

## Taming of the Mind

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**S**ri Ramakrishna describes the human mind, in his own inimitable way, as a seat fitted with a spring underneath, which remains pressed down so long as one keeps sitting on it, but springs up as soon as one moves out from there. By this example, Sri Ramakrishna conveys that, so long as a man is in touch with *satsanga* and good people, he acquires some God-like attributes; but as soon as he leaves *satsanga*, he reverts back to his old state of mind.<sup>1</sup> Such being the nature of human mind, it is naturally destined to play an important role in a man's life. Mind can be a friend or a foe. If the mind is a friend, the person's life will be successfully lived with happiness and fullness. But if the contrary happens i.e. if the mind is a foe, then the person's life will be miserable with a hellish existence.

The mind is a very powerful instrument with the potential of doing enormous good, or wreaking enormous havoc. Let us take the example of Arjuna of the *Mahabharata*. He was not only a great warrior, but also a great *Yogi*, a friend as well as a disciple of Sri Krishna. 'Arjuna is putting forth the doubt which everyone has. He says, "Verily, O Krishna, the mind is very, very fickle". *Cancelam hi manah krishna; hi* in Sanskrit means "it is very well known". *Pramāthi balavat dridham*, "it pulls me powerfully this way, that way". That is the nature of this mind; *tasyāham nigraham manye sudushkaram*, "its control and discipline I consider to be difficult"; *vāyoriva*, "like trying to catch the air".

So, (the verse) conveys the problem of dealing with the mind in the most luminous way. And it is good for us to know that it is not easy; it is hard. We cannot finish everything in six months and get away. And so Arjuna puts this question on our behalf...<sup>2</sup>

### Organs/Indriyas

To understand the mind, we need to understand the factors involved in it. We are aware that we have eleven organs, comprising five *karmendriyas* (organs of action, viz. speech, hands, legs, anus and genitals), five *jnānendriyas* (organs of perception, viz. sight, sound, smell, taste and touch) and one *antarindriya/ antahkarana* (mind). Our mind is different from the aforesaid *indriyas* and is indicated as *antarindriya/antahkarana* (internal sense), which assumes different names like *manas*—'The mind (*Manas*) is that modification of the internal instrument which considers the pros and cons of a subject (*Sankalpa* and *Vikalpa*)<sup>3</sup>, *buddhi* (Affirming/Confirming), *chitta*—'Memory (*Citta*) is that modification of the inner organ which is to remember'<sup>4</sup>, and *ahamkāra*—'Egoism (*Ahamkāra*) is that modification of the inner organ which is characterised by Self-consciousness'<sup>5</sup>, according to the different functions it performs. An example may clarify the situation. My *jnānendriya*—*chakshu* (eyes) sees a rose, my *antarindriya*—*manas* passes the image on to *chitta* (memory), which,

based on past memory, identifies it as rose and passes on the message to *buddhi* for confirmation, and then *ahamkāra* declares that I have seen a rose. The important fact to note is that the mind is not a part of the aforesaid ten *indriyas* (five *jnānendriyas* and five *karmendriyas*) and its importance lies in the fact that no *indriya* can work, or perform its function, without being attached to the mind. On the other hand, the mind can go on performing its function without these *indriyas*. The mind can introspect (become *antarmukha*) without being attached to them. Above all these is the *buddhi* (intelligence). Although the mind (*manas*) is supposed to be subservient to the intelligence (*buddhi*), it is so strong and obstinate that it sometimes overrides the intelligence (*buddhi*), and, that is when the problem starts, actually.

