

The best love is to serve all equally  
—Yogi Bhajan

MULLAH NASRUDDIN

Horse Race

A horse race was about to be held and the contestants were being lined up. Mullah Nasruddin came with an ox and asked that it be included in the race. "Have you gone mad?" said the organisers. "What chance does an ox have against horses?" "You talk that way because you do not know anything about my ox," said Nasruddin. "When it was a mere calf, it could run almost as fast as a pony. Now that it is older it should be able to run even faster."

Intoxicating Milk

One evening, a man carrying a can of milk stopped Mullah Nasruddin in the street and said he had a problem and wanted his advice. "What's your problem?" asked Hodja. "My problem is that though I never drink wine, I feel intoxicated when I get up in the morning," explained the man.



"What do you drink last thing at night?" asked Hodja, eyeing the milk can in his hand. "Milk." "Just as I thought," said Hodja. "That is the cause of your problem." "Milk causes intoxication?" asked the man, astonished. "It is like this," explained the Mullah. "You drink the milk and go to sleep. You toss around in your sleep. The milk gets churned. It turns into butter; butter churned, turns into cheese; cheese turns to fat, fat into sugar; sugar into alcohol. So you wake up with alcohol in your stomach. That is why you feel intoxicated in the morning." "So what do I do?" asked the man, bewildered. "Simple. Don't drink the milk," said Hodja. "Give it to me" — [english-for-students.com](http://english-for-students.com)



The art of being happy lies in the power of extracting happiness from common things  
— Henry Ward Beecher



# Lighting Up Lives

NAYASWAMIS JYOTISH & DEVI

who are carrying forward the mission of Swami Kriyananda's Ananda Sangha — inspired by his guru Paramhansa Yogananda — are currently in India. They interacted with NARAYANI GANESH, talking about Vrindavan widows, consciousness awareness and becoming agents of change

What is the thrust of Ananda Sangha's work in Vrindavan?

Jyotish: We work in cooperation with the Ramakrishna Mission and our aim is to restore to the marginalised people here, especially widows, dignity and divinity. It is not enough to just provide basic needs like food, shelter and clothing; they need follow up in their homes, they need to know that someone cares for them and loves them.

We have a database of widows in Vrindavan and they fall into one of the following categories:

- 1) Those who can take care of themselves with a little help; so we need to just check in on them to see if they are doing all right
- 2) Those who live in their own homes, but need assistance in the home to help them function
- 3) Those who cannot function on their own and for whom we make arrangements in care homes

Sometimes we also come across sadhus who are sick and who need help, and we do care for them as well.

Operationally, you have worked out a system?

Jyotish: Our staff wearing blue jackets make at least two to three hundred home visits a day. They mainly help to restore a sense of dignity to make them feel cared for. Many widowed mothers desire to die here in Vrindavan and cannot afford the cost of funeral rites so we make sure that arrangements are made to fulfil their wishes.

We also encourage them to participate in festivals and not stay confined within four walls. One woman said, "For the first time, we celebrated Deepavali on the streets."

Our staff is taught energisation meditation, making them feel positive and energetic so they can transmit the same to widow mothers. Now they can do simple exercises and yogic asanas for greater mobility. It's more about love and care, really.

Are you being helped by professionals?

Jyotish: Yes, we work with ex-WHO medical doctor Manjunath Kini, an

## What They Do In Vrindavan

Ananda Sangha volunteers complete at least 2,400 home visits per month in Vrindavan, says Nayaswami Jyotish, talking about their project that is designed to 'restore dignity and divinity' to those who have come to be tagged as 'Vrindavan widows'. Paramhansa Yogananda Public Charitable Trust works with the poorest of the poor, disadvantaged and marginalised sections of society to provide them with physical comfort including food, clothing shelter, health and medical care, to improve their life circumstances and help them live a life of joy. Ananda Sangha was founded by Swami Kriyananda, a direct disciple of Paramhansa Yogananda.

Currently, the Trust is providing support to more than 4,000 widows in the holy city of Vrindavan with home-based care, hospitalisation and shelter with total care and support. The Trust also conducts regular kirtans and sat-sangs. The Trust has also initiated programmes to support employment needs of youth and women and education of children. ■

Ananda Sangha member and he is also one of our teachers. He lives with his wife and two daughters and he is director of the charitable trust in Vrindavan. Other corporations help us with skill training. We are now more focussed on service. Many NGOs are coming to us in Vrindavan; we have a good reputation there as the work becomes more visible. They are seeking to replicate our model of service. They look out for the 'people in dark blue'!

Do you have your own care homes or do you serve care homes run by others?

Jyotish: Most care homes are rented; till we're able to afford to build our own.



WIDOWS FROM VRINDAVAN AND VARANASI ENJOY A WEEKEND OUTING AT INDIA GATE, NEW DELHI

They are small homes so they get personal attention, like a family. Of course, donations are welcome, not just money but anything, like clothes, food and medicines.

Many of us want to become agents of positive change, but don't know how. What would you suggest?

Devi: Many, when they have problems, project those problems on others; no one likes to take individual responsibility. For this, we really need to elevate our consciousness. You need to tell yourself, 'Let me do something; undertake a personal effort to act in a way that is positive.' Shift the responsibility from others to yourself. See what happens, then!

