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My Supernal Longing has Me Still in Its hold

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Many times I have been asked during my stay in the US why Hindus worship so many Gods and Goddesses. The answer is simple - it is easier to carry a known image in your mind than an abstract one. Much like a newborn infant puts its faith in the mother whose face is imprinted in its mind from the time of birth, so the mind grasps early an image of the Maker and fervently worships that image. As the infant would be desolated if asked to give up its mother, so the mind will be crippled if asked to give up its image of God. So, believing in the one intangible God, the Hindu worships God through the image and not the image as God.

And such divine image I want to perceive every moment of the day, even in my dreams. My last prayer for the night - Ramaskandam Hanumantam, Vainnadeyam Rikodaram, Sayaneya Smarenityam, Duru-soppanam Tasyanasyati - asks Lord Rama to guard my sleep and keep nightmares away and that, even in my sleep, He must grant me the privilege of thinking about Him. Alas, even thinking about God in the time that borders between dream and wakefulness is mostly riddled with mundane subject matter. My grandmother always told me that even if for a fleeting moment we can think of God with a clear mind, that day is blessed. To think of Him more than I did. I started writing a page of His "nama" - Sri Rama Jayam, Om Sharavanabhavaya Namaha - everyday, hoping for that still concentration of God. But extraneous sounds would obtrude along with thoughts of chores to be completed, and my fleeting moment would be lost. I prayed sincerely to Him, hoping He heard me but life continued as usual.

Then one day conversing with my mother, a story from my childhood came to memory. Once a little boy, afraid to cross the forest to get to his gurukul (school), was told by his busy mother to call upon Lord Krishna to accompany him. Krishna answered the innocent boy's prayer and walked by his side as a cowherd, playing his flute. Sometime later, when the mother asked the boy if his fears were settled,

he said, yes, now that Krishna walked with him everyday. The angry mother asked him not to tell lies, but the boy insisted he was telling the truth. She dragged him to the forest making him call Krishna, who did not come. But as she started chastising the boy, she heard the strains of the flute, and was struck dumb. She fell to her knees and begged forgiveness of Krishna for not having her son's faith.

Perhaps my belief lacked the implicit faith of that little boy. I tried to reassure my dejected self with many arguments why any kind of divine vision eluded me, but to no avail. My longing for celestial vision continued. Then one night in my exhausted slumber, I took a journey with my family to a temple in the mountains but somehow the temple remained beyond our reach. Tired and dispirited, I sat down surrounded by mountains, while the rest of my family searched for the temple. Darkness descended and went lagging by, dispersed by the dewy softness of dawn. The orange tip of the sun came up from behind the eastern hill. I saw reflected on each mountain the images of Ganesha, Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati. Looking at those shining, gigantic carvings, bathed in the golden glow of the sun, raised the hair on my arms. I shouted in joy, calling my family to come and look at the splendid sight. I woke up, still awed and spellbound at what had transpired. I felt God had answered my prayers. But that one glimpse is not enough. My supernal longing still has me in its hold.

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