

We Must Be Grounded in Both

There are two fundamental approaches to the spiritual life that are foundational to all the great religions. These paths or ways could be called the religious path and the spiritual path—the way of the law, and the way of grace or intuition or surrender or devotion in the higher sense.

The way of the law, the way of the Vedas, the way of the Old Testament, is a path of being told what to do. Gurudev is full of these instructions and guidelines. The other path is the path of transcendence, transcending the law by appealing directly to the highest truth—that God alone is and we are That. It is a path that seems to simplify everything. Indeed, sometimes, as Pūjya Swāmījī says in one of his talks *in Ponder These Truths*, there are people who say that teachers like Gurudev are foolish to teach all these things about do this and do that, when the actual truth is so simple. But Pūjya Swāmījī adds in an ironic way, “As if Gurudev didn’t know that we are the unconditioned Truth.”

Pūjya Swāmījī points out that Gurudev was very aware of the needs of seekers. He would give them certain instructions. When he would see that those instructions were no longer required, he would say, “Leave them off. They are no longer necessary for you.” Pūjya Swāmījī has also pointed that you have to know what is needed for you at any particular time. For example, there may be a time when fasting is required and a time when it is no longer required. One time, in a slightly different light, talking about the fastidiousness required of a Brāhmin, he said that a Brāhmin has to keep himself fastidiously clean until ultimately he realizes that it is impossible to keep the body clean. It gives him a dispassion for the body and, indirectly, for all the things of this world.

Thus, there are hidden benefits to following the law, and rules and regulations, that only a true *guru* recognizes, and only a true *guru* recognizes their import for the individual *sādhaka*. On the other hand, we must be very aware that we can go our whole life, perfect ourselves in the law, and never really have what could be called a spiritual breakthrough. We worship God, study about God, serve God, but we don’t have any intimate knowledge of God. That can only come about either through grace or the path of surrender that invites grace into our life in the form of spiritual experiences and direct spiritual knowledge. The path of surrender can also give us a way of purification by seeing directly into our weaknesses

from an intuitional point of view, from a point of view of surrender. “Be *guṇātīta*, be the witness,” Lord Kṛṣṇa advised Arjuna.

Finally, we discover that we are meant to be grounded in both paths. We are meant to be grounded in ethics and the law, and we are equally meant to be grounded in surrender and intuition. Both are required for our spiritual life. If we only emphasize the law, we will miss the Spirit, the essence of the spiritual life. If we are only interested in the essence, in the higher truth, then sometimes our behavior will be a betrayal of the higher truth. We will be demonstrating the power of the higher truth and the selfishness of our lower nature.

Thus an integral spiritual life, a balanced spiritual life leads us to be grounded in both, both a religious life and the spiritual life. This is what Gurudev demonstrated and what we can see in the life of Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī.