

Part1: Hinduism

1. SON: Honestly, can Hinduism stand grilling questions?

DADDY: Hinduism has no problem facing any type of questions. It does not have to hide behind unpronounceable Sanskrit words or spiritual dogmas. Instead, it absorbs new ideas like a sponge. Believe it or not, Hinduism recharges itself with modern technology. Psychology, Parapsychology, and Genetics enrich Hinduism. Within Hinduism, you can think and argue on any subject. You can make statements like, "THERE IS NO KRISHNA OR RAMA" and still be a Hindu. Hinduism gives everyone absolute freedom of thought and action. As you study Hinduism from one end to the other end, you will find it to be filled with all kinds of ideas. It has highly spiritualistic Advaita and Raja Yoga on one side and highly materialistic Tantras and Kama Sutra on the other. Its mythology is filled with all kinds of stories. On one side Advaita talks about Brahman (the infinite) alone and on the other side mythology talks about thousands of gods. It is a religion with unity in diversity. Picking subjects randomly from Hindu scriptures could confuse you. But if you sit down and study them all, you will be able to understand the truth behind all Hindu scriptures. Today there is quite a large number of books on Hinduism available, so even the knowledge of Sanskrit is not a MUST to understand the scriptures.

2. SON: Daddy, before you proceed, I want to ask you one very crucial question. Please don't get hurt. My question is, what authority do you have to talk about Hinduism.

DADDY: I am happy that you asked this question. Arjuna asked the same question to Lord Krishna, during the narration of the Bhagavad Gita. Krishna in an answer to Arjuna showed him his "Vishwa Roopa" and a stunned Arjuna saw the whole world revolving on the body of God. Arjuna got more than he had bargained for. Well, I cannot show you any such thing. You may laugh, but since even Arjuna asked that question to Lord Krishna, it is perfectly all right for you to ask me that same question. On my part, I can only say that I am a humble aspirant of truth like so many people. Of course I have read quite a number of books regarding Hinduism and other religions. My only intention is to lay out before you the history of Hinduism as well as the very salient points of Hinduism. After listening to my answers, you on your part should investigate the validity of my statements. At this juncture, let me quote one of the stanzas from a scripture, which a Guru told his disciple;

"NOBODY KNOWS WHAT IS RIGHT OR WHAT IS WRONG;
NOBODY KNOWS WHAT IS GOOD OR WHAT IS BAD;
THERE IS A DEITY RESIDING WITHIN YOU;
FIND IT OUT AND OBEY ITS COMMANDS."

That is my answer.

3. SON: Does Hinduism believe in conversion ?

DADDY: Not at all. A true Hindu never proselytizes. On the contrary, the Gita urges everyone to follow the religion in which he/she was born. A MAN IS BORN AS A HINDU, NEVER CONVERTED INTO HINDUISM.

4. SON: Is Hinduism tolerant to other religions ?

DADDY: In Hinduism, tolerance is not simply a matter of policy but an article of faith. Historians like H.G. Wells say that Hindu kings actually welcomed with open arms Christian missionaries and Muslim fakirs, and Buddhist monks for a free exchange of ideas. One great Hindu king, Asoka, in fact changed his religion to Buddhism and propagated Buddhism throughout India. One of the great apostles of Jesus Christ, St. Thomas, came all the way to Madras, India, and propagated Christianity and finally died at Mylapore, Madras. A TRUE HINDU NEVER CONDEMNES ANY TRUE RELIGION.

5. SON: Daddy, are Hindus allowed to study other religions ?

DADDY: Of course, my son. Hinduism not only allows, but actually encourages one to seek truths from all sources. Within hinduism, it strictly forbids comparison of different methods of God-realization for its individual merits, since all methods are true and all of them take devotees to God-realization. After studying Hinduism well, a Hindu should read and study all other true religious. Then he or she will be able to see Hinduism as the encyclopaedia of religions, fully grasping the greatness of Jesus Christ, the sacrificial nature of Sufi saints, and the importance of the Ten Commandments. If one knows Hinduism well, the Bible, Koran and Grantha Sahib (the Holy book of Sikhs) will be interesting to read.

6. SON: Daddy, is it possible to express "subtle truths" in simple language ?

DADDY: I have to answer 'NO' to your question. Hinduism started with Sruti, that which is heard. The Christ likes masters of those days called Rishis heard in their hearts "eternal truths" and they taught their disciples telepathically, by actual transfer of thoughts. Later they came out with languages like Sanskrit and Pali. For long periods of time, there were no written forms. The Vedas and the Upanishads were taught by chanting the lyrics.

We know that thought is the best medium of realising true knowledge, but since we cannot transfer thoughts, we express them in languages. Verbal languages is better than written language in expressing truths better than any other language. Right now we are using English, since it is spoken by a large majority of people and its vocabulary has developed abundantly. Again, we have mathematics and physics as aids to understand Truths today.

Again, understanding is something very personal.

For example $E = mc^2$ may be just a few letters of the alphabet for common folks, but for students of the science, they speak volumes. So eternal truths can be understood only if we evolve high enough to understand the truth. This is true of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and all other religions.

7. SON: Who is the founder of the Hinduism ?

DADDY: Nobody in particular. It is the research output of many learned men known as Rishis, all of whom were Christ like masters.

8. SON: When was Hinduism born ?

DADDY: An exact date cannot be given. Some historians trace the beginnings of Hinduism to the 3rd millennium B.C.

9. SON: How was Hinduism started?

DADDY: It started with Sruti. Sruti literally means "That which is heard". The great scientists of those days called Rishis who had perfected themselves by meditation are said to have heard in their hearts Eternal Truths and these truths were taught to their disciples telepathically. For long periods of time there was no literature on it. The Vedas and Upanishads were in Sruti form for a long period of time. Infact the word Upanishad means "Upa (near), Ni (down), Shad (sit)."

It means that the teachings of the Upanishads are conveyed from Guru to disciple, when the disciple sits very close to the Guru.

10. SON: What was the original name of Hinduism?

DADDY: Sanathana Dharma, meaning "Righteousness forever" was its original name. It was the Muslim invaders from the east who gave the name Hinduism. This word originated from the root word "INDUS". Some say that the word originated from a Persian word meaning "river People".

11. SON: What is the language in which Hindu scriptures are written ?

DADDY: Sanskrit. It is an ancient language like Latin.

12. SON: Is Hinduism confusing and contradictory ?

DADDY: Absolutely not. To a person who reads the Hindu scriptures haphazardly, Hinduism may seem to be somewhat confusing and contradictory. However, to someone who has researched the scriptures, Hinduism stands as an embodiment of truth. Since Hinduism is a slowly developed thought process, in it you can see the coexistence of primitive religion as well as a very advanced religion. Hinduism also allows literally hundreds of contradictory thoughts to coexist within it.

13. SON: Is Hinduism a religion like Christianity ?

DADDY: No. It is more a way of life than a specific religion. As I told you before, in Hinduism you can find all religions of the world. Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism emerged from Hinduism.

14. SON: Daddy, what is the most important aspect of Hinduism ?

DADDY: Since there are very many important aspect of Hinduism, it is very difficult to say that one aspect is better than the other. Still, personally I feel "Being Truthful to oneself" is the most important aspect of Hinduism.

15. SON: Which is easy, to become a believer or a non-believer ?

DADDY: To become a non-believer is quite easy. Just say, "I don't want to hear that; I don't believe in any-thing you say" and close your mind to truth and like an ostrich bury your head in heap of sand. To become a true believer one has to think and explore all realms of thought.

16. SON: Do you have to believe in Hinduism to study it ?

DADDY: Not at all. You can study Hinduism just like you study mathematics, physics or chemistry. You don't even have to believe in personal or impersonal God. Just have an open mind to look into different aspects and be ready to explore new realms of thought. That is all what is required from anyone who want to study Hinduism.

17. SON: Daddy, what attracts you to Hinduism ?

DADDY: "Utmost freedom of Thought" ... That is what attracts me to Hinduism. You can argue on any aspect of Hinduism and you don't have to accept anything until you are fully convinced about the truth behind it. Again Hinduism has no monopoly of ideas. Ideas are unwritten laws of the universe.

18. SON: What makes Hinduism really great ?

DADDY: Hinduism is a great banyan tree. On its "sakas"(limbs) one can see the principles of all the great religions of the world. The total surrender Yoga which Jesus Christ spoke of one can see in the Bhagavad Gita. The statement of the Sufis that "I am God" one can see in the Upanishads as "Aham Brahmasim." The statement of Lao-Tse that everything is Tao can be seen as "Everything is Brahman" in the Upanishads. In Hinduism alone one can see the strange coexistence of an atheist, an agnostic and a theist. When Socrates and the Sufis were persecuted in the West, in India we adored Buddha, who did not recognize the authority of the Vedas, and tolerated Charvaka, who ridiculed the Vedas and attacked the mere existence of God. So let us face it, in Hinduism one can find a religion tailor-made for each of us, whatever be our way of thinking.

Hinduism recognizes the fact that people are on different levels. Matters do not apply or appeal to all persons in the same manner. My mother could go into a trance just by looking at the picture of Lord Krishna. But for you and I, that is unimaginable. I could appreciate and admire Sanskrit lyrics in the Mahabharata, but for you that may be difficult. That is the reason why Hinduism, which is filled with hundreds of ideas, will appeal to all.

19. SON: Daddy, Is it a fact that many call Hinduism a personal religion ?

DADDY: It is indeed true. Hinduism, if at all someone wants to name it a religion with boundaries, is indeed a personal religion. Each Hindu prays and meditates alone. Bhajans are part of the modern trend in Hinduism. There is no word "pooja" in Vedic literature. Pooja is a part of the mythological scriptures of Hinduism. Great Rishis used to sit and pray for a common cause and then depart. This praying was known as "Yagna". According to Hinduism, each person's religion is unique. He/She is seeking within for all answers, so we have to conclude that Hinduism is a personal religion. A Guru can be a Raja Yogi and his disciple can be a Bhakti Yogi. Everyone follows a unique religion. That is the beauty of Hinduism.

Part 2: Hindu scriptures

1 SON: Daddy, what are the Hindu scriptures ?

DADDY: Son, the Hindu scriptures can be broadly classified into two groups. One is "Sruti" (that which is heard) literature and the other "Smriti" literature (that which is remembered). Both these groups are further divided.

