

A Kauaian Story of Love and Compassion

So often today, we see how segregation based on cultural identity can cause disputes and even war. It is an unfortunate truth that many of the world's problems are the result of tension stemming from religious differences. However, in a world that seems increasingly divided, it is important to recognize and shed light on positive acts that have united people in times of incredible hardship.

It was September 11, 1992, when hurricane Iniki shook the small island of Kauai. The category 4 hurricane ravaged hotels and laid waste to nearly 1,500 homes. Iniki delivered furious winds at speeds of over 160 km/h, which led to an estimated \$1.8 billion USD in damages. However, the story does not lie in the ferocity of the storm, but in the generosity of the people that were affected by this natural disaster -- specifically, the monks of the Kauai Hindu Monastery.

In 1992, the monastery was home to 23 Hindu monks who lived, worked, and worshipped upon the sacred grounds in the Kauaian city of Kapa'a. The wrath of Iniki completely destroyed their media studio, which is home to Hinduism's largest magazine, 'Hinduism Today', in addition to their shelter, kitchens, and other office buildings. The mess Iniki left behind meant that much work would be needed in order to restore the monks' beloved monastery.

Even with the overwhelming abundance of work ahead of them, the monks were concerned for their neighbours. The monastery had the only cow and the only propane stove in their rural neighbourhood and, instead of hoarding it for themselves, they shared it with their community. They baked bread and brought it to their neighbours, along with fresh milk. Moreover, they provided community members with water and even invited them to bathe in their freshwater river pond, as water and electricity were unavailable for several months. The monks knew that the bread they baked would not be enough to completely feed their community, but they understood that it would raise everyone's spirits. The people that the monks helped may not have been Hindu but, through their service, the monks bridged the gap between religions that we too often see collapse in the news today. What's more, they did this without using it as an opportunity to spread their religious dogma.

Confucius once said, "Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated." Sometimes, the best gift one can offer is compassion, such as in the actions exhibited by the Kauaian monks. The beauty of their aid lies in the fact that their offering delivered the emotional support that their neighbouring community so desperately needed. They used the Hindu principle of *karma yoga* to give without the expectation of receiving anything in return. We may not all be Kauaian monks in the wake of

a massive hurricane, but we must embody their positive response, because a storm is brewing in our world and, even through small actions, we can be the light that holds steady.