

Jeff Zucker, President  
Michael Bass, Executive VP of Programming  
Barbara Levin, VP of Communications  
Heather Brown, Manager

Dear Mr. Zucker, Mr. Bass, Ms. Levin, and Ms. Brown,

We write to you on behalf of the Coalition for Religious Literacy, a growing collection of Hindu and Indian American organizations, and organizations supportive of Hindu and Indian Americans, who are deeply disturbed and gravely concerned by the initial episode of Reza Aslan's *Believer*, which premiered on CNN on Sunday, March 5. That episode, filmed in Varanasi, India — one of Hinduism's holiest cities — featured Aslan interacting with a reclusive sect of Hindu ascetics, while offering inflammatory and stereotypical misrepresentations of Hinduism's core teachings and practices. In the wake of growing anti-immigrant sentiment across the US -- last month's hate crime shootings of two Indian Hindus in Kansas being the most widely reported -- we fear that *Believer*'s erroneous depictions, misleading imagery, and unnecessarily provocative scenes only serve to exacerbate Hinduphobia.

We the undersigned, hereby request that CNN engage in an urgent and constructive dialogue with the Hindu American community and take the following steps:

1. Provide a prominently visible space on CNN's Belief Blog, and on the homepage of the *Believer* series, for a spiritually and academically informed rejoinder correcting misrepresentations of the Hindu tradition that the debut episode promoted.
2. Broadcast a focus group session on CNN discussing the strong emotions that the first *Believer* episode elicited in the United States among Hindu Americans. Among others, we ask a focus group feature key stakeholders from the community, including scholars of Hinduism, Hindu Americans holding public office, community advocates, and other practicing Hindus who can articulate the underlying concerns that triggered the current controversy.
3. We ask that CNN desist from any future broadcast of the first episode of *Believer* due to the manifold errors in presentation and inherent risks to the Hindu American community as outlined herein.
4. If and when, future broadcasts occur, the following disclaimer should be aired prior to broadcast: *Aghoris are a small sect of Hindu ascetics who are deeply misunderstood and often misrepresented. Aghoris perform mystical and unorthodox rituals in an effort to transcend duality and achieve spiritual oneness. Many of their rituals and practices are not representative of the majority of Hinduism's adherents. Lastly, caste-based discrimination violates Hindu teachings. **This episode is not suitable for educational purposes.***

Religious literacy in America is woefully low and even lower with respect to Hinduism. In fact, the Pew Religious Knowledge Survey of 2013 found that only 36% of Americans could correctly answer a single basic question about Hinduism. Combined with today's highly charged climate, we fail to understand by CNN would choose to introduce its viewers to Hinduism, a faith practiced by more than one billion people worldwide, through the sensationalized, inaccurate, and provocative lens of Aslan's *Believer*.

By now, we are certain that CNN is aware of the outrage engendered by the debut of *Believer*. Nearly all Hindu members of Congress, academics, and prominent members of the community are weighing in, expressing an outrage that mirrors the mood of a vast majority of three million Hindu and Indian Americans.

We anticipate a positive response from CNN, and look forward to a sustained dialog towards a rapid and mutually acceptable resolution to what is being perceived as a crisis in the Hindu American community. We anticipate your response by Friday, March 17th and can be reached at 202.223.8222.

Regards,

The Coalition for Religious Literacy

Hindu American Foundation  
80-20 National Asian American PAC, Newark, DE  
America Sevashram Sangha, New York, NY  
American Institute of Vedic Studies, Santa Fe, NM  
American Hindus Against Defamation, Billerica, MA  
Arya Samaj Greater Houston, Houston, TX  
Ashtanga Yoga Austin, Austin, TX  
Association of Indians in America, New York, NY  
Babaji's Kriya Yoga Order of Acharyas USA, Inc, St Etienne de Bolton, QC  
Balavikas of Fairfax, Ashburn, VA  
Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council, New York, NY  
BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha - North America, Piscataway, NJ  
Bellevue Hindu Temple & Cultural Center, Bellevue, WA  
Bihar Foundation, Sunnyvale, CA  
Cambridge Hindu Society, Cambridge, Ontario, Canada  
Center for Spiritual Enlightenment, San Jose, CA  
Chinmaya Mission West, San Francisco, CA  
Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Silicon Valley, Los Gatos, CA  
Desh-Videsh Media Group, Inc., Fort Lauderdale, FL  
Divya Dham Sevashram Sangha, New York, NY  
Educators Society for Heritage of India, Marlboro, NJ  
Ekal Vidyalaya Foundation of USA, Houston, TX

