

Path to Dharma

தர்ம நெறி



News Letter 19 செய்தி மடல்

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ஷேத்திர(வயல்)விநாயகர் ஆலயம்,
ஸ்ரீ முன்னேஸ்வரம், சிலாபம், இலங்கை.

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Knowing Hinduism through Question and Answers

1. What is Spirituality?

Spirituality is a part of human experience and scientifically it benefits to mental health. It is not in itself the same thing as holding a particular religious belief, being religiously observant or belonging to an established faith tradition.

Dr. Raj Persaud in his book titled 'The Mind a user's guide' (- Transworld publishers-2007)

Says that, "It can be defined as the experience of a deep-seated sense of meaning and purpose in life, together with a sense of belonging and of harmony in the universe. Spirituality involves a striving for answers about the infinite, and is particularly important in times of stress, illness, loss, bereavement and death. Such concerns involve feelings, and are equally important in young people and for those with learning disability.

Genuine spirituality is inclusive and unifying. It creates a reciprocal sense that to harm another is to harm oneself, and equally that helping others is to help oneself. It applies to everyone, including those who do not believe in God or a higher being. While there are many religions, spirituality is universal, but also unique to each and every person".

2. What is the difference between the life of a present day Hindu compared to an era of an early traditional Hindu?

Primitive worship of spirits, godliness and animal totems of the tribal people of early Hindus, and the early Aryans type of adoration of the elements were congregated into the fold of philosophy of Hinduism. The mode of life of traditional Hindu asserts the idea of a god who has always lived in the mind of India. The early Hindus accepted the religions and rituals of the original inhabitants of India. Now the trend is completely changed and as a result of this consequences we forgetting our age old culture, adopting the materialistic attitude of west, in destroying our way of life so far followed. Because of this adaptation of the new trend we had to work excess with a narrow mentality of self centered style of work with out much devotion caused greater tension

3. In Hinduism does the soul namely the Athma go to hell the Naraka after death if bad deeds are done in this life?

In Hinduism - there is no concept of evil or Devil. Every being created by the preceptor Brahma is good. Some beings due to the past karma adopt bad behaviors in this life. But even the bad characters if they realize the truth and pray to God, the ambitious beings can do extremely well in the future life yet to come. In Hindu mythology there is yet, a term for hell - called Naraka. But even that region is governed by God. Any soul that has to suffer in hell, is there in hell for only a temporary phase. The final destination is always heaven. If a soul has done enough good deeds on earth, rightaway, it goes to heaven - in layman's words for the Sanskrit term is Swarga or Paradise. Should sins outnumber the merits of a soul, the temporary destination, according to Puranas - or ancient texts, is Naraka. But the journey doesn't end there. According to the theory of Karma a human being is born as many times on this earth as is necessary to shed his or her bad Karma and finally attains Mukti - salvation.

4. What is the relationship of the primordial mantra “AUM ” and “Nirguna , “Saguna Brahman”?”

The Hindu conception of the Supreme Being expressed as “AUM”. This spiritualist syllable includes all that is sacred in Hinduism. The cord of eternity, “AUM”, carries reverberations of Hindu metaphysical thought and spiritual energy.

“AUM”, is an assumption of the universal soul termed ‘The Brahman’. The Upanishads explain the universe as creation of the “AUM”. Each and every form of life is an exposure of the “Brahman’. Progressively god grew from a primordial “AUM”, into the powerful god, worshipped piously by devotees.

The Brahman, who is the creator of life, is our sole cosmic motivation. Once the individual life of a person comes to an end, the soul returns to the “Brahman’. The Brahman is without any describable form, male, female nor neuter gender is called as “Nirguna”.

The Brahman is conceptual and indefinable. Sages of the past needed a facade of “The Brahman” to whom they could offer their prayers

Progressively the amorphous “Nirguna Brahman”, evolved as “Saguna Brahman”. The transformation bestowed a gender, “The Brahman” appeared as a male trinity, a three faced God called “Trimurthi”.

