

It Is a Moral Choice - I

Although Gurudev was established in the highest consciousness, he constantly put emphasis on the moral side of our spiritual life. Be Good, Do Good, is his best-known aphorism, and he laid down as a condition of membership in The Divine Life Society the practice of *ahimsa*, *satyam*, and *brahmacarya*—non-injury, truthfulness, and purity—which he declared to be the foundation of the spiritual life.

This was based upon his view of the human being as being a combination of animal, human and divine, and that our fundamental task is to evolve from one to the other—and ultimately transcend all three. Why then is morality so important? Because he described the spiritual process as eliminating the animal within us by becoming fully human and then sublimating the human into the divine. At all periods and at all stages this involves moral choices.

The animal within us is that part of ourselves that is subject to lust, anger, and greed, and, as Lord Kṛṣṇa said, this is the gateway to hell. At best the animal within is a lack of self-awareness, dullness that is not awake to itself as being aware, nor is it awake to other individuals as being more than objects. Therefore, it is that part of ourselves that is totally self-centered and selfish.

The true human part of ourselves is that part that is not only self-aware—I am and I know that I am—but recognizes that other human beings feel the same as we do. We don't want to be treated badly, therefore, we shouldn't treat anyone else badly. In other words, what gets us out of the selfishness of our animal part are moral choices; we reject our selfishness and treat others as we would like to be treated. We put other human beings on a par with ourselves. We would never do to someone else what we wouldn't want to be done to ourselves. Still more, we do unto others as we would appreciate having done to ourselves.

But then, what about the divine part of ourselves? In what way do we have to make moral choices as far as the divine part is concerned? When we are in the animal and human part of ourselves, we see everything from a personal point of view. Even our moral choices are personal choices: I don't want to be treated that way, therefore I shouldn't treat you that way.

But the divine part of ourselves is that part of ourselves that sees things from a universal point of view, from an impersonal point of view.

Therefore, to enter into the divine part of ourselves means the renunciation of the personal, of feeling that I am the center of the universe. I am the subject and all else is an object to me. I do treat you the way I would like to be treated, but I still see you as an object, not really as my own self. To see you as my own self, I have to become impersonal, rise above my own individuality, and see the underlying oneness. This requires sacrifice of my individuality, which is a moral choice. I choose to give up that which is dearest to me, my own ego, in order to evolve, in order to become more like God. It is a moral choice.

Thus we must remember that we must never seek the divine in ourselves or the divine in general without remembering that it is a moral choice. It is not getting something for me, it is leaving me behind—for the greater good.