

Never Forget the Higher

One of the questions that has troubled philosophers throughout the centuries is the problem of good and evil and the question of how a perfect God could create evil. Vedānta says that that idea of God is too small. We have got to go right back to the beginning, to what is sometimes called the higher unmanifest. In that state where nothing is manifest, there is no question of good and evil.

The higher unmanifest then manifests the lower unmanifest. Sometimes it is called Iswara; other times *prakṛti*; other times *māyā*. It is these that descend into what is called *avidyā māyā* and *vidyā māyā*, or *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, or the descent of consciousness. In the lower unmanifest there is still no division. It is only when it manifests that there comes a question of differences, one force being unifying and the other dividing. *Sattva* is unifying, *tamas* is dividing, while *rajas* is the energy that can take us in either direction. *Avidyā māyā* is what takes us away from the sense of unity; *vidyā māyā* draws us back towards it.

All the Puranas are about the battle between these two forces. One force takes us into greater multiplicity, greater separation; the other force draws us back towards unity. Lord Yama told Naciketas that man constantly chooses between the two forces, the pleasant that takes us away from unity and the good that takes us back towards unity. Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī has likened it to two tracks. We choose which track to be on—that which is taking us into more and more separation or that which is taking us towards unity.

Lord Yama said that if you choose the pleasant you head for destruction while the good leads to your highest welfare; Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī declared that there is no way back to God except through a *sāttvic* ego. Therefore, we must choose the good over the pleasant. We must choose right over wrong. But there is a difficulty. Both are in the realm of *māyā*. Both are in the realm of *prakṛti*. The God that saves us is beyond both.

All the Purāṇas show us that solution. We have to appeal to the Lord that is above *prakṛti*, above *māyā*. So Lord Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna “Be *guṇātīta*.” Find that part of yourself that transcends the three *guṇas* and the pairs of opposites. Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī used to say that you must choose

between *avidyā māyā* and *vidyā māyā*. In other words, you must choose the good. You must be able to discriminate between *avidyā māyā* and *vidyā māyā* and at the same time never forget that all is Brahman. Thus it requires an enlightened approach.

We are in this world. This is a world of the three *guṇas* and the pairs of opposites. This is a world of *avidyā māyā* and *vidyā māyā*. We must choose *sattva*. We must choose *vidyā māyā*. Yet at the same time, we have to recognize that we want to go beyond both to a state of unity. We cannot do that if our discrimination drops into judgment. If we judge one thing as good and another thing as evil, that is separating. Judgment is different than discrimination.

Therefore, Jesus said judge not that you be not judged, because judgment separates, and we are never supposed to forget the unity of all things, that both *avidyā māyā* and *vidyā māyā* are *māyā*. They are both the same at the root. *Sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* are all *prakṛti* at the root and both *māyā* and *prakṛti* are part of Brahman. Thus we must discriminate between right and wrong, never forgetting that which transcends and includes them both.