

You Are Who You Think You Are

In one of his best known aphorisms Gurudev Swāmī Śivānandajī says, “Enquire, Who am I? Know thyself and be free.” He also said, “If you think you are a man, you are a man. If you think you are God, you are God.”

If you ask a child who they are, they may give a name and that they belong to a certain family. When they grow up, that may still be their identification—a certain name, a certain family. The family will have changed to a certain extent, but that is still their identity. Others expand their identification, perhaps to the religion they were born into or to the language they speak. Others identify with the whole country. Whatever is happening in the country, good or bad, affects them. A very few, who perhaps get into international politics or business or science, transcend their home country identity. They feel themselves to be citizens of the world.

These are all social identities. Gurudev was after something different: How we feel about ourselves in our innermost realm. Unfortunately, most of us are so identified with our external that we never question who we think we are from a fundamental point of view. Indeed, if we want to think that we are God, we think that it is some image of ourselves that has to be changed—we have to change our way of thinking or our way of living—and to a certain extent this may be correct.

However, there is a fundamental change that we have to bring about that most of us have never considered. How does God think? The sages who have become one with That say, “There are no differences here.” God has been described as having His center everywhere and circumference nowhere. He identifies with no particular body and mind or even the world. On the other hand, we have this peculiarity of thinking that we are the center of the universe and that everything else is an object. So we see differences. We have centered our identity in one body and mind instead of it being everywhere.

Therefore, we think that we are a man. If we want to think that we are God, then we have to do those things that gets our mind off our own individual body and mind and recognize that we are a universal being

functioning through this body and mind and equally functioning through every atom in creation.

All our spiritual practices are meant to help us to rub away, bit by bit, this idea of being centered in one body and mind, and instead to feel empathy for all other bodies and minds, and indeed, the whole world. Shifting our consciousness from one family to the country to the world is one way of expanding our consciousness. We are meant to do it in all the ways we can, so that ultimately we too see no differences.