

The Altar of Contemplation Swami Chinmayanada

We left last when we were discussing how by refusing to feed the mind (*abhavana*) with object perceptions (*vishaya-bhavana*) the mind shall slowly grind to a stop.

Some *rishis* go still further and declare that the meditator should give up even the attitude (*bhavana*) that he is an "imaginative-thinking-entity" (*sankalpavan.*) It is the mind's function to think, to feel or to imagine in short, to make *sankalpas*. These feelings and thoughts cannot arise, and they cannot be maintained by themselves, without an intimate reference to the thinker-feeler-ego.

When the idea "I am the thinker-feeler" is renounced by a meditator, he becomes, thereafter, an interested "observer" of the "flood of thoughts" rising in himself, and, soon enough, the very gurgling springs of his thoughts dry up in him.. The mind in him then, in due course, ends. In the egoless attitude of detachment one's mind becomes extremely subtle and gathers to itself a greater power of penetration to reach deeper meditations.

The mind in us determines the quality and beauty, the dynamism and glory, the nature and arrangements of the world around us. An extension of our mind in its constant perceptions and interpretations, unveils for us our private world of sorrows and joys, likes and dislikes, successes and failures. By conquering the mind we conquer our world. The outer circumstances and the available objects and beings around us can no longer make us dance to their will and whim. We shall come to call the tune, and the world around us shall learn to obey, as we will it act.

In fact, without this subjective conquest of one's own mind, no conquest anywhere is a real conquest. Even if you have won the whole world, of what avail is it to you, if you have not won over the soul (mind) in yourself? No success is a success, no joy a real joy, no beauty a true beauty unless the individual has conquered his own mind.

Even though you have not conquered, in battles, the world, you become the world-conqueror when you have conquered your mind; and although you have for long conquered the world by force, you have conquered nothing so long as you have not conquered yourself."

In order to thus conquer the mind one need not run away physically from all sense-objects or living beings in one's life. All that we have to do is to attend consistently to the taming of the mind. Objects (*Vishayas*) are helpless against a mind under control of the clear intellect. The sense-organs will not dare run out into the cess-pools of sensuous gratifications, when the mind behind them is a fully disciplined and strictly cultivated one.

Therefore, instead of unnecessarily wasting our energies in regulating the world of objects and environments, instead of exhausting ourselves in vain attempts at controlling the sense-organs, let us attend to the mastering of our mind. Say the *Acharyas*: "Extrovert thought (*chittam*) is the commander of the sense-organs, and so to win him is to win all; not to win him is to win none..... just as to one who is wearing shoes the whole world is covered with leather"

We need not conquer the sense-organs one by one, nor need we run away from all objects of sense fascinations. Control the mind: and then go wherever you will. With shoes one can walk even over thorny bushes and stony slopes. You are protected from them all. Conquer your mind, then you are insured against everything, everywhere, at all times.

A meditator must thus direct his attention constantly in capturing the wild mind and taming it to obey his own pure decisions and *sattvika* commands. Once the mind is conquered all else is conquered.

A conquered mind is called "pure mind" in Vedanta (*shuddha antahkarana*), and it is a mental equipment which is not agitated by every passing mood of passion, or is disturbed by every fascinating object that comes across it.

A pure mind has *less* agitations—but there are agitations still in it. We are—through following ethical and moral codes of conduct, through the cultivation of devotion to the Lord, through worship and prayers, penance and surrender unto Him, through study and reflection, dispassion and meditation upon the Self—striving to bring our mind into a quiet and total silence, and the quieter the mind gets, the more conquered the mind becomes.

When the direction of our thoughts is towards the objects, the agitations are more and the thoughts in that state of agitation are called *chittam*. So long as the *chittam* is riotous there cannot be any mental quietude, and, naturally, there can be no success in meditation.

Therefore it becomes clear that to quieten the mind it must be switched off from its blind, passionate run after the sense-objects. Left to itself, the mind in its irresistible energy would run towards its own familiar and known fields of pleasures. Thereafter it becomes habituated only to move in that limited field of gratifications. Once this extrovertedness has become a firm habit with mind, to wean that mind from its self-destructive preoccupations becomes painful and almost a herculean task.

The nature of the mind is that its thoughts will readily flow towards any object of its love. Where our *prem* is, there our mind reaches and lingers lovingly. This being its natural and instinctive mode of behavior, if we supply it with an alternative field of joyous love, it is sure to turn towards it, and in so doing, will be turning away from the world-of-objects, where it is now getting totally dissipated of all its rich potentialities.

This creative altar provided for the mind to hold on to, away from the storms of wordly temptations is called the "point-of-contemplation", (*alambanam*). With devotion when we thus worship, adore and meditate upon the chosen Lord of our heart (*Ishta-devata*), we give the mind a refreshing altar of contemplation upon which we may dry-dock the mind, away from the stormy confusions of sense-enchantments, and repair it.

Devotion (*bhakti*) thus contributes much to prepare the quietude of the mind, which is the beginning of the path of meditation. Rush to it: but haste makes waste: yet, hasten slowly.