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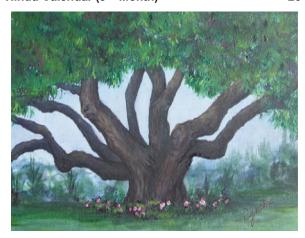
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Marg welcomes original articles for possible publication in the following areas: Dharma, Philosophy, Scriptures, and Culture; Hindu way of life; growing up as Hindu in America; Holistic living; problems and needs of multicultural Hindu families; and materials, including stories for the young readers.

We also invite our readers to send their comments regarding the *Marg* articles, or about other issues falling within the scope of *Marg*. We reserve the right to select, abbreviate, and edit for clarity submitted materials to conform to the editorial policy of *Marg* and the available space.

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PARASHU-RAMA AND RAMA AVATAR

Swami Jyotirmayananda

Out of the twenty-four avataras of Lord Vishnu that are given importance in Bhagavat Purana, ten are considered most important. These are: Matsya (Fish), Kurma or Kachhapa (Tortoise), Varaha (Hog), Vamana (Dwarf), Narasinha (Man-Lion), Parashu-Rama (Rama with an Axe), Rama (the delighter of hearts), Bala-Rama (Rama endowed with Might), Krishna (the Source of attraction and charm), and Buddha (the Enlightened).

In this article we will describe Parashu-Rama and Rama, along with their mystic implications for the spiritual movement in the life of an aspirant.

PARASHU-RAM

Lord Vishnu incarnated as Parashu-Rama (Rama who held an axe as his weapon). Though born a brahmin, as the son of princess Renuka and brahmin Sage Jamadagni, Parashu-Rama was physically strong, mentally tough and very aggressive by nature, and was raring to fight injustice, wherever he found it.

Once, when Parashu-Rama was away from the hermitages, the mighty king, Sahasrabahu, (also known as Kartavirya Arjuna) happened to come there with his people. Sage Jamadagni received them all with great courtesy. He then served them delicious food with the help of the wish-fulfilling Divine cow Kamadhenu—a gift from Lord Indra that could feed any number of people with extraordinary food within seconds.

Sahasrabahu was amazed by the powers of this Divine creature and immediately wanted to possess her for himself. Therefore, as he was leaving the ashram of Sage Jamadagni, he dragged away the cow and her calf forcefully.

Sahasrabahu had received a boon from Lord Dattatreya to be empowered with the strength of a thousand arms. Although initially working for positive developments in society, this mighty kshatriya warrior had become exceedingly arrogant and freely misused his power.

Coming to know of the injustice committed by Sahasrabahu, Parashu-Rama marched with his axe to the capital of the king, fought with his army, and finally killed the mighty Sahasrabahu himself. Then he returned the cow and calf to his father.

When the sons of the slain king saw that Parashu-Rama was away from home on a pilgrimage, they ravaged the hermitage of Sage Jamadagni and brutally slaughtered the Sage in revenge for the killing of Sahasrabahu.

Learning of what happened to his father, Parashu-Rama flew into a rage and killed all the perpetrators of the crime. He then continued to destroy twenty-one generations of sinful kshatriya kings who had been inflicting untold hardships on society. In order to restore peace and tranquility on the earth, Parashu-Rama kept roaming with his axe to crush the growing despotism, oppression cruelty let loose by the ruling class against weak and ordinary people.

Parashu-Rama's repeated slaving of the kshatriyas mystically implies that an aspirant should tirelessly strive the overhaul unconscious, repeatedly destroying sublimating the impure impressions that are based on rajas—impressions of egoism, externalization and multiplicity. Each time your mind is agitated or overcome by selfishness, greed, hate, or jealousy, rajas is at work, try to allow the spiritual force of Parashu-Rama's axe within you to mow down those weeds of rajas. They will grow again and again, and you must mow them down again and again. If you keep them under control, you will have a beautiful lawn flourishing within your mind! impressions (Shubha Divine samskaras) will blossom and

Parashu-Rama's mission was to bring about harmony and order by forceful means. He was born during a time when rajasic kshatriya kings who developed immense pride and conceit, were predominant on the earth. Sahastrabahu himself, with his power of thousand arms, represents vikshepa--rajasic distraction of mind. With his crude expression of Divine power, Parashu-Rama eliminated

an amazing number of those kings, not once, but repeatedly, mowing them down like weeds that would eventually destroy the garden.

In an ideal society that is harmony, moving towards brahmin as (saintly people who philosophical have insight) should be the leaders. Kshatriyas (politicians, soldiers, warriors) should always submit to brahmin as. Kshatriyas have a wonderful place in society, but they must be guided by sattwa (purity of mind). If they are guided by their own whims, they become demoniacs.

When saintly insight predominates, there will be prosperity, harmony and peace in the world. When force and might (kshatriyas) or money and wealth (Vaishyas) predominate, there will be degradation.

In the evolution of an Parashu-Rama aspirant, symbolizes a forceful approach to disciplining the mind and senses, while Rama symbolizes a more subtle and persuasive approach. Both approaches are necessary on the spiritual path, and an aspirant must develop a sensitive way of assessing which is more appropriate at any given moment. In general, however, the more you advance, the subtler is your handling of the inner obstacles to spiritual advancement.

By the time Lord Vishnu incarnated as Rama, the type of power that manifested in Parashu-Rama was no longer needed. What was needed was a higher movement of the spirit—fighting evil not by brute force,

but with intelligence and goodness. The mission of Rama Avatara symbolizes this more sublime movement in which the intellect that is inclined to lesser values is cut down and a purified intellect (intuitional) emerges. The axe of intuitive intellect then fells the entire tree of the world-process, which has its roots in the causal ignorance (avidya).

RAMA AVATAR

When the earth was burdened by the increase the decline of virtue, Lord Vishnu incarnated in the form of four sons of King Dasharatha, the ruler. of Ayodhya

Dasharatha had three wives. Queen Kaushalya gave birth to Rama, who was the eldest; Kaikeyi gave birth to Bharata; and Sumitra gave birth to the twins, Lakshmana and Shatrugna. When Rama reached the young age of 16, he received the teachings of Vedanta from Sage Vasistha, thereby enabling him to discover his innate Divine nature.

Then Rama, accompanied by his brother Lakshmana, assisted in the performance of a sacrifice by Sage Vishwamitra, and in so doing had to destroy many terrible demons.

After accomplishing the amazing feat of a breaking Shiva's bow in the marriage contest," Rama was wedded to Sita, the daughter of King Janaka.'

Noticing his own advancing age, Rama's father, King Dasharatha, wanted to declare Rama as his heir apparent. However, Kaikeyi, one of the King's wives, had other plans in

her mind. She had previously secured two boons from the king, and now used them to send Rama away to the forest for fourteen years. Her hope was that Bharata, her son through the king, would become the ruler of Ayodhya.

Rama, then, accompanied by his wife Sita and his younger brother Lakshmana, went to live in the forest. Later, Bharata, who was not aware of what his mother had done at the time because of his absence, came to the forest to persuade Rama to return and rule the kingdom.

Rama, however, was firm in keeping the words he had given to his father. So Bharata returned to Ayodhya, installed Rama's sandals on the throne, and began to rule the kingdom as Rama's servant.

While living a life of austerity in the forest, once Laksman brought about the disfigurement of Shurpanaka, the demoniac sister of the ten-headed demon-king Ravana, by cutting off her nose and ears. Ram and Lakshman also destroyed many of Surpanaka's bodyguards.

Angered by this, Ravana kidnapped Sita, who he longed to have as his wife, and brought her to Lanka, his capital city. To destroy Ravana and rescue Sita, Rama and Lakshmana befriended a vast army of monkeys and bears with the help of Hanuman and the monkey-king Sugriva. Among the monkeys, Hanuman became the closest and dearest servant of Rama.

Rama and his army built a bridge consisting of mountainous

rocks across the ocean. When they reached Lanka, Vibhishana, Ravana's satwic younger brother, joined Rama and assisted him in his virtuous endeavor.

Then after a terrible battle, Rama, with the aid of his brother Lakshmana, his valiant devotee Hanuman, Vibhishana, Sugriva, and the army of monkeys and bears, was able to destroy Ravana and Ravana's other brother, Kumbhakarna.

