



Innovation

A Collection of My Personal Views- My Reflections.

This Innovation is a collection of some of my personal views that I have accumulated over the years and promoted among my friends and family members.

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INTRODUCTION

I wish to make my own contributions for my readers to consider an alternative way of life. These articles are my own personal views and people have the right to agree to disagree or ponder some more to change the environment as well as the way of life for the future of humankind.

I do not wish to impose my ideas on anyone but if my contentions are worthy of your support I would appreciate more publicity.

In some cases, my views are disturbing for orthodox readers but when taken with a pinch of salt they make good logic and need to be viewed with understanding. I firmly believe in the power of the Supreme Being and conduct my prayers the way I feel comfortable and content.

My readers should try to understand my point of view because I am not in favour of any unnecessary religious ceremonies that waste our time, money and effort. Thus, I am a believer of *Pakhand Khandan* and wish to bring about ideas that would reform my way of life.

Modern Hinduism must give us the freedom to pray and live our life as we want to and not as dictated by some archaic and unnecessary ceremonies that have no meaning and logic.

I am fully responsible for all my words, actions, thoughts, character and habits so I WATCH my future steps with care and control.

Common Ground of Religious Unity

Many educated and wiser people have said a mouthful on the topic of the common ground of religious unity. There are many points of views on this subject but the one that outshines every one was made in 1893 by Swami Vivekananda. He never ever hoped that this unity would come by the triumph of any one of the religions and the destruction of the others.

If anyone had this feeling, he made his point clear to them. "Brother, yours is an impossible hope." Did the Swami wish that the Christian would become Hindu? God forbid. Did he wish that the Hindu or Buddhist would become Christian? God forbid.

The Swami explained his point thus: "The seed is put in the ground, and earth and air and water are placed around it. Does the seed become the earth; or the air, or the water? No. It becomes a plant, it develops after the law of its own growth assimilates the air, the earth, and the water that converts them into plant substance, and makes them grow into a plant.

Similar is the case with religion. The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. However, each must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.

All healthy discussions on the issue of assimilation of all human religions have shown the modern religious people of the world one good aspect. It has proved to the world that holiness, purity and charity are not the

exclusive possessions of any church, religion or temple in the world, and that every religious system has produced men and women of the most exalted character.

In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreamt of the exclusive survival of their own religion and the destruction of the others, the Swami pitied them from the bottom of his heart, and pointed out to them that they needed help and not resistance; they needed more assimilation and not destruction; and they required a lot more harmony and peace rather than dissension.

All the religious leaders of the world need to rethink about world peace and stability by finding a common ground of religious unity first and then other forms of peaceful events will naturally follow for our peaceful co-existence.

A Way of Life That Needs Some Changes.

I am not any expert on religion but a common Hindu who thinks for himself. The views presented here are solely for intelligent discussion and not as an argument or any form of debate. The readers are free to make their own conclusions dispassionately after reading these remarks.

Change has been a constant aspect of our living. History has revealed that we have experienced a variety of cultural, social and religious changes in our lifetime. It is believed by many people that our way of life needs a change if it does not meet the demands and requirements of the current situations.

Religious practices have been modified or changed if they became too rigid for any group of people. Hinduism has had many changes where wise people went on different paths but kept the initial beliefs. As time went by we saw the emergence of Arya Samajis, Kabir Panthis, Buddhists and others like the Saibaba followers. All these came about because people thought that necessary changes were needed.

Hinduism has had many internal changes as well. From time to time we have seen the emergence of a great lawgiver. He would codify the existing laws and remove those, which had become obsolete. He would make some alterations, adaptations, readjustments, additions and deletions to suit the needs of the time and see that the way of living of the people would be in accordance with the teachings of the Vedas.

We Hindus have seen that of such lawgivers, Manu, Yajnavalkya and Parasara were the most celebrated persons. They gave us their Smritis or laws and institutes. These laws and institutes were intended for a particular period and time and were never intended to go on forever.

These laws and rules of Hinduism, which are based entirely upon our social positions, time, climate and region, have been changing. It follows therefore that it must change with the changes in society and the changing conditions of time and climate. If this happens with consensus of the people it affects, then and then only the progress of the Hindu society can be ensured.

Many Hindus agree that it is not possible to follow some of the laws of Manu at the present time and in places like UK, Australia, USA, Canada and other overseas countries where Hindus have migrated. Maybe people are rightly questioning some of the practices that need change. Of course, we can always follow their spirit.

Our society is advancing and when any society, like ours, advances, it outgrows certain laws, which were valid and helpful at a particular time and stage of its growth. Many new aspects, which were not thought out by the old lawgivers have come into existence now. Many people believe that it is no use insisting that people should follow those old laws, which have become obsolete.

Our body needs food to function but we cannot live by food alone. As we grow up and receive or are given the needed knowledge we wish to attain some form of realisation. It is natural that we then look for a lot more reasons to live than the other animals do. A time comes when all the worldly prosperity and prestige do not give us full satisfaction in life.

We gradually want some form of spiritual consolation, a bit of solace and maybe peace in our life. We do not have to stick to and live in the past to achieve these phenomenon. Change in many respects brings progress.

It is at this time of our life that we look to some form of religion to give us some happiness and better understanding about our world we live in and the human society we interact with generally. We realise that there is a Supreme Power somewhere that created everything for us. We know that we have to bind our soul to that Supreme Power known as God.

This then makes us somewhat religious. It is this comprehension of religion that reveals to us the way for the attainment of human peace, progress and prosperity. We differentiate our living from that of other animal existence.

Depending on the place of our birth, our association with each other and our family history we look toward a certain belief and either remain a Hindu or convert to any of the many other religions of the world. Whatever is our religious belief, ultimately we have to behave as good human beings. Good human beings attain goodness, truth and beauty in their words, thoughts and deeds. Any deviation from these sound and solid aspects of living makes us alienate and we tend to differ in our human conduct and behaviour to be corrected through the processes of social or religious justice.

Hinduism is one of the oldest religions and the people who follow these principles and practices are known as Hindus. Unlike other religions, Hinduism is neither founded by any prophet nor has it any fixed dates. It should be free from religious fanaticism. It is an eternal religion based on the Vedas that were expressions of intuitive experiences of the sages of those days.

Therefore, we can say that Hinduism is a revealed religion. If it is so then some realistic changes are not only necessary but needed if it wants to survive the modern pressures of living and just criticism.

We cannot run away from the fact that our present society has considerably changed. Maybe there is a need and necessity for a new Smriti or religious laws to suit the requirements of this age. Another sage like Manu would have to emerge and place before us new and suitable codes of practices and laws. I certainly feel that the time is ripe for a new Smriti or law for Hinduism.

This will make our younger generation of Hindu families to better appreciate and fully understand the purpose of their religion. We all are able to hear some of the valid objections of this new generation but in our religious pride we attempt to force our own views on to them and are not able to think dispassionately to assist them. The children either withdraw altogether and change their religious paths or are fed up with religious fanaticism and become non-believers.

We all believe that Hinduism, unlike other religions, does not dogmatically assert that the final emancipation is possible only through its means. It should allow absolute freedom to the rational mind and it should never demand any undue restraints upon the freedom of human reason, thought, feeling and will. Hinduism has always allowed us the widest freedom in matters of faith and worship.

However, nowadays we notice that as an individual we Sanatanis or Hindus have very little say if any in the performance of our religious prayers that we ask our priests to conduct for us at our homes. Unless of course, we are free thinkers and are eager to practice religion as we wish.

The priests go on and on with their same routine and give us the religious jargon in a language that our new generation are not able to comprehend and find it boring. We are at the mercy of these priests to obey the obsolete and archaic practices and laws. If we want any changes to suit, our time and clime, they refuse to conduct the prayers for us and ask us to seek the services of a priest from a different sect of Hinduism.

Where has that allowance of absolute freedom to the human reason gone for Hinduism? I am told that Hinduism does not lie in the acceptance of any particular doctrine, or in the observance of some particular rituals or forms of worship. It should not force anybody to accept particular dogmas or forms of worship. It should allow everybody to reflect, investigate, enquire and cogitate.

Of course Hinduism does not condemn anyone or any religion. Even the unbelievers should be recognised as pious and honourable members of the society as long as they are good human beings. This is why Hinduism is proverbial, is extremely catholic and liberal. Despite all the differences of prevalent metaphysical doctrines, modes of religious discipline and forms of ritualistic practices and social habits, there should be an essential uniformity in the conception of religion and in the outlook on life. This is my reason to look for some changes.

It is good to notice that in some places in the world like the West & East Indies, Trinidad and Mauritius a lot of aspects of Hinduism have been modernised and the people have absolute freedom to practice Hinduism as they feel and like. The people there believe that Hinduism is a synthesis of all types of religious experiences. It is a whole and complete view of life. It is free from fanaticism and that is the reason it has its survival there.

If truth, beauty and goodness are the cornerstones of Hinduism then it is time now to become more elastic and tolerant to the new changes that are inevitable. We need to be more elastic in readjusting to the externals and non-essentials and then we would succeed in keeping our new generation intact and to be followers of new form of Hinduism.

Some priests I have spoken to agree that some changes are definitely needed in our obsolete practices and there are others who are prepared to conduct prayers for us in our homes and in public places as we would like them to do. But there are many around us who are still stuck in the past and any changes in the principles and practices of Hinduism for them are impossible and cannot be accepted.

We modern Hindus need the emergence of a courageous and determined new and reformed sage or lawgiver like Manu to give us new meaning to our old Universal Hindu Religion. One last thing to remember is that our voice for a change is more than what we have heard and a lot greater than whatever we have experienced.

Our revelations and traditions are books written by sages but they cannot constitute the final authority because they were heard from someone's experiences and were left as a record for the benefit of posterity. Then when the written language developed they were all composed as far as the memory could dictate.

What the sages heard and what they experienced and then what they wrote could vary from the original form of religious law. This is because the ones who heard and the ones who experienced the laws of religion were different from the ones who acted as scribes.

Therefore, some items may have been either forgotten or left out from the original in the process of recording and writing. Then, we now have more reasons to say that the time has come for a change and a modification that would be useful to all new generation Hindus.

Ramayan According to Valmiki.

There are two important epics for Hindus- The Ramayan and The Mahabharat. Both the epics have elements of violence and peace, deceit and honesty, evil and goodness, as well as truth and beauty. No other literary piece in any other language has the amalgam of such vast treasure. Ramayan depicts the duties of ideal relationships of many kinds- servants, lords, brother, wife, father, mother, king and their citizens. It is the journey of the incarnate of Lord Vishnu, Ram and was originally composed by Valmiki into 24,000 verses and 7 books or kaands.

The epic explores the concept of human existence and the idea of religion (Dharm) or righteousness. It contains the teachings of ancient Hindu sages and their philosophies and devotional elements. Hindus have been reciting these verses individually or in groups in a variety of ways and methods and interpreting the stories as best as they possibly could.

Ramayan is one of the longest literary pieces where Ram is depicted as an ideal hero and Ravan is his antagonist. While the theologists worship Ram as God incarnate, philosophers make him the mouth piece of an absolute human being. Then materialists appreciate the lyrical values of the whole literary composition. The point is that whoever sees him in whatever way, he is the one.

The one who is well behaved, well presented and all pervading. The one who is as bright as the full moon and who is many times more powerful than any human being. The one who always wears a pleasant smile on his face and is meditated upon with sincerity and emotions to eradicate and extinguish all obstacles.

The story of Ram, the incarnate of Lord Vishnu and his whole journey of a variety of activities were narrated to Valmiki by the sage Narad who was the brain child of Lord Brahma and sent to this world for this particular purpose. The reason why Valmiki was chosen by Lord Brahma to compose the epic can be interpreted by looking at the life of Valmiki before he became a sage.

Valmiki was a hunter who hunted and killed animals to feed his family and when asked as to who was responsible for all the sins thus created, none of his friends and family members stood up to share his sins. He then advanced his knowledge and abstained from all killings and became a devotee of the Lord.

Jaan aadi kavi naam prataapaa

Bhaye siddh kar ulta jaapaa

(By uttering his familiar idea
MaraMaraMaraMaraMaraM Valmiki found **Ram** and became a sage.)

When Valmiki asked Narad as to who is the one that is an absolute and a supreme human being he was told about the various qualities and attributes of Ram and his future activities and journey to uphold dharm or righteousness on the earth.

Divine sage Narad arrives at the hermitage of Sage Valmiki in order to enlighten him and keep him informed of his duty to author the epic poem Ramayan. In the dialogue between these two sages, Valmiki elicits from Narada about most virtuous person on earth, namely Ram. While eulogizing Ram, Narad gives an outline of Ramayan, truly highlighting those aspects that are the keynotes in this epic, like virtuosity, generosity, morality, chastity and the like.

Narad depicted Ram as the person who will be principled to rid the world of sins and all the demons who are the enemies of humanity. He will be the potential one, the one that would be conscientious, a redeemer, a truth teller and self determined in all his deeds.

Thus upon asking Narad, Valmiki came to know in advance all about the journey of the courageous one, who was to control all his ire. Valmiki's prospective hero Ram was going to be a man with godly qualities, a human being with godly attributes. In fact Brahma had imparted the knowledge about such a man to Narad who in turn imparted the legend to Valmiki to compose Ramayan.

Ram was to emerge from Ikshvaku Clan or Vansh and was destined to be a human being different from all normal ones to free all people from misery and suppression. He was to be born, study all aspects of devoted living, get exiled to fulfill a particular purpose when a replicar of his wife Sita was to be taken away by Rawan, the cruel king of Lanka but with the help of monkeys such as Hanuman and Sugriev Ram crosses the Strait to conquer and defeat Rawan to free Sita.

Valmiki then used his own initiative to compose the epic with philosophies, devotion, art, relationships and other human values to let the world believe that whenever there is an excess of sin and sinful people such as the demons and suppression of the rights of the good and law abiding people, God himself reincarnates in such human form to rid the world of all calamities.

Ramayan therefore has become one of the most read epics of Hindus for their salvation and attaining dharma or righteousness. People have the choice of

either to believe all that are told or take them as valuable piece of literature.

