

These are the questions and answers with Baba Hari Dass at the New Year's Retreat at Mt. Madonna Center on December 30, 1993. Mandira read the chalkboard. Copyright 1994 by Sri Rama Foundation.

Reading: Bhagavad Gita XII: 1-7.

Q: Regarding the conflict between religions who believe in God with form and those who worship God without form. Is there somewhere in the teaching that shows you that you shouldn't become so attached to your own form of God that you would want to go to war over it?

A: The flag represents a country. If we bow to a flag, we are bowing to a country. But one who is bowing to the cloth of the flag and not to your country, they are limited to cloth worship. In the Gita it is said that those who worship deities go to the deity and those who worship me, come to me. It means those who worship through a form, they achieve supreme Brahman. Catholics worship a form but that form represents formless God. If this truth is not known, then the worship will be limited to a form. American Indians worship God in a form of nature that is infinite, appearing in a finite form. The fight starts by not knowing.

Q: In the verse, it says that it is easier to approach God through form. Do we have a choice or is it more a matter of temperament?

A: Human mind always creates a form so it is easier to worship and meditate on a form. But those who always reflect on the truth, they end up meditating on the formless. Because the supreme conscious principle has no form. All forms are created in the supreme conscious principle. Like a dream.

Q: It seems like the Gita promises that if you devote yourself to God, you are liberated from your desires and from birth and death. If this is a transformation of the mind, in the essence of this would that person be the same person or a different person after the transformation?

A: What creates the personality? The ego of individuality. If you would condition the mind thinking you are universal, then what kind of personality would there be? You will be where you are. If you are with wise people, you are wise. If you are with children, you are a child, etc. If a person achieves knowledge of the Self or God, what happens? Outwardly, nothing changed. But internally the person doesn't dwell on any false things, so there is no attachment. But the person functions perfectly, physically and mentally.

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Q: Do we remember the way we used to be?

A: Remembrance is in the mind. Liberation is in the ego. Ego is simply an idea of "I am." It functions through the mind, intellect and senses. If the mind wants something, then the ego will say "I want." Ego connects our mind-body complex with outer objects and yet keeps us separate individuals. If the ego is separated from the mind, then it will not own any functions, thoughts, feelings of the mind. So the ego is singled out. It is no more individual. So automatically, it finds itself as universal consciousness.

Q: What does worship mean?

A: Worship means to keep divine presence in your heart. It is done in two ways: 1) conscious in thoughts, 2) by performing devotional things.

Q: When you talk about worship of God in many different forms, is it better to choose a form of deity which represents something you have already or is it better to choose an aspect of deity that you are working toward?

A: Deity can be anything. If you choose a form you respect, admire and love, then your mind will dwell on it easily. But you should not forget what it represents. If you remember it, then you will not get into conflict with others' religion, deity or method of worship. Because all different paths are going to the same destination.

Q: I am confused by something I heard earlier. You said that as one changes internally, the body remains the same. How could my external self remain constant while my internal self is changing?

A: You will still eat, sleep, act the same as before. You will still discriminate a dog and a cow in the same way. The only difference is attachment. You will not relate to things with an attachment. It's our attachment that distorts everything. So the person who has achieved enlightenment remains the same but is completely different.

Q: What kind of changes does the physical body go through when a person gets enlightened?

A: Prarabdha karma doesn't change. The body functions with prarabdha karma. The person will still get old, get sick, and die. Body changes appear by the discipline one practices. The person eats right food, sleeps and acts according to prescribed rules. That makes the body pure and healthy.

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Q: There is a teaching in Tibetan Buddhism where they describe a person as going "rainbow." The person leaves the body and there is no body left or perhaps just some teeth and bones are left. Would you comment on that?

A: Internal fire develops and burns down the physical body. It doesn't happen to everyone. Rare cases.

Q: Is that a death or does that incarnate spirit come back into that form again?

A: Death is complete forgetfulness of past identities. If the person remembers the past, then no one died.

Q: Is everyone's time of enlightenment pre-ordained?

A: Bhoga and apavarga, experience and liberation. Every person goes through experience and gets liberated from all experiences. But no time is fixed for liberation. If the time would be fixed, then there would be no need to try for liberation. It can happen at any time to anyone.