



Wisdom or Eye of Knowledge

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Information, Knowledge and Wisdom

OUR AGE IS an age of knowledge with astounding discoveries in diverse areas in science, technology, and humanities. While the horizon of knowledge is widening day by day, the wisdom seems to lag far behind. To acquire knowledge is in our hands, but we cannot acquire wisdom. Wisdom is

the knowledge that makes us happy. But most knowledge is only information, which may have a utilitarian purpose. Such knowledge does not bring a sense of fulfilment. Any amount of knowledge cannot lead to wisdom. One can know or not know something; one can study a thing in depth to know all about it. Such knowledge is an outcome of an action. But, one

cannot become wise by gaining knowledge because, wisdom is a state of being, not the outcome of any action.

Scientific curiosity can lead to increased levels of knowledge and skill, but does not necessarily lead to wiser human beings. Bertrand Russell said in his book *The Impact of Science on Society*: ‘Unless men increase in wisdom as much as in knowledge, increase of knowledge will be increase of sorrow.’¹ One may argue that in the 1940s, while there was certainly enthusiasm about scientific knowledge from many top scientists about the discovery of nuclear fission for the testing of the atomic bomb, it was misplaced as far as the wisdom of such testing was concerned. Certain other scientists, who had deep reservations about the implications of these experiments, which subsequently led to disastrous results in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, were definitely wiser. In Russell’s dictionary, the wise person is one who makes judicious choices with the goal of society’s welfare in mind. But one must go still one step further. **To have wisdom means to have a vision in life and to be able to see beyond the horizon of mere knowledge.** Vision with action can change the world. However, vision without action would just be a dream.

One tends to think wisdom can be attained either through collecting as much information as possible or by cramming the mind with knowledge from diverse fields. The acquisition of knowledge requires meaningful information, which a random collection of information is not. Some feel wisdom is a wise use of the knowledge about human values. An unwise use of knowledge makes one a ‘learned fool’. One can read books and gain understanding about the process of enlightenment, but one will still remain in the theoretical domain. Even being knowledgeable about everything cannot make one wise; any amount of knowledge cannot lead to wisdom.

Wisdom is a unique combination of facts and skills acquired by a person through experience and education. Thus with supreme intellect and integral experience one may be able to realise one’s true nature. Sri Ramakrishna often used to say that simple knowing is not enough; one has to assimilate that through hard labour. He illustrated this with the analogy of drinking milk: one does not know milk through reading or hearing about it, nor even by seeing it, but only after drinking it. He called it the feeling in one’s ‘own Pure Consciousness—about the real nature of Brahman.’²

Swami Vivekananda was also of the opinion that information from the world outside can only serve as a stimulator. If one is adequately prepared, the information would crystallise from within as knowledge, otherwise the effects of all the information from the environment would be transient and virtually useless. It is the withdrawal of senses leading to introspection that also differentiates one person from another. All other animal species are provided by the almighty with certain characteristics that make one of their sense organs far superior to that of the human beings. But in the humans, all the sense organs are equally strong, providing the capabilities of control and introspection, making the human beings unique in the animal kingdom. **So the realisation of one’s true nature depends on how one transforms one’s understanding about oneself with vision and makes use of it, through the sense organs while at the lower plane, and by the eye of knowledge, while at the higher plane.** Swamiji rightly said: ‘Knowledge ... is inherent in man. No knowledge comes from outside; it is all inside. What we say a man “knows”, should, in strict psychological language, be what he “discovers” or “unveils”; what a man learns is really what he “discovers”, by taking the cover off his own soul, which is a mine of infinite

knowledge.³ This knowledge cannot be acquired just by getting so-called education.

Education should be a process of understanding ourselves primarily and only secondarily as a process to accomplish tasks. This skill of accomplishing tasks is in actual practice that is taught in our widely-used present system of education, which has very little or no emphasis on realising one's true nature. The stages of our learning from childhood start with our parents and environment, culminate with a teacher, and finally with self. Knowledge deals with the matters of the not-Self while wisdom deals with our inherent Self, the Atman. However knowledgeable we are, we are still mired in sorrow. Only the wise enjoy the Atman, *sat-chid-ananda*.

Indian scriptures advise us to go beyond both accomplishing tasks and realise that which leads to tranquility and joy. The scriptures say: '*Sa vidya ya vimuktaye*; real knowledge is that which liberates.'⁴ Someone who is knowledgeable is a *vidvan*, while the wise one is a *jnani*, indicating the fact that wisdom is a state of being. But often the changing external conditions impact our wisdom and we may find that our so-called wisdom collapses; but this then cannot be termed as wisdom in the real sense. One must make sure that the wisdom one attains is stable and not affected by the changing external world experiences of sorrow or pleasure. The scriptural term for such a person is *sthithaprajna*, one who is established in the knowledge of one's true nature. The attainment of this state apparently requires the perfect assimilation of both the sensory energy and the psychic energy. Perfect assimilation makes one unperturbed despite changing worldly affairs. By detaching from worldly attractions and repulsions one can make oneself capable of realising a state of higher enjoyments. Even though we cannot perceive this subtle world, it impacts

our lives to a great extent. In order to tune into this world, we need a 'spiritual antenna', that is, our sixth sense needs to be awakened. Our sixth sense grows when we perform spiritual practices. With regular spiritual practices done in accord with the basic principles of spirituality, we can advance our spiritual understanding and become capable to perceive and experience the subtle world in greater degrees.

