

Seeing Nothing Except God

One day a visitor asked Gurudev, “Have you seen God?” Gurudev didn’t answer, but asked one of his assistants to bring the person a cup of coffee. Later, when everyone had forgotten the question, Gurudev turned to the person and said, “I see nothing except God.”

Why didn’t Gurudev give him the answer immediately? Because the question and the answer were coming from different angles of vision. The questioner assumed that the goal was to have *darśan* of the Divine, to see God as an object, because that is the only way that most of us can think. We want to experience God as something that we know. Gurudev’s answer pointed to something entirely different.

When Gurudev said I see nothing except God, he was indicating that subject-object had dropped away. He saw nothing except God because there was nothing except God. There was no one knowing it. As he once said to another devotee, “Who is there to know it?” Therefore the question was from one point of view, the answer from another one altogether.

This is vitally important for us to understand. Otherwise we may take some pride in what we discover in our spiritual journey. In his talk “Practice Your Conviction” in his book, *Ponder These Truths*, Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī outlines the spiritual journey as being to have first an intellectual conviction and then bring it to the feeling level where we experience God’s love, God’s truth, or God’s purity. But then, the goal of the process is to have direct experience where subject and object disappear and the Divine alone is without a second.

That was possibly the goal that the questioner had in mind, but Gurudev’s answer was entirely different. He said, “I see nothing except God,” which means that the direct experience had not been something that had come and gone, but something that had been so cultivated in his mind that it never left him. A direct experience will never leave us from a memory point of view, but it can be overwhelmed by our normal subject-object way of seeing things. Therefore, the purification of the mind that helped us to come to direct experience has to be continued indefinitely until the last traces of subject-object have disappeared for all practical purposes.

The reason that it is important for us to understand this is that sometimes we can make relatively rapid spiritual progress. It is even not totally uncommon for someone without any spiritual practices whatsoever to have direct experience. What usually happens then is that the ego takes over the experience and says, "I had that experience." The ego, which wasn't there at all during the experience, instead of being destroyed or worn away has actually been enhanced, and we suffer from spiritual pride, the deadliest of all sins.

Therefore, no matter what experience we have had, no matter how much we know, the only thing that counts finally is that, with absolute humility, we too can say with Gurudev, "I see nothing except God."