

Who Controls Your Mind

We will never stay low if our thoughts are high.

Our mind is the driver of our lives. The problem is that we often drive down the wrong road. Sometimes we even let go of the wheel!

Can we always think good thoughts, or is responding to the mind's whims man's default setting?

When anger and upset come, can you do anything about it? When fear strikes, are you forced to be paralyzed? When an unpleasant task is to be accomplished, must you be miserable? Unfortunately, for most people the answer is "yes."

People answer "yes" to these questions because they are acknowledging how their life is. They are happy when things are good; unhappy when things don't go well; stressed at work; relieved on the weekends; happy to accumulate and depressed when there is loss.

They are not in control.

Most people would say this is normal. It isn't. Let's look at what is actually normal.

What is normal is to be what is called *dhira* in Sanskrit. The word *dhira* is found in the *Bhagavad-gita* sloka, *dhiras tatra na muyanti*. A person who is *dhira* is "not disturbed even in the presence of disturbance."

Dhira is defined as sober or steady. The *Gita* elaborates other symptoms of the sober person.

- Is not elated by good or upset by bad
- Is not attached
- Doesn't become angry
- Is free from fear
- Is not bewildered by loss
- Is self-controlled

Why do I say this is normal when you hardly find a person with these qualities? Because if we reconnect to our normal spiritual state, this is how we will be. If your life is being pushed around by the demands of your mind and senses you are not in your normal state.

One of the greatest secrets - and revelations - of the sadhu is that "I decide." "I decide" means you can decide how you want to think and

feel, where you want to go, and how you prefer to respond to the challenges on the way.

When Srila Prabhupada was asked, "What is the greatest obstacle to spiritual advancement?" He answered, "You yourself, you are the greatest obstacle." This answer equal applies to any endeavor, be it material or spiritual. Krsna says in the *Gita*:

A man must elevate himself by his own mind, not degrade himself. The mind is the friend of the conditioned soul, and his enemy as well. (Bhagavad-gita 6.5).

Prabhupada's comment on this verse is, "One who cannot control his mind lives always with the greatest enemy."

You create your own heaven. And then you swim in the bliss. You create your own hell, and burn in it.

It is hugely empowering to know that you are not the mind, but you have a mind. You are the soul, and this means you are above the mind. Because you are above the mind, you have the power to direct it. This one little piece of wisdom can change your life forever (literally).

Thus knowing oneself to be transcendental to material senses, mind, and intelligence, one should control the lower self by the higher self and thus-by spiritual strength-conquer this insatiable enemy known as lust. (Bhagavad-gita 3.43)

For too many people, thinking just happens. It is a spontaneous reaction to what's going on around them. What is the source of your thoughts? Is it the billboards or TV commercials? Is it your parents or teachers? Is it your peer group or the Bollywood stars? Or is it the politically correct thought of the day?

If our thoughts are being made for us rather than by us, it will often lead to wrong decisions and a lot of trouble in life. So the question we must ask ourselves is, "Who owns our minds?" Of course, the obvious answer is, "We do." But sometimes it appears that the mind is manipulated by an outside force. Unwanted thoughts show up and begin to push us around. What's going on?

We are conditioned souls. We are products of our upbringing, environment, and association, both in this and previous lives. We are like pieces of clay that have been molded by external factors. Thus the mind has developed habitual ways of thinking that are on auto pilot. We create a habit and then the habit creates us. This explains why we have many thoughts that are out of alignment with our best interests and higher purpose.

But it doesn't have to remain like this. We can create a thought that is not in response to anything that is happening to us - or has happened to us in the past.

Create a beautiful thought right now. How do you feel? Good, right? Now create a morbid thought. How do you feel? Probably not so good. You just made yourself feel good and bad by what you chose to think about. You do have the power to choose your thoughts and thus shape your life.

When you try to break away from habitual thinking patterns, there is going to be some backlash. When you place a new thought in the current of the past, the current will try to knock the new thought out. The current of the past is going to protest, "You can't think this thought. You have never thought like this before. It doesn't fit you."

How do we deal with this? Prahbupada said just ignore those thoughts. In other words, don't give those thoughts energy. Starve them and they will gradually lose their influence. The less we feed them, the less they will affect us. And focus on your goals, not the things you don't want.

Here's another problem to watch out for when you try to take control of your mind: Your mind will try to overthrow you by pretending to be you! Remember, we are not the mind. We have a mind. And we are above the mind. But the mind is a great trickster. It makes us think he is us. Then we believe we are in control when actually the mind is in control.