Information is the basis for knowledge, knowledge is the basis for wisdom, wisdom is the basis for creativity, and creativity is the basis for innovation. More than a century ago, T S Eliot expressed the state of our knowledge: 'Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?'⁵

A human being requires much upgradation as we are slaves of our genetic system. But the limitations of the human body have indeed opened up new possibilities. We are given freedom to explore this possibility, the reality beyond here and now. With this unique ability, we are even able to explore the unseen realities

T S Eliot (1888–1965)



through consciousness. We are different from all species known to us in the sense that we have more possibilities than any other in the animal kingdom, who have less possibilities due to their physical design. Animals lack this consciousness. Wisdom relates to one's consciousness versus one's unconscious or subconscious. Consciousness is an intrinsic presence and is not located in our brain. Our brain is merely a translation device that is modelled to capture experiences received through the five senses. It then transmits the translated information to one's consciousness, which is the product of our spirit, our inner being. Spirit or soul refers to the same thing. All information stored in the DNA is increased or improved through experiences and carried over to the next body in the next lifetime.

Carl Jung described human beings on the basis of four psychological functions: thinking, feeling, sensation, and intuition.⁶ But relying on any of these functions separately, seems like the story of several blind men touching different parts of an elephant and drawing different conclusions about the shape of the elephant. Further, the capacities of these different senses vary. In most humans, the sense of sight is primary: most of the information about the world around us is acquired through vision; other sensory organs—hearing, smell, taste, and touch—have successively lower ranges. Our perception of the world is determined by sensory input—the things we experience. Technology can extend, modify, and improve the capabilities of the senses. If humans are sensitive only to certain ranges of stimuli, what consequences or limitations might this have for the acquisition of knowledge? But despite that, our senses do not usually provide us with a complete answer to fundamental issues of life. For example, the senses, lacking memory, cannot distinguish good

from bad; the illusory good may be for the time being only. Simple visual appearance is thus incomplete information.

According to Carl Jung, out of these four functions, people make decisions in life based on two very different sets of criteria, namely, thinking and feeling, which may be referred to as objective and subjective. These two ways of knowing, thinking, and processing information are functions of the analytical or the intuitive mind. When someone makes a decision based on logic and reason, they are in the thinking mode. When someone makes a decision based on their overall holistic picture, or what they believe to be right, they are operating in the feeling mode. Our entire life cannot be wholly governed by either. Some decisions are made entirely by the thinking or the feeling process alone. Most decisions involve some thinking and some feeling. We cannot avoid the influence of the world, but we can free ourselves from the bondage of identification with it. Fantasy is the result of feeling and the intellect working together. Mystical inner experience provides us with the subjective experience while the physical eye provides us with the objective experience. This inner knowledge is called *prajna*. It is hidden in all of us. It can bring great changes in us. It can even alter our personality structure. While awakening of wisdom requires gross purification, subtle purification is required for spiritual attainment, as discussed later.

Those who are deluded because of their hearts being forcibly attracted by the enjoyments of the seen and the unseen objects do not see the true reality. Those others, who have the eye of knowledge, *jnana-chakshuh*, insight of understanding that has arisen from having a clear vision, see the true reality. This is just like a mother's feelings for her child even when the child is beyond her physical vision. It is often said that listening to

one's body signals can help prevent bigger health problems. A skilled medical practitioner, using the 'clinical eye' can diagnose the illness just with a visual observation of the patient, without any detailed examination.

The *Katha Upanishad* compares a human being to a city with eleven gates—one on the top of the head, two eyes, two nostrils, two ears, mouth, navel, urethra, and anus.⁷ The one on top of the head is the eye of knowledge or the third eye that leads to inner realms housing myriad dimensions of consciousness. It is the *divya, prajna*, or *jnana chakshu*, through which the sage experiences the supreme vision called *aparoksha-anubhuti*, immediate experience. It is the third spiritual eye of yogis and sages. If our perception has to enhance itself, the most important thing is that our energy has to enhance itself. To open the third eye, one needs to be a regular practitioner of meditation, as it helps us to get a better and in-depth understanding of ourselves. The experience of calmness and peace in meditation enables us to get back in touch with our original nature, which in turn enlightens us as well as others around us. Many of the gods and goddesses are believed to possess this *prajna chakshu*. Shiva has been referred to as *tryambaka*, because he has a third eye. Similarly, Durga has been referred to as *trinayani*, the one with three eyes. The whole process of yoga is to evolve and refine our inbuilt energies in such a way that our perception is enhanced and the third eye opens.

