

beneficial, so also a malevolent, base, wicked and selfish thought can be baneful.

On this matter, I shall quote to you a passage from the Dhammapada which will give you an idea of the enormous importance attributed to thought by the wisdom of the past.

“Whatever an enemy may do to an enemy, whatever a hater may do to a hater, the harm caused by a misdirected thought is even greater still.

“Neither father nor mother nor any other kinsman can do so much good as a well-directed thought.”

If you reflect upon the incalculable number of thoughts which are emitted each day, you will see rising before your imagination a complex, mobile, quivering and terrible scene in which all these formations intercross and collide, battle, succumb and triumph in a vibratory movement which is so rapid that we can hardly picture it to ourselves.

Now you realise what the mental atmosphere of a city like Paris can be, where millions of individuals are thinking—and what thoughts! You can picture this teeming, mobile mass, this inextricable tangle. Well, in spite of all the contradictory tendencies, wills and opinions, a kind of unification or identity gets established among all these vibrations, for all of them—with a few minor exceptions—all express craving, craving in all its forms, all its aspects, on all planes.

All the thoughts of worldly-minded people whose only aim is enjoyment and physical diversion, express craving.

All the thoughts of intellectual creators or artists thirsting for esteem, fame and honour, express craving.

All the thoughts of the ruling class and the officials hankering after more power and influence, express craving.

All the thoughts of the thousands of employees and workmen, of all the oppressed, the unfortunate, the downtrodden struggling for some improvement of their cheerless existence, express craving.

All, rich or poor, powerful or weak, privileged or deprived,

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intellectual or obtuse, learned or ignorant, all want gold, always more gold to satisfy all their cravings.

If from place to place there occasionally flashes out a spark of pure and disinterested thought, of will to do well, of sincere seeking for truth, it is very soon swallowed up by this material flood that rolls like a sea of slime....

And yet we must kindle the stars that one by one will come to illumine this night.

But for the moment we are living within it, soaking it up, for in the mental as in the physical domain we are in a state of perpetual interchange with the environment.

This is to point out to you how we are contaminated each day, at each minute.

Can any one of us say that she has never felt craving and that she will never feel it again? Besides, how could we not feel craving when the atmosphere we breathe is saturated with it? How could we not feel this host of desires rising in ourselves when all the vibrations we receive are made of desires?...

And yet if we want our thought to be beneficial and effective we must free ourselves of this bondage.

With this fact in mind, let us first of all draw a practical conclusion: let us be lenient towards all, for temptation is strong and human ignorance is great indeed.

But just as we must be compassionate and kind to others, we must be exacting and strict with ourselves, since we want to become lights in the darkness, torches in the night.

We must therefore learn to resist this daily pollution victoriously.

The very fact of knowing that there is a danger of contagion is already a great step towards liberation. But it is far from sufficient.

There are two possible victories to be won, one collective, the other individual. The first is, so to say, positive and active, the second negative and passive.

To win the positive victory it is necessary to declare an open