

## The Meaning of Prem

*Baba Raul Canizares*

One of my university teachers noted Jewish scholar Jacob Neusner, told me that in many cases Orthodox Jews feel the fulfillment of their duties is more important than such esoteric concerns as whether God exists or if there is an afterlife. In other words, they claim that by fulfilling their *mitzvoh* (duties), they are doing the right thing. In Santeria today, there is also a trend towards “practice” rather than “religion.” In other words, the legitimate, money-making “professional” aspects are exulted over the contemplative, esoteric aspects. Part of the beauty of Santeria is in the gorgeous, gaudy exuberance of its colorful paraphernalia, but to concentrate solely on these material aspects and not in its deeper face is wrong.

In the Orisha Consciousness Movement we counter Santeria materialism with Indian spirituality—I am not suggesting that African religion in general and Santeria in particular do not have enough spirituality. I am merely stating that for our utilitarian use, Hindu concepts, which originally came from where all life began anyway, serve a beautiful function as the spirit of our faith. One particular Hindu concept the Movement has adopted as its paramount virtue is *Prem*, a Sanskrit word that has no direct English equivalent in its highest meaning. The closest is what I have defined as “the ultimate reality, beyond the impersonal Deity, beyond undifferentiated potential... a warm beam of LOVE from within, the LOVE that has no selfish motive, the LOVE that is a spontaneous expression of the Divinity of Humankind.” It is my teaching, then, that PREM is above the orishas, above ALL. We must strive to develop this quality—Even the Christian scriptures, in an inspired moment, said “GOD IS LOVE.” Notice it doesn’t say God FEELS love or God EXPRESSES love. It says LOVE is GOD, so let us seek PREM and PREM will permeate our beings filling our souls with DIVINE LOVE.

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“Stonehead Skinhead,” Sven Davisson,  
Oil on canvas, 16” x 20”  
(Estate of Raul Canizares)