Some Attributes of Wisdom

Dwelling on the sense objects causes attachment, which leads to craving; craving leads to anger, anger leads to delusion, delusion leads to the loss of memory, the loss of memory leads to the loss of intelligence, which ultimately leads to disintegration.⁸ However, if one is able to direct one's

mind away from the sense objects, eventually the person evolves as one established in one's true nature of Brahman, variously called in the scriptures as *sthitaprajna*, *dvandatita*, *dhira*, *viveki*, *gunatita*, or *jivanmukta*. In the Gita, we find that Sri Krishna grants *divya-chakshu*, divine eye, to his matured disciple, Arjuna so that he might see Sri Krishna's omnipresence through the *vishvarupa*, cosmic form, as described in the eleventh chapter of the Gita (11.8). Only a few in millions are fortunate to acquire such a vision. The presence of such persons in any age is the sign that it is possible to acquire such a state.

Sthitaprajna • The first mark of a *sthitaprajna*, one of steady wisdom, is casting off all desires and delighting and being content in one's own true nature, Brahman. This person is always

Carl G Jung (1875–1961)



happy irrespective of the external circumstances. The Gita states that after attaining this state, a person 'is not disturbed even in the face of great sorrow'. This withdrawal of senses is compared to a tortoise retracting its limbs into its shell. The person of wisdom in the same way withdraws one's senses from the worldly sense objects. This person is above all injunctions and prohibitions, above good and evil, virtue and vice, and endowed with an equanimous vision and balanced mind, and does not identify oneself with the body. The mind is neither shaken at the time of misery, nor attached to happiness; it is totally free from desires, fear and anger, neither excited nor disturbed while beholding good or bad. This is a struggle between the lower and the higher, between the animal and the divine in the human.

Attaining this *sthitaprajna* state is the goal of human evolution. If a person is surrounded by inferior instinctive forces, one will struggle provided one has an ideal. The aim is to free oneself from the influence of one's surroundings, hence the struggle for existence. The human being, a superior animal, highest on the evolutionary scale, has two heritages: biological and divine. The desire to escape from danger gave the carnivorous fish wings that enabled them to fly from surroundings. Another illustration is an insect in the presence of a wasp. One should not return hatred for hatred. If one maintains an intense desire for this state with perseverance, effort, and fervour, one can eventually attain it.

Gunatita • Everything in this world is associated with the three gunas—sattva, rajas, and tamas—in varying proportions. One who transcends the grip of these gunas is called *gunatita*. This person never identifies with the passing moods of gunas—elation, excitement, and depression—which are the characteristics of the body and the mind. In all disturbances of

the mental and physical environment, this person remains unperturbed, seeing in them only movements of *prakriti*, the primal nature, and not of themselves. A *gunatita* is alike in pleasure and pain, to friend and foe, and never feels oneself as the doer of anything. Only one who serves all with unswerving and exclusive devotion can thus hope to overcome the dominance of the gunas.

Jivanmukta • A *jivanmukta* is one who has realised one's true nature, Brahman, and lives in the body but is free from all bonds, sense-cravings, and has a clear understanding of the truth. Such a person has risen above the plane of gains or losses. So long as the effect of actions of such person, done before realising Brahman, produce their effects, the body of the *jivanmukta* remains. It is like a potter's wheel that will stop revolving only when the momentum it has received has worn itself out. The dissolution of the physical frame will take place only when the *prarabdha* karma that has given rise to this body has been exhausted. Even a few words of the *jivanmukta* produce a tremendous impression on the listeners. A *jivanmukta* is not miserable, is not anxious over the past and the future, and remains calm regardless of what is happening in the present. Such a person always remains unattached to the material world due to the awareness that this gross body is perishable, and such a person does not attach any significance to this body and is least interested in names and forms. Being indifferent to the actions and reactions of the senses and the body, a *jivanmukta* is totally bereft of the feelings of 'I' and 'mine'. A *jivanmukta* does not offend anybody by thought, word, and deed, and is not hurt even a bit by taunts, censures, insults, and persecutions. Such a person maintains balance or equanimity of mind amidst the duality of world: censure and praise, honour and dishonour, pleasure and pain. A *jivanmukta* is

above good and evil, virtue and vice, and finds no fault with others. Such a person is a powerhouse of spiritual energy, who sees all these through the eye of knowledge.

Dvantatita • Every experience in the world is a mix of good and bad. Some see social violence and terrorism as freedom struggle. Any enjoyment in our life is associated with long-term misery. All perception of duality in the world is due to the body, the mind, and the intellect. Humans suffer because they are trapped by their *upadhis*, limiting adjuncts, of the body, mind, and intellect. A human being possesses infinite possibilities, though the infinite seems to be ensnared by the finite body and mind. **So, the key attribute is to rise above likes and dislikes.** Though a person's spiritual awareness is covered by a thick veil of ignorance and makes the person a slave of endless desires and passions, the inherent nature of infinite Brahman does create a fascination in the form of an inward pull. Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'Brahman weeps, ensnared in the meshes of *maya*.'⁹ Under conditional bias and inbuilt prejudice along with worldly temptations, our knowledge cannot freely manifest. We attain bliss when the individual will is removed. It is the limited individual perception that divides the experience into joy and sorrow. It is wrong to say somebody is imparting happiness or sorrow to us. Our defective understanding is responsible for our joy or unhappiness.