Whatever is the case the fact remains that the epic has many powerful imageries, symbolisms and ideas for everyone to appreciate and emulate in order to strengthen their family and communal life. Every episode has a theme of its own and is subject to various human interpretations.

Valmiki then composed that Ram is the knower of the meaning and essence of all the scriptures, excellent at memory thus brilliant, and an esteemed one in all the worlds, gentle, level-headed and clear-headed in discriminating and distinguishing. Valmiki made Ram promote the concept of truth, beauty and goodness.

Like an ocean that is reached by many rivers accessibly, that reverential one too is always accessible and reachable by clean-minded ones, and he treats all equally, with dignity and respect. He who betters the happiness of his mother Kausalya is an embodiment of all noble merits, in profundity he is like an unfathomable ocean, and by fortitude he is unalterable like the kingly Himalayan Mountain.

In valour Ram is comparable with Vishnu, and in his looks he is attractive like the full-moon, he equals the earth in his perseverance, but he is matchable with era-end-fire in his wrath and in benevolence he is identical to Kubera, God of Wealth-Management, and in his candour he is like Dharma itself, the other God Probity on earth.

Ram marries Sita the daughter of Janak after dismantling the coveted Shiu Dhanush but gets into the wrought of Parshuram. When this storm in a teacup is resolved then Ram and Sita become one but Sita feels

at odd to touch Ram's feet when she remembers that the same feet touched another woman Ahillya and gave her salvation. After all the matrimonial ceremonies they return to Ayodhya to enjoy their family life and kingly responsibilities.

Ram being the possessor of suchlike merits, whose truthfulness alone was his courage, embodied with best intrinsic human and godly values, ever involved in the welfare of people, besides being the dear and eldest son of Dasharath, and hence the king Dasharath affectionately intended to establish such a Ram as crown prince to all intents and purposes of Ayodhya's welfare.

Then on seeing the arrangements for the anointment of Ram as crown-prince, Kaikeyi, the dear wife and a queen of Dasharath, claimed boons that were once accorded to her by Dasharath, which are the banishment of Ram and anointment of Bharat.

Bound by the truthfulness of his plighted word and by the halter of righteousness that king Dasharath exiled his dear son Ram to forests.

Such a brave one as he was, Ram agreed to go to the forests for the reason of appeasing Kaikeyi, and as directed by the verbal directive of his father, and to follow his father's word of honour.

In whom humbleness and the natural brotherly affection of a brother are abounding, such a fondly younger brother of Ram, namely Lakshman, indeed heartily followed his forest going brother Ram, exemplifying the ideals of brotherhood, thus augmenting the happiness of his mother Sumitra.

Sita, the best one among ladies, a possessor of all best qualities befitting to an ideal lady, the one who is as though fashioned by a Divine marvel, born in Janak's family and became Dasharath's daughter-in-law, and she who is the loving wife and an ever-amiable alter ego of Ram, even she followed Ram to forests, as if she was the Lady Rohini following the Moon.

The deities have their wives always with them. Chandra, the Moon has Rohini, a conspicuous star, while Surya, Sun has Prabha, Sunshine. Minus these wives, their glow and glitter is void. So also, Ram has an inseparable wife. Though Sita and Lakshman were not exiled, they followed Ram out of concept of 'togetherness.'

The citizens of Ayodhya and even his father Dasharath have followed that virtue-souled Ram for a distance when he started on his exile. Later Ram reached the tribal chief named Guha, who has a liking for Ram, on the bank of River Ganga in a town called Srngaberapur. And when Ram is teamed with Guha, Lakshman and Sita, he left off the charioteer and a minister of his father who charioted them thitherto, namely Sumantra.

That trio of Sita, Ram and Lakshman on treading forest after forest, and on crossing rivers with plethoric waters, reached the hermitage of Sage Bharadwaj, and by the ordainment of that sage they arrived at Chitrakut, and setting up a handsome cottage there, they who have enjoyed every comfort in Ayodhya began enjoying every comfort here also in no less a degree and that trio lived happily and exuberated themselves in woods at Chitrakut, similar to gods and celestials.

On Ram's going to Chitrakut thus, King Dasharath was aggrieved by the grief for his sons and daughter-in-law went to heaven.

On Dasharath's departure to heaven, though Sage Vashisht and other Brahmans have impressed upon him for his investiture in kingship, and even though he is highly effectual to rule such a kingdom, he knew that Bharat refused the kingdom, and that self-denying Bharat, for he is aloft the greed, grouse, and gripe, went to forests to pray for mercy at the feet of Ram.

But on reaching that great-souled Ram, who is a vanquisher just by his truthfulness, Bharat humbly and reverentially begged of his brother, and the avowed word of Bharata is this, 'oh! Knower of Probity, you alone shall be the king.'

Even though Ram is a really benevolent one, even though he is a readily willing one, even though he is a greatly reputed one for endowments, even though he is a highly capable endower of whatever sought by his adherers, even then Ram did not desire the kingdom, to keep up his own pledge and also owing to his father's directives.

On giving his sandals to Bharat for custodial care of kingdom till his return after the period of exile, then the elder brother of Bharat, namely Ram, persuasively turned away Bharat.

Unfulfilled is the desire of Bharat in taking back Ram to kingdom, hence on touching Ram's feet and taking sandals, he returned from Chitrakut, and without ruling from capital Ayodhya, he carried on the kingdom from a village called Nandigram, with an expectation of Ram's return.

On the departure of Bharat, Ram foresaw the repeated arrival of citizens, other subjects, or even Bharat to that place. Hence Ram indeed entered Dandak forest, determinedly about his plighted promise to undergo exile and decidedly about the elimination of demons.

Valmiki continues his composition and says that lotus-eyed Ram on his entering the vast of Dandak forest eliminated the demon Viraadh, and indeed descried Sage Sharabhanga, also even Sage Suteekhsn, also Sage Agastya and likewise Sage Agastya's brother.

On the advice of Sage Agastya Ram took a bow of Indra from Sage Agastya, which Indra once gave to Sage Agastya, along with a sword, and two quivers in which arrows will be ever-replenishing, and thus Ram is highly pleased to receive befitting weaponry.

While Ram is staying in the forest of Sage Sharabhanga, all the sages and forest moving ascetics, vaanaprashts, have approached him for the elimination of monsters and menacers.

Ram conceded to the supplications of those sages of that forest which had become an abode of demons, and Ram also promised those sages who were the dwellers of Dandak forest, and whose glow was like that of the Ritual-fire, to eliminate all of the demons in combat.

While Ram was living there in Dandak forest, a guise-changing demoness named Shurpanakha, who was a resident of Janasthaan, a place in Dandak forest, was disfigured. She showed special interest in Ram's brother Lakshman who chopped her nose as a punishment for her lust saying that the nose was one of the most important parts to show the beauty of a woman.

This is metonymy. Ram did not do it himself, but his brother Lakshman does this act of cutting the nose and ears of this demoness, which is the twisting point of the story. She is so named as Shurpanakha because her fingernails are like winnowing fans. She is the sister of Ravan, and she is the actual trouble-shooter in the epic.

Then in a combat Ram eliminated all the fourteen demons who rebelliously came at him in the first round of combat incited by the provokes of Shurpanakha, and then in second round Ram eliminated demon chiefs called Khara, Trishir, Duushan, who are none but the cousins of Shurpanakha and Ravan, together with all of their hench-demons.

During his stay in Dandak forest Ram eliminated fourteen thousand demons in all, who were the inhabitants of that very forest. Then on hearing the slaughter of his cousins, Ravan is convulsed in anger and sought the help of a demon named Maareech.

But Maareech deterred Ravan telling him time and again, 'Oh, Ravan, unpardonable will be your rivalry with that formidable Ram, formidable because fourteen thousand clansmen of ours could not triumph over him.'

Ravan is the supremo of demons and the main antagonist in this epic. His name is Dashagriiv, meaning that he has ten heads, whereby he can be called Decahedral demon, or a Decahedron, in a fanciful way.

Then heedless of Maareech's advice and ushered by the time of his own doom, Ravan advanced to the threshold of Ram's hermitage along with Maareech. Ravan stole the wife of Ram, namely Sita, by getting the princes Ram and Lakshman distracted distantly from their

hermitage through the trickster Maareech, and after putting down the eagle Jatayu, which came to Sita's rescue.

On seeing the eagle Jatayu almost dead and on hearing from the same eagle that Maithili (Sita) was stolen, seethed with anguish and senses frenzied Raghav (Ram) bewailed. Ram then cremated that eagle Jataayu in that anguish, and while searching for Sita in the forest, he indeed saw a demon named Kabandha, who was misshapen in his look and monstrous to look.

That Ram whose arms are highly powerful has eliminated and cremated that demon Kabandha, and Kabandha while going heavenward told Ram, 'Oh, Raghav, proceed to the ascetic lady of right-conduct and an expert in rightness, namely Shabari' and vanished.

He who is a great-resplendent one and an enemy-eliminator, that son of Dasharath, Ram arrived close at Shabari, and Shabari venerated him, thoroughly.

Ram met the vanar, monkey figure, Hanuman on the banks of Lake Pampa, and upon the word of Hanuman Ram indeed befriended Sugreev. That highly dynamic Ram detailed to Sugreev, and even to Hanuman, all that has happened from the beginning in general, and the abduction of Sita, in particular.

On listening all that has happened from Ram, that vanar Sugreev befriended Ram where the witness for that friendship is flaring fire, for it alone is auspicious.

Valmiki then continues his naration and says that woeful king of monkeys Sugreev woefully informed Ram about his saga of feud with his brother Vali in reply to Ram's query, in friendship and in its entirety.

Vali, the elder brother of Sugreev, is another principle character of Valmiki Ramayan. He is capable of rendering oblations to gods in the wee hours of a single day in four oceans on four sides of the globe, by his swinging from one ocean to the other. He is mightier than Ravan, the chief villain of the epic, and Ravan is subdued by Vali's strength. As a preamble to the incident of eliminating mighty Ravan in the last book of the epic, this episode of eliminating a still mightier monkey is the stepping-stone for the climactic victory. Sugreev always remained doubtful about the powers of Raghav and by reason of confiding in Raghav's prowess for himself, and by reason of making Raghav to confide in the powers of Vali, Sugreev has shown him the massive remains of demon Dundubhi, which is similar to a great mountain.

That omni-dextrous Ram looked at the skeleton, smiled in aplomb, then that very energetic Ram flicked that skeleton with tip of his foot's big toe wholly to a ten yojana-lengths. yet Sugreev's confidence remained apathetic.

Vali is able to throw that body, with whole of his foot, only up to two hundred bow-lengths, where the length of bow is said as six to seven feet. But Ram could kick that heap to ten yojan lengths, roughly ninety miles, only with a flip of his foot-toe's tip. But Sugreev continued his grumbling, 'in those days this skeleton was with flesh and blood, now it became weight-less, thus show me more of your show of strength'

And the often repeated epithet to Ram mahaa baahu means not just 'yards and yards of lengthy arms, dangling up to knees..' but 'one who does unimaginable deeds...' and his arms are the unusual instruments to

perform such unusual tasks, hence ambidextrous, or omni-dextrous...

Again Ram ripped seven massive trees called sala trees with only one great arrow, which not only rived the trees but also rent through a mountain, and to the nethermost subterranean of earth, in order to inculcate certainty in Sugreev.

Then Sugreev's heart is gladdened by that act of Ram and also at the prospect of his own success, and then that great monkey confiding in Ram advanced to the cave like Kishkindha along with Ram.

Then that best monkey Sugreev whose body-hue is golden war-whooped at the entrance of cave like Kishkindha, by which loud shouting there emerged Vali, the king of monkeys, out of that cave like Kishkindha.

Vali came out only on pacifying Tara, his wife, who deterred Vali from going to meet Sugreev in a combat, as she doubted that Sugreev must have come with Ram, and then Vali met Sugreev head on... and therein that duel Raghav eliminated Vali, only with one arrow.

On eliminating Vali in combat upon the word of Sugreev, then Rama established Sugreev alone for that kingdom as its king.

Sugreev being the ablest among monkeys summoned all of the monkeys and sent them forth in all directions in search of Sita, the daughter of Janak and wife of Ram. Sugreev is acclaimed to be a strict disciplinarian, as his orders are inviolable by any. Even now the proverbial saying exists that a "command by elders is to be followed like Sugreev's order which is to be

implemented even at each other's throats, but can not be refuted, lest those throats will be nipped off.

Then, upon the word of Sampati, the eagle and elder brother of Jataayu, the efficacious Hanuman leaped forth the salty ocean, which breadth-wise is in a hundred yojans.

On reaching the city Lanka ruled by Ravan, Hanuman has seen Sita, where she is lodged in Ashok gardens and meditating on Ram alone.

Hanuman on presenting the remembrance, an emblematic ring of Ram to Sita, also on delineating the sad disposition of Ram to her, thus on solacing Vaidehi, he started to smash the welcome-arch of that beautiful Ashoka gardens.

On wiping out five army chiefs, seven sons of ministers, and on kneading down a gallant demon named Aksha Kumar, Hanuman had to enter into the captivity of a powerful weapon darted by Indrajit, the son of Ravan.

Though the release from the weapon's captivity is known to him by the boon of Brahma, and though he is valiant enough to pulverise all the demons, but to see and talk to Ravan, thus to gauge the strength of enemy, Hanuman is intentionally tolerant of the demons and their making monkey of him when they fastened him with ropes and dragged him to Ravan's court.

After an audience with Ravan Hanuman burnt that city Lanka, except where Sita, the princess of Mithila is stationed, and then to narrate the pleasant news of locating Sita, he again got back to Ram, for he is a great monkey. This is further explained in chapter Sundar Kaand.

Hanuman sees Ravan and others in the court, creates a scene there, as a show of his side strength, and only to prove that the riches and wealth enjoyed at the cost others will burn down to ashes on some day, Hanuman burns everything down, except the place where Sita is stationed, besides Vibheeshan's place, for he is the prospective adherer of Ram.