Sita was reunited with Rama, and the gods praised Rama for ridding the earth of the burden of those terrible demons. Vibhishana was then made ruler of the kingdom of Lanka.

By this time fourteen years had also passed. Rama then returned in an aerial car to Ayodhya with Sita and Lakshmana. There Rama was coronated king, and he ruled for an extremely longtime, during which his people enjoyed immense peace, bliss and prosperity.

When circumstances required that Sita leave Ayodhya, she went into exile to the ashram of Sage Valmiki, where she gave birth to Lava and Kusha. Eventually, she entrusted her sons to the care of the Sage and entered into an opening in the earth while meditating upon Rama. After many years, Rama decided to terminate his physical existence and ascended to the heavenly world, where he eternally abides as the Self in all

Having assumed lesser levels of Divine descent, the Supreme Self manifested as Lord Rama, a perfect human being, the delighter of hearts. Rama and Krishna are described as purna avatars, or full avatars. Further, Rama is described as Maryada Purushottama, which implies that Rama is setting an example to be followed by humans. Although all avatars outstep human limits to a certain extent, in Rama's case this was much more controlled. Rama does not readily assert his Divinity, but always shows himself to be like everyone else. Yet the expressions of immense are there powers in his personality.

Since Lord Rama is one of the adored of Divine manifestations, the symbolism in his life covers the entire range of mystic movement in an aspirant. On the highest level of mystic understanding, Rama is Brahman, the Absolute Self. On the relative plane, Rama is Lord Vishnu, the Absolute with form and qualities. He appears as an incarnation or avatar of God and is an object of meditation for devotee. In addition, Rama represents the jiva or individual soul that has entered the forest of the world-process and struggles to overcome Maya (Cosmic Illusion) and attain Liberation.

This soul is born to King Dasharatha—an individual who is very virtuous. The soul is bound by the body and limited personality as well as to the queen mothers, who represent the three gunas (modes of Nature) in their positive expression-sattwa (purity and harmony), rajas (activity and externalization) and tamas (dullness, inertia, extreme

negativity). Nourished by the mothers and loved by the father, the soul evolves and struggles to discover its essential identity.

The soul (Rama) evolves in a personality that is a blend of four aspects—wisdom (jnana), will (dhyana), action (karma), and devotional feeling (bhakti). These are represented, respectively, by Rama, Lakshmana, Shatrughna, and Bharata.

Breaking Shiva's bow is a turning point in human life. The bow of Shiva represents a subtle illusion in the mind that keeps one glued to the sense of individuality and leads through endless cycles of birth and death (the path of pravritti). If one were to break that illusion, he would begin to tread the path of nivritti, the path that leads to Liberation. The moment one makes a resolve to become free of the bondage of individuality and attain Liberation, Rama (the emergent soul) within him breaks Shiva's bow and weds Sita, the purified intellect.

Rama had to enter into forest life for fourteen years before he could return to Ayodhya and been throned as king. This was necessary if he was to fulfill the objective of his embodimentthe destruction of demons. In one's spiritual movement there is a similar unfoldment. Although Rama abides at every moment in your heart, you cannot enthrone him or become one with his glorious presence until demons that abide in the forests and cities of the unconscious are destroyed by a deep-rooted

transformation within your personality.

The with encounter Shurpanaka (the sister of the demon king, Ravana) interesting mystical implications. confronting the developments in life, an aspirant has two choices—shreya, that is which good orrepresented by Sita; or preya, that which is alluring or pleasing, but impure, represented Shurpanaka. The cutting off of the nose and ears of the demoness is symbolic of the development vairagya of (dispassion) and viveka (discrimination between the Self and the non-Self.)

In order to find and recover the kidnapped Sita, Rama befriends the monkeys and bears. This represents that phase of spiritual movement where an aspirant learns to practice pratyahara withdrawal of the senses and control of the mind. The pranic energy operating at the plane of the senses and mind can be compared to monkeys and bears. Without Rama, without a Divine mission, those energies simply wander without purpose through the forests of the world process. But when Rama befriends them, all those energies are united in a powerful mystical mission that aids one's greatly spiritual evolution.

Hanuman represents the immense spiritual force that is known as atmabal or inner will-force. Here presents sadhana shakti—the power generated by intense spiritual discipline and

also brahmacharya shakti—the power of purity that results from the restraint of passion and the lessening of one's identification with the body-idea. If you enter into the unconsciousness during meditation, Hanuman goes with you brings about and tremendous change. Like Hanuman 's fiery destruction of most of Lanka before the arrival of Rama, the soul force within

you wipe out myriad negative impressions. It enables you to cross the ocean of illusion and enter into the place where the basis of ignorance abides.

Ravana, with the ten indrivas (five senses and five organs of action) as his heads, represents rajas-predominating ignorance (ignorance that is active, restless and distracted); his brother, Kumbhakarna, represents tamaspredominating ignorance (ignorance that dull, melancholy and extremely negative); and Vibhishana represents sattwa-predominating ignorance (ignorance that is purer and healthier). In the course of spiritual movement, the soul must befriend sattwa and enlist its assistance in fighting against rajas and tamas. Though sattwa belongs to the world of the demons of duality, yet one is led to Self-realization through its help.

The confrontation of Rama with Ravana is the last confrontation in the spiritual movement. All demoniac forces that harass the individual and humanity emanate from that ignorance. Therefore, when you

fight against ignorance it is your last fight~ and there is no fight it! Further, Rama's like annihilation of Ravana symbolizes the ascent Kundalini as it destroys the knot of karma, the knot of desire, and ultimately the knot of ignorance on its way to the crown of the where Enlightenment reaches its summit.

Thus, the soul discovers its essential nature as it is reunited with Sita—the intuitive intellect that had been kidnapped by ignorance. Then, like Rama and Sita reigning blissfully together for thousands of years, Rama rajya (kingdom) reigns within the personality of an enlightened Sage. This represents the state of Jivan Mukti, or Liberation in life. However, when the prarabdha karma (fructifying karma) of a Sage terminates, and he is ready to enter into Videha Mukti (bodiless Liberation), intuitional intellect is no longer needed. Thus, Sita departs, and Rama remains alone as the nondual Brahman (Existence-Consciousness-Bliss Absolute).

for an in-depth study of the story of Rama, please see Mysticism of the Ramayana by Swami Jyotirmayananda.

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VALUE YOUR OWN WISDOM

Your very own inner wisdom should be valued more than any other and will always guide you in the direction you need to travel.

Throughout our lives, we will encounter individuals presume to know what is best for us. The insights they offer cannot compare, however, to the powers of awareness and discernment that already exist within us. From birth, we are blessed with wisdom that cannot be learned or unlearned. It exists whether or not we acknowledge it because it is a gift given to us by a loving universe before we chose to experience existence on the earthly plane. Yet for all its permanence, it is vital that we value and honor this incredible element of the self. It is when we do not use our inborn wisdom that we begin to doubt our personal truths and are driven to

outside sources of information because we are afraid. What we know to be true in our hearts is invariably true, and we discover how intensely beautiful and useful self-trust can be when we recognize the power of our wisdom.

Inner wisdom is not subject to the influences of the outside world, which means that it will never demand that we surrender our free will, nor will it counsel us to act in opposition to our values. We benefit from this inspiration when we open ourselves to it, letting go of the false notion that we are less qualified than others to determine our fate. The wisdom inside of us is the source of our discernment and our ability to identify blessings in disguise. When we are unsure of who to trust, how to respond, or what we require, the answers lie in our inner wisdom. It knows where we going are

understands where we are coming from. Taking this into account though, it is not a product of experience but rather a piece of our connection to the universal mind.

In the whole of your existence, no force you will ever encounter will contribute as much to your ability to do what you need to do and be who you want to be as your natural wisdom. Through it, you reveal your growing consciousness to the greater source and discover the true extent of your strength. If you heed this wisdom with conviction and confidence, the patterns, people, and fears that held you back will be dismantled, paving the way for you to fulfill your truest potential

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Courtesy: www.dailyOm.org

TAKING A PAUSE

Giving ourselves a respite from our daily concerns is like giving a gift to ourselves. By stepping away from the problems that seem to saturate our thoughts, we lessen the weight of our troubles, and instead, become more receptive to the wisdom and answers the universe has to offer us.

