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IN MY OPINION

Godâs the Answer

Our Hindu concept of the devoteeâs evolving search for Truth is the key to world harmony

BY NITHIN SRIDHAR



THE BASIC PHILOSOPHY OF NEARLY every religion relies on accepting the existence of God; that of atheism relies on rejecting such existence. There have been lengthy debates regarding whether God exists, and if so, what constitutes God. Is God one or many, God or god?

In contrast, the Hindu religion includes many such belief systems. At one extreme, Hindu monotheists claim one absolute God, separate from the world; at the other extreme, Hindu polytheists accept a multiplicity of Gods, Goddesses and demigods. There are also Hindu monists, who claim the presence of "Only God," denying any separation between world and God. Hinduism has always accommodated all of these apparently divergent viewpoints as part of a coherent and all-embracing philosophy of life. This inclusiveness is possible because there is an inherent awareness in our religion that every person is ultimately on the same path, seeking the same goal. In the words of Vivekananda, "Man is not traveling from error to truth, but climbing up from truth to truth, from truth that is lower to truth that is higher." This simple truth finds its greatest expression in our understanding of the Deity and our worship.

Our concept of Deity is a unique contribution from Hinduism to the whole world, not only in terms of theological and spiritual value but also in the promotion of world harmony. In simple words, any person can connect with God in whatever way he is inclined to. This worldview completely removes any basis for religious intolerance.

The power from the Deity is completely dependent upon the devotee's sincerity and individual worship. Any two people might approach the Deity in very different ways. Some may feel the Deity to be Nirguna-Nirakara Brahman, formless and absolute. For others, the Deity may be a manifestation of this formless God. For some, the Deity is only one aspect of the Absolute, such as Vishnu, the Preserver. Some may worship the forces of nature, such as Agni or Vayu, while others worship the Atman.

A Deity can be God, or one of the Gods—or both, or neither—depending upon what the devotee seeks. The Deity-devotee relationship is an intimate connection dependent on spiritual clarity and mental earnestness. The more love a devotee has, the closer he is to the Deity and the clearer his understanding of the universe. The devotee perceives the Deity according to his limited perspective and inclinations and projects this limited perception on the limitless God. Thus God projects back to the devotee a limited and relatable form. As a devotee gets closer to the Deity, his mind becomes purer and his perception less limited.

Sandhya Vandana, Sun worship, illustrates this concept. At first glance it appears to be a simple prayer to the Sun who gives warmth and light to Earth, a show of gratitude towards nature. At a deeper level it can be understood as worship of the

entire cosmos, which at every moment is changing, evolving and dissolving. Deeper still, it is a prayer to all of existence, the source and energy that manifests the whole. Ultimately it is worship of the Inner Self, the essential core, present within the smallest particle and within the greatest galaxy.

As a devotee proceeds from his limited understanding of God into a direct experience of limitless Truth, he gains insight into a God who is formless and yet who manifests in an infinite number of forms. This insight into the nature of cosmic truth and its infinite expressions is the very foundation of the all-embracing and tolerant way of life that Hindu Dharma propounds.

NITHIN SRIDHAR, 25, of Mysore, Karnataka, writes on society and spirituality.
