

MIND

— AND —

MODERN PROBLEMS

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FOREWORD

Modern man has lost his soul in the pursuit of worldly pleasures. In this world of cut-throat competition and in the rat race to riches he forgot his true nature which is Self. The nature of Self is Satchidananda – Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute and Bliss Absolute. One needs to meditate on these words to understand the inner meaning and purport. That is every thing about us is relative and impermanent. Only Truth or Soul or Self or God is Absolute, Infinite and Permanent.

Man is constantly running around all the time under tremendous pressure. He is not able to cope up with the day to day problems. As a result there are more heartaches and more heart-brakes. All because he doesn't know his true glory; he doesn't know the real purpose and meaning of life.

Perhaps, never before man was as uncomfortable with his mind as he is today. Paradoxically today everyone believes the present era as the most advanced phase of human civilization and yet, the feeling of unfulfillment in life or dissatisfaction with oneself was never as high as it is now. Meditation centres are thriving; people are thirsting for spirituality and searching for methods to control the mind. Mind has become a big source of problem. As the problem has arisen they are seeking solution.

But the sage of Vedic India didn't wait till his mind became a source of great trouble to him. He just explored it as the scientist of modern era explores the external world. We can even call him mind-scientist or spiritual-scientist. The same scientific tempo a modern day scientist employs to discover something of the material world, the sage of yore employed to investigate the nature of the mind. Through such an investigation he analyzed the in and outs of the thing called mind, and devised methods to control and conquer it. The same knowledge has come to us through the corridor of time. All the methods described in India's spiritual literature have this one aim of helping man control his mind. In this small compendium called 'Mind and modern problems' a humble attempt has been made to analyze the factors responsible for the scattering and dissipation of mental energy in the present day context. And how to concentrate the mind through a disciplined life and steady spiritual practices has been dealt with in a lucid way. Meditation, personality, thought power, will-power, managing the emotions, stress and the means to overcome it are some of the things that are touched and some practical hints are given.

It is our sincere hope that the reader finds the book interesting from the perspective of forming an understanding on the nature of mind, the need and the method to control it. If this book paves the way for a more peaceful and fulfilling life even in one individual we consider our effort has not gone in vain.

Publisher's Note (2nd reprint)

On the occasion of the 150th birth anniversary Celebrations of Swami Vivekananda (2012-2014) which is being observed all over the country, we are extremely happy to publish a small compendium on the most important and vital topic of the times, 'MIND & MODERN PROBLEMS'. This is a very complex subject and many a great Sage, Saint, Professor, a Spiritual Seeker, a student or even a common man has been caught unawares by its play.

There are hundreds of books and articles on the topic of the mind and its control, behavior and other related facets but we felt that a small book which can stimulate fresh enthusiasm and which can act as a guidepost for more detailed study on the subject for the youngsters and students is necessary. Hence this book in your hands!! We are happy to inform the reader that within a short span of 3 months all the copies have been sold out and we are bringing out a reprint of the book for the benefit of many other young readers.

We would like to thank Br. Niyama Chaitanya of Ramakrishna Math, Hyderabad, Dr. Sumita Roy, Osmania University, Hyderabad and many others who have helped us in many ways for the outcome of this book. We are sure that the Lives and teachings of many great men and women and the Holy Trinity will motivate the youth to lead a more matured and peaceful and positive life.

- Publisher

INTRODUCTION

The Problems of the Mind:

Today we have bigger houses and smaller families; more conveniences, but less time; we have more degrees, but less common sense; more knowledge, less judgment. We have more experts, but more problems; more medicine, but less wellness. We spend too recklessly, laugh too little, drive too fast, get angry too quickly, stay up too late, get up too tired, read too little, and pray too seldom. We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values. We talk too much, love too little and lie too often. We have learned how to make a living, but not a life; we have added years to life, not life to years. Today we have taller buildings, but shorter tempers; wider freeways, but narrower viewpoints. We spend more, have less; we buy more, enjoy less. We went all the way to the moon and back, but have trouble crossing the street to meet the new neighbor. We conquered outer space, but not inner space. We have split the atom, but not our prejudice; we write more, but learn less; plan more, but accomplish less. We learned to

rush, but not to wait; we have higher incomes, but lower morals. We build more computers to hold more information, to produce more copies, but have less real communication. We are long on quantity, but short on quality.

These are the times of fast foods but slow digestion and less nutrition; tall men and short character; steep profits and shallow relationships. Two incomes, but more divorces; fancier houses, but broken homes!

We don't think we are presenting a cynical view of the world. The reader can go through from the beginning and recheck the truth of the above statements! If not in our lives, these are the commonly known happenings of the world around us. Thanks to the newspapers and electronic media which keep us informed about all these happenings!

In this book we would like to present some of these modern day problems and their suggested solutions. "Spirituality is not for the empty belly"—Sri Ramakrishna would say. Here, we may not be empty bellied, but probably *empty minded* or *empty hearted*. Ramakrishna Order does not try to serve only the spiritual needs of the people, but also their intellectual, mental and sometimes physical needs.

This is our idea of worship and service to the Lord. Really, these various dimensions of human personality are not unintegrated. If one's physical needs like food, shelter, clothing, warmth, health and even reasonable comfort are not taken care of, the mind cannot lift itself from the body and aspire to higher spheres like arts, science, pursuit of knowledge and religion. And when a man is fed, educated and given a job he invites new problems like lack of discipline, recklessness, whiling away time in daydreaming, poor social ability, lack of necessary skills, lack of clarity in thought, word and deed. Taking things much more to heart than required creates pressure and stress. Lack of proper upbringing, culture and higher ideas cause an individual to pursue animal pleasures.

Most educational institutions are focused on producing top rankers alone. There are a shockingly high number of schools which do not have playgrounds, or moral science classes or creative teachers. If a pupil comes to high school, he/she is pressurized from all sides—parents, teachers and relatives—to achieve a top rank or high percentage in exams. Competition kills creativity. Young students' aptitudes are not considered important. Sports, music, drawing and other such fields are considered to be only

side tracks. One has to compete in schools, in colleges, in universities and in office. One is not able to think for oneself. No choice is available to individual to do what he/she would like with his / her life. Everyone wants leisure, peace and joy but no one knows where to find them in this racing world of crammed houses, packed buses and jammed minds.

In this book we have tried to provide practical solutions, some of which may be called ‘tips and tricks’, to the problems of a busy human being in the world. Our idea is that if he/she is helped to overcome such petty obstacles—petty when compared to the great obstacles in spiritual life—he/she would have time, leisure and mind later on to immerse himself/herself in other higher pursuits of life.

Minds of Great Men

The Italian sculptor Agostino d’Antonio worked diligently on a large piece of marble. Unable to produce his desired masterpiece, he lamented, “I can do nothing with it.” Other sculptors also worked this difficult piece of marble, but to no avail. Michelangelo discovered the stone and visualized the possibilities in it.



His “I-can-make-it-happen” attitude resulted in one of the world’s masterpieces— David.

The experts of Spain concluded that Columbus’s plans to discover a new and shorter route to the West Indies was virtually impossible. Queen Isabella and



King Ferdinand ignored the report of the experts. “I can make it happen,” Columbus persisted. And he did. Everyone knew the world was flat, but not Columbus.

The Nina, the Pinta, the Santa Maria, along with Columbus and his small band of followers, sailed to “impossible” new lands and thriving resources. If Columbus had turned back, no one could have blamed him, considering the constant adversity he endured. Of course, no one would have remembered him either.

When Thomas Edison invented the light bulb, they say he tried over 2000 experiments before he got



it to work. A young reporter asked him how it felt to have failed so many times. He said, “I never failed once. I invented the light bulb. It just happened to be a 2000-step process.”

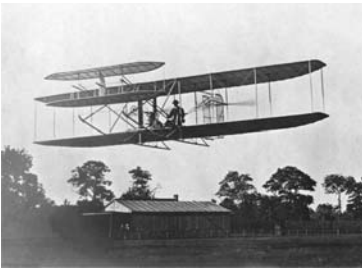
Even the great Thomas Alva Edison discouraged his friend, Henry Ford, from pursuing his fledgling idea of a motorcar. Convinced of the worthlessness of the idea, Edison invited Ford to come and work for him. Ford remained committed and tirelessly pursued his dream. Although his first attempt resulted in a vehicle without reverse gear, Henry Ford knew he could make it happen. And, of course, he did.



“Great spirits have always encountered violent opposition from mediocre minds.”

– Albert Einstein.

Let’s not forget our friends Orville and Wilbur Wright. Journalists, friends, armed forces specialists, and even their father laughed at the idea of an airplane. “What a silly and insane way to spend money. Leave flying to the birds,” they jeered. “Sorry,” the Wright brothers responded. “We have a dream, and we can



make it happen.” As a result, a place called Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, became the setting for the launching of their “ridiculous” idea.

“Forget it,” the experts advised Madame Curie. They agreed radium was a scientifically impossible idea. However, Marie Curie insisted, “I can make it happen.”

Beethoven composed his greatest works after becoming deaf. To list some other exceptional individuals:

- Sir Walter Raleigh wrote the *History of the World* during a thirteen year of imprisonment.
- Abraham Lincoln achieved greatness by his display of wisdom and character during the devastation of the Civil War.
- Luther translated the Bible while enduring confinement at the Castle of Wartburg.
- Under a sentence of death and during twenty years in exile, Dante wrote the *Divine Comedy*.
- John Bunyan wrote *The Pilgrim’s Progress* in a Bedford jail.
- Srinivasa Ramanujam became a renowned mathematician by sheer willpower and hard work.

- Scott Rigsby is an inspiration to runners even after his double amputation.

The Uses of Adversity

Adversity is the grindstone of life. Will it grind you down or polish you up?

A small boy—the fifth amongst seven siblings of a poor father, was selling newspapers in a small village to earn his living. He was not exceptionally smart at school but was fascinated by religion and rockets. The first rocket he built crashed. A missile that he built crashed multiple times and he was made a butt of ridicule.

He is the person to have scripted the Space Odyssey of India single-handed. He is Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam.



In 1962, four nervous young musicians played their first record audition for the executives of the Decca recording Company. The executives were not impressed. While

turning down this group of musicians, one executive said, “We don’t like their sound. Groups of guitars are on the way out.” The group was called The Beatles.

When Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone in 1876, it did not ring off the hook with calls from potential backers. After making a demonstration call, President Rutherford Hayes said, “That’s an amazing invention, but who would ever want to see one of them?”

In the 1940s, another young inventor named Chester Carlson took his idea to 20 corporations, including some of the biggest in his country. They all turned him down. In 1947 after seven long years of rejections, he finally got a tiny company in Rochester, New York, the Haloid company, to purchase the rights to his invention—an electrostatic paper-copying process!



A little girl—the 20th of 22 children, was born prematurely and her survival was doubtful. When she was 4 years old, she contracted double pneumonia and scarlet fever, which left her with a paralyzed left leg.

At age 9, she removed the metal leg brace she had been dependent on and began to walk without it. By 13 she had developed a rhythmic walk, which doctors said was a miracle. That same year she decided to become a runner. She entered a race and came in last.

For the next few years every race she entered, she came in last. Everyone told her to quit, but she kept on running. One day she actually won a race. And



then another. From then on she won every race she entered. Eventually this little girl, Wilma Rudolph, went on to win three Olympic gold medals.

A school teacher scolded a boy for not paying attention to his mathematics and for not being able to solve simple problems. She told him that he would not become anybody in life.

The boy was Albert Einstein.

So you can see how the mind can be harnessed and led to great achievement. This book will help you do this. It will be your companion on your way to success.

Chapter - 1

The Mind and You

The Mind is a universal subject, relevant to every human being. ‘How to control it?’ This question automatically arises because all success, all achievement in this world has been attained by controlling, channeling and mastering the mind. There is no other way. Of course, one wants to quiet it only to the extent which is contextually necessary for day-to-day living. One cannot bear it if the mind suddenly quiets down completely. One wants it to get excited, thrilled, interested, attached and detached at will.

Mind control is such an art that we do not have to wait till the end before the results come—every step we take in this discipline gives us joy in living, makes us feel more in tune with ourselves and with the rest of the world. That is why it has such a tremendous appeal universally—in the East and the West, in the ancient and the modern times. Mind control is a very essential discipline all of us have to cultivate. Without this we are lost. We have to know how to make the mind strong, harmonious; how to keep it under control, how to apply

it in day-to-day life from our own point of view and from the view-point of the society outside as well.

What shall we get out of mind control? We shall know how to conduct ourselves in the world, how to relate ourselves with all others at their own level, without any criticism or comment. No condemning but accepting everyone as he or she is. What a joy it is to gain such mental equilibrium!

All of us would like our minds to be like puppies, obeying every command, getting happy, sad, excited, thrilled, concentrated, attached, detached, peaceful, etc., at our will. But unfortunately, our minds are not so tractable. It seems to be sad and gloomy when we want it to be happy. It feels too elated, vigorous, and restless when we want it to be calm and peaceful. When we want it to be concentrated and sharp, it simply wanders away never staying on one thought. All this is a very common phenomenon. Yet we somehow force the mind when we think it is important, when it matters financially or when it is a question of pride, etc., and get things done.

But is there no state when the mind helps us in all endeavors, supports us and even guides us in the right direction, never tempts us into wrong things and habits, and becomes a pleasant companion to live with? There should be such a state. We all know of some people at

least who are said to have achieved such a mastery over their minds. But they certainly paid the price for it, they did their climbing. They trained their minds the hard way. There are no shortcuts. But if we are really willing we can take it as a good game. We can enjoy every bit of the journey to success, peace and joy. Only we should have endless enthusiasm, patience and perseverance. Mind you, it is all worth it. Every effort yields result, much more than we ever dreamt of. Because whether we know it or not, whether we like it or not, mind culture is a spiritual practice (not religious, but spiritual practice). And in spiritual struggle there is no failure. This is a path from lower truth to higher truth not from error to truth. We cannot do better than our best. Can we? What is needed is just trying to take things in the present—today—and give our best to them. Whatever we do, we shall just give our best and as sure as the Sun rises, we shall succeed.

The mind is often compared to a monkey or a wild elephant in a fit of madness. We will know what the nature of our mind is when we sit for some time in silence and solitude. Then, when we would like to think or focus all our attention on one subject, suddenly we find that the mind dwells on everything else but that particular topic.

There is a well-known story of a teacher who asked his student to relax and think for some time sitting with closed eyes, of anything but a monkey. All the time there were just monkeys in his mind. Try as he might, he couldn't remove the thought of a monkey. The very attempt to remove 'monkey' from his mind made his mind recall only the images of a monkey.

Why does it happen like that? Why this rebellion from the mind? The fact is that it wants to enjoy things more than we do. Then the senses and the mind want to ride you for their enjoyment not allowing you to ride them for your enjoyment. There is no mind-controlling culture in our present education system. It must be a subject all through our school and college curriculum. Swami Vivekananda said, "If I had to do my education over again, and had any voice in the matter, I would not study facts at all. I would develop the power of concentration and detachment, and then with a perfect instrument I could collect facts at will. Side by side, in the child, should be developed the power of concentration and detachment."

Two Functions of Your Mind

There are roughly two functions of the mind. To concentrate and to detach or restrain. Both are very necessary. If you want to do a piece of work, you have

to concentrate. You have to apply your mind wholly there. And when you finish the job, you should be able to detach yourself from it totally. Otherwise, our lives would be very difficult. When you want to read you have to concentrate on the book and the subject. The senses should no longer register any noise from the streets. But they do carry all that noise to your mind and you get disturbed. Really, if we can bring our interest in the street noises to zero, our senses cannot go there. We don't hear the sound at all. It is a truth that we don't even perceive a thing if we are not at least to some extent interested in it.