Courtesy: www.dailyOm.org

USE OF IMAGES IN HINDUS WORSHIPING SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S VIEWS

Umesh Gulati, Durham, NC

Narendra, later known to the world as Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902),was the chief disciple of Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886) who had initiated him and fifteen others into sannyasa or monkhood. After the passing away of their beloved Master (Guru), the brother disciples lived together for some time in a dilapidated house, which they had turned into a monastery. They also took their monastic names. Narendra got for himself the name Swami Vivekananda. Soon after that all except one left the sheltered life of a monastery and took to the road as wandering monks, either in a group of two or three, or taking a solo journey. Narendra, now Swami Vivekanand, preferred the latter course more often than any of his brother disciples.

All these journeys took him to every corner of India, from his original home in Kolkata (Calcutta) in the East to the North, to the West, and finally to the South. Many of these journeys were on foot; he took the train if and when some generous seeker offered him the fare. Like most monks in India, he ate whatever daily alms would bring him, and during the night he would sleep under a tree in the forest or in a cave or near the bank of a river. At times, he became the guest of rich people, and princes, too. But he never stayed there very long, for that would be against the grain of a real monk.

It was early February 1891 when the Swami alighted from a train at the Alwar Railway Station, Rajasthan. There with the help of a Bengali doctor, he settled in a room above one of the shops, which was meant for the wandering monks like him. After a few days, the prime minister of the state of Alwar chanced to hear about Swami Vivekananda and invited him to his residence for a talk. The minister also invited the Maharaja Mangal Singh of the State, who had become very much anglicized in and manner. thought minister's intention was that a contact with the Swami might soften the Maharaja's scorn for his own religion.

Maharaj started conversation by saying, "Well, Swami-ji, I hear that you are a great scholar. You can easily earn a handsome sum of money every month. Why then do you go about begging?

Swami-ji replied with a home thrust: "Maharaja, tell me why you spend your time constantly in the company of Westerners, go on shooting excursions, and neglect your duties to the State?

Those who were present were taken aback. "What a bold sadhu (wandering monk)! He will repent of this", they thought. But the

Maharaja took it calmly and, after a little thought, replied, "I cannot say why, but, I guess, I like to."

"Well, for the same reason I wander about as a beggar", rejoined Swami-ji.

The Maharaja's next question was, "Well, Swami-ji, I have no faith in idol-worship. What is going to be my fate?"

The Maharaja smiled as he spoke, apparently on his own sarcastic remark.

"Surely you are joking", said the Swami.

"No, Swami-ji, not at all. You see, I really cannot worship wood, earth, stone or metal, like other people. Does this mean that I shall fare worse in the life hereafter?

"Well, I suppose every man should follow the religious ideal according to his own faith," the Swami responded. But Swami-ji had not yet finished; his eyes lit on a picture of the Maharaja, which was hanging on the wall. At his desire, the picture was passed to him. Holding it in his hand he asked, "Whose picture is this?" The maharaja's minister answered that the picture was of The Swami Maharaja. commanded, "Spit on it." He repeated his command, "Any one of you may spit on it. What is it but a piece of paper? What

objection can you have against doing so?"

The Maharaja seemed shaken up, and all those present were thunderstruck and feared that something terrible might happen for such an insolent remark by the Swami. But the Swami persisted in his demand, "The Maharaja is not bodily present in this photograph. This is only a piece of paper. It doesn't contain his bones, flesh, or blood. And still if you refuse to spit on this picture, it is because it is the shadow of the Maharaja; indeed, by spitting on this photo, you feel that you will be insulting the Maharaja himself.

Maharaja, Swami the continued, "You see, Your Highness, though this picture is not you in one sense, yet in another sense, it is you. That is why your servants were so reluctant to spit on it. It is a shadow of you; it brings you into their minds. In the same way with the devotees' worship stone images of gods and goddesses, which bring to their minds the thought of their Ishta, or some special form and attributes of the Divinity, and help them to concentrate. I have traveled in many places, but nowhere have I found single Hindu worshipping an image, saying, 'O Stone, I worship Thee.' 'O Metal, be merciful to me.' Everyone, Maharaja, is worshipping the same one God who is the Supreme Spirit, the Soul of Pure Knowledge. And God appears to according their to understanding and their representation of Him."

Maharaja Mangal Singh felt greatly embarrassed and with folded hands asked the Swamiji's forgiveness and said, "Swami-ji, you have opened my eyes. I had never met anyone who explained the meaning to worshipping God through an image the way you have told me today. But what will be my fate? Have mercy on me." The Swami assured the Maharaja that God alone could be merciful. "Pray to God; He will show His mercy to you." In these two questions of the Maharaja, and the Swami's response to them brings out two very important attributes of Swami-ji's character. One is fearlessness and the other is his gift of explaining the significance of a very ancient religious practice of the Hindus. His fearlessness was the result of having realized the Atman or the Self, which made him aware that he was not just the body mind complex but the Spirit, without birth and without death, which no sword can pierce, nor the fire can burn, or water can wet, nor the wind can dry. The other was the result of his clear understanding of the scriptures, spiritual practices, and their symbolic significance.

We should not be too surprised ignorance, at the Maharaja's because it was the same misrepresentation that was cultivated even by many of his eminent contemporaries. Even today, the same view of the Hindus being idolatrous is very common. But more clearheaded people understand that a value is idolatrous only when it comes to an end, and not when like image

worship is used as a means of concentration on one's deity.

In her book, A History of God, Karen Armstrong, a former Catholic nun explains in this book the meaning of idolatry, which is not different from what Swami Vivekananda said one hundred years ago. She says: when some value like a Western value of individualism becomes an end-in-itself, it is idolatry. Again, "Despite the bad press it has in the Bible," says she, "there is nothing wrong with idolatry per se: it becomes objectionable or naïve only if the image of God, which has been constructed with such loving care, is confused with the ineffable reality to which it refers." (Ibid. 59)

Harvard professor Diana Eck, too, concurs with the above viewpoints about what idolatry is and what it is not. "The king, the lord, the shepherd, the father, the God with a mighty arm stretched through history -- are images, too. Even so, many of us ... think that those who address God through material images are idolaters, while those whose images are shaped by words are not. (Emphasis is ours.)

There is idolatry on both sides, but it has to do with the shortsightedness of those whose vision stops at the image. The image is a window, not an object. The eighteen-foot image of Vishnu is no more an idol than the cross, the 'Our Father,' or the bread at Holy Communion. … Idolatry is in the eye of the beholder."

The cross, indeed, is the greatest symbol of Christianity, which signifies to Christians not only the death of Christ but also the redemption of man. For, the blood of Christ cleanses man of the original sin. Islam, which is the most vehement opponent of images, and yet Muslims use the graves of their saints and martyrs almost in place of images. Besides, since such worship in both Christianity and Islam is for the objects in themselves and not as the means of having the vision of God, such worship is real idolatry.

In fact, the images in the Hindu temples are only the symbols by which the Hindus express the invisible by visible or sensuous representations. All our contact with the world outside is through symbols. Our language is nothing but symbols. Our art, our poetry, in fact every aspect of our life is based on symbols. In other words, worshipping God through images or Pratikas, taken as substitutes for God -- not God itself -- is quite legitimate means for realizing God. The important thing, as Sri Ramakrishna said, is sincerity and yearning for the realization of God as a kitten has for its mother cat. In fact, Sri Ramakrishna himself had one of his great visions of the Divine Mother Kali through his worship of her as a priest during the early years of his long stay at the Dakshin Eswar temple complex.

Let us illustrate by looking at the following anecdote. Sri Ramakrishna was appointed the priest of the Kali Temple at Dakshin Eswar in 1856. But Ramakrishna turned out to be an unusual priest; for the way he put his whole heart, soul and strength into the worship of the Deity in order to have Her 'darshan' (vision) and have Her living experience within his own heart, has no precedence in the history devotional of religion. Addressing the image of Kali, he would often exclaim piteously: 'Mother, you showed yourself to Ramaprasad a seventeenth century music composer, poet and saint in the past. Why won't You show yourself to me? Why won't You grant my prayer? I have been praying to You so long!' And he would weep bitterly. Many a time before the image in the shrine, he would become so absorbed and would, often, stop the performance of the ritual sitting motionless for hours at a time in the hope that the Mother would soon grant his prayer. Sri Ramakrishna describes his agony of separation from Mother:

There was an unbearable pain in my heart, because I couldn't get a vision of Mother. ... In my agony, I said to myself: "What is the use of living this life?" Suddenly my eyes fell on the sword that hangs in the temple. I decided to end my life with it, then and there. Like a madman, I ran to it and seized it.