2 SON: What are the foremost sacred books of Hinduism ?

DADDY: They are known as the Vedas, which mean knowledge. The four Vedas claim to teach a man the highest truths that can lead him to God. The first three Vedas are known as the Triple Veda. It is indeed true.

1. Rig Veda --- 1028 hymns (10 books) to gods like Indra and Agni
2. Yajur Veda--- Knowledge of rites
3. Sama Veda -- Knowledge of chants (Sama means Melody)
4. Atharva Veda - Knowledge given by st. Atharvana

3 SON: What do the Vedas consist of ?

DADDY: The Veda consist mainly of

1. Samhitas -- basic texts -- hymns, formulas and chants
2. Brahmanas --- directions for performance of rituals
3. Aranyakas -- contain Mantras and interpretations of rituals
4. Upanishads -- A number of texts revealing the ultimate spiritual truths and suggestions of ways to realise them. The word "Upanishad" is composed of "Upa" (near), "Ni" (down) and "Shad" (to sit). An Upanishad is a teaching given by a Guru to his disciple, when the disciple sits very close to him, so that the teaching will not be overheard.

4 SON: How many Upanishads are there ?

DADDY: There are more than 108 books of the Upanishads.

5 SON: Please tell me, who were the first law-givers of Hinduism ?

DADDY: They were Sages Manu, Yajnavalkya, Parasara and Gautama.

6 SON: What is the name of their Code Books ?

DADDY: Their code books are known as Dharma Sutras.

7 SON: What do Dharma Sutras consist of ?

DADDY: Dharma Sutras are a part of Vedangas. They give elaborate details on rules of conduct and duties of men in different stages of life and the rights and duties of kings. They also deal with religious matters such as purification rites and funeral ceremonies. They even deal with rights and duties of women and judicial matters. They also describe penances for various sins. The most important Dharma Sutra is the Manu Smriti or the Code of Manu written by Sage Manu. It has 2694 stanzas running into 12 chapters.

The next important Dharma Sutra is the yajnavalkya Smriti written by Sage Yajnavalkya. It has 1013 stanzas. Another important Dharmas Sutra is Gautama Smriti written by Saint Gautama. The Code of Manu is still very popular among Hindus. The Dharma Sutras exercise everlasting influence on Hinduism. It is the backbone of the Hindu ethics and morality. Of course much of the daily rituals described in the Dharmas Sutras are not practised today. But orthodox members of the Brahmin caste still observe the five daily Dharmas known as "Pancha Maha Yajnas".

8 SON: What is Panchatantra (five books) ?

DADDY: It is a collection of 87 stories told by a priest to a few dull princes to teach them about worldly affairs.

9 SON: Daddy, what is "Artha Shastra" ?

DADDY: The "Artha Shastra" is a code of ethics for kings written by Kautilya. Apart from ruling the country properly, this book also teaches how to conduct an efficient system of espionage. It also teaches methods of torturing the enemy.

10 SON: Do the laws in Hinduism change from time to time ?

DADDY: Yes, of course. The Rishis who guided Hinduism from one age to another made all changes as per the need of the time.

11 SON: So does Hinduism allow the introduction of new laws?

DADDY: It allows not only the introduction of new laws but also the production of new scriptures. Now Hindu society has grown very big and unfortunately, son, most Hindus only know the mythological books and a few lines from the Bhagavad Gita.

12 SON: Does that mean Hinduism is a dead religion ?

DADDY: Not at all. Since we do not know most of the scriptures, it does not mean that we are ignorant of the ideals and codes of Hinduism. Most Hindus practise Hinduism in their day-to-day life. Their family, social and professional lives are reflections of their practice of Hinduism, knowingly or unknowingly. Since we follow the Hindu code of ethics, we have less stress and strain in life.

I know son, you are very eager to ask me specific questions but let us go through the history and development of Hinduism first.

13 SON: Daddy, I know you are very much interested in Adi Sankaracharya. I wish to know more about him.

DADDY: Yes, my son. I have a hero-worship towards Sankaracharya. He is the founder of Advaita philosophy. He was a saint with Christ-like powers, but still he is well known for his philosophical approach of interpreting Vedas. He was a versatile genius who made his marks on every aspect of Hinduism. He performed his mother's funeral rites and composed several poems and prayers to gods and goddesses. Still he spoke of Brahman alone. Swami Chinmayananda often says, "Sankara starts where Einstein ends." Such was the knowledge of Sankaracharya. He was born at Kaladi about six miles from Alwaye in the State of Kerala. By the age of eight, he had mastered all four Vedas and by the age of 12 he was well-versed with all Hindu scriptures. By the age of 16, he had completed writing many important books and at the age of 32, he departed from the world. According to western historians, Sankaracharya lived between 788 to 820 A.D. It is said that when he was 8 years old he went to North India and became a disciple of Govinda Bhagavadpada, who was a disciple of Gaudapada. Later Sankara went to Benaras and there Padmapada, Hastamalaka and Totaka became his disciples. According to some, the last days of Sankara were spent in Kanchi, where he departed from his body. According to some Sankara never died. He just departed from sight. Saivaites believe that Sankaracharya is an Avatar of Lord Siva. During his short sojourn on earth, Sankaracharya wrote many books. He wrote commentaries on Bhagavad Gita Upanishads, Brahma Sutras and Vishnu Sahasranama. He wrote two independent manuals "Upadesasahasri" and "Vivekachoodamani". He also wrote books like "Atma Bodham" and "Bhaja Govindam". Of all the devotional poems he wrote, Saundarya Lahari is the best. He also established four monasteries in different corners of India which are known as Sankaramaths. They are at Sringeri(Mysore), Badrinath (Himalayas), Dwaraka (Saurashtra) and Puri (Orissa). Just like Jesus Christ, Sankara came not to destroy but to fulfil the spiritual vacuum in India, during that particular period in our history. Sankaracharya stopped the onslaught of Buddhism on Hindu ideals and restored Hinduism to its glory. According to him, "Brahman alone exists. All the rest is Maya or illusion. The individual soul (Jivatman) is Brahman alone and nothing else. People are bound by endless cycles of reincarnations due to ignorance. Ignorance is the root cause of all problems. Knowledge eradicates and delivers one from bondage." Hinduism owes quite a lot to Adi Sankaracharya. His teachings are the true personification of absolute freedom and his teachings are not limited to any particular group in Hinduism. You should try to read and study all his books in your lifetime.

Part 3: Dwaita and Advaita Philosophy.

1. SON: What is Dwaita philosophy?

DADDY: This philosophy is the philosophy of duality, propagated by Sage Madhva, who believed that devotion to God is extremely important. According to him, the world is real and there is a difference between man and God. Reality to him was of two kinds, independent and dependent. God is the only independent reality. Matter and self are dependent on and controlled by God. Self is active and is responsible for its own release from countless reincarnations by devotion to God. Sage Ramanuja, another great apostle of Dwaita philosophy, was born about A.D. 1050. He was a devotee of Lord Vishnu. He took a middle path between Advaita and Dwaita philosophies. Sage Ramanuja said that God is not an unqualified principle as Sankaracharya said, but a very personal god who can be loved and known through devotion. He argued that Sankara's Advaita philosophy is against devotion to God. But at the same time, Ramanuja believed in the traditional Vedanta position of oneness with God. He believed in Jivatman (individual soul) and Paramatman (Absolute soul) and the merging of Jivatman in Paramatman for attaining Salvation. Both Advaita and Dwaita philosophies prevailed in India with equal importance.

2. SON: Daddy, I am confused. If the Advaita and Dwaita philosophies are different, which one is right ?

DADDY: As I said earlier, it is normal to be confused some-times. Both philosophies are essentially one and the same but they differ only according to the level from which we-look at them. If I look at you and a robot as "Electrons and Protons", then both are the same. But looking from another level, the human being is very much different from an inanimate robot. Both are truths, but they differ in the level of perception. A model's face is pretty to the naked eye, but it is ugly under a powerful microscope. When the level of perception changes, the truth derived also changes. Again there is no airtight division between Advaita and Dwaita philosophies. Adi Sankaracharya himself had written several devotional poems to different forms of God. To some the Advaita philosophy will appeal and to others Dwaita philosophy will be interesting according to their nature. Two philosophies like these helped Hinduism to really explore into the unknown realms of our lives in general.

3. SON: What are the famous epics and who wrote them?

DADDY: The two famous epics or Itihasas are the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Sage Valmiki wrote the former and Sage Vyasa, son of Sage Parasara, wrote the latter.

4. SON: What does the Ramayana deal with ?

DADDY: In brief, the Ramayana is the story of Lord Rama and princess Sita. It is a poem of 24,000 couplets. The story in brief is as follows. Jealousy of his step-mother drove Rama into jungles along with his wife Sita and brother Lakshmana. There poor Sita was kidnapped by Ravana, the demon-king of Sri Lanka. Rama went to rescue her with the aid of the monkey-king Sugriva. In a great battle, Rama annihilated Ravana and his army. Thereafter, Rama along with Sita and Lakshmana returned triumphantly to their kingdom. The Ramayana is a very cherished poem of the Hindus. The holy Deepavali festival is a celebration of victory of Rama over Ravana. Diwali or Deepavali is a "festival of

lights" and is celebrated throughout India. Rama is an Avatar of Lord Vishnu and the Ram-yana is a story which projects the Hindu ideals of life. Rama is the perfect husband, Sita is the perfect wife and Lakshmana is the perfect brother. There are many versions of the Ramyana. The Hindi version is written by Tulsi Das. The Malayalam version is written by Thunchath Ezuthachan.

The original text of the Ramayana is written in very stylish Sanskrit.

5. SON: What is the famous "Yoga vashishtha"?

DADDY: It is one of the most important works in Hindu philosophy. All aspects of Darshanas, right from Samkhya to Vedanta are intricately woven into Yoga Vashishtha. The principal figures in this book are Lord Rama and Sage Vashishtha. Just like the the Bhagavad Gita, this is a dialogue between Sage Vashishtha and Lord Rama. Sage Vashishtha advises Rama on every aspect of life. Yoga Vashishtha contains 29,000 verses. Since this book emerged from the epic Ramayana it is believed that Sage Valmiki wrote this book also. Manu refers to Vashishtha as one of the exponents of Hinduism. Adi Sankaracharya refers to him as the first sage of the Vedanta school. One of the most important part of Yoga Vashishtha is the doctrine of mind. According to this book, When the mind vibrates, the world comes into existence, and when the mind stops vibrating, the world is destroyed. The language and style of the Yoga Vashishtha are very poetic. It is filled with fantastic stories and very philosophical discourses. Sage Valmiki ends the Yoga Vashishtha with a statement that he who listens to the dialogue between Sage Vashishtha and Lord Rama will be liberated and will attain the knowledge of Brahman.

