

The Spiritual Scientist

An ezine for those who think!

Is Deity Worship For The Less Intelligent?

Question: Is the worship of Deities a tool for less intelligent people that should be given up by the spiritually advanced?

Answer: Not exactly.

The sacred scriptures like the *Pancharatra*s and the *Puranas* explain that the Lord's appearance as the *archa-avatara* (the incarnation as the Deity or the iconic representation) is a special mercy for the spiritually under-evolved. As these people can't perceive God's all-pervasive presence, they can at least begin their God consciousness by respecting him when he manifests within their sense perception as the Deity.

But to properly understand the relationship of Deity worship with spiritual advancement, let's first understand how the *Srimad Bhagavatam* (eleventh canto) classifies devotees based on the level of their God consciousness:



Uttama-adhikari (first-level): Devotees at this level are so advanced that they can perceive God's presence everywhere. This does not mean that they worship everything as if it were God or that they give up worshipping the Deity as if it is not God, but that everything and everyone reminds them of God just as everything in the house reminds a loving mother of her newborn baby.

Madhyama-adhikari (second level): Devotees at this level understand that their God consciousness depends not only on how they see the Deity, but also on how they relate with the things and people of the world. Accordingly, in addition to worshipping the Deity, these devotees make friendship with other devotees, share their wisdom with the uninformed and avoid the envious.

Kanishtha-adikhari (third level): Devotees at this level perceive God only in the Deity and nowhere else. The spirituality of these devotees is limited only to the temple or the home-altar; they can't perceive God's relationship with other aspects of their life.

So, whereas the third-level devotees need the Deity to remember God, the first-level devotees don't. But this doesn't mean that the first-level devotees neglect or reject the Deity. Not at all. Rather, due to their great love for the Lord, they serve the Deity with even greater devotion.

Even the less intelligent or the third-level devotees can perceive God's presence as the Deity; those who can't see God's presence as the Deity are below even these third-level devotees. The God consciousness of the iconoclasts or the iconophobes is so abysmally low that even the supremely merciful *archa-avatar's* mercy is unable to reach them. Their reclamation is possible only when they open their minds to understand the profound philosophy underlying Deity Worship and develop the humility to admit that they need the Deity to begin their God consciousness. Otherwise, though they may imagine themselves to be more intelligent, they will remain zero-intelligent.

