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Gods, Myths, Religions in a Secular Age

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**Faith and Mistrust: Where is the Limit?**

The word ‘Religion’ doesn’t have a specific definition, but usually it refers to faith in a higher power. Most people refer to it as god. Throughout all these years, there has always been a religion, hence, god has always existed. And, the belief that this superpower exists has affected people’s lives. Personally, I believe in only one ideology and that is humanism. Keeping that in mind, I visited an institution, BrahmaKumaris, that is not bound to any religion and most importantly, they have been helping humankind to find and understand true values of life.

The event, “Relationships and Smooth Sailing”, took place at “The Imperia” hotel in Somerset. It was organized by the BrahmaKumaris, and sister Jayanti and sister Mohini were the speakers. The first thing I saw in the hallway was a picture of Brahma Baba, and there were many chairs organized that it looked like ray of lights coming out of a source. Everyone was very neatly dressed up and were really welcoming. The one thing I love the most about BrahmaKumaris is, the people. My mother and I were very warmly welcomed, and we got good seats as many people were attending the event. I soon realized that the event wasn’t actually open to all. Apparently, the attendees were supposed to finish a course taught by BrahmaKumaris, although we were let in respectfully. People wore white clothes and all the workers had a badge which represented the logo of BrahmaKumaris, which resembled light, coming out of one source (which they believe to be is Brahma Baba, the founder of BrahmaKumaris). For my surprise, Mayor of Somerset Township was also present in the event, along with some other politicians.

The event started right on time, which was really impressive, and not only that, pretty much everyone was there on time. The speaker, Sister Jayanti, an old lady (around 90 years old) started the program by lighting the candles, which is how most religious organizations in India open an event. Sister Jayanti started discussing the importance of relationships in people’s lives by uttering a *mantra* in Sanskrit, which was about the relationship between god and humans. Throughout her speech, she kept mentioning why the relationship between god and humans is so divine and the only true and unselfish of all. She explained how god helps its child in every situation and why we, as humans, should keep believing and trust him with everything. Then she went over some stuff that didn’t make sense to me. She started talking about how each member of BrahmaKumaris is involved with Baba (Brahma Baba, the founder of BrahmaKumaris), and how he always has been there for them, which is pretty basic, but then she gave instances when Baba, himself, appeared in some followers’ body as a soul to show them the right path and talked with them. I later found out that, every year, in Abu (a place in India, and headquarters of Brahmakumaris) they organize an event where Baba comes and talks to people by being present in someone else’s body. This isn’t even scientifically possible and didn’t make sense to me, but I kept listening to them without being judgmental. Everyone seemed to be aggreging with her and the later part of her speech was about how to establish strong connection with Baba.

I later got to talk to one of the followers, who has been serving there for the past 25 years. She was really humble and answered all my concerns very respectfully because I had many questions, as many things in the program didn’t make complete sense. She explained to me why Baba is important and why they follow him. She explained to me how the organization was started and how Baba managed to do what people in olden days, in India, didn’t believe in doing. In olden days, people believed that women should just do household work and shouldn’t have a job and should just spent her time with husband and children. This kept happening and one of the main reasons was, women weren’t allowed to go to school in those days and hence, they didn’t fully understand the difference between right and wrong. Brahma Baba helped women to follow their dream and educated them. He told me stories of his hardships and sacrifices, which was truly motivating and inspiring. I started understanding why those people respect him a lot, but there is a difference between following and blindly following something, I say this because for them, god is Baba.

As mentioned earlier, Brahmakumaris was originally established for women empowerment and to spread the message of peace. It isn’t related to any specific religion but open to all. The main idea is to make people believe in god and help them understand the concept of soul. It started as a really small organization back in ‘50s and in a really short time span they expanded in foreign countries such as London and United States. There are seven sisters right now managing the operation. In Abu (headquarters), all the followers live together and anyone who qualifies to be a member of the institution could stay there, leaving the family and all the relations behind. After talking more about it, I learnt that in Abu, women and men aren’t allowed to live together. They have different stations for both the genders. They believe that, followers could only be fully concentrated in *Bhakti* if their only focus is Baba and nothing else. Another interesting thing I got to know was how they strongly believe in the concept of *Moksha,* which is the state one reaches after death only by being fully pure and apparently, once *Moksha* is reached, one can never be born as a living entity again.

They believe in the concept of different *Yuga,* such as *Satya Yuga*, *Treta Yuga*, *Dvapara Yuga*, and *Kali Yuga*. All the Yugas occur once the cycle is finished, in that order. *Satya Yuga* was the time when there was only prosperity everywhere and no one was unhappy. Everyone has everything they needed, and there were no negative vibes. Then after, it kept getting worse as the *Satya Yuga* ended. This is *Kali Yuga*, which is the last and final stage and the life for all will be ending soon, and the better time will come again. The first time I heard about *Moksha*, I felt like why someone would not want to live again, and the answer is, in order to be born in *Satya Yuga* one need to achieve the state of *Moksha*. Along with other things, this didn’t make sense to me either. Doesn’t this mean that everything they have been doing is just to have a good “after life”? Isn’t that selfish? Not only that, one of the other members overheard us and said that the earth is going to end in 10-20 years, and to my surprise, everyone agreed to it. They seemed pretty confident about it so I asked how they could be so sure, which they responded as, “Baba told us”!

In the class, we learned about NRMs and how some of those movements turned out to be a disaster. We saw how people in those NRMs wanted to kill themselves in order to achieve something greater. On contrary, this NRM has been immensely beneficial to the society. I firmly believe in “living for a reason than dying for one”, and Brahmakumaris support this idea as well. I met people there and I realized that BrahmaKumaris gave them a reason to live, and not just to live, but to live a better life with a purpose. They, unlike some NRMs (such as Branch Davidians), don’t misinterpret religious books. All sisters in Brahmakumaris are very learned and they fully understand what they say to people.

Brahmakumaris have been doing great work for a noble cause, and I really appreciate it. The only thing that I don’t get is their belief system, and their concepts of past and life after death. We all know that there is a very fine line between faith and mistrust, which they might be neglecting, but who am I to judge?