6. SON: What does the Mahabharat Epic deal with?

DADDY: The Mahabharata consists of episodes, stories, dialogues, discourses and sermons. It contains 110,000 couplets or 220,000 lines. It is the longest poem in the world. The Bhagavad Gita actually is a part of the Mahabharata.

7. SON: Can you tell me the actual story of the Mahabharata.

DADDY: It is very difficult to narrate the story of the Mahabharata in a few words. Anyway let me try to narrate it to you in brief. Lord Brahma was born out of the navel of Lord Vishnu. Atri Was Brahma's son. Soma was the son of Atri. Budha was the son of Soma. Pururavas was the son of Budha. Ayus was the son of Pururavas. Yayati, Bharata, Kuru and Santanu were born in the line-age of Ayus.

King Santanu had a son from mother Ganga, known as Gangeya, popularly known as Bhishma. After the birth of Bhishma, mother Ganga separated from king Santanu. Santanu on his part fell in love with a woman named Satyavati (of the fisherman tribe) - Satyavati's father made Bhishma take a vow of celibacy throughout his life, in return for his daughter's hand in marriage to King Santanu. From Satyavati, king Santanu had two children, namely, Chitrangada and Vichitravirya. They married two daughters of the King of Kasi, namely Ambika and Ambalika. Chitrangada was killed by a Gandharva (celestial being) and Vichitravirya died of an illness. Suddenly the country was left without any ruler. So queen Satyavati summoned her son Sage Veda Vyasa (through Sage Parasara) to Impregnate both the princesses. Princess Ambika gave birth to a blind son named Dhritarashtra. Princess Ambalika gave birth to a son named Pandu. Sage Veda Vyasa also impregnated a servant girl who gave birth to Vidura. Pandu, though the younger prince, became the king since his elder brother Dhritarashtra was blind. He married princesses

Kunti and Madri and from Kunti he had three sons, namely, Yudhishtira (also known as Dharmaputra), Bhima, and Arjuna. From Madri he had Nakula and Sahadeva. All five children of Pandu were collectively called Pandavas. Dhritarashtra married princess Gandhari and had 100 sons and one daughter. The eldest son's name was Duryodhana and the daughter's name was Dussala.

King Pandu had an accidental death. So Dhritarashtra was installed as the king. But he could not rule. He was totally under the influence of prince Duryodhana. When the Pandava brothers came to stay in Hastinapura, the capital, Duryodhana tried to annihilate all Pandava brothers in many ways.

The feud between the Kauravas (Duryodhana and his ninety-nine brothers) and the Pandavas (five sons of Pandu) resulted in a fierce battle known as Mahabharata war. Lord Krishna sided with the Pandavas in the war. In the war all Kauravas were killed. After the war Yudhishtira became the king. Some years later Lord Krishna along with his clansmen called Yadavas left this world. Immediately after that Yudhishtira and his brothers handed over the kingdom to prince Parikshit, the grandson of Arjuna, and left for heaven. This, in brief, is the story.

8. SON: What is the name of the Hindu Holy Bible ?

DADDY: The majority of Hindus consider the Bhagavad Gita as the Hindu Holy Bible. It is said in one of the scriptures, "If the Upanishads can be considered as cows, the Bhagavad Gita can be considered as milk." Truly, the Gita is the essence of the Vedas. It is a part of the Mahabharata. The Bhagavad Gita is in the form of a conversation between the warrior-prince Arjuna and his charioteer and friend Lord Krishna at the outset of the Mahabharata war. Just before the beginning of the fight, Arjuna refused to fight when he saw that he had to kill his own kinsmen. Krishna advised him in detail on a variety of subjects. At the end Arjuna took Krishna's advice and fought a fierce war. The Bhagavad Gita consists of 18 chapters and about 700 verses. It deals in depth with all Yogas or ways of God-realization. There are so many versions of the Bhagavad Gita available in the market. It has an answer to every problem a man may face in his life. The Bhagavad Gita never commands one what to do, instead it gives the pros and cons of every issue and the final decision is left to oneself.

9. SON: Daddy, why is the Bhagavad Gita the most important scripture of the Hindus ?

DADDY: I think the Bhagavad Gita is the most important scripture of the Hindus because of the variety of subjects discussed in its 700 couplets. It advocates selfless action. It teaches in so many words the annihilation of desire and ego. It teaches the different ways to control the mind and the senses. All the great teachings of Jesus Christ regarding devotion and oneness with God you can see in the Bhagavad Gita. The Gita describes oneness with God in chapters 11, 12, 13, 14 and 18 with lines such as "Enters into Me", "Attains Me", "Abides in Me", "Realises Me" and "Attains Brahman" etc. The beauty of the Bhagavad Gita is that it requires of a man a complete change of consciousness rather than change of life-styles or outward appearances.

Remember, after the great Bhagavad Gita discourse, Arjuna did not become a hermit, instead he fought a fierce war annihilating all his enemies.

Most intellectuals in the world go through the Gita at least once in their life-time.

Robert Oppenheimer, the first chairman of the US Atomic Energy Commission, really shocked the

world when he quoted a couplet from the Gita (Chapter 11-12) after witnessing the very first atomic explosion test in the state of New Mexico. Later in a Congressional hearing, he

said that nuclear bombs reminded him of the Hindu God Lord Vishnu who said, "I AM DEATH, THE DEVOURER OF ALL." Believe it or not, there are more versions of the Bhagavad Gita in the world today than that of the Holy Bible.

I feel the whole story of Mahabharata with its ferocious war was written by sage Veda Vyasa to create the proper atmosphere to convey to the world the unwritten laws of the universe. I feel, even Lord Krishna and Arjuna were specially picked by the great sage to provide an authoritative outlook on the ultimate truths he wanted the world to know. For example, if I narrate about the US Constitution, not even a fly will listen, but if the Supreme Court Chief Justice speaks one line about the US Constitution, the whole of America will listen. If the US Constitution is discussed between the President and the U.S. Chief Justice in a lively conversation, the whole world will listen. The same analogy is applicable to the narration of the Bhagavad Gita. If it were written as "Veda Vyasa said so", it would not have been read by many, but when it was written as a very likely conversation between the greatest archer of the world, prince Arjuna, and the greatest teacher of the world, Lord Krishna, at the start of the great Mahabharata war, the whole world rejoices in reading it. Legends say that after Veda Vyasa wrote the Mahabharata, sage Narada compelled Sage Veda Vyasa to write the Bhagavata Purana with the help of Lord Ganapati, so that laymen could understand all the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita in a devotional format.

10. SON: Daddy, do you think the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita are more important than the personality of Lord Krishna ?

DADDY: It is indeed a very tough question to answer. To a person who believes that Lord Krishna is the Absolute personality of Godhead, Lord Krishna stands equal to or higher than all the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita. But to thousands of intellectuals around the globe, the teachings of the Gita are more important than Lord Krishna since they are ignorant of our mythology. When they read the Gita, they will not visualise the colourful, versatile, playful idol of gopis. They study it, as they study Mathematics or Physics or Chemistry. In science, "the theory of Relativity and Laws of Action" are more important than Einstein or Newton. In the same way, intellectuals read the Gita more as a "basic science" than as something taught by Lord Krishna. In a way, when one thinks deeply, he/she will be able to find that Lord Krishna is a microcosmic picture of the infinite. Lord Krishna showed that "shapeless shape" or "formless form" of him-self known as Vishwaroopa to Arjuna in the 11th chapter of the Gita. Lord Krishna said: "Arjuna, You cannot see me with your eyes; therefore I am giving you divine sight. Behold my supreme yoga power." (Chapter 11-18) .. Then Arjuna saw the entire universe resting together with its many divisions, in the body of the God of gods. (Chap 11-34). In the same chapter from couplets 14 to 31, Arjuna describes that "formless form" in detail. So we have to conclude that the Almighty came down as Lord Krishna and in his own words he will come down again and again in different forms whenever the world needs him. So even though it is normal for you and me to conceive personal fascination for Lord Krishna, it is better to understand him as the Supreme power, who also came down as Buddha and Christ and Nabhi and other prophets of the world. All through the bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna has said, "I am the way and come to me". In the Holy Bible, Jesus Christ has said the same a number of times. So whichever way you look at reading Bhagavad Gita, you are right. If you follow the teaching of the Gita, in a very logical and mathematical manner, you will achieve salvation since the Bhagavad Gita contains the unwritten laws of the universe. On the other hand, if you read it with devotion to Krishna and if you follow the Gita on a devotional basis, still you will achieve salvation. Both the intellectual way and the devotional way will lead you to God.

11. SON: What are the Puranas ?

DADDY: The Puranas are religious stories which expound truths. Just like the parables told by Jesus Christ, these stories are told to common folks to make them understand the higher truths of life. The word 'Purana' means ancient. The Puranas always stress devotion to God. Among the large number of Puranas, 18 are called major Puranas. Each of these provides a list of all the 18 Puranas, including itself but the names in the list in some Puranas slightly vary. So much so that we have a list of 20 Puranas. Out of the 20 Puranas, six are addressed to Lord Vishnu, six to Lord Shiva and six to Lord Brahma. The Puranas are written in question-and-answer form. They consist principally of stories about Hindu gods, goddesses, supernatural beings, seers and men. The Puranas do not have a specific date of composition.

12. SON : Daddy, what are the 20 important Puranas ?

DADDY: They are Agni Pnrana, Srimad Bhagavata Purana, Bhavishya Pnrana, Brahma Purana, Brahmanda Purana, Brahmavaivarta Purana, Garuda Purana, Harivamsa Purana, Kurma Purana, Linga Purana, Markandeya Purana, Matsya Purana, Narada Purana, Padma Purana, Skanda Purana, Siva Purana, Vamana Purana, Varaha Purana, Vayu Purana, and Vishnu Purana. Of all Puranas, the Srimad Bhagavata Purana addressed to Lord Vishnu is the most important.

