

The Need for Introspection

The spiritual life has been likened to a compass. The goal is straight north, but there are also 359 other degrees that we can follow that are not straight north. Some of them approximate the goal. Others go in the wrong direction. What is the wrong direction? The scriptures say that our fundamental error is wrong identification. We think that we are a body and mind. Gurudev puts the truth quite simply: “You’re not the body, you’re not the mind. Immortal Self you are.”

In the sixth chapter of the Gītā, Lord Kṛṣṇa gives us a spiritual formula. He says: Practice and Dispassion. We must have dispassion for whatever reinforces our wrong identification, and we must practice our true identification. Therefore, we must be aware in our lives, and especially in our spiritual lives, about those things that strengthen our wrong identification and those things that open us up to our true identification.

For example, if our spiritual practices lead us to think that now we know something or that our path is superior to other paths, then that reinforces our wrong identification. Because anything that reinforces the sense of I, whether it is lust, greed, hatred, anger, and jealousy or whether it is any form of spiritual pride, takes us in the wrong direction. It leads us south rather than north.

But offering everything to God, seeing God in all things, choosing the good over the pleasant leads us in a northern direction. If we are following the practice of offering everything to God and negating that we are the body and mind, we will heading at least in the right general direction. That will tend to reinforce itself and gradually point us towards straight north. But first we must be sure that we are actually heading in a northern direction. If there is no introspection, if there is no constant offering everything to God as Gurudev wanted us to do, then we should question our overall direction and make the necessary corrections. And it’s not something that we are meant to do occasionally. It is meant to be a central daily practice. Whatever else we are doing, we are meant to empty ourselves by offering everything to God.

The direction north is the direction of surrender. It is the direction of having dispassion for any self-importance whatsoever. It is the path of sacrifice, of sacrificing our own desires and living for God’s will: “Not my

will, but Thy will be done.” Gurudev and Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī wanted us to constantly introspect, to know where we are, to make sure that we are heading north.