

# *Jnana, Dharma and Bhakti*

The Hindu Way of Life and  
Three Paths to *Moksha*



# Hindu way of life

- ◆ Three paths to moksha:
  1. The path of knowledge (*jnana-marga*, *jnana yoga*)
  2. The path of action (*karma-marga*, *karma yoga*)
  3. The path of devotion (*bhakti-marga*, *bhakti yoga*)
- ◆ Three ways to lose oneself, to let go of one's self-centered desires.



# The Path of Knowledge

- ◆ Gain the profound wisdom and deep spiritual insight that I am Brahman.
- ◆ See beyond one's individual existence; feel beyond one's consciousness.
- ◆ Expand one's consciousness to encompass all.
- ◆ Be one with all that is.
- ◆ Lose oneself in the ocean of life.



# The Liberating Knowledge

“But if I know that my true self is indeed the Brahman, and that the Brahman includes within itself the entire universe, then there is nothing for me to desire for my “self,” for I already am all. ... Since this knowledge destroys all desires and thus all karma, there will be no more rebirths once this knowledge is fully and completely realized.”

— *The Sacred Path of the East*



# Desires Arise from Separation

- ◆ If we see ourselves as individuals, then we separate ourselves from everything else.
- ◆ Such a separation generates desires to acquire things that are not us.
- ◆ No separation, no desire



# Know Who You Are

- ◆ To know who we truly are, we need to break the shell of our egos.
- ◆ To go beyond our egotistic consciousness, we need to feel what others feel.
- ◆ To know Brahman, one would have to transcend the world of the senses, live a very simple life, and practice yoga and meditation.



# The Four Stages of Life

1. the student stage (age 8 – 24)
2. the householder stage (married at age 25 – having a son who can take over the responsibilities)
3. the recluse (forest dweller) stage
4. the *sannyasin* (renunciant, ascetic) stage
  - ❖ Leaving one's family behind.
  - ❖ It is a step toward the expansion of one's love.
  - ❖ By becoming less attached to one's family, one can strive to love all.



# The Eight Stages of Yoga

1. restraint—moral training
2. discipline—ascetic and religious practices
3. posture
4. respiration
5. withdrawal from sense-objects
6. concentration
7. meditation
8. trance



# Yoga—a Path to Enlightenment

- ◆ Discipline—refraining from self-indulgence—is a key step toward spiritual awakening.
- ◆ Stop the noises from bombarding the senses so that we would no longer be lost in the parade of sights and sounds.
- ◆ Through yoga, a person realizes the difference between the state of *Brahman* and the individual mortals' mental and physical states.



# The Path of Action (*Karma Yoga*)

- ◆ Fulfilling one's dharma (responsibilities, the right way to live)
- ◆ By fulfilling one's responsibilities in life, one would become free spiritually—no longer be preoccupied with self-gain.
- ◆ One would strive to do the right things for the right reason, and lose oneself in one's service to others.



# *Bhagavad Gita*



Krishna (on the left) revealed himself to Prince Arjuna, and taught him the meaning of dharma—one's roles and duties in life.



# Krishna's Teachings

- ◆ Each one of us is Brahman, and thus is deathless, birthless. So there is no need to fear death and to feel sad about death.
- ◆ It is the duty of a warrior to fight battles for righteous causes.
- ◆ If one acts according to one's dharma and does not desire certain consequences, then one would be free from fear, worries and disappointments.