Once Swami Vivekananda was in the house of Professor Deussen. The professor found the Swami turning over the pages of a poetical work. He spoke to him, but got no response. When the Swami came to know of it, he apologized, saying that he had been so absorbed in reading that he had not heard him. The professor was



not satisfied with this explanation until, in the course of conversation, the Swami quoted and interpreted verses from the book. Dr. Deussen was dumbfounded and asked him how he could accomplish such a feat of memory. Thereupon the

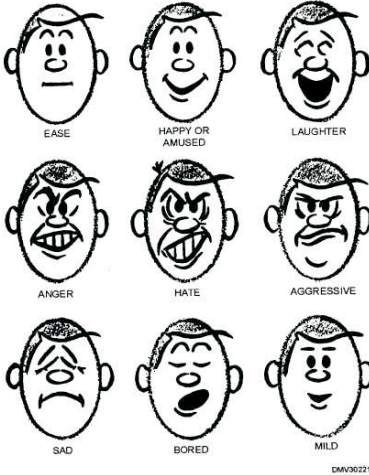
conversation turned upon the subject of concentration as practiced by the Indian yogi. From his personal knowledge the Swami said that the yogi could attain such perfection in concentration that in that state he would be unaware of it. [even if a piece of burning charcoal were placed on his body]

“Learn to let go and be free.”

- Buddha

That is the power of detachment of the mind. If you have that power nothing, absolutely nothing in the world can disturb you and your mind. You are almost free. What you want to do, your mind will have to do only that. You are the master, the mind is the slave. No emotions, no sentiments, no problems can disturb you. That's the acme of mind culture.

Restraining is a beautiful art which yields tremendous good to both the individual and society. Restraint is the sign of strength. If there is no self-restraint, there is no civilization, no culture, and no progress. Forest-dwellers do not control their emotions, their feelings, and their temper. Naturally, there can be no higher thoughts than eating, sleeping, dancing, drinking and sex. But look at society which has got several rules and customs and traditions, different ways of thinking and living. We find everything develops there: science,



art, philosophy, religion, architecture—everything. How much self-restraint a scientist has to practice! How much tapasya—to use a Sanskrit word—should a surgeon undergo before he becomes an expert in his profession! An engineer, a painter, a singer, an actor, a carpenter, why even a

kindergarten student for his/her age and knowledge, it is certainly tapasya to rise early, go to school, repeat things with the teacher and learn. All of these do and must practice self-restraint to achieve their ends. How much a poor rickshaw-puller, a cobbler or a goldsmith control their minds to do their jobs!

Every person does his/her job, whether he/she loves it or not; he/she has to do it if he/she has to survive in this game called life. There are always a thousand ways in which a person can fall, can be crushed mercilessly but only one or two ways, in which he/she can progress, succeed or at least stay in the same position.

This picture comes to show us that in society, one has to undertake a certain amount of tapasya to get what one desires. For some it is a question of survival, for few it is a question of prestige, for some it is a dream and for yet some others it is greed.

Whatever it is, tapasya is essential. Tapasya means control, the restraining force which as its effect reaps happiness or knowledge or long life—the three things a person consciously or unconsciously longs for and strives for all through life.

But amidst all this, there are so many, whose will is weak, whose mind rebels against them, makes them feel like miserable failures, leading them astray, making them fit for nothing, nervous wrecks. Young people whose minds must be pure and vigorous, bodies agile, clean and healthy, intellects clear and full of light and hope, wills of iron, nerves of steel, fearless and full of the spirit of service are becoming weak-willed, depressed, stress-ridden, full of fear and other complexes, with confused intellects, and cobwebs for their brains. So many think there is no escape from competition and if they fail, try to quit the world. Why has such a condition come upon their minds? Because there is a lack of right guidance, discipline and self-control or let us call it mind-culture.

Resolution/Will-power for Controlling Your Mind

Many want to control their minds. But few succeed finally, because they do not exercise sufficient will-power.



Don't ever give up!

They give up in the middle. One must take a strong resolve and desire to finish the work one started. A soldier, an ambassador, a pilot—all of these have to train themselves regularly and rigorously to achieve their goals and standards. One reaps as much as he sows. When one is totally convinced of the necessity of doing a certain thing, one sees it through. So first be convinced yourself that this is one of the most important things you have to do in your life – developing the powers of concentration and detachment. And be prepared to pay the price, which is high and naturally so because of its promising and almost permanent results.

Most of the other sciences deal with things that do not move, which are fixed. You can analyze the chair; the chair does not fly from you. But this science deals with the mind, which moves all the time; the moment you want to study it, it slips. Now the mind is in one mood, the next moment, perhaps, it is different, changing,

changing all the time. In the midst of all this change it has to be studied, understood, grasped and controlled. How much more difficult, then, is this science! It requires rigorous training.

For lack of Training, they lacked Knowledge. For lack of Knowledge, they lacked Confidence. For lack of Confidence, they lacked VICTORY!

Julius Caesar [44 B.C]

If you really want to study this science of the mind, you will have to start with that sort of determination, the same as, nay even more than, that which you put into any business of life. And what an amount of attention does business require, and what a rigorous taskmaster it is! Even if the father, the mother, the wife, or the child dies, business cannot stop! Even if the heart is breaking, we still have to go to our place of business, when every hour of work is a pang. That is business, and we think that it is just, that it is right. This science calls for more application than any business can ever require. Many people succeed in business; very few in this, because so much depends upon the particular constitution of the person studying it. As in business, all may not make a fortune, but everyone can make something, so in the study of this science each one can get a glimpse

which will convince him/her of its truth and of the fact that there have been people who have realized it fully.

Brave the danger of the mind. It has more power over you than a million atomic bombs. To control it makes you the master—fearless. Until you have felt the mind at work within itself, you will not be able to control it. A man can have everything, but if he does not have the cooperation of his mind, he has nothing.

Body-Mind Link

You cannot catch the mind when it is moving. If there is some pain in any part of the body, the mind goes there immediately. The mind is so constituted. It is like a watchdog and runs over the whole body. If there is any trouble anywhere—suppose an ant bites the finger immediately the mind goes there: “Hey, there is something happening there,” and it goes to look at it. It is a big watchdog, it tells you everything. The mind is wonderful for functioning at the physical level. But it is also most restless and most scattered at the physical level. We cannot make the mind listen to us if it is so divided into pieces. As the mustard seeds falling on the ground go each in a different direction and we feel it an almost impossible task to gather all of them back to one spot and make a heap again, similar is the case with the scattered mind.

If we want to catch hold of the mind, we have to keep the mind at rest and at one place. The first condition for that is: do not allow the mind to run all over the body. Once it goes where there are aches and pains in the body, you cannot hold it. Therefore we must keep the body in a good, clean and healthy condition. That is why in meditation, when we want to observe our mind; we keep the body at rest, in a steady and comfortable posture. That mastery over posture comes from exercising and from practice. When the body is at rest, you can observe the mind, watch the mind, and hold the mind on whatever you want. Then you can observe how the mind functions. When the mind is moving about, you cannot observe it. That is why the first condition in mind culture is to keep the body in good condition and at rest.

Hierarchy from Senses to Self

We all agree that the mind has to obey our will which implies that there is a higher faculty in man than the mind. This will is called *Buddhi* in Sanskrit. The first thing to be understood by every human being is that the mind is a separate entity from 'me'.

We know we have five sense organs—organs of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. When our mind wants to reach out to something or 'know' about something it uses one or more of these organs and gets

the desired knowledge. Here we can see that in the hierarchy, these senses are lower than the mind as these are used as instruments of the latter. These are called *Indriyas* in Sanskrit.

Well, if you have been watchful in our language, you find that we are using expressions like: *my* mind, *my* buddhi, *my* senses and *my* body. If all these are *mine*, who am I, then? ‘My pen’, ‘my book’, means: I possess a book or a pen and *it is separate from me*. Naturally a pen and a book are separate from us and so we *possess* them. We do not *be* or *become* them. This is easy to understand. Similarly, when we say these are *my* senses, *my* buddhi, *my* body and *my* mind, is it not logical that they are the things we *possess* and therefore are definitely *separate* from us? Here comes a big question. Who am I then? Well, that is a pretty big question. It took many life-times for many people to find out who this I is. That is the very goal of spiritual life. If you really want to find it out, you have to work on it full-time and with full involvement of the heart. Reading the life of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa is the best way to know about this path. But, whoever the I may be, for the time being; let us understand that this I is separate from all these things. I am an independent being using all these things to serve my objective, whatever it is.

In Sanskrit this **I** is called *Atman*. In English, it is generally translated as 'soul' or 'self'. The point we would like to drive home is that it is essential for every human being or at least for everyone who wants to control one's mind to remember that **I** am separate from *Buddhi*, **I** am separate from the mind, **I** am separate from the senses and **I** am separate from the body. Unless one feels this to be true (because it *is* true), at least partially, one cannot embark on the beautiful, very useful and most wanted practice called Mind-Control.

Swami Vivekananda asks us to 'picture the **I** (or the Self) to be the rider and this body the chariot, the intellect to be the charioteer, mind the reins, and the senses the horses. He, whose horses are well-trained, and whose reins are strong and kept well in the hands of the charioteer (the intellect) reaches the goal! But the man whose horses (the senses) are not controlled, nor the reins (the mind) well-managed, goes to destruction.'

In the above analogy, if the rider wants to enjoy the ride and achieve his objective in reaching a place of his choice, all the other parts of his chariot have to be subordinate to him and carry out his will. But think of a situation when the horses want to enjoy the ride! Each of the five horses going their own way! Where would *you* be?

Get to know the hierarchy well. The senses and the body must be under the control of the mind, the mind under the control of the Buddhi— the determining faculty, and the Buddhi under MY control.

Chapter - 2

Capabilities of Your Mind

The mind needs to be disciplined by the practice of concentration, meditation and such other techniques. These enhance the capabilities of your mind and help it to perform better.

Concentration:

Concentration is nothing but attention. It requires a quiet mind, not a scattered mind. The mind becomes unified when concentration takes place. All our efforts must be to bring about concentration and a unification of the mind. Everything is revealed to the mind that is one-pointed. We have so many layers of the mind! We have to know where the mind has gone and have to know how to gather the scattered pieces of the mind. We are not aware of the hidden pieces of the mind. Only when we have brought some peace into the superficial part of the mind will we become aware of its hidden pieces. That is very important. Layers and layers of the mind will become exposed and we will see then just how the mind is



scattered! And those spiritual personalities like Vivekananda and others have had such a tremendous influence on the minds of people because they know their minds through and through.

That is why those who try to lead a serious spiritual life live in forests or ashramas with lot of greenery, water, and silence. They need such external peace. They do not like to listen to noises, nor even loud sounds. Some of them do not even like to be in anyone's company. They just want to immerse themselves in the silence of nature and the self. In such an atmosphere, real insights into the mind are possible. But most of us have to live in cities and under tremendous pressure, traffic, people and noise. Then we have to do as much as we can to keep ourselves away from noise and distractions.

Who does not know that much of our suffering comes because we cannot control our mind? I want to forget something, I cannot forget it. Continually my mind goes back to the memory of it. I get crazy. Then I take a tranquilizer. Well, tranquilizers do not take me far. The doctors are already warning that they are dangerous. What shall I do? I find my brain has become torpid; my mind has gone to pieces. Alright, I go to a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist wants to put me in a nice place; but the nice places are all filled up; I cannot go there. What to do?

You must have noticed that some have control over their minds. Others don't have that control because, apart from other reasons, physical and psychological, they have not been trained to concentrate. With concentration a person understands a subject better. We somehow cannot get hold of all the aspects of things, whereas another person can. One person at once sees all the different bearings of a certain situation; another person cannot. What is the matter with the second person? His mind is not concentrated; he is not trained in attention. When you concentrate the mind, there is something that produces knowledge. Concentration will not produce the machine you are inventing, but it will produce knowledge, which afterwards you can set down on paper, or make a model of. It is concentration which suddenly brings out an explanation of a mysterious phenomenon. You have to worry over it, hold the mind there, hold it, hold it, and then suddenly something comes out.

Swami Vivekananda says, "The main difference between men and the animals is the difference in their power of concentration. All success in any line of work is the result of this. Everybody knows something about concentration. We see its results every day. High achievements in art, music, etc., are the results of concentration. An animal has very little power of

concentration. Those who have trained animals find much difficulty in the fact that the animal is constantly forgetting what is told him. He cannot concentrate his mind long upon anything at a time. Herein is the difference between man and the animals — man has the greater power of concentration. The difference in their power of concentration also constitutes the difference between man and man. Compare the lowest with the highest man. The difference is in the degree of concentration. This is the only difference.”

There are many people today who really are worried that the human mind is degenerating. In the average college student, we do not find enough knowledge and enough efficiency. We ask, “What is the matter with the system of education?” The matter is that the art of concentration, of attention, is gone. There is too much scattering of the mind, too much scattering of life-energy.

Unfortunately, we are living at a time when very little attention is being given to conservation. Everything is just expression, scattering out. The moment a person thinks of doing something, he does it. The moment he seeks pleasure, he indulges in it. But conservation is an important part of building up life; self-expression, self-manifestation is the least of it. You take for granted that

before a singer sings on stage, he or she has to train the voice for years and years. The same principle is applicable to every phase of life and every kind of life. We have to be prepared and trained. You find that an average schoolboy or a college student is perfect in self-indulgence and self-scattering; very few have learned the art of conservation. Conservation is not being an owl and sitting in one corner—though a good deal of that is necessary. You cannot spend all the evening watching movies, browsing internet without a purpose and roaming on the roads aimlessly and become a very concentrated person. Concentration requires a well-disciplined life.

Students complain so much about lack of concentration. “I have not the will-power to concentrate my mind,” they say. But if one is sincere, one surely has the will-power. But behind the will-power and vitality, the life force is not there. It is probably because the student is not eating well, or for some other reason his health might not have been good. Then one has to eat nourishing food well or take appropriate medical care. More often than not, it is the wrong usage of vital energy. The energy is expending itself in other directions.

What is vitality or vital energy or life-force? It is the energy because of which we are alive and because of which we move, do so many things, talk and even



think. If it is not behind the eye, we cannot see. If it is not behind our hand, we cannot move it. If it is not behind a thought, we cannot think. So this force has to be tapped and directed in the proper and

desired direction. You cannot have the vital energy to study and daydream at the same time. If you devote your energies to daydreaming, then you will have little left for study. You may say, "I have so much vital energy that I can study and also daydream at the same time. I can scatter it all around." But that is not true. It has been found that if the vitality is in one direction then it is not available for the other. Vitality is behind the senses and the whole body that every part of the body is clamoring for satisfaction. And from there you have to drag the energy to the desired goal in view. The extent you are able to do this, is the amount of concentration you can achieve!

The practice of concentration is absolutely necessary. Everybody has the ability to gain concentration, provided he is also willing to be patient. You really cannot make things happen just because you are impatient. Impatience is a state of mind which is to be condemned in every phase of existence.

