu at that time, so there was an opportunity to experience religious practices directly. My “advisor” was a Catholic Sicilian-born professor of Chinese Religion at the University of Hawaii. What was discovered were the similarities between Taoism and Hinduism, in ritual as well as in approach and attitude. The Taoist scripture being followed by the priest was in Sanskrit. Mudrâs were used to communicate with the Gods. The Hawaiian Deities were propitiated to accept the Taoist Gods. There were guardians of the eight directions.

There was no sermonizing in the temples, and the resident priests facilitated interaction between the Gods and people by performing rituals, burning prayers and translating the responses through their psychic vision and hearing. The process of comparing the two religions done, it was necessary to speak to my parents and convince my mother that changing my name was not a repudiation of the family, but accepting an identity which felt closer to me than my given name. While on a walk with Mother I tried to explain that I never felt comfortable with my own name, and she became even more hurt.

Finally I reminded her she had changed her own Chinese name to a Western one. When she replied, “That was different,” I blurted out, “If I had your name, I would have changed it, too!” She laughed, as her Cantonese name was less than melodic. After that, everything went smoothly. Back in 1980 we chose names from a very long list. I picked three first names and some last names and asked friends to call me by them. The combination which felt right and flowed together nicely was the one chosen. All was approved for the ceremony on MahaShivratri night in February of 1980 at Kadavul Temple on Kauai.

All in all, the process of entering the Hindu religion for me was more one of acceptance rather than the “burning by fire” that comes from a difficult severance. This was probably because of Taoism being so similar to Hinduism, my being raised in an Oriental family, and in the more tolerant environment of Hawaii, where so many beliefs and cultures blend together.

Indivar Sivanathan, 52, lives in Bend, Oregon, where she is a photographer, primarily of architecture and interiors. She entered Hinduism formally on February 14, 1980. Being Refused Communion Was the Test I Felt the Catholic Angels Withdraw When I Said “I No Longer Believed In Jesus as the Son of God.” By Aran Sendan. I was in the process of formally converting from Roman Catholicism to Hinduism, having done my point-counterpoint belief comparisons between the two religions and having gone back to the Catholic Church to

try practicing that faith again. I had resolved that, yes, indeed I felt more comfortable with Hindu beliefs than those of Catholicism or Christianity.

I needed a clean break with Catholicism, so went back to Sacred Heart Church, the parish in which I was baptized, confirmed and received my first holy communion. I had an appointment with the monsignor and met with him in the rectory office. It was an old room, filled with glass-doored bookcases piled up with books and papers. The desk was a jumble of more books and papers as well. I would have preferred a frank and rational discussion along the lines of the point-counterpoint; I was ready for that, but we were not going there. He was a little non-plussed by my statements, like it really wasn't happening, and said that, well, Buddhists or whatever were good people, too, and if I wanted to study, that it was alright with him. I insisted that he write "declared apostate" next to my name in the Parish record book where my baptism, confirmation and first holy communion dates were recorded.

He wouldn't do it, but allowed me to. I wrote "declared apostate" and dated it. I left the meeting a little unsatisfied by the interaction and felt that I needed to do something else. I decided to attend mass the next morning and went up to the communion rail where the same priest was giving out holy communion to the faithful. It seemed to me that his faith would prevent him from giving me holy communion and thus my point would be made. At the rail he asked if I "believed in Jesus Christ as the son of God and the savior of mankind." I said that I didn't and that he couldn't give me holy communion. At that moment it became real. I could feel the Catholic angels withdrawing from me, as clearly as I could feel the wind. I now understood Catholicism better than I had ever understood it before.

It isn't a religion of belief. It's a religion of faith, and clearly not my faith. I was no longer a Catholic. Aran Sendan, 50, is a builder and general contractor in El Sobrante, California. He and his wife Valli entered Hinduism formally on February 14, 1980. At Home in Hinduism Attending a Guru Pûjâ, I Knew Without Doubt That I Was a Hindu. By Chamundi Sabanathan. I first met Gurudeva just over 32 years ago, in 1967, at the age of 19, having married one of his devotees and begun my study and practice of The Master Course. My background to that point had been nonreligious.

My father was an unconfirmed Presbyterian, my mother an unconfirmed Episcopalian, and neither a church-goer. In my teen years, out of curiosity, I had accompanied several of my friends to their respective churches—Catholic, Baptist, Presbyterian, and a Jewish synagogue—but had felt no sense of recognition in any of them. It was like staring blankly at a piece of modern art and wondering, "Why?" During those years, though, I was also avidly reading whatever books I could find that dealt with the Eastern religions. These—especially the Upanishads and the Dhammapada—awakened in me a strong sense of recognition, a feeling of rightness.

Oddly enough, although I had expected to feel Gurudeva's presence very powerfully on meeting him, this did not happen at first, which disturbed me deeply. It wasn't until that first wonderful pûdapûjâ (ceremonial worship of his holy feet) in San Francisco that I knew beyond doubt that I was a Hindu. I had read about pûdapûjâ before.

I had known that after the guru's feet are ceremonially bathed, the devotees are offered the water to drink and I had worried that when that time came I might react in a Western way. Indeed, doubtless to make things easier for any who did feel reluctant, Gurudeva sort of chuckled and told us, "You don't have to drink it; I didn't wash them." But far from feeling any reluctance, I was completely overcome with the feeling one might have upon reaching an oasis after wandering for days, a lifetime, in this case, without water in the desert. At that point I

knew I was a Hindu and that Gurudeva was my satguru, although it was not until years later that my husband and I were actually able to take our family to Kadavul Hindu Temple in Hawaii and have our nâmakaran a samskaras.

Chamundi Sabanathan, 52, lives with her daughter and son-in-law and their three home-schooled children in Santa Rosa, California. She was accepted into Hinduism through the nâmakaran a samskara on Mahâsivaratri, March 4, 1981 at Kadavul Hindu Temple. Constant Nourishment and Solace I Took up Gurudeva's Hindu Teachings as a Teen and Entered the Faith at Age 25. By Shama Vinayaga. I first learned about Gurudeva when I was about sixteen years old. A group of my girl friends ordered The Master Course and started listening to it every Friday, at which time we also started doing hatha yoga. We had no religious foundation at this time and were blundering along. However, it was not until I was almost twenty that I decided to go to Hawaii and meet Gurudeva.

A friend came with me. We stayed in the outdoor cabins on the Mauna Kea hillside on the Big Island, attended daily pûjâs and started studying Shûm, the language of meditation. You can imagine my shock and surprise when the winter air descended on the Mauna Kea slopes. I thought that I was coming to Hawaii. I was warmer back home in the Canadian North. After two weeks of a very arduous schedule, we flew to Kauai to meet Gurudeva. The daily pûjâs had reached deep into my soul, and I felt that I was starting to climb out of an abyss. Upon arrival on Kauai, we attended a pûjâ at the Kadavul Hindu Temple.

The Siva Natarâja Deity was the only icon there at that time, and it was housed in a small shelter with a thick white sand floor. The pûjâs were extremely powerful and drew me inward. However, nothing compared to my meeting with dear, sweet Gurudeva. I was sitting with a group of ladies on the grass outside the temple when Gurudeva came along. He commented on the group of flowers ornating the lawn. It was at this time that I was blessed with Gurudeva's presence, the saktipâta from a realized soul and satguru. It was a gift that I will always cherish. The years ahead proved to be very arduous, as I was forced to face myself again and again. My belief structure had to be reformatted. I became a vegetarian, and I had to learn to combat instinctive desires. After many years of doing regular pûjâ and sâdhana, I was able to have my nâmakaran a samskara at the Kadavul Hindu Temple. I was almost twenty-five years old.

The after effects of the ceremony permeated the depths of my being. The congregation sang "Îa^kara Siva." To this day, when I sing this song I feel as if I have come home. The Hindu religion has given me constant nourishment and solace. It has given me the strength to face seed karmas. It has magically lifted me up again and again. There are no words to express the gratitude that I feel to Gurudeva, the philosophy and the Gods. There is no doubt in my mind that Hinduism is the root religion. It feels so ancient and yet so close. I pray that I will always have the humility to move forward in the San Mârge path, that I will have the courage to face myself at all times and that I will be able to slowly build my inner temple while maintaining a spirit of upliftment toward each human being that I may encounter—none of which I could begin to do without the guidance of Gurudeva Sivaya Subramuniaswami. Shama Vinayaga, is a Compliance Officer at Wainwright Credit Union Ltd. in Wainwright, Alberta, Canada. She became a Hindu on January 5, 1979. Breaking the Idol Barrier How the Hindu Way of Worship Changed My Life. By Rudite J. Emir. I grew up in a Christian family. Not only was it Christian, it was Protestant. Protestants tend to be austere in their ritualism and in their portrayal of holy images.

The typical church holds a cross, perhaps a statue or painting of Christ. Stained glass windows may depict the life of Christ or of his apostles, that is all. The Catholic propensity for richer

symbolism was viewed through my Protestant family's eyes as a strange kind of extravagance, colored by a touch of something almost pagan. I remember looking skeptically at Catholics kneeling in front of statues of saints and burning candles by their images to invoke their blessings. That's the kind of mind that came in contact with the religious thought and culture of the Hindus. Around the age of sixteen the impact of spiritual India began to enter my life. The influence came first through contemplative literature, the poetry of Rabindranâth Tagore, the Bhagavad Gîtâ, and the Upanishads. Though they touched my heart and initiated new stirrings deep within, still, the heart was not blasted wide open. I had not yet met my guru. Then I met Gurudev, Swami Chinmayananda. I was twenty-six, with an unappeased hunger that had begun ten years earlier and had still not been satisfied. Swâmîjî blasted my heart wide open as his love-drenched intellect pierced through my rational mind to reach the sanctuary within.

Around that time the symbolic and ritual aspect of Hindu worship also became known to me through bhajanas and kîrtana, prostrations to the teacher, receiving of prasâda from the hands of the guru, and the first tentative, uncertain, yet strangely overpowering experiences with a pâdapûjâ, worship of the guru's sandals. Still, the Protestant in me affirmed, "I am a Vedântin, not a Hindu. The ritualistic aspect of the spiritual search is for the Hindu, not for me, a Westerner. I am striving for the essence behind the symbol; the symbol itself I can forego." My first trip to India, about ten years after I had met Swâmîjî, included a few unforgettable visits to temples and some dutiful prostrations in front of idols. I did it out of respect for the spiritual traditions of a country I had grown to revere and out of my intellectual appreciation that each symbol stood for a deeper meaning behind it. But the Protestant in me still persisted in her protest against worship of inanimate stone and wood.

In the fall of 1987 I had the good fortune to participate in a Chinmâyâ Spiritual Camp at Sidhabari, Himachal Pradesh, at the foothills of the Himâlayas. The spiritually charged setting, the meditative stillness of the Himâlayas, left my mind in awe. One morning after meditation I found myself walking toward the temple. After doing my pranâms in front of the idols in the sanctuary, I followed the other worshipers to the rear of the temple. I must confess I had no idea what I might find there. As I turned the corner, my eyes fell upon a wooden image of Ganesha. A blast of overpowering emotion almost pushed me to the ground. I was reeling inside. Lord Ganesha, through the idol, had just come alive for me. In fact, He had caught me totally unawares, had taken me by surprise by this unexpectedly powerful announcement of His undeniable presence. "Lord Ganesha, what have You done? Of all the idols that I had contemplated upon in my intellectual studies of Hindu symbolism, You of all the many Deities left me quizzical and wondering, You with the strange animal head, the bloated belly, the broken tusk. I could never take You seriously. I wondered how so many Hindus could. And now, what have You done? Among the bevy of beautiful, statuesque, inspiring images of Hindu Gods, dear Lord, You chose to speak to me through the strange, even comical, form of Ganesha!" I left the temple as though struck by a bolt of lightning. My mind later pondered over what had transpired.

Perhaps my encounter with Ganesha was simply the extension of a fulfilling hour of contemplation that had ended just moments before my visit to the temple. The experience would most likely not be repeated. The next day I decided to test the previous day's newfound reality. As I rounded the corner toward the back of the temple, I found myself talking to Ganesha, half-reverently, half-jokingly (as He had left me with a very intimate, slightly jovial feeling of His presence the day before): "Ganesha, will You really be there for me again? Will you assert Your reality through the dead image of carved wood? Go ahead, prove it to me!" He did it again. And again and again, for many days afterward. The Protestant in me no longer protests.

How can she? Not only does Ganesha speak to me through the idol now, He has also proven His presence as the Remover of Obstacles for me. On my return trip from Sidhabari, I had no train reservations. Gathered in a huddle on the station platform, my friends were valiantly trying to persuade the railway personnel to allow me to use a ticket unused by another passenger. In vain. The conductor's face remained stern; his head continued to shake in an adamant "No!" Departure time was approaching fast. By the minute, it looked less and less likely that I would reach New Delhi in time to meet Swâmîjî when he arrived there. Only one thing to do. "Ganesha!" I cried in my mind, "You must come to help me now! Remove this obstacle!" The very instant I shouted those words in my mind, a smile broke across the conductor's face. "OK," he said, "we'll arrange for a seat." The Protestant protests no more.

The idol barrier has been broken. You may wonder if I took the step of converting to Hinduism. The answer is that I did not. I feel more of a universalist than a Hindu, although, through Vedânta, Hinduism became very close to my heart. I don't feel that I have fully severed my ties with my Christian roots, nor have I through my study of Vedânta disallowed loving, for instance, Rumi's intense love for God and worshiping Him through Rumi's poems. I see myself as someone who has a universal outlook on spirituality, with openness to many of the great religions of the world (which I have learned to understand from a deeper perspective through Vedânta), but with a particular love for Hinduism because of my many years of study with my guru from India.

Rudite Emir lives in Los Altos, California. She conducts business workshops incorporating the principles of Vedânta into business management. *An Unexpected Life-Changing Pûjâ How the Goddess Captured Me Forever.* By Stephen P. Huyler. I had been to Padmapoda, a village in eastern India, a number of times previously to visit the family of a close friend. Each time, I was taken to see the sacred tree that embodies the local Goddess, Gelubai, the Deity of the community. But this visit brought an unprecedented honor: being allowed to witness the ceremony of invocation in which the dynamic power of the supreme Goddess Chandi was requested. It was a very special ritual, enacted on rare occasions to implore the aid of the Goddess in overcoming a difficult domestic problem.

The entire ritual had already taken two priests two hours: preparing and dressing the image of the Goddess, drawing a sacred diagram upon the ground, building a fire on it, and feeding that fire with clarified butter (ghee), all the while singing Her names and praises. As a middle-aged cultural anthropologist and art historian who had already spent more than half my life studying India, I prided myself with my objectivity. I might feel empathy toward a particular subject or situation, but as a scholar I tried to distance myself, to observe and take notes. Despite my resistance at that moment, as the fire flared brightly and the spirit of the Goddess was invoked to enter the tree and be available to the village, I actually felt Her presence. I felt a change in the atmosphere: a palpable sense of power, pulsating, vibrating energy, the strength of which I had never before sensed. I was completely surprised, overwhelmed beyond any expectation. In that one moment I, who had come as an observer, had become a participant.

That insight altered and enriched my perception, allowing me to release decades of self-identity as an objective outsider. My personal and professional life was changed. I was transformed. I have always found the Indian people to be remarkably hospitable, opening their hearts and their lives to me with generous candor. People have always invited me into their homes, to witness and share in their private lives and feelings. I have been fascinated by Hindu spirituality, by the ways in which conscious awareness of the Divine permeates every aspect of daily and seasonal life. But for a young American raised in a strong Christian family, much of it seemed obtuse and confusing. Now when I am invited to attend a sacred ceremony,

I no longer withhold myself in critical appraisal. I am fully present. I realize my earlier distance was merely the consequence of my own limitations. The many Indians I have interacted with always invited my full participation.

For years it was I who held myself apart. My Western heritage and my unconscious miscomprehension of image worship blinded me from deeper understanding. Now I can admire and even be in awe of the ways in which the sacred permeates the lives of the Hindu people, while still maintaining strong attachments to my own home, family, friends, culture and ideals. Awareness of one only enriches awareness of the other. Long before I knew what was happening, I was being offered a deep trust. By opening their homes and their hearts to me, in sharing their private, personal and sacred thoughts with me, countless individuals in India have consciously and unconsciously made me an emissary. I understand now that I can serve as a bridge between two cultures. I have long felt the deep need to set aright the extraordinary imbalance of Western opinions of India. Projections assert that India will be a leading world power within the next few decades. It is remarkable that as India modernizes, as her people grow into leading proponents of an innovative and contemporary world, their sense of religion and spirituality is not diminished.

Hinduism is still as vital to the lives of the Indian people as it has ever been. It is a belief system in complete harmony with change, adaptation, modernization and growth. Stephen P. Huyler is an art historian, cultural anthropologist and photographer, living in Camden, Maine. *How I Became a Hindu The Story of My Rejection of Communism, Existentialism, Catholicism and Materialism.* By Sita Ram Goel, Excerpts From His Book, "How I Became a Hindu." I was born a Hindu. But I had ceased to be one by the time I came out of college at the age of twenty-two. I had become a Marxist and a militant atheist. I had come to believe that Hindu scriptures should be burnt in a bonfire if India was to be saved. It was fifteen years later that I could see this culmination as the explosion of an inflated ego. During those years of self-poisoning, I was sincerely convinced that I was engaged in a philosophical exploration of cosmic proportions.

How my ego got inflated to a point where I could see nothing beyond my own morbid mental constructions is no exceptional story. It happens to many of us mortals. What is relevant in my story is the seeking and the suffering and the struggle to break out of that spider's web of my own weaving. I will fit in the filaments as I proceed. My earliest memory of an awakening to interests other than those with which a young boy is normally occupied goes back to when I was eight years old. My family was living in Calcutta. My father was a total failure as a broker in the jute goods market. But he was a great storyteller. He could hardly be called an educated person, having spent only two or three years in a village school. But he had imbibed a lot of the traditional lore by attending kathâs and kîrtanas in his younger days. His knowledge of Hindu mythology, legendary heroes and the lives of saints was prolific. One fine evening he started telling me the lengthy and complex story of the Mahâbhârata. The narrative lasted for more than a month, each installment lasting over an hour or so. I absorbed every event and episode with rapt attention and bated breath. The sheer strength of some of the characters as they strode across the story lifted me up and above the humdrum of everyday life and made me dwell in the company of immortals. The Arya Samaj of my young days in the village had three main themes to which they devoted the largest part of their programs—the Muslims, the Sanâtanis, the Purânas.

The Muslims were portrayed as people who could not help doing everything that was unwholesome. The Sanâtani brâhmîns, with their priestcraft, were the great misleaders of mankind. And the Purânas, concocted by the Sanâtanis, were the source of every superstition

and puerile tradition prevalent in Hindu society. There was not much of traditional Sanâtanism in my family, due to the influence of Sri Garibdas, a saint in the nirgun a tradition of Kabir and Nanak. Our women did keep some fasts, performed some rituals and visited the temple and the Sivalinga. But the menfolk were mostly convinced about the futility of image worship and did not normally participate in any rituals.

The brâhmin priest was not seen in our homes, except on occasions like marriage and death. The great religious event in our family was the patha of the Granth Saheb performed by Garibdasi sâdhus who stayed with us for weeks at a time. I remember very vividly how lofty a view I took of my own nirgun a doctrines and how I looked down upon my classmates from Sanâtanist families whose ways I thought effeminate. I particularly disliked their going to the annual mela (festival) of a Devî in a neighboring town. God for me was a male person. Devî worship was a defilement of the true faith. But as my moral and intellectual life was preparing to settle down in a universe of firm faith provided by Mahâtma Gandhi, my emotional life was heading towards an upheaval which I had not anticipated. Let me hasten to clarify that this upheaval had nothing to do with love or romance.

The dimensions of this disturbance were quite different. I started doubting, first of all slowly and then rather strongly, if there was a moral order in the universe at large and in the human society in which I lived. The sages, saints and thinkers whom I had honored so far were sure that the world was made and governed by a God who was Satyam (Truth), Sivam (Good), Sundaram (Beauty). But all around me I saw much that was untrue, unwholesome and ugly. God and His creation could not be reconciled. This problem of evil arose and gripped my mind, partly because of my personal situation in life. In spite of my pose of humility, learned from Mahatma Gandhi, I was harboring a sense of great self-esteem. I was a good student who had won distinctions and scholarships at every stage.

I had read a lot of books, which made me feel learned and wise. I was trying to lead a life of moral endeavor, which I thought made me better than most of my fellow men. Standing at the confluence of these several streams of self-esteem, I came to believe that I was somebody in particular and that the society in which I lived owed me some special and privileged treatment. All this may sound ridiculous. But people who take themselves too seriously are seldom known for a sense of humor. My objective situation, however, presented a stark contrast to the subjective world in which I loved to live. I was very poor and had to lead a hard life. My learning, whatever it was worth, did not seem to impress anyone except my teachers and a few classmates.

Most people around me thought that I was a bookworm and a crank. My interest in Arya Samaj, the freedom movement and Harijan uplift had alienated the family elders in the village. I had even suffered physical assault from one of them. But the unkindest cut of all was that whenever I visited the home of some city classmate who liked me, his family people made it a point to ignore me as a village bumpkin outside the ken of their class. I was always so poorly dressed as to be mistaken for one of their servants.

It took me a long time to forget and forgive the father of a close friend who chided his son in my presence for having fallen into bad company; I did not know at that time that our upper classes are normally very uppish and that their culture and good manners are generally reserved for their social superiors. Over a period of time, I found that I was getting overwhelmed by a great sense of loneliness and self-pity. This black mood got intensified by my voluminous readings of the great tragedies from Western literature. Thomas Hardy was one of my most favorite novelists.

I read almost all his works. The comedies of Shakespeare I always gave up midway. But I lapped up his tragedies. I knew by heart all the soliloquies of Hamlet. And I thought that my situation was summed up by the following stanza in Grey's Elegy: "Full many a gem of purest ray serene, the dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear; full many a flower is born to blush unseen, and waste its sweetness on the desert air." I was sure that I was one of those gems and flowers which would never get the appreciation they deserved by virtue of their brilliance and fragrance. I translated the whole poem into Hindi verse. My mental defenses in support of Gandhism were giving way one by one under assault after assault mounted by a philosopher friend whom I loved as a remarkable human being and to whom I conceded a superiority of intellect and knowledge.

But I refused to share his conviction that this world was created and controlled by the Devil, who off and on spread some grains of happiness over his net in order better to trap the helpless human beings. I was not prepared to give up all hope so fully and finally. But the evolutionistic explanation of the world, inanimate and animate, which I had read in H. G. Wells' Outline of History a year or two before, now suddenly started coming alive in my consciousness. So far I had remembered only some unconventional observations made in this big book, namely, that Ashoka was the greatest king in the annals of human history, and that Alexander and Napoleon were criminals. Now I started wondering whether this world was really a chance concourse of atoms with no purposive consciousness leading it towards a godly goal and no moral order governing at the heart of its matrix.

Now I was in a desperate hurry to get a good knowledge of the doctrine of socialism. It was prescribed reading also for my next year's course in the history of Western political thought. But I did not want to wait till the next year. A desire to read Karl Marx now became irresistible. First, I read the Communist Manifesto. It was simply breathtaking in the breadth and depth of its sweep over vast vistas of human history. It was also a great call to action, to change the world and end exploitation and social injustice for all time to come. At the same time I concluded that God as a creator of this world could be conceived only in three ways—either as a rogue who sanctioned and shared in the roguery prevalent in his world, or as an imbecile who could no more control what he had created, or as a sannyâsin, who no more cared for what was happening to his creatures.

If God was a rogue, we had to rise in revolt against his rule. If he was an imbecile, we could forget him and take charge of the world ourselves. And if he was a sannyâsin, he could mind his business while we minded our own. The scriptures, however, held out a different version of God and his role. That version was supported neither by experience nor by logic. The scriptures should, therefore, be burned in a bonfire, preferably during winter when they could provide some warmth. Four years after leaving college, I was ready to join the Communist Party of India when it declared war on the newly born Republic of India in February, 1948. I conveyed my decision to my friend Ram Swarup, whom I had met after leaving college and who was to exercise a decisive influence on my intellectual evolution.

He wrote back immediately: "You are too intelligent not to become a communist. But you are also too intelligent to remain one for long." This was a prophecy which came true. It was only a year and a few months later that I renounced Marxism as an inadequate philosophy, realized that the Communist Party of India was a fifth column for the advancement of Russian Imperialism in India, and denounced the Soviet Union under Stalin as a vast slave empire. My encounter with Sri Aurobindo, on the other hand, came about almost inadvertently. I had heard his name from my father who extolled him as a great yogî.

My father literally believed that Sri Aurobindo could levitate as much as five feet above ground. But I had never read anything written by Sri Aurobindo, nor was he on my list of masters whom I aspired to read some day. The intellectual elite in the college talked a lot about Spengler, Bergson, Marcel Proust, Bernard Shaw and Aldous Huxley. But I had never heard the name of Sri Aurobindo in this exclusive club. As I look back, I can see that the greater part of Sri Aurobindo's vast vision as expounded in *The Life Divine* was beyond my grasp at that time. The heights to which he rose as a witness of the world process and the drama of human destiny left me literally gasping for breath. But this much was clear at the very start: that his concept of man had dimensions which were radically different from those I had come across in any other system of thought.

He was not dealing with man as a producer and consumer of material goods. He was not dealing with man as a member of a social, political and economic organization. He was not dealing with man as a rational animal or a moral aspirant or an aesthete. Man was all these, according to him, but man was also much more at the same time. He was a soul, effulgent with an inherent divinity which alone could sustain and give meaning to the outer manifestations of the human personality. And the promise made by Sri Aurobindo regarding the ultimate destiny of the human race was far more stupendous than that held out by Marx. The international proletarian revolution anticipated and advocated by Marx was to lead to a stage at which mankind could engage itself in rational, moral and aesthetic endeavors, free from the distortions brought about by class interests. But the supramentalization of the mental, vital and physical nature of man envisaged and recommended by Sri Aurobindo would enable mankind to bridge the gulf between human life as a terrestrial turmoil and human life as a spiritual self-existence.

The conceptual language I am using now to draw the distinction between Marx and Sri Aurobindo was not accessible to me in those days. Most of this clarity is wisdom by hindsight. But howsoever vague and inchoate my vision might have been at that time, I did feel that Sri Aurobindo was talking about fundamentally different dimensions of the universe and human life. The gulf between my mundane interests and the grand aspirations dictated by Sri Aurobindo's vision was very wide, and I could hardly muster the care or the courage to cross over. But in the inner recesses of my mind, I did become curious about the nature of the universe, about man's place in it and about a meaningful goal of human life. My problem now was to reconcile Sri Aurobindo with Marx, in that order. Marx, of course, came first. He was the exponent par excellence of the social scene with which I was primarily preoccupied as well as extremely dissatisfied. Sri Aurobindo had to be accommodated somewhere, somehow, in the system of Marx. The reconciliation was achieved by me several years later to my own great satisfaction. I came to the conclusion that while Marx stood for a harmonized social system, Sri Aurobindo held the key to a harmonized individual.

The ridiculousness of this reconciliation did not dawn on me, even when a well known exponent of Sri Aurobindo, to whom I presented it as a triumphant intellectual feat, dismissed it with a benevolent smile. I dismissed the exponent as wise by half because while he had studied Sri Aurobindo, he had most probably not studied Marx, at least not so well as I had done.

My plight was pretty serious after I left college. I was now a married man and the father of a son. There was a family to support, which included my parents in the village. But I had not a penny in my pocket. I gave up the only job I could get, as a clerk in the Central Secretariat, after exactly sixty-five days, because I was ashamed to be a cog in the British imperialist machine. My supreme aspiration was to be a lecturer in some college. But every interview to

which I was called ended with the employers' pointing out that I had no previous experience of teaching! I was present in the Second Party Conference of the Communist Party of India which was held in the Maidan at Calcutta in February, 1948.

I was really thrilled and made up my mind to join the Party immediately. But Destiny was determined, as it were, to deny me that "honor" also. My friend Ram Swarup suddenly appeared on the scene and expressed his intention to stay with me for quite some time. It was his first visit to Calcutta. I was very happy because he was my nearest and dearest in the whole world. I did not know that Ram Swarup had by now come to regard communism as a very great evil threatening to engulf the future of mankind. There had been nothing in his letters to indicate this decisive turn. After I failed to put my three best communist friends against Ram Swarup, I had to face him myself and all alone.

The discussions spread over several months. Most of the time I repeated party slogans, sometimes very vehemently. Ram Swarup dismissed them with a smile. One day in my exasperation I struck a superior attitude and said, "We find it difficult to come to any conclusion because I have a philosophical background while you proceed merely from economic, social and political premises." Ram Swarup enquired what I meant by philosophy, and I rattled out the list which I had ready in my mind—Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer and so on. Ram Swarup told me that at one time or the other he had studied all of them but had found them irrelevant and useless. I was surprised as well as pained.

Ram Swarup explained: "Suppose one knows this philosophical system or that. Does it make a better man out of him in any way? These systems are mere cerebrations and have little to offer towards practical purposes of life." The word cerebration got stuck in my mind and made it impossible for me to read any abstract philosophy anymore. I had been very fond of Western metaphysics and epistemology till then. Finally, I was back to square one. My faith in Gandhism had lost the battle to Marxism. Now I was no longer a Marxist. I asked myself again and again: Where do I go from here? The business of life can go on very well without an ideological frame of reference.

One reads books and papers and gossips and goes about passing conventional judgments on current events. One has a family, a vocation, a circle of friends and some hobbies to keep one occupied in leisure time. One grows old, collects his own share of diseases and looks back with anguish towards earlier times when one was young and active. For most of us ordinary mortals, this is the whole of human life. We take very seriously our successes and failures and our loves and hates, without spending a thought on what it is all about. Ram Swarup had tried his best to rescue me from the twin morass of a false self-esteem and a degrading self-pity. He had encouraged and assisted me with timely advice to take an impersonal interest in higher ideas and larger causes.

As I shared his ideas and concern for social causes, I could not question his command for action. Now I was invited by him to join a group to serve the new values we shared with him. The cultural and political atmosphere in India had become over the years chock full with communist categories of thought. The main task we took upon ourselves was to expose communist categories of thought as inimical to human freedom, national cohesion, social health, economic development and political and cultural pluralism, to which we were wedded as a people. Simultaneously we went out to explode the myths about communist countries so that our people, particularly our national and democratic political parties, could see them as they were totalitarian tyrannies with low standards of living and regimented culture.

In due course, we became acutely aware of the progressive degeneration of politics in India. A similar degeneration was taking place on the international plane as well. In this atmosphere of declining political standards, we decided to withdraw our anti-communist campaign as we had conceived it to start with. We were convinced that a larger battle, couched along deeper cultural contours, was needed if the nation was to be saved from the corrosion of its soul. Ram Swarup was now becoming more and more meditative and reflective in his comments on the current political scene. He often talked of a cultural vacuum which communism was using to its own great advantage.

Communism, he said, was deriving support from a deeper source, a new self-alienation amongst our political and cultural elite and advancing with the help of forces which on the surface seemed to be allied against communism. It was not our democratic polity alone which was under attack from communism. There were several other forces which had come together to suffocate and render sterile the deeper sources of India's inherent strength. It was at this time that I fell seriously ill and lost a lot of weight, which I had never had in plenty. A Catholic missionary whom I had known earlier in connection with our anti-communist work, came to visit me. He was a good and kindly man and had a strong character. He had insisted upon his religious right to sell our anti-communist literature in melas and exhibitions in spite of his mission's advice that this was no part of his ordained work and that, in any case, the government of India frowned upon it. The Father, as I called him, found me in a difficult condition, physically as well as financially. He felt sure that it was in such times that Jesus Christ came to people. He asked me if I was prepared to receive Jesus. I did not understand immediately that he was inviting me to get converted to Catholicism.

My impression was that he wanted to help me with some spiritual exercises prescribed by Christianity. Moreover, I had always admired Jesus. I had, therefore, no objection to receiving him. Only I was doubtful if someone was really in a position to arrange my meeting with Jesus. But I became aware of the Father's true intentions as I travelled with him to a distant monastery. He asked every other missionary he met on the way to pray for his success. At this monastery, which was a vast place with very picturesque surroundings, I was advised by the Father to go into a retreat. It meant my solitary confinement to a room. I was not supposed to look at or talk to anyone on my way to the bathrooms or while taking my morning and evening strolls on the extensive lawns outside.

And I was to meditate on themes which the Father prescribed for me in the course of four or five lectures he delivered to me during the course of the day, starting at about 6:30 in those winter mornings. I was not used to this way of life. I had never lived in such solitude by my own choice. My only solace was that I was allowed to smoke and provided with plenty of books on the Christian creed and theology. I tried to read some of the books. But I failed to finish any one of them. They were full of Biblical themes and theological terminology with which I was not familiar. Most of the time they made me recall Ram Swarup's observation about mere cerebration. Or they were simplistic harangues to love Christ and join the Catholic Church. They had a close similarity to communist pamphlets which I had read in plenty.

The Father had asked me again and again to invoke Christ and meditate upon him. But he had not told me how to do it. I had no previous practice in meditation. I did not know how to invoke Christ, or any other godhead for that matter. All I could do was to think again and again of Christ preaching the "Sermon on the Mount" or saving an adulteress from being stoned to death. While delivering a lecture about creation, the Father said that God in his wisdom and kindness had made all these fishes and animals and birds for man's consumption. I immediately rose in revolt. I told him very emphatically that I was a Vaishnava and a

vegetarian and that I had absolutely no use for a God that bestowed upon man the right to kill and eat His other creatures simply because man happened to be stronger and more skilled. I added that in my opinion it was the duty of the strong and the more skilled to protect the weak and the less wily. The Father also suddenly lost his self-possession. He almost shouted: "I can never understand you Hindus who go about seeking a soul in every lice and bug and cockroach that crawls around you. The Bible says in so many words that man is God's highest creation. What is wrong with the higher ruling over the lower?" I kept quiet. I could see the pain in his eyes. I did not want to add to his anguish.

He recovered his self possession very soon and smiled. Now I went down on my knees before him and asked his forgiveness for my lack of strength to go on with the retreat. He agreed, although rather reluctantly. His sense of failure was writ large on his face. I was very sorry indeed. I now wished that it would have been better for both of us if Christ had come to me. On our way back to the big city where his mission was housed, he became his old normal self again. There was not, a trace of bitterness on his face or in his voice as we talked and joked and discussed several serious and not so serious matters. Now I took my courage in both my hands and asked him my final question: "Father, am I not already a Christian? I do not normally tell a lie. I do not steal. I do not bear false witness. I do not covet my neighbor's wife or property.

What more can a man do to demand God's grace and kinship with Christ? Why should you insist on a formal conversion which in no way helps me to become better than what I am?" His reply was very positive and it estranged me from the Christian creed for good. He said: "It is an illusion that you can become a Christian if you practice Christian virtues. One cannot claim to be virtuous unless one is baptized in the Church of Christ. He is the only savior. No one outside his fold can claim salvation. The only thing the heathens can look forward to is eternal hell-fire." That evening I had a chat with the librarian in the mission's library. He was young but looked very sad and far away.

His surname was Hindu, but he told me that he had become a Christian a few years ago. He continued, "I fell seriously ill. There was no money in the house. I was earning a small salary and had a wife and two children to support. My relatives were also poor like me and could not help much, what with the cost of medicines and a prescribed diet. It was at this moment that the Father appeared on the scene. I had known him earlier as he frequented our street in search of converts. He brought all the medicines and fruits for me. I was very grateful to him. And one day in a moment of my mental weakness he baptized me. My wife refused to become a Christian. She was an orthodox Hindu. But she did not desert me.

After I had regained my health, the Father insisted that my conversion was not complete unless I ate beef. As a Kayastha I was already a nonvegetarian. I saw no harm in eating yet another type of meat. But as soon as my wife learned it, she left with our two children and went away to her father's place in another town. I went after her. But I was turned out of their house. I have been excommunicated. No one in our community or amongst our relatives will share with me so much as a glass of water. I have nowhere to go. This mission is my refuge till I die." I was reminded of Vivekânanda's description of Christianity as Churchianity.

At the same time I was ashamed of the society to which I belonged. For ages past, this society had perfected the art of losing its limbs, one after another. But what could I do for that young man? I was myself in search of a refuge, in the physical as well as the ideological sense. Later I had to leave Calcutta for good and return to Delhi on account of my health. I had spent twelve long years in that great and stormy center of Bengali culture and politics. I had participated in Calcutta's politics in a way, it was my misfortune that I did not drink equally deep at the fount of

Bengali culture which had in the recent past become synonymous with India's reawakening to her innermost soul. Bengal herself was turning away from that great heritage and towards an imported ideology which was leading her towards spiritual desolation. My new job in Delhi gave me a lot of leisure. I could read and think and take stock of my situation as I took long walks along the lonely avenues of New Delhi. But what mattered most was that I could now spend all my evenings with Ram Swarup. I could see that his seeking had taken a decisive turn towards a deeper direction. He was as awake to the social, political and cultural scene in India as ever before. But this vigil had now acquired an entirely new dimension. Political, social and cultural movements were no more clashes or congregations of external forces and intellectual ideas; they had become projections of psychic situations in which the members of a society chose to stay.

His judgments had now acquired a depth which I frequently found difficult to fathom. Ram Swarup was now spending long hours sitting in meditation. His talks now centered round the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Gîtâ, the Mahâbhârata and the Buddha. He invited me to sit in meditation with him sometimes. I tried off and on. But I was too restless to sit in a single pose for long, close my eyes to the outer world and peep into the void in search of some new perceptions. I had a strong urge to write and pour myself out in strong comments on the current political situation. But who was there to publish what I wrote? It was at this time that Sri K. R. Malkani, the soft-spoken and ever-smiling editor of the Organiser, extended the hospitality of his weekly to me. I wrote more or less regularly in the Organiser for several years. One of my long series was devoted to a political biography of Pandit Nehru which ultimately cost me my job. Some friends frowned upon my writing for the Organiser.

My invariable reply was that one paid court at the portals of the so-called prestigious papers only if one had nothing to say and if one's only aspiration was a fat check. I found Sri Malkani to be a very conscientious editor. He never crossed a "t" or dotted an "i" of whatever I wrote, without prior consultation with me. I was using my spare time during these three or four years to brush tip my Sanskrit. I made quite a headway because I relinquished the help of Hindi or English translations and broke through some very tough texts with the help of Sanskrit commentaries alone. At last I was able to read the Mahâbhârata in its original language. In the long evenings I spent with Ram Swarup I compared with him my notes on the Mahâbhârata. But Ram Swarup's way of looking at the Mahâbhârata, was quite different. He related it directly to the Vedas. He expounded how the mighty characters of this great epic embodied and made living the spiritual vision of the Vedic seers.

What fascinated me still more was Ram Swarup's exposition of dharma as enunciated in the Mahâbhârata. To me, dharma had always been a matter of normative morals, external rules and regulations, do's and don't's, enforced on life by an act of will. Now I was made to see dharma as a multidimensional movement of man's inner law of being, his psychic evolution, his spiritual growth and his spontaneous building of an outer life for himself and the community in which he lived. The next thing I did was to read and reread the major works of Sri Aurobindo and discuss his message with Ram Swarup day after day. Sri Aurobindo would have remained an abstract philosopher for me, in spite of all his writings on yoga, had not Ram Swarup explained to me how this seer was the greatest exponent of the Vedic vision in our times. Sri Aurobindo's message, he told me, was in essence the same old Vedic message, namely, that we are gods in our innermost being and should live the life of gods on this Earth. He made me see what Sri Aurobindo meant by the physical, the vital, the mental and the psychic. He related these terms to the theory of the five kosas in the Upanishads. But Sri Aurobindo was not an exponent of Vedic spirituality alone.

He was also a poet, a connoisseur, a statesman and a superb sociologist. His Human Cycle was an interpretation of history which placed man's striving for spiritual perfection in his inner as well as outer life as the prime mover of the world matrix. His Foundations of Indian Culture made me see for the first time that our multifaceted heritage of great spirituality, art, architecture, literature, social principles and political forms sprang from and revolved round a single center. That center was Sanâtana Dharma, which was the very soul of India. Sri Aurobindo had made it very clear in his Uttarpara Speech that India rose with the rise of Sanâtana Dharma and would die if Sanâtana Dharma was allowed to die. In my earlier days I had read the biography of Sri Ramakrishna written by Romain Rolland. I had read the talk which Vivekânanda had delivered long ago about "My Master." I had visited Sri Ramakrishna's room at Dakshineswar. I had also seen a Bengali film on his life. But what brought me into an intimate and living contact with this great mystic and bhakta and Sakta and advaitin was his Kathamrita. He had not used a single abstraction, nor discussed any of the problems which pass as philosophy.

His talks embodied expressions of a concrete consciousness which had dropped every trace of the dirt-land dross and inertia which characterize what is known as normal human consciousness. The metaphors which sprang spontaneously from this purified consciousness were matchless in their aptness and illumined in a few words the knotted problems which many voluminous works had failed to solve. I was now having my first intimations of immortality towards which Kabir and Nanak and Sri Garibdas had inclined me earlier. The final breakthrough came with the publication of Ram Swarup's long article, "Buddhism vis-à-vis Hinduism," in the Organiser sometime in 1959. The Buddha's parable of the man struck by an arrow and refusing medical aid until a number of his intellectual questions and curiosities were satisfied struck me in my solar plexus, as it were. I had spent a lifetime reveling in intellectual exercises. What was the nature of the universe?

What was man's place in it? Was there a God? Had he created this cosmos? Why had he made such a mess of it? What was the goal of human life? Was man free to pursue that goal? Or was he predetermined and destined and fated for a particular path and towards a particular goal by forces beyond his control? And so on and so forth. It was an endless cerebration. The Buddha had described it as Drishti-Kantar, the desert of seeking. Ramakrishna had also ridiculed the salt doll of an intellect which had gone out to fathom the great ocean but got dissolved at the very first dip. I was now sure that the quality of questions I raised was controlled by the quality of my consciousness.

Ram Swarup told me that what we called the normal human consciousness had to be made passive before one could establish contact with another consciousness which held the key to the proper questions and the proper answers. Wrestling with and stirring up the normal consciousness with all sorts of questions and curiosities was the surest way to block the way of a purer and higher consciousness which was always waiting on the threshold. I now requested Ram Swarup to initiate me into the art of meditation. He told me that no very elaborate art was involved. I could sit and meditate with him whenever I liked, wait and watch, go within myself as far as I could manage, at any time, dwell on whatever good thoughts got revealed in the process, and the rest would follow. I acted upon his simple instructions with some measure of skepticism in my mind. But in the next few days I could see some results, which encouraged me for a further endeavor. One day I meditated on ahimsa, which had remained an abstract concept for me so far. After a while I found myself begging forgiveness from all those whom I had hurt by word or deed, or towards whom I had harbored any ill will. It was not an exercise in generalities.

Person after person rose into my memory, going back into the distant past and I bowed in repentance before each one of them. Finally I begged forgiveness from Stalin, against whom I had written so much and upon whom I had hurled so many brickbats. The bitterness which had poisoned my life over the long years was swept off my mind in a sudden relaxation of nerves. I felt as if a thousand thorns which had tormented my flesh had been taken out by a master physician without causing the slightest pain. I was in need of no greater assurance that this was the way on which I should walk. One day I told Ram Swarup how I had never been able to accept the Devî, either as Sarasvatî or as Lakshmî or as Durgâ or as Kâlî. He smiled and asked me to meditate on the Devî that day. I tried my best in my own way. Nothing happened for some time. Nothing came my way. My mind was a big blank. But in the next moment the void was filled with a sense of some great presence. I did not see any concrete image. No words were whispered in my ears. Yet the rigidity of a lifetime broke down and disappeared.

The Great Mother was beckoning her lost child to go and sit in her lap and feel safe from all fears. We had a gramophone record of Dr. Govind Gopal Mukhopadhyaya's sonorous stuti to the Devî. As I played it, I prayed to Her. There were many more meditations. My progress was not fast; nor did I go far. But I now felt sure that this was the method by which I could rediscover for myself the great truths of which the ancients had spoken in Hindu scriptures. It was not the end of my seeking, which had only started in right earnest. But it was surely the end of my wandering in search of a shore where I could safely anchor my soul and take stock of my situation. Ram Swarup warned me very strongly against letting my reflective reason go to sleep under the soporific of inner experience, however deep or steep. This was the trap, he said, into which many a practitioner had fallen and felt sure that they had found the final truth, even when they were far away from the goal.

The soul's hunger for absolute Truth, absolute Good, absolute Beauty and absolute Power, I was told, was like the body's hunger for wholesome food and drink. And that which satisfied this hunger of the human soul, fully and finally, was Sanâtana Dharma, true for all times and climes. A votary of Sanâtana Dharma did not need an arbitrary exercise of will to put blind faith in a supernatural revelation laid down in a single scripture. He did not need the intermediacy of an historical prophet nor the help of an organized church to attain salvation. Sanâtana Dharma called upon its votary to explore his own self in the first instance and see for himself the truths expounded in sacred scriptures. Prophets and churches and scriptures could be aids, but never the substitutes for self-exploration, self-purification and self-transcendence. I had come back at last, come back to my spiritual home from which I had wandered away in self-forgetfulness. But this coming back was no atavistic act.

On the contrary, it was a reawakening to my ancestral heritage, which was waiting for me all along to lay my claim on its largesses. It was also the heritage of all mankind, as proved by the seers, sages and mystics of many a time and clime. It spoke in different languages to different people. To me it spoke in the language of Hindu spirituality and Hindu culture at their highest. I could not resist its call. I became a Hindu. Sita Ram Goel, of Delhi, is a well-known renaissance writer on Hindu issues. He is associated with the Voice of India, a publishing house which guides understanding through enlightening tracts, books and articles. Ram Swarup (1920-1998) was a distinguished social observer, author and spokesman of reascent Hinduism which, he believed, can also help other nations in rediscovering their spiritual roots. His best-known book is *The Word as Revelation, Names of God*. Author's note: It was with great pleasure that we received Sri Sita Ram Goel at our Hindu monastery on the Garden Island of Kauai in the mid '80s. His articulate message of strengthening the Hindu renaissance was profound, and his demeanor humble.

To have among us a person held in such high esteem by the Indian intellectual community invigorated our many resident swâmîs, yogîs and sâdha kas. Sita Ram's guru, Sri Ram Swarup, had for years been on our team of erudite, insightful writers for our public service, international magazine, HINDUISM TODAY, and his knowledge and insights into the needs of the times, based upon the failures of the past, sanctioned a mini-renaissance among our highly intellectual, Western-educated Indian readers living in America, Europe and Canada. Years later we enjoyed the long-awaited honor of a personal meeting with Ram Swarup when he came to visit me in our hotel in New Delhi in 1995 and spent valuable time with us, speaking on his views of the future of his beloved Sanâtana Dharma, now called Hinduism, and the molding of the masses through systematic education meted out in little doses to an open and deserving few who would, in turn, belt it out with authority to those they influenced.

He also commented that HINDUISM TODAY is the salvation, the blending together of worldwide seekers who have dedicated themselves to preserve the Sanâtana Dharma within their communities. Sri Ram Swarup elaborated in a later writing: "Hindu communities are now found in many countries, but with the exception of HINDUISM TODAY, there is no journal dealing with their problems and opportunities. In this respect, this journal is unique. It reveals to us an important face of Hinduism, its international face. Every time one picks up its copy, one becomes aware of Hindus not only in India but also in Fiji, Mauritius, Trinidad, South Africa, Southeast Asia and now also increasingly in Europe and North America. Its pages bring them together so often under the same roof that they begin to feel and live together."

