



Reach

SAYINGS AND TEACHINGS

Sri Ramakrishna on Vanity

Water is dried up at once if poured on a heap of ashes. Vanity is like this heap of ashes. Prayer and contemplation produce no effect upon the heart puffed up with vanity.

Source: *Great sayings: Words of Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda*; The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture; Calcutta; page 9.

Sri Sarada Devi on Control of the Mind

Regarding weakness of the mind, Holy Mother said to a disciple, "Child, this is the law of nature. Have you not noticed the full moon and the new moon? Likewise, the mind is sometimes dominated by good, and sometimes by bad tendencies."

Source: *Teachings of Sri Sarada Devi: The Holy Mother*, Sri Ramakrishna Mission Math, Mylapore; page 30.

Swami Vivekananda on Hinduism

The cardinal features of the Hindu religion are founded on the meditative and speculative philosophy and on the ethical teachings contained in the various books of the Vedas, which assert that the universe is infinite in space and eternal in duration. It never had a beginning, and it never had an end. . . . In the super-sensuous region which cannot be comprehended at all by human understanding, there is no past, and there is no future. The Vedas teach that the soul of man is immortal. The body is subject to the law of growth and decay; what grows, must of necessity decay. But the indwelling Spirit is related to the infinite and eternal life; it never had a beginning and it never will have an end.

Source: *Teachings of Swami Vivekananda* by Swami Mumukshananda, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta; page 53.

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We welcome you all to the Vedanta Movement in Australia, as epitomized in the lives of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda, and invite you to involve yourselves and actively participate in the propagation of the Universal Message of Vedanta.

1. NEWS FROM AUSTRALIAN CENTRES 11 MARCH 2021 TO 10 JUNE 2021

ADELAIDE

16 East Terrace, Kensington Gardens, SA 5068

Email: vedanta.adelaide@gmail.com

Contact: Dr Raman Sharma on (08) 8431 9775

Mrs Pathma Iswaran on (08) 8379 5336

URL: <http://vedantaadelaide.org>

Daily Activities

- The Centre functions from 7.30am-12.30pm and 4.00-8.00pm. The evening vesper service to Sri Ramakrishna is performed from 7.00-7.30 pm followed by *bhajans*, devotional reading and meditation.

Regular Activities

- Swami Manyananda conducted classes and discussions on the *Vedanta Sara* - 'Fundamentals of Vedanta' every Wednesday from 11:00 am to 12:00 noon.
- Swami Manyananda is also conducting classes on the *Narada Bhakti Sutras* on Sundays from 11:00 am.
- Every alternative Saturday, Swami Manyananda has been conducting a reading and discussion on *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* before the evening *aratrikam*.

Celebrations

- *Shivaratri* was celebrated on Thursday, 11 March 2021. The evening program started with *aratrikam* followed by special puja of Lord Siva accompanied by chanting and *bhajans*, worship of Siva Lingam by devotees, and concluded with *prasad* distribution.
- Sri Ramakrishna's *tithi puja* (birth anniversary) was celebrated on Monday, 15 March 2021. The morning program included Vedic chanting, *bhajans*, special puja, *pushpanjali* (offering of flowers to Guru Maharaj) and lunch *prasad*. The evening program started with *aratrikam* and followed by a special talk on the 'Life and Teachings of



Shivaratri in Adelaide



Sri Ramakrishna's Birth Anniversary



Ramanavami in Adelaide

Sri Ramakrishna' by Swami Manyananda, *bhajans, push panjali* (offering of flowers to Guru Maharaj), and concluded with dinner prasada.

- *Ramanavami* — marking the birth of Lord Rama — was celebrated on Wednesday, 21 April 2021. Starting with evening *aratrikam* and followed by special puja, *Ramanama Sankirtanam, bhajans*, and *prasada* distribution.

Other Activities

- Swami Sridharananda visited Adelaide from 6 May to 12 May 2021. He interacted with the devotees on two occasions. The first talk on 'Sri Ramakrishna as Swami Vivekananda Saw Him' on Sunday 9 May morning. This talk was followed by informal interaction with the devotees over light refreshments. The second talk on 'How to Divinize our Daily Life' on Monday, 10 May 2021 was after the evening *aratrikam*.

BRISBANE

96 Vedanta Drive, (next to 2 Poppy Crescent),
Springfield Lakes, QLD 4300

Email: info@vedantabrisbane.org

Contact: Swami Atmeshananda (07) 3818 9986

URL: <http://vedantabrisbane.org>

Daily Activities

- Meditation and the chanting of hymns were conducted between 6:15 am and 7:15 am on all days.
- *Vesper service (aratrikam), bhajans*, and readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* were held between 6:30 pm and 7:15 pm.
- Members were encouraged to visit the Centre and discuss topics concerning spiritual life.

Regular Activities

- Sunday mornings:- (a) Guided meditation from 7:00 am to 7:40 am. (b) Yoga class from 7:45 am to 9:00 am. (c) *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* Class (10:00 am—11:00 am). (d) *Bala Sangha* or

children's classes and *Yuva Sangha* (10:00 am—11:00 am during school term).

- A class on the *Brahma Sutras* was conducted on Tuesdays from 11 a.m. to 12 noon.
- A Vedic Chanting class was held on Wednesdays from 8:30 am to 9:30 am online.
- Classes on *Meditation and Spiritual Life* from 7:30 pm — 8:30 pm at 134 Fleming Rd, Chapel Hill, Qld, on alternate Fridays.
- A reading from the direct monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna is conducted on their birthdates after the evening *aratrikam*.
- Chanting of the *Sri Ramanama Sankirtanam* was held fortnightly at the Centre on *ekadashi* days (7:30 pm — 8:00 pm).
- Devotees took turns in decorating and worshipping Sri Ramakrishna's image every week at the Sri Selva Vinayakar temple, South Maclean, Qld.
- Swami Atmeshananda conducted *Vivekachudamani* classes for the Vedanta Group at Toowoomba on the first Wednesday of every month.
- A class on the *Ashtavakra Gita* was conducted at 101 Sharpless Drive, Springfield Lakes, on a fixed day of the month.
- On the third Saturday of every month, the *Bhagavad Gita* was studied online by the Vedanta group at the Gold Coast from 5.30 p.m. to 6.30 p.m.
- On alternate Fridays, the Centre's volunteers cooked food at its soup kitchen for the benefit of the needy. An average of 100 meals per week are cooked by volunteers, packed into containers and frozen. They are distributed free of cost through the Westside Community Centre, Goodna Street Life shop, Queensland Youth and Families Support Services and the Base Youth Support Services.
- Every Friday the Centre's Food bank distributed groceries to the needy. An average of 12 grocery hampers along with cooked food and free bread was distributed to the needy.
- The Maa Sarada's kitchen prepares and sells food at a reasonable cost to people. On an average, about 100 persons avail themselves of this service. The kitchen is efficiently managed by volunteers.
- On Fridays, a Justice of the Peace (JP) renders service at the Centre from 10 am to 11 a.m. Peo-

ple needing the service access this free service.

