

Swami Pratyagbodhananda Saraswati Enthralls Houston's Hindu Youth



Swamiji with youth after addressing them on their role in the future of Hindu Dharma at the Guruvayurappan Temple.

By Dr. Jayakumar Srinivasan

In his address to the youth, titled, "Role of Youth in the Future of Hindu Dharma" at the Sri Guruvayurappan temple, Swami Pratyagbodhananda of Arsha Vidya Gurukulam said that though children of Indian origin are born in the US, their roots go back to the ancient Indian civilizations of the Indus, Saraswati and beyond. A holistic understanding of that heritage enables them to have a strong Hindu identity.

Covering topics pertaining to the Hindu religion, including the multiplicity of Gods, idol worship, and daily customs such as wearing *tilak*, Swamiji answered the very interesting and often asked question, "Do we worship idols or Gods?" – Hindus worship Gods who personify ideals and are in the form of idols, clarified Swamiji.

According to Swamiji, when we salute a flag, we are not saluting a piece of cloth; we are saluting everything that it epitomizes – a collective history, the will, pride and aspirations of an entire nation! Likewise, Hindus worship idols which are not just ordinary statuettes, but icons which have come to possess a sanctified and sacred status over several millennia.

During interactions with the youth, Swamiji defined culture as encompassing of language, customs, dress, music, worship, festival, history and worldviews. Stressing on respect for all cultures, he said that no culture should be obliterated. According to Swamiji, the Hindu Dharma is exclusive in that if religion is removed from Indian culture, there will be no culture left. He touched upon the history of ongoing attempts by Abrahamic religions to convert Hindus, and categorically stated that "Conversion is violence against humanity", drawing applause from the audience.

America is unique in that independent religious identities are encouraged and respected. Here, the Hindu Youth have the opportunity to develop and express their religious identities in creative ways. Swamiji urged Hindu organizations to establish a solid Vedic Heritage curriculum for children and to develop leadership programs.

During the week Swamiji presented a series of discourses on Uddhava Gita, a dialogue between Lord Krishna and Uddhava. Swamiji also spoke at the Hindu Temple of Woodlands and at the Meenakshi Temple.

The program was organized by Arsha Vidya Satsanga, Houston.

For more information, visit www.AVShouston.org or email ArshaVidyaHou@gmail.com