Vedic Mysticism Brought Me Into Hinduism My Soul's Search Found in Hinduism What it Couldn't Find in Catholicism, Existentialism and Buddhism. By David Frawley (Pandit Vamadeva Shastri), Excerpts from His Book, "How I Became a Hindu." In my case it was not a question of a quick conversion like accepting Jesus as one's personal savior or surrendering to Allah. Nor was it the result of a concerted effort to convert me by religious preachers speaking of sin or redemption, or of religious intellectuals trying to convince me of the ultimacy of their particular philosophy or theology. It was a personal decision that occurred as the result of a long quest, a finishing touch of an extensive inner search of many years. For most people in the West becoming a Hindu resembles joining a tribal religion, a Native American or Native African belief with many gods and strange rituals, rather than converting to a creed or belief of an organized world religion.

Discovering Hinduism is something primeval, a contacting of the deeper roots of nature, in which the spirit lies hidden not as an historical creed but as a mysterious and unnameable power. It is not about taking on another monotheistic belief but an entirely different connection with life and consciousness than our Western religions provide us. I came to Hindu Dharma after an earlier exploration of Western intellectual thought and world mystical traditions, a long practice of yoga and Vedânta and a deep examination of the Vedas. In the process I came into contact with diverse aspects of Hindu society and with Hindu teachers that few Westerners have access to, taking me far beyond the range of the usual perceptions and misconceptions about the subject. Such direct experience, which was often quite different than what I had expected or was told would be the case, changed my views and brought me to my current position.

Hopefully my story can help others change from taking Hinduism as something primitive to understanding the beauty of this great spiritual tradition that may best represent our spiritual heritage as a species. I always had a certain mystical sense, going back to early childhood. Whether it was looking at the sky and gazing at the clouds or seeing distant snow covered mountains, I knew in my heart that there was a higher consciousness behind the world.

I felt a sacred and wonderful mystery from which we had come and to which we would return after our short sojourn on this strange planet. I had trouble reconciling this mystical sense with the idea of religion that I contacted through my Catholic background. Both my parents grew up on dairy farms in the Midwest of the United States (Wisconsin) and came from strong Catholic backgrounds. My mother's family in particular was quite pious and a pillar of the Church where they lived, following all the Church observances and donating liberally to its causes. One of her brothers was a priest, a missionary in South America, and he was regarded very highly, pursuing a very noble and holy occupation.

The figure of Jesus on the cross that we saw during mass was rather gruesome and unpleasant. One didn't want to look at it. We were told that we had all killed Jesus. We were responsible for his death by our sins, which were terrible in the eyes of God. But then I never knew Jesus and since he lived two thousand years ago, how could my actions have affected him? I could never really relate to the image of the sacrificed savior who saves us, we who cannot save ourselves. I also began to notice that we all have our personal failings, including the nuns that taught us who had evident tempers and not much patience. The whole thing didn't seem to be as God given as we were told it was.

At the age of fifteen I had a remarkable school teacher who taught a class on ancient history that opened my eyes about the ancient world. This began my fascination with ancient cultures that eventually led me to the Vedas. I sensed that the ancients had a better connection to the universe than we moderns and that their lives had a higher meaning. About the age of sixteen I underwent a major intellectual awakening. It came as a powerful experience that radically changed my thoughts and perception. Initially it was quite disturbing and disorienting. While some sort of intellectual ferment had been developing in me for several years, this one resulted in a profound break from the authorities and ideas of my childhood and the vestiges of my American education. It initiated a series of studies that encompassed Western intellectual thought and first brought me in contact with Eastern spirituality. It marked an important transition in my life.

Throughout this intellectual revolt I never lost sight of a higher reality. I fancied myself to be a "mystical atheist" because though I rejected the Biblical idea of a personal God, I did recognize an impersonal consciousness or pure being behind the universe. The law of karma and the process of rebirth that I had learned about through Eastern philosophy made more sense to me than such Christian teachings. After reading a number of different scriptures and spiritual texts from all over the world, the Christian fixation on Jesus seemed almost neurotic. It was clear to me that there have been many great sages throughout history and Jesus, however great, was only one of many and that his teachings were not the best preserved either. I failed to see what was so unique about him or what his teachings had that could not be found with more clarity elsewhere.

The mystic feeling I once had in Christianity was now entirely transferred to the East. At the beginning of 1970 in Denver I found a local guru who introduced me to many spiritual teachings. While in retrospect he was limited in his insights, he did serve as a catalyst to connect me with the spiritual path. Through the encounter with various spiritual teachings that he initiated, I took to the yogic path as my main pursuit in life. He made me familiar with a broad array of mystical teachings: Hindu, Buddhist, Theosophist and Sufi. It included everything from occult teachings of Alice Bailey to Zen, and a prominent place for the teachings of Gurdjieff.

I learned that a core of inner teachings existed behind the outer religious traditions of the world, an esoteric approach beyond their exoteric forms. At this time I discovered the Upanishads, in which I found great inspiration, and it became my favorite book. It led me to various Vedântic texts. I soon studied the works of Sankarâchârya, which I avidly read in translation, particularly his shorter works, like Viveka Chudamali. Of the different teachings that I contacted Vedânta struck the deepest cord. I remember once climbing a hill by Denver with a friend. When we got to the top, I had the feeling that I was immortal, that the Self in me was not limited by birth and death and had lived many lives before. Such Vedântic insights seemed natural, but the friend who was with me at the time didn't understand what I was talking about. With my philosophical bent of mind I also studied several Buddhist sûtras, especially the La^kâvatâra, which I found to be intellectually profound.

The Buddhist sûtras helped serve as a bridge between the Existentialism that I had studied earlier and Eastern meditation traditions. As I encountered these teachings at a young age before my mind had become fixed, I had the benefit of an almost Eastern education to complement my Western studies. My study of Eastern traditions was not merely intellectual but involved experimenting with yogic and meditational practices. I began practicing intense prânâyâma, mantra and meditation teachings in the summer of 1970. These mainly came from the kriyâ yoga tradition, which I contacted in several ways. I found that the techniques worked powerfully to create energy at a subtle level. I could feel the prâna moving through the nâdis, with some experiences of the chakras, and a general widening of consciousness beyond the ordinary sense of time and space. Mantra practices had a particularly powerful effect upon me. I felt that I had been some old Hindu yogî in a previous life, though in retrospect there was probably much fantasy in my approach.

Another benefit from the prânâyâma was that it almost eliminated the allergies that I had suffered from for years. It cleared and cleaned my nervous system. I learned that yogic practices can heal both body and mind. For a while I went back and forth between Buddhist and Vedântic perspectives. The intellectuality of Buddhism appealed to me, while the idealism of Vedânta was equally impelling. Buddhist logic had a subtlety that went beyond words and the Buddhist understanding of the mind had a depth that was extraordinary, dwarfing that of Western Psychology. But Vedânta had a sense of Pure Being and Consciousness that was more in harmony with my deeper mystical urges. It reflected the soul and its perennial aspiration for the Divine that seemed obvious to me. I felt the need of a cosmic creator such as Buddhism did not have. It was not the old monotheistic tyrant with his heaven and hell, but the wise and loving Divine Father and Mother, such as in the Hindu figures of Siva and Pârvatî. I also found the existence of the âtman or higher Self to be self-evident. That all is the Self appeared to be the most selfevident truth of existence. The Buddhist non-ego approach made sense as a rejection of the lower or false Self but I saw no need to dismiss the Self altogether as many Buddhists do.

Among the spiritual teachers whose writings I studied, most notable in terms of my own thought and expression, was Sri Aurobindo. Aurobindo possessed an intellectual breadth that was unparalleled by any author I had ever read. One could swim in the field of his mind like a whale in the open sea and never encounter any limits. He dwarfed the Western intellectuals that I studied and even the Western mystics. Relative to Indian teachers, his teaching was clear, modern, liberal and poetic, not tainted by caste, authority or dogma. Aurobindo's vision encompassed the past, revealing the mysteries of the ancient world that I had long sought. But it showed the way to the future as well, with a balanced and universal vision of humanity for all time. I studied a number of Aurobindo's works, notably the Life Divine, which unraveled all the secrets of the philosophies of India from Vedânta to Sampkya, yoga and tantra.

In it I noted the various verses from the Rig Veda that he used to open the chapters. I found these to be quite profound and mysterious and wanted to learn more of the Vedas. In looking through the titles of Sri Aurobindo, a book called Hymns to the Mystic Fire, which was hymns to Agni from the Rig Veda, struck a cord with my poetic vision. It led me to another book, Secret of the Veda, which more specifically explained the Vedic teaching and opened up the Vedic vision for me. At that time I became a Vedic person, not simply a Vedântin. While becoming a Vedântin was the first level of my inner change, becoming Vedic was the second stage. These two transitions overlapped to a great degree.

I followed the Vedas in the context of Vedânta. But later a more specific Vedic vision emerged and came to dominate over the Vedantic view. It brought a wider and more integral Vedânta and one that connected with poetry and mantra. Then in summer of 1978 my Vedic work, which would dominate the rest of my life, first emerged. I was inspired by some inner energy to write a set of poems about the ancient dawns and the ancient suns that directed me back to the Vedas. I decided to study the Vedas in depth in the original Sanskrit. I wanted to directly confirm if Sri Aurobindo's view was correct that the Vedas did have a deeper spiritual and Vedântic meaning. I had studied a Sanskrit through the years and already had Sanskrit texts of the Vedas and Upanishads to start with. Along a parallel line I had taken up the study of Vedic astrology.

I first studied astrology in Ojai in the early seventies, which with a Theosophical center had good resources on the subject. I also discovered a few good books on Vedic astrology. I practiced Western astrology for several years, using Vedic astrology as a sidelight, but gradually shifted over to the Vedic system. Along with my âyurvedic work in the mid-eighties I focused on Vedic astrology, introducing classes and courses in it as well, starting with âyurveda students. With âyurveda and Vedic astrology I discovered a practical usage of Vedic knowledge that was relevant to everyone. The gap between my Vedic work and my actual career began to disappear.

My Vedic work and my livelihood became interrelated. I focused on âyurveda and Vedic astrology for a few years and put my Vedic pursuits temporarily in the background. My first trip to India occurred as part of my pursuit of âyurveda. It involved visiting âyurvedic schools and companies in Bombay and Nagpur, and sightseeing to other parts of the country. I also had two important visits of a spiritual nature, first to Pondicherry and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, and second to the Ramanashram in nearby Tiruvannamalai, a pattern that was repeated in future visits to the country. I came to the Ramanashram to contact Ramana and his path of Self-inquiry, which is a method to experience the non-dual state of pure awareness. What I actually discovered was the God Skanda, the child of fire, who demanded purification, death and spiritual rebirth.

I encountered one of the Gods, not as a devotional or cultural image but as a primordial and awesome power. Ramana came to me through Lord Skanda, the son of Siva, with whom Ganapati Muni identified him. I came to understand Ramana as Lord Skanda, the embodiment of the flame of knowledge. Coming into Tiruvannamalai I felt the presence of a tremendous spiritual fire, which also had, in its more benefic moments, the face of a young boy. The image of a small boy carrying a spear, rising out of a fire, kept arising in my mind. This brought about an intense practice of Self-inquiry that was literally like death, though it was the ego's death, not that of the body. Going through that fire was perhaps the most intense spiritual experience of my life, to the point that I had at time to pray that it would not become too strong! Yet afterwards I felt refreshed and cleansed, with a purity of perception that was extraordinary.

Up to that point I had a limited understanding of the role of Deities in spiritual practice, I had almost no knowledge of Lord Skanda, though He is a popular Deity in South India and one sees His picture everywhere. I had not yet grasped the depth of His connection with Ramana. So I was shocked to come into a direct contact with such an entity, not as a mere fantasy but as a concrete and vivid inner experience penetrating to the core of my being. That the process of Self-inquiry, which starts out as a philosophical practice, could be aligned to a Deity in which my personality was swallowed up, was not something that I had noted in any teachings. In time I learned much about both Skanda and Ramana. Skanda is the incarnation of the power of direct insight.

He is the Self that is born of Self-inquiry, which is like a fire, the inner child born of the death of the ego on the cremation pyre of meditation. This child represents the innocent mind, free of ulterior motives, which alone can destroy all the demons, our negative conditionings, with His spear of discrimination beyond the fluctuations of the mind. Coming to Tiruvannamalai was an experience of that inner fire (tejas) which is Skanda and Ramana. I felt Lord Skanda most keenly at the great temple of Arunachalesvara in the nearby town. Initially the experience of the temple was more important for me than the experience of the ashram. Arunachalesvara temple still holds the vibration of Ramana, who was its child, where he stayed and practiced tapas when young and unknown.

The temple has its own divine presence that has nourished many great sages and yogîs. One day at the temple I decided to purchase a statue to take back home for my altar. I found a small statue of Lord Skanda, which I bought and put into my napsack. One of the brahmin priests in the temple noted my acquisition and asked for the statue, which I gave to him. He took my hand and led me through the temple, doing the pûjâ to the main Deities. He started with the Devî temple and then to the Sivalinga and finally to the Skanda temple. My statue was placed on all these mûrtis and was consecrated as part of the pûjâs. It was as if I myself was reborn as Skanda during these rites. On my first trip to India I met an individual who would have a decisive influence on my life and thought.

He would serve as my mentor for introducing me into Hindu thinking and to Hindu issues in India today. Dr. B.L. Vashta was an âyurvedic doctor working on product development for an âyurvedic company in Bombay. It was in that context in which I met him. He was then about seventy years of age, or about the age of my father. In 1991 Dr. Vashta raised the idea that I formally become a Hindu. I thought, Why not? I have been following this tradition for twenty years and working with it had become my main spiritual path and career dedication. I thought about the many Hindus that have become Christians following the allure of the affluent West. The example of a Christian becoming a Hindu would be good for many Hindus and would encourage confidence in their own traditions.

Why shouldn't I express my appreciation and make a more formal connection with Hindu Dharma? Personally, I am not much for formality and generally avoid ceremony or any kind of outer displays. But it didn't take much forethought to go ahead with this important project. It was also a way to create a new identity for myself that reflected the changes that I had gone through internally. Dr. Vashta told me that I was already a Hindu inwardly and so an outward ceremony wasn't necessary, but that the gesture would be appreciated by the community. I understood. The ceremony was called suddhi, which means purification. It was short and simple, a ritual pûjâ, a kumbhâbhishekam. It was held at a local Mumbai ashram, Masur âshram that had once been connected to the Arya Samaj but in time became more traditionally Hindu. No preaching. No condemnation. No threats or promises.

No swearing to go to a particular church or follow a prescribed path of action, just a promise to follow dharma. While Vashta organized the event, Avadhuta Shastri, the head of Masurashram, performed the pûjâ. His brother, Brahmachari Vishwanath, was one of the founders of the VHP. I took the name Vamadeva from the Vedic Rishi Vamadeva Gautama. Shastri came from Avadhuta Shastri. Vamadeva was a name of Indra, the supreme Vedic God, particularly as a falcon (syena). It was also a name of Savitar, the Sun God, who dispensed his grace or beauty (vâma). Vamadeva later became a name of Lord Siva in His northern face. So it was an important and powerful name, and one that few people carried. By this ceremony I was accepted into Hindu society as a brahmin by my occupation. I realized that I was a kind of kshatriya as well, a warrior, at least on the intellectual plane, addressing not only religious but also social and political issues. Pandit Vamadeva Shastri, a.k.a. David Frawley, is a Vedâchârya and Director of the American Institute of Vedic Studies in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He is also a well-known author on âyurveda and Vedic astrology.

CHAPTER 2: RELIGIOUS LOYALTY AND COMMITMENT

There is an entire school of thought, supported by some Hindu swâmîs ministering in the West, which all but denies the differences between religions by claiming that “all religions are one.” Because they are all one, the universalist reasoning goes, it is quite permissible for anyone to follow a Hindu religious life as much as he wants, with no need to formally accept Hinduism or sever loyalties to his previous religion. This school of thought states that it is also permissible for individuals to study and practice specific aspects of Hinduism, such as hatha yoga or Vedânta philosophy, while remaining within another religion, on the theory that these practices and philosophies will make them better at their own religion—better Jews, better Christians, better Muslims.

My own personal observation is that without a complete and final severance from one’s former religion or philosophy it is not possible to practice Hinduism fully and receive the full spiritual benefit, because of subconscious psychological confrontations that inevitably occur when the former belief and commitment make battle with the newly found ones. It is like trying to run a computer on two contradictory operating systems at the same time. Such inner conflict leads to confusion. In the spiritual aspirant it spells in decision and lack of commitment. For example, many problems may result if Hindu practices and beliefs are expressly forbidden by one’s original religion.

A Catholic accepting various principles of Vedânta is actually accepting beliefs contrary to the central dogmas of the Catholic Church, which he promised believe, uphold and defend at his confirmation. A Jew who enters a Hindu temple and worships an idol is, according to Jewish law of the Torah, to be stoned to death by his own mother and father for worshiping a graven image. To gain a clear subconscious for his future religious life, the individual must examine and reject those beliefs of his previous religion that differ from those of the Hindu religion he wishes to join. Then he must examine and accept the Hindu beliefs that are new to him. If he was confirmed or otherwise initiated in another religion or ideology, he must effect formal severance from his previous religion before formally entering the Hindu religion through the nâmakaranam samskara, name-giving sacrament. Belief is very important.

Beliefs create attitudes. Each faith carries a number of community attitudes, or ways of thinking and responding, which have developed through time in the minds of its followers through the collective beliefs. Attitude originally meant “posture of the body” and has come to mean a person’s state of mind as it can be deduced from the manner in which he holds himself. Therefore, a trained eye could, at a glance, distinguish in a crowd the Catholics, the Protestants, the Jews, the Hindus, etc., by the particular attitude and body language characteristic of their religion.

The true sign of the change in beliefs is the change in attitudes that the inner transformation brings. Fully embracing a new religion brings a noticeable change in the posture of the physical and emotional body, and one starts to hear that he looks different and looks at things differently. Each member of a certain religion has welcome access to all of its facilities, not only on the physical plane, but on the inner (astral) planes as well. As a Hindu, the great devonic realms of Hinduism, with its many great Rishis, masters and devas, devotees and Mahâdevas, welcome you each evening when you pass off to sleep, and when you finally drop your physical body at death. Likewise for the other religions. These inner plane realms have been described as being like vast cities, and each embodied person is psychically and emotionally connected to one realm or more due to his karmic attachments, desires, aversions, promises and commitments.

These inner bonds play a strong role throughout a person's life and are naturally felt during any consideration of new loyalties. Fully embracing Hinduism, for example, is a process of clearly defining one's attachments, positively attaching oneself to the Hindu realms while systematically detaching from other ties made in the past. The inner bonds are quite real, detailing responsibilities for the devotee to uphold, and various benefits, such as the protection of guardian devas, access to inner realms and special blessings in times of need. The final ceremony, the nâmakaran a samskara (or in some cases the vrâtyas toma), earned by fulfilling the stringent requirements that precede it, announces to one and all that the deed is done, a promise made, an inner contract made to live up to the lofty Sanâtana Dharma to the best of one's ability.

Of course, although much karma may have had to be cleared to reach this point, this is only the beginning. Like a new student in a vast university, the supplicant begins a new life in the company of like-minded devotees, all worshipping God and the Gods in the same manner and approaching life through the same belief structure. This makes for a harmonious, happy, productive community, and for a rewarding spiritual life. The way for this clean start in a new religion is cleared by honestly looking at prior commitments and systematically resolving what needs to be resolved. Entrance into Hinduism means becoming a member of a new community, a new tribe, a new group mind. What is a group mind? Every single human being on the planet is a member of a group mind, actually on several different levels. First, we are members of the group mind of our planet. Then, we are members of the human species. We are members of our race and ethnic group.

And we are members of that group mind we call our nation. While consciously or unconsciously sharing in group consciousness, mankind is also waking up to the tragedy of blind, separative consciousness, which breeds hatred, war, communal fighting, economic inequality and destruction of the planet itself. This awakening has led to a strong reaction. Thus, it is common to hear, "I am a universalist." "I am a citizen of all nations." "I consider myself a member of all religions." These New Age souls have become the expression of humanity's conscience, taking it upon themselves to assuage the guilt of eons of mankind's separative ignorance. But the fact of our membership in various groups remains. Even those who consider themselves independent of all groups are members of the group defined by the conviction to stand alone, or to stand with everyone. Group consciousness, loyalty and commitment are not at fault. Ignorance of our oneness in God is the problem.

The key, of course, is to transcend lower emotions and primitive group dynamics while sacrificing and committing oneself to working together with other people for higher ends. This is what should happen when one becomes a Hindu. The greatest spiritual work is done through religions. Temples and other facilities, printed scriptures, creeds of beliefs, codes of conduct, and the actual spiritual growth that religion seeks are all the combined results of groups of people. Religion exists and is sustained in the minds of groups of people. We could say that the group mind of a religion is tribal. Tribe is the awareness that one has natural affinity and loyalties with certain people with whom one lives and associates on a daily basis. Hinduism is a tribal religion.

You are either outside the tribe or within the tribe or disrespected by the tribe, but as long as you are remembered by the tribe and have at one time been accepted by the tribe, you belong to the tribe. That is the way we view our religion. The tribes of old were territorial; centered in a certain geographical area, members cultivated the land, gathered food, hunted and lived, bound together by bloodlines and social need. A religion is a tribe of a different kind. Hinduism, for example, occupies a particular dimension of the inner plane. Its members cultivate spiritual

seeds in the field of human consciousness. With faith they nurture, protect and preserve in themselves, in each other and their children, foundational beliefs for religious enterprise, spiritual unfoldment and mystical realization. Hinduism gathers together the power of particular forces from the inner worlds and brings those divine powers into manifestation on Earth as vehicles to carry members of its tribe forward into light and love. The tribe we call Hinduism is a great boat that carries souls across the turbulent and sometimes treacherous sea of life. In many ways, religion also transcends the commonalities of lower orders of tribe and community—nationality, language and ethnic difference. Hindus have many different languages, are born in many different countries.

The main common factor of this global tribe is religious belief. From the religious beliefs stem the traditions, culture and basic behavior patterns of the community. Members love and honor the tribe, its traditions, its culture. They mold their lives accordingly to great benefit for their own sake and for the sake of all other members of the tribe, for the sake of all Hindus. Entrance into Hinduism means becoming a part of all this. It may mean changing one's associations, commitments and community loyalties. Real entrance into Hinduism means spending one's time with Hindus, making friends with Indian, Sri Lankan, Nepalese, Balinese, African or Caribbean Hindus, enjoying an inspired Hindu culture. Let's take the example of a young nurse who is a member of the Western, agnostic, materialist community. Suppose that her karma and the inner impetus of her soul are such that she learns and awakens to certain divine truths which she discovers are basic Hindu beliefs. After careful study, she comes to the conclusion that, at heart, she is a Hindu.

She declares herself a Hindu. She begins to worship at a Hindu temple regularly. She may even change her name legally, on her passport and driver's license, and enter the religion formally through the *nâmakaran* a *samskara* at the temple. In all aspects she has become a Hindu. But there is one further and most important step to be taken. She must enter the Hindu community. Her other very sincere gestures will never have the full impact and depth if this merger does not take place. If she keeps associating only with non-Hindus, eating at McDonald's, spending her evenings at the disco, committing herself totally to the shallow social life of "fun," spending all her money on herself, we certainly could not call her a good Hindu. In fact, her entrance into Hinduism has meaning only insofar as she merges her lifestyle and her mind into the group mind, the tribal mind, the community mind, of other Hindus.

She should begin making friends from within the Hindu community. If she were asked out on a date for hamburgers by a young atheist intern from the hospital, she might say, "No, I am a vegetarian and will be going to my Indian music class tonight." In other words, her commitments and loyal ties should be to the traditions, the culture and the lifestyle of other members of her new tribe—which is now Hinduism. Today, one who holds only a single Hindu name or who appreciates Hinduism's essence but has not accepted its totality is an *ardha-Hindu*, or "half-Hindu." *Ardha-Hindus* include not only Westerners who have taken a Hindu first name, but Easterners who have taken a Western name, first or last, to disguise their true Hindu name or to render it easier for Westerners to pronounce. Other religions abhor this. For instance, in the Islamic community we would never meet Mohammed Ali Johnson or Joe Mohammed. They are proud to be who they are, abhorring all disguises. They set a good example for us. Some Hindus, or *ardha-Hindus*, seeking to be ecumenical and all-embracing, observe Easter or celebrate Christmas, thinking themselves tolerant. But are they? In fact, they are not, for they do not equally celebrate the Prophet Mohammed's birthday; nor do they observe Jewish or Shinto or Buddhist holy days, or those of other faiths.

CHAPTER 3: GURUDEVA SPEAKS ON ENTERING HINDUISM

In the late seventies, when the Hlmâlayan Academy began its research into religious loyalties, many questions arose. Some came from family devotees and others from the Saiva Swâmî Sangam of Saiva Siddhânta Church. Their number and relevance grew, and I decided to dictate the answers myself. The monks recorded the following upadesa. It covers an array of subjects, all relating to Hinduism in the modern world, focusing on the importance of religious roots and clear lines of loyalty for success on the eternal path. Devotee: How does one enter the Hindu religion?

Gurudeva: There are two ways to enter a religion. The first is to be born into the religion. The second way is through adoption or conversion, and today this process is formalized and made complete through the name-giving sacrament. Among these individuals, some have had ties with prior religions, and these ties have had to be severed. This severance, though perfectly acceptable, especially if the wife wishes to be of the same religion as her husband, is an arduous, soul searching task. History tells us that adoptives often become the strongest members of a religion due to their careful study prior to formal entrance and to their deep, soul-stirring convictions.

The name-giving sacrament, also known as the nâmakaran a samskara, is the sacred rite used in both forms of entry. Devotee: How is one born into Hinduism? Gurudeva: If both parents are Hindus, the child naturally is considered a Hindu and becomes a Hindu more fully by receiving a Hindu name and then other sacraments from time to time as he is growing up. The child is taught the tenets of the religion at home, in the temple and ideally in school as well. Devotee: How do born Hindus regard those who seek entrance into Hinduism?

Gurudeva: Hindus are happy to include any sincere man or woman in their worship services. In fact, all temples in the West are open to people of all religions.

Our religion is rich in symbolism, tradition and culture. Symbols are signposts, its unspoken language. Those seeking entrance who accept the symbols, traditions and culture are quickly accepted, loved and made to feel at home. Such devotees willingly wear the marks upon their forehead, decorate their home with the forms of our faith, go to our Gods for their needs, naturally hold their hands and their heads in a certain way when receiving the sacred sacraments, adore and prostrate before God, Gods and gurus, showing reverence and love. It's the look in the eye and the feel in the heart at seeing the images of the God and the Gods or a swâmî's feet that distinguish a Hindu as a Hindu. Yes, it is symbolism, it is tradition, it is the ancient Hindu culture and sincere worship that designate the Hindu home, the holy atmosphere that denotes the Hindu shrine.

Yes, it is the crying need for yearly pilgrimage to a holy temple somewhere of the soul's choice, a yâtrâ that releases and removes the burdens accumulated throughout the year, it is all this which identifies the Hindu soul. Devotee: Can one simply declare himself a Hindu?

Gurudeva: Yes, anyone can declare himself a member of the Hindu religion, but for one to be accepted into the community, he must immerse himself in its traditions and lifestyle. This is the first step. Next he must practice Hinduism openly and thus prove his declaration in his own life and in the minds of others. A person seeking entrance to Hinduism must convince not only himself but his close friends and family that, in fact, he is a Hindu. Otherwise, it is just a secret "play pretend." Finally, he must change his name and use his Hindu name, first and last, in all circumstances and have it made legal so that it appears on his passport, driver's license and business letters. This is a clear sign to one and all that he has fully embraced the Hindu faith.

Devotee: Why would someone not born into Hinduism wish to enter it later in life?

Gurudeva: In the ancient days, people lived in small hamlets and reincarnated back into the same hamlet and even into the same family time and time again. The families, the hamlets and even the countries were, for the most part, all of the same religion. The evolving soul could experience different facets of his religion without a break in continuity, from layman to priest and so on. Now, with modern-day travel and worldwide communication, this tightly knit pattern of reincarnation is dispersed, and souls find new bodies in different countries, families and religions, which in some cases are foreign to them. A soul born to parents of a certain religion may not, therefore, be himself of the nature of that religion. There are different religions to accommodate different peoples at different places on the Eternal Path. When a soul who has experienced the Hindu religion for many years in a small village in India or Sri Lanka suddenly finds himself incarnated, through desire, in the Western world in a family of no religion or in a Christian or a Jewish family that expects him to follow what is an alien faith to him, that soul intuitively seeks out and searches for the religion that is right for him. When he finds Hinduism, God and the Gods become dear to him, Lord Ganesha is a familiar friend. All layers of his mind are content, and wholeheartedly he declares himself a Hindu and later enters into the Hindu religion.

Conversion is a homecoming for the soul. Many people want to move from one religion to another because they have realized that they are not in the religion that is right for them. Their soul is not satisfied. Their beliefs have changed and they find themselves different from others within their birth religion. So, when the individual discusses his beliefs and his desire to enter Hinduism with his former religious leader, the priest, minister or rabbi intuitively realizes that truly this soul belongs to the religion of his belief. It is that easy. It is that final. Devotee: What are some of the other ways one might know if he is in fact a Hindu soul, having had deep impressions in that religion in past lives? Gurudeva: The Hindu soul is moved by the music, the pageantry and the rites of Hinduism.

He intuitively understands the esoterics of temple worship and is content with the essence of the philosophy. When he finds the religion of his heart, he begins to lean on it, to use it. Our religion does not claim its path to be the only path. Thus, a soul drawn into Hinduism who was not born into a Hindu family is asked to become familiar with all religions before making a final choice.

This is important, for entrance into the Hindu religion is irrevocable. There is no authority, no church, no aadheenam or other institution, empowered to sever a person from Hinduism, to disassociate him from this root religion. Devotee: Does this mean that someone born into the Hindu religion cannot leave it? Gurudeva: Yes, this means that should a member of the Hindu religion embrace another faith, he nevertheless remains a Hindu for the rest of his life and only a follower of the second religion, for leaving Hinduism is impossible. He would still be a Hindu, but an apostate to one of the sects within Hinduism.

The children born and raised in the parents' chosen religion, Christianity or Islam, for example, would be Christians or Muslims, provided they accepted the beliefs as they grew up. It is only their children, however, the third generation, that would be the true Christians or Muslims, not attached to or inclined to be pulled back to their Hindu roots. Therefore, Hindu religious leaders do proselytize among Hindus who have left the fold to follow another path in order to bring them back to the Hindu fold. These souls are considered to be Hindus who, for one reason or another, embraced another faith or abandoned all faiths for a time. Devotee: I have heard that it is not possible for one to leave the Jewish religion. Is this true? Gurudeva: Judaism does recognize apostasy, which is defined as the formal denial of the central tenets of Jewish faith,

especially the “unity and uniqueness of God” or as the formal conversion to a religion other than Judaism.

Apostate Jews are denied certain privileges, but are taken back into Judaism if they’re pent. Many religions are like this, never denying former adherents the possibility of coming back and requiring some kind of purification ceremony if they do return. Devotee: If a Muslim wishes to embrace Hinduism, having found himself to truly be a Hindu soul, how can he do this? Gurudeva: The Vishva Hindu Parishad, the Madurai Aadheenam, the Masurâsrama and many other institutions are bringing Muslims into Hinduism through a simple ceremony. As in Christianity, one would become a de facto apostate, for he no longer held the Muslim beliefs. He would be excommunicated, ipso facto. Like Christianity, Islam is based upon belief.

One can enter Islam by simply declaring belief in Mohammed as Allah’s true and final prophet, changing one’s names and declaring a few other beliefs. Therefore, it is logical that when one no longer held this central belief, he would no longer be a Muslim. Devotee: Within Hinduism, can one change from one sect, or from one sampradâya within a sect, to an other? Gurudeva: Yes, this happens quite often. It is part of the beauty of Hinduism that it allows for this kind of flexibility and change. After study of the new sect or sampradâya has been completed, the transfer is made through a special ceremony. Occasionally, Vaishnavites adopt Saivism through transfers of this kind. Certain Vaishnavites place a small discus, sacred symbol of Vishnu, on the shoulder of those who embrace their sect. Devotee: Can you explain more about apostasy? Is it the same as heresy or excommunication?

Gurudeva: Usually excommunication is defined as a formal censure imposed by a bishop or other ecclesiastical authority by which an individual is excluded from the religious community, barred from the sacraments and denied a religious burial. The penalty of excommunication is generally imposed only on those who have committed a major offense against the religious body, such as heresy or schism. Schism is the offense of causing or trying to cause a split within the religious organization. Heresy is different. It is the rejection of one or more of the doctrines of a religion by one who still maintains an overall adherence to that religion, who has not abandoned it altogether. Some religions impose the penalty of excommunication on heretics, while others do not.

Apostasy is a voluntary act by which an individual formally denies the central tenets or beliefs of a religion, having completely rejected the religion itself. When the individual’s rejection is formally recognized by the religious body, they consider him an apostate. As in the case of one who is excommunicated, an apostate is excluded from the religious community, barred from the sacraments and denied a religious burial. Some religious bodies only consider that an individual is an apostate after he has actually joined another religion. The rules vary. Some religions consider that an apostate incurs an ipso facto excommunication, meaning that by the very act of his apostasy he has auto matically imposed on himself the penalty of excommunication. Generally, those who have been excommunicated or declared apostate can seek readmittance into the religion through repentance. However, some religious bodies never allow apostates to reenter. Devotee: Is it right to take a person away from his religion? Isn’t there a negative karma involved? Gurudeva: Severance must be done by the person himself, not by the religionist or those seeking new members. It is a do-it-yourself path. All religious leaders should have a mutual respect for each other, a sense of professional ethics, an acknowledgement of the existence and the rights of every other religion in the world. None should seek to entice another into his religion, but rather encourage a deeper adherence to the beliefs and practices of each chosen faith. Hindus never set about to take a person away from another religion.

We encourage Christians to return to their churches, Jews to their synagogues, Muslims to their mosques, there to become even more diligent and sincere followers. On rare occasions, severance is permissible, even preferable, but it should be totally on the part of the individual. We do not encourage such transfers, but if the individual devotee insists, if his sincerity is well tested, his reasons well founded, if his persistence and purity prove him to be a Hindu soul beyond a doubt, and if he would suffer through life in an alien religious tradition, then he is accepted into the Hindu fold through the nâmakarana samskara in the traditional way.

Devotee: How important is religious education?

Gurudeva: All the eleven great religions of the world and each of the various faiths have some definite form of education for young and old alike. Religious education trains an individual how to use his religion to better his life by coming closer to God. It teaches him what to believe and what to reject. That individual, well trained, eventually becomes a defender of his faith, and the religion is preserved, protected and defended, and sometimes it is expanded by him. Man does not have horns or claws to protect himself. He is neither swift nor strong compared to the animal kingdom. His intelligence and knowledge are his weapons, his strength. Each religion educates its young in a sectarian way, for religionists believe that to learn one specific path is sufficient and necessary.

Therefore, education should not be diluted by taking in all religions under one banner for the sake of something called "universality." Rather, religious education should be faithful to tradition. Religious schools are essential, Saivite schools for the Saivites, Vaishnavite schools for the Vaishnavites and Sakta schools for the Saktas, Christian schools for the Christians and Muslim schools for the members of Islam. In the spirit of honesty and good faith in fulfillment of the duty to educate the young of our religion, this should be observed. The Christians do not send their children to Hindu schools, nor do the Muslims send their children to Christian or Jewish schools. The truly devout discriminate in this way for the sake of their children, whom they dearly love. Thus, they dispatch their sacred duty by passing their religion, their faith, on to the next generation.

Devotee: If a Hindu swâmî talks of reincarnation and karma and convinces Christians, Jews or Muslims of the validity of these concepts, since these are not official beliefs of these religions, has he not made them apostate to their religion? Gurudeva: Yes, indeed. Hinduism is so insidiously profound that it is capable of turning many people away from their born religion, none of which can match its depth. Through the Hindu swâmîs, thousands, millions, have been brought to the doorstep of Hinduism. How can these basic beliefs, inherent in all mankind, be erased once learned? Truly, the Jew and the Christian and the Muslim who learn that God is everywhere and within all things, that the soul returns from birth to birth and is responsible to its own actions through the principle of karma, that all souls are destined to full merger into God, and they forget these things?

Can we forget the law of gravity? Can we change the nature of electricity if, once comprehended, we deny all knowledge of it? The swâmîs, however, have gone as far as they feel ethically permitted to go, since many of their devotees were born into Christian or Jewish families. It is really up to the devotees to take further steps toward embracing Hinduism. The swâmîs, respecting their acceptance of the basic Hindu beliefs of karma, reincarnation, dharma and all-pervasive Divinity, have given them each a Hindu "ashram" name. They have done their part. Next the devotees must, if they are really sincere in embracing the path which the swâmî privately practices, complete their severance, have their name made legal and enter the Hindu religion formally through the traditional nâmakarana samskara. Then they will have the fullness of our religion in all its increments and will raise their children in the beliefs and

with the sacraments of their chosen sect within the multifaceted religion called Hinduism. Devotee: Does all the responsibility fall on the devotees? Gurudeva: The situation in the West has been building since the 1920s, when Hindu monks began attracting congregations in America and other Western countries. As we have said in the past, they as a rule have disguised their Hinduness. We might say this was done to avoid overstepping the ethical bounds of religious propriety.

Sincerely they sought to spread the universal message of Hinduism without drawing anyone away from their root religion. But they, too, have learned, especially as Hinduism has grown up in the West with the coming of thousands of Hindu immigrants, that their teachings have had a powerful impact. Many hundreds of devotees are betwixt and between, no longer good Christians and not yet fully Hindus. The most potent catalysts of all are the children of these devotees, who for all intents and purposes are born Hindus, raised in the Hindu culture, beliefs and attitudes, which permeates the yoga, universalist presentation of so many swâmîs and gurus. It is up to the devotees to declare their religious loyalties, if not for themselves, then for the sake of their children.

They know this, and the swâmîs know this, too. For some, this is a difficult step, for there is subconscious conflict between the old impressions and beliefs and the new. The sâdhana then, if they are to enter Hinduism fully, is to make the inner adjustments, to resolve the conflict. The swâmîs are there on the inside, ready to assist. We feel most of the swâmîs are simply waiting for their devotees to take the next step, as they have given as much as they can without overstepping their protocol. One of the purposes of this book is to show devotees how this is possible. The priests, whose duty it is to perform this important rite of passage, are the final link to orthodoxy for these hundreds of sincere souls.

Devotee: Is leaving one religion and entering another in any way objected to by government? Gurudeva: Not in the US, nor in most other countries which guarantee this right of personal religious choice, though some do restrict aggressive proselytization. This flow is well within the rights of citizens of the US. The founding fathers of this great country were anxious to not impose upon future generations the religious repressions they had suffered in Europe and, therefore, firmly established a personal freedom in religious matters that would allow members to come and go freely from one religion to another as they wished. Our nation explicitly provides for this freedom of religion in the Bill of Rights of the US Constitution.

Devotee: Is severance a difficult process? Gurudeva: Withdrawing from one religion to enter another is not a difficult accomplishment. It is heart-breaking, of course, for a religious leader, a Catholic priest, Protestant minister, Jewish rabbi or Taoist master to realize his religion did not satisfy the needs of a member of the congregation while witnessing that member's severance and adoption of another religion such as the Hindu religion. Such dedicated religious leaders love their religion, as we do, and naturally feel personally hurt and perhaps helpless when one among their congregations seeks spiritual fulfillment elsewhere, especially if he holds to the belief that his is the only true religion. Outside of such personal matters, which are understandable, the laws of apostasy within all the religions of the world are clear and lenient.

There may be challenges and difficulties involved in conversion, but these are generally due to the lack of understanding of the priest, minister, rabbi, family, friends or the individual himself.

Devotee: What are the keys to successfully severing former ties before entering a one's chosen religion? Gurudeva: Severance is an individual affair, to be handled in a personal way between the individual and his religious leaders, family and closest friends. Once he has convinced those individuals that, in deed, he is a Hindu because of belief, practice and community, he will have fully convinced his own subconscious mind, the great impressionable computer within him, that this, in fact, is actually true. It is not at all necessary for family, friends and religious leaders to accept the principles and practices of Hinduism or even to understand them for this process to work. But it is necessary that the matter not be kept secret from them, especially before the full and formal conversion takes place.

For a full severance to happen, a certain emotional exchange has to occur among the people involved, and in some cases there may be quite a number of people involved. Therefore, a severance certainly cannot be accomplished by mail order or as a mere transfer of paperwork, where one is written off the register of one religion and added onto the membership rolls of another. It is not a procedure consummated by a clerk who adjusts the files and the mailing list simply because he has been asked to have a name removed. Such a severance cannot be taken seriously. The subconscious mind of the individual is convinced only through the experience of speaking with family, friends and former religious counsel.

True severance is an inner matter; it is subconscious. It is not an organizational adjustment or mailing-list manipulation, which could then be readjusted in a year if the person changed his mind. For a severance to be true, strong and lasting, the process must make a strong, indelible impression within the subconscious mind of the religious leader, or his successor on the same physical premises where the devotee experienced the former religion and had its beliefs set into place in his mind.

Belief is another important aspect of severance. The individual must understand fully the beliefs that he was brought up with and compare them, one by one, to those of the new religion he wishes to join. Just prior to announcing to anyone his intent to enter Hinduism, the individual should participate for a short while, a day or two or more, in the religious services of his former religion. Then he should go to his minister or priest and explain that he now wishes to enter the Hindu religion. In this way he will update the subconscious mind and settle the minds of those who consider themselves his religious counselors, rather than just sneaking away, drifting away, from his former religion. Devotee: What can be the results if a full severance is not made and the person just drifts away?

Gurudeva: If only a drifting away occurs, only half a severance is attained. The half-committed person may later drift on again into still another religion, or back into the one that he left, still dissatisfied. Drifting from one religious group to another, with no break in continuity for subconscious cleansing of the impressions which produced deep commitment, is much like the wandering no mad might who drifts from nation to nation, never becoming a citizen of any, never taking on the duties and responsibilities of any one community. Such indecisive devotees are like the perpetual tourist who, never satisfied, wanders from one place to the next. This important protocol described above disallows the tendency of drifting away from one religion into another. Of course, many people do drift from one to another. We see this happening all of the time. It is easy to accept the new religion on blind faith, but without making a real commitment.

This may be because, in some cases, it's too much of an effort or embarrassment to go back and face up to their former religious leaders, family and friends. It is, however, ethical and courteous to let them know that this very important, life-changing event is moving within them and about to occur. In the process of severance and adoption, there has to be a time when the

devotee is in a limbo state, no longer holding the beliefs of the former religion and not yet fully accepted into Hinduism. This in-between state has to exist, if only briefly. Otherwise, nothing has happened sub consciously. An emptiness in the pit of the stomach should be felt for a time.

Devotee: If someone had no previous religion, would there be no severance necessary before entering Hinduism?

Gurudeva: Besides the great religions, there are other areas of belief to sever from as well, such as existentialism or the beliefs of the drug culture, communism, secular humanism. Severance from each one of these vast and powerful streams of thought should be taken as seriously as from a major religion. If the severance is not complete, right down to the most obscure belief, the individual may subconsciously try to adjust Hinduism to his own ideas, and this could be very frustrating to him. Each potential Hindu should study carefully all the beliefs within these other areas that have been impressed, knowingly or unknowingly, into his subconscious mind through the years. He must reject each one that does not concur with the beliefs of Hinduism.

Only in this soul-searching will a true and successful preparation have occurred. We want to stress once again that unless all alien beliefs are consciously rejected, unless former spiritual leaders, family and close friends are informed, and unless there is a definite break in continuity of leaving former religions or non-Hindu ways of thought before entering Hinduism, the purification and preparation process will not have been fully complete. Only by making this process as complete as possible can the new adoptive settle down as a full-fledged member of the Hindu community.

Devotee: Do Hindus actively proselytize for converts?

Gurudeva: No. Even though we are in the midst of strongly proselytizing faiths, Hindus do not actively proselytize among the members of other religions. We are over a billion strong and outnumber ourselves daily through the birth rate. However, we do welcome newcomers into the Hindu fold if they come knowingly and of their own volition. Hindu adoptives are expected to immerse themselves in philosophy, in temple worship, in protocol and earn their acceptance within the Hindu community.

We Hindus have always heartily recommended our philosophy to souls of other religions but have never overtly sought to dissuade them from their own religion. Yet, Hinduism has always proven itself to be the permanent home for the pilgrims who have knowledgeably sought it out, studied it and then lived its grand principles, performed the sâdhana and entered the community. For the eternal truths of Hinduism are for the peoples of the world. They are the heritage of all humanity.

CHAPTER 4: Gurudeva Speaks on Ethical Conversion

The following is a Question and Answer session, known in Sanskrit as an upadesa, in which we respond to devotees' queries on ethical conversion, sectarianism, paths of attainment, spiritual unfoldment and more.

Devotee: How do you view the practices of religious persons who embrace all at once Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and all the religions in a kind of universal ecumenism?

Gurudeva: This is a perfectly understandable phase of spiritual evolution, but it is not the true or final path for sincere seekers. It is certainly not what Sri Râmakrishna was trying to tell people, nor was it what our own beloved satguru, Siva Yoga swâmî, stood for. They were both staunch Hindus, one a Sakta and the other a Saivite, who understood their religion deeply. Sri Râmakrishna did not cease being a Sakti devotee, but so fully embraced Her worship that he came to know Her vastness in embracing everything. Nor did Siva Yogaswâmî abandon God Siva to become everything to everyone, but was everything in being the perfectly devout Saivite.

They were simply indicating, as I do, that religions are one in their movement toward God, some offering knowledge, others service, others love, attainment and direct experience. At the same time, they are different in their practices and attainments, and most assuredly distinct in their beliefs, the foundation of the attitudes of their members. It is good to love and respect all religions; it is a necessary condition of spiritual unfoldment. But it is necessary to keep firmly to a single path toward God. Our Siva Yogaswâmî taught that a train can only run on the tracks. Following the path given by our religion leads one onward through religious practices and sâdhana into divine realization. Otherwise, there is no longer a path, but a trackless plane where each wanders totally on his own, as his own guide, often without experience, in a desert of ignorance seeking solace in a mirage, an imaginary enlightenment he can see just on the horizon but which, in reality, does not exist.

Devotee: Some Hindus, particularly in the West, embrace all religions as if they were one, feeling that sectarianism is too narrow, too prone to conflicts. Why do you disagree with that view and prefer instead to promote sectarianism?

Gurudeva: Religious people do not cause conflicts. They resolve them and bring peace into the world. The Anglican British in India played upon sectarianism to create strife among the members of the sects toward one another to fulfill their own divide-and-rule policy, hoping the sects would destroy each other. They did the same with the caste and sub-caste positions, as well as with money exchange between the provinces. Much strife was created through communalism, stirring dissension between Hindus and Muslims, which was exactly what the British were attempting to do. I argue against nonsectarianism because it doesn't work. It may have been good for a time, but proved to be a deadend street, leading well-intentioned followers into an abyss of mental confusion, divorce, abortion and suicide, leading its followers to the question, "Where is the true path of Hinduism?" Our final answer to that question is the path of Hinduism is Saivism; it is Vaishnavism; it is Saktism; it is Smârtism. It is not in a Hinduism that is divorced from sectarianism, because Hinduism does not exist without its four major sects or denominations. It is a four-fold religion, the sum of its four sects. If you destroy the parts, you destroy the whole. If you eliminate the four denominations, you also eliminate Hinduism. In theory, the idea that all religions are one, or that all religions are the same, is a convincing no tion. But the great experiment to abandon one's religion to embrace all others or to relinquish one's sect to become nonsectarian has not worked. Nor was this the first effort to create an eclectic, man-made religion, one that took a little of this and a little of that and a few

ideas from its founder and a few improvements by its successors, and so on into an idealistic emptiness.

