

Persistence and Surrender

The spiritual life is meant to be progressive. It is not meant to be static, it is meant to be progressive. But the fact is, most seekers throughout the ages have known long periods where their spiritual life was anything but progressive.

For most of us the spiritual life is progressive in the beginning. If it wasn't, it would never attract us. Perhaps one way to explain that early progressive period is that it may be a recollection of what we have learned in previous births. However, the unfortunate feature of that part of our spiritual life—no matter how positive it may be from many points of view—is that it is all about us. We are thrilled with what we have found, and very often it gives us a feeling of our own importance. We have been called by God, we are special, we are making unusual progress. It is all about how good we are as an ego.

That, of course, is a total contradiction of the truth that we are learning. The truth that we are learning is that all is One, and to realize the truth, the ego has to die. But here, the ego is actually getting fattened by learning and experiencing these truths. This, of course, is a contradiction that has to fall under its own weight. The result is a dry period or even a dark night of the soul.

Sooner or later this should be replaced by a progressive period which is usually made possible by the dose of humility we get during the dry period. The dry period is actually a period of purification. Our ego is brought under control. It is humiliated until there is a recognition that we are not so great, and a humble dependence upon God begins to dawn.

If the dry period has gone on long enough and the surrender is deep enough, then whether we know it or not, our spiritual life becomes progressive again, but on a different basis. Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī once said, "The spiritual life doesn't really begin until you know who you are." However, the spiritual life can begin in a real sense without us consciously being aware of who we really are. If surrender is there, if deep surrender and trust is there, then in fact we know who we are without knowing who we are. It is so because we are coming from the right place and our spiritual life is being done on the right basis.

Actually, our goal is to be rid of any idea that we are anything. We think that God-realization means that we can boldly state, "I am That." Perhaps it is so, but we don't see the great ones walking around declaring, "I am that." Rather, there is a deep humility, an emptiness that we see in them. It is these long periods of dryness that help to empty us of "I am this, and I am that," and lead us towards the emptiness we see in the great ones. What is required of us is two things—persistence and surrender. Never give up, never give up, never give up: "It all belongs to You, O Lord. I will never give up, and I will wait patiently upon Your grace."