# *Dharma—Living as Brahman*

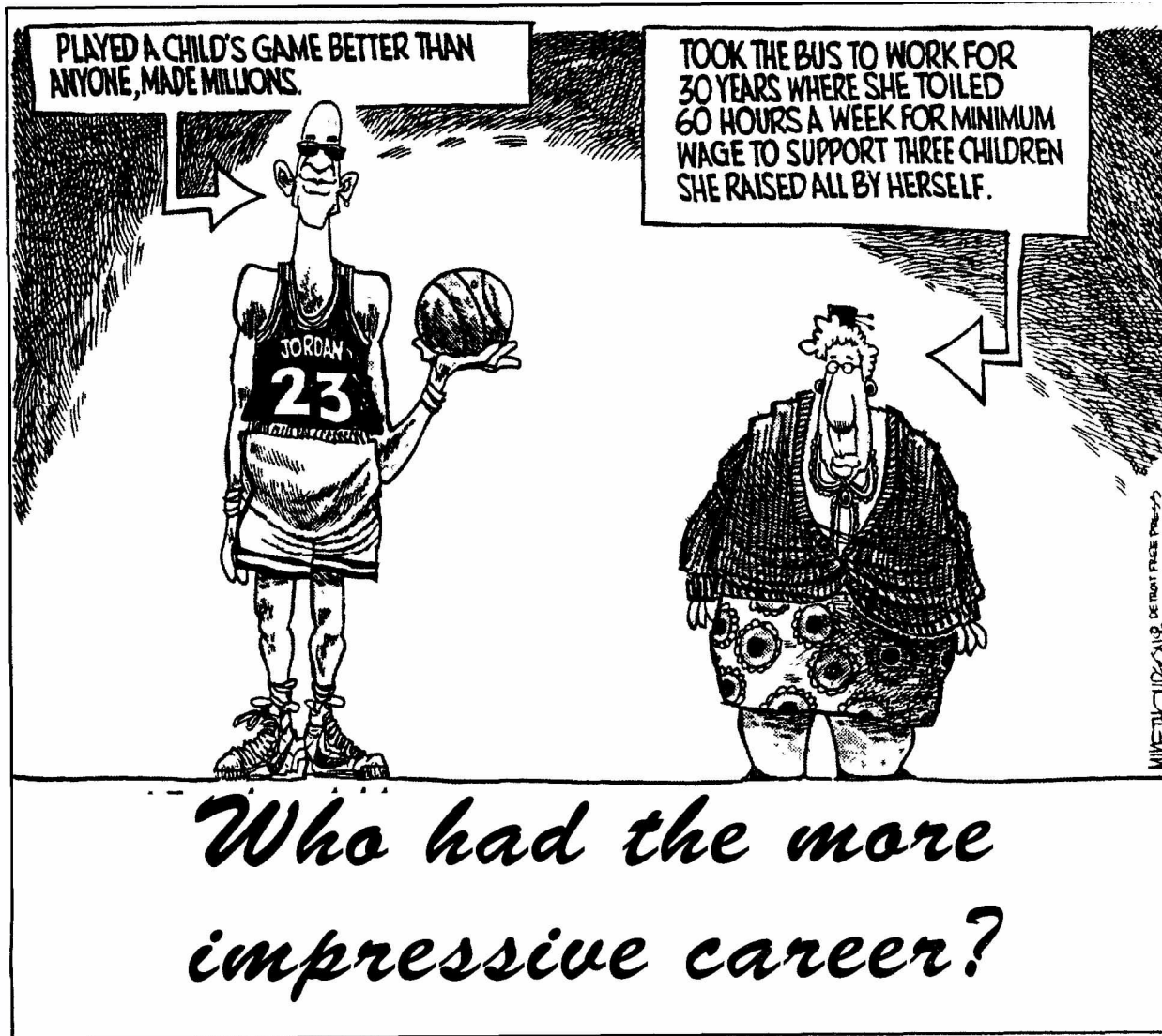
- ◆ Dharma is Brahman's way of being.
- ◆ It is to live and act like Brahman.
- ◆ It is to live without desires and attachment.
- ◆ To live without desires and attachment does not mean one no longer eats and drinks, cares and loves.
- ◆ Rather, it means that one eats, drinks, cares and loves out of the realization that it is one's responsibilities to do all of these, and not out of one's self-interest.



# *Dharma and Moksha*

- ◆ By living one's life according to dharma, one forgoes one's desires and one's selfhood and thus returns to the state of being Brahman.
- ◆ To achieve moksha by the way of action is to improve and finally redeem oneself through selfless service in the mundane routines of daily life. It is demanding, but it is a noble way of life.





# Winners or Losers?

- ◆ You work hard to achieve your goal. But what if your goal is not accomplished due to factors beyond your control?
- ◆ Anxiety? Fear?
- ◆ Disappointment? Bitterness?
- ◆ Asking a powerful deity to watch over you and to grant your wish is one way to cope with uncertainty in life.
- ◆ The Hindu teaching of dharma provides a different answer to this common question in life.



# It's How You Play the Game

- ◆ The meaning of one's action does not lie in its consequences.
- ◆ Each one of us has certain roles to play and certain duties to fulfill in life.
- ◆ The action one takes should be motivated by one's sense of duty, and not by one's desire for certain outcomes.
- ◆ If one can live this way, one can live a life free of disappointments.



# Not to Be Full of Oneself

- ◆ One can be successful without becoming full of oneself.
- ◆ One should fulfill one's duties and not be attached to the fruit of one's action. This does not mean that one should not enjoy the fruit of one's labor. You enjoy and share it, but are not attached to it.



# Free by Being Responsible

- ◆ Karma yoga teaches us that we can be free by fulfilling our responsibilities.
- ◆ One does not become free by avoiding one's responsibilities.
- ◆ Having rights to do what one desires is not true freedom. To do what we desire would make us the slave of our desires.
- ◆ Rather, freedom is to do what we ought to do in life.