There is an interesting and perfect description of the relationship between the *jnānendriyas*, the mind and the intelligence in *Kathopanishad*. Here, the body is taken as the Chariot (*Ratha*), the Soul (*Jivātmā*) is the charioteer, the intelligence (*Buddhi*) is the driver, and the mind (*Manah*) is the bridle.<sup>6</sup> It further says that the senses i.e. the faculties of perception are the horses and that the roads through which the horses travel are the matters to be enjoyed or for enjoyment by the senses.<sup>7</sup> In the next stanza, it cautions us that if *buddhi* is always linked to a vacillating/unconcentrated/unyielding (*asamāhita*) *manas*, it becomes conscienceless (*vivekaheena*) and is lorded by *manas*, giving a free-hand (recklessness) to the senses.<sup>8</sup>

### Impact of innovations and digital technology

Hence, it goes without saying that the mind needs to be tamed and always controlled by the intelligence. Left untamed,

it can sometimes cause unthinkable damages. The problem is further aggravated by the modern day's fast lifestyle, exacerbated by intense competition, sky-high ambitions and technological breakthroughs. Technology is increasingly taking us towards a sedentary lifestyle with adverse effects on our health. Round-the-clock entertainment on various streaming services has increased sleeplessness, strain on eyes, obesity, cardiac ailments and has hit hard on our attention span. All this has led to a disturbed and stressed mind and body. This point has been succinctly presented by Swami Bodhamayananda: '...a person with a restless, uncontrolled mind is much more prone to stress than a man with a controlled mind.'<sup>9</sup> But these technological developments need to be supported by spiritual attributes; otherwise, they will definitely put the mind under stress and conflicts, the final outcome of which would be a hostile mind.

Today, our patience (*dhriti*) is put to enormous strain, which, probably, is the outcome of a fast lifestyle; but patience is also the primary requirement for a friendly mind. To further emphasise the importance of control of the mind, we may remember the virtues to be possessed or cultivated by a virtuous person viz. *Shama*, *Dama*, *Tapah*, *Shoucham*, *Kshānti*, *Saralatā*, *Jnāna*, *Vijnāna*, and *Āstikya*. To develop these virtues, one must at first possess both a mind (*manas*) and an intellect (*buddhi*) which are discerning. 'The resting of the mind steadfastly on its Goal (viz. Brahman), after having detached itself from manifold sense-objects by continually observing their defects, is called *Shama* or calmness,'<sup>10</sup> while 'turning both kinds of sense-organs away from sense-objects and placing them in their respective centres is called *Dama* or self-control....'<sup>11</sup> Once

these are practised, the other virtues usually follow.

### How to calm the *manas/buddhi*?

The question now arises—how to accomplish this arduous, seemingly impossible, job of controlling the obstinate mind? Admitting Arjuna's supplication,<sup>12</sup> Sri Krishna suggested two ways to achieve that viz. *Abhyāsa* and *Vairāgya*.<sup>13</sup> '*Abhyāsa* means repetition of some idea or thought of the mind on some mental plane;...*vairāgya* means absence of hankering for enjoyment of desirable things, seen or unseen, as a result of the practice of discerning their defects.'<sup>14</sup>

The importance of *Abhyāsa* is stated by Patanjali in his *Yoga Sūtras* thus: *Abhyāsa* or practice is the effort to attain to that mental peace. And that practice, when endowed with an uninterrupted and true devotional attitude for a long time, certainly becomes like a firm foundation.<sup>15</sup> The great sage Bhartrihari extols *Vairāgya* thus: 'In enjoyment is the fear of disease; in social position the fear of falling off; in wealth the fear of (hostile) kings; in adoration the fear of humiliation; in strength the fear of enemies; in beauty the fear of old age; in scholarship the fear of opponents; in virtue the fear of slander; and in the body the fear of death. Everything in this world is fraught with fear; renunciation alone is fearlessness.'<sup>16</sup>

These two ways, Sri Krishna assured, are achievable gradually over a period of time. Repeated practice of a particular activity over a period of time creates sort of a path to our sub-conscious mind, which then controls our actions, without us being conscious about it. We may call it habit, or reflex action. It is like a pianist or a typist doing her/his job immaculately without looking at the keyboard to know where the keys are, even once.

