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**by**

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# **The Power of Thought**

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It gives me great pleasure to be able to speak to you on the important subject of **The Power of Thought**.

We are astonished at all the wonderful machinery of this modern scientific age whereby human labour is saved, time is economized and distance is shattered.

Yet, we are not so astonished at the much more powerful machinery—the machinery of the human mind.

Do remember that it is the human mind with its power of thinking that is responsible for the planning and creating all of the machinery in this world.

There was no divine assistance received by man for this purpose. No god came down from the heavens to instruct him. All this wonderful machinery and other wonderful inventions were anticipated, created and fashioned by the mind of man, unaided and alone.

It will thus be clearly seen how great and powerful is the human mind.

Sages and saints, philosophers and scientists have with one accord expressed the view that man's capacity for mental effort is unlimited.

Both the psychologist and the physiologist alike maintain that the greater the mental effort exercised, the greater is the number of cells

that arise in the brain in order to cope with the extra activity undertaken.

Such is the power generated by the mind to enable man to perform a stupendous task.

This is thought-power. It lies hidden within the human mind.

It has to be aroused and developed in order to be made use of.

But for this latent thought-power, one cannot understand how a certain Yogi in India in 1936, after having been buried alive in a sealed tomb made of stone in the presence of a large gathering, was found still to be alive when he was taken out of the tomb after a lapse of 40 days.

Doctors had examined him before the burial as well as after the exhumation. There was no divine intervention there, but by dint of sheer concentration of thought-power this Yogi was able to succeed in his determination to control his breath and the movements of his heart for 40 days.

It must not however be supposed that the ability to perform this achievement or the ability to perform similar achievements by others was obtained over night all of a sudden. Nothing short of a long, personal course of training in concentration and meditation can succeed in awakening this latent thought-power.

This latent thought-power can be utilized not merely to perform miracles by obtaining mastery over the forces of nature, but also to achieve spiritual perfection by obtaining mastery over the forces of evil.

It is only recently that scientists and psychologists began to assert that thought-power is one of the greatest forces in the universe. But do you know that this view was anticipated by the Buddha over 2500 years ago when in the very first stanza of the Dhammapada it was stated—“Mind is the forerunner of all states and conditions, mind is supreme, mind-born is everything”?

In that one line, the Buddha has said much. What are the implications involved?

Everything first arises in the mind, in the world of thought, before it enters the world of reality: Hence it is that everything is said to be mind-born. Thought always precedes actions. A house with its size and shape first exists in the mind of the architect before it exists in the outer world.

To proceed to a more complex illustration, a war between two countries first takes its rise in the minds of war-minded statesmen and others who are at the helm of affairs in the two countries concerned, before a real war commences in the outer world.

A powerful thought of one man can easily influence so many others. Hence has the Buddha said in the Saíyutta Nikáya — “Thought rules the world. By thought the world is led. Thought it is above all other things, that, brings everything within its sway.”

Actions are always the results of some prior thoughts - immediately prior or remotely prior. Sometimes a thought results in immediate action, sometimes it is the cumulative effect of several similar thoughts repeated from time to time. In either case, action is the undoubted result of thought.

Thought is so powerful, so important, that sometimes thought alone unaccompanied by any resultant action can exert a great influence and lead to startling results. Consider the story of the youth Mattakundali mentioned in the Dhammapada Commentary. He was seriously ill and was lying on his sick-bed when he saw the Buddha. He was immensely pleased with the appearance of the Buddha and wished very earnestly to worship him. But he was too weak to rise up or even to raise his hands in an act of worship. He then worshipped him mentally. It was a mental worship the he performed. Shortly thereafter he died, but this mental worship was powerful enough to cause his rebirth in a good state of existence.

When we say that thought is power, we must also understand that it is power either for good or bad.

It is like fire. It can help us. It can also harm us.

It all depends on the nature of thought we entertain. Great as is the influence of the body over the mind, the influence of the mind over the body is immeasurably greater—and why? It is because of the predominating power of thought.

Hence wholesome thoughts make for good health while unwholesome thoughts make for bad health. Otherwise, there is no reason why doctors require that patients should be kept in good cheer.

Worry and disappointment have a debilitating influence on the human system. Anger is a poison, not metaphorically only, but actually as well. This was once effectively demonstrated by an experiment carried out at the science laboratory of Duke University

in America.

