

## Beyond Direct Experience

In the talk called “Practice Your Conviction” in his book *Ponder These Truths*, Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī gives us a formula for realization. Apparently some devotees had approached him saying, “Swāmījī, we are convinced of the truth of Vedānta—God alone is and we are That—we are absolutely convinced that it is true, but it is not our experience. What should we do?” Swāmījī’s answer in three words was, “Practice your conviction.”

Actually, it’s a tremendous step to be able to say that you are convinced of the truth of the scriptures. That in itself doesn’t come easy. But it is one thing to be intellectually convinced, it is something else when your whole being is convinced—doubt cannot even enter in. Therefore Swāmījī said that you must continuously practice your conviction. You must continuously affirm the truth that God alone is, and at the same time you must negate all thoughts of separation. Ultimately, Swāmījī says, the intellectual conviction will move down to the feeling level, *bhāva*. And finally, *bhāva* will ripen into *anubhava* or direct experience.

It is important for us as seekers to understand the nature of these stages and also that *anubhava* itself—or direct experience—could be called both the end and the beginning of the spiritual life. It is the end in the sense that it confirms whatever we have intellectually understood and felt. It is the beginning because we are now convinced of the truth that we have both understood and felt and are, therefore, truly able to live our life in the light of that truth.

Why is direct experience usually not the final end of the spiritual life? Because both feeling experiences and direct experience can occur in our spiritual life long before the total purification of our intellect has been accomplished. Purification means that every possible thought, every *samskāra* that suggests to our mind separation has been contradicted and eliminated. It is even possible that at a young age, as a child, we might have direct experience, a direct experience so powerful that it changes the direction of our life. We know the truth and we know that our lives must be lived in the light of that truth. For example, in one case a young boy was climbing a tree at nine years of age. He had direct experience, and as he reported years later, “I have spent the rest of my life growing more completely into that experience.” In other words, as Pūjya Swāmī

Chidānandajī once said: “The spiritual life means rubbing away the ego a little bit each day.”

Today the deity in front of us is dressed in and surrounded by white. White is the symbol of purity, spotlessness. To become spotless we require intellectual conviction, feeling experiences of divinity and direct experience where *samsāra* drops away totally—everything is That and all separation has disappeared. Then that knowledge needs to be carried over into our daily life—our natural state—where day by day we rub away the spots until perfection, or absolute purity, is what is left.