



Promoting Understanding, Tolerance and Pluralism

Is Hindu a bad word?

"...classic yogic texts such as Patanjali's Yoga Sutra and the Bhagavad Gita..." pg. 36

"There are examples of this in all devotional traditions -- mystical Christianity, Judaism and Sufism, and especially in the bhakti tradition of India..." pg. 65

Dear Editor:

After reading this month's articles, "Eat Like a Yogi," "The Essence of Life" and "Everyday Ecstasy," and admiring the prominently printed "Oms" throughout the magazine, I couldn't help but wonder, "How many ways are there to avoid the word 'Hindu'?" I have read Yoga Journal for a number of years now and have found great wisdom in the experiences, insight and advice shared by so many who have been inspired by the tradition of my birth and that of a billion others. However, I have become increasingly bewildered and disappointed by what seems to be an intentional and systematic disregard for Hinduism as a religious and spiritual tradition and its contributions to the world over the past 5000 years. As a practicing Hindu and second-generation Hindu American, I find the repeated references to the teachings and philosophy of Hinduism as "ancient Indian" or "ancient yogic" or "Eastern" to be, frankly speaking, disingenuous and disrespectful. Sure, "Hinduism" or "Hindu" are not terms the ancient *rishis*, a.k.a. ancient yogis of India, used to define or label themselves, but in modern times, it is the word that is associated with those of us who happen to have been born from the history and into the generations who have sought solace in these life teachings; those of us who too are striving to live our lives according to the Hindu principles of *ahimsa*, *bhakti*, *brahmacharya*, *satsang* and *seva*; *Ekam sat vipraha bahuda vadanti* or "the Truth is one the wise call It by many names" and *Vasudaiva Kutumbakam* or "the world is one family."

One of the greatest contributions of the religion or way of life called Hinduism, in addition to ayurveda, astrology, mathematics and metallurgy among others, is yoga -- be it *bhakti yoga*, *hatha yoga*, *jnana yoga*, *karma yoga*, *kriya yoga* or *raja yoga* -- so please ask yourselves and your contributing writers to give credit where credit is due. Perhaps I am mistaken, but there seem to be no issues in referring to the teachings of Buddha as Buddhist teachings. Why then a double-standard for Hinduism and Hindu teachings? Indeed, I have observed numerous instances where some in the popular media, academia and even the uninformed masses have negatively caricatured Hinduism or wholly ignored the positive contributions of Hinduism. But from a community, no family of fellow *yogis*, is it not reasonable to expect more?

All those who find inspiration in the teachings of yoga must understand and appreciate, especially in a time of religious intolerance and strife as well as fraudulent conversions, that

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the philosophical tenets of Hinduism do not require one to convert or shun the tradition of one's birth or family, lest this be the fear in using the term "Hindu." Indeed, it is true that "a Hindu guru is not essential," as Jai Uttal was quoted in one article, because in practicing the universally applicable core concepts of Hinduism, codeword "yoga", a Christian can come closer to Christ; a Jew closer to Yahweh; a Muslim closer to Allah; and last but not least, a Hindu closer to Krishna (or Shiva or Shakti or Brahman, or whatever name the Wise may call It).

Hindus across America and around the world face religious bigotry, hate speech and human rights abuses because of fundamental misunderstandings about their religion. At the same time, millions are turning to the power and benefits of yoga; yoga, the gift given to all of us by realized souls who are considered the mothers and fathers of Hinduism. How can these two phenomena be reconciled? One answer is to acknowledge not only in our hearts and minds, but also in print, one of the greatest gifts of Hinduism to mankind: the way of yoga. Please accept this letter in the spirit in which it is sent, and that is an invitation for dialogue.

In peace,

Suhag A. Shukla
Legal Counsel and interim Managing Director

The **Hindu American Foundation (HAF)** is an advocacy group providing a progressive voice for over two million Hindu Americans. The Foundation interacts with and educates leaders in public policy, academia, media and the public at large about Hinduism and global issues concerning Hindus, such as the free exercise of religion, the portrayal of Hinduism, hate speech, hate crimes and human rights. By promoting the Hindu and American ideals of understanding, tolerance and pluralism, HAF stands firmly against hate, discrimination, defamation and terror. HAF is not affiliated with any religious or political organizations or entities.