The Trimurthi basically is in the form of a human, one body with three heads that symbolically expresses the cycle of life. Trimurthi personify birth, life and death. Trimurthi, as Brahma he takes the power of the creation of the Universe. Vishnu sustains dharma (righteousness) and order. Siva holds duty to destroy.

5. In general a lot of verses in the Vedas praise to many Gods. Are there any references in Vedas to show the concept of One God?

Countless verses in the Vedas praise to many Gods, nevertheless in spite of the multiplicity of gods, the Rig Veda affirms that: "To what is One, sages give many a title; they call it Agni, Yama, Matarisvan.

The concept of One God repeated in Yajur Veda: “For an awakened soul Indra, Varuna, Yama, Aditya, Chandra all these names represent only one basic power and spiritual entity.”

There are amazing similarities between old Slavic and Sanskrit languages, especially from the Vedic period. The very word "vedas" has same root with the Russian word "vedat", meaning "to know". The name of Fire god Agni, sounds just like "agon" in Russian, meaning fire. The word "varit", is, "to boil" sound similar to Varuna, the god of water. There are many same roots shared between Sanskrit and European languages: the word "mother" is "matar" in Sanskrit, "mama" in Russian, "mutter" in German, "madar" in Persian, "madre" in Spanish, "moder" in Swedish. So the modern group of languages that sprouted from Sanskrit is called Indo European group by linguists.

6. What are the different names of the species of Rudraksha tree from where the Rudraksha beads are obtained and the chemical composition of Rudraksha bead? Elucidate the significance of the number 108 of the Rudraksha beads.

The term Rudraksha, generally means the eyes of Lord Siva or Rudra implying thereby that it was pleasant to the eyes of Lord Siva, and hence so named in His honour. Siva Purana and Padma Purana write on the method of wearing, reciting mantras and benefits of Rudraksha.

Botanically, the Rudraksha tree belongs to the genus *Elaeocarpus*. The well known species are *Elaeocarpus ganitrus* Roxb, *Elaeocarpus sphaericus*, and *Elaeocarpus grandis*. These trees grow in very few places in the world including the Himalayas of India, Nepal, Tibet and, in some parts of Indonesia. They are huge trees with a wide silhouette whose flowers bloom in May and June and fruits ripen in September to November annually.

The *Rudraksha* fruit is a berry varying in size (3-40 mm; 1/8 to 1½ inches). It has smooth light green skin and pulp. Lodged within the pulp is a single round seed which has a rough surface and a cavity or hole running through it from top to bottom. These seeds are known as *Rudraksha* beads.

Each seed possesses one to twenty one vertical lines (longitude lines) running down on its surface. These lines are known as mukhas, or facets, and are natural formations of the seed. Seeds with one vertical line are known as ek-mukhi (one facet); those with two lines are dwi-mukhi (two facets), and so on. *Rudraksha* is the fruit which grows in bunches. Its pulp is hard and remains stuck to its seed. It is kept in water for a number of days and then *Rudraksha* fruit is taken out and the pulp is peeled off.

Rudraksha seeds contain carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, oxygen and trace elements in combined form. The percentage compositions of their gaseous elements were determined by C-H-N analyzer and by gas chromatography. The result shows that *Rudraksha* beads consist of 50.031 % carbon, 0.95% nitrogen, 17.897% hydrogen and 30.53% oxygen. According to mythology there are four varieties of *Rudraksha*. Rudraksa sanctifies, and destroys the sins by contact and prayers.

Significance of 108 in Rudraksha mala (garland).

The rosary of Rudraksha or set of mantra counting has 108 beads. 108 has been a sacred number in Hindu religion. This number is explained in many different ways. The number 108 may be the product of a precise mathematical function (for example $1^1 \times 2^2 \times 3^3 = 108$ that is powers of 1 to 1st power =1; 2 to 2nd power=4 (2x2); 3 to 3rd power=27 (3x3x3). $1 \times 4 \times 27 = 108$) which was thought to have special numerological significance.

