

Empty Thyself

As devotees of The Divine Life Society, we have never been encouraged to seek spiritual powers or *siddhi*-s. Indeed, quite the opposite has been the case. We have been reminded that the scriptures say: “Avoid *siddhi*-s like poison.” Why is this? It is because the whole purpose of the spiritual life is to wear away our ego, and most of us simply are not mature enough to have a spiritual *siddhi* and at the same time wear away our ego. Rather the *siddhi* is likely to strengthen the ego. Therefore it should be avoided.

But then, what about spiritual experiences? Almost everyone goes through periods of inspiration, followed by dry periods and then again periods of inspiration. When we are in a period of inspiration, that becomes our identity. A dry period also becomes our identity. Interestingly enough, for some seekers it can be a few days of one and then a few days of the other. They become so used to it that their identity with either the inspiration or the dryness is minimal.

However, if these periods become longer and more intense, then the identification can become quite strong. The devotee becomes used to having the inspiration present. They talk from that point of view; it becomes their identity. Then when a dry period comes, there can be an acute sense of loss. If this only involves a few weeks or even months, it's not too serious, but sometimes a period of inspiration can go on for years. If it goes on for long enough, the person can become a teacher, and then when suddenly the dry period comes they can be devastated – sometimes so devastated that they lose their mental balance. So we have to question not only spiritual powers but even spiritual experiences.

Is it not possible to have spiritual powers or spiritual experiences without an inevitable downside to them? It is, of course, if we have the strength to keep them in perspective, to remember what our purpose is in the spiritual life. Our purpose is to get rid of any identity whatsoever, good or bad, spiritual or unspiritual. Why? Because the Reality of all of us—good times or bad times—is the same. It is that One alone without a second. Any spiritual practice, any power, any experience, has the power to drag us away from that truth unless it is firmly fixed in our minds.

If the recognition of this true identity is firmly fixed in our mind, then no matter what our *siddhi* is, what our experience is, it cannot distract us because we will simply offer it all back to God. This is what Gurudev wanted us to do with all our experiences—offer them to God. That leaves us empty—without identification. And that is the purpose of our spiritual life—being empty, Emptying ourselves is true *sādhana*.

The senior people of the Āśram used to have a quote that they said was from the Bible: “Empty thyself and I fill thee.” The key to our spiritual life is to continuously empty ourselves. Then we are closest to our true Self.