**2/22/09 THESKEPTICARENA.COM**

**KARMA**

**KARMA IS A LAW IN HINDUISM WHICH MAINTAINS THAT EVERY ACT DONE, NO MATTER HOW INSIGNIFICANT, WILL EVENTUALLY RETURN TO THE DOER WITH EQUAL IMPACT. GOOD WILL BE RETURNED WITH GOOD; EVIL WITH EVIL. SINCE HINDUS BELIEVE IN REINCARNATION, KARMA KNOWS NO SIMPLE BIRTH/DEATH BOUNDARIES. IF GOOD OR EVIL BEFALL YOU, IT IS BECAUSE OF SOMETHING YOU DID IN THIS OR A PREVIOUS LIFETIME.**

**KARMA IS SOMETIMES REFERRED TO AS A "MORAL LAW OF CAUSE AND EFFECT." KARMA IS BOTH AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO DO GOOD AND TO AVOID EVIL, AS WELL AS AN EXPLANATION FOR WHATEVER GOOD OR EVIL BEFALLS A PERSON.**

**ON ONE LEVEL, KARMA SERVES TO EXPLAIN WHY GOOD THINGS HAPPEN TO BAD PEOPLE AND BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE. THE INJUSTICES OF THE WORLD, THE SEEMING RANDOM DISTRIBUTION OF GOOD AND EVIL, ARE ONLY APPARENT. IN REALITY, EVERYBODY IS GETTING WHAT HE OR SHE DESERVES. EVEN THE CHILD BRUTALIZED BY DRUGGED ADULTS DESERVES THE HORROR. THE MENTALLY ILL, THE RETARDED, THE HOMOSEXUALS, AND THE MILLIONS OF JEWS KILLED BY THE NAZIS DESERVED IT FOR EVIL THEY MUST HAVE DONE IN THE PAST. THE SLAVE BEATEN TO WITHIN A BREATH OF DEATH DESERVED IT, IF NOT FOR WHAT HE DID TODAY, THEN FOR WHAT HE DID IN SOME PREVIOUS LIFETIME. LIKEWISE FOR THE RAPE VICTIM. SHE IS JUST GETTING WHAT SHE DESERVES. ALL SUFFERING IS DESERVED, ACCORDING TO THE LAW OF KARMA.**

**DESPITE THE FACT THAT THERE COULD BE NO EVIDENCE FOR A METAPHYSICAL BELIEF IN KARMA, THE IDEA OF KARMA IS POPULAR AMONG MANY IN WESTERN CULTURES WHERE IT HAS BECOME DETACHED FROM ITS HINDU ROOTS. THE THEOSOPHISTS, FOR EXAMPLE, BELIEVE IN KARMA AND REINCARNATION. SO DOES JAMES VAN PRAAGH, WHO CLAIMS TO BE A PSYCHIC CONDUIT FOR ALL THE BILLIONS OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE DIED OVER THE CENTURIES.**

**LET'S SAY SOMEONE KILLS SOMEONE . . . AT A BANK MACHINE.... IT COULD BE TWO THINGS. IT COULD BE, THE PERSON WHO COMMITTED THE CRIME USED THEIR FREE WILL TO DO THAT. OR THIS MIGHT SOUND WEIRD, BUT IT COULD HAVE BEEN A KARMIC SITUATION WHERE THAT PERSON WHO WAS MURDERED HAD TO BE PAID BACK FOR MURDERING THE OTHER PERSON IN A PREVIOUS INCARNATION. [AMAZON.COM INTERVIEW WITH JAMES VAN PRAAGH]**

**VAN PRAAGH MAKES IT CLEAR THAT HE THINKS IT IS KARMA, NOT FREE WILL, THAT LEADS PEOPLE TO KILL ONE ANOTHER. IF VAN PRAAGH IS RIGHT, WE MAY AS WELL DISMANTLE OUR ETHICAL AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEMS. EVERYBODY IS JUST PLAYING OUT HIS OR HER KARMA. NOBODY IS REALLY GOOD OR EVIL. NOBODY IS REALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR ANYTHING THEY DO. WE'RE ALL JUST KARMIC PAWNS DOING A DANCE WITH DESTINY.**

