

PERCEPTION

Different people look at the same things but have different perceptions, colorblindness for example. Even without physical disabilities we perceive things in different ways, we draw different conclusions from similar perceptions. Perception or the ability to be aware of things, to see things clearly is worth examining. It should be evident that something about the perceiving individuals makes them perceive things as they do. The colorblind example is an obvious physical problem, but our perceptions are also related to our mental and emotional state, we perceive things, both examples suggesting we perceive things because of the way we are. If we do not examine the way we are we will not understand why we perceive things as we do, we will not understand our perceptions are inherently prejudiced. In other words, our motives color the way we perceive things. If I wanted the Yankees to win the World Series and they swept it in four games, it was a great World Series, but if I was rooting for the other team which lost in four straight games, it was one of the worst in history.

Yet it is much more subtle than that, more subtle than merely understanding what colors our perceptions in every situation. As we become clear, as we begin to let go of the motivating self and stop identifying ourselves with teams, and there are many teams in this world besides baseball teams, as we stop identifying ourselves as part of a specific team, a specific club, a specific race, a specific language, a specific culture or a specific way of being who we are, our perceptions change, suddenly they are not clouded by our attachment to our team. We do have to be careful about forming teams, the teams we choose to be part of.

Does God have a team? Right now, each of us has in some way joined a team on God's behalf, a choice which leads to confusion, leads to perceptions about the nature of God's response, His favoritism, His relation to the team we joined, the team we consider ourselves part of. It is almost as though we have no choice if we do not detach ourselves from association with the team. This is similar to tribalism, except that the tribes we are talking about now have become larger and larger—one tribe might consist of twenty-five percent of the world, the next of another twenty-five percent. Within the larger tribes, within the larger teams, there are subdivisions, and while these subdivisions often fight among themselves, when they face a completely different team they come together, the similarities are more evident. We group ourselves into sets of people whom we define as we define ourselves, with whom we see certain similarities.

To understand the difference between a religion which is named with a capital letter and religion which uses the lower case is a leap of understanding. When religion forms a team it is religion with a capital letter, when religion is the path to God it is merely religion. Our path is certainly religious, it is thought of as religion, but it is religion based on tolerance, on the knowledge that there is one God. If there is one God, is it possible that you and I have a different God? Is it possible that other people who proclaim there is one God can worship a God who is different from our God? Can Christians say Allah is different from their God, can Muslims say their God is different from the Christian God, can Jews say the Christian God and the Muslim God are different from their God?

Do we have the understanding that God exists, do we worship? If the way we worship is more important than God, what has happened to us, who have we become,

what is the point of our worship, our understanding of God? This has to do with attachment, it has to do with the self. As long as the self needs praise, needs the comfort that it is right and others are wrong, an understanding which makes the self more important, more worthy, as long as we believe that, we are in trouble. Once we are free of attachment, when we worship God as we have chosen to without being concerned about what others do, without insisting they choose our way, then we can enter a relationship with God, enter the reality which is God.

This does not mean we should give up our governing principles, nor does it mean we should change the way we do things, but it does mean we should be tolerant of others, it does mean we do not impose our way on others. Our way should be the way of example, revealing the conversion to God, revealing a melting in the presence of God, we should be that example.

There is no room for anger in religion, there is no room for anger in the worship of God, no room for extremes, yet we engage in anger, extremes and finger pointing, even though there is no place for comparisons in our worship of God. The command in scripture is simple and right to the point, it says you go your way and I go mine, you believe what you believe and I believe what I believe. This is not complicated, we do not need to discuss it or argue about it, we do not need to fight about it or be angry, and we do not need to be emotionally disturbed. We need to learn how to leave each other alone. Imagine people leaving each other alone; the world focuses on what happens when people do not leave each other alone.

We need to enter that open space where our attachments do not force us to bother someone else, where we are not bothered by someone else. Not only do unto others as

you would have them do unto you, do not bother others and do not be bothered by them. We should understand this kind of relationship on both an individual and a global basis. If this understanding were self-evident, people would have a much easier time.

There was a step in this direction at the founding of the United States with the separation of religion and government. It was a big step, one of the big things this country did, allowing people to form their own relationship to God, something we need to allow, we need to encourage within ourself and others. We are here to assist, to help, but not to compel. We need to act of our own volition whose truth lies in alignment with God's volition. If we are aligned with attachments to the world, we act with worldly volition, we act against our own best interests, not knowing who we are. This is something we can know only when we drop the attachments, when we make it critical to let go of things, critical not to tie ourself to movements, religions or groups which cloud the sense of who we are.

In the obliteration of selfhood, the relationship to the world is over, the relationship to attachment is over; it is only in this obliteration that reality can be seen, that truth can be seen. Let us allow ourself a glimpse of this self-annihilation, allow ourself release, take off the chains of karma and birth, of everything we were born into, everything we did with self-interest, the things we thought would push us ahead, monetarily, romantically, wherever we wanted to move. Let us drop these things; once we drop them clarity will emerge, the ability to see without being blinded by things other than God will emerge. Then a new life begins, a life of freedom untethered by attachments as we stop dragging all that baggage with us everywhere we go.

May God release each of us, may we be free, may we understand the great joy of freedom, understand the nature of burdens. Too often we think these burdens are the gifts we have been given, when the truth is they are our chains. May God release us from false understanding, from false perceptions, may we see the truth which is His alone.