

# Hindudharmangi- karasamaye Gurudevasya Bhashyam



## Gurudeva Speaks on Entering Hinduism



**I**N THE LATE SEVENTIES, WHEN THE Himalayan Academy began its research into religious loyalties, many questions arose. Some came from family devotees and others from the Saiva Swami SaMgam of Saiva Siddhanta Church. Their number and relevance grew, and I decided to dictate the answers myself. The monks recorded the following *upadesha*. It covers an array of subjects, all relating to Hinduism in the modern world, focusing on the importance of religious roots and clear lines of loyalty for success on the eternal path.

**Devotee:** *How does one enter the Hindu religion?*

**Gurudeva:** There are two ways to enter a religion. The first is to be born into the religion. The second way is through adoption or conversion, and today this process is formalized and made complete through the name-giving sacrament. Among these individuals, some have had ties with prior religions, and these ties have had to be severed. This severance, though perfectly acceptable, especially if the wife wishes to be of the same religion as her husband, is an arduous, soul-searching task. History tells us that adoptives often become the strongest members of a religion due to their careful study prior to formal entrance and to their deep, soul-stirring

convictions. The name-giving sacrament, also known as the *namakarana samskara*, is the sacred rite used in both forms of entry.

**Devotee:** *How is one born into Hinduism?*

**Gurudeva:** If both parents are Hindus, the child naturally is considered a Hindu and becomes a Hindu more fully by receiving a Hindu name and then other sacraments from time to time as he is growing up. The child is taught the tenets of the religion at home, in the temple and ideally in school as well.

**Devotee:** *How do born Hindus regard those who seek entrance into Hinduism?*

**Gurudeva:** Hindus are happy to include any sincere man or woman in their worship services. In fact, all temples in the West are open to people of all religions. Our religion is rich in symbolism, tradition and culture. Symbols are signposts, its unspoken language. Those seeking entrance who accept the symbols, traditions and culture are quickly accepted, loved and made to feel at home. Such devotees willingly wear the marks upon their forehead, decorate their home with the forms of our faith, go to our Gods for their needs, naturally hold their hands and their heads in a certain way when receiving the sacred sacraments, adore and prostrate before God, Gods and gurus, showing reverence and love. It's the look in the eye and the feel in the heart at seeing the images of the God and the Gods or a swami's feet that distinguish a Hindu as a Hindu. Yes, it is symbolism, it is tradition, it is the ancient Hindu culture and sincere worship that designate the Hindu home, the holy atmosphere that denotes the Hindu shrine. Yes, it is the crying need for yearly pilgrimage to a holy temple somewhere of the soul's choice, a *yatra* that releases and removes the burdens accumulated throughout the year -- it is all this which identifies the Hindu soul.

**Devotee:** *Can one simply declare himself a Hindu?*

**Gurudeva:** Yes, anyone can declare himself a member of the Hindu religion, but for one to be accepted into the community, he must immerse himself in its traditions and lifestyle. This is the first step. Next he must practice Hinduism openly and thus prove his declaration in his own life and in the minds of others. A person seeking entrance to Hinduism must convince not only himself but his close friends and family that, in fact, he is a Hindu. Otherwise, it is just a secret "play pretend." finally, he must change

his name and use his Hindu name, first and last, in all circumstances and have it made legal so that it appears on his passport, driver's license and business letters. This is a clear sign to one and all that he has fully embraced the Hindu faith.

**Devotee:** *Why would someone not born into Hinduism wish to enter it later in life?*

**Gurudeva:** In the ancient days, people lived in small hamlets and reincarnated back into the same hamlet and even into the same family time and time again. The families, the hamlets and even the countries were, for the most part, all of the same religion. The evolving soul could experience different facets of his religion without a break in continuity, from layman to priest and so on. Now, with modern-day travel and worldwide communication, this tightly knit pattern of reincarnation is dispersed, and souls find new bodies in different countries, families and religions, which in some cases are foreign to them. A soul born to parents of a certain religion may not, therefore, be himself of the nature of that religion. There are different religions to accommodate different peoples at different places on the Eternal Path.

