

# Taming the All Powerful Mind

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I am in the midst of a meeting – There is the ring of the bell of the wall clock – That reminds me of the temple that I visited today morning – I am reminded of the tall person who mentioned about his daughter, who is in Chicago – My memory goes to the visit that I made to Chicago 14 years ago – I stayed in my brother’s friend’s house – His daughter is Lakshmi – I am now reminded of the next street neighbour of the same name – She served us Masala Dosa when we visited their house last week – Hotel Saravana Bhavan makes good Masala Dosa – Masala Dosa contains onions – Onions are not Sattvic food and is taboo – My mother-in-law does not eat onions – When onion prices went up Delhi government lost the elections – Price rise is the problem that we face today – My servant maid keeps demanding more salary - ...

Are you wondering what is going on here? This is the transcript of the wandering mind of a person for *a few seconds* when he/she is in a normal mood. Imagine what will happen if this person is agitated. The mind will perhaps wander at five times this speed. If only everybody in the whole world began to prepare a transcript of everything that the mind wandered about in the manner demonstrated above in a piece of paper, we will wipe off the entire vegetation in a few days.

## Mind – The most powerful apparatus that we have

Of all the apparatuses that we have nothing comes closest to the mind. By apparatus we generally mean instrument, tools, materials, etc., having a particular function or intended for a specific use. Normally, there is a sense of ownership for an apparatus. This implies that the possessor has the freedom and control to use it in the manner he/she wants. However, mind is a unique apparatus. This is because while we may own it, it is nearly impossible to control it in the same manner as we would do with any other apparatus that we may possess. In fact most of our problems in personal, professional or social life are intricately connected to the degree to which we are able to control the mind. The reality is for most of us, the mind controls us rather than we trying to even gather it in the first place.

There are three reasons why the mind is considered very powerful:

- (a) It has the habit of being a disobedient servant. Once a bald headed person went to a religious master who claimed to have found a magic oil. He claimed that by applying the oil for 7 days, the baldness will disappear. The master gave him the oil and told him that there was only one condition for success. Every day when he applied, he should not think of the monkey. The person came back and as everyday he took a few drops of oil, the thing that came to his mind was the monkey.
- (b) Mind has a significant level of control on all *indriyas*. As things seem to work, mind is the *first entity* to receive all the signals that *jñānedriyas* gather from the “world outside”. Similarly mind is the *last entity* in the chain of command to provide the

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marching orders for the *karmendriyas* to engage with the “world outside”. Therefore, mind has the greater propensity to influence how as an individual we deal with the “world outside”.

- (c) Mind has enormous potential to work its way the moment it is threatened. Consider the situation where the child does not want to study medicine, although the parents are putting pressure. The mind will get activated and process enormous information to argue, resist and even to non-cooperate for a very long period of time. A senior manager in a multi-national firm, a priest in a temple or a family member will show identical behavior when they are not in line with what is being asked of them. In management parlance, this is called mind-set inertia

Given these attributes of the mind, a question that looms large on our face is how can one obtain mind control through meditation, despite so many benefits of such an exercise. In fact Arjuna faced a similar situation when Shri Krishna asked him to do *dhyāna yoga*. We shall see what we have to learn from this conversation between Arjuna and Krishna by looking at two *ślokas* from Chapter 6 of *Bhagavad Gītā*.

### Handling an all wavering mind

It was no wonder that Arjuna first confessed to Krishna that his mind is fickle and wavering (*caṃcalaṃ hi manaḥ*) all the time. Moreover, he also felt that the mind is tormenting or churning in nature (*pramāthiḥ*) and very strong and unyielding (*balavaddṛḍham*). Given these attributes he felt (*manye*) that trying to get the mind under one’s own control (*tasyāhaṃ nigrahaṃ*) is akin to catching and holding the air in an open space (*vāyoriva suduṣkaram*).

चंचलं हि मनः कृष्ण प्रमाथि बलवद्दृढम् ।

तस्याहं निग्रहं मन्ये वायोरिव सुदुष्करम् ॥ 6.34

*caṃcalaṃ hi manaḥ kṛṣṇa pramāthi balavaddṛḍham*  
*tasyāhaṃ nigrahaṃ manye vāyoriva suduṣkaram*

The greatness of the text *Gītā* lies in the degree of realism with which Shri Krishna has addressed several issues raised during the conversation. He first agrees entirely with Arjuna’s view point (*asaṃśayaṃ mahābhāho*) by acknowledging the fact that the mind is always wavering in nature and is very hard to keep it under one’s own sway (*mano durnigrahaṃ calam*). However, he pointed that one needs two type of efforts to succeed in this process. One is continuous practice (*abhyāsa*) and the other is to develop a certain degree of dispassion (*vairāgya*) over time.

असंशयं महाबाहो मनो दुर्निग्रहं चलम् ।

अभ्यासेन तु कौन्तेय वैराग्येण च गृह्यते ॥ 6.35

*asaṃśayaṃ mahābhāho mano durnigrahaṃ calam*  
*abhyāsena tu kaunteya vairāgyeṇa ca grhyate*

## The logic of *Abhyāsa* and *Vairāgya*

While agreeing with Arjuna's view point, Shri Krishna in his characteristic style gave a curt reply as to how to succeed in this process. At the outset it looks too simplistic and rather misleading. We need to explore carefully what is implied in this reply. It is a matter of common sense that the behavior of an unwilling and all too powerful person cannot be changed by enforcing rules and restrictions rather abruptly. Such a person will violently react, go on the offensive and even sabotage the entire efforts however well meaning the initiative was. On the other hand, a slow but a continuous effort to cajole, shove and deflect the person's interest and perspectives has a greater propensity to succeed.

As discussed above, mind has a similar profile and requires a similar approach to bring it under one's sway. This continuous effort is what Shri Krishna refers to as *abhyāsa*. The implication is that there will be a fairly long period of "no success" when we want to change the ways of doing things. We need a lot of patience, constancy of purpose and perseverance to make changes. Therefore, *abhyāsa* would mean continuous efforts over a long period of time and not short term initiatives which are typically "flavour of the month". This is the first acid test for our ability to tame the all-powerful mind.

The other practical suggestion pertains to providing an alternative agenda to the mind so that it can be deflected away. For instance consider this situation. Suppose we are too engaged with the prime time mega serials aired in the TV channels between 7.30 pm and 9.00 pm and want to get out of the habit. One way is to go for a walk when the prime time serials are running, or to do some exercise or prayer during that time. By this *abhyāsa* we will notice that we would have developed some dispassion (*vairāgya*) towards the serials and will slowly loosen the grip. After a few months we would have come out of this habit. The central issue in developing *vairāgya* is to provide an alternative agenda to the mind that is consistent with the change that we need to see in ourselves. Further, it also means we have a basic desire to see the change in ourselves.

Therefore three issues are important for taming the powerful mind; a basic desire to change ourselves, an alternative agenda consistent with the change that we want to see and a continuous practice of these for a long period of time, without worrying too much if the change has been successful. Through such a subtle handholding process, we will be able to bring mind into our sway. In order to all these, we also need the grace of Lord Krishna.