What happened then is impossible to put into our words; so, let Sri Ramakrishna himself describe it:

And then – I had a marvelous vision of the mother and fell down unconscious. ... The Divine Mother revealed to me in

the Kali Temple that it was She who had become everything. She showed me that everything was full of Consciousness. The Image was Consciousness, the altar was Consciousness, the water vessels were Consciousness, the doorsill was Consciousness, the marble floor was Consciousness -- all was Consciousness or an infinite shoreless sea of light. However far and in whatever direction I looked, I saw shining waves, one after another, coming toward me. They were raging and storming upon me with great speed. Very soon they were upon me; they made me sink down into unknown depths. I panted and struggled and lost consciousness.' It is not clear from Ramakrishna's account that he actually saw the form of Mother Kali in the midst of this vision of shining consciousness. But it would seem that he did; because the first words that he uttered on coming to himself were 'Mother, Mother!'

It has become fashionable to say that idolatry is wrong. Swami Vivekananda also 'once thought so . . . [but] I had to learn my lesson sitting at the feet of a man who realized everything through idols; I allude to Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. If such Ramakrishna Paramahamsas are produced by idol-worship, what will you have -- the reformer's creed or idols?

Thus, it is clear that, so long as we use the image of any deity to realize the invisible God [whom Sri Ramakrishna called Mother Kali], it is not idolatry. How else can we concentrate on

something, which is beyond thought or form? The image helps us focus on the invisible. Besides, in order to invoke the spirit in images, priests follow an elaborate procedure of preliminary rituals. They sing Vedic chants and say prayers to invoke and sanctify, and, thereby, enliven the presence of the Divine in the image (Pran pratishtha) for worship.

Once again, worship is offered to the consecrated Deity in the image and not to the image as such. Just as a picture of our father reminds us of our father and not of the paper on which the picture appears, in the same way the divine image brings into our minds our Deity. In ordinary life when we salute the national flag, we are not doing it for the piece of cloth with some markings, but for the honor of the country or that it represents. Similarly, images of the Deity, though humanly conceived, represent the invisible divinity that receives our worship.

The worship of God through an image, however, is neither compulsory nor obligatory for every Hindu, though it has certain advantages. In the first place, an image helps the worshiper concentrate on the Deity within oneself, which the image outside is just its representation. In the

second place, worship through images indirectly allows a devotee offer service, such as plucking flowers, making sandal paste, polishing the utensils of worship, arranging offering, etc., to the incidental Deities to their worship, thereby keeping the body, senses, and mind engaged in the thought of the Deity. Finally, and quite importantly, images of the Deities, artistically sculptured as they are, serve both theological and narrative functions. In a country like India, where a large percentage of population is still without formal education, images, according to Eckvi Diana are "visual theologies," and they continue to be "read" that way by the Hindus.

Worshipping God through images, however, is only the kindergarten of service to God. In fact, all rituals in all religions and in many sects of these religions are merely the preparatory form of bhakti, Gauni bhakti or devotion. Religious quarrels that we often encounter are over such rituals, dos and don'ts of religions. Only when through such preparatory form, worship ripens into what is called 'para bhakti' or supreme devotion that the objective of the worship, which is experiencing the direct vision of God within oneself, achieved. is

becomes possible when our heart gets purified through preparatory worship and we develop intense yearning for the darshan (vision) of God as a child has a yearning for his or her mother. Keeping the company of holy people, attending spiritual retreats from time to time, cultivating dispassion and discrimination, and having constant awareness of what one thinks, speaks, and does, helps this kind of attitude.

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The foremost thing is to make individual human beings into living temples.

If that happens, change will happen in the world.

Sudhguru

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REVIEW THE PAST - RENEW YOUR EFFORTS

Swami Lalitananda

At some time during the year, everyone looks back over their recent past and takes account of their actions according to their own perceptions. They worry about their mistakes, their failures gain more material possessions. Then they vow to make everything different in the future. They want wisdom without tears. They long for obstacles to be swept away like dust with an ordinary broom. They still wonder why they didn't succeed in all their endeavors when they made so many plans and promises. What they don't realize is that promises can be pompous and desires can be devastating, frothing with Without daydreams. real substance, without genuine without effort, sustained endeavor, nothing be can achieved.

Achievement of either material nature or spiritual nature must be backed by a sincere, sustained daily self-effort. "As you sow, so shall you reap." This is the universal law. Although many may disclaim karma and the fruit of actions, seeds planted, whether negative or positive, will give forth their blossoms and their fruit. As Swamiji has said again and again, "You are the Architect of your Destiny. "Therefore, there is no use in blaming the world, blaming society, blaming environment, blaming relatives, or blaming destiny. You alone are constructing the course of the future. You alone are stamping out the coin that you must carry. And you alone are drawing to vourself the conditions that you have vainly perpetuated.

If one is to change, it should be done by the strength of will. But how is one to develop willpower?

Already a weak will has brought about a treachery that is hard to undo, but with aspiration flaming anew in the heart, one can summon new hope and refrain from yielding to the temptation of procrastination.

Power of will can be developed by confronting problems with the light of reason and keeping in view the objective of Selfrealization. It is possible to change, and much more so, to be spiritually transformed. Stop having pity for yourself. Bring a program with the schedule for betterment in every aspect of life. Adopt moderation in external activities, in food, in weaving dreams, in entertainment, and in every movement of life.



Courtesy: International Yoga Guide www.yrf.org

THE VOICE OF SILENCE

Many people are afraid of silence. They must be doing something all the time.

Many people also are afraid of being alone. But actually no one ever is alone.

He's always with his great divine Self. Every person has a great,

divine Self within him, a perfect, shining, sublime being of light.

The voice of this being is a loud silence. The voice of your soul is a loud silence.

Many people have said that the voice of God is a deep, profound silence.

Satguru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927-2001) Founder of Hinduism Today



DINOSAURS OF THE INDIAN SUBCONTINENT

Dr. Omesh Chopra

Fossils give a glimpse of the life that existed on Earth long before we began writing history. They provide evidence of Earth's billion-year history. Fortunately, fossil record of the Indian subcontinent is excellent. It is home to fossils found nowhere else, including the 80-ton Bruhathkayosaurus and the chicken-sized Alwalkeria. Deposits of fossil flora and fauna give us information about the life that thrived in the subcontinent from the Late Triassic period to the end of the Cretaceous period (≈252-65 mya, million years ago). During that period the Indian plate was located in the southern hemisphere near Antarctica. Also, Major-general Sir William Henry Sleeman (KCB),[‡] a British soldier and later administrator in British India and best known for suppressing the organized criminal gangs known as Thugee in 1830s, also happens to be the first to discover dinosaur fossils in 1828 CE on Bara Simla Hill near a British Army gun carriage workshop in India. Sleeman was also known as the Accidental Palaeontologist. This happened 13 years before the word "dinosaur" was coined. Since then, many more dinosaur bones, eggs and nests have been found across the subcontinent. He noted, "Reasoning from the analogy at Jabbulpore where some of the basaltic cappings of the hills had evidently been thrown out of the craters long after this surface had been raised above the waters and +became habitation (for) both vegetable and animal life." The fossil was named Titanosaurus (1877 CE).

Let's first establish the distribution of landmass on planet Earth and location of the Indian subcontinent on Earth during the Triassic—Cretaceous periods. In 20th century, German geologist, meteorologist and polar researcher Alfred Wegener wrote a paper describing his theory that the continent landmasses were "drifting" across the earth, sometimes plowing

through the oceans and into each other. He called this continental drift. His theory is now known as the science of plate tectonics. According to this theory, Earth's outer shell is divided into large slabs of solid rock, called "plates," that glide over



Fig.1.Prientation of the various continents in Pangaea Supercontinent 310 mya.

Earth's mantle, the rocky inner layer above Earth's core. It explains mountain-building processes, volcanoes, and earthquakes as well as the evolution of Earth's surface. Initially, billions of years ago, planet earth consisted of a single planetary ocean and a single supercontinent. The evolution of planet Earth went through a series of supercontinent.