When a soul who has experienced the Hindu religion for many years in a small village in India or Sri Lanka suddenly finds himself incarnated, through desire, in the Western world in a family of no religion or in a Christian or a Jewish family that expects him to follow what is an alien faith to him, that soul intuitively seeks out and searches for the religion that is right for him. When he finds Hinduism, God and the Gods become dear to him, Lord Ganesha is a familiar friend. All layers of his mind are content, and wholeheartedly he declares himself a Hindu and later enters into the Hindu religion.

Conversion is a homecoming for the soul. Many people want to move from one religion to another because they have realized that they are not in the religion that is right for them. Their soul is not satisfied. Their beliefs have changed and they find themselves different from others within their birth religion. So, when the individual discusses his beliefs and his desire to enter Hinduism with his former religious leader, the priest, minister or rabbi intuitively realizes that truly this soul belongs to the religion of his belief. It is that easy. It is that final.

**Devotee:** *What are some of the other ways one might know if he is in fact a*

*Hindu soul, having had deep impressions in that religion in past lives?*

**Gurudeva:** The Hindu soul is moved by the music, the pageantry and the rites of Hinduism. He intuitively understands the esoterics of temple worship and is content with the essence of the philosophy. When he finds the religion of his heart, he begins to lean on it, to use it. Our religion does not claim its path to be the only path. Thus, a soul drawn into Hinduism who was not born into a Hindu family is asked to become familiar with all religions before making a final choice. This is important, for entrance into the Hindu religion is irrevocable. There is no authority -- no church, no aadheenam or other institution -- empowered to sever a person from Hinduism, to disassociate him from this root religion.

**Devotee:** *Does this mean that someone born into the Hindu religion cannot leave it?*

**Gurudeva:** Yes, this means that should a member of the Hindu religion embrace another faith, he nevertheless remains a Hindu for the rest of his life and only a follower of the second religion, for leaving Hinduism is impossible. He would still be a Hindu, but an apostate to one of the sects within Hinduism. The children born and raised in the parents' chosen religion, Christianity or Islam, for example, would be Christians or Muslims, provided they accepted the beliefs as they grew up. It is only their children, however, the third generation, that would be the true Christians or Muslims, not attached to or inclined to be pulled back to their Hindu roots. Therefore, Hindu religious leaders do proselytize among Hindus who have left the fold to follow another path in order to bring them back to the Hindu fold. These souls are considered to be Hindus who, for one reason or another, embraced another faith or abandoned all faiths for a time.

**Devotee:** *I have heard that it is not possible for one to leave the Jewish religion. Is this true?*

**Gurudeva:** Judaism does recognize apostasy, which is defined as the formal denial of the central tenets of Jewish faith -- especially the "unity and uniqueness of God" -- or as the formal conversion to a religion other than Judaism. Apostate Jews are denied certain privileges, but are taken back into Judaism if they repent. Many religions are like this, never denying former adherents the possibility of coming back and requiring some kind of purification ceremony if they do return.

**Devotee:** *If a Muslim wishes to embrace Hinduism, having found himself to truly be a Hindu soul, how can he do this?*

**Gurudeva:** The Vishva Hindu Parishad, the Madurai Aadheenam, the Masurashrama and many other institutions are bringing Muslims into Hinduism through a simple ceremony. As in Christianity, one would become a *de facto* apostate, for he no longer held the Muslim beliefs. He would be excommunicated, *ipso facto*. Like Christianity, Islam is based upon belief. One can enter Islam by simply declaring belief in Mohammed as Allah's true and final prophet, changing one's names and declaring a few other beliefs. Therefore, it is logical that when one no longer held this central belief, he would no longer be a Muslim.

**Devotee:** *Within Hinduism, can one change from one sect, or from one sampradaya within a sect, to another?*

**Gurudeva:** Yes, this happens quite often. It is part of the beauty of Hinduism that it allows for this kind of flexibility and change. After study of the new sect or *sampradaya* has been completed, the transfer is made through a special ceremony. Occasionally, Vaishnavites adopt Saivism through transfers of this kind. Certain Vaishnavites place a small discus, sacred symbol of Vishnu, on the shoulder of those who embrace their sect.

**Devotee:** *Can you explain more about apostasy? Is it the same as heresy or excommunication?*

**Gurudeva:** Usually excommunication is defined as a formal censure imposed by a bishop or other ecclesiastical authority by which an individual is excluded from the religious community, barred from the sacraments and denied a religious burial. The penalty of excommunication is generally imposed only on those who have committed a major offense against the religious body, such as heresy or schism. Schism is the offense of causing or trying to cause a split within the religious organization. Heresy is different. It is the rejection of one or more of the doctrines of a religion by one who still maintains an overall adherence to that religion, who has not abandoned it altogether. Some religions impose the penalty of excommunication on heretics, while others do not.