This is always true of religious efforts which do not uphold dharma. Throughout history utopian movements have risen and fallen, bright and promising in their birth, neglected and forgotten in their demise. Devotee: What about the principle of Ishta Devatâ? Isn't every Hindu free to choose the form of the Deity he or she wants to worship? Gurudeva: Of course, within each denomination the idea of Ishta Devatâ—that one may choose the form of the Deity he is naturally drawn to worship, is most proper and traditional. A Saivite, for example, is free to choose Ganesha as his Deity, or to become a devotee of Lord Murugan or Siva. But the modern Smârta trend of accepting a Devatâ outside of one's sect is not good. I believe that this was begun in an effort to break down sectarianism. We are proud to be Saivites, and Vaishnavites are proud of their religion, too. But there are those who sought to be free from their father's religion, even to embrace Christianity or Buddhism. Even a statue of Jesus and Mother Mary are seen today as valid Ishta Devatâs, and they stand next to a statue of Lord Ganesha on a liberal, nonsectarian Hindu's home altar.

On the positive side this is a sign of the broadness of our religion, which embraces all. But on the negative side it is a dilution of that same religion, which can lead to its destruction. Out of this comes a diluted religion, its strength sapped, its Gods exiled while foreign Gods hold sway. From my experience and inner findings, this idea of the Ishta Devatâ chosen from any of the Gods or Goddesses, or none of them, should be closely looked at, as it can bring about a distortion of the traditional continuity of our religion.

Devotee: There are those who teach a path to Truth through yoga and sâdhana alone, without the temples, without the Gods. Would their followers succeed on such a spiritual path?

Gurudeva: The first initiation that a traditional guru would give before sâdhana is assigned and yoga is taught is to bring the truth-seeker fully into his religion. Then he would give his devotees sâdhana to perform, basic religious practices to observe, such as japa and pilgrimage, and he would teach those devotees religious protocol and culture. Only after these matters were settled could experience of the deeper realizations be sought for. Of course, there could be peace of mind and a genuine devotion within those following yoga disciplines alone. But the deepest realizations of the yoga mârگا and the sâdhana mârگا come when these are coupled with the rich traditions, with temple worship and so on. At this juncture, yoga can be taught and the disciple given permission to practice it. This is the magic. Then it will really work.

Otherwise, it simply does not have the power that comes from the backing of the three worlds. Therefore, those who seek Truth through yoga must enter the arena of sâdhana—in our case, must fully embrace Saivism in its entirety. Only then will sâdhana bear the fruits of yogas well performed, as pûjâ bears the fruits of sakti power, and tapas bears the fruits of sânnidhya. Only then will the fruit of sâdhana ripen in the radiance of yoga, drawing its sustenance through the roots of the Rishis' revelations in the Vedic-Âgamic way. Devotee: So often we have been told that Vedânta and yoga make a Christian a better Christian. How does that relate to your insights on sectarianism? Gurudeva: A strong religion births from within itself its own spiritual lights.

You are correct. Christianity needs all the help that it can get, and yes, Vedânta and yoga have been a solace for millions of Christians. From personal experience in teaching Vedânta and yoga to Christians and Jews in the Western world, I assure you that it does not make them better Christians or Jews. Those steeped in Christian/Judaic emotions and dogma in early years studied diligently with me later in life, striving for Self Realization. The more they strove

in their yogic practices and philosophical understandings, the farther they moved from their goal. The Biblical theologies perpetuate a one-lifetime belief, inspiring a sense of hurried religious attainment. This very urgency of attaining a spiritual goal keeps the aspirant from the goal, keeps the mind agitated, the emotions frustrated, knowing that attainment has not yet been reached, knowing the time is shorter each day, and subconsciously believing that the soul has only one opportunity on this Earth to realize God. Does the fruit upon the tree ripen because we wish it to? Is the energy in the sap, the kundalini force, of the tree that ripens the fruit answerable to the demands of the fruit which is impatient to become ripe? No. It happens in its own good time. The ripening of the fruit depends on the roots of the tree, upon the soil and the season and the sun. Similarly, the ripening of the soul into its ultimate states of maturity depends on the roots of the religion, upon the season of the soul and upon the radiant light of the satguru. Thus, the wise hold firmly to the strong trunk of sectarianism, to traditionalism, to the principles lived from the time of the Rishis who brought forth the Vedas and the Āgamas, the revealed scriptures of the timeless Sanātana Dharma.

Devotee: It is sometimes taught that advanced souls need only follow the path of yoga to realize God. Are Vedānta philosophy and yoga disciplines sufficient to know God in this life, or are all the increments of religion needed? Gurudeva: Man has an instinctive, an intellectual and a superconscious phase of mind. Saiva Siddhānta theology postulates the progressive path of charyā, kriyā, yoga and jñāna. Charyā is virtuous and moral living. Kriyā is temple worship and devotion. Yoga is internalized devotion and union with God Siva. And jñāna is the awakened state of the matured yogī. The charyā mārga harnesses and controls the instinctive mind. The kriyā mārga harnesses and controls the intellectual mind. The yoga mārga releases man's individual awareness so that he is able to function superconsciously. And the jñāna mārga, after union with God, maintains that superconsciousness, as knowing bursts forth from within. It is from here that sruti, our great and lasting revealed scriptures, have come. All of the increments of a religion control and culture the instinctive and intellectual mind.

When a devotee sits in meditation and is plagued with instinctive desire through thoughts, feelings and fantasies, it is only because the instinctive mind has not been harnessed. He should first perform charyā more diligently, later to earn the right to practice yoga. When the devotee sits in meditation and the intellect plagues him, he has one thought dancing into another, ideas magnifying into images in an unstilled mind, it is kriyā that must be better performed as a divine antidote which harnesses the rash intellect through a deeply mystical process. Needless to say, Vedānta is the outgrowth and product of jñāna, and yoga is the result of charyā and kriyā, the great disciplinarians of the instinctive-intellectual mind. All of this is Saiva Siddhānta. Similarly, each sect within the Hindu religion has its specific traditions, goals and path of attainment.

Why hide our religion under the cloak of an intellectual explanation of Vedānta and certain simple practices of yoga when they are the earned outgrowth of a truly religious life? It was fine to do so in the early days in North America, for it helped to break up Western thinking with the truths of reincarnation and karma and physical yoga practices; but those days are over. The Catholic and Protestant churches declare these ideas a threat to their very existence, especially the concept that God is everywhere and in all things. Thus they naturally rise up in a unified force against the swāmīs who entice members of Abrahamic congregations away, and rise up when these same swāmīs refuse these sincere aspirants formal entrance into their sect of the Hindu religion. We deplore what has resulted in the lives of many in the Western world this last century who live in a state of limbo, apostate to their former religion but not accepted into their new faith by the Indian Hindu congregation of their community. In conclusion, Vedānta is a profound and intriguing philosophy. It complements existentialism as an opposite

point of view. Hatha yoga is beneficial to the physical body of the peoples of all religions. But when those simple beginnings inevitably extend to the preaching of reincarnation and karma, it leads Christian-Judaic followers astray. On the other hand, Vedânta for the nonreligious intellectual is reduced to simply another subject to be processed through the mental gridwork. This is fine. The same applies to the physical culturist who stresses only yoga âsanas. It is only when the individual begins to believe the swâmî's own philosophy and slowly relinquishes the Christian-Judaic-Islamic faith by accepting Hindu beliefs that he becomes apostate to his religion. It then becomes the swâmî's moral obligation to help the devotee complete the conversion into the Hindu religion. I myself listened to swâmîs from India in early years, even before I met my satguru, and believed most of what they were postulating about religion: that all religions lead to the same goal, that Vedânta will make Christians better Christians and Jews better Jews, that sectarianism is narrowminded and divisive. Then a number of years later I discovered that I had been misled.

Westerners are wiser now as to who comes from Asia and what he has to offer. And the Catholic and Protestant churches are better informed now, too. This is why we call for established Hindu religionists, well-schooled in the Saivite, Vaishnavite, Smârta or Sakta sect, to come forward and work with and work for a new generation of half-converted Westerners and immigrant Indians and their foreign-born offspring living far from their religious homeland and thus prone to stray from the religion of their grandparents. Devotee: Do you have to be a Hindu to realize God? Gurudeva: The Christian-Judaic-Islamic religions, also known as the Abrahamic faiths, do not hold to the doctrine that God is everywhere and in all things. Their belief is that God is eternally separate from the world He created. The first samâdhi of Satchidânanda, experiencing God in and through all things, postulated by Sanâtana Dharma and other Eastern faiths, believed in and then attained by their followers, is in most cases unattainable through those religious paths that block the conscious and subconscious states of mind of their followers by negating and denying this mystical experience as apostasy.

Extraterrestrial channels encased in the sushumnâ current in the spine of man are inherent in the fiber of the religions that know of and lead man's consciousness to God Realization. These inner channels of consciousness are available to its members, guiding them to their ultimate destiny on this planet. Still, there are rare souls who dive deeply into themselves despite their faith's beliefs, and penetrate into the states of Satchidânanda, sometimes becoming heretical members of the faith that claimed no such mystical experience was possible. But once Satchidânanda is even briefly experienced, the inner knowledge of reincarnation, the subtle forces of the law of karma and the presence of God in all things are intuitively understood. Actually, one of the major problems of the Abrahamic religions is having within them undeclared apostates who have had these universal inner experiences and who, in turn, silently sway the minds of other followers, not by preaching alien philosophies but by sharing their own compelling mystical encounters.

Devotee: Is it true that Hindu leaders sometimes make overt efforts to proselytize and convert Jews, Muslims and Christians? Gurudeva: Yes, this is true. Overt efforts are made to convert Jews, Christians and Muslims into one of the denominations of Hinduism, but only if they previously had a forced conversion from Hinduism through bribery, coercion or financial and educational rewards. Through ignorance and dire need, born Hindus have accepted "new religions" in order to have food on the table at the end of the day, to gain access to schools for their children or to a hospital for health care, to qualify for employment or a promotion, to protect their lands from confiscation or their families from harm. All this is a part of conversions brought about by political power or sheer cunning. This is not just a matter of history. It continues today, in the year 2000, and beyond. It is something all Hindus are concerned about.

It is the child of such force-converted families who will become a member of the religion through birth and belief; but it is only that child's child, the third generation, who can be regarded as a settled, born member of the new religion. It takes three generations for this process to be completed. Therefore, our proselytizing is focused on the first two generations, with a view to bringing them back to the Hindu religion. If we neglect them, we are not caring for our brothers and sisters. This kind of proselytizing among our own we consider our duty, for it is educating the young and reeducating their parents, and it is not infringing on the other faiths who imposed these unethical conversions. Devotee: Why do other religions sometimes use unscrupulous tactics to convert people away from Hinduism? Gurudeva: Conversion has often been a point of contention between religions. This need not be so, if only all the spiritual leaders would respect the other religions.

Historically, the Christians and Muslims have sought to convert members away from Hinduism, away from all the sects—Saivism, Vaishnavism, Smârtism and Shaktism. The Jews, however, have never infringed in this way, and have shown a deep affinity and support for the Hindu faith. Christians and Muslims seek converts because they genuinely believe that theirs is the only true religion on the planet. In November of 1999 Catholic Pope John Paul II dispelled all doubt as to his Church's dedication to world domination in New Delhi, India, on Dîpâvalî Day. Closing a three-year Asian Synod of Bishops, he issued the voluminous "PostSynodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Asia of the Holy Father John Paul II to the Bishops, Priests and Deacons, Men and Women in the Consecrated Life and All the Lay Faithful on Jesus Christ the Saviour and His Mission of Love and Service in Asia."

Many Hindus who believe that Catholics are friendly to their religion may be surprised upon reading excerpts from John Paul II's message to his missionaries in Asia: "Just as in the first millennium the Cross was planted on the soil of Europe, and in the second on that of the Americas and Africa, we can pray that in the Third Christian Millennium a great harvest of faith will be reaped in this vast and vital continent [of Asia]....If the Church in Asia is to fulfill its providential destiny, evangelization must be your absolute priority.... Christ is the one Mediator between God and man and the sole Redeemer of the world, to be clearly distinguished from the founders of other great religions....I pray to the Lord to send many more committed laborers to reap the harvest of souls which I see as ready and plentiful [in Asia]....The universal presence of the Holy Spirit cannot serve as an excuse for a failure to proclaim Jesus Christ explicitly as the one and only Saviour....Vatican II taught clearly that the entire Church is missionary, and that the work of evangelization is the duty of the whole People of God....Jesus Christ [is] the fulfillment of the yearnings expressed in the mythologies and folklore of the Asian peoples....The Synod therefore renewed the commitment of the Church in Asia to the task of improving both ecumenical relations and interreligious dialogue [as] essential to the Church's evangelizing mission on the continent....From the Christian point of view, interreligious dialogue is more than a way of fostering mutual knowledge and enrichment; it is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission....In many countries, Catholic schools play an important role in evangelization."

Asiaweek magazine, out of Hong Kong, commented in an editorial, "The pope's message threatens to alienate liberal Indians who previously dismissed the warnings of Hindu chauvinists as fanatical paranoia. But the pope's statements make clear the Vatican's expansionist agenda. And they lend credence to the longstanding complaint that Christianity's many good works in India are meant to give it a foothold on the nation's soul" (HINDUISM TODAY, Feb., 2000). Hindus do not become angry at the Christians or the Muslims who seek out converts, knowing that predators always take the weakest prey. United Hindus of the world concur that religious education of the harijan, the sùdra, the truant youth and the adult gone

astray is the dynamic key for moving Hinduism out of an agricultural era into the technological age. We feel our battle is not with the other religions. The battle and the challenge lie within Hinduism itself.

What can one lose by learning the Sanâtana Dharma? Ignorance. Only ignorance can be lost and personal realization of God gained. Those who are educated and think for themselves can only become strong and secure, well able to make the proper choice in their personal dharma. Devotee: What are the unscrupulous tactics used to convert Hindus away from their God and Gods? Gurudeva: Hindus who are still in the agricultural era are often simple, virtuous people, uneducated and believing. They work on the farms. They grow the crops and tend the herds. They are vulnerable to many tactics, and many are used. It's very sad, but true. One of the Saiva swâmîs of our order visited India recently, and I will ask him to relate what was told to him. "During a pilgrimage to India years ago, we were approached by many devout Hindus who were deeply disturbed about the way their children and neighbors were being converted to Christianity.

Of course, this is nothing new. It has been going on for centuries, but it is shocking to hear from those who are suffering that it is still happening. We were told, for instance, that a Christian feeding hall was opened in Chennai for undernourished and impoverished children. The children came for a few days, delighted to have a warm and healthy meal. Then they were told that it was getting difficult to keep track and that it would be necessary to identify which children were part of the program. The identification was completed on hundreds of young and hungry Hindu children. It was in the form of a small Christian cross tattooed on their chest!" Another Chennai incident was related.

A Catholic convent began a program of taking six-to eight-year-old Hindu children to a popular snake farm on weekends, including free snacks. About three or four buses were full each week. On the way to the snake farm at a given signal the driver would disengage the electrical wires and the engine would sputter to a stop on the roadside. He would try and try to start it, but of course could not. After some waiting, the nuns would say, "Well, we all want to get to the snake farm. The driver is having problems. Let's all pray for help. Now, how many of you worship Lord Ganesha?" Several children would raise their hands. "Fine. Let's pray to Lord Ganesha to help the bus driver." And all would pray for a few minutes. The driver would try again, and nothing would happen. Then the nuns would ask, "How many of you worship Lord Murugan?"

This would go on as devotees of Siva, Râma, Krishna and others all failed. Finally the nuns would say, "All your Gods have been unable to help. Let's try something new. Let's all pray to Jesus Christ. Get on your knees and pray to Jesus to start the bus." The children prayed, the bus driver reconnected the wiring, and the bus started. The children were told, "You see, Jesus is more powerful than all the Hindu Gods. Aren't you glad we prayed to Jesus? Now we can enjoy a day at the snake farm. Everyone say with me, 'Thank you, Jesus.'" The innocent children, only six or seven years old, did enjoy the day and were deeply impressed with the apparent helplessness of their Hindu Gods. These are two examples of what we were told by reliable elders. Devotee: Are Hindus who have entered the technological age equally affected by these deceptive means of conversion? Gurudeva: No, they are not.

They are more profoundly influenced by a more sophisticated brand of conversion—not to Christianity or Islam, but to modern Western thought, Freudian psychology, Marxist Communism and the postulations of the existentialist Frenchman, Jean Paul Sartre, who declared that God does not exist. Existentialist thought has poisoned the minds of many good Hindus, turned them away from belief toward nonbelief. Existentialism offers—in the place of

devotion and yoga and inner attainment—a dark view of man and of the universe. It postulates that there is no inherent meaning in life, nor is there immortality of the soul. It tells its follower that he cannot know order or harmony, for he is essentially a troubled being who must rely only on himself. It is a self-centered system, whereas Hinduism is a selfless, evolutionary, God-centric system. Devotee: Are there ethics and scruples controlling conversion from one religion to another, such as corporations have in moving a top executive from one company to another? Gurudeva: Doctors and lawyers have ethical guidelines concerning their patients and clients. Corporate officers have codes of conduct, too.

The best among them have a cultured protocol and respect for one another. This is not always true among religionists. They can and often do disdain one another. In the technological age, ethics exist among the white-collar workers, and disdain exists among blue-collar workers toward management. There is a stratum of humanity that will always work outside the boundaries of educated protocol, propelled by greed and by fear. The religions and their leaders should not and must not be unscrupulous, for that will be harmful to their constituency in the future. Religious leaders should rise at least to the level of corporate managers. For our part, we can suggest this as a solution to the problems of conversion.

Why should someone be ripped away from his born and raised religion to another and “better one” like a piece of merchandise snatched from the supermarket shelf, sold, redistributed and wholesaled to a foreign market? In India today the problems of forced or deceitful conversions are so prevalent that the government is trying to pass a law to prohibit such tactics, like the laws that already exist in Nepal. We hope such legislation is passed, not only in India but wherever similar problems exist.

Ethics must be established among all the religionists of the world. They must nurture an appreciation for each other, not merely a tolerance. Religious leaders, above all, must remain fair, despite their enthusiasm. We are not marketing a product. We are not competing for customers. The values and tenets we are offering must go into knowledgeable and willing hands. They cannot be forced upon the weak or foisted upon the unwary. A doctor would hate and then undermine another who stole his patients and slandered his name to effect the deed. An advocate would feel justifiably injured if clients were bribed to leave him for the services of a fellow attorney. The king of a country is riled at the loss of his lands, and religionists become antagonistic one to another when their fences are cut and their flocks taken elsewhere. Yes, a certain protocol must be established.

Permission must be granted from one's religious leaders, making for a graceful exit from one and entrance into another, just as a citizen formally changes his loyalty from one nation to another, legally and ethically. When war commences, warlords gather, and their nations decide on the ethics of torture, cruelty and needless slaughter. How much more essential is it, then, for religious leaders to come to fair agreements and rules of conduct in their handling of souls? All religions are not the same. There are eleven major ones, and a multitude of faiths form a twelfth. A oneness of ethics must exist among the religionists, priests, ministers, pandits, aadheenakartars, ĩakarâchâryas and others in the higher echelons, at the corporate level, for religion today is not unlike the great corporations which produce and distribute their products and services, supplying the world with food and plenty. Ethics must be established among the presidents and chairmen and executive directors of the religions. Then these holy personages will command the members to reach out and seek new members in a most enlightened way.

CHAPTER 5: DOES HINDUISM ACCEPT NEWCOMERS?

Our discussion of becoming a Hindu naturally gives rise to the question of how Hinduism historically has looked at the matter. Here we answer that query and the related question: "What makes a person a Hindu?" What Is Hinduism? Hinduism is India's indigenous religious and cultural system, followed today by over one billion adherents, mostly in India but with large populations in many other countries. Also called Sanâtana Dharma, "eternal religion," and Vaidika Dharma, "religion of the Vedas," Hinduism encompasses a broad spectrum of philosophies ranging from pluralistic theism to absolute monism. It is a family of myriad faiths with four primary denominations: Saivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism and Smârtism. These four 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 many yogas, the guru-sishya tradition and a reliance on the Vedas as scriptural authority. From the rich soil of Hinduism long ago sprang various other traditions.

Among these were Jainism, Buddhism, Vîrasaivism and Sikhism, all of which rejected the Vedas and thus emerged as completely distinct religions, dissociated from Hinduism, while still sharing many philosophical insights and cultural values with their parent faith. Not unlike all the other major religions of the world, Hinduism has no central headquarters. Nor do the Christians, Jews, Muslims or Buddhists. They all have many who represent and function as secretariates for their various denominations. Hinduism is no different in today's world. It has had many exemplars in the past and will in the future of its denominations and the teaching lineages within them, each headed by a pontiff. Critics have pointed out that Hinduism is not an organized religion. In truth, they are correct.

For 1,200 years Islamic and Christian rule in India, Hinduism's central citadel, eroded greatly upon its perpetuation. Yet it survived. In today's world it may be accused of being a poorly organized religion, but it's getting better daily, as a few minutes on the World Wide Web will prove (see our listing at the end of this book). Its temples and active organizations encircle the world. Whatever its faults, it has kept the fires of sâdhana and renunciation, of unabashed spiritual life and yoga disciplines alive. No other faith has done that to the same extent. No other major ancient faith has survived the assaults and the insults of the Abrahamic faiths. Hinduism's nearly three million swâmîs, gurus and sâdhus work tirelessly within, upon and among themselves and then, when ready, serve others, leading them from darkness into light, from death to immortality.

What Makes One a Hindu? Those who follow the Hindu way of life are Hindus. In the Mahâbhârata the great King Yudhishtira was asked, "What makes a Brahmin, birth, learning or conduct?" He replied, "It is conduct that makes a brahmin." Similarly, the modern Hindu may well state that it is conduct, based upon deep, practical understanding of dharma, karma and reincarnation, that makes a Hindu. After all, he might muse, is not a true devotee whose heart is filled with faith in and love for his Ishta Devatâ and who lives the Hindu Dharma as much a Hindu as his agnostic neighbor, though the first was born in Indonesia or North America and the second in Andhra Pradesh? Sri K. Navaratnam of Sri Lanka, a devotee for some forty years of Satguru Siva Yogaswâmî, in his *Studies in Hinduism* quotes from the book, *Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines*: "Hindus are those who adhere to the Hindu tradition, on the understanding that they are duly qualified to do so really effectively, and not

simply in an exterior and illusory way; non-Hindus, on the contrary, are those who, for any reason whatsoever, do not participate in the tradition in question.”

Sri K. Navaratnam enumerates a set of basic beliefs held by Hindus:

- 1. A belief in the existence of God.
- 2. A belief in the existence of a soul separate from the body.
- 3. A belief in the existence of the finitizing principle known as avidyâ (lack of knowledge) or mâyâ (limiting principle of matter).
- 4. A belief in the principle of matter, prakriti or mâyâ.
- 5. A belief in the theory of karma and reincarnation.
- 6. A belief in the indispensable guidance of a guru to guide the spiritual aspirant towards God Realization.
- 7. A belief in moksha, liberation, as the goal of human existence.
- 8. A belief in the indispensable necessity of temple worship in religious life.
- 9. A belief in graded forms of religious practices, both internal and external, until one realizes God.
- 10. A belief in ahimsa as the greatest dharma or virtue.
- 11. A belief in mental and physical purity as indispensable factors for spiritual progress.

Sri Sri Sri Jayendra Sarasvatî, 69th Sankaracharya of the Kamakoti Peetham, Kanchipuram, India, defines in one of his writings the basic features of Hinduism as follows:

1. The concept of idol worship and the worship of God in his Nirguna as well as Saguna form.
2. The wearing of sacred marks on the forehead.
3. Belief in the theory of past and future births in accordance with the theory of karma.
4. Cremation of ordinary men and burial of great men.

The periodical Hindu Vishva (Jan./Feb., 1986) cites the following definitions: “He who has perfect faith in the law of karma, the law of reincarnation, avatâra [divine incarnations], ancestor worship, varnâsrama dharma [social duty], Vedas and existence of God; he who practices the instructions given in the Vedas with faith and earnestness; he who does snâna [ritual bathing], srâddha [death memorial], pitri-tarpana [offerings to ancestors] and the pañcha mahâyajñas [five great sacrifices: to Rishis, ancestors, Gods, creatures and men], he who follows the varnâsrama dharmas, he who worships the avatâras and studies the Vedas is a Hindu.’ ”

The Vishva Hindu Parishad’s official definition from its Memorandum of Association, Rules and Regulation (1966) states: “Hindu means a person believing in, following or respecting the eternal values of life, ethical and spiritual, which have sprung up in Bhâratkhand [India] and includes any person calling himself a Hindu.” In all definitions, the three pivotal beliefs for Hindus are karma, reincarnation and the belief in all-pervasive Divinity— forming as they do the crux of day-to-day religion, explaining our past existence, guiding our present life and determining our future union with God. It is apparent from the pervasiveness of these beliefs today that a large number of non-Hindus qualify as self-declared Hindus already, for many believe in karma, dharma and reincarnation, strive to see God everywhere, have some concept of mâyâ, recognize someone as their guru, respect temple worship and believe in the evolution of the soul.

Many of these beliefs are heretical to most other religions, especially Christianity and the Jewish faith. Those who do believe in karma, reincarnation and union with the Divine have, indeed, evolved beyond the boundaries of Western religion.

The Indian Supreme Court, in 1966, formalized a judicial definition of Hindu beliefs to legally distinguish Hindu denominations from other religions in India. This seven point list was affirmed by the Court in 1995 in judging cases regarding religious identity:

- 1. Acceptance of the Vedas with reverence as the highest authority in religious and philosophic matters and acceptance with reverence of Vedas by Hindu thinkers and philosophers as the sole foundation of Hindu philosophy.
- 2. Spirit of tolerance and willingness to understand and appreciate the opponent's point of view based on the realization that truth is many sided.
- 3. Acceptance of great world rhythm by all six systems of Hindu philosophy: vast periods of creation, maintenance and dissolution follow each other in endless succession;
- 4. Acceptance by all systems of Hindu philosophy of the belief in rebirth and pre-existence.
- 5. Recognition of the fact that the means or ways to salvation are many.
- 6. Realization of the truth that numbers of Gods to be worshiped may be large, yet there being Hindus who do not believe in the worshiping of idols.
- 7. Unlike other religions, or religious creeds, Hindu religion's not being tied down to any definite set of philosophic concepts, as such.

A Summary of what most Hindus believe three decades ago we crafted a simple summary of Hindu beliefs and distributed it in hundreds of thousands of pamphlets around the world. On August, 1995, these nine belief were published by the Religious News Service in Washington, DC, for hundreds of American newspapers. On February 8, 1993, the Christianity Today magazine printed them side by side with their Christian counterparts so Christians could better comprehend Hindus

NINE BELIEFS OF HINDUISM

- 1. Hindus believe in the divinity of the Vedas, the world's most ancient scripture, and venerate the Āgamas as equally revealed. These primordial hymns are God's word and the bedrock of Sanātana Dharma, the eternal religion which has neither beginning nor end.
- 2. Hindus believe in a one, all-pervasive Supreme Being who is both immanent and transcendent, both Creator and Unmanifest Reality.
- 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, spiritual knowledge and liberation from the cycle of rebirth, is attained. Not a single soul will be eternally deprived of this destiny.
- 6. Hindus believe that divine beings exist in unseen worlds and that temple worship, rituals and sacraments as well as personal devotionals create a communion with these devas and Gods.

- 7. Hindus believe that a spiritually awakened master, or satguru, is essential to know the Transcendent Absolute, as are personal discipline, good conduct, purification, pilgrimage, self-inquiry and meditation.
- 8. Hindus believe that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered, and therefore practice ahimsa, “noninjury.”
- 9. Hindus believe that no particular religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others, but that all genuine religious paths are facets of God’s Pure Love and Light, deserving tolerance and understanding.

FIVE OBLIGATIONS OF ALL HINDUS

- 1. WORSHIP, UPĀSANĀ: 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 swâmîs, following divine law, especially âhiṣā, mental, emotional and physical noninjury to all beings. Thus they resolve karmas.
- 4. PILGRIMAGE, TIRTHAYĀTRĀ: 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, SAMSKĀRA: 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.

Hinduism Has Always Accepted Adoptives and Converts It is sometimes claimed that one must be born in a Hindu family to be a Hindu, that one cannot adopt it or convert from another faith. This is simply not true. The acceptance of outsiders into the Hindu fold has occurred for thousands of years. Groups as diverse as local aborigines and the invading Greeks of Alexander the Great have been brought in. Entering Hinduism has traditionally required little more than accepting and living the beliefs and codes of Hindus. This remains the basic factor in the process, although there are and always have been formal ceremonies recognizing entrance into the religion—particularly the nāmakaran a samskara, or naming rite in the case of adoptives and converts, and the vrātyastoma, vow-taking rite, in the case of those returning to one sect or another of the Hindu religion.

The most compelling testimony to Hinduism’s acceptance of non-Hindus into its fold is history. Possibly the most often quoted exposition of the subject appears in the Complete Works of Swâmî Vivekânanda (Vol. 5, p. 233), in an interview called “On the bounds of Hinduism,” which first appeared in the Prabuddha Bhârata in April, 1899: “Having been directed by the Editor, writes our representative, to interview Swâmî Vivekânanda on the question of converts to Hinduism, I found an opportunity one evening on the roof of a Ganges houseboat. It was after

nightfall, and we had stopped at the embankment of the Râmakrishna Math, and there the swâmî came down to speak with me. Time and place were alike delightful.

Overhead the stars, and around, the rolling Ganga; and on one side stood the dimly lighted building, with its background of palms and lofty shade-trees. 'I want to see you, Swâmî,' I began, 'on this matter of receiving back into Hinduism those who have been perverted from it. Is it your opinion that they should be received?' 'Certainly,' said the swâmî, 'they can and ought to be taken.' He sat gravely for a moment, thinking, and then resumed. 'The vast majority of Hindu perverts to Islam and Christianity are perverts by the sword, or the descendants of these. It would be obviously unfair to subject these to disabilities of any kind. As to the case of born aliens, did you say? Why, born aliens have been converted in the past by crowds, and the process is still going on.' 'In my own opinion, this statement not only applies to aboriginal tribes, to outlying nations, and to almost all our conquerors before the Mohammedan conquest, but also to all those castes who find a special origin in the Purânas. I hold that they have been aliens thus adopted.' 'Ceremonies of expiation are no doubt suitable in the case of willing converts, returning to their Mother-Church, as it were; but on those who were alienated by conquest, as in Kashmir and Nepal, or on strangers wishing to join us, no penance should be imposed.' 'But of what caste would these people be, Swâmîjî?' I ventured to ask. 'They must have some, or they can never be assimilated into the great body of Hindus. Where shall we look for their rightful place?' 'Returning converts,' said the swâmî quietly, 'will gain their own castes, of course. And new people will make theirs. You will remember,' he added, 'that this has already been done in the case of Vaishnavism.'

Converts from different castes and aliens were all able to combine under that flag and form a caste by themselves, and a very respectable one, too. From Râmânûja down to Chaitanya of Bengal, all great Vaishnava teachers have done the same.' 'Then as to names,' I enquired, 'I suppose aliens and perverts who have adopted non-Hindu names should be named newly. Would you give them caste names, or what?' 'Certainly,' said the swâmî thoughtfully, 'there is a great deal in a name!' and on this question he would say no more." Dr. S. Râdhâkrishnan, eminent philosopher and former president of India, confirmed Swâmî Vivekânanda's views in his well-known book, *The Hindu View of Life* (p. 28-29): "In a sense, Hinduism may be regarded as the first example in the world of a missionary religion. Only its missionary spirit is different from that associated with the proselytizing creeds. It did not regard it as its mission to convert humanity to any one opinion."

For what counts is conduct and not belief. Worshipers of different Gods and followers of different rites were taken into the Hindu fold. The ancient practice of vrâtyastoma, described fully in the Tândya Brâhman a, shows that not only individuals but whole tribes were absorbed into Hinduism. Many modern sects accept outsiders. Devala Smriti lays down rules for the simple purification of people forcibly converted to other faiths, or of womenfolk defiled and confined for years, and even of people who, for worldly advantage, embrace other faiths." In a recent article, writer Shreeram Tyambak Godbole of Bombay observes, "Hinduism . . . has been assimilating into itself all those who have been willing, without offending anybody. Whoever from other religions adopted even outwardly the customs and manners of the Hindus could, in course of time, hope to get his progeny easily assimilated in the Hindu society. This process has been going on for the last two or two and a half millenniums."

The beginnings of this process can be seen in the sixty-fifth chapter of Mahâbhârata, Ântiparva, where Indra is described to have ordered Mandhatru to give all access to all foreigners, like the Yavanas, into the Vedic religion." He gives a historical example, "[The] Bactrian Greeks had soon to run down to India as refugees, driven headlong by U-echis, when

they were all admitted to the Hindu fold. The same fate the U-echis, the Sakas, the Kushans and the Huns had to face. The Kushan emperor, Kadphesis II, took to Siva worship so devoutly that on his coins he inscribed the image of the Lord Siva and had himself mentioned as the devotee of Siva. Huvishka and Vasudeva and their descendants also inscribed Lord Siva and his Nandi on their coins....While the Abhirs became Vaishnavas, the Scythians and U-echis became Saiva s....Huns again became Saiva s. The Hun King Mihirkula had inscribed on his silver coins 'Jayatu Vrshadhvajah' and 'Jayatu Vrshah' along with Siva's Trisula and his Nandi and his umbrella....All the Bactrian Greeks, the U-echis, the Sakas, the Kushans, and the Huns are now so well assimilated into the Hindu society that their separate identity cannot at all be traced." Our friend and compatriot in promoting Sanâtana Dharma, Sri Ram Swarup (1920-1998), had this to say about the power of those who have converted to or adopted the Hindu faith. "Hitherto, Hindus knew only two categories:

Hindus born in India and Hindu emigrants who went overseas during the last few centuries, often under very adverse conditions. But now we have also a new, fast-growing third category of those who adopt Hinduism by free choice. This is an important category, and traditional Hinduism should become aware of them. Their contribution to Hinduism is notable. Hindu thought is changing the intellectual-religious contour of Europe and America and attracting their best minds. In this thought, they also find the principle of their own self-discovery and recovery. The new religion of these countries is now really the 'New Age,' which is greatly worrying the Christian establishment. The Pope sees 'Eastern influences' in this new development. Pat Robertson, an influential American evangelist, finds that 'the New Age and Hinduism—it is the same thing.' He complains, 'We are importing Hinduism into America.' " Must One Be Born in India to Be a Hindu?

At this time certain deeply ingrained misconceptions must also be erased, such as the mistaken notion—postulated primarily by brahmin pandits and a few of the Ākarâchâryas and parroted by Western academics—that one must be born in India to be a Hindu. Of course, the Hindus of Nepal and Sri Lanka, the Hindus born in Bali and Malaysia, the Mauritian born and Bangladesh-born Hindus would find such a concept very strange indeed, and few in the world would question their Hinduness. But the issue is often raised in America and Europe. Italian-born Swâmî Yogâ nandagiri bravely tackled this issue in his nation, as reported in our international magazine, HINDUISM TODAY. Swâmî explained, "We have to overcome a misunderstanding asserted by Italian scholars that one has to be born in India to be a Hindu. Our saga also hopes to spread the authentic Hindu culture among Italians who take yoga as just a sweet gymnastic." His invitation to HINDUISM TODAY outlined plans for a June, 1997, international conference in Milan on the controversial subject of conversion to Hinduism, among other subjects.

The problem is serious in Italy, for Hinduism is not officially recognized by the government. An individual's conversion and name change cannot be legalized. Tax deductible status is not granted to Hindu organizations. HINDUISM TODAY accepted the invitation and sent representatives Āchârya Ceyonswâmî and Sannyâsin Skandanâthaswâmî to the conference. It was in 1985 that Swâmî Yogâ nandagiri established the Gitânanda Āshram in Savona, perched in the hills a few miles from the Mediterranean Ligurian Sea above Corsica. He became a yogî in his teens and was trained in India by the late Swâmî Gitânanda of Pondicherry, among others. He learned Sanskrit, absorbed the South Indian Āgamic tradition, received sacraments making him a Hindu and was ultimately initiated as a renunciate monk. Malaysian-born Skandanâthaswâmî reported later, "I couldn't believe my eyes when we reached Savona. Swâmî Yogânandagiri and a small band of dedicated Italian Hindus have established full, traditional Hinduism at his âsrama. Stepping into his Sri Chakra temple was

like being in India. Other swâmîs teach yoga but often remain at a distance from Hinduism. But Yogânandagiri boldly declares his Hindu heritage, and that in Italy!" The conference was the first organized by Swâmî's newly created Unione Induista Italiana (Italian Hindu Union), as an attempt to unify under a Hindu banner those Italians already immersed in Indian culture.

The three days included workshops on Indian dance, yoga, âyurveda and astrology, all presented by leading Hindus. But a pivotal debate was taking place at meetings that pitted Italian professors of religion against Hindu swâmîs and delegates on the issue of converting to Hinduism. Chief adversary Professor Mario Piantelli opined that conversion to Hinduism is impossible for those not born in India. He was unanimously countered by all the Hindu delegates, who cited Indian Supreme Court decisions and statements by Swâmî Vivekânanda and Dr. S. Râdhâkrishnan, former president of India.

That might have been the end of the issue, but the day after the conference ended, a national Italian daily, L'Unità of Rome, published Piantelli's opinions in a major article. Swâmî Yogânandagiri flew to Rome to issue a rebuttal, and the debate entered the national forum. Swâmî Yogânandagiri wrote in his rebuttal: "Contrary to Professor Piantelli's statements, the Italian Hindu Union comprises people who not only love India, but have received a religious formation in India with all sacraments and who identify themselves deeply and seriously with the Hindu faith. The statement that Hinduism is a neologism referring only to those born in India is a wrong interpretation.

The word Hindu has evolved. Today in modern India Hindus are those following the principles of Sanâtana Dharma. Its main characteristic is its universality. There are no decrees or scriptures which say only those born in India can be Hindu. What about the children of the Hindus born in America, Africa, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Mauritius and Europe? They call themselves Hindu just like we Italian Hindus. So how can it be an exclusive religion only for those born in India? On the contrary, the Supreme Indian Court in 1966 codified the definition of Hinduism and in 1995 confirmed that: 'Hindus are those who accept the Vedas (sacred text) as the highest religious and philosophical authority and are tolerant and accept that truth can have many facets, who believe in cosmic cycles, rebirth and pre-existence and recognize that many paths lead to salvation.' Italian Hindus, among which there are also Indian citizens living in Italy, already exist and are recognized by Indian Hindus and Buddhists.

Many governments have legally recognized Hinduism." Swâmî had many allies. Dr. R. Gopalakrishnan, the Director of Râdhâkrishnan Institute for Advanced Study in Philosophy, University of Madras said, "As an Indian and as a Hindu, I find there is no truth in this statement that those who are born in India alone are eligible to become Hindus."

Dr. Atulchandra S. Thombare from Pune, India, noted, "A man can change his nationality, and even his sex, why not his religion?" Indian Ambassador to Italy, Mr. Fabian, a Catholic, said, "Faith is a matter of the heart and personal choice. If someone practices Hinduism and is accepted by Hindus, then he is one." Swâmî is allying himself with the Buddhists, who are also pressing for official recognition in Italy. They are, according to Swâmî, two years ahead of the Hindus in the decade-long process of changing the complex Italian laws relating to conversion. The Ceremony of Welcoming Back The vrâtyastoma ceremony ("vow pronouncement"), dating back to the Tannya Brâhmana of the Rig Veda, is performed for Hindus returning to India from abroad and for those who have embraced other faiths. One finds a wide range of converts in India, from communities such as the Syrian Malabar Christians, who adopted Christianity shortly after that religion's founding, to the Muslim converts of a thousand years ago, to Indians converted in the last few generations.

Especially in the case of many recent converts, the conversion is often superficial, and the return to Hinduism is a simple matter of ceremonial recognition. In other cases, complete reeducation is required. There are many organizations in India active in reconversion, some motivated by fears of non-Hindu dominance in regions once all Hindu.

The Masurâsrama in Mumbai specializes in reconversions through the suddhi sraddha, purification ceremony, bringing dozens of converts back into the Sanâtana Dharma each month. Masurâsrama founder, Dharma Bhaskar Ma surkar Maha râj, set a strong precedent in 1928 when he organized the purification rite for 1,150 devotees in Goa who had previously converted to Christianity. About the same time, Swâmî Âgamânandajî of the Râmakrishna Mission in Kerala recon verted hundreds to Hinduism, as did Nârâyan a Guru. More recently, two South Indian âsramas, Madurai Aadheenam and Kundrakuddi Aadheenam—have brought thousands of Indians back into Hinduism in mass conversion rites. Since the early 1960s, the Vishva Hindu Parishad has reportedly reconverted a half-million individuals through suddhi ceremonies all over India.

The VHP activities are extremely distressing to Christian missionaries who, according to an analysis published in HINDUISM TODAY (Feb. 1989), spent an average of \$6,000 to win over each convert. When such souls do return, it is the duty of established followers to shepherd them, blend them in and assist at every opportunity to make them successful members of the international extended family of our venerable faith. It is vital that reconversion campaigns are followed up with contiuing education, social improvement, community temple building and priest training to create fully self-sustaining groups. It is one of the duties of the Hindu priesthood to stand guard at the gates of Sanâtana Dharma and perform the sacred ceremonies for worthy souls to allow them entrance for the first time or reentrance into the Hindu fold in case they strayed into an alien faith and now desire to return.

The priesthoods of all four major denominations of Sanâtana Dharma, Saivism, Vaishnavism, Smârtism and Shaktism are performing the duty, empowered by the Gods, of bringing devotees back into the Hindu fold through a congregation of devotees. Swâmî Tilak aptly noted the present trend in Hinduism: “Multitudes of serious and sincere seekers of Truth are knocking at our doors. We cannot disappoint them, keeping our doors closed. We will have to open our doors and accord a hearty welcome to our new visitors. Whoever comes to us is ours, and we have a duty to make him feel quite at home with us. We must not suffer from superiority complex. Nor should fear or suspicion mar our magnanimity. While in Indonesia, we were pleased to see that the local Hindus had started taking non-Hindus in. We shall have to do the same all over. ... Marriages of mixed nature are unavoidable. Whether we like it or not, we will have to make room for them. We cannot lose a person only because he or she has got married to a non-Hindu. We should rather try to bring a Hindu’s non-Hindu spouse into our fold. In Trinidad, Guyana, Suriname and Jamaica, the pandits wisely do not perform the marriage of a mix-couple until the non-Hindu partner agrees to embrace Hinduism as his or her religion” (Hindu Vishva, July/August, 1985).

CHAPTER 6: BELIEFS OF ALL THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS

If religions have ever confused and confounded you, take heart! This next chapter, drawn from *Dancing with Siva*, was written just for you. It is our humble attempt to gather from hundreds of sources a simple, in-a-nutshell summary of the world's major spiritual paths. The strength of this undertaking, brevity, is also its flaw. Complex and subtle distinctions, not to mention important exceptions, are consciously set aside for the sake of simplicity. There are hundreds of books addressing deeper matters, but none that we know of which have attempted a straightforward comparative summary.

There is a need for no-nonsense reviews of religions, and this may hopefully begin to meet that need. By juxtaposing a few of their major beliefs, we hope to highlight how other major world religions and important modern secular philosophies are similar to and differ from Hinduism. A leisurely hour with this section under a favorite tree will endow you with a good grasp of the essential truths of every major religion practiced today on the planet. It may also dispel the myth that all religions are one, that they all seek to lead adherents by the same means to the same Ultimate Reality. They don't, as a conscientious review will show. As you read through the 171 beliefs in this study, put a check by the ones you believe. Why, you might find that you are a Buddhist-Christian-Existentialist or a Taoist-New Age Materialist. Place yourself in the cosmology of the beliefs of the world. Many have found this self-inquiry satisfying, others awesomely revealing.

Pilgrim, pilgrimage and road—it was but myself toward my Self, and your arrival was but myself at my own door. sufi mystic, Jalal al-din Rumi (1207–73) Once we have chosen and accepted our faith, it is then our spiritual duty to learn it well and live by it as a whole hearted, contributing member of a faith community so that we pass it on in a vibrant way to those who come after us, the next generation. This is carrying the traditions of the past forward, setting the patterns for our descendants, just as they were set for us by our elders. It is of the utmost importance that man's religious traditions be protected and preserved. It is our prayer that you come to know and live your religion and be fulfilled by it.

The spiritual path lies before you. Study well the religions that follow. Having studied, you will be more confident in your choice of faiths from among the many that lead to the one truth within you. It is most useful at this time that you become acquainted with religion from a broad perspective. Among these religions and the many faiths, which are potential new religions yet to be tried and proven through time, you will find your path. All of these religions and faiths are valid and serviceable to those on the spiritual path. It is not uncommon to change from one to another faith as you progress in your unfoldment. It is also not uncommon to change formally from one religion to another, even if you have been confirmed in that religion.

Religion is the foundation for all spiritual unfoldment, the basis for the practice of yoga, meditation, contemplation and inner transcendental states—itsself the stable fortress for the mind to rest within when consciousness returns from ecstasy to its normal state. Once one's religion is carefully chosen, then understood and lived, that inner stability, that foundation, which seals off the lower abysses of the mind, is permanently there. The higher doors are

open for the seeker. From our perspective, all religions are but God's Divine Law at work, and all worship the same God whom we, as Saivites, call Siva.

Nevertheless, as stated earlier, religions are not all the same. Significant differences exist. It is up to each of us to evaluate those differences and determine the direction of our quest. You will note that throughout this chapter, you are invited to write down your philosophical stance on each belief. Nine beliefs are listed for each of the world religions and faiths, and after each belief is a line for your evaluation. There are four choices. "Do believe" means that you now believe the statement given. "Do not believe" means that you have never believed the statement. "Once believed" means that you once held the belief but now do not. "Unfamiliar" means that you have never heard of or do not understand the statement. In making your evaluation, it is good to read through the all nine beliefs first before marking or checking any. When you are ready to mark your responses, check only those you are sure of first, then go back over the remaining beliefs a few times to make a final choice.

There are no right and wrong answers, for the purpose of the exercise is not to test your knowledge but to help you understand your beliefs. Therefore, be fully honest with yourself in marking your answers. When you are done with the entire section, you will know, perhaps for the first time, what you truly believe and what religion's beliefs are closest to your own. "Why," you might ask, "is this important?" The reason is that it is from our beliefs that we form our attitudes. Here is an illustration. When you observe that people of one faith behave differently from those of another faith with different attitudes, you are really seeing a different set of beliefs at work. The person of a faith that denies reincarnation will look upon a child prodigy as "lucky," whereas the person of a faith that believes in the process of reincarnation will wonder how many lives that soul worked to achieve such mastery and who he was in his last life. We are concerned with all of the great religions of the world.

Though we are of the Saivite Hindu religion, we know no barriers or boundaries, and see only that the success of any person on the path is reliant upon the depth and strength of his roots, his religious roots. A great tree with roots well wrapped around boulders and sunk deep into the earth can withstand any storm. High winds are nothing more to it than the cleansing of its branches. The individual on the path must be as firm in his religious foundation as this tree that I use as an example, in order to withstand raging emotions, depression and elation, confusion and despair. To him, they will be nothing more than a cleansing of false concepts as he dives deeper into his religion and philosophy. We can clearly see that religion and tradition are interlocked in the annals of time back many thousands of years, and we can easily ascertain how tradition moves forward from one generation to the next, setting the patterns for humanity.

