

Faith

One of the foundations of all religions and the spiritual life is faith. Faith means at a minimum that we believe in certain things. But more than that it means that we take refuge, we depend upon those beliefs to guide our life. And still more, we act on them. We gamble everything for the truths that we accept. It is so special because, in fact, faith means believing in something, taking refuge in something, gambling everything for something that we cannot be sure of in the normal way. We have faith in what is invisible rather than what is visible.

In Sanskrit, the word *śraddha* is defined as faith in God, the scriptures, the *guru*, and ourselves. We have faith in God, which means we believe in, take refuge in and gamble everything that God is good, that His purposes are good, that if He has called us to the spiritual life it is not something capricious. He intends to stick with us and lead us to the goal no matter how poor our own opinion of ourselves might be. We have faith in the scriptures, meaning we understand that no matter what the scriptures seem to be saying, they are all pointing to the fact that God alone is and that we should live our lives on that basis.

We have faith in the *guru*, even if he seems to be very human. Because no matter how well we know the scriptures, how much faith we have in God, we have inner blockages to recognizing and grasping the truth within ourselves. We can say I am That, we may even understand it intellectually and feel it emotionally, but we don't accept the fact of it. And, therefore, at times the *guru* will have to do some strange things. Pujya Swāmī Brahmānandajī, our late Vedānta teacher, said, "Sooner or later the *guru* will do something that you can't stand." At that point we must believe in the *guru*, we must still take refuge in him, and we must still gamble everything that he knows the truth and is acting in that light.

Finally we must have faith in ourselves. We must have faith that we are That, that we have been called to the spiritual life and that no matter how much *avidyā māyā* is working within us to distract us from our true goal, that *vidyā māyā*, the truth, is also within us and that that truth is true. We also have faith in ourselves because we are taking refuge in God, scriptures and *guru*. Our faith must be that we are meant for it, for as Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī has clearly told us, it is our birthright.

Thus, in the Vedic context, faith means belief, taking refuge in, and gambling everything on our faith in God, the scriptures, *guru*, and self.