Eventually, ≈310 mya, Earth's landmass was evenly distributed across the equator in a C-shape facing east (Fig. 1). Alfred Wegener named it Pangaea in Greek it means "all the Earth."

The top part of Pangaea was known as Laurasia and bottom half as Gondwana. India was located in Gondwana wedged between Africa and Australia with Antarctica to the south. Then ≈299 mya, a rift started opening from the east, which split a long, narrow strip off from the southern part of the C, which comprised parts of

^{*} Knight Commander is the second level of appointment attainable in the Most Honorable Order of the Bath. It is the second level of the Order of the Bath.

[§] The leached upper part of a rock that still contains disseminated sulphide mineral deposit.

present-day Anatolia, Iran, Afghanistan, Tibet, Indochina, and Malaya. This narrow strip is known as the Cimmerian Super terrane. Later ≈210 mya, when dinosaurs were roaming the earth, a major rifting of the tectonic plate caused Gondwana to split in 2 parts. Antarctica, Australia and the Indian subcontinent formed part of East Gondwana and Africa and South America formed the West Gondwana.

Dinosaurs have been studied in India in 3 phases. The first phase lasted for 100 years and ended in 1935. The second phase lasted for only 20 years. The third phase started after 1960s. In the Indian subcontinent, 25–30 genera of dinosaurs have been discovered. Dinosaurs remains have been found in the Lameta Formation, a sedimentary geological formation in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Mahārāṣṭra, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka associated with the Deccan Traps.† Recently, in 2023, researchers found 92 nesting sites containing 256 fossilized eggs belonging to Titanosaurus. In 1981, geologists conducting a mineral survey in Balasinor, Gujarat, discovered thousands of fossilized dinosaur eggs. It was believed to be home for at least 7 species of dinosaur. Researchers have also uncovered world's largest known dinosaur hatcheries containing fossils of $\approx 10,000$ dinosaur eggs in a neighboring area of Raiyoli. Figure 2 shows the locations where dinosaur eggs and eggshells have been found. However, these fossils, are under threat from vandals, opportunists, and indifferent public officials. Dinosaur eggs are being sold for \approx \$7 in villages. Other fossil sites are being destroyed through deforestation and mining. Additional information about some of the dinosaurs of India, is given below.*

As mentioned earlier, during the Triassic–Jurassic period (252–145 mya), India, Madagascar and Seychelles Islands were part of the supercontinent of Pangaea, located in the southern hemisphere wedged between Africa and Australia, with Antarctica to the south and ocean to the

north. During the Jurassic period, when dinosaurs were roaming the earth, the two parts of Pangaea started to split near the equator. The region south of the equator, named Gondwanaland, included nearly all the continents and islands belonging to the southern hemisphere as well as the Indian



Fig. 2 Locations where dinosaur eggs and eggshells have been found in India. Data taken from Harsha Dhiman, et al (2023 CE).

subcontinent and Arabia. The supercontinent north of the equator, named Laurasia, included North America and remaining Eurasia. Then around 170–120 mya, Gondwanaland began to split, and the continents of India and Africa-Arabia started to drift north toward Laurasia, of which Cimmeria was the southern coast. Africa-Arabia and India collided with the Eurasian \approx 50 mya. Later, Madagascar split from India \approx 95–84 mya and Seychelles according to some scholars split away \approx 66 mya and \approx 63–62 mya by other. So, India was an island during the days when dinosaurs roamed in India. Also, generally, dinosaurs of India are mentioned with those of Madagascar.

Shringasaurus indicus (horned lizard) (247–242 mya) was a large quadruped, horned, herbivorous

[†] Trap is derived from the Swedish word for stairs (trapp). It refers to the step-like terrain produced by the layers of lava.

dinosaur (Fig. 3a). Its name is derived from Sanskrit word śringa meaning horn, and Ancient Greek sauros meaning lizard. It was 3-4 m (9.8-13.1 ft) long and tall enough to look you in the eye. Its fossils were found ≈2017 in the red mudstone in the upper part of the Denwa Formation in Madhya Pradesh. Shringasaurus indicus lived during the middle Triassic period and is closely related to the smaller better known Azendohsaurus of Madagascar. It had two large horns above its eyes that faced up and forward from its skull. It is believed that probably the females lacked horns. Also, horns were not for defense but for sexual selection. The teeth of Shringasaurus were leafshaped and had large serrations on either side. The total tooth count is not known, but it had 8 front teeth in the upper jaw and several palatal teeth. Which were also serrated. Shringasaurus fossils suggests that they lived in herds. The herd included adults, sub-adults and juveniles of both males and females.

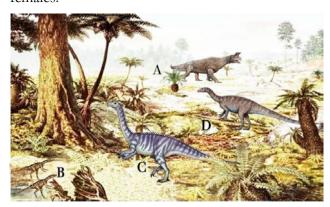


Fig. 3a: Triassic period dinosaurs of the Indian subcontinent. (A) Shringasaurus (247–242 mya), (B) Alwalkeria (237–209 mya), (C) Jaklapallisaurus and (D) Nambalia.

Alwalkeria (235–228 mya) was a tiny dinosaur that lived during the late Triassic period. Its fossils were discovered in the Godāvarī River valley. Initially it was named Walkeria maleriensis by Sankar Chatterjee in 1987, in honor of British paleontologist Alick Walker. However, since the name was already taken, the name Alwalkeria was created in 1994. The specific name maleriensis refers to the Maleri Formation, in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana where its fossil was discovered. Due to its fragmentary remains, not much more is known about this small theropod. Its partial skull

is about 4 cm (1.5 in) long. Alwalkeria was bipedal and ≈1.5 m (4.9 ft) long and weighed 2–5 kg (4.4–11.0 lb). Limited data suggests that it was an omnivore with a varied diet, including insects, small vertebrates, and plant material.

Jaklapallisaurus (≈203 mya) was probably herbivore that lived during the Triassic period. Its genus is monotypic. Its fossils were discovered in 2011 from the Upper Maleri Formation of the Pranhita–Godāvarī basin in Telangana. Its name is derived from the nearby town of Jaklapalli. It was ≈2.5 m (8.26 ft) long, 1.5 m (4.9 ft) tall and weighed ≈250 kg (551 lb). It is known from very scattered remains, not much is known about Jaklapallisaurus.

Nambalia (208–203 mya) was a sauropod dinosaur that also lived during the Triassic period. It was found with the fossils of Jaklapallisaurus in the Pranhita–Godāvarī basin in Telangana. Its name "Nambalia roychowdhuri" is derived from the village of Nambalia located south of the exaction site and honors Dr. Roy Chowdhuri for his research on the Triassic vertebrate faunas of India. It is known from skeletal remains but no heads, though there is material from several individuals. It is believed to be 3.7 m (12.1 ft) long and weighed ≈125 kg (276 lb).



Fig. 3b: Jurassic period dinosaurs of the Indian subcontinent. (A) Kotasaurus (196–183 mya)) (B) Lamplughsaura (196–183 mya), (C) Dandakosaurus (183–175 mya) (D) Pradhania (197–190 mya) (E) Tharosaurus indicus (167–100 mya) and (F)Barapasaurus (189–177 mya).

Kotasaurus (186–183 mya) was one of the most primitive sauropod dinosaurs that existed in the Early Jurassic period (Fig. 3b). It was discovered in the Kota Formation of Telangana, near the village of Yamanpalle. Kotasaurus shared its habitat with Barapasaurus. So far, the remains of at least 12 individuals are known. In late 1970s,

total of 840 skeletal parts have been found and later it was categorizing under a new genus and species of sauropod, "Kotasaurus yamanpalliensi." It was a large, quadrupedal herbivore with long neck and tail. Its body length was estimated to be 9 m (29.5 ft) long and 3 m (9.8 ft) tall. Their weight was ≈2500 kg. Their teeth were spoon-shaped, like those of later sauropods. They were herbivores and reproduced by laying eggs.

