

The term *moha* is usually defined as delusion, or an obscuring of reasoning, but delusion has many implications. In the highest philosophical sense, it is *moha* that causes the unenlightened mind to perceive a world of multiplicity, when in reality nothing exists other than the nondual *Brahman*—the Absolute Self. It is *moha* that causes the mind to ignore the blazing Reality of Divine glory that permeates all and to become stuck to names and forms, to ignore the ocean but become attached to the waves, to ignore the sky and become attached to little clouds.

Moha causes the mind to be caught up by apparent values of family and society, and then to feel completely confined to those values and circumstances. It is *moha* that causes you to view yourself as an individual completely dependent on your family or friends, and to feel that your joy completely depends upon them and theirs upon you.



*Ishwara Srishti
Versus
Jiva Srishti*

Imagine for a moment that you live in a beautifully decorated palatial home and, feeling a bit lazy, you lay down on your luxurious velvety bed.

You doze off, only to discover that in your dream you are being chased by a tiger.

No one is there to help you, and no matter where you run you are miserable. On waking, you realize that it was all just a dream. There was no tiger and your life was not in danger at all.

That palatial room with its velvety bed is symbolic of what the scriptures refer to *Ishwara srishti* — the creation of God. The Divine creation is majestic and infinitely blissful. From morning to night, the immense glory of God cascades through this universe, permeating all, internally and externally.

The Art of Positive Feeling Part Seven



Overcoming Delusion



by Swami Jyotirmayananda

The dream that arose when you went to sleep, the dream in which you found yourself entangled in so many difficulties, is symbolic of *jiva srishti*—the creation of the individual. Despite the omnipresent abundance of the Divine creation, the human mind remains cramped by the alternating pleasure and pain of life. Due to its conditioning and limitation, the mind experiences a world of time and space and is unable to bask in the awareness of Divine Presence. This is due to *moha*.

Moha, Maya and the Three Gunas

In the Gita, Chapter Seven, Verse 13, Lord Krishna speaks about the deluding power of the three gunas (modes of nature): “*Tribhiringunamayair bhaavairebhis sarvamidam jagat; Mohitam naabhijaanaati maamebhyah paramavyayam*” — “Deluded by these three modes of nature, all this world does not know Me who am different from them and immutable.”

This world is created by the blend of three gunas: *sattwa*, *rajas* and *tamas*. On the psychological plane, when you become calm, relaxed, and aware of Divine Presence, there is *sattwa* in your mind. When the mind becomes free of anger, hate, and greed and filled with Divine qualities, a window to eternity opens within your heart. You discover a mysterious source of inner peace. *Sattwa* beckons you to that.

When you are agitated and distracted, unable to be one-pointed, filled with ambitions, hypocritical and ostentatious, *rajas* is predominating in your personality. When you become prone to irrationality, bitterness, frustration, pervasive pessimism, anger, and hate and your mind loses all spiritual sensitivity, *tamas* has taken over your mind.

A Family of Thieves

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa told a parable about a king who was traveling alone, carrying a great treasure with him. Seeing him vulnerable to attack, three thieves sneaked up behind him, robbed him, tied him up, and dumped him in a dry well.

In a while, however, one of the three thieves developed compassion for the king. While the other two thieves were away, he secretly came back and untied him. Then he guided the king to the edge of the forest, and said, “Now you are free to go.” The king responded. “Why don’t you come with me? You helped me to be free of that bondage. Come to visit me and I will reward you with lots of treasure.” The thief said, “No, your majesty, I belong to the family of thieves, and I have no access to your royal palace.”

The implication of the parable is that all three of the *gunas*—*sattwa*, *rajas*, and *tamas*—are thieves. They attack the soul, which is essentially the emperor of emperors—the Divine Self—and rob it of its glory and majesty. Then they tie it up with the fetters of illusion and throw it into the dry well of repeated embodiment. The thief that develops compassion towards the soul is *sattwa*. He can lead it to Liberation, but that is as far as he can go. As a member of the family of thieves, he belongs to the relative world and cannot transcend it. It is easy to see how *rajas* and *tamas* are like thieves that keep you tied up with illusion. But how can it be that *sattwa*, the highest *guna*, also deludes?

