

LESSON 11

THE POWER OF THOUGHT

It is said that man generates three great forces: thought, desire, and action, and that of these the most far-reaching in its effects is thought. It is the parent of action and may be the guide and ruler of desire. Even the casual thinker may come sufficiently in contact with such phenomena as thought transference and other evidences of E.S.P. to realize that thought is a force to be reckoned with as certainly as is electricity. Like all energy, it may be used for either wise or unwise purposes, just as electricity may be used for the enhancement of living or for the destruction of life. Since the action of every force brings a corresponding reaction, and since thought is a power everyone wields in some degree, it becomes important to know what thought is and how it may be guided and controlled.

In the theosophical philosophy, neither the mind nor the brain is the real knower, or the real thinker; they must never be confused with the thinker himself, who is the true man. The mind is his instrument for obtaining knowledge, and the brain transmits to the physical mechanism the thought produced in the mental "body."

To think is to initiate vibratory waves that reproduce the vibrations of the object in mind. Habitual thought, along familiar lines, reproduces quickly and accurately. On the other hand, the attempt to think along new and strange lines brings slow and inadequate response, since the mental body is not yet accustomed to that rate of vibration. This is one explanation for the initial difficulty so often experienced by persons as they begin to study Theosophy. An inner hunger to search new paths of thought may bring about the need and the determination to explore the inexhaustible reaches of the ageless wisdom, but the mental body may resist because such exploration demands the setting aside of the habitual modes of thought and striking out into areas where there are no comfortable mental grooves (vibrations) into which thought may flow. New "grooves" have then to be made by persistent study and thought.

The effects of thought fall into two groups: the effects on the man, or the thinker, and the effects produced outside him. The effects on the man himself are, first the establishment of a vibratory habit through repeating the thought in the mental body and, second, the effects produced in the astral and causal bodies. In the astral body these effects consist, generally, of temporary emotions. In the causal body, however, they have a permanent influence upon the character of the individual.

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thought outside the man are in the mental field itself. The radiating vibrations form a floating form, called a “thought form” in the theosophical parlance. This explains why thought along constructive lines is so important. It not only builds physical and emotional reactions that become almost automatic, but it also builds qualities into the causal body, and these form part of the permanent character of the individual, life after life. The result of a sufficiently powerful thought can correspond in the mental “atmosphere” to that of a terrific explosion in the physical atmosphere.

Furthermore, because in each of us the fields of energy called the emotional and mental “bodies” are intermingled and interpenetrating, thought vibrations are communicated and can cause disturbances in the emotional atmosphere just as wind can affect the surface of the sea and cause huge waves. In a similar manner, emotions play upon the tenuous and sensitive matter of the mental realm. Naturally, these vibrations can affect anyone coming within their range, as a storm at sea affects those ships that are caught in it.

It is said by clairvoyants that thought forms can spread over a wide area; that they are comparable to radio waves that can be picked up and transmitted. These waves carry the characteristics of the original thought rather than its precise message. For example, a thought of pure devotion sent out by a Hindu worshipper of Sri Krishna might be of such intensity that it could be picked up by a devout Christian, who would then express it in terms of his own accustomed channel of devotion. Similarly, a person might direct an angry thought toward another and this could be picked up by still other persons who would not even know the original object of that anger but who would have in mind the objects of their own particular hostilities, and thus their own thoughts and feelings of anger would be reinforced. It is important to remember, however, that only when we ourselves are attuned to the particular vibrations involved in the thought of another, or when we are completely passive, are we likely to pick up another’s thought and act as though it were our own.

As you select a channel on the radio you can select a channel of thought and tune into it. Obviously, then, it is important to keep one’s thoughts at a high level in order to tune in to the highest vibrations of the mental world. Noble thoughts are a shield against vicious thoughts; we are constantly being exposed to situations in which we could lower our standards and let undesirable vibrations have their way with us unless we remember to pour our own constructive thoughts into the mental stream of energy. The way to clear a poorly ventilated room is to open it and flood it with fresh air. Clairvoyants tell us that thought forms show color--pale or vivid, muddied or clear according to the character of the thought which “ensouls” them. The clarity or vagueness of a thought, also, is said to be reflected in the positive or indefinite outlines of the form which it creates. If our thoughts are positive--and they can be positive in a destructive as well as in a constructive way--they will be so embodied

that other influences will be less effective. Prejudice, for example, can create rigid thought forms, hard to dissolve. Perhaps the wise man is he who has within himself a reserve of powerful, constructive altruistic thought which he can tap at will. This is one reason why it is said that the mind should not be permitted to drift idly, since in this state almost any passing thought may enter. If we keep in reserve some noble thought, some beautiful line of poetry, an inspiring scriptural quotation, or some high aspiration, it is always available when the mind is freed from the necessity to concentrate on some particular assignment or task.

This leads to two other important aspects of the power of thought. First is the matter of concentration. It is scarcely necessary to emphasize the value of concentration in all our daily activities. To have cultivated right mental habits is to have freed the mind to concentrate on essential matters. To approach our work, even in its most trivial aspects, with concentration is also to free the mind more quickly so that it may be directed to higher channels. By daily practice of concentration on the details of every day life as they arise, the habit is formed, and that same practice will prove valuable when we take up the study of Theosophy or some other subject which demands concentration in the higher realms of thought.

