

It Is Our Choice

The scriptures tell us that we who are pure Spirit—ever free, never bound, peaceful—have, through ignorance, identified ourselves with an individual body and mind; and, because of attachment to this body and mind, we have become bound to the idea that this is what we are. We are also bound by who and what we think this body and mind is—male or female, born under certain circumstances, a citizen of certain country, having had certain experiences, having moods of the mind, having certain strengths and weaknesses. Therefore when we try to break this bondage, to leave behind this idea that we are the body and mind, it is not just this simple idea that we are struggling with, but everything that this idea involves.

To accomplish this we're told to change certain habits, certain ideas, but often it seems to be so overwhelming that we feel we just can't. It's an impossible task. Indeed, we sometimes feel as if we are the victim of our minds and our circumstances. We can't change because of all the things that have happened to us. It is too much for us.

However, while from a human point of view all this may be quite understandable, it is not the spiritual point of view. When his book *A Call to Liberation* was being prepared for Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī, it was discovered that there were more talks on the theme "It is your choice" than on any other theme. In other words, we can think that we are the victim of our mind, we can think that certain things are overwhelming, but the spiritual answer is, it is your choice, you are responsible.

How can we be responsible for the things that have happened to us, for things that come into our mind? We may not be responsible for what happens to us, but we are responsible for how we react. Two people can have the same experience. One person says, "I am helpless. I can do nothing," the other person finds an answer—how they can be victorious. This applies to outer circumstances, and it also applies to our own mind.

How do we overcome? How do we become victorious? We should try to avoid giving a simple answer to this question, because it depends upon us and it depends upon our circumstances. Somehow we have got to find the strength within to overcome. But if we wanted to give a simple answer to the ultimate way to victory, it would be that we become victorious by

recognising that we cannot do it ourselves. We become victorious through depending upon a strength greater than ourselves.

If this sounds a bit like a platitude, if it sounds like something we have tried a thousand times and still have not been successful, perhaps we haven't understood the process properly. When we surrender, or to put it another way, when we let ourselves and our problems go, we must become aware that in that letting go a new strength emerges, a new wisdom emerges, a new angle of vision emerges. We may not become immediately aware of it, but it is there. The reason is that through surrender, through letting the world circumstances and our own circumstances be as they are, we come in touch with our authentic Self, our true Self.

That Self is beyond the three *guṇa*-s and the pairs of opposites. That Self is the witness of our mind and our circumstances. But that Self is not only the witness, it is also wisdom and power and strength. And so it becomes our choice whether to be the victim or the victor. It has actually always been our choice, and it will always be our choice. We are, therefore, ultimately responsible for our own lives.