

Choice

Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī's book *A Call to Liberation* is divided into sections according to topic. We might think that the largest number of entries would be under selfless service, devotion, meditation or Vedānta, but strangely enough the topic that has the most entries is choice: It is your choice.

Lord Yama, when he was speaking to Naciketas, said, "Man chooses between the good and the pleasant." Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī used to add the word constantly: "Man *constantly* chooses between the good and the pleasant." The pleasant is what our senses want to do, it is what is comfortable for the ego. The good is the hard and narrow path. Then Lord Yama warns Naciketas that while the good leads to our highest welfare, the pleasant leads to our destruction.

All religions teach us fundamentally the same approach. We should live by *dharma*, by righteousness. We should choose right rather wrong. But then, sometimes it isn't easy to know what to choose, in spite of the guidance of the scriptures and ethical teachers. For example, two fundamental virtues are common to all religions. It is summarized in Gurudev's injunction, taken from the scriptures, to practice non-injury, truthfulness and purity.

But what happens if you are going to visit a person in the hospital and the doctor tells you, "Don't tell them the truth about their condition. It could kill them." Then when you go in to see the patient, the first question is, "What is my true situation?" What do you choose, non-injury as the doctor has advised or do you choose the truth as the patient has requested? We might have an immediate answer, but more likely we would be caught in a conflict.

What do we do? Lord Kṛṣṇa gave the answer in the final teaching verse of the Gītā. After spending eighteen chapters telling Arjuna how to live by righteousness, how he must do the right thing, He finally says, "Abandoning all *dharmas*," which means all Arjuna's ideas of right and wrong, "take refuge in Me alone." In addition, Lord Yama, after telling Naciketas to choose the good over the pleasant, because it leads to his highest welfare added a surprising phrase. He said, "Both are bound."

We therefore are seeking something beyond morality, although morality is the ladder we must climb up. But finally, we want to be free of right and wrong and let God be the chooser. He knows what is truly right and wrong in any situation. In fact, He alone truly knows. Therefore, we must calculate as best we can what is right and what is wrong in any situation, but finally our appeal must be to the Indweller, the Lord within. We must leave the situation to Him and wait upon His guidance. Ultimately, He never fails us.