

# The Stable Mind

PEDRO OLIVEIRA

STUDENTS of Theosophy have been advised, again and again, to ponder and dwell on matters of deep significance. The sheer scope of theosophical literature is so vast that the temptation to get absorbed with details and descriptions may be sometimes quite overwhelming. Therefore we do need to remind ourselves that Theosophy, in its essence, is not just a description of vast universal processes and systems. In its own essential nature it is a living wisdom, an understanding that brings us to the very heart of our true identity, which is one with the very heart of existence.

The same theosophical teaching suggests that in order for the student to truly learn about life's deeper aspects, contentment, detachment and stability of mind become necessary. A mind that oscillates and fluctuates, allowing itself to be tossed around by experiences, inevitably becomes a prey to strong emotions and to self-aggrandizement. Under the sway of instability the mind can neither see itself nor the reality around it.

St Paul expressed this need to see clearly in his famous epistle to the Corinthians:

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. (1 Cor., 13:12)

Our perception of life, of ourselves and others, is darkened by conditioning. The source of this conditioning includes unresolved experiences, frustrations, anger, desire, separateness as well as deep-seated self-interest and self-importance. Our experience of life and its relationships is therefore mediated by the 'dark glass' of conditioning. However, St Paul in his letter pointed to the possibility of seeing 'face to face' — a direct, non-mediated perception, a true experience or insight. Such an experience can be profoundly transformative as it is an unconditional opening of oneself to the Other.

St Paul goes even deeper in his meditation on the nature of seeing. He says that now we know in part. Whatever knowledge we may have is bound to be a fragmentary knowledge so long as the background of conditioning is there in our minds. In its own essential form the nature of this conditioning has been called *avidyā*, ignorance, lack of wisdom.

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Mr Pedro Oliveira is in charge of the Editorial Office, Adyar, and was formerly international Secretary.

No amount of accumulation of knowledge can free us from ignorance which is the ultimate conditioning. As suggested by St Paul our liberation lies in the realization of our fundamental unity with the Other which is in itself all-knowing in its uncreated sacredness.

One of the important teachings in the *Bhagavadgītā* is about the nature of the stable mind. The Sanskrit expression *sthita-prajña* is translated as 'firm in judgement and wisdom, calm, contented'. The word *sthita* means 'firm, constant, invariable'. The following dialogue between Arjuna and Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the *Gītā* (II.54–7) conveys the depths of understanding which are open to one whose mind is stable:

What is the mark of him who is stable of mind, steadfast in contemplation, O Keśava? How doth the stable-minded talk, how doth he sit, how walk?

When a man abandoneth, O Pārtha, all the desires of the heart, and is satisfied in the SELF by the SELF, then is he called stable in mind. He whose mind is free from anxiety amid pains, indifferent amid pleasures, loosed from passion, fear and anger, he is called a sage of stable mind. He who on every side is without attachments, whatever hap of fair and foul, who neither likes nor dislikes, of such a one the understanding is well poised.<sup>1</sup>

The ordinary human mind is activated by many desires. Each desire is born of the image-making that goes on within the mind all the time. What is called the

personal self, the 'me', may be described as this intimate relationship between the energy of desire and the images which are constantly created within the mind. Unaware of this process the mind identifies itself with such emotions as anger, fear, suspicion, greed, pride and so on. The refusal to look at itself becomes the source of constant instability in the mind. This may be the reason why so many people in the world today, after having tried all sorts of meditation 'techniques', remain restless and discontented. As long as the sense of individuality is placed on the emotional-mental field there cannot be peace within. In the language of *The Voice of the Silence*, the senses will continue to make a playground of the mind.

However, if it is possible for someone to see the above process clearly and objectively, then there would be no need whatsoever to cling to any desire. One would observe desires arising within the mind and naturally let them go, like waves that arise and break on the shore. The depths of the ocean remain unperturbed and at peace. There is a causeless joy in just being oneself. Perhaps the Indian tradition pointed this out when it maintained that one of the innermost aspects of the Ultimate Reality is *ānanda*. When one truly begins to know oneself all forms of artificial behaviour and mental habits come to an end, as well as all self-seeking.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa also suggests that such an individual 'is free from anxiety amid pains, indifferent amid pleasures, loosed

from passion, fear and anger'. As long as one lives in a body there is bound to be some degree of pain and pleasure. The extraordinary beauty of the above statement by Śrī Kṛṣṇa is that the sage of stable mind is free from anxiety amid the experience of pain. Those who were near him reported about how composed and calm Ramana Maharshi was when he was being treated for cancer. The same was true of Annie Besant's attitude during the crises she faced as President of the Theosophical Society. At the core of such stable attitudes we may find a very deep realization that everything temporal is bound to come to an end. Also that consciousness, in its own essential nature, remains unaffected by the fluctuations of time and matter.

