

Getting Our Mind Off Ourselves

Our teachers tell us that the main barrier between ourselves and our true nature is the ego. But there are different degrees of ego. There is the *tāmasic* ego filled with self-centeredness and selfishness; there is the *rājasic* ego which is always distracted, and there is the *sāttvic* ego which is close to God. Actually Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī said that there is no way to God except through the *sāttvic* ego. So we not only have to be aware of the ego, but we have to be aware of the quality of our ego and raise it from *tamas* to *rajas* to *sattva*.

But then, what sort of activities could help us get rid of our ego—this constant thinking of ourselves, dwelling upon ourselves. If we have a *sāttvic* ego, it is no problem, we just have to recognize that a *sāttvic* ego is not the final goal. But if we're constantly thinking about ourselves, referring everything to ourselves, then that constantly covers the divinity that we are; we cannot be aware of It.

How do we get over this painful activity of thinking of ourselves all the time? Most people try to escape from themselves through distractions—through television, playing cards, gossiping. These distractions help us to forget the ego for a moment, but they leave us exhausted in the final analysis. If we examine ourselves we find that we feel depleted when we forget the ego through distractions.

There is a more positive way to get our mind off ourselves. That is what we might call constructive activities rather than distractive activities. Constructive activities include work. They also include participating in sports instead of just watching them. It can also mean creative hobbies which leave us feeling better when we do them rather than depleted.

The best way, of course, to get our mind off ourselves is through spiritual activities—selflessly helping others, thinking of God, offering everything to God. That puts us closest to our reality. Our reality is when we can't even think of any separation. The word I has no meaning to us, the word you has no meaning to us—even though we say them—because all is one. When we repeat God's name, when we think of God, when we worship God, we not only get our mind off ourselves, but our mind expands. We become close to our true Self.

Therefore, our first duty in the spiritual life is to stop thinking about ourselves all the time, to stop thinking of everything in terms of ourselves. Most people try to do it by distraction. That just leaves them depleted. A constructive way is through work, active sports, hobbies, which at least leaves us energized to a certain extent. But by far the best way is thinking of God, offering everything to God, surrendering to God, worshipping God, meditation. Then gradually, through constant practice, we'll stop this sick habit of always having our mind on ourselves.