13. SON: Is the Srimad Bhagavata a very important scripture ?

DADDY: It is a very imoortant book to Hindus and specially to Hare Krishna devotees. It contains 15,000 stanzas. It has 12 chapters. It was written by Sage Badarayana, also known as Vyasa. The greatest exponent of the Srimad Bhagavata is Sage Suka, the son of Sage Veda Vyasa. This book was recited to King Parikshit by Sage Suka one week before the doomed death of the King by serpent bite. Much of the book is in dialogue form between King Parikshit and Sage Suka.

The Srimad Bhagavata consists of stories of all the Avataras of Lord Vishnu. The 10th chapter of the book deals with the story of Lord Krishna in detail. The last chapter deals exclusively with the Kali Yuga, the present age, and about the last Avatar of Lord Vishnu, Kalki. There is also a vivid description of Pralaya or the great deluge in the last chapter. This book is an authority on Vaishnavism in Hinduism and is an important scripture to Hare Krishnas.

According to the Bhagavata Purana the universe and creation came into existence because God as a sport (Lila) willed to do so, and the realised devotee saw himself in all beings and all beings as part and parcel of God. According to this scripture, there are nine different ways of exhibiting Bhakti or devotion to God like listening to storics of God, meditating, serving and adoring his irnage and finally self-surrender.

14. SON : Daddy, is Indian classical music a part of Hinduism?

DADDY: Indian music can be divided broadly into two groups : Hindustani music and Carnatic music. The Hindustani music originated in northern India and has been influenced by Persian and Arabic cultures and also by Urdu language. The Carnatic (Karnatic) music on the other hand is the music of Southern India and is known as the classical music of India.

The Carnatic Music has roots in ancient Hindu Sama Veda and has absolutely no Persian or Arabic influences. The music is very much associated with devotional songs to deities. Very few instruments are used in this music and even if instruments are used alone, they are played in imitation of singing.

The music is based on seven letters, Sa, Ri, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni. These seven letters are mathematically improvised to make thousands of tunes named Ragas and a cyclic rhythmic pattern named Talas.

One of the greatest exponents of Carnatic music is Swami Thyagaraja. It is said that Swami Thyagaraja has composed more than 2,000 tunes, or melody types of Ragas in the Carnatic music. Lately, Indian Carnatic music is becoming very popular after Indian movies started making film music to the tune of Carnatic music. The present-day centres of this music are the States of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Mysore and Andhra Pradesh.

Part 4: Avatars of Lord Vishnu....

1. SON: What is an Avatar ?

DADDY: An Avatar is an incarnation of God. When God comes down to earth in any life-form, then we call him an Avatar.

2. SON : What is the purpose of an Avatar ?

DADDY: In the Bhagavad Gita it is written, "Whenever there is decay of Dharma (Righteousness) and outbreak of Adharma (non-Righteousness), I descend myself to protect the good, to annihilate the wicked and to re-establish Dharma (Righteousness). I am born from age to age." (Gita Chap.4-7,8).

3. SON : Do Hindus believe that another Avatar will come in the future ?

DADDY: Yes, Hindus do believe that. When God comes to earth again each will see him (her) according to individual faith. A Christian may see him as Christ, Hindu may see his as Krishna or as Kalki. Of course, there is only one God.

4. SON What are the 10 Avatars of Lord Vishnu ?

DADDY: Matsya (fish), Kurma (tortoise), Varaha (boar), Narasimha (man-lion), Vamana (dwarf), Parasurama (the warrior with an axe), Rama, Krishna, Buddha and Kalki (the man on the white horse).

All these Avatars are very important to the Vaishnava movement in India. The Kalki Avatar is yet to come. Hindus believe that the Kalki Avatar will come at the time of Pralaya, the great deluge.

5. SON Why did Lord Vishnu take so many Avatars ?

DADDY: Each Avatar has a definite purpose. Lord Vishnu came as a Matsya (fish) to save Sage Manu from the floods and recover the Vedas from a demon's hands. After that episode, things were still in disarray and the Devas (gods of heaven) discovered that the divine nectar of immortality had been lost and it was at the bottom of the sea. Lord Vishnu helped in its recovery by becoming a Kurma (tortoise).

Lord Vishnu took the Avatar of Varaha (boar) to kill a demon named Hiranyaksha, who dragged the earth to the bottom of the ocean. Lord Vishnu, after killing the demon brought earth back from the bottom of the ocean. After the death of Hiranyaksha, his twin-brother Hiranyakasipu became the king of demons. He made everyone treat him as God. Since Hiranyakasipu had received a boon from Lord Brahma that he could not be killed by either a man or an animal, Lord Vishnu took the form of a Narasimha (man-lion) and killed him.

Lord Vishnu came as Vamana (dwarf) to get rid of the demon-king Mahabali. Unlike any other demon, Mahabali was a very good king. According to mythology, during the reign of Mahabali, the world was like heaven and everyone was praising him in the three worlds. Lord Vishnu came down as Varnana and made Mahabali promise him that area of land which he could cover in three steps. Mahabali

agreed. The Vamana then immediately became a giant and took two steps to cover all the three worlds. He did not have a place to put his third step so Mahabali requested him to place his third step on his head. Then Vamana pushed Mahabali to the third world known as Patala. People in Kerala still celebrate the reign of Mahabali by a celebration named Onam.

Lord Vishnu came as Parasurama (the warrior with an axe) to save the Brahmin caste from the tyranny of the Kshatriyas.

Then he came as Rama, to annihilate the demon king of Lanka. We read the story of Rama at length in the Ramayana. The incarnation of Lord Vishnu as Krishna is the most popular Avatar of all. Hindus consider the Buddha as an Avatar. Kalki (man on white horse), as I said before, is an Avatar yet to come to restore the earth's purity, You should read Srimad Bhagavata to get all details.

6. SON : Are there more Avatars of Lord Vishnu ?

DADDY: Of course the ten Avatars of Lord Vishnu which I described to you at length are the principal Avatars of Lord Vishnu. According to the Bhagavata Purana, there are twenty-two incarnations of Lord Vishnu. They consist of the ten incarnations I have already described to you and 12 more incarnations as follows : 1. Sanat Kumara (youth); 2. Sage Narada (exponent of Bhakti and Tantras); 3. Saints Nara and Narayana; 4. Sage Kapila (founder of the Samkhya System); 5. Dattatreya (the greatest magician who restored Vedic rites and originator of Tantric rites); 6. Yajna (Lord Vishnu is identified as the sacrifice); 7. Rishabha (founder of the pre-Aryan Jain philosophy); 8. King Pruthu; 9. Dhanvatari, the founder of Ayurveda, (he came from the ocean of milk, holding the divine elixir; Amruth); 10. Balarama (came as brother of Lord Krishna, he is an embodiment of virtues); 11. Sage Veda Vyasa (author of the Mahabharata and the Bhagavatarn); 12. Mohini (the enchantress) who deprived the demons of the divine elixir, Amruth.

There are still more Avatars of Lord Vishnu which are not mentioned in the list above. For example, once upon a time Lord Vishnu happened to lose his head by an accident and he became horse-headed and known as Hayasirsa horse-headed). As horseheaded, Lord Vishnu went and killed two demons, Madhu and Kaitabha and rescued the Vedas from them.

7. SON : Is Aurveda a kind of medicine ?

DADDY: Ayurveda is a part of the Upavedas. It has its roots in the Atharva Veda. Sometimes this medical system is called the Fifth Veda. The Sanskrit word Ayurveda means medicine. The remedies in Ayurveda are mostly herbs. Ayurveda also uses water, minerals, urine, dung, milk, curd, etc. of the cow. The gods of healing in Ayurveda are Prajapati, Brihaspati, Indra etc. Ayurveda originally classified diseases into physical, supernatural and spiritual. Ayurveda is practised widely in the State of Kerala in India. It is taught in the Ayurveda College, Kottakkal, Kerala.

8. SON: Are Astrology and Astronomy interconnected ?

DADDY: In Hinduism, the word Jyotisha meant both astrology and astronomy. Both were part of the group known as Vedangas. Hindu astronomy benefited very much from the influence of Greek astronomy.

Astrology has come out of Hinduism, and it does play a major part in the lives of people; it is still used widely for many purposes. The God of Astrology is Lord Subramanyan, son of Lord Siva. Some say that, once upon a time, astrology was a very well developed science, but today's astrology is only a skeleton, with most of the valuable knowledge lost due to the practice of utmost secrecy by the learned men in Hindu society.

9. SON : What is Bhakti Yoga ?

DADDY: One of the easiest Yogas or paths to follow or practice is Bhakti Yoga. Bhakti Yoga comes from the root word Bhaj, which means "to be attached to". The Bhakti relationship between man and God is described in six different forms :

1. Madhura Bhava (sexual love);
2. Kanta Bhava (love of wife for husband);
3. Shanta Bhava (love of child for parent);
4. Vatsalya Bhava (love of parent for child);
5. Sakhya Bhava (friendship);
6. Dasya Bhava (affection of servant for his master).

One of the great exponents of Bhakti Yoga was Sage Narada. Narada states in his book Narada Bhakti Sutra: "A man who loves God has no wants nor any sorrows. He neither hates nor survives with a zeal for any ends of his own. Through devotion he attains peace and is ever happy in spirit." In the highest aspect of Bhakti Yoga, the devotee goes for "total Self-surrender to the will of the God." All devotional books including the Bhagavad Gita advocate this Self-surrender. Lord Krishna promises in the Bhagavad Gita, that He himself will take the burden of taking care of the day-to-day problems of a devotee who has dedicated himself to God by surrendering his free will. This promise of God is repeated many times in the Gita, in different slokas. The theme of total self-surrender is often repeated in the Holy Bible too.

10. SON : What does a devotee accomplish with Bhakti Yoga?

DADDY: Like other yogas, the final goal is salvation. Bhakti also indirectly leads to the total dissolution of the "I" or the Ego. According to Hinduism, Ego is the cause of all problems.

11. SON : Who are the great exponents of Bhakti Yoga ?

DADDY: There are several great saints who practised Bhakti Yoga in India. A few of the very prominent ones are : Lord Chaitanya, Tulasi Das and Meera Devi.

Lord Chaitanya and Meera Devi worshipped God as Lord Krishna.