This episode is to relegate the false pride of Ravan, and as a symbolic suggestion that pomp and effluence without virtue are short lived.

That inestimable intellectual Hanuman on approaching that great-souled Ram, and on performing circumambulation around him in reverence, subtly submitted that, 'I have seen Sita...'

"Then, Ram along with Sugreev and other monkeys has gone to the seashore of Great Ocean, and when Ocean-god is unyielding to give way, then he started to put the Ocean-god to turmoil with his arrows, as with Sun-god who puts an ocean to turmoil with his sunrays.

Ram became angry at the ocean for not yielding way to the crossover. In order to make way through the ocean, Ram starts depleting its waters with arrows, sharaah and in Sanskrit this word synonyms with the rays of sun, and therefore the similitude of Ram with Sun-god.

The Ocean-god revealed himself and upon the word of that Ocean-god alone, Ram put up vanara Nal to build a bridge across the ocean. Nal, a Vanar engineer, had a boon from his mother.

In his childhood he used to throw playthings into water, only to see them floating. But they were all submerged. His mother then gave a boon to him saying that

whatever article he throws in waters it will float, may they be toys or stones or boulders. Here that boon is taken advantage of, and a boulder bridge is built on oceanic waters.

This is the gist of Great War. On going to the city Lanka by that bridge and on eliminating Ravan in battle, Ram redeemed Sita, but he subsequently came down with much humiliation, since redeeming Sita in enemy's place might become controversial.

Then Ram spoke harsh words to Sita among the assemblages of monkeys, demons, and others, but Sita being husband-devout has entered the burning fire intolerant of those unkindly words of Ram.

Then Valmiki goes on to write that upon the word and clearance of the fire-god, Ram realised that Sita is rid of sins and he is very highly gladdened. When all the gods revered him for his great accomplishment in eliminating Ravan, Ram shone forth with his self-resplendence. Thus all the three worlds inclusive of their mobile and sessile beings, all gods with the observances of hermits have become exultant for this great accomplishment of the great souled Raghav Ram

Enthroning Vibheeshana as the chieftain of demons in Lanka, then feeling that his task is fulfilled, Ram indeed rejoiced highly getting rid of febrility about any uncertainty of fulfilling his promises, excepting for Jatayu.

Ram obtained boon from gods to get all the dead monkeys up on their feet as though woken up from sleep, and he travelled towards Ayodhya by Pushpak aircraft, with all the good hearted friends around him. Ram, the truth-valiant, has gone to the hermitage of

Sage Bharadwaj en route, and he has sent Hanuman to inform Bharat before hand of their coming.

Then on boarding Pushpak aircraft again Ram leaves the hermitage of Bharadwaj. He then while flying overhead of the very same places narates episodes jovially to Sugreev and others about the events in the days of his exile in forests. Ram then went to Nandigram, where Bharat was available.

That impeccable Ram rejoining with all of his brothers in the village of Nandigram removed his matted locks of hair along with them. Thus, he on regaining Sita and on discarding hermit's role again became a householder, and he regained his kingdom also to become Raja Ram.

When Ram was enthroned, the world was highly regaled and rejoicing, exuberant and abundant, also rightly righteous, trouble-free, disease-free, and free from fear of famine. All these had happened as Narada had foreseen the future and told Valmiki who in turn composed the epic before all the activities occurred.

While Ram was on the throne he made sure that the men in his kingdom did not see the deaths of their children anywhere in their lifetime, and the ladies remained husband-devout and unwidowed during their lifetime.

Valmiki writes that 'women were un-widowed and their husbands were ever living. However, the condition of Dasharath's widows pointed to contradict this statement. But Valmiki said that when a woman is living with her son or sons, though her husband dies, she is still a 'wife of somebody and therefore she is still un-widowed.

In the kingdom of Ram there was no fear for subjects from wildfires, gale-storms or from diseases, and there was no fear from hunger or thieves, nor the cattle would drowned in floodwaters, as well. Whether it be a township or a remote province, it will be replete with coin and grain, and all the people lived in high spirit during that era. So the people lived with great satisfaction and happiness in Raja Ram's reign.

Then hundreds of rituals and ceremonies were performed in the kingdom wherein a lot of jewellery, gold and things are bounteously donated. Many cows and uncountable wealth was given to the intellectuals and scholars. Then that highly illustrious Ram proceeded to Brahma's abode.

In this world, Raghav established kingly dynasties in hundredfold and maintained perfect social, cultural and economic harmony among the subjects. Everyone was treated equally and with human dignity. That was the essence of Ram Rajye. This hero Ram, the incarnate of Lord Vishnu left a remarkable legacy for all human beings to ponder, emulate and appreciate.

This Ramayana is holy in many respects, sin-eradicating, merit-endowing, and conformable with the teachings of Vedas and whoever reads this Legend of Ram, will hopefully be liberated of all the sins wrote Valmiki.

Any person who reads and follows the good intentions of this lifespan-enriching narrative of actuality, Ramayan, the peregrination of Ram, will be enjoying worldly pleasures with their children and grand children and with assemblages of kinfolks, servants as long as they live in this mortal world and on their demise, will be adored in heaven.

It is believed that the people who keep reading and following the philosophies contained in the epic will hopefully obtain excellence in their speech and knowledge, become affluent with monetary gains and attain all the pleasures of family life and relationships. There are a lot of philosophies and events that are plausible and thus believable but there are some that remain mere myths to be taken as literary themes.

I have read both the Valmiki Ramayan and the Ram Charitra Manas of Tulsidas and although there are some contextual differences in them, they do contain the similar themes and messages for all human beings. I recommend that every Hindu should read these literary compositions with proper understanding and faith to appreciate the art and style of writing and expression.

There are many useful anecdotes, valuable messages and spiritual accompaniments in this epic despite some myths and legends that cannot be logically explained and understood as authentic happenings but largely the characters, events, themes, style of writing, form and background are presented with care and control. These make the epic worth reading even if the readers can witness some aspects of exaggeration and fairy tale in places.

NIRVANA

I came to this world for my journey on 27th December 1939. I had no choice about when and where it would start. I did not know when, where or how it would end. I was not given any map but all I may have known that it was bound to end someday and sometime in the future.

However, I gathered during my journey that there were many rules that applied to my life and I had to learn them as I progressed. I could not totally control my route and even though many of my people claimed, I did not even know the whole purpose of my journey. All these would become clearer with time and discipline.

All I knew that once I started, I had to continue regardless every day, whether I liked it or not. A lot of it depended on what I did and how I performed my day-to-day events, this was going to be my karma, good bad or ugly.

I started with no possessions and I was told that when at last I finished my journey on this earth, I must return all I had accumulated. I would march out empty handed and no one

would accompany me but my karma. In the end, I would either be rewarded or punished. I now understand that this is life and I could change it with my daily activities and having faith in the Supreme Power.

Therefore, with my determination to move along with all the motivation and some sense of humour I have managed to cushion many of the bumps in my life. I thank the Almighty God for all this and I am still on my journey.

When I was a first year university student, I read a novel by a Nobel Prize winning German author Hermann Hesse titled *Siddhartha* that had some thematic resemblances to the life and living of Gautam Buddha.

In the novel, *Siddhartha*, a young man after receiving the necessary religious knowledge from his priestly father becomes totally confused and restless and leaves his family for a more contemplative, enlightening and peaceful life. He later gets in relationship with his Kamla, conceives a son, but is still bored and sickened by lust and greed so moves on again.

Near despair, *Siddhartha* comes to a river, which becomes a symbolism of cleansing for him. Here he hears a unique godly sound OM

(@). This sound signals the true beginning of his life. The beginning of total liberation from all suffering, letting go all attachment and aversion, attaining peace, and finally finding total enlightenment and wisdom for internal serenity and limitless happiness.

Although the theme of the novel is related somewhat to Buddhism, the ideas therein expressed general interest of the conflict between mind, body and spirit. The author showed that a re-examination of the relationship between the various aspects of us was possible by exhorting to finding yourself through self-understanding. Hermann Hesse could only make a simple attempt to clarify the joyous and wonderful ideals of Nirvana through the words, actions, thoughts, character and habits of his character Siddhartha, a protagonist of Buddha. In order to fully understand the whole concept of Nirvana I had to go deeper into the various Hindu and Buddhist scriptures.

Siddhartha was born in a priestly family and grew up in the village with his best friend Govinda. His father was an intellectual thus taught him all the needed knowledge of the priestly class. Siddhartha was able to make everyone happy but himself. The more he extended his knowledge the more troubled and

restless he became. So much so that he was very dissatisfied with his routine family life and he announced his intention to opt out and join an opposing religious group known as the Samanas.

Naturally, his father was upset and forbade his departure but seeing that the obstinate youth's body was in the home but his mind had already departed, Siddhartha's father acquiesced to his son's wishes. Siddhartha's best friend Govinda joins him as they disappear into the forest in search of the Samanas by relinquishing all their possessions and dedicating themselves to meditation, fasting and other methods of mortification.

As a result of this move, the normal human world became anathema to Siddhartha. For him it was all illusory and destined to decay leaving those who treasured it in great pain and suffering. He had one goal and that was to find enlightenment, ultimate joy, total liberation from all suffering and letting go all attachment and aversion. This was the idea of Nirvana for him.

Siddhartha was born in a Hindu family and wanted to find the way out of the cycle of rebirth through his karma. Hinduism is an extraordinarily tolerant way of life asserting

that there are many ways one can approach Nirvana or to be one with the Divine. Whichever way appeals to each person depends on the person and therefore no path is ultimately better than another.

He was in search of a realization, which was going to liberate him and enlighten his life to lighten up the darkness that enveloped and deluded him. Consequently, Siddhartha believed that if he remained in the priestly class he would not attain peace because in his search no one from his class had ever attained Nirvana. Therefore, he went out in search of the ultimate truth, goodness and beauty of humanity.

After reading the novel, I had an urge to dig deeper in the teachings of Buddhism and other aspects of Hinduism to extract more aspects of Nirvana. In my reading, I was amazed at the neo religious concept of Hinduism. On the one hand I had read a fictitious novel titled Siddhartha but on the other hand there were the teachings of Buddhism and Hinduism that I had to research and then merge the two to comprehend the idea of oneness with the Supreme also known as Nirvana. My understanding of Nirvana gradually became clearer as I read and researched this complex topic.

I found out that the state of Nirvana was joyous, wonderful and healing to the mind of the one who made an attempt and reached that possible enlightenment. It is neither a euphemism for death nor an annihilation or dissolution. Therefore, I deduced that Nirvana was not the termination of the physical body and the exhaustion of one's merit but was in fact the dissolution of the five aggregates of form, feeling, perception, volition and consciousness like the fire that is burnt out or the winds that are stilled.

However, I also gathered from my detailed reading and research that these views were one-sided and perhaps misleading and in actuality, Nirvana and Annihilation were as different as the day and night. 'What is Nirvana then?', I kept asking myself.

I constantly asked myself and went to the story of Prince Siddhartha meditating under the bodhi tree. Deep in meditation, he gazed at the starry sky and in a flash of insight; he saw the true nature of things and heard the unique godly sound of OM (@) to become a fully enlightened being. I then understood that this awakening to the truth, beauty and goodness of life and the universe is what is called Nirvana.

I gathered that Gautam Buddha saw through the duality of *me* versus *them* and transcended the limitation of time and space to enter into the boundless realm of the body of truth or dharma. These ideas gave me a lot more questions than I could find answers and so I posed another relevant question to myself, 'why should we be concerned with Nirvana in our life?' To get some satisfactory answers and valid explanations I had to do a lot more research, reading, and take stock of our lives.

I found out that human existence according to scriptures is limited in terms of both time and space. While our body lives, it has to die as well. Our life span is no more than a century at the most and the body usually grows no more than two metres tall. The biological and scientific composition of our entire body is very simple and destructible but the *Aatma* or soul is the governing aspect of our life.

The world is not just suffused with the Divine, it actually **is** the Divine. This is as true of human beings as it is of every other aspect of Nature. The aspect of the Divine, which resides in humans is called *Aatma*; it is not that this *Aatma* is an incomplete piece of the Creator, and that if one were to take the sum of the Divine in all things one would constitute the whole of Creator. The Creator or as the Hindus believe, Brahma is indivisible, and so

Aatma is just the name we apply to the Creator or Brahma in ourselves.

The phenomenal world which we daily experience is called Maya or an illusion. Ultimately, this world is an illusion, an elaborate costume which covers the essence of Absolute Reality, which, unnoticed, animates everything. Importantly, our subjective selves, our egos, are illusions (Maya) as well. For reasons unknown to us, our *Aatma* enters the cycle of birth and rebirth, Samsara, advancing through a series of lives, from unconsciousness, to consciousness, to self-consciousness. Self-consciousness results in the development of the ego, but it does not terminate there.

As we are not really our ego but are *Aatma*, we are not fully self-conscious until we identify ourselves with our true natures. It is this realization, which liberates us from the cycle of rebirth, (liberation or Mukti), which dissolves our individuality and reunites us with the totality of being from which we sprang.

Therefore, my understanding is that Nirvana frees us from such limitations and allows us to break out of our shell of delusion. In Nirvana, life permeates all space, traverses the three realms# of existence and spans all

directions. I gather from Buddhist literature that in Nirvana the life pulsates through all time, extends from antiquity to the present without change, lives through myriad *kalpas* and is forever new.

In such a state, the mind encompasses the entirety of the universe, traversing realms as numerous as grains of sand. When we see that 'self' and the material world resonate in harmony and when we understand 'self' and the 'other' as one, then there is no impulse to jealousy and no room for hatred or discrimination.

We are told that 'to put it simply, by rediscovering our original nature, we dwell in Nirvana and are once more able to see through the duality of subject versus object and the limitation of time and space.' Though human language and the human brain are limited and hardly conducive to fully understanding Nirvana, we as sentient beings should nevertheless, try to understand it in order to live happily and in peace with ourselves and all around us.

