

Thoreau Woods UU Church – Worship Service *The Divine in All of Us – Namaste!* March 6, 2011

Prelude

Chalice Lighting

We light this candle
For the light of truth and reason
For the warmth of love and friendship
For the flame of strength and action
And for the vision of tolerance and justice.

Opening Hymn

Please join me standing as you are able in our opening hymn No. 1059 and hymn of the month “May Your Life be as a Song”

Announcements

John Pepper

Visitors, Welcome! We are happy to have you here. (Pause)

If you would like, please sign our guest book on the table in the entryway and give your address or email if you want to receive our newsletter. If you would like to become a member, please pick up one of our application forms also located on the table and put it in the offering plate or look it over and turn it in when you feel ready.

Next week our speaker will be our own Matt Jackson and his talk’s title will be “Superheroes: A Modern Pantheon.” Please join us; I’m sure it will be fascinating.

Be sure and come the next week as well since the Tim and Bob Show will be back with their service titled “A Joyful Noise.”

Our special collection this month is for ...Are there any other announcements from the floor?

Opening Words

John Pepper

Look to this day!

For it is life, the very life of life.

In its brief course lie all the verities and realities of your existence:

The bliss of growth,

The glory of action,

The splendor of beauty;

For yesterday is but a dream, and tomorrow is only a vision; but today, well lived, makes every yesterday a dream of happiness and every tomorrow a vision of hope.

Look well, therefore, to this day.

Hymn

John Pepper

Please join me standing as you are able singing hymn No. 185 “Your Mercy, Oh Eternal One.”

Joys and Concerns

John Pepper

As an expression of our connectedness and community, you are invited to come forward and share a joy, sorrow or concern as you light a candle. Or you may choose to light a candle without comment. Visitors, you are also encouraged to participate.

Please form a line to my left.

(Pause)

I will light one final candle for all those joys and concerns left unsaid.

Offertory Statement

Offertory Music

Story for All Ages – “The Divine Spark” by Randy Hammer

Responsive Reading No. 611 “Brahman”

I am the Self that dwells in the heart of every mortal creature:

I am the beginning, the life span, and the end of all.

I am the radiant sun among the light-givers:

I am the mind:

I am consciousness in the living.

I am death that snatched all;

I, also, am the source of that shall be born.

I am time without end:

I am the sustainer: my face is everywhere.

I am the beginning, the middle, and the end in creation:

I am the knowledge of things spiritual.

I am glory, prosperity, beautiful speech, memory, intelligence, steadfastness, and forgiveness.

I am the divine seed of all lives. In this world nothing animate or inanimate exists without me.

I am the strength of the strong;

I am the purity of the good.

I am the knowledge of the knower.

There is no limit to my divine manifestations.

Whatever in this world is powerful, beautiful, or glorious, that you may know to have come forth from a fraction of my power and glory.

Bhagavad-Gita

Readings

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Who is Man?*

Awe is an intuition for the dignity of all things, a realization that things not only are what they are but also stand, however, remotely, for something supreme.

Awe is a sense for the transcendence, for the reference everywhere to mystery beyond all things. It enables us to perceive in the world intimations of the divine, ... to sense the ultimate in the common and the simple; to feel in the rush of the passing the stillness of the eternal. What we cannot comprehend by analysis, we become aware of in awe.

The Mother, *The Life Divine, The Mother's Talks*

As soon as one is convinced that there is a living and real Truth seeking to express itself in an objective universe, the only thing that seems to have any importance or value is to come into contact with this Truth, to identify oneself with it as perfectly as possible, and to no longer be anything but a means of expressing it, making it more and more living and tangible so that it may be manifested more and more perfectly.

All theories, all principles, all methods are more or less good according to their capacity to express that Truth; and as one goes forward on this path, if one goes beyond all the limits of Ignorance, one becomes aware that the *totality* of this manifestation, its wholeness, its totality is necessary for the expression of that Truth, that *nothing* can be left out, and perhaps that there is nothing more important or less important. The one thing that seems necessary is a harmonization of everything which puts each thing in its place, in its true relation with all the rest, so that the total Unity may manifest harmoniously.

If one comes down from this level, according to me one no longer understands anything and all arguments are of equal worth in the narrowness and limitation which take away all their real value.

Each thing in its place, in harmony with all the rest, and then one can begin to understand and to live.

And lastly from Swami Muktananda, *Play of Consciousness*

This world is a perfect reflection of God. The Vedantic teaching: "All this is indeed the Absolute" – is the ultimate truth. Everything is God. All countries, all holy places, all names are God's.

Only in the eyes of men are there differences of high and low. Truly, all the regions of this earth are holy places of the Lord. All bodies of water are holy rivers of God. All the shapes and forms of the world contain the very sound of God's name. Endless is the glory, endless are the names, endless is the sport of the Infinite.