When *sattwa* visits the mind for only a short duration, when it comes as a “guest” once in a while, it causes delusion. When you are not accustomed to the presence of *sattwa*, you erroneously conclude that the happiness it brings to you comes from the objects or situations that are outside of you at the moment. It creates a desire

to secure those objects and leads you into a state of dependency and bondage. On the other hand, if *sattwa* is allowed to abide in your personality, then that *sattwa* promotes Enlightenment. Such abiding *sattwa* opens the door to internal reflection and reveals that happiness arises from within. So you decide to join *satsanga* (good association) and to continuously promote *sattwa* more and more.

Insight into Maya

When *rajas* and *tamas* dominate your mind, the deluding force of *Maya* increases and *moha* swells up. Everything is colored by illusion. But when *sattwa* increases, the deluding force of *Maya* diminishes and fetters break.

Maya has two aspects: *avidya* (ignorance) and *vidya* (spiritual knowledge). *Avidya* drives you into more and more ignorance, increased involvement in the world of time and space. It entangles the mind in dwelling on the past or planning for the future. Under its sway, you do not have even a moment's rest or the peace of mind to transcend your ego and discover the joys of eternity.

While *avidya* holds you down in the world of relativity, *vidya* lifts you up. Using the simile of the Christian cross, *avidya* holds you to the horizontal plane, always pressured by the past, moving towards the future. *Vidya* gives you a vertical lift. Spiritual knowledge enables you to rise above the limited world of time and space and transcend it.

Everyone in this world who has not attained Enlightenment is as if fettered by chains, and in a fettered condition moves from one embodiment to another. In Sanskrit, fetters are known as *pashas*, and therefore, the scriptures refer to human beings in this predicament as *pashus* (animals) and to God as *Pashu Pati*, the Lord of all the animals. Therefore, in order to escape the delusive aspect

of *Maya*, in order to transcend the world of time and space, *sattwa* has to be promoted and *rajas* and *tamas* have to be controlled and sublimated.

Don't Let Yourself Be Tied Up by Moha

Moha and *mamata* (the sense of mine-ness) bind the feet of your soul with shackles. Bound by *moha* and *mamata*, the soul that could have experienced infinity and eternity becomes confined instead to the small circumference of its attachments in the realm of time and space. This point is simply illustrated in the following parable:

Once a king had a pet hawk that used to fly freely and enjoy its freedom. In the course of its daily flight, the hawk began to perch upon the small hut of an elderly woman. The woman often had fragrant hot pudding simmering, and she would open the window to speak with the hawk.

"Dear little one," she would coax, "Come to me and I will feed you and keep you warm, for you must be feeling very cold out there." At first, the hawk was merely amused by her soft words and would fly off after a brief rest. As days passed, however, he began to think, "How cozy it must be inside the hut. It really is cold out here, and maybe I do deserve a little extra warmth. Surely it would be so nice to have someone take care of me." So, with these thoughts in his mind, the hawk flew through the window into the hut.

Immediately the woman caught the hawk and bound its legs to prevent it from escaping into the wilderness again. Then she began to feed the hawk some of her delicacies. For an hour or so the hawk felt very comfortable. Soon, however, he began to think of the freedom that he used to have. All the while the lady went on talking to the hawk: "Now look how wonderful life is: no more running wildly, no more flying everywhere. You are my little one now."

Meanwhile, the king began to miss his hawk and he embarked on a search mission. As he passed the small hut in the forest he looked through the window and, lo and behold, to his great surprise saw his pet hawk with his legs tied! “Little hawk,” he cried out, “What misery have you brought upon yourself by your delusion!”

Like the hawk in this parable, the human spirit, which is always essentially beyond all confines, repeatedly accepts a condition of limitation. It is your birthright to fly freely everywhere, yet you somehow become accustomed to living in a cage, like a bird that has forgotten the joys of freedom.

Crossing the River of Moha

A popular story about Tulasidas, the saintly author of the Ramayana, gives a humorous yet poignant insight into the tricks played by the mind due to infatuation or exaggerated attachment. This aspect of *moha* hinders an individual’s practical sense, while it also leads them away from that which is conducive to spiritual advancement:

When Tulasidas was a young man, he became strongly attracted to a young lady and married her. Soon he became so enamored of his wife that he forgot everything else. According to the story, shortly after they were married Tulasidas’ wife had to go to her parents’ home for a while.