### *Bhakti* as a means to calm the *manas/buddhi*

Sri Krishna was fully aware that both the modes i.e., *Abhyāsa* and *Vairāgya*, suggested by Him to His beloved friend and disciple, Arjuna, were achievable but were difficult and time-taking. So, He suggested a relatively easier way and advised Arjuna to take the path of *Bhakti*. He says—'Those who fixing their mind on Me, worship Me, ever-steadfast, and endowed with supreme *Shraddhā*, they in My opinion, are the best versed in Yoga.'<sup>17</sup> Additionally, He provides an easy way out to tame the mind—'Fix thy mind on Me only, place thy intellect in Me: (then) thou shalt no doubt live in Me hereafter.'<sup>18</sup>

Sri Krishna while concluding his instructions to Arjuna in the *Gītā* says—'Occupy thy mind with Me, be devoted to Me, sacrifice to Me, bow down to Me. Thou shalt reach Myself; truly do I promise unto thee, (for) thou art dear to Me. Relinquishing all *Dharmas* take refuge in Me alone; I will liberate thee from all sins; grieve not.'<sup>19</sup> Moreover, *Bhakti* is the path prescribed for this Iron age (*Kaliyuga*). Sri Ramakrishna says—'For this Iron age it is communion with God by love (*Prema*), devotion (*Bhakti*) and self-surrender (*Ātmanivedanam*), as practised by the Rishi Nārada, that is most suitable.'<sup>20</sup>

Total concentration of the mind can be possible when the mind is calm. The calm mind, in turn, helps to bring about the control required for the *manas* and the *buddhi*. One should employ whatever means available to calm down the mind. In *Srimad Bhāgavatam*, Maharshi Nārada advises Yudhishtira that by whatever means, one should concentrate one's mind on Sri Krishna.<sup>21</sup> Constant practice with patience will calm the mind and ultimately bring it under control. Regarding *Vairāgya*, as explained above, almost on the same lines, Sri

Ramakrishna advises that purity of mind is an essential requirement of a blissful mind that can realise God. He explains the purity of mind in his own typical way: the mind is like a needle covered with mud, and God is like a magnet. The needle cannot be united with the magnet unless it is free from mud. Tears wash away the mud, which is nothing but lust, anger, greed and other evil tendencies, and the inclination to worldly enjoyments as well. As soon as the mud is washed away, the magnet attracts the needle, that is to say, man realises God. Only the pure in heart see God.<sup>22</sup> That is, in essence, called *Vairāgya*. On similar lines, Sri Ramakrishna's famous disciple, Swami Vivekananda, teaches on mind-control. In his own words: 'Before we can control the mind we must study it. We have to seize this unstable mind and drag it from its wanderings and fix it on one idea. Over and over again this must be done. By power of will we must get hold of the mind and make it stop and reflect upon the glory of God.'<sup>23</sup> Again, we are advised to be vigilant: 'Identify yourself with God, never with matter or with the mind.'<sup>24</sup>

### **Contribution of devotional singing toward development of *Bhakti***

In the *Srimad Bhāgavatam*, Sri Prahlāda states that there are nine types of devotion to God—'*Shravanam*—hearing of the Lord's divine leelā, *Kirtanam*—singing the Lord's glories, *Smaranam*—remembrance of the Lord at all times, *Pādasevanam*—serving the lotus feet of the Lord, *Archanam*—worshiping the Lord, *Vandanam*—prayers and prostrations to the Lord, *Dāsyam*—serving the Lord, the Master, as a *Dāsa*, *Sakhyam*—developing an attitude of friendship with the Lord, and *Ātmanivedanam*—surrendering oneself to the Lord.'<sup>25</sup> It appears to be very relevant to remember here the words of Swami

Vireswaranandaji Maharaj, very correctly pointing out that we do everything to keep our body fit and healthy so that we can work and earn, but do not have least concern for our mind, which primarily needs to be kept healthy to ensure us a joyful existence. He further elaborates that a very healthy mind stays so restful and calm that even if some sorrowful, painful or disturbing events happen, the mind will not be disturbed even a little but will be retaining its calmness.<sup>26</sup> If we sincerely believe that a healthy mind ensures happiness and a better life, then, it is our duty, not just a mere moral teaching, to ensure that the mind exists always in a state of bliss. In devotion, there is the beautiful relation that one can develop with the beloved, which helps the mind to get enraptured to the exclusion of all else (*uparati*) easily.