There is no end to God. However much you read, there is something left to study. However many holy places you visit, there are still more left to see. However far you see, there is always more ahead.

Such is the pervasiveness of the divine principle, the divine vastness; more divine than the divine is His glory.

Prayer

John Pepper

Please join me now in a time of quiet reflection. Close your eyes, look out the window, center yourself in whatever way feels right for you. (Pause)

Meister Eckhart shared with us the following:

If I spent enough time with the tiniest creature – even a caterpillar – I would never have to prepare a sermon. So full of God is every creature.

(Pause)

Amen and Namaste!

The Little Book of Prayers, p184

Sermon – *The Divine in All of Us – Namaste!*

If you were to live in my home you would have to like the TV channels Animal Planet and National Geographic. I guess I'm lucky that I like them – because we watch them a lot. Recently we watched a show about rebel monkeys in Jaipur, India. Since monkeys are viewed as sacred in much of the Indian culture, they are allowed to roam free. Of course they cause a great deal of havoc and the program mostly showed amusing and entertaining havoc.

The monkeys as a species are very territorial and tribal and in this one particular episode, one tribe was trying to take over another tribe's territory. Just as an attack was about to be launched, the lead monkey was doused with color. It looked like chalk dust but it was a brilliant orange. At first I thought it was something to control the monkeys, but the color, the chalk dust, had nothing to do with the monkeys. They had simply been caught up in one of the many Hindu festivals celebrated annually all across India.

This particular festival is known as Holi, the Hindu Festival of Colors and it will be celebrated this year on the 19th of this month.

As with most religions, over time religious holidays evolve and some believe Holi was originally an agricultural festival celebrating the arrival of spring. One author describes it as “probably the least religious of Hindu holidays. During Holi, Hindus attend a public bonfire, spray friends and family with colored powders and water, and generally go a bit wild in the streets. .. Holi is a time when man and nature alike throw off the gloom of winter and rejoice in the colors and liveliness of spring.”¹[1]

Another legend says that, “The festival of Holi is also associated with the enduring love between Lord Krishna (an incarnation of Vishnu) and Radha. According to legend, the young Krishna complained to his mother about why Radha was so fair and he so dark. His mother advised him to apply color on Radha's

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<http://www.religionfacts.com/hinduism/holi/day/hosts/holdings.html>

face and see how her complexion would change. ... Krishna's followers everywhere find special meaning in the joyous festival, as general frivolity is considered to be in imitation of Krishna's play."²[2]

So for many Hindus, Holi is a religious holiday honoring the Lord Krishna. Our Responsive Reading this morning was from the Bhagavad Gita, the primary scripture of Krishna.

Moving on to another religious festival, just this last week, on the 2nd of March, Hindus celebrated a religious holiday in honor of Lord Shiva called Maha Shivaratri. For Hindus, Shiva is the "God of Creation and Destruction, a perfect blend of all opposites; considered by many Hindus to be the supreme deity."³[3]

"It was on Shivaratri that Lord Shiva manifested himself ... for the first time. Since then, the day is considered to be extremely auspicious by the devotees of Shiva and they celebrate it as Maha Shivaratri – the grand night of Shiva. ... Worshippers dutifully follow all the traditions and customs related to Shivaratri festival, as they believe that sincere worship of Lord Shiva releases a person of his sins and also liberates him from the cycle of birth and death.

As Shiva is regarded as the ideal husband, unmarried women pray for a husband like Him. On the other hand, married women pray for the well being of their husbands on this auspicious day."⁴[4]

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We could spend the entire day or even the entire year talking about Hindu religious festivals because there are thousands, but we won't. Instead first let's talk a little about Hindu origins.

“No Hindu word corresponds exactly to the term ‘religion, and whoever or whatever should be considered responsible for ‘inventing Hinduism’ is a matter of ongoing debate. Nevertheless most scholars continue to use the word ‘Hinduism’ as a general term to denote a constellation of South Asian religious thought and activity that includes an incredible variety of expression and may range from simple beliefs of uneducated folk through elaborate rituals of a priestly intelligentsia to the transcendent meditations of an accomplished mystic. ...

What we call ‘Hinduism’ is an interpretation of the currently available record of the multifaceted ways in which hundreds of millions of human beings in the subcontinent of India, from ancient times to the present, have shaped their lives. In short, Hinduism like Americanism is a term that has been made to carry a variety of different meanings that range from the loftiest ideals to the lowest forms of behavior.

Hinduism, is not unique, but it is unusual among the world's major religions in having neither an identified founder nor a single defining creed, neither a central authority nor a fixed pantheon, neither a universally accepted scripture nor a seamless system of beliefs.

