

Yogic Understanding of the Mind

He who knows the receptacle (ayatana) verily becomes the receptacle of his people. Mind is verily the receptacle (of all our knowledge).—
Chhandogya Upanishad

Happiness has always been the prime aim of every human being. All your activities are directed towards acquiring maximum happiness in life. However, through the deluded notion that objects will provide happiness, you search for it outside. The result is that in spite of lifelong effort, there is disappointment.

Real and lasting happiness lies within. This is not perceived because the mind is usually completely externalized. As long as the mind is restlessly wandering amid objects, ever fluctuating, excited, agitated and uncontrolled, this true joy cannot be realized and enjoyed. To control the restless mind and perfectly still all thoughts and cravings remains our greatest problem.

For gaining mastery over the mind, you have to know what it is, how it works, how it deceives you at every turn and by what methods it can be subdued. The vast majority of people do not know the existence of the mind and its operations. Modern doctors know only a fragment of the mind. It is only the yogis and those who practise meditation and introspection that know the existence of the mind, its nature, ways and subtle workings. They also know the various methods of subduing the mind.

Mind is one of the ashta-prakritis. In the Bhagavad Gita (7:4), it is said:
Bhoomiraapo'nalo vaayuh kham mano buddhireva cha;Ahamkaara
iteeyam me bhinnaa prakritirashtadhaa.

Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, reason and egoism – these constitute the eightfold division of My Nature.

How the mind originated

Mind is nothing but atma shakti, power of the self. It is through mind that Brahman manifests Himself as the differentiated universe with heterogeneous objects. It has been said in the Aitareya Upanishad (1:3-4):

Brahma thought, 'There, indeed, are the worlds; I shall create the protectors of the worlds.' He gathered the Purusha from out of the waters and fashioned him. He heated him by the heat of meditation. When he was thus heated, his heart burst out. From the heart, the mind came; from the mind, the moon, the presiding deity of the mind.

Heart is the seat of the mind; therefore, the mind emerged when the heart

burst out. In samadhi, the mind goes to its original seat, the heart. In sleep also, it rests in the heart with a veil of ignorance between it and Brahman.

Cosmic mind and individual mind

Hiranyagarbha is the term used in the scriptures for cosmic mind. It is also called Karya Brahman and sambhuti, for it is the sum total (samashiti) of all minds. Hiranyagarbha is the cosmic prana, the sutratman (the conscious energy which operates in the macrocosmos), and represents the cosmic powerhouse. The different jivas, individual beings, represent the different, small bulbs. Electricity from the powerhouse flows through the insulated copper wires into the bulbs. Similarly, power from hiranyagarbha flows into jivas. The individual mind is ever connected with the cosmic mind.

The individual mind is also in close contact with other individual minds. As your mind evolves, you come into conscious experience of the mental currents, with the minds of others, near and distant, living and dead. The individual mind of A, although separated from the mind substance of other individuals, B, C, D, E, X, Y, etc. by a thin wall of the finest matter, is really in touch with the other apparently separated minds and with the universal mind of which it forms a part.

If A is a friend of B, A's mind is connected with B's mind. The minds of friends and relatives of A are attached to A's mind. Several minds are similarly linked to B's mind also. The minds of those who are attached to A's mind are, therefore, connected in turn with the minds of those who are hanging on B's mind. In this manner, one mind is in touch with all the minds in the whole world. This is the Vibhu theory of mind of raja yoga.

The mental body

Mind is atomic, according to Nyaya, the Indian school of logic. It is all-pervading, according to Patanjali Maharshi's school of raja yoga and is of middling size (same size as that of the body), according to the Vedantic school.

Mind is material, made up of subtle matter. Just as the physical body is composed of solid, liquid and gaseous matter, so also the mind is made of subtle matter of various grades of density with different rates of vibration. A raja yogi penetrates through different layers of the mind by intense sadhana.

The mental body or manomaya kosha varies in different people. It is composed of coarse or finer matter, according to the needs of the more or less unfolded consciousness connected with it. In the learned, it is active and well defined; in the undeveloped, it is cloudy and ill defined. There are several zones or slices in the mental body just as there are various compartments in the brain for particular types of thought. During intense

anger, for example, the whole mind is suffused with the black hue of malice and ill-will, from which fiery arrows of anger dart forth.

Fourfold mind or antahkarana chatushtaya

Antahkarana is the term used by Vedantins to include manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara. When used in a broad sense, it means the internal instrument. Antah means internal, karana means instrument. It is the inner instrument (as distinguished from bahyakarana, outer instrument or the senses) through which you sense, perceive, think and reason.

Ahamkara, ego, is derived from the prithvi (earth) tanmatra. (Tanmatras are subtle elements from which the five gross elements are derived.) Chitta, consciousness, is derived from jala (water) tanmatra; buddhi, discriminative mind, from agni (fire) tanmatra; manas, finite mind, from vayu (air) tanmatra; heart from akasha (space) tanmatra.

