

We Are Part of the Universe

One of mankind's oldest philosophical questions is whether or not we have free will: Are things happening according to God's will or are we choosing? That we must have some choice is indicated in Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī's book *A Call to Liberation* which is divided into topics. The one topic that has more entries than any other is the topic of choice. And Lord Yama tells Naciketas, "Man chooses between the good and the pleasant." So we must have at least some choice.

How much choice do we have? Some say that it is like a cow tied to a stake. The cow has freedom to eat and move around to the length of the rope, but can't go beyond that. Others say that we are not free to choose what happens to us, but that we have full responsibility and choice on how we respond. Others say that even our responses are conditioned; therefore we don't have choice. Finally, a wise person once said, "Pray as if it all depended upon God. Work as if it all depended upon you."

All these sayings try to help us to resolve this philosophical question if it happens to bother us, which, if we are serious philosophical students, it will sooner or later. But then, if we are going to ask questions about choice, we should make sure that we ask the questions that really count. As Lord Yama said to Naciketas, "If you choose the good, it leads to your highest welfare. If you choose the pleasant it leads to your destruction." So our day by day, moment by moment choices make a difference on how our life turns out.

As seekers, however, we are meant to be even more fundamental in our thinking. We are meant to get right down to the basic ground, and the basic ground has to do with our identification. We have chosen to have a wrong identification. It may have been imposed upon us, but we have a choice whether or not to continue to see ourselves as individual human beings or to see ourselves as divine beings. The whole of the spiritual life is meant to be a shift from an ego-centered life to a God-centered life. But even saying it that way is a bit abstract. What we can see more clearly is that right now we consider ourselves to be the center of the universe. We are the subject and everything else, including God, is an object to us. This is our illusion.

The truth is that we are part of the universe. We are part of the universe just as the stars are part of the universe. We are part of the universe just as the trees are part of the universe. We are part of the universe just as the atoms are part of the universe. Indeed, scientists tell us that neither are we nothing, nor are we that great. We seem to be around the midpoint from the very smallest to the furthest extents of space. So we are neither great nor unimportant. The important thing is that we are part of the universe. That is the shift that needs to take place. That is the fundamental choice we have to take from which all other choices follow automatically.

We know as we sit here that we feel ourselves to be the center of the universe. Are we prepared to renounce that feeling and feel and act according to the truth which is that we are part of the universe? It revolutionizes our behavior, and will eventually make real to us what our truth is.