Two factors which help develop concentration are:

1. Living a very restrained and disciplined life.
2. Regular practice of observing the ways of the mind

If you are reading a book, command your mind that it should not hear a conversation going on a few feet away or listen to the noises in the street. When you are reading, read. Be in the present. Some people do other practices. For instance, they will keep the attention of their eyes focused on one thing. They are aware of just that thing alone and of nothing else. They say that in such practices a correct posture is very helpful. The essential part of that posture is a straight backbone. Whether you sit cross-legged or sit in a chair, sit straight and do not let the spine touch anything. Of course that is completely against your idea of sitting, which is to recline against the back of the chair. You think that is quite legitimate. But, we think it is altogether wrong. First of all, the spine is not in a straight line, and next, the spine touches something, which it should not do. These are the basic steps.

Especially, if you have children under your care, you should teach them concentration. When they eat, when they are playing, or when they are reading—when they are doing anything, insist on their giving their full

mind to it. It is a dangerous habit children have been forming to have a television or a music system going on while they are studying. They will tell you that this helps in learning, makes it pleasant. Never, never allow the mind to become divided; whether you are eating dinner, or talking with somebody, or performing a job, or watching television or listening to music—whatever you do, make a habit of giving your full attention to it. That is an *absolutely necessary* thing. You will not know until you have trained yourself in this way what a tremendous difference it makes in your life. If you have trained an average child in the art of attention or concentration, you will find that he/she will grow up to be a stronger person. He/She will be able to control himself/herself. And as a result, the life of such a person will be much easier. We cannot say his/her life will be perfect, but it will certainly be much better because concentration is a great instrument.

When you really concentrate, you will find that first of all the conscious mind comes there. Then you find your unconscious mind is coming up. All the things that are embedded in the unconscious mind, impressions of the past, conversations you thought important or significant, etc.,—all of them start coming up and take you on a tour. Suppose you are trying to concentrate on

an image of the sun, you see the sky around it, then the clouds, then a picnic, then those who attended it and the car and then this and then the other thing. Gone! Your mind has taken you far away from the object of your concentration in a matter of seconds. The mind is scattered so rapidly that you will not even know how it has flitted by association from one thing to another. In one fraction of a second your mind has gone; there is no concentration. Then you have to bring the mind back and hold it there. ***“Hold it there and hold it there”***. And continually try again and again. Then you will find you have succeeded a little. And you will gain in confidence. “I may have failed but if I try again I can bring out the strength I need to succeed, I have it in me”—this is self-confidence. And one has to improvise like that.

Moreover, do not for a moment have the idea that you will practice for a short time and then give up. Concentration is of a permanent nature. You need it all the time, as long as you live. If you take a bath everyday for twenty years and then say, “Oh! I have practiced cleanliness for this long. Now I shall enjoy the fruits of it,” and stop bathing, you know what happens. Your body stinks. Of course if you practice concentration for twenty years diligently there will definitely be some permanent effect on your mind and you will certainly

enjoy its fruits. Nevertheless you cannot stop, because the mind can always unlearn anything. Be prepared to practice this everyday. Anything of eternal value must be approached with the idea of timelessness. You must say, "It is for all time and I will do it!"



How will you come to know about the power of the mind until you have battled with it? Never be disconcerted. You have within you what it takes to face the whole universe.

Discipline:

Let us first understand how several of our faculties function and how we take decisions. Senses are the five bearers of information from the world outside to the mind using the external sense organs like eyes, ears, etc., by being attracted to the sense objects outside. For example, sound is a sense object to the sense of hearing through the sense organ called ear. This information (e.g. sound) is brought to the brain which is the seat of the mind. Then, it is shown to the intellect, which then discriminates between good and bad, safe and unsafe, and after such analysis commands the mind about its duty and line of action and the mind in turn commands

the senses and the senses now using either the sense of perception or the sense of action—the hands, the legs, etc.,—does the job for us. Generally speaking, this is the mechanism of the mind and senses.

We have become so unconsciously permissive in our approach to this world that the senses automatically search the surroundings for anything *they* think worthwhile and start going towards those sense objects. They collect the data and present it before the mind. The mind when continuously presented with a particular kind of data gets attached to it and begins to *like* it. It argues in favor of these attractive things before the intellect. It presents these arguments with impeccable logic and repeats its requests endlessly. Slowly the intellect succumbs to the mind and allows that particular kind of data as permissible and enjoyable.

Let us take an example. Many times, in marriages and other occasions, loud music is played incessantly. The intention is to make the party as ‘enjoyable’ as



possible. Yes, to be able to reach the whole audience, some volume is required, but in most of the cases it is much more than necessary. It disturbs all the people living around. High

volume can create a very strong impression on the listeners' minds (which is also why such volume is used!). Everybody's senses are immediately drawn to such sound. At first, everyone feels uncomfortable, but slowly, the system tries to cope with the situation. Also when a person sees many others apparently enjoying such sound, he/she feels it to be a kind of courtesy or a social thing to conform to such tastes. He/She stops protesting and tries to silence his/her mind. After repeated exposures to such high volumes, he/she loses the sense of balance and starts liking such loud sounds.

This is all the more true in the case of popular—not classical—western music (nowadays so widely liked!) which simply pulls the mind out and makes it scattered.



The great Indian sages developed arts like music and dance as sadhanas (pathways) to reach highly concentrated, quiet and peaceful state of mind. Such music could even heal! Indian music properly learnt or listened to has tremendous power

to instill devotion and love for God. The whole approach

of popular western music is completely opposite to this. Many of the concerts are aimed at creating a sort of thrill and excitement. Generally speaking, such music does not allow a person to remain inward. And with deafening levels, it is all the more harmful to anyone who is trying to gain mastery over his senses.

Therefore, our appeal to the readers, who we think are interested in practicing this art of sense-and mind-control, is to avoid all such noises. (This refers to sound.)

Regarding sight, nowadays fast moving advertisements, previews and even the proper movies, and other such programs on TV and internet create such confusion in our brains and that too so gradually that we are not able to estimate the harm they are doing to the faculties of attention and concentration of our brains. The brains of those who are addicted to watching such scenes, on TV, etc., become incapable of concentrating on anything and gradually degenerate. Those who have such additions will not fare well in studies, or in games or anything else. They become highly susceptible to stress, daydreaming, lack of communication skills, lack of pragmatic approach and to be brief, they are good for nothing. Browsing the internet aimlessly, changing large number of channels within a few minutes may convince a person that he/she is getting cleverer and more

intelligent but the actual fact is that he/she is becoming more shallow and confused. Any work whatever it is must be done systematically and with full attention to every detail, using all the senses and limbs required. Alas! How exactly opposite the thinking of people at the present about these ideas is! How will they understand the memorizing capacities of ancient Indians, not of scholars but even ordinary housewives?

Swami Vivekananda once said, “The present system of education is all wrong. The mind is crammed with facts before it knows how to think. Control of the mind should be taught first. If I had my education to get over again, and had any voice in the matter, I would learn to master my mind first, and then gather facts, if I wanted them. It takes people a long time to learn things, because they can’t concentrate their minds at will.... It took three readings for me to memorize Macaulay’s *History of England*, while my mother memorized any sacred book in only one reading.... People are always suffering because they can’t control their minds. To give an illustration, though a rather crude one: A man has trouble with his wife. She leaves him and goes with other men. She’s a terror! But, poor fellow, he can’t take his mind away from her, and so he suffers.”

So we have to have a clear idea of what is the right food for the mind and senses and what is not. Please note that our idea is not to rob you of all your so called ‘pleasures’ and ‘joys’ of life. We would only remind you that the more you are disciplined, the more you can really enjoy your life, for your ideas of pleasure and happiness undergo tremendous change for the better. Then when you look back, you will wonder at what silly states of mind you stopped and considered them desirable.

Only when the mind is under your control and has become peaceful can you know what the mind is. You can never know your own mind unless you practice self-discipline. To bring the mind under control you have to direct it so that it cannot do anything on its own.

For this a well-planned and a regularly maintained routine is vital. Grown-ups need not be shy about it. We can have a systematic routine on paper and then follow it strictly. Any lifestyle other than a systematic one means wastage of time. It means the person has not yet realized the importance of time and the shortness of life. Youth is the time to practice, to sow the seeds—then you will reap a bumper crop. In spiritual life, they say that one has to finish whatever one has to achieve by devoting all of one’s energies to it before one is thirty. Because, after that the body and mind will start

disobeying the person vehemently. If you have not cultivated certain habits by thirty, it will be much more difficult after that.

There is no cause for being disheartened though. Every moment is a fresh opportunity to start towards



our goal. You can learn many things even after that. Only the point to remember is that you may have to put more effort than a person who has

started the practice earlier in life.

“In self-discipline one makes a disciple of oneself. One is one’s own teacher, trainer, coach, and disciplinarian. It is an odd sort of relationship, paradoxical in its own way, and many of us don’t handle it very well.”

-William Bennet (American Writer)

“Self-discipline begins with the mastery of your thoughts. If you don’t control what you think, you can’t control what you do. Simply, self-discipline enables you to think first and act afterward.”

-Napolean Hill (American Author)

Meditation

Meditation is different from concentration. In meditation there is relaxation and the mind is comparatively free. Here, we shall discuss the art of meditation, not as a spiritual practice, but as a process of sobering the monkey-mind. Sometimes it seems that this practice is not so much control of mind as control of the senses. In order to have interior vision, the senses have to come away from external vision. You may say, “Yes, but control of the senses requires control of thought.” True, but what are our thoughts anyhow? Ninety-nine percent of our thoughts are products of sense perception: memories of sense perception, imaginings about them, images and fancies following from them, thoughts about them, regrets about them, anger about them, cupidity about them, attachment, detachment, likes and dislikes, hunger for them, rejection of them—all the things that take place in our thought have followed from our sense experience.

We think that we take food only physically. But the sights we see, the smells we take in, the tastes, the touches and the sounds also are our food. Whatever we take in through the senses, stay inside us and influence us. They remain in our minds as memories and create all the above-mentioned feelings in us. They are the things

which disturb us. They are the things that take our minds away from focusing on our ideal.

For instance, spiritual aspirants—when they meditate—have God for their ideal. They aim to focus all their attention on God and God alone. For them, worldly things—things that are of a temporary nature and thoughts about them are obstacles in their way. For them, the joy of the Spirit is infinitely superior to anything this body and mind can bring



to them. So when they meditate they try to imagine God in their hearts and by unfocusing their minds from all external things they try to concentrate on God. And the beginners surely find it difficult to do so, because they have not yet learnt to control their senses outside the meditation-time. They are advised to avoid exciting thoughts, distracting sounds, etc., and are asked to stay calm throughout the day. Only then can they focus their minds on God when they sit for meditation. If throughout the day they have been angry for some time, excited, tensed, and under stress, etc., for some other time, how can they expect to quieten their minds

suddenly when they sit for meditation? Their whole lifestyle has to be changed. Their way of talking, thinking, their approach towards the opposite sex, their food, their functions and celebrations, what they read, how they react, their dresses, their postures—everything must be changed. All of these must be in accordance and in tune with their highest ambition—to be able to perceive the Reality, God, and to forget the delusion, the world.

If they take such practices like meditation to be as easy as a practice of dance or music or badminton or physical exercise, in which they could just think of those arts in the allotted time and forget about it immediately afterwards, they are not going to go anywhere. All their mental, physical, intellectual and spiritual forces must be diverted towards one object—God. Only then progress is possible in spiritual life.

Now, this book is not aimed at spiritual practitioners but it is for the so-called common individual who does not want to lead a highly-disciplined and arduous spiritual life but a ‘good’ life, the common individual who wants to control his/her mind only to the extent that he/she may be able to live a successful life and a life of peace and contentment. Naturally such a person does not need to ‘sacrifice’ so much as these spiritual aspirants do. But he/she has to definitely

undergo some discipline to reach a desirable state of control over the mind, body and senses.

Externally speaking, in meditation people sit quietly in a well ventilated and dimly lit place, in a steady and comfortable posture.



They close their eyes, keep their back, neck and head straight. Unless they are guided specifically by a teacher, they allow normal but more relaxed

and conscious breathing. They refuse to get disturbed by the body and its itches, irritations, small pains, coughs and sneezes, etc., and they do not want to be disturbed by the onslaught of undesirable thoughts.

But there is a whole lot more to it than the above mentioned points. These are just preparations for a long and uninterrupted session of meditative practice as a part of a long and patient training of the mind.

Meditation is a great art. It is essentially a spiritual technique and a highly effective tool to grasp the Reality of everything. Swami Ashokananda, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda, used to say, “The mind is so hard that an atomic bomb will not make a dent in it, but meditation will.” In this book, of course, we are not going to use the

word in its higher dimension. We shall take it as a tool which quietens the mind, which makes us understand ourselves and which gives us time to introspect about what is good and what is not.

- We recommend the readers to allot a specific time frame of at least twenty minutes, two times a day, preferably at sunrise and at sunset, for meditation.
- Our mind is a part of the larger mind. When other people begin to think, our mind becomes unquiet. The early morning is the best time for meditation, when others are not yet up.
- Select a good place where there are fewer chances of distractions and keep a small mat on which you can sit squatting comfortably and for a long time. And do not use that place and mat for any other purpose.
- In case of physical handicap or lack of squatting habit, one may use a straight-backed wooden chair.
- Turn your face towards a picture of the God you like or a symbol or an empty wall. Please have as high an ideal for meditation as possible. The highest and the best is God.
- The place should be well-ventilated and relatively silent. The lighting should be dim and pleasant.

No shooting lights or exciting colors, for example 'red', for lamps.

- We do not recommend music while meditating. This is a practice to know your mind in its true colors. So do not give the mind a chance to come before you once again in any kind of disguise whatsoever.
- Be extremely particular with the beginning time. At the same time don't suffer from 'impatience' for the ending time. In meditation you must feel you have time or the mind will always remain superficial and restless. You may have a cushion time of 5-10 minutes in hand.
- Do not undertake any breath control unless guided by an expert. Normal and relaxed breathing will do. If you want to observe something, observe whether when you inhale the belly expands like a balloon and contracts when you exhale. That is enough. Holding the breath is not advised for beginners.
- When you sit, remember **you** are different from *your* mind, body and senses. Witness the mind as you do a kid playing. Just take note of what it does when it is given free time and free rein.

- After some time, you will find the various tendencies of your mind. What thoughts play a dominant role in it, what thoughts cause you agitation, irritation, excitement, peace, happiness, etc.
- Then compare all of them in relation to the goal/ideal you have set before you. And analyze carefully what thoughts you do not want and what you do not need. Also what thoughts you do want to have more and more.
- Now you may slowly switch to a practice of applying will-power on your mind and trying to change it as you like it to be. You will know what to do and what not to do, if you are a careful investigator. Now you play a guru to your mind.
- Those who are trying to evade some bad thoughts from recurring have to be bold and persistent. Cut down the old thoughts again and again as they come to you again and again, and then the roots will die.
- When you begin the practice of meditation, there may be a period of stress. But surely there comes a period of stability. Then, when you meditate for even a short time you reach a deeper part of your

being. You feel as if someone has poured energy into your body and your mind and they are filled with peace and joy.

- You go to a pool of peace and joy and strength—that is how one should meditate. One day you will find that after your meditation you will feel yourself full of power. And then you will never want to leave the practice.
- You become calm by eliminating the causes of mental disturbance. Find out what they are and get rid of them. It is as simple as that. It is all about how to remove disturbing things from your mind and your life.
- Love the practice. It is very paying. Only you must have the patience to wait. There is so much joy in it. If you do it right then after some time you will not need anything else. You will be a very integrated personality. Thousands have experienced it and verified this result.