Mind is chetan (intelligent) when compared with the senses. It is jada (non-intelligent) when compared with buddhi. In Sankhya philosophy, buddhi is will and intellect combined. Some put chitta under mind and ahamkara under buddhi. Manas, buddhi, chitta and ahamkara are only functional aspects of the mind. Manas has all things for its objects and extends through the past, present and future; it is one, but has various functions. You are a judge when you exercise your judicial powers in the court. You are a cook when you work in the kitchen. You are the president of an association when you sit on the chair in that capacity. You are the same person, but you function differently and are called by different names according to those different functions. Similarly, when the mind does sankalpa-vikalpa (will-thought and doubt), it is called manas; when it discriminates and decides, it is buddhi; when it self-arrogates, it is ahamkara; when it is the storehouse of samskaras and seat of memory and also when it performs concentration and enquiry, it is chitta.

Who gave coolness to water, warmth to fire, motion to air? These qualities are their very nature. Even so, mind has its swabhava, inherent nature, of running towards objects, buddhi of determining, ahamkara of self-assertion and self-identification, chitta of thinking of those objects which are identified by ahamkara. When the mind is at work, buddhi and ahamkara work simultaneously along with the mind. Mind, buddhi and ahamkara work in healthy co-operation. Mind thinks whether a certain thing is good or bad. Buddhi comes in for determination. It is buddhi which discriminates the vishaya, subject. The swarupa, essential form, of mind is thought only. It is discriminative when it forwards the decisions of buddhi, the messages from buddhi, to the organs of action for execution. The mind selects, attends and rejects.

The three avasthas

Mind has three avasthas or states: jagrat (waking state), swapna (dreaming state) and sushupti (deep sleep state).

Jagrat avastha: The individual soul is called awake as long as it is connected with the various external objects by means of the modifications of the mind, which constitute limiting adjuncts of the soul. The mind apprehends the external objects and identifies itself with the gross body, which is one of the external objects. During the waking state, the mind occupies the brain.

Swapna avastha: When the mind enters the hita nadi, which proceeds from the heart and surrounds the great membrane around the heart, the individual soul or jiva experiences the state of dream. In the dream state, the senses are quiet and absorbed in the mind. Mind alone plays during dream. There is no land, sea, horse or elephant in dream, but the mind creates everything out of its own body, out of the materials supplied from the waking consciousness. The mind itself assumes the various forms of bee, flower, mountain, elephant, horse, river, etc. It is the subject and object as well. The seer and the seen are one. Perception takes place through the internal organ called manas.

Sushupti avastha: When the mind enters the puritat nadi, the state of deep sleep sets in. In dridha sushupti (dreamless sleep), you have a cessation of empirical consciousness. There is no play of the mind in this state. There is neither raga nor dwesha (attraction or repulsion, like or dislike). The mind dissolves into its cause. Manolaya (involution of the mind) takes place.

This state of profound sleep is not a complete non-being or negative, for such a hypothesis conflicts with the later recollections of a happy repose of sleep. The self continues to exist, though it is bereft of all experiences. The consciousness is continuous. You feel you have existed even during sleep as soon as you are awake. Vedantins build their philosophy around this sushupti avastha. This stage gives them the clue to the non-dual or advaitic state.

Shankara observes in the Chhandogya Upanishad that the phenomenon of duality caused by the action of the mind is present in the waking and dreaming states only, but absent in the deep sleep state. In waking and dreaming states, there is play of thoughts (and the simultaneous occurrence of names and forms) and hence the world as well. In dreamless sleep, there are no thoughts and hence, there is no world either. We taste the nature of absolute bliss in dreamless sleep.

The three gunas

The mind has three gunas or qualities: sattwa (light, bliss, goodness), rajas (passion, motion) and tamas (inertia, darkness). There are three vrittis in the mind corresponding to the three gunas. Santa vritti (peace) comes out of sattwa guna, ghora vritti (violence) from rajo guna and mudha vritti (ignorance) from tamo guna. Equilibrium or balance is santa vritti; anger is ghora vritti; laziness (alasya), carelessness (pramada) and drowsiness (tandri) are mudha vrittis.

Characteristics of sattwa guna: Sattwa guna is purity. It is prakasha, illumination, light. It is a force favourable for the attainment of moksha. The effect of sattwa guna is brahmavichara (enquiry or search for truth; differentiation between sat and asat, real and unreal.)

A sattwic mind is always steady. It finds delight internally. It may stick to one place indefinitely. It keeps friendship with persons for a long, long time. It can read the scriptures for any number of days. It can live on simple food for years together without grumbling.

During sattwic moments, when there is preponderance of pure sattwa in the mind, you are in touch with the divine source owing to the cleanness of the mind mirror and feel inspired. There is purity of thought (bhava samshuddhi) and purity of heart (sattwa samshuddhi). It is the fourth jnana bhumi or stage of jnana.

