

Should I follow Raama or Kṛiṣṇa?

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Children form a rubric of proper conduct by watching their parents. Misdeeds of one generation become a tradition for the next generation. We are unfortunately carrying a burden of misconstrued traditions of more than one hundred generations. It is our pleasure and duty to offer our respects to all elevated souls from our glorious history. Their idols remind us of the righteous teachings of these ancestors. However, what is the correct way of worshipping or paying respect to our ancestors. Should it be done by decorating their idols / pictures, by igniting lamps in front of artistic renderings of their images, by offering sweets to their images etc.? Or should we show our respect by implementing their teachings in our lives? Let's consider the example of two disciples of a teacher. One of these disciples likes to take care of the teacher by massaging the teacher's feet, washing his clothes etc. but pays no attention to the lessons in the class. The second disciple is eager to learn from the teacher and not only does he learn from his teacher but also implements his lessons in his own lifestyle. The teacher most definitely would like the second disciple as he is the one who would most likely carry his knowledge forward to the next generations.

There are numerous revered figures in the Hindu history, but two of them are universally revered, Shree Raama from the Raamaayaṇa and Shree Kṛiṣṇa from the Mahaabhaarata. Most Hindus worship both of them. However, very few follow the code of conduct established by them; on the contrary, most Hindus act opposite to their teachings. This is probably due to an apparent conflict between the teachings emanating from the Raamaayaṇa and the Mahaabhaarata. The dilemma most of us face is, who should we really follow, Raama or Kṛiṣṇa. The easy way out of this conflict probably is to follow neither. And that is why we keep their ideals on side and just keep on worshipping them by decorating their statues. Idols win over the ideals!

Raamaayaṇa is a wonderful example of the brotherly love. Brothers are happily sacrificing their own comfort and happiness for their brothers. Raama happily abdicates the throne for his brother Bharata and Bharata does not want to take the kingdom from his brother either. On the other hand, in Mahaabhaarata, brothers are fighting and ready to kill each other for the throne. And, when Arjuna wants to

give up arms and not fight the battle against his cousins, Shree Kṛiṣṇa in the World famous discourse of Geetaa encourages and guides him to pick up the weapons and continue with the battle. This contradiction is very confusing indeed! Which of them is teaching the correct code of conduct?

However, if we look closely, then despite the apparent contradiction on the surface, the teachings of Shree Raama and Shree Kṛiṣṇa are actually very much aligned to each other. Both of them are telling us to rise above self interest and perform actions for the greater good of the society. It is the duty of a warrior to protect and ensure happiness of the masses. Shree Raama knew that his brother Bharata was not only well versed in the art of nurturing a kingdom but was also kind hearted and followed a righteous code of conduct. He hence had no problem with Bharata taking over the kingdom. Bharata also had similar thoughts. He considered Raama to be a better ruler and hence was eager to make him the king.

On the other hand, Duryodhan from the Mahaabhaarata was an egotist with evil mindset. He did not even miss the chance of insulting his sister-in-law by disrobing her. Such evil person would only torment the masses if he became the king. That is why Shree Kṛiṣṇa asked Arjuna to pick up arms against this oppressor and anybody who was supporting him.

yajñāārthaat-karmaṇo’nyatra loko’yañ karma-bandhanah

tadarthañ karma kaunteya muktasaṅgaḥ samaachara

Shreemad bhagavad geetaa 3:9

The ninth verse from the third chapter of Geetaa clearly states that we should perform all of our actions with a feeling of yajña. When we rise above self interest and perform all of our actions for the greater good and benefit of the entire society, then all of our actions become a prayer to the God, and we realize that the difference between the teachings of Shree Raama and Shree Kṛiṣṇa was just an illusion created by our selfishness. Since this illusion is now resolved, we realize that we can actually follow both Raama and Kṛiṣṇa simultaneously as long as we stay away from selfish behavior.