

Know Thyself at All Levels

One of the world's basic universal spiritual instructions was encapsulated in the two words over the door of the temple of the Oracle of Delphi in ancient Greece. The two words were "Know Thyself." Normally we take that to mean, in Gurudev's words, Enquire, Who am I? Know thyself and be free. However, Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī has pointed out to us that it is equally important to know yourself at all levels of your being. Otherwise, perhaps our ability to know ourselves in an universal sense will not have the proper foundation to support it. Therefore, Pūjya Swāmījī said that you have to examine yourself, find out what's going on within.

In this sense, there are two important things that we should recognize about ourselves, both of which usually come as a bit of a shock. The first is that while we think that we are very much an individual and that we think for ourselves, in actual fact, if we examine our mind, we will be somewhat surprised to discover how much we are a product of our background, how much of our thinking of what is right and wrong is simply a matter of our conditioning.

We believe what we have been told, and when we meet someone else from a different background with different opinions, we assume that we are right and that they are wrong. This discovery is essential before we can get any form of universal feeling towards other human beings. We have to see that most of our differences are a matter of conditioning and of how we have interpreted our life experiences.

The second thing we need to discover is that we not only don't see ourselves as a product of our background, but we consider ourselves to be absolutely separate from everyone and everything else including God. We think that we are the center of the universe, the subject, and that everything else is an object to us.

These two factors both blind us to the truth of who we are. Fortunately, however, there is a third unnoticed factor, a factor that reflects the truth about us. That is that no matter how much we have changed, whether we have changed our country, whether we have changed our nature, how much older we are, we still think that we are *exactly* the same person we have always been and always will be.

So, therefore, we have these three factors that are important to know about ourselves as a preparation and foundation for our efforts to discover the deeper Truth. The first is how much we are a product of our background. We are very little different than others in the culture we come from, almost like leaves on a tree. But second, paradoxically, how we consider ourselves to be absolutely separate and different from everyone else, because we feel ourselves to be the center of the universe and everyone and everything else to be an object to us.

And the third factor, the factor that is also hidden, but is much closer to the truth, is that we feel that we are the same person we have ever been. Nothing has ever changed about us; we'll always be exactly the same. And if we will reflect, we will conclude that there is probably no difference between that within us which feels that it has ever been exactly the same person and that same feeling within everyone else. It is a universal connection with God.