

Developing a Sustained Commitment¹

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Many have the habit of making some New Year resolutions. For example, one may make a resolution to develop better eating habits and thereby reduce his/her obesity. Some other may resolve to start some physical exercises or yoga to improve physical fitness. Students and youngsters may also sometimes make resolutions. One young boy resolved that he will stop eating junk foods from the New Year. These resolutions are common even among elderly people. Some may decide to start going for early morning classes on Vedanta that is being conducted in their neighborhood. Others may choose to develop better and cleaner habits or learn something new.

If you analyze these resolutions you will find certain common elements irrespective of the age, nationality, sex, educational background or position of the person in the society. All of them have a good intention behind the idea. Improving physical fitness, developing newer habits, learning newer things are all positive ideas. However, in a vast majority of the cases, after a fortnight or two they would have given up the idea and would have been back to normal. One wonders why people tend to give up such noble ideas sooner than expected. At the core of this lies the basic question of how one develops a sustained commitment. Sustained commitment is required in all pursuits in one's life – spiritual, religious, social and materialistic. If only one understands how to make a sustained commitment to an idea or a thought, it can be applied over and over in multiple situations. Such a person will be successful in many things that he/she does. Undoubtedly, this is a useful skill for our life.

Lord Krishna diagnoses this problem and offers us some ideas on developing this skill. Let us understand this by looking at two *ślokas* in *Bhagavad Gitā*.

Developing Sustained Commitment – Source of the problem

Lord Krishna provides a direct and a simple diagnosis of the problem that we face in this regard. According to him, the crucial question we need to ask is how deep our sense of commitment is when we made it the first place. A shallow commitment will mean that the mind is not part of the commitment. Merely restraining the sense organs (*indriyāṇi*) but thinking differently about the issue in the mind is always the root cause of the problem. According to Lord Krishna such an approach is hypocritical (*mithyāchārah*). Those with such levels of commitment are indeed foolish (*vimūḍhātmā*).

कर्मन्द्रियाणि संयम्य य आस्ते मनसा स्मरन् ।
इन्द्रियार्थान्विमूढात्मा मिथ्याचारः स उच्यते ॥ 3.6

¹ Mahadevan, B. (2012). "Developing a sustained commitment", *Sadguru's Blessings*, Vol. 9 (8), April, 2012, pp 17 – 18.

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*karmendriyāṇi saṁyamya ya āste manaā smaran
indriyārthān-vimūdhātmā mithyāchārah sa ucyate*

If one tires to relate what Lord Krishna says to their own failures in making sustained commitment several inferences could be made. If the mind is not actively engaged into the commitment process, the benefit is likely to be temporary. This is simply because the mind will refuse to cooperate and will become the master while *buddhi* will be its slave. The mind will wonderfully work in myriad ways to direct the *buddhi* to process the information to its benefit. For example, after restraining from eating the junk food for a few days, it will justify why this is not required to solve the original problem. There may be other ways of addressing obesity. In the other example, the mind will come to the conclusion that getting up early in the morning and attending the veda class is perhaps not providing any significant advantages as one initially thought.

What is more alarming is that the revenge will be twice the vigour of the new attempt. This is a very common behavior in several cases. After restraining the food habit for sometime one returns to the old habit of eating with such a vengeance that they eat uncontrollably. It is a frequent practice to fast for a day and eat so much the following day. This nullifies or even reverses the benefit of fasting. Therefore, the short-term benefits are more than offset by the long term bad effects. This is why Lord Krishna refers to this as hypocritical behavior. Such is the power of the mind that it punishes the system for not taking it into confidence.

Mind control – Essential for Sustained Commitment

Therefore Lord Krishna prescribes that the starting point for such pursuits is to control the mind first and through that control the sense organs (*indriyaṇi manasā niyamya*). Any action done with a sense of detachment (*asaktaḥ*) is likely to breed excellence (*viśiṣyate*).

यस्त्विन्द्रियाणि मनसा नियम्यारभतेऽर्जुन ।

कर्मेन्द्रियैः कर्मयोगं असक्तः स विशिष्यते ॥ 3.7.

*yastvindriyāṇi manasā niyamya-ārabhate'rjuna
karmendriyaiḥ karmyogam asaktaḥ sa viśiṣyate*

The central issue in developing a sustained commitment is to control the sense organs with the mind. Once we develop this skill, we will succeed in many things that we do in our life. Students resolving to study regularly for a few hours to improve their performance in the exams will achieve it. A working executive wanting to improve his skills at work and make himself more valuable at the work place will achieve his objective. A husband or a wife wanting to make a better home by modifying their behavioural practices will succeed in their attempt.

Making Mind a slave to *Buddhi*

What this simply means is that the *buddhi* plays the role of a master and the mind the slave. An enslaved mind will not throw any tantrums and will faithfully direct the sense organs to behave as per the wishes of the *buddhi* and ensure a continued commitment to the resolution. Therefore, a simple investment required to make a sustained commitment is to acquire the means by which the mind can be brought under the control of *buddhi*.

Buddhi is endowed with the power of discrimination and this power must be exploited to its best to win the mind. In a practical sense what it means is that when a resolution is taken it must be preceded with considerable amount of thinking. Out of deep thinking and analysis of the consequences of the decision one can develop a firm conviction in the matter. Commitment to a new thought or a resolution also means changing some of our familiar practices and inheriting new ones. It is about changing the status quo. This will create some inconvenience, and will require more time and effort. It also means coming out of a familiar terrain and making new experiments and learning. This is why people drift away from their commitment after a few days.

Therefore, the other aspect is to reflect on the positives of the changed behavior. Once we get convinced of the reason for the new commitment making additional efforts to make it happen will follow naturally. Finally as Krishna says, developing some sense of detachment with the results of our initiatives even when actively engaging in it can also help us tame the mind easily. Let us take a firm commitment to reflect on this idea that Lord Krishna has given us. Perhaps we can make some progress in our social as well as spiritual pursuits in our life.