

Freedom and Obedience

The spiritual life is full of paradoxes. Usually these are seemingly conflicting teachings that we need to understand the significance of. One of them is that the goal of life is to be free, and yet if we want to be free, we have to put ourselves under discipline. We have to obey.

We are like children, spiritual children, undisciplined. We want to do what we want to do, whether it is in harmony with God's will and God's laws or not. Therefore, at the very beginning of the spiritual life, and to a certain extent till the very end, we have to deny our freedom to do what we want—bring ourselves under discipline—and strive to be in harmony with the laws of the universe.

This is not an easy task. We will gladly do what we want to do, but we don't want to do what we don't want to do. There is tremendous resistance within us. We will serve a guru or God, give everything to them as long as we more or less agree with what we are asked to do. But we find it most difficult to give our lives to God for the simple reason that we don't want to do what we don't want to do. Yet the essence of the spiritual life is aligning our lives with the greater good, which means inevitably that we're going to have to give up those habits and ways of thinking that are not in harmony with the whole.

However, if and when we have brought ourselves into harmony with God's laws, we then can find that this way of life has been so beneficial to us that our ego has shifted from wanting to do what it wants to do, to wanting to follow God's laws as it understands them. Then, we can become quite rigid, quite fearful of letting go of these laws. And yet, ultimately, to be free, it means that we have to pass from God's law to God Himself. We have to, in Lord Kṛṣṇa's words, abandon all *dharmas* and take refuge in Him alone.

If, however, we found it a real struggle to control our senses and mind, to bring them into harmony with God's laws, it is an equally difficult task to let these *dharmas* go after we have worked so hard for them. But it is the next step. Yet in no way is it going back to our previous idea of freedom. This is a freedom from rules and regulations, but it is, in a sense, a direct obedience to God's will. We are free of our individual ideas in order

to be part of the Whole. We directly know God's will for us, rather than taking our instruction from His laws or an outer guru.

Therefore, discipline and freedom, obedience and liberation, seemingly are paradoxes, but they are all a necessary part of our spiritual life. In some ways we never get away from discipline because it takes discipline and effort even to let go of our previous disciplines and just be—be vulnerable to God's will for us moment by moment. It requires great delicacy. It requires everything we've got.