Tulasidas worshipped God as Lord Rama.

One of the greatest exponents of modern times is Sri Ramakrishna Pararnahamsa. He worshipped God as Mother Goddess named Kali.

12. SON : Is Bhakti Yoga inferior to other yogas ?

DADDY: Hinduism never states that any one form of Yoga is superior to other. In fact it looks down upon any effort by zealots who practise Jnana Yoga, Karma Yoga or

Raja Yoga to condemn Bhakti Yoga. Throughout Hinduism, one can also see a disciple taking a different path or yoga from his teacher. Sage Ashtavakra, who is an Avadoota (a yogi who travels all the time), was the Guru of King Janaka (who ruled a country) and King Janaka was the Guru of Sage Suka who was indeed a great Bhakti Yogi.

Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa's (Bhakti Yogi) guru was Totapuri (an Avadoota) and Rama-Krishna's disciple was Swami Vivekanand who was a Raja Yogi.

13. SON : What is Karma Yoga ?

DADDY: The word Karma is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Kri' meaning "to do". The word Karma is used in many senses in Hinduism. Here the meaning of Karma is work. We do Karmas all the time. When we breathe, it is a Karma. When we think, it is a Karma, the Karmas we do dictate our Past, Present, and Future. According to Hinduism, all destined duties are good Karmas if they are duties popularly known as Svadharma.

According to Samkhya philosophy, Karmas are controlled by three forces. They are: Tamas, Rajas, and Sattva. Tamas represents inactivity. Rajas represents activity. Sattva is the equilibrium of the two. Karma yoga involves properly employing these three factors, to do our work better. As I said earlier, the different paths of God-realization in Hinduism are not airtight divisions, but they merge into each other. So Karma Yoga has a lot to do with Bhakti Yoga and Jnana Yoga. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of the Bhagavad Gita deal with Karma Yoga.

14. SON : What is Karma Yoga in brief ?

DADDY: Attaining freedom, by unselfish actions, "Nishkama Karma". Selfish actions retard our goal. Unselfish actions take us towards our goal. So Karma Yoga is the system of attaining freedom through selfless actions. A Karma Yogi may or may not believe in God or in any religious doctrine.

15. SON : What does the Bhagavad Gita say about Karma Yoga ?

DADDY: The Gita allots three chapters and 113 slokas to explain Karma Yoga. Some of the important points are :

1. No man will reach a state of actionlessness (Nishkarmata) by shunning actions.
2. Action is the nature of all beings in creation.
3. He who controls his desires of the flesh and does selfless actions is an honorable man.
4. Do actions without seeking profit, because such actions will ensure salvation for you.
5. Look at me, I am God. There is nothing I have to do in the three worlds. There is nothing in the three worlds I need or I can't get. Still I work all the time.
6. A man should do his own duty (Svadharma). A man will meet with disaster if he does someone else's duty. Svadharma, however despicable it may be, is better than someone else's duty.
7. The senses are good. Mind is better than the senses. The soul is better than the mind.

8. In whatever form a man worships me, I will make his devotion steadfast in that form. Whatever path a man may take, it will finally lead him to me.
9. He who performs unattached actions surrendering them to me will be untouched by sin just like water drops on a lotus leaf do not wet it.
10. Actions do not taint me nor do I have any desire for the fruits of actions. He who knows me in this way, no action is binding on him.

16. SON : What is Raja Yoga ?

DADDY: Raja Yoga in essence is a very scientific path of God-realization. In this path, God is more or less treated as Pure Energy. Sage Patanjali, the author of the Yoga Sutras, was the first to systematise the practices of this technical Yoga.

Patanjali defined Yoga as Chitta-Vritti-Nirodha.

Yoga - means union with the divine or Salvation.

Chitta - means Mind.

Vritti - means Modifications or Vibrations.

Nirodha - means Stoppage or Suppression or Restraint.

So according to Sage Patanjali, "The union with the Divine or salvation means stoppage of the vibrations or modifications of the mind." As per Patanjali, modifications of the mind are fivefold and are painful or non-painful in nature. They are Right Knowledge, Wrong Knowledge, Fancy, Sleep and Memory.

The practice of Raja Yoga started from the Vedic age. The Bhagavad Gita glorifies and recommends it by starting with a statement, "Raja Yoga, Raja Guhyam (kingly guarded secret), Pavitram (the most purified), Uttamam (the best), Pratyakshavagarnam (immediate result giving), Dharmyam- Kartum (steadfast to Dharma), Bhagavad Gita, Chap. 9-2.).

17. SON : What does a devotee achieve by practicing Raja Yoga ?

DADDY: In Raja Yoga, a devotee tries to achieve a state above the mind and in a way tries to achieve a mindless state. It is very difficult to explain it in simple terms. A student of Parapsychology may be able to understand the scientific aspect of Raja Yoga better than anyone else. The ordinary man whose consciousness is confined to the lower mind can conceive of only concrete images of objects, which are derived through the sense-organs. In a nutshell, for a perfected Raja Yogi, thinking is a voluntary process all the time, unlike most of us who think so many things involuntarily. We think about the pros and cons of every issue, even if we do not want to think about the issue at all. For example, if we decide not to think of monkeys for the next hour, we will be thinking about monkeys only for the next hour. That is the way the mind works all the time.

The Patanjali Yoga Sutra consists of 196 slokas. In his book, Patanjali has never stated or mentioned that this is the only way for God-realization, so much so that the state of mind as well as God-realization which he expounds can be achieved by other religious practices also.

18. SON : What are the disciplines and exercises in Raja Yoga?

DADDY: Raja Yoga mentions eight kinds of disciplines: Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana and Samadhi.

Yama - means Abstinence from all vices.

Niyama - means Observance of purity, contentment, etc.

Asana - means a posture suitable for meditation.

Pranayama - consists of prolonged expiration (Rechaka); Inspiration (Purakha); Retention (Kumbhaka) of breath. This exercise is supposed to be done only under the proper guidance of a realized master or Guru. In the Pranayama exercise, the devotee is supposed to control the vital currents in the body.

Pratyahara - means retraction or withdrawal of sense-organs from sense-objects.

Dharana - means the fixing of mind on any object.

Dhyana - means meditation.

Samadhi - is the final state. He who meditates ultimately attains Samadhi. In that state, the mind loses its complete identity and assumes a formless state, even though it can assume the form of any object it contemplates on. In Samadhi, the devotee realises the ultimate truth. Nirvikalpa Samadhi and Savikalpa Samadhi are the two types of Samadhis devotees attain in their divine pursuit.

PART 5

1. SON : Daddy, what exactly is the Law of Karma ?

DADDY: Hindus believe in life after death. They also believe in the idea, "As a man sows so shall he reap." That is the basis of Karmic Law. To put it in modern scientific terms, Hindus believe that every "action has a reaction." There is no such thing as action without any result. Every action, even every thought produces a reaction. Hindus believe that every thought and every action is weighed on the scales of eternal justice. The Law of Karma is one of "Cause and Effect". It works in the scientific world as well as in the moral world. These unwritten Karmic laws are universal and we can but obey these laws. These laws act in similar manner in similar circumstances. For instance, whenever you put your hand -in fire, you automatically burn your fingers. This happens at all times and at all places, to the newborn as well as to a Physicist who might have done ten or fifteen years of research on fire alone. Nobody can get away from the claws of Karmic law, because by nature we all do actions all the time. Even those who sit idle are doing actions with their mind, even though their actions will be fruitless and idiotic. The doctrine of Karma has started since the days of the Rig Veda and it is very well explained in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.

2. SON : What happen to us when we die ?

DADDY: According to Hinduism, the body alone dies, the soul never dies. But the path the soul takes is decided upon by the past actions which are popularly known as Karmas. "The actions of the former body do not die with the body." As I said above, past actions are attached to the soul and they decide the path of the soul's travel. So if you are born rich or poor, it is because of your actions in your previous life. If you are born with disease that also is the result of your past actions done in past lives. After death, the soul carries a heavy load of karmas and seeks an ideal body to be born in again. If you had lived as a rotten individual in your last life, then the soul will take birth in a home where people will be leading rotten lives. If you had lived a pious life, then you will be reborn in an ideal home where both parents will be pious and happy. "According to Hinduism, the soul continues this journey with a heavy load of Karmas from one life to another until it exhausts all Karmas by undergoing pain or pleasure sensations in the body." The different methods of God-realization provide easy ways to put an end to this drama of having pain or pleasure sensations in the body. Then the individual soul which is popularly known as Jivatman will merge with the Absolute soul or infinite power popularly known as Paramatman. This merging process is known as salvation.

3. SON: Daddy, how important are our thoughts ?

DADDY: According to Hinduism, every thought however insignificant it may be, is counted. Every thought we entertain circles around us. A thought never dies. It may lose its strength in time, but it never dies completely. If you repeatedly think about the same thing, then that thought becomes a Power- source. If you repeatedly think that you will get into an accident, then your wish will be fulfilled.

You will get into an accident. It was your powerful negative thoughts that resulted in an accident. At the same level, if you develop prosperity thoughts in you, then your life will change dramatically, even if you are a pauper at present.

By sending thoughts of love to your enemy, you will become a generator of love. Most probably your enemy may refuse to accept your thoughts of love. In that case, those

powerful thoughts of love will come back to you like a boomerang; you will become a fortress of love. The thoughts of hatred works exactly in the same manner.

"If you hate someone and you harbour that thought again and again you will become an embodiment of hate." In course of time, you will find even your best friend loathing your presence. Knowing the power of vengeful thoughts, Mahatma Gandhi said :

"Fight without Malice." We have the right to fight injustice without hating the personalities or circumstances involved.

4. SON : Daddy, how can you say that the "Law of Karma" is true ?

DADDY: Son, iust think, how else can we explain the inequalities around us ? A baby is born in the dry deserts of Ethiopia; another baby is born in the luxury of Buckingham Palace. Both are innocent babies. One suffers from malnutrition and diseases, whereas the other grows up in luxury. What a paradox ! Son, tell me now, is there another answer?

