

Our First God

The cover on the latest copy of The Divine Life Magazine is a reminder to us of the essence of Gurudev's integral yoga. Gurudev is quoted as saying, "Worship the poor, the downtrodden, and the oppressed. These are your first gods."

Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī used to often tell us to appreciate what Gurudev had done for us in providing an *Āśram* where we could come to serve, love, meditate, and realize. He also never tired of reminding us that Gurudev said, "Never give up on selfless service." And Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī, himself, although he was established in the highest realization, seldom taught the higher processes of yoga, but by his words and example his life was dedicated to service, especially to the poorest of the poor. How his heart went out to the lepers, to anyone who was suffering!

It is, of course, good for us to meditate, to be devoted, to study the scriptures, but what is the purpose of it all? The purpose is to be able to see God in all, to recognize that everything is divine. And, therefore, as Gurudev says on this cover, to worship God in the poor, the downtrodden and the oppressed, and because of their unfortunate situation, to see them as our first gods.

It is not a natural path for a seeker. We are happy to have our channel of service so that we can then follow the yoga of our choice. But perhaps that is not the most effective way to wear away our ego. Perhaps, in fact, the spiritual life is meant to be, in its own way, a crucifixion, a going against the natural inclinations of our ego-self in order to wear the ego away. Thus, *tapas* has a place in our life. Selfless service, meaning nothing in it for ourselves, has a place. Indeed, it may include many things that may be the last thing we might want to be doing at the present moment.

Ultimately, however, our deepest desire is for oneness.. It is what we really want at the bottom of our heart. We get distracted because we choose the pleasant rather than the good. But constantly in the teachings of both Gurudev and Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī are pointers to our highest welfare rather than to the pleasant. And so the message on the cover of the

latest Divine Life points us to our highest welfare, as Gurudev tells us there that our first gods are the poor, the downtrodden and the oppressed.