Every time-honored tradition loyally serves mankind, and following it through the context of one of the great religions of the world, one cannot go astray. Religion is the bringing together of the three worlds. This means that the ascended masters, angels, devas, Deities, saints, sages of the world's major religions, living without physical bodies in the inner worlds, still guide and govern, help and protect, shower forth blessings and inspiration to the members of their religious family, such as Taoism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism and so forth. This is why it is important to have a family name that proclaims your faith constantly in daily life. One cannot be all the religions of the world unless he truly adheres to the doctrines, to the dogma and philosophy of one of them. The tree will never grow strong enough to withstand high winds if it is planted in a bucket and carried here and there.

Hinduism, the world's oldest religion, has no beginning, it predates recorded history. founder: Hinduism has no human founder. major scriptures: The Vedas, Āgamas and more. adherents: Nearly one billion, mostly in India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Malaysia, Indonesia,

Indian Ocean, Africa, Europe and North and South America. sects: There are four main denominations: Saivism, Shaktism, Vaishnavism and Smârtism.

SYNOPSIS Hinduism is a vast and profound religion. It worships one Supreme Reality (called by many names) and teaches that all souls ultimately realize Truth.

There is no eternal hell, no damnation. It accepts all genuine spiritual paths—from pure monism (“ God alone exists”) to theistic dualism (“When shall I know His Grace?”). Each soul is free to find his own way, whether by devotion, austerity, meditation (yoga) or selfless service. Stress is placed on temple worship, scripture and the guru-disciple tradition. Festivals, pilgrimage, chanting of holy hymns and home worship are dynamic practices. Love, nonviolence, good conduct and the law of dharma define the Hindu path. Hinduism explains that the soul reincarnates until all karmas are resolved and God Realization is attained. The magnificent holy temples, the peaceful piety of the Hindu home, the subtle metaphysics and the science of yoga all play their part. Hinduism 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.

GOALS OF THE FOUR MAJOR HINDU SECTS:

1. **Saivism:** The primary goal of Saivism is realizing one’s identity with God Siva, in perfect union and non differentiation. This is termed nirvikalpa samâdhi, Self Realization, and may be attained in this life, granting moksha, permanent liberation from the cycles of birth and death. A secondary goal is savikalpa samâdhi, the realization of Satchidânanda, a unitive experience within super consciousness in which perfect Truth, knowledge and bliss are known. The soul’s final destiny is visvagrâsa, total merger in God Siva. **Shaktism:**
2. The primary goal of Shaktism is moksha, de fined as complete identification with God Siva. A secondary goal for the Saktas is to perform good works selflessly so that one may go, on death, to the heaven worlds and thereafter enjoy a good birth on earth, for heaven, too, is a transitory state. For Saktas, God is both the formless Absolute (Siva) and the manifest Divine (Shakti), worshiped as Pârvatî, Durgâ, Kâlî, Amman, Râjarâjesvarî, etc. Emphasis is given to the feminine manifest by which the masculine Unmanifest is ultimately reached. **Vaishnavism:**
3. The primary goal of Vaishnavites is videhamukti, liberation—attainable only after death—when the small self realizes union with God Vishnu’s body as a part of Him, yet maintains its pure individual personality. Lord Vishnu—all-pervasive consciousness—is the soul of the universe, distinct from the world and from the jîvas, “embodied souls,” which constitute His body. His transcendent Being is a celestial form residing in the city of Vaikuntha, the home of all eternal values and perfection, where the soul joins Him upon mukti, liberation. A secondary goal— the experience of God’s Grace—can be reached while yet embodied through taking refuge in Vishnu’s unbounded love. By loving and serving Vishnu and meditating upon Him and His incarnations, our spiritual hunger grows and we experience His Grace flooding our whole being.
4. **Smârtism:** The ultimate goal of Smârtas is moksha, to realize oneself as Brahman, the Absolute and only Reality, and become free from samsara, the cycles of birth and death. For this, one must conquer the state of avidyâ, ignorance, which causes the world to appear as real. All illusion has vanished for the realized being, jîvanmukta, even as he lives out life in the physical body. At death, his inner and outer bodies are extinguished. Brahman alone exists.

PATHS OF ATTAINMENT

- Saivism: The path for Saivites is divided into four progressive stages of belief and practice called charyâ, kriyâ, yoga and jñâna. 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 jñâna, or wisdom. Saivism values both bhakti and yoga, devotional and contemplative sâdhanas.
- Shaktism: The spiritual practices in Shaktism are similar to those in Saivism, though there is more emphasis in Shaktism 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 transcend 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 sâdhanas, and that man can communicate with and receive the grace of the Gods and Goddesses through the darshana of their icons. The paths of karma yoga and jñâna yoga lead to bhakti yoga. Among the foremost practices of Vaishnavites is chanting the holy names of the avatâras, Vishnu's incarnations, especially Râma and Krishna. Through total self-surrender, prapatti, to Vishnu, to Krishna or to His beloved consort Râdhâ Râni, liberation from samsara is attained.
- Smârtism: Smârtas, the most eclectic of Hindus, believe that moksha is achieved through jñâna yoga alone—defined as an intellectual and meditative but non-kundalini yoga path. Jñâna yoga's progressive stages are scriptural study (sravana), reflection (manana) and sustained meditation (dhyâna).

Guided by a realized guru and avowed to the unreality of the world, the initiate meditates on himself as Brahman to break through the illusion of mâyâ. 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 râja yoga, which certain Smârtas teach can also bring enlightenment. .

6A. Hindu Beliefs

- 1. I believe in the divinity of the Vedas, the world's most ancient scripture. These primordial hymns are God's word and the bedrock of Sanâtana Dharma, the eternal religion.
- 2. I believe in a one, all-pervasive Supreme Being who is both immanent and transcendent, both Creator and Creation.
- 3. I believe that the universe undergoes endless cycles of creation, preservation and dissolution.
- 4. I believe in karma, the law of cause and effect by which each individual creates his own destiny by his thoughts, words and deeds.
- 5. I believe that all souls reincarnate, evolving through many births until all their karmas have been resolved and moksha, spiritual knowledge and liberation from the cycle of rebirth, is attained.
- 6. I believe that divine beings exist in unseen worlds and that temple worship, rituals, sacraments and yoga create a communion with these Gods, Goddesses and devas.
- 7. I believe that a spiritually awakened master, or satguru, is essential to know the Transcendent Absolute, as are personal discipline, good conduct, purification, pilgrimage, self-inquiry and meditation.
- 8. I believe that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered, and therefore practice ahimsa, noninjury in thought, word and deed.
- 9. I believe that no particular religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others, but that all faiths deserve tolerance and understanding.

6B. Buddhism

Founded: Buddhism began about 2,500 years ago in India.

Founder: Gautama Siddhârtha, the Buddha, or “Enlightened One.” major scriptures: The Tripitaka, Anguttara-Nikâya, Dhammapada, Sutta-Nipâta, Samyutta-Nikâya and many others.
adherents: Over 300 million.

Sects: Buddhism today is divided into three main sects: Theravâda, or Hinayâna (Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Cambodia), Mahâyâna (China, Japan, Vietnam, Korea), and Vajrayâna (Tibet, Mongolia and Japan).

SYNOPSIS Life’s goal is Nirvâna. Toward that end, Buddha’s teachings are capsulized in the Four Noble Truths, chatvâriârya satyâni:

- 1. the truth of suffering (dukha): Suffering is the central fact of life. Being born is pain, growing old is pain, sickness is pain, death is pain. Union with what we dislike is pain, separation from what we like is pain, not obtaining what we desire is pain.
- 2. the truth of the origin (samudâya) of suffering: The cause of suffering is the desire (icçhâ), craving (tanhâ) or thirst (trishnâ) for sensual pleasures, for existence and experience, for worldly possessions and power. This craving binds one to the wheel of rebirth, samsara.
- 3. the truth of the cessation (nirodha) of suffering: Suffering can be brought to an end only by the complete cessation of desires—the forsaking, relinquishing and detaching of oneself from desire and craving.
- 4. the truth of the path (mârگا) to ending suffering: The means to the end of suffering is the Noble Eightfold Path (ârya âshtânga mârگا), right belief, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right meditation.

The primary goal of the Buddhists is nirvâna, defined as the end of change, literally meaning “blowing out,” as one blows out a candle. Theravâda tradition describes the indescribable as “peace and tranquility.” The Mahâyâna and Vajrayâna traditions view it as “neither existence nor nonexistence,” “emptiness and the unchanging essence of the Buddha” and “ultimate Reality.” It is synonymous with release from the bonds of desire, ego, suffering and rebirth. Buddha never defined nirvâna, except to say, “There is an unborn, an unoriginated, an unmade, an uncompounded,” and it lies beyond the experiences of the senses. Nirvâna is not a state of annihilation, but of peace and reality. As with Jainism, Buddhism has no creator God and thus no union with Him.

PATH OF ATTAINMENT Buddhism takes followers through progressive stages of dhyâna, samâpatti and samâdhi. Dhyâna is meditation, which leads to moral and intellectual purification, and to detachment which leads to pure consciousness. The samâpattis, or further dhyânas, lead through a progressive nullification of psychic, mental and emotional activity to a state which is perfect solitude, neither perception nor non-perception. This leads further to samâdhi, supernatural consciousness and, finally, entrance into the ineffable nirvâna. Many Buddhists understand the ultimate destiny and goal to be a heaven of bliss where one can enjoy eternity with the Bodhisattvas.

Mahâyâna places less value on monasticism than Theravâda and differs further in believing one can rely on the active help of other realized beings for salvation. Vajrayâna, also called Tantric or Mantrayâna Buddhism, stresses tantric rituals and yoga practices under the guidance of a guru. Its recognition of and involvement in the supernatural distinguishes it from other Buddhist schools.

Buddism Beliefs:

- 1. I believe that the Supreme is completely transcendent and can be described as Sûnya, a void or state of nonbeing.
- 2. I believe in the Four Noble Truths: 1. that suffering is universal; 2.-that desire is the cause of suffering; 3. that suffering may be ended by the annihilation of desire; 4. that to end desire one must follow the Eight-Fold Path.
- 3. I believe in the Eight-Fold Path of right belief, right aims, right speech, right actions, right occupation, right endeavor, right mindfulness and right meditation.
- 4. I believe that life's aim is to end suffering through the annihilation of individual existence and absorption into nirvâna, the Real.
- 5. I believe in the "Middle Path," living moderately, avoiding extremes of luxury and asceticism.
- 6. I believe in the greatness of self-giving love and compassion toward all creatures that live, for these contain merit exceeding the giving of offerings to the Gods.
- 7. I believe in the sanctity of the Buddha and in the sacred scriptures of Buddhism: the Tripitaka (Three Baskets of Wisdom) and/or the Mahâyâna Sûtras.
- 8. I believe that man's true nature is divine and eternal, yet his individuality is subject to the change that affects all forms and is therefore transient, dissolving at liberation into nirvâna.
- 9. I believe in dharma (the Way), karma (cause and effect), reincarnation, the sangha (brotherhood of seekers) and the passage on Earth as an opportunity to end the cycle of

6C. Jainism

Jainism founded: Jainism began about 2,500 years ago in India.

Founder: Nataputra Vardhamâna, known as Mahâvîra, "Great Hero." major scriptures: The Jain Āgamas and Siddhântas.

Adherents: About six million, almost exclusively in Central and South India, especially in Mumbai.

Sects: There are two sects. The Digambara ("Sky-clad") sect holds that a saint should own nothing, not even clothes, thus their practice of wearing only a loincloth. They believe that salvation in this birth is not possible for women. The Svetambara ("White-robed") sect disagrees with these points.

SYNOPSIS Jainism strives for the realization of the highest perfection of man, which in its original purity is free from all pain and the bondage of birth and death. The term Jain is derived from the Sanskrit jina, "conqueror," and implies conquest over this bondage imposed by the phenomenal world. Jainism does not consider it necessary to recognize a God or any being higher than the perfect man. Souls are beginningless and endless, eternally individual. It classes souls into three broad categories: those that are not yet evolved; those in the process of evolution and those that are liberated, free from rebirth. Jainism has strong monastic-ascetic leanings, even for householders. Its supreme ideal is ahimsa, equal kindness and reverence for all life. The Jain Āgamas teach great reverence for all forms of life, strict codes of vegetarianism, asceticism, nonviolence even in self-defense, and opposition to war. Jainism is, above all, a religion of love and compassion.

The primary goal of the Jains is becoming a Paramâtman, a perfected soul. This is accomplished when all layers of karma, which is viewed as a substance, are removed, leading the soul to rise to the ceiling of the universe, from darkness to light, where, beyond the Gods and all currents of transmigration, the soul abides forever in the solitary bliss of moksha. Moksha is defined in Jainism as liberation, self unity and integration, pure aloneness and endless calm, freedom from action and desire, freedom from karma and rebirth. Moksha is attainable in this world or at the time of death. When it is reached, man has fulfilled his destiny as the man-God. For the Jains there is no creator God and, therefore, no communion with Him. The nature of the soul is pure consciousness, power, bliss and omniscience.

PATH OF ATTAINMENT The soul passes through various stages of spiritual development, called gunasthânas, progressive manifestations of the innate faculties of knowledge and power accompanied by decreasing sinfulness and increasing purity. Souls attain better births according to the amount of personal karma they are able to eliminate during life. Between births, souls dwell in one of the seven hells, the sixteen heavens or fourteen celestial regions. Liberated souls abide at the top of the universe. All Jains take five vows, but it is the monk who practices celibacy and poverty. Jainism places great stress on ahimsa, asceticism, yoga and monasticism as the means of attainment. Temple pûjâs are performed to the twenty-four Tîrthankaras or spiritual preceptors, literally "ford-crossers," those who take others across the ocean of samsara.

Jainism Beliefs

- 1. I believe in the spiritual lineage of the 24 Tīrthankaras (“fordcrossers”) of whom the ascetic sage Mahāvīra was the last—that they should be revered and worshiped above all else.
- 2. I believe in the sacredness of all life, that one must cease injury to sentient creatures, large and small, and that even unintentional killing creates karma.
- 3. I believe that God is neither Creator, Father nor Friend. Such human conceptions are limited. All that may be said of Him is: He is.
- 4. I believe that each man’s soul is eternal and individual and that each must conquer himself by his own efforts and subordinate the worldly to the heavenly in order to attain moksha, or release.
- 5. I believe the conquest of oneself can only be achieved in ascetic discipline and strict religious observance, and that non-ascetics and women will have their salvation in another life.
- 6. I believe that the principle governing the successions of life is karma, that our actions, both good and bad, bind us and that karma may only be consumed by purification, penance and austerity.
- 7. I believe in the Jain Āgamas and Siddhāntas as the sacred scriptures that guide man’s moral and spiritual life.
- 8. I believe in the Three Jewels: right knowledge, right faith and right conduct.
- 9. I believe the ultimate goal of moksha is eternal release from samsara, the “wheel of birth and death,” and the concomitant attainment of Supreme Knowledge.

6D. Sikhism

Founded: Sikhism began about 500 years ago in Northern India, now the country of Pakistan.

Founder: Guru Nânak.

Major scripture: The Âdi Granth, revered as the present guru of the faith.

Adherents: Estimated at nine million, mostly in India's state of Punjab. sects: Besides the Khalsa, there are the Ram Raiyas in Uttar Pradesh and two groups that have living gurus—Mandharis and Nirankaris.

SYNOPSIS The Muslims began their invasions of India some 1,200 years ago. As a result of Islam's struggle with Hindu religion and culture, leaders sought a reconciliation between the two faiths, a middle path that embraced both. Sikhism (from sikka, meaning "disciple") united Hindu bhakti and Sufi mysticism most successfully. Sikhism began as a peaceful religion and patiently bore much persecution from the Muslims, but with the tenth guru, Govind Singh, self-preservation forced a strong militarism aimed at protecting the faith and way of life against severe opposition.

Sikhism stresses the importance of devotion, intense faith in the guru, the repetition of God's name (nâm) as a means of salvation, opposition to the worship of idols, the brotherhood of all men and rejection of caste differences (though certain caste attitudes persist to day).

There have been no gurus in the main Sikh tradition since Guru Govind Singh, whose last instructions to followers were to honor and cherish the teachings of the ten gurus as embodied in the scripture, Âdi Granth.

The goal of Sikhism lies in moksha, which is release and union with God, described as that of a lover with the beloved and resulting in self-transcendence, egolessness and enduring bliss, or ânanda. The Sikh is immersed in God, assimilated, identified with Him. It is the fulfillment of individuality in which man, freed of all limitations, becomes co-extensive and co-operant and co-present with God. In Sikhism, moksha means release into God's love. Man is not God, but is fulfilled in unitary, mystical consciousness with Him. God is the Personal Lord and Creator.

PATH OF ATTAINMENT To lead man to the goal of moksha, Sikhism follows a path of japa and hymns. Through chanting of the Holy Names, Sat Nâm, the soul is cleansed of its impurity, the ego is conquered and the wandering mind is stilled. This leads to a superconscious stillness. From here one enters into the divine light and thus attains the state of divine bliss. Once this highest goal is attained, the devotee must devote his awareness to the good of others. The highest goal can be realized only by God's grace, and this is obtained exclusively by following the satguru (or nowadays a sant, or saint, since there are no living gurus, by the edict of Govind Singh, the tenth and last guru) and by repeating the holy names of the Lord guided by the Âdi Granth, the scripture and sole repository of spiritual authority. For Sikhs there is no image worship, no symbol of Divinity

Sikhism Beliefs

- 1. I believe in God as the sovereign One, the omnipotent, immortal and personal Creator, a being beyond time, who is called Sat Nâm, for His name is Truth.
- 2. I believe that man grows spiritually by living truthfully, serving selflessly and by repetition of the Holy Name and Guru Nânak's Prayer, Japaji.
- 3. I believe that salvation lies in understanding the divine Truth and that man's surest path lies in faith, love, purity and devotion.
- 4. I believe in the scriptural and ethical authority of the Âdi Granth as God's revelation.
- 5. I believe that to know God the guru is essential as the guide who, himself absorbed in love of the Real, is able to awaken the soul to its true, divine nature
- 6. I believe in the line of ten gurus: Guru Nânak, Guru Angad, Guru Amardas, Guru Râm Dâs, Guru Arjun, Guru Har Govind, Guru Har Rai, Guru Harkrishnan, Guru Tegh Bahadur and Guru Govind Singh—all these are my teachers.
- 7. I believe that the world is mâya, a vain and transitory illusion; only God is true as all else passes away.
- 8. I believe in adopting the last name "Singh," meaning "lion" and signifying courage, and in the five symbols: 1) white dress (purity), 2) sword (bravery), 3) iron bracelet (morality), 4) uncut hair and beard (renunciation), and 5) comb (cleanliness).
- 9. I believe in the natural path and stand opposed to fasting, pilgrimage, caste, idolatry, celibacy and asceticism.

6E. Taoism

Founded: Taoism began about 2,500 years ago in China.

Founder: Lao-tzu, whom Confucius described as a dragon riding the wind and clouds.

Major scripture: The Tao-te-Ching, or "Book of Reason and Virtue," is among the shortest of all scriptures, containing only 5,000 words. Also central are the sacred writings of Chuang-tsu.

Adherents: Estimated at 50 million, mostly in China and other parts of Asia.

Sects: Taoism is a potentially mystical tradition, so interpretations have been diverse and its sects are many.

SYNOPSIS The Tao, or Way, has never been put down in words; rather it is left for the seeker to discover within. Lao-tzu himself wrote, "The Tao that can be named is not the eternal Tao." Taoism is concerned with man's spiritual level of being, and in the Tao-te-Ching the awakened man is compared to bamboo: upright, simple and useful outside—and hollow inside. Effulgent emptiness is the spirit of Tao, but no words will capture its spontaneity, its eternal newness. Adherents of the faith are taught to see the Tao everywhere, in all beings and in all things. Taoist shrines are the homes of divine beings who guide the religion, bless and protect worshipers. A uniquely Taoist concept is wu-wei, non-action. This does not mean no action, but rather not exceeding spontaneous action that accords with needs as they naturally arise; not indulging in calculated action and not acting so as to exceed the very minimum required for effective results. If we keep still and listen to the inner promptings of the Tao, we shall act effortlessly, efficiently, hardly giving the matter a thought. We will be ourselves, as we are.

The primary goal of Taoism may be described as the mystical intuition of the Tao, which is the Way, the Primal Meaning, the Undivided Unity, the Ultimate Reality. Both immanent and transcendent, the Tao is the natural way of all beings, it is the nameless beginning of heaven and earth, and it is the mother of all things. All things depend upon the Tao, all things return to it. Yet it lies hidden, transmitting its power and perfection to all things. He who has realized the Tao has uncovered the layers of consciousness so that he arrives at pure consciousness and sees the inner truth of everything. Only one who is free of desire can apprehend the Tao, thereafter leading a life of "actionless activity." There is no Personal God in Taoism, and thus no union with Him. There are three worlds and beings within them, and worship is part of the path.

PATH OF ATTAINMENT One who follows the Tao follows the natural order of things, not seeking to improve upon nature or to legislate virtue to others. The Taoist observes wu-wei, or non-doing, like water which without effort seeks and finds its proper level. This path includes purifying oneself through stilling the appetites and the emotions, accomplished in part through meditation, breath control and other forms of inner discipline, generally under a master. The foremost practice is goodness or naturalness, and detachment from the Ten Thousand Things of the world.

Taoism Beliefs

1. I believe that the Eternal may be understood as the Tao, or "Way," which embraces the moral and physical order of the universe, the path of virtue which Heaven itself follows, and the Absolute—yet so great is it that "the Tao that can be described is not the Eternal Tao."
2. I believe in the unique greatness of the sage Lao-tsu and in his disciple Chuang-tsu.
3. I believe in the scriptural insights and final authority of the Taote Ching and in the sacredness of Chuang-tsu's writings.
4. I believe that man aligns himself with the Eternal when he observes humility, simplicity, gentle yielding, serenity and effortless action.
5. I believe that the goal and the path of life are essentially the same, and that the Tao can be known only to exalted beings who realize it themselves—reflections of the Beyond are of no avail.
6. I believe the omniscient and impersonal Supreme is implacable, beyond concern for human woe, but that there exist lesser Divinities— from the high Gods who endure for eons, to the nature spirits and demons.
7. I believe that all actions create their opposing forces, and the wise will seek inaction in action.
8. I believe that man is one of the Ten Thousand Things of manifestation, is finite and will pass; only the Tao endures forever.
9. I believe in the oneness of all creation, in the spirituality of the material realms and in the brotherhood of all men.

6F. Confucianism

Founded: Confucianism began about 2,500 years ago in China.

Founder: Supreme Sage K'ung-fu-tsu (Confucius) and Second Sage Meng-tzu (Mencius).

Major scriptures: The Analects, Doctrine of the Mean, Great Learning and Mencius.

Adherents: Estimated at 350 million, mostly in China, Japan, Burma and Thailand.

Sects: There are no formal sects within Confucianism. Followers are free to profess other religions yet still be Confucianists.

SYNOPSIS Confucianism is, and has been for over 25 centuries, the dominant philosophical system in China and the guiding light in almost every aspect of Chinese life. Confucius and his followers traveled throughout the many feudal states of the Chinese empire, persuading rulers to adopt his social reforms. They did not offer a point-by-point program, but stressed instead the "Way," or "One Thread," Jen (also translated as "humanity or love"), that runs through all Confucius' teachings. They urged individuals to strive for perfect virtue, righteousness (called Yi) and improvement of character. They taught the importance of harmony in the family, order in the state and peace in the empire, which they saw as inherently interdependent. Teachings emphasize a code of conduct, self-cultivation and propriety—and thus the attainment of social and national order. Stress is more on human duty and the ideal of the "superior man" than on a divine or supramundane Reality. Still, Confucius fasted, worshiped the ancestors, attended sacrifices and sought to live in harmony with Heaven. Confucianism is now enjoying a renaissance in China.

The primary goal of Confucianism is to create a true nobility through proper education and the inculcation of all the virtues. It is described as the return to the way of one's ancestors, and the classics are studied to discover the ancient way of virtue. Spiritual nobility is attainable by all men; it is a moral achievement. Confucius accepted the Tao, but placed emphasis on this return to an idealized age and the cultivation of the superior man, on the pragmatic rather than the mystical. The superior man's greatest virtue is benevolent love. The other great virtues are duty, wisdom, truth and propriety. Salvation is seen as realizing and living one's natural goodness, which is endowed by heaven through education. The superior man always knows the right and follows his knowledge.

PATH OF ATTAINMENT Besides virtue, the five relationships offer the follower of Confucianism the means for progressing. These five relationships are to his ruler, his father, his wife, his elder brother and his friend. Ancestors are revered in Confucianism, and it is assumed that their spirit survives death. With respect to a Deity, Confucius was himself an agnostic, preferring to place emphasis on the ethical life here rather than to speak of a spiritual life beyond earthly existence, guiding men's minds not to the future, but to the present and the past.

6G Confucian Beliefs

1. I believe in the presence of the Supreme Ruler in all things, and in Heaven as the Ethical Principle whose law is order, impersonal and yet interested in mankind.
2. I believe that the purpose of life is to follow an orderly and reverent existence in accord with Li, propriety or virtue, so as to become the Superior Man.
3. I believe in the Golden Rule: “Never do to others what you would not like them to do to you.”
4. I believe that Confucius, China’s First Sage, is the Master of Life whose teachings embody the most profound understanding of Earth and Heaven, and that Mencius is China’s Second Sage.
5. I believe in the writings of Confucius as scriptural truth and in the Four Sacred Books: The Analects, Doctrine of the Mean, Great Learning, and Mencius.
6. I believe that each man has five relationships, entailing five duties to his fellow man: to his ruler, to his father, to his wife, to his elder brother and to his friend—the foremost being his familial duties.
7. I believe that human nature is inherently good, and evil is an unnatural condition arising from in harmony.
8. I believe that man is master of his own life and fate, free to conduct himself as he will, and that he should cultivate qualities of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom and sincerity.
9. I believe that the family is the most essential institution among men, and that religion should support the family and the state.

Shintoism Beliefs

Founded: Shintoism began around 2,500–3,000 years ago in Japan.

Founder: Each of the thirteen ancient sects has its own founder.

Major scriptures: Kojiki (Record of Ancient Things), Nihongi (Chronicles of Japan), a later work, Yengishiki (Institutes of the period of Yengi), and the Collection of 10,000 Leaves are the primary works, but they are not regarded as revealed scripture.

Adherents: Estimated at 30 million, mostly in Japan. Most are also Buddhists.

SYNOPSIS There are two main divisions. One is the thirteen ancient sects, all very similar. The second is known as State Shinto, and is a later synthesis finding its highest expression in the worship of the Emperor and loyalty to the State and family. Shinto (from the Chinese characters Shen and Tao, signifying the “Way of the Spirits”) is called Kami-no-michi in its native Japan. Kami are the many Gods or nature spirits. Shinto shrines are many—over 100,000 in Japan. In the shrines no images are worshiped, rather it is considered that the Kami themselves are there. Fresh foods, water, incense, etc., are offered daily upon the altar. There is an inward belief in the sacredness of the whole of the universe, that man can be in tune with this sacredness. Stress is placed on truthfulness and purification through which man may remove the “dust” which conceals his inherently divine nature and thus receive the guidance and blessings of Kami. The Shintoist’s ardent love of the motherland has found unique expression in the loyalty and devotion of the Japanese people to their state institutions.

The primary goal of Shintoism is to achieve immortality among the ancestral beings, the Kami. Kami is understood by the Shintoist as a supernatural, holy power living in or connected to the world of the spirit. Shintoism is strongly animistic, as are most Eastern and Oriental faiths, believing that all living things possess a Kami nature. Man’s nature is the highest, for he possesses the most Kami. Salvation is living in the spirit world with these divine beings, the Kami.

PATH OF ATTAINMENT Salvation is achieved in Shinto through observance of all taboos and the avoidance of persons and objects which might cause impurity or pollution. Prayers are made and offerings brought to the temples of the Gods and Goddesses, of which there are said to be 800 myriad in the universe. Man has no Supreme God to obey, but needs only know how to adjust to Kami in its various manifestations. A person’s Kami nature survives death, and a man naturally desires to be worthy of being remembered with approbation by his descendants. Therefore, fulfillment of duty is a most important aspect of Shinto

6H Shintoism Beliefs

1. I believe in the "Way of the Gods," Kami-no-michi, which asserts nature's sacredness and uniquely reveals the supernatural.
2. I believe there is not a single Supreme Being, but myriad Gods, superior beings, among all the wonders of the universe which is not inanimate but filled everywhere with sentient life
3. I believe in the scriptural authority of the great books known as the Record of Ancient Things, Chronicles of Japan, Institutes of the Period of Yengi and Collection of 10,000 Leaves.
4. I believe in the sanctity of cleanliness and purity, of body and spirit, and that impurity is a religious transgression.
5. I believe that the State is a divine institution whose laws should not be transgressed and to which individuals must sacrifice their own needs.
6. I believe in moral and spiritual uprightness as the cornerstone of religious ethics and in the supreme value of loyalty.
7. I believe that the supernatural reveals itself through all that is natural and beautiful, and value these above philosophical or theological doctrine.
8. I believe that whatever is, is Divine Spirit, that the world is a one brotherhood, that all men are capable of deep affinity with the Divine and that there exists no evil in the world whatsoever.
9. I believe in the practical use of ceremony and ritual, and in the worship of the Deities that animate nature, including the Sun Goddess Amaterasu, the Moon God Tsuki-yomi, and the Storm God Sasa-no-wo.

6I. Zoroastrianism

Founded: Zoroastrianism began 2,600 years ago in ancient Iran.

Founder: Spenta Zarathustra (Zoroaster).

Major scripture: Portions of the Zend Avesta (Persian).

Adherents: 125,000, mostly near Mumbai, where they are called Parsis. sects: The present-day sects are three: Shahenshai, Kadmi and Fassali. SYNOPSIS Two principles form the basis of Zoroastrian ethics: the maintenance of life and the struggle against evil. In order to maintain life, one must till the soil, raise cattle, marry and have children. Asceticism and celibacy are condemned; purity and avoidance of defilement (from death, demons, etc.) are valued. In order to combat evil, one must at all times oppose the forces of evil and those who side with them. Zoroastrianism stresses monotheism, while recognizing the universal sway of two opposite forces (dualism). The powers of good are led by Ahura Mazda, or Ormazd (the Wise Lord), and the forces of evil by Angra Mainyu or Ahriman (the Evil Spirit). Each side has an array of warriors; bands of angels and archangels on one side and hosts of demons and archfiends on the other. Good will eventually triumph on Judgment Day, when a Messiah and Savior named Saoshyant will appear to punish the wicked and establish the righteous in a paradise on Earth. A central feature of the faith is the sacred fire that is constantly kept burning in every home, fueled by fragrant sandalwood. Fire is considered the only worshipful symbol, the great purifier and sustainer, of the nature of the sun itself.

The goal of Zoroastrianism is to be rewarded with a place in heaven where the soul will be with God, called Ahura Mazda, sharing His blessed existence forever.

PATH OF ATTAINMENT Man's life, according to Zoroastrianism, is a moral struggle, not a search for knowledge or enlightenment. He is put on the earth to affirm and approve the world, not to deny it, not to escape from it. Salvation is found in obedience to the will of Ahura Mazda as revealed and taught by His prophet, Zoroaster. Man has but one life. He also has the freedom to choose between good and evil, the latter being embodied in Angra Mainyu who rebelled against God. At death, each is judged and consigned to his deserved abode. Zoroastrians hold truth as the greatest virtue, followed by good thoughts, words and deeds. They value the ethical life most highly. Though there will be a resurrection of the dead, a judgment and a kingdom of heaven on Earth, followed by punishment of the wicked, all sins are eventually burned away and all of mankind exists forever with Ahura Mazda. Hell, for the Zoroastrian, is not eternal.

6J.Zoroastrian Beliefs

1. I believe there are two Great Beings in the universe. One, Ahura Mazda, created man and all that is good, beautiful and true, while the other, Angra Mainyu, vivifies all that is evil, ugly and destructive.
2. I believe that man has free will to align himself with good or evil, and when all mankind is in harmony with the God Ahura Mazda, Angra Mainyu will be conquered.
3. I believe the soul is immortal and upon death crosses over Hell by a narrow bridge—the good crossing safely to Heaven and the evil falling into Hell.
4. I believe that a savior named Saoshyant will appear at the end of time, born of a virgin, reviving the dead, rewarding the good and punishing the evil, and thereafter Ahura Mazda will reign.
5. I believe that Zoroaster, also known as Zarathustra, is the foremost Prophet of God.
6. I believe in the scriptural authority of the Zend Avesta.
7. I believe that purity is the first virtue, truth the second and charity the third—and that man must discipline himself by good thoughts, words and deeds.
8. I believe that marriage excels continence, action excels contemplation and forgiveness excels revenge.
9. I believe in God as Seven Persons: Eternal Light; Right and Justice; Goodness and Love; Strength of Spirit; Piety and Faith; Health and Perfection; and Immortality—and that He may best be worshiped through the representation of fire.

6K Judaism

Founded: Judaism began about 3,700 years ago in the Near East, chiefly Canaan (now Israel) and Egypt.

Founders: Abraham, who started the lineage, and Moses, who emancipated the enslaved Jewish tribes from Egypt.

Major scripture: The Torah (the Old Testament and the Talmud). adherents: About 12 million worldwide, over half in the United States.

Sects: Jews are divided into Orthodox, Conservative and Reform sects, with other regional and ethnic divisions.

SYNOPSIS The religion of the Jews is inseparable from their history as a people. Much of the Torah traces the ancestry of Abraham through Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and finally to Moses, the foremost of God's prophets in Hebrew history. It was Moses who conveyed to Judaism the Ten Commandments given by God and established the religious laws and traditions. The Torah (literally, "doctrine, teaching, law") consists primarily of the written Torah, i.e. the Hebrew Bible, or the Old Testament; and secondarily of oral Torah, ultimately codified as Talmud (literally, "instruction"), in two reductions, Jerusalem Talmud and the more authoritative Babylonian Talmud. In the narrower sense, Torah denotes only the Pentateuch, i.e., the first five books of the Old Testament. But in extended usage, Torah as scripture is somewhat analogous to the Hindu Veda, which beyond the four Samhitas may also apply to their extensions, the Brâhmanas, Âranyakas and Upanishads.

As a term for moral and religious principles, Jewish Torah has as comprehensive an application as Hindu Dharma. By far the most profound characteristic of Judaism is its strict monotheism. The Jews hold an unshakable belief in one God and one God only, known as Yahweh, "whose name cannot be taken in vain," and from whom all creation flows. The Jewish people consider themselves a chosen people, apart from all the other peoples of the Earth, by virtue of their covenant with Yahweh. Much stress is placed on the hallowing of daily existence, worship in the synagogue, prayer and reading of the scriptures. Few religions can boast of such a close-knit family tradition as Judaism, making the home a great strength to the religion and a constant refuge to the faithful. Each day, morning and evening, every devout Jew affirms his faith by repeating Moses' prayer: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One."

The goal of Judaism lies in the strict obedience to the Torah, Jewish scripture, which can alleviate the plight of the individual and of society. Obeying God's law brings rewards in the future life when the Messiah will come to overthrow evil and reward the righteous in God's kingdom on the earth, the Day of the Lord. The soul thereafter will enjoy God's presence and love.

PATH OF ATTAINMENT Man has two impulses: good and evil. He can either follow God's law or rebel and be influenced by Satan, who caused God's creation to go astray. Following God's law is the highest morality, possible through obedience to the Torah, which pleases God. One must follow justice, charity, ethics and honesty, being true to the one true God, Yahweh.

6L. Judaism Beliefs

1. I believe in the One God and Creator who is incorporeal and transcendent, beyond the limitation of form, yet who cares for the world and its creatures, rewarding the good and punishing the evil.
2. I believe in the Prophets, of whom Moses was God's foremost, and in the Commandments revealed to him by God on Mount Sinai as man's highest law.
3. I believe in the Torah as God's word and scripture, composed of all the Old Testament books (the Hebrew Bible) and the Talmud. They are God's only immutable law.
4. I believe that upon death the soul goes to Heaven (or to Hell first if it has been sinful), that one day the Messiah will appear on Earth and there will be a Day of Judgment, and the dead shall physically arise to Life Everlasting.
5. I believe that the universe is not eternal, but was created by and will be destroyed by God.
6. I believe that no priest should intervene in the relationship of man and God, nor should God be represented in any form, nor should any being be worshiped other than the One God, Yahweh.
7. I believe in man's spiritualization through adherence to the law, justice, charity and honesty.
8. I believe that God has established a unique spiritual covenant with the Hebrew people to uphold for mankind the highest standards of monotheism and piety.
9. I believe in the duty of the family to make the home a House of God through devotions and ritual, prayers, sacred festivals and observation of the Holy Sabbath Day.

6M. Christianity

Founded: Christianity began about 2,000 years ago in what is now Israel.

Founder: Jesus of Nazareth, or Jesus Christ, “Anointed One,” “the Messiah.”

Major scripture: The Bible—Old and New Testaments.

Adherents: Estimated at 1.5 billion.

Sects: Christianity is divided into three main sects: Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Protestant. Among Protestants there are over 20,000 denominations. SYNOPSIS The majority of Christians adhere to the Apostles’ Creed: “I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth, and Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried. He descended into Hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended unto Heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost,...the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.”

Most Christian faith revolves around the basic principles of this creed, but with important exceptions to its various beliefs. Christianity has an unswerving conviction that it is the only true religion, the only path to salvation. This engenders a missionary zeal, an urgency to evangelize around the world. Stress is placed on acceptance of Jesus as God incarnate and Savior, on good conduct, compassion, service to mankind, faith and preparation for the Final Judgment. Only good Christians will be saved and accepted into heaven. Today over half of all Christians are black. Membership is diminishing in developed nations but increasing in undeveloped nations.

The goal of Christianity is eternal life with God in heaven, a perfect existence in which God’s glory and bliss are shared. It is also a personal life, enjoyed differently by souls according to the amount of grace achieved in life.

PATH OF ATTAINMENT Man’s plight is caused by disobedience to God’s will. Man needs redemption from the forces which would enslave and destroy him—fear, selfishness, hopelessness, desire and the supernatural forces of the Devil, sin and death against which he is powerless. His salvation comes only through faith in Jesus Christ, that is, in acceptance of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead as proof of God’s power over the forces of sin and death. The good Christian lives a life of virtue and obedience to God out of gratitude to God for sacrificing Jesus for the sins of all who come to accept Jesus Christ as personal Savior and Lord. Jesus is to return again to judge the world and bring God’s rule to the earth. Through following the law of God as found in the Holy Bible and through God’s grace, man attains salvation. Those who do not achieve this blessedness are, after death, consigned to a hell of eternal suffering and damnation.

6N. Christian Beliefs

1. I believe in God the Father, Creator of the universe, reigning forever distinct over man, His beloved creation.
2. I believe man is born a sinner, and that he may know salvation only through the Savior, Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son.
3. I believe that Jesus Christ was born of Mary, a virgin.
4. I believe that Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross, then resurrected from the dead and now sits at the right hand of the Father as the final judge of the dead, and that He will return again as prophesied.
5. I believe that the soul is embodied for a single lifetime, but is immortal and accountable to God for all thoughts and actions.
6. I believe in the historical truth of the Holy Bible, that it is sacred scripture of the highest authority and the only word of God.
7. I believe that upon death and according to its earthly deeds and its acceptance of the Christian faith, the soul enters Heaven, Purgatory or Hell. There it awaits the Last Judgment when the dead shall rise again, the redeemed to enjoy life everlasting and the unsaved to suffer eternally.
8. I believe in the intrinsic goodness of mankind and the affirmative nature of life, and in the priceless value of love, charity and faith.
9. I believe in the Holy Trinity of God who reveals Himself as Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and in the existence of Satan, the personification of evil, deception and darkness.

6O. Islam

Founded: Islam began about 1,400 years ago in present day Saudi Arabia.

Founder: Prophet Mohammed.

Major scriptures: The Koran, Islam's revealed scripture, and the Hadith, the teachings, sayings and life of the Prophet Mohammed.

Adherents: One billion, mostly in the Middle East, Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Africa, China and Eastern Europe.

Sects: There are two main divisions within Islam. The Sunnis are followers of the political successors of Mohammed. The Shiites are followers of Mohammed's family successors, all martyred at an early age.

SYNOPSIS Islam means "submission," surrender to the will of God, called Allah. Those who submit are called Muslims. Islam is based upon five "pillars," or principal acts of faith to which every Muslim in the world adheres. These are:

- 1) Faith in Allah: "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is His Prophet."
- 2) Praying five times daily: kneeling in the direction of Mecca, the holy city.
- 3) Giving of alms: a share of each Muslim's income is given to support the mosque and the poor.
- 4) Fasting: throughout Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar, the faithful fast from sunrise to sunset.
- 5) Pilgrimage: the binding force of the peoples who have embraced Islam. At least once in life every believer, physically and materially able to do so, must go to Mecca, the holy city.

They go dressed in simple, seamless white garments. Islam teaches absolute monotheism and Mohammed's primacy as God's last Prophet on Earth. Stress is on the brotherhood of believers, nondifference of religious and secular life, obedience to God's Law, abstinence from alcohol, good conduct and the limitation of all except Allah. Today Islam is the world's fastest-growing religion.

The primary goal of Islam is to enjoy eternal life, both physical and spiritual, in heaven with Allah. Heaven is a paradise in which all the joys and pleasures abound, in which one lives amid beautiful gardens and fountains, enjoying the choicest foods served by sweet maidens. Man is the noblest creation of God, ranking above the angels. It is the sacred duty of Muslims to convert others to the Islamic faith. Islam has an ardent conviction that it is the only true religion, the only path to salvation. From this belief arises an extraordinary zeal, to share the faith and to convert others. The ideal human society is an Islamic theocracy.

PATH OF ATTAINMENT Total submission to Allah is the single path to salvation, and even that is no guarantee, for Allah may desire even a faithful soul to experience misery. The good Muslim surrenders all pride, the chief among sins, and follows explicitly the will of Allah as revealed in the Koran by His last and greatest prophet, Mohammed. This and this alone brings a full and meaningful life and avoids the terrors of Hell which befall sinners and infidels. He believes in the Five Doctrines and observes the Five Pillars. The virtues of

truthfulness, temperance and humility before God are foremost for Islam, and the practices of fasting, pilgrimage, prayer and charity to the Muslim community are most necessary to please Allah.

The five doctrines are:

- 1) There is only one true God, Allah.
- 2) There are angels, chief of whom is Gabriel.
- 3) There are four inspired books: the Torah of Moses, the Zabur (Psalms) of David, the Injil (Evangel) of Jesus, and the Koran, Allah's final message, which supersedes all other scriptures.
- 4) There have been numerous prophets of Allah, culminating in Mohammed, the Last Prophet.
- 5) There will be a final Day of Judgment and Resurrection. A sixth, but optional, doctrine is belief in kismet, "fate" or "destiny."

ISLAMIC BELIEFS

1. I believe that Allah is the Supreme Creator and Sustainer, all-knowing and transcendent and yet the arbiter of good and evil, the final judge of men.
2. I believe in the Five Pillars of Faith: 1) praying five times daily, 2)-charity through alms-giving, 3) fasting during the ninth month, 4) pilgrimage to Holy Mecca, Saudi Arabia, and 5) profession of faith by acknowledging, "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is His Prophet."
3. I believe in the Koran as the Word of God and sacred scripture mediated through the Angel Gabriel to Mohammed.
4. I believe in the direct communion of each man with God, that all are equal in the eyes of God and therefore priests or other intercessors are unneeded.
5. I believe in the pure transcendence of God, great beyond imagining— no form or idol can be worshiped in His Name.
6. I believe that the soul of man is immortal, embodied once on earth, then entering Heaven or Hell upon death according to its conduct and faith on earth.
7. I believe in the Last Judgment and that man should stand in humble awe and fear of God's wrathful and vengeful power.
8. I believe that truthfulness should be observed in all circumstances, even though it may bring injury or pain.
9. I believe that salvation is only obtained through God's grace and not through man's efforts, yet man should do good and avoid all sins, especially drunkenness, usury and gambling.

6P. Faiths In his search of the Divine, man has created innumerable smaller “faiths.” These spiritual paths are often charismatic or mystical in source or nature and have a powerful spiritual presence despite being numerically small. A few examples:

SPIRITUALISM: Spiritualism holds that there is another, perhaps deeper, reality on “the other side” which can be contacted by mediums or psychics who have sufficient sensitivity. It is one of the oldest forms of communion.

SHAMANISM: This broad term includes the thousands of tribal faiths which have existed on every continent since long before recorded history. Beliefs include a deep sense of the sacredness of life and of the earth, communion with spirit guides and in the ability of man to live in harmony with and influence nature.

THEOSOPHY: Inspired by Hinduism and Buddhism and founded in 1875 by Madame Blavatsky and Colonel H.S. Olcott, Theosophy emphasizes mystical experience, esoteric doctrines and monism. Theosophists seek universal brotherhood, exploring the unexplained laws of nature and the psychic powers latent in man.

UNIVERSALISM: Many faiths are based on universalist principles, often as a conscious effort to avoid certain doctrines which are seen as narrow or sectarian. Universalism arises in all religions, whether Christian (Unitarianism), Islam (Baha’i), Jain (Rajneeshism) or Hindu (dozens of integrating-all-religions movements, such as those of Satya Sâi Bâba, Krishnamûrti and Mahârshi Mahesh Yogî).

OTHER FAITHS Among thousands of other faiths are: indigenous people’s tribal religions, humanitarianism, neo-Indian religion, shamanism, Anthroposophy, Swedenborgianism, Gnosticism, Neoplatonism, Scientology, Eckankar, channeling, witchcraft, Paganism, occultism, Subud, mysticism, Freemasonry, Satan worship, Huna, Voodoo, Santaria, Sufism, Baha’i, Rosicrucianism, Christian Science and Religious Science.

A Sampling of Beliefs of Faiths

1. I believe in the fundamental unity and common source of all religions (Baha'i and Universalism).
2. I believe man's natural spirituality is best expressed in loving and practical aid to his fellow man, rather than metaphysical inquiry (Humanitarianism).
3. I believe in the unity of religions, the efficacy of devotion, sâdhana and service and in Satya Sâi Bâba as the living Incarnation of God (Saiism).
4. I believe that spiritual progress comes through analysis of current and past life experiences which resolve past karma most directly (Scientology).
5. I believe that there is no God beyond the Divine within man and no truth beyond existential freedom, that all religions imprison man, causing repression, fear and poverty (Rajneeshism).
6. I believe man's sense of the sacred can be fulfilled naturally, without formal worship, houses of God, ceremony, creeds or theology (various faiths).
7. I believe religion consists of unitive and direct mystical experience which should be the objective of every religious aspirant (mysticism).
8. I believe that the cultivation of occult powers including ESP, astral travel, past life readings, etc., is the highest pursuit of that which is spiritual (occultism).
9. I believe in the intimate relationship of man, Spirit and the earth—which is a living, sacred being—and in the brotherhood of all creatures (indigenous tribalism).

6Q. Movements

Here we explore some of the larger movements, which are not necessarily spiritual in nature, but are important currents of thought and belief which shape modern politics and society. Others that we have not delved into include Human Rights, Gay Liberation, Women's Equality, Anti-Abortion, Anti-Child-Abuse, Interfaith, Native Rights, Extraterrestrialism and more.

6Q1. DRUG CULTURE "Drug culture" refers to the fluid ideas and unrestrained way of life developed in Western societies during the 1960s. Its adherents affect a lifestyle based on the use of various natural and man-made drugs such as marijuana, hashish, peyote, mescaline, cocaine, LSD and chemical designer drugs.

