

Transcending Like and Dislike

Some traditions emphasize the value of suffering; indeed, in all traditions we have examples of saints who actually pray for suffering. They recognize that when things are going well with them, God frequently doesn't seem to be so real. When they are in times of difficulty, they tend to feel the reality of God more. Moreover, even if a tradition doesn't emphasize the value of suffering, all traditions teach self-restraint; they teach *tapas*, austerities, that we must deny ourselves. As Lord Yama told Naciketas, "Man chooses between the pleasant and the good. The pleasant will lead to his destruction. The good to his highest welfare."

Therefore, obviously we should choose what is in our highest welfare, the good, even if at the time it seems to be quite unpleasant. And if we do choose the good over the pleasant, our life will improve. Many difficulties that we previously had will disappear. We will be better thought of, and we will think better of ourselves. However, there is one word of caution: Lord Yama warns: Man should choose the good over the pleasant, but *both are bound*. Indeed, we can find that there are some people who are highly ethical, highly admirable, but they seem more bound, more uptight, than many whose morals are looser.

What is the fundamental mistake being made? Vedānta tells us that the wheel of *samsāra* has two spokes, *rāga-dveṣa*, like and dislike. In other words, it is like and dislike, love and hate that bind us to this world. This is why they say that our great enemy is desire. Why is it so? Because desire doesn't allow our divinity to express itself. We are not only potentially divine, we are divine. That divinity will express through us whenever we give it an opportunity, whenever we get out of the way.

We are in the way with our likes and dislikes. Right action is not allowed to express itself through us because we have all our ideas of what is good and what is not good. For a man who is sense-oriented what is good are things that satisfy the senses. For a person who is very moralistic, things that satisfy the senses may be bad, denying himself may be good, but as long as we hang on to our own ideas, we don't allow God's morality—which may be quite different than our ideas of right and wrong—to express through us. Thus we can be hopelessly bound even when we choose the good over the pleasant.

The secret is we have to let go: “Abandon all your *dharmas* and take refuge in Me alone,” Lord Kṛṣṇa instructs Arjuna. And it is an interesting fact that if we will abandon in any part of our life, the Divine will immediately rush in. If artists sit down with their instrument or take a paint brush in their hand and let go of their idea of the right and the wrong way to do it, immediately the Divine will express through them, and those seeing their art will feel the touch of the Divine.

It applies to any part of our life, whether we are giving talks, whether we are working in our profession, whatever. If we get out of the way with our likes and dislikes, the Divine expresses through us. Indeed, the whole of the spiritual life is simply a long process of purifying ourselves of our likes and dislikes. This is why they can even say that some saints are not complete—because there are certain sections of their life where they still have preferences. Thus the trick of the spiritual life is to one by one eliminate our likes and dislikes so that the Divine—that we already are—has a clear channel to express Itself through.