If you can, try to give people tools to do something. Recently, at Ananda Sangha, we released a meditation app to help people. If each group works with other groups to give people tools to work on positive goals, then you create a large network. This is what we are trying to do with other spiritual groups like the RK Mission, Swami Ram Dass, and so on. Our campaign's line is 'Be the change.'

How can you gain more visibility to garner wider cooperation and help?

Devi: We have applied to the UN for entry as a spiritual NGO. Then one can suggest a special day, like International Day of Meditation and this could help bring more groups together.

Ananda Sangha India is to receive an award from a UN-affiliated NGO in New York in November this year, for helping to lift consciousness. This is significant because we need to understand that change comes from change in consciousness; only then can you hope to achieve sustainable living, harmony and selfless service. You need to become a catalyst for positive change.

Can you give me an example?

Devi: In the early days of Ananda Sangha in Nevada County, USA, there was stiff resistance from government agencies who did not want us there.

It took us five years to get approvals and acceptance to get anything done. Today, government officials speak on our behalf and uphold Ananda Sangha as an example to replicate — to respect the environment, to use

alternative sources of energy like solar, for example. They say, Ananda Sangha is a role model. See, that's how you can change by doing the right thing and demonstrating it at a practical level, by example. ■

Follow Nayaswamis Jyotish and Devi at [speakingtree.in](http://speakingtree.in)

CONVERSATIONS

# 'Instrument of harmony'

SHERIAR NOOREYZDAN

A bench of the Supreme Court, adjudicating a dispute between two communities over ownership of a place of worship in 1993, identified the cause of communal disharmony and suggested a remedy. Justices J S Verma and G N Ray, wrote: "The greatest religious tensions are not those between any one religion and another; they are tensions between the fundamentalist and pluralist in each and every religious tradition." They also recorded the following opinion: "A neutral perception for the requirement for communal harmony is to be found in the Baha'i Faith."

The judges apparently acknowledged that in the Baha'i faith, the kernel, the essence of all revealed religion — the unity of God, of religion, and of mankind not just rhetorically professed in words, but exemplified and seen to be practised — is evidenced in their communities and interaction with members of other communities. They follow the injunction of Baha'u'llah, founder of

the Baha'i faith, to 'consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship.'

Religion, practised in letter and spirit, can be the most potent means of spreading love, peace and harmony. No religion distinguishes between people on any account whatsoever.



SHRINE OF BAHU'U'LLAH, GARDEN OF BAHJI, AKKA, ISRAEL

This is amply demonstrated in the Baha'i community, comprising millions of people from every conceivable background of caste, colour, ethnicity, nationality, and social strata, who have voluntarily adopted this new belief system. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* describes the Baha'i faith as

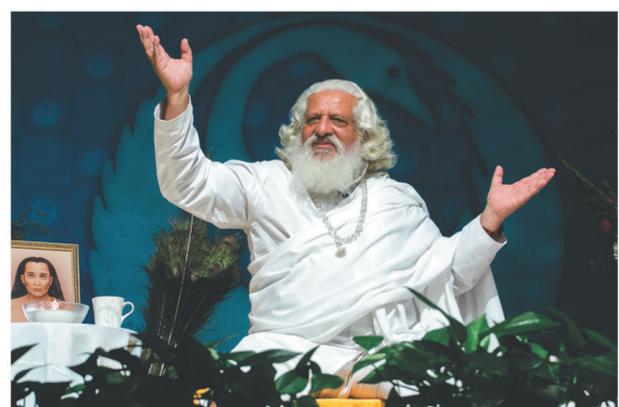
the most widely spread religion next to Christianity, although the Baha'is claim they do not proselytise or induce conversion. They explain the rapid spread of their faith to the fact that enrolment as a Baha'i does not mean conversion to an alien faith by abandonment of ancestral beliefs, but recognition, after study and investigation, of Baha'u'llah as the promised one of their respective scriptures. They claim that in Baha'u'llah, Hindus recognise their Kalki Avatar, Muslims their Imam Mehdi, Buddhists their Maitreya Amitabha, Zoroastrians their Shahbahram, Jews and Christians their Messiah and Saviour. Shedding traditional prejudices, they acknowledge the divinity of all God's manifestations, making erstwhile hostile religious contenders loving family members. And in their temples, Baha'is recite, with equal reverence, verses from all holy scriptures in ritual-free worship.

The learned Supreme Court judges have lauded 'the spirit of tolerance and assimilation' as hallmarks of the Baha'i civilisation, and quoted in their judgement the following

from a Baha'i booklet: "Lasting harmony between heterogeneous communities can only come through a recognition of the oneness of mankind, a realisation that differences that divide us along ethnic and religious lines have no foundation. Just as there are no boundaries drawn on the earth to separate nations, distinctions of social, economic, ethnic and religious identity imposed upon peoples are artificial; distinctions imposed by man have no substance."

This belief demolishes all communal barriers and brings about a confluence of faith, and the end of religious dissension. Is the Baha'i community a model of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*, the universal family of man foreseen by our sages, the destiny of mankind? Interestingly, the cited Supreme Court judgement concludes with M K Gandhi's famous bhajan 'Ishwar, Allah tero naam, sabko sanmati de Bhagwan' and expresses the hope that communal harmony and peace will reign in the country. ■

The writer is a member of the Baha'i community



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