



By Swami Jyotirmayananda

YOU CAN easily strengthen your body by eating nutritious food and doing exercises like running, jumping, walking, swimming, and Hatha Yoga. But how should you strengthen your mind? You can't take your mind to a gym to do some weight-lifting, but there are spiritual techniques that are effective for making the mind healthy and powerful.

It is of great value to learn these techniques, for if you wish to lead a life of relaxation and fulfillment, a strong mind is far more important than a strong body. A weak mind will drag the body down with it again and again, and prevent you from enjoying all the blessings of physical health by keeping your personality in a perpetual state of tension and frustration.

You may have a wonderful life, but when your mind becomes upset, all the things that delighted you and were a source of inspiration are no longer of any value. The lustrous moon, the radiant sun,

the wondrous sunrise, and the picturesque sunset all seem useless when your mind is not balanced. Learning how to strengthen your mind will enrich your life and lead you to wonderful treasures—to the valuable pearls of spiritual qualities that bring peace, bliss, and inner fulfillment.

A WEAK MIND wastes its energy over trifles day after day, hour after hour. Think of all the worries that invade such a mind. The mind beset with worries is like an animal in the forest that spends all its energy driving off the infinite variety of insect pests that torment him! Let your mind visualize those forest animals that are always shaking their bodies, wiggling their ears, swishing their tails and scratching themselves to get rid of the endless fleas and flies and mosquitoes. Isn't the human mind in a state of weakness just like those poor animals? Doesn't it forever tremble and shake due to mosquitoes

of irritability, fleas of insecurity, big buzzers of jealousy, and sometimes even a scorpion of revenge? These pests are always hovering over the mind, sapping out its mental energy. If the mind is not strong, it is vulnerable to everything and becomes a slave to the world.

You may have millions of dollars, but if you have a weak mind you will not have real happiness. You may be surrounded by luxury and plush surroundings, but if the mind is not strong you will feel extremely miserable. You may enter into sleep on an elegant, velvety bed, but soon you may be plagued by horrible dreams because your unconscious is filled with so many negative impressions.

Negative impressions make your mind weak, and positive impressions strengthen your mind. A strong mind expresses itself with great qualities, like humility, patience, endurance, control of temper, and faith in God. Developing good qualities strengthens your mind and enables you to develop more good qualities. Negative association and a negative lifestyle weaken your mind.

IN DESIGNING a lifestyle that encourages mental strength, a sense of rhythm is very important. For example, suppose one day you wake up early in the morning, but another day you go on sleeping until 11 o'clock. Suppose one day you feel like a great Yogi and practice meditation for hours, and for the next few days you forget about your meditation altogether. Such a discordant lifestyle weakens your mind and pulls you away from God.

The great secret of managing the mind is a rhythmic plan in daily life. Think of the things that you should do every day, and set a time to do them with a regularity that can be sustained. Performing your spiritual *sadhana* is like taking delicious medicine according to an intelligent schedule. If a doctor has prescribed two pills every four hours, you do not swallow all the pills at one time, thinking that you have finished your duty for the whole month! You take the pills little by little each day so that there is a cumulative effect in order to cure the illness.

Similarly, you schedule meditation and repetition of mantra for a set time each day, you study spiritual texts daily, and little by little you strengthen your mind and come closer to God. There is no rush, you are not taking an examination tomorrow, but in this school of life you must go on learning every day until you reach your goal of God-realization.

A HELPFUL EXERCISE for the mind is to find some inspiring spiritual passages and memorize them. On a day when you have nothing else to do, turn the pages of your memory and delve deep into the inspirational treasures that you have committed to memory. Let your mind be filled with hymns in praise of God. This practice gives you training for your memory power, absorbs the time when you are idle, and builds up good-association or *satsanga* within.

It is important to take charge of the time that you are not deeply involved in an activity, like when you are waiting for someone or something, or even just driving down the road towards a destination. During those waiting periods, you can open the book of your memory, recite those prayers and reflect upon the Divine thoughts you have collected. A miser who hordes his gold and jewels will frequently escape to his secret room to gloat over his treasures. Similarly, an aspirant must cherish the treasure of spiritual thoughts that have a dynamic effect on his personality.

SATSANGA, OR GOOD ASSOCIATION, is always important. Do not let your mind stand idle, because it can be easy prey for the workshop of the devil. Imagine that workshop with all the fantastic things that go on there, and be on your guard—or else the devil will conjure up some fantastic things to fill the emptiness of your mind.

There is a humorous story that sheds some light on the sad predicament of the empty mind: Once a poor, young man was carrying a jar of milk on his head and he thought to himself: “I will sell this milk and get some money to buy a cow. But I will not have enough money for a cow so I will buy

some goats. I will sell the milk from the goats and gradually I will be able to buy some cows. I will sell the cows and buy a business and the business will prosper and I will have a lot of money. I will buy a nice house and get married and show my wife what an important person I am. If she does not do what I want..." At this thought, the man kicked his foot and the jar of milk came tumbling to the ground! As the story clearly shows, empty thoughts and day dreams should be replaced by spiritual treasures.

Sometimes certain things in the present remind you of the past and you allow your mind either to think longingly about the "good old days" or else to indulge in regret about why you didn't do things differently then. Sometimes you fantasize vainly about the future. All of these things are innocent, but they weaken your mind in a definite way.

LESS INNOCENT, erroneous ways of weakening your mind involve how you deal with others. An aspirant must think deeply about what is called *sadachara*, righteous conduct. This is the most important point in building up mental strength. You must not interact with others with a sense of superiority, and you should not hurt others irrationally. The human personality is very complex. Sometimes you feel you are angry with another person, but you are really angry with yourself. The other person is merely reflecting something negative in yourself, and you don't like what you see in that reflection. The moment you are tempted to hurt someone, remember that such behavior is a sign of a weak mind and that you should not lower yourself to that level.

In all conditions of life one should be able to develop magnanimity. Love and understanding always have tremendous force. Never feel that God has made you an exception to the rule of karma and that you can hurt others and get away with it. Whatever actions you do to others will come back to you in due time. Therefore, if liberation is truly your goal, you have to be extremely vigilant in your daily interactions with others.

The art of loving God in others should be carefully developed. Do not let your mind waste its energy in vain reactions of anger, irritability, hysterical fits. Emotional outbursts weaken the mind and pave the way to a dark future.

AWEAK MIND is overly dependent upon the condition of the nervous system, and as time passes one's nerves deteriorate and leave the mind with no power. On the other hand, people who are spiritually strong find that as they age their mind becomes stronger and stronger, despite the natural deterioration of the body. A strong mind—one that has been tempered with faith, treated with meditation, and transformed with wisdom—can transcend the body and nervous system so effectively that even if death threatens you, you will not be frightened. A strong mind reveals to you that you are a soul, not the body. Death is simply taking away an old cloth that your spirit has outgrown, giving you another chance to strive towards Liberation.

If your mind is weak, everything frightens you. There is a saying, "A coward dies many a death." So, keep your strength of mind in view and promote it with patience. Nothing is more enjoyable or enriching in life than making the mind strong. Once you are determined to possess that strength of mind, you will find many ways and many methods to accomplish it. You will realize that you are the architect of your own destiny. With the mind in your command, well controlled and well strengthened, the three worlds will tremble before you. Your highly integrated mind will have power over matter and will lead you to the summit of infinite strength: God-realization.