Apostasy is a voluntary act by which an individual formally denies the central tenets or beliefs of a religion, having completely rejected the religion itself. When the individual's rejection is formally recognized by the religious

body, they consider him an apostate. As in the case of one who is excommunicated, an apostate is excluded from the religious community, barred from the sacraments and denied a religious burial. Some religious bodies only consider that an individual is an apostate after he has actually joined another religion. The rules vary. Some religions consider that an apostate incurs an *ipso facto* excommunication, meaning that by the very act of his apostasy he has automatically imposed on himself the penalty of excommunication. Generally, those who have been excommunicated or declared apostate can seek readmittance into the religion through repentance. However, some religious bodies never allow apostates to reenter.

**Devotee:** *Is it right to take a person away from his religion? Isn't there a negative karma involved?*

**Gurudeva:** Severance must be done by the person himself, not by the religionist or those seeking new members. It is a do-it-yourself path. All religious leaders should have a mutual respect for each other, a sense of professional ethics, an acknowledgement of the existence and the rights of every other religion in the world. None should seek to entice another into his religion, but rather encourage a deeper adherence to the beliefs and practices of each chosen faith. Hindus never set about to take a person away from another religion. We encourage Christians to return to their churches, Jews to their synagogues, Muslims to their mosques -- there to become even more diligent and sincere followers. On rare occasions, severance is permissible, even preferable, but it should be totally on the part of the individual. We do not encourage such transfers, but if the individual devotee insists, if his sincerity is well tested, his reasons well founded, if his persistence and purity prove him to be a Hindu soul beyond a doubt, and if he would suffer through life in an alien religious tradition, then he is accepted into the Hindu fold through the *namakarana samskara* in the traditional way.

**Devotee:** *How important is religious education?*

**Gurudeva:** All the eleven great religions of the world and each of the various faiths have some definite form of education for young and old alike. Religious education trains an individual how to use his religion to better his life by coming closer to God. It teaches him what to believe and what to reject. That individual, well trained, eventually becomes a defender of his faith, and the religion is preserved, protected and defended, and sometimes

it is expanded by him. Man does not have horns or claws to protect himself. He is neither swift nor strong compared to the animal kingdom. His intelligence and knowledge are his weapons, his strength.

Each religion educates its young in a sectarian way, for religionists believe that to learn one specific path is sufficient and necessary. Therefore, education should not be diluted by taking in all religions under one banner for the sake of something called "universality." Rather, religious education should be faithful to tradition. Religious schools are essential, Saivite schools for the Saivites, Vaishnavite schools for the Vaishnavites and Shakta schools for the Shaktas, Christian schools for the Christians and Muslim schools for the members of Islam. In the spirit of honesty and good faith in fulfillment of the duty to educate the young of our religion, this should be observed. The Christians do not send their children to Hindu schools, nor do the Muslims send their children to Christian or Jewish schools. The truly devout discriminate in this way for the sake of their children, whom they dearly love. Thus, they dispatch their sacred duty by passing their religion, their faith, on to the next generation.

**Devotee:** *If a Hindu swami talks of reincarnation and karma and convinces Christians, Jews or Muslims of the validity of these concepts, since these are not official beliefs of these religions, has he not made them apostate to their religion?*

**Gurudeva:** Yes, indeed. Hinduism is so insidiously profound that it is capable of turning many people away from their born religion, none of which can match its depth. Through the Hindu swamis, thousands, millions, have been brought to the doorstep of Hinduism. How can these basic beliefs, inherent in all mankind, be erased once learned? Truly, the Jew and the Christian and the Muslim who learn that God is everywhere and within all things, that the soul returns from birth to birth and is responsible to its own actions through the principle of karma, that all souls are destined to full merger into God -- can they forget these things? Can we forget the law of gravity? Can we change the nature of electricity if, once comprehended, we deny all knowledge of it? The swamis, however, have gone as far as they feel ethically permitted to go, since many of their devotees were born into Christian or Jewish families.