The word Nirvana is therefore really joyous and wonderful for all salient beings because it means becoming *free* from the suffering brought on by the *deluded belief* in duality and discrimination. It also refers to the

ensuing state of bliss, harmony, and being at ease with the world around us.

We are told in the Buddhist literature that we can define Nirvana by negation and by affirmation. It speaks of Nirvana among other explanations as being without form, limit, outflow, beginning, attachment, end, arising, clinging, decay, loss, equal, obstacles, want and affliction therefore it is unparalleled and immeasurable. It is also explained by affirmation to be absolute reality, permanent, secure, ultimate, hard to come by but perfect, pure and liberating.

Nirvana is also equated to Buddha Nature, the inherent nature of the body of truth (Dharma) and it is explained as the wisdom that knows what reasoning cannot know therefore it is the wisdom that sees the nature of all things as well as the end of all reasoning and the quietening of all disturbances.

While all these descriptions and explanations may look different, the meaning is still the same. Essentially, what they all are saying is that Nirvana is “our pure, original nature and our true, original being.” Through these teachings, we become free of delusions and are able to attain Nirvana by rediscovering our true nature.

Let us see what Nirvana does for the sentient human beings like us.

- Nirvana is sweeping the mind clean of greed.
- Nirvana is sweeping the mind clean of hatred.
- Nirvana is sweeping the mind clean of ignorance, delusion, and erroneous views.
- Nirvana is sweeping the mind clean of affliction.

The Buddhist scriptures describe Nirvana as “the eradication of all sorrow, the extinguishing of the three fires, namely greed, hatred and delusion, the severing of the attachment to the three notions, namely the notion of life and death, the notion of Nirvana and the notion of non-discrimination, and the disassociation from all realms of rebirth.”

As unenlightened beings, we all tend to endow these constructs with a sense of substantiality, which keeps us from Nirvana. Having the notion of Nirvana keeps us from Nirvana, even the attachment to non-discrimination is discrimination in itself.

We often read in scriptures and hear people talk about the impermanence of life, but it is

within this very impermanence of life that we find the unchanging nature of Nirvana.

We also hear Buddhists talk about suffering in this world and Nirvana as the ultimate happiness. When we say all suffering is rooted in the concept of self, we are referring to the usual connotation of self as a permanent and separate unit of identity that exists independently of others. When we speak of Nirvana as the ultimate happiness, we are still talking about a self, which feels this happiness. The self in the context of Nirvana is the true self and is different from the day-to-day connotation of self. This self is grounded in oneness and in the total harmony with all causes and conditions.

In addition to defining and understanding the meaning of Nirvana, we can also develop a better appreciation for this state of being through some of the analogies that have been used in Hindu and Buddhist literature to characterize Nirvana.

Firstly, in the religious scriptures or literature, there are many references to lotus blossoms, especially in depicting purity and altruism. The lotus starts to grow in the muck and mire at the bottom of a pool; it passes through the water and blossoms in the clean air, untainted by the mud. Similarly, Nirvana grows out of

the trials and tribulations of life, yet remains untainted by them.

Secondly, the literature compares Nirvana to water and states that like water, which extinguishes physical fires, Nirvana extinguishes the fires of delusion. Just as water quenches our physical thirst, the realization of Nirvana eliminates the thirst of desire.

Thirdly, we can compare Nirvana to an antidote when Nirvana according to Hindu and Buddhist scriptures is a sanctuary or medicine for the weary. Like an antidote, Nirvana neutralizes the poison of delusion.

Then we can compare Nirvana to the ocean. The ocean accepts all water regardless of its source. The ocean knows no discrimination. Nirvana is also a state of equanimity, without preference or aversion. Just as we could never measure fully the amount of water in the oceans, we could never fully describe the realm of Nirvana.

When we compare Nirvana to food, we notice that as food keeps us alive and healthy, so those who have attained Nirvana are free from the cycles of birth and death. In Nirvana, one is beyond the limitations of human life. Just as food relieves us of our hunger, the

realization of Nirvana frees us from the suffering of affliction.

Then there is a comparison of Nirvana to space in our scriptures. When we speak of space, there is no talk of arising, subsisting, changing, or passing away. The same is true of Nirvana. Once Nirvana is realized, one can never fall away from it. The realm of Nirvana is boundless. It is not to be found at any one place, yet it is everywhere. It is not dependent on any one thing, yet it is the foundation of all things. In Nirvana, one dwells in the midst of all phenomena and is in harmony with the universe.

When the scriptures compare Nirvana to a priceless gem it makes a lot of sense. Like a priceless gem, Nirvana is radiant and appeals to all.

Finally, when our scriptures compare Nirvana to a mountain peak it gives a much better understanding to us. The steadfastness of Nirvana can be compared to a tall mountain peak, reaching towards the sky, unfazed by the elements of weather. Nirvana stands tall, beyond the reach of all afflictions.

Buddhism speaks of four kinds of Nirvana:

- Nirvana of pure original nature,
- Nirvana with remainder,

- Nirvana without remainder, and
- Nirvana of non-abiding.

The Nirvana of pure original nature is the seeing of body of truth, the true nature of all phenomena. While delusion may temporarily prevent us from seeing the body of truth, its integrity is never compromised. Dharma or the body of truth has countless wondrous aspects and encompasses all things. It is not the same as all dharmas, yet it is no different. Our body of truth is our pure, original nature. If we look inside of ourselves, we all can see the body of truth.

Nirvana with remainder is attained when one is still alive. In this case, the word remainder refers to the effects of karma. The term “with remainder” means that while no new karma is being created, the effects of past karma have not been entirely extinguished. Because of the presence of the physical body, one still feels the various effects of hunger, temperature, sickness, and aging.

In Nirvana with remainder, one still has to eat when hungry or rest when tired. Even though the body continues to experience sickness, old age, and death, the mind is no longer enslaved by these processes. Regardless of one’s circumstances, one can still go on with life in

a calm, reserved manner. This is what is meant by Nirvana with remainder.

The state of Nirvana without remainder, is reached when all effects of karma are completely worked out, and the physical body is just a thing of the past. Without the creation of new karma, there is no coming together of the five aggregates* and no new birth results.

In this state, one's true nature is "dissolved" in all phenomena and becomes one with the universe. Just as sugar dissolves in water without a trace, its presence, though not visible, is indisputable. This total harmony is summed up in the saying, "Time from antiquity to the present is not separate from the present thought. The boundless land that separates you and me is nothing more than the tip of a down feather."

Nirvana of non-abiding is also known as Maha Nirvana. It is believed that of those who have attained Maha Nirvana, they are no longer attached to life and death because of their wisdom. Out of compassion, they are no longer attached to Nirvana. They see through the emptiness of the cycle of rebirth and continually reappear in this world to guide salient beings through the sea of suffering. They have everything, yet they do not call anything their own. They are always active

helping sentient beings, yet they are always at peace. They are not attached to any one way and can skilfully employ all means.

From our entire discussion of the meaning and these various kinds of Nirvana, we can safely deduce that one does not have to wait until the end of one's life to enter Nirvana. When Prince Siddhartha became a fully enlightened Buddha under the bodhi tree, he entered the realm of Nirvana with remainder.

When the Buddha passed away at the age of eighty between two sala trees, he entered Nirvana without remainder.

During the forty plus years when the Buddha travelled everywhere to teach the Dharma to all those with a willing ear, he lived a life free of attachment.

My assertion is that this kind of life that is purposeful yet without fixation on purpose is free and at ease. This is the realm of Nirvana.

I now believe that Nirvana is the total liberation from suffering. I also believe that those who have realized Nirvana experience unparalleled joy that flows from within.

My belief is that even the way enlightened ones conduct themselves reflects their internal

serenity. Therefore, simply by being in their presence, others can also share in this limitless happiness.

The Hindu and the Buddhist scriptures speak of Nirvana as the ultimate happiness that is attainable by the ones who make a genuine effort to do so.

However, those of us who cannot comprehend the meaning of Nirvana, think that the bliss of Nirvana comes from the suppression of all desires. This is a grave misunderstanding, as illustrated by the various scriptures and the exchange between various intellectuals.

I have heard some people ask and state that if the scriptures teach us to realize Nirvana by letting go of our sensory pleasures, which is very hard to do and causes us great pain, so what is the point of realizing Nirvana if it takes all the joy out of living?

My answer as a HR practitioner and after my extensive reading on the topic is simple. “It is incorrect to equate Nirvana with the ‘pain’ of abstention. When the scriptures teach us to refrain from indulgence, it is only a means to an end. When one wants to learn a new skill, one has to first ‘painfully’ practice the basics of that skill before one can excel in it.”

In my presentation, I have repeatedly said that Nirvana is the total liberation from suffering because I firmly believe in that idea. When we let go of all attachment and aversion, we live in harmony with all that is conditioned and in so doing calm the agitation that comes with desire.

I have said that the realm of Nirvana is without arising, without abiding, without attachment to the phenomenal self, and without blemish. In Nirvana, there is no arising and consequently no ceasing and no impermanence. Not only is there no arising of worldly phenomena, there is also no arising concerning the notion of Nirvana itself.

I am convinced that Nirvana is without blemish and is most wondrous and perfect. The serenity and joy that are experienced in Nirvana are not something that can be described in simple words and in a brief essay like this one.

Having said all these, I believe it is also something that we all can experience, and it is available to us at all times.

Now let me go back to the novel to conclude this presentation. In the end, though the lingering question that is left with me is how intertwined are the metaphysical and the ethical proposals of Siddhartha. Should we

accept reincarnation, the unity of all Being, and the fiction of time in order to accept Siddhartha's ethics of self-determination and love of good karma?

This becomes an allegory for all sentient beings, in fact a moral tale and not a philosophical treatise. In the end, we have the choice to follow Siddhartha's example in determining how much significance we can give to the Hindu way of life and Buddhism regarding Nirvana. I feel this leaves each one of us to come to our own conclusion.

1st May, 2014.

NOTES:

The five realms are: heaven, human, animal, hungry ghost and hell.

+ Kalpas – a period in which the universe experiences a cycle of creation and destruction.

*Five aggregates are: form, feeling, perception, volition and consciousness.

% Triple Gem constitute Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

History of Hanuman

Although there is a mention of Hanuman or Vrishakapi in Rigved some scholars believe otherwise and say that Hanuman was a proto Dravidian deity and has been prominently described in Valmiki Ramayan. Some purans say that Hanuman was regarded as an avatar of Shiva and was a combination of the trinity Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. Some say Hanuman was born as the son of the King and Queen of the Monkeys.

To a lot of other people and specially Hindus, he is the son of Anjana, a female Apsara who had been transformed into a monkey by a curse, and Vayu, the wind god. It is also said that from his god father Vayu, Hanuman received the ability to fly. Hanuman became more prominent and important in the medieval period and came to be portrayed as the ideal devotee of Ram. He was characterized as a lifelong celibate. His celibacy was the source of his strength and this theme became popular among the wrestlers of old India.

The mythical story of the birth of Hanuman is narrated at the end as a conclusion but it is explained here briefly. Vrihaspati had an

attendant called Punjikasthala, who was cursed to assume the form of a female monkey — a curse that could only be nullified if she would give birth to an incarnation of Lord Shiva. Reborn as Anjana, she performed intense austerities to please Shiva, who finally granted her the boon that would cure her of the curse.

When Agni, the god of fire, gave Dasharath, the king of Ayodhya, a bowl of sacred dessert to share among his wives so they may have divine children, an eagle snatched a part of the pudding and dropped it where Anjana was meditating, and Pavan, the god of wind delivered the sacred dessert to her outstretched hands. After she took the divine dessert, she gave birth to Hanuman. Thus, Lord Shiva incarnated as a monkey, and was born as Hanuman to Anjana, by the blessings of Pavana, who thus became Hanuman's godfather.

The birth of Hanuman released Anjana from the curse. Before she returned to heaven, Hanuman asked his mother about his life ahead. She assured him that he would never die, and said that fruits as ripe as the rising sun would be his food.

As a child, believing the sun to be a ripe mango, Hanuman pursued it in order to

eat it. Rahu, a Vedic planet corresponding to an eclipse, was at that time seeking out the sun as well, and he clashed with Hanuman. Hanuman thrashed Rahu and went to take sun in his mouth.

Rahu approached Indra, king of devas, and complained that a monkey child stopped him from taking on Sun, preventing the scheduled eclipse. This enraged Indra, who responded by throwing the Vajra (thunderbolt) at Hanuman, which struck his jaw. He fell back down to the earth and became unconscious. A permanent mark was left on his chin due to impact of Vajra, explaining his name Hanuman.

Upset over the attack, Hanuman's father figure Vayu deva (the deity of air) went into seclusion, withdrawing air along with him. As living beings began to asphyxiate, Indra withdrew the effect of his thunderbolt. The devas then revived Hanuman and blessed him with multiple boons to appease Vayu.

However, Hanuman's godfather, Pavana carried him to the nether world or 'Patal'. As he departed from the earth, all life panted for air, and Brahma had to beg him to return. In order to appease him they conferred a lot of boons and blessings on his foster child that made Hanuman invincible, immortal and super powerful.

Brahma gave Hanuman a boon that would protect him from the irrevocable Brahma's curse. Brahma also said: "Nobody will be able to kill you with any weapon in war." From Brahma he obtained the power of inducing fear in enemies, of destroying fear in friends, to be able to change his form at will and to be able to easily travel wherever he wished.

From Shiva he obtained the boons of longevity, scriptural wisdom and ability to cross the ocean. Shiva assured safety of Hanuman with a band that would protect him for life.

Indra blessed him that the Vajra weapon will no longer be effective on him and his body would become stronger than Vajra.

Varuna blessed baby Hanuman with a boon that he would always be protected from water.

Agni blessed him with immunity to burning by fire. Surya gave him two siddhis of yoga namely "laghima" and "garima", to be able to attain the smallest or to attain the biggest form.

Yama, the God of Death blessed him healthy life and free from his weapon *dand*, thus death would not come to him.

Kuber showered his blessings declaring that Hanuman would always remain happy and contented.

Vishwakarma blessed him that Hanuman would be protected from all his creations in the form of objects or weapons.

