

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

A Hindu perspective on service: Yoked to God through action

As a part of the Year of Interfaith Service, this is the fourth in a series of Insights on various religious perspectives on service.

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From the 1960s onward, a number of non-Indian Americans have investigated Hinduism in some form or fashion.

Much of this was fueled by the tradition's more mystical side. Seekers were promised that with time, patience and practice, they would be able to attain, as it says in the song "Aquarius" from Hair, "Mystic crystal revelations and the mind's true liberation."

People of all ages lined up to

receive esoteric teachings, a mantra, instructions on limb busting Hatha yoga poses and a guru's blessings.

For the most part, none of these students was asked to become a Hindu. The aforementioned practices were given freely (or expensively, depending on which route one took) to anyone of any, or no, religion.

Those who imparted this wisdom insisted that religious classification was of little consequence. And in some cases, the idea of a spiritual community was considered of meager value. Solitary observance of what was taught was plenty enough to hit



Stella

those spiritual heights.

But over the decades, many who dipped their toes in the Dharmic pool came away somewhat unsatisfied. While the teachings on meditation, Yoga, etc. were quite valid, taking them out of the context of a larger community shortchanged the aspirants. Many returned to the folds of their youth as they remembered the not-so-horrible things about church or synagogue.

For one, religious institutions have a history of offering service to the larger society. And being able to serve is a great blessing. While many were studying the sacred Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad Gita as it described higher states of bliss in meditation, the parts on the nobility of work for the higher good

escaped their perusal.

"He that abstains to help the rolling wheels of this great world, glutting his idle sense, lives a lost life, shameful and vain. Existing for himself, self-concentrated, serving self alone, No part hath he in aught; nothing achieved" (Chapter III).

Those who have fully embraced the Hindu Dharma, not just skimmed from the top, have discovered a full and rich tradition that values the same humanitarian ethos that Abrahamic faiths hold so dear. As a matter of fact, the word we use in English for the unselfish giving of our time and talent is "service."

This is a descendent of the Sanskrit word "seva." Those who render such are called sevaks.

And in the school of Yoga (where we get "yoke") it is said that divinity can be realized by various methods.

One such is called "Karma-Yoga." That is, "Yoked to God through righteous action."

This is defined as any selfless activity performed with no thought of result or reward. Truly, just good for its own sake.

The West Michigan Hindu Temple is humbled and pleased to be a part of this, The Year of Interfaith Service.

For the past several years now we have partnered with Christian organizations, such as Salvation Army and Habitat for Humanity, on worthwhile projects.

We anticipate more opportunities.