Gross intellect discriminates between the pairs of opposites: hot and cold, brightness and darkness, rich and poor, wise and ignorant; the corresponding entities are respectively temperature, light, wealth, and knowledge. The difference between the opposites is in the quantity and not in the quality of the entity. For example, it is the quantity of wealth that makes the difference between a poor and a rich person; acquisition of knowledge that differentiates between

the ignorant and the learned; the amount of light differentiates between brightness and darkness. It is this conditioned intellect, stored in us as prejudice that meets with a specific state of the self. As an example, a charged particle can be made to interact with another similar or dissimilar charged particle, but not with uncharged or neutral particle. If one is devoid of attraction or repulsion, prejudice or conditioned intellect, there is nothing to be biased about.

Dhira or Viveki • **Dhira is another name for a perfect person or one of complete knowledge.**

Dhiman is the one who is in possession of such knowledge. When we say that a person is intelligent, usually we mean that person has a high intelligence quotient, IQ, but in the scriptures such a person is one having an extraordinary intellect that is gained through the power of concentration, dispassion, and discrimination, resisting all the temptations. In such a person, there is the combination of knowledge, courage, and completely disciplined emotion. The extraordinary thing about this *dhira* is that they have turned the energy of the sense organs inward into the mind. They completely turn away all their sense organs like eyes, ears, and so on, from all sense objects. Thus becoming purified, this person realises the inner Self. It is obviously not possible for a person to be absorbed in the thought of external sense objects and simultaneously realise the inner Self.

The Buddhist Idea of Prajna

Prajna is the sixth *paramita*, perfection in the Buddhist Bodhisattva path. These *paramitas* are, three virtuous practices: *dana*, generosity, *shila*, morality, and *kshanti*, forbearance; and the remaining three are *virya*, energy or zeal, *dhyana* or meditation, and *prajna*, wisdom. The term *prajna* is composed of two Sanskrit terms: *pra*, which refers to that which is before, and

jna, which refers to knowledge. *Prajna* means wisdom or understanding that extinguishes afflictions and brings about enlightenment. But by *prajna*, we do not mean the simple insight that our intellect generally conceives or attributes to the term 'wisdom'. It is a kind of knowledge or understanding that is beyond the mind and the intellect. In order to understand *prajna*, we have to move beyond the realm of the intellect. There are three levels of *prajna*: the *prajna* of listening; the *prajna* of contemplating; and the *prajna* of meditation. The third stage, the *prajna* of meditation is marked by the realisation of the truth. *Prajna* of realisation helps in the development of mindfulness and awareness. *Prajna* or real wisdom, can only be attained through meditation, and therefore the

paramitas are prescribed in a particular order. If the mind is active, agitated, or moving, a state of equanimity cannot be perceived. The ultimate truth cannot be known by the agitated mind. When the mind becomes a perfect mirror it can then reflect the ultimate truth. In the Gita, this state of mind has been called *muktasanga*, free from worldly attachment.¹⁰ Perfection in work would be there if the mind is devoid of any constraints like competition. This is a condition devoid of the idea of 'I' and the idea of enjoyment.

The Brain and the States of the Mind

The human brain is the nearest working analogue of human mind. The mind is what the brain generates through its activity. But the mind