It is now known that thoughts of anger and hatred can cause indigestion, make the blood impure, quicken the clotting of blood and in extreme cases can induce high-blood pressure. To the woman Rohini who was suffering from a skin disease the Buddha remarked—“Do you know what is the cause of your skin-disease—it is anger”. On the other hand, thoughts of Maitri or Universal Love generate in the human system valuable chemical compounds which stimulate the cells of the body to produce energy.

Maitri thus has a tonic effect on the human system. The Mettanisana Sutta mentions as many as eleven beneficial effects according to one who habitually practises Maitri “He sleeps happily. He awakes happily. He is not disturbed by evil dreams. He becomes dear to human beings. He becomes dear to non-human beings.

The gods protect him. Fire, poison and weapons cannot touch him. He gains concentration quickly. His countenance is serene. At the moment of death he is not confused or confounded but dies in peace. Furthermore, if he does not attain to Arahathship he will at least be reborn in the Brahma world.”

It is thus left to us by the type of thought we entertain, to improve our physical well-being or weaken it, and also to enable ourselves or degrade ourselves.

We now see very clearly that thought is power. Thought undoubtedly is energy, and as such it is indestructible. Thought also cannot contain itself. It must sooner or later express itself in action, and if the thought is exceptionally strong by reason of habitual repetition, it can burst into action—action which the thinker himself is thereafter

powerless to check.

This is why psychologists say that thought is not static but dynamic. When we know that thought is a power for good or bad depending upon the good or bad nature of the thought we entertain, there is one obvious valuable lesson which we must learn.

We must be extremely careful of the type of thought we entertain, because the type of thought we entertain determines the type of action we perform, and the type of action we perform determines the type of character that is formed.

Evil cannot be easily checked at the action-stage. It is more easily checked at the thought-stage because we are, then, tackling the problem at its root.

You have heard the maxim—“Take care of the pennies and the pounds will take care of themselves.” We might in the same strain say—“Take care of your thoughts and your actions will take care of themselves.”

A thought once entertained tends to reproduce itself, and if the reproduced thought is again entertained without any discrimination as to whether it is a wholesome thought or unwholesome thought, the stage will sooner or later arise when this thought will be a habitual thought which will be automatically entertained. It will be an ever present thought, difficult to resist, looming large in your mind dominating it, and engrossing it.

If the thought in question is an evil thought, an unwelcome thought, just consider how freely and easily evil actions will result from it, and these evil actions you are powerless to resist. Friends,

do you not then realize how careful we should be at the first appearance of an evil thought? But do we take that care? How often during the day, do not unwholesome and evil thoughts appear and disappear without our having made the slightest effort to discourage such thoughts the moment they appear.

Perhaps on a Poya day when we are observing the eight precepts we may make some attempt to control our minds and resist the appearance of evil thoughts. But surely, need we wait for a Poya day or any auspicious day to be selective about the type of thoughts we should entertain?

In the Majjhima Nikáya the Buddha has emphatically declared that to the good man every moment is an auspicious moment and every day is Poya day.

In our day-to-day life there is ample scope and opportunity to check the arising of unwholesome thoughts and to induce the arising of wholesome thoughts. Do we make use of these opportunities? Do we so much as regard these as opportunities? The telephone rings while we are engrossed in some urgent work.

We rush to the telephone only to find that a wrong number has been rung up. We are upset. What does that mean? It means that an unwholesome thought, a thought of resentment or irritation has arisen in our mind. Is this not a fit opportunity to warn ourselves not to yield to this unwholesome thought? Is this not an opportunity to induce the wholesome thoughts of patience and forbearance? Do we even regard this as an opportunity?

We are driving a car at an excessive speed since we are bent on an urgent errand for which we are already late. At the first junction

the traffic signals show a red light. We apply our brakes and halt the car as we have to. But do we apply our mental brakes and halt the bitter thoughts of impatience and anger that are surging within our mind when our urgent trip is delayed for just two minutes which however to our impatient mind seem like two hours? There is no red danger signal here to warn us of the consequences of anger and impatience.

But once we know that anger and impatience are poisons which are injurious to our mental and physical well-being, is not the knowledge a sufficient danger signal to us? Some may say that these are trifling matters and what the mind must be guarded against are far more serious types of evil thought. This however is not the Buddha-view.

Buddha once stressed the necessity of guarding and protecting ourselves, and mentioning the various ways how this can be done referred thus to one particular way—namely “*anumattesu vajjesu bhayadassavi*” - which means “seeing danger in the minutest faults”. Surely this is a sufficient danger signal.

I trust enough has been said to make us appreciate the power of thought and to make us realize the necessity of habitually