Other Activities

- The Centre organized a children's vacation programme during the school holidays from 12 to 15 April 2021. Called the 'Busy Bee school holiday programme', it consisted of meditation, yoga, story-telling, painting workshop, positive affirmations, gardening, science pro-

- Jodie Walton, a community development officer of the Ipswich Council and Councillor Nicole Jonic visited the Centre and toured the premises on 20 April 2021. They were appraised of the existing and future projects of the Centre.
- The Mirvac group of companies, through members of their Orion shopping centre Springfield Lakes, donated their time and efforts to the Centre on 21 April 2021. They



Children's Vacation Camp in Brisbane



Representatives from the Mirvac Group of Companies

jects, insect recognition, creative writing workshop etc. 30 children participated in this programme.

- Elders from the Liworaji Aboriginal Corporation visited the Centre on 20 April to discuss matters of mutual interest. The Vedanta Centre will work with them to promote awareness and acceptance of their culture.

helped in landscaping and other essential maintenance works. This was done as part of their Community engagement programme.

- A Candle Light vigil was held at King George Square on 3 May 2021 to stand in Unity for India. Swami Atmeshananda offered prayers for all those affected by the COVID crisis. Brisbane City Hall was lit up in Indian colors and the



Members from the Ipswich Council



Buddhist Interfaith Function

big screen in King George square displayed the Indian Flag. The program was organized by the Global Organization of People of Indian Origin (GOPIO).

- On the occasion of Vesak celebrations (birthday of the Buddha), Swami Atmeshananda spoke at a conference organized by the Sri Lankan Buddhist Monastery, Brisbane, on 26 May 2021. The theme was 'The world peace through spirituality'.
- Swami Atmeshananda was invited to a programme with the Premier of Queensland and Minister for Trade, the Hon Anastacia Palaszczuk at Springfield Lakes on Monday, 31 May 2021. At the programme, the Premier announced the funding for establishing a new Public hospital with 174 beds to be co-located at the existing 95-bed Mater Private Hospital Springfield.
- The Centre has built three 'bio-reactors' to enable carbon capture and reduce carbon footprint. Volunteers Kavesh and Michael put forth their efforts to build these. More will be built in future, if possible. The material produced by this process brings lifeless soils back to life by reintroducing beneficial microorganisms to the soil with biologically enhanced



Mr. Stuart Andrews of the Tarwyn Park Training

2021 to give valuable advise about methods to conserve water and improve the soil in gardens and grow useful plants, herbs and vegetables. The Andrews family, which has advocated Natural Sequence Farming, has been featured on ABC Television's Australian Story four times.

Celebrations

- On the occasion of *Shivaratri*, worship was conducted on Thursday, 11 March 2021, at the Centre from 7 p.m to 10 p.m. Many devotees participated in this programme by offering worship one by one to Lord Shiva. *Prasadam* was distributed after the puja.
- The *tithi puja* (birth anniversary) of Sri Ramakrishna was conducted on Monday, 15 March 2021, in the morning. A handful of devotees participated in the puja.
- The public celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday was conducted on 21 March 2021 at the Centre. The occasion coincided with harmony day. As a result a multifaith programme, was conducted on the theme 'How my faith instils hope in times of crisis'. Speakers from the Bahai, Christian (evangelical and liberal), Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Sufi spoke on the subject and, with relevance to the unprecedented challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- *Ramanavami* was celebrated on 21 April 2021. Chanting of the *Vishnu Sahasranamam*, worship of Sri Rama and singing of the *Ramanama*



Building the bio-reactors

compost. The link given here gives us an idea of the bioreactors. <https://regenerationinternational.org/bioreactor/>

- Mr. Stuart Andrews of the Tarwyn Park Training visited the Centre on Wednesday, 2 June

Sankirtanam constituted the evening programme on this day.

- On the occasion of the birth anniversary of Sri Sankaracharya, a programme was held on Sunday, 16 May 2021. The event consisted of worship, chanting from the *Vishnu Sahasranama*, Vedic chanting, Readings from the 'Life and Teachings of Sri Sankaracharya', chanting of hymns and singing of *bhajans*. It concluded with the distribution of prasada to the devotees.
- The birthday of Bhagavan Buddha was celebrated on 26 May 2021 with chanting from the *Dhammapada* and *Prajnaparamita stotram*, *bhajans* and readings from the 'Life and Teachings of the Buddha'.

Forthcoming Programmes

- During school holidays in July, the Centre will conduct a holiday camp for children aged from 5 to 11. The dates for these are 5 to 8 July 2021
- *Guru Purnima* will be celebrated on 24 July 2021
- *Sri Krishna Janmashtami* will be celebrated on 30 August 2021. However, a special programme will be held on 29 August to enable more people to attend the celebrations.

CANBERRA

17 Bean Crescent, Mckellar, ACT 2617

Email: vedacanberra@gmail.com

Contact: Mr Jaishankar Venkataraman 6258 7612 / 0433 593 860

Regular Activities

- On account of the Covid 19 pandemic the Gita classes have been suspended temporarily. Friends and devotees are accessing the classes online. When the classes recommence they will be held at the Belconnen Community Meeting Room, 12 Chandler St, Belconnen, ACT. Monthly lectures are advertised by e-mail once scheduled.

