

# The Spiritual Scientist

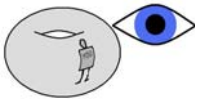
An ezine for those who think!

## The Mystery of God's Form

**Question:** If God is indeed a person with form and personality, then why do the Vedic texts describe him with words like *arupam* (formless)?

**Answer:** These words generally occur in a context that also contains some words that describe God as having a form. Consider the following verse from the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* (3.19)

*apani-pado javano grahita pashyaty acakshuh sa shrinoty akarnah  
sa vetti vedyam na ca tasyasti vetta tam ahur agryam purusham mahantam*



This verse contains apparent contradictions: *pashyaty acakshuh* "God has no eyes, but He sees." How is this contradiction to be reconciled? If we neglect the part about God's personal aspect, we are not being faithful to the scriptures.

The Vedic tradition contains a special *pramana* (method of acquiring knowledge) called *arthapatti* (postulation) that is used for this purpose. Consider two apparently contradictory statements:

1. Ravi does not eat food during the day
2. Ravi is growing fat

The *arthapatti* to reconcile these two statements would be: **Ravi eats in the night.**



Similarly, the *arthapatti* to reconcile the statements about God's having and not having a form is: God has a form this is spiritual, not material. Using such an *arthapatti* implicitly, Srila Prabhupada, the founder-acharya of ISKCON, translates the above verse as: "The Supreme Lord has no material hands and feet, but accepts whatever is offered to Him and moves very quickly. The Supreme Person has no material ears and eyes but sees and hears everything. He is the knower of everything, and He is all that is to be known. It is said that He is the best and the greatest of all persons."

**Question:** But why do scriptures have contradictions like these at all?

**Answer:** The word "body" has several connotations that do not apply to the Lord. A body is that which:

1. Is separate from the real person, the soul
2. Is a product of the past karma of the soul
3. Tends to degrade the soul
4. Has to be given up in due course of time



None of these apply the Lord, whose body is the same as Himself, who has no karmic past, who is never degraded, and whose form is eternal.

Because we tend to drag our material conceptions on God, the scriptures sometimes use negative words like *arupa* to emphasize that God's form is not like ours. Only when we recognize the eternality of God's all-attractive form and fall in love with that form can we become free from the infatuation with the temporarily good-looking forms of this word.