Lamplughsaura (196–183 mya) lived in India during the early Jurassic period and was named in honor of Pamela Lamplugh, the founder of the Indian Statistical Institute. Also, Pamela Lamplugh being a woman, the feminine 'saura' was chosen for the ending of the named instead of the more usual 'saurus', which is masculine. It is known from several partial skeletons discovered in the Dharmaram Formation of the Pranhita-Godavari basin in Andhra Pradesh, India. However, it is not clear whether "Lamplughsaura dharmaramensis" was a very advanced or a primitive sauropod dinosaur. Lamplughsaura represent a transitional form. It was probably ≈ 10

Dandakosaurus (183–175 mya) or "Dandakaranya lizard" is a genus of extinct theropod dinosaur that lived during the early Jurassic period along the Kota Formation in Andhra Pradesh, India. It was named after the Dandakaranya forest in central India. It is known from only a part of pubis bone from the pelvic area. However, it appears to have a vertical pubis. This could have interesting implications on the evolution of the dinosaur pubis. It has been estimated to be 10 m (32.8 ft) long and weighed 2300 kg (5071 lb).

Pradhania (197–190 mya) has been named after Dhuiya Pradhan, a fossil collector at the Indian Statistical Institute. It was discovered Upper Dharmaram Formation of the Pranhita–Godāvarī basin in Andhra Pradesh, India. So, most likely, it shared the same habitat as the genus Lamplughsaura. It was a modest-sized dinosaur ≈4 m (13.1 ft) long and 1.7 m (5.6 ft) tall Since it is known from only fragmentary remains, it is difficult to know anything more.

Tharosaurus indicus (167-100 mya) is the oldest known member of ancient creatures called Diplodocoidea. Diplodocoidea is derived from the Greek "diploos" (double) and "dokos" (beam), and the Latin "oidea" (likeness, resemblance), in reference to the double-beamed bones (chevrons) on the underside of their tail vertebrae. This superfamily of sauropods includes some of the longest animals, e.g., slender giants like Brontosaurus, Diplodocus and Apatosaurus found in North and South America, Africa and Asia, and depicted in the blockbuster movie "Jurassic Park." Fossils of Tharosaurus were discovered in the Jaisalmer Formation near Jetwai village in Rajasthan. In fact, its neck, trunk, and tail fragments predate the sauropod fossils reported in China by 2-3 million years. Tharosaurus is named after the Thar desert where it was found. Its remains were scattered over an area of 25 m², they provide insights into the evolution of a small skull, elongated neck and tail, columnar limbs, and quadrupedal gait sauropods. However, Tharosaurus indicus was probably ≈10–13 m (33– 43 ft) long, compared to its cousins in North America Diplodocus and Brontosaurus that measured ≈ 53.3 m (175 ft) and 21–23 m (69–75 ft), respectively, in length.

Barapasaurus (189–177 mya) was discovered in the lower part of the Kota Formation, from an early Jurassic period. It is one of the largest dinosaurs in India. It was 12-14 m (39-46 ft) tall and weighed 7000 kg. However, just like most gigantic dinosaurs Barapasaurus was a harmless herbivore. Its name means "big-legged lizard," where bara means big and pa means leg in various Indian languages. Barapasaurus is known from ≈300 bones from at least 6 individuals. Except for the anterior cervical vertebrae and the skull, its skeleton is almost completely known. Like all sauropods, Barapasaurus was an herbivore. However, since no cranium has yet been found, its exact diet is not known. Also note that although Barapasaurus was found in India, it is similar to dinosaurs found in Madagascar and East Africa. From this we can infer that during early Jurassic period, India and Madagascar were wedged between Africa and Australia, with Antarctica to the south and ocean to the north.

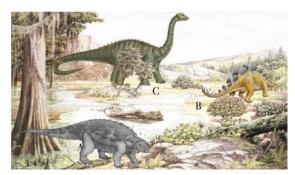


Fig. 3c: Cretaceous period dinosaurs of the Indian subcontinent. (A) Brachypodosaurus (70–65 mya, (B) Dravidosaurus (89–86 mya) and (C) Bruhathkayosaurus (71–69 mya).

Brachypodosaurus (70–65 mya) meaning "short-legged lizard" is a dubious genus of dinosaur from the Late Cretaceous Lameta Formation in India (Fig. 3c). The only remains discovered so far for this animal consist of a single fossil bone, excavated at the Chota Simla Hill near Jabalpur. Possibly it belongs to Ornithischia (birdhipped), an extinct species of mainly herbivorous dinosaurs characterized by a pelvic structure superficially similar to that of birds. Not much is known about this dinosaur because very few remains have been found. The size of Brachypodosaurus also remains uncertain.

Dravidosaurus (89–86 mya) is believed to be an extinct genus of stegosaur, a four-legged, herbivorous, armored dinosaur characterized by the distinctive kite-shaped upright plates along its back and spikes on its tail. Its name means "Dravidanadu lizard," Dravidanadu is a region in south India where its remains were discovered. It was estimated to be ≈ 3 m (10 ft) long and weighed ≈200 kg, (441 lb.). Yadagiri and Ayyasami named it Dravidosaurus blanfordi, honoring an English geologist and naturalist William Thomas Blanford. However, it is known from mostly poorly preserved and weathered fossils, consisting of a partial skull, a tooth, a sacrum, an ilium, an ischium, a dermal plate, and a spike, that were found in marine deposits near Ariyalur in Tamil Nadu. So, Dravidosaurus is interpreted as an ornithischian dinosaur distinguished by having a pelvic structure resembling that of a bird; a four-legged, armored

stegosaur dinosaur; or a plesiosaur, an extinct marine reptile. Thus, for now, pending further discoveries, Dravidosaurus remains a subject of debate.

Bruhathkayosaurus

(71–69 mya) might possibly be the largest dinosaur that ever lived on planet Earth. Estimates claim that the dinosaur could have been 28-47 m (92-154 ft) long, close to 33.5 m (110 ft) tall, which is as tall as an eleven-storied building, and weighed 175–220 tons. Its name literally means "hugebodied lizard." Bruhathkayosaurus is an extinct genus of sauropod dinosaur found near the southern tip of India in Tiruchirappalli district of Tamil Nadu, northeast of Kallamedu village. It was recovered from rocks of the Kallamedu Formation dated ≈70 mya. The shin bone (tibia) of Bruhathkayosaurus was 2 m (6.6 ft) long and fragmentary femur measured 0.5 m (2.5 ft). However, these estimates were based on fossil dimensions given by Yadagiri and Ayyasami in 1987. In 2017, it was reported that the holotype fossils had disintegrated, and no longer exist. It was also suggested that the alleged "bones" of Bruhathkayosaurus were actually pieces of petrified wood. Thus, for now, pending further fossil discoveries, Bruhathkayosaurus remains a subject of debate.

.....Continues in the next issue



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(Other References will be included in the next issue)

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IMPACT OF KATHAK ON ME A TEENAGER'S KATHAK JOURNEY

Noori Choudhary

HISTORY OF KATHAK

Kathak, as one of the classical dance forms of India, surpasses being just a performance art. It merges Hindu cultural values with millennia of tradition and storytelling to create a vibrant expression of Hindu principles. Past its ancient origins, however, Kathak serves as a bridge into the present, allowing many young people, especially those born outside of India, a captivating way to explore and understand their own complex culture.

The term "Kathak" itself comes from the Sanskrit word "Katha, which directly translates to "story". True to its name, Kathak is a narrative dance form that evolved from the storytelling traditions of ancient India. Historically, Kathak was performed by wandering bards or storytellers known as "Kathakars," who dance. music. and dramatic used expression to recount tales from Hindu epics like the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. Initially, Kathak was performed in temples and royal courts, and it often depicted scenes from Hindu mythology. One of the earliest forms of Kathak involved dance performances by gopis (female devotees) to please Lord Krishna. This divine play, or "Leela," celebrated the life and miracles of Krishna, showcasing the devotional aspect of Kathak.

Stylistically, Kathak has deep connection with Hinduism as its themes are largely derived from narratives of the lives of Hindu deities such as Lord Krishna and Radha.

One of the earliest forms of Kathak involved dance performances by Gopis (female devotees of Lord Krishna). This divine play or "Leela," celebrated the life and miracles of Krishna, showcasing the devotional aspect of Kathak.

The main goal of any kathak dancer is to illustrate a story and make every detail as clear to the audience as possible. Therefore, it becomes extremely complex to depict every intricacy within the elaborate lives of our deities, and doing so accurately to portray stories, so significant to our culture, becomes of paramount importance for every Kathak dancer.

