



HIV/AIDS - The Human Dimension

Voices from the Hindu World

This initiative entitled “HIV/AIDS – The Human Dimension: Voices From the Hindu World” is an innovative attempt to coalesce important voices from ancient Hindu texts and contemporary religious leaders, women, youth and children. We hope this first step will help our communities to better understand the human dimension of HIV/AIDS.

“Religious leaders are key to mitigating the epidemic because they are trusted and respected members of society and are influential in shaping social values and public opinion.”

Source : *What Religious Leaders can do about HIV/AIDS : Action for Children and Young People - WCRP*



INTRODUCTION

Over 40 million people are estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS in the world today. This disease is a worldwide concern that affects the lives of people from all corners of the globe crossing national, racial, religious and cultural boundaries. Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations, views the AIDS challenge as a threat to “human security”.

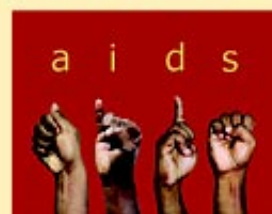
Although healthcare providers have worked hard to respond to the challenge of AIDS since its discovery in the early 1980s, there are simply not enough resources to facilitate adequate care and medical treatment. This is particularly true in nations with high concentrations of people living with AIDS. Social stigmas and discrimination continue to make the lives of these people extremely difficult. For these reasons, it must be emphasized that AIDS victims require more than just medical care. Truly, this challenge must be viewed within the context of human rights and human responsibilities.

International cooperation is an essential part of the fight against AIDS. The sharing of ideas and discoveries in the field of AIDS research has already led to benefits for all of humankind. This threat to “human security” must incorporate societal institutions which produce positive changes amongst communities in order to create an improved environment for those affected. An educated public is key to caring for people living with AIDS and to alleviating discrimination experienced by them.

India's Hindu community, in its multitudes, is beginning to notice the global impact of AIDS. Some religious organizations have already demonstrated leadership that produces meaningful changes in the lives of affected people. These organizations have also been responsible for leading their communities in revisiting such core religious values as compassion and understanding.

Karuna (compassion), *Shradha* (respect), and *Budh* (understanding), have been integral components of the Hindu tradition. Generations of parents and grandparents have shared these values with their families and communities. The ancient Hindu texts contain teachings that guide people to see that their well-being is interconnected with the well being of all... “*Loka Samastha Sukhino Bhavanthu*”.

The Hindu tradition is beginning to recognize the need for revisiting its core values, amplifying its voice of concern and compassion, and making a call of support for those living with AIDS. But (how) is this possible? Perhaps we need to look to God. Maybe there is some way that we can pause to give ourselves an opportunity to revisit what our traditions have taught us. This would allow us a way to reiterate voices of concern and compassion, and to offer our understanding towards informed action regarding those living with AIDS.



*“Yastu sarvani bhutani atmanyevanupasyati;
Sarvabhutesu catmanam tato na vijugupsate.”*

- Isa Upanisad (vi)

*He who sees everything in himself and himself in everything
never hates anything.*



*“Advesta Sarva-bhutanam maitrah karuna eva ca
Nirmamo nirahamkarah sama-duhkha-sukhah ksami.”*

- Gita Chapter 12, Verse No. 13

*Friendly and compassionate to all and without any touch of hatred;
devoid of possessiveness and arrogance; ever content and contemplative;
alike in happiness and misery.*



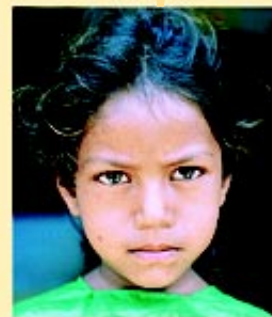
“Anukampa duhkhhitesu apaksapatena duhkhaprananeccha.”
- from the commentary on Hemacandracarya's yogasastra 2.15

*‘Compassion is the desire of removing the sufferings
of miserable ones in an impartial spirit.’*



“HIV/AIDS – The Human Dimesion : Voices From the Hindu World” is an innovative attempt to coalesce important voices from ancient Hindu texts and literature and contemporary voices of religious leaders, women, youth and children to help our communities better understand the human dimension of this epidemic. The contemporary voices included are leaders from different fields who have made significant contributions in their particular area of work. They have contributed to human development in their lifetimes and so their voices are recognized.

This booklet is only a first step ... a simple initiative to introduce the potential we have in responding to the great challenge of HIV/AIDS. It is our hope that through a deeper look into the religious tradition of the Hindu world, we can offer an empowering message to those who live every day with AIDS and to those who are standing up to this challenge. Each of our voices matter - to lead us and our communities into constructive action ... “*Thamosoma Jyothir Gamaya*”. We encourage you to go beyond what this booklet has offered – to initiate more informed thought and action that can honestly and effectively equip us in alleviating this threat to human security.



