

The Real Good

One of Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī's favorite stories from the Upaniṣads is the encounter between the young boy Naciketas and Lord Yama. Of course, one thing that appeals to Swāmījī is Naciketas's grit, his determination to know the highest at any cost. But the best-known part of the story is when Lord Yama tells Naciketas that man chooses between the good and the pleasant. The good leads to his highest welfare, the pleasant to his destruction.

As seekers, we are constantly, or we should be, trying to choose the good over the pleasant. And the sad truth is that more often than not we could agree with the apostle Paul who said, "The things that I should do, I find myself not doing; and the things that I should not do, I find myself doing." Not only is that a sad enough situation, but even if we are successful in overcoming some vice or developing a virtue, such as knowledge of the scriptures, selfless service, whatever it may be, then we actually can find ourselves in a worse position because we often develop the most deadly sin of all, spiritual pride. The result is we can feel quite discouraged, we can feel that we haven't changed at all or that our progress has been minimal.

Is it possible that we haven't totally understood Lord Yama's teaching to Naciketas? Is it possible that when Lord Yama talks about pleasant we don't have the whole picture, when He talks about good we don't have the whole picture? Perhaps from Lord Yama's point of view everything that we consider to be the good and the pleasant is just part of the pleasant, and the good is something else all together.

If we consider it from the point of view of the scriptural teaching that our fundamental error is wrong identification, then any change that we are able to make or not able to make in this human personality is, in a sense, all secondary. The only good is to reverse the fundamental error. In other words, we are lost in our wrong identification and so the only ultimate good is to get out of it. Unfortunately, improving on a mistake is still in the realm of a mistake. We have got to get out of the mistake realm.

The only way to do that is to, as Gurudev said, change our angle of vision. But this doesn't mean changing our angle of vision in the mistake; it means, rather, a retreat to where we came from. We came from that which

we can never know, that which is eternal—the stupendous silence as Pūjya Swāmījī sometimes describes it—a realm where we want nothing because we need nothing. It is a realm of total satisfaction.

How then do we retreat to that realm? It is by letting go of the entire complex of the mistake realm—both the good and the pleasant. It is letting go, surrender, trust. It is the only thing that will make a real difference in us. And it will make a difference in us. It is the way out. It is the path. It is what Gurudev and Swāmījī want for us.