

Memories As Minefields: Tread Very Carefully

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Memory is a mine in three senses of the word 'mine'.

1. Mine as a device that explodes on contact: Memories of our past bad habits are like mines implanted in our consciousness. At slight provocation, they could explode into uncontrollable desires that could destroy us. To an alcoholic trying to turn sober, the sight of a liquor bottle is a mine that could cause him to relapse into alcoholism.

Similarly, if someone has misbehaved with us, then that memory becomes like a mine. Whenever that person behaves even slightly improperly, we explode into a disproportionate burst of anger. Instead of being assertive, we end up being aggressive and so end up compounding the problem. Just as a trained general is essential to safely cross a dangerous minefield, a bona fide spiritual master is indispensable to navigate the journey of life, infested as it is with the mines of explosive memories.

2. Mine as excavation site from which ores and minerals are extracted: In spiritual life, the devotional memory of our supreme beloved God, Krishna, is the ultimate treasure mine. Just as we get some joy by thinking of the person we love, devotees experience supreme joy by lovingly thinking of the all-attractive Lord. Most of us have probably never given ourselves a chance to taste the ineffable joy of divine remembrance, although that joy is always on the tip of the tongue; it can be attained simply by attentive chanting of the names of God like the Hare Krishna mahamantra. Cherishing and relishing the treasure of divine love is our birthright as the beloved children of God. So why dissipate energy in external pursuits?

3. Mine as possession, "belonging to me": It is for each one

of us to decide: "Which mine am I going to treasure as mine? Am I going to let myself be exploded by bad memories or am I going to enrich myself with a mine of devotional treasure?"

The human mind tends to delight in worldly memories and neglect divine memories. The Bhagavad Gita describes the uncontrolled mind as an intractable enemy. A worldly enemy can be dealt with by *sama* or friendship, *dama* or gifts, *bheda* or divide and rule and *danda* or punishment.

The process of overcoming undesirable memories and experiencing the divine entails treading the five-fold path of awareness as Patanjali explained in the Yoga Sutra:

1. *Mudha*: deluded, as in sleep, laziness or dullness.

2. *Kshipta*: agitated, as in stress or mania.

3. *Vikshipta*: distracted, as in a lecture in a noisy environment.

4. *Ekagrata*: concentrated, as in a student revising an hour before the exam.

5. *Niroddha*: controlled, as in a devotee absorbed in *samadhi*, the trance of love.

When we starve the mind, that is, when we refuse to pander to its demands for immoral, unhealthy pleasures, it starts agitating more than normal. Many people become disheartened by this increased mental tumult and give up. But rich premiums await the courageous few who refuse to be cowed down by the mind's scary tactics. We could become spiritual adventurers by determinedly refusing to be cowed down by a recalcitrant mind into silence and submission by philosophical conviction and devotional meditation. Then the mine of the heart will yield us the treasures of unshakeable, unending peace and bliss.

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