The larger bead (Meru) of the Rudraksha mala (garland) not part of the 108. It is not tied in the sequence of the other beads. It is the guiding bead, the one that marks the beginning and end of the mala.

There are 54 letters in the Sanskrit alphabet. Each has masculine (Siva) and feminine (Sakti). 54 times 2 is 108. On the drawing of Sri Yantra there are marmas where three lines intersect, and there are 54 such intersections. Each intersection has masculine (Siva) and feminine (Sakti) qualities. 54 x 2 equals 108. Thus, there are 108 points which characterize the Sri Yantra as well as the human body. 9 times 12: Both of these numbers have been said to have spiritual significance in many traditions. 9 times 12 is 108. Also, 1 plus 8 equals 9 which is 9 times 12 equals 108.

The heart Chakra contains the intersections of energy lines, which totals to 108. These energy lines focus to form the heart Chakra. One of them, sushumna leads to the crown chakra, and is said to be the path to self-realization.

Marma stanas (sacred spots) are like energy intersections called chakras, which are said to be 108 in number in our body. Some say there are 108 feelings, with 36 related to the past, 36 related to the present, and 36 related to the future.

There are 12 constellations, and 9 arc segments called namshas (chandrakalas). 9 times 12 equal 108. Chandra (moon) and kalas are the divisions. In astrology; there are 12 houses and 9 planets. 12 times 9 equal (12x9) 108. The diameter of the sun is 108 times the diameter of the Earth.

The number 108 consists of the numerals 1, 0, and 8. The numeral 1 stands for God or higher Truth, 0 stands for emptiness or completeness in spiritual practice, and 8 stands for infinity or eternity. The numeral 1 of 108, and the numeral 8 of 108, when added together equals 9, which is the number of the i.e. 1, 2, 3 ... 10, etc. where 0 is not a number ($1+2+3+4+5+6+7+8+9 = 45$; $4+5=9$)

The number 108 is divided, such as in half, third, quarter, or twelfth, so the number of beads in some of the Rudraksha malas (garlands) has 54, 36, 27, or 9 beads. The Atman (the human soul) after death goes through 108 stages on the journey.

7. Is there any mention about the food habit of human in the Vedic texts of Hinduism?

Food in Sanskrit is termed 'anna'. Eating the daily food is considered as an important ritual in the life of the community of Hindus

Consumption of food as meal is mentioned in the Vedas of the early Hindu sacred writings. The Indus Valley Civilization thrived in northwest India from the middle of the third millennium B.C. to the middle of the second millennium B.C. the people lived happily. They ate rich diet including fish, meat, vegetables and milk and enjoyed intoxicating liquor and all other good things. Their attitude to food was liberal, prompted by a philosophy of having healthy minds and healthy bodies. Harappan culture compared to other ancient civilizations, indicated a more egalitarian social structure.

A later Vedic text, called the Taittiriya Upanishad, says that food is equal to Brahman, the Supreme God and that the eating is not an act of only filling the stomach but a religious sacrifice, in which oblations of food are offered to the fire in the stomach.

The Taittiriya Upanishad states that, "Food is life, therefore one should give food; eating is the supreme sacrifice." One of the ancient law books the 'Dharmaśāstras,' deal the rules and regulations of food and all other related of eating at length.

In Vedic periods (1500–500 B.C.E.), humanity consumed the whole lot, including beef. As time passed in later times, meat eating was considered a forbidden act. As regards the killing of animals, either for food or for a sacrifice was also regarded as a prohibited act in the life of a true Hindu.

On the other hand fasting (Fasting in the sense of not eating for a specific time (upavāsa), or abstaining from specific substances during certain periods) is given great importance in Ayurveda and Siddha medicine. Fasting is recommended both for the purification and to balance of the physical condition of the body, as well as for the emotions and the mind. Here three kinds of fasting are distinguished: purification fasts to clean the system; healing fasts to overcome a specific disorder; and austerity fasts, which are undertaken to deny the bodily urges on the way toward liberation from the cycle of rebirth.