*"Atm'ānpamyena sarvatra samam paśyati yo'rjuna
Sukham va yadi va duḥkham sa yogi paramo mataḥ."*

- Gita Chapter 6, Verse No. 32

*Oh Arjuna! In My view that Yogi is the best who, out of a sense of
identity with others on account of the perception of the same Atman
in all, feels their joy and suffering as his own.*



*"There is no virtue equal to compassion and no sin worse than
causing pain to another. This is the essence of all the scriptures."*

*"Lovers of God are always active in the service of others,
compassionately sharing their sorrows."*

- Ramayana



"Deho devalayaḥ proktī"

[Kalidasa's Raghuvaṃsa Canto II]

The Body is indeed a temple.



Of all the dangers that threaten mankind today, AIDS is the largest. The saddest thing is that infants and small children now constitute one of the fastest growing risk groups. In India, the disease is reaching alarming proportions and more than four million people are estimated to be affected. Swami Vivekananda reminded us of our Hindu philosophy that there is divinity in every human being. This divinity is not lost once a man is stricken with AIDS. In keeping with our traditions he becomes the responsibility of us all. This is the message we have to carry to him and prove it by looking after him, and by caring for him and helping him to fight the disease both physically and mentally. This service then becomes not only the service to a fellow human being, but to God who resides in us all.

- Swami Gokulananda
Head, Ramakrishna Mission, Delhi



The true magnitude of the human tragedy precipitated by HIV/AIDS pandemic is being kept under wraps. So far, the world at large has responded to the HIV/AIDS challenge mainly with the resources of technology. What we need to do is to see how we can deploy our spiritual resources - especially pertaining to self-control, the capacity to make life-friendly choices and to minimize our behaviour vulnerability - in this crucial battle against the killer virus. Taking care of children who have become victims of HIV/AIDS indeed is, from a spiritual point of view, a sacred duty.

- Swami Agnivesh
Working President, World Council of Arya Samaj, New Delhi



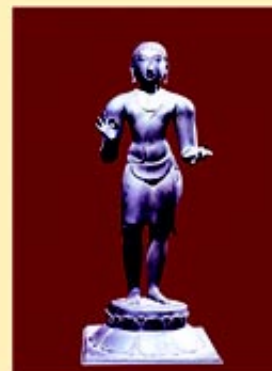
The international scientific community has been slow in recognizing and even harnessing the values of religion and tradition towards a greater holistic approach to the AIDS crisis. The moral potential of religion, the influence of rich and healthy traditional values, and the preservation of a helpful cultural milieu should never be underestimated.

- Swami Sarâclanandâ
Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa



From the Vedic period, considerable emphasis has been given to the control of disease epidemics through knowledge and community action. Charaka has particularly pointed out the need to avoid contagious diseases. He has also emphasized that prevention is better than cure. This applies to HIV/AIDS. Awareness and self-discipline can help to avoid the HIV/AIDS pandemic. What is important is self-discipline and control. This is the essence of the early Hindu tradition on disease management.

- Prof. M.S. Swaminathan
Pioneer of India's Green Revolution



“sāadhō bhāī, jīvat hī hī karo āsā.”

- Saint Kabir

*Oh friend! Hope for him whilst you live, know whilst you live,
understand whilst you live: for in life deliverance abides.
If your bonds be not broken whilst living,
what hope of deliverance in death?*



*“Sarvesam yah subrunirtyam sarvesam ca hite ratah
Karmana manasa vaca sa dharmam veda jajase.”*

- Mahabharat

*“Oh! Jaiali, he who is friend of all with his thoughts,
words, and deeds, and he who works for
the good of others indeed knows dharma.”*

*Dwelling in their heart as the sufferer I would (rather) undergo the suffering of all embodied
souls, so that through such vicarious suffering of mine they may be relieved of misery.*



“Each of us must be the change we want to see in this world”

- Mahatma Gandhi



One who deviates from nature deviates from happiness. Do not wander in the garden of senses, it only promises a little honey in the beginning but is poised with unending misery. Come back to the castle of inner senses and listen to your inner voices of positive thinking where the joys are pure and permanent.

- **H.H. Sugunendra Theertha Swamiji**
Udupi Puthige Mutt, Udupi



The teaching that God exists equally in all beings constitutes the core of the Hindu world view. It is God's existence in all that gives them value and significance. Everyone is sacred and worthy of reverence on account of reality and God within. The ideal Yogi is one who enters compassionately into the lives of others, learning to see through their eyes, sharing their feelings, understanding their thoughts, and responding to their needs. The Hindu tradition invites us to find delight in the well-being of others. To profess love and understanding of God, while ignoring or condemning those who suffer, is a tragic betrayal of the heart of Hinduism.

- **Prof. Anantanand Rambachan**
Professor of Religion and Philosophy, Saint Olaf College, Minnesota, USA



The larger philosophic concept of "Vasudaiva Kutumbakam" considers all of humanity to belong to one large family. There is no room, therefore, in Indian thinking for exclusion of any group of human beings from the sympathy and help that is due to them from others.