Vayu also blessed him with more speed than he himself had.

Kamenev also blessed him that the sex will not be effective on him. Therefore, his name is also Baal Bramhachari.

Hanuman selected Surya, the sun god as his preceptor, and approached him with the request to teach the scriptures. Surya agreed and Hanuman became his disciple, but had to face his constantly moving guru by traversing the sky backwards at equal pace, while taking his lessons. Hanuman's phenomenal concentration took him only 60 hours to master the scriptures.

On ascertaining Surya to be an all-knowing teacher, Hanuman raised his body into an orbit around the sun and requested to Surya to accept him as a student. Surya refused and explained claiming that he always had to be on the move in his chariot, it would be impossible for Hanuman to learn well.

Undeterred, Hanuman enlarged his form, with one leg on the eastern ranges and the other on the western ranges, and facing Surya again pleaded. Pleased by his persistence, Surya agreed. Hanuman then learned all of the knowledge that the sun god possessed.

When Hanuman requested Surya to quote his "guru-dakshina" (teacher's fee), the latter refused, saying that the pleasure of teaching one as dedicated as him was the fee in itself. Hanuman insisted, whereupon Surya asked him to help his (Surya's) spiritual son Sugriva. Hanuman's choice of Surya as his teacher is said to signify Surya as a *Karma Saakshi*, an eternal witness of all deeds.

To further clarify this aspect, Surya considered the manner in which Hanuman accomplished his studies as his tuition fees, but when Hanuman requested him to accept something more than that, the sun god asked Hanuman to assist his son Sugriva, by being his minister and compatriot.

Hanuman was mischievous in his childhood, and sometimes teased the meditating sages in the forests by snatching their personal belongings and by disturbing their well-arranged articles of worship. Finding his antics unbearable, but realizing that

Hanuman was but a child, (albeit invincible), the sages placed a mild curse on him by which he became unable to remember his own ability unless reminded by another person.

The curse is highlighted in Kishkindha Kand and he was relieved from the curse by the end of Kishkindha Kand of the epic Ramayan when Jambavanth reminds Hanuman of his abilities and encourages him to go and find Sita and in Sundar Kand he used his supernatural powers at his best.

With all the above narration, it can be said that Hanuman is the monkey deity renowned for his courage, power and faithful as well as selfless service.

At the time of the Ramayana, Hanuman was sent as an advance spy to Lanka. To reach the island he had to fly over the sea but there was blocked by Sursa, who wanted to test him. She had a boon that everybody who comes before her must pass through her mouth. However, when she wanted to swallow Hanuman, he became bigger and bigger so she also had to become bigger and bigger. Then Hanuman suddenly became very small and went in through her ear, coming out of her mouth, thus fulfilling the boon.

In the Ashokvatika or forest of Ashoka trees on Lanka, Hanuman spies on Ravana, who is trying in vain to press Sita into becoming his wife. Later he contacted Sita in the gardens of Ravana's palace, told her of the plans being made for her deliverance and gave her Rama's signet ring as a token. Pleased with his success, Hanuman fought the demon Meghnaath, son of Ravana, in the gardens of the palace of Lanka. He won over Meghnaath, but was finally captured by Ravana's demons.

Brought before the demon king, Ravana ordered that while as a messenger of Rama he could not be killed, his tail could be set afire with cloth and oil. But Hanuman used his powers to enlarge his tail indefinitely, until the demons had no cloth left to cover it. While they still tried to put fire to his tail, Hanuman became suddenly very small and escaped from his ropes.

Trailing his burning tail behind him, Hanuman then set fire to all of Lanka and flew back to the mainland. He rejoined Rama and gave him valuable information on Ravana's forces. The army crossed a bridge to Lanka that was made by another monkey leaders and master architects called Nal and Neel.

During the mighty battle that followed, Hanuman defeated the Demon Lankini, who was the principal guard of the city of Lanka.

Hanuman's greatest feat during the battle of Lanka however was to bring back the herb that cured Lakshman from a fatal wound. He flew all the way to the Himalayas to find it, harassed by many demons, such as Kaalnemi. Because Indra was confusing him, Hanuman could not find the herb and finally brought the entire mountain to Lanka.

Ravana was defeated by Ram and Ram and Sita were crowned King and Queen of Ayodhya. Obviously Hanuman was present, remained Ram's favorite general and continued his life in service to him. When Rama offered him any boon that he cared to name, he asked to live for as long as men spoke of the deeds of Rama.

On Tuesdays and in some cases, Saturdays, many people keep fast in honour of Hanuman and give special offerings to him. In times of trouble, it is a common faith among Hindus to chant the name of Hanuman or sing his hymn ("*Hanuman Chalisa*") and proclaim "Bajrangbali Ki Jai" — "victory to thy thunderbolt strength". Once every year — on the full-moon day of the Hindu month of Chaitra (April) at sunrise — Hanuman Jayanti is celebrated to commemorate the birth of Hanuman. Hanuman temples are among the most common public shrines found in India.

Thus, the character of Hanuman teaches us of the unlimited power that lies unused within each one of us. Hanuman directed all his energies towards the worship of Lord Rama, and his undying devotion made him such that he became free from all physical fatigue. In addition, Hanuman's only desire was to go on serving Rama. Hanuman perfectly exemplifies 'Dasyabhava' devotion — one of the nine types of devotions — that bonds the master and the servant. His greatness lies in his complete merger with his Lord, which also formed the base of his genial qualities.

It is hard to find a mythical character that is at once so powerful, learned, philosophic, humble and amusing!

Hanuman features prominently in the great epic of *Ramayana*. The venerable ape also features in the great epic *Mahabharata*. How Hanuman met the valiant Bhima, one of the Pandav brothers is itself a marvelous tale. He recognized Bhima as his spiritual brother, since both were born with the blessings of Pavan, the Wind God, and promised to aid the Pandavs in the big battle of Kurukshetra. Hanuman positioned himself in the flag of Arjun's chariot to secure and stabilize the war-craft. The triangular saffron flag of Hanuman stands for stability and equilibrium, sense-control and mind-control, and a sure sign of victory over all that is base and evil.

In conclusion, here is the mythical story of Pawanputra Hanuman, the mighty monkey-god. The story of his birth is as fascinating as his mighty deeds. However, to know about Hanuman, we have to go back sometime before his birth.

Let us go to the palace of Lord Brahma where it all started. Lord Brahma as we all know is the Hindu god of creation. He is believed to live in a beautiful divine palace in his heavenly abode. Such was the beauty of the palace that it was a constant source of amazement for even the deities. There were a number of attendants in the celestial palace-courts of Lord Brahma. Among them was a beautiful attendant named Anjana or sometimes also called Anjani.

Once, happy with her service, Lord Brahma decided to reward her. He called her and asked what she wanted. Anjana hesitated at first. Then she replied, "Lord, I wish you could remove a curse pronounced on me by a sage,"

"Tell me about it. Maybe I would be able to find some help for you," said Lord Brahma. Hopeful that her curse may be removed, Anjana continued, "When I was playing as a child on earth, I saw a monkey meditating with its legs folded in a lotus pose, like a human sage. It was a funny sight; so thinking that it was a monkey, I threw some fruits at it.

However, here I made a mistake. For it was no ordinary monkey. A powerful sage had taken the form of a monkey to do his tapasya (spiritual practice). My fruits disturbed his penance and he opened his eyes in great indignation. As soon as he saw me, he cursed me that I would become a monkey when I fall in love with anyone. I begged him to forgive me."

"The sage said that as he had already uttered it, he could not change the curse. However, he assured me that the man I fall in love with would love me in spite of my monkey face. Lord Brahma, I was born and brought up here. How can I live with a face of a monkey among my beautiful sisters? If you kindly grant me a boon to become my usual self, I will be very much obliged," she said anxiously.

Brahma felt sorry for the unfortunate apsara. He thought for a moment. Then he lifted his eyes towards the anxious Anjana. "I see a way for removing your curse, Anjana," he said kindly. "Go to earth and live there for a while. You will meet your husband on earth and your curse will be removed if you - give birth to an incarnation of Lord Shiva," said Lord Brahma.

Anjana accepted Brahma's advice. She was born in the earth shortly afterwards. She lived in a forest as a young hunter. One day she

saw a strong man fighting with a lion. "What a brave man!" she thought in wonder. "How I wish he will look at me!" As Anjana looked at the warrior in admiration, the man turned and saw her. As soon as his eyes fell on her, she turned into a monkey as was told to her.

With a pathetic cry, Anjana sank to the ground and covered her face with her hands. Seeing her fall to the ground, the man came running towards her. "Who are you fair maiden? Why do you cry? Uncover your face. Let me see you."

"I cannot, brave man," Anjana answered gloomily. "I am Anjana, an apsara cursed to become a monkey when I fall in love. I request you to please leave me alone in my sorrow," she wailed and peeked at the handsome man through her fingers.

To her great astonishment, she found a big monkey-faced man standing before her! If she did not see his face at first, it was because she could not and because until now she saw him from a distance. The monkey-faced man understood her surprise. He spoke. "I am not human, although I can take the human form if I want. I am Kesari, the king of Monkeys, blessed by Lord Shiva with magical powers. If you become my wife, I will be honoured. Would you honour me by becoming my wife,

dear Anjana?" Anjana became very happy. She accepted his proposal.

"Then the sage's word was indeed true," thought Anjana, "Kesari didn't mind my appearance because he himself is a monkey!"

Anjana and Kesari were married in the forests. Being a pious devotee, Anjana performed intense tapasya, worshipping Lord Shiva. Lord Shiva was pleased with her. He appeared before her and asked her what she wanted.

"Lord Shiva, I wish you to be born as my son, so that I can be freed from the sage's curse," Anjana made her solemn request to Lord Shiva.

"So be it!". Lord Shiva gave his consent and disappeared.

Soon after this, one day, as Anjana was worshipping Lord Shiva, in another part of the country, Dasarath, the king of Ayodhya, was performing a yagna (religious rite) to have children. It was the Putrakaam Yagna. As a result, Agni, the Fire-God gave him some sacred pudding and asked him to share that among his wives so that they may have divine children.

Here, Lord Shiva's boon to Anjana started to work. While Dasaratha gave the pudding to his elder wife Kausalya, by divine ordinance a kite or a bird snatched a portion of that pudding. Holding the pudding in its tails, the kite-bird flew away from Ayodhya towards the forests Anjana lived. It flew over the dense trees and dropped the pudding where Anjana was engaged in tapasya.

Vayu, the ever-present Wind-God, saw this event. "Go, Vayu!" he heard a silent command in his mind from Lord Shiva. Vayu immediately caught that portion of pudding and placed onto the outstretched hands of Anjana.

Anjana felt something drop in her hand. She opened her eyes and looked at the pudding in her hand. "Is this offering from Lord Shiva?" she wondered and after her prayers she swallowed that piece of pudding. As the divine pudding went inside her throat, Anjana immediately felt the blessings of Lord Shiva. In due course, she gave birth to a little monkey-faced boy.

Kesari was very happy to see his son. The child was called Hanuman, the son of Anjana. Having given birth to Lord Shiva's incarnation, Anjana was released from the curse of the

sage. She began to express her wish to return to Heaven.

There may be many other versions of the mythical existence of Pawanputra Hanuman and whatever are these stories, they all bring a variety of joy to the Hindus who believe in his spiritual powers and offer their prayers to him with divine faith.

A ROUTE TO ENLIGHTENMENT.

In my view, Buddhism is a perfect educational theme based on the profound and wholesome teachings of Buddha, revealing the genuine truth of life and universe. 'Life' refers to us and 'universe' refers to our living environment.

We are told that Buddha was NOT a God. Buddha refers to a fully enlightened person. 'Budh' in Sanskrit means 'to know or to be aware'.

The study of Buddha's very life as a human being can give us all an inspiration and a model for the spiritual path and for making our own life a spiritual practice. Humanistic Buddhism, promoted by the Buddhist Order can be seen in its established objectives: "Give others faith, give others joy, give others hope and give others convenience."

The Order tries to make Buddhism relevant in this world, in our lives, and in each one of our hearts. In so doing, it is hoped to build a Pure Land on earth. I believe that we would be able to give faith, joy, hope and convenience to

everyone we interact with in our life if we followed the teachings of Buddha.

Buddhists believe that all sentient beings have a Buddha nature, and that man has the potential to become a Buddha – a perfectly enlightened person. To achieve enlightenment, they believe human beings can outgrow ignorance and irrationality and see things as they really are. They believe that greed, hatred, jealousy and ignorance can be replaced by generosity, loving-kindness, compassion and wisdom. These are within the grasp of each person if they make effort, guided and supported by Buddha's teaching, and inspired by the example of Buddha.

Buddha was a quality teacher who taught his people the truth of life and universe, thus his disciples addressed Buddha as the 'Original Teacher'. Buddha statues in temples do not represent idol worship but could be viewed as symbolism, which serves as reminders of their respective virtues. Thus, when a Buddhist kneels down before the image of Buddha, he does not worship the holy image but brings to mind the teaching of the Enlightened One who has taught us the way to liberation. The kneeling and bowing are forms of veneration to Buddha as our most honoured teacher.

I think that Buddhist teachings are wide and profound, and have given us much insight to various phenomena of life and universe. The content of Buddha's education is more like a complete university of both theory and practice, and philosophy is only one of its courses. Philosophy deals mainly with knowledge and is not concerned with practice, whereas Buddhism does not stop with theoretical pursuits alone but lays special emphasis on practice and realization. It also differs from other religions in that it allows one to have questions regarding the teachings.

Buddhism dispenses with the concept of a supreme being, as does science, and explains the truths of the universe in terms of natural laws. All these exhibit a scientific spirit. Buddha advised us that we should not blindly believe but rather question, examine and rely on our own experience.

It is believed, that the religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend a personal god and avoid dogmas and theology. Many believe that if there were any religion that would cope with modern scientific needs, it would be Buddhism.