Aside from mythological tales, Kathak reflects many philosophical concepts monumental to Hinduism such as Dharma (duty/righteousness) and Bhakti (devotion). The dance form's emphasis on rhythm and expression mirrors the Hindu belief in the interconnectedness of the physical and spiritual realms. The emphasis on the storytelling aspect underscores the importance of oral traditions in preserving cultural and religious heritage.

by a blend of rhythm, storytelling, and truggles and lessons. improvisation. The dance involves intricate One of my favorite lessons was about footwork (known as "Tatkar"), graceful owh growth is inevitable with enough spins (or "Chakars"), and expressive hand gestures (or "Mudras"). These elements it just a small amount of growth. One work together to convey a narrative, f the fundamental parts of Kathak is often accompanied by classical music and our tatkaar or footwork. Watchina my poetry.

The performances usually begin with a "Thaat," a slow, graceful presentation of poses and movements that introduces the theme of the dance. This is followed by the "Nritta" (pure dance) sections, which focus on rhythm and technique, and the "Nritya" (expressive dance), interprets the story or emotions being portrayed. The climax often involves a dramatic presentation of a key moment from the narrative.

Kathak is more than a dance form; it is a living embodiment of Hindu cultural traditions. values and Through intricate movements, expressive storytelling, and rhythmic precision, Kathak continues to celebrate the rich heritage of Hinduism. For young people seeking to connect with their cultural roots or explore the beauty of Hindu traditions, Kathak offers a dynamic and enriching experience, bridging the gap between ancient customs and modern sensibilities.

.... MY JOURNEY

I could state, without exaggerating, that I have learned thousands of lessons from learning Kathak. However, many of these lessons I only understood with my

Kathak performances are characterized who growth as a dancer, over a decade of

ragtice and commitment. It truly is, even guru effortlessly do complex tatkaar as a six-year-old dazzled me. I would sit there mesmerized by the intricate patterns and clear sound of her foot's sole hitting the wooden floor, perfectly on beat every time. However, when I attempted to replicate it, I got no sound at all; you could barely tell I was even doing the footwork, especially without the traditional ghungroo adorned on my lower shin, or bells, which I was not yet ready to wear. I distinctly remember telling my guru that I would never be able to make the same, or even comparable amount, of what we informally called footwork sound as she did. As my teacher, she reassured me it would come with copious amounts of practice, but I truly didn't believe her.

My favorite lesson was one of the types I previously noted that I only learned with personal growth as a Kathak dancer. Another instance where this lesson was learned was in one of my annual practical exams. We had two parts to every exam before we could move on to the next level of our Kathak education: the written, where we demonstrated our textbook knowledge of Kathak and written notation, and the practical, my personal favorite, where we danced. On one practical, during one of my intermediate levels, the

examiner asked me, "Noori, how much do you practice every week before coming to class?". The question caught me off quard: should I lie and tell her I practice every single day or tell her the truth? I eventually settled on the less extreme lie that I practice almost every day. I was feeling pretty good because I thought it wasn't a suspiciously good amount, but also not so little that I got yelled at. And then I proceeded to get castigated for my lack of practice. "Noori you should be practicing every day. Every single one. That's the only way you will get better." I have spared you the five-minute extended version of this lecture, but the examiner right. I had obviously made was improvements from 4 years prior when I began dancing but then decided that plateauing was completely fine. Being admonished by my examiner was enough for me to realize I needed to get my act together, and I resumed my hard work journey, putting more effort not just into practicing at home, but even just adding more hard work into each proceeding weekly lesson I had with my guru.

Through my journey with Kathak, I've come to understand that growth is a slow but certain process, built on a foundation of persistent effort and dedication. Reflecting on the moments of frustration and revelation, I realize now that those early struggles with tatkaar and the stern

advice from my examiner were invaluable teachers. Each setback and every small victory contributed to a deeper appreciation of the art form and a more profound personal development.

The lesson that growth is inevitable with consistent practice resonates beyond the confines of the dance studio. It's a universal truth that applies to any pursuit or challenge. Just as my footwork evolved from tentative taps to confident rhythms, so to do our skills and capabilities in all areas of life improve with time and effort.

In essence, Kathak has taught me more than just dance. It has imparted a life lesson about perseverance, self-belief, and the transformative power of dedication. Each step I take on stage and each beat I master are not just expressions of an art form but milestones in a continuous journey of growth. This understanding is a gift that I carry with me, and I hope to inspire others to embrace their own paths of growth with the same commitment and patience

About the Author: Noori Choudhary is a junior at Unionville High School who is passionate about her culture and making knowledge about diversity accessible. In addition to receiving her Kathak diploma in 2025, she is top ranked at Speech and Debate in the state and has qualified to 5 national competitions. She hopes to pursue Political Advocacy and International Relations on the Pre-Law track in college.

"For him who has conquered the mind, the mind is the best of friends

"The Bhagvat Gita"

PERSEVERANCE

THE KEY TO SUCCESS

Dev Rishi Narad was a great god-sage. Just as there are sages among mankind, great yogis, so there are great yogis among the gods. Narad was a good yogi and very great sage.

He traveled everywhere - particularly, to see how the people were doing. One day he was passing through a forest and saw a man who had been meditating until the white ants had built a huge mound round his body -- so long had he been sitting in that position. He said to Narad, "Where are you going?"

Narad replied, "I am going to heaven." As a god-sage, Narad had free and unlimited access to heaven.

"Then ask God when he will be merciful to me and when I shall attain freedom.'

Farther on, Narad saw another man. He was jumping about, singing, and dancing. Seeing Narad, he said, "O, Narad, where are you going?" His voice and his gestures were wild.

Narad said," I am going to heaven." Then ask God when I shall be free, said the person.

Narad went on his journey. In the course of time, he came again by the same road, and there was the man who had been meditating with the ant hill around him. He said, "O Narad, did you ask the Lord about me?"

"Oh, yes." Replied Narad.

"What did he say?"

"The Lord told me that you would attain freedom in four more births."

Then the man began to weep and wail, and said, "I have meditated until an ant hill has grown around me, and I have four more births yet to go!"

Narad went to the other man. "Did you ask my question?" Asked the other man.

"Oh, yes. Do you see this tamarind tree? I must tell you that as many leaves as there are on that tree, so many times you shall be born, and then you shall attain freedom."

The man began to dance with joy, and said, "I shall have my freedom after such a short time!"

Just then, a voice from the heaven came, "My child, you will have freedom this minute."

Moral of the story

That was the reward for the second man's perseverance. He was ready to work through all those births; nothing discouraged him. But the first man felt that even four more births were too long. Only perseverance like that of the man who was willing to wait eons brings about the highest result.

PARABLE OF THE VEENA

Once a skilled musician demonstrated his musical skill on the strings of a Veena during a satsanga in his Ashram. His fingers floated upon the subtle strings. Music seemed to drizzle like a soft summer rain on the attentive ears of the audience. There was a sweet sentiment of divine devotion in the atmosphere.

When the satsanga was over, the Veena was left alone in the corner of the hall. I lingered awhile watching the strings and remembering the music that had expressed through them. And lo! the strings seemed to converse among themselves. First there were whispers, but gradually there were loud shouts and squeals.

One String said, "Look how wonderfully I conducted myself. That sweet melody that all the people were admiring could not have been possible without me."

The Second String said, "Yes, you did well. But all glories in me. I am greater than you. The musician gave more attention to me. Without me the music would have become discordant and abrupt."

The Third String spoke louder, "Look at the vanity of you two little strings. I am in the middle of the Veena. Indeed, I am the most favored one. You, strings, are like servants to assist upon me.

The fourth interrupted, "I am the best. Without me you all will become helpless and lifeless." And soon the whole

atmosphere rattled with confusion. All began to shout at their highest pitch.

I gently passed my fingers across the strings and said, "Silence! Please listen with attention. You are all equally great. No melody can be produced without coordination among all of you. Therefore, please live in harmony. Develop self-effacing love towards each other. And you will discover the Divine Melody flowing through you in an unceasing stream of sweetness."

There was silence in the atmosphere. The Strings came to their senses. Each one complained that life was running out.