In the above steps we have tried to give a very general and pragmatic picture of the practice of meditation. You can use your discrimination freely to make small amendments regarding the time, the period, the suggestions/commands you like to give to your mind,

etc. One has to remember that in this world every person is different from the other person. Each is a unique personality. You should be able to find out what suits you and what does not. Otherwise consult an able guide. The best guide we suggest is the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda. To whatever walk of life you may belong, to whatever religion, culture, language or race you may belong, you can find help in this literature. The world has not yet fully opened the gift he has given. You may be able to do this great favor of opening it for yourself and for those around you.

The mind is like a great pool of water. When this pool-like mind becomes calm and serene without any



waves and even ripples, you can see the things, the thoughts, impressions or tendencies, lying deep inside on the bed. Just like

you can see fish moving deep under water when a lake is clean and calm, you can see what is deep down in your mind, once it is quietened and purified with the help of meditation.

So the whole idea is to make the pool calm. Calmness and purity are different words for the same thing. How do you do this? You need to change your whole outlook on life.

1. The goal of life is the pursuit of **knowledge** and not of pleasure.
2. One must have a specific goal in life and must devote **all** energy to that one direction alone.
3. First one must leave no stone unturned to be the **ideal** person (in relation to one's family, workplace, country etc) in society. Unless a person lives up to his/her highest conception of truth, he/she goes to pieces.

If a person keeps these points in mind and tries to change and conduct his/her life accordingly, he/she will have much less distractions while meditating. Accordingly a person has to fix his/her lifestyle, his/her routine, his/her tastes and hobbies, his/her marital status, etc. Then, if he/she regularly and diligently practices concentration, meditation and the like, he/she shall succeed in controlling his/her mind soon and shall make his/her life blessed.

The practice of meditation must be regular, without any break, day after day. The mind cannot be trusted. We do not know from day-to-day what we will think. We need the steadying influence of the meditative period. A Swami used to say, "If you are tired and cannot think, meditate. You will find that your mind has become refreshed."

Few people recognize that accomplishment outside is greatly inferior to accomplishment within. All greatness comes from a calm and joyful mind. Only a joyous and cheerful heart can feel the dark sufferings of humankind. There is no better tonic for the nerves than pure thoughts.

Swami Vivekananda says, “The strong, the well-knit, the young, the healthy, the daring alone are fit to be Yogis. To the Yogi everything is bliss; every human face that he sees brings cheerfulness to him. That is the sign of a virtuous



man. Misery is caused by sin, and by no other cause. What business have you got with clouded faces? It is terrible. If you have a clouded face, do not go out that day; shut yourself up in your room. What right have you got to carry this disease out into the world? When your mind has become controlled, you have control over the whole body; instead of being a slave to this machine, the machine is your slave. Instead of this machine being able to drag the soul down, it becomes its greatest helpmate.”

In this journey, initially, dealing with the mind may look like riding a tamed tiger. Though tamed, you have to be highly alert and on guard, lest it will drag you down and devour you suddenly. But one day, as the fruit of your regular practice, dealing with this mind becomes like riding a nice little pony, which doesn't fell you and injure you, much less devour you.

Chapter 3

Traits of Your Mind

Habit-forming

The mind is a creature of habit. It is prone to habits: it doesn't matter what kind of habit it is, it likes to form them. If you feed it with good habits, it will learn them. If not, it will make bad habits—automatically. So one has to be careful, and work towards feeding the mind with positive ideas and habits always.

A man wanted to get a spirit under his control that could fulfill all his wishes. He pestered a hermit for it for a long time. Vexed, the hermit said one day, “Well! I shall give you a demon. You should keep him busy all the time. But remember, when he has no work he will eat you up.” And a demon was given to the man. Now whatever the man wanted the creature did it for him in a moment. Soon this man was out of ideas about how to keep the demon engaged. He could get everything he wanted but now the demon was without work and was about to devour him. He simply ran to the hermit and begged the holy man to save him. The hermit chanted something and ordered the chasing demon to get lost. Thus the man's life was saved.

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence therefore is not an act but a habit.”

– Aristotle.

The mind is like the demon. If you don't keep it fed with high thoughts and habits always, it starts to descend towards rubbish. It doesn't stay at one level constantly. Either it has to go up or fall down. So do keep it going up always.

There was a religious person, who did a certain ritual at 9:30 pm every evening. For many years he never missed it. One day, he was in a bad place trying to do a misdeed. At 9:30 pm his mind began to tell him that he couldn't miss the ritual. Try as he might he couldn't pacify the mind, so he had to abandon the act of vice and run home, take a bath and finish the ritual. And meanwhile he came to his senses, his sense of discrimination returned; he realized how this one good habit had saved him from the misdeed. That is the power of habit!

There is yet another story. A wise man told a young man that on a particular beach there are thousands of stones which are of the size that fits into a man's palm. All of them shine but only one of them is a diamond. It was one of the biggest diamonds in the world. If one just looks carefully for half a minute at the stone, one can tell whether it is the real diamond or stone. The young

man with lot of hope started examining every stone individually and to avoid repetition began to throw every stone examined into the sea. He did it for days and threw hundreds of them into the sea. Finally after seven days he came across the diamond. It shone beautifully. But even as he was examining it his hand by the *sheer force of habit* flung the diamond into the sea! He could not believe what he had done. The body and mind did the throwing so many times that the person himself could not resist the force of habit.

Swami Vivekananda says that the mind is like an ocean. Whatever we do, say or even think, make an impression on our mind. It sinks deep into the mind. Nothing is lost. Apparently, it may seem that you have forgotten all about that; but it is deep in the unconscious mind. It waits for a favorable opportunity to come back to the surface, express itself and assert its influence on the person. When this impression or samskara is formed like a seed, it sprouts at the opportune moment and makes the person repeat the action. There is a force felt from within to do the thing again. When it is repeated thus, this impression gets stronger. Like a cycle the samskara makes the person perform the same action again and again. This gets stronger and becomes a tendency and later a habit. Such a bundle of habits

determine the character of a person. If they are good, a person's good character is said to have been established and if they are bad, his character is bad. We never work alone. All the forces of good back our good efforts and all the forces of evil back our evil deeds.

It has to be emphasized that character is what distinguishes one person from another. A person of good character is inclined to do only good things. He will be helpless to do anything but good as he has a whole gamut of samskaras, tendencies and habits forcing him that way. Similar is the case with the man of bad character. He cannot help but be bad and do bad. Of course, there are ways by which one may change to the other side.

Repository of Character

But character contains something more than mere morality. For example, you may be a very moral person, but you may not necessarily believe that loyalty is a part of morality. Some of you would say that renunciation, detachment, strength of mind and confidence in oneself are not moral values. Although these qualities can probably be related to some of the cardinal moral virtues, let us make this distinction. For example, if a person has no confidence in himself, you would not call him immoral. Character, then, is made up of the cultivation of moral virtues plus some other virtues. In any kind of

life—material, intellectual or spiritual—all these virtues are very necessary in order that we can grow. Extremely necessary!

Whatever denies the true nature of our own being is against the formation of character, and whatever brings to me the sense of my own true nature is an essential element of character. Strength, the cultivation of fearlessness and the eradication of all kinds of weaknesses are essential factors in the development of character. We are the spirit. And if we are, we cannot at the same time be full of fear. Selfishness, by undermining one's true nature would destroy character. So unselfishness is also a necessary ingredient of character.

“True nobility lies not in being superior to others but being superior to your former self.”

Neither money pays, nor name, nor fame, nor learning, it is character that can cleave through the adamant wall of difficulties.

- Swami Vivekananda

What is the force behind a Buddha? What is the force behind a Christ? Behind a Vivekananda? A Gandhi? It is CHARACTER. What an impact character can make! Just by seeing Gautama Buddha, Angulimala, the hardcore bandit, surrendered. He felt irresistible peace,

calmness, power and light in Buddha's very appearance. Of course there was great spiritual power in him but it was also in the character. Five hundred lives of strong moral and ethical foundation was behind Buddha. When one goes through the *Jataka Tales*, where his previous incarnations are described, one is astounded at the strength of his morality. The British knew that every word Gandhi spoke was truth and the outcome of love and great sacrifice. That is why his personality and character were so irresistible that they gave up finally and India attained freedom. Similarly there are many incidents in the lives of Jesus Christ, Swami Vivekananda and others.

The only remedy for bad habits is counter habits; all the bad habits that have left their impressions are to be controlled by good habits. Go on doing good, thinking holy thoughts continuously; that is the only way to suppress base impressions. Never say any person is hopeless, because such a person only represents a character, a bundle of habits, which can be checked by new and better ones. Character is repeated habits, and repeated habits alone can reform character.

Therefore, the one thing, vitally important, is to build one's character. We can never stress the importance of devoting enough strength in character-building.

Character has to be established through a thousand stumbles.

Arise and awake. What matters it if this little life goes? Everyone has to die, the saint or the sinner, the rich or the poor. The body never remains for anyone. Arise and awake and be perfectly sincere. Our insincerity in India is awful; what we want is character, that steadiness and character that make a man cling on to a thing like grim death.

Let the sages blame or let them praise, let Lakshmi come today or let her go away, let death come just now or in a hundred years; he indeed is the sage who does not make one false step from the right path. Arise and awake, for the time is passing and all our energies will be frittered away in vain talking.

Chapter 4

Your Mind and Your Personality

What is Personality?

You see what is happening all around us. The world is one of influence. Part of our energy is used up in the preservation of our own bodies. Beyond that, every particle of our energy is day and night being used in influencing others. Our bodies, our virtues, our intellect, and our spirituality, all these are continuously influencing others; and so, conversely, we are being influenced by them. This is going on all around us. Now, to take a concrete example: A man comes; you know he is very learned, his language is beautiful, and he speaks to you by the hour; but he does not make any impression. Another man comes, and he speaks a few words, not well-arranged, ungrammatical perhaps; all the same, he makes an immense impression. Many of you have seen that. So it is evident that words alone cannot always produce an impression. Words, even thoughts contribute only one-third of the influence in making an impression, the person, two-thirds. What you call the personal magnetism of the speaker—that is what goes into impressing you.

In our families there are heads; some of them are successful, others are not. Why? We complain of others in our failures. The moment I am unsuccessful, I say, so-and-so is the cause of the failure. In failure, one does not like to confess one's own faults and weaknesses. Each person tries to hold himself/herself faultless and lay the blame upon somebody or something else, or even on bad luck. When heads of families fail, they should ask themselves, why it is that some persons manage a family so well and others do not. Then you will find that the difference is owing to the man—his presence, his personality.

Coming to great leaders of mankind, we always find that it was the personality of the man that counted. Now, take all the great authors of the past, the great thinkers. Really speaking, how many thoughts have they thought? Take all the writings that have been left to us by the past leaders of mankind; take each one of their books and appraise them. The real thoughts, new and genuine, that have been thought in this world up to this time, amount to only a handful. Read in their books the thoughts they have left for us. The authors do not appear to be giants to us, and yet we know that they were great giants in their own day. What made them so? Not simply the thoughts they thought, neither the books they wrote,

nor the speeches they made, it was something else that is now gone, that is their personality. As I have already remarked, the personality of the man is two-thirds of his self, and his intellect, his words, are but one-third. It is the real man, the personality of the man that runs through us. Our actions are but effects. Actions must come when the man is there; the effect is bound to follow the cause.

Importance of Time

When one begins to build character by starting to form habits, one must beware that one doesn't waste any time. You must bring your mind under control by consciously directing it so that it cannot think for itself. Suppose the mind wants to suddenly sleep, you can't simply let it go its own way. You should have a definite schedule for the whole day. If you want to rest for two hours, let that also be part of your routine. Make your mind go consciously and deliberately from one occupation to another occupation, until the time comes for you to fall asleep in the night. The mind easily becomes inattentive. You are doing one thing then the other parts of your body and mind should not do some different things. The mind should be always held in your full and conscious control.

Do not have time on your hands to daydream. Make the most of *every* moment. Time is very valuable. Who knows when you will have a better opportunity? You must *not* dwell on things which are unnecessary. You must not while away time in gossip. You must not take interest in things which are not part of the truth. You must not get interested in other people's affairs just out of curiosity. A terrible list! Isn't it? But it is worth it. Have you observed the achievers and the winners? All of them follow these things. They know the value of time.

A group of college students begged novelist Sinclair Lewis to give them a lecture, explaining that all of them were to become writers themselves.

Lewis began with: "How many of you really intend to be writers?" All hands were raised. "In that case, there is no point in my talking. My advice to you is: go home and write, write, write..." with that, he returned his notes to his pocket and left the room.

Most of us want to become writers, pilots, painters, and so many other things. But what do we do? Dream and dream again. But what we have to do is to *do it right now*.

Everybody recognizes that time is money; that time is life; but time is also mind; the way you spend your time will determine the condition of your mind.

Few Tips:

1. Prepare for the next day the night before.
2. Distribute your time for all these essentials—work, family and self-development. Do not be a workaholic.
3. Be early for appointments. Avoid last minute rush.
4. Plan. Be proactive.
5. Avoid procrastination. Develop a ‘DO IT NOW’ attitude.
6. Organize your home, workplace and table. Believe in ‘a place for every thing and everything in its place’.
7. Provide buffers in between appointments and give realistic time for completion of activities.
8. Do important work everyday; not only urgent or crises work.
9. Introspect and prevent crises.
10. Learn to say ‘No’ whenever needed—firmly, but politely.

11. Do one thing at a time.
12. Learn quick reading, quick writing, and quick talking techniques.
13. Develop a 'No disturbance time zone'—for introspection, planning, and creativity.
14. Delegate work.
15. Use waiting time usefully.
16. Ensure your activities are directed towards long-term and short-term goals. Avoid doing activities which do not lead to your goals.
17. Review how you are spending your time and make periodic corrections.
18. Take time to work, think, play, read, love and laugh.
19. Have control on your time. Do not allow others to control your time.
20. Prioritize. Have a 'To Do' list.
21. Learn to rest and relax.
22. Do 'High pay off' items first. Don't involve yourself in doing 'trivial many' things at the cost of the 'vital few'.
23. Analyze interruptions like phone calls, visitors, failures, noise, etc., and take action to reduce them.

24. Avoid too much 'Perfectionism.'
25. Do difficult and unpleasant activities in your 'Creative time'.
26. Be gracious with people and ruthless with time.

Developing Will-power

Concentrate, gather all your energies and pour them in the right channels. You need very little to go ahead if you really *want* to go ahead.

Be strong and manly. Be ashamed of any smallness within you. It does not become you. The most important thing is your own resolution to succeed. Your inner potential is raring to go; open the mental and spiritual gates and it will flood the whole world. By lifting your thoughts up your whole life can be elevated.

You have to have many small targets. Slowly we have to build up your will power. Suppose you are a student, you study for one hour and then you should examine yourself about what you have studied. When you start succeeding in these small and realistic goals you gain confidence and your will-power is strengthened.



Like Swami Vivekananda, there was another disciple of Sri Ramakrishna by name Swami Turiyananda. In his whole life he never sat with a bent backbone. Always upright! Imagine what a tremendous amount of will-power it takes to accomplish even such a small thing for the whole life.

The Brooklyn Bridge that spans the river tying Manhattan Island to Brooklyn is truly a miracle bridge. In 1863, a creative engineer named John Roebling was inspired by an idea for this spectacular bridge. However, bridge-building experts throughout the world told him to forget it; it could not be done.

Roebling convinced his son, Washington, who was a young up-coming engineer, that the bridge could be



built. The two of them developed the concepts of how it could be accomplished and how the obstacles could be overcome. With unharnessed excitement and inspiration, they hired their crew and began to build their dream bridge.

