

CONCEPT OF GOD IN HINDUISM

by Dr. Zakir Naik

1. Common Concept of God in Hinduism: Hinduism is commonly perceived as a polytheistic religion. Indeed, most Hindus would attest to this, by professing belief in multiple Gods. While some Hindus believe in the existence of three gods, some believe in thousands of gods, and some others in thirty three crore i.e. 330 million Gods. However, learned Hindus, who are well versed in their scriptures, insist that a Hindu should believe in and worship only one God.



The major difference between the Hindu and the Muslim perception of God is the common Hindus' belief in the philosophy of Pantheism. Pantheism considers everything, living and non-living, to be Divine and Sacred. The common Hindu, therefore, considers everything as God. He considers the trees as God, the sun as God, the moon as God, the monkey as God, the snake as God and even human beings as manifestations of God!

Islam, on the contrary, exhorts man to consider himself and his surroundings as examples of Divine Creation rather than as divinity itself. Muslims therefore believe that everything is God's i.e. the word 'God' with an apostrophe 's'. In other words the Muslims believe that everything belongs to God.

The trees belong to God, the sun belongs to God, the moon belongs to God, the monkey belongs to God, the snake belongs to God, the human beings belong to God and everything in this universe belongs to God.

Thus the major difference between the Hindu and the Muslim beliefs is the difference of the apostrophe 's'. The Hindu says everything is God. The Muslim says everything is God's.

2. Concept of God according to Hindu Scriptures:

We can gain a better understanding of the concept of God in Hinduism by analysing Hindu scriptures.

BHAGAVAD GITA:

The most popular amongst all the Hindu scriptures is the Bhagavad Gita.

Consider the following verse from the Gita:

"Those whose intelligence has been stolen by material desires surrender unto demigods and follow the particular rules and regulations of worship according to their own natures."

[Bhagavad Gita 7:20]

The Gita states that people who are materialistic worship demigods i.e. 'gods' besides the True God.

UPANISHADS:

The Upanishads are considered sacred scriptures by the Hindus.

The following verses from the Upanishads refer to the Concept of God:

1. "Ekam evadvitiam"

"He is One only without a second."

[Chandogya Upanishad 6:2:1]1

2. "Na casya kascij janita na cadhipah."

"Of Him there are neither parents nor lord."

[Svetasvatara Upanishad 6:9]2

3. "Na tasya pratima asti"

"There is no likeness of Him."

[Svetasvatara Upanishad 4:19]3

4. The following verses from the Upanishad allude to the inability of man to imagine God in a particular form:

"Na samdrse tisthati rupam asya, na caksusa pasyati kas canainam."

"His form is not to be seen; no one sees Him with the eye."

[Svetasvatara Upanishad 4:20]4

1[The Principal Upanishad by S. Radhakrishnan page 447 and 448]

[Sacred Books of the East, volume 1 'The Upanishads part I' page 93]

2[The Principal Upanishad by S. Radhakrishnan page 745]

[Sacred Books of the East, volume 15, 'The Upanishads part II' page 263.]

3[The Principal Upanishad by S. Radhakrishnan page 736 & 737]

[Sacred Books of the East, volume 15, 'The Upanishads part II' page no 253]

4[The Principal Upanishad by S. Radhakrishnan page 737]

[Sacred Books of the East, volume 15, 'The Upanishads part II' page no 253]

THE VEDAS

Vedas are considered the most sacred of all the Hindu scriptures. There are four principal Vedas: Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samveda and Atharvaveda.

1. Yajurveda

The following verses from the Yajurveda echo a similar concept of God:

1. "na tasya pratima asti"

"There is no image of Him."

[Yajurveda 32:3]5

2. "shudhama poapvidham"

"He is bodyless and pure."
[Yajurveda 40:8]6

3. "Andhatama pravishanti ye asambhuti mupaste"
"They enter darkness, those who worship the natural elements" (Air, Water, Fire, etc.). "They sink deeper in darkness, those who worship sambhuti."
[Yajurveda 40:9]7
4. Sambhuti means created things, for example table, chair, idol, etc.