Characteristics of rajo guna: Rajo guna is a hostile force that pulls you down into samsara. It represents negative qualities such as pride and anger. The rajasic mind always wants new sensations and variety. It has a tendency to look into the defects of others, remembers the wrongs done by others and easily forgets their good acts. It splits, separates and shows plurality whereas a sattwic mind unifies.

The three doshas

Milk is agreeable to some and disagreeable to others. There is nothing wrong with milk itself. Surely, there is something wrong with the mind. The viewpoint differs in these cases owing to the dosha of the mind.

Dosha means fault or defect. Mala (impurity), vikshepa (tossing), avarana (veil of ignorance) are the threefold defects of the mind. The mind is tossed about among objects of love and hatred like a feather in a stormy wind. Not resting on any object firmly, it is characterized by an excessive fluctuating power. It will fluctuate and be confused, will flit away from an object and then return to it, will rejoice in vain and be intoxicated with ahamkara, egoism. The mind becomes a prey to fear through its fluctuation.

The mind should be rendered fit for salvation, fit to approach its substratum, its father, Brahman by removing the three doshas. Mala (such as lust, anger, greed, delusion, pride, jealousy) is removed by performing nishkama karma, selfless service. Vikshepa is removed by upasana, trataka, pranayama and raja yoga. Avarana is removed by jnana, wisdom, study of spiritual literature, nididhyasana, deep meditation, and abheda chintan, constant contemplation, after duly understanding the right significance of the mahavakya, Tat Tvam Asi, Thou Art That.

The six important powers of the mind

There are three principal shaktis (powers, potencies) in the mind: ichha

shakti (will), kriya shakti (action) and jnana shakti (knowledge). A desire arises in the mind. This is ichha shakti. The mind exerts to have this desire gratified. This is kriya shakti. It plans, schemes and finds out methods, etc. for the achievement of the desired object. This is jnana shakti. There are also six other important powers of the mind: vedana shakti (power of perception), smarana shakti or smriti shakti (power of memory), bhavana shakti (power of imagination), manisha shakti (power of judgement), sankalpa shakti (will or volition) and dharana shakti (power to hold).

Vedana shakti: Vedana shakti is the power of cognition or sensation, or power of perception and knowing through the indriyas or senses (indriya jnana or sense knowledge).

Smriti shakti: Smriti shakti does three things. It grasps. It holds. It brings to memory whenever a thing is needed. Though the power of grasping is performed by vedana shakti, smriti shakti also participates in the act of grasping. Suppose you hear the sound of a bell in the temple. The memory shakti grasps it and retains it. When you again hear the sound of the temple bell, it at once reminds you, "This is the temple bell. This is not the hostel bell."

Bhavana shakti: You have never seen an elephant riding a cycle. When a man, who has actually seen it, gives you a description, your mind forms a mental picture at once. This is done by the bhavana shakti (power of imagination) of the mind.

Manisha shakti: Power of comparing and contrasting, drawing inferences, discussion, conclusion, all belong to manisha shakti of the mind. The manisha shakti (power of judgement) has two subdivisions, nirnaya (ascertainment) and tarka (logical reasoning).

A is mortal. B is mortal. C is mortal. Therefore, all men are mortal. Mr. Choudhary is a man. Therefore, Mr. Choudhary is mortal. This kind of drawing of conclusions through deductive and inductive logic with major and minor premises and middle term or through the five parts of syllogistic reasoning of the system of Nyaya are performed by manisha shakti of the mind.

Sankalpa shakti: Will is atma shakti. It is the dynamic aspect of Brahman. Will is Brahman in motion. In Vedanta, will plays a very conspicuous part. Some say that will is greater than imagination. Among the Vedantins, will is regarded as a greater faculty than imagination. What will imagination do without the impelling power of the will to execute the desires, wishes and ideals?

There is correlation, co-ordination and co-operation among the different principles in the mind. Therefore, who can say which is great or small, important or unimportant when each depends on the other for its power? It cannot be truly said that one is greater than the other, for their independence and power are derived from each other.

Dharana shakti: Dharana shakti (power to hold) is really a part of memory or smarana shakti. In common parlance, we say, "Mr. Ramakrishna is a man of good dharana in Vedanta." Here, it means that Mr. Ramakrishna holds fixed and steady ideas in Vedanta. He cannot be changed by anybody. He does not possess a wavering nature. He sticks to Vedanta alone and nobody can shake him.

How to unfold latent powers of the mind

There are many higher mental faculties latent in man. The mind is a magazine of power. The unfoldment of these latent, psychic powers is possible through proper sadhana. The sadhana should be systematic, constant and intense. The student must have reached the proper stage of development. There must be genuine faith also. Only then is success possible.

The mind is no doubt extremely turbulent. However, through repeated attempts you can subdue it perfectly. You are the master of the mind. By practice and non-attachment, assert your mastery. Feel the power, bliss and splendour that result from self-conquest. The only true laboratory is the mind. Study it, test it and then go beyond it. Remember, mind is the bridge that connects the human with the divine.