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How Seekers First Found God

*Self-Realization Fellowship International Headquarters,
Los Angeles, California, November 11, 1934*

We can readily understand how man first conceived of a science of medicine. He suffered physically and therefore sought a method to heal himself. But how did man happen to try to find out about God? The question gives scope for profound reflection.

In the Vedas* of India we find the earliest true concept of God. In her scriptures India has given the world immortal truths that have stood the test of time.

Every material inventor is actuated by material need—"necessity is the mother of invention." Similarly motivated by necessity, the early *rishis*† of India became ardent spiritual seekers. They had found that without inner satisfaction, no amount of external good fortune can bring lasting happiness. How then can one make himself really happy? That is the problem the wise men of India undertook to solve.

Three Aspects of Nature

Worship of God in prehistoric times began through man's fear of the various forces of nature. When it rained excessively, floods killed many people. Awed, man thought of the rain and wind and other natural forces as gods.

Later on, human beings realized that nature operates in three ways: creative, preservative, and dissolutive. A wave rising out of the ocean exemplifies the creative state; staying for a moment on the sea-breast, it is in the preservative state; and sinking back into the deep, it passes through the dissolutive state.

* From the Sanskrit *vid*, "to know." The Vedas comprise a voluminous scripture of 100,000 couplets. The origin of the Vedas is lost in antiquity. They were passed down orally for millenniums. According to tradition, the illumined sage Vyasa, who lived at the time of Bhagavan Krishna (see glossary), was the compiler and arranger of the Vedas in their present form.: Rig Veda, Sama Veda, Yajur Veda, and Atharva Veda.

† Literally "seers." The *rishis* were the inspired personages to whom the Vedas were revealed in an indeterminable antiquity.

Just as Jesus beheld the universal force of evil personified in Satan, so the great *rishis* beheld the universal forces of creation, preservation, and dissolution personified in definite forms. The sages of old named them Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Shiva the Destroyer. These primal powers were created as projections of the unmanifested Spirit to unfold His infinite drama of creation, while He, as God beyond creation, remains ever hidden behind their consciousness. In times of cosmic dissolution, all creation and its vast activating forces dissolve back into Spirit. There they rest until called upon again by the Great Director to reenact their roles.*

A Story About Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva

In India there is a popular story about Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. They were boasting among themselves about their tremendous might. Suddenly a little boy came up and said to Brahma, "What do you create?" "Everything," Brahma replied grandly. The boy asked the other two gods what their work was. "We preserve and destroy everything," they answered.

The young visitor was holding in his hand a single piece of straw about the size of a toothpick. Placing it in front of Brahma, he asked, "Can you create a piece of straw like this?" After prodigious effort, Brahma found to his astonishment that he could not. The lad then turned to Vishnu and asked him to save the straw, which was slowly starting to dissolve under the boy's steady gaze. Vishnu's efforts to hold it together were fruitless. Finally, the little stranger produced the piece of straw again and asked Shiva to destroy it. But try as Shiva would to annihilate it, the tiny straw remained intact.

The little boy turned again to Brahma: "Did you create me?" he asked. Brahma thought and thought; he could not remember ever having created this amazing child. Suddenly the boy vanished. The three gods awoke from their delusion and remembered that behind their power is a Greater Power.

* "They are true knowers...who understand the Day of Brahma, which endures for a thousand cycles (*yugas*), and the Night of Brahma, which also endures for a thousand cycles. At the dawn of Brahma's Day all creation, reborn, emerges from the state of non-manifestation; at the dusk of Brahma's Night all creation sinks into the sleep of non-manifestation" (Bhagavad Gita VIII:17-18).

God, the Supreme Cause

In the Western world the idea of God developed through observation of the law of cause and effect. Man can materialize objects by taking materials from the earth and shaping them in accordance with a preconceived idea; therefore it seemed reasonable to conclude that this whole universe must have been created out of ideas. This led to the concept that everything must have existed first as an idea. Someone had to create that first idea or cosmic plan. Thus through the analogy of the law of cause and effect, intelligent men reasoned that there must be a Supreme Cause.

Science has learned that all matter is made of invisible building blocks—electrons and protons—just as a house is built of bricks. But nobody can tell why some electrons and protons become wood, and others become human bone, and so on. What Intelligence guides them? This line of questioning gives room for God in even the material scientist's theories about the nature of the phenomenal worlds. The sages of India say that everything proceeds from and goes back into its source: God.