During that time young Tulasidas, feeling that he could not live without her, decided to visit the house where his wife was staying in a village just across the river. During a stormy night in the rainy season, Tulasidas set out on his mission. When he reached the river, he found something there in the darkness that he thought was a raft; so he sat down upon it and rowed. Actually it

was not a raft at all, but a dead body! However, due to his haste, Tulasidas never realized this.

After he crossed the river, Tulasidas went to the house where his wife lived. To his dismay, everything was locked up for the night. Thus, the next challenge before him was reaching the upper story of the little building where he would find her sleeping.

Tulasidas saw what he thought was a rope hanging on the building and he caught hold of the rope and climbed up. It was not a rope, however, but a snake—but Tulasidas did not realize that until the early morning! Finally, when he knocked at his wife’s door, she was amazed to see him. Rebuking him, she said, “You could have waited. Why did you come like this? If you had as much love for the Lord as you have for me, a mortal person, you would have attained God-realization by now!”

This unexpected rebuke from his wife turned Tulasidas’s mind inward in reflection and awakened many of his previous spiritual *samskaras* (impressions). He realized how, pressured by his desires, he had not known what he was doing during the night. He had considered a dead body as a raft, and a coiled snake as a rope! He was awed by the power of his mind to do seemingly impossible things under the sway of desires.

Thus reflecting after being rebuked by his wife, Tulasidas suddenly experienced an internal awakening and made a resolve, a *sankalpa*, to attain God-realization. He realized how foolish it was for him to have devoted all his energy to things that are transient, and vowed to direct his sentiments only towards Lord Rama.

Step Out of the Waters of Delusion

The great message of all spiritual teaching is that you have a choice: you can either keep ducking into the stream of ignorance and move from illusion to illusion, or you can enter the stream of

knowledge and recapture your essential identity as the Divine Self. Reflect upon this story about Narada and his experience in the turbulent waters of *moha*:

Once upon a time, Sage Narada went to Vaikuntha, where Lord Vishnu dwells. When the sage entered, Vishnu welcomed him warmly, but, to Narada's surprise, Goddess Lakshmi put a veil over her face and turned away from him. Dismayed and perplexed, Narada asked Lord Vishnu, "Why did Goddess turn away from me, I who am so pure minded, a person of great austerity?"

Lord Vishnu replied, "The ways of the Goddess are mysterious. She is the embodiment of *Maya*, or Cosmic Illusion, and thus very difficult to understand, Narada. So too, one never knows the subtle delusion that operates through one's unconscious."

Narada then pleaded before Lord Vishnu, "Oh Lord, show me your *Maya*. Let me un-

derstand what it is." Lord Vishnu said, "Very well. Soon I shall explain it to you, but let us go for a ride and relax for a while in the heavenly world first."

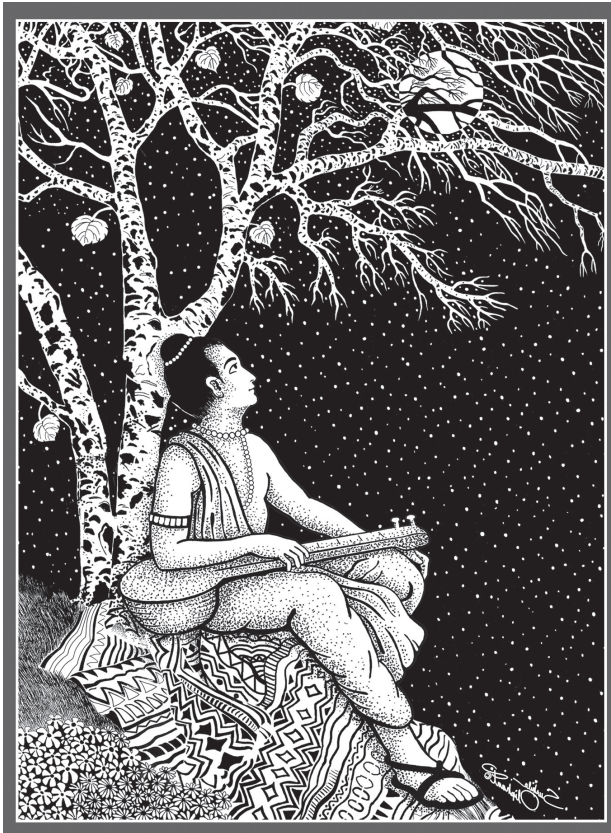
He then invoked the presence of the great bird Garuda, who swiftly appeared and carried them through the blue sky until they came to a beautiful and enchanting place, abounding with crystal clear streams and trees laden with blossoms.