The project was only a few months under construction when a tragic accident on the site took the life of John Roebling and severely injured his son, Washington. Washington was left with permanent brain damage and was unable to talk or walk. Everyone felt that the project would have to be scrapped since the Roeblings were the only ones who knew how the bridge could be built.

Even though Washington was unable to move or talk, his mind was as sharp as ever, and he still had a burning desire to complete the bridge. An idea hit him as he lay in his hospital bed, and he developed a code for communication. All he could move was one finger, so he touched the arm of his wife with that finger, tapping out the code to communicate to her what to tell the engineers who were building the bridge. For thirteen years, Washington tapped out his instructions with his finger until the spectacular Brooklyn Bridge was finally completed.

Courage Fosters Faith

Courage is the essence of faith. Only the brave can have faith. We live in a world in which fear predominates, and next to fear, is prejudice. The very fact that you have the courage to struggle will itself bring you nearer to your goal.

So many are afraid of struggle! Where have you found bravery without the necessity for struggle? How



can you express courage without struggle? Can you claim to be heroes if you have never entered the battlefield? The trouble with most of us is that we catch hold of the lowest rung of the ladder and there we wait, thinking that someone

else will do the rest for us. Think again: are you not cheating yourself this way? When you are able to laugh in the face of life you become the sovereign of the world—just like the person who is prepared to die.

If you have struggle within you, know that God has blessed you. If you stay where you are you glide pleasantly—peace there is, but it is the peace of degeneration. In life, you must always think you are a soldier, because you have a purpose. We are not talking of those



who live a happy-go-lucky life. The cult of happiness is deadly for the soul. Soldiers are not sent to the battlefield with the words, “My boys, I expect you to be happy!” When surrounded by enemies your mere goodness will not help you. You have to roar like a lion. When people in the world want to browbeat you, open your eyes like a lion and browbeat them back. Fight like the strong, not like the weak. Fight for conquest, not for retaliation. You may fight to carry something through—no more than that—and afterward, harbor no resentment.

**“Courage is resistance to fear;
mastery of fear—not absence of fear.”**

- Mark Twain

In this world of cruelty, everyone has to have some kind of defense mechanism. Otherwise you are disturbed

by all sorts
of things
and more
importantly
all sorts of
ideas. How
can you
keep to one
i d e a l



doggedly when everyday you are presented with so many

different ideas and ideals? You have to stand rock-solid when it is a risk of deviating from your principles, but you may float with the current when it is a matter of opinions. You need a sword in your hand for the battlefields that are within and without. You have to fight every inch of the way if you want to reach the goal. How shall we carry the sword, then? We should not have any kind of antagonistic feeling toward anybody. The sense of hatred has a weakening influence that will corrode us from within.

Carry the sharp sword of wisdom in your hand. Advance like a hero. Don't be thwarted by anything. Boldness and determination are called for. Look the universe in the eye and say, "On your knees! Your master has come!" But this is not physical aggression. This should be your spirit. And take 'caution'. Does it imply fear? Then use the word *alertness*. Alertness is the sign of the brave man. Can you believe that all real struggles are undertaken calmly? Gentleness, calmness, peace—that is the real strength! Results do not come about suddenly or miraculously. You have to be calm and steady.

Courage is not defined by those who fought and did not fall, but by those who fought, fell and rose again.

In climbing mountains, going down is also going forward. This we forget. Sometimes misery comes to

you not because you have done anything bad in the past, but because something good is going to come to you in the future. This you must remember: tomorrow your condition may change. So do not feel complacent and stop your effort. March on! March on! No life will be a failure; there is no such thing as failure in the universe. A hundred times man will hurt himself, a thousand times he will tumble, but in the end he will reach the goal.

In defeat, do not lose heart. Do not give up. Believe in yourself. Believe in your abilities. Steady, steady. Be steady like a rock. The light of victory will be in your eyes. It is not necessarily the talented person who advances; it is the determined person who does so.



Swami Vivekananda writes in a letter, "Struggle, struggle, was my motto for the last ten years. Struggle, still say I! When it was all dark, I used to say, struggle; when light is breaking in, I still say, struggle... No one has ever succeeded in keeping the society in good humor and at the same time did great works. One must work as the dictate comes from within, and then if it is right and good, society is bound to veer round, perhaps centuries

after one is dead and gone. We must plunge heart and soul and body into the work. And until we be ready to sacrifice everything else to one idea and to one alone, we never, never will see the light.

**“A failure is a man who has blundered,
but is not able to cash in on the experience.”**

- Elbert Hubbard

Go on bravely. Do not expect success in a day or a year. Always hold on to the highest. Be steady. Avoid jealousy and selfishness. Be obedient and eternally faithful to the cause of truth, humanity, and your country, and you will move the world. Remember it is the person, the life, which is the secret of power—nothing else. Keep this letter and read the last lines whenever you feel worried or jealous. Jealousy is the bane of all slaves. It is the bane of our nation. Avoid that always. All blessings attend you and all success.”

**“To rejoice in another’s prosperity, is to give content
to your own lot: to mitigate another’s grief,
is to alleviate or dispel your own.”**

- Thomas Edwards

Swami Vivekananda once read a story about some ships that were caught in a cyclone in the South Sea Islands, and there was a picture of it in the *Illustrated*

London News. All of them were wrecked except one English vessel (H.M.S. Calliope and the American men-of-war at Samoa), which weathered the storm. The picture showed the men who were going to be drowned, standing on the decks and cheering the people who were sailing through the storm. Be brave and generous like that. Do not drag others down to where you are.

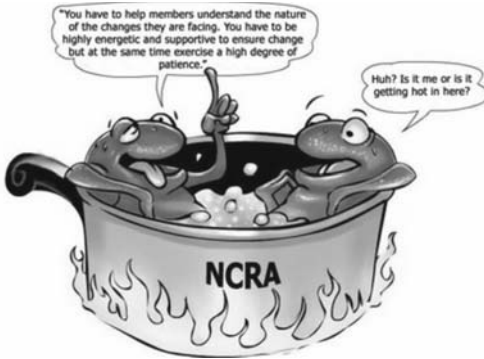


Never let life's hardships disturb you. All have to face problems, even saints and sages. But they do not get disturbed by them.

Learning from Conflicts

Conflict is good. Yes you read it right. Conflict is good. Conflict bothers people today, but without conflict no growth is attained. "Complacent as a cow"—is there any growth in that? Many times we are destroyed by life's tranquility. Only disasters can save us. If you throw a frog into a pan of boiling water, it will jump out in a second. But if you place it in a pan of water that is heated very gradually, it will lose the tension to spring when the moment to leap arrives.

We do not say that every conflict is desirable, but conflict in itself is not always bad. If you have a conflict or misunderstanding among yourselves, never try to solve



it by deciding who is right or wrong. That would do in a court of law. But when you want to lead lives of concentration,

goodness, restraint and peace, facile justice has no place in such a life! How can there be justice in an unjust world? Transcend the conflict—just forget it. It is not that the other person admits he is wrong, in spite of this you are friendly towards him; that is your triumph. But will not the other person continue to do wrong? No. the very fact that you forgot will change him. Life will teach him. God will teach him. Realize that you cannot do anything practically about the other's wrong views than getting yourself into conflict and making your life miserable, because most will not try to understand and those that do try to understand would understand when you had told them for the first time. The most important ingredient of wisdom is a sense of proportion. You should know

how much to talk and how much to show your feelings. If you do it in excess or less, you have had it.

But if you cannot avoid conflict, have it—what of that? Conflict will be what will save you many times. Problems are not solved; problems are transcended. If you think you have solved them, then you are making peace with your present condition, which is a compromise. Those who want to progress do not compromise. Most of our problems are phases, qualities of our own self-existence. When we change our state of mind, all the problems pertaining to our previous state will be left behind. Once we have grasped this principle, we can leave behind problem after problem.

When there is a conflict between the heart and the brain, let the heart be followed, because intellect has only one state—reason—and within that, the intellect works; it cannot go beyond this. It is the heart which takes one to the highest plane, which intellect can never reach; it goes beyond the intellect, and reaches to what is called inspiration.

Attitude is Everything

Your attitude is more important than your aptitude. A positive mental attitude is the key to success. We can't tailor-make the situations of life, but we can tailor-make

an attitude to fit into them—before they arise. That is attitude control.

Successful persons are positive and positive persons are successful. Why? They deliberately feed their minds with clean, clear, powerful and positive thoughts regularly.

“It is our mental attitude which makes the world what it is for us. The whole world is in our minds.”

- Swami Vivekananda

When boiled a carrot becomes soft, losing its hardness; an egg becomes hard, losing its fragile nature. But a coffee seed while getting boiled changes the flavor of the water with its rich aroma. When crisis knocks on your door, how do you respond? As a carrot? As an egg? Or as a coffee seed?

Choose your language

Reactive Language

1. There is nothing I can do
2. That is just the way I am
3. She makes me so mad/angry
4. They won't allow that

Proactive Language

1. Let us look for an alternative
2. I can choose a different approach
3. I can control my feelings
4. I can create an effective presentation

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 5. I have to do that | 5. I will choose an appropriate response |
| 6. I can't | 6. I choose |
| 7. I must | 7. I prefer |
| 8. If only..... | 8. I will |

The Pencil Parable

In the beginning, the Pencil Maker spoke to the pencil saying, "There are five things you need to know before I send you out into the world. Always remember them and you will become the best pencil you can be."

1. You will be able to do many great things, but only if you allow yourself to be held in someone's hand.
2. You will experience a painful sharpening from time to time, but this is required if you are to become a better pencil.
3. You have the ability to correct any mistakes you might make.
4. The most important part of you will always be what's inside.
5. No matter what the condition, you must continue to write. You must always leave a clear, legible mark no matter how difficult the situation.

The pencil understood, promising to remember, and went into the box fully understanding its Maker's purpose.

Thought Power

Always think of yourself in the best of terms and try to live up to them. You will be surprised. By thinking about negative things, you strengthen them. How can you forget what you think about everyday? Doubt punctuates our progress from beginning to end. Do not dwell on the defects of your nature, but rather dwell on that which will take you to your goal, to your ideal. You do not have to keep checking and rechecking mistakes—that is not a spiritual way of life. Just plunge into your battlefield.

“Half of the failures in life come from pulling one's horse when he is leaping.”

- Thomas Hood

The man of self-confidence is a master of destiny. He is positive, affirmative. Swami Vivekananda says, “The history of the world is the history of a few men who had faith in themselves. That faith calls out the divinity within. You can do



anything. You fail only when you do not strive sufficiently to manifest infinite power. As soon as a man or a nation loses faith, death comes.” At another place he said, “Let people say whatever they like, stick to your own convictions, and rest assured, the world will be at your feet. They say, “Have faith in this fellow or that fellow”, but I say, “Have faith in yourself first”, that’s the way. Have faith in yourself — all power is in you — be conscious and bring it out. Say, “I can do everything.””

What makes a person stand up and work? Strength! Strength is goodness, weakness is sin. If there is one word that you find coming out like a bomb from the Upanishads, bursting like a bomb-shell upon masses of ignorance, it is the word fearlessness. And the only religion that ought to be taught is the religion of fearlessness. Either in this world or in the world of religion, it is true that fear is the sure cause of degradation and sin. It is fear that brings misery, fear that brings death, fear that breeds evil.

“Almost anything you do will be insignificant, but it is very important that you do it.”

- Gandhi

Those who are always down-hearted and dispirited in this life can do no work; from life to life they come and go wailing and moaning. “The earth is enjoyed by

heroes”—this is the unfailing truth. Be a hero. Always say, “I have no fear.” Tell this to everybody —”Have no fear”. Fear is death, fear is sin, fear is hell, fear is unrighteousness, fear is wrong life. All the negative thoughts and ideas that are in this world have proceeded from this evil spirit of fear.

- A positive thought is the seed of a positive result.
- If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude. Don't complain.
- The most significant change in a person's life is a change of attitude. Right attitudes produce right actions.
- If you really want to be happy, no power on earth can keep you from being happy.
- Whether a glass is half-full or half-empty, depends on the attitude of the person looking at it.
- There is a better way for everything. Find it.
- A positive attitude is not a destination. It is a way of life.
- The difference between a successful person and others is not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of will.

- The positive thinker sees the invisible, feels the intangible, and achieves the impossible.
- The man with confidence in himself gains the confidence of others.
- You will only go as far as you think you can go.
- A positive attitude is like a magnet for positive results.
- Our life is a reflection of our attitudes.
- Positive attitudes create a chain reaction of positive thoughts.
- Attitude, not aptitude, determines your altitude.
- No man fails if he does his best.
- Sooner or later, those who win are those who think they can.
- A creative attitude is the fuel of progress and growth.
- Either I will find a way, or I will make one.
- Be the change you want to see in this world.
- Good to forgive, better to forget!

**How happy a man is, is not how much he has but
how little he needs.**

Positive Attitude

1. Believe that your performance, health, behavior and success depend on your attitude.
2. Believe that attitude can be changed.
3. Take PERSONAL responsibility to change/improve your attitude. Do not blame (or shift responsibility to) circumstances, things or persons.
4. Develop friendship and acquaintance with people with a positive mind.
5. Set your values and priorities right and be clear about them.
6. Be aware of your attitude in different situations; be introspective—think ‘Why did I behave the way I did?’—be critical, analyze whether your attitude/response was appropriate in a given situation.
7. Delay your response triggered off by negative emotions like anger, jealousy, greed, helplessness, cynicism, ego, and fear.
8. Your physical state greatly affects your attitude. Take care regarding dietary habits, exercises, hobbies, correct way of breathing, relaxation techniques, posture and other life styles.
9. Develop positive self-talk

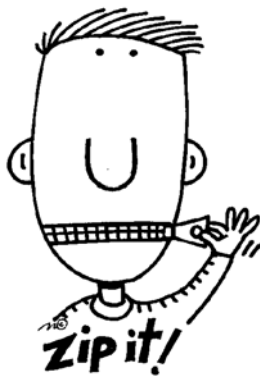
10. Seek feedback from others regarding your attitude and be positive and thankful about it.
11. Develop congruency in your attitude, thoughts, behavior, expression (speech) and action.
12. Have patience; attitude takes time to change.

“Nothing can stop the man with the right mental attitude from achieving his goal; nothing on earth can help the man with the wrong mental attitude.”

- Thomas Jefferson

Power of Silence

Most people talk nonsense. First one has to control one's speech, then the mind with all its desires and then the ego. Silence is the shrine of God. Struggle in absolute stillness and silence, whether for five months or five years. Everyone has to pass through that stage. Calmly, quietly, go ahead. The spoken word that our superficial mind receives rarely does any good. If you are untouched by gossip, you will be surprised at how much nonsense has gone out of your life. If you don't have to speak, *do not* speak.



When Calvin Coolidge was President of the US, he saw dozens of people each day. Most had complaints of one kind or another. One day a visiting Governor told the President that he did not understand how he was able to meet so many people in the space of a few hours.

“Why, you are finished with all your visitors by dinner time,” said the Governor, “while I am often in my office till midnight.”

“Yes,” said Coolidge. “That’s because you talk.”

Silence is not only for practical day-to-day dealings, but there is a lot more to it with respect to mental, intellectual and spiritual development. The power is with the silent ones, who only live and love and then withdraw their personality. Out of purity and silence comes the word of power.