5. SON : Do you think our problems are God's punishments?

DADDY: No, son. God will never punish us. God has created man near to perfection and has given him the "Free will" to decide whatever he wants. God never interferes in man's decisions. There is no such thing as being cursed. We ourselves make our lives miserable or happy. Even in the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna never tried to influence his disciple Arjuna's free will. Lord Krishna, like an adviser, only discussed with Arjuna (his disciple) the various options he could take in his life. So it is stupid to say things like 'Revenge of God', etc,

6. SON : Is God bound by the "Law of Karma" ?

DADDY: Hindus believe that even God is bound by the law of Karma once he takes human form. For example, when God came down as Lord Krishna, he had to be killed by a hunter because he had killed the hunter in his previous life in a very cunning manner. (In his previous life, when God came down as Lord Rama, he killed the monkey-king Bali by attacking him from the rear.) The Yadavas, the blood-relations of Lord Krishna, were also killed since their collective actions warranted their extinction.

7. SON : What is really the science of reincarnation ?

DADDY: Let me repeat to you briefly what Lord Krishna told Arjuna about reincarnation. Lord Krishna said : "At the time of death, the body dies but the soul never dies. The soul passes from one body to another after death like a body changing clothes. The soul goes on taking an endless number of bodies, until the soul exhausts all Karmas, attached to the soul. This process is known as reincarnation." (GITA 2-22).

8. SON : What is salvation ?

DADDY: When the individual soul (Jivatman) exhausts all its Karmas and merges with God - the infinite soul (Paramatman) then we say the individual soul has attained salvation.

9. SON : Will all men who die, reincarnate as men in their next life ?

DADDY: Not necessarily so. If a man exhibits beastly character throughout his life, he will reincarnate as a beast. A glutton may take birth as a pig or other lower forms of life. The Vedas talk about 8.5 million species of life, right from amoeba to human beings and semi-gods. A man can take anyone of these life-forms. Sometimes the soul will also remain in a standstill state for long periods of time without taking any body at all. However, please understand that the soul can get rid of its Karma only if it takes a body. So for attaining salvation, the soul is bound to reincarnate.

10. SON Daddy, did Krishna say that a person's next life is decided by his thoughts at the time of his death ?

DADDY: Of course, Lord Krishna has said that whatever form one thinks of during the time of death, one will attain that form. But at the same time, you know very well that a man who has beastly ideas throughout his life is unlikely to think of God during the time of death. Only God-fearing people can think of God during the time of death; others will think of a multitude of things but not about God.

11. SON : What happens to a man who was very good through-out his life but ended up as a rotten human being at the time of his death ?

DADDY: As I told you before, when a man dies his soul takes with it the sum-total of good and bad Karmas. If the sum-total of his actions is bad, he will go for a worse life-form. So it is the sum-total of Karma that decides the travel route of the soul. One or two bad actions alone do not determine the soul's new destination.

12. SON : Can we conclude that if a sick or retarded child is born, the parents and the child are equally responsible ?

DADDY: As per the law of Karma, the parents are destined to have a sick child to worry about and the child is destined to be born with sickness. But understand, both parents and the child can make life better by new good positive actions.

13. SON : How will one know which action is good?

DADDY: The most important part of any action is the motive behind it. If the motive is bad, then the best action is pious. For example, let us say that you are helping a poor innocent young girl to come up in her life. But if you are doing it with the intention of exploiting her at some future time, then your action is vicious and bad. But if your intentions are strictly humanitarian, then your action is a virtuous action indeed. The surgeon and the soldier do diagonally opposite actions. One saves life and other takes it away, but the motives of both actions are very good. So both actions are good.

14. SON : Daddy, what happens to someone who Commits suicide ?

DADDY: As per Hinduism such an action will condemn the soul for thousands of years, and be forced to start life all over again from the lowest level of the evolutionary ladder. The soul will have to wait countless years to finally take a human body again. Sometimes, the soul will remain in a standstill condition, becoming a ghost without taking a body, as per the Maha Bhagavatarn.

15. SON : Does the reincarnation theory tally with Darwin's theory of evolution?

DADDY: It not only agrees, but goes one step further by saying that the soul of a man can even go back on the ladder of evolution and take the body of an Amoeba. It may be a mere coincidence, but at the same time, it is very interesting to note that the 10 Avatars of Lord Vishnu are curiously complying with Darwin's theory of evolution. First Lord Vishnu came as Matsya (fish - living in water), then came as Kurma (tortoise - living in water as well as on land), then came as Varaha (boar - living on land only, an animal) then came as Narasirnha (man-lion, a combination of man and beast) then came as Vamana (child or dwarf), then came as Parasurama (ferocious fighter born to kill the Kshatriyas), then came as Rama (a king with all the problems of an ordinary human being), then came as Krishna (the superhuman, in a way the superman beyond any comparison with anyone else), then came Buddha (the silent one, a realised master) and finally still to come as Kalki (the destroyer to annihilate creation, so that the process of recreation can be started all over again). As I said before, this could be a strange coincidence or mythology may have been written based on in-depth knowledge of seers in human reproduction and development of a human being within the womb, where the foetus under goes timely transformation in tune with Darwin's theory of evolution.

16. SON : If Karma is the cause of reincarnation, then why was I born in the first place, when I should not have any Karma ?

DADDY: I could answer you that you were an amoeba first and then from that life you slowly evolved by thousands of reincarnations to a human being, but your next question will then be : How did I take birth as an amoeba ? I do not want to speculate. No scriptures talk about it. The Bhagavad Gita said : " Creation came out of food, food came out of rains, rains came out of Yajna, Yajna came out of Karmas, Karmas came out of Nature, Nature came out of the Infinite." This answer shows the instrumentality of creation. It shows our birth is purely instrumental and our desire for salvation is also purely instrumental. As long as you experience pleasure or pain, you are forced to correct the path you are travelling along and go above both those experiences. When you go above those experiences, you are automatically a realised soul. I am sure that if you contemplate on the above question, you will one day find the answer, but once you know the answer, you will be unable to express it in words for anyone else. Remember prince Siddhartha renounced the world to find answers to old age and disease and finally became the Buddha, the silent one. When his devotees questioned him for answers to old age and disease, he told them to follow the eightfold path and that would lead them to Truth and provide all answers.

17. SON : Daddy, do you think people in Ethiopia are cursed nd that is the reason why they suffer today ?

DADDY: Please do not think that even in your wildest dreams : God cannot curse anyone. He is the symbol of love and compassion. As I told you before, God has given us "Free Will" and our fate is decided by our own actions and our own thoughts. Each moment of our life we are doing things which decide our fate. Our past actions in our last life determine the trajectory of travel of the soul in the present. So as per the Hindu Law of Karma, people who had done bad Karmas in their past life take birth in bitter conditions in this life. Unluckily, many souls whose past lives' Karmas were very bad are born together in the deserts of Ethiopia, but they are not destined to suffer for ever. They should on their part help themselves to come out of this terrible condition. We on our part should help them to do so. It is our duty to do everything in our power to wipe out starvation and misery from Ethiopia. By serving them we are actually bettering our own fate for even the best among us may have abundance of past bad Karmas. The only thing we can do for the poor and the sick is to help them to come out of all miseries, and by doing so. we make our present and future lives better. The Hindu Law of Karma explains all the problems we see in our lives.

18. SON : Daddy, I know now that the Law of Karma is based on reincarnation. Is the science of reincarnation real ?

DADDY: I have to admit to you in all honesty that we do not have any corroborative scientific evidence to prove the science or theory of reincarnation. Many books have been written on this subject and some of them narrate stories told by people under hypnotic suggestions. Unluckily, most of these books are written by zealots who were carried away with the idea of reincarnation. Therefore, I cannot point out to you concrete evidence, but at the same time, I want to say that there is a mystery regarding death and reincarnation and unless and until someone proves to the world that reincarnation science is false this age-old scientific idea is here to stay. Please tell me, are there better theories to explain the problems in the world than the law of karma and the science of reincarnation ?

19. SON: What is Aum (Om) ?

DADDY: The sacred syllable Aum (Om) stands for the Absolute. It is uttered at the beginning and the end of most Hindu prayers. It is considered as the very essence of the Vedas. Some say that 'A' represents the Waking State, 'U' represents the Sleep State (Nidra), 'M' represents the Deep- Sleep State (Sushupti) and the combination Aum represents Total consciousness. The Katha Upanishad says, "The word which all the Vedas and all austerities declare, and desiring which men lead a life of chastity - That word I will tell you briefly.

This syllable is indeed Brahman; this syllable is indeed the Supreme."

The Mandukya Upanishad says, "Aum - This syllable stands for the whole world." The past, the present, the future, everything is just the syllable Aum. Even threefold time too is just Aum." Sage Patanjali who wrote the Yoga Sutra speaks of God as "Aum". He wrote, "Meditate on Aum (Om) to actually contact Ishwara (God). Aum is His symbol." In the Christian Bible, Aum is mentioned as the Word. "In the beginning there was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God." The word Aum, Christian Amen and Mohammedan Amin all represent one and the same. In the Upanishads, Aum has been described as Pranava.

20. SON: Please tell me how to chant Aum.

DADDY: Son, so much is written about Aum in all scriptures of Hinduism. Many people think that they can simply chant Aum with their human voices. The fact of the matter is that since the Aum sound has a very high or very low rate of vibration, it cannot be uttered by the human voice. Of course, there is nothing wrong in trying to chant the word Aum with your human voice. The right way of chanting Aum is mental chanting and superconscious chanting. Aum should be chanted with proper Pratyahara (interiorization of the attention) and Pranayama (life-force control and proper withdrawing of senses from sense objects.) It is said that he who knows God as the cosmic sound finds himself free of all miseries and death.

Part 6: About Mantra Yoga..

SON : What is Mantra Yoga ?

DADDY: Mantra Yoga originated from the Vedas and Tantras. This yoga brings about changes in material consciousness by the agency of sound. Of course, the 'sound' Mantra Yoga is referring to is a mysterious sound which you cannot hear by the human ear. From modern science, we know three important facts. 1. Matter is an expression of energy. 2. This energy vibrates at different frequencies in different types of matter. 3. Our sense-organs can only receive sensations made in a very limited frequency-range. For example, we can hear only the sound produced in a limited-frequency range and anything above this range is called Ultra Sound and the sound below it is called Infra Sound. Of course, by no means can one conclude that the sound in Mantra Yoga belongs to one of the categories above. We could say that Mantra Yoga is based on the vibratory aspect of energy and its modifications into varied matter. Mantras are used to bring about substantial results as well as the unification and unfolding of consciousness.