**WHY WOULD SUCH AN AMORAL PRINCIPLE SUCH AS KARMA BE PARADED FORTH AS IF IT EXPLAINED THE ULTIMATE JUSTICE OF AN INDIFFERENT UNIVERSE? BECAUSE, SAYS VAN PRAAGH, "WE ARE ON THIS EARTH TO LEARN LESSONS. THIS IS OUR SCHOOLROOM HERE. . . .WE MUST GO THROUGH CERTAIN LESSONS IN ORDER TO GROW." ACCORDING TO VAN PRAAGH, LIFE ON EARTH IS ACTUALLY LIFE IN PURGATORY. WE ARE HERE WORKING OUT OUR SINS, EVOLVING OUR SOULS, BURNING OFF SOME KARMA. THESE ARE THE SAME FEEBLE REASONS GIVEN FOR THE EXISTENCE OF EVIL IN A WORLD ALLEGEDLY CREATED BY AN OMNIPOTENT, ALL-GOOD GOD. VAN PRAAGH'S VERSION OF KARMA IS NOT LIKELY TO BE ACCEPTED BY HINDUS OR BUDDHISTS. THEY WOULD MAINTAIN THAT WHEN A PERSON DOES EVIL, THEY ARE ACTING FREELY. AND WHEN A PERSON SUFFERS EVIL, IT IS BECAUSE OF SOME EVIL FREELY DONE BY THAT PERSON IN THE PAST.**

**KARMA AS UNDERSTOOD BY VAN PRAAGH SEEMS TO MAKE LIFE TRIVIAL, A MERE WORKING OUT OF A METAPHYSICAL "LAW" WHICH REDUCES ALL HUMANS TO DEHUMANIZED CREATURES, DEVOID OF MORALITY AND RESPONSIBILITY, MERE CAUSES AND EFFECTS IN A POINTLESS SYSTEM. KARMA DOES NOT ALLOW THAT THE EVIL WHICH BEFALLS YOU MAY BE UNDESERVED.**

**KARMA IS A LAW FOR SHEEP. WE SHOULD NOT WONDER THAT THE SHEPHERDS ADVOCATE IT. IT IS A LAW FOR THE PASSIVE, FOR THOSE WHO WILL NOT DISTURB THE STATUS QUO, WHO WILL ACCEPT WHATEVER EVIL IS DONE AS "NATURAL" AND INEVITABLE. KARMA IS A LAW FOR SLAVES, FOR THE VANQUISHED.**

**CHRISTIANS WONDER DID ADAM AND EVE HAVE NAVELS; HINDUS WONDER DID THE FIRST BEINGS HAVE KARMA?**

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**THE SCIENCE SEGMENT**

**TINY MERCURY HAD HUGE VOLCANIC ERUPTIONS**

**OCTOBER 29, 2008**

**OUR SOLAR SYSTEM'S SMALLEST PLANET HAS SEEN AN ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF VOLCANIC ACTIVITY, ACCORDING TO SCIENTISTS STUDYING INFORMATION FROM THE LATEST MERCURY FLYBY.**

**IMAGES RETURNED EARLIER THIS MONTH FROM NASA'S MESSENGER (MERCURY SURFACE, SPACE ENVIRONMENT, GEOCHEMISTRY, AND RANGING) SPACECRAFT REVEAL ABOUT 3,600 CUBIC MILES (15,000 CUBIC KILOMETERS) OF SOLIDIFIED LAVA INSIDE A SINGLE CRATER ON MERCURY'S WESTERN HEMISPHERE.**

**THAT'S ENOUGH LAVA TO FILL THE ENTIRE BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN AREA TO A HEIGHT 12 TIMES THAT OF THE WASHINGTON MONUMENT, ACCORDING TO MARIA ZUBER OF THE MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY, WHO IS A CO-INVESTIGATOR FOR THE MISSION.**

**"THAT'S AN AWFUL LOT OF VOLCANIC MATERIAL IN ONE PLACE FOR SUCH A LITTLE PLANET," ZUBER TOLD REPORTERS DURING A WEDNESDAY BRIEFING.**

**SCIENTISTS THINK THIS VOLCANISM MAY HAVE HAPPENED 3.8 BILLION TO 4 BILLION YEARS AGO, ZUBER SAID, ADDING THAT A MORE PRECISE DATE WOULD REQUIRE STUDIES OF ROCK SAMPLES.**

**MERCURY HAS A LARGE IRON CORE THAT MAKES UP THE MAJORITY OF THE PLANET'S WIDTH, ZUBER SAID, SO "VOLCANIC PROCESSES COULD HAVE CONTINUED MUCH FURTHER INTO TIME, BUT THE PREPONDERANCE OF ACTIVITY PROBABLY OCCURRED EARLY."**

**PLANETARY BODIES TEND TO HEAT UP SLOWLY AND COOL OFF PRETTY QUICKLY. EARTH, WHICH IS THE LARGEST TERRESTRIAL PLANET IN THE SOLAR SYSTEM, IS STILL ACTIVE VOLCANICALLY, ZUBER NOTED, SUGGESTING SIZE MAY HELP SLOW THE COOLING PROCESS.**

