

EDITORIAL

Spirituality and Technology

TECHNOLOGY IS A HINDRANCE to spiritual life. Or that is what most of us think. Any increase in the restlessness of the mind or our inability to control it is conveniently blamed on technology. It is common and even fashionable today to punctuate talks on mind-control or spirituality with how the world has become so averse to mental poise due to the advances in technology. Often we regret how our private and public spaces have been encroached by technology, how smartphones, laptops, tablets, and social networking websites have eaten up our work and leisure. And with all this talk, we feel comfortable and content that at last we have been able to identify the culprit—of course, it is technology that has made our minds restless, else we were all so very rooted in our selves!

Repetition can give the semblance of credibility to even the most outlandish lies. Here is yet another example of this phenomenon. We constantly harp on about how technology has broken families, increased depression, created social barriers, and also taken away human communication. It is all so simple and easily explained. Or is it really? The scriptures of the major world religions talk over and again about the restlessness of the mind and how it is extremely difficult to rein it. Most of these scriptures date back some thousands of years. There was not so much technology then in human lives as today. Yet, the mind was no less a problem. However, back then, there was no easy target to be blamed like technology! Examples that are proverbial would be of help here. A lamp could be used for committing forgery or for studying

holy texts. Nonetheless the lamp is not to blame. A knife may be used for cutting fruits or for cutting someone's throat. Here again, the knife is not the culprit.

Spirituality is not deterred or inhibited by technology. Technology holds a great potential to be of help in our spiritual life.

Similar would be the line of thought for technology. It is technology that is bringing wonderful and seminal changes to the quality of our lives. You are able to read these very words because of technology. The dissemination of knowledge, both secular and spiritual, has taken a completely different dimension thanks to technology. The amount of material on the Internet on spirituality in the form of texts, audio, video, and even interactive websites is breathtaking. All this has been presented in a form that is both interesting and accessible. Gone are the days when one needed to scour through libraries to get some nuggets of spiritual wisdom buried in some ancient texts. Today, you can download those texts sitting in the comfort of your house and they are searchable, which makes it very easy for you to get the knowledge you want. This is true with spiritual counsel too. You can contact authentic gurus irrespective of distance and get valuable guidance from them for your spiritual life. Even gurus of the past come alive to us through their old videos available on the Internet. There are numerous discussion groups on the Internet, where spiritual aspirants or students of scriptures come together and discuss various

things. Even places of worship come to your computer screen, where you can see the image of your cherished deity and pray, and what is more, you can send your offerings and also receive consecrated food, just sitting at your computer.

With all this help to spiritual life brought about by technology, is it not overly unjustified to blame it for all evils of the mind and for all our shortcomings in spiritual practice? Spirituality is not deterred or inhibited by technology. Though it may surprise many, the truth is that technology holds a great potential to be a great help in our spiritual life. One of the foremost qualities required of a spiritual aspirant by all faith traditions is dispassion. This translates into going more and more towards 'How little can I do with?' from 'How much more can I possess?'. Technology helps us to do precisely that. For instance, a great range of equipment can be bundled into your smartphone. From listening to music, reading books, using the Internet, taking photographs, using a virtual personal assistant, and much more—the smartphone is all you need. Technology is a great power to unclutter our lives. All your possessions are converged to one possession, say a smartphone. Now, if you decide that you have to give up your possessions, just give up your smartphone. Though it may sound bordering on the ridiculous, it is true nonetheless.

Technology also frees up much of our erstwhile work time. Tasks that took hours just a decade ago are now seamlessly accomplished in minutes. That is good news for a spiritual aspirant. Now one has all those extra hours to contemplate, meditate, repeat a mantra, or perform worship. Assignments and responsibilities that once used to bog our minds and distract it from our spiritual practices can be efficiently delegated to technology.

The intellect is always superior to the mind and has the power to discipline the mind and the senses. Technology is a manifestation of the power of human intellect and it is only logical that

technology be used to train the mind. To effectively use technology it is necessary that we think logically, that we adopt a method of dealing with mundane matters by dividing them into discrete, divisible, and identifiable actions or parts. Then it becomes very easy to make technology do these routine tasks. Thus technology also helps us to focus on the essentials by getting rid of the non-essentials even while doing our daily chores.

Technology is the product of the workings of the human brain. For a devotee, it could be another facet of God's splendour to be marvelled at. God did not just create the universe but also created the human mind that has evolved technology into the shape it is in today. Every aspect of this universe has its good and bad features. So does technology. The key is to focus on the good aspects and exploit them to advantage in our spiritual life. So there is no gainsaying that technology has its allure that distracts us. But so does every sense object. The solution is to harness technology for our well-being and help in spiritual life. The litmus test is whether our mind gets dependent on technology, whether it becomes restless when there is no access to technology. If it does, then we are overdoing it. The same technology that helps one find one's way around using maps, leads to an accident if one uses it while crossing the road or driving a car. While there are millions of people who have no access to technology, there are many others who are using technology to explore new sources of livelihood, who are tapping new means of education. While there are people who are being drowned in the plethora of mostly unnecessary information on social networking websites, there are others using technology to connect with more people and resources. Technology could aid us all in our spiritual growth. Let us adopt the path of synthesis and benefit from technological innovations for all those temporary things we have to do before we realise the eternal Brahman. 