

## 2. The Detached Observer

Speaker: Prashant Kakoday – February 2013 - Cambridge, UK

One aim that every human has on this planet is to have a good standard of living and quality of life. Nothing is wrong with this aim. To achieve this better standard of living our emphasis has largely been to try to improve the outer world. The aim has been to improve our gadgets and computers, make cars go faster, find better houses and jobs, find more wealth and better relationships. All of this is essential.

However, what is given very little importance in society and in our educational system is our inner life, that is, what is going on in the mind and how we respond to outside situations? Apart from a few psychologists and psychoanalysts, very little effort is made to educate people in this field. Our inner life is what we experience all the time and so this lack of education can reduce the quality of our lives in a big way. A person may have wealth, he may be living in a castle, but if there is no understanding of the inner dynamics, he can live a life of anxiety or depression. Some effort to understand the basics can be rewarding in a big way. With a healthy mind and a rich inner life, a person will automatically be more efficient at improving his outer life.

A simple model to explain what is going on, is to see the whole of this outer world as a small box. Imagine a box that represents the entire outer world. What is the nature of this box? What is happening inside it, that is relevant to us? That box is unpredictable; we do not know what is going to happen to it in the next minute. Change is the law in that box; things change in front of us. 'End' is the law; everything comes to an end and new things start. Just as we see in a garden, flowers come, and the same flowers go. They begin to wilt, they disappear and new flowers come. This is the law of the outer world.

In such a world, if we create even the slightest attachment, sorrow is guaranteed. In a world that is changing, a world that is ending, a world that is unpredictable. If we create even one expectation of whatever kind, it will be the beginning of an attachment. If we start to believe that we own something, then sorrow is guaranteed to follow.

At present, we are busy creating more and more attachments in that box. No surprise then that we have become subservient to this outer world. We are so dependent on this changing outer world. Since this outer world is unpredictable, every attachment creates anxiety and sooner or later it will create disappointment, feelings of loss and fear of loss.

We have an option; we can be in that box, but we can go there as an observer. The only right option in this scenario is to be an observer. If we go into the garden as a detached observer and we see these flowers coming and going, it does not give us sorrow. The attitude is of a guest who does not own anything. A guest is sensible. He knows that he is there for a short time; he does not create any expectations. He watches things, he does not get caught up in the things and

events of the box.

We call this attitude the state of '*detached involvement*'. There is nothing wrong with being involved in the box; we are very much in the box, but it is a bit like coming into a house, knowing we are a guest there. We use things in the house, but we do not own anything, we do not create attachments to anything. When we leave the house we do not feel that we are losing anything. This is an example of detached involvement. By the word 'detached' we mean free, we do not mean we have any less love, or interest. A guest may be very interested, but he is sensible. What is his wisdom? The guest knows his time of exit.

If the guest comes and forgets he has to leave, it is as if he feels justified in behaving like a host, creating attachments, and thinking that he owns things. Reality is something that he has to face sooner or later. In this case we all have to leave, whether we like it or not, the change and the exit are guaranteed. Also, every time we forget that we have to leave, we go in the direction of expectations and attachments, we invite feelings of dependency and subservience to the outer world.