MELBOURNE

5-7 Angus Ave, Ringwood East, VIC 3135

Email: vedanta.melb@gmail.com

Contact: Swami Sunishthananda (03) 8684 9594

URL <http://www.vedantamelbourne.org>

Regular Activities

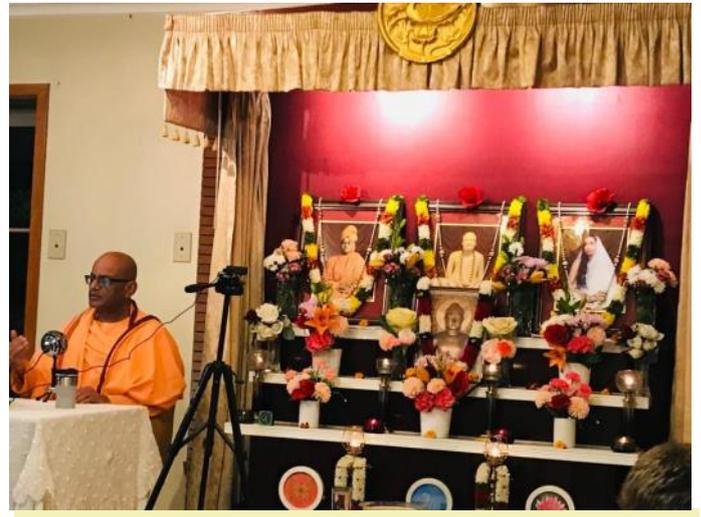
- The shrine was open from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm and 4:00 pm to 8:00 pm seven days a week.
- Vesper service (*aratrikam*), *bhajans*, reading from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* and meditation were conducted between 7:00 pm and 8:00 pm daily.
- *Ramanama Sankirtanam* on *Ekadasi* Days.
- A scriptural class on Sundays from 10:00 am to 11:00 am on *A Study of Swami Vivekananda's Karma Yoga* by Swami Sunishthananda online and onsite.
- Guided meditation followed by a class on Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* on Thursdays from 7:30 pm to 8:30 pm. This class is conducted online and onsite, when there is no lockdown.
- The *Shrimad Bhagavatam* is discussed online and onsite, when there is no lockdown, on Tuesdays from 7:30 pm to 8:30 pm.
- Guided meditation is conducted online and onsite, when there is no lockdown, on Saturdays from 7:30 pm to 8:00 pm and on Sundays from 9:30 am to 10:00 am.



Shivaratri in Melbourne



Sri Ramakrishna's Birth Anniversary



Buddha Purnima in Melbourne

Celebrations

- On the evening of Thursday, 11 March 2021, *Shivaratri* was celebrated. The programme included *aratrikam* (vesper service), chanting, special worship and *abhishekam* followed by the sharing of *prasad*.
- On Sunday, 21 March 2021, Sri Ramakrishna's *tithi puja* (birth anniversary) was celebrated. The programme in the morning included special worship, *homa*, *pushpanjali* and sharing of *prasad*. Swami Sunishthananda delivered a talk on the 'Life and Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna' in the evening after the *aratrikam* (vesper service).
- *Ramanavami* was celebrated on Saturday, 24 April and Sunday, 25 April 2021. It was funded by

the Government of Victoria's Hindu Festivals and Events 2020-2021 grants program. The program on Saturday evening included *aratrikam* (vesper service), special worship, *Ramanama Sankirtanam*, *bhajans* and sharing of *prasad*. On Sunday morning, a cultural event was organized in which various local cultural groups participated to present *bhajans*, recitations, skits, and dance performances. Local Councillor, Suzanne Stojanovic attended the cultural event.

- On the evening of Wednesday, 26 May 2021, *Buddha purnima* was celebrated online. The programme included *puja*, offerings, chanting and a talk on 'The Life and Teachings of Buddha.'



Ramanavami in Melbourne



Harmony Day Dinner

Other Activities

- Swami Sunishthananda was invited to attend the Harmony Day Dinner as a panel member. Organized by the Maroondah Interfaith Network at Club Kilsyth on Sunday, 28 March 2021, the function included a Question-and-Answer Session on the theme “Building Community across the Social Barriers” .
- Swami Sunishthananda represented the Hindu faith at an Interfaith meeting organized by the Victorian Sikh Gurudwaras Council of Victoria (VSGC). The meeting was in honour of the 400th *Parkash parab* (birth anniversary) of Guru Tegh Bahadur Saheb Ji. The meeting took place at the Gurudwara Sahib, Blackburn, on Saturday, 1 May 2021.
- Swami Sunishthananda represented the Hindu faith in an online vigil for India. It was organized by Calm in the City in association with Faith Council of Communities Victoria (FCCV) and the Multifaith Advisory Group to the Victorian Government. It was held on Tuesday, 11 May 2021, at 5.00 pm to pray for all those severely affected by the second wave of COVID 19 in India.
- Swami Sunishthananda represented the Hindu faith at the Jewish Care’s Multifaith Solidarity Gathering organized to pray for all who are severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic on Friday, 21 May 2021, at Schwartz Family Synagogue, Jewish Care Centre, St Kilda.

PERTH

51 Golf View Street, Yorkine, WA 6060

Email: vedantaperth@gmail.com

Contact: Sumita Chetty (04) 3892 8136

Parthiv Parekh 0430 511 699

Regular Activities:

- *Aratrikam* was conducted each night by a person or family taking the responsibility for it.



A Reading at Perth

- Monthly *satsungs* were held on 18 April 2021 and 16 May 2021.

Celebrations

- Sri Ramakrishna’s *tithi puja* or birth anniversary was observed on 21 March 2021. The programme included *bhajans*, reading about Sri Ramakrishna and the distribution of prasad.

SYDNEY

2 Stewart Street, Ermington, NSW 2115

144A Marsden Road, Ermington, NSW 2115 (Entry)

Email: vedasydney@vedantasydney.org

Contact: (02) 8197 7351

URL: www.vedantaaustralia.org

Daily Activities

- The shrine was open from 6:30 am to 1:00 pm and 4:00 pm to 8:30 pm seven days a week.
- Meditation from 6:30 am to 7:00 am and chanting from 7:00 am to 7:30 am.
- Vesper service (*aratrikam*), *bhajans*, and readings from *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* were conducted from 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm. The times change on special occasions.

Regular Activities

- Swami Sridharananda conducted his study of the *Srimad-Bhagavad Gitā* on Sundays between 9:30 am and 10:30 am. Due to the current re-

strictions owing to Covid 19, the talks were pre-recorded and uploaded to the Centre's website and Youtube Channel.

- Swami Sridharananda conducted a class on the *Mundaka Upanishad* on Saturdays from 11:00am to 12: 00 noon. Due to the current restrictions owing to Covid 19, the talks were pre-recorded and uploaded to the Centre's website and Youtube Channel.
- *Sri Ramanama Sankirtanam* was conducted on *ekadashi* days after the vesper service.
- Devotees also received spiritual counselling and guidance.

Celebrations

- *Shivaratri* was observed on 11 March 2021. According to Government regulations all those who attended registered online and the registrations were capped at 75. The programme included *bhajans*, *puja*, worship by the devotees and *prasad* distribution.



Shivaratri in Sydney

- Sri Ramakrishna's *tithi puja* (birth anniversary) was held on 15 March 2021. All those who attended registered online and the number of those who attended at one time did not exceed 75. The programme included *puja*, *homa*, *bhajans*, and *prasad* distribution.
- *Ramanavami* was held on 21 April 2021. The evening function included *puja*, singing of the entire *Ramanama Sankirtanam* and *bhajans* and the distribution of *prasad*. The maximum of 75 devotees registered to attend.



Sri Ramakrishna's Birth Anniversary in Sydney



Ramanavami in Sydney

2. OBITUARY: SWAMI VAGISHANANDA, VICE PRESIDENT, RAMAKRISHNA MATH & RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

Compiled and edited from *Swami Vagishananda* published by Ramakrishna Math, 24 March 2021.

