

“ Head up, heart open. To better days! ”  
—T F Hodge

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**BRIEFLY Mount Meru**

In a new documentary, 'Meru', which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival, climbers Conrad Anker, Jimmy Chin, and Renan Ozturk share the making of their coveted first ascent of Mt Meru. The 21,000-ft Himalayan peak considered the centre of the universe in Hindu cosmology, had seen many failed attempts by climbing teams. The team, led by Anker, attempted the peak in 2008 and again in 2011, and once before, too. The film pushes beyond the physical risks of the climb and gets the alpinists to speak about the very personal losses and challenges they experienced over the years before making the summit.

— National Geographic

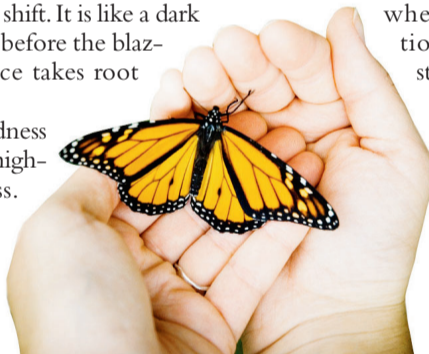
**N**amaste beloveds! Here we are in Breckenridge, a town in the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, where the elevation is about 9,600 feet (2,926 metres). The mountain rises to an incredible 12,998 feet and we have all had to be a bit careful about the thin air. As I write this, it is snowing fairly heavily; the world around us has gone white, beautiful and silent. I love it!

I have been thinking about consciousness, which is a habit of mine as you probably know. With Shivaratri just around the corner, and another year of mystical exploring having been experienced, further clarity about this fascinating subject has revealed itself.

Like the air in the mountains—which is thin and hard to operate within—so it is that really expanded levels of consciousness take some getting used to. Living in peace, feeling love for all, finding joy wherever we are, being fulfilled by simple things, being kind, forgiving and compassionate is not natural to us, in this time of Kali Yuga when astral gravity keeps us mainly operating in more mediocre fields of consciousness. When challenged by negative situations or people, we naturally tend towards being cynical, judgemental, critical, self-absorbed, selfish and sceptical. It is the Age we live in.

We even get frightened of what expansion of consciousness might mean for us. Who will we be? What will seem real? What will be destroyed as lower consciousness caves in and higher mind takes over? What will happen to our priorities? What will our world look like? This becomes particularly strong just before we have a spiritual lift and shift. It is like a dark night of the soul before the blazing glory of grace takes root inside of us.