Buddha's teaching centres on three major aspects: Precepts (morality), concentration (mind stability) and wisdom. Disciplining

through observing precepts is the method that helps one to achieve concentration. With mind stability or concentration, wisdom will be realized naturally. All sentient beings possess this innate wisdom or Buddha nature but are unable to realize it because of delusion and attachment. Buddha's teaching helps us to realize the innate perfect wisdom with which we can reduce our afflictions and turn suffering into happiness.

Compassion is unconditioned love, kindness and active sympathy. It extends itself without distinction to all sentient beings since it is based on the enlightened experience of the oneness of all beings. It is the will to end people's suffering. Compassion must be accompanied by wisdom in order to have the right effect. Wisdom is the fundamental idea, which is inherent in all people and can manifest itself only in deep concentration or after the attainment of a pure mind. In Buddhism, the main objective of practice is to achieve this ultimate wisdom.

The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism

1. Truth of Suffering – Life is subject to all kinds of suffering, the basic being birth, ageing, illness and death.

2. Cause of Suffering – Suffering is caused by ignorance, resulting in desire and craving which produce rebirth and a clinging in life.
3. Cessation of Suffering – This comes from total elimination of ignorance and detachment from desires and craving, reaching to a state of supreme bliss or Nirvana.
4. Path leading to Cessation of Suffering – The Noble Eightfold Path.

The Noble Eightfold Path of Buddhists

1. Right understanding – Understanding the Four Noble Truths.
2. Right thought – Develop a noble quality of life, not causing harm to others.
3. Right speech – No lying, idle-talk, slander and harsh words.
4. Right action – No killing, stealing and sexual misconduct.
5. Right livelihood – Avoid occupation causing harm to others.

6. Right effort – Self-discipline to develop a clear mental state.

7. Right mindfulness – Awareness of all actions and thoughts to avoid wrong deeds.

8. Right concentration – Attain mental peace and wisdom.

Buddhist literature talks of Taking Refuge in the 'Triple Gem' which is a Ceremony for people to commit themselves as Buddhists, following the proper practice.

'Taking refuge' means to return and rely. Triple Gem refers to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. When we take refuge in the Buddha, we are returning from our deluded mind and relying upon an awakened mind.

When taking refuge in the Dharma, we are returning from deviant views and relying upon proper views and understanding.

When taking refuge in the Sangha, we are returning from a polluted mind and relying upon the purity of the mind.

The 'Happy Buddha' found in temples is usually depicted as a chubby, happy figure. He is actually the 'one who has loving-kindness'. His gigantic belly represents his 'big heart' of tolerance and acceptance.

Karma refers to our past volitional deeds and thoughts, forming 'seeds' stored in our 8th consciousness which will be manifested when the right conditions come. Some ripen in this life, some in the next life and some in future lives. Evil seeds will give rise to evil fruits. They will not be cancelled out by doing good deeds.

The only thing to change our fate and destiny or prevent the reaping of evil effect is to practice kind deeds, correct our faults and accumulate more good conditions. If many good deeds are accumulated, the good fruit will ripen quickly and life can be changed for the better.

According to Buddhism, death of any living being is inherent in its nature. Death is a natural function of the ongoing process of life. For just as birth leads inevitably to death, so death leads inevitably to birth. Death is metaphorically taken as abandoning an old house (the physical body) and changing to a new house. After-life refers to the state of being reborn.

Not only is there scientific evidence to support the Buddhist as well as the Hindu belief of rebirth, it is the only after-life theory that has any evidence to support. During the last 30 years, parapsychologists have been studying reports that some people have vivid memories of their former lives. Professor Ian Stevenson of University of Virginia's Department of Psychology has described dozens of cases of this type in his books. He is an accredited scientist whose 25 year study of people who remember former lives is very strong evidence for the Buddhist teaching of rebirth.

Buddhists view death as exiting one realm of existence and entering another. The cycle of rebirth into countless lives continues until enlightenment, and Nirvana occurs. Rebirth is not the same as reincarnation, as it is not an eternal soul that migrates to a new physical form. Rather, our voluntary actions produced by body, speech and mind create our karma which will induce consequences either in the current life or in the future ones. Karma follows the Law of Cause and Effect that good begets good and bad begets bad. It will form a karma force that determines one's future existence in rebirth.

When we die, the mind with all the tendencies, preferences, abilities and characteristics that have been developed and conditioned in this life, re-establishes itself in a fertilized egg. Thus the individual is reborn and develops a personality conditioned both by the mental characteristics that have been carried over and by the new environment. The personality will change and be modified by conscious effort and conditioning factors like education, parental influence and society, and once again at death, re-established itself in a new fertilized egg, again entering a rebirth cycle.

There are five realms that one may be reborn i.e. heaven, human, animal, hungry ghost and hell. The most important factor influencing where we will be reborn is 'karma' – our intentional mental actions and thoughts. Whatever mental habits are strongly developed in this life will continue in the next life. In general, loving type of people practicing wholesome deeds, speech and thought tend to be reborn in a heavenly realm, and those upholding the five precepts may be reborn in the human realm. Those that fall in the three lower realms are usually obsessed by ignorance, greed and hatred.

The rebirth cycle is always the source of our suffering where there are life and death. The cycle of rebirth into countless lives continues until the conditions that cause it, i.e. craving and ignorance, cease. This is the state of Nirvana.

The Buddha teaches us various ways to practice to enable us to transcend the rebirth cycle, an essential step before the further attainment of Buddha hood, and to obtain complete liberation and happiness. This is the unique and ultimate goal of Buddhism, and the purpose of life.

It is true that Buddha discouraged people to indulge in these practices as many are just superstitions and deceitful. Even though some may be based on reliable studies and statistics, our future should not be bound by these fortune telling. Buddha teaches us that all things and phenomena in our lives are governed by the 'Law of Cause and Effect'.

Nothing that we encounter is haphazard as there must be a hidden cause we created in the past, i.e. everything whether good or adverse is self created. Based on this genuine truth, we are able to control our own fate and destiny as good begets good and bad begets bad.

Buddha's teaching is to tell us how to create our own better future and how to face adversity due to our past unwholesome deeds. Buddhism is a teaching that guides people to have a positive attitude towards life instead of relying on prophesy and fortune telling.

However, practices of fortune telling, fung-sui and so on have long been a kind of tradition and culture among the Chinese community for thousands of years and many people who are deluded about the truth of life, are still attached to them. Their practice has nothing to do with Buddhism.

Though you may find such practices in some temples, these temples may not be Buddhist temples as many Chinese temples are devoted to the worship of deities and spirits. Even so if you find this in Buddhist temples, this is only a way to accord with people's traditional beliefs, but still if they practice it, the effect mainly relies on their ultimate sincerity of the mind and not on superstitious belief.

In Christianity, people believe in an Almighty God who is the Creator of the earth and who has absolute power over nature and human destinies. In such sense, Buddhism has no God.

Buddhists believe in gods who are defined as heavenly beings or Devas. Devas are believed to inhabit the heavens above the human realm, but are still unenlightened, bound to Samsara or subject to birth and death. Many such beings have been converted to Buddhism and become its protectors (Dharma Protectors). Any living beings can be reborn as one of the gods if that living being has the required merit and virtue.

Some basic truth about our beliefs:

Do not believe in anything simply because you have heard it.

Do not believe in tradition because they have been handed down for many generations.

Do not believe in anything because it is spoken and rumoured by many.

Do not believe in anything simply because, it is found written in your religions books.

Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your teachers and elders.

But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all, then accept it and live up to it. All that we

experience begins with our good, truthful and beautiful thoughts. Our words, actions, thoughts, character and hearty deeds spring from our realization and enlightenment.

If we speak or act with evil thoughts, unpleasant circumstances and experiences then inevitably our life and living will result in evil ways. Wherever we go, we create bad circumstances because we carry bad thoughts. We cannot shake off this suffering as long as we are tied to our evil thoughts.

So let your words, actions, thoughts, character and heart enlighten you.

The Basics of My Way of Life

I am a sentient human being and have my roots in the Hindu family but my way of life differs from the old traditional Hindu living of my parents. I have many of my own experiences with my own way of existence and I do not think, behave and conduct my prayers as my parents and grandparents have been doing only because I have felt that there has been a need to change. I have changed and I feel better with the path that I have been following.

Although I speak from my own experience, I strongly feel that no one has the right to impose his or her beliefs on another person. I have never professed that my way is the best. If those people, including my children and grand children, find some points, which may be suitable for them, then they can carry out experiments for themselves and follow my way.

On the other hand, if they find that my way is of no use to them, then they are free to discard them.

I believe in the essence of truth, beauty and goodness of humanity. Since my God has no particular religion, my way of life is my own development. I wake up in the morning and after my cleansing, I say my universal prayer to inculcate peace in my mind and ensure that my brain and brawn are in some form of balance. This process synthesizes my thinking and my compassion.

I have always wanted happiness in life and wanted to be away from pain and suffering. For this reason, alone I conduct my prayers to the Almighty. For me there is no absolute way so everything is relative and I judge everything according to circumstances. I therefore pursued three means in my everyday living; mental development, material development and spiritual development.

For my mental development, I am indebted to my parents, family members and my friends and teachers. I have had good working life to sustain my material development. I have retired from active working life and live alone

in my own home free from all encumbrances. My spiritual development has come from my own experiences where I do not depend on any religious faith but on basic good human qualities. I have developed a sense of involvement, honesty within me, reasonable self-discipline and my human intelligence has been properly guided by my own motivation.

On this basis, I have been able to use my intelligence to transform myself by instilling the good human qualities and reducing the negative aspects of life. I am not a blind follower of any principle or faith and all unnecessary traditional ceremonies make no sense to me, hence I have abandoned all of them.

I firmly believe that many years have passed since Hindu religious traditions started; so many aspects are out of date and obsolete. I understand that religion, as a whole is irrelevant in this modern world. I conduct my own kind of prayer daily and perform a peaceful interaction with Almighty God once a month using my own independent method.

After this my daily life begins to roll as usual and I do all my proposed work which is my

karma- reading, writing, cleaning, gardening, volunteer work to help people in the community and communicating with people. I believe that I should not waste the opportunity that has been offered to me in this life. Human life is so precious and so difficult to achieve that it has to be well utilized. Life is transient but valuable so it is important to do something meaningful with it and try to bring all elements together for cumulative effect on our daily practices.

There is no doubt in my mind at all that God is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient so there is no need to go and seek for Him at any particular place or in a particular way. He is merciful, kind and amenable so a simple genuine prayer is answered for anyone who loves and surrenders his or her life to Him. I just do that.

This is all that is required for me to live a healthy and peacefully rewarding life and I will continue to do this as long as I am in a position to do this.

This is my way of life and whoever in my family or friendly circle wishes to follow is free to do so.

I too believe that in order to practise the application of joyful effort successfully, I must have the ability to concentrate, to focus on my events, actions and objectives. Thus, my power of judgement to judge between what is desirable and what is undesirable, what is negative and what is positive becomes very important for me. That is why I am a sentient being.

I have my total freedom to conduct my way of life the way I want and do not need any pressure or preaching from anyone. This is the true essence of my way of life. I have done this and I will continue to do this as long as I live.

So I always ask God to help me achieve my objectives in life. To further explain myself in detail I need to establish my argument in a more vivid way.

I was born in a supposedly Hindu family and have tried to live a Hindu way of life for the last 75 years. However, after my extensive reading, personal experiences and a variety of interactions with people of various ideals I now have culled my own main principles of living a fruitful and complete way of human life.

I know that God exists and He is the One Absolute Om. Over the years people have split the one trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh into several divine forms to suit their needs, understanding and interpretations.

I take all human beings as equal and if they behave well they all are divine. I believe that we are able to co-exist in this world through love, peace and empathy.

I believe that our good and effective conduct and activities enable us to live in harmony.

I believe that water is the greatest purifying agent; all good believable scriptures are excellent means to cleanse our body, mind and soul and the sacred prayers need to be chanted for posterity, peace and efficient living. There should not be blind following and all unnecessary ceremonies need to be condemned. I call this as Paakhand Khandan.

I have learnt that there are certain disciplines that a good human being should follow in order to co-exist in this difficult and increasingly precarious universe. These, among many other acceptable human qualities, include the following:

- Truth, Beauty and Goodness
- Non-violence
- No desire to possess more than what one needs
- Refrain from stealing
- Non corruptive existence
- Cleanliness
- Contentment
- Intelligent reading and discourse
- Austerity
- Perseverance
- Penance
- Prayers

Unfortunately, I have not been very successful in following all these disciplines and thus I have not properly followed the right way of life myself at all times. However, I tried to be a good human being and that is what matters for my modern living. Therefore, my conclusions about my way of life differ from many of my contemporaries but I stand by my contentions because they give me satisfaction to press on regardless.

I have sinned in life and almost everyday I ask for forgiveness and repentance in the following words and sentiments:

MY REPENTANCE & FORGIVENESS

I repent, O God most merciful; for all my sins; for every thought that was false or unjust or unclean; for every word spoken that ought not to have been spoken; for every deed done that ought not to have been done.

I repent for every deed and word and thought inspired by selfishness, and for every deed and word and thought inspired by hatred.

I repent most specially for every lustful thought and every lustful action; for every lie; for all hypocrisy; for every promise given but not fulfilled, and for all slander and back-biting.

Most specially also, I repent for every action that has brought ruin to others; for every word and deed that has given others pain; and for every wish that pain should befall others.

In your unbounded mercy, I ask you to forgive me, O God, for all these sins committed by me, and to forgive me for my constant failures to think and speak and act according to Thy will.

Whatever sins have been committed by me, in thought, word or deed, may the Supreme Lord,

the source of all strength, wisdom and purity,
forgive me and purify me of them all.

May my body become pure.
May I be free from impurity and sin.
May I realize myself as the light divine.
May my mind become ever pure.
May my self become pure.
May I realize my self as the light divine. Peace
be in my mind and in the entire universe.

In fact, I strongly feel that all human beings
should take note of my repentance and
forgiveness and do the same every now and
then to feel at ease.

For me Hinduism is not a religion but a way of
life for people who want to follow certain
principles and disciplines. In my view, it is a
culture more than a religion.