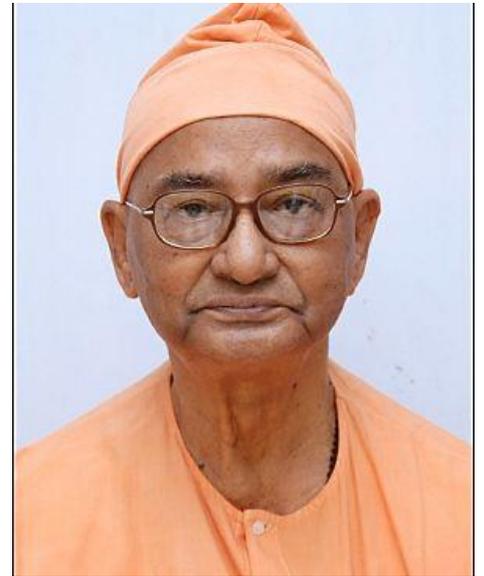
Swami Vagishananda was born as Samaresh Chandra on 12 January 1930 in Chittagong (In today's Bangladesh). In 1940 Samaresh Chandra was admitted to class 4 of the Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar, where he continued till he passed the matriculation exam in 1947. He was an accomplished student of the Vidyapith. And it was not just at studies that Maharaj was good but also in sports and other activities. After Deoghar, from 1947 he studied at the St. Pauls Cathedral Mission College, staying during this period at the Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home in Gouripur.

Next we find Maharaj completing his science-graduate studies from the Banga-Vasi College in Calcutta in 1952. He enrolled for studying medicine after this at the Homoeopathic Medical College when, however, a new horizon started beckoning him and did not allow him to complete the medical course. It was during this period that he started visiting the Janasikshamandira of Ramakrishna Mission, Saradapitha, as a volunteer.

On the 1st of February 1954 he left home for good and aspiring for monastic life joined the Ramakrishna Mission, Saradapitha. Even before this he had the good fortune of associating with two stalwarts of the Mission: Swami Vimuktanandaji, the Secretary of Ramakrishna Mission Saradapitha and Swami Tejasanandaji, the first Principal of the Saradapitha's Vidyamandir. Their exemplary lives left an indelible impression on (now brahmachari) Samaresh's mind.

Having joined the sangha, he was blessed with *mantradiksha* in 1955 by Swami Shankaranandaji Maharaj who also conferred on him the brahmacharya vows on 20 February 1958, with the name *Brahmachari Smritichaitanya*. Subsequently on 8th May 1962, on Shankar Jayanti, Swami Vishuddhanandaji Maharaj blessed maharaj with *sannyasa* and the name Swami Vagishananda.

Between April 1965 and November 1967 he served as Assistant Secretary of Saradapitha. After serving at Saradapitha for about 13 years, he left on 15 November 1967 to assume charge as Assistant Sec-



retary of the Ramakrishna Mission's Institute of Culture, Gol Park.

In March 1970 he was sent for extensive relief work at the Taki centre of the Mission (in North 24-Parganas today). He experienced here first-hand what it meant to be absolutely devastated by natural calamities, an experience which stood him in good stead when dealing later with the needs of the downtrodden. After this relief stint for 6 months, he was sent as Assistant Secretary to Ranchi-Morabadi centre (then in Bihar). He continued here from April 1972 as Secretary of this Ranchi centre.

After about 4 years at Ranchi-Morabadi, the headquarters at Belur Math asked Maharaj to

take over the centre at Malda. He served the Sangha through the Malda branch from December 1976 to mid-September of 1982.

In 1982 Maharaj was sent to head the Cossipore Math centre. This first stint at Cossipore was for a short period only since he was soon sent to assume charge of Kamarpukur centre in January 1985. His stay here also proved to be for a short duration since Maharaj was appointed head of the Bombay centre (called Mumbai today).

His arrival at the Bombay centre coincided with the year-long celebration of Sri Ramakrishna's 150th birthday. He knew very few people here, yet funds were to be collected. In his own way he went ahead and what a grand year-long programme took place studied with music programmes at different prominent venues of the city with artistes like Pandit Bhimsen Joshi, Kumar Gandharva, Purshottam Jalota and Sudha Malhotra. On the heels of this followed the celebrations of Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi's 150th birthday celebrations and the centenary celebrations of Swami Vivekananda's Chicago addresses.

In March 1990 when he was in Mumbai, Maharaj was elected a Trustee of the Ramakrishna Math and a member of the Governing Body of the Rama-

krishna Mission. In 2010 he was once again requested to head the Cossipore Math. Even at that advanced age he consented to this second stint at Cossipore.

In the month of July 2011 the Trustees at Belur Math decided that Maharaj should start giving *mantra-diksha*. Accordingly on 8 November 2011, the Jagaddhatri Puja day, Revered Maharaj initiated the first batch of 31 *sadhakas* at the Cossipore Math. This *mantra-diksha* continued without break for a little over 8 years ending at Ramakrishna Math, Sinthi (Kolkata), on 15 March 2020, where he gave *mantra-diksha* for the last time. During his lifetime he blessed 50,885 people with *mantra-diksha*. He had to travel extensively all over the country solely to satisfy people's thirst for spiritual initiation. These *diksha* programmes were arranged not only at the Math and Mission branch centres, but also at many ashramas which come under the Bhava Prachar umbrella of the Ramakrishna Math.

Towards the end of September 2020, one morning when Maharaj was strolling in the ashrama after his bath as per his usual routine, it was observed that he had some difficulty in breathing. Even after repeated enquiries Maharaj did not speak about his difficulty. The *sevaks* convinced him to go to Se-

va Pratishthan hospital for a check-up.

After examination doctors found that he was suffering from severe multiple infections. With proper care and treatment he felt better after 10-15 days and was discharged from the hospital. But his *sevaks* observed that Maharaj was still not his normal self, he could not eat properly and he seemed to find it difficult to follow his usual routine. He was again taken to Seva Pratishthan and diagnosis revealed irregular sodium-potassium levels in his blood. A new complication also surfaced now: whenever he drank any fluid it would enter his air-pipe resulting in severe cough. He could eat semi-solid foods without difficulty. The doctors inserted Ryle's Tube through the nostrils for drinking water and other fluids.