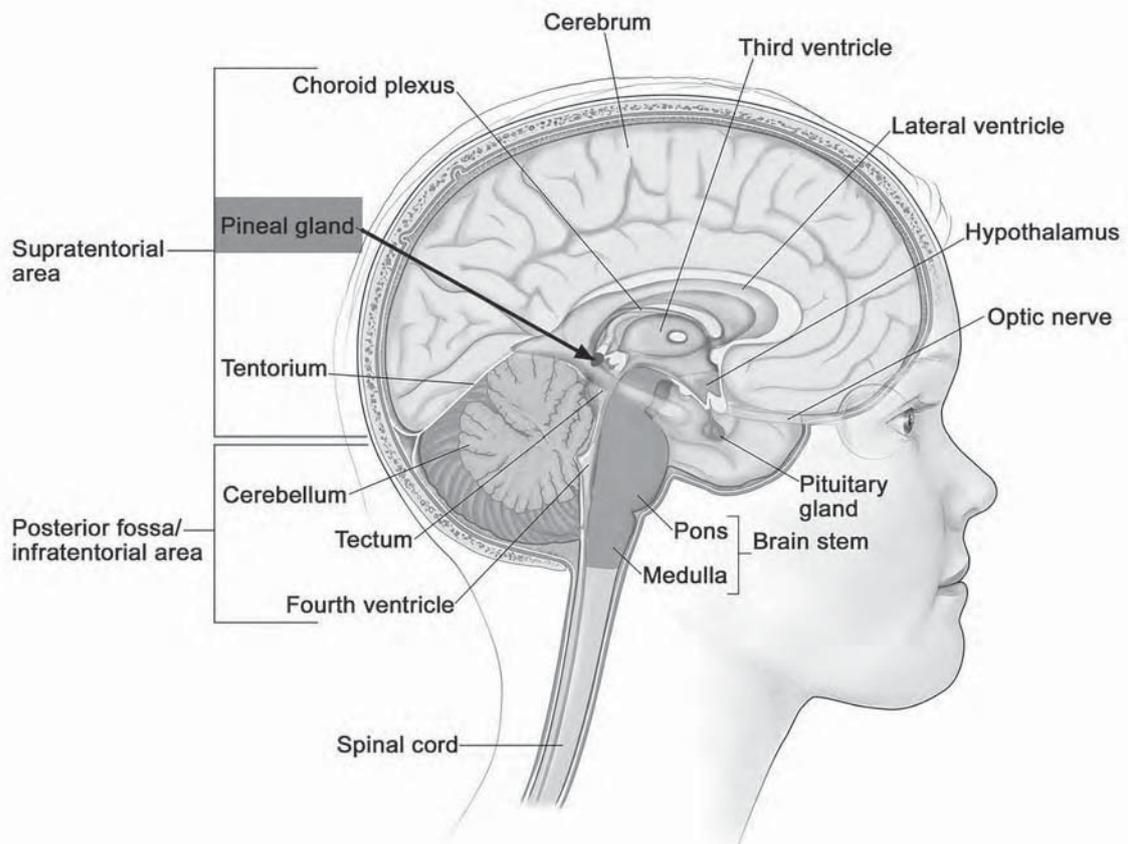


IMAGE: [HTTP://HEALTHJADE.COM](http://HEALTHJADE.COM)

is closely linked to the brain, now recognised due to the great strides in neuroscience. Each mental function seems to have a corresponding brain action. The brain has been aptly called the seat of mind. The brain also conditions the mind. According to neuroscientists, the mind is distributed among the three entities, namely, brain, body, and environment, as the organism engages and continues to construct meaning from its surroundings. Mind is a device located not only in the brain, but also distributed in the entire body through the sense organs. Out of our ten senses, the five senses of knowledge, provide input from the environment and this information is analysed, interpreted, and stored in our mind.

Eric Kandel, the 2000 Nobel laureate in physiology or medicine said ‘mind and brain are inseparable.’¹¹ According to the Western idea of psychology, the brain and the mind are intimately connected—anatomically, functionally, and historically. The two are indissolubly linked, leading to the notion that thoughts, feelings, and all manifestations of the mind are products of the activities of neurons in the brain. Mental activity is therefore basically brain activity. Further, as we work on the mind and control its movements, the brain automatically keeps changing along with it. Each mental activity has a corresponding brain function.

Behaviour and brain changes are measured non-invasively through brain-mapping techniques to ascertain this link between the brain and the mind. With the advent of many new techniques for the study of the brain, including electroencephalography, EEG; magnetoencephalography, MEG; positron emission tomography scan, PET scan; magnetic resonance imaging, MRI; and the newest method, functional MRI, fMRI; we get static, dynamic, two-dimensional, and three-dimensional pictures of the functioning brain.

By halting our thoughts, stilling our minds, engaging in mental silence, we give ourselves mental rest; then the mind comes up with the very best of thoughts that can deliver more truths of life. It is well known that mental stimulation improves brain function and actually protects against cognitive decline. Inhibition of this stimulation causes us to look inward and to deeply ponder our actions and reactions. Such introversion is indispensable for self-realisation as it displaces our attention from the outer world to the inner. When the external world disappears, our circle of consciousness contracts because our attention is primarily focused upon our inner self. It is this inner attention that activates the pineal gland in the brain.

The Third Eye: The Brain's Pineal Gland

In many religious texts the pineal gland located in the geometric center in human brain is often called ‘the third eye’ since anatomically its interior walls are made of photoreceptor neuron cells, rods, and cones that are like those in the retina in our physical eyes. Perhaps this is why ancient civilisations and spiritual teachers have associated the pineal gland with the third or inner eye.¹² The French philosopher René Descartes coined this term for the organ.¹³ The pineal gland, a small endocrine gland, lies at the very geometric center of the brain on the ventricular system. Being situated at the anatomical center of our brain, it serves as the intermediary gate bridging our physical and spiritual experiences here on earth. It produces the serotonin derivative melatonin, a hormone that affects the modulation of waking and sleep patterns and seasonal functions. Nowadays it is widely accepted that the pineal gland not only has specific functions but is a major gland that plays a significant role in the body. These functions include the production of melatonin, serotonin, and N,

N-Dimethyltryptamine or DMT, and setting the circadian rhythm or the sleep-wake cycle.

