

Upside Down

All religions speak about the spiritual enemies of man. Gurudev named some of them in his Universal Prayer: “Free us from egoism, lust, greed, hatred, anger and jealousy.” He also wanted us to develop virtues, so he adds, “Fill our hearts with divine virtues.” And in one of his best known aphorisms, he names some of those virtues: “Be good. Do good. Be kind. Be compassionate. Practice *ahimsā*, *satyam*, and *brahmacarya*.”

If we are sincere about ridding ourselves of the negative qualities and practicing the positive ones, we cannot help but see some change in ourselves over the years. Not always dramatic, but a real change, a solid change for the better for which we can be grateful to God and guru. But the danger is, from the highest spiritual point of view, that the more we improve, the more we are apt to find a spiritual comfort level. Life has become much easier for us because the Law of Karma works. If we are being good and doing good, then the world tends to be good and do good to us. And so we are very grateful and begin to relax.

At this point, some teachers will say very good, just carry on. But Gurudev and Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī, no matter how flexible they may have been from an outward point of view, never wanted us to relax. They didn’t want us to change just from a degree point of view, but to change radically, not going from here to there, but, right where we are, to be turned, so to speak, upside down.

The problem is that we are so used to the teachings that we don’t really hear them and get their real meaning; we don’t let them enter our being. For example, every morning when he came to speak to us in Gurudev’s sacred Samādhi Hall, Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī would begin with the absolute truth by addressing us with some epithet such as “Radiant Atman.” We are so used to the words that they really have no personal meaning for us. What it means is that our life doesn’t belong to us. It hasn’t been us that has been changing, it is the Spirit that is doing everything and is everything. Continuing to think that we exist separate from the Spirit prolongs our bondage just as firmly as if we hadn’t improved at all.

Therefore the spiritual life has a dimension to it that most of us, from a practical point of view, don’t come to grips with. We don’t come to grips with it because it seems to be beyond us. Our minds won’t go there. And yet

unless our minds will start to go there, we will get stuck somewhere and ultimately have that discouraging feeling that we are not really changing at all.

Therefore, we should try to read Gurudev, and read Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī, and read Pūjya Swāmī Krishnānandajī in a different light. Read the radical things that they are saying and know that they are talking to us. They are calling each one of us not just to be good, do good, but to turn our thinking upside down.