

WHAT is THE mind?

ARE THE BRAIN & THE MIND THE SAME THING?

The English word “mind” is quite vague and doesn’t capture the complexity of what the mind truly entails. We often use the word “mind” in different situations, like saying someone has an amazing mind or someone is not in their right mind. But defining what the mind really is can be tricky, even for scientists. It’s more than just the physical workings of the brain’s neurons. It includes our feelings, attitudes, and beliefs, which are intangible and invisible. If the brain and the mind were the same, brain scans would be able to read our thoughts. However, according to Vedic scriptures, the mind resides in our heart and is present in every cell of our body, controlling our bodily systems.

An example is how plants, despite not having brains, show signs of having a mind. Scientist JC Bose demonstrated that plants react to their environment and experience emotions. When a gardener walks in, the plants seem happy, and when a hunter walks in, they become despondent. Even the death of a bird can cause the plants to grieve. This challenges the idea that the mind and brain are the same.

In Vedic philosophy, the brain is like a computer’s hardware, and the mind is the software. While the brain is located in the head, the mind is said to reside in the heart. Understanding this difference helps us see that the modern idea of thoughts in the mind being merely electrochemical reactions in the brain is too simplistic. Thoughts are energy bundles that can help us explore whether enlightenment involves thoughts or transcends them altogether.

In yogic culture, there’s no singular “mind” as we commonly perceive it. Instead, there’s a physical body and a mental body. What we typically refer to as the mind is actually a combination of memory and intelligence.

Your body holds vast amounts of memory, far more than you might realize. For instance, you may not consciously remember what your ancestors looked like, but their traits are encoded in your DNA. Your body retains this memory, even if your mind doesn’t consciously recall it. Contrary to the body’s extensive memory, the mind is limited in its ability to remember. Moreover, the emphasis on intellectual processes over other forms of intelligence, such as intuition, gives undue importance to thought.

Thoughts are essentially recycled from existing data and cannot generate entirely new ideas. Therefore, dedicating oneself solely to the thought process may limit the potential for new experiences and insights.

Our individual psychological dramas may seem significant to us, but they’re just a small aspect of the broader life process. Life itself is governed by a deeper intelligence that transcends mere intellectual understanding.

In yogic tradition, the mind is understood as comprising 16 parts, further subdivided into 84,000 parts. However, let’s focus on 4 of these components for now.