As this Ryle's Tube needed replacement every three weeks which was painful for the patient, doctors suggested insertion of PEG (Percutaneous Endoscopic Gastrostomy) Tube through the abdomen for better medical management. On 12th March 2021, surgery was performed to fix the PEG Tube. When Dr. Pradip Chakraborty, a medicine specialist visited Revered Maharaj in the morning, Maharaj himself said to the doctor, "Today is the day of my surgery. I

shall go to the OT after a some blood with the phlegm. ly. Suddenly the blood pres-
while". The doctor in turn com- Doctors were immediately sure started dropping very fast.
forted him saying, "Yes Maha- called. Maharaj said, "I feel Maharaj was rushed to the ICU
raj, this is a minor procedure". nausea". At 4.00 p.m. he had and put on ventilation. The
The surgery was led by Dr. another bout of vomiting. He doctors and the entire medical
Achintya Das at 11.00 a.m. It said to the *sevak*s, "I am feeling team extended best possible
was an uneventful procedure severe pain, make me sit up". care but Maharaj did not re-
carried out in about 45 The place of the pain was, spond to the treatment. At 7.10
minutes. Doctors conveyed however, not clear – sometimes p.m. Revered Maharaj left the
that the procedure was success- he was pointing to his chest, mortal coil for his eternal
fully done and Maharaj was sometimes to some other part abode. He was 91 years old at
shifted back to his cot. He did of his body. A little later he the time of his *Mahasamadhi*.
not have any apparent difficul- asked a *sevak* to massage his The sad news spread immedi-
ty until then. At about 3.00 feet. Doctors were initially una- ately through television and
p.m., he had a bout of cough- ble to understand his com- other electronic media.
ing. A little later he coughed plaints. ECG was performed
again but this time there was but did not reveal any anoma-

3. CONTRIBUTIONS FROM FRIENDS AND DEVOTEES

Endless

by James Rayment

Endless chains of logic are not
easy,

Hard to digest and make your
stomach queasy,

Until it hits your brain like thun-
der,

With an awesome sense of won-
der,

That if nothing comes from noth-
ing,

Then something always is,

And thinking of beginnings,

Will only drive you loopy.

Then you quickly pack your bag,

And head down to the railway sta-
tion,

To the platform of surrender,

And board the train of thought,

To somewhere in Forever.

2. FEATURE ARTICLE: HINDUISM (THEISTIC)

(COMPILED BY RITA RAMSARAN BASED ON THE BBC'S WEBSITE AND BRITANNICA)

Context

Hinduism is the religion of the majority of people in India and Nepal. It also exists among significant populations outside of the sub-continent and has over 900 million adherents worldwide.

In some ways Hinduism is the oldest living religion in the world, or at least elements within it stretch back many thousands of years. Yet Hinduism resists easy definition partly because of the vast array of practices and beliefs found within it. It is also closely associated conceptually and historically with the other Indian religions Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism.

Unlike most other religions, Hinduism has no single founder, no single scripture, and no commonly agreed set of teachings. Throughout its extensive history, there have been many key figures teaching different philosophies and writing numerous holy books. For these reasons, writers often refer to Hinduism as 'a way of life' or 'a family of religions' rather than a single religion.

Defining Hinduism

The term 'Hindu' was derived from the river or river complex of the northwest, the Sindhu. Sindhu is a Sanskrit word used by the inhabitants of the region, the Aryans in the second millennium BCE. Those who lived in the West of the Sindhu could not pronounce Sindhu properly so it became Hindu to refer to all

those living on the other side of the Sindhu. Later migrants and invaders, the Persians in the sixth century BCE, the Greeks from the 4th century BCE, and the Muslims from the 8th century CE, used the name of this river in their own languages for the land and its people.

The term 'Hindu' itself probably does not go back before the 15th and 16th centuries when it was used by people to differentiate themselves from followers of other traditions, especially the Muslims (Yavannas), in Kashmir and Bengal. At that time the term may have simply indicated groups united by certain cultural practices such as cremation of the dead and styles of cuisine. The 'ism' was added to 'Hindu' only in the 19th century in the context of British colonialism and missionary activity.

The origins of the term 'Hindu' are thus cultural, political and geographical. Now the term is widely accepted although any definition is subject to much debate. In some ways it is true to say that Hinduism is a religion of recent origin yet its roots and formation go back thousands of years.

Although it is not easy to define Hinduism, we can say that it is rooted in India, most Hindus revere a body of texts as sacred scripture known as the Veda, and most Hindus draw on a common system of values known as dharma. Belief in karma and reincarnation and in the Atman or soul are some of the other

common bases of Hinduism.

The five strands

Across the sweep of Indian religious history, at least five elements have given shape to the Hindu religious tradition: **doctrine, practice, society, story, and devotion**. These five elements, to adopt a typical Hindu metaphor, are understood as relating to one another as strands in an elaborate braid. Moreover, each strand develops out of a history of conversation, elaboration, and challenge. Hence, in looking for what makes the tradition cohere, it is sometimes better to locate central points of tension than to expect clear agreements on Hindu thought and practice.

Doctrine

The first of the five strands of Hinduism is doctrine, as expressed in a vast textual tradition anchored to the Veda ("Knowledge"), the oldest core of Hindu religious utterance, and organized through the centuries primarily by members of the learned Brahman class. Here several characteristic tensions appear as outlined below:

- ◆ The relationship between the divine and the world.
- ◆ The disparity between the world-preserving ideal of dharma and that of *moksha* (release from an inherently flawed world).
- ◆ Individual destiny, as shaped by karma (the influence of one's actions on one's present and future lives), and the in-

dividual's deep bonds to family, society, and the divinities associated with these concepts.

Practice

The second strand in the fabric of Hinduism is practice. Many Hindus, in fact, would place this first. Despite India's enormous diversity, a common grammar of ritual behaviour connects various places, strata, and periods of Hindu life. While it is true that various elements of Vedic ritual survive in modern practice and thereby serve a unifying function, much more influential commonalities appear in the worship of icons or images (*pratima*, *murti*, or *archa*). Broadly, this is called *puja* ("honouring [the deity]"); if performed in a temple by a priest, it is called *archana*. It echoes conventions of hospitality that might be performed for an honoured guest, especially the giving and sharing of food. Such food is called *prasada* (Hindi, *prasad* meaning "grace"), reflecting the recognition that when human beings make offerings to deities, the initiative is not really theirs. They are actually responding to the generosity that bore them into a world fecund with life and possibility. The divine personality installed as a home or temple image receives *prasada*, tasting it (Hindus differ as to whether this is a real or symbolic act, gross or subtle) and offering the remnants to worshipers. Some Hindus also believe that *prasada* is infused with the grace of the deity to whom it is offered. Consuming these leftovers, worshipers accept their status as beings inferior to and dependent upon the divine. An element of

tension arises because the logic of *puja* and *prasada* seems to accord all humans an equal status with respect to God, yet exclusionary rules have sometimes been sanctified rather than challenged by *prasada*-based ritual.

