Editorial

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This issue of *RoSA* contains one article on ancient South Asia, and three on South Asian practices in the modern West. Two of the latter are based on fieldwork in the authors' own countries, respectively the UK and the USA; the third is based largely on recent publications emanating from the USA, while keeping an eye on the ancient South Asian traditions which those publications claim as authorities. The one article on an ancient subject comes from Israel—a token of the way in which the study of ancient South Asia is an international enterprise. We have previously published articles on ancient South Asian traditions and their later developments from China, Japan, Australia, the USA, and various countries of Europe, as well as from South Asia itself.

In the first article, Eviatar Shulman finds that the *Jātakas*, the stories of the Buddha's previous births, are often seen in the framework of history and biography, although not as these would be practised by a modern historian or biographer, who does not work with the concepts of rebirth or cosmic time. Shulman seeks to draw the study of the *Jātakas*, and especially of the *Jātaka-aṭṭhakathā*, away from this framework, and to understand them as reflections on the nature of Buddhahood. He is particularly interested in the way in which they present the Buddha's omniscience, and his insight into the conditioning which shapes the lives of others. Omniscience is understood here as 'knowledge of karmic conditioning', intimately linked to care and compassion. It not only enables the Buddha to tell the stories, identifying their characters as previous incarnations of himself and his hearers, but also

appears within the stories as the bodhisattva's understanding of the other characters.

Coming to the modern context, Martin Wood's article is also concerned with the care and compassion exercised by a figure who does not fit neatly in either of the categories divine and human: the Gujarati sadhu Jalaram Bapa (1799–1881), who on several occasions provided inexhaustible food for the poor. Miracles and blessings involving food, whether consumed by the deity, by devotees, or by needy people, are known in many Hindu devotional movements, both in hagiographical accounts of the past and in the present world, as Wood shows. His research is mainly among Gujaratis, but he also looks at the role of food in ISKCON and other groups; he finds that while in other movements feeding miracles are often played down, or are accepted as true without being made the basis of faith, for Jalaram's followers they are central to their experience of the living presence of the saint. In these days of food banks and soup kitchens, we hope that such miracles will not be factored into public policy.

Maya Warrier's article, on the Western adoption of ayurveda from the 1970s onwards, is less directly concerned with religion. However, she shows how the writings of Robert Svoboda, Deepak Chopra and David Frawley link ayurveda with the Western concern for 'spirituality'—something which is like religion only better. While the West in this context includes North America and Europe, it is a cultural rather than a geographical area; as Warrier mentions, it has locations in South Asia itself. Without seeking to define an authentic ayurveda from which Western ayurveda has departed, she shows how the latter has drawn, among other sources, on popular psychology, which incongruously combines Freudian psychoanalysis with Smilesian self-help. Another factor is the commercial imperative to find new markets for one's product: in this case, while the market for traditional ayurveda is limited to those who are sick, Western ayurveda is also targeted at those who are not. It is now part of the wellness industry, in which the three authors studied are entrepreneurs.

Frank Chappell's article is a study of contemporary Hinduism in the USA, based on anthropological fieldwork in two temples in Pennsylvania: a South Indian Vaishnava temple, and a more eclectic North Indian one which includes Jain images. He is particularly interested in how Hindus deal with moral questions, and the part played by texts and other forms of tradition in moral matters. While many informants referred to principles common to all religions, ahimsa was considered a distinctive Hindu value, though this did not always entail abstention from meat-eating or warfare. Chappell finds that American Hindus consider their attitude to Hinduism to be more reasoned or more philosophical than that of Hindus in India. This can be accounted for by reference to their situation as highly qualified professionals (as required by the immigration law of 1965) who need to explain their beliefs and practices not only to their children but to non-Hindu fellow-members of their social class.

The four articles represent, in different ways, *RoSA*'s interest in South Asian textual traditions—not only brahminical but also Buddhist, and, in the case of ayurveda, secular—and in ideas and practices, ancient and modern, in South Asia and elsewhere, both among people with personal connections to South Asia and among others who look to South Asia for intellectual or spiritual nourishment.