**If A is successful in life, the equation can be
A=X+Y+Z. X being his Work, Y being his Play, and
Z, that which has kept his mouth shut.**

Learning from Mistakes

We shall make mistakes, but being aware of them and learning from them is important. Swami Vivekananda says, “I have committed many mistakes in my life; but mark you, I am sure of this that without every one of those mistakes I should not be what I am

today, and so am quite satisfied to have made them. I do not mean that you are to go home and willfully commit mistakes; do not misunderstand me in that way. But do not mope because of the mistakes you have committed, but know that in the end all will come out straight. I cannot be otherwise, because goodness is our nature, purity is our nature, and that nature can never be destroyed. Our essential nature always remains the same.

There is nothing that is absolutely evil. The devil has a place here as well as God; else he would not be here. Just as I told you, it is through Hell that we pass to Heaven. Our mistakes have places here. Go on! Do not look back if you think you have done something that is not right. Now, do you believe you could be what you are today, had you not made those mistakes before? Bless your mistakes, then. They have been angels unawares. Blessed be torture! Blessed be happiness! Do not care what be your lot. Hold on to the ideal. March on! Do not look back upon little mistakes and things. In this battlefield of ours, the dust of mistakes must be raised. Those who are so thin-skinned that they cannot bear the dust let them get out of the ranks.”

Faith in God

A pious missionary went out on business. All of a sudden his three sons died of cholera. His wife covered

the three dead bodies of her beloved children with a sheet and was awaiting her husband at the gate. When he returned, she detained him at the gate and put him the question, “My dear husband, someone entrusts something to you and in your absence suddenly takes it back. Will you feel sorry?” He replied, “Certainly I would not”. Then she took him in, removed the sheet and showed the three corpses. He bore this calmly and buried the bodies. Such is the strength of mind of those who hold firm faith in the existence of an all-merciful God who disposes of everything in the universe.

Want to know one practical, down-to-earth effect of faith in God? When someone offends you or some misery falls on you, you can raise your spirit to heights where offences and miseries cannot reach.

Commitment and Achievement

Each work has to pass through these stages—ridicule, opposition, and then acceptance. Each man who thinks ahead of his time is sure to be misunderstood. So opposition and persecution are welcome, only I have to be steady and pure and must have immense faith in God, and all these will vanish.

W.A. Murray, who wrote *The Scottish Himalayan Expedition* in 1951, talks about the importance of commitment. In a famous quote, he says:

“Until one is committed there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is an elementary truth the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans; that the moment one definitely commits oneself, **then Providence moves too**. All sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one’s favour all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no one could have dreamt would have come their way.”

Self-confidence

**I see a greater Power than man,
Or God, or devil at my back.**

This is a statement made by Swami Vivekananda when he was not being helped by his own people and countrymen. He was alone in a strange land defending his religion and his people who were delaying even to provide credentials to their best-ever representative. What confidence and faith must the man have possessed to say such bold words in such trying circumstances!

A top World War II ace once said that fighter pilots fall into two broad categories: those who go out to kill and those who, secretly, desperately, know they are going to get killed—the hunters and the hunted.

“Faith, faith, faith in ourselves, faith, faith in God—this is the secret of greatness. If you have faith in all the three hundred and thirty millions of your mythological gods, and in all the gods which foreigners have now and again introduced into your midst, and still have no faith in yourselves, there is no salvation for you. Have faith in yourselves, and stand up on that faith and be strong; that is what we need. Why is it that we three hundred and thirty millions of people have been ruled for the last one thousand years by any and every handful of foreigners who chose to walk over our prostrate bodies? Because they had faith in themselves and we had not. The great thing is to have faith in oneself, even before faith in God.”

This is what Swami Vivekananda had to say on the subject.

A Real Story

In the 1800s, an acrobat named Blondin (Jean-Francois Gravlet) became famous for crossing Niagara Falls by tightrope many times, usually with no safety net. One day a crowd gathered at the falls to watch his most dangerous attempt yet. He planned to push a wheelbarrow loaded with a heavy sack of cement across the tightrope. With that extra weight, the slightest miscalculation could tip the wheelbarrow and twist him off the wire, plunging him to death 160 feet below in the raging waters.

Thousands watched breathlessly as he made his way across, placing one foot carefully in front of the other, quietly pushing the wheelbarrow across the spray-filled chasm, oblivious to the roar of the water beneath him. When he made it to the other side, the throng let out its collective breath and cheered. What a feat!

After his crossing, Blondin challenged a nearby reporter: “Do you believe I can do anything on a tightrope?” “Oh yes, Mr. Blondin,” said the reporter, “After what I’ve seen today, I believe it. You can do anything.” “Do you believe, then,” said Blondin, “that instead of a sack of cement, I could put a man in this wheelbarrow—a man who has never been on a tightrope before—and wheel him, without a net, safely over to the other side?”

“Oh yes sir, Mr. Blondin,” said the reporter, “I believe it.”

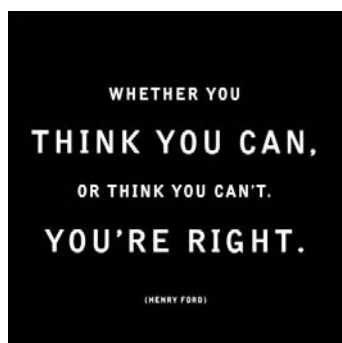
“Good,” said Blondin, “Get in.” The reporter paled and quickly disappeared into the crowd. It is



one thing to believe something, but quite another to have that kind of faith in someone. However, one person that day did have that kind of faith in Blondin. This brave volunteer agreed to get into the wheelbarrow and cross the falls with the master acrobat.

As Blondin tipped out the bag of cement and placed his passenger in the barrow, men on both sides of the falls quickly placed bets on the outcome. Then as the crowd cheered, Blondin made his way back across the falls, this time pushing a nervous passenger ahead of him. It looked like another easy conquest for the daredevil.

But when they were halfway across the 1,600-foot rope, a man with a heavy bet against them crept over and cut one of the guy wires. Suddenly, the tightrope pitched crazily back and forth, the force of the whipping motion gaining in intensity. As Blondin fought to keep his balance, he knew that they were seconds away from death. When the rim of the wheelbarrow came off the wire, they would both be pitched headlong into the churning waters.



Blondin spoke, cutting through the terror of his passenger in the wheelbarrow. “Stand up!” he



commanded. “Stand up and grab my shoulders!” The man sat there paralyzed.

“Let go and stand up! Let go of the wheelbarrow! Do it or die!” Somehow the

man managed to stand up and step out of the swaying wheelbarrow.

“Your arms... put them round my neck! Now, your legs ... round my waist!” said Blondin. Again the man obeyed, clinging to Blondin. The empty wheelbarrow fell, disappearing into the frothy turmoil far below. The aerialist stood there, using all his years of experience and every trained muscle to stay on the wire until the pitching subsided a little. Then inch by inch, he made his way across, carrying the man like a child. Finally, he deposited him on the other side. *We cannot even take a step ahead if we are not confident about it.*

The history of the world is the history of a few men who had faith in themselves. That faith calls out the divinity within. You can do anything. You fail only when you do not strive sufficiently to manifest infinite power. As soon as a man or a nation loses faith, death comes.

– Swami Vivekananda

Making Impossible Possible

Her name is Jessica Cox, aged 25. This girl of Tucson was born without arms, but that has only stopped her from doing one thing—using the word “can’t.” Her latest flight into the seemingly impossible is becoming the first Sport Pilot licensed to fly using only her feet.



With one of her feet, she mans the controls and with the other, she delicately guides the steering column. Her certificate qualifies her to fly a light-sport aircraft to altitudes of 10,000 feet.



“She’s a good pilot. She’s rock solid,” said Parrish Traweek, 42, the flying instructor at San Manuel’s Ray Blair Airport. Legs are her hands. “When she came up here driving a car,” Traweek recalled, “I knew she’d have no problem flying a plane.”

She can swim. She writes with her legs. She learns Karate. She can do all domestic things with her legs. Doctors never learned why



she was born without arms, but she figured out early on that she didn't want to use prosthetic devices.

**Success is not something to wait for:
it is something to work for.**

THE 10 THINGS IN LIFE YOU CAN REALLY TAKE CHARGE OF!

1. What you do:

- Your actions are yours alone.
- You choose to carry them out or avoid them.
- You are responsible for the effects of those actions.

2. What you say:

- The words you speak or write should be consciously chosen.
- They have an impact on your life and the lives of those you come in contact with.

3. What you think:

- There are some subconscious thoughts that you may not be able to control.
- Your thoughts, your beliefs, your ideals, etc., are what you have *chosen* to accept and believe in.
- So choose better.

4. Your work:

- Many people like to overlook this one. Never shirk responsibilities.

- It's your job and you chose it. If you stay (or quit), that's a choice as well.
5. *The people you associate with:*
- Your friends can either lift you up or bring you down.
 - You make the decision which type of friends you wish to have.
6. *Your basic physical health:*
- Decisions you make about your health, such as: diet, sleep, physical exercises, check-ups, etc., are in your hands. Take control of them.
7. *The environment you live in:*
- The condition of your home, the things that you possess, cleanliness, etc., are what you can control.
8. *Your fiscal situation:*
- Wisdom of Economy—what you need versus what you want. The choice is yours.
9. *Your time:*
- You choose how to 'spend' your time in various activities.
 - You'll never get more time than the 24 hour each day. But that is exactly the time anyone in the world gets per day and just see what all can be achieved!

10. Your legacy:

- All your actions, words, and knowledge that you share while you are living become the gift that you leave when you are gone.

Once you take charge of all these, you will be in almost full control of your life. These are the minimum things expected out of an individual these days.

“If you want to be happy, be.”

- Leo Tolstoy

Emotional Development

Emotion is any agitation or disturbance of mind, feeling, passion, any vehement or excited mental state. There are hundreds of emotions with their blends and variations.

Distortions within

- Anger: fury, outrage, animosity, irritability....
- Sadness: sorrow, grief, gloom, loneliness, dejection....
- Fear: anxiety, concern, edginess, terror....
- Enjoyment: happiness, relief, thrill, rapture, satisfaction....
- Love: acceptance, trust, kindness, devotion....
- Surprise: shock, amazement, wonder

Curriculum to balance

- *Self-awareness*: observing yourself; building a vocabulary for feelings.
- *Personal decision-making*: examining your actions and knowing their consequences.
- *Managing feelings*: finding ways to handle fears, anxieties and sadness.
- *Handling stress*: value of exercise, guided imagery, relaxation.
- *Empathy*: understanding others' feelings and appreciating the differences.
- *Self-acceptance*: seeing yourself in a positive light; being able to laugh at yourself.
- *Personal responsibility*: recognizing the consequences of your actions and decisions.
- *Assertiveness*: stating your concerns and feelings without anger or passivity.
- *Group dynamics*: cooperation, how to lead and when to follow

Some Useful Tips

- Prayer helps unburden many emotional imbalances.
- Cultivate the taste for watching nature
- Listen to good music

- Develop positive emotions like love, respect, kindness
- Avoid negative emotions like anger, jealousy, guilt, fear, worry, ego, inferiority, greed, etc.
- Avoid Criticizing
 Complaining
 Comparing
 Competing (the unhealthy way)
- Change Yourself

When I was a young man,
I wanted to change the world.

I found it was difficult to change the world,
So I tried to change my nation.

When I found I couldn't change the nation
I began to focus on my town.

I couldn't change the town
and as an older man,
I tried to change my family.

Now, as an elderly person I realize
the only thing I can change is myself.

And suddenly
I realize that if, long ago, I had changed myself,

I could have made an impact on my family,
My family and I could have made
an impact on our town,
their impact could have changed the nation.

And I could have changed the world.

- An unknown monk of 1100 AD

**Change can begin only from
you and only from within.**

- Stop complaining. Instead of blaming darkness everywhere, light a candle if you can! Stop blaming; instead take action
- Never Quit

Ants never quit!

- i. If they're headed somewhere and you try to stop them, they'll look for another way.
- ii. They'll climb over, they'll climb under, and they'll climb around.
- iii. They keep looking for another way.

The Lesson is:

Never quit looking for a way till you get to where you have aimed to go.

- Do All That You Possibly Can
 - i. How much will an ant gather during the summer to prepare for the winter?
 - ii. All that he possibly can.

The Lesson is:

Do all you that can....and more!

Chapter 5

Practical Hints

Anger Management:

An enemy takes up more space in our head than a friend in our heart.

The moment you are in tension

You will lose your attention

Then you are in total confusion

And you feel irritation

Then you spoil personal relation

Ultimately, you won't get cooperation

Then you'll make a big complication

Your Blood Pressure rises caution

And you will have to take medication

Instead, understand the situation

Try to think about the solution

Many problems are solved by discussion

Which will work out better in your profession

**Anger is a condition in which
the tongue works faster than the mind.**

1. The Way of Self-Awareness—you forget yourselves and then the fit comes. So always be aware of your self and do things consciously with full attention.
2. Develop a will to control anger; realize the uselessness of anger.
3. Avoid the occasion which may cause anger. Turn away from it.
4. Avoid haste—the mother of anger. Go about your work gently, lovingly and quietly.
5. Whenever you feel anger's approach, keep your mouth shut, your lips sealed.
6. Hum to yourself a simple and divine tune. Listening to soft music also helps.
7. Drink some cold water or go out and take a brisk walk.
8. Develop a sense of humor.
9. Cultivate an understanding heart or the feeling of empathy.
10. Learn to be a good listener; not only with the ears but with the heart as well.
11. Respect the other person and appreciate his/her feelings.



12. True understanding comes with the spirit of humility.
13. Look out for opportunities to be of service to others.
14. Be angry against your anger.
15. See that your face always wears a smile. Keep on smiling for miles and miles.
16. Always look at the brighter side of things.

“For a deeper understanding of the realities underlying human relationships, intense prayer is the answer.”

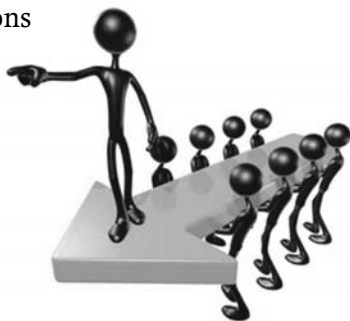
- Alexis Carrel

Become a Leader

Cultivate

- Integrity
- Effective communication
- Responsibility
- Positive mental attitude
- Consideration and respect
- Constancy of purpose
- Teamwork
- Effective resources management

- Fact-based decision-making
- Controlled emotions
- Courage
- Determination
- Ethical Behavior
- Endurance
- Dependability
- Desire to lead
- Sound judgment



Attain Success

Success is not an individual subject. It depends on many other qualities of a person. The readers are advised to go through the other sections like that of will-power, attitude, mind control, character-building, etc., to have a complete understanding of this subject.

We rarely seek to know the causes of failure! They are great men and women who raise the consciousness of people by asking questions and guiding us to success with their inspiring words and lives. Swami Vivekananda is the foremost of such leaders. He says:

Be like the pearl oyster. There is a pretty Indian fable to the effect that if it rains when the star Svati is in the ascendant, and a drop of rain falls into an oyster,

that drop becomes a pearl. The oysters know this, so they come to the surface when that star shines, and wait to catch the precious raindrop. When a drop falls into them, quickly the oysters close their shells and dive down to the bottom of the sea, there to patiently develop the drop into the pearl. We should be like that. First hear, then understand, and then, leaving all distractions, shut your minds to outside influences, and devote yourselves to developing the truth within you. There is the danger of frittering away your energies by taking up an idea only for its novelty, and then giving it up for another that is newer. Take one thing up and do it, and see the end of it, and before you have seen the end, do not give it up. He who can become mad with an idea, he alone sees light. Those that only take a nibble here and a nibble there will never attain anything. They may titillate their nerves for a moment, but there it will end. They will be slaves in the hands of nature, and will never get beyond its limitations.

Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life—think of it, dream of it! Live on that one idea! Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body, be full of that idea, and just leave every other idea alone. This is the way to success, and this is the way great giants are produced. Others are mere talking machines.

Success is not just satisfaction of some lower desires and disbelieving that one's life is a failure if he or she has not been satisfied. The important point is to make the "will to succeed" the dominant note of one's life. A strong will to persevere should be the goal. Ignorance of one's real nature and the world is the cause of failure.

Norman Vincent Peale says, "People are defeated in life not because of lack of ability but for the lack of whole-heartedness. They do not whole-heartedly expect to succeed." In many people there is an *unconscious conspiracy* against success. Fear of responsibility, day-dreaming, diversion of one's energies in the direction, becoming busy with trifling activities, complaining of lack of time and facilities, creating unfavorable situations oneself by neglecting one's duties—these are the main reasons for failure.



Deep within us is the storehouse of vibrant and positive energies. We must trust these good powers and act in life

“Failure is blindness to the strategic element in events; success is readiness for instant action when the opportune moment arrives.”

- Newell D. Hillis

Secret formula for success!

As per research, August is the most important and lucky month in which you can achieve success provided you have determination and put in sincere and continuous efforts.

The other equally good and lucky months, as per the same research, are June, February, December, October, January, March, July, November, April, September and lastly May.

**“Our greatest glory is not in never falling,
But in rising every time we fall.”**

- Confucius

Live Now

Life consists of what a person is thinking about all day. What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us and you are the only one who can



use your ability. It's an awesome responsibility. In your ruminating on the past and forecasting for the future you forget to live in the present. The past is already history and the future is a mystery. But the Present is a gift. Open it!

**You can't change the past,
but you can ruin the present
by worrying over the future.**

We have to plan for the best but also be prepared for the worst. And leave the rest to the almighty. We can and have to learn from the past, but we should not do it as a reliving of all those bad experiences. We may plan for the future but cannot afford to dream and fantasize about it in the day.

Coping with Stress

Over the last few decades, this world of ours has changed rapidly.



Stress has nothing to do with
how many hours you work

And everything to do with how
you feel during those hours

The stupendous advances in various branches of science and technology have opened up new avenues of knowledge,

enjoyment and human endeavor. At the same time, new problems have also cropped up. New terms have become common. For instance, globalization, millennium, management, holistic approach, etc., have become household words. The revolution in communication technology has shrunk the world in an unprecedented manner. Even the concept of time has changed. In today's fast-paced society, with an acute sense of urgency, a twenty-four-hour day measures far less than what it did half a century ago. Then there is increasing air and sound pollution as also thought pollution. Furthermore, there are job deadlines and work overload. These are some of the entirely new developments which have put greater stress on the modern man.

It is not that there was no stress in ancient times. According to Thomas A. Kempis, "It is truly a misery to live upon earth." Our very existence on this earth is fraught with various kinds of dangers and difficulties, and all the ancient cultures and religious systems have worked out ways and means of dealing with such existential problems and have symbolized and codified them in the epics and myths.

Take for example the episodes of the Ramayana. Dasharatha was faced with a situation, which in modern jargon could be termed as acute stress, and he succumbed

to it. For Rama, too, it was a stressful situation sudden in its origin and chronic in nature living in hostile, unfamiliar situations for fourteen long years! Sita, by choosing to



accompany Rama to the forest voluntarily, accepted a physically stressful situation, but was saved from psychological stress by remaining under the loving protection of Rama. However, she was subjected to extreme physical and psychological stress when she was kidnapped by Ravana and placed under custody, surrounded by hostile guards. The Mahabharata too is replete with events depicting various types of stress and the way they were dealt with. These teachings have become part and parcel of Indian culture. While each individual has his or her own way of dealing with stressful situations, these examples from the epics give us guidelines which show how they can be best tackled.

Then we also have examples of stress-free personalities like Sri Krishna, the Buddha, Jesus, Mahavir, Swami Vivekananda, etc., who could face all sorts of

stressful situations with perfect equanimity. Once Swami Vivekananda was invited to deliver a lecture by some cowboys in USA. They placed a tub upside down to make a platform and asked him to deliver his speech. As he was speaking, the sound of gun-shots was heard and bullets whizzed past him. But he remained unperturbed and continued with his speech. On another occasion, he was crossing a field in England with two of his companions, a lady and a gentleman. Suddenly a bull charged at them. The gentleman ran to safety but the lady fell down in the line of the charging bull. Swami Vivekananda could have run to safety, but instead, he stationed himself in front of the lady and faced the bull. The bull hesitated and retracted its steps. Swami Vivekananda was meanwhile mentally calculating the distance to which his heavy body would be thrown by the impact of the force of the charging bull!

Stress is a state that occurs when people are (a) faced with events they perceive as endangering their physical and psychological well-being, and are (b) unsure of their ability to deal with these events. Thus, stress has two components: (a) the endangering event or stressor and (b) the stress response.

The stressors could be of various types: there could be purely physical stressors like lifting a heavy load,

walking an unusually long distance, physical illness, exposure to extremes of climate, etc. There could also be psychological stressors which could again be acute, like the death of a near and dear one, attempted murder, robbery, being sacked, divorce, etc., or, they could be chronic like daily hassles, job adjustments, conjugal disharmony, severe financial stringency, etc. Earthquakes, floods, etc., are natural, and wars are man-made collective stressors.

Stress response could be physiological or psychological. Physiological response is mediated through a structure in the brain called the thalamus. It stimulates the sympathetic nervous system which is mainly responsible for the reaction of fight or flight. More of adrenaline is secreted, the heart rate, rate of respiration and blood pressure increase; secretion of saliva and other digestive secretions are reduced and blood flow is directed towards the muscles from other organs of the body temporarily. This acute physiological stress reaction lasts only so long as the stressor lasts. It helps the individual to fight or fly to safety. There could be occasions when such a stressful situation persists. In



that case the thalamo-sympathetic response may also get prolonged and an initially useful, protective response may turn into a harmful response leading to diseases like peptic ulcer, hypertension, etc.

Hans Selye, the pioneer in evolving the concept of physiological stress, has pointed out that a pair of endocrine glands called adrenals plays a very vital role in stress. The adrenals have two parts: medulla and cortex. The adrenal cortex secretes a hormone called cortisol under the stimulus from the pituitary gland the band-master of the endocrine orchestra of the human body. This cortisol plays a very important role in chronic stresses and protects against the harmful effects of long-standing stress.

Although these physiological responses can be modified by drugs, they are mostly beyond our control, being mediated and governed through the autonomic nervous system and the endocrine system. However, with the help of some of the techniques of yoga, one can, to some extent, reduce the somatic reaction. One such technique is pranayama or rhythmic breathing. Breathing is the only movement which though governed by the (involuntary) autonomic nervous system, is also to some extent, under our will. We can, by practice, make our breathing far more rhythmic than it is now.

Through breath control, we can reduce the physiological response to stress.

Asana, or steady posture, as advocated by yoga, also helps to dampen the possibility of severe physiological stress; remaining without movement for a long time, first of all, trains the voluntary nervous system and then its effect is also felt on the autonomic nervous system.

As we have mentioned, the religions of the world have evolved ways and means of dealing with stressful situations. Religions are, in essence and by definition, systems of faith—faith in a superhuman, sustaining and protecting power. Such a faith is one of the most important means of stress management. People with faith can bear much greater stress than people without it. The Sanskrit word for religion is dharma which is etymologically derived from the root 'dhrt, to sustain', which means a sustaining force.

Dharma as righteousness is greatly sustaining. A person who habitually and assiduously practices moral values and follows a righteous path is less prone to breakdown under stressful situations or being swayed by threats or temptations. The constant practice of values like truth, ahimsa and brahmacharya makes a person

morally tough against stress. There cannot be a better exemplar of this than Mahatma Gandhi.

The etymological meaning of the word ashrama is 'a stress-free place'. Shrama means stress, strain, tension or labour: ashrama means without stress and ashrama, with an elongated 'a' means a place, state or situation without stress. In this sense, the division of a Hindu's lifespan into four stages which are named as brahmacharya-ashrama, grihastha-ashrama, vanaprastha-ashrama, and sanyasa-ashrama is significant. The growing, fresh, young student can without much strain learn various skills, arts and sciences. She/He can also, likewise, accomplish the difficult task of controlling the senses and the mind in that stage of life. He or she is then supposed to enter the householder's life and discharge his/her duties towards family and society. This, again, must be done in a stress-free manner. Attaining maturity in the middle age, the householder could easily hand over the responsibilities to his offspring and lead a retired stress-free life as a vanaprasthin. Finally, with all worldly desires satisfied or sublimated, one can lead a life of renunciation without internal conflicts or tensions.

There could be various types of psychological reactions to stressors. If the individual does not consider a situation a threat, there would not be any reaction. This

is an important principle which can be made use of in minimizing stress. There is a story of a Zen master who lived in a village. Once a ruthless warrior attacked the country. Everyone fled except the monk. When the invading general asked his soldiers to search the village, they reported to him that except for a lone monk, there was not a soul in the village. The commander went to the monk and said. 'Don't you know that I can run over everything without blinking an eye?' The monk calmly replied. 'And I can be run over without my blinking an eye.' The monk had no stress reaction because he never saw a situation, however grave, as a threat.

All religious systems aim at building such equanimity in individuals who are not shaken by the severest of calamities or yield to the greatest of temptations.

What is the secret of such a stable stress-resistant personality? As we have just now said, he or she does not consider any situation a threat. Why? Because they know that they are by nature divine souls who cannot in any way be affected by the modifications which are produced in the body and mind. They cannot die, cannot be hurt, and cannot be deprived of anything. The Buddhists, of course, do not believe in a soul. Instead, they believe that there is nothing permanent everything

is in a flux. Hence, to feel threatened is irrational. A devotee identifies himself with his Divine Beloved God. She/He accepts with equanimity every situation as presented by God. Or, a devotee has firm faith that the Lord will save him/her. In other words, there could be various spiritual attitudes which can make a person totally stress-free.

“It is not work that kills men, it is worry. Work is healthy; you can hardly put more on a man than he can bear. But worry is rust upon the blade. It is not movement that destroys the machinery, but friction.”

- Henry Ward Beecher

Another attitude which can make one stress-free is to be mentally prepared for the worst. Swami Vivekananda's father told him when he was a young man: “Never be surprised at anything.” In this world of Maya anything is possible. Expectation in itself conduces to stress because if it is not fulfilled, we feel sorry or depressed.

According to laboratory experiments in stress response by modern techniques, it has been proved that if a person has an intimation of the stress situation about to occur, he responds to it in a much better way. The spiritual method trains the mind to accept the inevitability of disease and death, suffering and pain.

A second response to stress could be one of positive joy, when it is not considered a treat, but a challenge and an opportunity. A person with such an attitude rejoices when stressors are presented. Rather, he seeks such stressful situations so that by responding to them, he might be able to manifest his hidden potentialities. Swami Vivekananda was a great advocate of this attitude. Every stressful situation taken in the right attitude can act as a factor in character-building and a means of manifesting the inner potentiality. Indeed, those who from their early childhood have to face prolonged stressful situations get adapted to them better than those who are not exposed to them; and they also become physically and mentally tougher and better tailored to face stress.

Herein is the utility of the religious concept of tapas. Various types of tapas or austerities like fasts and night vigils, etc., are in fact voluntarily produced, planned and calculated stressful situations. They make the mind and body less stress-prone. Never seek an easy life: this is a common teaching of all religions. St. John of the Cross says:

Always seek for preference. Not the easiest but the hardest. Not the most charming but the most boring. Not what pleases but what repels. Not what consoles

but rather what afflicts. Not what saves trouble but what gives us trouble. Not the most but the least.

One of the commonest techniques prevalent in some form or the other in all religions is meditation. Christian prayer and mass, the Hindu sandhya, the Jain samayaka and the Muslim namaz are all various forms of meditation techniques. The votary is expected to perform these religious acts faithfully, with regularity and perseverance for a long time nay, for the entire life. By these exercises the practitioner develops values like dedication, consistency and concentration. They also greatly help in imparting emotional stability to him/her and in integrating his/her personality. Such virtues are extremely useful in dealing with stressful situations.

The second group of values advocated by all religions is non-attachment and dispassion. Every situation and its associated action involve a certain amount of uncertainty with regard to its results. If one is too deeply attached to the result or success of the enterprise one is likely to get frustrated some day or the other. While attachment to an activity and the expectation of a specific result do conduce to the concentration of our energies, attachment to the result and expectation of it cause undue stress and tension. That is why one is advised to work without attachments

and have equanimity in either success or failure, victory or defeat, good or bad. Without such equanimity, it is not possible to avoid stress and tension in work.

Two more psychological techniques prevalent among the religious are (1) constant remembrance of God and (2) emphasizing that the world is unreal or unimportant and is not worth the candle. The practice of constant remembrance of God acts like a buffer between the stressful situation and the individual. We read stories of saints who, when tortured by hostile people, did not feel the stress or react very strongly; in fact, they underrated the situation and easily got over it.

Constantly considering the world as unreal, transitory, full of suffering, a place not worth living in or possessing, immunizes the mind against events which might disturb it if they were considered real. We create our own stress-situations by overreaching and by giving too great an importance to situations.

There could be unwholesome responses in the form of anxiety, irritability, anger, depression, etc. When the stressor is considered an unwanted threat but which the person can cope with, there is irritation or anxiety. But when the person feels that he or she cannot cope with the stressor there is a feeling of helplessness, depression and apathy. This happens due to lack of faith in oneself

or in Divine help. Hence, in religious systems, faith in oneself or in God is strongly advocated and there is no greater advocate of faith in oneself than Swami Vivekananda.

“Don’t take the world-phantom too seriously.”

- Swami Yatiswarananda

We must remember that religions are basically not stress-releasing systems. They have a much deeper basis and a much higher and more sublime goal in view. To use them for stress-release would be like putting the cart before the horse.

Various religions of the world have presented before their votaries different spiritual paths to follow. These paths have the same highest ultimate spiritual goal called salvation, liberation, moksha, nirvana, etc. These spiritual practices make the aspirant a less stress-prone, more stable and efficient individual. This is a preliminary pre-condition for higher spiritual pursuits.

Besides, there is an entirely different way of looking at stress. According to religious thinking, stress situations are not only inevitable and unavoidable, but also essential. One has to pass through stress throughout life. Even learning and appearing at examinations cause an amount of stress. All worldly pursuits—literary,

scientific, political, and industrial—cause some amount of stress and strain. Greatness cannot be achieved in any field nor a strong, lofty and noble character be built without passing through the fire of stress, strain and struggle. Indeed, geniuses in any field, religious or secular, have been produced only through hard struggle. Jesus Christ, Sri Ramakrishna, the Buddha, St. Francis of Assisi, Rabia—all great saints and prophets led, from the modern standard of stress-assessment, tremendously stressful lives. So much so that many of them did not live long and passed away in early middle-age. Indeed, they subjected their bodies and minds to the limits of their endurance. But while doing so, they achieved the greatest fulfillment of their lives and proved to be immensely beneficial to the world. Thus, while one may practice religious techniques, the ultimate goal must never be lost sight of.

