

Hindu Mandir and Deity Worship- The Manifestation of Divinity

A small bronze statue sits in front of me, half buried in flowers and *akshadai*, the little grains slipping and sliding over each other onto the ground. Its face, half obscured by an elephant trunk, smiles gently, even when most of its mouth is covered. It stares blankly ahead as the puja continues, not even reacting when cold water is poured on top of it. This is my god, Ganesha, one of the many representations of the one divinity that we all seek to find and rejoice in. But the small statue does not give us a true representation of what he really is; like a scaled down model of one of the wonders of the world, it lacks the capability to give us a true feeling of the majesty and awe one feels when in the presence of the real thing. Divinity is hard to see in a limited physical form, but it clearly manifests itself in thoughts, feelings, and infinity as we attempt to and gradually succeed in contemplating a greater whole- and it is this idea that we worship.

Within our thoughts, divinity lacks a form- but it is tangible, and there nonetheless. It resides in the very core of our being, obscured by the incessant distractions that mark the human mind and human life. The attempt to get rid of this curtain of thought, to finally realize the *atman* at the very core, is well documented throughout time. In the stories of Ancient India, like the *Mahabharata*, the Pandava princes go on a pilgrimage, abandoning their worldly possessions in favor of the road to self-realization. The great sage Vishvamitra, once king of the most dominant kingdom then in existence, left all his power and wealth behind in favor of a life of meditation. While in the beginning, he was motivated by selfishness- a desire to see the sage Vashishta beaten and humbled- in the end, he attained *brahmananda*, eternal happiness and calm, devoid of all wants, and empowered by the knowledge that he had unlocked through his austerities. This state, *moksha*, is the true essence of divinity where one can accept everything they encounter, and so, learn from each and every one of their experiences. Within temples, it is this that we meditate and chat upon- the goal that, by worshipping, we gradually achieve.

The inner realm is beyond all that we can sense, and even the subtle workings of one's mind or intellect cannot perceive it but through speculation. It is a commonly

documented fact in the Vedic Texts: for instance, in the NirvAna Shatkam, in the last stanza, it states:

I am one without doubts , I am without form,

Due to knowledge I do not have any relation with my organs,

The inner self is completely separate from all senses, and so, can never be found by it. And, when looking upon it logically, it makes sense. People live without sight, and hearing, and sometimes even smell in the case of brain disorders such as anosmia. People are also known to live in rare cases with a lack of taste called aguesia. And even lack of the sense of touch is known, called paresthesias. So clearly, the self is not any of these senses. This is a fundamental lesson in Hindu dharma- not to be attached to one's senses. For after we die, the things we indulged in with our senses will remain behind on earth, with none of it being taken with you into one's next life. The only real thing to do then, with our life on earth, is to do as much good as we can, selflessly- without paying attention to all the things we may lose. It is this that we promote within meditation upon *Brahman* and the self.

Eternal happiness- that is the goal of all that we have done throughout our lives, throughout all the lives that we cannot remember, and throughout all the lives that have yet to come. *ParamAndA*- the journey of lifetimes, has with the greatest reward at the end. It seems fitting that those who achieve it in the end are revered beyond all others- the strength of character and the determination make anyone who achieves such a task a teacher to the whole world, and an example for all the younger generations. Eternal happiness is the true presence of divinity. Indeed, it is in eternity that divinity really rests; the unending road of water that is the ocean, the limitless, and constantly growing darkness that is the universe, and the eternally shifting blue, disturbed only by the radiance of the sun and the calm of slowly changing clouds- and the realized self. It is only here that we can begin to contemplate IsvarA, with the knowledge of the limitlessness nature of the self placed directly before us. Without it, we forget the nature of what we know in an effort to make it understandable- after all, in our world everything has an end. Even the longest lived star in the sky will die one day in a flash of light and heat. But Brahman is eternal- and will never die out. It is the fundamental goal to realize this, and become apart from the sorrows of life.

Brahman manifests in all the world- but only the most realized of people can see Brahman and the self in everything and everyone. One can begin to see divinity in the places closest to it- within temples and oneself, structures completely dedicated to *brahman*; at the very core, after stripping away the mAyA of the senses; and through the places where infinity is the most reachable, like the sky and the ocean. Few ever really reach the point of seeing Brahman everywhere throughout the world- but they all start in the temples and mandirs that we hold so dear. We all hold that ability to see clearly- and, with time and effort, we can realize it.

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