



The Power of Thought

Course Handout



Introduction

We generate three karmic forces every day of our lives: thought, emotion, and action. And the most powerful of these three is thought. Thought is the origin of action and controls emotion. Thought is as powerful a force as electricity. Like all forms of energy, thought can be used both well and ill, just as electricity can be used to improve the quality of life or to destroy it. Since the action of every force has a corresponding reaction, and since thought is a power we all control to some degree, it is important to know just what thought is and how it can be used effectively.

The nature and effect of thought

Thought is an energy that consciousness produces to modify the subtle matter of the mental plane. When we think, we cause our mental body to vibrate in certain ways, and those vibrations are passed on to the surrounding matter of the mental world. Those vibrations create thought forms—shapes in the mental energy field—whose colours, shapes, definiteness of form, and persistence correspond to the quality, type, clarity, and intensity of the thought that produced them. One of the great teachers said, succinctly and literally, “Thoughts are things.”

When we habitually think the same thought or the same type of thought, the resulting thought form is produced quickly and accurately. On the other hand, when we attempt to think along new and, for us, unusual lines, the resulting thought form will be slow and uncertain because our mental body is not yet accustomed to that particular type of vibration. This is one explanation for the initial difficulty people sometimes experience in studying a new subject or thinking in new ways.



The mental body resists because of the effort required to set aside habitual modes of thought and to strike out in new directions that lack the comfortable mental grooves (or vibrations) in which our thought is accustomed to flow. Getting out of old grooves requires persistent mental effort.

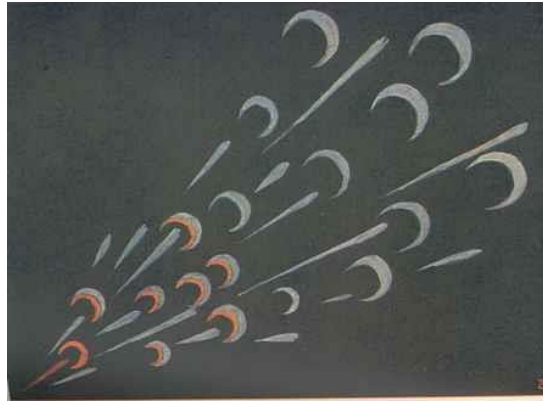


The effects of thought are of two kinds: those that react on the thinker and those that affect others.

The effects of thought on the thinker are also twofold. First, any repeated thought establishes a vibratory habit in our mental body. Second, thought has side effects on the astral and causal bodies. In our astral body, the effects are temporary emotions. In our causal body, however, thoughts have a permanent influence on our character. We make ourselves by the way we think. It is for this reason that right thought is so important. Our thoughts not only reinforce our habitual physical and emotional reactions, but they also build qualities into our causal body that form part of our permanent character, life after life.

The effects of our thoughts on others are through the mental field that unites them and us. When we think, radiating vibrations create a thought form that floats through the mental plane, setting up corresponding vibrations in the mental bodies of those it impinges on.

In addition, because the mental and emotional energy fields are intermingled and interpenetrating, thought vibrations cause changes in the emotional atmosphere, just as wind affects the surface of the sea and stirs up great waves. In the same way, emotions play upon the matter of the mental realm and create thoughts. Naturally, such mental - emotional vibrations can affect anyone coming within their range, just as a storm of wind and waves at sea affects ships caught in it. Thought forms, however, are not limited by time and space in the way physical forms are. They can spread rapidly over a wide area, being in that way more like radio or TV waves than air or water waves. On the other hand, they can also be directed to focus on a particular person.



This picture, from the book *Thought-Forms* by Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater (1901), depicting a clairvoyant description of sudden fright.

Thought waves convey the general nature of the original thought, rather than its exact message. For example, a Christian might pick up the thought of awe or devotion of a Hindu worshipper of Sri Krishna. But the Christian would perceive and express it as devotion to Jesus. Similarly, a person might have an angry thought about someone, and that thought may be picked up by other people who apply it to their own objects of hostility, reinforcing any anger in their own hearts.