Since neither the Muslim nor Christian model of religion fits it, modern scholars repeatedly comment on the difference of Hinduism. Many Christians and many Muslims have come to believe that there is one true Christianity and one true Islam. Hindus, on the other hand, have gloried in diversity. One of their basic

persistent affirmations has been that there are as many aspects of the truth as there are persons to perceive it.”⁵[\[5\]](#)

“As for the origin of the term, the earliest use of ‘Hindu’ according to the best evidence currently available was in about 500 BCE as the Persian equivalent for the Sanskrit word ‘Sindhu.’ Sindhu was the ancient name for a major river but also came to denote the people who lived on or beyond the Sindhu River as well as the region itself. ... The names of India and the Indus River are derived from these words.

In the late 1700s British writers began to use the terms ‘Hindu’ to refer to people in North India and ‘Hinduism’ to denote the religious beliefs, rituals, cultural values, and social institutions given shape by the high-caste Brahmins. More recently the term ‘Hinduism’ has been appropriated by the majority of people in India itself,

first as part of an attempt to establish an independent national identity in opposition to the British colonial empire and currently as an expression of religious and cultural self-understanding.⁶[\[6\]](#)

“Hinduism, alone of all the major religions in the world, there is no one right way. Hinduism is a religion of individuality. Many Hindus start their day praying while standing in water. Others pour water from vessels as the sun rises. Some may choose to worship at sunset, or at any other time. And not everyone worships the same deities. But virtually all Hindus believe that the Absolute is the pure blend of opposites, neither masculine nor feminine. The focus and means of worship are many, but the process has a common thread.

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It acknowledges one of the fundamental principles of Hinduism: God is a universal force, indivisible and yet infinitely divisible, the one and the many, the perfect mixture of all facets of existence.”7[7]

Just as there are far too many Hindu religious festivals to explore, there are also too many religious concepts to explore as well. So we’ll explore just a few. One is a term we hear often, even though we may not know what it means, and another is probably totally unfamiliar.

Dharma is the first and “Traditionally, ...the meaning of the term includes such ideas as ‘truth,’ ‘ethics,’ ‘duty,’ ‘law,’ ‘cosmic order,’ and ‘righteousness.’ Literally, dharma is ‘what holds (everything) together,’ and thus it is the basis of all order, whether natural, cosmic, social, or moral. It is the power that makes things what they are. This idea contains the implication that what a Hindu does is more important than what a Hindu believes.” ... “Dharma specifies a variety of ways of being, spiritual paths, and worldviews, each of which is in itself a valid way to foster the eventual fulfillment of an appropriately human religious destiny.”8[8]

Destiny relates to the second concept. “In order for an individual to fulfill his or her destiny it is necessary to preserve, perpetuate, and refine the physical world (uphold dharma) and to achieve liberation or an ultimate freedom from bondage, achieve *moksa*, is central to Hinduism. Hindu teachings seek to harmonize these two demands. They complete one with another yet are in tension with one another. Human beings are governed by physical needs and are social animals who seek to live in harmony with other beings, and yet they are spiritual souls who are destined at some point to transcend all physical and social limitations.

A spiritual orientation is a natural consequence of the Hindu worldview, which assumes that the sacred is a given, immanent in the universe. Because of this, every action, person, place, or thing, whether ostensibly secular or sacred, has religious implications. Dharma provides a temporal perspective, while moksa provides an eternal solution.”9[9]

“Counterbalancing an individual’s temporal social obligations – dharma, is his or her eternal destiny or liberation – moksa. According to a Hindu worldview, the universe, society, and all things within it are temporal, and one day or another will pass away. Thus to seek eternity in the finite is doomed to failure from the start. It is a given in most sub-traditions within Hinduism that every individual is, in some sense or other, a part of the divine.”10[10]

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It is from this belief, this worldview, that the phrase ‘Namaste’ comes from. Namaste is a form of greeting and it simply means, the divine or good in me greets the divine or good in you. It is an acknowledgment that we are all one, we are all a part of an infinite universe, and we are all a part of the interdependent web of existence.

One way individuals incorporate many of these beliefs into their lives is through rituals. “The primary purpose of most Hindu rituals is to bring balance and welfare to the family. Indian society is focused on the home, and the heart of every Hindu home is its shrine: the sacred space delineated for honoring and worshipping the Gods. ... Their rituals are complex, but the essence is simple. They embrace the one and the many: a transcendent Absolute God and innumerable Gods and Goddesses.