Mantra Yoga as such is not a special yoga, instead it is widely used by devotees belonging to all other yogas for spiritual upliftment and unfolding of consciousness.

Part 7: About Gods in Hinduism

1. SON: I am curious. Did you cover the complete list of gods in Hinduism ?

DADDY:I don't think I could ever give you a complete list of all the gods in Hinduism. Some say that there are at least thirty-three and three-fourth crores* gods in Hinduism. Even some saints are considered as gods. Again many of the gods worshipped by Hindus have different names in the Vedas.

For example, Lord Siva is known as Rudra in the Vedas. The art of -worshipping so many gods at the same time is no problem for Hindus, since they believe that all forms are manifestations of the one God or power.

* Crore means 10 millions.

2. SON: Are there any minor gods in Hinduism ?

DADDY: Yes, there are a large number of minor gods in Hinduism. They are mostly Gandharvas (celestial beings), Apsaras (celestial females), Devas (attendants of the god of heaven) and Nagas (snakes). All attendants of Lord Siva are also considered as minor gods. Apart from that many departed saints are also worshipped as minor gods.

3. SON : Please tell me more about Nagas (snakes).

DADDY: It is said that Nagas (snakes) are children of a saint named Kashyapa. According to the Varaha Purana, they occupy the three lower worlds, namely Patala, Atala, and Sutala. Of all the Nagas, three are most prominent. They are Vasuki, Sesha (Ananta) and Takshaka. Vasuki is the snake we see crawling around the neck of Lord Siva and in mythology it helped as a rope to churn 'the ocean of milk. Sesha or Ananta has one thousand heads and it is on this snake that Lord Vishnu sleeps in Vaikunta. Takshaka always gets into trouble and is very vicious, It tried to annihilate Arjuna, the great hero of the Mahabharata and at the end of the Mahabharata war, he managed to kill King Parikshit, the last heir of the Pandavas. The Nagas are worshipped in many Hindu temples along with the major and minor gods.

4. SON: Daddy, are there references to worship of multiple gods in the Upanishads ?

DADDY: The Upanishads have maintained the existence of one God known as Brahman. The only reference to multiple gods in the Upanishads comes from a conversation in Brihadaranyaka Upanishad between a devotee named Vidagdha Sakalya and Sage Yajnavalkya. The lively conversation is as follows: "How many gods are there, Yajnavalkya ?" "Three thousand three hundred and six," replied Yajnavalkya. "Yes, but just how many gods are there, Yajnavalkya ?" "Thirty-three," answered Yajnavalkya. "Yes, but just how many gods are there, Yajnavalkya ?" "Six," said the great saint. "Yes, but just how many gods are there, Yajnavalkya ?" "Three". "Yes, but just how many gods are there, Yajnavalkya ?" "Two." "Yes, but just how many gods are there, Yajnavalkya ?" "One and a half." "Yes, but just how many gods are there, Yajnavalkya ?" "O N E", answered the great teacher of Hinduism.

This conversation makes us conclude that even though there are many gods, in reality there is only ONE. One God appears in a thousand different forms to devotees according to the way they perceive that supreme power.

5. SON : Who is Nataraja ?

DADDY: He is the dancing god of India, who is actually Lord Siva. Nataraja is very popular in the west. You may have seen Nataraja statues even in some James Bond movies. Nata means Dance and Raja means King. Lord Siva is supposed to be dancing over the demon Apasmara, Ignorance - He who makes us forget who we really are, the Ego. Nataraja brings about the destruction of the Ego. He is also the visible symbol of the Rhythm of the Universe. He is encircled by a ring of flames, symbolising the vital processes of universal creation. The Mudras, hand-expressions of the deity, represent different activities. In one hand Lord Nataraja holds a drum, the symbol of speech, his second hand shows Abhaya Mudra ("Fear not - I will protect you" sign), in the palm of his third hand, he has a tongue of fire as a symbol of destruction and the fourth hand points downward to the uplifted foot. It symbolises the salvation of the devotee.

6. SON: In what other forms do Hindus worship Lord Siva?

DADDY: Hindus worship Lord Siva as Siva Linga (phallus and Yoni), as Nataraja (Dancer), as Dakshina-murthi (a meditating ascetic), as Kalyanasundara (the husband of Parvati), as Tripurantaka (destroyer of demons like Tripura), as Ardhanarishwara (half-woman God), as Bhairava (the destroyer), as Maheshwara (the lord of knowledge), as Hara (the remover of death). Among them Siva Linga is the most common form of image of Lord Siva one will see in most Hindu temples.

7. SON: Who is "Nandi" ?

DADDY: It is a bull with milk-white or snow-white color and is the vehicle of Lord Siva. Its neck is thick and horns are as hard as diamonds. You will see Nandi outside every Siva temple. It is the guardian of all four-legged animals.

8. SON: Do Hindus worship Lord Brahma ?

DADDY: It may be surprising to you to hear that Hindus generally do not worship Lord Brahma. The liberation of the soul is connected with Lord Vishnu and Lord Siva and that may be the reason why Lord Brahma is not worshipped by Hindus. Of course there are representations of Lord Brahma in most temples and his name is repeated in rituals. The Skanda Purana gives a number of reasons why Lord Brahma is not worshipped like Lord Vishnu and Lord Siva. One of the reasons is that he was cursed by Lord Siva never to be worshipped by mortals since Lord Brahma once lied to Lord Siva.

Part 8: Temples & Idol Making in Hinduism..

1. SON : How are Hindu temples constructed'

DADDY: To begin with, many Hindus believe that only saints like Adi Sankaracharya have the capability to consecrate temples. In fact -as per history, almost all prominent Hindu temples are consecrated by great saints and constructed by Hindu kings. The actual construction and consecration of a temple is done as per the Silpa Shastr, the Hindu architectural book. The process of construction and consecration of a temple is very elaborate. To begin with, temples are constructed on a site that is 'Shubha' (beautiful and auspicious), in the neighbourhood of rivers. Under all circumstances, a temple should be built only in very congenial surroundings. Their erection is considered a reintegration of Prajapati (first Man of creation like Adam) enabling him to continue his creative activity. Two of the most important ritual sequences associated with the construction and consecration of any Hindu temple are Pratishta (installation of icons) and Kumbhaabhishekam (temple dedication). The Pratishta is the process by which icons are endowed with divinity. The cosmic pillar is an important part of a Hindu temple. It is supposed to be the communication channel between mortals and gods. In modern times, one of the finest temples constructed in the world is Sri Venkateswara Temple in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and the construction and consecration of this temple are preserved in a very descriptive documentary film.

2. SON: Daddy, how the idol is made ?

DADDY: 'Idol-making' is a very elaborate process. They are made out of special wood as well as from special stones. When they are made out of wood, the tree is cut on an auspicious day and time as per astrological calculations. The artisan who makes the idol is known as 'Silpi'. Prior to making the idol, the 'Silpi' undergoes ritualistic purification and prays to gods for help. It is said, that he meditates and mentally visualises the idol, prior to starting the work. After the idol is made, it is purified by water, 'darbha grass', honey, and ghee (liquified butter). Then by a special Nyasa ritual (touching ceremony) the deity is invoked on the idol. Finally by a special Mantra, Prana or 'breath of life' is infused into the idol. Now idol-making is complete. Of course my description is very brief and the actual ceremony is very elaborate and colorful.

3. SON What is "Garbha Griha?"

DADDY: It is the innermost chamber of a temple, where the idol is consecrated. The word meaning of Garbha Graha is 'the home of pregnancy' which actually means a womb. Some temples are with several enclosures and they are supposed to represent the human body which is supposed to have five "Kosas" or sheaths. The outermost enclosure represents "Annamaya Kosa" (sheath made of food.) and the deity residing in the Garbha Griha represents Atman or soul.

Part 9: Mythology, A misnomer for Hinduism....

1. SON : Daddy, I want to ask you a lot of questions about mythology. Can you answer them all ?

DADDY: Son, to begin with, I want to caution you that mythology, as the word's meaning goes, is the "logic of myth". So, there could be instances where certain things contradict themselves in mythology. When someone looks at Hinduism, he should look at the Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads and Raja Yoga, and then ask questions regarding them. Anyway, I shall try to explain to you mythological concepts as clearly as I can.

2. SON: Since Hinduism advocates monogamy, then how come Lord Krishna had 16,008 wives ?

DADDY: To begin with, Lord Krishna is God in the flesh, not an ordinary human being. Secondly, Sage Narada himself felt that Krishna was a polygamist. One day, he went to the 16,008 houses, and Narada saw Krishna performing household duties in every house. From that observation he came to the conclusion that Krishna is a monogamist, and the supreme being. There is also another explanation about Krishna and his wives, most of whom are Gopis. "Love of Gopis for Krishna" is a symbolism of "the craving of Jivatman - individual soul - to merge with Paramatman (Absolute soul)." Here Gopis represent Jivatman (individual soul) and Krishna represents (Paramatman). To an ordinary man who reads songs of Swami Jayadeva, it will sound an exaggeration, but actually they are the symbolism of the Jivatma-Paramatma union.

3. SON: Daddy, you explained to me that non-violence is the highest Hindu virtue. How come, then all Hindu gods carry weapons and killed so many demons ?

DADDY: "Ahimsa Parmano Dharmah" - Non-violence is the highest virtue - is written for the ordinary man. Of course, Mahatma Gandhi used it effectively as a weapon against the British in India. But gods act on a different plane altogether. Their actions are not motivated by anger, greed or selfishness. They act in a very mathematical and logical manner. Just look at the way Lord Rama killed demon Ravana. Rama did that without any kind of anger. He could have transformed Ravana, but on the part of Ravana he was looking forward to death at the hands of Rama, so that he could achieve salvation. To give you another example, let us say, you put your hand in fire. You get burnt. You cry with pain. But the fire did not have any particular desire to hurt you. It is its nature to burn. Gods act in the same way. When they kill a demon, they do that without anger. They could convert the demon, but still they prefer to kill, because the demon's actions warrant pain for his body in this world.

