



Ālaya Vāni

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*“Just as the crushing of
a rose brings out its
sweet perfume, so
the difficulties of
life release the
sweetness within us.
If we let them, they can
bring out qualities such as
love for others, tenderness,
compassion, humilty, and
closeness to loved ones”.*

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Message from the Secretary
The Council of Hindu Temples of North America

Dear Friends,

Namaste & Greetings.

Best wishes to you and your families for the new year 2015. The annual meeting of the Council of Hindu temples of North America (CHTNA) for 2015 will be held at Paschima Kasi Sri Viswanatha Temple, Flint, Michigan on May 2nd. It is truly vital that as many Temples as possible become members of CHTNA and participate in the meeting. CHTNA plays the role of a strong voice to express concerns of Hindu Temples at the state and federal levels.

Several topics such as religious visas, management of Temples, involvement of youth in Temple activities etc. are discussed at these meetings. Such annual meetings of the Council provide a forum for the representatives of different Temples to share their experiences and thus learn from each other.

May the blessings of God Almighty be with all of us and our families. Looking forward to meeting all of you in Flint, MI.

Sincerely,
Dr. Uma Mysorekar
President, *Śri Mahā Vallabha Ganapati Devasthanam*,
Flushing, NY



Council Meeting 2014
at The Hindu Temple of Atlanta, Riverdale, GA

MEMBERSHIP APPEAL
TO ALL THE TEMPLES



PLEASE JOIN AND BE A PART OF THE COUNCIL OF HINDU TEMPLES OF NORTH AMERICA BY BECOMING A MEMBER AND MAKING THE COUNCIL A STRONG BODY REPRESENTING ALL THE TEMPLES. THE COUNCIL CAN HAVE A POWERFUL VOICE IN DEALING WITH ISSUES SUCH AS RELIGIOUS WORKERS VISAS, ETC - COMMON CONCERN OF ALL TEMPLES.

For Further Information regarding membership form and dues, Please call
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ANNUAL COUNCIL
MEETING OF 2015

will be held on Saturday, May 2, 2015

PASCHIMA KASI
SRI VISWANATHA TEMPLE
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Please visit the new Council website at
<http://www.chtna.org>

For information as well as links and resources
to other Temples in the United States.

Contact the Council by email at:
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THE VIRTUES OF A VEGETARIAN DIET

by: Keertana Srinivasan

Food facilitates our spiritual progress. What we eat helps us purify ourselves, and provides us with energy and strength. Consuming meat can corrupt our spiritual path and can obstruct us from achieving true bliss and purity. One tenet of Hinduism is that of a bhakti - to find God. As Ramakrishna Paramahansa stated, "Find God. That is the only purpose in life." To find God, we must have a calm mind. Such a state of calmness can be accomplished through the foods that we eat. Vegetarian food, in particular, can help us to achieve a state of calmness and purity, which can help us eventually accomplish the ultimate goal in life - to find God. A vegetarian diet also promotes the practice of respecting all animals, which is important to Hinduism. Acquiring a vegetarian diet is important in Hinduism for several reasons.

There are three main types of food: Sattvic, Rajasic, and Tamasic. Sattvic food is typically the most nutritious and wholesome, and it is the key to healthiness. Vegetarian food is usually considered Sattvic food. Rajasic food is considered bitter, over-cooked, and thus pain-inducing and causes our mind to not focus well. Fish and other meat is usually cooked in such a way that it is classified as Rajasic food. Red meat carries grey meat, thus can stop or slow down spiritual progress. Tamasic food is impure and not fresh, and can often cause us to become tired, and our minds become dull. Meat such as beef is often considered Tamasic food. There is the common English phrase, "You are what you eat." This is applicable to our diets. It is said that if you eat Sattvic food, you will become a Sattvic person - you will gain pure and healthy qualities. On the other hand, if you eat Rajasic or Tamasic food, such as meat, you will develop impure qualities, which include egotism and a temperamental attitude. Meat also has negative health effects. Through the bacteria it carries, meat has the potential to cause harmful diseases such as tapeworm disease. Meat consumption has also been shown to be linked to high cancer mortality rates. What we eat is important to the state of our minds, and our path to finding God. To find God, and to achieve spiritual progress, it is important to eat Sattvic foods and to maintain a healthy state of mind - Sattvic food is the best food for a healthy and spiritual life. Hinduism promotes spiritual progress; thus, to comply with the tenets of Hinduism, it is essential to maintain a vegetarian diet,

as this promotes the opportunity for us to advance spiritually. Sattvic food helps us gain purity within ourselves.

Meditation, often practiced in Hinduism, is another way to reach God. To meditate properly, we must maintain a calm state of mind. Our calmness is strongly correlated with the food we consume. Sattvic food such as milk and nuts are typically the best for meditation, as they promote spiritual calmness. However, meats typically corrupt the mind, and they hence do not allow us to meditate properly. Eating meat usually will slow down our spiritual progress.

The importance of how food can impact the mind can be demonstrated by the experiments of Uddalaka, who was a great scholar. Uddalaka told his son, who was very educated, to abstain from food for fifteen days. The son was told to drink only water, but not eat any food. The boy did as told, and after fifteen days, Uddalaka asked his son to recite the Vedas. The boy was unable to do this - he responded saying that he had forgotten everything he used to know. "The mind is not functioning," the boy said. However, after the boy ate some food, he was able to again chant the vedas. Thus, as illustrated by this important example, what we eat is very important to our minds and our spiritual progress.