The pineal gland is able to see both physically and intuitively, unlike our regular eyes. But the human pineal gland is denied access to light directly; only the retina senses light directly. It shows enhanced release of its hormone, melatonin, during the night. These hormones are related to mood, wakefulness, and other states of awareness. The pineal gland represents the third eye. The pineal gland sits close to the sensory and emotional centers of the brain, which could explain why spiritual experiences can evoke so much emotion and sensation. The pineal gland is associated with the sixth energy center called the *ajna* chakra. Every human being's pineal gland or third eye can be activated through practice to access the spiritual world that enables one to identify with the divine and the universe. The pineal gland, once tuned into proper frequencies with the help of meditation or yoga, produces many other hormones, which support various neurological functions. The proper functioning of the pineal gland keeps people focused, happy, awake in the day, and asleep at night, and prevents neurological degeneration as people age. Dr Rick Strassman, who has dedicated years of research on the pineal gland, suggests that this gland is the factory for the powerful brain chemical called DMT, which induces a psychedelic and mystical experience.¹⁴

With every new thing we learn, every new habit we form, there is a corresponding change in the brain, a process termed neuroplasticity. Throughout one's lifetime, the brain can change its structure as well as its wiring in major ways, generating new neurons and neuronal circuitry. If a particular activity is no longer being performed, its neural path is narrowed, as it were, and weakened, as the brain is always amenable to change. Repeated habits give rise to mental

tendencies called propensities. By conscious effort we can form new habits and thus new propensities. In other words, we can build our character in a manner we choose. Neuroscientists have found two modes of functioning of the brain: logical and holistic. The former is described by neurophysiological terms while the latter is described by holistic experiences and thought processes. A typical state of mind includes both these states with different degrees of emphasis.

According to the *Yoga Sutra* of Patanjali, our mind remains in one of these five states, in the ascending order of concentration: *kshipta*, disturbed; *mudha*, dull; *vikshipta*, distracted; *ekagrata*, focused; and *niruddha*, mastered. When the mind is in one of the first three states, it is identified with the *vritti*, mental impression itself. Patanjali's focus is to discipline the mind with a series of mental exercises to get rid of obstacles in order to arrive at the *ekagrata* and ultimately, the *niruddha* state. Depending upon the presence of the three *gunas*—*sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*—the state of the mind is asserted in different ways. For example, only if the *sattvic* quality is predominant would the mind be expected to be in the inward, *niruddha* state.

The *Katha Upanishad* says that all our sense organs are habitually outgoing and would be in one of the first three states depending upon our thoughts and passions.¹⁵ Due to binding attachment, we become less capable in restraining our sense organs and the mind. Only when we practise detachment, do we go beyond our limitations. Swamiji said: 'We have to seize this unstable mind and drag it from its wanderings and fix it on one idea. Over and over again this must be done. By power of will we must get hold of the mind and make it stop and reflect upon the glory of God.'¹⁶ The power of mind is measured by its ability to grasp and retain, called *dhriti*. A weak

mind can neither grasp nor retain properly. It is the quality of *dhriti* that determines the lifestyle, happiness and success in life. The entire process of education throughout the world is aimed at increasing these two aspects of a learner, and psychologists are always trying to find ways of enhancing these two powers.

Mind is the sixth sense organ, although in terms of subtlety, it is higher than the physical sense organs. Further, in the *Katha Upanishad*, the order of subtlety is given as the sense objects, the sense organs, the mind, the intellect, and the Atman.¹⁷

In this series, the mental side corresponds, of course, to what is subtler and the physical side to what is gross. Mind is the controller of all the sense organs and thus is superior to the senses. Wisdom is superior still. But the supreme is the Atman. The *Amritabindu Upanishad* says that our mind works on lower and higher levels.¹⁸ The impure state of the mind is the lower state that is mixed up with the sensory system and the cravings of the sensory system; the same mind, when it is freed from being in thrall to the sensory system, becomes pure, it becomes the higher mind. Swamiji says: 'The mind uncontrolled and unguided will drag us down, down, forever—rend us, kill us; and the mind controlled and guided will save us, free us.'¹⁹ This lower mind controls our sense organs, prevents us from going to the higher mind, and leads to ultimate destruction.

The attainment of a higher state of existence is possible only by the sacrifice of the lower states. One has to give up the old possession to acquire a new possession. The spirit of renunciation must be there, but not arising due to bitterness with life. A clenched fist has first to be opened if it is to grasp anything else. We have no conviction about the truth, although we see that a river gets fresh water after mixing with the ocean. By turning away from the futile

and painful struggles for existence of ego in the transmigratory world, a rare wise aspirant can see the inner self with introverted vision. This turning away is only the first step in spiritual life though, because our normal consciousness is limited to sense-bound universe. Our essential spiritual awareness is thus covered by a thick veil of ignorance. And due to this, the mind goes out through one's senses, seeks fulfilment from the world of objects, and becomes a slave of passions. In the words of Sri Ramakrishna one has to rise from the state of 'unripe I' to 'ripe I'.²⁰

Wisdom lies in surrendering our petty will to God's boundless will. And in the words of Sri Sarada Devi one has to get rid of all worldly desires or attachments. This ego self or 'I' consciousness is like a staircase, of which the lowest rung constitutes our ego. As soon as the ego dominates in us we start living conditioned by desire. It is through intense struggle that one can open this upward path. This struggle is the driving force behind the biological evolution for physical existence. For human beings with social, political, and economic outlooks this struggle for existence gets shifted to the mental level. The ego constantly struggles to maintain a distinct status for its identity.

