

[Peace Amongst Us](#)

Category : [November/December 2001](#)

Published by Anonymous on Nov. 02, 2001

COMMENTARY

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Hinduism's sects must look beyond their differences

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I am disappointed and saddened to observe many Hindus segregate from and quarrel with each other over the variety of rituals and Deities in our religion. I believe this is a significant reason young Indians my age, both in and outside India, are drifting away from our native culture and religion, unable to make sense of this disunity. I wanted to reconcile some of these apparent differences in the practices of Hinduism, and it was through the study of the Bhagavad Gita and the works of great souls like Swami Vivekananda that I have been able to gain some perspective and realize the true greatness of my religion. Nowhere in the Gita is there any mention of a particular ritual or Deity being more accurate or correct over another.

It became clear to me that Hinduism is an internal process. It is for our own benefit that we pursue the

Divine, and it is through the internal conditioning, the perfection of the soul, that we are able to achieve it. Swami Vivekananda further highlighted this fundamental philosophy, "Hindus have discovered that the absolute can only be realized, or thought of, or stated, through the relative, these images ... are simply so many symbols so many pegs to hang the spiritual ideas on. It is not that this help is necessary for everyone, but those who do not need it have no right to say that it is wrong. Nor is it compulsory in Hinduism." I was able to understand that the myriad of external methods our religion offers are like spokes on a wheel, all converging towards a fundamental religious philosophy. I began viewing these rituals, icons and images as guides, various channels through which we can harness and project our spiritual energies and progress towards the ultimate goal of liberation. It is important, I believe, to understand the external practices of Hinduism as a means to an internal end, and not an end in themselves.

Please allow me to make it clear that I do not intend to present myself as a knowledgeable or enlightened person by any means; nor do I wish to undermine the importance of external practices and rituals. I have already affirmed that these are crucial to the actualization of the profound philosophy of Hinduism; and indeed it is through the loss of these traditions that young Indians lose sight of their religion. However, I

would like to point out that when these external practices eclipse the fundamental religious ideas that they represent, it leads to disunity amongst fellow Hindus, and it is this internal dissolution that disturbs me.

In order to solidify Hinduism as a single unified religion, it is vital that the basic common philosophy behind these various sects and practices be brought to the foreground. I therefore encourage my generation, especially those who, like me, are abroad and, in a sense, alienated from their native culture and tradition, to study the basic philosophy and ideas present in the Vedas, and to understand that the many sects, rituals, Deities, protocols and other external differences are not contradictions within their religion but rather are testament to the magnanimity and universality of Hinduism. By grasping and internalizing the fundamental philosophy and ideals of our religion, we can realize the true greatness and profundity of Indian culture and spirituality, and illuminate the emptiness of the gratifications that the increasingly popular materialistic, mainstream culture offers. In conclusion, I find Swami Vivekananda's own words most appropriate: "Religion is realization; not talk, nor doctrine, nor theories, however beautiful they may be. It is being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging; it is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes. That is religion."

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