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*Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah*    ॐ सर्वे भवन्तु सुखिनः    ॐ    May Everybody Be Happy

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## NEWS LETTER

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Dear Friends,

I wish you all a very happy and prosperous New Year.

**Climate change** has become a very big issue. Everybody is talking about it. The Climate Institute in Australia has launched a combined document on behalf of various religious groups to emphasise the moral imperatives of climate change. Rev. Mataji - Pravrajika Ajayaprana represented the Hindu faith at the launch. She was interviewed by ABC's Radio National.

On behalf of the Hindu community in Australia we submitted a statement which is reproduced elsewhere in this newsletter. Every one of us has a moral responsibility to conserve resources, and reduce wastage.

I am pleased to say that a majority of Hindus are vegetarians. I would encourage those who are not vegetarians to reduce their consumption of meat to help redress the environmental damage being done by animal farming as quoted in our submission apart from the various health implications associated with meat consumption.

**Multi-cultural representation** continues to occupy an important aspect of the Hindu Council activities. Miss Sahiti Chekkala accompanied Mr Vijai Singhal to the MLC Girls School's Year-12 camp and spoke on the contributions Hindu faith makes to the multi-cultural Australian community. Her abridged speech is reproduced elsewhere in this Newsletter.

Mr Vijai Singhal also attended the "Learning Tolerance" seminar organised by the Ryde Council and the inaugural meeting of the Interfaith Network organised by the Marrickville Council.

I am very pleased to inform that the activities of the **Hindu Youth Council** are being revived by the efforts of some enthusiastic young people led by Dr Raj Maheshwari. A brief report on their activities is enclosed.

**Hindu Women's Council** members have also met a few times and have applied for the Membership of the Australian Women's Coalition Inc., an initiative of the Australian Government.

The activities of the Hindu Council are increasing constantly. I look forward to your continued support. We need more active members to come forward and help us in our ongoing efforts.

Regards,

Dr. A. Balasubramaniam  
Chairman

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### **HINDU YOUTH COUNCIL**

The Hindu Youth Council of Australia (HYCA), an umbrella body of the existing Hindu youth bodies around Sydney is presently innovating ways to contribute in the socio-psycho-spiritual wellbeing of for the young generation of our cultural Hindu religion background. HYCA initial objective is to provide an open social forum to the interested young members of our community who want to participate and contribute in celebrating our rich cultural heritage, and use this knowledge for the good of community and this country at large. HYCA is reorganising itself for a promising and ambitious 2007. There are regular meetings to share ideas and plan out the social calendar for the new year. HYCA plans to:

- To organise a New Year dinner to formally introduce the youth council.
- Conduct a general survey to identify the community's expectations from the organisation.

- Attempt to create a centralised register for the events being organised by other Hindu/Indian Youth Councils in Sydney. Organise discount tickets for the Hindu Council members for such events.
- Establish relationship with other Hindu/Indian organisations in Sydney/Australia to share information and resources.
- Plan an annual calendar for the Youth council with the aim to organise at least one big event in the first half of the year apart from assisting the parent organisation with their ongoing events.

Let's watch this space in the New Year for more exciting events.

### **CLIMATE CHANGE - Hindu Council Submission:**

The Climate institute launched joint document from various religious organisations on the moral imperative to climate change on 5th December 2006.

Hinduism is the world's oldest religion and it's third largest. Most Hindus are vegetarians, due to their belief in the sanctity of all life and commitment to simplicity. There are almost 100,000 Hindus living in Australia today and about 1 billion globally.

*Live in complete harmony with Nature,  
Experience the grace of God in the splendour  
of the universe.*

*Be blessed by God's reassuring love,  
The sweet dawn will sweeten your soul,  
The dazzling mid-day will set your hearts  
aflutter,*

*And the serene music of your soul will guide  
you towards peace and prosperity.*

*And when the day's task is over, you will  
sleep in the lap of Mother Nature,*

*All the deities will be favourable to you.*

*Mother Nature, Yajur Veda 34.37*

This is the message of living in harmony with Mother Nature from the Holy Scriptures of Hinduism, one of the oldest religions of the world. It is a pity that we have ignored this sublime message of living in complete harmony with nature and enjoying the many splendours of the universe. By our indiscriminate use and abuse of its abundant resources we have spoilt its beauty. Consumerism has been at the core of our ever-increasing desire to possess more and more to add to our so-called comforts for living. We have complicated our lives, and have added lots of mental worries. The ever-increasing demand on our energy resources has led to

climate change and warming of the earth's atmosphere with some drastic consequences.