Hinduism does not have any one founder and
it does not have a Bible or a Koran to which
controversies can be referred for resolution.
Consequently, it does not require its
adherents to accept any one idea. It is thus
cultural, not creedal, with a history
contemporaneous with the peoples with which
it is associated.

For me Hinduism is a unique faith! The most obvious misconception about Hinduism is that we tend to see it as just another religion. To be precise, Hinduism is a way of life, a dharma. Dharma does not mean religion. It is the law that governs all actions. Thus, contrary to popular perception, Hinduism is not just a religion in the tradition sense of the term. Out of this misinterpretation, have come most of the other misconceptions about Hinduism.

Over the years, the people who followed these traditions have been misinterpreting a lot of ideas and beliefs. Therefore, by now many of the original ideas and ideals have lost their originality and have become either obsolete or unbelievable.

Writings we now categorize as Hindu scriptures include not just books relating to spirituality but also secular pursuits like science, medicine and engineering. Some can be believed but many are myths and legends to substantiate certain contentions. This is another reason why it defies classification as a religion per se. Further, it cannot be claimed to be essentially a school of metaphysics. Nor can it be described as 'other worldly'. In fact,

one can almost identify Hinduism with a civilization that is flourishing even now and hopefully will flourish in the future.

Words like Hindu or Hinduism are anachronisms. They do not exist in the Indian cultural lexicon. People have coined them to suit their needs in different points of history. Nowhere in the scriptures is there any reference to Hinduism. So people who still cling to these archaic ideas need to change and adapt and adopt the modern way of life to suit their current and future needs, situations and circumstances.

Incidentally, these are my personal beliefs. This is the reason why I do my own prayers in the form, style and methods that I strongly feel are free from all superstitions and unnecessary ceremonies and conducts. There is no need for any person with my similar intellect to engage any other person to do or perform the prayers for them.

Every human being should be able to perform the prayers as they think fit and proper in order to obtain the necessary peace, prosperity and progress in family or individual life.

Success for Everyone.

Success for anyone has multiple explanations. Different people look at their success differently. If you have worked for over fifty years in the human services areas of various businesses, educational and political fields like I have done, you have the capacity to measure and provide some valid explanations for the success of people in their respective organisations.

Many wise people have asked some very valid questions on this topic. Is there a power that can reveal hidden veins of riches and uncover treasures of which we never dreamed? Is there a force that we can call upon to give health, happiness and spiritual enlightenment? When we talk of a power or a force we look at our success spiritually but it can be considered generally as well. We know fully well that all our success in life does not altogether depend and impinge on our ability and training because it also depends on our determination

to grasp the existing or arising opportunities that are presented to us.

Those of us who have had meaningful interactions in business, social and political life can categorically say that opportunities come by creation and not by chance. If we are ready to create opportunities for us then our paths of success become smooth, controllable and manageable. Since we have created them, we can earn the benefits out of them and use them to our best advantage.

If we are determined to use all the available outward means as well as all our natural abilities to overcome and manage every obstacle that come in our path we will then gradually utilise and develop the unlimited potential that lies within us to succeed in any aspect of life. We just have to think positively and generate our will-power. These internal human gifts will make us see all our successes revealed for us.

We alone are totally responsible for all our actions, words, thoughts and deeds. It is believed that we demonstrate our success or failure according to our daily activities. If our mind is always looking in the negative

direction then an occasional positive thought is definitely not enough to give us the success that we envisage. However, if we set our minds to think well and ponder rightly then we will definitely be able to plan our future properly and find our goals and objectives even if we face multiple dark spots in our life.

This power of positive thinking can be achieved by everyone through constant effort and proper practice but it requires volition or will power. We need to establish mechanical as well as conscious will and be determined to be constructive in all our efforts and endeavours. If we search hard within us we will find the needed talents and strengths to combat any weaknesses and shortcomings. If we take advantage of all the opportunities that knock at our door then we will be able to devote our entire energy to mastering one thing at a time and move towards success step by step.

Almost all successful people have tried to attempt simple tasks first and then as their confidence strengthens they have become more dynamic and aimed for more difficult accomplishments. Those successful people

neither scattered their energies nor left something half done to begin any new venture. They have often made wise selections and refused to submit to failure. This led them to success for them. We can learn a lot from many of such examples.

Motivation is Inspiration

In my view the most powerful motivating force is the recognition of one's peers. When we look carefully around all our religious and professional organisations, we will probably notice dramatic differences in the energy and enthusiasm our people bring to their respective jobs and work places.

The best of these workers perform their respective tasks harder and longer to meet their responsibilities and duties of either building sales or way of life, serving customers or making the work place safer and more productive. So recognising them publicly with tangible, personalized and custom rewards encourages their continued efforts and motivates fellow employees to strive for the same achievements and rewards.

It is unfortunate that not all our workers are adequately enthusiastic about the work they are assigned to perform. This is not what a modern commercial enterprise expects from

the work force. These kinds of individuals need to be inspired to move with the rest of the team members.

There are a few schools of thought on the issue of motivating the unmotivated workers of our workforce. Some are possible, some are difficult and almost all can be looked at professionally. Therefore, even if we have some workers who are not able to meet the challenges facing them, we can do a lot to inspire them to do peak performance.

The one that sounds very positive is that every member of our workforce can be additionally encouraged and inspired to do better to reach the expected peak performance. I know that many successful managers have been successfully motivating the employees by giving them a clear sense of direction rather than just being preoccupied with paperwork and procedures.

Then there is another view that no matter how hard we try there are some people who have slipped into our team who cannot be motivated and should be put out of the system. This is unfortunate but sadly enough there are work

places where such views are still maintained.

Of course, another view is that an eager or enthusiastic worker does not need to be pushed beyond his or her limits, hence does not need to be motivated. He or she is inspired enough to perform the duties assigned quite well with least or no supervision. These are the top performers with appropriate knowledge, information and skills. Shall I say that this should be part of our human nature.

From time to time I have had similar views on motivation but as work places and workforce have been changing so have my opinions and views seen some modifications and transformation. Now I am a liberal thinker on this issue.

I am a firm believer of listening to our people because wherever I have worked I found that the successes we achieved in productivity have come from the employees who are actually doing the work. They assisted us in developing ideas for doing the jobs faster and more economically.

However, now my views on this subject are somewhat different. I believe that motivation is

similar to inspiration. It is a personal choice of a person to be motivated or not to be motivated. It must initially emerge from within a person. It is epidemic. It is self-generated and yet we have able training personnel who prepare appropriate prescriptions to tackle the issue.

If a leader is able to provide personal inspiration and has been successful in creating an inspiring work environment then this innovation can easily bring out the best in the employees by inspiring them to emulate their leader. Thus the inspired workers will be in a position to perform at their individual and collective potential.

It makes sense to me that the most powerful motivation of the employees comes from their internal inspiration and they are willing and eager to do peak performance for their equally inspired leader of an inspirational setting. Such should be the case at all work places that are following the revolutionary leaders and inspirational work environments and practices.

It is therefore the belief of some leaders to detect those uninspired and unmotivated employees early in the induction process and replace them with more suitable choices,

otherwise our efforts to inspire and motivate the other members of the workforce will go in vain.

So our first task is to find out if our workers are ready and willing to be motivated. This is where I do not agree that we cannot motivate the unmotivated. At least we can give it a try and keep trying until we see tangible success.

Now the question is 'Can our leaders give up that easily?' and stop motivating the unmotivated. When we assess the time, effort and money that went in the recruitment process of such unmotivated people we cannot justify our stance to get rid of them so quickly and easily. So let us look at how we can motivate or inspire the uninspired and unmotivated.

I have already said that when we think of motivating the unmotivated a lot depends on the imagination of the leader. I wish to emphasise this point here once again.

If we have these types of lethargic and unwilling workers then naturally we are frustrated and would like to do something positive to inspire them to perform better for our mutual benefits.

We cannot give up on the uninspired and only concentrate on the inspired workers because there are ways and strategies that we can employ to motivate all our people whether they are good, bad or ugly performers.

Each worker is an individual and has different attributes therefore needs a variety of prescriptions to get the best result. Our investment in our human resource does not justify us to forget the uninspired workers of our workforce.

Firstly, the degree and types of workers differ and we have to select and group them so that we can develop different strategies and prescriptions for each type. According to some training consultants they can be commanders, drifters, attackers, pleasers, performers, avoiders and analytical. If there are so many types of people in our workforce we cannot afford to implement one prescription for all of them.

We have to take these as their talents, strengths or weaknesses and try to take the opportunity to build on these attributes or short comings. We have to design methods to put the right people in the right place. This

match making of employees and their jobs has given a lot of benefits to many modern business enterprises as well as other private and public organisations.

Secondly, we have to find out what would motivate these different types of workers. Since many of our workers nowadays look for rightful rewards for the good work they have been doing, it will pay us a lot of dividends if we rewarded their positive contributions through our sincere, authentic and genuine compliments rather than harping on criticism.

We can do two things to achieve this objective. Let us stop criticizing, condemning and complaining and start doing something positive to make all our workers become top performers. Let us reward the good ones more rather than reprimanding the bad ones.

Thirdly, we need to develop different methods for each of the groups before we take any action. Some employees need praise for the good work they are doing because they begin to feel that their participation and contribution are valued. I believe that when we tap into the strengths of the employees and allow them to do more of what they are naturally adept at,

people become more inspired to show their talents, strengths and achievements.

Therefore, I believe that if the workers are doing well enough then some simple words of encouragement and praise go a long way to make them happy and when they are happy they get inspired to contribute more.

For an inspired leader all these suggestions are easy, inexpensive and definitely very motivational, hence worth giving them a try.

I still believe that there is merit in old prescription to inspire your workers where you

- hire or gather your workers rightly,
- provide them clear objectives,
- manage by wandering around (MBWA),
- be transparent with all company financial information,
- set realistic benchmarks for incentives to entice staff,
- build and maintain trust, and

- treat your workers like real people.

Many people have asked to explain how could we perform all these important tasks. These are some of my thoughts on this aspect:

- Take time to vet all candidates properly and hire people who are qualified and fit for the job and the cooperate culture;
- Take time to inform workers what needs to be done by what deadline because vagueness bashes motivation;
- Take time to constantly visit various work places because employees do what we inspect and not so much of what we expect;
- Take time and effort to share company finances because this is one of the positive steps towards inspiring workers;
- Take time to ensure that your incentive programs for staff are right ways to entice them rather than make them inactive and lethargic;
- Take time to increase trust by showing empathy for the concerns of workers and

listen to them to make decisions because workers do things for leaders they believe in; and

- Take time to treat all your workers as real people by respecting their personal aspirations and desires to inspire them to excel.

These are some of the strategies and prescriptions I would employ to inspire my workforce whether they are already motivated or need motivation to present themselves with top performance.

If I were active in the workforce, I would let the managers of the future focus more on teamwork to build the pride of the people we manage in achieving success at our work place.

I am of the opinion that if we regard our workers or performers more as part of our inspired team rather than only individuals, we would certainly be on the right path to inspiring our workforce to help us take our enterprise to a new height.

The Best Way Out of a Problem is Through it.

My grandfather was an indentured sugarcane farmer and when I was a first year teacher, he told me a story that intrigued me.

He said that he ploughed around a large rock in one of his fields for years. While doing this he had damaged several of the blades of his plough and even a few ploughs as well. He had grown rather morbid and gruesome about that rock.

After breaking another new plough blade one day and remembering all the trouble the rock had caused him through the years, he was finally determined to do something about it.

When my grandfather put his crowbar under the rock, he was surprised to discover that it was only about a foot thick and that it could be broken up easily. Therefore, he broke it into pieces and when he was carting it away, he had to smile to himself and remembered all the trouble that the rock had caused him and

how easy it would have been to get rid of it much sooner.

Then he passed this wisdom to me and I still treasure his words. He said that there was often a temptation to bypass small obstacles when we were in a hurry to get a large problem solved. We simply do not want to stop and take the needed time to deal with it immediately. As I used to do, they just plough around it. Usually we tell ourselves that we will come back to it later but what really often happens is that we never do.

So he said, if the obstacle is of a type that will keep reappearing over and over, we are usually better off to take the time to fix it and be done with it. However, if we are tempted to go around it time and time again, then we should tarry a little and should ask ourselves, if the cost in time and money and trouble is worth it.

He concluded that the best way out of a problem is through it. I agreed and followed his wisdom all my life and still do.

My Reflections

I thank my parents and the Almighty God for allowing me to come in this world some seventy five years ago. I have persisted to continue on and breathe for as long as I can safely do so. I have continued to learn much grace and intelligence each and every day from everyone around me. I thank everyone for making me a person that I represent today. These are my reflections and no one needs to agree or disagree with these. Take whatever you can to assess your own living.

We human beings are subject to a lot of things and one of those aspects is the realization of being right and wrong. This aspect makes us somewhat different from all the other species of animals. We are supposed to be the most intelligent of all living creatures on earth. When anyone deviates from this norm one is not worth living a full and honest life.

Even if I got it wrong at times I kept trying to make my wrongs to teach me the rights and my rights to show me my wrongs. I have always tried to be the 'I' in LIFE so that I could see the difference between the right and the

wrong. Thus I was always able to appreciate each moment of my life that I was given to enjoy. I needed to be loyal with my people, fair in my words deeds and thoughts and efficient in my daily activities.

I have always tried my best to sincerely understand everything and everyone and I know that I am an intellectual person about most matters in life yet deep down I fully know that there is much more to living a healthy, peaceful and enjoyable family life than just intellectually understanding everything and everyone. Everyone is ignorant in some field and I am no exception. Whenever and wherever I notice my ignorance I immediately accept it as my downfall but I do not stop there but I endeavor to improve my fault. I only hope that the rest of the world begins to think like this.

I have come to realize that I do not understand a lot of things that affect us in life. In fact I have come to accept uncertainty. Part of my problem remains that I want to be certain of my uncertainty. This has been the hardest episode of my living.