The contributions made by our folk songs, especially, *bhakti geetis*, *kāli kirtans*, *shyāmā sangeet*, *kirtans* (especially on Sri Radha and Sri Krishna) and *bāul* songs in describing and understanding the mind and keeping it under control, are noteworthy. These devotional songs, which are mystical in nature, being easily comprehensible, are more appealing to the common people than our scriptures and other devotional literature. Our great poet, Rabindranath, was very much impressed by our *bāul* songs and he loved to draw upon them to improvise the tunes as well as the themes of some of his most loved songs and poems.

### **Contribution of the Bhakti Movement saints towards understanding the mind and taming it**

It may not be out of place to mention here some of our Bhakti Movement saints. Lalan Fakir, a famous *bāul* singer, expresses *Ātmatattva* and the intricacies of the mind in such a lucid manner that they become

easily understandable, with an immediate appeal to everyone's heart. In one of his songs he expresses his yearning to unite with his beloved (*Ātman*)—‘When shall I meet my heart's beloved (*Moner Mānush*).’ Chanting of the name of God, Dispassion, *Avidyā* (Ignorance), Death, *Kāla* (Time), *Karma*, Devotion, Liberation, etc., are the themes common in the songs of Ramprasad Sen. In one of his songs he eulogises the power of the name of God—‘I have dedicated my Self at the feet of the Fearless (*Kāli*).’ One often comes across Ramprasad's songs in the *Kathamrita (The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna)*. Sri Ramakrishna frequently sang his compositions to illustrate the teachings. Similarly, there are songs written by Kamalakanta Bhattacharya, Premik Maharaj (who established the Andul Kali Kirtan Samiti), Raja Ramakrishna and others, where devotion to *Shakti* is predominant. One very famous and appealing *bāul* song, sung in the tune of *kirtan* by the singers of the Andul Kali Kirtan Samiti is: O mind, why do you keep yourself in this world? Let's go to that city, where the full moon (beloved/*Ātman*) resides in joy, day and night. Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi had a close rapport with Premik Maharaj's Kali Kirtan Samiti and she listened to their songs several times at Belur Math.<sup>27</sup>

The devotion to the Beloved has been compared to wealth in one of Mira Bai's popular songs—I have been given the richness of God's name. Devotional songs like these are found throughout the Indian subcontinent in various languages. Sant Tukaram's *Abhangas* (meaning—without interruption or break), from Maharashtra, praise the need for holy company to remove the worldliness in oneself, which in turn will give rise to the love of God. He says—‘So

powerful are the saints that if you even touch the dust of their feet, the seed of all your desires will be burnt to a crisp...’ Our holy land of India has produced stalwarts from almost each and every region like, Tulsidas, Surdas (Uttar Pradesh), Purandara Dasa (Karnataka), Tyagaraja, Annamayacharya (Andhra Pradesh), Sant Jnaneswar (Maharashtra), Guru Nanak (Punjab), Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (Bengal), along with the Nayanars and Alwars (Tamil Nadu), to name a few. They were more well known in the regions that they dwelled and preached in, since they spoke the language of the common people. All their compositions take our minds to an exalted plane and provide us with the solace and peace that the modern man is in search of.

Devotion is easily attained through the grace of God. One has to sincerely and earnestly seek for the Divine grace to achieve a calm and steady mind. Our efforts towards achieving the calmness of the mind go a long way in improving our physical well-being as well. Ultimately, the Mind is the main cause of bondage and salvation of all human beings. A mind attached to objects is said to be the cause of bondage and a mind devoid of desires and resolutions is said to be the cause of salvation.<sup>28</sup> Taming the unruly mind may not be easy, but, we have various ways prescribed from time immemorial. These paths were followed by subsequent sages, devotees and *yogis*, who, time and again, vouched for the validity of these practices. ‘The choral singing in praise of the Supreme Lord easily brings about complete absorption in Him and becomes the source of joy and contentment. The chanting of the name of the Lord is a panacea for all sorrows and fears that the human beings are afflicted with, and singing His excellences forms a veritable boat for crossing the ocean of *samsāra*.’<sup>29</sup> ■

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