The Yajurveda contains the following prayer:
"Lead us to the good path and remove the sin that makes us stray and wander."
[Yajurveda 40:16]8

5[Yajurveda by Devi Chand M.A. page 377]

6[Yajurveda Samhita by Ralph T. H. Giffith page 538]

7[Yajurveda Samhita by Ralph T. H. Giffith page 538]

8[Yajurveda Samhita by Ralph T. H. Griffith page 541]

2. Atharvaveda

The Atharvaveda praises God in Book 20, hymn 58 and verse 3:

1. "Dev maha osi"
"God is verily great"
[Atharvaveda 20:58:3]9

3. Rigveda

1. The oldest of all the vedas is Rigveda. It is also the one considered most sacred by the Hindus. The Rigveda states in Book 1, hymn 164 and verse 46: "Sages (learned Priests) call one God by many names."
[Rigveda 1:164:46]

2. The Rigveda gives several different attributes to Almighty God. Many of these are mentioned in Rigveda Book 2 hymn 1.

Among the various attributes of God, one of the beautiful attributes mentioned in the Rigveda Book II hymn 1 verse 3, is Brahma. Brahma means 'The Creator'. Translated into Arabic it means Khaaliq. Muslims can have no objection if Almighty God is referred to as Khaaliq or 'Creator' or Brahma. However if it is said that Brahma is Almighty God who has four heads with each head having a crown, Muslims take strong exception to it.

Describing Almighty God in anthropomorphic terms also goes against the following verse of Yajurveda:

"Na tasya Pratima asti"
"There is no image of Him."
[Yajurveda 32:3]

Another beautiful attribute of God mentioned in the Rigveda Book II hymn 1 verse 3 is Vishnu. Vishnu means 'The Sustainer'. Translated into Arabic it means Rabb. Again, Muslims can have no objection if Almighty God is referred to as Rabb or 'Sustainer' or Vishnu. But the popular image of

9[Atharveda Samhita vol 2 William Dwight Whitney page 910]

Vishnu among Hindus, is that of a God who has four arms, with one of the right arms holding the Chakra, i.e. a discus and one of the left arms holding a 'conch shell', or riding a bird or reclining on a snake couch. Muslims can never accept any image of God. As mentioned earlier this also goes against Svetasvatara Upanishad Chapter 4 verse 19.

"Na tasya pratima asti"
"There is no likeness of Him"

The following verse from the Rigveda Book 8, hymn 1, verse 1 refer to the Unity and Glory of the Supreme Being:

3. "Ma cid anyad vi sansata sakhayo ma rishanyata"
"O friends, do not worship anybody but Him, the Divine One. Praise Him alone."
[Rigveda 8:1:1]10

4. "Devasya samituk parishtutih"
"Verily, great is the glory of the Divine Creator."
[Rigveda 5:1:81]11

Brahma Sutra of Hinduism:

The Brahma Sutra of Hinduism is:

"Ekam Brahm, dvitiya naste neh na naste kinchan"

"There is only one God, not the second; not at all, not at all, not in the least bit."

Thus only a dispassionate study of the Hindu scriptures can help one understand the concept of God in Hinduism.

0[Rigveda Samhita vol. 9, pages 2810 and 2811 by Swami Satya Prakash Sarasvati and Satyakam Vidyalankar]

11[Rigveda Samhita vol. 6, pages 1802 and 1803 by Swami Satya Prakash Saraswati and Satyakam Vidyalankar]

as from the sun." The Prophecy confirms:

1. The name of the Prophet as Ahmed since Ahmed is an Arabic name. Many translators misunderstood it to be 'Ahm at hi' and translated the mantra as "I alone have acquired the real wisdom of my father".

2. Prophet was given eternal law, i.e. the Shariah.

3. The Rishi was enlightened by the Shariah of Prophet Muhammad. The Qur'an says in Surah Saba Chapter 34 verse 28 (34:28):

"We have not sent thee but as a universal (Messenger) to men, giving them glad tidings and warning them (against sin), but most men understand not."