It is difficult to differentiate between pleasure and the identification with it. While there are naturally pleasurable experiences in life, it is the clinging to them that coarsens the mind. And it is the false sense of identity (*asmitā*) that makes such clinging possible. Someone who has discovered a source of deep contentment within does not need to cling to any experience, pleasurable or otherwise. They are seen for what they are and the consciousness remains unaffected.

The other quality mentioned by Śrī Kṛṣṇa about the nature of the stable mind is that it is 'loosed from passion, fear and anger'. Passion, fear and anger are essentially reactions to experience. Perhaps they could be seen as the ways in which the ignorant self demonstrates its own unwillingness to learn. They

also constitute deep undercurrents that maintain restlessness, anxiety and conflict in the mind. But they cannot grow in a stable mind for it is free from the reactions that have their source in self-centredness.

Finally, Arjuna's Teacher clarifies even further the precious nature of the stable mind. He says: 'He who on every side is without attachments, whatever hap of fair and foul, who neither likes nor dislikes, of such a one the understanding is well poised.' It is a fact of life that we do not have control over external circumstances nor over other people's behaviour. Yet a number of people live and behave as if they could have such a control, which is a form of illusion. The most enduring form of attachment, therefore, is attachment to our own sense of a separate self. When this attachment ends through insight into its vacuous, illusory nature, there is a profound sense of stability and real security. There is a peace that passes all understanding.

What does the stable mind see? What is the nature of its relationship to life and the universe? Kṛṣṇa, the Blessed Lord, says to Arjuna:

He attaineth Peace, into whom all desires flow as rivers flow into the ocean, which is filled with water, but remaineth unmoved — not he who desireth desires. Whoso forsaketh all desires and goeth onwards free from yearnings, selfless and without egoism — he goeth to Peace. This is the Eternal state, O son of Prthā. Having attained thereto none is bewildered. Who, even at the death-hour, is established

therein, he goeth to the Nirvāna of the Eternal. (II.70–2)

Such an individual can contribute to the transformation of the human consciousness not by being vocal, by writing or making speeches. Such a person, by being who he or she is, enables the whole world to come nearer to peace, brotherhood and compassion. Such a person transcends all the stereotypes, all barriers, all beliefs, all labelling, and can touch the heart and soul of many towards awakening and liberation.

In the Gospel of Thomas, which is a Gnostic text containing the inner or

esoteric teachings of Jesus, we find the following passage:

His disciples said to him, ‘When will the kingdom come?’ Jesus said: ‘It will not come by waiting for it. It will not be a matter of saying: “here it is” or “there it is”. Rather, the kingdom of the Father is spread out upon the earth, and men do not see it.’<sup>2</sup>

The stable mind sees what is always present, always near, never far away, never lost: the blessedness alive in every form of life. In it the seen, the seer and seeing are one. For it, there is no other.

## References

1. *Bhagavad Gītā*, trans. Annie Besant, The Theosophical Publishing House, Chennai, 2003, pp.38–9.
2. ‘The Gospel according to Thomas’ in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, ed. by James M. Robinson, Harper, New York, 1988, p.138.

. . . we must separate the brain from the mind. The brain is the centre of all our nerves, all our knowledge, all our theories, opinions, prejudices; from college, university, all that knowledge is gathered in the skull. All the thoughts, all the fears are there. Is the brain different from the mind? . . . The brain will always be limited. . . . The mind has no relationship with the brain; it can communicate with the brain, but the brain cannot communicate with it. . . . This brain, which is conditioned by knowledge, by experience, by tradition, cannot have any communication with the mind which is totally outside the activity of the brain. That mind can communicate with the brain, but the brain cannot communicate with it because the brain can imagine infinitely; the brain can imagine the nameless; the brain can do anything. The mind is too immense because it doesn’t belong to you; it’s not your mind.

J. Krishnamurti