

# IMPULSE OF WORSHIP GONE ASTRAY

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Human beings have been worshipping since time immemorial. They have worshipped their ancestors; carved, built and shaped idols signifying forces of Nature. Sometimes the idols were made of wood or clay, sometimes of stone and brick. Metals also were used for making idols, from iron and brass to silver and gold. Precious stones too of different colours, were availed of, especially when idols were carved in miniature. The grandeur of idols lay in the capacity of the adorers i.e. as to how much they could spend. The worshippers brought even sun and moon down to earth and placed them in temples specified for them. Thus they localized, rather, nationalized the universals.

For instance, here is an account of how the Hindus of India looked upto their gods.

“It’s (India’s) gods and goddesses are no doubt world forces philosophically, but practically and socially they are Indian. Most Indians cannot realize yet what an advantage it is for them as a nation, to be compatriots of their gods and goddesses.”<sup>328</sup>

The book quoted above was written in 1946. It swacks of idolatrous religion that prevailed in India and out of India about four thousand years ago. Others, most of them if not all, have changed. Now for them, their idols are not more than pieces of art. But in India gods are still worshipped. They are still deities, for the over whelming majority of the Hindus.

Why do human beings worship at all? Psychologists say it is fear or the instinct of self preservation that makes them worship idols possessing symbolic attributes. But others think otherwise. For example, religious peoples whose religion is based on revelation believe that worshipping is ingrained in human nature. To be afraid of something is one thing, to worship quite another. Human beings worship because they are created to worship their Creator. But this instinct, as it is the wont of all instincts when corrupted or handicapped by social surroundings or other circumstances find

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<sup>328</sup> Savitri Devi, A Warning to the Hindus, Calcutta, p. 13.

other modes for its unfolding. It falls upon false gods. Idol worship, it seems, is a false or corrupted expression of man's impulse to worship God.

Man grows physically and mentally, depending on how an individual is brought up. He is not mere body nor mere soul; He is both body and soul. And both body and soul need suitable nourishment. Apart from environment and social factors, the body hungers for material food. The soul hungers for non-material belief, categories for its nutrition. Among these are love, belief, worship. Material food makes man grow like all other breathing existences. Love, belief and worship make man develop and progress as a human being. Man's physical growth, as the growth of all living bodies has categorical limits. But his mental and spiritual progress has no limits. Man can rise to any spiritual heights, can become boundless. He possesses an atom of Divine Light, as his soul. It is God's breath, says the Quran.

Man's beginning is no doubt overwhelmed by nature but his uppermost reach is God Himself - God who has created the universe out of nothing, who sustains, and is the fountain-head of all that existed, all that exist and all that is being added to the universe every fraction moment. That is the creative will of God. Man is capable of creating a fellowship with his creator. In the words of Allama Iqbal;

Indeed the evolution of life shows that though in the beginning the mental is overwhelmed by the physical, the mental as it grows in power tends to dominate up the physical and may eventually rise to a position of complete independence.<sup>329</sup>

This gradual progress is to be earned. Man has to toil for it. What is naturally given is the potentiality to rise higher than all matter. This upward effort on the part of man is in fact the effort towards the realization of his self. As long as an individual remains earth-rooted, he remains, as if, without a self - the self of a man. He can find himself in his belief in and worship of God. The Quran commands;

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<sup>329</sup> The Reconstruction of Religious thought in Islam, 1944, p. 106.

Set your face truly and steadily to the Faith. (This is) God's handiwork according to the pattern on which He has made mankind. That is the standard Religion. But most mankind understand not.<sup>330</sup>

Man is created innocent. He is by nature pure, free from sin. According to the Quran, nobody is born with the burden of any of original sins on his neck. He is born a man-baby. If not misguided, his true nature leads him to God, otherwise he falls upon the meshes of the society he is related to and his soul gets corrupted. The result is that the way of his God-ward journey becomes barricaded. Hence his true nature can not find a vent. The Holy Prophet (may peace be on Him), according to an authentic reports has said;

Every infant is born in a state of conformity to the natural deposition with which he is created in his mothers womb, it is parents that make him a Jew, a Christian, and a Magian.-There Shall be no changing or altering of the religion of God.<sup>331</sup>

