

The Old, The New – And The Eternal

Does God exist far away 'somewhere out there', as most traditional religious followers believe? Or is divinity dormant within us, as the New Age proponents posit? The Bhagavad-gita (4.11) gives a principle that can unify these two schools of thought: "As all people surrender unto Me, I reward them accordingly." Let's see how progressive surrender actuates both traditional and modern thought systems toward a holistic understanding.

1. The Old – *Conventional Religions:*

Conventional religions refer to those past and present religious systems in which the followers perform the religious rituals for material benefits.

When faced with reversals in life, some people pray for material relief or gain. They start their surrender to God by following the rituals prescribed in the scriptures. When their prayers are answered, this revelation of the presence and munificence of God increases their faith. This increased faith inspires them to surrender further, which in turn leads to a greater revelation of God. Gradually, their surrender becomes pure, motivated only by love and free from all material desires. God then reveals Himself in His full glory as an enchanting person, best described by the name Krishna meaning 'all-attractive'. We then fall in love with Krishna and joyfully worship and serve Him according to His desires; for pleasing the beloved is the essential nature of love. When divine love fills and charms our heart, we rise far above the utilitarian religiosity that sees the Supreme as a mere order-supplier of our mundane desires. A *ritual* imbued with spirit becomes *spi-ritual*. Then, religious rituals blossom into spiritual expressions and experiences of divine love. This is how the traditional religious forms of worship lead the worshiper to the highest revelation.

2. The New – *New Age Movements:*

New Age movements refer to those modern belief systems that focus on tapping the powers latent within us to achieve our goals.

When confronted with life's vicissitudes, some other people start taking responsibility for their own thinking. This dynamism in one's mental life is also a step toward spiritual surrender, for one is giving up the grossly physical conception of life in terms of work and result. The relationship between positive thinking and improved performance is the basis of most new-age concepts. This revelation of the power of thoughts contains the seed

of further spiritual growth: "I can change my thoughts, but who is the 'I' that is changing the thoughts?"

Those who are thus spiritually enterprising rise beyond positive perception of reality to perception of positive reality. When they choose to surrender by receiving wisdom from books like the Bhagavad-gita, and by following scripturally recommended practices like chanting, they gradually perceive the positive reality that they are souls, beloved children of God, entitled to rejoice in eternal loving exchanges with Him. Then they harmonize themselves with the truly positive purpose of human life: to awaken our dormant love for God, experience His unlimited love for us and ultimately return back to His eternal abode. Thus the New Age thoughts can also lead to the realm of divine love.

3. The Eternal – *Krishna Consciousness*:

Krishna (God) consciousness – the constant, conscious, loving service offered by the soul to Krishna – is the eternal reality and the ultimate goal for conventional religionists, new-agers and everyone else.

The process of Krishna consciousness leads us directly to that supreme reality by awakening our dormant love for God, through engagement in devotional service with our body, mind and words. Krishna consciousness is thus the culmination of traditional religiosity, which emphasizes the primacy of the Supreme, and modern spirituality, which stresses the potency of our consciousness. Krishna consciousness bestows upon us the enlightened vision of life as a dynamic, harmonious interplay of human endeavor and divine empowerment. This vision makes life exciting and fulfilling; it opens the doorway for the full utilization of our latent material potential and complete realization of our dormant spiritual nature. No wonder that in the Bhagavad-gita (11.33) Krishna, the infinite divine supreme, issues an inspiring call for action to Arjuna, the representative of the finite human spirit, "Therefore, arise and attain glory. Conquer your enemies and enjoy a flourishing kingdom on this earth. All your enemies have already been killed by My arrangement. Just become an instrument in My hands." Empowered by Krishna's instructions, Arjuna overcame his initial bewilderment and attained a glorious success in this world and the next.

We too can, by following the Lord's instruction just as Arjuna did, attain empowerment and fulfillment in this



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