



Staying in the present moment

by Kim Nataraja

If we just watch our thoughts for a while, we realise quite soon that all of them are linked to the past or to the future. They whirl around our concerns about what has happened, in the form of memories, both good and bad, or about what might happen, our fears, hopes, desires and plans. We do not even see people and situations as they really are, but coloured by our thoughts, opinions, prejudices, experience and emotions. In fact, we could easily say that we walk around in a landscape of our own mind, our own thoughts, a world of illusion of our own making. We get so caught up in our own story; this creation of our mind can be so powerful that it may seem to be the only reality that exists. It can mask the existence of a Higher Reality.

But this Higher Reality, God, is experienced by the Mystics as pure 'Being' in the 'Here and Now': (Meister Eckhart) Among names none is more appropriate than He-who-is...for he dwells always anew in a Now without ceasing

When Moses asks God who he is, he gets two answers – one stresses the historical aspect: "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." (Exodus) and the second points to the God in the Here and Now: "I am that I am" (Exodus) - pure being, pure energy, pure consciousness. In the 'Gospel of John' we hear Jesus say something similar about himself: "Before Abraham was 'I am'."

Letting go of our thoughts allows us to stay in the present moment. It is the 'narrow path' of attention on our mantra that helps us to reach the silence in the ground of our being, in the Here and Now, by leaving our conditioned being behind. Eternity is in the Now. We need to realise that time is really made up out of a string of 'Now' moments – everything happens in the Now. But we distort the Now, by dwelling in our memories or by using this precious moment as a mere stepping stone to anticipate and prepare for the future.

Moreover, once the Now moment has been and gone, what is left of it becomes part of the past, a mere memory. These are again constructs of the mind: interpretations of events coloured by self-deception, by fear, hope or the need for consolation, really not much different from a dream or fantasy. This colouring furthermore varies depending on our changing moods and circumstances. We need to let go of these mirages; there is really only the 'Here and Now'. Being present, listening attentively to the mantra enables us to do so, to let go of thoughts and images, the past and the future and allows us to be our true 'self' dwelling in the Now:

"To be mindful is to live in the present moment, not to be imprisoned in the past, nor anticipating a future that may never happen. When we are fully aware of the present, life is transformed and the strain and stress disappear. So much of modern life is a feverish anticipation of future activity and excitement. We have to learn to step back from this into the freedom and possibility of the present." (Bede Griffiths)