It is really up to the devotees to take further steps toward embracing Hinduism. The swamis, respecting their acceptance of the basic Hindu beliefs of karma, reincarnation, dharma and all-pervasive Divinity, have

given them each a Hindu "ashram" name. They have done their part. Next the devotees must, if they are really sincere in embracing the path which the swami privately practices, complete their severance, have their name made legal and enter the Hindu religion formally through the traditional *namakarana samskara*. Then they will have the fullness of our religion in all its increments and will raise their children in the beliefs and with the sacraments of their chosen sect within the multi-faceted religion called Hinduism.

**Devotee:** *Does all the responsibility fall on the devotees?*

**Gurudeva:** The situation in the West has been building since the 1920s, when Hindu monks began attracting congregations in America and other Western countries. As we have said in the past, they as a rule have disguised their Hinduness. We might say this was done to avoid overstepping the ethical bounds of religious propriety. Sincerely they sought to spread the universal message of Hinduism without drawing anyone away from their root religion. But they, too, have learned, especially as Hinduism has grown up in the West with the coming of thousands of Hindu immigrants, that their teachings have had a powerful impact. Many hundreds of devotees are betwixt and between -- no longer good Christians and not yet fully Hindus. The most potent catalysts of all are the children of these devotees, who for all intents and purposes are born Hindus, raised in the Hindu culture, beliefs and attitudes, which permeates the yoga, universalist presentation of so many swamis and gurus. It is up to the devotees to declare their religious loyalties -- if not for themselves, then for the sake of their children. They know this, and the swamis know this, too. For some, this is a difficult step, for there is subconscious conflict between the old impressions and beliefs and the new. The *sadhana* then, if they are to enter Hinduism fully, is to make the inner adjustments, to resolve the conflict. The swamis are there on the inside, ready to assist.

We feel most of the swamis are simply waiting for their devotees to take the next step, as they have given as much as they can without overstepping their protocol. One of the purposes of this book is to show devotees how this is possible. The priests, whose duty it is to perform this important rite of passage, are the final link to orthodoxy for these hundreds of sincere souls.

**Devotee:** *Is leaving one religion and entering another in any way objected to by government?*



**Gurudeva:** Not in the US, nor in most other countries which guarantee this right of personal religious choice, though some do restrict aggressive proselytization. This flow is well within the rights of citizens of the US. The founding fathers of this great country were anxious to not impose upon future generations the religious repressions they had suffered in Europe and, therefore, firmly established a personal freedom in religious matters that would allow members to come and go freely from one religion to another as they wished. Our nation explicitly provides for this freedom of religion in the Bill of Rights of the US Constitution.

**Devotee:** *Is severance a difficult process?*

**Gurudeva:** Withdrawing from one religion to enter another is not a difficult accomplishment. It is heart-breaking, of course, for a religious leader, a Catholic priest, Protestant minister, Jewish rabbi or Taoist master to realize his religion did not satisfy the needs of a member of the congregation while witnessing that member's severance and adoption of another religion such as the Hindu religion. Such dedicated religious leaders love their religion, as we do, and naturally feel personally hurt and perhaps helpless when one among their congregations seeks spiritual fulfillment elsewhere, especially if he holds to the belief that his is the only true religion. Outside of such personal matters, which are understandable, the laws of apostasy within all the religions of the world are clear and lenient. There may be challenges and difficulties involved in conversion, but these are generally due to the lack of understanding of the priest, minister, rabbi, family, friends or the individual himself.

**Devotee:** *What are the keys to successfully severing former ties before entering a one's chosen religion?*

**Gurudeva:** Severance is an individual affair, to be handled in a personal way between the individual and his religious leaders, family and closest friends. Once he has convinced those individuals that, indeed, he is a Hindu because of belief, practice and community, he will have fully convinced his own subconscious mind, the great impressionable computer within him, that this, in fact, is actually true. It is not at all necessary for family, friends and religious leaders to accept the principles and practices of Hinduism or even to understand them for this process to work. But it is necessary that the matter not be kept secret from them, especially before the full and formal conversion takes place.