Activation of the Third Eye

The knowledge as the inner light is latent in all of us. But it is lost in the chaos of our worldly life. We can try to understand inner light with an analogy of laser light, which is effectively no different from ordinary light except with the special property of being extremely focused, technically termed as coherent. Likewise, the mind that perceives everything has to be freed from all worldly distractions that is being fed to it by the sense organs. In another scientific illustration, tuning into this subtle world requires a 'spiritual antenna', that is, our sixth sense needs

to be awakened. In radio physics the device used to capture invisible radio signals propagating in space is termed as an antenna. Meditation is the way to develop a spiritual antenna, though in the early stages, meditation is a struggle due to distracting thoughts. Yet another way of understanding this is as in the process of crystallisation: when the relevant solution is super-saturated with the constituent material, a tiny seed crystal acts as the outside instigator to facilitate the growth of a full crystal. Swamiji said about knowledge: 'All knowledge that the world has ever received comes from the mind; the infinite library of the universe is in your own mind. The external world is simply the suggestion, the occasion, which sets you to study your own mind, but the object of your study is always your own mind.'²¹ The journey back to this inner world involves reversal of the current of psychical energy flowing out through the extroverted mind and senses. This requires self-control and withdrawal of the mind from sense objects by discerning the eternal from the ephemeral. It is therefore a combination of the powers of dispassion, concentration, and discrimination through meditation.

Indian scriptures prescribe the remedy for saving the mind from restlessness, assuming the basic aim of human mind is attention, focus, or concentration. The mind cannot be stabilised without controlling the senses. The mind tends to tread the path it has learned through repeated habits. Unless we consciously take a different route in a given situation, our behaviour will normally follow our propensity. Where there are many strong desires, the mind is in constant turmoil. When we learn to train our senses and master our desires, fewer and fewer of these desires arise. When the senses are trained, they will participate harmoniously in the supreme stilling of the mind.

At first, one ought not to abruptly force the

organs of action to withdraw directly from the sense world, which is more difficult than understanding one's organs of knowledge. We should transform our senses into faithful servants instead of slave-masters. Passions cannot be destroyed abruptly but can be minimised or harnessed through purification. The positive always overcomes the negative. This is the way to control. When a river, for example, has gained momentum, it is hard to stop or even to divert it. Only two types of people don't struggle: those who have completely surrendered to their senses and those who have conquered the lower mind; all others have struggles as they have inadequate knowledge of the methods and unsuccessful attempts at the control of the mind.

Without controlling the senses, it is not possible to attain the state of steadiness in wisdom. Yoga is the mental exercise for the development of the powers of the mind. In order to gain proper self-knowledge, impurities in both the body and the mind should be cleaned and this requires a course of elaborate discipline in physical, mental, moral, and intellectual culture. The turbulent senses forcibly lead astray the mind of even a person, who struggles to control it. Swamiji stressed the importance of this power of concentration: 'The main difference between men and the animals is the difference in their power of concentration. ... The difference in their power of concentration also constitutes the difference between man and man' (6.37).

Patanjali prescribes various techniques for the creation of such a conducive atmosphere. Some of the important ones are, removal of worldly interactions, minimising mental disturbances through the purification and control of the senses. Patanjali's extensive process of controlling the senses and the mind is called the *ashtanga-marga*, the eightfold path, a psychosomatic spiritual discipline. This eightfold discipline for the

aspirant has *yama*, restraint; *niyama*, culture; *asana*, posture; *pranayama*, breath control; *pratyahara*, withdrawal of the senses; *dharana*, fixed attention; *dhyana*, meditation; and *samadhi*, perfect concentration. The first two are ethical practices, the next two are physical practices meant for quietening the body, the third pair are mental practices for withdrawing the mind from the external world of senses and turning it inward, and finally the last pair are supra-sensory practices, bring about an unbroken and uninterrupted flow of concentration. The first five disciplines are regarded as *bahiranga-sadhana*, external practices and the last three disciplines are called *antaranga-sadhana*, internal practice. Upon successful completion of the first five steps in ethical and physical practices, the mind is cleared of both the external and internal desires and prejudices, it becomes free of the ideas of doer-ship and enjoyer-ship.

