

Developing a Steady Mind¹

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In physics we are told that waves travel at the rate of 300,000 kilometers per second and is perhaps the fastest. However the fastest entity known to mankind is the mind. In a fraction of a second our mind can go to our relatives home in New Jersey, and from there to a village in the deepest forest in the Western Ghats and at the same time can also go to *Yama Loka* (whatever it means) or *Vaikunta* and return to the place where the physical body is currently residing. If you have an iota of doubt about your mind's capability, then sit in one place and close your eyes for 15 minutes. You will experience this power of the mind.

Mind and Its Capabilities

Speed is just one aspect of the mind. The mind is endowed with many more unique features. The mind has the capability to process many such things simultaneously. Clearly it appears to be an extraordinary capability that we all seem to have inherently in us. What can this rare capability do to us is an interesting question. Imagine that we have a machine with us that has enormous power (1000 horsepower). The machine can do a variety of chores for us. It can pull objects, crush, press, powder, mix, etc. Will the machine be useful for us? Will it do good for us? The answer to this question is both yes and no.

If we do not know how to operate this machine and control it (such as operating it as per standards, properly switching on, switching off etc.), then it can be a great source of trouble for us. A faulty operation may cost our limbs. Sometime the machine itself may get damaged necessitating major repairs, replacement etc. At the extreme it can also fatally knock us down or inflict such damage on us that we may find it hard to recover from it. On the other hand, if we know how to operate the machine and maintain it properly, it can be a great source of prosperity. We may be able to put it to gainful use and benefit from it.

In some sense, the human mind is very similar to this machine. If we do prolonged practice and control of the mind, then its extraordinary capability of processing multiple things at the same time could be put to good use. At one level it can help us to be more productive in our daily life and do some wonderful things. Living examples of this are the *aṣṭāvadhānis* (who can do eight things at the same time) and *śatāvadhānis* (who can demonstrate the capability of processing 100 things at the same time). At another level, it can help us turn our attention very well towards the spiritual life. Great Saints and Rishis are shining examples of this category.

On the other hand, if we are unable to take control of the mind, the consequences can be very serious and we may face a similar situation as in the case of the machine example illustrated above. An uncontrolled mind is like a bunch of horses let loose. It will wander all over the place, and bring back copious and endless thoughts. For example, consider a simple issue of going from Bangalore to Chennai. What turns out to be a simple thing can become

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quite complex if the mind is not in control. In an uncontrolled state it will bring 100's of thoughts related to this. For example, the mind will point to the impending dangers of travelling by each mode (such as bus, train, car, air plane etc.), some of the positive and negative events pertaining to the travel, challenges and surprises that one can face, the desirability of travelling alone vis-à-vis with a group, issues pertaining to night travel and day travel and so on. For a person with an uncontrolled mind, this list of thoughts can be truly endless. This invariably often leads an individual to a state of mental agitation.

Therefore, it is our natural curiosity to know what else this mind is capable of and what should we do to benefit from its capabilities. This is a subject matter that Lord Krishna has dealt in great detail in the *Gītā* in several verses. The first step in this journey is developing a steady mind. We shall see one of them in this article.

Developing a steady mind

If a simple act of going from Bangalore to Chennai could be processed so elaborately and intensely by one's mind, think about the consequences of taking more serious decisions in one's personal, professional or social life. The mind will keep dragging us to a number of desires, objects and entities in our life. Letting it to run its own course leads us to a "state of uncontrolled mind". Therefore, Lord Krishna advises that the first step to develop a steady mind is not to go after the mind as it wanders all over (*manogatān sarvān kāmān prajahāti*).

The question that naturally comes to us, what do we then do with the mind. It has the tendency to always go after something. If we do not let it feed on the "world outside", it may be hard to retain it. Therefore, Lord Krishna advises that when the mind is trained to feed on the "world inside" it will stop looking for the objects outside. After a prolonged training, the mind will begin to revel in the "world inside" (*ātmanyevātmanā tuṣṭaḥ*). When one reaches such a stage, he/she will truly be able to develop a steady mind.

प्रजहाति यदा कामान् सर्वान्पार्थ मनोगतान् ।
आत्मन्येवात्मना तुष्टः स्थितप्रज्ञस्तदोच्यते ॥ 2.55

*prajahāti yadā kāmān sarvān-pārtha manogatān
ātmanyevātmanā tuṣṭaḥ sthita-prajñastadā ucyate*

A path for Self-evolution

Training the mind to revel in the *world within* does not amount dismissing the *world outside* with hatred and contempt. It does not also mean getting disinterested with the world outside. It will merely reorient our perspectives about the world outside in a way that we make more meaning out of our life, choices and decisions that we make. The first stage of this journey will narrow down our thought waves from 1000's per minute to 100's per minute and so on. This will make the mind more serene.

Contrary to the modern thinking of "brain storming", this will help us in "brain stilling". If we storm our brain with 100's of thoughts it can at best help us gather some interesting ideas

from that storm. On the other hand, if we still our brain using the tool of a steady mind, we will become very reflective and deep in our thoughts. It will help us take decisions in calmness and a serene state of mind. In the second stage, this exercise of training the mind to revel in the *world within* will greatly facilitate our spiritual journey. We will begin to relate with the *world outside* with a different perspective and meaning.

The question that still remains unanswered is how do we reorient our mind in such a manner that it almost does a u-turn from the *world outside* to the *world within*. The entire Indian wisdom has addressed this in great detail. The *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali, the *bhakti*, *jñāna* and *rāja mārgas*, teachings of Lord Krishna in the *Gītā* are a few to name. We have plenty of resources and Gurus who are willing to shower their grace on us and help us travel on this path. We need to get deeply convinced about this and develop *śraddha*. Once we develop this, *guru kṛpā* and *bhagavat kaṭākṣa* will take us on this journey.