# Ahimsa

- ◆ The *Mahabharata* says that *ahimsa* is the highest dharma.

“One should never do that to another which one regards as injurious to one’s own self. This, in brief, is the rule of dharma. Yielding to desire and acting differently, one becomes guilty of adharmā.”

— *Mahabharata* 18:113.8



# Vegetarianism

- ◆ Vegetarianism is a nature and obvious way to live with a minimum of hurt to other beings. Hindu scripture speaks clearly and forcefully on vegetarianism. The *Yajur Veda* dictates: “Do not injure the beings living on the Earth, in the air and in the water.”



# The Path of Devotion (*Bhakti Yoga*)

- ◆ One achieves spiritual liberation by devoting one's love to Hindu deities such as Shiva or Vishnu.
- ◆ By focusing one's love on the great Hindu deities and not on oneself, one would no longer be self-centered. Eventually one would lose one's selfhood and achieve liberation.



# How Can Love Set One Free?

- ◆ To love Shiva or Vishnu is to love Brahman; to love Brahman is to love all.
- ◆ If we love all, then our deeds would not be motivated by self-interest; rather we would do things for our loved ones.



# Love and Responsibilities

- ◆ If we realize that our duties in life come from love, then we would no longer see duties as works and burdens.
- ◆ To love is to sacrifice without regarding it as sacrifice.
- ◆ It is no surprise that *Bhagavad Gita* teaches both dharma and bhakti.



# Brahman and Hindu Deities

- ◆ According to Shankara, Hindu deities are Brahman in various forms (the formed Brahman, *saguna* Brahman)
- ◆ Shiva and Vishnu are different manifestations of Brahman. That is, they are Brahman appears to us in different forms.



“

For Saivites, God is Siva. For Shaktas, Goddess Shakti is supreme. For Vaishnavites, Lord Vishnu is God. For Smartas—who see all Deities as reflections of the One God—the choice of Deity is left to the devotee.”



“*Yoga* means to yoke oneself to God within. The image or icon of worship is a focus for our prayers and devotions.”

“Hindus believe God is everywhere, in all things, whether stone, wood, creatures or people. So, it is not surprising that they feel comfortable worshiping the Divine in His material manifestation.”



# Shiva

- ◆ the deity of creation and destruction
- ◆ the Auspicious One
- ◆ the Lingam
- ◆ Nataraja (the Lord of the Dance)
- ◆ the Master Yogi



# Nataraja—the Lord of Dance



- ◆ Shiva creates the cosmos out of “his” dance.
- ◆ The cosmos is Shiva’s dance—the divine expression.
- ◆ Creation is seen as an ongoing expression, and not in terms of design and manufacturing.





*Ardhanarishvara (Hermaphroditic Shiva), Tiruvangado, India, 11th century.*

## Androgynous Shiva



# Shiva and his consort Parvati



- ◆ Quite often, Hindu deities are depicted in pairs.
- ◆ Marriage—union of love
- ◆ The union of love is the closest thing that we can experience that lets us experience how it feels like to reach *moksha* (union).