**BUT SMALLER ROCKY BODIES SUCH AS MERCURY AND OUR MOON ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE SEEN MOST OF THEIR VOLCANISM IN THEIR EARLIEST HISTORY.**

**STILL, THE NEW DATA SHOW THAT MERCURY HAD EVEN MORE ERUPTIONS THAN THE MOON, "WHICH HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE PLANETARY BODY WE'VE COMPARED MERCURY TO," ZUBER SAID.**

**OTHER FINDINGS**

**THE OCTOBER 6 FLYBY WAS THE SECOND IN A PLANNED SERIES OF THREE CLOSE SWEEPS PAST MERCURY THAT WILL ULTIMATELY PUT MESSENGER IN ORBIT AROUND THE PLANET IN 2011.**

**"THE MAIN PURPOSE OF THIS FLYBY WAS TO HAVE A TRAJECTORY CORRECTION TO HELP US TO GET INTO ORBIT LATER," SAID MARILYN LINDSTROM, A PROGRAM SCIENTIST AT NASA HEADQUARTERS IN WASHINGTON, D.C.**

**BUT ASTRONOMERS HAVE BEEN USING THE CLOSE APPROACHES AS OPPORTUNITIES TO COLLECT MORE DATA ABOUT AN OTHERWISE LARGELY NEGLECTED PLANET.**

**UNTIL RECENTLY HUMANS HAD SEEN JUST 45 PERCENT OF MERCURY'S SURFACE, BASED ON IMAGES TAKEN DURING THE MARINER MISSION IN THE 1970S.**

**MESSENGER'S FIRST FLYBY IN JANUARY TOOK HUNDREDS OF HIGH-RESOLUTION PICTURES COVERING 30 PERCENT OF THE PLANET'S EASTERN HEMISPHERE THAT HAD NEVER BEEN SEEN BEFORE.**

**DURING ITS SECOND FLYBY, MESSENGER WENT PAST THE WESTERN SIDE, REVEALING ANOTHER 30 PERCENT OF MERCURY'S SURFACE NEVER SEEN BEFORE BY SPACECRAFT AND ALLOWING SCIENTISTS TO COMPARE THE TWO SIDES OF THE PLANET FOR THE FIRST TIME.**

**"THIS HEMISPHERE OF MERCURY IS SMOOTHER THAN THE OTHER HEMISPHERE, AND WE NEED TO THINK HARD ABOUT WHY THAT'S THE CASE," ZUBER SAID.**

**SCIENTISTS ALSO NOTED A LARGE "WRINKLE RIDGE"—A FEATURE THAT PROBABLY FORMS WHEN A PLANET SHRINKS.**

**"WE BELIEVE IT IS ASSOCIATED WITH THE COOLING OF MERCURY, PROBABLY VERY EARLY IN IT'S HISTORY," ZUBER SAID.**

**"THE PLANET PROBABLY HAS UNDERGONE A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF CONTRACTION, BUT WE CAN'T GO SO FAR AS TO SAY HOW MUCH UNTIL WE TAKE MANY, MANY MORE MEASUREMENTS."**

**IN ADDITION, COLOR IMAGING SUGGESTS THAT MERCURY'S CRUST IS MADE OF THE SAME TYPES OF MATERIALS AT DEPTH AS WHAT'S SEEN ON THE SURFACE, UNLIKE THE DEFINED LAYERS OF MATERIAL SEEN IN EARTH'S CRUST.**

**"MERCURY'S CRUST IS MORE ANALOGOUS TO A MARBLED CAKE THAN A LAYERED CAKE, SAID CO-INVESTIGATOR MARK ROBINSON OF ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY.**

**MESSENGER'S THIRD AND FINAL FLYBY IS SCHEDULED FOR SEPTEMBER 29, 2009.**

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**THE ARENA GOES ABROAD**

**'LOOSE' INDIAN WOMEN LAUNCH UNDERWEAR PROTEST**

**2/14/09**

**LOVE MAY BE IN THE AIR WITH THE ARRIVAL OF VALENTINE'S DAY, BUT IN INDIA THE ATMOSPHERE IS FAR FROM SWEET AND HARMONIOUS AS TWO GROUPS BATTLE IT OUT.**

**A RADICAL RIGHT WING GROUP SAYS THE DAY ENCOURAGES PROMISCUITY AND PREMARITAL SEX.**

**BUT A GROUP OF YOUNG INDIAN WOMEN IS NOT TAKING THIS LYING DOWN AND IS FIGHTING BACK BY PELTING THEM WITH PINK UNDERWEAR.**