I know fully well that I am just passing ‘this way’ this one time and therefore I am certain that any good that I may do or any kindness that I may show to anyone has to be done now and here. So I cannot defer nor neglect this important aim or mission of my living because I may not pass ‘this way’ again. There may not be a second chance so I am determined to make the best of this coming. I would love when I am certain that the rest of the society begins to understand this simple philosophy. Consequently, I have decided to preach a gospel that I should try to be compassionate and kind to others and to myself. The question is “How” ?

I have often asked myself a very pertinent question- What are the most sincere and persistent efforts that I would like to make in my own life? I have been searching for a suitable answer to this important question – Who am I and What is my life’s purpose?

I have put my most persistent effort to this project but have failed many times and felt discouraged. However, the drive within me has been so strong internally that I learnt to get up again and continue to seek and find

alternatives. I have come quite far from where I first started this difficult journey but I have a long way to go. The greatest good will come to all of us if we began to fully understand the Who, What, Where, Why and How of our living.

One lesson that I have learnt along the way is that I must love my own self properly first before I can give my love to anyone else. Love is a feeling that is self generative and if one can generate it for oneself than it become very easy to give it to others. I wish to love all but I must first start by loving me. Sounds selfish but it has value for human living. If we learnt to love ourselves we will be able to pass that compassion to everyone around us.

I also learnt that whenever I am doing something that is coming from within, it does not feel like work or task but feels like 'vacation'. Instead of draining me and making me tired, it simply energizes me. I also found out that it really helped me to be on this path and peaceful journey because I have had support from my great family, faithful friends and my brilliant teachers that have been

constantly enriching my life. No man is an island and I do not profess to be one either.

I know that it has been hard to make sincere effort throughout my life to be a servant to everyone and be selfless in my services to my family, friends and the society but while I was trying to achieve this goal it made me feel good. I must confess that this selfless interest has not come to the top of my deeds and I have been selfishly trying to do things for myself over the last seventy years but I have made several efforts to change my route sometimes with success but many times I have failed. But I have not given up. I know I can do it. I will do it. The very day we all come to realize this mission of ours on earth we would definitely be blessed.

Now I realize that one of the ways I can gain those things is to give to others what I really want. I must find ways to make others feel good around me, help people to find their self confidence and self worth and above all to help people discover their own genius. I feel this is a good path to follow in this world. I will make every effort to go along this road. It is

better to be late than never begin on such a worthy destination.

My greatest struggle has been to live in this shifted consciousness and not to go back to my old deeds, needs and way of life. This is the journey that I have been trying to conduct when I wrote "Motivation Towards 2000" and other articles of interest for people. My short stories and poems speak very loudly for the readers to give them time to tarry a little in their own busy lives and start thinking for themselves. My novel Khamoshi speaks for itself to warn people to be righteous and helpful.

I realize that being 'other centered' might never happen but if I can remember to touch people, move them to discover who they are and inspire them to go after their dreams and believe that they are bigger than who they think they are, even once a week consistently, then I would consider myself sincere and purposeful. I am happy that I am doing the things right for a change. I know we all can take these simple steps in our life time.

Earlier in life I was doing things for gaining self appreciation, success, prestige and fame

etc but the day when I had a shift of focus I have begun doing things differently. It is about *giving* in many cases. Giving love, compassion, happiness, ideas, advice and ease of doing things to others is now making me happier. I have seen that this shift of paradigm has enabled me to work differently, think of alternatives, remain happy without worrying about what I get in return, gain more pleasure and listen to the needs of others. I feel good and this reflects into my good health.

I now realize the true meaning of what Mahatma Gandhi once said, an ounce of practice is worth more than tons of preaching. Rather than standing on a pulpit to preach I practice my beliefs. Many of these beliefs have been put in writing in multiple forms and many have been spoken at specific meetings where I was called to speak to the members of Jaycees, Lions, Rotarians and other Youth Groups,

After so many years of hard life I know that there is so much more to us and our experience than the next news story, the gossip around town, who drives us nuts, what to wear today, what to do, where to shop,

where our next vacation is, and all the activities surrounding the almighty dollar by getting ahead-being the best-competing and clawing our way to the top. In short it is so true now that I am much more than my job description. I do not have a set task but change my duty statement according to the wish of my family, my friends and the society at large.

When I peel back all the layers of my unconscious living, I am really able to rediscover my heart and soul. Within my heart and thoughts I fully well know what is true and necessary. I do just those things that make me happy. I lead myself to serve others for the higher good. I am ready to connect to my passion, my humble gifts to do my work, to take whatever action, and not be attached to the outcome.

When I am connected to what I know to be the truth about why I am here, I have tapped into the wellspring of boundless energy that is the Universe. I do not worry about the customs and traditions that hinder but I love the ones that give me courage and promote my welfare. I wake up each morning with a definite

purpose and a clear vision. I rest in the calm peace that comes with the deepest sense of gratitude. Each encounter, each step, each conversation, each smile is heavenly and holistic. I enjoy my life as it is and not as others want it to be.

I am guided by the Big Self, my words, my thoughts, my feelings and my heart. I express my Spirit which is Universal and connected to each Spirit within each heart, to everything around me, within me, and continue to nurture that with each of my breaths. While I am on this journey of my life, I am experiencing life and all it offers to me. I know what I am doing. In fact everyone will be able to achieve this excellence in life if they tried their best for a change.

With this experience comes my deeper understanding of what it is to 'fail', or to make a 'mistake'. I may judge myself or others by my 'failures' or by my 'mistakes', based on cultural norms and expectations, and when I do this unconsciously I suffer and cause suffering. For me that cannot be what is true spiritually.

Each experience can offer Love, and I can live in Love in this effort. The relationship I have with all sentient beings can be the expression of this Love. Full effort is fully living. Being present with the effort is life. Putting down attachment to the outcome of such divine effort is the ultimate in *moksha* (liberation) and experiencing this deepest joy daily is *ananda* (bliss). Therein lies my full victory.

In conclusion let me categorically state this for my readers. I also feel a certain discomfort with the overly strong morality and rigor. The paradox is that rigor is both very nourishing and also very draining. In reading and understanding my reflections one has to remember that all our bodies and minds are made differently and are very sensitive and respectful to behave differently at different times, in varied situations and changing circumstances.

We also need to realize that we come from different conditioning and many varieties of socio-cultural-economic backgrounds over our evolutionary cycle. Hence, it might be beautiful to feel inspired by someone else's love and integrity in life, but at the same time

one should be very aware that one is not "trying to become like someone else." Everyone has own individuality and this must be preserved at all cost.

For there is nothing more nourishing than being TRUE to our own truth and nothing more draining than trying to ape someone. The greatest violence on us is idealism. To live around "I should do this" or "I should be like that!" is difficult but some individuals can perform to meet these challenges whereas others fail to live up to that expectation.

I have over the years tried to reform myself to serve better for my family and friends and do better than what I was able to do previously. So I always needed assistance and maybe positive criticism so that could truthfully say I CAN. I have presented my views on the deterioration of Hinduism and have demanded that there should be change to meet the newer generation of followers. I have reviewed our religious literature and have shown that many people are blind followers in this world of logic and better comprehension.

I will continue to press on regardless for the needed change in the modern society but

anyone who has a different view has the right to agree to disagree with my philosophies. I have no qualms with that because that is what we term as the freedom of thought and speech.

My Reflections on Healthy Living.

We human beings are subject to a lot of things and one of those aspects is the realization of being right and wrong. This aspect makes us somewhat different from all the other species of animals. We are supposed to be the most intelligent and enlightened of all living creatures on earth. When anyone deviates from this norm one is not worth living a full and honest life. This earth is a great meeting place for all healthy, honest, hardworking, happy and hearty people. It is at this great meeting place called the society that we are able to differentiate the right from wrong.

Even if we get it wrong at times we should keep trying to make our wrongs to teach us the rights and our rights to show us our wrongs. We should always try to be the 'I' in LIFE so that we could clearly see the difference between the right and the wrong. Thus we would always be able to appreciate each moment of our life that we were given to enjoy. We need to be loyal with our people, fair in our words, deeds and thoughts and efficient in our daily activities. That would complete our life.

We as enlightened human beings should always try our best to sincerely understand everything and everyone

around us. We possess the necessary intellect and understand most matters in life, yet deep down we fully know that there is much more to living a healthy, peaceful and enjoyable family life than just intellectually understanding everything and everyone. Everyone is ignorant in some field and we are no exception. Whenever and wherever we notice our ignorance we immediately accept it as our downfall but we should not stop there but endeavor to improve our faults. If all of us begin to think like this, then this world would be a much better place to co-exist peacefully.

The very moment we come to realize that we do not fully understand a lot of things that affect us in life then our search for more knowledge commences and we begin to live a happier life. In fact we then come to accept uncertainty. Part of our problem remains that we want to be certain of our uncertainty. This has been the hardest episode of our modern living. The more we come to clarify our uncertainties the greater our general knowledge develops for our healthy living.

We are just passing ‘this way’ this one time and therefore any good that we may do or any kindness that we may show to anyone has to be done now and here. We cannot defer nor neglect this important aim or mission of our living because we may not pass ‘this way’ again. There may not be a second chance, so we should be determined to make the best of this coming. It would be very pleasant

if the rest of the society begins to understand this simple philosophy. Consequently, let us all decide to preach a gospel that we should try to be compassionate and kind to others and to ourselves.

If we are compassionate and kind with ourselves then we would easily look after our health, wealth and general wellbeing. Then similar actions and reactions would be easily dished out and given for others as well. Peace, prosperity and progress would easily prevail within us, our families and our respective societies.

It is believed that the greatest good would certainly come to all of us if we began to fully understand the Who, What, Where, Why and How of our living. This task is necessary for every one of us but it will take time to realize and comprehend. However, once we have achieved this objective then our success in all our endeavors would be forth coming. We need to grab all the existing opportunities to gather our mental as well as physical strengths in order to activate our potential talents and deactivate our existing weaknesses. This proactive action will make us come alive with all acceptable human qualities.

We must love our own self properly first before we can give our love to anyone else. Love is a feeling that is self generative and if one can generate it for oneself then it will become very easy to give it to others. It is human nature

and our internal wish to love all but we must first start by loving ourselves. Sounds selfish but it has value for healthy human living. If we learnt to love ourselves we will be able to pass that compassion to everyone around us. We will love our body, our soul and our environment, so love for everyone else will generate automatically.

Whenever we are doing something that is coming from within, it does not feel like work or task but feels like a 'vacation'. Instead of draining us and making us tired, it simply energizes us. This would really help us to be on an acceptable path and cull out a peaceful journey for our future. Thus we would develop a support mechanism within our family, with our faithful friends and with our teachers and our learners who would all contribute to constantly enrich our family life. No man is an island and we should never profess to be one either.

As soon as an appropriate realization develops within us we would be enlightened to begin to give our services freely and openly to all who need it. Let us learn to give to others what they really want and what they need. We must find ways to make others feel good around us, help people to find their self confidence and self worth and above all to help people discover their own genius. As soon as we begin to give to the needy we would be on a good path in this challenging world to proceed to healthy and peaceful living. This is a definite need for all of us.

My greatest struggle has been to live in this shifted consciousness and not to go back to my old deeds, needs and way of life. I realize that being 'other centered' might never happen but if I can remember to touch people, move them to discover who they are and inspire them to go after their dreams and believe that they are bigger than who they think they are, even once a week consistently, then I would consider myself sincere and purposeful. I am happy that I am doing the things right for a change. I know we all can take these simple steps in our life time. These steps are necessary but they are not easy and instant. Practice makes us perfect and proper practice will make us a healthy, wealthy and wise human being.

Earlier in life I was doing things for gaining self appreciation, success, prestige and fame etc but the day when I had a shift of focus I have begun doing things differently. It is about *giving* in many cases. Giving love, compassion, happiness, ideas, advice and ease of doing things to others is now making me happier. I have seen that this shift of paradigm has enabled me to work differently, think of alternatives, remain happy without worrying about what I get in return, gain more pleasure and listen to the needs of others. I feel good and this reflects into my good health. I listen carefully, I read comprehensively, I think well and above all I act wisely when the need arises.

I now realize the true meaning of what Mahatma Gandhi once said, an ounce of practice is worth more than tons of preaching. Rather than standing on a pulpit to preach I practice my beliefs. Many of these beliefs have been gathered through interaction with common people. Many of my ideas have sprung from my days as an active teacher, a human resource personnel and an education administrator. Some of my reflections have come from managing my family and me.

Nothing is ever difficult and laborious if we keep trying and believe in the power of persistence and hope. You all can do whatever you set your mind on and have your firm determination to perform yourself in life. Many things are difficult to do but with constant effort, hard work and proper planning most things will fall in place for a healthy living.

CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude my presentation with the ideas that I firmly believe in to make my life and living a happy and healthy one.

EIGHT HUMAN QUALITIES

1. Love and compassion for all beings
2. Forbearance
3. Freedom from envy
4. Purity of body, thought and action
5. Absence of painful exertions that arise due to ambition and greed
6. Possessing cheerfulness, lightness and auspiciousness
7. Being generous and dignified and not demeaning oneself
8. Absence of clamouring after undesirable things

All that we experience begins with thought. Our words and deeds spring from thought. If we speak or act with evil thoughts, unpleasant circumstances and experiences inevitably result. Wherever we go, we create bad circumstances because we carry bad thoughts. We cannot shake off this suffering as long as we are tied to our evil thoughts.

This is very much like the wheel of a bullock cart. The cart-wheel, along with the heavy load of the cart, keeps following the draught oxen. The animal is bound to this heavy load and cannot leave it.

ESSENCE OF HUMAN EXISTENCE

Do not believe in anything simply because you have heard it.

Do not believe in tradition because they have been handed down for many generations.

Do not believe in anything because it is spoken and rumoured by many.

Do not believe in anything simply because, it is found written in your religions books.

Do not believe in anything merely on the authority of your teachers and elders.

But after observation and analysis, when you find that anything and everything agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and benefit of one and all ,

Then accept it and live up to it.

**THIS IS THE ESSENCE OF
MODERN LIVING YRUTH
BEAUTY AND GOODNESS.**