

Rising Above *Avidyā Māyā* and *Vidyā Māyā*

If there is one thing that seekers from all over the world have in common, it is that when they have felt a call to the spiritual life, their spiritual life then became progressive. It moved quickly. But then, no matter who they are, sooner or later, they enter a period of what could be called stagnation or, at best, very little progress.

A couple of years ago, Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī was discussing what he called the blemishes of the body, mind, and intellect. He said that the blemish of the body is *tamas*, lethargy, laziness. The blemish of the mind is *rajas*; its restless nature, refusing to concentrate. And the blemish of the intellect is *sattva*, spending time with things that are not wrong, like good music and art, but which distract us from our search for God.

At other times Pūjya Swāmījī has said that this is called *avidyā māyā*—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*—that takes you away from God. Fortunately, there is also *vidyā māyā* that takes us towards God. We must constantly choose between the two; we must choose the good over the pleasant.

Vidyā māyā also expresses as *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*. *Tamas* manifests as those shocks and those pushes that we get that wake us up and make us realize that we're going the wrong way, that we should be striving for God. *Rajas* is that part that loves the spiritual life, that wants to be active in spiritual practices. *Sattva* is that which surrenders, that which is at peace, that which wants God for God Himself.

Thus the fate of most seekers is that we are the field for the play of *avidyā māyā* and *vidyā māyā*. Part of us is going away from God and part of us is struggling towards God, and the battle never seems to end. In other words, a stalemate. This battle and stalemate is what the Purāṇas are all about.

However, the purpose of the Purāṇas is to show us a way out. In the middle of this stalemate we have to recognize that there is something within us that is *guṇātīta*, beyond the three *guṇa*-s. Whether the three *guṇa*-s are expressing themselves as *avidyā māyā* or whether they are expressing themselves as *vidyā māyā*, the way out is to recognize that there is a part of us that transcends the three *guṇa*-s. How do we access that? The

recognition itself accesses it. Surrender to God or taking refuge in the Lord accesses it. What is important to recognize is that, as long as we are caught up in the *guṇa*-s, whether it is *avidyā māyā* or *vidyā māyā*, there is no way out finally. The only way out is to let it all go, to rise above it, or to recognize that the truth that we were never in it. We just thought we were.

Therefore, if we feel that our spiritual life is no longer making the progress we had hoped for, we must recognize and access that higher dimension of ourselves and rest there.