We are surrounded by others' thoughts of many sorts: happy and sad, angry and peaceful. But no external thought can impinge on us unless we are already attuned to its kind. We are not victims of the mental world around us, but active participants in it. Just as you select a TV channel to watch, you can select a thought channel to participate in. Obviously then, it is a good idea for us to tune in to right thoughts in the mental world. Right thoughts are a shield against wrong ones. The way to air out a badly ventilated room is to open its windows and flood it with fresh air; the way to clear a mind clogged with wrong thoughts is to fill it with right ones.

Clairvoyants tell us that thought forms have shapes and colour —pale or vivid, muddy or clear—according to the type and character of the thought that created them.



An Illustration of the Aura from C. W. Leadbeater's book *Man: Visible and Invisible*



They also say that the definiteness or vagueness of a thought is reflected in the clarity of the outline of its form. If our thoughts are clear—and they can be clear in a harmful as well as a helpful way—they will be resistant to being replaced by other thoughts. Prejudice, for example, can create rigid thought forms, hard to dissolve, whereas fairness creates forms that are adaptable but also strong. And the more intensely we think, the longer the thought forms we produce will last.

Concentration and meditation

Concentration and meditation are two important aspects of the power of thought. Concentration is obviously of value every day in all our activities. To concentrate on our work is to do it more efficiently and so to free ourselves quickly for other activities. Regularly concentrating on the details of everyday life forms a habit of attention, which will prove valuable when we take up any other subject requiring concentrated thought. Concentration is also essential for the other aspect of thought, meditation. Only a mind trained to stay on one subject, to concentrate on one task to the exclusion of all others, can succeed in meditation.



Meditation is especially important if we are to undertake the inner work needed for treading the Path—the process of becoming all that we can and should be. Meditation aims at quieting the personality—physically, emotionally, and mentally—in order that our focus may be redirected from our transitory personality to our abiding individuality. To achieve that change of focus, many meditative techniques are available, appropriate for various temperaments and occasions. No single technique is best for everyone, but some basic practices are helpful, whatever techniques are eventually used.

At the start, devote five minutes each morning to quiet, positive thought, focusing on qualities to develop. We all know our own faults, such as getting irritated over trifles, or worrying unnecessarily, being critical, unkind, or sarcastic, talking too much and gossiping, or withdrawing and being aloof. We can each name our own shortcomings. Thinking about these negative characteristics, however, is not the way to get rid of them. Instead, thinking about their opposites will help to replace them.



Devoting five minutes each morning to thinking about qualities that complement our weaknesses is helpful. Close your eyes and, in imagination, see yourself acting with the quality you want to acquire. To do this, concentration is essential; this exercise can be done only if the mind can concentrate exclusively on one activity.

If you are easily irritated, practice seeing yourself as serene, calm, kind. But be aware that a test will come: at some point irritation will overwhelm you, and you may think that you have failed. But if you have done the practice regularly, you will find that the irritation passes more quickly and easily than it did before. This will be so increasingly, and a time will eventually come when you will no longer react with irritation, no matter what the situation. Then you can begin on another aspect you want to foster.

Eventually you will feel that a five-minute period of such practice is not sufficient. The glow and the peace that results will hold you longer, and you will be correspondingly better able to manage your day intelligently and prudently. But regularity is more important than duration. Those skilled in such practices tell us that a regular schedule is most important; we should not miss a single day if we can help it.



We should not worry if results do not come as swiftly or as completely as we would like. Worry is one of the most difficult habits to overcome. It is a process of repeating the same negative thought over and over again, digging a rut deeper and deeper into one's consciousness. That's what it means to be "in a rut." The only way to get out of the rut is to start working in a new direction by giving your mental body new thoughts to repeat. You can memorise and, whenever a fit of worry strikes you, repeat to yourself such sayings as these: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14.27). "The

Self is peace; that Self am I. The Self is strength; that Self am I." "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all shall be well." Such thoughts give the mind new channels to follow, helping to free it from its earlier ruts.

