LET US BE HINDUS

(First talk by H H Swami Chinmayananda December 23, 1951)

A Hindu swami to talk. A Hindu temple for the background. A crowded hall of Hindus audience, and the subject for discussion: "Let us be Hindus." Strange! It sounds like a ridiculous paradox and a meaningless contradiction. I can very well see that you are surprised at the audacity of this sadhu.

It has become a new fashion with the educated Hindu to turn up his nose and sneer in contempt at the very mention of his religion in any discussion. Personally I too belong in my sympathies to these critics of our religion. But when this thoughtless team begins to declare we would benefit ourselves socially and nationally by running away from our sacred religion, I pause to reconsider my own stand.

At the present state of moral, ethical, and cultural degradation in our country, to totally dispose of religion would be making our dash to ruin the quicker. However decadent our religion may be, it is far better than having none at all. My proposal is that the wise thing would be for us to try and bring about a renaissance of Hinduism so that under its greatness-proved through many centuries-we may come to grow in to the very heights of culture and civilization that was our in the historical past.

No doubt, in India Hinduism has come to mean nothing more than bundle of sacred superstitions, or a certain way of dressing, cooking, eating, talking and so on. Our gods have fallen to the mortal level of administration officers at whose alters the faithful Hindu might pray and get special permits of the things he desires; that is, if he pays the required fee to the priest!

This degradation is not the product of any accidental and sudden historical upheaval. For two hundred years Hinduism has remained an encouragement of the rich. Once upon a time, the learned philosophers were rightly the advisers of the state. But then the quality of the adviser-class [Brahmana] and the ruler-class [Kshatriya] deteriorated. By slowly putrefying themselves in the leprous warmth of luxury and power, they have taken us to the regrettable stage in which we find ourselves now. The general cry of the educated class is really against this unreligion. However, it is only the thoughtless, uninformed leaders who call this Hinduism.

Certainly, is Hinduism can breed for us only heartless lalas [shopkeepers], corrupt babus [clerks], cowardly men, loveless masters, faithless servants; if Hinduism can give us only a state of social living in which each man is put against his brother; if Hinduism can give us only starvation, nakedness, and destitution; if Hinduism can encourage us only to plunder, to loot, and to steal; if Hinduism can preach to us only intolerance, fanaticism, hardheartedness, and cruelty; then I too cry, "Down, Down"; with that Hinduism.

And yet the above is a realistic picture of the sad condition and plight into which the Hindu people as a nation have allowed themselves to fall. This is the tragic picture of the great Hindu disaster in present-day India.

But Hinduism is not this external show that we have learned to parade about in our daily life. Hinduism is a science of perfection. There is in it an answer to every individual, social, national, or international problem. But unfortunately the religion, which we have come to follow blindly, is not the grand true Hinduism. It is only the treacherous scheme thrust upon us sometime in the past by the selfish, arrogant; power mad priest caste whose intention was to make us slaves of their plans and our own passions. The present day Hindu ignoramuses prove the tragic success of these religious saboteurs. With their guidance we overlook the fundamental tenets in sacred scriptures that are the very backbone of Hinduism. True Hinduism is the Sanatana Dharma [Eternal Truth] of the Upanishads.

The Upanishads declare in unmistakable terms that in reality, man-at the peak of his achievement- is God himself. He is advised to live his day to day experiences in life in such a systematic and scientific way that, hour by hour, consciously cleansing himself of all the encrustation of

imperfections that have gathered to conceal the beauty and divinity of the true eternal personality in him. The methods by which an individual can consciously purify and evolve by his self-effort to regain the status of his True Nature are the content of Hinduism. Hinduism in its vast amphitheater has preserved and worshiped, under the camouflage of the heavy descriptions contained in the Puranas, shastras [scriptures], and their commentaries of thousand different interpretations. This overgrowth has so effectively come to conceal that real beauty and grandeur of the tiny Temple of Truth that today the college-educated illiterates, in their ignorance of the language and style of the ancient Sanskrit writers, miss the Temple amidst its own festoons!

To inquire into the very textbooks of our religion with a view to knowing what Hinduism has to teach and how its message can be used to serve us as we face the problems of our daily life is the aim of the One Hundred Day's Upanishad Jnana Yagna, which is now proposed to commence on December 31, 1951, here in Poona.

Religion becomes dead and ineffectual if the seekers are not ready to live its ideals. For that matter is there any philosophy-political, social, or cultural-which can take us to its promised land of success, without our following its principles in our day-to-day living?

However great our culture might have been in the past, that dead glory, reported in the pages of history books, is not going to help us in our present trails. If the barbarous cavemen of the unexplored jungles want to become as civilized as the men of modern nations, they cannot achieve this total revolution through mere discourses, or even through an exhaustive study of the literature describing the ways of modern civilized nations. They will have to know and then live the civilized values of life. A mere knowledge of it will not help them. They can claim the blessing of their knowledge only if they are ready to live what they know. In order to live as civilized men, they will have to renounce completely their ways of uncivilized thinking and acting.

In fact without renunciation no progress is ever possible. We must renounce the thrills of our childhood games in order to grow to be young men of noble actions. Again, unless we renounce our youthful spirit, we cannot come to the reverence of old age.

Unless we are ready to renounce the low animal values of material life and replace them with the noble values of the truly religious life, we cannot hope to gain the blessings of religion. A study of a cookbook, however thorough it might be will not satisfy our hunger. No matter how long we may meditate upon and repeat the name of a medicine, we cannot get the cure we need until we actually take the medicine. Similarly, the blessings of religion can be ours only when we are ready to live the recommended values. To condemn unpracticed religion is as meaningless as those cavemen sitting around their open fire and querulously decrying advanced civilization.

During these one hundred days of the Upanishad Jnana Yagna, we shall be trying to discover the eternal happiness and bliss that is the succulent essence of all true religions. In the light of the principle of Truth declared in the Upanishads, we shall be trying to get at the scientific significance of the various practices that are considered part of our religion. In a spirit of communal living for these one hundred days we shall come to discover the Science of Perfection, the true essence of Hinduism.

Let us know what Hinduism is! Let us take an honest oath for ourselves, not only for our own sake, but for the sake of the entire world: That we shall, when once we are convinced of the validity of the Eternal Truth, try honestly to live as consistently as possible the values advocated by this ancient and sacred religion.

Let us be Hindus, and thus build up a true Hindustan [home of the Hindu] people with thousands of Shankara, hundreds of Buddhas, and dozens of Vivekanandas!