

## Dealing with Desires

Our late revered General Secretary, Swāmī Krishnānandajī, would frequently get into philosophical discussions with visitors. One time a student of Buddhism was discussing with Swāmī Krishnānandajī the fundamental differences between Buddhism and Hinduism. Finally Swāmī Krishnānandajī said, “I have studied those texts very carefully and come to the conclusion that there is no fundamental difference between the teachings of Buddhism and the teachings of Hinduism.”

Why is it that even at the ultimate level we can feel that there is a difference between *mokṣa*, *nirvāṇa*, the Kingdom of Heaven, or the Kingdom of God? The scriptures and the saints make very clear the reason. They say that it is because the goal cannot be described—when speech and mind try to approach It, they turn away baffled. That would be challenging enough for us, but Ramaṇa Maharṣi used to make it even more so by stating flatly, “You are all realized.” And when devotees would disagree with him, he would simply reply, “That’s your problem—your belief that you are not realized.”

All this should lead us to the conclusion that the goal of our life is not something that we attain in the normal sense, but rather something that we realize about our actual present situation. And what is it that the saints and the scriptures tell us about our present actual situation? They say that in spite of all the contradictions, in spite of the pairs of opposites and the three *guṇa*-s, the joys and the sorrows, there is no fundamental problem, everything is perfect here.

Why then do we not realize that perfection and be at peace? Our *guru*-s and the scriptures again give us a very simple reply. It is because of desires. In other words, we forget about the fundamental perfection because we want things for ourselves. We want material things, we want things to be a certain way, we want to be someone. And again Swāmī Krishnānandajī pointed out the subtlety of desires. He said, “Not all desires are the same. If you want a cup of coffee, and it is time for a cup of coffee, fulfill the desire. Have the cup of coffee. If you want to be president of the United States, then realize that that is a foolish desire and dismiss it. It is the in-between desires that you have to learn to understand and deal with skillfully.”

Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī has often described the spiritual life as an art and science. The real art and science of the spiritual life is to deal with our desires, never forgetting the underlying perfection that is always there. It is dealing with the imperfections and differences in the world, remembering always that God alone is. Therefore, even the seeming imperfections have perfection in them. It is truly an art and a science to see this. It is not a future goal that we are seeking, but one we are meant to realize here and now—today—in our daily life.