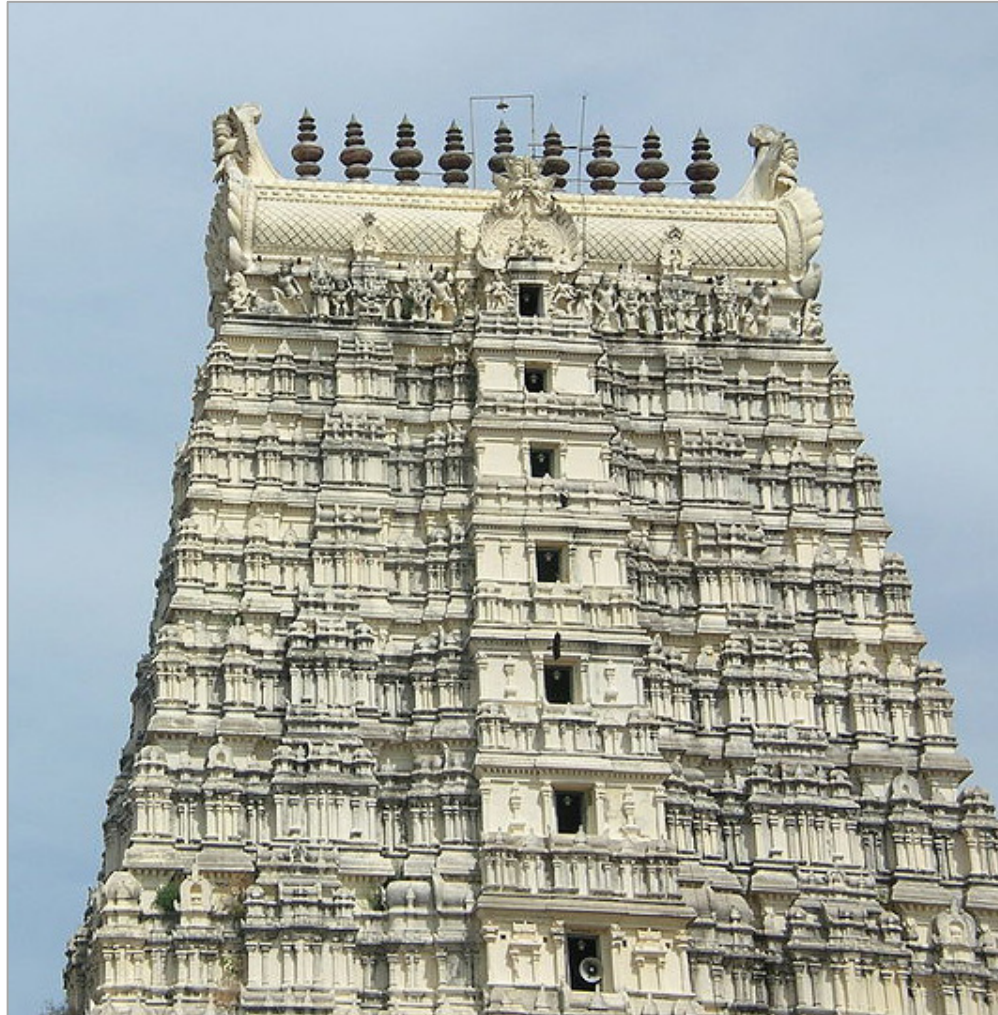
Brihadeeswara Temple Gateway





Brihadeeswara Temple Gopuram





Ramanathaswamy Temple Gopuram





Ramanathaswamy Temple  
(founded in the 12th century C.E.)



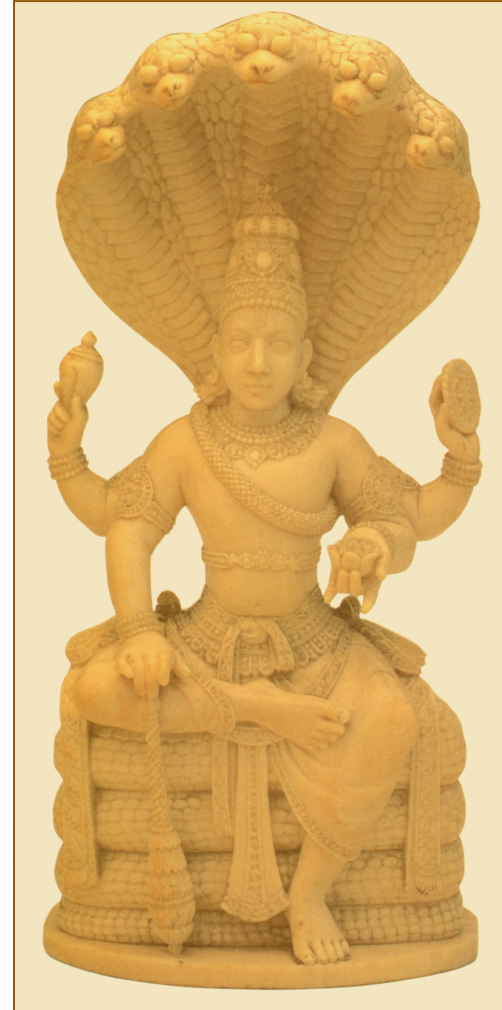


Virupaksha Temple Gopuram



# Vishnu

- ❖ the protector of the cosmos
- ❖ Vishnu sitting on the coils of Seshha, the many-headed serpent
- ❖ His four hands holding a conch shell, a lotus, a discus and a club





Vishnu and Lakshmi riding  
on the giant eagle Garuda



# Vishnu's Ten *Avatars*

- ◆ Vishnu is well-known as his ten *avatars*.
- ◆ Vishnu's avatars illustrate beautifully the idea of Brahman manifesting itself in the world of maya.
- ◆ An avatar is an incarnation of Brahman (God incarnated).
- ◆ The next picture shows Vishnu and his consort Lakshmi (the goddess of beauty and good fortune) surrounded by his ten avatars.



## Kurma the tortoise

Matsya  
the fish



Varaha  
the boar

Narasimha  
the man-lion

Vamana  
the dwarf

Parashurama  
the warrior

Rama

Krishna

Kalki — the  
future  
incarnation

the Buddha





Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple Gopuram





Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple Gopuram