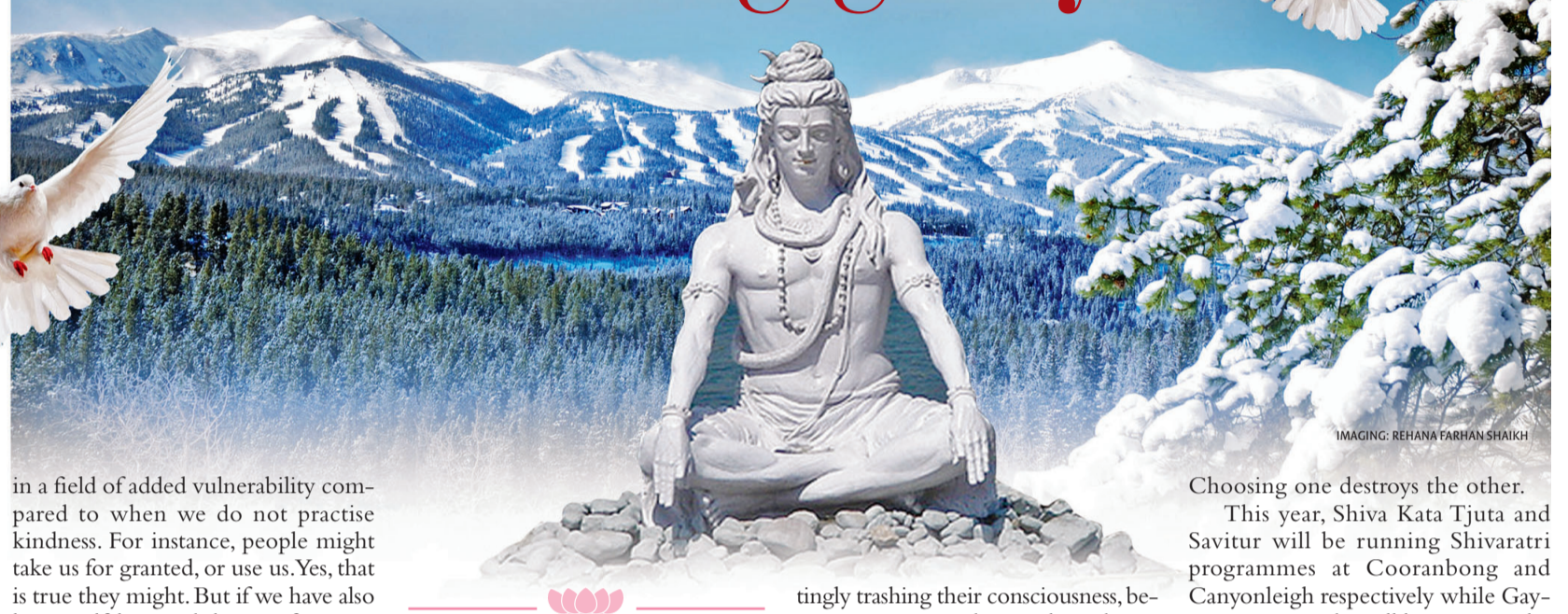
Genuine kindness is an example of higher consciousness. When we let it permeate our entire life, we find that we are



Here's a heartfelt Shivaratri message from Australian guru SHAKTI DURGA, who makes a pitch for genuine kindness that we sorely need



## 'From dark night to blazing glory'



IMAGING: REHANA FARHAN SHAHID

in a field of added vulnerability compared to when we do not practise kindness. For instance, people might take us for granted, or use us. Yes, that is true they might. But if we have also learnt self-love and the art of spiritual discernment, then such an outcome is far less likely. When we can confidently operate from a paradigm of kindness then the world starts to transform. It is hardest at the beginning when we embark upon such an exploration, but the more we practise it, the easier it gets to maintain it with peace, joy and fulfilment.

It takes a different kind of consciousness to maintain kindness, particularly in the face of unkindness and meanness from others. That is where the whole notion of spiritual strength and courage kicks in. It is easy to be kind when everyone around you is kind, but much harder when they are not. Being kind beyond where it is

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the norm is strengthening to our soul, and inch by inch, will lead to the establishment of the higher consciousness, within which kindness is an integral component.

What are we letting in, what are we moving towards, and what are the sacrifices we are making to do so? We are all in motion so far as consciousness is concerned. Some are unwittingly trashing their consciousness, becoming more and more boxed into the lower ends of the spectrum through their choices, while others are climbing the mountain, even though the air is thin and it is harder to operate in that environment until you get used to it.

Which brings me back to Shivaratri, which for me is a wonderful celebration, rich in spiritual depth and meaning. It is celebrated at the new moon in February/March (it is a moon festival just like Easter so the date moves around). Shivaratri, literally means 'night of Shiva' and is the night of the worship of Shiva, the Lord of consciousness, often called the Lord of destruction. He is called 'the destroyer' because when a new level of consciousness takes hold, for better or worse, it kills off the other possibilities. For instance, you cannot be kind and unkind at the same time.



SHIVARATRI

Choosing one destroys the other.

This year, Shiva Kata Tjuta and Savitur will be running Shivaratri programmes at Cooranbong and Canyonleigh respectively while Gayatri, Arjuna and I will be running the programme in Connecticut USA. We will be triangulating, from these three geographic venues, blessing the world with compassion and unity, which is the mystical basis of true expansion of consciousness.

