

Seek Beyond

It is a common wisdom throughout the world that human beings are seeking to find happiness and to avoid pain. Happiness comes with the presence, generally speaking, of *sattva guṇa*. Pain is usually caused by the presence of *rajas* or *tamas*. This very human preference for feeling good rather than its opposite we understandably bring over into the spiritual life. We are attracted by those people, teachings, and institutions that tend to make us feel good. We often studiously avoid hard truths that make us feel the opposite.

Actually, what has brought us to the spiritual life is supposed to be some dispassion for feeling that the world can give us any happiness, and often that is the case. But it can take years in the spiritual life to realize that we can get into the same trap in the spiritual life, because *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* never leave us as long as we are in the body. The problem is that we don't usually learn much when we're having good spiritual experiences. We're too busy enjoying them. Thus many great saints have prayed to God for suffering. Why? Because they have discovered from their own experience that while they have learned almost nothing from their highs, in their suffering they get close to God, they become very real.

It is not that our pleasant spiritual experiences cannot be very beneficial. Sometimes they bring great clarity of insight, sometimes experiences that can benefit us for years. But it never lasts. The experience always fades and very often so does the knowledge. But if we're feeling down, if *tamas* is present, and we remember to acknowledge the presence of God in the *tamas*, if we claim that God is just as much present now as He is when we are feeling His presence, then we get closer to the God and to the experience that Lord Kṛṣṇa encourages Arjuna to find. "Be *guṇātīta*," Lord Kṛṣṇa told Arjuna. "Be beyond the three *guṇa*-s and the pairs of opposites."

Thus Ramaṇa Maharṣi used to constantly remind his disciples: "What comes must go. What you are seeking is always present." And what is always present is something beyond our feelings, beyond the three *guṇa*-s. It is, from one point of view, unknowable and ungraspable, but if we take refuge in That, we will know the difference.