

Decoding Rituals and Symbols of Hinduism

Saturday October 3, 2015

12 noon – 2:30 pm

- 12 noon luncheon
- 12:45 pm ritual worship in the temple
- 1:05 pm discussion and explanation
- 2:00 pm question-answer
- 2:30 pm short tour (for those interested)

Vedanta Society
of Southern California
and
The Guibord Center—
Religion Inside Out

VEDANTIC PRINCIPLES

1. Religion is realization of the one Truth Eternal
 - (a) *Ekam sat viprā bahudhā vadanti:*
That which is is one; sages call it by various names
 - (b) God, Allah, Bodhisattva, Nirvana, Brahman, Atman
(Eternal Reality, Consciousness, and Bliss and Peace)
 - (c) Each religion is a valid path to reach that One Truth
Eternal
 - (d) Each religion has produced saints and seers of exalted
nature, to whom the whole world bows down in reverence
and love
2. In every great and recognised religion there are three parts:
philosophy, mythology, and ritual.
 - (a) Philosophy is the essence of every religion; it presents the
whole scope of a religion, setting forth its basic principles,
the goal and the means of reaching it.
 - (b) Mythology is philosophy made concrete: the abstractions
of philosophy concretised in the more or less imaginary
lives of men and supernatural beings.
 - (c) Ritual is still more concrete and is made up of forms and
ceremonies, various physical attitudes, flowers and
incense, and many other things, that appeal to the senses.
3. Abstract ideas are often very hard to comprehend. Therefore
symbols are of great help, and we cannot dispense with the
symbolical method of putting things before us.
 - (a) We cannot think but in symbols: words are symbols of
thought. There never was an idea without a
corresponding word.
 - (b) To represent ideas we use sound symbols or form symbols
(called *nāma* and *rūpa* in Sanskrit)
 - (c) According to the nature and temperament of a person,
one is free to choose an appropriate symbol: Mother,
Father, Shiva, Durga

- (d) Hindu Religion—better called *Sanātana Dharma*—employs a wide range of symbols and rituals for attaining the one Divine Reality or God.
4. Ultimate Truth is one without a second, beyond time-space-causation. In Hinduism, there is tremendous scope and choice:
- (a) Sound symbols: *Om, shrīng, klīng*
om bhūr-bhuvah-svah; A-U-M-bindu (dot)
great dicta like “*Aham brahmāsmi*, I am Brahman”
 - (b) Form symbols: various gods and goddesses; yantras
 - (c) Superhuman personalities—*avatāras*, incarnations
 - (d) Holy personalities: saints and sages
 - (e) Natural world: Sun, moon, ocean, mountain, plant, tree, flower—nature worshipped not as matter but as spirit
5. Rituals:
- (a) We worship whom we love and adore. We offer flowers, garlands, incense, candles, food, and other gifts.
 - (b) Prerequisite: moral life—virtues like truthfulness, non-injuring, purity
6. Divinity, purity, love, joy, peace is everywhere
- (a) We do not perceive it—due to ignorance
 - (b) “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God”
 - (c) How to attain that purity of heart?
 - (d) Hindu ritual and worship points to that step by step growth
7. Process of image worship: external and internal
- (a) Six major parts: preparation, purification, divinisation, invocation, service to the deity, and conclusion
 - (b) Preparation: gathering offerings, plucking flowers etc
 - (c) External purification:
 - bathing, cleaning articles & place of worship, washed clothing
 - purifying ground, seat, hands, flowers,
 - removing obstacles, terrestrial and celestial

- saluting the holy teacher
 - purifying the deity, articles of worship
- (d) Internal purification:
- regulate the breath
 - destroying negative thoughts and forces by concrete imagery—*bhūta-shuddhi*.
- (e) Divinisation
- affirming one's unity with the Divine
 - invoking the Divine within the heart
 - worshipping the Divine within: mental worship
- (f) Invocation
- Invoking the Divine into the image
- (g) Service to the Deity
- as an honoured guest: offer water to wash the feet, an *arghya* (respectful offering), water to rinse the mouth and hands, bath, perfume, flowers, sacred leaves, incense, light, and food offering
 - elaborate worship includes offerings of clothing, ornaments, flower garlands
- (h) Conclusion
- Prayer, surrendering fruits of the worship



EMBLEM OF THE RAMAKRISHNA ORDER
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