

Choosing the Highest

All the epics and Purāṇas represent classic battles between the forces of good and the forces of evil. However, the scriptures and our teachers make it very clear to us that what they are all talking about is the battle that is going on within each one of us. Thus the first lesson we should learn from this is that the battle that we find raging within ourselves is not a personal battle, but rather an individual representation of a cosmic battle, a universal battle. So we shouldn't be taking it so personally; we should see it in a more impersonal way.

This battle has been described in many ways. It is the battle between *avidyā māyā* and *vidyā māyā*. Lord Yama told Naciketas that man must choose between the pleasant and the good, and He warned that while the good will lead to your highest welfare, the pleasant leads to your destruction. Lord Jesus said choose the hard and narrow path that leads to salvation, for the broad and easy path leads to destruction. So while this is a universal battle going on within us, there are choices that we have to continuously make between what is pleasant and easy and what is more difficult but good.

What is important for us to recognize is that this battle never ends. It changes its face, it changes its subtlety, but it is something that we can expect to fight either till the last breath in the body or God-realization. And even in the latter case there are still choices that have to be made, albeit they are coming from a different level of our being.

This battle needs to be fought first at the physical level. We have to choose *ahimsa* over *himsa*, non-injury over hurting others. We have to choose to tell the truth rather than an easy lie. We have to choose self-restraint over indulging our senses. We must choose the good rather than what is easy and pleasant.

But this battle is not only fought on the outer level of our being. When we recognize that what we do on the outer is the result of what we are in the inner—what our thinking and feelings are—then we realize that this battle has to be fought and these choices have to be made in our inner being, in our inner thinking.

So often it is easy or even pleasant to feel sorry for ourselves, to feel that we are a victim, to feel that others are being unfair to us. The good, the hard way looks at things impersonally; it recognizes that nothing comes to us except what we have created. It is our *karma*. Thus we react in an impartial way. We see the truth of our situation and refuse to give in to that part of ourselves that wants to wallow in self-pity or any of the other negative ways of approaching life.

Strangely enough this battle doesn't end at the mental level. This battle goes on even at the spiritual level where there is the constant temptation to feel that life is now good, I have done enough. Because when we have fought the battles well outwardly and within our own mind, then life becomes much more pleasant for us. Indeed, we may have even earned respect from others, perhaps become a teacher, and there is a temptation to forget the good, which is always to go beyond it all, to rest in God, to rest in our true Self.

We must never give up that battle. The choice must always be for the good. We must always struggle to put our lives in the hands of God, to become His active instrument in this world. This life was not meant for rest; this life was not meant to take it easy. Lord Kṛṣṇa made that clear. He said that even though he had accomplished everything, He had everything, yet He was ever active in this world.

We are only happy when we are active, when we are struggling, when we are accomplishing. And when we have accomplished everything, then we will still only be satisfied—indeed it will become our natural state—to be ever active in this world helping others. So activity never ends, choosing the good never ends. It is what makes us victorious in life. We must always choose the good over the pleasant.