

The Power of Thought

Thoughts have power—real objective power. Through the power of thought we affect not only ourselves but also others around us. We are continually coloring the surrounding mental atmosphere, for we live not only in a physical environment but in an emotional and mental one as well. Just as the air that we breathe is part of our physical surroundings, so our thoughts and feelings become part of the emotional and mental environment in which we live.

This unseen environment exerts a persistent, but subtle, influence upon us, even if we are not aware of its existence. For instance, many of the random, passing thoughts that we entertain throughout the day do not necessarily originate from *our* mind but may instead have their source in the prevailing mental atmosphere. This happens particularly during those instances when our mind becomes momentarily idle and is not engaged with any specific thought process. Many spiritual traditions recognize the importance of purifying the mind of evil and harmful thoughts by cultivating the habit of holding positive and inspiring thoughts throughout the day.

Thought as Energy

The materialistic view that dominates ordinary Western science regards thought solely as a byproduct of electrical and chemical changes taking place within the physical organ of the brain. It assumes that thought is entirely derivative of neurological processes. According to this view, when death occurs all thought and consciousness abruptly comes to an end. Such a bleak and materialistic viewpoint is contrary to the teachings of the world religions as well as Eastern and Western esoteric traditions, which maintain that the body is a vehicle for consciousness, not its source. These traditions hold that consciousness continues on a higher plane of being following the death of the material body. Theosophical teachings affirm this point of view.

According to Theosophy, the observable material world coexists with a number of invisible worlds, each consisting of various grades of rarefied “matter” or energy. One of those worlds is referred to in early Theosophical literature as the *astral plane* and is associated with the energy of feelings and emotions. Beyond the astral plane is another still subtler field of energy known as the *mental plane*, which is associated with the realm of ideas both abstract and concrete. In later Theosophical literature the term *field* is often used in place of the word “plane” since the latter term may mistakenly suggest a series of stratified layers, whereas fields coexist in space but at different levels of frequency.

These energy fields influence us in subtle ways though we may not be aware of their existence. People who are psychically sensitive often report receiving distinct impressions from such varied places as a cathedral, a college lecture hall, a prison, a sports arena, or a funeral parlor. Tourists who visit the field where the Battle of Gettysburg took place often experience an inexplicable sense of sadness and sorrow. Visiting the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris or the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque in Iran may arouse sublime feelings of reverence and solemnity. Each place has its characteristic type of energy. At the level of higher vibratory rates that characterizes the mental field, clairvoyants have observed that thought energy may actually coalesce, take shape, and have a quasi-objective type of existence. More information on this fascinating subject is available in the book *Thought Forms* by Charles W. Leadbeater.

As human beings, we interact with the astral and mental fields through our subtle vehicles, which are composed of energy from the corresponding fields. For example, our astral body is composed of energy from the astral field while our mental body is composed of energy from the mental field. In other words, our subtle bodies are localized fields existing within universal fields. They coexist with the physical body and interpenetrate each other as well. Thought and emotional energy are therefore very much interconnected. Mental processes that occur in the subtle vehicles are transmitted to our physical consciousness through the organ of the brain in much the same way that invisible broadcast signals are received by a radio and then converted into sound vibrations that strike the physical ear. The radio is not the source of the broadcast, nor is the brain the source of all thought.

Although modern science is unable to verify the existence of the subtle bodies, throughout the ages untold numbers of seers, sages, and clairvoyants have observed and spoken of their reality. The reader is referred to *The Personal Aura* by Dora Kunz, a noted clairvoyant who used her rare psychic abilities to collaborate with medical professionals doing research on the source of disease and illness. Collectively, these higher vehicles are often referred to as the *aura*.

Effect of Thought on Character

It has been said that we are what we think. To a great extent, the quality of our character is formed by the creative power of our thoughts. An old Buddhist scripture begins, "Our life is shaped by our mind; we become what we think." In Proverbs 23:7 we find a similar observation: "For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he." The mind has been compared to a garden, which can be cultivated intelligently or allowed to run wild. Thoughts are the seeds that we plant daily in our mind. The soil of the earth will bring forth weeds or flowers, depending on what type of seeds

are allowed to take root. For better or worse, the thoughts we plant in our mind will eventually manifest in our lives.

