



Dharmashraddha Tatha Dharmanishtha



Religious Loyalty and Commitment



HERE IS AN ENTIRE SCHOOL OF THOUGHT, supported by some Hindu swamis ministering in the West, which all but denies the differences between religions by claiming that "all religions are one." Because they are all one, the universalist reasoning goes, it is quite permissible for anyone to follow a Hindu religious life as much as he wants, with no need to formally accept Hinduism or sever loyalties to his previous religion. This school of thought states that it is also permissible for individuals to study and practice specific aspects of Hinduism, such as hatha yoga or Vedanta philosophy, while remaining within another religion, on the theory that these practices and philosophies will make them better at their own religion -- better Jews, better Christians, better Muslims.

My own personal observation is that without a complete and final severance from one's former religion or philosophy it is not possible to practice Hinduism fully and receive the full spiritual benefit, because of subconscious psychological confrontations that inevitably occur when the

former belief and commitment make battle with the newly found ones. It is like trying to run a computer on two contradictory operating systems at the same time. Such inner conflict leads to confusion. In the spiritual aspirant it spells indecision and lack of commitment. For example, many problems may result if Hindu practices and beliefs are expressly forbidden by one's original religion. A Catholic accepting various principles of Vedanta is actually accepting beliefs contrary to the central dogmas of the Catholic Church, which he promised to believe, uphold and defend at his confirmation. A Jew who enters a Hindu temple and worships an idol is, according to Jewish law of the *Torah*, to be stoned to death by his own mother and father for worshipping a graven image.

To gain a clear subconscious for his future religious life, the individual must examine and reject those beliefs of his previous religion that differ from those of the Hindu religion he wishes to join. Then he must examine and accept the Hindu beliefs that are new to him. If he was confirmed or otherwise initiated in another religion or ideology, he must effect formal severance from his previous religion before formally entering the Hindu religion through the *namakarana samskara*, name-giving sacrament.

Belief is very important. Beliefs create attitudes. Each faith carries a number of community attitudes, or ways of thinking and responding, which have developed through time in the minds of its followers through the collective beliefs. *Attitude* originally meant "posture of the body" and has come to mean a person's state of mind as it can be deduced from the manner in which he holds himself. Therefore, a trained eye could, at a glance, distinguish in a crowd the Catholics, the Protestants, the Jews, the Hindus, etc., by the particular attitude and body language characteristic of their religion. The true sign of the change in beliefs is the change in attitudes that the inner transformation brings. Fully embracing a new religion brings a noticeable change in the posture of the physical and emotional body, and one starts to hear that he looks different and looks at things differently.

Each member of a certain religion has welcome access to all of its facilities, not only on the physical plane, but on the inner (astral) planes as well. As a Hindu, the great devonic realms of Hinduism, with its many great rishis, masters and devas, devotees and Mahadevas, welcome you each evening when you pass off to sleep, and when you finally drop your physical body at death. Likewise for the other religions.

These inner plane realms have been described as being like vast cities, and each embodied person is psychically and emotionally connected to one realm or more due to his karmic attachments, desires, aversions, promises and commitments. These inner bonds play a strong role throughout a

person's life and are naturally felt during any consideration of new loyalties. Fully embracing Hinduism, for example, is a process of clearly defining one's attachments, positively attaching oneself to the Hindu realms while systematically detaching from other ties made in the past. The inner bonds are quite real, detailing responsibilities for the devotee to uphold, and various benefits, such as the protection of guardian devas, access to inner realms and special blessings in times of need. The final ceremony, the *namakarana samskara* (or in some cases the *vratyastoma*), earned by fulfilling the stringent requirements that precede it, announces to one and all that the deed is done, a promise made, an inner contract made to live up to the lofty Sanatana Dharma to the best of one's ability.

Of course, although much karma may have had to be cleared to reach this point, this is only the beginning. Like a new student in a vast university, the supplicant begins a new life in the company of like-minded devotees, all worshipping God and the Gods in the same manner and approaching life through the same belief structure. This makes for a harmonious, happy, productive community, and for a rewarding spiritual life. The way for this clean start in a new religion is cleared by honestly looking at prior commitments and systematically resolving what needs to be resolved.

Entrance into Hinduism means becoming a member of a new community, a new tribe, a new group mind. What is a group mind? Every single human being on the planet is a member of a group mind -- actually on several different levels. first, we are members of the group mind of our planet. Then, we are members of the human species. We are members of our race and ethnic group. And we are members of that group mind we call our nation.

