

Seeing Work as an Expression of God

Yesterday we were mentioning that while the spiritual life can seem to be quite simple and straightforward in the beginning, inevitably, if we are taking it seriously, we will run into periods of confusion and seeming contradiction. We were discussing the seeming contradiction between our self-effort and God's grace and how, if we will work as if it all depended upon us and pray as if it all depended upon God, we will eventually, if we go into it deeply enough, see that there actually is no contradiction.

Another point of seeming contradiction is illustrated by Gurudev's attitude to work. He seems to have been a genius at extracting work from his disciples; they worked very hard. He would have any number of typists typing at the same time in the Diamond Jubilee Hall. Sometimes the Press would work all night to bring out a book. On the other hand, Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī tells a story of when Gurudev caught him furiously running around from the Āśram serving. Gurudev gave him an admonition that Swāmījī has remembered till this day.

So Gurudev wanted us to find a proper relationship between work and spiritual practice, and, indeed, surely that is the main theme of the Gītā. We may want the spiritual life, but that doesn't mean that we run away from our work or our duty. Whether we are in an *āśram* or whether we're in the world, we need to pay our own way. Unfortunately, there is something about the spiritual life that can bring out the *tamas* in us. There is a lazy streak in each one of us, a part of us that would like someone else to take the responsibility, to let someone do the work. To feel that we're spiritual and that we shouldn't have to get involved in the dirty work of the world is just one way to express our *tamas*. It is an unfortunate way of functioning.

We have to find skill in action. We have to find a way of integrating hard work with our spiritual life, because as Lord Kṛṣṇa says, there is no contradiction between duty and knowledge. Only foolish people think that there is.

Normally, we're told that the best way to integrate work and practice is to offer our work to God, to consider our work as worship. If we want to go into it a little deeper, we will realize that work cannot contradict our spiritual life because there is only One, not two. If there were two, then we

could say work is one thing, spiritual life is something else. But when God alone is, God is spiritual life and God is also work. Our work is not something separate from God, rather it is an expression of God.

Therefore, we can work as hard as we want; but it is our *bhāva* (mental disposition) that counts. We must see our work as an expression of God. And if we shirk work, if we avoid our duty, we are, in fact, egotistically resisting the expression of God in our lives. And to that extent our spiritual life, instead of being benefited, will suffer. That is why we should never shirk our work, rather we should do our duty and recognize it as an expression of God.