

Beyond the Mind

In his book *Ponder These Truths*, Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī has two outstanding talks on the subject of the mind. The only difficulty with these talks is that they are so contradictory that the editors chose to place one talk near the beginning of the book and the other towards the end. One talk puts down the mind. It says in essence, Don't think the mind is your friend. The other talk speaks about how necessary the mind is, that it has been given a bad name unnecessarily.

Why then was not one of the talks eliminated? Can they both be correct? The scriptures declare that mind is the cause of both bondage and liberation in the human being. In other words, it is how we look at the mind, how we understand the mind. Our late revered Vedānta teacher, Swāmī Brahmānandajī, used to say, "It's the only instrument we have." But then, we must remember that through its desires, through its attachments, through its conviction that it can get satisfaction from the world, it is the cause of our bondage. So when we deal with the mind, we are dealing with a two-edge sword. It is therefore how we understand the mind and how we use the mind.

The mind is subject to two universal forces. One called *avidyā māyā* is the constantly pushing it outwards to be involved in the world. The other, *vidyā māyā*, is constantly calling it back to oneness, to God. It depends upon which voice we listen to, whether we are choosing, in Lord Yama's terms, the good or the pleasant. The good leads to our highest welfare, the pleasant to our destruction. Therefore, what we choose is the cause of our bondage or our liberation.

Choosing the good, we follow our spiritual practices, especially our ethical training, but then ultimately we have to recognize that Lord Yama said something else to Naciketas. He said, "Both are bound." Both *avidyā māyā* and *vidyā māyā* are called *māyā*, and Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī said that the mind is nothing except *māyā*. Therefore, ultimately while *vidyā māyā* leads us towards our highest good and therefore is the cause of liberation, it in itself cannot give us liberation. For that we have to go beyond the mind. In the last teaching verse of the Gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa, after spending 18 chapters teaching Arjuna *dharma*, tells him to abandon all *dharmas* and take refuge in Him alone.

Therefore, while we must constantly choose the good over the pleasant, choose *vidyā māyā* over *avidyā māyā*, we must remember that taking refuge is the key. That is why Gurudev wanted us to constantly offer everything to God. That is why Lord Kṛṣṇa wanted Arjuna to fight, to make effort, but to leave the results to God. We must strive for liberation, but always leave the results to God, let everything go and just be