For a full severance to happen, a certain emotional exchange has to occur among the people involved, and in some cases there may be quite a number of people involved. Therefore, a severance certainly cannot be accomplished by mail order or as a mere transfer of paperwork, where one is written off the register of one religion and added onto the membership rolls of another. It is not a procedure consummated by a clerk who adjusts the files and the mailing list simply because he has been asked to have a name removed. Such a severance cannot be taken seriously. The subconscious mind of the individual is convinced only through the experience of speaking with family, friends and former religious counsel. True severance is an inner matter; it is subconscious. It is not an organizational adjustment or mailing-list manipulation, which could then be readjusted in a year if the person changed his mind. For a severance to be true, strong and lasting, the process must make a strong, indelible impression within the subconscious mind of the religious leader -- or his successor on the same physical premises where the devotee experienced the former religion and had its beliefs set into place in his mind.

Belief is another important aspect of severance. The individual must understand fully the beliefs that he was brought up with and compare them, one by one, to those of the new religion he wishes to join. Just prior to announcing to anyone his intent to enter Hinduism, the individual should participate for a short while, a day or two or more, in the religious services of his former religion. Then he should go to his minister or priest and explain that he now wishes to enter the Hindu religion. In this way he will update the subconscious mind and settle the minds of those who consider themselves his religious counselors, rather than just sneaking away, drifting away, from his former religion.

**Devotee:** *What can be the results if a full severance is not made and the person just drifts away?*

**Gurudeva:** If only a drifting away occurs, only half a severance is attained. The half-committed person may later drift on again into still another religion, or back into the one that he left, still dissatisfied. Drifting from one religious group to another, with no break in continuity for subconscious cleansing of the impressions which produced deep commitment, is much like the wandering nomad might who drifts from nation to nation, never becoming a citizen of any, never taking on the duties and responsibilities of any one community. Such indecisive devotees are like the perpetual tourist

who, never satisfied, wanders from one place to the next.

This important protocol described above disallows the tendency of drifting away from one religion into another. Of course, many people do drift from one to another. We see this happening all of the time. It is easy to accept the new religion on blind faith, but without making a real commitment. This may be because, in some cases, it's too much of an effort or embarrassment to go back and face up to their former religious leaders, family and friends. It is, however, ethical and courteous to let them know that this very important, life-changing event is moving within them and about to occur. In the process of severance and adoption, there has to be a time when the devotee is in a limbo state, no longer holding the beliefs of the former religion and not yet fully accepted into Hinduism. This in-between state has to exist, if only briefly. Otherwise, nothing has happened subconsciously. An emptiness in the pit of the stomach should be felt for a time.

**Devotee:** *If someone had no previous religion, would there be no severance necessary before entering Hinduism?*

**Gurudeva:** Besides the great religions, there are other areas of belief to sever from as well, such as existentialism or the beliefs of the drug culture, communism, secular humanism. Severance from each one of these vast and powerful streams of thought should be taken as seriously as from a major religion. If the severance is not complete, right down to the most obscure belief, the individual may subconsciously try to adjust Hinduism to his own ideas, and this could be very frustrating to him. Each potential Hindu should study carefully all the beliefs within these other areas that have been impressed, knowingly or unknowingly, into his subconscious mind through the years. He must reject each one that does not concur with the beliefs of Hinduism. Only in this soul-searching will a true and successful preparation have occurred.

We want to stress once again that unless all alien beliefs are consciously rejected, unless former spiritual leaders, family and close friends are informed, and unless there is a definite break in continuity of leaving former religions or non-Hindu ways of thought before entering Hinduism, the purification and preparation process will not have been fully complete. Only by making this process as complete as possible can the new adoptive settle down as a full-fledged member of the Hindu community.

**Devotee:** *Do Hindus actively proselytize for converts?*

**Gurudeva:** No. Even though we are in the midst of strongly proselytizing faiths, Hindus do not actively proselytize among the members of other religions. We are over a billion strong and outnumber ourselves daily through the birth rate. However, we do welcome newcomers into the Hindu fold if they come knowingly and of their own volition. Hindu adoptives are expected to immerse themselves in philosophy, in temple worship, in protocol and earn their acceptance within the Hindu community.

We Hindus have always heartily recommended our philosophy to souls of other religions but have never overtly sought to dissuade them from their own religion. Yet, Hinduism has always proven itself to be the permanent home for the pilgrims who have knowledgeably sought it out, studied it and then lived its grand principles, performed the *sadhana* and entered the community. For the eternal truths of Hinduism are for the peoples of the world. They are the heritage of all humanity.