My fingers gently passed upon the strings producing devotional music. And I said, "You do not have to wait for a future time. Harmonize yourselves. You will express the Divine Melody, HERE and NOW." And soon the serene atmosphere was flooded in sublime melody. The false sense of ego that asserted in each string now melted away in the ecstasy of Divine: Music.

Similar is the Veena of human personality, in which the strings of reason, emotion, will and action must be properly harmonized by the practice of Yoga to produce the melody of Divine Realization. It is not time that is important. In harmonization lies the secret of Self-realization.

(A story from Mahabharat)

THE KING AND THE NAGAS RETRIBUTION AND REVENGE

Sri Sudhguru

Krishna and the Pandavas have passed on and the new generation of Kshatriyas inhabits Hastinapur with Arjuna's grandson as their king. But the shadow of the past still looms over the words and deeds of today as Arjuna's feud with the Nagas continues through his progeny. Will the violence go on forever? Who will break the vicious cycle of revenge? Will there ever be peace?

The Pandavas and their generation were gone. Parikshit was coronated as the king. Parikshit literally means, "a tested one," or someone who has faced the pariksha (test) before being born. He was a stillborn child. Krishna literally gave his own life to him, and he grew up to rule as the king.

One day, he was out hunting and became very thirsty. He came to a small clearing. There was a hut where a Yogi was sitting and meditating. Parikshit said to the Yogi, "I am thirsty - give me water." The Yogi did not respond. He was in another state. The king got irritated. When a royal request is made, you are supposed to respond. He looked around and saw a dead serpent. He picked it up with an arrowhead and put it around the Yogi's neck.

A disciple of the Yogi came by, and when he saw this sacrilege, he got so furious that he cursed the king, "For what you have done to my Guru today, you will die of a snakebite within seven days." Parikshit was terrified. He ran back to Hastinapur and built a small place upon a column where he could live, so that the snakes could not climb up.

In the town of Hastinapur, people started gossiping, "What has happened to our king? His father was Abhimanyu, a great warrior. His grandfather was Arjuna, the greatest Kshatriya that ever lived. Why is our king sitting on a post in terror? What kind of a man is he?" But he was terrified of getting killed by a snake, so he sat on a post for seven days. On the seventh day, his trusted guards brought him fruit. He bit into the fruit, and out of it came a little snake that grew in size and bit him in the neck. Before the guards could come and save him, he died of the snakebite.

A VICIOUS CYCLE OF REVENGE

When Parikshit's son, Janamejaya, saw his father being killed by this Naga, he got so furious that he called all his priests and said, "Let us conduct a Sarpa Satra yagna. In this yagna, mantras are chanted, and all the snakes in the vicinity come and fall in the sacrificial fire and die. He wanted to conduct a snake sacrifice in revenge for his father's

death. The priests were also happy because they had their own grouse against the Nagas. So, they started the yagna and the serpents slowly began to come closer and fall into the fire. Hundreds of them killed themselves.

Then one of the Nagas called Astika came by and told Janamejaya, "Stop this cruel yagna. Your father was being punished for his arrogance and imprudence. He did this to a Yogi, so his disciple cursed him. Your greatgrandfather Arjuna burned the Khandava Vana to build his city. He burned every Naga in the place and shot down those who tried to escape with his arrows. The only one who escaped was Takshaka. Takshaka has been waiting for all these years to take revenge on the Kuru clan, and he fulfilled the cycle.

"If you burn these Nagas, so many other Nagas will be orphaned, and they will take vows of revenge once again. It will create an endless cycle of revenge and avenge. Let's put this to an end. I am telling you this because my father is a Manava and my mother is a Naga. So, I am a part of you and a part of the Nagas. Please believe me, I am speaking dharma.

Janamejaya asked, "What is this story that you were telling me about my great-grandfather? How do you know about

this?" Astika said, "Let Vaishampayana. He is the best one to tell you the story." They called the sage Vaishampayana who was the disciple of Vyasa, and the first one to hear the story Mahabharat from Vyasa**. Vaishampayana told the Mahabharat story to Janamejaya, and this is said to be the story that we hear today. They say the version of original written Mahabharat had disappeared because it was so fabulous that the gods loved it and stole it.

The Final Lesson

The yagna was abandoned, and Astika felt very proud. "I stopped the yagna and saved the Nagas from annihilation." Then the dog Sarama came by and said, "It is not Astika who stopped the yagna. When the yagna was started, Janamejaya and his sons threw stones at my children, unnecessarily accusing them of defiling the sacrificial offerings. Because of that, I cursed Janamejaya that this Naga sacrifice yagna should not succeed. That is the reason why it got abandoned."

That is a final lesson for you: do not think too much of yourself. We have our bit to play, and it is just a bit. There are too many other aspects of life that are influencing who and what we are right now.

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Courtesy: www.ish.sudhguru.org

PRAYER

LAST HYMN OF ĪSHOPANISHAD -Hymn 18 ईशोपनिषद् मन्त्र-१८

Not many people know that all hymns of Ishopanishad are identical to the hymns of chapter 40 of Yajur Veda, though a few hymns are in a different order. For example, the last hymn (18) of Ishopanishad is the 16th hymn in chapter 40 of Yajur Veda..

ईशोपनिषद् मन्त्र-१८

ओ३म् अग्ने नय सुपथा राये अस्मान विश्वानि देव वयुनानि विद्वान । युयोध्य स्मज़ुहुराणमेनो भूयिष्ठांते नम उक्ति विधेम ।। (यजुर्वेद -४०।१६)

Ishopanishad (Hymn 18)

Aum agne naya supathā rāye asmān vishvāni dev vayunāni vidvān.

Yuyo_dhya smajjuhu_rānhameno bhūyish_thānte nama uktim vidhem.

-Yajur Veda, 40:16

भावार्थ:

हे स्वप्रकाश, ज्ञान स्वरूप एवम् सुखदाता परमेश्वर। आप कृपा करके हमे प्रज्ञान और उत्तम कर्म करने के लिए बुद्धि एवम् शक्ति दिजिए जिस के द्वारा हम विज्ञान और आत्मिक ऐश्वर्य प्राप्त कर सकें। हे भगवन, हमे पापरूप कर्म को दूर करने की शक्ति दिजिए। हम आप की स्तुति एवम् आप को नमन सदैव करते रहें।।

GIST

O Self-effulgent and Omniscient God, kindly bestow upon us the strength and wisdom so that we may attain true knowledge and spirituality for the betterment of our lives. Please lead us so that we may cast out our debasing and sinful desires. We pleage that, in our daily life, we always offer our prayers and our profound obeisance to You.

Compiled by: Dr. Suresh Chander, Gaithersburg, MD

HINDU CALENDAR 2024 (VIKRAM SAMVAT 2081)

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|--|-----|------------------------------------|----|--|-------------------------|----|-----|----------------------|
| 02 | Mon | Amavasya | 01 | TUE | Amavasya, | 02 | SAT | Bhaiya Dooj |
| 07 | SAT | Shri Ganesh Chaturthi | | | Sharadh Ends | 12 | TUE | Dev Utthana Ekadashi |
| 14 | SAT | Parsva Ekadashi | 02 | WED | Mahatma Gandhi | 13 | WED | Pradosh: |
| 15 | SUN | Pradosh | | | Jayanti | 15 | FRI | Purnima |
| 16 | MON | Kanya Sankranti | 03 | THU | Navartri Begin | 26 | TUE | Utpanna Ekadashi |
| 17 | TUE | Purnima | 10 | THU | Durga Ashtami | 28 | THU | Pradosh |
| 18 | WED | Sharadh Begins | 11 | FRI | Navratri End | 30 | SAT | Amavasya |
| 27 | FRI | Indira Ekadashi | 12 | SAT | Dussehra | | | • |
| 29 | SUN | Pradosh | 13 | SUN | Papankusha Ekadashi | | | |
| | | | 14 | MON | Pradosh | | | |
| | | | 16 | WED | Purnima | | | |
| | * | 28 1 | 20 | SUN | Karva Chauth | | | 728 4 |
| | | | 27 | SUN | Rama Ekadashi | | | |
| | 6 | | 29 | TUE | Pradosh, Dhanteras | | | |
| | धम | रिक्षति रक्षितः। | 31 | THU | Diwali Lakshmi Pooja | | | धर्मो रक्षति रक्षितः |



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