

The Crucial Need of Aspiration

We are all familiar with the fundamental declaration of Vedānta that Brahman alone is without a second. We are also equally familiar with the *mahāvākya* that derives from this declaration: That thou art. If there is no second to Brahman, then by definition we are That.

The words are easy to say, and because they come from the scriptures and they are re-stated and reinforced by saints that we trust, it is possible to develop at least an intellectual conviction that they represent the truth, the fact of our life. But having an intellectual conviction and having day by day experience are two different things. How do we change an intellectual experience into direct experience?

In his book, *Ponder These Truths*, Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī deals with exactly this problem. Devotees had come to him with this very complaint: We are absolutely convinced of the truth of the scriptures, but it is not our day by day experience. Fundamentally, Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī's answer was that you have to practice your conviction, and he then outlined the Vedāntic method, a constant negation of our sense of separation and an affirmation of the truth. He also mentioned that there is also the devotee's method of constantly affirming our nothingness and God's everythingness.

But then, from a practical point of view, we require two fundamental qualifications. First, there is the recognition that what we are trying to bring about is a fundamental change in our being. We are totally used to identifying ourselves with our ego, that false Mr or Mrs so and so that the mind has created to explain who we are in the absence of our knowledge of the truth. Therefore, there has to be a genuine willingness on our part to give up our present identity in order to abide in the truth.

It sounds easy, but the truth of the matter is that we cling tenaciously to our present identity. We are upset when anyone challenges us in any way; we will defend to the death our false identity. Therefore, before any *sādhana* or any practice can do us any good, we not only have to be willing to give up our present identification, we have to hunger and thirst for it. There has to be an overwhelming aspiration. Even, when Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī was once asked whether a guru was necessary, he answered that what is required is aspiration.

In the final analysis, knowledge and willingness and all the other qualities will not benefit us unless aspiration is there. Thus we must not only practice our conviction, but underneath there must be a real willingness to give up our wrong identity and a powerful aspiration to let it go and abide in the truth.