The practices of Hinduism can be broadly categorised into four. These four types of practices correspond to the different dimensions of the human personality. The practices are jnana yoga, raja yoga, karma yoga, and bhakti yoga. Jnana yoga corresponds with the rational or intellectual faculty of people. Raja yoga corresponds with the concentrating or focusing faculty. Karma yoga is representative of the active faculty and Bhakti yoga of the emotional faculty. Given that individuals are a collection of these faculties, the more evolved individuals would develop all four faculties.

Jnana yoga is the path or practice of discrimination and renunciation. Raja yoga is the path of ethical living, breathing, postures, restraint of the senses and mind and concentration. Karma yoga is the path of reorienting ego-centric activities to divine-centric activity. And finally bhakti yoga is reorienting emotions from being people-centric to divine-centric, utilizing the different human sentiments.

Society

The third strand that has served to organize Hindu life is society. Early visitors to India from Greece and China and, later, others such as the Persian scholar and scientist al-Bīrūnī, who trav-

eled to India in the early 11th century, were struck by the highly stratified (if locally variant) social structure that has come to be called familiarly the caste system. While it is true that there is a vast disparity between the ancient vision of society as divided into four ideal classes (*varnas*) and the contemporary reality of thousands of endogamous birth-groups (*jatis*, literally "births"), few would deny that Indian society is notably plural and hierarchical.

The social domain, like the realms of religious practice and doctrine, is marked by a characteristic tension. There is the view that each person or group approaches truth in a way that is necessarily distinct, reflecting its own perspective. Only by allowing each to speak and act in such terms can a society constitute itself as a proper representation of truth or reality. Yet this context-sensitive habit of thought can too easily be used to legitimize social systems based on privilege and prejudice. If it is believed that no standards apply universally, one group can too easily justify its dominance over another. Historically, therefore, certain Hindus, while espousing tolerance at the level of doctrine, have maintained caste distinctions in the social realm.

Story

Another dimension drawing Hindus into a single community of discourse is narrative. For at least two millennia, people in almost all corners of India—and now well beyond—have responded to stories of divine play

and of interactions between gods and humans. These stories concern major figures in the Hindu pantheon: Krishna and Radha, Rama and Sita and Lakshmana, Shiva Parvati (or, in a different birth, Sati), and the Great Goddess Durga, or Devi, as a slayer of the buffalo demon Mahisasura. Often such narratives illustrate the interpenetration of the divine and human spheres, with deities such as Krishna and Rama entering entirely into the human drama. Many tales focus in different degrees on genealogies of human experience, forms of love, and the struggle between order and chaos or between duty and play. In generating, performing, and listening to these stories, Hindus have often experienced themselves as members of a single imagined family. Yet, simultaneously, these narratives serve to articulate tensions connected with righteous behaviour and social inequities. Thus, the *Ramayana*, traditionally a testament of Rama's righteous victories.

Devotion

There is a fifth strand that contributes to the unity of Hindu experience through time: *bhakti* ("sharing" or "devotion"), a broad tradition of a loving God that is especially associated with the lives and words of vernacular poet-saints throughout India. Devotional poems attributed to these inspired figures, who represent both genders and all social classes, have elaborated a store of images and moods to which access can be had in a score of languages. *Bhakti* verse first appeared in Tamil in south India and moved northward

into other regions with different languages. Individual poems are sometimes strikingly similar from one language or century to another, without there being any trace of mediation through the pan-Indian, distinctly upper-caste language Sanskrit. Often, individual motifs in the lives of *bhakti* poet-saints also bear strong family resemblances. With its central affirmation that religious faith is more fundamental than rigidities of practice or doctrine, *bhakti* provides a common challenge to other aspects of Hindu life. At the same time, it contributes to a common Hindu heritage—even a common heritage of protest. Yet certain expressions of *bhakti* are far more confrontational than others in their criticism of caste, image worship, and the performance of vows, pilgrimages, and acts of self-mortification.

Central Concepts of Hinduism

Atman

Atman means 'eternal self'. The atman refers to the real self beyond ego or false self. It is often referred to as 'spirit' or 'soul' and indicates the true self or essence which underlies our existence.

There are many interesting perspectives on the self in Hinduism ranging from the self as eternal servant of God to the self as being identified with God or Brahman. The understanding of the self as eternal supports the idea of reincarnation in that the same eternal being can inhabit temporary bodies.

The idea of atman entails the idea of the self as a spiritual ra-

ther than material being and thus there is a strong dimension of Hinduism which emphasises detachment from the material world and promotes practices such as asceticism. Thus it could be said that in this world, a spiritual being, the atman, has a human experience rather than a human being having a spiritual experience.

Dharma

Dharma is an important term in Indian religions. In Hinduism it means 'duty', 'virtue', 'morality', even 'religion' and it refers to the power which upholds the universe and society. Hindus believe that dharma was revealed in the Vedas although a more common word there for 'universal law' or 'righteousness' is *rita*. Dharma is the power that maintains society, it makes the grass grow, the sun shine, and makes moral people or rather gives humans the opportunity to act virtuously.

But acting virtuously does not mean precisely the same for everyone; different people have different obligations and duties according to their age, gender, and social position. Dharma is universal but it is also particular and operates within concrete circumstances. Each person therefore has their own dharma known as *sva-dharma*. What is correct for a woman might not be for a man or what is correct for an adult might not be for a child.

The importance of *sva-dharma* is illustrated well by the *Bhagavad Gita*. This text, set before the great battle of the Mahabharata, depicts the hero Arjuna riding in his chariot driven by his charioteer Krishna between

the great armies. The warrior Arjuna questions Krishna about why he should fight in the battle. Surely, he asks, killing one's relatives and teachers is wrong and so he refuses to fight.

Krishna assures him that this particular battle is righteous and he must fight as his duty or dharma as a warrior. Arjuna's svadharma was to fight in the battle because he was a warrior, but he must fight with detachment from the results of his actions and within the rules of the warriors' dharma. Indeed, not to act according to one's own dharma is wrong and called *adharmā*.

Correct action in accordance with dharma is also understood as service to humanity and to God. The idea of what has become known as sanatana dharma can be traced back to the *puranas* - texts of antiquity. Those who adhere to this idea of one's eternal dharma or constitution, claim that it transcends other mundane dharmas - that it is the *para dharma*, the ultimate dharma of the self. It is often associated with bhakti movements, who link an attitude of eternal service to a personal deity.

Varna and Ashrama

An important idea that developed in classical Hinduism is that dharma refers especially to a person's responsibility regarding class (*Varna*) and stage of life (*ashrama*). This is called varna ashrama-dharma. In Hindu history the highest class, the Brahmins, adhered to this doctrine. The class system is a model or ideal of social order that first occurs in the oldest Hindu text, the Rig Veda and the present-day caste

(jati) system may be rooted in this. The four classes are:

- *Brahmans* or *Brahmins* - the intellectuals and the priestly class who perform religious rituals
- *Kshatriya* (nobles or warriors) - who traditionally had power
- *Vaishyas* (commoners or merchants) - ordinary people who produce, farm, trade and earn a living
- *Shudras* (workers) - who traditionally served the higher classes, and included labourers, artists, musicians, and clerks

People in the top three classes are known as 'twice born' because they have been born from the womb and secondly through initiation in which boys receive a sacred thread as a symbol of their high status. Although usually considered an initiation for males it must be noted that there are examples of exceptions to this rule, where females receive this initiation.

