

Seeker's Wordbook

Navigate your way through Hinduism with this lexicon of key Sanskrit terms

FOR YEARS, READERS have been asking for definitions of the most common and basic Hindu terms. Here is a glossary that can get you through a dinner conversation or next month's issue of this magazine. Save it as a reference or download and study 700 more at this amazingly long web address! www.HinduismToday.kauai.hi.us/HimalayanAcademy/Publications/HinduLexicon/DWSLexicon.html



abhisheka: अभिषेक "Sprinkling; ablution." Ritual bathing of the Deity's image with water, curd, milk, honey, ghee, rosewater, etc. A special form of *pūjā* prescribed by Āgamic injunction.

ahimsā: अहिंसा "Noninjury," nonviolence or nonhurtfulness. Refraining from causing harm to others, physically, mentally or emotionally.

ārati: आरती "Light." The circling or waving of a lamp—usually fed with ghee, camphor or oil—before a holy person or the temple Deity at the high point of *pūjā*. The flame is then presented to the devotees, each passing his or her hands through it and bringing them to the eyes three times, thereby receiving the blessings.

ānava mala: आपवमल "Impurity of smallness; finitizing principle." The individualizing veil of duality that enshrouds the soul. It is the source of finitude and ignorance. The presence of *ānava mala* is what causes the misapprehension about the nature of God, soul and world, the notion of being separate and distinct from God and the universe. *Ānava* is the root *mala* and the last bond to be dissolved.

Aum: ॐ or ओम् Often spelled *Om*. The mystic syllable of Hinduism, placed at the beginning of most sacred writings. As a *mantra*, it is pronounced *aw* (as in *law*), *oo* (as in *zoo*), *mm*. Aum represents the Divine, and is associated with Lord Gaṇeśa. The dot above represents the Soundless Sound, Parānāda.

bhajana: भजन Spiritual song. Individual or group singing of devotional songs, hymns and chants.

bindu: बिन्दु "A drop, small particle, dot." 1) The seed or source of creation. In the 36 *tattvas*, the nucleus or first particle of transcendent light, technically called Parābindu. 2) Small dot worn on the forehead between the eyebrows, or in the middle of the forehead. It is a sign that one is a Hindu. Mystically, it represents the "third eye," or the "mind's eye," which sees things that the physical eyes cannot see. The forehead dot is a reminder to use and cultivate one's spiritual vision.

brahmacharya: ब्रह्मचर्य "Divine conduct." Controlling lust by remaining celibate when single, leading to faithfulness in marriage.

chakra: चक्र "Wheel." Any of the nerve plexes or centers of force and consciousness located within the inner bodies of man. The seven principal *chakras* are situated along the spinal cord from its base to the cranial chamber. Additionally, seven *chakras* exist below the spine. They are seats of instinctive consciousness and constitute the lower or hellish world.

The seven upper *chakras*, from lowest to

highest, are: 1) *mūlādhāra* (base of spine): memory, time and space; 2) *svādhishṭhāna* (below navel): reason; 3) *maṇipūra* (solar plexus): willpower; 4) *anāhata* (heart center): direct cognition; 5) *viśuddha* (throat): divine love; 6) *ājñā* (third eye): divine sight; 7) *sahasrāra* (crown of head): illumination, Godliness.

The seven lower *chakras*, from highest to lowest, are: 1) *atala* (hips): fear and lust; 2) *vitāla* (thighs): raging anger; 3) *sūtala* (knees): retaliatory jealousy; 4) *talātala* (calves): prolonged mental confusion; 5) *rasātala* (ankles): selfishness; 6) *mahātala* (feet): absence of conscience; 7) *pātala* (located in the soles of the feet): murder and malice.

darśana: दर्शन "Vision, sight." Seeing the Divine. Beholding, with inner or outer vision, a temple image, Deity, holy person or place, with the desire to inwardly contact and receive the grace and blessings of the venerated being or beings.

deva: देव "Shining one." A being living in the higher astral plane, in a subtle, nonphysical body. *Deva* is also used in scripture to mean "God or Deity."

