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Idol Worship

Idol Worship

The idol is a support for the neophyte. It is a prop in his spiritual childhood. A form or image is necessary for worship in the beginning. It is an external symbol of God for worship. It is a reminder of God. The material image calls up the mental idea. Steadiness of mind is obtained by image worship. The worshipper will have to associate the ideas of infinity, omnipotence, omniscience, purity, perfection, freedom, holiness, truth and omnipresence with the form of worship he chooses.

It is not possible for all to fix the mind on the Absolute. A concrete form is necessary for the vast majority for practicing concentration. To behold God everywhere and to practice the presence of God is not possible for the ordinary man. Idol worship is the easiest form of worship for the modern man.

A symbol is absolutely indispensable for fixing the mind. The mind wants a prop to lean upon. It cannot hold a conception of the Absolute in the initial stages. Without the help of some external aid the mind cannot be centralised. In the beginning, therefore, concentration or meditation is not possible without a symbol.

Everyone an Idol Worshipper

Idol worship is not peculiar to Hinduism. Christians worship the Cross. They have the image of the Cross in their mind. The Muslims keep the image of the Kaaba stone when they kneel and do prayers. The people of the whole world, save a few Yogis and Vedantins, are all worshippers of idols. They keep some image or the other in their mind.

The mental image also is a form of idol. The difference is not one of kind, but only of degree. All worshippers however intellectual they may be, generate a form in the mind and make the mind dwell on that image.

Everyone is thus an idol worshipper. Pictures drawings, etc, are only forms of idols. A Boas mind needs a concrete symbol as a prop and a subtle mind requires an abstract symbol. Even a Vedantin has the symbol Om to fix his wandering mind. It is not only the pictures or images in stone and in wood that are idols but dialectics and great leaders also become idols So, why condemn idolatry?

A Medium for Establishing Communion With God

Idols are not the idle fancies of sculptors but are shining channels through which the heart of the devotee is attracted to God and flows towards Him. Though apparently the image is worshipped, the devotee feels the presence of the Lord in it and pours out his devotion unto it. It is the appalling ignorance of the modern sensual man that clouds his vision and prevents him from seeing Divinity in the lovely and enchanting idols of His forms.

The wonderful scientific advances of this century ought to convince one of the glory of idol worship. How are the songsters and orators confined to a small box like thing called a radio or a T.V.? The latter are merely lifeless, mechanical structures which would break into a thousand pieces of thrown violently; and yet, if you know how to handle it, you can hear through it the music and see through it the pictures occurring several thousands of miles away. Even as you catch the sound-waves of people all over the globe through the radio and T.V., it is possible to commune with the all-pervading Lord through the medium of an idol. The divinity of the all-pervading God is vibrant in very atom of creation. There is net a speck of space where He is net. Why do you then say that He is net in the idols?

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There are many who would glibly say: "Oh, God is an all-pervading formless Being. How can He be confined to this idol!" Are these people ever conscious of His omnipresence? Do they always see Him and Him alone in everything? No. It is their ego that prevents them from bowing to the idols of God and with that motive they put this lame excuse forward.

Empty vessels make much sound. A practical man who does meditation and worship, who is full of knowledge and real devotion, always keeps silent. He influences and teaches others through silence. He alone knows whether an idol is necessary in the beginning of concentration or not.

However intellectual one may be, one cannot concentrate without the help of some symbol. An intellectual or a learned person may say on account of his pride and vanity: "I do not like an idol I do not wish to concentrate on a form." He cannot concentrate on the formless One. He thinks that people will laugh at him when they come to know that he is meditating on an idol. He never does any meditation on the formless One. He simply talks and argues and poses. He wastes his life in unnecessary discussions only. An ounce of practice is better than tons of theories.

Intellect is a hindrance in the vast majority of intellectual persons. They say that the existence of Brahman is guess-work, the superconscious state is a bluff and Self-realisation is an imagination of the Vedantins. Deluded souls! They are steeped in ignorance. They are carried away by their secular knowledge which is mere husk when compared to the knowledge of the Self. There is no hope of salvation for such people. First their wrong impressions should be hushed by good impressions through Satsang. Then only will they realise their mistakes. May the Lord bestow on them dear understanding and thirsting for real knowledge!

A Symbol of God

The idol is a substitute or symbol. The image in a temple, though it be made of stone, wood or metal, is precious for a devotee as it bears the mark of his Lord, as it represents something which he holds holy and eternal. A flag is only a small piece of painted cloth, but to a soldier it stands for something that he holds very dear. He is prepared to give up his life in defending his flag. Similarly, the image is very dear to a devotee. It speaks to him in its own language of devotion. Just as the flag arouses martial valour in the soldier, so also the image arouses devotion in the devotee. The Lord is superimposed on the image and the image generates divine thoughts in the worshipper.

A piece of ordinary white paper or coloured paper has no value. You throw it away. But, if there is the stamp of the Government on the paper (currency note), you keep it safe in your money pocket or trunk. Even so, an ordinary piece of atom has no value for you. You throw it away. But, if you behold the stone idol of Lord Krishna at Pandharpur or any other idol in shrines, you bow your head with folded palms, because there is the stamp of the Beloved Lord on the stone. The devotee superimposes on the stem idol his own Lord and all His attributes.

When you worship an image, you do not say: "This image has come from Jaipur. It was bought by Prabhu Singh. Its weight is 50 lbs. It is made of white marble. It has cost me Rs.500." No! You superimpose all the attributes of the Lord on the image and pray: "O Inner Ruler! You are all-pervading. You are omnipotent, omniscient and all-merciful. You are the source of everything. You are eternal, unchanging. You are the life of my life, the Soul of my soul! Give me light and knowledge! Let me dwell in Thee for ever!"

When your devotion and meditation become intense and deep, you do not see the stone image. You behold the Lord only who is pure Consciousness. Image worship is very necessary for beginners.

An Integral Part of the Cosmos

For a beginner, the idol is an absolute necessity. By worshipping the idol, the Lord is pleased. The idol is made up of the five elements. The five elements constitute the body of the Lord. The idol remains an idol, but the worship goes to the Lord.

If you shake hands with a man, he is highly pleased. You have touched only a small part of his body and yet he is happy. He smiles and welcomes you. Even so, the Lord is highly pleased when a small portion of His cosmic body is worshipped. An idol is a part of the body of the Lord. The whole world is His body. The devotion goes to the Lord.

The worshipper superimposes on the image the Lord and all His attributes. He does the sixteen forms of reverence to the Lord. First, the Presence of the Deity is invoked. Then a seat is offered, the feet are washed, warts is offered, and then hospitality is offered. The idol is bathed, dressed and invested with the sacred thread. Sandal paste is applied to its forehead, flowers are offered, and incense is burnt. Then a lamp is lit and waved before the Deity. Food is now offered, together with the burning of camphor. A gift of gold is offered. Finally (the sixteenth step), the Deity is bidden farewell.

In these external forms of worship, the inner love finds expression. The wandering mind is fixed non in this form of worship. The aspirant gradually feels the nearness of the Lord. He attains purity of heart and slowly annihilates his egoism.

To the worshipper who has faith in the symbol, any kind of image is the body of the Lord, be it made of stone, clay, or brass, or be it a picture, drawing, etc. Such worship can never be idolatry. All matter is a manifestation

of God. God is present in everything. Everything is an object of worship, for all is a manifestation of God who is therein worshipped. The very act of worship implies that the object of worship is superior and conscious. This way of looking at things must be attained by the devotee. The untutored mind must be trained to view things in the above manner.



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