

A Key Understanding

Our late revered Vedānta teacher, Swāmī Brahmānandajī, used to say that it is all right if you don't understand the truth, but you shouldn't misunderstand it. However, it is almost inevitable that we will misunderstand the truth of the spiritual life. If it were not so, we would all understand it immediately because it is so simple.

The truth may be very simple, but at the same time, compared to the grossness of our minds, it is extremely subtle. Therefore, we can never rest with the understanding that we have, because even if our understanding is in the right direction it needs to be continuously refined, made more and more subtle.

Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī often says, “If you want to become God, you must become like God,” and naturally, the discussion usually focuses around God's virtues: God is love. God is truth. God is purity. Therefore, become like that: Practice *ahimsa*, *satyam*, and *brahmacarya*. But God is also totally unknowable, unthinkable. And, therefore, if we think that we know God, then that is just encouragement He has given us to move us in the right direction. Our understanding has to become subtler and subtler until we can find nothing to hold on to, because we have ever been that Truth that was knowing any God in our mind or heart. So when there is nothing left to know, we are still there—the subtlest of the subtle.

No matter how we may describe it, the path to the truth is surrender, or in the words of Lord Kṛṣṇa and the Buddha, it is taking refuge. We no longer take refuge in things that we know, but in what we have always been, That which is the ultimate knower. That is why we must constantly be interested in subtler and subtler aspects of whatever we think we know.

In the Devī Māhātmyam, surrender means simply taking refuge and God will do it all for us. The Skanda Purāṇa teaches another way: Follow the Lord in battle. He will lead you to victory. But Lord Kṛṣṇa refused to be anything except the silent witness. Arjuna finally had to understand that the answer was to do his duty. Thus, true surrender does not mean giving responsibility to someone or something else. In fact, it usually means the exact opposite. It means that we stop blaming God, or others, or our situation, and take full responsibility for our lives.

That within us that takes full responsibility is who we really are—not this weak, confused, sometimes good, sometimes bad ego that we think we are. Therefore the purpose of this most important spiritual practice of all is to lead us from stage to stage of surrender until we discover that in the end it is taking full responsibility for our lives and fully doing our duty in this world.