Removal of Worldly Distractions

Just as the mind functions on conscious and unconscious levels, it can also work on a higher level called the superconscious. What appears as the conscious mind are *vrittis*, mental responses to the stimuli that we receive from the world. Empirical knowledge is possible only through the medium of *vrittis*. Experience is acquired through *vrittis*. Each *vritti* leaves an impression called *samskara* in the mind. This makes the mind biased and prejudiced. Ripples are constantly generated on the surface of a flowing river; there are also crosscurrents under the surface. *Vrittis* are like waves or ripples on the surface of a flowing river. The impulses and desires are like crosscurrents below. Waves are created by strong winds just like *vrittis* are caused by the external stimuli that create impulses or desires arising in the depth of the mind. There are five *kleshas*: *avidya*, ignorance; *asmita*, ego;

raga, attraction; *dvesha*, aversion; and *abhini-vesha*, the desire to live.²² Any action done with the above motives creates *samskaras* in addition to the direct result of the action and creates tendencies in one's mind.

These attachments are built in to our personality. That's why a spiritual aspirant is advised to work without any personal motive in order to get rid of *kleshas* and *samskaras*. But a worldly person having motivation to work always gets entangled with attachments and carries them forward from previous lifetimes and along the way, many more of them become ingrained in the course of daily living. As a result, the mind is full of likes and dislikes that distract our minds. And these interactions force one to return to and repeat past experiences. Our inherent strength is covered with *kleshas*. So there is a need to provide the right atmosphere for preparedness, as a farmer removes obstacles to allow water to flow into the field. A gardener cannot grow a plant or produce fruit, but can only make conditions favourable for the desired results. Children learn by themselves, the teacher only helps to facilitate this. Nature by itself will do the job on its own strength. The potentiality at the source is far more important than the helps along the way. So, our only necessary *sadhana* will be to keep obstacles away so as to make the mind prejudice free through the removal of the five *kleshas*.

Activation of the third eye, also known as *ajna* chakra, can be accomplished through meditation. Chakras are nerve centres, vast pools of energy in our bodies governing our psychic powers. The seven chakras are: *muladhara*, *manipura*, *svadhisthana*, *anahata*, *vishuddha*, *ajna*, and *sahasrara*. Mastering the art of meditation will help one to activate the *ajna* chakra through the pineal and the pituitary glands in our brain, to relax and open the mind to all its possibilities.

The energy flowing from this inner world is

intrinsically neutral, but in our lives it is manifested both positively and negatively due to in-built prejudices. How we use this inner power determines the quality of its manifestation. It is like electricity. Electricity is simply energy that can be converted to light, heat, or refrigeration. In other words, its apparent characteristics change depending upon how we channel it. The question is, how do we employ our energy? Learning to master our thoughts enables us to use our energy, our innate talent, positively, so that we consciously harness and direct this inner force.

The aim of opening the inner eye is to break the sense of limitations to open the floodgate of

neutral energy, enabling it to shape the world processes to cosmic ends. It would then allow the greatest activity with the least bondage to the demands of the personal self. For this to occur, the two physical eyes must work in harmony with the third eye. In other words, we must see not only the surface appearance, but also what lies behind it. When the third eye opens, one is no longer pulled by karma, maya, and ego; and one does not return to the former state of consciousness. **Then, one acquires knowledge of what is going to happen in the future and what is going to happen to the world.** The third eye is also the place for the manifestation of thoughts and desires.



SCULPTURE: A CAMBODIAN SHIVA HEAD SHOWING A THIRD EYE / VASSIL

The Mundaka Upanishad says: 'It is not comprehended through the eye, nor through speech, nor through the other senses; nor is it attained through austerity or karma.'²³ This wisdom cannot be achieved by physical eyes, being representative of the five sense organs; or by speech, being representative of the five organs of action; nor by any other senses, by austerity, or by any sacrificial rite. But it is only through the purity of mind gained through the clearing out of all attachments and prejudices that one can attain the illumination of *prajna*. The *Katha Upanishad* says that 'the Atman chooses to reveal itself to the one.'²⁴ It reveals itself only to the wise, the one who is prepared.

The Glory of Detachment

For getting the best out of the world, one has to remain a detached witness, without having any material motive. Swamiji said: 'Who enjoys the picture, the seller or the seer? The seller is busy with his accounts, computing what his gain will be, how much profit he will realise on the picture. ... That man is enjoying the picture who has gone there without any intention of buying or selling. He looks at the picture and enjoys it. So this whole universe is a picture, and when these desires have vanished, men will enjoy the world.'²⁵ Sri Ramakrishna said: 'Ramprasad described the world as a mere "framework of illusion". But if one loves God's hallowed feet, then—"This very world is a mansion of mirth."²⁶ This world is not an illusion of joy and sorrow but indeed becomes a pleasurable place through discernment and detachment. When Swamiji as Narendranath Dutta approached Sri Ramakrishna seeking a solution to his family's financial woes, he was sent to pray to the Goddess Kali, so that his distress would be alleviated. But over and over again, he could only pray for knowledge,

discernment, and renunciation, the best that one can achieve in life. This should be an abject lesson for all of us on what we should truly aspire for in our lives. 

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