

# Mind – One’s own friend or enemy?

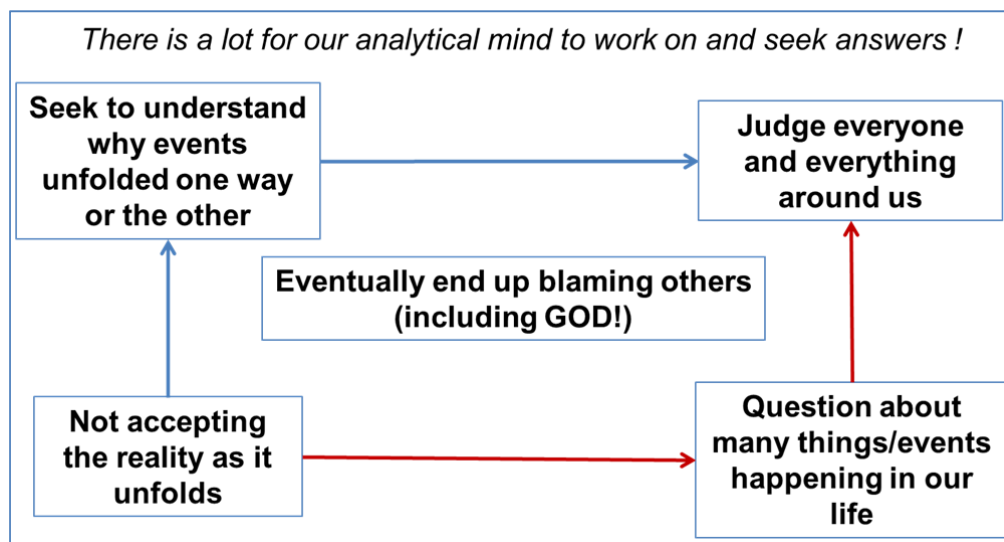
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Life is after all a roller coaster ride for us. Sometimes the going is great and at other times it is indeed bad. For most of us handling the situation when the going is bad is a big challenge. The moment something bad happens, it seems that there is a lot of work cut out for our analytical mind. How can things go wrong? Why is it that people find fault with me? Why am I so unlucky despite putting genuine hard work? There are a stream of thoughts and multitude of questions such as this spring up. We feel the urge to find answers to these questions. Therefore in right earnest the mind begins its job and sets on the journey to seek answers for the problem that we are going through. The figure below portrays the agenda for the mind.

## Understand the mind game

The starting point of this analysis is our inability to accept the reality as it unfolds in front of us. Since this is unacceptable we travel in our mind space in two dimensions:

- (a) We seek to understand why events unfolded in the manner it is and resulted in problems for us. In this journey we will soon end up in a situation where we will begin to judge everyone and everything around us.
- (b) We also seek to question many things about the events happening around us which created the bad situation for us. Why did the neighbor shout at me when I was not at all at fault? Why did the company pick-up not turn up today morning? Why did my spouse yell at me when the mistake was that of my mother-in-law? Why did my friend lie when he was asked to clarify? This list is rather long... In any case this journey will also lead us to judge everyone and everything around us.



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This mind journey will go on and it will eventually find fault with everyone else including with God. This is not a hypothetical analysis of human psychology. Every day we all go through several such thought processes, albeit in varying magnitude and duration. This is a very tiring process and often drains our enthusiasm, makes us feel low and takes away valuable time. We also become victims of the powerful forces and thought processes of the mind.

The question that comes to us naturally is what is this apparatus called mind? What can we do with this and how else it can influence our psychological health? To find some answers to these questions let us turn our attention to two *ślokas* from chapter 6 of *Bhagavad Gītā*.