The spiritual aim of fasting is to control the physical body as well as of emotions and the mind. This practice eventually leads to the ultimate aim of the goal of unconditioned consciousness or liberation from the cycle of rebirth, in union with the transcendent (either considered personal or impersonal).

Varied groups developed their own food habits and laid down particular rules and regulations, although there were regional differences due to various reasons. Some classified food according to the three qualities (*guna*): *sattva* food, which is pure; *rajas* food, which is energetic or exciting; and *tamas* food, which is impure. Only *sattva* food is allowed, which means no meat and fish, onions, garlic, specific fruits, and sharp spices and so on.

8. When and how was the term 'Hindu' coined?

It is not definitely known when and how the term 'Hindu' was coined. The word 'Hindu' is not seen anywhere in the earlier sacred Hindu scripts. The term "Hindu" first appeared as an Old Persian

geographical description (derived from the river *Sindhu*), to refer and to identify the people who lived beyond the River Indus.

According to some scholars, the origin of the term 'Hindu' would have derived from the Arabic term - *Al-Hind* (the Hind) referring to 'the land of the people of modern day India' which may have got translated in English as Hindu, as shown by R. Thapar, in his work *Interpreting Early India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press 1993. in page. 77

The term "Hindu" was used by all historians to refer to Turkey to Mughal Empires. The British intellectuals, by the end of the eighteenth century used this term 'Hindu' to refer collectively to the followers of Indian religions in "Hindustan", the area of northern and adjoining northwestern India.

Ultimately this term "Hindu" turn out to be a word equivalent to anybody of "Indian" origin who was not otherwise belonging to a religion of Abrahamic denomination, thereby encompassing a wide range of religious beliefs and practices as explained by Flood Gavin, in his book "Hare Krishna: Hinduism, Vaisnavism, and ISKCON: Authentic Traditions or Scholarly Constructions?". *Cults and Society*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2001. It is understood that around 1830 that "ism" was added to "Hindu" to denote the culture and religion of Hindu beliefs in contrast to other religions. The term 'Hinduism' was soon *accepted* and used by all the Hindus. Owing to the wide range of diversity in the beliefs, practices and traditions covered by Hinduism, there is no universally . recognized definition on who a Hindu is, or whether Hinduism represents a religious, cultural or socio-political entity. In 1995, Chief Justice P. B. Gajendragadkar was quoted in an Indian Supreme Court ruling as quoted below;

"When we think of the Hindu religion, unlike other religions in the world, the Hindu religion does not claim any one prophet; it does not worship any one god; it does not subscribe to any one dogma; it does not believe in any one philosophic concept; it does not follow any one set of religious rites or performances; in fact, it does not appear to satisfy the narrow traditional features of any religion or creed. It may broadly be described as a way of life and nothing more." (Supreme Court of India, "Bramchari Sidheswar Shai and others Versus State of West Bengal" 1995)

8. What is Kumbabisheka?

Kumbabisheka literally means the consecration of idols (murthis) dedication of a new temple or that of renovated one by pouring sanctified water over the idols (murthis) in the sanctums, kumbams of Garbagraha tower and over the kumbams of the Rajagopura tower (gateway tower). It is done on an auspicious day and it is a long process with preliminary functions like setting the yoga salas and culminating in mandala abishekam.

Hindus believe that cosmos and all living things are composed of the five elements - earths, water, fire, air and ether. Water symbolises the life-force. The Kumbabishekam is the ritual relating to water symbolism together with the other four elements.

Water from the holy rivers, collected at the source by pious men in clean containers is kept in kumbams or decorated pitchers adorned with flowers and are worshipped in a specially erected canopy, which is performed in the houses called Yagasala (place where offering done to fire God).

