

SPIRITUALITY • DEEPAK CHOPRA

# WILL GOD EVER LEAVE US ALONE?

God won't leave us alone as long as we feel afraid.

**I**N THEIR HEART of hearts I'm sure most people wish God would stop interfering in everyday life. This concern reaches far beyond religion. The US President and other born-again Christians refer to God's helping hand in making war in the Middle East. Western society couldn't be more different from traditional Muslim society, but we have in common that people in both places want God on their side, which involves knowing what he thinks. People assume that they do, a remarkable assumption given that God is infinitely present and infinitely transcendent, cosmic and personal at the same time, invisible and unable to be located in time and space.

Therefore people continue to be nagged by ancient documents called scriptures that claim to transmit what it is that God exactly wants. The great Indian poet Kabir wrote that he had read all the scriptures, bathed in all the sacred pools, visited all the holy shrines, and found God in none of them. Most people would consider that a counsel of despair when in fact it's the key to freedom. In Vedanta, the purest spiritual doctrine of India, God doesn't want anything of us. He doesn't want to be found; he has no laws that we should obey; he never judges, punishes, or puts forth expectations.

**THE TRUTH IS** that God left us alone a long time ago. This wasn't an act of abuse or abandonment. It was an opportunity to find our own freedom, and in that freedom to realise something simple yet profound: God is existence itself. Existence isn't an empty vessel. It contains life and death. It harbours the Self, a point of

consciousness that can embrace its own existence and create its own stage for evolution. If you go deep enough into Being, leaving aside all the objects that surround us and mask Being from our eyes, you find that Being is eternal and contains the seed of every created thing. All that exists is only a reflection of the Self, and all

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worlds, including this precious one, fall into three categories:

1. Consciousness reflected in material objects and events.
2. Consciousness reflected in subtle objects and events.
3. Consciousness reflecting upon itself.

Trees, mountains and clouds belong in the first category. Dreams, ideals and aspirations belong in the second. The Self belongs in the third. Whenever any noble cause is brought to my attention, such as the cause of the environment, I try to see its underlying reality, which is always the same.

Every cause, ideal, spiritual movement or soul teaching is about answering the question: Who am I? Fundamentalists of every stripe want this question answered once and for all by an unquestioned authority. They may succeed in quelling doubt for a while, but God has nothing to say and everything to say. He conforms to every type of mind that confronts him. I am fond of Thomas Merton's words: "The search for God consists of arriving at a place and discovering that God has just left." Which is as it should be. The essence of human nature is to reach beyond what we already know about ourselves.

**AT THIS MOMENT** we are faced with ferment and potential chaos as outmoded religious beliefs struggle to prove that they are as strong as ever. Professor of Religion Susan Smalley says, quite realistically, that no-one can "let go" of any belief until the void it would leave behind is filled. Those who have already 'let go' of God aren't necessarily better off than fundamentalists. They, too, have a void to fill.

God won't leave us alone as long as human beings feel afraid and lonely. He might evolve – so one hopes – into something other than a white-bearded authority figure with a taste for vengeance. In moderate denominations that transformation happened a long, long time ago. But somehow we couldn't handle a nicer God. Millions of people feel too hollow and afraid, angry and attacked, lonely and disconnected to believe in a benign divinity. This phenomenon is called alienation. It was well diagnosed by Marx and Freud, who pointed out that the human psyche suffers terribly when