

Beyond Materialism and Idealism

From ancient times the human being has asked the question, What is truth? or another way of expressing it, What is real or What is the Reality? Over the ages, two principal schools of thought have emerged, often referred to as materialism and idealism.

Materialists say that it is what you can taste, feel, smell, hear, and see that is real, and that consciousness, awareness, thought arise from that reality. If you say to materialists that we are aware in deep sleep or in *nirvakalpa samādhi* when there is no body and no mind, their response would be, “It is a body and mind that is saying that, that had that experience. Whatever you experience arises from a material entity.”

On the other hand, the idealists say that consciousness, awareness, is the reality, and that whatever we see, touch, taste, smell and hear is simply an appearance. It is not really there. It is like a dream that seems absolutely real when the dream is present, but upon waking we know that there was nothing there. We may have dreamt that an elephant entered the Samādhi Hall, but, in fact, it never happened. And so they refer to our present waking state as being one long dream.

Interestingly enough, neither materialists nor idealists seems to be able to come up with a totally satisfying answer experientially. Logically they may come up with a satisfactory answer, but not experientially. Those who believe in materialism and try to get their satisfaction from materialism never seem to be totally satisfied. And so it is with the idealists. They have a perfect system, but still they have desires. They are unable to live the theory that they are expressing. Indeed perhaps they don't want to, because the higher one moves in idealism the more abstracted one is from what we experience here.

Indeed there is something within us that doesn't want to stay there, that says that this life, the way it is being lived here, is potentially much richer than some abstracted *samādhi* state. We then begin to see both materialism and idealism as two poles, one an objective pole, the other a subjective pole. We begin to see that we transcend them both in a mystery that we can never totally explain, but that we can recognize.

There is a mystery that knows, or is the basis of, both poles. That mystery becomes open to us when we want neither materialism nor

idealism—when we want nothing. And the key is simply the teachings that we have been given: Be good, Do good, or as Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī says, You are divine—which means undivided—Know this truth and live to express it.

Live not to express materialism. Live not to express idealism. Live to express the undivided mystery that you are.