The twice born traditionally could go through four stages of life or ashrams. The ashrama system is as follows:

- *Brahmacarya* - 'celibate student' stage in which males learned the Veda
- *grihastha* - 'householder' in which the twice born male can experience the human purposes (purushartha) of responsibility, wealth, and sexual pleasure
- *Vanaprastha* - 'hermit' or 'wilderness dweller' in which the twice born male retires from life in the world to take up pilgrimage and religious observances along with his wife
- *Sannyasa* - 'renunciation' in

which the twice born gives up the world, takes on a saffron robe or, in some sects, goes naked, with a bowl and a staff to seek *moksha* (liberation) or develop devotion

Correct action in accordance with dharma is also understood as service to humanity and to God. The idea of what has become known as sanatana dharma can be traced back to the puranas. Those who adhere to this idea, addressing one's eternal dharma or constitution, claim that it transcends other mundane dharmas - that it is the *para dharma*, the ultimate dharma. It is often associated with bhakti movements, who propose that we are all eternal servants of a personal Deity, thus advocating each act, word, and deed to be acts of devotion. In the 19th Century the concept of sanatana dharma was used by some groups to advocate a unified view of Hinduism.

Karma and Samsara

Karma is a Sanskrit word whose literal meaning is 'action'. It refers to the law that every action has an equal reaction either immediately or at some point in the future. Good or virtuous actions, actions in harmony with dharma, will have good reactions or responses and bad actions, actions against dharma, will have the opposite effect.

In Hinduism karma operates not only in this lifetime but across lifetimes: the results of an action might only be experienced after the present life in a new life.

Hindus believe that human beings can create good or bad consequences for their actions and might reap the rewards of action

in this life, in a future human rebirth or reap the rewards of action in a heavenly or hell realm in which the self is reborn for a period of time.

This process of reincarnation is called *samsara*, a continuous cycle in which the soul is reborn over and over again according to the law of action and reaction. At death many Hindus believe the soul is carried by a subtle body into a new physical body which can be a human or non-human form (an animal or divine being). The goal of liberation (*moksha*) is to make people free from this cycle of action and reaction, and from rebirth.

Purushartha

Hinduism developed a doctrine that life has different goals according to a person's stage of life and position. These goals became codified in the 'goals of a person' or 'human goals', the purusharthas, especially in sacred texts about dharma called 'dharma shastras' of which the 'Laws of Manu' is the most famous. In these texts three goals of life are expressed, namely virtuous living or dharma, profit or worldly success, pleasure and liberation. The purusharthas express an understanding of human nature, that people have different desires and purposes which are all legitimate in their context.

Brahman

Brahman is a Sanskrit word which refers to a transcendent realm beyond the universe. As such, it is sometimes translated as 'God' although the two concepts are not identical. Brahman upholds and supports everything. According to some Hindus this is identified with the self (*atman*)

while others regard it as distinct from the self.

Most Hindus agree that Brahman pervades everything although they do not worship Brahman. Some Hindus regard a particular deity or deities as manifestations of Brahman.

God

Most Hindus believe in God but what this means varies in different traditions. The Sanskrit words *Bhagavan* and *Ishvara* mean 'Lord' or 'God' and indicate a reality who creates, sustains and destroys the universe over and over again. It is too simplistic to define Hinduism as belief in many gods or 'polytheism'. Most Hindus believe in a Supreme God, whose qualities and forms are represented by the multitude of deities which emanate from him. God, being unlimited, can have unlimited forms and expressions.

God can be approached in a number of ways and a devoted person can relate to God as a majestic king, as a parent figure, as a friend, as a child, as a beautiful woman, or even as a ferocious Goddess. Each person can relate to God in a particular form, the *ishta devata* or desired form of God. Thus, one person might be drawn towards Shiva, another towards Krishna, and another towards Kali. Many Hindus believe that all the different deities are aspects of a single, transcendent realm.

In the history of Hinduism, God is conceptualised in different ways, as an all knowing and all-pervading spirit, as the creator and force within all beings, their 'inner controller' (*antaryamin*)

and as wholly transcendent. There are two main ideas about Bhagavan or Ishvara:

1. Ultimately God is beyond language and anything that can be said about God cannot capture the reality. Followers of the Advaita Vedanta tradition (based on the teachings of Adi Shankara) maintain that the soul (*atman*) and Brahman are ultimately identical and liberation is achieved once this has been realised. This teaching is called non-dualism or advaita because it claims there is no distinction between the soul and the ultimate reality.

2. Bhagavan is a person. God can be understood as a supreme person with qualities of love and compassion towards creatures. On this theistic view the soul remains distinct from the Lord even in liberation. The supreme Lord expresses himself through the many gods and goddesses. The theologian Ramanuja (also in the wider Vedanta tradition as Shankara) makes a distinction between the essence of God and his energies. We can know the energies of God but not his essence. Devotion (*bhakti*) is the best way to understand God in this teaching.

For convenience Hindus are often classified into the three most popular Hindu denominations, called *paramparas* in Sanskrit. These paramparas are defined by their attraction to a particular form of God (called *ishta* or *devata*):

Vaishnavas focus on Vishnu and his incarnations (*avatara*, avatars). The Vaishnavas believe that God incarnates into the world in different forms such as

Krishna and Rama in order to restore dharma. This is considered to be the most popular Hindu denomination.

Shaivas focus on Shiva, particularly in his form of the linga although other forms such as the dancing Shiva are also worshipped. The Shaiva Siddhanta tradition believes that Shiva performs five acts of creation, maintenance, destruction, concealing himself, revealing himself through grace.

Shaktas focus on the Goddess in her gentle forms such as Lakshmi, Parvati, and Sarasvati, or in her ferocious forms such as Durga and Kali.

Guru

The terms *guru* and *acharya* refer to a teacher or master of a tradition. The basic meaning is of a teacher who teaches through example and conveys knowledge and wisdom to his disciples. The disciple in turn might become a teacher and so the lineage continues through the generations. One story that captures the spirit of the teacher is that a mother asks the teacher to stop her son eating sugar for he eats too much of it. The master tells her to come back in a week. She returns and he tells the child to do as his mother says and the child obeys. Asked by the mother why he delayed for a week, he replied, 'A week ago I had not stopped eating sugar!'