True religion is that God is one. He does not beget. He is not begotten. The one is absolutely one. In Judaism there are two, in Christianity three and in Magian belief it is an element i.e. fire, which is worshipped. There from the path opens for other and still other things created by God to share Divinity, one becoming many. This worship of many gods went on adding to the number of gods till they become innumerable. One thing is obvious. All such things were tribal, clanish, territorial, racial, special, regional and seasonal. They kept their worshippers, and natural so, alien to other clans, tribes, societies, nations. Rather they kept their adorers of one caste, class and entity against those of others. Every society, rather, class had its own gods to worship. All those who worshipped other gods could not be treated as kins. As many gods as many kinds of human beings. Thus human beings cannot be visualized as one "mankind" as long as they do not believe in and bow before one God.

The ingrained faculty of worship and belief in one God gone astray can play havoc with the adorers. Idols begin to live in their minds. Their vision narrows down to the bounds of the images, moulded, carved and shaped by

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<sup>330</sup> al-Quran, 30:30.

<sup>331</sup> Faiz-ul-Qadeer, ed. Muhammad Hasan Zaif Ullah, Mustafa al-Babi, Cairo, p. 243, (Vol. II).

themselves. The idols deprive their adorers of their selves. They become, so to say, soulless. The worship of material idols made them materialist. As the gods, so the devotees. It is a good old Arabic saying that if you worship wood you become wood. And so on, so forth. The object worshiped must affix its stamp on the mind of the devotee and snatch away his spiritual individuality which was to soar higher than all material levels.

No doubt the nature of man tried at best to categorize gods, though it could not easily rise above the level of related milieu. After all, all the idols could not be equal in power and prowess. Some were surely better than other. Then why could not there be one better than all, the best and the greatest of all the gods, the God of gods.

With almost all of the adoltrous societies, this idea remained at work and the amazing phenomenon is that every society characterized the sun as the biggest of all gods, rather the god of them all. Yes the Sun was the biggest, the brightest. No wonder then that in Egypt, India, Babylonia, Persia, Japan etc., it was the Sun that was held in the highest esteem.

The Sun atleast gave them the idea of one that was, above all. The point is that from many gods to one particular god, though a long journey, was natural. It can be presumed that the Sun stood for a bridge between the many and the one. Why after all, all the societies entertained the idea of one god who could be supposed to be the god of all other gods, if the idea was not implanted in their nature. "Pascal contends that men know that there is a God, without knowing what God is. Men can never mention the last number."<sup>332</sup>

With the help and guidance of intellect only, human beings could not go beyond this. The first sentence and the only sentence preserved from a book of Protagoras entitled "On the Gods", reads thus;

"With regard to the Gods I can not know whether they exist or do not exist, nor what they are like in appearance, because the factors preventing knowledge are many, the obscurity of the subject and the brevity of human life."<sup>333</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> Master-pieces of World Philosophy, p. 412.

<sup>333</sup> God, Man and State, Kathleen Freeman, p. 39.

It was the revelation through prophets of Almighty Allah that told mankind whom they sought after. They were always not many who ventured to listen to the prophets. Their fixation with false gods made them run away from paying heed to the Truth. They rather mocked at the messengers of Allah they stoned, even killed them and behaved like savage patients who pounce upon those who try to cure them.

Anyway it were the prophets of Allah who preached the unity of God and the equality and fraternity of all mankind. That was the gist of the message delivered by all prophets. It is only they who made human beings understand that the universe is one, it is so only because the Creator of the universe is one.

It is through Allah the Creator that human beings are not castes, or classes or kinds but one mankind. Mankind can never attain self-consciousness except through His grace. The universe in the ontological sense is one circle. It can not have more than one centre. Without One God as the controlling centre, there can be no harmony in the universe, and also in human beings.

Man cannot evolve into a perfect unity without his belief in god because only according to the law and purpose of God can man shape his behaviour and destiny. Say Willian Temple;

“Life cannot be fully integrated about the self as centre; it can only be fully integrated when it becomes God centered, for God is the real centre of the real world. His purpose is its controlling principle, only in Him, therefore can all creatures find a centre which bring them all to harmony with one another.<sup>334</sup>

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<sup>334</sup> Philosophy of religion, p, 328.