

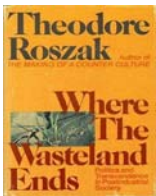
The Spiritual Scientist

An ezine for those who think!

Insight In Sight

Question: Does it make sense to worship a stone as if it were God?

Answer: Obviously, it doesn't.

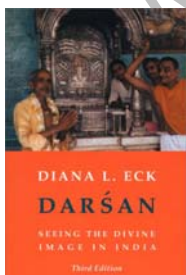
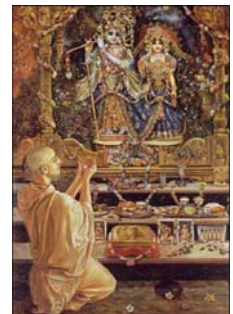


However, as author Theodore Roszak explains in his book *Where the Wasteland Ends*, the only proper location of idolatry is in the eye – in the eye of the beholder, not the worshipper. For it is only the beholder who thinks that stone is being worshipped; the worshipper has much more refined understanding. The beholder's sight lacks the insight that informs the worshipper's sight.

That insight is about God's immanence or his presence within nature. The Vedic scriptures like the *Bhagavad-gita* (9.4-5) explains that God has not only his self-existence in his own spiritual abode, but he is also omnipresent in his creation. When a devotee sincerely desires to serve the Lord, the Lord mercifully manifests himself in an image (deity):

1. Fashioned into a form that parallels the scriptural descriptions of God's original form and
2. Sanctified with devotion according to the scriptural process of *prana-pratistha* described in the *Pancharatra Agamas*.

To the common Semitic objection that a form will limit God, the Vedic adepts have a stunningly simple answer. The idea that a form will limit God stems from a material, anthropocentric notion of God's form. The supreme unlimited has such unlimited potency that he can accept an apparently limited form without being limited. Indeed, to claim that God cannot manifest himself in matter is to limit him in his potency. And to say that God cannot reciprocate with the love of his sincere devotee is to limit him in his love. Thus, the argument that the icon, better called as deity, limits God backfires – and not just once, but twice! Vedic followers rise beyond the misconceived iconophobia that limits those who try to limit God. If we too can similarly break free from our iconophobia, we will experience for ourselves the mystery and the beauty of God's iconic manifestations.



As the Harvard Hinduism scholar, Diana Eck, explains in her insightful book, *Darshan: Seeing the Divine Image in India*:

The image, which may be seen, bathed, adorned, touched, and honored, does not stand between the worshipper and the Lord, somehow receiving the honor properly due to the Supreme Lord. Rather, because the image is a form of the Supreme Lord, it is precisely the image that facilitates and enhances the close relationship of the worshipper and God and makes possible the deepest outpouring of emotions in worship.

In Vedic parlance, the act of beholding the sanctified form of the Lord is called *darshan*. So, we need to equip our intellect with *darshan* (philosophical insight) so that we can properly benefit when our eyes take *darshan* (sight) of the Deity of the Lord.

