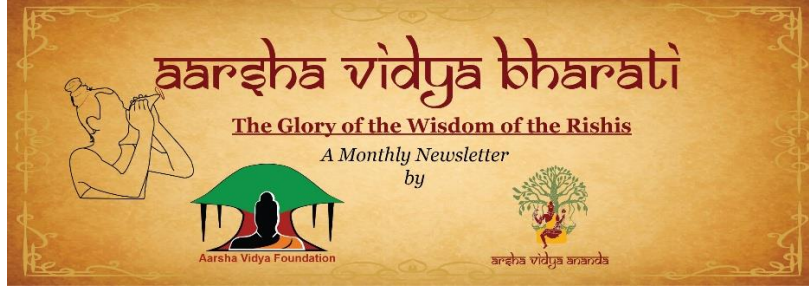

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A monthly newsletter that will bring you more happiness, more wisdom and more freedom



This is one of many articles from our monthly newsletter. Access the [Oct 2022 issue](#) or read any of [the articles](#).

Spotlight - Hinduism

Hinduism is more than 'a way of life'

By Swamini Brahmajnananda

When some Hindus are asked, 'What is Hinduism?', or 'What does it mean to be a Hindu?' They rattle off the answer, 'It is a way of life.' The Hindu knows that he/she belongs to an ancient civilisation that inspires and elevates, that still stands today but which has also been plundered and subjugated. There is awkwardness and shuffling of feet and a desperate need to change the topic knowing that 'religion' and the baggage that comes with the word will make inroads into the polite silence of conversation. And the myth of Hinduism being just 'a way of life' continues.

Spotlight on word



and meaning for clarity

By reducing Hinduism to 'a way of life', Hindus do themselves a disservice. Everyone has their way of life including animals. If we do not assert Hinduism as a religion also, we lose the legal rights of a religion and rightfully cannot take our place on the table in the world of religions. Any 'way of life' of people cannot be in isolation of a vision.

The teaching tradition of Vedas, including Vedanta, has survived in Bharat and even after thousands of years we continue to be blessed. An oral teaching tradition still surviving is nothing short of a miracle. It has been possible because the vision of oneness of Vedanta is reflected in the reverence and respect to different forms be it, the rivers, the mountains, the trees, our parents, *pitṛ*-s, Rishis and of course the Devatas. This vision did not just sit in the heads of certain people but flowed into the actions and limbs as *Sanātana* Dharma.

Our ways of relating to the different forms validates the vision that all that is here is sacred. All that is here is *Īśvara*.

And this very vision infuses our ways of living and relating with our people, trees, animals, rivers, mountains, our parents, *pitṛ*-s. The vision determines our way of living.

Suppose your name is Mala and I call you Gita, you will correct me. And rightly so. Further I tell you that who you are is not ok, your ways of living are not okay, will you keep quiet? You will either move away or refute me. Why? Because I am imposing my view of your identity onto you. You will be offended and rightly so because you have a unique identity. I or anyone else has no right to disrespect you. Correct? To function in society, we need a strong self-identity – a strong understanding of who we are, where we have come from and where we are

going. A part of this identity is our religious identity - being a Hindu, the one who lives a life of Dharma. If we don't claim our identity, others will declare our identity as good, bad or ugly and we will have to live with it or die because of it.

Some of you protest, 'We are studying Vedanta and are free of all identity'? Sure! Are you willing to stop being a citizen of your country? Claiming our identities and performing our duties is an integral part of *Kauśalam* and hence Karma Yoga. This sits well with also seeing the reality of all identities as invariable. The vision of Vedanta is not opposed to performing our responsibilities in our respective identities. Protecting and preserving Hinduism does not start with anything lofty but validating the key principles and practices that keep Hinduism alive, in our homes, in our families, in our communities. And so,

Hinduism is a

religion,

a vision determining the way of life,

a philosophy,

a culture and

home to an ancient civilisation.

Given how deep, profound and confusing Hinduism can be, we have put together [an essential guide to Hinduism](#) – its key principles and practices. As children of Hinduism, we honor, protect, preserve and defend Dharma by living a life of *Sanātana* Dharma.

॥ धर्मो रक्षति रक्षितः ॥

॥ *Dharmo rakṣati rakṣitaḥ* ॥

Dharma protects the one who protects it.