Second, it is impossible to discuss the power of thought without mentioning meditation. The regular practice of daily meditation is advocated for strengthening that control of the mind which becomes more and more necessary as one pursues the study of Theosophy. Meditation is the daily vitamin needed by the mental body. Here the power to concentrate is essential; only the mind that trains itself to stay on one subject, concentrate on one task to the exclusion of all others, can be successful in meditation.

Meditation is especially important in undertaking the inner work which each must eventually accomplish if he would tread the Path to Perfection. Five minutes each morning devoted to quiet thought on the positive development of desirable characteristics will bring very valuable results. For instance, to use a common phrase, we all know our own "besetting sins" which really means our own acquired habits of thought expressing themselves in undesirable action or emotion. We get irritable over trifles. We worry unnecessarily. We are critical, unkind, sarcastic. Each of us can name his own shortcomings. Thinking about these negative characteristics, lashing ourselves verbally and mentally, is not the way to eradicate them. But five minutes each morning devoted to lifting our consciousness into that mental atmosphere where these things do not exist for us can be more helpful in dissolving them than anything else we can do. Closing our eyes and, in imagination, seeing ourselves acting without the unwanted trait (or demonstrating its opposite) is a tonic to our mental bodies. Here, again, the value of concentration can be seen; the

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If you are easily irritated, practice seeing yourself as serene, calm, kind. A test may come; irritation may overwhelm you and you may think you have failed. But you will find that the irritation passes more quickly and easily than it once did. This will be increasingly the case, and the time will come when you will no longer react with irritation, no matter what the situation. Then you can begin on another negative aspect and gradually eliminate that.

Eventually you will come to feel that a five-minute meditation is not sufficient. The glow and peace which meditation brings will hold you longer and you will be correspondingly better and able to manage your day with intelligence and wisdom. Those who are skilled in the art of meditation tell us that regularity is most important; that we should not miss even one morning. And we should not worry when results do not come as swiftly or as completely as we might wish. Worry is one of the most difficult habits to overcome. It is a process of repeating the same thought over and over again, digging a rut deeper and deeper into one's consciousness. One often hears the phrase, "I'm in a rut." The only way to get out of it is to start working on a new channel by giving your mental body new thoughts to repeat: "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." Such meditative thoughts give the mind new channels and, as it flows into them, it is freed from its former confining rut.

It is helpful to remember that the world is governed by absolute justice. Only that which the good Law brings can ever affect one, no matter by what hand it may come. Nothing can injure us that has not been brought about by our own previous willing and acting. The sting of pain and the ache of sorrow are minimized when we learn to rest in the knowledge of the Law, to establish habits of acceptance and to think only along constructive and helpful lines.

Obviously, therefore, we do not help the sick by dwelling on their illness, but by sending out healing thoughts. We do not help the "sinner" by dwelling constantly on addiction to his "sin" which may be considered a lack of wholeness manifesting in some specific manner. Every day, drifting thoughts of love, of peace and progress, can be released, and as soon as there is a chink in the armor of the recipient they will flow in and reach him. Love always reaches another more effectively than does lack of love, or indifference.

Since the dead are also within reach of our thoughts, it is equally important to send them only the highest, most loving thoughts of which we are capable. Prayers for the dead are offered in many religions, with the realization of their efficacy. Our work and our thoughts on behalf of every noble cause are never

wasted.

In reflecting on the power of thought, it should not be forgotten that man's thought also has a creative aspect that has produced much man-made beauty in this world. By the power of his own thought the artist stimulates creative activity in others. Certainly the type of thinking that produces great painting, great sculpture, great literature, is of a higher quality than the ordinary thought which we apply to most of our daily activities. A painter once told Emerson, "Nobody could draw a tree without in some sort becoming a tree; or draw a child by studying the outlines of his form merely; but by watching for a time his motions and play, the painter enters into his nature and then can draw him at will in every situation."

Is it not apparent how close this brings us to the idea of Buddhi, so that we see it as possible for our thoughts to approach closely to that level in purity and intensity? In critical moments of life it is important to raise the level of our thought, for in such moments we can open ourselves to a more qualitative experience of Divine within ourselves. Times of inner tension may be times of opportunity when the mental body is most receptive. Then we are like a finely tuned radio and can intensify our listening for the inner Voice.

Goethe, the German poet, gave five rules for life, each of which involves the ability to control thought, and each of which, consistently observed, leads to greater power of thought: "Do not worry about your past, Do not be angry. Do not hate. Enjoy the Present. Leave your future to Providence." The works of Goethe indicate that he mastered his own advice.

The power of thought is not underestimated in our century. The works of Pavlov on the subject of "conditioning" point out how habits are created. Other scientific studies indicate the power of thought control and its latent possibilities. It is therefore important to possess the ability to elevate one's mind above outside influences and to be master of one's own destiny. In moments of tranquillity, from our own deep center of life, we can gather the thought forces that mature our judgment, elevate our character, and raise us to new heights on the Path. The advice of St. Paul is as rational and as scientific today as it was 1900 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)

References:

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QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. What is thought? Can you recall instances to show that thought transference is possible?
2. Based on the lesson, what is your understanding of thought vibrations and how they act.
3. What is the best way to protect oneself against unkind and injurious thoughts sent out by others?
4. What is the theosophical explanation of thought forms? What general principles underlie this concept of the production of thought forms? Illustrate.
5. How may thought be definitely used to build character? Why is the habit of steady thought valuable?
6. How may we help others, both living and dead, by means of thought?