Mantras are recited to add to the spiritual power and to the sanctity of the water. This ceremony signifies the consummation of the pious endeavour of building the abode of the almighty.

Kumbabishekam is also an occasion for periodical conservation of the sanctum sanctorum. To prevent oscillation and to fix the idols security, the images and the peetas (bases on which they are placed) are

sealed together by means of Ashtabandhanam, a chemical compound prepared by mixing mainly the substances namely, kombarakku (wood loc), cukkann thol (lime stone powder), kunkilium (konakai resin), karkaavi (red ochre), mezhugu (beeswax) and yerummai vennai (butter prepared out of buffalo's milk).

The labourers employed for mixing these components and preparing the desired compound are expected to have purificatory baths before they take up the work and to chant devotional hymns and utter the name of the particular God to whose temple the Kumbabishekam is to be performed.

During Kumbabishekam people from far and wide neighbourhood go in groups with musical instruments, alavattoms (multi-coloured flags representing in pictures mythological scenes), large sized colourful umbrellas and other temple paraphernalia. The participation at Kumbabishekam is considered one of the significant ways for invoking the blessing of God.

Tales from Panchatantra

“Excess of Greed is harmful”

The story of the blue jackal

Once there lived a jackal in a jungle and he strayed into a town in search of food. He was starving and was being chased by a group of dogs in the town. The jackal unintentionally entered the house of a dyer and fell into a container of blue indigo dye. Because of this the jackal was stained blue from head to tail. Slowly he ran away from the house without being seen back into the forest. All the animals of the woodland were surprised at his appearance. No one could place his identity. Taking advantage of his condition, the jackal decided to play the circumstances to his benefit. He proclaimed that he was a fierce owl, sent by the Gods, to the earth to guard the woods

The innocent animals believed what the jackal said. The jackal taking this as an advantage appointed the lion as his chief minister, the tiger as his guardian of the bed room and the elephant as the gatekeeper. He shrewdly drove all the jackals out of sight to a demarcated location from the forest for fear of being recognized. All the animals would hunt food and supply meals to the self proclaimed king. Later the king would distribute the remaining food to all equally just as a king would do. Thus he was leading a magnificent life.

One day unexpectedly a flock of jackals were passing by howling. Unable to control his natural instinct, the fierce owl showed his normal voice and howled at the top of his voice. Hearing this howl, all the animals realized that they had been fooled by a jackal and they got together and killed the jackal immediately.

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“Think wisely before your deeds”

The story of the heron and the crab

A long time ago a heron lived by the side of a pond. It was a lethargic old bird. One day this creature manipulated a devise to get a continuous supply of fish without much effort. Thus one day, the heron went to the bank of the pond and stood with a gloomy face without any attempt to catch any fish. There was also a carb living in the pond, which habitually helped the fishes in the pond. The crab on seeing the gloomy faced heron, asked about the mood of the heron.

The heron replied, "Aha! I am very much troubled that this pond is soon to be devoid of any fish. These fishes as you know are my source of food. I listened to a crowd of fishermen chatting about catching all the fishes in this pond. Anyhow I know of a pond a bit far away, where all the fishes can be safe and sound. If the fishes are paying attention, I can carry a few daily to the nearby pond where all can live happily and safely."

The crab conveyed this suggestion to the fishes. All the fishes were very enthusiastic to go to the new safer destination with the help of the heron. From that day onwards daily in the morning, some fishes volunteered to go to the new pond with the help of the heron.

Each day the heron took some fishes in the beak, and on reaching a large rock used to eat all the fishes and left the bones at the rock. Wicked heron got a continuous supply of fishes without any effort. At the end, the curiosity got the better of the crab, and one day it also volunteered to go with the fishes.

When the crab had gone closer to the rock, it realised the foul play the heron had been playing on the helpless fishes. The crab was furious and it tightened its claws around the neck of the heron and snapped the head of the heron off.

The heron had a selfish death. Then the crab crept back to the former pond and conveyed all the fish about the dishonesty the heron had been telling.