While consciously or unconsciously sharing in group consciousness, mankind is also waking up to the tragedy of blind, separative consciousness, which breeds hatred, war, communal fighting, economic inequality and destruction of the planet itself. This awakening has led to a strong reaction. Thus, it is common to hear, "I am a universalist." "I am a citizen of all nations." "I consider myself a member of all religions." These New Age souls have become the expression of humanity's conscience, taking it upon themselves to assuage the guilt of eons of mankind's separative ignorance. But the fact of our membership in various groups remains. Even those who consider themselves independent of all groups are members of the group defined by the conviction to stand alone, or to stand with everyone.

Group consciousness, loyalty and commitment are not at fault. Ignorance of our oneness in God is the problem. The key, of course, is to transcend lower emotions and primitive group dynamics while sacrificing and

committing oneself to working together with other people for higher ends. This is what should happen when one becomes a Hindu. The greatest spiritual work is done through religions. Temples and other facilities, printed scriptures, creeds of beliefs, codes of conduct, and the actual spiritual growth that religion seeks are all the combined results of groups of people. Religion exists and is sustained in the minds of groups of people.

We could say that the group mind of a religion is tribal. Tribe is the awareness that one has natural affinity and loyalties with certain people with whom one lives and associates on a daily basis. Hinduism is a tribal religion. You are either outside the tribe or within the tribe or disrespected by the tribe, but as long as you are remembered by the tribe and have at one time been accepted by the tribe, you belong to the tribe. That is the way we view our religion.

The tribes of old were territorial; centered in a certain geographical area, members cultivated the land, gathered food, hunted and lived, bound together by bloodlines and social need. A religion is a tribe of a different kind. Hinduism, for example, occupies a particular dimension of the inner plane. Its members cultivate spiritual seeds in the field of human consciousness. With faith they nurture, protect and preserve in themselves, in each other and their children, foundational beliefs for religious enterprise, spiritual unfoldment and mystical realization. Hinduism gathers together the power of particular forces from the inner worlds and brings those divine powers into manifestation on Earth as vehicles to carry members of its tribe forward into light and love. The tribe we call Hinduism is a great boat that carries souls across the turbulent and sometimes treacherous sea of life.

In many ways, religion also transcends the commonalities of lower orders of tribe and community -- nationality, language and ethnic difference. Hindus have many different languages, are born in many different countries. The main common factor of this global tribe is religious belief. From the religious beliefs stem the traditions, culture and basic behavior patterns of the community. Members love and honor the tribe, its traditions, its culture. They mold their lives accordingly to great benefit for their own sake and for the sake of all other members of the tribe, for the sake of all Hindus. Entrance into Hinduism means becoming a part of all this. It may mean changing one's associations, commitments and community loyalties. Real entrance into Hinduism means spending one's time with Hindus, making friends with Indian, Sri Lankan, Nepalese, Balinese, African or Caribbean Hindus, enjoying an inspired Hindu culture.

Let's take the example of a young nurse who is a member of the Western, agnostic, materialist community. Suppose that her karma and the inner impetus of her soul are such that she learns and awakens to certain divine truths which she discovers are basic Hindu beliefs. After careful study, she comes to the conclusion that, at heart, she is a Hindu. She declares herself a Hindu. She begins to worship at a Hindu temple regularly. She may even change her name legally, on her passport and driver's license, and enter the religion formally through the *namakarana samskara* at the temple. In all aspects she has become a Hindu. But there is one further and most important step to be taken. She must enter the Hindu community.

Her other very sincere gestures will never have the full impact and depth if this merger does not take place. If she keeps associating only with non-Hindus, eating at McDonald's, spending her evenings at the disco, committing herself totally to the shallow social life of "fun," spending all her money on herself -- we certainly could not call her a good Hindu. In fact, her entrance into Hinduism has meaning only insofar as she merges her lifestyle and her mind into the group mind, the tribal mind, the community mind, of other Hindus. She should begin making friends from within the Hindu community. If she were asked out on a date for hamburgers by a young atheist intern from the hospital, she might say, "No, I am a vegetarian and will be going to my Indian music class tonight." In other words, her commitments and loyalties should be to the traditions, the culture and the lifestyle of other members of her new tribe -- which is now Hinduism.

Today, one who holds only a single Hindu name or who appreciates Hinduism's essence but has not accepted its totality is an *ardha*-Hindu, or "half-Hindu." *Ardha*-Hindus include not only Westerners who have taken a Hindu first name, but Easterners who have taken a Western name, first or last, to disguise their true Hindu name or to render it easier for Westerners to pronounce. Other religions abhor this. For instance, in the Islamic community we would never meet Mohammed Ali Johnson or Joe Mohammed. They are proud to be who they are, abhorring all disguises. They set a good example for us.

Some Hindus, or *ardha*-Hindus, seeking to be ecumenical and all-embracing, observe Easter or celebrate Christmas, thinking themselves tolerant. But are they? In fact, they are not, for they do not equally celebrate the Prophet Mohammed's birthday; nor do they observe Jewish or Shinto or Buddhist holy days, or those of other faiths.