Hinduism is a religion that promotes the respect of all animals. Animals are considered to be manifestations of God, with souls of their own. For example, Lord Vishnu first incarnated onto Earth as a fish. He also took the form of many other animals later on. Lord Ganesha, the Hindu God of obstacles, has an elephant head. And Hanuman, the divine follower of Lord Rama, takes the form of a monkey. Further, animals also have been portrayed as helpers of God in Hinduism. For example, Nandi is the sacred bull who has been known to always protect and guard Lord Shiva. Animals have a very important role in Hinduism, and are considered to be forms of God. It is thus important to treat them justly, just as the ancient scriptures of Hinduism - the Vedas - declare. To treat animals justly, we must abstain from eating meat, and instead we should acquire a vegetarian diet to show our respect for animals, and to follow the beliefs of Hinduism.

I have been a vegetarian for seventeen years - my entire life. Initially, I was a vegetarian because that was the way I was raised. I did not eat meat simply because

my family never served it. I did not fully understand the concept of vegetarianism. However, as I grew older and more independent, I realized the importance of vegetarianism. Firstly, I am strongly opposed to animal abuse and cruelty of any manner. This is a moral issue I am very passionate about. I believe that animals have the right to be treated kindly and with compassion, just as humans do. This is one of the main reasons I abstain from meat. In addition, I have noticed that vegetarianism has helped made me a calmer and purer person. I find myself with energy and bliss after I eat, and throughout the day. When I do yoga as my school activity, I am able to focus on one goal and I am able to practice complete meditation. My friends who have recently converted to vegetarianism/veganism have told me that the conversion has helped them to become happier and healthy. They, too, find themselves with more energy and strength. Vegetarianism has been a crucial part of my life. It has helped me better understand my religion, and has made me a happier and calmer person. Vegetarianism has not only physically helped me by making me healthier, but it has also spiritually affected the way I think and act, and because of this, I am closer to attaining self-realization, and to finding God.

As translated from the Bhagavad Gita, "Foods in the mode of goodness increase the duration of life, purify one's existence and give strength, health, happiness and satisfaction." Obviously, it would be impossible to suggest that everyone in the world should give up Tamasic or Rajasic foods. Some people who do tough manual labor for their occupations need protein from meat to function. People who eat meat can still advance spiritually, though it will be at a slower pace. Sattvic food facilitates the process of spiritual progress. There are innumerable reasons for adapting to a vegetarian lifestyle. Eating vegetarian - sattvic - foods will help us become more spiritually advanced and pure. Further, it is important to respect animals, as this is an important belief of Hinduism. A vegetarian diet is important to our lives, as it can help us move forward spiritually, and find God.

2013-14 Essay Competition Entry - High School
Prize Winning Essay



HOLI

Holi, one of the popular festivals of India, is celebrated on *Phālguni* (Mar-Apr) *Purnima* (full moon), signaling the end of winter and the onset of spring. More popular in Northern India, this ancient festival celebrates the triumph of good over evil. *Holi* is the beginning of a new year for some, and a harvest festival for some others.

Houses are cleaned as in spring cleaning and fire wood is collected for days. Bonfires are lit on many street corners on *phālguni purnima* night - the eve of *Holi*. As the night wears off, some bring in the ambers of this pyre to rekindle their domestic fires; while others bring home the ashes for good luck. Enthusiasts dance to the rhythms of *dhol* (drums), sing devotional and folk songs, and go around the fire rejoicing the demise of legendary evil *Holika*, *Pootana*, or *Dhundhubi*, or the destruction and rebirth of *Kāma* the god of love and spring. The legend of *Holika* is by far the most popular:

The arrogant evil king *Hiranyakasipu* ordered everyone to worship him. But his pious son *Prahlāda* refused to do so. After several failed attempts, the enraged *Hiranyakasipu*, asked his evil sister *Holika* to put an end to *Prahlāda*. Being immune to fire, she put him on her lap and engulfed herself with fire. Lord *Nārāyana* came to *Prahlāda's* rescue and burned her instead. On *Holi*, a flammable effigy of *Holika* is attached to a fire proof pole (*Prahlāda*) and dropped into the bonfire to watch *Holika* (evil) burn.

The day after *purnima* comes *dhulendi* - the tradition of applying vibrant color as an expression of love and affection - the most popular part, making *Holi* the most colorful festival of India. Ancient murals and paintings show *Sri Krishna*, *Radha* and other *gopis* smear *gulāl* (color) as a symbol of their divine love for each other. In places like *Mathura*, where *Sri Krishna* had lived, celebrations start days early and last until *rang-panchami* - fifth day after *purnima*. Images of *Sri Krishna* and *Radha* are taken around on a chariot in joyous celebration.

Today's eager participants compete to be the first to apply color (powder or water) on others until they are fully covered, drenched and become unrecognizable. Out of respect, youngsters color only the feet of elders. Fun filled pranks are played on each other; and any negativity is quickly diffused by saying "*burā na māno, Holi hai!*" (Don't take offense, it's *Holi!*). Groups form human pyramids with the person on the top contending to be the first to break the high hung pot with his head. This practice is the re-enactment of the lore of child *Sri Krishna* stealing butter from His neighbors' high hung pots.

Originally, these colors that could enter through pores were extracted from plants with *āyurvedic* benefits. The heat generated from the bonfires help remove harmful bacteria in the air. After an inactive winter, these activities wake up the body, mind and spirit. Along with the day's activities, feasts are cooked and traditional sweets and drinks like *thandai* are exchanged with friends and foes alike - "even enemies are friends on *Holi*". This is the time to forge new friendships and renew old ones. The usual social divides like gender, age and status are set aside and everyone mingles freely without malice; which helps 'burn' the impurities in our hearts, and bringing harmony among all. May the joyous spirit of the festival of colors pervade our hearts and homes.