

Fundamentals Are Not Meant to Become Fundamentalism

If we look over the history of the last 25 years, it is quite possible that we will come to the conclusion that a great deal of the world's serious problems has been caused by religious fundamentalism. How is it possible that being a fundamentalist, being true to a religion, can cause a problem? For example, as members of The Divine Life Society, it is fundamental that we should practice *ahimsa*, *satyam*, and *brahmacarya*, non-injury, truthfulness, and purity. It is fundamental that we should practice yoga. We should Serve, Love, Meditate, Realize. Gurudev also wants us to be good, do good, be kind, be compassionate.

Is it possible to be too good, to do too much good, to be too truthful? It wouldn't seem so on the surface, but Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī once said that any virtue taken to an extreme can become a vice of another sort. He didn't say that taking truth, for example, to an extreme makes truth a vice, but a vice of another sort. And this is what we seem to be seeing in the world today. How can being dedicated to your religion, to the fundamentals of a religion become a vice? If we can discover the subtle reason, it can be a great help to our *sādhana*.

Virtues taken to an extreme can become a vice of another sort when we believe that we are the body and mind, when we believe that we must act in a certain way to achieve the good. When taken to an extreme, it means that others that don't do it our way should be corrected or even eliminated. On the other hand, if we would see the fundamentals of religious and spiritual life, such non-injury, truthfulness, and purity, as being an expression of what we and all other human beings already are, it will be impossible for us to carry our fundamentals to an extreme, because the moment we want someone else to act in a certain way, we will remember that they too are God, that God is also functioning through them; and just as we have our particular approach, God through them is showing them their path.

Thus we may lovingly suggest another way for them to look at things, but there will be a limit on how much we will force our ideas. There will be no danger of us taking our fundamentals to an extreme and making a vice out of them—a vice such as egoism, hatred or anger. All those things can arise out of virtues if we forget that we are all one.

Thus the most important thing in the religious and spiritual life is to get our fundamentals correct and to have them on the right basis. As Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī once said, “You can fill an entire notebook with the right calculations, but if you start off with the wrong premise, you will end up with the wrong answer.” Thus if we base our life on a belief that we are a separate ego, then no matter how well we practice, we are going to get the wrong answer. But if we base our life on the truth that we are the Goal already, then our actions and our fundamentals will be tempered by that truth and will eventually lead us to its full realization and expression in our life.