Different facets of the fascinating field of consciousness itself will be discussed, activated and experientially received by us. Expect blessings, fire puja, chanting and mantra as well as stories and ways that we can embrace consciousness in our lives in different ways. I hope you will be able to experience this celebration, join in the chanting, come to some of the events we have planned. And if you cannot, then remember to chant: *Aum Namah Shivaya. Namaste!*

Follow Shakti Durga at [speakingtree.in](http://speakingtree.in) and post your comments there



FACE TO FACE

## Gandhi And Godse

South Africa-based ELA GANDHI, M K Gandhi's granddaughter and social activist, was in Delhi recently. She spoke to SONAL SRIVASTAVA

Obama said that "religious intolerance" in India would have shocked Gandhi.

There is a lot of intolerance, but at the same time, India has been a secular country, all along. So, India can take pride in retaining secularism and also in the respect it has shown officially to different faiths. Communities are becoming more and more intolerant of each other; this worldwide phenomenon is what Obama referred to.

Why is there this growing intolerance?

We tend to believe that the act of terrorism is not perpetrated by individuals, but by their entire community. So, we begin to think that a particular community—say, the Muslim community—is responsible for all the violence; we think that all Muslims are terrorists and they believe in violence. Similarly, when a Hindu group attacks a Muslim group, they would believe exactly the same thing. There is no inter-respect or understanding of similarities and diversities between faiths. We need to understand and accept.

But atheists say 'abolish religion' since it is causing so much violence.

It is misinterpretation of religion. People who commit violence might say that they are doing it in the name of religion; they are not doing that religion any good. They are

alienating people from that religion. To say 'Do away with religion' is like throwing the baby out with the bath water. Bapuji said our prayers and our faith are important parts of our lives. It's not about saying your prayers every day; it's about living your prayers every day. People go to places of worship once a week and they think they can do whatever they want the rest of the week. That's not religion; religion is a way of life. You have to practise your religion.

Nathuram Godse was recently called a patriot. Does this also indicate rising intolerance?

First, the whole promotion of Nathuram Godse is based on misinterpretation of Gandhiji's ideas. People believe that Gandhiji was against Hindus and they have made many other interpretations which are baseless.

Recently, there has been a lot of writing about him, which has tried to defame Gandhi and what he did.

What Gandhi did is in black and white. When he made mistakes, he acknowledged them, and nobody else needs to point them out. He was against caste and racism, so when someone says that he promoted the caste system, he is wrong.

Secondly, Nathuram Godse is called a patriot because of his religious fanaticism; he was an extremist Hindu and that's why they are promoting him. By so doing, they are promoting extremism. But Gandhiji would never have said anything to people wanting to praise anybody. He would never hang Nathuram Godse.

Gandhiji was shot at previously, but forgave his attackers.