Gurus are generally very highly revered and can become the focus of devotion (bhakti) in some traditions. A fundamentally important teaching is that spiritual understanding is conveyed from teacher to disciple through a line-

age and when one guru passes away he or she is usually replaced by a successor. One guru could have more than one successor which leads to a multiplication of traditions.

Hindu scripture

The Vedas

These are the most ancient religious texts which define truth for Hindus.

They got their present form between 1200-200 BCE and were introduced to India by the Aryans.

Hindus believe that the texts were received by scholars direct from God and passed on to the next generations by word of mouth.

Vedic texts are sometimes called *shruti*, which means hearing. For hundreds, maybe even thousands of years, the texts were passed on orally.

Contents of the Vedas

The Vedas are made up of four compositions, and each Veda in turn has four parts which are arranged chronologically.

- **The Samhitas** are the most ancient part of the Vedas, consisting of hymns of praise to God.
- **The Brahmanas** are rituals and prayers to guide the priests in their duties.
- **The Aranyakas** concern worship and meditation.
- **The Upanishads** consist of the mystical and philosophical teachings of Hinduism.

The Samhitas

- **Rig-Veda Samhita** (c. 1200 BCE) is the oldest of the four Vedas and consists of 1028 hymns praising the ancient gods.
- **Yajur-Veda Samhita** is used as a handbook by priests performing the Vedic sacrifices.
- **Sama-Veda Samhita** consists of chants and tunes for singing at the sacrifices.
- **Atharva-Veda Samhita** (c. 900 BCE) preserves many traditions which pre-date the Aryan influence and consists of spells, charms and magical formulae.

The Upanishads

The Upanishads were so called because they were taught to those who sat down beside their teachers.

These texts developed from the Vedic tradition, but largely reshaped Hinduism by providing believers with philosophical knowledge.

The major Upanishads were largely composed between 800-200 BCE and are partly prose, partly verse.

Later Upanishads continued to be composed right down to the 16th century. Originally they were in oral form.

The early Upanishads were concerned with understanding the sacrificial rites.

Central to the Upanishads is the concept of Brahman.

Whilst the priests (Brahmins) had previously been the ones who, through ritual and sacrifice, had restricted access to the divine, now the knowledge of the uni-

verse was open to those of the high and middle castes willing to learn from a teacher.

Bhagavad Gita

The Bhagavad Gita, or "Song of the Lord" is part of the sixth book of the Mahabharata, the world's longest poem.

Composed between 500 BCE and 100 CE, the Mahabharata is an account of the wars of the house of Bharata.

It is one of the most popular Hindu texts and is known as a smriti text (the remembered tradition). This is considered by some to be of less importance than shruti (the heard text, such as the Vedas). It has, nevertheless, an important place within the Hindu tradition.

The Bhagavad Gita takes the form of a dialogue between Prince Arjuna and Krishna, his charioteer.

Arjuna is a warrior, about to join his brothers in a war between two branches of a royal family which would involve killing many of his friends and relatives.

He wants to withdraw from the battle but Krishna teaches him that he, Arjuna, must do his duty in accordance with his class and he argues that death does not destroy the soul.

Krishna points out that knowledge, work and devotion are all paths to salvation and that the central value in life is that of loyalty to God.

The Ramayana

Composed during a similar period, the Ramayana is one of India's best known tales.

It tells the story of Prince Rama who was sent into exile in the forest with his wife, Sita, and his brother, Lakshmana.

Sita was abducted by the evil demon Ravana but ultimately rescued by Prince Rama with the help of Hanuman.

The story is written in 24,000 couplets.

The symbolism of the story has been widely interpreted but basically is the story of good overcoming evil. Many people have said that it is a story about dharma or duty.

Worship

Puja

Hindu worship, or puja, involves images (murtis), prayers (mantras) and diagrams of the universe (yantras).

Central to Hindu worship is the image, or icon, which can be worshipped either at home or in the temple.

Individual rather than communal

Hindu worship is primarily an individual act rather than a communal one, as it involves making personal offerings to the deity.

Worshippers repeat the names of their favourite gods and goddesses, and repeat mantras. Water, fruit, flowers and incense are offered to god.

Worship at home

The majority of Hindu homes have a shrine where offerings are made and prayers are said.

A shrine can be anything: a

room, a small altar or simply pictures or statues of the deity.

Family members often worship together. Rituals should, strictly speaking, be performed three times a day. Some Hindus, but not all, worship wearing the sacred thread (over the left shoulder and hanging to the right hip). This is cotton for the Brahmin (priest), hemp for the Kshatriya (ruler) and wool for the vaishya (merchants).

Temple worship

At a Hindu temple, different parts of the building have a different spiritual or symbolic meaning.

- The central shrine is the heart of the worshipper
- The tower represents the flight of the spirit to heaven

A priest may read, or more usually recite, the Vedas to the assembled worshippers, but any "twice-born" Hindu can perform the reading of prayers and mantras

Religious rites

Hindu religious rites are classified into three categories:

- Nitya
- Nitya rituals are performed daily and consist in offerings made at the home shrine or performing puja to the family deities.
- Naimittika
- Naimittika rituals are important but only occur at certain times during the year, such as celebrations of the festivals, thanksgiving and so on.

- Kanya are rituals which are "optional" but highly desirable. Pilgrimage is one such.

Worship and pilgrimage

Pilgrimage is an important aspect of Hinduism. It's an undertaking to see and be seen by the deity.

Popular pilgrimage places are rivers but temples, mountains, and other sacred sites in India are also destinations for pilgrimages, as sites where the gods may have appeared or become manifest in the world.

Kumbha Mela

Once every 12 years, up to 10 million people share in ritual bathing at the Kumbha Mela festival at Allahabad where the waters of the Ganges and Jumna combine.

Hindus from all walks of life gather there for ritual bathing, believing that their sins will be washed away.

The bathing is followed by spiritual purification and a ceremony which secures the blessings of the deity.

River Ganges

The river Ganges is the holiest river for Hindus.

Varanasi

This city, also known as Benares, is situated on the banks of the Ganges and is one of the most important pilgrimage centres.

It is said to be the home of Lord Shiva where legend has it that his fiery light broke through the earth to reach the heavens.

A Hindu who dies at Varanasi and has their ashes scattered on

the Ganges is said to have experienced the best death possible.

Holy days

Diwali

Ganesh Chaturthi

Hanuman Jayanti

Holi

Krishna Janmashtami (Krishna Jayanti)

Mahashivaratri

Makar Sankranti

Navaratri (Navratri)

Raksha Bandhan

Rama Navami

Swaminarayan Jayanti

Thaipusam

Vaisakhi

Varsha Pratipada

Source:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/hinduism/ataglance/glance.shtml>

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hinduism/General-nature-of-Hinduism>