

What Are We To Be Liberated From?

One morning, when he went to Gurudev's Samādhi Hall, Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī asked a rhetorical question: "What are you to be liberated from?" After a few moments, he answered in one word: "Yourself!" But who is yourself? It is who we think we are, rather than who we really are. And who do we think we are? The body and mind. Who are we really? "Immortal Self you are," Gurudev said.

So to correct that error we do our spiritual practices. We try to understand our wrong identification, and through meditation, enquiry, and devotion, try to experience our true Self. But then, perhaps we're getting a little ahead of ourselves, because while our fundamental error is wrong identification with the body and mind, we have another identification—that we're not as aware of—that is blocking any effort we make to change our body-mind identification.

And that is a very subtle and insidious conviction that we are the center of the universe. We are the subject and everything else is an object. As we are the subject, it is quite natural for us to believe that the whole world is there for our purposes, to be of service to us, to be in harmony with us.

That would be quite alright as long as we as individuals were the only ones that thought that way. But every other human being in this world thinks the same way. And, therefore, naturally if everyone is thinking that the world should suit them, fights and quarrels are inevitable. And the more we function from our position as center of the universe, the stronger the "Yourself," that we are meant to be liberated from, becomes.

So while our fundamental error is identification with the body and mind, our real problem is this conviction that we are the center of the universe. That is why be good, do good is so fundamental to our *sādhana*. That is why the practice of *ahimsā*, *satyam*, and *brahmacarya* is so fundamental to our spiritual life. These practices of ethics and morality, of treating others the way we would like to be treated, are the only way to start wearing away this false conviction that we are the center of the universe.

First that has to be dealt with. Then perhaps, when that illusion gradually begins to dissipate, of itself our true universal identity will begin to reveal itself.