



## **Dedication of Prayer Space for Hindu and Buddhist Students at Duke University**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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DURHAM - In a true spirit of interfaith cooperation, the Hindu Student Association at Duke University and the Buddhist Community at Duke are pleased to announce the inauguration of their jointly-held prayer space. An event to celebrate the dedication of the prayer space will be held on January 22, 2011 at 6:00pm on Duke's west campus. Anju Bhargava, founder of Hindu American Seva Charities, will be on hand to deliver the keynote address. Ms. Bhargava is a member of President Obama's Council on Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships and the Senior Vice President of Bank of America.

During the summer of 2010 two rooms in Duke's Bryan Center were set aside for Duke's Buddhist and Hindu communities. Rather than each maintaining a separate space that would accommodate prayer and administration, the two groups decided to combine their resources to create a joint prayer space and shared office. The office is used for small group meetings, while the prayer space remains a place for meditation.

The creation of prayer space for these groups represents the university's support of and commitment to the flourishing of diverse religious life on campus. In a comment of support for the student groups, Zoila Airall, Assistant Vice President of Campus Life said, "I am thrilled that our Hindu and Buddhist groups now have prayer space for their religious observances." This sentiment is echoed by many involved with Religious Life at Duke. Christy Lohr Sapp, Associate Dean for Religious Life at Duke added, "It is exciting to see these groups representing two different world traditions working together to maximize the benefits of this space. The Hindu and Buddhist groups at Duke provide a great model of mutual support."

Students in each group also appreciate having a space dedicated for them. Dr. Airall adds, "Many students from both groups have stopped by to tell me how pleased they are with the space and our acknowledgement of their spiritual needs." HSA students and the chaplain to the Buddhist Community at Duke, Sumi Kim, have worked hard during the first semester to personalize the prayer room. The Buddhist community has commissioned a new altar and Yamini Misra has painted the holy syllable "Aum" on one wall. The location of the room on a quiet hallway on the Bryan Center's ground floor contributes to the purpose of the space. Sumi Kim notes that the location lends itself to contemplation.

During the academic year, the Buddhist Community at Duke offers morning meditation in the space at 8:30am four days a week and regular evening meditation on Mondays. The Hindu Student Association celebrates Hindu festivals throughout the year including the major event "Hindu Awareness Week" in the Spring and offers a weekly Gita discussion. The prayer room is also open for personal reflection and meditation throughout the day.

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