

TechNews

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TechNews is published on the Tuesday of each week of the academic year. Deadline for all submissions and announcements is 11:59 PM on the Friday prior to publication. Articles, photos, and illustrations must be submitted electronically to the TechNews website at technewsiit.com.

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ILLINOIS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY



Smart phones dumb down society

By Mike Purdy
OPINION EDITOR & DISTRIBUTION MANAGER

A week ago, while I was waiting for some friends near the train platform up at Fullerton, I decided to pull out my cell phone to send a quick text message. “You don’t have a smart phone!?” were the first words I heard coming from my left, apparently from a complete, slightly intoxicated stranger. She was with a few other college-aged students who were standing in a quiet circle, all glancing at me briefly before returning their deep gaze to their own smartphone devices. “No”, I replied, a bit baffled – and just like that, our interaction was over, and the merry bunch departed. Looking back on that brief exchange, I wonder what this girl was trying to get at. Was it simply a question? The sardonic, condescending tone of her words leads me to think otherwise. Does my “old-school” Samsung slider (which would have been all the rage in ninth grade) not match up to societal expectations for someone in my demographic? I believe her words were triggered by something even deeper than that; something which has become recently engrained within our culture and given rise to a generation of seemingly mechanized individuals. I call this the smart phone dilemma.

As the 21st century progresses, technological advancements continue to increase exponentially. With constant breakthroughs, record-breaking software, and consistently smaller and more powerful personal communication devices, we live in a fast-paced world where information is readily available, and people have to have it, now. Over one third of all American adults own a smart phone of some sort, while nearly 85 percent of our population owns a cell phone. In this contemporary “information age”, the advent of the smart phone has effectively changed facets of human lifestyle and interaction in many ways. On the plus side, the benefits of owning an iPhone or Android device are fairly significant: instant email and web browsing, picture-taking, personalized communication, easy access to almost any sort of information, and navigation capabilities, just to name a few. On the flip side of the coin, however, there are many adverse side effects of the smartphone era.

Through observation, it is clear that the emergence of smart phone technology,



along with other technological platforms such as gaming systems, has severely degraded many of our interpersonal communication skills. This is especially true within younger generations, as many teenagers and young adults are less inclined to hold long, meaningful conversations and are more inclined to post a “status update” or comment on a picture they were tagged in on Facebook. These days, it seems that our populace is so distracted by external stimuli and virtual infatuation that it has lost sight of the bigger picture and the more important things in life. Smart phones feed the ego, as was evidenced from my experience on the North side, and make the “self” the most important factor in one’s life (although this is definitely not the case for every smart phone user). Instead of saying “hi” or engaging me with a thought provoking question, my brief acquaintance last week seemed mentally programmed to compare our devices as if they were a symbol of social status.

What makes this dilemma even more ubiquitous is the fact that it is infiltrating human development at an early age. These days, children are raised around an abundance of screens and visual media. I saw a YouTube video a while back of a two year old child who had already mastered the iPad – I thought to myself, “will this kid ever explore nature, climb

a tree, or enjoy playing on the jungle gym at recess as much as I did?” That is, if the concept of recess even exists anymore. A recent article in Popular Science magazine cited that “nearly 25 percent of children ages 9 through 13 have no free time for physical activity, and a child is six times as likely to play a videogame as to ride a bike.” To me, these statistics are saddening. Our youngsters are so plugged in and technologically oriented that many core human instincts and skills are being diminished.

Overall, this “smart phone” dilemma, as I refer to it, is characterized by one contradiction: a strong connection to our devices and a weak connection between one another. Being an IIT student, I am constantly surrounded and immersed in technology, as are the rest of you. Heck, I even received an iPad just for choosing to attend this school. At times, however, I tend to feel overwhelmed by all of the emails, notifications, and updates, and find it necessary to take some time to rethink my priorities in life. Ultimately, I won’t be able to take these devices with me, but you’d better believe that I will cherish the memories of family, friends, and life experiences. I encourage you to do the same; to unplug, to leave the phone at home for a day, and make a conscious effort to connect with others on a deeper, more meaningful level.

Cartoon courtesy of kevinspear.com

Misconceptions, basics of Hinduism

By Sneha Seraf
TECHNEWS WRITER

Many times, I have heard comments on Hinduism by people who do not completely understand it. They often make fun of our deities; one depicted with an elephant head (Ganesha), another with four arms (Saraswati), and so on. Often, people will ask me, “Why do you worship all these gods?” Or, they will say things like, “Shame on you and your polytheistic religion – there is only one God, and He looks down on all you non-believers.”

Well, I am here to clear up some of these misunderstandings and misconceptions. Having graduated from Chinmaya Mission in the Chicagoland area two years back, I have a better understanding of my own religion than

I ever could have known from outside. I do not claim to know everything, of course, because there is still a great deal for me to learn over time. But I wish to share whatever knowledge I have to others, in order for them to have a clearer sense of the religion I believe in.

First of all, Hinduism is not technically a “religion” – at least, not in the way we see it. Its actual name is Sanātan Dharma, or “Eternal or Universal Righteousness” (sanātan meaning ‘eternal’, and dharma meaning ‘duty’ or ‘righteousness’). It is a philosophy built upon basic principles of humanity; it teaches us to treat each other with respect, and to love each other as equals. The more we care for each other as humans, the less selfish we become – and we in turn are transformed by this love, and are better able to tune into the eternal Self that is

the Divine.

Now, about our “polytheistic” worship: we do have many deities; thousands, in fact. But at the same time, we understand that these deities are merely personified traits of one Universal Being. We define this Universal Being as God, so as not to confuse others. According to our scriptures, God resides in the heart of every human being. Therefore, if we want to truly worship God, we do so by performing acts of kindness to our brethren. The rituals that we do in our temples only serve to enhance our understanding of the personified traits of the Divine.

If you have any questions, or if you would like to comment on this article, you may feel free to reply.

Defining the meaning of life, mathematically

By Rishikesh Gajam
TECHNEWS WRITER

Have you ever asked yourself what life is? My friend once told me that life is joy and to be enjoyed. This should mean that life begins at the end of sorrow, but does sorrow have an end in this short life which is given to us? You are living in a sorrowful world, at every turn you make sorrow follow you, and freedom can relieve you from that sorrow. But freedom means absolute and complete freedom, which is not possible in this stressful world. The other way is to share your soul with someone

else, that is also relieving. So this definition is wrong. From what we discussed above, let’s say that life is sorrow. But wait a minute... that is impossible. So let’s say life is a mixture of sorrow and happiness, but in what proportion? Aren’t some people’s lives more of sorrow than happiness and vice versa? Then what is life?

I would describe life as ‘X’, where

‘X’=Y * ? * C * ?

Here, ‘?’ = Opportunity

‘C’ = Circumstances

‘?’ = Luck

‘Y’ = You (i.e., what kind of person are you? Humorous or short tempered, negative or

positive, selfish or selfless, boastful or humble, hardworking or lazy, etc.)

Let’s do some work on this equation. As we all know and are told several times, we only get one opportunity to prove ourselves. Therefore, ? = 1. ‘C’ and ‘?’ are constants because you or anyone else does not determine them (like being born into a rich or a poor family). Therefore we get, X ? Y

By this relation we have proved how life is completely determined by you and only you alone. Your decisions are what make this the worst one ever or the best one possible.