dharma: धर्म "That which contains or upholds the cosmos." It is divine law, the law of being, the way of righteousness, religion, duty, responsibility, virtue, justice, goodness and truth. Essentially, *dharma* is the orderly fulfillment of an inherent nature or destiny. Relating to the soul, it is the mode of conduct most conducive to spiritual advancement. There are four principal kinds of *dharma*, as follows. They are known collectively as —**chaturdharma:** "four religious laws." 1) —**ṛita:** "Universal law." The inherent order of the cosmos. 2) —**varṇa dharma:** "Law of one's kind." Social duty. 3) —**āśrama dharma:** "Duties of life's stages." Human *dharma*. 4) —**svadharmā:** "Personal law." One's perfect individual pattern through life, according to one's own particular physical, mental and emotional nature.

dīkshā: दीक्षा "Initiation." Action or process by which one is entered into a new realm of spiritual knowledge and practice by a teacher or preceptor through the transmission of blessings. Denotes initial or deepened connection with the teacher and his lineage and is usually accompanied by ceremony. Most Hindu schools, and especially Śaivism, teach that only with initiation from a *satguru* is enlightenment attainable.

grace: "Benevolence, love, giving," from the Latin *gratus*, "beloved, agreeable." God's power of revelation, *anugraha śakti* ("kindness, showing favor"), by which souls are awakened to their true, Divine nature.

grihastha: गृहस्थ "Householder." Family man or woman. Family of a married couple and other relatives. Pertaining to family life.

guru: गुरु "Weighty one," indicating a being of great knowledge or skill. A term used to de-

scribe a teacher or guide in any subject, such as music, dance, sculpture, but especially religion.

hatha yoga: हठयोग "Forceful yoga." A system of physical and mental exercise developed in ancient times as a means of rejuvenation and used today in preparing the body and mind for meditation.

hell: *Naraka*. An unhappy, mentally and emotionally congested, distressful area of consciousness that can be experienced on the physical plane or in the sub-astral plane (*Naraka*) after death of the physical body. It is accompanied by the tormented emotions of hatred, remorse, resentment, fear, jealousy and self-condemnation. In the Hindu view, the hellish experience is not permanent, but a temporary condition of one's own making.

Hindu: हिन्दु A follower of, or relating to, Hinduism. Generally, one is understood to be a Hindu by being born into a Hindu family and practicing the faith, or by declaring oneself a Hindu. Acceptance into the fold is recognized through the name-giving sacrament, a temple ceremony called *nāmakaraṇa samskāra*, given to born Hindus shortly after birth, and to self-declared Hindus who have proven their sincerity and been accepted by a Hindu community. While traditions vary greatly, all Hindus rely on the *Vedas* as scriptural authority.

japa: जप "Recitation." Practice of concentratedly repeating a *mantra*, often while counting the repetitions on a *mālā* or strand of beads. It may be done silently or aloud. For Śaivites, *Namaḥ Śivāya* in its various forms is the most treasured *mantra* used in *japa*. The *mantra* Hare-Rāma-Hare-Kṛishṇa is among the foremost Vaishṇava *mantras*.

jīvanmukta: जीवन्मुक्त "Liberated soul." A being who has attained *nirvikalpa samādhi*—the realization of the Self, Parabrahman—and is liberated from rebirth while living in a human body. This attainment is the culmination of lifetimes of intense striving, *sādhana* and *tapas*, requiring total renunciation, *sannyāsa*, in the current incarnation.

karma: कर्म "Action, deed." *Karma* refers to 1) any act or deed; 2) the principle of cause and effect; 3) a consequence, "fruit of action" or "after effect" which sooner or later returns upon the doer. What we sow, we shall reap in this or future lives. Selfish, hateful acts will bring suffering. Benevolent actions will bring loving reactions. *Karma* is a neutral, self-perpetuating law of the inner cosmos, such as gravity is an impersonal law of the outer cosmos.

Karma is threefold: *sañchita*, *prārabdha* and *kriyamāna*. —**sañchita karma:** "Accumulated actions." The sum of all *karmas* of this life and past lives. —**prārabdha karma:** "Actions be-