Drug Culture Beliefs:

1. I believe that one can achieve the ultimate goal of enlightenment, as understood by any religion, through the use of drugs.
2. I believe that the psychedelic drug experience, properly handled, fulfills the role of a spiritual teacher or guru.
3. I believe that drugs give mystical experiences of various types identical to and therefore equally as valid as those achieved through yoga, penance, grace, etc.
4. I believe that the knowledge gained on drugs is more valid than the traditional knowledge given by society or religion because it is direct, personal experience of a higher order.
5. I believe that people who take drugs are more "aware" or "enlightened" than those who do not.
6. I believe that one can solve his personal psychological problems or "hang-ups" by taking drugs.
7. I believe in living simply, close to nature and in harmony with others and that sexual relationships need not be restricted by the traditional morals imposed by society.
8. I believe that the ideal life is to completely drop out of society, becoming self-sufficient and associating with others of a like mind, and that those who do not drop out of society but continue to involve themselves in mundane materialism are living in a lower consciousness.
9. I believe that the meaning of life is found in intense self-revelatory experiences, which can be attained through drugs that open the doors of perception to higher consciousness.

6Q2. NEW AGE The term new age was coined in the 1970s to denote an awakening of the mass consciousness to deeper realities and the need for individual attunement with universal, higher consciousness and creative transformation. In practice, new-age thinking embraces myriad enlightenment teachings (mostly of Eastern origin)—from crystallography to Zen, para psychology to holistic medicine.

New Age Beliefs:

1. I believe in the one Eternal Source or Ultimate Reality, called by many names, which flows through all forms of nature and can be known through spiritual realization and experience.
2. I believe in unseen worlds and beings who may interact with our world, and that some are benevolent and help guide and protect us, while others are malevolent, and that channeling, or mediumship, is a means of contacting such souls.
3. I believe that the world is a dynamic, conscious entity; that mankind is but one part of the cosmic ecology and that, as stewards, we must treat the world responsibly, with love, respect and reverence.
4. I believe that consciousness is present in and conveyed through some structures more than others. Thus, for example, crystals are powerful sources or channels of knowledge and spiritual strength.
5. I believe in meditation, trance, rebirthing, self-healing, channeling, past-life regression, crystals, sexual tantras, drugs and more as effective tools in the quest for wholeness and oneness with the sacred, and that one should continue to explore alternatives and not feel restricted to the disciplines of any one system of thought.
6. I believe the world has entered the New Age, the age of Aquarius, awakening to the consciousness of love, selflessness, compassion and creativity, from the old age of hatred, war, ignorance and greed. Those who perceive this vision should share it with others to uplift society.
7. I believe that traditional religions are outmoded and that we are moving toward a universal brotherhood; yet, the Eastern religions and so-called primitive faiths are rich reservoirs of truth and spiritual practice.
8. I believe in nonconformity and non-commitment: that each person is responsible to his-her own conscience only and not to the dictates of society which often unduly hamper freedom of expression, and that even spiritual gurus are to be approached with circumspection.
9. I believe that many of society's traditional economic and social structures are outmoded and should be abandoned for ones which reflect new-age consciousness, and that dropping out of society is a valid new-age alternative.

6Q3. ECOLOGY MOVEMENT In the 1980s there arose an Earth-ethics movement complete with philosophy, an immense following and compelling missionary zeal. It deemed the present global environmental imbalance so severe as to threaten future generations' quality of life, perhaps even leading to the extinction of the human race. There is a wide philosophical range among adherents:

- 1) man-centered conservationists seek to preserve natural resources for human enjoyment,
- 2) environmentalists work to preserve ecosystems and species and
- 3) "deep ecologists" call for spiritualization of human life in consonance with a sacred nature. In the 1990s this movement brought together organizational, tribal, religious and political leaders from hundreds of nations to focus on global concerns at international conferences. Adherents believe the world must act speedily to protect nature and humanity from disaster.

Beliefs of the Ecology Movement

1. I believe that all nature is sacred and One and that each life form has intrinsic value in a cosmos where elements, plants, animals and humans are intimately interconnected, essential to and dependent on the whole.
2. I believe that every human being has the right to a healthy, pristine, undiminished environment, and that we are morally obliged to work toward assuring this right for future generations.
3. I believe that all living beings have an inalienable right to exist, and that through our ignorance, assisted by science, we have disrupted life's balance and brought about the extinction of vast numbers of plant and animal species.
4. I believe that the sacredness of life demands the practice of nonviolence, that differences must be resolved by consultation rather than conflict. Nations must work toward complete disarmament.
5. I believe we must change our system of values away from materialism and consumerism, transform our hearts and minds, make simple and concrete changes in our way of life and renew our deepest religious impulses as we create a global society.
6. I believe mankind must rediscover the value of frugality, avoid waste, implement sustainable systems of nonpolluting farming, manufacturing and energy production to enable future generations to meet their needs. Simplicity of life fosters inner freedom and outer sustainability.
7. I believe that biological, cultural and religious diversity are essential to life's purpose, and that all species and human traditions, especially indigenous faiths, must be preserved through peaceful co-existence, protection of habitats through wilderness preservation.
8. I believe that the present ecological crisis is, at its heart, a spiritual crisis for the human race and affirm the importance of respecting all spiritual traditions, promoting those that foster concern and responsibility for the environment and vigorously challenging those that do not.
9. I believe that overpopulation poses one of the greatest threats to the natural environment and to the quality of human life, and that to establish a sustainable earth

community we must promote the extended family and make greater efforts to educate women and children.

6Q4. Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism describes any religious creed or philosophical persuasion marked by extreme dogmatism and intolerance. There are fundamentalist denominations within virtually every religion and faith—including Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism and Hinduism—all believing in a literal interpretation of their scripture as the exclusive truth, the one and only way which all souls must follow to attain salvation. Historically, fundamentalism, especially when coupled with evangelical zeal, has led to aggression and violence against nonbelievers.

Fundamentalist Beliefs

1. I believe that there is only one acceptable perception of truth, and it is stated in our scriptures; and all who do not accept this doctrine are following false paths and are destined to eternal damnation.
2. I believe that the gospel was spoken at one point in time by our messiah, the one and only true representative of God, and is not subject to or in need of adaptation through time or circumstance.
3. I believe that the members of our faith have been divinely commissioned by God and are duty-bound to spread His holy word throughout the world.
4. I believe that government should reflect and embody the beliefs of my faith, and that even nonbelievers should abide by our religious law as the law of the land.
5. I believe that there is in this world a battle between the believers, representing the forces of light, and the nonbelievers, representing the forces of darkness, and that ultimately good will conquer evil.
6. I believe that, if necessary, force and violence should be used to bring nonbelievers and dissidents to accept the truth of our religious doctrine, and that the use of such force is justifiable in the name of God.
7. I believe that free inquiry and the questioning of our religious doctrine is the first step to heresy and should be guarded against, and that modern liberties are forms of self-indulgence and sin.
8. I believe that our codes of morality are God's absolute commandments and are not subject to change, revision or reinterpretation.
9. I believe that education for children should consist of strict and exclusive learning of our teachings and careful censorship of other forms of thought and belief.

6R. Atheistic Philosophies

In this section we will examine the beliefs of four philosophies or world views that exclude God: materialism, communism, existentialism, and secular humanism.

Of course, there are many smaller isms that could be listed here, but these are among the most prevalent. Their ideas and teachings have great influence throughout the world, especially through Western universities and the Western news media.

Materialism is the opinion that “nothing exists except matter and its movements and modifications.” In practice it is “devotion to material needs or desires to the neglect of spiritual matters; a way of life, opinion or tendency based entirely upon material interests” (Oxford Eng. Dict.). There is a vast range of philosophies based on materialism, often embracing the philosophy of Western science, including determinism, or predetermination, the view that events occur by natural law and the results can be the only ones possible.

6R1. Materialism Beliefs

1. I believe that all religious endeavor is a waste of time and energy, that there is no God, and all so-called paranormal or psychic phenomena are quackery and superstition.
2. I believe that there is no such thing as the soul; death of the body is death of the mind, and there is no reincarnation or afterlife.
3. I believe that the material universe, governed by natural laws and chance, is the ultimate and only reality and that all apparently nonmaterial substances, such as mind, are explicable as modifications of matter.
4. I believe that science is the means of understanding all the secrets of the universe, for all phenomena are the result of material processes which are governed by predictable, natural laws.
5. I believe that free will is an illusion; that each event, being a fortuitous combination of particles and forces, can only happen in one way and is thus predetermined (deterministic materialism).
6. I believe that there is no objective “higher purpose” in life, no absolute basis for ethics or morality and no retribution for sin or reward for virtue. Seeking pleasure and avoiding pain are the only two goals rational men will pursue—what pleases me is good, what pains me is bad (hedonistic materialism).
7. I believe that all novel qualities of existence can be derived from changing material conditions—that men’s mental and spiritual life, their ideas and aims, reflect their material conditions of existence (dialectical materialism).
8. I believe that though not all things consist of matter or its modifications, whatever exists can be satisfactorily explained in natural terms (modified or naturalistic materialism).

9. I believe that man, the highest and most complex of the evolutionary process prevailing throughout the universe, may continue to evolve into an even more perfect being or higher species (utopian materialism).

6R2. Communism emerged around the turn of the twentieth century in present-day Russia as “a hypothetical stage of socialism, as formulated by Marx, Engels, Lenin and others, to be characterized by a classless and stateless society and the equal distribution of economic goods and to be achieved by revolutionary and dictatorial, rather than gradualistic, means” (Webster’s New World Dictionary).

Communism is proudly atheistic and seeks to liberate mankind from superstition and “spiritual bondage.”

Communist Beliefs

1. I believe there is no God and no knowable providential order, that this physical world is the only reality, physical beings are the only real beings, and reason is man’s highest faculty.

2. I believe religion is “the opiate of the people,” an exploiters’ tool of oppression that should be eliminated and its resources redirected to improving world conditions to lift mankind from misery.

3. I believe mysticism and religion are primitive and fraught with error, prejudice and superstition, and that modern science, based on materialism and empirical evidence, is the only respectable avenue to useful knowledge.

4. I believe that each person has but a single life and that death is final. Therefore, in this life we are to attain all that is deemed worthwhile and express our finer qualities in service to the greater social good.

5. I believe that as in the case of nature, history evolves in a continuous line from lower to higher forms, from tribalism, feudalism and capitalism to its final maturity in socialism, and that the collapse of capitalism and the establishment of socialism will usher in an age of peace and plenty, when state control will no longer be needed.

6. I believe that all men are created equal and are inherently good, and that distinctive attitudes, personalities and experiences are determined solely by one’s environment; therefore, to uplift mankind, improve the environment.

7. I believe that the views expressed by our great Marxist revolutionaries represent the one and only correct world outlook, and that it is imperative to overthrow the capitalist regimes, through violent revolution if necessary, to usher in a new order.

8. I believe that the world’s wealth should be shared equally, and that unequal distribution caused by class distinctions, is the root of all social evils, driving men to greed, selfishness and exploitation. Economic necessity is the basic moving force in society.

9. I believe there is no knowable providential order, that death is permanent, that God does not exist and that the highest life is one of intense consciousness.

6R3. Existentialism arose in Europe in the mid-nineteenth century. It teaches that God does not exist, or cannot be known, and affirms individuality and freedom. Stress is on transcendence of the mundane world through exaltation of will, the meaninglessness of existence and the absence of a substratum upon which to base truths or values. Man simply exists, free to create his own meaning in life. It is, however, important to bear in mind that there is a vital strain of religious, or quasi-religious, existentialism as well.

Existentialist Beliefs

1. I believe that there is no knowable providential order in nature or in the larger realm of existence or cosmos.
2. I believe that the being of man is ultimately meaningless, which is to say that man knows not why he exists and cannot rise to the knowledge of his destiny.
3. I believe that each man is an individual and should break his dependence on society and rely solely upon his own individual life, spirit, personality and thought.
4. I believe that immortality is not a condition of man. Death is quite realistically seen as an ultimate end and radical fact which cannot be overcome. Man should not tolerate even an anguished hope of personal survival.
5. I believe that harmony and security in human relationships are impossible to achieve, and the only satisfactory attitude toward others is based upon explicit recognition of this fact.
6. I believe that "Evil is not an illusion. It is not the effect of passions which might be cured, or a fear which might be overcome. It is not an ignorance which might be enlightened. Evil cannot be redeemed" (Sartre).
7. I believe that God does not exist.
8. I believe that the highest and best life is lived in the intensity of being fully conscious of the life experience. This experience necessarily contains problems, struggle, suffering and conflict. This is man's unalterable reality within which his free creative action and choice gives birth to the fullness of consciousness which would otherwise be deadened by security and contentment.
9. I believe that the soul of man is not whole without such unpleasant things as death, anxiety, guilt, fear and trembling, and despair. It would be the final error of reason to deny that these emotions exist, or to strive to manipulate them out of existence. Therefore, it can be said that nothing can be accomplished by denying that man is essentially a troubled being, except to make more trouble.

6R4. Humanism is “a modern, nontheistic, rationalist movement that holds that man is capable of self-fulfillment, ethical conduct, etc., without recourse to supernaturalism” (Webster’s New World Dictionary). By the term secular this stream distinguishes itself from theistic (Christian) humanism. Secular humanism evolved out of 18th-century rejection of revealed Christianity and the emergence of modern science and free thought. Modern secular humanists condemn and refute all assertions of divine or paranormal phenomena.

Secular Humanist Beliefs

1. I believe in non-theism, as there is no rational proof for the existence of God, and do not delude myself with thoughts of a Supreme Being.
2. I believe that traditional religions and faiths preach false doctrines, are oppressive and lead their followers toward ignorance, bigotry and dogmatism, and that it is my duty to be actively skeptical of, and challenge the illusions of orthodox religions and all attempts to explain the world in supernatural terms.
3. I believe in the preservation and enhancement of the human species as my ultimate concern, and in the global human family, which must preserve the Earth for future generations through developing a secular, planetary morality and system of law.
4. I believe that living a good, moral life is the best means for individual and collective happiness and that morality has a rational, secular basis.
5. I believe in expanding human rights and intellectual and moral freedom, and in secular democracy, with strict separation of church and state, as the means of eliminating discrimination and attaining equality and justice for all.
6. I believe in the development of the creative human potential through education in the arts and sciences, and in the paramount importance of free inquiry in an open, pluralistic, universalist society.
7. I believe in the application and development of reason and modern science as the highest means to understanding the universe, solving human problems and enabling each individual to realize his greatest potential.
8. I believe in striving for fulfillment and happiness in this life and reject all notions of reincarnation and afterlife as false and baseless, seeking my fullest capacity as a human being here and now, serving others and creating a better, more just world.
9. I believe in Darwin’s theory of evolution as scientific fact, and in naturalism, holding that the known world is all that exists, and that it has no supernatural or spiritual creation, control or significance.

6S.Religious Comparisons Comparing Eastern and Western Views

In the following analysis, using one of several common religious categorizations, we compare the Eastern religions with the Western ones on many points of belief. The Eastern religions are Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism. The Western religions are Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam. We can see immediately that there is a vast difference between Eastern and Western religions, with the Eastern goals being unitive and introspective and the Western goals being dualistic, extroverted.

The Eastern mind tends to see God everywhere, in all things, and to see everything as sacred.

The Western mind considers it heresy to believe that God pervades all things, and makes a strong difference between what is sacred and what is profane. In general we notice the Eastern holding to karma, reincarnation and liberation, the Western postulating a single life for the soul, followed by reward or punishment. Keep in mind that this is not a comprehensive comparison, as it does not take into account the East Asia religions—Taoism, Confucianism and Shinto. To discover your own belief patterns, take a pencil and put a check mark next to the view—Eastern or Western—which is closest to your own belief on each of the subjects. We might note here that the Eastern religions described here all originated in India, and that Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism were offshoots of Hinduism. Among the Western faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam all share a common root in Abraham, and in recent times the term Abrahamic has been coined to denote these three world religions. Naturally there are important exceptions to the views expressed (for example, Buddhism does not believe in a Personal God). Nevertheless these broad generalities are useful, as they give a scholarly window into the East and the West.

On Creation

Eastern view: The universe exists in endless cycles of creation, preservation and destruction. There is no absolute end to the world, neither is there a duality of God and world, but a unity.

Western view: The world was created by God and at some point in the future will be forever destroyed by Him. He is distinct from it, and rules it from above. Stresses a dualistic nature of the world.

On the True God

Eastern view: There is but one true and absolute God. All religions speak of Him. All souls are destined to receive God's grace through a process that takes them through diverse experiences on many paths according to their understanding, temperament and maturity of soul. God is pure Love and Consciousness but may be terrifying as well.

Western view: There is but one true God and one true religion. Those who accept it will enjoy God's grace; all others, unless they repent and come to my God, will suffer eternally in hell. God is loving as well as wrathful.

On Proof of God's Existence

Eastern view: Proof of God's existence and love lies in direct communion, and indirectly through enlightened gurus, the God-Realized men of all ages, and the revealed scriptures they bring forth in every age.

Western view: Proof of God's love and promise for man is in the person of His Prophet and in His unchanging and unique revealed scripture.

On Personal Experience of God

Eastern view: Personal, inner and often mystical experience of God is the crux of religion. Man can and ultimately must know God during earthly life. Individually oriented and introspective.

Western view: It is presumptuous for man to seek personal knowledge of God. The linchpin of religion is not experience but belief and faith, coupled with a virtuous life. Socially oriented and extroverted.

On the Path to God, and Divine Judgment

Eastern view: Man is free to choose his form of worship, for all paths lead ultimately to God. Sin is only of the mind, not of the soul, which is pure. There is no Judgment Day for God does not judge or punish. He lovingly guides all souls back to Himself.

Western view: Only one path leads to God, others are false and futile. Everyone must convert to the one true religion. Failing that, the soul, laden with sin, will be damned on Judgment Day.

On Man's Plight

Eastern view: Man's plight is but his soul's immaturity. He is ever on a progressive path which leads from ignorance to knowledge, from death to immortality.

Western view: Man's plight is due to disobedience to God's will, to nonbelief and non-acceptance of His law.

On Hell

Eastern view: God is Love and is inextricably one with the soul, guiding it through karmas into the fulfillment of dharma and finally to moksha, liberation. Hell is a lower astral realm, not a physical place; nor is it eternal. Hell exists as a period of karmic intensity or suffering, a state of mind in life or between lives.

Western view: On Judgment Day the physical body of every soul that ever lived is brought to life, and God consigns pure souls to heaven and sinners to hell, a physical place where the body burns without being consumed and one suffers the anguish of knowing he will never be with God.

On Evil

Eastern view: There is no intrinsic evil. All is good. All is God. No force in the world or in man opposes God, though the veiling instinctive-intellectual mind keeps us from knowledge of Him.

Western view: There is indeed genuine evil in the world, a living force which opposes the will of God. This evil is embodied in Satan and his demons, and partially in man as one of his tendencies.

On Virtue and Salvation

Eastern view: Virtuous conduct and right belief are the foundation stones of religious life, the first step toward higher mystical communion. Liberation requires knowledge and personal attainment, not mere belief.

Western view: If one obeys God's commands for a moral and ethical life and believes in Him and in His Prophet—for example, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed or Zoroaster—salvation is assured.

On the Origin of Religion

Eastern view: Religion is cosmic, eternal, transcending human history, which is cyclical. Stress is placed on revelation of God's presence in the here and now.

Western view: Religion is historical, beginning with a prophet or event. Stress is placed on the past and on the rewards or punishments of the future. History is linear, never to be repeated. Nature of Doctrines eastern view: Doctrines tend to be subtle, complex and even paradoxical. Freedom to worship and to believe in a variety of ways is predominant. Other paths are accepted as God's divine will at work. Universal and tolerant. western view: Doctrines tend to be simple, clear and rational. Worship and belief are formalized, exacting and required. Other paths are endured, but not honored. Exclusivist and dogmatic.

On Liberation and Enlightenment

Eastern view: The goals of enlightenment and liberation are to be found in this life, within the context of time, within man himself. Doctrines may be dual or nondual, dvaitic or advaitic.

Western view: Salvation comes at the end of the world, the end of time, and has nothing to do with enlightenment. Strictly dualistic, dvaitic. Mystical sects, though minor, provide exceptions.

On the Path to Sainthood

Eastern view: Path to saintliness is through self-discipline, purification, concentration and contemplation. Value is placed on ascetic ideals, individual sâdhana, yoga and superconscious awakening.

Western view: Path to saintliness is through self-sacrifice, submission to God and concern for the welfare of others. Value is placed on good works, social concerns and scriptural study, with little emphasis on yoga or asceticism.

On the Nature of Worship

Eastern view: Worship is individual, highly ritualistic and meditative, centering around the holy temple and the home shrine all days of the week.

Western view: Worship is congregational, simple in its rituals, centering around the church, synagogue or mosque, mostly on a Sabbath day.

SIMILARITIES On God and Devas

Eastern view: Belief in a Supreme Deity, maker of all souls and all things, and in lesser Deities and Mahâdevas.

Western view: Belief in a Supreme Deity, maker of all souls and all things, and in the angels and celestial hosts.

On Salvation and God's Will

Eastern view: Salvation is through strict obedience to God's will and the descent of His grace through the enlightened spiritual preceptor.

Western view: Salvation is through strict obedience to God's will, usually through a messiah, prophet or priest.

On Good Conduct

Eastern view: To live a virtuous and moral life is essential to further spiritual progress, for adharmic thoughts, deeds and words keep us from knowledge of God's closeness.

Western view: Religion must be based on ethical and moral conduct, for their opposite leads us away from God.

On the Destiny of the Soul

Eastern view: The purpose of life is to evolve, through experience, into our spiritual destiny. Things of the world are not the purpose of the world.

Western view: Man's destiny lies beyond this world, which is but an opportunity for earning eternal joy or suffering.

On the Nature of Reality

Eastern view: There is more to reality than we experience with the five senses. The soul is immortal, deathless and eternal, ultimately merging in God.

Western view: There is more to reality than the things of this world. The soul is immortal, deathless and eternal, living forever in God's presence or separated from Him.

6T. Comparing Judaism, Christianity and Islam The similarities between these three Abrahamic religions are stronger than their differences, though historically it is the differences that have been stressed. They each believe in a single life, followed by heaven or hell. They agree that God is opposed by evil, by Satan, who tempts and destroys sinners by causing disobedience to God's law. They are all prophet oriented, though Christianity is the only one to make the prophet divine. They believe in their religion as the one and only true religion, and that nonbelievers are condemned, though Judaism is somewhat more tolerant or universal, believing God judges all men of all religions by their actions. These three Biblical religions are strongly monotheistic and dualistic, believing man is eternally separate from God and that man's highest destiny is in heaven. Together they rely not so much on inner experience or mystical contact and guidance, as on sacred rites, on faith and belief, and on good works to guide man Godward. Each believes that God has a special covenant with its members, though the terms differ. They each bury their dead, anticipating that the physical body will one day be resurrected on the earth, rising from the grave on Judgment Day.

On the True Religion

Judaism: There is but one true religion, Judaism, and one revealed scripture, the Torah, which includes the Old Testament and the Talmud.

Christianity: There is but one true religion, Christianity, and one scripture—the Holy Bible, Old and New Testaments.

Islam: The one true faith is Islam, and the Koran is the highest revealed scripture, but other books are honored as revealed too, including the Bible and certain Hindu scriptures.

On Genesis and Original Sin

Judaism: Example of Adam, his temptation and fall from grace and in original sin. Some early and more of modern religious thinks tend to interpret this narrative as an allegory of human condition.

Christianity: The same, but taking Adam's story literally.

Islam: Same, but Allah forgave Adam. Therefore, there is no original sin.

On the Proof of God's Power

Judaism: Such proof can be seen in the historic Exodus.

Christianity: Proof of God's power lies in Christ's resurrection.

Islam: Proof of God's power is in the Koran itself.

On Man's Obligation to God

Judaism: Jews are obligated exclusively to Yahweh, since He delivered them out of Egypt.

Christianity: Man is obligated to God since He sacrificed His Son for man's sins.

Islam: There exists no special obligation; avoidance of hell is man's motivation.

On the Means to Salvation

Judaism: Salvation is through strict adherence to the Law as stated in the Torah.

Christianity: Salvation is through acceptance of Christ as Lord and Savior.

Islam: Salvation is through total submission to Allah.

6U. Comparing Hinduism and Christianity In 1993, our editors of HINDUISM TODAY were contacted by Christianity Today magazine to be interviewed for a major story called Hindus in America. Thus began a series of dialogs that added to their article crucial and often corrective in sights to dispel common myths and misinformation about the world's oldest religion. Perhaps most significantly, they agreed to publish our own nine fundamental Hindu beliefs. The editors of Christianity Today counter-composed nine parallel Christian convictions, written just before press time in a series of grueling sessions by the best theologians they could assemble. The resulting point-counterpoint—whose brevity is both its strength and its weakness—summarizes the cosmic perspective of two of the world's largest faiths.

1. On the Word of God

HINDUS believe in the divinity of the Vedas, the world's most ancient scripture, and venerate the Āgamas as equally revealed. These primordial hymns are God's word and the bedrock of Sanātana Dharma, the eternal religion which has neither beginning nor end.

CHRISTIANS believe that the Bible is the uniquely inspired and fully trustworthy word of God. It is the final authority for Christians in matters of belief and practice, and though it was written long ago, it continues to speak to believers today.

2. On the Nature of God

HINDUS believe in a one, all-pervasive Supreme Being who is both immanent and transcendent, both Creator and Unmanifest Reality.

CHRISTIANS believe in one God in three persons. He is distinct from his creation, yet intimately involved with it as its sustainer and redeemer.

3. On Creation

HINDUS believe that the universe undergoes endless cycles of creation, preservation and dissolution.

CHRISTIANS believe that the world was created once by the divine will, was corrupted by sin, yet under God's providence moves toward final perfection.

4. On the Consequence of Deeds

HINDUS believe in karma, the law of cause and effect by which each individual creates his own destiny by his thoughts, words and deeds.

CHRISTIANS believe that, through God's grace and favor, lost sinners are rescued from the guilt, power and eternal consequences of their evil thoughts, words and deeds.

5. On Reincarnation and Eternal Life

HINDUS believe that the soul reincarnates, evolving through many births until all karmas have been resolved, and moksha, spiritual knowledge and liberation from the cycle of rebirth, is attained. Not a single soul will be eternally deprived of this destiny.

CHRISTIANS believe that it is appointed for human beings to die once and after that face judgment. In Adam's sin, the human race was spiritually alienated from God, and that those who are called by God and respond to his grace will have eternal life. Those who persist in rebellion will be lost eternally.

6. On the Spirit Worlds

HINDUS believe that divine beings exist in unseen worlds and that temple worship, rituals, sacraments as well as personal devotionals create a communion with these devas and Gods.

CHRISTIANS believe that spirit beings inhabit the universe, some good and some evil, but worship is due to God alone.

7. On Religious Preceptors

HINDUS believe that a spiritually awakened master, or satguru, is essential to know the Transcendent Absolute, as are personal discipline, good conduct, purification, pilgrimage, self-inquiry and meditation.

CHRISTIANS believe that God has given us a clear revelation of Himself in Jesus and the sacred Scriptures. He has empowered by his Spirit prophets, apostles, evangelists, and pastors who are teachers charged to guide us into faith and holiness in accordance with his Word.

8. On Reverence for Life

HINDUS believe that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered, and therefore practice ahimsa, "noninjury."

CHRISTIANS believe that life is to be highly esteemed but that it must be subordinated in the service of Biblical love and justice.

9. On the Path to Salvation

HINDUS believe that no particular religion teaches the only way to salvation above all others, but that all genuine religious paths are facets of God's Pure Love and Light, deserving tolerance and understanding. CHRISTIANS believe that Jesus is God incarnate and, therefore, the only sure path to salvation. Many religions may offer ethical and spiritual insights, but only Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

6V. Comparing the Four Hindu Denominations

The spectrum of Hindu religiousness is found within four major sects or denominations: Saivism, Shaktism, Vaishnavism and Smârtism. 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 mâyâ (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 Âgamas, though their Âgamas 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 Kârttikeya are also worshiped.

Shaktism: Personal Goddess and temple Deity is Sri Devî or Shakti, female, worshiped as Râjarâjesvarî, Pârvatî, Lakshmî, Sarasvatî, Kâlî, Amman, etc. the Divine Mother.

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

Smârtism: Personal God and temple Deity is Èsvara, male or female, worshiped as Vishnu, Siva, Shakti, Ganesha and Sûrya or any Deity of devotee's choice, e.g., Kumâra 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 Râdhâ Rânî and Râma's Sitâ.

Smârtism: Shakti is a divine form of Èsvara. 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 sâdhana.

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.

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

On the Doctrine of Avatâra

Saivism: There are no divine earthly incarnations.

Shaktism: The Divine Mother does incarnate in this world.

Vaishnavism: Vishnu has ten or more incarnations.

Smârtism: 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 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.

Smârtism: Èsvara and man are in reality Absolute Brahman. Within mâyâ, the soul and Èsvara appear as two. Jñâna dispels the illusion.

On Spiritual Practice

Saivism: With bhakti as a base, emphasis is placed on sâdhana, tapas 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 non-ascetic.

Smârtism: Preparatory sâdhanas are bhakti, karma, râja yoga. Highest path is through knowledge, leading to jñâna.

Major Scriptures

Saivism: Vedas, Saiva Āgamas and Saiva Purânas.

Shaktism: Vedas, Sakta Āgamas (Tantras) and Purânas.

Vaishnavism: Vedas, Vaishnava Āgamas, Purânas and the Itihâsas (Râmâyana and Mahâbhârata, especially the Bhagavad Gîtâ).

Smârtism: Vedas, Āgamas and classical smriti—Purânas, Itihâsas, especially the Bhagavad Gîtâ, etc.

Regions of Influence

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

Shaktism: Geographically wide spread, most prominent in North India, especially Bengal and Assam.

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

Smârtism: Geographically wide spread, most prominent in North and South India.

CONCLUSION This concludes our comparison of Hinduism's four prominent denominations, and of other religions, faiths and philosophies. There are many more indigenous, tribal groups who follow similar paths with unique names, and there are many more paths yet to be discovered in the future. This chapter can be considered an outline, affording to careful readers a simple overview of those intangible human beliefs which, in all their variety, are at the root of attitudes and behavior which, over time, create culture. Hopefully it could do more; perhaps mark the beginning of discovering your own place in this grand scheme.

Conversion is easy into any one of these forms of worship, practice and attainment. It is happening all the time. All souls on the path to perfection eventually commit themselves by choosing a preceptor, one who has gone before. Journeying through life without a preceptor is like traversing the ocean without a map or a compass. Even climbing the slopes of the Himalayas, a Sherpa is needed to safely guide. Compare your beliefs, as they are today, with all those cataloged in this synopsis, and come to terms with the supreme dedication that each of these paths demands of its followers.

Having done this, declare boldly who you are to your own self. Claim your spiritual identity, your preceptor and the religious faith to which you find you belong. Then follow your chosen path with all your heart. Give it your full devotion, energy and loyalty in fulfilling its goals. True seekers on the path hoping for genuine attainment do not wander from path to path, school to school, preceptor to preceptor, because it is known that indecision inhibits all spiritual growth.

CHAPTER 7: Six Steps Toward Conversion

TO GAIN CLEAR SUB CON SCIOUS MEMORY patterns of the past for his future religious life, the individual seeking to enter Hinduism must examine and reject those beliefs of his previous religion or philosophy which differ from those of the Hindu sect he wishes to join. Then he must examine and accept the Hindu beliefs which are new to him. If he was confirmed or otherwise initiated in another religion or ideology, he must effect for mal severance from his previous religion or faith before formally entering the Hindu religion through the name-giving sacrament. Full religious conversion includes informing one's former religious or philosophical leader, preferably through a personal meeting, that the individual is entering a new religion.

Further, ethical conversion means that the parents and relatives, too, understand the momentous change that has taken place. This societal recognition, along with initiation, vow-taking and legal change of name on pass port and all documents, signifies true conversion on all levels of being. Nothing less will suffice. Even within Hinduism itself there are formal ceremonies and soul-searching requirements for Hindus converting from one denomination to another, as when a Saivite becomes a Vaishnavite or a Smârta becomes a Sakta, accomplished, in part, in some communities by writing with a golden needle the divine mantras on the convert's tongue.

Before explaining the steps of conversion, we want to advise Hindu societies worldwide to make close inquiries of adoptives and converts as to their fulfilling the six steps of conversion to open the doors to the ardha-Hindu into the fullness of the sectarian faith of his or her choice. De tailed below are the procedures for religious reconciliation that we have practiced for several decades in our own fellowship, guiding sincere souls who have initiated a process of self conversion which leads from a severance from their former faith into Saivite Hinduism.

1. First and most importantly, the devotee mixes socially and earns acceptance into an established Hindu community. The devotee should be worshiping regularly at the community's satsangas or temples, making yearly pilgrimages, per forming daily pûjâ and sâdhanas within the home and seriously striving to live up to the culture defined in the 365 Nandinâtha Sûtras of Living with Siva, which is a complete statement of Hindu values and culture.

2. POINT-COUNTERPOINT The devotee undertakes certain assigned Hindu studies and a formal analysis of former religions, denominations, sampradâyas or philosophical systems. He or she writes a point-counterpoint comparing Hinduism with each such school of thought to demonstrate a thorough grasp of the similarities and differences. Part two of this assignment is to complete a writ ten anal y sis of all former pledges or vows, indicating when and why each point mentioned in those vows was abandoned. This point-counterpoint is then presented to a Hindu elder for his review and comment.

3. SEVERING FROM FORMER MENTORS If formal severance is required, the dev o tee re turns to the former in situation and attends services or lectures for a few weeks. Then, accompanied by a relative or friend as a witness, he or she meets person ally with the former men tor. In the case of a married person, the spouse is preferred as a witness. The devotee explains that he will be joining the Hindu religion and wishes to sever ties with this church or institution. For an intimate understanding of severance, I would like to share with you a letter that one of my family counselors wrote to a potential convert from Catholicism: "Your point-counterpoint will do much for you in preparing you to meet your former priest to convince him that an inner transformation has occurred and you are indeed a Hindu soul, not a Catholic.

This is a face-to-face meeting with the religious leader of your former faith or his successor. This step is done on a very personal level, as the fire of severance takes place during this

confrontation. It cannot be done through the mail or on the telephone. "During this meeting, your conviction and clear understanding of both religions will allow your priest to see the thoughtfulness and sincerity of the decision you have made. A letter of release can, many times, be obtained before you leave his office when he sees clearly that you have completely abandoned the Catholic faith. This letter validates your personal release and clears the way for your formal entrance into Hinduism in all three worlds. It is an essential experience and document necessary for your nâmakarana samskara." We have many letters from Catholic priests, even archbishops, attesting to full conversion to Hinduism on the part of their former parishioners. In the case of formal religions, the devotee requests a letter of release, as an apostate (such as with the Catholic Church) or as an in active (as in most Protestant Christian denominations). If the religious leader grants a verbal severance but will not convey it in writing, the witness to the interview writes a letter stating what took place. This letter is later given to the guiding elder of the Hindu community which the devotee seeks to fully join.

Even if there is no granting of severance, verbally or in writing, the conversion is still considered complete, based on the canon law of the Catholic church (and which applies to other faiths in principle, such as Judaism) that someone who adopts another religion is, ipso facto, an apostate. In cases where there has been no formal commitment, such as in non-religious schools of thought, an inner severance may be effected through heartfelt conversation with former mentors of that school in which the devotee shares his or her true convictions.

4. ADOPTING A HINDU NAME The devotee then proceeds to have a legal change of name. The new name is placed on his or her passport, driver's license and all important financial and legal instruments, including credit cards, library cards and bank accounts. Even before formal entrance to Hinduism, devotees are encouraged to begin using their Hindu names at all times.

5. THE Namakarana Samskara The name-giving sacrament can be held at nearly any Hindu temple. Before the nâmakaran a samskara, the devotee informs family, relatives and close friends of his or her name change and intended entrance into Hinduism. At the sacred name-giving rite, the Hindu name is received, vows are taken and a certificate is signed, documenting the former name and the new name, place of ceremony and signature of the priest and at least three witnesses.

This sacrament marks the formal entrance into a particular sect of Hinduism, through the acceptance and blessings of established members and the blessings of Gods and devas invoked through rites performed by an authorized Hindu priest. When seeking out a priest who will perform the name giving rite, it is necessary to approach someone from within the sect that you wish to enter. Most priests will be familiar with how to perform the ritual; but if not, here are a few guidelines. More information will be posted on our Website at www.himalayanacademy.com/basics/conversion/. Arrangements must be made ahead of time. In summary, a homa (fire ceremony) is begun, with the supplicant sitting near the fire. He tells his old name and new name to the priest, along with his birth star, nakshatra.

When reciting the sankalpa (pronouncement of purpose), the priest intones the new name. A large tray of uncooked rice has been prepared. At an auspicious point in the ritual, the priest asks the participant to read aloud his declaration of loyalty to Hinduism. Then he is asked to recite his new name three times. After each recitation, the priest and the congregation proclaim, Tathaastu, meaning, "Be it so." Finally, the devotee is directed to write his new name in the tray of rice. The certificate is then signed by the devotee and witnesses.

On the day of this sacred occasion, the devotee should bring an offering basket of incense, fruits, a husked coconut, rock sugar, loose flowers and a beautiful flower garland for Lord Ganesha. Dakshinâ, a love offering for the priest, is a traditional appreciation of his services in bringing the seeker into the religion. A generous dakshinâ, a sum of us\$900 or more, is appropriate by year-2000 standards in the US, depending upon the number of priests attending. It is estimated that such a Vedic ceremony will take one to four hours and require many more hours of strict preparations. The presiding priest would be given \$301 or more, his second helper \$201 and other helpers \$101.

Traditionally, cash is wrapped in a betel leaf or its equivalent and handed personally to the priests right after the ceremony. Since this is a once-in-a-lifetime happening, the cost of the giving should not be a consideration. Of course, when the rite is performed in a temple, the management should also be given \$201 to \$501 for the use of their facilities, which would be arranged with them in advance and could be paid by check. In general, generosity is preferred to miserliness when it comes to rewarding our priests for these enormously important sacred ceremonies and passages. Such appreciation in the form of equitable payment ensures the gratitude and good feelings of the priests for the life ahead. If more than one family member is receiving the nâmakarana samskara, the amount paid to the priests and the temple would not necessarily be increased. This depends on the protocol of the particular temple. Any reception held afterwards would, of course, involve additional costs. One may elect to give gifts to the temple, such as a picture of your guru and his books and other publications, in thanks for the assistance and services.

6. The Namakarana Certificate .Four originals of the certificate should be signed: one for the temple management to display, one for the devotee's records, one for one's guru and one for legal matters, such as immigration and travel. Each original is signed by the devotee, the priest, his assistant and at least three witnesses who are established members of the faith. From his original, the devotees should send photocopies to all friends and relatives. A copy of this significant document proving membership in the Hindu faith should always be kept with one's passport to respond to institutions that ask for proof of Hindu identity before allowing entrance to their premises, such as orthodox temples in India. The nâmakarana certificate is a legal document giving the name of the temple, home or hall where the ceremony was performed.

It is proof of one's Hindu name that can be used for name changes on other documents, though ideally the name change should be legalized before the ceremony. In the United States a legal name change by court order is required to obtain a passport, and in some states it must be signed by a secretary of state. Each country has its own rules, so for these matters it is best to consult the proper authorities. For strength of character, commitment, loyalty and integrity, a double standard should be avoided at all costs, such as being a Hindu in the home and a non-Hindu to others by using the former name, or using a Hindu name on your driver's license but a non-Hindu name on your passport for international travel. This type of behavior reaps no spiritual benefits, but could reap harm to one's integrity.

After the severance and name-giving, the devotee publishes a three-day announcement in a local newspaper stating that the name-change has been completed and that he or she has entered the Hindu religion through the nâmakaran a samskara. The devotee should keep a copy of these announcements and all other documents related to the conversion (such as letters from attorneys and elders) as part of a dossier verifying the name-giving, which may be needed in the future, such as when seeking acceptance into a conservative Hindu organization, seeking permanent residency or citizenship in a foreign country or in other cases

when the Hindu name may come into question. Similarly, many temples in India and other countries will ask to see the passport, name-giving certificate or other appropriate proof of Hindu identity before admitting devotees of non-Indian origin.

CHAPTER 8: Choosing a Hindu Name

Of all the aspects of embracing the Hindu religion, the legal changing of one's name is certainly the most public, requiring adjustment on the part of friends, relatives, neighbors and even business acquaintances. A few approach this with trepidation, but the expected negative reaction—particularly from personal and business acquaintances—seldom materializes. If the family becomes genuinely concerned, this will be overcome by the obvious love, sincerity and depth of conviction of the individual. Legally changing one's name is not unusual. Women do it all the time at marriage. Movie stars rarely use their birth name. Name changes for religious reasons are almost as common.

Heavyweight boxer Cassius Clay startled the world in 1967 by proclaiming his conversion to Islam and changing his name to Muhammed Ali. But anyone who has gone through the experience of a religious name-change knows there are real obstacles. Here are a few:

1. Grandma's fears that you are rejecting the family traditions.
2. Your fears of what business associates might think.
3. The tendency to use the old name when you are among your non-Hindu friends.
4. The tendency to use the new first name and the old last name, or to modify the new Hindu name—Deva becomes Dave at work.
5. Using the name but not having it made legal.
6. Using the Hindu name with one group and former name with another, a practice of double standard that erodes one's self-image and encourages others to not take you seriously.

At my Himâlayan Academy, we have been involved with hundreds of such name changes since 1957, and our ad vice is, be strong! Take on the responsibilities of your new way of thinking and accept the karma and dharma of the Hindu community. Yes, there is a gentle departure, a break to a certain degree with your family and non-Hindu friends. But you will also be surprised how well most will understand. Some will even be influenced and encouraged by your strength. You may find that they actually share many of your convictions and that you have more in common in these areas than you had suspected.

There is probably not a single major religion in the world which does not have a unique system of names for its members, names which identify them as adherents of that particular heritage. This is well known, and there is nothing unusual about changing your name for religious reasons. In fact, it is expected and respected as a sign of genuine conviction and identity. When my monks become US citizens, the INS gives them the boon to take any name they wish, without further court proceedings—yet another example of the fluidity of names in the wider world. Naming Customs of the World People so often change their names in North America, for reasons running from marriage to difficult pronunciation, that a change of name is readily accepted. Society wisely recognizes that there are perfectly good reasons to change one's name. As I just noted, they occur with every marriage.

Most women have to go through all the processes of changing their bank accounts, driver's license, income tax records, and so on. In eastern Europe, where legislation has changed the basic assumptions concerning the family name, a different and unusual situation has developed. When a Czech woman, Anna Klimova, for instance, marries Josef Novak, both may retain their original family names, or the wife may become Anna Novakova or, more remarkably, the husband may become Josef Klima, accepting his wife's family name. This is decided by mutual agreement, and their children's names are decided in the same manner. Customs and patterns of names are different all over the world. Names have historically been changed in North America to give a more English-sounding name to one that may sound

foreign or be difficult to pronounce. Thus, Michael Igor Peschkowski becomes Mike Nichols or Josef Nejezch leba becomes Joe Neez. Name changing is common among actors, singers and performers. Judy Garland was born Frances Gumm, James Garner was James Baumgardner and Arlene Francis was Arlene Kazañjian.

Of all the nations in the world, Great Britain and the United States most closely follow the principle of Roman law that a person has the right to use and change his name as he pleases, except for fraudulent purposes. Changing one's name upon changing one's religion is a common custom. So recognized is it that in the West given names are actually called "Christian names," referring back to a time when conversion to Christianity was widespread, accompanied by the adoption of Biblical names such as Ruth, Mary, Peter, Paul, Mark, Luke and so forth.

A few decades ago in America, the Black Muslims had their members adopt Muslim names. It is quite natural that members of a religion wish to be recognized as a part of that heritage, and the name is one of the most obvious and important signs of their association. The venerable Madurai Aadheenam, a Saivite religious institution founded in South India more than a thousand years ago, brings Indian Christians and Muslims back into Hinduism, giving them a Hindu name which they legally adopt after publishing it in the local newspaper. Most American names are of English origin and are the result of a flurry of name changing and new customs regarding names—such as having two of them—which occurred in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. Before the Norman conquest of England in 1066, everyone had a single name like Cuthbeorht, Leofwine, Ethelnoth, Aethel beorht and Aethel hryth. All are true English names. After the conquest, those names were replaced by Norman names—William and Richard and John. Before 1066 only one percent of the English had a Biblical name, although they were Christians.

Two and a half centuries later, nearly everyone boasted a Christian name, again following Norman custom. Later in history, an increased social and political organization—particularly with regard to taxes and inheritance—required the addition of last names. That was when William the smith became William Smith. His son was called John Smith even if he was a farmer and not a smith. Or short Albert became Albert Short and his son was named Thomas Short, no matter what his height. Last names, then, are a fairly recent innovation, arising from the need to identify each John or Henry—the one by the bridge, the one in the woods, the short one or the one who owns the mill. The final tally for names of English origin shows one-third to be from localities, such as Brook, Wood, Ford, Lane and Bridges; another third derive from the father's name, such as Johnson (the son of John), Davidson, Richardson and less obviously Jennings, Hawkin and Hancock—all derivations from John; and the balance can be traced to occupations such as Smith, Taylor and Miller and less obviously Fletcher (arrow featherer), Mylne (variation of Miller) and Sawyer (one who saws).

Finally, there are a series which come from nick names such as Young, Gray, Armstrong and Smart. In other parts of the world the use of names is different. Among the Chinese and Hungarians, the family name comes first, followed by the given or forename, for example, Mao Tse-tung, whose family name is Mao, not Tse-tung. The Russians and Icelanders add a patronymic, a name derived from the father, between the given name and the family name. Thus, in Russia if the father's name is Ivan Krylov, then the son's name, for example, will be Pyotr (given) Ivanovich (patronymic) Kyrlov (family), and the daughter's name will be, for example, Varvara Ivanovna Kyrlova.

The usual form of address in Russian among acquaintances, neighbors and colleagues at work is by the given name and the patronymic, without the family name, i.e., PyotrIvanovich, without the Kyrlov. In Africa, one might be named Ayondela, meaning “a little tree that bends and bends as we all bend toward death.”

The American Indian name Taipa means, “valley quail spreading its wings as it alights” and Onida means, “the looked-for one.” Alaska’s Eskimos give the name of a recently departed member, as they believe this newborn to be a reincarnation of the recently departed friend or family member. The Muslims make things very simple and religious by adding Mohammed to most male names.

The Chinese make up new names for everyone. They also join first and second names in a nice meaning which might carry through the family—Precious Jade’s sisters might be named Precious Jewel and Precious Peace. They also have a tradition of repulsive names, such as “cat vomit,” which are intended to fool the evil spirits into thinking the child is unloved so they will leave him or her alone. The Hawaiians use descriptive names now coupled with Christian given names such as David Kekoalauliionapalihauliokekeoolau Kaapuava-ka me ha meha (Kekoa Kuapu for short), meaning, “the fine-leafed Koa tree on the beautiful green ridges of the Koolau Mountains.”

The Japanese use beautiful names like Umiko, “plum blossom child,” and functional ones such as Taro, “first male,” and Jiro “second male”. German Jews used to have only one name but added surnames in the 19th century. Scandanavians began using surnames at the beginning of this century. Hindu Names The most ancient and common source of Hindu names is from the names of God and the Gods. Each child receives a name selected from those of the family’s Ishta Devatâ, chosen Deity. Such names are called theophoric.

The custom of choosing a name from the Gods is among the most ancient, with examples in Persia, Greece, India and the early Indo-European civilizations. In Vedic times there was a Sanskrit convention for forming patronymics: if Garga was the father, then Gargi was the son, Gargya the grandson and Gargyâyana the great-grandson. Hindu names often indicate caste and sect. Iyer is for a certain caste of South Indian Saivite brahmins. Sharma is for a caste of North Indian brahmins.