### Dual Role of the Mind

Shri Krishna says we need to lift (*uddharet*) our “self” (*ātmānam*) to higher levels of our evolution using our mind (*ātmanā*) and not destroy our “self” (*na-ātmānam-avasādayet*). Through this he indicates that the mind is capable of both and we need to make our choice. Therefore he concludes that the mind can be a friend to one “self” (*ātmaiva hyātmano bandhuḥ*) or it can be the foe (*ātmaiva ripurātmanaḥ*). Shri Krishna proceeds further in the next *śloka* to define when the mind becomes the friend and when it becomes the foe.

उद्धरेदात्मनात्मानं नात्मानमवसादयेत् ।  
आत्मैव ह्यात्मनो बन्धुः आत्मैव रिपुरात्मनः ॥ 6.05

*uddharet-ātmanā-ātmānam na-ātmānam-avasādayet*  
*ātmaiva hyātmano bandhuḥ ātmaiva ripurātmanaḥ*

बन्धुरात्मात्मनस्तस्य येनात्मैवात्मना जितः ।  
अनात्मनस्तु शत्रुत्वे वर्तेतात्मैव शत्रुवत् ॥ 6.06

*bandhurātmāt-manas-tasya yenātmāivātmanā jitaḥ*  
*anātmānastu śaturtve varteta-ātmaiva śaturvat*

That person who (*vena*) is able to win (*jitaḥ*) over his mind (*ātmaiva*) by his own “self” (*ātmanā*) will find his mind (*manas-tasya*) to be a friend to his/her “self” (*bandhurātmāt*). On the other hand, for a person who finds his mind to be playing spoilt sport all the time, it will be (*varteta*) an enemy for his/her “self” (*ātmaiva śaturvat*).

The most important implication of these two *ślokas* is that Shri Krishna has pointed to the mind as an apparatus separate from oneself. Recognizing this reality itself will be a very significant and the first step in our journey of “managing” our mind.

## Mind Management

The main message that we have in these two *ślokas* is that we need to win over our mind. Therefore, we need to have more clarity on this aspect. What do we mean by winning over the mind? In simple terms, we do not let loose the mind so that it can go astray (as we see in the figure above and the accompanying discussions). Letting loose the mind means the *buddhi* refuses to enter into the situation and lets the mind to call the shots and influence all the choices and behavioural patterns that one needs to exhibit in a given situation.

For example, a person worked hard for the whole year and was very hopeful of getting a promotion or a salary hike. However, when it was announced in the office his/her name was not to be found. The question is how one should respond to this information. If mind takes the control of the situation it has a tendency to push us towards emotions such as anger, hatred, pity, fear, depression etc. This in turn will guide our response behavior which can vary from committing suicide to unleashing violence at one extreme level to stopping eating, socializing etc. at another level. This will never positively contribute to the development of the character and personality of an individual both from a spiritual and materialistic perspective.

On the other hand, if the control is taken over by the *buddhi*, the response patterns may be very different. There could be a greater degree of objectivity in the analysis of the situation and the type of response behaviour exhibited. For instance, the first conclusion we could have come to is that there is no point in mulling over and repenting on an issue which is dead and past (after all the decisions have been made and communicated formally). This will pave way for thinking more constructively how one can gather oneself from the situation and move forward. Also taking the control away from mind will ensure that the emotions do not continue to keep pouring out for a long time. The state of mind will return back to normal soon.

How can one get to this mode of shifting the control from mind to *buddhi*? It pertains to the issue of forming a habit. Mind is often used to the habit of doing something or the other (through a continuous stream of thoughts). Therefore the first step is to slow down the stream of thoughts that the mind is going through. For example, if the mind is very agitated it may process say at the rate of 100 thoughts per minute or so. We need to bring this down slowly from 100 to 50, later to 20 and so on. This tapering of thoughts will go a long way in winning over the mind. When the mind is devoid of thoughts, it has practically no motivation to call the shots in an emerging situation.

In order to taper the thoughts as a first step in this process one can give something else to the mind to focus on rather than the problem on hand. This is best achieved through some form of *dhyānam* or meditation.