Evidence of Order and Harmony Is Everywhere

Perceiving that every human being is a compound of matter and mind, the earliest Western thinkers believed that two independent forces existed: nature and mind. Later they began asking themselves, "Why is everything in nature arranged in a particular way? Why isn't one of man's arms longer than the other? Why don't stars and planets collide? Everywhere we see evidence of order and harmony in the universe." They concluded that mind and matter could not be both separate and sovereign; a single Intelligence must govern all. This conclusion naturally led to the idea that there is just one God, who is both the Cause and matter and the Intelligence within and behind it. One who attains the ultimate wisdom realizes that everything is Spirit—in essence, though hidden in manifestation. If you had the perception, you would see God in everything. Then the question is, how did seekers first find Him?

As the beginning step, they closed their eyes to shut out immediate contact with the world and matter, so they could concentrate more fully on discovering the Intelligence behind it. They reasoned that they could not behold God's presence in nature through the ordinary perceptions of the five senses. So they began to try to feel Him within themselves by deeper and deeper concentration. They eventually discovered how to shut off all five senses, thus

temporarily doing away entirely with the consciousness of matter. The inner world of the Spirit began to open up.* To those great ones of ancient India who undeviatingly persisted in these inner investigations, God finally revealed Himself.

Devotion and Right Activity Attract God's Attention

Thus the saints gradually began to convert their conceptions of God into perceptions of Him. That is what you must do also, if you would know Him. You don't stay long enough at your prayers. First you must have a right concept of God—a definite idea through which you can form a relationship with Him—and then you must meditate† and pray until that mental conception becomes changed into actual perception. Then you will know Him. If you persist, the Lord will come. The Searcher of Hearts wants only your sincere love. He is like a little child: someone may offer Him his whole wealth and He doesn't want it; and another cries to Him, "O Lord, I love you!" and into that devotee's heart He comes running.

Don't seek God with any ulterior motive, but pray to Him with devotion—unconditional, one-pointed, steady devotion. When your love for Him is as great as your attachment to your mortal body, He will come to you.

In seeking the Lord, activity comes after devotion in importance. Some say, "God is Power; therefore let us act with power." When you are active in doing good, with the Lord ever uppermost in your mind, you will perceive Him in this way. But there is wrong as well as right activity even in doing good. A zealous churchman who brings more and more people into his congregation solely to satisfy his own ego is not going to please God through that activity. To realize the presence of the Divine Indweller should be the first desire in every heart.

It is when you persistently, selflessly perform every action with love-inspired thoughts of God that He will come to you. Then you realize that you are the Ocean of Life, which has become the tiny wave of each life. That is the way of knowing the Lord through activity. When in every action you think of Him before you act, while you are performing the action, and after you have finished it,

* "...for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21).

† Meditation is that special form of concentration in which the attention has been liberated, by scientific yoga techniques, from the restlessness of the body-conscious state and is focused unflinchingly on God. Meditation is the concentrated flow of one's attention and consciousness toward communion and oneness with God.

He will reveal Himself to you. You must work, but let God work through you; this is the best part of devotion. If you are constantly thinking that He is walking through your feet, working through your hands, accomplishing through your will, you will know Him. You should also develop discrimination, so that you prefer spiritually constructive, God-conscious activity to work performed without any thought of Him.

Meditation Is the Highest Form of Activity

But greater than activity, devotion, or reason, is meditation. To meditate truly is to concentrate solely on Spirit. This is esoteric meditation. It is the highest form of activity that man can perform, and it is the most balanced way to find God. If you work all the time you may become mechanical and lose Him in preoccupation with your duties; and if you seek Him only through discriminative thought you may lose Him in the labyrinths of endless reasoning; and if you cultivate only devotion for God, your development may become merely emotional. But meditation combines and balances all these approaches.

Work, eat, walk, laugh, cry, meditate—only for Him. That is the best way to live. In so doing you will be truly happy serving Him, loving Him, and communing with Him. So long as you let the desires and weaknesses of the physical body control your thoughts and actions, you will not find Him. Always be master of your body. When you sit in the church or temple, you perhaps feel a little devotion and a little discriminative perception, but that is not enough. The esoteric activity of meditation is necessary if you really want to be aware of His presence.

You might think that after two hours of meditation I would be bored to death. No, I couldn't find anything in the world as intoxicating as this God of mine. When I drink that aged wine of my soul, a skyful of happiness throbs in my heart. Divine joy is in everyone. Sunlight shines equally on the charcoal and the diamond, but the diamond reflects the light. Such are the transparent minds that know and reflect Spirit.

Thus in the esoteric activity of meditation you have the solution to the mystery of knowing God. I do not blame you for what you do, but for what you do not do. You think you have no time for God. Suppose the Lord were too busy to look after you? What then? Wrest your mind from the mirage of the senses and habit. Why be deluded like that? I am pointing out to you a land more beautiful