Hinduism is a religion of ultimate individuality and personal choice. Both good and evil are believed to be of God, and the purpose of most rituals is to maintain a balance between such opposites: creation and destruction, light and dark, masculine and feminine. For the Hindu, as every aspect of existence has a purpose, human meaning involves a fundamental sense of duty and of conscientious accountability. All individuals are considered part of the greater whole, which functions well only when each person fulfills his or her obligations.”¹¹[11]

Life for the Hindu people is in reality no different from our own lives. They celebrate new births, marriages, and deaths just to name a few.

They celebrate the same life transitions that we do, only in culturally different ways. One common purpose of most religions is to bring meaning and purpose to these events, these transitions, and in the process they become religious traditions.

Within the ordinary lives of most people who practice some form of Hinduism, there are many celebrations or rites, also known as *samskāra*. These traditions include some form of ritual for births, marriages and deaths. In a traditional Hindu family, the practices leading up to and including the birth of the child mark a very sacred time in the life of the family. The practices actually begin shortly after the wedding on the fourth night that is supposed to be a rite of impregnation. One famous wedding hymn claims the bride is the earth and the groom is heaven where the groom is viewed as the provider of seed for the woman’s fertile earth.

Shortly after the actual birth and before the umbilical cord is cut, the father participates in a *samskara* designed to promote wisdom in the child by touching the baby’s lips with a mixture of honey, curds, and clarified butter all on a golden spoon. The second part of the *samskara* includes saying a mantra invoking a desire for long life. After the cord is cut, the parents often give the baby a secret name known only to them.

In another *samskara* ten or twelve days later, and in some places even as much as a year later, the newborn is given his or her everyday name. The public name is supposed to serve as a distraction for the real name

us protecting the baby from the “evil eye” or other dangerous elements.¹²[\[12\]](#) These and others birth

rituals serve as sacred reminders for the child and the family of a lifetime full of religious rituals to follow.

The wedding rituals practiced in the Hindu faith have evolved over the centuries and probably originated from hymns found in the sacred scriptures, the Rg-Veda. These hymns indicate that marriage was considered sacred forming a spiritual union between the couple using the magic of the mantras. 13[13] Texts from the Vedic ages break down the actions into selecting the auspicious day and the actual wedding

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details. The wedding is further described by its sacred components including walking around the sacred fire, releasing the bride from the father's home, carrying the bride to her new home, welcoming the bride to her new home, invocations of the gods for progeny, wealth and happiness, and

the actual consummation of the wedding vows.¹⁴^[14] These rituals evolved over time through the different religious schools of thought, into a variety of rituals and mantras according to the different customs followed by the different people practicing their own versions of the Hindu faith in their regions of the country and around the world.¹⁵^[15]

In Hindu society today, many of the marriage arrangements are the responsibility of the parents, taking many months to finalize. The modern Hindu marriage can be divided into three components – the betrothal, the marriage, and the consummation. Some of the common features include offerings made to a sacred fire and the couple is joined together by tying their garments together and circling the sacred fire a prescribed number of times. In addition, the groom applies the *bindior* to the center of the bride's forehead and hangs a gold pendant around her neck, which symbolizes the marriage itself. Once the gold pendant, also known as the *mangalustra*, is tied around her neck the marriage is considered irrevocable.

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At the end of the day, after night has fallen, the couple goes outside and views the pole star, which is seen as an emblem of stability and loyalty. 16[16]

And the last life ritual I'll share with you revolves around the death of a loved one. Hindu death rituals generally involve cremation, except for children and others who have not been ritually purified or who no longer need the purification offered by the fire, such as for ascetics and others who have renounced all earthly concerns. Typically the eldest son performs the rituals, which involves drawing three lines and invoking the lords of cremation and death. He also places sesame seeds into the deceased's mouth and the body is placed on a funeral pyre and lighted by the son. After the completion of the ceremonies, the

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individual has transitioned through all of the various stages of life and becomes a complete or perfected human being. 17[17]

The Hindu faith is indeed as varied as the people who practice it. Our own beliefs echo many of theirs. They believe in the individual's right to a free and responsible search for truth and meaning.

This manifests in the countless deities they revere and each person's right to follow the deity or deities that resonate with him or her.

And they believe that the whole world is a manifestation of the ultimate source of all of life and thus they respect the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

Their faith and their traditions simply remind us we are all one in this small world we call home.

Namaste!

Sermon Response

Closing Hymn

Please join me standing as you are able singing our final Hymn, No. 183 "The Wind of Change Forever Blown" and remain standing for our Benediction.

Benediction

John Pepper

Let there be peace in the sky and in the atmosphere, peace in the plant world and in the forests;

Let the cosmic powers be peaceful; let Brahma be peaceful;

Let there be undiluted and fulfilling peace everywhere.

Singing the Living Tradition, No. 511, Atharva Veda

Extinguish the Chalice

Postlude