The God names Venkatesvara or Krishna indicate a follower of Vishnu. Common names of Saivites are Natarâja, Mahâdevan, Sivalinga, Nîlakanthaha, Subramaniam, Kandiah and Kumâra. Dâs or Dâsa is a frequently used suffix meaning “slave” used by many denominations—hence Sivadas, Kâlîdâs, Haridâs. Often the first name is chosen according to the syllable mystically related to the individual’s nakshatra, birth star. There are 108 such sounds used to begin a name: four for each of the twenty-seven nakshatras.

Hindus sometimes change their name during their life as a result of a blessing at a temple or when a holy man initiates them. Swâmî Vivekânanda—who said, “Certainly, there is a great deal in a name!”—was originally named Narendranâth Dutt and had several names as a monk. The Tamil Saint Manikka vasagar was originally named Vatha vooran. My own beloved Satguru, Siva Yogaswâmî, was given the name Sadasivan at birth, then the Christian name John when he was sent to Catholic school as a child, then renamed Yoganâthan by the village headman who did not appreciate the Christian influence. Later in his life, Yoganâthan was given the title Yogaswâmî—“Master of Yoga”—and devotees used it so often that it became his name to this day.

Similarly, Kadaitswâmî, the name of Yogaswâmî's guru's guru, simply means the swâmî who frequented the kadai or marketplace. Yogaswâmî gave new names to many of his devotees, and many of those names were made legal.

A good example is myself. Yogaswâmî gave me the name Subramuniya in 1949. Returning to the United States, I had it made legal in the courts in 1950. Such changes of name in Hinduism are considered sacred moments, indicative of spiritual changes taking place on the inside. In following this tradition of the Guru Paramparâi, we at Himâlayan Academy require adoptives, converts and born Hindus with non-Saivite names, such as those named in Vaishnavite traditions, to adopt a Saivite name, first and last, and have it made legal before entering our Saiva Siddhânta Church.

A Sign of Commitment The change of name, and using it under all circumstances, and this means all circumstances, is an important sign of religious sincerity to the Hindu community. It shows the willingness of the newcomer to stand up and be counted as a Hindu. So significant is the change of name to the Hindu community that an adoptive with a Hindu name on his passport can gain entry to many temples which categorically deny entrance to Westerners on the grounds that they are assumed to be non-Hindus. Proceed with confidence. Be a hundred-percenter. Don't sit on the fence. It is risky to walk down the middle of the road. Stand up boldly and declare who you are. Western Hindus have been criticized in India for bearing Hindu names when it suits them in day-to-day circumstances, but maintaining a Christian or Jewish name on their passport, among relatives and for legal matters. Mature Hindus consider such deception noncommittal, immature and unacceptable. Legal name-change on all personal documents is one of the clearest indications of full and honest conversion. In the spring of 1988, after 20 years of dual identity, members of the ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness) community began a call for "non-Indian" devotees to adopt Vaishnava names.

Ashok Sarkar voiced the concern well in a letter to the editor published in ISKCON World Review (May 1988): "I would like to bring forth an important issue regarding the name registration of Vaishnava devotees, an issue which has been overlooked by the ISKCON administration. "The non-Indian Vaishnavas or Neo-Vaishnavas around the world have not officially changed their 'karmic' names yet. Can you imagine that after 22 years of ISKCON's successful movement, suddenly you find out that officially there are no Vaishnavas!

Therefore, I strongly suggest all Vaishnavas of ISKCON change their names officially as soon as possible. It is time for the Vaishnavas to stand up and be counted in the political world and thus have a voice in the administration of every land we live in. Let the phone books show long listings of Vaishnava names under Das and Dasi." Unfortunately, this stage of commitment never happened.

In fact, ISKCON later officially and ardently declared that they, as an organization and as individuals, are not Hindu and do not align themselves with Hinduism. Sadly, today many Hindus relinquish their beautiful Hindu names when they come to the West or alter them to fit into Western society. Thus, Sanmugasundaram may become Sam or Daram. Taking a further step away from the Hindu dharma, parents may even begin giving Christian names to their Hindu children. Alarmed at this trend, the late Swâmî Tilak of the Vishva Hindu Parishad noted, "Westernization is rapidly penetrating the well-to-do urban Hindu families everywhere. Although they assert that Westernization does not mean in any way the acceptance of the non-Hindu values, they are drifting away more and more from their traditional way of life. First, they change their names: Gyani becomes Johnny and Mira becomes Mary, on the pretext that non-Hindus find it difficult to follow Hindu names.

This contagious disease is not limited to Trinidad or Guyana alone; Hindus all over out of Bharat [India] have begun to follow this obnoxious trend. To some it may look to be simply a business trick, but it is fraught with dire consequences.

Lack of self-confidence works in its base way, which may lead one to de-moralization. All caution must be taken against this awful tendency” (Hindu Vishva, July/August, 1985). Sanskrit Birthstar Syllables According to traditional jyotishîs (Indian astrologers), among the most auspicious Hindu first names begin the syllables that corresponds to one’s birthstar, called nakshatra, which is the constellation with which the moon was aligned at the moment of birth. Below is a list of the twenty-seven nakshatras and the distinct Sanskrit syllables that correspond to each. To choose a nakshatra name (nâma nakshatra), first determine the birthstar of the child or adult, then look for the star in the list below to determine the syllable(s) with which the name should begin.

There are four sounds for each nakshatra, corresponding to the four quarters (pâdas) of each constellation. If you know the pâda under which the child or adult was born, it is best to choose the syllable of that pâda. Several of the nâma-nakshatra syllables are quite rare in actual usage in the Sanskrit language. For example, someone born under the fourth pâda of Pûrvâshâdhâ nakshatra may not find more than two or three qualifying names beginning with the syllable dha, even in extensive name lists, so it is common practice to choose a name starting with a similar syllable. In this case the syllable Asvinî Nakshatra Chu ò (as in Fu-Manchu) Che ò% (as in chase) Cho òË (as in choke) Lâ fÿ (as in lava) Bharanî Nakshatra Li /f (as in lilt) Lu f (as in lute) Le f% (as in leg) Lo fË (as in local) Krittikâ Nakshatra Å Çÿ (as in ânanda) I Ñ (as in iridescent) U Ü (as in uvula) E ä (as in egg) Rohinî Nakshatra O å (as in odor) Va Δ (as in vanilla) Vî Δ² (as in Vîn â) Vo ΔË (as in vote) MRigasira Nakshatra Ve Δ% (as in Veda) Vo ΔË (as in votary) Kâ éÿ (as in Kanji) Ke éÅ (as in Kenya) Ârdra Nakshatra Ku é (as in Kuwait) Ghâ îÿ (as in Ghana) Ng ñ (pronounced “ng”) Çhaö (as in Churchill) lable dhâ might be used, such as in the name Dhârana, or dha as in Dharma.

It is also common to resort to the syllable of another pâda within the same nakshatra if too few names are available. Why chose a name based on nakshatra? The first reason is that it vibrates in harmony with the nature of the individual in this particular incarnation, by virtue of its unique relation to the moon at the moment of birth, which has a significant impact on the inner, emotional nature. Secondly, by simply hearing the name, an astute jyotisha sâstrî, priest, swâmî or satguru would immediately know the nature of the person, cognizing that he was born under, say, the sravan â nakshatra.

He would thus be able to wisely counsel or console, advise and encourage accordingly. In ancient days, as today, this first sound of the first name was extremely important to knowledgeable preceptors. Punarvasu Nakshatra Ke éÅ (as in Kenya) Ko éË (as in kodiac) Hâ “ÿ (as in hardy) Hî “² (as in hither) Pushya Nakshatra Hû “³ (as in hurrah) He “% (as in heyday) Ho “Ë (as in homogenous) Îâ •ÿ (no English equiv.) Ashleshâ Nakshatra Îî •² (no English equiv.) Îlu •³ (no English equiv.) Îe •% (no English equiv.) Îo •Ë (no English equiv.) Maghâ Nakshatra Mâ °ÿ (as in mâyâ) Mî °² (as in miracle) Mû °³ (as in mudra) Me °% (as in megabyte) Purvaphalguni Nakshatra Mo °Ë (as in motion) Êâ çÿ (no English equiv.) Êî ç² (no English equiv.) Êû ç³ (no English equiv.) Uttaraphalguni Nakshatra Êe ç% (no English equiv.) Êo çË (no English equiv.) Pâ ¥ÿ (no English equiv.) Pî ¥² (no English equiv.) Hasta Nakshatra Pu ¥ (as in purusha) Shâ OEÿ (as in shanti) îâ Rÿ (no English equiv.) Êhâ §ÿ (no English equiv.) Chitra Nakshatra Pe ¥% (as in Peru) Po ¥Ë (as in pole) Râ çÿ (as in Râma) Rî ç² (as in Rio de Janeiro) Svâtî Nakshatra Ru ç³ (as in rumor) Re ç% (as in regulate) Râ çÿ (as in Râma) Tâ TMÿ (as in Tahiti) Visâkhâ Nakshatra Tî TM² (as in East Timor) Tû TM³ (as in tune) Te TM% (as in

terrace) To TMĒ (as in total) Anurâdhâ Nakshatra Nâ ≤^Y (as in Nagasaki) Nî ≤^α (as in Nicaragua) Nû ≤^ν (as in numeral) Ne ≤[%] (as in Nepal) Jyeshtâ Nakshatra No ≤^Ē (as in noble) Yâ æ^Y (as in Yama) Yî æ^α (as in yield) Yû æ^ν (as in Yukon) Mûla Nakshatra Ye æ[%] (as in Yemen) Yo æ^Ē (as in yo-yo) Bâ Π^Y (as in ball) Bî Π^α (as in Bini) Pûrvâshâdhâ Nakshatra Bu Π^ν (as in Buddha) Dhâ ∞^Y (as in dharma) Bha n (as in bhakti) Îhâ s^Y (no English equiv.) Uttarâshâdhâ Nakshatra Be Π[%] (as in beta) Bo Π^Ē (as in Bohemian) Jâ ú^Y (as in jar) Jî ú^α (as in jîva) Íravan a Nakshatra Ju ú^ν (as in Jupiter) Je ú[%] (ay as in hay) Jo ú^Ē (as in joke) Gha î (as in Ghana) Dhanishtâ Nakshatra Gâ î^Y (as in garden) Gî í^α (ee as in keep) Gû í^ν (as in guru) Ge í[%] (as in Gestalt) Íatabhîshâ Nakshatra Go í^Ē (as in go) Sâ -^Y (as in Sahara) Sî -^α (as in Sita) Sû -^ν (as in Sûrya) Pûrvabhâdhrapada Nakshatra Se -[%] (as in Seoul) So -^Ē (as in sonar) Dâ Æ^Y (as in Dante) Dî Æ^α (as in dípa) Uttarabhâdhrapada Nakshatra Du Æ^ν (as in duty) Tha ¨ (as in Thar Desert) Jñā ◊ (as in Jnana) Da Æ (as in Tahiti) Revatî Nakshatra De Æ[%] (as in deva) Do Æ^Ē (as in donut) Châ ò^Y (as in chakra) Chî ò^α (as in chief)

AA Abhisheka (m): inauguration; sacred oblation Acharya (m): teacher, scholar Adhyaksha (m): the great presider; Ganesha Adi (m): Primal Source; a name of Siva Aditi (f): freedom; security; Earth Aditya (m): name of seven Dieties of the heavenly sphere; a constellation; the seventh lunar mansion; the plant Calotropis Gigantea Adiyen, Adiyen (m): devotee, servant, slave Agama (m-f): coming forth; arrival; birth; knowledge; wisdom Agastya (m): thrower of mountains; one who humbles even the mountain; name of a Rishi; Siva

A Collection of Hindu Names for individuals seeking to choose a Hindu name, we have humbly assembled here a list of names primarily from the South Indian Saivite tradition, favoring shorter names which would be most easily pronounced in the West. Other very good sources are 1) The Penguin Book of Hindu Names, by Maneka Gandhi, and 2) Pick a Pretty Indian Name for Your Baby, by Meenal Pandya and Rashmee PandyaBhanot. Each book contains thousands of names from many of Hinduism's rich traditions.

There are also several wonderful websites (listed on p. 428) with extensive lists of Hindu names. As there is variety in traditions, there is variety in the pronunciation and spelling of names. For example, Shiva in the North of India may become Sivan in the South. For this purpose, we have listed a number of alternatives when multiple spellings and pronunciations exist. Names marked with an (m) are masculine, and those marked with an (f) are feminine. Names marked (m-f) are suitable for both genders. If you are adopting or converting to Hinduism, we suggest that you select a first name and a last name, and proceed with confidence. Confirm the proper pronunciation with Hindus in the community you are joining. Begin using your new name.

Later it can be made legal. Agni (m): fire; gold; God of fire Agnikumar (m): son of Agni; a name of Murugan Agranya (m): first born; Ganesha Aja (m-f): unborn; Ganesha Ajita (f): invincible; irresistible; Siva and Vishnu Alahan (m): beautiful one; Murugan Amala (m-f): spotless; pure; shining; Lakshmî and Nârâyana; plant Hibiscus Cannabinus and tree Emblica Officianalis Amara (m): immortal; a God; the Rudrâksha tree Amba (f): mother; a good woman; Durgâ Ambara (m): circumference; sky; saffron; a kind of perfume Ambika (f): mother; sensitive; compassionate; loving; Pârvatî Ambikanatha (m): Ambikâ's lord; Siva Ambu (m): water Ambuja (m): produced in water; lotus; conch; the moon Amiya (f): full of tenderness; nectar Amrita (m-f): undying; immortal; imperishable; heaven; first kâlâ of the moon; beautiful; beloved; divine nectar Anadi (m): eternal; immortal; Siva Anamaya (m-f): the savior of all ills; Murugan Anand, Ananda, Anandan (m): happiness; joy; blissful one; Siva and Gaurî Anandapriya (m): dear one who gives joy Anandi (f): bestower of pleasure; Gaurî Anant, Ananta (m): unending, eternal; the Earth; Pârvatî Anantamurti (m): of endless forms; Murugan

Anantashakti (m-f): the potent lord; Murugan Anekatman (m): the plurality of souls; Siva Anil Kumar (m): son of the wind; Hanuman Anishvara (m): having no superior; Siva and Murugan Anjali (f): prayerful Appar (m): father; a famous Saivite saint Aran (m): forest dweller; Siva Arati (f): offering of fire; worship Arul (m): grace Arumuga, Arumugam (m): sixfaced one; Murugan Arun (m), Aruna (f): red; passionate; life-giving; dawn; Sûrya Asha (f): hope; space; a quarter of the heavens Ashok, Ashoka (m): without sorrow Ashrita (f): the refuge; Ganesha Ashtamurti (m): lord of eight forms; Siva Asita (f): at rest; tranquil; at peace; Pârvatî Atmabhuvî (m-f): the unborn Self; Murugan Avyakta (m-f): the unmanifest; Siva B Babhravi (f): fire-clad; victorious; omnipresent; descendent of sage Babhru; Dûrgâ Badarayani (f): new; young; pure; perfume Bageshri (f): prosperity; beauty; a râga Bahubhuja (f): many-armed; Dûrgâ Bahudama (f): strong; powerful; a mother of Skanda's retinue Bahugandha (f): strong-scented, very fragrant; jasmine; sandalwood; musk Bahulika (f): manifold, magnified, multiplied, multifaceted personality, the Pleiades Bahumati (f): extremely knowledgeable; a scholar Bahupushpa (f): decorated with flowers; respected, venerated Bakavati (f): having the qualities of a heron: attentive, patient, watchful, cautious Bakul (f): a flower Bakula (m), Bakuli (f): a kind of tree; the fragrant flower of Mimusops Elengi Bala (m-f), Balan (m): young boy or girl; newly risen; simple; pure; jasmine Balaganapati (m): infant Ganesha Balaja (m-f): born of power; Arabian jasmine; grain; the Earth Balakunda (f): young flower; jasmine Balasarasvati (f): Goddess of knowledge Balavati (f): powerful, strong; a daughter Banashri (f): beauty of the forest Bandhupriya (f): dear to friends and relations Bandhura (f): rounded; lovely, charming Banita (f): woman Banshi (m): a flute; sweet-voiced; melodious Barhayita (f): as beautiful as the eye on a peacock feather Barhisha (f): kusha grass; ether; water; fire; sacrifice; light; splendor Baruna, Baruni (f): wife of lord of the Sea; Dûrgâ Basanti (f): of the spring; the yellow color associated with spring Basantika (f): spring Batika (f): flower Beanta (m): without end, eternal Bekuri (f): playing a musical instrument; an apsarâ Bela (f): jasmine; wave; time Beman (m): detached Beni (m): plait of hair Beniprasada (m): flowers sacred enough for offering Bhadra (m-f): fair, auspicious, beautiful; fortunate, prosperous; happy; gentle; Siva Bhadrarupa (f): of beautiful form Bhadrashashti (f): form of Dûrgâ Bhadrāsoma (f): as noble and beautiful as the moon Bhadravalli (f): beautiful vine; Arabian jasmine Bhadrîkâ (f), Bhadrîka (m): noble; beautiful, virtuous; auspicious Bhagada (f): bestower of wealth and happiness; an attendant of Skanda Bhagavat (m-f): possessing fortune; happy; divine; venerable Bhagavati (f): God and nature conjoined; the Creator Bhakta, Bhaktar (m): devotee Bhaktavatsala (m-f): lover of devotees; Murugan Bhakti (f): devotion, homage, piety Bhalla (m-f): auspicious; Siva Bhallaka (m): a bear Bhalli (f): arrow Bhamini (f): shining, radiant, glorious; passionate Bhanavi (f): descendant of the sun; shining like the sun; sacred; glorious, enlightening Bhandila (f): fortune Bhanuja (f): daughter of the sun; the Yamunâ river Bhanupriya (f): beloved of the sun Bhanushri (f): glorious as the sun Bharanda (m): one who fulfills; master; lord Bharanyu (m): protector, master; fire, sun; friend Bharatha (m): world protector Bharati (f): descendant of Bharata; articulate; meritorious, virtuous Bharga (m-f): the effulgent one; Siva Bharita (m-f): green Bhashat (m): the heart Bhasmapriya (m): a friend of the holy ash; a name of Siva Bhati (f): lovely, liked by all; perceptible; luminous; splendour Bhatta, Bhattara, Bhatti (m): noble lord; prince; king Bhattini (f): noble lady; a famous poet Bhava (m-f), Bhavan (m): existence itself; Siva Bhavabhuti (m-f): prosperity; the ashes of Siva Bhavada (m-f): giving life; cause of existence Bhavaja (f): born of the heart; beautiful; compassionate Bhavanatha (m): lord of creation Bhavani (f): noble, beautiful; Pârvatî Bhavanikanta (m): Bhavani's husband Bhavanti (f): charming; new; virtuous wife Bhavarupa (m-f): handsome or beautiful Bhavayana (m), Bhavayani (f): coming from Siva; Gaṅgâ Bhavesha (m): Siva, lord of wordly existence Bhavyakirti (f): of great fame; wise Bhima (m-f): of awesome strength; Siva Bija (f): germ, seed; element, source; the mystical root letter of a mantra Bijakshara (f): the seed alphabet, Aum, the first syllable of a mantra; the atomic alphabet; profound, omnipotent Bijamati (f): a mind

good at comprehending causes Bijanjali (f): a handful of seeds; life-giving Bijapushpa (f): a flower, maruvaka Bijli (f): lightning, bright, illuminating, enlightening Bijya (f): born of good parents Bina (f): intelligence; lute, harmonious, melodious Boddhri (m): a seer, one who knows, a preceptor Bodha (m), Bodhana (m-f), Bodhi (f): knowledge, awakening; sermon; perception; BRihaspati Bodhendra (m): lord of intelligence; Brahmani (f): Brahmâ's beloved Buddhi (f): intellect; Ganesha's consort Buddhipriya (m-f): lover of intelligence; Ganesha Ceyon (m): ancient Tamil name of Lord Murugan Chachari (m): moving quickly, restless Chaha (m): desire, desired, charming, loving Chaidya (m): intelligent; an administrator Chaitra (m): absorbed in pleasure; as pleasant as the spring Chaitraratha (m): chariot of intelligence; Sûrya Chaitrasakha (m): friend of the spring; one who incites love Chakora (m): shining; content Chakrin (m): KRishna and Siva Chakroddhata (m): the Supreme Chaksana (m): soothing to the eyes; appearance Chaksas (m): look, sight; radiance; teacher Chaksu (m): eye; Sun God, Sûrya Chaksusa (m): preceptor, seer Chala (m): ever-moving; Supreme Being Chalaka (m): directing, driving; Supreme Soul Chalameshvara (m): Siva Chaman (m): garden Chamar (m): a rod with a large tuft of hair used for fanning Chamaraja (m): leader of an army Chamasa (m): cup; vessel used for drinking soma at sacrifices Chamikara (m): gold, golden color; the thorn apple Champa (m): soothing Champaka (m): Champaka tree Chamundi (f): Dûrgâ as one of the seven mothers who destroyed the demons Chanda and Munda Chandana (m): sandalwood Chandanin (m): anointed with sandalwood; Siva Chandansu (m): hot-rayed, the sun Chandesvara (m): attendant of Siva Chandi (f): silver; fair, precious; cooling Chandipati (m): lord of Chandi; Siva Chandodeva (m): lord of the hymns Chandra (f), Chandran (m): shining, radiant; the moon Chandrabhala (m): bearing the moon on his forehead; Siva Chandradeva (m): the moon personified as Deity Chandrakin (m): wearer of the moon; the peacock, with moonlike eyes on its tail Chandrakumar (m): youthful moon; Murugan Chandramani (m): moonstone Chandramohan (m): as attractive as the moon Chandranatha (m): lord of the moon; Siva Chandrapada (m): the feet of the moon; moonbeam Chandraraja (m): born of the moon; the planet Mercury Chandravarna (m): the moon's radiance; Murugan Chandresa (m): lord of the moon; Siva Chandrika (f): moonlight Chandrila (m): possessing the moon; Siva Charuvikrama (m): handsome hero; Siva Chatresa (m): lord of the umbrella; Siva Chaturbahu (m): Vishnu and Siva Chaturveda (m): the four Vedas; the wisdom of dharma, artha, kâma and moksha Chayana (m): moon Chechanna (m): vivacious Chedi (m): intelligent; pleasant, likeable Chedipati (m): king of the Chedis; master of bliss; honorific of Shishupala Chediraja (m): king of Chedi Chekitana (m): intelligent; Siva Chetana, Chetan (m): conscious; animated; distinguished, elegant; sentient, mind; soul Chetas (m): intelligence, consciousness; splendor; soul; heart; mind Chetrama (m): pervading consciousness Chidambaram (m): hall of consciousness, Siva's shrine Chinmaya (m): full of consciousness; the supreme spirit Chitra (f): beautiful, wonderful; a picture; striking; excellent Chitrajyoti (f): wonderfully glorious; shining brilliantly Chitralata (f): wonderful vine Chitralkha (f): beautiful outline; a picture Chitralli (f): a wonderful lady Chitramayi (f): full of wonders; like a beautiful picture Chitrangada (f): with wonderful limbs; with bejewelled arms Chitrangi (f): of charming body Chitrapushpi (f): variegated blossom; Hibiscus Chitrarati (f): grantor of excellent gifts Chitrashri (f): with divine beauty Chitrini (f): having marks of excellence; ornamented; talented Chitta (f): thoughtful, intelligent; spiritual Chudakarna (m): shaven head; mendicant Chudala (f): having a lock of hair on the crown; a saintly queen Chudamani, Chudika, Chudikadevi (f): most excellent, best; jewel Chuhal (f): joyous Chula (m): man; nucleus of a comet Chulika (f): an introduction Chulin (m): Rishi; crowned; a crest Chulitaka (f): a poet Chuni (f): a small ruby; precious Chuninda (m): chosen as the best Chushini (f): female attendant of Dûrgâ Chutaka (f): a mango tree Chutalatika (f): woman of the mango tree D Dadhichi (m): a sage Dahanapriya (f): beloved of fire; wife of Agni Daksha (m-f): the skillful one; Ganesha Dakshayani (f): gold, golden ornament; daughter of a perfect being; Dûrgâ Dakshen, Dakshesh (m): clever; Siva Daksheyu

(f): striving for perfection; perfect Dalaja (f): produced from petals; honey Dalakosa (f): treasure of petals; jasmine flower Dalapati (m): army commander Damini (f): lightning; beauty Danadada (f): giving generously; an apsara or gandharva Danda (m): staff Dandapani (m): carrier of a staff; Lord Murugan Danta (f): tamed, mild; an apsara Danti (f): patience, self-restraint Danvir (m): generous Darpan (m): a mirror Darshan (m), Darshani (f): holy sight, blessing; Durgâ Darshatashri (f): of obvious beauty Das, Dasa, Dasan (m): devotee, servant of God Dasrasu (f): mother of the asvins Dattadevi (f): Goddess of gifts; mother of Chandragupta II Dattatreya (m): Given by Atri; the three-headed Divinity of Brahmâ-Vishnu-Siva Daya (f): compassion, sympathy Dayal (m): compassionate Dayamay (m): compassionate God Dayananda (m): joy of compassion Dayandhi (m): very compassionate Dayanvita (f): surrounded by mercy; merciful Dayashankar (m): source of compassion, Siva Dayavati (f): full of mercy Dayita (f): worthy of compassion; beloved, cherished Dehini (f): of the body, corporeal; bearer of the body; the Earth Desapali (f): protected by the country, belonging to the country, a native; a musical râga Desna (f): gift, offering Deva (m): a divine being or light; angel Devabrata (m): brother of Gods Devadasa (m): devotee of God Devadatta (f): given by the Gods; the mother of Gautama Buddha's cousin Devadhani (f): Indra's divine city Devadutta (m): God-given Devagarbha (f): the womb of the Gods; a river of ancient India Devagiri (f): divine knowledge; a râginî Devago (f): divine protectress; Shakti Devahuti (f): invocation of the Gods Devajami (f): sister of the Gods Devajaya (f): wife of the Gods Devajyoti (m-f): God's light Devak (m), Devaki (f): divine, glorious; pious Devakanchana (f): divine gold Devakanya (f): celestial maiden Devakiri (f): tongue of the Gods Devakri (f): myth; a râga Devakulya (f): divine pitcher; belonging to the Gods; the holy Ganga Devakusuma (f): divine flower; cloves Devala (f): attached to the Gods; music personified Devalata (f): divine vine; the double jasmine Devalekha (f): a divine line; with a divine outline; a celestial beauty Devam (m): God; Siva Devamala (f): divine garland Devamani (f): jewel of the Gods Devamata (f): mother of the Gods Devamati (f): godly minded; virtuous; venerated Devamatra (f): equivalent to a God; a mother in Skanda's retinue Devamayi (f): divine illusion Devamitra (f): friend of the Gods Devamshu (m): part of God Devanadi (f): river of the Gods Devananda (m-f): God's joy Devanangana (f): divine woman Devanatha (m): king; lord of devas Devanga (m): with God's limbs Devansha (m): part of God Devapratima (f): image of the Gods; an idol Devapriya (m): loved by the Gods Devaradhana (f): worship of the Gods Devaraja (m): Indra, king of devas Devaranjan (m): loved by the devas Devarati (f): delight of the Gods Devarupa (f): divine form Devasena (f): with an army of 303 Gods, Murugan's consort Devasenapati (m): commander of the devonic army; Murugan Devasmita (f): with a divine smile Devavanchana (f): with divine speech Devavani (f): divine voice Devavarnini (f): describer of the Gods Devavati (f): owned by the Gods Devaviti (f): enjoyment for the Gods Devayani (f): chariot of the Gods; invested with divine power Devayosa (f): the wife of a God Devayu (m): with divine life Devendra, Deven (m): chief of the Gods; Indra Devesi (f): a chief of the Goddesses; Durgâ Devi (f): angel, a name of Pârvatî Devika (f): minor Deity; God-like Devikadevi (f): invested with divine qualities Dharabhujâ (m): earth enjoyer; a king Dhama, Dhaman (m): ray; strength; splendour, majesty; house, place of pilgrimage; a rishi Dhamadhipa (m): lord of Rays; Sûrya Dhamakesin (m): ray-haired; Sûrya Dhamanidhi (m): treasure of splendour; Sûrya Dhamavat (m): owner of a house; powerful, strong Dhanadhipa (m): lord of wealth; Kubera Dhanajita (m): wealth; winning Dhanaka (m): avarice; a farmer; coriander; a Yayati king and son of Durdhama Dhanapala (m): guardian of wealth; a king Dhanapati (m): lord of wealth; Kubera Dhanaraja, Dhanraj (m): king of wealth Dhanavanta, Dhanavat (m): containing wealth; the sea Dhanavardhana (m): increasing wealth Dhanayush (m): with a rich life; a son of Pururavas Dhanesha, Dhanesh, Dhaneshvara (m): lord of wealth; Kubera Dhanin (m): wealthy; a messenger of the asuras; Kubera Dhansukha (m): wealthy Dhanu (m): the bow; the zodiac sign of Sagittarius Dhanuraja (m): king of archers; an ancestor of Sakyamuni Dhanurdhara, Dhanurgraha (m): bearer of a

bow; the zodiac sign of Sagittarius; Siva Dhanurvaktra (m): bow-mouthed; an attendant of Skanda Dhanurvedin (m): knower of the bow; versed in archery; Siva Dhanusha (m): the bow; a Rishi Dhanushaksha (m): bow-eyed; a sage Dhanva (m): with a bow; a king of Kâsî , father of Dhanvantari Dhanvanta (m): wealthy Dhanvantari (m): moving in a curve; the physician of the Gods; founder of âyurveda, a river Dhanya (f): virtuous; good; bestowing wealth Dharamvira (m): protector of religion Dharana (m): bearing, holding, keeping; resembling; Siva Dharanija (m): born of the Earth Dharen (m): one who supports Dharendra (m): king of the Earth; the Himâlayas Dharma (m): path of life; virtue; religion; duty, observance; right Dharmachandra (m): moon of dharma; religious; virtuous, venerated Dharmachara, Dharmacharin (m): observing dharma; virtuous; upright; Siva Dharmada (m): bestower of dharma; a follower of Skanda Dharmadasa (m): one who serves religion Dharmadeva (m): lord of dharma Dharmagopa (m): protector of dharma Dharmagosha (m): voice of dharma Dharmamitra (m): nectar of dharma; friend of dharma Dharmanandana (m): son of dharma; King Yudhishtira Dharmandhu (m): well of dharma; deeply religious; venerated Dharmanitya (m): constant in dharma Dharmapala (m): guardian of dharma Dharmaprabhasa, Dharmaparakasha (m): light of dharma; virtuous; religious; venerated Dharmaputra (m): son of dharma Dharmaranya (m): grove of dharma; a Brahmin devotee of Sûrya Dharmasakha (m): friend of dharma Dharmasarathi (m): charioteer of dharma; Dharmasavarni (m): resembling dharma Dharmashoka (m): Asoka the dutiful; Emperor Asoka Dharmasila (m): follower of dharma Dharmasindhu (m): ocean of dharma Dharmasingha (m): lion of dharma; one who guards, protects and practices dharma deeply Dharmasthavira (m): stable in dharma Dharmasuta (m): son of dharma Dharmasyas (m): glory of dharma Dharmavahana (m): vehicle of dharma; Siva Dharmavardhana (m): increasing dharma; Siva Dharmavarna (m): colored in dharma; virtuous Dharmavira (m): champion of dharma; defender of religion Dharmavivardhana (m): promoter of dharma; a son of Asoka Dharmayu (m): one who lives for dharma; a Puru king Dharmayupa (m): a pillar of dharma Dharmendra, Dharmesha, Dharmeshvara (m): lord of dharma Dharmendu (m): light of dharma Dharmishta (m): staying in dharma; virtuous, righteous Dharmottara (m): entirely devoted to dharma Dharsanatman (m): with a fierce nature; Siva Dharuna (m): bearing, supporting, holding; Brahmâ Dhata (m): establisher, creator, founder; supporter; one of the twelve adityas Dhataki (m): resembling the creator; a son of Vitihotra Dhatri (m): establisher, creator, founder; supporter Dhatriputra (m): Dhatri's son; Sanat kumâra, son of Brahmâ Dhaumya (m): smokey, grey; name of a Rishi Dhavak (m): runner; quick, swift, flowing Dhavala (m-f): dazzling white; pure; handsome; beautiful Dhavalachandra (m-f): white moon Dhavalapaksha (m): white winged; the light half of the mouth Dhavita (m-f): whitish; washed, purified, clean Dhavlesh (m): lord of white; Siva Dhira, Dheera (m-f), Dhiren (f): courageous; Ganesha Dhyana (m): meditation Didda (f): eyeball; a celebrated princess of Kashmir Didhiti (f): firm, stable; devotion; inspiration; religious reflection Didivi (f): shining, bright; risen as a star; BRihaspati Didyotisu (f): wishing to shine Digambara, Digvasas, Digvastra (m): sky clad; Siva and Skanda Digangana (f): quarter of the sky identified as a young maiden Digisha (m): lord of direction Dikkanya (f): quarter of the sky, identified as a young maiden Diksha (f): initiation; consecration, dedication Dikshita, Dikshitar (m): initiated; consecrated Dilipa (m): one who gives, accepts and protects; a righteous king Dimbesvari (f): Goddess of creation; Dûrgâ Dinabandhu (m): friend of the poor; Supreme Spirit Dinakara (m): that which causes the day; the sun; an aditya Dinakaratmaja (f): daughter of Dinakara; the river Yamuna Dinamani (m): day jewel; the sun Dinapati (m): day lord; the sun Dinaraja (m): day king; the sun Dinaratna (m): day jewel; the sun Dinesha, Dinesh (m): day lord; sun Dipa, Deepa (f): illuminating; light; a lamp, lantern Dipaka (m): illuminating; kindling; inflaming; lamp; saffron Dipakalika (f): flame of a lamp Dipakarni (m): with shining ears; attentive Dipakshi (f): bright-eyed Dipali (f): a row of lights Dipana (f): illuminating; impassioning; that which kindles Dipanjali (f): a lamp for praying; waved before the Deity

during ritual worship Dipavali (f): row of lights Dipavati (f): containing lights; a mythical river
 Dipen (m): lord of the lamp; light of the lamp Dipika (f): a small lamp, light, moonlight; fire plant
 Dipin (m): illuminating; exciting Dipita (m): inflamed; illuminated; manifested; excited Dipra (f):
 radiant, flaming, shining Dipsikha (f): the flame of a lamp Dipta (m): illuminated; blazing; hot;
 brilliant Dipti, Deepti (f): brightness; light; illuminating; enlightening Dirgha (m): lofty; long; tall;
 deep; Siva Dirgharoman (m): long-haired; an attendant of Siva Disa (f): region; direction; the
 point of the compass Dishta (m): settled; directed, appointed, assigned, fixed Disti (f): direction;
 good fortune; happiness; auspicious juncture Diti (f): glow, brightness, light; splendor, beauty;
 a daughter of Daksha Ditikara (m): bringing glow; irradiating, illuminating Ditimat (m):
 possessed with a glow, bright; splendid; brilliant Divakara (m): day maker, the sun Divali (f):
 row of lights Divapati (m): day lord; the sun Divija (m-f): born of the sky; heaven born; celestial
 Divoja (m): descended from heaven Divolka (f): fallen from the sky; a meteor Divya (f): divine,
 celestial, heavenly; charming, beautiful; an apsara Divyadeha (m): with a divine body
 Divyadevi (f): divine Goddess Divyajyoti (f): divine light Divyakrititi (f): of divine form; beautiful
 Divyanari, Divyastri (f): celestial maiden; an apsara Divyayamuna (f): the divine Yamuna river
 Dodahi (f): flute Dodiya (f): royal family Doma (f): a singer Dora (f): string of an instrument
 Duhsadhin (m): door keeper Dulal (m): dear one Duradhara (m): invincible; inaccessible
 Durantadeva (m): the God who removes difficulties, Ganesha Durasan (m): one who opens or
 unlocks doors; giver, granter Durgadas, Durgadasa (m): devotee of Durgâ Durgesha, Durgesh
 (m): lord of durgâ, the sacred grass; Siva Durjaya (m): invincible Durodhara (m): door opener
 Durvadeva (m): lord of durgâ, the sacred grass; Siva Durvara (m): irresistible Durvasas (m): a
 sage Dushyantana (m): destroyer of evil; a lunar dynasty emperor Duskala (m): destroyer of
 time; Siva Dustara (m): invincible Duvas (m): worship E Easan, Eashan, Eesan, Easvan,
 Eashvan (m): the Supreme Ruler Edha (f): prosperity, happiness Egattala (f): the Goddess of
 Chennai, India Eka (f): singular; peerless, unique; Durgâ Ekabhakti (f): the worship of one
 Deity Ekachandra (f): the only moon; the best one; a mother in the retinue of Skanda
 Ekacharini (f): a woman devoted to a single man; obedient; a loyal, chaste woman Ekadanta
 (m): having one tusk; Ganesha Ekadeva (m): the one great God Ekaja (f): born alone; the only
 child Ekajata (f): with a single twisted lock of hair; a tantric Goddess Ekakini (f): lonely, alone
 Ekala (m): solitary, solo singer Ekamati (f): concentrated Ekamukha (f): single-faced
 (rudraksha bead); with one mouth; extremely auspicious Ekananga (f): lover; the daughter of
 Yashoda and foster sister of KRishna Ekanayana (m): the planet Venus Ekangika (f): made of
 sandalwood; fair; frequent; auspicious; dear to the Gods Ekanta (f): a lovely woman; devoted
 to one Ekantika (f): devoted to one aim Ekaparna (f): single-leafed; living on a single leaf; the
 daughter of Himavana and Mena, the sister of Durgâ, Aparna and Ekapatala and the wife of
 sage Devala Ekarishi (m): chief Rishi Ekastaka (f): a collection of eight; the time for
 consecration; the eighth day after the full moon in the month of Magha Ekatala (m): harmony,
 unison Ekavaktra (f): single-faced; a mother of Skanda Ekavali (f): string of pearls Ekavira (f):
 outstandingly brave; a daughter of Siva Ekikarana (m): singularizing Ekisa (f): one Goddess;
 the primal Goddess Ekiya (m): a part of one whole, a friend Eksika (f): eye Ela (f): born of Ila;
 the Earth; cardamom Elana (m-f): orange Elavali (m-f): small delicate plant Elika (m-f): small
 cardamom seed Eloksi (f): with hair as thick as the cardamom creeper Enajina (m): deer skin
 (sacred to lord Siva) Enaksi (f): doe-eyed Eni (f): a deer; spotted; a flowing stream Enipada (f):
 with deer-like feet; fleet-footed Esanika (f): fulfilling desire; a goldsmith's balance scale Esha
 (f): wish, desire; aim Eshana (m): wishing, seeking Eta, Etaha (f): shining; flowing Etaka (m): a
 kind antelope or deer Etasa (m): many-hued; colorful Ethari (m): now, this moment Eti (f):
 arrival G Gagan (m): sky Gajanan (m): Lord Ganesha Gajapati, Gajendra or Gajaraja (m): lord
 or king of elephants Gaman (m): speed; voyage Ganadhara (m): chief of a group Gananatha,
 Ganapati (m): lord of celestial attendants; Siva; Ganesha Gandhika (m): fragrant Ganesh,
 Ganesha, Ganesa, Ganesan (m): lord of the gan as or categories, Ganesha Ganeshvara,

Ganesvara, Ganesvaran (m): lord of categories; Ganesha Ganga (f): Goddess of River Ganga
 Gangala (m): precious stone Gangesh (m): lord of the Ganga, Siva Gangeya (m): Son of
 Mother Ganga; Murugan Gauri (f): fair, brilliant, beautiful; Parvatî Gauriputra (m): the son of
 Gaurî; Ganesha Gayatri (f): phrased verse; a sacred Vedic mantra; a hymn to the sun;
 Sarasvatî as consort of Brahmâ and mother of the Vedas Girapati (m): lord of speech; Brahmâ
 Giratha (m): learned; BRihaspati Giri (m): mountain; honorific title given to Rishis; number
 eight; cloud; ball Giribandhava (m): friend of mountains; Siva Giridhanvana (m): the rainbow of
 mountains; Siva Giridhvaja (m): with the mountain as its banner; Indra's thunderbolt
 Girijanatha, Girijapati, (m): lord of Pârvatî; Siva Girijavara (m): consort of Pârvatî; Siva Giriksita
 (m): mountain dweller; Siva Girilala, Girinandana (m): son of the mountain lord; Ganesha;
 Kârttikeya Girimana (m): mountain-like; a powerful elephant Girinatha, Girindra, Giripati, Girish
 (m): lord of the mountains; Siva Giripriya (m-f): lover of mountains; Siva Giriraj (m): king of
 mountains; Himavana Girisa (m): lord of speech; BRihaspati Gita, Geeta (f): song Gitapriya
 (m): lover of music; an attendant of Skanda; Siva Gitavidyadhara (m): scholar of music; a
 gandharva who was a great musician Godavari (f): granting water; bestowing prosperity; a
 river Godhika (f): Sita's lizard; emblem of Goddess Gauri Gomati (f): a famous river Gopana
 (m-f): protected, secured Gopta (m): guardian Gora (m-f): fair skinned, handsome Gorakh,
 Gorakhdeva (m): selfdisciplined Goral (f): beautiful; fair skinned Gori (f): beautiful, Pârvatî
 Grahapati (m): lord of celestial bodies; Ganesha Gudapushpa (f): sweet flower Gudiya (f): doll
 Guha, Guhan (m): secret one; a cave; dweller in the heart's cave; Murugan Guhanatha (m):
 lord of the spiritual heart, Murugan Guhapriya (f): liking secret places; Indra's daughter Gulab
 (m): rose Gulabee (f): pink, rosy, pleasing Gulal (f): auspicious, colorful powder used in the
 Holi festival Gulika (f): ball; anything round; pearl Gulmini (f): clustering; creeper Gulshan (m):
 garden Gunadhaya (m): rich in virtues Gunaja (f): daughter of virtue; the Priyangu creeper
 Gunakali (f): possessing virtues; a raga Gunakara (m): endowed with all virtues Gunal, Gunala
 (m-f): virtuous Gunalakshmi (f): Lakshmi the virtuous Gunamaya (f): endowed with virtues
 Gunanidhi (m): a treasure house of virtues Gunasundari (f): made beautiful with virtues
 Gunatita (m): transcending all qualities; Ganesha, Siva Gunavara (f): best in qualities;
 meritorious; virtuous; Gunavati (f): virtuous; a river of ancient India Gunavina (f): virtuous
 Guncha (f): blossom; flower bud Gunchaka (f): boquet of flowers Guniyala (f): a virtuous
 woman Gunja (f): a small red berry plant Gunjana (f): buzzing of a bee Gunratna (m): a jewel
 of virtue Gunvan, Gunvanta (m): virtuous Gurudasa (m): devotee, servant of the teacher
 Guruparan (m): He who initiated His Father; Murugan Guruprita (m): love of the teacher HH
 Haima (m): snow, frost; dew; golden; the Himâlayas; Siva Hakesa (m): lord of sound Hamsa,
 Hansa (m): swan; goose Hamsika (f): beautiful swan Hansaja (m): son of a swan; a warrior in
 Skanda's band Hansanada (m): the cry of the swan Hanugiri (m): the mountain of Hanuman
 Hara, Harak, Haran (m): He who takes away; consumer; absorber; divisor; Siva and Agni
 Harachudamani (m): the crest gem of Siva Haradeva (m): lord of Siva Harahara (m): Siva's
 necklace Haramanas (m): the mind of Siva; the soul of God Haranetra (m): the eye of Siva
 Hararupa (m): with the form of Siva Harasekhara (m): the crest of Siva Harasiddha (m): eternal
 of Siva Harasunu (m): son of Siva; Kârttikeya Harasvarupa (m): in Siva's image Haratejas (m):
 Siva's fiery energy Harena (f): devotee of lord Siva Haresvara (m): Siva and Vishnu conjoined,
 Hari-Hara Harinakshi (f): eyes as beautiful as a doe Harita (f): green Harnita (f): deer-like
 Harsha (f): joy, delight Harshika, Harshila, Harshina (f): joyful Haryasva (m): with bay horses;
 Indra and Siva Hasanti (f): smiling Hasini (f): laughter Hastimukha (m): elephant-faced;
 Ganesha Hatakesha (m): lord of gold, Siva Havana (m): fire sacrifice, Agni Havisha (m-f):
 worthy of oblation; Siva Hema (m-f): gold; a dark horse Hemabala (m): power of gold; the pearl
 Hemachandra (m): golden moon Hemadri (m): golden mountain Hemaguha (m): golden cave
 Hemakanta (m): bright as gold Hemakeli (m): golden sport; Agni Hemakesha (m): with golden
 hair; Siva Hemakshi (f): with golden eyes Hemal (m-f), Hemali (f): golden Hemamalin (m):

garlanded with gold; Sûrya Heman (m): golden, yellow; the Jasmine blossom Hemanatha (m): lord of gold, Siva Hemanga, Hemanya (m): goldenbodied, a brahmin; a lion Hemapushpam (m): goldenflowered Hemavati (f): golden, Pârvatî Hemendra (m): lord of gold, Indra Hemina (f): golden Hemlata (m-f): golden creeper Henal (f): made from the henna powder Heramba (m): son of wealth; Ganesh Hetal (f): full of love Himachala (m): abode of snow; the Himâlaya mountain Himadri (f): peak of snow; the Himâlaya mountain; Pârvatî Himajyoti (m-f): with snow-like light; Chandra Himakara (m): snow-handed; causing cold; white; the moon Himasaila (m): snow mountain; the Himâlayas Himatanaya (m-f): son of the moon Himayati (m): one who favors; champion Himmat (m): courage Hinadosa (m): without fault Hindi (f): wanderer; Dûrgâ Hindika (f): astrologer Hindikanta, Hindipriya (m): beloved by Dûrgâ; Siva Hinduka (m): wanderer; Siva Hingula, Hinguli (f): vermilion Hinkara (m): chanting of hymns; the invocation of a Deity Hinvati (f): to gladden; delight Hira (f): diamond; Lakshmî Hiradevi (f): queen Hiranga (m): diamond-bodied; Indra's thunderbolt Hiranya (m): gold; most precious Hiranyavaha (m): bearing gold; Siva; the river Sona Hiresa (m): king of gems Hiroka; Hiroki (f): poet Hitasha (m): He who consumes oblations; Agni Hitesin (m): benevolent Hitesvara (m): God of welfare; caring for others Homa (m): oblation Honna (m): to possess Hosang (m): to be one's own self Hotravahana (m): with the chariot of invocation Hullura, Hulluri (m-f): king of the Nâgas Humbadevi (f): Goddess of jubilation Hundana, Hundani (m-f): attendant of Siva Hundanesa (m): a ram; tiger; Siva Hushka (m): a king Huta, Huti (m): one to whom an oblation into fire is offered; Siva Hutapriya (f): beloved of fire Hutasa, Hutasi (m-f): subsisting by fire; fire consumer Hutasana (f): a yogin î; having the nature of fire Huvishka (m): a king II Iditri (f): one who praises Ijana (m): one who has sacrificed Ikshanika (m): a fortune teller Iliana (m): from Ili, a weapon Indivar (m-f): blue lotus Indra (m): king of the devas Irajana (m): born of the wind Irilan (m): He who has no end Isan, Isha, Ishan, Ishvan, Eesan, Eesha (m): Supreme ruler, Siva Ishva (m): a spiritual teacher Isi, Isani, Eesi, Eesani (f): ruler; Parvatî Isvaran, Eashvaran (m): lord of the Universe; a millionaire JJ Jagadagauri (f): fairest of the universe, Pârvatî Jagadamba, Jaganmata (f): mother of the world, Dûrgâ; Lakshmî Jagadambika (f): little mother of the universe; Dûrgâ Jagadhatri (f): sustainer of the universe; Pârvatî Jai, Jay, Jaya (m): victory Jalabalika (f): maiden of water; daughter of the waters; lightning as the daughter of the clouds Jalada (m): giving water; raincloud Jaladhi (f): living in water; ocean; a crocodile Jaladhipa (m): lord of the waters Jalaj; Jalaja (f): born of water, the lotus; Lakshmî Jalakanta (f): beloved of water; the ocean; wind Jalakusuma (f): water flower; the lotus Jalal (m): glory Jalalata (f): creeper of water; a wave; a watervine Jalapushpa (f): water lily Jambalini (f): maiden of water, name of a river Janabalika (f): daughter of the people; very bright; lightning Janak, Janaka (m): progenitor; a father; name of a famous king Janaki (f): daughter of Janaka Janamitra (m): people's friend Janava (m): protector of men Janesha (m): king of people Jantananda, Jnatanandana (m): bliss of knowing Japa (m-f): repetition of mantras; chanting; incantation Japendra, Japesa, Japesha (m): lord of chanting; Siva Jasarani (f): queen of fame Jatarupa (f): beautiful, brilliant, golden Jatin (m): pertaining to a mendicant Jayapal (m): fruit of victory; a king Jayendra, Jeyendra (m): lord of victory Jayin (m): victorious Jeman (m): possessing victory Jenya (m): of noble origin; true Jetasri (f): Goddess of gains; a râga Jetva (m): to be gained Jhankar (f): a sweet sound Jhanvi, Janvika (f): Ganga, daughter of Rishi Jahinu Jharna (f): a small brook Jiva, Jeeva (m-f): soul Jivan, Jivana (m): source of life; the sun; Siva Jivanatha (m): lord of life Jivantha, Jivatha (m): long-lived; virtuous; life, breath; peacock Jivini (m): the sun; a brahmin; praise Jnanada (m): giver of knowledge Jnanadarpana (m): mirror of knowledge Jnanadatta (m): given by knowledge Jnanadeva (m): being of knowledge Jnanadipa (m): lamp of knowledge Jnanadirgha (m): far-knowing; farseeing Jnanagarbha (m): source of knowledge Jnanakara (m): maker of knowledge Jnanaketu (m): light of wisdom Jnanakirti (m): having marks of intelligence Jnanameru (m): mountain of knowledge Jnanamurti (m): knowledge personified Jnanapati (m): lord of knowledge