Our mind is the result of our past thinking, both in this life and in previous lives. Each person's mind has its own unique rate and range of vibration. It has certain tendencies, strengths, affinities, weaknesses, and imperfections, all of which are the outcome of previous patterns of thought. But the mind is not static and it is being modified constantly by our present modes of thinking as shown by recent brain imaging techniques.

Thoughts may be viewed as localized vibrations of mental "matter" occurring in the mental field. In general terms, pure and lofty thoughts consist of rapid vibrations whereas coarse and debased thoughts vibrate at slower frequencies. By deliberately training the mind to take in elevated and inspired thoughts, we gradually increase its capacity to respond to thoughts of a higher quality. Avoiding thoughts of a crass and degraded nature helps to purify the mind of any tendency to respond to such unsavory influences. A common spiritual practice is to begin each day with an inspiring and uplifting quote, to consider its meaning and application in daily life, and to return to that thought frequently throughout the day. Such a simple practice, in effect, creates a field that attracts similar thoughts while at the same time repelling those that are negative and debased.

In addition to having distinct vibratory rates, clairvoyants have observed that thoughts may take definite shapes and exhibit various colors. In Theosophical literature these are called thought forms. Most thought forms are of a transient nature lasting only a few moments, while others may last for days or years, depending on the intensity of concentration and amount of energy put into their creation. A mathematician working intently on a math problem may create a thought form that is quite well defined and which lasts for days in the mental field. On the other hand, a thought form inspired by a whimsical daydream may last only a few minutes. In Christian churches, a thought form of the Christ may last for years as new generations of worshippers continue to add their individual thought energy to the existing thought form created by earlier congregations. On the negative side, collective racial and ethnic prejudices may create lasting thought forms of hate and animosity, which hover in the atmosphere over nations or groups of people for decades or even centuries. The constant repetition of a thought helps to extend the longevity of the associated thought form, which, as mentioned before, exerts a subtle but definite influence.

It should be obvious that a prolonged habit of negative thinking will not only have harmful effects for the person who generates such thoughts, but also for persons nearby or to whom such negative thoughts are directed. It is well established that

there is a strong connection between negative mental thought patterns and some physical maladies such as high blood pressure, digestive disturbances, etc. By the same token, people who choose to take a positive outlook on life populate their mental atmosphere with thought forms of a beneficial nature. Since every thought or emotion produces a permanent effect by either strengthening or weakening a tendency within us, the greatest care must be exercised as to the type of thoughts and emotions that we permit ourselves to engage in.

Exercising such control over our thoughts may seem like an impossible task, but many people have proven that it can be done successfully. The proverbial 90-pound weakling who enters the gym for the first time may have difficulty envisioning himself with a strong, healthy body, but we all know that successful body builders were not born with magnificent physiques. They had to work hard to attain their goals over a period of time by eliminating harmful foods from their diet and adopting a program of rigorous exercise. In the same way, spiritual aspirants learn to take responsibility for their daily thought patterns by avoiding such habits as malicious gossip, idle chatter, displays of anger, or resentment and deliberately replacing them with positive qualities such as sympathy, tolerance, compassion, and forgiveness.

Much more information is available on this topic. If this subject interests you, you may want to explore some of the literature that is available through Quest Books and the Henry S. Olcott Memorial Library located at the national center of the Theosophical Society in America.

For Further Study

The Aura (audio CD), by Geoffrey Hodson

Meditation: A Practical Study, by Adelaide Gardner

Meditation Series, Pts 1-6 (audio CD), by Joy Mills

The Personal Aura, by Dora Kunz

The Power of Thought, by John Algeo and Shirley Nicholson

Thought Forms, by Charles W. Leadbeater

Thought Power, by Annie Besant