It is like the person who says, "I smoke because I like it," to which I ask, "Can you stop smoking?" If they can't stop smoking immediately, then they are not smoking because they like it but because they are addicted to it. In other words, they are forced to smoke. Of course, their mind has tricked them into thinking that doing something that is bad for them, something that will likely give them cancer, is enjoyable.

When your mind takes over it can make a fool out you.

How do we get out of this mess? We need to create a clear idea of where we want to go and what we want to become. Either your thinking will shape the reality you choose to create or reality (external forces) will shape you.

Let's get some perspective on this. Sit for a few moments and observe your thoughts. Experience yourself as the observer, the one who is not defined by your thoughts. This should feel much like you are

observing the thoughts of another person. You become aware of the thoughts but not affected by them. You see, you are not your thoughts.

What we are up against is that false ego protects our false identity, making us strongly identify with the mind. This makes it more difficult to realize that we have the power to think independently of the mind's dictates. The mind nourishes and protects the false ego, and the false ego reinforces our identity with the body and mind. (I am my mind, beauty, intelligence, abilities, wealth, family lineage, etc).

We are meant to take control of the direction of our life. If we were just a stimulus and response creature, there would be no free will in the universe, and thus no one would be responsible for their actions. And if this were the case, there would be no use in me writing this chapter, and no use in you reading it (you couldn't do anything about it anyway).

We have the ability to create an intention, a thought that is not the result of any previous cause or experience. We can think in defiance of past experience and conditioning. This is how great thinkers and visionaries operate. They don't see through the limits of what they have done or what has been done; rather they see what can be done.

Srila Prabhupada's first students were hippies. They lived unclean, irresponsible and whimsical lives. All were using psychedelic drugs and having unrestricted sex. Their minds and lives were hardly in their control. Yet by learning from the *Gita* that they were not physical beings, that they were more than a mind and body, they were able to totally change their lives, re-directing their thoughts and actions for a higher spiritual purpose. These same hippies became highly self-disciplined sadhus.

If they can do it, so can you.

We have much more control over our thoughts, and thus our lives, than we may presently know or believe. Understanding this opens up many new possibilities, both materially and spiritually.

In the *Gita* Krsna says the mind can either be the best friend or the worst enemy. Too many of us are plagued by self-sabotage. We limit ourselves, lack self-confidence and are insecure, all because we give credence to the mind's foolishness. We need to learn to act in spite of the mind's demands and dramas. Efforts to succeed without gaining control over the mind will prove difficult, if not impossible. Indeed, the aim of the entire yoga system is to gain perfect control of the

mind so the practitioner can both think of the welfare of others and elevate his soul back to God.

The sadhu doesn't think any thought that is not aligned with his highest self. And why would you want to think in a way that is not getting you where you want to go? Plant the right thoughts in the garden of your mind and your life will always be a delicious feast.

Let me leave you with this thought:

"It's not who you are that holds you back, it's who you think you are."

ANOTHER WAY OF SAYING THIS IS: "... IT'S WHO YOU THINK YOU ARE NOT." IS THAT TOO CONFUSING? DON'T KNOW IF THIS IS A GOOD WAY TO END THE CHAPTER. MAYBE IT DIGRESSES AND MAYBE WE SHOULD LEAVE IT OUT.

The Principle

As spiritual beings, we are above the mind. Therefore we own a mind, and can use the mind as we determine. However, the mind will attempt to capture our identity and engage us in thoughts and actions that are not aligned with our higher purpose.

The Practices

Create thoughts that are in alignment with your goals and with your highest self. The mantra is "I decide." Do not give energy to thoughts for which you are not in alignment. The the mind is most easily controlled by engaging it in something positive. Srila Prabhupada recommends that the mind should be engaged in thinking of the welfare of others.

The Lessons

What you feed on, feeds on you. If you don't use your mind it will use you. The mind will either become your friend or your enemy. You can overcome your conditioned nature. You can learn to respond to situations from your higher self (soul).

The Benefits

A life that you direct, rather than a life that is lived in reaction to external forces. A life with higher purpose. A life that is more spiritually connected.

The Quotes

An idle mind is a devil's workshop.

For he who has conquered his mind, it is the best of friends; but for one who has failed to do so, his very mind will be the greatest enemy. (Bhagavad-gita 6.6)

The mind is the root cause of lust, anger, pride, greed, lamentation, illusion and fear. (Srimad Bhagavatam 5.6.5)

You create your own heaven. And then you swim in the bliss. You create your own hell, and burn in it.

We should be careful not to trust the mind. (A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada)

Illustration Idea

Show the physical body, subtle body and soul, each on a progressively higher level than the last illustrating that the soul is above the mind and body.