

THE NEED FOR IMAGES/IDOLS

It is a well known fact that ordinary persons, whose minds are engrossed in various material interests, cannot concentrate for long on any subject, not to speak of the abstract aspect of Brahman. Realization of Brahman should, however, be the goal of every human being as only in this human birth one has the freedom to strive for it. Every human being should try to obtain the goal of moksha or liberation. Liberation from the cycle of birth and death can be attained only through realization of Brahman, i.e. feeling HIS existence in everything and oneness with everything. For this to happen, one requires a calm and concentrated mind, un-ruffled by any sensuous desire. For ordinary persons it is extremely difficult to attain this state of mind. So with a view to help beginners to concentrate their mind, the symbol is placed before them to feel that the UNTHINKABLE POWER has graciously taken that form to accept their offerings.

According to Hindu philosophy, the divine has both personal and impersonal aspects. Symbols of the personal aspect of God make it easier for the devotee to grasp the absolute. A devotee can be drawn closer to the Higher reality - Brahman through approximation. Symbols in Hinduism, then are used as intermediaries between the limited capacity of human beings and the incommunicable nature of Brahman. While Hinduism has profusely made use of symbolism in religious worship, it has never considered them as ultimate. They are stepping stones to a higher conception.

The followers of Sanathan Dharma worship God, who is all pervading. He is in every existing thing and being. He alone is. The sun contains abundance of energy. If we spread a piece of cloth in the path of the sun, it does not catch fire by itself. But if we place a lens and focus the sun's rays on that piece of cloth, we find that, after some time the cloth catches fire. Similarly, electrical energy is everywhere, but in order to bring it to our daily use, we need generators and transmission systems. In the same way, in order to get the Lord's grace, we build temples where we can focus the power of the Lord in a consecrated idol, for our benefit.

The image is not the idle fancy of the sculptor, but shining channels through which the heart of the devotee is attracted and flow towards God. Just as one is able to receive sound waves from all over the world through the radio, it is possible to commune with the all pervading Lord through the medium of the idol. The idol remains an image but the worship goes to the Lord. The idol is only a symbol of the divine.

If one admits and accepts that God is everywhere, how can one contradict oneself by saying that God is not in the idol. But we must remember that God is not limited to the idol, which becomes the living presence, adorned with jewelery, clothed and decorated with flowers, sandal paste, etc. We can talk to the idol, pray to the idol and approach the idol with the feeling that the idol is God.