- **Mr. A.P. Venkateswaran**
Former Foreign Secretary of India



If we put our minds together and extend our loving hands we can share the agony caused by HIV/AIDS and surely we can bring light to the horizon.

- **Mrs. Minoti Aram**
President, Shanti Ashram, Coimbatore



Compassion, love, and service to humanity are the keys to our way of life. When one is distressed, when one suffers to stand, providing comfort to the sick is a common practice within our families and communities. The dreaded disease HIV/AIDS is the challenge of our century. Let us join hands and work together to prevent HIV/AIDS. If one is affected, let us give love, care, affection, and companionship so that one never feels alone.

- **Mr. Manabendra Mondal**
Director, Socio Legal Aid Research & Training Centre, Calcutta



“Anrsamsyam paro dharmah.”

(Mahabharata 3.203.41)

Compassion is indeed supreme dharma.

*He who compares his own joys and sorrows with the joys and sorrows of others,
and he who understands that others feel as I feel, knows the dharma.*



*“If the senses five you sublimate
Then all worlds are yours
That is tapas rare;
That is the Lord's feet too;
That indeed is the way to grace received.”*

—Thirumoolan, 2035



“Sariramadyam khalu dharmasadhanam

[Kalidasa's Raghuvarsha Canto II]

The Body is indeed an instrument for performing dharma.



*That man who, living in the midst of temptations of the world,
attains perfection (from human limitations), is a hero.*

- Sri Ramakrishna



If I had to describe in one word the common characteristic of people living with AIDS, it would be grit. These people are all fighters - opinionated, incredibly knowledgeable about AIDS, and passionately committed to living. The first thought that I would like to share with you is never, never, never lose hope. Millions of people are thinking of you, praying for you. You are not alone in fighting this.

- Swami Satchidananda
Founder, Integral Yoga Institute, Virginia, USA



The Vedic culture of this land advocates SIMPLE LIVING and HIGH THINKING which guarantees inner peace and leisure. The Vedic vision dispels the ignorance regarding the true nature of man and helps to provide necessary insights into the uniqueness of human birth and how to make life worthy of living. The time is ripe for introspection and for reorienting our priorities and guarding ourselves against the challenges of the modern material world. One such challenge that threatens the whole of humanity is HIV/AIDS.

- Dr. B.K. Krishnaraj Vanavarayar
Chairman, The Indian Cotton Mills Federation
Chairman, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan



It's only natural to utilize the five senses for a happy life. It's the Almighty that has given five senses, so it is quite right to use them for a happy life. It is not a sin to seek the way of the senses. Thus, it is clear that religion does not stand in the way of worldly life with the five senses. We must be careful to be within our limits. The very same life of senses if and when properly controlled, leads us to the Lord.

- Dr. M.R.P. Gurusamy
Tamil Scholar



A successful education about HIV/AIDS could be run in the framework of religion. Religious beliefs and practices should help in the care and support of people with HIV, especially in settings where being HIV positive is often considered a punishment for one's immoral lifestyle. It is important to emphasize the supportive aspects of religion, the support that marginalized groups so badly need, and the support that people in this part of the world feel will make them comfortable and bring them solace.

- Ms. Nandhini
Dissemination Officer, PSG AIDS Infotech Centre



When humanity respects itself, it will be free to address AIDS. There are bright moments in life ahead. Very rare opportunities await us on our pathways. By being true to our relationships and by achieving a greater elevation in our thinking and attitude, we can be safeguarded from ourselves and our communities from the impact of this epidemic. Tamil literature spoke 2,000 years ago, "Good and bad never comes from others."

- Marabin Mainthen Muthiah
Poet and Writer



Your heart is the real temple. It is there that you must install God.
Good thoughts are the flowers to be offered to him,
Good actions are the worship,
Good words are the hymns ...
Love is the divine offering !!

- Mata Amritanandamai

Spiritual Leader



Chastity is not for ladies alone, but is just as important for men. Sri Raman is an example of this. In *Ramayana*, when Sri Hamuman went to Sri Lanka in search of Sri Seetha, the message sent by Sri Raman was “in this birth I will not even think of two ladies in my mind.” If this form of chastity is maintained, we need not worry about HIV/AIDS.

- Dr. R. Kousalya Devi

Managing Trustee, Gandhigram Trust



Showing love and affection to AIDS affected people is good,
but prevention of AIDS is better.

- Ms. Divya and Ms. Jeevitha

High School Student Leaders, Green Brigade, Shanti Ashram



As I became more aware about my physical growth and sexual needs I searched and searched for a path for the right way in life. As I kept searching and looking around I saw my parents and the image of them hand in hand and in peace with God. I then understood my path.

- Mr. P. Parthiban

Youth Leader



“Let us be part of the solution and not of the problem”

- Dr. M. Aram

Gandhian, Founder President, Shanti Ashram and Member of Parliament

