

The Practice of Wisdom

In the introduction to his *Sādhana Tattva*, Gurudev says that an ounce of practice is better than tons of theory. Does that mean that we shouldn't try to understand our spiritual life? Actually, for some time Gurudev used to make trips to the Punjab where he received a tremendous response. But ultimately he stopped going because the devotees were more interested in their emotional response to Gurudev than understanding the actual teaching he wanted to give.

Thus when Gurudev spoke about theory, he would be referring to those whom he sometimes called dry Vedāntins or lip-Vedāntins, those who could speak eloquently on Vedānta but did not put it into practice. It is actually necessary to have an understanding of the spiritual life. Otherwise, we will be going along blindly, not knowing what we're trying to accomplish.

Therefore, Gurudev and Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī wanted us to be aware of what is going on within ourselves. Gurudev said, "Scrutinize always your inner motives," and Pūjya Swāmī Chidānandajī used to explain that each one of us has two impersonal forces that are trying to lead us from within. One is *avidyā māyā*, which wants to lead us towards the world, to think in worldly ways. The other equally powerful, equally impersonal force, is *vidyā māyā* that wants to lead us back to God, to give us knowledge.

In addition Lord Yama warned Naciketas that man chooses between the good and the pleasant. The good leads to his highest welfare, the pleasant to his destruction. Therefore, if we are wise, we will choose the good. If we are foolish, we choose the pleasant. The difficulty with most of us is that the pleasant is so seductive, and it is so much easier than choosing the good. It is so pleasant! The good on the other hand requires self-restraint. It requires thinking of others rather than just thinking of ourselves. It requires effort, and we don't like to make effort except to get something pleasant.

But then, there is one bit of good news. The mind will go towards what it is habituated to. We go towards the pleasant because that is what we have indulged in and habituated our mind to. But if we choose the good and do unto others as we would have others do unto to us, if we choose the

good and do our spiritual practices—and we do then consistently—then gradually the mind sees that that is a better way of life than a life of indulgence, and it automatically wants to go towards the good rather than the pleasant.

What is then required is wisdom and vigilance. Wisdom to recognize that we are on the right path and vigilance to make sure we don't get distracted again by the pleasant. This sort of theory and understanding and wisdom are an integral and necessary part of our spiritual life. Indeed, we could say that it is part of the ounce of practice that is better than tons of theory.