

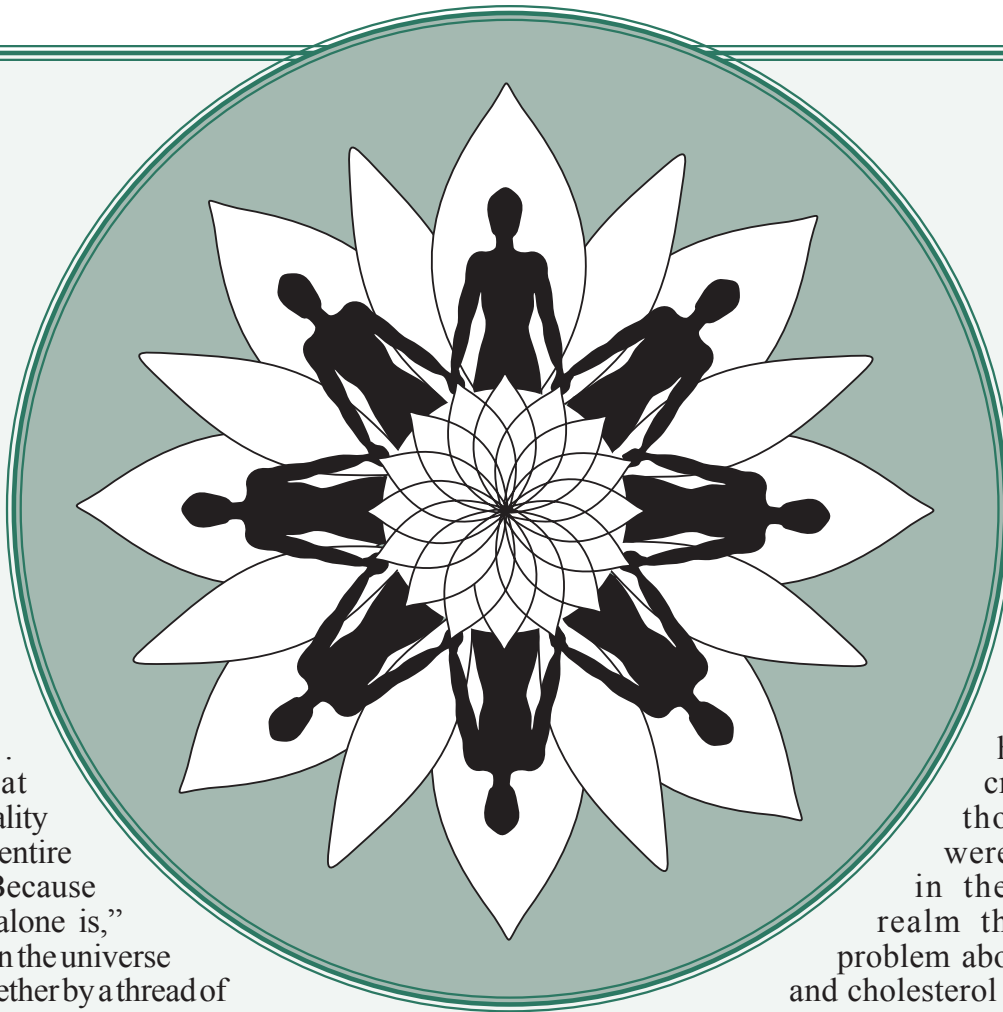
The Divine Self, or God, or *Brahman* is the intrinsic reality behind every human being in this creation. Indeed, that Self is the reality behind the entire universe. Because “*Brahman* alone is,” everything in the universe is linked together by a thread of unity woven from its Divine source.

Besides this philosophical basis for unity among living beings, there is a profound practical need for unity in the world. In all great works, success depends upon intense cooperation among people who are trying to accomplish a goal. Unity is important at home, in families, and in all levels of society. Certainly, any important spiritual project requires coordination of many people in a highly unified way.

An ancient story is told that highlights the glory of unity:

The Wisdom of the Hungry Gods

Once upon a time, the divine architect, Vishwakarma, invited gods and demons to



a grand feast for which the best type of celestial dishes were prepared. Imagine how incredibly rich those dishes were — since in the celestial realm there is no problem about calories and cholesterol and people can eat as much as they want of whatever they want!

Both gods and demons came to this superb feast, and both were terribly hungry. However, the demons were told that they would be served first, and they were instructed to line up to receive their food. After all dishes had been served to them and they had recited their prayers, the demons looked at the sumptuous preparations with great eagerness, unable to wait another minute to take the first bite.

Just at that moment, Vishwakarma spoke up and said, “My dear demon guests, I hope you will enjoy your dinner and eat as much as you want. However, there is just one restriction that you must observe. You must never bend your arms at the elbows while you eat.”

PROMOTE UNITY!

By Swami Jyotirmayananda

Hearing this, the hungry demons became confused. Try as they might, not one of them could find a way to get the food into his mouth without bending his arm. They tried moving this way and that way, but had no luck. Then they thought of bringing their heads down to the food, but they decided that was too degrading. So, indignantly, they got up and walked out without ever having enjoyed a bite of that wonderful food.

Then came the turn for the gods to be served. They too lined up to receive the food, recited their prayers, and eagerly reached for the first bite when Vishwakarma instructed them, “Remember I have laid down a condition. You may eat as much as you want as long as you do not bend your arms at the elbows.”

