

Our Outer and Inner Worlds

In a way we could say that as human beings we live in two worlds. One is our outer world of objects—all the people, plants, minerals, air—everything of this outer world and our activities in it. We also have an inner world, an inner world of thoughts, emotions, meditations—whatever goes on within. What defines us as human beings is where we put our attention.

We can get lost in both the outer world and the inner world, depending upon how much energy and time we invest in one or the other. The vast majority of human beings tend to get lost in the outer world. While they may have an inner world, there is no consciousness of it because all their concentration is on the outer world. On the other hand, there are some more artistic types, more intellectual types, who spend more time in their inner world.

Seekers also spend time on their inner world. Indeed, many in the world who feel called to the spiritual life, long to be able to leave and come to an ashram where they can have more time to dwell in their inner world.

However, Gurudev usually wouldn't encourage that. He would say realize God in the world. This seems to be counter-productive for a person who is longing to do what the scriptures seem to say, which is to turn away from the objects of sense and concentrate on spiritual practices. But here is a very subtle point that sooner or later we need to recognize.

Our inner world is as much an object to us as our outer world is. It is a world that we need to explore and understand, but we can lose ourselves in our inner world just as much as we can lose ourselves in our outer world. The purpose of our spiritual life is not to lose ourselves in either our outer or inner world, it is to wear away the ego, the me that wants things. It is not to lose ourselves; it is to discover who we are, who it is that is getting lost, who it is that thinks it's a me that is enjoying things in the inner world and finding things is the outer world.

We mustn't underestimate the importance of the inner world; we mustn't underestimate the importance of choosing the good. "Man chooses between the good and the pleasant," Lord Yama told Naciketas. It is the good that leads to his highest welfare, whereas the pleasant leads to his destruction. But then, Lord Yama added, "Both are bound." This means that

we cannot find our salvation through objects of either our outer or our inner world. Our salvation is in knowing who we are. It is in recognizing the Divine equally in both the outer world and the inner world. Above all, it is to recognize what it is that is recognizing the Divine in both the outer world and inner world. Finally, it is to merge all three. How do we do that?

Ours is the preparation through understanding all these aspects of our experience. The Divine alone brings about the merger. Our task is to continuously strive to purify and to find a balance between our inner world and our outer world until we become the truth that transcends both the outer the inner world and that which knows it.