There Lord Vishnu said, "Let us take a plunge in this wonderful stream and then rest," said Lord Vishnu. "You go first, Narada." "Yes my Lord," said Narada, and he handed Lord Vishnu his *veena*, the stringed instrument he carried with him wherever he went.

Then Narada entered the water. The moment he put his head under the water, his whole personality and body changed, transformed by *Maya*. When he emerged, there was no Lord Vishnu, no Narada. Narada had become a beautiful lady, well-dressed and bewildered, not knowing where she came from or who she was.

As she stood there in confusion, King Taladhwaja passed by with his royal retinue as they were engaged in a hunting expedition through the forest. Suddenly he saw the lady and was immediately enchanted by her beauty. "Who are you?" said Taladhwaja. The lady replied, "King, I do not know." The King proposed that she become his Queen, and the lady agreed because she felt so alone and did not have any protector.

Thus she became the supermost Queen of the great King, who loved her the most of all his wives. Time passed, and the lady, whose name became Saubhagya Sundari, remained completely unaware that she was essentially Narada. In the course of time she bore twelve sons, one after the other. As these sons were growing up, the lady, who was really Narada, was constantly involved in solving the prob-



lems of her large family, tending to quarrels, celebrating birthdays, caring for sickness, and delighting in their attainments.

In the course of time, a powerful enemy attacked the kingdom. In order to meet that enemy and his vast army, the King, along with his sons, went out to battle. And a fierce battle ensued, resulting in the death of all the royal sons of Saubhagya Sundari. The King, however, although badly defeated, escaped death.

When the Queen came to know of the defeat of her husband and the destruction of her family, she experienced intense grief. She rushed to the battlefield to see the bodies of her sons, whom she loved so dearly, and there she grieved even more intensely.

At that time, Lord Vishnu, in the form of an old ascetic, appeared before her saying, “Lady, why do you grieve? This is the nature of things. All that is born must die. Further, by grieving, you do not help the departed souls. You should rather enter the water of this stream and perform rituals and prayers for the peace of those souls.”

The queen plunged into the stream and as she emerged she found herself again transformed into Narada. Lord Vishnu was there smiling, holding the *veena* of the sage in his hand. He said, “Sage, why did you spend such a long time in the water?” And Narada realized then, with great wonder, that all his experiences had been nothing but the mysterious workings of *Maya*.

Essentially, we are all Saint Narada. We are all Divine, free of all sorrow and misery. But when we enter the stream of *avidya* or ignorance, the enchanting stream of the conditioned mind, we are transformed into a *jiva*, or individualized soul.

As an individualized soul, you become wedded to your ego, involved in the world of *moha* and *mamata* (mine-ness), and spend your

years struggling to find solutions for problems in the world of time and space—where there are no permanent solutions for anything.

Absorbed in “*moha*’s empire”—your family, friends and material possessions—you find it natural to think that these are the only things of importance. As a result, you live only for these perishable things, not realizing that you are essentially the Spirit, beyond time and space.

Through spiritual *sadhana* (discipline), however, you eventually develop *vairagya* (dispassion) and realize that everything will pass away. Nothing that you depend upon can be dependable all the time. You gain insight into the subtle and mysterious workings of *Maya*, and strive to learn the art of mystic awakening.

When your personality has been fully integrated, you are led to another kind of stream—*Jnana Ganga*, or the stream of wisdom and knowledge. The moment you enter into that stream, you emerge in your own essential form. As if awakened from the sway of Lord Vishnu’s *Maya*, you find the Divine Self smiling before you. You cast off the illusion of the sense of individuality, and emerge as *Brahman*. All your miseries and sorrows, all the experiences of countless embodiments, fade from your view like the experiences of a long dream. Then you realize, “I am *Brahman*—the Absolute Self.”

(To be continued)

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