Mahatma Gandhi, one of the greatest human beings of recent times, had said that there is enough provided by nature to meet everybody's needs, but not to fulfil their wants. He led a very simple life himself, living with very meagre personal possessions and setting an example for humanity. There is no limit to our wants and that is the basic cause of our problems. The Scriptures have always emphasised that we should control our desires.

In the Gita, Lord Shri Krishna says:

*Thinking of objects, attachment to them is formed. From attachment longing and from longing anger grows. From anger comes delusion, and delusion leads to loss of memory. From loss of memory comes the ruin of discrimination and from the ruin of discrimination the person perishes. Hence be a self-controlled man, moving amongst objects of desire with senses under restraint, free from attraction and aversion, attain tranquillity and peace.*

The message is to control our desires and thus reduce the demand on precious resources. Conserve energy and help save the environment.

Mahatma Gandhi was also a vegetarian and had propagated the cause of vegetarianism. Many recent health studies have pointed out the obvious health advantages of vegetarian diet. In *The Ethics of What We Eat*, Peter Singer and Jim Mason write:

*It has become apparent that the human appetite for animal flesh is a driving force behind virtually every major category of environmental damage now threatening the human future, deforestation, erosion, fresh water scarcity, air and water pollution, climate change, biodiversity loss, social injustice, the destabilisation of communities and the spread of disease.*

The authors claim that since European settlement in Australia, 13 per cent of the land has been cleared of native vegetation, mostly for grazing animals. When it comes to feeding the world, an acre of land used for crops could feed about 10 times as many people as an acre for grass-fed beef. The emissions from cows belching accounts for about 11 per cent of Australia's total national emissions, or 61 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent per year. Hence, by switching to vegetarian diet we can help save the environment.

Animal rights are another aspect of this. According to Mark Berriman, Director of the Australian Vegetarian Society (NSW): Over 50 billion animals are killed worldwide each year. It is hard to comprehend. We must develop compassion towards other creatures that at the moment have no legal rights or respect.

This brings us to another very important aspect of this issue and that is the pollution of internal environment, our inner peace and tranquillity. Unfortunately, the atmosphere now is full of hatred and mutual fear. We are living under the constant fear of terrorism. This so-called war on terrorism cannot be won through violent means: violence begets violence. We have to find peaceful means to solve this terrible situation. We have to overcome mutual hatred.

Hinduism believes in unity of existence. Vedas boldly declare, "*Sarvam Idam Khalu Brahma* – all this is nothing but Brahman". The Christ says, Love Thy Neighbour. Why? Hinduism provides the answer – because you and your neighbour are one. The same God resides in him and in you. Let us hope and pray that good sense prevails with all of us and that we do the right thing to help overcome the damage we have been causing to the inner and the external environment and learn to live in peace and harmony with Mother Nature.

Om! Shanti! Shanti! Shanti!  
Om! Peace! Peace! Peace!

## **INTER-FAITH AND CO-EXISTENCE IN MULTICULTURAL AUSTRALIA**

By: Sahiti Chekkala

*In the light of your faith/religious tradition, what contribution does your faith make to Australian society and how can it inform or contribute to the creation of and maintenance of harmonious communities?*

Hinduism, is known as "SANATAN DHARMA" - meaning the 'Eternal Religion'. Presently it is the third largest religion worldwide. It is based on the revelations of the Highest Truth, philosophies aimed at explaining meaning behind actions people undertake in life. It was not founded by any one individual prophet. It believes in the unity of all existence. Vedas are scriptural texts of Hinduism, which contain the vast treasure of both secular and spiritual knowledge.

**Unity of all existence:** Vedas boldly declare: SARVAM IDAM KHALU BRAHMA - meaning 'All this is nothing but Brahman'. Brahman is defined as the force that encapsulates life. It is described as an entity, believed to inhabit every portion of reality and existence throughout the entire universe. Brahman is our

consciousness. It is, in a sense, the part of God that resides within each one of us. Hinduism also states: EKAM SAT VIPRA BAHUDA VADANTI, meaning: 'Truth is one. Wise men call it by different names'. Hinduism respects all religions and their teachings. Religious pluralism is the answer to the religious divide. The basic concept of Hinduism supports the idea of 'Pluralism', that it is the unreserved acceptance that there can be many different paths to attain oneness with God. Hinduism itself provides many paths to the attainment of MOKSHA, or liberation, through the diversity of gods and goddesses connected with it.

One size fits all does not work. We are all individuals in our own right, coming from different backgrounds, inspired by different faiths and scriptures. So, the manner in which we relate to the same reality will also be different. Australia's identity of being a multicultural society is partly due to the multi-faith nature of its people. As a result, we learn to live together in peace, respecting all religions. Everyone has a right to choose the path of religion most suited to them.