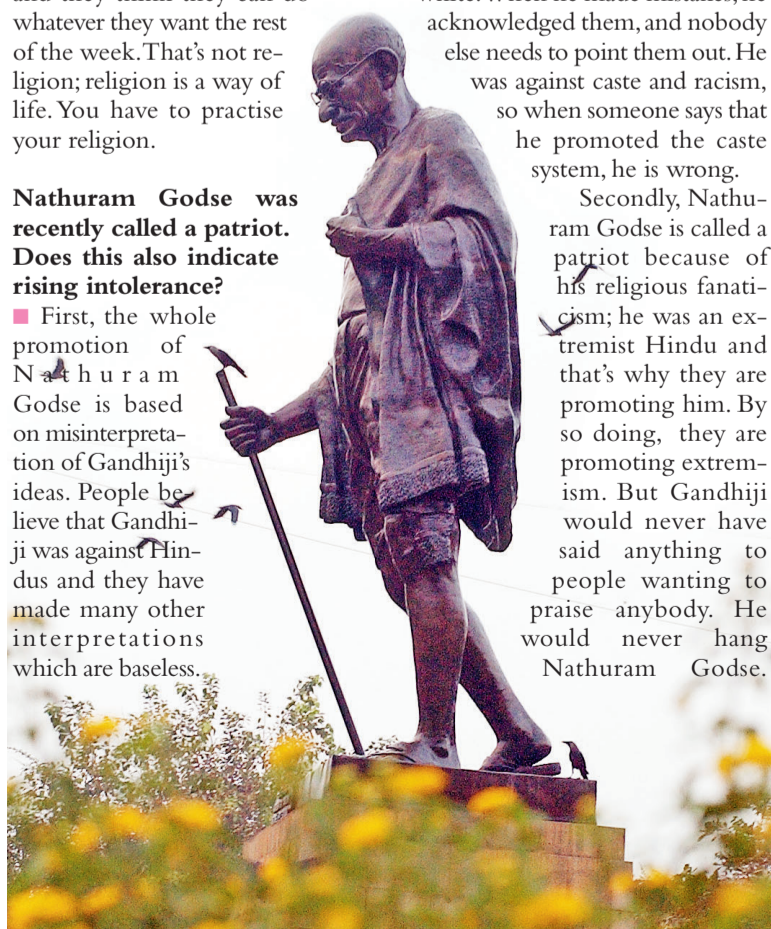
How can we promote inter-faith harmony in the world?

We have to first understand our own faith. We need to interpret our religions correctly and promote that to the world. No religion is 'inferior' or 'superior'—all preach the same things. There might be differences in rituals, on what happens to

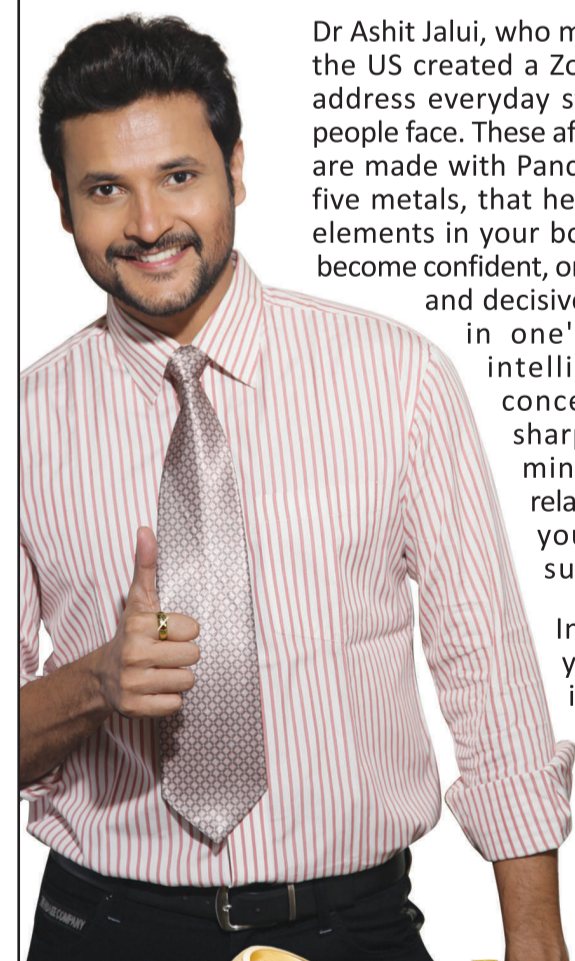
NATHURAM GODSE IS CALLED A PATRIOT BECAUSE OF HIS RELIGIOUS FANATICISM; HE WAS AN EXTREMIST HINDU AND THAT'S WHY HE IS BEING PROMOTED. BY THIS, THEY ARE PROMOTING EXTREMISM

soul and body after death and so on but fundamentally all teach the same message. We need to focus on that. The government doesn't have to involve itself in religion but it must uphold good messages of every religion. It must promote inter-faith harmony and respect for all faiths and above all, respect for peace and nonviolence.

Ela Gandhi was in Delhi to accept the Juliet Hollister Award given by Temple Of Understanding—USA



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