Religious systems do not give so much importance to stress; instead they blame conflict for all the problems. Stress is not created by challenge but by conflicts, doubt and confusion which could be of various types. If one responds with fight as, for example, Arjuna was advised to do, there won't be stress. Getting involved in a definite action is the state of resolution of conflict and shifting of the stressor-stress response equation in favor of response.

Hence, according to the Indian spiritual psychology, stress is produced by conflicts and conflicts could be of various types. First, there could be conflict at the intellectual level. One may be in doubt regarding what is right and what is wrong, and may find it difficult to decide about one's goal in life and one's duty, and may be confused about one's relation with the world and the people around. One's intellectual convictions may be shaky, so also one's resolves. Many of the stresses are produced due to such a mental state. Arjuna, on the battle field, was faced with such a conflict and confessed that he was *dharma-sammudha-chetaah* or confused about his duty. Sri Krishna, while analyzing the conflict said, "Even the wise are confused about what is right and what is wrong." For, even duties that are clearly laid down may come into conflict with one another and one may not be able to decide what would conduce to the greatest good of the greatest number in a specific situation. Thus, there could be volitional conflict between the means and the end, between work and its results and about one's duty.

Of course, in the case of Arjuna, there was also another conflict—emotional. He had to fight against his own kith and kin. Such a situation—a conflict between two opposing emotions—is another cause of stress. We

love many people, things and activities, but also hate others. Normally these likes and dislikes are well-balanced and we are able to avoid the disagreeable and hold on to the agreeable. But during the course of everyone's life, situations occur when one is faced with making choices between two to give up one and take up the other. A conflict arises and consequently stress is produced.

Finally a person with a restless, uncontrolled mind is much more prone to stress than a man with a controlled mind. Desires and emotions, thoughts, feelings and memories continuously arise in one's mind, and unless one is able to control and integrate them towards one direction, one is bound to experience greater stress.

As a matter of fact, these different types of conflicts are interrelated. More often than not, we are confused intellectually, emotionally, as well as volitionally—all together.

Whether the conflicts arise in isolation or are interrelated, there could be various distinct ways of resolving them depending upon the individual's temperamental make-up. In the Gita, from the beginning to the end, these various techniques have been described. It is significant that in the Gita a conflict-free personality is described at four different places in great detail: in the

second chapter as the sthitaprajna, in the sixth chapter as a yogi, in the twelfth chapter as an ideal devotee, and in the fourteenth chapter as the person who has gone beyond the three gunas. A state of steady wisdom as described in the second chapter is attained by the path of knowledge. A yogi attains equanimity by the path of meditation described in the sixth chapter. An ideal devotee attains the same state by the path of devotion. Surrendering actions and fruits thereof to the Lord—Karma Yoga—of course is the main technique recommended by the Gita. The ideal bhakta or a person who has gone beyond the sway of the three gunas, or the man of steady wisdom—all of them have one thing in common: they display equanimity and are not swayed by the opposites of likes and dislikes, happiness and misery.

There is another diametrically opposite situation in which a person may be absolutely stress-free and yet cruel and ruthless. All tyrants and hardcore criminals are unfortunately such ‘stable personalities’. They can do any so-called heroic deed without blinking an eye. Thus there could be an evil side of stress-management. In that, it might put a damper on one’s moral sense and make one insensitive to the sufferings of others. This issue must also be addressed while discussing stress-management.

Apart from prescribing techniques which have stress-releasing effects, all orthodox religious systems lay great stress on moral and ethical values, and thus aim at building a stress-free socially harmonious personality avoiding emergence of stress-resistant evil character. Take for example yoga, one of the most popular present-day stress-management systems. It has eight parts. The first two parts or steps called Yama and Niyama, deal with moral values and day-to-day observances. Yama consists of five moral values: non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, chastity and non-covetousness. Niyama includes internal and external purity, contentment, austerity, study of scriptures and surrender to God.

Tapas makes a person physically hardy, study of scriptures makes him/her intellectually strong and surrender to God makes him/her emotionally stable. In this context it may be observed that evil mythological characters like Ravana, Hiranyakashipu, Banasura, etc., had undergone tremendous superhuman austerities. They were great tapasvis. They not only knew the scriptures but also worshipped gods like Brahma or Shiva. They were indeed great yogis and yet their practice of yoga was the cause of suffering of millions of people. This is because they disregarded the above rule, Yama, and made use of the excellences obtained by yoga for self-

aggrandizement and personal enjoyment. This is the reason why all scriptures lay much greater stress on the practice of the ethical values, especially values such as unselfishness, renunciation and service even while instructing a person to cope with stress through the practice of other aspects of yoga.

Even from the point of view of stress-management, the practice of Yama is far more important. The roots of stress lie in our greed and attachments, in our likes and dislikes, in hatred, envy and jealousy, in conceit, sensuality and possessiveness. Unless these deep-rooted evil tendencies are uprooted, one cannot hope to attain an absolutely stress-free state. Dasharatha and Arjuna, for example, were austere individuals with many exemplary virtues. Yet they broke down due to their attachments.

This has become all the more important in the modern times, when accumulation of wealth and production of capital by any means, foul or fair, have become the sole aims of life. People are becoming self-centered and have very little concern for the interests of other human beings, sub-human creatures and nature. And if stress-management techniques were to equip one to do these without qualms, it will indeed be most unfortunate. It is better to have stress and feeling for

others and serve them than to become heartless stress-free brutes.

One of the most prominent stressors today is related to time. In the modern fast-paced; competitive society there is a pressure to accomplish more and more in less and less time. There are deadlines—this much must be done within this much time, etc. Although such an attitude can bring out the best in some, one is also liable to feel stress



because the body and mind are not trained for it. This particular type of time-related stress, as a matter of fact, is man-made. The concept of time, its division into years, months, days, hours, minutes and seconds are all man-made. True, there is an astronomical clock which runs according to the movement of the sun, the moon and the earth. But the rest of the division is man-made and by laying too great a stress on it, man has created his own problems. In his book *Time, Space and Medicine*, Dr. Dossey emphasized how the concept of an absolute time has caused a lot of heart disease and hypertension.

So, how should we deal with this problem of time? In religions, it is advised not to waste a single moment,

for a moment gone can never be retrieved. The aspirant is asked to begin his or her spiritual endeavor as early in life and with as great an intensity as possible. We find in Sri Ramakrishna's case that after each day's spiritual striving he would weep and bemoan the fact that another day had passed without his having the vision of the Divine Mother. Finally, he became desperate thinking that he might never be able to get the vision of the Divine Mother. Such an intense yearning for God is most auspicious, though it is extremely stressful too.

However, Sri Ramakrishna also had a unique childlike way of relaxing. If he was anxious for something or someone, he could be consoled instantly and could relax at will. In moments of difficulty, doubt and stress, he would earnestly pray to the Divine Mother. The Divine Mother would give him some explanation and solve his problem, and he would become completely relaxed and reassured. If we could develop such complete dependence on God, we could remain as intense as the time limit in work demands, and at the same time feel totally relaxed in God.

There is another uniqueness of Sri Ramakrishna, which is unfortunately overlooked and underemphasized. He could laugh as well as weep as none else, with his whole being. To be able to laugh and weep heartily are

great stress relievers. One must learn this art from Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master.

Laughter is God's sunshine.

Swami Vivekananda never really gave much importance to time in the sense we give it. He would often be late for his lectures or in catching trains. When someone complained, he would say. "You live in time, I live in eternity," and would continue to walk along without hurrying his steps. Or he would say that it was not possible for him to move faster to catch the train—after all, there would be another train which he could take.

Sound pollution, air pollution, problems of personal adjustments and many other modern stressful situations have been made by us because of our distorted priorities. We have made high industrial production, consumerism and economic achievements the yardsticks of success, at the altar of which peace, happiness and even human, ethical, moral and spiritual values are being sacrificed. It is but natural that such an attitude should cause stress, tension and unhappiness. Man is the master of time and money, and not vice-versa. The ultimate solution of the problem of stress lies in altering our priorities and revising our value systems.

Conclusion

Any book, any guide or guru can only show the way. To walk is up to the reader or the disciple. Those who strive hard, find all the positive forces in the world helping them.

May all find peace, happiness and fulfillment!

Read Out Aloud Daily

- I take the whole responsibility on my own shoulders. I am the creator of my own destiny.
- I am the boss of my mind and body. I have all the power I need to reach my goal. I can see at my back a power which no god or devil under the sun or beyond can resist.
- I bless those who revile me.
- I do everything in freedom and in love. There is nothing I do out of compulsion.
- I shall please everybody but without becoming a coward or a hypocrite.
- In matters of principle I stand like a rock, but in matters of opinion I flow with the current.

- I dedicate this life for the pursuit of Truth, Knowledge and Happiness for all and myself.

Social Benefits

When we finally know the contents of our mind we will discover, to our surprise that once we were just like them, those whom we despise now, only we have forgotten it. The innumerable impressions and habits of living and thinking, belonging to this present life have covered up a vast history of ours. The day when we have come face to face with that reality, we will be able to empathize with almost every man and woman, every situation and turn of fate. Nothing seems to be totally unknown to us. Just imagine a state of mind wherein you are amidst the worst types of people in the world and you still are able to say, "I can live with them. I accept them, not just tolerate them, because I know even I was like that once in my long history." That is one of the many benefits of meditation.

Moral Benefits

Today, moral science remains a neglected branch of human knowledge. Ignorance of basic moral principles is a serious handicap in dealing with the complex problems of life. Moral problems constitute at least one half of all the problems of man. Morality is the very

core of character. Man *is* moral. Morality is not something imposed upon us by religious or social

YOU LAUGH AT ME
because I'm
DIFFERENT *
i laugh at you.. because
you're all the
SAME *



conventions;
it is a part of
our inner
constitution.
The mind is
capable of

thinking good thoughts endlessly; it is not hurt by thinking good things, moral things and spiritual things. But let the mind think of bad things. You will find that very soon it will become sick, the body will also become sick, and everything will become sick. That shows what the normal tendency of the mind is. A person does not feel well if he tells lies. Very soon he finds that his whole being is disintegrating because of his habit of falsehood. If a person is impure, he feels the same kind of degeneration and continually struggles against it. If moral observances were merely conventional, just imposed by the community or believed in because some saints or prophets prescribed them, we would not feel bad about breaking them. Some people may say, "In this modern age it is a great burden to follow all this." Many people find that if they throw off all these moral obligations and observances, they feel better. They think if they can

throw off that tremendous pressure, that heavy burden, they feel light-hearted.

Yes, one has to admit that some people may have to struggle very hard in order to live up to moral principles; there are inner conflicts, and so on. So if a person is told that he does not have to observe these things, he will feel relieved. Having admitted that, we shall add that it is only a temporary relief. Very soon he finds that something within him resists this kind of concession; he finds he has become shallow, he has become weak and exceedingly vulnerable. If moral observances do not do anything else for us, they at least build within us an independent individuality so that we can live in accordance with some requirements of our own inner being, and to that extent we are able to resist incursions from the outside. We do not think that it has to be separately mentioned that one of the things most needed at the present time is the ability to resist the external world. In these times we have become so identified with externals that whenever things do not go well, we go to pieces. In individual, national, and international affairs we are continually subject to this kind of invasion. People cannot live long in this way. It is just a question of time before we find that a large number of people are going to pieces—literally going to pieces.

Moral principles are really just manifestations of our own integrity—our own Spirit. We are truthful not because social life would otherwise become impossible, but because our very nature is truth, and when we violate our own nature everything goes to pieces—and then, of course, social life also becomes disrupted.

Spiritual benefits

Many have this misconception that spirituality is for old people. It is not. A hundred times we say it is not for old people. Spirituality is for the young, the strong, the brave and for those full of hope. After you have spent away all your best energies and time in useless things for so many years and at the fag end of life you try to know what is God, what is soul, it would be impossible. Swami Brahmananda, a spiritual giant used to say, whatever you want to achieve, achieve before thirty. Swami Vivekananda used to say that he had finished everything (highest spiritual realization) by the time he was twenty nine.

“Are you growing spiritually? Can you love others? Can you feel your oneness with others? Have you peace within yourself and do you radiate it around you? That is called spiritual growth, which is stimulated by meditation inwardly and by work done in a spirit of service outwardly.”

- Swami Ranganathananda

Renunciation

Renunciation is a word even a king is afraid of. “To give up? Oh, No! I just got these things,”—that is the general attitude. Then why are we trying to discuss it here? Because we would like to provide clarity on the subject to those interested. Renunciation is the giving up of the small for the sake of the large. For the simple reason, that one cannot have both. There is lot of renunciation in society. Many practice it. Many others are forced to practice it. Let us understand it in brief, because it is a great subject and a great way of life one at least has to consider before deciding the goal of one’s life as a youngster.

The great Buddhist saint Nagarjuna moved around naked except for a loin cloth and, incongruously, a golden begging bowl gifted to him by the king who was his disciple.

One night he was about to lie down to sleep among the ruins of an ancient monastery when he noticed a thief lurking behind one of the columns. “Here, take this,” said Nagarjuna, holding out the begging bowl. “That way you won’t disturb me once I have fallen asleep.”

The thief eagerly grabbed his bowl and made off—only to return next morning with the bowl and a request. He said, “When you gave away this bowl so freely last night, you made me feel very poor. Teach me how to acquire the riches that make this kind of light-hearted detachment possible.”

That is renunciation. You are then the richest person in the world. No one can match your grace and happiness and serenity. You have nothing to fear. You have nothing to long for. Perfect contentment! Kings feel poor before you. If we read Vivekananda’s life, we will come to know how many kings and princes felt poor and childlike before him!

The following is from a speech by Swami Vivekananda:

“The sage wants liberty; he finds that sense-objects are all vain and that there is no end to pleasures and pains. How many rich people in the world want to find fresh pleasures! All pleasures are old, and they want new ones. Do you not see how many foolish things they are inventing every day, just to titillate the nerves for a moment, and that done, how there comes a reaction? The majority of people are just like a flock of sheep. If the leading sheep falls into a ditch, all the rest follow

and break their necks. In the same way, what one leading member of a society does, all the others do, without thinking what they are doing. When a man begins to see the vanity of worldly things, he will feel he ought not to be thus played upon or borne along by nature. That is slavery. If a man has a few kind words said to him, he begins to smile, and when he hears a few harsh words, he begins to weep. He is a slave to a bit of bread, to a breath of air; a slave to dress, a slave to patriotism, to country, to name, and to fame. He is thus in the midst of slavery and the real man has become buried within, through his bondage. What you call man is a slave. When one realises all this slavery, then comes the desire to be free; an intense desire comes. If a piece of burning charcoal be placed on a man's head, see how he struggles to throw it off. Similar will be the struggles for freedom of a man who really understands that he is a slave of nature."

Don't think small thoughts. Reach toward the Sun, if you have the courage. The small-minded say, "This is my own; that one is alien to me." The generous say, "The whole world is kin to me." Out of renunciation comes the peace of mind which is another name for mental strength.

“Freedom is the watchword. Be free! A free body, a free mind, and a free soul! That is what I have felt all my life.”

– Swami Vivekananda

About the glory of monasticism, Swami Vivekananda writes:

But then, what about this marvelous experience of standing alone, discarding all help, breasting the storms of life, of working without any sense of recompense, without any sense of putrid duty? Working a whole life, joyful, free—not goaded on to work like slaves by false human love or ambition?

This the monk alone can have. What about religion? Has it to remain or vanish? If it remains, it requires its experts, its soldiers. The monk is the religious expert, having made religion his lifeline. He is the soldier of God. What religion dies so long as it has a band of devoted monks? We leave it to you decide!