Forum For Hindu Awakening, Mount Laurel, NJ  
Forum for Religious Freedom, Princeton, NJ  
Gandhi Square of Florida, Davie, FL  
Gayatri Chetna Center, Piscataway, NJ  
Gayatri Pariwar USA, Reston, VA  
Global B.I., Columbus, OH  
Global Hindu Heritage Foundation, Frisco, TX  
Gujarati Samaj of Atlanta, Atlanta , GA  
Gujarati Samaj of Tri-State, Inc., Voorhees, NJ  
Gummakonda Reddy Foundation, Hallandale Beach, FL  
Health Foundation For Rural India, Voorhees , NJ  
Hindu American Political Action Committee, Houston, TX  
Hindu American Seva Communities , Washington, DC, MD  
Hindu Association of West Texas, Midland , TX  
Hindu Council of Australia, Sydney, NSW  
Hindu Council UK, London, England  
Hindu Cultural Center, London, Ontario, Canada  
Hindu Heritage Society Inc, Sydney, NSW  
Hindu Maha-Sabha of Burlington & Oakville, Oakville, Ontario, Canada  
Hindu Mandir Executive Conference, Billerica, MA  
Hindu Organization of Long Island, Manhasset , NY  
Hindu Prachar Kendra, Chaguanas, MI  
Hindu Society of Minnesota - Education Committee, Maple Grove, MN  
Hindu Society of Montana, Missoula, MT  
Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh USA Inc., Rockaway, NJ  
Hindu Temple & Cultural Center, Bothell, WA  
Hindu Temple of the Woodlands, The Woodlands, TX  
Hindu Youth Forum , Wolverhampton UK, UK  
Hinduism Today Magazine, Kapaa, HI  
Hindus of Greater Houston, Houston, TX  
Hindus on the Hill at St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN,  
Houston DurgaBari Society, Houston, TX  
India Awareness Foundation, Atlanta, GA  
India Canada Association , Ottawa, Ontario, Canada  
Indian Cultural Center, Marlton, NJ  
Indiaspora, San Francisco, CA  
Interfaith Dialogue Association, Grand Rapids, MI  
InterfaithShaadi.org, San Francisco, CA  
ISKCON of Houston, Houston, TX  
Jain Center of Northern CA, Milpitas, California  
Maheshwari Mahasabha of North America, Houston, TX  
Main Line Indian Association, Villanova, PA  
Marg Foundation, Gaithersburg, MD

Michigan Roundtable for Diversity and Inclusion, Detroit, MI  
Overseas Volunteers for a Better India, Irvine, TX  
Param Shakti Peeth of America, Rancho Palos Verdes,, CA  
Path to Anandam, Danville, California  
PYP Yog Foundation Inc, Sugar Land, TX  
Rajdhani Mandir, Chantilly , VA  
Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Ashrama, Hubli, Karnataka, India  
Sanaatana Karma Dharma, Dallas, TX  
Sanatan Mandir, San Bruno, CA  
Savani Farms, Fort Washington , PA  
Science of Identity Foundation, Honolulu, HI  
Sewa International, Houston, TX  
Sewa-AIFW (Asian Indian Family Wellness), Minneapolis, MN  
Shingal Center for Dharma Studies , Berkeley, CA  
Shiva Mandir and Cultural Organization. Inc., Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
Silicon Valley Interreligious Council, San Jose, CA  
South Florida Hindu Temple, Davie, FL  
Srishti Foundation , London, Ontario, Canada  
The Guibord Center, Los Angeles, CA  
The Hindu Temple of St.Louis, St. Louis, MO  
The Patrick McCollum Foundation For Peace, Moraga, CA  
UHJT-United Hindu and Jain Temples, Gaithersburg , MD  
UMA Interfaith Alliance, Inc., South San Francisco, CA  
Vedic Institute of Canada, Ingersoll, Ontario, Canada  
VYASA USA, Houston, TX  
World Hindu Council of America (VHPA), New York, NY