**THE RIGHT WING GROUP IS SRI RAM SENA ("THE ARMY OF LORD RAM"), A SMALL BUT VOCIFEROUS GROUP OF ACTIVISTS WHO ARE BLAMED FOR A BAR ATTACK IN MANGALORE LAST MONTH. THE ACTIVISTS SAY THEY ARE AGAINST WOMEN DRINKING ON THEIR OWN IN PUBS.**

**THE OFFICIAL CAMPAIGN POSTER**

**VIDEO FOOTAGE ON YOU TUBE SHOWS YOUNG WOMEN BEING CHASED AND HIT BY MEMBERS OF THE SRI RAM SENA GROUP.**

**ANGERED BY THIS ATTACK, A FEMALE INDIAN JOURNALIST CREATED A FACEBOOK GROUP CALLED THE CONSORTIUM OF PUB-GOING, LOOSE AND FORWARD WOMEN.**

**IN A MATTER OF DAYS, THOUSANDS OF LIKEMINDED WOMEN - AND INDEED SOME MEN - JOINED HER GROUP.**

**VALENTINE'S DAY**

**WITH VALENTINE'S DAY APPROACHING, THE SRI RAM SENA ACTIVISTS CLAIM THEY ARE PLANNING MORE ATTACKS.**

**NITYA VADUSEVAN, WHO IS FROM THE CONSORTIUM, EXPLAINS WHY IT IS THIS PARTICULAR DAY THAT IS A TARGET FOR THE EXTREMIST GROUP:**

**"THESE GROUPS HAVE BEEN ATTACKING WOMEN ON VALENTINE'S DAY FOR YEARS NOW. IT IS SEEN AS A WESTERN NOTION AND AS SOMETHING THAT ALLOWS PEOPLE TO EXPRESS THEIR LOVE OUTSIDE OF MARRIAGE. YOU CAN'T HAVE THAT KIND OF ATTITUDE, THEY SAY. YOU'RE NOT ALLOWED TO PUBLICLY SHOW YOUR LOVE".**

**PINK CHADDIS**

**THE CONSORTIUM WANTS TO EXPOSE THE ATTACKS FOR WHAT THEY ARE AND AS SUCH THEY HAVE LAUNCHED AN ANTI-SRI RAM SENA CAMPAIGN.**

**THIS INVOLVES SENDING PINK ‘CHADDIS' TO THE LEADER OF THE SRI RAN SENA GROUP, PRAMOD MUTALIK - ‘CHADDI' BEING INDIAN SLANG FOR UNDERWEAR.**

**NITYA VADUSEVAN SAYS IT MAY SOUND LIKE A JOKE, BUT THE UNDERLYING MESSAGE IS SERIOUS:**

**"IT'S A SIGNAL THAT SAYS YOU CAN'T TERM THINGS LIKE WOMEN DRINKING ON THEIR OWN AS ‘OBSCENE'. WE LIKE TO POINT THIS OUT WITH SOMETHING THAT'S FRIVOLOUS, FUN AND IRREVERENT".**

**OVERWHELMING**

**THE RESPONSE HAS BEEN OVERWHELMING, ACCORDING TO MS VADUSEVAN. SHE SAYS PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER THE COUNTRY HAVE SENT IN THEIR CHADDIS.**

**WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS HAVE COLLECTIVELY SENT UNDERGARMENTS TO THE HEAD OFFICE OF THE CONSORTIUM IN BANGALORE AS WELL AS DIRECTLY TO SRI RAM SENA'S HEADQUARTERS. LOCAL DROP-OFF POINTS IN VARIOUS INDIAN CITIES HAVE HAD TO CLOSE DUE TO THE HUGE RESPONSE, SAYS MS VADUSEVAN:**

**"EVEN NOW, TWO GIRLS JUST CAME UP TO US AND SAID: ‘WHERE CAN WE SEND THEM? WE HAVE THEM IN OUR BAGS RIGHT NOW!' SO THAT'S WHAT EVERYBODY'S TALKING ABOUT NOW. I DON'T THINK VALENTINE'S DAY IN INDIA WILL EVER BE THE SAME AFTER THIS".**

**PINK SARIS?**

**BUT THE MEMBERS OF SRI RAM SENA ARE NOT CONVINCED AND ARE HITTING BACK. THE GROUP'S LEADER, MUTALIK, HAS COME UP WITH A RATHER SURPRISING RESPONSE TO THE PROTEST.**