4. SON : Daddy, why are you so hesitant to answer my questions about mythology ?

DADDY: Son, you know very well that it is very difficult to answer questions on mythology using logic and reason. For example, how on earth can anybody explain Lord Ganapati (elephant-headed God) using a tiny mouse as his vehicle ? How can anybody explain the 10 heads of Ravana and one thousand heads of the serpent Ananta ? Science cannot still tackle the problems of the Siamese twins, let alone 10 or 1000 heads on one body. It is indeed funny to hear people criticise Lord Rama for giving up his beloved consort princess Sita. They now that by no means are they going to get any satisfactory answer on that question but still this type of criticism of mythology lingers on. Mythological stories may have been written with very high ideological meanings but unfortunately with our very limited knowledge, we cannot understand them. With the aid of modern science we may be able to understand things like Brahmastra (as nuclear missiles), Krishna's Sudarshana Chakra (as a kind of strategic defence initiative weapon with great offensive capabilities SDI), the story of the birth of Lord Hanuman, where Goddess Parvati transferred her

pregnancy to the wife of the God of Air (surrogate motherhood), four sons of Queen Kunti Devi (as test-tube babies), 100 sons of Queen Gandhari (she did not use a test-tube, she used big earthenware pot) and Pushpaka Vimana (a helicopter) and so on. Of course, all these are speculations and as such we are all better off using mythology to strictly understand the unwritten laws of the universe. Arguing on mythological stories is the erroneous act of all and as such all arguments should be avoided.

Part 10: Women on a Pedestal in Hinduism..

1. SON: How are women treated in Hinduism ?

DADDY: Women are kept on a pedestal in Hinduism, but at the same time their freedom is curtailed for the sake of protection. In the Code of Manu, it is stated that a woman should be protected by her father during her childhood, by her husband during her youth, and by her son during her old age. Manu also asked society to worship woman, because she is the "light of the house". Hinduism believes that a woman who devotes her entire life to the well-being of her husband is a Pativrata and she is endowed with numerous powers, usually attained by Sages.

In Hinduism, Saraswati is the Goddess of Knowledge, Lakshmi is the Goddess of Wealth, and Parvati is the Goddess of Power. At the same time, they are the consorts of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva respectively. The Mother God comes before the Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. So in mythology and in Sruti literature, women are held in very high esteem. In the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, one of the persons asking grilling questions to Sage Yajnavalkya is none other than a female saint named Gargi. The Saka Agamas or Tantras glorify the supreme as the Mother of the Universe under one of the names and forms of Devi. In Tantras, the female aspirant is looked upon as an embodiment, of Shakti and she is worshipped through rituals like Kumari Pooja (virgin worship) and Shakti Upasana (Goddess worship).

2. SON: Why do women wear a dot on their foreheads ?

DADDY: Actually, all Hindus, especially those who belong to the Brahmin caste, are supposed to wear a dot on their foreheads. It is supposed to be at the centre of the meeting point of the two eyes to protect that important point. That important point is known as the "Spiritual eye" or "third eye" or Ajna Chakra. There is a lot of discussion about this center in books relating to Kundalini Power (Tantric literature). These dots are made of herbal (turmeric) powder or sandalwood paste.

Only a person who meditates on this point is supposed to see light. Hindus believe that Jesus Christ was referring to this point when he said, "If therefore thine eye be single, thy body is full of light." (Mathew 6-22). In India, Vaishnavites put this dot in an elongated form, starting from the center between the eyes and going to the top-most point on the head, known as Sahasrara, to smoothen and protect the whole path of the flow of Kundalini power, which I have explained before. Anyway, in India as time went on, women kept up the system of wearing dots and a red dot of herbal powders meant that the woman is a respectably married lady. Widows are not supposed to wear a red dot. No particular attributes can be given to this system today. Some women even go for different colours of paint to match the colour of the sarees they wear !

3. SON : Why don't Hindus "kiss and hug" like others ?

DADDY: Of course, the questions of hygiene and fear of getting diseases have a lot to do with it. Apart from that, like anywhere else in the world, we are also concerned with such simple actions finally leading to incest.

Apart from all that, there is also an occult theory behind not touching one another. According to this theory, everyone has an "aura", in brief every creature including plants

has "auras". This aura is more or less like the corona surrounding a high-tension electric overhead line. It is said, auras of some great saints were visible to the naked eye, The aura of a man is the summation of his thoughts, actions and past Karmas. It is said, for example, that if the person whom we are embracing has "powerful depressive thoughts", it can badly affect our own aura. Similarly our aura will be benefited if we embrace a person with "powerful positive thoughts". At the same time, embracing amongst the two sexes is equally dangerous, even to God-realised masters, for even they may fall under the mighty power of sexual attraction.

So, whichever way you look at it, embracing and kissing are not good acts to follow as a routine, when meeting anyone in our day-to-day life, even if such acts are motivated by very noble thoughts. Again, it is wrong to believe that affection can be expressed only by physical touch.

4. SON: Please tell me more about the auras .

DADDY: Modern science has not come out with any specific proof about the aura's existence. At the same time, it is coming to the conclusion that our brain is a small electric generator and our thinking and actions are just "electric impulses".

Anyway, going back to the question of aura, it is believed that the finger-tips are one point through which this powerful aura can be discharged. That is the reason why, when God-realised masters bless you, they bless you by touching the topmost point of your head, which is a powerful center known as Sahasrara in the books relating to Kundalini Power. To protect losing of power from the aura, Hindus show the Namaste sign, (touching the fingertips of both hands) during which they keep the aura in a close-circuited position like two magnets' power that are kept intact by spacers short-circuiting their poles.

In Christianity this, power of the aura is known as Virtue. When Jesus Christ was dragging the cross across the streets of Jerusalem, a leper happened to touch him, and Christ said. "Virtue has gone out of me, who touched me ?" Then after seeing the leper turned into a healthy woman, Christ said, "Thy faith made thee whole." Here it is the power from the aura of Christ that transformed the woman and the woman could receive the power only because of her intense faith.

Part 11: Why Cow Worship?

1. SON : Why is a cow so important to Hindus ?

DADDY: Since the ancient times in India, the cow was the only animal people domesticated. In the Vedic age, cows were a real blessing to the community. Cows provided them with milk, butter and yogurt. The dead cow's skin was used to make shelters and clothing. So the community in the Vedic age was really indebted to the cow in many ways. This later made the community to look at the cow with devotion. Mythology speaks about a celestial cow named Kamadhenu which could grant and fulfil any wish. Lord Krishna was a cowherd and he spent most of his childhood and youth taking care of cows. As time passed, cows -were looked upon as a symbol of motherhood. Even in the writings of Sage Manu, there are specific references to cows and he forbids the slaughtering of cows. The Rig Veda 6-28 reads : "Cows are god, they seem to me to be Indra - the god of heaven." Hindu society, especially those who belong to the Brahmin caste, is supposed to be vegetarian. To Hindus, cows are still everything. Of course, the majority of Hindus still avoid consuming beef, but they do -not look down upon any person who consumes beef. Anyway, among the masses in India, the slaughtering of cows will be a very controversial issue for years to come.

Part 12: Ashrams, Non-Violence(Ahimsa) and Diet in Hinduism..

1. SON: Daddy, what are "Ashramas" and "Ashrama Dharma" ?

DADDY: As I have told you before, in Hinduism a man has to undergo four stages in his life. They are Brahmacharya or Kaumaryam (bachelor-student), Garhasthyam (married householder), Vanaprastam (hermit), Sannyasam (wandering renunciate). These four stages are collectively known as Ashramas. In each state the man is supposed to work hard for attaining salvation. During the state of Brahmacharya, the celibate student receives instruction about scriptures and learns self-control and prepares himself for life's responsibilities. In the Garhastya Ashrama, the man gets married to a virgin girl from his caste and takes up a vocation. He leads a married householder's life as per the instructions of the Dharmna Sutras. In Vanaprasta Ashram, a man prepares to renounce the world by living in jungles as a hermit. In Sannyasa Ashrama, the man renounces worldly affairs completely, cutting himself away from the world and becoming a wandering saint.

The work or duties one has to do during each stage is known as Ashrama Dharma. All Ashrama Dharmas are laid down by the Dharma Sutra. In the Gautama, Smriti, which is a part of the Dharma Sutras, there are 40 ceremonial rites in Garhastya Ashrama, but as per the Grihya Sutras, the total ceremonial rites in Garhastya Ashrama are sixteen. Ashrama Dharmas guide a man to the final goal - God-realization.

2. SON: Do Hindus practise non-violence ?

DADDY: There is an oft-quoted Hindu saying, "Ahimsa Paramo Dharma" which means "Non-violence is the highest duty." Long before Jesus Christ, Hinduism taught people to return good for evil. Scores of passages from the Mahabharata and the Maha bhagavata can be quoted in support.

Ahimsa or non-violence is for those who are brave and strong. To flee from a bully and brute and to call it Non-violence is the worst form of self-deception. Non-violence actually teaches mastery of spiritual strength over brute strength. The spirit of non-violence is prevalent among all religions. It is evident throughout the teachings of Christ and also in the lives of Sufi saints. True Ahimsa implies gentleness, courtesy, kindness, hospitality, humanity and love. Mahatma Gandhi is the greatest apostle of Ahimsa in modern times. He used Ahimsa effectively in his freedom fight against the British. Non-violence has two sides, as I said above. On the negative side, it means even running away from righteousness and duty for fear of afflicting pain on creatures. On the positive side it means perfect selfless love towards every creature. Non-violence should never be used to cover up cowardice.

3. SON :Is there a Hindu 'Diet Code'?

DADDY: According to Hinduism, food is divided into three categories - Sattvic, Rajasic and Tamasic. Tamasic is the worst food of all. The food that is left over and contaminated is usually called Tamasic food. These foods are supposed to produce jealousy and greed among men.

Rajasic foods : Food that consists of meat of animals is called Rajasic food. Rajasic food also contains spices, onions, garlic, hot-pepper, pickles etc. Rajasic foods are supposed to produce activity and strong emotional qualities among men.

Sattvic foods : Sattvic foods are those foods which do not agitate your stomach at all. Much of the

Sattvic food consists of fruits and nuts, and vegetables. These foods are supposed to produce calmness and nobility among men.

Hindu diet codes strictly prohibit the consumption of beef and pork.

As per those codes, eating fruits and vegetables increases one's magnetism. From what we can understand today about diets, we are sure that ancient Hindu saints had a very good idea about food in general and their effect on the body and thinking pattern of man. Expression of the soul is dependent on the body, and the body is dependant on food. So for proper spiritual development, a proper diet is a must for everyone.