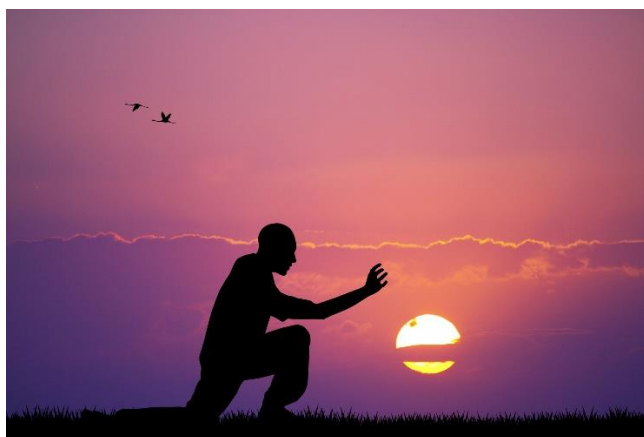
Similarly, we do not help the sick by thinking about their illness, but by sending them healing thoughts and seeing them in our imagination as whole and hale. We do not help "sinners" by dwelling on their faults, which result from a lack of wholeness; instead, we serve them by thinking of their good qualities and sending them thoughts of love, peace, and progress, which will flow into their minds as soon as there is a point of entry and help to develop those qualities in them.

The dead are also within the reach of our thoughts. It is important to send them only the most loving thoughts we can. Prayers for the dead are offered in many religions because they are known to be effective. And sending the dead calm, comforting, not sad, thoughts will help them to make their adjustment on the other side.

Ultimately, however, the purpose of meditation is not just to improve our personality, but rather to put us in touch with our own inner core, which has in it nothing but the good, the true, and the beautiful.



The purpose of meditation is to help us discover who we really are—to introduce us to the divine reality within ourselves and to awaken us to the realisation that everything really important is already inside us.



Some of the arts like Tai-chi are also ways to practice concentration and learn to balance the forces within the body.

To make this discovery, to meet our own inner spark, and to wake up to reality needs something other than thinking—even thinking good thoughts. What is needed is to make contact with an inner knowing, a transcendental wisdom, a gnosis at the core of our being. The Theosophical term for that is “buddhi.” And we contact buddhi not by using our mind but by quieting it. Spend five minutes every day in just being quiet, in not choosing, but just being silently aware of everything around you and within you.

It has been said, “Meditation is not what you think.” And that is correct in two senses. We

**Sow a Thought, Reap an Act;
Sow an Act, Reap a Habit;
Sow a Habit, Reap a Character;
Sow a Character, Reap a Destiny.**

-Upanishads

may think that meditation is thinking about something. But thinking about something is concentration, a prerequisite to meditation, not meditation itself. Meditation is not thinking at all, but instead experiencing an inner reality that is deeper than all feelings and thoughts. It is being calm, peaceful, energized, comforted, strengthened,

and enlightened. Athletes call it being in the zone or in the flow. Mystics call it listening to the Voice of the Silence.

The German poet, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, gave five rules for life, each of which involves the ability to control thought and all of which collectively lead to greater power of awareness: “Do not worry about your past. Do not be angry. Do not hate. Enjoy the present. Leave your future to Providence.” These rules are also ways to make contact with our own inner knowing, for that knowing is Providence within us.

In moments of tranquillity, from our own deep centre of life, we can gather the forces that advance us on the Path. The advice of St. Paul is as useful today as it was some 2000 years ago: “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Philippians 4:8).



The Golden Stairs

A clean life, an open mind, A pure heart, an eager intellect, An unveiled
spiritual perception, A brotherliness for all, A readiness to give and
receive advice

and instruction, A loyal sense of duty to the Teacher, A willing obedience
to the behests of

TRUTH, Once we have placed our confidence in,

and believe that Teacher to be in

possession of it; A courageous endurance of personal

injustice, A brave declaration of principles, A valiant defense of those
who are

unjustly attacked, And a constant eye to the ideal of human

progression and perfection which the

Secret Science depicts - These are the golden stairs up the steps

of which the learner may climb to the Temple of Divine Wisdom