**HE SAYS HE WILL SEND PINK SARIS TO THE CONSORTIUM. "TO COVER YOUR PERVERSION WITH A PIECE OF INDIAN CULTURE", HE TOLD THE WOMEN'S RIGHTS CAMPAIGNERS.**

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**FAMOUS QUOTES**

**HENRY LOUIS MENCKEN AKA "H. L." MENCKEN (1880 – 1956) 75 YEARS.**

**HE WAS AN AMERICAN JOURNALIST, ESSAYIST, MAGAZINE EDITOR, SATIRIST, ACERBIC CRITIC OF AMERICAN LIFE AND CULTURE, AND A STUDENT OF AMERICAN ENGLISH. MENCKEN, KNOWN AS THE "SAGE OF BALTIMORE", IS REGARDED AS ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL AMERICAN WRITERS AND PROSE STYLISTS OF THE FIRST HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY.**

**MENCKEN IS PERHAPS BEST REMEMBERED TODAY FOR THE AMERICAN LANGUAGE, A MULTI-VOLUME STUDY OF HOW THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IS SPOKEN IN THE UNITED STATES, AND FOR HIS SATIRICAL REPORTING ON THE SCOPES TRIAL, WHICH HE NAMED THE "MONKEY" TRIAL.**

**8 QUOTES!**

**"THE MOST CURIOUS SOCIAL CONVENTION OF THE GREAT AGE IN WHICH WE LIVE IS THE ONE TO THE EFFECT THAT RELIGIOUS OPINIONS SHOULD BE RESPECTED."**

**"MORAL CERTAINTY IS ALWAYS A SIGN OF CULTURAL INFERIORITY. THE MORE UNCIVILIZED THE MAN, THE SURER HE IS THAT HE KNOWS PRECISELY WHAT IS RIGHT AND WHAT IS WRONG. ALL HUMAN PROGRESS, EVEN IN MORALS, HAS BEEN THE WORK OF MEN WHO HAVE DOUBTED THE CURRENT MORAL VALUES, NOT OF MEN WHO HAVE WHOOPED THEM UP AND TRIED TO ENFORCE THEM. THE TRULY CIVILIZED MAN IS ALWAYS SKEPTICAL AND TOLERANT, IN THIS FIELD AS IN ALL OTHERS. HIS CULTURE IS BASED ON 'I AM NOT TOO SURE.'"**

**"WE MUST RESPECT THE OTHER FELLOW'S RELIGION, BUT ONLY IN THE SENSE AND TO THE EXTENT THAT WE RESPECT HIS THEORY THAT HIS WIFE IS BEAUTIFUL AND HIS CHILDREN SMART."**

**"PEOPLE SAY WE NEED RELIGION WHEN WHAT THEY REALLY MEAN IS WE NEED POLICE."**

**"THE MOST COMMON OF ALL FOLLIES IS TO BELIEVE PASSIONATELY IN THE PALPABLY NOT TRUE. IT IS THE CHIEF OCCUPATION OF MANKIND."**

**“FOR IT IS THE NATURAL TENDENCY OF THE IGNORANT TO BELIEVE WHAT IS NOT TRUE. IN ORDER TO OVERCOME THAT TENDENCY IT IS NOT SUFFICIENT TO EXHIBIT THE TRUE; IT IS ALSO NECESSARY TO EXPOSE AND DENOUNCE THE FALSE.”**

**"THE WAY TO DEAL WITH SUPERSTITION IS NOT TO BE POLITE TO IT, BUT TO TACKLE IT WITH ALL ARMS, AND SO ROUT IT, CRIPPLE IT, AND MAKE IT FOREVER INFAMOUS AND RIDICULOUS."**

**"EVEN A SUPERSTITIOUS MAN HAS CERTAIN INALIENABLE RIGHTS. HE HAS A RIGHT TO HARBOR AND INDULGE HIS IMBECILITIES AS LONG AS HE PLEASES, PROVIDED ONLY HE DOES NOT TRY TO INFLICT THEM UPON OTHER MEN BY FORCE. HE HAS A RIGHT TO ARGUE FOR THEM AS ELOQUENTLY AS HE CAN, IN SEASON AND OUT OF SEASON. HE HAS A RIGHT TO TEACH THEM TO HIS CHILDREN. BUT CERTAINLY HE HAS NO RIGHT TO BE PROTECTED AGAINST THE FREE CRITICISM OF THOSE WHO DO NOT HOLD THEM. HE HAS NO RIGHT TO DEMAND THAT THEY BE TREATED AS SACRED. HE HAS NO RIGHT TO PREACH THEM WITHOUT CHALLENGE."**