

Don't Object - Subject

By Swami Suryadevananda

Though it seems that a certain amount of sorrow, pain and suffering are part of life, yoga assures us that it need not be so. In the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, a beautiful sutra¹ tells us that unhappiness that has not reached the field of experience may be avoided by avoiding psychic contact with it.

What exactly is sorrow? Definitions of any word do not help as they are mere words, but experiences are real - they are experienced. It may be useful to approach this with questions instead of stock answers with the idea that in approaching this as an exploration, there may be some discovery. These questions are not placed for clear answers but rather, as points raised at the very beginning that may not seek to elicit answers from the known and therefore they will energize the quest to clarity.

Some Questions

- What is this thing called sorrow and how does it arise in me?
- If sorrow arises in me and is experienced by me and in me - how is it that I am unable to avoid its experience?
- If I am whole, I am the subject of all experience; but I feel subjected to this unhappiness when it is experienced - how does this happen?

Thought is expression in the mind and what results is also thought in the form of some experience. These two, expression and experience, happen in the same mind. Thought as expression is the cause and thought as experience is the result. Both expression and experience, or cause and effect, are made of the same stuff - they are the same mind substance.

This same substance undergoes an apparent division - and I use the word 'apparent' here because it is not permanent. After the experience, there is a period of wholeness of mind which is soon disturbed by the rise of another urge for experience, and so the cycle repeats itself. We seem to go from one cycle to another in the inner world. Actually, it does not matter what the outer world is doing so much as we seem to be concerned more about the inner world.

Experience happens in the inner world and its cause is the same inner world. It becomes most important to understand the rise of urge or desire - and its return as experience - to free ourselves from this self-infliction. This has to be possible, because at the same time that I am expressing or experiencing I am also aware that these are happening. Somehow, I seem to get identified first with thought or the outbox and then rapidly with experience - which is also thought of as the inbox or result. The awareness of this going on is still there, but it seems powerless in the background.

The seed for this mischief is *desire* - however subtle or tempest it be. Starting off quite innocently as a simple wish or preference, it first separates the thinker and then fashions that which is to be experienced within itself. Desire is feeling for some experience, and this

feeling is the craftsman who must make experience happen - all within itself. There is no other stuff or substance from which to fashion things.

Desire is division and it divides - first separating the thinker. With the rise of each desire, we instantly become much smaller, as the mind sequesters a small fragment who will be the thinker or experiencer (us) - and the desiring starts shaping the desired object within itself with the other part of the mind.

We lose subjecthood so as to make the objects of desire - and I am using 'objects' in its widest sense to include everything we consider external: people, things and conditions. It needs a convincing amount of material or we ourselves. We are the fashioner, the fashioning and the fashioned. Not only this, but we give rise to this and experience it all. So, the inner real estate is first divided and what was the subject is now relegated a small plot, all the while desire works on fashioning the desired out of the rest. We can experience this - as when the desire increases, we are less conscious of ourselves and more conscious of the object of desire and this is why we are impulsive with desires and helpless against them.

We are real, we feel we exist. For objects of desire to become real, they must get a larger part of us so they come into existence. This division does two things: it makes us smaller and at the same time the object looms larger with its own seeming separate existence. What was desire for the object becomes instead desire *to regain fullness*, as restlessness is not for the object - however tantalizing, but for the peace that comes from inner wholeness again. This is why we are restless when desires are fuelled.

The front end gives the illusion of desire for something, but in the back end it is a wish to regain selfhood or fullness of being again. The blinding pangs of separation once desire gains momentum is an outer reflection of this inner division. We just want to feel fuller, larger or more complete, but the illusion makes us believe that the object will make us happier, fuller or more complete.

Once the object is fashioned out of and in the mind, the very same desire goes about suggesting ways for attaining the object. Please keep in mind that the subject and object are *one mind*, and this is where desire begins its work. The larger part of the divided mind takes the shape of the object and becomes the new subject, as it is the larger us only. By repeated thinking or desiring, we transfer subjecthood to the object, which now becomes the subject and beacons us to unite somehow. This is when fulfillment of desire rises and we do what needs to be done to unite with the object which is our own self in the inner world.

The external object is only a sensory distraction for this inner jugglery. If the object was what would truly satisfy, why do other desires rise within so very quickly again? We should be satisfied, but we are not. This is why objects, whatever they may be, can never satisfy. Desires give rise to more raging desires - as the jugglery repeats just like a juggler gets better the more he practices.

We become the object and this is resented by selfhood or the feeling of self. The fulfillment of desire is an attempt towards restoring selfhood - uniting with the object only *seems* to be the way to do this. This is why we feel satisfied on getting the object we have - that is, until the next desire rises - seemingly regained selfhood or a little sanity.

The subject becomes the object and it objects to this chaos. The solution is in remaining the subject, maintaining selfhood, even though there be desires. Fueling desires by identifying with them is an expensive mistake. We do not really want many things, we want satisfaction and satisfaction is a feeling of not wanting - period.

Vigilance is the way to remaining the subject. Suppression of desires is not the solution, it increases the division. Vigilance sees the desires as objects and does not get lost in the jugglery of objects presented for the rug to be swept under its feet. Identification with desires 'I would like...' quickly signs selfhood away and the transfer begins.

We will discuss vigilance and satisfaction in other essays.

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¹The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (II.16) by Swami Venkatesananda, published by the Chiltern Yoga Trust of Australia (1998).