Jnanaprabha, Jnanaprakasha (m): brilliant with knowledge Jnanaraja (m): king of knowledge
 Jnanasiddhi (m): master of knowledge Jnanavajra (m): knowledge-thunderbolt Jnanavapi (m):
 pool of knowledge Jnani (m): enlightened one Jnata (f): intelligent Jnatri (m): knower Jogendra,
 Jogindra (f): lord of yoga; Siva Jogesha, Jogesh (f): king of yoga Jogini (f): yoginî Jogisha (f):
 lord of yoga Josha (f): pleased; force, power Josika (f): cluster of buds; maiden Josita (f):
 pleased Jovaki (f): firefly Jugnu (m): firefly; ornament Juhi (f): jasmine flower Juhu (m): tongue;
 flame; Brahmâ and Sûrya Jurni (f): fire-brand Jushka (m): lover; worshiper; meritorious Jushta
 (m), Jushti (f): love; service Jutika (f): a kind of camphor Juvasdeva (m): divine quickness in
 thought, word and deed Jyoti, Jyothi, Jothi (m-f): light KK Kadhapriya (f): ever-loved;
 everfriendly Kailash, Kailas (m): Siva's sacred mountain abode Kaileshvari (f): Goddess of
 water; the family Goddess; Dûrgâ Kairavini (f): water-born; the white lotus plant Kaivalya (m):
 established in liberation; Murugan Kakalika (f): with a low and sweet voice Kakubha (f): peak,
 summit; splendour, beauty; wreath of Champaka flowers Kala (f): a small part of anything; a
 skill; ingenuity Kaladhara, Kaladharan (m): wearer of the crescent; Siva Kalamali (f): dispelling
 darkness; splendid; sparkling Kalandika (f): bestower of art and skills; wisdom, intelligence
 Kalapini (f): as blue as the peacock's tail Kalavati (f): moonlight; well versed in the arts, kalâs
 Kali (f): blackness, the Goddess Kalikantha (f): with a pleasing voice; the dove Kallolini (f):
 always happy; a surging stream or river Kalyanavati (f): full of virtue; princess Kalyani (f):
 beneficial, lucky; excellent; propitious; a sacred cow Kamakanta (f): beloved of Kâma; jasmine
 Kamakshi (f): lovely-eyed Kamala (m-f), Kamal, Kamla (f): born of a lotus, spring; desirous,
 beautiful, excellent; wealth; pale red; rose colored; Brahmâ Kamaladevi (f): lady of the lotus
 Kamalini (f): lotus plant, collection of lotuses; beautiful; fragrant; auspicious; dear to the Gods
 Kamini (f): embodiment of love; Ganesha Kamini, Kamra (f): desirable, beautiful; loving Kanak,
 Kanchan (f): gold Kanakambara (f): clad in gold, golden; a flower Kanakasundari (f): as
 beautiful as gold Kanda, Kandan, Kandiah (m): of integrated form; Murugan Kandanatha (m):
 quick lord; Murugan Kannaki (f): chaste and devoted wife, Sîtâ Kanti (f): glory, beauty; wish;
 decoration Kanya (f): maiden Kapil (m), Kapila (f): reddish; a great Rishi Karishma (f): miracle
 Karpani (f): gladness Karttikeya (m): giver of courage; Murugan Karttiki (f): full moon in the
 month of Kârttika; pious, holy Karunya (f): merciful, compassionate; praiseworthy Kashi, Kasi
 (m): shining, splendrous; Vârânasî, Siva's holy city Kashvi (f): shining; beautiful Kathir, Katir
 (m): formless light, Murugan Kathiresan (m): lord of light; Murugan Kaumari (f): virginal Kavita
 (f): poem; poet Kavyamata (f): mother of poetry, mother of a brilliant one Kedara, Kedaradeva
 (m): field, meadow; peak of Himâlayan mountain; Siva Kedaranatha (m): lord of fields and
 meadows; Siva as worshiped in Himâlayas Kedaresa (m): lord of fields and meadows; statue
 of Siva in Kâsî Kedarin (m): region of the Himâlayas, Siva Kekavala (m): peacock Kekaya (m):
 chief of a warrior tribe; full of water Kelaka (m): dancer, tumbler Kelasa (m): crystal Kenati (f):
 wife of Kâma Kenava (m): of a teacher Kenipa (m): sage Kerkhi (m): gold necklace Kesara (m),
 Kesari (f): mane; saffron Kesarin (m): having a mane; a lion; prince Kesayanti (m): attendant of
 Skanda Kesin (m): long-haired; lion, Rudra Ketaka (m): banner, flag; gold ornament Ketali (f):
 one with shelter Ketana (m-f): house, shelter; flag, banner Ketayan, Ketayitri (m): one who
 summons, counsels, advises Ketu (m): a bright appearance; chief, leader, eminent person; the
 moon's south node Ketubha (m): cloud Ketubhuta (m): having a symbol Ketumala (m): garland
 of light Keturatna (m): a bright jewel Ketusringa (m): with shining horns; a king of ancient
 Bhârat Ketutara (m): a comet Ketuvarman (m): flag shooter; one whose flag flies everywhere
 Keva (f): lotus Kevala (m): alone; absolute, exclusive, pure, whole, perfect Kevalin (m): seeker
 of the Absolute Keya (m-f): monsoon flower; speed Keyura (m): armband Keyuraka (m): one who
 wears an armband Kimaya (f): divine Kinjala (f): brook; lotus Kinjalk (f): essence of a lotus Kinnari
 (f): female singer; stringed musical instrument; a singer in Indra's court Kiranamalin (m):
 garlanded with rays; Sûrya Kiranamayi (f): full of rays Kiranapani (m): ray-handed; Sûrya
 Kiranapati (m): lord of rays; Sûrya Kirata (m): Siva in his form as a warrior of the Kirata tribe

Kirati (f): one who dwells in the mountains; Dûrgâ and Ganga Kirin, Kirina (m-f): one who praises; poet, writer; speaker Kirmi (f): an image of gold Kirnali (f): beam of light Kirtana (m): praise; repeating Kirtenya (m): worthy of praise Kirti (f): fame, glory; the Goddess of fame and reputation Kirtida (f): giver of fame Kirtideva (m): lord of light; lord of fame Kirtidhara (m): bearer of fame Kirtimalini (f): garlanded with fame; an attendant of Skanda Kirtiman, Kirtimanta (m): famous Kirtimukha (m): famous face; a gan a born from the hair of Siva Kirtisena (m): with a glorious army Kishala (f): bud; blossom Kishori (f): small girl Kodandin (m): armed with a bow, Siva Komala (m-f): tender, soft, delicate, sweet; handsome, beautiful Kotijit (m): conquering millions; Kâlî dâsa Kotikasya (m): abode of millions Kotira (m): horned; Indra Kotishvara (m): lord of millions Kovida (m): knowledgeable, wise Kripa (f): compassion; grace; blessing Kripalavi (m-f): the compassionate one; Murugan Kritini (f): the skillful one; Ganesha Kriya (m): action; temple worship Kuhupala (m): lord of the moon; Siva Kuja (m): the gan a who wears the rudrâksha mâlâ Kuladeva (m): Deity of the family Kuladevi (f): family Goddess Kuladipa (m): light of the family Kulagan (m): beautiful one; Murugan Kulamani (f): jewel of the family Kulandai (m): beautiful one; Murugan Kuleshvari (f): family Goddess Kulishvara (m): family God; Siva Kumar, Kumara, Kumaran (m): youth; prince; Murugan Kumaradevi (f): Goddess of children; a princess who was the wife of Chandragupta Kumari (f): maiden; virgin girl Kumudanatha (m): the moon Kundalin (m): wearing large earrings; Siva Kundan (m): glittering, sparkling; gold; pure, refined Kunjeshvara (m): lord of the forest Kuntanatha (m): lord of vegetation Kusavarta (m): of a passage of the Ganga; of a muni; Siva Kusha (f): a kind of sacred grass Kusumita (f): flower in full bloom Kuvala (m): enricher of knowledge; water lily; pearl; water Kuvalayesha (m): lord of the Earth; ruler of waters; lord of lilies Kuvalya (m): the blue lotus L Lakshmi (f): wealth, prosperity; Goddess of wealth Lambodara (m): of large belly; Ganesha Lekha (m): document; Deity, God Lekhabhra (m): bright as light; shining Lekharaja (m): lord of the Gods; the Supreme Being Lelihana (m): darting out the tongue; serpent; Siva Lesha (m): small portion; a short song Lila, Leela (f): the divine play Linika (f): absorbed, dedicated Lochan, Lochana (m): eyes Lokesh (m): lord of regions Lokpriya (m): popular among all Lomesh (m): a sage Lubdhaka (m): hunter; the star Sirius Lunadosha (m): sinless; an attendant of Siva Lunakarna (m): with pierced ears Lusha (m): saffron; name of a Rishi MM Madhu, Madhur, Madhuri (f): honey Mahadev, Mahadeva, Mahadevan (m): Great God; Siva Mahadevi (f): great Goddess Mahakala (m): great time; Siva Mahan (m): great one; Siva Mahati (m-f): the consummation of glory; Murugan Mahendra (m): supreme ruler Mahesh, Mahesa, Mahesan, Maheshvara (m): great lord; Siva Mahesvari, Maheshvari (f): great Goddess Mala (f): rosary, prayer beads Mallik (m): king; lord Mallika (f): jasmine Manasa (f): mental power; Pârvatî Manesh (m): king of mind Mangala (f): auspicious one Mani (m-f): jewel Manick, Manik, Manickan, Manickam (m): ruby-like Manil (m): a beautiful bird Manin (m): mind Manish (m): intellect Manjari (f): a bouquet Manjeet (m): conqueror of mind Manju (f): pollen grains; attractive Manoj (m): born of the mind Manu (m): intelligent; the first man Mardav (m): softness; letting go of ego Markendeya (m): winning over death; devotee of Siva Maruti (m): son of the wind; Hanuman Matta (m-f): the embodiment of happiness; Murugan Mayil (f): peacock Mayilvaganam (m): peacock mount; Murugan Mayini (f): source of illusory power Midhusha (m): bountiful; son of Indra Midhushi (f): liberal; bountiful; Shakti Midhushtama (m): most liberal; Sûrya Mihika (f): mist, fog; snow Mihikansu (m): mist-rayed; the moon Mihira (m): causing heat, light and rain; sun, clouds, wind, air; a sage Mihirakula (m): born in the solar dynasty; a king Mihirana (m): born of the sun; Siva Milana, Milan (m): union; meeting; contract Milap (m): embrace Milita (f): partly opened, as in a flower blossom Mina, Meena (f): fish; gem; goblet of wine Minaketana (m): fish-bannered; Kâma Minakshi, Meenakshi (f): fish-eyed; a species of Durva grass; Pârvatî Minalaya (m): the ocean Minanatha (m): master of fish Minaraja (m): king of fish Minesh, Mineshvara (m): lord of fish; Siva Mira (f): ocean; Mirata (m): mirror Misraka (m): mixed; manifold Misri (m): mixed; sweet Mita (f): measured, gauged; tried

and tested; a friend; established Mitadhvaja (m): with a strong flag Mitali (f): friendship Mithi (m): knowledgeable; truthful Mithilesa (m): lord of Mithila Mithuna (m): forming a pair; the zodiac sign of Gemini; honey and clarified butter Miti (f): friend Mitra (m): friend, companion Mitrabahu (m): helped by friends Mitradeva (m): lord of friends Mitradharman (m): with faith in friends Mitragupta (m): protected by friends Mitrajit (m): winning friends Mitrajna (m): knower of friends; knower of the sun Mitrakrit (m): friend maker Mitrasaha (m): indulgent towards friends Mitrasena (m): with an army of friends Mitravaha, Mitravan, Mitravinda (m): having friends Mitravardhana (m): cherished by friends Mitravarman (m): warrior among friends Mitrayu (m): friendly; attractive; prudent Mitrodaya (m): sunrise Mitula (m): measured, limited, moderate Mitushi (f): with limited desires Mivara (m): leader of an army Moda (m): pleasure, enjoyment, joy; fragrance Modaka (m), Modaki (f): pleasing, delighting; a sweet goodie Modakara (m): one who accomplishes joy; full of joy, delighted; a Rishi Mohana, Mohi, Mohin, Mohita (m), Mohini (f): infatuating; beautiful; bewildering; one of the five arrows of Kâma; Siva or KRishn a Mohantara (m): very infatuating Mohona (f): endearing Moksha (m): emancipation, liberation; Mount Meru Mokshadvara (m): gate of liberation; Sûrya Mokshin, Mokshita (m): free, liberated Mora, Morara (m): peacock Moti (m): pearl Motia (m): jasmine Muchira (m): generous, liberal; virtuous; the wind; the Deity Mudabhaja (m): desirer of happiness Mudanvita (m): pleased, delighted, filled with joy Mudavarta (m): surrounded by happiness Muddaya (m): to be happy; to delight Mudgala (m): ever happy Muhurta (m): moment, instant Mukesh, Mukesa (m): lord of liberation; Siva Mukhachandra (m): moon face; with a face like the moon Mukhaja (m): born of the mouth Mukhakamala (m): with a face as lovely as a lotus Mukhendu (m): with a face as lovely as the moon Mukta (m): freed, emancipated, delivered; opened; a pearl Muktaguna (m): qualities of a pearl Muktananda (m): the joy of liberation Muktapida (m): crowned with pearls Muktapushpa (m): pearly flower Muktaratna (m): pearl gem Muktasena (m): with a free army Muktesh, Muktesa (m): lord of emancipation Mukunda (m): precious stone; one who liberates Mukutesvara (m): lord of the crown Mula (m): root or core Mulaka (m): prince Mulapurusha (m): male representative of a family Mularaja (m): lord of creation; the original root Mulashanti (m): a Vedic treatise Mulika (m): principal, primary Muni (m): silent one; sage; ascetic Munichandra (m): moon among ascetics Munikumara (m): young ascetic Munindra (m): chief of munis; Siva Muniratna (m): jewel among sages Munisa (m): chief of munis Munistuta (m): praised by sages; Ganesha Murajaka (m): a drum; one of Siva's attendants Murdhan, Murdhanya (m): the top or summit, beginning or first Murthi, Murthy, Murti (m): form; temple image Muruga, Murugan (m): beautiful; tender youth; the God of spiritual striving, lord of ascetics; Kârttikeya Murugesha (m): lord of the detached; Murugan Mushika (m): Ganesha's vahana, the mouse Muthu (m): nice; gentle NN Nabhan (m): heart center; Siva residing in the lotus of the heart Nabhanyu (m), Nabhanya (f): springing forth from the heavens; ethereal, celestial, heavenly Nabhasa (m), Nabhasi (f): misty; of the sky; celestial Nabhashvati (f): born of the sky; lightning; thunder Nabhasindhu (f): river of the sky; the ĀkâshaGanga or celestial Ganga, the Milky Way Nachiketa, Nachiketan (m): not conscious; fire Nada (m): sound Nadabindu (m): seed sound; the primal sound, Aum Nadinatha, Nadipati, Nadisha (m): lord of rivers; the ocean Naga (m): mountain; serpent; elephant Nagapati (m): overlord of the mountains; Himavan Nagadhiraja (m): The paramount king of the mountains; Himavan Nagamma (f): poetess Naganandini (f): mountain-born; Pârvatî Nagapushpika (f): flower of the mountains; yellow Jasmine Nagaraja (m): king of serpents; Siva who wears serpents as a mark of immortality and control of the instinctive mind Nagarini (f): urban; sophisticated Nagasri (f): princess Nagendra (m): chief of serpents; Chief of mountains; Himavan Nagesh, Nagesa, Nageshvar, Nageshvara (m): lord of serpents; lord of mountains; Himavan, Siva; Mahârishi Patâñjali Nageshvari (f): Goddess of serpents; Manasa Nagija (f): blossom of the flower Mesua Roxburghii Naka (m-f): vault of heaven; sky; Sûrya Nakaloka (m): the heavenly worlds Nakanadi (f): river of the sky; the ĀkâshaGanga or celestial Ganga, the Milky Way Nakanari (f): heavenly woman Nakanatha,

Nakadhīpa, Nakapati, Nakesa, Nakesh, Nakeshvara (m): lord of the sky; Indra Nakanayaka (m): God of Jupiter Nakapala (m): sky guardian Nakavanita (f): dwelling in the sky Nakin (m): having heaven; a God Nakshatra (m-f): one of 27 principle asterisms (star clusters, also called Lunar Mansions) in the Hindu system of astrology, usually referring to one's birthstar Nakula (m): mongoose; lord Siva who, like the mongoose, is immune to the venom of serpents Nala (f): made of reeds, a lotus flower Nalada (f): nectar of a flower Nalakini (f): multitude of flowers; lotus lake Nalami (f): fragrant nectar; lute of Siva Nalika (f): spear, arrow; lotus flower Nalini (f): lotus-like; lotus; beautiful; fragrant; gentle; sacred Nalita (f): Arum Colocassia Namasya (m-f): worshipful, worthy of salutation Namdeesh (m): the ocean Namita (f): one who worships, devotee Namya (f): venerable Nanda (f): delight; prosperity Nandadevi (f): Goddess of happiness; lofty Himalayan peak Nandana (m): rejoicing; gladdening Nandi, Nandikesh (m): happy, joyful; Siva's bull; Siva expressing his blissful nature Nandika, Nandini, Nandanti (f): gladdening, delightful, blissful; a daughter; Durgā and Gaṅgā Nandirudra (m): joyful Rudra; Siva Nandishvara (m): lord of Nandi; Siva Nandita (f): one who pleases Nanthakumar (m): eternal youth Naradhara (m): supporter of mankind; Siva Narapriya (m): beloved of mankind; favorable to mankind Naravira (m): heroic man Narendra, Naresh, Naresa, Nareshvara (m): chief of mankind Nari (f): feminine; wife, mother; daughter of Mount Meru Narika (f): spiritual; watery Narishta (m): dear to women; Arabian jasmine Naritirtha (f): five sacred bathing places for women Narmada (f): giver of pleasure; a holy river Narmadeshvara (m): lord of the river Narmada; Siva Narmadyuti (f): bright with joy; happy, merry Nartaki, Natakī, Natakīya (f): dancer Narvakya (f): words of the wife Narya (m): heroic; manly, human Natana, Natya (m): dancing Nataraj, Nataraja, Natarajan (m): king of dancers; Siva Natesa, Natesh, Nadesan, Nateshvar, Nadeshvar (m): lord of dancers; Siva Nateshvari (f): Goddess of dance; Pārvaī Nath, Natha, Nathan (m): protector, master, lord, chief; blessing Nathoka (m): a poet Nati (f): bowing, humble Natyapriya (m): fond of dance; Siva Nava (m): shout of joy Navamallika (f): the new creeper; jasmine Navangi (f): new, fresh body; lovely, beautiful Navika (m): captain, sailor; chief of a vessel Navina, Naviya, Navya (f): new, fresh, young Nayaja (f): daughter of wisdom Nayaka (m-f): chief, leader, guide Nayanapriti, Nayanatara (f): star of one's eye; beloved; very dear Nayavati (f): bearer of prudence Nayika (f): noble lady Nehal, Nehanshu (m-f): affectionate, loving Neman (m): of excellent conduct Neminathan (m): lord of the thunderbolt Nesan (m): devotee, friend Nesarajan (m): king of affection Neta (m): lord, leader, ruler Netanatha (m): lord of leaders Netra (m): eye; leader, guide Netrakosha (m): treasure of the eye; bud of a flower Netramusha (m): capturing the eye; beautiful; unusual Nichita (f): full; flowing down; Ganga Nidhra (m): moon; circumference of a wheel; the lunar mansion Revati Niharika (f): Milky Way Nika (m-f): tree; irrigation channel Nikhil (m): the Sun God, Sūrya Nila, Neela (m-f), Nilan (m), Nilani (f): dark blue; indigo; sapphire; Indian fig tree Nilabha (f): of bluish hue; moon Nilachandra (f): blue moon Nilagala (f): blue-necked; Siva Nilagiri Ternatea: mountain; blue variety of flower Clitoria Nilaja (f): blue steel Nilakamala (f): blue lotus or water lily Nilakantala (f): blue earrings Nilakantha, Nilakanta (m), Nilakanthi (f): blue-throated; Siva Nilalohita (m-f): red and blue; Siva and Murugan Nilama (m): dark blue; sapphire; indigo Nilapadma (f): blue lotus Nilapushpa (f): blue-flowered; a species of Eclipta Nilasi (f): Vitex Negundo flower Nilata (f): blueness Nili (f): indigo; a Goddess Nilima, Neelima (f): blueness Nilini (f): the indigo plant Nilmani, Neelmani (f): blue diamond, sapphire Niloda (f): with blue water; a river Nina (f): ornamented; slender Nira (f), Neera: consisting of water Niraj, Niraja (m-f): illuminating Nirajakshi (f): lotus-eyed; beautiful Nirajayati (f): shining upon, illuminating Niranjana (m): without blemish; Ganesha Nirmala (m-f), Nirmalan (m): without impurity Nirmalanatha (m): lord without bonds; Siva Nirupa (m-f): formless; air; ether; a God Nirvikar (m): flawless Nisha (f), Neesha: night; dream Nishasari (f): night bird; owl Nishtha (f): faith; conviction; fidelity Nita (f), Neeta, Niti: guided, correct, modest Nitha (m): leader; a king of the VRishnī dynasty Nitya (m-f): eternal, without end Nivan (f): one of the ten horses of the moon

O Odati (f): dawn; refreshing Oghavati (f): a swift stream Ojasvini (f): brave; bright Omala (f): bestower of the root mantra, Aum Omisa (f): Goddess of birth, life and death Omkar, Omkara (m): the root mantra, Aum Omvati (f): possessing the power of the root mantra, Aum PP
 Pachata (m): cooked, boiled; Sûrya, Agni and Indra Padma (f): lotus; lotus-hued one; Lakshmî Padmabandhu (m): friend of the lotus; Sûrya. Padmagarbha (m): born of a lotus; Brahmâ, Vishnu, Siva and Sûrya Padmaja (f): born of a lotus; Lakshmî Padmakara (m): holding a lotus; Sûrya Padmala (f): lotus-seated; Lakshmî Padmalochana (f): lotus-eyed Padmamalini (f): lotus-garlanded; Lakshmî Padmanjali (f): offering of lotuses Padmaraga (m): lotus-hued; ruby Padmashri (f): divine lotus; as beautiful as a lotus Padmin (m-f), Padmini (f): lotuslike; one who plucks the lotus; one who likes the lotus; elephant Palaka (m): protector; prince, sovereign Palaksha (m): white Palani (m): renunciate; Murugan Palin (m): protecting, guarding; keeping Pallava (m), Pallavi (f): sprout, shoot; spray; bud, blossom Panava (m): small drum; cymbal; prince Panavin (m): possessing a small drum; Siva Panchaka (m): consisting of five elements; an attendant of Skanda Panchaksha (m): five-eyed; an attendant of Siva Panchala (m): consisting of five; surrounded by five rivers; a râga; a nâga; Siva Panchama (m): dextrous, clever; beautiful, brilliant Panchamukha (m): five-faced, Siva and Ganesha Panchasya (m): five-faced; lion; Siva Pandura (m): pale; yellow-white, an attendant of Skanda Panika (m): hand; an attendant of Skanda Panikarna (m): hands and ears conjoined; attentive, pro-active; Siva Panita (m): admired, praised Pannagesha (m): lord of the creeping ones; lord of serpents; Siva Panshula (m): Siva's staff; Siva covered with sandalwood powder Papuri (m): bountiful; liberal, abundant Paraga (m): pollen of a flower; fragrant; fame, celebrity Paraj (m): gold Param (m): supreme; Siva Paramaka (m): highest, best Paramakshara (m): the supreme syllable; Aum Paramani (m): excellent jewel Paramesha, Parameshvara (m): supreme lord; Siva Parameshvari (f): supreme Goddess Paramika (f): highest, best, greatest; one who fulfills desires Parimala (f): fragrance, perfume Parinaha (m): circumference; width; Siva Parisatya (m): pure truth Parishruta (m): famous, celebrated; an attendant of Skanda Parshupani (m): axe holder; Ganesha Parvataja (m): born of mountains Parvati (f): of all mountains; mountain stream Pashunatha, Pashupati, Pasunatha, Pasupati (m): lord of cattle; lord of souls; Siva Patanjali (m): worshipful; name of a Rishi Paturupa (m): very clever Pavana, Pavanta (m): pious; sacred; pure; fire; incense; protecting Peruman (m): the great one; Siva Pesani, Peshani, Peshanidevi (f): well-formed; beautiful Peshal, Peshala, Peshaladevi (f): delicate Piki (f): Indian cuckoo Pillaiyar (m): Ganesha, the noble child Pinaki (f): Siva's box Pinga, Pingala (f): of yellow hue, golden, fiery; turmeric, saffron; Lakshmî Pingakshi (f): tawny-eyed, a Deity presiding over the family Piroja (f): turquoise Pitayuthi (f): an array of yellow; yellow jasmine Pitika (f): saffron; yellow jasmine; honey Pivanari (f): strong, robust, voluptuous Piyushadyuti (f): nectar-rayed; the moon Piyushakanika (f): nectar drop Polami (f): consort of Indra Pollavi (f): mango leaf Ponnambalam (m): golden hall Ponnamma (f): golden mother Posha (m-f): thriving, prosperity, increasing Poshaniya (f): to be protected Poshayitri (f): one who nourishes, cherishes or rears Poshita (f): cherished Poshya (f): thriving; abundant, copious Potriya (m-f), Potriyan (m): purifying Poya (m-f): a kind of wind instrument Prabha (f): lustre, radiance; Pârvatî Prabhava (m-f), Prabhavan (m): lord Supreme; Murugan Prabhavanatha (m): prominent, distinguished, powerful lord Pradip, Pradeep (m): source of light Prajapati (m): father of creation; Siva and Murugan Prakash, Prakasha (m): light Prakriti (f): nature; cosmos Prana (m-f): the life of life; energy; Murugan Prasad, Prashad (m): blessed offerings Prasannatma, Prasannatman (m): effulgent, kindly-souled; Ganesha Pratap (m): glory Pravina, Praveena (f): sagacious; competent Prem, Prema (m-f): love Priya (f): darling, beloved Puja (f): worship, honor, adoration, Pundarika (f): lotus-like; white umbrella; a mark on the forehead; tiger Pundarisraja (f): garland of lotuses Punita (f): sacred; pious; holy Punya (f): virtue, good work, merit; purity; holy basil Punyavati (f): full of virtues, righteous; fortunate; happy; beautiful Purani (f): fulfilling, completing, satisfying Puranjani (f): understanding, intelligence Purna,

Poorna, Purnama, Purnima (f): full, complete; full moon Purnamrita (f): full of nectar; a digit of the moon Pushan (m): nourisher; protector; a Vedic God Pushpa (f): flower; blossom Pushpamanjari (f): flower bouquet Pushpendu (f): moon of flowers; white lotus Pushpi (f): blossom; flower-like; tender, soft; beautiful; fragrant R Raga (f): act of coloring; feeling, passion; harmony, melody Ragamaya, Ragavati (f): full of passion; full of love; beloved; dear full of color; red Ragini (f): melody; attachment; love Rahuratna (f): jewel of Rahu; the hyacinth flower Raj, Raja, Rajan (m): king; Siva Rajadeva (m): kind of devas; Murugan Rajadhidevi (f): Goddess of the kings; queen; a daughter of Sûrya Rajakala (f): a royal piece; a digit of the moon Rajakanya, Rajakumari (f): daughter of a king; princess Rajakesari (f): shining gold; lion among kings Rajal (f): queenly Rajamani (f): crown jewel; royal gem Rajamukhi (f): royal countenance Rajani, Rajni (f): dark one; night; turmeric; queen; a holy river in ancient India Rajanvati (f): abode of kings; Earth Rajapushpa (f): royal flower Rajasri, Rajasi (f): royalty; grandeur; a gandharva Rajesh, Rajeshvara (m): lord of kings; Siva Rajeshvari (f): Goddess of a state; Pârvatî Rajita (f): illuminated, resplendent, bright, brilliant Rajivini (f): a collection of blue lotuses Rajvi (f): ruling Rajyadevi (f): Goddess of a state; royal woman; queen Rajyalakshmi (f): wealth of a state; royal Lakshmî Rakanisha (f): full-moon night Rakesh (f): lord of the full moon Rakhi (f): symbol of protection; full moon in Íravan a Rakini (f): night, a tantric Goddess Rakta (f): painted; red; beloved, dear; pleasant Raktahansa (f): red swan; contented soul Raktapadma (f): red lotus Rakti (f): redness; pleasing, loveliness; affection, devotion Rama (m): enchanting; a great king Rambha (f): lovable, pleasing, agreeable; staff Rameshvara (m): lord of Râma; Siva Ramita (f): pleasing; omnipresent Ramya (f): enchanting, pleasing, beautiful, enjoyable Rangabhuti (f): born of love; fullmoonnight in the month of Asvin i Rangaja (f): vermilion; born of love Rani (f): queen Ranjana (f): pleasing, to worship Ranjika (f): one who pleases; exciting love; charming, pleasing; red sandalwood Ranna (m): delight; sound; joy; quill or bow of a lute Rashmi (f): a ray of light Rasi (f): wealth, quantity, number; a star constellation Rasika (f): with discrimination; aesthetic; sentimental; passionate; tasteful, elegant Ratna, Ratnam (f): wealth; jewel Ratnamalavati (f): with a necklace of jewels Ratnavara (f): best among precious things; gold Ratridevi (f): Goddess of night Ratu (f): truthful; true speech; the celestial Ganga Ravi (m): the Sun God Ravichandrika (f): glory of the sun; moonlight; a râga Ravichandra, Ravichandran (m): the sun and moon conjoined Rebha (f): singer of praise Reem (f): seed Goddess Rejakshi (f): with eyes of fire Rekha (f): line, streak Renuka (f): born of dust Resaman, Reshma (f): storm, whirlwind Reva (f): agile, swift, quick Revati (f): prosperity; wealth; 27th constellation Ribhu, Ribuksha, Ribhwan (m): clever, skillful Riddhi (f): wealth or good fortune personified; Pârvatî, Lakshmî Riddhika (f): giver of wealth; Lakshmî Ridhkaran (f): prosperity; Lakshmî Rijnhav (m): happy, pleased Rijnhayal (m-f): winsome; cultured Rijnhwar (m): lover, adorer Riju (m): straight forward Rujukratu, Rijumati (m): performing right sacrifices or works; sincere; Indra Rijuta (f): honesty, sincerity Riksh (m): fixed star, constellation Rikshpati (m): lord of the stars; the moon Rikshvan (m): forest of bears; a mountain in India Rima (f): emancipated, released Rishav (f): pertaining to a sage Rishi (m): seer; sage Rishit (m-f): happy, pleased, stout Rishyamuk (m): beautiful mountain Rit (f): season Rita (f): flow; cosmic order; truth; righteous; correct; brave; honest Ritangoli (f): a strengthening medicine Ritaparna (m): truth-winged Ritayin (m): truthful Ritayu, Ritayus (m): follower of the sacred law Riti (m-f): stream Ritika (m-f): brass; bell metal Ritunatha (m): lord of the seasons; spring personified Rocha, Rochaka, Rochan, Rochana, Rochita, Rochisa, Rochmana (m), Roshini (f): shining, radiant; glorious; giving pleasure, agreeable, charming Rochismat (m): possessing light Rodas (m): heaven and earth Rohaka, Rohana, Rohanta, Rohil, Rohin, Rohini (m): ascending, climbing; blossom; mountain; tree; a nakshatra or star Rohinibhava (m): a son of Rohin î; planet Mercury Rohinikanta, Rohiniramana (m): beloved of Rohin î; the moon Rohinisa (m): lord of Rohin î; the moon Rohit, Rohita, Rohitaka (m): red; ornament made of precious stones; rainbow; blood; saffron; Sûrya Rohitaksha (m): red-eyed;

Sûrya Rohitasva (m): red horse; possessor of red horses; Agni Rola (m): painting Roladeva (m): lord of painting Roma (m): hair Romaharsha (m): goose bumps Romaharshana, Romir (m): causing goose bumps; causing the hair to stand erect Romali (f): line of hair Romani (f): romantic Romika (m): salt; magnet Rosana, Roshan (m): passionate; touchstone; quicksilver Rosavaroaha (m): diminisher of 325 anger Rudra (m): awesome; Siva Rupa, Rupali (f): beautiful S Sabanatha, Sabanathan, Sabapati (m): lord of dance; Siva Sabaratnam (m-f): jewel of dancers, Siva Sachi, Sachideva (m): a friend Sadashiva, Sadasiva, Sadasivam (m): eternally auspicious; Siva Sagar (m): ocean; king of solar dynasty Sahaja (m): natural Sahil (m): guide Sajan (m): beloved Sakhi, Sakhila (f): sympathizer; friendly; companion Sakti, Shakti (f): power, energy Samapriya (m-f): lover of Sâma Veda; Siva Sambasiva; Sambasivam (m): Siva the benevolent Sambhava (m): born, manifested Sambu, Shambu, Shambo (m): causing happiness; Siva Samudra (m): ocean; blue Sanatan, Sanatana (m): eternal Sangita, Sangeeta, Sangeet (f): music Sanjay (m): completely victorious Sanjiv, Sanjiva (m): possessed with life; vital Sankara, Sankar, Shankara (m): causing prosperity; Siva Sanmitra (m): a close friend Santosha, Santosh (m), Santoshi (f): contentment; peace Sarada, Sharada, Sharda (f): vîn â or lute bearer; Sarasvatî Sarasvati (f): a region abounding in pools; full of essences; Goddess of learning Saravan, Saravana, Saravanan, Saravanabhava (m): a reed-filled pond; quietude of mind; Murugan Sarita (f): river, stream; Dûrgâ Saroj, Saroja (f): found in lakes; lotus flower Sarvatanaya (m): son of Siva Sarvatmaka (m): the soul of all; Ganesha Satika (f): water Satina (f): real, essential; peace; water; bamboo Satvan, Satvi (f): strong, powerful, living Satvika (m-f): perfect goodness; purity; Siva Satya (m-f): truth Saumya (m-f): pleasant; Ganesha Savar (m): water; Siva Seduka (m): existent; a king of ancient India Sekhara (m): crown of the head; crest, peak; best, chief Selva, Selvan (m), Selvi (f): prosperous one Selvamani (m): beautiful jewel Selvaraj (m): handsome king Sena (m): army; leader; body Senabindu (m): pivot of the army Senachitta (m): war-minded Senahan (m): destroying armies Senajit (m): vanquishing armies Senaka (m): soldier Senani (m): leader, general, chief; Murugan Senapala (m): protector of the army Senapati (m): commander of generals; leader of an army Senaskandha (m): army of Skanda; a battalion Sendan (m): red-hued; Murugan Senika (m): soldier Sentilnatha (m): red lord Sephalendu (m): moon among the brave Sephara (m): charming; delightful Sevadhi (m): treasure receptacle; wealth; jewel Seval (m): rooster; emblem of Lord Murugan Sevara (m): treasury Seya, Seyana (m): obtaining, achieving Seyon, Ceyon (m): youthful; Murugan Shabnam (f): dewdrop Shaila (f): small mountain Shaktidhara, Saktidhara (m-f), Saktidharan (m): wielder of power; Murugan Shama (f): tranquility Shambhava (m): the benevolent one; Siva Shanmukha; Shanmuga, Shanmugan, Samugam (m): the six-faced one; Murugan Shanmukhanatha, Shanmuganatha (m): lord of six faces; Murugan Shanta, Santa (f): peaceful Shanti (f): peace Sharva (m-f): the archer; Siva Shashishekhara, Shashishekhara (m): wearer of the moon in His hair; Siva Shashvata (m): eternal, unchanging; Siva and Ganesha Shinjini (f): an anklet Shirali (f): peacock's crown Shirina (f): sweet Shivapriya, Sivapriya (m-f): the gracious beloved; Siva Shrida, Shreedra (m-f): the bestower of wealth; Ganesha Shripati (m): lord of wealth; Ganesha Shubha (f): auspicious Shubra, Subram (f): brilliance Shuddha (m-f): the pure one; Ganesha Shulapani (m): holder of a spear; Siva Siddhama (f): blessed mother; Dûrgâ Siddhan (m): perfected one; Murugan Siddhartha (m): one who has accomplished his aim Siddhasena (m): with a divine army; Kârttikeya Siddhayogin (m): perfected or accomplished yogî; Siva Siddheshvara (m): lord of blessed or accomplished ones; Siva Siddheshvari (f): Goddess of the blessed Siddhi (f): magical power; luck; accomplishment Siddhida (f): conferring felicity or powers; Siva Siddhima (f): one of achievement Sikha (f): peak, pinnacle, crest; plume, topknot Sikhandi (f): crested; yellow jasmine Sila (f): calm, tranquil; goodnatured Silamban (m): mountain king; -Murugan Silavati (f): virtuous, moral Silpi, Shilpi (m), Silpika, Shilpika (f): craftsman; sculptor Silpita, Shilpita (f): sculptured; well crafted and proportioned Sindura (f): a kind of tree Sita, Seeta (f): white Sitara

(f): star Siva, Sivan, Shiva (m-f): auspicious; a long â it becomes feminine, meaning the energy of Siva Sivaji, Shivaji (m): auspicious one; Siva Sivajnana (m), Sivajnanam: Siva's wisdom Sivakanta (f), Shivakanta: beloved of Siva Sivakumara, Sivakumaran, Shivakumara (m): son of Siva Sivalinga, Sivalingam (m): Siva's holy mark Sivananda, Shivananda (m): bliss of Siva Sivanatha, Sivanathan, Shivanatha (m): Siva lord Sivanesan (m): Siva's friend Sivani, Shivani (f): beloved of Siva Sivapadam (m): Siva's sacred feet Sivaprakasha, Shivaprakasha (m): light of Siva; light of prosperity Sivaprasada, Shivaprasada (m): given by Siva Sivaraja, Sivarajan, Shivaraja (m): Siva the king Sivarman, Shivarman (m): protected by Siva Sivasambu (m): Siva the benevolent Sivasankara, Shivashankara (m): Siva the prosperous Sivasri, Shivasri (m): glory of Siva Sivasundari, Shivasundari (f): Siva's beauty, Pârvatî Sivasvamin, Shivasvamin (m): Siva as master, benign lord Sivatkika, Shivatkika (f): soul of Siva, consisting of the essence of Siva Sivavallabha, Shivavallabha (f): loved by Siva; Indian white rose; Pârvatî Skanda (m): hopper; king; clever; quicksilver; Kârttikeya; Siva Skandanatha (m): quick lord; Kârttikeya Sobhaka, Shobhaka (m): brilliant; beautiful Sobhana, Sobhan (m): handsome; excellent; Siva Sohan (m): good-looking; charming Sohil (m): beautiful Sokkan (m): beautiful one, Siva Soma (m-f), Soman: the moon Somachandra (m), Somachandran: tranquil moon Somadeva (m): God of the moon Somadhara (m), Somadharan: moon-bearing; sky; heaven Somaja (m): son of the moon, the planet Mercury Somakanta (m): as lovely as the moon; beloved of the moon; moonstone Somakhya (m): as virtuous as the moon, the red lotus Somamshu (m): moonbeam Somanandin (m): delighted by the moon; an attendant of Siva Somanatha (m): lord of the moon Somashekhara, Somasegaram (m): moon-crested, Siva Somaskanda (m): warrior of the moon Somasundara (m-f), Somasundaram (m): beautiful moon; Siva Somendra (m): moon Somesa, Someshvara (m): lord of Soma; the moon Sona, Sonala, Sonali (f): redness; fire; gold Sonam (m): gold-like, beautiful; lucky Sopan (m): way to moksha Sovala (m): powerful Soven (m): beautiful Srikantha (m-f): beautiful-throated one; Siva Sthanavi (m-f): pillar of the universe; Siva Subala (m): good boy Subali (f): very strong, powerful Subandhava (f): good friend; Siva Subas (m): smile Subbalakshmi (f): divine fortune Subha (f): splendor, beauty; ornament, decoration; light, lustre; desire Subhadra (f): glorious, splendid; auspicious; Dûrgâ Subhaga (f): good fortune; wild jasmine; sacred basil; honored mother; beloved by husband Subharya (f): prosperous; graceful Subhash, Subhasha, Subhashana (f): eloquent Subodh, Subodha (f): knowledgeable; wise Subrahmanya, Subramanian, Subramaniam (m): effulgent radiance; Murugan Subuddhi (f): of good intellect; understanding, wise; clever Suchara (f): very skillful; good performer; with a beautiful gait Suchaya (f): casting a beautiful shadow; splendid Sudama (f): bountiful Sudaralakshmi (f): Goddess of beauty Sudarsha, Sudarshan (m), Sudarshini (f): lovely in appearance; easily seen, conspicuous; beautiful Sudhakara (m): receptacle of nectar; the moon Sudhi (f): good sense, intelligence Suditi (f): bright flame Sugandha (m-f), Sugandhi (f): sweet smelling fragrance; sacred basil; lion; virtuous; pious; Supreme Being Suguna (m): with good qualities Suhasini (f): smiling beautifully Sukaksha (m): abode of good; a Rishi Sukanta (m): very handsome Sukantha (m), Sukanthi (f): sweetvoiced Sukha (f): piety, virtue; ease, comfort; pleasure Sukhajata (m): happy; Siva Sukratu (m): one who does virtuous deeds; benevolent; Siva Sukumara (m), Sukumari (f): very tender; very delicate; with soft, delicate skin Sula, Sulan, Shula, Shulan (m): Siva's trident Suman (m-f): flower Sumana (m): of good disposition; great-hearted; charming; handsome Sumeru (m): vexalted, excellent; Siva Sunartaka (m): good dancer; Siva. Sundara, Sundaran, Sundaram (m), Sundari (f): beautiful, handsome, noble; a Saivite saint Sundareshvara (m): lord of beauty; Siva Sunita (f), Suniti: well conducted, well behaved, polite, civil; wise Suprasada (m): best offerings; auspicious; gracious; Siva Surabhi (f): sweet-smelling; agreeable; shining; charming, pleasing; famous; good, beautiful; beloved; wise, virtuous; Champaka tree; nutmeg Suragana (m): with servants of God; Siva Surala (f): one who brings the Gods; Ganga Suramohini (f): attracting the Gods

