

Renouncing the I

In many of his writings, Gurudev urged his readers to realize God right in their own home. Sometimes the question comes up: Do I need to take *sannyās*? The actual question is, what is real renunciation? Is it the outer renunciation symbolized by *sannyās* or is it, in the final analysis, the I that has to be renounced? If *sannyās* will help in the renunciation of the I, then it has a value. On the other hand, location or cloth doesn't really matter, if we understand what it is that is essential to renunciation.

What is it that supports the I, and thus should be renounced? We could say that the whole mind supports the I, our whole being. However, there are three things especially that we should be aware of that give support to our I, and, whether we are in the home or are *sannyās*, we all have to deal with them.

The first support is "I want," desire, primarily for comforts, power and possessions, but also it can be aversions, "I don't want this." Does it matter if we want something like a cup of coffee? It all depends upon how much we like or dislike something, how much emotion goes into it. If I want means that there is a lot of emotion in the wanting, it is binding and ultimately has to be worn away.

Even if we have worn away desire to a large extent, there is another prop to the I, and that is "I know," usually meaning I know best. It is separating. It is as if we somehow know the best way, and yet, on analysis, we will recognize that what we think is best is usually a result of our conditioning. Had we been born in a different family, in a different place, our conditioning would be quite different, and we would probably oppose what we now think is best. Therefore we have to broaden our understanding and recognize that what we think is best is a result, to a large extent, of where we were born and how we were taught. Thus, we should be prepared to renounce I know best along with I want.

The third thing that needs to be renounced, which is the key, is something that we all suffer from, and that is we all think that we are the center of the universe. We don't see ourselves as one with the universe, or part of the universe, but as the center of the universe. We are the subject and everything else is an object to us. The difficulty is that everyone else considers us as an object and consider themselves to be the subject. We

don't like it when they treat us as objects, nor do they like to be treated as objects. How then can there be any sense of oneness as long as we maintain our position of being the center of the universe? Therefore we have to see through this strange and dividing illusion and gradually wear it away.

Thus, the essence of renunciation is renunciation of our I, which is supported by I want, I know best, and I am the center of the universe.