How Shall We Define God?
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FROM THE THE VEDAS

How Shall We Define God?

Swami Chinmayananda's translation and commentary

The author, Rishi Aangiras, in his infinite kindness, is making a daring attempt to explain and express the Infinite in terms of the finite. Naturally, we who are accustomed to transactions in the finite world find it difficult to comprehend and grasp the full import of the expressions used. If a statement in higher mathematics is not intelligible to an advocate or a lawyer, he must be certainly mad to pass a judgment thereby and declare that higher mathematics is meaningless. And yet this is exactly what you and I are doing. Without equipping ourselves with the necessary preliminary knowledge, we jump into the great Science of Living and Life, as discussed in these textbooks, the scriptures. Then, when we cannot understand them, we unjustly criticize them, to our own great loss. I shall try to give you a peep into the unplumbed secret caves and treasure-houses of meaning-wealth that lie so beautifully concealed behind some of these expressions.

Invisible: The Supreme Reality is invisible, because what is visible should be an object of seeing. We are seeking the Center Life Force within ourselves, which is the very seer in us. Making use of the instrument of vision, the eyes, the seer is looking out to see the seen. With the same instrument of vision

the seer cannot see himself.

Let me take an example: with a telescope, an observer observes the moon. But with the same instrument, the observer cannot observe himself! For when the observer becomes the object, where is the observer at the eye-piece of the telescope? And hence the Reality, the Life Spark, is described here as "invisible."

Ungraspable: If it is not seen, a doubt may arise in our mind--it can, probably, be grasped by the mind; and this is negated by the verse. Mind cannot conceive the Truth, since the capacity to conceive the Truth is lent to the mind by the very Life Center which it is trying to conceive. The Atman--the dynamic power behind the mind that vitalizes the mind, that makes it possible for the mind to grasp things--cannot be grasped independently by the mind. Should the mind grasp the Reality, it should stand apart from the object it so grasps; and the moment the mind divorces itself from its connections with the Aatman, it becomes a dead, inert stuff which cannot grasp any idea anymore. Hence we say that the Supreme is ungraspable.

Unoriginated: Everything created or formed must perish or die away, because that which has a beginning has also an end. The Eternal or the Immortal is that which has no end; and if there should be no end, it should have no beginning also. Again, the absurdity in presuming a beginning for the Reality would be that we will have then a state of affairs which we will have to describe in terms of a ludicrous paradox. We will have to say, "There was a time when Reality was not real!"

Neither eyes nor ears nor hands nor legs: Earlier we are told by the verse that the Supreme is not visible to us. We may then jump into a misunderstanding that even though we cannot see It, It may be seeing us. This is denied by this verse. The Supreme has neither the organs of knowledge nor the organs of action. The eyes and ears, the hands and legs are vehicles which can function only in Him, but He needs none of these instruments for His own existence. The All-pervading needs no instrument to recognize Itself. There are no objects in Him other than Himself. There is no ignorance in Him to be discovered with some knowledge newly gained--He is Knowledge itself.

Swami Chinmayananda (1917-1993), Vedantist writer, lecturer, translator, dynamic spiritual leader and Hindu renaissance founder of Chinmaya Mission International

The Vedas are the divinely revealed and most revered scriptures, sruti, of Hinduism, likened to the Torah (1,200 bce), Bible New Testament (100 ce), Koran (630 ce) or Zend Avesta (600 bce). Four in number, Rig, Yajur, Sama and Atharva, the Vedas include over 100,000 verses. Oldest portions may date back as far as 6,000 bce.

Who Is a Hindu?

"Acceptance of the Vedas with reverence; recognition of the fact that the means or ways to salvation are diverse; and the realization of the truth that the number of gods to be worshiped is large, that indeed is the distinguishing feature of the Hindu religion." B.G. Tilak's definition of what makes one a basic Hindu, as quoted by India's Supreme Court. On July 2,

1995 the Court referred to it as an "adequate and satisfactory formula."