**Hinduism has always been the most tolerant, patient and welcoming of all religions. Hindu-India has been the sole nation on earth where the Jewish community was never persecuted. Jews have lived in India for over 2000 years.**

Recently, a "Lost" Jewish Tribe, who settled in North-Eastern region of India 27 centuries ago, migrated back to their homeland of Israel. The Bnei Menashe (children of Manasseh), were descendants of one of the 10 "lost tribes" of Israel. Over 2,700 years ago, 75% of the Jewish nation was exiled and disappeared, thus known as the Ten Lost Tribes. According to the history of the Bnei Menashe, they initially spent several centuries in China. When a despotic emperor persecuted them, they fled and settled in India. To this day, they have lived in India without facing persecution. DNA tests confirmed their identity.

Similarly, Zoroastrian refugees (now known as the Parsee community), escaping the destruction of the Persian civilisation at the hands of Islamic conquerors were granted refuge in India over a thousand years ago.

In the modern era, India provided sanctuary to the Dalai Lama and his Buddhist followers from Tibet, when they were driven out by the Chinese authorities. Hinduism is a religion that has always sought to live side-by-side, peacefully with the followers of other, non-Hindu faiths.

**Hindus contributions:** Hindu migrants, are mostly professionals, such as doctors, engineers, teachers, university professors and IT professionals. They are very law-abiding and friendly people. They have been making very significant and positive contributions to the Australian economy and towards the well-being of the Australian society. The next generation of Hindus, offspring of the migrants, have been performing well in their studies and are also accomplishing the professional status held by their parents, thereby continuing the tradition of their parents. To move forth as a nation, it is vital to not only contribute what one has to offer, but for one to open up and support others. Then only will harmony survive on the scaffold of acceptance by all.

## **NALANDA UNIVERSITY**

With support from Singapore, Japan and other countries interested in Buddhism, India's ancient Nalanda University, dating back to 5th century B.C., may soon be restored to its past glory as a primary seat of learning in Asia. An ambitious 150 million US-dollar project was unfolded at an international symposium titled 'Reviving Buddhist Cultural Links'. Essentially a joint venture between the provincial government of India's eastern Bihar state -- where Nalanda is located -- and the Singapore government, it envisages the participation of several countries with large Buddhist populations, including Sri Lanka, Thailand and China.

The project was not about the religion but Buddhist values and philosophy which have become an integral part of East Asian civilisation. As Asia re-emerges on the world stage, Asians could look back to their own past and derive inspiration from it for the future. Nalanda should be developed as an icon of the Asian renaissance, attracting scholars and students from a much wider region as the ancient university once did.

Indian President Abdul Kalam, described the project as a "model for evolving a happy, prosperous and peaceful society in our planet" and helpful in the "evolution of the enlightened citizen." The process, he said, has three components -- education with a value system, religion transforming into spirituality and economic development for societal transformation. "The mission of unity of minds is indeed gaining momentum from Bihar, the birthplace of ancient Nalanda," observed Kalam.

Land for the project has already been allocated near the ancient Nalanda university site, and a

bill to establish the university is expected to be passed by the Bihar state assembly in the third week of December.

Nalanda University was founded by Kumaragupta I of the Gupta dynasty during the golden age of classical Indian culture. Nalanda at the height of its glory accommodated over 10,000 students from across Asia. Chinese Buddhist scholar Prof. Tan Chung, described Nalanda as "the oldest precursor of Oxford and Cambridge - a fortress of learning"

China would not have been what it became but for the beneficial cultural influence of India. When the Han Dynasty was on the verge of collapse by the 6th century, it was the Buddhist influence which reunified China under the banner of Sui, whose rulers Emperor Wen and Emperor Yang both proclaimed themselves as the disciples of the Buddha. Nalanda offered China a model where great centres of learning based on monasteries and temples could provide commoners lives that throbbled with spirituality and wisdom. China during pre-Buddhist days could not have such vitality, and learning was the monopoly of a handful of families. The advent of Buddhism made a sea-change and China came alive as a popular land of spiritualism and wisdom.

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## **HOLI MELA 2007**

Hindu Council will be participating with the Holi Sabha of Australia to celebrate the Holi Mela jointly in Sydney with other Hindu organisations on 4th March 2007 at the Fairfield Show Ground.

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## **Inspiring Quotes**

The following are some inspiring extracts that can help one in everyday life:

### **Sure Success**

Take up one IDEA. Make that one IDEA your life-Think of it, Dream about it, Live by it. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body, be full of that IDEA and just leave every other alone.

Swami Vivekananda says:

"Awake, arise and stop not till the goal is reached."

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Newsletter compiled by Anusha Mahalingam