Surananda (f): joy of the Gods; a river Surapriya (f): dear to the Gods Suravani (f): Earth as the mother of the Gods Surendra (m): king of the Gods Suresh, Suresha, Suresan, Sureshvara (m): king of the Gods; Brahmâ, Siva, Indra and Murugan Suri, Surina (f): wise; learned one Surupa (m): well formed; handsome; wise, learned; Siva Surya (m): the Sun God Susaha (m): bearing well, Siva Sushubha (f): very beautiful; very auspicious Susmita (m): with a pleasant smile Suvarna (m), Svarna: of beautiful color; gold; famous; of noble birth; Siva Suvasa (m): well clad; Siva Svaha (f): Goddess of fire Swaminathan (m): lord of renunciates, Murugan T Tanuja (f): daughter Tanuka (f): slender Tanvi (f): young woman Tara (f): star; destiny Taraka (m-f): the great protector; Siva Tarala (f): splendid; honeybee Tarani (f): ray of light; boat Tarika (f): belonging to the stars Tarini (f): one who saves others, a raft; Goddess Tara Taruna (m): young boy Taruni (f): young girl; woman Tejadeva (m): God of power; Agni Tejapala (m): controller of power Tejaschanda (m): very bright; sharp and powerful Tejasinha (m): lion of power; a son of Ranadara Tejasvat, Tejasvin (m): sharp edged; splendid; powerful; bright, beautiful; energetic, spirited; strong, heroic; dignified, famous Tejeyu (m): possessed with splendor Tejindra (m): glorious chief Tejistha (m): very sharp; hot; bright Tejita (m): sharpened; whetted Tejomurti (m): consisting totally of light Tejonidhi (m): abounding in glory Tejorasi (m): array of splendor; Mount Meru Tejorupa (m): consisting of splendor; Brahmâ Thakur (m): leader, God, lord Thamby (m): little brother Tilabhavani (f): beautiful dot; jasmine Tilaka (m-f): mark on the forehead; ornament Tirtha (f): passage; way; ford; place of pilgrimage; sacred object Tirthadeva (m): lord of the pilgrimage; Siva Tirthaka (m): sanctified Tiru, Thiru (m-f): holy; often used as a prefix meaning "Mister." Todara (m): removing fear Todika (f): splitting; breaking; a râgin î Tokavati (f): woman with children Tokaya (f): to present a new-born child Tokini (f): having offspring Tokma (f): fresh; young shoot; green Tola (m-f): being very poised; with a deer skin belt Tolana (m-f): lifting up Tomadhara (f): a water cloud Tomara (m-f): lance; vel; javelin Tomaradhara (m-f): javelin thrower; fire Torana (m): arch; a triangle supporting a large balance; Siva Tosha (m-f), Toshan (m): satisfaction; contentment; pleasure; joy Toshadeva (m): pleasant, contented God Toshak (m): one who pleases Toshashana (m-f): pleasing or gratifying others Toshashaniya (f): pleasing Toshin, Toshita (m): satisfied; pleased Totala (f): repeating; Dûrgâ and Gaurî Toyadhi (m): containing water; water receptacle, the ocean Toyalaya (f): a constellation Toyanjali (f): cupped hands holding water Toyaraj (m): king of waters, ocean Toyesa, Toyesha (m): lord of water, Varuna Toyika (f): a place that was made famous by a festival Tudi (f): satisfying Tuhara (m): remover of darkness, a soldier of Skanda Tuhi (f): a cuckoo's cry Tuja (f): thunderbolt Tuka (m): young; boy; astronomer Tula (m): balance; scale, the zodiac sign of Libra Tuladhara (m): bearer of balance; poised; just Tulakuchi (m): balanced; with a good heart Tulasi (f): matchless; sacred basil Tulini (f): cotton Tumbavina (m): having the gourd for a lute; Siva Tungabala (m): very strong Tungabhadra (f): very noble; sacred Tungavena (f): loving heights Tungeshvara (m): lord of mountains, a temple of Siva Tungishvara (m): lord of the night; Siva Turni (m): quick, clever; zealous; expeditious; the mind Turvasha (m): overpowering; victorious, hero king extolled in the Rig Veda Turya (f): the fourth state; superconscious; superior powers Tushara (f): frost, snow; cold Tusharakanti (m): beloved of the snow mountains; Siva Tushta, Tushya, Tusita (m): satisfied, pleased, contented Tushti (f): satisfaction Tuvijata (m): of powerful nature, Indra and Varuna Tuvikshatra (f): ruling powerfully Tuvikurmi (m): powerful in working; Indra Tuvimanyu (m): zealous Tyagaraj, Tyagaraja (m): king of renunciates; Siva UU Udara (m-f): generous Udaya (m-f): to rise; prosperity; sunrise Udayana (m-f): rising; king of Avanti Udbhava (m-f): source, origin; birth Uddalaka (m): burnt open; a kind of honey Uddara (m-f): liberation Udita (f): grown; awakened; shining; risen Udyana (f): garden, park Ujala (f): bright Ujasa (m): light Uma (f): mother; Pârvatî Umadevi (f): divine mother Umapati (m): Siva, lord of Umâ Umeda (f): hope, wish Upala (f): a jewel Upamanyu (m): a devoted pupil Upasana (m): adoration, worship; religious meditation Usha (f): dawn Utpala (f): lotus, water lily Utsava (m-f): festival Uttama (f):

good, superior, best Uttara (f): highest; uppermost Uttarkumar (m): excellent son VV Vadanya (m): bountiful; liberal Vadishvara (m): God of disputants; peace maker Vagindra (m): lord of speech Vagisha (m), Vagishvara: lord of speech; master of language; Brahmâ, Ganesha Vaidyanatha (m): lord of knowledge; Murugan Vajrendra (m): lord of the thunderbolt; Indra Vakrabhuja (m): crooked-armed; Ganesha Vakrapada (m): crooked-legged; Ganesha Vakratunda (m): with a curved trunk; Ganesha Vallabhananda (m): rejoicing in being loved Vallabhendra (m): Indra among the beloved; best beloved Vallabheshvara (m): most beloved; God among the beloved Valli (m): creeper, vine; lightning; Earth Valmiki (m): name of a Rishi Vamadeva (m): noble lord; lovely lord; Siva Vanadeva (m): forest God Vananatha (m): controller of the forest; lion Vandan (m): salutation Vani (f): speech; praise; music; Sarasvatî Vanija (m): merchant, trader; the zodiac sign of Libra; Siva Vaniprada (m): grantor of the power of speech; Ganesha Varada, Varadan (m): benevolent; bestower of boons; Ganesha and Murugan Varanatha, Vararaja (m): lord of the waters; Varuna Varathanatha (m): most excellent lord Varavridha (m): eldest among the best; Siva Varen (m): best Varendra (m): lord of the nobles; chief, sovereign Varesh, Vareshvara (m): best God; God of boons; Siva Varin, Variyas (m): water; river; Siva Varuna (m): lord of the sea; enveloping sky; guarding of the West; a Vedic God Varuni (f): lord Varun a's consort Vasant (m): spring; cupid Vasanta (f): bestower of desires; companion of Kâma Vasanti (f): of the spring season; vernal Vasishta (m): most excellent; a Rishi Vasu (m): dwelling in all beings; divine; precious; God; gem, gold; water; wealthy; ray of light; excellent, good, beneficent Vasuki (f): one who resides under earth; wife of Tiruvalluvar Vasunanda (m): delighting the Gods Vasurupa (m): of divine form; Siva Vasvananta (m): infinite wealth Vayu (m): air; God of wind Vedadarshin (m): perceiver of knowledge; a seer Vedagarbha (m): the quintessence of the Vedas; Murugan Vedagatha (m): singer of the texts; Rishi Vedagupta (m): one who preserved the Vedas Vedesa (m): lord of Vedas Vedisa (m): lord of the wise Vegin (m): hawk; falcon Vel (m): lance Velan, Veylan (m): lance-bearer, Murugan Velmurugan (m): Murugan with lance Venidasa (m): of a man; braid of hair Venika (m): of a people; braid of hair Vetaka (m): of a man Vetrin (m): staff-bearer, Murugan Vettri (m): one who knows the nature of soul and God; sage Vibudheshvara, Vibudheshvaran (m): lord of the wise; Ganesha Vidya (f): knowledge Vighnaraja, Vighnarajan (m): the ruler of obstacles; Ganesha Vijaya; Vijay (m-f): victorious, triumphant Vimala, Vimali (f): stainless, pure; Sarasvatî Vina (f): an indian lute; lyre Vinadevi (f): Goddess of the vîn â, Sarasvatî Vinadhara (m): carrier of the vîn â; Siva Vinapani (f): vîn a bearer, Sarasvatî Vinay, Vinaya (f): guiding; modesty, control; taking away Vinayaka, Vinayaga (m): remover [of obstacles]; Ganesha Vinita (f): trained; modest Vira (m-f): hero; brave, powerful Virabhadra (m): foremost of heroes; Siva Virupaksha (m-f): the all-seeing one; Siva Visakan, Vishakan (m); Vishakha (m-f): branched, divided; a constellation; Murugan; Vishva, Vishvan (m): pervasive; world, universe Vishveshvara (m): all-pervading ruler of the cosmos; Siva Vodhavya (f): to be led home or married Vodhri (m-f): one who bears or carries; guide; charioteer Vola (m-f): myrrh Vollaha (m): chestnut-colored horse Vopula (m): a man Voraka, Volaka (m): writer Vorata (m-f): jasmine Vovam (f): white lotus Vovi (f): deer Vrishanka (m): whose emblem is a bull; Siva Vyaghrapada (m): tiger-foot YY Yaganiya (m): to be worshiped Yaja (f): worshiper, sacrificer; brahmin Yajaka (m): worshiping; liberal Yajamana (m): sacrificing; worshiping; patron of priests Yajata (m-f): holy, divine; dignified; worthy of worship; adorable; the moon; officiating priest of a sacrifice; Siva Yajisnu (m): worshiping the Gods Yajna, Yajnya, Yagna, Yagnya (f): sacred fire ritual Yajnavaha (m): conducting the sacrifice to the gods; an attendant of Skanda Yajnavahana (m): having sacrifice or worship as a vehicle; Siva and Vishnu Yajnikadeva (m): lord of sacrifices Yajnodaya (m): risen from the sacred fire Yamajit (m): conqueror of Yama; Siva Yamal (f): brace; pair, twin Yamantaka (m): destroyer of Yama; Siva Yami, Yamin (f): night; one who has curbed his passions Yamika (f): moonlit night Yamininatha (m): lord of the night; the moon Yamuna (f): a sacred river in India Yamunajanaka (m): father of

Yamuna; the sun Yasachandra (m): as famous as the moon Yash, Yashil (f): glory, fame
Yashila (f): successful Yashna (f): prayer Yashomati (f): having fame Yasksini (f): a celestial
being Yasodeva (m): lord of fame and beauty; a son of Râmachandra Yati (f), Yatin, Yatish
(m): restraint; control; guidance; ascetic; Siva Yatinatha, Yatishvara (m-f): lord of ascetics; Siva
as a forest sage Yatu (m): going; traveller; wind; time Yogadanda (m): staff of yogic striving
Yoganatha, Yoganathan (m): Siva, lord of union, yoga Yogendra (m): Siva, lord of yoga
Yogesh, Yogeshvara (m), Yogeshvari (f): master of yoga; Siva, Dûrgâ Yogin (m): ascetic; Siva
Yugandhara (f): the earth Yuthika (f): white jasmine Yuti (f): one who unites Yuvati (f): young girl

CHAPTER 9: Embracing Hindu Culture Cues and Clues

Those seeking to adopt the Hindu culture fully who have been raised in non-Hindu environments will face many changes. The refinements of Hindu culture must be carefully studied and practiced. Western culture gives freedom to the individual, irrespective of the hurts he may cause to elders, spouse and children. Eastern culture gives freedom within the bounds of duty to elders, spouse and children. The sense of duty is the foundation of Hindu culture, and in performing duty one finds freedom within oneself through the higher accomplishments of yoga. Arriving at this state of unity requires study, worship, sâdhana and effort to mold oneself into the beliefs and culture of the religion one seeks to adopt.

The gentle Hindu culture is the embodiment of the profound philosophy. Therefore, to become fully Hindu means fully adopting the attitudes, customs and protocols of Hinduism. Of course, the best way to absorb the subtle nuances is to associate with and live among high-minded Hindus and learn from their example. The Meaning of Culture Each of the religions of the world has its own culture, with many beautiful, refined qualities. Each religious culture naturally embodies the beliefs and worship of that religion, as followers live out their convictions and goals at all levels of life. The same is true of philosophies that are nonreligious, such as existentialism, humanism, materialism and communism. Each of these, too, has a culture. Each country has its combined culture as well.

Today in the West and in Asia as well there exist many sub-cultures, some of which are made up of anti-establishment, anti-religious people who consciously defy others by being uncultured by the standards of the mainstream society. That is actually part of their culture. A Few Cultural Cues and Clues To be cultured, in the highest sense, means to be in control of oneself and exemplify the highest qualities of one's society, religion or philosophy. For Hindus and those of other Eastern faiths this means to consistently conduct oneself in accordance with the higher nature. The Hindu culture is a culture of love, respect, honoring others and humbling one's own ego so that the inner nature, which is naturally pure and modest, will shine forth. There are countless ways the Hindu attitudes of compassion, respect and self-effacement are expressed. Below we briefly describe some of the most important for new converts and adoptives to incorporate into their lifestyle.

A. RESPECT AND REVERENCE

1. RESPECT FOR ELDERS: Respect for elders is a keystone of Hindu culture. This genuine acknowledgment of seniority is demonstrated through endearing customs, such as sitting to the left of elders, bringing gifts on special occasions, not sitting while they are standing, not speaking excessively, not yawning or stretching, not putting one's opinions forward strongly, not contradicting or arguing, seeking their advice and blessings, giving them first choice in all matters, even serving their food first.

2. NAME PROTOCOL: Youngers never use the proper name of their elders. In the Tamil tradition, a younger brother, for example, refers to his brother as annan, or periannan (older brother), not by name. The elder, however, may use the name of the younger. Children are trained to refer to all adults as auntie or uncle. Adults, too, refer to each other as elder or younger brother or simply as brother (likewise for women). Only men the same age will occasionally address each other by first name. A Hindu wife never speaks the name of her husband. When referring to him she uses terms such as "my husband," "him" or, for example, "Jothi's father." When addressing yogîs, swâmîs or sâdhakas, one uses the title, not personal pronouns, such as you or your (nor by the name alone). For example, one would never ask, "What do you want?" Instead, one would inquire, "What does Swâmî want?"

3. TOUCHING FEET IN RESPECT: One touches the feet of holy men and women in recognition of their great humility and inner attainment. A dancer or a musician touches the feet of his or her teacher before and after each lesson. Children prostrate and touch the feet of their mother and father at special times, such as New Year's day, birthdays and before departing on a journey.

4. BEHOLDING THE DIVINE: Newcomers to Hinduism will quickly become familiar with the concept of darshana, meaning, "seeing," and referring to beholding with inner or outer vision, a temple image, Deity, holy person or place, with the desire to inwardly contact and receive the grace and blessings of the venerated being or beings. This is the spirit of Hindu worship. Even beholding a photograph in the proper spirit is a form of darshana. Not only does the devotee seek to see the Divine, but to be seen as well, to stand humbly in the awakened gaze of the holy one, even if for an instant, such as in a crowded temple when thousands of worshipers file quickly past the enshrined Lord. Gods and gurus are thus said to "give" darshana, and devotees "take" darshana, with the eyes being the mystic locus through which energy is exchanged. It is a direct and personal two-sided apprehension—highly sought-after experience of Hindu faith.

5. DAKSHINA: It is tradition to provide dakshinâ, a monetary fee or gift to a priest given at the completion of any rite. Dakshinâ is also given to gurus as a token of appreciation for their spiritual blessings. Purity and its opposite, pollution, are vitally important in Hindu culture. While they imply a strong sense of physical cleanliness, their significance extends to social, ceremonial, mental, emotional, psychic and spiritual contamination. Freedom from all forms of contamination is a key to Hindu spirituality, and is one of the yamas. Physical purity requires a clean and well-ordered environment, yogic purging of the internal organs and frequent cleansing with water. Mental purity derives from meditation, right living and right thinking. Emotional purity depends on control of the mind, clearing the subconscious and keeping good company. Spiritual purity is maintained through following the yamas and niyamas, study of the Vedas and other scriptures, pilgrimage, meditation, japa, tapas and ahimsa.

Ritual purity requires the observance of certain prâyaschittas, or penances, for defilement derived from foreign travel, contact with base people or places, conversion to other faiths, contact with bodily wastes, attending a funeral, etc. Purity is of three forms—purity in mind, speech and body, or thought, word and deed. Purity is the pristine and natural state of the soul. Impurity, or pollution, is the obscuring of this state by adulterating experience and beclouding conceptions. In daily life, the Hindu strives to protect this innate purity by wise living, following the codes of dharma. This includes harnessing the sexual energies, associating with other virtuous Hindu devotees, never using harsh, angered or indecent language, and keeping a clean and healthy physical body. Clearly, Eastern culture regards purity as more than just physical. Something may be perfectly clean yet be impure or polluted by thoughts of another or by undesirable vibrations. Customs of purity are often based on hygiene and health. Here are several ways purity is preserved in Hindu culture.

B1. PURITY AND FOOD: Purity is central to food and nutrition, as the nature of one's nourishment deeply affects the entire physical, mental and emotional nature. In a marketplace, one does not touch food one doesn't intend to buy. One cooking food for others would never taste of the dish from a spoon and then put the spoon back in the pot. If food is to be tasted while cooking, a small portion is placed in the right hand. Similarly, one would not touch the lips to a water vessel that is also used by others. Nor would one offer something to another from which one has taken a bite or a sip.

2. SANCTIFIED FOOD OFFERINGS: However, the opposite of this is true in the case of the satguru's food leavings. Food that he has tasted of is revered as sacred prasâda or ucçhishta. This and the water from the washing of his feet are sought after and imbibed by devotees for the great spiritual blessings that they contain toward moksha.

3. FLOWER OFFERINGS: One does not sniff flowers picked for offering to the Deities; even the smell is for the Gods, not for us. Flowers that fall to the ground should not be offered.

4. OFFERINGS: Offerings, such as an archana basket, flowers or garlands, are carried with both hands on the right side of the body, so as to not be breathed on. All items are washed in preparation and, if carried more than a short distance, wrapped or covered.

5. THE LEFT HAND: In Asian culture the left hand is considered impure because it is used (with water) in the place of toilet paper for personal hygiene after answering the call of nature. Handing another person anything with the left hand may be considered a subtle insult.

6. SHOES: Shoes are considered impure. The cultured Hindu never wears shoes or sandals inside a temple or shrine, nor in his home or the homes of other Hindus. Carrying shoes in the hands from one part of the premises to another is also avoided. An ultimate insult is to be struck with a shoe.

7. CAUTION WITH FOOTWEAR: It is very important to apologize immediately if one touches someone with their shoe or sandal. This is done by touching the right hand to where the foot touched the other person and then touching one's right hand lightly to his own left eye and then the right. This same remedy applies to inadvertently hitting someone with the hand or foot or bumping into them.

C. EXCHANGE OF PRANA

1. GIVING AND RECEIVING WITH BOTH HANDS: Giving and accepting things from one to another, presenting offerings to the Deity, etc., is most properly done with both hands. The reason for this is that with the gift, prâna is also given through both hands, thus endowing more energy to the object. The recipient of the gift receives it with both hands along with the prâna from the gracious giver. It is known that this exchange of energies is vital for friendship, harmony and the total release of the gift to the recipient.

2. NOT POINTING THE FINGER: Pointing with the forefinger of the right hand or shaking the forefinger in emphasis while talking is never done. This is because the right hand possesses a powerful, aggressive prânic force, an energy that moves the forces of the world. Pointing the index finger channels that force into a single stream. The harshness of this energy would be severely felt in the nerve system of the recipient. More properly, rather than pointing or shaking the index finger to give direction or emphasize a verbal statement, the entire hand is used as a pointer, with the palm up and the thumb held alongside the forefinger.

3. SHAKING HANDS: The traditional way that Hindu men greet one another is with the añjali mudrâ, then, with palms still held together, extending their hands to one another, in a two-handed handshake, in a deliberate transfer of prâna. The hands of one man, usually the less senior, are gently clasped between the other's. Each looks smilingly into the other's face while bowing slightly in humility. This handshake is not firm, but relaxed and gentle.

4. GREETING WOMEN: However, Hindu men never shake hands with women in the above manner or in any other way. Women are greeted by placing hands in añjali mudrâ, the prayerful gesture.

5. NOT THROWING THINGS: Throwing any object to another person is considered extremely improper, even if the persons know each other very well. Cultured Hindus consider this crude and even mildly violent, even if done in efficiency or jest.

6. CARE IN SITTING: It is improper to sit with one's legs outstretched toward a temple, shrine or altar, or even toward another person. This is a grave insult. Crossing one leg over the knee when sitting in a chair should be avoided, though crossing at the ankles is permitted. One must always try to follow the example of traditional elders. Worshipping, meditating or sitting in the kneeling pose is not acceptable among Hindus.

7. DOORWAYS: Conversations are not held inside or through doorways. This is considered inauspicious. Similarly, to exchange or give or lend an object, one steps inside the room first, or the recipient steps out of the room so that both parties are in the same room.

D. MODESTY

1. MODESTY: Interaction in public between men and women is much more restrained in Asian culture than in Western culture. In Asian culture, for the most part, men socialize with men, and women with women. Men never touch women in public, such as helping a woman out of a car, unless the lady is very elderly or infirm.

2. DISPLAYING AFFECTION: Married couples in Asia do not hug, hold hands or kiss in public. Even embracing at airports and train stations is considered out of the question. Men, however, frequently walk hand in hand.

E. THE ROLE OF WOMEN

In traditional Hindu culture, women are held in the highest regard—far more respected, in truth, than in the West. But this does not imply the kind of equality or participation in public interactions that are common in the West. The qualities traditionally most admired in an Asian woman are modesty of manner, shyness and self-effacement. Self-assertive or bold tendencies are regarded with circumspection. Feminine refinements are expressed and protected in many customs, including the following:

1. WOMANLY RESERVE: In mixed company, a Hindu woman will keep modestly in the background and not participate freely in conversation. This, of course, does not apply to situations among family and close friends. When male guests are in the home, women of the household will appear when it is proper for them to do so. Visitors do not expect or ask to meet them. Women are not expected to speak out or make themselves a part of the conversation.

2. WALKING BEHIND ONE'S HUSBAND: The wife walks a step or two behind her husband, or if walking by his side, a step or two back, always giving him the lead. In the West, the reverse of this is often true.

3. SERVING AT MEALS: At meals women follow the custom of serving the men first before enjoying their own meal.

4. CHAPERONING: It is customary for a woman to always be accompanied when she leaves the home. Living alone, too, is unusual.

5. WOMEN IN PUBLIC: Generally it is improper for women to speak with strangers on the street and especially to strike up a casual conversation. Similarly, drinking alcohol or smoking in public, no matter how innocent, are interpreted as a sign of moral laxity and are not acceptable.

F. GUESTS IN THE HOME

1. HOME VISITS: Close friends can visit one another anytime without being announced or making arrangements first. When they drop in, at least a refreshing drink is always served.

2. HOSTING GUESTS: Children generally leave the room, with a smile, when guests enter. The mother remains close by to serve as needs arise. The father, if present, will speak with the guest. If he is not present, the mother and a mature son will fulfill this role; and if no son is present, the mother may act as hostess, but only with the accompaniment of someone close to the family.

3. WIFE HOME ALONE: If the lady of the house is home alone and a male visitor comes to see her husband, it is not proper for her to invite him in, nor for him to expect to enter. Rather, he will leave a message and depart.

4. GIVING GIFTS: Gifts are always given when one visits a home or stays over night as a guest. The value of the gift varies greatly, depending upon circumstances. It is proper to give a separate gift for the wife and the husband. The wife is given the nicest item. BODY LANGUAGE All Hindus know that "Life is meant to be lived joyously!" All is God, and God is everywhere and in all things. This understanding and appreciation is exemplified in every aspect of Hindu deportment.

G 1. KINDLY WORDS AND COUNTENANCE: Hindus strive to keep a pleasant expression on their face, a gentle smile and a kind word for everyone they meet through the day. They know in their heart of hearts that God is everywhere and that all in the universe is perfect at every point in time. This knowledge gives them strength and courage to face their daily karmas positively and graciously.

2. REFINED GESTURES: Hindus know that every movement of the body, the face, hands, eyes, mouth, head, etc., has a meaning. Youth are taught to be sensitive to the thoughts and feelings of others in their body language. It is wise for new adoptives and converts to realize that they are communicating even when they are not speaking. For example, standing with arms folded across one's chest. This can convey in body language a sense of aloofness and non-participation.

3. EYES: Eyes are also a primary means of communicating, and the meanings are fairly straightforward. They usually indicate degrees of interest in what the speaker is saying. Smiling with your eyes as well as your mouth conveys sincerity. There are three levels of smiling (and infinite shades and degrees in between). Having the eyes open only slightly indicates mild interest. Eyes more open and a bigger smile indicates more interest and enthusiasm. Having the eyes open wide with a big smile or nod, possibly accompanied by some verbal expression, indicates greater interest or great happiness.

CHAPTER 10: Nine Questions About Hinduism

In the spring of 1990, a group of teenagers from the Hindu Temple of Greater Chicago, Lemont, sent a formal request to me for “official answers” to nine questions they had been commonly asked about their religious heritage by their American peers. These same questions had perplexed the Hindu youth themselves, and their parents, they confided, had no convincing answers. We took up the challenge and provided the following answers to the nine questions. We begin with advice on the attitudes to hold when responding.

First, ask yourself, “Who is asking the question?” Millions of Americans are sincerely interested in Hinduism and the many Asian religions. Therefore, when asked questions about Hinduism, do not take a defensive position, even if the questioner seems confrontational. Instead assume that the person really wants to learn. With this in mind, it is still important never to answer a question about religion too boldly or too immediately. This might lead to confrontation. Offer a prologue first and then come to the question, guiding the inquirer toward understanding.

Your poise and deliberateness give the assurance that you know what you are talking about. It also gives you a moment to think and draw upon your intuitive knowing. Before going deeply into an answer, always ask the questioner what his religion is. Knowing who is asking, you can address his particular frame of mind and make your answer most relevant. Another important key: have confidence in yourself and your ability to give a meaningful and polite response. Even to say, “I am sorry. I still much to learn about my religion and I don’t yet know the answer to that,” is a meaningful answer. Honesty is always appreciated. Never be afraid to admit what you don’t know, for this lends credibility to what you do know. Here are four prologues that can be used, according to the situation, before you begin to actually answer a question.

1) “I am really pleased that you are interested in my religion. You may not know that one out of every six people in the world is a Hindu.”

2) “Many people have asked me about my spiritual tradition. I don’t know everything, but I will try to answer your question.”

3) “First, you should know that in Hinduism it is not only belief and intellectual understanding that is important. Hindus place the greatest value on experiencing each of these truths personally.”

4) The fourth type of prologue is to repeat the question to see if the person has actually stated what he wants to know. So, repeat the question in your own words and ask if you have understand his query correctly. If it’s a complicated question, you might begin by saying, “Philosophers have spent lifetimes discussing and pondering questions such as this, but I will do my best to explain in a simple way.” Have courage.

Speak from your inner mind. Sanâtana Dharma is an experiential path, not a dogma, so your experience in answering questions will help your own spiritual unfoldment. You will learn from your answers if you listen to your inner mind speak. This can be a lot of fun. The attentive teacher always learns more than the student. After the prologue, address the question without hesitation. If the person is sincere, you can say, “Do you have any other questions?” If he wants to know more, then elaborate as best you can. Use easy, everyday examples. Share what enlightened souls and scriptures of Hinduism have said on the subject.

Remember, we must not assume that everyone who asks about Hinduism is insincere or is challenging our faith. Many are just being friendly or making conversation to get to know you. So don’t be on the defensive or take it all too seriously. Smile when you give your response.

Be open. If the second or third question is on something you know nothing about, you can say, "I don't know. But if you are really interested, I will find out or mail you some literature or lend you one of my books." Smile and have confidence as you give these answers. Don't be shy. There is no question that can be put to you in your birth karmas that you cannot rise up to with a fine answer to fully satisfy the seeker. You may make lifelong friends in this way. The nine answers below are organized with a one-line response, followed by a longer answer, then a more detailed explanation.

You may be surprised to find how many people are content with the most simple and short answer, so start with that first. You may use the explanation as background information for yourself, or as a contingency response in case you end up in a deeper philosophical discussion. Memorize the answers and use them as needed. So now we begin with the questions your classmates and friends may have been asking you all the time.

Question One: Why does Hinduism have so many Gods? A: While acknowledging many Gods, all Hindus believe in a one Supreme God who creates and sustains the universe. Longer answer: Hindus believe in one God, one humanity and one world. We believe that there is one Supreme God who created the universe and who is worshiped as Light, Love and Consciousness.

People with different languages and cultures have understood the one God in their own distinct way. This is why we are very tolerant of all religions, as each has its own pathway to the one God. One of the unique understandings in Hinduism is that God is not far away, living in a remote heaven, but is inside each and every soul, in the heart and consciousness, waiting to be discovered. This knowing that God is always with us gives us hope and courage. Knowing the One Great God in this intimate and experiential way is the goal of Hindu spirituality.

Explanation: Hinduism is both monotheistic and henotheistic. Hindus were never polytheistic, in the sense that there are many equal Gods. Henotheism better defines the Hindu view of a single Supreme God with many other divinities. We Hindus believe there is one all-pervasive God who energizes the entire universe. We can see Him in the life shining out of the eyes of humans and all creatures.

This view of God as existing in and giving life to all things is called "panentheism." It is different from pantheism, which is the belief that God is the natural universe and nothing more. It is also different from strict theism which says God is only above the world, apart and transcendent. Panentheism is a beautiful concept. It says that God is both in the world and beyond it, both immanent and transcendent. That is the Hindu view. Hindus also believe in many devas or Gods who perform various functions, like executives in a large corporation. These should not be confused with God. There is one Supreme God only. What is sometimes confusing to non-Hindus is that Hindus of various sects may call the one God by many different names, according to their regional tradition.

Truth for the Hindu has many names, but that does not make for many truths. Hinduism gives us the freedom to approach God in our own way, without demanding conformity to any dogma. Advice: There is much confusion about this subject, not only among Hindus but among those on the outside looking in. Learn the right terms and the subtle differences in them, and you can explain the profound ways that Hindus look at Divinity. Others will be delighted with the richness of the ancient Indian concepts of God. You may wish to tell inquiring minds that some Hindus believe only in the formless Absolute Reality as God; others believe in God as personal Lord and Creator. This freedom makes the concept of God in Hinduism, the oldest living religion, the richest in all of Earth's existing faiths.

Question Two: Why do Hindus believe in reincarnation? A: We Hindus believe the soul is immortal and reenters a fleshy body time and time again in order to resolve experiences and learn all the lessons that life in the material world has to offer. Longer Answer: Carnate means “of flesh.” And reincarnate means to “reenter the flesh.” Yes, Hindus believe in reincarnation. To us, it explains the natural way the soul evolves from immaturity to spiritual illumination. I myself have had many lives before this one and expect to have more. Finally, when I have it all worked out and all the lessons have been learned, I will attain enlightenment and moksha, liberation. This means I will still exist, but will no longer be pulled back to be born in a physical body.

Even science is discovering reincarnation. There have been many cases of individuals remembering their past lives. These have been researched by scientists, psychiatrists and parapsychologists during the past decades and documented in very good books and videos. Explanation: At death the soul leaves the physical body. But the soul does not die. It lives on in a subtle body called the astral body. The astral body exists in the nonphysical dimension called the astral plane. Here we continue to have experiences until we are reborn again in another physical body as a baby. Each reincarnating soul chooses a home and a family which can best fulfill its next step of maturation. After enlightenment we do not have to re-experience the baseness of Earthly existence, but continue to evolve in our inner bodies. Similarly, after we graduate from school we never have to go back to the fifth grade. We have gone beyond that level in understanding.

Young children speak of vivid past-life memories, which fade as they grow older, as the veils of individuality shroud the soul’s intuitive understanding. Great mystics speak of their past lives as well. Reincarnation is believed in by the Jains and the Sikhs, by the Indians of the Americas, and by the Buddhists, certain Jewish sects, the Pagans and the many indigenous faiths. Even Christianity originally taught reincarnation, but formally renounced it in the twelfth century. It is, in fact, one of the widest held articles of faith on planet Earth.

Question Three: What is karma? A: Karma is the universal principle of cause and effect, action and reaction which governs all life. Longer Answer: Karma is one of the natural laws of the mind, just as gravity is a law of matter. It simply means “cause and effect.” What happens to us that is apparently unfortunate or unjust is not God punishing us. It is the result of our own past actions. The Vedas, Hinduism’s revealed scripture, tell us if we sow goodness, we will reap goodness; if we sow evil, we will reap evil. The divine law is: whatever karma we are experiencing in our life is just what we need at the moment, and nothing can happen but that we have the strength to meet it. Even harsh karma, when faced in wisdom, can be the greatest catalyst for spiritual unfoldment. Explanation: We cannot give anything away but that it comes back to us.

A few years ago in Chennai an American devotee said to me, “Shall I give money to the beggar?” I said, “Give him ten rupees. You may need the fifty rupees when karma pays you back, just as he needs the ten rupees now.” The karmic law pays higher interest than any bank when you give freely with no strings attached. Karma is basically energy. I throw energy out through thoughts, words and deeds, and it comes back to me, in time, through other people. We Hindus look at time as a circle, as things cycle around again. Professor Einstein came to the same conclusion. He saw time as a curved thing and space as well. This would eventually make a circle. Karma is a very just law. Karma, like gravity, treats everyone the same. Because we Hindus understand karma, we do not hate or resent people who do us harm. We understand they are giving back the effects of the causes we set in motion at an earlier time. At least we try not to hate them or hold hard feelings. The Hindu law of karma puts man at the

center of responsibility for everything he does and everything that is done to him. Karma is a word we hear quite often on television. “This is my karma,” or “It must have been something I did in a past life to bring such good karma to me.” In some schools of Hinduism karma is looked upon as something bad. A Hindu guest from Guyana, South America, visited us in Hawaii and mentioned that karma means “sin,” and that this is what the Christians in his country are preaching that it means. Some non-Hindus also preach that karma means “fate,” which we know is untrue. The idea of inexorable fate, or a preordained destiny over which one has no control, has nothing to do with Sanâtana Dharma. Karma actually means “cause and effect.”

The process of action and reaction on all levels—physical, mental and spiritual—is karma. Here is an example: I have a glass of water in front of me on a table. Because the table is not moving, the water is calm. Shake the table; the water ripples. This is action and reaction, the basic law of nature. Another example: I say kind words to you; you feel peaceful and happy. I say harsh words to you, and you become ruffled and upset. The kindness and the harshness will return to me, through others, at a later time. This is karma. It names the basic law of the motion of energy.

An architect thinks creative, productive thoughts while drawing plans for a new building. But were he to think destructive, unproductive thoughts, he would soon not be able to accomplish any kind of positive task even if he desired to do so. This is karma, a natural law of the mind. We must also be very careful about our thoughts, because thought creates, and thoughts make karmas—good, bad and mixed.

Question Four: Why do Hindus regard the cow as sacred? A: The cow represents the giving nature of life to every Hindu. Honoring this gentle animal, who gives more than she takes, we honor all creatures. Longer Answer: Hindus regard all living creatures as sacred—mammals, fishes, birds and more. To the Hindu, the cow symbolizes all other creatures.

The cow represents life and the sustenance of life. It also represents our soul, our obstinate intellect and unruly emotions. But the cow supersedes us because it is so giving, taking nothing but grass and grain. It gives and gives and gives, as does the liberated soul give and give and give. The cow is so vital to life, the virtual sustainer of life for humans. If you lived in a village and had only cows and no other domestic animals or agricultural pursuits, you and your family could survive with the butter, the cream, yogurt, ghee and milk. The cow is a complete ecology, a gentle creature and a symbol of abundance.

Question Five: Are Hindus idol worshipers? A: No, Hindus are not idle worshipers. They worship with great vigor and devotion! Longer Answer: Seriously, Hindus are not idol worshipers in the sense implied. We Hindus invoke the presence of God, or the Gods, from the higher, unseen worlds, into stone images so that we can experience His divine presence, commune with Him and receive His blessings. But the stone or metal Deity images are not mere symbols of the Gods. They are the form through which their love, power and blessings flood forth into this world. We may liken this mystery to our ability to communicate with others through the telephone. We do not talk to the telephone; rather we use it as a means of communication with another person. Without the telephone, we could not converse across long distances; and without the sanctified icon in the temple we cannot easily commune with the Deity. Divinity can also be invoked and felt in a sacred fire, or in a tree, or in the enlightened person of a satguru. In our temples, God is invoked in the sanctum by highly trained priests. Through the practice of yoga, or meditation, we invoke God inside yourself. Yoga means to yoke oneself to God within. The image or icon of worship is a focus for our prayers and devotions. Another way to explain icon worship is to acknowledge that Hindus believe God is

everywhere, in all things, whether stone, wood, creatures or people. So, it is not surprising that they feel comfortable worshipping the divine in His material manifestation. The Hindu can see God in stone and water, air and ether, and inside his own soul. Explanation: Humorously speaking, Hindus are not idle worshipers. I have never seen a Hindu worship in a lazy or idle way.

They worship with great vigor and devotion, with unstinting regularity and constancy. There's nothing idle about our ways of worship! (A little humor never hurts.) But, of course, the question is about "graven images." All religions have their symbols of holiness through which the sacred flows into the mundane. To name a few: the Christian cross, or statues of Mother Mary and Saint Theresa, the holy Kaaba in Mecca, the Sikh Ādi Granth enshrined in the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the Arc and Torah of the Jews, the image of a meditating Buddha, the totems of indigenous and Pagan faiths, and the artifacts of the many holy men and women of all religions. Such icons, or graven images, are held in awe by the followers of the respective faiths.

The tooth of the Buddha in Sri Lanka's town of Kandy is another loved and respected image. The question is, does this make all such religionists idol-worshippers? The answer is, yes and no. From our perspective, idol worship is an intelligent, mystical practice shared by all of the world's great faiths. The human mind releases itself from suffering through the use of forms and symbols that awaken reverence, evoke sanctity and spiritual wisdom. Even a fundamentalist Christian who rejects all forms of idol worship, including those of the Catholic and Episcopal churches, would resent someone who showed disrespect for his Bible. This is because he considers it sacred. In Hinduism one of the ultimate attainments is when the seeker transcends the need of all form and symbol. This is the yogi's goal. In this way Hinduism is the least idol-oriented of all the religions of the world. There is no religion that is more aware of the transcendent, timeless, formless, causeless Truth. Nor is there any religion which uses more symbols to represent Truth in preparation for that realization.

Question Six: Are Hindus forbidden to eat meat? A: Hindus teach vegetarianism as a way to live with minimum of hurt to other beings. But in today's world not all Hindus are vegetarian. Longer Answer: Vegetarians are more numerous in the South of India than in the North. This is because of the North's cooler climactic conditions and past Islamic influence. Our religion does not lay down rigid "do's and don'ts." There are no commandments. Hinduism gives us the wisdom to make up our own mind on what we put in our body, for it is the only one we have—in this life, at least. Priests and religious leaders are definitely vegetarian, so as to maintain a high level of purity and spiritual consciousness to fulfill their responsibilities, and to awaken the more refined areas of their nature.

Soldiers and law-enforcement officers are generally not vegetarians, because they have to keep alive their aggressive forces in order to perform their work. To practice yoga and be successful in meditation, it is mandatory to be vegetarian. It is a matter of wisdom—the application of knowledge at any given moment. Today, about twenty or thirty percent of all Hindus are vegetarians. Explanation: This can be a very touchy subject. When you are asked this question, there are several ways that you can go, depending on who is asking and the background in which they were raised. But there is an overlying principle which gives the Hindu answer to this query. It is called ahimsa, refraining from injuring, physically, mentally or emotionally, anyone or any living creature. The Hindu who wishes to strictly follow the path of noninjury to all creatures naturally adopts a vegetarian diet. It's really a matter of conscience more than anything else. When we eat meat, fish, fowl and eggs, we absorb the vibration of the instinctive creatures into our nerve system. This chemically alters our consciousness and

amplifies our lower nature, which is prone to fear, anger, jealousy, confusion, resentment and the like. Many Hindu swâmîs advise followers to be well-established vegetarians prior to initiation into mantra, and then to remain vegetarian thereafter. But most do not insist upon vegetarianism for those not seeking initiation.

Swâmîs have learned that families who are vegetarian have fewer problems than those who are not. There are many scriptural citations that counsel not eating meat, such as in the Vedas, Tirukural and Manu Dharma Śāstras. For guidance in this and all matters, Hindus also rely on their own guru, community elders, their own conscience and their knowledge of the benefits of abstaining from meat and enjoying a wholesome vegetarian diet. Of course, there are good Hindus who eat meat, and there are not-so-good Hindus who are vegetarians. Today in America and Europe there are millions of people who are vegetarians simply because they want to live a long time and be healthy. Many feel a moral obligation to shun the mentality of violence to which meat-eating gives rise. There are some good books on vegetarianism, such as *Diet for a New America* by John Robbins. There is also a fine magazine dedicated to the subject, called *Vegetarian Times*.

Question Seven: Do Hindus have a Bible? A: Our “Bible” is called the Veda. The Veda is comprised of four ancient and holy scriptures which all Hindus revere. Longer Answer: Like the Taoist Tao te Ching, the Buddhist Dhammapada, the Sikh Ādi Granth, the Jewish Torah, the Christian Bible and the Muslim Koran—the Veda is the Hindu holy book. The Veda is the ultimate scriptural authority for Hindus. Its words and wisdom permeate Hindu thought, ritual and meditation. They open a rare window into ancient Indian society, proclaiming life’s sacredness and the way to oneness with God. Explanation: For untold centuries unto today, the Veda has remained the sustaining force and authoritative doctrine, guiding followers in ways of worship, duty and enlightenment. The Veda is the meditative and philosophical focus for millions of monks and a billion seekers. Its stanzas are chanted from memory by priests and laymen daily as liturgy in temple worship and domestic ritual. All Hindus wholeheartedly accept the Veda, yet each draws selectively, interprets freely and amplifies abundantly. Over time, this tolerant allegiance has woven the varied tapestry of Indian Hindu Dharma. Today, the Veda is published in Sanskrit, English, French, German and other languages. But it is the metaphysical and popular Upanishads, the fourth section of the Veda, which have been most amply and ably translated.

Question Eight: Why do many Hindus wear a dot near the middle of their forehead? A: The dot worn on the forehead is a religious symbol. It is also a beauty mark. Longer Answer: The dot worn on the forehead is a sign that one is a Hindu. It is called the bindi in the Hindi language, bindu in Sanskrit and pottu in Tamil. In olden days, all Hindu men and women wore these marks, and they both also wore earrings. Today it is the women who are most faithful in wearing the bindi. The dot has a mystical meaning. It represents the third eye of spiritual sight, which sees things the physical eyes cannot see. Hindus seek to awaken their inner sight through yoga. The forehead dot is a reminder to use and this spiritual vision to perceive and better understand life’s inner workings, to see things not just physically, but with the “mind’s eye” as well. There are many types of forehead marks, or tilaka, in addition to the simple dot. Each mark represents a particular sect or denomination of our vast religion. We have four major sects: Saivism, Vaishnavism, Shaktism and Smârtism. Vaishnava Hindus, for example, wear a v-shaped tilaka made of clay. Elaborate tilakas are worn by Hindus mainly at religious events, though many wear the simple bindi, indicating they are Hindu, even in the general public. By these marks we know what a person believes, and therefore know how to begin conversations. For Hindu women, the forehead dot is also a beauty mark, not unlike the black mark European and American women once wore on the cheek. The red bindi is generally a

sign of marriage. A black bindi is often worn before marriage to ward off the evil eye. As an exotic fashion statement, the dot's color complements the color of a lady's sari. Ornate bindis are worn by actresses in popular American TV shows. Explanation: Men and women of a particular faith wishing to identify themselves to one another often do so by wearing distinctive religious symbols. Often these are blessed in their temples, churches or synagogues. In some countries Muslim girls cover their face with a veil.

Christians wear a cross on a necklace. Jewish boys wear small leather cases that hold scriptural passages, and the round cap called yalmuka. Do not be ashamed to wear the bindi on your forehead in the United States, Canada, Europe or any country of the world. It will distinguish you from all other people as a very special person, a Hindu, a knower of eternal truths. You will never be mistaken as belonging to another nationality or religion. For both boys and girls, men and women, the dot can be small or large depending on the circumstance, but should always be there in appropriate circumstances. Naturally, we don't want to flaunt our religion in the face of others. We observe that Christian boys and girls take off or conceal their crosses in the corporate business world. Recently a Canadian TV documentary distinguished the bindi by calling it a "Cool Dot." Times are changing, and to proudly wear the symbols that distinguish and define us is totally cool.

Question Nine: Are the Gods of Hinduism really married? A: To the more uneducated people who are not able to understand high philosophy, Hinduism is taught in story form. Those of the higher philosophy know that each God is complete within Himself, neither male nor female. Longer Answer: Hinduism is taught on many different levels to many different people, and to the more uneducated people who are not able to understand the high philosophy, Hinduism is taught in story form. These stories, called Purânas, are the basis of dance, plays, storytelling around the fire in the homes to children as they are growing up to amplify how they should live. Because the temple is the center of every Hindu community, and everyone is focused on the temple and the Gods within the temple, the Gods are the major players in these stories. Hindus who understand the higher philosophy seek to find God on the inside while also worshiping God in the temples.

Simple folk strive to be like a God, or like a Goddess. The stories illustrate how a family should live, how they should raise their children, and much, much more. Explanation: Those who are privileged to the higher philosophies know that Gods are neither male nor female, which is the yoga of idâ and pi^galâ blending into sushumnâ within each individual. They know that Gods do not marry, that they are complete within themselves. This unity is depicted by Ardhanârîsvara, Siva as half man and half woman and in the teaching that Siva and Shakti are one, that Shakti is Siva's energy. Hindus are very peaceful people, they believe in ahimsa, not hurting physically, mentally or emotionally, but in times of war, the stories become violent, stimulating young men to get out and fight, showing how the Gods killed the demons, and how battles were won. Before the printing press, there were few books and these were owned only by a few families. Hinduism was conveyed through stories and parables. Therefore, Hindus are a visual community, holding pictures in their mind on how they should behave in peacetime, how they should behave in wartime. Some modern swâmîs now urge devotees not to pay any attention to the Purânîc stories, saying that they have no relationship with the world today—that they are misleading and confusing. Instead, they encourage followers to deepen themselves with the higher philosophies of the Vedic Upanishads and the realizations of Hindu seers.

In conclusion, we can speak frankly about the subject of conversion, adoption and being born into a religion. During the time of the intense conversions of my followers— who then joined Saiva Siddhânta Church and are to this day loyal, mature members, having raised their children, and now their children are raising their children, a third generation is emerging—what impressed me was the attitude of ownership that each priest, minister and rabbi had when approached by a former parishioner.

This attitude does not exist in Sanâtana Dharma. It never has and never will. During this time, and much less in conversions that followed in the late 80's and 90's, the clergy of the various religions read and reread their own Jewish laws, Catholic canon, Protestant books of discipline and Mormon doctrines in regard to apostasy. In short, these texts all state in one way or another that any follower is automatically excommunicated who, through study or personal inner experience, has accepted the beliefs and follows the ways of another religion. It is as simple as that. We could have at that point said to would-be converts that it is really not necessary to go back to your archbishop, priest, minister or elder, since you are already an apostate. The only problem was that was on the human level it was simply not polite, good manners, to drift away, never facing up to the serious matter of severance and beginning a new life in a new religion. And it was simply not ethical.

There was and still is another factor, that of strengthening the would-be convert in his new-found religion and its beliefs, culture and new-found friends. This was done by sending him back to his former pastor, congregation, relatives, friends and their surrounding community, to take part in their ceremonies and give them a fair chance to bring him back into the fold by talking him out of his apostate views. This was then, and still is, an ethical procedure. Yes, that is all true, you may think but inwardly ask, "Has anyone who underwent this return ever turned around and decided to stay in their born religion?" The answer is frankly, yes. We have experienced this a few times and were glad for it. This proved to us the ethicality of our approach to conversion from one religion or ism to another.

Adoptives and born Hindus with little prior religious commitments have it easier, but they are generally subconsciously programmed with various ism's, such as communism, existentialism, atheism, materialism, scientism and secular humanism. To effect the same level of reconciliation, we required them to approach college and university professors as well as other mentors to hear their views and argue out the turn of events in their lives giving them a chance to turn the prospective Hindu back to their teachings. We have in our midst the New Age movement. It has made a difference in the Western world, but the unfortunate truth is that it offers little or nothing for the children. New Age parents have no heritage to pass on to the next generation.

To New Age groups visiting our ashram on this Garden Island in the mid-Pacific I give a simple analogy. I explain that there are many paths to the top of the mountain, some lead to the top and others half way up. But the New Age approach is to take none of these, but instead to go around and around the base of the mountain, sampling the most basic out-front teaching and disciplines each faith puts forward. This, I point out, is a nonproductive procedure. My postulation generally has had little impact on New Age seekers who were and still are totally committed to being non-committed in any way.

No matter. It has become an open secret that the movement called the New Age is, in fact, nothing more and nothing less than a modern discovery of the venerable, age-old Sanâtana Dharma, which in today's world is imbedded in many languages, as Hinduism in English, Indu Samayam in Tamil, Hindutva in Sanskrit, Hindouisme in French, Hinduismo in Spanish, Religione Hindú in Italian, Hinduismus in German and more. Why do we call it do-it-yourself

conversion? Because if you really want to accelerate the natural spiritual, evolutionary laws of the soul, which slowly bring the realizations of the essence of the Sanâtana Dharma, the eternal truths inherent in every soul, you have to do it yourself. There are millions of Hindus out there, born to a Hindu mother and father, who due to modern and powerful influences have diverted to other ways.

One of our goals in this book is to welcome them back to the religion of their birth. One of our broader goals is to teach them about their grandfather's path in words that make sense to them, with a style that is comfortable to them. For this, we at Himâlayan Academy have developed many tools, including children's books for their kids and grand-kids. Many don't take religion seriously until they see the result of their attitudes of indifference and worldliness in their own offspring. Then there is our international magazine, HINDUISM TODAY, which speaks of their religion's place in this contemporary world; as well as our books on meditation and personal spiritual experience; books on philosophy and theology and the Vedas; books on culture and lifestyle; and books on Lord Ganesha and vegetarianism. And now the book you hold in your hands: a book on how anyone, born-Hindu or born-Nothing, can join the eternal path, which has no equal, the ancient path which has none older than it, the innermost path which is the straightest way to God.