The hungry Gods talked quietly among themselves for a moment and then immediately arranged themselves into two lines facing each other. Half of the gods were on one side and half on the other, with the food in between. Then, in a simple manner, each god began feeding the god who stood across from him on line. In this way there was no need to bend their arms and they enjoyed the sumptuous feast immensely.

As the story shows, if you want to live life in a Divine way, you must learn to help others abundantly. No matter in what situation you are placed, always remember the importance of unity among people and try to promote it.

Working harmoniously with others is a great art — an art that requires many patiently learned skills. In the promotion of unity, it is important to avoid constant gossiping about others, constant backbiting. Such behavior is the demoniac way of doing things — not the Divine.

Further, in any project involving many people, it must be understood that each person’s separate duty is important to all the others. Therefore, do not hurt others by asserting that what you are doing is the best and most important, and that the other people are useless. When you do so, there will be an inevitable reaction and you and the project are going to be hurt.

Another parable is told that emphasizes this point:

The Horse Who Got His Just Reward

Once there was a merchant who owned a horse and a donkey, both of which were used to carry materials needed for his business over a long distance. On one such trip, the horse went on taunting and teasing the donkey with a sense of great superiority, asserting how much better he was at his job than the donkey.

Through all this, the poor donkey walked with tottering steps, suffering a great deal due to lumbago pains in his back. With fatigue he said, “Please, dear horse, take a little of my load on your back and don’t say those cutting words. Let’s work together.” The horse laughed and trotted ahead with great conceit.

Shortly after this, the donkey, who was in pain and very weak, fell unconscious. Seeing him fall, the merchant brought the donkey to a place where he could relax and recover. Then, much to the dismay of the horse, the man placed the entire heavy load that the donkey had been carrying on the horse’s back — in addition to the load that the horse was already carrying!

Of course, the moral of this tale is very simple. In all cooperative situations — whether at home or in a business — people must work together in a unified way. If your attitude helps to promote joyousness, harmony, and peace, your own load will, thereby, be lighter. Whenever you feel that you need other’s help, the help will be available. But when you develop egocentricity and create disharmony, ultimately, you will have to bear a greater load yourself.

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True spirituality is a life well-lived. If you do not know the art of living and working with others in a Divine way, then your mind will always be burdened by a lot of tension and stress. Demonic behavior creates karmic entanglements and that load of karma will not allow you to evolve.

Another important factor in promoting unity in your relationships with others is adaptability — learning the art of adapting and adjusting. Another parable is told which gives humorous insight into this great virtue:

Two Ways of Looking at an Eggplant

Once King Akbar was seated at dinner with his witty minister, Birbal, who was adept at giving philosophical teachings garbed in humor. Akbar had just finished eating a wonderful preparation of eggplant and, turning to Birbal, he said, “This eggplant is really delicious, very tasty.”

Birbal, looking at the top of the eggplant, replied, “Your majesty, that is why God has placed a crown on it’s head.”

The next day, however, Akbar suffered from a terrible stomach upset. He said, “Birbal, that eggplant is terrible. It has caused me a lot of pain.” And Birbal replied, “Your majesty, that is why God has put a nail on it’s head.”

Then Akbar asked Birbal, “How is it that yesterday you said that God has put a crown on the eggplant’s head, and today you are saying that God has put a nail on it’s head.” Birbal responded, “I am your servant, your Majesty, not the servant of the eggplant!”

As the words of the witty minister, Birbal, illustrate, when you are dealing with the personalities of others, an artistic approach is important. What you say and do should reflect a healthy sense of adaptability,



rather than an unreflective awareness of “truth.” In most situations, adaptability carries a greater truth than the mere assertion of “truth” that is somehow insensitive to the feelings of others.

For example, suppose you are walking with your friend in a scenic place and he is tense and worried about something. From the point of view of your relaxed mind, the world around you truly appears most beautiful. However, if you were to go on and on praising the wonderful moonlight and the wonderful flowers — knowing that all the while your friend was heavily burdened by worry and anxiety — that would be insensitive.

To promote harmony and unity, it is important to respect the psychological needs of others. People who lack that art all too often speak their minds in the name of truth, saying, “It may hurt you, but that’s the truth!” If you live by that philosophy there can be no harmony or peace.

Extending little courtesies to others is not a question of truth, it is not a question of philosophy, it is not a question of Vedanta, it is not a question of *Brahman!* Therefore, learn to adapt and adjust. Speak and act in a way that brings peace and joy to others.

The ultimate goal of promoting unity around you is to discover within your heart the universal stream of life that pervades all living beings in this creation. All living beings are like waves and, like waves, they cannot be separated from each other. There is an underlying ocean behind all. That ocean is your innermost Self.

If you are able to deeply feel that God dwells in all, and that you are serving God when you bend in service before others, then the promotion of unity becomes easy. You bring about a sense of cooperation even with people who are difficult, inimical, and even violent.

A rosebush experiences unity with its flowers as well as its thorns. So too, if you were to develop cosmic consciousness, you would experience inner peace among those who are negative as well as those who are positive. With that sense of unity, you can bloom like a rose, even in the midst of thorns. You can experience inner joy even in the midst of the chaos, trials, and tribulations of life.