

## True Spiritual Life

In the early days Gurudev began all his books with the words, “The goal of life is God-realization,” and he used to constantly repeat those same words to his disciples. Why did he feel it necessary to begin all his books with those words and to constantly remind his disciples—who presumably come to him to be guided towards God-realization—that the goal of life is God-realization?

The reason would seem to be that no matter what our early aspiration may be, we soon seem to drift back to an ordinary way of life with lesser goals. Our day-to-day living becomes the focus of our consciousness rather than God-realization. So Gurudev used every means he could to remind anyone who would listen about the real goal of life. “Do real *sādhana* my dear children. Do real *sādhana*,” he used to repeat.

This is one reason it came as rather a shock a number of years ago when one morning Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī said, “The spiritual life doesn’t begin until you know who you are.” We were under the impression that that was the goal of the spiritual life, and yet Swāmiji was saying that the spiritual life doesn’t even begin until we know who we are. Why is this? Because our spiritual life is practiced from where we are. We think we are a body and mind, and, therefore, it is quite natural for us to think that God-realization is something that we are going to achieve. It takes a long time to recognize that the goal of life, God-realization, is when we disappear. “Die to live,” Gurudev told us. Life in the Spirit, spiritual life, comes after we recognize that we are not the body and mind, but that we have always been Spirit.

The problem with our present seeking is that we want to locate ourselves in Spirit. But Spirit has no location. It is always present, everywhere. Therefore, we have to shift from the idea of locating ourselves somewhere, either in a body or mind, or in some experience that we think is Divine and to recognize that we are That which has no location because it is everywhere.

We are presently having to deal with *avidyā māyā* and with *tamo guṇa*, but now we are trying to deal with them from the point of view of the ego, and we are bound by them. When we realize that we are Spirit, *avidyā māyā* and the *guṇa*-s are still there: They never disappear because they are

the essence of manifested life, and as long as we are aware of manifested life we have to deal with them. But now we deal with them from a different perspective, from the perspective of Spirit, rather than the perspective of ego.

The spiritual life thus begins when we know who we are, because we know we are Spirit. Thereafter, the life we are leading is spiritual.